

## **Q & A with Author Brian Kindall About BLUE SKY**

### **Q – Dreams play an important role in your stories. Why?**

A – I feel like the wall between reality and dream is thinner than people think. If anything, dream is an extension of our waking life. Since I was a kid, I've had some of my greatest adventures while dreaming. I've flown up into the clouds and swum to the bottom of oceans; I've met dastardly villains and virtuous heroes. I've traveled back thousands of years in time and run with woolly mammoths. I've even talked with people who are no longer alive. It would be a shame for me as a writer to dismiss all of those adventures just because they didn't happen while I was awake. That's the good stuff. Those dreams are our doorways into the magic and mystery of life. Blue Sky asks, "What is the difference between what is dream and what is real?" To which the Stone Woman answers, "One is the other's echo and shadow." I feel pretty much the same way about it. To say a dream isn't real is like saying that a novel isn't real because it's a made up story. And yet you're holding that novel in your hand. It's chock full of the stuff of life. Your heart beats fast at the exciting parts. You feel sad or happy right along with the main character just as you would with a friend in waking life. How is that not real?

### **Q – You also often feature animals in your books. Why do they play such a prominent role? Do you have pets?**

A – I'm not a pet person. I like dogs, but I especially like animals out in the wild. I live in a very nature-rich place. We see deer and osprey and foxes almost every day. When I was growing up, my favorite books were about animals. *YELLOW EYES* was a book about a cougar. *THE BIOGRAPHY OF A GRIZZLY*, another favorite of mine, was about the life of a bear. Another was called *THE ODDYSSEY OF AN OTTER*. These books were very naturalistic. There wasn't a lot of fantasy going on. The authors did their best to imagine what life would be like through the eyes of these animals, their real hardships and experiences in the wilderness. Animals seem so wise and I think that's because they live in nature, away from the confusion of civilization. My own imagination used to run wild beyond the last pages of these books. I remember imagining what it would be like to be with a bear hibernating in his winter den. I remember wondering what it must be like to be a mountain goat enduring a snowstorm in the high peaks. What were their nights like in that bitter cold and magical world? When I started writing my own stories for young readers, I remembered how I felt as a kid, what I had liked, and how I would have preferred to see those realistic stories play out differently. To speak with an ibex seemed pretty neat. To live in their world, to move around in the high peaks throughout the seasons and beneath the stars, seemed even neater.

**Q – We also see a lot of the color Blue in your books.**

A – I use the color blue to link my middle-grade novels together. Blue is ethereal. Someone once said, Blue is darkness made visible. No other color is as mysterious as blue. It is fathomless like the sky and the seas. It's special, and yet it's very common. You may live where it never snows. Or you might live in a sprawling metropolis far from nature. But no matter where in the world you live, you have surely gazed into a blue sky. It's a color that connects us all together.

**Q – Your character Blue Sky finds herself alone in the wilderness throughout much of this book. That's not a situation most kids find themselves in very often. What were you trying to tell young readers by doing that?**

A – Wilderness is everywhere in one form or another. Middle School can seem like a wilderness in itself when things aren't going well. At some point in every young person's life, he or she is inevitably going to feel lost and alone. Being able to find your strength at those times is important for anyone, but it's even more important for someone trying to find who they are in the world and where they belong. Blue Sky is an example of every kid who has ever felt a bit overwhelmed and confused. The only difference is that her wilderness is actually made of mountains and glaciers.

**Q – When you are writing a book, do you know how it's going to end before you ever begin?**

A – Never. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of writers – those who lead, and those who follow. By leaders I mean the writers who plan out every detail of a book from beginning to end. They take charge and push the story along the way they want it to go. For them it's all just a matter of filling in the blanks along the way. That's a good way to do it. Like following an itinerary for a trip to an exotic land, you're more likely to get where you want to be by following that kind of a map. Followers are a different breed altogether. That's what I am. Followers feel their way through a story, groping along, throwing something up to be dealt with later, taking a wrong turn here and there, always having faith that some force, some wise muse, is leading the way. I've trained myself to trust that muse. It can be scary. It takes a different kind of focus and faith. But if you follow a story through to its end – if you travel without a map - you'll find yourself discovering surprises along the way that you never expected. Those surprises will in turn surprise and thrill your reader. For me, it's a better way to write, although it is quite often very terrifying.