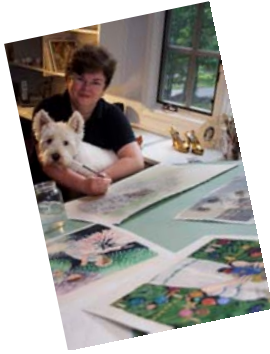


# The Making of *The Nutcracker* by Susan Jeffers



For me, the most difficult part of making a picture book, is finding and choosing the story that I would like to illustrate. Illustrating a book takes me a very long time, usually a year. In the case of *The Nutcracker*, it took three years. So I want to be sure I am going to love the story for a long time. I have to remain enchanted by the characters and deeply moved by the point of the story from the beginning. This is a big demand.



After I have chosen the story, the process seems to go along in the same way for every book. I make a dummy out of heavy paper...a piece for every page in the book. I divide the words in the story to flow from one page to the next. Then most times I will draw my favorite scene in the whole book. This is a scene that comes directly out of thin air. This scene has all that I love most about the story. In *The*

*Nutcracker* it is the scene where Marie and the prince have just left the house and snowflakes come swirling at them. What I love is the combination of fantasy and reality, taking the dancers and making them into snow and lifting them into the air. In the actual ballet the music and the beauty of the dance transport the audience to dreamland. I wanted the book to have the same feeling.

After I have a rough dummy of sketches, I find models for my characters. In *The Nutcracker* I needed a girl of about eleven with charm and effervescence. My editor, Barbara Lalicki, knew the perfect person: Meghan Morkal Williams.



I invited Meghan and her mother to my house to take photographs. I also asked my daughter Ali and her husband, Chad, to help. I had already taken a few photos of Ali and Chad

dancing and saying good-bye for the party scene. Chad is a fine photographer and I am a very nervous one, sure I will forget to load the camera and make unfortunate mistakes. So in addition to playing the Prince, Chad also took the bulk of the photos.



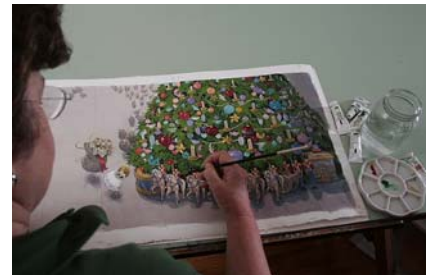
Ali, having danced in the *Nutcracker* ballet for many years, was perfect to play the roles opposite Meghan/Marie.



She was the Nutcracker and took turns playing the Prince with Chad, and also managed Emiko, the ferret, to evoke the wonderful expressions from Meghan that we needed for Marie.



Then, having done the photo research and gathered stacks of references for the time period costumes and architecture, I begin drawing. After the initial thumbnail, I perfect the drawing in pencil and then apply a waterproof black ink on top of the pencil. I still refer to the photo of Meghan at this point because I find that over time my eye improves and I get a better drawing.



After the ink dries, I start the color, a brilliant water-based paint called gouache applied in layers. Notice that the teddy bear has disappeared and the horsemen have gotten larger. One never stops editing. I work back and forth with the black line and color until I think it is done.

