

## Cathy MacLennan Extended Biography

I was born in Zimbabwe, spending my early childhood (mostly outside) observing the fascinating and exciting landscape, wildlife and of course an entirely different culture and way of life. My first big artwork was completed, at age 6, on the outside wall of our very white house, using coloured flower petals and other things from the garden crushed in a pestle and mortar (I was shown how to do this by the African children that I played with.) I was thrilled by the result, but my parents were not.

We moved to England when I was 8 years old. I have lived in the Reading area ever since. On leaving school, I studied fashion and textile design at The Berkshire College of Art and Design, specialising in textile design. I really enjoyed the course, gaining a lot of skills, but I did not find the fashion world to my liking.

In 1981, I married my husband Andy, then returning to the Berkshire College of Art and Design to study photography (a very good subject for a future mural artist, as light is very important in mural painting, but this was not my intention at the time.)

On completing the course, I set up a commercial photographic studio and business with a fellow student, providing images for advertising agencies and corporate clients for the next five years. The company is still in business, although I am no longer a partner.

I then took eight years break, to bring up my two boys, Christopher and Michael. It was during this time that I returned to the idea of mural painting. I had been painting murals on and off, for friends and family etc., since I was seventeen, but just for fun. I started to paint nurseries and children's rooms part-time. This was followed by larger commissions and in 1999 I set up Cerulean Blue specialising in 'hand-painted' interiors. This is my current occupation. Although I am asked to paint all the popular mural themes such as Mediterranean vistas, seascapes and skies, I actually prefer to work on children's rooms and enjoy trying to bring a storybook quality to the paintings, as opposed to simply depicting favourite characters.

I work from a studio at the end of the garden (we live in a very noisy, active house – both of my sons are musical, along with their friends) and it is a lovely place to get inspired and work on my own ideas for children's books or paintings.

My own work is very influenced by African art and culture. I like the bold use of colour and the striking use of black and white as colours in their own right. I like the use of pattern and the way that ordinary, everyday, cheap or free materials are used in African art as opposed to the expensive paints, papers and canvases etc. that are generally used here. I also like the way that African art is used to decorate basic things such as the outside walls of simple houses, ordinary furniture, textiles, cooking utensils etc. and not put ceremoniously, in a frame, on a wall.

The artwork that I have produced for *Chicky Chicky Chook Chook* uses these influences as the illustrations are done on ordinary brown packing paper using bold colours teamed with black and white.

- Cathy MacLennan