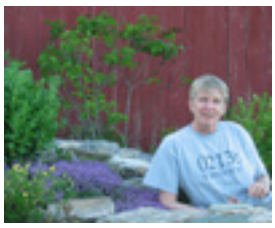
How do you get your ideas?

Posted on Jun 24, Posted by Lois Lowry Category Uncategorized

It is very, very hard to answer the question about the origin of ideas, because for me...and I assume this is true for almost all writers...ideas just APPEAR in the imagination, sometimes triggered by something you have seen, thought, read, or imagined.



Here is a scenario that just appeared in my mind, triggered by something that happened three days ago. A writer from the Bangor newspaper was here for an interview (hi, Kristen, if you are reading this!) because I am doing a bookstore thing up in that part of the state next week. So that she didn't have to bring a photographer, I had emailed her a couple of photos.

But shortly after she left, my son Ben arrived here in order to install my window air conditoners, something I can't do myself, weakling that I am, and he brought his two little boys with him. It was a lovely evening and I got out my camera to take some pictures of the grandsons.

Grey, age 7, found an interesting bug that he became involved with. But the younger boy, Rhys, age 5, wanted to use my camera. It made me a little nervous because it is a $1000 camera, but I told him as long as he kept the strap around his neck so that he couldn't drop it...and I showed him what to look through, and how to press the shutter.

Amazingly, he turned immediately into Richard Avedon. He told me where to sit, and then he moved into position, changing his stance several times while looking through the viewfinder, obviously planning the composition of the photograph. Then he clicked the shutter and gave

the camera back. No, no more, he said. Just one was enough. He went off to examine his brother's bug.

Later I put the digital photogarph into my computer. And I was amazed. Not at my own appearance, which is hopeless...I'll always be an old lady with a mediocre haircut. But at the quality of the photo he had taken.

On a whim I e-mailed it off to the newspaper writer. Probably they had already decided to use one of the previous ones I'd given them. But here is where my "what if..?" kicked in. What if they used that particular photograph? And under it, as a credit, his name: Rhys Lowry. (I told them his name when I sent the photo, so so far my what-if could actually take place).

So then: suppose the photo is published, and suppose someone somewhere...oh, let's say an editor from the New York Times, or Time Magazine...happens to be in need of a photogapher in Maine, for an assignment, and sees that picture, and looks at the credit, and calls Rhys Lowry (here's a plot complication; how do they find out his phone number? Hmmm. Have to work on the details)

What happens? His mom, my daughter-in-law Kate, answers the phone, and says...what? "Rhys? Sorry, he's on the potty right now?"

Well, that's amusing, but it ends the story. We need a way to keep it going, to get Rhys, age 5, hired for an important job, and then....

Or, as Gooney Bird Greene would say: *"Suddenly..."*

The beginnings are always easy. It's the plot complications, as they pile up, that make writing fiction difficult....and a lot of fun.

Tags: Untagged