



The Letterpress Project

An Interview With Gregory Mone

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

My favorite books as a child were *A Wrinkle in Time* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, but when I was a little older, in my early teens, my parents bought me a copy of *A Brief History of Time* by Stephen Hawking. I read it cover to cover several times. And I understood slightly more than nothing.

Still, that book meant so much to me, so when the chance to work with Neil deGrasse Tyson on a book about astrophysics for the very same audience arose, I was thrilled. Hopefully, with our book, young readers will understand more than nothing.

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

Well, I always loved reading and devouring books, but after college I had a terribly boring job and did not want to specialize in anything. So I went home at night and started writing a story about a recent college graduate with a terribly boring job who doesn't want to specialize in anything. That eventually turned into my first novel, *The Wages of Genius*. The main character thinks he's the reincarnation of Einstein, too, so that turned me on to science writing.

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

A book that sticks with the reader in such a way that they want to talk about it or re-read the story months or even years later. I still flip through *A Wrinkle in Time* and *The Dalkey Archive* by Flann O'Brien and several other favorites every so often. And

I hope kids will continually come back to *Astrophysics for Young People in a Hurry* as they grow. The universe is worth the trouble.

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

Yes, of course. Kids! Not any specific type of kid. I like to imagine a big room full of them, listening to the story as it's read aloud. With a few adults scattered around the room, and not one of them snoring.

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

No, I think the physical book still has a strong future because it allows the individual to focus on the story. No notifications or texts or alerts to distract you. Just simple words on a page and your brain bringing the story to life in your head. Books that are mindlessly devoured and quickly forgotten might be more suited to the electronic medium, but good books (see my definition above) will always have a place in the physical, tactile world.

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

I don't have the budget to be a book collector, but I've been lucky enough to find a few underpriced treasures, including first editions of *Manhattan Transfer* by John Dos Passos and the aforementioned *Dalkey Archive*. Two very generous people also gave me a copy of *Tales Told of Shem and Shaun*, a fragment of James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* that was printed before the book had a title. Joyce was perpetually running out of money, and he linked up with two wealthy American expats, Harry and Caresse Crosby, who printed a few early chapters of his work in progress through their imprint, The Black Sun Press. The paper, the typography, the layout and coloring — it is a stunningly beautiful book. But it's *Finnegan's Wake*, so it doesn't make any sense. Tried to read some of it to my kids once. They were quite confused.

What would I love to own? Maybe Harry Elkins Widener's copy of *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson. He was a book collector and a passenger on *Titanic*, and that novel was his favorite.