The 2004 Book Awards!
In This Issue of Skipping Stones:

Vol. 16, no. 3 May–August 2004

ISSN: 0899-529X

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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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Acknowledgements

Cover Art by Elizabeth Wilkinson, Saint Albans, VT.
Board of Directors: Paulette Ansari, Bahati Ansari, Mary Drew, Misa Joo, Bill Hessling, Steve Mallery, Ron Marson, Joachim Schulz, Hanna K Still and Arun N. Toké.
Special Thanks to Christine Degley, Li-Chuan Chiang, Nina Forsberg, our interns, contributors, supporters, volunteers and the teachers whose students’ work is in this issue.

Skipping Stones is an educational and charitable organization with a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. Donations to Skipping Stones are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Please support our 50% discount and free subscriptions to low-income subscribers by making a donation.


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

Subscriptions: Institutions: $35; Individuals: $25 Airmail: $10 extra; Low-income discount: 50%; Single / back issues: $5 each ($7, by air).

To submit, subscribe or reprint, contact: Skipping Stones Magazine PO Box 3939 Eugene, OR 97403 USA (541) 342-4956; editor@SkippingStones.org wwwSkippingStones.org

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Welcome! Have you already started dreaming about your summer vacation? What do you want to do this summer? While I hear some kids say, "Summer...what a bore...nothing exciting to do," there are many simple ways to make it extraordinary!

In our daily life, for the most part, we live and feel separated from nature and the outdoors. How can we feel that we belong in nature? As a kid, I remember taking morning walks with my father, uncle or brothers. We'd enjoy ripe mangoes, tamarind or other tropical fruits as we walked past those trees. Even now, as an adult, I love to take early morning strolls. Today, while I was enjoying the morning mist, what a pleasure it was to see two beautiful songbirds perched on the crowns of two nearby evergreens, welcoming the new day with their melodious chirps!

As we spend more time getting to know the woods and outdoors, we no longer feel afraid of those bugs, slugs and other critters that are simply minding their daily business. Nature walks, hikes or back country camping with a family member and a friend will help you feel at home in the great outdoors. An afternoon in the woods will offer more food for your soul than sitting in front of a computer or video screen. Pay attention to what you smell, hear, see and feel as you walk, without drifting in daydreams.

Do you have a garden? No? Then try windowsill, patio or roof-top gardens. Use garden compost and good potting soil in big planters to grow your favorite flowers, herbs, tomatoes and other vegetable plants. Eat plenty of garden-fresh salads and seasonal fruits like watermelon, berries and peaches when available. Watering a garden, chopping vegetables, making pizza from scratch with Mom or Dad...there are many ways to bring joy into our summer.

Many great literary works wait silently and patiently to be held in our hands. Look for the latest multicultural and nature books on pages 29–35.

As a student, I immersed myself in historical and spiritual books or (auto)biographies of people who have made our world better. I invite you to dig out the classics by Thoreau, Rachel Carson, Mahatma Gandhi, Herman Hesse, Khalil Gibran or Rumi.

As we learn about these visionaries, we see how they were able to make changes in their own lives. Like them, let's discover in our own life journey that the world does not revolve around us. While we must know that we're special, it's equally important for us to realize that everyone else is also very special, with their own feelings and values. Our mind works like a parachute, only when it is open! (Let us be open respectful and receptive of other ideas and ways.)

Summer is also a great time to get involved in community projects—maintaining nature trails, working in soup kitchens, helping the disabled or visiting a nursing home for the elderly. Some Sundays, I volunteer at the county juvenile detention center talking with youth. Difficulties or challenges that we face working with others do have a purpose in our life—to help us learn and grow. When we volunteer with humility and compassion, it feels really good inside. Now, that's something worth trying this summer!

Understanding our true nature and practicing selfless love and compassion for all is the core of the One World ideal that saints of many faiths practice and teach. As we learn it, we realize we are all connected and our true nature is unconditional love.

We feel useful, wanted and happy when we treat friends, family and strangers with kindness, when we help people in their hour of need.

What if we seek and work for the well-being of all, for the greater good this summer? Loka Samasta Sukhino Bhavatu—May all beings be content!
**Editor’s Mailbag**

**First Summer Breath**

I look at the clock,
I stare with such shock,
One hour to go,
OH NO!
I stare ahead, oh what a bore
I glance at the clock,
30 seconds to go.
3, 2, 1, the bell has just rung,
Finally, finally, we are done,
The hall fills with summer spirit,
Shouts so loud we can all hear it.

I walk out of my school,
No more grades, classes or rules,
I step onto the bus,
Everyone is making such a fuss.
The bus comes to a stop,
I step off,
and breathe my very first summer breath!

—Abby Beck, 14, Pennsylvania.

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**Dear teachers, students, writers, artists, poets:**

I have been working on getting together a book of poems, short stories, photos and drawings by teenagers about their experiences. The purpose of this book is to open up the eyes of teenagers to the fact that they are not the only ones going through something.

Here are a few subject ideas:
- body image: eating disorders, cutting, etc.
- family and relationships: divorce, siblings, etc.
- friends • depression • drugs and drinking

I want work that really shows what teens are dealing with in their lives. I have been sending this letter across the U.S., asking for submissions!

Please send to: casscoo@hotmail.com,
or mail to: Cassie O’Connor, student
Buxton School
291 South Street
Williamstown, MA 01267

Include your first name, age and city. If you would like a copy of the book when it is published, please include an address. Thanks!

—Cassie O’Connor, 16, Massachusetts.

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If the Eugene Peace Academy is allowed to become a public charter school, we’ll be taking an important step towards positive change in the world.

As a parent, one of the main concerns I have is how to create a peaceful world for my children to live in. The value that I spend the most time teaching my children is peace. As many are probably aware, this is an uphill struggle against media messages, peer influence, cultural beliefs and many other factors. It would be a powerful statement for Eugene if the Peace Academy was included in our school choices. How many military academies do we have in the United States?

As a family in the 4J school district, I feel blessed by the choices that are available. I am thankful to all of those who work to make these choices a reality and who truly care about the success of our children as they continue to grow. I also recognize that the choice of a school whose main focus is peace would be a message of hope in these times and a powerful statement about the values we are trying to teach.

—Marina Ormes, Eugene, Oregon.

(Visit www.eugenepeaceacademy.org for more.)

**Don’t Judge a Book by its Cover!**

Whether they’re white or black, you shouldn’t be teasing others because of their backpacks. It’s not fair to be mean and tease others when they’re unseen.

People are like apples—different on the outside, same on the inside. One last thing—don’t judge a book by its cover. Thank you for reading this!

—Kelsey Ward, 12, Illinois.

For kids who have the habit of watching TV in their spare time, watching less TV is hard. It’s like a boulder on their shoulders that’s hard to get rid of. Schools should hold an event where kids don’t watch TV for three weeks. For surviving this event, students should be rewarded. During the three weeks, they might read books, get better grades and spend more time with their families. Maybe even after the three long weeks, kids will finally realize that there are more fun things to do than watch television.

—Madhusree Chowdhury, grade 6, New York.
**What's On Your Mind?**

**Faint of Heart**

As I skimmed down the list of names and addresses, my concentration was thrown by the slam of my mother’s car door. I took a deep breath as she turned to me and asked, “Ready?”

Nervously, I replied, “Ready Mom.”

As we pulled up to the first house, I got the usual butterflies. The jittery, nervous kind. I slowly opened the car door and gazed at the house. It was medium sized, almost maroon, and reminded me of a barn. The three cement steps leading up to the front door were all cracked. The rusted railings on either side of the steps were corroded and bent.

I hesitantly began walking towards the house, being extremely careful not to exceed my mother’s pace. With her unpolished fingernail, she pushed the doorbell.

It had a nice chime to it when it rang, which gave me a sense of relief, although not enough to move from behind my mother, where I had positioned myself like a child.

A man who appeared to be ancient, although he was probably only around 60, slowly opened the door. His face was full of wrinkles around his droopy eyes and pouting lips. His face was a few weeks overdue for a shave and his fingernails were about two years overdue for a trimming. I immediately reacted with a slow step backwards and a nervous half-smile.

My mom, a natural at this, said, “Hi. How are you?”

I could say nothing. The man did not reply; he only nodded in acceptance. My mother handed him the larger package of food and I handed him the smaller. He nodded slowly again, as if to say thank you. As he closed the door, I let out a deep breath I had apparently been holding in the whole time.

I left feeling slightly good about myself for having brought this man his meal, but also slightly guilty and ashamed of myself for being afraid of such a harmless, less fortunate being. I spent the rest of the day replaying those three minutes over and over again in my head, wishing each time that I had smiled full-heartedly or possibly even had a conversation with him. Nothing serious, just a simple, “How are you?” or “How’s your day been?”

But lately, I’ve been better. I try to smile at everyone I meet and I try to be calm and less afraid. I just quietly say to myself, “You’re doing a nice thing that is appreciated more than you know. Feel confident and smile—it’ll go a long way.”


**No More Alcohol!**

I have no doubt that there are too many alcoholics in this world. Some die from going crazy, others die from drunk driving, and sometimes they take the lives of others along with them. It’s just wrong!

Many alcoholics do crazy things when they’re drunk. My friend once told me that when her uncle was drunk, he ran outside in the snow, yelled, “I’m the king of the universe!” and fell flat on his face. Ouch!

Have I convinced you that drinking is wrong? If not, listen to this: In the U.S., 16,652 people died as a result of drunk driving in 2001. Also, an estimated 513,000 people are injured each year in alcohol-related crashes. That’s approximately one person per minute! Can you believe that in 1999, 1.5 million people were arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol? It’s outrageous!

Drinking should definitely be stopped. Drunken people do crazy things, and many people die from drunk driving, including those who do not drink.

—Tasnia Mir, 11, New York.

* In response to a Gallup Youth Survey conducted this year, about 3 in 10 (27%) said they have used alcohol, and one in five teenagers (20%) said they had tried marijuana. These percentages are similar to those found last year.

Readers, how do you feel about alcohol and substance abuse? What solutions do you suggest?
I wish I had a magic carpet. Sometimes when I am trying to make up my mind about something, I feel I need to be on top of a mountain or on a lonely peaceful ocean beach. It’s frustrating not to find a spot to really feel alone with myself. —Vicki

Dear Vicki, I have felt that frustration many times! Some years ago, a good fairy planted a breakthrough in my mind as follows:

I met a friend whom I had not seen for a long time at a very small and very noisy restaurant. The only available table was right in the middle of the room and the intense noise. Eager for the serious conversation we anticipated, that good fairy instantaneously fed me the words to say to my friend: “Let’s pretend we are in a little rowboat and all the noise about us is the roar of the ocean.”

Ever since, I have been able to transform my distracting surrounding into the privacy of a stormy sea.

That moment taught me that the most significant decisions are often made in a split second.

Far reaching decisions often jell in the flash of an instant.

Recently, I was very moved by such a decisive action: a citizen of my hometown, Anita, made a huge difference to thousands of individuals by quickly following her conscience when casting a vote.

The city’s School Board had announced that at their upcoming meeting, they would vote on the naming of a newly-built school. A nominating committee had picked five possible names; one of the names was that of Cesar Chavez, a hero of the Latino community, who spent his lifetime helping migrant farm workers.

At the school board meeting, the Chair of the Board asked each member: We are not voting yet, but to which of the five proposed names are you most drawn?"

Three members said, “Cesar Chavez,” and four picked other names, such as Blue Heron or Twin Rivers.

After going around the circle, a member said, “I make a motion that we call the school Cesar Chavez.”

Immediately, Anita grasped how very important it was for the Latino population to be honored, to be acknowledged by the officials in this manner. Hundreds of Latino youth and adults had marched, canvassed, and sent letters in support of naming of the school after Cesar Chavez. Realizing that she could make a huge difference, Anita joyfully cast a Cesar Chavez vote.

Dear Vicki, we don’t always have the luxury of extended time for reflection. It’s worth the effort to learn to respond in the blink of an eye when the outcome of decisions matter.

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

Art by Sheree LeDoux, Univ. of Oregon

In Peace,
On the Go!
A Health Rocks Feature

Looking for a little inspiration for your next active hobby? Here are some students who seem to have more than enough enthusiasm to share. We hope you'll feel motivated to try one of these activities for yourself!

African Dance

Bare feet gracefully
Stride over the surface of wooden flooring,
Stereo-emitted instrumental music
Gently enriches the interior atmosphere
Of a sun-lit room
Creeping into eardrums, making them their own
Transforming inner awareness
To a feeling of unexplainable urge
In one’s stomach
Fluttering butterflies cause golden vibes
Heartbeat quickening as limbs
Vibrantly move
Taking in energy with each
quickening breath
Bliss.

—Kesi Augustine, 13, New York.

“Dance can transform your awareness and simply make you happy while you catch the beat.”

Laughing Eyes, Helping Hand

It was in the Arnold Arboretum that I learned to ride a bike. Rather, attempted to learn. After countless years and three separate attempts, I still cannot ride. Every time I tried, I fell. And every time I fell, I wanted to try again less and less.

It was the insecure feeling of balancing on two thin wheels that caused me to fall, probably even more often than most kids. It was as though an acrobat pulled me onto the tight rope above all those laughing eyes waiting for me to fall. As I grew older, it became harder and harder for me to try again because each year, there were more and more laughing eyes.

Then, over the past summer, my sister taught me how to rollerblade. After a few months, I began to think that the little girl who could never learn to ride a bike had left me at last. I was walking on two firm stilts, and I began to forget those laughing eyes. So, one Saturday, I finally got the courage to try my rollerblading on the flat, twisting road in the Arnold Arboretum. It wasn’t as flat as it appeared; the road was broken and uneven. Going slowly, I was scared of the cracks and fallen twigs, which seemed like craters and logs in my frightened mind. Bumping along, I tried to stop after only ten minutes.

I fell as I tried to stop; that’s when I found out that I was wrong. The little girl was still with me, after all these years. She was still there, no longer afraid of eyes but of falling.

I pulled myself up and extended my hand to her. “Don’t be stupid,” I scolded her as I raised her off the ground. “Try again tomorrow.”

I picked up her bike and we left the arboretum together. In that moment, I changed the past.

—Himani Gupta, grade 10, New York.

Jumping Rope

When I was little,
About five or six,
I loved to jump rope.
I jumped rope all day
Alone or with my friends.
It didn’t matter,
As long as I was jumping up and down
over a rope.
Sometimes we’d chant rhymes while we jumped.
We’d see who could jump the longest.
I always had so much fun
Jumping rope.

—Sarah Heller, 13, Pennsylvania.
Swimming. What does it mean to you? An image of a sun blazing overhead and a pool full of laughing people splashing and screaming probably comes to mind. That’s what I used to think, too. But then I became a swimmer, a competitive swimmer, on our local team. Boy, did my perspective change! Now, I think of competition in which your heart feels like it’s about to fly out from your chest until forced to stop by a solid wall of brick! Welcome to the wild world of competitive swimming.

When I first joined my current team, I was not a particularly great swimmer. I didn’t have the natural speed and rhythm of many people I knew, and I didn’t exactly know what freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke and butterfly were.

So, on my first day, I was a wreck. I was as nervous as a sluggish cat about to run past a doghouse. My head was full of self-doubt: Would I be the slowest one? Would I be able to keep up with everyone? I felt sick, and my stomach began to contract within itself. I even went through the five stages of grief: Denial: Maybe I’m dreaming. Anger: WHY did I ever agree to this? Bargaining: If I do another sport...like karate, I might not have to swim. Depression: This is the worst day ever. Acceptance: Well...if I must.

Eventually, I overcame my lack of self-confidence and moved to my next obstacle—surviving the seemingly endless onslaught of practices. We had two-hour practices every day, and during winter and summer breaks, we also had an additional two-hour practice beginning at 7 a.m. On freezing winter days, I would be swimming lap after lap, wishing that I was at home instead, wrapped in thick layers of blankets. In the summer, I would be too tired or too busy to hang out with friends.

Worst of all, even after working so hard, you can still miss qualifying for a high-level competition by just tenths, or even hundredths of a second. You wonder if you could have sprinted just a little earlier or flip-turned with just a little more snap.

But when you do improve, when you do win, the feeling is indescribable. When you look up at the electronic scoreboard and see the number one next to your lane, along with a time better than you ever thought you could get, the acute pain of exhaustion dulls and a rush of excitement courses through your veins.

Sure, pool parties and movies with friends are great and tons of fun, but the feeling you get when you accomplish something, the feeling you get when you finally reach your goal that you’ve worked so hard and so long to reach, is SO much better.

—Bonnie Cao, 13, California.

Snowboarding

When I come down the slope, my mind is on nothing but snow. I can feel the crunch of the snow on my feet and the wind rushing by. I don’t feel stressed, anxious, sad or mad. I just float. I go past the trees and the cares of the outside world. The snow is absorbed into the mind like water to a sponge. When I stop, the world exists again. It flickers for a moment and then it is clean. The greyness of the world is in my mind and the snow melts away...I’ll be back someday.

—Willy Parks, 14, Colorado.
A Day at the Barn

I could feel the rhythmic pounding of Geronimo’s hooves underneath me. We rounded the corner and Geronimo sped up to a smooth canter. He had gotten the right lead this time. There had been many times when he'd gotten the wrong lead, or had cantered with the wrong foot in front. I have tried to explain to him that you have to start with the outside leg forward when doing the trot to canter transitions. He'll learn one of these days.

“Now look at the jump and anticipate that he’ll stay at this speed,” Sarah yelled from the center of the arena. She had been my riding instructor for the past two years.

I looked at the jump. It was a vertical. A long, white pole resting on two jump cups. It was around two feet, higher than I had ever jumped before. I prayed that he wouldn’t refuse—Jumping is very difficult and scary if your horse doesn't know what he is doing. But Geronimo never hesitated for a second as he took off through the air. Quick release, hands up, heels down, hands and face up his neck. We landed gracefully and evenly on the other side.

Some people don’t appreciate the long years of sweat and hard work that equestrians pay for a good fifteen minutes in the show ring. It had taken me two years to get to this point and I was loving every minute of it.

“That was good!” Sarah yelled with a smile.

I slowed Geronimo down to a trot, then a walk. I led him to the center where Sarah was, and dismounted.

Roaring Rapids

Boats on the river
Bounce and splash through the rapids
Wet faces smiling.
—George Cashion, 13, Pennsylvania.

Horses

When I ride,
I feel pride
As I soar around the arena.
Gallop, canter, trot, walk,
Without a single balk!
Gelding, mare, stallion, colt,
No way is this horse gonna bolt!
—Allison Gail Ditmore, Alum Creek ES, Ohio.

“You did well today,” Sarah said.
“IT was all Geronimo,” I replied.

I walked Geronimo out to the crossties, took off his bridle and put on his halter. He stood perfectly still as I untacked him and gave him a good brushing. I stopped for a second to admire him—he really was a beautiful animal. Some commented that he was too short and fat for jumping. I thought he looked just as beautiful as a pricey Grand Prix jumper. He was an Appaloosa, with spots to spare. Grey, black and white hairs stuck out in all directions, giving him a scruffy look. His mane stood straight up, making a perfect mohawk on top of his head. Overall, he was quite a sight, one to be laughed at and loved at the same time.

After grooming and picking his feet, I led him back to his stall. He began munching on a mouthful of hay, only stopping momentarily to watch me go.

—Laura Langford, 13, Pennsylvania.

Hiking

Small and quiet trail
Hidden and undiscovered
A silent escape.
—Brian McGrath, 14, Pennsylvania.

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Wanna be in the Olympics?

You may not have heard of an Olympics like this before. While millions focus on the upcoming Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece, the 32nd Native Youth Olympics (NYO) brought some 400 student athletes to compete in traditional Native outdoor skills on April 22–24, 2004, at the University of Alaska, Anchorage.

The competition is open to all students from 7-12th grade, regardless of ethnicity. The events are based on games that past generations of Alaska Natives played to test their hunting and survival skills and to increase their strength, endurance, agility, and balance of mind and body.

For example, the “Stick Pull” is based on strengthening exercises that hunters would do to prepare themselves for pulling walruses out of the water. Some of the other events include:

“The Scissor Broad Jump” where the landing is as important as the jump. Developing balance and quick reflexes helped seal hunters jump from one ice floe to another while maintaining their balance on melting, shifting and breaking ice.

“The One-Hand Reach” is a test of an individual’s control over their body. If a hunter was to become lost on water, for example, they must know the skills to control their body in order not to panic and tip their kayak.

The games provide an insight into Alaska’s rich cultural heritage while promoting a healthy lifestyle.

Contact nlarsen@anchorage.net for more info.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Raising Rachel would certainly be an experience to learn from— I think I learned more than anyone else. Rachel is two years younger than me, age-wise, but she has more wisdom than I might ever have. She attends a school for the deaf, but the work she does is equivalent to, if not more difficult than, what a regular seventh-grader’s would be.

Since she cannot hear, her other senses are stronger. She communicates through her music and art better than she can with words. She is an exceptional artist. All of her vivid paintings are hung around her room. Rachel even painted a mural on her ceiling of a sparkling night sky. Her ability to play the violin blows me away; she can’t hear the beautiful sounds, but she enjoys it as much as anyone else. Beethoven is one of her idols.

Still, people underestimate Rachel all the time. When people see her with her special dog trained for the deaf, they assume that she is not intelligent. My parents decided to send her to sleep-away camp this past summer, although the camp discouraged it. Rachel went and had a great time. She rises above the low expectations that everyone has for her—she is constantly striving to improve, and her determination drives her to success.

She has helped me learn that obstacles make people stronger. She doesn’t get wrapped up in trivial matters. She is so expressive and creative that I sometimes forget that she can’t hear what’s going on around her. I wonder if she knows what she’s missing—if she’s even truly missing anything at all? Actions speak louder than words, especially in Rachel’s case.

—Lindsay Bass, 15, New York.
My Brother Jacob Is Special

My little two-year old brother Jacob has Down Syndrome. It is a disability, but people with Down Syndrome have many special abilities. People with Down Syndrome are born with an extra chromosome in every cell of their bodies.

When Jacob was born, I was really excited. I went to the hospital room and held him with so many happy feelings. Then, I went home and my mom called and told me that Jacob had Down Syndrome. It felt like all the good feelings went away. But now, I realize that there is nothing different about Jacob, he is a normal brother; he just has a different path through life. I wouldn’t want to change anything about Jacob because he is very special to me. I think it is a miracle that Jacob is alive!

Jacob has some unique gifts. He is one of the happiest people in my life! Now, when I see or hear about a person with Down Syndrome, I think, “Wow, was that family blessed.”

Jacob loves baths, but he doesn’t like to get out of the bath. He loves getting messy eating spaghetti. He puts tomato sauce in his hair! Jacob also loves books, just like I did when I was little. Occasionally, he rips a few pages, but we can always tape them back together.

Jacob makes me smile, even when I have a lot of homework or a headache. He is someone I never thought would come into my life, and I’m very thankful to have him!

Jacob uses sign language to express his feelings and needs. Jacob loves Mom, Dad, Anna and me. He doesn’t just sign it—he really means it.

I know Jacob can do anything! I will be his cheerleader. I believe in Jacob. I believe in angels. I believe that some angels don’t have wings.

—Sarah Baltisberger, grade 5, Ohio.

Nothing that Makes Us Inhuman

My cousin has Down Syndrome; children at her school tease her all the time. I wish people could see what her face looks like every time she comes home from school. How can people go to school everyday knowing that they are making people’s lives harder? How? Why? Just because she is different doesn’t mean that she doesn’t have feelings.

Be honest with yourself: Do you always feel bad for people with disabilities? Or, do you think of them as normal people, which they are? Do you laugh and chuckle to yourself about their appearance?

We may have minor differences, but nothing that makes us inhuman. We all have feelings and a heart.

Hello! My name is Isau Ajeti. I was born in Shtime, Kosovo, September 1988. I am an ethnic Albanian.

When I was two years old, my family moved to Germany. My two sisters, Serxhane and Arjeta, were born here. Seven years later, we returned to Shtime and built a beautiful two-story house.

My uncle and aunt lived in the house next to ours. They have three daughters—Remzie, Majlinda, and Nazlia—all younger than I am.

I never went to school in Kosovo. I was too young at first, and then later, it was too dangerous. My country was at war.

One day in April 1999, we looked outside and saw houses on fire. "Go! Go!" someone ran down the street shouting, "The enemy is coming!"

Right away our two families fled from Shtime. For two hours, we journeyed toward Vojnovc, a country town. Like us, hundreds of people filled the roads, trying to escape.

In Vojnovc, a family let us stay with them. More than 35 people crowded together in their small house. We shared whatever food there was.

After two weeks, we headed toward Ferijaj, my mother's hometown. War planes flew overhead. There was shooting on the ground. Six hours later, we reached Ferijaj. All our relatives, except one, were gone.

Ferijaj has a train station. We wanted to take a train to leave Kosovo. But with so many people, all the doors of the train were blocked. Someone opened a window. My father put me in first; then I pulled in the other five children, beginning with my five-month old cousin. Finally, the four grown-ups crawled through the small space.

It was very hot on the train. We were packed like sardines. We could hardly breathe. Hungry, tired and dirty, children were crying.

Riding for three hours, we got to the border of Macedonia, but the Serbian police stopped us. "You cannot get off the train," they said, "Go back."

We did.

The next day, we tried again. This time the border was opened to us. But the Serbian soldiers commanded, "Stay right on the railroad tracks. If you go to the right or left, we will kill you."

So, we walked, two by two inside the tracks, right into Macedonia.

What a difference it was for us there! NATO soldiers welcomed us and fed us. They gave us blankets and even diapers for my two little cousins.

Camp workers brought us to a small tent. It was very low—the grown-ups could not stand up straight in it. It rained outside. My father and my uncle took off their jackets and put them under us. We were cold because we didn't have enough blankets, but at least we were together.

Each morning we waited in line for food, sometimes until 1:00 p.m. The camp was dirty. We missed the bathrooms we had in our new homes in Shtime.

My father was in charge of both families. In one of the tents was a big board. Every night we checked it for his name and our camp number. It would tell us when and where we would be sent.

Finally, my mother's mother and another uncle left for Germany. We wanted to go with them, but we were separated. After five weeks in Macedonia, the rest of us flew to New Jersey, in the United States.

American soldiers brought us to Fort Dix where our Christian sponsors were waiting. Soon, a lady named Debbie and an Armenian man named Steve arrived. They brought flowers for my mother and my aunt. They were so nice. It didn't matter to them that we were Muslims.

Our sponsors found us two apartments next to each other. They helped us get groceries, clothes, furniture, medicine and jobs.

In June, a newspaper reported our story. A retired teacher read it and offered to teach English to me and my two older cousins, to prepare us for school. All summer we sat outdoors and learned the alphabet, numbers, colors and telling time. We love our very first American teacher.

In fall, we started school. At first everything was strange, but our teacher and classmates were wonderful, helping us learn English quickly.

Now, America is our new home.

—Told by Isau Ajeti; written by Blanche Gosselin, the retired English teacher in this story.
My mother and I are surrounded by fish: big fish, little fish, red fish, sole fish, fish without color and scales, fish with scales so shiny they look like silver coins shimmering in the hot sun. Eels, beady-eyed, slippery and serpentine, fat fish staring at us with protruding eyes, flat-headed fish with eyes on the same sides of their heads, fish curled up like the mouth-watering hot, drippy, sweet, s-w-e-e-t j-e-l-e-b-i.

Fish with snouts so long I want to put a water hukka in its mouth, to see the hot tobacco smoke breathing out of its gills like the man in the paan shop smoking his water pipe. Fish so dead they look bloated and blue, fish so fresh, the hooks still see, too, in their mouths. They swim belly-side up or sideways up the small round tubs.

Mother looks for one that does not look too dead. She palpates their undersides and looks beneath their flaps. Nothing escapes her keen eyes. The fish-sellers, both men and women, sit in their stalls. The men are sipping thin tea, the color of dirty water from the sewer. The women are trying to pick the lice eggs from each other’s hair. All of them neglect us.

One fat woman, so humongous that I can see the rolls of fat hugging her hidden neck, sits on a makeshift chair. Sweat drips from her forehead and she wipes it with her anchal, the end of her colorful sari. She is regal, presiding over animal and human subjects, dead and alive, and flails her arms in the sea of fish. I name her instantly—Queen. Queen of fish.

Occasionally, Queen looks in our direction. Mother picks up a fresh, large, red fish and asks the price. Queen ignores her. When mother repeats her question, Queen says, “You r-e-f-u-g-e-e-s can’t even touch that fish, that fish is so expensive. Leave it alone—you’re driving my regular customers away! Go to your own section of the bazaar, you don’t belong here!”

A torrential rain of hateful words pelts my mother and I.

Queen goes on, “Go back to your castles that you all claim to have left behind—your green rice fields and your rich brown farms and your fat milking cows. Go back to your fish-full ponds. Go back to where you came from, you stinking refugees. You, with your smell of garlic and mustard oil dripping from your sliced up hair. Smell trailing you and reeking up my shop. You take up our places, our jobs. We got to move every time people like you move in.”

Queen snatches the fish from my mother’s hand.

A typhoon brews in the depth of my mother’s eyes. Her full lips quiver, but she stands serene and calm in the midst of the turmoil. In her voice like gentle rain, she says, “I asked for the price, please let me know how much. Whether I want to buy it or not should be up to me.”

Queen dismisses us with a wave of her flabby hand, without answering. Mother clutches her jute marketing bag and flies out of the fish market, holding my arms tightly, as if afraid I would become a dreaded r-e-f-u-g-e-e.

“I learned a new word today, Papa.”

When I try to say it to him, it sits as a temporary, uninvited guest on my tongue and rolls like a heavy pebble unaccustomed to being used. I spit out each syllable. REF-U-GEE. I tell Papa about Queen and her words of garlic and mustard oil.

“What is a refugee, Papa.”

“They’re the Nutun Yehudis, the New Jews.”

“What is that, Papa?”

I watch for a hurricane like Mama’s in the pupils of his eyes, or for some other signal, but find none.

He looks at me for a long time. Then, he goes out of the room and comes back with a map. Stretching it on the mat for me, he says, “You see this country called Germany? In this nation, there were people who were called Jews. They were being persecuted and killed for no reason other than they were different. Refugees like us are the New Jews of this town, believed to be taking up other peoples’ places and jobs. Every time a new Yehudi comes in, this town loses a little piece of its soul.”

I watch him clenching and unclenching his empty hands. Perhaps he is looking for the pieces of soul, trying to catch them, fearful they may be flying in all directions, escaping like shooting stars through his fingers. Perhaps he worries that as we refugees move in, and the small chunks of soul disappear, the town will become soulless. He sighs deeply. I am fearful that all of the pieces of this town’s essence have eluded him. At least for now.

Next time, when I go wandering around in the back alleys and skip over the cobblestones, maybe I will find the pieces, and I will shout, “Eureka!”

Patiently, I will put back all the pieces of soul.
People ask me where I’m from, and I say that’s impossible to answer. A person is from millions of things not just the country they were born in or where their passport says they’re from or even where their parents feel they’re from. I am different from anyone. No one has the same nationality as me. I’m from the raindrops that drum against my window and sometimes wake me up, and from the gurgles of a baby, who is trying to talk. From the passionate, hungry flames that devour wood in huge bites. I am from the steady droning of a man on a television news show. I’m from the scented blue candles burning on my windowsill. I’m from the soft pearly snowflakes brushing against my cheek. From the smell of my grey Bennetton sweater as I take it out of the washing machine, and the cool smooth surface of a porcelain plate. I’m from the raindrops that drum against my window and sometimes wake me up, and from the gurgles of a baby, who is trying to talk. From the passionate, hungry flames that devour wood in huge bites. I am from the steady droning of a man on a television news show. I am from the soldiers who fought merciless battles on bloody grounds. And from the eyes of a kitten, blue, wide, innocent. I am from a dollmaker, who puts a little bit of himself into each of his creations. I’m from a fresh piece of paper, aching to be written on. I am from all of these things, but mostly I am from my memories, which keep me alive, and are mine, only mine, like selfish secrets to keep.

—Regina Martinez, Hamlin M.S., Oregon. Test your Spanish skills with this one! Use dictionary if needed.
"Too many trees," muttered Mr. Duncan. "They're blocking my view of the mountains."

When the animals saw Mr. Duncan with a chainsaw, they scrambled.

"We must save our woods!" squealed the squirrels. So, they dropped acorns on Mr. Duncan's head.

"Ouch-ouch-ouch!" said Mr. Duncan.

The next day, he marched into the woods wearing an old football helmet.

"We must save our woods!" buzzed the bees. So, they swarmed around Mr. Duncan's head, chasing him into the creek.

"It's c-c-c-cold!" said Mr. Duncan, flapping his arms.

The next day, he marched into the woods wearing a football helmet, a net over his face and a wet suit. He carried the chainsaw over his shoulder.

"Let's see who wins now," said Mr. Duncan.

A snake hissed, "We must save our woods."

Slowly, the snake slithered over Mr. Duncan's sandals.

"Oh, yikes! Oh, yikes!" said Mr. Duncan, as he scurried away. The next day, he wore a football helmet, a face net, a wet suit and a pair of army boots.

"We must save our woods," said the beavers, baring their big, buck teeth at Mr. Duncan.

"Run away!" he shouted, running away.

"When he was safely out of the woods, Mr. Duncan turned and shouted, "I will not give up!"

That night, all the animals and the insects held a meeting.

A monarch butterfly was the first to speak.

"The more bad things we do to Mr. Duncan, the angrier he gets," said the butterfly in a quiet, peaceful voice.

"He wants to do bad things to us!" bellowed a beaver.

"So, we'll keep doing bad things to him," agreed a bee.

"And the fighting will just get worse and worse," said the butterfly. She gave the other creatures a sad look and fluttered away.

The next day, Mr. Duncan wore a helmet, a face net, army boots and a rusted suit of armor he bought at a garage sale.

"Nothing will stop him today," sighed the animals.

Mr. Duncan was about to cut down the trees when he fell backwards with a loud clank!

He lay flat on his back like an upside-down turtle. He wiggled. He squiggled. He rattled a lot, but he could not get up.

Mr. Duncan let his head fall back into the dirt with a clunk.

Then he looked up. The sun filtered through the leaves and the air was filled with hundreds of orange butterflies.

Mr. Duncan lay watching them for the longest time.

"I think he's smiling," said the squirrel.

"We should have listened to the butterfly," said the beaver.

"It's still not too late," the snake spoke up.

When Mrs. Duncan came into the woods carrying a picnic basket, she discovered Mr. Duncan flat on his back.

"Good heavens, Henry! Are you all right?!" she asked.

"Never been better," Mr. Duncan smiled. "Look up in the tree."

"They're beautiful," said Mrs. Duncan. "And look over there!" she said.
Mr. Duncan's Woods contd.

In a nearby tree, squirrels jumped gracefully from one branch to the next. “They look like acrobats in the circus!” exclaimed Mr. Duncan.

Then they noticed the spider had spun a wonderful web high in another one of the trees. The threads glistened like silver. “We can eat later,” said Mrs. Duncan, setting the picnic basket under a tree.

After she helped Mr. Duncan out of his armor, they strolled along holding hands. They stopped many times to enjoy the sights, sounds and scents they had overlooked right in their own backyard.

Frogs croaked happily on lily pads. A mother duck paraded by, her ducklings behind her in a perfect line. A rabbit hopped soundlessly by the creek.

A woodpecker tap-tap-tapped high in an old maple.

A swarm of bees buzzed around the apple blossoms, gathering pollen. When they saw the Duncans approaching, they kindly buzzed away.

“Thank you, bees!” said Mr. and Mrs. Duncan, waving. They stuck their noses right inside the blossoms. “What a beautiful smell,” said Mrs. Duncan.

“What beautiful woods,” added Mr. Duncan.

Suddenly, a raccoon spotted the picnic basket sitting all by itself. “Yum, yum, I can’t wait to steal a liverwurst sandwich,” he said.

“Don’t even think about it!” chorused the insects and other animals.

“Just kidding,” mumbled the raccoon.

—Tom Dunsmuir, Pacific Palisades, CA.
Art: Li-Chuan Chiang and Sheree LeDoux, Eugene.

The Leaf and the Sheath

Traditionally, people in India have sat on the floor to eat. At most weddings in South India, people eat sitting cross-legged on the floor in lines. Cutlery is used, but the majority eat with their fingers. They eat off of banana leaves. Soups are served in leaf-bowls kept in shape by little twigs.

After the meal, all the leaves and cups are collected and dumped into a pit dug in the backyard. This is covered with mud. Eventually this turns to humus and can be used in farming. The leaves can also be eaten by cows and buffaloes.

Many eateries serve food on a plantain leaf. They might cut the plantain leaf in the shape of the plate. Where fresh plantain leaves are not available, plates made from locally-grown leaves are used. The leaves are collected and fashioned into plates using little twigs as pins to hold the leaves together. When they dry out, they are stored stacked one on top of another and can be kept for a long time.

The person washing the dishes puts the leaves in a bin after their use. If plates are used under the leaves, less water is consumed and less soap is needed. The garbage is completely bio-degradable. Income from leaf-making supplements household incomes in many tribal areas.

In addition, leaf plates or bowls are invariably used to serve roadside snacks in many regions. Even in South India today, it is common for food to be wrapped in a piece of banana leaf, then wrapped in newspaper, and tied with string. Also, bunches of coriander or other greens are often tied with string-like lengths of a fibrous leaf. Since it’s not very thin, it does not cut the delicate stalks.

In parts of Eastern India, single-use, little clay pots are used to serve tea. These are called khullar. They are low cost, bio-degradable and generate business for potters. In fact, they have become fashionable in many of the newer tea cafés in places like Manhattan and London!

Until recently, it was very common for people to buy and carry sweets, like rasgolla and gulab jamoon, packed in clay pots and covered with a leaf tied at the neck with jute thread, which had an extra loop for carrying!

Natural materials are also used many ways other than for serving food. Palms of coconut and areca are used for decoration during festivals. Flowers are strung together to add colour to the green background. The palm fronds are also used as thatch for homes: Hay is spread on a latticework of bamboo, and the palm thatch is placed on that.

The traditional way was to live as part of nature, but with increasing urban pressures, lifestyles have changed. Still, with better ecological awareness, a balance is possible.

—Radha H.S., Bangalore, India.
Why Go Green?

A garden without wildlife? Not for me! Gardens should be alive, not just with plants, but with all kinds of insect, bird and animal life. To me, the notion of a sterile garden is frightening. To raise pest-free crops and still enjoy the wildlife in the garden, a truce must be called.

A few years ago, I went completely organic after deciding that chemicals were not for the health of my garden or myself. I think science and nature could work more harmoniously by not introducing unnatural chemicals into our food, earth and water.

So, what do I have? A garden full of pests? No! I have a garden full of pests and predators. The predators balance the number of pests, leading to their natural decline. It takes several years to build up a balanced, working organic garden. But in the end, it's worth it!

Slugs and snails were on the leaves of my plants, leaving visible holes, especially the cabbages. I tried to use to get rid of them. But, there was no way! Nothing worked! So, what I did was find a new place to attract the snails. Now, using this natural method, they go there instead of on my cabbages.

Today, I am happy. Nobody said it was going to be easy to have a garden welcoming everything. But, the process is interesting. And the success is yours—you worked for it.

—Monica Matei, Petah Tikva, Israel. Monica is trained in botany, plant anatomy and physiology.

• Organic food is food grown without use of pesticides, insecticides, artificial fertilizers or chemicals, on uncontaminated soil. Art: Sheree LeDoux.

Eating Blueberries When I Was Eight

It was worth a three-hour drive, unpacking, getting ready for the night, sleeping, getting up early. It was worth carrying buckets out to the woods.

The path erupts into blue bushes in the middle of summer, flourishing violet pods with one mission: to satisfy my taste buds.

I pick blueberries for hours, My hands turn blue, so I can dump berries into my bowl of Cheerios. Don't worry. They're clean and spiders don't eat much. Spiders simply try to get to those navy lifeboats. The milk takes on color, turns itself into a blue sea.

The only thing I regret is leaving those violet paths, is leaving those blue bushes only to return, three weeks later to the white halls of school.

—Mark Repka, CNHS, New York.

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The Future of Humanity: The Ozone Layer

What would life be like without the ozone layer high above our heads? What is the future of our planet without the presence of the ozone layer?

The ozone layer is an invisible sheet 19 to 48 kilometers above the ground that absorbs most of the ultraviolet rays from the sun. The mix of sunlight and oxygen forms the ozone layer. Without the ozone, there would be many health hazards to humans, animals and plants, possibly causing life on Earth to end.

Holes are created in the ozone sheet by chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs for short. This chemical can be found in substances such as aerosol spray cans, bromine halocarbons, nitrous oxides from fertilizers, refrigerants, cleaning fluids, and plastic packaging substances. Aerosol spray cans are the most common culprits.

Scientists also believe that carbon dioxide plays a big role in the breakdown of the ozone. This includes exhaust gas from high altitude planes and cars, and the burning of rain forests. The breakdown of the ozone layer actually happens when chlorine-containing chemicals rise into the air and sunlight breaks down the chemical. The chlorine in the chemical slowly destroys the ozone molecules, resulting in a hole in our ozone layer.

All of the CFCs floating into the ozone have caused a large ozone hole right above Antarctica, the South Pole. As the hole gets larger, it will cause Antarctica, as well as other ice caps, to melt. This will cause water-levels to rise everywhere.

The CFCs will also cause global warming, or the gradual increase of temperature of the lower atmosphere. This is evident by comparing the ice of Greenland from 20 years ago to now; the ice has thinned rapidly around the edges.

The ultraviolet rays that pass through the ozone holes can be very hazardous to life down on Earth. Too much exposure causes skin cancer and possibly cataracts, which is cloudiness of the lens of the eye. Ultraviolet rays will damage marine animals such as fish, shrimp and crab, resulting in a likely imbalance in the ocean food web. The ultraviolet rays will change plants' distribution of nutrients, metabolism and photosynthesis. Since all food chains basically begin with plants, all life would end if the plants died out from ultraviolet radiation.

Although the holes in the ozone layer cannot be mended, there are things you can do to prevent the holes from getting larger and the creation of future holes. You can start off by using your car as little as possible, which means there will be less carbon dioxide emitted into the air. Since aerosol spray cans are the main cause of the holes, do not use aerosol cans at all. You could also join environmental conservation groups to support the prevention of rainforest burning. Many people working together can make a difference.

Preserving what is left of the ozone layer may seem like a big task, but the job will be easier if many people work together. The ozone layer is what keeps Earth alive. To preserve the ozone layer is to preserve the future.

—Kristal Hang, student, New Jersey.

• What actions can we take in our lives?

—Charlie Fischer, gr. 8, Michigan.
Pros and Cons

Do you remember being little? No, I mean really little. Do you remember not being able to do all the stuff that you can do now? I do.

When I was younger, I couldn’t walk. Now, I can walk ten miles for all my parents care. They think of it as exercise.

When I was younger, I was strapped down in a booster chair anywhere I went. Now, I sit in a regular chair. Well, most of the time.

But no matter how many advantages there are to being eleven, there are still disadvantages. When I was younger, I was the center of attention, the star of the house. Now, I’m an equal.

When I was younger, I could sleep anytime I wanted. Now, I have to wake up early. I didn’t even have to go to school, like I do now, for eight whole hours a day, nine months a year.

When I was younger, I even had food delivered to me, right into my mouth. Now, sometimes I have to make my own meals.

So, there are pros and cons to being old. I’m happy I’m older, but at the same time, part of me wants to be a baby again. I don’t know. Maybe in a couple years I’ll be looking back on now the same way I look back on being a baby. If that’s true, then I’m going out and enjoying my childhood!

—Daniel Smith, Illinois.

The World

When I look around this “beautiful” nation
I see everything’s screaming, “I’m man’s creation!”
God would not build such a terrible mess,
These people, this land, this life, this stress.
I go outside to bump into starvation,
The skin, the bones, the stench brings frustration.
How can you go on luxury trips,
When people in Africa can’t fill prescription slips?
War cannot resolve all our problems,
I learned in kindergarten that talking would solve them.
I guess I’m no better than those I speak of,
But at least I can see the problems above.

—Chantelle Brown, student, Florida.

I Walk In Love

If you walk in love down Love Street
love is what you will get.

—I Have A River

I have a river
in my backyard
the sun is a fish
up in the sky.
My dad likes
to catch fish
with his feet.
There is a fish
that likes to jump
on the moon.
At night
the fish creates fire
by hammering two moon rocks together
with a fishing pole
so he can cook himself up in the morning
for breakfast.

—Javon Smith, grade 6, Michigan.

Musings

As the wind wanders over the fields
Gently caressing foliage green
On a telephone wire, a single bird yields
An unanswered question:
What does loneliness mean?

Is he merely enjoying the evening so bright,
As yet undisturbed by friend or by foe?
Or friendless? Or feeling despair in the night?
How deep is the difference? Am I to know?

True happiness aches; hope pervades our distress
All things on Earth are a loss and a gain.
I gaze at this bird, and now must confess
There lies a fine line between pleasure and pain.

—Jessica Campbell, 16, Oregon.

"I wrote it one quiet summer evening. A bird was perched alone on a telephone wire and I began to think about both the bird and life. I have found that the simplest thing you see in nature can represent the biggest questions in our world."
“Poetry is looking at your shadow and seeing something you’ve never seen before.”
—Teresa Willeeder, grade 7, New Jersey.

Mississippi
The mud was deep.
The boy and girl couldn’t walk through it.
Even the river was filled with mud.
The fish couldn’t swim in it.
The moon looked like the face of a clock.
But the stars in the sky still shined.
—Frankie Rodgers, grade 6, Michigan.

Mi Padre
Sitting on my balcony
with low rhythm
my father’s voice
full and round
danger to the universe
is not allowed
—Ana Martinez, Franklin HS, California.

Things I Remember
Ice cream cones dripping down my hands
The weekly trips to the beach
The rides in the mini jeep with my sister
The late nights waiting for Santa.
Powder footprints my mom used
to make like the Easter Bunny’s.
Festive outfits that always matched my sister’s.
Trips to the zoo and the days at the park.
Being chased by my grandma with a wooden spoon.
The sound of little giggles as my cousins
and I ate all the cookie dough.
Smell of the grass as I
lay watching the clouds
Cutting my knees
Runny noses that
my mom would fix
The young, naïve me.
My childhood trails behind me
Like a soft, patchwork quilt.
—Deanna Minuto, 15, New York.

I Am From
I am from
a sacred buffalo who wonders
I am from
somebody who believes in her
Native traditions
I am from
a land where I’m encircled by my people
I am from
Confusion that walked across the plains
I am from
a ceremony that took negativity
out of this body of mine.
I am from
the opening of a dream catcher
I am from
a sacred buffalo who wonders.
—Jena Patpat, Native American, grade 8, WA.

Blue
The blue of his eyes
is soft like the gentle sky,
translucent like water.
—Alexandra Conlon, 13, Pennsylvania.

Triceratops the Monster
Boom, bang, smack clang,
When he moves I hear his bang.
Moving like a semi-truck,
Always alert like a buck.
When he eats, he eats his greens,
His stomach works like a machine.
When T-rex attacks he attacks with fury,
But when he defends,
He does in a hurry.
When he made his thunderous clash,
The trees were scared and made a dash,
When Triceratops goes to sleep,
He sleeps without a peep.
—Spencer Moe, 12, Oregon.
Fi-ve Fantas­ti­cal Fathers
With Fins, Feathers, and Fur
Saluting Animal Dads on Father's Day

Sure, human dads can play catch and help with homework, but can they give birth? Daddy sea horses can! This Father’s Day, while you’re praising your family’s patriarch, you may also remember that some of the best dads in the world can be found in the animal kingdom:

Sea Horses: The “Mr. Moms” of the marine world, male sea horses, carry up to 2,000 fertilized eggs in pouches in their stomachs until they hatch. Even after the babies are born, they stay inside the pouch until they are ready to venture out on their own.

Microhylid Frogs: Buy these dads a “Baby on Board” sign to put on their backs! These froggy fathers from New Guinea play piggyback once their babies hatch from their eggs. One by one, the dad lets as many as 24 froglets climb onto his back for a family road trip. He hops about 50 feet each night, and one by one, his kids jump off along the way to begin new lives of their own.

Darwin’s Rheas: Thought your dad was overprotective? Darwin’s rhea, also known as South American ostriches, are so protective of their children that they routinely rush cowboys on horseback and have even been known to attack small airplanes on the ground if they get too close to their brood!

Marmosets: These little monkeys do everything but Lamaze class! Dedicated dads assist during labor by biting off the umbilical cord and cleaning up the afterbirth. They also let Mom get some R&R by taking care of the kids when they’re not nursing.

Sand Grouse: Talk about sponging off Dad! These pigeon-like birds live in areas where water is sparse, so fathers fly as many as 50 miles to get water for their kids. After they soak up the water in their breast feathers, they fly home and let their chicks suckle the moisture from their bodies.

Fathers of the animal kingdom are not that different from our own beloved dads. This Father’s Day, when you are honoring your dad, honor animal dads, too, by practicing kindness and compassion toward all animals.

—Amy Skylark Elizabeth, PETA.kids.com

Life as a Caterpillar

My life is as lonely as a caterpillar’s no friends, no relatives, aunts or uncles; each day growing and growing until my day will come and my spirit will fly and soar.

Every day is almost the same it’s just that you learn something new but it’s not much, it’s just a little; I wish I could be with others to learn more.

Waiting for my wings to build my cocoon and sing and sing.

In a month or so, my life will change, I will travel to my long-lost relatives, in the grassy hills where caterpillars find their dreams.

If you want to know what my dreams are, follow me and I will show you:
to fly and to be free and to be loved.

—Natasha Oliveira-Zepeda, 12, Ontario, Canada. “I’m part Canadian-Portuguese and part Mexican. I wrote this just before leaving Canada to live with my relatives in Guadelahara, Mexico, for one year.”

Peacock

Beautiful peacock
The most wondrous creature
Elegant they are
A beautiful feather crown
Mysterious-eyed feathers.

—Stephen Flaherty, gr. 4, MA.

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Father, if I could speak to you
I would tell you about my exhausting typical day
I would ask you which direction I should take
I would ask you for help in things when
I make a mistake
I would tell you what I would do
if I was a persuasive lawyer
or an intelligent doctor
or even a creative storyteller.
I would tell you about the pain
that showers me like rain
Father, if I could speak to you
I would tell you what is in my heart
When you left us and everything fell apart
Father, if I could speak to you
Oh, Father, if I could speak to you.

—Sheena Floresca, grade 8, Washington.

The Failing Economy
Roast chicken with baked potatoes,
leftovers again. Mom used to throw them away,
make a new dinner like tuna in a green, peppery
sauce, or steak with crispy onions. Tonight is
roast chicken again.
Dinner seems to stretch for two nights these days.
Dad walks in, empty-handed. He must have
left his briefcase in the car. I rush over to
greet him. He picks me up and throws me over
his shoulder. The stubble from his
chin scrapes the side of my thigh. He probably
forgot to shave before work this morning. I’ll
remind him later.
Dad follows me upstairs to
tuck me into bed.
Hey, I’m gonna pick you up from school
tomorrow afternoon.
None of my
friends’ fathers ever meet them after school.
I must be lucky, lucky, lucky.

—Taryn Goodman, 17, New York.

Super-Dad
I praise him for his will and strength to rise to
the top in everything he does. His determination
surpasses all of those I know. He is my father.

My father grew up in Baghdad, Iraq. His forti­
tude to succeed led him to the United States at the
age of 25. Ever since I can remember, nothing has
ever been good enough for him. Learning English
as my second language was no excuse for doing
poorly. All my teachers criticized me, but my
father stuck by my side. His willpower slowly
rubbed off on me and I grew more confident with
his support. He taught me that if he could do it,
coming from much less than I did, then I should
be able to do anything with twice the force.

Many times, he took on the role of Super-Dad
in the family. He left for the city in a suit and tie
and returned to mow the lawn and look over my
Armenian homework to make sure there were no
grammatical errors. He’d often say, “Lav, ema
kuna mamen okna.”

“Oh Dad, I’m too tired to help mom.”

Seeing him take off his glasses, I knew he
wanted to sleep, too, but that was not an option
for either of us. I admire my father so deeply
because he pushed himself to the limits and eventu­
ally surpassed them. Learning five languages at
once seemed impossible, but he made it a reality.
He has given me all I need to blossom, and now it
is in my hands to do so.

—Anita Moursalian, grade 12, New York.

untitled
I can feel the tears going down his face
I can taste him before he went away
I can hear him calling
when going to sleep
I can hear him asking for help
I can feel him hugging me before
going to school.
I can feel, taste and hear him
and, I can love him.

—Marquis Ransom, 13,
Art: Christine Degley and Shree LeDoux
YOUNG HANDS,

Think about your hands.
Your hands do wonderful and difficult things for you. Your hands hold books, pencils, spoons. Your hands weave rugs, plant gardens, carry water. They shape clay and plow fields, cradle violins and babies. They wipe away tears.

When you grow old, what will you think about your hands? My elderly friends look at their hands, paper-thin and wrinkled with age.

Most of these hands can no longer weave, plow or write, but they still can wipe away tears. My friends often feel sad that no one asks about the past. They remind me of the important work their hands did over the course of a lifetime:

"I was a telegraph operator. I used my fingers to work the telegraph."
"I played the piano and played with my children."
"I worked in a shoe factory, pushing the stamp onto the leather."
"My hands cleaned the house and played cards."
"I sewed."
"I typed."
"My hands cooked, mowed the lawn, shoveled snow."
"I have a doctor’s hands."

Mom’s Hands

I looked at her caring hands, swollen and blue, the plastic hospital bracelet loose on her wrist.

I thought of the hands that held the handlebars of my Barbie bicycle, petted the family dog, chopped peppers for a salad—

Hands that used to thread a needle and sew Halloween costumes of amethyst and burgundy.

Hands white from chalk and blackboards, that mopped and scrubbed every weekend.

I looked at her caring hands, helpless—and I took her hand in mine.

—Karen Sprauer, grade 10, New York.

OLD HANDS

"My hands painted houses."
"I loved to bowl with my hands."
"My hands wore rings."
"My hands planted flowers."
"I was in the sausage-making business. My hands made sausage."
"My hands painted watercolor skies."
"My hands played the mellophone and the baritone horn."
"I taught with my hands."

Take the hands of an elderly friend and ask about them. Ask about the wonderful and difficult work they did with their hands. And remember that even hands that can no longer sew or plant or feed anyone have a purpose: They can hold your hands.

—Paula Lesso, Binghamton, New York.

"As a former activities leader at two long-term care facilities, I learned to appreciate my relationships with elderly friends. I loved their stories, and cherished their companionship. I think it’s so important to keep the connection between generations alive; that’s when we’re at our best as human beings."
Jennifer sat in the only empty corner of her pink-carpeted room, holding her slippers in her hand and wondering what magic she ever saw in them. These were her Chinese red slippers with golden-embroidered roosters on the center of each one; her Ah Ma had given them to her three years ago. By now, the felt bottoms were worn and shiny from sliding down the hallway every morning for breakfast; the China silk inside was thin and ruddy red. Three inches too short for her feet, but they perfectly fit her hands.

She remembered the Saturday, like every other, when the whole family visited Ah Ma in her tiny apartment on Pike Street, in Chinatown. Jen hated the long car rides from her snooty-rich, suburban neighborhood to the busy, loud and dirty city. After circling Pike Street and not finding a parking spot, her father would park in the municipal lot three blocks away. Mom, Dad and Jen would get out of the car, taking whatever new trinket they brought for Ah Ma. This time, it was one of those salad spinners that you wind up and all the water comes out, leaving dry lettuce in the strainer.

Bundled in a poofy coat, gloves and boots, Jen skipped ahead of her parents, swinging the salad-spinner in the plastic bag. After her mom buzzed to open the door, Jen’s face, pink from the cold, was pleasantly surprised when she entered the apartment building. They always went in from the basement level, smelling laundry detergent and fabric softener all through their ride up to the third-floor. Ah Ma would always be waiting outside the elevator door for them, first squishing Jen and greeting her in Chinese, most of which she couldn’t understand, then leading them to her apartment at the end of the hall.

Jen’s older cousins, Frederick and David, were already there eating little red packages of Chinese nickel candy. Jen quickly took off her coat and gloves, dropped them and the salad-spinner in front of her mother and headed for the candy lying on the table. She grabbed Jen’s wrist before she could escape, putting the salad spinner in her skinny arms, saying, “Give this to your Ah Ma before you get any candy, ok?”

“Ok, Mom. Ah Ma, here. Look! It’s a salad-spinner,” said Jen, pushing the plastic bag onto her grandmother’s lap.

“A what?”

“Open it. I’ll show you how to use it.”

Ah Ma carefully took the cardboard box from the bag and stared at the pictures on the plastic contraption. Jen promptly took the box from her hands and opened it, plopping the salad-spinner on the table. Putting her small hand on the knob, Jen spun it in circles, faster and faster, then lifted the cover to show Ah Ma the inside.

“Look, you spin really, really fast to dry the lettuce inside. The water is left in here,” said Jen proudly.

Ah Ma smiled for a thank-you and gave Jen the candy she wanted. Then, Ah Ma pulled her aside to her bedroom.

“I have something for you, too, Noy Noy.”

Jen sat crossed-legged on her grandmother’s bed while Ah Ma got a double-knotted plastic bag from her closet. “This is for you.”

She placed the bag into Jen’s hands, then quickly left to help prepare lunch.

Accustomed to receiving gifts from her Ah Ma, she shook out two shiny, red slippers decorated with a picture of her animal, a rooster, in golden thread. She smiled, put them on her little orange-socked feet and went to show her new slippers to Fred and Dave.

“Look! Look!” shouted Jen to her cousins, pointing at the golden roosters. They were too immersed in video games to notice her.

Jen spent the rest of the day stuffing candy in her mouth and shuffling in her rooster slippers, in and out of Ah Ma’s bedroom, intentionally walking into Ah Ma’s legs to show she was wearing them. This was her way of saying thank you. Each time, Ah Ma would scold her in Chinese, calling her “clumsy, bad girl,” Ah Ma’s way of saying, “You’re welcome.”

* * * * * *

Biting her bottom lip so hard it started to bleed, Jennifer sucked her wound and breathed in slowly, trying to hold in approaching tears that wouldn’t come out an hour ago at Ah Ma’s funeral. But the force was too strong. Tears spilled from her eyes and silent wails rushed from her heavy heart. Three drops of blood from her lip collected on one of the slippers, staining a golden rooster, before Jen flung the slippers from her hands under her bed, unsettling a quiet sheet of dust.

—Tiffany Chin, 17, New York.
"Psst," Bilal whispered. The boy lifted his head. His frightened eyes and tear-stained face filled Bilal with pity.

"Who are you? Why are you locked up?" he asked.

After considering whether or not to trust a stranger the boy said, "I'm Naeem. Babu, our village headman has imprisoned me."

"Why?"

"Babu has vowed to kill my father. My father has run away, so he has caught me to make him return," moaned Naeem.

"Why?" repeated Bilal.

"My father refused my sister's marriage to Babu's son, who is mean and cruel."

Startled by the thud of falling apples, Bilal took to heels. His main fascination that day was crossing Swat by a rope bridge.

At night, he was too excited to sleep. The memory of the gushing river over which he hung, pushing the pulley to move forward, made his ears tingle to think that one slip could have carried him away, never to return. Then the picture of speckled trout danced before his eyes. He felt fearlessly valiant. He was ashamed of being frightened away from the hut.

So, very early the next morning, he returned to the hut. Securely hidden, he saw a burly, bearded man enter with a knotted rope and lash Naeem mercilessly. Each lash filled Bilal with rage and each scream, with determination to act.

When Babu left, Bilal swallowed the lump in his throat and whispered, "Naeem."

Groaning, Naeem dragged himself to the window. Across from the window was a closed door. In a corner sat a boy about his own age, in tatters, his head between his knees, his arms cradling his legs. His knuckles and toes were swollen and bleeding.

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Skipping Stones
arrived and unlocked the door. Before he stepped in, he heard a stone hit it. Astonished, Babu turned around. Someone was running. Babu chased him and almost caught up.

But, Bilal made it safely into his bedroom and fell, panting. “Is the devil chasing you?” his father growled. “No, just jogging vigorously,” he gasped.

During his remaining stay, Bilal heard no more screams. When school reopened, everyone noticed that Bilal was friendly, even kind. Whenever anyone thanked him for his help, Bilal thanked the speckled trout.

---Shamim Nargis Rae, Colorado.

Dante dragged Caroline out over silver sand, past shore scrub and land-dwelling creatures, into the last uncivilized realm, the sea. As iridescent flashes swirled around his calves, lapping up and down like a dog greeting his master, Dante curled his withered toes and felt the slimy mud. The water grinned in a spectrum of unnatural steely glints of silver, teal and green. The waves crept up to Dante’s thighs, but that was not far enough. The Caroline obediently followed her master to the very end of the earth, and into the sea.

The moon shone vibrantly from its halo of mist. The stars cast a muffled glow from beyond the haze, and the air tasted like salt and stung like a wet rope’s end. Dante and the Caroline had beaten all of the odds in every race. Now Dante and the Caroline raced no more; the beaches were overrun by new, young sailors who did not care about a crusty old man and his beat-up dinghy.

Tonight, Dante would show the ocean that he still remained in charge. Dante swung himself up into the cockpit and grasped the tiller and sheet in one deft gesture. Filled with the grace of practicality, he made no unnecessary movement as he laid his firm grasp over the dinghy’s natural swoop and turn. Serenely, the Caroline bent to his touch, picking up speed in the fast-deepening night.

Dante saw, through the drifts of condensation, the two triangular red flags at the mast of the marina, a warning to all those sailing small boats. Small boats were not boats with intelligence, or capability, or skill; small boats were not Caroline.

He sailed her until he was well out to sea, and the wind freshened with a greater force that made him laugh with exhilaration. As the approaching gale shrieked out her presence, Caroline’s halyard screamed out her defiance. The sail dripped with the spray of the flying waves, waves that disintegrated from the top down, smothering the landscape with foam.

His eyes narrowed to the closing horizon, Dante pulled in the sheet, his callused palm wrapping around that length of nylon cord as if they were one. The tiller frantically pivoted to his will, but the weather helm was steering. To combat it, Dante had to focus on the shape of his sail, illuminated by the ethereal blue flashes of lightning drawing near. With a swift, horrifying jerk, the wind severed the mainsheet block in an almost cavalier demonstration of might. Stolidly refusing to be beaten, Dante held the tiller extension in his knees as he lunged forward, his center of gravity low, and looped the mainsheet over the wayward boom. He screamed at Caroline for her stubbornness, his voice cracking. He screamed at the storm, but his folly he would not admit.
Caroline seemed to be grasped by a great pain. Her seam leaked under the strain of the relentless surges, and her sail frayed in tremendous heartache. Her body was being dashed apart, and her master refused to give in, ripping her with his pride. She tried desperately not to let him down, her efforts wild as her sail tore off across the middle. Her boom swung helpless to the fruitless urging of the sheet. In one jarring snap, her mast came tumbling down, letting go to the fury of the sea that she had mocked.

Dante wept spray tears and cursed the triumphant waves. A double-tiered light to the east called for his attention.

"Sir, sir, don’t worry, you’re safe, sir!"

As if sensing her master’s rescue was at hand, Caroline gave up her own struggle and gave out underneath him, sinking straight down with all the dignity of a martyr. The sheet still wrapped firmly about his wrist, Dante let his head sink into the ravenous waves, water closing over his skull and filling his open mouth.

But soon he felt capable hands gripping his shoulders, a harness curled under his arms, and he was on the deck of the rescue ship, surrounded by humans and gasping for air. He had mocked nature, and had paid with the life of his Caroline. He had tried to redeem himself by self-sacrifice, but even that gesture was not enough; his actions were paid for, and he was left to suffer the guilt.

It was cruel that both of them should live by the water, but depend upon the air; his Caroline was drowning, and cruel irony prevented him from saving her. However, a smile crackled on his chapped lips, in response to the smile from the sky. The moon’s sly crescent was breaking through the clouds, its silvery halo distorted in the atmosphere, its appetite satisfied.

—H. E. Sternberg, 14, Vermont.

"This is a short tale about a man, his boat and a storm, but its simplicity is only in the telling; it can be read as a metaphor for conflicts between control and cooperation, command and companionship...I also write plays and screenplays. I directed and produced my first movie-short; I aspire to become a movie director."

When My Dad and I Go Camping

When my dad and I go camping at one of Wisconsin’s State Forests, we go hiking. Once, we went hiking on the biggest trail in our park. It was enjoyable because we heard the sounds of nature and could glimpse out onto the lake.

When my dad and I go camping, we rent bikes. The trail is twelve miles long, but we only go four because we get tired—the steep hills wear us out. Once we saw three deer drinking out of a pond. There was a mama and two baby deer. They were adorable.

When my dad and I go camping, we go swimming in the lake. At the lake, I feel like I’m at the beach because there is sand all around the lake. The water is cold like Lake Michigan, and you have to step in slowly.

When my dad and I go camping, we read books together—we grab a picnic table by the lake and read. On our last few trips, we have taken the Harry Potter series. I like reading with my dad because we like the same kinds of books.

When my dad and I go camping, we cook: breakfast, lunch and dinner. We prepare hamburgers, hot dogs, and noodles. I like to help my dad cook because I like cooking myself.

When my dad and I go camping, we sit by the fire and talk about school, funny things, life, boats and business stuff. While we sit there, we look up at the stars. We just sit in our chairs and stare. The stars there are so different: They are much clearer. Sometimes, our marshmallows turn out burnt, but typically, they turn to just right.

When my dad and I go camping, we stay up late, until 11 pm. Before then, we hear yelling and playing music. If my mom were there, we would be in bed sooo much earlier.

When my dad and I go camping at Wisconsin’s State Forests, we have GREAT time!

Noteworthy NorthEast West South • Taking Action

UCS Tries to Restore Scientific Integrity

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) has launched an important campaign to restore scientific integrity in U.S. federal policymaking. Recently, they released a statement signed by 62 of the nation’s leading scientists, including 20 Nobel laureates and 19 recipients of the National Medal of Science, condemning the administration’s abuse of science. Many leading newspapers carried in-depth news reports about the UCS’s statement which claims that the current administration has suppressed and distorted scientific analysis on a wide range of issues from childhood lead-poisoning and mercury emissions to climate change, reproductive health, and nuclear weapons, seriously threatening our health, environment and security.

The UCS also issued a report investigating the integrity of science in federal policymaking and launched an online information center to help scientists and citizens learn about their efforts. The Congress has also heard the call to action; it held a hearing on this issue in the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation committee.

In the few weeks since the launch of this campaign, over two thousand scientists have added their name to the UCS statement!

(For more information visit, www.ucsanction.org).

Global Warming Continues Unabated

In Europe, this winter was reportedly much warmer than normal. In the scientific community, the consensus seems to be that global warming is for real. The only question is: How much? The current estimates range from 2°F to 10°F, which could raise the sea-level in many costal areas by 20 feet in a matter of decades. Increasing sea-level is already causing serious problems in some tropical island nations.

- Suggested Action: Ask the government to do everything possible to implement Kyoto Protocol that will help reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.

Military Draft by 2005?

The U.S. Congress is considering the Universal National Service Act of 2003, “To provide for the common defense by requiring that all young persons [ages 18 - 26] in the United States, including women, perform a period of military service or a period of civilian service in furtherance of the national defense and homeland security, and for other purposes.” These active bills currently sit in the Committee on Armed Services. Yet, $ 28 million have been added to the 2004 Selective Service System (SSS) budget to prepare for a military draft that could start as early as June 15, 2005. By March end next year, the SSS must report to the President that the system, which has been dormant for decades, is ready for activation.

The Pentagon has begun a public campaign to fill all 10,350 draft board positions and 11,070 appeals board slots nationwide. Military experts and influential members of Congress suggest that if the prediction of a “long, hard slog” in Iraq and Afghanistan [and a permanent state of war on “terrorism”] proves accurate, the U.S. may have no choice but to draft.

- Suggested Actions: Write to your Representatives to ask them why they aren’t telling their constituents about these bills. Send letters to the editors of newspapers and periodicals asking them to cover this important story. It’s your future; share your views.

Prateep Ungsongtham Hata of Thailand, a former child labourer who has devoted 35 years of her life to help the most vulnerable children to go to school, has won the World’s Children’s Prize for the Rights of the Child. It is the largest children’s rights award in the world. This year 1.3 million children took part in a global vote to decide the winners. Paul and Mercy Bhaskar from India, who have worked against child labour for more than 20 years, along with Liz Gaynes and her daughter, Emani Davis, of the United States who have helped prisoners’ children for 20 years, were also honored.

Summer Days to Remember

May 5: Cinco de Mayo, Children’s Day (Korea) • May 9: Mother’s Day • May 21: UN Day for Cultural Diversity & Dialogue • June 5: UN Environment Day • June 20: Father’s Day, World Refugee Day • June 21: Midsummer Fest • July 1: Canada Day • July 6: Dharma Day (Buddhist); Kwan Yin’s Path • Aug. 1: Forgiveness Day • Aug. 30: Rakshabandhan • Sept. 11: A Day of Intercultural & Interfaith Dialogue

The Deliverance of Dancing Bear will put a smile on the face of anyone who cares about animals. A bear’s dreams of freedom sustain her for years as she lives a life of forced dancing for hours on her hind legs in a marketplace or being locked in a small cage. One day, an old man decides he can no longer watch the abuse and buys the bear’s freedom from her keeper. Months later, the same keeper has a bear cub, and the old man offers to buy the cub also. This time, however, the crowd chides the keeper for his performing bears.

The author explains that in 1979, she saw her first dancing bear in Greece—a memory that remained vivid and painful. She was thrilled when, in 1993, the captive bears no longer danced in the streets of Greece or Turkey, thanks to the World Society for the Protection of Animals.

—Charlotte Behm, educator, Springfield, OR.

Ecology and Nature Books:
Promoting an understanding of natural systems, specific species or habitats, human, plant and animal relationships, resource conservation, environmental protection and restoration efforts, community projects and sustainable living.


This beautiful tale begins with hungry Little Groundhog pilfering food from his neighbor’s vegetable garden. Squirrel scolds him, telling him to grow his own garden rather than steal from others. A true friend, Squirrel teaches Little Groundhog to grow a garden, step by step, through the year. They gather and store seeds, then wait for Spring to plant and care for the garden. Finally they have a huge feast, sharing the harvest with their friends.

While demonstrating how to plant a garden, this picture book also teaches a valuable lesson about doing one’s part and sharing. It is a charming mix of natural history guide and storybook. Lovely and accurate renditions of seeds and plants form a border around the story’s images. Every page is a visual feast for those who love nature, plants and animals. The extra care and attention to the art of the story is unusual, and just one indicator of this book’s fine quality.

—Mary Meredith Drew, educator, Woodburn, OR.

River of Words pays homage to one of the most basic resources we’ve got: Water. Be wowed by the gushing torrents of poetry and art that youth around the world have created in its honor!

Lyrical, charming and original, this book is a must-read for anyone wishing to rediscover the beauty of our natural world or reconnect with the creative impulses within him/herself.

One eleven-year-old from Maine writes, for example, “Ocean, blue, gray and green / gallops up to the shore / like a friendly puppy, licking / your toes.” On another page, a twelve-year-old Ukrainian girl paints a bright blue “water tree” teeming with sea life. A boy sits on one of the “branches”, holding an ax. The title? “Don’t Cut Off the Branch You’re Sitting On.”

This beautiful book offers us the opportunity to see nature with new eyes. The art and poetry comes from the River of Words programs and contests, which promote literacy, watershed awareness and the arts. www.riverofwords.org.

—Nicole Degli Esposti, assistant editor.


**Cool Woods** takes its readers to the last great forest wilderness on Earth, the boreal forest. This special northern forest encircling the world is home to plant and animal life just below the tundra. The authors take us from North American wetlands and mountains to the Siberian Taiga to Old World forests of Europe. The boreal forest also provides wood, water and fresh air for all.

The balance between man and nature in these special forests is a delicate one, one that has worked for centuries. This balance is now threatened with clear-cutting, acid rain, and radioactivity, putting the “vital lungs of the Earth” in danger.

**Cool Woods** is informative and beautifully illustrated. More importantly it is a call to action to all who care about the survival of our planet.

—Beth Erfurth, Homeschooling parent, Eugene.


**Okomi and the Tickling Game** depicts the mother-infant relationship of two chimpanzees during a tickling game. It shows how chimps have the same social interactions as humans.

It is written in a way that a small child will enjoy, but it also puts out a big message with few words. The wonderful cartoon illustrations will attract and hold the reader’s attention.

The story is based on real events and chimp behavior in the wild, as observed by Jane Goodall. Through more than 40 years of research, Dr. Goodall has shown that chimps exhibit many behaviors almost exactly like humans.

—Charlotte Erfurth, 14, homeschooler, Eugene.


Ever want to know what it’s like to be a polar bear in the Arctic? This beautifully illustrated book narrates the struggle of a polar bear and her two cubs as they face impacts of global warming. While journeying off to a nearby dump in search of food, they are captured and brought to a special bear jail where they are given only water until they are sent back home.

Coming from Kodiak, Alaska, I related to this book because Kodiak grizzly bears will roam into town, digging through dumpsters in search of food when fish and berries are scarce due to natural consequences such as global warming.

I recommend this book to all readers, especially elementary students. It clearly illustrates the life of a bear in a poetic, yet realistic manner.

—Sheree LeDoux, student, University of Oregon.
Multicultural and International Books:

*Focusing on ethnic diversity and intercultural or global relationships, these books build bridges of communication, understanding, social justice and peace.*


Thich Nhat Hanh is one of the deeply spiritual leaders of our time. He lives at a monastery in France and travels all over the world sharing his insight on mindful living. In this book, he shares a very important day in his life as a school boy. On that day, his teacher took the class hiking up a mountain to visit a hermit who lived there.

The soft simplicity of the words used as well as the full page watercolor illustrations transport us to the Vietnam of his childhood and the spiritual aura of his youth.

The greatest gift of this story is that we each seek the serenity and fulfillment inside of us and as we find it, we realize that what we were looking for is the Buddha—the source of inner-contentment.

This book alerted me to be attentive to the spiritual experiences in youth. I would like to give this book to every child I know in order to acquaint them with moments of spiritual awakening within, of the movement of the soul’s journey of a lifetime. In my experience, there is no greater gift in life.

—Hanna Still, contributing editor.


Chuy, a 17-year old high school student, was about to go meet his girlfriend when fate took an unexpected turn. In a nightclub, he complimented another boy on his shoes and rather than a ‘thank you,’ got a fatal stab wound. As his body lay on the floor, Chuy felt himself floating up and realized his soul was leaving his body.

The *Afterlife* follows Chuy through the first days after his death, as he visits loved ones, meets his killer and falls in love. He sees the grief his death stirs in his home and community, and how lives change under duress. In the end, Chuy makes peace with his shortchanged life.

Soto explores death from a teenage perspective, revealing pressures faced in school, on the streets and in life. Gang violence and suicide are also delicately woven into the story.

Without adhering to a specific religious ideal, his thought-provoking story reflects on life, death and an afterlife. Rough and honest, but also a tender love story with depth and sentiment.

—Emma Juhlin, student intern, U. of Oregon.


In this story, we follow the everyday joys and occasional sorrows of Alice’s eleventh year. The writing is light and lyrical—brief day-in-the-life events intertwined with Navajo perspectives and wisdom.

In January, Alice cares for a newborn lamb. “It was almost this cold the night you were born,” says her grandfather. In March, Alice reports that on her school trip to San Francisco, she saw Evonne Goolgong hit a million tennis balls. So in October, Alice sews a tennis dress for Halloween. Alice gets sent to the principal’s office in November for making up a song called, “We’d be glad to see Columbus sail away.” In December, at home, Alice looks into a mirror and says, “I am safe here.” As she watches the rug made by her grandmother when lightning lashes her mountain, Alice writes, “Beauty is before me. Beauty is around me.” I paused after I read this page. I wondered what the United States would be like if most of us could feel the same about our childhood home.

—Charlotte Behm, educator, Springfield, Oregon.
In her latest, *A Cafecito Story*, Julia Alvarez brings us a story of transformation—a story whose time is now.

Joe, a Nebraska farm boy, becomes a teacher, marries and gets transplanted to the city. Unhappy with his life, he takes off to the Dominican Republic on a Christmas “package deal.” It doesn’t take him long to discover that he must explore on his own to know the true paisaje de Republica Dominicana. Thus, his story of soul-searching begins.

The market-driven economic model of free-trade has put small family farmers and the ecology of coffee growing regions in serious danger. In *A Cafecito Story*, we see the socio-economic model of Fair Trade, a win-win situation. Thanks to conscientious consumers, it’s gaining grounds.

With its beautiful wood-block prints by Dominican artist, Belkis Ramírez, this bilingual book says YES! to life and its challenges. I read *A Cafecito Story* in one stretch. I didn’t even need to get up for a cafecito, and I love a good cup of coffee! With its rich aroma and an aftertaste, this book will last long in my memory. Good to the last drop, with an insightful afterword and a resources section!

—Arun


Marcus’s first-grade teacher always tells her class to make a new friend everyday. This is very difficult when Marcus already knows everyone at his school and in his neighborhood. One day, while playing at the park, Marcus sees a black squirrel. Marcus tries to make friends with the squirrel and talk to him, but he always runs up a tree. Finally, the squirrel, whose name is Squizzy, stops to talk to Marcus and a new friendship begins.

This is a very believable story about how to make a new friend. The illustrations are done in deep, rich colors. There are lots of forest greens, browns, and reds. Often placed against beautiful pastel backgrounds, these colors draw the reader right into the story.

—Paulette Ansari, librarian, Springfield, OR.

When My Name Was Keoko is filled with danger, adventure and secrets. Korean customs and culture are woven into this heart-wrenching book about one family’s survival during the Japanese occupation of Korea, which began prior to World War II and continued through the war.

Kim Sun Hee and Kim Tae Yul alternate telling the story in first-person, showing how the same events affect people differently. They learn the Korean customs and language at home, but at school they must learn to read and write in Japanese. Their loyalty to Korea is deepened when the Japanese Emperor decrees that all Koreans must take Japanese names.

The devastating effects of war and occupation on families, friendships and daily life are well-portrayed. Containing the whole gamut of human emotions, this compelling story is an urgent plea for peace. I recommend it highly.

—Yvonne Young, storyteller and grandparent.


In a small African village, a very dark, silent baby girl is born. She is called Shining because of the beautiful light coming from her black skin. Shining doesn’t cry when she is in pain; she doesn’t laugh when she is happy. But she always listens to every sound around her. Her eyes hold the wisdom of the ancient ones.

When Shining is two, her mother, who loves her, takes her to the One who knows all things. The One does not answer her questions but she assures her that one day she’d understand why Shining is silent. As the little girl grows, the villagers grow increasingly afraid of her. They suspect an evil demon has stolen her voice and so they all shun her. When it is time for the womanhood ceremony they refuse to let Shining join them.

This is an intriguing story filled with deep spiritual truth. Shining’s life has a profound meaning that unfolds along with the story.

John Clapp uses his colors brilliantly to make Shining’s dark skin really shine and her eyes truly look wise.

—Paulette Ansari, board member.


Tangled Threads tells the life story of a 13-year-old Hmong girl, Mai, from Laos, who lives in a refugee camp in Thailand with her grandmother after her parents are killed. For ten years, much of her her time is spent stitching pa’ndau, intricately beautiful embroidery for clothing and story cloths.

When her cousins, See and Pa Cue, and her aunt and uncle leave the camp to settle in the U.S., Mai eagerly waits her turn. Some years later, Mai’s turn finally comes: She is plunged into a new life. Everything is more different than she could ever have imagined. Her cousins, now teenagers named Heather and Lisa, no longer appreciate Hmong customs and values.

Mai’s grandmother becomes very depressed and dependent on Mai. A wonderful English teacher helps Mai immensely, but she is in turmoil, torn between appreciation for her culture and desire to adopt the new ways around her. Mai becomes very angry with her grandmother when Heather and Lisa tell Mai a family secret.

Mai’s story is both heartbreaking and heartwarming. Many new Americans will surely recognize themselves and their own struggles as they read about Mai’s. It is also a wonderful resource for their teachers and a good read!

—Yvonne Young, retired educator, Eugene.

"El Tesoro en la calle Oro. Los amigos que tienes son un tesoro. Los nuevos de plata, los viejos de oro."

This is a book about friendship, loyalty and the importance of the neighborhood.

The characters we encounter in the imaginative and realistic illustrations may be young, old, middle-aged, latinos, anglos or something else, but this is just happenstance. We get to know them by how they treat each other.

Isabel, a middle-aged person who operates at the level of a five-year-old, is the central character. She and her grandmother bring the neighbors of Oro Street together. Read the book and discover how she does it in El Tesoro de la calle Oro.

—Esther Celis, Mexican American, is our Spanish editor.


Neel and his friend, Daniel both like Chachaji (uncle) and the attention they get from him. They often have tea and snacks together. Neel learns about his Indian heritage and culture through Chachaji’s stories. Chachaji always drinks out of his favorite tea cup that carries many memories of their family’s migration during the partition of India. One day, Chachaji’s favorite cup drops from Neel’s soapy fingers while doing dishes.

Not long after that, Chachaji is admitted to the hospital due to heart trouble. Neel glues together the broken cup and gives it to Chachaji as he comes home. The family has a tea party to welcome him!

Stark illustrations give life to the characters in the story. I liked the book a lot because it teaches family values.

—Shyam Das-Toké, 8, Indian-American.


As an Alaskan Native woman who grew up in a village in the Alaskan interior, I directly connected to Velma Wallis’ autobiographical story, Raising Ourselves. The descriptions of her Native lifestyle, food and economy surely sounded similar to many Native Alaskans’ experiences, as did her stories of alcoholism, cultural change and family ties.

Her story sounded unlike most Native villages, however, when she described “not knowing” her neighbors and certain parts of her town.

Still, this book really reminded me of my days growing up. Being punished for speaking Native was common in most villages, as was having no TV well into the 1970’s. Conducting daily activities based on the seasons, listening to the stories of our elders, living with a generator for power and having limited resources and modern conveniences were all part of growing up in remote region of Alaska.

For these descriptions and her honesty, the book should be read by those who want to know what village life may have been like a few decades ago. Things are not too different now in some ways, and the continuing loss of Native cultural influences creates difficulties in growing up in a Native Alaskan village.

Through Raising Ourselves, readers from “the outside” get a good understanding of life in Alaska’s countless small Native villages.

—Cora Jones, Athabascan Native, Springfield, OR.
Teaching Resources and Educational Videos: Educators will find these books and educational videos extremely helpful in their work with students and children to develop multicultural and nature awareness.

So They May Speak... (30-minute video and a resource guide). Produced by Ideas in Motion and California Tomorrow. For adults and educators. californiatomorrow.org.

So We May Speak illustrates three different models of educating using language immersion programs. Featured are the statewide French immersion program in Louisiana, the district-wide Spanish dual immersion program in Ysleta, Texas, and a community-based Cambodian after-school volunteer program in Fresno, CA.

This video reminds us that our country consists of many nationalities with their heritage of languages and cultures. The immersion programs featured enhance the multicultural and multilingual backgrounds that make our country a richly diverse nation.

So much is to be gained by inclusion of all the nationalities; much is to be lost by arrogance and fear. This video is a wonderful teaching tool and an inspiration for communities to implement more educational language immersion programs.

—Beth Erfurth, AFS volunteer. Art by Elizabeth Wilkinson, VT.

Our Roots, Our Future: Affirming Culture and Language in After School and Youth Programs by California Tomorrow, californiatomorrow.org.


Forest Conservation Policy by V. Alaric Sample and Antony S. Cheng. Gr. 8-12. ABC-CLIO, abc-clio.com


Artist's Statement

"I grew up with a Finnish, German and American background all rolled into one. My artwork is influenced by my love of travel and people. I think that if you look a person in the eye, no matter the color, you will see that even though we look different, we are still the same inside."

—Jennifer Vivekanand, Saline, Michigan.

www.artbyjenn.com