Books have always been an important part of my daily life. I can’t remember not being able to read and I can’t imagine a life without reading. Reading reinforces your philosophies, makes you question your beliefs and opens a gateway to other worlds.

I love second-hand book shops. Some years ago I bought a pile of books in a shop in the Cotswolds. Among them was a copy of *Little Grey Rabbit* by Alison Uttley. Imagine my delight when I got home and found it was autographed by Uttley. And then, the most amazing treasure fell out! A little blue envelope with a six penny stamp contained a letter to Uttley from Eleanor Farjeon! The contents were a story in themselves – all about Farjeon’s garden. All this wondrous enjoyment for 50p! So, as they say, never judge a book by its cover!

As a child I spent most of my time exploring the local park and countryside, having adventures with my friends. I used to love the *Famous Five* stories by Enid Blyton as the children were always having exciting experiences outdoors. I also liked school stories about boarding schools – perhaps because my father was a teacher at Rugby School.

Sheila started writing for *Literacy Time* in 2005, contributing a short story called *A Fresh Start* for our Friendship issue for Years 3 and 4 (No 42). The main characters in this story, Sam and Katie, reappeared in *Perfect Timing* in The Second World War issue (*Literacy Time for Years 3 and 4*, No 46). Since retiring from teaching, Sheila has spent a great deal of her time travelling and, while in South Africa, found inspiration for *Sipho’s Dream*, which was published in the Big Cats issue of *Literacy Time for Years 5 and 6* (No 39).

The characters of Sam and Katie now star in Sheila’s illustrated book, *Fresh Start*, published January 2007 (ISBN 0955432901). The book contains six stories which can be read either independently or together as episodes in a longer tale. To order your copy or find out more, email nomedicas@hotmail.co.uk.
My most vivid memory of being read to comes from when I was seven. We had a new teacher called Miss Grey. She must have moved to Rugby from a different part of the country because she had a different accent to us. She read with great feeling and, at the end of the school day, read us *The Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling. The wonderful literature of Kipling read so well by Miss Grey with her strange accent is something I will never forget and I love his books still.

I don’t have a favourite book because so many have given me such pleasure. Different books suit different moods. When I’m travelling I like to read books written by authors from the country I’m in. If I’m feeling pensive and have a lot of time I love Thomas Hardy; the language he uses paints pictures for me. Recently I’ve discovered Anita Shreve and I was enthralled by her novel *Sea Glass*. It’s so beautifully written I know I shall read it again. I often reread a book and can’t throw a book away.

When I write for children I want them to feel the same way as I do and want to reread their favourite stories. I try to keep my stories simple but relevant to children today. I like to address the emotional literacy of childhood experience and bring some magic and fun into their lives. It’s sometimes difficult being a child in the 21st century and I hope I help children to acknowledge and address those issues. It’s also important for me to make people smile and I hope the antics of Muttley dog in my Katie and Sam stories do just that. He was our family dog and he had so many real adventures I could write a book just about him! Maybe that will be my next project!