Acknowledgements

Cover art by Rachel Rees, age 10, Susanville, CA. Winner of the 2000 River of Words Grand Prize.

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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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EdPress Awards and 1997 NAME Award for Excellence in Educational Journalism

Skipping Stones (Pub. No. 015-089) is published bimonthly, except July/August, by Skipping Stones, Inc., 1309 Lincoln St., Eugene, OR 97401. Postage paid at periodicals rate at Eugene, OR, Postmaster: Please send address changes to Skipping Stones, P. O. Box 3939 Eugene, OR 97403-0939.

Subscriptions: institutions: $35; individuals: $25 (Airmail: $10 extra; low-income discount: 50%); Single/back issues: $5 ($6, air). To submit, subscribe, or reprint, contact:

Skipping Stones Magazine P. O. Box 3939 Eugene, OR 97403 USA; tel. (541) 342-4956; skipping@efn.org; Web: www.efn.org/~skipping and also www.treelink.com/skipping

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A few years ago, I attended the All India Annual Music Festival that honors Kalidas, one of the greatest poets and musicians India has ever produced. I wish to share a story about him and his teacher.

The teacher welcomed and invited them in. A small oil lamp lit the serene, radiant face of the teacher. They all sat on a bamboo floor mat. After formalities and some polite conversation, the emperor was anxious to see the teacher play. He signaled Kalidas to ask him to play, but out of deep respect for his teacher, Kalidas simply couldn’t ask him to perform!

Instead, Kalidas asked his teacher’s permission to sing a new song he had composed. Kalidas knew if he made a few mistakes while singing and playing the instrument, his teacher was sure to demonstrate how to play the raga (composition) properly.

After a while, when Kalidas was purposefully off-key, the teacher interrupted, “No, no, no! Not like that. Pass the instrument to me; let me show you.” As the teacher began to play and sing, he became totally absorbed in the music. The bliss that it created engulfed everyone present. Hours passed before he plucked the last note. The eastern horizon was painted in dawn colors as they all, including the emperor, returned to a normal state of awareness.

On their way back to the capital, the emperor was unusually silent. Finally, he spoke in a gentle voice, “Kalidas, I was totally absorbed in the music. I’ve never experienced anything like this before. Your teacher’s music is heavenly, out of this world! How can he create that?”

Kalidas replied humbly, “Sir, every time I play at your court, I am playing to please you. But my teacher was not playing to please us. His music was pouring out of his true self. When we are trying to perform for the sake of proving ourselves, or to show off, we are not genuine. Great music is produced only if one forgets oneself, and the beauty of the music takes hold of the player.”

We can tune in to the perfect music that nature creates and dance to its joyful rhythm.

Winter Creek by Shintaro Maeda, 14, 2000 ROW Winner (page 6), Wichita, KS.
A Dolphin Call

I am a little dolphin. Since my birth, I have lived in this beautiful ocean. The ocean is not only my home; it is the bassinet of all creatures. It was the ocean that bred the character of the Earth. Because of the ocean’s existence, you humans can breathe. The ocean draws on carbon dioxide and makes oxygen. So no ocean, no life.

Human, do you know that the ocean is a wonderful, rich land? If you come to the ocean, you’ll certainly be attracted by the ocean’s forest, seaweed. Seaweed is an ancient kind of sea plant. It is the food for ocean animals, just like bread and rice is for humans. It contains rich protein and many kinds of elements. Moreover, many ocean creatures can be used for medicine.

The gulfweed in front of my house even helps to biodegrade sewage. The ocean is the wash basin of the Earth, and water is the magic solvent.

More than 80 elements have been found dissolved in sea water, including many rare and precious metals like boron and gold. Sounds impossible, doesn’t it? The ocean is like a blue cornucopia. And, you humans are surely familiar with oil, which is a product of the ocean.

The ocean covers an incredibly large area. All the continents put together are not as large as the area of the Pacific Ocean. Last week my neighbor came back from Japan. She told me there was a big man-made island there. How wonderful!

My aunt’s family from Manila Bay came here yesterday. They were angry because polluted water has destroyed their homeland. Oceans create the gorgeous surroundings on Earth. If you destroy the oceans, you destroy yourselves!

Now more and more people are showing their concern for the environment, and the ocean creatures are thrilled. Let humans and this beautiful ocean become friends forever.

—Gong Hao-ying, S.I.S.U., Shanghai, China.

Peace in the 21st Century

I’m dreaming of a world in the 21st Century where peace and love will reign in every home and family. Friendship and sharing will be practiced among all people. Understanding and tolerance will prevail in schools. Tranquility and safety will be felt in the streets. That is peace for me.

If the people stop killing and selling drugs and weapons, if they quit fighting and making war for power and territory, if the human family respects each other and wildlife, then there will be peace.

We do not need films about terrorists, wars and murders. It’s much better to make comedies and cartoons. There is also no need to make toy pistols and machine guns. We could produce beautiful, soft animals, creative games and non-violent toys. The next generation should not see any more violence on TV.

We should open healing centers for drug, alcohol and tobacco dependence. Let’s make creative centers and parks for the young where they can enjoy life and nature, sports, crafts, music and participate in different activities. Peace, environmental education, conflict resolution and rules of etiquette should be offered in every curriculum. Adults should think first about a peaceful life and about happiness for their children.

It’s also very important to preserve nature and take care of the fragile planet we live on. We need cars that run on electric and solar energy so we don’t pollute the air we breathe. Every factory should be equipped with air and waste cleaning systems.

There are too many video and computer games about fighting and war. They encourage violence because boys and girls imagine killing people. It’s possible to create educational and even funny games that bring peace to the minds of children and smiles to their faces. If from early childhood, adults exemplify peaceful living to children, they will always be good citizens; they will not want to mistreat each other. Each of us can do something for peace. I will teach peace to my future children and to their children, and I’ll spread the seeds of peace and love all around.

Assalomu alaikum! Peace be with you! People in my country greet each other this way. Let peace be with us all! Let my dream of peace prevailing on Earth come true!

—Vitaly Ionesov, 14, Samarkand, Uzbekistan.
Love You Like a Sister

“The ones who need love the most are often the hardest to love.” This thought relates a lot to my relationship with my sister. We know that we love each other very much, but showing it is a problem. There is a three-year age difference between us, and no matter what I do, to her it is always wrong.

I’m the eldest in a family with four children, so everyone looks up to me. It is a lot of weight to put on my shoulders, and I handle it in the best way that I can. My sister who is closest in age to me seems to hold a grudge against me. I try to be friends with her, but the little comments and the way she acts, make it seem like she is pushing me away.

Ever since we were young, my sister has felt that my parents love me more and appreciate my ways of helping out more than her ways. This is not the case, but it has basically been her closing line when every one of our battles has been resolved.

There can be a different side too, one which is caring and kind. A side that you can get along with and is fun to be with. When she is not scheming projects with my younger siblings or agitating the rest of us, you can see love in her eyes. Sometimes when she lets her guard down, kind words can come out of her mouth, and you can feel friendship. A bond between us will always be there. It is like a treasure locked up, only to be let out when she thinks no one is looking.

There will still be times in the years to come when there will be slamming doors and loud voices, but we’ll always have love in our hearts and a friendship that can’t be denied. Though this is sometimes hard to say, Natalie is someone I’m proud to call my sister.

—Allison Somma, 13, Gibsonia, Penn.

We Can Make A Difference!

October 28th is the National Make-A-Difference Day. Every year our school participates in it to help others in need. We hold a drive to collect items for soup kitchens, the homeless, refugees and needy veterans in hospitals. We also collect soda tabs for an organization so that our school can sponsor a dog for a blind person. We collect aluminum cans for Animal Friends and call it “Paws to Recycle.” In our Leaders’ Club we work with the Special Olympics.

Although we’ve greatly succeeded in our efforts, participation from others in our community is vital. I am writing on behalf of Pine-Richland Middle School to encourage others to participate in this drive, not just in October, but every day. Not only do we need help here in the Pittsburgh area but across the nation as well. I want people to know that small contributions will help. As my teachers say, “Person to person, you can make a difference.” I truly believe that, and at my school it really shows.

—Jessica Petrovich, 14, Gibsonia, Pennsylvania.

Worry, Worry, Worry!

I think that worry springs from the human need to be reassured. We feel a need to be reassured from an authoritative figure such as a teacher or boss so that we feel confident that we did a task the right way. The more we worry about such trivial things, the less we notice the important things in life.

I am not saying that worrying is always completely out of place, but constant worry will affect your health and attitude. There are some things that definitely need to be worried about. If a family member is sick, there is a need to worry. Also we often rightly worry about hunger and poverty in the world. These are examples of legitimate worries, but even these worries can be abated by praying or talking to a friend. Remember this: Worry is like a rocking chair; it gives you something to do, but it doesn’t get you anywhere.

—Steven Dotterer, 13, Wexford, Pennsylvania.
A flashing white fin appears,
Then vanishes
Into the muddy, light-brown waters of the Yangtze River.
Unknown to human kind,
Before Three Gorges Dam began.
The dam in central China on the Yangtze River will
Produce much electricity,
But it will produce no good for this dolphin.

It swims upstream back to its birthplace on the same river,
To nurture its young,
Much like the salmon.
It cannot see,
But uses vibrations.
The most endangered dolphin in the world.
It will be wiped off the face of the Earth
Within a few decades.

The Three Gorges Dam will block off the passage,
Which these dolphins swim through
To get to the nurturing ground.
The water was once filled with these quick creatures,
Streaks of white whenever you looked hard,
But now, threatened by the dam,
Fewer than 50 are left.
This soon-to-be-extinct dolphin only found in the Yangtze,
This white flash,
Flag bearer,
This dying creature,
Is, indeed,
The Baiji.*

*Baiji means the flag-bearer that was left behind in Mandarin.

—Christine Yin, 13, American Intl. School of Guangzhou, Guangzhou, P. R. China, International Grand Prize Winner.

River of Words (ROW) is a nonprofit, international arts and environmental education organization that nurtures respect for and understanding of the natural world by promoting literacy in all forms. Through its workshops, publications and annual poetry and art contest (five of the 2000 winners are featured here, on page 3 and on the cover), ROW fosters responsibility, imagination and action in young people and publicly acknowledges their creativity and concerns. Deadlines are Feb. 15 (N. America) and March 1 (Intl.). For more information or to order an Educator’s Guide and curriculum material, contact River of Words, 2530-C San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, CA 94702 USA; 510-548-POEM (7636); info@riverofwords.org; Website: riverofwords.org
**A Crack in the Heavens**

On howling nights, When all is still, And eerie sounds, Begin to spill, And from the sky, Drips a drop of pride, And on your tongue, It starts to ride.

In spring, When all the days Are warm, With golden drops, On silken strands, In silver sandals, Rain does stand.

—Talia Bolnick, 8, Beverly Hills, California.

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**The Waterfall's Song**

The waterfall has a mind of its own. Twirling, swirling, curling, thundering, bursting, inging down with all of its might. But through all of the thrashing and crashing you can hear the music of the tiny white streaks weaving their way through the full turquoise loom. Thrashing, crashing, hurling down, down, down! All over and over and over, but still a whistling sound’s magic sings over the roaring, rocking waterfall. It will never be destroyed.

—Sophie West, grade 2, Mill Valley, CA.

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**Water Everywhere!**

I wish to ride Poseidon’s horse Into the water to see the animals. I would coast on the waves and then Nudge the horse So he would plunge into the surf And go down, down, down into the world of fish. We would zoom past shipwrecks, We would out-swim a shark And we would glide through a School of mackerel; We would land on the bottom to watch Startled flounder flee, Then we would glide swiftly toward the sunlight And burst through the waves Just in time for dinner.

—Alexander Zamenhof, 10, Brookline, Massachusetts.

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**Seaworthy Dirge**

In the misty ways of the unforgiving sun, sea men rise, wiping sleep from eyes. Onward to another day.

They wade into the brackish waters, hold testing fingers to the wind. Deep sea fish awaken and scatter to the shoremen’s cry, “’Tis time, ’Tis time!”

In the misty ways of the unforgiving sun, the shoreline jigs and the waves dance their reel in time to the rowing of oars and the setting sails.

The breakers off shore swallow men whole. Wharf women cry out in anguish at the loss of their livelihoods and of their men.

In the misty ways of the unforgiving sun, the sea takes what she must have.

—Brannon Still, 17, Dassel, Minnesota.
The first thing that pops into most people’s minds when they think of a beaver is the phrase “busy as a beaver.” They certainly are big enough for the job. In fact, they are the largest rodents in North America. A grown beaver can weigh as much as an eight-year-old girl!

Beavers have wide, scaly tails and fur as soft as silk. Since beavers swim so often, they have two layers of fur. You already know that the first layer is like silk, so what is the second layer like? It’s thick and wooly so they can stay warm in the winter. The color of their fur and skin is either brownish-gold or dark brown.

One of the beavers’ favorite hobbies is building dams. They spend hours doing it. Another one of their hobbies is building lodges. People sometimes get confused between lodges and dams. Lodges are what beavers live in.

If you live in Asia, Europe, Canada or the United States, you must be an expert on beavers, because that’s where they live too! If you don’t, I’d better fill you in. Beavers live in wet, damp places. Therefore you are more likely to find a beaver by a pond in a forest than in Egypt. Beavers live around ponds with high banks. If you look at a beaver’s home in a beaver colony, you’ll see that no two beavers’ homes look exactly alike.

Beavers are herbivores, which means they only eat plants. They are not predators. Beavers eat bark, branches, twigs, shrubs, tree buds and leaves. On the other hand, if you are a beaver out there reading my story, watch out for bears!

Did you know that beavers are born knowing how to build dams? That would be like you and me being born knowing how to write! Beavers can chop down more than 200 trees a year! The reason for this is that their teeth grow and grow and grow. They have to chew a lot of things so that their teeth stay a normal size.

In conclusion, if you see a beaver, leave it alone. It is busy enough building dams.

—Jillian Klueber, 10, Doylestown, Pennsylvania.

Beaver Bites

- Beavers sniff for danger.
- Baby beavers live with their parents for two years.
- Beavers can weigh as much as an 8-year-old girl.
- Oil is made from beaver tails.
- Beavers are born knowing how to build dams.
- A beaver can cut down more than 200 trees a year.

A Wishing World

I wish I could speak with dolphins, To understand their clicks, beeps and whistles, To talk with them about the depths of the vast ocean, Hear their wisdom from years of seeing the grand sea, To see their problems with us humans, And strive to change their ideas about us. Yet I know this is not possible, For the scientists of this world have not created, The technology that holds the key to my wish. So I’ll keep trying to bring humans from the dark, And make my wish come true.

—Travis Hefner, 13, Wexford, Penn
The Squirrel and the Oak Tree

After the Earth was created, Mother Nature was placed in charge to make certain that any problems arising would be kindly and fairly resolved. On Monday, the first day she opened her new office, a giant oak tree blew in all in a tizzy. Every limb was waving to and fro. Mrs. Oak was so upset she had to catch her breeze before she could tell Mother Nature her troubles.

"After my new acorns drop to the ground, I have no way to take care of them. The sun dries them out or the rain makes them too soggy to be able to grow. If I can’t plant my acorns, I’m afraid there won’t be enough trees to fill the forests. What am I to do, what am I to do?” she barked.

"Oh dear, oh dear, what would the forests be if there were no trees in them?” Mother Nature sighed. "Please, come back next week. I will try to find a solution to your problem."

"I must think of something, but what?” Mother Nature thought as Mrs. Oak lumbered away. She thought and thought but could not come up with one idea. She knew this problem was going to be a hard nut to crack.

On Tuesday, the second day Mother Nature’s office was open, a very thin and tattered squirrel limped in to ask for help.

"How can I help you Mrs. Squirrel?” Mother Nature asked.

"The bobcat, the wolf, the coyote, the fox, the cougar and others come into my home on the ground and take my children away while they are still babies. I’ve no place to hide, and food is difficult to find when you are continuously being chased. I’m afraid that soon there will be no squirrels left in the woods,” she chattered.

"Oh dear, oh dear,” said Mother Nature. “This is very serious. Do come back next week, and I will think very hard about your problem.” When Mrs. Squirrel left, Mother Nature thought and thought, but she could not come up with one idea. She knew the answer would be a hard one to trap.

Monday arrived and Mother Nature was still up a tree on how to assist Mrs. Oak in planting her acorns. She was still in a stew on how to help Mrs. Squirrel as well. She opened her office door the slightest amount and peeked into the waiting room. There she spied the great Oak and Mrs. Squirrel waiting to see her. "Oh dear, oh dear, what to do, what to do?” she mumbled.

Just then Mr. Fox slyly came into the waiting room, for he too had a problem. Upon seeing him, Mrs. Squirrel was so alarmed she jumped straight up into Mrs. Oak’s arms. The Oak tree held Mrs. Squirrel close until her tail had settled down. Mr. Fox went in to talk to Mother Nature.

“I feel so safe here in your arms,” Mrs. Squirrel sighed, “I wish I could stay here forever.” The great Oak rustled her leaves and said she wished someone could make her acorns feel as safe and well cared for.

Mrs. Squirrel began jumping up and down. She chattered that she would take care of Mrs. Oak’s little nuts. She and her family would plant acorns all day if Mrs. Oak would allow them to live safely in her arms. Mrs. Oak swayed to and fro and blew a soft breeze. “If you would do that for me, then I will make more than enough nuts to plant. Then you and your family will have plenty of food to eat as well.”

And so Mrs. Squirrel and Mrs. Oak went back to the forest the very best of friends, each helping themselves by helping the other. To this day, the partnership continues. The squirrel stores some acorns in its nest high in the Oak’s strong branches and then plants the rest. During the long winter it digs up and eats some of the acorns it had planted but is always sure to leave many to grow into great oak trees. This is the squirrel’s way of saying thank you to the strong oak for the food and shelter.

Mother Nature is very happy too. When her children find ways to work together to solve their problems, her smile is as big as the sunrise.

—Jared McKlintoc, Richmond, Virginia.
Nature Poetry

Trees
Trees are old and ancient spirits
Put on Earth to guide those who listen.
Mysterious as they are
If you listen
You can uncover their secrets.
They’re sanctuaries to wanderers
Birds, squirrels and other animals.
They reach to the sky
Listening to the gods.
In that manner
They know what’s to come.
So if you need help
Listen.
Not with your ears
But with your heart
To trees.
If there are no trees to listen to
Then the wanderers will be lost.
And what’ll we do with our hearts
Now covered in frost?
—Alexandria Corrie, 9, Portland, OR.

Nostalgia
Dry, hot air
of July.
Storm clouds rolling over
peaks of the Rocky Mountains
Coyotes whispering
throughout the night.
Lightning flickering
in my window.
Tan earth, blue sky,
smoldering sun
I miss you.
Counting stars
in the backyard,
while lying on the trampoline.
Singing in the car
driving through the desert.
I miss you.
—Tori Medeiros, New City, NY.

Peaceful
Sand beneath your feet
Wind blowing through your wispy hair
The peace of the ocean.
—Carly Mathisen, 14, Gibsonia, PA.

My Farm
The goats are eating blackberry leaves.
I’m cold. I should have worn a jacket.
The daisies are opening.
The blueberries are budding out.
The goats are hungry,
they are trying to climb over the gate.
When I pour the grain in the tray,
they eat as fast as they can.
I gather the eggs in the chicken house.
The big white rooster comes in
and starts scratching.
I reach in the nesting box.
I keep a sharp eye on the rooster,
and he keeps a sharp eye on me.
—Alison Helzer, 8, Pleasant Hill, OR.

Moon
The moon is the light
The glowing sun of the night
The home of the stars.
—Kevin Hughes, 13, Wexford, PA.

Hoof Beats on the Wind
I am told in ancient legends
Of times before man
Of dreams no human has ever had
Of hoof beats on the wind
Of the sons of the hunt
Within our veins
The world was caught
In an ever-widening arch
—Helen Plamp, 17, Superior, Wisconsin.

El Durazno
El Durazno
Inocencia, cuando
Los niños lo comen
Son frescos como
El aire y su cáscara se
Siente tela de seda
Es amor porque es dulce.
Te deja los labios
Dulces y te deja sus gotitas
De jugo en los labios rosados.
—Rubi Ruiz, 13, Mexican American, Katy, Texas.

The Peach
The Peach
Innocence.
When children eat you,
They taste the freshness
of the air.
Your peel is silk.
You are love because you are sweet.
You leave the sweetness
of love in
Drops of juice on rosy lips.
—Rubi Ruiz, 13, Mexican American, Katy, Texas.
**Adaptation**

We share our earth with more than 40 million different species of plants and animals, most of which are insects. When the environment where a plant or animal lives changes, the plant or animal must also change to survive in the new environment. This process of change is called adaptation.

In order to adapt to changes in the environment, plants and animals often develop some strange or unusual characteristics. They can change color, learn to swim, or hunt at night instead of during the day. They can change their diets or their smell and even grow extra limbs!

*Here are a few unusual adaptations:*

**Tenebrionid (Tuh-NEE-bree-AH-nid) Beetle:** This beetle gets all the water it needs from fog. Standing on a dune in the desert where it lives, the beetle raises its rear-end into the fog. Droplets of water collect on its body and run down toward its mouth for it to drink.

**American House Spider:** The cobweb of this spider is a trap which snares insects that walk under it. When an insect walks into the web it is hoisted up off the ground and hangs until the spider eats it. These webs can even catch mice!

**Black-Eyed Susan:** These yellow and black flowers seem just like any other wildflower you might find in a field. However, they have special ultraviolet markings on their petals that can't be seen by human eyes. These markings act as runway lights that help insects land, like an airplane.

—Carolyn Hill, nature educator, Annapolis, Maryland.

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**Nature Feature**

**Born Into This World**

Born into this world,
I await my mother’s love,
And blessings of those who care.
The first star smiles at me,
The first cuckoo sings my song.

Born into this world,
I wait to be loved and to be hurt.
I wait for the daggers of hatred and envy
to strike

And draw my life's blood,
Leaving deep scars that can never be hidden.
I wait for the dust of mortals to touch my feet
The washing of a thousand tides will not wash
them clean.

Born into this world,
I hope to see the light of the sun
and the dark of the night and love both.
I hope to feel the radiance of creation and
the harmony of happiness,
know the dungeons of grief and the
decay of death.

I breathe my first breath,
I cry my first cry,
And wait for the world to take me into its arms
And sing me life’s lullaby.

—Sravana Reddy, 15, lives in Bangalore, India.
*Besides English, she also speaks and writes Telugu.*

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**The Lightning Tree**

I first saw “the lightning tree” on a visit to Olympic National Forest with my fifth grade class. There is a tree that stands near the beginning of the forest that is all covered in black ash from being struck by lightning.

At first we thought it was dead, but when we looked closer we could see that the top was still alive. The guide told us that the tree’s roots still hold water and help the other trees during times of drought.

We could also see that small animals took shelter in the tree. I learned that we should not be quick to cut things down or throw them away. Even if they look dead, trees might still be important.

—Miranda Timonen is a fifth-grader in Edmonds, Washington.
Calling Me Home
Grilled chicken seasoned to perfection.
A salad lightly showered
In white wine vinegarette,
The soft white rice, the sweet red beans and,
My favorite, the sweet plantains which
You baked in the oven
Softly browned.

You look at me with your
Big worn out brown
Eyes and say:
“Come porque después
de esto no hay comida.”

You look over me
As I am eating
And remembering the days
When I was home,
In my country
With my own kind
Where I was truly at peace.

Each bite takes me to a
different spot,
Where Javier and I
played “plaquita”
where Miguel and I used to fight
and I could also hear you
call me in at twelve,
for it was time to eat.

—Melissa Fajardo, 16, Congers, New York

Ant and Dove: An Indian folk tale

Once upon a time there lived an ant. This ant lived in a hole under a tree. Since it was monsoon season there were big rains. One day there was such a big thunderstorm that the ant got stuck and couldn’t do anything but float about in a puddle.

Luckily a dove watched all of this from a tree above. He felt pity for the little ant, so he broke off a leaf and put it into the water. Slowly the ant got onto the leaf. The dove picked the leaf up and brought the ant to his tree. The ant was very grateful for this.

“Thank you, great dove, for saving a little ant like me.”

“Never mind,” replied the dove, “we are neighbors and from now on we will be friends.”

So the ant and dove became best friends. One day, the ant was walking along the tree when he saw a hunter aiming at the dove. The ant quickly climbed up the hunter’s leg and bit him. The ant bit the hunter so hard that the hunter lost his balance, and the dove was saved.

Moral: A friend in need is a friend indeed.

—Charvi Ganatra, Singapore. She also sent the story in her mother tongue, Gujarati (above) from India.

A Hungry Hell
Sickening pains swirl deep within with every sucking, life-preserving breath.
Cold feet brush the hard, muddy ground, nothing to cover or blanket dirty skin.
Naked skeletons huddle in dark corners, afraid of the light, afraid of what’s to come: body-trembling life, or the stairway leading up to the bright lights ahead.
Liquid dirt pours down dry, aching throats, offering the drink of survival: Mother’s pain, a child’s continuous heart-breaking screams, churning, rumbling stomachs heard like thunder far off in the night’s desolate sky.
Each day new life enters this Earthly hell; deep new breaths of life soon seize as hungry fire takes control.
Swarms of scents, death and disease, transform into one in this waste-ridden land.
Life never began, nor will ever be complete; hunger, breath, silence.

—Lauren Eichelberger, Jefferson City, Missouri
A Prayer for the Hunt

Running Bear had a strange dream. The woods were filled with a bright light, and a young woman named Water Dance was kneeling before a tree.

Why would there be a woman in a dream about the hunt? Not that women couldn’t hunt, they often did during hard times, but it was not traditional.

Running Bear felt uneasy, but the sun rose over the sacred mountain. The birds began to sing, and things became less strange.

She-Who-Weaves made some root tea in earthen pottery, and Running Bear joined her. The first snow covered the ground lightly although patches of ground were still clear. The snow was certainly a good omen because it would be easier to follow the deer by their fresh footprints in the snow.

Water Dance came laughing up to Running Bear. He could tell she had no idea she was in his dream, so maybe all was well.

Running Bear was the spiritual leader of his tribe. Silver Wolf was the chief of the tribe, and Eagle Feather was the best hunter. Eagle Feather would send the first spear into the deer when the hunt commenced.

These three sat and ate black nuts and dried rabbit meat. They prayed together for the good of the hunt, for the good of the deer, for the good of the mountain, and for the good of the people.

It was a sacred time, and it was important to interpret the signs in the natural world all around, and within, to preserve the harmony of all things.

She-Who-Weaves came to Running Bear and said, “There seems to be much on your mind. Do not fret so.” Running Bear smiled and remembered how much he loved her. “I had a strange dream,” he said.

“Then let it fly away like a bird because your heart needs not this care,” she said. “We all need your magic for the hunt, so be well, promise?” Running Bear smiled again. “As usual you are right, my only woman, and again my heart is free.”

On the day of the hunt, Eagle Feather took ill, and due to the shortage of men, Water Dance, joined the hunt. It was she who threw the first spear, and it was straight and true.

—Jon Bush, Belmont, Massachusetts.
Several people have asked me what I think of the movement described in a recently published book and in a movie by the same name, “Pay it Forward.”

The idea of the movement is ultra simple. People make a commitment to do good deeds for other individuals; the book suggests helping three individuals. The recipients are not asked to pay the donors back or feel obligated to them. Instead, each beneficiary does good deeds for three other folks in need.

My first reaction was skeptical about “Pay it Forward.” Would people have the generosity to give to strangers without investigating whether that stranger deserved such generosity, and if they would indeed fulfill their obligations to other needy folk? To test this idea, I decided to observe human nature and record my findings. In the past two months I encountered three incidents worth recording, and I can provide witnesses to the truth of these episodes.

1. Last Friday I had to make a brief announcement before a high school assembly program. I was surprised by a strong young man in a super-hero costume riding his bicycle onto the stage as I took my seat. The audience responded to his energized talk with uproarious laughter, as he vividly described a four-month, 5,000-mile bike trip from Seattle, Washington to Boston, Massachusetts, in super-hero costume, cycling from town to town in order to carry out helpful tasks for whomever had a need.

2. “I am having a wonderful day,” a mother said to me in a phone conversation. “My daughter is home with a painful ear infection, but four of her friends came by and brought a box full of little toys, puzzles and other entertainment. They suggested that my daughter add to its contents, and that the box be passed around to the next sick child in the neighborhood after she has recovered. Isn’t that touching?”

3. I became aware of a mother struggling with a crying toddler while attempting to push a grocery cart. I watched another woman, alert to the first woman’s pain, join the chaotic scene and suggest that the mother carry the youngster while the stranger offered to push the grocery cart.

Dear readers: I never anticipated experiencing such examples of outgoing caring as described above. I conclude that what we experience depends on the eyes and heart with which we look about us. If we look for selfishness, we sense ourselves living in the mire of selfishness. If we look for generous goodness, we experience ourselves surrounded by humanity filled with a generous spirit. I commit myself to the “Pay it Forward” movement. Think of all the good deeds we can release into the world if all Skipping Stones readers accept this challenge to make a difference in the world.

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

In peace,
How would you like to be dumped in a vat of purple water? It happened to me on my first visit to India with no warning at all, and boy, did I cry! All around me my aunts, uncles and cousins were laughing. Tearful laughter replaced my wails as I realized this was supposed to be fun. The joke was on me, but I had to admit, I must have looked silly sopping wet with purple water. It was the beginning of spring; it was Holi. No time in India is so free, so full of merriment, as Holi.

All over the country people awaken to drum beats, food, festivity, and most importantly, color! Gulal (red-colored powder) and many other colors are available all over India during the month of March. Gulal is thrown on people and rubbed on faces. Many colors are mixed in water to tint the country and people with vivid hues of red, green, purple, yellow, orange and blue. Everyone roams around with rainbow-colored faces.

Holi is a celebration of many things, including the victory of good over evil. It is the legend of Holika that symbolizes this victory. Holika was the evil daughter of an even more evil king, Hiranyakashyapu. He wanted the world to pray to him as a god, but nobody wanted to pray to an evil king. The king’s own son, Prahlad, refused to pray to him. Holika was evil like her father, so they plotted against Prahlad.

Hiranyakashyapu asked Holika to take Prahlad in her lap. Holika was thought to be immune to fire, so the King lit a fire around Holika, hoping to burn Prahlad. But good won, and evil lost. Holika was burned instead. On Holi, many people light a bonfire at night to recreate Holika’s demise. They throw popcorn and sesame candy into the fire to keep it blazing high.

Holi is also the celebration of the harvest and the spring season. There are street parties on every corner, music coming from all directions, practical jokes, dancing and merry making. All day long, rainbow-colored people drop into friends’ houses to share drink and food and, of course, to dump them into vats of colored water. The only rule is to have fun!

After my very wet initiation to the Holi celebration, I enjoyed the day like no other. I must have been a sight at the end of the day, having been drenched with water pistols, hoses, water balloons and buckets. The gulal rubbed on my face might have made me look like an alien instead of a person, but I looked no different than everybody else that day. I made sure that I wasn’t the only one getting colored and soaked.

—Milan Sandhu, Framingham, Massachusetts. “The weather in New England is never conducive to a proper outdoor Holi. The only choice becomes renting school halls or waiting until the weather is warmer. Both are poor substitutes.” Photos show Indian-American children after an Americanized Holi celebration in the greater Boston area.
Thousands of years ago, Guatemala was home to one of the brightest ancient civilizations, the Mayas. Now the country has grown with the world, never leaving behind the roots that made it one of the world’s most beautiful cultures. Guatemala is filled with thousands of astonishing scenes, found around each corner in the cities and on each path in the fields. Its weather is amazing. Believe it or not, it’s spring all year long. That is what gives it its nickname, “The Country of Eternal Spring.”

The Guatemala of the new millennium still reflects its ancient roots. Most of the population is indigenous—descendants of the Maya. Many Mayan traditions are still embedded in their everyday life, including food, clothing and daily activities. Guatemala has 33 indigenous tribes, each with its own language and traditions.

Guatemala is filled with different landmarks, ranging from active volcanoes and beautiful lakes, to lovely rainforests and black-sand beaches. Guatemala is home to hundreds of endangered species of flora and fauna. Today Guatemala is a great tourist destination since it has many things to offer to both the tourist who looks for adventure and the tourist who seeks only a calm, soothing time. I personally encourage you to come visit our beautiful country and have the time of your life while you are at it.

—Text and photo by Stefan Benchoam C., American School of Guatemala, Guatemala City.

Ipala

A majestic chain of volcanoes crosses through the beautiful heartland of Guatemala. Each volcano is unique, but the Ipala Volcano is one of the most precious. This ancient, extinct geographic formation has a crater about 600 meters in diameter. A lagoon of crystalline water inside the crater makes this place an awe-inspiring sight.

The Ipala volcano is located in the eastern part of our country. From the capital, it takes about three and a half hours to reach the trailhead. The hike takes about an hour and a half to the crater and the lagoon. The summit is about 10 more minutes. Around the lagoon, the crater climbs a couple hundred feet more. On the parts of the crater which are above water, there is a marvelous forest. Squirrels, birds and other small animals live here. This forest contrasts with the rest of the volcano which is arid and dry.

During the last five years, there has been growing concern about the conservation of this beautiful place. Two pumps were constructed along the lagoon’s shore to supply water to the towns at the base of the volcano. The water level has been decreasing in the last years. Also, the forest has been cut down in certain parts. This fragile ecosystem is like an oasis in the middle of an arid land. It is very important to preserve it.

Fortunately the Guatemalan government has designated this place as a preserved area. Rangers have been assigned to look after this ecosystem. There are certain areas of the forest that are restricted to the public so that wildlife is not tampered with. Also, recycle and garbage bins have been placed on the shore of the lagoon so that people visiting this place won’t litter. Through these measures, there is still hope that future generations will be able to marvel at places like this.

—Rodrigo Pemueller, 17, American School of Guatemala in Guatemala City. “There are over 33 volcanoes in Guatemala, of which I have climbed 25. I love nature and hiking. My goal is to climb all the volcanoes in my country.”
These Boots Were Made for Talking

Much art is born of oppression. Perhaps none more so than Gumboot dancing, the legacy of black South African miners who toiled miles beneath the earth’s surface at the turn of the 20th Century.

With the discovery of gold in the late 1880's, thousands of South African men left their wives and children for long periods of time to work in the mines. Many of these men migrated from rural areas or neighboring colonies to the Rand, an area near Johannesburg, which required huge labor forces.

Ruled by government laws and policies which significantly limited their rights, black miners were subject to unjust and horrendous working conditions. Paid lower wages than white miners and relegated exclusively to menial work, black workers were forbidden to speak in the mines and many times were chained or shackled to their stations in the darkness.

Work was back-breaking and repetitive, the heat and humidity stifling. Wading knee-deep in infected waters, due to frequent flooding, the miners would often develop ulcers on their feet and legs, causing lost work time. Rather than drain the floors of the mines, the bosses decided to provide the men with rubber Wellington boots, or gumboots—a much cheaper solution. Along with these boots, the miners' uniforms consisted of only a pair of pants and a bandana worn around the head to absorb sweat. In defiance of the rule of silence, the enslaved men devised their own Morse Code by rhythmically stomping and hand-slapping their Wellington boots which enabled them to communicate with one another in the dark.

With time, these movements became a form of entertainment to the miners. When not working, they would elaborate and perform their rhythmic routines for each other as a means of alleviating homesickness and helping them to forget their dismal surroundings.

With the addition of more contemporary movements, music and song, this South African art form garnered unusual mass appeal. Today, the tradition of Gumboot dancing lives on. This joyous and life-affirming art form is performed with thick gumboots and ankle bracelets made of bottle caps to re-create the sound of the miners’ chains. It is applauded and appreciated by all who witness a performance of this rhythmic, high-energy tribute to generations of miners whose human ingenuity and creativity triumphed in the bleakest of times.

—Anne Renaud, Westmount, Quebec, Canada.

My Night

Diamond-cut stars push through the dark night bright blue and yellow, small pieces of the sun. Moonlight penetrates my bedroom window, reflecting off my blinds awakening me from sleep. Cool air and silent streets absorb my thoughts, my thoughts of peace, my thoughts of quiet, my night.

—Connie Reina, 16, New City, New York.

—Katie Wilt, grade 8, Rockford, Michigan.
The Hunt: Strong hunting skills are necessary for survival. The Waazabi people of Tanzania work together to build tools for the long-awaited hunt. The women create bows from stripped tree branches, and the men make the poisonous arrows from sharpened stones.

Kids: A child’s playfulness increases with anticipation of the rainy season. Rain is scarce during the merciless Tanzanian summer.

Artist’s Statement

Tanzania, Africa, with its troubled past remains one of the poorest countries in our world. But the people of Tanzania foster constructive endeavors in education and social equality. One can only acknowledge their heroic efforts on the path to self-reliance.

My sojourn in Tanzania began with its people and their welcoming gestures and smiles. They offered me, a foreign guest, an incredible sense of hospitality with their genuine embraces.

The presence of Wilson, my guide and friend, was essential. Born to the Maasai, he had an aspiration to see the outside world, to observe and experience different cultures, and to extend his knowledge to those with an open mind.

I journeyed through the beautiful plains of Tanzania, homeland to Mt. Kilimanjaro, Ngorongoro Crater and the Serengeti National Park. This land sustains a rich cultural heritage with more than 120 tribes and a diversity of wildlife.

What seemed a simple safari proved to be a heart-warming pilgrimage through the lives and heartland of the Maasai and Waazabi tribes. There was a sense of immediate unity, acceptance and respect among us, which is rare in today’s self-absorbed society. They were not afraid to share a most precious asset, compassion.

An untamed and courageous tusker in the wilds of the Ngorongoro Crater. Poaching is still a threat for elephants.

contd. on page 19.
Respecting Boundaries:
Some Maasai believe that a portrait could be damaging to their soul. As in other cultures, respecting boundaries is important.

Hungry Eyes: Eyes that seek salvation and understanding. The survival rate in the arid Tanzanian climate is low due to the scarcity of food.

My journey also evoked historical images of adventurers who repeatedly dishonored the African cultures. Today we as a modern society continue to brazenly ignore the disease that lurks in each one of us—greed. It festers into famine, creating anger, frustration and even death. It takes its toll on the most precious of souls, the children.

© Xavier Z. Avila, Los Angeles, California.

Maasai Unity: The young and the elderly gather and chant their humble thanks for blessings. Trees play an invigorating role, providing essential shade from the relentless heat of the Serengeti Plains.
Child of Africa

Who knows what goes on in the mind of a seven-year-old? Does it really register that you are taking one of the biggest steps of your life? Or is it just another adventure? I scarcely remember whether or not I felt any pain or even a sense of loss. When my grandparents tearfully kissed me goodbye, and our furniture slowly began to disappear, I wonder if I realized how important this all would be.

The first half of my childhood was spent in Cape Town, South Africa. When I was seven my father decided to go where people in his profession, occupational therapy, were needed more (and therefore better paid). Our family (Mom, Dad, my younger sister, two dogs and I) was living in a two-bedroom house in a nice neighborhood. In those days, if you were white, you were automatically considered better, more well-off, and were treated better. I grew up with parents who, thankfully, taught me differently.

We were truly Africans, all of our friends and family lived there. Leaving must have been so hard on my parents. In the time since we have moved, God has brought South Africa to us through various friends, my grandparents, and two uncles. But many of the people we once knew so well are lost to us forever, having died or moved on.

I remember, in a dream-like way, the plane, the overnight stop in London, the 22-hour flight, the airports. I even think I saw the Alps, but since it was 2 a.m., I can’t be certain. My parents must have been so scared. Imagine arriving on a new continent with just a few suitcases (our furniture was not to arrive for three months) and two young children. We never even met our temporary host family until we arrived. I remember Mom was so scared about people suing us (Oh, what strange ideas foreigners have of Americans!) that she wouldn’t let me push a shopping cart for two years. A boy at my new public school told me that since I’d sneezed on him, he’d sue my parents for all they were worth—and we believed him!

People didn’t understand our accents or lingo so every time we went out of the house we had another adventure. Did you know that Americans drive on the wrong side of the road, that the light-switches are upside-down, and the names for trucks, sweaters, sneakers and red lights are totally weird? They are actually called lorries, jerseys, tekkies, and robots.

I never felt that I fit in with the U.S. schools. Imagine a school where you didn’t walk in two straight lines, where you didn’t wear uniforms, and didn’t say “sir” unless you wanted to! Home schooling, even as a last resort, was the best thing that could have happened to me.

Six years after the move from halfway across the world, I still have traces of Africa left in me. My mom still speaks her native language, Afrikaans, and is trying to teach it to me. We have a few native African phrases we use to scare people. My parents’ British-sounding accents are still there, my mom’s more pronounced than my dad’s. We have African artifacts on the walls, and I don’t think I will ever get into the habit of wearing shoes, or that I will ever stop crying when I see the African plains on “The Lion King.” The child of Africa that I was will never go away, and I will always have a love for Africa and its people.

I know that I have had a wonderful experience compared to so many who will never leave their hometowns. I have been blessed to meet so many different people, to experience so many cultures, to explore so many different parts of the world.

I know that no matter how “Americanized” I become, I will always be an African at heart.

—Cara Rogers, Greenville, Tennessee. Photo: Life on a “homeland” for Blacks during Apartheid.
How about spending your next vacation in a country where one of the national foods is *potjiekos*? This meal is a lot like the country itself — many different people thrown together in a big mix. The result is a unique blend of tribes and traditions. The place is South Africa, where people drive on the left-hand side of the road, and sneakers are called “tackies.”

Did you know that there are 11 official languages in South Africa? They are: English, Afrikaans, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Xhosa and Zulu. The reason for this is the hugely diverse population. Three quarters of South Africa’s 39 million inhabitants are Blacks. Their ancestors began arriving from central and northern Africa 15 thousand years ago.

Six million South Africans are white, of European descent. Approximately 60% of them are Afrikaners, descendants of Dutch settlers. The early Dutch pioneer farmers (also known as Boers) developed their own language, Afrikaans. Based on Dutch, it also has Malay, French, German and African influences.

English-speaking descendants of British settlers make up 35% of the European population.

Indians came to South Africa in 1860 to work as laborers in the sugar cane plantations in KwaZulu-Natal. Today one million Indians live in that province, mostly in the city of Durban. They make up one of the largest communities of Indians outside of India.

The food in South Africa is as diverse as its languages. Have you ever had a grilled ostrich steak or dined on *waterblombredejie*? How about a *samosa* or a snack of *bi/tong*?

There are strange-sounding words for things other than food too. Let’s begin with the title of this article, “Ja well, no fine!” This expression means “okay then.” I resort to using it at dinner when Mom tells me to eat my *pap*.

Pap (pronounced “pup”) has the texture and taste of wet baby powder. Many South Africans like it, and it is served at *braais*.

A *braai* is the first thing you will be invited to when you visit South Africa. It is a backyard barbecue, and it takes place whatever the weather, so you go even if it’s raining like mad and hang on a cold.

“Hang of a...” means the same as the English “heck of a...” as in “I have a heck of a headache.” I can say, “I had a hang of a good time at the braai.”

“Stroppy” means rebellious and disrespectful. For instance, a child who throws his pap on the floor is stroppy. You may overhear the following comment during a basketball game, “Dennis Rodman is real *stroppy* He better watch out because his opponents could knock him on his guava.”

Guava. Everybody knows that guava is a fruit, but in South Africa a guava is also a butt. But it is inappropriate to use this expression with anyone who is not a friend. Also it is not polite to laugh if the Cape Doctor knocks a stranger onto his guava.

The “Cape Doctor” is a south-easter wind that blows in summer months. It is called the Cape Doctor because old-timers said it blew the city’s bad air out to sea, along with street garbage such as old newspapers.

“Lekker” is a word used by many to express approval. If you see a shiny new bicycle in the store window, you might exclaim, “Ag, that bike is lekkerrrr!” Draw out the last syllable for effect.

“Ag” is one of the most useful South African words. Pronounced “ach,” it is used to start a reply when asked a tricky question, as in “Ag, I don’t know.” This powerful little word can also stand alone as a signal of irritation or of pleasure.

“Fixed up” means that something is under control. If Mother asks me to take out the rubbish (garbage) I say, “I’ve taken it out already. All fixed up, mom.”

“Isit?” This is a great word in conversations and can be used when you don’t have a clever reply to a difficult question. For example, if someone tells you that this is an interesting article, it is appropriate for you to respond by saying, “Isit?”

---Sarah A. Kirk now lives in Englewood, New Jersey.
Ansino, You Were My Best Friend!

I have been feeling restless lately, as if I had some kind of a mission to accomplish. My mind has been urging me to write about the best friend I had in grammar school. I was 13 or so when I met him. His name was Ansino Mohammed. He lived about ten minutes away from my house in Eritrea. His parents lived in Yemen, and he lived with his grandparents. Often he would wait for me outside, and we would walk together. Our school was far away. We had to walk for 30 minutes. Early in the morning, listening to distant crows waking the city and to the prayers of muezzins and priests, we would walk through the quiet and clean streets of Asmara.

We would pass the Commercial Bank, built with bulletproof glass and surrounded by cans and ropes that deformed its beauty and made ugly sounds whenever anybody came close. The Ethiopian soldiers that guarded it would smile at us sometimes, but we would pretend not to see them. Our fun would begin when we reached the marketplace, Mercato. Then we would stop at every closed shop to see the products. When we tired of this we would begin shouting and laughing and racing as if we owned the whole city.

When we reached the cathedral, we would look at each other as if we could read each other’s mind and run up the stairs, laughing until we stopped at its big, cool doors with the picture of St. Mary and Jesus Christ. All of a sudden we would compose ourselves, push the big doors open and go inside. It did not matter to us that we didn’t belong to that church. I went to the Protestant church, and he was a Muslim. We had visited it several times, so we knew what to expect once we were inside. We would find old women, most of whom were Italians, kneeling with their rosary and chanting prayers—Ave Maria... We would stand on our tiptoes, dip our fingers in the holy water and make the sign of the cross. Then we would sit and remain composed for several minutes. We loved the cool, quiet, peaceful atmosphere of the church. Now when I think of it, if we were asked why we went there, our explanation would be something like this: As children we understood God/Allah better than anybody else. We knew that He would not discriminate against us. We were His children. A Christian, a Muslim, a girl, a boy...we are all equal before His eyes and welcome at His house.

Once we were out in the open again, we would resume our shouting and laughing until we reached our school. In those times we innocently believed that a boy and a girl could be friends, but the adults thought differently. The closer we became, the more people began to talk about us. Soon it was seen as a very big issue, the kind that required a family forum. There was an immediate decision, and the case was closed. He was to leave for Yemen and not see me again. It came as a great shock to both of us. All our young minds could ask was, “But why?” He never even came to say goodbye.

Now, ten years later, I think of him and wish to see him and talk about those days we enjoyed as children. He was funny and sweet. He was a brother to me.

I am the kind of person who is usually unemotional. Tears do not come easily to my eyes, and my heart does not leap with happiness when something good happens to me. I have always lingered at this point. The only reason I can think of is that maybe I’m afraid of getting hurt and finding no one beside me for comfort. I am afraid of losing the “good,” and so I would rather not have it than have it and lose it. Ansino was one of the “good” things that happened to me. I lost him, and I lost several friends after him too.

Ansino, I wish you the best wherever you are, and thank you for all those old times. I never got a chance to tell you this: You were my best friend.

—Rahel A. Zere was raised in Eritrea, in northeastern Africa. She now resides in Los Angeles, California.
Colombia es mucho más que drogas, guerrilla y corrupción

Colombia es uno de los más bellos países de Sur América. Tiene una área de 437,000 millas cuadradas, es igual al área de Portugal, España y Francia unidas. Es el único país de Sudamerica que tiene costas en los dos océanos Atlántico y Pacífico. La cordillera de los Andes atraviesa el territorio.

Colombia es un país de extremos contrastes geográficos como el desierto de la Guajira, la selva de la costa del Pacífico que tiene el record de mayores lluvias en el mundo y La Serranía de la Macarena, una desolada formación montañosa de alrededor de 120 Kmts. de longitud. Posée pequeñas islas, la más grande es el Archipiélago de San Andrés.

Colombia tiene una población de 44 millones de habitantes. Su lengua es el español, la mayoría de su población es católica y la moneda es el Peso. Acerca de las costumbres familiares es muy común que los hijos vivan con sus padres hasta que se casan. Luego cuando ya viven solos todos los fines de semana se reúnen con sus familias para pasar juntos.

“Ajiaco” es una de sus comidas típicas, es un a sopa, que se prepara con pollo, papas, maíz y guascas (una hierba colombiana), El “Vallenato” es una música muy popular, pero cada región tienen su propia música y el “fútbol” es el deporte nacional.

En este momento Colombia tiene graves problemas sociales y la población civil está en la mitad del conflicto, pero ellos no pierden la esperanza de encontrar la paz. Los Colombianos son honestos, fuertemente trabajadores y a pesar de los grandes problemas, están luchando para hacer de Colombia un lugar agradable para vivir.

Colombia es también gente como Juan Pablo Montoya, piloto de carreras, Shakira, famosa cantante o Gabriel García Marquez, premio Nobel. Desafortunadamente las noticias internacionales no recuerdan que Colombia es mucho más que drogas y guerrilla. Colombia es millones de honestos colombianos, deliciosa comida, hermosa música y maravillosos lugares para visitar.

Colombia is one of the most beautiful countries in South America. It has an area of about 437,000 sq. miles, equal to the area of Portugal, Spain and France put together. It’s the only South American country with both Pacific and Atlantic coastlines. The Andes mountain range runs through the territory.

Colombia is a country of geographic contrasts and extremes. It has the desert of the Guajira; the jungle of the Pacific coast, with world record rainfall; and the Macarena, an isolated mountain formation about 120 km. long. Colombia also has several small islands, the largest of which is the archipelago of San Andres.

Colombia has a population of 44 million, mostly Catholic. The language is Spanish, and the currency is the Peso. It’s very common for children to live with their parents until they get married. When they start living on their own, they often get together with their family on weekends.

“Ajiaco” is a common food; it’s a stew with chicken, potatoes, corn and guascas (a typical Colombian spice). Vallenato is a popular type of music, but every region has its own music. Soccer is the national sport.

Nowadays, Colombia has serious social problems, and the citizens are caught in the middle of the conflict. But we haven’t lost the hope of finding peace. Colombian people are honest, strong workers, and despite big problems, they are struggling to make Colombia a nice place to live.

Colombia is also home to people like Juan Pablo Montoya, a race car driver; Shakira, a famous singer; and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the Nobel Prize winner. Unfortunately international news doesn’t recognize that Colombia is much more than drugs and guerrilla warfare. Colombia is millions of honest Colombians, delicious food, beautiful music and marvelous places to visit.

—Martha Elías is from Bogotá, Colombia.
Beauty and the Beast: War in Colombia

My country is wracked by a 40-year-long civil war. Recently, three of my classmates were kidnapped by a guerrilla group.

(Warning! This writing contains graphic descriptions of violence. —editor)

Little Stanley

Noon is hot, hot as the blood that spills across the field and sings in the veins. Battle is hot, and evening brings clouds and the coolness of death. Like the men below, the clouds wander across the sky like wraiths. Some are gray, others are white; all are tinged pink with the light—or is it the blood of the battleground, or is it the dying sun?

But the beauty of the evening is lost on the shepherd. He lies on his back in a field—not a field of axe and horse and blade, but a field of grass and scythe and plow. He bears no witness to the glory of the evening. Like the snowy clouds above, his flock of sheep are stained with pink. The animals commit no treason, bear no arms nor take any sides in the conflict. They are put to the sword and the torch nonetheless.

Pescador

The mist dresses the mountains silver during the night. On the top of one mountain there are no trees, save one, a majestic tree whose branches reach up in worship to the stars. A tree so tall and stout that the farmers planted their fields around it rather than waste time trying to cut it down. Tonight the moon blesses it, weaving liquid silver amongst the branches and leaves, until the eye cannot tell where the moonlight ends and the tree begins.

Soft as a lover, the mist rises tenderly and silently from the ground and the trees. What tendrils remain are burned away by the rising sun. Abruptly, every bird in the jungle lends its voice to the cacophony of howls, chirps and screeches. The morning chorus tries desperately to drown out the silence of man.

Alejandro de Vega lies in this morning. His wife lies beside him. Where her face would be, there is now a crimson spiderweb cloth. They were killed in their bed at night. The men burst in on them and, without pleasure or regret, fired.

Each house in Pescador tells the same story with fresh horror. Babies murdered in the cradle, old folks slain in their beds. A man who tried to flee lies dead in the town’s only street. His dog pads up to him, licks his face and noses his arm. Then it sits back and lets loose a mournful howl.

The raiders are driving off some cattle as plunder, others are slaughtered. One lies dead by the stream, half in, half out of the water. A leaf floats down and drifts upon the water, oily and tainted by the cattle’s blood. In the fields beyond, the field mice cower in their holes from the shadow of a kestrel. The leaf floats on the water; the hawk stoops in the field. In the midst of horror walks life, and beauty sits in the lap of death.

Beyond the Podium

The world’s finest scientists, writers and humanitarians are laid out before him. As he makes his way to the podium, perhaps he reflects on how these men and women have book deals and research grants and huge budgets, more money than his country’s health service. Many of them come from countries which have grown fat exploiting developing countries. Perhaps he wonders if they look down on his country, with its civil war and insecurity. Do they see it as barbaric?

The first Colombian Nobel Prize winner reaches the podium. The polite applause dies down. The air conditioner hums, the dull roar of a tame animal. Outside, the wind blows free, screaming its joy. His mouth opens. Words come out:

“My country has suffered 40 years of civil war. Many of you live in places where you do not fear being kidnapped and forced to march for years in a jungle. But how can you expect my country to match the point you are at, if we have been independent for much less than you have? Do not forget that in the beginning of your nations, the stench of death and burnt farms and villages was only too common.”
Beyond the podium, past the concrete freeways and chain mesh fences, are the jungles and mountains of Colombia. Here, the countrymen of the first Colombian Nobel Prize winner, like the Europeans before them, bleed and pray and curse and die. And the bumblebee flies anyway.

News of a Kidnapping

Every morning you wake up and don’t think about it. You get dressed, brush your teeth and eat breakfast, still not thinking about it. You get ready for school, get in the car, pull out of the driveway. Then it hits you. This was exactly what three of your classmates did one ordinary morning, but as they were driving to your school, something happened. A car pulled out in front of them, forcing them to stop, and guns were aimed through the windows. A few minutes later they were on the road again, but they were not on the way to school. Instead, they were being driven to the mountains, where they would be forced to march. Walk and walk and walk. Eventually they would reach a hut, their home for the following months. Or years. Or forever. No blankets, just wooden bunks covered by a tarp. In mountains where the wind howls, and you need two layers of clothing to stay warm. But they were going to school, not the Andes Mountains. They were wearing T-shirts and shorts, not jeans, sweaters and jackets. And if they should ask their captors for blankets, they say, “Why should you get blankets when our comrades are sleeping on the floor in a prison?” So they shiver and starve and march.

But it wasn’t you. So don’t worry. The guerrillas are like lightning, they never strike the same place—at least not in the same storm. So go to school; our other friends are there. It’s not as though kids don’t still laugh in the hallways. We put up posters and organize rallies and marches. But the guerrillas have been here for 40 years. Why didn’t we do anything before? We make speeches and listen to them. Is all this stemming from a sensation of guilt perhaps? Do we all feel guilty? Guilt for having at the back of our minds a sensation of relief at not having been chosen? We are like the prisoners in the concentration camps of the Second World War. If someone else has been “selected,” you’ll live until the next “selection.” And like the Jews, we push the thought of abduction to the back of our minds. We’ve been here forever. I doubt anything will happen. It’s just rumors. Our whole life is here, where else could we go? So we wait and stall and procrastinate. Until maybe one day they pull our names out of the hat. One morning, we get up, groom ourselves, and leave the house on the way to school. But we never get there...

—Daniel Henry Pachico, 17, is a high school student in Colegio Bolivar, Colombia. Photos by Martha Elías of Bogotá, Colombia.
En Una Mirada

Stone blue eyes
stare at me
hatred, prejudice seeping
from those two round white globes,
blinking occasionally
en una mirada.

They cannot penetrate the barrier of my skin.
They remain fixated,
captured like strangled fish
in a finely woven net of physical appearance.

You are different, they screech.
You are abnormal, they sneer,
something that wasn’t meant to be.

I look back at myself,
unable to see through my insecurity.
The face of the white Latina
glaring back from the mirror.
I am the mirage of my displaced identity,
I see it all
en una mirada.

In one look I am outside of myself,
the racist scrutinizer,
superficial convict,
prisoner within the tangled cage
of my self-inflicted oppression.

One-girl jury,
my eyes like whips,
like lasers
lacerating the
smooth white skin
that stretches over the golden bones
of my youth.

I realize that I cannot capture my soul
in this reflection.
I am not my enemy, but myself.
And so I breathe this pride,
I see myself as the Latina I am,
en una mirada.

—Janiva Cifuentes-Hiss, 17, Colombian American, Olympia, Washington. Art: Mike Salazar, TX

Homesick

Yes, you can ask me,
Am I homesick?

Usually I would say yes but not this time.
I lost my 5’5” body in the colorful crowd
on Michigan Avenue.

My mind lost all memories,
as I flew 1,000 feet.
The wind carried it into Lake Michigan,
and the tangerine sunset
dyed my heart into a sweet, juicy lust
for Chicago, Illinois.

Endless skyscrapers,
millions of faces.

As my tiny mind tries to comprehend all of this,
impossible.

How can I remember home?
I flow with the street’s beat,
the rhythm so rich.

I indulge in more,
but each stomach cannot become full,
and that is when I crave
the delicious flavor of Arizona.

But I am not full, yet.

—Mikaela Crank, 14, Native American, Kayenta, AZ

Taller Than The Trees

I wish I could be taller
Above the birds and trees
Above the telephone wires
Up to the trees above
So I could finally look down
Instead of always up.

But I know
That it will not come true.
For now I’ll stick
To hats and platform shoes.
Maybe someday I’ll get tall
But for now, I’m just small.

—Jennifer Yesenosky, 13, Gibsonia, Penn.
Beyond Names

The yellow school bus from the reservation squealed to a stop, and the double doors opened with a loud HUFF. Lorraine Posey pressed her face against the chilled window pane, trying to calm the dizzy feeling in her head and stomach.

"Welcome to white-man school, Rainy," joked her cousin, Celeste. That was the way Celeste was—always able to shrug off a problem with a laugh. But Rainy was different. Ever since she had heard the reservation school was going to close, she had lived with a pot of fear boiling inside her.

"Smile!" said Celeste in Ute, the language they both spoke at home. "Guin’nee!"

No use coming to school looking like a snapping turtle, thought Rainy. She forced a smile across her face.

Inside, Celeste and Rainy found that there were three fifth-grade classrooms in the white-man school, and they were to be in different ones. Celeste squeezed Rainy’s hand for courage as the bell rang.

Rainy found her room and slid into a desk near the back of the room.

"We have a new Native American student joining us today," her teacher announced.

Rainy tried to look around the classroom full of new faces, but everything seemed blurry to her. She could not make herself smile. Why did the teacher have to single her out?

It was hard to concentrate. In her old school, the teachers would sometimes explain things in Ute. Now everything came at her too fast and all in English.

When the bell rang for recess, Rainy hurried to find Celeste. Her foot stumbled on something on the playground and she fell forward.

"Hey, you ran into me!" a boy’s voice yelled.

"I’m sorry—," Rainy began. Then she looked up and saw that the boy was grinning wickedly.

"No problem, Brownie," he said, and swaggered off. Rainy’s face felt hot. Is that how other kids saw her too? Did they only see her brown skin?

"You should have popped him in the mouth!" Celeste said angrily when Rainy told her.

Rainy shook her head. "No, I don’t want him to hate me," she said.

Celeste looked disgusted. "He already does hate you. From now on, stick with me."

After lunch, the class lined up to go to the restrooms. As they jostled down the hall, a girl with reddish hair and bright blue eyes smiled at her.

"Hi, I’m Shelly. It’s kinda hard being the new kid, huh?"

Rainy was surprised. She nodded, then decided to make more of an effort. "I guess I’m a little shy."

Suddenly she felt a hard shove. It was the boy again.

"Excuse me, Brownie!" he said, laughing, as he moved on down the hall.

"Just ignore Devin," Shelly said. "He’s mean to everyone."

Rainy hung her head to hide the tears springing to her eyes.

That night her grandmother chased her out of the kitchen because she wasn’t paying attention.

"Go help your grandpa feed the animals," she said. "I don’t want to see you get burned or cut your fingers off."

Grandpa was slouched over the rickety fence, talking softly in Ute to his old horse. He spoke in the old way, but she caught some of it.

"You smarty pants, you still think you can eat like a big, fat kuchinaa and get away with it."

"Grandpa, how come you say such mean things to him? You know he’s your favorite."

"And he knows it too," Grandpa said, chuckling. "Animals are smart, little one. They know what you’re really saying by the tone of your voice. Besides, I only called him a pig, and everyone knows a pig is a very intelligent animal."

In bed she felt restless. What should she do about the boy? Should she hit him, like Celeste said to do?
Should she ignore him like the friendly white girl told her to do? If she did nothing, he would think it was okay to hurt others and keep thinking his prejudiced thoughts.

Then suddenly she had an idea, a way of getting back at Devin. And the beauty of it was, he wouldn’t even know it.

On the playground the next day Rainy asked, “Devin, do you want to play with us?” She held a kickball in her arms and smiled at him. Celeste stood back, frowning.

“What is this—a joke?” Devin smirked.

“No, I mean it,” Rainy said. “You’re the only one who has been nice to me.”

Devin hesitated. “I haven’t been nice to you.”

Rainy persisted. “Well, at least you talked to me. It’s hard being new and not having any friends. In our tribe we give special Indian names to our friends.”

Devin seemed to study her, with suspicion in his eyes. Then he shrugged his shoulders and almost smiled. “You really speak Indian? Cool.

So what’s my Indian name?”

Rainy smiled. “Kuchinaa. It’s a secret name that fits you perfectly.” She could see Celeste out of the corner of her eye, stifling a laugh.

Devin seemed to relax. “Hey, thanks. I never had a secret name before.” Then he actually grinned, in a sheepish sort of way. “Listen, I’m sorry for what I called you before. So what does kuchinaa mean, anyway?”

Rainy looked at the ground. She felt a pang of guilt for the trick she had played on him. This wasn’t going the way she had planned. As she looked up, she saw Celeste bursting with the word “pig” on the tip of her tongue. Rainy tried to stop her with a look only best friends can read. She could tell Celeste understood.

Rainy smiled and shrugged. “It’s a very intelligent animal. Come on, let’s play, Kuchinaa.”

Grandpa was right, she thought. A name wasn’t so important. What mattered was the tone of voice. What mattered was friendship.

—Linda T. Raczek, Ute, Cortez, Colorado.

Portrait of a Friend

I can’t give solutions to all of life’s little problems, doubts or fears, but I can listen to you, and together we will search for answers.

I can’t change your past with all its heartache and pain, nor the future with its untold stories.

But I can be there now when you need me to care.

I can’t keep your feet from stumbling, I can only offer my hand that you may grasp it and not fall.

Your joys, triumphs, successes, and happiness are not mine, yet I can share in your laughter.

Your decisions in life are not mine to make, nor judge; I can only support you, encourage you and help you when you ask.

I can’t prevent you from falling away from friendship, from your values, from me. I can only pray for you, talk to you and wait for you.

I can’t give you boundaries that I have determined for you, but I can give you the room to change, room to grow, room to be yourself.

I can’t keep your heart from breaking and hurting, but I can cry with you and help you pick up the pieces and put them back in place.

I can’t tell you who you are.

I can only love you and be your friend.

—Marilu Bustamante, 16, American School of Guatemala, Guatemala City, Guatemala.
The Truth Behind My Lies

I was twelve when I lost my virginity. I wasn’t a druggie, and I never skipped school. That all changed in 1996. My mom and I moved in with her boyfriend, Rob, and his parents when I was five. Rob treated me like his own, and he stuck up for me when his mother would say rude things to me.

My mom began going out on weekends, and Rob would choose those times to molest me. I couldn’t tell my mom or anyone else because no one would believe me.

Rob continued to molest me throughout the year. The secret became known when he attempted to molest my best friend. Jessica told her mom about it. Everyone believed that the sex abuse occurred, except the person I needed to believe it most—my mom.

The state pulled me out of my home for 90 days. Even though my mom never believed me, she took me back home. I was not allowed to see Jessica anymore and was put into another school. I was home, but I had no family. There was no trust or love.

That year I ended up skipping school and doing more drugs. I even ran away a few times. My mom’s loyalty was to Rob and never me. That hurts more than the abuse.

Now I’m in a treatment center, and I’m learning that with self-worth and support from friends I can live a better life.

—Lynn T., Portland, Oregon. Her teacher adds that Lynn’s perpetrator has since been convicted.

Sandip’s Story

My parents come from a small town in Bengal, India. During the summers we visit our grandparents in India. I like to hear my grandfather’s stories about when he was fighting for India’s independence. They sent him to a jail in North Bengal where there were tigers and rhinos outside. Some of his friends were hung by the British for robbing their guns and ammunition.

In America they also threw the British out and fought a war with them for independence. So I think we might have something in common. Now, though, Americans are friends with the British, and some do not like dark-skinned people like us or my friend, Tyrone, whose great-great-grandfather was a slave.

I do not like going to school because I am the shortest of all the boys in my class. But I am one of the smartest. I got very angry with my father one day when he said I should study hard, or I will become like Tyrone. Tyrone is a great guy, but he does not want to go to college. His father works at the gas station, and he knows all about cars. My mother explained to me that we were also from a poor family in India, but now we live in this big house because my father and mother had studied hard. They want me to read books. I have read the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. I especially like to read adventure stories and comics, which my father does not approve of.

My father says he wishes that someday the whites would forget about their so-called superiority and work with us blacks. He says their false pride could one day be their downfall, just like what happened in India. Christopher Columbus went looking for my country because he had heard about the riches of India.

I know when I grow up, I will love my black friends more than they are loved by people right now.

—Priyadarshi Datta, 10, Birmingham, Alabama

This is Just to Say

So many nights
You’ve stayed up.
Trying to
Figure out
Why I was crying.
Never too tired
And
Never too busy
You held me close
While I was sick.
Forgive me for
Giving you so much trouble.
You’re so sweet
And
So wonderful.

—Lyuda Vasylonok, 16, New City, New York
When I was a little girl I had an uncle, Alda, who lived in Czechoslovakia, a far-away country that I couldn't visit. He wrote letters to my grandmother in words spelled with letters that looked similar to English. But when my grandmother said the words, they didn't sound at all like the letter sounds I practiced with my father. Czech is a Slavic language. It sounds punchy and hard.

At Christmas we sent my uncle presents bought from a special catalog published by the Czech government. It was filled with pictures of fancy soaps, wine, books—even a car! My grandmother bought my uncle a Trabant, a Russian-made car, from this catalog. It wasn't that he couldn't afford to buy himself a car; he just wanted to save a little money. For some strange reason the car was much cheaper in the catalog than if he had bought it in Czechoslovakia.

My uncle sent us presents, too. I still have the beautiful dolls and blown-glass statues he sent me for birthdays and holidays.

Czechoslovakia didn't exist before 1918 and doesn't exist now, but its history spans thousands of years. How can that be? Czechoslovakia was made up of three different kingdoms: Bohemia, Moravia, and later, Slovakia. Eventually these kingdoms combined to form a more stable country—the Republic of Czechoslovakia—during the unstable time of WWI. Czechoslovakia did not become communist until 1948, just after WWII, when the party seized power. In 1989, the Communist government was overthrown.

The Czech Republic & Slovakia

In 1993, Czechoslovakia separated into two states, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. When this happened, I knew I could finally visit my relatives in Prague and see the houses of my mother’s grandparents—places I’d seen only in faded black and white photographs taken more than 50 years ago.

Tragically, years of neglect under communism had left the homes in disrepair, but the essence of these grand houses still remained. Neglect was everywhere outside the capital city of Prague, which the government kept up as a showplace. One of the challenges for the new country and its people is to build an infrastructure—highways, bridges, and facilities—so the population outside the capital can also have opportunities. But all this, of course, comes with a price.

During my visit, my cousin told me that many people miss the old system. Before, they had lots of time to read books, paint, sculpt or garden. Now people have to work for a living, and some of them don't like it at all. Of course, not all Czech people think this way. My cousin is very happy to be able to have his own business.

This summer I will welcome my cousin and his family to my home in the U.S., something that would have been impossible only 10 years ago.

—Anne Pelletier Strong, Garrington, New Jersey.

Czech if You Know

- The alphabet we use today was probably invented in the Ninth Century by the Byzantine missionaries, Cyril and Methodius, in Czechoslovakia.
- Not all revolutions have to include a war. In 1989, when the communist government was overthrown in Czechoslovakia, the revolution was so peaceful it was nicknamed, "The Velvet Revolution."
- Most homes in the Czech Republic are built from a stucco-like material and have lots of ornate decoration over the windows and doors.
- In the new free-market economy, some people are becoming very successful. Under the pre-revolution government, people were assigned a house or apartment depending on job status. Now successful business people are building huge, beautiful homes on the outskirts of the city, similar to American suburbs.
Dia Sin Carro: On the first Thursday of February each year there is no traffic in the city of Bogotá, Colombia. On Car-Free Day, the normally crowded streets are still packed but with people traveling by bike, bus, roller skates or on foot instead of by car. Mayor Enrique Peñalosa, a bicycle enthusiast, encouraged voters to institute Car-Free Day last year. It is based on similar experiments in some European cities. Although cities cannot yet work without cars, the day gives a glimpse of life without traffic.

BookPALS: In many cities across the country, children are exposed to a special dose of read-aloud when their BookPALS (Performing Artists for Literacy in Schools) pay a weekly visit. Founded on the premise that before children can learn to read, especially if they are non-native speakers of English, or are not read to at home, they must experience the magic of books and develop a love of reading. Who better to make books come alive than actors, whose art is that of storytelling? BookPALS read weekly to the same kids hoping to help them love books and want to read themselves. Nationally, some 1,500 volunteers serve more than 35,000 elementary students in 800 schools. It is funded by the Screen Actors Guild Foundation.

The Right Livelihood Award Winners for 2000 are:

• Tewolde Berhan Gebre Egziabher (Ethiopia) for his work on safeguarding international biodiversity while protecting the traditional and community rights of farmers to use their local natural resources. He also helped pass legislation barring patents on living things.

• Munir (Indonesia) for his work in human rights resulting in the release of pro-democracy activists. His human rights organization focuses on political violence, respect for due process of law, ensuring victims’ physical and psychological recovery, and promoting reconciliation and peace. Munir also trains police and army officials in human rights.

• Birsel Lemke (Turkey) for her Citizens’ Initiative which helped ban gold-mining projects in Turkey that use cyanide extraction technology, a method now regarded as “ecologically barbaric” and “disastrous and unacceptable on scientific grounds.” Her organization has raised national environmental awareness.

• Wes Jackson and The Land Institute (USA) for their work on natural farming using perennial instead of annual crops. Such systems are less wasteful and destructive than conventional agriculture and reduce soil erosion and agrochemical pollution. They have done extensive research on renewable energy and on fossil-, pesticide-, and fertilizer-free farming.
Near the small village of Nonington in Southern Kent, U.K., there lies a haven of peace, a refuge, a quiet place away from the noise and fighting of our world today; it is the Peace Garden. This garden, about an acre in size, is being created by children, ages 5 to 14. The garden, now bursting with color, provides a place to think, meditate and just be in nature! The twittering of the birds, the laughter of a child, the scent of the flowers, and the wind in the trees remind us that our generation still has the chance to plant flowers for peace and enjoy God’s creation.

In our Peace Garden there are many smaller gardens, memorials, statues, murals and plaques to remember the need and suffering of our world.

A winding path leads to a lamp which was lit at the stroke of midnight to welcome in the millennium. We want to keep the lamp burning until there is peace among all people. As you wander around, your eyes may stop to gaze at the statue “Hands Across the Divide.” You may wonder why the hands are joined here, while at the original one in Northern Ireland, the hands are only reaching out for each other? This statue in the Peace Garden brings the message that friendship, love, peace and reconciliation are possible.

In various parts of the garden you will see a menorah and grape arbor remembering Israel, palm trees and a wooden memorial for the suffering from sanctions in Iraq, and sparkling teardrop mirrors in memory of the tears shed for the 16 kindergarteners massacred in Dunblane, Scotland. A lamp and garden with 15 columbinies is a memorial to the 15 killed in Littleton, Colorado, in April 1999. We raise the money needed for maintaining and expanding the garden with several ongoing projects.

A garden portraying the wonderful prophecy of Isaiah sums up our hope that one day we will have peace among all nations:

“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.”

We know this can happen, as over 1,000 people have already visited and enjoyed our garden.

Many people including Elias Chacoor, Pope John Paul II, Steven McDonald, Nelson Mandela, Pete Seeger and Queen Noor of Jordan have written to us with their thoughts on peace, filling three volumes with inspiring reading.

To arrange a visit, or to contact us, write to:
Peace Garden, Beech Grove School, Sandwich Rd., Nonington, Kent, CT15 4HH, U.K.
–Hanna King, 13, Nonington, United Kingdom.
A Trip to Paradise: The Canary Islands

In the summer of 2000 I took a short trip to paradise. La Gomera, in the Canary Islands, is a rare botanical wonder, with many bright flowers and animals not found anywhere else in the world. The trip was a dream come true: palm trees swaying in the ocean breeze, the shade of the beautiful banana trees, small villages with winding streets and colorful markets, and the magnificent volcanoes that seemed so mysterious and bewitching.

As I flip through my sketch book I remember all the fun I had and the great cultural experiences. There was always something else to draw and somewhere else to visit. There was a lush rainforest named EL Cedro, and in this forest were many plants and animals unique to La Gomera. Luckily it’s protected. Many protection programs help keep the island green and full of colors.

My mother helped me pick out my colored pencils, and she helped me with new sketching techniques. While on the island, I drew without thinking of details; I just drew what I saw through my eyes. I felt inspired by everything around me. For such a small island there are so many natural wonders. La Gomera is a fascinating island full of life, and I tried to capture it by sketching from the heart.

—Quena Keis, 14, French American, Corvallis, Oregon. (see more of her artwork on the back cover.)
Sea Soup: Phytoplankton by Mary M. Cerullo; photos by Bill Curtsinger (Tilbury House). Invisible to the naked eye, phytoplankton are the source of our atmosphere, ocean food chain, and much of our oil supply. Great photomicroscopy and text shed light on these tiny drifters. Ages 8-13. ISBN: 0-88448-208-1.

El Siglo Más Nuevo del Mundo by Teresa Duran; Illust. Montse Gisbert (Tándem Ediciones). Meet the family of the world's newest century. Mother History and Father Time lead this brood of years, months, days, hours and even seconds – with a little help from the godparents, sun, moon and arithmetic of course! In Spanish only. Ages 5-9. ISBN: 84-8131-347-5.

This is the Tree by Miriam Moss; Illust. Adrienne Kennaway (Kane/Miller). Vivid and enticing pictures help tell the story of the ancient Baobab tree and its role in life on the African plains. Baobab facts at the end include the story of how it came to be known as “the upside-down tree.” Ages 4-8. ISBN: 0-916291-98-7.


Freedom School, Yes! by Amy Little Sugar and Floyd Cooper (Philomel). The author interviewed teachers and volunteers from the 1964 Mississippi Freedom School Summer Project. This book reminds us of the incredible bravery and strength of the African American people in the South of the 50’s and 60’s as they struggled for their rights. It skillfully illustrates the alliances that were forged with young white activists from the North, while providing effective female role models. All ages. ISBN: 0-399-23006-8.


I Heard the Willow Weep by Toni Albert; Illust. Margaret Brandt (Trickle Creek Books). Part One: A simply told and informatively illustrated story about how humans have negatively affected the Earth. Part Two: Practical solutions for making a positive impact as well as educational activities to foster understanding. Ages 5-10. ISBN: 1-929432-00-3.

For Every Child: The rights of the child in words and pictures (Phyllis Fogelman Books). Fourteen of the United Nations’ 54 Rights of the Child are brilliantly and emotionally illustrated by artists from diverse cultures. The text describes each right in simple, understandable language. Includes the official wording from the UN statement at the end. Beautiful and powerful. All ages. ISBN: 0-8037-2650-3.


A Fish out of Water by Wesley Eure; Illust. students of the Meredith College art department (Pelican). A bird and a fish have fallen in love through a strange coincidence. Now, in the face their families’ disapproval, they must find common ground on which to live and play. Ages 5-9. ISBN: 1-56554-850-7.
There has been a lot of talk in the media, in communities and in schools about appreciating and celebrating diversity. We are learning to value the way our human differences enrich our lives. However, adults still sometimes feel unsure about how to communicate what we are learning to our children.

Many of us were raised in intolerant or passive communities, homes and schools where racism was either perpetuated or ignored. Children absorb our attitudes, even those we don’t know we have. As we grew up, the world around us did not have the awareness or the language for promoting cultural sensitivity and appreciation. So we have had to learn by trial and error. We are still learning about respectful ways of treating one another. We are still searching for effective ways of reaching across cultures, languages, religions, physical attributes and sexual orientations to find common ground.

As we educate ourselves about diversity and sensititize ourselves to the realities of intolerance, racism and homophobia in our society, we sometimes feel both horrified and powerless to change things. However, many ordinary, good-hearted people of all cultures, races and religions are confronting and challenging the bigotry they encounter, and change is occurring. Even if it is not always possible to change people’s minds, it is definitely possible to interrupt intolerant behavior, which will eventually lead to changes in attitudes and perceptions. Challenging and interrupting overt and subtle discrimination goes hand in hand with teaching others, especially our children, to value and respect all people. By working on both of these fronts, we can become part of the solution.

We can approach intolerance two ways: the proactive, creating what we want; and the responsive, dealing effectively with what we do not want. The two are interdependent. A balance between creating appreciation and acceptance and working to eliminate intolerance will bring us closer to a better world.

How do we begin? Educating ourselves is essential so that we feel competent to confront hate and encourage mutual appreciation. However, educating our children is the way to create lasting change in the world. How do we educate our children when we are still finding our way? Skipping Stones can recommend some resources that offer a way to enhance our own learning as we teach our children to live effectively and peaceably in our diverse world.

Hate Hurts: How Children Learn and Unlearn Prejudice, by Caryl Stern-LaRosa and Ellen Hofheimer Bettman. (Anti-Defamation League and Scholastic). This is a manual for adults and teenagers on confronting intolerance and encouraging appreciation of diversity. The writing is clear, direct and very readable. Many short vignettes are actual quotes from people who have been targets of hate or who have witnessed it and been unsure how to respond. First-hand accounts and suggestions about effective responses to hateful behavior are also included.

Parents and adult caretakers are encouraged to take an active role in intervening with youngsters who have been either targets or perpetrators of intolerant acts. A valuable chapter addresses the danger of internet hate groups and their accessibility to kids. A bibliography and resource section encourages the reader to continue learning about this complex topic.

Lesbian and Gay Voices, by Frances Ann Day. (Greenwood Press). This reference lists lesbian/gay-themed books for children and young adults. Books on this list help “bring the gay community out of invisibility into the light of understanding and acceptance. That light in turn helps our young people to grow up to be strong, healthy members of society, and helps society realize that those same young people matter and deserve to be recognized, included, and accepted for who they truly are.” Descriptions of these books are arranged by reading level. It also suggests books for educators and parents and profiles of many of the authors.

Culture Smart! by Susan Rodriguez (Prentice Hall Press). Educators can use these slides and creative arts and crafts projects to explore the traditions and cultures of 10 different regions of the world.

That’s a Family! A video by Deborah Chasnoff (Women’s Educational Media). 36 mins. This documentary tours various family structures from a child’s point of view. It explains terms such as divorce, mixed-race, gay and lesbian, birth-mom and stepdad.

The demographics of our society are changing rapidly. Whatever the makeup of a child’s present community, sooner or later s/he will face the challenges of living and working with diverse groups of people. Preparing children to live together peacefully in a diverse world is one way we can make that world a happier, safer and more loving place for all of us.

—Mary Drew, educator and board member.
Scrap book entries by Quena Keis, 14, Corvallis, Oregon. Also see page 33.