

Barefoot Books

An interview with co-founder Tessa Strickland

You need look no further than Barefoot's mission statement to find out why their books are so special: "Explore. Imagine. Create. Connect. Give Back. That's what Barefoot Books is all about. It's exploring other cultures, our planet, ourselves. It's making time for make-believe and letting imaginations run wild and free. Most of all, it's about using the power of stories to nourish the creative spark in everyone and strengthen connections with family, the global community, and the earth."

Always full of colour, culture and glorious artwork, Barefoot's books often support their storytelling with factual sections about the different ways people live: really enlightening for curious minds.

What were your aims and inspirations when you first set up Barefoot Books?

My aim is a constant: to introduce children to art and story in a way which supports their imaginative development, helps them to empathise with others, respects their natural good taste and instils in them an understanding of the world as a richly complex, diverse, fascinating and beautiful place.

My first inspiration was my father's collection of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, which I was absorbed by as a child. Then, when I was a young editor at Penguin, I read the psychiatrist Bruno Bettelheim's classic study, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. This account of the vital role of fairy-tale archetypes in helping children get a purchase on life was a major influence on my thought. As a young parent, I began wondering what I could best offer the next generation, including my own children – what values I wanted to pass on. I saw a need and set out to respond to it.

Tell us about Barefoot's partnerships with organisations promoting global conservation.

Barefoot is committed to honouring diversity in every sense of the word:

economic diversity, cultural diversity, ecological diversity. The predicament of our much-abused planet is a constant concern to me, but I think it's important not to put responsibility for their elders' errors on the shoulders of the young generation. However, it seems a good idea to collaborate wherever we can with the right organisations to raise awareness of critically important issues: so we work closely with charities such as Oxfam, New Internationalist and Plan UK, as well as other, smaller organisations.

Many of your books have audio CDs to accompany them. Can you tell me a bit more about how you see the relationship between books and the spoken word as well as music?

One of the fascinating aspects of the spoken word, and the word on the page, is its musicality. Children have, I think, a natural sense of rhythm and music and I like to work with authors who recognise this. Many of Barefoot's authors are professional storytellers, and I think this comes through in the writing. The audio CDs were a natural extension to our picture books as they enable children to listen and read at the same time.

What projects for the near future are you most excited about at the moment?

I am very excited to be publishing a breathtakingly beautiful new story by Carol Ann Duffy called *The Gift* next autumn. We've just published our first cookbook for children. It's actually a deck of large, practical cards called *Kids' Kitchen*. Its creator, Fiona Bird, is passionate about teaching children a proper understanding of nutrition, using scrummy recipes that they can easily make. This spring will see another deck, *Kids' Garden*, which is full of imaginative and fun things for children to do with plants, inside and out. ●

Interview by Mel Tibbs

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Juno selection

Walk with Me! by Stella Blackstone, illustrated by Caroline Mockford, £5.99, 1-4



A beautiful lift-the-flap book for the very young featuring children and animals from around the world.

We all Went on Safari: A Counting Journey through Tanzania by Laurie Krebs, illustrated by Julia Cairns, £9.99, 4-10



Learn to count (in English and in Swahili!) by spotting wildlife with Tanzanian children.

My Daddy is a Pretzel: Yoga for Parents and Kids by Baron Baptiste, illustrated by Sophie Fatus, £6.99, all ages



A fun way to bring the ancient wisdom of yoga to life. Complete with illustrations and instructions for nine different poses.

Grandmothers' Stories retold by Burleigh Muten, illustrated by Sián Bailey, narrated by Olympia Dukakis, £9.99, 7+



Eight stories from around the world, each with a wise woman at its core.