

1. All your books and your characters have a lot of freedom. The way they live and the way we see them (my daughter is saying it depends on who sees and I agree, anyway...). Do you think that freedom is the main subject of your work? Emily loves to Bounce (or Duda adora Pular, in Portuguese), is specially about this, about freedom?

I don't focus on freedom. I love philosophy and abstract thought. I guess little pieces of me unintentionally escape into my stories. I only try to make beautiful books. When I write, I play. I have fun with words. The characters in my books often have bare feet and are exploring windy hills or big trees. I paint what I call "interior spaces" and "exterior spaces". The interiors are introspective, exteriors expressive. If my characters are inside they are more than likely trapped or closed off from what is important in their lives. Everything wonderful happens in the wide open spaces.

I think creativity lives in a special place between what's correct and what's wrong. It's a place where there are no green ticks or red crosses, only exploration without judgement. That's where I find all my ideas. My characters are always living in or searching for that place too.

2. Is Emily (or Duda) somebody you know, someone who has inspired you?

When I write, I'm unaware that I'm basing my characters on anyone. I just write. As time goes by I become aware that my life is sprinkled throughout all my books. Emily's joyous bouncing was my energetic 4-year-old daughter with her boundless imagination in tow. Pedro and Tina (My wife and I). O Homem que Amava Caixas (my father and I), etc, etc.

3. Why mummy and daddy's bed is always the best place to bounce?

There is no place better. Especially if Mum and Dad are sleeping-in and need waking up! I wasn't allowed to bounce on my mum and dad's bed. But I always did. I was never punished unless my dad caught me and tickled me to death.

4. The book Leaf (Folha, in Portuguese), without writings, Is a way to amplify the possibilities of understanding and dreaming in the reading?

If I remove my hearing aids and walk around my property watching, without sound; the world becomes a different place and I observe the details. That's what I was hoping for with Leaf. I hoped that the reader would become deaf to the noise of words and easily switch on their inner voice. The silence in Leaf is very special. Leaf has an openness that allows different people to discover their own essence within the story. They can make the story their own. Words would have closed it off to one idea.

Some people have suggested that it's about spirit, others creativity/intuition, some see it as a straight environmental book. The part in the book where the boy has his severe haircut has had various reactions from readers. The first extreme being that the boy reminds them of a Buddhist monk . . . the other extreme, a Holocaust victim. That's exactly what I was hoping for. Ultimately the book ends at the same place but everyone's journey is different.

5. Your books don't have a big conflict to justify them. I mean, you, fortunately, doesn't seem to be worried, during your writings and drawings, to have a big moral lesson, but feeling, a lot of feeling. Do you think that this is the best way to touch people, especially children?

I'm an emotional person. I remember how I've felt with everything I've done in life, more than places or things. I remember how I felt on the mountain top, but possibly not how I got there. If I read a book I remember how it made me feel, but I might not be able to recall the details of the story. It's just me. When I write it comes from an emotional centre. I always hope that people feel differing emotions when they read my stories and from your question . . . it seems they do.

6. In your site, you said you didn't want to grow up, but it happened, anyway... What do you do keep your childish self?

When I was a kid I looked at grown-ups as sad and serious. Grown-ups sit around and talk instead of playing

imaginary games, or sit on the beach instead of swimming all day. I'm now a grown-up. I have to admit I like to sit around and talk and sometimes I don't swim all day. I have children, responsibility and deadlines. But I try to remember the best parts of my childhood. Security, freedom, cuddles and pets . . . being listened to. I work and live at home in a job where I can have bare feet. My imagination takes me on many journeys. I also allow myself time to play. Playing with ideas, with my children and family, with my dogs, with the sky . . . I love spontaneous affection, giving and receiving.

7. You also said you dislike social uniformity. Does your books try to help kids to go out this kind of jail?

I love wiggly lines, curves and unpredictability. So I try to avoid uniformity as it often leads to monotony. I don't know if my writing helps kids get out of that kind of jail. No proof there. I might quietly like to think my books are a small voice helping children to nurture their intuition, nourish their true selves and hold onto their hearts' desire. If not, hopefully my books are a fun read and when this generation of children grow up they might remember the feelings they felt whilst reading my books.

8. How old are your kids? Do they help with your writings? Do they draw as well?

My kids inspire me to play. They're more likely to talk me into not working and going to the beach instead of helping me to write. I guess I'm not an author/illustrator who needs constant quiet. My children (now ages 9 and 12) have always been welcome in my studio. They use my art materials, make cubbies, interrupt me whenever they want. I love it! I bounce lots of ideas off them. My daughter and son have painted little parts of my illustrations. Maybe Emily's purple hat or a dog's nose, little things. They are both good drawers (no training, just lots of paper and pencils to play with). My family appear in all my books. As I've said, "often I don't realise I'm writing or illustrating them until after I've finished". I blindly think they're original characters.

9. What do you want to write about, that you haven't written yet?

No idea, I just write when an idea pops into my head and I see where it takes me. I write lots of silly things. Book ideas emerge in their own good time.

The book I'm working on now is different to all my others. It won't be silent like Leaf. There will be words but no human or animal characters. I'll be using shapes instead! The sort of shapes Milli (Ana, Guto eo Gato Dancarino) would make or paint. I don't want to say too much except that it's risky business and fun (the marketing department would prefer another Vira Lata). People who have seen the story are surprised at how much feeling can come from shapes . . . hopefully Brazil buys it. If they don't, let me know and when it's printed, I'll send you a copy .

10. Have you ever been to Brazil? Would you like to visit our country? (It would be a pleasure!)

I receive more letters from Brazil than anywhere else in the world. But, so far, I'm not a world traveller. My books are all over the globe, but I mostly stay at home and draw. My agent would like me to one day go to Italy. An American publisher wants me to go to New York. I was once invited to open a bookshop in Korea. Still, I stay at home and draw.

I am planning to travel with my family in the next few years. I promise I will put Brazil on my list.