

Stone Soup

the magazine by young writers and artists



"My Favorite Game," by Alia Nemir Ahmed, age 9, United Arab Emirates

RHIA'S RENAISSANCE

Summer camp is usually boring, but not this year

THE VAGABOND

James sets out on an all-night bus trip to escape his problems at home

Also: Joshua lovingly remembers his father

Illustrations by Zoe Paschkis, Valerie Thompson and Ayla Reynolds

A poem about Mardi Gras

MARCH/APRIL 2001

\$5.50 U.S. \$7.50 CANADA

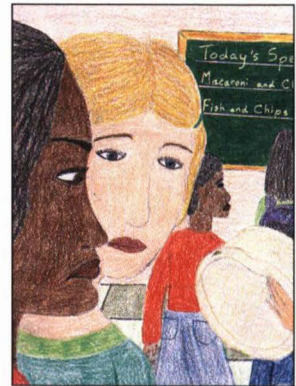
Stone Soup

the magazine by young writers and artists

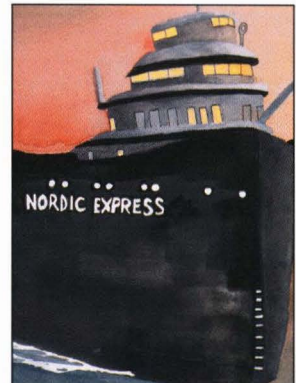
Volume 29, Number 4
March/April 2001

STORIES

- Rhia's Renaissance** *Sarah Casserly Marcus* 5
Rhia discovers a passion for photography
- A Treasure** *Allison Stadd* 11
An old wool hat is lost and found, repeatedly
- Basketball Free-Throw** *Inci Atrek* 17
Inci finally has a chance to help her team
- Miraculous Mike** *Joshua MacLean* 23
Joshua always wanted to be just like his dad
- The Bus Ride** *Christine Nichols* 25
Will anyone stand up to the sixth-grade bully?
- Tiger Prey** *Pace Ellsworth* 28
Even a predator could become prey one day
- Every Nordic Night** *Naomi Rowsell* 34
Naomi and her dad both love boats
- Rattlesnake!** *Ben Guarino* 36
Ben has a close encounter with a deadly snake
- The Vagabond** *Michelle Doré Sizemore* 39
His parents are always fighting, and James thinks it's his fault



page 11



page 34

POEMS

- The Day Before Fat Tuesday** *Alice Baumgartner* 9
- Night Magic** *Sarah Dougherty* 31

BOOK REVIEWS

- Destiny** *Adrienne Raphel* 20
- When Mack Came Back** *Austin Alvermann* 32



page 36

♻️ *Stone Soup* is printed on recycled paper

Available from the Library of Congress in braille for visually handicapped readers
Call 800 424-8567 to request the braille edition

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: "My Favorite Game" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by The International Museum of Children's Art in Oslo, Norway. Established in 1986 by Rafael and Alla Goldin, the museum is a wonderland of floor-to-ceiling art by children from over 150 countries. Don't miss it if you are ever in Oslo! Special thanks to Angela and Alla Goldin.

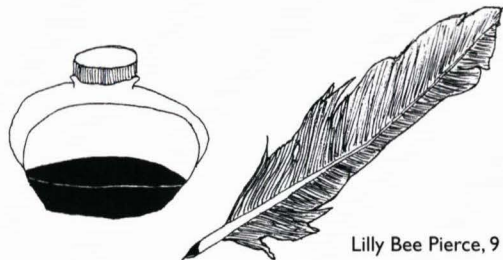
Gerry Mandel
William Rubel
Editors

❖
Laurie Gabriel
Fulfillment Director

❖
Stephen Pollard
Production

❖
Barbara Harker
Administrative Assistant

Stone Soup (ISSN 0094-579X) is published six times a year by the Children's Art Foundation, 765 Cedar Street, Suite 201, Santa Cruz, CA 95060. Phone: 800 447-4569. It is published bi-monthly in January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, and November/December. Volume 29, Number 4. Copyright © 2001 by the Children's Art Foundation. All rights reserved. Reproduction of the whole or any part of the contents without written permission is prohibited. *Stone Soup* is mailed to members of the Children's Art Foundation. Eighty percent of the membership fee is designated for subscription to *Stone Soup*. In the United States, a one-year membership costs \$33, two years \$54, three years \$74. Rates to Canada and Mexico are an additional \$6 per year. Rates to all other countries are an additional \$12 per year. Please remit in U.S. funds or the equivalent amount in your own currency. Send SUBMISSIONS, SUBSCRIPTIONS, and ADDRESS CHANGES to: *Stone Soup*, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to *Stone Soup*, P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Preferred periodical postage paid at Santa Cruz, California. Printed in the United States of America.



Lilly Bee Pierce, 9

The Mailbox

I was reading over some of my old issues recently, and, in doing so, I realized that I look forward to seeing repeated authors and illustrators. I think that the kids whose writing and artwork get published over and over (there are lots of them!) must feel so privileged, working for such a great magazine. Jane Westrick, Erica Pratt, William Drewes, Jessica Limbacher, and Rosalie Schulick are just some of the exceptionally talented kids whose work is very often printed in *Stone Soup*. I love seeing stories and art by them because I know that they have quality work. The kids are the backbone to *Stone Soup*. Incidentally, this magazine is a dream periodical for children ages 8–13. Thank you for publishing it!

Adrienne Raphael, 11
St. Johnsbury, Vermont

Adrienne's book review appears on page 20 of this issue.

As an English teacher and someone who loves kids, I want to thank you for your work to acknowledge and encourage young writers! I applaud and appreciate your efforts. I can see every day how writing affects the lives of kids in positive ways.

Joyelle Callahan, teacher
Birmingham, Alabama

I would like to congratulate Sarah Shissler on her remarkable story named "Lakota" [July/August 2000]. I enjoy reading stories about people and animals so this was definitely what I needed. The story was beautifully written and the pictures were great. Keep on writing Sarah!

Chelsie Ouellette, 11
Bethel, Connecticut

Writing is a way to change opinions that are different from yours. Changing opinions is good because it allows you to have a new outlook on things. Sometimes when you have a problem with something you have to just step back and change your outlook on it. Writing shows you how to do it. For instance, if you're very girly and your friend's more of a jock, try writing a story about yourself being a jock and your friend being girly. While writing the story, you'll be forced to really look into yourself and your friend. After the story is done, I guarantee you that you'll understand your friend, and even yourself, a tad more.

Becca Pava, 11
Springfield, Massachusetts

Stone Soup is a wonderful publication which my son Mitchell looks forward to getting; we have a reading ritual—no electronic media of any sort for a certain period of time every week. There's nothing like holding a book or a good quality journal in your hands that no machine will ever replace. Keep up the good work.

Randy Shiner, parent
Del Mar, California

I love your magazine! I want to compliment Alex Ivker's story "A Christmas Wish" in the November/December 2000 issue. I enjoyed the story a lot and I loved the illustrations by Jessica Libor. I hope to see another story by them soon.

Noelle Bloomfield, 10
Alexandria, Virginia

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 door to the cabin opened and in walked her three bunkmates and their counselor, Judy

Rhia's Renaissance

by Sarah Casserly Marcus

illustrated by Jessie Hennen

RHIA THOUGHT SHE WAS an ordinary girl. From her mousy brown hair to her average height, she was not physically remarkable. Her life was ordinary, too. Every weekday she woke up, went to school, got good grades, came home, and did her homework.

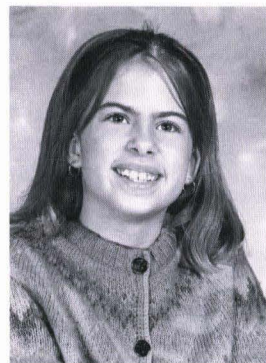
When she arrived home one afternoon in March, her mother had a very telling look on her face. This was an ordinary occurrence at this time each year. It was time to choose a camp for this summer.

For as long as Rhia could remember, when March came she had to make this stressful and unpleasant decision. While she was at camp, her parents always went on an exotic vacation. She dreaded going to camp; it was never her style. Every year it was the same; her mom would say she found the "perfect" camp. However, camp was only "perfect" for Rhia's parents, who were able to go on their vacation without worries about their daughter.

To Rhia, camp was boring, just like the tiresome succession of baby-sitters her parents had employed. Rhia survived each summer without complaint until her mother suggested returning to that camp for another year. Therefore, each March, Rhia's mother was forced to come up with another "perfect" camp. Rhia shrugged her shoulders and resigned herself to another boring summer.



Sarah Casserly Marcus, II
Watchung, New Jersey



Jessie Hennen, II
Shoreview, Minnesota

ON THE twenty-second of June, with their car loaded with gear for a safari in Africa, Rhia's parents delivered their daughter and her trunk to Camp Renaissance. As they pulled away, Rhia took her first deep breath of the clean New England air. Thank goodness her parents were scheduled to leave from Boston, or Rhia would have been stuck in another hot and muggy camp in the South. Rhia rubbed the slight chill from her arms and proceeded to the camp office to check in.

A local teenager helped Rhia move her trunk to her assigned cabin. The cabin was small, with beds for four girls and one for the counselor. No more bunk beds to hit your head on from below or twist your ankle when you jumped off. The cabin was charming, all the beds had quilts, and there were the most unusual flowers on each bedside table. The blossoms were pale purple with pink edges, and so delicate. She smiled as she turned to place her things in a small chest that smelled of wild roses. The sights and smells of this place beckoned her to reexamine how she felt about camp.

The door to the cabin opened and in walked her three bunkmates and their counselor, Judy. Margaret was the smallest of the girls, with long, curly red hair and an infectious giggle. The serious-looking blond with glasses was Amy, who didn't seem so serious when she unpacked her huge stuffed octopus. Then there was Kim, who was glamorous, but kindly began to suggest that

she could work wonders with Rhia's hair. All the girls seemed so different; Rhia had a feeling Camp Renaissance would be a unique experience.

After a dinner without bug juice or hot dogs, the girls went to sign up for their activities. Rhia chose some of the usual like swimming, jewelry-making, pottery and canoeing. Most of the other campers had made their final decisions and had gone on to the campfire. As Amy was about to leave, she noticed Rhia was having trouble. Amy sat down next to Rhia and asked if she could help. Rhia's confusion and inability to decide was foreign to Amy, who was so confident and always knew what to do. She suggested that Rhia take a chance and go for a challenge. Advice taken, Rhia decided to choose something new, different and maybe exciting. She chose photography.

The first few days of photography class were spent learning to load film, work the camera and develop pictures. At the end of the first week they were sent off to explore and take pictures.

As she wandered around the camp property, the sun beat strongly on her back. The shade beneath the trees seemed so enticing. When Rhia walked through the outer rim of trees and moved farther into the woods, peacefulness fell over her. The sounds of other campers dissolved in the distance. Ten minutes into her forest walk, Rhia could see the edge of a clearing. As she came closer, she was surprised to find a lovely marble statue of a man in the center of

the clearing. He looked almost like a god in this tiny piece of heaven. To Rhia, he appeared peaceful and content, as if he knew the magic that permeated this area. She felt that same sense of excitement and hope that she had felt when she first entered her cabin. This sensation made her feel like she belonged here and urged her to move closer.

Rhia had to blink and shade her eyes as she stepped out from beneath the trees. The ground below her was as soft as a pillow and she looked down to see a dense, green ground cover. When she looked more closely she could see little stems supporting minute buds. She remembered her mission and pulled out her camera. She focused on the delicate buds and hit the shutter again and again and again. Over and over she adjusted her view, from a wide slice of the ground cover to a close-up of the perfectly posed single bud. From her position behind the viewfinder, all the shots looked like the professional pictures she had seen on gallery walls. Full of anticipation, she rushed back to camp and the darkroom.

Rhia missed canoeing and pottery the next day. She spent hours focusing and adjusting the enlarger to print her pictures to her satisfaction. The buds were perfect and seemed to have a mystical power over her. She felt compelled to return to the clearing, but would have to wait as it was almost time for dinner.

The next day it rained, so Rhia waited again. The hours seemed to crawl by so slowly. Rhia thought that she would

never get back to the clearing. Rhia spent a lot of the time staring out the window, praying for a break in the downpour. The cabin door flew open. Rhia jumped out of her bed as Kim burst through the door. Kim was bored as well and decided it was the perfect time for Rhia's makeover.

Rhia was filled with apprehension as Kim gathered a blow-dryer, curling iron, and at least eight different brushes. Kim was curling and pinning and tugging and seemed to know what she was doing. With another bang, Margaret entered. Rhia almost jumped out of her skin. Margaret plopped down on the bed, and began jabbering away. Soon Rhia was so wrapped up in Margaret's stories and giggles; she found herself totally relaxed. By the time the dinner bell rang, Rhia's tresses were no longer mousy and blah, but bouncy and "cool." It was the talk of the mess hall at dinner.

The day after dawned sunny and warm. After breakfast, Rhia had an hour of free time. She knew this was her chance. With her camera flung over her shoulder, Rhia ran through the forest. As she hit the clearing she was overwhelmed. The green ground cover had bloomed into a sea of pale purple. As she focused the lens for a closeup, she realized that she had seen these flowers before. Of course; they were the same flowers that had been on her night table the first day of camp. Was it a coincidence, or was she supposed to find this clearing?



Two or three times a week she would be drawn to the clearing

This question stayed with her through the summer. Two or three times a week she would be drawn to the clearing. The flowers continued to go through their life cycle, each phase ordinary for the flower but magical for Rhia. The flowers became like friends, each unique and beautiful in their own way. No two were exactly alike and often their differences were what made them so special. She found the pattern of budding, blooming, and dying repetitive, but strangely comforting and beautiful. Perhaps she was beginning to see the extraordinary in the ordinary. Perhaps this was the secret of Camp Renaissance.

The summer's end came all too soon. Rhia's parting from her friends was bittersweet. She would miss them terribly, but she would always remember what she had learned from them. Amy had given her the confidence to expand her horizons. Kim taught her that everyone has potential. Margaret's gift of laughter taught her not to take things so seriously.

Rhia greeted her parents with a new happiness and a suggestion that she return to this "perfect" camp next summer. Before she climbed into the car, she paused and glanced toward the forest, with a hint of secret to her smile; she caught a glimpse of the statue in the clearing at the edge of the trees. ❖

The Day Before Fat Tuesday

by Alice Baumgartner



Alice Baumgartner, 12
Chicago, Illinois

Whenever I smell potato leek soup,
I drift back to the Mardi Gras dinner,
While serving the steaming hot side dish.
Instead of hearing the soft music
Playing in the background of the café
I hear the clash of a glass plate falling to the floor
And the loud chatter of hundreds of people.
And whenever I eat pearl couscous,
I'll wander back to the tables
Littered with plastic crawfish and beads.
When it's the day before Fat Tuesday
And it's seventy-degree weather,
I'll think of when we played
Truth or Dare in the playground.
Wherever I am, I'll always remember that night,
The day before Fat Tuesday.



"Hey, guys! Look what I found on my front lawn this morning"

A Treasure

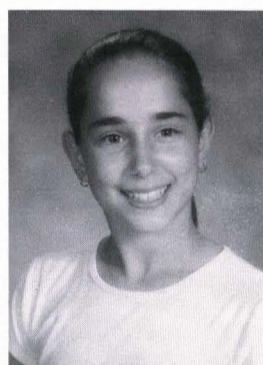
by Allison Stadd

illustrated by Valerie Thompson

STIFLING A YAWN, Jenna jerked the front door open, goosebumps forming on her bare arms in the icy morning air. Jenna scuttled hastily to the edge of the driveway, snatching up the morning newspaper. Just about to turn back to the house, she noticed a strange lump on the other side of the yard, just beneath the azalea bush.

Frowning in puzzlement, Jenna approached cautiously. She had never been much for dead animals . . . then again, it could just be an oddly colored pile of leaves. But when she finally stooped down to the object, she found it was an old hat! It was the lightest cream color, and despite the small hole on the bottom rim, the hat was perfect. Jenna curiously pulled the hat on her head. It hugged her ears cozily, as if it were made specially for her. Grinning, she sauntered back into the house to grab her book bag, shuffling back out and down the street to the bus stop.

WHEN THE lunch bell at school finally rang, Jenna snatched the hat from her locker and scampered into the cafeteria in record speed. She collapsed, panting, onto one of the flimsy plastic chairs directly across from her two best friends, Lauren and Jessica. "Hey, guys!" she nearly shouted. "Look what I found on my front lawn this morning." Holding up the old winter hat, she let Lauren and Jessica examine it closely.



Allison Stadd, 12
Bethesda, Maryland



Valerie Thompson, 13
Barry's Bay, Ontario, Canada

Lauren wrinkled her nose in disgust. "Ew! Do you know where that thing could've been before ending up on your lawn? It's dirty, and whoever wore it before you could've had lice or something, Jenna!"

Rolling her eyes, Jenna turned to Jessica for support.

Looking down at her macaroni and cheese, Jessica mumbled, "Lauren's right, Jen. It is sorta gross, you know."

Jenna sighed and placed the hat gingerly down on the seat beside her.

Just then, Lindsay called to the three-some from across the cafeteria, motioning that she had saved them seats. Heartily ambling over to Lindsay's table with Lauren and Jessica at her side, Jenna completely forgot about her new hat. It was still waiting patiently on the table when the bell ending lunch rang. The kind old janitor scooped it up into his arms, along with the growing pile of assorted lost items, and dumped everything into the lost-and-found bin right outside the cafeteria. Just then, a tall, lanky boy sauntered up to the bin and began rummaging through the strange collection of lost items. "Now, I just *know* my watch is in here!" he mumbled determinedly. Suddenly, his hand touched upon some soft, worn fabric. Pulling out the object, he saw it was a warm old winter hat. His fingers touching the same material as Jenna's had earlier, the boy positioned the hat on his head, his lost watch forgotten. Stuffing the hat into his book bag, he strolled nonchalantly off to class.

WHEN THE dismissal bell rang at the end of the school day, the boy strode out of the school building, breathing in the fresh frosty air, and unhooked his bike from the rack on the side brick wall. Before straddling the faded leather seat, he jammed his new hat on his head. He then rode off, pumping his legs hard to get home as fast as he could. He was eager to finish his biology homework so he could meet his friends at the skating rink. At last he reached the sloping front lawn of 46 Chestnut Street and threw his bike down on the driveway. Jamming his rusty key into the door's lock, he shoved it open and called a greeting to his grandfather, "I'm home, Grandfather!"

The old man appeared in the kitchen doorway. "What's that on your head, boy?" he called back. The boy tossed the hat to his grandfather in response, and he quickly examined it. "Well, sonny," the old man began, "it's not every day you get a nice, hand-knit old winter hat like this one. But, it seems to me that this could be the same hat my patient was wearing at the hospital today, and lost. His description pretty much matched this here hat. Now isn't this an interesting coincidence."

The boy shrugged. "No big deal. It's just an old hat. Take it to your patient and see. It could easily be his hat, since the parking garage is across the street from my school. Someone probably found it and turned it in to the lost-and-found." With that, the boy clam-

bered up the stairs, lugging his heavy backpack behind him.

"Well, I have work to do at the hospital, and that patient might be coming in again tonight, but I'll be back for dinner!" Grandfather called up the stairs.

He hobbled outside to the old beat-up station wagon and rumbled off into the distance. When he at last arrived at Schwartz Hospital's faculty parking lot, Grandfather grabbed his briefcase and stuffed the hat inside. He then scuttled inside the brilliantly illuminated building to escape the chilly winter air and climbed inside the sturdy silver elevator. He jabbed his finger at the third-floor button and then stepped off at his stop. When the doctor arrived at his destination, he set his briefcase down on the floor, the hat still snuggled inside, and began to sort out a large pile of papers. Suddenly, the phone rang in an irritated tone. Grumbling, Grandfather picked up the receiver. The impatient voice on the other end told him he was needed in the emergency room downstairs immediately. Hastily placing his stethoscope around his neck and buttoning up his long white lab coat, Doctor Fitzgerald rushed to the elevator and descended to the emergency room to save a fortunate someone's life.

Meanwhile, another doctor on the same floor was busy shouting madly into a small cell phone while sauntering down the same hallway Grandfather just had. "I said I wanted *four* copies of that form! *Four*, I tell you! Listen to me, you lunatic. Who is the doctor here? That's

correct. And who is always right, therefore? That's correct again! Now shut your trap and get me those copies or I'll see to it that you are fired immediately!" Slamming down the cell phone in disgust, Doctor Mitchell began mumbling to himself in irritation. Not paying attention, he strode into Grandfather's office, shouldering the old man's briefcase, thinking it was his own. Muttering the entire way home, Doctor Mitchell announced to his wife and daughter that he was suffering from an unbearable migraine and was going to sleep in his room. They were ordered not to bother him.

After he slammed the door behind him like a period of the sentence, his daughter Jenna sighed in disgust. "Why is Dad always in such a bad mood, Mom?" she asked in frustration. Jenna's day had already been ruined. She had lost the neat treasure that had appeared on her lawn that morning—a warm winter hat. Jenna's own had been eaten by the neighbor's dog the previous year and her mother refused to "waste money on such a pointless purchase."

Getting up from the kitchen table, Jenna grabbed the cordless phone from the counter and went to her room. Dialing Lauren's, and then Jessica's, number, she listened to the answering machine explain to her in its patient monotone that no one was home at either house. Throwing the phone down, Jenna descended the staircase and strolled into the kitchen again. She was about to flip on the TV, when she

noticed something sticking out of her father's briefcase. No, it couldn't be . . . or could it? Cautiously peering into the leather bag, Jenna reached inside and—"Yippee!" she yelled, "I found the hat! I can't believe my luck!" Racing upstairs again, not even searching for this strange miracle's explanation, Jenna modeled herself in front of the mirror, brushing back her dark brown hair. Once again, the hat fit perfectly on her head, like a king's crown.

Even when Jenna's mother demanded that she take a short trip to the general store to stock up on some more junk food, Jenna's good mood couldn't be spoiled. After all, it would give her a chance to wear her new hat again. Stuffing the crumpled list of items carelessly in her jeans pocket, Jenna began the short trek to Mr. Sanders' store, humming to herself.

Meanwhile, at his small general store, Mr. Sanders was whistling contentedly through his cracked buck teeth. Adjusting his large plastic glasses and hiking up his pink sweatpants, eccentric Mr. Sanders grabbed the tape dispenser and a small stack of papers on his desk and strutted over to the front of the store. Taping up one of the sloppy signs, Mr. Sanders viewed his handiwork proudly, reading over the uneven lines.

MISSING HAT

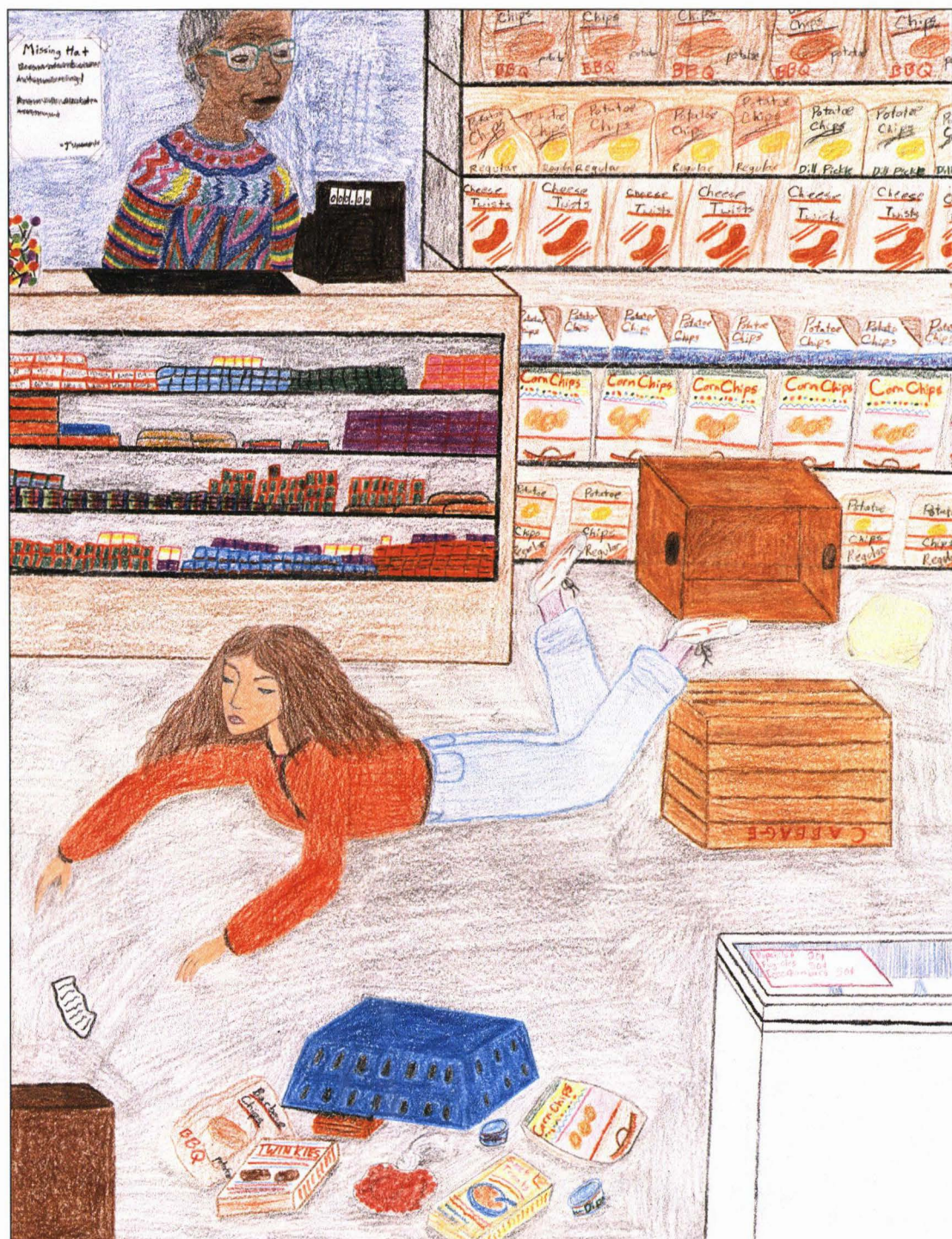
Cream-colored winter hat with small hole on bottom rim is missing!

Reward for finding hat: 2 cartons of eggs and a 6-pack of gum

—J. Sanders

Mr. Sanders shuffled off to put up some more signs. Just then, Jenna stepped into the bright store. Plucking off her warm hat, she began to pick her way around the many piles of boxes, crates, and stands parked around the store. Finally, she caught a glimpse of the cookie shelves and began to make her way toward her destination, no longer being so cautious to watch where she stepped. Still clutching her hat in a loose fist, Jenna stumbled over a large vegetable crate, scraping her knee on the side and losing her balance completely. Thrown suddenly into the air, she landed with a sickening thud on the hard concrete floor. The air whooshed out of her lungs and she choked on her own breath. Coughing hysterically, she managed to stumble to her feet. But she couldn't find the hat anywhere. During her fall, she had lost her grip on it. Mr. Sanders had arrived back at the check-out counter just in time to view Jenna's embarrassing spill. The two spotted the hat at the same sparkling moment and both lunged toward the object with relief. Both hands, one large and callused, and one young and smooth, reached for the warm material at the same time, and two heads bumped together with a muffled crack. But the two hands still grasped the hat, and at either end was a sharp tug.

"Um, excuse me, Mr. Sanders, would you mind if I could have my hat back now? I lost it when I was falling over that crate. And, by the way, you should clear a path for your customers so they



Thrown suddenly into the air, she landed with a sickening thud on the hard concrete floor

don't risk their lives over trying to buy a box of cookies!" Jenna exclaimed.

Mr. Sanders chuckled. "Lil' girl, dincha see my signs? I lost this hat this mornin'. Been lookin' fer it ever since! You have no business claimin' things you know ain't rightly yers."

Just then, another customer (who had observed the whole scene) leaned over the glowering pair, a slight hint of a smile on her lips. The woman was flipping through a catalog and opened to a glossy page, letting Jenna and Mr. Sanders see. Satisfied with their now-blank expressions, she shuffled noisily away, stifling a chuckle.

The catalog for Stevenson Fashion had shown a picture of a display of hats—all exact replicas of the one now lying on the general store floor between Jenna and Mr. Sanders. Suddenly, Jenna realized that this hat was no special treasure. This hat was merely a store-bought, machine-made hat that probably would wear out within a month.

Her cheeks blushing furiously, Jenna bent numbly to pick up the hat and placed it on the windowsill nearby. Fluttering softly in the cool evening

breeze blowing like a whisper through the open window, the hat now took on a new meaning for both the old man and Jenna. Without speaking, Jenna followed behind Mr. Sanders to assist him in taking down the signs.

Sorting through a stack of forms, Mr. Sanders let out a great yelp of joy. "Looky here! I found my hat! My real hat! Well, waddya know. It's most likely been mighty lonely under these here papers. Well, this shorely makes my day, little missy!" Meanwhile, Grandfather's patient was leaving a message at the office explaining that he had just found his lost hat at the bottom of his briefcase.

A small black crow fluttered onto the windowsill in the store, cocking its beady yellow eyes at the strange woolen object lying innocently next to it. Rubbing its beak thoughtfully on the worn, peeling paint, the crow leaned forward, straining its neck to see a little closer. Finally approving of the soft old hat, the small crow grabbed it in its sharp beak and flew off, flapping its graceful wings, plunging into the golden sunset. ❖

Basketball Free-Throw

by Inci Atrek

illustrated by Fraser Poorman

TAKING THE BASKETBALL from the referee in my raw, steamy hands, I felt the gym getting chillier when I stood still. This was the very first time so many people were depending on me—I wasn't used to it. My face, blood-red after running and jumping for an exceptionally long time, had broken out into a cold sweat, as had the rest of my body. Funny; I had been scorching hot a few seconds before. With veins throbbing violently in my throat, my eyes darted down to the flaming orange ball that I held in my shaky hands. I wanted it to stay there perpetually, never to leave and try its luck making it into the hoop. I had never really paid attention to all the billions of tiny little bumps which coated it. Today, they were starting to make me feel especially dizzy.

It seemed like an eternity for everyone to get lined up, but at last, they did. Anxiously, my gaze lifted up toward my teammates' faces. Unmistakably written all over was a mixture of hope and belief. I was hypnotized by their eyes, waiting eagerly for the moment that would come soon. Too soon, if you ask me. I wasn't sure I was ready. It was only one shot, and no more—no second chance. I gulped as these thoughts rushed through my head like an express train, one after another, moving so rapidly they seemed like a blur. My coach's eyes were fixed on me, like a hawk watching its prey's each and every move. Her clipboard in hand and whistle around



Inci Atrek, 11
Sunnyvale, California



Fraser Poorman, 9
Weston, Florida



After our team had come this far, the least I could do was attempt to win us this game

her strong neck, she didn't seem to be distracted by anything, as if in a trance. She bit her lip and appeared to be waiting with hopes rising in her heart.

Instantly, all the moisture drained away from my throat as I caught a glimpse of my opponent; the girl who had been watching me all throughout the game like a bloodthirsty wolf. As hard as I tried, I could not tear my eyes away from her. Even though she wore a blinding white shirt like the others on her team, she stood out—at least to me. Her vicious sapphire eyes had sparks of ice dancing in them, and were as frosty as the expression on her face. A chill slithered over me, raising goosebumps on my legs and arms, and I shivered as I tried to gain control of my body again.

The soft, whispery voices of the crowd above were echoing through my head. I began to feel dazed, and felt like pinching myself with my clammy hands to make sure that this wasn't a dream. No, a feeling making me this apprehensive could only come in real life. The basketball now seemed ponderous in my weak hands, so I gripped it firmer to make sure it wouldn't fall and cause a scene.

At last, I knew the time was right. I couldn't stall any longer, no matter how much I wished to. This one shot was

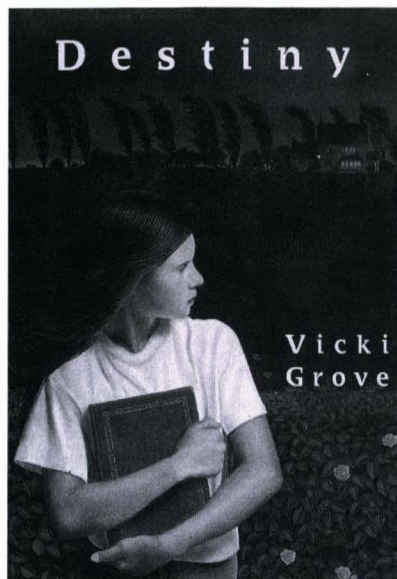
worth a thousand words to me . . . How much I always wanted to be the one actually helping my team, not just running around trying to catch the rebounds, which I never really succeeded in. Always, a longer arm would shoot up in front of me and grab it for her own. But now it was my turn. I felt the power that the others had, but not the courage.

I gripped the glowing ball harder and let it go, waiting for it to hit the ground and bounce. BOOM!!! It made such a noise, it seemed like the world had awakened from the dead. I did it once more, and got into the shooting position, trying not to tremble.

Suddenly, I realized something. The basket seemed smaller, farther away. My arms seemed to weaken, giving up on me. I wasn't sure I could throw the ball that far. I began to wonder how all the other players had made it. What was the difference between them and me? They were all brave enough to at least try, my mind said, and if they were, so are you. I had to agree. After our team had come this far, the least I could do was attempt to win us this game. I did my best to balance myself on my insecure knees, and jump, throwing the glistering orange ball with all my might as far and as high as I could manage . . . ❖

Book Review

by Adrienne Raphael



Adrienne Raphael, 11
St. Johnsbury, Vermont

Destiny by Vicki Grove; G. P. Putnam's Sons: New York, 2000; \$16.99

DO YOU BELIEVE IN FATE? Do you believe that our lives all have a certain destiny? Or do you believe in free will? These are the main questions that the book *Destiny*, by Vicki Grove, grapples with. The title, *Destiny*, doesn't just refer to fate, though. The main character of this novel is named Destiny Louise Capperson.

Destiny is a powerful name. In ancient Greek mythology, Zeus, the god of the sky, and Themis, goddess of justice and law, had children called the Destinies. The Destinies were three sisters "born from the just heavens," who measured and snipped the threads of life. However, that's not what Destiny Capperson does. She has chores like hauling around half-rotten potatoes for local folks to buy.

Destiny Capperson is an artistic girl born into a life of chaos. Virginia, her mother, is a high-school dropout who believes that she will win the lottery because a telephone psychic tells her that "something good, big and *soon*" is going to happen to the Cappersons in the form of "moola." Jack, Destiny's stepfather, is a bad-hearted and lazy bum who

has resorted to harmful actions just to get money. Nathan, Ethelene, and Roberta are the younger siblings that complete Destiny's family. When Nathan was younger, maybe five or six, he got his legs crunched in a car accident—or supposedly an accident. Jack had been driving his truck, with Nathan in it, and another car rammed into it. Nathan's legs got smashed forward, and with the impact, were crushed. At least, that's the story that Jack tells (but you can't always believe Jack).

Destiny tries to help out her family by getting a part-time job reading to a retired Latin teacher whose eyes are going bad. Mrs. Peck, the teacher, tells Destiny all about ancient Greek and Roman mythology. That's where Destiny learns the true origin of her name, about goddesses who controlled the fates of people.

Mrs. Peck gives Destiny a book about the ancient myths. When Destiny brings the book home, she finds a picture of Mrs. Peck inside that she uses for her bookmark. But when Nathan sees the photograph of Mrs. Peck, he immediately screeches, "That's the *bad* lady! She was in the other car that crunched my legs!" That's when Destiny's world turns upside down.

I love all of the ties to Greek and Roman mythology in this book because I adore reading the ancient myths myself. Destiny learns all about the gods and goddesses from Mrs. Peck, and I learned mythology from a Latin teacher,

too! In my school, all of the students have to take a mythology test every year. We study and study for it, and our Latin teacher tells us all sorts of myths. Although Destiny doesn't have to take a mythology test, Mrs. Peck does tell her the stories of the gods and goddesses. When Mrs. Peck tells Destiny that her namesakes were "born from the just heavens," Destiny begins to feel as if she was born right out of the sky, too, instead of being the child of dreamy, scheming Virginia Capperson and some man that she doesn't even know.

Vicki Grove does a wonderful job of "painting" her characters. Take Virginia Capperson, for instance. Can't you just see her in the following paragraph?

My mother sank to a chair and buried both hands in her short blond hair. You could see the purple acrylic nails she bought herself for her twenty-ninth birthday last summer shining through.

Vicki Grove also describes the people in her story through dialogue. Jack has the slang tone of an uneducated truck driver. Mrs. Peck uses perfect grammar, just as you would expect a teacher to do. Destiny talks like any normal kid, and Virginia always sounds as if life just hit her hard in the face and she still wants to ignore it. Vicki Grove makes it clear that each character has his or her own little world, and you find out more and more about each of the worlds as you read this great book.

Consider it your fate to read *Destiny*.❖



Joshua and his father

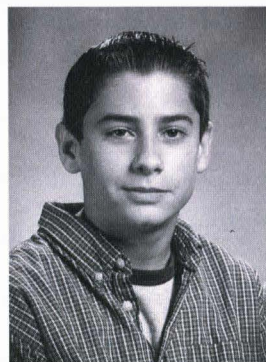
Miraculous Mike

by Joshua MacLean

WHEN I THINK BACK to when I was little, I always remember my dad trying to keep me and my sisters happy. When I was bored, he'd bring me into the backyard and play catch with me, or do some sort of activity along those lines. I remember when he took me to my first baseball game, and got me this cool mini baseball bat that I really wanted. Whenever I told jokes or tried to be funny, he always laughed, even though half the time it wasn't really funny at all. As I got older, my mother always said that I had the same sense of humor that my father did, so that made me feel pretty good, because I wanted to be just like him.

My father always used to make sure I understood what I was doing in school, especially in math since he was a math teacher a while ago. I still remember the time that my second-grade teacher got mad because my dad taught me multiplication. When all the kids were practicing addition and subtraction, I was practicing multiplication and trying to understand division.

Whenever I was nervous when I was younger, my father always tried to cheer me up. When I was scared about going to school on my first day of first grade, he gave me a nickel that he told me was his lucky nickel, and would cheer me up if I got sad. I still have that nickel, along with another lucky charm that my dad gave me. The other charm was a pendant that can be hung from a necklace. It was a small baseball



Joshua MacLean, 13
Braintree, Massachusetts

glove with a baseball inside of it, and it's a little smaller than a mouse ball from the mouse of a computer. One morning at the end of a bad week, he was right there when I woke up. He said, "I have something for you," and he reached his hand on top of the armoire. He pulled something down and said that one of his relatives gave it to him when he was a little kid. Then he handed me the small pendant and said it would bring me good luck.

When I found out that my dad was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, which is really called A.L.S., I was really shocked. I felt that he no longer was going to be able to take care of me, and that I was going to have to take care of him. All I knew about his disease was that it caused the muscles in his body to stop working, muscle by muscle. We could start to tell that the disease was affecting him gradually month by month, the way the doctors said it would.

What I remember happening to him first was the loss of his ability to straighten his fingers. Then he started having trouble walking and lifting things, and then as things got worse, he ended up in a wheelchair, almost completely helpless. Even though he was handicapped, he never stopped working. He even got an award from the government for being handicapped, only capable of moving his neck and

legs, and still doing just as much work as any other person who had been working for them. People at his work even put a sign up on the door to his office saying "Miraculous Mike."

Over time he kept getting worse; however, he still kept trying to keep the family happy. It seemed to me that he started getting better when he stopped smoking, but I guess I was wrong.

When I was at a Thanksgiving party for my mother's work, my mom got a call. She started crying and I just knew something was wrong with my dad. That night my mom's best friend Kate drove me and my sisters to the hospital where my dad was. I saw a bunch of people I knew there, and they said my dad was OK. But deep down inside me I knew they would be saying that even if he was on his deathbed, which I had a feeling he was. The next day was the last full day I had with my father, and he died the next night on November 16, 1996.

I knew this would cause a total change in my life from the moment I had the feeling it was going to happen. Now I realize how lucky I was to have him for the time that I did, and how I never should have taken him for granted. Now, I can't believe my ears when I hear someone say they hate their parents. I guess they won't realize how lucky they are to have them until they actually don't. ❖

The Bus Ride

by Christine Nichols

illustrated by Jill Cooley

IT WAS WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON. I sat waiting anxiously at my desk. It was almost time to leave school. That meant it was almost time to go on the bus. I hated the bus. Big sixth-graders sat in the back. They always bullied us third-graders. Butterflies began forming in my stomach as I quickly jogged to my locker.

Today, I was late. It was my turn to clean the chalkboard. I grabbed my books out of my locker and shoved them into my bag. The halls were deserted except for a few kids hurrying to the door. As I walked out into the warm May sunshine, my fear ceased for a moment as I enjoyed the beautiful afternoon; but it left as soon as it came when I spotted the bus.

When I climbed the big, black steps onto the bus, I prayed that there would be an empty seat left up front; but there wasn't. Every single seat was filled with two people. I walked toward the back hoping to find an empty seat. The kids around me were happily talking; I wished I could be one of them. Why, why wasn't there an empty seat? It wasn't fair. Suddenly I spotted an empty seat. The only problem was, it was right smack in the middle of the sixth-graders. I tried to look around me for another place to sit, but there was none. The bus started moving so I had to sit down.

The radio was playing "Bye, Bye, Bye" by 'N Sync. All of the sixth-grade girls around me started singing, while the boys



Christine Nichols, 13
Concord, New Hampshire



Jill Cooley, 13
Burlington, Massachusetts



She gave me a big hug and said, "You can stop crying now, it will be OK"

were groaning. Happily, I sat back in my seat. None of them had noticed me yet.

As we were getting off the highway, the boy sitting in front of me turned around. He had one green eye and one blue. His blond hair hung over his eyes as if to hide them.

"Hey, what are you doing back here? The back of the bus is for sixth-graders only." At first, I didn't know what to say. Then, I realized I should just tell the truth.

"I had to stay after school and clean the chalkboard, which made me late, and there was nowhere else to sit by the time I got here."

"So, you're a teacher's pet? I don't like teachers' pets; in fact, I hate teachers' pets!"

I wished that someone would help me, that the bus driver would hear what was going on; but he didn't. By now, everybody in the back of the bus was quiet, waiting for the boy's next move. Or perhaps, they simply did not want to get involved.

"I like your little baby overalls and your pink flowered shirt. Who picked them out for you? Your mommy? I bet you wish she was here right now, don't

you, don't you?"

That was the last straw. I had been so nervous for so long that I started to cry. Tears were streaming down my face that reminded me of a warm spring rain. I couldn't help myself. I wanted to stop and fight back but I couldn't.

Just when I thought I couldn't cry anymore, a tall blond-haired, blue-eyed girl wearing practically the same outfit as me sat down next to me. She gave me a big hug and said, "You can stop crying now, it will be OK."

She turned to the boy and said, "Stop picking on innocent little girls. She told you why she sat back here; I'm sure she would have sat up front if she could have. As for her outfit, I'm wearing practically the same thing and I don't look like a baby, do I?"

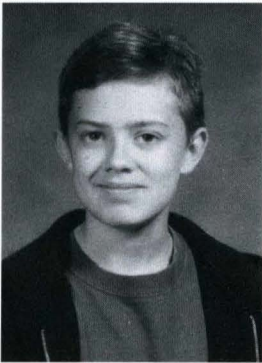
The boy just sat there stunned. He opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out. People around us started cheering for this mysterious girl sitting next to me. The boy slumped down into his seat.

The rest of the bus ride home the girl (named Hannah) and I became quick friends. When I got off the bus that afternoon I was on top of the world. ❖

Tiger Prey

by Pace Ellsworth

illustrated by Ayla Reynolds



Pace Ellsworth, 13
Burke, Virginia



Ayla Reynolds, 12
Juneau, Alaska

THE THICK, TALL GRASS sways as the tired wind barely strokes it. Its soft movement quietly brushes against the face of the sleeping antelope. She breathes softly in and out, farther away from the herd than any of the others and one of the smallest members, too. In the middle of a large clearing, she lies there. Passing predators would take advantage of a weak sleeping animal like her. The wind blows northward, in the face of the poor sleeping creature.

No one and nothing except for the wind and the darkness of night see him, the dark, ghostly, almost invisible figure that is moving silently through the tall grass. Slinking steadily and stealthily closer and closer, the nocturnal hunter is north of the small antelope. From the scent she gives him, the experienced predator attains a better position to attack. He is only a few yards north of the sleeper, when suddenly, the wind shifts directly south, carrying his scent with it! In the dark, he despairs, flattening himself down in the thick grass. Awakening, she smells him and stands cautiously, ready to flee at a moment's notice. Terrified for her life, she flexibly spies in every direction, but he has ducked out of sight.

Immediately, she darts away to wake and warn the herd! Waiting long for this moment, he leaps from the tall grass in a flash of lightning followed by a roar of thunder as he pounces upon the now sprinting, panting antelope! The roar wakes the herd, and they instantly scatter in fear while the



No one and nothing except for the wind and the darkness of night see him

predator pulls its prey to the ground with his huge paws and claws. With the rupture of her jugular, the antelope dies instantly and the whole night is silent again, except for the diminishing whisper of a hundred antelope hooves in the distance. With Tiger's first kill in days he rests and eats.

TIGER CONTINUES his meal of antelope, after a short swim in his favorite pool to clean himself from the

bloody kill. Sitting there under his tree in the thick grass, tearing slowly and getting his fill for quite a while, he basks in the afternoon sun. After hiding the rest of his kill in the dirt and grass for a later meal, Tiger then sleeps in his lazy way, proud of his unbeatable strength. He is a cautious and vigilant tiger, not about to allow anything to get his hard-fought-for food. After his small nap, the wanderer goes on a walk, marking the trail behind (as always) so

he can get back very easily and finish the antelope later on.

Tiger walks up to a short, lonely tree about a mile through his regular stroll. About to scratch a personal mark in its side, he is reaching out his claws when BANG! BANG! Startled, Tiger jumps from the tree trunk and dives into the grass for cover. He has no idea what the loud sound is or what it is coming from. Tiger only knows that whatever made those sounds is far away, and he thinks that it would take a long time to reach him, especially if he heads back to his kill. Then the strange barking beast would go away rather than do battle with Tiger. He is a strong and experienced tiger.

Being a predator, he is not afraid, for tigers are incapable of complete fear. He is merely concerned as he warily heads back toward his food. When he arrives at his domicile, Tiger discovers that his food is exposed and has been tampered with, half of it gone! He smells it and then jumps away. There is a different, new and strange smell. Almost a mixture of smells though. Tiger is more confused now than he ever has been in his life.

Sparked by a newly found curiosity, Tiger searches, examines, observes, and finds only a few yards away, a puddle. Though not like the puddle of an occasional heavy rain. A crude, black, nauseating substance, the liquid is also somehow clear and shiny. Tiger nudges the puddle with his paw quickly and the black covers his paw. He then licks his

paw once nervously and "GRR!" He begins growling and shaking because of the revolting taste. Immediately, he jogs to his watering hole to wash his mouth and paws vigorously. When Tiger returns to the cloudy puddle, he finds that its scent marks over a long distance in a line. Captivated, he follows the scent, at first ignoring its disgusting smell. Using his curiosity more than his experience, Tiger is growing in bewilderment.

The sun slowly begins to set behind him as he walks, trudges and lumbers along. Along the trail, he sees more of the liquid and tries to stay away from it. But nothing will stop him, and he continues his journey.

About to rest and nap until night for the first time on his trek, Tiger sees over a mile away, a large thing a little less than the size of an adult elephant. With round, black feet the shape of the full moon, it looks like an oddly shaped boulder. Getting closer, Tiger sees that on the top of the bizarre structure sit creatures, silhouetted in the setting sun. Animals like nothing he has seen before. They have heads, four legs each, and some other physical features like his. Except that they stand on their hind legs and hold long pointed objects that look like small branches.

Tiger does not know what to make of all these new sights, sounds, and scents. What he may never know is that these strange things threaten his very existence. He does not know it, but he is becoming more the hunted than the hunter. ❖

Night Magic

by Sarah Dougherty

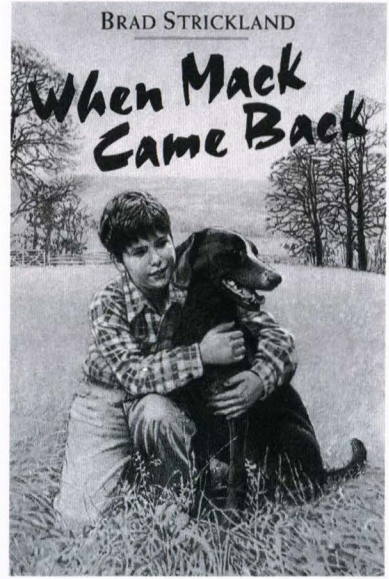


Sarah Dougherty, 11
Jenkintown, Pennsylvania

When my spirit is low
You'll catch it
And carry it on your back.
You'll fly through the gardens
And into town.
You'll fly past the bright streetlights
With my spirit holding on tight.
You'll use your silent magic
And light up one last time.
Then you'll fly into my backyard
Up through my window
As the summer breezes blow.
You'll gently drop my spirit over me.
And with my spirit all lit up
And shining bright
I'll sleep peacefully through the summer night
With visions of lightning bugs in my mind.

Book Review

by Austin Alvermann



Austin Alvermann, 8
Richboro, Pennsylvania

When Mack Came Back by Brad Strickland; Dial Books for Young Readers: New York, 2000; \$15.99

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED DOGS, but I can never have one, because of my allergies. The book *When Mack Came Back* was appealing to me because I could understand how much the boy wanted a dog and what he felt like when he thought the dog would die. Whether you have a dog or not, you will enjoy this book!

This book is about a family's struggles during World War II. The older brother Ben has gone off to war and the youngest son, Maury, feels very alone. There is very little money, and people can barely buy what they need. The father doesn't like Maury as much as he likes Ben because they are so different. For example, the father and Ben like hunting while Maury would rather read and go to school.

I admire Maury because he is very good at school and he is so brave. He knew his father wouldn't approve, but he made the choice to sell his bike to save his dog. He risked getting in trouble, because calling the vet was the right thing to do. Sometimes, whether people like it or not, you have to do what you know is right.

There are many exciting parts in this story that make it difficult to put down. One of these times was when Maury thought he would lose his dog due to illness. A vet came and cured the dog just when Maury thought he would die. The father still tried to get the dog out of the house by attempting to give the dog away. To my relief Mack and Maury got to stay together after all.

I have had a similar experience. Once I had a pug, but my mother gave him away because of my asthma. I missed

playing with Brooklyn very much. I feel lucky because my dad plays with me and is much nicer than Maury's dad.

I learned many things from *When Mack Came Back*. Unlike Maury's father, you can like people even if they are different from you. For example, if there is a new kid who comes to your school who is different, you can still be friends. I also learned to do what's right even if other people are against you. Maury makes some tough decisions but gets some great rewards. ♦



Jane Westrick, 12, Mechanicsville, Virginia

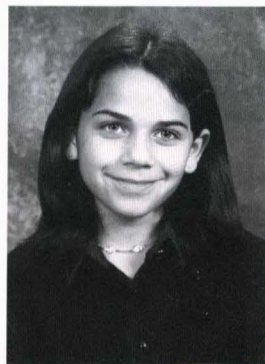
Every Nordic Night

by Naomi Rowsell

illustrated by Jesyka Palmer



Naomi Rowsell, 12
Harrington Harbour,
Quebec, Canada



Jesyka Palmer, 10
Blissfield, Michigan

THE NORDIC EXPRESS is a large freight boat that comes in extremely late every Thursday night, now, but when I was little it used to come in around sixty or seven o'clock every Friday night.

Mom and I would usually just be finishing the supper dishes when we'd hear the great loud blast of the horn coming from the Nordic Express as it came to a stop beside the pebbly gray wharf of our tiny rock-covered island, Harrington Harbour. That's when Dad and I would start getting ready.

I would scurry around for my rubber boots, gloves and warm jacket, sometimes leaving the dishes. No matter how much I tried to hurry Dad was always ready before me, but he was patient and never complained. Then after lightly kissing Mom good-bye, I'd hurry off after Dad.

He'd stroll along with me trotting along beside him, my rubber boots flapping as we headed for the wharf.

Usually a fall-flavored wind nearly blew our feet from under us, but still we always continued on. If the gangplank wasn't down, we'd go into the shed to keep out the ever-blowing wind and wait and watch; Dad liked this; so did I.

For some reason when I was on the wharf I always held my dad's hand. His skin was worn like leather and it looked like it had been stained brown; mine wasn't quite so brown or worn, just evenly tanned. Even though he never said so, I



I liked holding his hand as he explained things about the boat to me

knew Dad didn't hold my hand because I might fall in the water; he trusted me not to go near the edge, and I didn't hold his hand because I was scared. He knew this even though I didn't say so. That's the way we are; we don't have to say everything, we just know.

I liked holding his hand as he explained things about the boat to me. I liked looking into his deep sea-green eyes whenever he talked about boats; they shone like diamonds in the eerie darkness of the night. My dad loves boats, and so do I.

Once the gangplank was down and the people got off, Dad and I would get on. I liked swaying back and forth as we

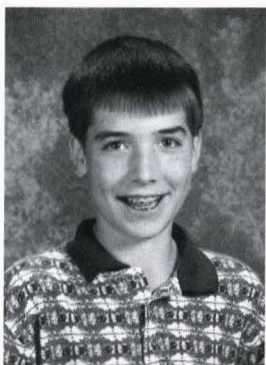
walked up the shaky gangplank. As soon as we boarded we always headed straight for the vending machines. Dad always had a loonie or two in his pocket; he'd let me push the buttons and drop the money in too; he knew I liked it without me having to tell him. I'd get a bag of chips or a chocolate bar, then sometimes, while I was contentedly munching my little treat, we'd talk to Dad's friends who worked on the boat, or rather he'd talk, I'd eat and listen.

Then we'd head for home, with the wind lashing at our backs, just me and Dad. I love this memory of my childhood, and so does Dad. ❖

Rattlesnake!

by Ben Guarino

illustrated by Garrett Landon

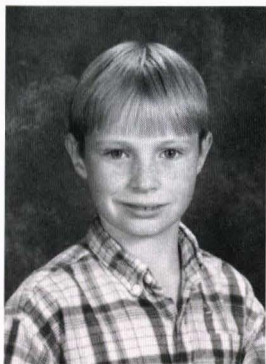


Ben Guarino, 11
Colchester, Connecticut

IN THE SUMMER OF 1996, I was lounging in the moss of my grassy backyard. The perimeter of the yard was bordered by a leafy hedge, which led to a huge pine forest. Our pine forest covered about fifty square acres, and housed giant evergreens. In the corner of the yard was a log pile, with half-rotted logs jumbled in a heap. Next to the decaying mass of wood was a green garden, which belonged to my mother. She had planted many bright yellow marigolds, light green cucumbers, and ripe, red tomatoes. This was a perfect feast for a mouse, which we had an abundance of.

Even though I was only seven, I knew there were some snakes living in either the pine forest or the log pile. I loved reptiles, and I often scoured the woodlands for them. That day I had decided to search near the rotting logs, which were home to a family of mice. Snakes love to devour mice, by first biting, strangling, or poisoning them, then swallowing them whole. I crawled on my hands and knees, peering through the tall, yellow grass. I was as quiet as an owl, looking for any sign of movement.

Very suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a fast-moving ripple in the dead grass. As I turned to face it, I could then see the brown, slithering snake. I should have gotten up and left, for my father had told me never to approach a wild animal. But I stayed, held there by curiosity.



Garrett Landon, 12
Santa Cruz, California



Little did I realize that the agitated snake would think I was threatening it by my action

I studied the snake for a while, staring at it in awe. I watched the snake intently, wondering what type of snake it was. The thought that it was a rattlesnake crossed my mind. I shook the thought off, saying to myself, "There are no rattlesnakes here." But I was wrong.

The sun reflected off the snake's brown scales, which were shimmering like diamonds. The small, beady eyes of the snake stared up at me. Its tongue was as red as blood and it flicked in and out, smelling the air, sensing my presence.

The snake backed up, I leaned over to get a closer look, and . . . I heard the sound of an angered timber rattlesnake. The shaking noise of the snake's rattle-like tail bore into my head. My heart froze. The rattlesnake rose up into its curved striking position, and again, the crimson red tongue shot in and out of sight.

"Nice snake," I mumbled to the venomous terror. The snake hissed and I felt a shiver run down my spine. I sat there, transfixed at the sight of the beautiful, but dangerous, creature. I then realized I had to leave the yard, and run into my house.

I was sitting on my knees, so when I rose to get up I put my hand on the ground for support. Little did I realize that the agitated snake would think I

was threatening it by my action. That was a costly mistake.

FOOP! The snake shot out of its poised stance and sunk its fangs into the muscles of my hand. The strike was as fast as lightning. The rattlesnake's mouth was wide open, and for a few seconds I could see its fangs glisten in the sunlight.

At first, I felt excruciating pain in my hand. Then the world started to dance around my head. I felt like I was on an out-of-control roller-coaster. "Help!" I screamed feebly. Even though it was a pitiful attempt to attract attention, I saw my mother coming to the window. Flashing lights illuminated the sky, and then the earth went black.

Two days later I awoke, with a doctor standing over me. I was in the hospital, but I had recovered, all except for the puncture wound the snake had inflicted on my hand. The doctor had explained to me that normally people do not become unconscious when bitten. I had had a severe allergic reaction to the venom. Later that day, my brother told me that the flashing lights I had seen were on the ambulance that my father had called, which had come screaming to my house.

In the afternoon I returned home. I have never seen another rattlesnake in our woods, and hopefully, I won't encounter any more of them. ❖

The Vagabond

by Michelle Doré Sizemore

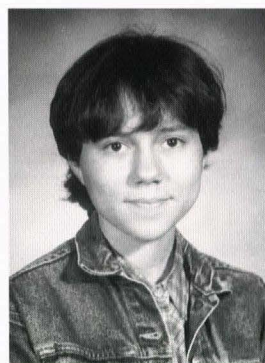
illustrated by Zoe Paschkis



PRESS MY FACE against the glass, the froth of scarlet fury still bubbling in my throat. The rumbling of the floor beneath me rattles my legs, and I clutch my sports bag protectively to my chest. My mind churns with the rhythm of the engine, and I kick nervously at the bars beneath the seat in front of me. Trying to calm the violence in my mind, I check my watch. The hands inform me that it is 1:53 AM, though I know that the stupid timepiece is fast by about six minutes. Either way, it has been about six hours since I began this mad quest. Even now, I am unsure of my precise destination, though I have a stable idea. The bus driver is eyeing me with increasing suspicion in the mirror. I try to keep my eyes off him, for my eyes are always the stool pigeons to my guilt.

A man who has recently left the seat nearby has forgotten his newspaper, I realize. My boredom gets the better of me, and I reach across the aisle and seize it. The front page is chock-full of woe, and I absentmindedly lose myself in the tale of a young man murdered by a gang in a shopping mall. Only half of me is interested; the other half is still dwelling on my own sad events, all now past. An angry sort of depression befalls me whenever the last month crosses my mind, and I try to fight the thoughts away.

With the sound of steam being released from a valve, the bus wails to a halt, and the doors are drawn open. I look over



Michelle Doré Sizemore, 13
Seattle, Washington



Zoe Paschkis, 13
Newton, Massachusetts

the edge of the seat, wondering which other nighthawks might require the bus at two o'clock. An aged man ambles up the steps, coughing into his hands before paying the toll. The next and only other newcomer is a girl about my age. She is African-American, with a long wool coat and a knapsack slung haphazardly over her shoulder. The older man, probably her grandfather, sits in the seat across from mine, and the girl follows. When they notice I am watching them, my eyes flick back to the newspaper. A sudden shudder and a moan beneath my feet tells me the bus has started up again.

I sigh, folding up the paper. None of the stories can hold my attention. Remembering I have missed supper and have not eaten for thirteen hours, I withdraw a wallet from my pocket. It is not mine, but my mother's. She does not know yet that I have it, or that I have her ATM code numbers memorized and could easily refill my supply. I count out five dollars; that should be enough to get me a few slices of pizza and a soda from Pizza Palace. Replacing the wallet and slipping the money into my jacket sleeve, I wait for the bus to approach a cluster of restaurants.

"Are you done with that?" The voice startles me, and I look up. The girl across the aisle is looking at me. "The newspaper, I mean," she adds.

"Oh. Well, in that case, yes." I lift the newspaper and hold it out across the aisle, and the girl takes it, thanks me, and flips through it to the film reviews.

I hear her tell her grandfather that the new Spielberg movie sounds good, but the words make no sense to me. My brow is knit, and I have my head leaned against the window again. A crushing headache has overtaken me.

About ten minutes later, a neon sign catches my eye, marking the Pizza Palace nearby. I hook my fingers on the stop line and pull. A small bell rings toward the front of the bus, and the driver pulls over. I collect my belongings, make my way up the aisle, and thank the driver as I exit. I have to bite my lip to hide my wince. The icy look on the driver's face as he nods to me is all too familiar; I recognize it as the look in my parents' eyes whenever they set their gaze on one another.

It is 2:11 AM now. As I approach the Pizza Palace, I shudder in the cold of the night. I chose a bitter time to make this endeavor. Snow is falling, and I estimate that it is below zero outside. Around the outdoor vents, the snow is gray and slushy, but it is immaculate where I am standing. Reverting to a childish habit, I put out my tongue and catch a feather of crystal ice. The very air smells of snow, and there is a certain surreal aura about the wind as it whips the flakes around like debris in a cyclone.

The blast of heat as I open the door to the restaurant is a shock after the chill I suffered outdoors. Like the bus, it is sparsely populated on the inside. I head up to the counter, ordering three slices of pepperoni pizza and a Coca-Cola. The cashier takes my money and



I head up to the counter, ordering three slices of pepperoni pizza and a Coca-Cola

her companion hands me my food, which I carry to the table farthest from the counter before seating myself. I barely taste my meal, but at least it does not disagree with me. The waiter gives me an odd look, but I ignore him.

Reaching into my duffel, I extract a novel. This, I quickly discover, holds me about as well as the newspaper did. Nonetheless, I pretend to read it in hopes of masking my true thoughts to the two people at the counter. My true thoughts, I know, are nothing to share. The fiasco repeats itself in my mind, making me shiver. The sound of a fist upon the table . . . angry voices, inescapable even in the farthest-off corners of the house . . . those five words from my mother . . . a feeling of inexpressible guilt, followed by anger . . . "Richard, I want a divorce!" . . . then silence.

The fury in my heart rises to a fever pitch; I jam my plastic fork into the crust of my pizza, doing so with the intensity of a murderer driving a knife into the heart of a screaming victim, I blink rapidly, and the words on the page before me are scumbled. My parents are better off without me, I am positive. They will not quarrel without reason, and if the reason is removed, the hostility will end forever. There is no effect without a cause. I was an idiot to drive them that far in the first place; perhaps there is still a chance. I rub my eyes with the back of my hand and check my pocket. That grubby little bit of stationery is still there, the address of

my Aunt Margaret in Hartford still scrawled upon it. Aunt Margaret is a widow; I will not be able to break up her marriage, at least.

Crumpling my napkin, I carry my tray to the pile near the trash bin, take my sports bag up in my arms once more, and return to the cold of the outside. The snow is thicker now, and the wind is picking up speed. If there is a blizzard on the way, I need to get a move on. Though I've already been sixty miles, Hartford is a full forty miles away yet, and I want to be able to get there as soon as possible. My bare head is encrusted with shards of diamond, and icy water is dripping down the neck of my shirt.

Zippering up my sweatshirt-jacket, I rub my hands together and set off down the street. In a few minutes, I happen upon a bus stop. I will take the bus to Hartford, or close to it, I decide. If I cannot get there on just one bus, I'll take two or three. Now, all I need to do is wait for the bus.

My feet are soaked to the skin. I stamp around, trying to keep warm, all the while my mind on the goings-on at home. Those voices keep on pummeling my brain, and my wrath with myself and my parents is heightening still further. Cold and miserable, I silently curse the bus for not turning up. My headache is agony, and I am starting to feel congested.

I have nothing else to do but look around me. A sort of woeful apprehension seems to be rising in my chest.

There are lumpy heaps of cloth slumped in the alley, shuddering in the cold. Time seems to be standing still. I hear one of them sneeze. Like me, they are all alone in the world. A lump is rising in my throat. What if Aunt Margaret has no place for me? What if she tries to send me back, and I have to run off again? I do not want to end up all alone, without a family, huddled in some dark alley. Nonsense, I tell myself, Aunt Margaret would not turn me away. But the fear lingers. Where will I go if Margaret drops me?

When the bus finally arrives, I am damp, as though I have just been through a light rain. Only the contents of the wallet remain dry, I notice, while I count out \$1.50 for the toll. "Does this bus go all the way to Hartford?" I ask hopefully, wondering if I can avoid the bus switching. The driver shakes her head. I realize I am the only person on the bus. Of course, it is 3:42 AM now, and even the late-nighters and drunkards have gone to bed. I take a seat out of view of the driver's mirror so as to avoid any funny looks from the driver.

"How close to Hartford does this route get?" I inquire. The driver says that the bus goes within four miles. That is a start. When I ask how long that will take, she replies that it will take about an hour. "OK. Could you drop me off there, then?" She agrees. I bunch up my duffel bag and put it in the corner of the seat. I lie down and place my head upon it with the intention of going to sleep. The bus driver,

however, is obviously lonely, and is intent on making conversation. My reverie must wait until the driver gets tired of me. I wearily prop my heavy head up on my hand, while the driver tells me how odd it is that I should be out so early, and on a holiday, too. Thinking fast, I inform her that I am going to Hartford early to get my sister a Christmas present. "I forgot about it until tonight," I say cheerfully, "and my parents said it was OK if I went to get it now." I bury my face in my duffel as I hear the hum of her voice.

I have a strange feeling in my chest, perhaps a replacement for my anger. It is like there is a bottle of fizzy soda right beneath my throat, and the cap is loosely screwed on and about to fly off. The conversation I overheard almost eight hours ago keeps running through my head. . . . "I've had it up to here, Louise!" . . . "You don't understand anything anymore, Richard!" . . .

God, I wonder, what did I do to make them hate each other so much? And they have to hate me, too, because they must know how this is killing me. I think the nightmare all started when I was seven, during a tee-ball game. I had lost, and I came out of the locker room to see my parents fighting awfully. Now, five years later, I have pushed them to the limit. I do not know what I did, exactly, but I know it is my fault. I cannot stay violently mad at myself forever, but I know I'll never forgive myself. They do not deserve to go through a messy divorce, and I am the nuncle who got

them started on that path.

I begin to sob silently into my sport bag. The driver does not notice. She, apparently, is in the middle of a very funny story about her daughter's last Christmas present. "Get a handle on yourself, you idiot!" I hiss, clawing one hand with the other like a cat. Gulping, I put my chin on my hands, both lips clamped between my jaws, and stare at the snowflakes. I mumble something like "Yeah" when the bus driver asks if I would like the radio on, not really paying attention to what I am saying.

A swirl of music dances to my ears, while I thrum my fingers against my cheekbone and glare at the snow outside. Rather pretty, how it catches the light whenever it enters the orb of light around a streetlamp. After several minutes, I begin to drift into an uneasy sleep, but I wake sharply at mention of my name. There it is, on the radio! The DJ is going over the news.

". . . Police say that twelve-year-old James Peter Chapman left his home at approximately 8:15 PM last night, possibly carrying with him a red, white, and blue duffel bag. He is described as being five feet, three inches tall, with a slight build, only about 102 pounds, auburn hair, and very bright blue eyes. He was last seen wearing black jeans and a white T-shirt, and he could also be wearing a black hooded sweatshirt with a zipper. If you see the little guy, police say to contact them at 291-3859 . . ."

The driver promptly halts the vehicle and turns around to get a better look

at me. I stare right back at her, those telltale eyes giving me away, as usual. She reaches for the intercom. A sinking feeling catches hold of me and pulls me like a kappa into the murky depths. "Hello, Mabel? Get me the police department, please." The kappa's long fingers seem to close around my neck. "Hello? Yes, I have some information on that missing boy, James Chapman. He's right here with me, on my bus."

Directly before he strangles me, the kappa whispers that now my parents will fight again, and have no chance to be happy.

THEY PRACTICALLY have to drag me from the bus. The policemen try to be nice, and they allow me to ride in the front seat of the police car, but I do not want to come with them. The words of my conscience are still alive in my head, hammering me. The buzz of the car engine and the flash of the lights on the snow around me engulf me. I am swimming in sight and sound, though none of it is truly registering.

After an hour or two, as my parents' house comes into sight, I sink into a state of brooding silence. The policemen open the door for me and lead me up to my house. This is probably half out of kindness and half because they have to make sure I do not run off again. One policeman rings the doorbell. The singsong chant of the bells has barely begun when my parents' faces are framed in the doorway.

They look glad to see me, but I know



Mother and Father fling their arms around me as though I have just returned from the Great Hereafter

that all too soon they will start arguing again. Mother and Father fling their arms around me as though I have just returned from the Great Hereafter, drawing me into the house. Mother invites the policemen into the house for a cup of tea, but they refuse, and they leave.

The clock chimes six times at almost the very instant the door closes. Surely, the fighting will begin now? No, not yet. My parents, of course, demand where I have been for the past ten hours, and what I thought I was doing. "I was just going to Hartford," I tell them, "so that I could live with Auntie Margaret." I go on to explain, slowly and logically, that if I left them alone, they would not fight, and I was simply trying to spare them the agony of a divorce.

"Darling," Mother says to me slowly, "it is not your fault that your father and I are getting a divorce. It's been a long time coming, really. Your father and I are very different people. Can you understand that?"

How can it not be my fault? They always fight around me. But do they always fight because of me? I look at my parents, perplexed. My mother tells me that it is all right if I am upset about the divorce, but to please never run off like that again.

"Listen," Father says, "we should put all this behind us for a day and try to have a good Christmas. We should be thankful that bus driver found James, and enjoy another day together as a family before we discuss this anymore."

Mother starts to say something about Father always taking charge of things, but she glances at me and sighs. "I'll agree to that," she says.

Before I know it, a fire is lit in the fireplace, and the Christmas tree is aglow. As my parents and I exchange gifts, I can tell that it is hard work for them not to fight. For the first time I see that my parents are much more than just my parents. They are people, and they both have very difficult personalities. The divorce might be painful, but perhaps it is for the best.

In that lullaby time between the exchange of presents and the eating of Christmas breakfast, my parents avoid each other tactfully during the preparation of bacon and eggs, while I sit on the built-in seat beside the window. I press my face against the glass, gazing out into the lazy blizzard. The sun is almost up, as I can tell from the streaks of light gray shining forth through the stormy dark.

I have enjoyed my morning, but after the happiness is gone, once again I am gripped by the mad depression that possessed me before. I know it will not last, that one day I will be spending my Christmases split in two. The family feeling will disappear. And though I am somewhat aware I have little to do with the problems in my family, I will be immensely affected by them. No matter what, though, I will try to make the best of it. I would rather travel between two parents than travel on my own. ❖

The Stone Soup Store

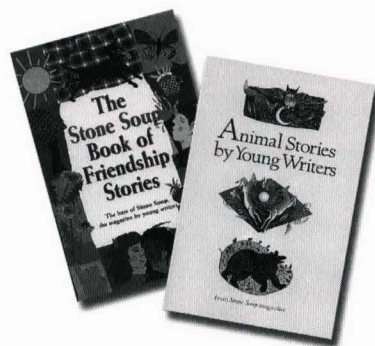
(See all our products in color on the back cover)

Stories from Stone Soup

If you like *Stone Soup*, you'll love *The Stone Soup Book of Friendship Stories* and *Animal Stories by Young Writers*! These two 6- by 9-inch quality paperbacks present some of the best stories to appear in the pages of *Stone Soup* over the years. Published by Tricycle Press, the anthologies provide hours of great reading and make wonderful gifts.

#108 *Friendship Stories* \$8.95

#109 *Animal Stories* \$9.95



Cat T-Shirt



Are you a cat-lover, or do you know one? Everyone who comes into our offices falls in love with the painting "Cats Warming Themselves" by 8-year-old Dalius Arulis from Lithuania. This charming painting is reproduced in brilliant color on our 100% cotton T-shirts for young people and adults.

#101 Youth M, L \$12 #102 Adult M, L, XL \$15

Jessie Mug

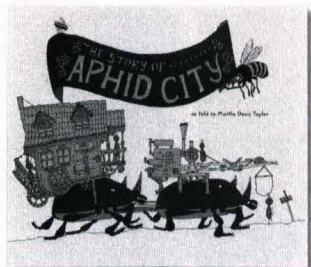
Three of Jessie Moore's whimsical line drawings are a regular feature on page 2 of *Stone Soup*. Now you can brighten your breakfast table with our colorful mugs, each ringed with six of Jessie's drawings of girls in different outfits and poses. Sets of three can include any combination of colors. Colors: plum, rose, teal.

#103 *Jessie Mug* \$8

#104 *Set of 3 Mugs* \$20



Aphid City



Martin Taylor, a talented young artist whose work frequently appears in *Stone Soup*, wrote and illustrated *The Story of Aphid City* when he was nine years old. This epic tale of war and peace in the insect kingdom is lavishly illustrated with over 25 of Martin's exquisitely detailed pen drawings. A large-format, high-quality paperback book.

#110 *Aphid City* \$17.95

The order form is on the next page →

Stone Soup

the magazine by young writers and artists

P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063, USA

800 447-4569

Orders taken Monday-Friday 9:00-5:30 Pacific time*

Messages taken 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; fax: 831 426-1161

www.stonesoup.com

(To order subscriptions, use the cards in the center of the magazine, call 800 447-4569, or visit www.stonesoup.com)

ORDERED BY		SHIP TO (if different from ordered by)	
Name		Name	
Address (no P.O. boxes)		Address (no P.O. boxes)	
City, State, Zip		City, State, Zip	
Daytime phone ()		(List additional names and addresses on a separate sheet)	

QUANTITY	ITEM NUMBER	DESCRIPTION	SIZE	COLOR	PRICE EACH	TOTAL PRICE

HOW TO ORDER: Mail in this form or a copy of it with your check, money order, or credit card information; fax us your order with your credit card information; visit our Web site; or call us toll free. During non-business hours messages (but not orders) are taken by our voice mail system. Your satisfaction is guaranteed.

* **HOLIDAY ORDERS:** From November 26 to December 21, our staff works Monday-Friday 7 AM-5:30 PM Pacific time. We recommend special shipping for orders received after December 12.

Subtotal

Sales tax

For delivery in CA add 7.75%

Regular shipping (see below)

Separate charge for each address

Special shipping (see below)

TOTAL

REGULAR SHIPPING

Priority Mail

US addresses only

Please allow 2 weeks for delivery

up to \$25	\$4.50
\$25.01-\$50	\$6.00
\$50.01-\$75	\$7.50
\$75.01-\$100	\$9.00
over \$100	\$10.50

SPECIAL SHIPPING

FedEx Overnight

Add \$18 to shipping prices at left

Canada

Add \$2 to shipping prices at left

Other Countries

Call for rates to your country

METHOD OF PAYMENT

☐ Check or money order enclosed
(Payable to Stone Soup. US funds only)

☐ VISA ☐ MC ☐ AmEx ☐ Discover

Card number

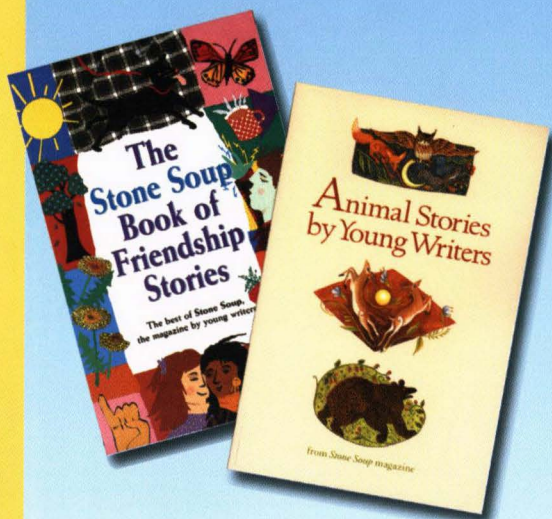
Expiration date

Cardholder's name (please print)

Sorry, no C.O.D. orders

Thank you for your order! Visit our Web site at www.stonesoup.com

THE STONE SOUP STORE



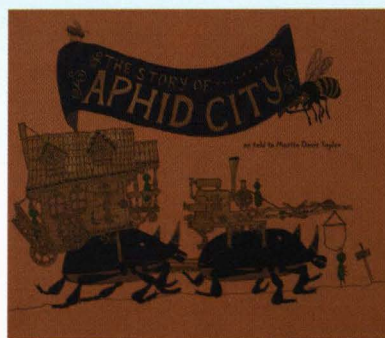
ANTHOLOGIES



CAT T-SHIRT



JESSIE MUGS



APHID CITY

See pages 47 and 48 for more information and to place your order

Visit our Web site at www.stonesoup.com