



Source: Sean Rayment, 'Peace in Iraq lost in first 100 days, UK report says', *Telegraph*, London in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 05/11/07.

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Writer's block—there can never be writer's block because there are always words. We live in a sea of words, words all around us, and words running through our minds. All a writer has to do is write some down. Easy, a cinch, no problem...just listen to the words in your mind and write.

Now, if I were an architect: I can really imagine architect's block—there are so many different ways that things can block you if you're an architect. Because as an architect, you're dealing with objects, materials, solid things in the world. And objects tend to push back. People do too. The concrete not bending the way you want it to bend and the mayor wanting the building to be more magnificent. Things like that get in the way.

I heard a story once about an architect who wanted to make a building that had a secret breathing space on every floor. In his mind, this space was going to be empty, a space that interrupted the flow of the architecture, and provided something like a rest in music, a pause, a place to rethink the path that you had so decisively taken when you entered the building in the first place.

If you looked at the plans that he drew for the building, you would never have found these spaces. They were well hidden. And so it became difficult to convey his idea to the contractors and other workers who were actually making the building. He found that he had to be more hands-on, more involved in the daily process of construction. He would come to the building site every day and just wander around. When he found the right place, the place for his breathing space, he'd mark it with a piece of chalk.

'Here,' he'd say to the contractor. 'Make a small space, big enough to fit one man, standing up, with room for his arms to spread out, to reach the walls and the ceiling. Just that big and no bigger. Here.'

The contractor really tried to do what the architect said, but he just didn't get it. So, one space was too small, another too large. One was triangular, another curved. The architect didn't notice these problems until it was too late. The contractor managed to hide his mistakes.

When the building opened, the architect took a walk through the first floor. He entered with determination, walking quickly up to the reception desk, asking directions to the elevators. He went right away to the bank of elevators and pushed the button for UP. Meanwhile, he looked around for his hidden space. But he didn't find one on that floor.

When he got to the second floor, he proceeded to walk through the hallways until he got to the end of one corridor. There he found that he was lost. He took a deep

breath and told himself not to panic. How could he be lost in his own building? He realized that he could see a couple of stairs, unexpectedly going down. He took them slowly, because he had to bend his head to get into the small space they led down to. He could only squat in this space and he did so.

'Is this one of my breathing spaces?' he thought with dismay. 'But this is so uncomfortable, cramped, and dingy.'

He went back up the stairs and took the elevator to the third floor. Again, he wandered the corridors, ending up in a perfectly proportioned empty room.

'This is more like it,' he thought. But the room was painted bright yellow. The colour made his heart beat faster. Not a resting place, at all.

He continued from floor to floor, on each floor finding a room more disappointing than the last. Not one of the hidden rooms was really hidden, not one of the rooms provided the kind of space he had envisioned.

'I'll kill that contractor,' he said.

But, he knew it was his own fault.

There was something about the idea of an empty room that still intrigued him, so he sat down to think about it in his favourite chair.

And that reminds me of chairs. If you see an empty chair, do you want to sit in it? Do you think about the person who sat in it before or the person who might sit in it, the one approaching the chair, tired from walking, looking for a little rest?

Some chairs seem to belong to one person. People will point these out.

'That's my father's chair.'

'That's my chair.'

People like to sit, to read in a chair, to doze, to sit on the edge of a chair and listen to a good story. A line of empty chairs waits for the dance; rows of empty chairs wait for an audience; a circle of chairs wait for therapy, or if they're around a table, they're waiting for hungry people to sit down and eat, or drink whiskey and play poker, or hold hands and summon the dead. When I see an empty chair, I think about the dead, the ones who can't sit in their chairs anymore, taking a load off their feet.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ellen Zweig.*