

KALLI DAKOS



I was sitting at lunch

with a group of students when Tony looked down at his sandwich and yelled, "Someone took a bite out of my peanut butter and potato chips sandwich and it wasn't me!"

I was a tired teacher that day and didn't want to deal with problems, but the poet inside of me began to bubble up in excitement. There was a story here, a mystery, and I had to check it out. We never did figure out where that bite went, but together we wrote the poem "Who Took a Bite Out of Tony's Sandwich?" And later that week I tried my first peanut butter and potato chips sandwich.

It's the poet inside of me who knows how to live. It's the poet inside of me who is wide awake, and ready to embrace the beauty, the challenges, and the mysteries in life. It's the poet inside of me who celebrates living on a daily basis, and finds extraordinary joys in very ordinary moments.

Take pencils, for example. Who would think there might be a gold mine of writing possibilities in plain old pencils? But pencils, like the one I found in my driveway, have stories too, and some of them are tragic:

Under a car squished out flat awful to end life like that.

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Or the poor pencil that ended up in the toilet.

My pencil is a mess,
Because I heard it drop,
Into the toilet
With a plip, plip, plop!

If I weren't a poet, I would have missed the little girl who had glued a rainbow of colored yarn to the top of her pencil so it would be as pretty as the fancy ones her friends had purchased in the stores, and I would have definitely missed the problem that the bright yellow five-foot styro-foam pencil had:

I may be pretty; I may be smart.
But I am a pencil without a part.

I may be lovely; I may be bright,
But I'm a pencil that just can't write.

If there is a gold mine of poetry in pencils, then there must be buried treasures all around us: in the book bags we lug to school, the snowflakes that fall, the trees outside classroom windows, the games we play in gym, the stories we tell at lunch, and the secrets we hide in our hearts.

As I write this letter, I am looking outside my study window at the bank of my river. A man is throwing a ball to a dog, and by accident, he throws it in the water. The dog runs to the water's edge, stops, and looks at the ball floating away. I watch in awe. Will the dog jump in the water or not? A strange thought crosses my mind—at least he doesn't have to worry about a bathing suit.

The water is cold, but the dog makes the courageous choice and jumps in. He paddles to the ball and brings it back to the owner, ready to play the game again.

I begin to write my next poem:

"Dogs Don't Have to Wear Bathing Suits"

Kalli Dakos

My Writing Is an Awful Mess

My writing is an awful mess,
And my teacher asked me why.
"I zoom through my assignments,"
I told her with a sigh.

"I want to finish all this work
So I can yack with friends,
I simply cannot wait until
The school day finally ends.

"I never check my spelling and
Punctuation, I don't try,
For if I spent my time on these,
My . . . social life would die.

"It's talking with my friends each day
That keeps my whole world bright,
And I don't want to give this up,
Just to get my schoolwork right."