What was your inspiration for the book? Why ice cream?

Ice cream and children, America and summer all represent freedom to me. And what could be more inspiring than freedom? I did not grow up in America, but my children were born here, and through them, I discovered the joy of ice cream trucks and parlors, colors and flavors, cones and cups! My children are grown now, and the book is a celebration of their childhoods and the many happy times we spent together in various places eating ice cream. I hope young readers and their families will see themselves in Joe and his family.

What did ice cream mean to you growing up?

I grew up in the totalitarian country (of Czechoslovakia), and like children all over the world, we loved ice cream. But everything in our world was without colors. Even the ice cream was black (brown) and white (and later, just a bit of pink). The best and most expensive Soviet ice cream, called “morozhenoe,” was made with two waffles and vanilla in between, similar to an ice cream sandwich. It took practice to bite into it without the ice cream shooting out the other side. But even this treat paled in comparison to the rainbow of ice cream colors and flavors I discovered in America!

How did you arrive at the wonderful blend of fact and fiction and nonfiction?

My father-in-law is a famous scientist. So he always made sure my son studied over the summer and asked him lots of questions—are you reading, counting, learning?—and rewarded him for his efforts. That memory was the initial inspiration for the format of the book, that learning can be sweet and fun. Then, as I researched, I fell in love with the rich history of ice cream in America—all those hokeypokey men and pushcarts and immigrants in search of a democratic, communal connection through food. The rainbow of ice cream colors felt reflective of the American rainbow society. That really resonated for me as an immigrant myself.

How did you decide on the palette and art style for the book?

The art style and palette are meant to celebrate the colors of summer, of ice cream, of family. When I arrived here in the dark days of the Cold War, there were not so many colors and flavors, but thankfully, times and tastes change, and now we have mango, pineapple, cherry, and pistachio! All those beautiful colors swirled in my head as I painted the book.

Did you discover anything particularly fascinating while working on the book?

The modern American ice cream universe is forever fascinating because the flavors, colors, and choices are endless. You have to grow up here to navigate it all—cup or cone, sugar or waffle, one scoop or two, nuts or sprinkles, hot fudge or caramel, whip cream, cherry, credit or debit? The biggest ice cream I ever saw was a giant snow cone, in all colors of the rainbow. A child would need a shower and a bath to wash his face after eating those yellow and aqua colors! I was always touched by the jingle bells of ice cream trucks which magically materialized whenever my children exited the school building, finished a soccer game, or left for a fishing trip. It’s hard to say no when an ice cream truck is parked next to the ball field and all the players are getting a scoop. I thought, what a country caring about its young ones!

You’re a world traveler. Do you have any favorite places and flavors?

I’ve eaten ice cream at Fauchon on the boulevards of Paris, on the Lido in Venice, and at the Castle garden in Prague. But the best place for ice cream is without a doubt America. And the best people to eat ice cream with are your family! I will never forget having scoops of delicious ice cream in a place called “Blue Pig” in Croton, New York. Our children—wrapped in towels, with wet hair—would laugh themselves silly while devouring the colorful, messy after-swimming treat. Or magical fire fly-filled summer evenings in Madison, Wisconsin, where families with grandparents, babies, and dogs would gather in the parking lot of Michael’s Frozen Custard on Monroe Street to indulge in what felt like a sacred reunion...or summers on Cape May, in Florida, upstate New York, Texas (a lot of Texas), Ohio, Mississippi, California—all made more magical with scoops and scoops of colorful ice cream—the best summers ever.
Color the picture with ice cream colors!
How many can you think of?
Math is more fun with tasty treats!
Can you solve these word problems before dessert?

1. If there are 65 days of summer, and I eat 1 ice cream cone every day, how many ice cream cones will I eat before school starts?

2. If each scoop costs 50 cents and I have $2.00 in my pocket, how many scoops can I get?

3. If all 6 of us eat 1 ice cream cone with 2 scoops, how many scoops do we eat in total?

4. If the ice cream truck has 5 strawberry shortcakes and 4 of us buy 1, how many are left?
Dive into delicious history!
Can you match the inventor or leader to his culinary connection?

- Sold waffles at the 1904 World’s Fair, which became the first pointy cones! **Thomas Jefferson**
- Used an eighteen-step recipe he learned in France **Harry Burt**
- Frenchman who sold ice cream at the 1904 World’s Fair **George Washington**
- The first founding father to buy his very own ice cream machine **Arnold Fornachou**
- Served ice cream as a treat at his second inaugural ball **James Madison**
- Created ice cream on sticks **Ernest Hamwi**