

Cup Cakes, Doctor Who and a Puffin.

Part of the world of

Jenny Colgan

Jenny Colgan was born in Prestwick, Ayrshire where she grew up and enjoyed a disciplined, traditional childhood. A quiet bookworm, she never dreamed of earning a living as a writer – that aim would never have been tolerated. But she tried hard to do well and studied at Edinburgh University before she drifted down to London for six years, working in the NHS and moonlighting as a cartoonist and a stand-up comic. Devising her own material, and consistently revising the script, gave her more satisfaction than the ‘bread and butter’ job so she resolved to write a novel. At this time, in 2000, the book *Bridget Jones’ Diary* was being well received in the market place so Jenny was hopeful that her debut novel – a romantic comedy, *Amanda’s Wedding* would be accepted by a publisher and find a place on the country’s bookshelves. Happily her writing took off. Since 2011 she has continued to write, single stand alones (at least one a year) as well as adding to two series, *Cupcake Café* and *Rosie Hopkins’ Sweetshop*, all under her own name.

Jenny confessed that she is a terrific fan of *Doctor Who*. She remembered watching episodes as a child with the rest of the family, especially when Peter Davison was playing the Doctor. “I clearly remember ‘The City of Death’ with the Eiffel Tower looming over everything as the Mona Lisas were revealed. – I got such a cold, shivering feeling of fright – so imagine my delight when I was asked to write for the *Doctor Who* line of stories!” She is passionate about this literary and audible Whoniverse having already contributed *Dark Horizons* and *Into Nowhere* for the eleventh Doctor and also *A Long Way Down* and *All the Empty Towers* for the twelfth. BBC Books commissioned *In The Blood*, which led to the question if writing these sci-fi stories created extra pressure? “Not really” was her



reply. “There’s different tension because there are stricter criteria about what you can and can’t do. With *Doctor Who* you’re sharing the world with everyone. In my own novels I can do what I want – everything belongs to me. And I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Jenny is married to a Kiwi, an All Blacks fan who is a marine engineer. They lived in the Netherlands when their first son, Wallace, was born. He went to a nursery there and naturally picked up a working knowledge of the Dutch language. When their second son, Michael-Francis, was a baby they moved to the South of France, to Juan Les Pins. The two boys attended a French primary school and painlessly learned to speak the language fluently and to behave impeccably. Jenny could not fault their early learning and emphasised what a good start to

life they had enjoyed from the rigour and structure imposed on them as young children. They were taught to read, drilled in grammar and mathematics, and they had to learn a poem each week from memory. Her daughter, Delphine, went to a French nursery and speaks French confidently. The family moved back to Scotland, when she was two, as they wanted to be nearer their relatives, and she began her education here. All three children were enrolled in the local primary school but were horrified to discover a lunch break of forty minutes. In France they had enjoyed a break of one or two hours which included a three/four course lunch every day.

Although Jenny’s husband is not a reader for pleasure, Jenny has shared books and stories with all three children since they were born. European and British picture books were pored over. Jenny confessed that her all time favourite picture book is Jon Klassen’s *I Want My Hat Back*. The boys enjoyed sharing *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, but didn’t want to read the

rest of the series. They also both enjoyed *Little House on the Prairie* too. Jenny enjoyed *Alice In Wonderland* as a child. She loved the comedy and the sound of the language and she was delighted and surprised when Delphine at the age of six labelled it one of her best-ever books. The boys now choose independently. *The Hunger Games* was devoured by Wallace, which he read in French, and moved on through the subsequent titles. Asterix is always available and anything with zombies satisfies him now. For Michael-Francis *The Wimpy Kid* is favoured, especially the wacky illustrations. Peer pressure exerts quite a hold nowadays – particularly towards titles by David Walliams.

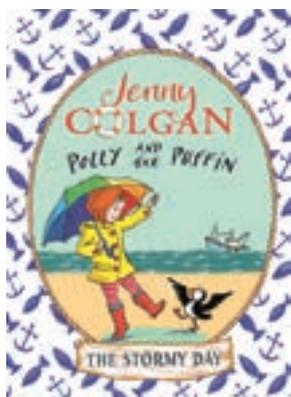
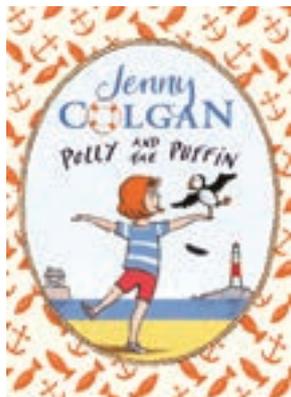
Delphine enjoys short stories about a particular character, such as in *Milly Molly Mandy* and *My Naughty Little Sister*. These old fashioned, charming tales thrilled Jenny as a child and they have influenced the sort of story she wants to write for younger inexperienced readers. Her first story, *Polly and the Puffin*, is all about a wild bird, Neil, which also featured in her recent novel, *Little Beech Street Bakery*. It is perfect to snuggle down with at bedtime and easily accessible to children who are beginning to feel able to decode print alone. At the end of the book there are a few silly ‘puffin’ jokes that are sure to amuse young readers who will soon know them

off by heart. The activity suggestions will also encourage those children who are less than keen readers (but who are more of a creative nature) to keep on going. Award winning illustrator, Thomas Docherty was chosen to illustrate the story. Although

Jenny has never met him she felt that he would do justice to her ideas. She originates coloured sketches for him, with the text, and Thomas breathes life into them. A second book in the series, *The Stormy Day*, continues with more appropriate activities to enhance the story. There are rhymes – easily committed to memory – which provide easy recitations for party time presentations as well as simple recipes to try.

Jenny Colgan’s work schedule is certainly hectic, but her relaxed attitude is based on an orderly routine. The family retain a base in France, an apartment in London and home is an Edwardian castle half an hour from Edinburgh. A convenient gym nearby enables her day to start well, after she has taken the children to school. Then it’s back to the peace and quiet at base to continue with her writing until teatime and the children’s return.

David Blanch



Published by Little, Brown
Polly & the Puffin. £5.99 ISBN 978-0349131900
Polly & the Puffin: The Stormy Day. £5.99 ISBN 978-0349131924

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