The 2001 Youth Honor Awards

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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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We treaded in deep waters this summer. A major leak in the water pipes of our building made Skipping Stones feel like Soggy, Sinking Stones. And a few days later, the whole office smelled like Stinking Stones! But now we are back to skipping and hopping again.

Welcome to the autumn issue. Are you looking forward to the new school year? Did you take any trips this summer? In this first issue of the new school year, you’ll find many stories of journeys abroad.

On pages 20–27, six exchange students, who spent a semester or more in Bolivia, Chile, the Czech Republic, Japan or Germany, discuss their experiences. Do you know of any international students in your school or town? Invite them to share their views with you and your friends.

This issue also features the 2001 Youth Honor Awards for creative art, essays, poems and stories on multicultural and nature themes (pages 6–14). For the 2002 awards, we invite your creative writing and art on the following two themes:

World Wide Web of Nature: Technology and the Web of Life; and http://hip or hype? The Internet and Multicultural Issues.

We’ve changed the timeline. Youth Honor Award entries should now be postmarked by 20 January 2002. We’ll announce the winners in May, before school is out, and the awards will be featured in the summer issue. We believe you and your teachers will welcome this change.

Time flies! It’s been 13 years since we came out with the first issue of Skipping Stones! I’m convinced more than ever that one of the root causes of many problems societies face is over consumption of resources. We’re drowning ourselves in material possessions. Let’s look around our homes and ask ourselves, “Why do we need so much stuff?”

Even in our relatively small office, we have simply toooooo much! So we regularly donate boxes of books and magazines (our overly-abundant resource) to schools and libraries that request more reading material. And, we also recycle envelopes, cardboard, and a lot of junk mail. Still, our office is like a sea of paper! (To reduce junk mail, visit: www.newdream.org, and follow the link to Declare Your Independence From Junk Mail).

Advertisements on TV, radio and in print media fuel our desire to acquire and consume. How can we reduce our resource use? Reusing, fixing old items instead of always buying new, limiting TV, ignoring “buy now and save later” ads, reducing shopping trips, sending ‘No gifts, please!’ with birthday party invitations... What works for you and your family?

And, speaking of over consumption, how much candy do we eat around Halloween? (General Warning: Too much candy may cause cavities and is harmful to your health.) Let’s think of non-candy ways to have good times! Costume parties, games, visiting friends, putting on plays... Here is my challenge to you: Do not buy, accept, eat or give away candy during the Halloween Week (26 Oct.– 2 Nov.). Your reward? Four (back) issues of Skipping Stones magazine. Have your parent/teacher send us a note or e-mail by 15 Nov. to claim the prize.

What are your ideas for a more meaningful and fulfilling life?
Thanks for sending us your magazine. It is a great resource for us. The level of English is just right for students in the 9th to 11th grades. Also, seeing so many things written by non-native speakers is great motivation.

From your Nov.-Dec. 2000 issue, we read the "Cambodian Beliefs and Manners." Then the students did a list of Ukrainian Beliefs and Manners:

- When a fork falls from the table a guest will come.
- When a sparrow flies low it will rain.
- If the sky is clear on New Year’s Day it will be a good year.
- If you take out the garbage after sunset you will lose money.
- If you have a lot of moles you’ll have a happy life.
- When someone says something and then sneezes it’s the truth.
- When someone hiccups it means that somewhere someone is speaking about them.

Thanks! Expect more from us in the future.
—Jeremy Lewis, Peace Corps, Dneprorudne, Ukraine

If it sounds repetitious hearing me say that I appreciate you, it’s because I can hardly find words expressive enough for the gratitude I feel. For so many years (since around age 8 or 9) I tried to speak up about what I saw ahead for our future...of how it isn’t good to allow ignorance of diversity on a worldwide scale. The hardest thing for me to deal with was people ignoring simple ways toward peace.

It saddened me to the deepest core until I met others who encouraged me to use my “voice,” and I broke free to enable progression, not oppression. Authors help to raise children, and it moves me immensely to see you in your 13th year.

Blessings to you and all your supportive staff. Feel proud; we are proud of you!
—Trisha (Tree) Rava, research@treelink.com.

Today I was thrilled to arrive at the post office to find a full box of children’s books waiting for me. I had not expected so many beautiful books. I am so excited to be able to share these books with the children at several schools and day care centers, and I’m hoping to start a story hour at each of them.

Thank you so much for helping to make the magical world of reading available to the children and families of my community. Con mucho cariño,
—Ellen Davis, Peace Corps, Puntarenas, Costa Rica.

The Worst Advice in History

One of the most tragic moments in history was World War II. Adolph Hitler was in charge of Germany, and his mission in life was to wipe out the Jewish people and anyone else who didn’t like him or his ideas. He was a very creative man, coming up with hundreds of reasons and ways to kill Jews. He was a very motivational speaker, winning followers by the way he spoke rather than by what he said.

Scores of people followed him including a group of young boys called the “Hitler Youth.” They did as he said and walked the streets picking fights with Jews. Those boys barely knew anything more—they had been brainwashed. Hitler once said, “Knowledge is ruin to my young men.” I believe that he meant if these boys learned too much, they might learn what they were doing was wrong.

I think his quote should be first on a page of The Worst Advice You Ever Heard. Knowledge is power! Maybe if the Hitler Youth had learned more, they would have done something to stop him. He never lived to learn from his mistakes, but we can still learn from them. Learn what is right and what is wrong. Stand up for what you believe in, even if you’re standing alone.
—Jessica Kaminsky, 13, Wexford, Penn.

Former Youth Award Winner Writes

You obviously are running a magazine that embraces the differences among the human race.

It’s harder to keep a 4.0 in high school than I thought it would be, but I’ve kept it so far. Since eighth grade I’ve done a lot in ceramics, quilting and textiles, but drawing still interests me.

I’ve become more politically active. Being on our school’s speech team forced me to decide my opinions on controversial topics. Being involved in drama has brought me in contact with individuals with alternative lifestyles and backgrounds. Many of them have suffered by living in such a small, rural town. Here, in Forest Grove, Oregon, there is so much of the rampant bigotry that loves ignorance.

I am active on the council of S.O.A.P. (Students Organized Against Prejudice), a club of politically, socially active, open-minded people that a friend started last year. We now have close to 40 members. And, yes, I am publicity manager! So, if you are aware of any programs/organizations/ballot measures that are in need of support, let me know.
—Sansone Sophia <afowerschild@yahoo.com>
What's On Your Mind?

Speak Out... or Shhh Up

I think teenagers should be able to tell adults, especially their parents, what's going on in their lives. They should even be able to talk about what's going wrong. It's hard enough being teenagers, but not having anyone to talk to is terrible. I think some kids are scared to talk to their moms and dads. They hurt themselves physically and mentally by doing this.

Some teenage girls are bulimic and/or anorexic. This is a horrible thing to do to themselves. Some boys are too but not nearly as many as the amount of girls. Girls do it to look good and perfect. Actually it doesn't make you look any better. It makes you look pale or even sickly. It also can make you non-athletic because you are too tiny and sick to do anything. Most kids will not tell their parents because they know it's bad. This keeps out the parents when they can help the most.

I am a teenager myself, and I know I would have trouble talking to my parents about these illnesses. You could say something to a family member like your brother, sister, aunt or uncle. Even a close neighbor would work as long as you tell someone that you have a problem.

My last request is just to slow down and talk with your parents about stuff such as school, friends, parties, etc. I think it’s good for children and parents to spend time together. If we spend more time talking maybe there will be less family disagreements and more togetherness.

—Lauren Hanahan, 13, Gibsonia, Pennsylvania.

Unwanted Dogs

Each year 13 million dogs and cats are euthanized in animal shelters, and millions more are abandoned. I would love to give every single one of those animals a home, but I already have a dog. I wouldn’t want to have to send a litter of puppies to the pound because I couldn’t find homes for them, but this happens every day. I live out in the country, and people often abandon dogs out here. My parents have to call the pound and have them picked up because we can’t usually take care of a litter of puppies in addition to the pets we already have. If people would spay or neuter their dogs we wouldn’t have so many unwanted puppies.

I also wish people would make sure they want a dog before they get one. Every animal deserves a chance to live and be itself. Every dog needs not only food and a house but love and kindness. You are your dog’s only friend, and he or she loves you steadfastly.

—Abigail Hutchins, 13, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

On the Question of Tibet

Tibet is a small country in Asia bordering Nepal and China. Almost the entire population of Tibet is Buddhist. In 1949 the Chinese army invaded the peace-loving people’s home. They killed monks, bombed monasteries and took the country by force. Most Tibetans fled, but some remained, not wanting to leave their homeland. To this day, they are jailed for practicing Buddhism or flying the Tibetan flag. Slowly but surely more people are becoming aware of this awful situation, but few people really understand the Tibetan’s plight.

I think it’s time to take action. America is afraid to openly confront the Chinese. If the president were to say to China, “If you do not leave Tibet right now, we will send in the military,” that would be bad. It could spark World War Three. The American government would only do that to a smaller, less powerful country. It would be much wiser to follow the Dalai Lama’s non-violent approach.

One way to help is to write letters to the local newspaper. You can also send postcards to the Chinese government. It will let the president of China know that we are aware of the genocide in Tibet. A steady inflow of letters from concerned young people cannot be ignored forever.

We are the business executives, governors and presidents of the next generation. If we work together, we can make a difference in the world today.

—Collin Ackerman, 14, Gibsonia, PA. Read about Tibet and the Dalai Lama in Vol. 10 # 5 & Vol. 11 # 1.
The 2001 Youth Honor Awards

Emma Leslie Meng, 8, Hsinchu, Taiwan
Abbey Forbes, 10, Port Deposit, Maryland
Emma Morrison, 10, Brooklyn, New York
Sydney Shepherd, 10, Hickory, North Carolina
Fourth Grade ESL Class, Heritage Elem, Woodburn, Oregon
Rajiv Smith-Mahabir, 14, Berkeley, California
Ria Bond, 16 & Reed Bond, 12, homeschoolers, St. Maries, Idaho
Sarah Eisenstein Stumbar, 16, Ithaca, New York
Rada Leenders, 16, Antwerp Int'l. School, Antwerp, Belgium
Vandana Kapur, 17, Richard Montgomery H.S., N. Potomac, Maryland
Earthbeat, student group, Woodstock Union H.S., Woodstock, Vermont

Reflections of a Turtle

Under the water I sleep.
I ponder, and I wonder,
As the sky fills with thunder.
I am safe in the water,
And my life is in my shell,
With the fishes, here I dwell.
I sometimes think; I sometimes sleep,
I like it in the water deep.
My silent, unguarded secrets I keep.

"My family lives in a 71-acre evergreen forest, and we raise poultry and livestock. We have a small family forestry business, and our mother homeschools us. My poem is about a box turtle that lives in our pond."

—Reed Bond, 12, St. Maries, Idaho.

Tree (above) and flowers (right), water color paintings by Emma Leslie Meng, a second grader in Hsinchu, Taiwan. Eight-year-old Emma has Chinese ancestry.
"The reason I am so concerned about pollution is that I travel all over, and my dad works at the power and chemical plants. I see the pollution at the power and chemical plants, and, when it drifts up, it gets into the clouds. When it rains acid rain falls and gets in the water. The fish drink the water, and we eat the fish and get sick. So please put filters on the stacks, please. Even if it costs a lot of money."

— Abbey Forbes, 10, homeschooler, Port Deposit, MD. Every year Abbey does an environmental awareness project. This year she focused on industrial pollution. Abbey made copies of her poster and mailed them to many companies. Three firms responded to her.

Voices of the Earth

The voices in the wind, Oh! How they speak to me. It is so much easier to talk to those you cannot see. The voices in the wind, you must feel to understand them. The voices of the mind are more precious than a gem.

Their friends, (the voices of the water) Are silent, that’s no doubt. Because they possess silent fish, Like salmon, bass and trout. The voices of the water thrive In misty waterfalls. They like to sing to little girls Standing near their aqua walls.

The voices of the trees, (such as the birds and bees) Are old and have stories to tell Of the beautiful sandy beaches, With their marvelous pink and blue shells.

The language of the voices of the Earth, You must listen to with all your heart. These voices of the Earth are waiting for you to hear So, just take a deep breath, go outside and start.

— Sydney Shepherd, 10, Hickory, North Carolina.

Wonders of the World

Hope The key to the seed of life. Wonder Why the birds' song sounds like a fife. Love Most fragile limb on the tree of the world. Wonder Why friendship is always being swirled. Escape To a land that is wild and new. Wonder About a land mortals never knew. Fly Up to a rainbow-streaked sky. Wonder Why angels never die?

Sydney writes, "Writing poetry enables me to express myself through words. It gives me a sense of freedom, happiness and success. I would love to become a published author someday, as well as an actress and a cellist for a symphony orchestra. In addition to poetry writing, I also enjoy reading, acting and playing the cello."
Immigration Thoughts

It is difficult to describe the world today without remembering the long caravans of people, walking slowly along black roads, heavy with children, with domestic animals, with their lives contained in a single bundle of luggage gripped tightly in their knuckled hands.

Like ants, they come from south and east, some stacked and suffocated in big trucks, others like seagulls drowned in the waves—escaping war, poverty, genocide or just searching for freedom of mind and expression. They are looking for the better life, for the promised life, only to discover years and years in closed compounds or remote, poor neighborhoods with no right to work, no right to vote. They are discriminated against, pulled into back alleys by mafiosos, burned and chased by neonazis, used as pawns in political games. Wouldn’t it have been better to just lie down and die on the threshold of “home?”

Hundreds of protocols, conventions, charters and resolutions are dedicated to the mass exodus of refugees and displaced persons. They prescribe antidotes for poverty, armed conflict, malnutrition, diseases and many other physical problems. Pages and pages of these documents promote human rights, but in none of them do I find the solution I am looking for. How does one treat the ailing heart of an immigrant? The immigrant is uprooted from the land and life he knows and spends nights and days casting long looks across rivers and into infinite horizons, intensely trying to recall the image of the apple blossom tree of his youth and of his past life. The image has faded, become blurred, like a photographic plate that had too many copies made from it. The immigrant tries to hear the folk songs which seemed so ridiculous and unnecessary in the past. Now they sound like distant ashes, but he remembers them as divine melodies.

Despite the tears of these immigrants, despite their new stifled circumstances, they will never return. Time does not wait. Their cities, villages, families and friends change. Going back would open their eyes to the destruction of their country. They would realize that their memories are idealized, and they truly can never go back to what they remember. Returning means seeing that they are alienated from their culture. It means finding out that they do not fully belong anywhere anymore. It means being lost.

When people ask me, “Where are you from?” I say, “Belgium.” It’s true. I’ve lived in Antwerp all my life. I eat Belgian food. I buy Belgian clothes. I even breathe Belgian air. But then there is always someone in the background who cleverly says, “Aren’t you something like Bulgarian, or Hungarian or something?” “No!” I quickly say and hope no one will see that I am blushing. No! I do not come from a former-communist country. No! I can not even read that language. No! I do not know their national anthem, No! I don’t even know how it feels to have lived there.

But it’s true that not all my relatives possess a Belgian passport. And, yes, I suppose my presence in Belgium has caused unemployment rates to rise. And I do not have blue eyes. And sometimes I close the door to my room, and I put on some sad song and cry because I wish I knew where I come from and who I am and what I should say when someone asks me, “Where are you from?” I wish I didn’t feel as if I’m only telling a half-truth when I say that I am Belgian.

I’ve read that in ancient times all lands were one, Pangea. It seems that the continents themselves exhale nostalgia for that state. Louis Debernieres said, “Thus India pushes farther into Asia, ploughing up the Himalayas. The Arabian Peninsula and Africa push toward Europe. Only the Americas hurry away westward, so determined to be isolated and superior that they have forgotten that the world is round and that one day they will find themselves glued to China.”

Like the continents, there are people who say that they belong not to a nation but to the world. They demand an international passport and a universal right of residence. I fall into this category, people who do not believe in borders, people who never had a chance to become patriotic.

—Rada Leenders, 16, Antwerp Int’l School, Antwerp, Belgium.
**She Is All Alone**

she is all alone
cold,
in a corner crying
she crawls tired, into her little ditch
under the stairs
she peeks out her head
watching all
the feet trample
the clean white snow
she hears a voice
walking down
she ducks but too late
they see her yelling
she runs
her bare feet treading on the cold
she runs for what seems like miles
the church bell rings
she sniffs
she hasn’t eaten for two days
she trudges up to the stand
staring greedily at
the steaming chestnuts
the man turns
she jolts
but she doesn’t need to
a bag full of chestnuts
is in front of her
she takes them
the man smiles
“Merry Christmas.”

“I play viola, flute and cello. My inspirations for writing come from things I see in real, everyday New York City life. I also get inspiration from the great outdoors (the country not the city) or from just one word. I also write about my emotions. Some of my hobbies include reading, swimming, soccer, acting and singing.”

—Emma Morrison, 10, St. Ann’s School, Brooklyn, NY.

**Untitled 1**

the darkness
watching the
eagle
crawling at the
celling of the moon

**Untitled 2**

As the moon goes behind the
bellowing clouds
she seeps through a crack
into a palace of glittering marble,
where she goes into a little
room,
and she hides under layers of
silk

**Sorrow**

I lay in bed, happy;
I heard someone crying:
Who?
I opened the window;
I called out, “Who is it?”
The spring rain answered,
“It...is...I...It...is...I.”

I walked down the road;
I heard someone crying:
Who?
I turned to the field;
I called out, “Who is it?”
The whispering leaves answered,
“It’s me. It’s me. It’s me.”

I swam through the ocean;
I heard someone crying:
Who?
I gazed toward the shore;
I called out, “Who is it?”
The flowing waves answered,
“It’s ...us...It’s ...us.”

I ran through the forest;
I heard someone crying:
Who?
I turned to the trees;
I called out, “Who is it?”
The whispering leaves answered,
“Gaia...Gaia...Gaia.”

“I lay in bed listening to the crickets sing outside. I thought that they seemed to be saying, ‘It’s me,’ over and over. I was thinking about how we, the most precocious of Gaia’s children, must be making her very sad, and the two ideas just merged together. ‘Sorrow’ is a message, a warning, to try to make people think about the pain we inflict on our planet.”

—Ria Bond, 16, St. Marys, Idaho.
Youth Honor Awards

I believe that involving kids and adults in community activities is important because it allows them to learn about social issues through first-hand experience. We also have the opportunity to make life a little easier for others. To do my part, I help feed homeless people twice a month at a local church.

Every first and fourth Sunday of the month, homeless people from all over the San Francisco Bay Area gather at St. Mary Magdalen’s Parish in Berkeley, California, to eat a dinner prepared by volunteers. My school requires that I complete 20 hours of community service. By the end of my freshman year, I had completed more than 60 hours of volunteer work.

For each Sunday dinner, I walk five blocks from my home to the church. I usually arrive about an hour and a half before dinner is served and stay about half an hour after the last guest has left. During that time, I help prepare, serve and clean up at the parish.

When I arrive, I put on rubber gloves and go to work. I usually wash pots until they are so shiny that I can see my reflection in them. Then I mix the salad until every millimeter of lettuce is covered with ranch dressing.

My main job is setting up the drinks at one of four serving tables. I work as people politely move past, eager to fill their dry mouths. Eight columns of cups for milk, six for fruit punch and two for water. Each type of drink is arranged in four rows, creating a mural of white and red circles. Occasionally, I turn my back, and a drink is gone in a second. The “thief” just smiles and thanks me, so I nod back courteously.

When dinner is ready to be served, a whisper and then a murmur arises from the crowd. But they can’t eat just yet. They must wait for the cook to walk into the middle of the hall, greet everyone and give a prayer. Finally, the first ticket number is called, and the lucky recipient waltzes up to the tables of steaming food, rich desserts and sweet drinks to fill his or her plate.

When the dinner guests arrive at my drink table, they are often carrying at least three plates teeming with hot food. Most diners take two cups, but one guest always takes at least 15 cups of milk.

For the next 15 minutes I walk around the tables making sure everyone has enough to eat.

“More sugar, please?” one woman asks, and I hurry off to the kitchen to refill the sugar cup.

Occasionally, someone will want a piece of fruit, or the coffee pot will be empty. I fix the problem, and they go back to chatting about life. Some of these discussions are about how “George W. Bush is an idiot,” and how “he’s screwing up America.” The arguments are very clear and, for a moment, it seems like the speakers are college professors, not high school dropouts. At another church where I volunteer, a homeless man plays the piano beautifully during and after dinner, showing that even though these people are homeless, they are still smart and talented.

When all the guests have had their fill, they file out the door, expressing their thanks to the workers and volunteers. When the floor is swept and mopped, we can leave. I am relieved when the work is finally over, but on my walk home, I find myself thinking about the gentleness and kindness of the people at the parish dining hall—the homeless and the volunteers. I often feel a sense of gratification because I’ve performed a service for people who must struggle against many odds every day for basic necessities that many of us take for granted.

According to Food First, 36 million Americans are hungry, and 5 to 7 million are homeless. I believe that hunger is a violation of human rights. I like to think that my work at St. Mary Magdalen’s is a tiny contribution to the movement to improve the lives of poor people in our society.

—Rajiv Smith-Mahabir, 14, Berkeley, California.
The Children of Kosovo

There are little eyes
which are the pathways to old caverns of horror
little doors to much longer hallways
which lead to rooms where stories
have been wrapped in boxes and tied
with fancy ribbon
to keep the dark of night locked tightly away.

There are the small high-pitched voices
which ask in words dripping with fear
if they can play outside
if they can talk to a friend
if they can see their grandparents again
if their best friend will come home soon
if the bombs will stop falling
if the flowers will grow again
if they can crawl out of the shelter which hides
them from bombs
but which traps their evil dreams.

Stress-laden voices must extend the
hallway of madness
to include another room
the older voices just heard that a bomb fell
on the house of their child’s grandparents
the body of the little girl their daughter dreams of
now resides only in a Kosovar mass grave.

The little girl the mother dreamed of having
never has been, never has lived
bombings, killings, disappearances
keep a child from being young at all
when life spans are decreased to only a few years
there is the need to live the cycle of human life
being young and being old.

Hearing rumors that the violence is nearing
that now there will be bombs overhead
that now there will be soldiers with guns on the
rumors meaning everything
hands attached to rapidly beating hearts
struggling into sweaters and packing satchels
money and three days’ food.
Walking through the forest
shrouded in a deep, omniscient green
filled with fatigue
the girl and her parents travel down a road
littered with bodies, spotted with blood, scattered with photographs
too heavy to carry.

Seeing the soldiers too late and struggling
to do everything to force their daughter to hide
pushing her, shoving her into the camouflaging
green and brown
only to see that she will not move
that she is brave, she is a child of war, she is Kosovo
who knows nothing but death
and fractured moments of stolen laughter
who believes that if she does not die now
it is solely a temporary reprieve.

Becoming through a foggy, fearful haze
a body
a photograph
and so much, much more
a symbol of your Kosovar dreams

Knowing that in one month’s time
there will be another parent who must add to
the hallway of terror and nighttime dreams.

—Sarah Eisenstein Stumbar, 16, Ithaca, N.Y.
Sarah writes, “I have been brought up in
a multiculturally-focused home. My recent
travels to India, Ghana and Egypt have me wanting to live elsewhere in the world.”

Sarah hopes to become a doctor
for Doctors Without Borders.
Meeting Anjali

The knotted wooden swing creaked as I rested my aching body on the dent on the right side. I closed my bloodshot eyes, only to have them snap open again after feeling a tap on my shoulder and seeing my sister holding out a frosted glass filled to the brim with refreshing iced tea. I nodded and smiled gratefully, staring out into the distance, past my small-town neighborhood into the deep nothingness of space.

“How are you feeling?” asked my sister as she carefully lowered onto the splintering left dent.

“Tired.”

She glanced at me, irritated. “I mean emotionally.”

My eyes remained fixed on the blackness above, but my mind wandered back to the place that it had avoided throughout a day of polishing silverware and mopping bathroom floors. I thought of my parents driving back home with one more person than they left with, a thought that had been temporarily pushed to the recesses of my mind.

“I don’t think I’m ready,” I replied deliberately. “To tell you the truth, I’m not thrilled about adopting a kid from India.”

She looked at me, startled. “Why? I thought you were happy.”

“Well I guess, at first, but then I got to thinking, ‘What is this kid going to be like?’ I mean India is so different; she might not understand half of what we say or do.”

My sister nodded slightly, fiddling with a piece of wood that had chipped off of the swing. “You know, I borrowed an Indian movie with subtitles from Sheila the other day. It was awful! Three hours of nonsensical singing and dancing with absolutely no plot.”

I laughed a little bit, “I think that’s the least of our problems.”

She spoke again, slightly choked up this time. “In the movie, they showed this woman getting married in this bright red dress, walking around a fire. Now how are we supposed to plan for her future wedding?”

I suppressed my laughter this time, understanding how seriously my sister took these “problems.”

She hadn’t even met this girl, and she was thinking about our new sister’s wedding!

A thought then entered my mind that hadn’t even come up before in the midst of worrying about her taste in food and clothes and agonizing over how strange her traditions, holidays and religion might be.

“Youth Honor Awards

“Do we even know what her name is?” My sister’s panicked eyes calmed down and twinkled with good humor. “I don’t think we do.”

We immediately broke into fits of uncontrollable laughter. I suppose our standards for entertainment had dropped significantly due to sheer exhaustion from a day of hard labor and confusion of what was to come. As I wiped tears from my eyes, I offered a suggestion. “Why don’t we pick a name for her now?”

“Great idea! That way we know that we can at least pronounce it.”

I grinned. “Alicia?”

She scrunched up her face. “Nah. Elizabeth?”

“Um...Denise?”

As we rhythmically dealt out our own ideas and then proceeded to reject the other’s next suggestion, headlights approached, and the hum of a car neared our picket-fenced home. We quieted down and decided soundlessly that this matter could be dealt with later. When a familiar minivan finally pulled into our driveway, we held hands, and I could almost feel her praying for the best. “Time for a third dent in the swing,” she said almost inaudibly.

My father came out first, with a half-hearted smile and sweat stains indicative of southern humidity spotting his shirt. Then Mom stepped out of the passenger side of the van holding a tiny brown hand in hers. As my much-awaited baby sister walked into the light, I forgot. I forgot my fears of disliking the strange Indian girl that was to enter my household, and I understood what love at first sight truly was. She wore a faded pink dress suit with delicate embroidery and affirmed her distinctness by a tiny red dot adorning her forehead. Her clothes were as unconventional as I expected her customs to be. But as I observed and then enveloped her soft, small body in my arms for that first time, I realized that she was a person just like us who needed affection and appreciation.


“Anjali,” I whispered as I ran my hands through her silky black hair. “What a perfect name.”

—Vandana Kapur, 17, Indian American, Richard Montgomery H.S., N. Potomac, MD.

“I pray that people can be proud of who they are...without hating those who are not like them. It is possible to maintain an identity amidst a sea of coexistence.”
Since 1994 Earthbeat at Woodstock Union High School has been committed to developing youth awareness and active concern for the environment. Our members have differing views on ecological management and wildlife preservation, but our differing opinions diversify our program. We attempt to reach adults and youth in our community by hosting school activities, workshops and night presentations.

Last spring Earthbeat worked to beautify our school grounds by planting 150 bulbs for an insect-friendly garden. We also implemented a composting program, which is both effective and simple. The nutrient-rich compost is utilized by our school's horticultural classes. This year we worked with raptors, directed tours of the Vermont Institute of Natural Sciences, brought programs to our school, developed games for children and made public presentations.

Next year's plans include beautifying the school by planting more trees and flowers, stationing more trash and recycling bins near playing fields and developing a butterfly garden in a marshy area. Earthbeat believes that if students realize they can help change our school environment, they will become involved.

We also hope to reach the community on a larger scale by publishing an information packet on environmental awareness. It will include environmental facts, contact numbers and photographs of disappearing wildlife in our region. Earthbeat works to inform our community, get people involved and inspire others to take action to save the environment.

—Meieli Sawyer, president of Earthbeat and senior at WUHS, Woodstock, Vermont. Below: Leah Young (L) and Lauren Skaskiw observe a wood turtle.

The name “Heritage School” was chosen for our school because we honor our own and one another’s background and traditions. Every student here is taught in their home language and at least one other language: Spanish, Russian or English. Students learn about each other’s cultures and many other cultures around the world.

Children and adults at Heritage are also very involved in natural science investigations and efforts to protect the environment. We have a garden here and grow native plants. Some classes plant trees on our school grounds. The fifth-graders do worm composting, and the third-and fourth-graders study about ecology, pollution, recycling, and how they can help solve environmental problems.

—The fourth grade ESL class, Heritage Elem. School, and ESL teacher Mary Drew, Woodburn, Oregon. See the Parent/Teacher Guide for more.

Top: Water Pollution by Christopher Ramos; Bottom: Garden by Zoia Chernishoff, 9, both at Heritage Elem.
The Hallway

I walk the hallway to the adventures beyond
Hoping for a quest that will take me far and long
The entrance to love, mystery and discovery
A place where animals can bring you
to your greatest reverie
The doorway to life and pride
A world that will fulfill your heart and mind
Kings, queens, journeys and more
Friendly animals, talking objects, trips galore
With a startled pop you wake from your snore
Waiting for darkness to take you back once more
To the world away from the thoughtless crowd
To travel around like a drifting cloud.

—Richard White, 11, African American, Clovis, CA.

Noteworthy Entries

Searching for my Future

Searching for my future,
For the life ahead of me,
Searching for my hopes and dreams,
And for what is meant to be,
Books can’t help me find this one,
So I think I’ll begin to start,
To search for my future,
Way deep down in my heart.

“I thought a lot about what I want to be like when I’m older... If I want to do well in life, I have to search for my future right here and now by trying different things and finding my weaknesses and strengths.”


Imagination

So colorful, so creative, so graceful, so beautiful, imagination.
Lights tinkling in the center, making paintings or sculptures, no matter.

Where the art lives, where the fire glows, imagination.
Helping our lives, helping our souls with its power... imagination.

—Saul Boulanger, 7, Corvallis, Oregon.

Help! I’m Trapped Inside a Raindrop!

I was walking home from school when it started to rain.
I got trapped inside a raindrop and it’s driving me insane.
I want to go home sweet home to get something to eat,
but how can I go like this with water to my feet?
I think and think and then I get a clue,
but then the weather changes from hot to cold — Achoo!
Just then the raindrop changed into a dazzling, dangling snowflake.
I think and think and think some more.
Just then the weather made a change; it changed from cold to hot.
Hip hip hooray!
I went inside my backpack to look for a pencil to pop the raindrop.
But the pencil was a useless tool. Splash!
The raindrop hit the ground, and now I have a swimming pool.

—James Buschbach, 8, Oak Lawn, Illinois.
I want to pose a question to every one of you who is willing to grab a bit of scratch paper and jot down your answer: to what extent are your actions a result of your conscience guiding you?

Here is the story that caused me to give conscience a great deal of thought:

A girl who just turned 16 and has very little support from her family managed to obtain her birth certificate, driver license and the other important documents necessary to emancipate herself. She put all the papers in her purse three days prior to her court appointment. The following day her purse was stolen at school. The head of the school called a meeting of the students and explained how important the purse's contents were to the girl, but the purse was not returned. The next day another meeting of the students was called during which the girl explained all of the work she had done to obtain the papers. Still no result! At a meeting the following day, students expressed their concern for the girl and for the lack of safety at school. That afternoon the principal checked the rest room before leaving the building. On a wide window sill was the purse with all the papers intact. Obviously, someone's conscience had developed over the three meetings to the point of having the courage to return the purse and ensure the girl's success at her court appearance.

Another conspicuous example of conscience arose since the last issue of Skipping Stones. People all over the United States were startled by the action of Senator Jim Jeffords of Vermont. Jeffords said he could no longer adhere to the policies pursued by his party and was moved by his conscience to declare himself an Independent senator. It must have taken a great deal of courage to confront the hostility from the members of his former party, yet the senator stood up for his convictions.

Conscience is essential in all walks of life: parenting, teaching, business, family life, friendships. How is it taught? How is it developed? Is there an inner-voice that lets our actions be informed by conscience, or do actions bounce along on their own paths? What do you think? What is your experience?

In peace,
Last summer my family had a reunion to honor my grandparents. We are all of Vietnamese origin, and we give a great deal of respect to our elders. We planned a surprise performance for my grandparents, and I decided to take part by singing. My song contained the line “Every time you drink water, remember the spring.” This is a piece of advice that has been passed from generation to generation in my family and probably in other families as well.

There are two ways to look at every sentence, the “black” meaning and the “white” meaning. The black meaning is the literal meaning, and the white meaning is its metaphorical interpretation. You may have to read the sentence many times to understand its white meaning. For instance, the saying above is not really about water. It is about not forgetting where you came from.

The concept of remembering where you come from is very important to Vietnamese people. They are proud and have a lot of respect for elders. The elders are our youngsters’ life. They have all given us something—experience. Everybody has a different experience, and everybody has something special to teach.

Without parents, you wouldn’t exist. Parents are the ones who have spent most of your life with you. Although the umbilical cord was cut, you are still “connected” to your mother. Parents teach you almost everything you need for the future. They care for and love you, so they have earned the right to be respected by their children.

Every family history has some good and some bad times that contribute to each person’s character. No matter how you became who you are, you should not forget to be thankful. You are full of experiences that were given from generation to generation to you. Even bad parts of the past can lead you to a great life. You have to see the succession so you can learn from the mistakes and improve. You can see yourself as an upgrade of your parents, improved and with less flaws. If you want to achieve anything, you have to fight for it like your ancestors did. The future depends on what you’re willing to do about it.

The other “white” meaning of the saying is that everything you have comes from somewhere. Nothing is falling down from heaven!

When you eat toast, remember its baker; if you have a car, remember its maker. Without the people who made these things, you wouldn’t have them to enjoy. Even if you are in love with someone, think of their parents. Without them you never would have met him/her. Be thankful for everything you have, and show the makers respect. They’ve earned it.

—Viet-Khoi Huynh, 16, is an exchange student from Germany living in Houston, Texas.

Mountains
Mountains
dark, jagged
towering, looming, controlling
watching the world below
rock.

Waves
Waves, gently rolling
Water’s sound, speaking softly
Sea’s breath never ends.

—Kevin Allgaier, 14, Wexford, PA.
Meghan, Anna and Luisa are sailors. They are also home schooled as they sail around the world with their families. Their beds are bunks; the sea is their playground, and the flutter of sails in the wind is their means of transportation.

Meghan and Anna use textbooks from a school district in the United States. Luisa is enrolled in the Calvert Home Schooling Program. Their classrooms, however, are the sailboats on which they live and the world they explore.

There are no TVs, telephones or CD players aboard, but the girls are not bored. They read while their sailboat floats, creaking and groaning, through the sea. They sketch flying fish that flop on deck and write poetry about the storm-petrels and flamingoes that fly overhead. On land they visit cities such as Rome, London and Lisbon and record their experiences in journals, scrapbooks and newsletters to friends in the U.S.

Anna’s interest in astronomy developed during their sail across the Atlantic Ocean. She said, “During the first week of July, on clear nights, we chased a bright light in the distance, but one evening it wasn’t in view. There was only the sea to keep us company as it turned somersaults and slapped the side of the boat. All of a sudden, the light pounced out from behind a sail. My mother and I jumped in surprise. We thought it was a sailing vessel heading toward us on a collision course! We nicknamed it ‘the starship,’ although I later learned that it was the planet Venus.”

Luisa is fascinated with dolphins. One morning her father awakened the family at daybreak. They were sailing along the cliffs of an island in the Azores, which lie west of Portugal. Forty to 50 dolphins leaped alongside their boat. They surfed the bow waves and then plunged below like corkscrews. “When we arrived in Portugal, my dad and I walked to an internet cafe to search for information about dolphins,” she said. “Some researchers think that they surf the bow waves to conserve energy. It’s like a hiker who tires of walking and hitchs a ride.”

Whether at sea or on shore, Meghan likes the mathematics of sailing. While planning passages from one country to the next with her parents, she calculates distances on charts using the speed x time = distance formula. She also navigates the boat. Meghan says, “On land trips travelers read road signs and maps, but on the sea we use charts and a compass.” She enjoys real-life sailing word problems such as determining the surface area of a sail and calculating the miles per gallon they travel.

After shopping for food at the colorful markets in Spain, she converts the local money, pesetas, into dollars and records their expenditures.

Anna, Meghan and Luisa have become world travelers. They want to learn about and understand the diverse cultures and environments that they visit. That is their classroom, and they find education exciting on schools that float.


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Children Are Angels

Children are angels sent down to Earth to complete a special mission...

To make us laugh, smile, cry...
They are our best teachers.

Children make every day brighter than the rest,
They are like flowers,
If you don’t take care of them,
They will wilt and fade...

Children are precious treasures that we should treasure for a lifetime...
They are our key to life, love, joy and happiness.

—Gabriella Ilisco, Philadelphia, Penn.
For 20 years now I have remembered these words because they ring true for me. At age 10, I decided I wanted to be an illustrator. When I was 38, I finally published my first picture book, *Juan Bobo and the Pig: A Puerto Rican Folktale* retold by Felix Pitre. It took a long time to gather experiences and develop enough confidence to find my way to this dream. I am thankful for “a stubborn streak,” a small voice inside that kept sounding its yearning.

I do not like to feel limited by anyone. My mother, aware of this, helped me overcome my fear of riding a bike by seeming to doubt my abilities. Her challenge drove my success as she knew it would. In reality she had great confidence in me. There have been other instances throughout life when I’ve worked hard to prove myself—sometimes for others, sometimes to discover my own capacities. I’ve especially flourished in the company of those who believed in me and gave me opportunities to reach higher levels of achievement. I encourage you to believe in yourself, challenge and educate yourself and seek out the company of others who will provide support in attaining your goals.

I was fortunate to know what I wanted in life. It is not always easy to define goals. We can’t see the end of a path, only the little ground that lies immediately before us. Be curious! Watch and listen for guidance step by step. If you are open and alert to what is around you opportunities will not pass you by.

My parents did not go to college, but they were determined that I would have this opportunity despite limited resources. I worked after school and summers to save money, kept my grades up and applied for financial aid. I attended college in Portland, Oregon, on a full tuition grant. I was drawn to the overseas studies program at Lewis & Clark College after developing the travel bug on a high school summer exchange program to Oaxaca, Mexico. College provided both intense study and more chances to explore the world.
After finishing my degree I worked for seven years as a middle school art instructor in West Linn, Oregon. I continued taking evening art courses and exploring the world in the summers. One travel companion enjoyed sketching with me. As we spent hours visually recording new sights, my hunger for illustrating grew stronger. I wanted more commercial training and a larger artist community for an illustration career.

I didn’t know anyone in New York City. I needed a transition period to reconceive myself as an illustrator. I moved to Brooklyn in 1984 and attended Pratt Institute to study illustration and design. After two years I completed a B.F.A., but I was still years away from illustrating. I needed a job. Illustration is a freelance career. As a new graduate, I had no client basis for support.

I worked as an art assistant at Dutton Children’s Books. Working with a variety of publishers proved the best training ground for understanding the illustration process. Finally I gained the confidence and experience to approach an editor with my illustrations. I was staff art director for Four Winds Press when my first book was released. During the next year I became a freelancer.

I have since illustrated books set in Puerto Rico, Nigeria and Tanzania. I also work as a freelance art director for Lee & Low Books, a publisher of books for children of color. It’s a privilege to work with artists and authors from many cultures. Currently this publisher has a “New Voices” contest. They are always eager to see new authors and artists.

Life unfolds at different rates. Be patient and constant. Listen to and feed your yearnings. Don’t limit yourself and don’t let anyone else either!


From Paco and the Witch by Felix Pitre (Lodestar/Penguin)

From The Ancestor Tree by E. Obinkaram Echewa, Lodestar/Dutton
In March we interviewed six high school students who had recently returned from their international exchanges. (L to R) Meredith Fleming, six months, near Patagonia, Chile; Erika Whobrey, one year, München (Munich), Germany; Marisa Rodney, six months, Baden-Württemberg, Germany; Kelly O’Brien, six months, the Czech Republic; Erica Benedict-Barra, six months, Trinidad, Bolivia; Kim Brunner, one year, Japan. Our thanks to Tripp Sommer and Monica Hausmann of KLCC Radio for moderating and recording the discussion.

Moderator: Did anything seem awkward about your host family or host town when you arrived?

Marisa (Germany): I was in a very tiny village of 700 people, and it was 40 minutes by bus to my school. The first month I had a lot of difficulties accepting the fact that I was kind of stranded. The buses didn’t run after six, and I was totally dependent on a bus. My family didn’t know any English, and I’d only had two years of German. That was kind of a barrier in the beginning.

Erica (Bolivia): I think the biggest surprise for me was winding up in a family that was fairly strict. I had to be home right on time. If I wasn’t, I was grounded. That took a little adjusting to because I’ve grown up here in a fairly liberal family.

Erika (Germany): I think the neatest thing for me about my host family was that I had a brother for the year, and I’m an only child. I enjoyed that.

Kelly (Czech): There were plenty of awkward moments at school, but my family was just amazing. One of the things about Czech people is that they walk everywhere. I had a 45-minute walk to and from school, and it was uphill both ways. [Laughter] Gas is really expensive there, so they didn’t drive.

Meredith (Chile): I lived with a family that I didn’t know anything about before I left my country. I was the oldest with four younger brothers, and here I’m the youngest with two older sisters. It was really different because we had this huge mansion-style house with two maids. It was kind of hard to adjust to. I went to a preppy German private school in Chile. It wasn’t too hard because everybody was really warm and open.

Kim (Japan): I had to get adjusted to the school uniform—I hate school uniforms! And it took me pretty close to an hour to get to school and an hour to get back home. I did kyudo, Japanese archery, after school. I would leave at 7:20 in the morning and get home at 7:10 at night. Also, the house was really small, and the hallways were really narrow. When it’s raining, you hang the laundry inside, so you really don’t have any space.

Moderator: Could you talk a little bit more about what your school experience was like, both in terms of
language and in acclimating to a new school?

Kelly (Czech): All of my classmates were absolutely wonderful. English is mandatory from fourth grade; everyone spoke very good English. I didn’t understand a thing in any of my classes because my Czech just wasn’t anywhere close to helping me understand. The main principle in the school system is memorization of facts. You get a date; you get what happened on the date, and you memorize that. There was no discussion. You didn’t question the teachers; it wasn’t interactive at all like what I’m used to. They knew chemical structures of things that would never be useful unless you go into that particular field, and they don’t know how to put it together and figure other stuff out. It’s a very different teaching method.

Kim (Japan): It was pretty much the same in Japan. They’re really good at memorizing stuff. And they try to get into the right middle schools, so they can get into the right high school, so they can get into the right college. My school wasn’t exactly rocket scientists—it was kind of like business prep school. They had a lot of accounting, bookkeeping, general math, basic science, computer classes and things like that. I did go to another school while I was there, so I got to see what more generalized schooling was. They just give you a whole bunch of facts that you’re supposed to memorize.

[When asked if the language was challenging]:

Japanese is hard to read if you don’t know a lot of characters, so I can’t read a whole lot of books because my vocabulary isn’t very big. There was another problem—I learned, really, to speak Japanese with my friends. In Japanese when you talk to elders or superiors you use different words and terms of address. I don’t really know any of that, so I got a little nervous when I had to talk to teachers or the principal. But I can talk to friends and people that are considered “equals” really easily.

Erica (Bolivia): Right from the very beginning I was amazed at how warm all the girls in my class were. They felt it was their personal responsibility to take me out and show me the town. That was really nice because the boys were basically in total control of the class. The teachers were fairly intimidated, and the class was quite out of control. I think I had a worse situation than the average class in Bolivia. School was the downside of living there, but I still made good friends with some of the girls. My best friends, though, were outside of school, which really upset my host mom because she thought that I should make best friends with the girls at school because they were of the same class we were, which was basically upper class.

Also, with school, I was really startled the first week when an English teacher said, “Okay, today you need to go out and buy a hundred sheets of paper, take a ruler and draw a border around each piece of paper.” And I said, “Well, this shouldn’t be a problem. I’ll just do one and go make copies.” But I found out that was not acceptable, and it really aggravated me for a long time. I told my host brother, and he was rather offended with my complaining. After thinking about it, I realized that Bolivia hasn’t had as much modern technology for as long as the U.S., so doing this the old-fashioned, manual way was perfectly respectable.

Erika (Germany): My first day of school I was scared out of my mind. I knew nobody. I’d had a little of the language but not really enough to help me, and the first minute I met someone, they said to me, “So what grade do you want to be in?” I said, “I don’t know.” And they said, “Well, you’ve got to know. You’ve got to decide now. Class starts in five minutes.” So they decided to put me in a grade lower than I am usually in. But I actually switched schools a month into it because I switched host families, and then I enjoyed going to school every day.

They were working on coming up with new ways of teaching, but they had a lot of the old, traditional ways of teaching. The teachers write on the board; you copy it; you memorize it, and you write it down to do a test. I’m more of an interactive class person, but by the end I got pretty used to it. I think school was something I had to go to and make the best of.

Marissa (Germany): The good thing about school was that it was shorter and was over every day at 1
o’clock or noon. But I also didn’t like that it wasn’t so interactive. I didn’t really know any German, especially because all the German I learned was proper German, and they spoke Schwäbisch which was a way different dialect. Overall, school didn’t seem to be as social as it is here. People seem to go to school to learn, and then they go home and eat lunch. Everyone had their friends outside and in the lower levels of school. That was hard because if someone wanted to invite me to do something, it would be me with them one-on-one, which was awkward because I didn’t know them or the language that well.

Meredith (Chile): I liked my school. It was a free school through 12th grade, and it had only three hundred students. My class had 17 kids. You’re in the same classroom with the same group of kids all day long. It really helps you get to know them. The first minute I walked in the door, the boys picked up an empty chair and brought it over to where the girls sat and said, “Oh, you can sit here.” Everyone was really friendly. I actually heard that Chile has the best educational system in Latin America. They didn’t just learn the facts; they learned how to do things. School got out at 1 p.m. every day. I liked school, but my best friends weren’t in my class.

Meredith Fleming (left) and Marisa Rodney (right)

Kim (Japan): I sometimes had to go to school six days a week. In Japan they have school on Saturday every other week. We got out at 3:40 p.m., and on Saturdays we got out at 1:15 p.m.

Moderator: What were some of the stereotypes about Americans that you encountered?

Marissa (Germany): I just thought it was funny, all the stereotypical questions I’d get like, “Do you eat a lot of fast food, like McDonalds?” and “Have you seen ‘American Pie?’” [Laughter] “Have you met any movie stars?” And they all make fun of all our morals, like, “Did you really care about the Monica Lewinski affair?” They thought our election system was a joke. “So who do you guess is going to be president?” I heard this every day from one of my teachers who just loved saying, “So it looks like it’s Gore today,” or “It looks like it’s Bush today.”

Kim (Japan): I was the first exchange student my school had ever had, and even though I was relatively near a big city, I could go for a couple weeks without seeing another foreigner. People would stare at me everywhere I went. I wanted to get a big sign that said, “Stop looking at me. I can see you!” But I got used to it.

Meredith (Chile): For me, nobody knew I was a foreigner until I started talking. Where I lived there was a lot of European influence. I had friends who had blond hair. They looked more “American” than I did. But I also got all the stereotypes, like, “So your parents are really fat, aren’t they? All Americans are really fat.” But everybody was really warm and open. They want to get to know you and ask you thousands of questions.

Kelly (Czech): I got a lot of the same questions over and over. Outside of Prague, the general perceptions the Czechs have of Americans are based on the American media that gets over there. Most movies and TV shows are American. They have all of these ideas about us like all the women are very loose, and we live right next to Michael Jordan. Part of the experience was dealing with the ideas they had about me before I even came. I think I just destroyed any ideas they had about American women. Girls all wear very tight clothes there, and I wear these huge cargo pants. I sort of dress like a skater, and that just boggled their minds.

Moderator: Besides the stereotypes they had about America, what were the political and moral issues that were important to them?

Erika (Germany): One of the very refreshing things is that they don’t spend all their time talking about
who has a boyfriend, who’s going out with who and the latest rumors. People were interested in American politics. We know hardly anything about other countries politics, yet all the countries know about American politics because their lives depend so much on America’s foreign policy. Toward the end, I was their friend, and they talked to me about all the things you’d normally talk about. Teenage life is really so similar.

Kelly (Czech): All of my friends at school wanted to know about movies and, more than movies, music. They listen to a lot of American music... My friends from the Czech Republic would come to class singing these songs. They’d have no idea what the lyrics meant, and they’d ask me to explain what they meant. My friends were also very interested in computers, which was perfect because I’m a computer person too. So we were talking about new software, new hardware and how annoying Microsoft is, that sort of thing. We also talked about typical teenage stuff.

Marissa (Germany): Actually I don’t remember ever talking about politics. They didn’t seem that interested. But I would get the basic questions like, “Are your views more liberal or conservative?” My host family was really surprised that I didn’t know as much about German politics as I did about the U.S. because they knew so much about the U.S., more than I do. I think our news is so censored here. I was hearing stuff about the U.S. that I would have never heard here.

Erica (Bolivia): In Bolivia I really wanted to find out what was going on politically and what perceptions they had of the U.S. I did some serious sleuthing on that, asking all my friends, “Which party do you associate with?” There are three main parties there, and sometimes they would say, “Oh, I really don’t know; it doesn’t really matter,” or “My family supports this party because this party gave my father a job.” If you ask what the differences are between the parties, they say, “Oh, they’re really all the same.” What all the presidents advocate is pan, techo y trabajo—food, housing and work. There’s a fair amount of corruption, I believe, in all of the parties. Really, all the votes are basically bought. My host father was a doctor, and he would go out to the country for free health care for all the campesinos who would promise to vote for Banzer, who is now the president of Bolivia, who, back in the 70’s, took the country in a very violent coup. My father said, “Oh, Banzer’s changed. He’s a good president now,” and my host mother says, “My father was almost shot by one of his soldiers.” They tried not to ever have controversy in the family. It was kept subtle.

I went and visited my host grandfather in Tarija, southern Bolivia. He went to Russia for a year when he was in college because, I believe, he supported a communist regime during this period of political turmoil. I had talked with my host mother, and I knew he had gone to Russia so he wouldn’t get killed. I asked him, “So why did you go to Russia?” And he said, “Oh, just to be an exchange student.” He didn’t want to tell me because, as an American, he thought I would be very anti-communist. There’s a lot of complicated politics going on in Bolivia.

Moderator: There’ve been so many school shootings in the U.S. Did that ever happen in the country you were visiting, or was that just a U.S. occurrence?

Erika (Germany): When I was there, it was the first year that there had been a school shooting in Germany, and it was a huge deal. They’d heard there was one near us, the Thurston school shooting, and they know a lot about it. I explained it as best I could. I’d get a lot of questions like, “Do you carry a gun always?” and “Do you have guards in your school?” And I said, “No, I won’t touch a gun,” but it was a big deal when that happened in Germany, and they became so nervous. They thought, “Oh my gosh, what if the same thing happens that’s been happening in America?” I think that it’s becoming more of an issue in many countries, and unfortunately, it’s part of our culture that I had to explain. I think it was important for them to meet Americans who don’t condone shooting and guns because they tend to get an image of Americans as gun carriers and violent people.
Kim (Japan): Guns are illegal in Japan, so that doesn’t happen a lot there. I told them about the shootings, and they were, of course, really shocked. People seemed to ask me all the time, “Do you carry a gun?” or “Do you have a gun at your house or a lot of guns?” They think we’re all armed to the teeth and bring them to school. I tried to discourage that idea as much as possible.

Kelly (Czech): It just wasn’t an issue. They didn’t think of the possibility of that ever happening; it has never happened in the Czech Republic.

Marissa (Germany): I mainly only talked about it with my family, and their response was, “Well, the simple solution would be better gun control.” They didn’t understand why it was an issue here.

Meredith (Chile): They all knew about what had happened here, but most of my friends were level-headed enough that they knew it was a rare occasion. It’s not something they think is normal. I don’t see that happening in Chile.

Erica (Bolivia): In Bolivia, I didn’t see the use of guns where I was. There was, however, a fair amount of violence, particularly against women. There didn’t seem to be any support services in my town at all, and I knew one girl, in particular, who I really wanted to find some support for because I felt that she was being abused, at least emotionally. She was a classmate of mine and was being abused by other classmates, boys, so I looked around. I looked in the phone book; I asked people, but I couldn’t find any social services anywhere.

Thankfully, guns don’t seem to be in the hands of the youth in Trinidad, but there are certainly other forms of violence. It made me very thankful for all the social services we have here that people can be referred to for help. I did finally find one city office that dealt with issues pertaining to young people. This was the office anybody comes to if they have any problems with anything.

Moderator: How was the food where you were?

Kelly (Czech): My host sister’s favorite food was chestnuts. So one day we decided to ride our bikes to find chestnuts that had fallen off the tree. Well, the whole bike trip was uphill. We had to ride our bikes through the forest, and there wasn’t actually a path. Then we got to where the chestnuts were, and she started pointing to these little, green prickly things. You can’t just pop them in your mouth and start chewing either. You can’t even peel them when they’re raw. You take them home, put them in a frying pan, and the way you know they’re done is when a couple of them start to explode loudly and messily all over the kitchen. Then you take these piping hot chestnuts and peel them with your fingers. It’s like trying to peel leather; it’s extremely tough. So you have to take a knife, hope you don’t slip, and stick it in the peel so you can peel it off. I thought they tasted terrible.

Czech food is generally very heavy, meat and dumplings. Not dumplings like little round things. You boil this whole loaf and cut it up. It’s like squishy bread. I really liked them. You put sauce over turkey and the dumplings, and that’s your meal. They had this thing called “hairy dumplings,” which were these little grey, lumpy potato things. They were scary looking, but they tasted really good. The traditional Christmas meal is a hunk of fried carp. You buy the carp three days before and keep it in your bathtub downstairs. Christmas morning you kill it so you can cook it for dinner. You eat it breaded and deep-fried with potato salad, and that’s Christmas dinner.

Erika (Germany): I loved German food. It’s soul food. It’s delicious—a lot of cream, fat and cheese. I gained a lot of weight. Here we buy cream in the little tiny cardboard bottle, and there they buy them by the half liter—three at a time! Some of my other favorite things were the Christmas goodies, the licorice! My favorite meal was one they make only in southern Germany called Kaiserschmarn. It’s like a very, very thick crepe. You cut it up once you finish cooking it and put jam and powdered sugar over it.

Kim (Japan): I gained a lot of weight while I was over there. It was all really good food, but it was so
fattening. There’s a lot of deepfried stuff. I think I ate more rice than my whole American family has in their entire lives combined. I was afraid of getting sick of rice when I first got there, but I got used to it. They eat rice like you drink water—in pretty much equal amounts. They have it with every meal. There were also a lot of vegetables and seaweed. I really like seaweed now, but I still don’t really like raw fish.

Erica (Bolivia): My least favorite food was probably McDonald’s. Shockingly, it was the most expensive meal you could possibly buy out. But it was something about the status of it that would lead people to go out and buy it. My second least favorite food was something called negra, which is coagulated blood sausage. I didn’t know what it was when I ate it. It wasn’t that bad, but I was kind of turned off by the little chunks of fat.

There was also great food in Bolivia. I could just walk to the mercado, the nearby market, and for 30 cents I could have this amazing banana or papaya milk smoothie. They had wonderful food, lots of bread. Every morning people would eat little buns of different types. After school, at about 12:30, we’d all come home and eat a huge lunch, almuerzo. And for dinner we’d eat a little bit, the same as breakfast, snacks. There were a lot of soups. Traditionally a main meal must have soup first. Rice was also a mainstay of my region, the eastern Amazon. In the West, however, on the Altiplano, which is at about 13,000 feet, potatoes are an absolute mainstay.

Meredith (Chile): I loved the Chilean food. The big meal of the day is at 1 o’clock. We had two people cooking for us all day long, so when we got home there were always big, extravagant meals waiting for us. It was all so good; you could never stop eating.

One of my favorite meals is gnocchi. They’re pasta-shaped things made out of potatoes with tomato sauce on them. You have to eat meat; nobody’s a vegetarian. You also eat a lot of seafood because there’s a lot of ocean. After lunch you have postre, dessert. You don’t leave until everyone’s eaten every bite they give you. We had fresh-baked bread every day. In the afternoons I’d come home for once, which is around 5 o’clock. We’d drink tea, and my family would make a cake everyday—like a fruitcake. Then at night we’d eat another big meal. They eat a lot!

Marisa (Germany): I just can’t believe anyone eats as much bread as they do in Germany. You eat bread for breakfast, and you eat bread for dinner every single day—bread with meat and different kinds of cheese. I don’t like German food that much. It was good, but it was bland. I love spicy food and lots of good seasoning. I ate so much chocolate, and it was so cheap.

Moderator: What is the main religion in your host country, and how much you were participating in or exposed to ceremonies and services?

Kelly (Czech): I think the Czech Republic is 39 percent Roman Catholic and 39 percent atheist, and the rest is “other.” The reason for that is they used to be a very devout Roman Catholic country, but the communists frowned on religion. My family was atheist, and I’m actually a Catholic. I had an exceptional family. They were extremely open-minded, culturally and religiously. But I think that there are some people in the Czech Republic who would still view religion as not a good thing—as a habit. The Communist Manifesto says that religion is the “opiate of the masses,” and I think there are a lot of people in the Czech Republic who view it that way, but there are also a lot of people who go to church every Sunday.

I didn’t go to Mass because it was very intimidating. Nobody spoke English because the older generation in general doesn’t speak English. My host family told me they were afraid I was going to be some sort of religious zealot, and I was going to try and convert them all. So they were glad I was a pretty liberal Catholic. I learned a lot from them.

Marissa (Germany): My host family was extremely religious. My tiny village was like a church community. My mom worked for the church. They believed everything in the Bible to the extent of contradicting...
science, but they didn’t have the usual parenthood stuff I would associate with being religious. They were not very strict about me coming home at any time, and they were a lot more open about sex.

**Meredith** (Chile): I was told Chile was 95 to 98 percent Catholic, so I packed up all my skirts and planned to go to church every Sunday. When I got there I didn’t go to church once. But I also had a friend who had to pray with his family every day and had to go to church every Sunday. But none of my friends were really that religious.

**Erika** (Germany): Where I lived, in southwest Germany, most of the population is Catholic, and in northern Germany they tend to be Lutheran. I’m actually fairly religious, and it was interesting adjusting to a host family that was atheist. It was interesting to exchange points of view with people who don’t believe in all the same things I do. One of the things that really bothered me was that in school we had three religion classes: Catholic, Lutheran and “other.” I just couldn’t get over “other.” It was like, “Everyone in every other religion besides Catholic and Lutheran, you all go and learn the same things because your religions aren’t all that unique anyway.” There were many Turkish people living in Munich. So Muslims, Jews, atheists were all in one class. The Lutheran class was very, very small, and the Catholic class was humongous. But most of the people in Munich don’t go to church. They go on Christmas and Easter, and that’s it.

**Erica** (Bolivia): In Bolivia, we didn’t even have the “other.” We just had an Evangelical class and a Catholic class. I thought, “Well, I’m neither, so I’ll do the Evangelical class because that’s something I really don’t know anything about.” I kind of swallowed my pride and my beliefs and listened to—what I considered—very fundamentalist religious dogma. The majority of Bolivians are Catholic, but the number of Evangelical people is growing very steadily because the Evangelical people tend to go out to the country and recruit *campesinos*. So if you go out to the country, you will find a lot more Evangelical people. Some of the things I found offensive about the dogma we learned in class were that among the “many versions” people can have, “being gay is a terrible perversion, masturbation is a terrible perversion, and you must abstain from sex until after marriage.” To a certain degree that’s true with Catholics too. I felt like the Evangelicals and the Catholics got along pretty well. They seemed to avoid their differences.

**Kim** (Japan): My host family was Buddhist, and we also lived with my host grandparents. My host family, excluding my grandparents, didn’t really do a lot of going to temples. My host father wanted to go to this big temple to do the New Year’s prayer, but my host mother was like, “No, it’s going to be so crowded, and it’s three hours from here. We’re not going.” But my host grandparents were a lot more into it. I didn’t really see them a whole lot because they lived downstairs, and we lived upstairs. My room was right above the spare room, which was the traditional *tatami* room, and in the closet they had a shrine. It was a 4’ by 2’ shrine. There was a little bowl, and you go in there and hit the bowl so it makes this ringing noise a couple times and clap your hands and pray. After a while, I realized I could hear that ringing in my room. I would hear it once an hour. My host grandmother would go in there whenever she thought of it. We did go to some temples, mostly for sightseeing. My host family wasn’t very religious.

**Moderator:** Can you do a bit of a comparison between your experience as a foreign exchange student versus the experiences of foreign exchange students at your school in the U.S.?

**Erica** (Bolivia): I was really worried that things would be like they were here because I pretty much thought that the exchange students over here were ignored or had trouble making friends except with each other. People didn’t know how to relate to the exchange students in schools of 2,000 people. We didn’t even know who the exchange students were. But when I went to Bolivia, my school had six classes. The two exchange students, a girl from Japan and I, really stood out, and everybody treated us pretty specially.

When I came back home to Eugene, the exchange students seemed to be doing better at my school. I think they’re doing better primarily because we’ve started an international club where everyone can meet each other, and other people can participate. It’s not that we’re cold. I think many students just don’t know who the exchange students are.
Erika (Germany): I would say being an exchange student to a country other than the U.S. is something very different from being an exchange student here. It isn’t common in other countries to have so many exchange students in one school. I know at South Eugene this year we have almost 30 exchange students, and I think as a society we’ve become so multicultural that it just isn’t such a big deal anymore. When I went to Germany everyone came up to me and said, “Oh, you’re from the United States.” Actually, all my friends wanted to start speaking English with me. I answered back in what little German I had, and after a year I became fluent in German. They’d ask me about the rap songs—what all the words meant, and I got so sick of it. But I think my experience there was really special. They are not as open in Germany as in Latin American countries, but once I made friends they were true friends and very special to me.

Moderator: Do you have any advice for future exchange students?

Kelly (Czech): One of the things that helped me the most was that I tried to keep my expectations way down. You don’t want to go there expecting a dryer—[Another voice: You may have to hand wash your own clothes!]

Kelly (Czech): Exactly. Don’t automatically assume things you have heard about the country are true. It’s really hard to eliminate any expectations because even if you don’t think you have any, you do.

Kim (Japan): My dad sent me 20 bags of microwave popcorn, but I found out there wasn’t a microwave! Just try to have as few expectations as possible. I think it will make the transition a whole lot smoother.

Erika (Germany): I think one of the expectations a lot of people have that can get them in trouble is having a wonderful host family. You might have a wonderful host family, but you always have difficulties—just like in your own family. It’s important to talk to your host family in the beginning about what their rules are. There are lot of rules you have as a family that you never realize until somebody points them out and says, “Well, we’ve never done things that way.” Simply talking to your host family is a big deal. A lot of people try to avoid it so much that when they finally do talk to them, it becomes this big blow up.

Kim (Japan): Don’t be too hard on yourself. As I said earlier, I was in kyudo, Japanese archery, for about six months. It was really time-consuming. The competitions were just nerve-wracking. I was the only person with red hair in a competition of about 800 people. I quit after six months because I was totally stressed out about it, and it was just not worth it. After that I was relaxed and enjoyed myself and was free to do whatever I wanted after school.

Meredith: I’d say you have to keep an open mind. If you meet somebody, and you don’t like one of their beliefs, it doesn’t mean they couldn’t be a really good friend. You just have to accept people for who they are. Take risks. If you’re not having a good day, and somebody invites you somewhere, don’t say no! Sometimes you have to put yourself in situations you don’t want to be in. That just makes everything better.

Marisa (Germany): If you really want to see a different culture, I wouldn’t go to western Europe. Germany was so much like the U.S. in a lot of things. It was more modern than I expected.

Erica (Bolivia): I think there are a lot of different elements that make up an excellent stay abroad, and very rarely do all the elements come through. As soon as you arrive someplace, try to find ways of meeting people outside of school. Everything isn’t going to go perfectly. That’s one of the best things about the whole experience because you learn to cope.

Also make sure you have a very comfortable backpack in case you do get to travel. Make sure you have a really good book that tells you all about your country. And also, the more of the language you know before you go, the faster you get to learn about the deeper parts of the culture—the things that you can’t see, that you can only know by really having good discussions with people. That’s the richest thing you can possibly get out of being an exchange student. You can’t get that by just being a tourist. It’s really knowing people and relationships. So learn the language before you go! Every word counts.

Our special thanks to Beth Erfurth, volunteer exchange coordinator with A.F.S. in Eugene, Oregon, for her help in organizing this event.

—editors
A Filipino-American Girl

"Are you Hawaiian? Hispanic? Chinese?" I have been asked all these questions, to which I answer, "No, I am a Filipino-American." My parents are immigrants from the Philippines, but I was born in America. Filipino culture was something I took for granted most of my life, until I traveled there last year. Little did I know that in that short span of time, two weeks, my whole outlook on life would be broadened and changed.

Most of the world sees the Philippines, like other third-world countries, as a place of poverty and sadness. Yes, there is poverty, but there is poverty all over the world. If you look closely, you will see an emerging, developing country with a rich culture.

My trip begins in the capital. Driving through Manila is an exciting adventure. Jeepneys, similar to buses but named and painted bright, flashy colors, crowd the streets. Tricycles or motorcycles with buggies attached zoomed past us with passengers happily looking out the windows. In the busy, bustling downtown area sari-sari stores (small stands) line the sides of the roads. At the sari-sari stores you can buy all sorts of delicious snacks like banana-cue, fried bananas on a stick rolled in sugar; freshly-peeled mangoes; lemonade and sugarcane sticks to suck on.

We leave the city and enter the countryside. The low hills and clear blue sky provide the perfect backdrop for my Philippines experience. I am surrounded by lush green rice paddies on all sides. I can hear the caribou grunting as they pad through the long rice stalks. I see the farmers working diligently under the hot sun, with rolled up pants and wide hats to guard their faces. Vendors walk the streets peddling yams, fried banana, quail eggs, buko (coconut juice) and boiled corn.

A mountain, taller than the others, rises in the distance. I ask my mother what it is, and she replies, "Mt. Arayat." She tells me the tale of a rich girl on a plantation and a poor plantation worker who fell in love. The rich girl’s father, however, forbid them to marry, and the girl died of sorrow. Where she was buried, the ground shook, and a mountain rose out of the ground. It bore her face. Looking closely at the mountain, I can make out the lovely face that inspired such a story.

At a barrio, fiesta bright lights hang from the trees and poles. A large lechon (pig) is crackling over an open fire, and the aroma floats to my nose. Children laugh and jump as they try to grab the gifts of the pabitin, a board on a pulley with hanging gifts. For the adults, there is the tinikling, the Philippine national dance. Two bamboo poles are rhythmically raised and lowered, and a man and woman dance barefooted around them, imitating small birds courting. One false step and the dancer’s foot will be smashed. Great agility and grace is required for this dance.

It’s Christmas, and the whole neighborhood walks in the humid streets to church for midnight Mass. After Mass, the congregation walks home where a feast of Filipino cuisine is prepared, and presents are exchanged.

Tears are shed, and the trip is over. Now I have a taste of both cultures, and I feel I truly have the best of both worlds. I am an American, but I am also a Filipino.

—Amanda Mangaser, 12, Goleta, California.
Going Back Home

"While civilization has been improving our houses, it has not equally improved the men who are to inhabit them. It has created palaces, but it was not so easy to create noblemen and kings."

—Henry David Thoreau

My great-grandfather was a rice farmer and owned a rather large farm in central Taiwan. My mother used to visit there every summer when she was little. This year she brought me there too.

The first thing I noticed was that the farm did not look like the stereotypical American farm with a farmhouse, barn, corral and planting fields. On the contrary, it was organized like a traditional Chinese farm. The land supported the extended family, all the descendants of my mother's grandparents. The main house was shaped so that it outlined three sides of a rectangle with a gate to complete the fourth side. Surrounding the house were numerous rice paddies and a vegetable garden but no animals.

The inside of the house was rustic and had an antique look and smell about it. It wasn't messy; in fact, everything seemed very tidy. It just looked dirty. The gray, faded floor tiles looked dusty from years of use. In the countryside it is hard to keep your floors sparkly clean. Part of the house had been renovated to accommodate a gas stove and water pipes, but the remains of three original wood-burning stoves and a washbasin are still visible. There was no computer, no fax machine, no DVD player—none of the modern technologies upon which our lives so heavily depend. Most of my relatives did not even own a car. There was no air conditioner either; it is much cooler in the country, away from the stifling skyscrapers and other buildings.

My great-aunts and uncles, I found, were wonderfully simple people, as were their children and grandchildren. They had rarely or never been to the big city, Taipei. They had never ridden in an airplane. Their pleasures were not in surfing the net or shopping for the latest fashion but in drinking tea and cooking vegetables from their own gardens. They take pride in their gardens because they are so much healthier than commercial farms, which they claim use so many pesticides that even a mouse walking through the fields will die of poisoning.

Their unstoppable gossip and the proverbial epigrams with which they teasingly scolded each other were rather comical. From the second they saw us approaching on the dirt road, they were friendly and welcoming, each fighting over who would have us over for lunch. We ate at least two lunches that day, plus afternoon tea and dinner.

Back home in America, I realize how different my life is from theirs. I live in a big house, with more modern-day comforts than my relatives ever dreamed of. My neighborhood is the type that materialistic people drive through simply to look at the houses. I will always enjoy driving through the crisp, clean air and scenery of the countryside where my great-aunts and uncles live. But a drive through the country is different from a drive through a suburban neighborhood crowded with grand and stately, nearly-new houses with cultivated lawns and cars visible on the driveway.

Where I live, the splendor of the outside undoubtedly mirrors that of the inside, but the people living inside, I have found, do not always reflect the beauty of their houses. Many are cold, unfriendly, arrogant or excessively superficial—people who sneer at those less fortunate than themselves, when in reality those same "less fortunate" people may be better at heart.

My great-grandfather's family is not wealthy, but it has a heart of gold. The fact that a person lives in a palace does not prove her/his nobleness.

—Catherine Chou, N. Clarkstown HS, New City, NY.
The story of my great-grandmother, Rose Weisman Linton, is a fascinating tale of courage and determination. At age 17, she left her family in Russia, seeking freedom from persecution and opportunities for education. She traveled alone to America, not knowing a word of English. Her emigration ticket was originally not even intended for her. It was sent to her older sister, who ultimately refused to be separated from her family. If Rose had not made this courageous decision to leave her homeland, my family would not be here today.

Rose Weisman was born in 1890 in the village of Podolsk, Russia. This rural community was 26 miles south of Moscow, along the Pakhra River. Life was difficult for the villagers because they lived in constant terror of persecution by the Cossacks. These troops of peasant soldiers were used by the czarist government to suppress internal unrest. They channeled the working population's dissatisfaction with political and economic conditions into hatred and bigotry against religious minorities. Mob attacks, known as pogroms, killed countless civilians and devastated homes and property. Though Rose's father was influential and well-educated, his family was not immune to the ruthless destruction by the Cossacks. At night the family would hear the dreadful warning sound of the galloping horses' hooves. They would quickly board up the doors and windows of their simple house, attempting to make it appear abandoned. How long could they survive the carnage of the Cossack troops? Emigration offered the only hope for freedom from terrorism and from physical, emotional and economic adversity. It was decided that one family member must attempt to escape this tyranny.

A Legacy of Courage

The Weisman family contacted a relative living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, who managed to save enough money for a single boat ticket to America. Rose's older sister was the recipient of this ticket, but she couldn't bear to leave her family. Rose offered to go in her sister's stead rather than allow the ticket to go to waste.

Rose's father accompanied her to Bremen, Germany, where she boarded a ship. Once on board, Rose discovered how miserable her conditions would be. She was guided to the lowest section of the vessel, where all of the steerage passengers shared one room. This area of the ship was reserved for passengers who were paying the cheapest fares. The room was filled with row upon row of bunks. The heat, stench and lack of privacy were almost intolerable.

After a long and exhausting voyage, Rose arrived in Philadelphia. From there, she had to find her way alone to her aunt's home in Pittsburgh. She managed to find the train station, purchase a ticket, and arrive safely at her aunt's home without speaking a word of English. At regular intervals Rose penned letters and sent what money she could to her family in Russia. Her family was grateful and responded with letters of their own.

Suddenly, without explanation, Rose's letters went unanswered and all correspondence from Russia ceased. Rose desperately attempted to learn the fate of her mother, father and sister to no avail. It was as if her family had vanished without a trace. In later years, it became known that during that time, particularly violent pogroms erupted across Russia. Countless victims were massacred, and most likely Rose's family was among them.

Rose remained with her aunt for several years, diligently working in the family store. She was determined to learn to speak and read her new language as quickly as possible. Rose enlisted the aid of a young neighbor who was an immigrant from Ireland. They would sit on her front porch, reviewing vocabulary and practicing conversation. Rose avidly read books and newspapers, and whenever possible, she attended night classes.

Several years later, Rose met and fell in love with a family acquaintance, Samuel Linton. They soon married and established their own home in a steel-
producing suburb of Pittsburgh. They settled into a content family life and raised four children. Rose encouraged her children to appreciate their educational opportunities. All of the children acquired a love of classical literature; in fact they would often show up for meals with books in their hands! Three of the four children obtained college degrees.

During this time, Samuel was employed by Westinghouse, an electronics corporation. His income, however, was not enough to comfortably support a family of six. Rose was determined to provide additional financial support in these times of economic hardship. She converted the first floor of their home into a thriving general store. Men passing to and from work at the local steel mills would stop by her store to buy items such as handkerchiefs, tobacco and work gloves. At night they would sit around the store’s soda fountain discussing politics and world events.

Rose was a woman of enormous resolve and determination. Her bold exodus from a land of tyranny during her teenage years allowed for the survival of future generations of her family. Rose overcame many obstacles along the way including her youth, gender, language and lack of formal education. She faced every barrier she encountered with tremendous spirit and perseverance. Her courage and determination will never be forgotten.

—Ryan Propper, 15, Greenwood Village, Colorado.

Rosh Hashana

Each fall, as the school year gets underway, the first holiday of the Jewish calendar, Rosh Hashana, begins. Rosh Hashana is Hebrew for “head of the year,” and it is celebrated on the first and second days of the Hebrew month of Tishrei. The holiday begins with a blast of the shofar, a musical instrument carved from a ram’s horn. The shofar has been used for over 3,000 years to announce the start of important holidays and festivals.

All Jewish holidays begin at sundown. We light the candles and begin our celebrations with a special meal. Although every family has their own traditions regarding what they eat, certain foods will always be found on the table at Rosh Hashana. Challah, bread made of honey, eggs and sometimes raisins, is shaped into a round loaf, like a crown, for the “head” of the year. We enjoy crisp apples, sliced and ready for dipping in honey, but pomegranates are the traditional first fruit of the New Year. They are served as a reminder that we should be as overflowing in good deeds as they’re in seeds! The apples dipped in honey are our way of wishing each other a sweet New Year.

The trumpeting sound of the shofar is like a call to awaken. “Open your eyes! Think! Take stock of your days!” Similar to the New Year celebrated on January 1st, Rosh Hashana is a time of reflection, a time to consider the choices you have made all year long and to observe how you might grow and change with the coming year. Rosh Hashana is also the beginning of a time called the “Days of Awe,” the ten days that begin with Rosh Hashana and end with Yom Kippur, the “Day of Atonement.”

During this time many Jews perform the ceremony of tashlich, in which we symbolically cast away our past mistakes. We meet by a river, creek or any flowing body of water, and we empty our pockets of breadcrumbs. The breadcrumbs we have gathered represent our mistakes. We cast them into the water, and when we release them, we are asking God to rid us of our misdeeds and help us learn to take responsibility for the things we do and say. During the Days of Awe, we reach out to those in our lives with whom we may have had disagreements or misunderstandings, and we offer apologies. This process is called teshuvah, which means to return. This allows us an opportunity to “return” to a purer sense of ourselves. Then, with a clear head and an open heart, we are ready to begin the new year.

When all this is done with a sincere heart, Jews believe that we are inscribed in the book of life for yet another year, and so we wish each other l’shana tova, a happy New Year! The air becomes crisper; the leaves turn colors, and, though winter is approaching, we experience a sense of renewal. A fresh start and with it a sense of the peace and cooperation that comes from letting go of past mistakes and standing together as you focus on the future.

—Jennifer Jacobs, Fairbanks, Alaska. This year, Rosh Hashana begins at sundown on the 17th of September and Yom Kippur is on the 27th.
Ruby Bridges: In Her Shoes

Walking to school,  
Really wasn’t cool.  
We were all the same,  
So why did the white folks shout my name?  
“We don’t want you here! Whites only!  
Go away!”

Were the definitions of what they would say.  
I didn’t understand it, I was too young.  
Until, out of all those days came one.  
A black baby doll, dark skinned,  
Looked a lot like one of my kin.  
It was in a coffin, and suddenly, like that!  
A light came on with a snap!  
The color of my skin, the outside,  
what you see.  
That was the problem they had with me.  
A six-year-old girl, called names,  
Just because our skin wasn’t the same.  
Now, is that fair? I think not.  
It’s something that I’ve never forgot.  
I’ve got a head, so do you.  
Eyes, ears, nose and a mouth on it too.  
Two arms, two legs, toes and fingers,  
But still that question always lingers.  
That’s my body, that’s all.  
Now you need to make the call.  
Why can’t it be, you and me,  
Us together as a We?

—Danielle Henry, 6th grade, Mill City, Oregon.

Lightning

In a blaze of jagged, white light,  
I streak across the darkened sky.  
I lunge from cloud to cloud,  
Then pounce down to the ground.  
I strike randomly.  
I bestow no warnings.  
My energy singes where I touch.  
I am powerful, brilliant and destructive,  
For a mere second, then I am gone.

—Brian Haskins, 14, Gibsonia, Penn.
Native American Games and Stories by James Bruchac and Joseph Bruchac, Illust. Kayeri Akweks (Fulcrum). In the spirit of learning while playing, this book provides Native history, folk tales, and instructions for team sports and games of chance, skill and awareness. Ages 10 and up. ISBN 1-55591-979-0.


Jungle Islands: My South Sea Adventure by Maria Coffey and Debora Pearson, photos Dag Goering (Annick). Join Maria and Dag on their kayak explorations of the Solomon Islands. This colorful travelogue describes lessons learned from the locals about the animals, plants and customs of the region. Ages 8 and up. ISBN 1-55037-596-2.


Teenagers in Ukraine want penpals. They have various disabilities and they are ages 12 and up. If possible, please write to them in Russian or Ukrainian.

c/o July Mandel, Peace Corps Volunteer
NADEZHDA
41 Artema, Mailbox 123
84500 Artemovsk
Donetsk Region UKRAINE

Maria Kekez, 16, F
P. Heruca 9,
10000 Zagreb, Croatia
kiss@net.hr
Int: animals, postcards, travel

Jennifer Forss, 16, F
Abelsberg 22
73050 Skultuna, Sweden
Int: music, pet rat

Viktorija Zaksaité, 15, F
Bandžužius 14-18
Klaipėda LT-5814 Lithuania
Int: foreign friends

Ria Bond, 16, F
HC 01, Box 215R
S1. Maries, ID 83861 USA
Int: books, music, beads, old movies
(Read her poem on page 9!)

Illustration and game by Boris Chesakov, 17, Russian American, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This was one of the noteworthy entries from the Youth Awards.
A Guide For PARENTS & TEACHERS

Heritage School

Working with Skipping Stones has inspired me to take note of people who reach across barriers of language and culture to understand and appreciate one another.

Last year I was seeking work as an ESL teacher and wanting to expand my own multicultural awareness by working with children whose home language is not English. I never imagined I’d be working in a school that is trilingual, where children and adults from at least three languages and cultures work and learn together every day.

Heritage Elementary School in Woodburn, Oregon, was named with the vision of honoring everyone’s heritage. What is so impressive and moving to me as a staff member at Heritage is that the cultures in our school are not just paid lip service. They are accepted and incorporated into every aspect of our curriculum and our day-to-day work together. It goes way beyond dedicating one day or one month per year to learn about a certain “other” group.

The faces and clothing of our staff let you know immediately that you are not in an ordinary school. Russian Old Believers and Mexican Americans share our front office space with European Americans, and every parent and child has someone in the office that s/he can talk to. When a student enters the front door of our school, s/he does not feel different or left out but sees faces that look like hers and hears words she can understand.

We have translators at school at all times so parents and students can find assistance and do business in their home language. We use multicultural and bilingual (Spanish-English) teaching materials. Staff and volunteers translate materials into Russian for use in the classroom. Students learn in their home language in the primary grades, gradually moving into English. Every child studies a second language, either English, Spanish or Russian. Every announcement and every note home is written in three languages. We have community book fairs where books are available in all three languages. Our school cafeteria serves foods familiar to the students from their home cultures as well as foods common in the U.S.

Out on the playground, you can see a climbing structure built to resemble traditional Russian architecture. When we have school assemblies, everyone sings the Heritage Song in three languages, and students learn songs and dances from many cultures.

The school’s front hall is covered with photos of the school staff: Russian, Ukrainian, Mexican American, African American, Native American and European American, all with self-written introductions and titles of their favorite books. Turn the corner at the office, and you can find walls full of photos of school activities: the César Chávez assembly, reading activities, environmental/ecological projects, visiting authors, holiday celebrations at school, and photos of events that unite us within our diversity: twin day, crazy hair day, hat day, etc. These photos remind us of the fun we can have together. Our work and fun together bond us as one community that includes many.

There are also newspaper clippings of parents, children and staff involved in the larger community of Woodburn. This month the articles described a collaboration between our school and a nearby middle school in on-site environmental projects including planting trees, planting vegetables and creating compost; an article about a teaching assistant who opened a Russian bakery in town; and another one about a father who makes outstanding barbecue.

Our school not only honors diversity but lives it.

—Mary Drew is an educator and board member. Also see page 13 and back cover for students’ art and photos.

Recommended Resources

Pete Seeger’s Storytelling Book by Pete Seeger and Paul Jacobs (Harcourt). The storytelling tradition has been passed on for thousands of years. But it is in danger of being lost to the age of ready-made entertainment. In this resource for parents, storytellers and teachers, the authors share the secrets of spinning tales and tell over 50 new and old stories. If you have’t seen Pete Seeger in person, this is the next best thing! All ages. ISBN 0-15-601311-8.

Curtains Up! Theatre Games and Storytelling by Robert Rubinstein, illus. Libby Head (Fulcrum). Over a hundred imaginative activities (e.g., Human Puppets, The Monster Meal, The Key) help storytelling, improvisation and public speaking skills. Middle grades. ISBN 1-55591-984-7.

A Narmada Diary (video) by Anand Patwardhan and Simantini Dhuru. 60 mins. (First Run/Carus Films). For a decade the people of the Narmada Valley, India, many of whom are indigenous, have been resisting the mammoth development project of Sardar Sarover Dam. This film documents one of the most dynamic global struggles against unjust and unsustainable development. For social & ecological studies/current issues classes. Upper grades.

Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism by Suzanne Pharr (Chardon). Essential reading for anyone who wishes for a greater understanding of how homophobia keeps all people—not just lesbian, gay, transgender or questioning—from realizing their full potential. Pharr is the founder of the Women’s Project in Little Rock. ISBN 1-890759-01-5.
Students at Heritage Elem., a multicultural, trilingual school in Woodburn, Oregon. See pp. 13 and 35.

Skipping Stones
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