

Tampa Tribune, Family Life section, 3/15/01, By Philip Morgan: “A Story of Peace”

A Children’s book by self-published author Michael Sterns delivers a message of love.

As a child, Michael Sterns found himself deeply moved by a television public service commercial. It showed Iron Eyes Cody, famous for countless American Indian roles in the movies, shedding a tear as he looked over a littered landscape.

“Later in life I have been upset sometimes at how poorly we have been treating each other on the face of this Earth,” Sterns says.

So it’s natural that an antipollution, pro-diversity, peaceful coexistence message would carry the theme of “Kokopelli & the Butterfly”, the Tampa resident’s self-published children’s book.

“The message, the story, the illustrations and Stern’s in class presentations were such a hit with first-through third graders at Tampa’s Beach Park School that the preschool and kindergarten teachers want him to visit their classes, too,” says Richard Winkler, head of the private school.

“I suggest to parents that they ought to purchase the book and keep it in their child’s library,” he says.

The book features Kokopelli, a flute-playing icon who represents goodwill in various cultures, among them the Indians of the American Southwest. Kokopelli travels from tribe to tribe teaching respect for the environment and living things and how to peacefully resolve conflicts.

The lessons come into play when Kokopelli, saddened at the sight of a tribe’s beautiful caged butterfly, enrages its captors by releasing the creature. The butterfly then makes an amazing transformation.

The book sends a good message to young people, says Sandra Nicolette, principal of Lake St. George Elementary School in Palm Harbor. But she was glad students were also able to learn about the messenger.

“One thing we jumped on is he is an author in living color,” says Nicolette.

Students in the school are studying authors and literature, and as part of his presentation, Sterns answered questions on writing a book and getting it published.

“The kids have been enthralled,” says Nicolette.

Sterns, 32, spent years pulling the project together, hiring artists Joseph V. Cioffi and Gayle Deal to illustrate it and raising the money to publish the 2,500 copies.

They came off the press before Thanksgiving and sold out, Sterns says. He just received a shipment of 5,000 more.

The book is available on Amazon.com and at Tampa Bay area booksellers including Barnes & Noble, Borders, B. Dalton and Waldenbooks.

Self-published authors have to be self-motivated sellers, so Sterns’ marketing degree from the University of Florida has come in handy. In addition to his school appearances, Sterns tells the story at festivals and book signings and, in the role of publicist, he pitches the book to the media.