

DON FREEMAN

Author and illustrator of children's books

ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

(edited by Roy Freeman)

Over the years my father, who wrote and drew the pictures for *Corduroy* and many other popular children's books, received many letters from children and adults alike asking to know more about him as an author and illustrator of children's books. Even after he passed away in 1978 at the age of 69, the flow of fan mail continues unabated. My mother, Lydia Freeman, collected the most frequently asked questions from these letters until she died in 1998 in Switzerland at the age of 92. Since then I have tried to find answers from my father's correspondence and from my own recollections.

I present this information in three parts hoping that you may understand more about the kind of person and writer my father was. The first part will give you an idea where Don and Lydia got their ideas and inspirations for their children's books. Lydia helped Don on most of his books, especially storyline and text. Their ideas came to them out of every-day situations that one customarily encounters when working and living as an artist. Don used to say "an idea 'lit' on me." I have included several of Lydia's remembrances of poignant and humorous personal life experiences that coincided with events they observed transpiring in the world around them to illustrate the sources of Don and Lydia's creative inspirations. In the second part I give some general information about Don as an author-illustrator and in the third part, I have tried to answer a few of the most frequently asked questions about Don personally.

I hope these are helpful to give you a picture of the man and artist the Don was. He always enjoyed hearing from readers and Lydia and I join in thanking you for your interest. Maybe one day you would like to write or illustrate a book yourself? I wish you the best in whatever endeavor your own life story brings!

Roy Freeman
Lucerne, Switzerland
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Part I. About Don Freeman as an author-illustrator

1. Why did Don become a writer and illustrator of children's books?

Don never made a deliberate decision to be an author-illustrator. The writing and illustrating of children's books was just one - albeit a very important one - of the mediums he continued to work with throughout his life. These mediums included oil painting, lithography, etching, chalks and watercolor. Don was an excellent draftsman. He had studied drawing and lithography with Joan Sloan in New York and was an accomplished lithographer (see *The Prints of Don Freeman, A Catalogue Raisonné* by Edith McCulloch, The University Press of Virginia Charlottesville, 1988). He was well known for his sketches of Manhattan life in the 1930's brimming with a keen and ingenious sense of story and humor.

In the words of Don's last editor at Viking Press, Linda Zuckerman:

"The apparent simplicity and spontaneity that are the hallmarks of Don's style came from a complex, sophisticated man. I finally became fully aware of Don's dual nature for the first time a few years ago when the Margo Feiden Gallery in New York had a one-man show of his early paintings, drawings, and lithographs of New York and the theater scene in the thirties and forties. Many of his pictures were prominently featured on the opening pages of the drama sections of *The New York Times* and *The New York Herald Tribune*. The remarkable work was filled with exuberance, gentle satire, and acute observations of the frailties of men and women in all walks of life; it was sentimental, witty, even romantic and could not possibly be the work of the man who thought up *Dandelion*—or could it? That these two separate bodies of work could come from the same man in the course of one productive lifetime is a tribute to Don's versatility and an indication of the contradictions that seemed to exist quite happily within him. This shift back and forth from a worldly sophisticate to an ingenuous optimist made Don an intensely attractive and interesting man."

2. What was Don's technique of drawing and writing?

At the time most of his books were created, photographic reproduction was still in its infancy, and he therefore produced his stories in the context of the established technique of book illustrating and printing of that time. First he made a "dummy" (that is, a mock-up in the exact size, with the correct number of pages and the exact composition for each page; there was also an additional sample of colors, and an explanation of where they would be used). Don wrote or typed out the text below each

color illustration in the dummy. The dummy allowed the publisher to get a good impression of how the book would look in print. Don then made a black-and-white line-drawing facsimile of each illustration in the dummy and created color separation transparencies (each one in black ink, crayon, or chalk, which the printer overlaid on the line drawing to create the complete color illustration. For all books, color separations are in the primary colors red, yellow and blue. In order to create a specific purple, for instance, Don would create a specific blue and a specific red color separation that would be overlaid. For this reason, putting a book together was a much longer process than it is today and placed considerable demands on the illustrator. One of Don's skills as an illustrator lay in his partly inherent, partly acquired ability to create specific transparencies which, when overlaid and printed each in a different basic color produced the exact (new) color he had used in the original illustrations. He never remained with one technique but was continuously experimenting with how to combine spontaneous sketches with carefully tedious draftsmanship. A striking example is the technique for his last book *A Pocket for Corduroy*. Overprinting two separate originals creates the final illustrations. One is a set of full color washes done probably in a matter of minutes. The second is a completely different set of black outlines on scratchboard done meticulously to fit precisely and give the final contours outline, form and shape.

3. How did Don work on his books?

Don always worked out a "dummy" first. A dummy in the book business is a draft showing how the completed text and illustrations of the book would look. For a fascinating insight into this process, see the video *Storyteller* (distributed by SVE/Churchill Media, Chicago). Don would make one version after another, showing to Lydia, to me, to his friends and if it looks hopeful, to his editors. As in any publication there were comments, criticisms, suggestions, with all the accompanying lows and highs that an artist or author must shoulder on the way to bringing a creative idea to print.

Dummies of some of Don's children's books are in museum collections and can be viewed for research purposes, for instance at the Children's Literature Research Collection of the University of Minnesota (www.special.lib.umn.edu).

3. In what sort of condition was Don in when he had his ideas for a picture book?

The same conditions as are customary in normal working and living as an artist. Don used to say "an idea 'lit' on me." For example, the idea for *Fly High, Fly Low* came to Don in the following way: He was living in San Francisco in 1956 with his family in a

rented house which the owners unexpectedly and suddenly needed to move back into. Just about this time, Don one day observed a billboard with a pigeon's nest being taken down and hauled away, and remarked to his wife that pigeons were also having to relocate their "roost!" This poignant-humorous coincidence of a personal life experience with an event he observed transpiring in the world around him well illustrates the sources of Don Freeman's creative inspirations.

4. What were the points to which Don paid most attention to while producing picture books?

The drawing of the subjects and the background in the context of the storyline -which had to be clear, interesting and entertaining.

5. Who was the author-illustrator for picture books that interested Don the most?

Don was interested in the work of many author-illustrators, and never expressed a preference for any single artist. But he did greatly admire, and was inspired by, the work of Taro Yashima, Clement Hurd, William McCloskey, John Burningham, and Maurice Sendak amongst others. Whether or not it was his favorite childhood reading experience we cannot say, but he did very much enjoy as a child the Oz books by Frank Baum.

6. Which of Don's books was his personal favorite?

Don never personally expressed a preference for one of his own books, but we recall him being creatively very fulfilled by *Pet of the Met*, *Mop Top* and *Fly High, Fly Low*. In all three of these books, he felt that the story was especially meaningful, engaging and accessible to both children and adults, while the artwork harmonized with, and complemented the story line, in an especially fortuitous fashion. These books also dealt with themes and interests personally important to him: the theater (*Pet of the Met*), his family life (*Mop Top*), and love nature and concern for the environment (*Fly High, Fly Low, The Seal and the Slick*). They also had just the mixture he always sought in his work of warm humor that embraced life in all of its vicissitudes.

7. How many picture books did Don produce, and how many did he generally produce in a year?

From 1949 (his first children's book was *Chuggy and the Blue Caboose*, with Lydia) until he died (*A Pocket for Corduroy* was his last) Don wrote and illustrated in total 31 books for children and 3 books for adults; he also illustrated 37 books by other authors such as William Saroyan, Washington Irving, James Thurber, Brooks Atkinson, Astrid

Lindgren, Clyde Robert Bulla, John Steinbeck (book jacket), and Julia Cunningham among others. This makes an average of one of his own books and one illustrated book for another author per year. In addition, Don was always had several book ideas "cooking" at the same time. Some of these cooked for years and never came to fruition in his lifetime. Some of these could be completed after he died and even published. See next answer.

8. Are you planning a new book from Don's unpublished ideas?

Don died of heart attack in the apartment of one of his editors in New York, the night that after giving the final go ahead to print to the color reproductions for *A Pocket for Corduroy*. He left behind many unfinished children's books. Since 2000, three books of Don's have been published that he had worked on for years but never was able to complete: *Gregory's Shadow*, *Manuelo the Playing Mantis*, and *Earl The Squirrel*. There are even more unpublished books by Don. One that Don called "My most beautiful book" is now being prepared for publication. In addition there are other ideas, a story about how Manuelo, the "playing" mantis, goes to Nashville, *The Sparrows of Stonehenge*, and "*Something's in the Wind*" (this you can view on the Internet: www.donfreeman.info/childrens-books/unpublished/something-cover). Don was also working on an autobiographical novel of his childhood entitled *Jigsaw Summer*.

9. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being an author and illustrator?

The advantages are freedom of choice and variety of subjects; also the freedom to be oneself. Potential difficulties are: more work of a kind that is very exacting and demands great diligence; having to research and study the topic or theme one is working on; finding an understanding editor; and being confronted with the disappointment of rejections (which one never becomes immune to).

10. What message did Don want to give readers through your books?

Don was never motivated to convey a message per se through any of his books. However, it was natural for him to want his characters to meet their problems with courage and a hopeful attitude. In his lecture (see www.donfreeman.info/childrens-books/dons-lecture/), he says:

"I have never sat down in front of my drawing board and wondered what story I should do next. Stories come chasing after me from out of the blue, you might say. I am patient to the point of permitting a story to take its time in forming in my mind then whichever characters takes my fancy first, I grab hold and follow where it leads me. Hardly ever do I start out with a moral,

but sometimes after the book is printed and is out, I discover to my amazement that a moral has somehow sneaked in!"

Do you have any advice to budding writers and illustrator of children's books?

Don once said: "Never try to imitate any other artist or illustrator. Never write down to children - that is, do not limit the vocabulary because one is writing for children. Always assume that children are as intelligent and insightful as you are!"

Perhaps the view from his last editor will express Don's way of doing books that might help others in this world of computer-aided, and computer-drawn illustrations. In 1979 Linda Zuckerman wrote:

"Don's approach to a picture book never really changed with the design trends of the time. His pictures were always free, spontaneous, and sometimes a little sketchy. We tried occasionally to put them into a frame, to suggest borders, to design the book so that the type and the art were consistently related to each other in terms of space, size, and placement on the page. But Don's unpretentious, down-to-earth, old-fashioned approach never varied. His books are not glamorous, and by some standards perhaps they are not consistently beautiful. But they are honest."

This statement would remain exactly true if Don was still living today. There is a fund for budding writers and illustrators of children's books, The Don Freeman Fund for Children's Books Authors, administered by the Society for Children's Book Writers, Los Angeles California.

Part III. About Don Freeman's private life

1. Please tell us about Don's lifestyle. How did he spend a day?

Don's artwork was his lifestyle. He was a creative artist and not a family father. He was rarely at home. He was almost always to be found at his drawing table or out-of-doors, in the park, on the street, or down by the sea, making quick sketches and observing people. He always carried a sketchbook around with him. In fact he used to say "I feel naked without my sketchbook," if ever queried when caught in the act. He was often invited to libraries, where he sketched classes of primary school children who eagerly awaited and greatly enjoyed his visits. He frequently performed chalk talks for children at libraries where he created magical worlds with fluorescent chalks on large drawings sheets in darkened rooms, entrancing children and parents alike. He was in constant contact with his publishers and spent a good deal of time assuring that the color reproductions of his illustrations for his books would be as true to the original drawings as possible.

2. How did Don enjoy his leisure?

Don never took vacations. Don was a people-lover wherever he was. When in New York, which he frequently visited on publishing matters and always retained a great passion for, Don always went to exhibitions and the theater. He took occasional walks (not enough, his doctor warned), but was never a great fan of strenuous hiking! Evenings out he enjoyed in the company of his wife and his friends. His vital interest in many aspects of life revolved around people. He was interested in art, literature, the environment, the cinema, politics, civil rights, social change and disarmament.

3. What were Don's hobbies?

Don Freeman had no particular hobbies, but he did enjoy listening to, and playing music. He played the trumpet in dance bands in the 30's to make a living and was especially fond of jazz. He never stopped playing a trumpet. He even had a wonderful way of cupping his hands over his mouth and making a trumpet sound – without a trumpet!

4. What was Don's motto or philosophy of life?

"Make the most out of what you have."

Don cared about the plight of those in trouble and he tried to understand the causes of violence. He recognized the dark side of life and was very grateful his good fortune. He believed in making the most of one's individual talents. He felt strongly that a positive attitude is a key to a productive life. You can get a feeling for his attitude by looking at his *Newsstands* or sketches of New York life in the 1930's and 1940's on www.donfreeman/paintings.

5. What sort of a child was Don?

Don's mother died when he was very young (he never mentioned her in any way) and his father gave Don and his older brother Warren to a guardian to bring them up. Therefore, Don was practically an orphan. His father used to visit on weekends and this was very special for the boys. The guardian was a very strict and difficult for Don. He writes of her (with illustrations) and several incidents of his childhood with a lot of humor in his semi-autobiography *Come One, Come All!* In addition, in the last years of his life he was working on another autobiographical book "Jigsaw Summer," which focused on these early years. In both these books, Don writes of how he loved to get neighborhood kids together to direct and to enact scenes from films he had seen at the cinema where his father frequently took him.

I am sure that this situation (being an orphan) deeply affected Don and in different ways comes out in his books. I am sure you can feel this when you read *Corduroy* or *Beady Bear*, for instance.

6. If Don had not become an author-illustrator, what do you think Don would have liked to have been?

As noted above, Don Freeman was in fact not only an author-illustrator but also a musician (he played trumpet in jazz bands), a prolific graphic artist, a print-maker and a painter. He loved the New York theater and even had a small part in a Broadway show. He and an inventor-friend of his, Manuel Tolegian, built a "power easel", special easel where Don could continually illustrate scenes to music as a roll of paper automatically moved by. Don called these performances "Chalk Talks" and they were a great success. He would darken the room and use ultraviolet light and chinks that lit up to make this into a truly magic performance. This he mastered completely, it was a fulfillment of his wish to be an actor and perform in his own way. Therefore, Don actually lived out everything he wanted to be!

7. What were Don's happiest and funniest moments?

Don was happiest when doing his chalk talks and watching children and adults enjoying his books and caricatures. See the quote at the beginning of Part I:

"I work all the time, long into the night, and it's such a pleasure. I don't know when time ends. I've never been happier in my life!"¹

Don ends his lecture to new children's book writers and illustrators with the words:

"Being able to travel around the country from time to time when I am invited to attend book festivals and such and visiting children in their classrooms and libraries, I have had the thrill of my life discovering that many children know my books. Once you see the looks on the faces of the boys and girls who are acquainted with your books and hear them talk of the characters as if they were close friends, nothing could persuade you to cease creating still another book. At least, that is the case with me. I should be embarrassed to admit this, but indulging in such experiences I cannot help feeling that the picture book is indeed one of the most rewarding forms an artist or writer could possibly wish for."

¹ *Something About the Author*, Gale Research, 1979.

As to his funniest moments, well I am sure he had many. Recently, the curator of Al Hirschfeld works, David Leopold, told me a story that I had never known. Don and Al must have been pretty wild buddies together. On the special night to inaugurate the opening of the Radio City Music Hall, they snuck in backstage and mingled with everybody getting ready in under the main stage. Don was exhausted and decided to take a nap before the opening. He stretched out on a piano bench and went to sleep. A while later, he woke up and looked around – where was Al? Don could not see him anywhere. Suddenly he felt as if the piano stool was moving upwards. What was happening was that the inauguration show was beginning and that the piano and stool were being raised onto the main stage where the curtain was opening for the whole audience to see. And there was Don on stage in the middle of the opening! So he really got to see the opening – but not the way he had planned.

Part II. About Don Freeman's books

"Illustrating children's books is an expression of the theater for me. I can create my own theater in picture books. I love the flow of turning the pages, the suspense of what's next. Ideas just come at me and after me. It's all so natural. I work all the time, long into the night, and it's such a pleasure. I don't know when time ends. I've never been happier in my life!"²

Chuggy and the Blue Caboose

(Co-authored with Lydia Freeman, Viking Press, 1950)

About *Chuggy and the Blue Caboose*, their first children's book, Lydia recalls the following episode: "After moving from New York to Santa Barbara [in 1948], the only place we could find to live was an apartment very close to the railroad track. We had lost our first child shortly after birth. I was pregnant again and although I never liked the idea of being next to a railroad track, we were stuck with what we could find. We were always awakened at night because of the trains. Sometimes they would change engines at a roundhouse. There was a little caboose that was often left there overnight, and it looked lonely and blue in the moonlight. It was also only a short block to the ocean, and after Roy was born in the Spring, I used to walk by the tracks with him in his pram through the shore side park on the way to the beach.

"One morning, Don went out sketching. He took a sketchbook along, and mentioned that he was going to make a drawing of the railroad trains and tracks. I said: "Well, I hope you come back with a book." And he did! This was how the idea for *Chuggy* was born! There was a switchman at the level crossing who had a shack with a little garden, and the train engineers always enjoyed stopping their trains there to have a chat with him. He was a real "guardian of the crossing." This man appears as "Mitch the Switchman" on pages 15 and 16 of *Chuggy*.

"Don then started to make some notes about the book, we worked on it together. I was always very good at thinking of a plot, and a climax. In *Chuggy*, we placed this climax at the part where the trains are having trouble, getting stuck in the snow, and the little caboose Chuggy goes to the rescue."

It was a local librarian, Marjory Rankin, who encouraged Don to publish his book. She liked *Chuggy*, and when Don asked, "Well, what shall I do with it?" Marjory said: "Send it to May Masee, the head of the children's book division of the Viking Press in New York. Start at the top!" Don quite often gave her credit for this. "Marge

² *Something About the Author*, Gale Research, 1979.

encouraged me to send in a book I did for my son. 'Send it to a publisher,' she said. It was published, and since then I've been hooked."³

Pet of the Met

(Co-authored with Lydia Freeman, Viking Press, 1953)

Award: The New York Herald Tribune's Book World Children's Spring Book Festival Award, 1953.

After *Chuggy and the Blue Caboose* was completed, Lydia and Don went back to New York taking me (Roy) with them. Lydia recalls: "We were actually in California a shorter time than we had thought we would be... We did rent a house, but it got harder for Don to function at that distance from his editor and potential publishers - when it came to letter-writing and telephone calls. Besides, Don loved New York, the people and city life were in his blood. There was a financial aspect too; being in New York made it easier to keep up the contacts and take on an illustrating job when other people needed him. We took a house across the Hudson in upstate New York, in a small suburb called Otter Pond. It was a lovely house with a fireplace. I remember that it was a very, very cold winter that year. Roy had his first birthday in the following spring.

"In the thirties and forties Don had done a lot of drawings backstage for the theater page of the New York Times. He loved the theater a lot. There are always mice backstage - and naturally you think 'Well, what happened to them? There must be a cat around here.' If you are familiar with the backstage of theaters and ever are allowed to sort of prowl around, to investigate, so-to-speak with the idea that you are doing a drawing - then all of a sudden ideas just sort of come. And it was such a natural idea. Also, I think there was a Mozart production at the opera at that time, and the music of Mozart has so many playful, wonderful passages in it, that Don's imagination just took him to the idea that this was the climax. So Don and I sort of had the idea for *The Pet of the Met* at the same time - or at least two ideas: the cat world in the theater, and the mice in the cellar. So we just holed in for the winter in Otter Pond and did the whole thing: *The Pet of the Met*. It was a real collaboration: we worked on it, tossing the story back and forth, and it all came together."

³ *Something About the Author*, Gale Research, 1979.

Beady Bear

Viking Press, 1954

Don dedicated his third children's book, *Beady Bear*, to Marjorie Rankin, because she supported his initial adventure with *Chuggy and the Blue Caboose*. "In *Beady Bear*," Lydia recalls, "Don expressed the insight that the idea of *going away* and thinking that life is going to be easier, or that you can get along better by going away, has its drawbacks. Because when you get way off, and live the way you thought you wanted to live, you find out you miss a few important things in life, like relationships, giving back to other people. Don liked himself wrestled with this: as an artist he had a need to be alone and also to be with people."

Mop Top

Viking Press, 1955

Mop Top is the story of red-haired boy who never wanted to have his hair cut. According to Lydia, Don happened to have been in Washington at the time he wrote *Mop Top*.

"I think he had drawn something that was going on in the Senate. It was at the time when long hair was in the news - although I think the story would have happened anyway, just because of the *idea* of a little boy who didn't want his hair cut. It was the easiest book with the least problems, of any book Don ever did. It just sort of came off. It's rather simple. He did the story in a couple of days, and drew the whole dummy (that is a draft showing how the completed text and illustrations of the book would look) while still in Washington. Then, when he got back to New York, he perfected it a little bit. Roy was about five at the time Don did *Mop Top*, which is why the little boy in the book looks so much like Roy at that age. Roy was not into haircuts either, he took after Don who did not pay much attention to getting his hair trimmed – it took time away from doing drawing! And Roy's hair was a little reddish. So the story was closer to home than one might think! He didn't dislike haircuts, he just didn't think it was particularly necessary - even when it was."

Fly High, Fly Low

Viking Press, 1957

Award: Runner up for the Caldecott Medal, 1958.

The idea for *Fly High, Fly Low* 'lit' on my father when we were living in Sausalito, just across the Golden Gate Bridge north of San Francisco. Lydia recalls: "One day in San Francisco, Don happened to walk by a billboard that was being taken down.

There was a pidgin's nest in one of the letters, and Don realized that the pidgins were going to have to relocate. Coincidentally, very shortly thereafter we were informed we would have to move from the house we had rented in Sausalito, which we had begun to love. The owners had gone abroad, saying they were going to stay overseas for a couple of years. But then we got a long-distance call from them: they were coming back a year sooner than they had thought and they wanted their house back! So, as Don remarked to me, we were also suddenly and unexpectedly without a 'roost,' and had to figure out what we were going to do. Just like the pigeons Sid and Midge in *Fly High, Fly Low!*"

The Night the Lights Went Out

Viking Press, 1958

No information at present

Space Witch

Viking Press, 1959

No information at present

Norman the Doorman

Viking Press, 1959

Filmstrip, 1966; movie, 1971.

No information at present

Cyrano, the Crow

Viking Press, 1960

No information at present

Come Again Pelican

Viking Press, 1961

Awards: Southern California Council on Literature for Children and Young People, 1962; Nakamori Prize, 1976

This book recounts the story of young Ty who takes fishing lessons from a pelican on a wind-swept beach. After Sausalito our family moved to Carpenteria, a small beach town just south of Santa Barbara. Lydia recalls: "Like Ty, Roy loved to fish from a small pier. Spending time at the beach and watching the pelicans was a sort of natural setting. It must have reminded Don of his own childhood in San Diego. Don's mother had died when he was very young and he grew up with his brother under the supervision of a strict and yet superstitious guardian. (Besides a published autobiography called "Come One Come All" about his early experiences in New York, Don at the end of his life was working on a humorous story of his childhood in San Diego. There are many stories about this guardian there.) Don's father used to come

most every weekend and take the boys on outings. Sometimes they went to the ocean where they saw pelicans. Don remembered one of these expeditions where he climbed up an old piling in the water and was enjoying just sitting there - until he discovered a natural phenomena called tides and the fact that to get back to the beach he had to get his clothes soaked!

"Much later, in Santa Barbara, Don observed that the pelicans - which are strange and wonderful creatures. These great birds love the beaches of Santa Barbara and get to be quite tame. Well, not *really* tame, but they didn't scare so easily."

Ski Pup

Viking Press, 1963

High up in the Swiss Alps, a Saint Bernard by the name of Hugo is learning to be a rescue dog. Lydia was very surprised about this book. She writes:

"Don, Roy and I had gone on a trip to Mexico in the early 60's. Our first trip out of the US. We were on our own, and had quite a few adventures. Don made a *lot* of drawings, I made a lot of drawings, and even Roy made a couple of drawings. And so in my mind I thought 'Gee, what a background for a story! Something with a Mexican background.' We didn't discuss it. But when we returned home, Don seemed to be preoccupied, and I thought in my imagination, 'Maybe he's really dreaming up that story.' Well, he *was* dreaming up a story. But the most astonishing fact was, it was *Ski Pup*! And he had never been to Switzerland! And he had *never* been skiing. How he got from Mexico to the story for *Ski Pup*, I don't know!"

Botts, the Naughty Otter,
Golden State Books, 1963
No information at present

The Turtle and the Dove
Viking Press, 1964
No information at present

Dandelion

Viking Press, 1964

An idiosyncrasy of my father was the habit of checking into a hotel as a book deadline approached so that he wouldn't be distracted. Don reported to an interviewer once: "I've finished books in hotels in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York City, and a

host of other big cities. *Dandelion*, a funny account of a lion who decides to live up to his name, was done in a gloomy hotel room in Washington, D.C."⁴

A Rainbow of My Own,
Viking Press, 1967

No information at present

Corduroy

Viking Press, 1968

Don's most popular book is about toy bear in a department store who lost one of the buttons of his corduroy overalls. Years after he published *Corduroy*, Don wrote to his editor at that time at Viking Press, Linda Zuckerman:

"Just possibly you would like to hear something of the background of *Corduroy* as I first came upon it... Of course I can't remember exactly how it started, but I do recall wanting to do a story about a department store in which a character wanders around at night after the doors close. Then I also wanted the story to show the vast difference between the luxury of a department store [and] the simple life [most people live]. The idea of simple basic values was another theme that was running around in the back of my head. I don't remember how or when a toy bear came into my life, but he must have come from way out of my past. You know, I could just see a bear wearing corduroy overalls with one button missing ... the minute I settled on *Corduroy* and Lisa, everything came together."⁵

The Guard Mouse
Viking Press, 1968

Add-a-Line Alphabet
Golden State Junior Books, 1968

The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Hole
Privately printed by Don Freeman's Newsstand, Santa Barbara, California, 1968

Quiet! There's a Canary in the Library
Golden State Junior Books, 1969

Hattie, the Backstage Bat
Viking Press, 1970
No information at present

⁴ *Something About the Author*, Gale Research, 1979.

⁵ Linda Zukerman, "Don Freeman, An Editor's View", *The Horn Book Magazine*, June, 1979, p. 279-80.

Forever Laughter

Golden State Junior Books, 1970

Two masks. Pure Don, book of no words. Turned in to a mime performance by
Barbara Aliprantes

Penguins, of All People

Viking Press, 1971

Inspired by UN sketches, done at San Francisco Convention

Inspector Peckit

Viking Press, 1972

Began as "Cattiva, the Cat" from an idea about Paris windows. An illustration is in *Windows to the World* by Linda Zuckerman, Viking Press, 1980. How the original book evolved is the subject of the film documentary *Storymaker*. Available from Clearvue & SVE, Inc. (www.clearvue.com)

Flash, the Dash

Golden State Junior Books, 1973

In 1973, *Flash the Dash*, his twenty-fifth children's book was published. Don tells how he got the idea for this book: "As best I can recall, the idea for *Flash the Dash* began creeping up on me a few years ago, right after meeting two lively dachshunds who belonged to a friend of mine. These two dogs wanted to play games with me and they wouldn't take 'No, not now' for an answer. I remember innocently throwing some sort of rubber object as far as possible, only to have them dash after it and bring it back and lay it in my lap. I suppose they took turns. Anyway, this so-called game went on and on until my arm and patience grew weak to the point of exhaustion. But they weren't exhausted at all!

"Little did I know that these two perpetual-motion pets would continue chasing me in my mind for months afterwards. Finally one day I sat down and started putting together a story about a dachshund that delivered telegrams. The name Flash came naturally but the name for his mate took a bit of head scratching. Yes, she had to be Sashay."⁶

Tilly Witch

Viking Press, 1974

No information at present

The Paper Party

Viking Press, 1974

Award: 1974 Juvenile Award from the Commonwealth Club of California.

⁶ *Something About the Author*, Gale Research, 1979.

This is a story that must have evolved from Don's experience as a newspaper artist. "I have always enjoyed going backstage of the theater and in a way this is what Jory does when he goes inside the TV set," he once noted in a letter to his publisher.

The Seal and the Slick

Viking Press, 1974

About a seal caught in an oil slick. Taken directly from a real occurrence near Santa Barbara.

Will's Quill

Viking Press, 1975

Another story that had been hanging around going through different shapes and forms. Don had done a book "Great Shakes" A humorous take off that unabashedly exposed Don's love of Shakespeare in spite of the caricature and humor. Linda Zuckerman considers this Don's best book.

The Chalk Box Story

J.B. Lippincott, 1976

No information at present.

Bearymore

Viking Press, 1976

No information at present

A Pocket for Corduroy

Viking Press, 1978.

Don's last book when he was alive is a sequel to Corduroy in which Lisa loses her favorite bear in a Laundromat. Linda Zuckerman was Don's editor at this time. In the same article quoted above, she writes:

"Don's last book, *A Pocket for Corduroy*, ... was published exactly ten years after *Corduroy* (Viking). For a long time I had thought a sequel would be a good idea, which I never felt it would be appropriate for me to suggest. The conception of a book should normally be the author's, and the editor should not usurp the author's prerogative. But finally I took a deep breath and mentioned to Don over the phone that I had an idea for a book, and would he mind if I told it to him? He said no, so a few days later I timidly wrote, 'Perhaps it's not a new idea, and perhaps it has already occurred to you, and you've rejected it. But I think it would be wonderful to have a sequel to *Corduroy*. I think you can do it. For some reason or other the title *Corduroy's Pocket* keeps coming back to me. I don't know what this means

or what kind of story it would be. I guess I just like the title and would like to see a book attached to it.' That was on March 25, 1977."

"On April 26 a dummy arrived in the mail. Don wrote, 'Your suggestion hit a responsive chord. As you know I don't usually take ideas for books that are flung at me, but this was such a natural I set right to work on it. I like to think that this new story doesn't lean or depend on *Corduroy's* first story, [but] that it has a life of its own.' And in a later letter—'Unlike my other stories, *Corduroy* number one hasn't a thick plot, as I'm sure you know. It has a theme, and in creating this sequel I've had to hold to the form and nature of the original. In other words, a book is a world of its own [and] in this new story I've had to keep within the bounds of that world."⁷

In a later letter to Linda, Don wrote:

"I've always wanted to do a picture book about a laundromat. I had a studio right next door to one, and I loved the whole scene. It seemed to me that this is one of the few places where people come together naturally and on their own go about their chores ... however, the instant you mentioned *Corduroy's Pocket* everything fell into place. I knew the laundromat was a perfect setting for this story. Even the underlying theme came clear ... looking for a pocket amongst all the laundry objects. The less self-conscious I am about how and why the laundromat seems a perfect setting, the better; nevertheless I believe our pocket story evolves out of the good feeling of people getting together."⁸

For more information, visit the websites:

www.donfreeman.info

www.lydiafreeman.com.

Additional literature / sources of information about Don:

Commire Ann., *Something about the Author*, Volume 17, pages 60-69, published by Gale Research Inc., Detroit 1976. ISBN: 0-8103-0098-2.

⁷ Linda Zukerman, 1979, op. cit p. 279.

⁸ Linda Zukerman, *ibid* p. 280.