

A story about the friendship between a Porcupine called Morgan and his trusty friend Isabelle. When a fire erupts on Cascade Mountain, Morgan knew Isabelle had left earlier to hike to the waterfalls there. Will he find her in time?

## **Morgan And The Great Cascade Mountain Fire**

By Harry Winthrop Holmes Jr.

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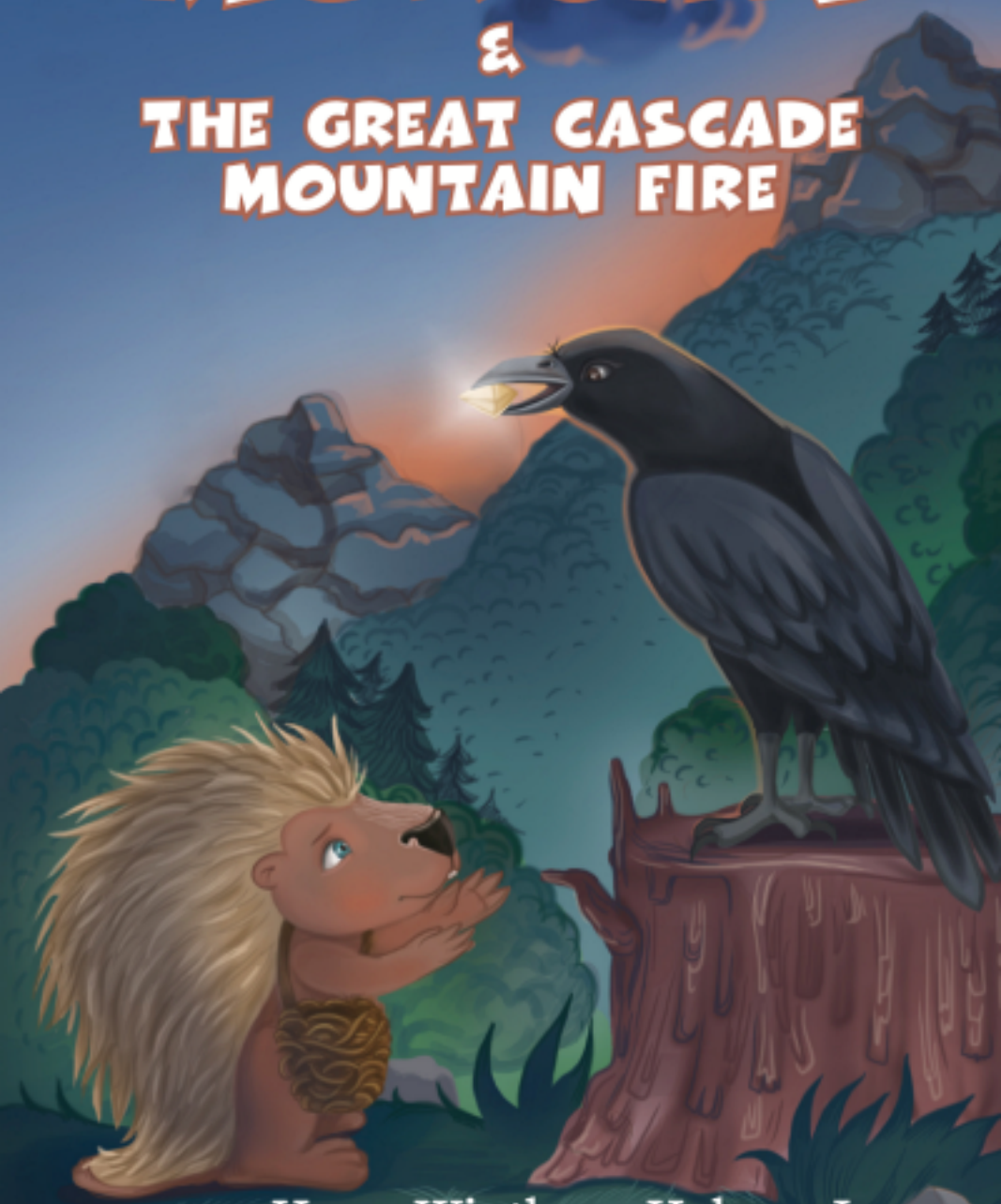
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# MORGAN

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## THE GREAT CASCADE MOUNTAIN FIRE



Written by **Harry Winthrop Holmes Jr.**

Illustrations by Maryana Flyak

**TO MY DAUGHTER, LAURA WHO IS  
AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER.**

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# SILENT DANGER

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**T**HE MORNING is quiet. The air still and cold after a light early morning rain mixed with sleet. It's late October. Morgan, a North America Porcupine, living here on the Hadley farm, looked beyond the valley below sensing there was something different about the haze on Cascade Mountain.

Like many animals of the forest, Morgan could detect odors from many common things, such as wildflowers, trash and smoldering campfires left by careless humans. He knew if the scent was pleasant, suspicious or dangerous.

Forestry alarms were quiet, yet Morgan perceived danger in the air. He just didn't know where or if a fire was present. His instincts alerted him to the existence of smoke, brought by the gentle breeze blowing from the northeast and through the mountain trees.

The distant hills lay before the majestic Adirondacks, blanketed by a dazzling array of gold, red, orange and vivid colors of fall. Elements of winter were showing their notes, a dusting of snow capped the highest elevations and mixing against the mosaics of clouds and tired path ways below. Wind echoed lost whispers of the Algonquin, Mohawk and influences of American settlers.

Cascade Mountain, home for Morgan's animal friends and the place where he was born serve as get-away for humans to hike, enjoy nature's wonders and scenic overlooks.

It had been five years since Morgan found Isabelle, then a young 8 year old girl, who had fallen and lay beside the roadway below her farm with a sprained ankle. Morgan wanted to help her but was unsure of what to do. After several minutes Morgan found for first the time he had not only met a human friend, a quest he so dearly wanted, but discovered the honorable feeling of friendship. Isabelle asked Morgan to go up the hill beside where she lay, to her home, and bring her family to her. They would be worried and could take her to a nearby hospital for x-rays.

Isabelle was found and would be alright. She wanted Morgan to stay on the farm as her buddy and let that be his new home.

Bill Hadley, Isabelle's 18 year old brother, and now showing a three day old scruffy beard, walked out of the house and gathered some lumber from his pickup. He looked around and chuckled when saw Morgan, his trusty friend chatter his teeth for communication and followed with a slow waddle instead of a walk. "I guess that chatter is you saying good morning. Well good morning, Mr. Morgan, today you and I will be together, a team if you might. Isabelle left earlier to visit the falls, meet with the church fellowship group and explore the surrounding woods. Mom is away in Sable Forks.

“I want to start work on the lean-to for the back of the barn. I’ve been putting that task off, far too long. But first I’ll fix you some cantaloupe and for me a serving of Funny Nibbles. It’s Isabelle’s cereal, but we are out of my Loopy Nuggets and besides she wouldn’t mine her older brother having just one helping.

“Morgan, it looks like we had an early drizzle. That’s good but it is still very dry in the forest. I see the clouds are parting some and the sun is shining through. Let’s go to work.”

Morgan turned to follow Bill back to the house but not after looking again across to Cascade Mountain, thinking about the strange existence of smoke and the evaporating haze of ground fog in the valley below.

Trails through the Cascades were well traveled by hikers, walking up to picnic in grassy clean areas, next to the water fall. If you stood too close to the falling water the wind would hurl a misty spray to your face. It was a delightful respite on warm humid days and a way to enjoy the freshness of the mountain.

Bill poured a large glass of orange juice and filled his bowl with cereal. The radio blared with farm reports, indicating beans were selling at five cents less than a week ago. It was Saturday and the local farmers market would stay open until 5:00 in the afternoon.

Fall was harvest time and except for a garden full of collard greens, Bill, who had finished the first two years of a local trade school had already sold most of his vegetable product weeks before. The apple industry kept sales open until the first snow or when apple

produce became dormant and sales declined.

After breakfast, Bill filled the troughs with water for Lumpy, Tag and Cargo, the retired work horses of the farm. Though the days of pulling the plows were past for them they remained to roam the pastures and hillsides in equestrian peace. Bill made some minor repairs to the gate holding the chickens within their pen, then picked up his tools to build the lean-to.

“Well fella I guess this project won’t get built by its self. Better start with the hammering and a sawin.” Morgan was still wondering what a ‘lean-to’ was. Since living on the farm, he had learned the meaning of many words but a ‘lean-to’ was not one of them. Morgan clicked his teeth, spun around and grunted anyway, showing he understood.

Neighbors to the farm often stopped to talk with Morgan, though petting a porcupine could be hazardous and not recommended without gloves. Morgan liked meeting human visitors and was never alarmed or aggressive. Aware of his sharp quills he turned them away when people approached.

While Bill worked, Morgan wandered around the top of the hill overlooking the cows in the lower pasture. Again he looked to the Adirondacks looming in the distance with foot hills closer by. He thought about his pal the beaver and the rough and tumble old bear. He worried about the existence of a forest fire and the safety of all his animal friends.

The mountains were the source of many superstitions and legends. Morgan remembered listening to



humans, repeat old yarns about men searching for gold but for Morgan the mountains were home for deer, bears and trout in the glistening cold streams leading to lakes in the valley below.

His transformation to human populations brought happiness, a dream come true and a new purpose in life. Morgan was content and loved his home overlooking the farm.

Bill placed boards in line with the barn roof, slanting just enough for rain to pour off on the lower end. He looked down at Morgan and laughed at the porcupine's slow and silly looking waddle. He talked to Morgan as though he understood every word and described every detail.

"Morgan, this structure will be a place for you to get under if a sudden rain comes along. Your outdoor shelter will do the same but sometimes in a heavy down-pour the nearest roof may be more appropriate." Morgan again clicked his teeth, as he often did, to let Bill know of his understanding and approval of the structure.

Morgan walked to the back of the barn again overlooking the hills in the distance. The stench of smoldering leaves filtered across the hill carried by an oncoming wind. Morgan looked for fire but still there was not a sign of flame. He turned to walk to the front of the home again and the smell of ash and smoke became more prevalent.

Morgan looked down at the highway and the entrance to the trailhead leading to the falls. Isabelle would have walked that trail just a few hours earlier to



meet her friends from church. He stood watching the cars and trucks go by, knowing nothing of the oncoming blaze on the mountain. Then another whiff of wind blew across the pasture, and a sea of smoke rose on the east side, adjacent to the trail to the cascades.

Morgan grunted and turned to go back to the barn where Bill was working. He bumped the ladder Bill was standing on while nailing lumber to the roof of the structure.

“Watch out Guy, you’ll cause me to drop the hammer or a nail.”

Morgan spun around grunting as loud as he could.

“What in the heck is the matter, what do you want?”

Morgan pulled out five quills and placed them on the ground. He arranged them in the shape of an arrow pointing to the mountain.

“You’ve used this sign before, on the morning after Isabelle got hurt. Why are you using quills?”

Morgan looked toward the road, then looked back at Bill. Finally Bill noticed the smoke rising up through the trees. “There’s fire; you’re trying to tell me about fire.”

With each second the fire raged higher, creating a thunderhead of black searing smoke. The air filled with the odor of burning fir trees and dry brush from the forest floor. An alarm sounded, and the rush of volunteers quickly broke into action responding to the base camp for firemen at the campground.

“Morgan I have to leave and help with the fire. I pray Isabelle is safe but she should be near the falls by

now, high above the flames and smoke. Our fire teams will find her. I have to leave.”

Morgan stood, observing smoke from the mountain and watching Bill drive away in his ford pick-up. The brake lights flashed, as he headed down the steep driveway. Morgan was silent and memories of the night Isabelle was carried away to a hospital with a sprained ankle surfaced. He wondered then, as he wondered now, if she was safe and would he ever see her again. Forest fires were always serious and life threatening for humans and animals alike.

Morgan wanted to find Isabelle. He remembered his days living in the forest and being teased by his animal friends. They told him he was too slow and didn’t want to play with him because of his sharp quills. Morgan never thought about his small size or slow waddle, although he could run short distances. “I can be of value finding Isabelle and the girls from the church but I’ll have to venture out alone. My eyesight is better than most porcupines and I know things about the forest that humans don’t know.”

# BLACK DIAMOND

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**C**AW, CAW, look at me, look at me,” the bird repeated.

“Who are you?” Morgan asked in a nervous, almost inaudible tone. “Why are you here?”

“They call me Black Diamond. The sky angel sent me.”

“Why are you called Black Diamond? That’s a funny name for a Black Crow.”

“Why am I called Black Diamond? Because of my beauty of course. My illustrious shiny black beauty.” Morgan spun around in disbelief and asked again why his name was Black Diamond.

“Because black is beautiful. Coal is black and turns to a diamond over time. I like the name and the sky creatures think I’m beautiful too.”

“I know the way out of the fire and smoke but you have to do exactly as I say. Leave this trail and go through the thicket to your left. It’s a short cut and will lead you to a safer place but watch out for rattlesnakes and fisher cats.

Morgan did not fear snakes because of his extensive covering of sharp quills. Snakes usually left him alone. Fishers Cats, which are not actually cats, were one of the few animals that could successfully kill a porcupine.

“I’ve been searching for a little girl and her friends. Her name is Isabelle and they’re headed to the waterfall

on the other trail. Will this new way take me to her?”

“I don’t have an answer for you but the trail you speak of is filled with fire and smoke. The sky angel only said to come now for you were in very serious trouble. The sky angel is watching, even though you may not see her. Do not waste any more time and leave through the heavy brush to your left. You’ll find a new pathway soon.”

Morgan followed Black Diamond’s advice and did not question his judgement. Again he marked a spot with quills in the direction he was headed.

Pushing through the heavy thicket was even more difficult but because of his small size he could easily crawl under or around bushes and rocks. He could not see Black Diamond but every now and then, he could hear his “Caw, Caw” as he pushed forward.

Time passed slowly, however, Morgan had walked rugged trails before and now hoped an easier way would come. Heading to a different, unknown locations was scary but he was not going to give up.

As the sun lowered to early afternoon, Morgan reached the new trail Black Diamond talked about. The trail was clear and not scorched by fire.

Morgan looked around. He didn’t recognize the area but knew it was a trail used by the hikers. Morgan was about to sit down to rest when he heard, “Caw, Caw, I’m glad to see you again.” He looked up and there on a stump was Black Diamond. Morgan was safe and knew the smart old crow, Black Diamond had guided him through.

“Black Diamond, you are beautiful and very intelligent. How did you get so smart?”

“All Crows are wise and investigative but I’ve studied human nature and it has appeared to me that most humans usually think about only one thing at a time. It’s not that they’re lazy but sometimes jump from one thing to another without thinking. They never take the time to learn the best way or the better way to solve a problem, although I have yet to understand the difference from better or best. I guess the best way to solve a problem may be the better way to do it.”

If Morgan wasn’t confused before, he was now. However, learning was a life time experience. He needed confidence and knew to never give up on your goals in life.

“Black Diamond, I’m still a little confused, but you have given me hope to carry on.”

“Follow this trail up the mountain. You’ll come near the fire at times but the fire has already burned much of the path. That’s a good thing for fire will not cross previous burned areas of ground. Fire needs fuel, such as dry brush and trees to burn rapidly. However, I do worry about the wind. It can blow fire over and ignite unburned areas. You’ll have to walk another day until you reach the old miners’ cave known as the black hole. You’ll need this.”

Morgan looked on as Black Diamond handed him a shiny rock like object. “Take this and put it in your satchel. Don’t lose it, for it’ll be your light through the mountain. When you get to the black hole, take it out and hold it up to the light of the sun.”



“What is this?”

“It contains a magic mineral that has the ability to glow in the dark after being exposed to light. The humans call it a phosphorescent rock but this rock is special and even brighter than most.”

“But the sky is covered with smoke. Will there be enough light?”

“Yes, the sky creatures are watching and will open up the smoky sky and let the sun shine through. However, the light will only last for two minutes for they’re fighting a difficult battle with smoky clouds and cannot return to pleasant skies right now. Smoky skies will not disappear until the fires are distinguished. Do not waste time and continue up the mountain.”

“I’ll go now.” Morgan said.

“Morgan, your courage and confidence is evident. Do not stray from your course.”

“How do you know my name?”

“Did I say I’m a good investigator? Well it was through my skillful use of wizardry that I found your name and you live on the Hadley farm. You were unhappy living on Cascade Mountain and wanted to meet the humans and find new friends.” Black Diamond said.

Black Diamond fluttered his large wings and lifted up, higher than the tree tops and with only a second of thought disappeared into the smoky sky.

Morgan continued on his way, occasionally finding himself submerged in dense foliage, large bushes and boulders. Waddling and walking was slow and tiring. Farther along the trail, fire again cracked and the wind



swirled in two directions. Black Diamond told me not to worry, Morgan whispered under his breath. Fire could be seen jumping from tree to tree and again burning the trail behind.

A large flaming limb fell across the trail. Morgan's quills and fur caught fire from hot pine needles that landing on his back. He remembered Bill telling everyone on the farm to Stop-Drop-and Roll, something he'd learned when he was studying to become a firefighter. Morgan covered his eyes and quickly fell to the ground rolling over and over putting the flames out. "It worked, Stop-Drop and Roll really works. Morgan said.

Morgan, covered in dust and burnt debris, was otherwise okay. Only singed fur, that curled up tight and blackened quills; he was not seriously injured. His satchel had fallen to the ground and just as he was about to reach down for it he gave a loud squeal and jumped back in horror. There before him was a sight he could barely recognize. Burned fur, mangled bone, ash and blood. The charred body of a baby fawn. Probably the deer had been running before being hit and scorched by the blazing, falling tree limbs. Fires were a terrible entrapment for forest animals and he remembered hearing stories from his friend the beaver and his mom about how forest fires depleted life and left only barren destruction behind.

Still stunned by the death of a baby fawn, Morgan worried more and more about the where-a-bouts and safety of Isabelle. He was scared, lost and in some ways,

questioning the advice of Black Diamond. He wanted reassurance about the direction he was following.

Morgan followed the new trail until late afternoon while knowing he would have to face another night on the fiery mountain. At times he would roll down an incline, wait for the dizzy sensation to stop and continue on his way. He did everything he could to hurry his progress and locate the missing girls. As he rounded a curve in the pathway he saw the smoldering remains of a cabin. The only thing still standing was the stone fireplace.

Carefully Morgan stepped over the burned footings. He saw the arm of what used to be a rocking chair similar to the one Laura, Isabelle's mom, used when picking lima beans. There was no evidence of life.

On the far side of the home stood the metal shell of a bed, refrigerator and stove. Other objects were burned and twisted beyond recognition.

Morgan stood shaking, remembering the sight of the burned fawn. Had humans been here in the cabin when it was burning? Those were the agonizing thoughts racing through his mind.

He was about to leave and return to the trail when he saw a silver object amidst the blackened rubble. Morgan stepped forward and picked up a wrinkled piece of tin foil covered in soot. It reminded him of the aluminum foil Isabelle's mom used to wrap food and place in picnic baskets or take to church potluck dinners. Next to this was the blackened impression of a boot company's logo. A boot image on a piece of

unburned linoleum stuck to a partially burnt piece of wood. Possibly the only remains of the oak flooring in the cabin. The boot print showed a mountain elk with large antlers. This looks like the design on Isabelle's hiking boot, Morgan thought. Isabelle may have been here. But where would she have gone?

He had to speed up his journey to find her and the missing girls from the church.

Morgan placed the foil and the blackened boot print in his satchel, even though part of the item stuck out just a bit. Morgan left the burned cabin and continued on the trail as Black Diamond had suggested. He looked to the sky, hoping to see the sky angel. The smoke billowed against the clouds and he knew the sky angel might not appear.

He wanted to travel at night to make up time and needed to use the shiny rock first to help light his way.

Morgan reached in and withdrew the shiny rock and held it upward. "Sky Angels can you hear me. I have to keep traveling. I have to find Isabelle. Can you bring sunlight to make the rock glow?" Morgan looked up at the late afternoon clouds now rolling even faster than before but now forming the word, "Yes."

The sun broke through and illuminated the magic rock. The rock glowed, just as Black Diamond had said it would. Morgan looked up at the clouds to thank the sky angel, but there was nothing but a blackened sky.

Fires shimmered, sparked in the dark of the evening, lighting the earth and glowing like Christmas stars and exploding as Roman candles on the Fourth

of July. The trail was lit by the glowing rock and the outline of distant hills were illuminated by the reflectance of fire. Every now and then the wind would change direction bringing smoke to the path Morgan was traveling. Again he lowered his face to the ground to find breathable air.

Traveling at night was dangerous, slower and uncertain but uncertainty was a condition Morgan knew well. Uncertainty was always a part of life; he'd experienced it since leaving his mountain home five years ago.

He rested only when he stopped to gather herbs and bark to eat.

Morgan slowly proceeded onward as the light from the magic rock gradually went out.

First light developed in the sky, bringing light to a new day. Morgan had brought a water bottle with him and stored it in his satchel. However, now the water was gone. Morgan went to a stream to refill the container. The creek waters were murky and dark. Morgan knew the water may have turned to poison. Besides the threat of fire, water also became a deadly liquid. Forest animals wouldn't be unable to drink from the mountain streams.

# ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

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Maryana Flyak is a children's writer, children's book illustrator and icon painter born in Lviv, Ukraine in 1983. Maryana graduated from the Lviv Academy of Arts with a master's degree in sacred art.

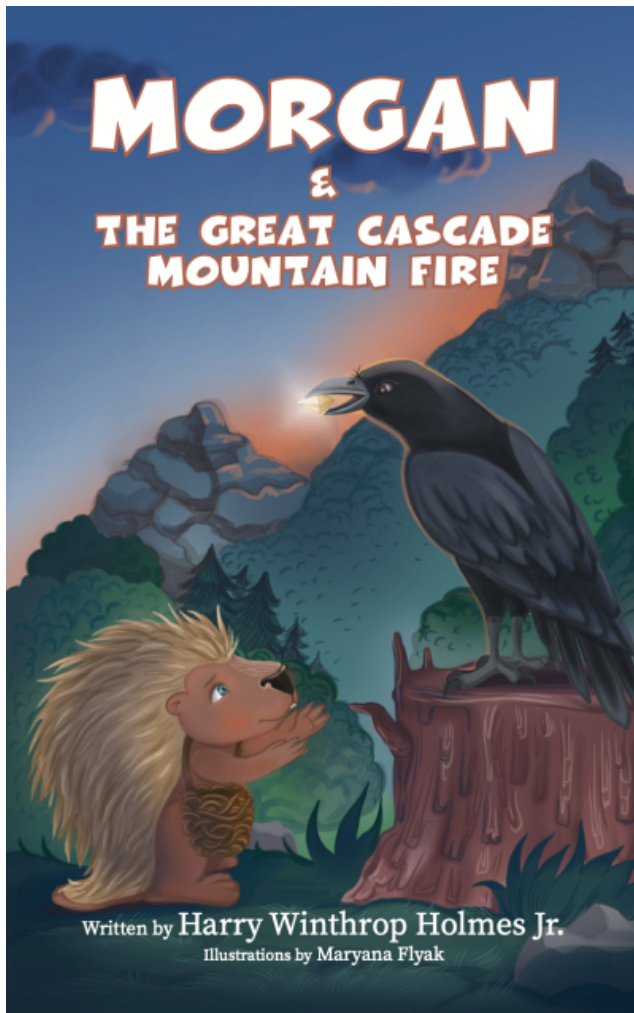
She was a co-founder of children's Christian magazines "Angel," "Angel Science," "Flashlight." For 10 years she worked as the chief artist and editor of these magazines. Maryana combined her work with writing and illustrating her own books: *Ivasyk's Christmas*, *Miracles in the Forest*, *How Nicholas Went to Jesus*, *Lamas Without a Break for Advertising* and others.

As a freelancer she has illustrated more than thirty children's books around the world: USA, Great Britain, Australia, Israel, Spain and participated in the annual icon painting exhibition in New York, at the parish of the Greek Catholic Church. She has had exhibitions of book illustrations in the annual Publishers' Forum in Lviv.

Maryana is the author of the children's Christian songs on the album *I sing with my heart*.

She is the mother of three wonderful children who inspire her to come up with new ideas every day.

Thanks for all the talents given to God!



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