



The Letterpress Project

An Interview With Jenny Sullivan

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

*There were always books in our house: last-but-one of six siblings, all avid readers and all-but-one older than me, I became their project. Between them they had me reading simple books before I started school – which wasn't popular with my infants' school teachers who had to borrow books from the Juniors for me to read. My Grand-daughter in Ireland, Catrin, had a similar problem with a teacher who insisted she pointed to the words she found very easy to read "Mummy, my mind goes faster than my fingers"! We had a weekly family trip to our local library in Cardiff and it was hell to be only allowed one book. I used to find the thickest, smallest-print books I could. I was reading *White Fang*; *Call of the Wild*; all the Louisa May Alcott books; *Heidi*; Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* – all while in primary school. My father gave me a copy of my favourite book when I was 13 "*The Once and Future King*" by T H White. It was the only book he signed – he didn't believe in "damaging" books and woe betide us if we turned down a corner of a page! I still feel guilty "marking" a page on my Kindle! I lost that beloved copy to someone who borrowed it and moved house – which to my mind is a capital offence. However, I now have four copies, just in case, and still read it with as much pleasure as I did the first time. Catrin has a copy, too...*

Q2. What inspired you to become an author?

*My lovely Primary teacher, Miss Jeannie Thomas, who never, ever raised her voice. Round as a bread roll, with shiny glasses, she'd always tell us stories – as they occurred to her, sometimes in the middle of an arithmetic lesson – indeed, one of my books, "*Following Blue Water*" is a direct result of her telling us the story of Madoc ap Owain Gwynedd, who discovered America in 1170 and another Welsh story, that of Cantre'r Gwaelod, also appears in various forms in several of my books.*

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

I can't draw, so illustrations are (sometimes) thrust upon me! However, my favourite illustrators (Brett Breckon, Jac Jones and Graham Howells) ALWAYS read the books they're going to illustrate and they never let my imagination down. Indeed, two of my novels have Brett's son on the cover! Brett's are so good I have a couple of giclee prints of the best ones decorating the wall of our living room because they're beautiful.

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

Yes, me! I live my books as I'm writing them – although lately I seem to be writing for my grandchildren (five, three in North Weald, England and two in Coagh, Northern Ireland). Indeed, during lockdown I wrote three novels (part of my 15 – I think! – book Magic Apostrophe series) starring them all – which was difficult, but apparently, they all loved the results. I don't write for a market – I write books that I think children will enjoy – and also two adult novels about Owain Glyndwr, which earned me a PhD.

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

All my "best" books are physical: but living in France a Kindle is essential – buying books online gets expensive when it comes to postage! I don't think e-books will ever replace the thrill of holding a new hardback by a loved author. Long ago I was a reviewer for the Welsh national newspaper, the Western Mail – the thrill of receiving a parcel full of brand new books with that wonderful smell was unbelievable. Except the parcel of Barbara Cartland books the editor sent me as a joke: that was like overdosing on candyfloss.

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

I am indeed a book collector. I have everything Terry Pratchett wrote in physical book-form – he is my all-time favourite author. I love his humour, his freshness, his wisdom. I'd love to own a copy of the book he didn't write... I cried all through "The Shepherd's Crown" despite it being a very funny book – because I knew I'd never read another new Pratchett. I re-read "Hogfather" every Christmas – but then can't stop and read all the others, too. They never become stale. Our house has books in every room – there are three full bookcases in my office, seven in my husband's, four in the sunroom – all floor-to-ceiling, plus shelves in all our guest bedrooms (and the loo!). So, you could say we collect books!