

Author's Spotlight on Anne C. Bromley



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By Grace Nall

Imagine a writing assignment igniting a story you've been keeping close to your heart. Soon, a light shines on your main character's inner secrets, fears, and joys. Award-winning children's book author Anne C. Bromley recalls her student writing days at The Institute for Children's Literature.

"It all began with an assignment," stated Bromley. "Write a 350-word physical description of a real child you have observed (cannot be a relative or a child you know) and write a 350-word monologue in this child's voice." The assignment suited Bromley's writing style since she doesn't plot first. Instead, she gets to know her main character. Bromley's main character in her book, *The Lunch Thief* (c. 2010, Tilbury House Publishers), came "alive" in a department store.

"While walking through the men's department at J.C. Penny's Store one evening in late November, I saw a heavysset boy about 12 years old, struggling to try on a sweater," stated Bromley. "His mother kept handing him more sweaters, and he was not happy about this."

Writers have the knack for applying sensory details to create vivid images. "I went over to the Food Court of the mall and wrote down all that I'd seen and heard," stated Bromley. "When I got home, I wrote an objective description of this experience. Then, I wrote an interior monologue in this boy's voice. He 'told' me his problem and that helped to jumpstart my story."

Bromley describes writing as "the inner itch you can't scratch." "It is just something I love to do," stated Bromley. "Something I **have** to do, even if no one reads another word."

Perseverance ignited opportunities and *The Lunch Thief* garnered a *Skipping Stones* Honor Book Award in 2011. *Skipping Stones*, a nonprofit international multicultural magazine for youth, highlights cultural and environmental awareness. *The School Library Journal* gave *The Lunch Thief* rave reviews stating "... this entirely credible story of how a thoughtful boy elects to light one candle in response to a larger problem of homelessness and hunger would make an excellent touchstone for class discussion."

Bromley's writing journey for *The Lunch Thief* not only came from a department store incident, but from her own close encounter with the San Diego Wildfires of 2003 and 2007. "Each story is inspired differently," stated Bromley. "One may come from an image ... another from a strong memory... usually there is a sense of urgency that pushes me to begin writing the story."

"The firestorms of 2003 and 2007 are, so far, the most extreme on record," stated Bromley. "Everyone is affected, whether one sees flames leaping across a freeway or if one breathes air so toxic one must wear a surgical mask." She further added, "So fire was in the back of my mind, and it seemed appropriate to use the fire and its impact on Kevin's life as a way to 'explain' his odd behavior and to lead Rafael to a better understanding." Bromley lived along the coast and within ten minutes of the fire line. "The smoke filled my lungs, but I had an evacuation pack ready at the front door," stated Bromley. "I had friends in the East County who were evacuated and one whose trailer was torched."

Bromley has authored numerous poems and essays in literary magazines, including two poetry books, *Scenes from the Light Years* and *Midwinter Transport* (Carnegie Mellon University Press). Other books include a book of translations with SUNY Press (Poems by Rosalia de Castro). Her current projects include revising an early middle grade novel, along with three picture books. Bromley has advice for balancing life as an author. "The desire to write will help each person find the 'windows' necessary to get the writing done, whether it's at the crack of dawn, midnight, or on one's lunch hour," says Bromley. "There is no formula. There is only 'the itch you can't scratch.'" Visit her website at www.annebromley.com. (c SCBWI Sandcastle Newsletter, January 2012)