



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An Interview with Elisa Peacock

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

My earliest memories are of sitting on my mum's lap reading *The Dragon Pirate Stories*, by Sheila K. McCullagh. I had to look this series up, having just a hazy memory of smoking cannons, climbing the rigging and swashbuckling pirate battles! I was happy to find many posts about these books. People sharing their memories of this wonderful reading scheme. The stories felt so full and alive, a testament to the power of picture books.

The bedtime stories I never wanted to end were, *Winnie The Pooh* and *The Wind In The Willows*. Dr Seuss was in reserve, for nights when time was short. *The Cat In The Hat* will always have a place on my bookshelf.

As I progressed to reading independently, I fell in love with Enid Blyton. Often lambasted for her clumsy portrayal of cultures and people outside her realm of experience; in recent times certain characters have been 'tweaked,' to bring them in step with a more modern, informed audience. I'm happy to see them being enjoyed by a whole new generation of young readers.

Enid was prolific, writing somewhere in the region of 700 books! Her stories were part of our airing cupboard library. Inherited from our nan, these were the books my mum and aunties had read before me. I rip roared my way through *The Famous Five* and *Malory Towers* series, like a Netflix binge on steroids! Although some would say unrelatable, given our working class background, (how did those families afford eight bedroom mansions in the countryside?!) we never had a holiday that didn't involve a tent! I loved them regardless.

However, my very favourite airing cupboard finds were, *The Folk of the Faraway Tree* collection. A fantasy series that first introduced me to the idea of portals and doorways to other realms. This trope still resonates to this day, guaranteed to pique my interest in any story or film. Inspired by the cosmic Yggdrasil tree, an immense ash tree that connects the nine parallel worlds in Norse mythology; Blyton's Faraway

Folk gave me an enduring sense of wonder about other dimensions, dreamscapes and the characters that might be found there. Thank you Enid!

Q2. What inspired you to become an author?

I did my teacher training at Goldsmiths' College, where I was lucky enough to have Margaret Mallet as one of my lecturers. She instilled an understanding and appreciation of the power of books and reading on a child's development. I fell in love with picture books during my degree studies. Since then, during the years of sharing them in the classroom, I've laughed, cried and have come to see many as modern day parables. They teach us about kindness, grief, other worlds and great adventure. Who wouldn't want to have a go at creating such a work of art?

Q3. For you, what makes a successful children's book?

Sometimes I read a book to a class and as soon as it's finished there is an excited chorus of, "AGAIN!" To me this is a successful book. Especially with regard to picture books. The best are readable again and again. This happened most recently with B.J.Novak's, *The Book With No Pictures*. If you haven't read it, check it out. A concept so simple but yet so brilliant!

Sometimes I'll enter a classroom (I am a supply teacher now, so I can juggle writing with the need to make money!) and a child will come to say hello.

"What's your name?"

"I'm Miss Peacock. What's your name?"

"Alba. Can you read this book to me?"

"I'd love too!"

I'd not come across *Wonky Donkey* by Craig and Katz Smith before, but I knew it was a smash when the above happened twice in one week. Also, how special to be introduced to a book by its target audience. Those little people who care not for the author or illustrator, but have just fallen in love with the story.

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

No. My writing process normally involves me getting a title first, then the ideas start to flow from there. As the ideas develop it becomes apparent if a story is more appropriate as a picture book, chapter book or a mid-grade novel for an older audience.

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

I think, like the revival of vinyl, people love something they can touch and hold in their hands. We can pour over the cover and illustrations in a book, bring them down from the shelves and share them with others. We display them, collect rare versions of them and nothing looks nicer on a wall than a shelf of books, (in my humble opinion!). True bibliophiles love the smell of books. They can even help keep a sunburnt nose at bay, on a lazy beach day! As convenient as digital versions are, and I do love an audio book, I have no fear that physical books won't rub along nicely with their digital counterparts.

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

I don't consider myself a book collector, although we do own quite a lot of books in our house! I think books are for sharing, borrowing and lending. Passing around to your friends. Shoving into gift bags alongside the 'real' present.

That said, if anyone has a first edition of *The Cat In The Hat* or *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* knocking around, I wouldn't say no.