



Obituary: Alec Davis 1944-2020

By *AndreaMReece*

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Article Author:

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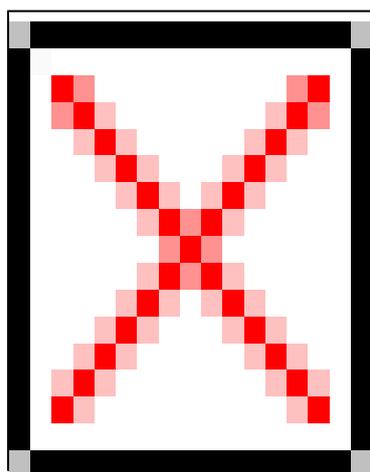
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Obituaries

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Books for Keeps founder **Richard Hill** remembers his friend, **Alec Davis**, the original **Books for Keeps** designer.

Alec Davis, who originally designed **Books for Keeps** and went on to produce the artwork for 189 issues, died aged 76 on Saturday 28th November 2020. He is remembered by his friend, founder of **Books for Keeps**, **Richard Hill**.



I first met Alec in 1962 when he was a graphic design student at St Martin's School of Art on the Charing Cross Road and I was at LSE on the other side of Covent Garden. Later we were to work together for almost 50 years. And what a joy he was to work with ? never flustered under pressure (and there was always pressure), always on time (and so often things could run late), utterly dependable (we weren't always) and spot-on precise and accurate (he had a remarkable eye for discrepancies and slips in the use of language). I'm not sure a penniless children's book magazine starting up in 1980 would have survived without that steadiness and utter reliability.

Those qualities of smooth running, vital though they are in any enterprise, were not what put Alec into another league. It was his superb knowledge of typography, fonts, graphics and the rest, so essential to the balance and appeal of a page. His eye for detail went into legendary status, though nothing to do with art work, when he showed me a model boat with the life buoys in perfect scale, achieved, of course, by sucking an enormous number of Polo mints. I don't think he ever touched a Polo again.

He came out top of his final year at St Martin's and, something that always amused us, was briefly tutored by [Michael Foreman](#) [3], just six years older than him. Of course neither of us had any notion at the time of how much we'd later be working with Mike's material on **BfK** covers, articles, reviews and interviews. He worked for spells at CUP and Mills & Boon and freelanced for Penguin before setting up his graphic design company in a garden shed overlooking the Severn in Gloucestershire.

He started in a world where paste-up with cow-gum, type-setting and physical artwork were the order of the day. I've watched him hold a typeset full stop on the tip of his scalpel and place it at the end of a sentence with the same accuracy you'd expect from a word-processor. He effortlessly then moved on to desk-top with Quark, Illustrator and Photoshop for company on his beloved Mac.

He was the most literary of graphic designers I ever met and won the **Guardian** cryptic crossword puzzle several times. He loved music, painted, wrote some wonderful poetry and was a brilliant cook. He came up with **BfK**'s name, suggesting that as our intention was, amongst other things, to encourage children to become life-long readers, why not call ourselves **Books for Keeps**. The name 'Authorgraph', our centre-piece interview, was also his idea too.

And **BfK** is still with us because people like Alec gave it their talented, clever best and complete love. If you look at the [PDF version](#) [4] of this Issue you are looking at what Alec laid down 41 years ago. A sweet man has gone but gave us and left us so much. Thank you, my extraordinary, amazing friend.

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