Women: Seeking Dignity and Equality

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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.

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Last month, I was invited to a grand celebration of a friend’s fortieth trip around the Sun! Don’t get me wrong; I did not go to a NASA astronaut’s party. My friend is just an ordinary person like you and I. How often do we think of our birthdays as one more trip around the Sun? Isn’t it a cool way to look at the passage of time in our life and to celebrate life?

Did you know that in many cultures, it is the birthday boy or girl who gives gifts to the friends gathered for the celebration? As a child in India, I did not think of birthdays in terms of gifts. In fact, birthdays were not at all a big deal! There were, however, many national celebrations that were really birthdays of people who had made great contributions to society and the world. For example, the first prime minister’s birthday in mid-November is the Children’s Day in India.

During my summer camp experience in rural México, I discovered that everyone in nearby communities was welcome to birthday celebrations, which included a feast, dance and a live band. Often, they were Catholic “Namedays.”

In our community birthday parties, sometimes we play a guessing game. One player thinks of a person that every player would know. Others take turns asking questions like: “If this person was an animal (or a book, fruit, plant, flower, object...), what kind of animal (or book, fruit, plant, flower, object...) would it be? The player who has thought of the person answers in as much detail as s/he chooses. “S/he would be a monkey eating a ripe banana,” or “a piano out of tune,” giving a hint of the personality. When players feel like they have enough information, they take an educated guess of the person. It’s a creative game that stretches imagination of everyone involved.

Once a great Buddhist teacher brought several cooking pots to his outdoor classroom and asked the students, “Observe each pot carefully. Which pot represents a good student, a seeker?” One pot was covered with a lid, another was placed upside down. One was full to the brim with water. One had a crack at the bottom and leaked. Yet another had some muddy liquid in it and one was on its side. Then there was an empty pot that was open and balanced on three rocks.

Needless to say, the students were amused and had a great time discussing the merits of each pot. Each student chose a pot that they felt described a good student.

The teacher asked a quiet, attentive student to explain his choice of pot. The student described in a few, well chosen words, “The covered pot represents a student who is not open to receive anything new. The upside down pot represents a student who is not tuned or ready to receive teachings imparted by the teacher; the full-to-the brim pot is like a student who thinks he knows it all; the pot with muddy water needs a cleansing of mind; the one resting on its side represents a student who can’t stand the rigor and heat on the spiritual path; the cracked, leaky pot represents a student who can’t retain what he has learned. The only pot that represents an ideal student is the clean, empty pot sitting on the three stones because it is ready to receive whatever is imparted by the teacher and ready to process it, as the cooking pot would, with the fire underneath.”

Skipping Stones just celebrated its thirteenth birthday. Now, you could say that we’re a teenage magazine! The first issue of Vol. 13 features many interesting articles for inquiring teenagers.
Best wishes and good luck in for the new year. May your world be full of happiness, like blooming flowers.
—Ms. Liao Yezi, Editor
Red Scarf Magazine, Sichuan, P. R. China

Thank You Notes
I just wanted to tell you that we have received your donation of books and periodicals—and all I can say is WOW!! What a wonderful selection for our students here to enjoy! Thank you to all those who contributed to this shipment. We plan to commission our new library in November, and I’ll be sure to send you a photo of the ceremony.

—Amy Hardt, Peace Corps Volunteer, Ghana

Your beautiful and most generous gift, the box of books, was awesome. A Thai friend helped me unpack them and couldn’t believe her eyes. I’m not sure you’re aware of the quality of books in this country, but most are either softcover or paperback. Most students can only afford to read comic books, which are in black and white.

We eagerly await the next shipment, and I promise I will be more prompt in my acknowledgement. You have been the first person to respond to our request for anything to help these kids, so you can imagine how excited we’ve been.

The magazines have been arriving right on time, and some of the teachers in our English class are most impressed with them. This is their first exposure to an American published magazine.

—Sharon Treasure, Peace Corps Volunteer, Thailand

We love your magazine at our school, but as a librarian, I find it frustrating that your book reviews do not contain the following information:

- Publishers, ISBN numbers, and prices, please!
- I really do appreciate your beautiful and thoughtful publication and buy it even though our budget is small, and it is very expensive when translated into Canadian dollars. But it is worth it, I feel, for it is very special and much appreciated by our staff, students and parents. Keep up the good work, and if I ever get to Eugene (where I do have friends) maybe I will come and visit you.

—Marsha Woodburn, Denman Island, B.C., Canada

Peace on Earth
Throughout history, people have yearned for peace, whether it would be peace of mind, home or society. To help the world achieve this goal, leaders have emerged to bring forth grace and charity.

Martin Luther King, Jr. is known as one of the most passionate and peaceful leaders of our time. His main cause was African-American civil rights. His methods of achieving this dream were not of violence nor radical retaliation—they were non-violent and passive. Drawing inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi, who led peaceful protests in South Africa and in India, during the early 1900’s, he came to believe that peaceful protest was the way to go. In times of chaos and insecurity for blacks, King fought peacefully and fervently for equality and dignity.

Even though it may take a long time to accomplish, people all over the world have been, and continue to be, inspired and dedicated to the hard work of achieving peace.

—Audrey Hwang, Asian American, Illinois

Racism and violence are two of the worst experiences that any human being can live with.

It’s nobody’s fault how they are, the only difference is the skin color. And there is an idiom in Spanish that says, “El agua clara o revolcada sigue siendo agua.” Entonces, nosotros blancos o negros, primero que todo somos seres humanos y debemos ser tratados como tales.

—Irene Zuniga, Lizabeth Duarte and Beatriz Ramirez are ESL students in Springfield, Oregon
What’s On Your Mind?

This is a 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.

Safari Through the Blackboard Jungle

School is supposed to be a safe place where students feel comfortable. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Some students cannot comfortably walk from class to class or learn in the classrooms. Instead, they are bombarded with insults, rudeness and mean comments. They are not fully able to be themselves without others making fun of and harassing them.

I am astonished at how rude and insensitive some students are to their fellow classmates. They make sexist comments and torment fellow students who they suspect are gay or who are of a different race or religion. Simply dressing differently from others can make one a target. Being different is considered weird. Some students and teachers do not seem to understand how hurtful these comments and actions toward others are.

I understand the pressure that is laid upon us. Some believe that being cool means teasing students, and that making fun of people is funny. But your actions and words may be more harmful than you think they are.

Do teachers and parents know what is really going on at schools? Perhaps they don’t want to know about the cruelty that exists. Too many people, including myself, have looked the other way when someone was being treated badly. We are fearful to speak out against such actions because we don’t want to be the next target. We need to stop looking the other way and fight against the ugliness that penetrates our schools. We need to fight the racist, sexist and discriminating comments made by others and try to make our schools caring places where students aren’t afraid to walk the halls, voice their thoughts and be who they really want to be.

I applaud the students who are fighting against discrimination and other inappropriate behavior. These wonderful people have the courage to stand up against bullies who try to make students insecure about themselves. I applaud the students who dress the way they want. I applaud the students who don’t laugh along with the rest of the crowd at the expense of others. I applaud anyone who has an open mind, and is trying to think of ways for making things better. I hope that more people will decide to stand up against the violence. Only then can we have peaceful and caring schools.

—Rachel Hubbard, 15, Glen Ellyn, Illinois. Request her zine for teenagers, Splash! (subscriptions: $8/yr.) from 635 Hill Ave. Glen Ellyn, Illinois 60137 USA.

On Drugs

Drug addicts are afraid to face the real world, the misery they assume there is. But what they don’t realize, until it is too late, is that drugs lead them to a very harsh life. Drugs lead to poverty, violence, jail time, and more. After those things have happened from drugs, you know you were better off before. Addicts love the feeling from drugs, but I’d rather feel the love from hugs.

—Ryan Bachman, 15, Clarinda Academy, Sac City, IA.

Walking in Another’s Shoes

Sometimes I hear deprecating talk about people who succumb to drug use. I know a mother of four children who has been on drugs most of her life. She is now desperately working on a program to free herself from drug use. Most of us could not imagine the horrible circumstances of her whole life, let alone the void of caring, love and nurturing she has experienced.

I cringe when I hear judgmental denunciations of her. Who knows whether I would have rallied the inner-strength needed to resist addictive behavior had I been in her situation? I have not walked in her shoes!

—Hanna Still, Eugene, Oregon.
Women have come a long way over time, but their journey to finding freedom and equality has been a constant struggle throughout history. We have been denied the power to vote, pursue higher education and a career, or even choose a spouse. We have been oppressed in countless instances, in different societies.

In the last several decades, almost every country has taken steps to remove boundaries that limit opportunities for women. Every part of the world is unique, however, and changes in women's roles reflect the diversity of cultures. For example, in many cultures, although a woman's job is traditionally to raise children, this isn't seen as inferior as it is in some Western cultures but rather as a job of equal or greater value. Many women choose to stay at home.

As an Iranian-American born in the U.S., I've been exposed to both the traditional Iranian viewpoints as well as Western outlooks. Recognizing that we often see issues from only our own perspectives, I asked five women from five different regions of the world to share their views on women's issues in their communities. Happy International Women's Day (8 March).

—Beata Mostafavi, 20, is our journalism intern from the Univ. of Oregon.

Hisae Nakai, Japan, freshman early childhood education major at the University of Oregon. She has lived in the U.S. for six months.

"The traditional idea in Japan is that men are superior to women, but things are changing. I worked in a restaurant in Japan before I came here, and women were given much more respect compared to older times. My boss was a woman; women are now more prominent in the workplace.

"Now the number of single women in Japan is much higher than 10 years ago. Many are also traveling abroad more, like myself, to study or work. Although traditionally the woman is supposed to get married and stay at home, our generation has the attitude of, 'No, I don't want to do that.' Partly because of the media, which shows successful women in other countries, women in Japan are striving for independence more and more. It is more accepted today than before.

"However, women are definitely not equal to men, just closer. There are still inequalities as far as our Japanese culture goes. For example, my mother is divorced, and she would never re-marry because that is looked down upon. No one wants to marry a divorced woman because society sees the divorce as being the woman's fault, as in 'she must have done something wrong to have been left.' But these are things that will take a long time to change."

Martha Isabel Ellas, business administrator, married, mother of two, from Bogotá, Colombia.

"Women's roles have changed. Before, men's role was to work, and women's was to take care of the children, but now there are equal opportunities for men and women.

"In Colombia, women hadn't had equal opportunities to study and work, and about 50 years ago, they weren't allowed to vote or to participate in government, but this situation has changed. Women work in offices, and men share chores at home. Nevertheless, women earn less money than men when they have the same job.

"Almost always women can decide what is most important in their lives. For example, many women have decided to stay at home and raise children, but others have gone to work because they need the money or want to grow professionally. Women feel the need to work because of the difficult economic conditions of my country, and they look for better quality of life. Roles have changed, but the new generation has accepted the change more easily than the older people.

"Colombian women are looking for the equality between men and women and
are trying to protect the rights of women like a fair salary, less work hours for the pregnant, legal abortion and no discrimination for lesbians. I believe that together men and women could make a better world. They are different but can walk together complementing each other.”

Viraj Ghate, 41, Maharashtra, India, is a mother of two teen-age daughters and finance manager in a multinational electronics company.

“Women certainly have found a more prominent role in society, and they are more aware of their rights. An Indian urban woman is more confident today, and the society around her accepts her newfound confidence, although the rural women are slightly slower in their progress in this regard.

“There are still some social issues, which are a part of old tradition and culture, which make it very difficult for women to escape from the role expected of them. There are ongoing efforts to educate women and make them financially independent through government and NGO [non-governmental organization] programs, but given the size of the population, the progress is rather slow.

“Women know that an ideal blend of tradition and the modern is what makes a society balanced and healthy. Despite being an independent and ‘space conscious’ woman, I am interested in a whole lot of so-called ‘womanly’ things, and hence, my role models are those women who have been able to strike a balance in their family life and career without compromising or demanding undue attention. I think Western women have too much pressure to live under, trying to prove themselves for the rights they demand. The freedom movement has also caused some distortions in society, such as an increase in divorce and the breaking of family structures, leading to a lot of trauma to Western society. However, their struggle for equality and recognition has helped developing countries progress also.

“Traditionally Indian culture doesn’t allow as much liberty to women as their Western counter-parts. Urban women in India have the great responsibility of getting themselves educated, acquiring skills for a career and catering to the family needs. Men opting to look after children and the house is almost unheard of in India because, traditionally, it is still the man who is a provider and a family head. Women who opt to have a career are well respected, but if they choose their career above their family, they are not looked at in a positive light. What Indian women are seeking today is probably more respect for their great contribution to making a sound society, which gives their nation an identity, recognition and confidence.

“I believe that the society that treats their women with dignity and respect can elevate itself from many social, economical and emotional problems. Increasing awareness about women’s potential, rights, equality and dignity, which they were denied, is making women today reach out and take advantage of opportunities that will make a world of a difference to them and the people around them.”

Amanda Marusich, 17, American, a senior at South Eugene High School, Oregon

“I think America’s view of women has undergone some major changes. Back in the 50’s, a stereotypical woman was expected to be a ‘domestic housewife,’ whose primary concerns were the children, the house and what to feed her husband for dinner. But now society is much more willing to allow women to take control of their lives, encouraging them to further their education and supporting them as they strive for success in their desired career.

“Our country has come a long way, and as a female, I feel fortunate to live here. But there are still some areas where women encounter discrimination. Men still outnumber women in upper-level jobs, and in cases where men and women are employed in equivalent positions, men receive higher wages. I think sexism and gender
bias still exist in the U.S., and though it is much more subtle than elsewhere, it is every bit as pernicious.

"In regard to the American view on family life, I think it is generally more acceptable for women to stay home with the children while their husbands work instead of vice-versa. But all of these roles, and the American concept of 'family' itself, are continually shifting, with more single, working-parent families and such. So, potentially, this double standard could flip completely around. However, I am hopeful that we will eventually end up with a culture where both men and women share equal responsibility for raising their children and supporting their household as well as enjoying equal rights and opportunities in all other areas of their lives."

Haydeh Kiani came to the U.S. with her husband prior to the 1979 Iranian revolution. She is a mother and vice president of a bank in Oregon. She recently visited Iran.

“When I was a student in college, women had more social rights than now. They could wear whatever they wanted, and relationships with boys were accepted in big cities. But it was still hard for parents to give girls freedom. If boys were late coming home it was okay, but for girls it was important to know where they were, who they were with and what they were doing.

“Today, because of new laws that came after the revolution, women have to wear a scarf to cover themselves. Women also can’t work in many jobs unless they are very educated. That’s why many families try their hardest, under their own authority, to give their daughters as much freedom and education as they can. If they can afford it, they put more effort and money into college for their daughters.

“Nowadays, because of all the restrictions, the only things girls can do with a high school diploma is stay at home with their parents or get married. College is very competitive in Iran, and out of about 1 million students, only 130,000 are accepted. The percentage of women getting accepted is much higher because they focus so much more on studies. When I went to college, it was more for fun, but now for women it’s a matter of life. College is their door to finding a husband of choice, a good job, good friends and a social life. Without it they feel trapped.

“Even though it appears that women are more restricted, families try to give their daughters a lot of opportunity and try to tell them, ‘Even though you have to cover yourself and have less rights than your brother, you are not less than he is.’ Because there weren’t as many restrictions on women when I lived in Iran, more women didn’t mind staying at home because they had that choice. But now I see girls are really trying to prove themselves despite government restrictions.

“Every year there is a budget for sending talented students abroad to study. This year Congress debated sending women as well, but they decided not to because women would become ‘corrupt’ if sent to another country.

“The government does allow women to participate in some things. The prime minister of Iran is a woman, and many women are in government positions. But religious leaders insist that based on Islamic law, a woman has half the rights of a man. So it’s harder for a woman to initiate a divorce, and it takes two women to witness a crime for them to be valid witnesses. I think these leaders interpret the religion wrong.

“It’s harder for women to fight for their rights in Iran because religious people say, ‘Well, this is what the books say, and if you’re really Muslim you should respect that.’ They also show Western advertisements that objectify women and say, ‘See, even with all the rights they have, women are still used and beaten there. Is that how you want to be?’

“No matter if you’re Japanese, American or Iranian, it’s a human wish not to be pushed away because of your gender. We all want to at least have the opportunity to do what we want. Every woman wants that much.”
International Exchange Students

Meet five high school exchange students from Finland, Germany, Italy and Thailand. These young women left their homes and families to experience another culture. We asked them to share their experiences in the U.S. We also asked them who their heroes are, what is important to them and what inspires or motivates them.

My hero is my piano teacher. She is the most passionate and inspiring woman I know. She lives her life full of passion, with the deep belief that she won’t regret anything because everything happens for a reason. She gives me the strength to know that things which seem impossible can be done, and that I can reach my goals if I only fight hard enough. She believes in the beauty and importance of art and gave me the appreciation and love I needed to become confident and to believe in my art skills.

I feel very strongly about honesty and respect. I believe that everybody deserves a certain amount of respect regardless of whether I really like them or not. Respect is the basis for a good community and society.

The most outstanding moments in my life happened this year. I can’t pick out one or two because this transformation is constant. I’ve learned how much my family means to me because of the simple fact that I’m not with them now. I have seen how strong I can be because I’m on my own, making friends and finding my way. I have learned to be myself, to create my own character and to take criticism. When you are no longer in your familiar environment and everything is different, you find out who you really are.

I get a lot of energy from theater and art, but the main thing is my mind-set and the support of my friends. My environment is a supportive place; I can fall down, be caught and be brought back up again.

I have seen that when you believe in yourself you can make it. I think as long as we follow our hearts anything can be done. I see so many adults unhappy with their jobs and lives, but we are a new generation, and I’m sure we can make a difference and create an open, creative environment for everybody to express themselves without jealousy or disrespect.

—Tinka Standke lives in Hanover, Germany.

My hero is Neil Armstrong, the first astronaut to land on the moon. He marked a turning point in space exploration. I have always had a great interest in that field; science is probably my second favorite subject, after English. I hope one day to be able to experience something as great as Armstrong did!

I believe honesty is one of the most important values because it shows the real face of a person. If you are not honest to your friends and to the people you love, you will fall in life. I also believe that to dream and to have goals for your future is important because it gives you hope.

My high school in Italy was probably one of the biggest influences in my life. I learned to work hard, and I made great friendships that I hope will last forever. Of course, this exchange year is also going to be very important for the rest of my life. I learned so much about American culture and the big gap between Europe and the U.S.; I learned how to survive without family and friends; I learned to be more self-confident, independent and outgoing.

I love watching TV and from that I always get an inspiration to go on. I always saw the U.S. as the place where I could fulfill my dreams, and that’s why I decided to come here for my exchange year. I live every day as a new challenge. Every day is special for its own reason, and I try to make the best out of it!

I think everyone should experience travelling, perhaps as an exchange student because you can learn so much about yourself! I’d also advise everyone to laugh at their mistakes and learn from them. Enjoy life as much as possible, and listen to other people because everyone has a magnificent story to tell!

—Barbara Fabri lives in Genova, Italy.
My mother has been my role model since I was born. She is a strong and loving woman, who has fought for good things in her life. Although she’s got some irritating sides, like we all do, the final description of her is surely always positive. I hope that some day I could become as important to someone as she has been for me. Without her support, love and scolding, I just simply wouldn’t be here.

I value balance and health of body and soul. When people feel right in both ways, mentally and physically, they are more likely to do good things and live happily. Mental and physical health are connected with each other in people. Mental balance and health include many things. For me, Christianity, my religion, belongs to that balance. Love should be used as a spice in all foods, and there can not be too much of such a thing as charity.

I get my energy from many sources, depending on when I need to have it. If things have anything to do with other people, I get a whole lot of my energy from seeing them happy. I like preparing little surprises for other people. Other people’s opinions are often important for me. In general, the good feeling that I get when I know I’m doing something good inspires me. After all, everyone is responsible for his own life, and therefore, life itself inspires me to do things that make life better.

The capital city of Finland, Helsinki, has just 546,000 inhabitants, and in my home town, we have just a little bit more than 3,300 people! So I’m very glad that I have this great opportunity to get familiar with the U.S.A., Eugene, my host family and all the people that I have met.

If you ever get an opportunity to visit a new country, use it. You’ll never learn so much just by reading books. Talking to people from other countries can open you a whole new world. Try it!

—Tuike Rintanen, Luvia, Finland

My Dad and Mom are the only two people who could be my heroes. They are both very hard working, honest and generous. They take good care of all of us. I am proud of my parents. They do the two jobs of parenting and business equally well.

You will be successful in whatever you do, if you have responsibility. The first responsibility is self-responsibility. As a student, my self-responsibility is to study hard. The second responsibility is toward my family. The third responsibility is toward society, to be a good citizen. If people take care of these three responsibilities, everybody will be happy.

I’m in a moment of transformation in my life. I had never been in any foreign country by myself before. Here, I have had to learn to live by myself in a different culture, weather, language and way of life. It was very difficult at first because I couldn’t communicate very well. I felt tired, bored and sad sometimes. But I tried to keep myself busy by doing something fun, talking to somebody, studying hard and trying to be optimistic. All these things helped me get over that difficult period of time.

I receive inspiration from those I love—my family and friends—and also from myself. I believe in what I want to do and achieve. I have accomplished what I aspired to do by trying my best, by not looking down on myself and by not easily giving up. However, once I really couldn’t accomplish what I wanted so I left that behind and took it as a lesson to improve myself later on.

As an exchange student, it is very challenging to encounter a different culture, language and way of life. It is really difficult at first, but you get stronger after you get over it. I have started to understand different ways of thinking, and that nothing is absolutely right or wrong, just different. I feel that I am now much more open than before.

Anyone who is still my age should consider being an exchange student. Don’t be afraid of having to leave your home and the people you love. There are so many things in this world that we should know and learn. It helps us understand each other much better.

—Tanya (Lily) Sripatanasakul, Bangkok, Thailand.
Portrait of a Sixteen-Year-Old

I can't remember anything before I met my best friend, Anna. My memory starts with that bleak recess in October of the third grade. I was very lonely, and I asked another lonely girl if she wanted to play "Little House on the Prairie." She said she would, and soon we became inseparable.

We lived a marvelously carefree life back then. The world was alive for us, life was unstructured, and time was generous and free. We read each other's stories and made up our own. We stood triumphant atop "mountains" as Zeus and Hercules and rolled down backyard hills to find afterward, as we lay giggling with grass in our hair, that we were our normal fifth-grade selves again. We dreamt of the foreboding sphinxes and temples that towered over seamless stretches of sand—then awoke in our pajamas, excited over chocolate chip pancake breakfasts. We had the best of each world; we had the excitement and glamour of the enchanted, imaginary world and the cozy comforts of the ordinary one. That was the best part about being young.

Some nights we slept over at each other's houses. There, we created hundreds of make-believe epic sagas in which the characters led adventurous lives full of passion, drama and war. We no longer saw the simple faded furniture of our homes, but instead, streams with glowing rainbow waters, trees that grew out of the sky with enticing but poisonous magical fruits, and hidden palaces made of glass so transparent they were almost invisible. We would talk and talk, then drowsiness would slip over us comfortably, and there, halfway between dreams and reality, I'd sense something aching, inexpressible, lovely. It was the first time I had consciously felt love—love for Anna, for our life, and the perfection of that moment.

"Let's be empresses in China with giant silk worm farms...Let's be the fairies who paint the sunset on the sky every night...Let's be...Let's be...Let's be this way forever..."

But then, Anna moved back to Taiwan, and my life plummeted. For several years after that I measured time in terms of how long it had been since July 17, 1993—the day Anna left.

My delicate dream world shattered. Sixth grade steamrolled in with the teen-age magazines, and the trendy clothes, hair, and make-up that began to consume the lives of my former friends. Suddenly, nobody wanted to be themselves, but instead, some universal archetype of teen-age perfection. A concept of normality was emerging among my peers. I never learned to revere pop-culture like the rest of my class, for Anna and I had never concerned ourselves with anything but books, history class, make-believe games and fairy-tales. Most of the time, I felt like the rest of the world blended together in complete harmony while I was some discordant note.

Another thing that began to plague me in sixth grade was my speech disorder. I had never concerned myself with my stuttering up to that point in my life. I only stuttered when I was nervous, and since I spent all my time with Anna, I seldom stuttered. But as my life deteriorated into unending days of torment at school, I was forced to face my problem. The teachers dragged me to therapy, and I found it utterly humiliating. Of course it only increased my peculiarity in my peers' eyes. At an age when physical beauty and glamour are of paramount importance, stuttering was particularly painful because it's a disorder generally associated with ugly, stupid, nervous people.

Moreover, I had absolutely nothing to sustain my self-esteem in those middle school days. I made it a priority to find a talent, so it wouldn't matter if I were a social outcast or not. I felt abnormal already, but if I could be abnormal and supremely talented, then I could think of myself as a "tortured genius" like Van Gogh.

Even in unhappiness, my romantic mind sought to free itself from the uninspired confines of ordinariness. So I set out to become a great artist. I spent months trying the visual arts, but after filling a sketchbook with lopsided apples and oranges, I laughed at myself and retired the idea of being an artist.
Portrait of a Sixteen Year Old

Then I decided to be a swimmer, and to my satisfaction, I won the “Swimmer of the Month” award in January and February of my seventh grade year. But alas, I possessed no great swimming talent and even after five grueling days of practice a week, I was still easily beaten by the supremely talented athletes. I was by no means a talented musician either, for I had seen enough musical talent to recognize it, and it certainly did not lie within me.

If I couldn’t be talented in music, arts or sports, then I decided I must be an academically talented individual. I was slightly more successful in that area and took ridiculous pride in the many awards and trophies I accumulated from math contests, spelling bees and other competitions. Exhilarated by my success, I told myself every morning that I was an unsurpassable genius. My new mentality required endless nights of studying and obsessing over every minute detail in my work. My self-esteem was built upon this strange network of grades, ranks, scores and points. I spent hours calculating and speculating my grade point average and deciding who was my competition and who was not.

By this point, I had long forgotten my idea of being a “tortured artist.” I only wanted to be perfect now. I wanted not only to be an unsurpassable genius, but to be the most beautiful, the most admired, the most respected and the most loved. I knew that someday, when I got out of my ugly skin, a new beautiful, talented me would emerge, triumphant and invincible.

My sophomore year I met Josh, whom I believed was the human embodiment of superiority and talent. He was the final piece in the puzzle, the central stone in the arch! He was a god, and his affection elevated me from the disgrace of my stuttering years to the height of beauty, talent and perfection. We floated through that spring, invincible in our pink bubble, pure and uncontaminated by the masses of mediocrity that lay beneath. It was all very straightforward, I thought: he was perfect for me, and I was perfect for him. It was simply meant to be.

Not since elementary school had I been so happy. Now I had met someone whom I loved; I was leaving for vacation in Europe; and my final grades were stunningly impressive. It was frighteningly perfect, for I was at the very pinnacle of happiness. I remember my last evening in Venice: I was riding a gondola, and someone was playing an accordion and singing in deep Italian. When we passed through the Grand Canal with all its romantic cafés and all its famous old places, haunting and lovely in the silky darkness, I blew a kiss to Josh and fancied it would reach him from Venice...

And then, it all ended strangely. Josh and I broke up in a heated fight of swears and accusations and never spoke to each other again. My grades deteriorated, and I began to argue with my parents. With all the stress of junior year, I hardly slept and became devoted to torturing myself in the name of academics. On Thursday nights I would stay up until four in the morning writing English papers, coughing and crying while listening to break-up songs.

I lost my idealism and sank into cynicism. I sensed there was something chaotic and random about life. Scientific forces had replaced the loving and forgiving divine hand. Love was not divine and profound, but instead, a simple chemical reaction. True loyalty didn’t exist; we were only beasts who fought for survival. Our existence was random and pointless.

Then, a peculiar thing happened. One day, I went to check the mail, and I saw an envelope with Chinese in the return address. Could it be? No, of course not, we hadn’t contacted each other in two years. But it was! It was Anna, and somehow the sight of her letter touched a resounding golden chord in me as I saw that beloved, cherished, dearest handwriting of hers, through tears of delight.

In a moment, I realized that life was never meant to be simple; it wasn’t a straightforward organized system where we were each plopped down next to perfect people. Sometimes the perfect people were halfway across the world from us. I grasped the transitoriness of everything; how everything is constantly passing and moving on,
and how time solves and creates all problems in its eternally strange ways. It makes us stronger, richer, deeper and more real. I looked back on the wonder of elementary school, the pains of middle school, Anna, Josh, the obsession with grades and talent, and I realized something else. Beneath it all, there is a part of me which had remained unchanged all these years. I know that sometimes I’m stupid; sometimes I’m brilliant; sometimes I’m a failure and other times, a success. Sometimes I can stand up in front of the whole class and voice profound opinions eloquently, and other times the simple conversation on the telephone with the pizza delivery man is difficult. Sometimes I’m so attractive that boys stop me in the mall and ask for my phone number, but even then, I remember crying in the bathroom at the seventh grade dance where every other girl besides me had a date and a corsage. But the whole time the absolute core of my character is still the same. Underneath it all, I’m just a girl who loves stories, loves to read and loves good times with friends. Ever since that realization, I’ve been trying to find that layer of infiniteness within others and myself. I’ve tried to look past the levels of success and failure and stupidity and brilliance and prettiness and ugliness to the core and essence of the individual. I know that life is special, and I know this because there’s always going to be something divine or profound or noble for us to hold onto after everything else has failed us.

I think it’s peculiar to be sixteen. Today when I wake up, I’m going to look at myself in the mirror and laugh or smash it in disgust or kiss my reflection. Life is crazy isn’t it? I’m sixteen— isn’t that awful? Isn’t that marvelous?


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Exchange Students... continued from page 10

honesty. I really like when people talk clearly because when you know what another person thinks, you can learn from their comments and try to change your behavior. And you know how to face that person.

I think that this year is transforming me, making me understand how to be able to live my life on my own, without my parent’s and my family’s support. I also think these eleven months far from my home and my culture are making me more mature. They are making me think more about how to behave appropriately in different situations.

I really don’t know where I get my energy for what I’m doing, but I would say that I always try to think positively and have a finish-line [goal] every time. So, my objective is to get there first, and after that, there will be another finish-line, and another...

I also think that everything you give, sooner or later, in some way, you will get back, from your family, your friends and others. Therefore, try to do your best.

The experience of living far from home makes you learn a lot of different things. Most importantly, it opens your horizons by teaching you about a different culture. It makes you appreciate your own country and also understand that there is a whole world outside of your country.

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Step Into My Sistahood

Step into my sistahood, where women strive for individuality. Behold the ebony dames who fancy true naked femininity.

Interpret our attitudes as ambitions to succeed.

Careful not to mistake our eagerness for greed.

Watch as we conquer dreams that lie in distant stars.

Listen as we express our innermost self to folk afar.

Learn that we won’t cease to be the sovereigns of a mighty nation.

Know that our hearts will forever dwell in aspiration.

Why I’m a Nubian Queen

I’m the faults of society, according to my history books.

I’m a girl by my genes.

My dawgs will tell you I’m a clown.

But by choice I am a Nubian queen.

—Jennifer Trabi, is a high school senior and an aspiring writer in Iola, Kansas.
Dear W.E:

If you were going through a hard time, would you want your dad to abandon you? Would the solution of your dad becoming kind again be better than separation? I shall share a Korean story, *Tiger’s Whisker*, which may be helpful.

As soon as Yun Ok’s husband went off to work in the rice fields, the young woman ran as fast as she could to the hermit’s hut high up in the mountains.

“Oh, famous sage! My good husband returned from fighting in the wars for three years. Since his return, he hardly speaks to me; he is rough; he walks away angry if he does not like the food I cook. Instead of working, he sits and gazes toward the sea. Please, you must make a potion to cure him.”

The learned-one reflected for a long time. Finally he announced, “The potion can be made. I need you to bring one ingredient, a whisker of a living tiger.”

Yun Ok created a plan. She fed her husband a delicious and rich dinner, whereupon he fell into a deep sleep. Yun Ok quickly took a bowl of rice and poured meat juice over it. She hastened toward the cave where a tiger was known to live. For a long time she stood still, speaking and singing in soothing tones. She followed this routine, approaching closer to the cave each night.

One day she detected the tiger peeking out of the cave’s entrance, sniffing. Each day she went a little closer, until one day the tiger took a step toward Yun Ok. Now the tiger and she were close enough to look into each other’s eyes. She spoke gently and held the bowl invitingly, until the tiger dared to devour the food. Each night thereafter she found the tiger waiting for her. While he ate, she rubbed his head softly. At last, one night, begging the tiger not to turn angry, she carefully pulled out one whisker while he ate.

“I have it! I have the tiger’s whisker,” Yun Ok shouted as she came leaping into the hermit’s hut. The sage examined the whisker carefully. When he was satisfied that it came from a living tiger, he rubbed his hands clean over the open fire.

“You lost my whisker!” Yun Ok cried, “You burned it up in the fire. All I did to get it was in vain.”

“Young Ok,” the wise man said, “if you could win the love and confidence of a wild, blood-thirsty animal by gentleness and patience, surely you have it in you to cure the damage your husband has suffered.”

W.F., I wonder if your love and gentle patience is not more than sufficient to heal your father’s pain and anger from losing his job.

In peace,

[Signature]

Illustrations by Brett Forman

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

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“All alone, all alone, all alone.” Those were the first words out of my mom’s mouth after I began, “How did you first feel after sending me off?” My father passed away in a car accident, and my mom, unable to support me on her own while having to tend to unfinished legal business in New York, was forced to send me to Korea to live with my grandma. For her to lose me, after losing her husband, was the hardest decision she’d ever made. This was the most difficult and painful time in my mom’s life. She was left all alone in a foreign country at 27 years old, as she struggled to settle the past, create a new foundation for herself and prepare to bring me back to her.

After seeing me off to Korea, my mom cried in the taxicab all the way from JFK airport to her apartment in Flushing. Upon arriving home to the dark, empty apartment, all she could do was wonder what she had just done, and what she could possibly do now. “All alone, all alone, all alone,” she kept repeating to me in our interview, in her not-so-perfect English. She’s still not great at English, but 14 years ago she was much worse. Held back by a language barrier and left behind by her husband and her daughter, she was completely alone. She was determined to ultimately raise me in the United States, even if it took several years for me to come back. To decide to take such an arduous road is only one step, she says. Carrying out the actual decision, traveling the road, was the real test.

“I didn’t want to go on,” she said. Hearing these words come out of my mom’s mouth scared me to death. Those are words I hear on TV, in stories of suicidal, depressed people, not my own mom. Seeing my hesitation she said to me, “Didn’t want to go on, not don’t...we’re all human.” The morning after I left, she had no desire to get up, to do anything. She went through a time of terrible depression and mourning while she stayed here on her own. “It’s like losing everything at once and being told I have to try to gain everything back, all by myself.” Her usual routine was to eat breakfast alone in the morning, go to work, come home and eat dinner alone.

“I was walking in the air.” She tried to explain and wanted me to find a word that meant “walking in the air.” Scared? Yes, like walking with no ground underneath, like you might fall through any moment.

It was through her newfound faith that my mom found the solace and comfort she thought she had lost. Without anyone beside her, more than ever, she felt an unexplainable emptiness inside her that could only be filled with God. God helped her, she believes, to overcome her grief and desolation and to get back on her feet again.

After regaining her strength, she set out to establish herself independently. To bring me back to America, she had to earn enough money and make sure she was settled and secure. She didn’t want to solve her problems by getting married, however. She wanted to accomplish it herself. My mom seems to always choose the harder path. “Why?” I asked her. “Why not?” she answered back. “You don’t want to be strong? No growing?” She always tries to speak to me in English when she’s saying something serious because she wants to make sure I get it. But the broken, grammatically incorrect English, comes out sounding less serious. I understand what she’s saying anyway. She knew how hard it would be. “Not stupid! I know it going to be hard, but I do anyway! I want to grow, be strong woman!” Life hadn’t turned out the way she’d expected. It had brought her great grief, but also a new opportunity to become something she couldn’t have otherwise become.

In Korea, she’d had some experience managing a fashion boutique, so she decided to try it here in America. She heard of a boutique managed by a Korean. They met, and she got a job as a saleswoman. Her English greatly improved, and she tried her best to be “Americanized.” She struggled to understand the different customs and culture of the country. What struck her about the American culture
was the freedom. "Freedom for woman," she said emphatically. She could never have attempted to live on her own and establish herself in Korea as she did in America. All the women would have pointed fingers and denounced her for trying to be a man. Taking advantage of this freedom, my mom worked hard and, in a few years, got promoted to manager of another store on the other side of town.

Her great joy was to call and talk to me. I couldn't quite remember her, having left her when I was a baby. All I knew was that she was my mom, and I could feel how much she loved me. Through these phone calls she kept in touch with me as I grew from age three to eight. She tells me now that she used to cry for hours after we hung up. Through all those years she had to fight out each day—fighting against herself, because there was a part of her that wanted to quit, to give up and run back to Korea, or marry someone and quickly send for me. She had to consciously discipline herself to work and not focus on the sadness and loneliness that sometimes crept in.

The year that she was ready to send for me, 1990, my mom remarried. Soon after, my sister was born. When I met my mom at the airport that year she was wearing a purple jumpsuit, looking so American and foreign, yet the connection between us was there from the beginning. It was hard to separate myself from my grandma, who returned to Korea a couple of weeks later, but it wasn't difficult to settle in with my new family. My mom is my mom, and to me, it's as if we've never been separated. My dad is my dad, and I feel as though he has always been. Here I am in the United States, a junior in high school, writing this paper. This is what my mom truly wanted.

I've always known my mom's history, picking up bits and pieces from family members, but it's quite different hearing her story coming from her own mouth. Learning about her difficult times when we were apart, and how she got through these times is a strange, new experience. I can't forget my mom's sacrifice of five years of her life so that I could have a better life with better opportunities. I've learned many lessons from her. Through faith and strength of character, discipline and determination, my mom has shown me that the impossible can be done. I've also been able to understand that my mom isn't Super Woman, but a human who had her own great struggles to overcome and learn from, after which she became a truly amazing woman.

—Grace You, 17, New City, NY.

Mother Teresa

Once born
Born a flower
Loving as can be
Helpful to anyone she sees
Sometimes in tears
Of worried fears
Fears of apparitions
With great compassion
And a loving heart
That's pretty much her whole life's part
She is wonderful
In making people's lives very careful
She is also responsible
Conscientious, and has a lot of Courage
She has a caring character
She has left us in old age
That's what you call
a long-lived survivor
in our hearts:
Known to be our Mother Teresa

—Fiza Baloch, 12, Torrance, California.

Fiza writes, "Mother Teresa (1910-1997) was 18 years old when she began her lifelong task of helping the world. She helped anyone, regardless of religion or nationality. She often said, 'If you don't want your child, give it to me.' She received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 for her work with the poor and terminally ill." Art: Jim Johnson
Close Enough For Me

One hot day in August of 1992, my parents and I stood on the front porch of Dr. Martin Luther King's birth home in Atlanta, Georgia. I was still wrestling with my disappointment at not being able to get inside. I kept hoping the front door would open, and a friendly tour guide would invite us in. Dad must have sensed my disappointment because he said, “This is close enough for me and your mother, Sis.” He always called me “Sis” when he was feeling especially tender toward me.

My mind went back to a phone conversation with Dad around the middle of May that same year. I made the mistake of telling Dad all about my planned trip to Atlanta for four days and four nights. My friend Sandi, who lives in Chicago (my old stomping grounds) and I (I live in Eugene, Oregon) had been talking on the phone for nearly an hour when I decided to join her on her trip to Atlanta. Sandi was excited and pleased to hear that I was coming. We synchronized our flights, and we planned to meet at the Atlanta airport.

During the conversation with Dad, he said, “Your mother and I are going to drive up to Atlanta to see you.”

I tried to find a polite way to talk him out of it. “It’s an awfully long drive, Dad.”

“It’s only about five and a half hours. Besides, your mother and I have never been to Atlanta, and I would like to see Dr. King’s house before I’m gone.” Dad had been talking about death frequently for the last year so I had gotten used to hearing this.

“But I’m only here for four days. This is really Sandi’s trip, and she has everything all planned. Besides, you know I’ll be there on Thanksgiving to surprise Mom for her seventieth birthday.”

“Yes, but tomorrow is not promised, Sis. I don’t want you to get that close and not see you.”

So my parents were coming to Atlanta whether I wanted them to or not. I didn’t quite know how to break the news to Sandi. When I told her about my parents’ plan to spend one of the four days with me she handled the news well.

I assured her that she was expected to go on with her plans without me if my parents were unable or unwilling to go along. Certainly I knew that Dad considered Dr. King a personal hero as well as a national one. His picture was the only one displayed in my parents’ house that wasn’t of a close family member.

My parents showed up on the second day of our trip. We stayed at the oldest African-American hotel in Atlanta. Dad invited us all to breakfast and paid for it all too. He was gracious and witty, and there was a lot of laughter at our table. Then Sandi and our daughters took off to enjoy their day, and I was left with my parents, sipping coffee. My parents wanted to see Dr. King’s house first so we climbed into their car, and I directed them to the house.

We found a place to park about two blocks from Dr. King’s house. I didn’t realize it, but two blocks turned out to be a long way for my mother to walk. Dad was so patient, thoughtful and kind; I just kept thinking, “This is not the father I grew up with.” As we stood on the porch I began to tell them everything I could remember the tour guide saying about the house the day before. We stopped at the King Center, which was between us and the car. Dad turned to me and said, “Sis, I’d like to buy something. What would you like?”

We ended up buying an African skirt, matching top, and a head scarf with a gold and black design that we both liked. I modeled it for them later that evening.

I did fly down for Thanksgiving, and I certainly surprised my mother. Dad cooked the turkey and made the dressing. He was really proud of himself; it was his first turkey ever. That was the last time I saw Dad alive. He passed away on March 31st the next year. When I reflect on the last two occasions we were together and the many phone conversations, I find new meaning in something he said to me: “This is close enough for your mother and me, Sis.”

I agree; we came close enough.

---Paulette Ansari, Skipping Stones Board member, is an African American storyteller and a librarian in Springfield School District, Oregon.
Marketplaces are always a bustling hub of activity. They demonstrate the true heartbeat of any culture. Each market is different in its presentation, variety and abundance. People go to market to hawk their wares, buy necessary groceries and goods, and to socialize. The market is the center of any community and is often a place for political gatherings and other interactions. In many countries where e-mail and telephones are not common in every home, the market is the main means for socialization. Men can often be seen relaxing over a game of cards. Women catch up on the latest gossip, and children run and play in the market streets. Though some features, such as bartering and bargaining, are common to markets around the world, each marketplace is a unique expression of that region.

The delectable dishes served at Scott Market (front cover) in Yangon, Myanmar, are one distinguishing feature of that marketplace. Authentic Burmese meals are prepared within the market’s narrow streets. The food is commonly flavored with ngapi, a dried and fermented shrimp paste, curry and other spices. Rice and noodles are the staples of any Burmese feast, and they are typi-
cally washed down with a tall glass of sugar cane juice or orange brandy. Scott Market is filled with unusual Burmese items including baskets, marionettes, ornate wall hangings and longyis, a traditional Burmese men’s outfit.

Cuban markets are not as varied, lush or plentiful as in other countries. Cuba is a relatively poor country where food is sometimes in short supply. Most locals dine on soups made of combinations of plantains, beans, rice, chicken and locally grown produce.

The markets in Cebu City, Philippines, are always buzzing with activity. Children bathe in small tubs near stalls where their parents prepare fish, vegetables, eggs and meats for purchase and for their own lunches. Carts carrying local produce hobble through the alleyways to make their deliveries. Families are often seen washing dishes alongside their stall after a hearty meal. Filipino food is a mixture of Chinese, American, Spanish and Malaysian cuisine. It consists of mechado (beef with pork fat), menudo (diced meat and potatoes stewed in tomato sauce), egg rolls, roast pig, prawns, lobster, meat stews, papaya and shrimp paste. Each region boasts its own specialty, and each meal is carefully prepared and served with pride.

Moroccan markets, also known as Souqs, are always filled with endless rows of stalls selling rugs, leatherware, pottery, jewelry, brassware and woodwork, in addition to a variety of foods and spices. Usually the merchandise is neatly stacked in pyramids. The Place Djemaa el-Fna, in Marrakech, is one of the best markets in the country for purchasing local goods and for watching the jugglers, storytellers, snake charmers, magicians, and acrobats who perform at sunset. Filled with vivid colors, mouth-watering aromas, and unusual sights, this market is one of the most important cultural centers in Morocco.

In Urumqi, China, depending on what section of the market you visit, you may mistakenly think you are in Morocco. The Uygur people, who reside in the northwestern corner of China, are of Turkic origin and speak a Turkic language rather than Chinese. They are of Islamic faith, like the Moroccans, and sell items that resemble those found in a Moroccan market. Next to the Uygur market is the Chinese market where dried lizards and snakes, animal claws, bones, horns, herbs and medicinal cures can be found along with a wide range of fruits, vegetables, duck, chicken, fish, tofu, sea snakes, jellyfish and other delicacies. (Also see market scenes on the covers.)

—Caryn B. Davis is a freelance writer, photographer, and documentary producer. In 1999 she worked as a media producer onboard a flying, educational eye hospital. The project was sponsored by Orbis International, a non-profit organization dedicated to fighting blindness. The crew traveled to nine countries for medical training missions with local doctors.
Japanese Children's Games

You play badminton; we play hanetsuki.
You play jacks; we play otedama.
You play marbles; we play biidama.
You play Pin-the-Tail-on-the-Donkey; we play fukuwarai.
You play Go Fish; we play Irohagaruta.

In the United States, there are a lot of games that you play with another person or in teams. In Japan, the team games are sports like baseball, but there are many games you can play by yourself.

In Origami we fold paper to create animals, flowers, boxes—just about anything you can imagine. A popular bird to make is the crane, tsuru. You take a square piece of paper and fold wings and the body, flip the neck and fold a head, and on the other side, flip the tail up. Then you turn it over and blow in the hole in the belly and make a wish while pulling out the wings. It's really easy to fold, and after you create a few, you string them together on thread for a colorful decoration. The crane is believed to live for 10,000 years, so it's a popular and lucky decoration at festivals, weddings and births.

Otedama is a juggling game much like jacks. In jacks you use small, metal-pronged toys. The object of jacks is to capture as many of them as you can, without dropping them, during the bounce of a small, rubber ball. In otedama, we use small bean-filled bags instead of metal jacks. In jacks, you bounce a ball and scoop up jacks with the same hand. In otedama, we sing a special juggling song while juggling bags in one hand. Biidama is marbles in Japanese, and it is the same as in Western countries. The rules are similar to billiards.

Fukuwarai is not a donkey, but a woman's face, and instead of pinning the tail on the donkey, you put together the woman's face by pinning on her eyes, nose and mouth while blindfolded.
There are three popular card games: Irohagaruta, Hanafuda and Hyakunin-isshu.

Irohagaruta has two sets of 46 cards. One set has a picture and the other set has 46 proverbs. The object of the game is to match the picture with the proverb. Hanafuda is a flower card game with each flower representing one of the 12 months of the year. This game is played like blackjack or 21. The third most popular card game in Japan is Hyakunin-isshu or “100 Famous Japanese Poems.” This is a matching game. Often families play card games during the New Year celebration from January 1st through the 3rd.

Menko is an interesting card game as the object is to slap your thick card on the ground so that your opponent’s card flips over, after which you get to keep his or her card. The game continues until someone has collected the most cards.

No matter where you go in this world, there is one thing that you will always find: children enjoy playing games. The games may be similar or completely different, but the sounds of laughter can always be heard no matter where you are.

—Mrs. Tracy Kanno, mother of two Japanese American daughters, lives in Cranston, Rhode Island. Illustrations by Momoyo Kuwahara, a Japanese artist in San Francisco, California.

In Winter

Into the cold,
leaving behind the warm blaze of home
for the sparkling cold of outside.
I step off the porch,
my feet breaking through the thin crust of white
to rest on the slumbering earth.
Trudging up the gentle slope
I look back at my lonely footprints
stretching so bleakly back to the house
dark shadows against the pure white.
Ahead, the dark woods loom,
stretching on for eternity
I could stay forever in this cold darkness

Hina Matsuri (Girls’ Day) Altar. (See Vol. 12, no. 5)

Vol. 13 no. 1

Skipping Stones
The Legend of the Sylphs

The sylphs lived in their shimmering cities when the fairies still roamed the land. Up in the clouds the children of stardust flitted about playing. But then night came upon them and their cities darkened. No longer did people hear the magical song of the sylphs.

Those were the dark times. Wars were fought over trivial differences, and the people forgot the magic of the sylph song. Up in the clouds airplanes rushed by, tearing the clouds and the sylph cities. The people were indifferent to the beauty of their palaces and gardens, but babies knew the truth.

Only children could see the wondrous towers and the sylphs playing with stardust. When the children grew up, they learned that stardust does not exist. They were told that the sylph song was only the wind, and the sylph children were just wisps of evaporated water. No longer did they trace visions in the clouds. They laughed and taught their children more important things. The sylphs mourned the loss of their playmates and wished for the days when wise men spoke to them, and they were welcome at people’s firesides.

The sylph queen had the power to bring the sylph song back, but she was gone. She had disappeared into the mist many years ago. One morning, the sylphs saw a young boy walking through the ruined cities. He shone like the queen used to, and the sylph children began to dance for joy. They recognized the boy who had danced with them years ago; he was the sylph king. He had come back to bring the sylph song back to the people. Stardust filled the sky in every color of the rainbow.

“When will you teach the people to sing the sylph song again?” the sylphs asked him.

“I can’t. I haven’t much strength left,” he said, “Sing with me, and perhaps they will hear. In times of trouble we must sing together. The queen would wish it so.”

They sang the sylph song once again:

Sing for peace and let the rain
Heal the wounds and the pain.
Now sing once more and again!
Peace will have a shining birth!

Sing for peace and bless the trees,
Bless the sweet and peaceful breeze.
Bless the birds and beasts and bees
That bless our mother Earth!

Please let your voice join mine in song,
Peace is waiting, not for long.
Someday this world’ll be right, not wrong
Peace will have a shining birth.

The wind, the Alps, the land, and sea,
Will lend their voices to our plea.
If we bring peace, then we will be
The true children of this earth.

—Nicole Morse, 13, Weybridge, Vermont.
Illustration: Sabine Wiebringhaus-Timm, France

Recorro a lo largo de la playa
sensación de soledad
Apenas usted me acompaña
y viendo las huellas de su pie deslavarse
junto con las mías
me siento familiar y cómodo.

Familiar
I walk along the beach,
feeling quite alone.
Just you joining me,
and seeing your footprints wash away
with mine
feels familiar and comfortable

—Amanda Freedman, 16, New City, New York
Lesson From a Stranger

People of this world follow many religions including Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, and others. My parents are Muslim, and they have raised me to be a follower of Islam.

Muslims believe that every person on Earth has a destiny. God plans out our destinies, and we can't change that. Our job is to live by the guidelines of the Koran as best we can.

We are given tests in life to challenge whether we can handle certain situations appropriately. Some tests are very simple, but others can be so difficult by challenging our patience.

In situations like these, I think of how short and precious every moment of life really is. We should treasure every experience, because before we know it, we become old and begin to die.

Last weekend, while I was waiting for my bus, an elderly woman approached me. She looked into the waste can to see if there were any aluminum cans inside. Sadly, her search proved fruitless.

With her aged fingers, she reached out and touched my hands. Her wide smile showed missing teeth. She began to tell me the story of her life. She led me through her family's struggle during the Great Depression.

Even though every word she spoke also showered me with her saliva, I listened intently. I knew she needed someone to share her troubles with, and I felt fortunate that she had entrusted me with these intimate feelings.

Hopefully, I handled this situation correctly. I tried to listen to her while pushing away any selfish feelings. I could have driven her away, but I knew that this little conversation meant a lot to the old woman.

Everyone learns from life's experiences. Tough times teach you to be strong, and good times allow you to be thankful for life itself. Religion and faith can help you cope with these situations, by hopefully taking away your fears.

—Yusra Adi, 15, Eugene, Oregon.
Ten-year-old Warren and his friends, Bobby and Tommy Carpenter, collected chunks of dirt from a vacant lot. Known as dirt bombs, the chunks felt as hard as rocks. “They’ll make good throwing,” Warren declared.

At dusk they walked ten blocks to bombard Mrs. Walker’s roof. Her husband, Johnny Walker, had recently passed away, leaving her poor and friendless. The kids had always poked fun at him because he was fat, and the left side of his face had been burned in a fire. Now they picked on his wife.

They took aim at her roof and began throwing. “Look at them burst,” Warren said gleefully, as he heaved another. “Too bad she don’t have no phone to call the cops.”

After a while, the door creaked open, and Mrs. Walker stepped outside. Her face looked drawn like a worn leather seat. Her hair had the shape and texture of a snowy white brillo pad. She pointed a cane with a dull brass handle. “You there,” she said in a raspy voice. “Come here.”

Warren pointed to himself. “Me?”

“Yes, you.”

Bobby’s eyes opened as big as quarters. “Don’t go near her,” he cautioned.

“She’s an old lady. She can’t hurt me.”

Mrs. Walker shook the cane at him. “Scaredy cat, are you?”

“I ain’t scared of you,” Warren said.

Mrs. Walker pushed the door open with the cane. “Let’s see you come inside without them knees knocking.”

“Don’t do it,” Bobby pleaded, as Warren took the challenge and walked toward her. Mrs. Walker beckoned with a crooked finger as the other boys ran away.

With the door shut tight behind him he felt alone and vulnerable. “Sit!” she ordered, motioning to the couch where a lace throw covered shredded, musty pillow cushions. The pungent smell of liniment and dank carpet filled his nostrils. In the faint light, he watched her closely. Up close she seemed like a walking raisin, yet she gave an impression of strength.

Finally Mrs. Walker said, “So you’re the leader of that pack of wolves.” Her lips drew back on coffee-colored teeth. “Wait here.”

She hobbled into what appeared to be a bedroom. He heard the shuffle of paper, drawers open and close, boxes fall. Then a closet door slid open. He waited and waited for her. The long silence drove him crazy. Finally, he turned to see Mrs. Walker standing above him. She held a huge pile of scrapbooks and photo albums, which she dumped on his lap. “Look at these,” she said. “Then we’ll talk.”

Warren thumbed through yellowed newspaper clippings titled Jazz Man Johnny Walker. The glue had dried out on some, and they slid out of the scrapbooks. The dates amazed him, 1925 to 1940—what he considered ancient times.

Then the dates jumped to 1946. During that six-year period Warren found only one photo of Sergeant Johnny Walker in a green World War II uniform among an all-black battalion. A Purple Heart and several ribbons were pinned to the page. After 1946, a slim, handsome Johnny Walker in a suit and tie held a horn or a saxophone.

A few pages later, Warren folded open musty, rain-stained posters: Dizzy Gillespie, Charles Shaw and Johnny Walker. The finest in jazz at the Harlem Club appearing in cities like New York and Chicago. Warren sat for hours reading about King Oliver’s Creole Jazz Band and Louis Armstrong. He had no idea where Mrs. Walker had hobbled off to, or if his friends would return.

Warren continued to read until the streetlights blinked on and brightened a window enough to startle him. Mrs. Walker had hobbled up without him hearing a thing. “My husband, Johnny Benjamin Walker, was a great musician. He played Paris, New Orleans, you name the city. Later, he played alone, and no one came to hear him no more.”
She sighed. "He got himself a factory job as a watchman. One night the building caught fire, and my Johnny tried to put it out. That fire burned him bad; he wasn't the same man after that."

She handed him two records in their worn dust jackets. "I overheard your friends say that you liked music."

"But why give them to me? I ain't never been nice to you."

"Johnny always told me to make a friend where you ain't got a friend. He'd want you to have them."

Warren accepted the gift. "How come you moved to our town? Didn't he make a lot of money?"

"No. We had barely enough to live on."

"But he made records; he played in all these clubs..."

"Colored man in a colorless world. I'll learn you the old days if you come back to visit me."

He stared back at her thoughtfully. "You know, I've always wanted to be a musician."

Mrs. Walker smiled. "I have my husband's saxophone and horns in storage. Maybe I'll let you practice on them."

She didn't ask him what he had learned from her, though he had expected her to. Adults always did that when they made him read something in school, or when he was being punished. This time he didn't feel punished. He wasn't even certain he could verbalize the feeling that had come over him, or if he could describe what he now understood. But as he walked home with his friends, he knew he would never again throw dirt bombs at Mrs. Walker's house. He knew he would never make fun of her either. He was ashamed of what he'd done. Johnny Walker had lived a good life, a life rich in success and pride. Warren knew he had to visit Mrs. Walker again. He was already thinking of his questions for the next time.

—John Christopher Weil, La Jolla, California

Walls

Walls mean different things to different people. For some, they are walls that are invisible, blocking people's feelings from others. For others, they are walls of privacy. Or they can be walls of opportunity, such as the "Golden Door" at Ellis Island.

They are blankets that make you feel safe when you think a monster is in your closet. They were those signs separating the black people from the white. They can be walls that teach lessons such as the Vietnam Wall.

They are playpens that protect babies from harm. They are large aquariums that keep fish wet, and us dry.

Walls can be parents forbidding you to go near the street when you were younger. Walls can be consciences telling you wrong from right.

Walls are writers' blocks that block an individual's creativity.

Walls are invisible fences that keep animals from running away.

Walls can be a brain freeze that makes you forget a line in a play.

—Nicole Zingaro, 10, Robbinsville, New Jersey

Global warming can't stop Santa!

Illustration by Rebecca Rhodin, Allentown, Pennsylvania.
Injun: Another Side to the Story

I could smell the chocolate in the air, so I knew Mom had been baking. I dropped my books, grabbed a cookie for the road and started for the door.

"Be back by six, Ronnie," my mother called after me, "and stay out of the road."

"Okay, Mom," I answered. Mom gave me the same instructions each day.

When I got to Bobby’s house he was operating the controls of his new racecar. It sped around and turned like something out of the Indy 500. We got around to talking about the new kid at school, who had straight, black hair and a reddish tinge to his skin. Lots of kids were calling him “Injun.”

Bobby told me about a movie he’d watched on TV, where Injuns did bad things to white people. They dressed strangely, too, with weird hair. Bobby said his dad told him the Injuns who had moved into our area were taking jobs away from people who’d lived here for generations. He said the government had given the Injuns free land to live on, and that’s where they ought to stay. He warned him never to trust an Injun farther than he could throw one.

I started wondering whether Injun’s dad ever did something bad to anyone like me, and I got this creepy feeling that I didn’t want to find out. I wondered if my father was going to lose his job at the plant, and whether we would end up like the people who lived on the street downtown.

Dad asked at dinner how things were at school. I told him about Injun, and that I’d made up my mind to stay clear of him just in case he got any ideas.

"Ronnie!" cried my mother. Dad held up his hand as if to say, “I’ll handle this.” He said that if I were so determined to stay away from Injun then perhaps I ought to find out more about him first.

“You never know what you might learn that Bobby would love to know,” he said with a straight face, but I thought he had something up his sleeve.

“Mrs. Olala has been asking if you’d come to dinner,” Mom said, hopefully.

“Perfect opportunity to check this guy out,” Dad said, smiling.

“Okay,” I said, wanting to get it over with.

“Tomorrow, then,” Mom said.

The next day, I made an excuse to the guys about why I couldn’t play after school. Something about my grandmother being sick. The last thing I wanted was for them to know I’d gone traitor on them.

I was surprised at how much like my own house Injun’s looked. I mustered up all my courage and rang the doorbell. Mrs. Olala smiled and invited me in. Takoda, which was Injun’s real name, showed me his room. I had to admit he had some pretty cool stuff: feathers, a buffalo hide and clothing with fringes. He was proud of them. He said his Grandpa Teetonka gave him all these things, and some of them were more than a hundred years old.

For dinner we ate fried bread that was like pizza crust and beef stew with blackberries. Dessert was “Indian pudding” with corn and fruit. I thought the food might make me sick, but it tasted good.

After dinner, we all sat around Grandpa Teetonka in the den. It seemed funny that there was no TV, but only until Grandpa started talking about how their family was Sioux from South Dakota and had come to our state to find work. He explained his name means “talks too much.” He said he felt foolish about it when he was a “young’un,” but it had worked out well because he was a good storyteller. Everybody laughed when he said that. Then he told us his grandfather’s stories about buffalo stampeding through the open Dakota plains with nothing to keep them from being free, and how the Sioux had to defend themselves from the people who came to put up fences on their land. I listened to stories about the Creation and the Four Winds until my head was spinning. It felt more real than any movie.

Too soon, Mom came to take me home. Takoda gave me a feather with a string of beads. I knew Bobby would never even lend me his racecar, much less give it to me. I felt funny inside about Takoda giving me one of his treasures to keep.

Now I knew there was another side to the story, more than what Bobby saw in that stupid movie. I also knew that I wasn’t going to call Takoda “Injun.” I would use his real name, which Grandpa Teetonka explained means “friend to all,” because that’s who Takoda was.

—Catherine Miller, Glen Ellen, California.
A Long-Distance Connection

Staring up at the sky,
I see many stars shining brightly in the moon's shadow.
I wonder if my grandfather is looking down on me
to see me growing up to be who I am today.

I hope one day he will come to me in my dreams;
I will hear his soft voice, with its slight German accent,
floating down to me from the telephone of wind,
telling me he misses me and is proud of me.

I know I can't really call him,
I know that's impossible.
All I can do is hear his voice in the wind,
the rustling of leaves crunching like the coarseness in his voice;
the patience in his voice like a stream flowing from the mountain tops.

—Stephanie Levy, 14, New City, New York.

Adolescence

Adolescence is the time when you enter the rite of passage.
It's hard to realize that the world does not revolve around ourselves,
that we cannot always be among the envied elite.
For each of us are just one of the world's millions of victims,
trying to survive the hardships, disappointments and failures which will inevitably be encountered.
The unstable adolescents secretly admire and worship others, and their own reflection is nothing but an ignorant nobody.
Their despised flaws blind them from their exceptional, flourishing talents.
The desire for acceptance and love can engender a troubled rebel, concealing themselves and deceiving others to be portrayed as the stereotypical "cool."

This is the truth, I can assure you.
For whatever adolescence is, it can best be described as me.

—Christina Vangelakos, 13, Lutherville, Maryland.

August Rain

Late in August, the last monsoon
Quenches the eternal thirst of dust.
I lift my face and feel the rain
Caress my cheeks. Sweet solace,
Simple solace, simple tears. Worlds
Rush past, deception and injustice
Hold the scepter. Can't feel the spin of the earth,
I'm standing apart
And watching
Alone.

Idle chatter, whispered secrets,
The normal course of life. It's not hard
To face the facts. Life takes its toll,
Rain needs an ocean to sacrifice
Its life blood. But pain
Will not give fruits
Of pleasure. Only
A sort of numbness, gnawing
Slowly at my bones.

Now you laugh, now you cry,
Feel warmth, now hatred.
I wish it were easier to understand
The human mind. Time can only
Close your eyes, time
Can never really heal.
All you need is a wisp
Of memory to cringe
In pain.

We live a search
For truth, joy, beauty.
There's no harm in pretending
To forget. The spectrum of life
Broken into a million bands.
All we need are fond moments,
Moments of beauty, moments of joy,
Moments of truth.

—Sravana Reddy, 15, lives in Bangalore, India.
Besides English, she also speaks and writes Telugu.
United Nations Millennium Peace Summit

The United Nations Millennium Peace Summit in August 2000 invited hundreds of religious and spiritual leaders, from all continents and corners of the world, to the General Assembly of the United Nations to seek common ground and to express a commitment to tolerance and non-violence. Bishops, cardinals, rabbis, lamas, mullahs, ministers, grand muftis, gurus, sadhus, yogis, and leaders of all major world religions and indigenous traditions met and exchanged their views for two days. Following are some excerpts from one of the keynote addresses by Mata Amritanandamayi (Ammachi). Ammachi was born in 1953 in a small fishing village in Kerala, south India. She is a highly respected spiritual teacher of countless people, from all walks of life, all over the world.

"We have stepped into the new millennium with hope and great expectations of change. Although the number denoting the year has changed, essentially nothing else has. Real change must happen within us. For only when conflict and negativity are removed from within, can we play a truly constructive role in establishing peace. With the goal of peace in mind, the invaluable efforts of the United Nations to bring nations together, thereby creating peace and harmony, merit heartfelt praise.

- The very words "nation" and "religion" imply division and diversity. This diversity may seem to create an obstacle in fostering peace in the world, yet in reality, it is this diversity that brings richness and beauty, just as a bouquet made of flowers of a variety colors is more beautiful than a bouquet of flowers that are exactly the same. There is one truth that shines through all of creation. The rivers and mountains, flowers, sun, moon and stars, you and I, all are expressions of this one reality. It is by assimilating this truth in our lives that we can discover the inherent beauty in diversity. When we work together as a global family, not belonging to a particular race or nation, peace and happiness will once again prevail on this earth.

- As I travel around the world, people come to me and share their sorrows. Some have told me that their family members were killed in a religious clash. Sometimes it was a fight between Hindus and Muslims, other times between Hindus and Christians, or between Christians and Muslims. It is so painful to hear of the fighting because people are not going into the depths of their religion. Our ties to our religion or country should not make us forget our basic human values. We are all links in the great chain of life. The ability to feel the sufferings of all beings as our own should awaken an intense yearning to comfort them.

- We are living in an era when science and communication have turned the world into one small community. Although the world has become closer through technology, we are not drawn closer in our hearts. Today we are capable of destroying the Earth in an instant, yet we also have the capacity to create heaven on Earth. The future of humanity depends on the choice we make.

- If we look back at history, we can find that all conflicts originate from conflict within the individual. What is the real source of this inner-conflict? It is the lack of awareness of our true nature, the one living power within us of which we are all a part. The role of spirituality, true religion, is to awaken this awareness and to help develop qualities such as love, empathy, tolerance, patience and humility. Religion is the science of the mind. Today we are trying to clone human beings, but we do not attempt to create within ourselves a perfect loving and peaceful human being. We are aware of the need to protect our environment, yet we are seldom concerned with the pollution that negative thoughts create in the atmosphere and in the consciousness of humanity. The inner-pollution of the mind is in many ways more lethal than chemical pollution, for it has the power to destroy humanity at any time. We therefore have to purify our mental environment.

- Though the founders of all religions realized and practiced the noblest of ideals in life, many followers have failed to live up to them. Instead of focusing on the essential religious principles of love and compassion, we focus on the external rituals and traditions.
That is how these religions, which were meant to foster peace and unity among us, became instrumental in spreading war and conflict. This does not negate the importance of religious disciplines and traditions; they are necessary for our spiritual development. But we must remember that these traditions are the means to a goal and not the goal itself. We must remember that religion is meant for humanity and not humanity for religion.

• To solve the complex and controversial issues such as religious freedom, conversion and fanatism, the religious leaders must come together in dialogue with open hearts in order to arrive at mutually acceptable and practical solutions. The key to world peace is within every individual residing on this planet. Just as every member of a house shares the responsibility of safeguarding the home, each one of us shares the responsibility of world peace. Peace is not just the absence of war and conflict; it goes well beyond that. Peace must be fostered within the individual, within the family and within society.

• Instead of trying to increase the number of followers, religions should create an environment in which one may wisely accept the noble ideals of any religion. Tomorrow’s world will be shaped by today’s children. In their tender minds, it is easy to cultivate universal human values. If you walk through a patch of green grass a few times, you will quickly make a path, whereas it takes countless trips to forge a trail on a rocky hillside. The teaching of universal principles and human values should be a standard part of the general education, not the responsibility of the family alone. This should not be delayed any further, otherwise future generations will be lost to the world.

• We cannot lose sight of the essential needs of the people. Until these needs are met, it is impossible to aspire for higher states of awareness and understanding. If in any part of the world people are dying of hunger or are suffering in poverty, it is a matter of shame for all nations. Based on the ideal of universal religion. We should invoke God’s compassion in our own hearts and hands. Regardless of whether we fail or succeed in bringing about world peace, we ourselves will change for the better. Even if there is no visible change, the change in us will eventually affect change in the world.

• We must learn from our past or we will repeat our mistakes. Those who have harmed others in the past must now engage in positive actions to uplift the victims of their past oppression. Each nation should foster an atmosphere of openness, forgiveness, friendship, help, trust and support to heal old wounds. Thus, by living the ideals of religion, we transcend our narrow-mindedness, and our lives become offerings to the world.

• In God’s creation, men and women are equal. But over the centuries, the sad condition of women has not significantly improved. Women who give birth to humankind, should be assured an equal role in society.

• Love is the only medicine that can heal the wounds of the world. Just as the body needs food to grow, the soul needs love to unfold. Love is the very foundation, beauty and fulfillment of life. Where love exists, there cannot be conflict of any kind; peace alone will reign. What cannot be achieved through bloodshed can be achieved through love. May the light of love and peace shine within our hearts.

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Rehan: A Tribute to My Brother

It all started on November 30, 1991, when my brother Rehan was born. I thought he was the best brother in the world, which he was, but he had a life-threatening problem. He had a liver problem, a heart murmur, and one heart valve that was narrower than the other. My parents were told he would die in a couple weeks, but he fought through those weeks. In fact, he lived until the age of seven.

Eleven months after he was born Rehan learned to walk, like any other 11-month-old child. He had a heart bypass in May and came back home in June.

When he was three, he grew bumps on his hands and feet, much like chicken pox but not contagious. We took him to a Chinese doctor who gave him an herb tea to drink every day. His nose started bleeding that night, and we went to the emergency room. The doctor said that he needed a liver transplant. The bleeding stopped after he found that he needed to go through surgery to stop it.

For the next four years he was an amazing brother. He acted like he didn’t have a problem. He was happy, energetic and fun.

In the summer Rehan was going to have surgery for his heart. I wasn’t so scared about it because he’d already had the same surgery before.

Two days before he was going to the hospital I got a cold, and my mom sent me away to my cousin’s house until I got better, so I wouldn’t infect Rehan. I called my mom, and she said that the surgery went well; he was even awake.

After a week, I went to see my brother. I was exited to see him because I was planning to have a big party for him. He gave me a piece of paper just before I left. It said, “My Party,” and he drew balloons and candy. I went in to the waiting room and saw my mom crying. I didn’t want to ask her why because I knew it would be something I didn’t want to hear, so I went to sleep. The next day at the hospital, my parents told me it was time to say goodbye. I thought it was a joke at first. I cried a lot.

I did so much with him, and now he is gone. Since then I thought that I was the worst sister in the world.

At the funeral it hit me that it was true, and that my brother wasn’t going to come back. I cried so much that there was a puddle where I was standing. We left the mosque where I saw him last. My dad then went to the other funeral for my brother that took place in the cemetery.

I went to my house where there was a gathering to help my family feel comfortable after the death. I wished that this wouldn’t have happened, but I kept on telling myself that this is life, and I must go on.

—Mubeen Quadri, 13, Lincolnwood, Illinois.

Living in the Inner City

I dream a dream
Of fairy tale flowers
Of princes and queens
And rainbow showers.

I dream a dream
Of musical dancing
Of daisies and dew drops
And horses prancing.

I dream a dream
Of young hands fighting
Of policemen and jail bars
And of cigarettes lighting.

Only this is not a dream.

—Sondra Eby, 16, Harrisburg, Virginia.

Where in the World?

1. Which country has eight of the top ten mountain peaks in the world?
   India, China, Nepal, Tibet, Chile

2. Which is the most-spoken language?
   Hindi, Chinese (Mandarin), Spanish, English, Russian, Urdu, German, French

3. Name a country that has the shape of a chili pepper.

4. Which island country in Asia elected the first woman prime minister in the world?

5. Name a South American country whose official language is Portuguese.
Celebrations:
24 January  Chinese New Year
February  African American History Month
8 February  Tu B’Shevat – Jewish Arbor Day
21 February  Shivrathri: Lord Shiva’s Birthday
March  Women’s History Month
8 March  International Women’s Day
9 March  Jewish celebration of Purim
9–10 March  Holi, Hindu Festival of Color

For the Birds: Many bird species are showing population declines due to habitat loss or other human impacts. Now, people of all ages and backgrounds can help monitor bird populations by participating in the annual Great Backyard Bird Count, February 16–19, 2001. The GBBC asks families, individuals, classrooms and community groups to count the number and kinds of birds that visit their feeders, local parks, schoolyards and other areas during any or all of the four count days. Just count the highest number of each bird species seen at one time (to ensure the birds are not counted more than once) and keep track of the amount of time spent counting. Then log on to the web site: www.birdsource.org. You will be able to see almost immediately how your observations fit into the continent-wide perspective.

Free Internet Reference Service: Public and private libraries from around the world are joining together to form a comprehensive digital reference service. By June 2001, anyone from any country will be able to ask a question by a fax, e-mail, phone or by visiting any of the participating libraries. The questions will be passed through the network to the library best equipped to answer it—even if the library is in Australia and the question came from Italy. Currently, the information is primarily in English, but the group hopes to eventually operate in many languages.

Coral Reef Reserve Proposed Near Hawaii
President Clinton has proposed to set aside 84 million acres of underwater reef around the Hawaiian islands as protected land. If approved, the area will be called Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Coral Reef Reserve, and it will encompass about 70 percent of the coral reef area within the U.S. The area, which will be off limits to oil drilling, will serve as a refuge for sea animals such as monk seals and sea turtles. Fishing and boating will be allowed in limited amounts.

Climate Change Leaves Polar Bears Hungry: The polar bears of Churchill, Manitoba, are skinnier and grumpier this year. The bears gather every year on the western shores of the Hudson Bay when the sea ice forms so they can hunt seals, a main part of their diet. Temperatures in the area are constantly on the rise, though, and the ice now melts about three weeks earlier than 25 years ago. That means less seal hunting, less fat and reduced energy for the rest of the year. According to Environment Canada, a federal agency, temperatures in the area will rise 4° to 11°F in this century, and within 30 years, this area of sub-Arctic tundra could turn into a temperate, leafy forest. Polar bears don’t eat leaves!


Our good friend, Sadako Hessling passed away at the age of 71. Sadako’s brush paintings and Japanese caligraphy has adorned pages of many issues. She always brought her cheerful spirits to Skipping Stones meetings and gatherings over the years. We will miss you, Sadako!

This year’s Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Kim Dae Jung of South Korea for his work for democracy and freedom on the Korean Peninsula. His efforts for peace and reconciliation between North and South Korea were also lauded by the selection committee.

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PeaceBike's One-Year Birthday

Exactly one year ago I started out on my bike from Champoeg Park in Oregon. As I write this, I am in Quito, Ecuador, getting ready to head south again in a few days. As I was thinking about what to write in this article I started remembering all the kids (over 5000). I have visited on this Peacebike “edu-venture,” and what kinds of questions they had for me. They wanted to know things like:

Why is it called Peacebike? It is called Peacebike because this trip is about growing peace by riding a bike. The Peacebike Expedition Team (Frank Pollari and I) have visited with students so far in 11 countries. At each school we ask young people to join us in a friendship revolution. Hundreds of kids are now spreading peace and breaking down prejudice by becoming Peacebike Pen Pals or E-mail Pals. Thousands of other kids have pledged to be peace-makers in their families and communities. We also share our travels with thousands more people at www.peacebike.org, and they learn more about the good things people are doing in every country. That builds understanding and peace too!

Do I get scared? On this bike trip of more than 9000 kilometers there have been a few times I was scared, like in Mexico when a bull on the side of the road started chasing after me, but most of the time I don’t have any reason to be scared. I have met hundreds of wonderful people on this trip, and they have helped me before things even get close to scary. For example, one time when I was getting pretty sick a doctor gave me a free exam because he wanted to help Peacebike. Another time, when I was riding through the mountains of Oaxaca, Mexico, and was almost out of water, some road construction workers gave me some of their bottled water to drink! I have learned to expect things to work out even if at first they look like they could be scary.

Do I get tired? Yes I do, every day. The most tired I got was in Belize when I had a fever and got stuck in a rainy downpour on a muddy road. My bags were about 15 pounds heavier when wet, and I had to carry my bike across thigh-high creeks that had washed over the road. That was tiring. Lots of people think that because I have traveled so far on a bike I must be half-superhero, but I am just a regular guy who started biking and kept on going. It is like many things in life—if you want to get somewhere you keep practicing and if you keep at it you will find, little by little, you really progress.

Where do I sleep? I have slept in a free five-star hotel, in a hotel with a cockroach convention in the bathroom, restaurants, a jail, a police fortress, inside a redwood tree, a classroom and with families. I have been welcomed into hundreds of homes—from that first couple on the Oregon coast, to a peace worker in Costa Rica. One family I stayed with didn’t speak Spanish, only Mayan, and the grandma of the house was 120 years old!

How do I pay for it? I worked as a teacher before I went on this trip and saved a big chunk of change by not spending a lot of money during those years. Many friends, schools, kids, businesses and people along the way have given money so that the Peacebike adventure can go on. The whole trip isn’t paid for, but I believe that as more people find out about what Peacebike is doing, they will keep supporting this adventure of about 40,000 kilometers.

Peacebike hopes that when governments start talking about going to war you will know your friends in other countries well enough to say, “No, we are not going to war. There must be another way because those people are my friends.” While you work on making peace, we will too—pedal by pedal, around the world. Let’s build peace together!

—Tad Beckwith is now in Bolivia, South America
EASTERN EUROPE

TESAN ALEKSANDRA, girl, age 15
Bjelopolska 160, 71123 Lukavica
Sarajevo, Bosnia- Herzegovina
Int: rap music, volleyball, swimming...

JASENA SKARO, girl, age 16
Rendiceva 21
21 000 SPLIT, CROATIA
Int: travel, music, write, books, Spanish

ANDREA ZUPAN, girl, 16
Kotorska 60/2
Crikvenica 51260, Croatia
Int: Rock, reading, traveling, animals, email: Live_4ever_28@altavista.com

COLOMBIA

ARTURO JOSE LINERO (Male) age 17
Calle 28 Barrio el Reposo
Santa Marta, Colombia
Int: estudiar, inventar, música

NATALIA CARDONA (Female) age 14
Kra 74 #81-48
Barranquilla, Colombia
Int: bailar, leer, escribir cartas

JOHNAN ABADIA VENTURA (M) 15
Carrera 5 No 11-112
Barrio San Martín Leticia
Amazonas, Colombia
Int: Basketball, rock music, dance

MELISSA SANDOVAL (F) 11
Urbanización Los Mangos Bq. 46-4A
Barranquilla, Colombia
Int: jugar, hacer amigos

MARYLYS SANCHEZ (F) 11
Urbanización Los Mangos Bq. 44, 3A
Barranquilla, Colombia
Int: jugar, hacer amigos

INGRID VESOLORES (F) 11
Urbanización Los Mangos Bq. 49, 1B
Barranquilla, Colombia
Int: jugar, divertirse

LISBETH CARRILLO (F) 9
Urbanización Los Mangos Bq. 47, 4A
Barranquilla, Colombia
Int: patinar, hacer amigos

ANDRES YANEZ (M) 13
Urbanización Los Mangos Bq. 46, 2B
Barranquilla, Colombia
Int: Baseball, estudiar, pintar

ANIVAL SOTO MAYOR, 9
Urbanización Los Mangos Bq. 48, 2A
Barranquilla, Colombia

JULY GUTIERREZ (F) 11
Urbanización Los Mangos Bq. 41, 1A
Barranquilla, Colombia
Int: Barbas, voleibol

RUSSELL ALVARÉZ S. (M) 10
Urbanización Los Mangos Bq. 45, 2A
Barranquilla, Colombia
Int: jugar nintendo, estudiar, futbol

JOHN CESAR VILLAS (M) 15
Calle 58, Dirección 9 Manzana 20
Bosque Barranquilla, Colombia
Int: basquetbol, estudiar mucho

HERNANDO JOSÉ GUTIERREZ (M) 7
Urbanización Los Mangos Bq. 41, 1A
Barranquilla, Colombia
Int: futbol, patinar

MIGUEL ANGEL BENETTI (M) 8
O/o Elizabeth Baez
Urbanización Los Mangos Bq. 45, 4A
Barranquilla, Colombia
Int: Nintendo, voleibol

JACKSON AVILA PAEZ (M) 11 and also
JESUS ESNEIDER AVILA PAEZ (M) 11
Urbanización Los Mangos Bq 45, 4A
Barranquilla, Colombia
Int: Nintendo, bailar, música

MI nombre es Luisa Fernanda Molano Elías, Tengo 14 años pero ya casi cumplí los 15.
Mi pasatiempo es la computadora. Estudio en el Colegio Eucafrisíifico Mercedario en 8 grado, Me gusta mucho la música y la salsa es mi favorita. También la música árabe porque yo tengo raíces libanesas.
También me gusta el cine, pero voy a películas que no sean tan violentas porque en el mundo hay mucha violencia como para continuar aplaudiéndola en el cine.
My hobby is the computer. My school is "Eucafrisico Mercedario" and I am in 8th grade. I love the music and "Salsa" is my favorite. I also like Arabic Music because I have Lebanese roots.
I also like to go the movies but not to violent ones because there is already a lot of violence in the world as to continue applauding in the movies.
—Luisa Fernanda Molano Elías, age 15
O/o Cra. 41 No. 183A - 48 Int 131
Bogotá, Colombia South America

GHANA, W/A

RUBBY TIWAH, girl, 15
Good Foundation School P.O Box 303
Sunyani B/A, GHANA
Int: reading, writing, music, penpals

EDITH Osei Boama, girl, 13
Miracle Prep. School, P. O Box 832
Sunyani, B/A, GHANA
Int: penpals, football, movies, music

DANIEL YOWU OWUSU, boy, 15.
P. O. Box 231 Sunyani, B/A GHANA
Int: penpals, riddles

PATIENCE BAYOX, girl, 15, and also
KUDJOE BENJAMIN, boy, 15, both at
St. James J.S. School. P. O Box 549
Sunyani B/A, GHANA
Int: church, making friends.

PRINCE OWUSU SMARI, boy (Int: letter writing, music), Emmanuel Owusu Smart, boy, (Int: Singing, football), Owusu Y. Smari, boy, (Int: pen pals, dancing), Yaw Owusu Aduomi, boy, (Int: photo and letter exchange) all at
P. O. Box 13, Afebubu B/A, GHANA

Kwabena Balla, boy, 14
P. O Box 97, Sunyani B/A, GHANA
Int: soccer, TV, music, poetry

Augustus Anndor, boy, 15
C/o The Truth Ministry, P.O. Box 1230
Odumase Sunyani B/A GHANA

Prince Owusu, boy, P.O. Box 391, Techiman B/A, GHANA

YORLENI G UZMÁN (F) age 16
Corregimiento de Cristobal
Barriada 16 de Junio, Casa 60C
Colón, Panama
Int: bicycling, studying, music, ballads

KATHERINE DIAZ (F) 17
Corregimiento de Sabaneta, Casa 13
Colón, Panama
Int: studying, sports, music

Vol. 13 no. 1
Skipping Stones
The Farmer Author/Illustrator: Mark Ludy (Green Pastures). This is a tale of patience, perseverance and faith. The story’s powerful message focuses on the qualities that build character in children. Ages 5 and up. Full color illustrations. ISBN# 0-9664276-0-2


The Little Book of Big Questions, by Jackie French, Illust. Martha Newbigging (Annick Press). This book offers possible answers to some confounding questions such as: How did the universe begin?, Is it wrong to kill in self-defense?, How do you explain red to a blind person? The answers are designed to stimulate discussion. Reference guide included. Ages 6 to 15. ISBN# 1-55037-654-3.

Barbara Jordan: Getting Things Done, by James Mendelsohn (Twenty-First Century). This biography follows the life of the first black woman from the South elected to the U.S. Congress. Jordan is known for her role on the committee that met to decide whether President Nixon should be impeached. The book is chock-full of historical photos. Ages 12 and up. ISBN# 0-7613-1467-9.


Practicing Kwanzaa Year Round: Affirmations & Activities Around the Seven Principles, by Gwynelle Dismukes (Global Cultures). This book provides a concise explanation of the origins and traditions of Kwanzaa, including how to apply the seven principles year round. Ages 10 and up. ISBN# 1-57067-113-3.

When Beaver Was Very Great: Stories to Live By, by Anne M. Dunn (Midwest Traditions). These short stories are a mixture of traditional Ojibwe tales and modern prose. Each writing provides wisdom and insight on aspects of life ranging from unity with nature to personal growth and respect for elders. Ages 10 and up. ISBN # 1-883953-07-3.


Elegy on the Death of César Chávez, by Rudolfo Anaya, Illust. Gaspar Enriquez. (Cinco Puntos Press). Latin American labor and civil rights activist César Chávez lives on in our thoughts and actions when we work to make a just society for all. This beautifully illustrated book also contains a brief biography and time line. Ages 13 to adults. ISBN# 0-938317-51-2.

VIDEOS

Hanging Out, by Wesley Lowe (NFBC c/o Bullfrog Films). This fast-paced video concentrates on the prejudice and stereotyping of an ethnic group. Dramatic vignettes explore issues of inter- and intra-racial prejudice. Ages 12 to 17.

Peanut Man: George Washington Carver, by Fred Holms (Grace Products/History in Action). A student faced with tough choices is transported back to the past to meet George W. Carver who faced many challenges in his own life. Ages 10 to 17. 30 mins.

From A Gator Ride to the Dentist Office, by Peter Cook, (P.C. Productions, PscookProd@aol.com). A video in American Sign Language that captures a few of Peter Cook’s original stories. It incorporates pantomime and facial expressions and acting. With spoken English translations. All ages. 45 mins.
A Guide for Awakening the Buddhist Heart

We all long for a satisfying life. Our inner nature determines, to a large extent, how close we come to having satisfaction and happiness with our lives.

In every culture and religion, people find models of soul-satisfying individuals. All cultures, faiths and religions have a way of describing genuine, generous people, who exemplify a "loving heart." Buddhism is one path which can guide people to living loving-kindness. (The Dalai Lama always says, "My religion is loving-kindness.") Lama Surya Das, a leading spokesperson for American Buddhism, does an excellent job of presenting a road map to achieving a life of loving-kindness in his latest book, *Awakening the Buddhist Heart*. (Broadway Books/Random House).

The "Buddhist heart" is alive and well in all of us. It is just a matter of awakening to it. In this 250-page book, the author draws on many Asian and some Western spiritual traditions to help us nurture our true nature, our inner goodness, our compassionate and caring side.

Lama Surya’s Western upbringing and over 25 years of Eastern exposure have helped him bring an universal appeal to his message. We can awaken to our true nature through spiritual connections within ourselves because everything we do and feel is part of our spiritual journey. We are all interconnected and interdependent on each other.

Awakening to our true nature brings purpose, meaning and love into our daily life. Life is about relationships—relationships we have and we develop with ourselves, with each other, with the world and with that which is beyond any of us. When our relationships are good, we feel good; when they are bad, we feel awful. When our relationships are superficial, we feel as though we are leading superficial lives. Love comes through relating to others in a genuine and meaningful way.

Lama Surya Das explains that love makes us lessen our selfish and self-centered view of the world. It challenges us to go beyond ourselves. As parents, we know very well what it feels like to regard another as more important than one’s self. Love gives meaning to our life. Love also requires honesty and self-examination. As spiritual seekers, we have to question our motivations and reasons for loving.

We can realize the truth, wisdom, clarity, and peace of mind that is latent in each of us through our spiritual efforts. When we get a sense of the bigger picture, what is important in the long run, we can focus on those values and virtues, issues and concerns, and we can let go of the rest (superficial or even comic). Spirituality gives us the ability to distinguish the real from the unreal and an understanding of the cause and effect (or, the Karma theory).

**Four mind changers.** Reflect on the following:

1. I have been blessed with life in which I can do many things to further my own happiness and the happiness of those around me.
2. Life is short; there is no time to waste.
3. The journey through life isn’t supposed to be easy; it’s supposed to be real.
4. Wherever we go, wherever we remain, the results of our actions follow us.

Let’s be mindful of our common behavior patterns that have hidden agendas and seem to control others; behaviors that dwell in superficial values, gossip and tale telling, exploitation, dependent clinging or living in the past. Be mindful of the impulse to control others. Notice our convoluted logic, and tangled, self-defeating behavior. How beautiful the world would be, if we tried not to harm others, even with words.

**Connecting and reaching out: How to do it?**

- Accept others as they are—warts and all.
- Let go of closed and judgemental points of view.
- Do unto others as you’d have others do unto you.
- Empathize with others.
- Stay open and challenge your assumptions.
- Be “present” for others.
- Use the power of words to build deeper connections.
- Smile. Share your inner peace in subtle ways with even “strangers.” Develop an authentically generous spirit: The more we have, the more we have to give.

**Ways we can share our bounty:** Share money and gifts. Give the gift of your time and energy to give energy and courage to others. Be kind. Share what you know. Perform your responsibilities in the most loving manner. Become a generous “receiver.”

**Art of listening:** We bring greater authenticity to our relationships by genuinely listening to the sounds and voices of the world. The practice of listening begins with silence. The oral Sufi tradition says, “Mohammed is an ear.” Practice Noble Silence.

If there is such a thing as *spirituality made easy*, this book is it! An appendix offers 37 practices and meditations for spiritual seekers.
(Clockwise from top) A produce market, Casablanca, Morocco; A girl with grapefruit, Twante, Myanmar; Women walk past a rug shop, Marrakech, Morocco; A necklace and pottery booth, Marrakech, Morocco.

Photographs by Caryn B. Davis, Chester, CT. Please see pages 18-19 for more.

Skipping Stones
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Sample. Please subscribe!
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