



The Letterpress Project

An Interview With Elizabeth Wein

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

I can remember my parents reading to me when I was two years old: *The Thirteen Clocks* by James Thurber and *Little Bear* by Else Homelund Minarik, and I loved to pretend to be the characters in those books. I had a “space helmet” made out of a cereal box and wires just like Little Bear’s!

When I was able to read to myself, my favourite book was *A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. I think there is a bit of the heroine, Sara Crewe, in all my characters. I even named my daughter Sara!

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

When I was 7, my grandmother gave me a book every month – she called it the “Book of the Month Club.” Some of these she bought new, but some were books that had been her own when she was a young reader. It was *Ellen Tebbits* by Beverly Cleary that made me go, “I want to write books like this one.”

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

The most important part of a book for me is a character I can relate to. It doesn’t have to be a character *like me*. It just has to be someone I relate to, maybe because of personality or ambition or family relationships – but sometimes just out of admiration. Some of my heroes over the years have been Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*, Ged the wizard in the Earthsea books, and Wonder Woman (I had the reprints of the original 1940s comics).

I loved fantasy as a teen, not so much as an adult, but I still love characters who are determined, quirky, and who come to life on the page.

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

I pretty much aim to please myself as a reader – I write books that I would love to read. I realize that not everybody shares my reading tastes, but I hope that the characters I invent are people that teen readers can find something in common with even if they come from different backgrounds.

I am all about *empathy*.

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 that for the foreseeable future, electronic books and physical books will exist side by side. There seem to be different uses and needs for both! I use both myself, but I still prefer a physical book.

I expect that in the future, electronic books will more closely mimic physical books – perhaps with pages that turn, or covers that can be changed to reflect the book currently being read.

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

I definitely am a book collector, and I have multiple copies of my favourites.

I'd love to own a book that once belonged to one of my favourite authors. Maybe something that Laura Ingalls Wilder or Frances Hodgson Burnett signed her name in to declare ownership! I love buying old books and finding notes in them. I am nosy about previous owners!