



The Letterpress Project

# An Interview With Jessica Wilson

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

My very first memories of literacy are of our flashcards. My mother taught us our first words before we could walk or talk. I can also remember acting as my teacher's assistant at school and being called on to sit with the other children who were struggling with their reading. As you can imagine, my parents were horrified when they found out and promptly moved me to a better school!

My mother made a concerted effort to find books with protagonists who looked like us. One of my favourites which she bought, not long after the passing of my grandmother, was 'To Hell With Dying' by Alice Walker. By bridging a gap between the supernatural and realism, the book left an indelible mark on my young imagination.

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

I became an author primarily because of the underrepresentation of black children in books and the need for there to be more books encompassing black history.

There are so many stories which have not yet been told and need to be heard. I use my work to spotlight these narratives. As a writer of Caribbean descent, I feel it is a duty to document our heritage. We must bring the margins to the centre.

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

Authenticity and work centred upon human connections. I never thought I enjoyed stories with war as their backdrop, for example, however, after reading Chimamanda Adichie's 'Half

of a Yellow Sun', I changed my assumption. Her intimate understanding of her characters and interweaving plots is inspiring.

I also enjoy surrealism in fiction and art: I'm intrigued by realms which hang between make-believe and naturalism.

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

I write from a very intuitive space and tend to reflect on the marketing afterwards! I feel my creative process would be otherwise hindered.

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

I hope that gadgets will never supplant tangible books.

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

I'm more than a book collector- I'm a book hoarder! Books are the one thing I cannot get rid of.

My cousin laid claim to my grandma's beloved pocket bible complete with annotations. I'd love to have that book!