

Margaret Springer

There are bits of scrap paper in a jar that she keeps. The scraps hold random words like *waterfall* and *mouse* and Margaret Springer turns them into children's stories.

She also has a collection of names, some exotic, gleaned from birth notices and concert programs. There are aging newspaper clippings and a memory she has of skating in bright, blue skates at a Waterloo rink.



All of these things have inspired Springer to write the dozens of stories and articles she has crafted since she began her career as a freelance writer for children in 1982.

But none of these can compare to the child within Springer who gives her stories such heart:

"I think a good story has some kind of emotional resonance. If a child reads something I wrote and laughs or gets a lump in his throat . . . then that's what I'm after. It's the child within me connecting with the child in somebody else."

Springer was born in England in 1941 and immigrated to Canada when she was 11 years old. After high school in Montreal, she attended McGill University where she received degrees in arts and library sciences.

Upon graduation, she worked in the library of the McGill School of Library Science for two years before moving to Waterloo and working at St. Paul's United College Library between 1966 and 1980.

Her first children's article was published in 1982 and within ten years she had written her first picture book, *A Royal Ball* (1992). Three more books followed: *Move Over, Einstein* (1997); *Dr. Beastly's Lab*, (1998) and *Finding Annie* (2005).

While living and writing in Waterloo, Springer taught more than 30 courses at Conestoga College and in 1988 she was an instructor for correspondence courses at the Institute for Children's Literature in Connecticut. She also served on the board of the Waterloo Community Arts Centre and taught courses at the Button Factory.

She has had dozens of articles published in periodicals like *Highlights for Children*, *Turtle* and *Pennywhistle Press*. Her writing in *Highlights for Children* included a story in 1990 that was inspired by a newspaper clipping about an oil leak in Laurel Creek in the northwest end of Waterloo. *Dishpan Ducks* became a popular story read in classrooms across the city and translated into Spanish. Springer has won four awards for her writing in *Highlights for Children*.

Another popular story in *Highlights* was called *The Wall*. In it, Springer told the true story about a young American undergraduate student of architecture who won a national contest to design the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Springer has said she doesn't try to teach a lesson, however, she does try to communicate with children about the real world and the difficult emotions of childhood.

"I don't talk down to them through my stories. And I don't assume that childhood is all bright, sunny and happy. I find that when writers do that, the needs of the children are often ignored."

Her passion for communicating with children, ironically has given her much insight into herself: "Writing for me is like solving a puzzle, and it's a different puzzle each time. I find it enormously challenging – and satisfying – to explore my own interests, emotions and experiences through fiction or nonfiction. Connecting with readers is an important aspect, but it's just as important that I'm connecting with myself."

Photo credit: The Waterloo Chronicle