



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An Interview With Candy Gourlay

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

I was a six year old, playing in my grandma's bedroom (which, actually, was forbidden, but there I was). My grandmother loved to read and there were many books in her room. I had only just learned how to sound out words so I thought I'd practice. I opened one of the books, a mystery serial from the 1930s and 40s called Beverly Gray, written by Clair Blank. As I slowly sounded out the words, I realised that it was telling me a story. To this day, I remember the electricity that ran through me when I realised that there were stories between the pages of a book!

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

Discovering books was love at first sight. I knew, instantly, what I wanted to become when I grew up. I wanted to write books and make children feel the way I did when read them. But it wasn't as easy as that. At the time, growing up in the Philippines, there were no publishers, all our books were imported from the West. Writing became my profession but I had to work in journalism and not make up stories, which was what I really wanted to do. Years later when I found myself living in England (the home of Shakespeare!), I decided to have a go at becoming an author. It was a long and difficult journey but here I am!

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

I am still a big reader. But becoming a writer of books meant that I had to learn what happens under the bonnet ... I had to learn what makes a good story work. As a result, when I read, I struggle with my technical self taking note of the writer's craft (and mistakes) instead of simply immersing myself in the story. A really successful book is one that can make me forget about writing.

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

I think, unlike writers for adults, children's authors have a closer relationship with their readers. My reader is by my side from the moment the idea of a story pops up in my head to the moment that the book makes it to the shelf of a bookstore. When I write, I am always thinking about my reader's enjoyment - will my reader hate this? Am I being too boring? Will he or she be intrigued, annoyed, confused, entertained?

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

I read so much that digital books are a joy to me. I can carry my library around in my pocket. But at the same time, I believe that the physical book will always have a place in the world. Especially books for children. Childhood is a tactile time, and there is nothing like the smell and the feel of a book in your hands!

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

I am not strictly a collector, but once I own a book, I find it very hard to give it away or put it in the recycling basket. What special book would I love to own? When i go to the British Library, I love staring at illuminated manuscripts, with their extraordinary illustrations and artful script, and little cartoons in the margins. I would love to be allowed to hold one in my hands, and be given the chance to pore over it!