

Viewpoints

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This is not a Med-Evac situation, folks. It is just a local guy who happens to own a helicopter and who landed last evening on my lawn and took me for a sunset cruise, as it were.



So there I am, looking down on my own chimneys.(hard to see, in these small photos. But the 'copter is above the roof, to the right of that tall tree) Defintely a new and different view of my own life.

Writers are always looking for new viewpoints. One of the most astounding in recent years was the *tour-de-force* called "The Lovely Bones" by Alice Sebold, in which the story is told by a dead fourteen year old girl who looks down and relates the effect of her murder on the lives of everyone who knew her. More recently, "The Book Thief," which I'm told (I haven't read it yet) is narrated by Death.

Whose story is this? Who should tell it? are the questions I ask myself when I begin a new book. Often the answer is straightforward. Other times, less so. Long ago, a book called AUTUMN STREET which remains one of my favorites, the story (a mostly-true one from my own childhood, actually) is told through the perceptions of a very young child but in the voice of a grown woman looking back on the events.

More recently, I wrestled with point-of-view when writing *THE SILENT BOY*. The title character is a boy about fourteen, but he doesn't (can't) speak. Who should tell his story? Eventually I decided that it worked best if the events in the plot are told by someone who doesn't completely understand them: a little girl. The Unreliable Narrator, this is called in writing courses. It is an intriguing challenge for the writer, and often a remarkable experience for the reader (most notable example coming to my mind at the moment: "Why I Live at the PO" by Eudora Welty)

The usual decision for the writer is simply first-person versus third-person. I've done both, and my favorite first-person narrative among my own books is the one called "Rabble Starkey" because it was both a joy and a challenge to write in the voice of the young girl whose life has been very limited by her circumstances. As her life expands, so does her voice, the diction and cadence of it. Chances are the reader doesn't even notice! But I, the writer, did! And it was fun.

Here's a funny thing. Most (well, many) people who have read my books about Anastasia Krupnik think, on remembering them, that they are written in the first person. They're not. Those books are in the limited third person. I love it that the intimacy of the voice deludes the reader that way.

I have never (yet), though, hovered over my own house and looked down at my own chimneys. Until yesterday.

Tags: Untagged