



The Letterpress Project

An Interview With Jeremy Strong

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

A: My earliest memories are of being read to by my grandmother at bedtime. A few years later I had a collection of four books of African folk tales about a group of animals. I loved those stories and went back to them time and again. The first book was called THE LONG GRASS WHISPERS and my favourite character was the rabbit, Kalulu. I have always enjoyed animal stories. I also loved writing stories from age 5 onwards. I can remember lying on the carpet in our front room, writing. I still have one – with dozens of spelling mistakes, no capital letters and no punctuation – but the story is still clearly there!

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

A: Clearly I was inspired by the stories read to me when I was a child, but aged 8-9 I had a lovely teacher at primary school who encouraged my own story writing so that by the time I left her class aged 9 I knew I wanted to be a writer.

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

A: When you get a story idea it is in your head and you see it as a mighty and wonderful thing. Then you have the job of making that story on paper as brilliant as what you have in your head! If you can get anywhere near doing that then that, for me as a writer is a success. When I am reading I look for stories that are gripping or deeply satisfying to read and are well written, stories that make me think 'I wish I had written that!'

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

A: I nearly always have a particular audience in mind and that's important, especially if you are writing for children. I also write stories for dyslexic children and they have to be written in a particular way too.

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

A: I feel that there will always be people who prefer to hold a real book, and that means there will always be both. The little thrill of turning an actual page is so very different to pressing a button on an ebook reader.

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

A: Over the years I have collected and read thousands of books. I have several 'special' books that I own, many of them books I've had since childhood. But I also very much enjoy passing favourite books on to family and friends – and also receiving other people's favourite books. I think my all time favourite is Sharon Creech's LOVE THAT DOG. It's small and short but boy! Does it pack a punch! And so beautifully written.