

What to Write

I sit back and stare at the ceiling. The smell of my brother's hot chocolate drifts over to me. I must admit that it smells good. But I am not here to drink hot chocolate. I'm not even here to fantasize about drinking hot chocolate while I drink something else. I am here to write.

But what should I write? That is the question. I want to write but I don't want to write something that is so dull and poorly written that I am appalled by it the next day. It has to be something so fabulous and breathtaking that everyone is amazed by it. But what? Everyone seems to think that the inspiration for something that wonderful comes from something particularly amazing. That can't be true. The inspiration can come from anywhere or anything. But what do I have in my few years of life to offer people as some new insight never thought of before? What do I know that is so important, many people will want to hear of it for years to come? Nothing that I can think of right now.

I tap the keyboard absently, think a moment, and then I start to write. After a few lines, I shake my head. That will not work. I need something better. It takes just a few moments to erase it all. I am back at the beginning. A blank page and empty ideas.

There are so many sounds around me that call for my attention: my brother, stirring his drink, whistling—even breathing; the fan in the bathroom humming; the cars on the highway passing; the fireworks down the street exploding; the gerbils in their nest chewing; my dog outside barking. But none of them help me. None of them give me ideas of what to write.

I am truly stuck. The cursor taunts me as it blinks away the seconds. A blank page stares back at me. It is so empty, just waiting to be filled with thoughts that will slowly build upon each other until they evolve into a story, telling of all the worlds out there from Earth to Narnia. But my mind is as blank as the page. .

I jump as a bug lands near me and shoo it away, frightened. Although I'm normally not scared of bugs, there was a large bug in the kitchen earlier so I am rather tense around them tonight. It could always be that large bug from the kitchen.

Maybe I could write something about a bug.

I lean back and start typing. There is a bug colony and he wandered away in a moment of foolishness. He is trying to find his way home but keeps getting trapped in people's houses. However, the topic loses interest for me almost as soon as I start. I do not want to write about bugs. I want to write about something more interesting and even my brother's hermit crab would be more interesting than a lost bug. Besides, journeys are hard to write. That is definitely not my spectacular topic.

So I am back to the beginning. I have nothing to write. My page is once again blank. I stared thoughtfully at the ceiling. For the first time I notice that a part of it is uneven. My hamster cage also has a tissue hanging from the top. And the blinds are crooked; I should go fix that.

No! I can't. I am here to write. To write about something, even if I only write for five minutes. But what? What is something that interests me?

I slowly play with some dialogue in my head, starting with one line and creating a reply. I

have written stories off of conversations in my head that start like that. So, in hopes they will give me ideas, I concentrate on them. There is one conversation between a prince and a peasant girl but it is so cliché to have them fall in love and that seems the only possible solution. There is another between a lost boy and a troll. The troll is a gentle troll but still, it would be hard to position a boy in a cave that contains a troll without him knowing it, especially with how much trolls are said to smell. Then there is a third between a bandit and a young widower with two young children in the middle of the desert. That seems slightly interesting but ideas on how to expand that elude me. None of the conversations help. Frustrated, I push them mentally aside and clear my mind.

So then, what to write?

My dog sniffs my toes. Her cold nose touches them as she sniffs, tickling me. I wonder if dogs can be tickled. I don't think so. Even if they could, they don't have any ability to laugh. She wanders by and I pet her for a moment. She looks up at me with sad brown eyes, asking for a walk. I shake my head. I can't take her on a walk right now. Later, when I'm done writing.

My dad comes in and we talk, joking about which is a more effective weapon—a bamboo stick or an AK47—and why the bamboo stick is the far more superior weapon. As he leaves, I get up and get myself a drink of water. I'm getting distracted, I know, but a glass of ice water sounds wonderful right now.

Maybe I could write about my civilization on Pluto. I've done two stories with them already and they haven't been that bad. I don't know what to write about with them though. The idea is just there, in the back of my mind, ready for use someday when I have a good plot. Just not today.

Not today. That is an incredible phrase I keep using. Why not today? I need to write something—I read that in a book—but nothing seems interesting today. A billion other things call my attention instead of the blank page before me from my hamsters I want to hold to the guitar I need to practice. Perhaps if I started earlier, instead of chatting with friends all afternoon on MSN, it might go better. But I am stuck now. I have to write now but no real inspiration is coming.

Idly, I start to write something completely random, making up words and creating creatures. I even make a place where there is no gravity. I get three paragraphs into it before I realize how utterly stupid it is. It is so stupid it does not count as writing at all. I doubt anyone would even understand it. Once again, I delete all I have written and am left with a blank page.

My dog comes back to say hi and that she's bored. I am too. I finish my water and put the cup in the dishwasher. It is quiet now, quieter than it normally is in our house. So quiet, in fact, I can hear the hum of the computer and the tick of the clock. The clock says it is late. I should probably go to bed. I want to paint a picture tomorrow and that is going to take several hours.

My picture is going to be beautiful. I'm going to find a tree on the internet and copy that. Under my tree, I'm going to place a young girl. The girl will be reading a book and wearing a sun hat and a skirt, so she will look slightly old fashion. I know that much. I have drawn something like that before though it was only a quick sketch on an envelope. Never have I painted it. I hope it will come out very well, since I don't paint as often as I'd like to. If it is good, then I will give it to my sister as her birthday present. I think that even if it isn't as good as I'd like, she will like it a lot. She seems to like everything I do, whether it be writing, drawing or painting. That's just

how she is and, although it frustrates me sometimes because I can never get an accurate assessment of what I write from her, sometimes it is very nice.

Writing....

I have it!

It hits suddenly. I'm not sure from where exactly but it hits. Hard. In that moment, I know what to write. I know the exact, perfect story. What to name her? Samantha—no, Tikva. I like the name Tikva. I start to type and just as I start to type, the story comes. It flows out of my hands like it has always been there.

Tikva is there. She speaks to me in a way that few people can hear. She tells me her story. It comes fast. So fast that I am skipping over words. I do not care. I'll come back later to fix them. I have to fix my spelling anyway. But I must write it now, before it is gone. Before I lose the story I have gained.

Typing. Fast. So fast. Words just come out. Thoughts fall over each other in their haste to escape. I know the exact words to use and when to use them. I don't know how. I just do. I know who she is. I know what she did. I know why she sits under that particular tree and what caused her to want to sit under the elm and not a birch. I know everything about her, just like she is telling them to me. Quickly, steadily, the events unfold. Tikva tells me. She tells me it all.

I write. Words fly. Time passes. Quickly. Accurately. They come. Fall over each other. Like a waterfall. A churning waterfall. Thoughts. So many thoughts. Ideas. No. Don't use that. That is not important. Yes. Use that. His name? Cadfael. Definitely.

Writing. Keyboard keys are the only sound I hear. Keys and Tikva. I write. Fast. Desperate to record it all. The ending shows itself. I must do it. I don't want to. I write. Keep writing. Pause for a moment. Think. Analyze. Start again. Pause. Retype. Much better. Go on. Write. Just keep writing. Taptap. Fingers hurt. Wrists hurt. Mind is in the story. Keep writing.

Laughter. Tears. Battles. Fear. Writing. Traitors. Love. Mourning. Writing. Magic. Knights. Kings. Desperation. Fear. Writing. Always writing. It unfolds. Comes out. Becomes a story. Evolves. Tikva. Death. Life. New life. Baby. Laughter again. Tears again. It starts again.

The story comes. It takes wings. It flies. Becomes something wonderful. I have always known her. Yet, I haven't. It is my story. It is hers just as much. I know it. I'm writing. Writing so fast. It's marvelous. Wonderful.

The end.

It is over just as suddenly as it came. Before me once again, the cursor blinks. I stop and look at the page. It is nearly seven pages now, finishing half way down the seventh page. This is where the story must end even if I don't want it to. Her story—Tikva's story—is over now. I am done. I have written it just as she told me.

I save it and go back to the top. Carefully, I read it again, fixing my mistakes as I go. It is wonderful, completely wonderful. Never can I write another one like it. Delighted, I e-mail it to my friends. Tomorrow morning, they will read it and, once they read it, they will send comments. Most should be good; it is that wonderful. Some will not be. Always there is the room for improvement. That's just the way it is.

I know since I have written these sudden stories before. I know that eventually this story, which I think is wonderful tonight, will not be that wonderful. Tikva, in spite of how real she is to me, is only a character, one from the vast array of characters that appear in my mind daily.

Where these characters came from, I do not know. They just come. Sometimes, something little—such as washing my face, or playing with a piece of wood—will inspire a whole story. Sometimes, though, it takes more work and time. A flash of ingenuity or sitting in front of the computer for thirty minutes both result in a story, one just as good as the other.

I always get a story though. Eventually, a story—be it a ten page short story or a four hundred page novel—will come. Some ideas spring on me and demand to be written that moment. Others slip in quietly on cat's feet and unfold slowly with patient deliberation. I cannot say that a particular thing will always give me an idea. Tonight, Tikva's story came from the picture I want to paint. Tomorrow, it will be something else

For tonight, though, I am satisfied. I wrote a story—a good story—of a girl name Tikva and her trials after her parents died. Perhaps tomorrow I will write more about her, such as her childhood. Perhaps I will write of a character slowly built up over time and pages. Or perhaps, something new will come. Some new character will appear and give me their story as a result to my question: what to write?