



# Lady Ginny's Tea Parties

## Susan Rennick Jolliffe

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## STORY

When Ear-Scratcher (The Duke) and Calls-Me-Sweetie-Pie (The Duchess) do not return in time to host their families famous series of tea parties, Lady Ginny (the poodle) and Codger (the cat) must step in. Codger slows them down a bit, but with the help of Cook and two tiny and unusual characters (Crapulous and Acidophilus) they entertain eleven gatherings of guests from mountain lions to butterflies, with just the right treats for each, elegantly prepared, and (almost) flawlessly presented. *Lady Ginny's Tea Parties* is Lady Ginny's scrapbook, documenting her heroic attempts: the menus, the mishaps and the haute couture...

*Lady Ginny's Tea Parties* is a nature book about what real North American animals eat masquerading as a humorous fantasy book starring the author's large eccentric poodle, Ginny. It is a journal of her heroic attempt to host her Family's Famous Tea Parties with the help of Cook and the annoying lack of help from Codger, the Cat. Susan Rennick Jolliffe has written and illustrated it so that it is full of "yucks" of the 'ha-ha' type and "yucks" of the disgusting food variety as what the animals eat is accurate, just in fancy tea party form (e.g. "slugs-in-a-blanket").

Everyone has their own idea of what a tea party should be including the food, of which the live variety is constantly attempting to escape.

## AUTHOR-ILLUSTRATOR

Susan Rennick Jolliffe lives in Ottawa, Ontario. She alighted into the world of children's books after many years as a visual artist known for her humorous and beautiful transformations of what most people consider junk. Her first illustrated book is *The Twelve Days of Summer* by Jan Andrews (Orca 2005), which combines her love of whimsical drawing and nature.

Susan knew she wanted to be an artist from a very young age, constantly drawing characters and making "stuff". She practically lived backstage throughout high school painting theatre sets. However after attending the Nova Scotia College of Fine Art and Design in Halifax, her first job was not as an artist but working in Canadian archaeology as a ceramic analyst. Susan credits a few of those years of digging through other people's garbage (while reading tons of science fiction) with fine-tuning her sense of humor and history. Volunteering in her children's schools (1980's) developed into a busy life conducting workshops in

schools and museums (MASC) with a strong environmental theme cleverly disguised as fun. Her giant “Moose” community participation sculpture was voted one of the ten most popular public art pieces in Ottawa. In 2000 she created “Sculpture Vultures: How to Make Fabulous Sculptures Out of Used Paper” (General Store Publishing) with teacher Jane Ellens, to share her projects.

She has used the tea party as a theme in much of her satirical artwork for many years as representing civility in the midst of chaos.

#### A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

I loved to read as a child almost as much as I loved to draw. My favorite books were *The Narnia Books* (by C.S.Lewis), *The Wind in the Willows* (by Kenneth Grahame), *The Blue Fairy Book* (by Andrew Lang), Greek mythology, nature books and, of course, dog stories. The first time that I read *The Incredible Journey* (by Sheila Burnford) I burst into happy tears when Bodger came panting over the hill. When the movie came out on tape, my children would call me into the TV room at that exact spot just so their friends could watch me burst into happy tears—every time.

When I was about seven years old we lived in Deep River, in northern Ontario, where my Dad had an amphibious airplane, acquired as payment for building the Pembroke airport. He used to fly our family into secluded lakes and we'd explore the wild places. I remember my sister and I being tied to the pontoons (makeshift dock) with our lifejackets on fishing for hours and happily watching life on the lake. I am still as fascinated now as I was then with what the animals, birds, bugs and flowers are up to all around us. One of my favorite nature encounters was with a tree sparrow that I rescued from a cat. Time seemed to stop while I held this tiny living jewel in my hand. Then, luckily not badly hurt, it looked at me and flew away.

For a long time, I had been playing with the idea of a fantasy tea party book starring my charming and goofy standard poodle Ginny as hostess (in fact my large painting called the “Tea Party” with a poodle pouring tea hangs in the front foyer of my children's school in Ottawa, created in 1999, then purchased as a gift for a retiring teacher.) The idea really started take shape while I was researching for the illustrations for *The Twelve Days of Summer* in 2004. I got hooked on finding out what the creatures from the book ate and was surprised to discover that I didn't know nearly as much as I thought I did! I had the same vague ideas as most city people, kids and adults alike. So it really was a kind of “Eureka!” moment when I mixed fantasy and reality and had my guest list of real

animals for *Lady Ginny's Tea Parties*.

Ginny was a particularly quirky dog and many bits of the story are based on her real behaviors. As in the book, she loved taking any shoes left inside near an open back door outside and making a pile of them in her special place in the back yard. Neither my family nor myself considered this very charming when one of us had been frantically trying to find their left shoe that they were SURE they had left near the back door and they are LATE and it was RAINING.... BUT, she never chewed them.

Ginny would also drag almost anything we left on the porch railing over to her special place. This included sleeping bags that we were airing out, tea towels, a bag of corn waiting to be shucked...

She was also famous in our neighbourhood for her good-natured whirling around when she met other dogs and people. She was a big dog so it was hilarious. People have often remarked that I am just like her but I don't whirl around.

She was also very fond of whining at dogs on TV and for some reason got very excited about women with big hair.

Codger, the cat is based on many cats but particularly my sister's huge mixed Maine coon cats, which were of the opinion that they were better than everyone else. One year I made them catnip mice for Christmas, which were wrapped in many layers of plastic, then wrapping paper. They knocked down the Christmas tree, ripped open many presents and then had a nap in the wreckage.

## ILLUSTRATING

My favorite drawings, both my own and other people's, are plain black ink or pencil with lots of detail, especially old etchings like those by Gustav Dore and Albrecht Durer.

I think I have been an illustrator at heart because I have always wanted the drawings and the sculptures that I have made to tell a story. For example, I made a series of highly decorated hubcaps like "Her Majesty's Royal Hubcap", with a queen's face and crown and covered in jewels. The idea was that the person looking at it would make up a story in their mind about what the car would look like, driving around in it etc.

I love making picture books because I get to make a whole little world that the person reading it can enjoy at their own speed. They can take the time to enjoy the little details that I have had such fun including. I also like mixing fantasy with real nature.

I start by writing the story, with sketches in the margins and then I storyboard it in pencil on big sheets of newsprint divided into rectangles. These are very messy-looking to everyone else but full of ideas and notes to myself. Then I roughly draw the whole book the size it will be printed after consulting with the publisher. When I decide that the drawings are the way I want them, I use a light table as a guide to copy an outline of the final drawings onto watercolour paper using very fine pens, in black ink (you could use a window too). Then comes the BEST part -when I move them to my drafting table and make them come alive with shading and coloured pencils and inks.

#### CURRICULAR INTEGRATION IDEAS (science/art/writing)

This book is in journal or scrapbook format and is so highly detailed that it is not meant as much to be read all at once but as a jumping off point for science, art, writing and quiet enjoyment with small groups.

#### Grade 1/2.

My experience so far in the schools has been with grades 1 and 2. We talk of tea parties, manners etc. with my directed questions like “What is the job of a host or hostess? Does everyone wear pajamas? I introduce the characters, draw, read them to them and ask who they think the guests are from reading several of the menus. What starts out as a peaceful read turns into a rousing science discussion punctuated by surprised and hilarious protestations of “gross”. This is how I set up the challenge for the children to create their own tea party.

#### Grades 3/4

I was at an arts initiative day recently and was delighted to hear from Grade 3/4 teachers that the word play in the menus and text are exactly what they were looking for in creative writing. They were excited about using the book as an engaging way to meet science/ecology/research/art curriculum expectations.

## Orca Book Publishers Teachers' Guide

- Create your own tea party choosing a host or hostess and North American animal/bird/bugs as a guest(s), researching what they eat. Make up an imaginative menu and a story about what happened at the party using fancy language to “illustrate” your host/hostess’s personality. Choose your favorite scene to illustrate. These could all be made into a class journal set up like mine.

- A stirring group rendition of “I’m a Little Teapot” is always welcomed.

*“I’m a little teapot, short and stout,  
Here is my handle. Here is my spout.  
When I get all steamed up, hear me shout!  
Tip me over and  
Pour me out!”*

- Good friends and relatives have sent me pictures of their favorite teacup or teapot, which I have included in the book. There is always a story like “this was my grandmother’s and my mother said that she only got to use it on very special occasions”. Students could be asked to go home and ask their parent(s) and/or relative if they have a favorite teacup or teapot, draw a picture of it and recount a story for the class—eg. “my grandmother brought this from India.”
- Have a real dress-up, good-manners tea party in class, with parent’s help, of course.
- Write a story about your pet or someone else’s that shows their personality. Draw a picture to illustrate your favorite scene from this story.  
**OR**  
Draw a picture of what you imagine your pet would dress like if they were a person. What would be their hobby or job?
- Write a true story about an experience that you have had with a wild animal, bug, bird or fish.

**Lady Ginny's Tea Parties Quiz:**

1. Why did Lady Ginny feel that she had to host the family's tea parties?
2. Why do you think that Codger is wearing oven mitts in April's "Welcome Home Twittery Tea"?
3. What creatures were the Duke and Duchess hoping to spot in the Tiny Township?
4. Why did Lady Ginny and Cook plan the "Jeepers Peepers Pond Party" for May instead of December?
5. How many members of the cat family can you see in November's "Something to Sink Your Teeth into Tea"?
6. What happens to male moose's antlers every year?
7. What award did the Duke and Duchess win that you can see on a table in Eatwell's?
8. Where do Canada geese fly to every fall?
9. What do butterflies eat?
10. Who eats pinecones?

**Answers:**

1. Ginny feels that since the Duke and Duchess are delayed and she knows that everyone is expecting Eatwell's famous tea parties, she must take on the responsibility. She wants to help her family but she also thinks it will be FUN!
2. To stop him from trying to catch the little birds with his claws.
3. Wee flying horses
4. Frogs and their "food" hibernate in the winter.
5. Mountain lion, lynx and Codger.
6. Their antlers fall off and they grow new ones.
7. They are the "Bird watching Champions of 1928"
8. They fly south, some stopping in the middle of the United States if it's a warm winter, some flying all the way to Mexico

9.They lap up nectar with their tongues, as they have no teeth.

10. Squirrels

\*\*\*Note: We have included a ledger-sized placemat for you to download and reproduce for fun colouring! It was originally designed for my big fancy tea party launch.