

# Margret and H. A. Rey and their famous Curious George

by Louise Borden

Millions of us around the world have read one or more of the seven original Curious George stories included in this seventy-fifth anniversary edition. My favorites growing up were *Curious George Takes a Job* and *Curious George Rides a Bike*.

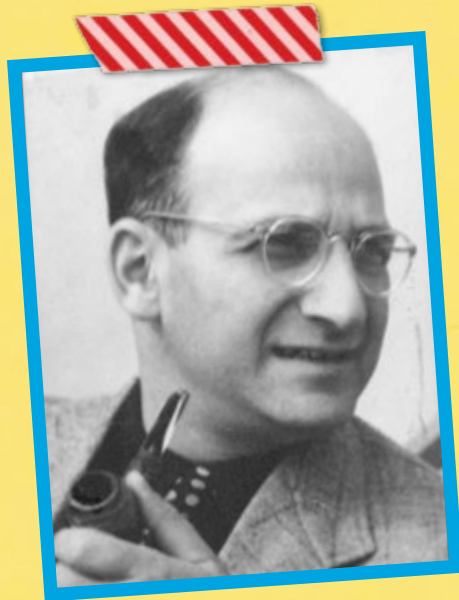


Years after reading those yellow books, I found out what the H and the A stand for in H. A. Rey . . . and that echoes of H.A.'s life, and those of his wife, Margret, appear in the illustrations of their stories. Maybe you can discover them too.

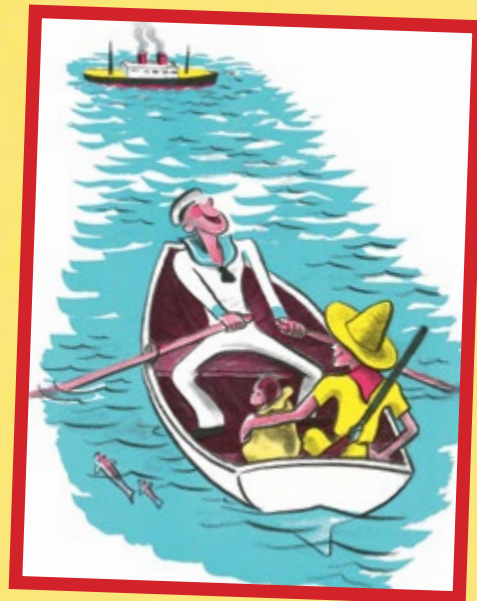


# Early Years

Hans Augusto Reyersbach was born in Hamburg, Germany, close to the North Sea. As a boy, he watched the ships of the world sail into port and unload their cargoes on the docks of the river Elbe.



Hans had one brother and two sisters. From an early age he showed a talent for drawing horses and all kinds of things. And he could mimic the roars of the lions he saw in the Hagenbeck Zoo, not far from his house.



H.A. didn't know then he would grow up to live on three continents... and be known for creating the most famous monkey in the world.

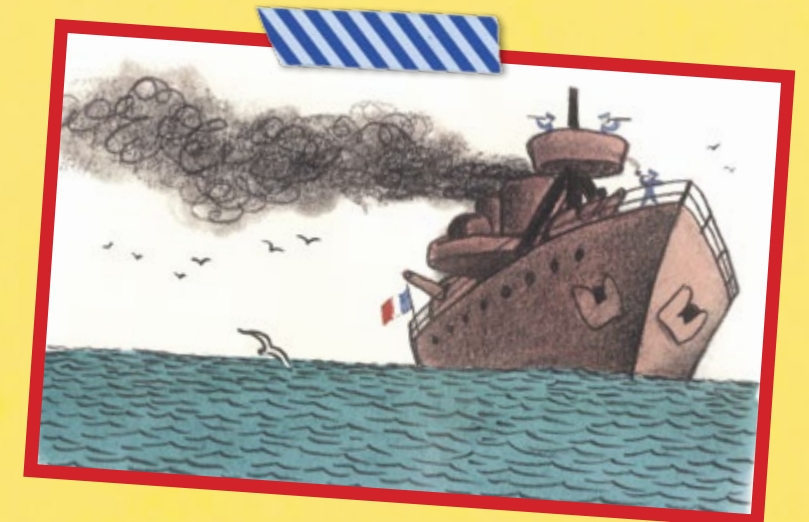


When Hans turned ten on September 16, 1908, Margarete Elisabeth Waldstein was only two years old. Her parents lived near the Reyersbachs. Both families were Jewish, and were friends.



Sketch by H. A. Rey.

In 1914, Germany went to war against England, France, and Russia.







Margarete Waldstein was now eight years old, and had two sisters and two brothers.

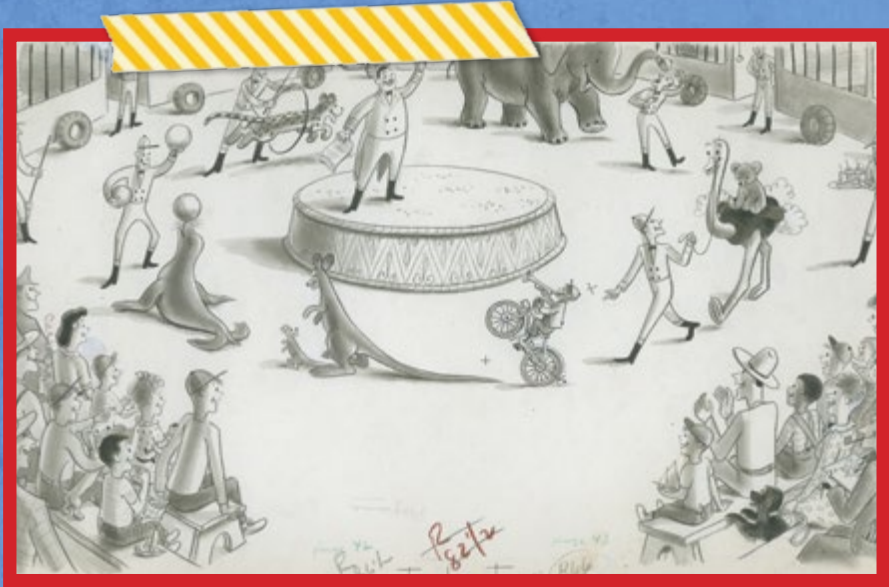
When Germany lost the war in 1918, Hans went home to Hamburg. To help pay for college classes, he painted circus posters . . . and met clowns and acrobats as he sketched the big ring.



Hans Reyersbach was in high school and a student of languages. But he still loved to draw. After graduation, Hans was drafted into the German army to serve as a soldier.



Hans with his unit.



Original sketch from *Curious George Rides a Bike*.



At the front, he carried a pocket guide of the stars. "Hmm," Hans told himself on clear nights. "This star guide is not easy to understand . . ." never guessing he would later create two star guides of his own.



Then, in the early 1920s at a party at the Waldstein home, Hans saw Margarete for the first time . . . when she slid down a banister. Already, Margarete, with her smile and her curls, had the sparkle and confidence she would carry the rest of her life.



# Brazil



S.S. Albert Ballin.

Times were hard after the war, so Hans joined a relative's import-export business. He left Germany in 1925, sailing from Hamburg to New York City aboard the *Albert Ballin*. Six months later, H.A. went on to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. There he learned Portuguese and traveled to the Amazon River. Ten years went by.

Margarete moved to London, England, to work as a photographer. Her parents and family would also leave Hamburg because of Hitler's anti-Jewish laws. In 1935, Margarete bought a ticket to sail to Brazil, and packed her camera. She knew Hans Reyersbach, her family friend, was there.



Map of Brazil illustrated by Hans.

In Hamburg, Margarete Waldstein was now grown up. She studied art at the famous Bauhaus, and then in Düsseldorf. Margarete also had a love for photography.



Seal from Margarete's school certificate.



Photo taken by Margarete.

The two artists from Hamburg shared ideas and began to work together. Margarete changed her first name to Margret and Hans shortened his last name to Rey.

H.A. and Margret made a great team. They soon married and started the first husband-and-wife advertising agency in Rio.

In 1936, carrying new Brazilian passports, the Reys sailed back to Europe for a belated honeymoon.

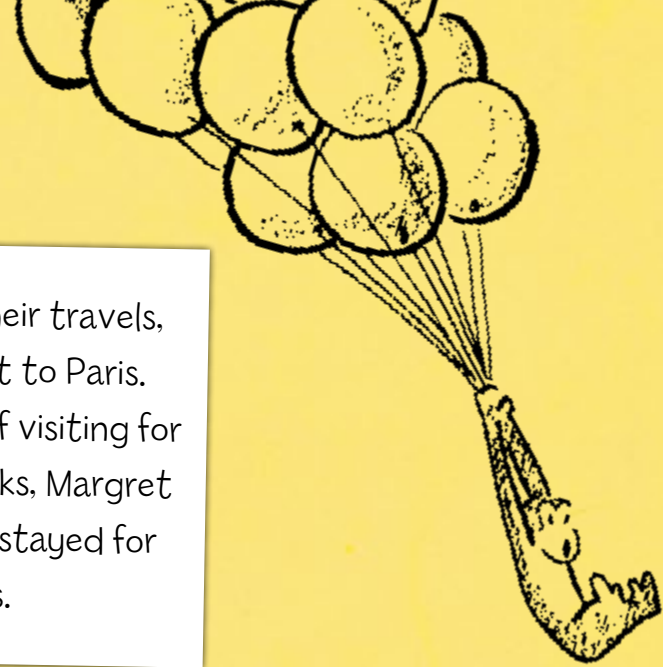


Margarete and her siblings.

When Adolf Hitler became the leader of Germany in 1933, his Nazi laws changed life for German Jews.



# France



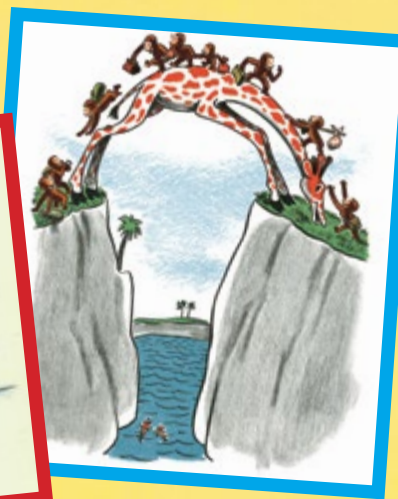
The Reys lived here—at the Terrass Hotel.

During their travels, they went to Paris. Instead of visiting for a few weeks, Margret and Hans stayed for four years.

Soon the Reys began to create books and found publishers in Paris and London. Hans was the thinker with vision. Margret was the art director and organizer.



H.A.'s first books in Paris were wordless, and for grownups. Hans also designed paper punch-outs.



And . . . he loved to draw giraffes. His first book for children was about a giraffe and nine monkeys without tails.

*Rafi et les 9 Singes* was published in France in 1939 and also in England, as *Raffy and the Nine Monkeys*.



On September 1, 1939, the shadow of war covered Europe once again. That day, Adolf Hitler sent his soldiers into Poland. France and England soon declared war on Germany.

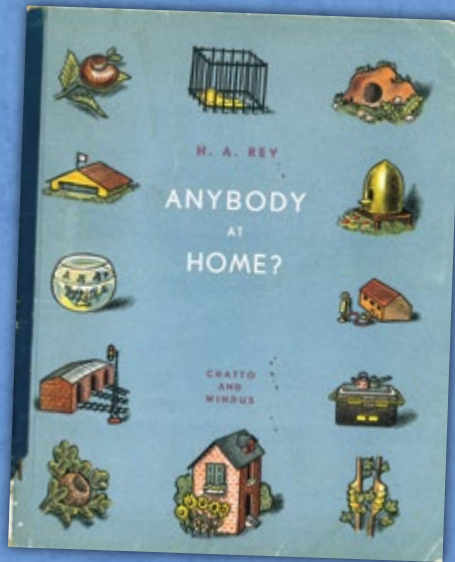
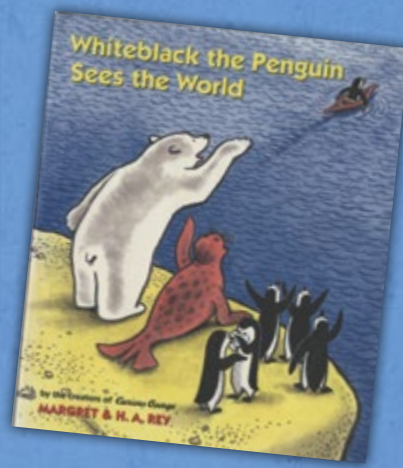
Margret and Hans left Paris and traveled south to Château Feuga, an old castle owned by German friends. There, Hans worked on a new book starring Fifi, the youngest monkey in the Raffy book. Fifi was a curious monkey who had a friend, the man with the yellow hat (who looked like a fellow the Reys had both known in Hamburg).



Château Feuga.



H.A. also painted pictures for a book about a penguin named Whiteblack. Margret worked on the design and typed the words. "Travelers always have lots of stories . . ." And the Reys were pleased with their new lift-the-flap book.



And the war? On May 10, 1940, Hitler's troops invaded France.

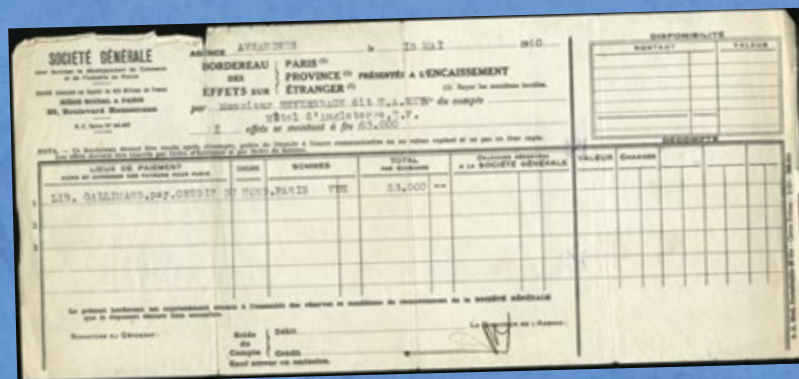
Margret and H.A. hurried back to Paris and made a plan to go to America, where Margret's sister Mary was living. As German tanks rattled closer to the capital, there was bedlam on the streets of Paris. People fled from the city by car, horse, bicycle, and foot.



On Christmas Eve, they returned to their apartment at the Terrass Hotel. Then in April 1940, the two artists went to a town in Normandy to work near the sea.



The Reys took their winter coats and their manuscripts and fled Paris on bicycles that Hans had assembled himself.



Hans' advance receipt.

Their French publisher, Gallimard, sent Hans a contract, and advance money, for *The Adventures of Fifi* and two other books.

H.A. and Margret traveled to Portugal, then Brazil, and finally docked in New York City on October 14, 1940. As Hans said: "One never forgets the day you arrive in America . . ."



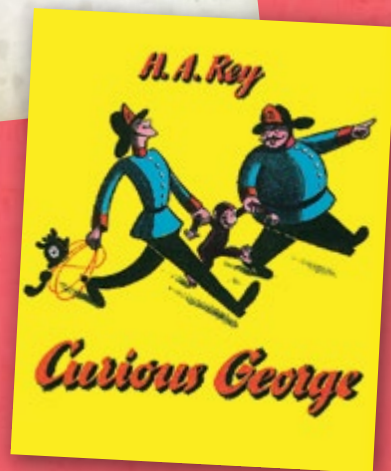
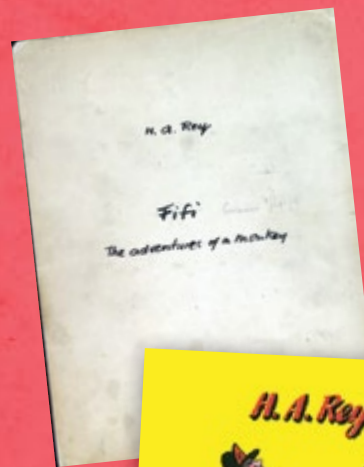


# New York City

On October 17, H.A. sent a postcard to Grace Hogarth, one of their London editors, who was now at Houghton Mifflin in Boston.



In November, Mrs. Hogarth came to New York and offered Hans a contract for four of the manuscripts the Reys had carried from Paris, including *The Adventures of Fifi*. She asked that Fifi's name be changed to a stronger, more American name. Hmm . . . maybe . . . George? *Curious George* was published on August 17, 1941.



In New York City, Margret and H.A. lived on Perry Street and on West 236th Street until they moved to 42 Washington Square.



Design by H.A. Rey.

"I never go above 14th Street . . . everything I need is here," Hans said of their life in Greenwich Village.



The Reys loved the energy in New York City. They always had a cocker spaniel for company: first Charcoal (Charky), followed by Jamie, Scoopy, Andy, and finally, in 1993, Jeannie.

Sometimes Margret wrote her own stories. Hans also illustrated books by other writers.

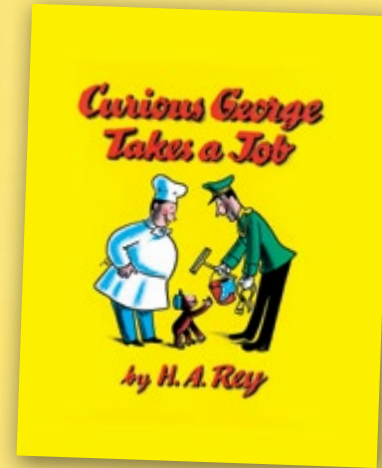


Illustration from *The Park Book* dummy.

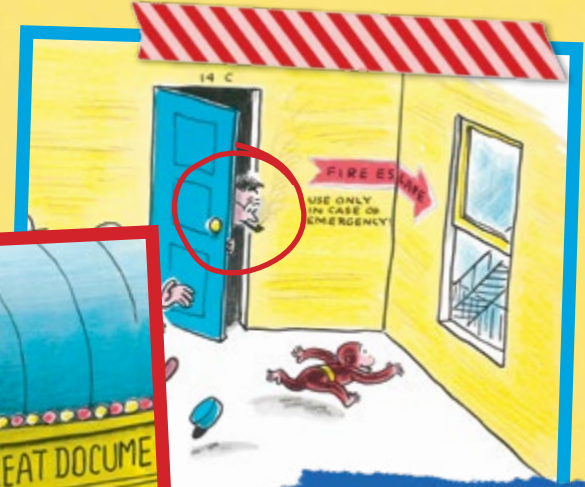
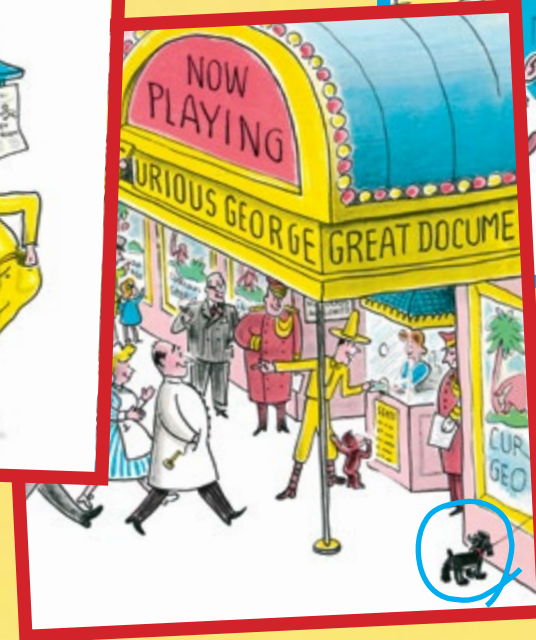


In 1946, their *Curious George* readers had asked for a new book. Hmm . . .





See Charky at the newsstand and the movie?



Is that H.A. in 14C?

A Fifth Avenue scene, a building with windows to wash, a subway, a newsstand, a movie . . . (and, of course, the man with the yellow hat) became parts of *Curious George Takes a Job*, published in 1947. The text seems simple, but it took the Reys more than a year to find just the right trouble for George to get into . . . and to get out of.

In 1949, Margret and H.A. moved to 82 Washington Place. Hans rented a room nearby for his studio.



Look for Margret strolling with her dog. Look for Hans with his sketchbook next to his pal Mr. Jackson.



Sketch of Washington Place apartment.

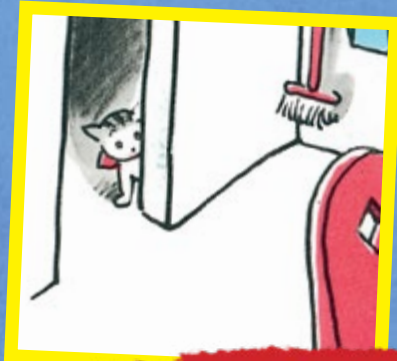
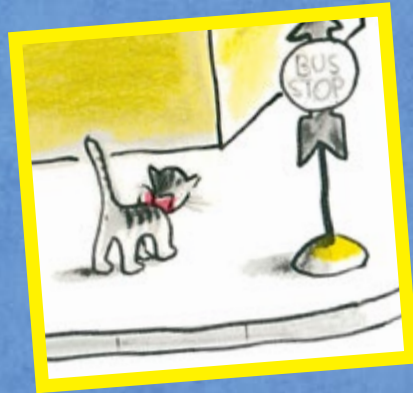


H.A. in his studio.

“The coming of an idea is wonderful and exciting . . . the making of the first sketches is fun too since I love drawing . . . I do not mean to say you feel happy every minute . . . There are times when you run into snags.” (H.A.)



H.A. liked to give little stories to many of the extra characters in his books.



Follow the story of the kitten in *Curious George Takes a Job*. And look for the mini-story about the mice or the balloon man in *Curious George*.

The third Curious George book, *Curious George Rides a Bike*, was published in 1952 . . . with a bicycle and a newsboy, a neighborhood, a river, a fleet of paper boats, a traveling circus, and a lost little bear.



Look for Charky and Margret in the neighborhood.



Find the Reys and Charky at the show.



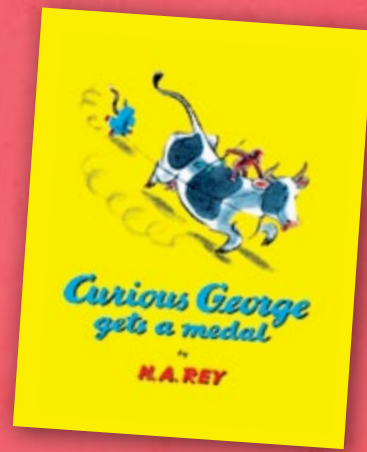
Look at the blue car's license plate. What do you think "CG3" stands for?

The Reys continued to love their Greenwich Village neighborhood. Margret once said, "Every night we had a dog meeting on the square. Fifteen or twenty dogs from the neighborhood played together. We had a silent agreement with the police to let our dogs off the leash at night."





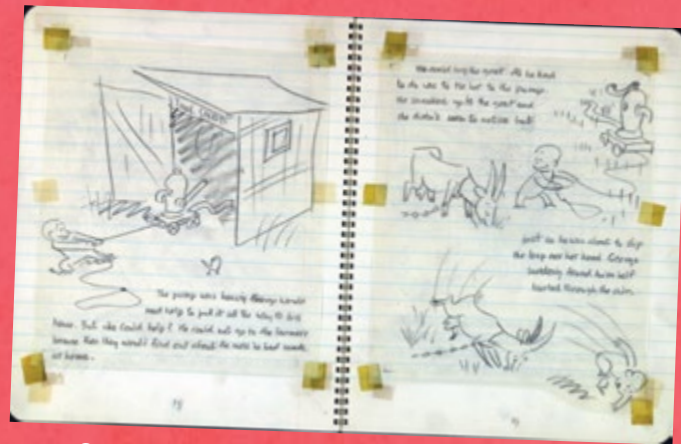
During this happy time, the fourth Curious George book was created. *Curious George Gets a Medal*, published in 1957, has a comic adventure with soapsuds and a hose. (This actually happened to an aspiring chemist the Reys had known years before in Hamburg.) George causes an uproar and redeems himself by taking a ride on a rocket.



Hans and Margret working together.

In the late 1950s, educators were abuzz about the best way to teach beginning readers: short lines with simple vocabulary. So Margret typed a list of 219 words. What should the book be about?

When real monkeys were later sent into outer space, Margret liked to joke that George was their inspiration.



Original sketch from *Curious George Gets a Medal*.



"Hmm," said Hans. "I like kites . . ." The Reys took Jamie for a stroll and plotted scenes for a good story. "Would George do this?" "No, George would do that." Gradually the story took shape.



See the blue truck with "CG4"? And the Reys' dog Jamie on the last page?

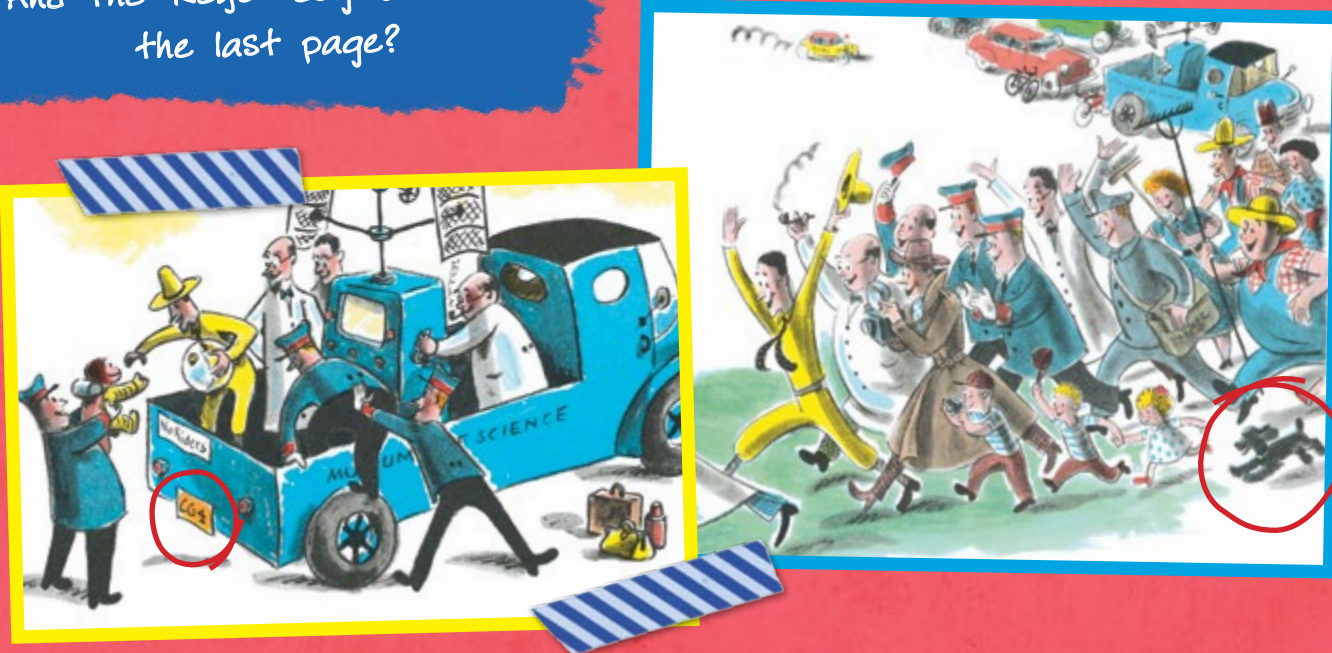


Dummy spread from *Curious George Flies a Kite*.



Original sketch from *Curious George Flies a Kite*.

In 1958, *Curious George Flies a Kite* appeared in bookstores and libraries. Margret hoped kids wouldn't notice the new easy-to-read style. Hans hoped kids would notice the little robin and "CG5."





# Cambridge

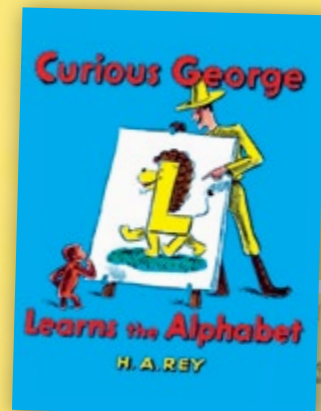
On to another adventure, the Reys left New York City in 1963 and moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts. Hilliard Street, number 12, and then 14, became their home.



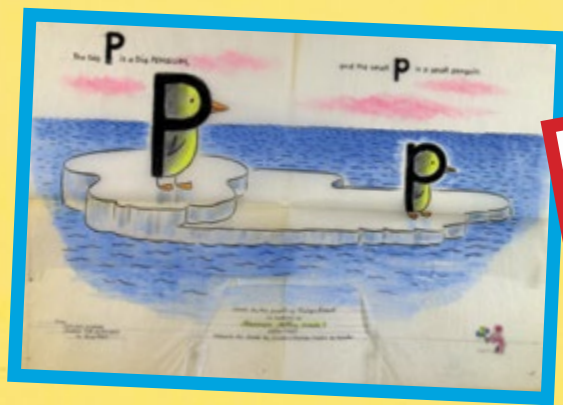
The creators of George were now popular speakers at book events. A few times, Hans even roared like a lion.



Soon, *Curious George Learns the Alphabet* brought letters and words to readers in a classic and clever Rey way. H.A. said: "This book was all mine."



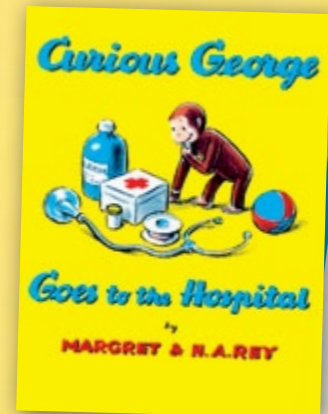
Original sketch from *Curious George Learns the Alphabet*.



Dummy spread from *Curious George Learns the Alphabet*.



In 1966, *Curious George Goes to the Hospital* was published after Children's Hospital in Boston asked the Reys to create a book to ease the fear of a first visit for kids.

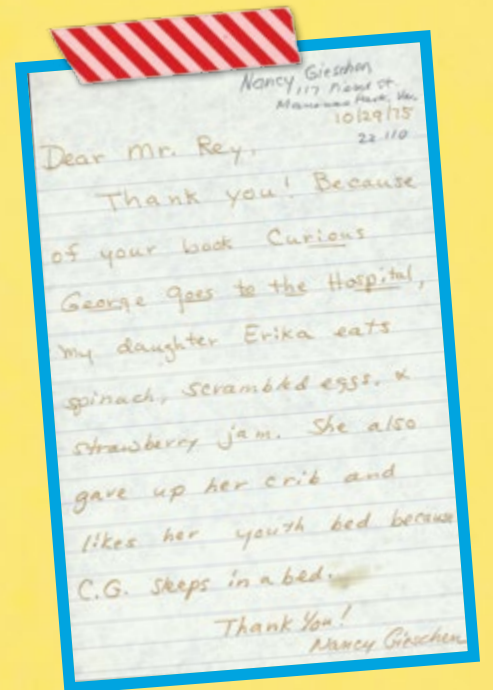


Setting the story in just one place was a challenge for Margret and Hans. A jigsaw puzzle piece and George's curiosity lead to a tummyache and surgery.



Can you find Margret and Scoopy by the curb?

"This book gave us the most satisfaction of all," Margret said, after hundreds of parents wrote thank-you letters to the Reys.



These seven tales about George and his antics have been translated into sixteen different languages.



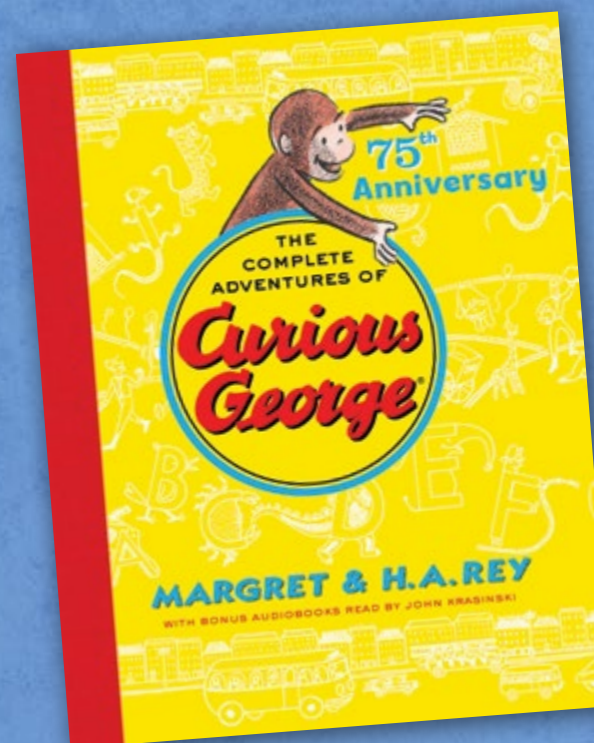


George's curiosity is now famous around the globe. H.A., who once said in an interview, "We're in the monkey business, you might say . . ." died a few weeks before his seventy-ninth birthday.

Remember Hans Augusto Reyersbach, the boy who spent hours at the zoo in Hamburg? Remember Margarete Elisabeth Waldstein, who slid down the banister of her house?



Margret lived into her ninety-first year at 14 Hilliard Street, walking with her dog Jeannie and their friend Lay Lee Ong to Harvard Square . . . and sharing her beloved George with the children of the world.



How lucky we are, generations of readers, to have the books of these two artists to carry ahead in our twenty-first century.



A selection of New Year's cards designed by H.A.

In 1944, Hans wrote on an annual New Year's card: "Let's think of the future: that's where we shall spend the rest of our lives."

Someday, if you travel beyond our planet Earth, the courage of a little monkey will be in your pocket . . . because Curious George, born on pages in wartime France, has been there before you, showing you the way.







This book's end papers is a map of the World of Curious George, created by the illustrator Anna Grossnickle Hines in celebration of the 75th anniversary of Curious George. As you explore the map you will find the locations of all of George's adventures . . . the dock where he tried to catch a fish, the launch where he flew into space, the skyscraper in need of a window washer, the hospital he visited to remove a swallowed puzzle piece, and so much more!

**TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE END PAPERS  
AND SEE IF YOU CAN FIND . . .**

- the subway entrance
- the phone booth
- the newspaper stand
- the balloon man
- the bunny house  
(and a couple of bunnies)
- newspaper boats
- a kite (hint: it's stuck in a tree)
- the man with the yellow hat (and George)
- George's friend Bill
- Margret Rey
- H. A. Rey



**HANS AUGUSTO REY** (1898–1977) met his wife-to-be, **MARGRET REY** (1906–1996), at a party in her father's home in Germany. When he first caught a glimpse of her, she was sliding down the banister. They

lived in Rio de Janeiro and Paris before moving to New York City and eventually settling in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Throughout their lives the Reys created many lively picture books together, but it is their incorrigible little monkey, Curious George, who has become an American icon, selling millions of books and capturing the hearts of readers everywhere.

**LOUISE BORDEN** is the author of thirty books for young readers, both fiction and nonfiction, including *The Journey That Saved Curious George*, illustrated by Allan Drummond, and *His Name Was Raoul Wallenberg*. Her subjects range from kindergarten to baseball to World War II. Louise and her husband, Peter, have three grown children and live in Cincinnati, Ohio.



**JOHN KRASINSKI** has established himself as one of the most exciting talents as an actor, writer, and director, engaging audiences on the big and small screen. Krasinski notably starred on NBC's Emmy®-winning smash hit *The Office* for nine seasons, where he portrayed the charming boy-next-door Jim Halpert. Born and raised in Newton, Massachusetts, Krasinski currently resides in Los Angeles with his wife, Emily Blunt, and their family.





## IMAGE CREDITS

[1] H.A. & Margret Rey Papers, de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, The University of Southern Mississippi

[2] Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company

[3] akg-images

[4] www.moore-mccormack.com

[5] National Archives/Ancestry.com

[6] From the collection of Louise Borden

[7] From the collection of Lay Lee Ong

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Pages **401**: book illustrations [2], photos [1]; **402**: photo [1], boat watercolor [1], pencil sketch [1]; **403**: watercolor [1], photo [1], book illustrations [2]; **404**: photos [1], covers [2]; **405**: sketch [1], photo [1], cover [2]; **406**: family photo [1], school seal [1], camera photo [3], ship [5]; **407**: map [1], photo [1], book illustration [1], invite [7]; **408**: pencil sketch [1], photo [6], cover [6], book illustration [6]; **409**: French cover [1], English cover [2], book illustrations [2], color photo [1], black-and-white photo [3]; **410**: photo [1], receipt [1], covers [2], book illustration [2]; **411**: black-and-white photos [3], Statue of Liberty [3], ship [4]; **412**: Fifi [1], sketch [1], CG with phone [2], covers [2]; **413**: Self-portrait [1], photos [1], spread [1], book illustration [2]; **414**: cover [2], illustrations [2], photo [3]; **415**: pencil sketch [1], photo [1], book illustrations [2]; **416**: cover and book illustrations [2]; **417**: photo [1], illustrations [2]; **418**: pencil sketch [1], cover and book illustrations [2]; **419**: photos [1], pencil sketch [1], spread [1], cover [2], book illustrations [2]; **420**: black-and-white photo [1], pencil sketch [1], spread [1], cover [2], illustration [2], color photo [6]; **421**: pencil sketch [1], letter [1], covers and illustrations [2]; **422**: photos and cards [1]; **423**: photo [1], cover and illustration [2]; **425**: John Krasinski photo [8].