

INTERVIEW WITH JANET EMSON AND CLARE HELEN WELSH –

From First Page to Last.

1. Tell us a little about I Love You More.

‘I Love You More’ is a celebration of unconditional parental love and the beauty of nature. It’s based around a conversation between Mum and Rae, in which Mum describes her love. It’s packed with lyrical word play and heart, and the most sensational artwork from husband and wife team, Kevin and Kristen Howdeshell.



2. What inspired the book?

I wrote this story in Covid lockdown after a tricky day of home-schooling. I wanted to express just how much I love my children and began thinking of nature-inspired similes. Did I love them as much as whales love the sea? As much as winged things love to fly? And so, ‘I Love You More’ was born!

3. Do you think of the words first and then the illustrations or are the two envisaged at the same time?

Because I don’t illustrate, the words always come first for me. But I am a very visual thinker. I leave space for the art to tell the story and think cinematically – not necessarily in detail – but I do get a sense of the tone of the book and how the spreads will feel. Occasionally, a character comes to me first. I can see them and speak to them! But that happens less often.

4. Is there anything about the process of publishing a book that still surprises you?

Making a picture book is full of surprises! I don't have my heart set on any particular visual style for my books, so I'm always surprised – delighted in this case – when I get to see artwork for the first time or when a publisher suggests an artist. The story goes on a whole new adventure when an illustrator comes on board. They bring the text alive, of course, but they also strengthen the story. In the case of 'I Love You More' I wrote some extra lines and tweaked the order of the animals, so that each spread could be a full double page of artwork of Kevin and Kristen's artwork.



5. What do you do when you aren't writing? What do you do to relax and get away from it all?

Hmmm... think about writing? Teach writing? And read! And I visit children in bookshops, libraries, festivals and schools to share my love of books. I have a family and a dog, so much of my time is with them. In any spare time, I like to paint and create with mixed media. But writing takes up a lot of my headspace! Oh, and I review outstanding picture books that can help when life is hard:

www.booksthathelp.co.uk

6. If you could only read one book for the rest of your life which book would it be?

Gosh! I've never thought about that before. What a question! Is it cheating to say a poetry collection? I read 'Whale of A Time' recently, curated by Lou Peacock and published by Nosy Crow. There are endless smiles in there!

7. I like to end my Q&As with the same question so here we go. During all the Q&As and interviews you've done what question have you not been asked that you wish had been asked – and what's the answer?

Wow. Another tough question... tumbleweed... I would like to mention just how tough writing can be. It's a dream job in many respects and I am feel very fortunate to have published so many books that I am proud of. I also enjoy working with such passionate and creative people.

But it is also HARD! The words don't always flow, the texts aren't always acquired, and the books don't always sell as much as everyone hopes. You need resilience and a good dose of grit, plus passion, to be a writer. Luckily, the highs outweigh the lows. But for those wanting to write, I think it's worth being honest.

I have a feature called Under the Reader's Radar which tries to highlight books that may have been missed by readers, but which deserve to be wider read. Do you have a book you'd like to 'shout about?'

THE QUICKEST BEDTIME STORY EVER

(Louise Fitzgerald, Kate Hindley)

This hilarious and engaging bedtime story is packed with great voice, silliness and irresistible illustrations. The inventive, interactive bedtime preamble will have even the most wriggly readers laughing out loud, before settling them down ready for bed.

A cute, clever and cosy bedtime book.