Skipping Stones

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Skipping Stones is a nonprofit children's magazine that encourages cooperation, creativity, and celebration of cultural and linguistic diversity. We explore stewardship of the ecological and social webs that nurture us. We offer a unique forum for communication among children from different lands and backgrounds. Skipping Stones expands horizons in a playful, creative way. We seek suggestions, submissions, subscriptions, and support.

Editor and Publisher: Arun Narayan Toké
Editorial Staff: Hanna Still, Erin Leffler
Interns: Nicole Degley, Amanda Marusich
Beata Mostafavi
Student Reviewers: Katherine Assef, Sarah E Stumbar, Stephanie Kacoyanis, Janiva Cifuentes-Hiss, A. Marusich

Acknowledgements
Cover: Taiwan Photo by Henry Westheim, Taiwan
Board of Directors: Paulette and Bahati Ansari, Charlotte Behm, Mary Drew, Bill Hessling, D. Keis, Steve Mallory, Ron Marson, Joachim Shultz, Hanna Still, Arun N. Toké
Special Thanks to: Peace Rose Graphics, Esther Celis, Martha I. Elias, Kathy Danz, and all the teachers whose students' work is featured in this issue. We also extend our gratitude to our contributors, volunteers, and subscribers.

Skipping Stones is an educational and charitable organization with a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. Donations to Skipping Stones are fully tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Please support our 50% discount and free subscriptions to low-income subscribers by making a tax-deductible donation. Financial support provided in part by Tops Learning Systems, V. Wellington-Cabot Foundation, Black United Fund, Emerald Valley Kitchens, Share It Now Foundation, and SELCO. Winner of the 1995 Golden Shoestring Award 1997 NAME Award EdPress for Excellence in Educational Journalism

Skipping Stones (Pub. No. 015-089) is published bimonthly, except July/August, by Skipping Stones, Inc., 1309 Lincoln St., Eugene, OR 97401. Postage paid at periodicals rate at Eugene, OR. Postmaster: Please send address changes to Skipping Stones, P. O. Box 3939 Eugene, OR 97403-0939. Subscriptions: institutions: $35; individuals: $25 (Airmail: $10 extra; low-income discount: 50%; multiple copy discount available). Single/back issues: $5 ($6, air). To submit, subscribe, or reprint, contact: Skipping Stones Magazine P. O. Box 3939 Eugene, OR 97403 USA; tel. (541) 342-4956; skipping@efn.org; Web: www.efn.org/~skipping
and also www.treelink.com/skipping

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The Zen of Building a Playhouse

As a child, I built houses of cards and castles of cardboard. But no sand castles—we lived too far away from the ocean so I didn’t visit the sandy shores of the Arabian Sea until after college.

Now, here I am building a real playhouse. It’s not really for myself; it is for my son, Shyam. We started playing with the idea of a “small” structure that would use up all the left-over wood and building material from the construction of our home three years ago. We waited until this summer, actually, until end of August to begin nailing down pieces. I should have begun hammering in June. Early this month, we had a stretch of five days with lots of rain and I now understand the importance of finishing the roof before the rains. Other details have a much lower priority now.

Today, on the eve of Autumn Equinox, as I write this letter to you, I see a mountain of unfinished work that still needs our attention before the soaking rains of the Pacific Northwest dampen the building season.

Every Saturday and Sunday morning, after I’ve just begun working, Shyam yells from the window, “Daddy, wait, I’m coming to work.” Soon, he is there with his dump truck and work gloves. He says, “I got up early, so I can help you,” climbing the ladder, all the way to the top as my heart pounds. What a big HELP he is. He brings a box of nails or the hammer on his dump truck while I wait. Many times, he says, “Can you pass me that tape please, I need to measure this.” We have two ladders, two hammers, two squares, two levels... But we still don’t have enough patience. Around 6 pm, he’s ready to ask me “Shall we call it a day?” And I want to do ‘just one more thing.’

The playhouse has turned into a big task. Partly because it has grown in size like the apple trees that we have planted. Our left-over material is long gone. We have scavenged wood from our neighbors, and bought used plywood sheets, windows, and a door from our city’s recycling center. We’ve even bought some sustainably-harvested wood from a friend and visited a hardware store.

And the play is still in progress. I invite your words of advice for us amateurs. Our windows and doors are still wide open...

Vol. 12 no. 5
Skipping Stones
Your Letters

I liked most of your (Vol. 11, No. 4) but there was one thing that made me absolutely furious. It was "Exchange Students Speak Out," where they talked about the NATO action and they said they "disagree with this war in Kosovo" and "killing innocent people." I was so tired of people seeing Serbs as innocent victims after everything they did to us because of our own religion. To understand my reaction you have to know that I was 14 when the war in Bosnia started.

I remember very well what it was like and how they treated us—not just their soldiers, but the civilians, too, people who were our neighbors. My family and I would sit on the basement floor, gathered around a small radio powered by batteries, because there was no electricity, listening to the Serbs saying how we were bombing ourselves to get the sympathy of the world. Their snipers were shooting at me while I was trying to bring drinking water because we didn’t have any in the house. We were hungry most of the time because they wouldn’t let the food convoys pass their checkpoints, and when they did, they would first take all the good food, leaving us with damp flour, old potatoes, bad rice, or cans that expired more than a year ago. And we ate them because we had nothing else. Their bombs destroyed my house. And that is why I applauded every time NATO dropped a bomb. They had no problem bombing our homes, schools, and hospitals, yet they protested our destroying their military targets. So excuse me, but I don’t feel sorry for any of them.

—Aida Dikic, Mostar, Bosnia–Herzegovina

War

War is a way for a country to show its strength
But the ruling power forgets about the people
Who suffer fighting to survive
Through those gloomy days

—Thomas Fillebeen, 13, New York, New York

Aloha! I am a fresham at the Univ. of Hawai‘i at Manoa. I am from Kyushu, Japan, however, I lived in Perth, Western Australia from 1994 until 1998.

Hate breeds hate. We can’t get anywhere with hate. I believe all our problems are caused by ignorance, and education is the only way to solve the fundamental causes of our complex problems. So, please keep knowledge flowing. Thank you!

—Akira Tanaka, Manoa, Hawai‘i

Hi! My name is Rose Zulliger. I live in Bexley, Ohio and go to Bexley Middle School. I am half Jewish and half Catholic. I belong to a synagogue, and my Bat Mitzvah is this June. My ancestors come from various countries around the world.

When I get older, I would like to pursue a career in politics. I would like to be the first Jewish, female president. I think that there are many large milestones that have to be turned over before that happens.

—Rose Zulliger, 12, Bexley, Ohio

Comforting Trees

To me, the most incredible feeling is to simply be alone in the tranquil quiet of the forest. If you just let yourself be absorbed into the movements and sounds and feelings around you, it’s like leaving the world, even if it’s only for a brief moment in time. That is the idea that inspired my poem, All I Really Needed (vol. 12, No. 4). Even though the trees aren’t capable of comforting you in ways humans can, the ways in which they can are better. If all you need is someone to listen, no matter what you have to say, a tree will listen forever.

—Amanda Burk, 14, Gibsonia, Pennsylvania

To A Teacher

I don’t think I have ever seen a lovelier thing than a teacher. If teachers teach well, they will make a small ripple in a pond called life. The world of tomorrow is ours for the taking. So no matter how small of an impact teachers have on their students, it will get the ripple effect started. Teachers pave the way to our success, like so many before us. But you have your own class because you have your own way of teaching, your own experiences to guide you. In all stories the true hero is you, the teacher. So when you feel that you can’t make an impact, read this poem. I am just one of the people you helped change forever.

From your loving student. I can never repay you.

—Tiffany Curran, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania

Jumping Ahead of our Own Schedule!

Our sincere apologies to you all for a technical error in the last issue. The cover date on the last issue was incorrectly stated as Nov.- Dec. 2000, rather than Sept.- Oct. 2000 as shown on the Table of Contents.
What's On Your Mind?

This is your forum for expressing views on critical matters in your lives. We know that you have unique and fresh perspectives. We offer this page for your active participation and invite you to share your opinions with others on an issue. Send your art and/or writing under 250 words.

See The Difference You Can Make

Like victims of racism, I have often been treated unfairly. I have been made fun of because I am blind. For example, there have been times when, walking down the hall at school, I have heard someone say, "There is that blind kid." Then others join in. I have a disability that causes me to do some things differently or not at all, but I am still a very special person just like everybody else.

I do not know why people think that they have to try to bring other people down. For example, when people make fun of blacks by saying things like, "There goes a ******," just because they are not having a very good day or they just want someone to pick on. I feel that everybody should be treated equally, and with the same amount of respect as everyone else. One good thing about being blind is that I have never judged anyone by his or her appearance.

We could help make this community racism and violence free by giving speeches and leading nonviolent marches in opposition to racism and violence. We could post signs up around town and write editorials for the newspaper that advocate peace and acceptance. But most of all, we could show from our hearts that we feel racism and violence are wrong and that they need to stop. I hope you will try to make a difference in your community. If you make an effort to stop racism and violence, it will work.

—Cody Scott Murphey, 12, Springfield, Oregon

Living in America, an Israeli Citizen

In less than two years, I will get that paper in the mail that says, "You will be serving the Israeli army," before that I must figure out what to do. I am a hard-working student, and college is a priority as soon as I graduate from high school, but there will be a conflict soon. Because I am an Israeli citizen, I am required to serve in the Israeli army for about two years.

Seeing my family, my cousins, and other relatives who have already served their time, I have learned that none of them went to college. After serving the army for several years in dangerous situations and hot weather, most people are tired and impatient, and don't want to start school all over again.

Israel is a wonderful country, and I love being there. Although I was born in New York, I feel like I belong in Israel every time I go there, for it is truly my homeland. I speak the language, practice the traditions, and live according to the culture. Sometimes I feel like I belong in Israel even more than in New York. However, going to serve in the army doesn't sound like an event that fits in my life. But it certainly sounds nice to help my country, meet new people, and experience a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

I talked to my friend who served in the army, and she told me that if there was one time in her life she could repeat, it would be those three unforgettable years of serving in the army. I would love to go just because of hearing her interesting and chilling stories. However, there is a slight problem. She is 25 years old and is only starting college this year. I admire her for being determined to go, but right now, 25 seems so far away to begin a college education.

Today I sit and wonder about all the positive and negative aspects of going into the army. I comfort myself by saying, "Don't worry, I still have two more years until that paper comes in the mail."

—Dana Naim, 15, New City, New York
Eid-ul-Adha marks our prophet Ibrahim’s sacrifice of his son to Allah. Ibrahim dreamed that Allah told him to sacrifice Ismail, and the following day, he went to the fields and took his son with him. When Ismail asked his father what he was doing, Ibrahim said that he had to do work ordered by Allah. Ismail agreed to do anything Allah wanted. Ibrahim blindfolded Ismail so that he wouldn’t see what Ibrahim was doing. Just as he was about to cut Ismail’s neck, Ibrahim saw a sheep struggling in a nearby thicket. He realized that Allah was pleased with Ibrahim’s obedience, and had provided the sheep for the sacrifice instead of Ismail.

On Eid, you must wake up early to make it to the prayer. The women wear all sorts of jewelry and clothes, like sari, salwar kameez, gharara, laynga and jibab. Men wear salwar kameez or nice pants and shirts. There is a difference between the men’s salwar kameez and the women’s salwar kameez. The women’s clothes are covered with beautiful, colorful designs, while the men’s clothes are plain and casual. I usually wear a gharara, which is a relatively short skirt layered over a longer one. Ghararas are designed with beautiful colors and sometimes small mirrors. A laynga is a style of pants that look like a skirt. A sari is a piece of cloth wrapped around a person’s body with a shirt that matches the cloth. Some women prefer jibabs, which are also long pieces of coat-like cloth with something worn underneath them.

The Imam, or prayer leader, leads this holiday’s special prayer, which is only a few minutes long. Another prayer is held a little while later for people who missed the first prayer. This holiday’s prayer is different from the regular prayer. The leader and everyone else reads together, which is the same, but this time the Imam reads the beginning of the prayer seven times. Then he reads a few chapters from the Quran.

The Imam is always a male because even though women may participate in prayers, they
are not allowed to lead them. In Pakistan, my native country, women aren’t allowed to join the men in prayer on Eid. In the United States, women usually join their families at the location where the prayer is held. This is one major difference between the two countries that I am particularly concerned about. I think women in Pakistan should be allowed to do the same thing that we do here in Chicago.

During the reading of the prayer, after we do the regular prayer steps, the Imam repeats the beginning part seven times. I always mess up during this prayer because it is confusing.

When the prayer is over, everyone walks around looking for their friends and wishes each other Eid Mubarak, which means Happy Eid. I love this part the most because you get to communicate with friends you haven’t seen for years!

After this, we leave the prayer hall. I usually return to my home where my family and I invite some close friends to eat some snacks with us like sandwiches, egg rolls, patties, and savaya. This is when I like to sit down and relax for a while.

At night, we attend a very big celebration.

Some years it’s at my house, and we invite about 60 people and eat different kinds of food. (I love parties!) The point of the big celebration is for people to enjoy themselves after the fasting.

One of the similarities between Christmas and Eid is the giving of gifts. Like Christmas, mostly children receive gifts. These are usually given to them by family and close friends and can range from money to clothes.

One of Eid-ul-Adha’s important traditions is buying lamb or goat meat and sending it to all the people you know. It’s very stressful because it’s hard for my family to remember everyone since we meet new people every year.

It is time to share and help others begin learning about Islam and our cultural background. We learn about other important holidays, like Christmas and Hanukkah, but there are not a lot of readily available sources for learning about Islam. I hope that my writing about my religion will help change this.

—Buthul Hussaini, 13 (wrote about Ramadan) and Syema Sheikh, 12 (wrote about Eid-ul-Adha) are now 8th grade students in Lincolnwood, Illinois.

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Ecuador is a country in northern South America. My mother was born there and I have many family members who live in a city called Guayaquil. That’s where I went for the Holiday season. I had so much fun there! I did things that you really wouldn’t do every day. The best part of my trip was witnessing a very old tradition that was very new to me!

One day while we were driving down an old road I saw an odd-looking paper man that was wearing real clothes! I asked my grandmother what it was, and she told me that it was the Año Viejo, the “Old Year.” I had no idea what she meant, but in the days that followed I saw more and more of them just hanging around outside people’s homes. Then finally my uncle announced that it was time to make our own “Old Year.” I was amazed at how hard it was to make them! They are made out of papier-maché and paper towel rolls. The hard part is shaping them. When they are dry, you dress them in men’s clothes. Little did I know that on New Year’s eve I’d see the most magnificent sights of my life. At exactly midnight, the streets lit up with fire. In front of everyone’s houses their Año Viejo were on fire, and the people were all standing around them getting hugs and kisses. My grandmother explained that burning the Año Viejo would take away all the bad things that happened that year. After you stand around and congratulate people for getting through a tough year together, it gets kind of boring, so you go to everyone’s doorsteps and collect candy. The next day you visit relatives and collect more sweets so that you have a sweet year. The ashes are not cleaned from the streets for a few days. And, when they are, you know the new year has really come.

—Samantha Porec, 13, Lincolnwood, Illinois.
Returning Home to México

After exiting the rickety old bus plastered with crosses and posters of the Virgin Guadalupe, I step onto a dirt road which seems unfamiliar to me. I begin, instinctively, walking down the road, passing corn rows, cattle, and men plowing their fields in preparation for next year's harvest. Although I feel connected to this desolate land, I am still uncomfortable. I turn at the river and leap from stone to stone, trying not to fall as I slowly make my way across. I glance up to see a small girl in a soiled pink dress running barefoot down the road with a stick in one dirty hand and a lollipop in her mouth, screaming, “David! David!” I instantly feel warm and welcome as I recognize my nine-year-old Mexican sister, Lucila, whose family I had lived with for two months in the remote town of El Capulín, México. It is July '99.

As a volunteer for Amigos de las Américas during the summer of my freshman year, I came to teach this third world village how to improve their living conditions through community sanitation. Each day I rotated my assistance among the eight families who were digging six-foot holes into solid rock in order to construct their own latrines. My father, Venancio García, the town’s sheriff and spokesman, offered to help me on my first day. From the moment he had jumbled the only English words that he could speak—“Good morning ladies and germanies! In the right corner, weighing two hundreds and thirty pounds, is Hulk Hogan!”—we became best friends. I spent every day learning from Venancio. He taught me how to balance two buckets of water on a stick over my back and how to carry them up a steep hill to the pan where I took my weekly bath. He taught me how to slam a 20-pound steel bar into the solid rock of the mountainside, a task I did in the heat of the scalding sun, until I finally pierced the one stubborn stone that allowed me to continue my shoveling the next morning. Venancio taught me that no one needed anything except someone to love, a good work ethic, and a hammer.

There were eight of us in the family: Venancio, his wife la Señora, my two brothers Eugenio and Miguel, my three sisters Meche, Lucila and Chilo, and me. During my first day with my new family, my Spanish was horrible. However, my inability to communicate did not stop them from realizing that it was my birthday. At first, I was scared and forgot how to speak, but when the birthday cake came out and my one-year-old sister, Meche, had icing all over her face and dress, all my nagging worries were soon forgotten. I received presents from my new family including a soda, a piece of chocolate, a machete, a slingshot, a kiss, and a handmade blanket. I did not know how to thank them for the unnecessary gifts they had given me, but I knew that they understood what my huge smile meant. While my family was too poor to own a radio, they found it in their hearts to give me these gifts to make my entrance into their home remarkable, and for this there will always be a place in my heart for them.

Today, as I remember the Garcías I hear voices that call my name. It is my family that has brought me back to my village in Guanajuato, México for the last three years. As I see their smiling faces light up with joy and feel their warm embraces upon my return, I know I am part of the family of El Capulín. It is as if I am an exchange student who is merely studying in the United States, while yearning to return to my true home in El Capulín, México each summer.

—David Lipp, 19, Houston, Texas
I always wanted to have an exchange student from another country. I dreamed of learning another language, and getting to teach the student English. I never considered how I might grow to love her, or how sad I would be when she left.

Yuu Tagawa stayed with my family for four months, and I really miss her now. Yuu is from Japan. Since we have only three bedrooms, and Yuu made the fifth family member, we ended up doing a huge ‘musical chairs’ with all our furniture; some went up to the attic and some came down. My biological sister and I had to share a room for four months.

Yuu taught me Japanese reading and writing, and taught us a little Japanese culture. We taught her American sayings and culture.

One very interesting aspect of the learning process for Yuu was her trouble with colloquial expressions, such as “make sure.” How do you make sure? What is it made of?

It was also interesting to see the simple things which Yuu had never heard of or seen before. One weekend, we stayed at our home in the Catskill Mountains. When we opened the door, Yuu gasped. The fireplace! She had heard of them, but never in her life had she actually seen one. That evening, we all sat around the fireplace, playing cards and talking. I noticed that Yuu wasn’t doing either—she was relaxing on the couch, just watching the fire.

Yuu had also never seen or tasted peanut butter before. One morning my mother was listing the usual choices for breakfast. When she got to toast with peanut butter, Yuu tilted her head to one side like she did when she was confused. My mother showed her the peanut butter, and she looked at it from every angle. Yuu burst out laughing at the astonished look on my mother’s face when Yuu told her she had never seen peanut butter before.

One night, my mother gave Yuu free reign of the kitchen, and she cooked up a real Japanese meal. It was a sort of stew: potatoes, carrots, and onions boiled in water and soy sauce. My mother was afraid no one would like it, but we all did!

One day, Yuu gave my sister and me each a kimono (a Japanese formal dress). There is a special ribbon that goes around your middle, and she said she had to take classes to learn how to tie it! It took Yuu two full minutes to complete the tie. We dressed up in kimonos, and Yuu took a picture of us. The picture is still on our mantelpiece.

One thing I loved about Yuu was her sense of humor. It took her a few weeks to learn to express it in English, but it was an amazing accomplishment. As my mother remarked later, it’s very hard to have a sense of humor in another language. You don’t know what is considered funny, and what is considered insulting. Yuu was a natural; she had us in stitches sometimes.

Yuu was like a sister to me. When I heard that she had to go, I cried and was very angry with everyone for awhile—even with her for leaving. But she is very happy in her new home, and I see her walking home from school sometimes. I miss her very much. Still, I think many more people should have exchange students. You could have a friend, or a sister, for life.

—Emily Bernier, 12, Oneonta, New York. Emily shares: "My ancestors are French, Italian, French-Canadian, Danish, and Scottish. My great-aunt Carmela, who is now in her nineties, still remembers coming over to Ellis Island when she was 13."
Hina Matsuri: Girl’s Day in Japan

In our house, the front room is our Japanese room, which is decorated with ornate screens, framed photos of Japan, books on Japan, and a low Japanese table with two zabutons underneath. A zabuton is a cushion used for sitting on the floor. Sometimes we eat a snack on the table, but usually it is used for special meals and on holidays like today, March 3rd, Girls’ Day. Other Japanese objects include Japanese dolls in glass cases, paper lamps, and two o cha, or tea boxes, from a tea shop in Nigata, Japan, which we use as end tables. They store our kimonos and fragile things from Japan.

This morning we will set the room up for Girls’ Day and after school five friends will come over and celebrate with us. This is an important holiday for girls because we set out and display the Emperor and Empress dolls and their courtiers and eat special treats.

There were originally five holidays to celebrate the changing of the seasons during the Edo periods in Japanese history. Only two of these holidays are still celebrated today: Girls’ Day, March 3rd, and Boys’ Day, May 5th.

On Girls’ Day, or Hina Matsuri, special Emperor and Empress dolls are displayed to ensure a daughter’s good marriage. The dolls wear very ornate kimonos from the Heian period in Japanese history. Courtiers are also displayed on a tiered shelf with the Emperor and Empress dolls on the top tier and the courtier dolls on the lower tiers. Major hotels and department stores in Japan display O Hina sama, Emperor and Empress dolls and court. Some dolls are over one hundred years old. In the family, dolls are passed down from generation to generation, as they are very expensive.

Before we take the dolls out of the wooden box we put on our spring kimonos and set up the doll display on the Japanese table, carefully unrolling the red flooring where the dolls sit. Our kimonos reflect the season with tiny peach blossoms starting on the right shoulder and cascading to the bottom. The Emperor and Empress dolls are carefully unwrapped and dusted off. On the next two tiers down are three female attendants, and five court musicians. The musicians hold miniature traditional instruments: a shamisen (three-stringed guitar); a shakuhachi (bamboo clarinet); a taiko (two-sided drum); a biwa (five-stringed guitar); and an asho (vertical bamboo flute). Most families have only three tiers in their doll display, but other tiers would include priests, furniture, a carriage, warriors, and more ladies-in-waiting. Also on the tiers are offerings of peach blossoms, sweet mochi (rice cakes), and dumplings in peach shapes. After we assemble our family O Hina sama doll display, we take a few photos before changing and going off to school. After school friends will join us in celebrating Girls’ Day. They will also wear kimonos and sit on zabutons while eating Hina Matsuri crackers, peach dumplings, and juice.

We will celebrate by inviting our friends to try ikebana, Japanese flower arranging, and then enjoy a Japanese tea ceremony or cha-no-yu. For Japanese ikebana we each choose one peach branch, tearing off most of the leaves so we can focus on the tiny pink blossoms. We place some branches around the doll display and use one branch for the tea ceremony.

Japanese tea ceremonies are very quiet and graceful. Tea is prepared one cup or bowl at a time. Before you receive the tea bowl it is rinsed and wiped, then the tea is prepared. The bowl is turned three times and placed in front of the guest, who bows and picks it up, turning it three times. The taste is bitter, so sweets of pure sugar are offered. The hot tea is drunk in three mouthfuls before the bowl is returned for the next guest. While you are waiting you can enjoy looking at the doll display, the peach branch ikebana, or a calligraphy banner to mark the occasion.

As soon as the holiday is over, the dolls are wrapped back up and put away so as not to delay the marriage of the daughters. When the kimonos are folded and stored, the tea ceremony things drying in the drainer, and the girlfriends have all returned home, the only thing left is a peach branch in a lacquered vase on the Japanese table...until next year.

—Tracy Kanno, Cranston, Rhode Island
World Child

Most of my classmates have only one name, but I have two: Lindsey and Aiko. Lindsey is my Nana’s family name. She is Scottish and we wear kilts to her family gatherings. Aiko means ‘love child’ in Japanese. My father is from Tokyo, Japan. We wear kimonos at certain times of the year and for family photos, especially when my O-baachan (Grandmother) and O-jiichan (Grandfather) visit us from Japan.

My parents call me ‘peace baby,’ as my birthday is August 15, the day Japan surrendered to the Allied Forces and ended World War II. I am eight years old. Last year I received my first real kimono on 3-5-7 Day in November. On this Japanese festival day, girls aged three and seven receive kimonos and thousand-year candy for a thousand years of happiness. They go to the shrine and pray for their health and happiness. Boys get their kimonos when they are five.

Our family eats at the ‘world cafe,’ as my mom calls it. We mostly eat a Japanese diet of rice, soy foods, and fish, but my mom also makes chicken rogan-josh from Mongolia, banana leaf curry from Singapore, paprika chicken from Hungary and more dishes from around the world. I ate meatloaf at school for the first time. It was okay. My mom shows me and my sister how to make simple recipes like rolled sushi on a bamboo mat and rice balls with pickled plum inside. I enjoy cooking. When my Nana visited Italy she brought me back a cookbook for kids in Italian. Another friend gave us a cookbook in Spanish.

It seems like every month we celebrate something. In January, we celebrate O-Shoogatsu, the Japanese New Year. We eat special food and wear kimonos to visit friends. We also call relatives and friends in Japan, and wish them, “Akmashite omedetoo gozaimasu,” or “Happy New Year.” Kids get red envelopes of money from relatives. We also fly kites on New Year’s Day.

Also in January, we go to the teashop wearing our kilts for a Scottish dinner, bagpipe music and to listen to Robbie Burns’s poetry. I want to go to Scotland some day with my Nana and see the Loch Ness Monster.

March 3 is Hina Matsuri, Girls’ Day in Japan. We set up the Emperor and Empress dolls and eat rice snacks that are pink and green. We wear our kimonos after school and look at the displays of the Emperor and Empress dolls and their courtiers at major hotels and department stores.

On May 5, we celebrate Tengo no sekku (Boys’ Day) by flying carp kites from our roof. We also display samurai (warrior) armor so our brother will have strength and wisdom. He wears his kimono and shares special snacks with us. Before dinner we fly home-made kites.

We have Lederhosen (leather pants) from Germany that we wear to Oktoberfest and also at Nikolaus Day, December 6. On the evening of the 5th we wash our shoes and leave them under our German feather tree where Santa will visit and stuff our shoes with fruit and chocolates like Mozartkugel and Milkabars. We also get small toys and oranges. But that’s only if we are good. If we are bad, we get a potato. The next morning we open our shoes, and have a big German breakfast with cheeses and meats from Germany. I wear my Lederhosen to school with my sister and brother and talk about Nikolaus in my class.

At the beginning of May, we go to the Annual Scottish Games and wear Nana’s family crest with our tartan scarves. We see the different Scottish families as they march onto a field. We hear bagpipes and eat meat pies.

My Otoosan (father) tells that it’s important to know where you came from so you know where you will go. Our heritage helps us to make decisions in our lives and know how we are to act. The best thing about me is my family village: I am part of Japan, with culture and customs from my father; I am part of Germany, with culture and customs from my mother; I am of Scotland from my Nana, and of America from me. I have a large world village to share it with all.

—Lindsey Aiko Kanno, 8, Cranston, RI
The Legacy: Thoughts of an Adopted Youth

A lost heritage will be the legacy left to her descendants. They will speak of her as the uprooted child. Stories will travel from mouth to mouth of the little Indian girl adopted by white Americans. They will say that except for her middle name and her birthdate, she has no other traces of the time spent in her native country—now a foreign country. She immigrated to the United States at the age of two-and-a-half, an age too young to remember her orphanage life, too young to fully have learned her native tongue of Hindi, and what little she did speak was forgotten in a year’s time. Her abandonment was not realized until nearly 20 years later.

Her descendants will say that she grew up in a neighborhood where parents purchased their teenage children cars instead of second-rate plumbing equipment for the entire family. They will wonder what she has lost and gained, having been raised in a Western society. They will experience the luxuries of air-conditioning and a better education. Biased comparisons will be made between America, a land where dreams come true for everyone, versus India, a financially poor and overpopulated land. The country that is culturally different with its inferior medical institutions, lack of developed farmland and outdated military equipment—everything that defines a Third-World country—will lose.

Although she was proud to be Indian, she thought that at times her ethnicity hindered her ability to move forward in the culture in which she was raised. Her descendants will constantly ponder this issue as she did throughout her life. They will not fathom how much it hurt when the girl’s friends assured her that they did not view her as a person of color, but simply as their friend. It hurt because by not acknowledging her ethnicity, they did not acknowledge that being Indian was who she was.

The girl wanted neither pity nor attempts at sympathy from her descendants. All she desired was their understanding that her lost connections were not her fault, nor were they the faults of her adoptive parents or her biological ones. She wanted them to recognize that she involuntarily severed ties with India. She was never given the chance to experience the dilemma of being raised in conflicting cultures, but was raised with a more obscure difficulty: a lost identity. Some will say she was saved the hassle of a bi-cultural lifestyle, but she will always crave the choice not given to her. Her lost sense of identity will add to the disadvantages of foreign adoption. Those who oppose her adoption will say that to uproot a child and place her in a foreign country is detrimental to the child’s pride in her native heritage. Those who advocate that her adoption improved her life and the lives of her descendants will say that she would have probably been raised in the orphanage her entire life, deprived of a family. Hours will turn into days as the debate is discussed at family gatherings. In-laws, adults, and even children will have opinions to add to the conversation.

They will eat hamburgers, hot dogs, and potato chips, watching the sports channel as they discuss the girl’s life. They will neither realize nor comprehend that their light skin tone helps mitigate the obstacles that the girl experienced. Her descendants’ skin tones will help them to be easily accepted into a society where light skin is considered better. They will have less difficulty in interracial marriages or acceptance into upper-class clubs. As their skin tones eventually lose their darkness, they will lose what remnants they have of the little-known ancestry the girl had. This is the legacy she will leave behind.

—Melanie Susanne Vimala Spillane,
Decatur, Georgia
I used to think the happiest place on Earth was Disney World. However, things have changed; I grew up and gained wisdom through the years. Now I think the happiest place in the world is my grandmother’s house in India where I spend time with my family. There are no rides or attractions to keep me happy and busy, but there is warm love and a special feeling—a feeling that I can’t quite describe, but which I know is good for my soul and heart.

We arrived in Delhi in the middle of the night. As soon as we deboarded the plane I felt at home with the smell of India. My uncle came to pick us up and we went home. It was good to see my family. Everyone was excited. We took a long six-hour train ride to Amritser, to my second home—my grandmother’s house. We got there in the middle of the night, so I assumed that only my uncle and my grandmother would be there, and we would see everybody else in the morning. But to my surprise, once we got off the train, there was a huge group of people waiting eagerly outside to greet us with smiles.

I was glad to get reacquainted with my whole family. Most of all, I was happy to see my nanie, my grandmother. Her beautiful eyes greeted me with a warm hug. I was also glad to see my brothers. They are not my blood brothers, but in India your first cousins are called your brothers. You respect and love them and call them your brothers. I have four of them, and we are very attached to each other. I am their only sister and they always treat me with love, dignity and pride. They would do anything for me. For that I am very grateful. We had fun horsing around and going on motorcycle rides together.

What could be better than to spend the dawn of a new century with your family? We decorated, catered, and set up a party at my nanie’s house. We had music, dancing, and fireworks; love, family, and togetherness. We laughed and danced and talked the whole night through. I have wanted so much to relive the fun of that night.

I can’t tell you the sadness I felt when we left the Monday after New Year’s. I wouldn’t be seeing my nanie or the rest of my family for another three years. I was rushed to say my goodbyes because the train was about to leave, but when I said goodbye to my nanie, no one was going to rush me. I gave her the biggest hug in the world, and said, “I don’t want to be away for another three years. I simply cannot bear it. My home is with you.” But she said not to worry, and to smile. She said we would keep in touch and we would never be apart in our hearts.

Nothing means more to me that my nanie, She is the one who taught me values when I was little. She was the one who taught me about Sikhism, about the sacred hymns and prayers of my religion. She encouraged me through life.

My first priority is to be with my family as much as I can. They motivate me when I am swimming the last lap of a 500 set. They encourage me when I am studying for a hard biology test. They lift my spirits. So I dedicate this essay to them.

—Jasmine Sidhu, grade 9, New City, New York

Make a Mkeka Mat!

The seven-day celebration of Kwanzaa is an African-American holiday. It was created in 1966 by Maulana Karenga, an African-American teacher who wanted to educate his people about their history. It’s a time to celebrate kinship with family gatherings and reunion. The holiday combines the African harvest customs with the culture and social history of African-Americans. Symbols of Kwanzaa are placed on the Mkeka mat. Kwanzaa begins on 26 Dec. this year.

Materials: Black construction paper, 10”x16”, 5 strips of red construction paper, 5”x1”, 5 strips of green construction paper, 5”x1”

Steps: 1. Fold the black construction paper in half. Cut 1” wide slits starting at the folded edge and cutting up. Stop 3” from the top.

2. Open up the black construction paper. At the edges on both sides, cut a fringe of about 2 1/2” long.

3. Alternating colors weave the red and green strips in and out of the black construction paper. Row 1 is under, over, under, over, until the end. Row 2 is over, under, over, under until the end. Repeat with remaining rows until complete.

—Tracy Sikkink, Los Angeles, CA
My grandfather told me, “Even if you can bring a smile onto one person’s face in the world, it is worth more than any jewel or any amount of money.” I never forgot what he said, but I never acknowledged it until a couple of summers ago on a trip to India.

“Hurry!” I heard my brother shout from the entrance to the train compartment. “We’re going to leave without you!”

Hurriedly, I reached into my purse and pulled out some wrinkled rupee notes. I handed them to the cashier, mumbling a quick “thank you,” and ran to the train. I made my way through the masses of people and ran to the train where my brother pulled me into the compartment. Moments later, the train picked up its pace and began to move away from the crowded station.

“You are so slow!” said my brother, the frustration obvious in his tone.

“Sorry!” I said loudly, trying to control the anger that was building up in my voice.

“Okay, it’s alright,” said my uncle. “At least you made it. Now can we please try and enjoy ourselves?”

I gritted my teeth.

*****

We were riding in a first class compartment. There were three layered bunk beds on either side of the compartment, and sheets and pillows were kept on each bunk. My parents were riding in the train compartment adjacent to ours. Suddenly we heard a knock on the door.

“Sahib,” an Indian term for Sir, “I have your food,” said a man on the other side.

My uncle got up from his seat with a mild groan and unlocked the door. The man came in with decorated trays of different Indian foods that had the warm scent of authentic Indian spices.

“Thanks.” My uncle nodded as the man made his way out the door.

“Just let me know if you need anything else.”

“C’mon, let’s eat,” said my uncle.

“I’m not hungry,” I mumbled, and crawled up to the middle bunk.

The voices droned on as my thoughts drifted away. I thought about my initial impressions before coming to India. I had envisioned India as some sort of exotic land. An image appeared in my mind. I could almost taste the hot air as the sounds of drums echoed in the background. But suddenly this image changed to a horrific one of a crippled beggar being pushed into the cold mud by all passersbys. He looked around with melancholy eyes, just slightly being able to whisper. “Help me. God bless you all.”

******

“We have now reached New Delhi,” the train announcer said in his barely comprehensible voice.

Immediately after the train came to a halt in the station, a group of men wearing orange shirts, with orange turbans tied around their heads came up to us. They were called “coolies,” and carried our luggage out on their heads.

I don’t remember how long we sat at the station, but I remember that I was on the verge of collapsing from the unbearable heat when I saw my dad walk up to us. He wiped the sweat off his forehead with the sleeve of his shirt and took in a deep breath.

“Our tickets weren’t confirmed and the only place left is in third class until Mandali Station. Otherwise we’ll have to spend the night here.”

“Well, we’re definitely not staying here another night,” said my mom. “We’ll just go third class.”

I had never traveled in a third class train before. Ever since we had gotten here, we had received special treatment. We were considered to be the aristocrats of the country. When the train arrived, we stepped arrogantly on, trying to avoid any contact with the people. They were clearly not ones with whom we could associate. I figured that this compartment was bound to be the same as all the others we had come across so far. I’ll never forget the image I saw when I walked into the train.

There were masses of people everywhere. Kids sprawled on the ground, some wearing only a shirt; old men sat with crooked walking sticks, meditating; young mothers sat with their faces covered with saris, holding bawling infants dressed in rags.

The train jolted to a start and I flew forward, nearly stepping on one of the kids in front of me. The
train began chugging along the rusty tracks. The heat became more sweltering by the minute and, exhausted from our previous journey, I sank into a deep sleep. About an hour or so later, I finally woke up, my eyes dazed from sleep.

"Mungfulli! Mungfulli! Garam Garam Mungfulli!" The shrill voice of the short, chubby man walking down the aisles echoed in my ears. He was walking through our compartment wearing around his neck a rope attached to a large box that held peanuts. I realized that I was starving.

I handed the man some money, and he smiled at me. He quickly made a cone out of newspaper, his slick fingers ensuring it was perfect. He handed me the cone of peanuts, winked, and then continued pacing through the compartment shouting, "Mungfulli!"

I heard some laughter and glanced up. There was a little boy standing in front of me. He was wearing torn clothes and messy hair. He was looking at me eating my peanuts, not paying attention to anything else that was going on. Not knowing what to do, I took out a peanut and handed it to the little boy. Happily he went back to where his mother was.

"Look mommy, look!" he said delightedly. "Look what she gave me." He pointed back at me.

I managed a smile.

Suddenly, I heard the sound of banging. As I listened more carefully, it sounded like drums. And I heard tambourines, too! A man and his daughter were beginning to sing a song. I recognized the tune at once; it was one of my favorite songs. In no time, other people joined in. Not feeling self-conscious anymore, I started to sing too. It was so much fun! We sang song after song. Skinny little kids dressed in rags danced in the middle of the compartment. One of them even pulled me into the group. I had never freely enjoyed myself so much.

Before I knew it, we came to our station. An hour ago, I would have jumped with joy, but now, I felt an unexplainable sadness as I left the train. I felt some connection with these people, whose lives were astonishingly different from mine. After I stepped off the train, I looked up at the window. The little boy was staring outside. He waved, smiling at me. I could feel the tears in my eyes, as I waved goodbye to him while the train pulled out of the station.

—Alpana Das, student, Fairfax, Virginia
Joy

Feeling the true bliss of peace:
I stand beside the glistening green Statue of Liberty,
And know the real meaning of freedom.
I smile at the fact that I was lucky enough to
experience the outcome of Martin Luther King Jr.
And his desperate attempts to express that all
people are equal.

Cracking a joke:
Always fun to see the twinkle in my friend’s eyes,
As her dimples scrunch up
And she becomes a barrel full of laughter.

Accomplishing my goal:
I touch the wall, as I finish the last stroke of
my swim race.
The water glistens below, and I fill with joy after
hearing the news
That I got first place.

Expressing her love:
“My mother,” the most beautiful words ever spoken,
She smothers me with a kiss and gives a big bear hug
As she announces it’s time for bed.

—Molly Burke, 12, West Hartford, Connecticut

Joy is like magic warm
rain that falls from the sky.
Joy is a lullaby that will
sing you to sleep.

—Bridgett Johnson-Elliott, gr. 3, Cottage Grove, OR

Our Chinese Culture

The Chinese culture is very different from the
American culture. There are a lot of differences
in our food, eating habits, celebrations and
language. For example, in Chinese restaurants we
order different kinds of food, put them in the
middle of the table, and share. This way each
person can eat a variety of dishes. We eat using
chopsticks, while Westerners eat using spoons
and forks.

We also eat food that is different from the
typical food served in America. For example, we
eat “brown eggs” instead of regular white eggs.
Brown eggs are actually hard-boiled eggs braised
in soy sauce. We also eat squid, which is not too
common in America, and serve fish with the head
on instead of a fillet. Instead of ice cream, we eat
crushed ice topped with red beans, tapioca, and
condensed milk.

During Chinese New Year we eat rice cakes,
while Americans drink champagne at their New
Year. Chinese children get red pockets, which are
small red envelopes that have money inside them.
We use the lunar calendar while Americans use
the solar calendar, and during the Full Moon
Harvest Festival, we eat moon cakes. For birth­
days, we eat fish for good luck, and noodles for
long life, while Americans eat birthday cake.

The Chinese alphabet has 36 characters while
the English alphabet has 26. The Chinese
language is hard to learn because it doesn’t use
the alphabet to spell things, but has an individual
character for each word. The English language is
read horizontally from left to right, while Chinese
is written vertically from right to left. The hardest
part about learning Chinese is that every word has
to be spoken with the right tone or it will be a
totally different word.

Although there are many differences between
the Chinese and the American cultures, there are
still many similarities. Families are very impor­
tant in both cultures; they both celebrate New
Year and Independence Day; they both pass on
traditions by telling stories and singing songs.

—Eric Cheng, 12, The Woodlands, Texas
"Ma, where are you?" I called. The wind grabbed the door out of my wet hand, slamming it shut. I slid my umbrella next to my mother's in the urn by the door. It made a satisfying whizzing sound before it clunked to the bottom of the porcelain.

"Wen-ling, leave your umbrella in the garage to dry." The living room was dark, save for two red candles that sputtered on the cherry-wood altar.

"Ma, the police came to my school. Everyone on Yang-Ming Mountain has to evacuate." I yanked a small wheeled suitcase out of the hall closet. "Immediately."

"Put that away," Ma said. She was hanging up strips of yellow paper covered with vermilion triangles. Buddhist spells. "Pay your respects to your father."

I put the suitcase back and lit two joss sticks at the altar. Wisps of incense twirled their way up to heaven as I stared at the black-and-white head shot of my father.

 please Ba, make her listen to me. The wind howled through the crack at the bottom of the front door, as if in reply. I never prayed to Ma's Buddhist gods, but I talked to my father a lot. I always had.

"I went to the temple this morning and asked the priest for a spell to protect the house." Ma went to the local temple to bai-bai every day, usually for me to be respectful or to get good grades, whichever problem was more urgent. At least today the typhoon had taken precedence.

"Ma, listen to me."

"I'm listening. What do you want to eat?"

"If we don't leave..." I kneeled down and grabbed her knees. "We could die."

"Fate is fate." She pushed back my bangs. Her hand was like ice on my forehead. "And don't say 'die.' You'll bring us bad luck."

"Mother, don't be so superstitious! I'm stating a fact. There's a super-typhoon coming. There'll be landslides and flooding. Remember last time?"

Last time was two months ago when a large chunk of our backyard slid down the mountain. One of our neighbors lost his house. A week later Ba died. Heart attack, the doctor said.

Ma finished hanging the last strip and stepped down. "A spell protected your grandfather's house when that American bomb fell and..."

"Didn't explode," I finished for her. "I remember that story."

"Not a story—a fact."

Ba, help! She won't listen to me.

Obey your mother. His last words.

"Give your father a bowl of rice. It's dinner time."

"He's dead," I whispered, even though I could still hear his voice.

She strode to the kitchen and scooped a bowl of rice out of the rice cooker. "Go to your room."

"Mother, I'm not a child."

"Fate is fate."

"You've got to stop living in a fantasy world. Ba doesn't need to be fed, and strips of paper don't protect a house."

"Wen-ling Huang! You are being disrespectful and disobedient."

I swallowed hard. "Mama, please. We can both stay with Paw-Paw."

"We are not leaving this house." Ma set the rice down on the altar, lit more joss, and raised the thin sticks above her head.

I walked to the door and spun my umbrella around in the urn. Obey. Obey. Obey. I always obey. And I'm always treated like a child.

The umbrella dropped with a soft clink. I opened the door and slipped out. The rain pelted my head and battered my shoulder blades. Mud surged down the road as grass and stones swirled around my sneakers. Everything on the mountain was headed down, I thought. Everything except Ma. What if I was wrong? I stopped and peered back through the rain at the house.

"Wen-ling!" I heard the slap-slap of rubber thongs before I could see her. "Foolish child! Going out without your umbrella." Her purse got caught up with the handle as she gave it to me.

The purse meant she would come with me. I bit my lip hard so she wouldn't see me smile. Thank you, Ba. Or Buddha. Whoever.

We sloshed on down the hill, our umbrellas knocking together like paper lanterns.

"Let's stop," I said when we reached the temple. "Why stop? You don't believe."

"I know," I smiled, keeping my prayers to Ba a secret. "But you do."

—Kathleen Ahrens, Taipei, Taiwan
(clockwise from top) Surviving the September 1999 Earthquake; Young Girl Praying at Jun Lan Temple, Tachia; After the Quake: What Do I Do Now?; and Family Praying, Tainan. © by Henry Westheim
Taiwan, My Homeland

The island of Taiwan is shaped like a sweet potato, with a population of 24,118,000 and an area of 35,962 sq. km. Taiwan shares the culture, ancestry, and traditions of China.

Chinese New Year is in the middle of February. People decorate their houses and put banners on their doorways and windows, celebrating the holiday season. On New Year's morning, people wake up early to go downtown to see fireworks, watch a dragon dance in the street, or visit relatives and friends to wish them a happy New Year.

In June, the Taiwanese celebrate a dragon boating festival. The legend claims that Chuyen, a loyalist to the King in 650 B.C.E., drowned in Milo Lake in China. Townspeople threw rice cakes into the lake so that the dragon who lived there wouldn't eat his body. People still celebrate this tradition today.

There are also traditions that go along with the preparation of food. Chinese cooking is a form of art. Ingredients are used not only for the flavor of the food, but for the color and appearance of the dish as well. Chinese foods come from many different regions: Canton, Szechwan, Shanghai, Hunan, Mandarin and Mongolia. All are stir-fried in a wok and use various combinations of soy sauce, sesame oil, garlic, ginger root and other spices to create a unique sauce.

In Taiwan, temples are places for worship and meditation to relax your mind, body and soul. Some people choose to be Buddhist monks. Both females and males shave their heads, and wear the same kind of ashen clothes. They have a routine they follow each day. The early morning is a time for prayer and the study of Buddhist philosophies. They grow their own vegetables and do not eat any meat. If you visit the temples, they will welcome you and cook a delicious dish to serve you.

Taiwan has a rich culture. It is my birthplace and sometimes I think I take it for granted. How I wish to live in my homeland!

—Photos & text by Mei-Li Liu, Colorado Springs, CO
My Favorite Celebration

Students of Jennifer Jesseph, ESL teacher in Rochester, Minnesota, share their favorite celebrations.

**Georgiov den**

My native country is Bulgaria. One of the most important and biggest celebrations is Georgiov den (Georgy’s Day) and it is the 6th of May. It marks the beginning of summer, the season of agriculture. This day is devoted to Bulgarian shepherds. People butcher the biggest sheep for an offering. They also go swimming in the rivers and hike mountains. All this is for health and fruitfulness.

—Sofia Vladimirova, grade eight, Bulgarian

**Ethiopian New Year**

What a joyous time. It’s a time of music, dancing, and fun. When the sun goes down, the festivities start. First, we light candles that are bright as the stars. Then the band starts making the stars, the moon, and the sky dance to the beat. The boys and men wear the mane of the lion, stripes of the tiger, and the skin of the zebra. As the men dance, they also sing, “Welcome New Year. May you be as pleasant as the last.” The women at home sing and dance and cook a feast for the New Year. When the men come home and friends come over, the feast begins. You invite the priest to come over and eat. They say a prayer, bless the food, and eat.

—Yonatan Fitwi, grade seven, Ethiopian

**Thuk Bat**

A very special occasion from our country of Laos is called Thuk Bat. We don’t do it very often. We wear a special dress and we bring food and rice to the temple. We sit on the floor and all the Buddhas sit on special chairs. The Buddhas say the words. After that, one of the Buddhas comes down with a bucket full of water and a leaf. Then he takes the leaf and dips it in the water and sprays us. Finally we get up and put food in the bowls for the Buddhas. The occasion is very important to us.

—Jeany Vongkhams, grade eight, Laotian

**Day of the Dead**

An important celebration in my culture is Day of the Dead. It’s a holiday where people go to the cemetery and visit the dead. The visitors have to give them food, flowers, or gifts. They light up a candle and pray for their relatives who died. And some people light up a candle so the dead visit them when they are asleep. At night, lots of people walk in the street carrying statues of gods and praying.

—Marrion Yanson, grade seven, Phillipino

**Pa-chon Boun**

I chose to write about Pa-chon Boun. It is like Halloween except we just pray for the dead. We bring food like fruit to the temple. The monk will pray and give the food to whomever we brought for. Afterward, we come home and gather the family to pray and tell stories about the dead. That night is a special night for the family and the dead. It’s the only day and night the dead can come to the family and receive gifts, food, money, and clothes. The spirits that don’t have families, or if the families don’t pray for them, they don’t get any food or money. So they might say chants to make the family not do well in life. That’s why it’s important to pray for the dead.

—Vith Khoeun, grade eight, Cambodian

The Celebration Altar is where you gather up your cousins and friends and have a party. Then we put all sorts of food on a plate and put it by a tree. We pray and say, “Let the ancestors have a great time and enjoy the food that we have put outside.” The party goes on and that is what it is like to have a Celebration Altar.

—Sophat Oum, grade seven, Cambodian

**Traditional Dances**

An important celebration in my culture are the traditional dances. There are many kinds of dances. Some of the names of the dances are The Blessing Dance, the Coconut Dance, and the
Umbrella Dance. They all have different steps. The Blessing Dance is a girl’s dance. The dancers hold a traditional cup filled with flowers. They throw the flower petals as they dance. In the Coconut Dance, each girl and boy gets his or her own pair of coconuts. They use the coconuts to make a sound that goes to the beat of the music. In the Umbrella Dance, the girls hold the umbrellas and dance. The boys also dance and try to take the umbrellas away from the girls. These dances are important to me; they are part of my culture.

—Lana Chhem, grade eight, Cambodian

Ramadan and Eid

An important celebration in our culture is called Eid fitr. It is one of the biggest celebrations in our religion. It is the next day after Ramadan ends. Ramadan is when all Muslim adults have to fast. On Eid, you have to wake up early in the morning, take a bath, wear your newest clothes, and go to the Mosque at about 1:00 p.m. Then you have fun the rest of the day. Eid lasts for two days. This is a happy day for every Muslim. I love this day.

—Ahmed Ali, grade seven, from Somalia

Vietnamese New Year

New Year is the biggest event of my culture. On New Year, we get lucky money, which is money given from elders and our parents for good luck. There are also dances by people in dragon costumes and many fire crackers to play with. After the celebration, we go to our relatives’ houses to wish them a good and happy year. Then they give us lucky money and say something like, “We hope you do well in school.” After all the fun playing with our relatives, watching the dances, and playing with fire crackers, it is time to go home. An old year ends but a new one is just beginning.

—Nguyen Huynh, grade seven, Vietnamese

Cambodian Beliefs and Manners

- If you have a mole on your lower lip, it means you like to talk a lot.
- A mole near your eye means you’ll have a hard life.
- A mole near your foot means you like to leave the house, go out, and have fun.
- A mole on your left cheek means you’re pretty.
- A mole on your right cheek means you’re ugly but have a nice heart.
- Clean your house before New Year or else there will be bad luck during the year.
- Don’t have only three people walk outside at night. A ghost might haunt the middle person because the ghost will think he is weak.
- Don’t touch elders on the head; it is sacred.
- Don’t point at pictures of Buddha. And always put pictures of Buddha above you. It’s disrespectful.

Market in Oaxaca, México Photo: Katacha Diaz, Davis, CA

El Día de los Muertos es un día especial que se celebra en México el dos de noviembre. Esta celebración empezó con los Aztecas quienes creían que los muertos podían influir a los vivientes. Los conquistadores Españoles no pudieron borrar esta tradición y durante los siglos se mezcló con la celebración del día religioso de las Santas Animas de la Iglesia Catolica. La gente indígena de Janitzio en el Lago de Pátzcuaro, incluye en sus celebraciones, visitas al cementerio a media noche para decorar las tumbas con velas y flores. También deja ofrendas de comida y objetos especiales.

—Maria Rosalino, Coto de Caza, California
Leaving Mogadishu

My name is Abdirahman Said and I was born in Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia, a small country in East Africa. My whole life I heard people talk about how great America is, with so many opportunities. The thing that got me most curious about America was when people said, "America has the answers to all your questions." For years I dreamed about moving to America.

In 1991, Somalia was corrupted by war. My family did not want us to grow up in a country where everyone was killing each other, so we decided to move to Saudi Arabia. Everyone in my family came, except for my father and my older brother. Father had to sell his business first, and my brother stayed with him to help. Unfortunately, because of the war, nobody wanted to take the risk of buying a huge corporation.

Saudi Arabia was a really beautiful place to live, but they had some really strict rules and my mother did not like that. So after six months, we decided to move to Canada. We had to switch planes when we got to Germany, but something went wrong. While in Germany, my mother’s water broke, which meant she was about to have a baby, so they took her to the hospital and she had a healthy baby boy.

Since the baby was born in a European country, the baby was European and we had a decision to make: stay in Germany, or move to Canada and start all over again finding a house, new jobs, etc. Since we could now legally live in Europe because of my new brother, and we were already settled there, we decided to stay in Germany.

Europe was the best thing that happened to us; for once in our lives we lived in a community where we were happy. Europe gave us things we never had before, like a great education, free from beatings. In Africa it was the common belief that if the kids were not beaten, they would not learn anything. For kids to learn, they had to be beaten every time they made a mistake.

Europe also gave us the feeling of being safe from danger. In Saudi Arabia and Somalia, you could never actually tell when you would be safe—the army might just come to your house and ask for your oldest son to be entered into the war, even if your son were only 12 years old.

The other thing was that you never knew when you were going to die. If you walked down the streets of East Africa, you would feel bullets passing you back and forth, bullets that were shot from blocks away, from the trees, anywhere. It was that dangerous in East Africa.

Saudi Arabia was a little bit different. Since it’s a Muslim country, they have some very difficult rules. A woman can’t go outside unless her entire body except for the pupils of her eyes are covered. And Saudi Arabia is always 90° F at the coolest. If you are caught or accused of stealing they have very harsh punishments. So Europe was pretty safe compared to where we had been.

We lived in Europe for five years, and during those five years it was nothing but happiness, except for the fact that our father was missing somewhere in Africa. A year after we left Somalia, his corporation and its insurance company both got bombed. My father was broke and had no way out of the country. We tried to send him some money but it did not get to him; it kept either coming back to us or getting lost somewhere in Africa. We thought maybe it was because he moved somewhere else, or that maybe he was dead. Or, maybe he got out of there. Anything was possible. I was really sad about the fact that he was gone, and mad that he did not come with us when we left Africa.

Finally, after years of searching, we found him. Or, actually, he found us. He had been staying in Seattle, Washington, with my oldest brother. He escaped from East Africa with money that was hidden in my old room. There was a tiny space in the floorboards that my grandfather and I made when I was about two years old. I had forgotten about it. According to my father, there was more than U.S.$ 20,000 in there.

I asked him, “How did you know about that place? The only people who knew were Grandfather and me?”
He said, “One day I missed you so much that I went into your room, thinking about how I used to wake you up every morning and kiss you on your cheeks and how you would hate that. I got down on my knee and started to pray for God to let me be with my wife and children again. I guess God answered my prayers because as I stood up, my foot got stuck in a tiny little hole where only a child’s hand could fit. When I got my foot out, I saw a hundred dollar bill stuck to the bottom of it. I pulled up the floorboards and found a little box that I had given your grandfather for his birthday, with your name on it. I opened it, and there was all the money!

“I called the airlines and asked my friend to get me a ticket out of here. Before we went, I tried to contact your mother in Canada, but your uncle said that you all never even arrived. When I asked him if he knew where you were, he said he didn’t know. So I flew over to America with your brother. Since we had $8,000 left, we had a fresh new start with an apartment and pretty good jobs.

“I went to all kinds of search centers for families who have lost one another, but that took too long, so I started my own search. After years, I finally got the number to your mother’s family in Saudi Arabia, and when I called her, she told me exactly where you were staying. That was the happiest day since I came to America, and here I am, talking to you. I missed you, your sister, and your mother so much. I promise you this: I will never leave you again, never ever.”

—Abdirahman Said, Seattle, Washington

Not Home

I fear this new world
I fear my new surroundings
I have flown on the big white bird
over the blue thing that never seems to end
I fear my new home
I’m scared of new ways
I’m scared of standing in front of everyone’s eyes
I’m scared of not cutting it
I’m scared of not making the right impression
I’m scared
I miss my old world
I miss the countryside of my old home
I miss the constant visiting of cousins

—Josh Wasel, 12, A. I. S., Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

What Is Fire?

Fire is a kind of rage that flows into a controllable ball. I sometimes put it in a little box with all the other fireballs. That box stays in the back of my head and sits there flaring and filling up. Fire makes me want to do things unordinary, such as juggle blocks of burning wood, or punch hot blocks of steel. When you look into my eyes, they’ll tell you to stay away from me. I am fire. I am unordinary. Alvin is fire.

This is what I’d like to do with that fire. I want to say the world is fire and you can see it in my eyes. I want to take that fire in my eyes and burn the mask off of the man who tried to rob me. I want that fire to make concentrated smoke. I want to make that fire scare away the toughest bullies, and the maddest dogs. I want to make that fire change colors and spit it at the sky for everyone to see. They will see my fire. They will see the fire that burns in me.

—Alvin Eugene Carter Jr., grade 8, Detroit, Michigan
A State of Mind, Alaskan

There’s an essence that’s Alaskan,
A strength of will and spirit,
And it binds us to this frozen, vast expanse.

Seward’s Folly it may be,
And we may curse it through our teeth,
But it’s worth it for our bright Auroral dance.

There’s a purity, Alaskan,
Clear as all our lakes and streams,
That comes from being so close to nature every day.

It’s a love of moose and spruce and grizzly,
Of mosquitoes, ice and snow,
And of nights beneath the frozen Milky Way.

There is a state of mind, Alaskan,
Which says, “Duct Tape fixes all,”
And that Carhartts are the only clothes you need.

There’s a stubbornness, Alaskan,
Which says, “I’m in the Last Frontier,
And the rules I like, perhaps I’ll choose to heed.”

There’s a kindness that’s Alaskan,
For the state’s so very small,
That nearly everyone’s a friend of a friend.

So whenever you’re in trouble,
Someone’s bound to stop and help,
And everyone has got a helping hand to lend.

There’s a state of mind that’s tourist,
That says, “Oh, damn the ice and snow,
Damn the skeets and white sox buzzing round my head!”

“Oh the mountains are all pretty,
And the streams are very clear,
But I’d rather have my comfy home instead!”

There’s a state of mind that’s tourist,
Which says, “Show me all the sights,
But from the comfort of a car or train or cruise ship.

“Oh I’m cold, and how I itch,
And how I miss the sunny beach,
And how I wish I were anywhere but on this blasted trip!”

There’s a state of mind, Alaskan,
That says “Tourists all begone.”
For you don’t get it, and you probably never will.

For Alaskan veins have blood of ice,
Our hearts beat with the snowfall,
And you’ll never be a true Alaskan until...

Until you’ve raced outside with eyes alight,
To greet the year’s first snowfall,
And joyfully caught snowflakes on your tongue;

Until you’ve camped away from car or boat,
In the solitude of nature,
And in the silence you’ve burst out and loudly sung;

Until you’ve seen the Borealis dance,
And you have seen the eagle soar,
You can never be a true Alaskan.

And until you learn to love it all,
Without misgivings, qualms, or questions,
Then you’re certainly a tourist, if you’re askin’.

—Hailey Heinze, 14, Eagle River, Alaska

As I sit in a classroom
I recall those long ago days
When I was the same.
Back then I was popular
And I had many different friends.
I was young and so were they
As a child you really don’t see
Differences at all

But as you grow up, you notice things
And sometimes learn the hard way
What a difference a difference can make.
But if you’re really special
One of the few
You learn something that
Makes your voice heard:
Compassion.

—Jessica Sutton, 16, Lewisville, Texas
Undo The Spell!

A playful old wizard got so bored that he magically jumbled the vowels on signs all over town. Undo his spell so the signs are readable again by figuring out which vowels equal which, but be warned—each sign may have a different jumble!

Example: If he switched the vowels so that: a = o, e = i and o = u, then “Shoe Sale” would read “Shui Soli.”

1. Froo Pirkung
2. Thas Spuco Fer Ront
3. Ruod Cunstricteun Ohaod
4. Bay Inu, Gut Inu Fruu
5. Grind Aponung
6. Druva Threigh Wundiw
7. Na Lettireng
8. Pluesu Cimu Egean

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Do You Believe in Fairies?

As Anna walked home from school on Monday, she passed by her neighbor’s garden, and something caught her eye. It was a beautiful flower. She put down her violin and backpack and crept into the garden. As she stared at the flower, she realized why it had caught her eye. The petals sparkled, as if somebody had sprinkled fairy dust on them.

"Ha," she laughed at herself. "There are no such things as fairies."

That night as the family was eating dinner, her little brother cried, "Look! My tooth fell out!" He passed it around.

Anna’s mother said, "Wow! Your first tooth, honey!" She showed it to everyone. Anna’s brother was glowing.

"I wonder what the tooth fairy will bring me!" He said happily.

Anna couldn’t fall asleep that night. It was hot, and all of the windows were open. The moon was full, and its light was shining across her bed. She got up and wrapped a blanket around herself, and slipped outside. She found herself walking to her neighbor’s garden. When she got there, she opened the gate and very quietly went up to the flower. The petals sparkled in the moonlight. All was quiet except for a tiny laugh. She held her breath, straining to hear it again, but it did not come back. She reached out to stroke the petal. It looked like a crystal, and she was almost afraid to touch it, lest it should break. She finally plucked it carefully from the flower. She heard the laughter again. She looked at the petal more carefully and saw a tiny fairy sitting on it. She was beautiful, with long, shimmering hair and a dress made of the same kind of crystal petals. Her voice was like tinkling glass ornaments on a Christmas tree.

"Hello, Anna. How is your brother? I heard he lost a tooth today. Sofia brought him a silver dollar. I hope he likes it."

Anna could hear the fairies laughing together.

—Prima Cristofalo, 13, Oakland, California
An Unexpected Friend

My parents’ friends have a daughter who has Down’s Syndrome. She is 40 years old. The only way you would know her age is by the fact that she has gray hair. Lynn is very sweet, kind and gentle. She loves all kinds of music, ice skating, and going to the movies. She speaks very well and is very polite. She loves to take part in any activity that she can. She was involved in the Special Olympics for gymnastics.

One day about three years ago, I brought her swimming with me at our local pool. We enjoyed the day and had fun swimming and diving all day long. She was teaching me different swimming techniques, when a group of my friends saw me and came over. They said, “Why are you swimming with her?” I said, “Because she’s my friend. Why don’t you join us?” They laughed and said they didn’t want to swim with a retarded person. I was so upset! I told them, “She is a very nice person and a good friend. She is a great swimmer and has been teaching me a lot. I think you would enjoy being with her.” They didn’t want to stay, so they swam away.

A little while later they needed some people to play a game called “sharks and minnows.” I told them I would love to play if Lynn could play too. They finally agreed that she could play. Lynn wasn’t anything they expected her to be! They had a lot of fun with her, since she was never caught because she was such a fast swimmer!

I wish people would not judge others by their appearances. They should get to know people before they make an opinion about them. My friends turned out to like Lynn, but they never would have realized it if I hadn’t encouraged them to give her a chance.

—Katie Halliday, 14, Gibsonia, Pennsylvania

What Matters Most to Me

During summer vacation, right before school started, I got an envelope from the school addressed, “To the Parents of Claudine Koma.” When my schedule comes every summer I hope that I will not be in Special Ed classes because I have been in them since third grade. I don’t know what it feels like to be in all regular classes. I took out the white paper and saw that first, second and third periods were all regular classes. I was excited until I saw that fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh periods were all Special Ed classes. I was about to cry, but I didn’t because my mom and my brother were there. I always wonder, Why did this happen to me? I told myself that perhaps it was a mistake and I would not be in any special classes, but I would try not to get my hopes up.

The first day of school was only for two hours. I went to all of my classes and they seemed fine, but when the other kids asked my schedule, they made fun of me. As the days went by I knew that I was getting made fun of, but I pretended I didn’t hear and tried to ignore them. While I was in one of my Special Ed classes we discussed how we felt about being in special classes. I felt like crying because I did not want to say anything. When the teacher asked my opinion I told everyone that I had been in Special Ed classes since the third grade and that I hated being in them.

People keep making fun of me. When I told my teacher she said she would talk to them about their behavior, but she always forgets to tell them. When people make fun of me I feel angry. I always think that maybe, if I try harder I will get to be in a regular class.

I think about the future and wonder if I will always be in special classes. Will I always need help in school? If I didn’t have help, would I get as good grades as I do now? I hope as I get older, I will worry less about what others think and realize that sometimes learning is hard for me and it doesn’t make me a bad person just because I need a little extra help.

—Claudine Koma, 12, Lincolnwood, Illinois.

It is no use walking anywhere to preach, unless our walking is our preaching.

—St. Francis of Assisi
Beachside Memories of Grandpa

Thick Florida air hovers over the beach
Palm trees barely move with the breeze
The night sky is as black as the sea
With every print my bare feet make
in the cool sand
a sense of softness runs through me
I get closer to the water
Behind me
the Aruba Café plays its music
Lights of red, green and orange flash
people dance
and waitresses serve burgers and fries.

I am too distant from that scene
My toes skim the tide’s foam
my eyes stare into what seems like blank water
In the empty darkness
I can only see the water by my feet
and the occasional boat illuminating waves
as it passes by
I am sad. I miss my grandfather.

Yellow sky gives the seagulls a background to soar on
On this beach-painted day
My sister and I giggle
as Mother brings us lunch from the Aruba Café
Running as my feet burn on the sand-paper sand
I cannot wait to reach the pale blue cold sea that floats before me
calling my name, inviting me in
Grandpa is already there, spreading his arms to the heavens
Squinting up, his glasses reflect a sparkle
I jump into his arms
He lifts me so high
that I become a princess, gleaming
and I swear I can almost touch that happy sky
The sun beats down on my skin
as my heart fills with love
My grandpa is my best friend.

And now here I am
on the cold white sand
standing in the same spot
where in my childhood I had been a princess
The Aruba Café is doing more business than ever
but I knew it when I was young
Waves roll over my toes
and the sky still serves as a background
for sea gulls
It’s funny how places and things stay the same
but the feelings of them don’t
My grandfather is not here with me
I miss him. This beach-side paradise is not what it used to be
But then again, neither am I
I turn to walk back
and as sad as I feel
I smile
knowing that the water-colored sun will rise
against the tide tomorrow morning
as will a new day.

—Elizabeth Katz, 15, New City, NY, also writes, “My grandfather passed away two summers ago. He had suffered from Alzheimer’s Disease, that robbed him of his memory and sanity. Writing this poem was one of the hardest things I have ever done, because it was one of the first times I put my feelings about his life and death into words. When I read this poem to my mother and grandmother, their eyes and mine filled with tears—but not tears of sadness, tears that keep the happiness of the past alive.”

Cartoons by Lindy Wojcicki, Orlando, Florida
The Feeling of Fall
Leaves are floating silently
off the brightly colored trees,
crackling beneath my feet.
The faint sound of rakes
scrapping across the concrete.
Your hair gets all frazzled
when the breezes come.
You can always smell
the sweet fragrance of mums.
Birds flying south in the form of a V
is something in Fall that’s pretty to see.
Leaves on the ground on a cool, damp day
As the wind tickles your face
in a whispering way.
—Kaitlyn Schonta, 11, Elmhurst, Illinois

Costa Rica
Mountainous rainforest
tropically hot
narrow curvaceous roads
incredible flora and fauna abound
bubbly gorgeous mineral hot springs
red squirrels sloths and wild boars
toucans and scarlet macaws
hiking and bird watching
volcano erupting
spewing hot bright red lava
over cone-shaped rocky forests
amidst the clouds big brilliant stars
close enough to almost touch
huge blue butterflies
swimming relaxing wondering
sipping cold delicious granizadas
speaking spanish to white-faced monkey troops
brief pastel sunsets
sandy beaches as soft as silk
crocodiles hummingbirds iguanas
hospitable ticos
welcome to a moment in Paradise
—Abbe Horswill, 12, Upper Gwynedd, Penn.
Abbe wrote this after visiting Costa Rica
during Spring Break this year.

Biding Time
Jetties wait in whispering water,
Waiting for the ship to run aground,
Waiting for the tide to come in.
Breakers swell onward, blasting canvas.
Waiting until the sails are tattered,
Waiting for the keep to split.
Sea sponges caper below gleefully,
Waiting for the men to fall,
Waiting for the castles to crumble.
—Brannon Still, 17, Dassel, Minnesota

The Garden
The sweet smell of flowers
The rich, dark soil under your feet
The wind blows, making the
Daffodils dance, pansies prance, zinnias sway
While the bachelor buttons keep the beat.
The birds’ songs ring out from the bordering trees.
They ride the wind
Down to the flowers, trying to please
Them with their gay songs.
The butterfly swoops gracefully above
Their heads, trying to decide the right place to land.
When in the garden, you’re never gloomy
For the bright colors and cheerful noises
Make you forget your worries.
—Tara Schmitt, 10, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Worms
Pink, long
Moving through dirt
Five hearts in one body
Nightcrawler
—Katie Enge, 12, Anoka, Minnesota
Caring for Others

My mom used to be a foster parent for children who had been neglected or abused. At first, I did not understand why she would want to take in more children because she already had four of us to take care of, and my dad too. I really did not want to have to share our things with others, but I soon changed my mind. I did not always get along with the kids who came to stay with us, but I learned how to accept them.

My mom explained to us that she felt sorry for kids who were abused or neglected because their parents were alcoholics or drug addicts who could not even take care of themselves, let alone their children. She did not like to see a child go through all the hurt of not having anything to eat or not even having clean clothes to wear. She felt that everyone needed a safe place to go because the world can be scary. She wanted us to help her make these kids feel at home with us until their parents could get help for their own problems.

Our whole family has learned how to accept people for who they are. We try to understand how they ended up the way they did, and we do not put anyone down for not having as much as we do or for having a different life style. My mom feels that being loved and accepted is the most important thing in the world, even more important than money. She thinks that love gives you the confidence to go out and try new things even if it means making mistakes. She knows what it feels like to be abused because she was once, and she wants kids to realize that the abuse is not their fault.

I do not know how my mom could take in people and just take care of them, but she did. We had kids with us who ended up going back to their parents and kids who had to go into group homes because they just could not accept help. We also had kids here who just stayed for awhile because neither of their parents wanted them. Some kids had disabilities because their moms took drugs while pregnant with them.

Even though my mom is not a foster parent any longer, we have a teenager living with us right now because his mom did not want him to stay with her anymore, and he had nowhere else to turn. He is now looking for a job to help out at our house. Everyone knows that they can come here and stay whenever they need a place to go. We always have someone sleeping over even if it is just a friend. My mom takes in stray animals too. We've had birds, cats, frogs, fish and dogs.

My mom taught us how important it is to care for people. I think that we will be better people for helping others.

—Nick Emanuele, 14, Gibsonia, Pennsylvania

Sisters

I am so lucky to have you as my sister.
You are there for me through everything.
Our four-year difference only brings us closer.
I am getting older, and we're going to drift apart.
But don't forget, I will always be your big sister.

I will be your bridesmaid
and will be there for you when you have
your first child.
The bond we share is unexplainable.
Hopefully, we will each have two daughters
who will be able to share this deep feeling.

I enjoy watching you grow up
and become a beautiful young woman.
You are truly the best.
Who else can I wake up at 2:00 a.m..
and tell about my date?
Who will comfort me when I'm in one of my
depressed moods?
Only you.

Alex,
this is an acknowledgement
of how important you are to me.
You are my pride, my joy,
and most of all, the wind beneath my wings.

—Nancy Gutman, 15, Short Hills, New Jersey
Do you get embarrassed when you make a mistake? —K.S.

Dear K.S.: Here is an incident when I acted quite foolishly. The instant that I caught on to my folly, however, I realized how much I had learned from my mistake and did not have the time or inclination to be embarrassed.

I was anxious to have a small class experience the miracles of nature by observing the many stages in the life of butterflies. We knew that butterfly life begins with an egg, which develops into a caterpillar, and at the right moment, the caterpillar emerges from its cocoon as a butterfly. We brought four different cocoons attached to branches into our science corner and kept careful watch. Two of the cocoons finally seemed to show some signs of life. The head of one butterfly worked furiously to crack the cocoon shell. The little insect used every part of his body to free himself from his tiny prison. My heart went out to the struggling creature. I took a sturdy needle and tried to assist the butterfly emerge by enlarging the escape opening. Finally the butterfly escaped. However I must have interfered with nature’s genius and caused damage. The butterfly barely emerged, soon it collapsed and died.

We stood back and quietly watched as the next butterfly emerged successfully. Each step of the freedom struggle was guided by nature’s own wisdom; every body part developing strength and agility in the process.

How similar are our learning experiences to that of the butterfly! Life presents us with opportunities to develop skills, and then gives us the chances to use them: to forgive someone, to comfort another, to get over grief and loneliness, etc. Each task requires our perseverance to grow in nature’s wisdom. I do not regret deeds I have done, nor worry about being embarrassed because I did the best I knew at the time. If it was not the wisest choice, it will remain in my mind as a learning experience.

Just as the butterfly copes with the challenge of emerging from the cocoon, we humans grow in wisdom and insight to cope with our life challenges.

Send your questions or comments to:
Dear Hanna c/o Skipping Stones
P. O. Box 3939
Eugene, OR 97403 USA

In peace,

Illustrations by
Judi Lamb, Eugene
The Dying Tree

Once, while on a construction job site, my dad and I came upon a lot with uprooted oak trees lying in it. A wave of pity for the trees ripped through my heart. It was so hard to believe people could cut down those beautiful, graceful trees. My dad decided to cut the biggest tree up for firewood. I followed him over and he cranked up his chainsaw; it made a hideous noise. He put the chainsaw to the tree and began to saw. The sound was terrible, it was as if the giant oak were crying out. I covered my ears and backed away. I began to see the tree in a different way, as a living thing, not just a thing. I felt overwhelmed and wanted to run away and cry. With a final saw, Dad disconnected the tree roots from its stump and began loading the logs into our pick-up truck.

I knelt next to the stump and counted the rings, which are supposed to tell you how old a tree is. There were 38! The tree that was 38 years old was now dead. At least the tree was going to be used in some way. I'm thankful to that tree; it kept my family and me warm all winter long. Of everything I witnessed that day, the best thing was seeing nature as it truly is: alive.

—Tiffany Wilson, 13, Loganville, Georgia

The Pearl of Life

A beautiful sphere, perfect in shape
A great size of swirling mass
Yet more delicate than an enchanted flower in its purest glory

The clouds slowly intertwining, looking down to the surface with pity
For the clouds slowly have watched the delicate earth form, they have watched it grow
They have witnessed the destruction slowly taking a stronger grasp of the majestic marble

In a downward spiral of destruction time is catching up
It's almost too late
Soon there will be no more

—John Langford, 11, A.I.S.—Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Old Man Winter

Wind is blowing down the door
Old Man Winter's lurkin'
He's begging me to let him in
Whoops! I forgot—
he's not much of an inside person.

—Ben Cooksey, Amhearst, Ohio

As the Clouds Drop Closer

As the clouds drop closer they fade into the trees with their fading raindrops like kisses plucking at my hand they fall gently the wind caresses my hair softly swirling the fallen leaves of mahogany and copper and maroon Autumn comes and with it days of leisure sitting on the bank of a river listening to it gurgle and breathe lying on a pile of leaves staring up into the crystal-clear sky and wishing you could be in a certain place at a certain time

while you know that you can’t the mist of loneliness yet freedom and mirth surrounding you keeping a tight grip without choking you relax and fall asleep and dream of the rainbows as they fall around you you are protected by the limb of a tree that shelters you from those persistent mists as the clouds drop closer the mists are beaten away and you daydream and sleep in peace.

—Virginia Tice, 12, Oakland, CA
Belize
Simonne Moreno, girl, 14
POBox 93; 121 San Francisco St.
Orange Walk, Belize, C.A.
Int: writing, sports
Kira Sutherland, girl, 14
68 Belize Road
Orange Walk, Belize, C.A.
Int: music, reading, talking
Amrita Vaswani, girl, 14
50 Queen Victoria Avenue
Orange Walk, Belize, C.A.
Int: reading, poems, singing
Leslie Allen, girl, 15
45 Queen Victoria Avenue
Orange Walk, Belize, C.A.
Int: dancing, music, traveling
Rayis Benairdey, girl, 15
54 Liberty Ave.
Orange Walk, Belize, C.A.
Int: playing music, fixing things
Eian Gideon, boy, 15
2 Liberty Ave.
Orange Walk, Belize, C.A.
Int: music, sports
Elviz Nunez, boy, 15
14 San Victor Street
Orange Walk, Belize, C.A.
Int: swimming, jokes, cards
Shawna Torres, girl, 15
St. George's Caye St.
Orange Walk, Belize, C.A.
Int: softball, music
Meena Vaxwani, girl, 15
50 Queen Victoria Avenue
Orange Walk, Belize, C.A.
Int: music, reading
Hezron Vega, boy, 15
Bliss Drive Unity Street 3
Orange Walk, Belize, C.A.
Jorge Gentle, boy, 12
1 Albert Lane, Trial Farm Village
Orange Walk District, Belize, C.A.
Gina Cal, girl, 16
5 Lover's Lane
Orange Walk, Belize, C.A.
Int: singing, traveling
Marleny Gonzalez, girl, 16
Yo Creek Village
Orange Walk, Belize, C.A.

Oscar Leia, boy, 16
17 Riverside Street
Orange Walk, Belize, C.A.
Int: arcade games
Mauro Azael Mendez, boy, 16
46 San Francisco Street
Orange Walk, Belize, C.A.
Int: musicians like me
Christel Novelo, girl, 16
28 Liberty Avenue
Orange Walk, Belize, C.A.
Int: good jokes, dancing
Luis Carlos Alcoser, boy, 17
34 Guadalupe Street
Orange Walk, Belize, C.A.
Int: singing, sports, movies
Melissa Colon, girl, 13
438 Seagull St., Trial Farm Village
Orange Walk District, Belize, C.A.
Karen Vanessa Flores, girl, 13
Guadalupe St., Trial Farm Village
House 1 606
Orange Walk Town, Belize, C.A.
Olegario Jones, boy, 14,
Int: stamp collecting, traveling; and
Alfredo Carvajal, boy, 14
Int: adventures, art, swimming
both at Trial Farm Village
Orange Walk District, Belize, C.A.
Teresita Sanchez, girl, 14
Indian Hill
Orange Walk District, Belize, C.A.
Int: music, watching TV
Felipa Elizabeth Urizar, girl, 14
92 Zericote Street, Trial Farm Village
Orange Walk Town, Belize, C.A.
Int: softball, exploring new places

Other Countries
Alexander Dikun, boy, 13
ul. Pritytzkogo d. 136, kv. 68
Minsk, 220017 BELARUS
Int: sailing, swimming, skooting
Audrea Beader, girl, 15
Mariua Getaldicha 23
21000 Split, CROATIA
email: nbeader@iwet.hr
Int: sports, animals

Eric Adjei, boy, 15, c/o Gaylord Asante
P. O. Box 2190 Sunyani, B/A, GHANA
Int: writing, playing games
Lawrence Bosomtwe, boy, 12
P.O. Box 971 Sunyani, B/A, GHANA
Int: singing, reading, football, dancing
Nana Asamoah, girl, 8
P.O. Box 2190 Sunyani, B/A, GHANA,
Int: movies, writing letters, swimming
Linda, girl, 14 and Anatu, girl, 14
both at P.O. Box 971
Sunyani, B/A, GHANA, W/A
Int: basketball, U.S. pen pals
Prince Edward Owusu, boy, 15
P.O. Box 597 Techiman, B/A, GHANA
Sharma Ahhicock, girl, 15
165 Glenn Road, Kara, Kara
Mackenzie, Linden, GUYANA
Int: music, sports, meeting people
Lina Racaite, girl, 18
Seskines 73-95
Vilnilis 2010 LITHUANIA
Int: correspondence in German, music
Elena Maroska, girl, 15
UL. "Nju Delhiska"
B-4 4/2 91000 Skopje
Skopje, MACEDONIA
Int: volleyball, music, traveling
Anna Pahlsson, girl, 14
Bobergsanden 2B
217 61 Milmo, SWEDEN
email: an.pahlsson@telia.com
Int: writing letters, traveling, friends
Jenny Adlercreutz Lindberg, girl, 12
Bjorka vagen 10
26035 Odoika SWEDEN
Int: animals, TV, music, writing letters
Elin Lidby, girl, 16
grangatan 8 57140 nässjö SWEDEN
Int: swimming, friends and boys

Write to penpals in Zambia:
Fort Hares’ PenPal Club ($5 donation)
c/o Fort Hares’ Flori-Organic Gardens
P. O. Box 450114, Mpuia,
ZAMBIA
Everton Pedzisayi, boy, 11
Int: soccer, tennis, comic books
Lee Roy Pedzisayi, boy, 14
Int: rugby, darts, stamp collecting
both at 18 Mufanje Road
P. O. Mufakose Harare, ZIMBABWE
This is the United Nations Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence. The UN has also designated the year 2000 a "year of education for nonviolence." The Millenium Peace Day was celebrated at the UN on 19 September. Every third Tuesday of September, the UN celebrates Peace Day, when dignitaries ring the Peace Bell and everyone observes a minute of silence for peace.

Hundreds of VIPs, celebrities, and Heads of State have signed the Peace Manifesto 2000, written by a group of Nobel Peace Prize Laureates to create a sense of responsibility starting on a personal level. It is not an appeal or petition addressed to a higher authority, but rather the responsibility of each and every individual to put into practice the values, attitudes and forms of behavior which inspire the culture of peace. The Manifesto includes the promise to respect all life without prejudice, reject violence, share with others, defend freedom of expression and cultural diversity, preserve the planet and to rediscover solidarity. Everyone can contribute to these goals by promoting nonviolence, tolerance, dialogue, reconciliation, justice and solidarity on a daily basis. The latest signature count for the Manifesto is over 60 million. Over 30 million people from India and 12 million Colombians have signed the Manifesto. You too can sign it on www.2000cultureofpeace.com.

"May Peace Prevail on Earth"

Families Against Violence Advocacy (FAVA) Network encourages classrooms to make use of their Pledge of Nonviolence, in which students pledge to respect others, communicate better, listen, forgive, respect nature, play creatively, and be courageous. Contact FAVA c/o: Parenting for Peace & Justice Network, Institute for Peace and Justice, 4144 Lindell Blvd., #408, St. Louis, MO 63108; ppjn@aol.com.

On 21 October 1999, about 1,000 Seattle students marched to show their support for the Day of National Concern About Young People and Gun Violence. As a part of this day, students promised to never bring a gun to school and to never use a gun to resolve a dispute.

The International Youth Parliament 2000 (IYP 2000) is taking place in Sydney, Australia from 19–28 October. This is an opportunity for young people around the world to share their ideas for building a diverse and sustainable human society, and to seek youthful solutions to both local and global challenges. It will focus on three areas: breaking the cycle of poverty, youth in conflict, and cultural activism. The parliament is an international youth declaration of the need to act together under the banner of equality and democracy. It is a chance for young people from all over the world to meet and understand their similarities and differences. www.caa.org.au/parliament.

Over 100,000 schools and organizations will celebrate Red Ribbon Week from 23 to 31 October. Since the U.S. Congress officially proclaimed the first National Red Ribbon Week in 1988, the wearing of these ribbons has served as a symbol of the commitment of parents, teachers and children toward the creation of a drug-free America.


The National Black Arts Festival celebrated its seventh biennial festival in Atlanta from 6 July – 6 August. It was one of the world's largest celebrations of the sights, sounds and expressions of the African Diaspora in the United States.

Bravo! Davo Karnicar, 38, of Slovenia, is the first person ever to ski nonstop down the world's tallest mountain, Mt. Everest. It took him just five hours to descend from the top at 29,000 ft. to the base camp at 17,500 ft. As you can guess, Davo is a ski instructor!

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Stories of Young Pioneers: In Their Own Words by Violet T. Kimball (Mountain Press). Relive the spirit of the Emigrant Trail through memoirs, letters, and journal entries of the children who experienced the great migration west. Ages 9-16.


Daughters of Eve: Strong Women of the Bible by Lillian Hammer Ross, Illustr. Kyra Teis (Barefoot Books). With beautiful pictures and creative narration, the contributions of strong women from the Hebrew Bible are retold in nine accurate, educational, and entertaining stories.

Into a New Century: Remarkable Women of the West by Liza Ketchum (Little, Brown). This book recognizes the importance of the mothers, aunts, sisters and daughters of the 19th century by highlighting the lives of eight women from America’s young and wild West. Ages 9 and up.


Voices From the Fields interviews and photographs by S. Beth Atkin (Little, Brown). Heartbreaking and heartening first-hand stories and poetry of migrant Hispanic farm-workers and their families. Candidly covers many prevalent topics such as gangs, teenage pregnancy and discrimination. Ages 10 and up.

Wampum Belts of the Iroquois by Tehanetoren’s (Book Publishing Co.). A history of the sacred art of Native American wampum, belts woven and embroidered with shells and porcupine quills. Includes photographs of wampum re-creations, woven by Tehanetoren’s Mohawk students. Ages 10 and up.

Drawing for the Artistically Undiscovered by Quentin Blake and John Cassidy (Klutz). An outstanding book for hands that really want to learn how to draw sketches. Comic. Unique. All ages.

When Beaver Was Very Great by Anne M. Dunn (Midwest Traditions). This collection of traditional and modern Native American legends and tales, told by an Ojibwe storyteller, teaches important life lessons, and offers a glimpse of the world as seen through the eyes of nature. Ages 9 and up.

Dragonsong: A Tale for the New Millenium by Russel Young, Illustr. Civi Cheng (Shen’s Books). The enchantingly-illustrated tale of a Chinese dragon who travels the world, meeting other dragons who share with him their knowledge, in the hopes of finding an enduring gift that will win him the role of Keeper of the Mountain. Ages 6 and up.

When the World Began by Elizabeth Laird (Oxford University Press). A collection of 20 Ethiopian tales that have been passed down through the hands of storytellers for centuries. For ages 6 and up.


The Moonflower by Peter and Jean Loewer (Peachtree). Bees, bats and moonflowers all have something in common in this colorfully illustrated, charming account of what happens outside after the sun goes down. Ages 5-12.

Girls Who Rocked the World Vol. 2 by Michelle Roehm (Beyond Words). From a pharaoh to a fashion designer, this book is dedicated to women who have overcome difficulties, fought for their beliefs and achieved greatness. Includes quotes from girls around the world describing how they plan to rock the world. Ages 8 and up.

Multicultural Cookbook of Life-Cycle Celebrations by Lois S. Webb (Oryx). This amazing book features over 500 recipes from 145 different countries, giving you the opportunity to tour the world from your kitchen. Includes a section on religious life-styles and customs, and a dictionary of culinary terms.

The Autumn Equinox: Celebrating the Harvest by Ellen Jackson, Illustr. Jan Davey Ellis (Millbook). Colorful illustrations enhance the descriptions of harvest celebrations and traditions from around the world. Includes a section of projects, activities, and recipes. Ages 5-11.
Is it a BIG WORLD or a SMALL WORLD out there? It depends on how we look at it. As parents and teachers, we are the ones who help our youth shape their minds. How do we instill a world view in our students? As the saying goes, books are a window to the world. Here are a few new resources published recently that can help give children an insight to the world.

**Traditions and Legends**

- **More Ready-to-Tell Tales from Around the World**, edited by David Hoff and Bill Mooney (August House). This is a sequel to their first collection, *Ready-to-Tell Tales*, and it contains 46 tales by the nation's best-known multicultural storytellers. The stories, organized in ten themes, are adapted for oral performance in your class and come with tips. Also, from *August House*, comes *Creating a Family Storytelling Tradition: Awakening the Hidden Storyteller* by Robin Moore.

- **Keeping the Traditions: A Multicultural Resource** by Phyllis J. Perry (Fulcrum). With 20 stories from 20 different countries, this book will help you bring the richness and vitality of the world to your students. Plenty of background information on each of the featured countries follow the stories, so you can help students expand their understanding of the world.

- **Holiday Symbols** by Sue Ellen Thompson (Omnigraphics). Featuring traditions from around the world, this dictionary-style reference book highlights ancient and modern holidays and celebrations, the legends and events from which they originated and the images that symbolize them.

**Appreciating Diversity**


- **Who Talks Funny? A Book About Languages** by Brenda S. Cox (Linnet Books). An overview of the languages of the world: how they originated, how they work, and what makes them different. It will guide you through the grammar, pronunciation, and much more.

- **My Own True Name** by Pat Mora (Arte Publico). This collection, containing scores of English and Spanish poems for young adults written by Ms. Mora during the last 15 years, will bring a Mexican-American voice to your class.

- **Armenia: A Rugged Land, An Enduring People** by Lucine Kasbarian (Dillon Press). With color photos and maps, this is an ideal resource book for your unit on history, folktales and festivals of Armenia and its people. Suitable for grades 4 to 8.

- **Spanish First Names** by Fred J. Hill (Hippocrene Books). Explores the origins and meanings of over 500 common Spanish names for both boys and girls.

**Family and Bonding**

- **Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys** by Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson (Ballantine). Two leading child psychologists help break down the barriers of misconception, outdated generalizations and expectations that have been holding back boys’ ‘emotional literacy’ for ages. Some of the issues raised are boys’ relationships with mothers, fathers, girls, and also their struggles with alcohol, drugs and depression.

- **You Are So Beautiful Without Your Hair: A Daughter’s Journey with the Death of her Parents** by Suzane Piela (Bluestar Comm.). This true account focuses on family relationships and the psychological aspects of death, loss, and terminal illness in a family.

- **Love Pearls** by Nancy Swan Drew (Celestial Arts/Ten Speed). A collection of sweet messages and advice from a mother to her daughter. Illustrated. Ages 10 and up.

**Resources**

- **Coretta Scott King Award Books: Using Great Literature with Children and Young Adults** by Claire G. Stephens (Libraries Unlimited). A reference book to help you select appropriate, culturally-sensitive African-American books for your students and children. It gives great introductions to the over one hundred honored books and their creators. Many suggestions and activities are also included for effective classroom use.

- **That’s Not Fair! A Teacher’s Guide to Activism with Young Children** by Ann Pelo and Fran Davidson (Redleaf Press). Written by two early-childhood educators who have long been involved in strengthening children’s activist identities, this book offers guidelines for tapping into children’s natural instincts toward fairness, and for encouraging them to find creative solutions to the problems and injustice they see in the world.

- **Biography Today: Environmental Leaders 2**. Edited by Kevin and Laurie Hillstrom (Omnigraphics). This is a reference guide with profiles of modern-day leaders of the environmental movement, as well as information on how to contact their organizations.
Girl Praying at Jun Lan Temple, Tachia; Mountain View Point, Chiufen; Mother and Child Descending Mountain, Chiufen; Temple, Daken Scenic Area, Taichung.

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