



The Letterpress Project

# An interview with Ruby Wright

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

I still have most of the picture books from my childhood and I've re-read them so often that I can't recall the moment they came into my life, but some are almost Proustian moments: I had Spot's First Walk by Eric Hall and on one page there's a garden which I can almost smell, it's so vivid in my memory. That's the kind of connection with the reader that I think all picture book creators must dream of. I know I certainly do. Other absolute favourites include Father Christmas by Raymond Briggs, Garth Pig and the Ice Cream Lady by Mary Rayner, Mr Gumpy by John Burningham, Mr Rabbit and the Lovely Present by Maurice Sendak and Each Peach Pear Plum by Janet and Allen Ahlberg. I remember the first time I read a whole Tintin book to myself, I had chicken pox and when I finished all 64 pages I felt immensely proud and like a door had opened to me. I think I always ping-ponged back to my picture books when I needed reassurance. Maurice Sendak in particular spoke to me, I still adore his humour and atmosphere and surrealism. Aside from picture books there are fiction books I re-read for years: Nurse Matilda by Christianna Brand and Edward Ardizzone, The Borrowers by Mary Norton, Little House on the Prairie by Laura Ingalls Wilder, My Naughty Little Sister by Dorothy Edwards and Shirley Hughes. I've read all of them to my own children and they still resonate.

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

It was always my dream job but I honestly didn't think I had the talent until I had kids and decided to really dedicate myself to making it my career. Before that I always worked in the creative industries and had a fine art degree but there were so many things I liked doing that I never committed to anything. Having children gave me a focus because I suddenly didn't have very much time, so I enrolled on an evening course in picture book illustration with Claire Alexander, which was my real starting point. But it took years and years and years of practice and help from my amazing mentor Ness Wood from Orange Beak Studio before I was lucky enough to get my agent Jodie Hodges and my first book contract from Rocket Bird Books.

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

For me it's important to be able to emotionally engage with the character, and to recognise something about my own life in the story. I love it when the boundary between reality and fantasy is blurred because I think children have such a rich internal world and they can have incredibly sophisticated flights of fancy. I am constantly amazed at the talent of contemporary illustrators and often think 'I wish I'd done that', which I think is the real test! I still buy loads of picture books and think of them as works of art. Beautiful, affordable artworks primarily for children. What a wonderful occupation this is.

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

I probably think of myself as a child looking through the book, and I want to be amazed or amused or absorbed in the detail of the image. And I think of the parent reading the story for the Nth time. There were books I read to my children that had to be put on a high shelf because they were too annoying to re-read. The words are so important, and so difficult to write.

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

I really hope there is a future for the printed book, I think it's more important now than at any point in history. I feel confident that books for children will continue to be valued even if adult books become increasingly digital. With a physical book the child is in control. When we interact with our digital devices we're relinquishing the power to a handful of billionaires.

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

My collection of picture books is a bit out of control but it doesn't stop me collecting more. There are a couple of old books I'd like to find: One is a first edition of Eloise by Kay Thompson and Hilary Knight, my Dad had a copy when he was little and passed it on to me. I took off the dust jacket because I liked the look of the book underneath and I have always felt guilty about losing it. And my mum talks about a

Danish book from her childhood called The Magic Chalk which she's never been able to find, I would love to locate it and see her time travel back to her childhood. Books are so good for that...