



This month, we've been talking to . . . Belinda Ellis

Belinda Ellis is a New Zealand designer, painter, illustrator, and lover of words. She has had a successful career as a graphic designer in New Zealand and London, painting and illustrating when time allowed and the fancy took her. More recently, Belinda has been a Lead Designer at Designworks – one of Australasia's leading brand agencies – and has won various awards for her design work, here and in New York. Ellis' first picture book, *Back-To-Front Bob*, rejoices in palindromes. Her second, *Punctuation Mark*, delves into the dos and don'ts of punctuation.

We asked Belinda some questions about herself and her writing, and here's what she said...

Where were you born? Where do you live now?

Born in Wellington; live in Wellington. Once a Wellingtonian, always a Wellingtonian.

Where did you go to school? Did you have a nickname?

Khandallah Primary School, Raroa Intermediate, Wellington Girls' College, Wellington Polytechnic School of Design. My family have always just called me 'B' or 'Blins'; at design school I was called Belle.

What were you like in school? What is the naughtiest thing you did?

Garrulous. A perfectionist. Prone to panic. The naughtiest thing I did is so lame it's not worth mentioning. In fact, the only time I was sent to the Headmaster's Office for a misdemeanour, I was completely innocent. Pathetic, no?

What was your favourite book growing up?

In hindsight, rather an odd book. *Lafcadio – The Lion Who Shot Back*, by Shel Silverstein, has this really bizarre ending, but on account of the protagonist's penchant for marshmallows, was a book I sought in the library again and again. As an eight year old, the idea of a marshmallow suit appealed to me enormously. I had a thing for the pillow-y confection back then. Still do, in fact.

Who is your favourite children's author?

Just the one? That's too hard. My favourites are: Oliver Jeffers, Ian Falconer, Lynley Dodd, Roald Dahl – *The BFG* in particular – Dr Seuss and Quentin Blake.

What is your favourite food/colour/movie?

Food: Rose Turkish Delight. Think of Edmund's seduction in *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*

Colour: Pea Green

Movie: *Local Hero* (released 1983)

Who inspired you to write/illustrate?

At design school I had a great illustration and life-drawing tutor, Roger Hart. He used to sing to me during class, excerpts from Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*: 'Ah! Belinda, I am prest with torment ...' With regards to writing, my father was in the law and my mother was an English and Classics teacher, so words were always going to be venerated in our household. Dad was a terrible (marvellous?) punster and I guess the predilection I have for tinkering with words must reflect on him – wordplay is rife in my design work.

How did you get started? How old were you?

I've always liked to dabble ...

Why did you want to be a writer/illustrator?

After 25 years working as a graphic designer I felt the urge to give up gainful employment and to create something less ephemeral. Something to keep rather than bin.

How do you think up ideas?

Like Bob in my first book, I love words. But I also love images. The melding of the two is where magic happens.

Do you have a special place where you write/illustrate?

My studio. Having a good sound system and being

surrounded by treasured flotsam, jetsam, books and artwork – who wouldn't be inspired?

What is the best thing about being an author/illustrator?

The money. Did I tell you I was a comedian?

Have you had a funny or embarrassing moment as an author/illustrator?

I drank some paint water once, by accident, at design school. A classmate had what I thought was a bottle of Appletiser on his desk. I took a swig.

What do you do when you are not writing/illustrating?

Spend time with friends and family, read, tango, garden, swim, cook and fossick. With regard to the last, I'm a real bowerbird.

Which famous person from the past would you like to talk to?

Shakespeare ... Such stuff as dreams are made on.

What would you have chosen to be if you were not an author/illustrator?

If I'd had an ounce of flair for it, I would love to have been a musician or singer. When you're good at it, to perform on your own or in a group must be electrifying. To dance at that level would be amazing too – your body being the instrument you express yourself with.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about yourself?

Likes / Dislikes:

The smell of freshly laundered bed linen / The smell of boys' socks

Poppies / Dahlias

Empathy, in all its forms / Cruelty, of any sort whatsoever

Grace / Gracelessness

Order / Chaos

Tea / Coffee

Laughing often / Crying often

Crying joyfully / Laughing maniacally

The call of the kokako / SHOUTING

Colour – lots of it / Racism – can't abide it

Pinot gris / Energy drinks

French bread, stinky cheese and strawberries / Food not made with love.

Awards received:

Grand Winner for Best Overall Annual Report and winner of a Gold at the International Arc Awards, New York (2004) for GNS Science.

Finalist at the Designers Institute of New Zealand Best Design Awards for my identity for Novak and Middleton Architects (2006).

Winner of a Gold Pin at the Designers Institute of New Zealand Best Design Awards for my identity and trophy for the New Zealand Prime Minister's Science Prize (2010).

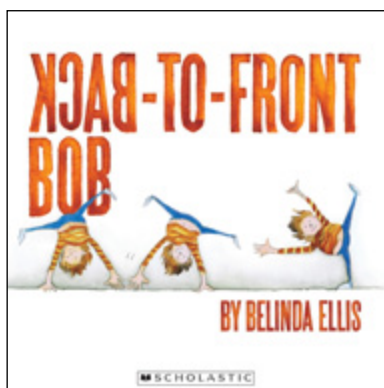
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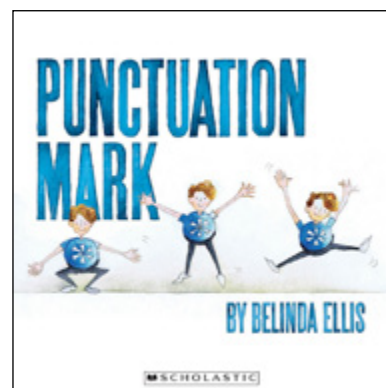
Back-to-Front Bob

Publication May 2014
ISBN 978-1-77543-183-1
Print RRP \$19.50
Format 240 x 240 mm
Extent 32 pp
Age 5-10 years



Punctuation Mark

Publication July 2014
ISBN 978-1-77543-184-8
Print RRP \$19.50
Format 240 x 240 mm
Extent 32 pp
Age 5-10 years



 SCHOLASTIC

Read Every Day. Lead a Better Life.