

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



"A Town in the Andes," by Rosa María Zúñiga Moreno, age 13, Peru

CRY OF THE PHOENIX

A legendary bird whisks Min-Li and her pet rat off to a new life

ASHIE

Ashlyn and Amber seem different as night and day, until disaster strikes

Also: Illustrations by Min Joo Yi and Gwyneth Welch

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2008

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Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

VOLUME 36, NUMBER 3
JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2008

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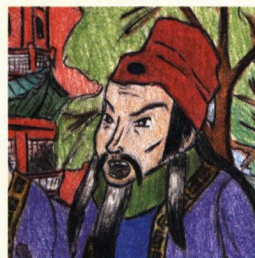
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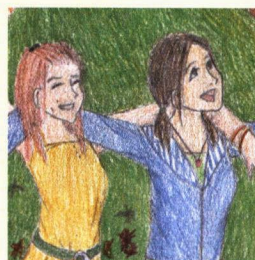
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Stone Soup

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.



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Jessie Moore, 12

Contributors' Guidelines

Stone Soup welcomes submissions from
young people through age 13. For our
complete guidelines, please visit our
Web site: 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 within
four 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
three samples of your artwork, 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 situa-
tions 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.

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of Menlo Park, California. For over 25 years, Paintbrush Diplomacy has worked to
promote children's artistic expression around the world and to raise awareness of
children's causes. Special thanks to Louise Valeur and Char Pribuss.

The Mailbox



LBP, 9

I wanted to thank you for your magazine and the opportunities you give many, many children. There are very few magazines that accept work and don't have a very small limit and pay *and* have such *great* quality. The reason I learned of this was because I was looking for other places to submit my work when I turn fourteen, and there are not a whole lot that have all the qualifications I mentioned earlier.

HANNAH SELLERS, 13
Bainbridge Township, Ohio

Hannah's book review was published in our January/February 2007 issue.

Stone Soup is full of great stories and illustrations! I read "Muslim Girl" [March/April 2005], which was a very good story and it had a very good life lesson. The life lesson was to always respect people's religions and differences. When I read the first paragraph of "Muslim Girl" I couldn't help myself but to keep reading! In it a girl comes to school and is forced to take her headdress off by her teacher or go to the office. Because wearing the headdress is important to her religion she quietly gets up from her seat and goes straight to the office without saying a word. I also really enjoyed looking at the great illustrations. Just by looking at the title and the illustrations I could kind of tell already what was going on in the story without even reading it.

RENEE NABINGER, 10
Hanover, New Hampshire

I love that you give kids a chance to express themselves creatively. I believe that just because we're kids, it doesn't mean we can't do great things.

DEVYN FUSSMAN, 13
Jacksonville, Florida

I love *Stone Soup*! I just read "Greyhound Park" in the July/August 2007 issue. Since I've always wanted a dog, I really could envision the story. Also, congratulations to Alicia Zanoni, the illustrations were beautiful and in such detail!

JENNA MCKENNY, 10
Norwell, Massachusetts

I just received my September/October issue of *Stone Soup* and I flipped right to "Saturday Night at the Panaderia" by William Gwaltney. I enjoy reading his stories, and I would like to congratulate him on having so many of them published. Seeing all of his words and illustrations has inspired me to continue submitting work to your magazine.

ANNAKAI HAYAKAWA GESHLIDER, 12
San Francisco, California

Annakai's latest story, "Journeys to the Past," is on page 41 of this issue.

I have been re-reading and admiring the May/June 2007 issue of *Stone Soup*, in which you published my story, "The Summer Father Was Away." I love so many of the other stories, but my favorite is "Saturdays," by Sophie Stid. She captured the warmth and the closeness, yet the differences between, a family of sisters. It reminded me of one of my favorite series, *The Melendy Quartet*, by Elizabeth Enright, about a slightly crazy, endearing, and adventurous group of artistic siblings. The first book in the series is called *The Saturdays*.

SARIEL FRIEDMAN, 11
Pacific Palisades, California

You can read all the pieces mentioned in The Mailbox at 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 want 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 trees reach over me like a mother hovering over a newborn baby

Below the Sparkling Sunshine

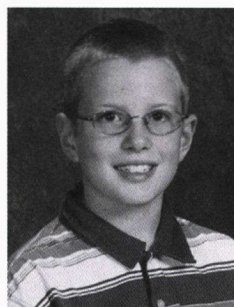
By **Eddie Mansius**

Illustrated by **Dennis Guo**

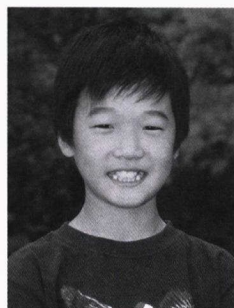
SOME DAYS I LOOK out the window through the mixture of trees, onto my backyard. The cool wind, the rustling of the leaves seem to beckon me closer. *This way, this way to paradise*, they whisper through the rays of sunshine. I cannot contain myself any longer, for I must traverse to my Utopia, my paradise, my special place.

I throw on my boots haphazardly, not wasting any time. The second I set foot outside the door, a wave of tranquility sweeps over me. I run as fast as I can, but only as fast as my body will let me, for my heart is there instantly. By the time I have reached the creek, my feet are sore from running in rain boots, but I can hardly feel it, for I am excited beyond words. Just inhaling the fresh air and hearing the babbling of the brook makes me want to lie down and stare up at the blue Carolina sky. But I don't yet; I must go to the perfect place where the trees reach over me like a mother hovering over a newborn baby. I must go to a place where the ground is as soft as a cloud and the water as shiny as a new Ferrari. This is the place where I can whisper anything to the woods and they will only listen.

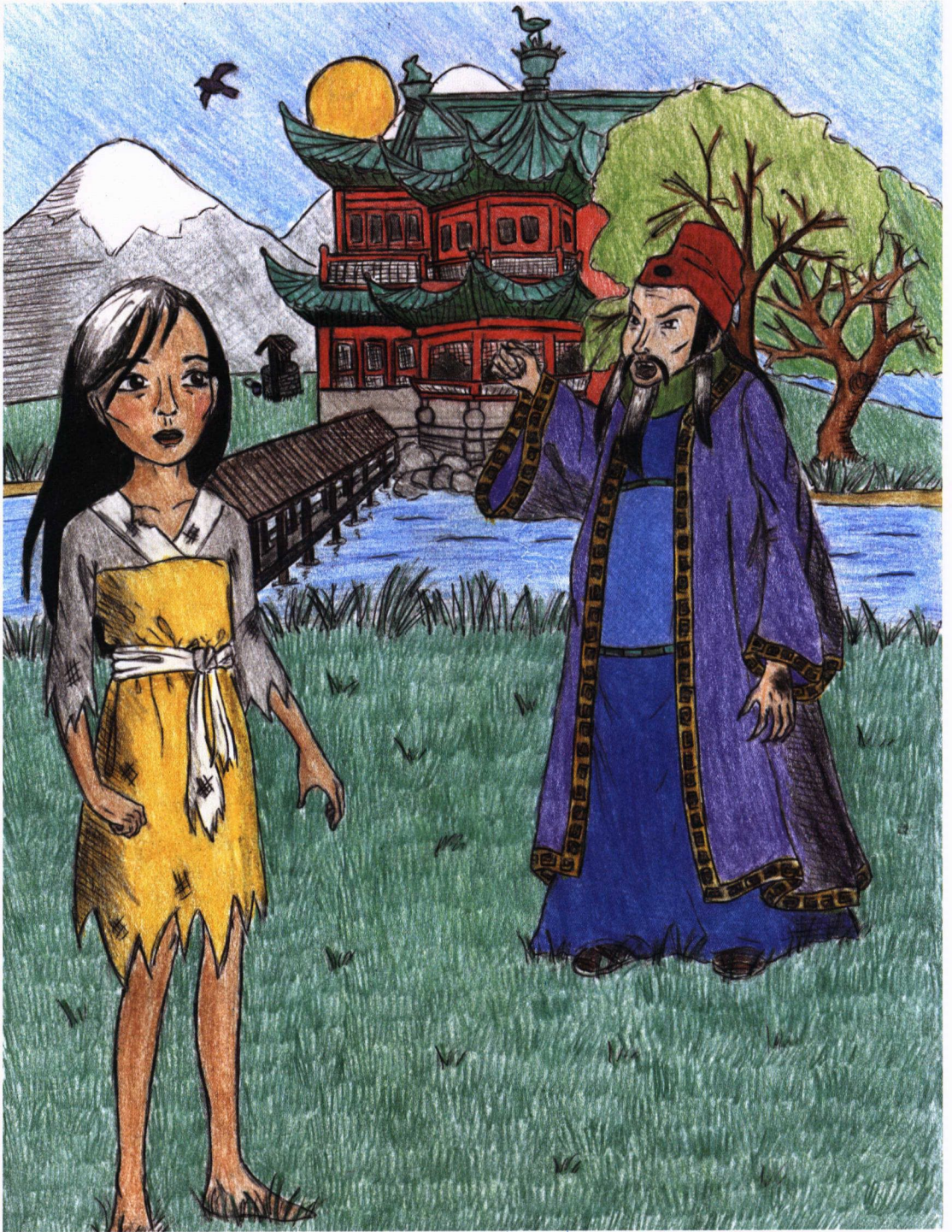
As I lie at that spot, the shadows of the leaves dance around me, creating a greenish hue over everything. The sunlight sparkles around me and all other noises and problems are shut out by the protection of the forest. Nothing can hurt me here. No one can tease me here. It is here that my spirit is free. ❁



Eddie Mansius, 11
Charlotte, North Carolina



Dennis Guo, 11
Lexington, Massachusetts



"Where is my morning tea? Go make it!"

Cry of the Phoenix

By **Samantha Lai**

Illustrated by **Min Joo Yi**

MIN-LI WAS AN eleven-year-old slave girl taken from her family so long ago that she barely even knew who she was. Her owner, Master Chu, never considered telling her anyway. He never really treated Min-Li properly, and he was a terrible master. Master Chu never even used Min-Li's real name; he called her "wretch" and "lazy one" instead. Min-Li's only friend was a river rat that she had named Huang He, after the Yellow River. After all, he was a river rat.

"Wretch! Where are you hiding this time?" barked Master Chu. Min-Li appeared around the corner of the run-down barn.

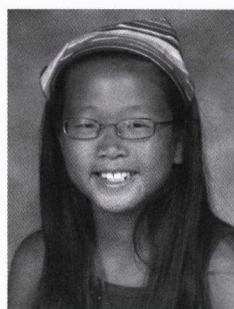
"I wasn't hiding, Master, I was just..."

The man silenced her with a furious look. "Where is my morning tea? Go make it!"

Min-Li ran to the well to fetch water for the tea. On her way, she saw the mouse, Huang He. "Huang! Come, we'll get water together," she said.

That same day, Min-Li went behind the barn to spend some time with Huang. But Min-Li heard a voice she had never heard before. "Min-Li," it said. She shook the voice out of her mind. But she heard it again. "Min-Li," it said again. Min-Li peered into darkness, but saw nothing.

Just as the sun was about to set, the voice came again. Min-Li spun around. There behind her was a majestic bird-like creature with feathers as bright and colorful as the rays of the rising sun. "Min-Li, bring me to your home. I will return your hospitality. I am one of the legendary phoenixes." Min-Li stopped, bewil-



Samantha Lai, 10
Piedmont, California



Min Joo Yi, 13
Bellevue, Washington



They slipped through the air and into the dark night

dered, but motioned for the regal creature to follow her into the drab barn.

"I'm sorry, but this is the only place I have for you to stay." Min-Li walked to the cottage, drowning in questions. Where was this bizarre creature from? Was it friendly, or was it the devil's trickery? Min-Li couldn't sleep that night.

Suddenly, during the middle of the night, there was a loud screech. *MIN-LI! COME TO THE BARN QUICKLY!* Min-Li slipped out of her cot quietly and leapt out the window. But she was stunned to discover a very strange occurrence. All

the birds, rats, and insects had come out from their nests and were all over the ground. I wonder if this is a bad sign, she thought. The phoenix was waiting for Min-Li in the barn.

"What about Huang?"

"Take the mouse."

"How will we leave?" she whispered.

"We will fly," the phoenix answered swiftly. Min-Li hesitated, and then mounted the phoenix, quick as a flash. The phoenix spread its powerful wings and took off gracefully. They slipped through the air and into the dark night.

"Who are you?" Min-Li asked once they were gliding with the wind.

"I am Sakai, messenger of the phoenixes," the phoenix replied. Her voice was sweet and musical, like many crickets singing on a warm summer's night.

"Where are we headed?" Min-Li asked. The phoenix was silent.

They swooped through the air like wind and landed on a riverbank many miles away.

"This is Xining."

Min-Li's dark eyes widened in amazement. The scenery was unbelievably beautiful and calming. "Why did you take me here?" Min-Li asked.

"You were in great danger at the time."

"Is there a village near here?"

Sakai nodded toward the east. "Small village that way."

"May we stay there tonight?" Min-Li asked. Huang He slipped out of Min-Li's hands and darted eastwards. "Wait! Huang! Come back!" Min-Li dashed after the mouse. Huang ran until a river came into view. Sakai flew behind Min-Li to where Huang was sitting. Then she scooped up Huang and Min-Li and flew over the river.

They reached the village quickly, and Sakai disappeared behind a wall as Min-Li asked the villagers if they could stay for the night. A deadly sickness was going through the village at the time. Sakai, Min-Li and Huang stayed at a villager's

barn for a night before leaving in the early morning. All the sick people of the village had unexpectedly gotten well on the morning Min-Li had left.

As the three soared through the air, Min-Li asked the phoenix if it knew about her past. Sakai started to tell a story of where Min-Li was born and what had happened to her parents.

"You were born in the city of Shanghai. Your parents were of a race we now know as the Guardians of the Phoenix. The people of that race were the only humans who could understand the tongue of the phoenix. All Guardians had magical healing powers. Your mother and father were both from a wealthy family from the far west. Both were falling on very hard times and had to sell you as a slave. They passed away soon afterward."

Min-Li listened intently, absorbed in the story, and her eyes gleaming and fixed on the bird.

"You, Min-Li, are a Guardian. When you retreat to the heavens after you have completed your task of curing ill villages, you may join your parents in the paradise of Shangri-La."

Min-Li agreed to go with a dazzling smile on her face. Sakai smiled back at her meaningfully. Sakai's enormous wings lifted them higher yet into the air and they soared to start Min-Li's long journey. And that was only the beginning. ❀



Screaming, laughing, dancing, we let go and wave it goodbye into the sky

The Balloon

By **Emma Delaney**

Illustrated by **Nancy Yan**

THE DAY OF THE eighth-grade picnic is beautiful and flawless, the sky a velvet blanket of blue. My mom drops me off in front of the school. A cheerful and colorful Goodbye Eighth Graders! banner greets me over the front door of the school. A big bouquet of purple balloons is tied to it. I go to Camden Academy, a small private school in New Hampshire with just fifteen kids in my grade. It is here where I've met my six best friends—Lilly, Elizabeth, Bridget, Charlotte, Sarah, and Caroline.

I make my way to the playground where the celebration is taking place, past the boys playing kickball on the soccer field and little kids munching on cookies on the swings.

My friends are clustered around a picnic bench, talking excitedly. The seven of us girls have been best friends since kindergarten and have been an inseparable group. But after eight years, we are splitting up. We are going in different directions for high school, which looms in front of us, a stretch of summer the only thing in between.

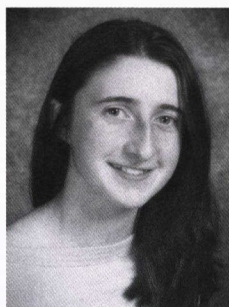
"Hey," I say softly, squeezing my way onto the bench next to Lilly and Bridget. "What's going on?"

"We're making a wish!" Sarah gushes.

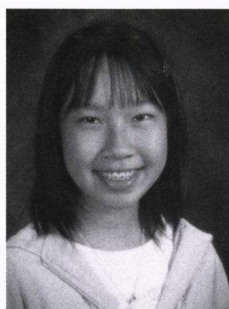
"A wish? What do you mean?" I ask.

"Mrs. Peterson gave us a piece of paper to write a wish on that we'll tie to the balloon string like a kite. Then we'll each sign the balloon and release it into the air with the wish!"

"What are we going to wish for?" I ask.



Emma Delaney, 13
Hartland, Vermont



Nancy Yan, 13
Louisville, Colorado

"I think we should wish for world peace!" Elizabeth yells. Everyone laughs.

"No way! That I'll marry Orlando Bloom," Sarah says.

"Yeah, you wish!" Bridget says.

"A million dollars for everyone!" Caroline says.

"How about, we wish to be best friends forever?" I ask.

"Yeah, that's sweet. I like that!" Charlotte says.

"Perfect. Write it neat!" In large curvy letters Lilly writes, "We wish to be friends forever."

"OK, now everyone sign their name!" Elizabeth says.

We each sign our names. We each had a different name, a distinct style, and different personalities, but still one love.

"OK, ready for blastoff?" Lilly asks everyone, rolling the paper and tying it onto the string. We walk over to the end of the field by the fence. Seven fingers hold the string and seven voices shout, "Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one!"

Screaming, laughing, dancing, we let go and wave it goodbye into the sky.

"Goodbye!" yells Bridget.

"Have a great journey!" I yell.

"Don't forget to write!" yells Elizabeth.

As it sails over the trees, climbing above the rooftops over town, I think about what great friends I have. It's like a fairy tale, all of us being together, but what will happen in high school? Will we always be friends or will we drift apart?

The balloon grows farther and farther away, from a ping-pong ball to a marble to

just a speck in the distance.

"Cake!" Mrs. Peterson yells from the picnic tables. The voice slices through my thoughts like a knife.

"Cake? I love cake!" Bridget exclaims, already running off to the cake table. Everyone follows, but me.

"Ash, come on! Cake time! Let's eat, let's go!" Charlotte yells.

"Coming! I'll be there in a minute," I say and tilt my head back and look up at the sky. The balloon is nowhere to be found.

Suddenly it's important that I find the balloon. The balloon represents my friendship with my friends and I don't want to see it go. I can't let it disappear! I search the sky until my eyes hurt. I can't find it.

Maybe if I get higher up, I'll be able to see it. I run up the hill, the long grass slashing against my legs.

I get this crazy idea that if I can see it just one last time, our friendship will last forever.

I reach the top of the hill, but I still can't see it. "Higher!" I urge myself. I run back down the hill and stop below a towering maple tree. Its bark is hard and coarse as leather. I pull myself up through the tree branches, not looking down, only up at the ocean-blue sky. I stop when I get high enough. I can see mountains and ski resorts. Coursing rivers and puffy clouds. But I don't see the balloon.

It's gone. I've let my friends down. Our friendship will just disappear.

"Hey, Ash?"

I peer through the leafy foliage. I see Charlotte's face looking up at me.

"Oh, hey Charlotte."

"Don't you want cake?"

"No."

"What are you doing up there?"

"Nothing, just looking around."

"For the balloon?"

"Yeah."

Her eyes narrow. "What's so important about it?"

"Nothing."

"Can you still see it?" she asks quietly.

"No, not really."

She stares hard at me. "I'll be right back, OK?"

I figure she's going to get me cake. "Wait, I don't want any cake!" But she doesn't hear me, she's already off and running.

She returns soon, holding it behind her back. It looks bigger though and black. Is that really cake?

"Hey Ashley, I'm coming up!"

"OK."

The tree shakes as she climbs it. Suddenly she's beside me, her cheeks flushed from running.

"Here, I brought a present for you!" Her blond bangs fall into her eyes as she pulls a black bulky shape from around her neck. I expected cake but instead it's binoculars. She places them in my lap.

"They'll help you see."

Words of thanks flood to my mouth but none of them seem to sum up how happy I actually am right now. I look through the lens.

"Can you see anything?"

"I can see Armando's Pizza sign and a man washing his car."

Then, I smile. "Wait, I see the balloon! And the wish too!" I pull the binoculars off my face. "Do you want to look?"

Charlotte's eyes are soft and warm. "No, I'm OK, thanks. I believe you. Do you want to go get cake now?"

Maybe our friendship will live happily ever after. "Yeah, let's go."

We find Sarah, Bridget, Elizabeth, Caroline, and Lilly waiting for us at the cake table.

"Ashley! Where'd you go? You missed the funniest thing! Caroline tripped Mrs. Bennet!" Bridget shrieked.

Caroline blushed. "It was an accident! It's not my fault I'm so clumsy!"

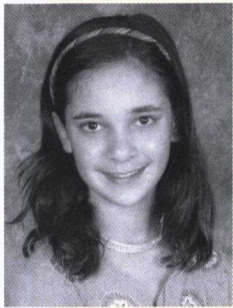
They laughed happily. I joined in; tentative at first and then harder and harder as Caroline retold the story.

"Oh! There's no more cake?" Charlotte asks.

"Oh yeah, it's all gone, those animals! But don't worry we saved you a piece." Elizabeth smiled my favorite lopsided smile. "Besides, what are friends for?" 🍪

Sunset

By Rhiannon Grodnik



Rhiannon Grodnik, 11
San Francisco, California

I watch the sun melting like butter into the calm swirl
of waves and foam
It glides down, a flying ballerina
In the far end of my vision, I can see shimmering stars
glistening:
City lights
I look deeply into the vast universe below, a world of its own,
And see reflections
Somewhere, I can be sure, someone else is beholding the
same image.
And watching the same moon run like a track star into the
waiting sky,
Her finish line
I hear the buzz of voice and wind and sea, blended to perfection
I breathe the deep night air in deeply and regard the
infinite sky,
Ever changing like the world around me
And in that short moment of life, everything is silent
I can remember none of my past, and can think not of
my future
I can hear no buzz, only the rhythmic sounds of my heart and
my breath

I feel I am alone on this earth, alone with the stars
and the moon and the wind
Alone with only one song to listen to:
The song of peace that has been heard by many before,
And will be for many to come
And then it all disappears:
The aloneness
The light
San Francisco,
Into darkness



"Is this the grand Alamo?"

Snow Fights

By Adam Jacobs

Illustrated by Zachary Meyer

“**I**MAGINE ETHAN, right there: the Alamo!” Jack said, throwing out his arms at the blank patch of snow.

“The Alamo?” said Ethan.

“Sure! All you need to do is build a big, weird-shaped wall and put a bunch of windows on it.”

Ethan and Jack had been arguing about what would be a cooler snow fort for about two hours. Seriously. Originally, they had decided to make their “Super Fort,” where they took a huge pile of snow and chipped out a gigantic structure, but there was obviously no huge pile of snow in Jack’s front yard.

“How about something medieval?” said Ethan.

“The Alamo would look way cooler though! Here, I’ll show you.” Jack began to construct a wall, packing up bricks of snow with a shovel. “Come on, give me a hand here!”

But Ethan didn’t help. Instead, he stomped over to the other end of the yard and began to make a medieval castle fort. Jack just grumbled and continued making his Alamo fort. He’d show that stuck-up Ethan how cool *his* fort would be. He could just imagine his jaw dropping out of his face as he saw the true beauty of the Alamo.

But twenty minutes later when Jack peered over his wall, it was *his* jaw that dropped. Ethan had built a ten-foot-long wall that went well above his head, complete with turrets and draw-bridge, pieced together with a sled and a large rope. And he had just started. He was about to scream when Ethan walked over to his miniscule fort and made a long, low whistle.



Adam Jacobs, 11
Brooklyn Park, Minnesota



Zachary Meyer, 12
Shelby Township, Michigan

"Oh, what is it?" said Jack, punching the ground with his glove.

"Your fort is pretty good."

"Really?" Jack jumped up.

"Sure! I mean, come over and I'll show you how horrible *mine* is!" He dashed away behind his fort. Confused, Jack trotted after him. All *he* had built was a three-foot wall. Maybe Ethan's fort wasn't so cool after all! At that thought, he quickened his pace.

But when Jack came around the corner to the other side of Ethan's fort, he was nowhere to be seen. He checked the fort for tunnels and found none. It looked identical to the opposite side. "Ethan!" he said. No answer. "Ethan?"

Thunk! Jack looked over the wall, wide-eyed. His fort no longer existed. In its place stood a triumphant-looking Ethan. "Is this the grand Alamo?" he said.

"Why, you..." Jack's face burned red with anger. He picked up a snowball and chucked it clean across the yard, right into Ethan's face. Ethan screamed and fell over in surprise. Jack ran to the front of the yard, parallel to the street, and began to work on another fort, hurriedly packing chunks of snow on top of each other like clay to form a thin barrier. This meant war!

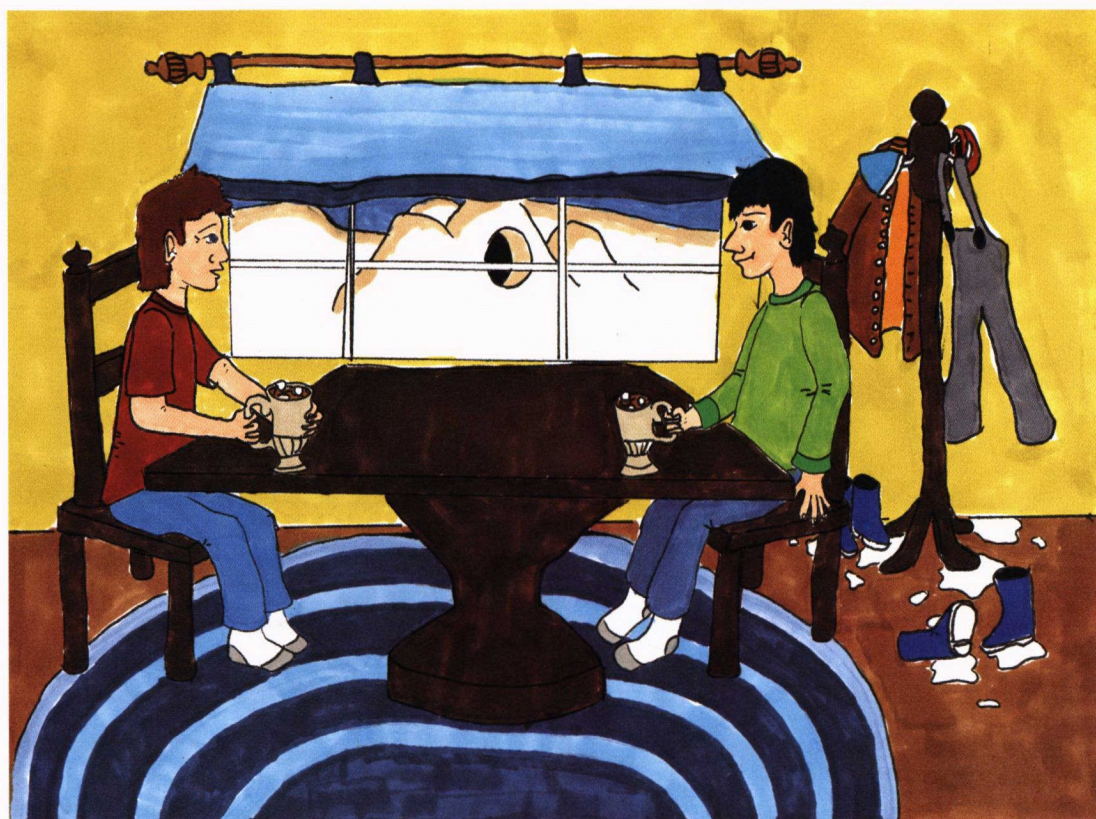
Meanwhile, Ethan stomped back once again to his little haven, wiping bits of the cold, melted snow off his face. Hidden from view, he began to make a large pile of snowballs. It wasn't Jack's nature to stop at this point. Once he had a good-sized pile of what he knew would be his friend's chilling defeat, he picked one up, stepped

out from behind the wall, got ready to throw, and shouted, "Hey, Jack!"

But Jack had been quicker to act. A second snowball hit Ethan smack dab in the middle of the face, knocking him to the ground with a thud. Ethan looked up to see Jack standing in front of a new three-foot wall, preparing for another throw. He was completely unaware of the snowplow looming ominously behind him, being driven by a man who seemed to think more about the color of the sprinkles on the doughnut he was eating than the safety of the local children. The snowplow made a loud groaning noise as it lifted its plow in order to dump a large snowbank over Jack and his fort.

The driver, still oblivious to his surroundings, backed up and continued down the street. Ethan turned to the pile of snow that now hid Jack's sneering figure. He could suffocate in there! He sprinted over as fast as his boots would allow and tore away at the bank with remarkable speed. But no sign of Jack. The snowbank had a very wide perimeter. In what area of it had he been buried? Ethan couldn't remember. Frantically he dug to the left, then to the right. How long could someone last under something as cold as this? A day? An hour? A minute? Finally he felt a solid object under the snow, and grabbed it and heaved it with all his might. Out popped Jack, shivering from the cold, but very much alive. "Are you OK?" said Ethan.

"Huh? Oh yeah, I guess... What just happened?"



Half an hour later, they both sat inside, sipping hot cocoa

"A snowplow came. You were buried alive!"

Jack's teeth chattered. "Would you mind going inside for a little? I'm freezing!"

HALF AN HOUR later, they both sat inside, sipping hot cocoa and look-

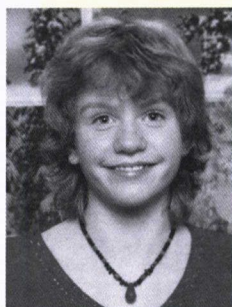
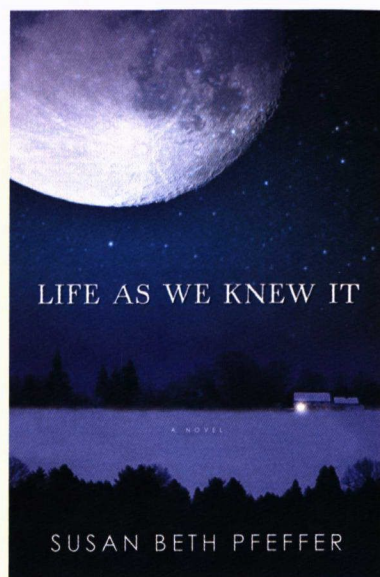
ing out at the hill of snow that the plow had dumped on the yard. "You know, Ethan, I'm feeling pretty warm again, and there is that new snowbank out front now..." he smiled and looked at Ethan. "Do you think we can build the Super Fort now?"

Ethan smiled too. "Let's get to work." ❁

Book Review

By Megan Kibler

Life As We Knew It by Susan Beth Pfeffer;
Harcourt Children's Books: New York, 2006;
\$17



Megan Kibler, 12
East Springfield,
Pennsylvania

MY FIRST IMPRESSION of the book *Life As We Knew It* was that it would be boring and drawn-out, judging by its number of pages and blunt plot. When I began reading it, I was mesmerized with the book's intensity and multiple problems that stemmed from the story's main conflict: an asteroid hitting the moon, knocking it closer to the earth and off its orbit. From that moment, life for Miranda, the main character, drastically changes as she, along with the rest of humanity, is burdened with the devastating aftereffects of the asteroid. First of all, natural disasters such as tsunamis are submerging peninsulas all across the globe, beginning the List of the Dead posted on the Internet. Scientists even announce that "the world is coming to an end."

Afterwards, Miranda and her family embark on a shopping spree to create a surplus of food in case this theory is true. I realized that things we can take for granted, such as clean drinking water, enough food to eat, and a comfortable home, have a huge impact on your life if affected.

As the plot continues, the results only become worse. Earthquakes occur, fatal viruses are common, weather patterns change, and heating oil along with electricity is hard to come

by. This disables phone and Internet connections, and the outside world's future seems closer to non-existence every day. I thought about what I valued and appreciated the opportunities I had each day.

I was also amazed at what Miranda has to cope with concerning her living situation. In order to conserve heat, they move into the living room and board up the windows. My house seemed much nicer in comparison, making me feel thankful.

As for the way the book was written, there were some pros and cons to it. I thought the format of the story, which was written as if it were Miranda's diary, seemed very engaging and made you feel as if you were going through the same struggle that she was. However, her account was too detailed with repetitive thoughts such as being hungry or bored that didn't contribute to the plot and made it less appealing to the reader because of the day-to-day format. Some topics that the author focused upon were dedication to your family, dealing with forced situations, and how a crisis has a different affect on each person.

This book made me realize something important: we should pay attention to our surroundings and to what is going on in the world, such as the war in Iraq or the world hunger issue. These events may not affect us, but we should know about them because one day, unexpectedly, something similar could happen in our country. Another current problem is the effect of global warming, which is the heating of the earth's atmosphere because of the carbon dioxide released from motor vehicles, factories, and the overuse of electricity. Although it seems an asteroid won't be colliding with the earth any time soon, global warming is having the same impact—only gradually—on our planet.

With its wonderful morals and intricate plot, *Life As We Knew It* is a book that everyone should read. ❀



And now, I was going to be late for my riding class, all because of Amber

Ashie

By Rie Maeda

Illustrated by Gwyneth Welch

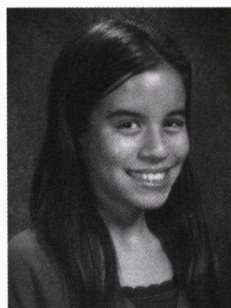
“DAD,” I WHINED, stomping the sole of my new black riding boots into the hard pavement of the driveway, feeling my heel grinding into the small pebbles. “Can we go to the stable yet?”

I tugged on the handle of my dad’s old pickup truck, yearning to open the door, hop in, and drive off.

“Ashlyn, honey, I’m just trying to snap the buckle on Amber’s riding helmet. You’re going to have to be patient.”

I looked over at my dad who was wrestling with my ten-year-old sister, Amber, trying to wiggle the glossy blue helmet over her tight blond curls. Amber laughed and squirmed as my dad tried to buckle the little childproof snap on the helmet. Finally, Amber pulled away from both the helmet and my dad’s grasp. She ran away screaming and giggling around the back of the house, her curls flying, her blue eyes sparkling, trying to find a place to hide. My dad stood there with the helmet and sighed. He looked over at me, shrugged helplessly as if to say, What can I do? and then ran after her, yelling, “I’m coming to get you!”

I sighed, leaning back against the cool window of the truck. I checked my watch. I had put on my own helmet exactly an hour ago. And now, I was going to be late for my riding class, all because of Amber. And wait a second—didn’t this same thing happen last week? And the week before that? Oh, and yesterday Amber scooped up the last spoon of mocha almond fudge ice cream that I had already called dibs on and Dad and Meredith didn’t get mad at her. And this morning, it wasn’t an



Rie Maeda, 13
Lexington, Massachusetts



Gwyneth Welch, 13
Hancock, New Hampshire

accident that she used up all the maple syrup on her pancakes, leaving none for me. I turned around and looked at my reflection in the glass window of the car. My straight chestnut-colored brown hair, my hazel brown eyes, and tanned skin seemed so blah next to Amber's little blond curls, glittering blue eyes, and pale complexion. Amber and I were on different ends of the spectrum. While I'm serious, Amber was exciting and funny. I'm smart, but Amber acts like a ditzy, cute ten-year-old. When Amber's in the room, all the adults kiss her and pinch her cheeks and coo over her. When I'm in the room, the adults ignore me, or they start including me in their horribly boring adult conversations about global warming or what muffins are on sale at the market. When Amber grows up, she's probably going to be an old, happy woman, her big house filled with friends and family who adore her and look up to her. I'm probably going to be the little maid who sits in the corner of the room, whom nobody is paying attention to. I'm always overshadowed by Amber.

I turned my back to the car and to my relief, I saw my dad streaking out around the side of the house, carrying a laughing Amber in his arms. He buckled her up in the back seat of the pickup and said, "Come on, Ashlyn. Hop in."

Finally. I pulled open the passenger door and sat in the leather seat. I leaned back and relaxed. I was on my way to my favorite place. The stable. When my mom died five years ago, I wanted to do something or have something that would

make me feel connected to her. Out of his grief, my dad had hidden all of my mom's possessions so he wouldn't have to look at them. I didn't dare ask my dad about Mom. So, I asked my grandmother, who told me that Mom was a champion horsewoman. So, I asked my dad for horse-riding lessons and a pass to the local stable. My dad had been a bit hesitant at first. He didn't want to go back to the stable, or see horses. They brought back memories of him and Mom that he didn't want to see anymore. But Meredith, my stepmom, had coaxed him into letting me start lessons. Meredith is so sweet and nice. I can't see how that little devil sitting behind me is related to her. Then, I realized that the little devil was talking to me.

"Hey, Ashlyn? Ashlyn? Hello? Anyone home? Ashlyn?"

I reluctantly turned around to face her.

"Oh there you are," she giggled her innocent little laugh. "Were you daydreaming? I don't know how to daydream. Billy Morrison at school daydreams. It's so funny. The teacher calls on him and he's always daydreaming so he's not paying attention so he's always like 'what?' Do you think Billy Morrison is cute, Ashlyn? I do, he's so funny. And he likes strawberries. Daddy? Daddy? Can we get strawberries on the way home? The juicy red kind? Billy Morrison likes strawberries and I wanna be just like him and I wanna learn how to daydream like Billy and Ashlyn. Oooh—we're going to horseback riding! Yay! I hope Victoria lets me ride Dreamer today. I love Dreamer. Her mane is all

smooth and shiny and Victoria lets me brush it. Do you think I'll be able to ride the advanced trail today? Do you? Do you? I hope so 'cause Victoria said I will be able to soon. What's soon? Is soon in five years? Or in ten? Or is it in one month? Or one week? Is soon right now? Daddy, I..."

I groaned, slipping back in my seat, slouching way down. I could still hear her voice from way down here, my ear to the leather seat, her voice rushing through the air all around us, sounding like an annoying little bird chirping.

"Dad, make her stop," I moaned. Oh yeah, that's one thing I forgot to mention. My stepsister is a chatterbox times one billion. Talking is one of her necessities like eating and breathing. If there were a sport in the Olympics for talking, my stepsister would take not just the gold, but the silver, and bronze too. And what's worse is that her voice is just so absolutely annoying. It's sweet and airy and it always makes the parents squeal and coo over her. To the parents, Amber's a jewel. To me, she's a nightmare. She's like a little tic that clings to you.

My dad turned toward me and said, "Ashlyn, honey, sit up please. That's dangerous. And please," he said, lowering his voice, "Amber's just a little kid learning about the world. Let her talk. She just wants everyone to like her."

Little? Did he just call Amber little? She's ten years old, not four. She's only two years younger than me. And everyone likes Amber. Before, I was my dad's little star. And now, I reckon Amber is. She al-

ways steals all the attention. Oh and yeah, sure, Amber so wants to be like me. As if.

AFTER ABOUT the longest hour of my whole life, we finally arrive at Happy Horse Stable. Ignore the name. They're one of the top ten best stables in the country.

I jumped out of the car, relieved to be out of that little box I was trapped in with Amber. I ran over to Victoria, the owner of the stable.

"Victoria, I'm so sorry I'm late," I panted breathlessly. "I..."

"Yoo-hoo, Victoria," a way too familiar voice chirped. "It's me."

I turned around and had to jump out of the way to avoid knocking into Amber, who ran straight towards Victoria and into her arms for a big hug. Victoria laughed and lifted Amber into the air. She then put her back down.

"Well if it isn't princess Amber," Victoria bent down and cooed, sounding like a teacher talking to a preschooler. "What would you like to do today, darling?"

"I wanna ride Dreamer," Amber squealed, with a big angelic smile.

"Oh, all right," Victoria said kindly, "Come on, sweetie. Let's go get Dreamer." She lifted Amber onto her shoulder and they walked off around the corner of the stable, leaving me standing in the dried mud. I sighed and walked slowly into the stable. I walked over to Camila, my favorite horse. I had named her after my real mom. I stroked her long mane and she whinnied. I pulled a carrot out of my pock-



I felt like a princess riding a unicorn over a high cliff and onto the other side

et, and held it out to her. I giggled as she crunched the carrot, licking my fingers, and tickling my hand with her soft velvety nose. I led her out of her room and out of the stable. I hopped on her and kicked her side. She trotted quickly through the spacious grassy pasture to where my class was being held. They were all huddled in a little circle, talking strategy.

"Ashlyn, over here!" my teacher, Marilyn, called, lifting her head up and beckoning me over to the circle of horses and kids. All the other kids lifted their heads and smiled at me.

"Hey Ashlyn!" everyone called. I smiled happily, feeling relaxed and happy. I felt like I belonged.

"Ashlyn, we're working on jumps today. And I was just telling everyone about that jump you showed me yesterday at private lessons. Since you are our star, can you demonstrate a jump for the class?"

"Sure," I said, glad to demonstrate my skills. I had been horseback riding for about four years and I was already the best rider at Happy Horse Stable. I had won five national horse-jumping competitions and my shelf at home was covered in medals, trophies, ribbons, and certificates. The stable was my second home. I turned Camila around and we trotted over to the jumping spot. I positioned Camila on the starting line. I leaned forward, seeing the jumping bar about twenty yards away. I anticipated the rush of air I felt as I jumped. As everyone watched, I dug into Camila's sides and she shot off. We shot off for about nineteen yards. Then, we

took air, sailing high over the bar and into the air. I felt like a princess riding a unicorn over a high cliff and onto the other side. We slowly descended five yards away from the bar, hitting the ground delicately. I flushed with pride. There was complete silence. I began to panic. What had I done wrong? Suddenly, my class burst into applause, cheering and clapping, whooping and hollering. Marilyn's face was shining with pride. Finally, after about five minutes, the applause died off. I smiled with complete satisfaction. But then, my smile slowly slid off my face as I heard cheering in the direction of Amber's class. I looked over to see Amber on her horse, standing next to a miniature jump, which she had apparently just cleared. Her class was cheering and clapping. I could hear Victoria shouting, "You're going to be our next Happy Horse stablewoman!" My face turned grim. My throat tingled, like I was going to start crying. The pit in my stomach grew deeper. I had had it with Amber. There was going to be only one champion here. And that champion would be me.

THE NEXT WEEK at lessons, to my utter disappointment, Victoria allowed Amber to go with my advanced class on the advanced trails at Sunnapeak Woods, a large woods located next to the five-acre land plot of Happy Horse Stable. All it took from Amber was a hug, some smiles, and lots of giggles, and Victoria said yes. I groaned under my breath when Amber galloped up next to me and started chattering away about some new thing or

another that had happened at school. I quickly started ahead of the group, galloping Camila over fallen trees, through the rough advanced trail. Roots grew up from the ground dangerously. I shivered. Even though the sun was shining brightly, it was getting a bit chilly. I wrapped my sweater closer around me and hugged myself into Camila for warmth. After another hour of riding, I approached a running brook about four yards wide. This was going to be a jumping challenge. I anticipated the flying feeling. At the signal, Camila shot forward and we sailed high over the brook. As we landed I felt that same happy feeling, a feeling that I had done something right. Then, I heard a voice from very near call, "Ashlyn? Ashlyn?"

I turned around and looked across the brook to see Amber sitting on her horse right next to the water's edge. Amber smiled, delighted to see me. I moaned. She had followed me!

"What, Amber?" I cried, exasperated. "What do you want now? Did you have to follow me? It was bad enough that you were even put in the advanced class group! You aren't even good enough to be in my group. You just charmed Victoria into getting into the advanced group! You've ruined my life! You took all the attention away from me! Look at what you've done!"

I gasped, clapping my hand to my mouth. Had I really just said that aloud? Amber's face closed in. Her bottom lip trembled. Her nose scrunched up. Her eyes filled with small pools of tears.

"Amber, I..." I started. "I didn't mean to..."

"Well, I'll show you," Amber said in a quiet voice.

She turned around and trotted off. I thought she was going to turn around back to the farm, but then about twenty yards from the brook she stopped, turned around, and positioned her horse. She dug in and the horse galloped off towards the brook again. I knew what was happening before it happened.

"Amber, no!" I cried. "No, Amber, you don't know how to jump this far!"

Her eyes were now more determined than ever. She was four yards from the brook, three yards, two yards, and then it happened. Dreamer's foot caught on a root sticking out of the ground. Her back leg twisted and she fell down, whinnying. Amber bumped off the horse and flew into the air, screaming. "Help! Ashlyn! Help!" she cried.

I jumped off of Camila and ran towards where Amber didn't land into my arms on land. The air carried her down with a big splash into the brook. She didn't come up. "Amber!" I screamed hysterically. "Amber!"

Then, to my relief, Amber's head poked up out of the water. She was panting and bobbing up and down. The current was picking up speed. Amber sailed with the water, down the brook, bobbing up and down, screaming.

"Swim to the side, Amber! Over to me!" I cried, running down the edge of the brook, bending towards the water's edge,

holding out my arms.

"I can't swim!" Amber yelled.

I knew what I had to do. I dove into the cold water, not caring if I was going to be soaking or not. I swam quickly with the current towards Amber, the distance between us growing smaller and smaller. I grabbed her hand and pulled her close to me. Then, I swam to the shore. I pushed her up onto the shore and then pulled myself out, dripping and panting. We both sat quietly on the shore for a while, shivering from the cold.

"Ashie?" Amber finally broke the silence. I looked around. Who was Ashie? Amber tugged on my arm. "Ashie?" I looked down at her big blue eyes. I was Ashie. At that moment, I felt something

I couldn't describe. I don't know. I guess maybe a mix of relief, joy, and compassion.

"Yes?" I said in a soft voice.

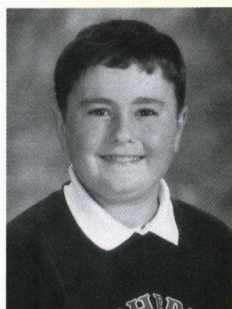
"Ashie, I... I love you," Amber said in a soft voice.

At that moment, I realized something. Amber and I weren't totally different. We both knew exactly what to say at the right time. I looked down at Amber, shivering, huddled in the cold. I put my arm around her and pulled her in tight. "I love you too," I whispered, so just she could hear. And there I sat, on the edge of a rushing brook, the grass moist with our drops, the sun shining through the trees, a slight breeze whistling through the forest, with my stepsister. No, actually, my sister, Amber.



But Still It Waits

By **Nicholas Bonavolonta**



Nicholas Bonavolonta, 12
Oakland, California

A tree
Waiting
Standing high, drinking water
Through its mighty roots
Near a river
Shimmering blue
As smooth as glass
It watches the leaves fall
And quickly swept away by the river
Swept far, far away
But still it waits

Its branches blow gently
Back and forth
A fish jumps out of the water
Glistening in the sun
The tree wonders
What it is like underwater?
But still it waits

The tree hears birds flying
Near its branches
Taunting it
By flying far away
And coming back
The tree wants to explore
Wants to see the world around
But still it waits

It is now afternoon
And the tree looks around
It sees the beauty of what is around it
It longs to see what is down the river
Or over the mountain
But still it waits



It was just the perfect day to run

A Winter Walk

By Emina S. Sonnad

Illustrated by the author

IT WAS ONE of those winter days that seemed much more like spring. There had been a storm yesterday but the only trace of it now was the slightly dark mist suspended in the vast open sky. Weak sunlight crept through the open windows, casting a timid sort of light throughout the room and a quiet chirping of birds could almost be heard outside in the maple tree. It was just one of those days begging for me to go outside and find out what it would bring.

"Will someone take Scooter for a walk?" I heard Mama call. Jumping up, I skipped down the stairs two at a time, grabbing our dachshund's leash as I flew down the hallway.

"I will!" I called out loudly.

As I found our little puppy snoozing on the couch I approached him quietly, not wanting to startle him, and then whispered gently, "Hey, little guy. Do you feel like going outside with me today?" Which was of course a very unnecessary question, considering the fact that he was already starting to wake up, wagging his tail excitedly.

"I take that as a yes, then," I said happily, picking him up and burying my face in his warm fur.

Outside the weather was cold and crisp, but at the same time there was a type of warmth in the air that filled me up like a helium balloon, so that I was so full of happiness I might have lifted off of the ground. I tugged gently on the leash and then whispered softly, "Come on, little guy. Let's run!"

And with that we were off, racing against the wind that was



Emina S. Sonnad, 12
Ojai, California

whipping my long hair out behind me. We were racing against the sunlight that trickled towards us gently, creeping serenely into my little puppy's eyes, illuminating his look of sheer delight. It was just the perfect day to run. I looked over to my side to marvel at how Scooter's long back and powerful little legs could propel him forward so quick and gracefully. I was laughing inside, as his big, silky ears flapped like maple leaves in a windstorm. He was panting slightly, and I realized that I was too. Our breath turned into small little clouds that teased us and then floated away wispily, finally diffusing into the rest of the foggy air.

The grass beneath my shoes was crunching slightly and I was amazed at the thin layer of frost that laced every single blade of grass, big or small. I thought of how not a blade was left bare, how incredible it was that every piece was wrapped in the tiny little ice crystals.

We ran for a while, until our hearts

pounded like drums. The chilly air started to sting my throat like a sharp knife piercing through my neck, down my throat, and into my heaving lungs. The dog was so swift, it was hard to keep up, but gradually his pace was slowing down. His eyes were widening in concentration as he looked up at me, signaling that our walk was now over. I nodded, unable to muster the breath required to speak, and turned towards home. One step at a time, we worked our way back to the front door. Then I turned to my beloved puppy.

"Oh Scooter, I love you so much. What would I do without you?"

My little dog's eyes dilated and he raised a paw hopefully. I put my hand out, and he jumped into my arms. I hugged him tightly and felt his soft fur against my face. Then I carried him inside the house where he knew that warmth, love, and dog biscuits would always be there for him. And he would be there, for us. ❀



Parachute Prom

By **Emily Waxman**

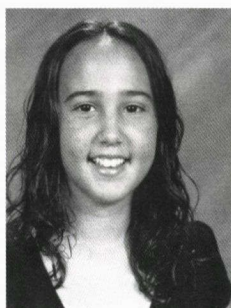
Illustrated by **Adele Hall**

I TWIRL AROUND and around in front of my mirror. I quickly smooth out the crinkles beginning to form on the beautiful silk dress. Glancing at my face I notice a stray hair and quickly pin it back into place. Reapplying a coat of lipstick, I nervously look at my dress one last time. It is beautiful.

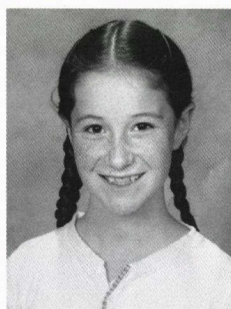
I am filled with pride I cannot explain. Just three weeks ago it was an old dirty silk parachute, filled with memories of a war that we thought would never happen. Filled with memories of the terror my brothers experienced when they dropped behind enemy lines. Filled with memories of the dread they experienced if the Germans found them. However, even these feelings of worry cannot overwhelm my feeling of eagerness to wear the dress.

I savor the way the silk slips through my hands like warm butter against my skin. The top hugs me tightly then carefully flows into a billowing skirt. It has been gathered in at places to give it a ruffled look. The dove-white silk carefully accents my tan skin. Just like this happiness accents the hardness that I have gone through in my life.

Behind me in the mirror I see my room. It is a mess from all my getting ready. I see shoes strewn about, towels flung on the floor, and a whole slew of makeup, bobby pins, and the little jewelry I have. Behind that I glimpse my childhood pictures of chocolate cakes with pink icing and fairy-tale cities that existed only in my wildest dreams. Old birthday cards and letters from close friends fill me with nostalgia. My eyes fill with tears as I think of how happy I feel. I remember the times that led up to this moment.



Emily Waxman, 10
Los Angeles, California



Adele Hall, 11
Simi Valley, California



This is the moment I have been waiting for and now it has finally come

I remember that it was a Saturday afternoon and I was in the living room getting fitted for the dress. I watched my mother carefully to be sure she wouldn't stick me with her pins. I watched those graceful hands gather the silk tight across my front to show off a slim figure. The

dress was starting to look like a dress and less like the parachute that it was. The dove-white silk hugged my body carefully as I imagined the prom. I looked out the window and saw our yard in full bloom. The flowers were bright colors and the grass green. Shifting my gaze to inside the

house I saw my sister carefully doing her homework. A little beyond that I saw my youngest brother reading intently a book called *The Odyssey*. It was about his tenth time reading it. Out of the corner of my eye I saw my grandmother washing the dishes. I can still hear her humming an old tune her mother had sung to her on their farm in Greece when she was a little girl. However, even through all that happiness on that day, I still remembered the fit I had when I heard I was to be wearing a silk parachute to the senior prom.

I was crying. I was crying and I could not stop. I had made sacrifices my whole life but for once I was hoping to have something for me. I ran to my room and I slammed the door. All I was thinking of was the dirty parachute in a box with all of the other things that my brother had brought back from the war. It was festering away in a dark corner of the hall closet in all of its gory glory. The bullet holes from where it had been shot at showed proudly. The smell was unbearable; it was a mixture of dirty muddy grass, and sweat.

I had thought, Father, don't think of me as selfish, but why did you leave us with nobody to bring in money? Why couldn't you have held on for the good of your family? I had thought that before but never as fiercely as then. If he had not died so suddenly, I remember thinking, Mother would have enough money to buy me a new dress and she wouldn't have to work. I realize now that those initial reac-

tions were silly, but at the time it seemed so important. Now, I wonder, do I deserve this dress?

Our family is poor and it was so even before Father died. He lost his restaurant job and he went to work in the shipyards, which didn't exactly make him want to go to work each day. And then Alex and Perry went to war and we didn't hear from them. Three months after they came home, Father died.

And here I was thinking that my mother's best effort wasn't good enough for me to wear. I don't think that now. This is the moment I have been waiting for and now it has finally come. I survey myself with a critical eye. I can't help but feel happy with the young woman I see staring back at me. With one last glance at myself, I open the door. ❀

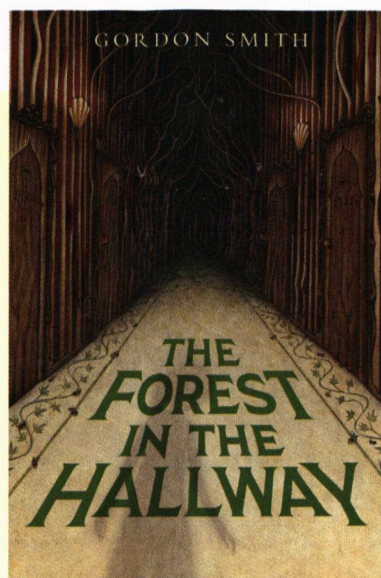
AUTHOR'S FOOTNOTE

THIS STORY WAS inspired by a real person and a real dress! Helen Phillips wore this prom dress in January of 1946. She still has the dress that was made from her brother Alex's silk parachute. Alex Phillips was in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II when he parachuted into Greece to help the resistance fighters. Helen's granddaughter Emily first heard this story in the fall of 2005 when she was ten years old and her grandmother was seventy-five.

Book Review

By Anya Josephs

The Forest in the Hallway by Gordon Smith;
Clarion Books: New York, 2006; \$16



Anya Josephs, 12
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

YOU CAN'T JUDGE a book by its cover. How many times have you heard that phrase? Still, when I picked up *The Forest in the Hallway*, I took a good look at the cover and thought, Looks OK. I was incredibly, absolutely wrong. I was expecting an average fantasy book. This one is extraordinary.

The wonder begins in the first eight pages, where Gordon Smith introduces Beatriz. She seems like a nice, normal girl in a bad situation. Her parents have recently disappeared. Not a lot of details about her are given, but, in that first chapter, I get the feeling that she's a sweet, smart, obedient girl.

Beatriz reacts to her problems the same way I would. She deals with her loneliness and fear by thinking and watching the city outside her window, as well as thinking sarcastic things about her Uncle M, who's taking care of her.

When a strange face tells her to go to the nineteenth floor, she does, seeking adventure. Here, in a forest-like hallway, she meets the great character of Death, who needs some help collecting a witch. Death is a perfect mix of creepiness and humor. He's funny, and almost kind, but continually reminds Beatriz that he is Death with small, unsettling habits and comments


(for example, he wears a black, hooded robe).

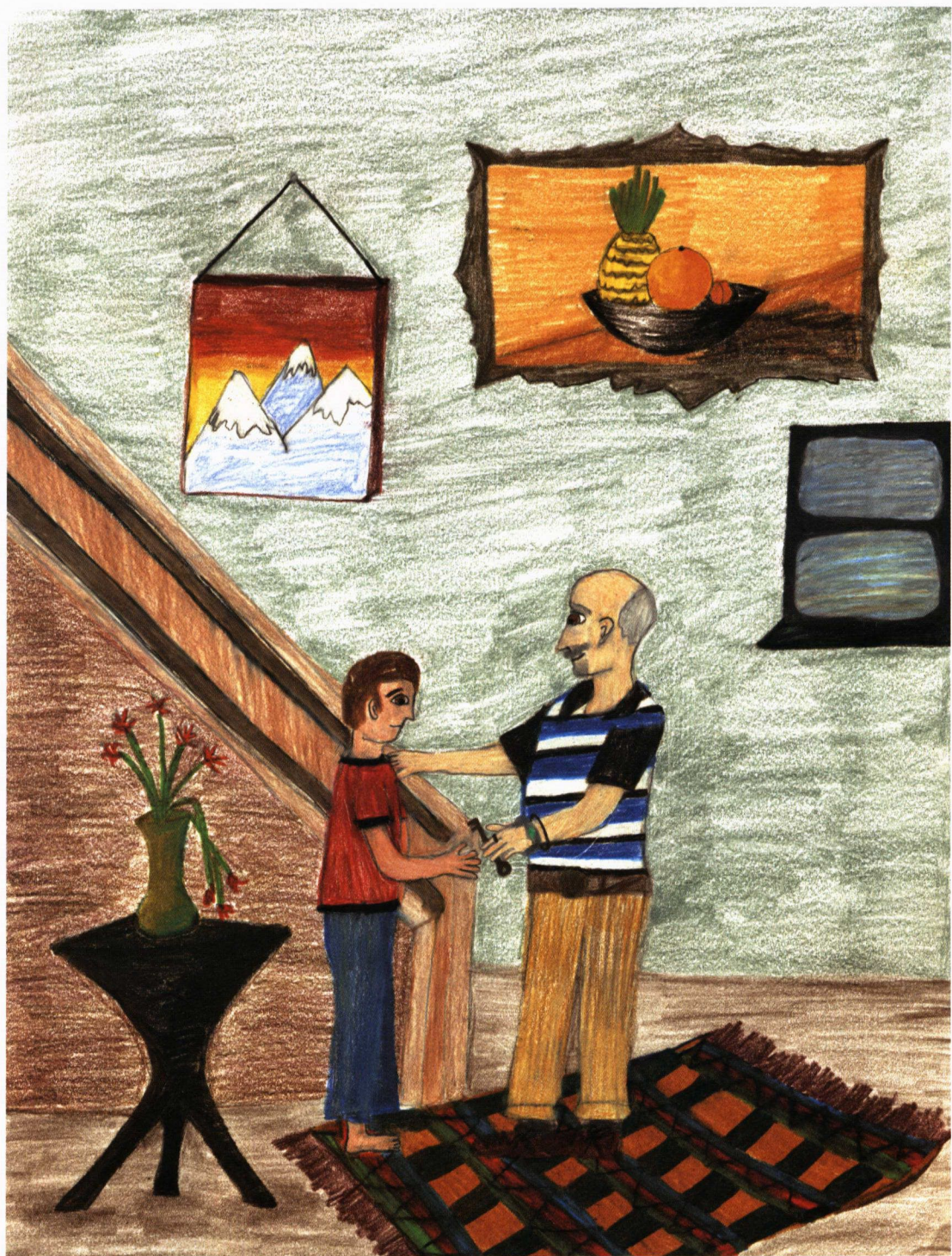
Other fabulous characters are Rose, a winged woman, and her two children, Pyramus and Thisby. Rose is sarcastic and tough, and her wings at first unsettle Beatriz. However, it's clear she loves her children and wants to help. Pyramus and Thisby are silly, kind children. They remind me of Sarah and Claire, two little girls in my neighborhood who treat me like I'm their best friend and are always eager to share things with me. I think it's very realistic that these two enthusiastic kids are even bored by their adventure. I am especially fond of Pyramus and Thisby because I'm in a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where two characters are named Pyramus and Thisby.

This book touches on some big issues. For example, Beatriz is at first afraid of Rose, Pyramus, and Thisby, because they have wings. I think this is how the author mentions the issue of racism. By allowing Beatriz to gradually become good friends with Rose and her children, he also shows that it's silly to fear people who look different.

However, it's the little touches that really bring this book to life, for example, "Beatriz loved animals. She wouldn't even kill insects, but she made an exception for mosquitoes." I have said the exact same thing to some of my friends. I'm a vegetarian, but I loathe mosquitoes.

This book is hilarious. I laughed out loud at least five times while reading it. Angela, the villain, is a great character. She's distinctly evil, but funny, with traits such as wearing really ugly clothes (think miniskirt, pink fuzzy sweater and white tights). She's much more realistic than a villain who's just cruel.

I heartily recommend this book to everyone. The journey of one normal girl through a host of hilariously harrowing adventures will fascinate you through its humor, imagery, character, and details. 



"Here, take this key as well. It may do you some good in unlocking those other worlds"

Journeys to the Past

By Annakai Hayakawa Geshlider

Illustrated by the author

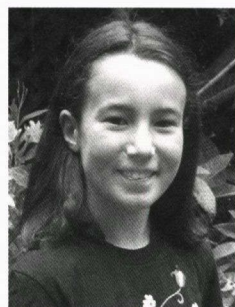
THE FLOOR CREAKED as Simon crept through his grandparents' attic towards a large chest in the corner of the room that had caught his eye. In the dusty attic, cobwebs hung from the shelves and bookcases and a thick layer of dust blanketed the mildew-covered furniture. As he timidly tiptoed towards the chest, Simon felt an air of complete silence in the small room, a feeling that the whole world was waiting for him to discover what lay ahead. Carefully raising the key to the large brass lock that secured the maple-wood chest, Simon slowly turned it between his fingers. The key felt smooth and cool, and it fit perfectly in the keyhole. A satisfactory "click" sounded from the chest and he lifted the lid.

Inside it was filled with many magnificent treasures: loads and loads of books. His eyes feasted upon the sight and he immediately reached for one of the musty spines, caution instantly gone from his body. And it was only a few moments later when Simon realized that what lay before him were not normal books.

"Tuesday, December 23, 1986," he read aloud into the dimly lit room. Once again he could almost feel the whole room listening to him. The ancient furniture, the peeling wallpaper covering the cracked walls, and even the spiders stopped weaving their webs to listen to Simon's eloquent voice. Simon was good at reading aloud, and he knew it, for when he read aloud, he could nearly bring the words alive.

"Dear Diary," he continued to his audience.

"I know you aren't much of a book, just a few old scraps



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San Francisco, California



Deep sympathy filled his heart for the writer of the tattered diary

bound together, but that was all I could find, just like everything is all I could find. When we are still hungry after dinner it is because those few scraps of meat and broken crackers were all I could find, and when we are cold at night it is because the small knit blanket was all I could find. That is the way we live, and I can't do much to change it. Every day I try, looking for an odd job or collecting coins on the busy sidewalks. The way it is is not easy, but the way it is is the way it is."

Simon paused for a moment. Deep sympathy filled his heart for the writer

of the tattered diary. He was so intrigued that he read on.

"My family and I may not have it well off, sleeping in the park, scavenging for scraps of food, begging for money on the streets. Yet every day it seems that I have my children to remind me that I can still be a happy man. In fact, when I think about it, I am happier than most men. I have my family, and whether we don't have much to eat or not, we are still together. We have our own kind of riches."

The end of the entry made Simon's mind churn. Although he had not met the

man, he felt that he already knew him very well. Simon tried to imagine his own family living that way. All his life he had lived in the same house with a roof over his head. His parents had cooked him meals and bought him things. He could never remember his family being desperate. The silence in the room urged Simon to think to himself, and inside he knew he had changed.

AS HE GENTLY placed the dirty diary onto the floor beside him, Simon began to wonder why his grandparents had the chest in their attic. And how had they obtained the diary of the man? He had been exploring for good books around the house earlier that day when his grandpa had suggested that he look up in the attic. "Who knows what you'll find up there," he had told his grandson. "When your grandmother closed down the shop all the books came with us. Here, take this key as well. It may do you some good in unlocking those other worlds."

Simon had taken the key from his grandpa's wrinkled hand and thanked him. He didn't question him on what he had been told. He knew it was up to him to find out what was up there. It was more fun that way. It was more fun for him to discover the chest himself, and whatever mysteries lay behind it and inside it. It's up to me, he thought to himself as he reached into the chest and pulled out another book. As he was opening the front cover, he heard a soft knock on the attic door and in walked his grandma.

"Jonah told me he'd given you the key,"

she said with a tiny smile on her lips and a subtle sparkle in her eyes. "And it's about time we showed it to you," she added. She walked over to where Simon was sitting on a corduroy cushion and seated herself next to him. "I see you've found Oscar's diary," she said, pointing to the one he had just been reading, which was lying open on the floor.

"You know him?" Simon asked incredulously.

"He's a very good friend of mine," his grandma told him. "This diary from when he was living on the streets became published as a book, with help from me and everyone else at the publishing house. And I'm the lucky owner of the original copy," she informed him proudly.

"How'd you meet the guy? Oscar, I mean."

His grandma began to weave her tale.

"While I was on my way to the subway station to visit your grandfather some twenty years ago, I saw a man alongside the sidewalk who was trying to sharpen a stubby pencil on the concrete. In his other hand he was holding a small book. I was in a hurry to see Jonah after he'd had his surgery, but I was also interested in the man and offered to help him.

"Once I'd sharpened the pencil for him with my Swiss army knife, the one that you own now, Simon," she added, "and emptied my pockets of quarters, the man and I exchanged names and conversation. He told me about how he'd been writing in a diary that he'd made himself. I told him about a friend of mine who was look-

ing for someone to clean his supermarket, and for good pay, too. By the time I'd finished, the smile stretching across his face was so big, I could count every one of his teeth."

Simon liked the way his grandma told stories, how she spoke different people's voices and how her face and hands moved with the story. At times her voice was compelling or grim; at others it was enticing and pleasant. It made Simon feel good to think how his grandma had helped Oscar so much.

The two of them spent the rest of the evening poring over the huge collection of diaries and journals in the chest. Some of them had been given to his grandma by people she had met, but most of them she had found or bought. There were around fifteen books in the chest, and together they spent hour after hour reading them and discovering the lives of their authors.

THERE WAS a small journal in the chest that was covered in a thin layer of faded blue fabric. Simon fished it out from underneath the others and handed it to his grandma. "This is one of the older ones," she told him, and it was not hard to tell. Inside the yellowing pages were wrinkled and stained, and they were thin and delicate like the wings of a butterfly.

"I bought this one a couple of years ago after it had been found in Topaz, Arizona, where Japanese-Americans were interned during World War II. I haven't read it in a while, but if I remember correctly, the author is a ten-year-old girl who lived there.

Go on, you read it," his grandma said as she handed him the book. Beginning at the first entry, Simon began to read aloud once again, except this time he had a person before him of flesh and blood to hear his clear voice resonate throughout the room.

"April 14, 1942," he spoke firmly.

"Today we were loaded into buses and driven deep into the dusty, dry desert. We rode for at least five hours before I nodded off to sleep in my seat, and when we arrived the sun was just setting. Tachi's first breath of air sent him coughing and gasping for breath, and I have a feeling it's not going to be too good for his asthma up here. Sand blew everywhere, and the area was very barren except for the blocks of barracks where we were to sleep and the mess halls where we were to eat. When the buses drove away, my family and all the other families from the busload were left standing in what seemed like the middle of nowhere. There was not even a tree in sight.

"Once we found our assigned barrack, we worked together with some other families in our block to set up our blankets and cooking stoves. We also stuffed some straw into the cracks in the walls, which helped to keep out the drafts at night, but not much.

"April 15, 1942.

"The next morning we lined up outside the mess hall to eat breakfast. It was early in the morning and I was still sleepy after staying up most of the night waiting in line with Tachi because he had to use the bathroom. It had been cold and dark and

slow, and I wished they'd built more toilets so there wouldn't be such a long wait. And here I was, having to wait in line once again. Hunger gnawed at my stomach because I hadn't eaten anything since yesterday morning. I also missed my parents. Otousan and Okaasan had gone to eat at another block's mess hall with a family that they'd known from Los Angeles. We almost always eat breakfast together. I tried not to think about them and focused on entertaining Tachi with goofy faces so he wouldn't become impatient.

"When we finally got our breakfast, which wasn't much of a breakfast at all, we found a table with some other kids who invited us to sit with them. I poked at my bowl of chewy rice with gooey pineapple slices on top. I tried a bit, just in case it tasted better than it looked, but it was so revolting in my mouth that I had to force myself to swallow it. I desperately wished for some soy sauce instead of canned pineapples.

"The boy, Yoshi, and the two girls, Anne and Sachiko, and I talked about what was going on. Tachi is too young to care, and he just chewed on his plastic fork.

"I hate being behind barbed wire,' Sachiko said. 'And there's always a guard watching us. We didn't even do anything wrong.' 'The government thinks we're communicating with Japan, but we are Americans too!' I said, a little too loudly, and Tachi stopped chewing his fork to look up at me. I began to get madder and madder as I thought about how unfair it all was. We had to sleep in tiny rooms, eat

uncooked food, and have guards watching us all the time. 'We'll see you tomorrow,' I told the other kids and I grabbed Tachi's hand and stepped out into the scorching hot sun. It pounded down on my back and burned my face. We are people too! I kept saying over and over again in my mind. And by the time we reached our barrack, we were both covered from head to toe in dust."

Simon's mind floated back into the present as he finished reading the entry. He had been reading for so long that both he and his grandma could almost feel the heat and the dust from the desert. They were both silenced for a few minutes as they thought about what the girl's past had been like. Simon's grandma ended the silence when she suggested, "I think you should read the next entry. I have to know what happens."

So as they plunged into the hot, dry past Simon's voice shaped the story once again.

"April 16, 1942.

"When Otousan and Okaasan returned home yesterday they brought with them some seeds that their friends had given them. 'We are going to start a garden,' Otousan announced. Tachi and I were overjoyed. It was just what we needed, right outside our barrack. Some other families in our block helped us to loosen up the soil, which was very hard work. The desert ground was packed down so hard that we spent all morning soaking it with water and upturning it with shovels. When it was finally loose enough to plant



We are people too! I kept saying over and over again in my mind

the seeds, Anne, Yoshi, Sachiko, Tachi and I got to dig little holes with our fingers and drop the seeds in. We then covered the holes with earth and watered our garden some more.

"Every day we are going to take turns watering the garden. First me, then Sachiko, Yoshi, Anne, and then Tachi, because he's littlest. Then we start over again. The grownups help us sometimes, but we do most of the work.

"Now we have something to look forward to and something to be excited about. Someday soon little sprouts will pop up and we will tend to them until they are full grown. The garden helps us forget about where we are and how bad it is, and it provides us with a small flame of happiness in the dark world. As the tiny seeds grow, so will that flame."

The end of the entry left Simon and his grandma deep in happiness and thought for the girl and her family in the internment camp. They had both been enchanted by the stories from her journal. We know her now, yet she's never met us, Simon thought to himself. He wondered if the girl had ever imagined that her journal would one day be read by others than herself.


"IT'S GETTING LATE," Simon's grandma told him. But we still have time for one more." She sorted through the chest and pulled out a large red hardcover

book that was still in very good condition. It had gold lining down the side which read "Property of Gladys Ferguson." On the inside the pages were filled with loopy marks from a ballpoint pen.

"June 10, 1995," Simon read with slight difficulty because the entry was written in longhand and he found it tricky to decipher the curvy, loopy lettering.

"Today's my birthday, my ninetieth, and since it's a round, whole number, everyone flew down from Michigan to feed me cake and flood me with presents. I'm not much of the party sort, being an old bag of bones and all, but it was enjoyable to spend time with my family. I may have been living for ninety years, but I've been blessed with the ability to still hold a fountain pen. Some say you can live life twice by writing in a journal: you can relive your experiences reading over them. Yessir, I think I could kill some time writing in this little blank book."

Simon closed the journal and placed it back in the chest. He was lost in thought. "She's quite a character, isn't she?" his grandma laughed, but Simon wasn't listening.

Live life twice, he thought to himself. Then he knew what he wanted to do. He would write in a journal so that he could know everything and learn everything. But most of all, he thought, he wanted to learn about himself. 

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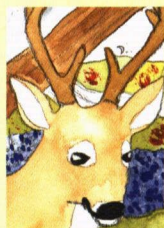
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