

THE CALDECOTT AWARD 1963

# The Snowy Day

illustrated by EZRA JACK KEATS

written by THE ILLUSTRATOR

published by THE VIKING PRESS 1962

## FORMAT

SIZE: 9" x 8", oblong, 32 pp.

ARTIST'S MEDIUM: Collage — cut papers and materials, some worked on with paint; some stamped with patterns cut in gum erasers

PRINTING PROCESS: Offset lithography

ILLUSTRATIONS: Front matter, full-color collage doublespreads throughout

TYPE: Aldine Bembo

## BOOK NOTE

THROUGH a day of adventure and discovery, Peter finds all the joys and wonders of fresh-fallen snow in the city. Such a simple story is given excitement and strength by the sure and dramatic use of color and shapes.

## CALDECOTT AWARD ACCEPTANCE

by *Ezra Jack Keats*

I AM very happy to be here to receive this great honor for a book which means so much to me, a book which led me into new avenues of expression.

I would like to tell you how *The Snowy Day* was done, and how I arrived at the technique used in it. However, it would be more accurate to say that I found myself participating in the involvement of the book.

First let me tell you about its beginnings. Years ago, long before I ever thought of doing children's books, while looking through a magazine I came upon four candid photos of a little boy about three or four years old. His expressive face, his body attitudes, the very way he wore his clothes, totally captivated me. I clipped the strip of photos and stuck it on my studio wall, where it stayed for quite a while, and then it was put away.

As the years went by, these pictures would find their way back to my walls, offering me fresh pleasure at each encounter.

In more recent years, while illustrating children's books, the desire to do my own story about this little boy began to germinate. Up he went again — this time above my drawing table. He was my model and inspiration. Finally I began work on *The Snowy Day*. When the book was finished and on the presses, I told Annis Duff, whose guidance and empathy have been immeasurable, about my long association with this little boy. How many years was it? I went over to *Life* magazine and had it checked. To my astonishment they informed me that I had found him twenty-two years ago!

Now for the technique — I had no idea as to how the book would be illustrated, except that I wanted to add a few bits of patterned paper to supplement the painting.

As work progressed, one swatch of material suggested another, and before I realized it, each page was being handled in a style I had never worked in before. A rather strange sequence of

events came into play. I worked — and waited. Then quite unexpectedly I would come across just the appropriate material for the page I was working on.

For instance, one day I visited my art supply shop looking for a sheet of off-white paper to use for the bed linen for the opening pages. Before I could make my request, the clerk said, "We just received some wonderful Belgian canvas. I think you'll like to see it." I hadn't painted on canvas for years, but there he was displaying a huge roll of canvas. It had just the right color and texture for the linen. I bought a narrow strip, leaving a puzzled clerk wondering what strange shape of picture I planned to paint.

The creative efforts of people from many lands contributed to the materials in the book. Some of the papers used for the collage came from Japan, some from Italy, some from Sweden, many from our own country.

The mother's dress is made of the kind of oilcloth used for lining cupboards. I made a big sheet of snow-texture by rolling white paint over wet inks on paper and achieved the effect of snow flakes by cutting patterns out of gum erasers, dipping them into paint, and then stamping them onto the pages. The gray background for the pages where Peter goes to sleep was made by spattering India ink with a toothbrush.

Friends would enthusiastically discuss the things they did as children in the snow, others would suggest nuances of plot, or a change of a word. All of us wanted so much to see little Peter march through these pages, experiencing, in the purity and innocence of childhood, the joys of a first snow.

I can honestly say that Peter came into being because we wanted him; and I hope that, as the Scriptures say, "a little child shall lead them," and that he will show in his own way the wisdom of a pure heart.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

by *Esther Hautzig*

### Ezra Jack Keats

THE quality one immediately senses in Ezra Jack Keats is his genuine love for children. And what is more important, he not only loves children, he respects them, understands them, and *listens* to them. So many people love children, but, alas, so few really take the trouble to listen to them and understand them on their own level. Children have problems; they experience frustrations that seem unimportant to us as we look down on them from our Mount Olympus of adulthood; they take pleasure in things which may seem insignificant to us. But a sympathetic observer of children, and one who remembers his childhood as vividly and perceptively as does Ezra Jack Keats, knows instinctively, without deliberation and courses in child psychology, what the world of childhood is really like.

A snowy day, a beautiful, brisk snowy day can be a glorious experience for a child — and it is just that for Peter in the Caldecott Medal-winning book, *The Snowy Day*. The loss of a dog in a big, strange city can be a terrible and sad experience for a child, especially for a child who does not speak English, and it is just that for Juanito in *My Dog Is Lost!* (Crowell), which Ezra Jack Keats illustrated and wrote with Pat Cherr. That Peter is a Negro child and Juanito a Puerto Rican boy reflects Mr. Keats's desire to do books for all children.

Everything that concerns children interests him, be it the troubles of a young Puerto Rican neighbor like Juanito, who wanted a dog desperately but was not allowed to have one, or an appealing photograph of a boy just like Peter which he clipped from a magazine and saved for more than twenty years. When Mr. Keats decided to write and illustrate *The Snowy Day*, he

found the clipping and put it in front of him because he felt that it would give him the feeling of ease and naturalness that the little boy had. When he showed the first few doublespreads of *The Snowy Day* to Annis Duff, his editor at Viking Press, he had alternate pages of full color and black and white. He says, "I'll be everlastingly grateful to Mrs. Duff because she asked me to do the whole book in full color, and while it made for an enormous increase in production costs, it was just the thing to have done!"

Ezra Jack Keats came to illustrating children's books after being a painter for a number of years. Following his discharge from the army at the end of World War II he made some full-color illustrations for the now-defunct magazine *Collier's*, and, having saved up enough money, he went to Europe for a year. He spent most of that time in Paris. When he returned to the United States he produced some book jackets for adult novels. One of them caught the attention of Elizabeth Riley, who asked Mr. Keats to do a jacket for a teen-age novel which was being published at the Thomas Y. Crowell Company. Shortly afterward Miss Riley suggested that Mr. Keats illustrate one of Elisabeth Hubbard Lansing's books, *Jubilant for Sure*, which is set in the hills of Kentucky. Mr. Keats recalls in detail the beginning of his career in the field of children's book illustration:

I liked *Jubilant for Sure* very much, and I wanted to do a good job, so I decided it was time for a trip. I didn't know anyone in Kentucky, but I knew remotely someone in Tennessee so I went down to the Smokies and decided to sketch there. One day I got a hitch on an ice truck and, as we were bumping along, I saw a really typical shack that had an old porch and a rocker. I asked the driver to stop and hopped off. As I was sketching I suddenly noticed on the righthand side of the porch a four-year-old girl, with a head of golden curls. She looked very boldly and calmly at me and kept shifting over so she was directly in front of me. I included her in my drawing and then showed it to her. She smiled but wasn't a bit surprised. She had never seen anyone draw! While I was talking with the child, her mother came out. She looked at the drawing and thought it very nice. She asked me to stay to lunch, which would be ready when the little girl's father and grandfather came home. So I joined them and we had a very nice lunch. When it was over, they invited me to stay with them for a few days. I could

see that they weren't very well off, so I said that I would stay, but that I would like to pay for my share of the expenses. In that case, the father said, the invitation was off. So I accepted and spent a whole week with them, living right in the house with them, and what a marvelous experience it was. I had a wonderful time with that child!

Having a wonderful time with a child happened at the beginning of Ezra Jack Keats's distinguished career as a children's book illustrator, and his enjoyment of children's company has obviously not dimmed with the years. His own childhood was spent in Brooklyn, where he was the youngest of three children. He began to draw when he was very young; but, as he recalls it, he first became aware that his drawing meant anything to anybody when he was about nine or ten years old.

We had this kitchen table — it was enamel, with two drawers, one for silverware, the other for bread. Anyway, I proceeded to draw on the top of it, all the things kids draw pretty much, a profile of a lady with long lashes and a lot of curls. . . . I filled up the entire table with pictures of little cottages, curly smoke coming out of the chimneys, men's profiles, and kids. I drew an Indian and a Chinese with straw hat and pigtails. . . . I finished, the entire area was covered with sketches, completely covered with them. My mother came in and I expected her to say, "What have you been doing?" and "Get that sponge and wash it off!" Instead she looked at me and said, "Did you do that? Isn't it wonderful!" and she proceeded to look at each thing and clucked her tongue and said, "Now isn't that nice!" Then she said, "You know, it's so wonderful, it's a shame to wash it off." So she got out the tablecloth which we used only on Friday nights and she covered the whole little mural and every time a neighbor would come in, she'd unveil it to show what I had done. They'd all say, "Mmm, isn't that nice." They couldn't say anything else, Mother was so proud.

From the table-top mural, Ezra Jack Keats went on to other drawing. But his father did not look on the young artist's work with the same approval his mother had shown. Mr. Keats's father was a waiter in Greenwich Village when it was the Bohemia of America. He must have seen a great deal of deprivation and starvation there, for he constantly warned his son, "Never be an artist; you'll be a bum, you'll starve, you'll have a terrible life." But the boy painted nevertheless. When he heard his father coming up

the stairs, he would hide everything as fast as he could under the long oilcloth cover of the sewing machine.

My father would come in and smell the paints and say, "You've been painting. Get out and play ball and stop making a fool of yourself." So I had to go out and play ball. . . . Then one day he came home and said, "If you don't think artists starve, well, let me tell you. One man came in the other day and swapped me a tube of paint for a bowl of soup." My father put down a brand-new tube of paint. I thought how lucky I was that the poor man had to make such a swap. The swap happened again and again, and one day my father brought home a package of brushes, very inexpensive brushes which no professional artist would have bought. It dawned on me that my father was buying this stuff for me and had a terrible conflict. He was proud of my painting and he wanted to supply me with paint, but at the same time he lived in real dread of my living a life like that of the artists he had seen.

Mr. Keats's father continued to supply paints and brushes and he continued to complain. But once, when the boy made a sign for the candy store across the street from his home and got a quarter for it, his father was impressed. He said, "See, now you're using your head. You'll become a sign painter and you'll make a decent living, and you'll be a lot better off than these artists I see in the Village."

Once, a day Ezra Jack Keats remembers perfectly even now, his father took him to the Metropolitan Museum.

My father thought that the most important paintings in the world would be those of important people. He showed me Gilbert Stuart's painting of George Washington and Andrew Jackson's portrait and all the colonial paintings. . . . It was all very nice and it was all really dull, and I was getting tired. Suddenly I looked down the length of the corridor and at the other end was an arched doorway which opened to another gallery, completely bathed in sunlight. Framed in that archway was Daumier's *Third Class Carriage*. I never heard of Daumier and I knew nothing about his painting. . . . I felt a pounding in my heart and I just turned toward it and walked toward it as though hypnotized. As I got closer to it, it glowed more magnificently. . . .

The father lived to see his son become a professional artist, but he never uttered a word of praise when Ezra won a number of

prizes upon graduation from Thomas Jefferson High School. After his father's death, Ezra Jack Keats found in a wallet tattered clippings about all the prizes he had won. "He never said a word to me about it, and when I looked into that wallet I looked into a different man."

Since those days, long ago, Mr. Keats has received words of praise from many sources. The books he has illustrated and those he has written have been praised by reviewers, educators, librarians, and, most of all, by children. Some months ago, my six-year-old daughter was showing her very best friend her well-worn copy of *The Snowy Day* and a picture of Ezra Jack Keats which appeared in *Publishers' Weekly* at the time of the announcement of the Caldecott Medal. "My friend Jack Keats wrote this book," she said with awe, "and it was picked as the best book in the world."

Ezra Jack Keats is her friend, as he is every child's friend, and *The Snowy Day* is undoubtedly "the best book in the world" to a multitude of children.