

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists



"My Trade Is Driving," by Sasha Kozlov, age 9, Dnepropetrovsk, Russia

UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN

Will Sieke be able to find her family after the flood?

THE GREAT CHESSBOARD

A young soldier learns the harsh realities of war firsthand

Also: Illustrations by Lauren Walker and Andrew Smith
Sharon Wang visits her family in China

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2004

\$5.50 US \$7.50 CANADA

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VOLUME 32, NUMBER 3
JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2004

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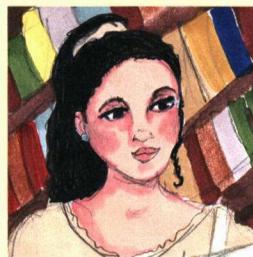
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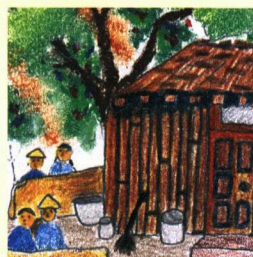
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Stone Soup is printed on recycled paper

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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 bimonthly in January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, and November/December. Volume 32, Number 3. Copyright ©2004 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. Please 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. Periodical postage paid at Santa Cruz, CA and additional offices. Printed in Canada.

Stone Soup

The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists

WELCOME TO ALL OUR READERS, old and new! We've had the pleasure of publishing *Stone Soup* for over 30 years. It is our belief that, by presenting rich, heart-felt work by young people the world over, we can stir the imaginations of our readers and inspire young writers and artists to create.



Jessie Moore, 12

Contributors' Guidelines

Stone Soup welcomes submissions from young people through age 13. For our complete guidelines, please visit our Web site at www.stonesoup.com.

Story and poem authors: Please do not enclose a self-addressed envelope

with your submission. Send copies of your work, not originals. If we decide to consider your work for a future issue, you will hear from us in four to six weeks. If you do not hear from us, it means we were not able to use your work. Don't be discouraged! Try again!

Book reviewers: If you are interested in reviewing books for *Stone Soup*, write editor Gerry Mandel. Tell her a little about yourself and the kinds of books you like to read. Enclose an SASE for her reply.

Artists: If you would like to illustrate for *Stone Soup*, send Ms. Mandel some samples of your art work, along with a letter saying what you like to draw most. Enclose an SASE for her reply. We need artists who can draw or paint complete scenes in color. Please send color copies of your work, not originals.

All 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. Send your work to *Stone Soup*, Submissions Dept., P.O. Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063. Include your name, age, birthdate, home address and phone number.

Cover: "My Trade Is Driving" was loaned to *Stone Soup* by Paintbrush Diplomacy of San Mateo, California. For over 25 years, Paintbrush Diplomacy has worked to promote children's artistic expression around the world and to raise awareness of children's causes. Special thanks to Louise Valeur and Char Pribuss.

The Mailbox



LBP, 9

I decided today after getting the July/August 2003 *Stone Soup* that it was time to write and praise this wonderful magazine. The stories were as thoughtful and beautiful as ever and I would especially like to compliment the poem "Fiesta," written by Natalia M. Thompson. The flavor of her poem was culturally rich and simply right. What got to me most was that in the fourth verse she spelled México the true way. It has always irritated me how everybody here spells México Mexico and if you pronounce it correctly they don't understand until you say it the way they do. I hope her poem and my letter will draw attention to this subject. I also loved John Roberts's poem "Doing the Tango."

TANIA FLORES, 12
Chico, California

I would like to congratulate Kevin Zhou and Elizabeth Wright for their story in the September/October 2003 issue: "The Moment of Decision." The story was creative and not too short, or too long. I was also extremely impressed by the illustrator and her illustrations. They had a lot of detail and really told you what was going on in the story.

GREG PFEIFER, 9
Haddonfield, New Jersey

I really like the concept of this magazine, how children like me write and draw all of the things that go into the magazine, and how the editors just put it together and add a few notes in the front. Not only that, but the actual stories, poems, drawings, and book reviews are really interesting. I think *Stone Soup* is a great magazine, not only for writers and artists, but for all kids.

JENNA SACKLER, 11
Bethesda, Maryland

I absolutely loved the story titled "The Clown Who Found a Frown," by Ashley Steever [March/April 2003]. I almost cried at the ending, because it was such a moving story. The author clearly knows how to keep the story moving, yet have space for detail. The illustrations were terrific too. I can't wait to hear more from this author!

LINDA ZHONG, 12
Okemos, Michigan

I was recently reading *The Mailbox* in one of my old issues when I came across a letter mentioning a story in the May/June 2000 issue called "The Wild Mare." I didn't remember reading it, so, my curiosity aroused, I hunted up that issue and found the story in the very back. I didn't understand why I hadn't read it before. I recognized all the other stories and could recall their plots, but not this one. Perhaps because it is very inconspicuous at the back of the magazine. I truly believe I did not read "The Wild Mare" until the night of July 26, 2003, *three years* after it was published. Anyway, I wish to compliment Emily Villano on her beautiful story, and to apologize for overlooking it in the first place.

JAMIE LEE JACOBS, 13
Boynton Beach, Florida

Thank you so much for publishing "A Window by the Sea" [September/October 2003]. I read that story again and again, it was so good. My compliments to Alison Citron for fantastic writing, and to Dara Green for her vivid illustrations.

LAUREN JAPPE, 11
Ipswich, Massachusetts

You can read all the stories mentioned in The Mailbox on our Web site: 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.

Musical Dreams

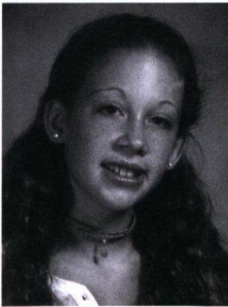
By **Betty Julia Rosen**

Illustrated by **Claire Neviaser**

INTRODUCTION



Betty Julia Rosen, 12
South Euclid, Ohio



Claire Neviaser, 12
Madison, Wisconsin

HELEN SILVERSTEIN TRIED to fight back tears as she sat in the passenger's seat of her mother's sleek, blue Dodge. Despite the fact that Olivia Roi Silverstein, her mother, was almost breaking the speed limit, Helen felt that she could never be far enough away from her viola teacher's house. The woman's harsh words still rang in her ears: "You need to work on this! It won't just come to you one day, you know." Helen had spent weeks perfecting the Bach sonata and three-octave arpeggios that she had just played flawlessly, or so Helen thought. Obviously, her teacher thought that the performance was far from flawless. In fact, she seemed to find a fault in every note: the pitch was flat or sharp, her bow was crooked, her instrument wasn't high enough, or worst of all, her vibrato was wrong. Why did everyone else seem to think her vibrato was so beautiful while her teacher considered it to be sloppy and terrible?

Because, thought Helen, everyone who likes my playing knows nothing about music. This wasn't quite true; after all, her parents were both excellent musicians, but did they truly enjoy her playing? Sometimes it was hard to tell.

The radio cut sharply into Helen's thoughts, and the monotonous voice of a man droning on and on about the stock market was like a needle jabbing into her temples again and again. "Mom, do you mind turning off the radio?" she asked. "I've got a headache."

"You know, I'm entitled to listen to something I like once in a



The first slow, rich notes of the concerto poured from her viola

while,” said Olivia, turning off the radio. “Did you finish your French homework yet? You said you’d do it on the way to your lesson!”

“Oops! Sorry. I forgot. Do you have a pen?”

“It’s in my purse, and I don’t have a free hand right now! You’ll have to get it yourself!” snapped her mother.

Please be calm. Take a deep breath, begged Helen silently, but she said, “I don’t mind getting the pen. Sorry to bother you.”

“I just don’t see why I have to do everything for you, Helen,” sighed Mrs. Silverstein. Helen felt a lump rise in her throat. Now her mother was angry with her. Could this day possibly get any worse?

She arrived home to find her house dimly lit and quiet. This was to be expected, as her dad loved privacy and conserving energy. Sighing, Helen pushed in the doorbell. After a few seconds, her dad rushed to open the door, a plate of freshly cooked chicken paprikash in one hand. A towel was tucked into his shirt collar, and his silver-gray beard and mustache glistened in the blackness of the night. His large, warm brown eyes pierced through the milky strands of moonlight that clung to the sky. With a tight smile on his face, he asked, “Why’d you have such a long lesson?” Helen could hear the stormy annoyance in his voice, and she couldn’t bear to see him upset, too.

“I’m going to get ready for bed,” said Helen, kissing her father. “I’ll meet you upstairs.” She jogged up the stairs to her

room, changed into her pajamas, and started in on the tedious task of running a brush through her hair one hundred times.

MOVEMENT ONE

HELEN STRODE confidently down the hall on her way out of the Harrisburg School of Music (H.S.M.). She had just finished her last orchestra rehearsal of the year, and it had ended early. Helen hoisted her viola strap higher on her shoulder as she watched the other violists chatting happily. Amy, Sara, and Katy were inseparable. In fact, the only student from Helen’s orchestra who would speak to her was her stand partner, Allysa.

She hated to sound like a typical moody, depressed teenager with social problems, but sometimes Helen felt like no one liked her. Even Tori Peterson, a girl from her math class and the only other person from her grade who attended H.S.M., refused to talk to her. Instead, she and her snotty, popular friends, Quinn Wallace and Astrid Amberson, completely ignored Helen. The only time Helen felt comfortable at H.S.M. was when she was playing viola. The power of being the principal, the leader, the best violist, was invigorating, and the pure joy and love of playing rich, beautiful music enlightened her and filled her with pleasure. Helen’s only regret was that she wasn’t in the most advanced orchestra.

A hot-pink flyer startled her, and Helen peered at it more closely. It was information about the advanced orchestra. Scan-

ning the list of audition requirements, Helen popped it into the side pocket of her purple case. She also flipped through the thick stack of excerpts. Every student auditioning had to play the required excerpts, or small sections of pieces. Violins had to play Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, and Prokofiev; cellos were required to perform Haydn and Schubert. Finally, Helen's hands found the viola excerpts. There were only two: Mozart and Haydn.

Carefully sliding the excerpts into her case, she continued down the hallway. Adrenaline pulsed through her body at the thought of auditioning. It was an exciting, educational experience that always made Helen feel proud, and since performing never made her nervous, she looked upon auditions as rare opportunities to test herself and push her limits. Besides, joining this orchestra might be the key to improving her playing.

MOVEMENT TWO

HELEN ANXIOUSLY flipped through her two books of pieces. The Bach sonatas all seemed too difficult or too basic to play for her audition, and she knew the judges would be annoyed to hear the same Suzuki pieces over and over again. At first, she had thought of asking her teacher to help her choose a piece, then decided against it. Helen's teacher would only select a piece like the Seitz Student Concerto in C Major, a concerto played by nearly every violin and viola student in the world! How could she stand up in front of three professional judges

and play the same piece that they had heard from sixty other talented students? It would be humiliating; Helen had to pick a less common piece.

"Hey Dad!" Helen called to her father. "I'm biking over to H.S.M., OK? I should be back in an hour!"

"OK, honey," replied her father. "Be careful! Call me if you need a ride back for some reason!"

Helen scooped up her white faux-suede purse, checked to make sure her hot-pink cell phone was working, and studied her reflection in a small compact mirror. Her wavy, black hair was perfectly neat in its ponytail. Clipping on her gray helmet, Helen hoped that she would find what she was seeking in the enormous, beautiful H.S.M. library.

TEN MINUTES later, Helen was standing in one of the brightly lit aisles of the Heidi East Freedman Library at H.S.M. Music for various instruments covered the walls; orchestra and chamber music pieces were organized neatly into bins in the middle of the room. Tucking a strand of her dark hair behind her right ear, she sighed. She wasn't having much luck; most of the viola music was either études or books of music for beginners. Only a few more difficult pieces could be found, and those were mostly far too difficult.

As she glanced at a violin serenade transcribed for viola, Helen spotted Chris Schwartz entering the library. To hear his name, no one would guess that Chris was



The slender, tall sixteen-year-old boy waved to Helen and smiled brightly

Chinese; it would also never be guessed that he was the most talented high school violinist at H.S.M. and the concertmaster of the advanced orchestra. The slender, tall sixteen-year-old boy waved to Helen and smiled brightly. Helen smiled back and was suddenly filled with determination to be in the same orchestra as Chris. Maybe she could even work up the courage to ask him out!

Filled with new resolve, Helen snatched a thin, red book from the shelf and glanced at it. F. Seitz. She moaned and hoped that this wasn't some kind of omen that she was meant to play the Seitz C Major Concerto. As she prepared to place the music back on the shelf, three sheets that looked like copies fell to the floor. Helen stared at the title: F. Seitz, Concerto in G Minor for Violin, Transcribed for Viola. It was a different piece, not the one so many students played. Scanning the pages of notes, Helen decided that it was perfect: very difficult, but within her abilities. There were ten weeks before the audition, and if she worked hard, she thought she could learn to play it well enough to insure her entrance into the advanced orchestra.

FRUSTRATION TORE through Helen as she struggled to play the difficult passage. Fast notes, double stops, *and* tricky bowing were too difficult for her. Still, she couldn't skip any notes, for every note was part of the foundation of the piece. If she left out some of the notes in the chords, it would be like ripping away the bottom of

a building and expecting it to continue to stand.

This piece marks, thought Helen with a grin, one small step for man, one giant leap for Helen Silverstein. A leap into the realm of the viola. Once she could play this piece, Helen decided, she could continue to improve until she was the best; she ignored the part of herself that told her that she had been doing that since her first viola lesson.

"Mom! Could you play this passage for me?" called Helen. Her mother, a professional violist and violinist, played the notes perfectly. Thanking Olivia, Helen heard her mother's performance repeat several times in her brain. Gritting her teeth, she set her bow on the string and began to play.

MOVEMENT THREE

THE CLOCK read 3:15 AM when Helen opened her eyes. She had awakened about an hour ago but had lain silently in the darkness, waiting for the sun to rise. Stifling a groan, she realized that her dad probably wouldn't get up for three and a half hours and her mom not for almost six hours! That meant she had to wait for six hours to practice for her audition, which was at eleven o'clock.

For a moment, Helen entertained the possibility of riding her bike or even walking to the local high school and using a practice room to warm up and work on her piece. After all, Rita Maria and Koalas, her two best friends, would not hesitate to do just that. Still, Helen shook

it away as an exciting but unrealistic idea. There were too many what-ifs: what if her parents woke up early and found she was gone? What if she accidentally broke or lost her viola? What if there were ax murderers and thieves stalking the night? With a smile, Helen realized that it was highly unlikely that murderers and thieves would be wandering around in her neighborhood. Still, Helen would rather be safe than sorry.

HELEN DIDN'T run downstairs to practice the minute her mother awoke. She was still asleep, in fact, sitting upright on her bed with her head leaning against the wall. When her mother shook her awake, annoyance at herself overwhelmed Helen. How could she have fallen asleep and wasted time that she could have used to practice?

She jumped out of bed and pulled on her lucky black loafers, an oversized black T-shirt, and a pair of banana-colored jean flares. Brushing her hair and teeth, she ran downstairs and quickly flipped open the latch of her viola case, lifted out her bow and tightened it, and adjusted the shoulder pad on her instrument. Helen's fingers quickly raced up and down the fingerboard as she practiced scales. After opening her music and scanning the pencil marks that covered it, she began to play the piece for the last time before the audition.

"HELEN SILVERSTEIN? The judges are waiting for you." A tall, overweight

woman with hot-pink cat's-eye glasses, a salmon-colored suit, knee-high white stiletto-heeled boots, and platinum-blond hair cut to her earlobes called to Helen in a loud voice. Her voice was so sugary sweet that it brought the tastes of rich chocolate and overly sweetened candy to Helen's taste buds, and her southern drawl hummed like a swarm of buzzing bees.

Her hands shaking, Helen stood, her music and bow in one hand and her instrument in the other. The woman led her into a large room; the white walls and floor had the sterile look and smell of a doctor's office, and the room was completely bare except for a small table behind which sat three judges. Two young brunettes and a gray-haired elderly woman watched critically as Helen adjusted the metal stand that had been placed in the center of the room and laid her music on it.

She flew through the required scales and arpeggios, then paused for a moment. Images of Chris, her parents, and her teacher filled her head. They would be proud if she played well, but they wouldn't feel any disappointment if she didn't. Helen was playing only for herself; she was the one who truly cared about the results. With that in mind, she set her bow on the string and drew it gracefully out in a long arc. The first slow, rich notes of the concerto poured from her viola, and the beautiful, deep tones resonated throughout the room, carrying with them Helen's hopes.

CODA

A BROAD GRIN stretched across Helen's face as she stood up to take a bow with the rest of the advanced orchestra; they had just finished a flawless performance of a piece by Haydn. As the members of the orchestra left the stage, Helen thought back over her experiences in the orchestra and was filled with joy. The audition, the rehearsals, and the concert had all helped show her the true meaning of music and life.

When she had finished packing up her viola, Helen spotted Chris. He was staring at her with his narrow, black eyes, and his pale skin glistened with sweat.

"Congratulations!" cried Helen to Chris; he had played a concerto in the concert.

"Thanks. You too; I'm so proud of you!"

At first, this struck Helen as an odd thing to say, but the joy of the moment enveloped her and she realized that it was the simple truth. Chris admired her dedication. She felt a blush creep over her face. "Well, I guess I'll see you at our next rehearsal, after winter break," she said softly. Smiling, she began to walk away as, on stage, the college orchestra began to play a slow piece by Beethoven.

"Wait!" hissed Chris. "I mean . . . um, do you want to . . . you know . . . um . . . do you want to go out with me sometime?" He spoke quickly, and his face was flushed.

"I'd love to," whispered Helen, and suddenly, all of her worries slipped away. Life was, for a moment, perfect. ❀



A Day with My Dog

By **Zack Bell**

Illustrated by **Sheri Park**



Zack Bell, 13
Woodbridge, Connecticut



Sheri Park, 12
Redwood City, California

I PICKED UP THE SOGGY, slobbered-on tennis ball and threw it yet again. I watched Sunset gleefully pursue it yet again. It was part of our special bond, this pointless game of fetch. Both of us knew our parts in this tireless ritual of throwing and retrieving. Sunset did not want to give up the ball without a struggle. I had to grasp it while she held it tightly in her jaws, and we played tug-of-war. I yanked it back and forth and her head followed. She then released the ball for a moment's time to catch her breath; I snatched it from her teeth and threw it again.

At last we collapsed on the grass, exhausted. I began stroking her mane of golden fur that surrounded her golden retriever head that moved rhythmically with each pant. She snuggled her body closer to mine and rolled over to expose her soft white underbelly. It was flaked with mud. In fact, her fur was matted with dirt. I knew I would have to do something about it, but that would be later.

She awaited her belly-scratching with eager anticipation. I responded to her invitation by running my fingernails along the sleek lines of her torso. She rolled her head to the side and closed her eyes in pure contentment. She would gladly have welcomed my continuing in this way till eternity. Disappointment was inevitable. At last, I got up and beckoned to her. She waited a little longer, hoping I would return, but finally she knew her duty and reluctantly followed.

I picked up the garden hose as casually as possible, but Sunset



It was part of our special bond, this pointless game of fetch

was not so easily fooled. When I turned on the water, aiming the nozzle toward the flower bed to make her think I was innocently watering the flowers, Sunset tried to make a run for it. I was too quick for her. Dropping the garden hose, I leaped upon her. She crouched down, curling her sixty-pound body into a remarkably small, furry ball. While lying across her, I stretched my arm out as far as it would go and just barely reached the hose.

It took four towels to dry her off. I vig-

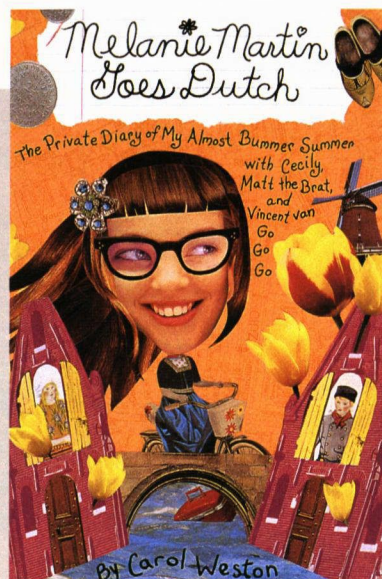
orously rubbed her down with each towel. The sweet fragrance of the soap could not cover up the distinctive odor of damp dog. Sunset rose to her feet, shook herself thoroughly, and with an effort at restoring her pride, gracefully pranced over to a sun-drenched spot on the lawn. She lay down. I sprawled myself out beside her. We both looked into the distance and watched the puffy white clouds drift by.

I knew that if I ever had a choice, that would be the day I would relive. ❀

Book Review

By Libby Coleman

Melanie Martin Goes Dutch by Carol Weston;
Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2002; \$15.95



Libby Coleman, 9
Scarsdale, New York

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL if your parents told you that you were going to Holland for your summer vacation? Happy? Excited? Well, Melanie Martin feels both until she lands 3500 miles away from her home in New York City. Melanie, a ten-year-old almost-fifth-grader, keeps a daily diary, and her entries and doodles make up the pages of the book. In this story, she travels with her mom, an art teacher; her dad, an overworked lawyer; her pesky brother, “Matt the Brat”; and her best friend since kindergarten, Cecily Hausner.

This book has many good qualities. It is smart and witty. It made me laugh out loud because it was so funny. Through Melanie’s eyes I learned a lot about Holland. I learned what the Dutch eat (lots of cheese, including fondue) and how they get around (by bicycle). I learned about their great artists (Vermeer, Rembrandt, and van Gogh) and a great writer (Anne Frank). I learned about their windmills, wooden shoes, and half-nude beaches. I even learned that the Pilgrims were in Holland before sailing on the Mayflower.

I also learned how jealousy and anger can make you behave badly and how important it is to try to be a good person. Melanie is a special girl. She is funny and intelligent, but she can

also be stubborn and selfish. By the end, though, she learns to be kinder, especially to Cecily, who is dealing with a very serious issue. Melanie learns, with the help of Anne Frank's diary, that "being a good person cannot just mean doing nothing wrong. It also has to mean doing something right." Melanie also learns that it is stupid to complain about privileges when Anne did not complain about hardships, like having to live in a small area without making noise.

I could relate to this book a lot. I have traveled to Europe with my family and I know that traveling can be both exciting and difficult. I have enjoyed going to museums and learning about different cultures, but sometimes I get sick of walking around and want to watch TV, and sometimes I get sick of foreign food and want to eat at McDonald's. When my family travels, we are five people, two parents and three kids, just like in *Melanie Martin*. Most of the time we enjoy ourselves, but sometimes we argue. My brother can be annoying like Matt.

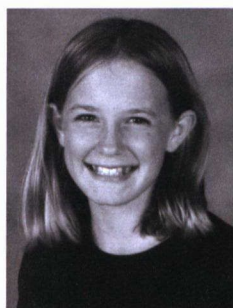
Like Melanie, I enjoy writing. I keep a journal in school. This book made me want to keep a journal the next time I travel with my family. Melanie writes lots of short, funny poems and is very interested in words. I learned some new vocabulary and the derivation (the origin) of some English expressions. For example, Melanie's dad says that "nitwit" probably came from the Dutch for "I don't know." When Dutch settlers went to school and couldn't speak English, they would answer the teacher "*niet weten*" which earned them the nickname nitwits.

Melanie Martin Goes Dutch is the second in a series—the first is called *The Diary of Melanie Martin*—but it doesn't matter which order you read them in. I read *Goes Dutch* first and liked it so much that I immediately read *The Diary* in which Melanie and her family travel to Italy. These books are real page-turners. I can't wait to read the next book about Melanie and her travels! ❁

Wolf Hunter

By Natalie Wittenbrook

Illustrated by Lauren Walker



Natalie Wittenbrook, 11
San Francisco, California



Lauren Walker, 13
Morgantown, West Virginia

“**H**I, DAD.” RHEA SMILED for about a second at her dad and slammed the front door. He glanced up, and then continued reading the paper. Just like always, he didn’t care if she was home or not.

“Rhea, will you please stop wearing that *stupid* shirt?”

Rhea scowled at him. He knew as well as she did that he could have said something when they bought it. She frowned at him and stormed to her room.

“I don’t want to hear about it.” She slammed and locked her door and stared into her mirror at her black shirt with a howling wolf. Her dad was angry because he made his money by selling chicken eggs and fresh vegetables to produce stores, and also shooting and skinning wolves and selling the pelts to fur companies. Rhea thought it was surely illegal but he insisted it wasn’t.

“Well, it should be,” Rhea had muttered. Rhea was the complete opposite of her dad. Most people thought they weren’t related because Rhea had short brown hair and hazel eyes, and her dad had black hair and dark brown eyes, but Rhea knew the main difference was in their personalities. Rhea was a vegetarian. Her dad liked steak. When wolves were skinned, she snuck out of the house to the Animal Society and played with the animals until she felt that everything was over. Her dad’s hunting was actually the reason her dad and mom had divorced. Her mom had walked out the door a year ago, after her dad had shot a young wolf for, Rhea thought, no reason at all. And now, more than ever, Rhea wished that her mom had taken her. Rhea was



He kept looking back, as if he was expecting the cage to close any minute

torn from her thoughts by an ear-shattering gunshot coming from outside.

"Not *again*!" she groaned in disgust. She decided to peek outside to see what her dad had killed this time, and fell backwards onto her bed when she saw the faint outline of a dead wolf lying on bloodstained grass in the forest behind their house. Her heart was pounding like a sledgehammer, and the only thing she could do was lie on her back in complete shock. So that's exactly what she did for a long time.

Finally, her dad called her downstairs for dinner. She sighed, and slipped off her bed, her bare, sweaty feet sticking to the

wood floor of her room. As she went down the old staircase, it creaked on every step. Her dad was eating chicken, and he muttered, "Your dinner is by the sink."

Rhea pulled her ravioli from the counter and sat down as far away from her dad as possible. They sat that way very silently for a long time and finally Rhea asked her dad, "Can I volunteer at the Animal Society?" She already knew what the answer would be.

"Rhea, we've gone over this before. You're too young to go anywhere without adult supervision . . ."

Rhea was suddenly tired of his excuses. "Dad, I'm twelve years old and it's only

three blocks away!"

She dropped her fork and ran into the backyard. For a long time she sat on the ground, staring at the newly turned soil. A tiny beetle was crawling across a pebble, trying to get to a leaf, but every time it tried, it just fell back again. The third time it tried, it was flipped onto its back. Rhea picked the flailing beetle up and set it on the leaf.

"I wish I were a beetle," Rhea thought out loud. "Then my only goal would be to get to a leaf, instead of making my dad stop shooting." Rhea smiled sadly. It seemed hopeless.

The next morning, her dad told her he was going to kill the wolves attacking the henhouses.

"Don't get any ideas," he said suspiciously. "I know you don't like me shooting, but if wolves are killing our hens then you know I have to shoot them." She smiled angelically, but deep down inside she didn't agree one bit.

"I won't."

As soon as their old Toyota pickup was out of sight, she grabbed her bike and pedaled in the direction of the woods.

"He didn't really think I would stay!" she reassured herself. She figured that if she went straight through the woods instead of around them, she could beat him to the chicken coops. By the time she arrived, her dad was already there. He was pointing his gun at a female wolf guarding her baby.

Her dad took aim, and she ran toward him, trying to stop him, trying to do any-

thing, but even before she started running, she knew she was too late. The shot rang out, and Rhea prayed for the wolves to run away in time, but the poor, faithful mother wolf protected her baby until death. She howled in pain and her beautiful gray fur was soaked in blood.

Tears poured down Rhea's cheeks as she saw the orphaned baby whimpering and nudging his mother's lifeless body, wondering why she wasn't moving. Rhea fell to her knees and sat there until her dad came over.

"Rhea, stand up this instant and come home with me." Her dad sounded mad and she didn't understand how he could just ignore the fact that the pup no longer had a mother. She dried her tears and was overcome with anger.

"I hate you!" she screamed. Rhea stood up and grabbed the pup in her jacket, bundling him up like she was wrapping a present, and ran as fast as she could to the Animal Society. When Rhea got to the front desk of the Society, she quickly told them what had happened.

"I see." The person at the front desk spoke soothingly. "Don't worry, Rhea, we'll take good care of your wolf." Rhea nodded, gave the squirming bundle to the front desk, and started to walk out.

"Rhea, wait!" Rhea turned around. It was Joe, one of the volunteers. "You can visit this wolf anytime you want."

She smiled. "Thanks, Joe." Rhea walked home thinking about the wolf the whole way.

As soon as she stepped in the door, her

dad said angrily, "You know you shouldn't run off like that. Do you know how dangerous it is to pick up a wild animal?"

No way was she going to answer that. "Dad, I have to visit the wolf tomorrow at the Animal Society."

Her dad frowned. "You're not going anywhere. You are grounded for a week. You know better than to do that. You could have been killed!"

"But Dad," pleaded Rhea, "You don't understand..."

He raised his eyebrows. "I don't need to. Go to your room and stay there." Rhea ran up the stairs and halfheartedly flipped the channels on her tiny TV. That week, Rhea could barely stand not leaving the house. So the next week, and the next, and the next, Rhea visited the wolf. And finally, after almost a year had passed, Joe informed Rhea that the wolf was ready to be released into the wild.

The next day, Rhea dragged her dad to watch, hoping it would change something in him. Before the wolf was released, Rhea talked Joe into making her dad pet some of the animals in the injured animals section and actually learn something about animals. A bit later, she told the wolf that he would be free soon, and noticed her dad and Joe talking about something in the rodent section. She wondered what they were talking about. Her dad looked solemn and Joe was obviously trying to convince him about something. By the way they occasionally glanced in her direction, she figured they were talking

about her.

A few minutes later, Rhea and her dad walked to where the wolf was being set free. The cage creaked open and the nervous wolf stepped out and sniffed the fresh summer air. He kept looking back, as if he was expecting the cage to close any minute. In about ten seconds he realized that the cage wasn't going to close, and bounded out to the freedom of the forest in the distance.

Rhea smiled through her tears and watched the joyful wolf until he faded out of sight. As she and her dad were walking home, she asked what he and Joe were talking about. Her dad grinned.

"I won't tell you," he said suspensefully.

"Come on!" Rhea pleaded.

"Well, OK," he said. "Joe convinced me to let you volunteer there. He gave about a thousand examples of how responsible you were with animals, and how much you liked wolves. He also mentioned that you went over there and cried when I shot them." Rhea's cheeks burned.

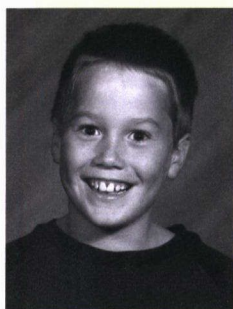
"So are you going to stop shooting?" she asked hopefully.

He sighed. "Rhea, I can't promise you anything, except that I'll stop shooting wolves to sell the pelts. If a wolf puts us in danger, I'll have to do something about it. Do you understand?"

Rhea nodded and hugged her dad happily. She felt like a huge weight had just been lifted off her. And that night, as she was drifting off to sleep, she thought she heard a wolf's howl of freedom. ❀

My Dad

By **Brendan Cunningham**



Brendan Cunningham, 8
West Hartford, Connecticut

Spacious, dark oak desk
holding a red pencil
in a brightly lit room.
Built by his splintered hands
and intelligent brain.
He is a carpenter.

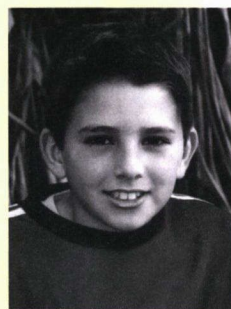
Standing in wet sneakers on Conard Field,
smiling,
pointing his index finger
to where scrambling first-years should be.
He is a football coach.

In my blue-sheeted bed
he lies,
book in hand,
reading,
listening,
and falling asleep beside me.
He is my dad.

One Snake's Life

By **Ben Amoss**

New Spanish moss was my bed
The ships' horns were my alarm clock
In the early morning
Along the Mississippi River's edge
I was swimming left to right
Left to right
The mud was brown
The sky was gray
Going up the willow trees
Down the willow trees
Hiding in the rocks
That mourning dove egg was delicious
It was cool and damp
When I slithered to the top of the levee
(I was in a frightening mood)
It happened
I didn't see it coming
The wheel



Ben Amoss, 10
Jefferson, Louisiana



"Boats! Look everyone, boats!"

Until We Meet Again

By **Lauren Boersma**

Illustrated by **Boya Liu**

I WAS SKIPPING THROUGH the fields. I smelled one of Mama's tulips and sighed. It smelled just as I expected a sunrise would, if it had a smell. Suddenly, a boat appeared. I happily stepped into it. Suddenly the boat began to fill with water. I looked around. Water surrounded me! It was everywhere. I . . . I . . .

I sat up quickly. I was in bed. It had been just a dream. I hadn't had many dreams like this before. Here in the Netherlands, not many people feared the water because of the dikes, which held it back. But something wasn't right.

Just then my feet splashed in ankle-deep water. It churned and swirled around my legs. Startled, I looked down. Water filled my bed. The floor was no longer visible. Water was everywhere, inching higher and higher.

I rubbed my eyes. Was I dreaming? The water couldn't have made it over the dikes. It wasn't possible! Was it? The icy water chilled my feet to the bone. I shrieked.

My little brother Theodore, whom I call Teddy, sat up groggily. "What is it, Sieke? Am I late for chores?" he asked sleepily. His always-curious eyes looked up into mine. Teddy was nine that year. He was my only sibling.

"Come on, Teddy," I ordered, "upstairs, now!"

"But Sieke," he began, and then he saw the murky water, creeping slowly upward. I grabbed his hand, and we rushed up the stairs. We nearly crashed into Papa, who was on his way down.



Lauren Boersma, 11
Sioux Center, Iowa



Boya Liu, 13
Erie, Colorado

He looked behind us at the rushing water and said, "Go upstairs and wait with your mater." Teddy and I swiftly obeyed. We climbed the stairs and ran into the welcome arms of our mother.

Mama squeezed us tight. "We know all about it," she told us when we tried to explain. "As soon as your papa woke up and saw it he headed straight for you." I began to sob.

"We'll be all right," she kept repeating, "we'll be all right." There was no fear in her soothing voice, though I think she was trying to convince herself as much as us.

I looked up at Mama, her golden hair swept up in two yellow braids, and her warm blue eyes anxious. As I said earlier, I was twelve, and people were constantly telling me that I looked like my mater. I wanted to be as brave as my mama, sitting there, comforting us. Her fear just barely showed in her bright blue eyes.

Suddenly Papa burst through the door. "Up . . . on . . . the roof . . ." he panted. The water crept up the stairs behind him, like a robber coming to take all we had.

Herding us out of her lap, Mama flung the window open. Papa rushed over and lifted me up. "Grab hold of the roof, Sieke, and pull yourself up," he instructed. So much was happening, and it was all happening so fast. Terrified, I squeezed my eyes shut and clung to the top of the roof, only halfway out the window.

"Pull up, Sieke," ordered Papa.

"I can't," I sobbed. Mama looked at me with pleading eyes. Taking a deep breath, I heaved myself up on the roof. Shivering,

I sat there, waiting for the rest of them.

Next came Teddy, then Mama, and last Papa. We all sat on the roof, clinging to each other, watching the deadly water rise toward us every second. We waited for what seemed like an eternity before the boats arrived.

Teddy saw them first. It was maybe midday. The sun was blazing, set high in the sky. Half of me wanted to jump in the cool water. I was staring at it, when all of a sudden Teddy cried, "Boats! Look everyone, boats!" He ran and gave me a big hug. A dozen or so boats were floating past us, filled with people.

"Hello," called a tall man from one of the boats, "would you like a ride?" Teddy jumped into a boat joyfully. I turned my back to them. What if one of the boats sprung a leak or . . .

"It's much safer here than there on your roof, missy," said a voice from behind me. I whirled around. It was the tall man. My family had already disappeared in the people. The man somehow reminded me of Papa. Maybe it was his yellow beard, or his kind eyes. Smiling, I stepped into the boat and we floated away.

I was nervous. It wasn't the boat; I had been on boats before. It was that water, that terrifying water. We floated by a bloated cow, and I felt sick.

"Mater?" I said, looking around for my mother. There was no answer. "Mater!" I called, frightened. "Pater? Teddy?" I looked around desperately, realizing that my family was not in the boat that I was! I thought back. Many of the boats had

separated back by our house. Who knew how far away they were now?

I sat down, distressed. I was alone. Then I felt a hand on my shoulder and looked up. It was the tall man. "You'll find them," he said. I looked down at his feet. He was wearing *klompen*, wooden shoes. I wondered if he lived near us.

"I'm Mr. Van Roekel," he introduced himself.

"My name is Sieke," I replied.

"Sieke," he repeated and smiled. I smiled back.

Just then another boat came our way. A man yelled, "Van Roekel! We need some help over here! We have a family with six kids, nearly in over their heads." Mr. Van Roekel jumped into the boat. I barely had time to shout a goodbye. I never saw him again.

Later, another boat came by. I saw a few men talking to each other. One of them nodded his head. A few of his passengers climbed into our boat. Some in our boat moved to theirs.

Suddenly a sopping little girl clutching a care-worn doll was thrust into my open arms. Startled, I nearly dropped her. She looked at me through tears, or maybe just water. I couldn't tell the difference.

She noticed me looking at her doll. "I got her from *Sinter-Klass*," she said, squeezing her doll lovingly. "Mater told me not to go in after her, but I did. Then the water tried to get me," she said solemnly.

I didn't laugh at this little girl's idea of the water. The water was a monster. It wanted to take everything away from me.

A little sobbing voice interrupted my thoughts. "Mater, I want my mater." I looked down at the little girl.

"Can you tell me about your mater?" I asked the girl softly.

She looked up at me. She began to tell me about her mother, and was soon chattering on about her whole family. "And I'm the youngest," she finished. "Oh, and my name is Elise. What's yours?" she added as an afterthought.

"My name?" I asked.

She nodded.

"Sieke," I replied.

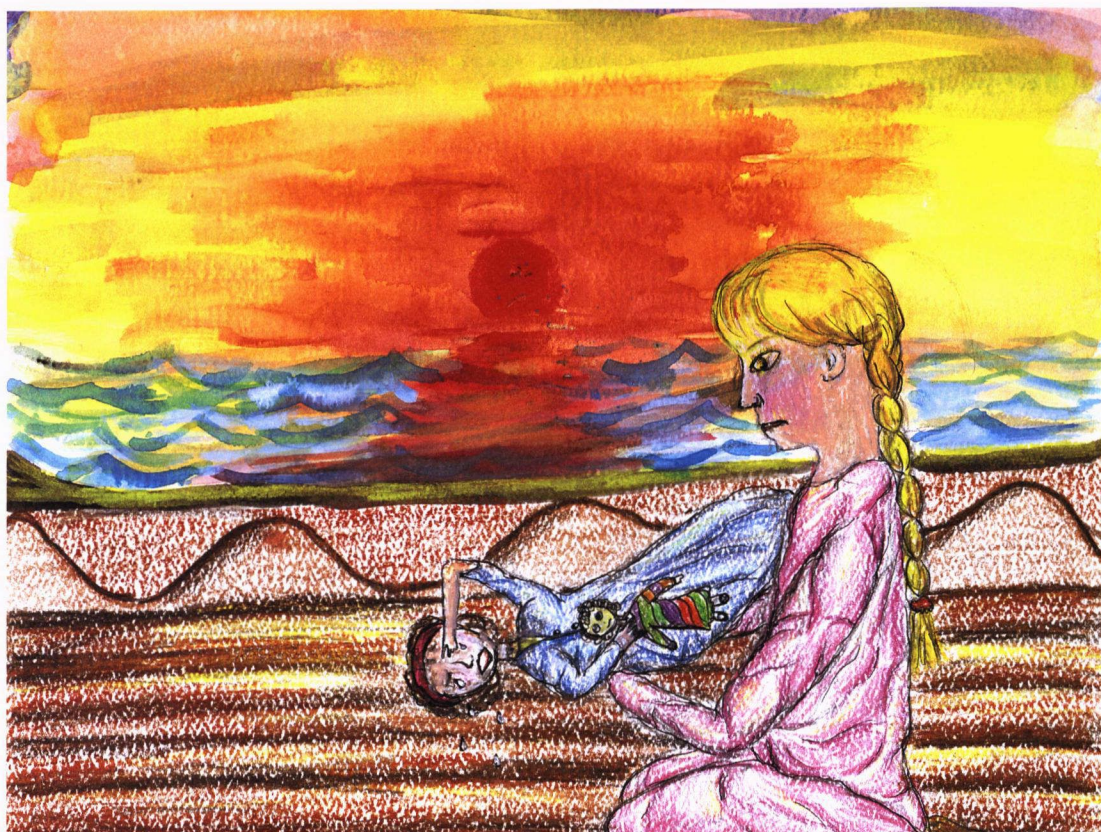
"You remind me of my favoritest sister, Gertie. Well, she's my only sister, but . . ." she trailed off and yawned.

I realized that it was getting dark. I looked down at Elise. Slowly, as she drifted off to sleep in my lap, I thought of my family. It had felt good to talk to and comfort someone. I looked up at the stars, like holes in the immense blanket of sky, and, hard as I tried not to, I fell into a dreamless sleep.

I woke in the morning to a peaceful sunny sky. Elise still lay in my lap, sleeping. Something seemed out of place. It was peaceful, still as a cat, curling up for a nap. Then suddenly I realized that the water had stopped rushing.

Excitedly I looked down at the calm water. My movement woke Elise. Soon we were shouting and hugging each other. We woke the others in the boat, and soon everyone was celebrating.

By late that afternoon, the water was just in small puddles. We got out of the



A little sobbing voice interrupted my thoughts. "Mater, I want my mater"

boat, thankful to be walking on the soft squishy earth. Some people had wooden *klompen*; others found them and put them on. I just went barefoot, letting the mud squish between my toes. I carried Elise on my back.

Though Elise and I had known each other for just that one terrible night, we had become very close. Though as we ran through the muddy streets together, I remembered how Teddy and I loved to walk through the mud. I thought of Mama and Papa. I was sure Elise missed her family too.

Soon we were walking from boat to boat, searching. We saw no familiar faces. Feeling more dejected each time, we began to slow down.

"Oh!" cried Elise suddenly, as we walked down a muddy street, "I dropped my dolly." I tiredly gave her permission to go get her dolly, which she had dropped back at the end of the road.

As her tiny feet pattered away through muddy puddles, a girl, who looked just about my age, with eyes red from crying, walked over. "Have you met a little girl named Elise?" she asked. She began to de-

scribe my Elise, the Elise that I had spent the endless night with.

"Is your name . . . Gertie?" I asked, my voice barely above a whisper. The answer to my question came from behind me.

"Gertie!" shrieked a little voice. Elise flung her arms around her sister. Tears were pouring down Gertie's face.

"Elise," she sobbed, "Elise, I'm never letting go of you again." Elise laid her head on Gertie's shoulder. As Gertie led me to the rest of her family, sobbing all the way, I watched Elise. Her eyes were beginning to close. Her hair framed her face like a little halo. But the thing that most caught my attention was the smile on her face. Her face positively glowed.

I was so happy for Elise, and for Gertie, but I ached for my family. I longed for familiar, loving faces. I walked slowly after Gertie and Elise.

"Mater, Pater, and the boys are just around this next corner," Gertie told me. I turned and saw a family just as Elise had described: four tall boys and a man, all with deep brown eyes, and a woman who looked much like Elise and Gertie.

"Mater!" yelled Elise, "Mater!" She dove into her mother's arms.

"Elise," sobbed her mother, "Elise, my baby." Elise told her about the night we had spent together. "You saved my baby," she looked up at me, "*dank u*, thank you."

I smiled shyly. I was just happy to see Elise with her family again. Suddenly, from behind me burst out, "Sieke!"

I whirled around. My mama was rushing toward me. I didn't dare believe it. Mama, if it truly was her, hugged me tight. "Mama!" I screamed, "Mama! It really is you!"

Suddenly Papa and Teddy were around me too. It was a blur of joy and love, happiness and sadness. It was as if someone had poured all of our feelings out into a bottle, and shook them all up. My head fell against my mama's chest, and I hugged her, feeling that I would never let go.

Later that night, our families chatted around the fire like old friends. I thought of no place I would rather be than here, among family and friends. Thinking of all my jumbled emotions, I fell into sleep.

When I woke, Elise's family was gathering up the little they had left, and putting it in a wagon that I assumed they must have found. Papa and Elise's father were shaking hands. I walked over to Elise, who was in her mother's arms.

"We have to go, Sieke," she whispered to me.

"I know," I whispered back.

"Goodbye," she said, tears beginning to trickle down her cheeks.

"No," I replied, "not goodbye." I was tired of saying goodbye. I took her small hand in mine and gazed into her eyes, the color of the sea. "God bless you, until we meet again." As her mother walked away, she waved at me and smiled. Until we meet again, I thought, until we meet again . . .





He picked it up and looked closely at the tall, muscular figure of his father

The Great Chessboard

A Story of the Civil War

By **Will Ilgen**

Illustrated by **Andrew Smith**

IT WAS EARLY DAWN on July 1, 1863.

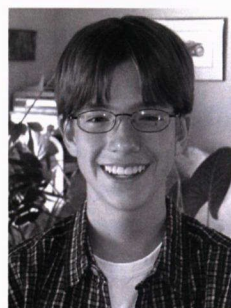
The cool breeze crept through the hills. Sunlight swarmed over the long and copious lines of tents. Not a soul stirred. It was, without a doubt, a sight for the human eye to behold.

A lone shadow sat upon a tree stump, a few yards from the line of quiet tents from which he had come, staring off into the hills, awake, yet still dreaming. It's all like a dream, the figure thought lullingy. All like a glorious dream. But the dream turned him to reality, which may if it chooses come as a complete and disappointing surprise to many. Why must there be reality? Why cannot everything be one, wonderful, everlasting dream? A bugle sounded four notes, a pause, and two more: reveille, the wake-up call.

Corporal Benjamin Ryan of the 3rd Minnesota Volunteers of the Union Army rose from the stump and trudged down toward the camp. Alas, Ryan thought, the dream must end someday, and we must face the harsh truth of reality. Men of his regiment began to rise from their tents and the calm sleeping ground was soon filled with noise and hustle. Ryan walked amongst the men, himself already dressed and ready for any order. Another hour or so, he thought, and we'll be on the move again. He could feel it. Within the men, in the sky, in the rising sun, everywhere. He could picture it in his mind: row upon row of trudging, tired men in blue uniforms, kicking up dust, their heads low, muskets hunched over their shoulders. It was not a nice sight. They knew



Will Ilgen, 11
Castro Valley, California



Andrew Smith, 13
Cave Creek, Arizona

they were losing the war.

The American Civil War had been raging for over two years now; who could know how much longer it would last? Every passing day brought more death, more sorrow, more mourning. Corporal Ryan was in the Union army, the army of the northern states. The Confederate army had control of the southern states. With General Robert Edward Lee as their commander, the Confederates, or the Rebs, seemed invincible, and time and time again they had reminded the Union army of that. The army of the North had gone through many commanders, the latest being Joe Hooker, but President Abraham Lincoln resigned him from command after the Union disaster at Chancellorsville, and thus Hooker was replaced by General George Meade. Meade was known by his officers as the "snapping turtle," for his aggressive reputation. Ryan wished that General John Reynolds, the commander of his corps, was in charge of the army; he'd win the war over a day or two if they'd picked him first. Ryan knew that General Reynolds had in fact been offered a commission for Major General, and had turned it down. It was his choice, but Ryan still thought he was the best man in the army. But there were other things to think of now.

The rest of the men in the regiment lined up for a brisk breakfast. Ryan found that he wasn't hungry; he went to his tent. After he ducked in, he sat down on the grass. He ran his fingers through the fresh green, then through his hair. He looked

around at his belongings. A canteen, some rations, a diary he'd written in every day since he'd enlisted, his bedroll, a quilt his mother had made for him when he was very young, an oil lamp, paper for letters, his musket, ammunition, a baseball, and, carefully laid on the quilt, a photograph of himself, his mother, his younger sister, his father, and his auntie. His most prized possession: all he had left of his family. He picked it up and looked closely at the tall, muscular figure of his father. He would have been proud, Ryan thought, if he saw me now, in the army. He was a lieutenant during 1812, and would tell a younger Ryan of his many different engagements. Ryan lived for the excitement of his father's stories of war all the while his father was alive . . . and now, his father dead, himself finally enlisted, Ryan found what a nightmare war was. Ryan thought hard to remember the day the nightmare began.

"**T**HANK YOU, Reverend," Ryan had said. "I'm sorry my mother couldn't be present for the memorial, she . . . is not herself."

Ryan had nodded to Reverend Mitchell and strode away from the sanctuary of the deceased. It had been a dull, cloudy day in January. No snow fell. No person walked the lonely Minnesota streets except Ryan, who was not certain what to think. He refused to face reality: he refused to face the fact that his father was dead. But he knew it was true. That was reality. The harsh, harsh reality.

Ryan came to his home. He slowly

walked up the front steps, and entered the door. His sister was in her room; he could hear her crying. She hadn't stopped for three days. Ryan went to his room and looked out the window. His mother was out there, tearing up grass and dirt and showering herself with it, screaming, sobbing, cursing the Lord for her husband's death. Ryan knelt beside the bed and prayed silently for his mother and his father's spirit. He rose, looked to the ceiling, and cried, "Why?"

He ran out of the house, into the deserted road, seeking solitude, seeking peace with himself. He could not find any peace within him. He was flushed with emotions. He was in rage, in despair, in mourning . . . where to go? What to do? To whom must he turn? Unanswered questions. Too many unanswered questions. He just stood in the center of the road, helpless, for about an hour, and then, suddenly, he knew what to do. Where to go. He went back to the house, gathered his belongings, slipped a note under a vase in the dining room, and set out the door. He was off to join the Union army.

THAT HAD BEEN January, 1862. Now it was July, 1863. After nearly two years at war, Ryan, in his own strange way, had found some solitude. Of course, he had no idea where his mother or sister were, but he frequently wrote letters to them, and upon finishing one, he would take it outside, and let it be carried away with the wind. He would stand there for a

while and watch it float off to the horizon, until it was but a speck in the distance. He thought of the old life in Minnesota, but stopped; it was just too painful. That was all Ryan had: painful memories.

He rose from the ground and left the tent. The sun was up now, and most of the men were finished eating breakfast. Many were taking down their tents. Yep, we'll be moving today, thought Ryan. None of the men really knew where the army was headed. Some said they were pursuing the Confederates to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Ryan carefully packed away his few belongings and took down his tent.

"Ben! Benjamin!"

Ryan looked up to see Peter Simon walking his way. Good ol' Peter, Ryan thought. Ryan knew Peter's intelligence wasn't the highest, but, as Ryan figured, it doesn't take brains to be a good friend.

"Well, Ben, I reckon we're off to chase the Rebs," Peter said.

"I dunno, Peter," Ryan said. "Don't believe everything you hear in the ranks."

But Peter was right. And little did Benjamin Ryan know what they were in for.

RYAN MARCHED with his regiment: a thin, curving line, like a snake weaving its way through a patch of grass. Peter and Ryan walked alongside each other. It was murderously hot, and wearing a blue wool uniform didn't help at all.

"So, Ben," said Peter. "You ready to beat them Rebs?"

"Now, Pete," Ryan replied, "just remember there's an even chance we'll lose."

"That's what you said all them times before."

"And tell me this, was I ever wrong?"

Peter kicked up some dust and muttered, "No." Ryan smiled and looked up ahead. The regiment had been marching for hours now, and Ryan could hear faint gunfire up ahead. Ryan had a small nausea about entering a fight, and the sounds of this one weren't too welcoming.

Ryan heard much cheering behind him and turned to look. Someone on horseback was riding down the line. Ryan recognized who the rider was almost instantly: it was General John Reynolds. The men had great respect for Reynolds. As he rode down the line, men tipped their hats and waved. He was a tall man, even taller in his saddle. He had a long, groomed beard and sat up high, looking onward with determination. Ryan grinned. He really believes in us, he thought.

He turned to Peter and said, "Where's the fight, anyway?"

"I hear it's up by some town called Gettysburg."

CANNON SHELLS burst all around. Ryan felt the heat of battle. Men fell all around him, screaming. He crouched low to the ground, having to dodge bullets here and there. He turned and saw Peter, on his belly, firing away.

When they had gotten there, they saw the cavalry of General John Buford lined up, warding off the Rebels. And they had done a good job. The infantry had gotten there just in time.

Ryan crouched behind bodies, firing. He turned around and spotted General Reynolds, away a few yards, shouting, waving his hat, and then the general stopped, and fell out of his saddle. As he saw Reynolds lying on the ground like that, Ryan knew the harsh truth: General Reynolds was dead.

Ryan kept on firing for a goodly while. A thousand questions grew and filled his mind: with Reynolds dead, who will lead us? How long can we keep firing? How long can we hold? They sure are firin' at us hard.

And then he saw the Rebs come up, start to charge in their direction, and he rose to his feet, turned, and fled with the rest of the regiment.

DARKNESS surrounded the Federal camp. The light of day was no more. Ryan sat around a campfire with Peter, and a few other soldiers he hadn't met, warming his hands. He stared into the flames, searched within his soul for solitude, but he could find none.

After Reynolds had been shot, the command of the first corps was given to Abner Doubleday. Soon after, when the rest of the corps had fled, they had stationed themselves on a rise named Cemetery Ridge, which was below the town of Gettysburg and opposite the Rebel camps. The rest of the army would soon join them. But for now, all was quiet throughout the camp. The stars twinkled in the sky. The wind floated upon the clear sky. The moon shone bright over the



"It's just a game of chess, is all. It's a game of strategy"

long ridge. The fire was warm, welcoming. But Benjamin Ryan was still not at peace.

Ryan thought long and hard. What was this war really about? Was it for the slaves? States' rights? Or was it all simply a huge misunderstanding? Why were all these innocent people dying? Ryan found himself saying this out loud. He blushed. An older soldier sitting across from him spoke.

"Well, son," he began, "I dunno what it's all about, but I will tell you this whole thing is just like a game. A game that don't never end. It's just a game of chess, is all. It's a game of strategy, and you must learn to cope with casualties. Men are the play-

ers, and the world is the board on which this gruesome combat is fought. There are grand victories, there are great losses; there are mistakes . . .

Ryan listened intently. The man heaved a great sigh and shook his head. "Sooner or later," he said, "if the game keeps up, there will be no more players . . . and nothin' more worth fightin' over. But it won't matter. Men will just keep on fighting over nothing, probably. It's just the way we are. And nothing will change."

The man rose and left the fire. Ryan watched after him. Then he lowered his head, and stared into the flames once more.

SOON CAME dawn on July 2, 1863. Ryan and Peter were out on the ridge, entrenched, ready. Ryan gazed out over the open field, the untouched plain. Beautiful. He looked toward the opposite ridge, Seminary Ridge, and saw the Rebs lining up, getting ready to advance. He turned to Peter and said, "Time for another round of chess."

Ryan lay down on the cool earth, resting, waiting for the Rebs to come. And they would come, he thought; and we will meet them. He closed his eyes, again thought of the house back in Minnesota, of his mother, wherever she may be now, of his father.

No, he thought to himself. I will think on that no longer. Painful, too painful. He opened his eyes, sat up. He turned to gaze on Seminary Ridge. There was now much noise coming from there. And through the thick mass of trees, he began to see the Rebs form for the assault. It was time.

When the Rebs stepped out, advancing on the Union line, they were being bombarded by cannon shells and a hail of bullets, but kept coming. Ryan couldn't figure how; he was almost out of ammunition, and still they came. He knew it was General A. P. Hill's men coming at them, and Hill's boys were known for their courageous fighting. At Antietam, in 1862, just as the Rebel line was giving way, up came Hill, just arriving from Harper's Ferry, to save the battle. And they were indeed coming hard now, just as they had before.

Ryan looked down the Union line, which was in the shape of a fishhook, and

saw a small company, the 1st Minnesota, charge out at the Rebels. He couldn't see much; it was just a large cluster of blue and gray. Ryan finally saw the company stumble back. But out of the whole company that had charged, only a few seemed to return.

Smoke rose all over the battleground. Shells seemed to burst up from the ground, sending debris flying in all directions. The speed of the bullets rang in Ryan's ear. The Rebel line in front of them stopped abruptly, let loose a round of bullets. He heard a man scream, and it was very close to him, and he turned and saw Peter, lying on the ground, blood gushing from his side.

RYAN RUSHED to Peter's side and said, "Pete, Peter!"

Peter looked up into Ryan's eyes. "I'm . . . I'm all right, Ben . . ." he stammered. "I . . . I think I'll make it . . ." Ryan saw the blood; he wasn't sure what to do, the same mix of emotions and confusion he had felt at home in Minnesota.

He tried to cover the gash with a bandanna, but the blood merely soaked through. Now Peter was shuddering, fighting the pain, fighting to breathe. He lay still for a moment, then looked up at Ryan.

"I'm all right, Ben . . ." Peter sighed.

Ryan bit his lip, trying to fight back tears.

"No . . ." Peter said. "Too late. This is it. I'm a casualty of chess. Ben . . . tell my mother, please—don't forget, now. All I want to do . . . is sleep . . ."

Peter tilted his head back, and Ryan knew he was gone.

THAT NIGHT Ryan slept out under the stars. He stared out into space, pondering the great mystery of death. The Union army had been able to ward off the Rebs, they had not taken the ridge; but Ryan did not care about that, nor about anything at the moment. His mind only seemed to focus on Peter's death.

He stared out into the infinite dark, and he thought he could see the stars dance, merry in their place. His father had once told him that the stars were the souls of those passed; and as he looked, he believed in himself that he saw his parents, Peter . . . and all others long passed.

He stared and he thought; he thought for a long time, on many things he had not since thought on, and slowly shut his eyes, and drifted into a peaceful sleep . . .

RYAN WAS UP on the ridge early the next morning, July 3, 1863. And the day after would be Independence Day. How tragically ironic that the new nation that had declared its independence from England in the 1770s was now at war with itself. A horrible, bloody war that would not end.

He walked along the camp, looking out to the foggy fields. It was no longer the beautiful, untouched plain he had seen before, but now a worn battleground. Bodies lay out in the open, horribly mangled. Blood was splattered around them.

Ryan wandered from the campgrounds.

He walked to a rise with a wooden cross and a mound of dirt beneath it. This was where Ryan had buried Peter. He did not stand too close, for fear he should step on the mound which covered his companion. But he knelt, and prayed. He would not break his promise to Peter, and he would tell his friend's mother, once he had the chance, once this was all over. But would it ever end? No. There will be more fights. Many more. This war would go on, never stop, and eventually Ryan would die, a man of old age, never to have put down his rifle.

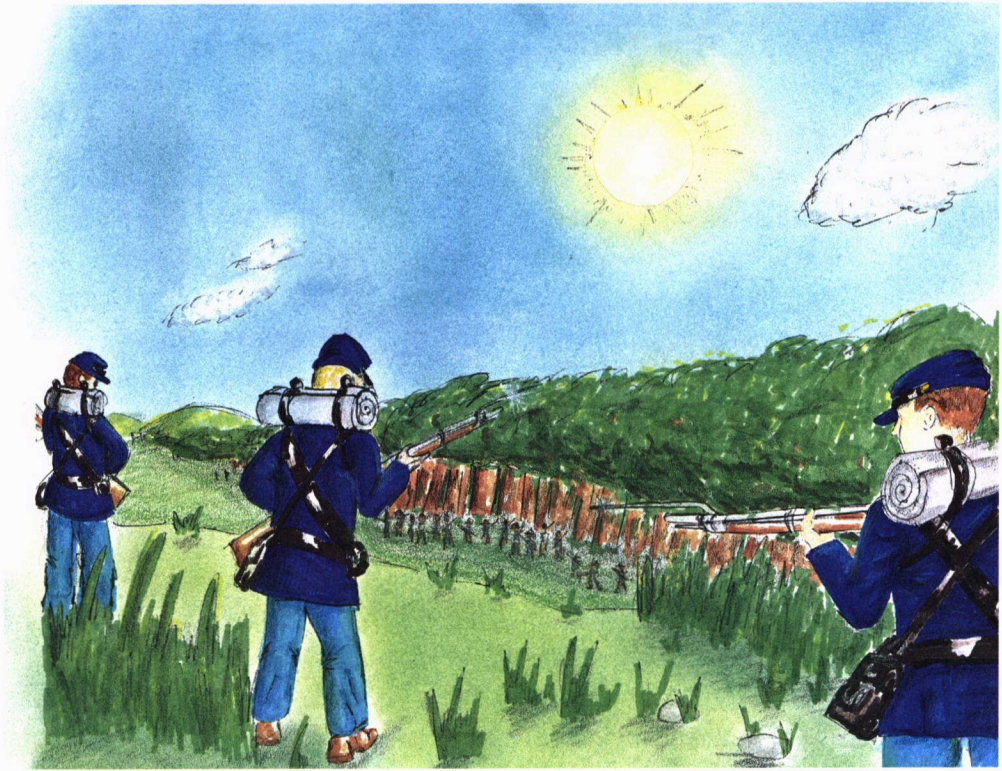
Well, let them come, then.

He was soon on the ridge, watching the Rebs. But the strange thing was, they weren't doing anything. They just crouched in the trees, like rabbits hiding from a fox. They did not seem to have any reason for assault. This troubled him. He knew the Rebs, they weren't like this.

By now, most of his regiment was out on the ridge, loading muskets, setting the artillery, chatting, writing a final letter home, in case this should be their last day. If the Rebs did come, they'd be waiting. Ryan looked back toward Seminary Ridge. He noted the Rebels were setting up an artillery line. It was the longest row of cannon Ryan had ever seen. Lord, Ryan thought, they must be setting up every battery they have over there!

Ryan moved forward for a closer look to . . . *BOOM!*

A shot rang out. An artillery shot. And Ryan knew it hadn't come from the Union's cannon. *BOOM CRACK ZING!*



And then he saw them, moving out from behind the trees, forming, and beginning to march

Shells flew everywhere, soaring overhead, hurtling to the ground. Ryan dove into the earth. He covered his head with his hands. He heard yelling and screaming everywhere. Someone shouted, "It's the Rebs! They're bombarding us!"

Ryan turned and saw clearly: the Rebs were firing at the Union line, nonstop. Ryan did not move, did not think, just waited, waited for the thundering to cease, waited for the assault he knew was coming, to come.

ABOUT AN HOUR later, the firing had stopped. Now Ryan was on the ridge, rifle in hand, waiting for the Rebs

to attack. And then he saw them, moving out from behind the trees, forming, and beginning to march. Ryan estimated about three divisions or more were coming. And he was ready.

He remembered Peter. He remembered the shot, the scream, and the sight he would never forget. He remembered it all in one long, painful moment, the last words: "All I want to do is sleep." Ryan began to shed painful tears.

Good night, sweet prince,
And may flights of angels
Sing thee to thy rest.

And as the Rebs advanced, Ryan felt

something he had never before felt in battle; it was not sadness, nor worry, it was anger. Hate. He felt great hate now, toward the Rebs, as they came. And he was now very ready to fight, for Peter.

The Union artillery thundered like clockwork. Men on the other side flew in the air, came back down to earth dead. Some of their lines began to fall apart, but still they came. The Rebs began to come quicker now, advancing at a greater speed. The heavy bombardment could not stop them. Soon their casualties were high, and yet, somehow, in a way that seemed to defy logic, they kept coming. They simply would not stop.

They were now about half a mile away from the Union line. The heavy artillery was now joined with the steady beat of musket fire. More men fell. The Rebs stopped, returned fire. Now they were falling by the dozen; a haunting scream seemed to fill the air. And although he wished to, Ryan did not fire. He could not. No; let them rest. They have come this far. Wait.

Everything was chaos, all around him. Men on both sides screamed, fell, flew into the air. Ryan could do nothing. He simply sat, unmoving, as the whole world flooded past. And he knew he was alone now. He could see the Rebels charging, but in his mind, everything was still. He washed away the screams, the horrible sounds of battle. He saw blurred shapes rush past him, the Rebs had reached the line, but he could hear nothing, and the

battle went on without him, thank the Lord, and there was a flush of faces and colors, and before he knew it, it was over; all over.

RYAN COULD NOT sleep at all that night, and so he went up on the ridge, in the heavy rain, watching the sun creep up over the Pennsylvanian hills, watching the dawn of July 4; Independence Day. He looked out over the ridge and saw a sight to behold: the Confederate Army was retreating. They were fleeing back to Virginia, their home. They deserve home, Ryan thought. They lost many yesterday. Let them go. We'll catch up.

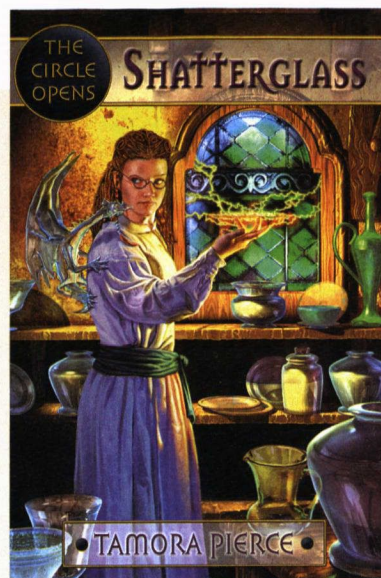
The battle of Gettysburg was won. Ryan smiled, and walked away, down the ridge, under the great clouds of gray, on the great chessboard.

GETTYSBURG was the largest and bloodiest battle in American history. About 50,000 men were either killed, captured, or wounded through July 1-3, 1863. The American Civil War would go on until 1865, when General Robert E. Lee of the Confederate army surrendered his forces to the Union army's commander, Ulysses S. Grant, who would later become a president of the United States. The slaves were freed when the war ended, but it would take generations afterward for African Americans to be granted equal rights. Corporal Benjamin Ryan is a fictitious character in this story, but to me, he is most certainly real. ❀

Book Review

By Hayley Merrill

Shatterglass by Tamora Pierce; Scholastic Press: New York, 2003; \$16.95



Hayley Merrill, 13
Waterford, Connecticut

SHATTERGLASS, A FANTASY NOVEL by Tamora Pierce, touches ingeniously close to the real world. Pierce is able to weave a tale which, although fiction, is startlingly believable. The last volume in *The Circle Opens* quartet, *Shatterglass* follows the life of Tris, a young ambient mage of unimaginable power, and Kethlun Warder, a glassmaker who just wants to live a normal life but can't. Together they encounter two major crimes in the city of Tharios—one that takes away all rights of the *prathmuni* and the other, a murder.

Who are the *prathmuni*? They are the “untouchables” of Tharios, uncomfortably similar to the Untouchables of India. In this book we are able to see the extremes of the mistreatment of people in India in a totally different world. When Tris asks a *prathmuni* girl why they are discriminated against, the girl explains, “We handle the bodies of the dead. We skin and tan animal hides. We make shoes. We take out the night soil. But mostly, we handle the dead, which means we defile whatever we touch . . .” This is similar to the Hindu law that says that working with animal skins makes one unclean, as does work that involves physical contact with blood, excrement, and the dead, all things which the Untouchables of India do.

Shatterglass touched me because it shoved the issues of human injustice right into my face. When I first read about the *prathmuni* I thought, This is insane! I am so thankful that I don't live in a world like that! And yet, only a day after I had read about the *prathmuni*, I happened to read an article in *National Geographic* that spoke of the injustice of Untouchables occurring in *my* world!

As I read on I realized that *Shatterglass* had many messages that reflected reality. For example: Kethlun Warder. Keth is a glassmaker of about twenty years who just wants to be normal—but can't. After being hit by lightning, he finds that his previous ease at glassmaking is gone and a mysterious power has taken its place. It is Tris's job to help Kethlun accept the fact that he is *not* like everyone else and that being different is OK, even good. Almost everyone deals with the issues of wanting to be someone he or she is not and having to accept reality.

And then the murder mystery. (That is the great thing about *Shatterglass*. It has at least three major plots occurring and intertwining all at the same time—and the book makes perfect sense!) Obviously I have never been involved with murder, so I can't relate directly to it, but the mystery made the story that much deeper, that much more believable, that much better. After murdering the victims, the assassin would take the bodies and place them in public areas where everyone would notice them, in order to make the point that the caste system was wrong. In this way the murderer ridicules the government, but that does not mean that this method of drawing attention to the issue is the right one to use. The killer's method of displaying the corpses brings further into view the insanity of the treatment of the *prathmuni*. It also shows how wrong murder really is; Pierce shows that no victims are anonymous losses. ❀

Where the Cotton Bolls Grow

By Sharon Wang

Illustrated by Vivienne Clark



Sharon Wang, 13
Troy, Michigan



Vivienne Clark, 11
Albuquerque, New Mexico

MY FATHER WAS THE FIRST in his rural hometown to ever go to college.

In China the colleges are scarce. College entrance exams were created to wipe out the majority of the people who wanted to advance from high school. In my father's time, not all the high-school graduates took the exams, and out of those who did, only three percent made it to college. It was the accomplishment of this feat that led him to meet my mother and eventually move to the United States.

Ten years later, our family took our first plane trip back to China. I was twelve the summer we rode on a silver bird over mountains and seas to fly to my father's homeland. We transferred to a seven-hour bus which bobbed over miles and miles of blue and green expanse with fishermen laying sheets of plastic on the sides of the road to dry their newly harvested crayfish. Bus changed to pickup truck when an uncle that I had never seen enthusiastically picked us up in the only automobile in the village, a large clumsy machine with a roar that mixed with that of the wind until I could not tell which was which.

Stretch upon stretch of green dotted with red and purple and white caught my eye. Beautiful flowers lay upon artistically stretched leaves that were waist-high. "They grow flowers here?" I shrieked. I caught the hint of the word "cotton" screamed back at me. My mom used to be obsessed with the movie *Gone with the Wind* when I was little, and the only cotton fields I had ever seen were the black-and-white ones in the movie. Seeing the



Stretch upon stretch of green dotted with red and purple and white caught my eye

fields of bright color, I had not realized that it was cotton.

When the engine of the pickup finally stopped roaring, there was a shabby courtyard to the right of us. In contrast to the bright shades of green in the fields, everything in the village living areas was a brown, as if all color had been washed out and worn away. A group of no less than thirty people of all ages stood outside the wooden double doors that were chipped

at the edges from fifty years of use. From the youngest at age eight to my grandma with sixty-some years behind her, they all seemed to be staring at me, eyes squinting from the sun. My family.

Something about the scene intimidated me into getting off on the other side of the pickup truck. The arrival of visitors from outside the country that no one had seen for ten years was a rare event; at night a crowd of farmers carrying stools

flooded into my grandparents' courtyard and seated themselves there, all looking as if waiting for me to do something. They did not revert to normal conversation until I told a few jokes in English and sang "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" for them, and it was not until after I had fallen asleep on my bed—a clay block covered with a layer of woven bamboo—that they picked up their stools and left.

I begged my dad to take me to the cotton fields the next day. I wanted to get a closer look at the tiny flowers and lush greenery so I could come to a conjecture about whether picking cotton was anything like *Gone with the Wind* had portrayed it. I studied the farmer closest to us. He was bent over, a large straw hat covering a sun-browned face. His shabby clothes were wet, droplets of water and sweat collecting on his shirt and his pants. A large tank of battered metal weighed upon his back. In one hand was a hose connected to the tank that he used to spray pesticide onto the plants below.

As I watched, he squirted the pesticide. A wave of pungent scent nearly choked me and my dad when the toxic fumes hit us. Clouds of sickly yellow misted the air. The farmer treaded into the cloud to reach the next stretch of cotton plants, and was hit by the spray. It clung to his clothes, sticky little droplets that covered all parts of his body. I realized with a jolt that what I had thought was water on his clothes was really pesticide.

My dad waved to the worker, and greeted him loudly. The farmer turned around,

eyes squinted in thought. It was apparent that he did not recognize my father.

"Qing!" My dad called out the farmer's name. To my shock, I recognized it as a popular name that parents in villages named their little girls, "hard-worker."

The farmer's face lighted in sudden recognition, and I realized that it indeed was a woman. She had apparently grown up with my dad and had all but forgotten him. My dad explained that he had moved to America after college and flew back with my mother and me for a visit. She had not known my dad at first sight, but she did seem to know what America was. Her eyes lit up, and she pointed to an empty can of pesticide on the ground. "That's from America," she said.

I went over and inspected the can. The Monsanto Company, St. Louis, had produced it.

"Say," Qing asked me, watching me read the words on the can, "do they grow cotton in America too?"

I shook my head, expecting her to start denouncing American farmers for not growing something as precious as cotton that she had grown all her life. Instead, she got a misty look in her eyes.

"America must be such a wonderful place. Don't have to grow cotton." She made a dramatic sweep with one hand, indicating the field. "The bugs have gotten worse and worse. Why, just a coupla years ago, Chinese pesticides work. Now only imported ones do. And sometimes even imported ones ain't strong enough. You gotta spray 'em once every ten days, or

else the cotton's gone for sure." Her voice was strong now. She didn't know about America or plane flights, but she did know about cotton.

Looking down, I saw her point. There, nested in a hole it had created in a premature boll of cotton, was a boll weevil enjoying a nap in the sun. Qing had just sprayed waves of pesticide over that very area. A sudden thought popped into my head. "Isn't pesticide highly toxic?"

"Aye," she replied. "Two villagers were rushed to the hospital in town just yesterday from pesticide poisoning. It's a dangerous job, it is."

Two villagers. I shuddered. How could you keep on doing something like that every day knowing that others had already died from it? Knowing that you could be next? From what I gathered from Qing and my dad's conversation, the "dangerous job" paid only two yuan or so per pound. That was a year's revenue of five thousand yuan, or about six hundred dollars. Yet it was the only way cotton growers had to put food in their children's mouths. For every twenty-five-dollar Kmart jacket that most people dismiss as being too cheap to be worn in public, only about fifty cents goes to the cotton farmers. If the cotton farmers reaped half as much as they sowed, those ugly jackets would be expensive enough to be worn in public.

I did not go back to the cotton field that day or the day after. My curiosity seemed to be suddenly sucked up, and

even the flowers weren't so pretty anymore.

The day before we left, someone told my father that Qing too had received pesticide poisoning and been rushed to the hospital. Somehow, since I had talked to her, I felt like she was my special cotton grower. Thankfully, by the time we received the news, she had been discharged from the hospital and was recovering in her home. I begged my parents for us to visit her. Since it was the custom to bring gifts whenever visiting anyone, I rummaged in my pack. All I managed to find was an electronic bouncy-ball, the kind that lit up and played music if you bounced it hard enough.

As I stepped onto the dirt floor of the dusty room that Qing was resting in, I noticed that even though she was extremely pallid and frail, she managed to look more spirited than the first time I saw her.

"We're going back to America tomorrow," my dad said softly. "We heard about what happened and came to see you before we left."

I took out the ball, bounced it for demonstration, and then put it in her hands. "This is something else that is made in America," I explained. Just like her pesticide.

She fingered the ball gently, running a digit over the line where the two rubber parts had been put together.

"America must be a wonderful place," she said. "Don't have to grow cotton . . ." ❁

Note: Cotton is grown in some parts of the United States.

The Locket of Lost Love

By Jessica Blanton

Illustrated by Lydia Trottman



Jessica Blanton, 12
Old Greenwich, Connecticut



Lydia Trottman, 12
Fort Collins, Colorado

MELISSA'S HAND RECKLESSLY fumbled in her backpack, reaching past crumpled papers and all the dried-out gel pens.

"Hurry up," the bus driver impatiently snapped, as she stared at the long line of kids. "I haven't got all day!"

"I'm looking for it," Melissa mumbled, now furiously tossing her notebooks out. Her bus pass was missing, and this meant a lengthy two-mile walk home. "You know I come on the bus every day," she tried, but wasn't successful. The doors of the bus closed in a hurry. She sighed, yet as she put everything back into her midnight backpack, something caught her eye.

A shiny gold chain was sticking out of the front pocket, revealing itself daintily. Melissa's shaking hands reached out to touch its thick, smooth texture. She gingerly pulled it out, glaring nervously at the heart locket in the middle. The paint had chipped off, now just showing the cheap material it was made of. "Mama," she whispered.

"Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday dear Mellie, happy birthday to you," the crowd chanted. Presents, presents were everywhere. Some wrapped in bright red, others in huge bows and clown party bags. And the balloons, they were all the colors of the rainbow, dazzling beauties covering the entire ceiling, each with a huge 4 on it.

"Mellie?"

Melissa jerked, startled by the sound of her name. It was Chloe, with a concerned look on her face. "Whatcha doing



"You can put it on," that gentle soothing voice said

here; it's almost four o'clock!" Melissa opened her mouth to tell the bus pass incident to her friend, but stopped. She saw Chloe curiously looking at the locket in her hand.

"It's nothing," Melissa anxiously said as she put the necklace in her pocket. "Anyway, I have to get home." A brisk autumn breeze hit her face as she got up.

"See ya tomorrow! Are ya coming to ballet today and . . ." Chloe's words were drowned out by Melissa's flashback.

Breathing in as much as possible, and then letting it all out, just blowing away the flames on the candles. How much fun that was. Of course, nothing could beat

opening presents, so the sweet sound of "Present time!" rang through the air. They then all formed a circle, and each delightful box was passed around. Clowns, yes, clowns. Clowns were on this certain bag, filled with glittery tissue paper. Inside, though, was the best treat. A locket.

Melissa continued on walking. A grin slowly formed on her face, as the memory became more and more real. How she longed to go back there, to her fourth birthday party, the time when no one seemed to have a care in the world. Now her heart ached. "Mama," she whispered, once again.

A girl, with curly light brown hair and a

surprised smile, and a thirty-year-old woman, with a straw hat and warm, soft eyes, were stored inside the locket. "You can put it on," that gentle soothing voice said. "Like this." Then an outburst of giggles exploded through the air. It jumped around the room until each person was absolutely hysterical. The smile faded, and turned into a frown. Just what was so funny?

"Oh, Mellie, dear, you look exactly like your mother when she was a little girl, identical, I must say. Your bright, happy face, and beautiful eyes," an elderly man kindly explained.

Melissa, for the second time that day, dug inside her backpack. Finally she found a small pocket mirror and gazed at her reflection. Is that you, Mama? Am I looking at you? Suddenly, her eyes swelled up and tears began to drop, one by one. She just couldn't help herself. And with a painful resentment, she opened the heart locket. Yes, there it was, a girl, with curly light brown hair and a surprised smile, and a thirty-year-old woman, with a straw hat and warm, soft eyes.

Before she knew it, Melissa was on Marshwood Boulevard, and just a few yards from her house. There would be Dad, trying to cook the quickest dinner, while watching ESPN at the same time. He probably would barely hear her walk in and start her homework.

THE SMELL of grease awaited Melissa as she stepped inside.

"Hey, Mellie. Decided I would order

Chinese, OK?" Dad said.

"Hmmm . . . is that the Bulls game you have on?"

"Nah. It just finished."

Melissa just nodded and started to head upstairs, when her father's voice stopped her.

"What's in your hand?" he asked, maybe a little louder than he meant. He was staring right into Melissa's teary eyes, and sensed that something was wrong. "If it is a teacher's note or something you better just come out and say it 'cause . . ."

"No, Dad." And Melissa opened her hand.

"Bye, honey," that amazing voice said. She stepped out into the lawn and walked down the gravel driveway.


"Bye, Mama." But little did anyone know how true that farewell was.

The woman floated into her Volvo and took off. Down the paved street, past the deep wooded area and soon out of sight.

A phone call came much later, followed by many others. The house soon became lonely, as everyone, looking quite ghostly, left. What is a hospital? What has happened? And where is Mama?

"Is that what I think it is?" Dad exclaimed, trying to sound more enthusiastic than he really was.

"She is gone." Melissa choked on the words, not even believing it herself. She just shook her head.

"No, that is where you are wrong." He took the locket from her hand and opened it up. "She is right here. In the locket of lost love." 

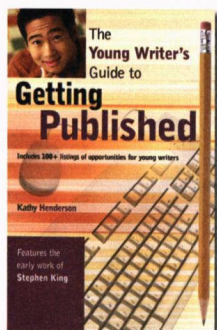
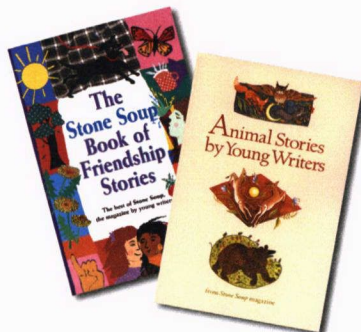
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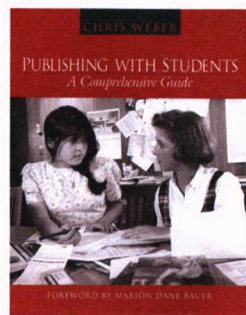
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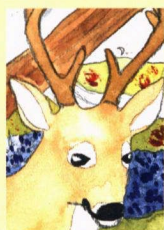
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