



## *Behind the Mouse*

### *About the Illustrator*

#### **Helen Craig**

Helen Craig was born in London in 1934. She moved to the country with her family just before World War II. Many of the images from this country life have been incorporated into her illustrations in the Angelina Ballerina books. Helen realized how important books were to her at a very young age: "I would almost enter the pictures and become so absorbed that I could wait -- expecting the figures to move. Now that I am an illustrator myself, I try to make my pictures live for the children who look at them."

Helen Craig comes from a very artistic family: her great grandmother, Ellen Terry, was a celebrated actress; her grandfather, Edward Gordon Craig, was a famous stage designer and innovative wood engraver; her father was a film director and her brother is a graphic designer. At the age of 16, Helen became an apprentice to a commercial photographer in London, only drawing for her own pleasure. She went on to set up her own photographic studio, as well as working as a freelance potter and sculptor.

It was only when her son Ben, was born in 1965 that she experimented with ideas for children's picture books. She was inspired by Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, after buying it for Ben. In 1970, Helen took her drawings to an editor at Macmillan Books. From then on, her career as a children's illustrator took off.

Helen has now worked on over 60 children's book titles. The most famous are her illustrations for the *Angelina Ballerina* series written by Katharine Holabird.

Helen received an award from the Society of Authors (US) in 1977 for *The Mouse House ABC*; won the Kentucky Bluegrass award for *Angelina Ballerina* in 1985; *Angelina's Christmas* was selected as the Child Study Association's 'Children's Book of the Year' in 1987; in 1990, *Angelina's Birthday* won a category award at the British Book Design and Production Exhibition. Angelina has also been honored with several Platinum Oppenheim Toy Portfolio Awards for **Rose Fairy Princess** in 2002, and **Friends Forever** and **The Magic Of Dance** in 2004.

Helen lives in a cottage in Buckinghamshire, England.