



Marc Simont

The Stray Dog
ISBN13: 9780064436694

Q: Can you tell the story of how *The Stray Dog* came to about?

A: I showed a copy of *The Philharmonic Gets Dressed* to my friend, Reiko Sassa, the librarian at Japan Society. There is an illustration of a dog in the book that reminded her of a family pet, a stray they had picked up in a public park. The account she gave was a natural for a kids' book and I encouraged her to write it up. Time passed, and when nothing came of her attempt to get that story published, we agreed that I should have a go at it with my own version. I showed it to my friend Harriet Barton, Creative Director at HarperCollins, and a week later *The Stray Dog* was in the works.

Q: Can you describe the process of creating *The Stray Dog*? Did the words or the pictures come first?

A: As I was working on the color dummy for the book, it occurred to me that this simple story of a family and a dog could be told without words. Eventually it became clear that some text was needed to help move the story along, but by then I had developed the pictures to the point where a minimal amount of text was sufficient to round out the story.

Q: Is there a difference between illustrating stories you write and stories written by other authors?

A: The work involved in developing illustrations for a text is the same whether the story is mine or someone else's. The process in both cases is one of transposing written words into images. The tricky part is when a writer has to turn the text over to someone else to do the pictures. It's a bit like giving up a pet you can no longer care for: all you can do is hope that the new owner will love it and treat it well.

Q: You have illustrated many different kinds of children's books, from picture books such as *The First Christmas* to novels like *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*. What are some of the differences between illustrating a picture book and illustrating a novel?

A: With the very young, you can let your imagination run free, and they'll stay with you. If you try that with older kids, they're apt to tell you that you're getting off the subject.

Q: It has been said you have "a remarkable ability to connect with the child reader" (from *Children's Books and Their Creators*). Where does that ability come from?

A: Ursula Nordstrom, the legendary editor-in-chief of Harper Junior Books, who didn't go to college or have any special training, was asked about her qualifications. "I'm an ex-child," she said. Not letting the child in us get away altogether keeps open a line of communication as we get older.