



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

AN INTERVIEW WITH ABIE LONGSTAFF

Q1. What are your earliest memories of books and reading? For example, did you have a favourite or inspirational book?

I come from a very book-loving household. My parents were both big readers and I was lucky enough to grow up surrounded by stories and poetry. I'm the eldest of six girls, so I have fond memories of reading to my little sisters. Because of this, younger fiction really sticks in my mind. I think it's why I developed a love of picture books. When I read them to my own children I can hear my mother's voice reading them to me, and I love that circle of connection.

Q2. What inspired you to become an author / illustrator?

As a child I used to make things all the time. I made magazines, pop songs, board games, plays, poems and books. Most of them were extremely cringeworthy. And I do remember spending waaaay longer coming up with the name for my pop band than actually practising the singing. At school I loved playing with words, and I was fairly academic so I did a law degree and qualified as a barrister. I was a lawyer for a time but, once I had my own children, I rediscovered my love of picture books. I started to write again and, for a time, I juggled both jobs – law and writing – which involved a bizarre mixture of writing about mermaids on a Monday and advising on domestic violence legislation on a Tuesday. I gave up the day job to write full time about a year ago and have loved spending every time immersed in a fictional world.

Q3. For you, what makes a successful book or illustration?

Readability. Successful books make you want to come back to them time and time again - picture books particularly so. They are designed to be read over and over and have to withstand the test of time, both in terms of their words and their pictures.

Q4. Do you have a specific audience in mind when you write your books / plan your illustrations?

Of course picture books are primarily written for a child. But most parents know that feeling when you're tired, you've had a long day, you've finally got the kids in bed, you read the last bedtime story, shut the book and a little voice cries 'Again! Again!' I have great sympathy for that exhausted parent and I make sure there's something to interest him/her as well as the child.

With my older books, I just try to write the book I would have wanted to read myself at that age.

Q5. What future do you think the physical book has? For example, do you think the electronic book will replace the physical book?

There are some wonderful electronic books available, but for me these have a different purpose than physical books. Electronic books allow a child to press buttons, read and play on their own. But physical books are more about bonding. There's something cosy and snuggly about cuddling up with a child, turning the pages one by one and sharing the story together.

Q6. Are you a book collector? Is there a special book you'd love to own?

I'm not a collector, but my shelves are overflowing with books. I'm really running out of space and I refuse to double-stack them because I love reading all their spines.