

# Punxsutawney Phil:

## The King of Groundhog Day

By Jean Craighead George

Every year at two o'clock in the morning on February 2, fourteen men in tuxedos, black coats, and top hats carry a groundhog from a cozy zoo to the top of a hill called Gobbler's Knob in Punxsutawney (Punks-su-taw-ney), Pennsylvania. The groundhog is placed in a hollow tree stump that has a door attached. Half awake, he curls into a ball and goes back to sleep while the fourteen men drink coffee and wait for daybreak. The groundhog's name is Punxsutawney Phil, and February 2 is Groundhog Day.

According to an ancient Roman legend that German settlers brought with them to America, there will be six more weeks of winter if February 2 is sunny and clear. The Pennsylvania Germans believed that the groundhog was a most intelligent and sensible animal. And so they reasoned that such a wise creature would see his shadow if the day was sunny, and would go back to sleep for another six weeks of winter. If he didn't see his shadow, he would stay up and spring would come early.

The legend was first tested on February 2 in 1871. It was a dull time of the year with the holidays over and little farming to do. A few Punxsutawneyites went off to the woods first thing in the morning and found a groundhog. They named him Punxsutawney Phil, and they watched while he went back to

sleep right after seeing hi shadow. The townspeople then went back to their village and feasted and danced. To this day, they are still asking Phil about the weather while the rest of the country waits for the answer.

Just before the sunrise, the president of the Punxsutawney Ground Hog Club taps on the stump and awakens Phil. He is irritated. He has been awakened twice this day, and he sees no carrots. He is handed to the president, chittering angrily. The president chitters back. Visitors hold their breath. They are told the man and the groundhog are talking about the weather. Then over the horizon comes the sun, and Phil's shadow falls on the ground. "Six more weeks of winter", the president announces. The band strikes up a lively tune, and everyone for the miles around celebrates Groundhog Day.

At the end of the day, Phil is carried home to his zoo. Once again, he tucks his head into his belly and -goes back to sleep, just as he would do in the wild. Groundhogs hibernate in October and awaken in February to locate mates. Ordinarily, they then go back to sleep and get up in March to breed. The young are born in April.

Groundhogs are easily tamed. Like Phil, most love to sit on human laps, mow grass all summer, and sleep all winter. But no one is really sure how accurate Phil's weather forecasting is, except for Punxsutawneyites. They say their King of the Weather Prophets has never been wrong.