



## An Imperfect Sister

*Writing prompts, discussion questions, and audio transcript*

### ABOUT THE STORYTELLER

Betsy Bird is the author of *GIANT DANCE PARTY* and *WILD THINGS: ACTS OF MISCHIEF IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE*. She is also a children's book reviewer and Evanston Public Library's Collection Development Manager.  
<http://blogs.slj.com/afuse8production>

### Talk it Out

Read the following excerpt from Betsy Bird:

*[S]o much of my life has been ... people being like, "You were supposed to do this thing." And me being like, "Did you really? Was that? Was it?" Because I'm in my own head so much that I was like, "You probably did say that. I don't – right! Okay." ... I definitely would occasionally get in trouble for just complete absence of thought.*

#### Now discuss:

Do you ever get in trouble for not doing something you are supposed to? What do you think she means by "[b]ecause I'm in my own head so much"? Explain your answer.

Read this additional excerpt from Betsy Bird:

*I remember very clearly there was some instance where ... the whole cast and crew went out for a dinner. And I was definitely supposed to drive [my little sister home], but my friends were there, and I guess I got confused. I like to tell myself I got confused. Likely I just completely forgot.*

#### Now discuss:

Why do you think Betsy likes to tell herself she got confused, when she probably just completely forgot? Can you think of any times when you've told yourself you

did something for one reason, but you know you really did it for another reason entirely? Brainstorm a list of possible benefits to deceiving ourselves in that way. Now brainstorm a list of possible harms.

Finally: In her clip, Betsy describes one way in which she is very different from her son and daughter. Describe some ways in which you differ from your parents or other adults who take care of you. Describe some ways in which you are similar. What are some pros and cons of differences in families? What are some pros and cons of similarities?

## Write it Out

Choose one of the following prompts and write 1-2 pages, double-spaced:

- Describe one of your favorite things that your sibling (or one of your siblings) has ever done. Then describe one of your least favorite things she or he has ever done. If you don't have a sibling, choose someone who is like a sibling to you (a cousin or friend, for example).
- Imagine that you are Betsy Bird's sister and you have just been left behind after *Little Women*. Write a diary entry about what happened and how you feel.
- Write a story that begins with these two sentences: "My friend is in the most trouble she has ever been in. And it is all because of her little brother." Keep going from there. Be sure to include dialogue, description of setting, and description of emotions.

## TRANSCRIPT OF THE AUDIO MEMORY, An Imperfect Sister

*Betsy: I have kids now. I've got a daughter and a son, and they are three years apart. And they adore each other. Like he won't come up and hug my husband or myself, but he will grab her in a tackle hug and just adore her. He's just one, and she's four, and she thinks it's hilarious; and she loves him, and he loves her.*

*And I stare at this and I'm like, That was not me. Each kid in my family was born, and we would get a gift every time a kid was born because it was like, Oh, and here's something for you because it's a new sibling. So for me it was like, New siblings. Yay! Presents. Siblings themselves, Hey, sure. Why not?*

*And my sister really you know, admired me as a child; and I just completely was kind of like, "Hello small person. Hello. Moving on over here." And I just did – I got in trouble. If I got in trouble, I got in trouble because of them. Because of me ignoring them, or forgetting about them, or not including them because I simply didn't remember they were there. So that was my experience.*

*I didn't have much conflict with them because we were all in our own little separate spheres in my head. Now I don't think we actually were in retrospect,*

*but to my mind I was like, “She’s got her thing; he’s got his thing; I’ve got my thing. We’re fine.” I think my sister would’ve liked a little more togetherness.*

*Interviewer: Do you remember a moment when you got in trouble for you ignoring them?*

*Betsy: Oh yeah. Oh, yeah. There was a moment. I think I was a senior in high school. And we had in our town this really cool program, The Civic Youth theatre. So we had this theatre where kids from all different schools could come together; and they did the sets and the props and the costumes and the acting and the stage lighting and the stage managing. And there were really just like three adults who would vaguely tell people what to do. But the kids ran everything.*

*And my sister, near the end we did Little Women, and she was an actress, really from the start. And so she got to play Amy in a production, and I was one of the stage managers. I remember very clearly there was some instance where the whole cast and crew went out for a dinner. And I was definitely supposed to drive her back, but my friends were there, and I guess I got confused. I like to tell myself I got confused. Likely I just completely forgot. And my mother was just livid with me. She’s like, “You were supposed to drive your little sister home. You didn’t do that. You went out with your friends instead.”*

*And so much of my life has been ... people being like, “You were supposed to do this thing.” And me being like, “Did you really? Was that? Was it?” Because I’m in my own head so much that I was like, “You probably did say that. I don’t – right! Okay.”*

© Julie Sternberg and Marcie Colleen 2016  
Illustration by Matthew Cordell