

Zaro Weil

An authentic voice



Zaro Weil's latest collection of poetry, *Cherry Moon*, has been described as thought provoking, and delightfully original. She says, "writing *Cherry Moon* was an extraordinary year for me. Really hard, but completely joyous".

Cherry Moon has the subtitle 'Little Poems, Big Ideas, Mindful of Nature'. Zaro's reason for her chosen theme comes from both being close to nature and the search for authenticity. "As writers," she reflects, "we are searching for something that means something, that has some truth to it. When you cut away everything else you are left with a blossom in the spring, or a cloud in the sky and those are the things that to me feel the most authentic in the world and so, I'm drawn to writing about them." Zaro also cites living on a farm in France as an important influence, after previously having lived in the city. "I was so excited to see all these animals ... I was very influenced by that and so a lot of my poetry is really nature-centred. I didn't mean it to be, it just happened."

Remembering writing her first poem at seven years old, she stated that moments like these, "make a deep impression on you, in ways that we really don't understand". Her big break came after putting on the play *Mud Weavings* with her theatre dance group in America, for which she wrote poems and songs. Having come to London, she met up with a literary agent and offered him her poems. This resulted in Orchard Books publishing Zaro's first poetry book *Mud, Moon and Me* (1988) and she hasn't looked back since.

Zaro has been inspired by poets such as William Carlos Williams and Carl Sandburg. She likes to play with words and admits to being stimulated by whom she read last. "When I was working on my last book, I'd just been reading Robert Macfarlane. I was thunderstruck by the way he was explaining old language usage, and the way that people would take single words and make them double words and change the order of things to accentuate, like 'upbubbles'. I love the word 'upbubbles', instead of bubbling up, it makes you feel like a bubble. I'm very careful about who I choose to read, because I know they are going to make an impact on me in some way." She continues, "I kind of collect the poems together after I've written them, but when I know I'm heading down a certain path I see all the things that relate to that path."

Having no problems when it comes to finding the time to write, she has an App on

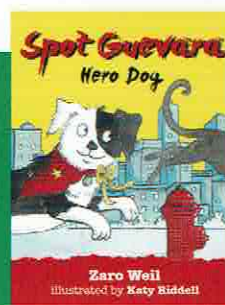
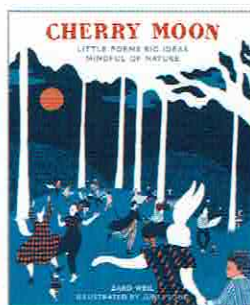
her phone that enables her to write anywhere. "It doesn't matter if it's crowded or noisy or I'm home and sitting in a cabin in the woods." She also has a trick for overcoming writer's block, by going back to something that she's written to see if she can rewrite it. "You have to think about tiny little words. Every one of them has to be so well articulated and thought about. Once you start with language again, coming back to it after an hour or two, then it's much easier."

Cherry Moon features beautiful artwork by the illustrator Junli Song, who Zaro first encountered at the Bologna Book Fair two years ago. "I wandered into one of the art schools which had a stand there ... and suddenly I saw this young woman's art work and I just fell in love with it." Zaro and Junli collaborated very closely on the project via email and Skype, with ideas being shared between them.

Last year, inspired by her pet dog, Spot, Zaro published her first chapter book, *Spot Guevara*, illustrated by Katy Riddell, which she admits was a different experience to writing poetry. "When you are writing poetry," she says, "the poetry has to be really tight ... and so when I was working on *Spot Guevara*, I tried to use that same identification with prose. It took a while to flip my brain to narrative and to not let the sentences go on like a leggy geranium. I had to try hard to make narrative work in the same way that poetry works but be different and have a narrative drive." She easily found Spot's voice, "He is the sweetest doggy. I didn't have to go very far or work very hard!" She is currently working on a sequel where Spot finds himself in London, "but I can't reveal any more than that".

I asked Zaro if she had any useful advice to offer aspiring poets. Her answer is "Trust yourself. Don't judge your work while you are writing. Come back to it and judge it. Let it flow out from your heart and then you have to temper it and that's where the skill comes in."

Imogen Easton



Bibliography:

Published by Troika:

Cherry Moon illustrated by Junli Song
£14.00 ISBN: 978-1909991941

Spot Guevara: Hero Dog illustrated by Katy Riddell
£8.99 ISBN: 978-1909991897