

# Stone Soup

the magazine by young writers and artists



"Bird World," by Farrah Noor Bhandari Mithila, age 10, Bangladesh

## NUTCRACKER DREAMS

Maria never gives up on her dream of dancing in the Christmas ballet

## WOODPECKER'S WAY

Braden discovers a hidden world ruled by a woodpecker-rabbit

*Also:* Illustrations by Holly Wist, Joe Lobosco and Alina Eydel

A trapper has a change of heart when he sees a baby lynx

A review of a book about the Civil War

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2002

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the magazine by young writers and artists

Volume 31, Number 2  
November/December 2002

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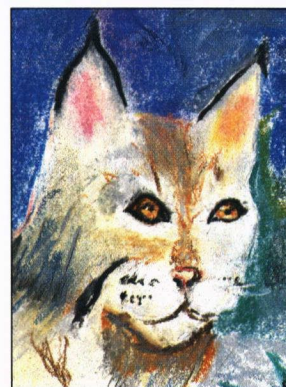
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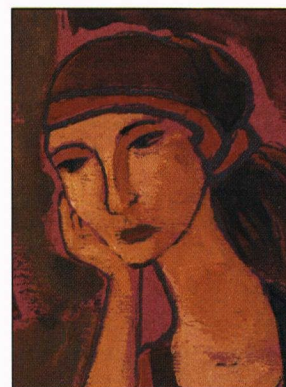
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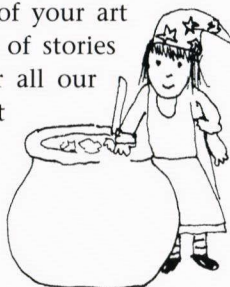
Welcome to all our readers, old and new! We've had the pleasure of publishing *Stone Soup* for over 29 years. It is our belief that, by presenting rich, heartfelt work by young people the world over, we can stir the imaginations of our readers and inspire young writers and artists to create.



## 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. (For more detailed guidelines, visit [www.stonesoup.com](http://www.stonesoup.com).)



Jessie Moore, 12

**Cover:** "Bird World" 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

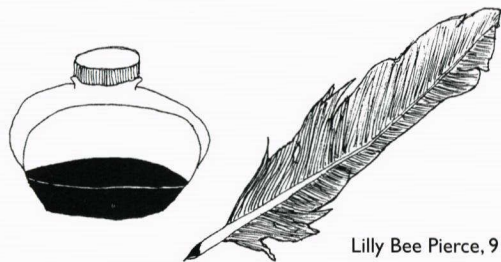
Laurie Gabriel  
Subscription Director

Stephen Pollard  
Production

Barbara Harker  
Administrative Assistant

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## The Mailbox

I know it's a little belated, but I'd like to compliment Shelley Noel McFatter for her story "Roscoe" [November/December 2001] and Marley Powell for his poem "Sounds" [January/February 2002]. "Roscoe" came alive with the color and emotions Shelley put into it. "Sounds" had a wonderful, catching beat that pulled you in. Thanks to these writers for two fresh, extraordinary pieces!

Anna Hagen, 12  
Lake Oswego, Oregon

*Shelley's new story appears on page 19.*

I was going through *Stone Soup* when I saw "Guts and a Few Strokes" [March/April 2002]. I'm not really someone that likes swimming races, but when I started to read "Guts and a Few Strokes," I couldn't put it down! I got mad and very frustrated just like Sophia. I got mad when the coach only chose boys for the swim team. Boys and girls are the same. They can do the same things and this story showed that. This story told all kids that you can do anything if you just try it! This piece shows so many different points of view. It really made me want to read on and on. When I finished the piece, I thought, I can't wait for another story like this to come out!

Allison Schlau, 11  
West Chester, Ohio

I was reading *Stone Soup* when I flipped to the story "With Liberty and Justice for Some" [January/February 2002] with the camp and goodbyes. I was anxious to hear the ending, and once I started I couldn't put it down. The author showed me how the times were sore during World War II. I think that people are equal and deserve justice and liberty without a war. I can see that the author really tried to make the readers jolt into the story when she bounded out of bed. With opening arms she told me a story that was different from any story I had ever heard before!

Leah Hartman, 11  
Cincinnati, Ohio

I really love all of the stories you put in your magazine. I've read a decent amount of them to say they are really good. Many of them are very spectacular. Some stories are emotional, funny, serious, sad, and even inspirational. I also believe that some drawings are very beautiful and match the story perfectly. One thing I appreciate is that you came up with this great magazine that respects kids' writing and artistry. I admire the fact that you don't just put in well-written stories, but stories that are actually interesting. You respect kids for who they are and their thoughts and dreams. You make kids look intelligent, when many kids really are. You help the world see that we can be great writers/artists. I especially like the story about the wild, beautiful, untamed African horse that was taken in captivity ["Colors of a Champion," May/June 2001]. I especially remembered that one because it was a beautiful story. And it had a strong story line. I really loved the author's use of description to tell how this horse must have felt about leaving her family to become a race horse.

Ariana Spence, 11  
Brooklyn, New York

*You can read all the stories mentioned in The Mailbox on our Web site: [www.stonesoup.com](http://www.stonesoup.com).*

**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 ran out on stage. All I could think about was dancing



# Nutcracker Dreams

by Rachel Hellwig

illustrated by the author

**M**Y HOLIDAY WISH was to dance in the *Nutcracker*. I was eleven years old and a student of Charlotte Kingston Ballet School. My teacher, Mrs. Brooke, had told me that the director from the local ballet company was going to select several children from our class to perform minor roles in the holiday ballet. Everyone guessed that star students Cathleen Patterson and Ana White would be chosen. Some said other possible picks might be Isabella Hope, Abby Watkins and Tasha Shilling. But no one knew for sure. Inwardly I wanted it to be me, Maria Keller. The company was coming in four weeks to look at the class. So, I carefully practiced every day at home and twice a week at class. I also read stories about famous ballerinas. Every day I thought about Clara and her nutcracker. Every night I listened to music from the *Nutcracker*. It seemed like a blink of an eye before the day to audition arrived.

**I** CARRIED MY ballet slippers downstairs. I stopped to inhale the scent of baking sugar cookies and gingerbread that filled the house. I slipped on my coat and got in the family car. My mom drove me there. It took us fifteen minutes to reach the academy.

"Good luck, sweetie!" Mom told me as she dropped me off.

I smiled, but I was nervous. Inside the school everyone



Rachel Hellwig, 13  
Collierville, Tennessee

was warming up. I did the same.

A few minutes later, my friend, Tara Frost, came up to me. "This is going to be pretty exciting!" she said enthusiastically. I nodded.

The company director came in and watched us dance. I danced the best I could. But, I could see the company had their eyes on other girls. Ana and Cathleen were asked to dance again by themselves. So were Tara and Tasha. Finally, it came time to announce who would dance in the *Nutcracker*. The company first announced who would get the parts of the children at the Christmas party in the first scene. Abby, Tara, Isabella and Tasha were chosen. Tara and I hit high fives when we heard this news. Next, Sara Linden, Marian Fisher, Penelope Smith and Christine Lu were selected to play little clowns in a scene in the Kingdom of Sweets. Then, the last roles were announced. Tara looked anxiously at me. I nervously glanced back at her.

"Ana White, Josie Tillman, Bethany King, and Cathleen Paterson have been selected to dance as lambs in the dance of the flutes. Megan Patterson will be an understudy. All of these girls need to be at the Crossroads Ballet Studio at five PM on Monday. Thank you everyone," said the company director.

My heart sank; I would not be in the *Nutcracker* after all. My Christmas dream vanished. "It wasn't supposed to happen this way," I mumbled to myself as I unlaced my ballet slippers.

Tara came over to me. "Maria, you

were an inch away from being picked. But, I think Isabella might have done a little better than you on some moves," she said.

I nodded.

"Maybe next year," she said hopefully.

"Maybe next year," I whispered. But I was doubtful. I got up to leave. I put on my coat. As I left I turned around to stare at the girls who were chosen. They were laughing and talking happily to each other. I will not be jealous of them, I promised myself as I left the building. Mom came and picked me up. I told her everything in the car as we drove home.

"I'm sorry, Maria, I wish you would have gotten a role. I know how much you wanted one. But just keep on practicing and do not give up. You will get to dance in a ballet someday," she said, trying to comfort me.

That night at dinner, my fifteen-year-old sister Mallory suggested that, even though I was not going to be in the *Nutcracker*, I could go watch a few rehearsals just to see what they were like. I thought it was a good idea. Mom called Mrs. Brooke later that evening to see if it would be OK and she said yes. Dad agreed to drive me there. I was a little excited about seeing them, but I would have been more excited if I was going to be in them.

That night, I lay in bed re-reading a book about Sara-Anne Medova. She was a famous ballerina who came from my hometown. The last chapter was called "Try, Try Again." It talked about how



Sara-Anne became famous. When I finished it I realized that I could get upset over not getting a role. If I tried again and again and did not give up, I would eventually get a part in a ballet.

On Monday I sat in on the first rehearsal of the *Nutcracker*. All of the students from my class did well. But a young nineteen-year-old ballerina caught my eye. She was playing the part of Clara. She moved with such grace and elegance that you would think she was lighter than air. At the end of the rehearsal I approached her. "You dance beautifully," I said.

"Thank you," she replied kindly. Then she asked, "Who are you, young lady?"

"I am Maria Keller," I replied.

"I am Laurie Lewis," she said. There was a pause, then she said, "I noticed that you did not dance with the rest of us."

"Yes, I just came to watch. Some girls from my ballet class were chosen to be in the *Nutcracker*, but I was not one of them," I replied.

"Oh, I see. The same thing happened to me when I was young. I was never chosen to dance in anything. But, I began to practice more and more and my dancing got better. A few months ago I auditioned for the Crossroads Ballet Company and was chosen. The director liked me so much he gave me the role of Clara, even though I am very new," she said.

I was surprised. This ballerina did not give up and I will not either, I thought to myself.

"Just keep on trying and you will make it," she encouraged me.

"Thank you, I will," I said enthusiastically.

"Well, I better go now, I have a busy schedule, but I hope to see you again," she said.

"Goodbye, Miss Lewis!" I said as I put on my coat. I stepped outside. It was cold; snowflakes were beginning to fall. I caught one on my tongue. Dad pulled up in the car. I got in. The radio was playing Christmas music. As we drove home the streetlights made the thick blanket of snow on the ground glow orange.

Days seemed to fly by until the next rehearsal. I enjoyed going to them. Even though I did not dance, the dancers somehow made me feel like I was. I always looked forward to seeing Laurie Lewis. She always had something interesting to say about ballet.

On December 14 (four days before opening night) there was a dress rehearsal. All the ballerinas looked so beautiful in their costumes. Tara said it was magical. When I left that night I was a little sad. This was the last rehearsal I was going to. It would be a long time before I saw Laurie Lewis and the other ballerinas. Or so I thought.

On the very next afternoon, I got an urgent phone call from Mrs. Brooke. "Maria, the ballet company needs your help. Cathleen Patterson got sick. So did her sister Megan, who was the understudy. Their doctor said Megan will probably be well in time for the second



"Miss Lewis, were you the ballerina who recommended me to the company director?"

performance of the *Nutcracker* and Cathleen will probably be well in time for the third performance. But the company does not have anyone to dance Cathleen's part on opening night. A young ballerina from the company recommended you for the role. The director says that he would like you down at

the studio today if you can manage."

I could not believe it. I ran to ask Mom. She said she would take me to the studio as soon as I was needed. I got back on the phone. "I will be at the studio whenever the company needs me," I said.

"Great, the company would like you



there by four-thirty," said Mrs. Brooke.

"OK, I will be there. Thank you Mrs. Brooke," I said, then set down the phone.

Mom drove me over right away. "Have fun, Maria!" she called out as I got out of the car.

"I will!" I replied excitedly. Inside, I was shown the routine I was to dance. I practiced it for an hour, then I went home. I practiced a lot the next day. I had to learn my dance quickly because the following day was opening night.

All the dancers were told to arrive at five PM so there would be plenty of time to get ready. Dad dropped me off and said that he, Mom and Mallory would be back at seven to watch the performance. Backstage everyone was getting into costume and warming up. As I looked around at the dancers I saw Laurie Lewis. She was putting on her stage makeup. I walked up to her.

"Miss Lewis, were you the ballerina who recommended me to the company director?" I asked.

She smiled. "Yes, I was," she replied.

"Thank you so very much," I said with a smile.

The director called me. "Maria Keller, it is time to get dressed."

My costume had white pants, a long-sleeved shirt, and a hood with floppy ears made out of fabric that looked like lamb's wool. There was also a flower necklace that went with it. I put on my costume. Then Tara and I helped each other put on our makeup. Tara was wearing an old-fashioned-style orange

dress with a frilly slip underneath. Her hair had been curled in ringlets and tied with a black ribbon.

"This is going to be exciting," she exclaimed.

"Curtain goes up in fifteen minutes," said the director. I went to put on my ballet slippers. When I picked them up I found a little silver necklace with a ballerina charm tied to the ribbons. There was a little note tied to it that said,

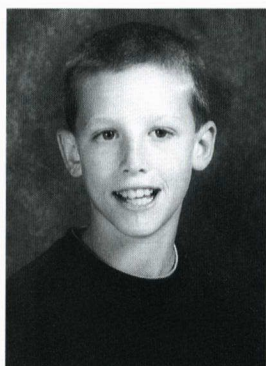
May all your *Nutcracker* dreams come true.  
Love, Mom, Dad and Mallory

I smiled and put it on under my flower necklace. I ran back to the wings. Everyone was waiting and ready to start. The lights were dimmed, the music started, and the curtain went up. Laurie Lewis danced wonderfully. It was not that long before Tara danced. She and the other girls from my class did a great job. It was about an hour before the dance of the flutes was performed. The ballerinas got their cue and danced out onto the stage. After five minutes the lambs were given their cue. "One, two three, go!" said the director. I could feel my heart pounding with excitement. I ran out on stage. All I could think about was dancing. My holiday wish was coming true! After another five minutes we gracefully ran back to the wings. As I looked back at the stage I smiled. It was everything I hoped it would be.

After the ballet was over, my family and friends asked me how I liked it. I told them, "My *Nutcracker* dreams came true!" ❖

# Treasure Box

by Mark Roberts



Mark Roberts, 11  
Windsor, California

Born in northern forests of  
Australia centuries ago  
And carved from yellow jarrah,  
My wooden treasure box  
Holds secrets of its own.

Felled for ballast on sailing ships,  
It traveled over distant oceans  
And touched exotic shores,  
Seeking the spirit of Africa.

Abandoned on the docks,  
The jarrah became railroad ties,  
Carrying steam engines  
Across the dry,  
Burned colors of a continent.

Polished and alive again  
After four hundred years,  
The box captures within it  
The roar of a startled lion,  
The thundering hooves of wildebeest  
And the long, graceful loping of giraffes.

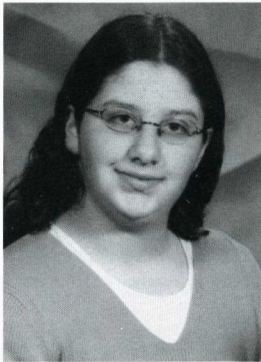


Our secrets are treasured  
Together now  
With the shimmering heat of the plain,  
And warm a space for my own memories  
Still waiting to unfold.

# Creamsicle

by Bonnie Robinson

illustrated by Joe Lobosco



Bonnie Robinson, 11  
Brooklyn, New York



T'S DEAD.

That was twelve-year-old Julian Horowitz's first thought when he spotted the kitten in the white-blanketed woods when he was walking home from school.

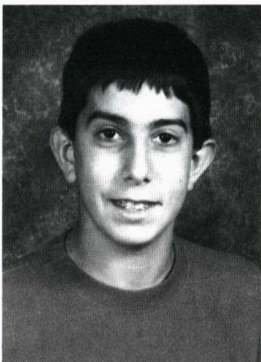
The kitten was vividly orange and bright white colored, reminding Julian of a Creamsicle ice cream bar. It (Julian didn't know whether the kitten was male or female) was partially covered by a sheet of snow, and the kitten wasn't moving, making Julian almost positive the kitten was dead.

Julian slowly reached out his hand to the kitten's fur. What he felt allayed him. The kitten was still breathing, although taking very shallow breaths.

He peered closely at the kitten as he rhythmically petted its fur. He noticed that the kitten was female. She was definitely unconscious.

"Don't worry, kitty, you'll be fine," murmured Julian. He paused, trying to think of a name for the woebegone creature. "Yeah, don't worry, Creamsicle, I'll take care of you."

Julian scooped Creamsicle up and into his coat. Suddenly, Creamsicle shuddered, seeming to regain consciousness for a moment and causing Julian to nearly drop her in surprise. Fortunately, he didn't, and he tucked Creamsicle tighter into his coat. He shivered himself. It was freezing outside. Even though he was layered in a T-shirt, a long-sleeved turtleneck, two thick sweaters, and a big, heavy winter coat, Julian could



Joe Lobosco, 13  
Kinnelon, New Jersey





Julian slowly reached out his hand to the kitten's fur

still feel the cold. He wondered how Creamsicle felt, with only a velvety covering of fur protecting her from the winter chill.

Julian and Creamsicle walked this way for about half an hour, or rather, Julian walked with Creamsicle inside his coat, until they reached Julian's doorstep. Mrs. Horowitz, who had seen her son hunched over something while ambling slowly up the path to the house, threw open the door immediately. When she saw what Julian was holding, her face transformed to the color of milk.

"Julian Horowitz, you drop that . . . that thing this instant!" she shrieked. "That thing is sick with something awful, just look at it closely!"

It was true. Creamsicle was now shivering and throwing herself about violently. All of a sudden, the shivering stopped, and Creamsicle fell limply into Julian's arms. Relief flowed over him as he, once again, noticed that the kitten was still breathing. He thought she regained consciousness for a second.

Julian's mother had obviously detected hints of emotion from her son, for



she again began to speak. "Julian, don't you dare get attached to that kitten," she said, leaning over to have a look at Creamsicle before continuing. "She's going to die soon, don't pretend that you don't know it, and the last thing I need is you weeping and moping because some stupid kitten that you befriended is dead."

"You're wrong," Julian whispered hoarsely. "She's not going to die, She's Not Going To Die, SHE'S NOT GOING TO DIE!" He, too, was shrieking, and he added, "Take her to the veterinarian, you'll see that you're wrong."

"Oh lord, Julian, how could you? You couldn't have known this cat for more than an hour, and you are already purely in love with her!" Mrs. Horowitz began to mutter something about pet lovers in the family. "You know what, since you will not believe me, I will take this kitten, now, to the vet for you. If I can't, maybe the vet can convince you that this animal will die."

Turning deaf ears to his mom, Julian carried Creamsicle into the family's eight-year-old Toyota. Mrs. Horowitz followed him.

Julian had never before been to the local veterinarian's office because his family had never owned a pet. His mom seemed to hate all animals, his dad, though an animal lover like Julian, had never suggested the family get a pet, and Julian's seventeen-year-old brother Justin didn't care one way or the other. So it was a shock for Julian to see his mother zoom across town as if she

knew the way to the local veterinarian's office perfectly, as though she had been to the vet hundreds of times. He wondered when his mom had been to the vet, and why.

Now that he wasn't talking to his mom, Julian began to speak softly to the unconscious Creamsicle.

Creamsicle looked terrible. She had taken on a glazed expression and looked almost frozen. Her breath was coming out in shallow gasps. Her body was not functioning properly. Julian, after looking at her, bit his lip and closed his eyes.

A few minutes later, Mrs. Horowitz pulled to a stop next to the vet's office. She, for some reason, looked worse than Julian felt. She was pale and looked like she was going to begin to cry.

The receptionist led Julian, Mrs. Horowitz, and Creamsicle into the vet's office ahead of the other people waiting.

"Hello, Mrs. Horowitz," said the veterinarian, whose name was Dr. Jakes. "I haven't seen you in about fifteen years. How are Tiger and Buster?"

Who the heck are Tiger and Buster? thought Julian questioningly, and how does this guy know who my mom is?

"So, what brings you here today?" asked Dr. Jakes.

"I found this kitten; she's sick," answered Julian shyly.

Dr. Jakes picked up Creamsicle gingerly and looked at her carefully. After only a few minutes of poking and prodding, Dr. Jakes announced, "This kitten has hypothermia."

Julian didn't hear a reaction from his



mother, so he didn't know if hypothermia was some terrible disease or not. So he asked, "What kind of disease is hypothermia?"

"Well," Dr. Jakes began to explain, "hypothermia isn't really a disease. It's what can happen to a warm-blooded animal if he or she is left out in freezing temperatures for too long without protection." As he was saying this, Dr. Jakes placed Creamsicle in a blanket he had gotten from a cabinet, and put the kitten and the blanket down next to a radiator in the corner of the room, then spoke again.

"Hypothermia can make your body stop functioning the way it should, which is why this kitty looks frozen."

"My mom says Creamsicle won't live. Will she? Can I take her home today?"

"No, she won't die, but you cannot take her home today. She should not be moved. She has to stay in a warm spot until she has recovered completely. Oh, and no charge for this appointment. I don't like to charge people kind enough to foster strays."

Once Dr. Jakes had finished his sentence, Mrs. Horowitz pulled her son out of the office and into the car. Once in the car, she began to cry.

Before Julian could ask, "Mom, what's wrong?" Mrs. Horowitz spoke between sobs.

"Julian, we are not keeping that kitten." With that sentence, Julian realized that, for some reason, keeping Creamsicle was an immediate "no" to his mom.

"Mom," asked Julian, trying to keep his anger out of his voice, "Why don't you want Creamsicle?"

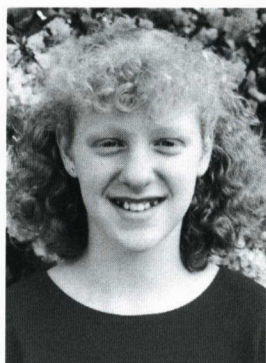
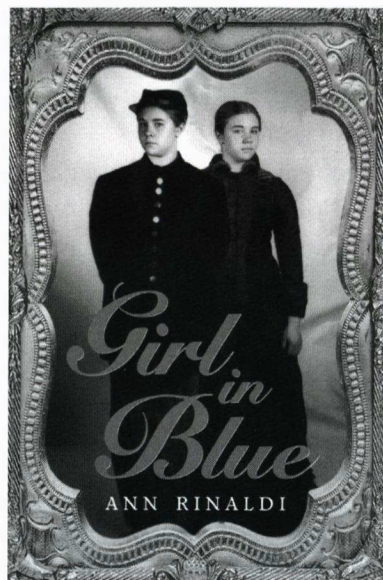
"Because . . . because . . ." suddenly her sentence broke off, and she didn't speak again for a few minutes. When she did, her voice was filled with agony. "Julian, did you know I once had pets? Lots of them?" As Julian shook his head, she continued. "I've had Buster, Tiger, Tabby, Shadow, Prancer, Andrew, Samantha, and White Paw. Buster, Shadow, Andrew and Samantha were dogs, and the others, cats. I loved them all tremendously, and none of them lived past seven. I haven't been attached to an animal for thirteen years, since Buster died. Bu- . . ."

"But Mom," protested Julian, interrupting, "it won't be that way with Creamsicle."

"Let me finish, Julian. But my experience with each animal was wonderful. And . . . and I don't want you to be deprived of that." Mrs. Horowitz heaved a sigh and sniffled. "Sooo, I'm going to let you keep that kitten." She smiled wistfully. "I hope she lives for a really long time." ❖

# Book Review

by Sarah Bollenbach



Sarah Bollenbach, 13  
Coatesville, Pennsylvania

*Girl in Blue* by Ann Rinaldi; Scholastic Press: New York, 2001; \$15.95

**G**IRL IN BLUE was one of the most fascinating and suspenseful books I have ever read. I could hardly put it down!

*Girl in Blue* is a story about a sixteen-year-old girl, named Sarah Louisa Wheelock, who disguises herself as a teenage boy and runs away to serve in the Union army during the American Civil War.

Ann Rinaldi captivates you with her story and her characters. Although there are no illustrations in the book, I feel there really is no need for them. She paints a vivid picture of each of the characters, in appearance, actions, and personalities. For example, Sarah was described as a sweet, quiet girl, who was always there for anyone who needed her. But she was also described as the one in the family who always supplied them with fresh venison for dinner. She loved hunting in the woods, carrying her father's rifle, which she had named Fanny. Throughout the book, her character traits were displayed through the different experiences and problems she had. When she served in the army, she was brave,



and although it was very difficult to keep disguised who she was, she kept going and pretended to be Private Neddy Compton. She was very gifted in medicine and doctoring. She knew many remedies to cure diseases that even the so-called doctors in the army had not been taught.

Rinaldi described Sarah's experiences in this book so well, and realistically, I felt like I was truly a part of the story. For example, at one point in the book, Sarah crosses the borders, into the Rebel territory. She is stopped and searched, and the suspense in the book was captivating. Sarah was carrying some very important letters to deliver, and if they were discovered, it could mean death for her and many others. When Sarah received word that her father had died, and she was grieving, I felt like I had known him as well and was sad too. My great-grandmother died recently, and that was really sad. She had been a wonderful great-grandmother to me and my three brothers. She would always send us a card with money in it for our birthdays and at Christmas. Whenever she was able, she would come visit us, or come to our plays or piano recitals. In a way, I can relate to Sarah, when she found out her father had died.

There was one character in the book named Rose Greenhow. Sarah was assigned to work as a maid for her, after Sarah had been discovered to be a girl. Mrs. Greenhow was suspected of being a Rebel spy, and Sarah was given the job

to find out whether or not that was true through her duties as her maid. Rose Greenhow was the most stuck-up person I have ever read about! She was always cranky and grumpy, even though her every want and need were catered to immediately. Sarah must have been in an awful position living with her! I know I would hate having to constantly be wondering if anyone knew who I was, or where I was from, like Sarah, and having to watch my back around every street corner.

At one point in the book, Sarah went home to visit her family. She was still disguised as a boy, dressed in the Union Army's uniform. Her mother did not recognize her, but her brother Ben did. She and Ben had always been close. Sarah really struggled with wanting to tell her mother that she wasn't Private Neddy Compton, but that she was her daughter, Sarah Wheelock. I can't imagine being away from my family for more than a year, and then going back home to all the familiar smells, sights, and places, and still not be able to reveal who I really was. Sarah must have felt awful.

This was a wonderful and exciting book. I could read it several times. *Girl in Blue* revealed the hardships of the war in the times of slavery and showed what people had to endure. I came away feeling like I had made a new friend in Sarah Wheelock. I love the Civil War, and this book made it even more exciting. ❖





It was a baby lynx; a perfect miniature of its mother



# Trapped Heart

by Shelley Noel McFatter

illustrated by Holly Wist

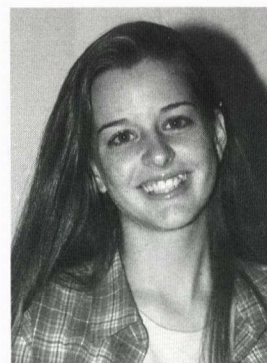
**T**HE ICY AIR CARESSED Jeff's cheek, hissing softly through the gray-brown stubble that decorated his weather-beaten face. His faded leather boots smashed the freshly fallen snow, leaving a heavy imprint on each perfectly formed flake. The bluish glow of morning shone on the dewy leaves of the spruce trees, peppering the ground with glowing rays that danced to and fro.

Jeff smiled as his trapline came into view. A plump snowshoe rabbit was struggling valiantly between the steel teeth, emitting plaintive squeals of distress. Lifting his rifle to his shoulder in one fluid, effortless motion, Jeff pulled the trigger and ended the rabbit's pain forever. The shot echoed hollowly through the surrounding mountains, a mournful cry that pierced the heart of every animal that could hear it.

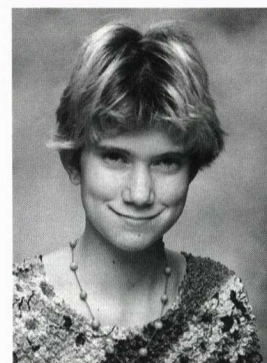
The second trap was untouched, but had a telltale circle of paw prints rimming its rusted structure. Jeff bent over and studied the clearly defined tracks, cursing under his breath. Lynx. A chill scurried up his spine. A lynx was an unmerciful killer, a thief to be reckoned with.

The next trap was sprung, but only a tuft of fur remained between the metal jaws. And another ring of identical prints decorated the surrounding area. Jeff carefully reset the trap, smearing deer fat onto his callused fingers so as not to leave man-scent.

The next one had a bare skeleton attached, with a bloody



Shelley Noel McFatter, 13  
Brandon, Florida



Holly Wist, 13  
Murphysboro, Illinois

trail that writhed away into the bushes. And the next was no better. A half-eaten carcass of a marten lay frozen in the snow, its pelt shredded and the upper half of its body scattered around the site in bloody bits.

Jeff groaned in anguish. That's ten dollars lost already, he thought with a sigh. What am I gonna do? A chilly wind whipped through his hair, burning his eyes until they turned red and began to run. He continued along the trapline doggedly, watching as the damaged pelts materialized before him.

His finger played with the trigger hungrily, eager to kill something, *anything*, to pay for this destruction.

He returned home with a meager allotment of pelts, all worth under two dollars. His cheeks were flushed under the shadow of his growing beard, and his dark eyes glinted with rage. He would catch that lynx. He had to catch that lynx. And when it was caught, he would kill it. Jeff licked his cracked, bleeding lips with anticipation.

Everything was ready. The traps were set and baited, and Jeff had slathered on a layer of lard to mask his scent. The sun, cold and pale, was setting over the mountains like a scoop of vanilla ice cream melting on its cone. The bitter Alaskan wind tossed flakes of fresh snow about in a raging tempest, clouding the air with stinging drops that clung to anything and everything with their sticky tentacles.

Jeff pulled his rifle down from its regal throne on the shelf, cleaning it

gently with a soft chamois rag. People often said that this was his best friend, his companion, the love of his life. And perhaps they were right. An old, hard-hearted hermit that caught animals for a living couldn't possibly care for something of flesh and blood. It seemed only right for him to dote on his steel destroyer, an object that existed only to wound and take away life. But there had always been a hole in their relationship—an emptiness that Jeff could not explain or even try to understand. His rifle was a part of him; but a dead thing of metal could not fill the void that existed deep inside his hardened and seldom-used heart.

But right now the lynx consumed his thoughts. It would be on the prowl tonight, hungry for an easy meal that took little effort to kill. Jeff buttoned up the collar on his weathered, fur-lined jacket and stepped outside. The snow-laden wind slapped his bare face viciously, sending icy tingles down his stiff spine. But nothing could keep him inside tonight.

Darkness settled in on the frozen Alaskan wilderness. The local screech owl began to hoot, its glowing green eyes roving the ground for a mouse or two to satisfy his rumbling stomach. Jeff hid himself in the frosty brush in front of the trapline, wetting his finger to make sure the wind wasn't blowing his lard-covered scent straight down to the traps.

The minutes ticked by. A small mink crept silently out of the brush on the



opposite side and pressed his nose to the ground. The strong, alluring odor of meat soon led him into the mouth of the third trap, which closed with a *SNAP!* around his back leg. Jeff fought off the urge to kill the writhing, squealing animal. He knew that the noise would soon lead the lynx straight to him. All he had to do was wait.

Time crept by like a weary snail. Each minute seemed an hour, each hour seemed a day. A fine dusting of snow had settled over Jeff's immobile form, melting into his coat and sending shivers down his back. He clenched his jaw to stop the chattering of his stained teeth and clung ever tighter to his long-barreled shotgun. The mink screamed and twisted against the cruel steel teeth of the trap, but only succeeded in tearing his flesh even more. A crimson trickle of blood pooled under the metal vise, its warm scent reverberating in the cold night.

A twig snapped. Jeff cocked his rifle and tucked it into his shoulder, his fingers trembling with excitement. Two green, almond-shaped eyes glittered from behind a spruce tree, cautiously roving the area. Jeff held his breath. There was his enemy, the unmerciful thief.

The sleek, cat-like creature stepped into the clearing, her pointed, black-tipped ears twitching nervously. Jeff found a bead, aiming for her snowy breast. The lynx bent her regal head and sniffed the mink, her ivory teeth shimmering in the moonlight. Jeff placed his

finger on the trigger and pulled.

There was an ominous *CLICK* as the gun misfired. The lynx vanished.

Jeff cursed as he never had before, throwing the rifle from him like a dirty rag. It landed with a soft *thunk* in a snowdrift; a fair-weather friend rejected in a moment of despair. Jeff walked silently home.

The sun was well into its zenith when he awoke the next day, puffy-eyed and angry at the world. He guzzled down at least three cups of cold, black coffee and puffed a few cigarettes—neither of which seemed to help his spirits.

Lying back down on his lumpy mattress, he thought about his predicament.

There were already enough pelts in the storage building to get him through another year—if he stretched it. But there would be no fancy new traps to use next season, and the beautiful pair of boots he longed for would simply remain a dream. And then there was his old and leaky roof—it wouldn't get the shingles it needed either. The list went on and on.

Jeff closed his eyes with a sigh. There's only one way to get what you want, he admitted to himself. Kill the lynx.

Early that evening, he unearthed his frozen rifle and filled it with fresh powder and balls, shooting a few quick rounds to make sure it still worked.

The air was crisp and clear, contrasting greatly with the stormy weather the night before. Jeff stopped a moment to

drink in the sweet scent, smiling as a refreshingly cool breeze kissed his cheek. But the moment couldn't last forever. He continued on his way, rifle clenched tightly in one hand, cup of coffee in the other. He approached the trapline from a different angle this time, down by the stream where the iced-over reeds would hide him from view. Nestled down in a prickly bed of grass, he sipped his cold coffee slowly. It would have to keep him awake tonight; his heavy eyelids were already beginning to droop. The sun was nearly down now and the moon had started to rise, a pale globe of crystal that twinkled and shimmered with its stolen rays of light.

An hour passed. The night shed her cloak of darkness on the frozen mountainside, wrapping it tightly in her dark arms until the only light that remained was the cold twinkling of the stars and moon. Jeff yawned softly, feeling the pain from lack of sleep in every inch of his body.

Another hour crept by. The coffee was nearly gone, and Jeff knew that if something didn't happen soon, he was going to fall asleep. A large marten leaped gracefully out of a spruce tree, attracted by the delicious odor of cooling blood. He paused to sniff the chilly air, his luscious tail ramrod-straight behind his sleek, rust-colored body. Jeff held his breath. The lynx would most certainly kill for a meal of this beautiful creature; if it was caught.

The marten approached the bait warily, saliva dripping from his eager jaws.

He must have sensed some danger, however, for he simply circled it, staying a safe distance away and keeping one yellow eye on the surrounding shrubs. Jeff's hand tightened on the gun. The urge to simply shoot the marten was overwhelming. The gorgeous pelt would bring in at least ten dollars, enough for those boots . . . He trembled as the desire to end the creature's life consumed him. Kill, kill, KILL! it whispered seductively. KILL IT! You can kill the lynx too. You can kill anything. You'll be happy and have everything you want. Kill!!

His hands were pulling the gun to his shoulder, his finger was unlocking the safety catch. Kill, kill, KILL! His eye found a bead on the marten's chest. KILL!!! As his finger was wrapping itself around the trigger, the marten leaped for the bait. The steel jaws of the trap leaped out of the snow and clamped tightly about his front paw with a sickening CRUNCH. The marten yelped in pain and tried desperately to free himself; but his struggles were to no avail.

Jeff released the gun and drew a shaky breath, wiping the glaze of sweat from his forehead with a clammy hand. What's wrong with me?! he asked himself angrily. Why am I so possessed with this "kill" thing? He gulped down the last bit of his coffee and shifted position. Remember, you're here to kill the lynx, he reminded himself sternly. Once the lynx is dead and mounted on the wall everything will be all right. He nodded as if to convince himself of the fact and





A large marten leaped gracefully out of a spruce tree

sighed. It won't be long now . . .

The night was silent. The marten had settled down to gnaw at his bleeding appendage, hoping to extricate it before his fate was decided by a pistol or another animal's teeth. Jeff lay half-asleep in the reeds, his eyes weighted with the stubborn lead called weariness that

threatened to close them for the rest of the night.

A dark, shadowy form crouched low in the brush that dotted the ridgetop, surveying the land below it with slitted yellow eyes. Nothing stirred.

It slunk down the hill cautiously, making scarcely a noise as its feet lightly



kissed the ground. Jeff sat bolt upright when he saw the dusky figure inching toward the defenseless marten, moonlight shining off its thick, speckled fur.

The lynx licked her jaws hungrily, aching for the taste of warm blood. Her luminous, amber-flecked eyes glittered as they hit a ray of starlight, sending a chill down Jeff's spine.

There she is, the voice hissed. You must kill her! He tucked the rifle's butt into his shoulder and slid back the safety. Kill! KILL! *KILL!!* He cocked the gun with his thumb and wrapped a finger around the trigger. Kill!! KILL!!! *KILL!!!* The voices screamed inside of him, demanding, possessing. But something deep down in his heart was quietly saying that killing the lynx wouldn't make everything right. There would still be that hole—that emptiness that neither killing nor his gun could fill. Kill the lynx. You must kill the lynx. Kill now, before it's too late!! He shook his head, trying to resist the voices. Kill, kill, *KILL!* His head spun. Kill *now!* Kill, KILL, *KILL!!!* His finger tightened on the trigger, he gave in to the voices. He took a perfect bead on the crouching shadow and then . . .

"Mew!"

The lynx turned from the marten with a growl. A tiny kitten, not even a month old, stumbled out of the bushes, crying plaintively for his mother. Jeff froze. It was a baby lynx; a perfect miniature of its mother, complete with

the lightly speckled fur and black-tipped ears. The adult quickly scooped up her offspring, glancing around to make sure no one had seen the vulnerable fur ball.

Kill them both! They'll bring lots of money. Kill, kill, KILL, *KILL!!!!* Jeff let the rifle slip out of his hands and fall to the ground with a clatter. No; I can't do it! he said to himself, watching the innocent kitten as he was carried off to their den. Not a mother—not a baby! He covered his craggy face with both hands and sighed. I'm done for. My trapline's just as good as ruined now. Oh, God, what am I gonna do?

The kitten danced before his eyes, a peaceful picture of love and happiness. He managed to smile at the vision, imagining how warm and soft that spotted downy fur was . . . He stopped. The ever-present hole—the emptiness that seemed a part of him—had faded. It wasn't quite as painful, not quite as piercing, as it had been for many, many years.

You have loved, a tiny voice whispered. You have shown compassion and mercy. Your heart is filled with love. He took a deep breath and felt the crisp air rush through him as never before. I have loved, he said to himself. *Me. I have loved.* He lifted his head slowly and stared up at the sky. The stars winked back at him, glittering jewels of hope studding a beautiful black tapestry.

Jeff smiled.





# Of Basketball and the Valley of the Stoops

by Lia Regal

illustrated by Alina Eydel

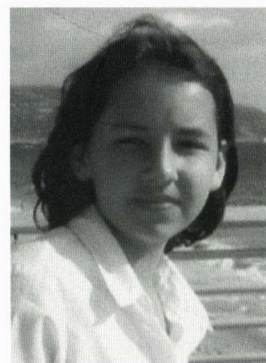
**I** SPENT THE FIRST twelve years of my life in Brooklyn, New York, in the area below Park Slope. It was a nice neighborhood, with the brownstone houses lining the streets, dotting the sloping hills. Trees grew abundantly along the sidewalks, in tiny patches of grass in front of each house. It was a happy suburban neighborhood where children laughed and sang, playing basketball in the school playgrounds. Momma (fondly) called it the Valley of the Stoops, because everywhere you went on the wide, slanting streets you would find people lounging on the stoops (our name for the steps in front of a building), people of every age and color; laughing, joking, selling old knickknacks. Dad (not so fondly) called it the Cage because to him that's exactly what Brooklyn was. He hated the neighborhood, the houses, he may even have hated us, his family. Dad hated anything that tied him down.

Everyone knew everybody else; my family was part of a laughing, caring community in the large Brooklyn neighborhood.

**"K**AILA!" MELISSA CALLED. "Kaila, they just put the list up."

I screeched to a halt in front of the door to my Spanish class. I had been running; the bell was about to ring. "Really?" I said excitedly. "Did you see it yet?"

AUTHOR:  
Lia Regal, 12  
New York, New York



Alina Eydel, 12  
Laguna Hills, California

Melissa, my best friend since kindergarten, shook her head, eyes sparkling in excitement. "No, but Denise saw it."

"Did she make it?" I asked. The three of us had been waiting for the list to be put up ever since we'd tried out for the girls' basketball team.

Melissa shrugged. "I dunno, but she looked angry. I bet she didn't."

The bell rang. Melissa started to run to the school bulletin board. "I can't wait all through Spanish to find out," she told me as we ran.

The list was there, with ten names typed on it, showing the names of the new girls' basketball team. I scanned it and found my name, the sixth on the list. "Yesss!" I cried, pumping my fist in the air.

Melissa smiled politely. "Good for you!" she said. Her name wasn't there.

THE FIRST GAME was held only a week afterward, but we were a good enough team. We were playing against Bay Ridge Middle School, who had won the last three championships according to Coach.

The game started out fine. Sarah, an eighth-grader, scored three points and got a couple of steals. We were ahead by seven points by the end of the first half. In the second half we started to slip. I scored once and put us ahead by nine points in the beginning, but Bay Ridge tightened their defense and managed to cut our lead to two points. Coach called time-out with a minute and sixteen seconds to go. She gave us a pep-talk and

switched a few players. I was still in the game. We scored twice more, but Bay Ridge cut the lead to a single point and scored with 8.3 seconds to the end of the game. I took the ball and passed it to Sarah, who shot a long three-pointer. The buzzer sounded as the ball hit the rim and bounced off. Bay Ridge had won.

MOMMA SAT at the kitchen table, eyes snapping, head bent over the potatoes she was skinning. I stood uncertainly in the doorway, the rain from my umbrella dripping onto the floor. The house was warm and unusually quiet; my younger brother, Louis, was seven and ordinarily made a lot of noise. And Momma had been fighting with Dad an awful lot lately, so the noise level in our house had increased.

"Didya win your basketball game?" Momma raised her head and looked at me.

I shook my head. "No, they beat us."

"By how much?"

"A point." I put away my umbrella and raincoat, coming to sit next to Momma. I picked up a potato and a knife and started to scrape away the skin. "Momma, where is everyone? It's so quiet."

Momma looked up sharply. "Louis is up in his room," she said. The cold November rain pattered in rhythm on the roof and windows. It was late, maybe seven or so in the evening. Dad should have been home an hour ago. I wondered where he was, but I didn't





I stood uncertainly in the doorway, the rain from my umbrella dripping onto the floor

dare ask Momma.

She cleared her throat to fill the silence. "Rain hasn't let up," she ob-

served. I nodded, finishing the last potato.

"Need any more help?" I asked



Momma.

"No, go on upstairs. Do your homework or something."

I went upstairs, but I didn't go to my room. "Louis?" I said, poking my head into his room. He was sitting on the floor, quietly filling in a worksheet. He looked up at me.

"Did Momma stop crying?"

I was surprised. "She was crying?" I asked.

"Yeah, when Daddy came home. He made her cry. He yelled at her and told me to go to my room and get out of his way."

"Dad came home?"

Louis nodded, returning to his worksheet. I went downstairs.

"Momma? Louis says Dad came home before. Where is he?"

Her head whipped around, eyes flashing. "Kaila, if I knew I would have told you when you came home. I don't know where your father's got himself to, but when he comes home . . . !" She sucked in her breath and made a violent gesture with her fist. I gave a small smile, knowing Momma had never and would never hurt a soul in her life, and went to my room.

**M**Y LIFE AT HOME did not improve over the next month or so. In fact, the only high point in my life at all became basketball. Even when Momma and Dad yelled until three in the morning, it made me feel better when I did well in practice the next day. When Coach told me I could start the game

against Sunset Park in two days, it didn't matter that Dad hadn't come home at all the night before. I put my soul into the practices and games. Basketball set me free.

And then things went from bad to worse. Dad didn't come home one night, and the next night he was still gone. Momma didn't mention it at all. She went right on with her life as though nothing was wrong. For a week this went on, then for another week. Dad didn't come home.

The night he came back was the night Momma knew we had to leave. Louis and I were at the table, doing our homework while Momma paid bills. The rain pounded on the windows, and the light from the kitchen lamp gave the house a warm, cozy feeling. We didn't expect him to come back; Momma acted as though he'd never existed.

The door opened and he walked in, swaying in the doorway, soaking wet. His eyes were bloodshot, his words slurred. He staggered toward Momma. "Liza . . ." he said, looking at her with squinted eyes as though he couldn't see her.

Momma stood next to the table, back rigid, eyes turning to ice. She sent Louis and me to our rooms. We stayed at the top of the staircase, wide-eyed and scared. Pots clanged, Dad roared over Momma's voice. Then he walked out the door and was gone.

**A**ND SO, after our team had fought our way through all eight games



and had made it to the play-offs (we were second in the league), it didn't really come as a surprise when Momma spoke of divorce. "I know you and Louis have heard the fighting," she told me as we made dinner one day in mid-December. "So I'm divorcing your father. It's up to you who you want to live with." I took her hand.

"Momma, I'm staying with you."

DAD HAD CLAIM to the house; it was his, after all, he had bought it. And so, as the rest of the world looked forward to the holidays and a break from school, Louis and I began to look forward to when we could move and leave Brooklyn behind.

For I had begun to hate Brooklyn and our neighborhood. For the first time I understood why Dad called it the Cage. The people knew everyone else's business, the society was too close-knit. The kids at school found out about my parents' divorce and pestered Louis and me about it. "Your parents are really getting divorced?" they asked. "Who are you going to live with?" Some tormented us with, "Don't your parents love you? Each other?" I ignored them, playing basketball for all I was worth, hoping every day that Momma would find a house so we could move away and I could start over.

SHE DID FIND a house. It was a rickety old farmhouse with a barn. The house was small and falling apart, the peeling paint a faded yellow. The inside

was white, with windows facing the ocean. The previous occupants had left furniture and a small wooden rowboat that I promptly decided to fix up. Momma, Louis, and I moved there during Christmas break. Dad could have the brownstone. I doubted he would stay long in Brooklyn anyway, now that we weren't there to tie him down.

I didn't give up basketball. My new school has a team, and I've joined. There are more schools in their league than there were in our league in Brooklyn, so there are still a few more games in the regular season. Our team is good, and we hope to make it to the play-offs.

Coach sent me a letter, telling me that they had won the championship for the first time in eight years. Everyone on the team added a little message to me, wishing me luck and telling me to keep playing basketball.

Momma and I have fixed up the inside of our new house, painting the walls in cheerful blues and greens, carpeting the floors with soft rugs. Louis is sanding the old furniture the previous occupants left for us. Come spring, we'll paint the outside of the house.

It was hard to leave Brooklyn and my Valley of the Stoops, hard to leave Melissa and the basketball team behind. Even though the kids had teased me about the divorce, a part of me still didn't want to leave. But for now, I have my family, the ocean, a boat, and basketball, and that's the way it is. ❖





Braden was hoping desperately that either the snow or the woodpecker-rabbit would stop soon



# Woodpecker's Way

by Braden M. McDonald

illustrated by Max Strebel

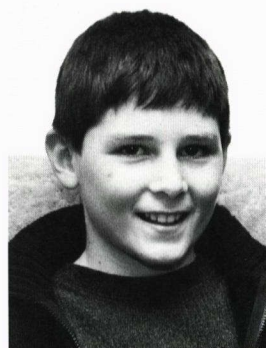
## CHAPTER ONE: HOLIDAY CHARACTER

**B**RADEN WAS VERY LUCKY in many ways. His only bad luck was that he had a severe allergy to rabbits. Not many have traveled the world by boat and are at a wonderfully academic-filled private school, called Turn-lamb Terrace. But this does not take place in school, or neither in town. Braden was also lucky as his grandparents had a 320-acre farm. With spreading hills, plains and valleys, and also numerous vegetable patches, it was a beautiful place to be. It was also natural with beautiful green grass and trees, and the only dirtiness was the cows' pies. It was Braden's favorite place in the world: 728 Whatten Road, Admaston County, Ontario—Admaston County was just outside of Renfrew. This place had a lot of activity. The activities ranged from hikes, milking cows, playing on the tractor, setting up a pretend farm business, helping Grandma prepare supper and much, much more. It was holiday, but it was active.

At the age of ten, with no map (though he was planning to draw one out one day), Braden could only go on short hikes by himself. Grandma told him even though it was eight PM, and darkening (on August 10) that he could go on one hill where he always exuded happiness. It was very short—you had to turn around sooner or later. This fact allowed him to go on it alone quite frequently. He liked to be alone—he could think about the new school year of grade five—he had just turned ten in July.



Braden M. McDonald, 10  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada



Max Strebel, 12  
San Francisco, California

"Oh, yes, that hill's perfectly fine for you—just stay out of mischief!" Grandma said in her valley voice. For the last part ("stay out of mischief . . ."), she had been joking, as Braden never got into mischief.

"Can I have my midnight snack first?" Braden joked back to Grandma, as one, it was not midnight, and two, he never ate between meals.

#### CHAPTER TWO:

##### JUST HIS BODY AND HIS EAGERNESS

SO HE SET OFF. It hadn't rained too much this year, in 1989. This didn't affect the grass, as I said it was as green as fresh cabbage, but it did affect the crop—especially the potatoes. Poor Grandpa had been out in the potato fields since two PM, and had only returned once for a drink, and once for a very brief supper. Grandma despised this. He was still off there, watering them, and he was also digging some up for Grandma's own soup recipe.

I can't describe how convenient that McDonald farm is. Right in the middle (quite a far distance away) are all the crops, and to the sides are the hills. Braden's hill to hike on was closest to the crop to the right side.

Remembering all this himself, Braden began to gather speed. Luckily, he was not carrying anything, but he was tired from helping groom the horses all day. That didn't stop him. He remembered his harder times, when he had had pneumonia for six months, and at some times had been unable to breathe. He

still had a touch of that pneumonia, so was hoarse.

He had reached his favorite hill and could see Grandpa in the distance. He did not bother yelling "hard work, is it?" as the poor man was hard of hearing. So he turned the opposite direction as he saw something gleaming in the distance. With this farm lacking technology, it couldn't be a satellite dish with medallion edges, or anything of that sort. As Braden approached it he could see that it was some sort of rock. Even closer . . . he could tell that it was huge. He could also see many pecks and nibbles imprinted in it. Braden was very excited—and because of this he looked around for any piece of farm equipment he could find—a shovel, a rake—anything. Nothing could be seen. Not thinking twice, he put his hands down into a little crevice and pulled. He pulled on the rock, but something from beneath pulled him down into some kind of hole.

#### CHAPTER THREE:

##### NEVER BEEN THERE;

##### NEVER DONE THAT

BRADEN HAD expected it all to be pitch-dark—due to soil. However, it was as clear as day—bright, too. It was some different land—just a valley. It was snowing, but woodpeckers could be seen off in the distance. Some of them were carrying wands in their teeth; and some were using them. For example, a tree could have come to life, if the woodpecker that pointed its wand



at the tree hadn't been half asleep. Braden was astonished. He realized that it wasn't just ordinary snow falling—the snowflakes didn't have any pattern (they were square) and some were black.

So he climbed down to feel the unique snow.

As happy as he was when he set off hiking—and he was very impressed with himself to have found the land—he was very sad and hurting now, as when the black snow touched him, it seemed to have burnt a hole in his skin. So his spirits dropped very quickly—as if it were a thermometer showing a drop of temperature from 30 degrees Celsius to minus-30 degrees Celsius.

He could not seem to get back up to his homeland—there were too many woodpeckers in the way. The ones that weren't in the way were pecking away noisily and annoyingly. He tried to stay closer to the white snowflakes, but when one touched him, he realized it was bitter ice. Black "snow" must have been hot embers, and white "snow" must have been ice.

To make it even worse, some woodpeckers were swooping at him; and there was one in the lead—it wasn't a woodpecker.

CHAPTER FOUR:  
NEVER SEEN THAT;  
NEVER HEARD THAT

**O**R RATHER . . . wasn't just a woodpecker. It had two sides for faces—on the right and left side. At the front and back there was a little crevice.

One side was the side of a woodpecker's; and the other was the side of a rabbit's—very fluffy with a mouth ready to nibble. The creature had one side with a wing, and the other with a paw. It didn't fly—just walked with one sharp talon, and one foot-paw. It was a terrifying sight for Braden. Both its mouths or beaks seemed to go together on its crevice to nibble and peck at the same time—and it did so right in the area where the "coal" had touched Braden's skin. Braden tried to scream, but as he was hoarse, couldn't do so very loudly. Braden was hoping desperately that either the snow (which was painning his bare legs ferociously) or the woodpecker-rabbit would stop soon. He coughed in a choking manner (to clear his throat), and then tried to scream. He was hoarse, the woodpeckers were noisy, Grandpa was hard of hearing, and Grandma was very far off. It was no use. He knew he would not die, but he did not know how healthy his skin would be (particularly given his severe allergy to rabbits); or how he would ever be happy again. His eyes were also watering from the rabbit.

**N**OW NO ONE, not even Braden, who had traveled the world by boat, had seen this woodpecker-rabbit before. He was taken by surprise. But it was even more surprising when the creature was after him with a dagger. He was after the spot where the ember had started, and then the peck-nibbles had been put on top. This only added a

third coat to his pain.

On a positive note, Grandpa was heading back from a long potato-nurturing day. He could see wings off in the distance—poking out from a large hole where the rock had been.

"Someone must've opened it," he said, surprised, to himself. He had not been that far away from it, and had now reached it.

He looked down into the hole, and could see the blue sky with black and white snow falling from it. He could see woodpeckers. He loved birds, so exclaimed in excitement. But when his eye caught sight of his grandson being attacked by a woodpecker-rabbit, he changed his mind.

The woodpecker-rabbit's dagger may have been stronger than Grandpa's hoe, but the woodpecker-rabbit wasn't concentrating on himself, just Braden.

So Grandpa threw the hoe down, hitting all the heads of the regular woodpeckers circling, and knocking the attacker out.

Braden was free to come up, and did so immediately—hugging Grandpa in thanks. Tears streamed down his face—not from his allergy to rabbits, but from happiness and relief.

#### EPILOGUE:

#### NOW THE WORLD KNOWS

**B**RADEN FELT very thankful for his grandfather's rescue. He managed to get home, with Grandpa's help (he was limping) and slept a night with

many painful interruptions when his leg hurt. He was about to go home that day, but then the woodpecker-rabbit found his way to the farmhouse and pecked on the door. It was a screen door, and the regular door was open, so they could see what it was and were very worried. None of them opened the door.

Then, a powerful breeze came on, and the door flew open, and the woodpecker swooshed in. "Govecs Zacramin. CUZ-YU! Julles nevecev uyht toto men!" was how it sounded to Grandma and Grandpa, but Braden heard it differently.

"I apologize for the scars that I gave to you last night. When woodpeckers and woodpecker-rabbits are half-asleep, we do crazy things." At that, the woodpecker-rabbit pecked on Braden's scars, and they were immediately cured.

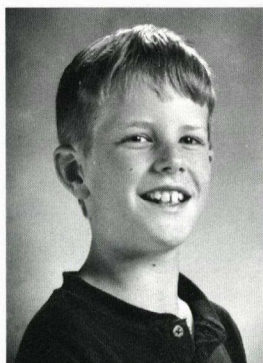
They were friends forever, and it made all the more reason for Braden to go to his grandparents' farm more frequently. His allergy to rabbits was no longer a problem with his health, and he could speak the language of the fantasy animals, such as woodpecker-rabbits. Through the years, he continued through that land, and met many more amazing creatures.

Now the world knows about woodpecker-rabbits, as Braden was in every newspaper in the world, as they all thought he healed very quickly. Another article stated that the woodpecker-rabbit cured him, which was the truth. This article was only in *The Sunday Times*, England. ❖



# Alone

by Brendan Grant



Brendan Grant, 11  
Piermont, New Hampshire

Alone is the homeless man looking at all the goods  
in the grocery market that he cannot have

Alone is the refugees leaving all they ever knew behind,  
their friends, their houses

Alone is the single pillar  
Standing in the rubble of a bombed building

Alone is the Iraqi mother whose children have died  
From lack of medical care

Alone is the turban among a thousand baseball caps

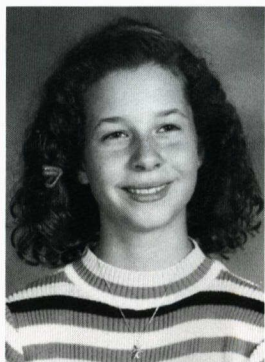
# A Chorus of Coyotes

by Megan Gannett

illustrated by Nina Prader



Megan Gannett, 12  
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada



Nina Prader, 12  
Washington, DC

**H**ANNAH LEAPT OUT of the truck, hardly able to restrain herself. Snow had come, winter had come! And here she was, about to spend a full afternoon cross-country skiing with Grandpa; the first time since last March when they had been forced to leave early due to the rapid melting of the snow. Around the parking lot, the deep woods looked inviting. Hannah followed the trail with her eyes until the first bend, and, wondering what secrets the rest of it held, she felt another surge of joy inside and wanted to sing, though she didn't dare break the delicious silence that surrounded her.

"Hannah," chuckled Grandpa's voice from behind, startling her and breaking the peaceful spell, "don't just stand there and dream away, but come wax those skis. It's going to be supertime before we get skiing!" Hannah tore her hungry eyes off the trail and did as she was bid. The sound and smell of the sticky wax as she applied it made her sigh with happiness, causing Grandpa to chuckle again. Each of the numerous adventures in the woods which Hannah had experienced and gained knowledge from came back to her as she scraped a thick coating onto the bottom of her skis.

When both pairs of skis were waxed, and the picnic they had prepared was divided equally between Hannah and Grandpa, they set off down the trail. Hannah was in the lead, her skis pushing and gliding rhythmically down the





She wished she could be a part of the forest rather than a visitor in it

shining trail as the sun's bright rays bounced off it. Hannah felt so light-hearted she was sure she could do the same. But the forest was peacefully quiet, and despite her gaiety Hannah felt strangely like an intruder, even though her skis made only a soft, soothing "ssssk, ssssk" as she skied along. She wished she could be a part of the forest rather than a visitor in it. She wondered if the animals of the woods were gaping out from the shadows, awed at these brightly clothed creatures who traveled the paths.

"Darn!" exclaimed Grandpa suddenly. "Snow is getting into my boots—I forgot to put on my gaiters!"

Hannah laughed at him for being so

foolish and flipped her long, dirty-blond hair over her shoulder as she stopped and turned to look at him. "Grandpa," she said, "we've been skiing every year for seven years and you forget your gaiters of all things. How did that happen?"

Gaiters are a waterproof garment used to stop snow from entering the ski boot in cross-country skiing. Hannah was incredulous, because Grandpa was an expert skier, and he had taught her everything she knew about skiing.

"I just forgot, honey," he said, grinning with his granddaughter over his stupidity. "I'll go back. I'll only be a minute, so you can go on, but when you reach the fork take the usual route."



He turned and headed for the parking lot, and Hannah kept going, still smiling to herself.

Hannah Louise Richard had been born the youngest in a large, happy family, with her mother, father, and five siblings. But shortly after her birth, Mr. and Mrs. Richard had decided that taking care of Hannah's two-year-old twin sisters and her, plus the other three, was too much for them, and she had been sent to live with Grandma and Grandpa until they could cope with the situation and have her home. The time had come, but little Hannah had already accepted her grandparents as her guardians and wouldn't be moved from them, so with them she had stayed. One of the hobbies the three had always shared was cross-country skiing, and they had always done it together until two years ago when Grandma had died. Now it was something that Hannah and Grandpa did together.

Hannah had reached the fork, so she took the left turn unhesitantly (it had always been the way she and Grandpa had gone). The trail was a loop, so it would come right back to the fork. She began to sing softly to herself, enjoying being alone in her favorite place, and the time slipped softly by while Hannah, carried away in her own contentment, forgot about Grandpa until half an hour later when she sat down to wait for him. She remained there for ten minutes, and he still didn't show up. She had expected him to be close behind, but obviously he wasn't. On these

trails it was easy to be close behind but out of sight as there were many small hills, twists and turns in the path. Hannah supposed he had forgotten how to put on his gaiters, and suppressed a giggle at the absurd thought. Then she started on the gorp which she was carrying in her daypack; she was famished after lots of skiing and saw it as a way to pass the time she spent waiting for Grandpa. But when he still didn't come, she continued on without him.

As she began to ski again, Hannah felt a growing triumph inside of her. She was alone in the forest and having a splendid adventure. She didn't know where Grandpa was, but she knew he'd be OK, however far behind he had become. Although his age was going on seventy, he was in good shape and looked young enough to be her father, and she knew nothing could have harmed him.

Another half hour ticked by, as Hannah skied through the still forest, the moss- and lichen-covered deciduous trees bare but possessing a certain gentle beauty despite their lack of summer greenness. She was still enjoying herself immensely when she heard the coyotes. Their high-pitched yowling echoed through the forest and Hannah halted. They sounded very nearby, and she knew it was a whole pack. She also knew they probably wouldn't hurt her (it was rare for them to carry off even a small child), but their wild, eerie cries made her shiver. It wasn't a shiver of



fear, exactly, but more one of excitement, and amazement at the thought that she was sharing the forest with those creatures. In a way, it made her feel as if she belonged to the woods, and its hidden world, for weren't the coyotes letting her hear them? And the sound wasn't aggressive, it sounded almost mournful. Hannah waited until it subsided to go on.

She was still thinking about the coyotes when she reached a small but steep hill and began to sidestep up it. She wondered what it would be like to live like the coyotes, away from the smelly, hectic city where she lived. She wondered if . . .

Hannah gave a small cry of surprise as Grandpa appeared at the peak of the hill . . . his figure loomed closer as she scrambled out of the way to avoid a painful collision, quite worth escaping. She lay gasping in shock as he sped down the hill, slowing as quickly as he could. For a moment they remained silent, staring at each other confusedly. Finally Grandpa remarked, "That was close, wasn't it, Hannah?"

"It sure was," agreed Hannah, giving a nervous giggle. "Why—why did you go that way?"

"That's the way we've always gone,

isn't it?"

"No." Hannah grinned. "We've always gone the way I went, you silly goose."

They laughed.

"Maybe I'm just being forgetful today," Grandpa told her apologetically. "Now that I think about it, I believe you're right."

"Oh, well." Hannah smiled and got up. "Did you see those coyotes?"

"No, but I sure heard them," replied Grandpa as they sidestepped up the hill back the way he had come. "Were you afraid?"

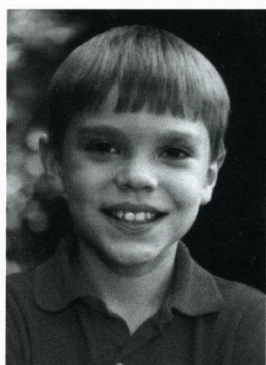
"No—not really," decided Hannah thoughtfully. "I was just . . . kind of entranced, I guess." They skied along, chatting. Hannah had learned that skiing was fun alone, not only with company, but now she was glad to have Grandpa with her as they absorbed the beauty of nature together.

Back at the parking lot, forty-five minutes later, she and Grandpa removed their equipment, packed up and were on their way. But as they left, Hannah internally murmured a soft goodbye to the trail, and to the silent woods, where she meant to spend much of her life—skiing—with the cries of the coyotes ringing in her ears. ❖

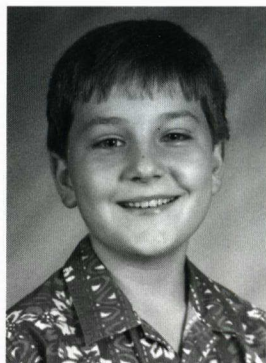
# Crystal Desolation

by Andrew Fine

illustrated by Jackson Harris



Andrew Fine, 11  
Ridgewood, New Jersey



Jackson Harris, 11  
Tampa, Florida

**M**Y HAND FELT LIKE ICE against the cold, hard metal doorknob on this hostile, windy crisp day. As I opened the door, I was greeted by a cold gust of wind that stung my face like a thousand bee stings. This cold does not bother me, but instead provides me with a queer comfort. I cannot explain this, just like you can't explain how the universe came to be. As I took another long step outside, wind pounded upon my jacket, sending cold ripples through it like ocean waves. Shivering, I smiled. I knew that I was basically alone in the town, that all the other people were hiding in the houses. This gave me comfort, knowing that I had the streets to myself, and the only one I had to share them with was the wind. Wind continued to stampede towards me, tackling me backwards like an angry dog protecting his bone. It was as if he wanted the streets all to himself as well.

My shoes made a crunching sound against the damp grass like a sponge. Dead leaves swirled around me, pushed by cruel gusts of wind in a tornado-like dance that broke the sudden silence. The icy wind howled and roared at me as I pushed onward into this dead world slowly and carefully. The wind was the only thing making noise besides the dark, large crows squawking, as if pleading for help, in the air beside the gray clouds.

As I scanned my desolate surroundings, which this morn-





Not a soul could be seen outside on a cold, rainy day like this one

ing had been my warm, sunny street, bare trees loomed over me like dark, misty mountains; cold, menacing. The edges of the trees appeared blurry, but smooth and wide. These trees made large shadows on the bare street, making the gloomy scene look even gloomier.

Suddenly, I felt terribly alone and tiny in the world; not a soul could be seen outside on a cold, rainy day like this one. Puddles began to form as rain pounded upon my hood, which was knocked over by the unexpected gusts of wind. I risked a glance upwards at the dark clouds, but expanding tree branches blocked my view far above me. The dead branches looked like mysterious hands stretching on forever as if pleading for help upon the angry sky.

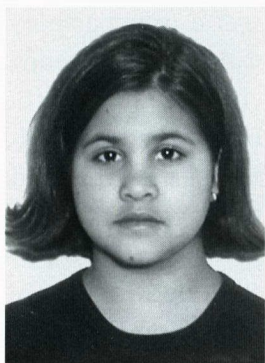
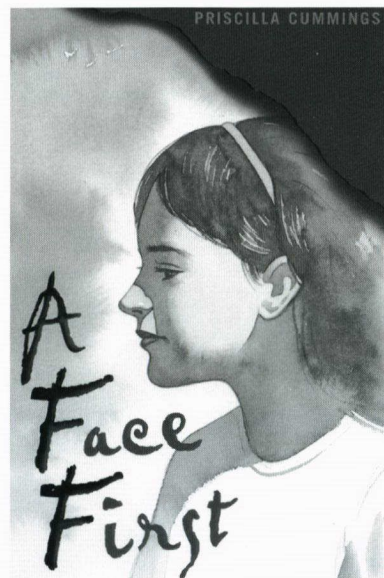
Pearls of rain trickled down my cheek and danced down my shirt, tickling me while making me shiver. The rain came down harder, harder until it splattered upon the empty streets that loomed

around me. The dim sun played hide-and-seek behind the clouds, darkening and lightening the scene unexpectedly. The leaves no longer danced; they flew around frantically while chased by the angry, howling wind. My face stung and seemed to be splitting open by the cold. I stuffed my hands in my warm pockets, but rain continued to splatter upon them. Lightning flashed, lighting up the scene for an instant, but then the world became dark again. The rain continued to shoot downward, making me have to blink constantly to prevent my eyes from becoming soaked.

Deciding that I had fought the cold enough, I gave up and retreated inside my warm, safe, cozy home, leaving the wind to own the streets as I had. Wind chased me there, but I did not let it inside by closing the door firmly. I smiled, but I didn't know why. It's just one of those things that you can't explain. Just like desolation. ❖

# Book Review

by Tahani Al-Salem



Tahani Al-Salem, 11  
Dubai, United Arab Emirates

*A Face First* by Priscilla Cummings; Dutton Children's Books: New York, 2001; \$16.99

**W**HEN KELLEY GOT IN THE ACCIDENT it made me realize how precious life really is. The poor girl is only in sixth grade and she is scarred for life. I cried as I read about all the things that happened to Kelley, and the way she felt about life; she wanted to die if she had to look the way she did. I can't imagine how life could be so bad that you would want to die. This book showed me how quickly your life can change, from being healthy and great to being at the hospital with a broken leg and having third-degree burns on your face and body. Thinking of how quickly things can change reminded me of September 11. How the day before the nation was bright and on September 11 the nation was torn and shattered; that one day has scarred the nation forever. Kelley is scarred forever in what happened to her, for the thought that she will never look the way she used to. Priscilla Cummings, the author, described everything so well. I felt like I was there watching the whole accident, and being there at the hospital with Kelley it is unbelievable how she describes everything. One part that



I think was just unbelievably moving is when Kelley's sister Leah was in Paris for college, and she wanted to come home because of Kelley's accident. Kelley knows that going to college in Paris is her sister's dream so she begs her not to come; her sister says she won't come. Then when Kelley comes home from the hospital, Leah comes without telling Kelley. Kelley is so happy to see her. The thought that Kelley was thinking of her sister and her dream of going to college in Paris, before thinking of

herself and how much she needed her sister at the time, was really moving. This book is so truthful because the story it tells is so true. I don't think people want to realize it though—the fact that there is a chance you can die tomorrow, or that you will be diagnosed with cancer, or get in an accident. This book does not hide the truth, it tells it, and that is something I really like about this book. This book changed my outlook on life, and it will change yours too. ❖

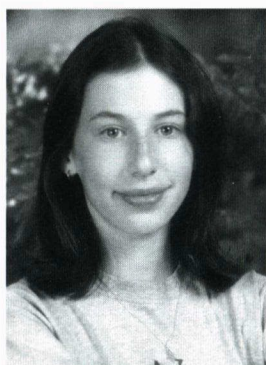


Mary Elizabeth McCarthy, 13, Columbia, South Carolina

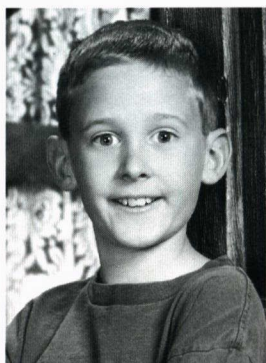
# To Begin Again

by Mara Elizabeth Lasky

illustrated by Elliott P. Frank



Mara Elizabeth Lasky, 13  
Walnut Creek, California



Elliott P. Frank, 11  
Evergreen, Colorado

**A** GLEAMING SILVER PICTURE FRAME stuck out from among the ashes. With renewed determination, Angela squatted down and began unearthing the priceless treasure from the still-smoldering cinders. She recognized it as her parents' wedding frame. Angela closed her eyes and tried to imagine herself standing within her cozy living room, near the hearth. In her mind's eye she walked over to the mantel and looked longingly at the family photographs. Her baby brother on his first birthday, face and cheeks covered in chocolate cake, her mother and father, smiling radiantly on their wedding day, and her grandmother, with twinkling forget-me-not eyes. The image blurred, and Angela was brought back to the present, sitting in the remains of her house.

Trying to fill a void that could not be filled, Angela gently wrapped the picture frame in her sweater and deposited it in a paper bag. For the past two days she had slipped away from the chaos of her family's rental apartment and had come down to the spot of her old house in search of something, anything, that was from her old life. The search had been a disappointment. Until today, the only thing salvaged from the flames had been two toilets, and a sink.

Angela recalled with surprising vividness the night of the fire at her house. She had been awakened from a dream by the shrill cry of the smoke detector. While she was still trying





She unwrapped the picture frame, with the charred photo, and her tears fell upon them

to contemplate the noise and confusion, her dad burst wildly into her room.

"Follow me, Angela, quickly!"

"Dad, what's happening!" she had cried out in fear.

"Our house is on fire. Follow me, and stay low to the ground," answered her father, in an attempt to be reassuring.

Angela followed doggedly behind him. The whole thing seemed surreal to her, like a bad dream. She still did not believe that her house was on fire, not when she heard the great rumble of flames, or smelt the smoke clogging her lungs, or even when she saw the yellow tongues of fire licking the chimney. Angela remembered her brothers and

sisters and mother all sitting in a pile weeping.

"Angie, our house is burning, our house is burning down," Molly, Angela's six-year-old sister, had said between sobs. Angela did not answer her. She was in a state of shock, as if her body was going through the motions while her mind was in another dimension. The rest of the night had been a whirl of neighbors and friends coming to console Angela's family. They congregated on the front lawn and watched in silence as firefighters battled with the scarlet dragon.

It had been a little over a month since the night of the fire. In that month Angela had experienced many strong emotions: shock, anger, sorrow, and most of all emptiness. She had come back to the scene of the fire in the hope of finding something of value buried in the ashes: diaries, photos, maybe even her violin. Angela realized now that, as hard as she tried, she could not undo the damage that had been done. She could not bring back her house, or her old carefree life. For the first time since the fire, Angela began to cry.

She cried with a passion and force that shook her small figure. She unwrapped the picture frame, with the charred photo, and her tears fell upon

them. The sun sank behind menacing gray clouds, and like tears, giant raindrops fell from the sky.

After a while, Angela's crying subdued to momentary sniffles. She felt a surprising sense of relief, like a huge burden had been lifted from her shoulders. It stopped raining, and glorious sunshine warmed her body. Angela felt homesick, but not for her old house; for her family and friends. She had been so cold to them since the fire, pulling away when they tried to comfort her. Now Angela wanted their company, and wanted to repair the damage she had done to their relationship.

"I knew I'd find you here," said a tall, sinewy woman, with light brown skin and warm brown eyes.

"Mother!" Angela exclaimed, jumping up and rushing into her arms.

There was a long silence while Angela's mother surveyed the ashes and the burnt wedding picture. Finally she said, "I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry too, Mother," Angela said in remorse.

"Come, let's go home. We have a lot of catching up to do."

With one last look back at the place of her childhood, Angela turned to leave. But not before she had securely tucked the silver picture frame in her pants pocket. ❖



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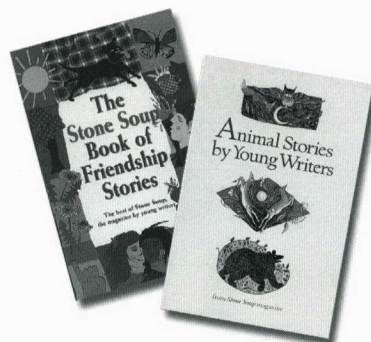
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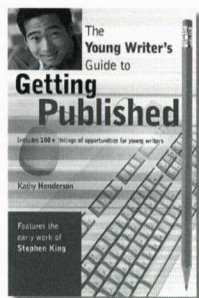
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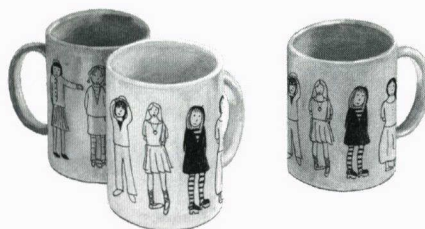


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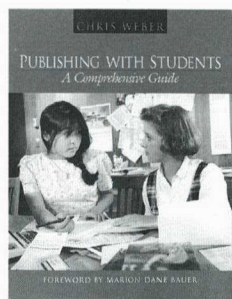
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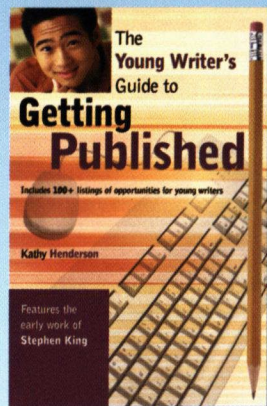
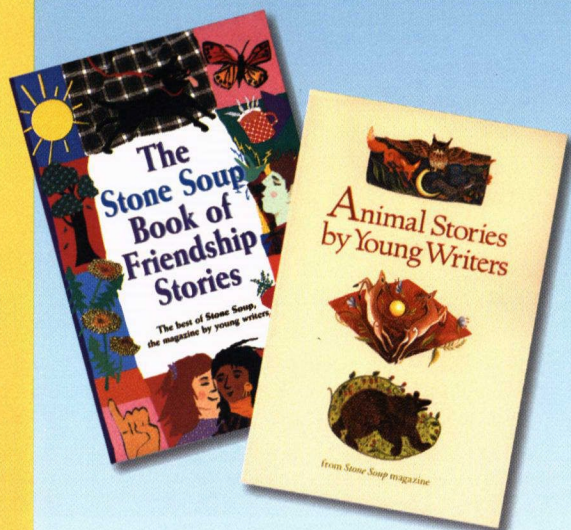
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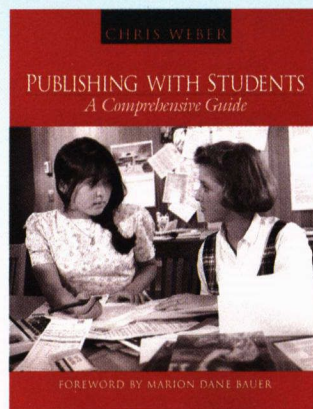


## GETTING PUBLISHED

## ANTHOLOGIES



## JESSIE MUGS



## PUBLISHING WITH STUDENTS

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