

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



"Family Wedding," by Spartak Gurshin, age 14, Moldova

THE SHOOTING STAR

Will Darren's wish for friendship come true?

THE LONE STRAW HAT

A tragedy forever changes the way Olivia sees her family's pond

Also: A review of a book about slavery

A story from India

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2004

\$5.75 US \$7.50 CANADA

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The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 33, NUMBER 1
SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2004

STORIES

A Bird's Prophecy by Annam Nayak 5

Venky's father sends him away after a misunderstanding

The Shooting Star by Samantha Cecil 9

The new girl causes problems for Darren, until ...

Thank You for Thursdays by Marlee Rosenthal 16

Chicken pot pie brings back memories of Aunt Carol

The Lone Straw Hat by Olivia Grugan 21

How could a tranquil summer day end so tragically?

Water All Around by Marian Homans-Turnbull 25

Miranda and her family head home after a summer on Bell Island

Because of Trust by Lauren Tompkins 35

Shannon takes her volunteer work at the kitten room seriously

Adrian by Katie Russell 45

Five old friends discover that first impressions can be wrong

POEMS

An Autumn Storm by Rosemary Engelfried 15

Neverland by Nicole Guenther 42

BOOK REVIEWS

Days of Jubilee reviewed by Laura Krull 18

Guardians of Ga'Hoole reviewed by Anthony Cali 32



page 9



page 21



page 35



page 45



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Stone Soup is printed on recycled paper

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Stone Soup (ISSN 0094 579X) is published six times a year by the Children's Art Foundation, 765 Cedar Street, Suite 201, Santa Cruz, CA 95060. Phone: 800-447-4569. It is published bimonthly in January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, and November/December. Volume 33, Number 1. Copyright ©2004 by the Children's Art Foundation. All rights reserved. Reproduction of the whole or any part of the contents without written permission is prohibited. *Stone Soup* is mailed to members of the Children's Art Foundation. Eighty percent of the membership fee is designated for subscription to *Stone Soup*. In the United States, a one-year membership costs \$34, two years \$55, three years \$75. Rates to Canada and Mexico are an additional \$6 per year. Rates to all other countries are an additional \$12 per year. Please remit in U.S. funds or the equivalent amount in your own currency. Please send SUBMISSIONS, SUBSCRIPTIONS, and ADDRESS CHANGES to: *Stone Soup*, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to *Stone Soup*, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Periodical postage paid at Santa Cruz, CA and additional offices. Printed in Canada.

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

WELCOME TO ALL OUR READERS, old and new! We've had the pleasure of publishing *Stone Soup* for over 30 years. It is our belief that, by presenting rich, heart-felt work by young people the world over, we can stir the imaginations of our readers and inspire young writers and artists to create.



Jessie Moore, 12

Contributors' Guidelines

Stone Soup welcomes submissions from young people through age 13. For our complete guidelines, please visit our Web site at www.stonesoup.com.

Story and poem authors: Please do not enclose a self-addressed envelope with your submission. Send copies of your work, not originals. If we decide to consider your work for a future issue, you will hear from us in four to six weeks. If you do not hear from us, it means we were not able to use your work. Don't be discouraged! Try again!

Book reviewers: If you are interested in reviewing books for *Stone Soup*, write editor Gerry Mandel. Tell her a little about yourself and the kinds of books you like to read. Enclose an SASE for her reply.

Artists: If you would like to illustrate for *Stone Soup*, send Ms. Mandel some samples of your art work, along with a letter saying what you like to draw most. Enclose an SASE for her reply. We need artists who can draw or paint complete scenes in color. Please send color copies of your work, not originals.

All contributors: Send us writing and art about the things you feel most strongly about! Whether your work is about imaginary situations or real ones, use your own experiences and observations to give your work depth and a sense of reality. Send your work to *Stone Soup*, Submissions Dept., P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Include your name, age, birthdate, home address and phone number.

Cover: "Family Wedding" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by The International Museum of Children's Art in Oslo, Norway. Established in 1986 by Rafael and Alla Goldin, the museum is a wonderland of floor-to-ceiling art by children from over 150 countries. Don't miss it if you are ever in Oslo! Special thanks to Angela and Alla Goldin.

The Mailbox



LBP, 9

At the pleasurable time of receiving *Stone Soup* I am often most interested in the stories, but this time the book review on *Finding Sophie* [May/June 2004] caught my eye. *Finding Sophie* is a book that I had a chance to read this past December, and I was able to relate to many of the points that Allison Goldberg mentioned. I must say that I agree with many of her statements. Before concluding this letter, I would like to tell *Stone Soup* and all of its readers that, here in Canada, the marvelous *Finding Sophie* is nominated for the Silver Birch Award, an honorable Canadian literary award for children's books. My school among many others is very involved in the reading and voting for the winning book, and many students seem to admire *Finding Sophie* immensely!

BRADEN M. McDONALD, 12
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Braden's story, "Woodpecker's Way," appeared in our November/December 2002 issue.

I am writing to you because I am very impressed with Megan M. Gannett's story, "The Kingdom of Stones" [March/April 2004]. It is written so beautifully that I almost forgot it was made up while I was reading it. I have never seen characters that are more vivid and unique than Megan's. Every sentence is thick with detail and emotion and I can tell that it was fun for Megan to write this.

ARIANA MCSWEENEY, 13
Montpelier, Vermont

I have enjoyed many of the stories you include in the magazine. They have made me laugh, cry, and wonder. I have recently read a poem in your magazine called "Ode to Marbles" [May/June 2004]. Thank you all for wonderful moments.

IZZY TAYLOR, 11
Minneapolis, Minnesota

About ten years ago, three of my stories were published in *Stone Soup*: "Blankets" [November/December 1994], "Mistaken Identity" [January/February 1995], and "The Barn" [May/June 1996]. I was just browsing the Internet and happened upon your *Stone Soup* site. I was very pleased to see that you are still a thriving publication, having adapted to the changing technologically advanced world, but not having changed your philosophy behind your work. I still recognize the names of Gerry Mandel and William Rubel, whose letter of acceptance thrilled me in those past years. I have wonderful memories of writing in those earlier years, and being published in your magazine remains an honor that I still treasure. I am about to graduate from Wheaton College in Illinois with a degree in mathematics. I am planning on returning to Portland to pursue a Masters in teaching math. I still love to write and have done so for my classes and as a hobby. Thanks in part to your encouragement those many years ago, writing will continue to be something dear to my heart.

ELISE LOCKWOOD
Wheaton, Illinois

You can read all the stories and reviews mentioned in The Mailbox on our Web site: www.stonesoup.com

Note to our readers: Send us your letters! We are especially interested in detailed comments about specific stories, poems, book reviews, and illustrations. We'd also like to receive anecdotes (150 words or less) about interesting experiences you'd like to share with our readers. Send letters to The Mailbox, *Stone Soup*, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Include your name, age, address, and phone number.



He spoke to the little birds circling the terrace

A Bird's Prophecy

By Annam Nayak

Illustrated by Nicolas Hugon

THE KINGDOM OF RAJA BHASKARENDRA was administered by governors, who had many powers in their own provinces. The office of the governor passed from father to son, as did the crown of the king himself. One of these governors was Raja Dhaval. His son Venky was the pride and joy of his life.

One fateful day, Dhaval came across Venky as he sat under a tree, looking up at its branches and uttering strange sounds that did not belong to any human language. As the governor approached, there was a flap and flutter of wings and several birds flew away. "Oh Father, you have frightened them away!" Venky said reproachfully. "They were telling me about the great ocean—that blue expanse under the sun, all day long."

"But how can you know that, son?" Dhaval asked. "The birds do not speak our language."

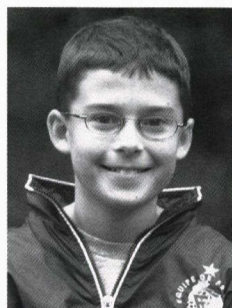
"Yet I understand them," Venky said. "I can talk to them as if I was one of them."

As the years went by, Venky's powers did not lessen. He grew into a youth blessed with wisdom and courage as well as a supernatural power—the ability to talk to the birds. All the people declared Venky a worthy heir to follow in his father's footsteps.

But one black day, something happened to turn the old chief's anger against his son and cause him to leave the land of his birth in sorrow. While Venky was waiting on his father at the table one evening, Dhaval pointed at the birds seated on the windowsill, chattering animatedly. "Tell me, my son," he asked, "what are those



Annam Nayak, 12
Mysore, India



Nicolas Hugon, 12
Weston, Massachusetts

birds saying? I have never known them to be so noisy before."

Venky lowered his eyes. "If I answer your question, Father, you may get angry."

Naturally, this reply only made the governor all the more curious. He persisted and at last, Venky told him, "They are saying that one day, our positions will be changed. It will be you who will be waiting upon me at this very same table."

As soon as the governor heard these words, he was filled with wrath, for what could such a prophecy mean but that one day, his son would rise against him? "Traitor!" cried the old man. "Would you betray your own father? Leave my home and never let me see you again!"

And in spite of his protestations of loyalty and devotion to his father, Venky was forced to say goodbye to the home he had known all his life. He left as a poor man with nothing but the clothes on his back. He managed to get taken as a new member on a ship bound for Sri Lanka. Over there, Venky continued his journey on foot across the countryside with a heart ready for adventure.

Before long, he entered into the grounds of the king of those areas. As he drew near the gateway, he heard the sound of sawing. An army of woodcutters was felling the trees that stood in the palace courtyard. But that wasn't all. To Venky's astonishment, he saw that the sky around the palace was full of birds whose shrill cries fell ceaselessly upon his ears, forcing him to shield them with his hands. A royal servant nodded to him. "Ah stranger, you

may well try to shut your ears, but it's useless. Not only outside but also inside the palace, we are assailed with this incessant noise. It's enough to drive a man out of his mind. The king is at his wits' end to know how to get rid of this plague."

At once Venky realized how he might be able to help the royal household in their time of trouble. He asked for an audience with the king. A valet led the way through the long galleries where sparrows beat their wings against the paneled walls and across the terrace where the ladies of the court vainly tried to converse with each other above the never-ending racket. The king was on the terrace as well, his chin gripped in one bejeweled hand, in an attitude of deep despair.

"Excuse me, your Majesty," Venky began. "I think I may be able to rid you of this feathered curse that has fallen on your palace."

At once, the king's face brightened and a gleam of hope flashed in his eyes. "If what you say is true," he declared, "your reward will be great. But how will you accomplish this?"

Venky told the king about his ability to speak with the birds in their own tongue. "There must be some reason, Sire, why the birds are waging their shrill warfare with you." He spoke to the little birds circling the terrace, uttering the strange sounds his father first heard under the tree. At once, the birds flew to his shoulder with excited chattering. The king could not understand any of it, but Venky understood perfectly. "Why Sire, it's really

quite simple," he said. "The birds are furious because you have ordered your woodcutters to chop down the trees in which they build their nests. If you stop this destruction, they promise they will plague you no more."

At once the king issued orders to stop the cutting. And no sooner had the last ax been laid to rest than from every nook and cranny of the palace, a huge flock of birds rose and soared out to rebuild their nests among the trees. From that day, not even one little bird ever troubled the king. True to his word, the king rewarded Venky with gold and a ship fully equipped and manned. Venky set sail in this ship and wherever he went, he gained wealth and wisdom. Yet he never forgot his old home and after ten years, he returned to his home shores.

His rich ship with its golden prow anchored in his father's province. Venky's clansmen gaped at the magnificence of the ship and wondered which rich stranger had sailed into their midst. As was the custom, the governor came out to welcome the stranger and offer his hospitality. Dhaval did not recognize his son. He was sure that this glittering stranger was

a relative of the king himself and so he treated him with all the honor due to a young nobleman. As master of the province, Dhaval waited upon the young man at the same table where Venky had waited on him years ago.

Unable to bear it any more, Venky cried, "My father, do you not remember your son? You sent me away in wrath because of a prophecy—it has come true, for you are waiting upon me at your own table. Oh Father, I repeat, I never had any thoughts of treachery against you. Please receive me as your son again!"

And Dhaval did. The unhappy rift between the father and son was healed. In the sight of everyone assembled, Dhaval restored his son to his inheritance. Great was the rejoicing in the province at the heir's return—Venky the famous traveler!

The tales of Venky's wanderings, his deeds and exploits reached far and wide, even to the ears of Raja Bhaskarendra, who found him to be a man of wisdom and appointed him as the governor of six provinces. Venky's adventures were many and became the stuff of legend, but they must be narrated another time! ❀



He closed his eyes and whispered, "I wish I was popular at school"

The Shooting Star

By **Samantha Cecil**

Illustrated by **Chelsey Scheffe**

DARREN MILAR SIGHED as he walked into the schoolyard. All around him kids were laughing, running, and playing. The sound of tetherball chains as they clinked against their metal poles rang out as Darren passed. When kids started school again, they were sometimes nervous, excited, or a little sad. But that was nothing compared to what Darren felt.

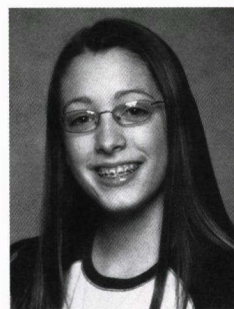
Ever since kindergarten, Darren had been the outcast. The nerd, if you had to put it that way. Other kids had had loads of friends, and turned against him. Darren had only one friend, Ian, and Ian was just as nerdy as Darren, without the glasses and braces. The start of school meant Darren was back to rude notes on his locker, people laughing at him in the corridors, and Ian telling him to ignore them. But he couldn't ignore them, and already Darren knew, the second he walked into the schoolyard, that he was off to the start of another terrible year.

And so it was, another terrible first day back. In the corridors, even kids younger than him, sixth-graders, laughed at him. As usual, in classes, teachers told him that he had extraordinary talent, while people sniggered and pointed behind the teacher's back. Ian is never laughed at, thought Darren, looking around at Ian. He was sitting, working in his math book. How does he do it? thought Darren desperately.

LATER THAT NIGHT in bed, Darren lay propped up on pillows, looking at the stars. He had heard that there would



Samantha Cecil, 10
San Carlos, California



Chelsey Scheffe, 13
Bellingham, Washington

be shooting stars tonight. He was thinking of a wish, and it wasn't hard. He closed his eyes and whispered, "I wish I was popular at school."

But when he opened his eyes, nothing had happened. His wish hadn't come true.

THE NEXT DAY at school Darren had totally forgotten about his wish. He and Ian were talking when suddenly, a hush fell over the blacktop. That was not normal, even the tetherball chains weren't clinking. Darren and Ian stopped talking and looked up. Standing in front of them was the prettiest girl Darren had ever seen.

She had long red hair that reached nearly to her waist, and eyes as green as jade. A few freckles were scattered across her nose. She could have been a model if she hadn't had the ugliest scowl on her face, if her faded jeans weren't torn at the knees, and if her Good Charlotte shirt was still black, instead of a smoky gray. Darren was paralyzed. He didn't know whether she was an angel or a devil.

Fortunately, he was spared the moment of trying to speak because the girl asked him, "You go here?"

"Y- yes," he stammered.

"Good. Then you'll be able to tell me where the principal's office is."

She looked at him like a tiger examining its prey.

"D- down the hall, f- fifth door past the water fountain." He thought he must look like an idiot, stammering next to her speaking confidently. She didn't even

thank him, just walked away, leaving him and the rest of the school staring after her, her sandals clip-clopping loudly on the dead-silent playground.

When the bell rang ten minutes later, the school was still frozen in awe at the girl's entrance. Darren was suddenly the center of attention for once, and people kept asking him about the girl, because he had seen her best. Then, in history, Darren finally got to learn about her.

"Class, we have a new student today," said Ms. Kent, after the class had settled down. "She has been on vacation in Mexico, up until yesterday. Dear, would you like to come and introduce yourself?"

The girl walked up to the front of the class. "My name is Claire Guerrero," she growled. "I like punk rock bands. My favorite color is black, and I play the guitar. Any questions? Good." She walked back to her seat.

"Well then," the teacher replied, "I'm sure you'll all be very nice to Claire. Now please open your book to page 102 . . ."

But barely anyone was listening. Claire opened her book and didn't look at anyone. Darren had a bad feeling in his stomach, and gulped. Just one more person to pick on me.

Soon Claire did become the most popular kid in school, but she chose her friends carefully, and they were almost all boys. If Darren thought this was bad, the worst was yet to come. Two weeks after Claire arrived, Darren came to school and looked around at their usual table. It was empty. This was odd, because Ian was usu-

ally dropped off by his older brother Alec pretty early. Darren sat down, and looked around for Ian. He found him quickly, but his heart sank.

Claire's group, which was usually prowling around and scaring sixth-graders, was now sitting down at a far-removed table. They were talking to (Darren shut his eyes tight) . . . Ian. Darren couldn't believe it. Claire had taken his best friend from him. Now Ethan Lowell was talking to Ian, who pointed at Darren. The whole group looked over and laughed. Zach Parker said something, and the group cracked up again. Darren felt like crying.

He tried to sit with them at lunch, but Ethan Lowell said, "Sorry, no room here, but there's a spot for you at the nerd table." Ian looked uncomfortable, and shifted in his seat.

Marilyn Fisher said, "Don't worry, Darren. I'm sure you'll find a place to sit." He didn't realize she'd put a KICK ME sign on his back.

THE DAYS PASSED, and Darren became more and more miserable. He tried sitting with his sisters, but they talked about fashion and other girly stuff. He tried as hard as he could to be friends with Claire, and he was practically down on bended knee. One day as he sat on the swing alone, he thought back to the night of his wish. Why couldn't it have come true? he thought.

Then, his luck changed.

He was trying to fall asleep one night, but he kept thinking back to his wish

that hadn't come true. Desperately, he thought, maybe a shooting star will come tonight. He thought of the same wish, and closed his eyes. When he opened his eyes, he gasped. A shooting star had just flown by!

THE NEXT DAY in biology (with Claire) the teacher assigned them to do reports in groups. People were catching each other's eyes and grinning. Darren looked hopefully at Ian, but he was staring determinedly at Ethan Lowell.

"I will assign you into groups of two. Once you're in a group, decide what to do a report on and how to do it. Now let's see, Ethan Lowell, Melissa Holmes. Zach Parker, Julia Davenport. Claire Guerrerro . . ." She paused, looking around the room. "Darren Milar."

Claire exploded. "*What?!*" she screamed. "I can't be with Darren, he's a geek, and can't I please be with Ethan or Zach or Ian? Please, Mrs. Titan, I'll do anything!"

But Mrs. Titan held firm, and after ten minutes of earsplitting rage, Claire grudgingly gave in.

They decided to do a report on an underwater creature. Since they lived in Half Moon Bay, Darren would pick Claire up at her house at four o'clock, and they would go from there. Both of them also grumbled about being together, because no one wants to be partnered with a geek, and no one wants to be partnered with the person who stole their best friend.

But even right after school got out, there was a change in the atmosphere

around Darren. Instead of people laughing at him, people shot him awed looks in the corridors. Kids whispered to each other behind his back, and Darren heard one kid say to the other, "You see that kid in the red shirt? With the glasses and braces? He got Claire Guererro as his partner. Claire Guererro!"

"Whoa. Totally awesome, dude," said the guy's friend.

Later that afternoon, Darren set off to Claire's. He was really nervous, especially after the attitude people showed him after school. What if he screwed up somehow? Then what would the people at school say?

"398, 400, 402. This is it," Darren said to himself, looking up at the house. It was pretty big, and because of all the fog outside, the windows had faint yellow glows in them. In one of the windows, someone was moving. Darren could see the person bending down, and a long mane of hair fell down beside it. Darren moved closer to the porch, and knocked.

He heard the sounds of dogs barking, and someone hurrying down the stairs. That person said, "Shut up for a second, Tiny, hold still," and the door opened.

Claire was standing there, holding a massive dog's collar, as he strained to get close to Darren. She panted, "Tiny only barks at you if he doesn't know you." She shoved Tiny back in, and shut the door. They started walking briskly, to keep warm.

"You named your dog Tiny?" said Darren as they walked past the ice cream

shop in town. "But he's massive!"

"Yeah, well," Claire shrugged, "he's nothing compared to my other dogs. They're not really mine anyway, they're my brothers'. I have three brothers and they got dogs for Christmas last year. Tiny, Timid, and Shy they call them. I got a cat, and his name is Reggie. He loves to hunt, and brings me back dead lizards and other small, dead animals every day."

By now they were at the ocean. They took out their notebooks, and took notes on crabs, as they seemed to be everywhere. Darren was looking for more, when he tripped over a large rock, and fell right into Claire, knocking her over.

That moment, something must've popped in Claire. Darren expected her to be really angry at him, and start yelling, but instead she cracked up laughing. Tears streamed down her face. Darren, bewildered, didn't know what to do, so he laughed right along with her. From that moment on, Claire didn't make fun of Darren, but treated him like an equal. They talked, and talked, and soon Darren realized she wasn't the tough, bullying girl she imagined. Deep down, Claire was a normal girl, but her brothers had spent so much time with her that she had adapted to being like them. When Darren felt really comfortable with her, he asked her the question he'd wanted to ask for the past two months. "Claire?" he asked. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Yeah."

"How come you stole Ian from me?"

Claire looked at him, apparently puz-



"Tiny only barks at you if he doesn't know you"

zled. "Was Ian your friend?" she asked.

"Yes. My only friend. The only person who would bother to listen to what I have to say."

"I'm sorry, Darren. I didn't realize he was your only friend. It must've been bad for you without him. But now, trust me; you'll have more than one friend." She smiled down at him, and Darren felt happier than he'd ever been.

They finished their notes, and walked home. On the way there, it started to rain. When they got to Claire's house, they were soaking wet. Claire invited Darren in.

Darren was introduced to Tiny, Timid, and Shy, Claire's dogs. Shy barked at him when he first petted her, but she quieted down when he gave her a cookie. He also was introduced to Reggie, but he only saw a glimpse of the orange cat, because Reggie had gone out to catch salamanders that came out from the rain. Darren was beginning to think that this actually wasn't a dream, and it was real.

THE NEXT DAY at school, Darren walked past his own table where he used to sit. He walked past the tetherball courts, the basketball courts, and very nervously approached Claire's table.

"Why aren't you sitting at the nerd table?" asked Ethan Lowell.

"Or why aren't you kissing up to the teachers since you have extraordinary talent?" smirked Zach Parker.

Ian looked pretty uncomfortable and couldn't meet Darren's eye.

"You aren't cool enough to sit here, geek," taunted Marilyn Fisher.

"Hi, Darren. Come and sit down," said Claire.

Everyone looked at her. Darren sat.

"Are you insane?" questioned Ethan.


Ian looked a great deal happier.

"No one in their right mind would sit next to that nerd!" spluttered Zach.

"You were just complaining about him yesterday!" cried Marilyn.

"Yeah, well, once you get to know him . . ." Claire caught Darren's eye and grinned. The rest of the group looked at each other and shrugged. It turned out Ethan, Zach, and Marilyn were normal too, just trying to act like Claire to be her friend.

When the bell rang, he went to his locker, and where there'd been a "Nerd Convention at This Locker" sign, there was now a note, signed neatly by (Darren pinched himself to make sure he wasn't dreaming) Christi Feller, his crush, asking him if he wanted to get some sodas after school. At that moment, Darren knew life was going to be a lot better.

THE NEXT YEAR, Darren walked into the schoolyard once again. Kids still ran, shouted, and laughed as he passed. The worn-out tetherball chains still clinked as he walked by. But no one laughed and pointed at him this year. For the first time in his life, Darren was welcomed back into a group of friends that didn't laugh at him, they laughed with him. 

An Autumn Storm

By Rosemary Engelfried

Fog wisping through the Douglas firs
Rain dripping from the wind-whipped boughs
Crisp and cold fresh autumn air
The smell of spruce and dampened earth.

An ocean vista filled with fog
Like a misty edge of the world
Only the ceaseless distant roar
Betrays the presence of the waves.

Fog increases the distances
Close Sitka spruce seem faraway
The trees merge into soft pale mist
Gray rain pours from an ashen sky.

A forest on the ocean cliffs
Blown with wild wind and lashing rain
The stark truth of towering trees
The beauty of an autumn storm.



Rosemary Engelfried, 13
Hillsboro, Oregon

Thank You for Thursdays

By Marlee Rosenthal

Illustrated by Alicia Zanoni



Marlee Rosenthal, 12
Haddonfield, New Jersey



Alicia Zanoni, 11
Waterford, Michigan

“AUNT CAROL, WHAT’S THAT?” I asked as I carefully examined her plate. It was a stormy evening outside, but inside Ponzio’s it felt warm and fuzzy.

She whispered into my soft ear, “Chicken pot pie.” It was magical, it was sensational, it was as delicate as a butterfly’s wing. She spooned me a lump of what looked at the time like a mountain of broth. I embraced the smell that tickled my nose and plummeted down into my stomach, like a rapid waterfall splashing down onto the drenched, mossy rock.

“I will never forget that moment,” I confide to my father. We sit famished at the Ponzio’s counter drinking our waters with lemon, trying to watch the time fly by. It’s noisy and crowded at Ponzio’s tonight. I slump, and I slouch, waiting for my chicken pot pie to arrive. I watch Rachel, my sister, who deliberately slurps her soup. As I wait, I focus on the water drops on my glass as they glide down like droplets on a raincoat.

All of a sudden, my nose perks up. I notice someone walking swiftly with a pie. I slowly rise back into my seat, placing my folded napkin onto my lap. I freeze. My chicken pot pie has arrived!

As I clench my spoon in midair, the scent hugs my nose, and it draws me closer to heaven. As I close my eyes, I dream of warmth, and kindness, and everything around me seems to float around, closing their eyes too. I devour my first bite. Suddenly, I’m lapping up the creamy broth. I cut up the carrots and smash them into my face. I’m swooning; and I feel tingly all over.



My chicken pot pie has arrived!

Then my dad stands up; he catches my eye and signals it's time to depart. From the outside I appear full and cheerful. But inside, I cry. I don't want to leave this pool of luscious ingredients! My father takes my hesitant hand, and we start for the car.

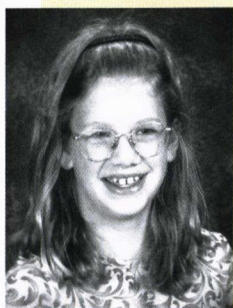
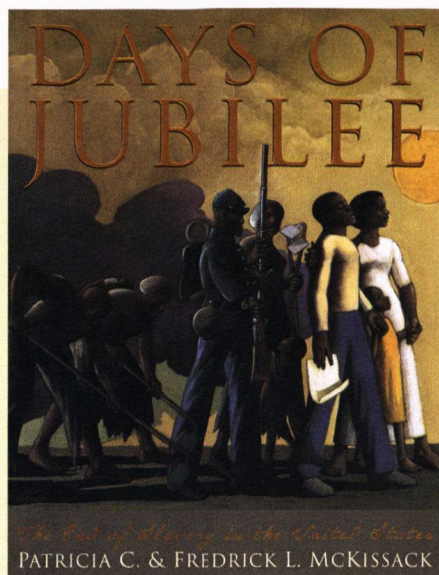
As we start pulling away, I thank my

dad for the delicious dinner. He smiles, but continues to drive. I press both hands to the window, looking at the midnight sky, licking off the excess crust on my left cheek. And as I take my last glimpse of the sky, I see my Aunt Carol, motioning for me to come back next Thursday. ❀

Book Review

By Laura Krull

Days of Jubilee by Patricia C. and Fredrick L. McKissack; Scholastic Press: New York, 2003; \$18.95



Laura Krull, 12
Bend, Oregon

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE says that all men are created equal, with certain unalienable rights, which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. At one point in American history, that wasn't true for millions of African-Americans in bondage throughout America.

Scattered throughout the book were first-person narratives, which I greatly enjoyed reading. These stories about slaves and others were mixed with interesting facts about the Civil War. I also liked reading from the slaves' perspective, and their stories touched my heart.


James Forten, a free African-American, was the very first story, and it was also the best, in my opinion. I felt his courage inside of me, as he stood listening to the first reading of the Declaration of Independence. He stayed to listen to the reading even though he was bullied by white men. James was overjoyed when he concluded that in this new country, people of color would be free. James eagerly joined the Revolutionary Army to help fight for freedom. I had his hope inside of me, as he believed that now, in this new world, his fellow brethren would have their freedom. And although the book didn't mention it, I also felt his pain I knew he would have later, when he learned that his fellow black men would stay in bondage for many more years. I admire him,

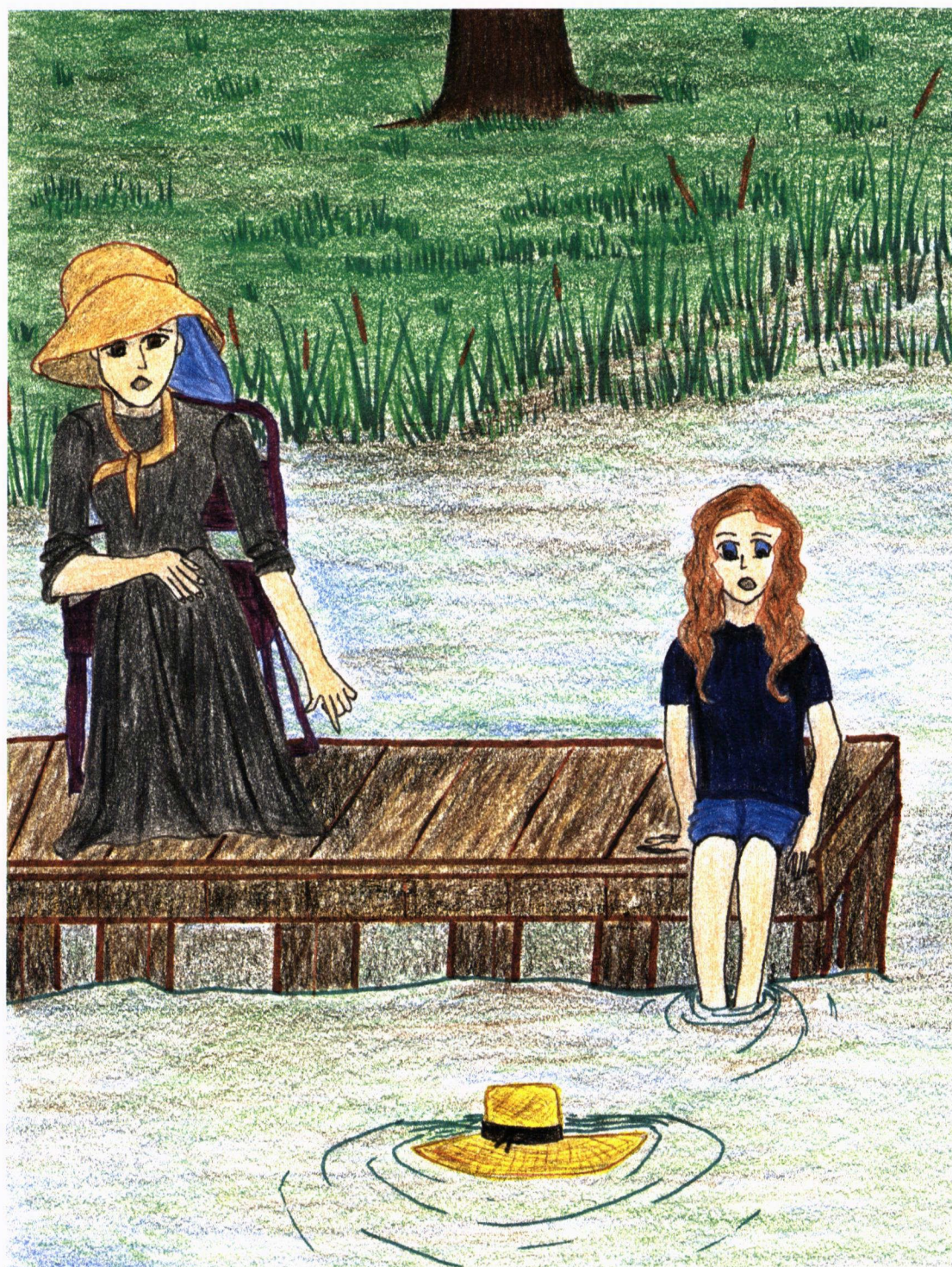
because he stood up for himself and his race.

Many years later, Abraham Lincoln also joined the fight for the abolition of slavery. He was the main force behind the emancipation of slaves, but he didn't start out that way. I was surprised, and almost shocked, to learn that the Great Emancipator had doubts about abolishing slavery at the beginning of the Civil War. Now I see that he changed as the war went on; he made the war not just a fight for reuniting the Union, but also a fight for abolishing slavery. Abraham Lincoln was a great, brave leader, and he's my hero.

Another leader at that time was General William Tecumseh Sherman. I believe General Sherman was a great man, and he shared many traits with Lincoln. Sherman treated the slaves fairly, giving them jobs with the army if they wanted. The newly freed blacks called him the Deliverer, somebody like Moses who came to set the people free.

The book was very well written, so well that as I read, I could envision myself celebrating among the freed slaves. I loved reading about the different days they called their Jubilee, such as Juneteenth and Eightamay. I felt their joy, hope, and happiness. I could imagine their delight, and feel their pride as they walked away from their former masters, free once and for all. As I read on, I also felt a sadness welling up inside of me, as I read about that fateful night at Ford's Theatre, where Abraham Lincoln was shot and killed. My heart mourned with all of the people. I felt the loss that happened so many years ago, and yet was recreated in my head, allowing Lincoln to live and die once again.

Days of Jubilee is a very good book. It teaches about a different time, different people, and different lifestyles. It opens you up into a whole new world. 



I turned to look at where David had been and saw only his small hat in the murky water

The Lone Straw Hat

By Olivia Grugan

Illustrated by Jesyka Palmer

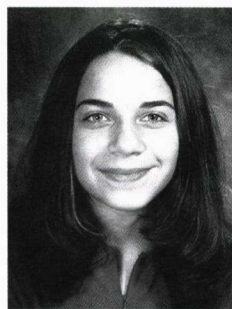
THE WATER. IT USED TO BE tranquil. A calm, yet dynamic giant, nourishing the life within. Sometimes its surface churned, purging the muddy banks of debris and stirring up the sediment on the bottom. Other times it was as still as a hot day in August. At these times the mud would settle to the bottom, and the turtles would come to bask on the rocks. The children would run to its edge and catch newts and water bugs. Soon their parents would follow and give the nod, confirming that it was time to play in the refreshing water. Cries of joy would fill the air as everyone was assured that life was good.

This is what I used to see when I looked through the long, tangled branches to our pond. Three-quarters of an acre in area with a small island slightly off center, our pond was a special place where we would all congregate on warm summer days in June, July, August, and sometimes September. The adults would walk down the rough path with cool drinks in their hands and hearty laughs in their throats, followed by the bare and pattering feet of the children. My two sisters, my brother, and I sometimes spent hours in the pond area, frolicking in the sunshine. Often my five cousins processed to the water's edge, where we children would begin stripping down to our bathing suits. The adults would make their way for the lawn chairs on the dock from which they kept a watchful eye on all that was happening.

The first rule at our house was "No matter what, no children may play by the pond without an adult." We followed this rule



Olivia Grugan, 13
Alexandria, Pennsylvania



Jesyka Palmer, 13
Blissfield, Michigan

faithfully but didn't let it spoil our fun. With the adults present, we had races, swam laps, practiced our dives and flips, made sandcastles, and pretended we were mermaids. Sometimes we used the pond for a learning opportunity. Papa would make us aware of the feeding patterns of fish or tell us of the life cycle of the newts at the water's edge. Mama would clear up our uncertainties about sea monsters and whether or not sharks might be lurking in the muddy waters of the deep end of the pond.

In the winter we bundled up like Eskimos and tramped down the slippery path to the pond to try out our ice-skating skills. Occasionally there was a bump or a bruise, but no one let that bother them; there were always a loving mother and some hot chocolate. All we had to do was call.

My memories of the pond were nothing but joyous, and I relished every moment of my time there. But on that morning in June, the water transformed before my eyes when I looked at it and saw the lone, straw hat floating at the dock's edge. It was small, hand sewn, with a simple black band encircling the base. The brim? Three-and-a-half inches wide. Carefully cared for, it must have been his Sunday hat. The ripples of water that it made widened quickly, mirroring my fear.

Earlier that morning our Amish friends, the Peachey's, arrived at our home in a big fifteen-passenger van. We had been planning to get together for months. They came on Ascension Day, celebrated by

Christians for Jesus' ascent into heaven. For the Amish, this is the only holiday of the year. After lunch and socializing we decided to show the Peachey's our new house. Although it was still being built, it was approaching completion. As we were a big group of people, we went in two carloads. The first group was made up of the men and the older children. As soon as we got to the house, my dad and Mr. Peachey went into the house. Amos wanted a tour. But we children retreated to the sandy beach. There we began building sandcastles and splashing, ankle deep, in the water. It was too cold to go in any deeper.

"This is probably David's first time in a pond," said Sarah, the oldest Peachey child, referring to her younger brother.

I replied, "Really? How old is he?"

"Six," came the response. Modest not only in dress but also in speech, Sarah did not elaborate.

Just six years of age, I thought. This meant he had just started school. He only had one year of English under his belt. No wonder he didn't respond when I called, "Let's go rinse off our feet at the dock and then head up to the house."

Once at the dock, David sat down next to me as we all began kicking in the water. Laughter filled the air. But it all stopped when, after just a few minutes (or was it seconds?), I felt a splash on my leg. Oh, this certainly wasn't the first; we had been splashing the whole time. But this splash was different; it wasn't small and staccato like the rest; it was more like a small wall of water . . . followed by a silence.

Instinctively, I turned to look at where David had been and saw only his small hat in the murky water.

"Papa! David fell in the water!" My cry echoed from the hillside. Immediately my dad responded by bounding out of the house with Amos at his heels. As we watched Papa dive without hesitation from the bank into the water, Sarah and I gathered up the other children. I realized that I didn't have any time to waste. I had to do something to help.

Just then I saw Papa's head emerge. "Call 911," he said and then, catching a breath, he went back under. I was relieved to have some instructions, but I was also feeling frantic. This big task of calling for help was now on my shoulders.

Running up to the porch, I saw Mama run out of the van and dash into the house. She had come in the second carload, but it was apparent that she could sense that something was wrong. Mama and I met by the phone, and I stood next to her as she dialed those numbers everyone prays never to have to dial. Since Mama wasn't clear on all the details, we collaborated to come up with the facts that the emergency worker wanted. Upon hanging up the phone my mom said, "We have to go flag down the ambulance!"

"OK, Mama. Let's go," I replied.

On our trip down the long lane I noticed that my feet were still bare from having played in the water. The pain of the black macadam as it transferred its stored heat to my tender soles is, for some reason, very prominent in my memory.

"Keep walking," Mama said, breaking my train of thought and taking my mind off the pain. "We can't afford to have the ambulance miss our driveway." I thought about this as we marched on. "We can't afford . . ." Why? What was going to happen? Everything would be all right, just like always. I kept this comforting thought running through my mind as we waited . . . and waited. Everything would be all right . . . right?

"Here it comes!" Mama eventually said. "Should we follow it?" I replied.

Mama was understandably distraught. All she said in reply was, "Oh, help."

As we followed those red lights and blaring whistles down our driveway, I felt relieved. The outside world was interfering. They would take care of David. At the same time though, it made my heart sink a little. Maybe that's because, now that they were here, my biggest fear was affirmed; this *was* serious.

Up at the house, the emergency workers leapt out of the ambulance and sprinted down to the pond. I quickly made my way over to where all the other children were waiting in the car. They had been instructed to stay put. When I got there, I found all nine children quiet with fear; nonetheless, the look in their eyes was hopeful. They were waiting for me to bring news. I felt helpless. I couldn't tell them anything, so I just stepped into the car and sat silently in the middle row of seats. As I looked into Sarah's eyes all I could focus on were her pupils. They were like deep canyons with no end. She too

was wondering, "Will I ever see David again?"

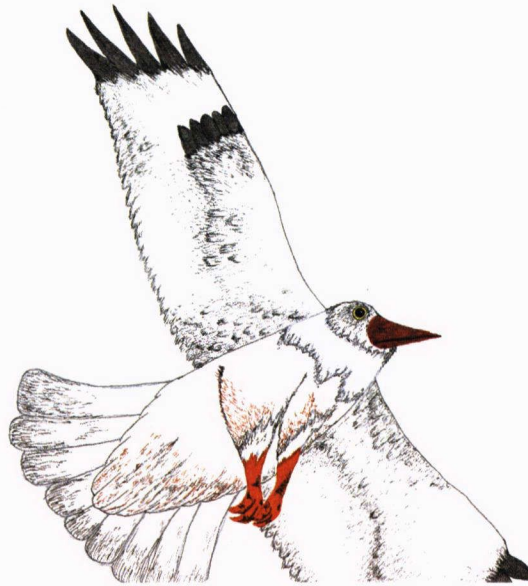
The commotion of the next few hours was indescribable. I'm not even sure what happened exactly. David was taken by ambulance to the hospital, and for a few glorious moments our hope soared like a bird because news was brought that his heart was beating again. But shortly thereafter we looked overhead and saw a helicopter, and our bird tumbled to the ground. David was being flown to a bigger hospital, which meant things were serious. There they discovered that, although his heart was beating, David was not there anymore. His body was empty. His spirit gone.

Silently I went to bed that night. The tears didn't come. I regret this. Why

couldn't I cry . . . simply shed a few tears? It would be the least I could do.

It wasn't until I saw Sarah and the other Peacheys again that I cried. They had lost a part of their family. No one would ever know what he would have done with his life or what potential lay within him.

Now, three years later in the cold winter months, when I walk down to the pond a sharp breeze bites at my cheek, and the mist that rises off the water envelopes me. I turn to look out over the glassy pond surface, and I realize that I am not only looking at a life-sustaining being but also a life-taking creature. A red-tailed hawk cries in the distance, and for a moment I too want to soar above everything and cry out for all to hear. ❁



Water All Around

By **Marian Homans-Turnbull**

Illustrated by the author

THE SUN ROSE AS USUAL that morning, but no one saw it. There was no shortage of watchers; the two fishermen on Bell Island were up mending their nets, watching the horizon for the glow that would tell them it was time to set out, and the beady-eyed gulls were watching in their wary way from nests on shore and seats on the ocean's broad back, and their favorite vantage point, the sky. The quiet old lady on Middle Island was awake, gazing at the eastern sky and dreaming of sunrises long ago when she bustled about making breakfast for her children, and wondering if any of them ever stopped to watch the sunrise, and the little girl in the little white house next door was just getting out of bed, not because she had to, but because she always woke up with the sun and there was really no reason to stay in bed. It was not the watchers that were missing, it was the sun.

The little girl—she was not really so very little, but was more a little girl than anything else—was the only one to think it strange. The fishermen, when they had waited long enough, simply smiled at each other and started the motor of their boat, and the old woman too knew the Nova Scotia fog well. But to the girl, as she stepped out of the door into the misty dawn, it was like waking to a whole new world. The surrounding islands, near enough to swim to the day before, had vanished, replaced by swirling clouds of thick fog that wetted her skin and hair but without the striking feeling of rain. It was like being on a ship miles from anywhere, she thought. All she could see was water. Water and fog. She sat



Marian Homans-Turnbull, 13
Guilford, Connecticut



The surrounding islands had vanished, replaced by swirling clouds of thick fog

down in the grass then, tousle-haired and dreamy-eyed, hugging her knees and breathing in the mystery.

The fog had not lifted when the little girl's mother called her name. It was their last day on the island and it was time to pack up and leave, to drive to the ferry

and return to civilization. And the little girl remembered that she was not really a captain's daughter on a three-masted schooner off the coast of Scotland, but was a little girl named Miranda who was starting algebra and Latin in the fall and was going to lead the poetry club. So she

went inside and drank the hot chocolate her mother had made for her, and put her cup in a suitcase, and then remembered to say good morning, and wrung out her nightgown, which was very wet with sitting on the dew-soaked grass.

When the packing, which should only be lived through once, was over, and the suitcases were all piled on the red motor boat, Miranda's mother went to wake the baby. Miranda slipped out the door and set off on the path around the island to say goodbye to her friends. It was still at most two hours past sunrise, but she knew everyone would be awake, because where there are no electric lights or other such extravagances (as on any proper island), daylight hours are precious and no one wastes them in bed. So she said her goodbyes and returned to a wailing baby and distracted mother, and in time things fell into place, and they clambered into the boat and scrabbled perches amongst the luggage, and Mother pulled the cord on the outboard motor and as it stuttered to life they set off into the fog.

Miranda's mother knew the way from island to shore, and could steer straight despite the fog, but wind and tide conspired against them, and pushed the boat off course, so that a rock came up to starboard that they had not knowingly steered toward, and the trip which had been an adventure turned frightening. All they could see was water and fog. They could have been heading out to sea, or straight at a reef, or anywhere. The fog seemed menacing now, and the excitement was

gone. The spray flung at them by the wind had turned cold, not cool, and the wind itself was harsher. Miranda took the tiller while her mother hunted frantically for the compass, but it was packed deep in some unknown bag. One arm around baby and the other hand on the tiller, Miranda could not reach up to brush her wind-tossed hair out of her eyes, so she shook her head, then suddenly released baby and felt her hair with her hand. She stared at the waves for a long moment, then cried over the growl of the motor, "The wind! It was coming from the north, from the mainland! Steer into the wind!"

Mother nodded, and said something, but the wind carried away her words. Then Miranda remembered that she was steering, and swung the tiller around so that the little boat faced the wind. It blew her hair back for her but she freed her hand anyway to take off her salt-encrusted spectacles to rake the horizon with her eyes for any sign of land. Baby crept over to Mother, looking for a sheltering arm, and the three huddled down in the boat as the wind and spray hit them, and presently there came a shadow in the fog, and it grew clearer until it became a wooded promontory and a weathered dock, and presently the little girl found herself climbing up the ladder, and that her heart was no longer pounding, and that her cheeks were wet with something more than mist and spray. And she blinked her eyes as she pulled baby up with her cold hands, and she fumbled with her glasses one-handed as she hauled bag after bag

up the hill to the car, and she finally had the glasses on when they drove away. And presently she came to be smiling, because it didn't take much to make the little girl smile, and because her hands were growing warm.

When they reached the ferry, she stopped smiling. First her smile grew weaker when she saw the gray angularity of the city, because it made her remember that summer was almost over, and that her clothes had not been washed for over a week and were encrusted with salt, and other inconvenient memories. Then it faded altogether when the car stopped at the ferry dock and Mother spoke to the funny little man in the booth. First she said, "Emily Jackson," and "zero-seven-four-six-eight-zero-three," the way she always did, but then she said, "What do you mean, oversold?" and "It can't be" and "This is just insane," and then the man came out and they talked and then they yelled, and the man said that they had oversold the boat and that he was very sorry but since they were the last passengers to arrive, there was no room for their car. And Miranda covered baby's ears as Mother tried everything and grew furious, and then Mother, in a stroke of genius, ordered the man to put them on the boat as foot passengers and send the car over on the next ferry; she would pick it up. They piled a few clothes and medicines into what bags they could carry, and snatched up their life jackets for when they got to Maine, and ran onto the boat with minutes to spare; getting lost in the fog had

taken longer than they thought. They found seats and sat down, and when some time had passed, Miranda found that she could smile again, for this was just the next part of the adventure, and she was back to being surrounded by water, and no land in sight, and that was really the way she liked to be.

Her mother grew worried again, because the friends in Maine could not come to meet them at Bar Harbor where the ferry docked, and they needed to find some way to get from Bar Harbor to the friends' island at the head of Somes Sound. But Miranda wasn't anxious at all. She was not happy, certainly not, and she was cold and salty and hungry and exhausted, but she wasn't worried. Things would work out. And if they didn't, there would just be more adventures.

Baby went to sleep and Mother was reading, so Miranda went out on the deck and leaned out over the water with her arms folded on the railing. The water rushed past, blue-black and bottomless green-gray with flecks of white at the peak of each wave until it met the boat, then churning, frothy and white with swirls of the palest blue and green, and none of it the same from one moment to the next. The wind, still from the north, was behind them now, and there was a visible change from the glassy rollers in the lee of the giant ferry to the darker, wind-ruffled water beyond. Mere yards from the boat, the water ended as the sky came down to meet it, throwing its sodden white blanket of mist over all beyond.

At the other end of the deck stood a white-haired old gentleman, the sole human there on the deck apart from the girl. A few brazen gulls pecked at the deck between them. He too had been watching the ocean go past, but now he was watching the little girl standing silently with her tangled hair blowing about her white face. She seemed intent on something, barely smiling and gazing so serenely at the water, and looked frozen, standing pale and motionless and listing slightly in the wind. But he knew her name. It was a pretty name, and fitting for a girl so obviously of the ocean. As he had been. And still was. So he said the name, softly. "Miranda."

The little girl's eyes lit up and she turned, smiling fully again, and full of wonder.

"How do you know my name?" she asked.

He told her that he had watched the scene below, and noticed her, and wondered how it had turned out. He was sorry for them, especially because he had reserved the last place. He asked her where she was going, and—though she had been drilled in not talking to strangers, she was still young enough to listen to intuition, and to have intuition worth listening to—she told him, about their sailor friends in Maine and the magical times they'd had, there and elsewhere but always with the sea, and the weeks on Middle Island and the friends she had made, and the races and the exploring and the boats and the swimming, and even about the Latin and the algebra and the poetry, because they

had a large place in her heart too, only she sometimes forgot them in the excitement of the sea, just as she sometimes forgot the ocean in the long months of school, but could never really forget either one.

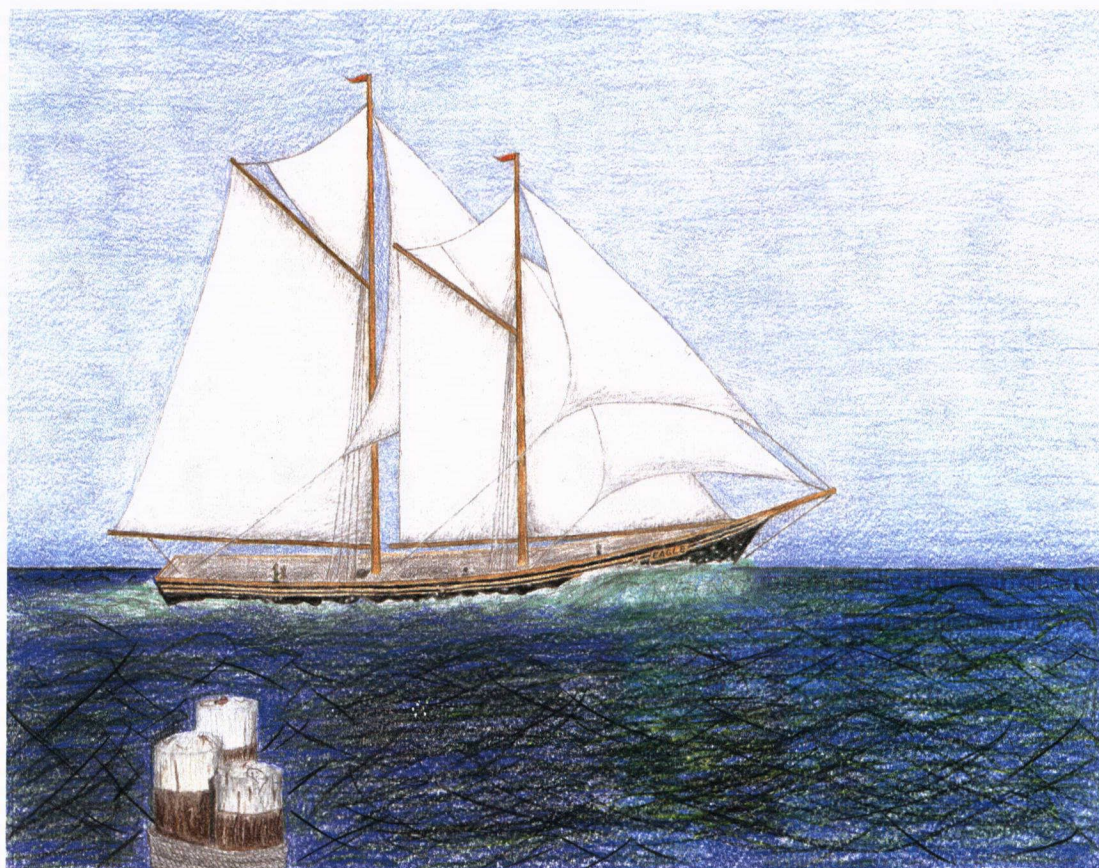
And she asked him where he was going, but he just smiled and replied, "Oh, wherever the winds take me."

And they spoke on, about everything and nothing, she merry and full of three months of play, and he vague and with always a secret smile in his eye. And presently they found that they had talked enough, and were content to stand and watch the waves roll by. And when the little girl looked up again, the old man was gone.

She was worried then, remembering how secretive he had been, and how much she had told him, and wondering if perhaps she had done wrong. But she put her worries away shortly, seeing her mother walk out onto the deck looking as if she had finally learned to put worries away. While baby placidly ran her toy motorcycle over their feet, Mother told Miranda in an excited murmur, "That gentleman you were speaking to just now is the captain of the schooner *Eagle*. He apparently has her moored in the harbor but was today going to take her up to her other mooring, near Somesville, where she spends the early fall."

The little girl's eyes and mouth were wide open now, and her face shone.

"He wants to know if we would like to go with him, and row from the boat to Sheep Island!"



And oh, what a glorious sail it was!

The last became one glorious crescendo in breathless unison as daughter finally grasped mother's meaning and was too impatient to be told. They both knew the incredible kindness this man was showing them, and tried to show collected gratitude when he came, but Miranda, though very calm, was still radiant at the prospect of going home on a real, live schooner, being a girl whose knowledge of sailing extended little beyond the nine-foot dinghies she had learned in, and her mother was still reeling from the sudden reversal

of fate that turned her desperation into gladness. So the three talked out the logistics, and before they knew it, the fog began to clear and the town of Bar Harbor suddenly came into view, with great craggy hills and acres of dense pine, and Captain Harris, for that was the old gentleman's name, pointed out his lovely ship, sitting at anchor but with pennants flying. And then they were climbing down the stairs and onto the land, with packages that suddenly seemed lighter than before and the life jackets they had so luckily thought to

bring, and before the little girl could fully catch her breath she was in a little dory rowing out to the tall ship, and soon she was clambering aboard, and now the crew of three sturdy men who seemed a multitude had the sails up, and now they were off, truly off, and sailing!

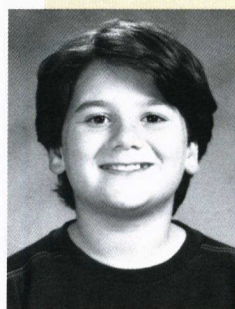
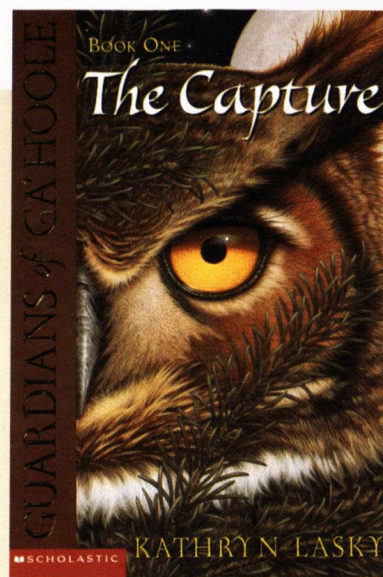
And oh, what a glorious sail it was!

The fog had lifted fully now, and the sun shone fiercely. The wind came roaring, still from the north, and it was a series of long easy reaches down to the bottom of the island. There were great, following swells, so that they could almost have been surfing, but the sea was not choppy. The only other boats were a few tiny sails on the horizon to port, and to starboard rose the pine-covered crags of Mount Desert. The Eagle fairly flew along the water, with all her sails well out and the gay flags on the stays whipping. The Captain sailed at first, while bags were properly packed and life jackets were scrambled into and baby

was loosely tied to a ring in the middle of the deck, but then he offered Miranda a turn at the wheel, in a very open place. Her eyes glowing, she took it, and steered straight ahead, which wasn't really so very hard, after all. And though she had not been worried, she was still relieved at the happy ending of their close call, and knew how close it had been, so her broad smile was still a trifle pensive. But then she forgot all that in the glory of the wind and waves, and her smile grew brighter, like sunshine across a calm sea. And she looked forward to sailing into the harbor, to her friends' envious faces and the welcome of the little island. And presently she came to see the funny side of the whole thing, and the little girl laughed, with her head thrown back and her sun-bleached hair tossing in the wind, and her eyes like stars, and her hand on the wheel, and white sails flying, and water, deep, shifting, shining water, all around. ❀

Book Review

By Anthony Cali



Anthony Cali, 10
Acworth, Georgia

Guardians of Ga'Hoole, Book One: The Capture by Kathryn Lasky; Scholastic Inc.: New York, 2003; \$4.99

I WAS EXCITED WHEN I opened the book *Guardians of Ga'Hoole, The Capture*, by Kathryn Lasky. I could tell it would be a good book once I read the cover. Initially, it appealed to my love of animals and nature. Once I started reading it, however, I was so interested in the story that I was fascinated by this adventurous world of St. Aegolius Academy for Orphaned Owls, also known as St. Aggies.

This book is about a young barn owl named Soren. He and his friends are captured and taken to an evil academy where they hypnotize young owls and force them to join their evil army bent on destroying all owl kingdoms. Soren and his friend Gylfie escape the hypnotism by telling stories of the Great Ga'Hoole Kingdom. It forces them to stay awake so they are unable to fall asleep during a full moon, also known as moon blinking. That's just the beginning of their adventures, for they escape and meet up with two other owls, Twilight and Digger. Together, they are in search of the Great Ga'Hoole Tree, which they hope will be able to stop the evil academy of St. Aggies.

The author was very clever, and made a map of the entire owl world. This map is illustrated on the inside cover of the book and includes at least ten different areas, such as Forest Kingdom of Tyto (where Soren is from), St. Aegolius Canyons, and the Island of the Great Ga'Hoole Tree. On the outer edges of the map, there is even an area called Beyond the Beyond. I enjoy reading maps, and this made the book very appealing to me.

I had read that the author spent several years doing extensive research about owls, in order to write a nonfiction book. She decided in the end to write a fantasy about owls, but to include as much information as she could about their natural history. This is very obvious when you get to the end of the book and find a type of glossary naming all of the characters in the story, their origin, and the type of animal they are. It also includes the scientific name for each animal. I was surprised that there were so many different types of owls. Not only was it a learning experience, it made the book seem much more realistic.

The story definitely drew me into its fantasy world. I felt at times as if I was Soren. Sometimes I felt eager, sometimes I felt scared, sometimes victorious. I didn't want to put the book down even to eat or sleep. It was definitely a page-turner with a good-versus-evil theme, which is a characteristic found in most of my favorite stories.

Guardians of Ga'Hoole, The Capture, by Kathryn Lasky, is definitely a book I would recommend to my friends. In fact, I can't wait to read the next book in the series. ❁



"Come to pick up a form?" Halley asked

Because of Trust

By **Lauren Tompkins**

Illustrated by **Emily Wendland**

SHANNON TOOK A DEEP BREATH and then opened the door. Tiny brass bells that hung on the inside tinkled merrily until she closed the door behind her and ran her hand swiftly through almost completely brown hair. She let her breath out, and then inhaled the smells of the Animal Rescue Thrift Store she was now standing inside. Another girl at the counter looked up from the cash register, and grinned. Halley was a full fifteen years older than Shannon, but they could talk together as if they were the exact same age. "Hi, Shannon!" she called.

"Hi!" Shannon replied. There was a loud and throaty meow from near her sneakers, informing Shannon that Jenny was making her presence known. "I won't forget you," Shannon said, kneeling so that she could pet the pure white cat that had been in the shop for as long as she could remember. Jenny purred, rubbing her head up against Shannon's shoe, rolling on the gray carpet.

"Come to pick up a form?" Halley asked, carefully sorting the money into equal piles.

Shannon's mouth was suddenly dry, and she stood, ignoring Jenny's pleas for more petting.

"Yes." She nodded.

"Hold on," Halley said. The front counter was always a mess of labels, pieces of paper, things on sale, and things that Halley needed to put price tags on. Halley rummaged around in a drawer for several minutes, and Shannon stood as if frozen in the



Lauren Tompkins, 11
Kneeland, California



Emily Wendland, 13
Esko, Minnesota

same spot. "Ah! Got one!" she called.

Shannon walked to the counter, and Halley passed over a piece of paper on the clipboard.

Shannon took them and bit her lip. "Isn't the kitten room open?" she asked.

"I think I can let you in. There is a new batch of kittens that I just put flea ointment on, so I don't want kids petting them too much. Go ahead." Halley turned to help a customer.

SHANNON SLIPPED inside the kitty room and made sure the door was firmly closed behind her, and locked. If there were new kittens that meant that they wanted out of the room above all else.

As she turned around, she realized that she had been right—five kittens bounded toward the door hopefully. One tabby, two Siamese and two sandy-colored. Shannon bent over . . . and they scattered, finding shelter under the metal file cabinets, cages, and cave made from just-washed blankets warm from the dryer. "Better get used to me," Shannon said, looking around. "I may work here, you know." No response from the kittens. They didn't stick so much as a whisker out from their hiding places. Shannon sighed. Well, she wasn't about to go crawling around after them now, scaring them half to death.

She sat down in one of the rocking chairs and looked at the form. It was hard to understand the first time she read it, but then she read it again, and began to fill it out. The last question was the sim-

plest for her. "Why do you think working in the kitty room would help? Why do you like kittens?"

Shannon paused, and carefully wrote her answer. "Because these kittens don't have any homes, they don't have any mothers to go to. I know I couldn't be a mother, but I've always loved kittens—I may never know why. It could be because of trust."

Surprised that she was done, she looked down at her lap. There was a sandy-colored kitten sitting on it. When Shannon reached down, it hopped off. Shannon shrugged, and opened the kitty room door, then slipped out. Halley was standing there, and Shannon handed her the paper.

"I know the director will let you in, even though you're only eleven," Halley said, putting the form on the director's desk. "She's seen how those kittens love you."

"Need any help?" Shannon looked at the messy desk quizzically.

"No, thanks though. Isn't it time for your dinner?"

Shannon sped out the door, calling, "Thank you!"

"WAS IT ACCEPTED?" Shannon was excited, jumping up and down at the counter.

Halley smiled. "Of course. I told the director you have experience with cats so you know what to do . . ."

"When do I start?"

"Nobody's in there now," Halley said.

"You won't be getting paid, you know."

Shannon nodded. "Yes—I know."

THE KITTY ROOM hadn't been cleaned in several days, so Shannon had her work cut out for her. The cleaning closet was full and cluttered. Shannon started dusting right away. Dust fell off the tops of the shelves and the file cabinet, cascaded down from the cages. Sneezing, Shannon dusted the rest and went to the dishes full of food. Except that was the problem. They were empty. It took her a good ten minutes to find the wet cat food. She dumped it into a new not-dusty bowl and set it on the tray. Time to wash the dishes. She opened the screen door, and closed it behind her, balancing dish soap in one hand, and a plastic box full of dishes in the other, and was nearly bowled over by a blur of gold fur. "Benny. Down!" Benny, a golden retriever, rolled in the dirt, and Shannon began to wash the dishes on the grass.

She went inside again and dried them, put them on the correct shelf, and looked around. It didn't look much better. She grimly clamped her mouth shut. She would make this place shine—or else.

TWO MONTHS LATER

THE DIRECTOR, a red-haired woman with glasses, looked into the room. "You did this?"

Shannon nodded, embarrassed.

Instead of scolding, Ms. Lanburn put her head to one side. "Very good. Excuse

me—it is time for our meeting. There's somebody coming in about ten minutes who I think you should meet."

"Who?" Shannon asked, tugging at one of her braids.

"She wants to volunteer. I'm sorry, but I really do have to leave now."

Shannon cuddled the tabby kitten in her arms for a moment, then put him down. His fur was matted from stepping in the water bowl. She went to find the brush and sat down with him in her lap in the newly-covered rocking chair. She had sewn one of her old blankets from home onto it, and now it had the design of embroidered gold kittens running on a red background. Shannon was attacking the fur of the kitten that sat purring in her lap when there was a knock on the glass.

"Come in!" Shannon called, setting the kitten down.

In stepped a girl her age, wearing a plaid skirt and a green top, hair spilling down her back like honey. She had long lashes and from whatever way she looked Shannon couldn't deny the envy at being that pretty.

"Hello." Shannon extended her hand. "Sorry!" It was covered in wet cat fur.

"I'm Mary. You're Shannon, right?"

"Right."

The girl was a few inches shorter than Shannon, and seemed about a year younger.

"I'm here to volunteer," Mary said shortly.

"Good. We need more people here, we really do," Shannon said warmly. "Want

me to show you the ropes? This is the radiator—you aren't supposed to leave it on . . ."

"No, thank you. They said I could volunteer *today*," Mary cut Shannon short.

"But . . . but . . ." Shannon stuttered, "I . . . I was going to volunteer today . . . I mean, I was here first, so, maybe you could help?"

"No, thank you," was the reply again.

Shannon stood there. She expected Mary to turn on her heel and walk out. But the other girl didn't move.

"Maybe we need to start over," Shannon said. "I think we do. Maybe you could *help* me? That must be why the director sent you here, now."

"No. Thank you."

Shannon felt as if she was going to cry, a deep sorrowful feeling in her chest.

So she was the one that left the room.

SHANNON LIVED only a block away from the thrift store, and she was on summer break, so she could really go there and volunteer any time she wanted. She wasn't able to last night.

Groaning, she heaved herself out of her bed and dressed, brushed her hair, then went downstairs to have breakfast. It was six o'clock in the morning. Mary won't have even gotten up yet, Shannon thought, eating her cereal so quickly she spilt milk on her lap. The thrift store would be open, though. If not, she could find a spare key.

She ran to her mother and father's bedroom. "Mom, Dad, I'm going to be volun-

teering, OK?"

Her mother rolled over in bed. "All right, I'll call the thrift store if you aren't back by one o'clock."

Shannon nodded, and left the house.

The air was crisp, making her eyes sting, and her nose run. But there was something else in the air that made her nose even more irritated than it was with the fresh air. Smoke. Not wood smoke either. Shannon knew wood smoke because she lit the fire in their house every morning. It smelled strange. Looking up in the sky, Shannon saw a haze. Running, she followed it, for only a block until she realized where it was coming from when she reached an open parking lot. Flames were shooting out of the back of the thrift store, and smoke was rising into the air in a billowing cloud.

THE DOOR was open, but there wasn't anybody inside. Shannon pushed it, and out ran a white blur, yowling. Jenny. Smoke filled Shannon's nose now, and when she stepped inside she could hardly see a thing. She fumbled in her pocket, found a hanky, and crammed it over her mouth.

The kittens. That was all that mattered now.

Stumbling through the smoke, Shannon found the door, but flames were in front of that. There was a broad window behind the director's desk. Shannon grabbed a raffle item, a heavy painted rock, and threw it at the window. Hard. The window shattered, and Shannon clambered on top



Flames were shooting out of the back of the thrift store

of Ms. Lanburn's desk and threw herself in. She landed on the floor, flames barely a foot away from her. Loud kitten meows reached her ears, and Shannon stood. The

flames were creeping toward her and the cages. Some of the kittens weren't even inside, but they were huddled in a basket, looking wide-eyed at the flames. Shannon

took two quick steps forward, and unlocked the cages, and held the bundle of kittens in her arms. There was no time to think. She went back to the window and placed them on the director's desk, and jumped out herself. The smoke was searing her lungs, making it seem like every breath was a precious thing, so long as it didn't hurt.

The two sandy kittens looked up at her, and the two Siamese were rolling in a ball on the desk. In the distance Shannon heard sirens, quiet at first, but then getting closer and closer, and it came to her in a flash. The tabby. She had forgotten the tabby. Shannon jumped through the window again. The tabby was still locked in its cage, blinking dumbly at the flames that were only inches from the window that Shannon had just jumped through. It didn't meow. It didn't hiss, or screech or even look terrified. It just sat there, looking at the flames, as if paralyzed. Shannon opened the cage, and grabbed the tabby, stuffing it under her coat. The flames had advanced five feet, roaring and crackling, snaking toward the girl and the kitten. Now there was no way out the window. There was no escape.

ONE WEEK LATER

FOR NOW, Shannon hardly remembered the flames getting close, so close she had gasped and scrambled for a door, any hidden door, back pressed against the cages. And it seemed like a silly dream that the fire had been put out just then,

by firemen in yellow coats holding a heavy hose.

But it had been real, and Shannon knew it because of several things. The floor in the kitty room had to be replaced, but that wasn't too much of a problem because it had been carpet anyway, and probably had held too many germs to be healthy. And the kittens, for the most part, were fine, except for the smoke damage to their throats, but the vet assured them that it would get better soon. The whole back of the kitty room had to be redone, and the door had burned down completely. When Shannon was asked the cause of the fire, it was confirmed that the radiator had been left on—and Shannon was believed rightfully when she told the truth and said that she wasn't the one that had left it on.

"But do you have any idea who left it on?" Ms. Lanburn had asked. Shannon had pressed her lips shut and just shaken her head.

Shannon now watched the kittens from a new rocking chair as they skidded on the new wood floor in the kitten room, and fought, and batted at toys. The tabby now sat in the far corner of the room, observing everything in sight as if not seeing anything at all. He was shy, Shannon realized. Shy because he didn't know what to do.

She was about to bend down and try to pick him up when the door to the kitty room opened. Two of the kittens jumped forward as Ms. Lanburn struggled to close the door quickly, and Shannon grabbed them by the scruffs of their necks.

Ms. Lanburn sat down on another chair and there was silence for a moment before she started to speak. "I'd like to thank you for what you've done," Ms. Lanburn said, turning her head slightly toward Shannon. "I don't like to think of what would have happened if you hadn't saved them. The kittens. And I want to thank you for it . . ."

Shannon cut her off. "No, wait, I didn't . . ."

But the director was faster. "How would you like a job here? I would pay you money . . ."

Shannon thought for a moment. "No money for now, maybe later. But I'd love to work here."

Ms. Lanburn looked disappointed. "How about a . . . well, something else that you'd like?"

Shannon looked around the kitty room until her eyes fell on the tabby. "Trust,"

she whispered.

"What?" the director asked, startled.

"Tr- . . . the kitten. Trust. Could I have him?"

SHANNON WENT to the front door and opened it. "Goodbye, Shannon!" Ms. Lanburn called. Halley echoed the same. The little bells tinkled as she opened it a bit wider, and the crisp air flooded in.

Trust the tabby rested on Shannon's arm. Shannon was fairly sure that he wouldn't try to run away.

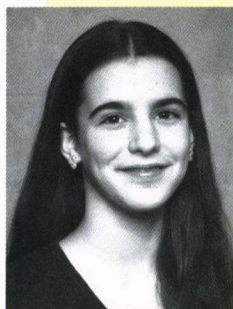
And she paused. Before her, on the door, etched into the wood with what looked like might have been a nail, was one word. *Sorry*.

Shannon looked at it for a minute more until Trust meowed. It was the first meow that Shannon heard from him. "All right, all right." Shannon stepped outside, and closed the door behind her. ❁



Neverland

By Nicole Guenther



Nicole Guenther, 12
Vancouver, Washington

There might be no Neverland,
No heaven, no after.
Only cold Earth.
There might be nothing—
Yet isn't that something?
So pretend today will last forever.

And fly now, soar,
Gravity only exists
If you believe in it.
Fly with sunbeams
Tangled in your glowing hair
And fly with moonbeams
Softening your face
And fly on the back of Pegasus.
Fly close to the sun,
And don't be burned,
Fly to the moon,
And leave your handprint
Denting it for who knows how long.

Bring me with you
When you go,
Lifting gently from
This battered planet.
We will skim the galaxies
Like tadpoles in a puddle
Or young eagles
Weightless
For the first time.
We will fly past
Where all the maps and pictures show
To un-named universes
Where we will orbit
Other suns
And we will
Never
Land.



The ball met the bat and it flew farther than we'd ever, in five years, hit a ball

Adrian

By Katie Russell

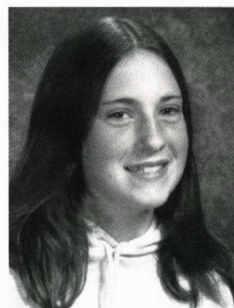
Illustrated by Joanna Stanley

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL AFTERNOON in August; it was slightly breezy and there wasn't a cloud in the baby-blue sky. School started in two weeks and the kids in my neighborhood were going all out, trying to squeeze all the fun they could into those last precious hours in the park. The kids in sixth grade were especially outrageous. You weren't allowed to play in the park as soon as you entered middle school. It was an unwritten law set down by years of sun-streaked kids coming and going.

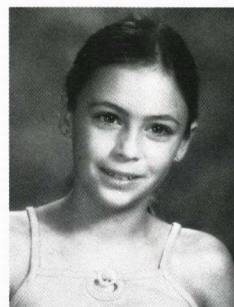
This was my last summer. My friends and I woke up early each morning and came home late each night. Dusty, tan and happy, we'd crawl into our beds without bothering to change.

It was softball that I was most interested in. Softball. We were obsessed. No matter how many times we'd been told to by well-meaning mothers, we wouldn't change our interests to something more feminine, like makeup, or clothes. The mothers would sigh and shake their heads, hoping that we would come down to earth by the time middle school rolled around.

There were five of us; me, Amy, Francine, Kath, and Becca. Amy was short with red hair and tons of freckles. She was short-tempered, but if you got on her good side, she was as kind as could be. Francine had long blond-brown hair that fell to the middle of her back. She was the quiet one among us, though compared to most people she was incredibly loud. Kath, or Kathleen, with brown hair cut close to her head, was the sports player among us. We all played softball, but she played every



Katie Russell, 12
Charlotte, Vermont



Joanna Stanley, 10
Seal Beach, California

possible sport that she could. Becca, with black hair that was always pulled back into a ponytail, was the intellectual one. For some reason, she had been born with a gift for math, something that none of us understood. We were best friends, and we thought that we would never accept another person into our group.

The softball field that we played on was old, so old that our grandparents remember playing on it. There had been several suggestions to tear it down and build a couple of soccer fields in its place. They had been solidly refused, not only by us, but also by more than half the adults in the town, people who had grown up with it there.

There were no dugouts like the newer fields, but it didn't matter to anyone. The grass was mostly brown with scattered bits of green mixed in; cigarette butts were more common than either color grass. The dirt that formed the diamond had not been replaced in a while, making the ground as hard as cement. All in all, the field was a waste of space, but it was perfect for our purposes.

Today we were, like all other days, playing softball. It was windy and dirt was getting thrown up in our eyes. There were enough of us only to have one pitcher, one batter, a first baseman, a shortstop and an outfielder. This wasn't enough, especially toward the end of the summer, when we'd had two and a half months to practice, but we worked through it all, adapting the rules to fit our purposes.

We were years older than anyone else,

most of the kids having already adjusted into the normal world according to their proud parents. We were labeled The Outcasts and spit on by kids three years younger than us. We didn't mind the spitting or the names, but if a kid ticked us off, a bloody nose solved matters temporarily.

Today Amy was pitching and I was supposed to be batting, when I saw a figure coming toward us. I turned to look, stunned. Nobody, absolutely nobody, ever came to see us. We were used to it.

This was someone new. It had to have been, I thought. A ball whizzed by my head and I turned to glare accusingly at Amy. She shrugged, then laughed.

"Served you right!" she called.

I stuck out my tongue and turned back around, letting go of the bat. It slid to the ground with a soft tap. The figure was closer now and I could tell it was a girl. The rest of my friends saw what I was looking at and walked toward me. We gathered around home plate, all glaring at this newcomer.

The girl was tall, over five feet, an accomplishment in us since we'd all been born into short families. Her hair was dark brown, pulled back roughly from her face and tied in a ponytail. The baseball cap that was shoved on her head was dark blue. She was wearing a dark pink tank top, with light pink shorts.

It was Francine who spoke first. "Nice outfit."

Amy spat rudely at the new girl's feet. "I think the mall's that way." She gestured

with a tip of her head.

The new girl stared steadily at them with dark brown eyes, reminding me of a trapped deer.

"My name's Adrian. I came to play softball." Her voice was quiet, but she sounded self-assured. For some reason, I wanted desperately to save this girl from the fate that she was accepting unknowingly.

"OK, you can bat," I said quickly. Francine looked at me strangely, but I shrugged.

Francine shrugged too. "Why don't you play catcher, then?" she suggested. I nodded mutely.

We walked back to our positions. I crouched behind the plate. Adrian picked up the bat I'd dropped. She clamped her hands around it, squeezing hard until her fingers were striped red and white. Her fingernails were painted a light green, but

it had started to chip away.

Eventually, she shuffled up to the plate. Amy threw the ball perfectly. It was going to be very hard to hit, I thought. I doubted Adrian would even swing. Adrian looked carefully at the approaching ball, then swung powerfully.

With a resounding crack, the ball met the bat and it flew farther than we'd ever, in five years, hit a ball. It flew over the brown wood fence that bordered the softball field and toward the house nearby. There was the sound of splintering glass and a female voice yelling at the top of her lungs.

Adrian tossed the bat aside and loped carefully around the bases. We all stared at her as she crossed home plate. She blushed red.

"What?" she murmured.

"Hey," I said finally. "My name's Sammy."



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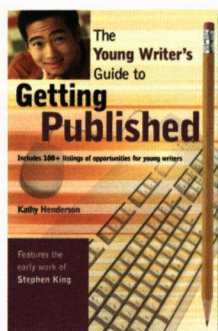
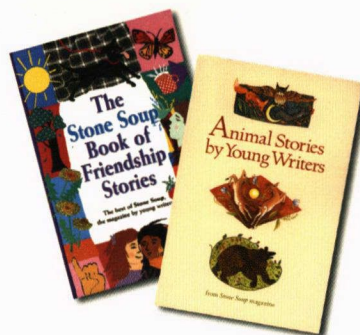
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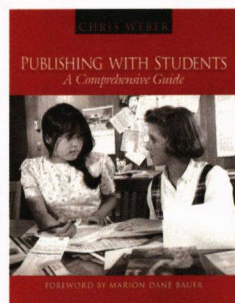
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