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BIOGRAPHY

Berta and Elmer Hader: A Lifetime of Art
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Joyful Productions
978-0-9891087-0-6
Five Stars (out of Five)

This well-researched biography is as visually delightful as one of the Haders' books.

Children's book lovers and collectors have a wonderful new present, as brightly and invitingly packaged as any childhood birthday gift, with the publication of *Berta and Elmer Hader: A Lifetime of Art*. This married couple was a prolific children's book author and illustrator team, best known for their Caldecott Medal-winning title *The Big Snow*. The book is written by the Haders' niece, who grew up to be a teacher, and a friend who is a bookstore owner, while the graphic design is courtesy of another accomplished married artist pair. It's a generously sized book and a high-quality production that radiates affection for the Haders and their simple yet rich lives.

Before their courtship, Berta was a fashion illustrator and Elmer known for his landscapes. They married in 1919 and began building a life together as working partners, turning out scores of magazine illustrations, designing and building a stone house, and raising their only child, Hamilton, until his death at age two. For the next fifty years, the pair devoted their energies principally to illustrating and writing ninety-one colorful, nature-themed, often whimsical, children's books that garnered many awards, as well as a legion of fans of all ages.

This volume is a seamless blend of text and images that make this extensively researched portrait as easy to read and as visually delightful as one of the Haders' own books. Reproduction of the detail and color in the many examples of the couple's artwork is first-rate, and it is a delight to see the numerous sketches, illustrated letters, paper toys, and other previously unpublished items culled from a myriad of academic and personal collections. Book collectors will particularly appreciate the sizable number of references and the chronological list of Hader

titles at the end. A glossary and many explanations throughout the text also illuminate how the pair used their technical virtuosity with various printing processes to make their detailed artwork shimmer with depths of color and to produce as many books as they did.

The authors write about the Haders with simple, factual, straightforward prose, which seems to suit this down-to-earth couple. However, the book lacks analysis of how the Haders felt about their various subjects, nor does it include much about the motivations behind their work, other than noting they shared a love of nature and animals. This seems a curious absence, given that both had a large circle of interesting friends—Katherine Anne Porter, Imogen Cunningham, Rose Wilder Lane among them—and traveled widely. Elmer also served in World War I, had a short-lived vaudeville career, and spent forty-six years as a local zoning administrator. Surely the couple had strong passions and views on any number of subjects, as might well be expressed in the correspondence archives held by various public libraries; the inclusion of this material would more fully convey what made these two very singular people tick.

Overall, this charming and professionally executed book gives a mostly linear account of the Haders' professional lives and the technical aspects of how they worked with editors and printers to produce their shelves of popular children's story books. One can imagine Berta and Elmer would be very pleased at this showcase of their artistic legacy.

Rachel Jagareski