

Sophy Henn Q&A

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You have a new picture book character, making her debut in February 2017. How did the idea for Edie come about?

Edie just sort of popped into my head, pretty much fully formed. I think she is an amalgamation of lots of little girls, the ones who lead from the front in the playground/at nursery. There are always characters who are VERY busy, organising everyone and helping out whether you want them to or not. I love that spirit and can do attitude, which doesn't often last in such an undiluted form once peer pressure and self-awareness kick in. I wanted to celebrate it and its unfailing positivity.

Was it difficult to choose her name and decide what she'd look like, wear etc.?

No! It's a look my daughter and her cousin wore a lot as little girls, the tutu with a jersey top, falling down socks and Mary-Janes, a fairly classic little girl look. I particularly like the spreads where it is embellished from the dressing up box. We've all seen/lived the jeans, jumper, wellies and princess dress look at the supermarket. I'm just trying to figure out what the grown up equivalent is and then giving that a whirl myself! And the whole look is topped off with a lovely pom pom, because I love pom poms!

Is Edie similar to you or anyone you know?

I'd like to think we are all a little bit Edie, well-meaning and earnest.

What are the best and worst things about being an author-illustrator?

I love my job and cannot believe how lucky I am! I get to think up characters & stories, then draw them...everyday! I work from home which is very handy as I can fully indulge my tea habit without fear of judgement from any office mates! Also I can wear comfy clothes which I believe is now known as athleisure!

When I do leave the house to do events it is always thrilling to see children react to your books. I really love the age group that I work with, they don't pull any punches and you know when you are losing the room! Conversely when they are enjoying the event you know it's genuine and that feeling is amazing. I have a big cardboard Pom Pom that I take to events now and when the audience filed in a little boy started hopping around pointing at it cheering "Pom Pom, Pom Pom!". I won't lie, it made me a bit emotional, in a good way!

Another awesome aspect of my job is working with some extraordinarily talented and very lovely people, which is a delight and very motivating. I have met my heroes and found some new ones, and can honestly say by and large everyone has been completely lovely!

The only slight downside I can think of is the fact you are always at work, I am trying to get better at having strict working hours, but when your brain won't comply and your

studio is in your house it can be tricky! Oh and the admin, but then we all hate admin don't we?

Name one thing about you which people may be surprised to learn

I love to tap dance! It's been a while as I can't find a class nearby, but I loved the classes I did a while ago. It was a group of mums in a church hall (crucially there were no mirrors), and if we behaved ourselves we were allowed to use the canes and wear the sparkly bowler hats! Heaven!

Who has been an inspiration to you, personally and professionally?

My daughter has been my main inspiration. The fun I had reading to her when she was little and seeing the joy she got from books inspired me to try my hand at writing and illustrating. Lauren Child's Charlie and Lola had just been published and we both loved it, which always makes storytime all the more pleasant! The voice of Charlie, the style of illustration and the everydayness of the stories were all hugely inspiring, there was nothing like them out there at that time, not that I was aware of anyway. As a designer who dabbled in illustration (that's what I was then) I was genuinely excited by them, it was a style of picture book that not only did I really enjoy (there were lots of those) but I could visually relate to as well. Since working in this industry I am constantly inspired by the amazing talents I get to rub shoulders with, how utterly encouraging and genuinely lovely they are. Cheesy but true!