How do you get your ideas?

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OKay, so I was just in New York for a couple of days. Went to a glitzy black-tie dinner at the Museum of Natural History where we ate dinner under the dangling great blue whale, and listened to Tina Brown and Gore Vidal and Tim Russert and others. A lovely once-a year event which raises money for PEN, the organization that promotes and supposts literary freedom and fights on behalf of oppressed writers everywhere.

But that has nothing to do with the "where do you get your ideas?" question. It just explains why I was in New York.

On Monday morning I was walking on Broadway, between, oh, 79th and 83rd...(okay, so I'd been to the Barnes & Noble. So I can't live a day without going to a bookstore. I bought a book for my grandson) ...headed back to my hotel... when suddenly I saw a very small boy, maybe two or three...toddling out in the street. Just wandering, in the way of little ones, headed south on Broadway, in the cars-going-north side of the street, where luckily, at the next corner, traffic was stopped for a light. But the light would be changing in a few seconds, and there was this little guy, waddling along in his Pampers and OshKosh overalls, just happily making his way down the center of the street.

So I ran out and scooped him up. He yowled and kicked me, and I didn't blame him. When I took him back to sidewalk and looked around, I could see a panicky mother...with an empty stroller...frantically looking around. "Ive got him!" I called. I delivered him back to her, she heaved a sigh of relief, the traffic rumbled past, she thanked me, and I went on my way.

But here's what I began thinking. What if...heh, heh, isn't that always the key phrase?...as I stood there holding that yowling child, his mother had yelled, "Grab that woman! She took my little boy!" So now I am grabbed by a beefy passerby, a concerned citizen, while the woman dials 911 on her cell phone, and next thing I know, a black-and-white car comes up with sirens going, and in seconds the police have me in plastic handcuffs.

By the time I got back to my hotel a few blocks away, I had already set the scene: I am being read my rights and questioned in the police station (dirty floor, bad coffee, phones ringing)...and I had written a lot of dialogue, including my (you get ONE) phone call to Martin "You're *where*?" suggesting that he find me a good lawyer QUICK... The detective assigned to me has looked in my Barnes & Noble bag and found that I had bought "My Brother" by Anthony Browne ("If you weren't planning to keep the child, ma'am, why were you buying a children's book?" His tone is polite but sardonic; he has cigarette breath)

etc. etc.

And that is how one gets ideas. Gets them, plays with them, and then releases them into the atmosphere.

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