



## **Mind like a Sponge** **by Bobbi Linkemer**

**W**e retain what is learned. People with such minds see life as “earth school” - a huge classroom in which to take in as much as possible, think about it, talk about it, write about it, and, especially, make new and original connections out of it. They are inherently smart, in my experience, though not always in conventional ways. They may not necessarily belong to Mensa, have a college degree, or even have much formal schooling. On the other hand, they may be very well-educated, well-traveled, and well-versed in the classics. The important thing is that they know things. And they know them because they observe life, they question, they listen, they read, and they treat each new piece of knowledge as if it were something of great value.

Whether they are left-brained scientists or mathematicians or right-brained artists or actors, they share an insatiable curiosity about virtually everything. Such people seem incapable of boredom, finding the most prosaic, seemingly dull subjects worthy of attention. Some are introverted and keep all of this information to themselves; others will talk your ear off, convinced that everyone wants to know more.

Their other trait is the ability to integrate all of this information - make it a part of themselves, tuck it away for future reference, and invariably pull it out at exactly the right moment. It's a remarkable gift and quite an indispensable one for a writer. The question is, if you weren't born with this kind of mind, how do you build one from scratch? Here are some ways to begin.

- Decide to be interested, even if, at first, you are not. If that is too much, at least decide to be present. If you are fully awake and aware, something is bound to strike a chord. If nothing does, you might want to rethink your decision to be a writer. If you are absolutely unable to kindle a flicker of interest, consider that a red flag. Perhaps you are in the wrong profession or the wrong segment of the right profession.
- Listen, really listen, to what your resource person is telling you. Ask questions. Feed back what you think you heard. Don't be satisfied with superficial answers. Dig a little deeper. Engage yourself in a dialogue, rather than a question and answer session, where you throw out a question, the interviewee throws back an answer, and there is no real connection.
- Think of the assignment as a giant jigsaw puzzle, with every new piece of information adding to the pattern. Begin to form a diagram in your mind, or on paper, of how the pieces seem to be fitting. Try to picture the puzzle complete, and ask yourself, “What's missing? What do I need to fill in the holes? Where or how can I find it? What will this look like when it's finished?”

- Play detective. Look for clues that will lead you to sources that will answer questions or suggest the questions when you don't know what to ask. Nose around. Go to the library. Surf the Internet. Seek out experts. Check out Web sites. Find a unique twist. Follow off-beat leads. Be persistent. Amazing things will happen. You may even get hooked on the topic.

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