



# The Mitten



I've always liked to tell children about the fun and hard work that goes into writing and illustrating children's books. This is my first letter to you, and it's all about my book, *The Mitten*.



For me, the best part about telling a story is drawing the pictures. This letter will be a story about the story, and I'll draw pictures to go with it. By now you've probably guessed that I see myself in an unusual way.

Jan Brett

## How do you GET A book idea?



*The Mitten* came about when three teachers, who were also good friends, suggested the idea at a book signing. They thought I would like to draw the animals and the snowy scenery in this folktale. They were so right! When you draw,

often your feelings about the subject show. Sometimes these feelings surprise you.

Every story has its own story. Once, I met an unusual girl. Her name was Miriam, and she was very, very curious. Her face looked like it could have come out of the past. I had a strong feeling that I wanted to put her into a book. Her adventuresome personality gave me the idea for my version of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. If you happen to read it, you'll see Goldilocks looks like Miriam, and is spunky like she is, too.



Miriam

Another book, *The First Dog*, came about because I wondered about our Husky, Perky Pumpkin. I looked at our dog's expressions, and tried to guess what she was thinking. I had to use my imagination and "wolf-up" Perky for the book. That was the best part.



Perky wants a bone



Perky was on the bed



She wants to chase the cat



"I'm a good dog"

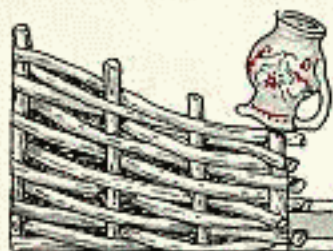


## IS IT EASY TO GET STARTED ON A BOOK?

A UKRAINIAN WOMAN, NAMED OXANA PIASECKYJ HELPED ME BY TRANSLATING DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF THE MITTEN INTO ENGLISH. IN ONE TELLING, MANY ANIMALS CRAWL INTO AN OLD POT. THE POT BREAKS INTO BITS WHEN TOO MANY ANIMALS SQUEEZE IN. ANOTHER VERSION TELLS ABOUT A HUNTER WHO GOES BACK TO FIND HIS LOST MITTEN FILLED WITH ANIMALS. THEN HE BLASTS IT WITH HIS GUN. IN THE OLDEN DAYS, PEOPLE WOULD HAVE BEEN HAPPY TO HAVE FOOD FOR THEIR TABLE. BUT FOR OUR TIMES, I THOUGHT THIS WAS TOO VIOLENT AN ENDING. I THOUGHT UP A NEW TWIST FOR THE MITTEN STORY AFTER THINKING IT OVER AGAIN AND AGAIN. IT WASN'T EASY TO GET STARTED, BUT HEARING DIFFERENT VERSIONS, MADE ME WORK OUT WHAT I THOUGHT WAS IMPORTANT.



JOE, MY HUSBAND, AND I, WENT TO THE UKRAINIAN SECTION OF NEW YORK CITY TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THAT CULTURE. I NEEDED TO KNOW WHAT A UKRAINIAN HOUSE LOOKED LIKE, INSIDE AND OUT. AT THE UKRAINIAN MUSEUM, ONE OF THE GUIDES, CHRISTINE, TOLD US SOME VALUABLE TIDBITS. SHE SUGGESTED THAT IN THE BOOK, ONE'S CLOTHES SHOULD LOOK TOO BIG. "NICKI WOULD BE WEARING HAND-ME-DOWNS. CLOTHES WERE HANDMADE AND MEANT TO LAST A LONG TIME," SHE SAID. WE LEARNED THERE IS A CUSTOM OF HANGING A WATER JUG ON YOUR FENCE. THAT WAY, A PASSERBY COULD HELP THEMSELVES TO A COOL DRINK. CHRISTINE ALSO SAID TO BE SURE AND PUT A STORK'S NEST ON THE COTTAGE ROOF. IT BRINGS GOOD LUCK!



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HERE'S ONE OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF TAD.



YOU CAN'T JUST COPY OR TRACE A PHOTO - IT WILL LOOK STIFF. BUT IT CAN GIVE A GOOD STARTING PLACE.

### Why BORDERS?

I DRAW BORDERS WHEN I HAVE TOO MANY IDEAS. IN *THE MITTEN*, THE BORDERS SHOW NICKI, TREKKING THROUGH THE WOODS, AND SCARING DIFFERENT ANIMALS OUT OF THEIR HIDING PLACES. WHEN YOU TURN THE PAGE IN THE BOOK, YOU CAN SEE THE ANIMAL THAT COMES NEXT.

### HOW DO YOU MAKE UP CHARACTERS?

THE PERSON WHO HELPS ME WITH THE ART WORK PART OF MY BOOKS IS CALLED THE ART DIRECTOR. THIS PERSON WORKS AT THE PUBLISHER. NANETTE STEVENSON HELPED ME WITH *THE MITTEN*, SHE SAID, "IF YOU DON'T USE A MODEL, AN ARTIST COULD EASILY DRAW THEMSELVES OVER AND OVER AGAIN." I THINK SHE'S RIGHT IN MY CASE. AFTER ALL, WE SEE OURSELVES IN THE MIRROR A LOT.

THE MODEL FOR NICKI IS A NEIGHBOR, TAD BEAGLEY. I CHOSE HIM BECAUSE HE WAS SO FULL OF ENERGY. I FOUND OUT THAT HE WAS ALSO VERY EAGER TO HELP. HE CLIMBED TREES, JUMPED WALLS, AND LEAPED IN THE AIR WHILE I TOOK PICTURES.

MY MOTHER, JEAN, WAS THE MODEL FOR BABA. I CHANGED HER HAIR FROM SHINEY BROWN TO SNOWY WHITE. I PUT A LONG BRAID ON HER HEAD. I USED MY ARTISTIC LICENSE TO CHANGE THINGS. THAT'S ONE OF THE BEST THINGS ABOUT DRAWING.

MY MOUSE, LITTLE PEARL WAS A MODEL TOO. IF YOU LOOK AT MY BOOK, *GOLDILOCKS*



AND THE THREE BEARS, YOU WILL GUESS WHY THE MOUSE IN *THE MITTEN* LOOKS FAMILIAR.

I'M ALWAYS NERVOUS SHOWING THE BOOK FOR THE FIRST TIME



FINE-TUNING THE ART WITH NANETTE



JEAN, BEFORE THE WHITE BRAID.



## AN ARTIST NEEDS TO KNOW...

AN ARTIST NEEDS TO KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT THEIR SUBJECT. ONE OF THE ANIMAL CHARACTERS IN *THE MITTEN* IS A HEDGEHOG. I HAD NEVER SEEN ONE BECAUSE THEY DON'T LIVE IN NORTH AMERICA. WHEN I VISITED ENGLAND, I WENT TO A WILDLIFE HOSPITAL CALLED ST TIGGYWINKLES. WHEN I WAS THERE, I WAS ABLE TO PICK ONE UP AND LEARN ABOUT IT.



HEDGEHOGS ARE ABOUT THE SIZE OF A GUINEA PIG, AND THEY ARE COVERED WITH PRICKLES. HEDGEHOGS ARE GENTLE. THEY ONLY HAVE TO ROLL UP IN A BALL TO BE SAFE FROM PREDATORS. THIS IS A DISADVANTAGE IF A CAR IS COMING. THAT IS WHY ST TIGGYWINKLES HAS LOTS OF PATIENTS. HEDGEHOGS ARE ONE OF MY FAVORITE ANIMALS. SOMEDAY I'D LIKE TO THINK UP A HEDGEHOG STORY FOR A BOOK.



Hedgehog mom and babies

Ryeship with his cast

... SOME TIMES THEY LIVE IN BRUSH PILES



WE SPONSORED THREE HEDGEHOGS AT ST TIGGYWINKLES. ONE HAD A BROKEN LEG, ONE WAS LISTLESS AND NEEDED MEDICINE AND ONE WAS AN ORPHAN AND NEEDED SPECIAL CARE. RYESHIP, JULIE AND MOWGLI HAVE BEEN RELEASED BACK INTO THE WILD.



A FRIEND IN ENGLAND SAID THAT THE HEDGEHOG THAT LIVED IN THEIR YARD LIKED TO TEASE THEIR GOLDEN RETRIEVER. HEDGEHOGS FORAGE AT NIGHT FOR INSECTS. EVERY EVENING THE HEDGEHOG ATE THE DOG'S FOOD. THEN IT FLIPPED OVER THE BOWL WITH A CLANK, AS IF TO SAY "I'M DONE, THAT WAS GREAT." EXPERTS THINK HEDGEHOGS JUST NATURALLY TURN OBJECTS OVER LOOKING FOR BUGS.



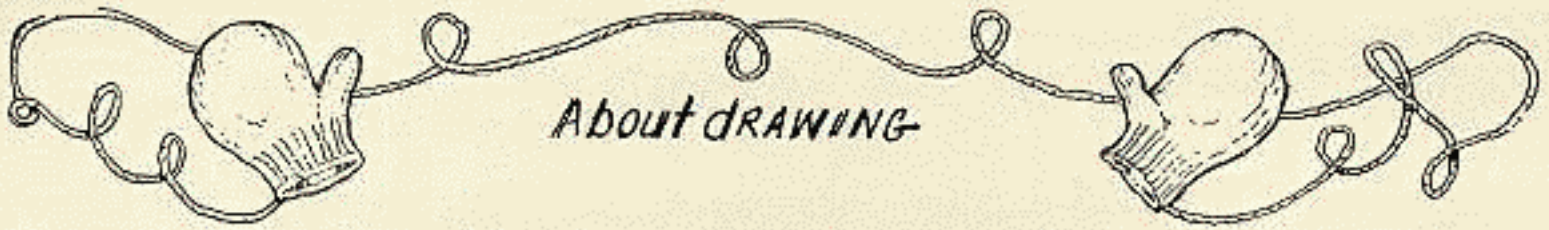
A ROLLED-UP H.H.

VIEW FROM UNDERNEATH



GARDENERS LIKE HEDGEHOGS BECAUSE THEY EAT DESTRUCTIVE BUGS. I LIKE THEM BECAUSE THEY ARE GENTLE AND DETERMINED. THEY HAVE A NICE SHAPE, ESPECIALLY THEIR NOSES. HEDGEHOGS ALSO HAVE A DISTINCTIVE WALK. ITS NOT A WADDLE, AND ITS NOT A SCURRY, IT'S MORE LIKE A SCUTTLE.





## ABOUT DRAWING

When I create a book, I first start by writing the story. That is the hardest part for me. Then I do a book dummy. "Dummy" is the word professional illustrators use to describe a simple version of their book. I use a cartoon style that doesn't take too long. The dummy gives me a first impression of what my book will be like. Many times my book will change in the final version.



IN THE ART  
STUDIO - LOOKING  
AT THE DUMMY

MY BRUSHES  
ARE SMALL

I DON'T NEED MANY  
SPECIAL TOOLS, JUST MY  
ART MATERIALS, GOOD  
LIGHT AND MY IMAGINATION

After I've planned to leave space for the words, I do a pencil sketch for the final version. Then, I paint the characters in their setting. I'm never really sure how they'll come out. That makes it exciting. I use watercolors, and I don't put very much water on my brush. That prevents the colors from running together. The pictures for this letter are drawn with a pen and India ink.

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## 'All About' Questions

"How long does it take to draw a page from a book and how long does it take to draw a book?"

Kimberly Age 10 Beaverton, OR

It takes an hour to do one inch, so it adds up to about two days to do a page. The Mitten took four months, but my new book The Wild Christmas Reindeer took five.

"What is your advise for frustrated artists?"

Sophie, 6th grade teacher, Wilton, N.H.

Don't feel bad. Every artist has things they draw better than others. I don't draw motorcycles or bridges well. But I'm proud of my animals. I think to myself, it is a wonderful feeling to create something brand new.

"How many books have you written, and which one is your favorite?"

John Age 8 Long Valley N.J.

I've written five books, but I've illustrated many more. My favorite is always the one I'm working on, because I feel most like myself when I'm drawing.

"Many of your books are about animals, do you have any pets?"

Natalie Age 17 Las Vegas NV.

I have three pets, Westy, a Quarterhorse, Perky Pumpkin our Siberian Husky and Little Pearl, a mouse.

