

"Go into the story and find the animals"

[Scott Myers](#)

Writing wisdom from a three year-old boy: My son Luke.



To see this world of wonder through the eyes of a child...

This writing mantra derives from a conversation I had with my then three year-old son. It went pretty much like this:

Me: Hey, Luke, I'm starting to write a new script tomorrow. And it's funny, but no matter how many times I start a new story, I get a bit, uh, nervous about it. Got any, you know, advice for your dad?

Luke [without any hesitation]: Go into the story and find

God as my witness, that's what my son said.

Now who knows what Luke was really thinking at the time. Stupidly, I didn't follow up with him, flummoxed as I was at his comment. I remember mulling it over and thinking that the whole idea of going into a story is precisely what a writer does, immersing themselves in a narrative universe that they create. That has always seemed just right to me, both in its simplicity and profundity, which is frankly why I named this blog GoIntoTheStory.

But over time, it's the *other* part in which I've discovered more and more layers of meaning. Start with the verb "find." Is there any word more appropriate to describe the writing process? Here are some of its definitions:

- "to come upon by chance": Doesn't that sound like brainstorming?
- "to locate, attain, or obtain by search or effort": Doesn't that sound like research?
- "to discover or perceive after consideration": Doesn't that sound like what happens when we mull over our story?
- "to feel or perceive": As we go into the story, we become more and more emotionally connected to it.
- "to become aware of, or discover": The biggie, where as explorers we uncover a story's hidden gems.

Then there is "the animals." I'm almost sure what Luke was

thinking about was how a children's story so often is habituated by animals. Thus in his eyes, my task was probably pretty simple: *Go find the animals. They are your characters.* But what if we think about it more symbolically.

- Animals can be both domesticated and wild. So some things we discover as we go into the story are what we might expect (domesticated). Other times we're surprised, even shocked by ideas and thoughts that spring to mind (wild).
- Animals are alive, organic, and intuitive beings. So are our story's characters.
- Throughout human history, animals have come to mean something in stories. A fox is sly and cunning. A crow in many cultures signifies death. An owl is wise. Per Jung and others who study myth and psychoanalysis, animals can serve as conduits into the mind of the dreamer.

Which reminds me of something I read about a movie director who in prepping to make a movie gave each of the actors their own animal token as something they could reference in interpreting their character.

I'm sure if you think about it, you could probably come up with other shades of meaning for the mantra.

I just know it's my favorite writing mantra because of its source: a cherubic youngster with bright blue eyes and a look of deep intention in his face:

Go into the story... and find the animals.