



The Letterpress Project

# An Interview With Patricia Forde

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

I am one of six children and we were all readers. Books were in short supply when I was growing up, but my sisters and I were fans of the local library, and fought over the books we wanted to read. We read a lot of Enid Blyton and loved the *Mallory Towers* series. This started a passion for books about boarding school. I found *The Chalet School* series by Elinor M. Brent Dyer when I was about ten and became an enthusiastic and lifelong fan.

I also loved fantasy and remember vividly the day I started to read *The Hobbit*. From there I read Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, *A Wizard of Earthsea* by Ursula K. Le Guin and *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeline L'Engle.

I also discovered an Irish author called Patricia O'Shea who wrote a wonderful book called *The Hounds of the Morrigan*, set in Galway, my home town.

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

I was, and still am, a reader. Reading books is what inspired me to write them. As a child, I read all of the time and read all sorts of books. As a teacher, I read to the children I taught every day, and tried to make every child a reader. As a parent, I loved watching my own children develop a love of books and finding their own favourite authors. I have always loved stories, and I think if you start from that place, you are driven to try to emulate those authors whose work you love.

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

Character and voice. I am drawn to strong, often strange characters in literature, and I love a distinctive voice. The voice makes me feel that I am in a safe place with a storyteller who is confident and passionate about their story. Katherine Rundell has that kind of voice. She just grabs you on the first page and pulls you after her through the story. Philip Pullman also has it – a kind of authority that means you can't put the book down.

Equally with illustration, strong characters appeal to me and a distinctive style. I love Nicola Bernardelli's work and was delighted when he agreed to illustrate *To The Island*. His work is very lyrical, I think, and his take on fantasy is wonderful. I also love Rachel Saunder's and Benji Davies work. In Ireland we have some wonderful illustrators – people like Mary Murphy, Niamh Sharkey and Pj Lynch.

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

I think my audience is always the same no matter what I am writing. I write for the child I was. I go back to the books that I loved and am influenced by them, all over again. I'm also lucky in that I remember a lot of detail from my childhood. I remember the smell of the library, the excitement of finding a book. I remember how I thought I could stop time whenever I wanted to, and that the rest of the world would stop too. Small things, but those details really help when you are writing.

**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 gloriously optimistic about the future of the physical book. The more I deal with children and young people, the more I realise that they love the physical book as much as we did. People will continue to use electronic books for convenience, but I don't think that the electronic version can compete with the physical book. The elevator didn't replace the stairs, and I think equally electronic books won't replace real books.

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

Yes. I love to collect books. I have collected a lot of vintage picture books and I also collect *Chalet School* books. I have quite a few first editions, and unabridged versions, but still have a long way to go to collect the entire series!