



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

AN INTERVIEW WITH TODD HENDERSON

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

Books were always inspirational to me, largely because I was renowned for my rather vivid imagination (as my Mother likes to call it) and they somehow helped me make sense of why I saw the world the way I did (and still do), which I'm still not sure I can explain to this day.

Reading made me realise I could use my imagination and channel it in incredible ways, by getting lost in something which, for a moment, felt like reality. For instance, I was right there with Burglar Bill and his swag bag, I climbed the dark, dark stairs with Funny Bones and sat in the trees with Muggle Wump the monkey, alerting unsuspecting children to the presence of the Enormous Crocodile.

My imagination soon led me to start forming alternate endings to all my favourite stories, which tended to consist of an unexpected turn of events (a theme consistent in my books). This leads me perfectly on to my favourite, inspirational and most influential books.

Revoltin' Rhymes & Dirty Beasts, a collection of short stories by Roald Dahl will never, ever leave me and have helped shape my approach to everything I write because they are full of the abnormal. They are also short and horrid enough to not let my imagination drift too far, which is something truly incredible based on how easily I am distracted!

They were, quite simply, so different from any other books I had encountered as a child and I treasured those books like no other. I ensured they remained in as immaculate condition as possible, a tough ask considering they were handed down by two elder brothers.

I can honestly say I've never read and re-read a couple of books so much in my entire life and I never will.

Q2. What inspired you to become an author?

Oscar, my first-born child.

I used to write songs for the band I sung in and soon found that writing verses came naturally to me, while always holding a large interest in writing. This gradually developed into jotting down the odd story, but it didn't come to the fore until I was reading Oscar a book and a deep, crackling roll of thunder passed overhead.

He looked at me with his eyes as wide as can be with childlike wonder and asked me, "What's that, a dragon?"

That very night something awoke inside me and I started writing my first full story about a little boy running home to get away from the clap of thunder and bolts of lightning, believing them to be the roars and flames of a dragon.

Since then, I haven't stopped writing and don't plan on stopping anytime soon. My children are a great inspiration to me and every day I think of another plotline based on just watching them and their imaginations at work.

I have annoyed my wife on numerous occasions with this obsession, particularly when I've been rhyming in my sleep. I soon learned a sharp elbow led lesson, but there was nothing I could do to stop it! Instead, I took a pen and paper to bed to capture my slumber based mumblings.

Q3. For you, what makes a successful book?

A successful book, in my eyes, is one that gets picked up so many times the parents and children know the story line inside out, but never truly tire of it. A book that captures a child and the inner child of an adult is a special thing indeed.

When parents say to me they think they love my books even more than their child does and they always encourage them to read mine before bed over all the others, it makes me appreciate what I've achieved. The moment when an adult and child suspend their age gap for just a moment and enjoy something on the same level is special beyond belief. It may be fleeting, but it's remembered by parent and child alike. Knowing I have played a small, but vital, part in that is exactly why I write.

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

To be honest, I don't. I'm obviously aware I can't use a certain degree of plot based complexity or vocabulary for my books, but I certainly don't let it lead how I approach my writing. It's something that comes naturally to how my work reads, so I just let it flow and you can always rework elements depending on how others around you read it before it goes anywhere near the inside of a book.

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

I personally believe this to be an easy answer and I am very much of the electronic generation. I was young and in awe, watching in wonderment at the birth of consoles, handheld games as well as the electronic book and the incredible growth they have witnessed; yet I truly believe the physical book will endure the test it faces.

Computers and technology show such vast levels of advancement from one generation to the next, it's impossible to keep up. I will soon find myself completely out of my depth with what my children are using in regards to technology, but the one thing we will always mutually appreciate is a book and the story it has to tell. It is a way of acknowledging that you do, and always will, have common ground simply by sitting and reading a book. Reading then becomes more than just a pastime that carries on into later life, it becomes a way of returning to the memories they created for you in your youth. Electronic books are simply unable to offer that level of physical interactivity with the book itself and the individual that reads them with you (unless an incredible 3D version with the touch and feel of a real book has been created without me knowing!).

Besides, humans tend to be die hard traditionalists and unless something comes along and changes the path of its predecessors in a relatively short space of time, then we tend to stand up and champion it's cause. Even those that 'find' reading later in life largely gravitate towards a physical book, which tells you a lot about the unrelenting interest they offer.

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

I'm honestly not sure I'd be allowed to have any more books! I have a mountain of books and paper from my writing. I even have old bags with stories strewn throughout and I sometimes can't recall penning them and question myself as to when I wrote them, so you can only imagine how much I clutter the areas surrounding me.

Unexpectedly, I recently found some information out about my Great Grandfather, who had been deemed 'lost' (to my family) since the mid 1930's. I discovered that, after an incredibly varied life, he changed his name and became a very prominent children's author which took me by surprise to say the least. He was known as 'Jock of BBC Children's Hour' due to his regular readings on the BBC and being Scottish. After coming across this information, I simply had to buy all his books, including an autobiography that makes no mention of my family even existing! Those books are rather special to me, I must admit.

Referring to the beginning though, if there was one book I would like to own it would be the very first printed copy of Roald Dahl's Revolting Rhymes. That truly would make my rather odd world complete.