楼下那棵银杏，我记了整整一年

三年级那会儿，每次写春天，我都要翻《好词好句》，抄一句春姑娘来了。五年级秋天，班主任布置了一个任务：每人选一个观察对象，记满一年。我想了半天，选了楼下那棵银杏，因为它每天都在，不用我跑远路。

第一页笔记只有一行：叶子黄了，风一吹就掉。妈妈看了一眼说，这一句谁都会写。我不服气，第二天特意站到树下往上看，又低头看地面。叶子边缘是一圈浅黄，黄得像是被火燎过；叶柄断开的地方有一点透明的汁；地上的叶子积了薄薄一层，踩上去的声音和踩水泥地不一样。那天我写了半页纸，写完自己读了一遍，确实和第一行不一样。

冬天我记树皮。树皮裂成一条条竖纹，缝里嵌着雪，雪落在树上化得比落在地上慢。我还数过树枝的分杈，发现它总是先分成两股，再各自分成两股。春天最难记。四月初芽才冒出一点绿，我蹲在树下看了好一会儿，在笔记里写：芽小得像米粒，绿得不敢大声。五月叶子长成巴掌大，我算了算，从米粒到巴掌，用了三十八天。

六年级上学期的作文写《窗外》，我把笔记里银杏发芽那一段搬了进去。老师当堂朗读，读完说了一句：这个绿是看出来的，不是抄出来的。那天放学，我绕到树下拍了拍它的干。

现在我的抽屉里躺着四本笔记，春芽、夏叶、秋落、冬皮，各一本。这一年给我最大的体会是：观察不是去找东西写，而是把日子过成素材。记录细节也不能只写叶子黄了，要写黄成什么样，像被火燎过，这就是黄的样子。我以前写作文爱编，编一个助人为乐的故事交上去；现在我明白了，编出来的东西自己都不信，看出来的东西不用编。以前我总抱怨没东西可写，其实东西一直在楼下站着，只是我以前从不抬头看它。接下来我还要记下去，看它把这四个季节再走一遍。

The Ginkgo Tree Below My Building: A Year of Notes

In Grade Three, every time I wrote about spring, I opened my book of good words and good sentences and copied one line: Miss Spring has arrived. In the autumn of Grade Five, our homeroom teacher gave us a task: each person picks one thing to observe and keeps notes for a full year. I thought for a long time and chose the ginkgo tree below my building, because it was there every day and I would not have to walk far.

The first page of my notes had only one line: the leaves turned yellow, and the wind blew them down. My mother took one look and said anyone could write that sentence. I was not convinced. The next day I stood right under the tree and looked up, then looked down at the ground. The edge of each leaf had a pale yellow ring, yellow as if scorched by fire; where the leaf stem broke off there was a bit of clear juice; the fallen leaves formed a thin layer, and walking on them sounded different from walking on concrete. That day I wrote half a page. I read it back myself, and it really was different from that first line.

In winter I recorded the bark. It cracked into long vertical lines, snow settled in the cracks, and snow on the tree melted more slowly than snow on the ground. I also counted how the branches fork, and found that a branch always splits into two first, and then each half splits into two again. Spring was the hardest to record. In early April the buds pushed out just a point of green. I squatted under the tree and watched for a long while, then wrote in my notes: the buds are small as grains of rice, green too quietly to speak aloud. By May the leaves had grown to the size of a palm. I counted the days: from a grain of rice to a palm took thirty-eight days.

For the composition Out of My Window in the first term of Grade Six, I moved the paragraph about the ginkgo buds straight out of my notes. My teacher read it aloud in class, then said one sentence: this green was seen, not copied. After school that day I walked around to the tree and patted its trunk.

Now four notebooks lie in my drawer: spring buds, summer leaves, autumn fall, winter bark, one for each. The biggest lesson of this year is that observing is not hunting for something to write about; it is turning daily life into material. Recording details cannot stop at the leaves turned yellow. You have to write what kind of yellow it is, like a ring scorched by fire, and that is what yellow looks like. I used to invent stories for my compositions and hand in made-up tales of helping others. Now I understand that invented things do not even convince the writer, while things you have seen need no invention. I used to complain that I had nothing to write about. The material had been standing downstairs all along. I simply never looked up at it. I will keep recording, and watch this tree walk through the four seasons once more.