



The Letterpress Project

An Interview With Corri Doerrfeld

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

My earliest memories of books, are of my father reading to me at bedtime. He was always very patient letting me take in the pictures along with the words and was also good at “performing” different voices and characters. The book I loved the most as a very young child was Barbapapa by Annette Tison and Talus Taylor. My favourite spread was the one which showed Barbapapa growing underneath the ground in Frank’s garden. I think I fell in love with the idea that it didn’t matter how strange and unexpected Barbapapa was, Frank never questioned why he was there or if he deserved to be loved and accepted. I still love how open kids can be to new people and ideas.

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

I have always drawn pictures. Even when I was very little, I drew constantly. I loved drawing animals and cartoon characters. I wrote stories for school, but mainly wanted to use art to create stories. For a very long time I wanted to be an animator, but as computer animation took over, that changed. I would say I was most inspired by the children I worked with. I worked at a preschool for many years taking care of two year olds. Their personalities, comments, and view-points on the world lead me to write my very first books. After that, it was wanting to be with

my own two children that kept me pursuing a career as an author/illustrator. I spent many years taking care of my kids during the day and painting at night.

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

For books with illustrations, I think the most successful ones use the words and the pictures to tell the story. Each should enhance the other, not simply mirror or repeat. I think most of the story should be in the illustrations. The mood, the layers of meaning, and the hidden little parts of the story that even children who cannot read yet can see and understand are all so important. To me, the most successful picture book can even be enjoyed without the words.

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

I don't typically have a specific audience when I write. If I am thinking of someone, it's the adults in my life who still seem to struggle with certain emotional situations. Having read so many books to kids myself, I also try to keep the words more at a minimum and let the art tell the story. I think picture books should be a shared experience, one that leaves space for the child to look at the illustrations and talk about what they see. All my books really just start with an idea or a question I personally can't stop thinking about. After I flesh out that idea with words, I make tiny rough illustrations to see where art can take the place of words. Ultimately when I create a book, I am simply trying to capture a feeling. I sometimes forget that my books will be read by other people!

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

I think physical books aren't going anywhere unless the materials to make them simply become too rare or expensive. Tablets and eBooks serve a purpose, but they simply cannot compare with the sensation of holding a book together, the smell of the ink on the paper, or the anticipation of

pages getting caught as you try to turn them. Physical books can be passed down between generations, their worn spines, yellow pages, and handwritten notes in the front becoming stories themselves. I have a few books still from my own childhood and they feel like actual tangible memories I can hold. Only my copy of *Swimmy* by Leo Leoni has the crayon marks I drew as a small child in the front. My copy of *Barbapapa* is the only one my dad read to me every night. To me, those personal touches cannot be replaced by a screen.

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

I suppose I'm a book collector of sorts, my favourite books to buy being the ones my friends write and illustrate. I also love books featuring rabbits and ones illustrated in the 1950's-1970's. I loved reading *Watership Down* as a child, so maybe owning a first edition of that would be interesting!