



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An interview with Karin Littlewood

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

Very strong, powerful, instinctive memories flooding back as I reflect on this I can remember being read to and I can easily be transported back to those very happy times. My father was English, my mother German and the books we had reflected this. I was very much aware of the distinctly different illustration and writing styles and the different languages spoken and written.. But they were all telling stories and the more ways possible the better! And not just told to me but we were quite a big family so it really was a shared experience!

The illustrations were so important even at that early age. .. it's as if they immediately took me into another world .I didn't have one favourite, but lots of favourites. I still have them now. Ranging from 'Strewwelpeter' (Shockheaded Peter) and loving being shocked and horrified as the stories became more and more gruesome! But, as it was my mum's childhood copy, I was even more frightened of the German gothic,thick black spidery typeface! Dad would bring out John Hassell 'Albert,'arold and Others , putting on all the different voices. It must have worked as I can still recite ' There's a famous seaside place called Blackpool!' The list is endless. 'Harold and the Purple Crayon' , The Ant and Bee books, 'Joba and the Wild Boar, 'The Useful Dragon of Sam Ling Toy', all the Dr Seuss books...fairy tales, animal ,stories with children from around the world .. I just need to show you my heaving book shelves!

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

Inspiration came from all those books that I was surrounded by ...at home, at school and the local library .My father had a friend who was a painter and I must have been 3 years old

and we went to his studio in the Yorkshire Dales. His studio was filled with paintings and sketches and he opened a plans chest full of drawings ... it filled me with absolute wonder and this feeling that this was something special. Inspiration is bound up with acknowledgement of powerful instinct

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

A book that makes you feel something ... sadness, happiness, wonderment, and one which, when you read it, takes you to another place. I love reading stories...and also when writing and illustrating my own stories ...which the reader can read other stories into. Endings don't have to literally be 'The End' they can be the beginning of something new

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

'Picture books are not just for children' is my mantra. Obviously I'm aware of the market, but I try not to think too much about the audience when I'm beginning my picture book I do like to think that anyone, anywhere may pick up one of my books and enjoy it

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

Some time ago, when I was doing an event, a teacher came up and asked if I had noticed I was hugging my book! I hadn't, but now that is something I tell children whenever I get the chance. Every day is a 'hug a book day' ... and that answers the question as you can't say that about an e book! Hugging your tablet doesn't quite have the same effect. Of course e books have an important role to play. But a book is yours ... Not shared with millions of others. I look at my childhood books ... My little sister scribbled her name in my book which now brings back memories. Sand can get in the pages, and sprinkle out years later, breakfast jam can stick the pages together, torn pages which were once a disaster now make you smile..... the book and you become one, bonded together like nothing else. We are still tactile human beings in this digital age

A real book for me any day!

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

I do collect books but as to a special book I would love to own.... I'll know it when I see it! I don't covet anything. I like waiting for things to come into my life and trust that the best

things always do. So the next time I come across a wonderful book either in a bookshop , or a market in some far off place, in a skip or a gift from someone then I'll let you know! One special book that came into my life recently was a beautiful illustrated version of "Love and War in the Apennines" published by the Folio Society, cloth bound and in a case. It feels wonderful to hold, a real treasure and it was also illustrated by my husband Robin Heighway - Bury which makes it even more special. It was a wonderful surprise gift as I hadn't seen all the illustrations when he was doing them. Picture books aren't just for children, for sure !