Sandy Czaja

*Notchlok Bears*

by Pam North

 Sandy Csaja's website states her view of her craft very well: “The best job in the world since 1994 - making people smile.” Asked about her work, this Arizona artist replied, “For anyone who doesn’t know my work, I love color and contrast and new designs. I like character bears and large,

mellow-looking lions. I make several sizes of animals, and I work in mohair, alpaca, and all kinds of fur, including recycled natural furs, such as mink, seal, and fox.”

 “I had no idea that I would spend much of my life in the world of teddy bears! Before 1994, my husband and I were raising three sons, and I was working as an office manager in a dental office. Friends and co-workers would ask me to make a teddy bear for them, but at first I never thought of

selling a teddy bear. Now my passion is to create beautiful pieces of art for those who love teddy bears. I am as passionate about creating a beautiful bear as I was when I first named my company *Notchlok Bears*. I still worry over every detail, from the design to the very last stitch. ”

 Czaja has won several prestigious awards for her bears: In 2011, the TBAI Peoples Choice Award for *The Global Family;*  in 2012, the KC Teddy Bear Jubilee, Souvenir Artist Award; and in 2014, the TOBY Industry's Choice Award.
 She also is an author. Her children's book, *Jake and Baron*, is a charming tale about a little boy who takes his teddy bear to the ocean, but forgets his backpack to hold his acquired seaside treasures, and how his bear helps him keep them safe and together. “I would love to write another book about Baron. I love this little bear, who lives with his young owner, Jake. He is a gentle little bear with a huge heart! Some of my collectors have read *Jake and Baron* to their children, and said they loved it.”

 Czaja is busy pursuing new avenues in her bear creation. “I know we already are well into the new year, but I have so many plans! I’m working on a new bear series, called *The Bears Outback.* These furry critters will have small eyes, be made of various shades of brown and black fur, and look somewhat like real bears. They'll be comical, character bears, a little human, a little bear. I just haven’t quite worked out all the details yet. I’d also like to create the bear that keeps getting away from me - that one that I see in my head but just can’t seem to create out of fur!”

 She sums it up best when she says, “I think my bumper sticker should read, 'I Would Rather Be Making Bears!'”

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