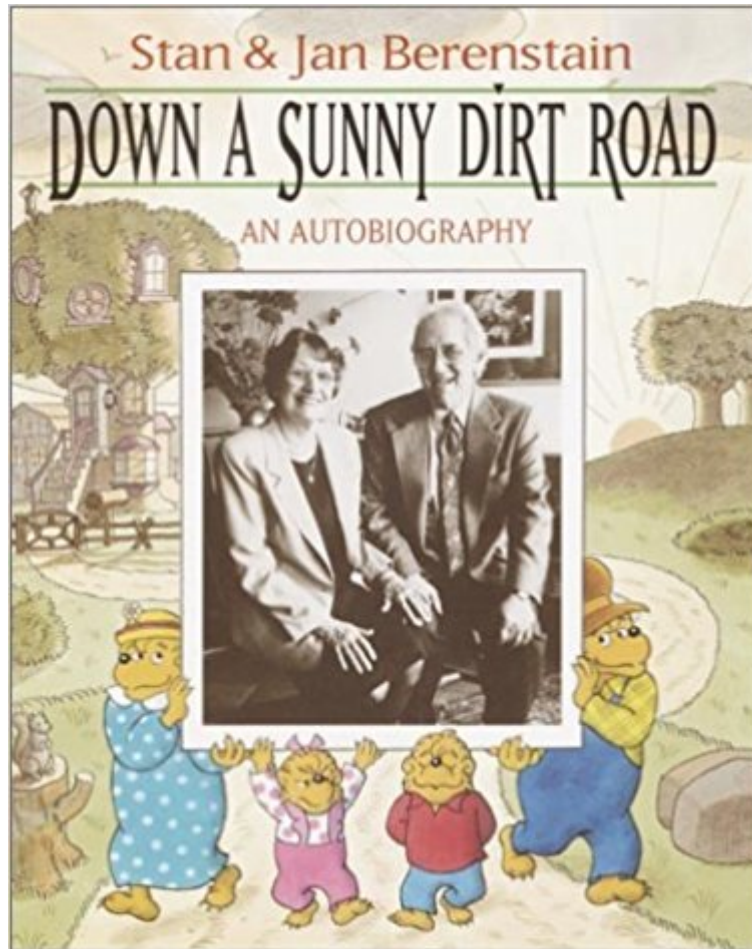




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# Down A Sunny Dirt Road: An Autobiography



## Synopsis

Once upon a time, in Mrs. Sweeney's first year drawing class at the Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Art, a "lantern-jawed exotic" named Stan admired the drawing of a brown-haired, blue-eyed girl named Janice . . . and it was kismet! It also heralded the birth of one of the great collaborations in all of children's literature: Stan and Jan Berenstain, creators of the Berenstain Bears. This enormously readable account tells of the early years before they met, their courtship (briefly interrupted by World War II), married life, and their first fateful meeting with Theodor Seuss Geisel—the editor-in-chief and president of Beginner Books. It was this fateful meeting that led to the publication of *The Big Honey Hunt*—the book that launched their careers as children's book artists and introduced to the world what would quickly become America's first family of bears: the Berenstain Bears.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

You'd think that Jan and Stan Berenstain's true calling was the whole bear thing (*Bears in the Night*, *The Big Honey Hunt*, etc.). But after spending even a couple minutes reading their absorbing and often hilarious autobiography, you'll wonder why they don't do more memoirs. Taking turns with chapters like "Stan Meets Jan" and "Jan Meets Stan," the Berenstains share some of the most minute and telling details that contributed to their uniquely successful career and marriage (which long ago passed the 50-year mark). We hear about 5-year-old Stan's "cat period" (quickly eclipsed

by his "zeppelin period," after spotting the Graf Zeppelin sailing over Philadelphia's "el"); a third-grade dance performance by shy "Janece" as the Red-Breasted Robin (Jan's teacher never pronounced her name correctly); the couple's budding romance at art school and its interruption by the draft (followed by some funny WWII recollections from Stan); their struggling early success at the Saturday Evening Post and Collier's (where they became famous for their "moppet mob scenes"); and their momentous first meeting with Theodor ("Dr.") Seuss Geisel, which led to some surprising consternation--"Our modest dream of a doing a funny book about a family of bears who lived in a tree was turning into a waking nightmare." Even though the Berenstains have kindly written to a preteen level, teens and grownups should still find Down a Sunny Dirt Road highly readable. And die-hard fans of the Bear family will especially enjoy the comprehensive bibliography--who ever knew about The Berenstain Bears and the Drug-Free Zone? (Ages 10 and older) --Paul Hughes

The creative couple behind the bestselling Berenstain Bears opens this sprightly, joint autobiography with alternating chapters chronicling their respective childhoods in Philadelphia. Stan's and Jan's anecdotal recollections work in the kinds of details that children lap up: Stan remembers spotting his first zeppelin (a "great silver cigar"), Jan recalls tracing the White Knight onto a color plate of John Tenniel's artwork and, later, the couple use their childhood memories of the Saturday matinee as inspiration for a Collier's cover (reproduced in the book). After their creative aspirations bring them together as students at the Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Art (recorded in successive chapters as "Stan Meets Jan" and "Jan Meets Stan"), they offer perspectives on the ensuing WWII years (Stan served as a medical artist in the Army, Jan worked as an aircraft riveter), then merge their voices into one. Highlights include their auspicious meeting with the feisty, at times cantankerous Theodor Seuss Geisel, editor-in-chief of Random House's new Beginner Books, and the launch of the furry family from Bear Country. The roomy, clean design is reminiscent of Bill Peet: An Autobiography; their illustrations of themselves jitterbugging or playing field hockey (rendered in the Berenstain's familiar, contemporary style) demonstrate the impressive versatility of the couple's talents. Though sometimes long on detail, this breezy, humorous saga makes for an intriguing publishing tale and may appeal most to aspiring artists and adult fans, who will happily follow these amicable, humble authors down their indisputably sunny autobiographical road. Ages 12-up. (Sept.) Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Like many little children, my mother would always read me a story just before going to bed at night. Out of all the books to choose from on my little shelf, The Berenstain Bears were among my most favorite to hear. Being a PA native like the authors, I have always been curious about how they got involved in the world of children's publishing and what their lives were like up until each one's passing. I have just received a copy of these memoirs this afternoon in the mail and everything in it looks wonderful. The text is accompanied by wonderful illustrations of Stan and Jan Berenstain as well as old photographs, cartoons, magazine covers, and of course, illustrations of the bear family. Although the age level group seems pre-teen, this book is also a marvelous story for adults who grew up with the bears during their childhood. I am thrilled to have a copy of "Down a Sunny Dirt Road" in my personal library and look forward to reading over it. Thankfully, although the authors are no longer with us, their two sons, Mike and Leo Berenstain are here to help keep the legacy alive. We can all be well assured that with this book, we are always welcome to walk down that "sunny dirt road, deep in bear country". A wonderful book.

This is a great read for all lovers of the Berenstain Bears books! I loved it so much that I bought this one and donated it to our local library!

I thoroughly enjoyed this lavishly illustrated dual biography of Stan and Jan Berenstain. It's warm and humorous and it upset me that it's out of print. But that's what their publisher, Random House, does for some reason. Some of Random House's best children's books over the years have gone out of print and are never brought back, and I guess it's the same with their adult books. Not sure where this one fits - I am an adult, a retired school librarian, and loved it but I think older kids would enjoy it too. Thank goodness for the internet which makes it easier to find OP books, although some are very expensive, such as TUBBY AND THE POOH BAH which my son loved and I wanted to get for my granddaughter, but not for \$100! This one is a bargain though!

Down a Sunny Dirt Road would be a highly enjoyable addition to any book collection. It is the story of Stan and Jan Berenstain covering their childhood up to today. The book is broken up into chapters of about five pages each. The text is large and easy to read. Throughout the book, the chapter is broken up between Stan and Jan. Each of them tells their own point of view about events that only they were a part of as well as events they both experienced together. The book is lovingly put together and packed with pictures of Stan and Jan as well as illustrations that each of them made to illustrate the events that they are talking about in the chapter. The autobiography is all

encompassing and contains many great extras like a list of all of the books that the couple has written or illustrated, a chronology of events, and all of the awards that they have won. The book is the tale of a great love story between two star-crossed lovers that luckily for us, ended up together. The couple lived the true rags to riches story and this idea runs throughout the book because it has influenced choices they have made. It is great to hear about their start in the cartoon industry as well as their creation of the lovable bears we have come to know as Mama, Papa, Sister, Brother, and now Honey. It was also very interesting to learn about how they based the bears on. One of the most enjoyable chapters of the book focuses on their meetings with beloved children's author Dr. Seuss. The advice that Dr. Seuss gave them about their books was fun to read and the knowledge that he tried to make the bears like the books he wrote, but the Berenstain Bears were reluctant to do so. The book also highlights the fact that Stan and Jan are real artists, not only cartoonists. Their other artwork is breathtakingly beautiful and is contained within the chapters about attending art school. The autobiography is well done and answers all of the pertinent questions that people would want to know like the authors' favorite books, where they get their ideas, and the correct pronunciation of their last name. Down a Sunny Dirt Road would most likely be more enjoyable to adults who grew up with the Berenstain bears or during the era that the Berenstains grew up. There are a lot of people, items, and events that are mentioned, especially in the early chapters, that children would not know or understand. The Berenstain Bears do a good job of explaining these unknown terms, but there are just so many on the page that the children may not be able to comprehend the terms used. As far as autobiographies go, this is a great one. Down a Sunny Dirt Road is perfect for anyone wanting a great biography or a true fan that would like to travel down that sunny dirt road with those lovable Berenstain bears.

As a parent, I remember curling up with my sons and reading the adventure of the Berenstain Bears. The illustrations and the stories were always well-crafted. But how did this couple which has sold millions of children's books begin on their journey to publication? You will learn about their early life and how they met and married. I found it fascinating about how they moved from illustration work into children's books. In a true behind-the-scenes look, you will learn about their first meeting with Theodor Geisel (aka Dr. Seuss), who was the editor-in-chief of Random House's Beginner Books. I recommend anyone interested in children's writing or children's book illustration would profit from reading this book. It is excellent. I ranked it at four-stars for a reason: the book is a misfit in some ways. It appears like a children's book because it includes Berenstain illustrations combined with

family photos and an oversized design. It doesn't easily fall into the autobiographical section of a bookstore nor does it fit into the children's book section. Even with these cautions, I loved this book and learned a great deal from it and recommend it to others.

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