



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An Interview With Sam Hearn

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

I don't remember there being many books at home in particular. Saying that, My Mum is very definitely a reader, and I know she read stories to both me and my older brother. Luckily, I still own what I'm sure was a favourite bedtime story; it is a small hardback, lift-the-flap book from the Hallmark company, called 'Lamont the lonely Monster'. It's a bit worn around the edges and patched with lots of sellotape fixes on flaps that have been accidentally torn from over enthusiastic lifting. The best thing is that when I look through it, I can still hear my mum's voice acting out the different monster characters. I'm smiling now even as I think about it!

As for discovering the excitement of reading for myself - that definitely coincided with the publication of the U.K Marvel Transformers comic, sometime in late 1984! After that, I loved comics; whether it was Transformers, Action Force, the Marvel superhero comics that my aunt would buy me from the newsagent, or my brother's (then later, my own) copies of 2000AD.

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

Mum and Dad tell me that if there was a bit of paper around somewhere when I was small, I'd be drawing on it. Quite often with some sort of story too. In my memory, comics are definitely the reason why I wanted to draw all the time as a kid - But It wasn't until much later, at university, that I really acknowledged illustration could be a career path. That's also where I discovered how much I like the format of

children's books and thought I might be able to pursue something similar eventually. The writing part is still quite new to me, professionally at least. I've always written for myself in some form, but the opportunity to write and illustrate my own children books came about unexpectedly after 15 years or so of illustration - and I'm very glad it did!

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

Ultimately I think a book has been successful if there's something about it that makes you want to keep picking it up again and again. It could be because of the words, or pictures alone, as long as they strike a chord with you. There is an extra satisfaction when both words and pictures work so well together you get another dimension to explore beyond the story on the page. It's all subjective of course, and the positive outcome is that there should be something in a book for everyone!

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

Not intentionally! The fun part of the job is that you get to be the audience yourself. I think you have to be able to like the work you're making, before you can expect another audience to appreciate it too. I try to either draw the picture I really want to see at that moment or write the words and phrases that I can hear in my head. This sounds simple, but it's where all the 'work' goes into writing or illustrating a book.

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

For me personally, I think the physical book has a place in our future as long as storytelling does. Digital content can be fulfilling, but I don't think you can beat the sensation of handling a book and feeling the turn of a page - particularly with children books as so many involve a tactile element. Beyond that I haven't really given it much thought!

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

I wouldn't say I'm a book collector, but it is nice to have a lot of books around! I'm quite happy with the idea of giving them away and renewing the selection though. I have quite a lot of signed children books that I'm sure I wouldn't want to get rid of,

especially when they're signed by illustrator or writers that have become friends. And since writing Sherlock themed books for Scholastic, I've collected quite a few different versions of the original stories too.