



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An Interview With Nadine Kaadan

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

Growing up, the problem was that I didn't have many Arabic children's books around me – there just weren't many around. And apart from a few Swedish translated fairy tales, there were only a few children's magazines that I really enjoyed reading. I did enjoy reading French children books however, and my favourite was *Le Petit Nicolas et Les Copins* by Rene Goscinny and Jean-Jaques Sempe. I loved the wit and mischief of 'Nicolas', and the simplicity of the illustrations was lovely – I found it inspirational.

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

I've always wanted to be a children's book author and illustrator, it was simply my passion! I started writing and illustrating children's books when I was 10 years old. I photocopied my stories, coloured them, and (tried) to sell them to whoever was interested (almost always at a 100% loss). I pretty much gave them away and just loved it. Here I am 20 years later still doing the same, as my full-time job. Looking back at the magazine I created at the age of 10, I realise that almost all of the characters in my stories had western names, although there weren't foreign children around me. I think- as I mentioned earlier- this was simply due to a lack of local Syrian children's books at the time, and the fact that I was surrounded by

French and English children's stories. Growing up, I made it a point to develop more of an indigenous style inspired by local aesthetics and by my lovely city, Damascus.

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

I don't think there's a simple recipe for a successful book. I believe that if children relate to the story and engage with it, then that's a success. Some stories manage to stay with us for a long time and shape our identities and make us who we are. But for me, I find it crucial that the story speaks to as many kids as possible - leaving no one behind regardless of gender, ethnicity, and background.

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

I try my best not to think of an audience when writing/ illustrating – although this is almost impossible because of the requirements of a tough publishing market. I'm not sure if this is the best way, but I simply write a story that I love and feel that I need to tell, and hope that it finds its way to children who will like it!

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

I don't think one will replace the other, and it shouldn't - I think physical books will always hold a special place. For example, it's nice that physical books age and smell a certain way – this can give a history of a particular story and of how many times it was read. It can really belong to someone.

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

I simply can't stop buying picture books! Every time I travel I like to buy a picture book, even if I don't speak the language of the country. Especially Latin American picture books, because their stories tend to be very bold, poetic, and unique. One of my favourites is *Sky Blue Accident* by Jorge Lujan, and Piet Grobler.