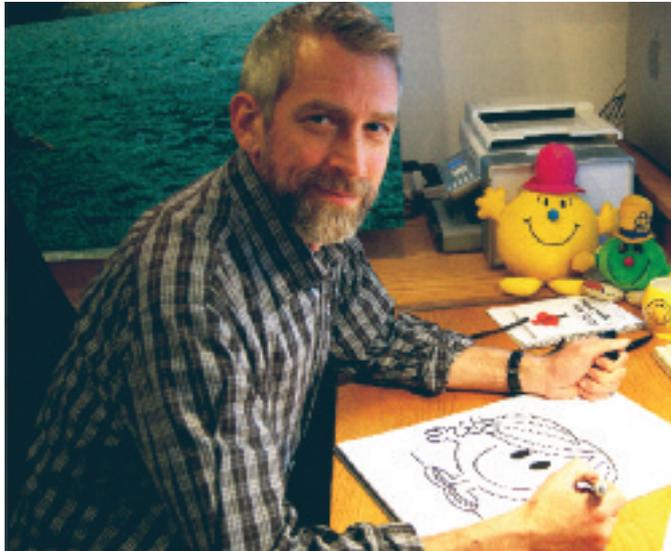


Adam Hargreaves

Fulfilling an Ambition



There can be very few adults and children who are not acquainted with the phenomenally successful *Mr Men* and *Little Misses* series. So, I was delighted to be given the opportunity to talk to Adam Hargreaves, who, since his father's death, has been the writer and illustrator of these best-selling books, and who shortly will be launching his own series.

It is fitting that Adam was Roger's successor, because, aged six, he asked his father what a tickle looked like. His father thought for a moment, then started doodling and Mr Tickle was created. I wondered if Adam was tired of being referred to as 'son of Roger Hargreaves'. The warmth with which he talks about his father, makes it immediately clear he takes a lot of pride in his father's ideas and being able to continue them. "My father would have been surprised but chuffed and I'm very grateful for it, because it has provided me with a fantastic job for thirty years. I still love it and I get to do what I like doing."

Initially, Adam found it a difficult task to draw the characters, but by studying the drawings and the books, and endless practice, he could replicate his father's characters and create more of his own such as Mr Cool and Little Miss Bad. He also spent a lot of time reading and re-reading the stories to get a sense of how they were told.

Forty-six years on, the books are as popular as they have always been, so I



asked Adam what he thinks makes them so appealing and why they remain one of the top-selling series? Adam believes that this is principally down to the idea of personifying human emotions and characteristics. They are characters that everybody can understand and relate to, particularly small children, combined with his father's unique simple drawings. They cross language and cultural barriers - everyone understands happiness or grumpiness - and work across a whole range of different age groups in multiple ways. "Everyone can identify a bit of themselves in each of the characters. They have become culturally part of Britain; there is always a Mr Men being referred to." Asked which one he would describe himself as, Adam admitted to being Mr Forgetful, to which he noted that everybody in his family would agree.

If he hadn't been 'thrust into it', would he have considered entering the world of children's books? "I had an ambition to, but whether I would have done so, is anybody's guess. From a very young age, I have always drawn relatively well. It was something I loved doing and because of my father being who he was, the idea of children's books was not a mad idea. I had been farming for six years, but my interest in farming was waning just before he died and I wanted to do something more creative."



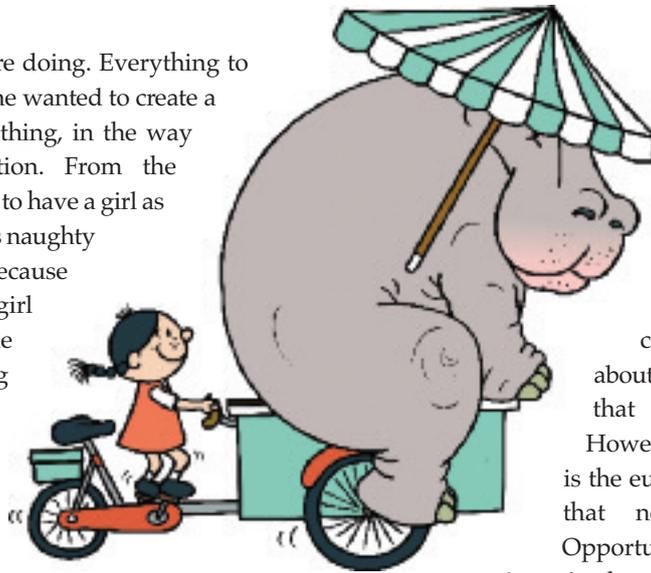
The *Mr Men* and *Little Misses* continue to be a large part of Adam's working life. In April, a new *Dr Who* mash-up series, written in the iconic style of the *Mr Men*, was launched. Yet more exciting is the fact that Adam is also fulfilling a long-held ambition for his own stories to be published. Pavilion Children's Books have acquired his first series that does not involve the *Mr Men* or *Little Misses*. I was curious to find out why his own series and why now?

"I guess it is a very long-held ambition. I did write a number of stories, particularly around the time when I took over *Mr Men*, but couldn't find a publisher for them, and then *Mr Men* became full-time, so it wasn't until 2004, when we sold the company, that I could pursue some of my own wishes, painting being one of them (Adam paints fantastically detailed, realistic landscapes.) and writing a children's book of my own, which I badly wanted to be able to do."

An idea had been developing for about six years, taking different forms and going through quite a few changes. Adam was particularly interested in children's imagination and how

they really believe in what they are doing. Everything to them is so real. With this in mind, he wanted to create a child character that could do anything, in the way children can in their imagination. From the beginning, it was Adam's intention to have a girl as the main character, someone who is naughty and strong willed. "Probably because Jessica was my first child, so a girl seemed quite natural for the character." With some prompting from Neil Dunncliffe at Pavilion, he realised that his character could just do these extraordinary, silly, mischievous things, such as take an elephant home on the bus if they wanted to.

Adam always wanted to write a series. "I've always been involved with a series, so it seemed natural, and I wanted something that could work across lots of titles." The first book in a series of three titles, *Molly Mischief...My Perfect Pet*, is scheduled for release in August 2017. In this story, Molly visits the Zoo and begins thinking about what sort of pet she would really like to have. A hippopotamus is too muddy, a giraffe too tall and an elephant too large. Molly's mission is to find the perfect pet, with plenty of mischief and mayhem along the way. The second and third books again feature Molly Mischief and will



follow in 2018 - *My Super Powers* and *My Perfect Job*.

For Adam, it is the fun that a child will get from his stories that is important. "When writing *Mr Men* stories, they sometimes have a moral - Mr Grumpy gets his comeuppance. *Molly Mischief* is about humour. If it makes a child giggle, that is what I want to achieve."

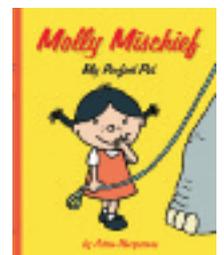
However, there is more to the story. Big is the euphemism for better. Molly learns that not everything big is best. Opportunities are given for children to

learn for themselves, including developing their language. On one page synonyms for big are emphasised. Adam is a great advocate of using long words in context that allows children to understand as well as having fun with language.

Although still retaining some characteristics of his father's style of illustration for *Molly Mischief*, Adam produces more realistic illustrations. Having developed a technique using felt tip he wanted to maintain that style, so he sketches in black pen, then traces a clean line in black felt pen. Finished illustrations are scanned onto the computer to colour in, as he likes the flat colour this produces. Adam admits to being quite impatient working quickly and rarely going back to change things. "I have an accurate mind's eye of how I want it to look, so I don't use endless sketches to get to composition. I can see it, draw it and get it right."

Adam is conscious of the adult reading the story and hopes there is something in the book for them as well - "a dreadful pun can be amusing to all ages." It is something he says his dad was very good at. In *Molly Mischief* he hopes that he is telling the story in a way that is enjoyable to read. When reading to his own children, there were some stories he dreaded because the language was stilted and didn't flow well, something that cannot be said of Adam's writing.

Roger Hargreaves had always been keen that his children had an ambition, but as a 'pig-headed teenager' Adam had said he didn't have one. He has since discovered that he has determination driven by ambition and wants the stories of Molly to continue for a long time. "As long as the publishers will let me and readership allows me. I really want to pursue Molly as far as I am allowed to." With great excitement, we look forward to further mischief and mayhem from Molly.



Debbie Wiggett



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