

To say I have loved poetry since I was a child may sound a little banal. It's true, though. I don't remember my first introduction to poetry, but the fact that, when I had my own children, I was able to summon up scores of nursery rhymes to sooth and amuse them suggests that my parents, and maybe my grandparents, judging by the fact that several of them were in Scots dialect, did a pretty good job of inculcating the power of rhyme and rhythm in me at an early age.

The book that I remember making a huge difference to me, though, was *The Book of a Thousand Poems*, published by Evans. It was a dumpy little hardback bound in red with an abstract pink and blue plant on a purple ground on the white cover. I can see it in my mind's eye now. And, if I were at home, I could see the real thing, with the inscription, "To Katie, from Mummy and Daddy, on her seventh birthday." But I didn't leap on the book instantly: it was really, really thick; a thousand poems felt daunting to me at seven, rather than inviting; and it had no pictures. I left it on the shelf. Until, one day, I can't remember why, I opened it... and that was that. My copy is still stuffed with tiny scraps of coloured paper, marking my favourite poems, and I would move them around in the book as some of the poems overtook others in my affections, while some dropped away. I could recite many of them still.

The book was given to me when I lived in a small two-bedroomed bungalow on the outskirts of Edinburgh. Though the house was small, the garden was huge – of course, probably more enormous in memory than it would seem now. I spent hours in that garden. I learned to skip there, and to juggle. Teddies and dolls had pretend teas on the grass, where you could also practice cartwheels and headstands. It was the seventies, so there was an orange space-hopper that lived in the shed, with a slightly terrifying, grinning face printed on it, that could be bounced carefully down the narrow, concrete paths.

And, of course, there were plants and animals. There were daisies for daisy chains. There was a fuchsia that you could make into a ballet dancer if you plucked out all but two stamens from a single flower, leaving two thin legs and yellow-powdered, tip-toed feet, and used the stalk as arms. There was an apple tree that was made for climbing and a lilac tree whose scent was a May magnet to me. There was a holly tree with a carpet of skeleton leaves underneath it. You could taste all the plants, even though you weren't supposed to. Roses and goldenrod were sweet, and so were daisy stems though they were also oddly metallic. Privet leaves and dandelion sap were horribly bitter. You were never, never, never to eat laburnum or foxglove, and if you were tempted to put the foxglove flowers on the tips of your fingers when no-one was looking – and who isn't tempted to put foxglove flowers on the tips of their fingers when no-one was looking? – you had to wash your hands afterwards, or your heart would stop. There were beetles and flies and wasps and bees and worms and slugs and snails and caterpillars to pick up and peer at and deposit back where you'd got them. There were blackbirds and robins and sparrows and thrushes and starlings. You could hear them loud every morning and often during the day. In spring, you could see nests. There was once a squirrel, and once, after a wet spell, a frog, and several times there were hedgehogs.

I grew up, then, with nature and with poetry. And I grew up to be a publisher, and I published many poetry books, including *A Poem For Every Day Of The Year*, which I published for the National Year of Reading in 1994 when I worked at Macmillan. I published many nature books, too, and I am truly proud of the many books inviting children into the natural world in different ways that Nosy Crow has published through its partnership with The National Trust.

But the book I am proudest and happiest to publish, I think, in that it is both the most ambitious book that I have published and one that is tied so closely to my childhood loves, is *I Am The Seed That Grew The Tree: A Nature Poem For Every Day Of The Year*. This has been a huge labour of love

that has taken years to put together. Fiona Waters, an enormously experienced anthologist with whom I have worked many times previously, collected an astonishing range of accessible and exciting nature poems, from the simplest of rhymes to Ted Hughes and WB Yeats, from Shakespeare to living poets, and from haiku to sonnets. The book covers the nature we find in the city, and the nature we find in the wildest places – forests and rivers and the sea. Most, but not all, of the poems were written, or recited if they weren't written, in English, but some poems in translation were irresistible.

We asked Frann Preston-Gannon to illustrate it. She's a young illustrator who was the first British recipient of the Maurice Sendak Fellowship, spending time with the legendary author and illustrator in his home before his death. She created full-colour art for every single spread of the book, sometimes pulling together up to four very different poems with a single visual image, and sometimes illustrating a single poem with a big, bold picture. It was a huge amount of work. She had a baby half-way through. I am not sure which was the more difficult labour and birth – her daughter or the book!

I felt from the beginning that this was a once-in-a-lifetime book. And one of the privileges of being an independent publisher is that you are answerable to no-one else if you decide to take a big risk and really push the boat out. I approached this in a spirit of building in the expectation that people would come, to misquote Field of Dreams. We chose lots of poems that are still in copyright, and we blew our permissions budget... and then our revised permissions budget... and then the next one and the next one. We made it a properly decent size, so that it's a perfect book for sharing with one or two children on your knee, or at bedtime, but not so huge that it's unwieldy. We made it bright and colourful on every page, so that there was something to seduce a child's eye. We quarter-bound it in real cloth, and argued amicably over the choice of the headband and tailband and ribbon-marker colours. We came up with cover design after cover design, refining and refining until we had something that was just right.

We publish on 6 September 2018. As I write this, we have finished copies of startling loveliness, but we don't know if anyone will buy it, so I write this with my heart in my mouth, a little. Now we can only hope that people – the people we made it for: children and parents and grandparents and other carers, and teachers and librarians – will love it as much as we loved making it.