

An Interview With Susan Rollings

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

My special memories of books and reading takes me back to around 6 yrs old. I adored my Grandfather and he started to take me once a week to his local Library. I remember how vast and high the ceilings felt as a lady peered down at me and gave me my first library ticket. I then remember feeling completely in awe as I was allowed to wander around the bookshelves all by myself and pick anything I wanted! It was a magical time. It was from here that I found "The Cat in the Hat" by Dr Seuss. I so loved the rhythm and the whacky humorous style of the stories. He put the fun and mischief into learning to read; I loved it.

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

I was always drawing and dreaming up little stories to go with my sketches, but it wasn't until I watched my own children at play, did I really dare to dream I might create a real book! Wow, that was an exciting moment.

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

The success of a book for me is if a child finishes a story thinking "that story could be about me!" or that they are not alone in their fears or dreams. But the longevity of a book comes with the layering of subtle details to draw both the adult reader and child into the story; then the parents will come back too and that's a double success!

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

Tricky question. It depends on the story of course, but my aim is to be as inclusive as I can. All children need to find themselves in a story somewhere, especially those who feel they are in a minority. Hence the reason I wanted to update the New Shoes Red Shoes and Best Friends Special Friends books, as I felt that these two stories still presented a great opportunity to do so, even now. Working with Childs Play, we have managed to include much more diversity in these new versions and with two lovely different illustrators this time too.

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

When personal computers first hit the scene, I kept hearing the phrase, “well we won’t need artists any more, what are you going to do?” But, now we just have more artists who like to work with computers. This is just the same. For all of us who are hooked on a physical book, nothing has changed. The electronic book is just another great tool to promote reading and if that’s a cool experience to some people, well that’s brilliant! More people to like reading! (Who knows, they may even later, turn back to having a physical book later.) But for the rest of us, there will always be something overwhelmingly magical about the nature of the physical book. To smell, to touch, to own and to share the physicality of a book together, brings a real added joy to the content; where even the act of slowly turning a paper page, allows you to savour and enjoy that moment of anticipation and excitement.

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

I love collecting picture books. I am currently collecting the illustrative work of Olivier Tallec. I adore the picture book “Big Wolf, Little Wolf” written by Nadine Brun-Cosme and so wonderfully illustrated by Olivier Tallec. The story and images drip with emotional magic on every page, with its subtle rendering about what it is to be lonely.