

Date: April 2013

Author/Interview subject: Polly Dunbar (PD)

Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth (JF)

Other speakers: Audience (Aud)

In the puppet show:

Arthur (A), Mum (M), Dad (D), Brother (B), Narrator (N).

JF: Hello there, a very warm welcome to this very, very special Authors Live event with Polly Dunbar and Long Nosed Puppets. It's organised by the Scottish Book Trust in conjunction with BBC Scotland Learning and funded by Creative Scotland. I'm Janice Forsyth, hello, hi there and out there, yes I can...I think I can see you, out there on the high seas are thousands of pupils from schools the length and breadth of the UK including Leith Primary School in Angus, hi there. Renton Primary School in West Dunbartonshire, hello and Bowker Vale Primary in Manchester, hello to you too. And we have some real live children here too. If you want to look at them they are very gorgeous, they're going to wave to you right now. They are Pirie Park Primary from here in Glasgow, wave to them there. There they are. Aren't they beautiful? Very well behaved too. So what a wonderful, wonderful show we have for you today, you know that because it's going to be so special, not only do we get to meet the world famous author Polly Dunbar but, so exciting, we also get a fabulous puppet show of her very latest picture book, she's so wonderful. It's performed for us today by the amazing award winning Long Nosed Puppets. Before that though do you want to meet the author?

Aud: Yeah.

JF: Yes you do. A big huge round of applause please for Polly Dunbar.

Aud: [Round of applause].

JF: Welcome.

PD: Thank you very much.

- JF: Oh it's so nice to see you, how lovely.
- PD: Thank you for having me, it's lovely to be here.
- JF: Now we will have the puppet show which is going to be great but first look isn't this marvellous, but first of all we thought it would be good to ask a few questions of Polly just to find out how you become a world famous author. And one of the interesting things about you Polly is you had your first book published when you were really, really young?
- PD: Yes, I was...when I was 16, so a little bit older than you guys, when I was studying for my exams I...while I should have been revising I was drawing lots of pictures of cartoons of how difficult it was to take exams and it became a book called Help I've Forgotten My Brain and that was...yeah, that was quite a few years ago now but I was really, really lucky to start so young, yeah.
- JF: How marvellous.
- PD: But I started writing my very first book when I was about six or seven, so you're never too young, never too young to start.
- JF: Anyone here write books just now? Lots of hands going up, Polly, yes it's very impressive.
- PD: Yeah.
- JF: And so the first book was published when you were 16 and that's a few years ago now.
- PD: A few.
- JF: Have you kept a tally of how many books you've now had published?
- PD: Quite a few, I've written about 15 of my own but I also draw the pictures for my books so I'm an illustrator as well as an author. I've illustrated about 30 altogether, so quite a few over the years, yeah.
- JF: Wow! And what about the characters, we love the characters in Polly's books don't we? I wonder are they just completely out of your imagination or perhaps are some of them inspired or based on real people?
- PD: Oh well there's one book I've written called Penguin and it's about a little boy called Ben and a penguin that doesn't speak and the boy is based on my brother who is called Ben and he gave me a toy penguin. And it's based on my brother

when he was a little boy and he was quite happy about that which is good. Sometimes I think people aren't that pleased.

JF: Well he looks incredibly cute though it must be said. Is he as cute as that in real life?

PD: Bigger [laugh].

JF: Yeah, much bigger I'm sure. Now Tilly and Friends, I'm sure many people here and watching all round the country is now shown in CBeebies, what it is like to see your book on the telly?

PD: It's amazing, yeah, it's to see my characters that I've spent so long looking at and drawing and suddenly they move and they sing and they dance and it's like they've come to life and taken on a life of their own and it's so...yeah, I'm very, very, very happy with it, yeah.

JF: Well your characters are going to take on a life of their own very soon, in a few minutes when we see them with the puppets. So writing books and illustrating books is one thing moving into puppetry and all of that, what...tell us a little bit about this?

PD: Well me and my friend Catherine Morton from college were best friends and we studied illustration together and we love making things, we just loved working together and gluing and sticking and cutting and about seven years ago now we thought let's make a puppet show just for fun. So we made a book that's written by my mum Joyce Dunbar, Shoe Baby, into a show and we asked a very dear friend of ours, Tom Gray, to write some music and he wrote a brilliant, brilliant soundtrack and people came and it was great fun. So almost accidentally we set up Long Nosed Puppets.

JF: Wow. Do you like puppets?

Aud: Yeah.

JF: Have you ever made any puppets?

Aud: Yeah.

JF: Yeah, I'm sure wherever you're watching too puppets...you can make all sorts of puppets can't you?

PD: You can make them out of anything. In our first show we made an octopus out of an umbrella because we weren't taught how to make puppets we just have to make it up as we go along which is a lot of fun because you can be really, really

inventive, there are no rules as long as you give something character it comes to life so yes.

JF: Have you turned other books of yours then quite a few into puppets...?

PD: Yeah, there's been Shoe Baby and Penguin the one with my brother and Flyaway Katie and now Arthur's Dreamboat which is our most recent, yeah.

JF: And I must say this looks really beautiful but people could make puppet theatres out of...I suppose you could use an old cardboard box couldn't you?

PD: Well exactly, yeah. We've used a lot of papier-mâché, a lot of cutting and sticking, everything is handmade and hand stitched, it takes a long time to do but it's all handmade. And we're a group of friends so once we've made the puppets we get our friends Kirsty and Ant and Ozzy, they come along and they're talented actors and puppeteers and they make something that we've just stuck together, the way they make it move suddenly it comes to life. So it's a real skill to make an umbrella be a convincing octopus.

JF: I'm sure it is. And just thinking about the books for a minute because the illustrations are so beautiful but the words are so interesting too and there's a lot of interesting crazy stuff goes on in the books what comes first then, is it...do you have the story idea, do you do the words or do you start with the drawing?

PD: Well with this book Arthur's Dreamboat it started with a little drawing, I live by the sea in Brighton and on the coast and one day I saw a little boat very, very far off in the horizon and then there was a little boy on the beach and you know sometimes when things are very, very far away, they're very small and the boy walked just in front of the boat and it looked like it was on his head. And I was like huh that boy's got a boat on his head and no one else knows only I can see it. So I drew a little picture and it's a completely mad idea and...but then later I saw the picture in my sketchbook and I thought I'm going to write a story about that. So in that case, yeah, the picture came first which is...

JF: Because it is almost like a dreamlike story, it's fabulous.

PD: It's very, yeah, it's very dreamlike.

JF: How long does it actually take to write a story like this one?

PD: Oh well I wrote it and it was...took six years before it got published so it was a long time. But then when they decided that they were going to make it into a real book it takes me about three months to draw the pictures, once I get going I'm quite quick. I think if you do things quite quickly they have a lot of energy about

them but then it takes about six months to make a puppet show, it's a lot more work because you can draw a very quick character but then to actually make him three dimensional and move and that takes more time.

JF: Yeah, so it must be interesting actually because you see your books published which must be exciting, you see them here and you're part of that process but also in television. Is there one that's the most thrilling of all for you?

PD: Well they're all thrilling in different ways but there was something magic I think about a puppet show because you have a live audience and that's what you don't get with television, when there's actual people there. And the audience I think become a part of the show, there is a special atmosphere within a theatre that you can't beat anywhere I think so I love the...yeah. I do...

JF: So for all the people who are watching out there, all the children maybe in nurseries and primary schools right across the UK should they be sitting and watching this and behaving nicely in their classrooms as if they're just watching the television or should they become a bit more involved?

PD: Oh no, absolutely joining in is very, very important, becoming part of the show and as we say it's a dreamboat and there's room for everyone, so we all have to go on the journey with Arthur together.

JF: Are you looking forward to going on the journey children here?

Aud: Yeah!

JF: Do you think you might be doing a little bit of shouting and singing perhaps?

Aud: Yeah.

PD: I hope so.

JF: It's a lovely, lovely story. And we're going to be transported across the high seas, I'm not going to start feeling seasick at all I'm going to be really enjoying it, it's going to be such great fun. I'm going to be shouting and singing too I have to warn you. I'm not very good at singing. So wherever you are don't forget to really join in because just before we take our seats I need to say that lots and lots of bits in the show where you'll be asked to sing along, shout out or even Polly is it true, possibly do a bit of dancing?

PD: Well yeah, there is a...the mum you can do a bit of dancing along to her, yeah she's got some moves.

JF: Now you have a very pretty box here, just briefly is there something of interest in there?

PD: This is very special, there's a magic, magic shell in here and it always helps me to start to tell the story, here is it.

JF: Wow! Can you see it everybody?

PD: Does anybody know what happens if you hold a shell to your ear like that? Can you make the noise?

JF: Are you doing it out there too?

[Sea noise].

JF: Wow.

PD: Yes you can hear the sound of the sea and this is how the book starts with a shhhhhh and one more time shhhh, that's brilliant.

JF: So now we're all nice and calm I think it's time for the show to begin don't you? Shall we have a huge round of applause though, thank you very much Polly. Time for the show.

Aud: [Round of applause].

[Puppet show].

N: Ladies and jellyfish, boys and girls, welcome. Long Nosed Puppets present to you Arthur's Dreamboat.

[Singing song 0:11:02 – 0:12:08].

N: One night Arthur had a dream, it was amazing.

D: Arthur, time to get up.

A: What, I was just having a lovely dream about...[sleeping].

M: Arthur, are you out of bed? Lots to do today.

A: But the spotty sails are waving around [sleeping].

Dog: [Dog noises].

[Singing song 0:13:16 – 0:14:27].

N: Have you ever had a dream that is so special and seemed so real that it stays with you all day long? Well this was one of those.

A: Oh wow that was amazing.

Dog: [Dog noises].

A: Oh hello.

Dog: [Dog noises].

A: Last night I had this dream, I had this dream about a boat, this boat was pink just like your tongue and green it was, it was, it was brilliant.

Dog: [Dog noises].

A: Right, I'm going to go and tell everybody.

N: Arthur taking his dream with him went to find his big brother. See ya. The dreamboat began to grow.

Dog: [Dog noises].

N: Arthur's brother was in his bedroom, he was tapping out a familiar rhythm, you'll hear it in every house, every street, every office, all around the world, can you hear him? Tipperty, tapperty, tipperty, tapperty. How does it go? Tipperty, tapperty, tipperty, tapperty. Can you make that sound? Tipperty, tapperty, tipperty, tapperty, tipperty, tapperty.

[Singing song 0:16:30 – 0:17:36].

A: What?

[Singing song 0:17:40 – 0:18:17].

A: Huh?

[Singing song 0:18:23 – 0:18:57].

A: What?

[Singing song 0:19:02 – 0:19:20].

N: Oh look here comes Arthur now.

A: Hey, hey, over here, I've got this amazing thing to tell you. Hey, last night I had this dream. Oi, last night I dreamt about a boat. Are you listening? It was a pink

and green boat with a stripy mast. Oh, did you hear me? There were waves. Are you listening to me? Hello? Hellooo?

N: Arthur's big brother wasn't listening, he was far too busy tipperty tapping.

A: Oh, oh well, I'm going to tell mum about my dream, she will love it. Mum? Mum? Mum? Mum? Mum? Mum?

N: As Arthur searched for someone to listen his dreamboat grew even bigger.

[Singing song 0:20:42 – 0:21:07].

D: [Making dog noises].

N: Here's Arthur's mum. Like most mums she has a lot to do, Hoover the kids, feed the house, iron the floor, wash the postman and yet she always has a little something to sing about.

M: [Singing song 0:22:50 – 0:23:50].

A: Mum, there you are.

M: Yes, yes, la-de-dah.

A: You wouldn't believe this.

M: Yes, yes isn't that nice?

A: Mum, I'm trying to tell you something.

M: Lovely dear.

A: Last night I dreamt about a boat.

M: La-de-dah.

A: It was pink and green with a stripy mast.

M: La, la, la.

A: And lovely spotty sails.

M: Wonderful dear.

N: Arthur's mum wasn't really listening she was far too busy.

M: Who's with me?

[Singing song 0:24:30 – 0:25:41].

M: Right, it would be lovely if you could all sing with me, could you do that? Could everybody sing with me? Let's have a go.

[Singing song 0:25:50 – 0:26:26].

N: So Arthur went to tell his baby sister, perhaps she would listen. And do you know that very special boat got bigger and bigger. Arthur's sister was making a terrible mess of eating her breakfast, she was throwing the food around this way and that, can you hear her? Splitter, splatter, splodge, splitter, splatter, splodge. Can you make that sound? Splitter, splatter, splodge, splitter, splatter, splodge. Splitter, splatter, splodge, splitter, splatter, splodge. Here comes Arthur now.

[Singing song 0:27:20 – 0:29:09].

A: She's not listening, can you help me? Are you ready? I said hey.

Aud: Hey.

A: Let's try again. Make it louder this time. I said Hey!!!

Aud: Hey!

A: No, just one more time, okay. I said hey!

Aud: Hey!

A: Ah, she's not listening but the thing is...

[Singing song 0:29:33 – 0:30:01].

N: Arthur's sister wasn't listening, Arthur's sister was busy.

A: Perhaps dad will listen to me.

N: The boat grew ever bigger.

A: Dad. Dad? Dad? Dad? Dad?

[Singing song 0:30:27 – 0:31:10].

D: [making dog noises].

N: Oh look here's Arthur's dad.

Aud: [laugh].

N: Like most of us on occasion he enjoys a little time to himself, who can blame him?

[Singing song 0:32:53 – 0:35:26].

A: Dad, last night.

D: Huh?

A: Dad! It was amazing.

D: Mm.

A: Dad! Dad! I had this dream. Hello? Dad! I'm here. Dad! It was a pink and green boat. Dad! Lovely spotty sails. Dad, with a stripy mast. Dad! Golden flag. Dad, and a beautiful figurehead. Dad!

D: [Sighs].

A: Listen to me! I'm trying to tell you about my dreamboat!

N: Arthur's brother stopped going to tipperty tap. Arthur's mum stopped going ho-ha-la-de-dah. Arthur's sister stopped going splitter, splatter splodge. And Arthur's dad stopped reading his paper and listened. They all stopped and listened. Shhhh. They could hear the sound of the sea. Shhh, can you make that sound? Shhh. Everyone make the sound of the sea.

Aud: Shhh.

N: Shhh. Shhh. And the boat got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger until it was big enough for Arthur. Whoosh! Waves swirled all around.

[Singing song 0:38:00 – 0:38:14].

N: Waves crashed.

Dog: [Making dog noises].

D: Arthur, lovely boat.

A: What was that?

D: Lovely boat.

A: Yeah, I know, thanks.

B: Nice ride bro.

A: Now you tell me.

B: No worries.

M: Darling, Arthur, the water's awfully cold your sister's soaked through, sweetie can we get in?

N: Arthur thought, hmm. Should he let them on his boat?

[Singing song 0:39:16 – 0:39:44].

N: Arthur's voice is very small and the sea is very big. Arthur's family can't hear him, can we help? After three let's all shout all aboard. Are you ready? One, two, three.

Aud: All aboard!

N: All aboard! Arthur, was that loud enough?

A: No, I don't think so. They didn't hear us.

N: All right, let's try harder, are you ready? One, two, three...

Aud: All aboard!

N: All aboard! Arthur's family climbed aboard.

D: Hey give me a hand.

M: Take your sister first that's it.

D: Oh I'm in.

M: Oh that dog, here's a towel.

A: Budge up.

D: Careful now.

B: Move along.

A: There's enough room.

M: This is a lovely dreamboat.

D: You kept this quiet.

Dog: [Making dog noises].

N: And do you know that dreamboat was big enough for everyone.

[Singing song 0:41:10 – 0:42:05].

M: Sway with us.

A: Come on everybody.

D: That's it, we're all on the same boat.

[Singing song 0:42:15 – 0:43:45].

Aud: [Round of applause].

N: One night Arthur had a dream and it really was amazing.

[Playing song 0:44:02 – 0:44:35].

Aud: [Round of applause].

[Playing song 0:44:44 – 0:45:07].

JF: Wow! How good was that? Wasn't that fantastic? How much did you enjoy that?

Aud: Yeah!

JF: And we were all swaying along. Were you swaying along wherever you are? I know you were, yes, lovely to see you. Always such great fun. Guess what, sadly that's just about it for today. Awww, isn't it sad? But I would just like to remind you that you can watch all of the previous Authors Live events including this one and download all the free learning resources, your teachers will tell you all about that at the website actually which is, scottishbooktrust.com/authorslive. And big excitement for the last event before the summer holidays we're stepping back in time with the actor/TV star/archaeologist/historian and author of the Weird World Wonders books Tony Robinson. So that's on Thursday 6th June and that event's suitable for upper primary school classes, so tell all your friends by email, text, carrier pigeon, however you like to do it. And Polly will be taking part in a Glow meet at 1:30 this afternoon for any schools in Scotland who want to find out even more about her and her books, so please do join in. Check out the hat, she's got her own boat, isn't it fabulous? Isn't that wonderful? So just before we go and say goodbye, I think we should have another huge round of applause for Polly and the wonderful Long Nosed Puppeteers, are they going to come back and wave to us?

Aud: [Round of applause].

JF: Thank you very much, bye bye.