



## Judith Kerr: A spellbinding writer and illustrator

Judith Kerr, who was born in Berlin in 1923, was the creator of the classic children's books 'The Tiger Who Came to Tea' and 'Mog the Forgetful Cat'. She was unusual in being equally successful as a writer and an illustrator. She always claimed that she was 'a very slow' illustrator and that her work was 'more rubbing out than drawing', but in her career she created more than 30 books, mostly about Mog, all of which have remained in print and which sell worldwide. 5

The bestselling 'The Tiger Who Came to Tea' (1968) was her first book. With bold illustrations, it tells the playful and imaginative story of how the everyday routine of a mother and her young daughter, Sophie, is disrupted by the unexpected arrival of a handsome stripy tiger. There is no panic; the tiger settles down to drink all the water and eat all the food, to Sophie's delight rather than terror, before leaving politely. When father comes home, he cheers mother and daughter up by taking them out to dinner. 10

Described as 'a dazzling first book' which would make children 'scream with delicious pleasure' by one of the earliest reviewers, it was a simple picture book that generated a lot of delight. Judith was frequently heard to say, in the nicest way possible: 'It's just the story of a tiger who came to tea. I made it up to amuse my children because we were bored and because their father was away filming for very long days at a time.' 15 20

It was also to entertain her own children that Judith wrote 'Mog the Forgetful Cat' (1970), the first of what was to become a hugely successful series about Mog, who was based on the cats she herself owned. Both in her stories and in the talks she gave to very young children, Judith was most amusing about Mog and her endearing and infuriating characteristics. She gave Mog the human qualities she believed cats to have. 25

Nowadays, authors are also expected to be live performers, a role which Judith excelled at. She was always smartly turned out and well-prepared for her talks. A lively and inspiring speaker, she took part in festivals and bookshop events, where she charmed audiences from babies to grandparents with her humour, warmth and natural storytelling ability. 30

She used her own life as the inspiration for most of her work, claiming that stories from her real life were better than ones she made up from scratch. Her original audience, too, came from her own life; long before she wrote anything down, she told her children stories. She wrote the books that followed partly because her son, Matthew, was so dissatisfied by the books he was expected to read. 35

Judith loved to work and was skilful at adapting her artwork as she grew older by switching from ink to crayons and coloured pencils, which could be more easily rubbed out. She never lost her enthusiasm for the children who read her books or for their parents, many of whom came to her talks in the hope – always rewarded – of getting advice about how to turn their own ideas into stories. 40

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