

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



"After the Tsunami," by Nathania Caroline Candra, age 11, Surabaya, Indonesia

THE SHIFTING SANDS

On the anniversary of the tsunami, this story brings the tragedy to life

HAPPINESS IN THE JOHNSON FAMILY

A poem about the joys of Christmas morning

Also: Illustrations by Thea Green and Noel Lunceford

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2005

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 34, NUMBER 2

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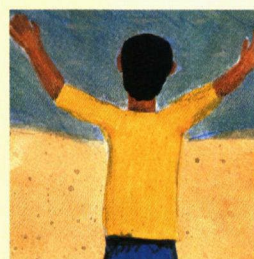
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Stone Soup

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: "After the Tsunami" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by the International Children's Art Foundation (ICAF) in Washington, D.C. ICAF has a program called Healing Arts for Tsunami Survivors, which you can learn about at their Web site: www.icafe.org. Special thanks to Jenny Adams and Ashfaq Ishaq.

The Mailbox



LBP, 9

I just received my September/October 2005 issue of *Stone Soup* and I absolutely had to write! I love the story "The Last Dragon," by Veronica Engler. I felt the emotions right along with the characters. It was one of the best stories I've ever read. Great job, Veronica!

BAILEY ROSS, 13
Everett, Washington

I absolutely loved Elena Tennant's story, "Muslim Girl," in the March/April 2005 issue. The story is wonderful and the plot is lovely. The pictures were wonderfully done, and are very high quality. This is probably my favorite story, even though this is my first issue. This story truly is a masterpiece, and the illustrations are pure gold! My compliments to Elena Tennant and Emma Kilgore Hine.

GALINA SMITH, 10
New London, Connecticut

I have enjoyed so many stories published in your magazine, but I just had to comment on a few that really stood out as outstanding. One of the stories I loved was "A Bouquet," by Esther Lyon, in your May/June 2005 issue. I am a dancer and I thought the story was really good and it described being in your first dance show very well. Thanks, Esther, and keep writing! One other story and the illustration for it also were beautiful in my opinion. The story "Roses on the Water" was a simple but extraordinary story that was like the subject of a poem. As if the story wasn't enough, the illustration was perfect for the story, simple but beautiful. I thought it was done by a professional adult artist! Great job, Katie Sinclair and Thea Green!

COLLEEN CHALMERS, 12
Bellingham, Washington

Thea's new illustration is on page 4 of this issue.

I have been seriously writing for about eight months now and quite a few of my stories have been sent to *Stone Soup*. Although none have yet been selected for publication, I just want to thank you for giving me a reason to keep it up. Comparing my first stories to more recent ones, I really believe I have improved a lot. I know I will keep improving over the years and it's nice to have a hobby you can never grow tired of.

KATHERINE ROTH, 13
Rochester Hills, Michigan

Since she wrote this letter, Katherine has had two stories published in Stone Soup, "My Last Summer's Night," March/April 2005, and "Maddie's Little Miracle," page 43 of the current issue.

The May/June 2005 issue was the first issue of *Stone Soup* I read, and I truly enjoyed several pieces of work. Courtney Lam's illustrations for "Second Chance Ride" really captured the scenes in a lovely way. Great job, Courtney! I significantly enjoyed reading "My Piano" by Brittany Newell. It was incredibly figurative, and there was an abundance of phenomenal metaphors. The setting was very realistic as well. Astonishing work, Brittany! Nicole Guenther is a wonderful poet. I really enjoyed her poem "Frog Song." I am looking forward to more great stories, illustrations and poems. Keep it up, *Stone Soup*!

BOAT LYNCH, 11
New York, New York

All the work mentioned in The Mailbox can be found on our Web site: www.stonesoup.com.

Correction: We accidentally left out one line from Katie Ferman's poem, "Peeling Apples," in our September/October 2005 issue. You can read the complete poem on our Web site.

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.



The dragon stretched his wings, then calmly asked, "Would you like to live there? With me?"

Penny's Journey

By **Ben Mast**

Illustrated by **Thea Green**

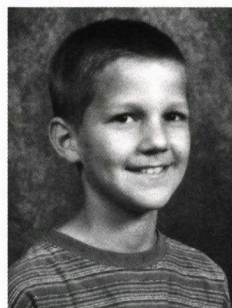
THE HOLE, setting there in the middle of the clearing, was by no means small, but the little, wide-eyed girl of thirteen years was still amazed that something as big as a dragon could've fit through it.

Penny was a peasant in the town. She had left the city's gates to fetch water for her family when she sighted a strange trail of scales and prints leading off toward the forest. And then she had seen it—a glittering, sky-blue dragon with magnificent leathery wings and blazing green eyes. It had been only a second before it had slithered into the burrow in a final flash of radiance.

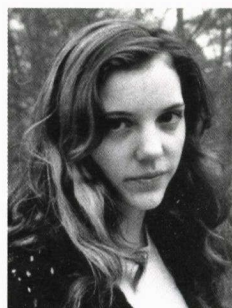
Now Penny stood beside the hole, her straight profile outlined in the setting sun, confident, but tense—like a tiger waiting to pounce, dirty-blond wisps of her hair escaping from a messy bun in the evening breeze. Her empty water jug lay upturned and forgotten. The people of her city dreaded dragons, their emotions mixed with fear and anger. But even Penny, after seeing a dragon in its most innocent form, could not blame them. Only thirteen years had passed since the dragons had come.

There had been nine of them, all fiery red, with hot, searing breath and wide, hungry mouths. They had killed Penny's sister, mother, and father. She could not remember any of them, though, because that was the night she was born, two hours before her family was killed. Now, all that remained of her relatives were her uncle, aunt, adopted two-year-old brother and her grandparents, who all lived in the same mud hut.

Penny raced among the tall, ominous pines and oaks, their



Ben Mast, 12
Goshen, Indiana



Thea Green, 13
Marshall, Virginia

snagging branches snatching at her skin and clothing. She only slowed to a steady trot once the trees thinned and she could see the village gates ahead. The village was small and nearly everyone knew everyone. But ever since the fateful day when Penny was born, each person had grown independent and sharp. Penny raced among the small, familiar houses until she saw the tiny mud-brick cottage with a thatched roof that was her own. After murmuring a brief apology for not getting water to her hawk-eyed, hands-on-her-hips kind of grandma, she trotted briskly to her small room in search of a good book.

But thoughts of the sky-blue dragon slowly led her to the window, looking out toward the dark forest. Through all of what Penny had experienced in her thirteen short years, she had a will tougher than most young girls. But this—it pulled on her as if by magic and soon she was sprinting toward the wood again. She soon came upon the hole, but this time she didn't stop.

She dove right in, and blackness shrouded over her thoughts.

PENNY WOKE UP feeling like she had eaten too many of Grandma's sweet cakes the night before. Trying in vain to flatten a mess of disheveled hair, she turned her sharp chin to a noise in the door.

There sat the dragon, its glittering eyes focusing on the young girl. Finally, in a deep, throaty voice, he said, "I've been waiting."

Penny sat speechless with wonder. Before she could think of the strangeness of what he had said, he croaked again, "What is your name?"

"Penny."

"Where do you come from?"

"The village." Her voice was barely a whisper.

"Are you scared?"

"Yes."

"I can make you happier." The dragon's eyes seemed to smile.

Penny's eyes flared in anger. "Who said I wasn't happy?" she snapped angrily. She stood as if to leave.

"Please," the dragon sighed, rustling his wings. "I am lonely. Stay." And then, "I will show you my world."

"But . . ." Penny objected, but then a burst of color flashed into her mind. She cried in astonishment, and as more images splashed across her thoughts, she realized that the dragon could not only speak, but he could pass on pictures into another's mind, too. Into Penny's mind sparked dazzling mountains, sparkling rivers, and creatures of all different kinds. And suddenly they stopped. Penny only realized that she was closing her eyes then, and she looked up, blinking, at the dragon, who gave a kind smile back.

"That was . . . wonderful," Penny stammered quietly.

The dragon stretched his wings, then calmly asked, "Would you like to live there? With me?"

Penny thought of the astounding offer. Her thoughts returned to the pictures—

the castles, and treasure, pirates and mermaids and lakes and . . . everything imaginable. But how? How could there be a place so . . . perfect? But, she thought, Grandma had always said there was a perfect place—later. But was this what she had meant? Thinking of her grandma made her thoughts whirl to Stefan, the small outcast who her family adopted, his pudgy cheeks and tumbling chuckle. And of tight-lipped Grandma, “pleasingly plump” Aunt Mabel, tall, dangerous-looking Uncle Ted, and old Gramps, who couldn’t walk or remember anything. “Not much to speak of,” Penny said dismally to herself.

But they were enough.

Her sharp complexion turned toward the dragon and she stated flatly, “I’m sorry. But I refuse.”

The dragon let out a strange human-like scream. Then, his textured scales turned into folds of smooth, silky black robes. His green eyes turned dark and dangerous as his snout folded in and a beard sprouted from a jutting chin. And there stood a man—a magician—with an evil glint in his eye.

“Penny, you’re the last one of a long line. Your father was the twenty-third in that line and you, the twenty-fourth. If you haven’t figured it out by now, I plan to have you eliminated from existence.”

She had. Her first instincts told her to turn and run, but she wanted to learn more. “Why are you doing this?” Her voice was confident. The only thing betraying her fear was in her eyes.

“One of your ancient ancestors and I


made a deal—and he didn’t keep his end of the deal up, as did I. You can figure out the rest. Be assured, it would have been a much slower, more painful death if you had not resisted the temptation to come to ‘my world.’”

“Did you send the red dragons to our village the night my family died?” Penny’s voice quavered.

“Smart girl.”

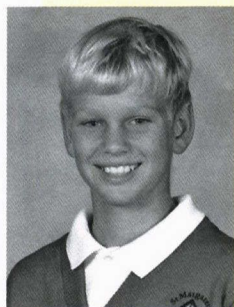
Penny did not need any further knowledge of the sadistic magician. She turned and bolted for the hole. The wizard raised a finger and it disappeared. Penny turned, helpless, and then dove into a roll, grabbing a handful of sand and throwing it into the magician’s face. As he wiped grit from his eyes and spat it out of his mouth, he lost his concentration and the hole reappeared for an instant. It was all Penny needed. She catapulted through, appearing in the middle of the forest. From her position, she could hear the magician clambering through the hole after her, cursing all the while. In a final act of desperation, she took her abandoned water jug and shoved it through the hole, hearing the satisfying clunk of the clay jug meeting the magician’s skull.

Without another thought, the girl turned and tore through the forest all the way to her village. Stopping briefly at the door of her house, she barged in, sighting her grandma, and in a bound swept her off the floor in a big hug.

Their arms entwined and, tears streaming down Penny’s grubby face, she cried, “I love you, Grandma. I love you.” 

Happiness in the Johnson Family

By Colin Johnson



Colin Johnson, 11
Laguna Beach, California

I smell butter cookies, hot chocolate and the stickiness of sleep
As we gallop up the stairs to the family room
My brother jumping up and down beside me
Like a monkey in his tree-green plaid pajamas
The tree is glowing like a pyramid of radium
And the presents, mysterious cubes and ovals
 wrapped in slippery wax wrapping paper
The color of fluffy foamy whipped cream
I hope to get a new skateboard or a surfboard
Or any kind of board that moves
I imagine tearing through the boxes to discover
 the treasure within
We stare at our thumbs as we wait as impatiently
 as dogs about to be fed
For my parents to wake up so we can open presents
But we only hear our dad snoring
As loud as the howl of the wind on a crisp, cold winter night
But then we turn around and see our rumply tousled parents
 in the pine-scented hallway
"You can open your presents now," they say
With smiles as wide as two slivers of the moon
"*Finally!*" my brother and I shout as we rush towards the pile
 of mysterious presents

In the boxes I find root-beer-scented surf wax
A black leash to hold me to my surfboard
 and my surfboard to me
And foamy grip tape to help me from slipping off the board
And as I hear my mom's graceful laughter
As she watches my brother bounce around the living room
With a ribbon tied around his legs and arms
 as if he were a present
I feel cozy in a blanket of happiness and love

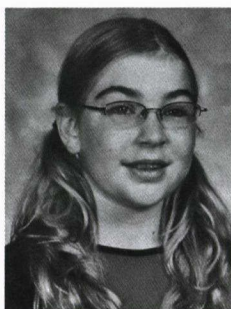
Morning of the Horses

By Annakai Hayakawa Geshliger

Illustrated by Marci Lessman



Annakai Hayakawa Geshliger, 9
San Francisco, California



Marci Lessman, 12
Faribault, Minnesota

A MYSTERIOUS QUIETNESS filled the misty morning air as Sadie stepped into her slippers and tiptoed out to the garden. The cold morning air slipped beneath her flannel nightgown and made her shiver. Here in Toronto, Canada, the winter mornings were cold and Sadie disliked them. But she ignored the chilly weather and headed toward the back of her garden. When Sadie reached the tangling green vines that grew up and over the red brick wall that separated her garden from the alley, she glanced over her shoulder at her house to make sure that none of the family was watching. Soundlessly, Sadie heaved herself over the wall and hopped down into the alley below. And then there it was, the horse corral, which was surrounded by a number of elm trees.

Sadie secretly visited these horses most mornings, and felt very sorry for them because they were not well taken care of. But two months ago, Sadie had decided to take care of the horses herself. She opened her knapsack and took out the oats, carrots, apples and sugar cubes that she had packed. Each and every horse had learned to trust Sadie, and all came trotting up to her anxiously. Sadie smiled at her friends, and stroked their velvet muzzles with happiness. This time of morning, misty and cool, with the horses, was Sadie's time. Her favorite time. She loved to feed them and watch their tails whisk the air.

The man who owned the horses was unkind to them. He barely fed them a bucket of grain a day, and he never brushed their coats, manes and tails, rode them or hung out with them.



The sun was rising, and they galloped toward it, wild and free

And there he was, treating all people around him with kindness and leaving his poor horses out in the thunder and lightning, rain and snow. He didn't deserve to own horses, thought Sadie. If you owned a horse, you should care for it.

Once in a while, Sadie brought along her hairbrush to brush the horses with. The horses really seemed to enjoy being brushed, since their coats were so shabby and dusty. Her horses may be shabby and thin, hungry and old, but they still had a sort of young liveliness kept inside them.

As Sadie was gently brushing the manes of the horses, she heard a whinnying call

come from a gray stallion. All the other horses came jogging up to him. Seconds later, Sadie watched in amazement as each horse gracefully leapt over the fence! Then, from the bottom of her heart, Sadie knew that she must climb aboard. She skipped over to a buckskin mare and mounted up. All eight horses and Sadie ran down the alley, through the quiet, sleeping streets, and up over the hill at the end of the block.

Sadie's nightgown fluttered in the breeze along with the horses' manes and tails. The sun was rising, and they galloped toward it, wild and free. ❀



The ocean curled up and became a lasso

The Shifting Sands

By **Gus Ruchman**

Illustrated by **Noel Lunceford**

JAIDEV," HIS MOTHER whispered to him, as he ran into her arms. "How was your day?"

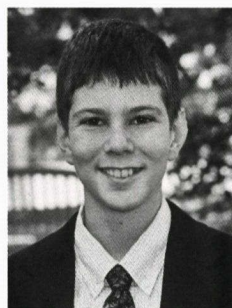
"Good!" he answered vigorously, as they gave each other their ritual hug and kiss. "And the weekend is finally here!" He bounced around with the energy of a rabbit. But happiness is temporary, and is often struck down.

Jaidev was a young boy of about eleven living in India. He belonged to the sizable Muslim minority and lived with his two parents and his brother, Tarang. They lived in a small, mostly Muslim community on the coast of India. They were not in poverty, but neither was Jaidev's family bathing in priceless gems. However, regardless of their social status, they enjoyed a content life, by being faithful to the Holy Koran and finding strength in Allah, and living as a close and loving family.

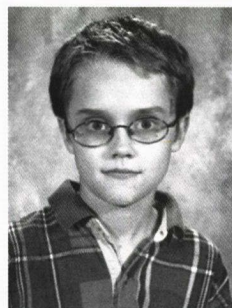
When they returned home Father had not yet returned from his busy work day, and Tarang was still over at a friend's house. Jaidev helped his mother to begin preparing for the evening meal. They organized the spices and counted the eggs. They measured the milk and the water just perfectly. Jaidev's mouth was watering by the time they got out the curry.

A little later, Father returned home with Tarang trotting behind him. Tarang was fourteen years old and was sometimes rebellious, sometimes calm. One day he would yell and scream and not agree with anything, and the next day he would just sit and listen like an awakening bird.

The family sat down to the delicious meal that Jaidev and



Gus Ruchman, 12
Cos Cob, Connecticut



Noel Lunceford, 12
Grandview, Missouri

Mother had strained all afternoon to create. The fumes of the curried chicken wafted throughout the house, engulfing and seducing all who came near.

After eating, the children and the adults split. Jaidev and Tarang strode off to the bedroom they shared, while Mother and Father cleaned up in the kitchen and then went off to their room. Little by little, the house subsided into sleep, and night crept with its ominous inky blackness over India and the world.

DAWN AWOKE with brilliant light over the ocean, but it served only as mockery of the dangers of the waters. Jaidev and Tarang woke up at sunrise to go out and play on the sand and swim in the salty ocean. They told their mother and father, who were still quite sleepy and just nodded their heads before going back into the bliss of their unconsciousness only moments later.

The two brothers raced and wrestled in the pale morning sun. The grains of sand moved in a rhythmic dance with the feet of Jaidev and Tarang as they played for hours on end. Beads of sweat began to form on their bodies, pouring down into the soft meadow of dunes. The heat became too much to bear.

"Watch this," Tarang called out to Jaidev.

Tarang turned toward the ocean and began to run. He became a blur, then a streak, and then he dove, head first, into the refreshing, cool water.

"Come on, Jaidev," he shouted play-

fully. He stood up and then let himself fall backward with a splash. The water engulfed him innocently. "It feels so good!" he taunted.

Jaidev smiled back. He began to gallop like a madman and was about ten yards away from the ocean when he heard a scream.

Time slowed. Then time stopped. The ocean curled up and became a lasso. It ensnared Tarang and tugged. Tarang disappeared under the water.

Jaidev halted at the tip of the white foam. "Tarang?" he shrilly shouted. The only response came from the gulls up above, chuckling rudely to themselves. He shouted again. This time the ocean responded.

The waves and the salt and the currents and the water became one mass of energy. They sharply receded into the depths, in the blink of an eye. What lay before Jaidev was one hundred yards of empty desert where the sea and his brother had just been.

"Tarang?" he whispered, this time in a choked voice and so softly, that the gulls did not laugh, for they did not hear him.

Jaidev just watched, in amazement, in shock, in awe, at the barrenness of the stretch where life had been only moments earlier. There were clams and fish and other strange creatures that were left behind. Why couldn't they have been claimed back into their watery homes and Tarang been left on the beach laughing and rolling as they had been only minutes, no, seconds ago? Or was it minutes? Time

had become distorted in such a way that Jaidev had no perspective anymore. He had nothing to compare time with. Had it been five seconds since the disaster? Had it been fifteen minutes? He did not know.

Jaidev was oblivious to any danger that could still be coming. He very gently plopped himself down in the sand, and prayed. He prayed to Allah that Tarang would come back. Then he thought. He thought about the ocean and the birds. He thought about the sand and curried chicken and Mother and Father. He thought about the wind and the sun and the terrible thunder that shattered the air when lightning fell from the sky. And then he opened his eyes. He realized that he had to run back home to tell his parents about Tarang's disappearance. His toes hugged the sand as he turned around. He walked, and then he began to sprint. He ran to the house, but as he got there, he saw Mother and Father sprinting out the door.

Why are they running too? he thought.

Jaidev spun around. The sea was in a fury, rampaging up the beach toward their small community. He began to run faster than he had ever run before. His legs stretched and his feet flew in a constantly hastening tempo.

Don't look back, don't look back, don't look back, he thought. He caught that thought, killing one single mosquito out of an entire cloud of them. The other million mosquitoes were random thoughts racing through his head but having no effect on his condition.

Jaidev no longer saw Mother and Father. He had been running blindly and had somehow lost them. He fought not to look back, but he didn't need to. He could hear the raging ocean flinging forward tons upon tons of torn-up trees, cars, and dirt. He felt like a deer being followed by a hunter. Death was closing in, and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

Jaidev's legs were tiring, but they kept going faster and faster. His lungs were only breathing in, without time to exhale, and he was sure that at any given moment his heart would pop. The ground no longer existed, and the terrible beast pursuing Jaidev was ready to pounce.

The earth was dancing. The trees swayed and bowed as if to pay homage to an all-powerful master. The dirt jumped and the pebbles rolled. Jaidev ran over this grand finale and into the mosque, the sturdiest building in the entire town. He ran through the building and climbed onto the roof, where he watched as the wall of water mercilessly pounded the walls. Thick stones took the impact and protected the holy sanctuary of God, where Jaidev remained, sitting on the roof.

Mother and Father are dead. Tarang is dead. I too will die soon. Jaidev let out a savage wail, which echoed silently throughout the rest of the day. Tears rolled down his face and then poured onto his cut, bruised, bare feet.

He looked around. Everything was swaying left and right. Fog filled his vision. The fog turned a deadly black. Jaidev slumped over, and fainted.

WHEN JAIDEV'S EYES slowly opened, his entire body ached.

"Ah!" he shouted in surprise. He was looking into the eyes of a man who looked in his late fifties.

"Lie back down," said the man in a soft, soothing voice. "You need your strength. Now tell me, what is your name?"

Jaidev let out a breath. "Jaidev," he whispered.

"Oh," the man said as if it gave him a small amount of comfort. "It means god of victory. I think that you can learn a lot about a person through his name. I hope yours is reflective of you!"

Jaidev strained his muscles. "Who are you?"

The man took a moment. "I," he paused, "am Taran. It means raft. Over the past few days, I've been tending to you. Maybe I'm your life raft."

"Thank you," Jaidev said gratefully. "I had a brother named Tarang. He was swallowed by the sea before the waves came. Tarang means wave. I prayed for him to return and he did, I think. He returned to me in his true form."

Jaidev sat up. Below him lay a wasteland. Where his beloved town had been, there were now miles upon miles of mud and debris. The only structure still standing was the mosque upon which he was sitting. The trauma of it seized him. He fell back into Taran.

"Did . . ." Jaidev began.

" . . . your parents did not make it," Taran interrupted. Pain spread across his face, and his eyebrows sagged.

"I will go pray for them," Jaidev replied. It was the only thing that he knew how to say. "Please honor them, and pray with me."

"I . . ."

" . . . please!"

An awkward silence fell between them.

"I am Hindu. But let there be peace between us." The air came to a screeching halt. "If we want to live, we both must live. Neither one of us can make it alone. We must stay at each other's side until a better day comes." He let the words sink in.

Still, Jaidev did not speak. The eleven-year-old suddenly looked a man of many years.

"Fine, I will teach you how to pray in a mosque." Jaidev's strength had returned. He rose, and walked through the barren mosque. Taran followed him.

FOR TWO DAYS, they prayed, for there was nothing else to do. They had no food and no water. And slowly, reality began to sink in. Mother and Father were dead, and Tarang was with them. Jaidev screamed at night. He shouted out that it was his fault, that he had asked Allah for Tarang to come back to them. He became more and more derelict and depressed and only found strength in spiritual prayer.

The fifth day after the wave had hit, the sun was bright as though the ground were full of green trees and life, a sick parody of the true wasteland. Taran and Jaidev were both on the verge of starvation. The only food that they had eaten had been a few



They ran toward the helicopter as if it were a divine spirit

small pieces of fruit. They had been sweet and full of juice, and left both Taran and Jaidev craving more. While in the earliest of the morning prayer sessions, the chatter and whirl of machinery stirred the blue sky. Jaidev raised his eyes. He saw a helicopter alighting on the nearby mud flats. He ran over to Taran with excitement gleaming in his eyes for the first time since the catastrophe.

"Taran!" he shouted. "Taran! Come quickly. Help has arrived."

They ran toward the helicopter as if it were a divine spirit; they knew that it was good, and they were excited, but at the same time, they were afraid of such a mighty thing. As they drew closer, more and more people came into view. Survivors had come from every corner of the wreckage with the hope of salvation. The blades of the chopper became louder and more terrible, and the downdraft was like an echo of the wave itself. Jaidev managed to work his way into the crowd and grab a box of supplies that was lying on the ground.

"Taran," he yelled, "Taran, I've got one!"

They began to run out of the mob scene and back to the safety of the mosque. Their weakness no longer mattered to them as they ran like giddy schoolboys back to their shelter. Upon reaching the holy walls, they saw the helicopter ascend into the sky and the mass of starving, run-down people disperse.

"We must thank Allah," said Jaidev, sounding grateful and trying to hide his euphoria. He ran inside without waiting

for Taran in order to offer a quick prayer before seeing what nourishment this box of hope contained.

Jaidev was on his knees with his face pressed to the ground when he heard a yell that wasn't quite a yell, but more of a sudden drawing in of breath. There was a pounding noise, and then silence. He jumped up, breaking his spiritual bond, and ran outside.

The holy walls of the mosque had been tainted with human life. Blood ran fresh on the ground, smothering the earth. In the middle of the pool lay Taran, slumped over and almost dead. About one hundred yards away, running across the desolate plain, was a burly, bearded man, his hands stained with blood, and in those hands, the brown package that contained life.

"Jaidev," Taran whispered, "I am dying. Listen to me. Plead, beg, do whatever it takes, but get on the next helicopter. And as my last wish, bury me facing Mecca, although I am a Hindu. We must live together, and I will show this bond for the rest of eternity."

"No! You can't die. It could be weeks until the next . . ." The tears overtook Jaidev even more than when his family had died. That had all been a dream, but this was real. It was real like the blood that spilled before him, it was real like the man he had come to love, and it was real like the sound of the wheezing that reached his ears that had become sore with tragedy.

"You must have faith. It's the only thing that you still have. It's the only thing that nobody can ever take away from you."

Taran began hacking and coughing up blood. His bruised eye twitched. "Be your name. Be a god of victory. Bring light to a dark place. Bring . . ." His voice faded. His eyes closed. His face, frozen in cold sweat, became a statue. The life fled his body, as if running from another massive wave. Taran did not move, and he did not breathe.

Jaidev's face fell into the bloody mangled mess of limbs and hair and compassion, and his tears, salty like the sea, cleansed the body. He buried Taran where he lay, outside the walls of a mosque, the only standing structure in the middle of a sea of emptiness. The mosque stood like a beacon of light, in a pit of blackness, but now, it too had its sorrows. Jaidev said prayers over the grave and made sure that Taran's soul and body were safe.

Then he ran out to the shore that had caused so much grief. He fell to his knees and let out a savage scream. His body went limp from exhaustion, and he collapsed in the sand.

TWO DAYS LATER, Jaidev still was on the beach, unconscious. His eyes opened briefly, and he saw the sun get blotted out. The fateful sound of helicopter blades rang in his ears. The feel of the downdraft leapt onto his face as another helicopter landed not more than fifteen yards away. Jaidev struggled to lift himself but found that all life had left his body.

He rolled over onto his stomach and, in a last effort, shouted, "U-S-A," three letters that he recognized from his English textbook in school, that were painted in a bold red, white, and blue flag on the side of the aircraft.

A thin man with pale skin, wearing aviator glasses and a dark brown uniform, looked up. His buzz-cut, dirty-blond hair shimmered like the grass that no longer existed on the forsaken coastline. Jaidev's body imploded on itself and lay still. He saw the man's lips move and then saw sand fly up into the air, as a boot landed on the beach. The man lifted the limp heap that was Jaidev like a rag doll, and brought him into the helicopter.

Seconds later, the ground fell away, and water was pouring into Jaidev's mouth. He looked at the window of the mosque one last time, and thought of Taran. His body would lie there always, facing west toward Mecca. Jaidev then realized something. His mind flashed a picture of a sunset and a picture of Taran. Taran was facing toward the end of the sun, when light ebbs and disappears.

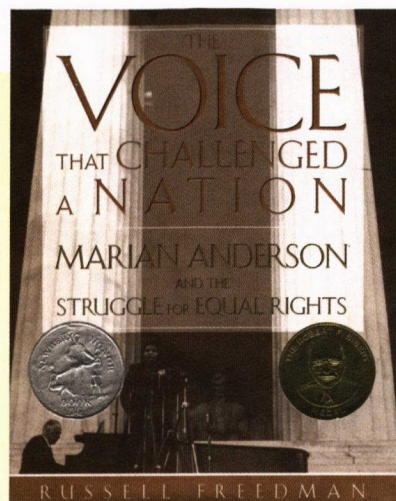
But the light doesn't disappear, he thought. It goes out of view. It's somewhere else, fighting other darkness. And then it returns. Dawn always returns.

And far down below, the people watched the shadow of the helicopter, while their feet stood in the shifting sands and the innocent waves. ❁

Book Review

By Akeyla Todd

The Voice That Challenged a Nation, by Russell Freedman; Clarion Books: New York, 2004; \$18



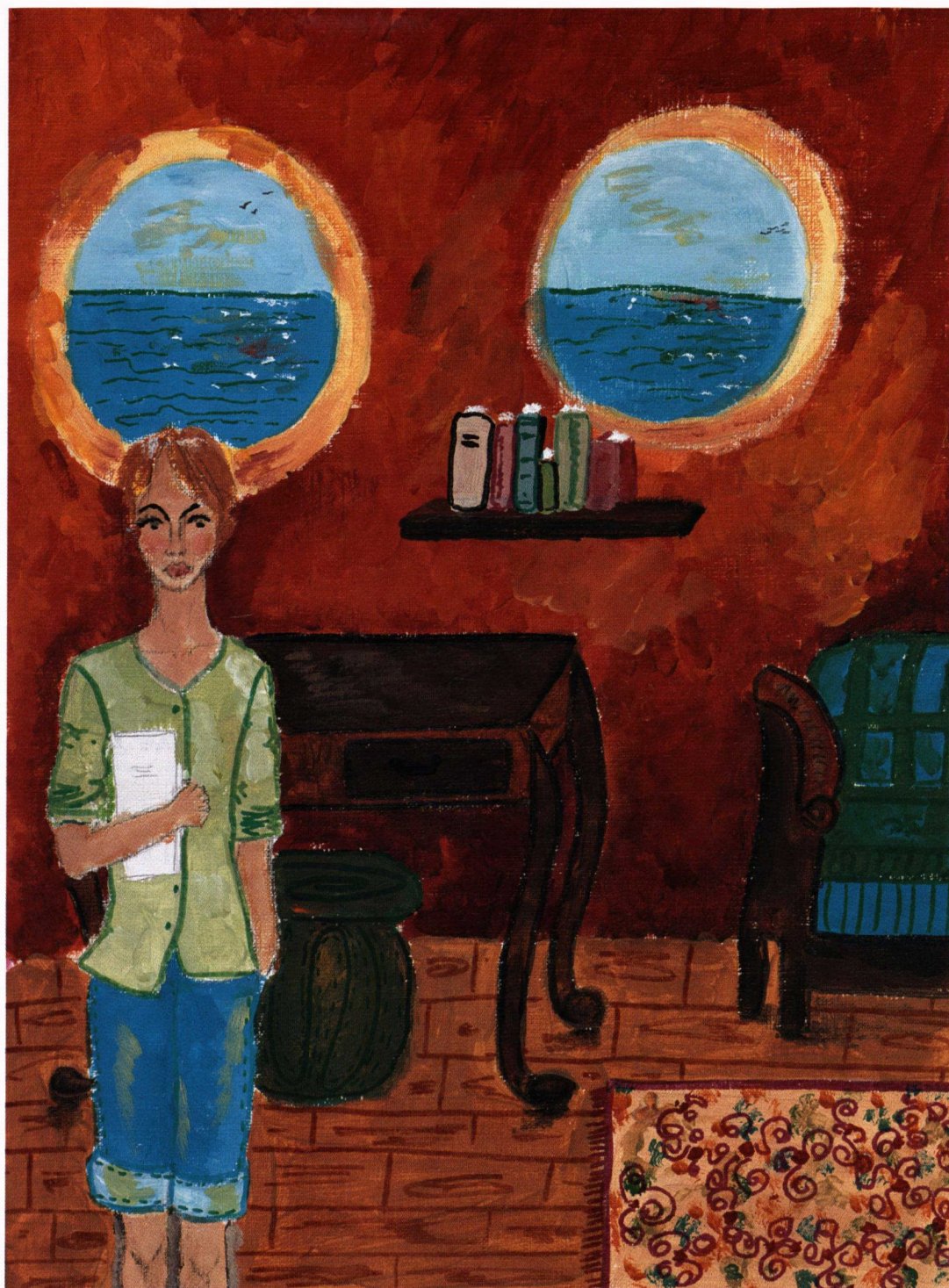
Akeyla Todd, 12
Bronx, New York

MARIAN ANDERSON was a great opera singer during the 1930s and 1940s. She was also an African-American. Marian was born on February 27, 1897, in South Philadelphia. She was the oldest of three daughters of John and Anna Anderson.

At age twelve, Marian lost her committed father to death. Her mother had to raise her three daughters by herself. Marian worked to help her mother by scrubbing steps and running errands for her mother with her sisters. Today it is very unlikely that a kid would be scrubbing steps in an urban area like Philadelphia. It amazed me how the family worked together to make ends meet. Whenever she got money from her performances it was usually five dollars, and she gave her mother two dollars, gave one to each of her sisters and kept one for herself. Even though I think that today's kids are very caring, I think that not many would give their hard-earned money away like this, especially to their younger siblings. Marian got through school and was able to afford music lessons because the Union Baptist Church, which she attended, raised money for her. She had joined the senior *and* junior choirs and never missed a Sunday with them. She was very dedicated to these choirs and loved to sing. I was amazed at this symbol of unity in the African-American culture as well as the American culture in general.

Her goal at that time was to be able to study and improve her voice at a certain school. However, when she went there for an application, she was turned down because she was black. The way the author described the situation made me livid. A singer with a voice like Marian's deserved to be heard and accepted at a famous and first-class school. This incident made her wonder why she wasn't able to get an application because, even though she was black, she knew she sang amazingly well and she had great potential. However, she did go on and I believe that this incident helped her to overcome some of the other surprises that were caused by prejudice along the way.

What Marian went through to be recognized in mainstream America made me distressed and perplexed. How could a country that proclaimed "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" for all be so cruel and prejudiced toward one of its own? Even after Marian became famous in Europe and loved in America, the Daughters of the American Revolution denied her the right to sing at Constitution Hall. Many people stood by Marian, including Eleanor Roosevelt, the First Lady at the time. Eleanor went so far as to resign from her position in the DAR in order to protest against Marian's rejection to sing at Constitution Hall. On April 9, 1939, Marian sang on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to thousands of people, being "the voice that challenged a nation." She sang two more times at the Lincoln Memorial, one being in 1963, at the Civil Rights March, when Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his "I Have a Dream" speech. In 1955, she became the first African-American soloist at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. She led the way for many artists, including her nephew, James DePriest, who was able to conduct a series of concerts in Constitution Hall. She was not only extraordinary because of her voice, but also her strength, dignity and character, which shone through her voice. She was an inspiration and role model, not only for African-Americans, but also people of all nations. ❁



The people who had built the house must have loved the sea as she did

A Wider World

By Christy Joy Frost

Illustrated by Vivien Rubin

KAYLA DROPPED the laundry basket down by the washing machine. This was the last load to bring down. She was hot from running up and down the stairs all morning.

She rolled up her sleeves and looked around the basement. The unfinished cement walls looked bare and cold, brightened only by the dabs of paint she had splotted there when she was five.

She climbed the wooden stairs to the kitchen where her mother was writing a shopping list.

"How many guests do we have booked?" Kayla asked as she pushed her sandy hair out of her face. Having a B-and-B was a lot of work but it brought in extra income as her dad's house-painting business didn't bring in much.

Mom looked away from her shopping list. "I think we'll have three rooms taken by tonight. Mrs. and Mr. Wosen will take one and then Charmaine, and a new lady is coming tonight. An author, I think.

But Kayla didn't care if she was an astronaut. There was no one her age. She was used to being the only person around under twenty, but she hated it. She didn't even go to school! She knew taking correspondence courses gave her more time to help her mom, but still. She gathered her schoolbooks off the sideboard, grabbed a Werthers candy from the little black cat-shaped dish by the door, and ran out to the porch. She stepped into blue flip-flops decorated with palm trees, and



Christy Joy Frost, 13
Verdun, Quebec, Canada



Vivien Rubin, 13
Sherman Oaks, California

headed toward the beach, sucking her candy. It wasn't really a proper beach, just a little string of pebbly inlets separated by small outcroppings of rocks and scrub. She swam down here in the summer but now in early September, the ocean water was too frigid to do anything but dip your toes. She settled down on a patch of moss and began her math.

WHEN SHE returned to the house her mother was making up beds in the empty rooms. Kayla walked down the long hall with the guest rooms on either side. At the end of the hallway she pushed open an old white door. She ran up the narrow flight of stairs to her own room perched at the top of the house and stood just inside the doorway soaking up the sunlight that streamed through her many round windows. She loved her room. The people who had built the house must have loved the sea as she did for they had built the five round windows exactly like portholes. Kayla sometimes pretended that each window opened onto a different country. She put her schoolbooks on the shelf next to her whale-watching and sea-life books. She checked the small box outside her door where her mom always put her mail. She found a postcard from Sharon, a girl from England who stayed here two summers ago, and a plain white envelope. She tore open the envelope and two pieces of pink writing paper fell out. She didn't recognize the handwriting. She read,

Dear Butterfly, (*Butterfly?* Kayla thought, genuinely puzzled.)

My life is so blah. Nothing ever happens. I haven't seen you for ages. Since you left it feels like my world is falling to pieces. All my friends have more friends than I do. They all go to private schools. Today my little brother messed up my room. It seems like my friends live in other worlds and no one understands how I feel about mine. Please write back soon.

Your friend, Chelsea

"What a wimp," said Kayla aloud. "She has a little brother, friends, and she goes to school, and she still thinks her life is boring."

But who in the world was that letter meant for anyway? She was definitely not Butterfly. Kayla studied the envelope. The address was blurred as if something had been spilled on it. There was a return address. Montreal.

I'm sure I don't know anyone from Montreal, thought Kayla.

Kayla's mother's voice filtered up, calling her to make dinner. Cramming the mysterious letter into her pocket, she ran down the stairs.

FROM THE hallway Kayla heard voices from the kitchen. She was about to go in when she caught her name. Kayla peered around the doorway surreptitiously. Brochure in hand, her mother was chatting to a lady.

She must be the author coming to stay, thought Kayla. Though she knew it was wrong, she stayed to listen. Just for a mo-

ment, she told herself.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Tarnsford," Kayla heard her mom speak, "I reserved a room for you looking out over the forest."

"Wonderful! And I heard you have a daughter. I am writing a book and she may be able to help me if she would."

"Of course she will," Mom purred. "I'll send her up after dinner."

Kayla groaned inwardly. She remembered when the librarian, Mrs. Baxter, had been writing a book on "the juvenile reader," her mother had volunteered her and consequently she had spent three hours answering questions like, "How does reading relate to your personal development?" or "What book has inspired you to break the boundaries of your expectations?" At least this time, Kayla told herself, she knew what to expect.

Feeling slightly guilty for listening, she stepped into the room. Mrs. Tarnsford had just gone to get her bags. "Do I have to?" Kayla blurted out.

Her mother looked round with a wry smile. "So you heard?" Seeing Kayla's face she went on. "Yes, you do have to. She is a good paying guest and she is only staying three days. Now I have lots to do. Please start the dinner," she said, giving Kayla's shoulder a squeeze as she went out of the room.

SEVEN O'CLOCK saw Kayla reluctantly climbing the stairs. All the other guests had gone out to dinner and the cracks under their doors were dark. Come to think of it, so was Mrs. Tarnsford's.

When she came to the last door she

knocked. There was no answer. Maybe she was reading. Kayla contemplated going back down or even better, up to her room, but she knew if she left, she'd just have to go tomorrow. So she pushed open the door. It swung open on a darkened room.

"Welcome to the dungeon. Tomorrow you shall be tried for treason," a voice boomed.

Kayla gasped and almost screamed. All the drapes were pulled and the room was completely dark except for two strangely carved candlesticks with lighted candles placed on the small table. Behind the table stood the author, holding a small gray knife. Kayla was about to scream when the lady grabbed a pen and a piece of paper.

"Hold it right there. That's perfect."

Bewildered, Kayla stayed where she was. Then at last, Mrs. Tarnsford put down her paper, blew out the candles, and flicked on the lights. She began to laugh.

Kayla just stared at her, knees weak with relief that she was not going to be in on some secret ceremony.

At last, Mrs. Tarnsford stopped. "Call me Jane," she said simply. "I'm sorry I scared you. You see, I had to. If I'd told you, you wouldn't have entered into the world properly."

"Huh?" said Kayla, completely bewildered.

Jane explained, "You see, I'm writing a story about a boy in medieval England. He gets condemned to the dungeon. I wanted to write exactly what he felt, so I got up the whole darkness thing because I just



Kayla sat, frozen. Jane was gone

couldn't seem to write exactly what he felt.

"Did I look scared enough?"

"Completely!" Jane said.

Kayla asked, "What else did you mean about entering the world?"

Jane ran her fingers through her thick dark hair and thought a moment before answering. "Well, when you write, you are making a world for your reader to enter and sometimes it's easier to write about something that's right before your eyes. I just couldn't describe Jaird's terror and bewilderment."

"Jaird?" Kayla asked.

Jane smiled, "My character. I've been working on him so long he almost seems real to me, but then again . . ." she laughed ". . . he is real in his own world."

"Can I read your book, someday?" Kayla asked at last.

Jane went over to an old sea trunk she had leaned against the wall. She sorted through some papers and then reappeared carrying a pile of typed pages. "Here," she said, handing them to Kayla, "is my book, or all there is of it yet. Enjoy finding a new world."

KAYLA HELD the manuscript close as she went to the door. As she was about to leave, she turned and asked hesitantly, "If it would be useful . . . I mean if you'd like it, could I help you some more?"

Jane turned from the papers she was sorting. "Of course. Besides, you might find more worlds than you expected hidden in yours."

Kayla walked slowly up the stairs to her

room. She put the manuscript carefully down on her desk and went to one of her round windows. She opened the casement and leaned out, sniffing the chill of an autumn evening. A squirrel ran across the browning lawn that sloped down to the woods. She wondered what life was like for a squirrel. "More worlds than you expected are hidden in yours." Jane's words came back to her as she watched, the dusk slowly deepening. Perhaps that was what Jane had meant, she mused, and it was true when you thought about it. The squirrel's world was way different from hers; bigger, more dangerous, freer, and yet they both shared the same woods on the same day. She left the window open as she slipped her pajamas on. Soon her mom would insist on shut windows, but not yet.

She only remembered the mysterious letter as she was drifting off and she was too tired to get it. She fell asleep and dreamed that she was a squirrel using planets as stepping stones across a gray sea.

KAYLA OPENED her eyes. Light was pouring through her portholes. She glanced at her small travel clock on the table beside her. Ten-thirty. She stretched luxuriously. Saturday mornings were her favorite. She loved waking up to a school-free day. She pulled on her jeans and shirt slowly and came down to the kitchen where her mother was frying bacon for the guests. Kayla pulled out a wooden kitchen chair and sat, enjoying the peacefulness. She could hear the guests talking in the dining

room. She wondered if Jane was there.

What an exciting life Jane must have; an author traveling while she writes a book. Nothing like my life or my world, Kayla thought.

Suddenly her mom remembered something. "Oh, Kayla, I almost forgot to tell you something. Mrs. Tarnsford received a call that her mother is ill. She had to go to her. She left around seven. Kayla sat, frozen. Jane was gone. She couldn't believe it, but her mom continued. "Yes, and she left a letter for you. It's on the sideboard."

Kayla jumped up, almost knocking over a vase of flowers.

"Careful!" her mom called, but Kayla was already halfway to her room, letter in hand. She sat on her bed and carefully slit open the envelope.

The paper Jane had used was thick and creamy. She ran her fingers over its softness before reading.

Dear Kayla,

I am sorry not to have had the opportunity to say goodbye. I would have liked to have gotten to know you better but my mother needs me.

What a wide and fascinating life you have. You meet so many new people! While

other kids in school are learning verbs and algebra, you are learning life. Keep asking questions and learning things. The more you know your world, the wider it is. Enjoy life.

Love, Jane

P.S. I have another copy of my manuscript. You can keep the one I lent you as long as you want.


Kayla just sat for a moment feeling warm all over. A wide and fascinating life, Jane had said. She felt in her pocket and found the mysterious letter. She pulled it out and read her two letters over, holding and comparing them in her mind, and then she walked to her small desk in her wide life.

Dear Chelsea,

My name is Kayla Airson. Your letter to Butterfly accidentally came to my house. Since I read your letter I have been finding out new things about life. I've found that sometimes our world is wider than we think. My life isn't perfect but it's right for me.

Love, Kayla, your maybe friend

P.S. I am enclosing my return address in case you want to write.

P.P.S. There are more worlds in your world than you think. 

The Burden of Words

By **Natalia M. Thompson**

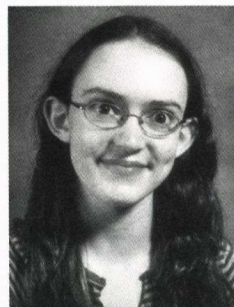
Illustrated by **Jessica Brodsky**

TODAY IS GRAY. A sluggish gray, tantalizing us with memories of the sunny days we could see Popocateptl. The day has been immersed with haze, clouds clotting the sky. It's on days like this that the pollution becomes an accomplice with my asthma, draining my nose and rasping my throat. Rasping my thoughts. My head is cotton, gray cotton.

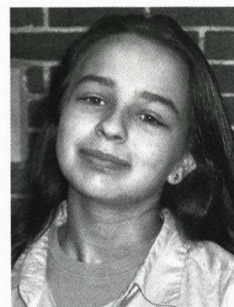
I hurry to get home, reminding myself of the mountain of homework that awaits. Home isn't that far from school; close enough that I can walk. My home isn't in the city's quiet, peaceful neighborhoods that elude the dizzying pace outside. We live right off Insurgentes, known for being one of the largest streets in the Americas.

It's six paces from the curb to our strip of shriveled yard, nine more to the steps, four up to the stoop. Our home perches on the street, absorbing the street's noise and everything else that comes with it. And our home looks like every other one. It's a cream stucco-concrete building. Wrought-iron bars protectively span the windows. A collection of spikes of multicolored glass crown the flat roof—our generic, low-cost security. Home, enough for our five-person family unit.

I let myself in. The smell of warm bread wafts through the house, hanging in the closets and hovering in the hall. Mmmmm—Mami must have been to the panadería. Leaving my satchel in the living room, I float into the kitchen through strands of mid-afternoon light. I know from the smells, from the singing, from the atmosphere, that Mami is inside.



Natalia M. Thompson, 13
Madison, Wisconsin



Jessica Brodsky, 13
Brookline, Massachusetts



"I have raised my daughters to be strong-willed and independent because I was raised not to be"

"Hola, Mami."

"Mi'ja," she says, pecking me on the cheek. "Cómo estás?"

"Oh, I had an OK day. Como siempre."

"Ay, mi'ja, aren't you hungry? Here, have a torta." She sets the sandwich in front of me on my favorite azure plate. Food is love, always.

I push the torta away; I just had lunch. "Gracias, Mami, pero no tengo hambre."

"Ay, Rosana, por favor. You are never hungry anymore. My daughter shouldn't be so thin. Just look at you."

I look at myself. Pale skin, lightest of my family; rough hands my mother wishes I'd manicure; protocol jeans. The light

above buzzes, on the verge of burning out, like it always is. Mami imposes food on me; imposes it on everybody. Everything is normal.

"OK, just have some bites. Just a little."

"Por favor, Mami. I'm tired, not hungry."

"Ya, ya. Same thing." The torta goes back on the counter. She'll find time later to impose it on some other innocent individual.

"So. How was your day?"

I shrug. "The usual. But, Mami, I was wondering—there are some extra honors courses being offered after school. They would really help me do better in college. Would it be OK if I took them?"

Mami is washing dishes in the sink, deep in the suds of irony. I know she wishes she'd gone to college herself. "Really, Rosana, I want you to be an independent woman someday. You deserve a good education, mi'ja. But family comes first. You need to spend less time with your studies, more with your family. Too many rebellious ideas swirling around in your head."

"Por favor, Mami."

She turns toward me, shoulders sinking. The kitchen is dim, but her eyes seem lighter, deeper. "You know what Papi would say." I'm perfectly aware of it: he would say no.

I try again: "But Mami, you always tell me to take advantage of the opportunities."


Her eyes are glistening. "I know I tell you to. But you're forgetting what is most important." Then she pauses, her voice

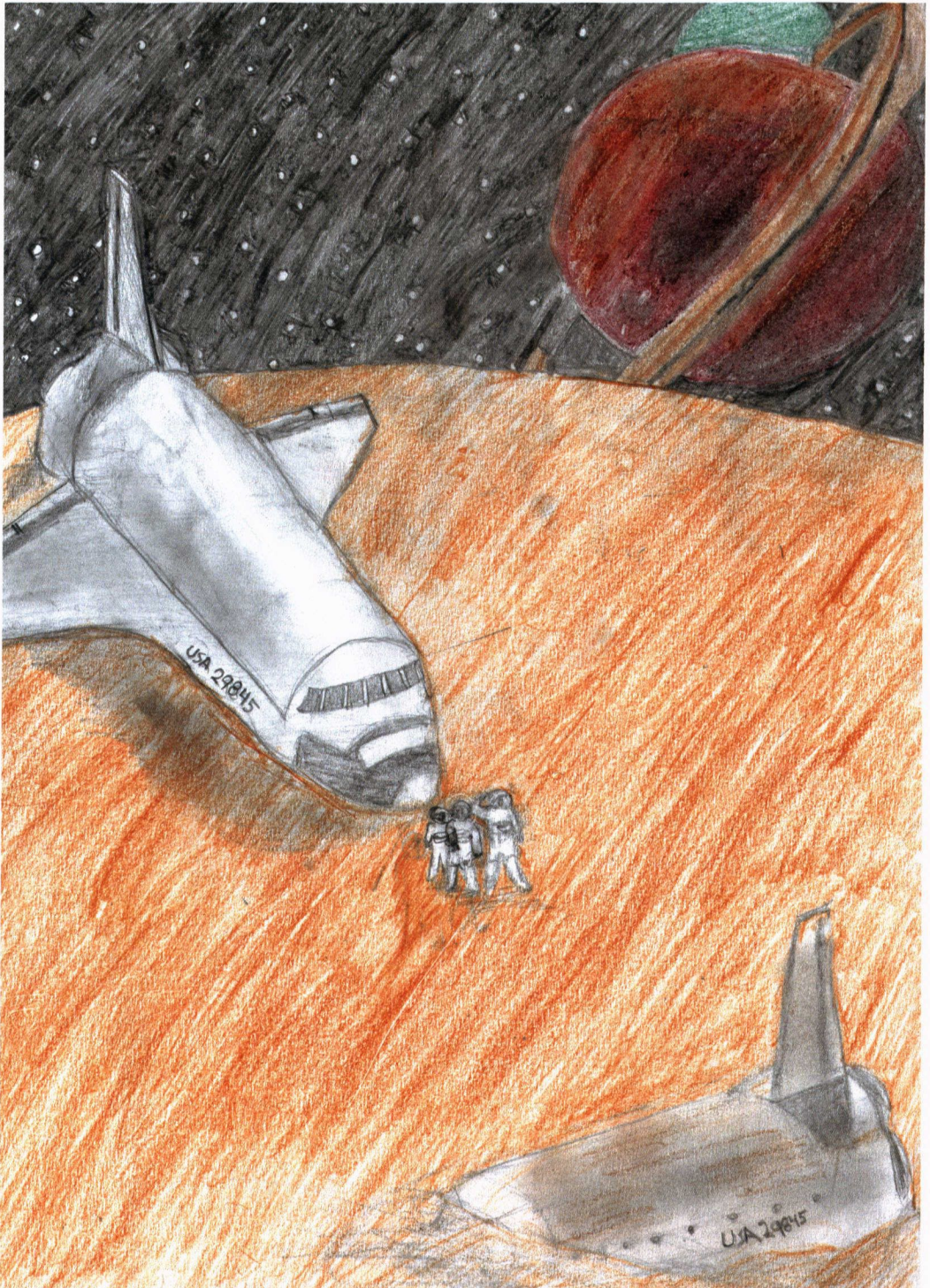
lowering to a whisper. Her voice is grainy, sound coming drifting in separate molecules. "I have raised my daughters to be strong-willed and independent because I was raised not to be. I didn't go to college. I married too early. I wish I hadn't."

Her words hang in the air, heavier than the smell of fresh bread. The molecules have stopped floating; now they're at a standstill. The power of her words has frozen them in place, in time.

Mami turns back to the sink quickly, still washing dishes in the suds of irony. For an instant, it is as if the words were never spoken. "I didn't mean that. I love your papi very much." Her words ring unconvincing. And I know without her uttering another word that she really wishes she had gone to college and had a career first. Mami remains silent now, as usual. She's never spoken about herself that way before.

When she speaks again, it is not my mother's strong voice. It's a wilted voice, marred to crack like an egg. Like my mother. Like us all. "My role is to be a good mother, a good wife. I wanted to work; I couldn't. I had children. I would have been a failure if I weren't married with children by a certain age. But you are different." Being different should be a compliment, but it's not. "You are different. So go ahead, take the courses."

I should feel happy. Relieved. But I don't. I feel only as if another burden has been placed securely on my shoulders, tension rising, an encumbrance imposed. With my mother's blessings. 



About fifty yards away, half-buried in the dirt of a dry, dead planet, was a space shuttle

AE-51

By Parth Raval

Illustrated by Alex Hamilton

HAVE YOU FOUND a landing site yet, Mallory?" roared General Landings, gray hairs bristling. In the close confines of the ship's cockpit, the sound nearly blew my eardrums out.

I gritted my teeth and said, "Not yet sir. I'm scanning as we speak sir."

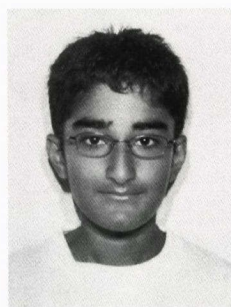
"Well get on with it!" He turned away and I shook my head. Jeez, that guy was irritating. We had been in space for nearly five years Earth time, but some new, strange technology that gave me a severe headache whenever I thought about it, made it possible to make the trip in little over a year. However long we had been out there, though, the general's ear-splitting commands were beginning to grate on my nerves. I flipped onto a different screen in my little navigation alcove. A high-res moving picture of the planet's surface danced around in front of me. The glare was hurting my eyes and I squinted.

"Jax," I called to the pilot.

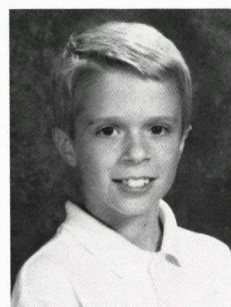
"Yeah."

"Try HG-737," I said, giving the coordinates for a possible landing site. Sometimes it took multiple tries to get a good site, and I hoped this one would work or the general would have a few choice words to say. As Jax began the descent, General Landings leaned over my shoulder to look at the screens.

"Does this junk heap have any life?" he asked. The importance of the moment had made him talk in a civil tone and I was eager to keep it that way. I did some rapid typing and looked at



Parth Raval, 12
Loma Linda, California



Alex Hamilton, 12
Louisville, Kentucky

the results, interested.

"This place has been dead since time began. Not a spark of life." The general sighed and rubbed his eyes. He snapped them open again and glared at the monitor.

"Didn't we send a probe here a couple years ago?" I asked.

"We did. And the stupid thing sent transmissions back saying this was a good place for making a colony. Probes," he growled, and added a few colorful adjectives.

"This place will work," I said, trying to keep the general in a good mood.

The ship slowly had started to shake. We were going through the atmosphere of planet AE-51 and I braced myself. This was the part of the flight where I usually evicted some of my stomach contents. The gentle rumbles gave way to a violent throttling that felt as if a couple of giants were playing ping-pong with our ship. My teeth began to vibrate in my mouth and I clamped them shut. I'm not getting paid enough for this, I thought. The shakings got worse and worse and I thought I saw my life flashing before my eyes. Somewhere far away I heard Jax flipping switches and cursing. I was sure I was going to have a few more white hairs after this ordeal. We got rattled harder and harder until we suddenly seemed to hover and then all movement stopped.

"We've landed," said Jax with a trace of smugness. I closed my eyes, gave a long relieved sigh, and released my seat belt.

"Good! Now let's get out there!" said the general, so loudly that he nearly

knocked me off my feet. I opened the door to the cockpit and walked into the cabin. It consisted of a few chairs and a big red couch, a coffee maker, and an entertainment system. The two other men of our team were sitting there. They were twins, and I couldn't exactly remember why they had come on the trip.

"Bob, Ron, we've landed," I said. They both got up wordlessly. They did everything without expression, without emotion, and I couldn't remember the last time they talked. I often thought that they didn't even care if we landed or not. We strapped on helmets from the racks and, for no particular reason, stood in a line. General Landings strode briskly from the cockpit, snapped on a helmet and, with great relish, opened the main hatch.

None of us went out at first. We simply stood dumb in the cabin until Jax boldly walked out, her shoulders hunched. Following her lead, we all cautiously left the ship. I stared out the visor of my helmet. The flat ground was a dusty orange color with small pebbles scattered about. A small wind gusted around our legs, pulling up some sand and swirling it in the air. I looked around. On all sides were straight, empty spaces, not a single hill or bump. But it wasn't the depressing landscape that left me speechless. About fifty yards away, half-buried in the dirt of a dry, dead planet, was a space shuttle.

Bob reached it first; I think it was the first time I had seen him run. The rest of us approached it slowly, like it would jump up and attack us at any moment. I ran a

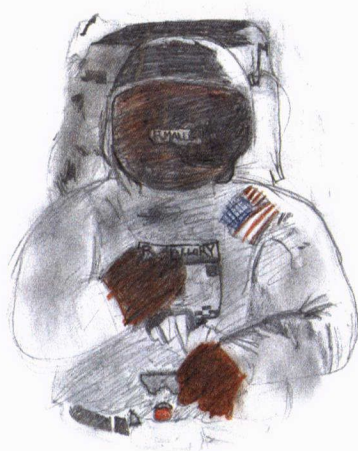
gloved hand lightly up and down the rusty side. From the amount of wear I guessed the ship to be at least five hundred years old; but the model was very similar to a new version that had been made in America. Jax was examining the underside and I heard her gasp and swear over the speaker in my helmet.

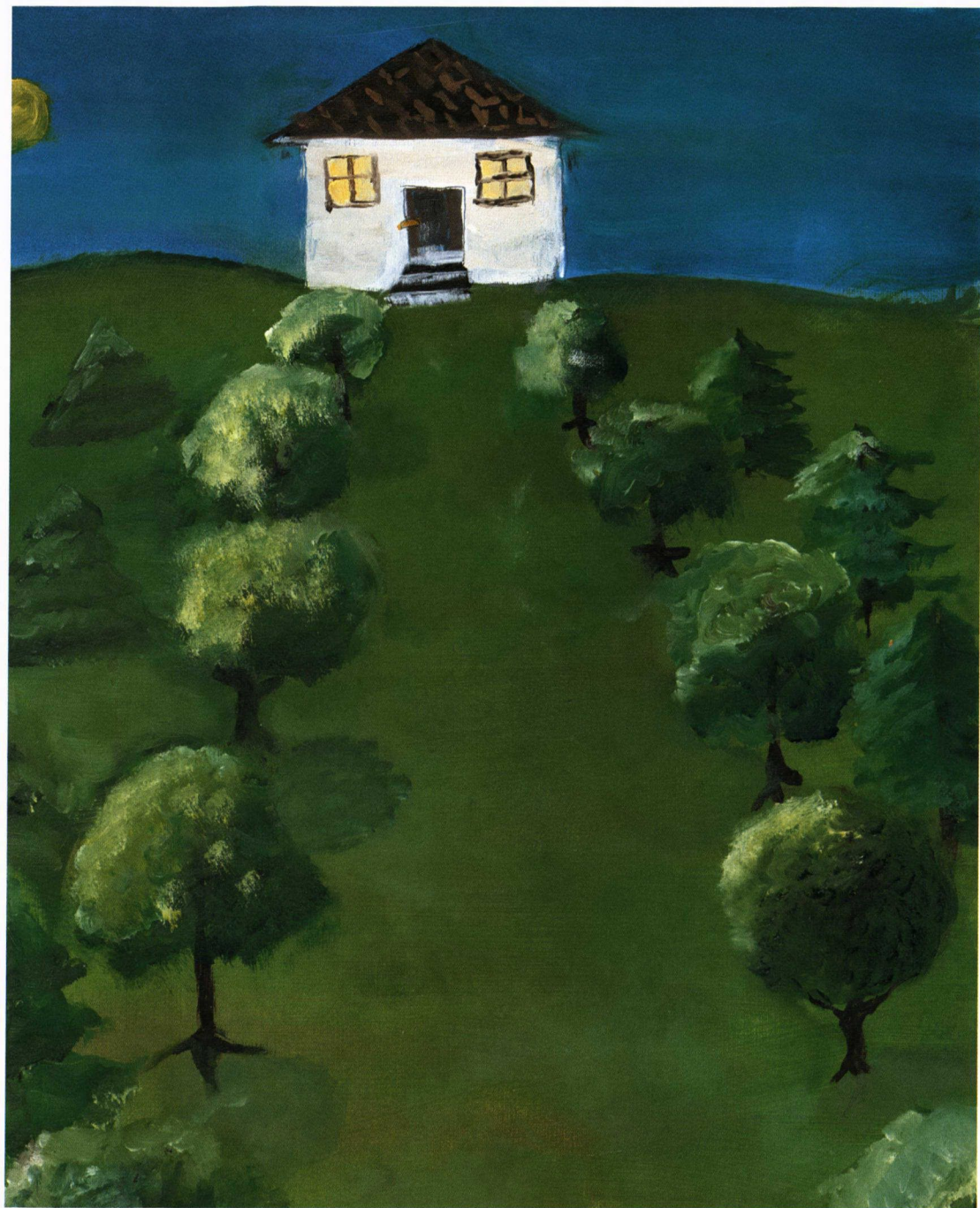
"What is it?" I asked, running over to her. She wordlessly nodded to the metal. I looked. The ID number of the ship was USA 29845. The ship we had come in had the same ID. And two different ships never have the same numbers. I called over the rest of the team and we all silently crouched in front of the large black figures, like an ancient tribe worshipping some idol. Even the general was lost for words, his mouth opening and closing like a dying fish. Ron fiddled with some wires and the main hatch opened. We all looked at each other. Following Jax's example, I went into the ship first, with the team

trailing behind me. The cabin looked exactly like ours, down to the coffee stain on the couch. Jax looked around.

"We could make our own episode of 'The Twilight Zone' with this," she said. No one laughed. I walked over to the computer tucked into the back of the room. Lying on its keyboard was a small scrap of fabric with a piece of plastic sewed to it. I picked it up and it almost fell apart in my fingers. The plastic was worn and cracked but I could still read "R. Mallory" engraved in it. I gave a start and unwittingly fingered the nametag on my chest. I dropped the old tag as if it was a black-widow spider. This isn't happening, I thought. This is all just a weird dream. A really weird dream. The ship's log was opened on the computer. Reluctantly, I began to read, my face slowly growing closer and closer to the screen.

"Have you found a landing site yet, Mallory?" roared General Landings..."





All these trees, with no houses behind ours!

Changes

By Karin Denton

Illustrated by Tara Hutchinson

TICK-TICK. TICK-TICK. The turn signal silenced as Dad rounded the last curb. After a long car ride, Orchard Drive was finally in view. My soon-to-be new house loomed in the distance. It was a sort of gloomy gray color with a ruby-red door that stood out against the drab surroundings. I had decided to like it. After all, what choice did I have? Mom and Dad had made up their minds. Come morning, the house was ours. Besides, everything at home, at school felt so . . . disconnected. It was all flat, the same old life I'd had since age five. I might even need a change. But life wasn't bad exactly, I reminded myself. It was fine, and safe, I knew that. Who knew what was waiting here?

Our old red Buick pulled up the unfamiliar driveway. Dad unlocked the doors with a click and we climbed out. As we walked to the front door, Dad promised, "It won't be long today, hon. I just have to make a few touch-ups on the paint job." I nodded. The house was truly ugly on the inside, and since Mom loved to watch "Trading Spaces," "House to Home," and other interior decorating shows, she had taken on redecorating the house as her personal mission. Dad and I had reached the front door. He punched in a number in the lockbox the real estate company had attached to its handle.

As he turned the knob, I couldn't resist asking, "What's the password?"

Dad grinned, "Secret."

It was something I'd always asked, and the answer was always



Karin Denton, 12
Edinboro, Pennsylvania



Tara Hutchinson, 11
Damascus, Maryland

the same. Now we were in the house, and I was distracted by the awful *smell*! I coughed. The horrid scent made the air seem thick; I could barely breathe. Probably the paint, I told myself. Every wall had been painted, courtesy of Dad, and we had hired a company to put in wood flooring. Then I remembered—they had put a protective coating on the floor. That was probably not the most pleasant fragrance, and mixed in with the paint scent, the result made you want to hold your nose! But Dad admired what he could see of the house.

"Looks nice," he said, a bit of pride in his voice. "It'll smell for a while, though, partly because of the paint, but mostly because of the floors. They put on a special coat of . . ."

I smiled, hoping I looked interested while being informed of something I'd just figured out for myself, but I was putting all my efforts into trying not to gag on the scent. How could I survive even fifteen minutes in here?

"Look, Dad," I said, interrupting him. "Maybe I can go outside today. I mean, it's the warmest weather we've had this spring, and we've got that whole woods in our backyard . . ."

He hesitated, and for a moment I thought he wouldn't let me go.

"I think—oh, go ahead. Have fun."

I'D ALWAYS LOVED walking in the woods, but the opportunity hardly presented itself. We lived in a city, and our backyard had been a few yards of grass, but this—this was heaven! All these trees,

with no houses behind ours! I set out, but to my disappointment, the trees were purposely planted in rows. Not a woods to have adventures in, not a natural forest. These trees were planted by man. As I walked through orderly rows of maple and pine, I thought about life. Well, I thought about moving, in particular.

The same old thoughts I'd been thinking ran through my head. A change. That sounded inviting. I envisioned myself with new friends, great friends, an awesome school . . . but who was I kidding? I wasn't the most outgoing person in the universe, and I certainly wouldn't be surrounded by friends at the end of September. The best date I could expect friends by was December. Change, I told myself. Change is nice. But moving? Isn't that a little extreme? Moving is much too permanent, too final. It takes away everything—special friends. I'd still see them once in a while, but . . . There was nothing wrong with life as it was. It just needed a little spice, like a new hobby, or new friends, or both. I wondered if I could convince my parents to back out of it. The contract, Mom had told me, wasn't signed yet, but tomorrow they had a meeting with the current owner and then the papers would be signed. The owner had let us do whatever we pleased with the house (such as paint it) for right now.

I forced myself to let my thoughts wander, and became aware that I was now walking through an assortment of different trees, not the rows I'd been walking on before. I wondered if I was still on

the property. Who owned the land behind this, anyway? I imagined running into an escaped convict, and from there, my thoughts ran wild. I spotted a beer bottle, and then a broken piece of pottery. Could someone really be living back here?! Frantically, I walked straight ahead, thinking maybe I'd run into a house soon, until my path was blocked by a thick row of bushes that stretched on and on. I trudged through it, only getting three scratches, but I tripped on a fallen branch and fell flat on my face. Something had cushioned my fall. I glanced down. Grass, piles of it. The lush green grass you only see on TV commercials.

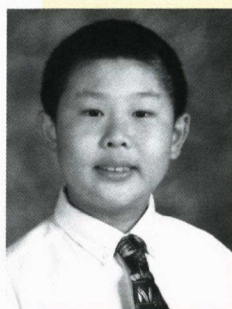
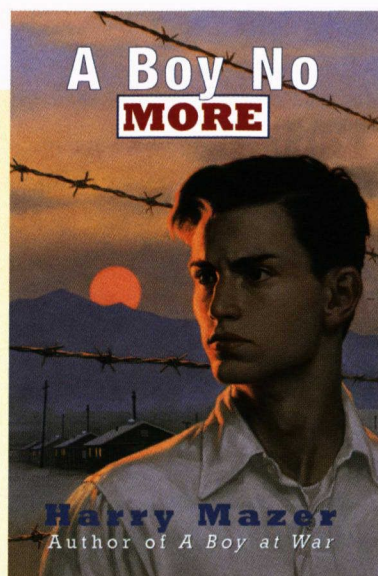
I didn't feel any pain, so I looked around. Oh, the sunlight! I hadn't real-

ized how dark it had been among the trees. There was that bright, lush, green grass, with a large bush here and there. Little yellow wildflowers and purple crocuses sprinkled the ground, and I spotted a lone robin making a nest inside one of the bushes. I was being silly. Escaped convict? Hiding in the woods? Of course not. It was a beautiful place; nature's meadow. You could tell it wasn't man-made. There was something wild about the bushes, and the grass was untamed. I looked around, trying to take it all in. I walked a few paces, and then on impulse, flung myself down on the grass, letting the sun's warmth shine on my face. I lay there, and I knew in my heart, that I could handle it. It was time. I was ready for a change. 🌼



Book Review

By Dylan Sun



Dylan Sun, 10
Califon, New Jersey

A Boy No More, by Harry Mazer; Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing; New York, 2004; \$15.95

HARRY MAZER'S BOOK, *A Boy No More*, is set during World War II. On December 7, 1941, Adam Pelko, a fourteen-year-old boy, and his friends Davi and Martin were in a rowboat when the bombs fell on the *USS Arizona* on which Adam's father served. This was the legendary Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. Soon afterwards, Adam was evacuated from Hawaii with his family and moved to San Diego to start a new life.

The author adopted the perspective of Adam to tell this page-turning adventure. I find this point of view makes World War II seem a lot clearer, especially because it is so remote in time to me. In the vivid descriptions, I felt Adam's struggle to survive life without his father, his need to be responsible and work to help his family, his bonding friendship with Davi, and his frustration at others who were either lazy or counterproductive.

In the second chapter Adam recalls, "I saw my father's ship, that great battleship the *USS Arizona*, explode and sink." This scene reminds me of when my family went to Hawaii for a vacation two years ago. We visited *USS Arizona* Memorial Center at

Pearl Harbor. When I was standing on the memorial that straddled the sunken battleship's hull, I could still see the roof of the cabins and the smokestack. There were trickles of oil seeping to the surface of the water around the ship, making the water murky, dark, and shiny. I was saddened by the death of the sailors in Pearl Harbor.

Even though I am so far in history from World War II, I have witnessed a similar horrifying catastrophe in my day: the collapsing of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. I remember clearly when I saw the planes hit the Twin Towers on the television. I recall the loud sirens, the burning flames and the people running on the streets, and finally, the whole building slowly collapsing into black smoke.

A Boy No More is a captivating story about history that we should remember. Harry Mazer wrote another book about Adam and Davi, which I will read, called *A Boy at War*. Some other stories around this time frame are *Don't You Know There's a War On?* by Avi, and *Bat 6* by Virginia Euwer Wolff. I strongly suggest that anyone who is interested in learning about the history of World War II read this book. ❁



The great golden retriever shot through the opening like a bolt of lightning

Maddie's Little Miracle

By Katherine Roth

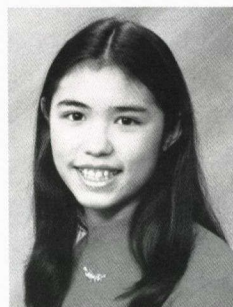
Illustrated by Emma Glennon

THE MOVIE DRONED ON:

"... though today some of the canyons hold man-made lakes. This played an important role in the discovery of..."

I slumped down in my seat and let out a deep yawn, despite my efforts at fighting it. How could they expect anyone to be alert and focused in the last class of the last day before winter break? Crinkled notebook paper lay scattered across desks, smeared in gray smudges from listless doodling. Girls passed notes back and forth, scribbling out conversations that had grown from meager sentences into five-page sagas. A couple kids remained staring at the television screen, lost in a deep trance. It made me wonder whether people could actually fall asleep with their eyes wide open.

I rested my chin on my fist, gazing absentmindedly out the window. Big, fluffy white snow flurries floated down loftily from the sky, settling atop the old, leftover snow in a thin, new layer. It looked to me like good packing snow, the kind you can build big, bulky snowmen out of. Perhaps I'd build a snowman of my own when I got home. That was, of course, after I dropped by the Andersons' house. Mrs. Anderson had called me up on the phone last night, asking if I'd like to look after Maddie, their huge golden retriever, for a couple of days while they were out of town. I'd answered yes without any hesitation. Maddie must be the most lovable dog you are ever likely to meet. I'd looked after her a few times before. It was always fun. This time, however, I



Katherine Roth, 13
Rochester Hills, Michigan



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Greenland, New Hampshire

felt a little uneasy, a little weird. It would be the first time I looked after Maddie, just Maddie, and not also their gray tabby cat, Gretchen.

Gretchen had been missing for nearly five days now, ever since that horrible snowstorm had blown past. I believe everyone had been a little freaked that day. I know for sure that I had been. We'd lost our power pretty early on, leaving the whole world, as much of it as I could see anyway, lost in total darkness. Outside, the wind had shrieked and howled relentlessly, like dying wolves on their last breath. It beat upon our house as if someone was actually standing outside taking a swing at it. I had to keep reassuring myself there was no way a house could literally uproot itself and fly away, like the one in *The Wizard of Oz*. Relief washed over me the next day as I woke to discover it had finally ended. Left behind, though, was a trail of gruesome damage.

Poor Gretchen. There were no tracks, no clues. We didn't know where to even begin looking. The outlook was bleak.

I felt a pencil jabbing at me between my shoulder blades. "Hey, Katie!" whispered Laura. "Some of us are heading over to Caribou after school. You gonna come? It'll basically be me, Allie, Sylvia, Steph. Maybe even Tim and Rich."

I was already shaking my head no, but stopped as she mentioned Rich. He was new. We'd met him only a few days ago. He had bright blue eyes and the kind of smile that made you want to smile too. I toyed with the thought of going, but

eventually discarded it. Maddie was waiting for me. The sorry pup, locked up all day in that house. She was probably dying to get some fresh air. Rich would just have to wait.

"Sorry," I said, "I've got a job to do."

"Another dog thing?"

"Yeah."

The movie snapped off and the screen went blank. "OK, class," Mrs. Chavez said, rising from her desk. "Your homework over break will be to take notes on Section Two of Chapter Ten. We'll discuss them when we get back. You're dismissed."

I packed up my books and battled my way down the bustling hall. Kids, anxious to begin their winter break, swarmed all around in a brilliant chaos.

Somehow I managed to reach my locker, retrieve my backpack and some books I needed, and now was heading for the front entrance. Quickening my pace, I was able to disembark, without interruption, swiftly out the doors.

IT WAS SNOWING like mad by now. Cold too. Thank goodness I didn't live far off. Down a couple of streets, left at the main intersection, and I was in my neighborhood. I stopped first at my house, dropped off my backpack, snatched the Andersons' key off the table, and ventured back outside.

The Andersons lived only three houses down. I inserted the key in their lock and twisted. The door swung open easily and I strode in.

"Woof! Woof!"

Maddie came barreling around the corner, jumping up to greet me like I was the first person she'd seen in years. Though that's probably the way she feels, I realized, as she sent me reeling backwards.

"Whoa there, Maddie," I said, taking her front paws off my shoulders and setting them back on the ground. "Happy to see you, too."

I led Maddie through the house and opened the door to their fenced-in backyard. The great golden retriever shot through the opening like a bolt of lightning, galloping into the fresh, powdery snow. She looped about in huge, winding circles, dashing this way and that, sprinting around crazily as if her life depended on it. I smiled. That was Maddie for you.

Eventually Maddie began to slow, and she sat herself down right at the farthest corner of the yard. Her snout almost touched the cold metal of the fence. She was staring out at something, very still, a deep sadness seeming to have suddenly fallen over her. Her eyes clouded over, her tail drooped low, and all the while she kept staring out ahead of her. Whining softly, she began pawing at the fence.

My face was grim. She must miss Gretchen, I thought to myself, she must miss her really bad. I stood there a moment longer, then pulled the door shut and went to check on Maddie's food bowl. It was empty, so I got a cup of her dog food from the pantry and poured it into her bowl. I also went to the sink and got her some fresh, cool water.

"Maddie!" I called, sticking my head out the door. The snow had let up considerably. "Come here, Maddie! Time to come in!"

There was silence.

"Maddie?"

I looked out over the backyard, searching for the familiar patch of yellow fur. But there was nothing there, only the sparkling white snow.

"Maddie!" I called again, stepping out into the cold. I could feel my heart banging against my chest, my breath growing short. Where'd that dog gotten to?

I stopped in the middle of the yard, standing stock-still. The sun reflected so brightly off the snow I could barely even squint. There was nothing, just a world of surreal white. I could see my own cloud of breath as I exhaled, could feel a new icy bitterness entering as I inhaled. My hands, hanging numbly at my side, curled into fists, the nails digging deeply into skin until I finally released. Over and over again I repeated this uneasy movement. Only a moment had passed, yet it seemed like hours.

Where had that blasted dog gone?

Then, out of the corner of my eye, I spotted something; something anyone else would have passed over had they not been searching for it. A small black dot near the far left corner of the fence stood out against the sparkling white, a dot that should not have been there. I headed for it in haste.

All I could do was stare in horror. A hole. A hole had been dug beneath the

fence. It wasn't a large hole, just big enough that a dog about Maddie's size could probably fit through if she was determined. I felt the ground around the hole. It was as hard as ice and a great deal colder. This was the work of one determined dog.

There were paw prints on the other side of the fence, leading away through the neighborhood. I dashed back to the house, plowing my way like crazy through the heavy drifts of snow. Flinging open the cabinet where all the treats were kept, I grabbed the largest one I could find, knowing from experience that that was the best strategy for reeling in runaways. Then I shot through the front door and around to the back of the house.

There were the paw prints, still fresh in the snow. "Maddie!" I cried, trailing after the tracks while trying to whistle through chapped lips. I made my way down different streets, past houses I did not recognize. The tracks seemed to continue on for miles, each pawprint identical to the next. I began to worry I was running in some sort of large circle.

I finally began to slow as the tracks approached the Common Area, a large, somewhat woodsy section of our neighborhood. I came to a halt, hunched over and panting like crazy, trying to catch my breath. An icy wind blew past, searing like fire across my cheek. The long, bare branches of trees looming high overhead creaked menacingly, completely enveloped in a thin layer of ice. Other than that, the world remained utterly silent. I glanced around, waiting for something, anything.

Then it came. Maddie appeared through the trees, like a pale ghost fluttering in the wind, and walked right up to the edge of the Common Area.

"Maddie," I called, my voice slicing through the air. I held out the treat for her. "Come on, Maddie. Come here girl."

She didn't come. Instead, she disappeared back into the Common Area. Hesitantly, I followed.

I had only to walk a few yards in before I caught sight of her again. She was sitting beside the giant trunk of an oak, watching me expectantly.

"Come on, Maddie," I cooed. "Let's just go back home, and . . ."

My heart went numb as I caught sight.

"Oh my gosh," I muttered, stumbling over to where the scraggly, limp body of Gretchen lay. The cat's tiny chest made only the slightest indication of a breath.

"Oh my gosh . . ."

EVERYTHING that followed was a blur to me; it all happened so fast. The next thing I vividly remember is standing inside the veterinary hospital. Gretchen had just been rushed through a pair of double doors, and some people whom I'd never met before were telling me to sit down.

I took their advice and sat, needing a few minutes to gather my thoughts, to try and make sense of what had just happened. Eventually I took a deep breath, stood up, and headed for the nearest pay phone.

A couple hours later the Andersons entered the veterinary hospital. My mom,

who'd arrived minutes after I called, took my hand.

"We'd better get home. You look tired."

"No," I said, trying to appear more awake. But my mom soon got the best of me, and we left.

Sometime at night my mom shook me awake. "The Andersons just called," she whispered. "Gretchen pulled through."

Two days later, the Andersons brought Gretchen home. She was bandaged up and badly bruised, but doing better. Two of us had to hold Maddie down to keep her from pouncing on Gretchen. Finally she got the message and we let her up.

That night, I headed over to the Andersons' with my family. They had invited us for dinner as a kind of thank you. I guess they'd gotten it into their heads that I was the one who'd saved Gretchen,

even though I kept telling them over and over again that it was Maddie who had done everything, that this was really Maddie's little miracle. But I don't think Maddie really cared if she got the credit. She was just happy that her friend was back home, safe and sound.

"Can you pass the rolls, dear?" Mrs. Anderson said, as we sat down to eat.

I reached over and handed her the rolls, then sat back for a moment and just looked around. Maddie lay sprawled by the fireside, a purely contented expression on her face. Gretchen lay beside her, stomach and both front paws still heavily bandaged.

Maddie's ears perked, and she glanced up at me, her tail wagging slowly. For a moment, I held her gaze.

Maybe miracles do exist.



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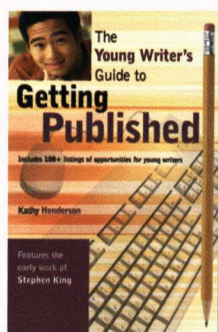
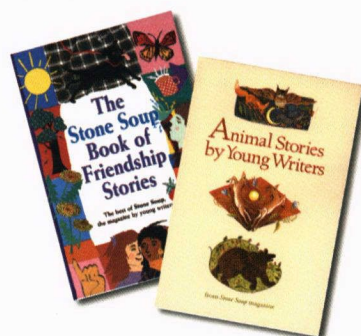
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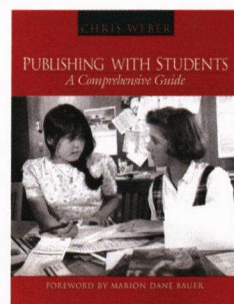
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