

Q&A with Tricia Springstubb, author of *What Happened on Fox Street*

1. *What Happened on Fox Street* deals a lot with family relationships. How has your family inspired you?

I'm the oldest of five kids, and I have three daughters. I know too well that siblings don't always get along, and that parents can let kids down. But for me, family lies at the heart of everything, in my real life and in my stories. Being part of something bigger and sturdier than I am gives me comfort—and also the courage to pull away and be myself. And ooh boy, do families ever give you ideas for stories!

- 2. What is your relationship like with your red-haired sister? Is she a wild child, too? I have two sisters. The red-haired one has always been more daring than I am, and the blond one is much more glam. They live in New York, and I don't get to see them nearly enough. But when we get together, it's all about laughing and teasing and remembering.
- 3. How does having children of your own influence the way you write for young audiences? Every job I've ever had was with children, and I wrote stories for kids long before I became a mother. But having my own girls made me vividly see how important books can be in young lives. Watching my girls read made me really want to write the truest, most lasting kind of stories I can.
- 4. You, like Mo, enjoy quiet, green places. Where is your favorite quiet, green place? I love my backyard. We have big oak trees that give us lots of privacy. It's very shady, but I have a small, stubborn flower garden. My favorite thing is to lie on my luxurious lounger and read.
- 5. Tell us the story of the one unforgettable time you saw a fox!

Last summer I'd finished writing *What Happened on Fox Street* but no publisher had bought it yet. My husband I were on the way home from visiting friends in Vermont, and we were driving through the Adirondacks after dark. Suddenly he said, "What was that?" I looked, and there, on the side of the road, a fox was looking back. I only got to see it for a moment before it disappeared into the woods. It was so thrilling! And I couldn't help thinking, *Maybe this is a sign my book is going to get published...*

6. What is your favorite memory from a childhood summer?

I grew up in a big family, in a neighborhood of big families. In summer no one went to camp or lessons—we kids just ran wild from dawn to dark. We played baseball in the street, Barbies on the front stoops. We caught fireflies in jars. My friend and I played "weeds"—we'd pick long stalks, hold them upside down so the leaves drooped like ball gowns, and act out elaborate fantasies. There was a field behind our house where, like Mo and Merce, we had our secret hideout. Those were long, hot, blissful days.

7. To you, what is at the heart of What Happened on Fox Street?

I wrote and rewrote *What Happened on Fox Street* more times than I want to remember. It was way long at first, and I kept whittling away, trying to find the heart at the center. The moment it all came clear to me was when I understood the book is about Mo and her father. As much as she adores him, she comes to see he's not perfect. He can't protect her from everything in life. I remember realizing this about my own father, who loved me more than anything but wasn't always the man I wished he was. It was a painful but necessary thing to understand, and I think all kids have a moment something like it. Growing up—it's a bumpy, twisty road.

8. What advice would you give to your readers about living through big changes in their lives?

Changes are always painful for me. Like Mo, I often want to hit the FREEZE button and make everything stay just the way it is. I can get myself very sad remembering when my girls were little and lived at home. But at the same time, watching them grow up and make their own lives has been uber exciting. So what I try to remember is that every time we lose something, another thing takes its place. If Mo has to move off Fox Street, it's going to be really hard. But I think she'll be okay. Better than okay, if I know her.

