



The Letterpress Project

An Interview With Petrea Honychurch Seaman

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

Both avid readers, my mother and grandmother regularly read to my sister and me. I have such fond memories of snuggling up with my grandmother and listening to her soothing voice reading Beatrix Potter or with my mum as she chuckled reading us *Chloe and Maude* by Sandra Boynton and Jill Murphy's *Five Minutes Peace*. I loved stories like *Barbar*, *The Paperbag Princess*, *The Tough Princess*, *Bill and Pete*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Bill and Stanley*, *The Quangle Wangle's Hat*, and encyclopaedias. It's hard to pick a favourite book but *Chloe and Maude* holds a special place in my heart. I still laugh when I read it to my girls.

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

A combination of things. For as long as I can remember, I enjoyed storytelling. My sister and I spent hours at a time alone with our imaginations and creating our own little worlds. We grew up on the Caribbean island of Dominica in a home that was fairly isolated, and of course there was no internet at that time, so we would write and draw, imagine and play. I was also surrounded by storytellers. Mealtimes were spent discussing all sorts of things - history, culture, the environment, our heritage, connections and old tales. But while I had a strong tie to facts, my escape was through fantasy so playtime meshed everything together. As I got older, my life flowed in a different direction, away from a focus on writing. It was after my daughters were born I found myself motivated to write with more purpose and to start doing more about getting it out there.

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

Just writing it! There are many degrees of success, but creating something genuine that people share and relate to, and enjoy, and can be inspired by is success enough.

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

In a way, yes. When I have an idea, I explore it and see where it takes me. Because my children are a significant part of my life, I think about them, what they are drawn to, and how they see the world. I think about what I liked as a child and my fantastical journeys with my sister. Many West Indians live out of the region and their children grow up in different cultures. I think about what one misses or craves about our homelands. I want to capture the essence, create nostalgia. This is what I wanted with *Good Night My Sweet Island*. To create a comforting reminder of island life. An illustrated home away from home.

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

There is a lot of convenience to having an electronic book. I can tell you in our Dominican house, with a growing lack of shelving space and battling the creatures that either want to feast on or live in the books, physical books can have their challenges. On the one hand, with the growing ease of animation, increasing commonplace of AI, VR, and AR, storytelling experiences will evolve. Most people have one or more devices and we are heavily reliant on them. Owning a digital book is also less expensive than buying a physical one so they have a further reach. But it's like a simulation vs the real thing. Nothing can replace a physical book. The feel, the smell. Knowing the age of a book and how many times it's been read, or if it's new and you're its first owner. There's a connection you don't get with a device. I enjoy seeing my kids winding down on the couch, picking a book off the shelf and exploring the pictures or the words. Like Carl Sagan once said, "What an astonishing thing a book is. It's a flat object made from a tree with flexible parts on which are imprinted lots of funny dark squiggles. But one glance at it and you're inside the mind of another person, maybe somebody dead for thousands of years..."

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

I guess you could say I'm a collector in that I hold on to what I have. Some of the books I value most are the ones that impacted me throughout my life so far and those that my children appreciate now. I know I won't get rid of any of them. Some were passed on to me and I'll pass them on to my children and, hopefully, grandchildren and so on. There are non-fiction books I know won't get republished but hold valuable information about the past and local wildlife, some of those I don't have, I'd like to own them.