

Literacy Time

Author Profile



TONY MITTON



That Tony Mitton's latest book for children is called **Party Animals** and features creatures like monkeys, hippos, gazelles, lions and

hyenas, should be no surprise when you know that the author was born in Africa in 1951.

Tony's father was an army officer, who helped organise supplies for the British Army troops stationed overseas. The family was living in Tripoli (in modern-day Libya) when Tony was born, and also spent time in Hong Kong and Germany during Tony's early childhood, where he went to

Literacy Time Ages 5-7
July 2007 (Issue 31), features an extract from Tony Mitton's *Party Animals* (Alison Green Books)

on Poster 1. His work has also appeared in the following back issues:



Literacy Time for Years 1&2

- Issue 15 – leaflet of his poems
- Issue 29 – poem 'Worm Words'

Literacy Time for Years 3&4

- Issue 4 – story *Jamie and the Shell*
- Issue 12 – story *Strange Rescue*
- Issue 30 – poem 'Dreaming the Unicorn'
- Issue 31 – poem 'Undersea Tea'
- Issue 41 – poem 'Rainforest Song'

Literacy Time for Years 5&6

- Issue 22 – poem 'Feather'



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a number of primary schools for services children.

Tony remembers little about his time in Africa or Germany, as he was so young when he lived there, but of his time spent in Hong Kong he recalls *'the babble of the markets, the smell of incense, the (for me) unusual foods, rides in rickshaws and sampans, visiting islands and Buddhist temples. It was a rich store of experiences.'*

When Tony was nine, his family moved to England and he went to a boarding school in Suffolk. He enjoyed reading – including *'masses of Enid Blyton'*, whose writing was extremely popular at the time, boys' adventure books and comics like *Radio Fun*, *Beano*, *Dandy*, *Wizard* and *The Eagle*.

Although he admits to having loved poetry, songs and stories from an early age, it was while Tony was at boarding school that his interest in writing blossomed. He particularly enjoyed drama and music lessons, and also liked doing writing assignments and reading in his spare time. By teen-age, Tony had started to write poetry regularly and, when he qualified for Cambridge University, he chose to study for a degree in English Literature.

Tony graduated then went on to train as an English teacher. However, he found teaching English at O' and A' Level too restricting and, longing for a position in which he could be more creative in his teaching, he decided to move into primary teaching. *'I just knew the primary school was a far better territory for the kind of teacher I wanted to be,'* explains Tony. *'I also found the have-a-go curiosity of upper primary school children extremely appealing.'*

When he became a father in his mid-thirties, Tony decided to teach part-time so that he could share the parenting with his wife. His reduced teaching hours also meant that he could devote more time to writing.

He began writing for children around the age of 40. Initially, he wrote purely for his own two children, but enjoyed it so much that he decided to try and get his work published. Success came in 1998, when Tony's first collection of poems, *Plum*, was published by Scholastic. This was followed by *The Red and White Spotted Handkerchief* (Scholastic) that won the Nestle Smarties Silver Medal in 2000, *Pip*



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(Scholastic), a Poetry Book Choice, and *Fluff and Other Stuff* (Orchard).

Tony has also had picture book success with titles like *Down by the Cool of the Pool* (Orchard) and the *Amazing Machines* series (Kingfisher) and also produced ten books of *Rap Rhymes* (Orchard Books) – humorous versions of well-known traditional stories.

Tony reads and enjoys books by many other contemporary children's authors and illustrators. For older children's fiction he said that he admires Roald Dahl, Philip Pullman, Geraldine McCaughrean, Gillian Cross, David Almond, Louis Sachar, Eve Ibbotson, Melvin Burgess and William Nicholson. 'And I even forgot to mention *J K Rowling, oops, didn't I?*' He would also like to get to know the work of Linda Newbery and Jamila Gavin.

He also loves picture books, and has particularly enjoyed titles by Julia Donaldson ('*Her plotting and her verse style are both masterful*'), Maurice Sendak, Jeff Brown, Jeanne Willis, Martin Waddell, Hiawyn Oram, Allan Ahlberg and admires the work of authors/illustrators like Quentin Blake, Lauren Child, Charlotte Voake, Guy Parker-Rees, Ant Parker,

Helen Oxenbury, John Lawrence, James Mayhew and Shirley Hughes.

In poetry, Tony admires Michael Rosen, Roger McGough, Carol Ann Duffy, Charles Causley, John Agard, Jackie Kay, Kit Wright, Val Bloom and Gareth Owen and the Americans Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky. '*Oh, yes, Allan Ahlberg too. People forget to mention him as a poet because of his other work. And there are lots of very strong children's poets who don't have their own collections, but are actually very good lyric writers. Clare Bevan, for instance. And more recent names coming through like James Carter and Roger Stevens.*'

Past poets also have a very strong influence on him, especially Christina Rossetti, Eleanor Farjeon, Robert Louis Stevenson, AA Milne, Walter de la Mare and James Reeves. '*I feel their work chimes and echoes in the more recent Charles Causley.*'

Today, Tony lives in Cambridge with his family and writes full-time, but he still visits lots of schools, libraries and events to perform and talk about his work. His two children are now in their teens.

