



In the *Twinkling of an Eye*

Sarah Ellis, editor



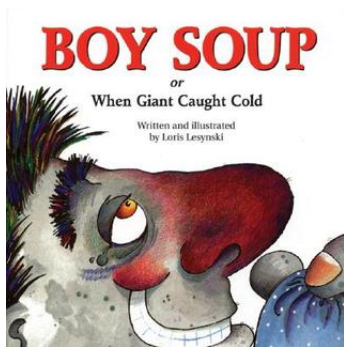
Of Eraser Mulch and the Illustrator's Dance

Loris Lesynski

Loris Lesynski is the author/illustrator of Boy Soup and Ogre Fun. Catmagic will be published this fall and Dirty Dog Boogie and Other Poems in the spring of 1999. All of her books are published by Annick Press.

More often than anything else, I'm asked, "Do you already imagine the pictures as you're writing the story?" People are curiously interested in the ways we two-hatters go about being author/illustrators.

Well, sure I see them. Then when I talk about how horrid it is coming up with the illustration ideas, they cross-examine me: "How come it's so hard when you said you already saw the pictures in your head?"



Sure, I see pictures in my head -- but not pictures that could be drawn by me. Not in this lifetime. Not in many. The visuals that swirl around in my mind when I'm writing, whether it's about ogre yawns or upside-down cats, are truly radiant. They're action-packed scenarios with lots of wonderfully gauzy colours and perfect lighting; they leave Merchant Ivory in the dust. The pictures I can actually draw in this real world on 32 pages with my real sausage-fingers are another matter altogether. A piece of artboard awaiting illustration is a terribly blank thing. My first sketches of a scene or scribbles of a character have all the depth of a cheesy greeting card. The kind from a convenience store. I decide it's the paper's fault and go out to buy the most splendid, the most expensive. I decide I need more reference material, and order some from New York. None of this works.

The only thing that works, that makes the illustrations start to happen, is the same thing that makes the writing begin to boil. Do it, discard it; draw it, rub it out; try this out, crumple it up; go at it again. Use the crummiest paper you've got so you can crumple/redo, crumple/redo. Mounds of eraser bits collect on the floor. I consider going into a sideline business selling eraser bits as mulch. I have far too many compensatory snacks. Eventually something happens: the story in my head, the pictures in my head, and heart, find a little bridge between inside and outside and begin to cross. If I have an ounce of energy left at this point, I dance around the room in a delight that nothing else matches . . . then get back to work. The most important creative tool may well be the eraser. Do it; do it again; make it better; come at it from this side, then this side; one more time; then dance, re-do, dance.