



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?

I remember always reading. We moved a few times when I was a kid, and signing up to a new library was always high on the to-do list in a new town – doctor, dentist, school, library. My mum used to take us to the library once a fortnight and I'd lend the maximum number of books I could take out. My favourites as a teenager were *I Capture the Castle* by Dodie Smith, *A Little Love Song* by Michelle Magorian, *A Moment in Time* by HE Bates and *Fifteen* by Beverley Cleary.

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

I never thought I could be an author – it seemed a magical and mysterious thing to do. It's not as though, when you show aptitude for writing while doing English GCSE, the school careers centre suggests "novelist" as a career path... I know I definitely wanted to be Paula Danziger when I grew up – there was no one more cool or more kind, and she wrote these great books for and about teenagers! But it seemed like a pipe dream – no one actually got to do that for real, in real life –I couldn't work out what her secret was...

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

Heart. Voice. A reason for that book or illustration existing – it being written from a place of passion and understanding and burning desire to tell this particular story. Having said that, books and art and anything creative, it's so subjective – there are books I LOVE, am evangelical about, will buy multiple copies of to give to people, or multiple copies of because I love it that much and can't resist it; then that book leaves someone else cold. Any book is successful if it finds just one reader who needed it, who gets it, who gets something from it.

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

Teenagers! I wrote *The Square Root of Summer* as the book I would have needed as a seventeen-year-old, that I would have wanted as a seventeen-year-old. It was a book written for me, but me in the past. And I write for the characters in the book – as you write, they become real, and you want to do them justice, and be empathetic towards them, show them kindness, give them hope and redemption – and the hope is that if you write that way, a real-life teenager will find something of themselves in the pages.

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

There's room for both! Look, I heart my Kindle on holidays, and in a pinch I'll read books on an app on my phone, but I find it easier to browse for books in a real shop, and I read physical books differently. You slow down and pace yourself as you're coming to the end, like a conductor and an orchestra, and that can be hard to do with an e-reader telling you there's 25% left but actually, one page of that is book and most of it is end-matter and adverts and "tell twitter you've read this". Ebooks are great – I've fallen in love with a lot of authors that way, getting a 99p introduction to their work; and physical books are great, especially when publishers and bookshops are trying to compete with ebooks so they make gorgeous editions with lovely endpapers, ribbons, embossed jackets and the rest. Though I'm equally fond of a battered orange Penguin paperback with crumbling page. Physical books will always exist, and you can exhume and resurrect me in 500 years to tell me I'm wrong if that's the case.

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

Like most writers and book-lovers, I have too many books. I try to have clear-outs and definitely feel better when there are fewer teetering piles in my tiny flat, but it's hard to get rid of anything signed, anything that was a gift and written in by the giver, anything second-hand that came with accidental ephemera like a postcard or a note stuffed in there from the previous owner, anything with memories (like my very stained copy of *Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, which I took to a festival in Paris), or books I reread constantly. I probably don't need five copies of *Jane Eyre* or *The Secret Garden*, and yet... I'd love to own a first edition *I Capture the Castle*. The most special books I own are hand-me-downs: my grandmother's leather-bound TS Eliot, my dad's poetry books.

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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