



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An Interview with Alan Dapré

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

I remember reading a colourful story about a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly. I loved the butterfly's bright smile and rainbow wings. Magical change has been a theme in many of my books too. By the age of 5, I was also reading comics. Words and pictures really do spark the imagination. I once laid three comics out on the kitchen floor to say 'Twinkle. Twinkle. Little Star.' As a child I read everything I could get my hands on, so there were no 'boy or girl' gender specific books to me, just books.

'The Guinness Book Of Answers' (1976) was an inspirational book. I still have it; one of the few items I own from my early days in children's care homes. I recall being amazed and intrigued by the detailed descriptions of countries, population facts, mountain heights, star distances...and untimely ends of various kings. Another favourite childhood was my treasured (now battered) Superman & Batman annual (1973). It has a scribbled dedication, written when I was 8, to my pal Ian (which he crossed out when he gave it back to me). My daughter Isla (also 8) is not impressed by my untidy handwriting.

Q2. What inspired you to become an author?

I don't recall a specific moment when I thought I must become a writer. It just happened. My love of adventure stories filtered through and I began to write my own. Around the age of 10, I'd sit in a quiet room away from the other children and read a book. This would spark a story and I would write my ideas down. I remember making up tales about a pet dinosaur. Who wouldn't want to own a diplodocus? No stories have survived my time in Care. Unfortunately, I was never given my school work to keep at the end of each year – so anything I wrote in lessons is long gone. Going through

past writing can be very comforting so I store all my daughter's school books & project work. Isla enjoys seeing what she was up to at various ages & stages of her childhood.

One wall in the children's home was full of dusty 'classic' texts. Little Women, Anne of Green Gables, The Mill on The Floss. I read them all – no doubt skipping pages. I can't say they thrilled or fully engaged me. I preferred my visits to the library and coming out with books like Stig Of The Dump, A Wizard of Earthsea and The Family From One End Street.

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

A successful book is one that children want to pick up and read. It should have an eye-catching cover, an engaging title or both. I sometimes read books that at first seem dull but end up being completely enthralling. So a successful book must also make you want to keep reading to the end.

The best illustrations are those that resonate with the words and amplify the story in some way. Illustrations should use the text as a springboard and add an extra depth...by providing further clarity, meaning and engagement.

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

The audience I have in my head is an amalgam of every eight year old I have ever met. I try to capture their fun, enthusiasm, curiosity and energy within my words. Then as they read they can see themselves. I chat a lot to young readers and they make it clear what things they enjoy reading. My daughter, Isla, reads the books I write and is never short of an opinion. Her outgoing, friendly, compassionate, adventurous nature is also mirrored in my books. The stories are for both girls and boys to enjoy and explore.

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

As long as we have a means to make paper pages (or something close to them) then the physical book will prevail. Cuddling up to an electronic tablet is not the same as having a book on your lap and flicking physically through pages. Printed books are like old friends. They need to be hugged, to be looked after, to be valued. To be passed on.

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

I'm not a book collector as such. I buy lots of non-fiction titles and dip into them when I can. I usually have a pile of books by the bed. I enjoy reading non-fiction as it is a refreshing counter-point to my daily immersion in fiction writing. I like getting books signed by illustrators. Often they will add a

quick sketch. I have a treasured one signed & illustrated by Korky Paul.

The special book I'd love to own is out in 2018. *Porridge the Tartan Cat and the Pet Show Show-off* stars a character called Isla, who is based on my daughter. She turns invisible and has to help Porridge save the day. Being a proud Dad, I can't think of anything better than being able to put my child in a book. The illustrator Yuliya Somina has done an awesome job of drawing her. I'm a lucky man.