



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An Interview With Jane Tanner

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

The year I turned 4 years old I discovered 'The House at Pooh Corner' in my Christmas stocking. Even at that age I was delighted by the playful language and what was often implied but not said.

When my mother read to us from the 'Winnie the Pooh' stories, it seemed that there were hidden meanings and mysteries to be understood.

I felt the same about the wonderful E. H. Shepard drawings which said so much with so little...
Just a few well observed lines!

I still remember little piglet being blown across the page with the wind in his ears.

I was a shy and solitary child. Books were my dear companions and I read my way through the local library at a very early age. The Christmas I turned 8 my uncle gave me a large format copy of "Alice in Wonderland". Once again, it was the perfect combination of pictures and words filled with metaphor, hidden meaning and emotion. I was entranced, and I still am.

These books are my great treasures and, although I love many picture books, they are still my favourites.

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

I studied painting and printmaking at the Victorian College of the Arts, where the word "Illustration" was often used as a derogatory term... referring to limited and literal content. After a few years of teaching I needed to work from home while my daughter was small. I loved beautiful picture books but I hadn't thought of that direction for myself until a friend suggested that I illustrate some nursery rhymes that her husband was publishing.

This led to an exhibition of the originals, and it changed my life forever!

At the opening, my elderly uncle approached me with tears in his eyes. I had illustrated a rhyme about a lonely mouse in a cold house, and my uncle exclaimed: "I know just how that mouse feels!".

That was a turning point for me, I suddenly knew that I wanted to touch peoples' hearts...

To draw pictures full of feelings, to tell stories that move people deeply.

The natural world has always been a source of inspiration for me, too, and I have sought to bring the reader's attention to the beauty that exists all around us.

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

I think my early experiences of A. A. Milne with E. H. Shepard and Lewis Carrol with Tenniel set the bar very high. For me, the words and pictures in a successful book need to create the sort of energy that breathes life into the characters... and to leave room for the readers to make their own contribution.

There needs to be space for imagination and thoughtfulness. Never underestimate your audience, no matter the age! I also feel that acute observation of animals and humans, and the world they inhabit, adds authenticity to a book or illustration.

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

Absolutely! Speaking as an illustrator, I learned years ago that most very young children don't understand perspective. Drawing a close-up that doesn't include the whole figure may appear to be a dismembered body; the same figure drawn twice on the page may seem to be multiples of that character. A large object, close up, beside a small object in the distance can be misread as "big means more important, small means less important".

Every one develops at different rates, but I think the storyteller needs to be aware of age appropriateness.

It seems to me that we have a responsibility not to tell stories to the very young about things that will leave them feeling powerless, hopeless or confused. In fact, I believe that empowering and respecting readers is essential to good storytelling

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

The content of both eBooks and physical books may be the same, however the intimacy and pace of reading a physical book allows time to linger, to turn back to a previous page and to read at a pace that the illustrator and author intended. E-Books are great for a quick read, but they just as quickly vanish. A beautiful book with a tactile cover and paper stock lovingly chosen to enhance the content will become a treasure, but cheap, mass produced books with vacuous content can only do harm.

It is up to the consumer to demand a quality experience.

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

I have been collecting books, particularly poetry books, all my life. In fact, only the bathroom and laundry, in my home, are book free. I know I should cull them, but there is the wonderful serendipitous joy of picking up an old friend, spontaneously, and rediscovering why I loved it. As for a book I would love to own. I still have my original 'House at Pooh Corner' but something happened to my large format 'Alice in Wonderland'. I spent so many Saturdays pouring over that book that it became a part of me. How much I would love to find it again...and yet it isn't really lost. I carry it in my memory.