我的观察本里住着一百个小实验

三年级开始，妈妈给我一个硬皮本，说专门用来记你看到的东西。头半年我只记过种子发芽，后来记的东西越来越杂：泡糖水、听冰糖、看盐水结白边。现在这个本子里住着一百多个小实验，我的作文有一半是从里面挑出来的。

本子前几页的字又乱又大。记泡糖水那次，我一开始只写了一句糖一会儿就化了。妈妈看了一眼，问我：一会儿是多久？你数了几勺？从那以后我记东西先写数字。冷水和温水各一杯，每分钟加一勺糖、搅拌十圈。温水到第七勺，杯底开始躺下细小的糖粒；冷水到第四勺，糖就站在杯底不化了。我在旁边写：温水比冷水能吞下更多的糖。这是我自己得出的句子，不是从作文书上抄的。

记到第三个本子，我不光用眼睛，还用鼻子和耳朵。冰糖丢进热水，会发出很细的咔嚓声，像有人在很远的地方掰小树枝。我把这个声音写进《我的妈妈》，因为妈妈煮汤炒糖色的时候，我就站在灶边听。妈妈听见我念那段，说：你连这个都记得。我说本子里记着呢，第七页。

本子里也记失败。盐水挂绳结晶，我挂了三天，杯沿结出一圈白边，正高兴，第四天杯子被碰倒，盐水泼了一桌。我在记录里写：失败，前功尽弃，下次用带盖的杯子。后来写《一次失败》，我把泼在桌上的盐水画成一小片地图，把白边写成雪。老师评语是：有现场。

这些记录还教会我记人说的话。妈妈看糖水时说温水能吞糖，同学看结晶时说像下雪，我都原样记下来。写作文的时候，人物一开口，就是他们真说过的话，不用我编。

现在我每天早上翻开观察本看一眼，像运动员看训练表。它让我明白：观察不是看一眼就过去，是把稍纵即逝的东西固定下来。数字会固定，声音会固定，别人的一句话也会固定。固定下来的东西，就是下一篇文章的种子。写作的功夫，一半在写之前。

A Hundred Small Experiments Live in My Observation Book

In third grade, my mother gave me a hardcover notebook and said it was only for recording what you see. In the first half year I recorded nothing but seeds sprouting. Later the entries grew mixed: dissolving sugar in water, listening to rock candy, watching salt water leave a white rim. Today that book houses over a hundred small experiments, and half of my essays were picked out of it.

The handwriting on the early pages is messy and huge. That time with the sugar water, I started with one line: the sugar melted after a while. One glance at it, my mother asked: how long is a while? How many spoonfuls did you count? Since then I write numbers first. One cup of cold water, one of warm; one spoonful of sugar every minute, stirred ten turns. In the warm cup, at the seventh spoonful, fine grains of sugar began to lie on the bottom; in the cold cup, at the fourth, the sugar stood there and refused to melt. I wrote beside it: warm water can swallow more sugar than cold. That sentence was mine, not copied from an essay book.

By the third notebook I used my nose and ears, not just my eyes. Rock candy dropped into hot water gives off a fine crackling, like someone snapping small twigs far away. I wrote that sound into My Mother, because while she stir-fried sugar for soup I stood by the stove listening. When she heard me read that part aloud, she said: you remembered even that. I said it is in the book, page seven.

The book also keeps failures. For salt water crystals on a string, I hung it three days, and a white rim formed on the cup edge. Just as I got excited, on day four the cup got knocked over and salt water spread across the table. My entry read: failed, all work lost, next time use a cup with a lid. Later, writing One Failure, I drew the spilled salt water as a small map on the table and wrote the white rim as snow. The teacher comment was: you were there.

These records also taught me to write down what people say. My mother said warm water can swallow sugar; a classmate said the crystals look like snow. I kept their words as they were. In an essay, when a character opens a mouth, it is what they truly said, and I do not have to invent it.

Now I open the observation book every morning for a glance, the way an athlete checks a training log. It taught me that observing is not one passing look; it is pinning down what vanishes in a second. Numbers get pinned, sounds get pinned, one sentence from someone else gets pinned too. What gets pinned is the seed of the next piece. Half the craft of writing happens before the writing.

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