



**The Letterpress Project**

**Author and Illustrator E-Interviews**

# **An Interview With Jessica Shepherd**

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

I remember, when I was a baby, I had a special nursery rhyme book that my parents would read to me and I vividly remember the illustrations in that. I grew to love Noddy, Rosie and Jim, Postman Pat and Batman (the makings of a 90s child). I also had Michael Bond's Book of Bears, which I loved (among many, many others), but it is the illustrations of the stories that are etched in my memory, rather than the words.

When we grew a little older my Mum would read Alice in Wonderland to my siblings and I and we would often end up in hysterics at The Mad Hatter, which isn't a great recipe for sleep!

I remember really loving stories that were a little bit dark, such as 'The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids' and other stories by the Grimm Brothers. We had a lot of Ladybird Books but as a small (unusual) child I would chew off the spines so most of them are in very poor condition.

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

Initially I chose to do an Illustration degree as I wanted to train as an Art Therapist and you need a visual arts degree in order to proceed on to the required Masters in Art Therapy. I hoped that training in Illustration might also help me to use my skills as a therapist to communicate difficult topics through picture books. I was extremely fortunate to have my first picture book 'Grandma' picked up by its publisher, Child's Play, before I had even finished my degree and so the Masters in Art Therapy took a back seat and my life has been on an exciting and unexpected course ever since.

I now have a fabulous daughter who is 15 months old and I have taken time out to adjust to being a Mum. Although she keeps me very busy, I am now beginning to dip my toes back into the world of writing and drawing pictures.

I am fascinated by the power children's books have to reach the hearts of people of all ages, and their incredible ability to heighten one's sense of empathy, and also hope. Although I haven't released any books since 'Grandma' I am determined to do my best to use this incredible platform to encourage others.

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

I think if it helps you to see a new perspective, and if it is beautiful.

If it makes you feel something then it has been successful for you, and that is entirely subjective. Books/illustrations must find their right audience - something that moves one person may do nothing for another.

I love illustrations that look like they have been fun to create; mixed media, naïve, expressive illustrations always draw me in. Children's books that make me tick are often ones that deal with a subject that is difficult to talk about, and that make it more comfortable to engage in dialogue about something that may otherwise be avoided. Also books that encourage children to really engage with their ever-changing feelings.

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

I hope my books are written simply enough to be understood by young children, but with enough depth to move those with great life experience.

I think my illustrations and writing style are naturally quite naïve and probably most suited to a young audience, however I try and work in a way that excites me and I hope that this communicates and can connect with people of all ages.

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

No! Not completely...surely that's an impossibility?! I think as long as there are people who love books, there will be people who will make books. There are lots of people who enjoy the turn of the page much more than reading from a screen. People seem to be increasingly nostalgic and I think with the risk of the physical novel being lost into the future people seem to treasure it more. Vinyl and tapes are making a huge come back – I think in an age where everything can be stored on a chip many things we used to use have become unnecessary but as a result many people treasure those beautiful physical objects as a luxury.

Regarding Picture Books, I don't think they could ever be replaced. Nothing electronic could ever replace the act of cuddling with your child and their favourite story book at bedtime, turning those well used pages over together.

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

I collect children's books with beautiful illustrations and/or those that make me feel something. I do own a lot of children's books. Some might say (and do) an unnecessary amount but I don't think you can have too many really. Perhaps I could open a library!

I'm sure there are very few, if any, that have a great deal of monetary value but to me they are beautiful and inspire me!