

Field Research

The first time I went to Texas I saw armadillos everywhere! I became curious and asked about them. One Texan laughingly told me that one time in her flower garden a 'dillo came moseying along and bumped smack into her tennis shoes. I thought, "If she had been wearing cowboy boots, the armadillo might have mistaken them for a relative." That was the beginning of *Armadillo Rodeo*. I also admire the unbridled enthusiasm of Texans. No challenge is big enough! Bo, the armadillo character in my book, is just like that.

When I visited Houston, Dallas, Tyler, San Antonio, Fort Worth and Austin, I enjoyed passing the time spotting handsome cowboy boots. I'm inspired by the artistry and imagination of their leatherwork, and I tried to show this in my borders.



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Texas bluebonnet

Firewheel

My husband, Joe, and I work together, and he called the Park Service in Texas and asked them if they knew a place where armadillos live and Texas bluebonnets grow. They told him about the Enchanted Rock Natural area. The enchanted rocks are granite outcroppings, famous for their wondrous pink color. Bluebonnets, red paintbrushes, pink phlox, yellow daises and claret cups make the countryside look like a colorful quilt. The hill country, as this part of Texas is called, seemed like a fascinating place to set Bo, the armadillo's story. We visited the historic town of Fredericksburg. Its limestone, and log houses and barns made me feel I knew just the Curly H ranch would look. Native Americans, German settlers, and cowboys have all made their homes there too.

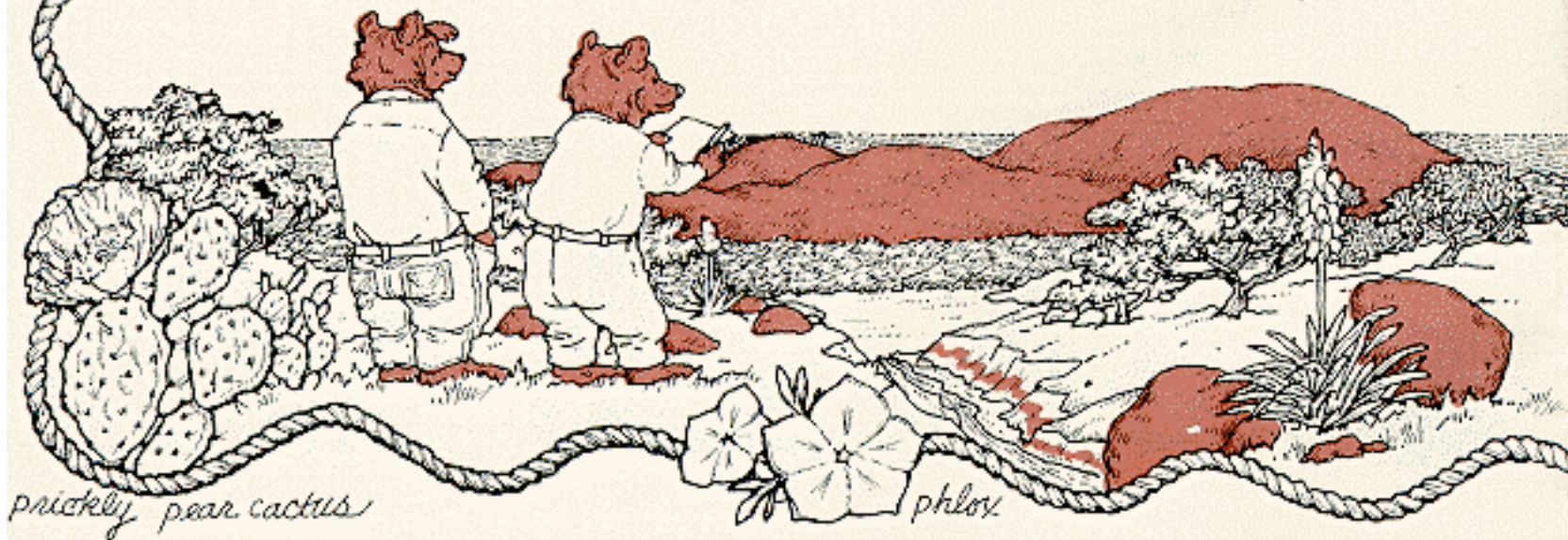


Attractive! The pinnacle of plant creation!

prickly pear cactus

yucca

Everytime Joe and I stopped to see a live oak, a prickly pear, or a creek that looked like it could be Bo's home, a passerby would stop and say, "Y'all need any help?" we found people are always ready to stop and be neighborly.



prickly pear cactus

phlox

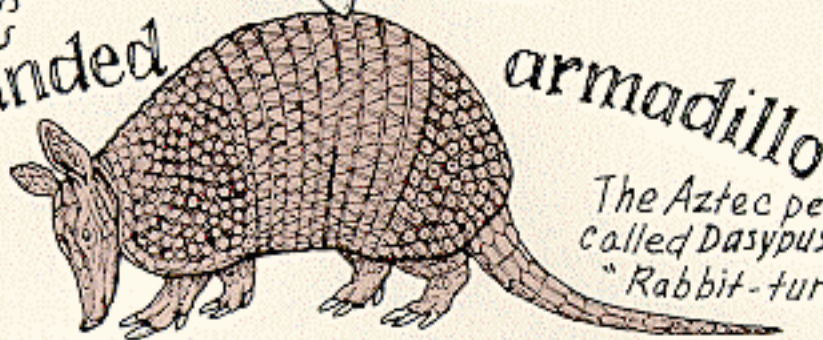
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"little armored one" is what armadillo means in Spanish.

The nine-banded



armadillo

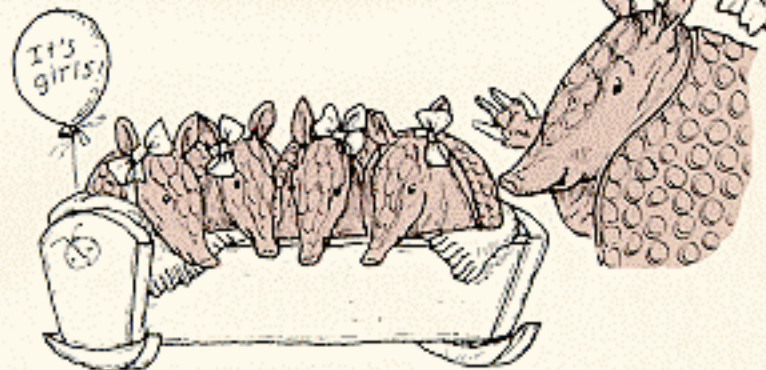
The Aztec people called *Dasyus novemcinctus* "Rabbit-turtle"

The nine-banded armadillo is an animal that is unique, adaptable, comical, fragile, tough, odd-looking and fun to draw. I hope you'll share my appreciation of this animal found only in the Americas.

Armadillos are not desert animals like I first thought. They make their homes in warm climates with diggable soil, where there's water nearby. Armadillos love to eat insects and their closest relatives are anteaters and sloths. They cannot see very well, but they make up for this with acute hearing, sense of smell, and quick reflexes. Armadillos eat up to 14,000 ants in one meal, and they can sense an earthworm 6" underground. Their long toenails and muscular legs are just right for fast-as-a-flash digging. Not only does their leathery shell protect them, but armadillos can leap up to 3 feet in the air, walk under water, swim or dig their way out of danger.



Hedgehog means "perfection-mammal," "adorable feast-for-the-eyes," and "elegant smallish person" depending on the translation.



I was fascinated to learn that armadillos always have four pups and they are either four boys or four girls.

Now you know why my book character, Bo, could mistake boots for another armadillo, jump onto a pony's back, and why he has three brothers.



The nine-banded armadillos range has expanded to include many of our Southern states.

prickly poppy



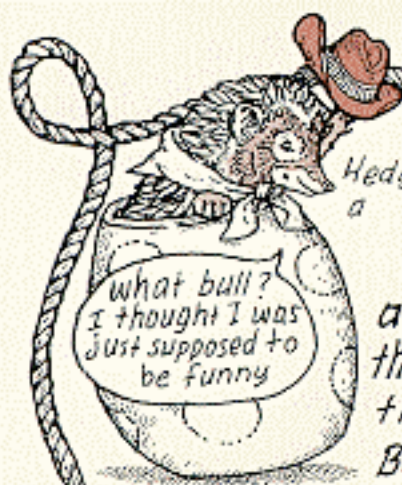
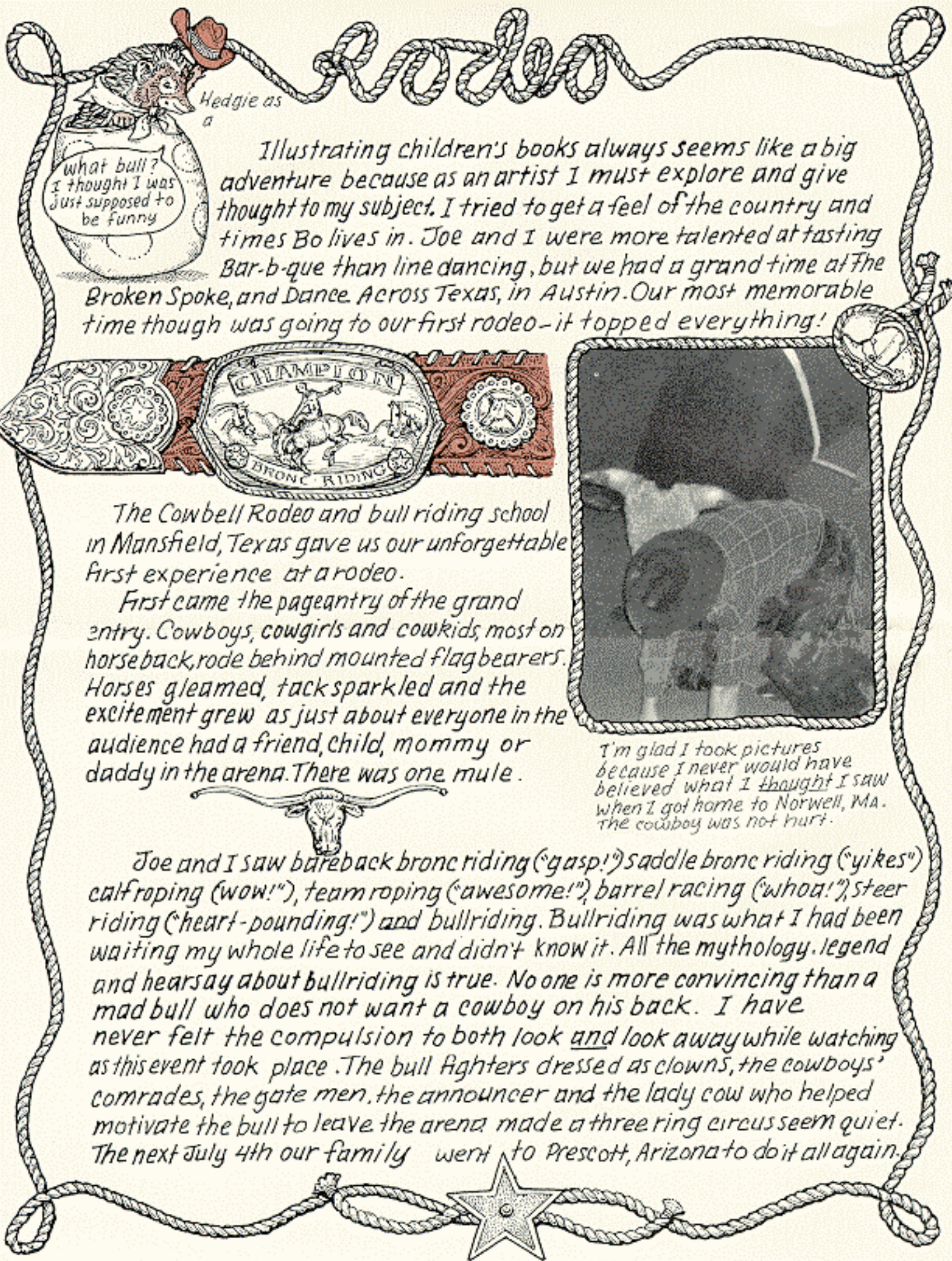
paintbrush



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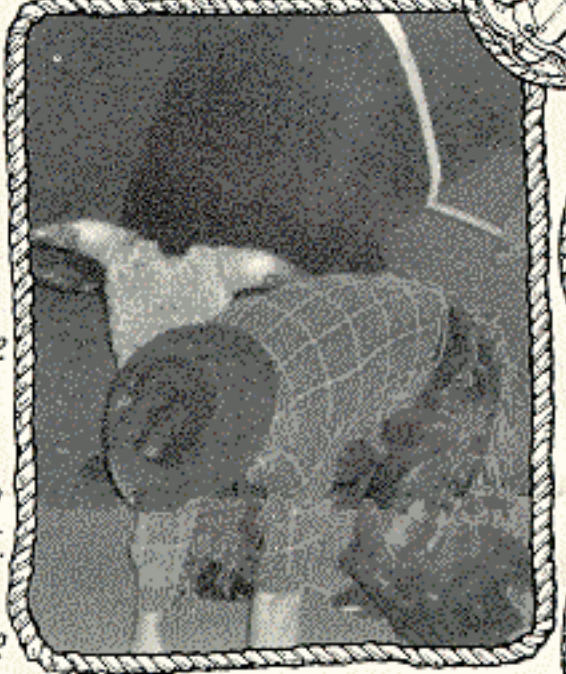
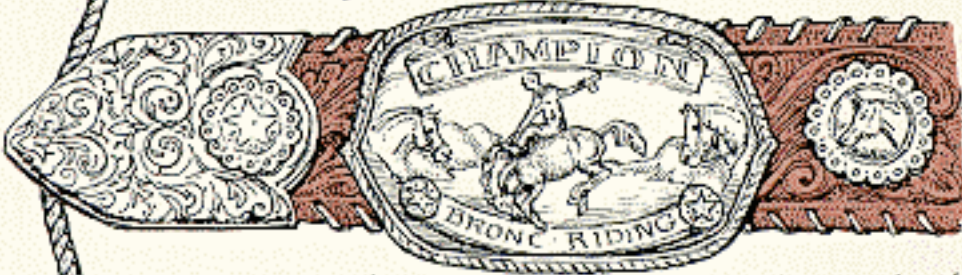
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Hedgie as a

rodeo

Illustrating children's books always seems like a big adventure because as an artist I must explore and give thought to my subject. I tried to get a feel of the country and times Bo lives in. Joe and I were more talented at tasting Bar-b-que than line dancing, but we had a grand time at The Broken Spoke, and Dance Across Texas, in Austin. Our most memorable time though was going to our first rodeo - it topped everything!



The Cowbell Rodeo and bull riding school in Mansfield, Texas gave us our unforgettable first experience at a rodeo.

First came the pageantry of the grand entry. Cowboys, cowgirls and cowkids, most on horseback, rode behind mounted flagbearers. Horses gleamed, tack sparkled and the excitement grew as just about everyone in the audience had a friend, child, mommy or daddy in the arena. There was one mule.



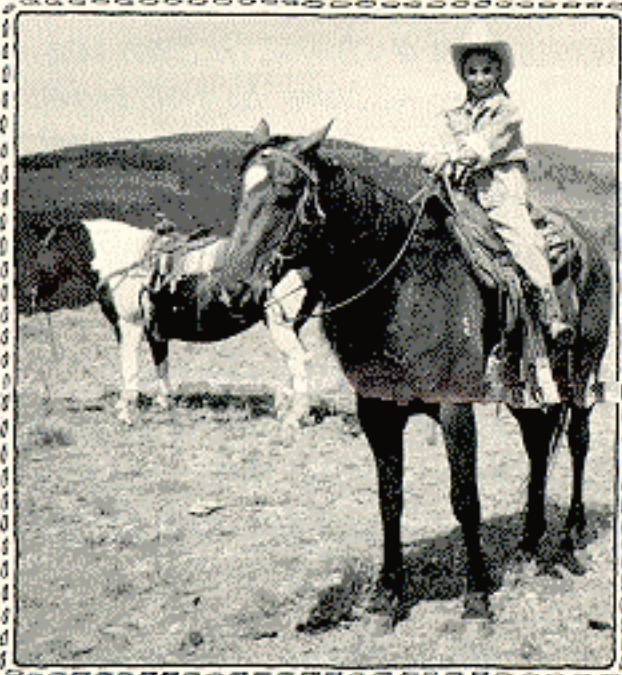
I'm glad I took pictures because I never would have believed what I thought I saw when I got home to Norwell, MA. The cowboy was not hurt.

Joe and I saw bareback bronc riding ("gasp!") saddle bronc riding ("yikes") calf roping ("wow!"), team roping ("awesome!"), barrel racing ("whoa!"), steer riding ("heart-pounding!") and bullriding. Bullriding was what I had been waiting my whole life to see and didn't know it. All the mythology, legend and hearsay about bullriding is true. No one is more convincing than a mad bull who does not want a cowboy on his back. I have never felt the compulsion to both look and look away while watching as this event took place. The bull fighters dressed as clowns, the cowboys' comrades, the gate men, the announcer and the lady cow who helped motivate the bull to leave the arena made a three ring circus seem quiet. The next July 4th our family went to Prescott, Arizona to do it all again.



Often a storyteller will give human ways to their animal characters and that is what I did with Bo. You could say I anthropomorphized an armadillo. If you learn this word with me: anthropomorphic, for the rest of your life you will know how to describe an animal that has been given people-like ways. Can you guess the names of these famous anthropomorphized animals?

- a bull that likes to sniff flowers
- a rabbit that loses his blue jacket
- an elephant that wears a crown



In my newsnotes I like to acknowledge the children and animals who inspired my book characters. I based my ideas for my Harmony Jean character on Emily Larson, a girl who rides at the same barn I do, River Wind Farm. I tried to remember Emily's special features when I drew Harmony Jean. Here is a photo of Emily riding western style at a ranch out West.

Did you notice the handsome pinto, Spotlight, in this book? He's a real horse that lives at River Wind Farm. He would probably buck if an armadillo hitched on to his tail and climbed on his back, it's only natural! Normally he has perfect manners and has won many blue ribbons for jumping fences.

