



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this series of Letterpress Project e-interviews that we are undertaking over the coming months. The Letterpress Project is a not-for-profit initiative that exists to promote the value and pleasures of the physical book and we are keen to get the thoughts of authors and book illustrators about their own influences, experiences and love of books. We are happy for you to make your answers as long or as brief as you are comfortable with and we will undertake not to edit or paraphrase any of your comments without your explicit permission.

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

As a child we had a copy of Brian Wildsmith's Mother Goose, which actually belonged to my younger sister, but I adored the pictures – the colour and pattern delighted me, and I pretty much stole it from my sister.

It wasn't until I was given a copy for my own first child that I realised how much of an influence those illustrations had been on my own work.

I also loved Beatrix Potter – the size and shape of those little books and the sheer beauty of the illustrations delighted me from a very early age, and I was fascinated by detail of her work. She was a scientist as well as an artist and I found that mixture of extremely detailed observation of the natural world and the pure fantasy of 'dormice in bonnets' captivating. I used to 'go into' those illustrations – imagined I was walking along that lane in Tom Kitten, or sitting amongst the foxgloves in Jemima Puddleduck, or walking up the stairs of the dolls house in The Tale of Two Bad Mice.

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

I started making little books when I was about 5 years old and completely fell in love with the simple process of folding sheets of paper in half, into a simple book, and then being able to tell a story with a beginning, a middle and an end.. I also remember my dad reading Milly Molly Mandy to me and noticing that Joyce Lancaster Brisley had both written and illustrated the books and both of us being seriously impressed that someone had done both those things!

I continued to make little books all through childhood and teenage years, and gradually realised that this was actually a profession that I might be able to pursue.

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

It is when I want to revisit it time and again, when there is something there that bears re-examination and closer study. In an illustration it is pouring over detail, being drawn into a picture and noticing more and more.

In terms of reading, I love books, and passages in books that stir a memory, or a feeling, or an idea that I want to experience again.

Every now and again, I try to get rid of some of the hundreds of books that fill my book shelves – always a difficult job. The ones that go in the Oxfam pile are books that I've read but have left no residue of feeling or empathy, no sense that I may want to revisit something in them. The ones I keep are the ones that contain something that excites or inspires me, that I need to know I can access again when the time is right. And of course the perfect book is one whose contents has just that hold on my heart and memory, and is also a thing of beauty in itself, with a lovely binding, glorious illustrations, lovely typography.

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

I'm aware of the sort of age group that the book is aimed at, and with picture books that is sometimes quite young, although I always want my picture books to resonate for older children and teenagers too. And adults. Everyone really!

But beyond that, I think I am writing and illustrating both for the child I was myself, and the artist and writer that I am now. I am making the books that I wanted, that I would have been excited by. I am also making the pictures that I want to make, as an artist, and the stories that I want to write as an author.

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 actually think you can improve much on the picture book as a piece of design. When you watch how children look at books, turning pages, looking at details in the pictures, turning back to check something, it is clear that the picture book works as an object. They are pleasing to hold, to feel, to smell...

I'm not a Ludite – I often read on my i-pad, but I much prefer the experience of turning pages and looking at pictures....I think there is a role for both.

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

I used to want to own things, but that has changed as I've got older, and I find myself wanting to shed things rather than acquire them. I am more interested in making pictures and writing stories than I am in collecting....but I do love and treasure the books I already have.

Thank you very much for taking time to do this for us. We will advise you when we publish it on the website - www.letterpressproject.co.uk. Please return the completed interview to:

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