

# The Wild Christmas Reindeer

Hi again! It was so much fun to think up the story of *The Wild Christmas Reindeer*, that I'd like to tell you all about it. The best part was drawing the pictures. But, in order to draw them, I had to do a lot of hard work. I think it was worth it. I hope you think so too.



How did you think up the idea for your book?



I'd like to tell you about this book by answering some of the good questions you've asked me in your letters.

Jan Brett

*The Wild Christmas Reindeer* began with an idea about a place, the North Pole. I pictured Santa Claus as a toy maker who loves to make beautiful things for children, just children. The legend of the elves could have sprung from people who once really existed. I imagined that a small group of elves survived in this secret place. It's called Santa's Winterfarm. I drew it for you below.



[Page 1 of 6](#)

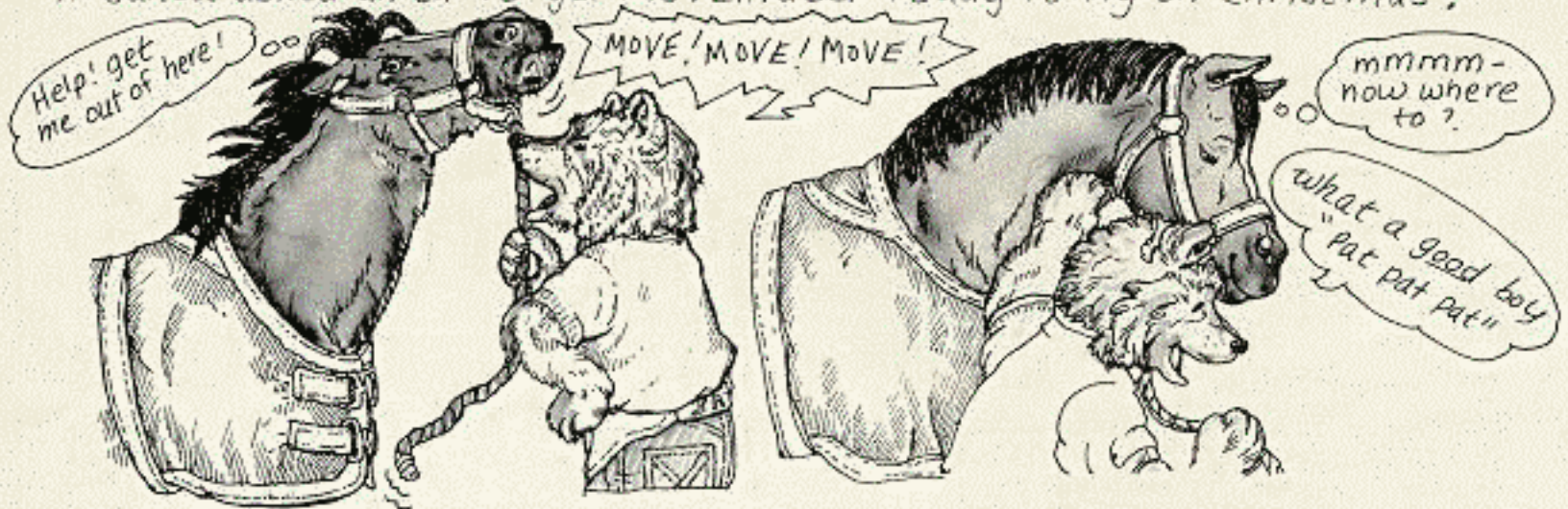
[Next Page](#)

[Home Page](#)



How do you think up the story part?

When I started thinking about the North Pole, I couldn't wait to draw the reindeer. I love animals, and I've noticed if you love your subject, and are intrigued by it, those feelings show in your drawings. I wanted reindeer to be important in my story. I asked myself, "what if Santa asked an elf to get the reindeer ready to fly on Christmas?"



At the same time that I was wondering what could happen to reindeer, I was having a bothersome time with my horse, Westy. Westy isn't perfect, and I was trying hard to make him obey. I noticed that if I was angry with him and lost my temper, things only got worse. But, if I took a deep breath and spoke calmly, he would listen to me. Then, together we could improve.

I made a jump in my mind. When Santa asked the elf girl to help with the reindeer, the very same things could happen to her.




Every story must have a beginning, middle and end. In my books, something will happen that will change things. In *The Mitten*, it is a sneeze. In *The Wild Christmas Reindeer*, the elf girl stops bossing and starts helping. In my new book, *Berlioz the Bear*, the event that changes everything is a giant bee sting.

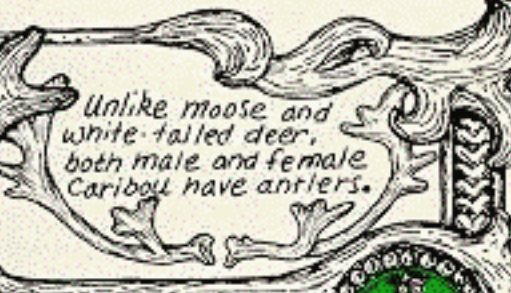
[Page 2 of 6](#)

[Next Page](#)


[Home Page](#)



The Caribou I saw in Maine had shed their antlers. It doesn't hurt and they grow back.



Unlike moose and white-tailed deer, both male and female Caribou have antlers.



### Is Teeka an elf?

Yes! If you mean a very special person who doesn't talk a lot but thinks a great deal. If you mean a person who is small in size, and very athletic. The elf I know enchants everyone around her, and has a magic way with animals.

I guess I have to admit my model for Teeka is a real girl. I showed Natalie my story, and she agreed to act out all the parts while I sketched her, took photographs and watched the way she did things. I wanted you to believe in my character, and to care what happened to her.

When I got to know Natalie, my story changed. At first, the elf girl was impatient and angry with the reindeer. But Natalie wasn't like that. I changed the book character so that she just tries too hard instead of being mad. My character became thoughtful and determined, like Natalie.

In real life, Natalie has long hair. When she came to visit, her hair went down her back in graceful curls. When I showed my drawings of her to my editor, Margaret, she said she looked too modern. I decided to cut and tuft her hair, but only in the pictures. She looks even more elfin.



It's wonderful to have someone you trust to help you with your work. Then it has the chance to become even better.

my editor Margaret gives good advice



NEW ROOM



FIRST SAILPLANE SOLD

My book begins, "Teeka was excited and a little afraid. That's exactly how I have felt every time I've done anything memorable."



BOOR TALKS





Did you go to a far away place for ideas?

We went to Norway!



I remember, we were driving high in the mountains when we saw this Stave church. It was snowy and bleak. Then we saw this building. It was awesome. It looked mysterious and whimsical at the same time.

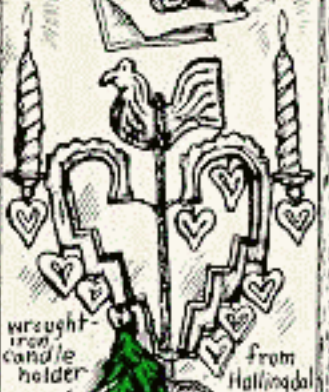
I hope you can see the similarities between this 800 year old structure and the reindeer barn.

I went to folk museums in Norway. I saw sleighs, cloaks, spoons, harnesses and blankets, all made with beautiful designs. I tried to show how I felt about their beauty when I drew the workshops.



a box from Bykle

In the borders of my book, you can see the days slip by as Teeka works with the reindeer.



wrought-iron candle holder from Hallingdal



buttons from Setesdal

The thing I like best about the workshop towers, is that you can find most of them on the page that begins the book.



a butter tub with horse head handles.

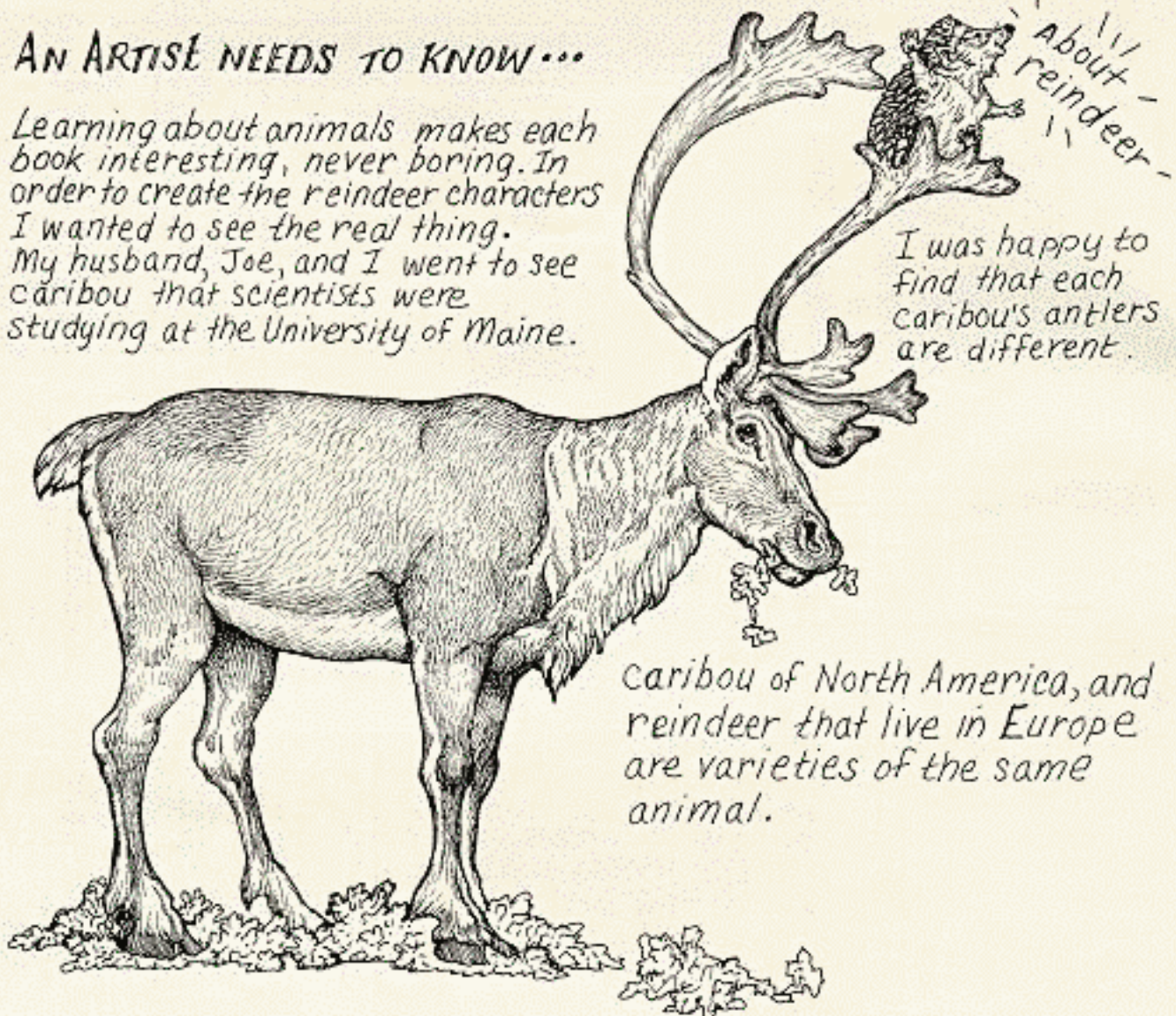


design from Telemark on an apron

Something has always made me curious. You can find out what's inside each workshop by looking in the borders of the book.

## AN ARTIST NEEDS TO KNOW...

Learning about animals makes each book interesting, never boring. In order to create the reindeer characters I wanted to see the real thing. My husband, Joe, and I went to see caribou that scientists were studying at the University of Maine.



I was really worried that I wouldn't be able to get close enough to the caribou. In my book, I would need to know what a reindeer tummy looked like, and the bottom of their hooves because I show Lichen upside down. Best of all, I wanted to imagine how a reindeer would feel to hug. Would he be fluffy or scratchy, friendly or aloof?

When the day came, my hopes of getting close to the caribou sank. In the first pen was a white-tailed deer. Although it was tame it bounded off and hid at our first quick movement. In the second pen was a moose. We didn't have a chance to find out what she was like. The scientist hurried us through because she looked cranky.

But when the scientist opened the door to the third pen two happy caribou came barreling over. They acted like puppies. One wanted to eat my pom-pom. They both nuzzled us.

The problem was not getting close to the caribou, the problem was getting far enough away so that all my photos didn't look like this →



Page 5 of 6

[Next Page](#)

[Home Page](#)



The reindeer names in *The Wild Christmas Reindeer* are not the traditional ones. I remember reading about Dancer, Prancer, Donder and Vixen, Cupid and Comet, Dasher and Blitzen in Clement Clarke Moore's famous poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas."

I felt that although Santa Claus is immortal, the reindeer may not be. They would have grown too old to pull the sleigh. The flying reindeer in my book are the great-great grandchildren of the famous ones from one hundred years ago. See if you can find a portrait of their ancestors in the reindeer barn. (It's small)



It was enjoyable naming the reindeer in my book, and giving them personalities. For example, Tundra sees himself as the noble leader. He also likes being first. Snowball is always hungry. He's pure white and chubby, so his name fits. Crag likes to stand alone. The others call him "Crab" if he's too grumpy. The dark, mysterious one is Twilight. Look for big, soft, brown eyes to find Heather. She is easily frightened. Bramble is named for the shape of his antlers. Windswept is always getting carried away and forgetting to stop. The eighth reindeer is called Lichen after the mossy looking markings on his coat.

[Home Page](#)

[Click here for a free subscription to janbrett.com](http://janbrett.com)

© Jan Brett 1996-2001