



Alanna Books by Anna McQuinn: an inadvertent publisher?

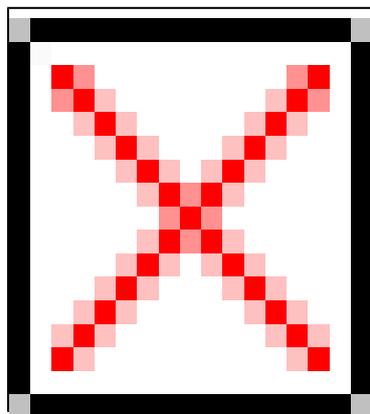
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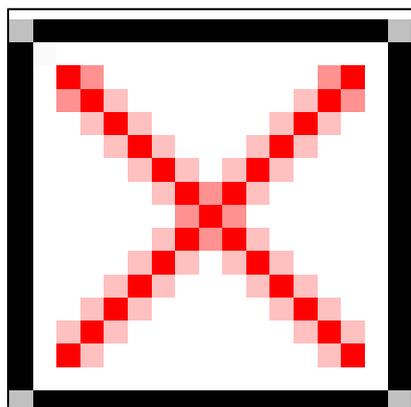
Ten years of child-centred publishing



Anna McQuinn has worked in children's publishing for over 20 years as a writer, editor and publisher. She currently runs **Alanna Books**, which is celebrating its 10th birthday this year. **Anna** introduces her list.

When I say 'inadvertent publisher' I don't mean to imply any lack of passion. I've been passionate about children's books all my life and have worked in some of the most wonderful children's lists: Child's Play, Tamarind, Frances Lincoln and DeAgostini Editions, as well as my own list, Zero to Ten. After a difficult redundancy following a takeover, in 2003 I took a step back to work directly with small children, running groups for babies and toddlers and their parents in Acton Library for **Sure Start**. I continued to work in publishing one day a week, writing, editing and developing new ideas.

At the Bologna Bookfair in 2004, I sold the rights to one of my new books, [Lulu Loves the Library](#) [3] in the USA, Netherlands and Denmark, but struggled to find a publisher in the UK. As we approached the print deadline I bemoaned the fact that the books wouldn't be in the UK and, in a moment of madness, like the Little Red Hen, I decided to do it myself!



I set up **Alanna Books** in early 2006 and was delighted that Turnaround Publishing Services agreed to take on UK representation and distribution. **Lulu Loves the Library** was published in September that year. In six months we sold out of the first 3,000 hardback printing and had to re-print ? **Alanna Books** had arrived!

Lulu was quickly followed by [My Friend Jamal](#) [4] ? a second title where I sold world rights, retaining the UK for Alanna Books. And then came the queries, ?when are you doing another Lulu book?? I spoke to my co-publishers at the next Bologna Fair and all signed up for **Lulu Loves Stories**.

Now, if I were making cheese, I would be regarded as ?artisan? and could charge a premium for being involved in every aspect of the book ? but publishing doesn?t work that way and instead tiny independents compete on exactly the same terms as enormous conglomerates with huge budgets and staff. So, tiny publishers like me have to work smarter and harder.

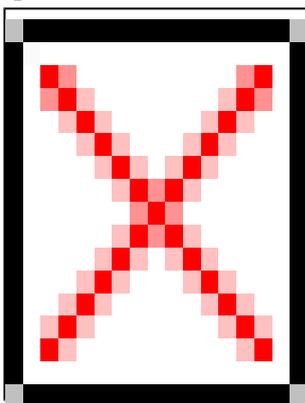
On the international stage, I feel that one of the keys to success has been finding international ?champions? for the books, then working collaboratively and closely with them in innovative ways ? something we continue to do today. This has really worked ? in the United States, Lulu?s publisher, Charlesbridge has just reached sales of one million dollars for the series this year.

Here in the UK, Alanna Books has to work harder and smarter to achieve visibility.

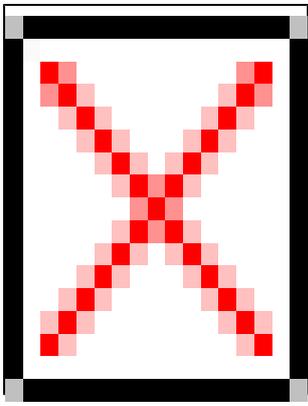
One of our most successful innovations came shortly after publishing **Lulu Loves the Library**, when I was repeatedly asked when Alanna Books would publish dual-language editions.

I was reluctant for a number of reasons: I was unconvinced that dual-language was as important to pre-readers and nervous about the logistical challenges of deciding which languages, and how to manage stock. But I was sensitive to the needs of families who did not read English confidently enough to share picture books with their young children. So we came up with an innovative solution - we recorded parents telling the Lulu stories in their first language, then put all of the recordings on a ?Multi-language CD? which now comes free with the books. So now, instead of stocking multiple editions of a story with different languages, nurseries, pre-schools, reception classes and libraries can use the same book ? they can listen in English or they can select one of the different language tracks to share the story with children who have home languages other than English.

Like other small publishers in the UK, we also innovate by seeking out some of the best books from around the world

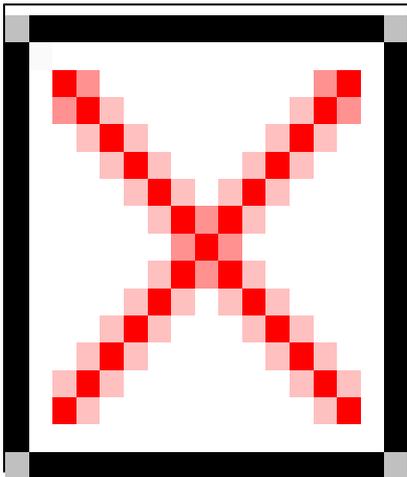


and publishing them in the UK. Our first acquisition was **Little Frog** written and illustrated by Denmark?s most famous cartoonist, Jakob Martin Strid. We followed that by acquiring multi-award winning [A Splendid Friend Indeed](#) [5]



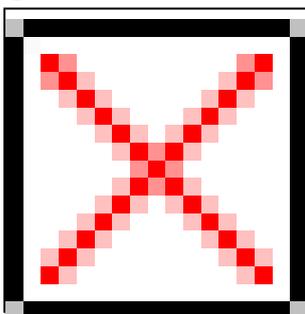
from the USA (which went on to be shortlisted for the UKLA prize) and **What Are You Playing At?** from France (endorsed by **Amnesty**, one of **CLPE**'s Books of the Year 2014 and chosen by John Newman for **Books for Keeps** as one of the top 10 books for introducing children to philosophy).

So, for an inadvertent publisher, we're doing OK! Our tiny book-loving Lulu is going from strength to strength ? **Lulu Loves the Library** won the Honours medal in the National Parenting Publications Awards in the US and a CLEL Silver Bell (awarded to the best 25 picture books from the last 25 years); **Lulu Loves Stories** was the 2012 choice for the one-book/one-state Kansas Reads to Pre-schoolers programme and read aloud to over 14,000 children in the month of November; it was Chicago Public Library's Best of the Best Picture Books in 2011's choice, and won the Coventry Inspiration Book Award 2012; **Lulu Reads to Zeki** was one of the Best Books of the Year 2013 chosen by the prestigious Bank Street College of Education USA and one of the Guardian's Top 10 Culturally Diverse Books for Toddlers 2014. [Zeki Loves Baby Club](#) [6] featuring Lulu's baby brother, was one of **Books for Keeps**' Books of the Year 2014 and the recent **Lulu Loves Flowers** was shortlisted for the 2015 Green Earth Book Award.



This last award was particularly special. As someone who has been committed to inclusion for over 20 years, it has been a real thrill to see Lulu shortlisted for a prize that is *not* about diversity. This may seem odd, but I strongly believe that all children should see someone like them in books and that this should be an ordinary, everyday thing. I believe that little girls (whether Black, Asian, disabled, or not) should not be in books in order to teach young readers about tolerance, racism or some other 'issue'. I think Lulu has the right to be the star in her own story for no reason other than she's wonderful! And what better reward for that, than to win an award for growing flowers!

Work is already complete on the second title about Lulu's baby brother Zeki who is proving to be quite a character in



his own right. And Lulu fans can look forward to following her as she adopts a rescue cat in 2017. I hope that the celebrations around our 10th birthday will help put Lulu and Alanna Books more securely on the

map. We will continue to work in innovative ways with our international partners, and smarter and harder here in the UK ? because we believe the books we publish are special ? and far more important than cheese!

To celebrate ten years of publishing for children, **Alanna Books** has created this special poster featuring the wonderful Lulu to promote reading. **Books for Keeps** readers can download it for free: it forms the centre pages of our May issue (218) and can be downloaded [here](#) [7] as a PDF.

Anna McQuinn, publisher with Alanna Books is also a children?s author. As well as the Lulu series, she has written books for Chicken House, Barefoot Books and O?Brien Press.

Books mentioned:

Lulu Loves the Library, Anna McQuinn, ills Rosalind Beardshaw, 978-0-9551998-20

Lulu Loves Stories, Anna McQuinn, ills Rosalind Beardshaw, 978-1-907825-019

Lulu Reads to Zeki, Anna McQuinn, ills Rosalind Beardshaw, 978-1-907825-057

Lulu Loves Flowers, Anna McQuinn, ills Rosalind Beardshaw, 978-1-907825-125

Zeki Loves Baby Club, Anna McQuinn, ills Ruth Hearson, 978-1-907825-101

Little Frog, Jakob Martin Strid, 978-0-9551998-68

A Splendid Friend Indeed, Suzanne Bloom, 978-0-9551998-99

What Are You Playing At?, Marie-Sabine Roger & Anne Sud, 978-1-907825-026

My Friend Jamal, Anna McQuinn, ills Ben Frey, 978-0-9551998-13

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