



**The Letterpress Project**

**Author and Illustrator E-Interviews**

# **An Interview With Rachel Rooney**

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

I don't remember a time I couldn't read - I was an extremely precocious and voracious reader. I do remember my mother reading a story to me when I was about 3 years old and as she paused on the page, I just carried on reading the next sentence for her. She didn't know that I could read and expressed surprise, stating that she no longer needed to read to me now that I could do it for myself. I remember being rather disappointed about that. Listening to others reading out poetry or stories still remains a real pleasure.

Later, in infants school I raced through the reading schemes and so was given special dispensation to go into the juniors to choose my books from their library. That made me feel special and rather grown - up. I would read anything and everything I could find in my path - from the backs of cereal packets to comics, poetry and novels. I loved all the classics such as *The Secret Garden*, *The Borrowers*, *A Little Princess*, *Ballet Shoes*, to name a few. I became very immersed in fairy tales too - particularly Andrew Lang's coloured fairy book series. I also enjoyed the poetry of Rossetti, Causeley and Hughes, amongst others.

**Q2. What inspired you to become an author**

I didn't make a conscious effort to become an author. Most of my life I've worked as a special needs teacher and I'd not thought of myself as author material. I started writing poetry (as an adult) in my early forties, mainly for pleasure and as a way to organise my thoughts and emotions. It became a compulsion and eventually I got some poems placed in children's poetry anthologies. It was only then I began to entertain the idea that I might collate what I'd written into a solo poetry collection. Those poems became my first collection, *The Language of Cat*.

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

As a poet, I don't think in terms of what makes a successful book but rather what makes a successful poem. For me, a successful poem has an essential truth and a balance to it, using language at its most powerful. I'm happy to go with Emily Dickinson's definition... *'If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry.'*

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

I have occasionally written for a specific age range but even then, there's a large part of me that is only ever writing for myself. If it doesn't satisfy for me on some significant emotional level then the chances are that it won't make the grade for anyone. Even my rhyming picture book *A Patch of Black* was written as a sort of self-help mantra at a time that I felt at my most vulnerable.

When I write poems, I'm often unsure whether it will end up as suitable for children. Luckily, I have a fairly noisy inner child and seem to think in a relatively child-like way so usually they do end up being published. However, I have a growing pile of poems that I think fall just outside of the established Primary School publishing market. I'm still trying to work out if they are childish adult poems or adult-like children's poems and what the hell to do with them.

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

All I can say is that the electronic book will never replace the physical book for me. I want to sniff their words, balance my dinner plate on their backs, admire their spines and caress the covers. I like to see the top of my bookmark travelling along the book's edges. I like them to insulate my walls.

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

I wouldn't class myself as a book collector, though the house would feel very empty without them there. I don't organise them alphabetically or seek out certain editions and their number depends on the length of shelves that I currently own. Paperbacks can end up dog-eared and stamped on with coffee cup rings. I will only cling onto a book if it has specific sentimental value - like those certain books from childhood. I'll also keep hold of most poetry books as they will be revisited. The one book I'd like to find again is a first edition of *A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett - similar to the one that I'd inherited as a child.

It had beautiful colour plate illustrations and a thick, green, cloth cover. I was always very careful with it - almost deferential, and I was furious and extremely upset when my younger sister destroyed it through misuse. I can't imagine the destruction of an electronic book download could have quite the same effect as this.