

A Letter from E. B. White

Where did the ideas for Charlotte and *Stuart Little* come from? Why did E. B. White choose to write about a pig? Did his stories really happen? Read the answers in this letter, which he wrote to all kids everywhere shortly before his death.

Dear Reader:

I receive many letters from children and can't answer them all -- there wouldn't be time enough in a day. That is why I am sending you this printed reply to your letter. I'll try to answer some of the questions that are commonly asked.

Where did I get the idea for *Stuart Little* and for *Charlotte's Web*? Well, many years ago I went to bed one night in a railway sleeping car, and during the night I dreamed about a tiny boy who acted rather like a mouse. That's how the story of *Stuart Little* got started.

As for *Charlotte's Web*, I like animals and my barn is a very pleasant place to be, at all hours. One day when I was on my way to feed the pig, I began feeling sorry for the pig because, like most pigs, he was doomed to die. This made me sad. So I started thinking of ways to save a pig's life. I had been watching a big grey spider at her work and was impressed by how clever she was at weaving. Gradually I worked the spider into the story that you know, a story of friendship and salvation on a farm. Three years after I started writing it, it was published. (I am not a fast worker, as you can see.)

Sometimes I'm asked how old I was when I started to write, and what made me want to write. I started early -- as soon as I could spell. In fact, I can't remember any time in my life when I wasn't busy writing. I don't know what caused me to do it, or why I enjoyed it, but I think children often find pleasure and satisfaction in trying to set their thoughts down on paper, either in words or in pictures. I was no good at drawing, so I used words instead. As I grew older, I found that writing can be a way of earning a living.

Some of my readers want me to visit their school. Some want me to send a picture, or an autograph, or a book. And some ask questions about my family and my animals and my pets. Much as I'd like to, I can't go visiting. I can't send books, either -- you can find them in a bookstore or a library. Many children assume that a writer owns (or even makes) his own books. This is not true -- books are made by the publisher. If a writer wants a copy, he must buy it. That's why I can't send books. And I do not send autographs -- I leave that to the movie stars. I live most of the year in the country, in New England. From our windows we can look out at the sea and the mountains. I live near my married son and three grandchildren.

Are my stories true, you ask? No, they are imaginary tales, containing fantastic characters and events. In real life, a family doesn't have a child who looks like a mouse; in real life, a spider doesn't spin words in her web. In real life, a swan doesn't blow a trumpet. But real life is only one kind of life -- there is also the life of the imagination. And although my stories are imaginary, I like to think that there is some truth in them, too -- truth about the way people and animals feel and think and act.

Yours sincerely,

E. B. White