

Here's advice someone gave me about writing stories: "Write about what you know." In *The Hat* I wrote about two things I knew about, knitting and hedgehogs. Then I added something I *wanted* to know about, the country of Denmark.

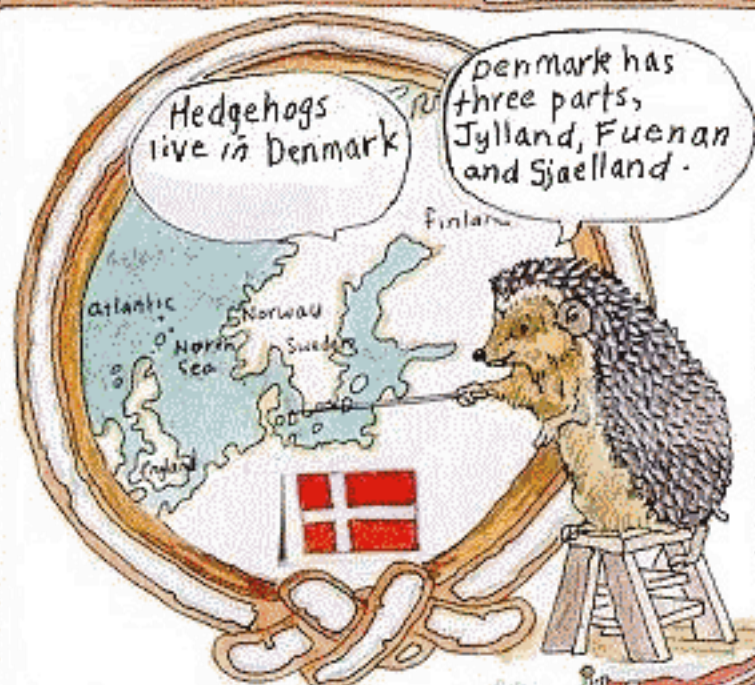
The idea for *The Hat* came to me after a curious incident with our pet hedgehog, Pudge. We let Pudge romp around loose at night. One morning, Joe and I realized she was missing. We looked and looked for her. Hedgehogs like small dark places so we searched everywhere, but to no avail. Joe spotted a slipper sock on the floor. It was puffier than usual. It moved. Pudge had gotten in but she couldn't get out. Her prickles were stuck in the woolen stitches. We rescued her carefully with a pair of scissors. It was a close call but it gave me an idea....



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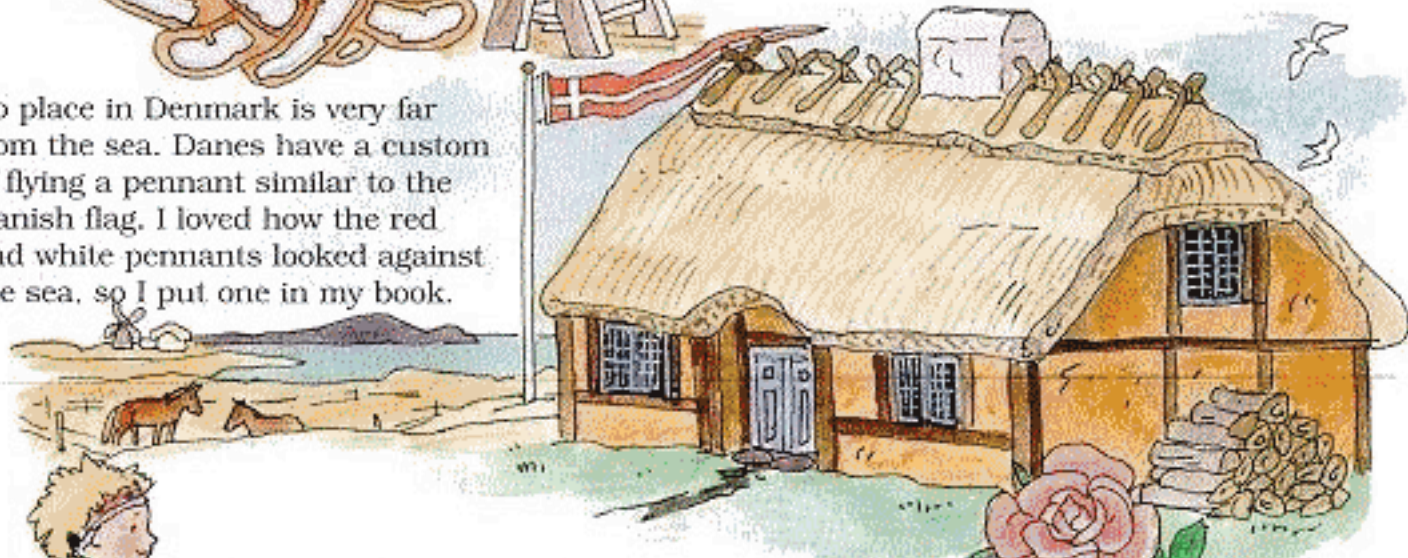
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My husband Joe and I went to Denmark to get ideas for the setting of *The Hat*. We stayed in a 400 year old inn with a thatched roof and colorful painted door on the island of Fuenan. An ocean current keeps Fuenan warmer than usual. We visited Denmark in late December and there were a few roses still in bloom. The landscape was covered with a silvery frost. The day we left a big snowstorm came. I put all our Denmark weather in *The Hat*.

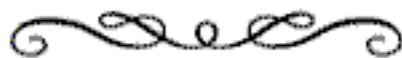
No place in Denmark is very far from the sea. Danes have a custom of flying a pennant similar to the Danish flag. I loved how the red and white pennants looked against the sea, so I put one in my book.



The little girl, Lisa in *The Hat* is modeled after my friend Sara Carty and also my daughter Lia. Since Lia is 27 I had to remember how she looked! My friends Lise and Lisa (mom and daughter) Shields helped me too. Lise was born in Denmark. I named my character for them!



I was curious about why many old houses in Denmark were painted a yellow-orange color. The reason, I was told, is that in olden times you wouldn't go to the hardware store and pick a color. A farmer would make "whitewash" out of lime (a powder made from limerock) and water. Some people would put rusty iron nails in the paint. The iron oxide flaked off and colored the paint a beautiful sunset color.



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If you look on Lisa's clothes line, you'll see a colorful knitted hat. I saw one just like it in a Danish Museum. It is called a nikulørshuer or nine-color hat. It is a traditional design, and the funny thing is there are usually only 4 or 5 colors in a nine-color hat!



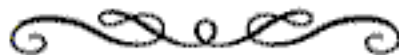
If you look at the farmhouse in *The Hat* you'll see the roof is made out of thatch. Thatch is bundles of tall grass grown for this purpose. A thatch roof will last 50 years, and the thatch is piled on and secured in a special way so there are no leaks. It keeps the house warm in winter and cool in summer. We saw men thatching a house with huge bundles of thatch. When it's new it is the color of pale straw. As it weathers, it packs down, and moss and lichen grow on it and turn the roof green.



Denmark is wonderful farm country. Windmills dot the countryside. It was fun to stop and sketch the animals that would appear in my book. I always knew where pigs lived, because pig farms usually had a big pig painted on the side of the barn.

We saw lots and lots of farm geese. Geese find food in Denmark's grassy fields. The gander (a male goose) in *The Hat* looks like the geese we saw. In the book, when Hedge has a conversation with the gander, the gander says, "Hedge has flipped his gizzard." A gizzard is a bird's "second stomach," where food from the first stomach is ground up fine. It's sort of a joke, because hedgehogs do not have gizzards, just birds.

The cat in the book is named Luther. He lives in New York with my editor Margaret Frith.



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