

the magazine by young writers and artists



"A Day in My Life: at Home, in School and with My Friends," by Veronica Triyasni, age 11, Indonesia

THE REAL MR. VANKOS

Is the new neighbor a madman? Lynn decides to find out for herself

THE HEALER'S APPRENTICE

Keris must say good-bye to her family and begin a new life

Also: Illustrations by Jane Westrick and Chavaya Beebee-Galvão

A boy feels strangely drawn to a family of wolves

A review of a book about Albert Einstein

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2000

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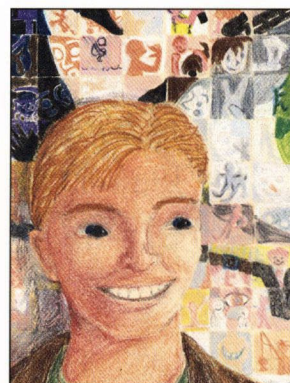
Stone Soup

the magazine by young writers and artists

Volume 29, Number 1
September/October 2000

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Stone Soup

the magazine by young writers and artists

Welcome to all our readers, old and new! We've had the pleasure of publishing *Stone Soup* for over 27 years. It is our belief that, by presenting rich, heartfelt work by young people the world over, we can stir the imaginations of our readers and inspire young writers and artists to create.



Contributors' Guidelines

Stone Soup welcomes submissions from young people through age 13. If you want us to respond to your submission, you must enclose a business-size self-addressed stamped envelope. If you want your work returned, your envelope must be large enough and have sufficient postage for the return of your work. (Foreign contributors need not include return postage.) Contributors whose work is accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope will hear from us within four weeks. Mail your submission to *Stone Soup*, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Include your name, age, home address, and phone number. If you are interested in reviewing books for *Stone Soup*, write Gerry Mandel for more information. Tell her a little about yourself and the kinds of books you like to read. If you would like to illustrate for *Stone Soup*, send Ms. Mandel some samples of your art work, along with a letter saying what kinds of stories you would like to illustrate. Here's a tip for all our 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.



Jessie Moore, 12

Cover: Veronica Triyasni made her painting when she was a student in a special after-school art program at the Sanggar Melati Suci (Pure Jasmine Studio) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia; the teacher is A. Hari Santosa. Special thanks to Joseph Fischer of Berkeley, California.

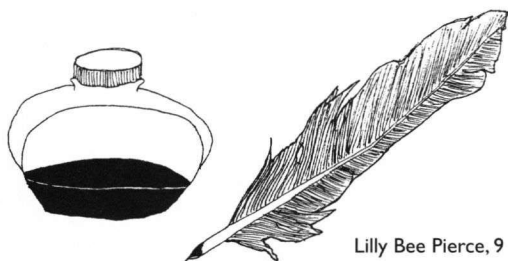
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Lilly Bee Pierce, 9

The Mailbox

I recently started checking out your magazine at my public library. I just finished reading the March/April 1999 issue, and let me tell you, "Pain, Pride, Prejudice" by Anna Wong was one of the best stories I have ever read. Nobody should have to live through prejudice, but what happened to Rowena was downright horrible. I have no clue how anyone could have enough nerve to be so cruel. My only complaint is, at the end of the story, Rowena should have reported what happened to her. Other than that, it was great!

Lisa Matthies, 10
West Bend, Wisconsin

I have been an avid reader of *Stone Soup* for many years. One of the stories that shows an impressive amount of both talent and creativity is Sarah Shissler's story from your July/August 2000 issue, "Lakota." I have enormous interest in the topic. Sarah used advanced vocabulary, beautiful imagery, and excellent descriptions, which made me feel like I was there. Her illustrations enhanced this feeling. This is a fantastic piece of writing.

Tara C. Stroll, 14
Roslyn Heights, New York

My first issue of *Stone Soup* was the May/June 2000. I had to make comments on two stories. One was "Robbie" by Emma A. Lunbeck. That was my favorite story in the issue! All of them were good, but Emma had a page-turning way of writing the story. In my favorite part of the story it said, "Smiling back at my mother, I slipped Robbie's ring onto my finger. I'll be back, Robbie. I'll be back." That was an awesome ending, Emma! Keep writing! You're really good at it. And to Jane Westrick, you made the most beautiful pictures that I've ever seen!

The other one I wanted to comment on was "The Wild Mare" by Emily Villano. This girl had an extremely huge vocabulary for her age! Her story was sad, yet very magical. She describes the land of the horses so beautifully. I guarantee you that some day, that girl is going to be a very famous, talented, and popular writer!

Madeline Kyle, 11
Westford, Massachusetts

Of all the great artists and young writers that stand out in my mind, one sparkles with talent—the illustrator of "Robbie," Jane Westrick. The story is also very heartfelt, and in the drawings Jane Westrick showed everything like you were looking through her eyes.

Hannae Syd Pavlick, 12
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Thank you for the wonderful experience *Stone Soup* is giving me. Each new story is more than a bunch of words for me—it is someone else's life (real or created), and by illustrating it, I feel like I'm part of that too. I can't wait to meet the new characters I will illustrate, I love this!

Jane Westrick, 12
Mechanicsville, Virginia

See "The Real Mr. Vankos" on page 5 for Jane's latest illustrations.

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.



"Who would do such an absurd thing?" Anita muttered early one morning as she was ironing my shirt

The Real Mr. Vankos

by Laura Aberle

illustrated by Jane Westrick

WHEN MR. VANKOS painted a giant portrait of himself on the side of his house, I heard many mentions of him being totally out of his mind. Everyone in my neighborhood had a house of solid color with shutters of the opposite shade. It seemed to anger them that someone would paint their house more than two colors, like it was a sacred tradition to be dead boring. With so many people against him, I had no reason to disagree with the statement.

My natural curiosity got the better of me, though, as usual. For as long as I could remember I had been expected to find things to do, to play by myself if I must. My parents were always working and I was left alone with Anita, who had her hands full with all the housework, and my three younger brothers. When my friends weren't available, or when no one could drive me somewhere, I would just wander around and try to catch pieces of conversations between the neighbors or see who was putting a new addition on their house next. So I have always been extremely curious—even nosy—and I was no less than captivated by the strange man with the colorful house.

"Who would do such an absurd thing?" my nanny Anita muttered early one morning as she was ironing my shirt. "That lunatic was slaving over some portrait for weeks, knowing the only thing he'll get from it is the whole block thinking he's nuts. Well, I tell you," she continued with a lit-



Laura Aberle, 12
Glastonbury, Connecticut



Jane Westrick, 12
Mechanicsville, Virginia

tle smirk, "he succeeded in doing that." She pressed the last crease out of the shirt and handed it over to me, sighing. "That house was so nice before he moved in," she breathed, putting her hands on her wide hips. "He must have been a very deprived child, wanting all this negative attention. Why doesn't he move back to the city where they're used to all this weirdness?"

I took the shirt and scampered down the hall to my bedroom. I flicked on the light and changed out of my pajamas into my school clothes. Ignoring Anita's cries to hurry up, I crossed the room and pulled back a lacy curtain. A soft morning glow came filtering through as I peered out the window and tried to get a glimpse of the painting. Mr. Vankos's house was two away, but it was set back farther than the other houses, so I could see the side of it. Unfortunately, the only thing visible above the fence at the edge of his yard was what seemed to be the forehead of a giant face, topped by a disheveled mass of black hair. It seemed to be slightly grainy in appearance, as if not all the colors had totally mixed. I stood on my tiptoes to get a better look, but just then, Anita hurried into the room.

"Lynn, speed it up or you'll be late for school," she hissed impatiently. "Your mother will have my head . . ." She suddenly saw me craning my neck toward Mr. Vankos's house. "Sweetie, you stay *away* from that loony Vankos or you'll never leave this house again on your own. Understand?"

"Oh yes, Anita, I was just curious about that big picture you were talking about . . ." I replied, trying to sound as if I wasn't truly interested.

"Well don't be," Anita snapped, pulling the curtain closed in one hasty motion. "Now slip your shoes on and let's go!"

My nanny waved to me from the window as I began the walk toward school. I could see the tiny form of my friend Jill waiting for me at the corner. I picked up the pace, my breath fogging up the frigid air in front of me. My backpack bounced along on my back, my cold feet tingled as I splashed through a slushy puddle, my hands swayed unsteadily as I tiptoed around a patch of ice, until suddenly, I halted.

I had arrived at Vankos's house. It looked pretty normal with its white shingles and black shutters, but as I took a step backward I could see the left side.

The painting was gigantic. I stood there in awe and gasped. Below the hair and the forehead were two sharp green eyes covered by tiny gray glasses with a long, pointed nose between them. Two thin black lips were frowning near the bottom of the waxy, white face. For some reason, the whole thing mesmerized me. I stood there and gaped, breathless.

"That is the ugliest thing I've ever seen. How can you even look at it, Lynn?" a girl's voice moaned. I hadn't realized Jill had walked up beside me. I jumped slightly at her words.

"Wha-?" I asked in confusion.

"I said that *thing* on his wall is gross," Jill complained. "Vankos looks like a madman."

"How do you know it's a picture of him?" I asked, my eyes still glued to the house. "I mean it could be anybody—no one's ever seen him, have they?"

Jill shrugged carelessly and said, "C'mon, let's get to school."

With one last glance at the painting, I reluctantly followed her down the street.

All day I couldn't concentrate. I kept thinking about the evil green eyes on that horrible pale face. Although frightening, the portrait intrigued me and I had to know more.

I knew the only way to calm myself was to knock on the lunatic's door and ask him about the portrait. I was wondering if he really was insane and he'd try to attack me or something when someone asked me, "Lynn, do you have a story for your newspaper article?"

I took a deep breath and glanced around the room. I was in my Young Reporters class and the teacher was making sure we were preparing for our articles.

"Yes I do," I replied firmly.

"Good, I'm glad to see you haven't been daydreaming but actually *working* for a change," the teacher muttered a little too loudly, marking something down on her clipboard. I ignored her comment. Instead, I opened my notebook and began jotting down questions to ask Mr. Vankos.

At the last bell, I made up a lie that I

had to hurry home to help Anita with something. I lied well and escaped having to walk with Jill. She'd definitely be against my interview with Mr. Vankos, just like everyone else, and I didn't want any complications. As I approached the house though, I began hoping for her to come along and stop me from getting myself in deep trouble.

I picked up the cold metal knocker tentatively and thought momentarily. Would the knocking be the sound of my death or the sound of me about to shed light on some misunderstood man?

My hand quivered uncertainly. I could imagine Mr. Vankos taking me hostage for disturbing him.

Suddenly I imagined my parents not caring that I was gone. They didn't know me well enough to mourn my disappearance for too long. Maybe they wouldn't even care enough to pay the ransom!

On the other hand, though, I would care if I was taken hostage and I could almost hear Anita sobbing, "I told her not to go, I told her he was trouble. Why couldn't she listen?"

Maybe it isn't worth it, I thought. I should just pick another topic for my article. Even if it's a boring one, at least I'll be alive and well.

I dropped the knocker and before I could realize what I'd just done, it swung back toward the door and emitted a loud bang. I froze, unable to make a break for it—or maybe unwilling. My natural curiosity had glued me to the

spot while my mind was shrieking, Run, Lynn, run while you still can!

Before I knew it, someone was opening the door. The interior was dark, but I could see the outline of someone standing there. I stared at the person, and my eyes moved to their hand. The hand was holding a long thin object dripping with a glistening red liquid. Blood?

I couldn't stand it any longer. I screamed. Actually, it was more of a strangled yelp.

"Oh, I'm sorry," a gentle voice wafted out of the darkness. "This paint should come off your shoes in no time." I automatically looked down at my left shoe and saw a little splatter of red. Obviously paint. I felt like an idiot as I remembered that Mr. Vankos was a painter. All the rumors of him being crazy had apparently gone to my head. I squeezed my eyes shut and breathed deeply.

"Um, uh, M-Mr. Vankos?" I squeaked.

"Yes, that's me."

"Could I just ask you some quick questions about your paintings?" I asked. Then I quickly added, "It's for school."

"Sure, what's up?"

The normal, casual tone in his voice surprised me. I stuttered for a few moments and then glanced down at my notepad. I read from it, "I would like to know why you, um, put that, uh, painting on your house? I mean, it's not exactly . . . uh, *similar* to the other houses." I paused, waiting for Mr. Vankos to leap out of the shadows and strangle

me. I shuffled backwards a bit and said, "And, um, is it a self-portrait?"

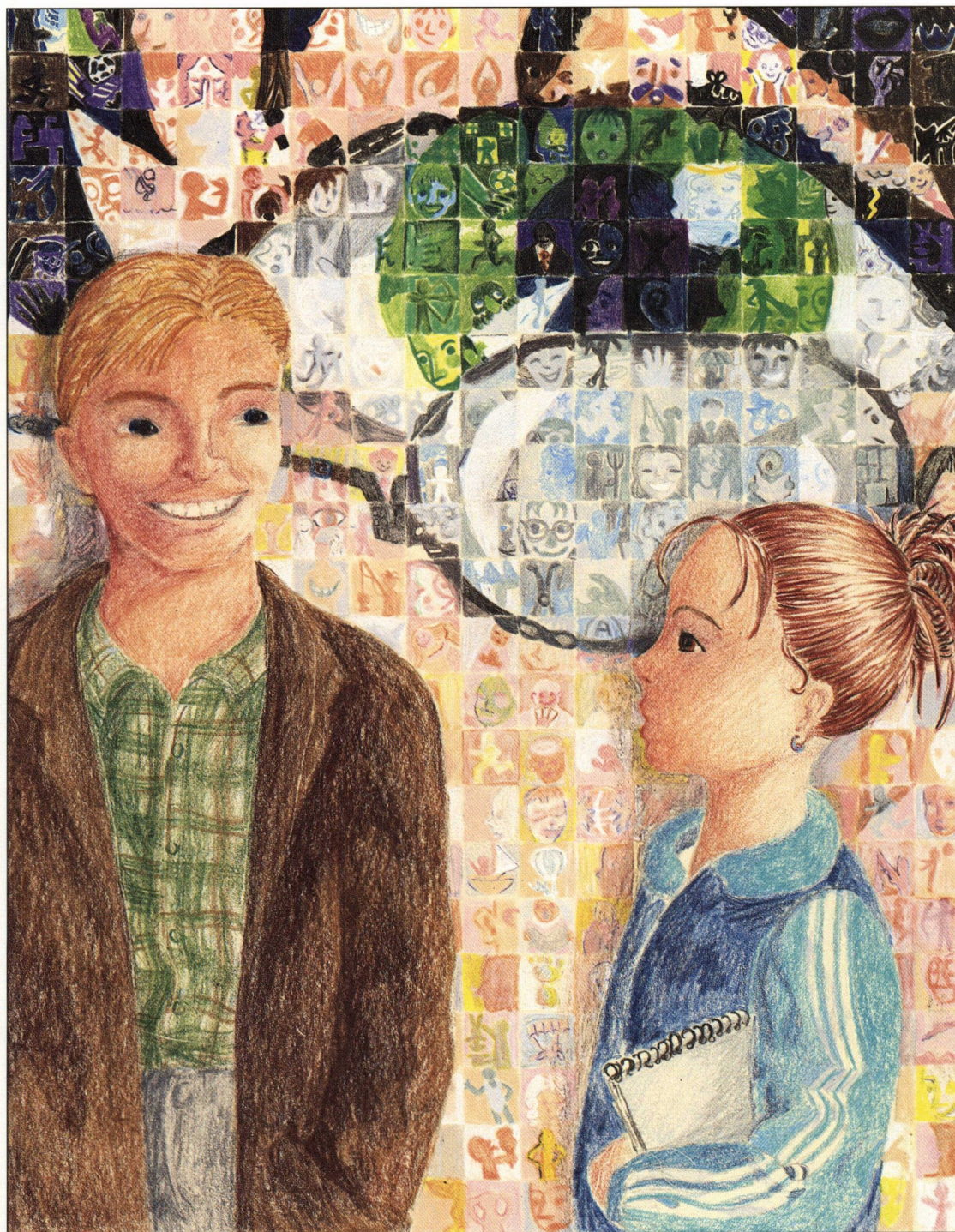
"Well," the man began, "as you can see it's definitely not a self-portrait." He stepped into the fading light of the afternoon and I saw it was true. The young man before me had short, well-kept blond hair and sparkling blue eyes. He had a warm smile and good complexion—almost the opposite of the painting. I scribbled something on my notepad as he continued with, "And as for why I did it, I don't know. The picture just came to me, and I guess I wanted to show off my skills with it. It's a special kind of painting, you know."

I was silent.

"Let me show you," he said and took a step forward. I leaped backwards, still uneasy around him. He grinned and began to walk around to the other side of the house. I reluctantly followed him, scribbling on my notepad.

I had never been so close to the portrait before. It was even more amazing than before. As I looked closer at it, I saw that it was made of little boxes and within each box was a person. Every person was different from the others. There were people running, swimming, smiling, laughing, and painting. They were all different colors with different expressions. If they'd all been the same, it would've been boring and incomplete. I almost laughed as I studied all the different people.

"Do you have any more questions?" Mr. Vankos asked.



I saw that it was made of little boxes and within each box was a person

"Um, yes," I said. I didn't look at my notes this time, but right into his sparkling eyes. I said, "Don't you know that people hate you for this painting?"

The man was silent. I couldn't tell if he hadn't known that or if he was angry that I had brought it up. My body tensed but I would not run. I had to know the truth. I couldn't let this man go on being lonely unless I knew the truth. Mr. Vankos turned and stared at the portrait, then lifted his hand and brushed it across the surface. The paint-splattered hand lay there as Mr. Vankos thought of an answer. Finally, his hand dropped and he said, "That's their problem," and turned to go back into the house. "Please excuse me," he muttered.

I almost called after him because so many more questions were bubbling up inside of me. Instead, I glanced at the painting and without another thought, rushed home.

About two weeks later, as I was walking home from school, Jill ran up to me with a paper flapping in her hand.

"You actually *went to his house?*" she shrieked, horrified.

"Yeah," I replied nonchalantly. "No big deal, he's a nice guy."

"Wow, you're brave. I can't believe everybody thought he was so psycho."

Jill studied me with admiration then repeated, "Wow."

I shrugged and smiled. Jill looked down at the paper and said, "I love this part of your article, Lynn. It's great. Let me read it."

"Jill, I know what I wrote, you don't need to . . ."

"I believe that we are all trapped in a square, with different moods and appearances, likes and dislikes. If we were all the same, wouldn't the world be boring and incomplete? So if the people in this town are too cruel to allow Mr. Vankos to become a part of our ordinary tapestry, if we do not want a little color and fire in our lives, then you will never know true happiness. Let the town remain the same, but remember my warning when you're wishing you had been kinder and wiser . . ."

Jill trailed off and sniffled, pretending to be deeply moved. "That is just so touching," she murmured. I laughed.

As we passed Mr. Vankos's house on the way home from school, a group had formed around the painting. Everyone was pointing to different squares, talking. In the midst was Mr. Vankos himself. He smiled and waved. I smiled slowly and knew that I had made the town's painting complete. ❖

Evening on the Fish Pond

by Danny Musher



Danny Musher, II
Bethesda, Maryland

The fish pond lies embraced
By a cradle of stillness . . .

Gentle autumn winds
Rustle through its lacy reeds,
Rippling the cool water,
Caressing the banks
As tenderly as a finger on a rose.

Rushes adorned with
Shimmering water-pearl dresses
Bend over the still water,
Peering at a wavy reflection of
A gold and crimson sky.

The soft blanket of night
Gently lays its cheek onto the pond
As sounds of crickets herald
A warm, serene night.

A Crimson Glimmer

by Chappell Sargent

illustrated by Lainey Guddat



Chappell Sargent, 10
Charlestown, Massachusetts



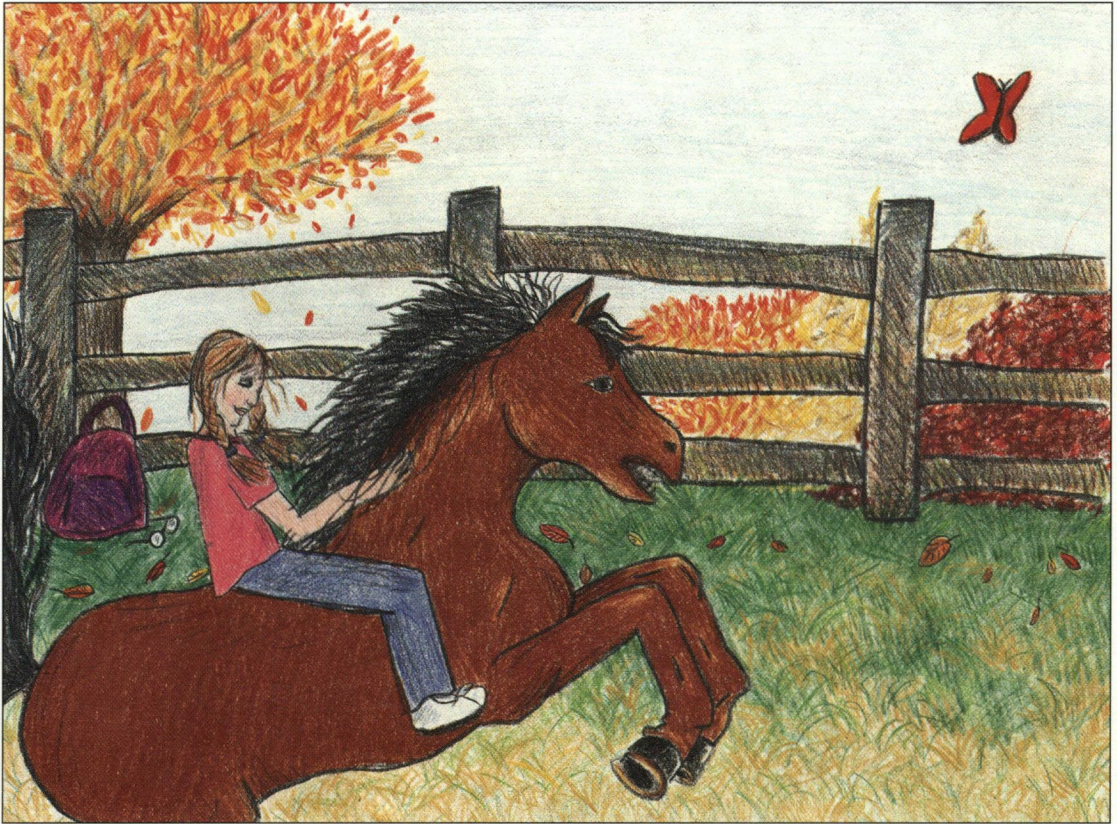
Lainey Guddat, 11
Kent, Washington

THE AIR WAS COOL, and leaves had departed from their shaky branches. Early October had come. Ansadore, the old chestnut mare, was rolling in the browning grass. She snorted, rolled over, and stood up. Not to say standing up didn't take much effort, though. She was, indeed, very old and it took more than a mere push to rise to her feet. After the grunts of weariness, however, she did manage it and was standing on her sleek legs.

Mary, tired after school, was just walking up the hill to the paddocks. Her light brown hair had been placed neatly into two braids that morning but was now in an absolute wreck, looking somewhat like a dead rat sitting atop her head. Her blue-green eyes were shielded off by round, silver-rimmed glasses which she ripped off so suddenly that they scraped her forehead. She hated the glasses. She was certain she could see perfectly fine without them, but her mother had insisted, and she never argued with her mother.

She sighed dramatically as she approached Ansadore. "Oh, Any," she called to the horse by nickname. "I hate it here! I want to move, run away! I want to ride you across the country and back, then fly to London, Rome, Paris!" She collapsed, caught up in her own drama. The horse stared back at her with large, understanding eyes. Mary stood up again.

"I'm gonna go for a ride," she said. She crawled under the wooden fence, dropped her book bag, and put her hands on



It was nothing more than a quick blur, a glimmer of an intense crimson color

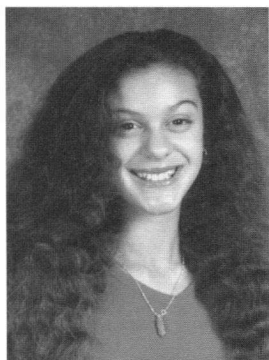
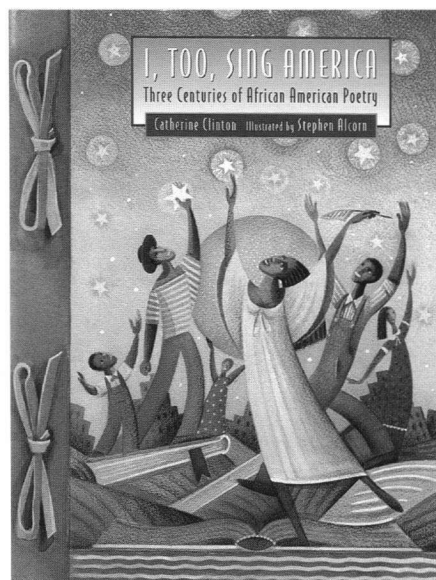
Ansadore's back. She pushed up and swung a leg over the horse's back. Once on and balanced, she tapped the horse's belly with her sneakers. The well-trained horse immediately took the signal and began trotting down the hill.

Near the bottom, something flew up in front of them. It was nothing more than a quick blur, a glimmer of an intense crimson color. Ansadore spooked. She reared, whinnying, something she hadn't done for over ten years. Mary

slowly slid off the horse's back and into the dirt, while Ansadore took off up the hill. Mary, shaking her head in discomfort, caught another glimpse of the crimson glimmer. It was far above her head for a moment, then swooped down into a shrub. Mary leaned forward to get a better glance. There, on a branch, was the object that had caused so much confusion. It was beautiful, Mary had thought. It was the crimson glimmer. It was . . . a butterfly. ❖

Book Review

by Jessica Arguilez Baris



Jessica Arguilez Baris, 13
San Diego, California

I, Too, Sing America by Catherine Clinton; Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston, 1998; \$20

THIS IS A COLLECTION of African-American poetry that is tragic and triumphant. You will learn a lot about history from these poems. I am an eighth-grader studying American history at Farb Middle School. This book helped me understand the issue of slavery from the point of view of people who were slaves, and made me think about racism and discrimination in America in a way that I didn't think about from reading my textbook from school.

This book is a mixture of poets' biographies, the history of the time when they were alive, and their writings. It begins in the 1700s and continues through today. There are poems about Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Other poems describe Indian attacks and the American Revolution. Famous African-Americans such as Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, and W. E. B. Du Bois are included in this book. Also, I learned about poets that I never heard of before I read this book.

The illustrations are strong, beautiful drawings by Stephen Alcorn. When I saw the cover of this book, I wanted to have

it because it was so beautiful. The book cover, people dancing on books and reaching for stars, captures the hope that many of the poems make you feel inside as you read them.

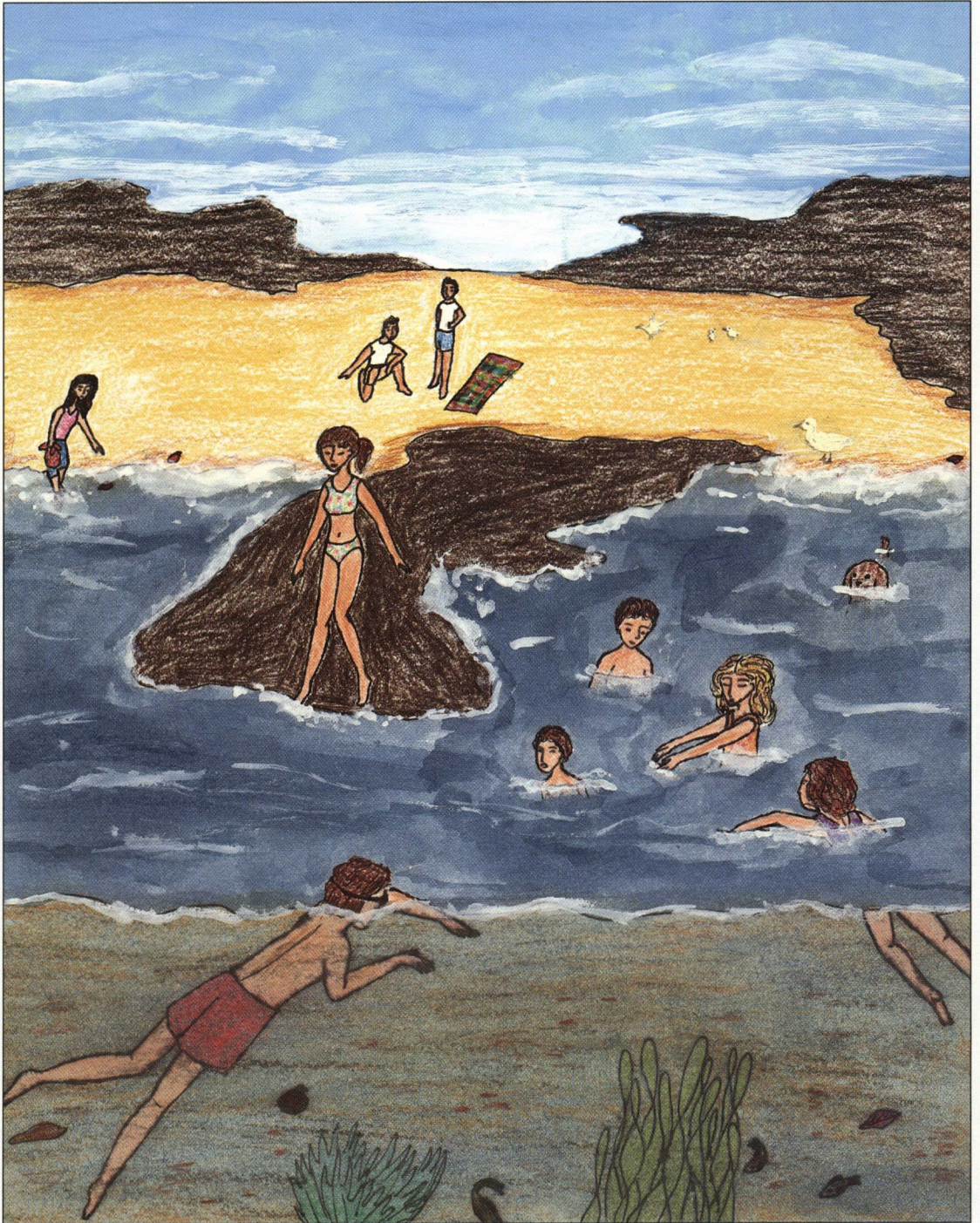
My favorite poem is written by Langston Hughes, titled "Merry-Go-Round, Colored Child at Carnival." It stuck in my head because I remember when I went to Seaport Village in San Diego and my mother let my brother, my sister and me ride the carousel. We sat on the beautiful horses, going up and down, and laughing as the carousel went around. I didn't laugh when I read the poem about a colored child who wanted to know where was the section for colored people to ride. This poem is a history lesson about Jim Crow laws, which made separate things for Caucasian people and colored people such as drinking fountains, bathrooms, schools and restaurants. The child asks, "Where's the

horse for a kid that's black?" He says he knows where the back of the bus is but he wonders where the back of the carousel is. My brother, sister and I would have been the children watching the Caucasian children laugh and wondered why we couldn't get on if we had been alive when the author had lived.

What I didn't like about the book is that I didn't understand all the poetry. I will try to read those poems when I am older. What I like best about this book is that it has poetry by people I have seen on TV like Maya Angelou, and people like Lucy Terry, who was a slave in the 1700s, and a section telling about the poet. These poems are like a history lesson that grabs your heart and doesn't let go. I like history, but reading my middle school textbook is a little bit boring. You won't let go of this book, *I, Too Sing America*, until you have read every poem in it. ❖



Hannah Fine, 10, Providence, Rhode Island



He noticed his sister testing the water and sank under, planning his attack

On the Beach

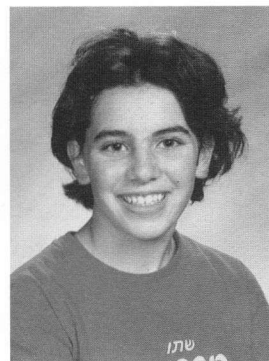
by Liza Brown

illustrated by Valerie Thompson

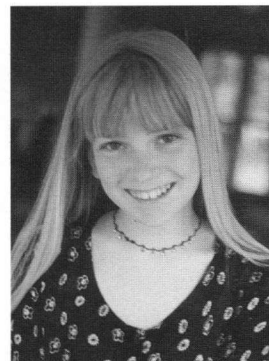
SALLY WALKED SLOWLY across the long stretch of brown sand, tripping over small pebbles blocking her path. She scurried down to the rocks, dirty-blond hair flying as she went. Casually, she brushed back her hair with a quick flick of her hand. She spied a blue blob among the rocks. She loved looking for long-lost tennis balls, Superballs and dog toys. She scampered hurriedly to the resting place of the blue blob. To her great disappointment, a Pepsi cup stuck out. She ignored it and darted between the rocks, peering between, in and around the rocks and crevices. Suddenly, a bright green ball caught her eye.

"Fleepo!" she called, whistling for her brown mutt. The dog, long tongue, floppy ears and huge brown eyes, greeted her with a yap loud enough for the whole world to hear. She summoned her dog over to the green ball. Easily reached, she freed the ball from its nook between two large rocks. Sally grinned and threw the ball in the air.

Fleepo sped across the rocks to catch the wild green blur. She snapped it up in her mouth and returned it to her owner. Sally threw the ball far out toward the water and watched as the small puppy dipped in to retrieve it. The pup, now covered in mud and water, dropped the ball proudly at Sally's feet, ignoring the other dogs sniffing at her. Sally petted each new dog and let the ball fly. Each dog sailed down to the water and splashed up water almost reaching Sally. She



Liza Brown, 11
Berkeley, California



Valerie Thompson, 12
Barry's Bay, Ontario, Canada

laughed as they clambered over each other and waited until they returned the ball. As the ball took another trip through the air, Sally smiled and thought, Only dogs can make me happy that fast.

Jordan watched as a light brown lizard crawled carefully around the rocks. He grimaced as his loud brother stomped his way over to him.

"Hi, Jordan." His small brother collapsed into a heap of a large T-shirt and skinny legs.

Jordan sensed a sadness in his brother's tone of voice and turned. Sure enough, a glittering tear dripped down his brother's face. Jordan patted his brother gently on his head. "What's wrong, Parker?"

His brother let both eyes roll down to his shoes and mumbled, "It's Pete's Sake. He's gone."

"What happened?!" Jordan's mind supplied thoughts of drowned dogs and paws sticking up in the air. He grimaced for a second time and stared at his brother.

"I lost 'im."

Jordan smiled to himself. You could not lose a dog in this park. All the dogs stuck together in here, either darting between rocks or soaring through the air to catch a ball. Jordan took his brother's small hand and led him up the rocks. He peeked around the hills, pointed out good hiding spots of most of the dogs, and headed across the bridge.

Still clutching his brother's hand, Parker scanned the small hills around

the park. Sure enough, Pete's Sake was romping around with two other dogs on a hill. Parker grabbed Jordan around the waist. "Oh, Jordan! Thanks so much! I was major worried!"

Jordan smiled and led his brother back to the rocks. He showed him the former resting place of the lizard and continued searching for more. He didn't even mind his brother's pounding feet; suddenly lizards and noise didn't seem that important anymore. On a sudden instinct, he grabbed Parker's hand and took in his brother's deep smile. Jordan just grinned back and didn't let on the deep thought going on in his head. Only Parker can make me happy that fast, he thought, and skipped over three rocks to catch an escaping lizard.

Solemnly, Rita crawled down to the rocks and pulled off her shoes. A glint of bright metallic light suddenly caught her interest, but she brushed it away from her mind like a piece of lint. She wiggled her toes slowly, disgusted at the dirt clodding her big toe. She scraped it off with a stick and watched the waves float in the sea. She heard her cousins discussing her bad mood and planted herself deeper into her foul feeling of disgust. The metallic glint caught her eye again and this time, to avoid and surprise her cousins, she got up to examine it. As she grew closer, a shiny seashell came into her view. Handling the shell like a cracked egg, she brought it close to her glowing eyes. Since it was abandoned by its previous owner, Rita claimed it and tucked it into a make-

shift bag, giving her bandana to the cause. Suddenly, it seemed like the whole beach was shining. She collected shell after shell, passing brother, uncle and cousins on her way without even a mean glance. Finally when her bag was full, she carefully placed them into her basket, now unloaded of its earlier package of picnic food. She unwrapped the bandana and quickly skipped back to the damp sand of the bank of the ocean.

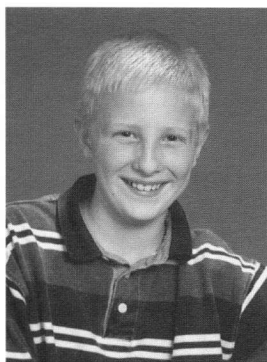
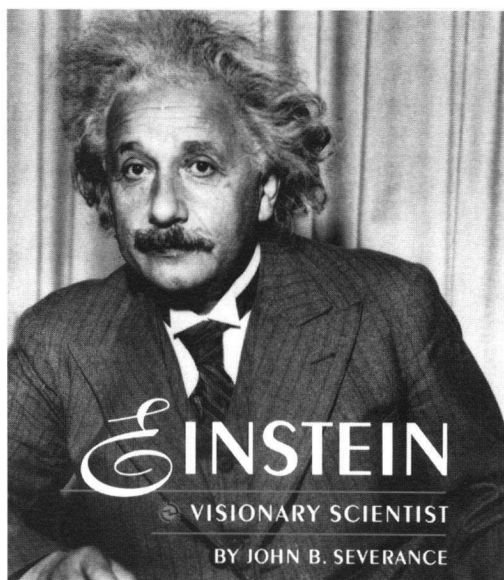
Before she knew it, Rita was letting water tickle her toes as she reached for a large, shimmering red shell. Without full notice, she had rolled up her shorts and was thigh-deep in ocean water. She laughed as the water tickled her legs. Forgetting all about her foul mood, she gleefully showed her now interested brother about the shells. Soon, speckles of children could be seen, each slowly picking up fragile shells and placing them in bandana-bags. Rita delicately placed another shell in her bag and smiled, thinking, Only seashells could make me happy this fast. She helped her cousin carry up his bag without noting her kindness and climbed back down to the ocean of shells below her.

Todd flicked an ant off his toe and rolled his eyes. His sister was flirting with two boys and he was disgusted. Finally, too bored for anything else, he left the warm comfort of his picnic blanket to visit the ocean. Some kids were collecting seashells, but he ignored

them. Already in his swimming trunks, he tested the water like it was a sleeping grizzly and relaxed to find the temperature reasonable. His blue eyes checked over the ocean and he smiled, relieved of no shark sighting. Deeper and deeper he went, pulling his goggles over his eyes and exploring the underwater world. He saw mostly green water, but a few fish darted into view. Todd floated up and down, catching breath after breath. His sister was eyeing him, daring him to embarrass her. He just turned, not caring about her anymore. He flipped deep under, welcoming two boys, brave and ready for fun. Soon, a game of marco polo started and Todd was it. He splashed and yelled at the top of his lungs, reaching her rapidly disappearing arms and legs. With a loud screech he caught a victim and pulled on his goggles again. He noticed his sister testing the water and sank under, planning his attack. When her ankles came into view, he bit them. Not hard but enough for a shriek to reach his ears. He jumped up and his sister screamed. He pulled her under and smiled. Only the ocean can make me happy that fast. With a yank of her ponytail, Todd joined her into the game, announcing that she was it. Almost oblivious to the new girl and her dog, a boy with his younger brother and a young girl joining the game, Todd thought, Well, I'm sure no one understands about this beach making me leap for joy. ❖

Book Review

by Casey Pelletier



Casey Pelletier, 13
Telford, Pennsylvania

Einstein: Visionary Scientist by John B. Severance; Clarion Books: New York, 1999; \$15

TO MOST KIDS, *Einstein: Visionary Scientist* would seem like “a book about some dead guy whose ideas I don’t understand.” At first, I was too busy thinking about writing this review to have any opinion on this book. Once I was into the book, I forgot about the review and enjoyed the story immensely.

I was surprised to discover that Albert was a slow learner, and that he had a ferocious temper. This was something I could relate to. When I was in elementary school I lagged behind the others in my class. My frustration led me to have a bad temper. However, my temper was pint-sized compared to Albert’s tantrums. Once, he just missed his sister Maja with a bowling ball. Another time, he hit his sister with the handle of a garden hoe. Even on my worst days, I never threw a bowling ball.

Something I didn’t know was that Albert took violin lessons. I took violin lessons too, but I never had a lesson like Albert’s. On his first lesson he threw a chair at his teacher. That nasty disposition again!

Two other things about Albert's education surprised me. One, he was a dreamy student. He was oblivious to the world around him and was lost in his own scientific thoughts. I also am like that sometimes, I get lost in my own world. The other was that he flunked all of his subjects except math and physics. I was amazed because I thought that smart people were good in everything. Albert's principal once said, "It doesn't matter how we teach him, he'll never amount to anything anyway." He was obviously wrong!

Another way that Albert and I are alike: we both like to write papers on our ideas. Years later when he was at the peak of his popularity, he would tour all over, and speak of his theories he had written about. I found it interesting that he was booed at some lectures; I guess there were people who just didn't understand his ideas.

I don't totally agree with Albert's

pacifist views. I enjoy studying about war and the armed forces. I think the reason for this difference is that he was a Jew during Hitler's reign over Europe, whereas I have never been that close to war and have always known freedom.

The author, John B. Severance, did a remarkable job of making Einstein's difficult ideas understandable. If you had to do a school project on a famous scientist, this would be an excellent reference book to use. It demonstrates that although this is a book about the smartest guy in the world, you, too, can understand Albert Einstein.

This is a really great book that I'd recommend to anyone, especially if you've ever been misunderstood or not liked. It shows you that even if you are picked on or put down, as long as you keep trying you will never be a failure. Who knows, you might be the next smartest person in history. ♦



Jessica Libor, 12, Worcester, Pennsylvania

A Winner

by Allison Stadd

illustrated by Natalie Chin



Allison Stadd, 12
Bethesda, Maryland

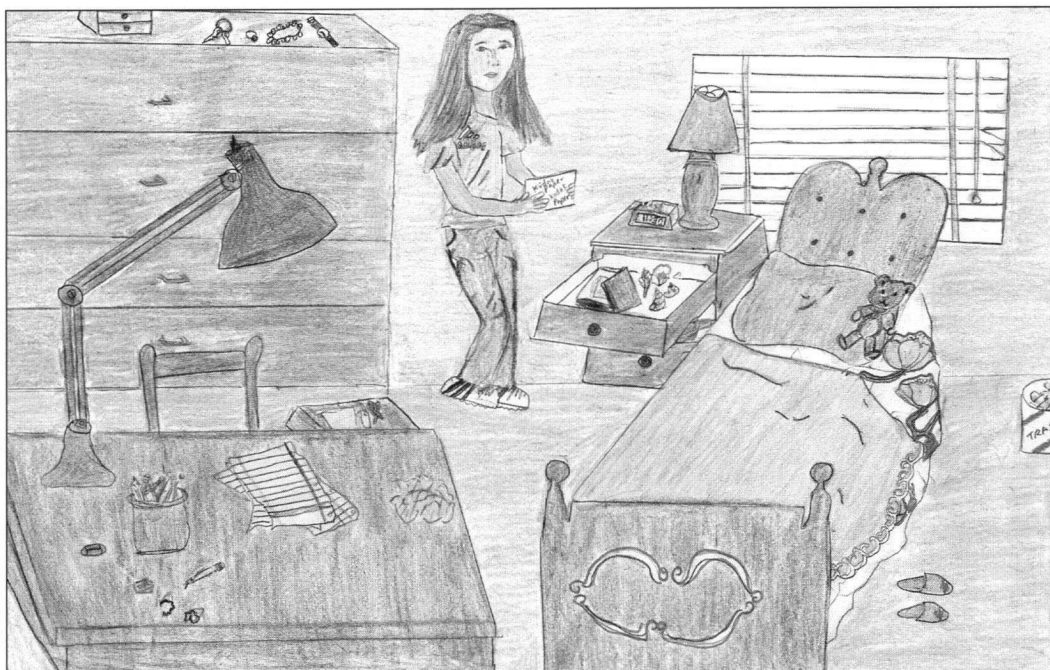


Natalie Chin, 8
Bellevue, Washington

“ONCE UPON A TIME—no, no, that’s not right . . .” Laura chewed on her thumbnail and pouted. “Gosh, I just can’t seem to get this right!” Finally, she threw down her pencil, crumpled up the paper and jammed it into the plastic trash can in the corner of her room. Smacking her forehead with a sweaty palm, Laura threw herself on her bed and punched her pillow. “How am I supposed to become the world’s greatest novelist, let alone the winner of this writing contest, if I can’t even start the dumb story?!” she questioned her tattered teddy bear, Henry.

In exasperation, Laura rolled onto the floor and stared up at the chipped ceiling of her room. Smothered in the sticky embrace of the stiff quiet in her room, Laura’s mind filled with cloudy memories of the past. Tiptoeing in, they seemed to fill in the chinks of her brain connecting her to the world, and she was lost to reality.

Images of a pleasant, smiling face and bubbling laughter flickered in Laura’s mind, as if she was watching her past on a movie screen. That’s when she saw it—the face. Like a dangerous beast, it haunted her dreams, serving as a token of what she had lost. Choking on a sob, Laura clung to her teddy bear. Blinking, she returned to the present. Slowly rising to her feet, she quietly padded over to her night table, and tugged open the wooden drawer hesitantly. Rummaging inside for what seemed like hours, but was only a matter of



Revealing the picture, she stroked the figure lovingly. "Dad," she whispered. "Dad . . ."

mere minutes, Laura's shaking fingers clasped what she was hunting for—the photograph. Revealing the picture, she stroked the figure lovingly. "Dad," she whispered. "Dad . . ."

Suddenly, her mother's voice bit into the haziness surrounding Laura. "Laur, hon? Laura! It's lunchtime! C'mon, sweetie, I have to leave soon! Laura, lunch!" Sensing the impatience in her mother's summoning, Laura quickly stuck the picture back into the drawer and scampered down the steps. Sliding into a seat at the kitchen table, Laura drummed her fingers on the table as she inhaled the delicious smell of the grilled cheese baking in the toaster.

Quickly gobbling up every last morsel of the sandwich, Laura listened to her

mom tell her of the appointment that she had to run off to and that "she hoped Laura wouldn't mind if she had to fix herself some dinner and she would be back early tomorrow morning."

"You know, there's canned soup in the cupboard, honey," Mrs. Hanley called from the front hall as she shouldered her purse and flipped up her sunglasses. "Be a love and take out the trash, will you sweetie? Oh, and don't forget you do have homework to do even though it's Saturday. Laurie—don't spend too much time on that writing contest thing, you know just as well as I do that you have plenty of more important things to be spending your time on. Well, I'll try and call

when I get there, OK? Bye, sweetie!"

Sighing, Laura cleared her place and rinsed off the dishes, after watching her mother's beat-up station wagon rumble off into the distance. Typical mother, she thought disgustedly. Nonetheless, she did as she had been instructed to and emptied the trash out into the bin at the back of the house. Back inside her cozy room, Laura kicked off her tennis shoes and plucked the clothespin off her nose, pulling up the broken blinds on her window.

Once again sitting silently at her desk, Laura stared solemnly at the picture of her dad that she had placed gingerly down in front of herself. Studying the man's unique features, she decided she had a lot in common with her dad—the same wispy chestnut hair and twinkling green eyes. In fact, looking closer, Laura could see she and her father had the same smile, creasing at the corners and slightly lopsided.

Laura could remember that smile from a long time ago—at her third birthday party when her father had dressed up like a clown and performed silly tricks; and at the beach when she was eight, when together they had built a tall, stately sand castle, crowned with a small stick and soiled piece of fish netting. Chuckling to herself, Laura recalled the time that her father had spilled an entire orange soda on his jeans on purpose to match Laura's own when she had wet her pants. Smiling sadly at the picture, Laura felt that hole in her heart, that missing piece in the

puzzle. True, it was a corner piece, hard to accommodate without. But, nevertheless, as Laura's father had taught her, everything is possible. How many times had he said, time and again, no one's a winner without making the effort? And Laura wanted so much to be her father's daughter—to be the winner that she knew he had in his heart. Sharing the same secret passion, Laura and her father had always thought alike and acted alike. Now he was merely a whisper on the wind. But now Laura realized that it was up to her to carry on that special passion and bring out the real winner inside her that was bottled up. These selfish tears she had cried from time to time were the cork that kept her true self inside. And now, she was ready to unplug the cork.

Filled with new inspiration and soaring spirits, Laura picked up her pencil and a clean stack of paper, and wrote. And wrote. And wrote. In fact, she set up her flashlight and was still busy scribbling well into the night. At last, when the first golden purple streaks of the sunrise were painted across the sky's easel, Laura set down her pencil once again and sat back into her pillows to read what she had written. What her hand had written, with a mind of its own. And as her lips sounded out the last sweet syllable of this masterpiece, Laura didn't have to seal the envelope, she didn't have to receive the congratulations letter, she didn't have to gaze happily at her mother's astonished yet proud face, to know that she was a winner. ❖

Enchantment of the Wolves

by Leah Karker

illustrated by Ayla Reynolds

THE FARM LOOKED OLD and dull, but in my thoughts everything, even the quiet farm, was eerie. I had the dream again; the same dream I had every full moon, the only dream I ever had. The gentle eyes of my mother looked down at me. All I could see were the soft, green eyes. I could feel the warmth and fear of my mother, fear that was for me.

"Terry!" called my father. "Breakfast!" He was actually my adoptive father. He found me in the woods and took care of me. He knew that adopting me would be a bad idea. He had no experience whatsoever with raising a child, and the only person who could help him would be his younger brother. He spent weeks searching for my family, but found no one. He could give me up to an orphanage or adopt me himself. I suppose he felt responsible for me, or maybe it was sheer pity, but he took me in and I was brought up living on a farm with him and my uncle, Dude. He is really my Uncle Ben, but "Uncle Ben" makes rice, and Dude was a childhood nickname. I suppose I liked Dude all right, but he was gone so much that I didn't really get to spend much time with him.

"Coming!" I yelled. I ran hard and fast, I was good at that. Dude says my mother and father were probably great athletes. Besides, today my father was making waffles for breakfast.



Leah Karker, 12
Rockland, Maine



Ayla Reynolds, 12
Craig, Alaska

I SAT DOWN and pulled the straw out of my tangled hair. I had slept in the barn with the animals again. I felt at peace with them. My father could tell I had been sleeping there, but I suppose, against his better judgement, he let me be.

My father and I did not talk much. It wasn't that we didn't like each other, it's just that we didn't "click." Neither of us was a very good conversationalist, so silence filled the gaps in our relationship. But it wasn't a comfortable silence. It wasn't awkward either. There was simply nothing there; no words, no thoughts, no feelings. I had lived twelve years with someone I barely knew. His tired face was that of a stranger that looked different every time I saw it. I did not miss my father when we were apart, and I did not notice when we were together. I was never angry with him, nor was I happy. He was simply there, nameless, my provider, but don't get me wrong. I *was* grateful to him. Only sometimes I wondered if his choice to adopt me was a smart one. Did I really belong here? Could things really go on like this?

"Did you finish all of your homework?" my father asked, breaking the silence.

"Yep," I answered.

"What are you doing in school today?" he continued quietly.

"Nothing."

"Hmmm. Do you like your new math

class?"

"No, not really."

We both went back to poking at our waffles. It was a typical breakfast conversation. I thought of saying more; telling him how I despised math class and how I learned more walking home through the peaceful woods, tasting the fresh air, than I ever could at school, but I decided that I would sound silly and thought better of it.

Many long, silent moments passed before the next conversation began.

"I got another one this morning." This time it was Dude speaking.

My father nodded.

"Two more chickens are gone."

"Suppose I'll go down to the market an' get some more." He looked tired and distressed.

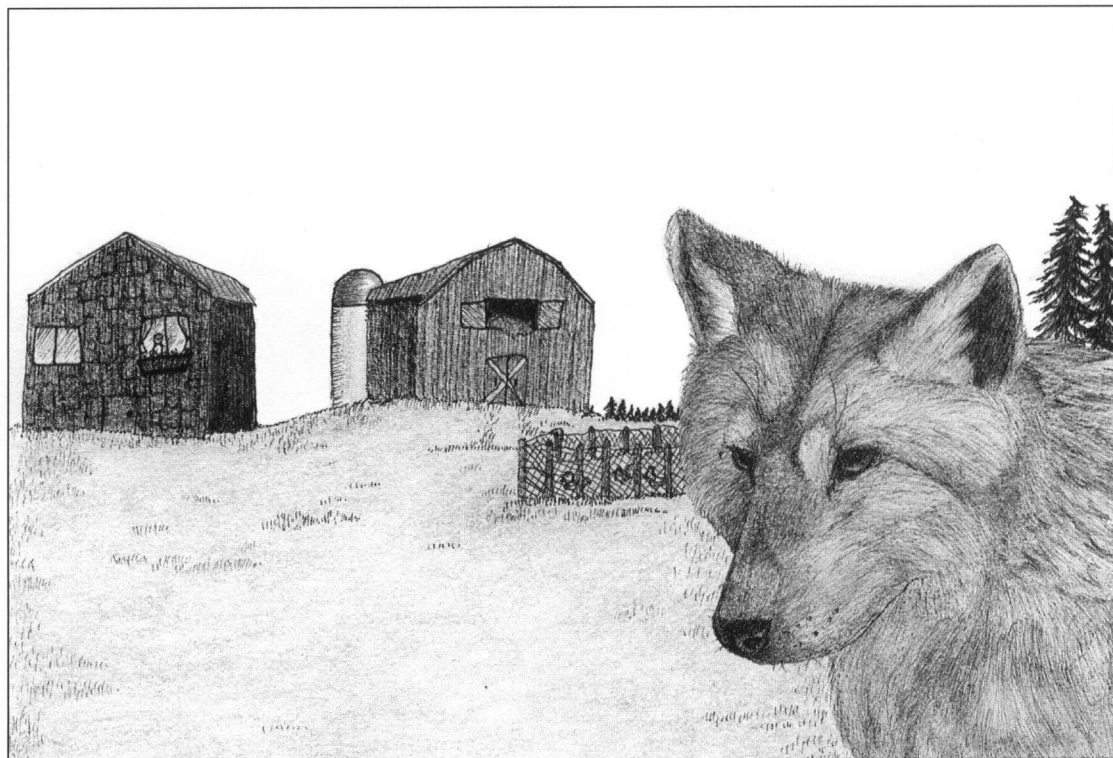
I knew what they were talking about. I hated it. Our chickens were disappearing. My father decided it was wolves, but we never actually saw them take the chickens. Although with so many wolves running around Stoneland, Wyoming, what else could it have been? I had my own ideas. When I proved that the Hoster boys from next door were taking the chickens, no more innocent wolves would die. I couldn't be absolutely sure they were taking them, but whenever they came over they snooped around, and day by day their chicken flock seemed to grow larger and ours smaller.

Off in my own world, I stared blankly out the window, but my thoughts on

the chickens came to an abrupt halt as a beautiful full-grown wolf stepped into our yard. It was far away from the chickens, but close enough. Even though the wolf wasn't after them, it was in danger simply by being here. I had to get to it before my father did.

than my heart, and somehow, somehow, I knew she felt the same.

The part when I actually, physically tackled the wolf was a blur of forgotten memory. All I knew, or rather felt, was me running with the wolf, for the wolf, to a place I knew by heart and yet had



I stared blankly out the window as a beautiful full-grown wolf stepped into our yard

I tore across the yard, each step faster than I could count. As I neared the wolf I did not slow. For my own safety I should have stopped. I did not. I knew the wolf wouldn't hurt me. I could feel it in a place deeper and more spiritual

never seen. The feel of my legs straining to push my body through the force of the eager wind felt natural, completely natural.

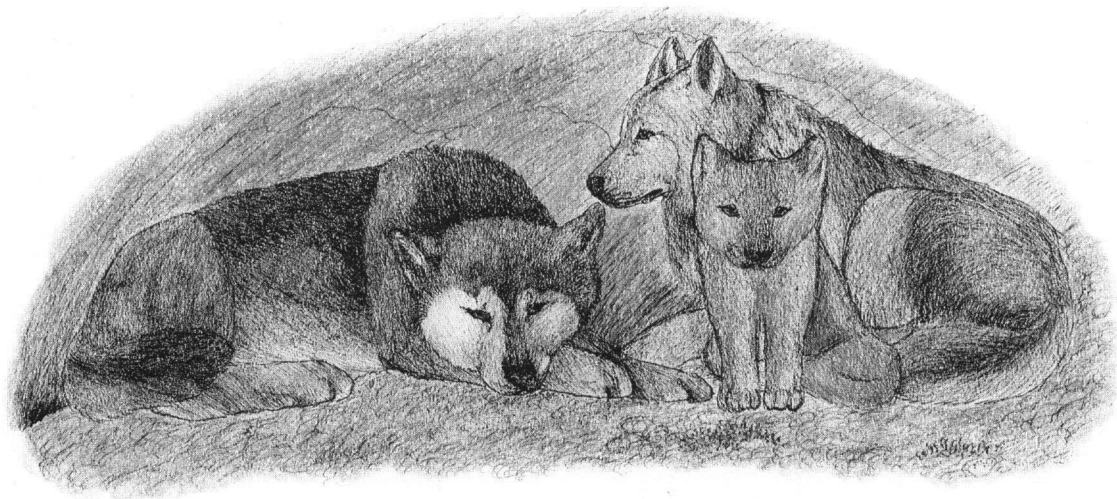
When my heart finally stopped urging me forward with the force of a

thousand fists, I found myself at the entrance of a cave. Unsure of what to do next, I glanced over at the wolf. Taking sure and gentle steps, she proceeded inside. I followed, a bit bewildered.

There must have been fifteen . . . no, twenty wolves! The soft gray texture of their fur made me want to reach out

lization either. The word civilization makes me think of ancient Egypt, hieroglyphics, and social studies. This was a . . . a family. It was a crazy thought, but somehow it seemed like my family. I shrugged it off.

Time passed. I stood and watched, just watched, for maybe an hour or two. Slowly, the blue sky faded into black.



They were completely at peace, and they looked at me as if I belonged

and touch them but I kept my distance. They were all peaceful and quiet, so . . . so satisfying for the soul. They were completely at peace, and they looked at me as if I belonged. For once in my life, I felt I did.

My first thought was that I had stumbled on a secret civilization, but that was wrong, all wrong. I hadn't stumbled, I was led, and I wouldn't say civi-

When the first star appeared in the sky I knew it was time to leave. They knew it too. Before I could leave, the wolf that led me here showed me some objects on a rock. The arrowheads and old carved rocks were gifts, from them to me. I accepted gratefully, wishing I had something to offer in return. Even if I did, I wouldn't have been able to give it. The wolf had left. She had left

me to make it home by myself. Somehow I did.

The next few days were a blur. I had been devoted to proving the Hoster boys guilty. I had recently found out that their father had trusted them with the farm while their mother was sick in the hospital near town. He spent all his time there. I told my dad, but he said I needed more information.

One night while I was hard at work on my case, I heard the sound of a gunshot. This gunshot, though, was not over by the chicken coop. It was right here by the house. I heard it again. Then I ran, lying to myself, saying I didn't know what it was, but I did.

In one second flat I was there. I dropped onto my knees, landing hard. No, I thought, this is a dream. It has to be. The body of the wolf was sprawled out on the ground in silent pain. She had been shot twice in the leg and was losing blood fast. I could feel the eyes of my father burning into me, waiting to see what I would do next, but I didn't care. Her head turned and she looked at me. She was dying and I felt the fear in her eyes. It was so familiar. Those eyes, they were so eerie. My dream, it was my dream; the same green eyes, the same warmth, the same fear. This couldn't be true. The eyes in my dream belonged to my mother, and this wolf couldn't be . . . or could it? There were so many questions, too many questions. This wolf was dying! The eyes closed.

I placed my hands over her heart, and with every ounce of strength in my body I strained to push life back into her. It was silly, but I didn't know what else to do. I was so completely helpless. There was one more thing to try. I had to get her home.

I ran to the barn. My sled, where was it? There it was. The rope was more tangled than ever, but speed was with me and I succeeded. I lifted her limp body onto the sled, grabbed the rope, and ran. When I reached the cave I saw the whole pack waiting as if they already knew what had happened. I lifted her off of the sled and watched them clean her wounds. Then I left. I was totally and completely scared, more than ever now.

I took my time getting home. I wasn't eager to see my father. Each breath I took stung my chest and for the first time that night I felt the cold wind bite my face. But even so, the hurt inside of me was greater than the hurt on the outside.

When I did reach home I didn't talk, eat, or even get ready for bed. I simply lay down in the darkness of my room with my pain and silence and went to sleep.

When my eyes opened I lay still for a second adjusting to the glow in the room. I had slept for a few hours, but I had been awakened by something. I thought it was the moonlight streaming in through the open window, but as I walked over to close it and pull

the shade I felt something turn in my stomach. Maybe it wasn't the light that woke me up. I smelled the air and sensed that something out there wasn't right. My eyes scanned the yard. Everything was normal but over by the chicken coop I saw a small dark figure crouched in the tiny chicken door between the fenced-in outdoor area and the coop building. I sometimes crawled through there in feeble attempts to frighten the chickens.

I ran fast and noisily down the stairs and out the door. Behind me I could hear my dad and Dude beginning to stir. When I got outside I moved slowly and quietly toward the figure. When I reached it I saw that the figure was actually a chubby little boy. "Hey!" I yelled.

"Help, help! I'm stuck!" he cried. And he was stuck. His upper body was inside the coop and his lower body was outside, wriggling madly to set himself free. Luckily, I had been in his position before and knew what to do. The chicken doors were tall and narrow so my first instruction was:

"Turn your body sideways."

He did.

"Now, lift your hands above your head and slide out backwards."

The boy followed my instructions and, having sprung himself loose, he grinned at his freedom. That triumphant grin soon faded though, as I grasped his arm. I was bigger and stronger than the boy and a fight would have been pointless. Besides, my father

and Dude had emerged from the house and were headed toward us.

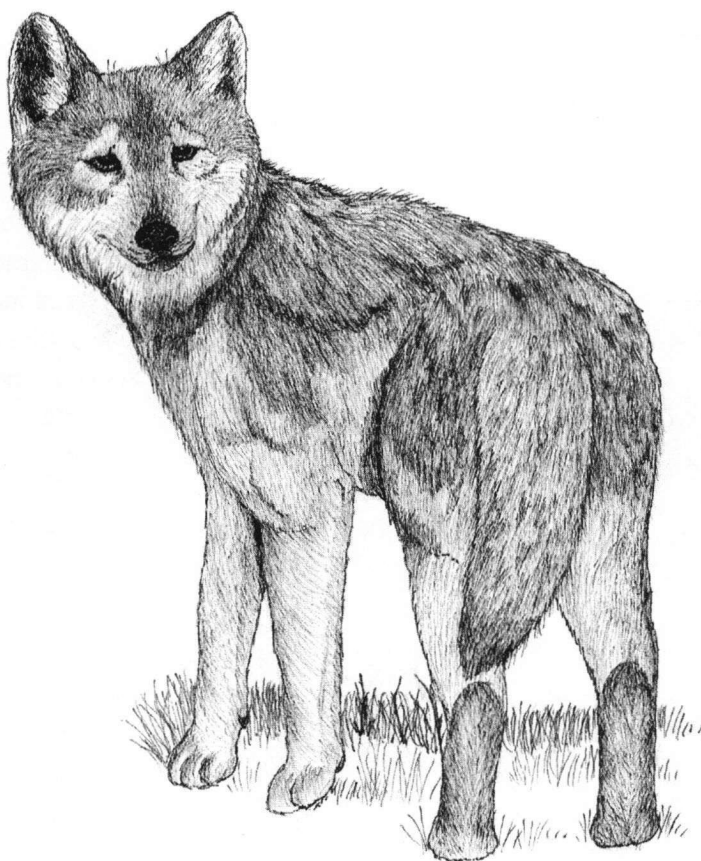
I turned the boy so that the moon could cast a soft glow on his pained face. Even in the dim light I recognized him immediately. The boy—the figure—was none other than Dennis, the younger and chubbier of the Hoster boys. He was ten years old, a few years younger than me. He knew he had been caught and tears filled his eyes in shameful defeat. By that time my father and Dude had caught up to me. I handed him over to them without a word and headed up toward the house, but before I turned I caught a glimpse of the guilty expression on my father's face. He had been wrong. They had all been wrong.

I continued on through the damp night, filled with feelings unfelt and words unspoken. I did not look back, but I could hear the painful wailing of Dennis Hoster and the deep rumbling of my father's accusing voice. Once again I lay down in my dark room and slept. Only this time I awoke on my own, and did not fall back asleep. I wrote a note to my father saying I had found my mother and would be going to live with her. I could explain better in writing than I ever could come close to in person. I even told him I loved him and I would miss him. That very night (or rather, morning) I left.

I walked slowly. I wasn't rushed. When I reached the cave I realized how scared I really was. I said one last good-

bye to the place I had grown up in. Then, I turned to greet my family, and in the center of them, my mother. She was healthy, but with one less leg. I looked down at my own hands, and

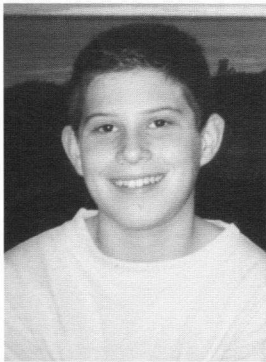
watched them change slowly back to their original form. I watched the claws and the fur grow. I was one of them again. We were us again, together. I was finally at peace. ❖



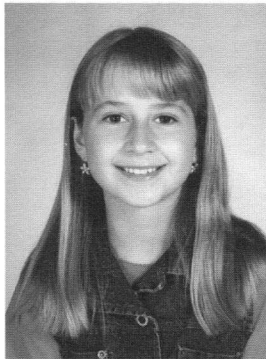
Nicely Johnson and Caylan

by Daniel Lyons

illustrated by Miranda Lynne Morris



Daniel Lyons, 12
Norristown, Pennsylvania



Miranda Lynne Morris, 11
Nobel, Ontario, Canada

AS I RECALL, it was early in the morning, around seven or eight, when I first arrived at summer camp. The beautiful summer breeze whisked through my nose, giving me a vague sense of freedom. How I had longed to leave school and have this feeling tingle my senses. This had marked my third year at summer camp, and I was ecstatic to meet my friends again.

I walked across the new green grass leading to the main campus. Directly in front of me, I would say about twenty-five yards, a red-haired boy paced back and forth. He looked at his feet, as if he had just discovered them. I came closer, and noticed his pale white skin. I had never seen anyone like him before. Now, I was several feet from him, but he managed to still keep his head faced to the ground.

"Hello. I'm Daniel Lyons, it's very nice to meet you."

I held my hand out for a handshake, making him slowly lift his head up.

"I am Cay. . . Cayla . . . Caylan . . . I am Caylan."

"Hi, Caylan, it's very nice to meet you."

I was puzzled by the way he talked. As he spoke, he would change the position of his head and hands. As I walked away, I got a quick glance at the back of his white T-shirt. "Johnson School for Special Students." I began to formulate why he was different from the rest of us. It gave me a drooping feeling of sadness, but I kept walking.



"Hey Dan! What have you been doin' with that Caylan kid?"

I would say a week or so had passed by when Gary, the head of the drama section of the camp, informed us that we were going to put on the production "Guys and Dolls," and auditions were to be held that afternoon. I thought I did fairly well, because I earned the part of Nicely Johnson. I would perform the song "Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat."

I walked down the cobblestone path leading to the boys' bunk. Caylan walked over to me.

"I hear that . . . that you are Nicely . . . Nicely Johnson. That song you sing. I know the words. Can you . . . you take me out on stage with . . . with you? OK then. Bye."

He began to walk away.

"Wait, Caylan! Umm . . . I dunno if you can do tha- . . . I'll talk to Gary."

He smiled at me.

"YOU'RE IT, CAYLAN!"

I ran away from him laughing. He was laughing more than I was, and I don't think I'd ever seen him so happy. He reached for me, and missed. I kept running, until he had finally caught me. I now chased him around, until we were both tired. We sat down, breathing heavily.

"So, did you . . . did you talk to Gary?"

"No, I didn't, Caylan; I guess I will now."

"NO! ARE YOU outta your mind?!"

Gary's face turned a dark shade of red.

"But he doesn't understand! He may be thirteen years old, but he's really just a young child; he can't take your refusal!"

"No, and that's *final!*"

I walked away, my tail between my legs. Caylan walked up to me. I stared at him darkly. He understood, and walked away. I kept walking a different direction.

I smashed into the water, still amazed on the height I gained on the diving board jump. I opened my eyes as a girl swam under my feet. It was Jenna, one of my good friends. She and I surfaced.

"Hey Dan! What have you been doin' with that Caylan kid? You don't hang out with us much any more. And why the heck won't he come in the water?"

"He hates water, it scares him. He really likes to stand on the edge and look in. I dunno why."

I looked at him still standing on the edge smiling. Krist came up behind him, ready to push him in. I sprung from the water, and rushed Krist, pushing him and me into the water.

"Don't push him in! You know he hates water!"

"I'm just playin'. What's wrong with you?!"

He swam down under the water and swam away. Caylan smiled and kept gazing into the water. Jenna swam back up to me, a frown spread on her face. She shook her head and swam away.

I walked down to the boys' bunk dribbling a basketball. I looked in and there Caylan was. He hummed the tune

to my song from the play. He danced to himself, the exact movements I do in the number. He knew as if choreographed by my rehearsals. It was amazing, a flawless mirror of myself! I smiled as he finished, and clapped loudly. He swung around and began to laugh; he bowed and walked past me.

Two weeks had passed since then, and Caylan and I went our separate ways. We talked now and then, but not as much as we used to. I had focused more on my other friends. Now I walked with Jenna and Krist. We were talking, and mid-sentence, Krist was interrupted by a magnificently huge boom. We were showered with water as the sky turned darker. More booms followed, preceding more rain. Jenna, Krist and I ran to our bunks, where roll was called.

"Dan."

"Here."

"Krist."

"Here."

"Caylan . . . Caylan!?"

Oh no. A feeling of dread shot through my stomach. I ran outside, barefoot, running through the mud. Rain pattered painfully now on my back. I ran to the pavilion. Empty. I proceeded running to the music shed, a great distance away. No one was there either. I ran past the tennis courts, where a white flash glared in my eyes. Caylan was sitting in the corner of the court.

"CAYLAN! Let's go! C'mon! Now!"

Caylan got up and came up to me, smiling.

"Caylan, this is not a game; stop!"

His look changed to sadness.

"Fine, let's go, I'm sorry."

He followed me back to the bunk. The counselor looked at me.

"Caylan?"

"Here . . ."

Finally the day I dreaded, the play. I sat quivering uncontrollably in my suit and makeup, adding to my nervous state. One minute seemed like an hour. Acts came on and passed, but all I could think of was Caylan. I hadn't seen him lately, and I didn't know where he was. Finally it was my time, and a plan shot through my head. I ran around the camp calling Caylan's name. He walked up to me, in a suit.

"And now, Daniel Lyons as Nicely Johnson, singing 'Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat.'"

I walked out on stage holding Caylan's hand. A smile breached his face ear to ear. A deafening silence swept the audience. The parents began to whisper, and Gary's mouth gaped open. This was it. Cheri, the piano player for the play, began to play. The number went perfectly, no flaws and no missed dance steps. Caylan sang great too. He had great fun, and we shocked everyone. From that day on, Caylan and I remained friends; contrary to what people think, Nicely Johnson and Caylan took the show away. And now I really can't wait for the summer . . . ❖



Taking a deep breath, she recited what she knew must be her part of the apprentice's oath

The Healer's Apprentice

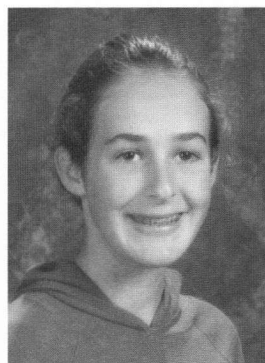
by Laurel Lathrop

illustrated by Chavaya Beebee-Galvão

MURMURS AND WHISPERS buzzed through the darkened hall. No one had any idea why the elders had called a meet, but that did not hinder them from thinking up reasons. Some believed that it was merely a routine meeting to discuss the upcoming harvest celebration, though they could not explain why it was conducted in such secrecy. Others stoutly maintained that the worst had happened; someone outside the Arborus clan had learned the sacred healing-knowledge and they were called to meeting to discuss how to react to the threat.

A group of girls near the front of the hall were particularly talkative, whispering and giggling loudly among themselves. One of the girls participated little in the conversation, but listened and smiled at the exuberance of her friends. She was one of the few not targeted in the girls' good-natured teasing; for a reason no one could explain, Keris was off limits. Though she was well-liked to an extent, the girls seemed to understand that she was somewhat different; Keris had always been on the edges of the girls' activities. But she assumed a wistful expression when no one was looking, for Keris was desperately uncomfortable with her position on the outskirts, though she knew she didn't belong in the inner group.

An elder stepped onto the speaking platform at the front, and even the girls' lively chatter died down as everyone



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Los Altos, California



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State College, Pennsylvania

hushed in expectation. It was Elder Larch, the spokeswoman for the elders and in charge of mediating disputes among the clan. She stepped to the front of the platform and spoke, her voice reaching to every corner of the hall.

"Friends," she began with a small smile, "we know all of you are wondering why the elders have called you here today. Many of you will have noted that Elder Oak has been in failing health for the past several months. He feels his ailment has begun to interfere with his duties as healer."

A murmur of polite dissent rippled through the hall, but many of the clan secretly agreed with the elder. How could someone flawed in body be entrusted with the most sacred knowledge of the entire clan?

"Therefore," continued Elder Larch, raising her voice above the murmurs, "he has decided to take an apprentice, one to whom he can pass on his knowledge, and who will take over his duties when he leaves us. This meet was called so that he may announce his choice for apprentice."

Now the murmur was more excited, as everyone wondered aloud who the apprentice would be.

All but Keris. She sat stiffly in her chair, a look of realization slowly spreading over her face and leaving her eyes wide in an almost terrified expression. She knew that when apprentices were called, the elders almost always chose young people on the outside of

their social group. This way, they would be willing to leave their age group and devote their lives to learning their calling. Keris knew that she fit the requirement, but she was sure the elders did not know that part of her wanted, and wanted desperately, to fit in and be accepted, even while the other part knew that she would never truly be a part of her peer group.

With a sense of inevitability, Keris watched Elder Oak step shakily into the speaking area. She was probably the only one in the hall not surprised at all when he announced formally, "Keris Noltera, I, Elder Oak, call you to bind yourself to the learning of the healing-knowledge, to be my apprentice and acolyte from this day until the day I leave the clan forever." Then he smiled kindly and, looking at her for the first time, added, "Now, my dear, you must come up here and say your part of the oath."

Numbly, hardly noticing the gasps and congratulations of her friends, Keris stood up and walked to the front of the hall. Her heart had dropped out. She felt nothing but a vague sadness, and for her, that was hardly unusual. She ascended the stairs at the side of the platform and joined the elder. He motioned for her to turn and face the crowd. As she did so, words flew into her mind. She gasped and looked incredulously at the frail elder, hardly believing he could be capable of such power. But he merely nodded and smiled, gently urging her to go ahead. Taking a deep breath, she

recited what she knew must be her part of the apprentice's oath.

"I, Keris Noltera, do accept the call of Elder Oak and agree to bind myself to the learning of the healing-knowledge, to be his apprentice and acolyte until the day he leaves the clan forever."

After she finished speaking, she felt a connection begin between herself and the elder. This strange presence in her mind filled her with curiosity, but she was pulled back from exploring it by Elder Oak, who stepped to the front of the stage and announced, "Tonight, there will be a celebration in honor of my new apprentice."

Masked by the murmur of anticipation, the elder told Keris, "You will have the rest of the day, including the celebration, to say your good-byes and move your belongings out of your family's home. I will take you to your new lodgings after the celebration. You know where I live, don't you?"

Keris nodded. Though she had never come close enough to see the old man's dwelling, everyone in the clan knew where it was, several miles into the dense forest to the west of the clan's village.

Even after the healer moved off, Keris could hardly believe the ceremony was over; it had happened so quickly. In a few minutes her very destiny with the clan had been determined, and her childhood ended. No longer would she live with her family, or even associate with them or her friends. She was now an acolyte.

AS SOON AS they could get away from the congratulations, Keris and her family walked home, none knowing what to say. Finally, little Allia burst out, "Are you going away forever?"

Keris smiled sadly. "Not forever, but I won't live with you and Mommy and Daddy anymore. I don't know if I can visit very often, but I'll think of you every day." Her words had no effect on the forlorn expression her little sister wore. Then Mother smiled bravely, and, picking up Allia, said, "It seems we all have to get used to this change, don't we?"

At home, Keris fled to her room. She couldn't stand the awkward silence of her family and busied herself with stuffing clothes into a carrying bag. She was finished quickly, so she sat on her bed and silently contemplated her room, nearly bare except for the bookshelves that lined the walls.

Absorbed in her melancholy thoughts, Keris did not hear her parents enter the room until Mother said quietly, "Keris, your father and I want you to know how proud we are of you. Becoming an apprentice to the healer, especially at your age, is very unusual, and an honor to you and our family. We found it hard to say that earlier because, well, you're still our little girl . . ."

Keris groaned, "Mom . . ." but she smiled. "Mommy's little girl" was a family joke, especially now, since Keris was no longer a little girl. It was comforting to hear it from Mother, a familiar word in the midst of all the changes she was



She rushed to the bed and threw her arms around Keris, sobbing, "I don't want you to go away!"

going through. Mother came and sat on the bed, and Father cleared his throat and added, "It's hard for us to think of you as a young woman, or an apprentice, and I know it's difficult for you too. And now that you're leaving home . . ."

"Oh, Dad! Of course it's hard! But it's time I became more independent. All apprentices are my age, or a year or two older. It's normal. Trust me, I'll be fine."

Father smiled and Mother ruffled Keris's hair, at which Keris rolled her eyes. Mother chuckled, "Of course *you* will, honey. But can you understand what it's like for parents to watch their little girl leave the nest?"

"Yes, Mother," Keris replied with a relieved grin. Leaving home wasn't so

hard, at least as long as Allia didn't appear suddenly and complicate things . . .

As if on cue, her sister burst through the door. She rushed to the bed and threw her arms around Keris, sobbing, "I don't want you to go away!"

Keris was touched, and hugged her sister gently. She said, "Part of me doesn't want to go either, but it's not my choice. I'm going to be an apprentice now, and that's a hard move to make for all of us. But I'll think of you every day, and anyway, the healer's house isn't so far away. I'll bet you can even see the top of the chimney over the trees."

As Allia ran to the window to see, Keris felt herself wishing desperately that her words were true. She had no idea; in fact, she did not even know if

the elder's house had a chimney. After all, he might have some magic to make a fire for himself with no smoke. But her sister's grin as she turned away from the window let her breathe a sigh of relief.

"You're right!" Allia squealed. "Your new house isn't so far away!" Giggling, she dashed out of the room.

Keris's mother stood up. Father spoke.

"Well, Keris, I'm glad we could talk for a little while. I hope you'll be happy as an apprentice. We'll all miss you, and I know you'll miss us, but I think it's really for the best. You need to have an experience of being on your own, and this seems to be the perfect one."

Keris smiled. "I hope so."

After her parents had left, she sat on her bed again. An emptiness was slowly growing inside her, and with a flash of terror she realized what it was. Something was happening within her to separate her from her family. She didn't think she would even miss them as an apprentice, and that scared her even as it filled her with a strange exhilaration. She was truly beginning a new life. Shaken, Keris wasn't sure whether she wanted to grieve for her sudden loss or rejoice for her rebirth.

AT THE CELEBRATION, her friends were distant, regarding her with something like fear in their eyes even as they greeted her. She had known this would happen; deep within her, she knew that her uncomfortable relationship with her peer group could not go on forever, and it was almost a relief to

have her ties to her friends severed in one stroke. Many other clanspeople gave her congratulations, but Keris already felt detached, and replied with distant politeness. At the end of the celebration, Elder Oak appeared.

"When you're ready, Keris, I'll take you home."

She smiled and nodded. Her family had stayed nearby throughout the event, and now they stood next to her.

"Well," started Father, "I guess this is it. We'll miss you, Keris."

Mother and Allia nodded, but Keris sensed in them the same detachment she felt herself. There was no more to say, except . . . "Good-bye," she whispered. Silently, she hugged all three, then turned to find Elder Oak. Her last ties to her former life had been severed.

Without a backward glance, she followed the healer out of the village and into the forest. He cleared his throat and spoke.

"Tomorrow we begin work in the forest, identifying trees and herbs. I will teach you the preliminary spells, and we'll see how it goes from there."

Keris smiled and nodded. At the moment, she felt empty, but it was an eager emptiness; she was ready to be filled with new knowledge and her new life as the healer's apprentice.

She fell asleep quickly and easily that night, feeling as though she was finally home.

The next morning was the first morning in a long time that she woke up smiling. ♦

If I Could Choose . . .

by Jennifer Chin



Jennifer Chin, 11
Bellevue, Washington

If I could choose to be any place in the world,
I would choose Malaysia where my grandma lives;
Where you can smell the hot, humid air,
And see the palm trees sway in the breeze.

If I could choose to be any place in the world,
I would choose Australia where my granduncle lives;
Where the wind makes sand fly
And where all the animals are unique.

If I could choose to be any place in the world,
I would choose Singapore, where my cousins live;
Where everybody is welcoming to visitors,
And they all have wonderful things to say.

If I could choose to be any place in the world,
I wouldn't care where it was.
Whether it was hot and dry,
Whether it was cold and wet,
I would choose to be any place in the world,
As long as I could be with my family.

Foxes and Frogs

by Julia Echternach

illustrated by Max Strebel

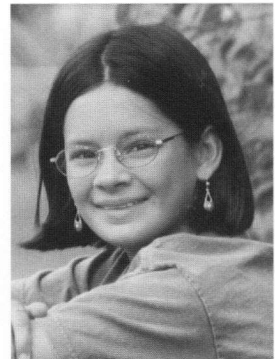
I'VE ALWAYS LOVED to explore. Sometimes I'll just put on my roller blades and go, turning onto the paths I know so well and trying to turn around corners I haven't turned around before. Usually I only find more houses, but sometimes I'll come out by the forest, which kind of looks all the same, but I don't really think about that.

The other day, when I first met Ally, I was skating over to the reservoir where I saw the fox a few weeks ago. The reservoir is in the middle of a huge, flat field covered with wild grass and prairie dogs and, of course, the reservoir. I saw the fox trotting over the stones to get a drink of water, clean, fresh running water that was spurting out of the wall. The fox had silky, fluffy, long fur and ears that pricked up at everything, and a sandpaper pink tongue like cats have. The tip of its tail was bright white like snow.

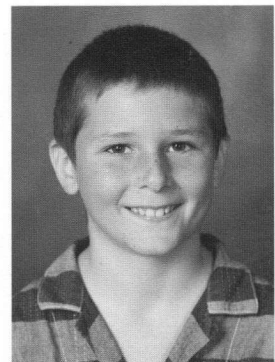
Anyway, I guess Ally'd seen the fox too, because there she was, sitting on the stones of the reservoir, admiring her handful of dandelions and talking to herself. I sneaked up behind Ally like I had sneaked up behind the fox, as if she were an exotic specimen that could only be observed under silence.

"Hi," I said before I knew what in the world I was doing, and Ally didn't jump three feet in the air like I would have, she just turned around and said "hi" back to me.

"I'm Ally," she told me, and tucked her stringy brown-



Julia Echternach, 11
Highlands Ranch, Colorado



Max Strebel, 10
San Francisco, California



"Hi froggy," I mumbled, stroking its head

blond hair behind her ear. "Who are you?"

"Jessie." I slowly sat down on the rocks. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh . . ." Ally sighed dreamily and looked up at the sky. "I don't know. I just felt like coming here. I like to do whatever I feel like doing."

I'd never met anyone who just did something if they felt like it. More often than not, someone did something because it seemed sensible and productive and interesting. It sounded like a nice life, doing whatever you felt like doing,

not really caring if it was weird, maybe even useless.

"I came to look for the fox," I explained to Ally, feeling that if I asked her what she was doing, I had to at least say what I was doing myself.

"That's OK." Ally twirled her hair around her finger. "Some people come down to shoot it, not to look at it."

"They do?"

"Yep, the woman from the museum comes every day, to see if Foxy's died during the night. I guess she doesn't shoot it, but she wants it to die."



The fox! It stood on top of the rocks, staring hypnotically at the mountains

I noticed for the first time how hot it was that day. It was the middle of summer and Mom had said it was ninety-six degrees that day.

"Do you want to go swimming?" Ally asked me brightly.

"Swimming? Where?"

"Here!" Ally took off her Texas and walked down to the water. "It's nice and cool, you know."

The water did look kind of inviting. "Are you sure we're allowed to?"

"Well, there aren't any 'No Swimming' signs."

"Good point." I slowly took off my socks. Mom always made us wear socks in the summer. I tiptoed over the rocks, burning my toes, to the water.

"Don't slip," Ally warned me, but before I knew what was happening, I did slip. Right off a rock into the water.

"Eek!" I squealed as my feet sank into the sand. I started to tilt backwards to the rocks. Ally grabbed my arm and pushed me back up.

"Thanks."

Ally nodded. "I fall in all the time, and my mom gets angry at me. I would-

n't want you to get in trouble too."

The water was ice cold. I took a deep breath and slowly walked further into the water. When it was a few inches below the bottom of my shorts, I stopped. Ally walked in behind me.

I wasn't sure what was so interesting about standing in a reservoir, but Ally knew what to do. "Look for little splash-es," she told me. "There's a frog over in this corner of the reservoir."

In a few minutes Ally had caught the frog. She held her hands together, her fingers twitching, then slowly opened up her hands. There sat a frog, looking like a short, oval-shaped pickle. "Here it is," she said.

I smiled down at the frog. "Hi froggy," I mumbled, stroking its head. I'd always expected frogs to be slimy and gross, but this one felt like . . . well, it felt like a frog, if you know what frogs feel like.

Ally dropped the frog back into the water. "Isn't this fun?"

I nodded. "It's like . . . I don't know, it just seems more like summer down here in the reservoir."

"Look!" Ally suddenly pointed behind me. I turned around slowly, and when I saw what it was, I gasped.

The fox! It stood on top of the rocks,

staring hypnotically at the mountains, its ear twitching just the slightest bit. It had a black nose and that fluffy fur, and white on the end of its tail, looking as bright as snow.

Ally and I watched it for a few minutes until the fox left. "Wow," I whispered. "Do you see her a lot?"

"Yep."

"Amazing."

"Everything is amazing," Ally said in a casual tone. "So if you want to see miracles, just go ahead. You shouldn't let people stop you with that kind of stuff."

Everything was amazing. This seemed like a genius idea. "That sounds about right."

"It is." Ally turned and looked right into my eyes, smiling. "It's OK. Better than OK, even."

Then she turned away, walked up the rocks, and started to leave. Before she rode off on her bicycle, she looked back and said, "Maybe I'll see you tomorrow."

"OK," I called back. Then I went to put on my roller blades. Everything was amazing . . . maybe I'd known that all along, always liking to explore and see new things. Maybe from then on I should just do what I felt like doing. It sounded OK. ❖

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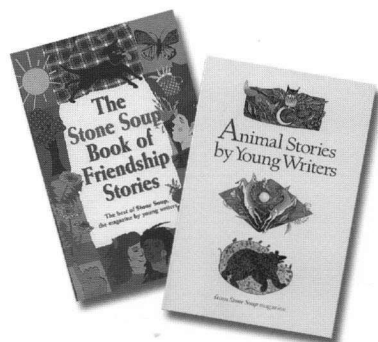
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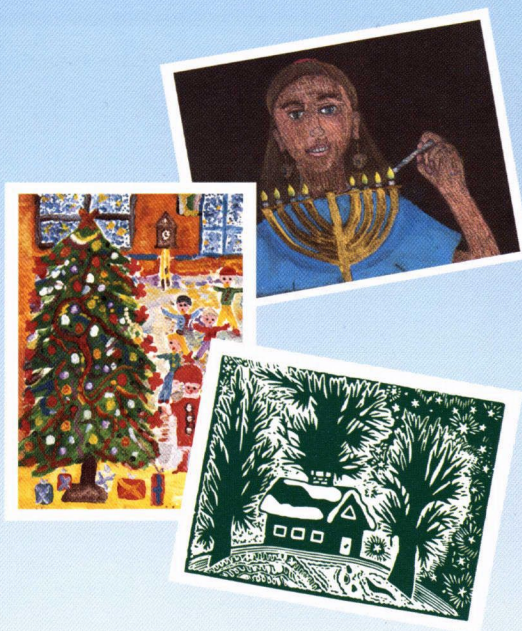
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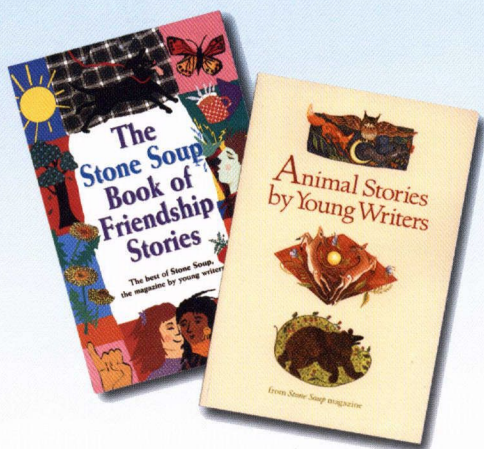
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