



Leslie Connor

Crunch
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What inspired you to become a children's book author, and what were you doing before this?

Well, I studied art in college and that's a part of my life, past and present. I still enjoy creating. Right now, I'm creating stories. It took time for me to understand that some of my ideas would make good books. I often feel like I've finally opened up a big surprise package'one that waited on my doorstep for years.

What do you like most about your job? Least?

I love releasing my imagination onto the page and creating images with words. If there is anything I don't like about my job, it's got to be trying to tell someone 'what my book is about.' I always get quiet when somebody asks that question.

How often do you ride your bicycle? Could you fix it if something broke?

I take my bike on short errands just about any day that the mercury makes it to fifty-five. But I live in New England, and, well, I don't have snow tires on my two-wheeler.

I'm no bike mechanic, but I can do some repairs. I have a great memory from when I was about fourteen: I came across a little girl pushing a bike. Her chain had slipped and was scraping along the pavement, and she was crying her eyes out. I didn't really think I could help her. But I had watched somebody get a chain back up on a chain ring, so I gave it a try. By golly, it worked! Off she went'fast! I think she felt relieved, and I felt surprised.

Are the Marrisses and the people in their town made up, or are they based on real people?

I invented the Marriss family and the town they live in. But my characters and towns are almost always composites of real people and real places. I combine, mix, match, and patch them together. If this were art, I'd be making a collage.

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you were suddenly in charge like Dewey? How did you handle it?

Yes! Back in my college days I worked at a restaurant. One busy night the hostess and the chef both got grumpy and they both walked off the job. One other waitress and I had to take the orders, cook the orders, and serve the orders. We were sprinting from kitchen to dining room. Like Dewey and Vince, we had too much work for two people but we felt responsible for keeping all the customers happy.

When did you first become interested in environmental issues such as the energy crisis that's at the heart of *Crunch*?

As a kid, my family had house rules about remembering to turn off lights and not letting the water run. But my first real awareness of environmental issues probably came in third grade when I celebrated Arbor Day with my class. In the years that followed I learned that there are simple daily practices we should engage in to conserve the Earth's natural resources. Part of my research for *Crunch* was watching the film, *Who Killed the Electric Car?* For me, it was an important movie, and a profoundly sad one.

What do you hope readers take away from *Crunch*?

Oh, wouldn't I love to contribute to an increase in bike culture all across America! You bet! But most of all, I want readers to see some part of themselves in Dewey Marriss and his siblings, and to know that, try as you might, you can't always make the Mr. Gilmartins of this world happy. And that's not your fault!