

## Kevin Brockmeier

Kevin Brockmeier writes stories that are inventive and bend toward the fantastic. His latest collection, *The View From the Seventh Layer*, gives readers another glimpse into the author's storytelling portal, which is routinely described as meticulous, imaginative, lyrical and empathetic. He grew up in Little Rock, Ark., reading fantasy and science fiction, and it wasn't until college that his tastes gravitated to realistic literary fiction, a background he credits for his current writing style. After college, he attended the Iowa Writers' Workshop program at the University of Iowa, studying under such names as Frank Conroy and Marilyn Robison, and graduated in 1997 with an MFA degree. He lives in Little Rock and tends to follow every adult book he writes with one for children.

**Credits:** His work also includes *The Brief History of the Dead*, *The Truth About Celia* and *Things That Fall From the Sky* and the children's novels *City of Names* and *Grooves: A Kind of Mystery*. His stories have also appeared in *The New Yorker*, *McSweeney's* and *The Oxford American*.



**Why:** A simple answer: I write out of gratitude to all the books I've loved and out of a desire to emulate them.

**Routine:** I write at home on a desktop, very slowly. I never learned to type properly, so I employ the much-derided two-finger method of composition, but my two fingers have become pretty fast over the years. I write so slowly because I'm constitutionally incapable of moving on from a sentence that seems wooden or inauthentic. I try to hew to regular working hours, typically ... from about 10 in the morning to 5 in the evening.

**Revisions:** I tend to revise each sentence many times before I move on to the next, each paragraph many times before I move on to the next, and each page many times before I move on to the next. I progress very slowly to the end of a story in a series of tiny overlapping waves. This is a terrible working method, and I don't recommend it to anyone, but one of its few advantages is that my stories have usually reached a state that's fairly close to their final form by the time I finish the last sentence.

**Ideas:** Like everyone else, I have dozens of ideas a day that could serve as the basis for an interesting story. They come from reading and fantasizing and observing my own life and talking with friends and strangers and simply watching the world around me and wondering *What if?* In other words, they come from everywhere. I once heard someone compare writing a story to canoeing a river, and the metaphor is one that makes sense to me: I often have a broad notion of where a story is going to lead me before I start, but rarely do I know every single development, and I permit myself to discover a lot of the scenery as I go along.

**Influences:** I'm in the habit, actually, of keeping and regularly updating a list of my 50 favorite books. ... Among the writers are Italo Calvino, William Maxwell, James Agee, Bohumil Hrabal, J.G. Ballard, Walter Tevis and Peter S. Beagle. ... I'm the type of reader who instinctually cleaves to F. Scott Fitzgerald's advice to his daughter—*Read authors, not books*—and once I discover a writer whose work feels intimate to me, I tend to rush through everything that writer has writ-

ten. As for my children's fiction, that's very much indebted to Daniel Pinkwater, [author of *Alan Mendelsohn: The Boy From Mars*].

**Advice:** First, read as much as you can—both classic and contemporary literature, fiction and poetry, across every genre and discipline. Beyond that, the first thing to keep in mind is it's difficult to write well, and you should accept it as a given that if you want your fiction to be as truthful and precisely calibrated as it can be, the process will be painstaking.

I think most writers ultimately end up adopting either the sentence or the paragraph as the smallest unit of meaning in their work, the component by which their stories move forward, and it can be helpful to discover which kind of writer you are and embrace that style of writing. For writers who are battling a resistance to getting started, I think Ray Bradbury's dictum can be helpful: "Jump off the cliff and build your wings on the way down."

*Interview by Zoie Clift, a freelance writer in Little Rock, Ark.*