



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?

My mother read me loads of Dr Seuss books when I was little. I can remember chuckling away whilst listening to *Green Eggs & Ham* and *The Cat in the Hat*. I adored the fabulous creatures found inside the covers of *One Fish Two Fish* - I still worry about poor old Ned and his too-short bed. Mum also read me the poems of A A Milne, Edward Lear, Hillaire Belloc and Spike Milligan – all brilliantly zany.

My father used to make up stories for me at bed time, usually featuring a mischievous character called Mousey. I loved them.

I can't say there was one particular book or experience that inspired me. I think it's more of a mixture of everything my parents did that made me love books and reading so much – and set me on my path to creating my own crazy stories!

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

I was an only child and spent many happy hours creating characters to play with and fictional places to explore.

I journeyed along the banks of the Amazon river on many occasions when visiting my grandparents in Barnard Castle (it was actually the river Tees!)

I became one of a group of castaways with my friends on the long summer holidays on the beaches of North Cornwall. We struggled to survive, building shelters from driftwood and cooking on fires.

I think I've always been creating stories in one way or another.

Stories have the ability to entertain and take us to far off places, real or imaginary. They deserve to be written down for others to share.

I loved reading as a child and tried to instill that enthusiasm in all the children I taught when I was a class teacher. It's now exciting to think that children today, and maybe in the future, might just enjoy reading a book I have written.

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

To be a success in my book (pun fully intended), a story must keep me turning the pages until I reach the end. It needs to scoop me up and take me in to its world. I want to live in between the pages.

I love humour, but that's not the be all and end all of a successful book. A serious story deserves a serious telling, but lightness of touch in the writing will always keep me reading on.

I suppose I need the characters to be believable, I need to empathise with them. I want to 'see' the places they go, feel what they feel. I want to be cheering them on when they face their problems. I want to laugh with them, cry with them. A really successful book will stay with me long after I've turned the last page.

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

I'm published in the picture book age range so, yes, I'm thinking about 3-6 year olds when I write those particular stories. I need to consider the language used at that age, the themes that are relevant, word count. Having said that, I often go completely off piste, so to speak.

I have some stories on the go for older children. Here again I need to consider age range and be fairly specific with language and length.

I do sometimes write poetry, which tends to be a much more personal exercise. In this instance I don't worry about who might one day read them!

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

After having a strop about how terrible the electronic book was and how we would all be sorry when the physical book had disappeared, I calmed down and began to realise that I believe they can both inhabit our world and get along side by side just fine. I don't see the need for an electronic book personally...I love the feel and look of the real thing too much...but I can see some circumstances where it may be preferable.

Physical books make great gifts (much better than telling the recipient you've paid for a download) and I'm sure children will continue to enjoy handling them. The dramatic page turns you get in picture books just aren't the same on a screen! I often joke that picture

books will be the last to go if physical books ever do disappear, but here's hoping they stick around for a long while yet.

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

I don't specifically collect particular books. Ask my husband and he will say I collect book shelves...he's forever having to put up another one to house my overflowing collection. I just love books and can't resist buying ones that catch my eye whilst browsing in the bookshop.

Having said that, I have bought complete series of books over the years, recent ones being Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl*, J K Rowling's *Harry Potter* and Lindsay Davis' *Falco* novels. I'm now starting out on Davis' new series of *Flavia Alba* stories, so no doubt my husband will be putting up another shelf very soon...

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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