The characters in this modern folk tale, based on a real family encountered by the author, are resilient and cheerful in the face of extreme poverty. And they are resourceful in using the little they have to very good effect. Mia lives in a village which has grown up on a collection of waste dumps between a city and a snowy mountain range in South America. Even the houses are made out of rubbish and Mia?fs family dream of having a house built of bricks. Her father, like the other men of the village, ekes out a living by selling scrap which the people in the city have discarded.

The illustrations include big landscapes; one shows the village with its pall of pollution, others the snowy mountain environment and yet others the fine buildings of the big city. But it is the clusters of small pictures, full of interesting detail and annotated with hand lettered information, that invite children into the texture of villagers? daily lives. These vignettes show us that the harshness of life is sweetened by warm family relationships: Mia runs to meet her father on his return from work each evening. They also show the importance of Mia?fs donkey and small dog, Poco, in her everyday life and activities.

When Poco goes missing, Mia rides her donkey up to the mountains to search for him. Michael Foreman?fs pictures capture well the moments of sheer exhilaration when girl and donkey are overwhelmed by the clean air and pure white snow ?rolling over and over in the whole white world of it?. Mia plants flowers collected during her star-lit journey back from the mountains and persuades her parents to sell the flowers in the big city. Young readers will share the hope that one day the brick house will be built. For 7 year olds and upwards. MM