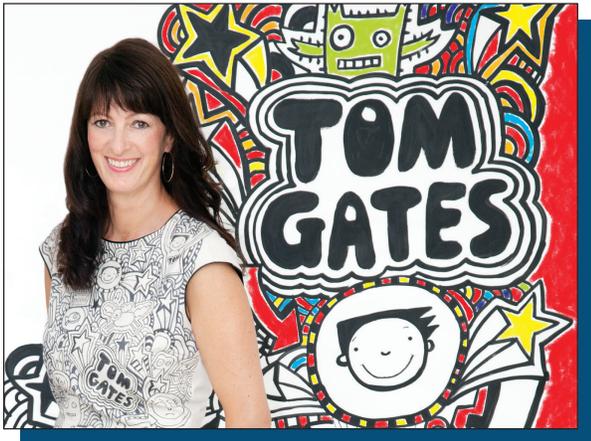


# A Conversation with L. PICHON



**How did the idea for Tom Gates come about?**

It started off as a picture-book idea, based on a scrapbook that had lots of drawings and bits and pieces stuck in it. That's where Tom's voice first appeared (and Mrs. Worthington too, with her slightly hairy top lip). But the publishers wanted more of a story. So I wrote one about Tom Gates and put it in a journal with some doodles on the cover. Publishers liked the format and quite liked the story but they didn't think the two went together. So finally I bought three school exercise books and imagined that Tom was writing and drawing in them himself, with Mr. Fullerman looming over his shoulder and Marcus Meldrew being annoying. Luckily the publishers really liked this idea, so I got to write a whole story with all the drawings and doodles.

**Tom is quite a smart aleck, but also very sharp in his observations. Is he based on anyone you know?**

Slightly on me as a child, but also my son. I can remember what some of the boys were like in both my old schools, too. Tom is a combination of lots of different characters, really.

**How do you go about creating the Tom Gates books, and what tools do you use?**

First I get all the ideas I have collected in various notebooks and on sticky notes and begin doing random drawings to see if they spark any storylines. If they do, I use really thin paper, called layout paper, to do the drawings on, and ordinary paper with a soft pencil and eraser to do the writing. I write as if I'm writing in an exercise book. Every page is handwritten with the rough story and drawings. It takes a while, but time flies when it's going well. For the final artwork, I scan each page into the computer and sometimes boost up the black-and-white lines to make them stronger. I might add more typefaces to make a point in the book, too. Both of the main fonts in the book are made from my own handwriting.

**When *The Brilliant World of Tom Gates* won the Roald Dahl Funny Prize, it was described as "brilliantly laugh-out-loud funny" by Francesca Simon, author of the *Horrid Henry* books. Who were your favorite authors when you were growing up, and which funny books would you recommend?**

I was pleased to bits with all the nice comments about my book! When I was younger, I loved Spike Milligan's *Silly Verse for Kids* and all of Roald Dahl's books. My favorite of his was probably *The Twits*. But I was also a massive fan of Richard Scarry's drawings and stories. I found all the creatures and the details he added to be fascinating and funny.

Q&A reproduced with thanks to Scholastic Education