

Long before my mother was born, her aunts owned a store in a small village in Maine. They had a smart gray horse who pulled a shiny black buggy when they went out riding.

Prince was the finest horse in town. But no one remembers who took care of that beautiful animal while the aunts were working in their store: perhaps it was a sneaky trader who tried to steal him; perhaps it was a one-legged harmonica player who taught him to dance; perhaps it was two children who once saved Prince's life.

Jacqueline Briggs Martin really did have two great-aunts who owned a horse like Prince. In *THE FINEST HORSE IN TOWN*, she recreates life in a small American town as it might have been at the turn of the 20th century. Susan Gaber's extraordinary watercolor paintings make the people and events in these three stories truly come alive.



**Jacqueline Briggs Martin** is the author of more than a dozen picture books for children, including *SNOWFLAKE BENTLEY*, winner of the 1999 Caldecott Medal. She grew up on a farm in Maine and heard stories during her childhood of the two great-aunts featured in *THE FINEST HORSE IN TOWN*.

**Susan Gaber** has illustrated over twenty picture books for children. She has collaborated on one other book with Jacqueline Briggs Martin, *GOOD TIMES ON GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN*.

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# THE FINEST HORSE IN TOWN

by Jacqueline Briggs Martin ♦ illustrated by Susan Gaber



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PURPLE HOUSE PRESS

*For my mother, my daughter, my sisters—  
from whom I am still learning  
about memory, laughter, and love.*

—*J.B.M.*

*To Karen*

—*S.G.*

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Summary: Long ago, two sisters in Maine owned a remarkable gray horse named Prince, who went on to become legendary in their family.

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Note to readers:

I hope you will enjoy this book based on my mother's aunts. I never met these aunts but knew they were important in our family. They were capable store managers and skilled seamstresses. One of them taught my mother to sew. My mother told me that they had once owned a store in a small town in Maine. A very old man who worked in a jewelry shop fixing watches in that town remembered them and told us they had a fancy carriage and a wonderful horse.

I didn't know what actually happened with them and their horse, but I wanted to write about them. I made up three stories about things which *might* have happened with these sisters and their horse.

If you would like to learn more about my work on this story and how you can learn about stories from your own family or your own place, you may want to read what I wrote in *Yourstory: A Guide for Thinking of Questions — Finding the Answers*. It's part of the *Bringing History Home* Curriculum Project developed and tested in Iowa and available for use nationally. A link to it can be found at my website: [www.JacquelineBriggsMartin.com](http://www.JacquelineBriggsMartin.com).

Jacqueline Briggs Martin  
2003





Long before my mother was born,  
her aunts owned a store  
in a small village in Maine.  
They sold gloves and socks,  
cloth and corsets, needles and pins,  
and all kinds of shoes.  
They had a smart gray horse  
who pulled a shiny black buggy  
when they went out riding.  
We know they had the horse and buggy  
because a very old watchmaker told us,  
and he was there.  
“That Prince was a beauty,” the old man said.  
“The finest horse in town.”





But I can't think who took care of the horse when the sisters were busy with the dry-goods store." Perhaps it was a trader named Hooks, who kept Prince in his horse barn. Every Wednesday at five o'clock Hooks brought Prince and the shiny black buggy to the store so the sisters could go for a drive. And every Sunday afternoon they drove out to the lake. But the horse trader had a sharp eye, and he knew a horse like Prince would bring good money in the city.