

meet your neighbors

Loon Chicks

OF SUMMIT HILL

*A 1983 Coloring Book Reprint
For The Next Generation*

By **Liz Shaffer-Wishner** with **Linda Mazanec**,
Lombard Avenue resident

If you call Linda Mazanec of Lombard Avenue loony, she might take it as a compliment.

In 1983, while raising her kids, Linda and friend Joan Cox combined their creative abilities to draw and tell stories, creating a book that allowed readers to enjoy both.

The business partners worked tirelessly on a book that combined their interests in research, artistry, Minnesota's fauna and children's literature. "I was an English major in college, and when I wrote the book, I put so much work into it," said Linda. "I wound up making a giant scroll. There was no digital cut and paste back then, so I would literally cut and paste parts."

As the project evolved, the two found themselves creating a coloring book for their children as well as others in that ripe age range. By using the Latin name for the common loon, they created a book title that was both educational and playful: *Gavia Immer, Splendid Swimmer: A Read and Color Book About Loons*.

After months of work, Linda and Joan received the first copies of the book from the printer. However, their excitement was tinged with the realization that their work was just beginning.

First, they had to color the covers of their own coloring books.

"The printer charged more to use three colors rather than just two," said Linda. "Since our book



Linda Mazanec with loons playing in background

cover has black, green, and red (the loon's eyes are red), we wound up saving the printing cost, taking a permanent marker, and coloring the eyes ourselves on the first few thousand copies. We actually realized shortly thereafter that we had forgotten to dot the eyes, so we had to go back and fix our mistake. We were laughing like crazy all the while."

Then there was the issue of distribution.

"After it was first printed, we drove up to Alexandria to pick up the copies from the printer, put the books in our car and drove around Minnesota selling them to gift shops." The trip was a great suc-



cess. The first 2,000 copies sold in just one month – so the business partners and friends reprinted their book. The following spring, Linda had her youngest child, and at the ripe age of two months, he was buckled in for another of Linda and Joan's trips around the state.

"In our first five years, we sold 12,000 copies," Linda said. "We sold them as far away as Maine, and even to L.L. Bean."

"I was lucky enough to be home with my kids until my youngest was in kindergarten, which is how I was able to do projects like this," Linda acknowledged. When her kids were old enough to have projects and school days of their own, Linda took the opportunity to go to graduate school, receiving her master's degree in Library Media Education. She then worked as the media specialist at IHM St. Luke's (now St. Thomas More) and at public schools in White Bear Lake and St. Paul.

For nearly 30 years Linda and Joan celebrated, recounted the story to friends and family, and occasionally answered questions about reprinting the book. With children to raise, degrees to finish and careers to explore, the adventure seemed like a tale from the past.

That is, until 2013, when the two were convinced to reprint.

"This did come at a time when suddenly coloring books for adults are very popular," Linda said. "I wouldn't call ours an adult coloring book. The drawings themselves are simple, and loons are simply colored," she said, "but the information appeals to both children and adults."

The two celebrated the book's reprinting with another trip around the state. Again, it was well received, and the friends sold every copy they had brought along. "Things have changed tremendously over the last 30 years. It's now harder to navigate the wholesale buying and selling process. But the one thing that hasn't changed is the appeal of the book."

"The whole thing is such a funny story," she said with a smile and a laugh. "Everything from choosing such an obscure title to dotting all those eyes to taking a 2-month-old baby on a selling trip. And now we're back on the great adventure again."

You can pick up a copy of Linda and Joan's book at the Love From Minnesota store in Roseville, at Sixth Chamber Books on Grand Avenue, or at the Wild Bird Store in Highland. You can also visit their website, www.loonchicks.com, or check in on Facebook to see more photos of their loony adventures. Just search for "*Gavia Immer, Splendid Swimmer*."

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