



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this series of Letterpress Project e-interviews that we are undertaking over the coming months. The Letterpress Project is a not-for-profit initiative that exists to promote the value and pleasures of the physical book and we are keen to get the thoughts of authors and book illustrators about their own influences, experiences and love of books. We are happy for you to make your answers as long or as brief as you are comfortable with and we will undertake not to edit or paraphrase any of your comments without your explicit permission.

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

I don't remember being read to. My warmest childhood recollections involve snatched time away from the rest of the family, lying on my bed, reading Enid Blyton picture books. From these I graduated through *The Secret Seven* to *The Famous Five*. However, the most memorable book from that time and genre was *Four Stowaways and Anna* by an author called E.M. Frow. This was a more realistic treatment of the 'children and a quest' story and its twist at the end has made me a fan of this particular trope in storytelling. While I was still in my early teenage years my father gave me *No Mean City* to read and its no-holds-barred depiction of Gorbals slum life was more effective in turning me towards socialism than any amount of proselytising on his part.

Q2. What inspired you to become an author?

While I was aged 12 in grammar school, I was made to write a 500 word punishment essay by a prefect. It was a diatribe about the inherent injustice of the prefect system and, in particular, inveighed against the head boy. Next morning I was dragged out of the assembly line and held in front of the Head Boy so he could punch me in the face. I realised that I was capable of writing things that provoked a reaction. What power!

Q3. For you, what makes a successful book?

The writers I admire most pay attention to plotting and structure. While I'm reading, I want to admire the construction of a story as much as I enjoy the writing. My favourite author is John Irving and, while his characters are 'real' and memorable (even when they're fantastic) and he writes extraordinarily well, I think I get as much satisfaction from the way his novels are put together.

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

No. I have come to terms with the fact that I will not become a best-seller. (I won't go into the reasons behind this here.) So, I write for the enjoyment of creating something that I can look at and say: 'I did this.' (I accept that anybody reading this will say: 'could this be why you're not a best-seller?' The short answer is yes. The longer answer is too long.)

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

The physical book is already making a comeback. My Kindle is excellent for holiday reading especially abroad where carry-on weight is limited but I will always prefer real paper.

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

I'm not a book collector although I have some interesting books. (I still have my copy of *Four Stowaways and Anna* that I mentioned earlier nearly 60 years after reading it.) I would like to own an original copy of B S Johnson's 'book in a box' *The Untouchables*.

Thank you very much for taking time to do this for us. We will advise you when we publish it on the website - www.letterpressproject.co.uk. Please return the completed interview to:

Karen Argent

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