



The Letterpress Project

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

I was able to read at a very young age. I particularly loved a Ladybird copy of 'The Owl and the Pussycat (I still have it). I read it so much that I could recite it, and I used to read it backwards as well.

My parents read to me a lot. I can remember snuggling up with my mum and her doing all the voices. My Dad would often read excerpts of whatever he was reading, so when I read 'The Colour of Magic' for the first time I had huge déjà vu for the description of the Discworld at the start of the book.

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

I always wanted to be an author. I suppose it came from my love of books, but it was always what I 'wanted to be when I was older'. As I went through school I realised that it wasn't very easy to 'become a writer' and so I ended up going into the sciences and eventually training as a biology teacher. I did, however, always scribble down stories and poems.

When I had my eldest child I found the transition to motherhood very emotional, and particularly became aware of the lack of support and politics around breastfeeding. My scribbles at that time became my first book, Milk. I was so passionate about bringing awareness into this phase of matrescence, especially where it pertains to breastfeeding, that I threw myself into ensuring this book was published.

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

I suppose this depends on how you define 'success'. For me personally it's not about sales or revenue, but more about connection. If one of my books has led somebody to think about something they've never considered before, or to start conversations with loved ones about an important topic...well that's success.

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

Yes, I do. For children's books I try to think about how to make the concepts (around marine biology) understandable and fun. This is around how you explain things, linking the story to illustrations and also word use. For adults I also have in mind the audience I am writing for, and what the important things they want to get from the book are, whether that's information or story.

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 ebooks have a place and it's only to be expected that they will become a more popular format. Being able to have hundreds of books on one device is obviously convenient, along with the lower cost and the ability to change fonts and navigate the text.

That said, the tactile nature of a physical book is priceless. Particularly for children's picture books, ebooks don't really work. My children have huge collections of book that they can grab off the shelf and flick through - I don't believe they have any ebooks. Equally for me, as a book lover, I much prefer the reading experience of a physical book, and I enjoy collecting favourites on my handmade bookcase.

So yes, I think the ebook will become increasingly popular, but physical books have a timeless appeal.

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

I tend to keep non-fiction books (usually about the sea) along with a few favourite fiction titles. I love that my bookcase is a resource for the family for homework and so forth, and also that books are regularly referenced. To me it's sad for a book to languish on a shelf when it could be enjoyed by somebody else who's picked it up at a charity shop or a book swap. I only keep books that I think will be read again.