



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An Interview With Margrit Dahm

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

I can remember learning how to read in school, but as it was the early years after the war, there were not so many books available. I was familiar though with nursery rhymes and Grimm's fairy tales. When I was seven or eight, my favourite literature was reading the life stories of people who in later years became saints as I had an aunt who always sent me these books. But when I was ten plus, I first set about to read all the books which were available at home, and each book seemed to be a new discovery which affected the way I thought and felt. This was followed during my teenage years by a period when I read mostly French books by well-known French authors like Colette, Françoise Sagan, André Gide, Simone de Beauvoir and Sartre. They influenced me greatly, and in these books I often found the answers to questions which had remained unanswered, but also gave rise to new questions. I can't say that I had then a favourite book as I avidly read every book I could get hold of.

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

Ever since I can remember, from my early school years onwards, I enjoyed writing stories or composing poems, and this continued when as a student of a convent school, I had to write essays. Literature and writing essays remained my favourite subject.

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

For me, there are certain criteria which make a book successful: Firstly, it must be well-written, in a fluid style, its language being exquisite and inspiring, and then it must provoke thought and feeling on a deeper level so that you like to ponder on what you have just read. As to illustrations, I can't think of any better example than *The Little Prince* by Saint-Exupéry, a book which he illustrated himself and which speaks to grown-ups and children alike. I am afraid, I am not as good an illustrator as he was.

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

Not really. I either like to write a book which is meant for adults or I write a book which mainly aims at children, but in both cases I like it to be a book which speak to their minds and hearts. When I write poetry, I naturally like to address people who are fond of poetry.

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

I like to think that the physical book will continue to be around for a long time yet to come. I, for one, still prefer to hold the book I am reading in my hands where I can turn pages and get involved in the physical presence of the book. I think we would lose out if the electronic book would replace the physical book entirely. We have already lost the art of letter writing, for instance, as writing an email is not at all the same and will always be poorer in quality.

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

I am not really a collector of anything, but I can say that in my home I like to be surrounded by my books. There will always be bookshelves in any home I have. Having said that, I wouldn't mind to own a first edition of any well-known book like Jane Austen for instance who is one of my favourite authors.