

How Clifford Was Born

By Lorraine St. Pierre

There is only one Clifford the Big Red Dog, and children all over the world enjoy reading about his adventures. But why is Clifford red? Why isn't he brown or black or tan, like other dogs? When I visited Norman Bridwell, who is Clifford's creator and my neighbor, I asked him just that. His answer surprised me.

"There was a jar of red paint on the end of my drawing table," he said, laughing. "I dunked my brush in it and decided the dog would be red."

Clifford wasn't even the dog's name at first. When Mr. Bridwell finished painting him, he wanted to give him a funny name. Because the dog was so big, he thought Tiny would be a good name. But Mr. Bridwell's wife, Norma, felt that it didn't suit him.

"He needs a strong name," she said, and suggested Clifford, the name of the imaginary playmate she'd had as a child. Mr. Bridwell liked the sound of it and decided it was perfect.

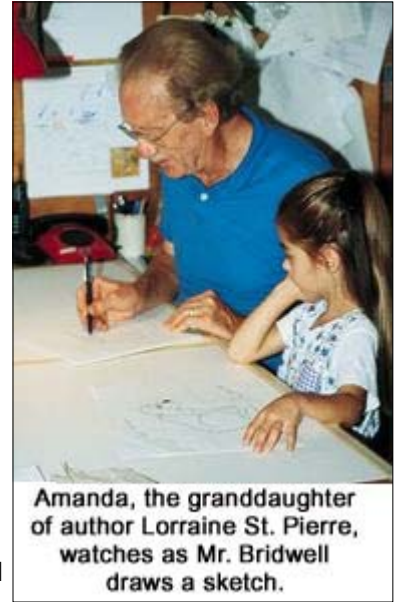
He also thought the big red dog would need a friend, so he drew a little girl with a happy smile. Mr. Bridwell named her Emily Elizabeth, after his daughter. Then he wrote a story about them and drew pictures for it.

Mrs. Bridwell made a bright gingham cover for the story and bound it up like a real book. Then the Bridwells sent it off to a publishing house. Luckily, it reached an editor who fell in love with it, and that's how Clifford was born.

Over the past 36 years, more than 60 books about Clifford have been published. What makes him so popular? When I asked Mr. Bridwell, he said, "Maybe it's because, even though Clifford is klutzy and funny, he always, always tries to be helpful."

Mr. Bridwell has a sunny studio in his home, which is on the island of Martha's Vineyard, in Massachusetts. His studio is small and cluttered, but very comfortable. The ceiling is papered with covers from all the books he has written. Mr. Bridwell does most of his work there.

Every now and then, however, he finds a quiet spot on one of the island beaches and works for an hour or two. I see Mr. Bridwell often, down by our town's pier. He stands there looking out at the ocean, deep in thought. I always wonder if he's planning another Clifford story.



Amanda, the granddaughter of author Lorraine St. Pierre, watches as Mr. Bridwell draws a sketch.

Writing Tips from a Pro

Here is some advice that Mr. Bridwell has given to kids:

"Write about things you know and enjoy. Think about something, and then write down all the things that go with it. You'll be surprised how much there is. I always carry a small pad in my pocket. That way I never miss anything.

"For example, suppose you want to write a baseball story. Think of all the things that go with the sport. Watch how the people act. Is there something funny or unusual you can draw or jot down? Did the pitcher spit on the ball before he threw it? Find out why. Ask a lot of questions.

"When you get home, look at your notes, and try to chain your ideas together. Do it over and over again until the words feel right and seem to flow. You'll know when it's OK."

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