



AN INTERVIEW WITH ROSALIND BEARDSHAW

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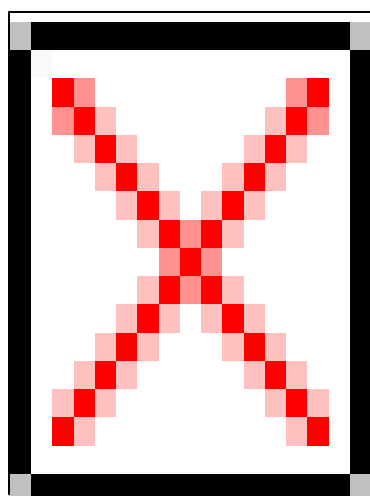
[Mike Farren](#) [1]

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The illustrator of the popular **Lulu** books talks to **Mike Farren**

Mike Farren meets **Rosalind Beardshaw**, illustrator of the award-winning ? and much loved ? **Lulu** series of books.



When I visit the studio Ros Beardshaw shares with two other artists and a changing cast of dogs, may blossom is billowing around like pink snowdrifts and there?s the sound of children playing in the school next door.

It?s easy to imagine the fun Lulu would have with the blossom, and her excitement about all the friends she?d make and the books she?d read when she goes to school.

I also think of the fun and excitement Ros would have, drawing it.

Originally from Sheffield, Ros was encouraged in her love of art by her parents. ?Both mum and dad were artistic,? she tells me. ?They could have made a great career as artists but weren?t given the opportunity. They always bought me sketch pads and charcoal, and gave me the goods to draw.?

Books by Raymond Briggs provided a further influence. ?I used to look at **Father Christmas** over and over,? she says. ?I?m also a big fan of Helen Oxenbury. They?re illustrators that have influenced me.?

Her inclination toward illustration became more concrete when her foundation course tutor said he could see her doing either fine art or illustration. ?He suggested that if I wanted to earn money, I should do illustration!?

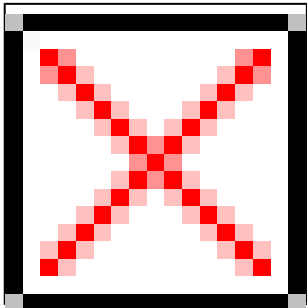
Working life began as a freelance, designing cards and gift wrap. ?One of my first jobs,? she recalls ?was designing Christmas cake packaging for Marks and Spencer. I remember being with my grandma in M&S and she very proudly bought it and told the cashier that I?d drawn the snowmen on the box.?

Ros sees this freelance experience, with tight deadlines and self-reliance, as good discipline. It was also in this period that she gained an agent and an entrée into the world of book illustration. ?We had a Young Designers exhibition at the Business Design Centre in Islington. My agent, Heather Richards, was an art buyer for Cambridge University Press, and

she picked me up there. She became an agent about five years after that and asked if I'd like to go with her. The first jobs I did in publishing were a literacy series for CUP.?

More mainstream children's book illustration began with Bloomsbury. **Fran's Flower** was shortlisted for the **Sheffield Book Prize**. Ros has fond memories of her time with Bloomsbury, not only because it was just as **Harry Potter** was taking off, but also because they published two books ? **Grandpa's Surprise** and **Grandma's Beach** ? based on her own grandparents.

The relationship with Anna McQuinn of [Alanna Books](#) [3], the creator and publisher of the **Lulu** series, came about

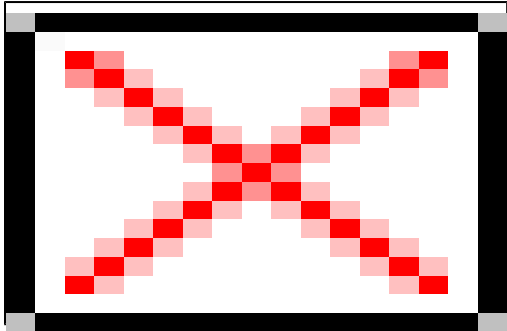


through Heather Richards . It's clearly a link-up that gives her a lot of satisfaction, as well as success. ?Anna's great,? Ros enthuses. ?She's lovely to work with. She always responds so positively to what I send her.?

Ros goes on to describe the process of collaborating with Anna: ?She sends me a text and she really leaves me to it. She doesn't send many suggestions or layouts. It's very freeing.?

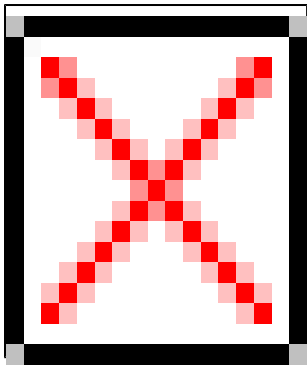
She does mention some input from Anna about hairstyles, but adds that input from the taste in clothes of her four year old daughter, Iris, influences the outfits she draws for Lulu. It's gratifying for Ros that her daughter is a fan of the [Lulu](#) [4] books and frequently selects them, unprompted, for her reading. In fact, she shows me a cardboard cut-out of Lulu, and tells me that it has been damaged, ?Because Iris hugged her so tightly!?

I also ask Ros about the ethos of Alanna Books, with its mission to promote inclusivity and reflect the experience of all children. She tells me that she finds this very motivating, adding that, ?It was my experience, growing up in Sheffield. My class was very diverse. It's something that I feel is very important in children's books.?



The emphasis that the books to date have placed on libraries and reading is also clearly very important both to writer and illustrator, with Ros telling me how much she enjoys the workshops she carries out in libraries.

Four **Lulu** books have already been published, and Ros has just completed the fifth, **Lulu Gets a Cat**, which is scheduled for May or June 2017. After that, there is discussion about the possibility that Lulu may appear as a superhero, or in a school or nursery setting. ?The series can go on and on,? suggests Ros, eagerly.



Doubtless, its popularity with readers will ensure it does exactly that, but it's not only readers (certainly not only British readers) who love the books. 'I couldn't tell you how many languages Lulu has been translated into,' Ros admits. 'I've got a Gaelic version here. The Brazilian government have recently endorsed Lulu. Because of poverty in the country, people don't have cash to buy books, so the government provide a lot of books and Lulu is going to be one of them.'

It's a fitting endorsement for the charming little girl who loves books, loves life, and gives so much pleasure to her young readers.

Mike Farren is a freelance writer based in West Yorkshire.

[Lulu Loves the Library](#) [4], [Lulu Loves Stories](#) [5] and [Lulu Loves Flowers](#) [6], by Anna McQuinn and Rosalind Beardshaw are published by **Alanna Books**. Thanks to **Alanna Books** for this splendid [Lulu poster](#) [7] to promote reading, free to download for **Books for Keeps** readers.

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