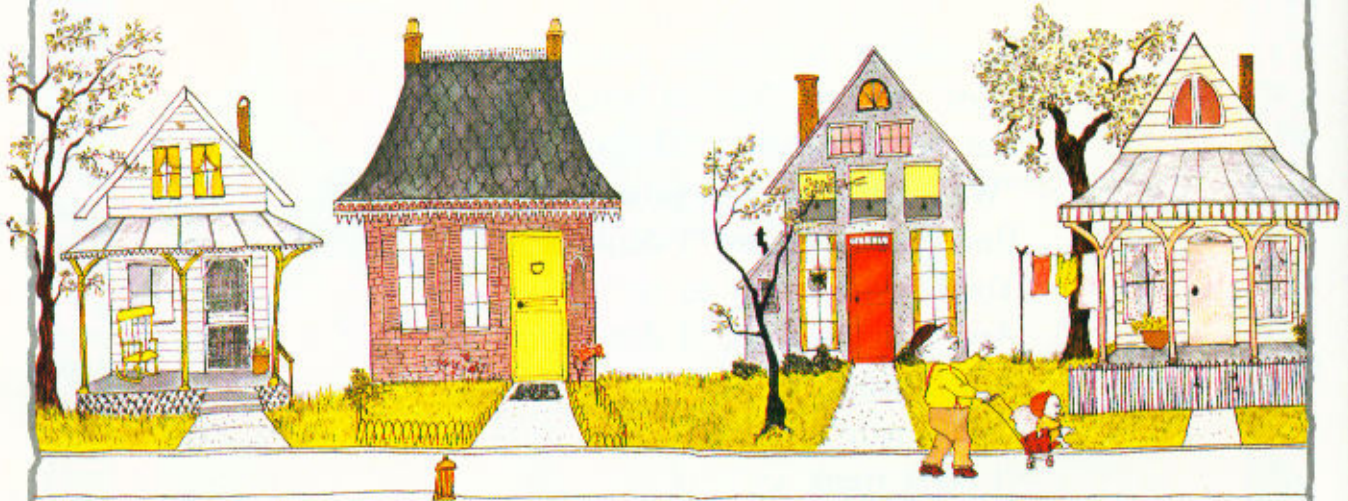


A Special Trade

by Sally Wittman

Illustrated by Karen Gundersheimer



Old Bartholomew is Nelly's neighbor.

When Nelly was very small, he would take her every day for a walk down the block to Mrs. Pringle's vegetable garden.

Bartholomew never pushed too fast. He always warned Nelly about Mr. Oliver's bumpy driveway: "Hang on, Nell! Here's a bump!" And she'd shout "BUMP!" as she rode over it.

If they met a nice dog along the way, they'd stop and pet it. But if it was nasty, Bartholomew would shoo it away.



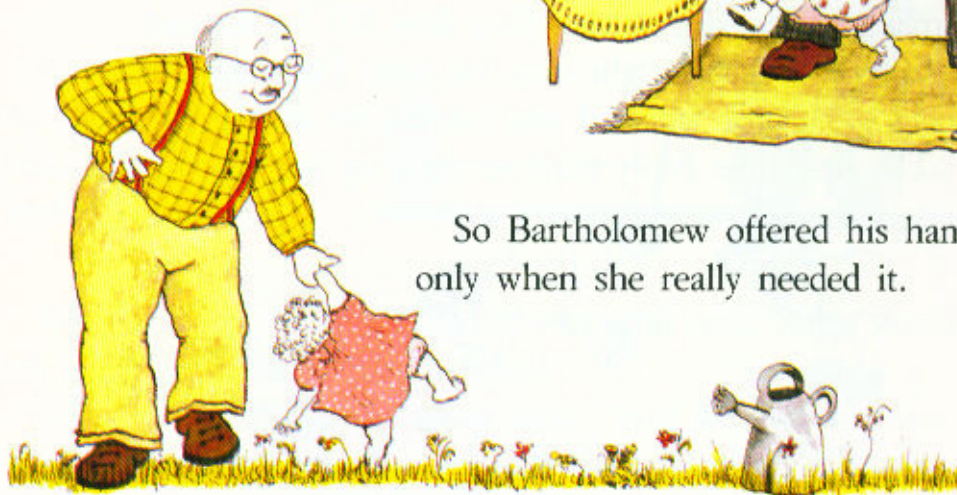
When Mrs. Pringle's sprinkler was on, he would say, "Get ready, get set, CHAAARRRRRRRRRRRRRRRGE!" Nelly would squeal "Wheeeee!" as he pushed her through it.

When Nelly began to walk, Bartholomew took her by the hand. "NO-NO!" she cried, pulling it back.

Nelly didn't want any help.



So Bartholomew offered his hand only when she really needed it.



Bartholomew was getting older, too. He needed a walking stick. So they walked very slowly. When they walked upstairs, they *both* held on to the railing.

The neighbors called them "ham and eggs" because they were always together.

Even on Halloween.

And on the coldest day of winter when everyone else was inside.



One summer Bartholomew taught Nelly to skate by circling his walking stick. "Easy does it!" he warned.

Then she skated right over his toes! He wasn't mad, though. He just whistled and rubbed his foot.

The first time Nelly tried to skate by herself,



she fell.

Bartholomew saw that she felt like crying. He pulled up something from the garden and said, "Don't be saddish, have a radish!"

Nelly laughed and ate it. She didn't really like radishes, but she did like Bartholomew.

Before long, Nelly was in school and Bartholomew had gotten even older.



Sometimes he needed a helping hand, but he didn't like to take one.

So Nelly held out her hand only when Bartholomew really needed it.



Whenever Bartholomew had to stop and rest, Nelly would beg for a story about the "old days."

Once after a story, she asked him, "Will we ever run out of things to talk about?"

"If we do," said Bartholomew, "we just won't say anything. Good friends can do that."

Some days they just took it easy and sat on the porch. Bartholomew would play a tune on his harmonica. Nelly would make up the words.

One day Bartholomew went out alone and fell down the stairs. An ambulance with a red flasher and a siren took him to the hospital.

He was gone for a long time.

Nelly wrote him every day. She always ended with, "Come back soon, so we can go for walks again."

When Bartholomew came home, he was in a wheelchair. The smile was gone from his eyes.

"I guess our walks are over," he said.

"No they aren't," said Nelly. "I can take *you* for walks now."

She knew just how to do it, too.

Nice and easy, not too fast.

Just before Mr. Oliver's driveway, she would call, "Get ready for the bump!" And Bartholomew would wave his hat like a cowboy as he rode over it.

If they saw a nice dog, they'd stop and pet it.

But if it was mean, Nelly would shoo it away.

One day when the sprinkler was on, Nelly started to go around. But she changed her mind. "All right, Bartholomew.



Ready, set, one, two, three. CHAAARRRRRRRRRRRRRGE!"
And she pushed him right through it!

"Ah . . . that was fun!" said Bartholomew.

Nelly grinned. "I hope your wheelchair won't rust."

"Fiddlesticks!" He laughed. "Who cares if it does!"

Mrs. Pringle leaned over the fence.

"Seems just like yesterday Bartholomew
was pushing *you* in the stroller."

"That was when I was little,"
said Nelly. "Now it's my
turn to push and
Bartholomew's turn
to sit . . . kind of
like a trade."

Then they sat
in the sun to dry.
Nelly munched
on a carrot.

Bartholomew played a tune on his harmonica.

Nelly could see the old smile was back in Bartholomew's
eyes.

