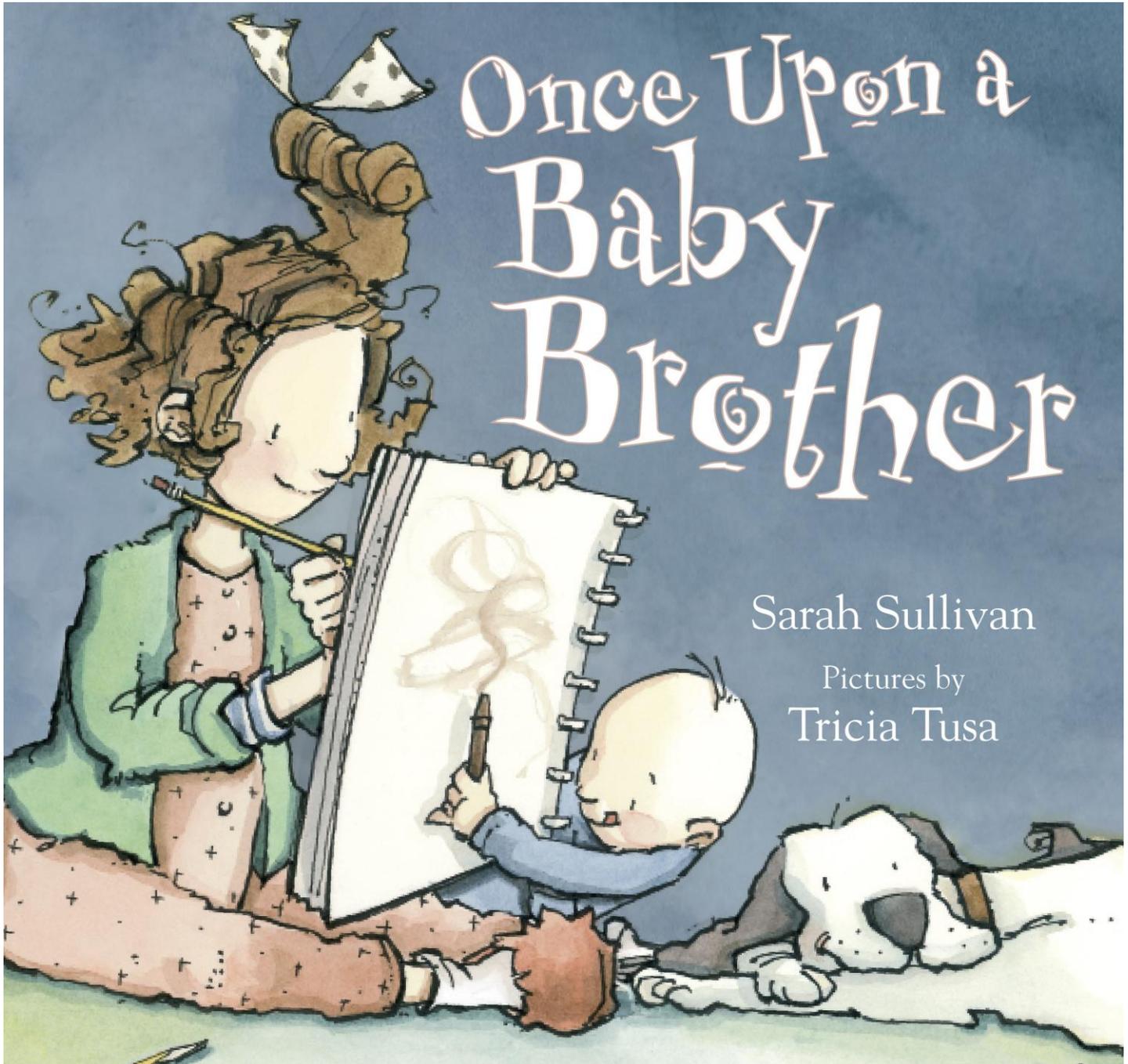


A Teacher's Guide to

# Once Upon a Baby Brother

Written by Sarah Sullivan

Illustrated By Tricia Tusa



ONCE UPON A BABY BROTHER © 2010 by Sarah Sullivan; Art by Tricia Tusa; Farrar, Straus & Giroux

## Story Summary

Lizzie loves to make up stories and tell them to anyone and everyone. But now that her annoying baby brother, Marvin, has joined the family, only her faithful dog, Big George, has time to listen. Fortunately, Miss Pennyroyal, Lizzie's teacher, loves stories, too. Each day at writing time, Lizzie grabs her Princess Merriweather pencil, snaps open her Imagination Notebook, and she's off on a writing adventure:

*The brave young girl rescued her teacher from the alligator pit...*

Lizzie's so full of writing ideas, it seems like nothing can stop her. And then one day, something does—and not even her Princess Merriweather pencil can help. What's a writer to do?

## Praise for Once Upon a Baby Brother

"Sullivan has found an oblique way to write about the ups and downs of a school-age child adjusting to a much younger sibling, and she carries it out with skill. Bringing the story to life, Tusa's strong, quirky line-and-wash drawings define characters and settings, add bits of visual humor, amplify the book's emotional content, and give the jacket its winsome appeal." ~*Booklist*

"[A] fresh take on the new-sibling theme with an empowering female character...Tusa's cheerful black-lined watercolors do a nice job expressing Lizzie's creative spirit... Funny and useful." ~*Kirkus Reviews*

"Sullivan and Tusa seem to know in their bones that writing can be so all-consuming that lunchtime and recess pale by comparison. . . . readers will know they're witnessing a girl who's utterly in the zone."~*Publisher's Weekly*



## About the Author

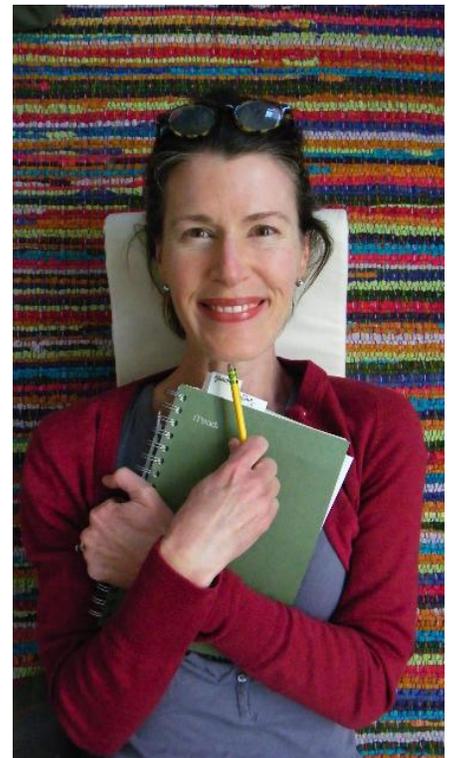
Sarah Sullivan finds ideas for her stories and poetry from her family, friends and the world around her. She grew up *mostly* in Littleton, Colorado, and has lived in Delaware, Alabama, Massachusetts, South Carolina, Paris, France and West Virginia. She has been a tour guide, a waitress, a children's museum administrator, a writing instructor, a teacher and a lawyer. Her book, *Dear Baby: Letters from Your Big*

*Brother* was an Oppenheim Toy Portfolio Gold award winner. She holds an MFA in Writing for Children from Vermont College where she won the Harcourt Post-Graduate Scholarship. She also won an Individual Artist Grant/Fellowship from the West Virginia Arts Commission. Besides writing, she loves traveling, visiting schools and paddling her ultra-light canoe. Learn more about her at <http://www.sarahsullivanbooks.com>

## About the Illustrator

Tricia Tusa has enjoyed writing and illustrating children's books now for almost 30 years. Born in Texas, and, having lived in several other parts of the world, she and her family now reside in New Mexico. She has been honored with a variety of awards for her books. To name a few, *IN A BLUE ROOM* written by Jim Averbeck received a Charlotte Zolotow Honor award. *FRED STAYS WITH ME* written by Nancy Coffelt garnered the Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor.

*CAMILLA'S NEW HAIRDO* written and illustrated by Tricia received the Parent's Choice award. *THE FAMILY REUNION*, also written and illustrated by Tricia was noted as one of USA Today's year's favorites. Most recently, *THE SANDWICH SWAP* written by Queen Rania of Jordan and Kelly DiPucchio has been named as #1 on The New York Times bestseller list.



## Pre-Reading

### Making Connections

Ask students to share stories about feeling angry or frustrated with siblings (or other family members). How did they resolve their negative feelings?

- *Make connections between previous experiences and reading selections.*

### Take a Book Walk

Show the front cover of *Once Upon a Baby Brother*, pointing out the title, author and illustrator. What are the roles of the author and illustrator?

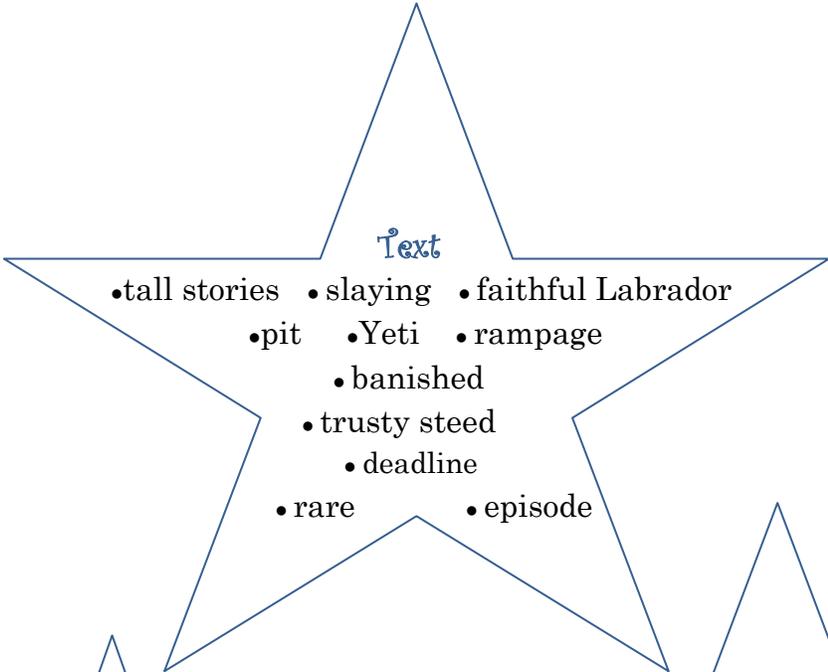
What is happening in the cover illustration? Does the girl realize what the baby is doing? If not, how will she react when she finds out?

Flip through the pages and ask what's happening in the illustrations. What is Lizzie's favorite thing to do? What is the problem in the story? Can students guess the solution?

- *Preview the selection by using pictures and titles.*
- *Make predictions about content.*
- *Identify what an author does and what an illustrator does.*

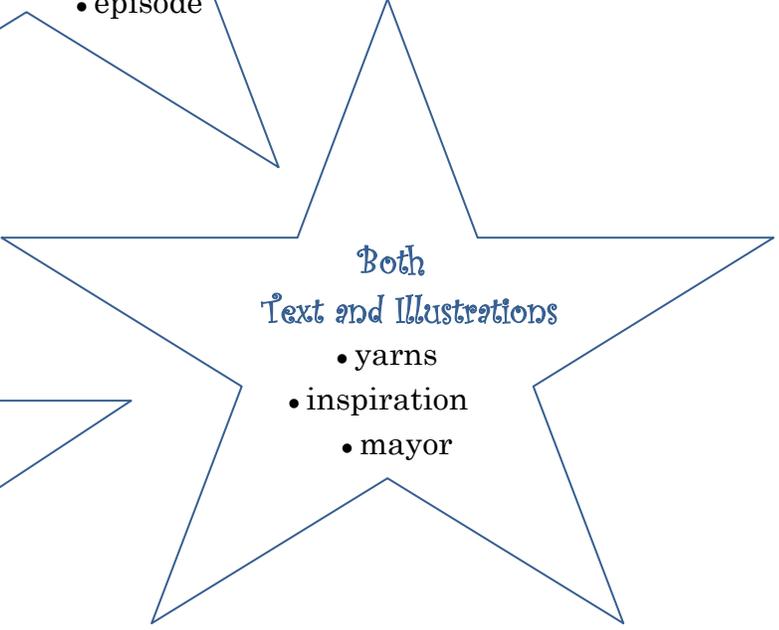
## Vocabulary

Encourage your students to infer meanings of the following words from:



### Text

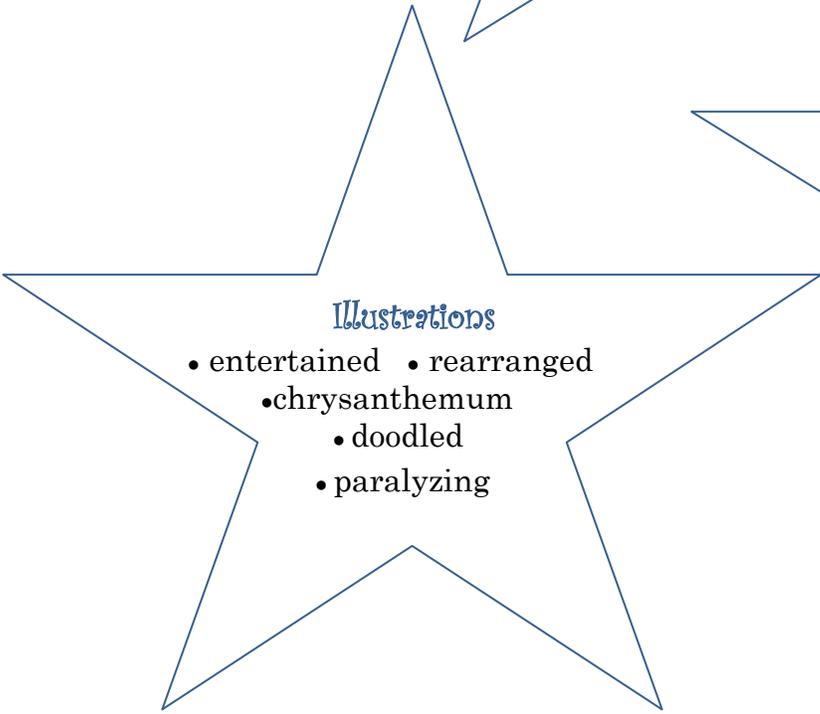
- tall stories
- slaying
- faithful Labrador
- pit
- Yeti
- rampage
- banished
- trusty steed
- deadline
- rare
- episode



### Both

#### Text and Illustrations

- yarns
- inspiration
- mayor



### Illustrations

- entertained
- rearranged
- chrysanthemum
- doodled
- paralyzing

- Use meaning clue, pictures and language structure to expand vocabulary when reading.
- Use context to read unfamiliar words.

## Discussion Questions

1. What does Lizzie use to write her stories? (*knowledge*)
2. Why doesn't Lizzie like her little brother, Marvin? (*comprehension*)
3. Tell about an event at your house that changed your life. Tell how things were before this event and afterwards. (*application*)
4. Does Marvin make Lizzie a better writer? Why or why not? (*analysis*)
5. Look at the story that Lizzie wrote and illustrated about the beautiful princess and her ugly baby brother. How do you think Lizzie might revise this story now? (*synthesis*)
6. Everyone thinks Lizzie is a great writer. Do you agree? What makes her stories so entertaining? Look at the faces of the people who are listening to her story about the girl who became president and lived in the White House. How does Lizzie's story make them feel? (*evaluation*)

## Student Activities

### Pencil Toppers

Lizzie writes with her special Princess Merriweather pencil. Make your own inspirational pencil toppers. Some suggestions:

► **Beads of Inspiration:** Let students string beads and/or sequins onto a five-inch piece of yarn or embroidery floss. Make a knot at one end of the yarn and string the beads, leaving two inches at the top. Tie another knot as close as possible to the last bead. Tie the string around the top of a pencil and wrap with colorful duct or electrical tape. As a variation, give students beads with letters of the alphabet and let them string their names or a word that inspires them to write.

► **Blooming Ideas:** Wrap the stem of an artificial flower together with a pencil, using green floral tape.

► **Fine Feathered Friends:** Secure the stems of colorful feathers to a pencil top with electrical tape.

- *Understand the elements of art and the principles of design as they relate to artistic expression and communication.*



### Just Imagine!

Lizzie keeps an Imagination Notebook where she jots down ideas, drawings and stories. Provide materials (see below) for your students to decorate the covers of their own Imagination Notebooks. Let them share the covers of their notebooks and describe how and why they chose their designs. How will their designs help to inspire their writing?

stickers	photos	ribbons/rickrack	old maps
comic strips	wrapping paper	rubber stamps	gold glitter pen (not for little brothers!)

- *Describe the relationship between form and function.*

## Unblock Writer's Block

When Lizzie's imagination fizzled, she tried to revive it by listening to music, drawing pictures, rereading favorite fairy tales, and studying the comics in the Sunday paper

What do your students do when their creative juices have dried up? Have them try different pre-writing activities, like Lizzie did. Invite them to bring their Imagination Notebooks to a variety of settings...in the woods, on their beds, under the kitchen table, on a porch swing, etc. to find a writing spot that works best for them. Students can rate their attempts to find their muse on a chart like the one below (see reproducible student chart on the following page).

Graph the class results; discuss similarities and differences.

I tried ...	I didn't write a word.	I jotted down some ideas.	Wow! I wrote and wrote and wrote...
...rereading my favorite stories.		√	
...brainstorming in a tree.			√
...listening to music while writing.		√	
...watching TV.	√		

- *Generate ideas before writing*
- *Use a variety of planning strategies*
- *Gather data relating to familiar experiences*
- *Investigate, identify, and describe various forms of data collection using tables.*

# In Search of My Muse...



I tried ...	I didn't write a word.	I jotted down some ideas.	Wow! I wrote and wrote and wrote...

## Finish Lizzie's Stories

Make a list of Lizzie's story snippets that appear throughout the book. Ask students to decide if they are beginnings, middles or endings (some might fit in more than one category). Have them choose their favorite and finish the story.

It was a dark and stormy night...

Once, in a far-off galaxy...

The faithful Labrador rescued his master from the storm-tossed seas...

The brave young girl rescued her teacher from the alligator pit.

"There's only one creature with footprints like this, Captain."

"You don't mean..."

"I'm afraid so, sir. The Yeti is on the rampage again."

And the little girl grew up to be President and brought her parents to live with her in the White House.

After slaying the dragons in the forest, the princess gave a surprise party for the King.

The beautiful girl and her handsome dog took a rocket to the moon and discovered a new planet in the solar system.

- Recognize beginning, middle and end of narratives.
- Organize writing to include a beginning, middle, and end.



## Life in the White House

One of Lizzie's stories is about a little girl who grows up to be president and lives in the White House with her parents. Who lives in the White House? Where is it located?

What is it like to live in the White House? Take a virtual tour and find out! Go to <http://www.whitehousemuseum.org> and click on "Start the Tour." To see the rooms where the First Family lives, scroll down the page and click on "Residence."

- *Recognize that the President is the leader of the United States.*
- *Locate Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States, on a United States map.*
- *Explore the potential of the Internet as a means of personal learning.*

## Marvinosaurus

Look at Lizzie's three versions of Marvin in her notebook:

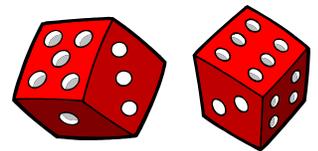
- the Marvinosaurus
- Marvin the Pirate
- the Marvinfish

Think of a character you might write about and come up with three different versions of that character. Make three sketches like Lizzie did. Choose one to star in your own story.

- *Develop ideas for works of art by brainstorming and making preliminary sketches.*
- *Use prewriting strategies.*
- *Use descriptive vocabulary.*

## Roll A Story

Ask your class to brainstorm six characters (may be a mix of human and non-human characters), six settings, and six problems. Set up three dice on an interactive whiteboard (or make the dice from a paper template) with one die for characters, one for settings and one for problems.



Roll each die. Take the character, setting and problem shown and let the class come up with a possible solution to the problem. Now add details and create a story!

- *Use available technology.*
- *Identify the elements of narrative structure, including setting, character, and conflict.*
- *Use prewriting and planning strategies to organize information before writing.*

## Comic Book

Miss Pennyroyal says: “Everyone needs to think of a character who will have lots of adventures.” Help students to brainstorm adventures by exploring common story structures such as the following:

A character has a goal, but something is preventing the character from achieving this goal. The character makes two failed attempts to achieve the goal. On the third try, the problem is solved.

Model this process with the group. Older children may come up with their own stories using this process, while younger students might benefit from creating a story with input from the whole group.

Once students have a basic story outline, let them plan a comic strip using the graphic organizer on the following page. Invite students to refer to Lizzie’s comic strip to see how dialogue, narrative and illustrations all contribute to the story. Once they’ve planned their comic strip, provide each student with a large strip of poster board for their final projects.

**Variation:** At the end of Lizzie’s story, it says, “Stay tuned for Episode Two!” What do your students think would happen if Lizzie’s story were continued? Let them express their ideas in a comic strip.

- *Identify the elements of narrative structure, including setting, character, and conflict.*
- *Use prewriting and planning strategies to organize information before writing.*
- *Produce art that depicts stories and events.*

### Comic Strip Planner

Author and Illustrator: \_\_\_\_\_

(YOU!)

\_\_\_\_\_ wants \_\_\_\_\_,  
(character) (character's goal)

but \_\_\_\_\_.  
(something that is preventing the main character from achieving the goal)

So \_\_\_\_\_ but that doesn't work.  
(character's first attempt at solving the problem)

Then \_\_\_\_\_ but that doesn't work, either.  
(character's second attempt at solving the problem)

Finally, \_\_\_\_\_!

Use the following boxes to sketch your ideas for your comic strip. Think about what you want your characters to say and use speech bubbles. How can you show action with through your drawings?

--	--	--	--	--	--

Title and your name

What your character wants

What is in the way of your character's goal?

First try at solving the problem

Second try at solving the problem

Solution

## An Interview with Author Sarah Sullivan



### 1. How did you get the idea for *Once Upon a Baby Brother*?

As often happens, the first few lines came into my head. I heard the voice of a young girl telling her stories. It soon became clear that she had certain issues with her younger brother Marvin. Sadly, the entire story did not come so easily. Once I had the beginning, it took a lot of plain, old-fashioned work to find my way to the end.

### 2. Once the idea came to you, what happened next? Did you jot it down right away? Let it simmer?

I took down those first few lines right away. Then I jotted down various lines that might fit *somewhere*, not necessarily in the order in which I was writing them down. I knew that Lizzie would make Marvin the villain in her stories. And I always knew it would be a funny story. But, I had trouble with the dramatic structure, (a common problem for me), until Melanie Kroupa expressed interest in the manuscript. With her expert and inspired guidance, the story started to develop the dramatic arc it needed.

### 3. What did you find the most challenging about writing this book? The most rewarding?

The most challenging part of writing this story . . . hmm. There were two major challenges. The first challenge was figuring out how to integrate the home story with the school story in the space of a 32-page picture book. The second challenge was figuring out how to succinctly tell the story of turning Marvin into a comic book hero. My editor and Tricia Tusa had A LOT to do with making that work! Creating a picture book is truly a collaborative enterprise!

### 4. How did the illustrations come about?

People are often surprised to learn that writers do not select their own illustrators – (at least, not usually). Once Melanie and I finalized the text, she began looking for an illustrator. As you might imagine, I was THRILLED when she mentioned Tricia Tusa's name and was DOING BACK FLIPS when Tricia agreed to illustrate the book. As time

passed and I had the opportunity to see sketches and then, proofs with color art, the joy and excitement continued to grow.

**5. You have written two other picture books, *Dear Baby: Letters from Your Big Brother*, and *Root Beer and Banana*. How does your writing process compare from book to book?**

That's a good question. The process has actually been quite different from one book to the next. I wrote the first draft of *Dear Baby* long before I started writing *Root Beer and Banana*. *Dear Baby* came about because my then 7-year-old son was talking about how well (or sometimes, not so well) two of his friends got along with their little sisters. I wondered how my own son would get along with a younger brother or sister if he had one. I also thought about the way my older brother used to complain about how much I used to bother him when I was little. Add to that the fact that I had just finished reading Lee Smith's epistolary novel, *Fair and Tender Ladies*, which meant that I was thinking about ways to tell stories through letters. All of these thoughts swirled around in my head and the first draft of *Dear Baby* was the result.

*Root Beer and Banana*, on the other hand, came directly out of a picture book workshop led by George Ella Lyon. She guided us through a writing exercise in which she directed us to focus on the details of a particularly vivid memory and then write a poem about it. I remembered a summer spent with my grandparents in a small town on the Rappahannock River in Virginia. I wrote a poem about going with my grandfather to buy a popsicle at a mom-and-pop grocery called Mister Mac's. I put the poem away for a while, as George Ella suggested that we do. Some time later, I was sitting up late reading one night when the voice of a young girl came into my head. "My name's Miracle," the girl said, "on account of the doctor said Mama couldn't have any more after my brothers, but I came anyway." I have no idea why this young girl appeared out of thin air one night – but she did and I knew instinctively that she belonged in the world of my poem. When I added Miracle to what I had already written, the story began to take shape immediately.

**6. How did you know you wanted to become a writer? When did you begin to think of yourself as a writer?)**

I guess I have a little bit in common with my main character in that, like Lizzie, I have always loved to tell stories. The writing fever really took hold once I learned to read in first grade. I started reading *everything!* Books, magazines, comics in newspapers, cereal boxes, the courtesy light sign on the dashboard of my grandfather's Oldsmobile – *everything!* And I started writing stories too. My first story was about a dead bird I

found lying in the grass in our yard. I know that sounds a bit morbid, but the bird was so lovely. It was a cardinal and it made me sad to see it lying there so still. I had to write about it. I suppose then, and now, a lot of my motivation comes from a need to try and understand why things happen the way they do.

Later on, my best friend, Nelle, and I had a secret club in a room in the basement of her house in Colorado. We collected *Sugar and Spike* comic books and wrote comic books with our own characters. Wait a minute -- *This is starting to sound familiar . . .*

I still have trouble calling myself a writer, even though I write every day. But, I have come to understand that, no matter what I call myself, I will always write. I will always tell stories. It's a need. I'm unhappy if I don't write.

### **7. What is the best piece of writing advice you have ever received?**

Anne LaMott's advice in *Bird by Bird* is pretty hard to beat. Give yourself permission to write terrible first drafts. (Okay. She didn't use the word *terrible*.)

### **8. What advice do you have for young writers—especially those with little brothers?**

There is no better training for a writer than to read. Read all the time. Read all different kinds of things. And then follow your passion and, as one of my writing teachers, Jane Resh Thomas, advises her students, write what moves you. Write about things that you care *passionately* about.

### **9. When you aren't writing, what are some of your favorite things to do?**

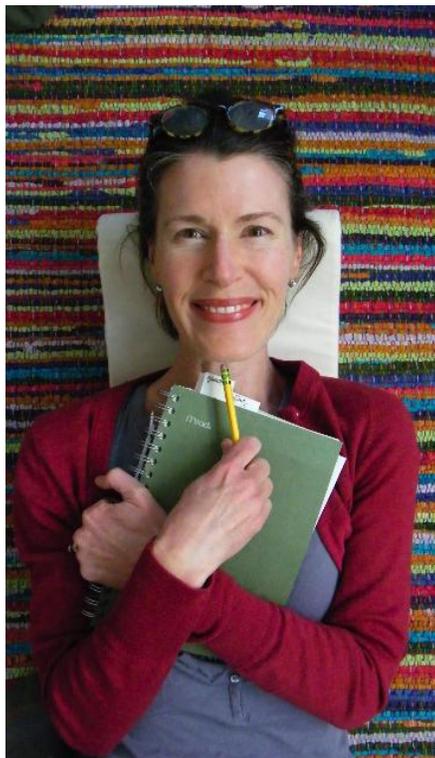
Long walks, reading, canoeing, theater (both from the audience and backstage), and travel.

### **10. Do you have a muse like the main character in your book does?**

Hmm. A muse? Not really, although my husband has suggested it's a little odd that I've written two books involving sibling rivalry. I am inspired by the work of other writers. My list of favorites is long and changes constantly. Some of the people whose work I find particularly inspiring are Eudora Welty, Sharon Creech and Kate DiCamillo. I love certain works like *The Great Gatsby* and the opening pages of *My Antonia*. Lately, I've been completely knocked out by Colm Toibín and Colum McCann. And I go back to some

of John Cheever's stories with regularity. But, ask me tomorrow and I will probably give you a completely different list.

## An Interview with Illustrator Tricia Tusa



### 1. When did you begin to think of yourself as an artist?

I have never not thought of myself as an artist and, yet, have never really thought of myself as an artist. I just know that, from the beginning, I have always loved making things with my hands. I love the feeling of going deep within myself in search of what it is I want to draw or paint or sculpt. It requires a lot of courage because, quite often, there are no lights on down there. I feel my way in the dark with no guide book. Very fun way to feel very alive.

### 2. What type of media do you like working with the most?

I really like to experiment with all kinds of media. I first get a sense of the story and then try to match up a medium that seems to match up with what I feel the story needs. But, I do love drawing with pencil or my pen and ink. I like watercolor and, then, sometimes I hate it. I often work with acrylic when doing paintings just for myself. I like printmaking and egg tempera and oil, too. I love making 3-d things out of clay and firing them in my little kiln. I also indulge in Paper mache.

### 3. How did you break into the children's book illustrating profession?

I moved to New York City at age 21 and got out the phone book and called quite a few publishing companies. I asked to speak to art directors. I made appointments with them to show my very homemade portfolio of about 15 drawings and paintings. I received very nice feedback ,and, not so very nice from a few. Holiday House offered me my first contract. They are still such a lovely, warm and welcoming company and I am so grateful to them.

### 4. Did you collaborate with the author as you did the illustrations?

I never have collaborated with the author on a story. And, quite often have never corresponded even after the book is done. Strange but true. I really want to find my own

interpretation of the words through my own imagination. I can be distracted easily by outside input. It removes me from myself and I find it hard to get back. For this reason I really appreciate how editors and art directors have an understanding of this as an important part of the process, and seem to know to keep out of the way, as well. However, I will say that after ONCE UPON A BABY BROTHER was complete, I got to know the author, Sarah Sullivan, via email. That has been a lot of fun for me.

### **5. How long did it take to illustrate ONCE UPON A BABY BROTHER?**

It took me about a month to complete the dummy. The final art took about 3 or 4 months to do.

### **6. What is the most challenging part of your job? The most rewarding?**

The most challenging part of making books is really between your ears. It requires much alone time so that you can hear and connect with your heart and mind. So, therefore, you spend much time having conversations with yourself wondering if you are doing your absolute best. Is it as good as it can be? How can you take it further? It can feel like torture, sometimes. This is why I really try to integrate my days with some balance. I go on long walks, swim laps, do yoga and think about other things.

The most rewarding part is DECIDING you have done the best you can ... and knowing that there are more books out there to make.

### **7. Are any of the characters or the setting modeled on real-life people and places?**

Friends and loved ones often show up in my characters' faces. I love my husband's face - so full of character and kindness. He appears in many books, just as my beautiful daughter does at all her various ages. The kitchens I draw are usually kitchens I have lived in. And the nature is most likely what I look at from my windows.

### **8. Pablo Picasso once said, "All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up." Do you agree?**

I do think we all come into this world as artists, in one form or another. I believe we enter this world wanting to find a way to express what is within. It seems that when well-meaning adults get in the way and impose themselves, their ideas, expectations, judgments onto a child's process, it can hinder this natural process of self-discovery and self-expression.

**9. Do you have a muse—baby brother or otherwise?**

My muse is my childhood memories, remembering every age I have ever been and how it felt. Daydreaming allows for my muse to feel heard. I am affected creatively by the love I feel for (and by) my husband and dear daughter.

**10. What do you like to do in your spare time?**

In my spare time, I take long walks, take yoga classes, and swim. I spend a lot of time in my studio doing art with my daughter. I sew and I love to read. I love to daydream. I watch the sky and trees.