

Capturing Ideas

by Karen Rigley

Non-writers often ask, "Where do you get your ideas?"

The answer is everywhere. A word or phrase can fire a writer's imagination. Overhearing a conversation in a café, or the way a person cocks their head, or watching strangers say goodbye at the airport may spark a story. News items, children's antics, cloud formations, an unusual name or the scent of a nightblooming flower, can be the match to burst a twig-size idea into forest fire.

Writers can discover things to write about any where they care to look. How often has an emotion or memory or disaster struck you with "I must write about this"?

Frequently a character picked from real life or imagination demands to be written about, maybe because of a special strength or flaw. A quality which makes that character react in a special way to problems and situations.

Even a real life crime can inspire a story (preferably with an ending customized by the author). One story of mine actually developed from an old-fashioned used typewriter ribbon, one from a pretty name, another from a missing housewife and her cup of coffee. An intrigue can blossom out of secret passages within the walls of a fourteenth century German castle or a curious classified ad. Who? Why? A match lights!

The stealthy silhouette of a man standing by a street lamp on a rainy night can inspire a mystery. Seeing an unknown woman crying can spark a writer's imagination. Even an unidentified noise at midnight can spin into a tale.

Hobbies fuel ideas for characters, background and plot. So can careers. Or an author can discover a story in research. Perhaps a historical novelist striking gold in a century old journal kept by a medical student. Some authors can write an entire book around one antique gown. Where will it be worn? When? Who will wear it? For who? What happens?

Often a writer's ideas spring from questions like: "What if?" or "What happens next?" Anything can ignite a novel's action/reaction plot if it strikes an author. Lobsters at the supermarket, a shadow through a shower curtain, even a trip to the zoo have sparked entire novels. Anything can set off a writer.

We aren't safe anywhere -- not washing the dishes, sitting in a dentist chair, or flying over the desert. Keep notes to stockpile your ideas. Organize your ideas in notebook, on index cards or in your computer.

Writers never know when that idea-spark might be needed to light a story bonfire. Ideas are everywhere. Capture them.

Karen E Rigley is a multi-award winning author/poet/designer, Karen is recognized for her ability to touch readers with her myriad of stories, articles, scripts and poetry. She's a member of Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America and also the International Women's Writing Guild. She was editor/director of Writer's Rainbow. Her work's appeared in: Chicken Soup for the Soul: Love Stories, Underwired Magazine (Sept 08), On the SingleSide, Magic, The Magic Within, Grit, Science Fiction Review, ComputerEdge, Andre Norton's TALES OF THE WITCHWORLD (Volumes Two & Three), CATFANTASTIC Edited by Andre Norton & Martin H. Greenberg, CATFANTASTIC II and CATFANTASTIC III, Romance Writers Report, RhymeTime, SouthWest Writers Workshop, Science Fiction & Fantasy Workshop, Inkling, Keystrokes, MysteryTime, Housewife Writers Forum, Strange Wonderland, Today's Woman, etc.

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