



The Letterpress Project

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

I read all the time as a child. Even in my teens, there wasn't much in the way of TV (you watched *Neighbours* and *Home & Away*, then that was pretty much it until it was time for *Top of the Pops!*). So reading was the best fun to be had.

As a young child, my favourite books were the classics, all passed on to me by my mother: *Ballet Shoes* – and anything by Noel Streatfeild (*When The Siren Wailed* made a big impression). *Little Women* (and all the sequels), *Family from One End Street* and *Children of the New Forest*.

I also gobbled up Dickens. I didn't understand every word – often whole pages would leave me baffled! But the good thing about Dickens (as I now tell my children) is he *wants* to keep you hooked. Like every great storyteller, he'll never leave a reader behind, and always keeps the important stuff well posted.

As a teenager, I loved the Adrian Mole Diaries (Pauline Mole is my fag-smoking feminist hero!). I also got very into Agatha Christie (probably because her 'whodunnits' lined my parents' bookshelves).

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

The barrow-loads of books I read as a child. They're so much more fun than adult novels! They scoop you up on to wonderful, imaginative adventure, before depositing you safely in a happy ending (most of the time at least!) I'm a sucker for a satisfactory ending (hence my love for Dickens – and Agatha Christie: they always tie things up very well at the end).

I still vividly remember the world-conquering ambitions and romantic day-dreams I had as a child growing into a teenager. Every feeling was so technicolour! I think that's why I've written a book for teenagers: I want to try and tap into that youthful passion and courage – and sense of earnest endeavour (and re-live it again for myself!).

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

Honesty, humour – and a knack for taking you by surprise.

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

Looking back on it, I realise I wrote *The Swish* as a 'love letter' to my youngest daughter Rose, now 13. She read (and edited) every draft, and remains my biggest cheerleader (apart from the team at Candy Jar Books, whose support means the world!).

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

Not for younger people, no. I've been very struck by how my three children (now all teenagers) definitely prefer a book they can hold and treasure. Kindles are great for holidays, but a book is for life.

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

I'm nothing as grand as a book collector – but I do let them collect around me. They line my bedroom walls, and tumble off my bookshelves (perpetually over-crammed). If I've taught my children one thing, it's NEVER to leave the house without a book. Whatever snags hit your day – double detention, terrible traffic – you're never bored with a book. And you're never alone.