

Stone Soup

the magazine by young writers and artists



"Family at Lunch," by Katharina Tunemann, age 10, Heiligenstadt, Germany

MYSTERY AT THE MARSH

Ann and Jeff are determined to find out why the fish are dying

CHARACTERISTIC PROPERTY

Even in the year 3014, a girl can feel neglected by her busy parents

Also: Illustrations by Jessie Hennen and Jesyka Palmer

A review of a book about Mexican immigrants

A poem about September 11

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2002

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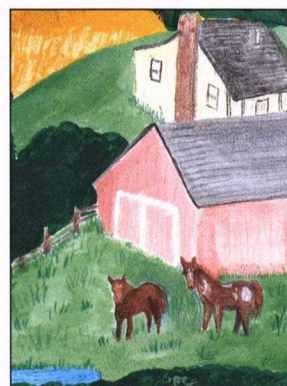
Stone Soup

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Volume 31, Number 1
September/October 2002

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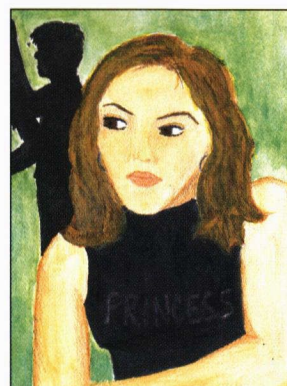
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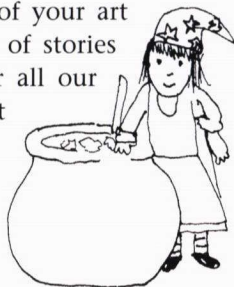
Welcome to all our readers, old and new! We've had the pleasure of publishing *Stone Soup* for over 29 years. It is our belief that, by presenting rich, heartfelt work by young people the world over, we can stir the imaginations of our readers and inspire young writers and artists to create.



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.)



Jessie Moore, 12

Cover: "Family at Lunch" is part of *Stone Soup*'s permanent collection of children's art. It was donated to us by Shankar's International Children's Competition in New Delhi, India, which has been held every year since 1949! Visit www.childrensbooktrust.com to learn more about Shankar's. Special thanks to Mrs. Srinivasan.

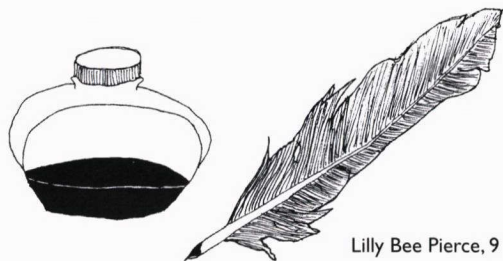
Gerry Mandel
William Rubel
Editors

❖
Laurie Gabriel
Subscription Director

❖
Stephen Pollard
Production

❖
Barbara Harker
Administrative Assistant

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Lilly Bee Pierce, 9

The Mailbox

In the story "Permanence" [January/February 2002], the reader follows a young girl who wanders the country as her father runs away from grief. She battles disappointment, broken trust, grief and constant separation. Anywhere she settles, her father takes her away from. It is because of his search for emotional comfort that Cassie finds herself learning never to assume something is permanent. This may sound like a professional story to those who don't know it appeared in *Stone Soup*. I believe that Xian Chiang-Waren shows immense talent in this style of writing. Someday her novels may appear on the bestseller list. Her story not only made me feel empathy with the characters, it made me realize things about myself and my own writing. All of my stories feature some kind of dramatic change in the character's life. This is because that is my deepest fear: change. I have always lived in the same house, my parents have never had a new baby, no one has died and no friends have moved away. I fear change. And my fear comes out in my writing, for it all has to do with change somehow. It was "Permanence" that made me realize this.

Eve Asher, 11
Auburndale, Massachusetts

Xian's new story is on page 5. Eve's story, "Guts and a Few Strokes," appeared in our March/April 2002 issue.

I am a Thai-American. I found your magazine at the bookstore the other day and read the whole thing right away while my mom was having her coffee and doing her homework. I really liked the stories, especially the one called "Little Mango Tree" [May/June 2002] because it was about Thailand. I was born in Thailand and go there almost every summer. The story painted a very good and accurate picture of Thailand. I could go there in my mind reading it.

Aubrey Pongluelert, 9
Fresno, California

As a child I was always in touch with the Holocaust. Ever since I knew what it was I could not stop reading about it. I felt that I had a special connection with the victims and survivors of this tragic event and I felt that there was more that I could learn. I am constantly searching for stories about children in their war-torn villages and homes. I would like to thank you for putting the poem "Grandfather" in your May/June 2002 issue. It really made that connection with the past stronger.

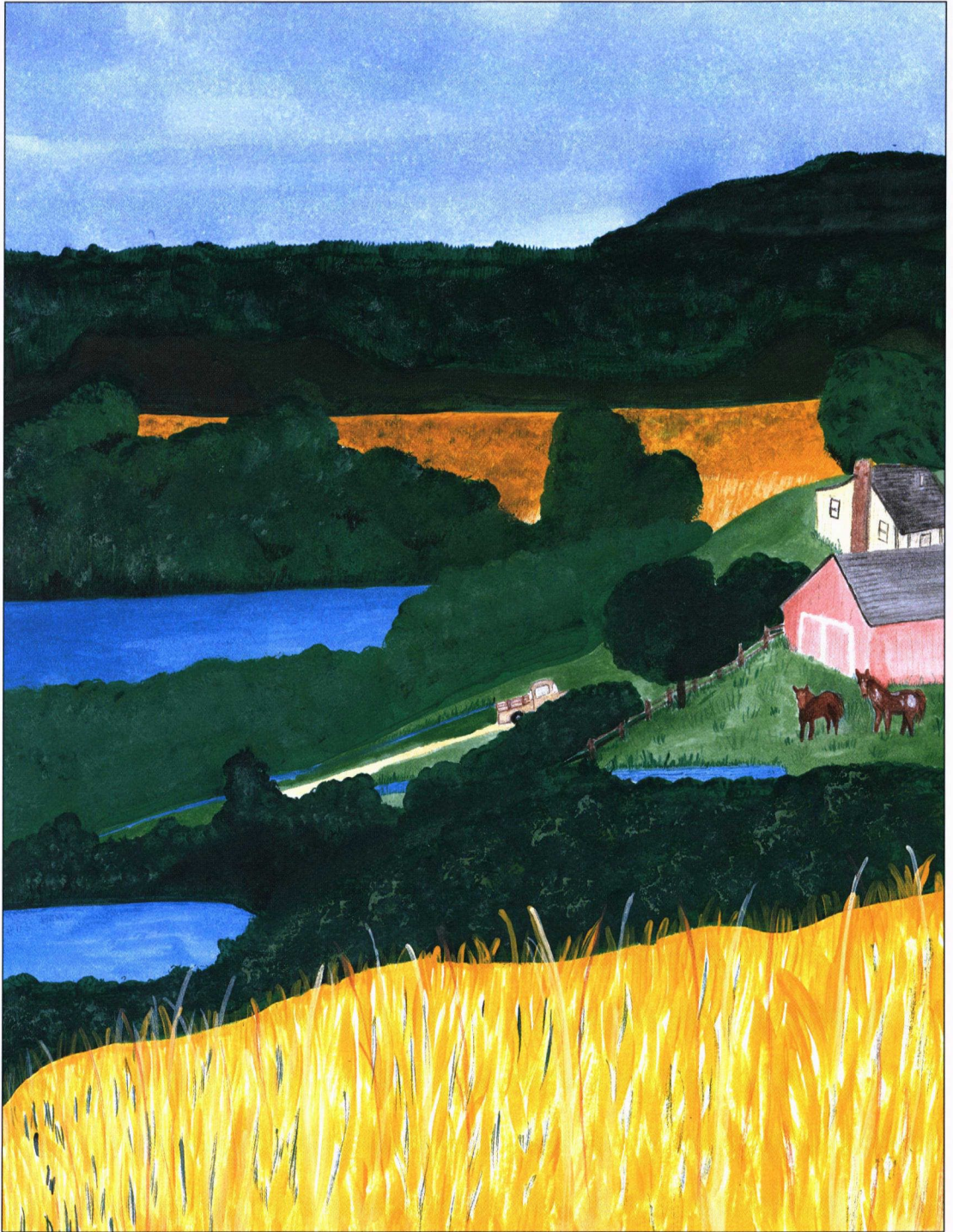
Sophie Date, 12
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

We have a whole section of Holocaust writing by children on our Web site, www.stonesoup.com.

I absolutely *LOVED* the story "Kisses from Cecile" in your May/June 2002 issue. It was amazing! I thought it was going to be one of those stories that I'd hold off reading for a while because it would be boring, but *boy* was I wrong! I got into it *so* quickly! I loved the way the author, Marie Agnello, had *actual* pictures. The story wouldn't be the same without them. I've been getting *Stone Soup* for two years and that is by far the best story I've ever read!

Julia Hanson, 10
Sudbury, Massachusetts

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



The Kentucky countryside was beautiful, with rolling green hills and grassy farmland

Allison

by Xian Chiang-Waren

illustrated by Jesyka Palmer

THE AIRPORT WAS ALMOST empty, with only a few solitary people wandering about the terminal. The silence echoed throughout the building, surrounding us in a hushed stillness. Mom and I stood by the baggage claim and waited for her friend to come.

"Mom," I whispered. "I do not want to do this."

"Shush, Lena," she replied. "I've been promising Liza we'd visit for years now, ever since you were a baby."

"I didn't want to come. I don't want to spend the summer in the middle of nowhere."

"I've known Liza since grade school, you know. We're old friends. We always planned to live next door to one another, but then she moved with her husband when the war started ..."

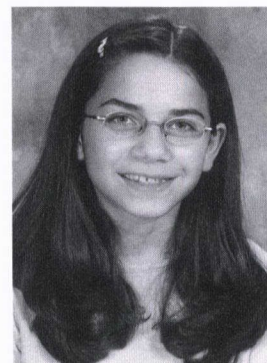
I stopped listening. Mom didn't notice; she was completely wrapped up in memory. I was angry at her, anyhow, for dragging me to the middle of nowhere, to visit her friend and her friend's children in Kentucky for the summer of 1981. A whole summer lost! I always spent summers at home in our upper-class Manhattan neighborhood, with my friends.

"Susan!" I looked up in surprise. A large, red-faced woman was rushing toward my mother with her arms outstretched and a huge smile on her face.

"Liza!" Mom squealed, returning the hug. The woman



Xian Chiang-Waren, 12
New York, New York



Jesyka Palmer, 11
Blissfield, Michigan

who was my mother's best friend peered down at me.

"I do declare, Susie!" she said. "This sure can't be the baby who you told me about, can it? Why, this girl is all but a young lady already!" Liza smiled at me. I didn't know what to say, so I didn't say anything.

"Sure's gonna be hot out today," Liza said as we walked to her car, an ancient tan pickup truck. "Y'all is gonna be a mite hot in them skirts an' tights you're wearing. My kids're all in shorts by mid-April, yep."

I looked down at my plaid skirt and white tights, noticing that I was already beginning to perspire. We drove along the road. It was already blistering hot outside, but the Kentucky countryside was beautiful, with rolling green hills and grassy farmland. We passed several crystal-clear streams and swimming holes.

Liza's farm was on a hillside. She grew tomatoes and corn and pumpkins, but she didn't actually do the work herself. "I got me a few hired workers," she told Mom and me.

The house was wooden, but painted yellow on the outside. Inside, it was slightly messy but comfortable. Liza looked around as we entered. "My kids are all over the place these days," she told Mom. "I've got four of them. My oldest, John, is at college. The others are Sam, Allison, and the littlest, Beth. Sam's sixteen, Beth's seven, and Allison is just about Lena's age." She didn't mention her husband.

Just then a girl ran through the back door, dressed in cut-off shorts and a yellow T-shirt. She was barefoot, and her golden hair streamed out behind her back. She was out of breath from running, her cheeks pink, hazel eyes sparkling. Liza smiled at her. "There you are, Allison. I was just telling Susan and Lena about you, I was." She turned to me. "Lena, this is my daughter Allison."

Allison sized me up, then smiled. "I'll show you your room," she said, leading me up the stairs. "You're in with me and Beth, and I guess your mom is on the couch." She opened the door to a room, with twin beds and a cot on the floor. The room wasn't painted, but there was a window looking out across the fields.

"You can have the bed, I don't mind the cot," Allison told me. I put my suitcase on one of the beds. "Do you want to look around the farm?" she asked.

I shrugged. "OK," I agreed.

Allison showed me the barn. "We've got horses, two of them. One's brown, named Chocolate, and the other's dappled. A real show horse, but we keep her for a pet really. Her name's Moon Light. Beth named her that."

Allison led me around the property, over the grassy hills and to the woods. The land was beautiful, fertile, not at all like the city. I fell in love with it at once. Allison pointed out her favorite trees, and the patterns of a spider web, raccoon tracks and hawks. The sun cast a golden glow, shining its light on the wildflowers and the land. I felt freer than I had ever felt in my life. Allison

smiled and laughed and sang little tunes. "I love this place," she told me.

"I already do, too," I said. And I meant it.

Allison smiled.

THE DAYS passed quickly in Kentucky. Allison showed me the swimming hole and her secret paths through the woods. She taught me how to ride Moon Light, the dappled horse. Soon I had traded my stiff skirts for a pair of cutoffs and T-shirts. Allison showed me the land, showed me how to whittle fishhooks and to build a fire. And she showed me sunrises.

I had seen sunrises before, of course, at home in New York. I watched them idly, usually half-asleep, listening to Mom and Dad talking in the kitchen. Dad hadn't come on the trip. He didn't like travel. Allison never mentioned her father, but she asked me an awful lot about mine. We would be walking along a path, and out of the blue she would say, "Does your father like flowers? Or is that just mothers?" And I was never sure if she was talking in general or about my parents in particular.

One of the first mornings there, I awoke in the soft bed, with the red-and-blue quilt pulled over me. Someone was shuffling around the room, opening the bureau drawers and putting on clothes. It wasn't even light out yet, the sky a pale gray that let out a faint light. Allison was brushing her hair into a ponytail, looking every so often out the window. "What're you doing?" I asked.

She turned to me. "Going to watch the sun rise," she answered. "Want to come?"

I got dressed quickly and combed my hair hurriedly, letting it fall loose because there wasn't time to put it up. Then we hurried across the fields, dodging the neat rows of corn and tomatoes. Allison led me through the woods, down a path that I hadn't been on yet. It led up a steep hill, lined with daffodils and dogwood and Queen Anne's lace.

We neared the top of the hill, where a tall, majestic sycamore tree loomed above the other trees, its branches reaching for the heavens. Allison started to climb it. "Come on," she said impatiently, when she saw I was still standing at the bottom. "You'll miss it."

"I can't." I backed away slightly.

"Can't climb a tree?" She shook her head in disbelief. "City girl."

I bristled, but Allison didn't notice. She grabbed my hand and pulled me to the lowest branch. "Climb," she commanded. I did, first hesitantly, then faster and faster, leaping from branch to branch, laughing into the faint breeze. I felt freer than anything right then, scrambling up that sycamore, smiling at the green leaves and the smooth bark. I followed Allison to a thick branch near the top. We sat there, under the canopy of green leaves and singing birds, to watch the sun rise.

At first it was just a slight glow of orange at the very edge of the horizon, then it rose a bit more until it was a



"Beautiful," I murmured. Allison nodded in agreement

half-circle, glowing red, painting the sky with rose and lavender. Yellow streaks appeared and the red ball of flame rose still higher until it popped into the sky. I let out the breath I had been holding. Allison sighed happily.

"Beautiful," I murmured. Allison nodded in agreement, and we sat there until the sky turned blue and we could hear Liza calling for us. Then we climbed down the tree and ran down the path to the farm.

AND THEN, all too soon, the summer was over. I was tanned, and the soles of my feet had hardened from running barefoot. My normally brown hair was sun-streaked to the point of being almost blond, and I was carrying a heart of freedom. I didn't want to leave.

But Mom was packing our suitcases and Liza had stored the cot away. Allison was taking me around the property again. We rode the horses, Chocolate and Moon Light, to the sycamore that last evening, to watch the sunset. "Just as pretty as sunrise," Allison promised. "Do fathers like to watch the sun?"

We climbed the tree and sat on the branch. "Allison?" I asked suddenly.

"Yeah?"

"Where's your father?"

She was silent, staring at the setting

sun. It glowed orange, casting an eternal glow over the earth. The wind rustled the leaves slightly, and we sat, watching it all.

"In Vietnam." She said it so abruptly, so directly. It shattered the peaceful silence around us.

"But the war was over years ago," I said, before I could stop myself.

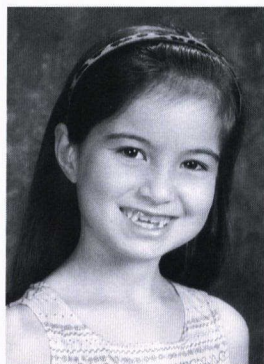
"He's coming back," she said softly, and suddenly she looked so delicate and fragile I thought she might break. I put my arm around her and she started crying, without making any noise, just silently crying as the sun set on my last day in Kentucky.

I'M BACK in New York now. The first day we were back seemed strange, with the ambulance sirens and the cars honking all up and down Central Park West. I watched the cars on the street, then across into the park. I found myself thinking about the tall sycamore on the hill. I wondered if there were climbing trees in Central Park. I had never tried to find out.

A light rain was falling on the window, but through the foggy clouds I could see the sun setting over New York. I leaned my head against the glass. Thanks, Allison, I thought contentedly. Thanks for the summer of a lifetime. ❖

America Ever After

by Tae Kathleen Keller



Tae Kathleen Keller, 8
Waihapu, Hawaii

I love to go to the library
walk through stacks
and rows
of books,
picking whatever I like,
the books pull me in.
I can go on any adventure.
I can sit and read
all day,
worming through them,
reading out the whole shelf
I am at home
and somewhere else
at the same time.

One morning,
I saw spinning
planes thud
into tragedy, crumbling
around the whole of America;
everybody listened,
hushed.
We sipped up the sadness.
Hurt.

I know I am safe
in my house
with people I love.
I hear the rushing water
of the sighing waterfall.
Mom clicks away on her computer.
I can see my little sister sit
silently,
waiting for Dad.
I grab my book
so I can disappear
into a world
of happily ever after.

I see ash
and broken brick.
I am worried.
There are people
under there, too.
My heart drops.
I would not want to be there.
I do not want a war.
I think about other kids
my age
in different countries.
They must be scared.
The war might come to them.

I am lucky to live
in America.

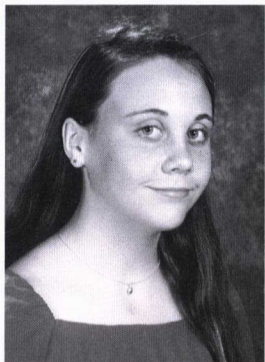
Phone Call

by Teresa Cotsirilos

illustrated by Caitlin Ayer



Teresa Cotsirilos, 13
Berkeley, California



Caitlin Ayer, 13
Campbell, California

J HAD BEEN WATER-COLORING when my mom poked her head through the classroom door. She made eye contact with my teacher Diane, who nodded and told me to get my things even though it wasn't even lunchtime yet and I'd never been able to eat my peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich, which was a shame because I liked peanut butter a lot. I was leaving school *early*.

"Why, Mommy?"

"Because you are going to receive a very *special* phone call."

Special. The word echoed. I didn't know what receive meant, but whatever it had to do with a phone call it was going to be *special*.

"Is the phone call for me?"

My mom looked at me sideways through the rearview mirror. "Yes, of course it's for you; you are the one *receiving* it."

A *special* phone call, for *me*!

"Who's calling, Mommy? Who's calling! Who am I to *receive* from?" I said the word carefully.

My mom smiled a little. "Her name is Kiria Eleni" (KEE-REE e-LAY-nee—the "r" is rolled).

"Kiria Eleni . . ." I liked the way her name rolled around in my mouth; it was quickness, light, a feather. I liked it. Delicious!—I was getting picked up *early* so that I could *receive* a *special* phone call that was all for *me* from Kiria Eleni.



I had seen plenty of wrinkled faces, but I'd never heard a wrinkled voice before

"Who is she?"

"She was Daddy's old nurse; When your grandmother, Yiayia (YI-ya) Theresa, got sick, she and your grandfather, Papou (pa-POO), wrote a letter to her village in Greece. The letter asked for a woman to come and take care of your daddy, who was only a baby then. And Kiria Eleni came."

"Why does she want to talk to me."

"Because you are the second Teresa."

I beamed. The Second Teresa. Many people I know now hate being second in things because it makes them feel subordinate, but for me, being The

Second Teresa was a heavenly privilege. She had died, and then years later when I was born they put a pinch of her memory into me. It was an honor.

My dad had come home early and was waiting for me. As soon as I walked in the door, he pulled a chair out from under my little table, seated it in the middle of the room, and then seated me on top of that. "Now Teresa," he said, squatting down in order to look me in the face. "I want to tell you some things about Kiria Eleni. She doesn't live in this country and doesn't speak English; she will be talking to you from Greece,

and she'll be speaking Greek to you. She is also very old."

I frowned. "How can I talk with her if I don't know any Greek?" It was going to be a problem. The only words of Greek I knew were *pisino* and *pisinake*, which both roughly translated to butt. It was the slang that I had picked up from my dad, and I was a bit embarrassed about using it with people outside of my family.

"Your *papou* will be on the line, too. He will translate for you." He turned to my mom and took a deep breath. "All right," he said, "let's call." He picked up the phone and dialed, then started talking in words that I couldn't understand. Then he talked in English a little, and then in gibberish again. I sat very still in my chair; the hard wood of the chair was beginning to hurt my *pisino*, but I was very good and sat still anyway. I watched my dad talk and talk as he was transferred from one place to the next, switching languages every so often as my mom paced back and forth. Then, my dad turned toward me and took the one, two, three long steps to where I had been waiting patiently. "Here you are," he said, handing me the phone.

I took it gingerly and held it away from my ear a little, afraid of getting bombarded with a torrent of Greek that would make me feel stupid. "Er . . . hello?"

It was only Papou. "Hi, dahlin'," he said. His loud Chicago voice was dampened by the stuffy connection. "How's my favorite granddaughter?" I was his

only granddaughter, at the time.

"I'm good."

"How's school?"

"Good. I did some water-coloring today."

"That's great. And what grade are you in again? First?"

I giggled. "*Second*, Papou, *second*!"

"Second grade! Wow, dahlin'! You're becoming a young lady! So do you want to talk to Kiria Eleni now?"

"Yeah. You in Greece?"

"Yeah. It's beautiful, dahlin'—I'll take you when you're thirteen, I promise. I'll take you to Greek school so that you can learn Greek and then I'll take you here. Boy, it's beautiful . . . all right, dahlin', I'm putting her on." He said something in what I assumed was Greek, and then someone else got on.

The voice was cracked and shriveled in an eerie way. I had seen plenty of wrinkled faces, but I'd never heard a wrinkled voice before because most of the old people I knew then were in surprisingly good shape. It was a stomach-jerking first. "O ya, mumble jumble-o . . ." the words were like quick fingers on a piano key. She sprinted to the finish line of her sentence. A rustling, and the phone was transferred to Papou.

"She said hello."

"Well. I say hello back."

Greek. She got the phone again. "Bla bla bla . . ." I listened intently, but she didn't say anything about *pisinos* so I didn't catch a word.

"She asked if your father has been teaching you any Greek."

"No. The only words I know are *pisino* and *pisinake*."

Papou gave out his laugh, a wry-dry guffaw that rumbles down from deep inside. He told this to Kiria Eleni, and she in turn cackled hysterically. "Yada yada yada . . ." This had to be the most surreal experience of my life.

"She said that's just like your father, and also wants to know if you're doing well with your studies."

I thought about the water-coloring I had left in order to talk to this woman. I was glad I had abandoned it. "School's good. I'm doing well." (It was a lie—I was one of the best writers in the class, but slept through math because I didn't get any of it. By the end of the year, I had been forced to tears over those ferocious numbers many, many times, and was ultimately forced to get a tutor.)

Greek, then English. "Good. If you go to school, then the world is open. You are smart, just like Theresa." There was a pause, and then, with a short chuckle, she said something else, and Papou translated.

"She said, 'I hope that I live long enough to meet you.'"

In the second before I responded, I remember my brain scrambling to think of something to answer with. My imagination sharpened; I saw myself diving

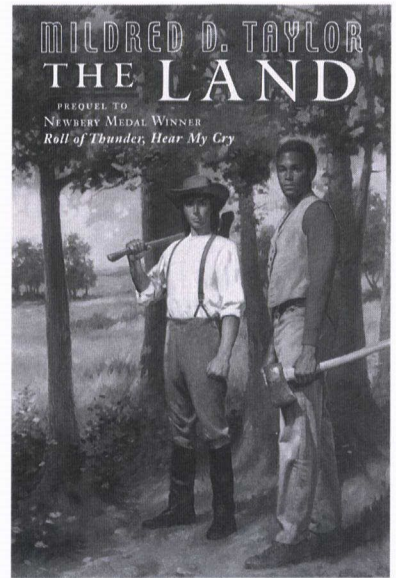
into the mouthpiece of the phone and flying across ocean and sea to Greece, to a kind old lady who wanted to see me, and who I suddenly desperately wanted to see too. I wanted to tell her all about the watercolors I was doing in class, and about my friends and enemies, and about my little brother. I wanted to ask her about Greece and Greek and the *yia-yia* that I never knew, but had still been given a piece of. It was a part of me that I knew nothing about. I wanted to sit there with Papou and with her and talk and talk and talk and then go off and play on the beaches of Greece with the happy children that were Greek, Greek like me (though I wondered whether or not they ate peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches, or just ate all those olives instead. Maybe they ate peanut-butter-and-olive sandwiches. I would have to find out.) And at night when they thought I was sleeping, I would hear them talking about how wonderfully I was growing up, and then I would feel proud.

My dreams were coated with the knowledge that they were unreachable—she was old, and I was not thirteen, and she would go, and with her, all the things she could have told me.

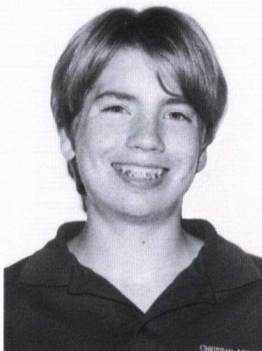
"Tell her," I said, "that I hope she does, too." ❖

Book Review


by Sam Gates



The Land by Mildred D. Taylor; Phyllis Fogelman Books: New York, 2001; \$17.99



Sam Gates, 13
Louisville, Kentucky

“AN'T FIGURE HOW YOU can be so crazy 'bout them white brothers of yours neither, when once y'all grown, they'll be the boss and you'll be jus' another nigger.”

One of the factors that made *The Land* so interesting was a unique conflict. Paul-Edward grew up with a black mother and a white father during the post-Civil War era. There was still a good deal of hate between the two races in the South. Though slavery was illegal, blacks were still treated like dirt. As Paul-Edward was growing up, he was the proverbial “man without a country.” Blacks didn’t like him because he had white skin and whites didn’t like him because they just knew that down deep he was a black. As I said earlier, this presented a very unique conflict.

Another reason that *The Land* was so good was that it played my emotions better than Yo-Yo Ma can play the cello. When Paul was trying to win the horse race, my blood pressure rose higher. When Paul was missing his dad because of

running away on the train, the next time I saw my dad I hugged him tighter. When Paul was running from the whites, I pulled my bed covers a little closer.

The two main characters are Mitchell, a black who starts out hating Paul-Edward, but eventually—through a deal with him—becomes his best friend. Mitchell isn't afraid of anything, and has a great sense of humor. The other main character, of course, is Paul himself. He is very intellectual, has a healthy amount of worries, and doesn't understand why whites hate blacks. These characters' clashing personalities give the book pizzazz and bring two, usually opposite, views of each situation into the mix,

making it a lot more fun to read.

Most people would say this book is simply preaching against racism, but the moral goes deeper than color. *The Land* is not just simply about blacks vs. whites, but it tells a story of how through friendship, love, and determination a man beat the odds and made his dream a reality. It doesn't matter if it's a black who wants to own land in a white man's country, or a boy who wants to become president when he grows up, the moral is that nice guys don't necessarily finish last. *The Land* is fast-paced, a quick read, and very well written. I normally do not even enjoy historical fiction, but this was one of the best books I have read in a while. ♦



Katie Yost, 12, Dover, Delaware



It looked cold and lonely, but Ann knew it was full of life

Mystery at the Marsh

by Marie Chapman

illustrated by Jessie Hennen

“**L**OOK!” A LITTLE BROWN HEAD bobbed out from under the dock; the feet under it propelled it around the reeds and out of sight. “What was that thing?” asked Ted, almost falling into the water trying to find it.

“A muskrat, kids. You can use that in your essay when we get back to school,” said Miss Cole.

Ann Dover looked out at the ripples shimmering and glistening with the reflected sun. She sighed, her breath sending a gray smoke-like puff over the lake. The gently swaying cattails rustled and Ann caught a whiff of the dusty incense they gave off, tickling her pink, cold nose.

“OK, class, you may start taking notes now.”

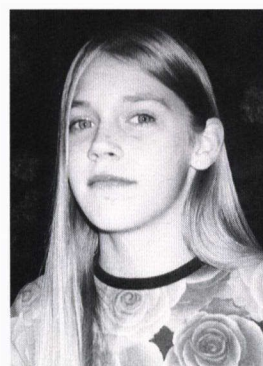
Ann stared into the water. The bottom was covered with long, stringy algae, which she assumed was making the almost-faint stench. It looked cold and lonely, but Ann knew it was full of life.

“Full of life,” she wrote.

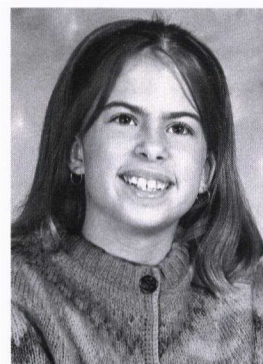
As Ann looked back at the warm biological station, she noticed something by the bank. It was a big pile of what looked like algae, but it was more clumpy, like individual things. She started to examine it, but out of the corner of her eye, she saw her teacher looking disapprovingly at her, and quickly started writing.

“OK, kids, pack up. It’s snack time!”

Ann heard people hiss, “Yesssss!” under their breath.



Marie Chapman, 12
Madison, Wisconsin



Jessie Hennen, 13
Shoreview, Minnesota

Everyone got up and formed a line. As they trudged back up the dock, stomping their feet to warm them, Ann heard Bob whisper to Jeff, "Finally. It smelled like dead fish over there."

Dead fish. That was what the pile was. But how did all those fish die? Ann thought. Best not to think about that now, she decided. All she was thinking about was having a nice snack in the warm biological station.

ANN WAS RELIEVED when the class stepped in front of big doors leading to a warm, cozy habitat. Everyone wanted to get in, and there was a scramble as the doors of the biological station opened.

Along the wall were all sorts of stuffed marsh birds, displays of life cycles, and glass cases of rock samples marked with little labels. Off to one side, there was a little shelf. In it were eleven or twelve species of fish. Fish. Ann caught up with her class and seated herself against the wall. After unzipping her backpack, she took out a fruit roll-up.

Dead fish. True, it was still cold from the winter that had passed, but they should have been hibernating, or whatever fish do. She would have to look around the lake again.

Sitting up, she saw a little plate that said "Men's Room—205. Women's Room—128." The women's room was downstairs! She could ask to use the bathroom, and then slip out the door that led to the lake. Getting up, she

walked over to her teacher.

"Miss Cole, may I use the bathroom?" Ann held her breath.

"Hurry back. We'll be working on the trail next."

Rushing downstairs, Ann started searching for the lake door. She had only seen it from the dock, and it wasn't a main door.

"Hi!" Ann glanced up. Looking down at her was a kind-faced woman in a scientist's white lab coat. Her name tag read Biologist Mason. "May I help you?" she asked.

Ann thought quickly. "Could you show me to the bathroom?" she asked, hoping her face didn't give her away.

"Right down the hall, and through the third door on the left," the woman answered. Ann thanked her, and started to the bathroom.

"Do you like the lake?" she heard Biologist Mason call after her. Ann turned around and nodded, trying to make it look like she was in a hurry.

"Come with your family sometime, and I'll show you around. My name's Jennifer." With that, finally, the biologist turned and retreated into a lab.

Ann stood a moment, thinking. Then, she realized how little time she had. Stepping down the last of the stairs, she looked right. There was a lab. She looked left. There was a big door propped open by an oar. Ann pushed open the door and stepped out onto a dirt path. A little to the right stood the dock. Ann ran out to where the fish were. It hadn't changed from a few min-

utes ago. There was nothing she could see to cause the fishes' death. Crushed, Ann turned around; she was face-to-face with Jeff Schiller, one of her seventh-grade classmates.

Ann stared at him. Then, knowing they would both get in trouble if they were late, they started walking back. "You're going to tell on me, aren't you," Ann said without looking at him.

"No, I was coming out for the same reason. To see about the fish." Seeing Ann didn't trust him, he added, "We can find out together."

"OK," Ann said. "But not now, we'll be late. I'll talk to you at break." She immediately regretted it, but there was no time to take it back. Jeff followed her as they ran up the stairs, clanging on the metal, making an echo loud enough for the world to hear.

"**R**INNNNNNNG!" Back at school, break time had finally crept its way up to pounce on Ann. She looked around, but in the mass of kids, she lost sight of Jeff by the door. Slowly, she slipped her essay paper (titled "Wingra Marsh") in a blue folder and, putting her pencil back in her desk, got to her feet.

Other girls have crushes on boys, but not me, she thought, staring at the door. What will people think when they see me talking to Jeff—the most popular boy at Henry James Middle School? She took a deep breath and started outside.

"Ann."

Ann jumped. She had forgotten about Miss Cole correcting papers at her desk.

"May I see your essay, please?"

"Oh," Ann said, taking the folder out again. She brought it up to Miss Cole's desk. "It's not done." She handed it to her teacher, who took it and started reading it. Wondering how much break was left, she glanced at the clock: 11:48. Already, four minutes had passed. If her teacher had a talk planned, she'd never get outside. Tick, tick, tick. The clock continued ticking and her teacher continued reading. Ann could see that she was impressed. Another minute went by.

"You seem to know a lot about the marsh." Miss Cole had finally finished reading. "Why don't you speak up in class if you know things so well?"

Ann immediately knew she was not getting outside today. Next and last break she had to stay in for a special class.

"I'm afraid I'll be wrong," she answered half-truthfully, her head down. The whole truth was, if she were wrong, she thought Jeff would think she was stupid.

"There's stuff in here I didn't know, Ann." Ann looked up. "Is it OK if I publish it when it's done?" Miss Cole looked hopeful.

"Uh, OK..." Ann stammered.

"Thank you," Miss Cole said as the door opened. The class came spilling into the classroom. Jeff looked at her. They sat down across from each other.

The class began algebra. Ann took out her textbook but didn't try to solve



Ann looked at him and picked up the paper, smoothing it out

$5m + 2 = 3m + 2(m + 1)$. Instead, she looked at Jeff, who was scribbling something on a piece of paper. Then Jeff crushed it up in a ball under his desk as quietly as he could, put it on the floor, and watched Miss Cole as did the rest of the class.

What's he up to? thought Ann, as Joey McCarfy gave the answer to the math problem. Finally, when Miss Cole turned to the blackboard, Jeff kicked the paper across the aisle and it landed under her desk. Ann looked at him and picked up the paper, smoothing it out. Wow, he's got good handwriting, she

thought as she read, "Why didn't you come outside?"

Ann looked up at Miss Cole, who was busy writing an answer on the board, and wrote under Jeff's message, "Miss Cole wanted to see my essay." Well, I may as well impress him, she muttered, and printed, "She wants to publish it. We can talk at my house." Ann rolled the note up and kicked it back. She watched Jeff's eyes flicker across it.

Just then, Miss Cole turned around. When Miss Cole turned back to the board again, Jeff caught Ann's eye and nodded.

ANN FELT THE cool handbar on the school's front door. "You're standing where everyone will see us, Jeff—*move!*" she muttered. She looked through the glass at all the kids standing around. She tried to get his attention by waving a little, but Jeff was talking to another boy, still looking around.

When the boy moved away, Ann, having no other choice, put up her hood and went through the door. Jeff saw her and opened his mouth to speak.

"No." Ann shook her head. She put a finger to her lips. They moved away and started across the street.

"Why did you shush me?"

"Well . . ." Ann didn't want him to know she was embarrassed. "I . . . I want to keep it private."

"OK. Where do you live?"

"Right here."

"Oh. You live really close to school."

"Yup." She looked down at an ant crawling over her shoe. "I know. Let's go down to the marsh. There's this lady—Jennifer—who could take us on one of those tours. With all those people, we'll blend right in. I'll leave a note for my dad, and you can call your mom or dad."

They went inside. Ann showed Jeff the phone, then fumbled around in a drawer for a pad of paper. As she wrote "Gone to the marsh. Be back soon. Love you," she heard Jeff say, "Mom! We're just interested in the same things." He glanced around impatiently and, spying Ann watching, said, "Uh, I should go now. Bye." Ann turned to hide a giggle.

Seven minutes later they stepped into the Mazzuchelli Biological Station. "Hmmm . . . there's no one here," Jeff said, looking around.

"Let's go outside and see if she's leading a tour."

Jennifer was, and was just saying to her group, "So, if you see anything, tell the police, and you'll be able to visit soon." She looked worried. Ann and Jeff went up to her. "Back so soon?" Jennifer asked Ann when she recognized her. "Is this your big brother?"

"No, he's . . ." She tried to find a way to say "not my brother or my boyfriend" without hurting Jeff's feelings. ". . . a classmate from school. Is there something wrong?"

"Yes. Someone just snuck into some labs and ruined all the equipment and experiments. I'm afraid you'll have to go home until we get things sorted out."

Ann stared at her. "But who?"

"We don't know. I need to sort this out, so . . ." She gestured to the gate.

"But we think we found something," Jeff put in quickly.

"What sort of something?" It was obvious Ms. Mason was ready to accept help from anyone she thought could help.

"Dead fish." Ann was now active when she realized she could help. "They're over here."

Ann and Jeff led Jennifer over to the dock and pointed to the fish. "Yuck! This water looks too thick and slimy to be sanitary for fish," Jennifer said. "I'll take a sample to test at whatever's left of

the lab." They took the sample to the lab.

"Oh my, it's oil. Someone *tried* to kill the fish."

Ann and Jeff looked at each other, not proudly because they had found something important, but with worry. "We'll find the people who did this, don't worry," Ann said bravely. Right now, she and Jeff were in this together. "Unless the marsh gets destroyed first. If the marsh goes, the clues go!"

JEFF AND ANN walked home together. "I'll call you after dinner. You know, see if we've thought of anything useful." Ann went in the house, and Jeff walked on to his apartment seven or eight blocks away.

Ann didn't think of anything and neither did Jeff, she found when she looked up his number and called him. "We can't do anything . . . wait!" Ann paused.

"What?" came Jeff's voice from the forgotten telephone.

Ann put it to her ear again. "I just thought of something. We have to go back. Tonight, after you're in bed, get dressed again and meet me at the playground across from Mazzuchelli. Without your parents knowing."

Jeff, apparently stunned, asked, "How?"

"Climb out a window or something. I don't know."

Her father's voice came from the hall. "I need to call your mother. What are you doing?"

"Just getting a homework assignment," Ann called back. "Bring a flashlight," she hissed into the mouthpiece, and hung up.

"HE'S NOT HERE. I shouldn't have trusted him." Ann was waiting under a streetlight at the gate by the marsh.

"Trusted who?" a voice came from behind her. It was Jeff. "Hey, I went through a lot to get here. I twisted my foot climbing down the tree from my window. Now, what's your little plan?"

Ann looked at his annoyed face in the dark. "Now that you're here, you don't have to be sarcastic." She held up a camera. "We, two middle-school kids, are going to catch the culprit in action."

"What?"

"They have to be here. Why wait? They could come here tonight and do whatever their sick little minds command them to do."

IT WAS VERY dark and rainy outside, and Ann was afraid she wouldn't get a clear picture of the person's face. She also knew that this was extremely dangerous, going after a criminal at night, alone, without an adult. She held on to Jeff's hand harder, as she helped him along the edge of Wingra Lake on his bad foot.

"Why are we here? What are the chances the people will come back? They've only been here two times."

"Jeff, I know it's been two times. I can add. My initials *spell* add. Ann Danielle

Dover."

"Well then, maybe you can add up all the hours we've been here."

"Boys." Ann sighed and looked around a tree, holding up her flash camera. They went on and on and on, listening and watching for movement other than their own. Suddenly, Ann stopped and put out an arm to stop Jeff. "What's that?" She pointed to a big unmoving object sitting on the trail.

"I don't know, Ann. Maybe it's dynamite the people here are going to use to blow us up with."

Ann rolled her eyes and turned on a flashlight to see it better. She gasped. "It's a Bobcat. They're going to try to destroy the land." The little bulldozer was just sitting there. Someone must be coming back for it.

The moon went behind a cloud like it was afraid of something coming. "Jeff, we have to hide. Then we can take the picture and get out of here. Quick! Get behind this tree!"

In his rush, Jeff tripped on a stone. He yelled, teetered a little, then fell backward into the lake with a splash.

"Jeff, give me your hand. Be quiet." Just then a light from a flashlight appeared and men's voices rang in their ears as they froze.

ANN WAS STANDING in the water holding Jeff's hand and Jeff was lying on his back next to the dock, his eyes wide.

No time to help him out of the lake, Ann thought. Holding the camera

above the water, she pulled Jeff under the dock, their heads still above the surface. They peeked around the side of the dock. There, indeed, were two men walking around. They were so close that Ann could smell their cigarettes burning and hear the two men muttering. As she held her breath, Ann could hear what they were saying.

"Doesn't care what could happen to us. Just wants his mini-mall. I've been in jail before, and I don't want to go there again. If it weren't for that 'dozer I'd be at home right now, relaxing."

Ann choked, thinking the whiner had said "Dover," instead of "dozer." In the moonlight, she saw a pistol stuck in his belt.

Ann pointed to Jeff's flashlight, and motioned to hold it up at the villains' faces. She held up her camera. "This should get both faces and the Bobcat," she thought.

"Get ready to swim," she whispered to Jeff. "Turn the flashlight on . . . now!"

"I guess we'd better get started," the other man began.

Jeff's flashlight flicked on and Ann's camera clicked.

The bigger man, who was just speaking, had been twirling the keys to the bulldozer on his thumb. Ann got a perfect shot of his face as he dropped the keys. "Get them!" the bigger one shouted at the other.

Ann and Jeff turned around and swam. They swam as if the lake would swallow them up if they didn't get out of the water in half a breath.



"Get ready to swim," she whispered to Jeff. "Turn the flashlight on . . . now!"

Ann looked back. The smaller man was running the length of the dock. He reached the end and plunged in the water with a clumsy dive. He landed flat on his stomach with a slap; water sprayed up into the bigger man's face, who was screaming at the other one. Ann didn't look back but kept swimming, but Jeff didn't. Even in the dark, she could make out his face from the man's flashlight. He was smiling!

"Don't swim, you idiot! Shoot them!" the man on the dock yelled.

"He can't swim, look!" said Jeff. Ann looked and, sure enough, the man in the water was floundering around, more intent on trying not to drown than getting his gun out.

Reaching the other side of the small lake, Ann and Jeff scrambled under the fence. They ran across the bridge to the park, right into a policeman. Then they saw Jennifer. Jeff just pointed, but Ann said, "I left the camera under the dock, in case they're not there."

The police ran around to the gate and Jennifer walked the kids back home. "What happened to you guys? The police said someone walking by Mazzuchelli heard someone inside and called them." She looked at them, soaked and

dirty.

Jeff grinned at Ann, and picked a leech off his knee. "Let's just say we don't need any more swimming lessons."

YEARS LATER . . .

"**A**ND THE POLICE found the camera, developed the picture, and caught the people who were trying to ruin the marsh. Their boss wanted the land to be sold for a mall that he would make profits from."

Ann Dover sat with her husband on the dock, her auburn hair flying with the lake wind, and her naturalist name tag gleaming proudly.

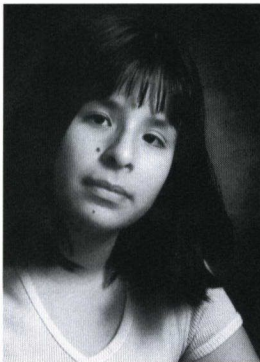
Jeff smiled at her. "We grew up together, and that's when we fell in love. Ann couldn't leave the marsh, so her new job is teaching kids like you about it."

The school kids, a little younger than Ann was when her class took a field trip to Mazzuchelli, stared at them.

"OK, kids, back to your teacher." It was Jennifer. She winked at Ann and her husband as she ushered the kids back on land. Ann let out a deep sigh and looked into the water, which she knew was "full of life." ❖

Book Review

by Luisa V. Lopez



Luisa V. Lopez, 11
New York, New York

Luisa was 10 when she
wrote her review.

Esperanza Rising by Pam Muñoz Ryan; Scholastic Press:
New York, 2000; \$15.95

DID YOU KNOW THAT *esperanza* means *hope* in Spanish? That word, and that word alone, is the perfect way to describe the young heroine of this novel, *Esperanza Ortega*.

Esperanza Ortega is a pampered little rich girl in Aguascalientes, Mexico in 1930, who has all the food, clothes, and toys that any twelve-year-old child could want. She has many servants and she has her love for her mother, father, and grandmother. The novel starts by showing the theme of the book: when Esperanza was six years old, her father took her for a walk in El Rancho de Rosas, their home, and told her to lie down in the field, and she could feel the heart of the valley. When Esperanza did as he said, it turned out to be true, and she and her father shared this little secret.

The day before Esperanza's thirteenth birthday, however, a horrible thing happens: her father is attacked and killed by bandits, who believe that they killed righteously, because Papa is rich and most likely scorns the poor, like them. When this dreadful news is delivered to Esperanza and her

mother, they go into mourning, and Papa's older stepbrothers, Tio Marco and Tio Luis, come to supposedly help them through their time of need. The true purpose for their staying comes clear, though, when Tio Luis announces that he wishes to marry Mama. However, Mama turns his proposal down. But after the uncles burn their house to the ground, the family realizes that they must leave Mexico.

Esperanza, Mama, and their former servants—Miguel, Alfonso, and Hortensia—take the train to California and begin to work as farm laborers. Esperanza is enraged, however, because she is not used to “being treated like horses” or living among poor people. Even after she befriends Miguel's younger cousin Isabel, she still scorns and fears the labor camp because there are the strikers in it who are trying to get better working conditions and will stop at nothing and no one to get what they want.

I liked *Esperanza Rising*, but there was one big thing that I didn't like: Esperanza was so real a character that I felt a little bit queasy. I'm not very comfortable around realistic fiction books. I'm more the fantasy-novel type. I still don't like books that don't end “happily ever after.”

There were some things that Esperanza experienced that I have as well. When Esperanza was asked to sweep the porch and she didn't know how to even use a broom, I knew just how she felt, because I've had that feeling more than

once. When I was little, I begged my mom to let me have a bike, so I could be “just like the big kids,” and I never rode it, so I've never learned how to ride a bike. When my friends ask me to ride my bike with them, I always have to lie and say that it's “much closer to walk,” and “oh, couldn't you walk, too?” It's very difficult when you can't do something that most other people can. But Esperanza learned how to use a broom, while I still have yet to learn how to ride a bike!

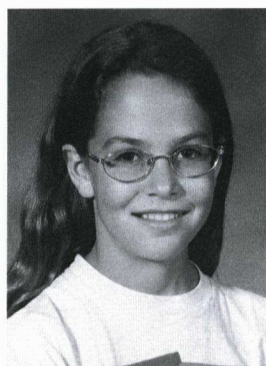
Esperanza Rising is written so you could definitely feel what the characters were feeling. I very nearly almost laughed out loud at the part when Esperanza had to wash the babies' diapers and she didn't know how, so she was just dipping them into the washing basin with two fingers.

Esperanza Rising is a vivid, well-written book. The author takes her time, and describes every scene and every character as though the whole novel revolved around them. And she shows how Esperanza changes: from a pampered, stuck-up girl, to an understanding young woman. And the whole story contains hope. Hope that the strikers will understand why Esperanza and her family and the other workers need their jobs and will not join them. Hope that Esperanza will one day become rich again. And hope that Abuelita, Esperanza's grandmother, will one day come and join Esperanza and Mama in the labor camp, because she was left behind at El Rancho de Rosas. ♦

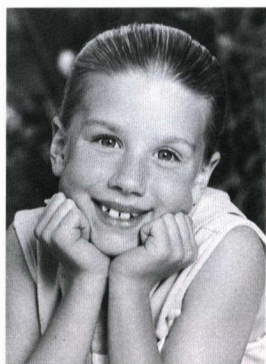
Paradise

by Leah Sausjord Karlins

illustrated by Maya Sprinsock



Leah Sausjord Karlins, 12
Campbell, California



Maya Sprinsock, 9
Santa Cruz, California



LOOK ONCE MORE out the rolled-down window of our faded blue Chevrolet and gaze out at our little yellow summer house, rapidly shrinking as we roll away. The trim white shutters are pulled tight, awaiting next year when we return and the house will brim with life and energy once again. I see our dark auburn porch sitting peacefully on the sand. A warm breeze blows, tinkling the silver chimes that hang from its roof. The little windowbox my mom uses during the summer has nothing left but a little dirt and maybe a couple of dead spiders.

Stretching below and past the porch is pure white sand. It leads to sparkling aqua-blue waters that reflect the sun and almost blind me in their brightness. I remember this morning when I took a last swim in the cool, turquoise waters. The sunrise was beautiful, pale pink, lavender, and apricot, but the water held a chill which I hadn't felt all summer.

I look down at my patched denim cutoffs. They have been worn so many times that they are almost white, but they hold a faint sea-smell that I love. Those shorts bring back memories of all the past summers we have spent on Richolette Beach. I remember the sunny day a few years ago when a bunch of neighbors and our whole family teamed up to push a beached whale back to sea. I recall that notable time when Dad first taught me how to sail a boat. I remember watching my first falling star on Grandma's knees late



I remember this morning when I took a last swim in the cool, turquoise waters

one night, catching my first fish, and learning the miracle of life one week as I watched hundreds of baby sea turtles, just hatched, crawl to the sea for the first time.

Mom reprimanded me this morning, saying that it will be cold back in San Francisco and I should at least wear pants, but I insisted that since it was the last day of summer, I was going to wear my summer shorts. The last day of summer. I guess I can't deny any longer that fall is really coming. The leaves of the oaks and maples we drive by remind me of colorful nasturtiums and flickering flames with their brilliant reds, oranges and yellows.

I look back longingly at my lovely days of getting up early for a refreshing morning swim, sunbathing idly on the soft, warm sand, and hunting for interesting shells for my collection. I

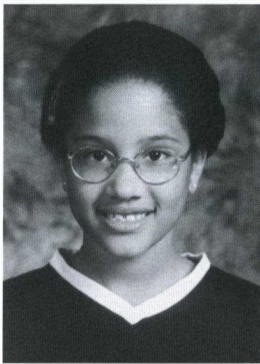
remember watching the sun set over the ocean and then dropping into bed, exhausted but exhilarated, to fall asleep to the peaceful sounds of waves lapping playfully on the sand, and crickets chirping soothing lullabies. Realization creeps over me that starting tomorrow I will again be forced to stick to a strict schedule of homework, teachers and classes. I shudder slightly as a cool wind sweeps through the car window, which I close.

Forcing thoughts of school to the back of my mind, I lean back cozily against the warm seat and close my eyes. My mind wanders freely, and again I start daydreaming of past days at the little house on Richolette Beach. For I know that summer will come again, and I will once more lie on the sand, idly watching the gentle waves. I know that once more, I can be in paradise. ❖

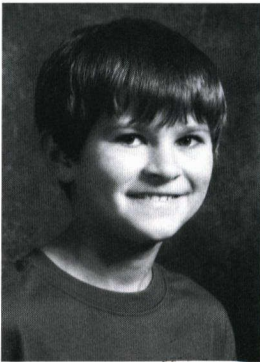
Characteristic Property

by Rachel Marris Reeves

illustrated by Martin Taylor



Rachel Marris Reeves, 12
Kensington, Maryland

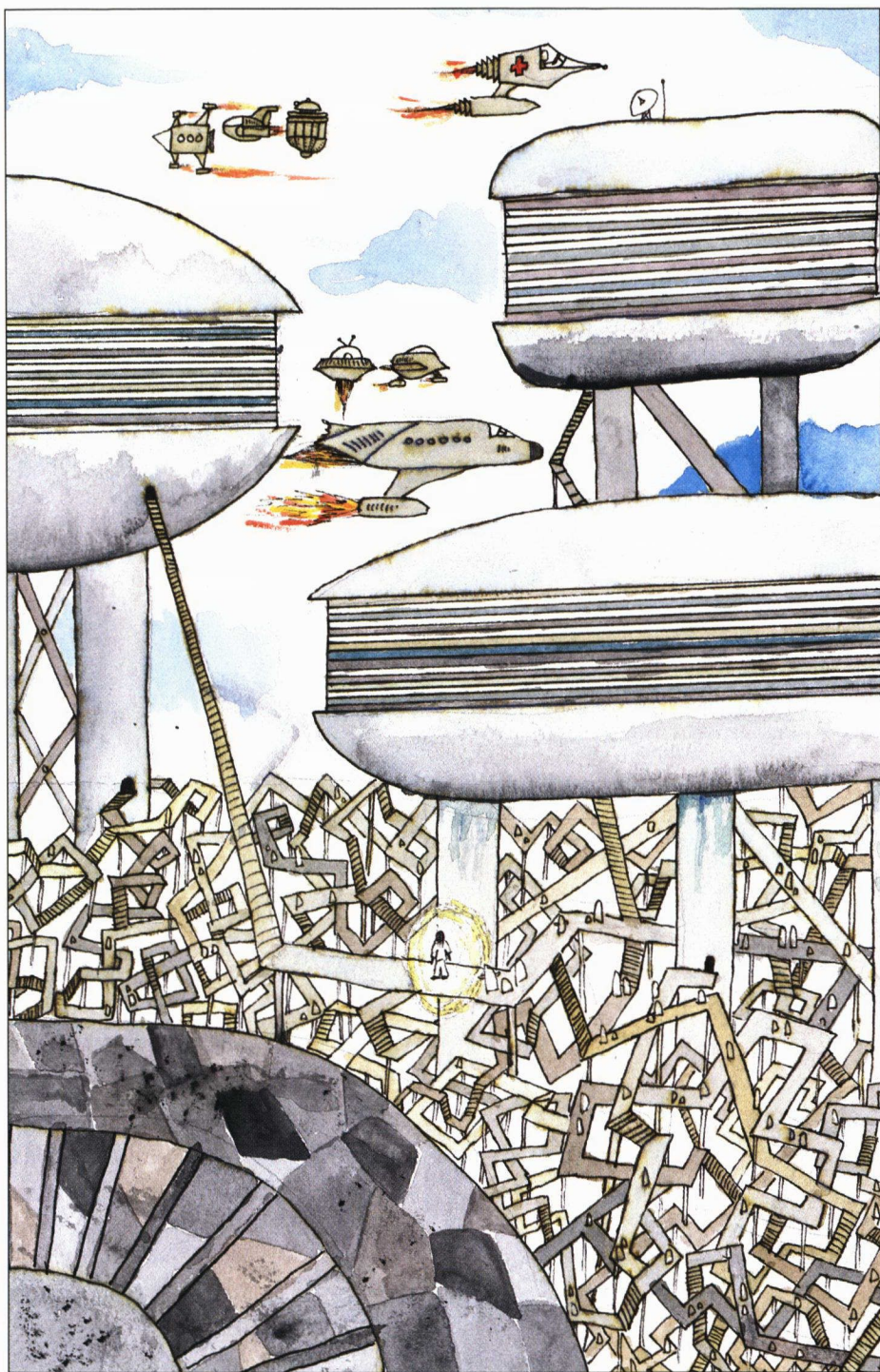


Martin Taylor, 12
Portola Valley, California

THE SPACE PODS ZOOMED above Cassiopeia Jaiden Starwing as she stood on the moving sidewalk on her way home from Academy. Cassie ignored the zooming noise as everyone else did, but her mind did not focus on the obvious. Cassie always acted mellow—she was the youngest of seven children, and the only girl, and she was used to lying low while her brothers got into trouble. But today Cassie was bubbling inside. Tomorrow was her thirteenth birthday, but, like everyone on the planet Earth, she celebrated a day before with her family members. Today was her special day—her day to shine.

Cassie grinned as the sidewalk approached her home. It was common knowledge throughout the galaxy that the people on Earth had some of the richest homes anywhere—Earth was a base station to the other planets and jobs there were well paying and important. Cassie's home was no exception—it was a huge house, with floor upon floor of circular living space. Cassie's father owned the fastest growing rocket ship company in the galaxy, and was always busy. Cassie's mother used to work for the Intergalactical Peace Council and retired soon after her second son, Forrest, was born. Now Oriana Starwing was one of the most admired economics teachers on Earth, and was known as far away as Neptune.

Cassie entered her home, expecting to be greeted by her



The space pods zoomed above Cassiopeia as she stood on the moving sidewalk

family at the door, the way her brothers' celebrations began, but things were not as she suspected. In fact, they were the opposite. Her mother rushed around, collecting papers and briefcases, her pretty blond hair pulled off her face, exposing her Martian features, a skinny pointy nose and a heart-shaped face. Her father, unusually harried, barked instructions into the videophone in the living room. Cassie could see he was talking to his secretary, the chubby one, and an immigrant from Venus. Something about his wife going away . . . needing a housekeeper . . .

"Cassie, star beam, how was your day?" Draco Starwing said quickly as he pounded the TERMINATE button on the videophone. "How was that event . . . what was it? A debate on who discovered Mercury first . . . or was it a Moon Ball championship?"

"The debate was two weeks ago. I lost. Yumi plays Moon Ball. His championship is in two weeks. He'll probably lose too . . ."

"Oh, that's fab!" exclaimed Draco, having not heard a word Cassie had said. "Now, Cass, I gotta tell ya something. Your mom got a grant to go get her hands dirty and learn about the third-world areas in Saturn . . . so she'll be going away for a month or so. And I'll be at a forum on Jupiter for the next two weeks, so that means you'll be here with your darling bros, won't that be fun?"

Cassie felt her face grow hot. She hated her life sometimes—her parents

never home, her brothers endlessly annoying her, and now her own birthday was ignored. She stalked away from her father and headed up the curving DNA-like stairs. Right before she reached the second level, she swung around on her heels. "Aren't you forgetting something?" Cassie asked quietly, her face twisted into a sarcastic smile.

"Cass, whadaya mean? We've got it all set up, a student from Neptune is studying here and she'll live with you guys for a month to take care of you. The school knows, the government knows, your brothers know. Your grandmother knows. What's missing?"

"A happy birthday." And with that, Cassie dashed up to the seventh story.

The next day, in the wee hours of the morning, Cassie heard the vr-vrooming noise of her parents' space pods zooming away, one to the right, one to the left. Throughout the night they had tried to come in and apologize, but Cassie would pretend to be asleep. Finally, an hour before they left, Cassie's mother simply came in and placed a parcel on Cassie's Holovision.

Cassie woke up at exactly nine o'clock. It was the first day of Daybreak, the three days of freedom that came after every eight days of work and school. She turned off her floating bed as she hobbled to her mirror, her back sore.

Cassie stared at her reflection. She had fallen asleep in her academy uniform. All I see is a short girl in a purple-and-white outfit. Long, stringy dark

hair. My father's big green eyes, my mother's broad smile. No one even knows my name. Ha, but maybe that will all change, now that I'm thirteen—if they even remember.

She moped into the shower and emerged eight minutes later. She changed into one of her comfiest outfits—a silver shirt with fleecy black pants. Now she was prepared to meet the housekeeper.

"Oooh, wet hair, did wittle baby Cryeoweepa have a bad night?" Pisces, her fourteen-year-old brother on his way to the kitchen, ambushed Cassie. Only a year older than she, Pisces was Cassie's biggest annoyance. Her other brothers had a more seldom and subdued teasing style, but Pisces did not pick up on the trend. "Heavens, Cass, you're what? Thirteen now? And you still act like a baby. Mom and Dad just forgot. Oh, yeah, by the way, they couldn't find a good present at such short notice, so Dad got you a Starwing Rockets shirt. Have a great one." And with that, Pisces was on the run again, toward the kitchen.

"Oooh, you must be . . . uh . . . Kwasseo- no . . . no . . . Caspian? Ugh, I've taken Earthen for several years and still I cannot pronounce the simplest of names. But, no worries, I am Daviana, your housekeeper. I go to school in Neptune where I study Earth, but I wanted to come here and learn about an average family on Earth. At the University of Neptune, all they teach is history and government issues." All this

was said very fast in a very heavy accent that Cassie identified as the one of the people of Southern Neptune. Very high-pitched and watery-sounding.

"Cassiopeia. Nice to meet you, Daviana. I'll have an ostrich egg scrambled, please."

"Oooh, it's so funny how you and your brothers all order the same thing! Hmm, I wonder if I can't get your names straight now—Octavio, Forrest, Yumi, Silvanus, Riordan, Pisces and Cassiopeia! Wonderful!"

Cassie ignored the enthusiastic housekeeper and stepped on the motion sensor door leading to the backyard. It was spring, and the air was the perfect kind for cloud surfing. One of the things Cassie loved about Earth was the presence of actual seasons. She knew it was true that not all areas on Earth had such defined seasons, but there was more variation here than on any of the other planets. Last year, when they had studied the ancient Earth, the class located what "country" they would have been in if they lived in the year 2001. It was France. Now, in the year 3014, only two planets still had countries—Neptune and Saturn. All the other planets were divided into five sections.

Cassie climbed into a tall tree with a wooden platform at the top, supported by a storage area underneath. This was her family's cloud surfing platform. Cloud surfing was the base of many sports on Earth. Using a special board, people could fly on air thermals and float on clouds. Though Cassie enjoyed

simply gliding over the city, most sports incorporated this skill into games.

She knew that it would be another forty minutes or so until the egg was ready, so Cassie climbed into the storage area to get her board. It was about five feet long and two feet wide, silver, and made by Cirrus, one of the best board makers in the Galaxy. Cassie strapped her boots on the board and felt the warm feeling that came with rising into the air. She hovered there, one hundred feet above her home's platform. The slightest movement with her foot, and she was off, flying around the city.

Though the more advanced surfers, like her brother Yumi, actually rode the clouds, Cassie opted to stay relatively close to the ground and relied on the winds to fuel her rides. She twisted and turned, guiding herself to the best winds, picking up bursts of speed. Her favorite part was coming up—descending to fifty feet above the ground and then turning around, bursting back into the sky. She leaned forward, accelerating the speed of her board, but the wind turned so that every few feet the pressure would push up the tip of her board, but Cassie would continue to lean. As she reached fifty feet above the ground, she swung around and leaned on her back foot, sending her up to one hundred thirty feet above the ground, bursting and flying against the flow of the wind. She reached the platform and landed. It had been a wild ride.

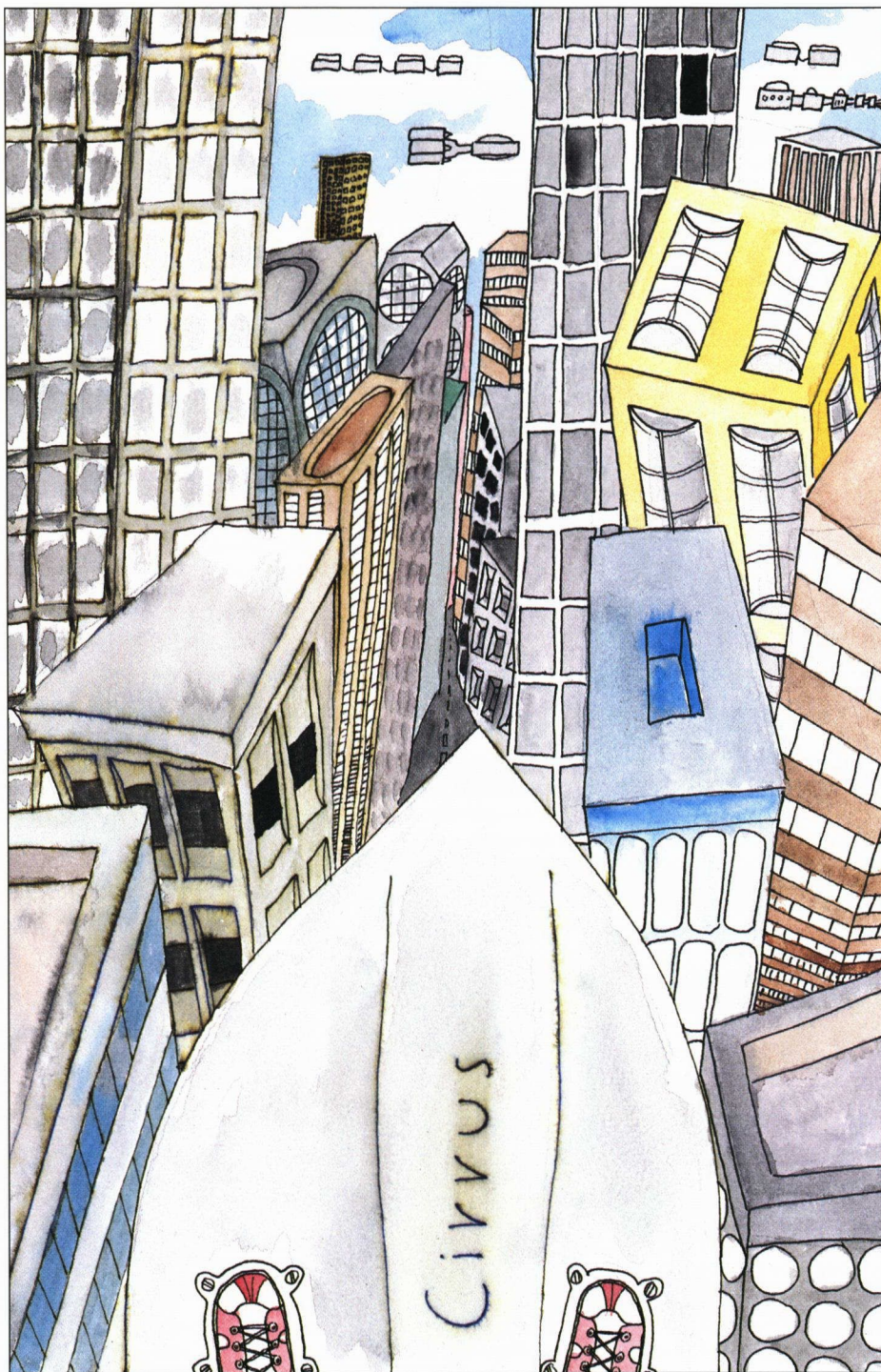
All through her breakfast of ostrich eggs, Cassie listened to all of her broth-

ers' endless talk of sports. Cassie never knew anyone could talk about one brand of moon ball net for half an hour. Yumi and Silvanus argued about high-flying cloud surfing boards. Silvanus threw his eggshells at Riordan. Riordan screamed at Octavio, blaming him. Cassie threw in a few tidbits for her brothers to swallow and chew, and then to incorporate into the conversation, but she soon gave up. Everything she said was either turned into an argument or turned against her.

As the days passed by, Cassie became immune to their constant bickering. Every few days one of her parents would call on the videophone. During the first week of their absence, Cassie's spirit was fueled on the idea of seeing their faces again, but now it was just an event, something that happened regularly.

"Cass, Mom's on the VP. She cut all her hair off, can you imagine that, it almost makes her look as ugly as you," Riordan said, brushing by her in the hallway. "But anyway, she needs to talk to you."

Cassie walked up to the videophone. It was a big black screen, with lots of silver buttons, dials and gauges on the side. When she whined about her brothers being on the videophone too much, her parents lectured her on their childhoods, when using a videophone was a privilege that was granted every month or so. Cassie did not have many friends, so she used the VP rarely. She played with the machine until her mother's



The slightest movement with her foot, and she was off, flying around the city

face appeared clearly on the screen.

"Cassie! Star beam, how are you? I've learned so much out here, I have to take you sometime."

"Hi, Mom."

"Look, I found something out here . . . your great-grandmother Aquamarine used to teach here—and I never knew that, but everyone in this village knows all about her. I've found something of hers that I thought might interest you. I had Daviana put it on your bed."

"Gotcha," Cassie mumbled, hanging her hair in her eyes.

"K, love ya light-years, bye."

"Bye."

Cassie headed up to her bedroom. The pale yellow bed blended nicely with the icy Alice-blue walls, and at first glance did not appear to have anything on it. But as Cassie approached the bed, she found a thin, shimmery material lying on it, folded into a triangular shape. In the center of the triangle, embroidered in the darkest blue, it read "Aquamarine Adored, Duchess of Saturn." Intrigued, Cassie unfolded the material. It emitted an angelic noise, resembling the light airy chimes heard every Sunday morning. The material pulled itself away from her hands and floated in the air, reshaping itself into an octagon. Dark ink appeared in a blob at the top of the cloth, and suddenly the ink began to form into letters, then words, then sentences. And the distant, far-off voice of the long-gone Duchess

of Saturn began to read:

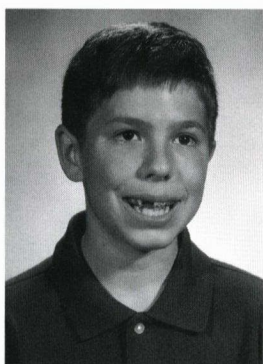
Sometimes, I feel as if I am often forgotten. Saturn is the only planet that has not yet chosen the more conventional Democracy as its system of government. Instead, we follow the old ways. Because of this, I am the forgotten ninth child of Stag and Ignasia, and I will never be any more to them than their girl child that they wish was never there. My parents go away often without warning, sometimes bringing my brothers, sometimes going alone or with their friends. Once when I was a young girl I confronted them about this, but they brushed my questioning aside, and said, "Marina, one day you will understand that a characteristic property of life is that you will not always be the most important priority." And, painful as this is to know, I know that I will be stronger than the others, because neither mother nor father cared about me. And, as much as I hope this does not continue generation after generation, because love is one of the most confusing things in this world, and it should be unconditional from at least two people. So I make this scroll in the hopes that, one day, a member of the Andromedas, no matter how distantly related, will find this, and have the unconditional love of one more.

Cassie found herself staring at the material, but it efficiently folded itself back into a triangle and placed itself on her bed. If a fragile duchess that lived in a world without technology could endure a lifetime of neglect, Cassie could stand a month.



The Best Thing in the World

by Craig Shepard



Craig Shepard, 12
Camillus, New York

The late August sun warms the carpet in my room.
I sit listening to the sounds below me.
Mom and Grandma cooking food in the kitchen.
Dad putting the finishing touches on the cake
Aunts, uncles, cousins, friends ringing the doorbell
My brother running to the door with hellos
Loud laughter sounds throughout the house
Squeals of delight from baby Maddy's discoveries
"Come down Craig, you're being rude," yells Mom.
It's my birthday, I'm not being rude.
I'm thanking God for the best thing in the world.
The best thing in the world is this moment in my life.

Basketball Season

by Rita Rozenbaoum

illustrated by the author

WEEK ONE



Rita Rozenbaoum, 12
Arcadia, California

ROLL DOWN THE CAR WINDOW. It's hot. The engine murmurs steadily. I can feel my stomach flipping as we near Fullor. The basketball courts loom ahead, all empty but one. The two-door Toyota stops. Amy jumps out quickly. I take my time, slowly stepping out onto the scorched cracked blacktop. I can feel the heat through my black sandals. We wave good-bye, and I force a smile. Inside I am whimpering.

Amy jogs over in her running shoes, short brown hair tied back. A blue sweatshirt casually blends into relatively baggy jeans. I wobble after her, my shoes slowing me down. I had curled my hair the night before. It lay like a doll's. Big hoops dangle from my ears, giving way to a silver choker necklace. It was all planned out the night before. The clothes. I wanted to make a good first impression. Tight jeans match with my tank. It reads "Princess."

We stop in front of the coach. He frowns at me, observing my ensemble. I can feel my face turn red. I didn't know they would all be boys. Sixteen boys. Sixteen pairs of eyes. Sixteen smirks.

We need to run a warm-up lap around the bare field. The boys gradually pass me. Sympathetically, Amy matches my slow pace. I stare longingly in the direction of home, but am forced to turn a corner and head for the sneering crowd instead. A ball rolls out toward me, slowly. I pick it up. What



But now, as I look around me . . . I just don't belong

am I doing here? Who am I trying to fool? Being on a team seemed like a great idea two weeks ago when I applied. But now, as I look around me . . . I just don't belong . . . I close my eyes, in hope that I can just wake up from this bad dream . . . They open, looking down. I hold in my hands a basketball. I drop it, watching it roll away. Slowly, I turn to run.

We both slip on the gravel. The boys make no attempt to muffle a loud laugh. I know they're laughing at me. Amy goes to Felton Junior High. Fullor

and Felton are like brothers. The two schools end in the same high school. They accept Amy as one of them. I am the outsider at Remdon Private Middle School.

I arrive last, panting loudly. Everybody stares at me, annoyed. I held back the group. Coach says something about an all-star team. "The judges will choose the two best players . . . It's in your hands . . . Only those who really want it . . ." I am not listening. A boy with mousy brown hair and large front teeth whispers something to his friend. Dis-

tinctly I can make out the words "pathetic" and "blondie." They snicker, causing the coach to clear his throat loudly in their direction. I stare down at my feet. The private whimpers inside of me are threatening to reveal themselves to the world. The only pathetic blond here is me.

WEEK TWO

I FEEL MY FOREHEAD. It seems fine. I stand still and close my eyes, searching every inch of my body for any sign of pain or illness. If I concentrate really hard, I can almost feel some pressure in my head . . . It's useless. Unfortunately, it seems I'm in perfect health, and basketball practice starts in fifteen minutes.

WEEK THREE

I DON'T KNOW if it is the boys' taunts or really just my lack of ability that is causing me to miss. Every shot. Insults are murmured constantly in my direction, loud enough for me to hear, yet concealed from the coach. Things like "princess" and "loser." I don't dare tell him, for fear of what the rest might do to me. It doesn't make the situation any easier to accept, that apart from Amy, I am the oldest.

No matter how much older I am than the boys, I'm still too young to have a nervous breakdown, but I fear it is edging close. Sobs echo throughout the inside of my head. My life is turning into a living nightmare. Amy gave up trying

to convince me to ignore them. Ignore them? How can I just ignore them? Easy for her to say; feet don't stick out in attempts to trip her as she walks by. Every little mistake of hers is forgotten automatically. Mine are as good as posted for public viewing.

WEEK FOUR

SHOOT . . . MISS. Shoot . . . miss. Shoot . . . miss.

WEEK FIVE

THE BOY with the big teeth goes by: C.J. Every now and then I make a shot. Nobody notices.

WEEK SIX

C.J. SAYS he'll give me a dollar for every shot I make. He coughs when I'm about to shoot and makes attempts to trip me when Coach isn't looking. So why don't I just leave? I thought about it. It's too late. If I go now, C.J. will think he defeated me. I feel like Hamlet. To leave or not to leave . . . I'm not the quiet accepting type. I'm proud. Perhaps too proud. I shout back the first insults that come into my head. C.J. and his followers can top anything I say. I don't care what the coach thinks, either. I don't think he even notices anything is wrong. He's far too ignorant and absorbed in his own little world.

C.J. says something about my school. I throw the ball so hard at him, he falls

over backward. Coach sees this as an accident. With their "chief" gone for the day, the boys don't seem to find any pleasure in making my life miserable. Only a fraction continue to taunt me. Today I made my first three-pointer.

WEEK SEVEN

I AM WEARING sports pants today. My hair is tied in a ponytail and I have no jewelry. I am not the last chosen for the team today, and say nothing to C.J. He remains silent as well. I'm beginning to understand why it was so hard to move and why I wasn't fast enough . . .

There is tension in the air. Our game is coming up. The weather took a sharp turn from blazing sun to icy rain. We have only one real game before two all-stars are chosen. Unfortunately, C.J. doesn't cease screaming things at me. It doesn't seem to bother me as much anymore.

Coach says we can't go home until we finish ten layups. One by one my teammates leave. Ten people left . . . seven . . . five . . . three . . . and then I'm alone. Coach says I don't have to finish them. I refuse to leave. I pick up the ball and throw it continuously at the net.

That night in bed I dreamed of nothing but the twenty layups that I made.

WEEK EIGHT

THE WHISTLE blows and the ball is in the air. It shoots from team to team. It looks fun from the bench. That's where I am and have been for three-quarters of the game. Coach forgot about me. He and the other judges are picking two all-stars from the teams. Fifteen minutes left in the game. Ten minutes. Five . . . Suddenly C.J. crashes into the wall. He is bleeding. I am the only replacement. The score is 44 to 44. Three minutes left. I'm in.

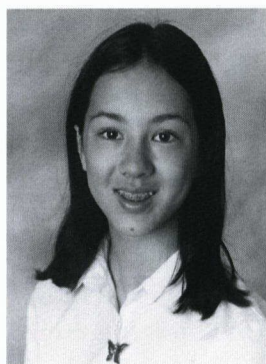
There are two seconds on the clock, and the score remains a tie. A bulky boy from the opposing team smashes into me. I am fouled.

I step to the foul line. Raindrops fall silently around me. The court blurs slightly. Everything slows down, almost as if the world were paused for that brief second of time. I hold in my hands a basketball. And then it's not the crowd of laughing boys . . . it's not the annoyed looks . . . it's not the insults, and the mockery . . . it's just me and the ball. Nobody else is there. There is nobody in the world but me and my foul shot. The judges are watching me . . . somewhere . . . It is all so simple. Tomorrow I will be an all-star. I aim for the basket and shoot. ❖

Rare Treasure

by Justine Koo Drennan

illustrated by the author



Justine Koo Drennan, 12
San Mateo, California

Justine's Chinese name is Gu Zewei. She learned about the one-child law when she visited China.

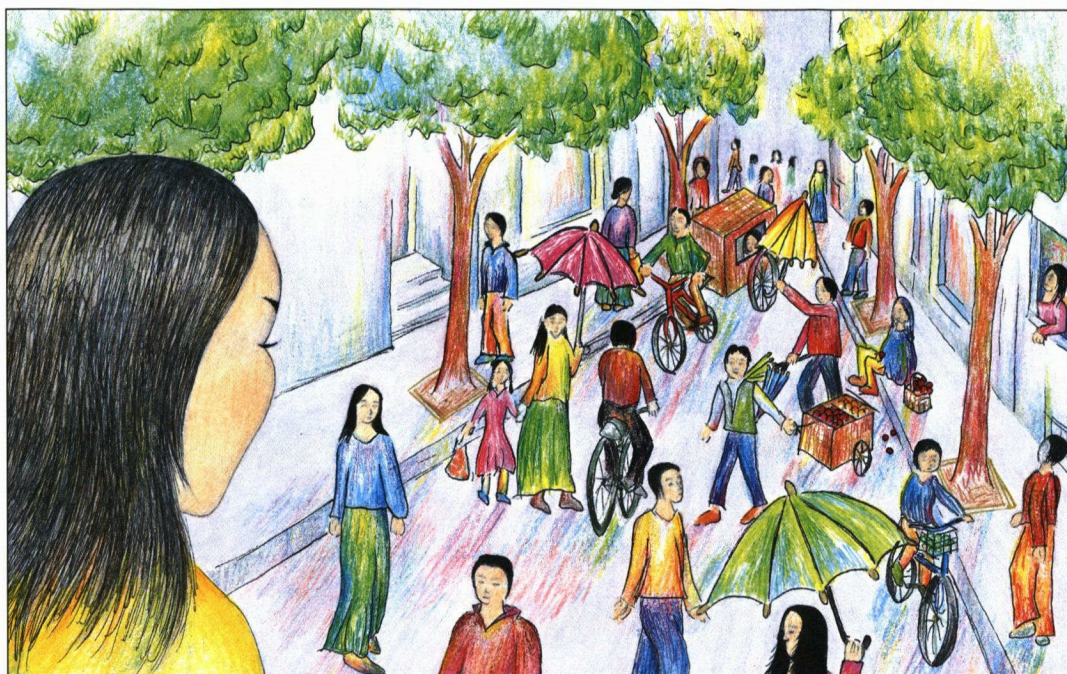
THE DAY GU ZEWAI was born, we got the first notice. We had a month to choose a child to give away. "I will come to take her when you have decided," the official who delivered the notice said. She said "when you have decided," but her words implied that she was sure we would choose the girl, not the boy, to give away.

Zewei's name, which means "Rare Treasure," caused a great deal of confusion in the adoption department, because it is usually a boy's name. No one thought of girls as rare treasures.

After the official left, Zemin took Zewei's hand and looked at her with a mixture of envy and love, as I watched them and thought. The only other choice besides giving one of the children up was leaving the country. However, after how much we were fined for having Zewei, we would have no money left.

During the next two weeks, my husband and I cared for the baby and looked for solutions constantly. We hardly ever spoke, except to ask each other to hold Zewei or change the blankets on her bed. So far, she had been much more quiet than Zemin when he was her age, and the house's silence, combined with her simple, calm stare, hurt me more than any cacophony or uproar.

At the end of the second week, there was a loud knock on the door. It was the official again.



Would we be able to leave these familiar sights and sounds we had grown up with?

"If I were you," she said, "I would just give her up now. There is no point in getting more attached to her."

"How do you know that we will choose to give her? Do you just assume we will give the girl?" I asked.

"The boy is your first and he is a boy."

"I did not say I *wanted* to give him either."

"Just make a decision," said the official, and slammed the door.

I needed to get out. The stillness in the house clashed too strongly with the inner tempest and indecision in my mind. I went out on the clattering, crowded Shanghai street—so crowded. I blamed the crowd for the indecision. If it hadn't been for overpopulation, the

government wouldn't have had to make the one-child law.

What became of the children who were given away? Most went to other countries, so Zewei or Zemin would leave China even if we did give one away, except separated from the family. And the rest of us would still be here. We did not know if it would be better somewhere else, but at least most other countries didn't have the one-child law. However, there still was the money problem.

As I dodged rickshaws and bicycles, and the shouts of fruit- and umbrella-sellers rang in my ears, I wondered, even if we had enough money, would we be able to leave these familiar sights and sounds we had grown up with?

When I returned to the house, my husband greeted me at the door.

"The baby has been hungry," he said.

"I'm sorry."

He nodded.

"I'll go back to her now."

He nodded again.

I broke out, "We have hardly spoken for two weeks, and now the official came again, telling us we just have two weeks left and now you won't speak at all. You always just let things happen."

"The baby is hungry."

I stomped off to Zewei's bed, then remembered to tiptoe, for fear of waking her.

The official came at the third week again, and we were still undecided. In the meantime, Zewei learned how to work both hands and kick her feet, discovering a world which might not end up being hers.

During the fourth week, I was so tired I fell asleep as soon as I lay down in bed. One night I had a dream in which I was gazing out across the sea to the other side, which was almost hidden in mist, causing its shape and outline to be unclear. Zemin and Zewei crawled toward it, making hardly any progress, and occasionally being tossed back by the high, dagger-like waves. I found myself hoping they would make it and wanting to go myself. Then a tidal wave came and washed me toward them . . .

That morning was exactly a month from Zewei's birthday. We would have to choose soon. I got up and started to

make breakfast. Shortly after, my husband got up. I gave him a futile, inquisitive glance. He shrugged.

We sat through the day, waiting. At five o'clock sharp, the official came for the last time. She was in a bad mood when we opened the door for her. She didn't come in.

"Why don't you have her ready?" she asked.

"We haven't decided."

"You have to. All the other families give them right when they're born. This is ridiculous."

I sat down on the porch steps and didn't say anything.

My husband said, "They're more yours than mine, really. You decide."

Just like him to lay the decision on someone else. I sat there for a long time, almost peaceful, lost in the importance of the moment. I should be crying, I thought. I should protest. But I felt outside my body, my tumultuous mind floating far above. And then in an equally external voice, I spoke. "We're going to leave the country. I don't care where we go, or how much it costs, if they don't have the one-child law. We're going to leave China."

AFTER MANY DELAYS and uncertainties, Zewei, Zemin, my husband and I stood on the deck of a ship taking us to another continent. Between us, we only had a few yuans. The horizon was cloudy, but I looked that way eagerly. Then I looked back at my children's faces. ❖

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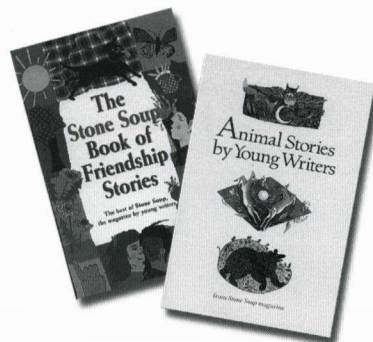
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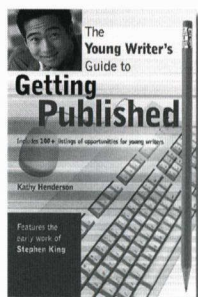
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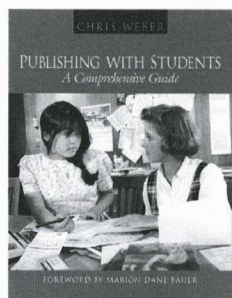
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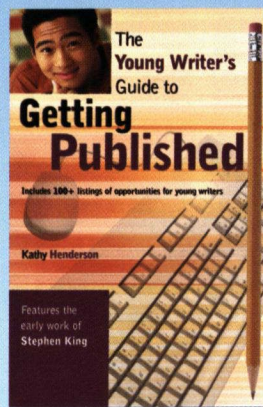
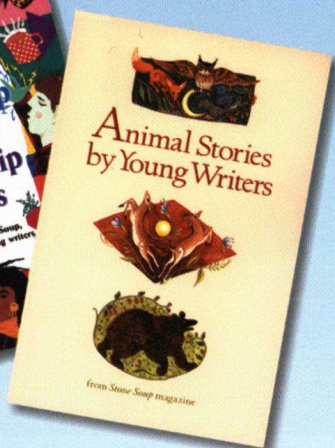
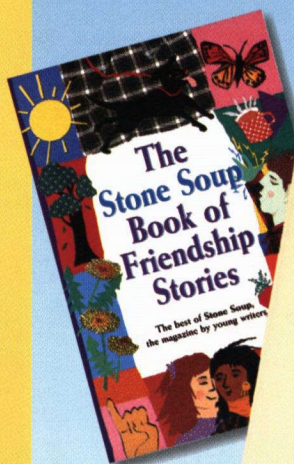
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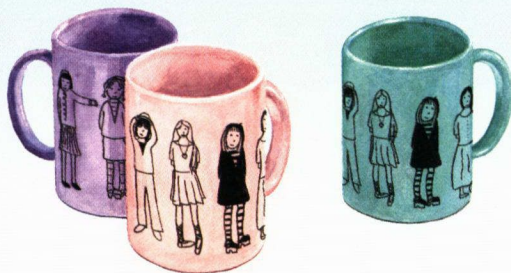
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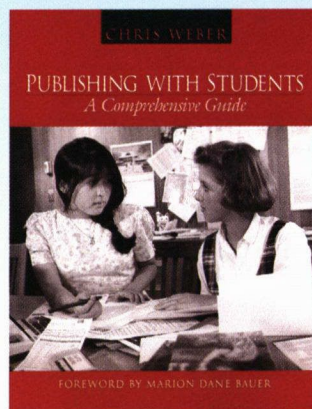


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