

Snowflake Bentley

by Jacqueline Briggs Martin

Narrator #1	Narrator #2	Narrator #3	Narrator #4	Narrator #5
Narrator #6	Narrator #7	Narrator #8	Narrator #9	Narrator #10
Willie Bentley		Willie's Father		

Narrator #1	<u>Snowflake Bentley</u> by Jacqueline Briggs Martin
Narrator #2	In the days when farmers worked with ox and sled and cut the dark with lantern light, there lived a boy who loved snow more than anything else in the world.
Narrator #3	Willie Bentley's happiest days were snowstorm days. H watched snowflakes fall on his mittens, on the dried grass of Vermont farm fields, on the dark metal handle of the barn door.
Narrator #4	He said snow was as beautiful as butterflies or apple blossoms.
Narrator #5	He could net butterflies and show them to his older brother, Charlie. He could pick apple blossoms and take them to his mother.
Narrator #6	But he could not share snowflakes because he could not save them.
Narrator #7	When his mother gave him an old microscope, he used it to look at flowers, raindrops, and blades of grass.
Narrator #8	Best of all, he used it to look at snow.

Narrator #9	When other children built forts and pelted snowballs at roosting crows, Willie was catching single snowflakes.
Narrator #10	Day after stormy day he studied the icy crystals.
Narrator #1	Their intricate patterns were even more beautiful than he had imagined.
Narrator #2	He expected to find whole flakes that were the same, that were copies of each other.
Narrator #3	But he never did.
Narrator #4	Willie decided he must find a way to save snowflakes so others could see their wonderful designs.
Narrator #5	For three winters he tried drawing snow crystals. They always melted before he could finish.
Narrator #6	When he was sixteen, Willie read of a camera with its own microscope.
Willie Bentley	"If I had that camera I could photograph snowflakes,"
Narrator #7	Willie told his mother.
Narrator #8	Willie's mother knew he would not be happy until he could share what he had seen.
Willie's Father	"Fussing with snow is just foolishness,"
Narrator #9	his father said.
Narrator #10	Still, he loved his son. When Willie was seventeen his parents spent their savings and bought the camera.

Narrator #1	It was taller than a newborn calf and cost as much as his father's herd of ten cows.
Narrator #2	Willie was sure it was the best of all cameras.
Narrator #3	Even so his first pictures were failures- no better than shadows.
Narrator #4	Yet he would not quit.
Narrator #5	Mistake by mistake, snowflake by snowflake, Willie worked through every storm.
Narrator #6	Winter ended, the snow melted, and he had no good pictures.
Narrator #7	He waited for another season of snow.
Narrator #8	One day, in the second winter, he tried a new experiment.
Narrator #9	It worked!
Narrator #10	Willie had figured out how to photograph snowflakes!
Willie Bentley	"Now everyone can see the great beauty in a tiny crystal,"
Narrator #1	he said.
Narrator #2	But in those days no one cared.
Narrator #3	Neighbors laughed at the idea of photographing snow.
All Narrators	"Snow in Vermont it as common as dirt. We don't need pictures,"
Narrator #4	they said.
Narrator #5	Willie said the photographs would be his gift to the world.

Narrator #6	While other farmers sat by the fire or rode to town with horse and sleigh, Willie studies snowstorms.
Narrator #7	He stood at the shed door and held out a black tray to catch the flakes.
Narrator #8	When he found only jumbled, broken crystals, he brushed the tray clean with a turkey feather and held it out again.
Narrator #9	He waited hours for just the right crystal and didn't notice the cold.
Narrator #10	If the shed were warm, the snow would melt. If he breathed on the black tray the snow would melt. If he twitched a muscle as he held the snow crystal on the long wooden pick the snowflake would break.
Narrator #1	He had to work fast or the snowflake would evaporate before he could slide it into place and take its picture.
Narrator #2	Some winters he was able to make only a few dozen good pictures.
Narrator #3	Some winters he made hundreds.
Narrator #4	Willie so loved the beauty of nature he took pictures in all seasons.
Narrator #5	In the summer his nieces and nephews rubbed coat hangers with sticky pitch from spruce tress. Then Willie could use them to pick up spider webs jeweled with water drops and take their pictures.

Narrator #6	On fall nights he would gently tie a grasshopper to a flower so he could find it in the morning and photograph the dew-covered insect.
Narrator #7	But his snow pictures were always his favorites.
Narrator #8	He gave away copies or sold them for a few cents.
Narrator #9	He made special pictures as gifts for birthdays.
Narrator #10	He held evening slide shows on the lawns of his friends. Children and adults sat on the grass and watched while Willie projected his slides onto a sheet hung over a clothesline.
Narrator #1	He wrote about snow and published his pictures in magazines.
Narrator #2	He gave speeches about snow to faraway scholars and neighborhood skywatchers.
Narrator #3	The little farmer came to be known as the world's expert on snow, the "Snowflake Man."
Narrator #4	But he never grew rich.
Narrator #5	He spent every penny on his pictures. Willie said there were treasures in snow.
Willie Bentley	"I can't afford to miss a single snowstorm. I never know when I will find some wonderful prize,"
Narrator #6	he said.
Narrator #7	Other scientists raised money so Willie could gather his best photographs in a book.
Narrator #8	When he was sixty-six years old Willie's book-his gift to the world- was published.

Narrator #9	Still he was not ready to quit.
Narrator #10	Less than a month after turning the first page in his book, Willie walked six miles home in a blizzard to make more pictures.
Narrator #1	He became ill with pneumonia after that walk and died two weeks later.
Narrator #2	A monument was built for Willie in the center of town.
Narrator #3	The girls and boys who had been his neighbors grew up and told their sons and daughters the story of the ma who loved snow.
Narrator #4	Forty years after Wilson Bentley's death, children his village worked to set up a museum in honor of the farmer-scientist.
Narrator #5	And his book has taken the delicate snow crystals that once blew across Vermont, past mountains, over the earth.
Narrator #6	Neighbors and strangers have come to know of the icy wonders that land on their own mittens- thanks to Snowflake Bentley.

