

Stone Soup

the magazine by young writers and artists



"A Village on Mount Pelion," by Sonia Stavropoulou, age 9, Greece

A TEST OF HONOR

Today is Retsina's last chance to become a Space Cadet

A CHRISTMAS WISH

Will Lily and Scruffy be able to find Grandpa and bring him home?

Also: The excitement of a day at Yankee Stadium

A scary adventure in the bayous of Louisiana

A poem from Japan

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2000

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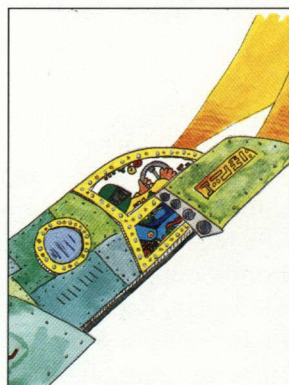
Volume 29, Number 2
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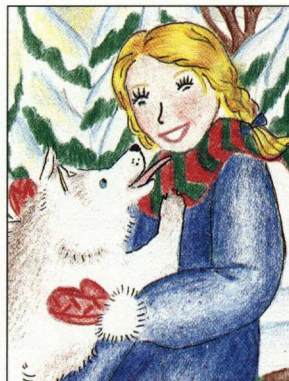
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Stone Soup

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: "A Village on Mount Pelion" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by the Museum of Greek Children's Art in Athens. The museum preserves and exhibits children's art, holds an annual art competition for Greek children, and conducts educational programs for children and teachers. Special thanks to director Mrs. Helen-Fay Stamati.

Gerry Mandel

William Rubel

Editors



Laurie Gabriel

Fulfillment Director



Stephen Pollard

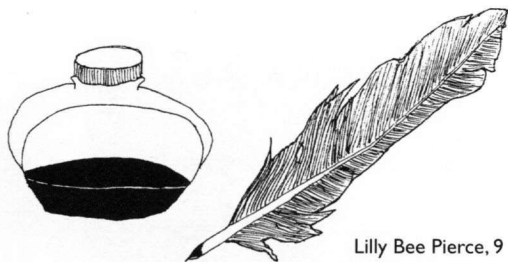
Production



Barbara Harker

Administrative Assistant

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Lilly Bee Pierce, 9

The Mailbox

I enjoy writing and reading and this is the perfect magazine for me! I would like to be a writer when I grow up. In the July/August issue, one particular story caught my eye, and that was "Lakota." I decided to read it for the plain and simple reason that the wolf is one of my favorite animals. What I saw shocked me. It was such a wonderful story. I almost cried when I read Chapter Six and Pike died. It was a very well-written story, and I would like to congratulate the author on her work.

Cecille deLaurentis, 9
Oaklyn, New Jersey

I was glancing through the July/August 2000 issue of *Stone Soup*, and I noticed ten-year-old Martin Taylor's illustration of "a tiny midwestern town in Iowa." I loved it—those tiny, perfect houses and cars were so cute! I was amazed to see such a high level of detail so nicely balanced out, and I hope Martin Taylor will illustrate children's books someday soon!

Alli Massar, 15
Fort Langley, British Columbia, Canada

See "A Test of Honor" on page 10 for Martin's latest illustrations.

The emotion-packed story about that girl, roses and the grave ["Carrying Heart's Roses," July/August 2000] was probably the best I've ever read. Tell the writer that I cried when I read it and I wished I could write something like that. I really loved "Song of a Wanderer," too. The words tingled with excitement, just like they do when you have a really good story!

Emily Elizabeth Hogstad, 11
Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Seeing my name on the cover of the July/August 2000 issue was very exciting. I was also feeling a little sad, because I knew it was the last time. I want to say thank you for giving young writers and illustrators an outlet for their work. I just wish there were more publishers like you. Young people that want to be actors, singers, gymnasts, skaters, swimmers, etc. are taken seriously. These young people are able to compete against other kids as well as adults in their field. Young writers and illustrators that have practiced and become proficient in their field should be given the same opportunity. Thanks for listening.

Erica D. Pratt, 14
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

I have just finished reading your fantastic September/October 2000 issue. It is a work of art! All the illustrations were gorgeous, but I would especially like to compliment Jane Westrick and Natalie Chin. Jane, your illustrations for "The Real Mr. Vankos" were fabulous! Your illustrations are so realistic and I admire that very much. You will always be a popular artist. When I saw the illustration for "A Winner" I never expected it was done by an eight-year-old! I think it so amazing the way you can draw for your age, Natalie. Keep up the great work!

Nina Brentlinger, 10
Seattle, Washington

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.



"Remember the beginning of the summer? When we first got to the house?"

Memories of Sunset Lake

by Mandana Nakhai

illustrated by Zoe Paschkis

IT WAS GETTING DARK. Zoe lay on the hammock on the front porch eating an ice-cream sundae. She looked out at the golden lake thoughtfully. The porch door slammed. Zoe scooted over for her twin brother, Hunter.

"Thinkin'?"

Zoe nodded. She slurped a chocolate drip off the side of the tall glass. Hunter carefully watched Zoe's gaze drop toward the other white-picket-fence houses ringing the lake.

"I just can't believe the summer's over."

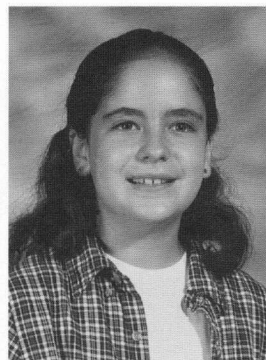
Hunter got up and dangled his feet over the porch, brushing some blond hair out of his intense green eyes. "Well, we can come back next summer. We have to go back to school, you know."

Zoe nodded, wishing that the summer would never end.

Cool air blew the trees as the twins walked down to the dock. "I just wish we could have done something interesting. All we did is sit around on the dock the whole time."

Hunter rolled up his khakis and dipped his feet in the water, thinking about what his sister had said. "We did lots of stuff. Remember the beginning of the summer? When we first got to the house?"

Zoe closed her eyes, thinking of the empty smell of the house, the hot sun beating down on her back. She remembered wondering if there would be any other girls her age at Sunset Lake. Another cool breeze brought Zoe back to the



Mandana Nakhai, 11
Tucson, Arizona



Zoe Paschkis, 12
Newton, Massachusetts

present.

"But we didn't do anything at the beginning."

Hunter grinned. "Sure we did. We met Daryl and Kelly. And then we went canoeing."

Zoe had to laugh. The four friends had rented a canoe for the afternoon and gone canoeing. Only they hadn't told anyone. A huge summer storm arrived and blew them up on one of the islands. They had to spend the night to wait out the storm.

"We got in so much trouble!" Hunter exclaimed, happy that he had made Zoe laugh.

Zoe picked up a shell lying on the dock. "I remember when we collected all those shells."

Hunter took the shell from her hand. "Yeah, that was neat." They had taken their shells to the little town nearby for the annual shell festival. A tall man with a truckload of shells had bought one of theirs for one hundred dollars! "I'll never throw another shell like that one back into the lake." Hunter extracted his freezing legs from the lake and rolled his pants down.

"We went swimming a lot." Zoe could practically feel the sun throwing its fiery rays down at the beach patrons. The run, the jump, then the splash were all clear in her mind. Cool water enveloped her, soothing the burning skin.

"Hello? Zoe?" Hunter was waving his hand in front of her face.

"Oh! I just thought of the Fourth of July."

Hunter looked out at the purple sky, enjoying the memories. All of the Sunset Lake summerhouse renters had thrown a big potluck on the beach. Everyone splashed in the lake and ate hot dogs and hamburgers. The fireworks burst out with brilliant colors and shapes, provoking oohs and aahs with every dazzling explosion.

There was a creak from the house. "Kids, come on in! We have to be on the road early tomorrow, so you need to get to bed sometime soon."

Hunter turned to face the house. "One minute, Mom!" The sky was black, stars bright with prospect. "So?"

"So, I guess we did have a pretty cool summer."

Hunter nodded, taking Zoe's hand. "Yeah. We sure did."

They walked to the porch, happier than when they had come this way earlier. Zoe took a last look at the sparkling lake, the white houses lining it, the tall trees. She inhaled the piney smell along with the memories that came with. She felt that her happiness was unreasonable, considering she would be back at school in a week, but she couldn't shake the feeling. "See you next summer, Sunset Lake," she whispered. ❖

Christmas Gifts

by Scott Limbacher

illustrated by Hannah Rose

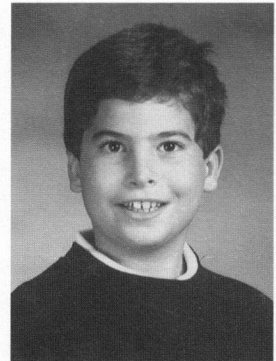
“**M**AN, I CAN’T WAIT until I get out of here, and I can live with a real family,” John said for the millionth time to his best friend in the orphanage, Tom.

“Yeah, but I’ll sure miss you when you’re gone,” Tom answered while wolfing down some cornbread at dinner.

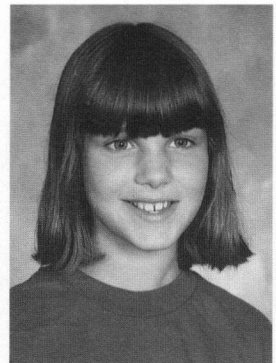
John and Tom had lived in Saint Vincent’s Orphanage for as long as he could remember. John was tired of the sameness of all the bedrooms and the cheery posters that tried to cover the cement-gray walls. Most of all he was tired of being told how lucky he was to have a roof over his head and food in his belly. It wasn’t like his life was right out of a Dickens novel or anything like that, but the empty feeling was always with him. Now things were sure to change—he had been told that a family had chosen to adopt him.

“I’ll miss you too,” he said softly to Tom. “But I bet they’ll be real rich, and I’ll be able to visit you any time I want,” John added, trying to cheer Tom up.

Tomorrow, John thought to himself as he lay in bed staring at a crack in the ceiling. They’ll get me lots of presents, especially since tomorrow’s Christmas Eve. He pictured a tree that towered over a high-ceilinged family room with a golden star at the top that threw light all around the room. John still had some mixed feelings about leaving Tom, but he shook off the thought. He saw himself in the middle of his family on some exotic vacation, tanned, and arms around



Scott Limbacher, 10
Ambler, Pennsylvania



Hannah Rose, 12
Marysville, Tennessee



There must be a mistake, he wanted to shout. This isn't my family

each other—the perfect Kodak moment. Excitement kept him awake for a long time.

The next morning, John woke up and bounded out of bed. “Today’s the day,” he whispered. It was already eight forty-five in the morning, and his family would arrive to pick him up in fifteen minutes! John slipped on his best clothes—a white-collared shirt and a pair of jeans. He brushed his teeth, combed his hair, and grabbed a piece of toast from the cafeteria. He had little to pack up, so that didn’t take him very

long. It was nine o’clock and time for John to meet his new family. John raced down into the lobby of the orphanage with his suitcase gripped tightly in his hand.

There stood a man, dressed in a faded polyester suit, holding the hand of a woman who wrapped her bulky frame in a too-bright yellow K-mart sweater.

“Here he is,” the director of the orphanage chirped in a sing-songy voice. John’s stomach pretzeled up.

There must be a mistake, he wanted to shout. This isn’t my family. But he

said nothing.

"John," the director said as she took him by the hand and pulled him over to the strangers, "come and say hi to your new family." Her Jekyll-and-Hyde personality was nauseating, but he almost begged her to let him stay, and to tell the two that stared at him to go away.

"Hi, John, I'm Mr. Adams, and this is Mrs. Adams, but of course you can just call us Mom and Dad," the man said with a chuckle. John echoed a fake laugh.

"We're so happy to have you as our son," the woman gushed. She almost sounded like she meant it, John thought.

When they pulled up to the Adamses' house, the disappointment sat like a lump in John's stomach. Yellow paint peeled like tired banana skin from the house. Inside, a muddy-brown sofa filled one side of the room. A Charlie Brown Christmas tree draped in tinsel and strung popcorn slumped by the window.

That night, John thought about having to live the rest of his life with these people and somehow he felt even emptier than he had felt at the orphanage. But tomorrow was Christmas and some small part of him still held onto the hope that Christmas would bring its magic into his life.

The next morning John walked

downstairs to find his new parents standing next to the three-foot tree. They handed him a present wrapped in newspaper.

"Merry Christmas, son!" Mr. Adams's voice was warm. John unwrapped the gift and found a football.

"Gee, I'm really sorry," John mumbled.

"Why?" Mrs. Adams asked, looking confused.

"Well," John explained, "I don't have anything to give either of you."

A smile slowly spread across Mr. Adams's face. "Oh, but you do," he said. "You're here, aren't you? We've always wanted a son." Somehow it sounded like the truth to John. He felt just a small part of the hole inside of him fill up.

That night at dinner the three sat around a table and shared food and stories. There was a lot of catching up to do. John found himself talking, sharing bits and pieces of his life, the funny moments and some of the painful ones, too. Once he started, he couldn't stop the waterfall of words. And for the first time in his life he felt like someone was really listening. And as the sun set in pinks and blues on Christmas day, and laughter filled up the tiny kitchen where they sat, John felt, for the first time in his life, like he was just where he wanted to be—just where he belonged. ♦

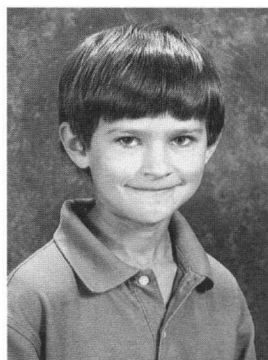
A Test of Honor

by Rebecca Orchard

illustrated by Martin Taylor



Rebecca Orchard, 12
Wadsworth, Ohio



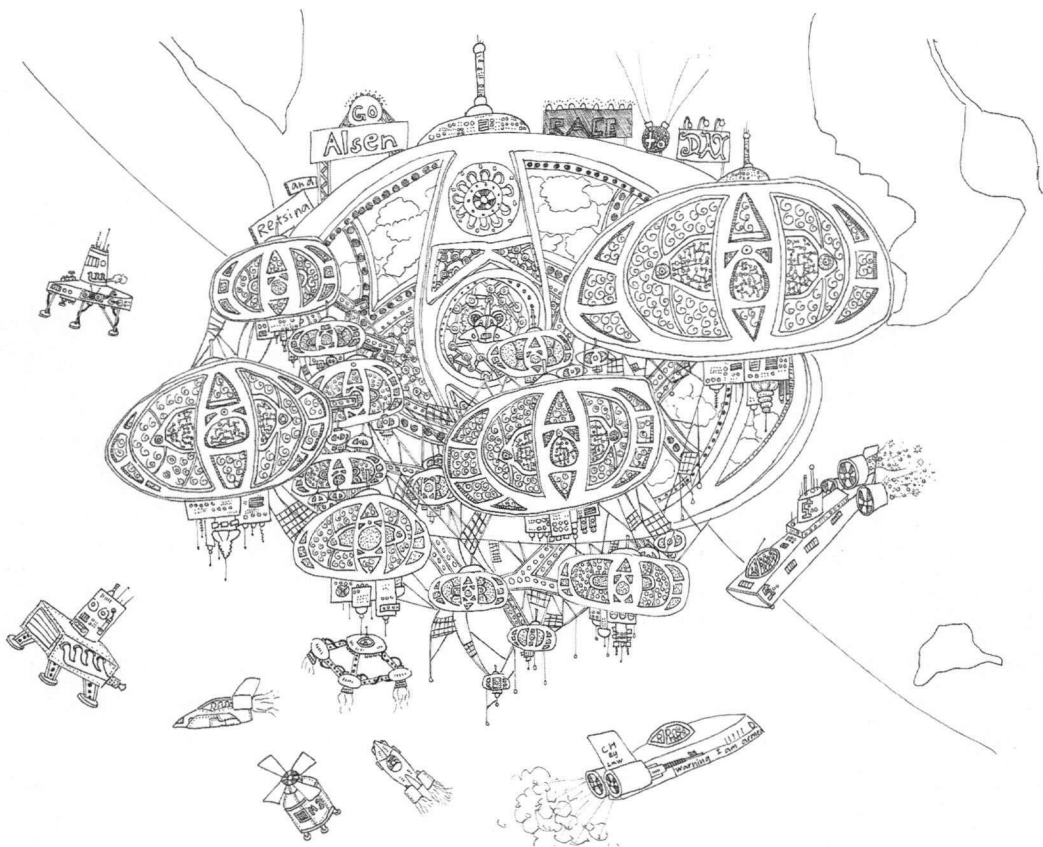
Martin Taylor, 10
Portola Valley, California

RETSINA FLIPPED HER LONG, black hair behind her. She looked around at the empty, quiet bunker she lived in. Once it was filled with the joyous shouts of girls, but now only deafening silence reigned, echoing off the stone walls. Girls here on Matia 3 were expected to raise large families, but ten years ago, one woman had changed all that. Sloran, Retsina's role model, had entered StarCor and trained as a Space Cadet, shocking the entire world.

Today was Retsina's last chance to become a Space Cadet. Trainees were allowed four tries at the test, and she had failed the last three, coming in the top three places all three times. But that wasn't good enough. Only one could pass the test at a time, and it had been a boy every year.

But today, oh, today she was going to show them all. She had trained an hour longer than any of them every day, and started an hour earlier. A grin sprouted on her too-narrow face. One of the reasons she had chosen to go into StarCor was because she wasn't pretty enough to be married off and improve her family's landhold. To do that, you had to be exceptionally beautiful, and she was only middling, a short, small girl with coarse, somewhat shaggy black hair and black eyes.

Footsteps rang off the walls, and Retsina knew that Sloran was back from patrolling in her hovercar. The older girl entered the bunker with an air of fatigue. "It's Testing Day, isn't it?" she asked Retsina.



Only one could pass the test at a time, and it had been a boy every year

The young girl nodded. "The last one of the year."

Sloran smiled in that distant, icy way she had. The years were taking their toll on the young woman. She was, what, twenty-three Matia standard years old? Most died by forty-five.

"I know I haven't been the best of roommates, but I just wanted to wish you good luck." With that, she drew Retsina into an embrace.

Retsina pulled away, backing slowly out the door with her head bowed; the proper status for a woman of Matia.

"Hey!" Sloran's voice rang out. "If you truly want to be a Space Cadet, walk like one!"

Retsina straightened her shoulders, smiled into Sloran's eyes, and ran out the door.

"**M**ARK THREE . . . two . . . one!" The trainees ran around the course set for them. Grismom, the head trainer, watched their progress with a smile. He had produced a fine crop of Cadets this year, even with that "pesky" girl thrown in. To be honest, he liked her, and con-

sidered her a hard-working, intelligent young lady. It was a pity only one from the Elite class was allowed to graduate a year.

The finishing tone sounded, and he looked up to see who had won. The girl! The weakling Retsina had won the race. This was her worst area, discounting wrestling. This put her in the lead, with Alsen, a boy her age, right behind her.

He walked over to congratulate her. "Well done, *Retshine al Tuesel*," he said, using her respectful full name.

"Thank you, sir," she managed in between sharp intakes of air. She looked around her. Alsen was glaring at her for beating him, for there was only one more activity, and only those two would be competing. She paled, and seemed to withdraw for a second. Then she stood up. "I am ready whenever my worthy opponent deems fit," she said respectfully, with a bit of challenge thrown in. Grismom nodded and led the way.

Retsina paled as she saw the last test. This was the one that had caused her to remain in training for two years. A long, wide, rocky cavern that held a pool of water was the setting. The challenge was to swim the entire length of the cavern, about two kilometers, and scale the cliff face with no safety equipment, fresh out of the pool. The first one to the top graduated, the other went home in shame, or re-applied to the council to allow another two-year training period.

Retsina dropped to her knees to allow

her long hair to be twisted into a hairstyle that would not fall out. Alsen was doing the same, for none of the trainees cut their hair until they graduated. Retsina could almost taste the nervousness in the air as she stood at the side of the water. "Mark three . . . two . . . one!"

The starting tone sounded as she dove into the water, to start swimming automatically. The stroke required was extremely difficult, but it was the fastest. It involved twisting every four strokes to grab the knee, where a propulsion button would be, swim under the water, breathe, mid-dive under, and repeat the process. They were not given propulsion systems, but had to swim the entire length by themselves.

Alsen finished up first, starting to pull himself up the rock face, when Retsina pulled the move she had been planning for three months now. She lined her small feet up on a ledge under the water, and pushed, making herself shoot out of the water. She grabbed an overhanging rock, and pulled herself upwards, her feet seeking dry purchase. Alsen looked up the few feet that were between them, blond head thrown back.

She spared him one glance as she continued upwards. When the simulated earthquake vibrated the cliff face, she was already at a ledge that other students had proved "safe," and waited it out. In the course of two minutes, it was over, and Alsen had been thrown into the water. He did not give up, however, but started climbing again, hand over hand, even faster than before. Retsina,

however, was almost at the top.

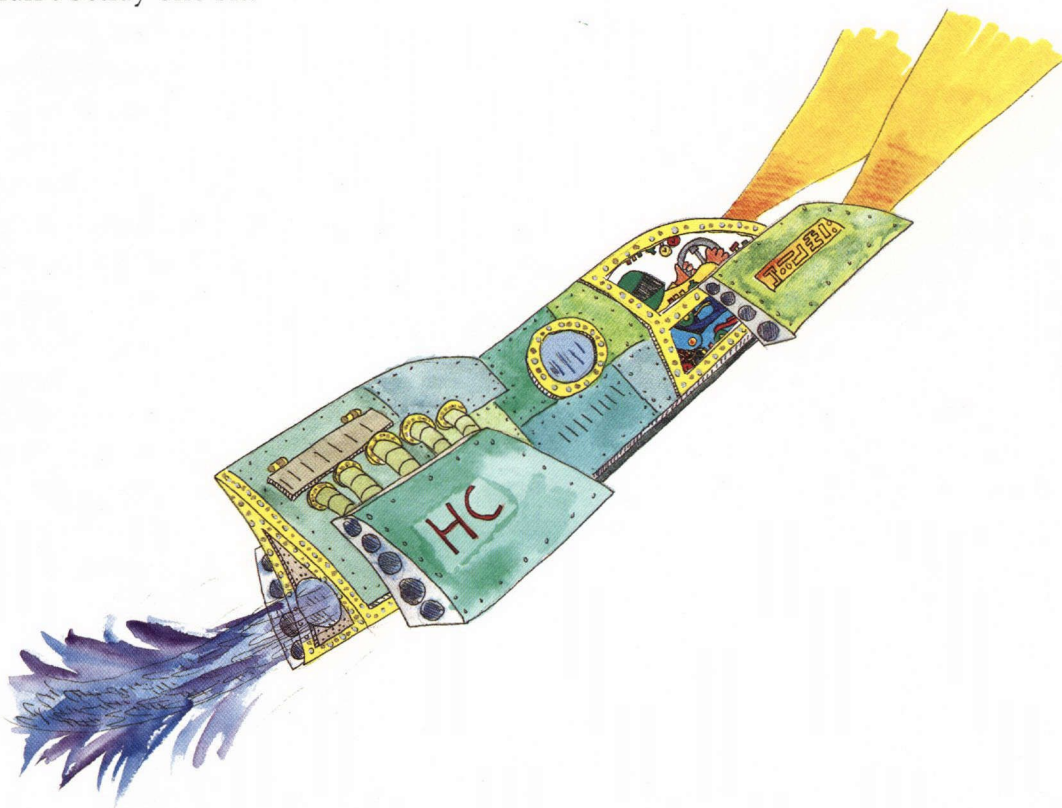
With a mighty heave, she threw herself on the ground, having reached the top two yards ahead of Alsen. Looking ahead, she saw Sloran's specially tailored boots.

"I knew you could do it!" the Cadet exclaimed, pulling Retsina close, not minding that she was sopping wet.

Retsina looked over at a glaring Alsen, his gray eyes piercing hers. Prodded by the training master, he offered his hand.

"Good job," he said, and she could see his grudging appreciation of her shine in his eyes, even though his face didn't betray one bit.

THAT EVENING, she sat perfectly still for the ritual haircut, and placed her insignia on her jacket. Tomorrow morning, with her extremely short hair, "unfitting" for a lady, she would climb into a hovercar of her own and cruise the skies, just she and the computer. And space, that vast expanse, never ceased its beckoning, and she knew, someday, that she would sail between the stars on the sea of black. She had proved it to the trainees, Sloran, her family, and the entire world of Matia 3. But most important, she had proved it to herself. ❖



Old Man Swamp

by Meredith Allen

illustrated by Shoshana Leffler



Meredith Allen, 12
Harvey, Louisiana



Shoshana Leffler, 13
Bronx, New York

THE DAY WAS HOT and humid, one of those lazy days that always found themselves in a place like Marrisville. Bare legs hanging off the creaky, wooden porch, head pancaked between her hands, Athena, half in a doze, was watching the dying grass stir in the seldom stirs of wind. The classic sign of boredom. That is all the town held for her. After living in the fun-loving city of New Orleans, the plain little rows upon rows of houses of the suburb were claustrophobic. Yet, her dear mother sought yet another "ideal" life. And there Athena was, sipping her grandmother's lemonade, watching the grass grow with her best friend Josh. Even he, the class clown, was calm and dull. "You think maybe if it got a few degrees higher the cement will melt?" Josh said, chewing on the end of a weed.

"Change of pace," the girl responded. She stared over to Mr. Baker's lawn and Mr. Baker shaping a mustang out of the huge hedge with clippers.

"Think we'll turn out like that?" asked Josh, who always seemed to read her mind.

"I pray not."

"Hey," Josh jumped up, "let's go down to the trails and find Old Man Swamp." Athena laughed. It was so stupid. The trails were in the swamp, which was a furnace, especially in mid-July. Athena felt like she was already half fried, but was totally bored. And, it was an idea. Josh was obsessed with

Old Man Swamp, an old hermit in the swamp people say went crazy and goes around scarin' people. Josh thought he was cool. Athena thought he was an insane coot.

Josh and Athena jogged the three miles to the edge of the park, good practice for the annual race New Orleans held each year. They crossed the fallen cypress over the murky branch of the bayou, and hopped on the well-worn path. "You know, they say Old Man Swamp's son was killed by a pirate's ghost. That's why he wanders these woods, trying to take revenge on the spirit," Josh said. He crossed over the path onto the woods' floor of dead leaves, darting through the ferns.

"Josh, come back, I don't feel like getting lost in the swamp," Athena said with a groan.

"Come on, you baby, where's your sense of adventure?" Josh retaliated. Athena flinched. She was now obligated to follow, for she took all dares seriously, and Josh knew it. "Besides, you know our man won't live by the trails," Josh said, hopping over a vacant turtle shell like he was scaling a long jump.

"OK, but we ain't introducing ourselves."

The two had gone pretty deep in the woods when they came upon a wide canal. "Game's over, Josh, let's go," Athena pleaded with him, and Josh looked at her, then at the canal. Chewing on his lower lip, he ran toward it, and to Athena's dismay plunged into the water.

He submerged in the middle of the canal, hooting and hollering. "It's cool," he exclaimed. Liar.

Then, to her horror, she saw it. Two black eyes peeping out of the water where the stream made its bend through the woods. And, it was filling the gap between itself and Josh. "Get out of there, Josh!" she screamed, a lump rising from her chest to her throat.

"Come on, chicken, have a little fun," he cried, doing a backstroke upstream, near the 'gator.

"No, Josh, there's an alligator!" Athena screamed desperately. Josh jerked his head up, looking wildly in all directions. The monster was now only about ten yards away, and in a snap decision Athena raced down the bank, sliding on the muddy slope, running into the water. She paddled as fast as she could, having no clue as to the fundamentals of swimming, trying to make it. Josh was frozen, though. He stared at it dead in the eyes as they continued sliding closer to him in the water. "Josh!" she screamed as she reached his side. He snapped out of the trance, Athena already hauling him back as best she could. Athena looked back, and found herself almost staring down the throat of the reptile.

Swoosh! Something whizzed by her head, narrowly missing it. It struck the beast square on its throat, flipping it sideways. She shot out of the canal, running through the murk and up the bank, not stopping till she almost smacked into him. Not Josh. There



Old Man Swamp's grin broadened into a smile, almost like Josh had complimented him

stood a stout old man with fur pelts tied around his arms and legs, and a long silvery beard filled and matted with twigs and leaves. He took her by the shoulders to steady her, Athena trying to stifle a scream.

"Old Man Swamp!" He looked past Athena to Josh who had said it, a grin appearing on his withered lips. Old Man

Swamp released Athena, who almost collapsed; her knees suddenly turned to Jell-O. Josh, by contrast, almost skipped toward the brute. "How . . . you . . . what . . . ?" Josh asked, stuttering and slurring his words, dumbfounded, and in an odd way, star-struck by the man. Old Man Swamp's grin broadened into a smile, almost like Josh had complimented him.

"Well, with a commotion like that, I couldn't keep away," he responded in a raspy voice that sounded like the dead leaves under his feet. His eyes darted from Athena to Josh, and the immense hulk of a man turned around and strode away.

It took Athena only a second to realize they were lost. She shot Josh a look, and cried, "Um, excuse me, Mister, but we're kinda lost." The mountain turned around, giving a critical but quick once-over that gave Athena the shivers. Then he jerked his head to signal them to follow, but Josh was already beside him.

"It must be cool to live in the swamp." The comment sparked an exchange of knowledge about nature, Josh utterly entranced by Old Man Swamp, and it filled the long walk back home. Then they finally came upon the black road.

Old Man Swamp scratched his head as if he were in deep thought, looking up and down the road. "That way," he pointed left, "is Choctaw. The other way's Marrisville; take your pick."

Athena, all ready to leave, stopped and almost stared at him, at this elusive figure before her, something out of her

land's past. "Why are you here?" she asked bluntly.

Old Man Swamp stood there, unmoving like this was a question he had pondered himself. He looked upward toward the radiant heavens as a hawk flew from horizon to horizon, and then Old Man Swamp stared at her, finally responding, "Girly, you can't put it into words, but you can't get it anywhere else," and he looked up again. Then he winked at Athena, and stalked off back into the trees.

Athena had known what he meant, but she couldn't tell you either, for it was deep in the swamp, in the trees, the bayou, the hawks, even the alligators. Something within it and Old Man Swamp that drove the two together. Athena turned to Josh, who appeared confused by the response. Then Athena whirled back around and shouted, "Thank you!" but Old Man Swamp was gone.

As Josh and Athena walked back home, Athena said, "You know, I used to believe this place was boring."

"Nah," Josh said, "a boring place can't hold me, you and Old Man Swamp." ♦

The First Snowflake

by Sarah Kim Perry



Sarah Kim Perry, 11
Bethesda, Maryland

At midnight today, the first snowflake fell
Wandering through miles of clear December air.
It blew onto my windowpane
And lay there, a silent witness
To the candlelight twinkling within
And the stars without.

Sketching Tammy

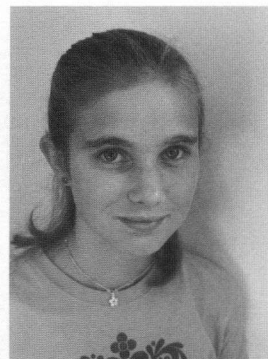
by Hana Bieliauskas

illustrated by Nicole Meyo

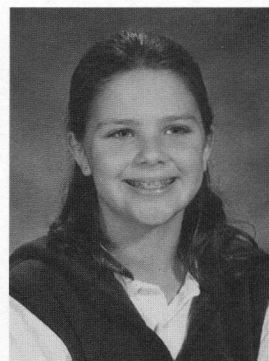
ART CLASS. THE COMFORTING scent of paints and crayons greeted me as I made my way into the room. As if by magic all of my problems seemed to slip away, like I was losing many heavy weights that were tied to my heart. For two hours, those long-awaited two hours on Friday afternoons, I could be as free as an eagle and let my imagination soar. No one called me “teacher’s pet” or shot me mean glances for exactly 120 minutes. I didn’t have to worry about tests, or when we were going to move again, or Mom always being tired.

“Samantha!” Barbra, my art teacher, always seemed to have a smile ready for anyone. No doubt I needed her smile after a long week of school. “Have a seat. We’ll start as soon as the new girl arrives.”

I pulled out a metal chair from the table and sat down. The new girl, I thought vaguely. Barbra had mentioned her the week before. I paid no real attention, there was no reason to. I had never had many friends, we moved too often due to Dad’s job for me to keep any friends for long. No one at this new school liked me and I made no move to get into one of their groups. I was used to being an outsider. I took some colored pencils from my backpack and began to sketch. I drew the outline of a face, then added eyes and a nose in the correct spots. I took a peach color and shaded in the skin. Then I made the eyes blue and the hair blond with a slight curl at



Hana Bieliauskas, 13
Cincinnati, Ohio



Nicole Meyo, 11
Akron, Ohio



"This is Tammy," announced Barbra, her arm around the girl's shoulders

the bottom. The mouth was curved in a pleasant smile. I grinned back at my sketch. If only I had a friend like the girl that I'd drawn.

"OK, everyone, let's stop for a second so I can introduce our new student." At Barbra's voice, I closed my sketchpad and looked up. The several other students, all high-school age, did the same. For a moment, we all just stared. Then one of the boys whispered something to a girl beside him, and she giggled. The new student was a girl about thirteen—my age. She was black.

"This is Tammy," announced Barbra, her arm around the girl's shoulders. Tammy smiled at us timidly, then Barbra pointed her to a seat. "You can sit over there by Samantha." Tammy looked my way, but I pretended to study my sketchpad. I had never spent any time with a person who was a different color than me, and I was unsure how to act. Our neighborhoods had been almost entirely white.

Barbra gave us instructions to draw what scared us. I set to work drawing what first came to my mind—a snake. I had always been terrified of snakes. Once I went to the zoo and saw one behind glass. After that I was unable to sleep without nightmares for weeks.

I finished my drawing of a copperhead, my worst-feared snake. Tammy was still drawing. I glanced quickly at her sketch. What I saw startled me—a man in black stood pointing a gun at someone. The person was pressed against a wall, looking scared.

That night, after I had read a few chapters of my book, I glanced at my sketchpad and saw the snake picture. I held the pad and thought of Tammy's sketch, how real it was. The copperhead was an imaginary fear, in a way. None lived in my Illinois town, or anywhere else that I'd lived. But guns—the possibility made me shiver.

During the next few weeks I had a tendency to sneak a peek at Tammy's sketches. The one with the gun stayed with me. Every time that I heard of a shooting on television or on the radio, Tammy's sketch popped into my mind. Her other sketches were good, too. They all showed that feeling that Barbra encouraged us to include in our pictures. She had once said, "A picture is worth a thousand words."

Then things started happening. At first I thought it was nothing, but I was wrong. After the second art class that Tammy attended was when the happenings began. When she came back the following week, all of her sketches for an upcoming painting were all torn up. Only one sketch remained—one that had a man standing behind a podium. It took a moment for me to realize that it was supposed to be Martin Luther King, Jr. It took a moment because his head had been blotted out with black ink. Scrawled across the paper were the words, "Go home, darkie."

When Tammy saw this, her eyes opened a little wider, but that was all. Barbra, however, turned as red as a beet, and, for the first time that I'd ever seen,

she got angry. "I do not accept this behavior in my class," she said, holding up the sketch. "I expect it never to happen again."

The happenings continued, although they weren't as visible as the first. They didn't happen every class, either. Once Tammy's sculpture was squashed. Then her colored pencils disappeared. After that her painting had shoe marks on it, like someone had stepped on it.

Through it all, I remained silent. I hadn't spoken once to Tammy. The other students occasionally said a few words to her, but they rarely exceeded "Pass the paint." I did find myself beginning to admire Tammy's obvious talent for art. Barbra did, too, and began calling her "Picassa" after the artist Picasso. That made Tammy smile.

I felt tension in the class, even when I tried to convince myself that it was nothing. I began to notice that two of the boys would casually knock into Tammy, or spill water her way "accidentally." Their actions made me feel uneasy, yet I had no proof that they were the ones who were doing all of those mean things to Tammy.

Then one class Tammy was late. She only arrived when the class was half over. One of the boys was absent—sick, his friend claimed. When Tammy did arrive, her shoes were caked with mud, her hair messy, although it looked as if she'd tried to fix it. Out of the corner of my eye I thought I saw the boy who had spilled the water on Tammy's sketch the week before smile.

That day my mom was late picking me up. My little brother had a doctor's appointment and she had been caught in the Friday afternoon traffic. I waited for her on a bench outside the art building, my coat wrapped around me. It was a biting cold February day, gray and dreary.

As I was sitting on the bench, the art building door opened and Tammy walked out. I wondered for the first time who picked her up. I had never seen her mom or dad. I noticed for the first time, too, how thin her coat was. It was faded and she held it shut with one hand, as if it didn't zip. The wind blew her hair out from its ponytail. She had worn no hat, as I had.

Just then, as Tammy began walking down the sidewalk, the boy whom I had thought to be sick jumped out from behind the hedge. He stood right in front of Tammy, blocking her way.

I felt my heart race and my body lock up. I prayed that the boy wouldn't see me on the bench. I heard the boy tell Tammy, "Give me your bus money, darkie." Bus money! So Tammy took a bus to and from art. No wonder I never saw a car. And that boy had called her darkie, like what had been written on the sketch! The pieces were all coming together now.

Tammy protested in a firm voice. "No."

"Give it to me, or else I'll pound you into the cement," the boy said with such cruelty that I felt my stomach leap into my throat. I wanted to run



She opened her eyes, cringing, and sat up. "Tammy, are you all right?"

and get help, but my legs refused to move.

"No. I won't give it to you." Tammy stood her ground. Through my dizziness I noted how small she was compared to the boy.

Then something terrible happened. The boy punched Tammy so hard that she fell to the ground. I heard her body hit the pavement. The boy got ready to hit her again, but this time she stopped him. "Here." Painfully, she reached into her pocket and gave him a piece of crumpled money. The bully left, then, leaving Tammy lying unmoving on the sidewalk.

As soon as he turned the corner, my legs unlocked and my brain began to function again. I ran to Tammy and

knelt by her. "Tammy!" She opened her eyes, cringing, and sat up. "Tammy, are you all right?"

"Yeah." She softly touched her head. "Yeah, I knew it was coming. They were looking for me on the way to art, those boys. I was able to avoid them by taking a different route—one that went through the woods." Painfully, she stood, and I saw blood on her cheek. I handed her a tissue and, gratefully, she accepted it. "That's why I was late."

"You sure you're OK?" I blurted out. "I can go get Barbra."

"Nah," replied Tammy. "But thanks anyhow."

I nodded, shifting my weight from one foot to another. "Why did they do that to you? Is it because you're, I

mean . . ."

"Black," put in Tammy. "I guess mostly. They're just uncomfortable, though—that's what my mama says. It makes the bullies feel good to put down people who are different from them. Gives them some kind of ugly power."

I nodded, understanding. Tammy wiped her bleeding lip. It was puffing up. She didn't look as brave anymore, just worried. Then it came to me that Tammy probably had no way to get home—that bully had stolen her bus fare!

"Will your mom come to pick you up?" I asked. "There's a phone inside." I gestured to the art building behind us.

Tammy shook her head. "We don't have a car." She paused. "I guess I could call my aunt."

Suddenly, without thinking, I volunteered, "I'm sure my mom could take you home. Where do you live?"

"Fourth Street." Tammy looked hopeful. "Oh, do you think she would?"

I was surprised at her answer—Fourth Street was on the other side of town! Still, when my mom came, she assured Tammy that it would be no problem for her to run her home.

Tammy directed my mom to her house. I wasn't prepared for what I saw. Poverty and crime were spelled out in bold letters all over the streets. This was the bad part of the city, where there were murders and drugs. Little kids,

only about four, walked out on the streets alone. The buildings were falling apart, their windows broken and paint chipped. Boom boxes blared out rap music. I had always thought of the people who lived around there to be mean, like the criminals that I saw on TV. Tammy wasn't mean, though. She wasn't a criminal.

"That's my building," pointed Tammy. She thanked my mom and me.

I walked Tammy up to the door. Before she went inside, I told her quickly, "Tammy, your sketches are great."

A grin lit up Tammy's face. "Thanks! So are yours. I'm so glad that I got to come to art classes. They were my birthday present. Mama said that I should go and become a famous artist." She laughed. "I'm definitely not famous yet, but maybe someday."

As we threaded our way back home, I stared out the window. I thought of Tammy's neighborhood and wondered if she had really seen that man with the gun. It was very possible.

Later that evening I found the picture that I'd drawn in my sketchpad of the "perfect friend." I turned to a clean page and drew the same outline of the face, shading it in with a chocolate color. Then I made the face have two brown eyes and black hair. When I was finished, the sketch looked like Tammy. Friends, I had discovered, came in a variety of colors. ❖

Waiting for the Right Time

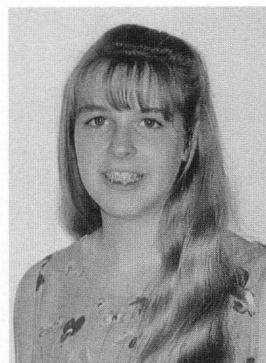
by Kristen Martin

illustrated by Hannah LeVasseur

IT HAS BEEN three years since she, my one and only best friend, left, and I am dying to see her. She had lived down the street and I had known her forever.

I have vivid memories of her room: clothes strewn all over, hanging on chairs, underneath her bed, and piled on her desk. Play horses with broken legs and unruly manes were stationed in miniature barns, on her dresser, and on her comforter. The sun would glow through the lacy curtains onto her bed, which was usually not made. The two dressers, which were placed against the wall, were piled high with papers, toys, and other odds and ends. She would always have to clean it before she played with me, so if I wanted to start playing soon, I'd help her stuff all her things underneath her bed, then we would take everything back out to find what we wanted to play with. Or we would take out a game like Monopoly and litter the floor again. If I didn't help her, I'd end up waiting for a call back all day, and finally, at 5:00 PM, I'd find out she finally finished, but by then it was too late.

These memories have plagued my thoughts over and over. All I think about is Hannah and her family in England. I sometimes start to imagine what her huge house looks like, what her yard looks like, and especially about her. I wonder if she keeps her room clean now, if she still yells at her siblings when they barge unexpectedly into her room, or if she still lingers while doing her work. Maybe she has improved



Kristen Martin, 12
Herndon, Virginia



Hannah LeVasseur, 12
West Chester, Pennsylvania



We would take out a game of Monopoly and litter the floor again

her spelling since writing the word "mountain" six times repeatedly incorrectly, and spelled differently each time! Maybe . . . oh well, it is not worth thinking about if I can't go and see her. Believe me, I've been there!

It started a year after she left. I greatly missed her, and could never stop thinking about her, especially when I received lengthy letters from her, or when she wrote me via the Internet to tell me how she was doing. She had tried to describe her house, but it was too big and elaborate to explain. I started to long to see her again. I begged (on my hands and knees of course) my parents to let me go, but I was "too young," "it is too dangerous," "it is such a long journey," "it's too expensive." All of these and more were the excuses I received until I had had enough.

Yelling at my parents, I screamed, "It's my best friend. I haven't seen her in so long and you expect me to do that without a fight? Without an argument until I win?!?"

My parents responded, "We have told you why. Maybe she can visit."

"But you don't understand," I whined, "this is my best friend. I have seen her almost every day since I was four, but now that record has been broken because she moved and I can't even visit."

"Well, you'll never visit with that attitude. Go to your room and cool down." And I reluctantly trudged up to my room.

Later, once I'd been in my room for a while, I heard a soft knock on the door. I called, "Come in." In walked my solemn-faced dad. He walked over to my bed and sat down next to me; then he waited for me to start. I said, "Hi."

He answered, "Hi. Would you like to talk about this long trip you have been dreaming of for months?"

"I guess so," I answered reluctantly (what else could I say?). "I really want to see Hannah. I haven't seen her for so long, and I only get to talk to her on the phone once in a while, and when we do get to talk, it's about worthless things, since we don't know what to talk about."

"I understand," was the surprising answer. "I really want to go there too. Maybe we can plan a trip there for the whole family. While we're there, we could also see Darby and Brittany (our cousins who also live in England)."

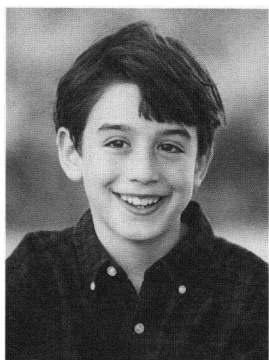
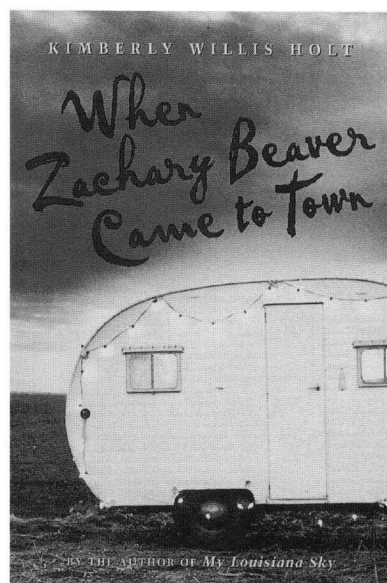
"Really?" I started to get excited now. A trip on the plane with my whole family would be much better than flying by myself like I had planned.

"Yes, I think we could try that. We just have to wait until the right time to ask your mom. Until then, we'll just hint *every once in a while*. Sound good?"

"Sounds very good. Just hint, got it!" And ever since, I've been waiting for the right time. Of course I still miss Hannah a whole bunch, but I am content to wait until the perfect time . . . ❖

Book Review

by Eli Black



Eli Black, 9
Austin, Texas

When Zachary Beaver Came to Town by Kimberly Willis Holt; Henry Holt and Company: New York, 1999; \$16.95

HAS A TRAILER FROM NOWHERE with a 300-pound boy inside ever pulled up in front of your local grocery store? That's exactly what happened in *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town*. When I first picked up this book I found it only slightly entertaining, but as I read on I became very involved and couldn't put it down.

In the book, a 300-pound boy, Zachary Beaver, is brought to Antler, Texas, in a trailer pulled by his legal guardian, Paulie, who charges people two dollars for a look at Zachary—a one-man freak show, “The Fattest Boy in the World.” At first everyone in the town stays away from Zachary because he is different, and in a small town like Antler, different is bad. Zachary's situation reminded me of a kid at an acting camp I knew who everyone made fun of—just because he was fat. Even though I'd never talked to him, I knew on the inside he was probably a great guy and I felt really sorry for him. I watched this boy sit by himself and draw—he was a great drawer—and I started talking to him some. Whenever somebody is different, people often stay

away from them, but in some cases they get used to them and then, in a way, befriend them. I guess that's what I did.

And that's what happened with Zachary. Toby and Cal, two best friends in Antler—Toby being the slightest bit more mature—stay away from Zachary at first but after a while decide to help Zachary have some fun. They have Cal's older sister, who just learned to drive, take them and Zachary to a drive-in movie by building stairs in the back of the truck so he could get out. He was too fat to get out of the trailer otherwise.

They even fulfill Zachary's dream to be baptized. Zachary wanted to be baptized because that was his mom's dream for him before she died. When she died, he went to her funeral, but there was such a crowd staring at him (because of his weight) that he wouldn't get baptized. In the end, the Bowl-a-Rama owner, Ferris, who was almost a preacher, baptizes Zachary. Eventually, the people of Antler got used to Zachary being there, and they start to feel sorry for him, and would even leave him food on his door step and run away.

The book has a selection of everything from tragedy to even a little romance between the prettiest girl in town and Toby. But the main point of the book, and the part I liked best, was the way the author showed the many

ways that people learn to live with and actually like strangers. This is probably a common experience, much like another one of my experiences with a Turkish boy who was in my third-grade class. He was made fun of because of his name, Bilge, and because of his personality. Over the year, I learned to like him a lot, even though no one else did, probably because my personality was more like his than the other boys in my class. I keep asking my mom how we can find Bilge in Turkey, because I miss him, but all we know about him is his first name.

Probably the saddest part of the book, and another feeling that I've had some experience with, was when Cal's older brother, Wayne, who everyone likes, is fighting in the Vietnam War and near the end, dies. Before Wayne dies, Toby writes him a letter pretending to be Cal, because Cal never returned any of Wayne's letters to him because he was too lazy. When Cal figures this out, it threatens their friendship. I can't relate to that but my friend can. Once I told him a secret and he, not thinking, told someone else, causing me to be very upset. In the end, it all turned out all right. He apologized and the secret didn't cause too much harm.

As for what happens to Cal and Toby's friendship, well, you'll just have to read the book to find out. ❖

Winter Light

by Miyo Kurosaki



Miyo Kurosaki, 12
Kyoto, Japan

Warm light
Streams from the sky
Snow swirls in freezing wind
Still, I will go out.
Through the branches sprinkles
A shower of light
A lesson from the trees
About the winter sun

Here is Miyo's poem in Japanese:

暖かい光が
空から降って来る
ふきすさぶ北風の中
それでも私は外に出る
枝だの隙間よりふりそそぐ
光のシャワー
街路樹が教えてくれた
真冬の太陽

atataakai hikari ga
sora kara futte kuru
fukisusabu kitakaze no naka
sore de mo watakushi wa soto ni deru
eda no sukima yori furisosogu
hikari no shawaa
gairoju ga oshiete kureta
mafuyu no taiyoo

A Christmas Wish

by Alex Ivker

illustrated by Jessica Libor



Alex Ivker, 11
Wayland, Massachusetts



Jessica Libor, 13
Worcester, Pennsylvania

“**S**CRUFFY! WHERE ARE YOU?” I screamed at the top of my lungs. “Where could he be?” I asked in dismay. I turned around to make my way to Hickory Hill where I thought Scruffy might be lurking. Just then I heard a faint bark and in the next moment a little furry husky had tumbled into my arms. “There you are, I’ve been looking everywhere for you. Well, you’re here now and that is all that matters. Come on. Grandma told me to be home before supper and it’s getting dark.”

Scruffy and I headed down the mountain toward our house. It was winter and the bitter cold was creeping in. By the time we got home it was pitch black, and the smell of warm stew and a blazing fire welcomed us into our home. It was almost Christmas and the house was as cheery as it had ever been.

My name is Lily May Matthews, Lily for short. I’m seven years old. I live in a small cabin nestled in the woods with my grandma, grandpa and Scruffy, my puppy. My grandparents like the isolation and the independence of living away from the town. We don’t have transportation or contact with other people unless we take a weekend trip into town, which is a long and tiring walk by foot.

I had just gotten back from my expedition with Scruffy to the dark shadowy cave up in the northern part of the forest, but in the midst of our expedition Scruffy had run off, and I



Just then I heard a faint bark and in the next moment a little furry husky had tumbled into my arms

spent the rest of the expedition chasing after him.

"This stew is delicious, Grandma," I said to my grandma, as the warm, tasteful liquid touched my tongue and scurried down to my stomach.

"Thank you, dear, now eat up so you can get a good night's rest."

"Where's Grandpa?" I asked, noticing the empty rocking chair with warm soup that was waiting, untouched.

"He started out on his fishing trip late this afternoon. I know he promised to take you but we couldn't find you. I'm sorry, sweets."

"Oh. It's all right. I'll go next year," I said, trying to hide my disappointment. As I sat sipping my soup, I noticed Scruffy pawing the door.

"Oh, Scruffy, you know you're not allowed out after dark," said Grandma as she sat by the fire warming her mint tea.

I stared at Scruffy for a long while, holding my spoon in midair, just staring. Something was wrong, I could feel it. Something told me that Scruffy didn't want to go out, but he needed to go out. Something was definitely wrong.

"Grandma, something's wrong," I said, getting up from the chair and pushing the soup out of my way.

"What's wrong, Lily?" Grandma asked, gesturing for me to come sit in her lap. I declined the invitation and went to the door. I opened the door and looked out into the somber, windy night. A crescent moon was hanging in the sky, clouds steadily devouring it.

Scruffy barked, scurried out the door, and disappeared into the dark.

"There's a storm coming," Grandma said as she walked up behind me to peer out into the night. "I do hope Grandpa gets back soon," she added. I began to feel Grandma's uneasiness with the situation and I began to worry.

"He's just enjoying taking his time. He'll be in soon; you know Grandpa." She forced out a meek smile and hurried me into the cabin. I crawled into bed without bothering to wash. The mattress was comforting and soft and the blanket was warm and gentle. Grandma kissed me goodnight, went and sat by the fire and started to knit. Every few minutes she glanced out the window in hopes that Grandpa would come trudging over the hill with a sack full of trout hanging by his side. But he never came, and the old rocking chair lay empty and untouched.

About a week had passed since Grandpa had disappeared, and in that week everything had been destroyed. Grandma, the blooming flower that she had once been, had died and turned into a sad, weeping weed. She just sat by the fire day after day, never speaking. When I tried to comfort her, she would try to smile for me, although as the days went by it became harder.

I couldn't bear the sadness of the house, but the more I tried to be cheery the more I missed Grandpa. There was no laughter and no happiness. It had been killed and all that remained was an unbearable pain that would not leave.

"Dear God, I wish Grandpa will come home for Christmas. Nothing is the same without him. I need him here and so does Grandma. Please help me. Thank you. Amen." I prayed like that every night the same prayer. I had to see my grandpa. And even worse, Scruffy had not returned home since he ran off that night.

Later on, I went up to Blueberry Field to pick blueberries for the pie that Grandma was making. As I was picking, I heard a rustling in the bush behind me. I froze. It stopped. I went back to picking. Then it moved again. I cautiously turned around to see if I could get a glimpse of the creature. All I saw was fur. A bear! I slowly crept toward the creature, hoping he would not notice me. But it was too late, the creature had attacked. I screamed as the so-called beast ferociously licked me.

"Scruffy! You came back," I cried. "Come on, let's go home." We ran around Blueberry Field, through the woods, and down Hickory Hill. I slammed the door as we ran into the house, gasping for breath. We must have startled Grandma because she had apparently spilled her tea.

"Grandma, look! Scruffy came home."

"Why, hello, little one, and might I ask where you have been?" She smiled. The house already seemed more cheery. I went into the bedroom to change out of my hat and scarf and mittens. When I came back out, I noticed that Scruffy was waiting at the door.

"Oh, no, you're not going anywhere,"

I said, as I grabbed Scruffy and whirled him around in my arms. Scruffy seemed unsatisfied with my response and began to whine.

"Oh, fine, but you'd better come back." I opened the door and Scruffy raced out. When he was halfway out of the yard, he paused and looked back, waiting for me to come.

"I'm not going out now, Scruffy. Go on." He continued to stare at me, waiting for me. He wanted me to follow him. He really wanted me to follow him.

"Grandma, I think I'm going to go out for a little while," I said, as I started to throw on my boots, gloves, and hat.

"All right, sweetheart, just be back before supper." I grabbed some muffins and a little jug of cider. I ran out the door. Scruffy waited patiently for me as I carved a path through the snow to get to him.

We started off on our journey, up the mountain, through all of our regular expedition spots. We passed them all and just walked until finally we didn't know where we were going and we didn't much care. I was determined to find out why Scruffy was making me follow him. The sun was melting away over the horizon. It was cold and the snow was whipping against my flushed cheeks. My hands felt like long clear rods of freezing ice and the rest of my body felt like it had been beaten up and no longer was capable of movement. The wind was picking up and was now thrashing my body violently around. It was too late to go home now, I had to



When I came back out, I noticed that Scruffy was waiting at the door

find shelter. Scruffy shivered in my weak, tired arms. I walked on through the storm, snow pouring over me, devouring my body as I slowly sank to the ground. I fell and landed head down in the snow. I suddenly burst into tears. I couldn't move. My body was cold and motionless.

Take me now, I thought. Take me away from this place which no longer has a meaning to me. I lay there thinking of my grandpa and how he used to grab me in his arms and hold me tight. His strong, sturdy, reliable arms that I

would never forget no matter what I did. I remember how they used to give me warmth and happiness when I was sad. Grandpa wouldn't let me go, he would pick me up with his arms and make it all better. But he isn't here anymore, I thought. I have to pick myself up and this time no one is going to do it for me. I pulled myself up out of the snow and brushed all of the snow away, along with that I brushed away fear, and sadness which I never thought would or could leave.

"Come on, Scruffy, let's find a place

to stay." My heart was glowing with warmth that kept me going until my legs were numb. The warmth had been trapped in there waiting to glow and shine for a long time; now it was free. I knew not what time it was and I didn't care. I was going to live and that's all that mattered.

What lay in front of me was endless trail to be walked upon, and what lay behind me was trail that had already been walked upon. It was pitch black outside and the silence of the air was evil. My breath was all that was heard, a heavy, steady beat that didn't change. I like things that don't change, I thought. Scruffy lay wrapped in my arms.

Then, out of the corner of my eye I saw a tint of light gleaming in the woods. It was blurred and hard to make out, but it was light and I could see it. I tripped over myself, almost squashing Scruffy. I caught myself and skidded toward the light. I stopped as the light grew larger, too afraid to find out if it was real or just my overworked, too-hopeful imagination. I was too cold and tired to care. I bounded toward the light, tripping over stones and branches that lay hidden in the snow as I went. Then, as I got closer, I saw what it really was.

"A cave!" I whispered. I wanted to scream with joy but the cold gusts of wind were waiting to freeze my mouth as soon as I opened it. My joy was too startling for my body to handle. I was too tired and happy to think of unnecessary information about what might be

lurking in the cave.

I crept into the cave. It was cold, damp and hollow. As I walked, I could feel my body begin to tingle like it was thawing away all of the cold and dampness in my body. I came to a large cavern and decided to rest there since I had already ventured deep into the cave, deeper than I had wished. It was dark and isolated and, although I was scared for my life, I was relieved. Scruffy's fur had clung to me from the dampness and he was no longer shivering. I lay there listening to the sounds around me. I could no longer hear the grueling, insufferable sounds of the thrashing, ferocious winds. Only a faint rasping sound could be heard. I listened to it. It seemed sad and lonely more than ferocious and evil. The wind was picking up for the sound became louder . . . or was closer? Tension was building inside of me. I tried to remember which direction I had come from, but I couldn't see or think in the darkness. The rasping sound was coming closer. I clung to Scruffy, my one comfort. The sound was now too close to bear and I silently crept farther away. I knelt to the ground and froze, trying to hold my breath. My mouth was pushing against my legs to hold in the fear that was about to explode. I listened. The sound was weak and tired, maybe even ill. The rasping of its breath was scared and old. It was now only a step away from me. I heard a hesitation and a fumble for something. And then a blazing light shot up out of nowhere. I screamed and froze.

There, in front of me, was the face of a ghost, a wrinkled, white, shriveled-up face, staring at me with blank, hollow eyes.

"Lily?" I heard a voice say. "Is that you?" With caution, I slowly opened my eyes. I stared at the face with emptiness and confusion.

"Who are you?" It was more a plea than a request.

"You don't recognize me?" The man seemed sad and resentful. "Lily. It's me, it's Grandpa." There was a long silence and no one spoke and then I spoke.

"Grandpa?" My voice was shivering with fear. What if it wasn't Grandpa? My mind was whirling with thoughts and emotions that I couldn't handle all at once. I had to think of what had happened. How was Grandpa here? Why had he not come home? Was he even Grandpa?

"Why are you here?" I raised my voice and sat up. Something had come over me that I could not control. I was angry. "Why didn't you come home to us?" I started to cry through my anger. Tears were streaming down over my flushed, enraged face. "We, we, we thought you were dead!" I could no longer hold it in. I turned my back and sobbed. I sobbed until I couldn't see straight. Grandpa awkwardly walked toward me, outstretching his arms. He wrapped his arms around me and I didn't refuse, I couldn't. Beneath the anger and sadness I was the happiest girl alive. I had found the reason that my family, my life had been torn apart. He held me and hugged me

for a long time. His strong, sturdy arms brought back so many memories. I clung harder to him, making sure he wouldn't disappear again. Then he stumbled backwards and fell. He moaned in pain. I stared in horror.

"What's wrong, Grandpa?"

"It's a long story, Lily."

"You can tell me. We're not going anywhere until tomorrow, anyway."

"I was trying to get to my campsite before dark and I was having trouble walking since the snow has been very deep lately. I stopped to have some of the delicious dinner your grandma packed for me. As I was eating, a little grizzly cub came tumbling out of the bushes nearby me. I knew I wasn't supposed to get near it since the mama could be lurking anywhere, but it looked hungry so I left some food in the snow. I was surprised that it wasn't hibernating, it being winter and all. Then . . ." He paused and took a deep breath, seeping in the dampness of the glowing cavern.

"I was walking through the woods toward the way the cub had come. Then I heard a growl and . . ." Grandpa knelt his head toward his leg.

"Oh, Grandpa! How did you get away? What happened?" Guilt flooded me once again that I could have misjudged the person I loved the most.

"Well, Lily. You must always remember that grizzlies can't see very well, can hardly see at all, in fact. They have excellent smell, though. My leg was wounded but I could still crawl. I crawled under a bush and buried myself

in snow to isolate my smell as best as possible. She eventually went away. This cave saved me. It was lying in the middle of the woods while I was looking for shelter. It was a miracle. I also had a bit of first aid from the first-aid kit I brought fishing with me. I would have bled to death without it. I have no more food and I don't have the strength to go and try to find firewood, let alone get some food. And, the storm has been horrible."

I stared around me in the cavern. The storm should be dying down by now. It was already morning, I was sure. I hadn't noticed it before, but, in spite of the cold, dark cavern, the room seemed lighter. I knelt toward Grandpa and lifted his pant off his wounded leg. It was wrapped in bloody gauze that needed to be changed. I looked in the first-aid kit and found nothing. I felt a sharp stab in my upper stomach and once again realized how hungry I was. I searched through my coat pocket and pulled out a crumbled muffin. (I had dropped the jugs, since they were too heavy, and the other muffin lay in crumbs at the bottom of my pocket.)

I lay down on the rough surface of the cavern. I thought of my mattress and how I missed home. I lay there staring into nothing, just dreaming, and as I did I fell asleep.

When I woke up it was just as dark as it was with my eyes closed, indicating that it was night. I sat and looked over my shoulder. Grandpa lay sprawled out on the cavern floor. Every few minutes

he'd go into an uproar of hacking, and it almost seemed as if he was choking. The wound had made him sick and he needed medicine fast. I had to do something. I silently inched toward the sack Grandpa had next to him. I gently lifted it and pulled out the Swiss Army knife Grandpa had brought.

I quietly crept out of the cavern and through the cave. As I came to the opening I paused. The storm had stopped. As I made my way out into the snow I realized I needed to hurry before Grandpa and Scruffy realized I was gone. I trudged through the woods carelessly. After a few minutes I stopped at a low branched tree. I hope the Swiss Army can do it, I thought, as I hugged the tree and started cutting away at the branch. It was stressful and tiring, and I do believe that that was the most ornery branch I have ever stumbled upon. I got it down, nonetheless, and I brought it back to the cave before Grandpa and Scruffy had even moved.

I then carved off the side twigs so that it was smooth and clean. After that I split the branch into two so I had two branches. I stared, pleased at my creation. I then remembered that I was not yet done and needed to focus, so I went back to my work.

I forcefully yanked off a thin strip of material from my pants. I had tall boots so the snow wouldn't bother me if one of my pants legs had been cut shin-high. I then laid out the material on the floor and cut it into two thin strips.

"There. That ought to do it," I whis-

pered. I then woke Grandpa and showed him the brace I had made for his leg. He smiled as though my effort had been hard but the chances of it getting him home were slim. I ignored the expression and refused to believe him. It would work. It had to. I gently put the branches on either side of his leg and tied it together with the strips. Scruffy then woke up. It was as if he knew something was going to happen. I then gathered our things and Grandpa slowly stumbled up. He got his balance and started to totter toward the entrance of the cave. When we got there Grandpa got out his compass to see which way to go.

We walked for a long time in silence, taking breaks every few minutes. I counted how many days Grandpa had been in the cave. I counted a week and two days which meant . . .

"Grandpa!" I shouted. He looked up at me with surprise and interest. "Christmas is tomorrow!"

"It can't be. Can it?"

"It is, it is." I was so caught up in everything I had completely forgotten. Wait until Grandma saw us. I couldn't wait to see her face.

We walked all day until our feet were aching. The sun was going down and I began to worry. We wouldn't be able to get home in the dark. Somehow we had to pick up our pace. And somehow we just managed to do that. Just then Grandpa sat down. I didn't know what to do. The sun was disappearing in front of our eyes.

"I can't walk anymore," he moaned. He looked white. Scruffy looked at Grandpa with sadness. He wanted to go home just as much as we did.

"All right, we'll rest under this tree." We walked over to a tree and sat down. I looked around and took in the view. Something looked familiar but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. We must have passed it on the way through the storm, although I was certain it was something else. I stared at the bushes in front of me, trying to remember. And then, I did.

"Grandpa! This is Blueberry Field!" I exclaimed in delight. Those bushes were the bushes Scruffy had jumped out of when I was picking blueberries!

"This is what?" he asked. I was astounded that Grandpa didn't know what it was, although he never went around the west side of the woods, and if I wasn't mistaken Blueberry Field was in the west region.

"Grandpa, follow me." I helped him up and we walked. I was breaking into a run.

"Slow down, Lily. I can't go that fast."

"Sorry, Grandpa. I can't help it."

We came to a hill, and Grandpa paused.

"I'll help you. We can make it over if you go slow. We did it before." We slowly walked up the hill. I let go of Grandpa and walked in front of him. As I came to the top of the hill I froze. My body couldn't move. There in front of me was an old lady wrapped in scarves staring up at an evergreen decorated in

ornaments. She was kneeling on the ground holding a picture, as if she was praying. A few feet away was her cabin, my house.

"Grandma!" I screamed. The woman looked up and froze. She dropped the picture and got up. She started running toward me at a speed that I didn't know she was capable of. As she approached me I flung my arms around her and we both burst into tears. My emotions were wild and uncontrollable. I was too happy to think. Tears were running over my face and my vision was blurred. Then I heard a voice I had not heard in a long time; a voice that it seemed like I waited to hear my whole life.

"Mary." It was the voice of my grandpa, not a tired, old, wounded grandpa, but my grandpa. Grandma unlatched me from her arms and stared with glowing eyes at Grandpa. All was silent.

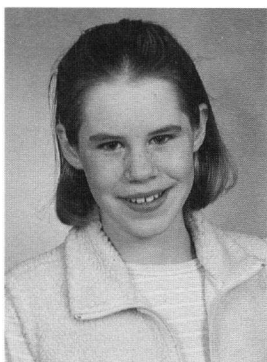
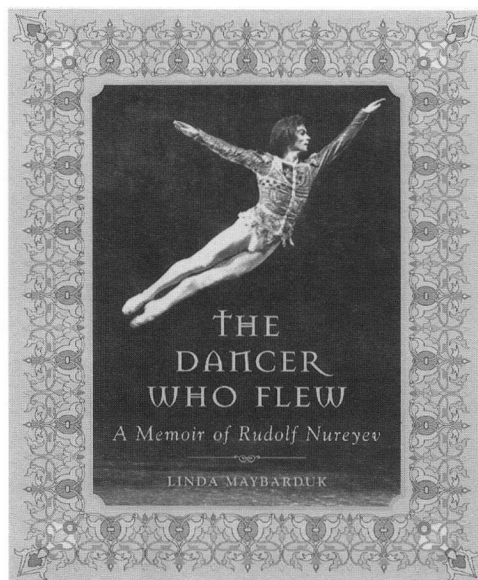
"John?" she cried as a tear rolled down her cheek. Her cheeks were rosy and warm like usual, and Grandpa was comforting and gentle, just like always. As they embraced me in their arms, I thought how wonderful life was. I had my family back. My thoughts were blurred from the emotions and I couldn't speak. But in the midst of everything I managed to whisper something that made me smile.

"My Christmas wish came true." ❖



Book Review

by Marit Rogne



Marit Rogne, 12
Ann Arbor, Michigan

The Dancer Who Flew: A Memoir of Rudolf Nureyev by Linda Maybarduk; Tundra Books: Toronto, 1999; \$18.95

WHEN I WAS NINE years old, I was in a musical at the local university in my town, the University of Michigan. My friends in the cast and I would stand in the wings and watch the dancers onstage, awed by the gracefulness and majesty they created. We would try to imitate the dances backstage, trying to get every lift and every spin just right. The dances were incredibly difficult for people of our age and size, but somehow we managed to do all of them. There was one lift I did where I would actually fly through the air like a bird. Once I was so overcome I fell on the ground laughing with delight.

I've read many books about dance, but this is the only one I have ever read that captures the passion of dance. I expected another book listing dates of famous dances and who played what role. Instead I received an emotional book which reflected my own feelings for dancing, and which made me want to throw down the book and dance.

The Dancer Who Flew: A Memoir of Rudolf Nureyev by Linda Maybarduk is a biography of Rudolf Nureyev, who changed

dancing forever. Linda Maybarduk was Rudolf's personal friend, so she told a lot about her own experiences with him, which made the book much more personal and touching.

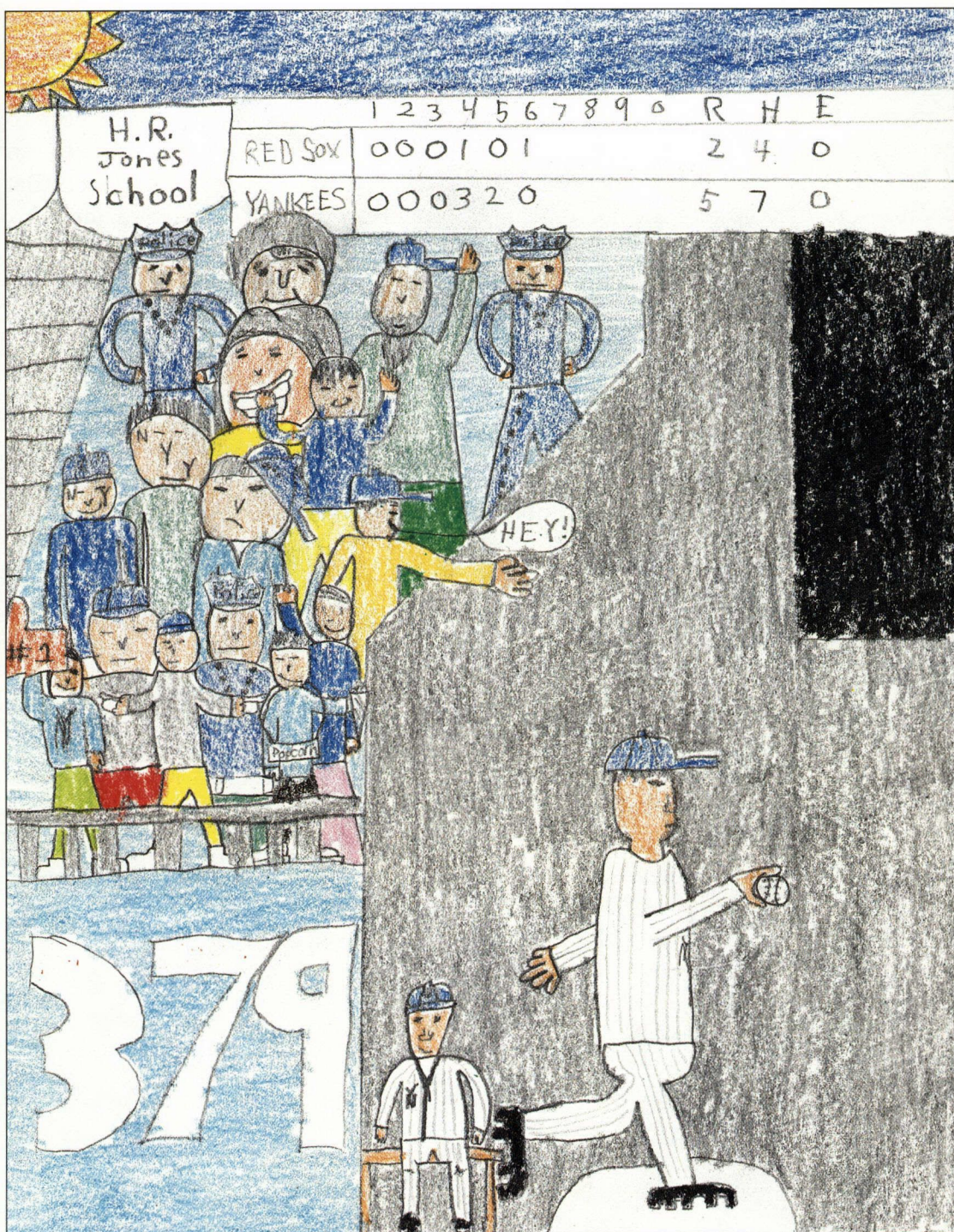
Rudolf grew up in the communist country of Russia, where his family was struggling to make ends meet. For much of his childhood, his father was away at war, so his mother had to work twice as hard. While his father was away, Rudolf discovered dancing when his mother took him to a ballet on New Year's Eve. From then on he became obsessed with ballet. Rudolf's father was not at all supportive of his son's dreams and ambitions when he returned from the war. So on his own money and willpower, Rudolf auditioned for the Leningrad Ballet School in Russia and made it.

While he was at the Leningrad Ballet School, Rudolf and his friends would sneak out of the school late at night and dance. They would chase each other around trying to jump faster, higher, or farther than the other. This was my favorite part of the book because the author expresses their love for dance so wonderfully that I could so easily imag-

ine three excited teenagers running around Leningrad dancing and laughing.

What I loved about the book was that it was so clear that this man was born to perform and loved every minute on stage. I could relate to this so well that sometimes I had to put down the book to think about my own experiences on stage. The author expressed how nervous he was before he went on stage, but then when he was there, he felt perfectly at home and happy. I've felt the same way, so overwhelmed I want to burst. When you know you are doing well and you are making people happy, it is the most effervescent and wonderful feeling. I could tell that Rudolf felt the same way, and I felt almost a connection to him, even though I never met him.

Rudolf often talked about the invisible energy that propelled him through so many performances, even years after he should have retired. I, too, have felt that same invisible energy and passion that draws me back to the stage time and time again. It's really very simple. Despite hard work, performing is one of the best things on earth. ❖



"Hey!" I shouted leaning over the rail, and incredibly Irabu acknowledged me

A Connecticut Yankee Visits the Bronx

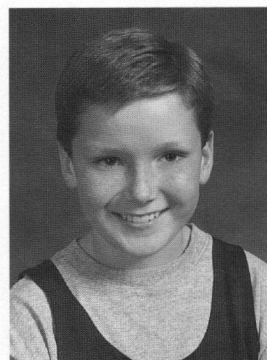
by Cooper Oznowicz

illustrated by Devon Hoffman

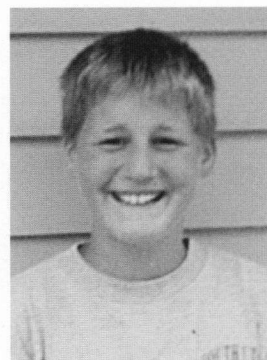
AS I STEPPED OUT OF Byron's family Suburban, I could feel the powerful presence of Yankee Stadium. Coming from a small town, just being in the city was exciting. Today was Byron's birthday and he had invited Matthew, David and myself to go to this game. We were really hyped up.

I remember Byron saying to me, "Get your mitt, Coop!" At that moment, standing there with my best friend in the shadow of Yankee Stadium, decked out in my Yankee cap, I felt like a real fan. We threw the ball around for a few minutes in the parking lot before heading to the ballpark. Soon we were walking through the tunnel to the stadium. I could hear the fans shouting, smell the hot dogs, and feel the anticipation. The whole experience was intense. In the Bronx, you are a Yankee fan or you're dirt.

It was stunning. At the end of the tunnel the magical field sparkled. We found our seats. Byron and I were excited and talked about the game. Of course, in our minds, there was no question that the Yankees would win. Byron, his dad, Matthew and David went to get drinks and hot dogs. Miles, Byron's little brother, wanted me to stay with him, so I did. Little did I know that the rest of our crew wouldn't return until the middle of the first inning. The concession lines are long at Yankee Stadium. We were seated very close to the bullpen where Irabu was warming up. "Hey!" I shouted lean-



Cooper Oznowicz, 12
West Cornwall, Connecticut



Devon Hoffman, 11
Utica, New York

ing over the rail, and incredibly Irabu acknowledged me, before the security guards pulled me back. Byron returned with our hot dogs and we sat on the hard seats with the sun beating down on us, eating and watching the game. Soon the spirit of New York captured us, and we were jumping up and down, roaring with the rest of the crowd.

It was hot. We decided we needed a break and went back through the tunnel to the concession stands to buy cold drinks. We had earned them with all of our hard cheering. By the time we got back to our seats, the score was 10-4 Boston. It looked as if the Yanks were going to lose. Since we had a long drive home, we decided to call it a day. In spite of the inevitable loss, I knew this day would remain in my memory for a long time. We left.

As soon as we got in the car we turned on the radio to check out the score. The announcer said the Yankees had made a huge comeback. The score was now 10-9. We were so mad. We were even swearing. I think all of New

York heard us. We felt like fools for leaving the game. We heard the announcer say that the Yanks had hit a home run, right to where we had been sitting! We sat through three nail-biting innings in the car listening to the radio.

At the bottom of the ninth with two runners on and two outs, Bernie Williams came to the plate. Williams is an intimidating batter for any pitcher. The count went to three and two. There was silence in the car. The whole game led up to this moment. The tension was crazy. We hung on every word. The pitch was good—the announcer said, “It’s a swing, a hit, and a line drive to center field—back-back-back . . .” But the center fielder jumped up and robbed the ball from being a home run. He didn’t catch it—he “captured it,” said the announcer and brought it in to his chest. Boston had won. Everyone in our car was yelling and swearing. People in other cars were beeping their horns. That was the moment when I realized I really hated the Boston Red Sox, and that I loved this game with all my heart. ❖

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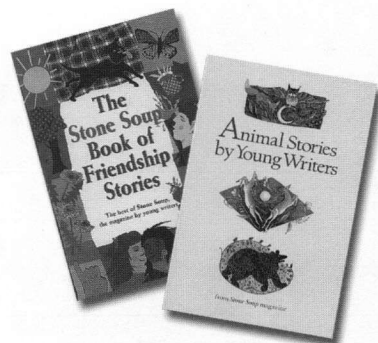
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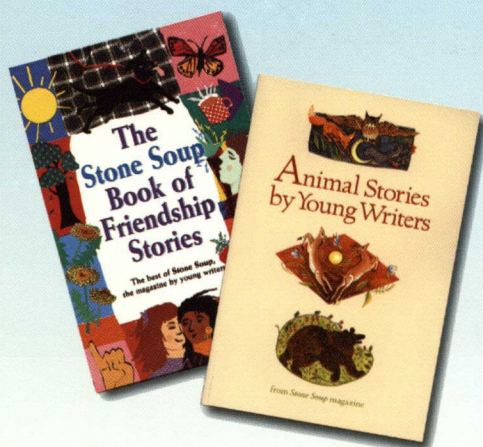
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