

**Linden Hills E-News**  
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**Featured Story: WILD RUMPUS**



**Who's behind it?**

Tom Braun, seen here with his grandchildren Max and Mia (?) X and Y bought the building at 2730 W. 43<sup>rd</sup> Street in 1988. At the time, the old building—vintage 1911—housed a hair salon and The Yarn Shop.

In partnership with Collette Morgan, and using the children's collection from the late and much-lamented Odegard's Bookstore, Tom converted most of the downstairs space to a children's bookstore that first opened in September 1992.

**Why the unusual design?**

Tom and Collette hired architect Dan Feidt, who'd never designed a commercial space before, to help them create something that flowed from their imaginations, instead of following established rules. As Tom says, "We just did what we liked doing."

It was Dan who came up with the idea of making a door-within-a-door. It was Tom and Collette who came up with the vision of creating a space that starts out as a traditional interior, but as you go farther in, gradually becomes more and more like an exterior, with the sky breaking through the roof, a garden shed, trees, and interior walls designed to look more like exteriors (right down to the shape of the windowsills).

Their inspiration came from the book "The Salamander Room" by Anne Mazer, about a little boy who brings home a pet salamander and whose room gradually changes to a forest where his salamander can feel at home.

**Why the animals?**

According to Tom, Collette liked the idea of keeping cats, a fixture in the traditional image of a bookseller's shop. By luck or design, they began with Manx cats, unique among felines for bobtails and a laid-back, laissez-faire attitude toward kids and crowds.

The black and white Brave Irene was a fixture for 15 of the store's 16 years, finally succumbing to old age. Irene, for the record, was a male, but suffered no apparent identity crisis from his cross-gendered name.

Over the years animals just kept moving in, partly because customers began asking Tom and Collette to adopt pets that could no longer be cared for. Chickens, a parrot, a hedgehog, even a Vietnamese pot-bellied pig named Norman have called the place home.

When city animal control officers began sniffing around the shop, Tom solved the problem by obtaining a license as a pet store, a license he continues to renew every year so the store animals can keep their home.

### **Why the name?**

People naturally assume the name is an homage to Maurice Sendak, but Tom says it really originated in homage to the Coen brothers. He and Collette had recently seen the Coens' "Miller's Crossing", where the 1920s gangsters go around asking, "What's the rumpus?" Tom credits Collette with drawing the connection to the partying by Sendak's wild things, and the name was born.

### **Why Linden Hills?**

Not long after Wild Rumpus opened, Mall of America approached Tom and Collette about opening a store there, hoping to duplicate Rumpus's success.

"We looked at each other for maybe twenty seconds," he recalls, "and said, 'Nah.'"

Assessing what makes the store special and successful, he says, "so much depends on the neighborhood, the building, the community, making good connections with the schools."

In a time when independent booksellers seem on the verge of extinction, Wild Rumpus not only survives, it prospers. Tom says 2008, with all its national economic woes, was one of the most profitable years in the store's history. Good news for everyone who's made the store part of their families' lives, and in some cases are introducing a third generation to the magic place where the ceiling splits open, and chickens, cats and kids run free.