



The Journey That Saved Curious George

by [Louise Borden](#)

illustrated by [Allan Drummond](#)

- [About the Book](#)
- [About the Author](#)
- [About the Illustrator](#)
- [A Conversation with Louise Borden](#)
- [Curious About George](#)

About the Book

Everybody loves Curious George, the mischievous monkey, but few know the harrowing story behind his creators' narrow escape from Paris just hours before the Nazis seized control of the city. In 1940, Hans and Margret Rey had to flee their home as the German army advanced. They began their journey to freedom on bicycles, pedaling to southern France with their children's book manuscripts among their few possessions. One of these manuscripts went on to become *Curious George*, the tale of that inquisitive monkey who is one of the most enduring characters in children's literature. The Reys' story is now told in dramatic detail in *The Journey That Saved Curious George*.

Published more than sixty years ago, *Curious George* continues to amuse, teach, and entertain children today. George will be seen on the big screen in early 2006 in an animated feature film starring Will Ferrell as the Man with the Yellow Hat. WGBH, the award-winning PBS affiliate, is creating a math and science concept show for preschoolers, to air in fall 2007 as part of their "Ready to Learn" programming, starring Curious George. Readers who have loved George for generations and those just making his acquaintance will be intrigued by the thrilling story of his road to publication.

You can't walk down a street or through a mall in America these days without noticing the nostalgia factor. Dick and Jane are on the bestseller list, FiestaWare is on tables, Nick at Nite's lineup could be from 1970. Girls of all ages are wearing capri pants, knitting is the latest hot hobby, and Twister is a favorite family game. Some folks may be yearning for what seemed to be a simpler time; others may simply respond to the inherent charm and quality of classic goods. Curious George, with his good-natured penchant for mischief, strikes just the right chord on both fronts.

Louise Borden combed primary resources, including Hans Rey's pocket diaries, to tell this dramatic story. Archival materials — photographs, train ticket stubs, letters and cards — introduce readers to the world of Hans and Margret Rey, and Allan Drummond dramatically and colorfully illustrates their wartime trek to a new home. Follow the Reys'

amazing story in this unique large-format book that resembles a travel journal; see for yourself the route the Reys took as they traveled to freedom.

About the Author

Louise Borden is the author of nineteen picture books, including *The Journey That Saved Curious George* (Houghton Mifflin Company, September 2005). She frequently speaks about the writing process to students and teachers — her travels have taken her to over five hundred schools across the country.

A history major in college, Borden has written historical fiction about subjects ranging from Boston on the eve of the American Revolution to the rescue of soldiers at Dunkirk in World War II to the Dempsey-Tunney boxing match in 1927.

She has also written several picture book-biographies, including *Fly High! The Story of Bessie Coleman*, which she wrote with Mary Kay Kroeger, and *Sea Clocks: The Story of Longitude*. Her book *Good Luck, Mrs. K*, a school story about a third-grade class and their teacher, won a Christopher Award in 2000.

Several of her titles have been listed as notable in the field of social studies. Others have received starred reviews in *School Library Journal*, *Horn Book Magazine*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *Booklist*.

Louise lives with her husband, Pete, in Terrace Park, Ohio, a suburb of Cincinnati. The Bordens' have three grown children. For more information, please visit www.louiseborden.com.

About the Illustrator

The British-born illustrator **Allan Drummond** has a degree in graphic design from the London College of Printing and a degree in illustration from the Royal College of Art. In 2004 he became chair of the Savannah (Georgia) College of Art and Design. Mr. Drummond lives with his wife and three sons in Savannah. For more information, please visit www.allandrummond.com.

A Conversation with Louise Borden

Why did you decide to write this book?

For many years, I had been intrigued by the snippets of information I knew about the Reys' escape from Paris. I had just finished writing a book, *The Little Ships*, about the same time period, June 1940. I wanted to know more: details about the Reys' lives as artists, why they were living in Paris, the particulars of their journey. How far did they bicycle each day? What happened to the belongings they left behind? What was it like to be German-born Jews during World War II in Europe?

As a historian writing for young people, you have to be mindful of what your readers know. How did this affect your description of the situation of Jews in France in 1940?

Whenever I am writing about a European setting during World War II, I try to make the time period accessible to young American readers. It is a real challenge to take a subject as complicated as World War II and write about it in a way that children can understand. I also think that maps can give young readers important information about where the events are occurring.

For *The Journey that Saved Curious George*, I realized that even adult readers might not be aware of the situation in France in 1940. The war was unfolding on many fronts. Armies were in retreat. Governments were surrendering. Imagine the confusion and fright that must have been common among ordinary citizens. So I tried to set the wartime scene by mentioning faraway battles in Poland, then the situation in Denmark and Norway, and, on May 10, the invasion of Holland and Belgium, and then France. All French citizens were at risk, not just Jews. Everyone was fleeing from the battles.

In 1940, the full implications of what the Germans had in mind for Jewish citizens in France was not yet known by the public. Besides their Brazilian passports, the Reys also held French identity cards that stated their occupation and nationality but not their religion. If the Reys had remained in France, even though their Brazilian passports did not state that they were Jewish, I am sure they would have been caught in the closing net of the Nazis and been deported to a concentration camp. After the fall of France, foreign Jews were required to be registered on French government lists. Many non-Jewish citizens were deported as well, after Germany took control of France.

In my text, I tried to inform young readers that Germany was not a safe place for Jews in the 1930s. Kids are smart. They will understand that wherever the Nazis were in control after the 1930s, this situation would continue until the Nazis were defeated. Some students in the upper elementary grades know about the plight of Jews during World War II and have beginning knowledge of the Holocaust. The story about the Reys takes place before those terrible events unfolded.

What was one thing that surprised you during your research and travels?

As I was reading through copies of letters and looking at the Reys' personal photographs, as well as photographs of Paris during this time period, it seemed like a very gray and black-and-white world. Photos were not in color. Newsreels were not in color. Letters were typed or written in black ink on white paper. And yet, when I looked at the artwork of Hans Rey, the colors were vibrant — yellow and blue, red and green. And I realized that the Reys' childhoods and their later life in Paris and as refugees were lived in full color.

Before I visited Chateau Feuga, where the Reys spent the fall of 1939, I had been picturing the black-and-white photo we found in the archives. But when I saw the house it was in full color! This, I think, is what surprised me — the black-and-white research versus the full-color scenes from my travels.

Something else that surprised me was Hans's meticulous notes in his calendar books. He was certainly a man of habit in his record keeping, which seems to be at odds with the image of a typical artist. Hans had an interest in science and philosophy and had planned

to study medicine in his university years, but the poor economy in Germany made that impossible. In letters and documents, his small handwriting was neat and orderly, whereas Margret's script appeared much larger and bolder and was sometimes difficult to read.

What do you think accounts for the popularity of Curious George?

I think that most people need and love humor in life. The antics and expressions of the character Curious George hit the mark in delighting readers of many ages and nationalities. Think of all the laughter and smiles around the world that have been generated by this one mischievous little monkey!

George brings a positive outlook to his readers in those moments when they are turning the pages of his books — an outlook that they can carry with them into their own lives.

So many of George's instincts are universal ones. His most famous trait, curiosity, shines through all the Curious George stories and inspires children in what they already know about the world — that it is a big place full of unknown adventures. George also touches our hearts in a unique and special way. He endures through generations of readers because we can each see a part of ourselves in his antics, mishaps, and solutions to comical and unexpected situations.

Curious George is such an enduring character from children's literature. Does he remind you of Hans and Margret Rey at all?

Yes. I think that Hans and Margret live on via the wonderful personality of their famous George. Just by reading the Reys' letters to their family and their editors, I instantly recognized their humor and playful approach to life. Even when they were living through threatening circumstances, their humor and positive energy shone through like a bright thread.

Many scenes in the *Curious George* books reflect parts of the Reys' lives — just look for a camera, hanging on the wall in a ship cabin, and you'll be reminded that Margret Rey was a photographer. Hans smoked a pipe, just like the Man with the Yellow Hat. Turtles, the zoo scenes, the balloon man — these all came from the Reys' lives in Europe. When I page through the *Curious George* books, I feel as if I am reliving some of their adventures. Both Margret and Hans were creative and curious people — they explored life with their inquisitive minds. They were always learning new things, and they stepped out into a busy world with a smile, just like George.

How do you think we can keep curiosity alive in children?

I'm not sure how to answer that question. I've always been curious about many aspects of the world, and I think that comes from being a reader. When I was in elementary school, I loved reading books about other countries and cultures and learning new things through books. I knew my first heroes through books. Today's young reader has the influences of TV and computers, but those can be used in positive ways to enhance curiosity. As long as we have wonderful literature, good teachers, and vibrant classrooms in America, and can grow lifelong readers, I think we'll continue to foster curiosity in kids. And being curious about the small and big things in life will certainly enrich their worlds.

Curious About George

More than thirty million copies of *Curious George* books have been sold worldwide.

Curious George has been translated into sixteen languages, including Yiddish, Afrikaans, and Braille.

Curious George first appeared in *Cecily G and the Nine Monkeys*, which was published in France in 1939. He was called Fifi in those editions.

Hans Rey first saw his future wife, Margret, at a party in her father's home in Germany, where she was sliding down the banister.

Hans and Margret Rey narrowly escaped the Nazis by fleeing Paris in 1940 only hours before the Nazis invaded. They bicycled out of the city with the original manuscript of *Curious George* on their backs.

When *Curious George* was published in 1941, King George was the king of England. So as not to be disrespectful to the king by associating him with a monkey, Curious George was called Zozo in England.

The Reys created *Curious George Goes to the Hospital* at the request of officials at Boston Children's Hospital, who wanted a book to prepare children for a hospital stay. After it was published, many parents wrote to the Reys to tell them how effective the book was in reducing their child's fear of hospitals.

A newspaper clipping about two mice that were sent into space to study the effects of weightlessness inspired the story of George's own space flight in *Curious George Gets a Medal*.

Many of the Reys' own interests and adventures found their way into the Curious George books. Both Hans and Margret were very fond of animals, and their first stop in a new city was always the zoo. Hans smoked a pipe; they lived among palm trees in Brazil; they rode out of Paris on bicycles; and they left Europe on an ocean liner.

The *Curious George* books were a true collaboration. Hans was usually in charge of the ideas and the illustrations, while Margret handled the plot and the writing.