

The Princess Bride: Ten Things I Learned

I was 40 years old and had been divorced five years, with no intentions at all of remarrying, when I was introduced to a man named Greg Leavitt.

During those five years of single parenthood, before meeting Greg, I had refused to date – no point, given that I had no intentions at all of remarrying, and any relationship without marriage wouldn't do, given I had some rather traditional ideas about such things.

Also, I had six children ages eight to seventeen. This meant that not only was I too preoccupied to date, even if I had had every intention of marrying, it was ridiculous to think anyone *would* marry me given that I came packaged with six children.

And even if someone was *crazy* enough to take on all seven of us, I wouldn't have him... because of the implied *craziness*.

It may be hard to believe, but the odd man still asked me out. And I always said no to the odd men.

But for reasons too long to tell, when Greg asked me to go to a movie with him, I shocked myself by saying yes. Well, first I said no, and then he was so sweet about my rejection, I changed my mind and said yes.

We went to the movies. At the end of the evening, I was shocked to hear myself accept an invitation to a second date.

As we continued to date, I discovered that we were so... *wrong* for each other. I had many children, he had no children. I was a voracious reader and a writer. He didn't read much of anything except the newspaper. I liked PBS. He liked ESPN. I was loquacious, he was reticent. I was dreamy, romantic. He was pragmatic, sensible.

And I soon loved him with a most irrational love.

If he loved me back, it was hard to tell. He was kind, attentive, but smart enough to know what he might be taking on by marrying a woman with six children. He was sensible enough to know that his quiet, orderly life would be completely exploded by marrying me.

But he kept asking me out, and I kept saying yes, and I kept loving him with a most irrational love. I never said so, because *he* never said so, and I admired him for being sane enough to never say so...

But one fateful day, he came over to my house, and together we watched *The Princess Bride*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9HqSVSISl4> (just the last minute or so, or edit out the old man and the boy)

After the movie was over, my Greg, this quiet, stolid, reserved man, took me in his arms and solemnly told me that I was his true love and did I think this happened every day? It wasn't many months after, that we were married.

That is the secret power of *The Princess Bride*. My husband fell under its spell. I didn't do it on purpose – I thought he was impervious to spells. I think he thought he was, too, and I'm pretty sure he went home that day somewhat bewildered.

For that moment in time, for that spell cast by *The Princess Bride* upon my husband of now 26 years, William Goldman deserves my undying gratitude. But long before I met my husband, long before there was even a movie, I was already forever grateful to William Goldman because of his iconic book *The Princess Bride*, which taught me many things about storytelling when I was in the very beginnings of my apprenticeship as a writer. It was a mentor text for me before I knew what a mentor text was. It is a book of extremes, but it seems it took extremes to help me see.

In this lecture, I'll talk about ten things I learned from the book, *The Princess Bride*.

1. I learned from *The Princess Bride* that a book that changes people and hearts does not have to be bleak or depressing, or even about social pathologies. I've worked with more than one student whose style and leanings go toward humor or romance or fantasy or adventure, and they do it very well. But sometimes they arrive at VCFA and decide they must throw it all over because they think the kinds of books they like to write are not somehow as meaningful or important.

Goldman wrote umpteen "serious" books, including *Marathon Man*, and many award-winning screenplays like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *All the President's Men*, *Misery*, *The Stepford Wives*, and *A Bridge Too Far*. According to Goldman, none of these so-called serious works ever elicited the love and adoration of *The Princess Bride*. None of them have remained as popular and enduring as *The Princess Bride*. Goldman wrote, "I've gotten more responses on *The Princess Bride* than on anything else I've done put together – all kinds of strange outpouring letters. Something in *The Princess Bride* affects people."

This is a story, which includes: "Fencing. Fighting. Torture. Poison. True Love. Hate. Revenge. Giants. Hunters. Bad men. Good men. Beautifullest Ladies. Snakes. Spiders. Pain. Death. Brave men. Cowardly men. Strongest men. Chases. Escapes. Lies. Truths. Passion. Miracles..."

Basically, this is a list of fiction clichés, and yet they speak to our child selves. The writer declares himself. He doesn't hedge about and dissemble. He comes right out and says, this is what the story is about, and if you keep reading knowing all this, we have an agreement. We have entered the world of story together, and anything is possible now. It's sweet, it's sincere.

David Foster Wallace predicted, in his 1993 essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction", a new literary movement which would espouse something called the New Sincerity ethos:

“The next real literary "rebels" in this country might well emerge as some weird bunch of anti-rebels, born oglers who dare somehow to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse and instantiate single-entendre principles.... Who eschew self-consciousness and hip fatigue. These anti-rebels would be outdated, of course, before they even started. Dead on the page. Too sincere. Clearly repressed. Backward, quaint, naive, anachronistic. Maybe that'll be the point. Maybe that's why they'll be the next real rebels. Real rebels, as far as I can see, risk disapproval. The old postmodern insurgents risked the gasp and squeal: shock, disgust, outrage, censorship, accusations of socialism, anarchism, nihilism. Today's risks are different. The new rebels might be artists willing to risk the yawn, the rolled eyes, the cool smile, the nudged ribs, the parody of gifted ironists, the "Oh how banal." To risk accusations of sentimentality, melodrama. Of overcredulity. Of softness. Of willingness to be suckered by a world of lurkers and starers”. End quote.

As a young writer, I learned that a book about beautiful ladies, passion and miracles, sincerely told, can be every bit as meaningful and relevant and enduring as a book about addiction, mental illness, prostitution, homelessness or any number of societal ills.

Number one lesson from *Princess Bride*: write the book you want to read, and write it well and with truth and with all your heart.

2. I learned from *The Princess Bride* that a touch of humor can make heartbreaking moments even more poignant and heartbreaking.

In every book I've written I have tried to implement this principle: a touch of humor at the most serious moments somehow makes the pain more painful, the romance more romantic.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBcoZ56Vv5E>

One of the most touching moments for me is when Fezzik the giant, who compulsively rhymes, and Inigo, realize that they are very dear to one another.

“You’re my friend, my only one,” Fezzik says.

“*Pathetic*, that’s what we are,” Inigo says.

“*Athletic*,” Fezzik says.

“That’s very good,” says Inigo.

Why does this funny bit of dialogue break my heart with joy? Why do we understand the depth of this friendship more with this humorous exchange than we would with any more straightforward kind of declaration?

I don’t know precisely how this works, the mix of humor and human emotion. Does it drain some of the sappiness out of a potentially sappy moment? Does it help us believe it more easily? When characters are funny, we love them more – so we have this character we love more, who is loving more? Is it the juxtaposition of humor and gravitas? I don’t understand it, but I do use it as a technique in my work.

Think about your project. Is there a poignant moment in it that could be even more poignant if you added a touch of humor? *The Princess Bride* taught me that humor can underline the sorrow and love, can make us laugh, and also weep.

3. I learned from *The Princess Bride* that knowing who is telling the story, and why, can add an additional layer of meaning.

According to the introduction, *The Princess Bride: S. Morgenstern’s Classic Tale of True Love and High Adventure* is a real book written by an author named S. Morgenstern. When the author Goldman’s life goes sideways as an adult, he remembers this book that his father read to him when he was a sick child, and he desperately seeks a copy of the Morgenstern for comfort.

None of this happened, of course. Don't mock me if I tell you that it took me a while before I figured it out. And I'm not the only one. To this day, you will find online reviews that explain that *The Princess Bride* is an abridgement of an original novel by S. Morgenstern, and that Goldman as a boy had pneumonia when his father read him this book, etc.

Two reviews in the front matter are from fictional Morgenstern experts.

In the front matter of *The Princess Bride* is a list of Goldman's published novels. You will not find *The Princess Bride* among them, although he does acknowledge himself as the creator of the screenplay. The author becomes part of the fiction. Which I loved – aren't we all creating the story of ourselves as we go? Don't we even create a fiction around how our fiction is created – which is that it comes whole cloth as a result of our own genius, when in reality it is largely housework, drudge work, with little moments of inspiration?

The Princess Bride has a frame text – the central story about the princess bride is bracketed by Goldman's own experience with the fictional text.

As a novice writer, I loved the possibilities of a frame text to reveal ways for the narrative to be interpreted. In the case of *The Princess Bride*, for me the frame story became a commentary on the healing nature of story. The self-reflective nature of the story means that the whole book is a commentary on story in general.

Years later I discovered that what Goldman was doing had a name. It was called metafiction.

Metafiction is a narrative technique in which the work self-consciously calls attention to itself as a work of fiction. Here are three common techniques of metafiction that Goldman uses, and beside them, the title of one of my books in which this technique became central to the themes of my story:

- creating a story within a story (*Keturah and Lord Death*)
- a story about someone reading or writing a book (*My Book of Life by Angel*)
- addressing the reader directly (*Calvin*) In the case of Calvin, the reader is supposedly Bill Waterson, and the reader is simply a voyeur.

Since reading *The Princess Bride*, I have always tried to address the question of who is telling my story and why they are telling it. Doing so has helped me find the voice of the piece. It has given my character an additional desire line as they seek to fulfill their reasoning for telling the story. It can add additional layers of meaning for both writer and reader, whether or not we are addressing directly the practice of fiction.

4. I learned from *The Princess Bride* to leave out the boring stuff.

The Princess Bride the Good Parts Version ostensibly was born when Goldman's father abridged the book as he read to him when he was a child and ill – as I have mentioned. The reason it needed abridging, according to the author, was because Morgenstern often larded the pages with unnecessary material.

The author tells us that he cut out sixty-six pages of text dealing with Prince Humperdinck's ancestry and Florentine history. In the full version of the *Morgenstern*, it takes fifty-six and a half pages for Queen Bella to pack for her trip to Guilder and extend an invitation to Princess Noreena of Guilder. She tenders the invitation to Princess Noreena (1 page), Princess Noreena accepts (1 page), and then we get 23 pages of Princess Noreena packing all her clothes and hats for her journey to Florin. An entire chapter called "Preparations" is left out of the Goldman abridgement.

Goldman states that these pages were originally written to be symbolic – they were the "literary" bits.

Goldman asks in the frame, "Why would a master of narrative stop his narrative dead before it has much chance to begin generating?" end quote. Here is a question for the ages! The question struck me as a young writer, and it saved me and my readers much sorrow and wading.

My book *Buffalo Flats* was 410 pages long when I first sent it off to my editors. Over the course of the editing process, I cut 140 pages. And the story survived. It not only survived, it got better. The minute I catch myself trying to be symbolic, try to remember that every book I write should be abridged... *by me*. Every book I write should be the good-parts version.

5. I learned reading *The Princess Bride* how to make my characters loveable – how to let them be heroes.

I had thought, as a new writer (and I am often tempted to think as an experienced writer), that my task was to make my characters real, absolutely human. I did my job so well, I made my characters so human and fallible, that nobody really liked them. Readers had no interest in spending ten or so hours with them – the time it would take to read the book.

It took me some time and some living to realize that real humans are in fact heroic, that virtually all people, once you get to know them well enough, are in fact loveable. I didn't know this when I read *The Princess Bride* the first time because I hadn't practiced loving long enough, I hadn't the acquired the wisdom to see that in virtually every human being is a secret hero. It became my task as a writer to discover my character's heroic bits, knowing that my readers would relate and see themselves on the page.

I once made this declaration before an audience, that our characters must be likeable, and I was taken to task for it. Someone said, that's not true, they need only be interesting. I believe they confused *likeable* with *good*. Any character who is so compelling that they capture our attention, that they interest us, must needs be likeable for one reason or another. Probably the single best thing I ever did for my writing career was to consciously set out to give readers at least one reason to like my protagonist.

I studied fictional characters I loved, and characters of *The Princess Bride*, and found that they often had at least one of the following qualities:

- they love and/or are loved
- physical attractiveness
- altruism
- plans, purpose or dreams
- courage or a heightened sense of fair play
- unique attitude – shrewd or self-deprecating sense of humor
- cleverness
- characters in jeopardy
- an endearing flaw

We can love characters for their **physical attractiveness**. But you'll want to do it in a unique and original way.

Goldman concretizes Buttercup's beauty. He writes, "The year that Buttercup was born, the most beautiful woman in the world was a French scullery maid named Annette.... The year Buttercup turned ten, the most beautiful woman lived in Bengal, the daughter of a successful tea merchant."

If we suspend disbelief in that moment, then we fully accept it when we are told that at fifteen, Buttercup was objectively and measurably the most beautiful woman in the world. On a sort of shallow level, this makes us interested in Buttercup.

But what makes us love her is when she thinks, "How could someone care if she were the most beautiful woman in the world or not?" We like her for her humility. Also, she has an endearing flaw or two: we learn she is without imagination – she names her horse "Horse" – and she's a bad speller.

We will love characters for their **altruism**. Altruism is the practice of disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others. We love Inigo Montoya because he has devoted his entire life to becoming a wizard of the sword so he might avenge the death of his beloved father at the hands of the six-fingered man.

We will willingly love a character for having **plans, purpose and dreams**: Westley sets out on the high seas so he and Buttercup can have a life together. He will do anything to save her from Humperdink or the Sicilian. His plan is to make Buttercup his own.

We will love a character by giving them **courage and a heightened sense of fair play**: Westley is courage personified. He survives the Dread Pirate Roberts. He climbs the Cliffs of Insanity, defeats the greatest swordsman in the world. Their battle is the height of gentlemanly fair play. He gets himself and Buttercup through the Fire Swamp, and with courtesy and good manners he survives the tortures of the Count.

We will often love a character for their **unique attitude** – sometimes for a shrewd or self-deprecating sense of humor.

We will love a character for his **cleverness**: Westley excels at pirate-ing, outwits even the Sicilian who is known for his cleverness. He comes up with the plan to storm the heavily guarded palace and rescue Buttercup. He isn't just a pretty face.

We love characters who **love and are loved**: Has there ever been a love like the love between Westley and Buttercup? As Buttercup says of Westley, "he's 'not so much wonderful as perfect. Kind of flawless. More or less magnificent. Without blemish. Rather on the ideal side." There is also great love between Fezzik and Inigo, as they eventually realize that they no longer have to be lonely because they have each other.

We will care about and root for characters who are in **jeopardy, but who don't feel sorry for themselves** – this last caveat is mine: All the characters

in the story are elevated by their opponents. The six-fingered Count is equal to Inigo in his swordsmanship. Humperdinck, while a figure of ridicule, is not to be underestimated as a villain. He has perfected the art of hunting, and uses his skills to capture Westley as they emerge from the Fire Swamp. He is determined to conquer Gilder, and is coldly willing to have Buttercup killed to achieve his ends. Humperdinck is a formidable opponent, placing our beloved characters in jeopardy. But the good characters, no matter their sufferings, never feel sorry for themselves. If they did, the reader wouldn't have to: death to story.

We will love characters who have an **endearing flaw**: Inigo and Fezzik are unable to make decisions for themselves and long for a leader. Fezzik compulsively rhymes everything.

One of the best bits of advice I got was in the early days of my apprenticeship, from someone who didn't like my work. He said simply: "I don't like your character – I can't root for her." I took that to heart, and it turned out to be great advice, and advice I have had to be given a time or two since. Even in my more straight-forwardly serious books, I learned from *The Princess Bride* to give my readers at least one reason to love my character. Real people, are, in fact, secret heroes. They will relate to your heroes.

6. I learned from *The Princess Bride* that there is a time and a place for filling in backstory

My first rule of backstory is, if you can avoid it, do.

The second rule is, don't include too much backstory too soon, or you run the risk of slowing the story down or stalling it out completely. The reader quietly puts the book down.

But if you do have essential backstory, I learned from *The Princess Bride* to insert it into the story in a place where it can actually work for you, where

you *want* to slow the story a little, where you need to give the reader a sense of the passing of time.

After Westley and Buttercup reunite, about thirty pages go by before Westley takes the time to reveal to Buttercup how he became himself the Dread Pirate Roberts in a long line of Dread Pirate Roberts. He tells her the story as they are walking through the Fire Swamp, over about five pages. The whole time he's talking we get a sensation of the hours it's taking for them to get through the swamp.

I also learned from the *Princess Bride* that sometimes it's best to begin at the beginning. I was once told, you start a story in the same place you pick up a puppy – somewhere in the middle. But that's not always true. I mean, it's true about puppies. But stories sometimes begin at the beginning. Like showing when Buttercup is born and how she grows into her beauty.

I learned from *The Princess Bride* when to fill in backstory, and when backstory should be front story.

7. I learned from *The Princess Bride* to let the worst happen, to let things become hopeless.

On page 286, Westley dies. It says, "Westley lay dead by the Machine." I read it, but I couldn't absorb it. I read that sentence several times. "Westley lay dead of the Machine."

It was impossible, of course, that Westley could be dead. A hundred pages remained to the book! But the author let me live with that terrible revelation for thirty-one pages before I learned that Westley was only "mostly dead."

Even so, Miracle Max said it could take months before he had strength again, and the wedding between Buttercup and Prince Humperdinck was happening in five hours. It was hopeless.

All passages to the castle but one have been sealed, there is only one key to that passage, the Prince carries it with him, and it is heavily guarded. Even Westley, the eternal optimist, feels hopeless. “I want to die,” he whispers. “I’m sorry. Leave me.”

For Westley, brave Westley, to say that – surely it is hopeless...

And then...

And then... he says, “I mean if we even had a wheelbarrow, that would be something.”

“Where did we put that wheelbarrow the albino had?” Inigo asks.

“Over by the albino, I think,” Fezzik replies.

“Well, why didn’t you list that among our assets in the first place?” Westley declares.

Because of a wheelbarrow, hope returns.

Because of *The Princess Bride*, every one of my books builds to a moment of hopelessness – for me, it is intrinsic to the climax of the story. I always try to imagine a moment in my book where things become hopeless. I don’t always know how they’re going to get out of that hopeless moment – that’s why I’m writing, to find out! Once I realize that a wheelbarrow is going to be the answer, I make sure to put it somewhere handy in revision.

8. The Princess Bride taught me the power of the ambiguous ending.

The story has come to the hoped-for conclusion. Inigo has dispatched the six-fingered man, and he and Westley and Fezzik have rescued Buttercup from the clutches of Humperdinck. It’s all over and we have our happy ending... And then comes a scene you won’t see in the movie:

“From behind them suddenly, closer than they had imagined, they could hear the roar of Humperdinck: ‘Stop them! Cut them off!’” They were admittedly startled, but there was no reason to worry: they were on the fastest horses in the kingdom, and the lead was already theirs. However, this was before Inigo’s wound reopened, and Westley relapsed again, and Fezzik took the wrong turn, and Buttercup’s horse threw a shoe. And the night behind them was filled with the crescendoing sound of pursuit...”

I pressed the book to my heart. Of course they escaped... or did they?

On the same page, right after that ending, Goldman, in italic font, adds an ambiguous ending of his own.

Yes, he says, they got away, got their strength back and had lots of adventures, and more than their share of laughs. But then he says, “But that doesn’t mean I think they had a happy ending, either. Because in my opinion, anyway, they squabbled a lot, and Buttercup lost her looks eventually, and one day Fezzik lost a fight, and some hotshot kid whipped Inigo with a sword and Westley was never able to really sleep sound because of Humperdinck maybe being on the trail.....” end quote

I sat with the book in lap for a time after that, which is always the desired effect. Don’t we all want our readers to come to the end and sit with the book in their lap for a time, thinking? wondering?

I wondered, would I prefer to imagine Westley and Buttercup, always young, always having had an impossible one-of-a-kind love, never tarnished by the struggles of mortality? Did I want them, in a way, to die in their young love like Romeo and Juliet? To always be the fantasy?

Or did I want reality? Did I want them to grow old together? Did I want Buttercup to lose her looks and Westley to wonder, on bad days, if this really was true love?

I thought a long time about these ambiguous endings, one ambiguous about what happened to them, and one ambiguous about what the reader might want for them.

I love happy or at least hopeful endings. But all of my books end with at least a touch of ambiguity. Angel gets away from her pimp, but does she escape the killer, who circles around the streets? Calvin gets rescued from the lake, but who was the one who alerted the rescuers? I learned from *The Princess Bride*, that if you leave your reader with a question, they will sit, holding the book, wondering and thinking, for a brief and magical moment.

9. I learned from *The Princess Bride* the power of verisimilitude.

Verisimilitude is the "lifelikeness" or believability of a work of fiction.

Over six months, Mandy Patinkin, who played Inigo Montoya, trained with professional fencers so he could portray the world's greatest swordsman. Cary Elwes prepared for four months. This was to be the greatest sword fight ever seen on the screen.

Patinkin had learned to fence more than 10 years earlier at Juilliard. But before traveling to London to shoot *The Princess Bride*, he spent two months working intensely with the head coach of fencing at Yale.

"We'd work 8 to 10 hours a day," says Patinkin. Patinkin trained using only his left hand so he would be ready for the big reveal.

Patinkin and Elwes performed their duel for director Rob Reiner on the Cliffs of Insanity set for the first time. When they finished, both of them were drenched in sweat. They looked at Reiner, who said, "That's it?" It was good, he said, but it was over too soon. Reiner wanted it to be longer, more epic, the greatest sword fight ever to grace the screen.

So they and their trainers went back to work, training with both hands. If they weren't in a scene, they were off-set sword fighting; at every free moment, the actors had fake blades in their hands.

Elwes and Patinkin also had to learn each other's duel choreography, meaning twice the workload. They added acrobatics to the scene. They also perfected the part where the Man in Black knocks Inigo's sword from his hand, which flies into the air and is perfectly caught by Patinkin.

Once again, this time in full makeup and costume, Elwes and Patinkin performed the scene for Reiner. This time, Reiner's response was: "Great job, guys! Fantastic! Now let's do it again."

For days, they shot and re-shot the duel from every possible angle. The final version of the fight was so well done that fencing academies now show it to their students, who study it to learn their moves. The consensus among the informed is that *The Princess Bride* sword fight truly is the best sword fight in movie history.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUczpTPATyU>

What did this teach me about writing? This is the kind of care that we want to take when we are world-building, and world-building isn't just for fantasy – it's for every fictional world. What we are seeking is verisimilitude – the sense that the fictional world is real. Elwes and Patinkin are not fencing experts – they practiced until they could *look* like fencing experts.

No matter what book you are writing, you can assume that you'll need to do research. If you are writing a book in which a character weaves, for example, you won't necessarily become an expert weaver, but you will know enough to fool an expert weaver. If you are writing a time travel novel, you will have to know all the theories around time travel.

I learned from *The Princess Bride* to do my research, to create a solid world for my readers to stand on when they step into my fictional world, to make the reader ask, “Wait – did this really happen?”

10. I learned from *The Princess Bride* I learned the essential nature of anagnorisis

Anagnorisis is a term for the moment when a character recognizes his true nature or identity or situation. It’s a moment of resolution for the character, a moment of change. Everything in the story has led to this moment of revelation for the character.

Each one of the characters in the Princess Bride has a moment when they learn something about their true selves. Inigo and Fezzik both learn their own power and ability – they learn that they can make decisions and take care of themselves. They don’t have to attach themselves to a leader, who might steer them wrong.

Buttercup says, to Westley, after they are captured coming out of the Fire Swamp, “I would rather live than die.” Westley says, “We were talking of love, madam,” to which she replies, “I can live without love.”

But toward the end she has a moment of anagnorisis and realizes that in fact she cannot live without love.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3yKk7FC9Bg>

As for Westley, who is practically immortal, practically superman, he comes to a point of great humility, when he realizes he cannot survive on his own power:

“Westley: “I was dying again, so I asked the Lord of the Permanent Affection for the strength to live the day. Clearly the answer came in the affirmative.”

“I didn’t know there was such a Fellow,” Buttercup said.

“Neither did I, in truth, but if He didn’t exist, I didn’t much want to either.”

When I begin a novel, my mind is always reaching toward a point when my character will experience anagnorisis, when they will discover something they didn't know about themselves before. That will often be the most powerful moment in the story.

I would like to share one final thing I learned as a novice writer, not from *The Princess Bride* text, but from William Goldman himself about writing. He said,

“Writing is finally about one thing: going into a room alone and doing it. Putting words on paper that have never been there in quite that way before. And although you are physically by yourself, the haunting Demon never leaves you, that Demon being the knowledge of your own terrible limitations, your hopeless inadequacy, the impossibility of ever getting it right.” End quote.

I realized then, when I was young, that after all the lectures and workshops, after all the classes and conferences, ultimately they weren't what was going to make me a writer. They could help, but the only way for me to become a writer was to go into a room alone and put words on paper. Every day, day in and day out, forever. Once I had this understanding, I was on my way.

I learned that, even knowing my limitations and inadequacy, I can write. That somehow the humility my limitations bring is actually good for my work. I live with it. I write in spite of it. I write because of it. The main thing is that I go into a room and do it.

William Goldman died at a good old age a little over two years ago. This lecture is my thanks to him, and for the beloved, the brilliant, *The Princess Bride*.