

“HOMEWORK”

LIVING LIKE A WRITER

Robert McCloskey, the author of *Make Way for Ducklings*, was driving in Boston one time, and the traffic stopped completely. “What’s going on?” he thought, wondering if there had been an accident or something. So he got out of his car to look and walked ahead a few cars—and saw a long line of ducks crossing the highway. The traffic on all sides had stopped while each little duckling waddled along. McCloskey said to himself, “I could write a story about this! I could tell about the day I was driving in traffic, then everything stopped. I could tell about how I got out of my car and watched.” That story became *Make Way for Ducklings*, a book that has sold millions of copies.

Robert McCloskey, like so many other authors, lives differently because he is a writer. He lives every second waiting for stories to surface. He’s not alone. In the *New York Times* there was a story about how a tourist, visiting New York City from Arizona, saw a homeless man, ragged, tired, sitting sprawled on the sidewalk. The man had bare feet, blistered, sticking out from too-short trousers. As the tourist looked at the homeless man, a policeman came by, crouched alongside the homeless man, and said, “Your feet looked cold so I got you these boots,” and he produced boots with a soft fuzzy interior, which he slid on the homeless man’s feet. But here is the thing: the tourist said to herself, “This moment matters. This is beautiful.” And she used her phone to take a picture of that policeman doing that act of generosity. Later, she wrote about the small moment she’d experienced, and sent her writing and the photo to the police department, thinking the policeman deserved a note of appreciation. Before long, hundreds of thousands of people had heard the story.

Both Robert McCloskey and that tourist from Arizona lived like writers, seeing small moments that they experienced and then saying, “This matters. I could write about this.”

Continue to collect entries for your own writing. As you try to imagine the stories you might write, remember that writers see the potential for stories *everywhere*. Give yourself the eyes to find them!

When there is an interaction between family members, watch it as a writer. Notice how people talk, move, and act. Think about the meaning and significance behind the small things, and see if you can let your life prompt your writing. Meanwhile, we’ll add this to our list of strategies for generating narrative writing.

Strategies for Generating Personal Narrative Writing

- Think of a **person** who matters to you, list Small Moment stories connected to him/her and write one.
- Think of **first times**, **last times**, or **times you realized something**, list stories you could tell about each and write one.
- Think about a **place** that matters, list small moments that occurred in that place and write one.
- Think of a **strong feeling**. List stories of particular times you felt it and write one.
- **Live differently** because you are a writer. Notice small moments and capture them in entries.