



The Letterpress Project

An Interview With Petr Horáček

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

I think many people can remember the cosy feeling of being in bed and being read to by a parent. In my case it was mainly my father who read to me.

I grew up in Czechoslovakia and the titles of the books would not be familiar to you, but they were all beautifully illustrated by Josef Lada, Radek Pilař or Zdeněk Burian.

I wasn't a very strong reader myself and I used to get stuck looking at the illustrations for hours. Books by Jules Verne beautifully illustrated by George Roux occupied me for hours.

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

I studied fine art and used to work as a designer before I came to England. Illustrating a book was one of my first opportunities to earn some money in UK. It all happened around the time when my first daughter was born. One of her first books was *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle. Being from the Czech Republic I had never seen this book before. I loved it and I wanted to make such beautiful books myself. Having a little child in the house made the writing somehow easier.

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

Making a successful book or illustrations should never be the aim. A successful book or illustrations must be result of complete honesty, hard work and ... a huge amount of luck.

Of course, being able to identify with the reader and have some understanding, or experience of what children are interested about helps.

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

Yes, I roughly imagine for what age I'm going to write. The text has to be well crafted; the book has to have rhythm and the language needs to be right. The same goes for the illustrations. I like to play with materials and paint, but equally I want to be understood by the child who is going to read my book. It all sounds simple, but getting the balance between the text and illustrations can be challenging.

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

I am not worried about the future of physical books and specially not about future of picture books. Books were around us for such a long time that we all know by now that books must smell nice, must have a specific sound when you are turning pages, must feel good in your hands. You can't replace that with technology.

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

I live in a small house and my garden studio isn't very big either. I'm very precious about my space and I choose very carefully which books I'm going to keep. However, I have more and more books I want to keep on my shelves.

I would like to have some pop-up books from my childhood illustrated by the amazing Vojtěch Kubašta.