



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An Interview With Dwayne Brenna

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

Outside of the usual nursery rhymes that mothers read their children, my earliest memories of reading have to do with other people's books. When I was in Grade Four, I got ahold of my brother's pristine copy of *The Odyssey* and read it from cover to cover. Because my brother hadn't bothered to read the book, I became his instant resource on all matters Greek, including the hierarchy of the gods, the irresistible song of the sirens, and all the rest of Odysseus' arduous journey home. Later, I found my dad's dog-eared school copy of *Tom Sawyer* and devoured it. I remember my dad's warning to prospective book thieves, hand-written on the title page: "I pity the baker,/ I pity the cook,/ I pity the one/ who steals this book." One of my aunts had also drawn caricatures of Bette Davis on the inside back cover.

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

I had a high school English teacher who valued literature as much as my other teachers valued the sciences. His name was Terry Chamberlain, and he's subsequently published several books of fiction. In Grade Eleven, he asked the class to write a short story based on some aspect of our past. I chose to write about my grandfather, who carved out a homestead in Saskatchewan in 1905. To my amazement, I got an A on the assignment, and I began thinking that maybe I could be a writer when I grew up. I really wasn't much good at anything else in high school.

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

A story is successful, in my view, when it communicates in form and content precisely what is meant to be communicated. That happens when the form matches the subject matter and when the choice of words, images, and metaphors seem like they could not be other than what they are. I get the feeling that these requirements have been met when I'm reading F. Scott Fitzgerald or Ken Kesey.

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

I imagine two audiences when I'm writing. First and foremost, I want to move my wife to incredulity and amazement. She's a celebrated writer in her own right. I want her to fall in love, every day, with the writer in me.

The second audience I imagine is my writers' group, which consists of three very talented and established writers, Don Kerr, David Carpenter, and David Margoshes. All of my work has been funneled through this group at one stage or another and has benefited from its wisdom. I've learned a great deal by listening to my writing mates, and I listen closely to the things they have to say. I trust their instincts when it comes to telling a good, clear 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 like to read off the printed page. Second best is to listen to a fine reader narrating an excellent audiobook. I've never been much interested in reading books on computer screens, tablets, or phones. Doing so makes me feel like a moth attracted to a garish movie marquee at midnight.

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

At university, my creative writing teacher was Professor H.V. Weekes. By his own account, he'd survived the Great Depression by working as a student, a farm hand, a pool shark, and a writer. He wrote several stories for *True Confessions*. He told the

creative writing class that he'd been pregnant and unwed five times and that he'd made fifty bucks each time by writing a story about it. He also mentioned that the Great Canadian Novel had already been written and that it was sitting in a desk drawer in his study. I'd dearly love to get my hands on that manuscript.