

Stone Soup

the magazine by young writers and artists



"Trio," by Csaba Tóth, age 12, Hungary

WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR SOME

It's World War II, and Betty's family is sent to an internment camp

AUTUMN THUNDER

Will the mother fox find food for her kits before the storm begins?

Also: Illustrations by Christy Callahan and Alice Feng

Abby is determined to ride for the Pony Express

A poem about September 11

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2002

\$5.50 U.S. \$7.50 CANADA

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Volume 30, Number 3
January/February 2002

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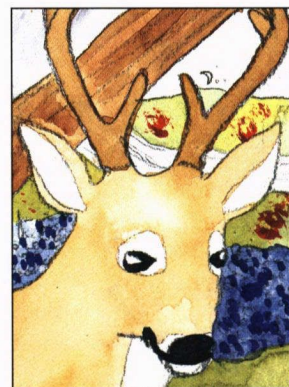
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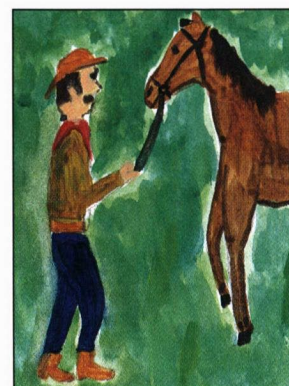
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Stone Soup

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 28 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, phone number, and e-mail. 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: "Trio" 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.

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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 30, Number 3. Copyright © 2002 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

From my bedroom window, I can see the World Trade Center and the Twin Towers. When I do my homework, I sit at my desk and look out the window at the towers and day-dream. As a very small child, I called them my towers. At night, Mom would come into my room and sing to me and I would say good night to her and the same to my father. When they turned off the light and went to their room, I would creep out of bed and open my window. Leaning out of it, I would yell, "Good night, New York!" I would grin at the street lamps and whisper good night to my towers.

I've long since grown out of that, of course, but the sight of the Twin Towers always comforts me. Mom says it's because as a baby I spent hours staring at them in awe, and although I'm not sure that makes sense, maybe she's right. I've always enjoyed watching them silhouetted against the sky.

Except, now I can't . . .

Xian Chiang-Waren, 12
New York, New York

This is an excerpt from Xian's story, "The Day the Twin Towers Collapsed." You can read her entire story on our Web site at www.stonesoup.com. Read Xian's story "Permanence" on page 25 of this issue. Read a poem about September 11 on page 11.

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.

I would like to congratulate Joshua MacLean for his story in the March/April 2001 issue of *Stone Soup*, "Miraculous Mike." I really enjoyed reading his story, even though the end was really sad. It makes me want to appreciate my dad more than I do now!

Rachel Campos, 12
San Rafael de Heredia, Costa Rica

Ever since I was little, I have loved to read, so I always wait in anticipation for the book reviews. In the September/October 2001 issue, I was especially impressed by Julia Zelman's review for *Queen's Own Fool*. She articulated her thoughts exquisitely and presented a well-rounded piece. I commend Julia for a job well done and know she will rise to great heights.

Casey Canfield, 13
Baltimore, Maryland

I absolutely LOVED Jane Westrick's last illustrations in "Baby," as well as Leslie Pearsall's story [September/October 2001]. I will miss Jane's illustrations greatly. She has the ability to make things seem alive! And Leslie really demonstrated how important parent/child relationships are.

Janna Repta, 14
Savoy, Illinois

I would like to compliment Jessica Libor on her well written story "Seventeen Years" [July/August 2001]. It's really amazing how a thirteen-year-old can write such a fabulous story. The illustrations took me away. I am also very sad that Jessica Libor and Jane Westrick's illustrations must end in *Stone Soup*. They are both very talented artists and I hope one day their work appears in art shows and they become famous so not only young people but older people can admire the great work they did and see the awesome artists they have become.

Molly Milan, 12
Elgin, Oklahoma




I nodded a quick apology to the postman in case my dog had disturbed him

With Liberty and Justice for Some

by Libby Nelson

illustrated by Christy Callahan

“IP!” THE SHARP, INSISTENT yapping of my dog Urashima drew me sluggishly upright the day the summons came.

“Yip!”

“Betty,” my mother called to me from the kitchen, “quiet your dog, please!”

“Yip!”

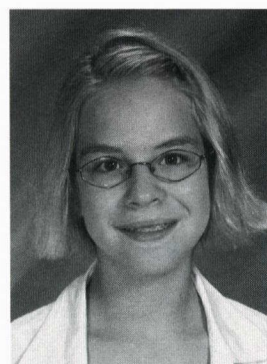
I responded with an unpromising grunt, flipping the page of my book. I was engrossed in *Gone With the Wind*, reading it for the seventh time, and resented any distractions.

“Yip!”

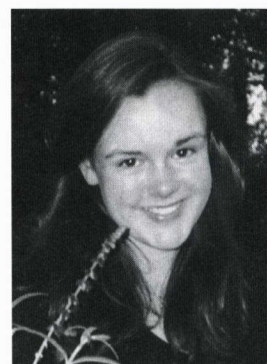
“Betty Okubo, that means *now*!”

I slowly sat up, dragging my feet like a run-down windup toy as I walked to the door. Pulling Ura’s collar with one hand and groping for the mail with the other, I nodded a quick apology to the postman in case my dog had disturbed him. He gave me a glare that could crush stone and hurried down the sidewalk, as if our house was liable to explode at any moment.

Letting go of my terrier, I groped through the closet for the mail: a brand new Sears-Roebuck catalogue, the monthly electric bill, a notice that my library books were hereby overdue—and a printed envelope addressed to “The Okubo family.” Sucking in my breath, I opened it and prayed fervently that it didn’t hold bad news. But no notice of death, doom,



Libby Nelson, 13
Leawood, Kansas



Christy Callahan, 13
Martinez, California

or despair fell out, only a typewritten slip addressed "To whom it may concern."

I ran through the house with the force of a full elephant stampede, screaming, "Mama! Mama!"

"What?" my mother asked in a tired voice as I frantically waved the paper in her face. She seized it from me and began to read, then sat down quickly as a look of shock crossed her face. "They don't understand," she murmured. "They will never understand."

"What is it?" I asked eagerly. Wordlessly, she passed the paper to me. I read it slowly, carefully, drinking in every dire word like forbidden fruit.

1 May 1942

To whom it may concern:

All Americans of Japanese descent in Military Zone 41 must report for internment between the dates of May 1 and June 1. Please be at the First Methodist Church of Newark on May 7. You will be moved from there to an internment camp. Bring only as much as you can carry. Tardiness will not be tolerated.

In a flash, everything made sense: the cold looks people had given me in the six months since Pearl Harbor; the fear in my mother's eyes when I ventured out alone at night; the suspicious glares I received when others discussed the war; what being in "Military Zone 41" really meant, other than the fact that we were prohibited from leaving. My parents had tried to make excuses for the government: it was wartime, after

all; it wasn't just us, it was Italians and Germans as well; even though we weren't spies, others might be. They had refused to move away before it was too late.

"They just won't understand," Mama muttered again. I nodded in silent agreement. We were as American as the O'Neils, who lived next door, or the Smiths, who owned the local grocery. We celebrated the Fourth of July and had a picture of George Washington in our dining room. But our last name was Okubo, our hair was black and straight, and our eyes were slanted, and so we had to go.

"It's not fair!" I burst out. "We're as American as they are!" Mama had come over from Japan when she was eight. Dad was *Nisei*, born here. I'd never heard of Hirohito until I saw his name in a headline in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. And yet we were being ordered away, just because our ancestors were Japanese.

"No, it's not fair," Mama agreed, "but neither is life."

I scowled.

My parents made me go to school the next few days, although I didn't want to. The allures of packing won out over the drab calls to learn the history, geography, and language of a country that no longer wanted me. "Who knows when you'll see another school," was my father's only comment on the topic. "Enjoy this while you can."

Every school day began with the Lord's Prayer, the "Star-Spangled Ban-

ner," and the Pledge of Allegiance. I stood dutifully with my hand over my heart for the latter, but balked at the words "with liberty and justice for all." I had just received a painful example of American liberty and justice. With that thought in mind, I closed my mouth on the last phrase. Never, I swore to myself, never again would I say those six stalwart words. Never again would I believe in liberty and justice for all.

I gave tearful farewells to my friends and Ura, who had to stay behind. A less sorrowful good-bye was given to my school, which I was not overly mournful about deserting. Then, toting our three suitcases apiece, my family boarded the bus together, not knowing where we were traveling or what would happen when we reached our destination.

The bus was deathly quiet except for the cries of a few babies and the mumbling of old women in Japanese. I propped *Anne of Green Gables* on my knee and began to read, trying to lose myself in the story as we traveled along a narrow road through a windswept desert.

The camp appeared suddenly before me, its barbed-wire fences a stark reminder of our coming imprisonment. "Barbed wire, Hana?" my father asked my mother nervously. "I don't like the look of this." None of us did. For the first time in years, I accepted my father's hand as we stepped off the bus.

The first thing I saw was tar-paper barracks lined up in rows, as far as the eye could see. The second thing I saw was a

girl about my age running breathlessly toward the slowing bus. Her black hair lay sleekly down her back and her dark eyes sparkled as she skidded to a stop, kicking up clouds of dirt. "I'm Asako," she introduced herself, gasping. "And you're Betty. You're next to us. Don't worry, it's not that bad here. I take dance and play basketball and go to school . . ." I made a face ". . . and, well, the food's awful, but that doesn't matter so much. We're down here. Come on!"

Bewildered by this girl's seemingly boundless energy, I grasped my luggage like a lifeline and blindly followed her to a barrack. She flung open a door, did a tap-dance step, and announced, "Ta-da! Here it is!"

I was far from impressed. The room was spartan and tiny, holding a wood-burning stove, a rachitic table and chairs, and three army cots. My father set his baggage on a rickety wooden chair and pushed the beds up next to the wall so that we would have more room. Although he didn't know it at the time, this gave me the added benefit of being able to whisper to Asako through the cracks in the wall at night.

"So," Asako asked eagerly, "what do you think?"

"I can't say that it's *nice*, exactly," I replied hesitantly, "but I suppose it shall have to do."

Life in camp quickly settled into a grinding monotony. Asako and I began ninth grade, along with fifty others. Manzanar High School was unlike any other: filled with studious pupils, fer-

vently learning the language and culture of a country that no longer wanted them. Asako's best subject was math; everyone agreed that I was a good writer. We never mentioned life after Manzanar. I had no intention of remaining confined forever, yet existence outside of the barbed wire, beyond the guards, seemed surrealistic. I had not exchanged a word with my friends since the fateful day we said good-bye, over two years ago, and they rarely occupied my thoughts now. In the weeks following our departure, I took comfort in imagining what they were doing, feeling as if I was among them again. But as the year passed without a word between us, they played a smaller and smaller role in my dreams of life outside of the internment. I had already begun to forget their faces. "They're just not a part of my life anymore," I said to Asako when we compared memories of the outside world. "They have no idea what's happening to me."

Even as my memories slowly faded, I never stopped dreaming of freedom: dreaming of my home, where the wind didn't whistle through the walls at night, where my bed was a fluffy mattress, not an army cot. I longed for a meal without the ubiquitous hunger that followed: a meal of apple pie, cheeseburgers, chocolate cake, and mint ice cream. I yearned for the war to be over so that we could return home at last. We gathered around the radio every night, following the progress of the war, wondering when we could re-

turn. As the Allies advanced through Europe, I finished tenth grade and began eleventh. It was an odd feeling, knowing that I might graduate from a school outside Manzanar—a school that I had barely attended.

The day that I began my eleventh-grade finals, class was stopped. I groaned and laid down my pencil; I had finally started to make progress on the American History essay, and didn't wish to be interrupted. I took tests well once I began; it was beginning that was the problem. The rest of the class didn't share my disappointment; a low murmur of talking began as the principal's voice crackled over the intercom.

"Students," Mr. Mitsuko began, "Germany has surrendered." The class began to buzz like a zoo of infuriated flies. "The war in Europe is over."

My heart started beating like a bass drum. Could we go home? The unspoken question hovered on the lips of every student in the room, as school was dismissed for the day. Would the government release us from this camouflaged prison? As the days crept by without a word of our liberation, we began to lose hope. The military island-hopping campaign was not ending the war in the Pacific; I began to think that I would celebrate my eighteenth birthday at Manzanar.

That last summer was long and scorchingly hot. The tar-paper barracks heated like ovens during the day and remained that way long into the night. I would lie in bed for hours, tossing and



The class began to buzz like a zoo of infuriated flies

turning, the muggy air pressing on me as I unsuccessfully tried to sleep, listening to the rhythm of Asako's gentle snoring through the wall.

The heat stretched though July and into August. Asako and I lazed about on the faded wooden benches, watching the few remaining plants wilt. We often talked for hours, discussing memories from before Manzanar, reliving the taste of juicy watermelons and crisp, tangy strawberries—tastes that had become nothing more than a dim memory, filed with all of the other happy times before

internment, happy times that we devoutly hoped to have again.

And then, one day, as I sat on the sun-blistered bench, Asako did not come. I waited for three hours, feeling my skin burning from the sun, reading *The Grapes of Wrath* and watching worriedly for my best friend.

Finally, just as I was about to move to one of the sparse patches of shade, I saw her running toward me, black hair flying behind her in the desert wind.

"We've bombed Hiroshima," she called, her words drifting toward me.

"My uncle is dead."

The United States, she told me, had created the most terrible weapon that the world had ever seen and proceeded to drop it on one of the major Japanese cities in hopes of ending the war. Asako's mother's brother lived there; she had never met him.

As it had two months before, the question of freedom hovered on my lips. We knew the war could not go on much longer; Asako and I spent the ensuing week tensely waiting, hoping beyond hope for the news that the war had ended, but it continued to drag on. The dropping of another atomic bomb did not bring immediate surrender. We began to think that we would be imprisoned forever.

August 14, 1945, was a brilliantly clear day, the sun shining from a cloudless sky. Asako and I sipped weak lemonade and talked as the breeze ruffled our black hair. Suddenly, a bell began ringing insistently. People ran out of their barracks and into the dusty streets, hugging each other, crying.

"It's over!" someone yelled for our benefit. "It's finally over! They've surrendered! It's over! We're free!"

I had entertained naïve expectations of racing through the fence the moment that an American victory was proclaimed, only taking time to collect my few belongings before rushing out to

freedom. Reality, as it so often is, was painfully different from my imagination. The release was not instant; it would be a week. A week was an infinitesimal amount of time considering how long I had been in Manzanar, and yet impossible to wait through. But the days finally passed, as days do, and my family and Asako's family were standing before the gates of the camp, on our way to freedom.

"All ready to go?" my father asked me. I looked at Asako, and unbidden tears filled my eyes as I realized that I would probably never see her again. No one else would ever understand what it meant to lose four years of my life, the years when I should have been growing and laughing with my friends, not confined in a place I never should have been.

I had thought that when the gates of Manzanar closed behind me for the last time, I would be free. Now, as I stood watching the barbed wire drift slowly in the wind, I realized my mistake. I might have been released, but I still bore the scars. Manzanar had stolen four years from my life. My beliefs in equality had been shattered, my conception of American "liberty and justice" forever changed. The effects of internment would be with me forever. I might have left Manzanar, but I would never be truly free. ❖

September 11, 2001

by Rachel Weary



Rachel Weary, 8
St. Albert, Alberta, Canada

today is my birthday
i am eight years old

colored tissue and balloons

then

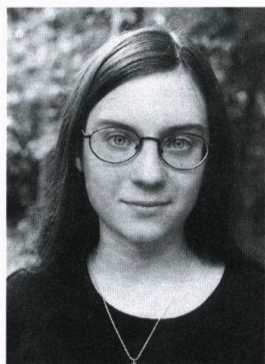
in one bright blinding moment
life changes forever

a thousand dreams float from the sky
and scatter jigsaw over New York City

Autumn Thunder

by Isabel Harding

illustrated by the author



Isabel Harding, 13
Atlanta, Georgia

IT HAD BEEN ONE of those days when the sun could not seem to make up its mind whether it wanted to hide behind a curtain of clouds or look out over the world. Throughout the day the light had alternated between the brilliant gold of autumn leaves and the darkness that inspired the owl to open his eyes. The sky was sometimes a deep azure blue, laced with soft white clouds; sometimes it was the deep gray of a wolf's coat, streaked with distant white lightning and growling black thunder.

Now, just as the sun was beginning to set on the hilly horizon, a gray squirrel poked her head over the leafy edge of her nest in an oak tree. She blinked and peered toward the hills as the sun surrendered to dark cloaks of gray-blue cloud that were slowly and steadily pulling across the sky. The clouds were ominous and held trouble for the little squirrel. She was young and nervous. In her anxiousness to evade the predators that lurked on the forest floor, she had not built her winter nest in the giant oak's strong, secure arms nearer the trunk, but dangerously high in the slender fingers, where the wind blew the strongest, and the rain struck like bullets.

Hunger forced the squirrel to abandon these troubling thoughts. She thought of acorns, and began her journey to the earth.

She clambered over the mass of sticks and leaves of her nest. A breeze wrapped around the flimsy branches and the



The owl held tight, leaning backwards and flapping to keep his balance

squirrel swung for a moment before continuing on toward the rough bark of the tree's sturdy body. She flicked her tail with agitation. With every step she realized how quickly the wind was picking up, and how urgent was her need to find a new home for the cold, gusty months ahead. The approaching storm was not going to be friendly.

On her way to the ground, the squirrel passed a hole in the tree. Curious, she poked her head inside. The entrance to the hole was small, but inside it was roomy and cozy. It was also uninhabited. There was no owl dozing in the hole like the booming great horned monarch a few trees down from the squirrel's oak. There was no raccoon with its harlequin mask and bushy ringed tail. The only living thing in the room was an old bark beetle, a descendant of the bark beetle who had chewed out the hole long ago.

The squirrel was not bothered by the beetle. She knew she had found her new winter shelter, and, reassured, she continued down.

However, as soon as the squirrel felt the worn dirt under her paws, she was immediately unnerved again. She was an inhabitant of the trees. She survived high in the secretive world of branches and wood. But the ground was insecure, alien—swarming with predators. The squirrel flicked her tail again and looked around. She had expert eyesight, and good color vision; she did not see the scarlet flash of a fox, or the plodding brown boots of a human.

Gingerly the squirrel inched across the ground. After a while she came to a patch of earth that had imprinted itself in her mind earlier that autumn. She began to dig feverishly. Her little paws neatly shoveled away the top layer of soil to uncover the scrumptious acorn she had buried a few weeks ago. Eagerly she popped it into her mouth and went to another nut-cache, until the ground was pocketed with harvested holes. Even in her bliss the squirrel glanced around the forest floor for predators.

But predators did not live only on the ground. On a branch on the pine tree a short distance from the squirrel, the noble great horned owl was brooding, his eyes half-closed. His feathers were fluffed, his feathery horns standing straight up on his head. His yellow eyes were dull.

The squirrel made a quick jump to another cache. This sudden movement attracted the owl and made him alert. His eyes snapped to attention. He dug his talons into the branch and yawned. As the squirrel continued to hop across the ground, the owl twisted his head around until it was nearly upside-down, the better to see every part of the squirrel, the prey.

For many days now the owl had gone without a substantial meal. His unhealthy feathers were notched with pale streaks that told of his hunger. The owl extended his long, brown wings and flapped silently from the pine.

The squirrel's head shot up. She looked around, wide-eyed. Just as the

owl whirled above her, a snarl of thunder erupted. The squirrel leaped narrowly away and raced up the tree to her new home in the bark beetle's hole.

The owl hooted his eerie call and it merged with the deep thunder. He flew to another tree to sulk and wait for more prey.

Another movement below made him lift his wings—but he saw that it was not food. It was a red fox, loping down an old hunting trail with a rabbit in her mouth. The vixen had four hungry kits in a den near the stream that snaked through the forest. She was having to feed them constantly, for the kits were growing rapidly and would leave her in early winter. As if to remind the fox of her purpose, a chilly breeze descended from the looming gray-blue storm cloud and ruffled her fur.

The determined fox quickened her pace. The starving owl flapped his wings.

He struck the vixen's mouth and gripped the rabbit in his talons. The fox was reluctant to let go of her well-earned catch. Her own young were hungry. She growled menacingly and pulled, neck muscles rippling. The owl held tight, leaning backwards and flapping to keep his balance. The vixen's jaws ached. She was forced to let go.

In a few seconds the owl had soared to a high limb and was voraciously tearing off pieces of meat with his hooked beak. The vixen snarled at him and continued down the hunting trail.

A boom of thunder drummed

through the still air. The vixen trotted briskly through the trees until she reached a meadow below the foothills of the mountains. Here, many voles and mice made their homes. The blue-black light was thick, but the fox could see as well in darkness as she could in daylight. Her nose was even more powerful than her eyes, and she sniffed eagerly through the grass.

Mourning doves and mockingbirds in the surrounding treetops were serenading the fall storm. Their low, melancholy coos and shrill, busy cries clashed like storm clouds and sunlight. The fox glanced briefly at them, then breathed in the earthy smells of the meadow. She caught the scent of a mole, crouching in its underground lair.

The mole was feeding on worms in one of the many tunnels of his huge earthen network. He felt the atmospheric changes, the humidity above ground, and knew that a storm was on the way. In the wetness following the rain showers hundreds of earthworms would slither up into the moisture. The mole would go into the world above the soil for the first time in his short life and feast.

As the first raindrops began to plop above his head, the mole shoveled upward with his plow-like forepaws, following a long, pink earthworm. The mole could not see—his eyes were just fleshy bumps on his dull face—or hear. But his powerful nose and sensitive feet guided him toward the alien land above the dark tunnels. After a few shoves of

his mighty forefeet, the mole burst into the air.

No sooner had the mole made the transition from one world to another than the fox was above him. She snapped her fearsome teeth, and the mole retreated hurriedly into the safety of his chamber. He shoveled dirt behind him, blocking up the hole, and scurried a distance to his favorite sleeping cav-

its, she caught the scent of a field mouse. It was feeding on seeds a short distance away. Before it could escape, the fox reared on her hind legs, bounced high into the air, and shot straight down like an arrow into the grass. After she had gobbled down the field mouse, she came across several more, and pounced and ate until she was full.



A pair of song sparrows were fluffed up to keep dry

ern. When his heartbeat had slowed somewhat, he curled up into a warm ball and fell asleep.

Meanwhile, the desperate, hungry fox dug away the earth of the mole's escape tunnel. But it was no use. Although a small, awkward-looking creature, the mole was fast, and he was safe in his bedroom a quarter-mile away from where the fox had attacked.

When the vixen was about to turn and head home with no food for her

The rain was falling heavier now, and, ears folded, tail straight out behind her, the fox ran to the dry shelter of the trees.

She retraced her scent-trail back to her den, a shallow pit dug under a fallen tree. The kits were waiting for her there, and they greeted her exuberantly, yelping and jumping with excitement. Then they gathered around and licked their mother's lips, inducing her to cough up a heap of fresh mouse meat

for them. The kits set upon it hungrily. This routine of feeding, common among mammals, was the most sensible way of nourishing the young. It meant that the vixen could catch and eat more food, and that there was no meat trail to lead predators to the fox den.

When all the foxes were satisfied, the mother fox led her litter inside the den. She curled herself around the four small bodies, until all were warm and safe and sleeping soundly.

The rain roared as it sailed through the matted ceiling of tree limbs. The wind tore at branches and leaves. Thunder crashed and lightning split the sky. One slender electrical arm reached down and struck the trunk of a nearby tree, a towering giant of more than one hundred years and uncountable storms. With a terrifying creak the tree sailed toward the ground. It shook the earth as it fell.

All across the forest animals were waiting out the storm. A pair of song sparrows were fluffed up to keep dry. They had tried to sleep, but the wind and thunder kept them awake. They were mates, and huddled close on their tree branch.

In her den in the side of a mountain foothill a black bear was curled into a tight ball. The sound of the falling tree woke her. She lifted her head drowsily and looked out at the cascading rain and howling wind. The bear was pregnant—she would give birth early next year—but now she was just beginning her winter routine, during which time

she would rest and eat, rest and eat, until winter pushed her into the depths of hibernation. She blinked at the storm, yawned, and went back to sleep.

All through that night the storm raged, hurtling wind and icy rain against the trees. Thunder roared like the irritable mate of the bear, lightning lit up the dark world of the mole as he searched for worms near the top layer of soil.

In the middle of the night the mother fox lifted her head. She was uneasy. Rainwater was seeping into her den under the log. The storm was not weakening, and it grew muddier in the tight shelter. The vixen stood and nudged her kits awake. Yawning, whimpering, the young foxes stirred. Their mother urged them to their feet. A rivulet of water was now streaming into the den. The foxes would have to find a new shelter.

The kits stared wide-eyed at the soporific world around them. The ground shook with the awesome power of the thunder and rain. Fiery lightning exploded overhead. The young foxes yelped and clustered around their mother. One of the kits, the weakest and smallest in the litter, shivered and moaned helplessly. The vixen picked up the runt by the scruff of his neck and led the rest of the kits through the forest.

The great horned owl saw the foxes pass beneath him and rolled out his haunting call. He was stuffed with the rabbit he had stolen from the mother fox earlier, and called, not to prepare for a hunt, but merely to frighten the foxes. The vixen gave a low growl and the kits

hurried along.

As the wind died down to a ghostly whisper, the fox family arrived at their destination. The tired mother looked up to see a mass of rocks in a shady pine grove. She loped over to it and dropped the pup she had been carrying. The others stumbled with exhaustion to their new home and flopped in the secure darkness of the crags. The mother fox licked them until they felt warm and dry again, then pushed her nose into her brush and sighed contentedly, lulled to sleep by the thunder rumbling in the distance.

Inside her hole in the oak tree, the little squirrel twitched and fluttered her eyes. She went to the entrance and craned her neck. She tilted an ear toward the mountains. She waited for a long time, but no more thunder growled. The rain no longer fell in heavy, icy sheets but in gentle, pattering drops, until the gray clouds were swept quickly away to reveal the stars above, shining with a soft, pale glow. A drop of water collected on a branch and plopped upon the squirrel's head. The squirrel went back inside her den. She preferred the silence and dryness of her new nest to the wet outdoors.

The dark hours wore on until, at last, just above the tops of the distant mountains, a halo of sunlight peeked up. It shed a dull, wintry blue light over the land. The song sparrows shook the dampness from their bodies, pressed their feathers flat, and puffed out their breasts. Their whistling carols rang in

the air. The storm was gone.

Animals from all over the forest listened intently to the song and looked out at the pale, down-soft light. The bear stretched and rolled out of her den to grow fat on blueberries until she fasted for the winter and resumed her hibernation. The mole did not hear the song, but he felt the air pressure lift and the humidity sweep away and plowed up out of the soil. A worm slithered under his toes, and he ate heartily.

When the sun was high above the snowy peaks, and their song had ended, the sparrows stretched their wings and flapped away from the tree branch. Powerful, instinctive emotions had been triggered within them with the ending of the autumn storm. They flew south to warmer climates, with more sparrows clustering on until the sky was alive with fluttering, twittering birds.

The fox pups looked curiously up at the feathery air and lapped rainwater from the tips of leaves. They watched a white-tailed doe glide elegantly through the forest. Two antlered bucks strode up to her. Their smooth new antlers gleamed in the light of the dawn. They pawed the ground and charged, their racks clashing with a loud crack in the still air. It was the confrontational time of rut, the mating season for the deer. The fox kits took little interest in the noisy battle and proceeded to pounce on each other's tails.

The sky looked like a great wild fish, pale grayish blue with a streak of orange-pink splashed along the low horizon.



Animals from all over the forest looked out at the pale, down-soft light

Under its solemn light the forest shone with a magnificent freshness and grandeur.

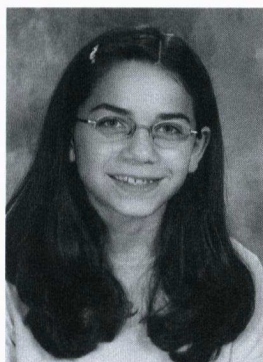
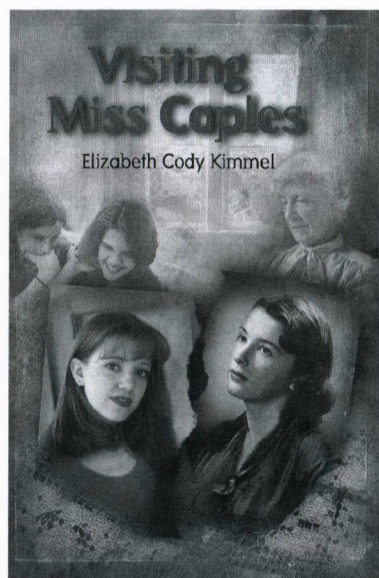
The animals went on with their daily lives. A bark beetle began to chew a new hole in an oak tree, which would one day be used by one of the gray squirrel's grandchildren. Two earthworms came together in the soil to reproduce, and the mole went back underground, with

the reassuring knowledge that there was plenty of food to be had. The deer battled for mates, the foxes played, and the great horned owl quietly surveyed his prosperous kingdom.

And hundreds of other species of animals and insects and birds went on with the turning of the earth, in the shimmering wetness and the sparkling beauty after the storm. ❖

Book Review

by Jesyka Palmer



Jesyka Palmer, 10
Blissfield, Michigan

Visiting Miss Caples by Elizabeth Cody Kimmel; Dial Books: New York, 2000; \$16.99

WHEN I FIRST SAW the cover of the book *Visiting Miss Caples* I thought the story would be downright boring. I put off reading it for a while. When I did start reading the story, I was easily caught up in the book. Jenna's character was easy to relate to—who doesn't have a friend that they look up to and rely and depend upon for support? I cannot imagine having a friend for so long and then suddenly losing her over some stupid prank. Jenna has to choose between following her friend, the most popular girl in school, or to do the right thing and become a social outcast.

There is not a teenager out there who doesn't worry about being liked or having friends. What makes it harder is when someone vows to be your worst enemy. Even after years of torment from Liv and Jenna, Jane had never tried to get back at them. I think if we all tried that approach kids would feel a lot safer at school. There are always going to be kids who think that they are better than everyone else is. I don't think we can get rid of the bullies either. They will always be there. What we can do is try to turn the other way and try non-

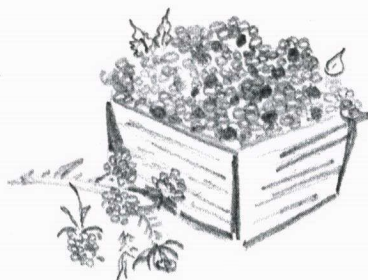
violent solutions to our problems and accept others for their differences. Those differences that we see in each other are what make people unique. It would be really boring if everyone looked, acted and thought the same. I had an experience like Jenna's a couple of years ago. I used to hang around a group of girls at school. I guess you could say it was the in-crowd. The leader of our group was always getting us into trouble. Finally, one day she thought of this horrible prank to play on this other girl. I told her I wasn't going to go through with it. She became really upset and turned the others against me. I dreaded going to school and facing them or wondering what they were going to do to me that day. I tried to ignore them, found different friends, and eventually the whole thing was forgotten. I became friends with other girls who I can truly call my friends.

Another situation I can relate to was the social studies project that Jenna had to do. Her assignment was to read to an

elderly shut-in once a week. I know exactly how Jenna felt the first time she visited Miss Caples. I have volunteered for the past two summers at senior centers. It is really hard to try to get people to open up and talk to you. It is amazing though what you can learn from the stories they tell you. I became really close to a few of the people there. I look forward to it every summer.

My favorite line from the story is "The past is like smoke in the wind." Both Liv and Miss Caples say this. I never really thought about how true that is. We always worry about what happened last month, last week, or the day before. But the past, like smoke, will eventually become fuzzy or fade away and then completely vanish or become absorbed by something else. We need to think more about our present and future and leave the past where it is—behind us.

I truly enjoyed this book and would recommend it to anyone who enjoys reading. ❖

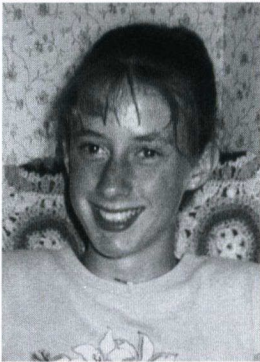


Ariane Phipps-Morgan, 13, Heikendorf, Germany

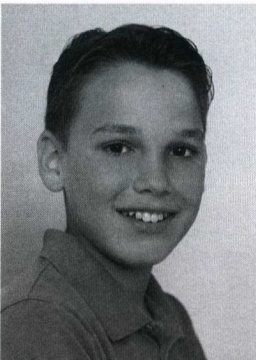
Halfback

by Andrea Bachmann

illustrated by Teddy Harvey



Andrea Bachmann, 13
St. Louis, Missouri



Teddy Harvey, 12
Williamsburg, Virginia

THE SCORE WAS TIED, one to one, in the second half. It was a hot July day, the kind where people say you could fry an egg on the sidewalk, or however the saying goes. The sun was beating down on the soccer field like crazy, and everyone on our team was getting tired, especially me. I don't exactly have the greatest endurance when it comes to running.

So I was taking a nice, long break on the sidelines, having a drink from my water bottle. I poured some water on my short brown hair and down the back of my red uniform to cool off. Then I sat with my teammates, watching the game. I'd been there for about five minutes when my coach called me over. I got up from the bench tiredly and stood next to him. "Andrea," he said, keeping his eyes on the field, "you wanna play some halfback?"

Now, for anyone who doesn't know how soccer works, there are basically three rows of players, not including the goalie. Halfback is the one in the middle. I usually played fullback, or defense, back by the goal. I liked it back there. I was used to it, I'd been playing that position since second grade at least, and it was pretty simple for me.

I did not want to play halfback. I had only played there once or twice before in practice, maybe one time in a game. And this was an important game, it would determine our place in the tournament; I couldn't play halfback. "No," I



I watched as the ball soared straight through the air

refused.

No wasn't enough for my coach, though. He wouldn't take that for an answer. To him, asking me, "Wanna play some halfback?" was the same as saying, "Go play halfback position now!"

"I can't!" I begged him. "There's no way! You can't put me there, I can't play halfback!" It did no good. I couldn't convince him that this was a mistake. He insisted on putting me in halfback position anyway.

When the next opportunity came, he yelled "Sub, Ref!" and pushed me onto the field. "Let's go, Andrea, it's just like fullback, only up a little farther. It's not that hard." That was basically the only advice I got.

I dragged my feet along, walking onto the field. Come on, it's not that bad, just like fullback. You can do it, I repeated to myself. You can do this. Slowly, I took my position at halfback. I told myself I'd do a good job, but I didn't really believe it.

Honestly, if you must know, it wasn't too hard, playing halfback, but for some reason I still felt like I was doing everything wrong. I couldn't kick right or pass right or do much of anything. At

least, I didn't think so.

Anyway, the game went on. Just when I thought it would be over soon, someone kicked the ball to me. I was wide open, and I didn't see anyone coming toward me as I ran to kick the ball. Suddenly, I heard Courtney, another halfback on my team, yelling at the top of her lungs, "Shoot, Andrea, shoot!"

So I did. And then I watched as the ball soared straight through the air and curved to land right in the corner of the goal. It was one of those kicks that my coach would call beautiful. I never understood how a sweaty, dirty sport like soccer could be considered beautiful, but it was. I had scored a beautiful goal. Realizing this, I screamed and laughed as my teammates joined my cheers.

I couldn't believe it. Sure, I'd scored a goal before, but never like this one, and never from halfback.

It turned out that it was the game-winning goal, and it helped our team get into the finals for that tournament. We all went home with silver medals. Now, I play halfback all the time. In fact, I'd rather play there than anywhere else. ❖

Permanence

by Xian Chiang-Waren

illustrated by Anna Harrington

THE U-HAUL PULLS OUT of the driveway. Raindrops fall on the windows, pelting the glass in a steady rhythm. Dad is driving. He's wearing his old red flannel shirt and worn blue jeans, which I haven't seen since we came here, to Miami. My stepmother Lisa is in the passenger seat, humming along to the Beatles (an old music group) on the radio. Dad starts singing with her; he's smiling, happy to be leaving Miami. I'm not singing or smiling. I don't want to leave another place that felt like home.

EVER SINCE my mother died, my father has been constantly moving, dragging me along with him like a sack of dirty laundry. I spent the first seven years of my life in Crisfield, Maryland, on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay. My parents had bought the little beach house when I was born, and I loved every part of it. I remember the hours I spent playing in the dusty barn (which was somewhat larger than the actual house), or swimming in the bay. We had a private beach with a small dock, and a canoe that my father took me fishing in.

It's hard to remember my mother. Almost every memory of her is a blur. I do have a photograph of her, though. She was pretty, with long chestnut-brown hair and sparkling blue eyes. In the snapshot my mother is sprawled on the dock, red autumn leaves caught in her hair and falling in a thin



Xian Chiang-Waren, 12
New York, New York



Anna Harrington, 11
Andover, Massachusetts



I often take it out and stare at the place that was once mine, and the woman who used to be my mother

carpet around her. It is either sunrise or sunset, because reflections of pink and orange sky are in the rippling water. My mother is laughing at something; her smile lights up the world around her. In the background there are ducks swimming around the dock.

It's a nice picture. I used to spend most of my time looking at it idly. Even now (usually when I'm supposed to be doing something else) I often take it out and stare at the place that was once mine, and the woman who used to be my mother.

She died when I was six. I can just barely remember the time spent at the hospital. I remember nurses hurrying in and out of her room, my family coming and going in and out of the hospital. And the doctors. I remember I was scared of the doctors.

My relatives were all crying, but I didn't understand. Nobody had ever explained death to me, and so I didn't know what it was to die. My mother lay still, very still. Her chest moved slowly up and down, her breathing was raspy and loud. I watched her chest more



Homework, swimming . . . anything one of us did the other would do too

than her face as she breathed in and out. I kept watching because I was afraid that if I turned away the breathing would stop.

The funeral went by in a blur. I remember standing and hugging everybody. People kept crying into my shoulder, which was strange to me because Momma had always said that adults ought to comfort me, not the other way around. The people were saying things about my mother: "Poor child, your poor mother!" Or, "Look at her, the brave little girl isn't shedding a tear over

her momma!" And, "Oh yes, it was a disaster . . . drunk driver rammed right into Cathy . . . poor girl doesn't understand about it." Cathy was my mother's name. I was the poor girl everyone was talking about, and I did not understand anything except that my mother was gone.

AND SO my father left Maryland and took me along with him. By then I was seven and knew about death and drunk drivers killing my mother. Dad sold the house; he sold the barn

and the beach, even the canoe. "Why?" I asked, tears running down my cheeks over my beloved home. My father answered that we were moving because everything here reminded him of my mother.

From place to place we moved, all along the eastern seaboard, but then inland and further west because the ocean reminded Dad of Momma, too. He married Lisa while we were in Vancouver, more because they were friends than because they loved each other. "It's a way that we can be best friends and so that the social workers won't think you have a broken family," Dad explained. "So that they won't try to put you in a foster home." I didn't mind because Lisa was nice, like a substitute mother, and Dad needed a friend.

We never stayed anywhere for too long; each place was like a stop along the line, on a train that always kept on going. I grew used to moving, accustomed to never making friends. If I made friends I knew it wouldn't be for long, because as soon as Dad decided to go somewhere else to live the friend would just be one more person missing in my life.

But then we stopped in Miami. I was twelve. This time, my father told me, it would be different. "This time it's for real," he said. "Miami will be permanence. We'll settle down and stay for a while, a few years at the very least. You can make some friends, Cassie, go to a good school. We'll have a house, a real life, a permanent one. I promise."

Permanence. That's all I ever wanted. I hated moving, hated going to the awful schools where I never allowed myself to make friends. Lisa saw how happy I was and came over to hug me. I was a bit confused about why Miami would be so different, but Lisa explained that my father thought he had run from my mother's memory long enough. Miami was her hometown and Dad believed he could find peace on the Florida shores.

We got a small house on South Beach, a short distance from Miami. I enrolled in school and made friends. My best friend was Haley, who lived only a quarter-mile from my house. I loved having a best friend; we did everything together. Homework, swimming . . . anything one of us did the other would do too. We were in the same class, and were both good students. The only time either of us got in trouble was when we were caught passing notes to each other.

Haley had short red hair and hazel eyes. She was forever playing with my long brown hair, putting it up in the latest styles. I tried my best to style her hair, but it was too short.

Both of us loved the water. She had grown up on South Beach, and I of course had learned to swim on the Chesapeake Bay. Florida is warm year-round, so we usually went swimming together after school, before starting homework. We were the best of friends and I never wanted to leave Miami, and believed we never would.

EVERYTHING changed one April evening. I had just gotten back from Haley's house and started my homework. I was finishing a math worksheet and was determined to get it done before dinner so I could watch a television special about Mount Everest. My father walked into my room and sat on my bed. "What are you working on?" he asked.

"Math," I told him. "Dividing fractions."

He nodded and cleared his throat. "I've got news for you."

"What news?" I asked, barely looking up from my worksheet.

"We're moving."

Then I looked up. "Again?" I asked, feeling my throat grow dry.

Dad nodded. "Next week. To Wisconsin."

I jumped up. "No!" I cried. "You can't do that, Dad. You said we'd stay. You promised."

He sighed heavily and opened his mouth to speak. I didn't want to hear his excuse. I rushed on.

"No, Dad, please. You said we'd stay, you said this time was for real. You promised, Dad, and I believed you. You told me Miami was permanence." Cold teardrops were falling from my eyes and I didn't try to stop them.

"I'm sorry, Cassie. I'd stay if I could."

"Then why can't you?" I asked, my voice rising. "Why won't you stay?"

Dad looked at the floor. "I thought I could cope, Cassie. I thought your mother would be less haunting here.

But everywhere I go . . ." he broke off, took a deep breath, and started again. "She told me about Miami and South Beach. She used to live around here, you know. She described everything to me. And I see the things she talked about. I see her telling me about it, and I can't deal with it. Cassie, I'm sorry. I can't stay."

And so we packed our bags and sold the house. I bid a tearful farewell to Haley and promised to write. "And who knows?" I said. "Maybe someday we'll come back again." That was impossible and I knew it, but it was nice to think about. Haley looked a little hopeful when I said that. At least she stopped crying.

It rained the day we left. The rain made it look as if the sky was crying right along with me. I didn't want to leave the ocean and my mother's birthplace. But I knew it was too hard for my father to stay.

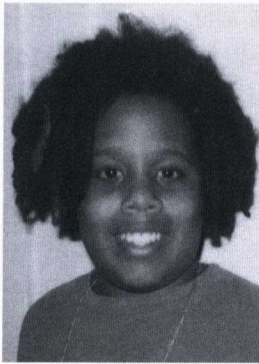
The car zips down the freeway. Lisa is asleep now, her head resting on the window. The rain has finally stopped and a bit of sun shines through the clouds. Dad looks at me in the rearview mirror. "Back home, aren't we?" he asks.

I grin. "Anywhere on the road is home," I say.

There is no permanence. Miami taught me that. Nothing can stay the same forever, and maybe that doesn't matter. As long as you stay with the people you love, anywhere can be home. And as for the future? Who knows. All I can do is keep on going. ❖

Sounds

by Marley Powell



Marley Powell, 12
Los Angeles, California

My iguana cage is silent.
Just two weeks ago it was alive with sounds.
I wish we'd just throw it out.
The other night I heard a helicopter fly over my head.
I hear a lot of helicopters at night when I'm trying to sleep
but this one was different.
I was at UCLA and it was late at night and it flew
over my head and I ran away from it but then it landed
on the top of the UCLA emergency room parking lot
and I was glad the awful noise just stopped.
The answering machine picks up and says I would like
to know if you can join Kaleidoscope on Sunday night.
I don't recognize the voice but I know it has something
to do with school.
I hear my stomach gurgling.
It sounds like a washing machine.
The siren of a police car wakes my cat up.
The sound of a blue jay squawking is stopped by
a loud shriek.
I wonder if my cat got the bird.
A dog is howling like a werewolf next door.
The thought of that makes me shiver.
I hit my pen against the table like a drumstick.
I'm drumming to "Love Me Do."
It's suddenly so quiet.

The French people to the left of us are not home.
The Japanese people to the right are asleep.
I don't like it.
The only sound I hear is the tap tap tapping of my foot
on the floor and the rap rap rapping of my pen
on the table . . .
Paul McCartney's voice sings in my head.
I can't believe he can sing so deep and so high at the
same time.

Abby and the Pony Express

by Ann Pedtke

illustrated by Alice Feng



Ann Pedtke, 13
Laingsburg, Michigan



Alice Feng, 12
North Potomac, Maryland

ABBY HEARD A LONG, distant call, somewhere out there in the night. A trumpeting call, like a bugle . . . or maybe it was only the wind. Snow whirled past the cabin window in an endless parade of white, and the wind moaned as it blew around the corner of their house. There had been blizzards like this last March, but this year was different. Abby didn't feel content inside, as Mama sewed and Papa whittled in the flickering light of the fire, as their old draft horse James slept peacefully in the barn. This year something inside her felt unsettled as she looked out at the wild blur of snowflakes. There was something bigger and better she could be doing. Something more important than knitting stockings, more interesting than sitting inside on these long, long winter evenings.

It was because of the Pony Express, of course. Ever since that exciting day last April, when the first delivery boy in that amazing new mail system had come galloping into the station, Abby had known that she wanted to be one of those fearless Pony Express riders.

That sunny day Papa and Abby had ridden James to one of the stations, where the station keeper and the stock tender kept food and fresh horses for the boys who rode the Pony Express. James plodded along so slowly that the trip took them nearly an hour.

There were only two small log cabins there, alone in the



Soon Abby saw the Pony Express boy, charging across the prairie

middle of the prairie. One was a stable for the horses; the other served as a storeroom and a place for the men to stay. Abby noticed that the windows were small squares of grease paper instead of glass.

Two wagons were parked in the shadow of the stable; they had been used to bring supplies from the city of St. Joseph.

"This whole thing was one man's invention," Papa told Abby. "Mr. William Russell decided that the western territories needed a system that would get the mail to them faster than stagecoach, and so he organized the Pony Express and invested just about all the money he had in it. The man's probably hoping for a government grant eventually, and I wouldn't be surprised if they gave it to him. Supposedly these ponies can get the latest news from St. Joseph to Sacramento in ten days."

Abby shaded her eyes with her hand and gazed at the sky, the long, waving grass, the emptiness in every direction. But it didn't really feel empty or deserted. It felt as if the land had flattened itself down to make way, and the two little station buildings were the only things brave enough to stay where they were, waiting for whoever was coming.

"I bet the Pony Express will get the mail through faster than that someday," she said. "All the riders have to do is travel a little bit faster!"

Suddenly a rider's bugle had echoed across the prairie, warning of his approach. The station keeper, a big, im-

portant-looking man with a big, important-looking mustache, hustled Abby and Papa out of the way as he brought out a restless mustang pony, already saddled and prepared for the rider. Soon Abby saw the Pony Express boy, charging across the prairie on his horse, stirring up a tiny cloud of dust.

Papa bent down close to Abby's ear, his beard tickling her neck. "That rider's name is Johnny Fry," he whispered. "He's the first boy to ever travel for the Pony Express. Today he has ridden all the way from St. Joseph."

When Johnny Fry got to the station he leaped off his horse, threw the saddlebag full of mail onto the new mustang, jumped up to the mustang's back, and rode away again, toward far-off Sacramento. It all happened so fast that for a moment Abby was stunned.

"That's all you get to see," the station keeper had grunted, as he removed the tired horse's saddle and led the horse into the stable. "You people just think the Pony Express is a whole heap of cowboys and Indians, don't you? Well, you're not going to see any Indians here."

But Abby had seen enough to decide that she loved it.

Now she shivered in excitement as she pressed her nose against the frosty glass of the cabin window. *She* could be a rider for the Pony Express! She had ridden lots of horses before. What a wild, adventurous, wonderful life to lead! She would ride through the prai-

ries and mountains and deserts of the West, just her and her faithful pony. She would have a hero's welcome wherever she went! And if the war over slavery really broke out, she would carry secret messages for their new president, Abraham Lincoln, to help him make the United States into one country again.

Abby examined her reflection in the window. Curling red hair, a little bit bushy; long, but she could gather it into a bun and tuck it under a cowboy hat if she wanted to, out of the way. Hers was a tall, skinny figure; she would certainly be light enough for the horses to carry her long distances. She was only fourteen, but lots of boys that age were working for the Pony Express, and earning over one hundred dollars a month, too! She wasn't afraid of a snowstorm, she thought defiantly. If only she had been born a boy.

"You neglect your knitting, Abby," Mama reminded quietly.

Abby jumped and quickly picked up the long needles in her lap.

"Ah, let her daydream," Papa said, winking at her. "She has enough days of snow ahead to finish my socks."

Abby smiled into her lap and then looked up again. "Papa," she asked carefully, "do you think California will secede along with the southern states? And will the Pony Express become a mail carrier for the South, then?"

Papa kept whittling. "Ah, President Lincoln will set things to rights. I have trust in him, Abby. I think we can all put our trust in that great man."

Abby gazed out the window and wondered if the sound she had heard was a Pony Express rider's horn. She thought she heard it again, but the sound was part of the blend of wind and snow, and her ears couldn't be sure. It was like trying to catch a movement far away in the prairie grass.

Then the knock came.

Abby jerked her head up from her knitting. "Papa! Papa, someone's here! Here at the door!"

Mama's eyes stayed on her sewing. "Goodness! Can't you even hear the wind without getting excitable, Abby? Who would come to our house at this time of night?"

The knock came again. Abby was sure it was a knock.

This time Papa jumped up. "If that's the wind, Clara, then I'm a Confederate!" He unbolted the door and pulled it open. Abby shivered at the cold that swept in.

A young man stood there. He might have been sixteen, or maybe he was eighteen, and just small for his age. He wore a brimmed hat, whitened with snow, and a buckskin shirt under his long cloak. Abby noticed with surprise that there were Indian moccasins on his feet.

He held his right arm against his chest, as if protecting it.

"Sorry," he said, his voice hoarse, "but I'm a rider for the Pony Express. My name's Tom. I kept blowing on my horn, but I guess I wasn't quite as near to the station as I thought. Do . . . do

you think I might have a bite to eat before I go on?"

"Of course! Come inside, man!" Papa clapped him on the back and pulled him into the cabin, pushing the door shut against the swirling blizzard.

Tom was tall and thin, with light, unkempt hair that brushed over his eyes. He kept his arm against his chest as he talked. "I carry the words of our good president Abraham Lincoln, which he spoke as his inaugural speech. I take them to California for the people there to read. Actually," he added sheepishly, "I only take them to the next Pony Express station, where a different rider will relay them on."

"But that's just two miles away!" Abby exclaimed. "What made you stop?" She couldn't believe it. A real, live Pony Express rider, here, in her own cabin!

The boy smiled ruefully. "Actually, I only signed up a week ago. This is my first run. And my mustang . . . well, he's a frisky one. The truth of it is, he bucked me right off and my arm seems to have sprained itself a little—I don't know whether it's broke or not. But I'll be just fine in a minute or two! I can still ride . . . I think." He grinned shakily.

"Good heavens! Your horse is out in that storm? Does he have a blanket?" Papa asked.

"Yeah, two or three at least, and an apple I gave him. He'll be fine for a few minutes, I'd say." Tom pulled his leather saddlebag, his *mochila*, out from under his cloak and slung it onto the table. He

brought all the letters inside with him, Abby thought. They were even a higher priority than his horse!

"How long have you known how to ride?" Papa asked, glancing at Tom's arm.

Tom shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "Well, nearly . . . nearly three weeks, now."

Only three weeks! Abby herself had been able to ride for years! Papa had taught her to ride their old horse James almost as soon as she could walk. How could a person not know how to ride a horse by the time they were Tom's age? she thought scornfully.

"Goodness, how did you ever manage to get the position?" Mama inquired.

"Well, my uncle's a friend of the man who runs one of the stations. He said he'd recommend me. I know I don't deserve the chance," Tom added hastily, "but I'll learn. Before long I'll be able to ride any old pony. And stay on, too."

Mama had heated up some beans on the cookstove and now she gave Tom a bowl full, along with two leftover biscuits from supper. He ate hungrily, leaning over his dish. He held his spoon with his left hand.

"I'm sorry you folks have to take me in and feed me like this," he said, between mouthfuls. "I mean, it's awfully nice of you to do it."

"Stay the night, Tom," Papa invited. "This is no weather to be riding in, and even if it was, you're in no condition to ride!"

Tom looked up from his food. "Oh,



"I'm sorry you folks have to take me in and feed me like this," he said, between mouthfuls

no, sir! The mail has got to go through, and especially today. President Lincoln's words will keep every Californian a loyal member of the Union. I'm sure of it!"

His right arm brushed against the table, and Abby saw him wince. She was so filled with excitement that she could barely keep still. Poor Tom didn't even look like he could hold the reins, but she had two strong arms and was ever so much lighter than her mother or father! Lighter than Tom, even! And the station was only two miles away.

"Papa," she said, trying to keep her

voice from wavering, trying to keep herself from shouting out the words. "Papa, I could take the mail! It's *only* two miles. Tom can't go with his arm like that. Not if he's been riding for only three weeks! Not if his horse is so wild!"

Tom looked up again. "Oh, no! I couldn't ask you to do a thing like that! It's my job, and I've got to take care of it myself. You're . . . you're just a girl."

Abby grew more determined. "I could!" she said. "You know I could, Papa. I've ridden horses before; I've even driven the wagon!"

For a rare moment Papa was serious. "Abby! You couldn't find your way! You'd get lost and you would probably freeze to death!"

"It's . . . it's actually very easy, sir," Tom said hesitantly. "You just head west. They have lamps in all the windows, and the pony knows what to do."

"Papa," Abby begged, "the South might get word to California first. They could turn President Lincoln's speech inside out! And California might secede."

This was the only chance she would ever, ever have, and she couldn't possibly let it get past her.

"I am well aware of that, Abby. I agree that Tom shouldn't continue at the moment, but you are too young."

"I'm really well enough to get there myself," Tom protested.

Mama crossed her arms in front of her. "Richard," she said, "Abby is right. Everyone in California needs to read Tom's mail. As soon as possible."

"Tomorrow is as soon as it can be, Clara."

"Tomorrow is tomorrow. We can do something about it tonight."

Papa stared at her for a moment. The fire flicked shadows onto the walls, and the snow howled past outside the window. Finally, he sighed. "Well, if we agree that the mail needs to get through, then so be it. But I'm the one who should go."

"Sir, the pony should be carrying someone . . . a little bit lighter. The station keeper said that we all have to be under one hundred and twenty-five

pounds, and you're, well, not to offend you or anything, but . . ."

Abby smiled to herself. Papa was a big man, not round about the middle, but big. Much heavier than one hundred and twenty-five pounds.

"Richard!" Mama said again. "Abby is going to go. Can't you see that? If we told her 'no' once more, I think she would get on that mustang and ride off anyways." She smiled at Abby, and Abby smiled back, amazed. *Mama* was letting her go! Mama was actually agreeing!

"Honestly, Richard. For the Kansas we live in and the California where others live, and for the two of them united together, don't you think we should risk something? I think you are much too heavy for that pony."

Papa's face slowly broke into a smile. "Well . . . I guess I am much too heavy for that pony out there. I reckon he'd be tired out by the time he got me to the station." He turned to Abby. "Well, get going," he said.

Abby hugged him and he hugged her back, his big arms surrounding her and his beard tickling her neck. Then she hugged Mama, too, and began to pull on her long winter coat over her dress.

"Oh, all right," Tom said. "I guess I'll let you go. Just one thing; don't let him buck you."

Abby smiled at him as she wrapped a scarf around her neck, grabbed the mochila full of mail, and stepped outside. Tom wasn't really very brave, she thought.

The wind blasted into her, nearly slamming her body backwards into the cabin wall. Tom's brown mustang stood in front of her, snorting and pawing at the snow. Abby saw the golden shine of the bugle, tied to the back of the saddle.

She threw the leather mochila over the pony's back, took a deep breath, and pulled herself up, too. It was reassuring to feel the horse's warm body against her legs.

"Giddyup!" she cried, but the wind caught her voice and pulled it away into the snow. She nudged the mustang lightly with her heels, and he began to trot forward, prancing as if he had traveled the same route before and knew exactly where to go, but wasn't in a hurry just yet.

The wind blew needles into Abby's cheeks, but she didn't care. "I'm a rider for the Pony Express!" she shouted, knowing that there was no one to hear her except the horse.

The pony began to run and Abby gripped his sides with her knees and leaned forward, clutching the saddle horn. The horse took a little leap sideways, but she managed to keep her balance and jerk the reins to the opposite side before he could do it again. He was frisky, but she could handle him! She began to feel exceedingly brave.

Nothing but dark snow passed on either side.

And snow.

And more snow.

And snow.

And more snow.

Abby began to curl and uncurl her toes inside her shoes, trying to warm them up. Her cheeks felt numb and dull, and she could barely feel it when she slapped them with her mittened hand. Her knees gripped the horse's sides automatically.

Surely the pony would know the way, wouldn't he? The station couldn't be much farther. It was only two miles from their cabin! The horse kept galloping forward, the flakes kept sweeping past on either side. Abby kept curling and uncurling her toes.

She began to feel as if she would never be anywhere but on this mustang, riding through this same dark world of snow.

The horse kept galloping forward, the flakes kept sweeping past on either side. Abby kept curling and uncurling her toes.

Suddenly, she was afraid. The pony could just stop and lie down and they would freeze, the two of them. There would be nothing in the world that she could do about it! No one would see her, no matter how long she waved. No one would hear her, no matter how long she called.

But the horse kept galloping forward, the flakes kept sweeping past on either side. And Abby kept curling and uncurling her toes.

She jolted her head up. There was a light! Through the layers and layers of snow shone the light of a lamp! Tom's mustang must have seen it, too, for he whinnied and began charging forward



"I'm a rider for the Pony Express!" she shouted

even faster than before. Warmth flooded into Abby's hands and feet and cheeks. It was the station! She was going to get the mail through after all! She wouldn't be stuck in this world of snow forever and ever and ever. The pony bounded forward and Abby threw back her head and laughed.

As they came closer, she saw another young man waiting on the back of his pony, ready to take the mail and carry it away through the whiteness. She had forgotten to blow the horn, she realized, but still he was ready and waiting.

The station keeper with the big mustache was standing outside one of the little log buildings, holding a lantern.

"Throw me your mochila!" he shouted. Abby stood in her stirrups and tossed it to him. In one motion he slung it on the next rider's horse, slapped the horse's flank and yelled, "Get going!"

The pony and its rider disappeared into the snow.

It was over. No one was cheering, no one was waiting to congratulate her. And only two people knew what she

had accomplished. For a moment Abby didn't know what to think.

But in the next moment she discovered that she didn't care! She had assured that the mail was safe, and who knew how important that might turn out to be for her country? Just think, those two miles that had seemed so long could have changed the course of history! They could have changed history even more than some of those famous men who were thought of as heroes. It was a glorious feeling to be able to play a part, even a little part, in something so huge and important!

It took more courage to do when you knew you weren't going to be made a hero for it, more courage than she had imagined. But all the Pony Express riders had that courage! Abby decided that Tom was brave for wanting to be one of those riders, although people probably wouldn't even remember his name a hundred years into the future.

"Are you planning on getting off that horse?" the station keeper barked. He squinted up at her through the snow and in the light of the lantern his round face lit up with surprise. "Why, you're not the rider that was supposed to come galloping in here, missy! You're just a girl!"

Abby slipped off the mustang, but the man still stared at her.

"The other rider hurt his arm," she explained hastily. "He stopped at our cabin. He didn't look like he could ride very well, so I figured, since I'm so light, that I could bring the mail the last two miles. And I did." She brushed the snow out of her eyes. The blizzard whirled all around her, but somewhere inside herself Abby felt a place that was perfectly still. *Almost* content.

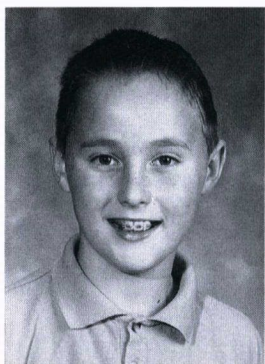
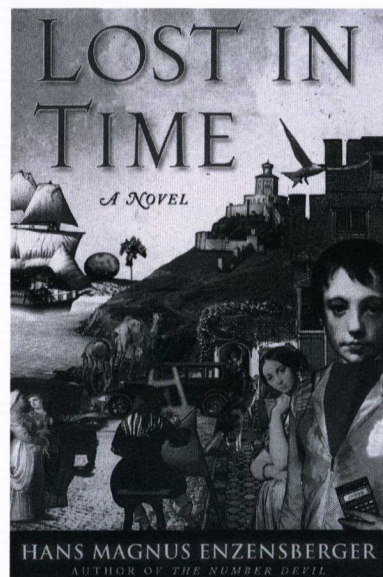
The station keeper looked her up and down. "Well, I guess you are a Pony Express rider after all. But you're not going to ride back in this blow, especially considering you don't have a horse no more." He took the pony's reins from Abby's hands. Abby stared at him.

"Well, get hustling inside, missy! You can head back as soon as this storm is over. If you're one of those Pony Express riders, well . . . I'd guess they deserve anything I can give 'em." Abby smiled in relief and followed the station keeper inside. Secretly, she agreed with him. ❖

Note: The Pony Express ran from April 3, 1860, to October 24, 1861, when the telegraph put it out of business. When the Pony Express delivered President Lincoln's inaugural speech in 1861, it was their fastest time on record. They carried the mail from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California, in seven days and seventeen hours, despite the harsh March weather.

Book Review

by Cameron Mckeich



Cameron Mckeich, 11
Newmarket, Ontario, Canada

Lost in Time by Hans Magnus Enzensberger; Henry Holt and Company: New York, 2000; \$18

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED what it would be like to travel in time? And have you ever wondered what problems you might encounter and what the consequences might be? In *Lost in Time* Robert finds out all these things and more as he wades deeper and deeper into history and lands himself in more trouble than he could ever imagine in his wildest dreams.

It all starts when Robert rubs his eyes while watching TV and opens them in 1956 Siberia. Accused of being a German spy, he has many adventures there before being transported to 1946 Australia through a movie screen. This happens seven times and by the time he is a painter's apprentice in 1621 Holland Robert is beginning to doubt he will ever get back to the present, his friends, family and life. That is, until he comes up with a miraculous and ingenious idea to get him back home. To find out what happens you'll have to read the book.

Every time Robert travels to a different time period the story changes a little and so does Robert. He begins to know

what to expect and even learns new things about history and himself. The story is sometimes a mystery, like when Robert puzzles over what's going on in Soviet Russia, sometimes adventure, like when Robert joins a band of thieves in 1638 Germany, sometimes romantic, like when Robert meets his first girlfriend Caroline in Australia, and sometimes it is historical, like when Robert pieces together his surroundings in a new time and the reader learns about what life was like back then.

The saddest part is when Robert must leave his girlfriend Caroline in another time. The most exciting part is when Robert joins the army in 1638—a war he has only read about in history text-

books. Personally, I don't have a favorite part—I enjoyed the entire thing! Time travel has always interested me and I found it entertaining when Robert had to explain things like calculators to people who lived in the eighteenth century! At times I was annoyed at the mistakes Robert made; like mentioning television to someone before it had even been invented, but when I thought hard about it, I realized I would make the same mistakes too! How would you manage being zapped in time with no idea of where you would be next or more importantly, when you would be next?!

I would highly recommend this great book to anyone aged ten and up or for any strong reader. ♦

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦



Sue Cairnie, 9, Keremeas, British Columbia, Canada

Ellen's Sixth-Grade Family

by Chappell Sargent

illustrated by Paula Kaufman



Chappell Sargent, 12
Charlestown, Massachusetts



Paula Kaufman, 13
Charleston, West Virginia

THE SIXTH GRADE HAD finally come to a close. Actually, the year hadn't been too long or hard. The last day dragged by so slowly. Yet here it was, the end of the year, and it seemed it had all passed by in the wink of an eye. Ellen went to the end-of-the-year pool party that afternoon. The whole class was there. Twelve of the twenty-seven were leaving for other junior high schools. Ellen was staying, since she'd only been accepted to one school and she didn't really like it. That night she lay in bed thinking about all the people who would be gone next year, and about those staying. Most of the girls leaving had been mean to her and all year she'd been happy that they wouldn't be returning in the fall. But now she would only remember all the nice things they'd done, the funny things they'd said, and how they had changed since she met them all six years ago. Now they really felt like her family, and any past resentment drifted away. She would never see almost half of her family again. Ellen rubbed her eyes to stop the tears, but her breath was already coming up shorter so she knew she wouldn't be able to resist the crying fit in store for her. Trying to console herself, she thought of all the people staying. Most of them were her friends, but could she really call them that anymore? They had changed so much this year; they became interested in boys and makeovers and pop singers, and Laura had started dating. Ellen recalled that in fifth grade she had always felt a little un-



Ellen knew her mother understood so she made no effort to speak

comfortable because she and her friends were such geeks. She had thought that it was they who were keeping her from becoming cool. Yet now, she was a little girl playing with toy horses, and they were out at the mall. Now she started to cry. Whimpers and snuffles and tears grew into uncontrollable wailing until her mother came in and threw her arms around her. Ellen knew her mother understood so she made no effort to speak. She just cried and cried in her mother's embrace till her tears would come no more. And she slept.

At about one in the morning, she re-awoke. Her thoughts were muddled now. She had dreamed of the first day in seventh grade. The dream began in her home. Ellen watched herself eat, dress, and walk out the door. She got on the bus, the only girl left from her grade, and rode to school. When she entered her classroom, the teacher yelled at her for being late. Her friends, Laura and Cordy, were talking about all the boys they went out with over the summer. They didn't even acknowledge her presence. She ran to her old sixth-

grade classroom. No one was there. There were just rows and rows of empty desks. She saw her own from when she'd sat in it last year. The seventh-grade teacher strode in and yelled to her to get back in her classroom. Then she woke up.

Trying to figure the dream out, she finally concluded that it was best to forget it and begin her summer. She picked up a book to read until it was lights out. She turned on the lamp and saw which book she had picked out. It was her class yearbook.

Each page of pictures brought another memory to her head. Her first day of school, her first bus ride, her first sleepover. Her friends had been there for each of these. They wouldn't desert her because they were changing and she wasn't, Ellen realized. She could always hang out with them. Half of her thoughts were released now, but she still worried about all those people leaving. Would she ever see them again? she wondered. With a sigh she turned off the lamp and went back to sleep.

Her father woke her up late in the morning and handed her a list of chores. "This is stuff to do so we can go to the Cape today," he said. Ellen looked it over. "Mostly packing," he said, "and if you get it done quick maybe you can invite a friend down with us." Ellen's eyes lit up. She could invite someone who was leaving for a different school! That way it wouldn't

feel as difficult not seeing her in seventh grade. Ellen hurried through the packing and called Lizzie. She was the nicest of the girls leaving. An answering machine clicked on. Ellen hung up and tried Sarah. She had other plans. Ellen called every girl leaving that she wouldn't mind having a sleepover with, and none of them could come. She decided then that what she'd feared had come true. Those girls had all moved on and were trying to forget middle school. And so must she.

Ellen decided that the only way to move out of the past was to focus on the future. Next year Laura and Cordy would be there, so she had to think about her friendship with them. She called up Cordy. "Hi, this is Ellen. Um . . . we're going to the Cape this weekend. Wanna come?" Cordy accepted.

The weekend was fantastic. She played games with Cordy that she had been longing to play all year, like tag and hide-and-seek, games that Laura had deemed "uncool." And on their way back home, they passed a big green van. Inside sat Ann and Abbie, two of the girls Ellen was sure she would never see again. They waved, and she waved back. There was no sting of sadness. She had simply passed by two old friends. They had moved on and she had moved on. Her family was not ripped in half and separated. She had her family always with her, in her mind, in her yearbook, and in her heart. ❖

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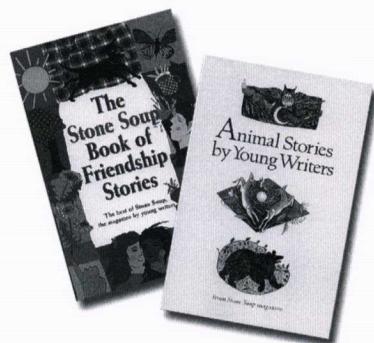
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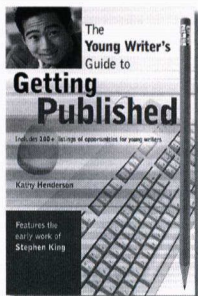
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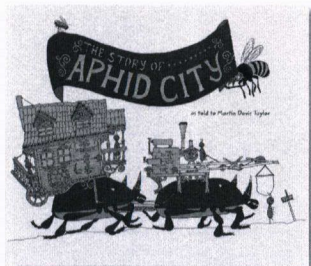
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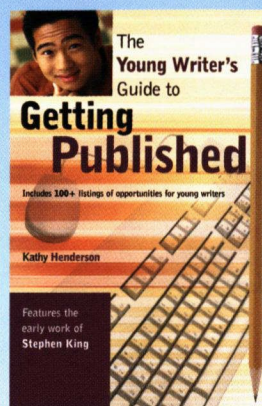
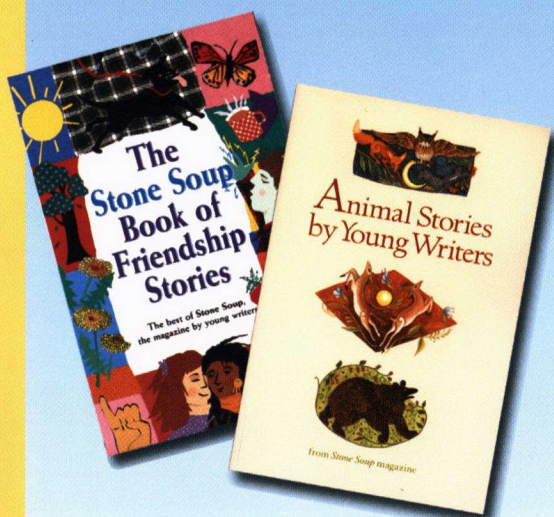
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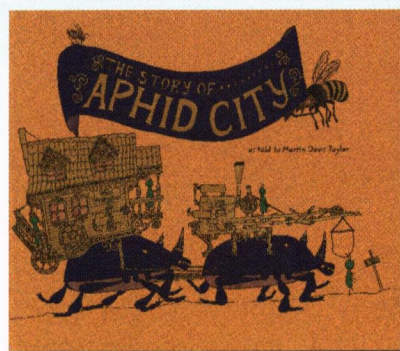


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