



Elen Caldecott graduated with an MA in Writing for Young People from Bath Spa University. At the end of the course she was highly commended in the PFD Prize for Most Promising Writer for Young People.

Before becoming a writer, she was an archaeologist, a nurse, a theatre usher and a museum security guard. It was while working at the museum that Elen realised there is a way to steal anything if you think about it hard enough. Elen either had to become a master thief, or create some characters to do it for her – and so her debut novel, *How Kirsty Jenkins Stole the Elephant*, published by Bloomsbury in January 2009, was born.

How Kirsty Jenkins Stole the Elephant was shortlisted for the Waterstone's Children's Book Prize and eight regional awards, longlisted for the Branford Boase Award and has been nominated for the Carnegie Medal

How Ali Ferguson Saved Houdini, published by Bloomsbury in July 2010, is a funny and moving story about three children making friends and working out their problems, while solving a mysterious case of missing mammals. Elen lives in Bristol with her husband, Simon.

Cyprus Well was delighted to get the chance to ask Elen a few questions about her work and the writing world.

Describe for us your favourite place to write?

I usually write at the kitchen table, or on the sofa. I do have a room which is partly my study and partly where the dog sleeps. I don't work in there, but it's great to have somewhere to leave piles of papers and books that isn't in anyone else's way. I'm not attached to any one place.

Do you have any writing routines – number of words a day, for example?

I have a day job, so writing gets done around that. I once heard Steve Voake give some fantastic advice: if you write 300 words every day, you can write a novel in a year. I remember that whenever I'm desperately trying to find time to write!

We're often asked for advice on getting a first work published? Do you have any tips for aspiring writers?

I can only speak personally, but for me getting my first work published was never going to be possible. The first novel I wrote just wasn't good enough. I realised that quite quickly during the submission process and so decided that I needed to improve at my craft if I was

to have any hope of being published. So, I enrolled on an MA. I think it's important to remember that though the vagaries of publishing trends are beyond your control, your own writing ability isn't. Concentrate on the things you can control.

Can you talk about influences on your own writing, favourite writers for example?

I like contemporary stories, so I am a huge fan of Frank Cottrell Boyce and Hilary McKay; I think their novels are simple but elegant. I would love to be able to write like that. My own life experience and political (with a small 'p') beliefs also influence my work. I like to see real people from all walks of life written about.

Do you feel there are particular challenges for children's writers?

You have to be certain that the things you're interested in are also interesting to your readers; there's no point, for example, in writing about divorce from the point of view of the mother; children just won't care. So, you have to work hard on creating a bond with readers that don't necessarily share your point of view.

Cyprus Well is keeping an eye on developments in digital books – the iPad etc – and we hear conflicting reports about what it will mean for the future of books as we know them – what are your feelings about the likely impact on children's literature?

I wouldn't say that I have my head in the sand, but... My feeling is that it will take a long time for children to adopt ebooks, mostly because who would give an expensive bit of kit to a seven year old to carry around with them? Can you imagine a playground with iPads being flung around in sportsbags, marking out goals? I don't own an ereader, but I have read a couple of novels on my laptop, I didn't love the experience, but I did love the fact that I wanted a book, I looked it up, paid for it and was able to start reading it within 5 minutes. That ease of access is very exciting.

Do you have a favourite writing exercise you'd like to share with our readers?

I like to use pictures as an inspiration, especially paintings of people. I thoroughly recommend taking a pen and notebook along to a gallery and taking time to look really hard at the images you see. It depends on the kind of exhibition, of course, but you might find characters, or themes, or emotions that spark off a story idea for you.

Thank you Elen!

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