



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An Interview With Helen Marshall

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

I could always read well from a young age and would enjoy reading aloud to the class in primary school. My earliest memory of books would have had to have been the ones given to me at school to take home but I don't remember any specifically that I was fond of. We had a few author visits at school, I remember really enjoying one called 'Meet Me By The Steel-Men.' It was about the steel statues in Meadowhall, (the shopping centre in Sheffield) which often people would use as a location for meet ups or lost children. I could really connect to the characters and enjoyed that it was set in my home town and inspired by its history of the steelworks.

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

Probably my most favourite literary character – Josephine March, Little Women. I loved reading about her wanting to become a writer and the motto of 'writing what you know' has stuck with me since then.

Writing in general and performing definitely comes from my maternal grandad though. He was called Ramsey Walton and some of my earliest memories are helping him practice his lines for amateur dramatic shows. I have all of his plays now and they still have the coloured paper clips which he used as bookmarks for his parts.

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

For me a successful story will feed you just enough information to form the characters in your mind, leaving you a little leeway to do the rest of the imagining. It should paint you a clear picture, inviting you in and then take you on a magical journey where we can learn through the eyes of the characters within it.

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

Not really as I think picture books can be enjoyed by all! Personally I still love reading books aimed at young audiences and get much enjoyment reading them for myself.

I love picture books and how they can provide this opportunity for children and adults to interact, bond and talk about deeper meaning within books. They're a great catalyst for conversation.

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

Not a chance. I think electronic books have their place and so do physical books. I have a kindle and find it really useful on holiday when I finally get chance to catch up on my reading list and don't have to take my whole book shelf with me. Alternatively, there is nothing greater than curling up in front of the fire with a 'proper good book.' Leafing through pages is part of the enjoyment, personally I don't really get the smell thing but the sound of the paper sliding between your fingertips is part of the reading experience!

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

I do own a lot of books; I wouldn't say I'm very precious over my book collections though. I enjoy passing them on if I think a certain person would really enjoy it. Just like when you cook something delicious and want that feedback - I feel the same with books. Controversially I don't hesitate to annotate books, or turn edges, the scruffier the book the more I have enjoyed it!