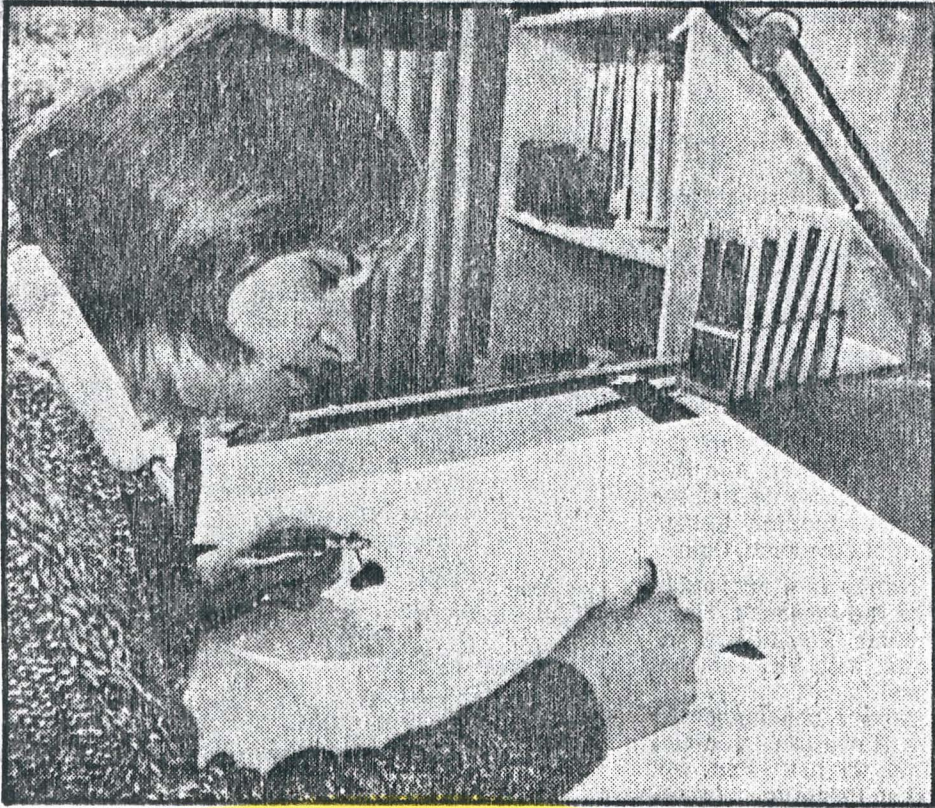


Peninsula Living

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Times Tribune staff photo by Ken Ylmm

Artist Bunny Carter's work is included in the exhibition, "Design: Illustration," on view through March 3 in the Euphrat Gallery at De Anza College, Cupertino.

Bunny and Luke Skywalker — the busy life of an artist

By Gay Morris
Times Tribune staff

Bunny Carter says she never feels guilty for being a working mother. Both her parents were artists and she has memories of occasionally eating cake and ice cream for breakfast because her mother had forgotten to shop. Life was unpredictable and exciting because of her parents' work.

Carter is a pretty blond woman who looks more like the sweetheart of Sigma Chi than a commercial artist whose high-powered career is handled by four agents. Her work is included in the current exhibition, "Design: Illustration" at the Euphrat Gallery, De Anza College in Cupertino. She also teaches full time at San Jose State University. Her husband, Dennis, is an engineering professor at Stanford University with his own diverse obligations and commitments. They have two children, Amanda, 9, an expert equestrienne who keeps a show pony at Stanford Stables, and Todd, enveloped in the complexities of kindergarten and

immediate problems like getting a tennis ball out of the top of a hedge.

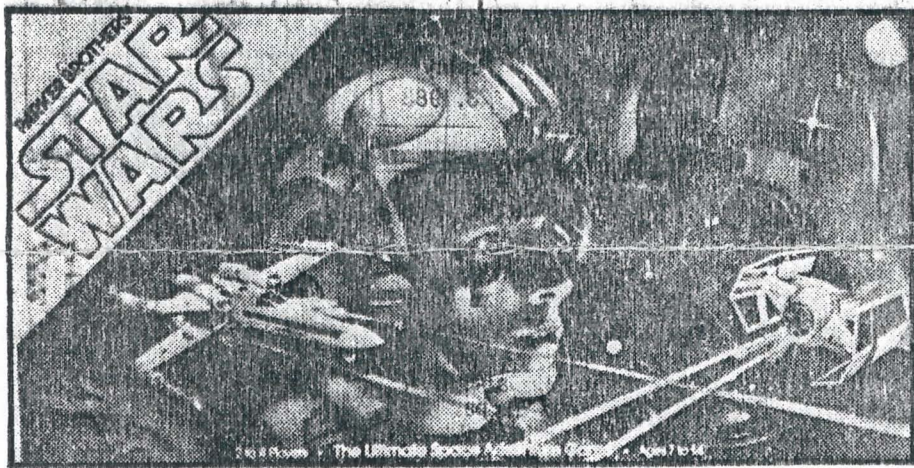
Carter was born in Philadelphia and grew up in the surrounding area. "It was the usual artists' life. My parents both wanted to do fine art, but they had two kids and a mortgage, so they did commercial art work as well."

Her father taught at the Philadelphia College of Art for 40 years and also did covers and cartoons for national magazines such as Saturday Review. Her mother also taught and drew cartoons, along with writing and illustrating a successful children's book. Today, Carter's parents can afford to be exclusively fine artists. Her mother specializes in watercolor portraits and her father paints primarily in oils.

"My parents always had so much fun, there never was much question about what we were going to do," Carter said.

Her sister, now a professional artist, made the mistake of attending the Philadelphia College of Art and taking classes from her parents. Carter said

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Times Tribune staff photos by Ken Ylmm



Palo Alto commercial artist Bunny Carter's illustration of heroic, innocent-eyed Luke Skywalker (above) was used by Parker Brothers in its "Star Wars" game. Another illustration (left) was used for a calendar. It includes humorous references both to traditional calendar art (the woman in a gown) and to the life of a commercial artist (note the T-square the woman holds in her hand and the drafting tools in the background).

ARTIST

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the poor girl would ask her mother how her picture looked and her mother would tell her to put on lipstick, or say she would tell her later at home because she was busy with students.

When Carter reached college age, "I wanted to go someplace where there were frat parties and ski weekends, but my parents insisted I go to an art school because they wanted me to meet a nice artist and settle down."

As with most parental wishes, that went by the board. Bunny went to art school but she married Dennis Carter, an engineering student at the University of Michigan.

Off they went to Ann Arbor and Bunny got a job cutting mats in Detroit. "The reason they hired me was that all the mats in my portfolio were so beautifully cut. That was because my dad had cut them."

Nevertheless, it was a foot in the door, and she did well.

After a while, there was a promotion opportunity to illustrator with Carter and a male colleague the obvious competitors.

"I assumed I was going to get the promotion because I was better," she said. "But then he got it! Those were the days before women's lib and people could say things, so when I asked how come I hadn't gotten the job they said it was because when my husband graduated I would leave, which was true. Well, three days later the guy was drafted, so I got the job after all."

And when Dennis graduated, the Carters did move, to Los Angeles, where Dennis worked on the space shuttle. Bunny found a job at Studio Artists as an illustrator, making good contacts and having in her words "some success."

Two years later, Dennis concluded the space shuttle wasn't for him and decided to go to Stanford for a Ph.D. There followed teaching positions at the University of Washington for three years and then Harvard for three years.

During this time Bunny established herself as a free-lance commercial artist with an international reputation. She took advantage of every opportunity and worked night and day to do it. By the time the Carters moved back to Palo Alto last September, Bunny could choose assignments instead of taking everything that came along, appropriate or not.

Today, she does a lot of work for Lucas Films, as well as magazine illustrations, calendars, book covers and all sorts of advertising work.

Not everything she does is successful. She was once asked to do a sort of history of man on roller skates, beginning a series of figures with a cave man and working up to what the advertisers said should be a gorgeous 20th century blonde. Carter enthusiastically drew a gorgeous young man. An icy note informed her that wasn't the client's idea of a blonde.

Recently, too, she was asked to do a double-page magazine spread for a new TV series. The client wanted 12 figures with all the women sexy. "After working around the clock trying to get it finished in three days," Carter said, "I sent off the illustration express. They said it was about as sexy as the Hardy Boys."

In a funk, Carter went out and got a job with Lucas Films. She had done an illustration of Luke Skywalker for Parker Brothers and decided to stick with him. "Everything I do with him is great," she said. "He always turns out looking so dewy eyed and innocent."

Because of her heavy workload, Carter squeezes all her teaching at San Jose State into two days, leaving early in the morning and finishing her last class at 10 p.m. "A lot of artists don't like teaching, but I love it," she said.

Many of her students are talented, and she likes serving as a successful role model for them. Students often don't realize the kind of commitment it takes to be successful in the commercial art world, she noted. There's no problem with being a woman. "They'd hire chimpanzees if they did the job well." But it's a highly competitive profession, it's time consuming and it's hard to become established.

The only answer is hard work. "I've been working night and day for 14 years," Carter said.

The compensations lie in the fact that the work is satisfying and fun. And although she works hard, Carter has her studio at home and doesn't mind the children's occasional interruptions. In fact, her youngsters often serve as models, their pictures appearing in paintings and illustrations all over the house.

They are growing up with art, just the way she did, and they are learning, as she did, that life can be unpredictable and exciting. For instance, one day last week, she forgot to send her son to school. "Well, it's his first year and we're not completely used to it, and I just forgot."