"I am not writing to do something for children…. I am writing, I suppose, to get rid of my own fears but it is mostly to discover what I feel and to discover some childish part of myself….” Catherine Storr (1913-2001)

Between 2008 and 2010 Catherine Storr’s daughter, Cecilia Storr, donated a large proportion of her mother’s archive to Seven Stories. The collection offers a unique insight into Storr’s life, inspiration and love of storytelling.

The Writer
Before her success as a writer, Catherine Storr (1913-2001) qualified as a doctor, completing her training in 1944, the year her first daughter, Sophia, was born. By this time she had already published a children’s book, *Ingeborg and Ruthy* (G.G. Harrap & Co., 1940), under the pen-name Catherine Preston.

Writing had always been her chosen career, and though she worked as a psychotherapist in the department of psychological medicine at Middlesex Hospital from 1950-1960, being a mother inspired her to try her hand at writing again. Several of the stories she told, and sometimes turned into handmade books for her three daughters, found their way into print. Later she continued making handmade books for her grandchildren, some of which were also published.

Inspiration
Catherine Storr was an inveterate writer from childhood, completing her first work, ‘Mrs Biddle’s Diary’, aged 6. Later on in life, Storr’s ideas often came to her when entertaining her children on long walks and journeys. When walking on the beach one day, one of her daughters found a stone with a hole through it, like a ring. She put it on and her mother said, ‘Now you are engaged. Suppose it was a giant’s ring?’ With those words came the story of *Polly, the Giant’s Bride* (Faber and Faber, 1956)

Storr often drew on her own childhood for inspiration. Her first published work, *Ingeborg and Ruthy*, written while she was studying for her degree in medicine, features a little girl whose doll, Ruthy, comes to life and does a succession of naughty things. Although she is mischievous, Ruthy is not the uncanny doll of horror films; she acts out the kinds of things a child might long to do were it not for the consequences. Ruthy was the name of Catherine Storr’s favourite doll, who remained a companion into adulthood.
Work as a psychotherapist
After studying English Literature at Cambridge, Catherine Storr went on to study medicine. She then worked as a psychotherapist at Middlesex Hospital and, during this time, explored both Freudian and Jungian analysis. Some of Storr’s experiences from this time informed her book *Tales from a Psychiatrist’s Couch* (1977).

Storr was highly alert to the way the mind works and often reflected on how her own memories, fantasies and experiences played out on the pages of her books. She was aware that consciously or not, her writing used fantasy to explore material that might not be appropriate in writing for children and young people if dealt with directly. As she said about a scene in *Marianne and Mark* (1960), “… when Marianne rides on the back of Alan’s cycle… that for me is describing a sexual experience for the young…. Whether they recognize it as that or not I don’t know, but when I had written it I saw it was deliberate.” (Children’s Literature in Education, 1:1, 1970, p. 37).

Family stories
Many of the stories that Catherine Storr wrote were solely intended for the amusement and enjoyment of her family. She regularly wrote and illustrated little handmade books featuring entertaining tales that addressed a particular child’s concerns of the moment, or that marked birthdays and shared experiences. Some of these handmade books are preserved in the Catherine Storr archive at Seven Stories, and give a unique insight into Storr’s unfailing delight in storytelling.

Storr also wrote plays for her daughters to perform in their Pelham Puppet Theatre. Most of the plays were based on fairy tales, and the manuscripts in the archives show that all the family took the activity seriously. The scripts are set out as they would be for professionals; there are songs and special effects. Polly (Cecilia) Storr recalls, ‘Emma [Catherine Storr’s third daughter] appeared as the Giant in ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’. She wore Wellington boots and walked onto the puppet stage – only her boots visible, and she appeared a real giant compared to the puppets!’

*This introduction to Catherine Storr is by Kimberley Reynolds, Professor of Children’s Literature in the School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics at Newcastle University*