

# Stone Soup

the magazine by young writers and artists



"Holiday of Russian Winter," by Ira Bobkova, age 8, St. Petersburg, Russia

## CATALINA, MY FRIEND

A scarlet macaw tells a story of love and loss in Florida

## GOOD-BYE JACK

In their two years together, Peter and his foster brother form a deep bond

*Also:* A poem and a drawing from war-torn Kosovo

Illustrations by Max Strebel and Jane Westrick

A story from England

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Volume 29, Number 3  
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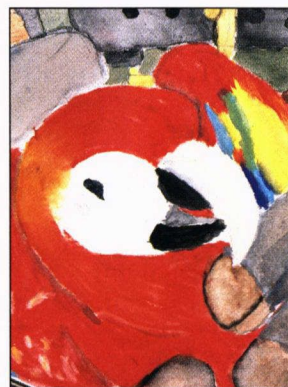
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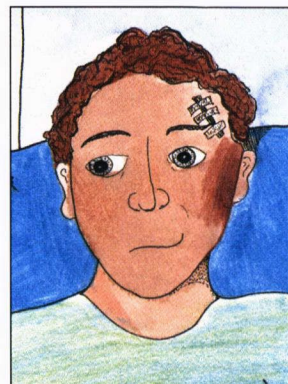
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# Stone Soup

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:** "Holiday of Russian Winter" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by the Albany-Tula Alliance in New York and the Children's Art Exchange in Vermont. Both organizations promote exchanges of children's art between the former Soviet Union and the United States. Special thanks to Laura Chodos and Renee Wells.

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Lilly Bee Pierce, 9

## The Mailbox

I really love this magazine! It's so interesting to see how others think about things and to see their writing styles. Also, since I'm really into art, I like to see other people's work, but I wish you would have an issue each month. My favorite story is from the July/August 1999 issue. It's called "Brief Encounter." I love the story because it has so much to do with my life and I really like the art work in it.

Sarah Andrus, 12  
Beaverton, Oregon

Your publication is superb and I always look forward to reading my daughter's copy when it arrives. Last night I was going through the May/June 2000 issue and was much taken with two pictures in particular by the young artist William Drewes, for the story "Beethoven's Bargain." I would be most pleased if you would pass along my comments to him. "Your pictures are absolutely wonderful. They have what all real art has—a sense of life and the feel of things beautiful. This is something many folks spend a lifetime trying to come up with. Keep up the good work."

Eugene Beck, parent  
Reno, Nevada

Being a poet myself, I love this fantastic magazine. I have recently begun slam poetry, and plan to send it in very soon. I am also a teenager, and can easily relate to all of the stories. They are inspiring and heartfelt. I truly enjoy this magazine, and hope to receive it throughout my teen years and beyond.

Jen Jukl, 12  
San Jose, California

I would like to compliment Laura Aberle and Jane Westrick on what an incredible job they did on "The Real Mr. Vankos" [September/October 2000]. I was very impressed by both the art work and the writing. Lynn was a very well developed character and was expressed in an interesting way. As for the illustrations, they were quite realistic, no, make that *very* realistic. I felt like I was actually there, watching from my bedroom window with binoculars. Overall, I was taken aback by this exquisite story.

Caroline Hodge, 10  
Palo Alto, California

I wanted to tell Hana Bieliauskas how much I like her wonderful story "Sketching Tammy" [November/December 2000]. I really like stories that are about important things. I think stories like that can change the world. More people should write stories about what they believe. I also like Marit Rogne's review of *The Dancer Who Flew* and Alex Ivker's "A Christmas Wish."

Blake Grindon, 11  
Middlebury, Vermont

I liked "Memories of Sunset Lake" in the November/December 2000 issue. It reminded me of a lake I love. Tell the author and illustrator it was great.

Emily Culbert, 9  
Chicago, Illinois

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

# The Berry Patch

by Lia Cuccurullo

illustrated by Hannah Richman



Lia Cuccurullo, 13  
Sydney, British Columbia,  
Canada



Hannah Richman, 13  
Kittanning, Pennsylvania



I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN an early bird. I love to wake around 5:45 AM every morning, even on weekends. Mom says my early-birdness comes from Nanna Mary, but I'm not sure about that.

I felt so alive this morning, energy climbed and slipped all throughout me, like a bird waiting to be let out of its cage.

Normally I just end up standing by the window looking at the street lights, watching the different-colored cars pass with yawning drivers blinking at the rising sun. This morning was different for me. I crept downstairs, keeping myself on tiptoes and taking river steps (Momma's name for big steps) until I reached the doorknob of the back door. I twisted it very slowly, sucking in my breath. I didn't want anyone to hear me leave. The door opened and cool morning air hit me. I was only in my nightie and it grabbed me like an unknown stranger. I could almost taste the dew in the grass, and I could feel the flowers opening to the rising sun.

I slid my old sneakers on and started walking to my secret berry patch. Leaves brushed against my face, whispering to me playfully.

The berry patch is my thinking spot. I first discovered it when I moved here from Florida. I think the berries represent me. When we moved here the berries were all tiny, hard, and green, innocent, not knowing what life had to offer, just like I was, stiff and tense from the move. As the months passed,





I can feel a row of ants march across my leg, and I can hear the birds begin their song

the berries developed to become big, black and juicy, full of life, full of knowing. That's how I felt, I had opened up and met friends. I was no longer hard and green, I was soft and juicy.

I can feel a row of ants march across my leg, and I can hear the birds begin their song. The sun is up now; it's dancing on my face. I know it's time for me

to get up and go to school. Mom is probably in the kitchen by now, cooking pancakes in her chewed-up moccasins, and my sister is probably skipping around her begging if she can help pour the batter into the pan.

I start to walk home and as I look back I see a big black berry. I smile to myself and, of course, I pick it . . . ❖

# Christmas Miracle

by Vanessa Coakley

illustrated by Alicia Betancourt



Vanessa Coakley, 12  
Brooklyn, New York



Alicia Betancourt, 12  
Silver Spring, Maryland

**A**NDREA PRESSED HER NOSE against the frosted windowpane to get a better look outside. Not a drop of snow fell from the gray, overcast sky on this gloomy Christmas afternoon. Fidgety with anticipation, she wriggled in her seat. She could hear the adults in the parlor, talking and laughing away. She got up to go see if they were having more fun than she was, sitting by the window and waiting for the snow to come. She listened as they reminisced about old times long gone by.

A girl of ten, she was curious about everything. She spoke up in a tiny voice from the back of the room, "Mommy, is it going to snow?"

"Honey, it's going to take a miracle for it to snow. They call for rain today," her mother said from across the table.

"Oh, I think it'll snow," her grandmother said. "I can think of bigger miracles."

"Like what?" Andrea asked. "Did you ever have a Christmas miracle?" Her grandmother stroked Andrea's hair awhile before she began.

"Well, when I was small, I lived in a tiny country house in a rural farming community in Minnesota. The weather was real bad in winter, but we managed. My father farmed the land we owned with the help of Uncle Jack and Uncle Jim. My mother worked as a seamstress. My older brother Sam was fifteen. At the time, I was about your age, nine or ten.



"We had a small vegetable garden in the back of our tiny house and in the summertime Sam used to take me down to the farmers' market in town. We would split the money we got for a few dozen cucumbers, carrots and potatoes. I had saved all of my money until Christmas, when I wanted to buy a special gift for my mother.

"I had passed by Sherry's Specialty Store and in the large store window saw the most beautiful watch for sale. It just so happened that my mother's old watch had stopped ticking a couple of days ago and she needed a new one. So one cold day in late December, right before Christmas, while my parents were at work, I got out the \$21.95 that I had saved from the summer, which I hid under the loose floorboard of our back porch, along with the key to my diary. I begged Sam to take me down to town. Reluctantly, he gave in and got his coat. I ran down to Sherry's, Sam at my side and money in hand.

"I opened the door to a brightly lit store and heard the cowbell attached to the door jingle. Jars filled to the top with candy lined the counter's shelves. Yards of colorful ribbons and fabric dripped from their cubbyholes. Dress-up dolls with blinky eyes stared down at me. I resisted all of the temptations to snatch them up and then remembered why I was here.

"That gleaming watch shined from under the counter. A single ray of light sparkled against its face as it slowly ticked away the time I had spent saving

up for this glorious day. I put my hand on the warm glass counter and said, 'I think I want this one, right here.' The clerk unlocked the counter with a small gold key, lifted it out and showed it to me. Then placing it in a satin box, he tied a small bow around it and rang up the price on the register: \$21.90 exactly.

"I was beaming so hard that my jaw ached when I left the store. I held tight to my mother's gift. I can still feel its rough crushed-velvet exterior rubbing against my sweaty palm. I looked up at the sky, which was gray and overcast, just like today . . ."

"Did it snow?" an anxious Andrea interrupted her story.

"Oh, yes, it snowed. I looked down and saw a single snowflake fall to the dusty soil. Then another and another until they were falling so quickly I could barely keep track of them. My feet were soon crunching through a thin layer of powdery light snow. Gusts of wind blew the snow up in my face as I marched on. Sam didn't want to admit it, but we were in the middle of a full-fledged genuine blizzard. I clasped Sam's hand as if my life depended on it, for his face was no longer visible through the thick layer of falling flakes.

"We needed to find shelter, so I yelled to Sam above the roar of the wind. 'What do we do now?'

"'Just follow me, I know the way!' he shouted back. Later on, he confided to me that he didn't know where we were going, but after an hour of wandering, my faith in Sam withered. We trudged



The clerk unlocked the counter with a small gold key, lifted it out and showed it to me

on endlessly through the rough weather.

"Soon, Sam grasped some sort of handle. He pulled it open with all of his strength, revealing a barn. Like most of the barns in the area, there were a few work animals and chickens. Nothing that different. With much struggle, Sam and I pushed against the wide doors, huge gusts of wind stinging our faces. A sudden click brought silence. I opened my eyes and saw that the big red doors were closed. I had never heard a more beautiful sound in my life than the click of those doors. I slid down into the hay,

tired and cold.

"Sam paced in front of the large barn doors. He tried to find some clue to where we were, but he only got frustrated without his compass. It all looked so familiar, but I was too exhausted to concentrate on anything. Finally, hungry and worn out, he nestled into the hay next to me. I closed my eyes and slept.

"When I awoke, I didn't know how long I had been asleep. All I could hear was the rhythmic sound of Sam's breathing. I headed toward the door and cautiously opened it a bit to peek



outside. It had stopped snowing, and at least a foot of it lay on the ground. Not wanting to wake Sam, I quietly shut the door and stepped outside into the oncoming daylight. I could clearly see the light of a house not too far away. With hope in my heart, I ran as fast as I could to the house, which looked so familiar, even in the snow. Smoke puffed out from the modest house's low brick chimney. They sure are up early, I thought. I climbed the snow-covered steps and looked out. The world seemed so different, dazzling white snow lay everywhere, like a snow globe turned upside down. I took another step toward the door and my foot slid something back. I bent down and brushed away the snow. A loose floorboard lay to the side of an open space, where a small metal key lay, just waiting for me.

"This was my house! This was my key! A huge bubble of hope nearly floated me to the clouds. I pounded the brass doorknocker and was greeted by my two parents. They looked so old, with bags under their eyes and wrinkles in their faces. When they saw me, they lit up like a Christmas tree and wrapped me in a warm hug. Even though I was starving and cold, I felt like flying. I jumped off the porch and landed in the foot-deep snow. I made snow angels until I had used up all my happiness. I ran to get Sam, who was still asleep in the barn. He joined the family as we warmed up by the fire. I told our exciting adventure to them, all the pain, frustration and joy. When it came to

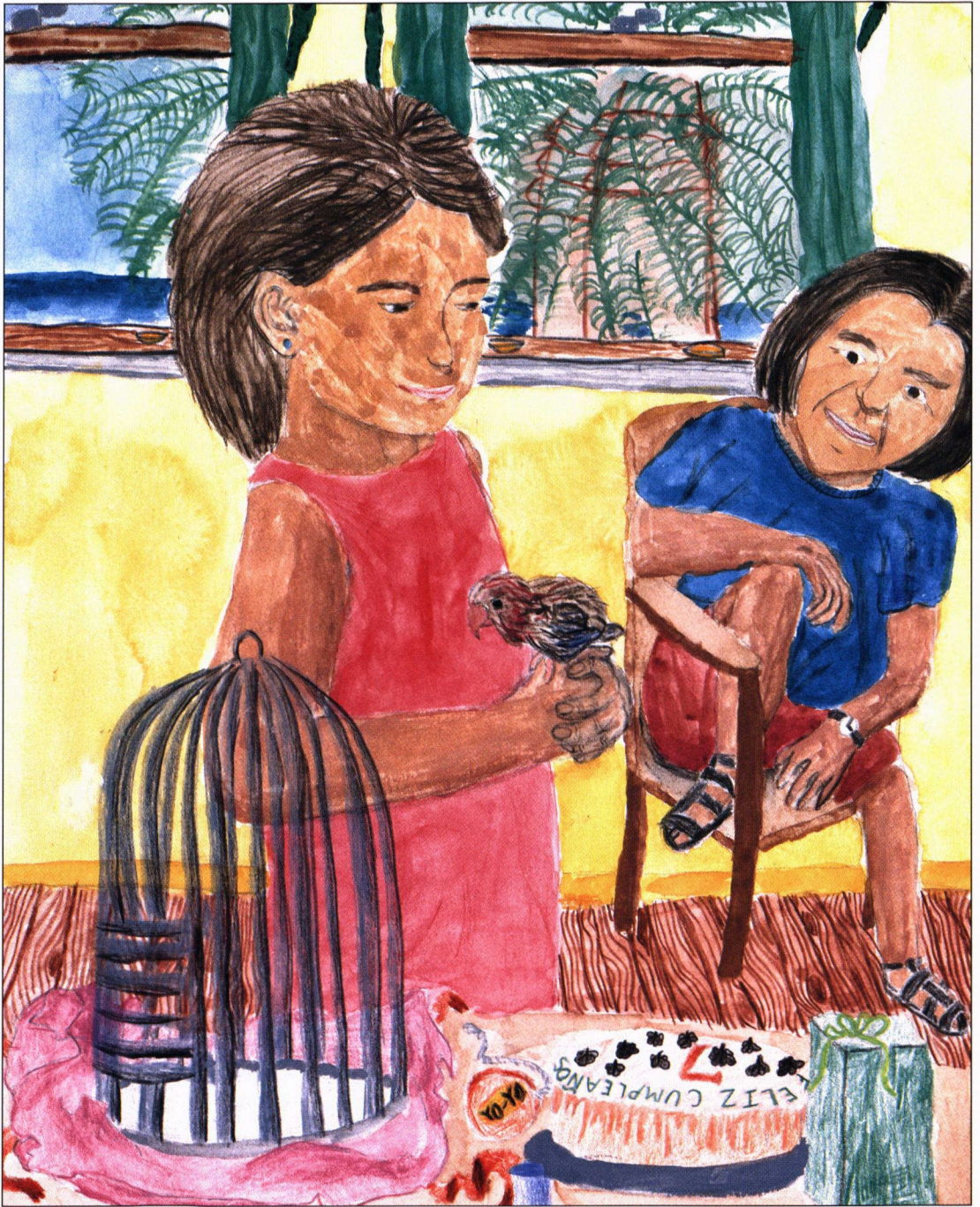
the part where I was going to show the watch to my mother, my pockets were empty.

"Panicked thoughts of losing that precious watch flooded my mind. I burst out the door, frantically searching to find it. My foot kicked the loose floorboard again, and to my great surprise, there in the empty space lay the silver watch, sparkling and untouched on a pedestal of white snow. I looked around to see if anyone had found it and had given it back, yet I had told no one about this secret spot. Not a single person walked the streets, not a single path had been cleared. The whole town was just starting to wake up.

"Back then, I thought it was Santa Claus, but today I still don't know who gave it back. Now that's a Christmas miracle," she said as she finished up her story.

The room was quiet. Everyone was still trying to absorb the story. She slowly stood up and walked to the window. A lot had changed since then. Now she lived in Chicago. Her parents had passed away years ago, and her brother Sam wasn't coming home for the holidays this year. Raindrops fell from the sky. So much for a miracle, she thought. She turned away from the window, but then looked again, just to make sure. Rain still fell steadily from the blackened sky. No snow this Christmas, she said to herself. Yet as she looked harder into the mist, a single snowflake fell. Yes, she thought, another Christmas, another miracle. ❖





I suppose for a human she was a little girl, but to me she was gigantic



# Catalina, My Friend

by Francisca Thomas

illustrated by Max Strebel

**M**Y EARLIEST MEMORY is of being trapped in a box.

It was a large cardboard shoebox with a few holes punched into the side for air. Light glowed through the holes, but I couldn't see through them; I could only feel myself sliding from side to side as the box was tossed around. I didn't understand what was going on, and I was terrified.

Then, I remember, the movement suddenly stopped. The lid of the box was lifted and I was bathed in blinding light. I blinked. I fluttered my almost featherless little wings. I squeaked pitifully.

Then I saw her. I suppose for a human she was a little girl, but to me she was gigantic. Still, I wasn't afraid. She looked so gentle. I stared into her deep brown eyes and squeaked again.

Her face, a dark tan color, broke into a delighted smile. "A bird?" she said. "For me?"

"Happy seventh birthday, Catalina," said one of the huge people surrounding me. "This *loro*, this parrot, marks the one year we have been living in America."

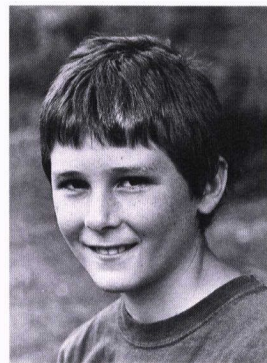
"*Como se llama?*" the girl asked. "What is his name?"

"We thought you could be naming it yourself. Is your bird," said someone. "Mr. Allen, nice man next door, he gives him to you for free, because his big parrots is having too many little parrots. He says this is boy bird."

"Let's put him in his cage," said someone else. "He still is



Francisca Thomas, 13  
New York, New York



Max Strebel, 10  
San Francisco, California

baby, Catalina, so you need to be feeding him special food with a spoon."

Suddenly I felt myself being lifted out of the box. I felt warm hands cupped around me. At first I struggled, but Catalina's hands were so gentle I soon nestled against them.

"I will call him Paco," she said.

"Why Paco?" asked one of the others.

Catalina shrugged. "I like the name Paco. Is good name for *loro*."

Another person, a large man, beamed at Catalina. "Now let us celebrate! Today is Catalina's birthday, and one year since we have come here from Cuba!"

Everybody cheered. Catalina stroked my head, and I knew I was safe with her.

**M**ONTHS PASSED. Soon I was an almost fully grown scarlet macaw, with glossy, bright red feathers; red, yellow, and blue wings that were strong for flying; an enormous sharp beak for cracking nuts and chewing wood; and a long tail of pointed red feathers. I would fly free around the house, singing along with the radio, inspecting the food in the kitchen, and chewing everything I could get my beak on.

Catalina fed me and talked to me in a soft voice and cuddled me in her hands, so as I grew I learned to trust and love humans. This was a good thing, for there were many humans in the house.

There was Mama, Catalina's mother, who always had something delicious in the kitchen, though I was not always allowed to sample it.

There was Papa, Catalina's father, who bought me my food and toys. He played music on the radio that I enjoyed singing along with.

Arturo was Catalina's brother, sixteen years old; he was noisy and a little bit frightening to me. He also played music on the radio, but I didn't like it as much as Papa's music.

Then there was Mariana, Catalina's sister. She was nineteen years old and did not pay very much attention to me; she was usually in her room or with her boyfriend. But she was very beautiful, and I always wanted to chew her long black hair, or pull off her shiny gold earrings. Unfortunately, she didn't let me do either.

This was Catalina's family, and everyone was mostly kind to me; but I always liked Catalina best of all. She was my mother, my sister, my best friend, and everything else to me. We did everything together. I thought we would be together forever.

Then came hurricane season.

We had had hurricane seasons before, living in Florida as we did. But this one was more severe than most. From what I understood, a huge hurricane was in South America and coming our way. Hurricane Andrew, it was called.

Catalina's mother was clearly nervous, frequently listening to the radio and saying things like, "I hope the hurricane is to be staying in Panama. We are having already enough of troubles." Or, "Arturo, please keep inside the house today. The sky is too many



clouds." She would often glance out the window and then return to her work with a sigh of relief. I didn't understand why she was so afraid, but I was beginning to get nervous, too.

Then something else happened to make the tension in the house double: Mariana became pregnant.

Of course everyone was happy that she would have a baby. It would be the first member of the family born in America. But there were some huge problems. Catalina's family was definitely not rich; they had a hard enough time already with five people and a bird in the house. A baby would cost more money than Papa could earn as a cook in a local restaurant. There was talk of Mama, Mariana, and Arturo getting jobs. They considered selling some furniture, though there wasn't much to sell. There was no room or money for a baby, and though Mama and Papa said we should move, everyone knew we did not have enough money.

So with the hurricane and the baby, there was a lot of fear in the household.

Then, one wet, cloudy, windy day, I heard the music on the radio stop with a long, shrill beeping sound, and a voice said, "Hurricane Andrew has taken a surprise turn to the west. Now predicted to pass through the Keys, up north to Fort Lauderdale. Do not attempt to leave your home for any reason until further notice. Repeat: Hurricane Andrew . . ."

"Catalina," said Mama in a tight, breathless voice, "take Paco to the base-

ment and stay there. I go to get Arturo and Mariana. Do not be leaving from the basement!"

"*Sí, Mamá.*" Catalina picked me up onto her shoulder and was about to enter the basement, when she ran back to the kitchen. "*Pero, Mamá*—but, Mama—Papa is at work. What about Papa?"

A shadow crossed Mama's face. She said in a low voice, "Let us be praying his restaurant has basement."

Catalina began to tremble.

"*Vayate, Catalina!* Go away! The hurricane is coming!"

Without another word, Catalina and I went downstairs.

THE NEXT FEW hours were pure terror for me. It was so dark in the basement that I could barely see, but I could certainly hear and feel the wind, ripping and tearing at the house. I think I would have died of fear if Catalina had not been there, holding me tight in her arms. Snuggling close to each other, Arturo, Mariana, Mama, Catalina, and I listened to the howling, shrieking wind, the crashing and shattering of furniture upstairs, the cracking and rustling of falling trees, until the hurricane was over.

Even then, no one went upstairs for almost an hour. We were all too afraid of what we would see. We huddled together as if a monster lurked upstairs, until Mariana finally said, "We have to go upstairs. We cannot be staying here forever. My baby is not to be born in

basement."

So we all began to walk upstairs, Catalina holding me on her arm as if she was afraid I'd disappear if she let go. Arturo opened the door.

I thought we were in another house. Everything was completely gone. The house was filled up with water. The roof had been blown off. The walls had collapsed and were more air space than plaster. All the furniture, including my cage, was in pieces that were floating around. Several palm trees and other plants were lying across the floor.

Mama stared desolately at the wreckage. Finally she said in a choked voice, "We have no insurance."

Though I didn't understand her words, I knew we were in a very serious situation. We all just stood there, staring at what had once been our home.

Suddenly Arturo whispered, "Papa! Still he is at the restaurant. We have to go and get him!"

Eager to leave the mess, everyone began to run to the restaurant. I gripped Catalina's shoulder with all my strength as she raced across the ruined streets. The restaurant was not too far away from the house, and so we arrived in a few minutes.

The restaurant was in a similar condition to our house, and Papa was nowhere in sight. But before anyone had time to be really afraid, he came running up behind us.

"Papa!" squealed Catalina. Everyone ran to him, and there was much rejoicing as we all discovered each other

alive. He told us his manager had noticed the hurricane coming long before it happened, and generously invited Papa and the other workers to stay with him in his basement until the storm was over.

"Well, at least we all are alive," said Mama matter-of-factly. "We can live in basement until . . ."

Her voice trailed off. Until what? Until the house could be rebuilt? That would take years. Until we could buy a new one? The restaurant was ruined, so Papa couldn't work there anymore. We had no money. Until what?

But nobody thought about it. We were all too glad to be alive.

And so we spent the next few days sleeping on spare blankets in the basement. I had no cage, so I slept in a cardboard box with air holes. I was afraid of the dark, noisy basement, and wished I had my cage back.

Then, on the fourth day, Catalina's parents called everyone over for an important discussion.

"We is having big problem," Papa began. "The restaurant is gone, and so I cannot be working there anymore."

"Our house is gone, too," Mama continued, "and we are having no insurance. And now Mariana is going to have a baby. We have only one thing left to sell—but it will be bringing us much money."

Everyone was silent. Slowly, everyone's head turned to Catalina and me. Suddenly understanding, Catalina leaped to her feet.





I screamed and bit frantically, but I couldn't escape

"No!" she cried. "Not Paco! Please, please not Paco! Please, you cannot be selling him, he is part of the family, is *mi amigo*—my friend!"

"We are having no choice, Catalina," said Papa gently. "Mr. Allen gave us Paco for free, but good parrot like him will be giving us ten thousand dollars, maybe more."

"Of course we will be missing him," added Mama, "but we have to do this, or we die."

"No," whispered Catalina, sobbing into my feathers. "No, no, no."

SO THAT WAS how I found myself once again in a box, only this time a much bigger wooden box, being taken away from Catalina. I was bewildered. Why were they doing this? Why was Catalina crying so hard as Papa forced me into the box? Would I ever see any of them again?

I walked to the air hole in the box and peered out. Through the pouring rain, I could just barely see Catalina, running barefoot through the muddy street. I heard her screaming, "Paco! Paco! Papa, please, please bring him



back!" I saw Mama chase after her and pull her back. Catalina buried her head in her mother's shoulder and sobbed.

And then I saw no more, for now my box was being taken into another house. I couldn't get a good look, but I could hear dozens of birds—screeching, chirping, singing, even talking. I heard Papa ask for the manager of Simbad's Bird Shop.

"This is big parrot I am selling to you on the phone," I heard him say to the manager. "You remember? Big, friendly bird, is very healthy and nice. Good bird. How much you give me for him?"

The lid was lifted and a man's unfamiliar face loomed over me. I felt as helpless and frightened as I had the last time I was in a box, so long ago.

"What a lovely bird! A scarlet macaw, I believe. This one's got to be worth at least fifteen thousand dollars. Blah blah blah . . ."

I stopped listening then. I knew, somehow, that I was being taken away from Catalina forever. I couldn't believe it. I thought they loved me. Why were they getting rid of me?

Suddenly a gloved hand swooped down on me like a hawk and snatched me up. I screamed and bit frantically, but I couldn't escape. These hands were nothing like the gentle hands of Catalina—they were big and rough, squeezing me around the wings. They threw me into a large black cage that wasn't mine and locked the door.

"Aahhrckk!" I screamed in agony. "Aaahhwwkk!" I watched in despair as

Catalina's father took the money and walked out the door. Oh, please, take me back! I thought.

I saw Papa look back. With my keen parrot ears, I heard him whisper, "*Adios*, Paco. I am so sorry." And I could have been mistaken, but I thought I saw a single tear in his eye. But no matter how much I shrieked, he did not return. I was abandoned. And alone.

I DON'T KNOW how long I lived in that bird store, but it was a very long time. I was too depressed to eat much and tried to bite anyone who put his or her hands in my cage. I began to pluck my feathers, yanking them off with my beak and watching listlessly as they drifted to the floor. Large bald patches started to appear on my once-glossy wings.

The staff decided I was sick and moved me to a dark, isolated room in the corner of the shop. So then my days were spent in silence and darkness among the empty cages of birds who had been sick and not made it. I could only watch the action through a little window in the wall. I slowly began to lose all hope of ever seeing Catalina again.

Then, one day, a young man walked into the store. I watched without interest as he inspected all the most splendid birds in the store—huge macaws, fancy cockatoos, wildly colored lorries. But he left them all every time he saw their price.

Then he passed me. As soon as he



caught sight of me through my window, he called an employee over right away. "Hey, you," he said, "how much for this one?"

The employee glanced at me through the window and said, "You don't want this one. He's sick."

"Oh, I don't care," said the man. "It's not for me, see. I just want to show off a flashy bird to my friends—I'll get rid of it in a week or two. So since it's sick, is it cheaper than the others?"

The employee took one look at me and said, "I'll let you have him for two thousand. He doesn't look like he'll live much longer anyway."

"Deal!" The man paid for me and then took me in my cage out of the store. It had been ages since I'd been in the fresh air, and though I was afraid, I enjoyed the warm breeze on my feathers. I disliked this man already. I knew he wouldn't love me the way Catalina had. But at least I was out of the store.

I had my eyes closed, enjoying the wind, when I heard my new owner shout, "Hey, little Cuban brat, get out of my way!"

And then another voice, "Sorry! I am leaving now, you see?"

I froze.

I knew that voice. I would have known it anywhere.

Slowly, afraid to believe it, I opened my eyes. But the man was standing in the way of the girl, so I couldn't see who it was.

He laughed and mimicked, "'Sorry! I am leaving now, you see?' Well, little

Cuban, you're not leaving fast enough, you see?" I saw his leg fly out and kick the girl in the stomach. She crumpled to the ground.

And for the tiniest fraction of a second, I saw her face.

The man threw my cage onto the ground and began to step on Catalina—for that was who it was, even if she was a year or two older—and kick dirt onto her. He was yelling, "Go back to where you came from, you little brat! We don't need any more communists in Florida!"

My cage was rolling down the sidewalk and I couldn't stop it. I screamed, but Catalina couldn't help me.

Then the cage hit a parking meter and stopped rolling. Dazed, I tried to get up—and that was when I noticed the cage door had been knocked open!

I scrambled out onto the sidewalk. Free at last, I flew over to the man with a rage I had never known before. I descended on the back of his neck and sank my beak, which could crush wood to sawdust, into his skin.

He yelled in pain and ran. I followed him, screeching and biting him wherever I could see bare flesh, until he was far down the street, bleeding all over and definitely not coming back.

Then I flew over to Catalina, who was still collapsed on the sidewalk. I stepped onto her back and gently pulled her silky black hair with my beak. I walked in a circle around her and anxiously nuzzled her cheek.

Slowly, she came to and looked at me. She blinked. Her mouth dropped open.

"P- . . . Paco?" she whispered incredulously.

I gave a soft purr of affection and hopped onto her shoulder.

"Paco!" she cried joyfully and hugged me close. "You have come back! You saved me, you scared that man away! You are back! Oh, Paco, I am so happy!"

For a few minutes we sat together on the sidewalk, rejoicing. Neither of us could believe we were reunited once more, when so much time had passed.

After a while she took me back to her house. It was a new house, a lovely Spanish-style house near the ocean. Catalina explained to me that the money I had brought, in addition to earnings from various jobs, had bought a much nicer house. She said that since they had sold me, Papa had gotten a new job at a better restaurant, so they had more money for Mariana's baby, Manuelito, and now for me.

We entered through a screen door into a bright, sunny kitchen. Instantly I heard water boiling, music on the radio, and all the sounds of home.

I also heard a new sound—a baby crying. I heard Mariana talk softly to the baby, and the cry became a happy gurgle.

"Mama! Papa!" shouted Catalina. "Paco is back! Paco is back!"

Mama and Papa were so astonished to see me, they couldn't even speak. Catalina took advantage of that to tell the whole story of what had happened—how a man had bought me, how the man beat her up, how I escaped and drove the man away, and how we found each other at last.

Mama and Papa looked as if they were about to tell Catalina to return me to the store, but when they heard that I had saved Catalina, they fell upon me with gratitude.

"*Gracias*, Paco! Thank you, Paco! You saved our *niñita*, our little girl! *Gracias*, *gracias*! *Sí*, Catalina, of course he can stay!"

IT'S A HOT summer day in Florida. Catalina and I are sitting on the beach, just enjoying each other's company. The wind blows back Catalina's hair and ruffles my feathers. I pull her hair back behind her ear with my beak, and she strokes my wings. I'm so happy to finally be back with Catalina.

"*Gracias* again, Paco," she whispers. "We are together again. You are back home, Paco, and you will never, ever have to leave." ❖





## Book Review

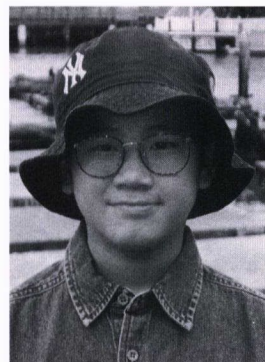
by Kevin Zhou

*Our Only May Amelia* by Jennifer Holm; HarperCollins Books: New York, 1999; \$15.95

**C**LOSE YOUR EYES and imagine that you're the only girl on the Nasel River in the state of Washington, you have seven brothers to deal with, you have a very mean grandmother, and on top of everything, your birthday wish which seems to go right, is instead hindered. That is the exact same scenario that May Amelia Jackson deals with. But she's not your ordinary everyday girl. She loves to go on exciting adventures in the woods and in town with her favorite brother Wilbert, but sometimes these adventures could lead to disasters.

May Amelia Jackson is sometimes called a "no-good girl" by her father. That is because she is always getting into mischief. She has six-and-a-half brothers, the half being Kaarlo, her cousin, who was given to her parents when Kaarlo was only ten years old.

When I started to read the book, I felt sorry for May Amelia because she was the only girl in a town, and I thought that she would be very lonesome, for there was no other girl to play with her. Then, as I read further into the



Kevin Zhou, 11  
Danville, California

book, I learned that she would always play with her brother Wilbert because they both liked to go exploring. I didn't really like her cousin Kaarlo because he was always teasing her and Wilbert. One time, when May Amelia accidentally let go of a board Kaarlo was fixing, the push of the board sent Kaarlo flying into the muck that the pigs played in. May Amelia tried to say it was an accident, but Kaarlo didn't listen to her. He picked her up and intentionally threw her into the muck. He gave a snicker and walked away. I felt happy when Wilbert came over and helped May Amelia out and then he told Kaarlo never to do it again. Kaarlo just shrugged his shoulders and went inside to get cleaned off.

One part of the book made me literally sit on the edge of my seat because it was so exciting. When Lonny Petersen, their next-door neighbor, asked May Amelia, Kaarlo, and Wilbert if they wanted to go collect cranberries at his Cousin Thyme's bogs, they all agreed and started on their journey. As they moved ahead, the fog began to kick in. It was so thick that they couldn't even see their own hands in front of them! Luckily, Lonny said that he knew the way and he would lead everybody. As they approached a big old bridge, Lonny told them to be careful because the bridge might collapse any minute. Suddenly Lonny stopped. He asked the three if they heard a baby crying. Lonny was known to hear things, but this time, everybody heard it. Then sudden-

ly, out of nowhere, a huge cougar jumped out. They all started running until they got to the other side of the bridge. The bridge all of a sudden gave in and the cougar fell into the river. Before it went down, it gave a roar that startled everyone. I was very glad that none of them had been hurt by the attack.

The saddest part in the story was when May Amelia's mother was having a baby. May Amelia had always wished that the baby would be a girl, so she could have a girl to talk to and not always a boy. Then, after the baby came out, it turned out to be a girl. May Amelia was so excited. She then decided to name the baby Amy Alice Jackson, since "Amy" was MAY scrambled up and "Alice" after one of her aunts. Her mother immediately became ill after the childbirth so May had to take care of her. She fed Amy and made sure that she slept well. Then, on Christmas Eve, May noticed that baby Amy had not cried all night. She put her ear to Amy's chest and did not hear anything. She screamed so loud that everyone rushed up. They asked what had happened and she cried that the baby was dead.

Baby Amy was buried on Smith Island, which is an island in the middle of the Nasel. At the funeral, evil Grandmother Patience said that if only the baby had been in the care of her real mother and not in the care of that wicked child, then she still might be alive. At that very statement, May Amelia ran as hard as she could until



she got to Astoria, where she went to her Uncle Henry and Aunt Feenie's house. She stayed there a couple of weeks until she went back home.

*Our Only May Amelia* is a very good book, with sadness, excitement, adventure, and even a little bit of comedy. After I read this book, I got to thinking. What if I was the only one of my gender in a whole town? Would I have handled the situation as smoothly as May

Amelia did? I honestly think that I couldn't have lived through it. I would want to immediately move away from there. I admire how May Amelia took the best of things and did a lot of stuff her own way. Even when everyone in her family wanted her to be a "proper young lady," she continued to go on adventures with her brother Wilbert. You should read the book to learn more about May Amelia's many adventures. ❖



Katie Yost, 10, Dover, Delaware

# Lightning Rod

by Valerie Gill

illustrated by Abram Shanedling



Valerie Gill, 13  
Pocatello, Idaho



Abram Shanedling, 13  
Minneapolis, Minnesota



LOVE STORMS. Especially electrical storms. The only downside is that I can't use the computer. I still love storms.

This was a big one. I watched the lightning reach down with long, slim fingers. I counted the seconds until the thunder came. It was still far away. I was sitting on the back of the couch with my hands pressed up against the window. My breath fogged the glass. It was so dark outside. I'm glad we live in the country, so the streetlights could not take away from the glory of the storms.

There was a flash, and my crude shadow was cast back into the living room. In the brief light the sky seemed purple. It was gone so quickly, leaving the image jumping on my retina. The darkness was all the blacker for the brief illumination.

It was coming closer with every strike. The wind raged around the old house and drove the rain hard against the window.

One . . . two . . . three . . . fo- . . . the thunder rattled the windows. Soon it would be directly over the house.

I was waiting for it. I could not have waited more than twenty seconds, but each second was an hour. And then it came, bright and blinding. The purple light filled the house, pouring in the windows. I savored the adrenaline that washed downward to my feet. The crash deafened me.

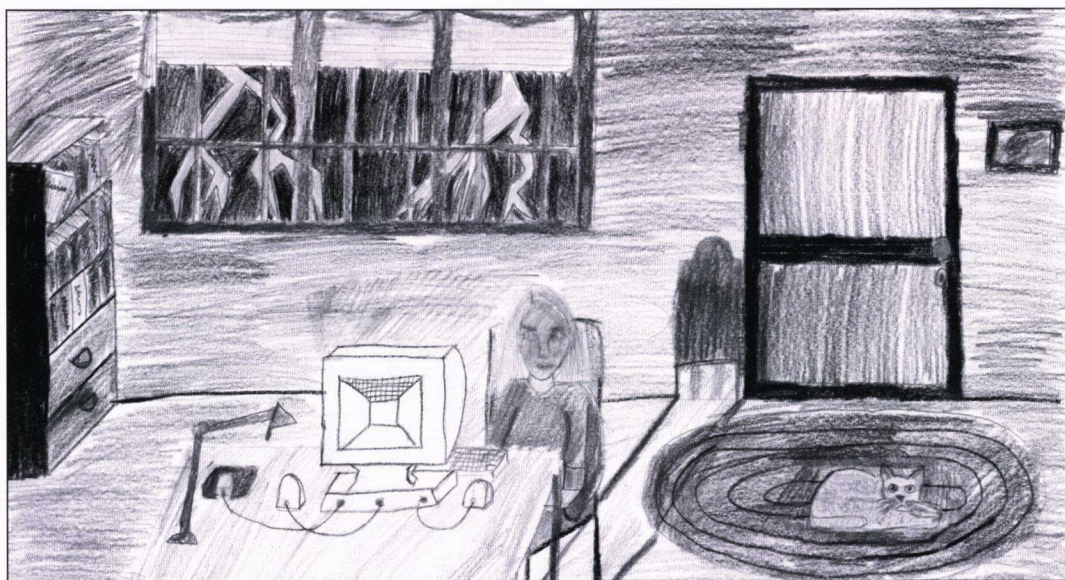


Then the lights went out.

I got a flashlight from the closet. It was dim, but I couldn't find any new batteries. I checked the woodstove, and added some old two-by-fours. I like power outages. It's kind of a love-hate relationship, power outages and me. They prevent me from using the computer, the so-called "love of my life." An accurate description. There is something about the loss of electricity that appeals to me. I have heard it is that way with many people.

thunder and rain became background noise. I walked down the hall, thinking about my computer game. Only twelve levels to go until I entered the chamber of the warlord Zanegus. I had been thinking to try a new strategy tonight. But my plans were overthrown by the forces of nature. I pushed open the door to the computer room, aka "Raquel's lair."

Nero, the white cat my mother named, shot out the door. I wondered how he got in.



I sat down at the keyboard and clicked the mouse

Lightning lit up the house like a strobe light. Thunder made my teeth rattle. It rang in my ears and made me dizzy. The storm was stationary. I wondered why.

The human mind can become accustomed to almost anything it encounters, if exposed to it long enough. The

The computer was on. Its bluish glow filled the room. It was on screen-saver. The one called "Mystify Your Mind." I flicked the light switch on and off. Nothing happened. Too weird.

I sat down at the keyboard and clicked the mouse. The screen showed that I was online. An instant message

filled the screen. It was blank. I typed,

"Hello? Anyone there?"

"Yes."

There was no screen name.

"Who is that there?"

"Not who, why."

"OK, why, then?"

"To show you."

"Elaborate."

There was a roll of images on the screen. A spiderweb laced with dew. A drop of water falling on a still pool. Sunlight through green leaves.

"I don't understand."

"The world is old. It dies. See?"

"No."

"It is like yourself. It can only live for so long. It will die, like you."

"When?"

"Eventually."

"When exactly?"

"Long after you die."

"So why do I matter?"

"Everyone matters."

"Why are you telling me?"

"Because you have a job to do."

"And what is that?"

"Learn. Learn about the moon and the stars and the breath of the earth. Know the parasite and the host."

"The parasite. What is . . . ?"

"The human race is the parasite to the earth. The galaxy is the host to the earth. The universe is the parasite of something much grander."

"What?"

"That is not for you to know."

"Then what am I to know?"

"The earth."

"Everything about it?"

"Yes."

"I can't. It's too much."

"You will find it is not."

"Why?"

"Somebody has to know."

"But why me? I have a life. I go to school and play computer games and watch TV. I can't just become a recluse and cram my head with facts day and night. It won't work."

"Just try. It will come."

"Who are you? How is the computer on when there is no power? I don't understand."

"I am the sun and the moon and the planets, and I am you."

"Wait a sec."

"You are looking in a mirror. You are speaking to an echo. You know me very well."

"And how?"

"That is not for you to know."

"Why not?"

"As the human brain cannot comprehend infinity, so you cannot understand certain facts. I am the host of the universe and the parasite of a quark and the soul of your body. Good-bye."

The computer had kicked me off the Internet.

I sat in the darkness and stared at the screen. The thunder moved off, becoming a distant growl. The rain slackened. Nero meandered into the room and jumped into my lap.

The power came back on.





# The Chase

by Fiona Cull

illustrated by the author

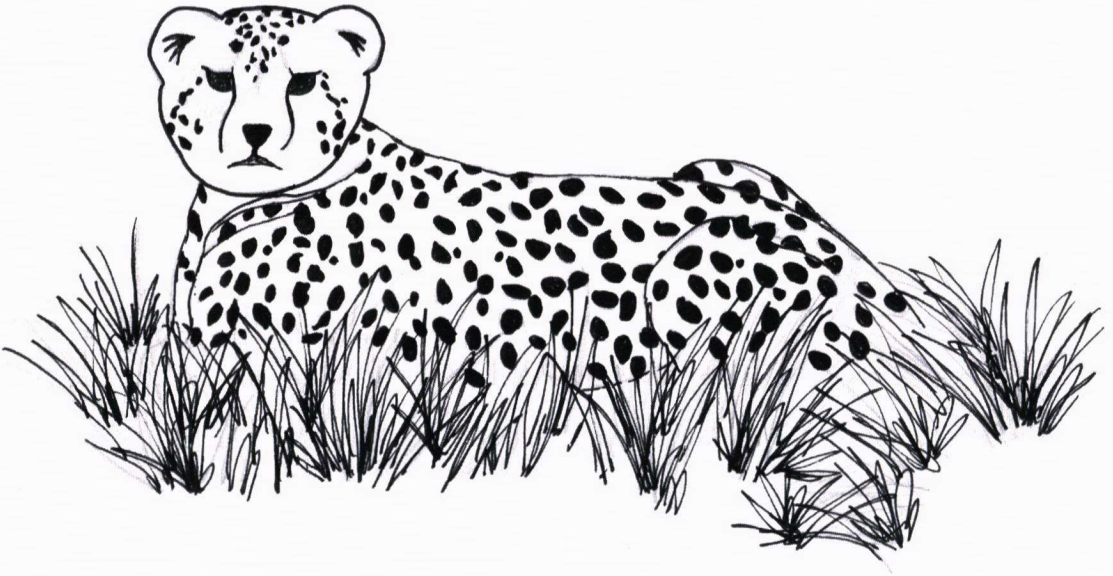
**D**UST TWIRLED UP into the sky as the mother cheetah chased after the young gazelle. Like all cheetahs, she had a flexible spine, enabling her to cover the ground quickly by taking huge strides. Using her speed as a weapon she took a leap and brought the young animal down, then, taking it by the throat and piercing its windpipe, she suffocated it. Then she gulped down the bloody flesh quickly, for fresh meat soon attracts scavengers; a vulture, a jackal, a marabou stork, it seemed everyone had a share in her well-earned prize. After pulling most of the red bloody flesh off her dead animal she lifted her graceful strong head and raced off toward her den, which was holding two cubs.

As she came to a halt at the den, a huge flash of lightning struck the ground, and the sound of thunder cracked in the dark sky. A hyena screamed and ran from its hiding place, and a small herd of gazelles stood shivering, like a shimmering water hole on the grassy plain. The first drops of cold rain splattered onto the cheetah's nose and descended slowly onto the bloody scruff.

She stood with her head up, sniffing the gusty air; for a second she stood frozen, then backed slowly down the passage to her screaming cubs. Slowly, slowly until she hit the tunnel end and found her pups. They lifted their tiny noses to her mouth and made worrying noises up to her. The re-



Fiona Cull, 11  
Barnsley, South Yorkshire,  
England



She gulped down the bloody flesh quickly

gurgitated food dropped onto the sandy floor. The pups exploded with excitement and pushed their way toward it; their eyes were already open, and the stronger cub had dominance over the smaller, weaker one. Their mother lay down and started grooming her sandy brown fur. A bolt of lightning flashed down to the ground just near enough for them to see the sparks of fire, but with their eyes closed in pleasure they saw nothing.

Suddenly the grass was a licking amber flame. In an instant the frightened cheetah picked up the stronger cub and rushed to the entrance. The fire licked into the den as they proceeded up to it. Her strong back legs bunched under her and the rows of well-built muscle that had been developed for sprinting at ninety kilometers per hour

were now all used to jump high into the air with the cub. The flames engulfed her like a lion jumping through a hoop of fire. They made it with ease and ran off through the golden grass.

The tiny cub screamed and dragged herself up to the entrance of the earth. The flames were too intense for her and they burnt her little whiskers and quivering wet nose. The frightened creature scampered helplessly back down to the chamber, her tail between her scrawny legs.

The earth fell away as she scratched at the soil. Every time her paws hit the solid wall she whimpered painfully. Where was the emergency exit? She tried in vain to cast her mind back to when the lioness had attacked them; her mother had saved them by blocking up the entrance. Now the soil that for



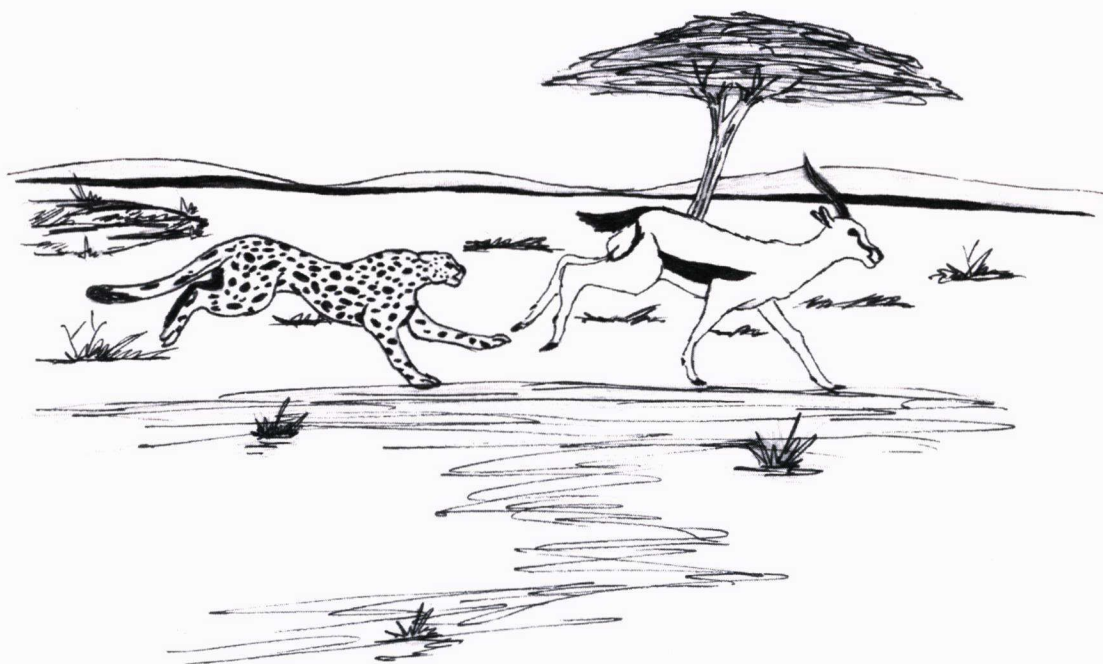
so long had been her friend held her back. There must be a way out. She was sure of it! Glancing back to the entrance of the earth she saw, to her horror, one of the longer roots had burst into glowing flames. Frantically she started to dig. Her baby paws scrabbled at the sides of the tunnel, sending sheets of earth flying behind her. She battered at it with her head, desperate to force a way through. Earth clogged her eyes and nostrils. The large root had glowed dangerously for some time, now it burst with light and golden colors—flames!

The cub's paws broke through the sidewall. She slid halfway down a sooty tunnel and stopped. Behind her the bedding had caught fire.

Breathing hard she kicked at the soft earth; the air was full of drifting dust. Her long pink tongue and throat were coated in sticky sand, and as she broke out of the tunnel a fine drizzle started, wetting her face. Bedraggled, disheveled and soaking wet, she struggled on, following the telltale scent of her mother. She screamed in triumph as the dark silhouette of her parent came into view. She scampered happily up to her, wagging her tail and purring in delight. They curled up with the older cub and closed their eyes in pleasure. Outside the wind howled round and the rain pelted down, while lightning lit up the sky. They were cozy and warm in their new-found den; it was small but comfortable with the small amount of bedding they found.

The dawning was wet, but with happiness for all animals that gathered. Herds of hundreds grazed on the grass-filled plains. Wildebeest, gazelles and large families of warthogs—they all scurried around a fallen tree finding food, and so did the cheetahs. Silently the two cubs and the long-legged female perched on the top of a warm, gray rock. The youngsters were too interested in the family of wobbly quail that were pecking at the long grass seeds. They never noticed the small herd of gazelle.

The mother cheetah, although young, was too wise to be distracted by such a small meal. The pickings she was focusing on were larger, stronger and faster; also, they were much more nutritious and rich in goodness and would help her produce better milk, so her cubs would grow stronger. Taking no notice of the noisy creatures, she padded down the rock onto the grass. She crept along on her tummy until within three meters, then sprang forward. It was a good take-off, and she was catching up with the young buck that she had been observing for some time. Her speed was tremendous, like a blurred object—faster than the eye could follow; she gripped the hard ground with her claws and pushed herself forward. The buck was slowing, and had tried to throw the cheetah off course, dodging this way and back. But a cheetah's long, strong tail isn't for nothing! It came into action. She swung it around, low and fast, the ground helping her. Just as she was



Her speed was tremendous, like a blurred object

on top of the prey, she did what no cheetah should ever do when in a high-speed chase: she turned her head.

The thing that had caught her eye made her gasp.

A lioness. No! No! The female lion slowly crept toward the cubs' rock! WHAM! She skidded across the ground as the buck's hooves smashed into her face. For a long time she lay unconscious—like an age of waiting. But in desperation to warn her cubs she forced herself to her feet. Screaming with anger she bounded toward the spot where the lioness had been. The strong, sweet smell of the lion made her feel sick. It

was left where the cubs had been. She scanned the area and called out in the hope they might hear her. Listening carefully she heard little squeaks of happiness, the two lost cubs emerged from a tiny gap in the rocks! Another surprise for the happy cheetah mother was that in the two of their mouths was a plump quail chick!

Tired and hungry, they returned to the temporary den, and the cubs tried their first taste of meat. Later they tussled over the bones and scraps before falling asleep at their mother's side. The female looked down upon them with pride; they'd make fine predators yet! ❖



# The Ultimate Challenge: To Come Home Alive

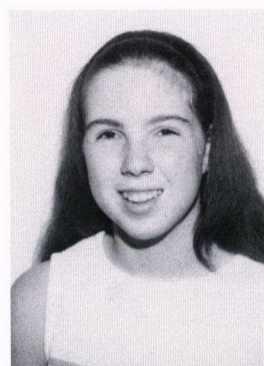
by Tara Stroll

illustrated by Jane Westrick

**P**ETER BRADBURY STEPPED outside into the ten-degrees-below-zero Canadian air. The winter would get much colder. The bundled-up, seventeen-year-old boy was not cold. He had grown up in this weather. He was tall, lean, dirty, unshaven, strong, and tough. He had been born in the woods. With much difficulty, he trudged through the three-foot-deep snow over to a rack that his snowshoes were on. The frame was made from wood and the webbing was made from animal skin. They had to be kept outside the whole winter. The temperature change of bringing them in the house was not good for them. Wearing the snowshoes, he walked on top of the snow with ease over to a small doghouse. Curled up inside was a young malamute. He was a grayish brown with black ears and patches of white on his face.

"Come on, Chocolate. We're going to check the trapline." The dog got up. Peter was wearing many layers to stay warm. He had a pack on his back. Chocolate had a thick coat of hair; he was always dressed for the weather. Peter put another pack on Chocolate's back. "We're ready to go."

The dog followed Peter into the woods. Peter Bradbury's trapline was fifteen miles long. At the other end there was a cabin where he would sleep. The next day he would come back home. It was usually easy for Peter and Chocolate to travel the ten miles in a day.



Tara Stroll, 13  
Roslyn Heights, New York



Jane Westrick, 13  
Mechanicsville, Virginia





"Come on, Chocolate. We're going to check the trapline"



When they traveled down the trail, through the pines, Chocolate ran ahead and then turned around and came bounding back to Peter. Both dog and boy squinted. The light from the sun reflected on the white snow caused their eyes pain. Sometimes Chocolate would run off to the side to chase a squirrel for a while. Peter was quite amused when he dashed into the forest in a frenzy, in mad pursuit of some small animal, barking nonstop. Finally he would give up and come back to Peter.

At each trap that they came to, Peter would put in fresh bait, reset the trap, and if there was an animal in it, take it out. The bait came from Chocolate's pack. Peter whistled cheerfully as he went along. He and Chocolate knew the route well. The first three traps were empty. At the fourth, there was a jackrabbit which he took. He tied the rabbit's legs together and attached it to the outside of his pack. When he got home, Peter and his mother would skin the animals and sell the pelts at the closest trading post at the end of the season. Peter's father had died long ago, so Peter was the man of the house. His mother did odd jobs in town. During the winter, Peter's trapline was their main income. They desperately needed the money.

The fifth trap he disappointedly found empty. At the sixth he found an arctic fox. He cheerfully whistled as they moved on. The seventh and eighth traps were empty. Peter started to notice a change in the weather. It was getting colder and dark clouds filled the sky. It

had gotten extremely windy. The cold bit at Peter's pink nose. It was snowing lightly. At the ninth trap there was an ermine. Ermine fur was very much in demand. Very happily, Peter took it out.

They were headed toward the tenth trap when there were some very sudden gusts of wind. The snow was much heavier now, coming down in sheets. Peter could barely see. "It's a blizzard! We'd better stop awhile, Chocolate. Let's look for some shelter." About seventy meters to the left of the trail, there was a small rock outcropping. The roof sloped down and met the floor at the very back. Slabs of rock held it up. It could not have been more than fifteen feet by ten feet. Once sitting inside the dry shelter, Peter began to go to work. He brushed the snow off of himself and the dog. "We'll just stay here awhile, Chocolate."

The dog barked.

"I'm going to build a fire. You stay here while I try to find something dry to burn."

The dog stayed in the shelter while Peter pushed his way through the heavy snow, not being able to see where he was going, in search of something to burn. He found some tree branches, felled from the blizzard. Gathering as much as he could possible carry, he tried to make his way back to the shelter.

"Oh, no!" Peter groaned aloud. "How will I find my way back? OK, OK. Don't panic. I can't be more than fifty feet away. I'll call Chocolate. I'll hear his bark and follow the sound back.

Chocolate! Chocolate!" he shouted, but his voice was lost in the wind. He continued to shout and kept moving toward where he thought the shelter was. He did not hear an answer.

Then he saw something coming toward him. It was an animal covered with snow, about the size of a wolf. Peter started to back away but the animal kept coming closer. Peter tried to remain calm. It was unlike wolves to attack people. The animal kept advancing toward Peter. Peter was still not sure what it was. He kept backing away. Then the wolf-like animal jumped on him.

"Chocolate!" Peter cried in relief. Chocolate led him back to the shelter. Once inside, Peter set to work. His hands and feet were numb from cold. His ears were almost frozen. His top layer of clothes was soaking. Peter cut up the wet wood and made a tepee. He stuck the leaves underneath it to use as the kindling.

"Now," Peter said to Chocolate, "all I have to do is get the fire going and then we will defrost." Peter hesitated a moment and then said, "Oh no. Oh no. Oh boy." He sighed and then said in a grim voice, "I forgot to pack the matches."

Chocolate cocked his head and gave Peter an odd look. Then he whined.

"Oh boy. What are we going to do? Things are not looking good. Oh boy. Oh boy." Then Peter's face brightened, "There might still be some in here from last time." He opened up his pack, rummaged around and found a book of

matches. Then he kissed it.

"We're in luck, Chocolate." He opened it up. "There's only three left. It's hard to start a fire with wet wood. Once we get it started, we have to keep it burning. And you know what, Chocolate, this blizzard is not going to let up. We'll never make it to the cabin today. You know what, Chocolate? We're going to have to spend the night here. We can't go to sleep because the fire will go out and we'll surely freeze to death. We're going to be awake all night, feeding the fire and gathering wood." He thought a moment and then said, "And you know what, Chocolate? I don't want to die. I'm going to get more wood and maybe some birch bark to help start the fire. When I come back we're going to have a fire. Tomorrow morning we'll be able to travel again and we'll make it to the cabin. Then we'll have food and supplies and matches and a radio and a stove. But right now we have to make that fire." He set out again.

Peter came back with more wood, birch bark, and leaves. He set everything up and lit the first match. The birch bark would not light. It was too wet. The flame flickered and then went out. "Let's try again." He lit the second match. This time, he tried lighting a different piece. He had the same result. "Well, cross your fingers, Chocolate. It's looking like we've only got one match left." He lit the match. Then he tried to light the kindling. He slowly released his breath as it lit.

"We have a fire!" Peter gave the dog a



big hug. He fanned the fire and it continued to grow. Water was boiling on the wood. That was a bad sign. He kept feeding it more twigs. The glow of the flames gave light and the fire provided some warmth. "Let's have some supper." From the pack, he took two fish for Chocolate. Peter took for himself a piece of pemmican. Peter spent the whole night gathering wood and keeping the fire going, only taking small naps in between.

He awoke for the final time at seven o'clock in the morning. They did not eat breakfast. Peter packed up and put out the fire. "Let's go, Chocolate. It's time to leave." They stepped out into a new world. It was totally unlike the previous night, dark, cold, and unfriendly. The sun was shining and it was warm and bright. The blizzard had stopped during the night. The ground was covered in a sparkling blanket of snow. Everything was white. Shining icicles hung from the trees. Peter could almost imagine little white fairies dancing on the ice. They really seemed to belong there. A clump of snow fell down from an overhead tree and onto Chocolate's head. The surprised dog shook himself off and Peter laughed. "I think that the trail is this way." After ten minutes of walking, they came to a trail leading in what seemed to be the right direction.

"Here's the trail, Chocolate. Let's go. We'll make it to the cabin in time for lunch." Peter started to walk down the trail but stopped abruptly when he noticed that the dog was not following

him. He turned around. "What's the matter, Chocolate?" Chocolate barked. "Come on, boy." Peter turned back around and kept walking. Chocolate barked like crazy. "Well, let's go." Peter was starting to get annoyed. Chocolate came up to Peter, grabbed the bottom of Peter's pants in his mouth, and started to pull him in the other direction. "What's wrong?" Chocolate kept pulling him. "Let go of me, Chocolate!" The dog immediately obeyed. "We're going this way. Let's go." Chocolate followed Peter as they continued walking down the trail. "Silly dog," Peter muttered to himself. "He's going crazy."

The day continued to get warmer and the snow and icicles were melting. They had walked for about two hours when Peter suddenly stopped. "Chocolate," he said, "we haven't been checking the traps. That is because there haven't been any to check. We're not on my trapline! Now we're really lost."

He looked down at Chocolate. "OK, you were right. I hate it when you have that 'I told you so' look on your face. Get rid of that grin right now!" The dog stared at him. "I said right now!" Peter said with his hands on his hips. The dog's grin remained. Peter shouted, "Chocolate Bradbury! Did you hear me?" Peter was getting quite frustrated. Apparently, the dog did because he put his head on Peter's feet and whimpered. Peter patted him on the head and said, "All right. This trail is probably parallel to my trapline. Let's take a shortcut and go through the woods this way. We'll





The dog grabbed the boy's arm in his mouth and dragged him out of the water

be there in no time. Any objections, group leader?" Chocolate remained silent. They went on.

They were not on a path, so the traveling was harder. They had to push branches out of their way and walk over or crawl under other obstacles. Peter led the way. They had been traveling for quite some time. "We should be getting there by now. This wasn't smart. We should have gone back on the wrong trail to the shelter and then found the trapline. This shortcut was the stupidest thing to do. Well, let's keep going. Mother will be worried about us. She'll

send out a search party soon, if she doesn't come out on skis to find us herself. Oh well."

Peter heard a cracking noise and, without warning, the ground under him gave way. He fell into a stream of icy cold water. Chunks of ice floated around him. As Peter's body began to go numb with cold, he knew that he would die if he did not get out quickly. But, very heroically, Chocolate jumped from chunk to chunk of ice across the stream. He eventually had to swim in the shallow but freezing water. The dog grabbed the boy's arm in his mouth and dragged him out of the





"I'm going to sleep now. Any objections, group leader?"

water and onto land again.

Peter lay in the snow and Chocolate licked his face. Feeling the dog's warm tongue, Peter came to his senses. "Chocolate, you saved my life!" Chocolate glowed with pride as he wagged his tail happily. "I need to try to get dry now." He started to use his arms to push himself up when he fell down again. He screamed with pain. "Chocolate, you dragged me out by my arm, didn't you? My shoulder is dislocated!" Chocolate looked sad. "Oh, it's not your fault, Chocolate. I'm not mad at you. You saved my life. OK. Calm down. Relax.

Take a deep breath, Peter. I know how to do this. I need something heavy." He picked up a rock with his right arm, his uninjured one. "OK. Here it goes." With his right hand, he pushed the bone into a different position. Then he placed the rock into his left hand. "Ow!" he screamed in pain as his shoulder shifted into place. He took a deep breath. "It's OK, Chocolate. It's all better now. The muscles will just be sore for a while. I need to get dry now."

Peter did not have a lot of spare clothing with him. He put dry clothing on underneath but the layers on top



were still wet. "We'll stop and build a fire to dry these off so I can be warm and toasty again." He remembered that he did not have any matches. "Forget that. Let's have something to eat. What am I carrying this pemmican for anyway?" Peter gave Chocolate some of the pemmican in his pack and then had some himself. "OK, we better get going if we want to find my trapline and the cabin at the end of it." They pushed on, newly refreshed from their meal.

They had traveled for another two hours. They were both getting weary. Chocolate was leading the way. He was about fifteen feet in front of Peter. Suddenly, the dog seemed to fall. He was then out of visibility. Peter ran to the spot to see Chocolate lying at the bottom of a ten-foot-deep crevice.

"Chocolate! Hang on, boy. I'm coming soon. You just wait there." Peter kept giving Chocolate warm words of encouragement while he worked. The crevice was very steep. Once he jumped down, there would be no way to get back up and Chocolate might be hurt. Peter took a coil of rope out of his backpack and tied one end to the nearest sturdy tree. He threw the coil down. Holding onto it, he used the rope to rappel down to the bottom of the crack. "Oh, Chocolate."

The boy sat and hugged the dog for a long time. Tears streamed down his cheeks. "Are you all right? Try to get up." The dog got up and stood on three legs. "Walk a little bit." Chocolate walked, very slowly and very wobbly on

three legs. He would not put down his back, left leg. "Let me see." Peter examined his leg. "I think it's broken. We'll put a splint on it when we get back up." Peter tied the dog around the top of his legs, where he had been sitting. He then had both hands to use to pull himself up. When they were on top again, Peter untied Chocolate. Peter used sticks and cloth torn from his undershirt to put a splint on the dog's leg. He gathered up his rope.

"Now, how are we going to get to the other side? It's certainly too far to jump. Hmmmm. There's a fallen tree going across it a ways down. Let's use that." They went down to where the log was. It seemed sturdy enough. Peter straddled across, holding Chocolate in front of him. He took a good hour covering the eleven feet. He was very worried that he would fall and not be able to get out. He placed Chocolate down on the ground. Then, quite abruptly, the log gave way under him. Peter grabbed the edge of the cliff. His body dangled down. He kicked his feet wildly. He was hanging on only his hands. His life could depend on the strength of his fingertips. Very slowly, inch by inch, he pulled himself up. Safely on the other side of the crevice, they continued on their journey to the cabin.

They had walked for another three and a half hours. It was getting dark. It got dark early in the winter. Their hopes were not very high. Chocolate had been leading. All of a sudden, Chocolate turned around and ran back to Peter



rather quickly, considering he was hobbling on three legs. Chocolate was barking furiously. He obviously wanted Peter to come quick. "All right, group leader, I'm coming." Peter ran after the limping dog. Ahead of him, Peter saw Chocolate barking at an empty trap. It was one of Peter's traps.

"Chocolate, we've found the trapline!" The empty trap led to the trail that led to the cabin. "We have another four miles to get to the cabin, based on this. We can get there by midnight. I know that traveling is slow and hard for you because of your broken leg. I'm tired and weary too, Chocolate. And my wet clothes are making me very cold. I don't have a fur coat on me like you do. If we stop for the night, we'll freeze without a fire. We have to keep going. Come on Chocolate, you can do it."

After another hour of traveling, they stopped to rest awhile and ate some pemmican and fish. It was very dark now. They were weighed down by pain and lack of rest. The journey seemed to take forever. They were farther from the cabin than Peter thought they were. They had to make more and more stops to rest and had to take longer rests. The cold reminded Peter that if they went to sleep they would freeze. Chocolate was exhausted. Being a hero took his strength away. Peter continually urged him on.

Soon it became pitch black. Peter used his flashlight then. It was not very powerful but it helped them to see the trail. Peter turned it off often to try to

save the batteries. Their pace got slower and slower. Peter thought that his feet were made of lead. He almost fell asleep while he was walking.

The fatigued travelers reached the cabin at one o'clock in the morning. Both Peter and Chocolate had never been so happy to see it. They went inside. Peter used the radio to tell his worried mother that he was OK and would come home the next day. Among food, candles, matches, tents, skis, ski wax, blankets, clothing, and the radio, there was a sled that Peter would pull Chocolate home on. Peter lit candles, built a fire in the stove, put on dry clothes, ate, and fed Chocolate. He finally plopped down on the small bed in the corner of the cabin for a well-deserved rest.

"I'm going to sleep now. Any objections, group leader?" Chocolate was too tired to answer.

#### EPILOGUE

PETER PULLED Chocolate on the sled and they made it home the next day. Peter's mother had been worried and had gone out to look for them. She went home at the end of the day, figuring that they were spending an extra night at the cabin. Chocolate's leg was fractured but he had a quick recovery. The bone healed beautifully. Peter and his mother had their best fur season ever. Peter and Chocolate still manage a trapline every winter. Whenever Peter goes out to check it, he always makes sure that he has enough matches. ❖

# Life Without You

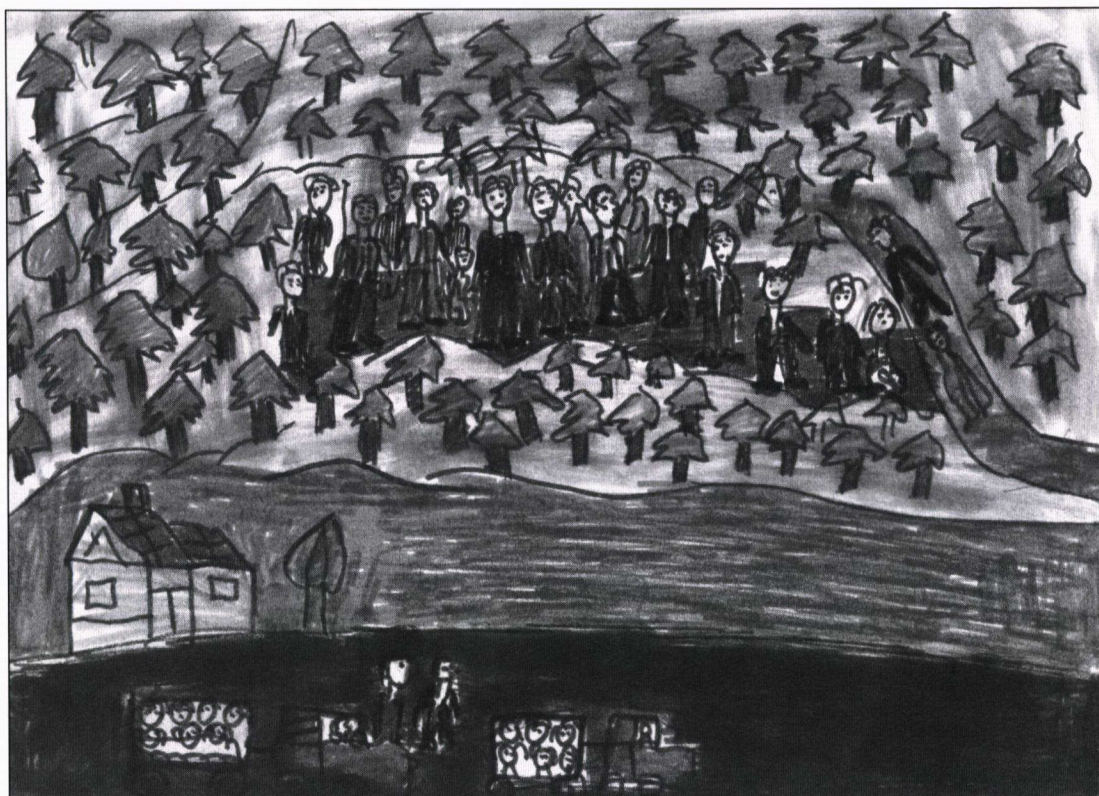
by Laberije Shala, 13, Rashiq, Kosovo

You were loved, sweet,  
Always smiling  
When I needed you,  
You left.

You gave me the name orphan,  
You gave me a black shadow,  
Life without you has no sense.  
Now, in your best years,  
Black soil covers you.  
O my Daddy  
On your grave  
There are roses  
It's me who put them there  
Your orphan  
My Daddy  
A life without you.

The poem and drawing on these two pages were created in 1999 by young ethnic Albanians from western Kosovo. Many of these young people witnessed mass murder and the systematic destruction of their family homes. They were forced to march over the mountains to refugee camps in





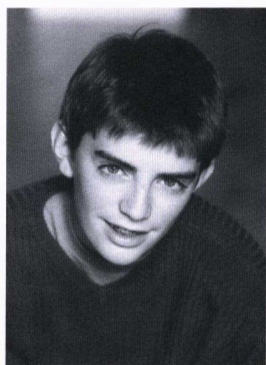
Florije Bobi, 12, Lybeniq, Kosovo

neighboring Albania and Montenegro. An international relief agency called Concern Worldwide organized classes for the young refugees and compiled their work in a book called *Drawing Lessons*. To learn more about Concern Worldwide, go to their Web site at [www.concernusa.org](http://www.concernusa.org).

# Together

by Alex Mifflin

illustrated by Sarah Dennis



Alex Mifflin, 12  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada



Sarah Dennis, 13  
Nashville, Tennessee

**W**HEN I LOOK BACK NOW, eighteen months later, at our horrendous car crash, it seems so far away, so surreal. But the harsh reminders are suddenly there. My older brother's scars, jagged lines across his muscled chest and stomach, and also running down his spine. Still my hero, so brave in his suffering, never a word of complaint during his long healing process. My mother's stiff neck and hole marks on her brow from her "halo" brace, used to heal her broken neck (what a nice name for such a painful contraption!).

One moment my parents and two older brothers, Scott and Tyler, and I were carefree and traveling along a remote country road on the second-to-last day of our family vacation in Australia, my stepdad cracking a joke, hilarious as usual. Everyone relaxed from just playing tennis. The next moment, we're violently hit head-on by a speeding car. The sound of crashing metal, then everything is still, my family all moaning in pain, smoke in the air, no one seems to be able to move. In a haze, I try to open the van's side door but can't. My stepdad groans and rolls out, blood is everywhere, my mom is not moving, shouts to get out of the van, my eldest brother Scott whimpers in agony that he can't move (broken pelvis and nose), but Tyler, thirteen, an incredible athlete, miraculously moves to the front seat and crawls out, now lying in a fetal position by the side of the hot, dirt





I vividly remember my mom, dad and stepdad around Tyler's bed, each massaging a different foot and hand

shoulder of the road, moaning in intense pain (back broken in three places, severed stomach and severe intestinal injuries, severed leg arteries). Finally I jump out of the driver's door and see the smoking car that hit us and it seems to be on fire, with an older man trapped inside.

What to do? My parents are now both shouting for me to get help, I am the only one who can move. Me, the kid brother, the out-of-it one, suddenly called upon. I have no choice. A lonely country road, I can see no one and no houses. The van is demolished, the other car is crushed, with smoke coming from

it. Suddenly I run, yelling "Help, help" until I find a house. Part of me wants to rest and make it go away. Two men and a woman come outside. They are kind and phone for help (they visit me later in the hospital). Fortunately, an ambulance arrives from close by, and soon a helicopter comes for Tyler, who is in serious trouble. Another courageous man, luckily just driving by, rescues the trapped and injured man with a crowbar.

My mother's neck is broken, so close to paralysis, but she is going to be OK and is taken by helicopter to Brisbane, three hours' drive away. Tyler and the rest of us are in the Lismore Base



Hospital. He is in critical condition. They stabilize his broken back and work on his insides, removing thirty percent of his intestines. His leg circulation is bad, and many skilled doctors work to save his foot and toe. My aunt and uncle fly in from Singapore. My aunt talks endlessly to a semi-conscious Tyler and holds his hand. He thinks she is my mother, their voices so similar. It is wonderful to have healthy family looking out for us. The doctors and police say we are lucky to be alive; seat belts and air bags saved us. I say a few awkward prayers for Tyler, he is the cool, free-spirited one, now lying powerless in his hospital bed, linked up to all sorts of monitors, while I play endless video games. My bruises and headaches heal quickly. I try hard not to think of the natural athlete, the graceful snowboarder, triple-long-jumper and effortless back-flip diver, without a foot or his toes. I run from room to room telling each person how the other is doing. It is a strange feeling when your "together" parents and brothers are helpless and you're fine. I imagine my mother lonely and frantic with worry about Tyler, and away from us. She is the one who insisted that we buckle up, immediately, after each of the many stops of our three-week trip, and now she is separated from us. Later, my dad arrives from Canada to be by Tyler's side.

My mom, heavily sedated, is mistakenly put in the overcrowded female "dementia" ward of a public hospital with one woman named Ivy, who is over 90, who never stops talking and thinks she

is having a baby. Yes, there is some humor, even in tragic moments.

All I can say to anyone who has been in a car crash is that my heart goes out to you. It is a numbing and mind-boggling experience. It is best to focus on the positive things. There are many, and we're grateful to be alive, and that my baby sister Caleigh wasn't with us. She was left home with my grandmother, because she was too young to really enjoy what my mom called a more macho trip.

And yes, Australia is a wonderful country for a family vacation. We combined my interest in nature and my older brothers' interest in sports and adventure. We started in beautiful Sydney, saw its impressive aquarium and zoo, and then on to the Blue Mountains, where we hired a biologist for a nature tour, saw wild kangaroos and leaned over the steep cliffs looking down into the ancient forest. We went to an ecological mountain retreat in the rain forest—no phones or TV—and night-time nature walks to see the fascinating animal life. We absailed down a beautiful cliff and explored remote nature caves and trails. We drove up the Gold Coast. My brothers went bungee-jumping. We took a huge ferry over to an island near the Great Barrier Reef, and went scuba diving and snorkeling. We all learned so much and enjoyed Australian hospitality, including on a macadamia nut farm where we stayed on the night before the accident. The owners looked out for us after the accident.



Once Tyler is out of critical condition, he is helicoptered to Brisbane for his specialized back surgery. He is part Australian now, with three titanium screws in his back. I vividly remember my mom, dad and stepdad around Tyler's bed, each massaging a different foot and hand, telling amusing stories to keep his spirits up. We are staying at a nearby fancy hotel, waiting for Tyler. I sigh every time my parents and Scott drop anything because I am the healthy one and I have to pick it up. My mother's metal neck brace is awkward for her, and my stepdad is on crutches, with a broken foot, broken ribs and a damaged knee. Scott is in a wheelchair until his pelvis heals. Somewhat moody is a good way to describe our spirits for our hotel stay. We hire a wonderful masseuse, who comes each day to ease our aches and comes to the hospital to massage Tyler's toes and feet. She gives Tyler a didgeridoo as a present.

We are all closer together as a result of the trip, even including the accident.

After Tyler came home and could walk without crutches and returned triumphantly to school, my mother arranged for us to see a psychologist

who deals with accident victims, especially for Tyler. Initially, we all had said we were fine and didn't really need to go, but as it turns out we all had important things to say. Ironically, we each separately said the accident hadn't really affected us, but had affected another member of the family. My mother was worried that Tyler might become too adventurous and try to grow up too fast. Like life could end any time, so why not go for the gusto—but rushing through adolescence is not a good idea either. When you are young, you think you are invincible. Now, my philosophy is to enjoy each day and don't take life for granted. It sounds like a cliché, but I know now that life and family are truly precious.

Oh yes, and things are relatively normal again. Tyler picks on me regularly, girls are still crazy about him, and he and Scott snowboard with ease and style, and he gets acupuncture and special vitamins. My mom is telling us even more how much she loves us, and to look out for one another, and everyone still tells lots of jokes and funny stories.

*C'est la vie*, together. ❖

# Good-Bye Jack

by Peter Swegart

illustrated by Lucy Strother



Peter Swegart, 10  
Rome, Maine



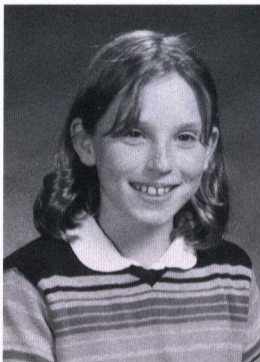
AM WRITING THIS STORY to tell you about a little orphan boy. His name was Jack and he was my foster brother for two years.

When Jack first came to live at our house, he was small. He carried his belongings in a laundry basket and wore jeans with holes in them. He had a scraggly mushroom haircut. When Jack was nervous and scared, he stuttered. He also was confused. One time, we went to my violin lesson at a church; he asked, "Is this my new home?" He would get mad a lot. He'd have temper tantrums and yell. I think he was mad because he felt that nobody wanted him.

When Jack first came, I was worried that Jack might have to go live somewhere else, because he had lots of problems. I was afraid that he might hurt somebody. He broke many of my toys. I didn't know what was going to happen to Jack. I didn't think he would be adopted. I reassured myself, "Miracles can happen."

One Mother's Day we were eating a big dinner. I looked over and Jack was hunched in his chair. My mom asked what he was doing. He looked up with tears in his eyes and said "I . . . I lost my mudder . . . I lost my mudder . . . I'll never see her again." His face was pale and he was crying softly. After that, none of us felt like eating.

I never had a foster brother before. All I could do was be a big brother to him by teaching him and helping him, by



Lucy Strother, 11  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin





I showed him the *real* way to play. I made real truck noises—I pretended to make roads

playing with him, and by reading books to him.

At first when we played trucks he would pull his truck off the ground and make a whooshing sound. He didn't know how to play with trucks. I just played the way I knew how to play and

he copied me. I showed him the *real* way to play. I made real truck noises—I pretended to make roads. With the bulldozer we made ditches near the road and put sticks in for pipes. Jack and I pretended to go on trips and go to houses. We dug holes with trucks. One



time we wanted to dig to water so we could have our own swimming pool. We dug and we dug until it was up to Jack's waist and then we gave up. We were pretty mad.

In the summer, we'd go swimming at a little pond about two miles down the road. We liked to play an imaginary game called Dragon. Jack and I would get in the shallow water and we'd splash water on each other. If somebody got splashed more than five times he would die. I often let Jack win.

Over the months, Jack started to get better. His speech got better, his imagination improved, he learned to draw, and he didn't have as many temper tantrums.

One day an adoption worker came and talked to Jack about adoption. They looked all over Maine and found some nice people who liked kids. When Jack met his new parents, it was a happy day. They introduced themselves and gave big hugs. His new parents were cheerful and bouncy. His dad had a big laugh, curly hair, and small glasses that sat on the end of his nose. His new mother had big brown gentle eyes, laughed softly, and had a flashing white smile. They talked, gave presents, and looked at Jack's photo album. Jack played Legos on the rug with his new dad. That night when we were going to bed, Jack walked

over to my bed and said, "Peter, I'm going to miss you and I don't want to leave. I'm scared of moving." Then he started to cry. He gave me a hug.

I said, "They're really nice people and they'll be your real parents." I think that made him feel better. He cried a little and went to sleep.

We went on a visit to Jack's new house. It was a big farmhouse with lots of windows which made a bright feeling. They kept a little turtle in a tank and pottery on tables around the house. I went up to Jack's room and saw his comfy-looking bed with lots of covers. The house was near the ocean.

The day Jack left, his parents arrived in a pickup truck. We had juice and doughnuts. Jack gave me a hug. I looked down and saw my trucks where we used to play. I walked up to Jack and put all my trucks into his bag. Jack jumped into the truck and drove down the driveway. I had my eyes fixed on the truck as it disappeared behind the trees. I kept looking where it had disappeared. There was a long silence.

That night in bed I thought about all the good things we did together. I thought of trucks. I thought of swimming. When Jack first came he was just a kid to play with, but after two years living with him, he was my real little brother. ❖



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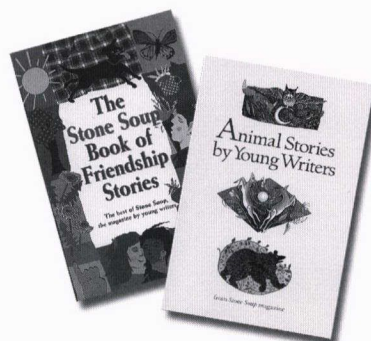
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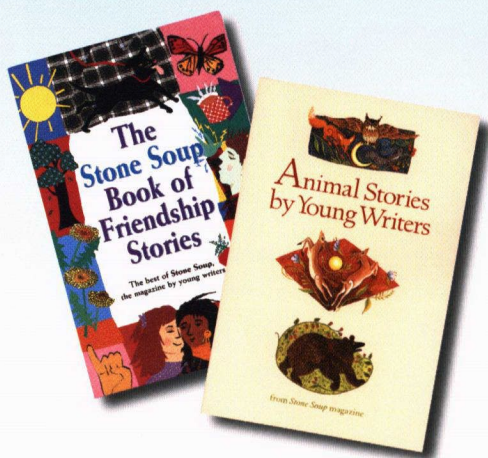
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