

# Chicken Soup for the **Preteen** Soul

**101 Stories of Changes,  
Choices and Growing Up  
for Kids Ages 9-13**

Featuring:

Mia Hamm

Karl Malone

Beverley Mitchell

\*NSYNC

With a Foreword by

Kenan Thompson

*To those who read  
Chicken Soup for the Kid's Soul  
and were inspired enough to  
request a follow-up book-  
we dedicate Preteen Soul !*

*And to our own kids  
Who know what it's like to be a preteen:  
Christopher, Liz, Melanie,  
Marleigh and Weston  
We will love you through every stage  
of your lives.*

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# 1

# ACHIEVING DREAMS

*If it were all up to me*

*The poor would have riches  
And the blind man would see  
The hungry would eat  
And the weak would be strong  
And the people with hatred would all get  
along  
The ones who are greedy would start to  
care  
The thirsty would drink  
And the deaf person hear  
And sorrow and sadness would all disap  
pear  
And that is how the world would be  
If it were all up to me.*

*Sara Alfano, eleven*

## Where in the World Is Carmen?

*M*y mother always told me, "Seize the moment of excited curiosity. "In other words, go for it.

**Michael Thomas**

What can you learn from a teddy bear, a little bit of stuffed fluff that can't talk? One summer, my oldest daughter and the rest of our family learned a lot.

We had seen a program on television about a reporter who had hitchhiked across America. My daughter Ashley's first comment was, "I wish I could do that! " Of course, as far as my ten-year-old hitchhiking across America — that wasn't going to happen. But I wanted to encourage that spirit of adventure in her just the same.

Three years earlier, Ashley had been diagnosed with cancer. Ever since her surgery, she was shy and distrustful of new situations and new people. Although she is cancer-free now, the tests and scary procedures had made her reluctant to take risks or to venture outside her known world. I began trying to think of a way for her to "hitchhike" across the country without leaving home. That's how Carmen was

born.

Carmen is a teddy bear that Ashley had received as a gift while she was in the hospital. We decided that sending Carmen in Ashley's place was a good compromise. So we purchased a notebook to serve as a travel journal and a bag for Carmen to travel in ,and Carmen was ready to begin her trip. Ashley wrote this letter in Carmen's journal:

*My name is Ashley and I am ten years old. One time on TV ,I saw this story about how these kids sent a bear on a trip on a plane. Then I saw another story about how this reporter guy walked across America. Well,we don't live very close to a big airport, and Dad and Mom won't let me walk across America. Carmen can't walk ,so will you please help her?*

*This is my bear ,Carmen. She is a special bear. I got her when I had to go to the hospital. She wants to go to all fifty states if she can. But ,she will need your help. (Maybe she can even go to Disneyland. )Mom says we can't go until she won't have to carry my little sister. Please let her ride with you and keep her safe. Tell her about yourself so she won't be lonely. I will miss her. So please take very good care of her. I let her wear my guardian angel pin to help keep her safe.*

*Write a little about yourself and then introduce her to someone new. She wants to meet as many new people as she can. If you keep her for more than one day, please try to write in the journal every day. Where are you going? Where did you pick Carmen up? Which roads did you take? Where are you from? How old are you? Do you have kids? Do you have sis-*

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*ters? I do and sometimes I don't like them. (Mom says I can't say "hate", but I can say that I don't like them, and some times I don't like them a lot!)*

*I think by about September she will be ready to come home. In her coin purse is \$5.00. Please put her in a nice sturdy box with her journal and bag and send her to Sac City State Bank, Attention :Caretaker of Carmen Bear.*

*Someone there will keep her safe for me until I can pick her up. If you would like to hear from Carmen after she gets home,please leave your address in her notebook and we will send you a note and let you know when she gets home safely.*

*Thank you for taking care of Carmen, and thank you for taking the time to write in her notebook.*

*Your new friends,  
Carmen and Ashley*

Our family friend is a highway patrol officer. We asked him if he would be willing to start Carmen on her trip by taking her on his route for a day. That afternoon, he spotted a driver from out of state that wasn't wearing a safety belt. After pulling her over and letting her off with only a warning, Phil asked the driver to take Carmen on the next part of her journey. Naturally, she agreed. That's how Carmen began her tour of the United States.

Summer passed with a flurry of activities, family vacations, visiting grandparents and summer fun. Each day Ashley would ask if any packages had come for her. Each day the answer was, "Not today, Ash. "By the middle of September we thought that the chances of Carmen returning home were slim.

Then on September 24,Carmen came home in a ten-inch-square box that had a postmark from Hawaii! The box was packed with mementos of all of the wonderful places and people that Carmen had met. A straw hat from Wisconsin,to keep the sun out of her eyes. An Indian beaded necklace from Cherokee, Oklahoma. An autograph from Mickey Mouse when she went to Disney~landA picture of her celebrating the Fourth of July in St. Louis. Another picture of her floating in a swimming pool "catching some raysVwhile she was in Arizona. Carmen made it to sixteen states,including Hawaii. Not too bad for five months of travel!

But Carmen came back with much more than just "things". She came back with friends whom a ten-year-old living in rural Iowa wouldn't have had a chance to meet. Ashley wrote letters to all of the people who helped Carmen along in her travels. She thanked every one of them for their help and friendship to Carmen and her.

Pretty soon, word traveled around our small community about the traveling bear, and Ashley was asked to give a program about Carmen to a group of over one hundred people. Ashley ended her talk by saying, "Be kind to traveling bears ! And if you need a traveling companion, let me know because Carmen still has thirty-four more states to go! "

Since Ashley's presentation, Carmen has become a world traveler. Once again ,we are awaiting her return. She was expected home some time ago, and we very much hope to see her again.

I never would have dreamed that a little bit of stuffed fluff could have taught so many things: patience to see what things can happen if we are just willing to wait, the ability to imagine what wonderful things might happen, courage to take the chance and allow those things to happen, and faith

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to believe in people and in the goodness in their hearts.

My favorite part of the story? After reading the journal, looking at the pictures and tracing the roads that Carmen had traveled, I opened the zippered coin purse that Ashley had sent with Carmen. Inside, folded in half, was the five-dollar bill that Carmen had left with five months ago.

*Marieta Irwin*

## Trash Bags Are for Trash

*What do we live for if not to make life less difficult for each other?*

*George Eliot*

I walked through the den on my way to get ready for bed and looked once again at the amazing mountain of duffel bags. Each bag had a stuffed animal ,a luggage tag and a note from me inside of it. The pile of bags went from floor to ceiling, more than five thousand bags ,enough for each and every foster-care kid in three states. My dream was coming true-big time.

After I went to bed,right before I went to sleep,I closed my eyes and thought back to when it all started ...when I got the idea for my dream...

I had been in second grade when I went with my two brothers and my parents to Paris, France. My brothers, Brock and Cory, and I had entered an essay contest about what we were going to do to change the world to make it a better place to live. We won and were chosen as three of ten kids who would represent the United States at the Children's

World Summit. Nine hundred kids from around the world were chosen to meet with each other and talk about world issues. We exchanged ideas on solving the problems in our world today and had lots of fun during the days we were together.

While I was there, I met two foster-care kids. They were two boys, and after getting to know them, I learned a lot about what foster-care kids go through. They told me that when kids go into the foster-care system, they don't just lose their parents and their home, sometimes they are also separated from their brothers and sisters. Not every foster-care home wants to care for an entire family of kids. Foster-care kids also lose most of their toys and clothes. They told me that when the kids are picked up from their home by a social worker, they are given only a trash bag to put their few belongings into. This trash bag is what foster-care kids carry with them when they are moved from home to home.

I felt really sad when I heard this. I couldn't even imagine what life would be like without my family and home—much less what it would be like to have to live out of a trash bag. Trash bags are for trash, not for kids to carry their belongings in.

After I came home from France, I saw an after-school movie that was about a girl living in foster care. It was just like what the boys had described to me at the Children's World Summit, and it made me cry. Right then I decided that I wanted to help foster-care kids. These kids needed my help, because they were not being respected like they should be.

My whole family is into volunteering. Brock and Cory had started a project after they saw a show on television about some kids who died in a fire. The kids had died because the

fire department didn't have this special camera that can see through smoke to find people in a burning house. My brothers began Project Rescue Vision in 1996 to raise needed money for our town's fire department. Of course, I helped too. I was only four years old, and I was the "President of the Art Department." My job was to hand-color all of the information envelopes that were given out. I helped them until I was seven. Then I began my own project for foster-care kids.

I started by asking my mom to stop at garage sales when I saw suitcases or duffel bags for sale. I would tell the person who was having the garage sale what I wanted to do with the bags, and most of the time they gave me the bags for free. I tried to put myself into the mind of a foster-care kid, and I decided that the kids should have a stuffed animal in the bag, too. I figured that if I was in that situation I would want a cuddly friend to hug when I was sad and felt lonely for my parents. People often gave those to me for free, too.

In October 1998, I helped organize a luggage drive during our local "Make a Difference Day". Some congresspeople and senators showed up to give their support, and I came up with this idea for everyone to get their hand painted and then put their handprint on a big banner to show that they had made a difference that day. I got all these kids to help paint people's hands. It was really funny to watch these important people have their hands painted.

The senators and congresspeople went back to Washington and told other people about my project, and then a company named Freddie Mac set up a grant for me and donated fifteen thousand dollars. I am the youngest person they have ever granted money to. Because of this grant, I had a story about my project and me on the cover of the *Washington Post*. Then the most amazing thing happened. President and

Mrs. Clinton read about me and wanted to meet me. I was really excited! They were so nice, and I gave the president one of my bags with a Beanie Baby in it to give to any foster kid that he may meet. A few days later, he sent some bags to me from his own collection to give to foster-care kids, so I did.

My project really started growing because of all the media attention. Radio stations called me for interviews about what I was doing and some TV shows had me on. More people then heard about me from the TV and radio interviews and from word-of-mouth, and they called me to offer help.

Every week I called my friends and family to see if they wanted to come and put together bags. I always had help from many people. My class even helped, too. My teacher announced to my class what I was doing, and everybody started bringing stuffed animals and duffel bags to school. One of my friends brought in ten big bags full of stuffed animals!

On each bag, I put a luggage tag designed by me. On the front of each luggage tag is a picture of a girl and a suitcase with wheels on it. In each bag, I put a cuddly stuffed animal and a special note I wrote, letting them know that I love and care about them. My mom helped me type this note:

*Dear Friend,*

*Hi, my name is Makenzie Snyder. I am nine years old, and I'm in the third grade. I collect suitcases and duffel bags as an act of kindness for those who are in need of them. God told me you could use a duffel bag and a cuddly friend so I sent this with love to you. I want you to always know that you are loved, especially and never give up.*

Love, your friend,  
Makenzie Snyder

After the bags are stuffed,I call social workers to tell them they can come and pick up the bags to hand out to the foster-care kids. I have had a lot of support from several big companies, schools, churches, organizations and individuals who have donated money,or sent me bags and stuffed animals. I've even been on the Rosie O'Donnell Show! Several thousand bags have been sent out so far, and right now I have five thousand more ready to go, sitting in my den. Those bags will go to kids in Maryland, Washington ,D. C. , and Virginia.

I have had a lot of help from a lot of people,but most importantly from my parents and my brothers. My brother Brock came up with the name for my project. He said I should call it "Children to Children" since it was all about kids knowing what other kids want and helping them get it. My brothers have also given me good advice about always sending thank-you notes to the people who help me. They told me I had to work hard ,call tons of people and to never give up... and I haven't.

I know that this is just the beginning. There are 530,000 foster-care kids in the United States. My dream is for all the foster-care kids in the entire United States to receive a duffel bag and a cuddly friend. I know it can be done if everyone helps out. It is a lot of work but I never get tired of it. I remember the girl in the movie that I saw. If she had been given one of my duffel bags,she would have known that someone out there cared about what happened to her. I don't want any kid ,anywhere, to go through what she or the two boys did. Kid to kid, Children to children — that's what it's

all about.

*Makenzie Snyder, nine*

[EDITORS' NOTE: If you would like more information about Children to Children , go to Makenzie's Web site at [www.childrentochildren.org](http://www.childrentochildren.org). ]

## Run with It

*Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.*

**Theodore Roosevelt**

The first time I saw Jeff was when my best friend, Brian, and I were in the fourth grade. When our teacher introduced Jeff to the class she explained that he was sick and that he might not be able to be in class all of the time.

Jeff was completely bald from cancer treatments, and he wore a hat. That was one reason that he and I bonded right away. Being the tomboy that I was, I liked wearing a hat — only I wasn't allowed to wear one in class. Jeff was allowed to wear his hat all of the time. Other than that, he was a normal friend to both Brian and me. Some things he couldn't do as well as the other kids because he had tubes in his chest for his treatments, but we never thought of him as sick because he didn't act that way.

The only time that we would realize that Jeff was sick was when he went for his chemotherapy treatments. We'd notice the difference, but we'd just sort of think, Yeah, Jeff's not

*feeling really well now*, and then it would pass and things would be back to normal. Jeff, Brian and I were really sports-oriented ,and we became best buds. We would swim, run and jump on the trampoline. As fourth grade progressed,Jeff got better and better. By the end of the school year he went into remission;the cancer was all gone.

Brian,Jeff and I spent tons of time together during the summer between fourth and fifth grades. We loved being outdoors, running everywhere and staying over at each other's houses. Before school started,Jeff went away on vacation with his family for a few weeks.

Then came the night that I will always remember. We were eating dinner when the phone rang. It was Jeff's mom, calling to say that Jeff was in the hospital. The cancer had come back. My reaction was, Wait a minute. What's going on?

Jeff and I talked on the phone the next day and he sounded like his normal self. I couldn't really imagine him being back in the hospital. Then, a few days later, my mom took me to visit him. When I walked into his room, Jeff looked really weak. His mom was talking about a trip to California for a bone marrow transplant operation, and how important it would be for Jeff. Even though everyone looked very serious and sad, the thought of losing Jeff never crossed my mind. I just thought he would get better.

During the next few weeks, before the operation, Jeff was allowed to play with Brian and me but he had to wear a surgical mask because he had to be careful of infections. I realize now that his parents wanted him to experience as much of life as possible while he could. One night ,they took Jeff and me to this really fancy restaurant up in the mountains, and it felt sort of like a date. We both dressed up — which was

weird for me,because I never wore anything but shorts and hats.

When Jeff left for California to have his operation I told him, "Bye ,see you in a month or so,"as if nothing much was happening. I wrote to him while he was there, and the letters that he sent to me talked about the things that we would do together when he returned home. It didn't even cross my mind that I might never see him again.

Then ,one night ,I went to a skating party. Brian was supposed to be there but I couldn't find him. When I got home, my dad was out in the garage working on a project. When Dad spotted me,he opened the door to the house to let my mom know that I had arrived. I walked into the house, and Mom said, "I need to talk to you alone in your bedroom, Susie." I grabbed some chocolate chips off the counter and bounded off to my room. "Jeff's mom called. . ."was all she had to say. I knew. The chocolate held me tightly. I've never been an emotional person, but my heart just sank and I felt empty. It was too hard to believe. Brian had heard about it just before the skating party, and that's why he hadn't been there.

That evening ,Brian and I talked for hours. We had never talked much on the phone before, because we had always been doing things ,but that night we talked and talked ,reminiscing about Jeff. We started worrying about Jeff's parents and if they could handle the medical expenses. And that was the beginning of our idea. We wanted to do something, but we didn't know what.

When we figured out that Jeff's parents didn't need the money, we started thinking instead about something that would help everybody remember Jeff, something to honor him. Brian and I thought about the time the three of us did a

run together. Jeff had loved running ,but it had been hard for him to finish the run. He was really happy when he was able to cross the finish line ,and so were we. Why **not** do a run for Jeff?

It seemed like a good idea. We knew that we would have to advertise in order to have enough runners, and that we'd have to get sponsors for food and drinks. We even thought we knew what the forms needed to look like for sign-ups.

I know now that all of this planning was part of our grieving process. All through it ,we told each other stories about Jeff. Right around that time ,his parents donated a tree to the school and we all planted it in Jeff's memory. It was tough on his parents ,but it really helped all the kids. Everyone got to shovel some dirt around the tree, and Jeff's parents held hands with each other and cried.

If we'd been old enough to know what was really involved, we probably wouldn't have started it. But we were just some kids with a great idea, so we went for it. We took the phone book and started calling Coors, Pepsi and Mile-High Yogurt -anything we could find. "We want to do a run, and we're looking for sponsorship," We would say to whoever answered the phone. "Who can we talk to?" I wonder if the people on the other end could tell that we were only fifth-graders !

Then one day ,Mom came to me all excited. "A man from Pepsi called and asked to talk to you. What's going on?" I guess we'd been persuasive enough ! After I called him back and got his pledge of support ,I told my parents about the run and they promised to help. The vice-principal got involved and he brought the plans for the run to the gym teacher ,who was a runner. All of the adults in our lives were encouraging us.

We started writing letters to lots of companies ,which was pretty funny because Brian has the worst handwriting in the world. I don't know how anyone ever read what he was trying to say. But somehow it worked because we started receiving all kinds of gifts. The yogurt place gave us five hundred free yogurts ,and other companies donated money.

The plans for the run were growing so big that we needed a professional organizer. Someone came along and donated this service for free ,and that's when things really started to roll. The entire community became involved :stuffing packets, raising money, writing numbers on racing bibs, holding meetings. Pretty soon, the whole city knew what was going to happen.

The day of the run finally came ,and it was huge! Tons of people ran, ReMax donated T-shirts and there were awards for anyone who could beat the gym teacher's time. The park where the run was held was near Jeff's house, which was where the procession had gone after his funeral. Because of where it was held, the run had even more of a special meaning to Brian and me. And, we raised ten thousand dollars !We donated the money to the Leukemia Society in Jeff's name.

Even now ,I think about Jeff quite a lot. If something's going on in my life that feels bad, I tell myself, *Come on, get over it. Stop feeling sorry for yourself. If Jeff were still alive, he would be glad just to have the opportunity to deal with this.*

The run made such an impact on my life. The biggest thing was (and I credit the adults for this) that no one ever told us "No. .. We kept hearing, "If you want to do it,you can do it !"It has helped me in everything I've done since ,and I've had a "Go for it!" attitude about things.

There's a big bike ride I've heard about that goes from Los

Angeles to Orlando, and I'm thinking about riding in it. Some of my friends think I'm crazy and they ask me, "Is that even possible?" Of course it is! *You're alive, you're here — so run with it!*

*Susan Overton*

## The Back of David's Head

**H**ave a belief in yourself that is bigger than anyone's disbelief.

**August Wilson**

I couldn't stand fifth grade. I didn't like the milk that was warm by lunchtime from sitting near the radiator all morning. I didn't like recess because I could never get a turn on the swing. But most of all I didn't like my teacher ,Mrs. Kelly, because I was sure that Mrs. Kelly didn't like me.

Mrs. Kelly never let me pass out books or collect papers. Mrs. Kelly made me sit in the last seat of the sixth row behind David Abbot ,the biggest kid in the whole class. David was bigger than most of the eighth-graders, and he never, ever took a bath. The only thing I could see all day was the back of David's head.

At the beginning of fifth grade, Mrs. Kelly had explained all the classroom rules including the one about being excused for the rest room. She told all the students that they had to raise their hand with one or two fingers when they wanted to be excused. Then she would know what they were going to

do in the restroom, and how long they would be gone from the classroom. The whole class would laugh whenever anyone held up two fingers to be excused.

One Monday in October, Mrs. Kelly said, "Clear your desks and take out your composition books. Today I want you to write a composition called 'Something Interesting' about something you have personally seen. Do not repeat any topics. ..

"Can we write about Disneyland?" Maureen Murphy asked. Everyone in the class knew that Maureen had been to Disneyland more than anyone else in the whole school.

"That would be perfect, Maureen," Mrs. Kelly answered with a smile.

I opened my black and white composition book. I tried to ignore the huge red U for "unsatisfactory" that partly covered the title, "My Summer Vacation." I remembered Mrs. Kelly's comments without even looking at them.

*It has been brought to my attention that this composition is about your last year's summer vacation, and you have already written about the same trip for a composition last year during the fourth grade. Therefore, this assignment is unsatisfactory. Your penmanship is also unsatisfactory.*

I didn't care about the penmanship comment. That was on every assignment I turned in. What bothered me was that Mrs. Kelly would not accept my composition about my train trip to Denver. The only trip I had ever gone on in my whole life had been the trip to Denver. In the fourth grade, my composition had been about all the things I had seen from the train windows on the way to Denver. For the fifth grade,

I wrote a whole new composition about the hotel in Denver with the glass elevators.

Mrs. Kelly wrote an outline on the blackboard. One paragraph for an introduction, then three paragraphs to describe the topic in detail. A final paragraph for a conclusion. I knew that Maureen Murphy had a composition book filled with E's for excellent and even S's for superior while my best grade had been an F. In spite of Mrs. Kelly's red marks, I really liked to fill the pages of my composition book with words and ideas. I frowned and stared at the back of David's head.

That's when I noticed that the back of David's head looked like a brown forest with a long, brown, hairy trail that ran down his neck. He had three big brown freckles peeking out from the forest. The top of his head looked like a cartoon porcupine with brown hairs sticking up all over. David's ears were reddish tan with pudgy lobes that flapped against his neck when he raised his hand with only one finger. Looking at the back of David's head, I decided this composition could be different. It could be full of imagination instead of boring and embarrassing because I had never had the chance to see anything interesting, outside of the trip to Denver.

I opened my composition book and began to write. I wrote and wrote until Mrs. Kelly said, "Mary Ellyn, this is the third time I've called your name. It is time to line up to go home. However, you will stay after and writer I will pay attention in class one hundred times before you are excused. ..

On Wednesday, Maureen tiptoed around the room in her fancy shoes passing back everyone's composition notebooks. I ignored her snotty smile and opened my book, paging past

all the F's and U's. I couldn't wait to see a beautiful letter at the top of my composition, entitled "The Back of David's Head."

By the time I found the page ,my whole body was so tense with excitement I almost fell off my seat. But what I saw made my breath stop in a gasp. Across the whole composition Mrs. Kelly had scrawled a huge red U. It was the biggest and reddest U I had ever seen. The red words in the margin swam in a blur from the tears that filled my eyes. A huge tear plopped onto the page ,splashing over the comment about penmanship. I slapped the book shut and raised my hand with two fingers. I didn't care who laughed.

In the bathroom,I sat on the edge of a toilet and cried for a long time. After a while I heard the restroom door swish open.

"I know you're in here,Mary Ellyn ,"*Maureen Murphy's* voice oozed under the green painted metal door. "Mrs. Kelly says you'd better get back in class ,right now."

I waited for the sound of the door swishing closed. "You just wait and see,Mrs. Kelly,"I said in a low scary voice. "Someday I'll show you. Someday I'll write lots of stories and SELL them for lots of money. Someday my stories will be in books! Just you wait and see. "

And when I grew up ,that's *exactly* what I did.

SO THERE,MRS. KELLY !

*Mary Ellyn Sandford*

[EDITORS'NOTE :*Mrs. Kelly and readers might be interested to know that Mary Ellyn's work has been published in several magazines as well as Chicken Soup for the Kid's Soul.*]



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## Going to the Dogs

*If we all did the things we are capable of doing,  
we would literally astound ourselves.*

Thomas Edison

One day my mom and I were sitting in her office looking at a magazine called ***Humane Society News***. We read a very sad story about a New Jersey police dog named Solo that had been sent into a building to catch an armed suspect. The last thing Solo did before entering the building was to lick his owner's face. A few minutes later, Solo was shot and killed in the line of duty. I knew how sad that officer must have felt because my own dog, Kela, had recently died. I felt like my world had ended when I lost Kela. She had been my best friend since I could remember.

The article went on to tell about a fund-raiser that was going on in New Jersey to help buy bulletproof vests for the police dogs there. I thought, *Every police dog should be protected just like the police. I may be a kid, but why can't I do a fund-raiser to help save the dogs in our area?*

Then I found out that a bulletproof vest for a police dog

costs \$475. My mom thought it was a lot of money for an eleven-year-old girl to raise, but she told me to go ahead and try anyway.

We called our local Oceanside Police Department and found out that their dogs needed bulletproof vests. At that point, I realized that I needed a name for the fund-raiser and thought since I was trying to protect just one dog's life, I would call my program Vest A Dog.

I decided that veterinarian offices and pet stores would be really good places to go with donation boxes and Vest A Dog flyers. I used little green Chinese take-out boxes, decorated with a picture of Tiko, the dog I chose to vest, and me. I wrote on each box "Help protect the life of a police dog by donating a dollar. .."

One afternoon, after all the boxes had been distributed throughout our community ,I got a call from a local newspaper reporter who had seen one of my fliers. The reporter decided to do an article about Vest A Dog. *That ought to spread the word,I* thought. I asked K9 Officer Jim Wall ,who is Tiko's partner,if they would have their picture taken with me for the article and they did.

After the article came out,I waited for a few days before checking to see if there were any donations. I was really nervous when I finally went to collect the money. *Would there be anything in the boxes?I* wondered. I really wasn't sure that I could raise enough to buy the vest. But when I collected the first box,I couldn't believe my eyes. I realized that there are many generous animal lovers out there. The box was practically overflowing with dollar bills! I kept checking back to collect the donations every few days. After about three weeks,I counted the money from all of the boxes. It totaled

over three thousand dollars! I was so excited and totally amazed at the amount of money that I had raised. Not only was there enough money to buy Tiko's vest ,but Vest A Dog had raised enough to buy vests for the other five unprotected dogs on the Oceanside Police Department. I couldn't believe it!

When the officers from the K9 unit found out that they were going to be able to protect all six of their dogs,they couldn't stop thanking me. They decided to put together a presentation ceremony where I would give the six vests I was donating to the department's dogs. That's where I got to meet all of the other police dogs and their handlers. I was actually a little scared of them, but the officers assured me that the dogs were very friendly. I learned that these were not just police dogs ,but also the officers' family pet. Again, I thought of my dog Kela and also about Solo. I wanted even more to make sure that these police dogs didn't die while trying to protect people.

Once I began presenting the vests at the ceremony,I kept seeing television reporters come in and set up cameras. I never expected to see so many news stations there! I was excited to talk with them about what I was doing. When they asked me if I was going to continue my Vest A Dog program to help protect the other fifty dogs in San Diego County,where we live,I replied, "Yes ! We need to protect these dogs because they protect us every day. "

Soon the phone was ringing off the hook ! Each day, reporters from newspapers and television stations called with interview requests. They wanted more information about my Vest A Dog program and also wanted to know where donations could be made. The media is so powerful! People began

to mail donations to Vest A Dog!

Looking back, the success of Vest A Dog totally surprised me at first. Then I realized that it wasn't unusual that a lot of other people felt the same way I did about these dogs. They just didn't know how to help before Vest A Dog got started.

So far, Vest A Dog has raised more than twenty-five thousand dollars and has supplied all of the law enforcement dogs within San Diego County with a protective vest! Then, just when I had achieved what I thought was my highest goal, people from all over the country began to call me to find out how to raise funds to vest dogs in their areas. So now my fund-raiser is continuing nationwide, and I have a Web page to tell other people how to organize a fund-raiser like the one that I did.

Knowing that more and more dogs are being protected is really rewarding. It has made all my efforts more than worth it.

Then, one day after school, my mom told me that the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) wanted to honor me for the work that I had done to protect police dogs. They invited my mom and me to New York so that I could receive an award and a check for five thousand dollars! That vested another ten dogs!

I'm so proud and happy that the money I have raised is all going to the dogs. I'm still amazed that I have vested so many dogs when I really wasn't sure if I could vest even one. Even though some days I was tired from schoolwork, I knew it was important to continue fund raising to help save these special dogs. It was a lot of hard work but I learned that if you just keep going, you can accomplish anything.

Don't think that just because you are a kid that you can't make a difference. Even if you think something is impossible ,it can be done.

*Stephanie Taylor,eleven*

*[EDITORS' NOTE:For more information on how to start a Vest A Dog program in your area,log on to [www.dogvest.corn](http://www.dogvest.corn). ]*

***If I Could Change the World  
for the Better, I Would ...***

Eliminate every man-made weapon and all war. I would make sure that everyone treats each other equally.

*Lance Bass, \*NSYNC*

Find one positive thing that everyone in the world could believe in. Prove to everyone there is a common ground in all people, no matter what race, color, sex, faith, rich or poor. Bring people a little closer together ,and remind them we're all the same. Just try to make it through life as human beings, and remember that every life is just as important as the next.

*J. C. Chasez, \*NSYNC*

Have free ice cream breaks for everybody. I would have children have more say-so in the world ,and ban all guns and drugs.

*Joey Fatone Jr. , "NSYNC*

Put a smile on everyone's face.

*Chris Kirkpatrick, \*NSYNC*

End racism and make equality for men and women. I would teach life through music.

*Justin Timberlake, "NSYNC*

Melt every cold heart and mold them into new warm ones.

*Scarlett Kotlarczyk ,eleven*

Help people realize that people like me who learn and do things differently than them are still really the same underneath it all. We want to be liked and smiled at.

*Wilson Cook ,nine*

Find another way to test drugs instead of using them on animals.

*Brandon Barger ,thirteen*

Make it so every kid would have a warm meal ,and no one would go starving.

*Timothy Blevans ,eleven*

Open a house for all of the orphans of the world. I would

*Stacey Bergman ,fifteen*

Stop kids from making fun of other kids. Prejudice is just what we don't need. Kids hate being ridiculed.

Rachel Force, eleven

Make people realize that it's not what other people think of you, but what you think of yourself. You shouldn't put yourself down when people say cruel things about you or do things to you, because they're the ones that need a little Chicken Soup for their soul.

Sarah Hampton ,fourteen

Travel back in time ,and make sure the people who invented drugs and smoking never discovered or invented them.

Lisa Cline ,eleven

Find a cure for diabetes. My little brother's friend has juvenile diabetes. Every year my family "Walks for the Cure." I wish there wasn't such a disease because he has to take shots and stuff.

Kristin Boden ,thirteen

Want everyone to keep an open mind about everything, because with an open mind ,you can accomplish anything.

Annemarie Staley ,fourteen

Make everything solar powered including factories, vehicles and all types of machinery. By doing this ,there wouldn't be as much air pollution and people could breathe easier.

Tracye Paye ,thirteen

Give every child a grandmother like mine. She may not be rich and famous ,but she has enough love in her heart for her twenty-one grandchildren and great-grandchildren ,and plenty more to spare. How many millionaires can say that?

Casey Singleton,eighteen

Make it so that kids don't have to go through child abuse.

Kristen Hamilton ,eleven

Make every capable person do one hour of community service per month. This would include cleaning up rubbish, bathing and feeding homeless people ,and planting trees.

Trevor Burton ,nineteen

Make sure that no one in the world is harmed because of their religion.

Pratima Neti ,eleven

Stop child labor, which is unfortunately still going on in this world. Children deserve the right to live ,and working at a very young age will not give you that freedom.

Jessilyn Yoo,twelve

Pay teachers more ,because teachers are the foundation of all learning. Without teachers ,the world would just be a useless space full of useless people.

Angela Rotchstein,fourteen

Make sure that everybody in the world is able to read. Reading is the world's greatest gift for the mind and imagination.

Jessica Behles ,fourteen

Have everybody just agree to disagree instead of fighting. After all,we are all different ,and have our own ways ;this is the spice of life.

Jill Ananda ,fourteen

Plant the rainforests back all over the world, so that the trees will grow and the rivers will flow. I would bring back the animals that have died out ,but without the dinosaurs!

Kyla Cangemi ,ten

Make the world a happier place with no bombings or school shootings.

Chap Arst ,thirteen

Show everyone the love that my adoptive mother showed me. I was angry at the world because I thought no one loved me or could ever love me. No one wanted a thirteen-year-old girl, but she came along and showed me that people could and do care about me. I would definitely give that to any person in this world. Love is all the world needs.

Mia Sifford ,seventeen

Give every child a blanket, not only to keep them warm, but to snuggle with. We each need something to hold onto, and a fuzzy blanket would help away the problems of the world, if only for a moment or two.

Steve Hayden ,thirteen

Let all the kids in the whole world know that they can succeed in anything that they put their heart into. There is always a solution for problems;you just have to look in your heart to find them.

Alysia Escalante ,thirteen

Fix that hole in the ozone layer so the heat of the sun won't kill us.

Nikole Pegues ,eleven

Ask everyone in school to say one nice thing to another person every day. Have every family tell each other they love one another.

*William Baun ,twelve*

Have people talk to each other and listen more, and make sure that everybody would have enough play time.

*Neil Gogno ,nine*

Stop all the violence that is on TV, which is where people get the idea that it is okay to hurt or kill someone. When we were channel surfing ,my stepmom and I saw seven guns and three acts of violence all in one minute; even my dog got scared !

*Bethany Hicks,twelve*

Want everyone to have at least one best friend that they could count on.

*Andrea Hawsey,eleven*

Create vehicles that would run on natural resource waste material to stop the pollution.

**Rosie Huf, eleven**

Get more clubs and activities going so that people would stay away from gangs ,drugs and crimes.

*Stacy Luebbe,fourteen*

Bring back all our lost loved ones for a day.

*Rita Koch, ten*

Make sure that all children in the world can go to school, and have *Chicken Soup* books so they know that they aren't alone.

*Allison Opsitnick, twelve*

## A Run to Remember

Thirteen can be a challenging age. Not only did I have to adapt to my changing body; I also had to deal with my parents' bitter divorce,a new family and the upsetting move from my country home to a crowded suburb.

When we moved, my beloved companion, a small brown pony, had to be sold. I was trashed. Feeling helpless and alone, I couldn't eat or sleep, and I cried all of the time. I missed my family, my home and my pony. Finally, my father, realizing how much I missed my pony ,purchased an old red gelding for me at a local auction.

Cowboy was without a doubt the ugliest horse in the world. He was pigeon-toed and knock-kneed. But I didn't care about his faults.I loved him beyond all reason.

I joined a riding club and endured rude comments and mean snickers about Cowboy's looks. I never let on about how I felt ,but deep down inside ,my heart was breaking. The other members rode beautiful registered horses.

When Cowboy and I entered the events where the horse is judged on appearance,we were quickly "shown the gate." No amount of grooming, vitamins or unconditional love would turn Cowboy into a beauty. I finally realized that my only chance to compete would be in the timed-speed events.

I chose barrel racing.

One girl named Becky rode a big brown thoroughbred mare in the race events. She always won the blue ribbons. Needless to say, she didn't feel threatened when I competed against her at the next show. She didn't need to. I came in next to last.

The stinging memory of Becky's smirks made me determined to beat her. For the whole next month I woke up early every day and rode Cowboy five miles to the arena. We practiced for hours in the hot sun and then I would walk Cowboy home. On the way home I would be so tired, those five miles seemed twice as long.

All of our hard work didn't make me feel confident by the time the show came. I sat at the gate and sweated it out while I watched Becky and her horse charge through the pattern of barrels, acing the course with ease.

My turn finally came. As I nudged Cowboy forward he stumbled, and almost fell, much to the delight of the other riders. I jammed my hat down on my head, stroked Cowboy's big red neck and entered the arena. At the signal, we dashed toward the first barrel, quickly whipped around it and with perfect precision rounded the second and thundered on to the third. We tore around the final curve and shot for the finish line.

No cheers filled the air. The end of our run was met with surprised silence. With the sound of my heart pounding in my ears, I heard the announcer call our time. Cowboy and I had beaten Becky and her fancy thoroughbred by a full two seconds!

I gained much more than a blue ribbon that day. At thirteen, I realized that no matter what the odds, I'd always

come out a winner if I wanted something badly enough to work for it. I can be the master of my own destiny.

*Barbara L. Glenn*

## Shining Down

*You must be the change you wish to see in the world.*

Gandhi

One dark morning while driving to work ,my dad ,Clayton Kavalinas ,swerved to avoid a deer in the road. His car skidded on black ice,hit a guardrail and spun into an oncoming truck. He died in the crash. He was only thirty-five years old. Streetlights could have helped prevent the accident, but there were no lights on that stretch of highway called the Marquis of Lorne Trail on the outskirts of Calgary,Canada.

I was only eleven when he died. I was devastated over the loss of my father ,especially when I realized that his death could have been avoided. In a two-year period ,my father and one other driver were killed ,and twenty-nine accidents happened on that area of the highway. Time and again I thought, *How could I find a way to make my dad's short life really count?*

I felt triumphant when I figured out what I could do. I decided that I would try to get some lights put up in that area

to help other drivers see better.

Once I figured out what I had to do,I fought as hard as I could to get new lights on that road. But I didn't realize what a big deal that would be! I was determined and very motivated. I didn't want what happened to my father to happen to anyone else.

I was studying government in school, and I tried to find a way to increase public pressure on city hall to install lights. With help from my classmates,I handed out flyers at homes and shopping malls, and obtained over three hundred signatures on the petition needed to grab the attention of the politicians in charge of road safety issues. I contacted them, too, and told them what I was trying to do. I was pretty amazed when some of the politicians actually listened to a kid! Finally,there was a meeting at city hall about the need for new lights.

Before the meeting,the local media found out what I was trying to do and reported on the problem. The reporters helped people in the area "see the lightw and acknowledge the danger on Marquis of Lorne Trail.

With TV,radio stations and newspapers covering it ,more people understood why lights were needed. They also learned what it was like for a child to lose a father. A lot of people told me they were touched and they decided to help. The public pressure began to rise and within four months from the morning my dad lost his life on that highway, the city council agreed to spend \$290,000 for new lights.

Sometimes, going through the accident over and over, in order to make a point ,was a hard thing to do emotionally. At times, I had hard nights and I cried. But at other times ,I'd be really happy and proud that my dad's life was the one that

made the difference in helping to save many other lives from fatal accidents.

I was never so proud in my life as I was on September 16, 1996,nearly a year after I lost my dad. Speaking through a walkie-talkie at the side of the road,I gave a city worker instructions to turn on the lights for the first time. During the same lighting ceremony,I was given a plaque from the City of Calgary honoring me for my public service efforts. Since then,the number of collisions on Marquis of Lorne Trail has been drastically reduced.

While helping many people I'll never even meet ,I think I also helped my mother,my younger brother ,Shaun ,and my little sister,Kaitlin,become more determined to continue to enjoy life. I helped lift their spirits ,and they were there to support me. We all cried together. We all laughed together. We all thought about life together. My dad's death brought us closer together as a family, making something positive come out of the situation and helping to ease our grief.

But it was really my dad who ended up teaching me a lot about determination, courage and faith. In his own way, through this project ,he helped me grow up. I learned that if you're determined,if you put your heart into something,you can overcome any obstacle. You can accomplish anything.

Life goes on now. The cameras have stopped filming and the civic leaders focus on other problems. But the street-lights will always be there to help me get through difficult times.

I know that I'll always be reminded of the terrible accident and I'll still suffer grief from losing my dad,but I gain comfort knowing that area of the highway is now a safer place. I feel my dad's presence there. I'll always have the

comfort of knowing that every night, a little bit of Dad is shining down.

*Michael Kavalinas,sixteen  
As told by Monte Stewart*

## Dreams

*They say a person needs just three things to be truly happy in this world. Someone to love, something to do and something to hope for.*

*Tom Bodett*

When I was three years old ,I slept on a very small bed in a large room with twenty-five other boys and girls in an orphanage in Hungary. Being the youngest boy in the building, I got picked on often because I was the smallest. My sister, Kristin, protected me when she could, but the older boys were really mean to me. Kristin and I had been taken from our birth mother when we were only babies because she couldn't take care of us.

When I was about one year old,Kristin and I were taken in by a lady who became our foster mom. We thought we'd found a home and had really grown to love her ,when about a year and a half later ,she decided she couldn't afford to keep us any longer. She told us that she was taking us to the orphanage for a visit, but she never came back to pick us up.

We had lived in the orphanage again for about six months

by the time Christmas came. None of us got any presents at all. I had only a few clothes of my own and no toys. We got two meals a day but the bread was hard and the food was terrible. I had one good friend at the orphanage named Attila, and we used to talk a lot about what it would be like to have somebody come and take us away from there. Our dream was to have a real family and do things that most other kids did. I had never even gone swimming or seen a movie in my life. Sometimes Attila, Kristin and I watched the only show they had on television, which was ***Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.***

Two or three times, people came to the orphanage and talked to my sister Kristin and me, but they never came back to see us again.

One day, this pretty lady with big hair and a big man with glasses came to see Kristin and me. We couldn't understand what they were saying, but the Hungarian girl who was with them told us that they had come from a faraway place called America. We spent a lot of time with them that day, and I told Attila what a good time I had.

They came back to see us every day for a week and took us for ice cream and long walks. The Hungarian girl told us that the man and lady wanted to adopt us and take us back with them to America. We were so excited and happy.

When I told Attila what was going to happen, he was very sad and didn't want us to leave him there. I told him he should ask the big man if he would take him so that he could come to America and be my brother. The next time the man and lady came, he jumped up into the man's lap and asked him if he could come with us. But, since the man didn't speak Hungarian, he didn't know what Attila wanted and just

smiled at him.

Kristin and I flew on a great big jet plane to America. Things look very different but wonderful here. All the food tastes great ,and I have my own room with a big bed and lots of clothes. I got a stuffed animal of my very own: my first toy.

Everyone was really nice, and our neighbors even gave each of us something called a bicycle. It didn't take long for me to learn to ride. Christmas came and there were lots of boxes under the tree for Kristin and me. America is a great place and I am very happy here.

After a year ,we went with a group of kids to a special ceremony where we were made citizens of the United States! After the ceremony, two men with a TV camera came and asked us questions about what life was like in Hungary. That night we were on television like the Ninja Turtles!

I hope that Attila got to see us and I wonder if he knows that dreams really can come true.

*Ryan Kelly ,ten*

# 2 *ON* *FRIENDSHIP*

*When you are sad I will dry your tears  
When you are scared I will ease your fears  
When you are worried I will give you hope  
If you want to give up I'll help you cope  
When you're lost and can't see the light  
I'll be your beacon shining so bright  
This is my oath that I pledge to the end  
Why you may ask?  
Because you're my friend.*

*Nicole Ritchie ,fifteen*

## The Forgotten Friend

*Friendship without self-interest is one of the rare and beautiful things of life.*

James Francis Byrnes

It was my tenth birthday -double digits -and I would have the biggest party ever. The guest list, which I kept at the back of my homework assignment folder, began with a few close friends. But in the two weeks before that special Friday night, it had quickly grown from seven girls to a whopping total of seventeen. Nearly every girl in my fifth-grade class had been invited to sleep over at my house for a big celebration. I was especially happy when each guest I invited excitedly accepted the invitation. It would be a night of scary stories, pizza and lots of presents. But as I later realized, I would truly treasure only one gift I received that night.

The family room was a flurry of shouts and bursts of laughter. We had just finished a game of Twister and were lining up for the limbo when the doorbell rang. I hardly paid attention to who might be at the door. What did it matter,

really? Everyone I liked from school was there,in my family room,preparing to lean under the stick held by my two sisters.

"Judy ,come here for a minute ,"Mom called from the front door.

I rolled my eyes and shrugged to my friends as if to say,  
***Now who would dare bother me at a time like this?*** What I really wanted to say was,***It's tough being popular!***

I rounded the bend toward the front door,then stopped. I know my mouth dropped open and I could feel my face turning red,for there on the front porch stood Sarah Westly-the quiet girl who sat next to me in music class -and she was holding a gift.

I thought about the growing list in the back of my assignment folder. ***How had I forgotten to invite Sarah?***

I remembered that I only added a name to the list when someone had shown an interest in me(like kids do when they know someone is having a party and they don't want to be left out).But Sarah had never done that. Never once had she asked me about my birthday party. Never once did she squeeze into the circle of kids surrounding me at lunch time. And once she even helped me carry my backpack while I lugged my science project to our thirdfloor classroom.

I guess I had forgotten to invite her simply because she wasn't pushing to be invited. I accepted the gift from Sarah and asked her to join the party.

"I can't stay,"she said,looking down. "My dad's waiting in the car."

"Can you come in for a little while?"I nearly begged. By now I felt pretty bad about forgetting to invite her and really did want her to stay.

"Thanks, but I have to go,"she said,turning toward the

door. "See you Monday. ..

I stood in the foyer with Sarah's gift in my hands and an empty feeling in my heart.

I didn't open the gift until hours after the party had ended. Hours after the games, the food, the ghost stories, the pillow fights ,the pranks on those first to fall asleep and the snores.

Inside the small box was a ceramic tabby cat about three inches tall with its tail in the air. In my mind ,it was the best gift I had received,even though I was never really into cats. I later found out that the figurine looked exactly like Sarah's cat,Seymour.

I didn't know it then,but now I realize that Sarah was my one true childhood friend. While the other girls drifted away, Sarah was always there for me ,ever loyal and supportive. She was an unconditional friend who stood by me, always encouraging and understanding me.

Although I'll always feel bad about forgetting her,I also realize that I might not have discovered Sarah as a friend had I remembered to invite her to that unforgettable tenth birthday party.

*Judith Burnett Schneider*

## Backfire!

*Actions,not words,are the true criterion of the attachment of friends.*

George Washington

It was spring at last. The sun was high in a cloudless sky. Birds sang. Flowers bloomed. Best of all, it was Saturday—a perfect day to be out playing with friends. The problem was, we'd only been in town two months so I hadn't made any friends. My family moved a lot. It's hard when you're always the new kid on the block.

So, here I was, stuck with my baby brother John and Mary, the new sitter, while Mom and Dad were out of town on business. It was not going to be a fun day!

Just as we started lunch, the phone rang. I hopped up to answer it. "Hello, Morrell's residence. Lou speaking."

"Hi, Lou. It's Alicia."

My heart did a rapid pit-a-pat-pat. "Alicia Whitman?" She giggled. "You know another Alicia?"

"No." "There was only one Alicia: the most popular, prettiest, richest girl in my class."

"I called to invite you over to my house this afternoon. We can ride my horse."

"Hang on. I'll ask. "Heart racing, I ran to the kitchen. "Mary, can I go play with my friend Alicia this afternoon?"

Mary was trying to scoop peas off the floor faster than my brother dropped them. "Where does she live?"

"Only a few blocks from here," I said, picturing the fancy brick house that we passed on our way home from school. I held my breath.

"Would your mom let you go?"

"Sure, she would. Please, Mary. Please, please, please."

John dumped the whole dish from his highchair.

"Oh, all right," Mary said with a sigh.

I rushed back to the phone. "Alicia, I can come. What time? ..

"One o'clock?"

"Great. See ya then. ..

I was so excited I could hardly breathe. I was going to hang out with Alicia Whitman! Ride her horse. Every girl in class wanted to be Alicia's friend.

"Come eat your lunch," Mary called.

"I'm not hungry. I have to get ready."

I chose my outfit very carefully: My best shorts, clean T-shirt and brand-new shoes. I even washed my face and combed the tangles out of my hair. When I was satisfied, I called, "I'm going now, Mary."

I set off. The sun beat down on my back and bounced off the sidewalk. Cars and trucks swished by on the highway. I didn't care about the heat or the noise. I was too busy day-dreaming about the possibility of becoming good friends with Alicia. I'd liked Alicia from the first day. We were a lot alike. We both loved to read. Our hands were the first up to

answer questions. We mostly got A's. We both liked to play sports ,although Alicia was always picked first and me last. And we both were horse-crazy. I just knew we could be best friends-if we had a chance.

The sidewalk stretched on forever and ever. It hadn't seemed this far in the car! My shirt was getting sweaty and one heel in my new shoes hurt like crazy. I stopped and pulled down my sock. A big, fat blister had bubbled up. Youch! I kept going ,walking on my tippytoes. It couldn't be that much farther now ,could it?

Several blocks later, across the highway, I saw the meadow with Alicia's horse, Buttercup,in it. Now all I had to do was cross four lanes of traffic. I sure hoped I wasn't late!

Cars and trucks whizzed past me. I waited the longest time for a break. When it came, I made a mad dash to the other side. Whew! I was there.

The Whitman house was surrounded by big'old trees. The cool shade felt wonderful. I smoothed my hair and my shorts. My mouth was dry. I hoped Alicia would offer me a cold drink right away. I walked up to the front door and rang the bell.

No one answered.

I rang again ,then knocked. No one came to the door.

Maybe they were out back? I walked around on the brick walk. There were no cars in the driveway. No one on the fancy rock terrace either. I knocked on the back door.

Nobody came.

Alicia's tree house was empty,too. I climbed up to check. Except for Buttercup ,the whole place was deserted!

I couldn't believe it. Had I heard Alicia wrong? Didn't she say today? Why would she invite me and leave? Maybe she'd gone *to* pick me up? That was it! Alicia didn't walk to school

or ride the bus. A shiny black car brought her and was waiting when school was out. She wouldn't expect me to walk all the way out here. We'd just missed each other.

Happily, I went back and sat on the front steps. I waited and waited and waited. It got later and later. No Alicia. No Whitmans. Nobody came.

I sat there with my head in my hands, growing more disappointed and confused by the minute. I finally decided that Alicia wasn't coming, so I got up and trudged home. I was ashamed of myself. I'd been so hungry for a friend that I'd fallen for her mean trick.

By Monday morning my shame had turned to anger. Being pretty and popular didn't give someone the right to trick people! I spotted Alicia on the playground, surrounded by the usual group of girls. I pushed my way into the circle. "What you did was mean, Alicia Whitman. I don't want to be your friend, now or ever!" I stomped away.

"Wait!" Alicia cried. "What did I do?"

Right there, in front of God and all her friends, I told her.

Alicia was shaking her head. "I didn't call you, Lou. It wasn't me. We were out of town all weekend. ..

Someone giggled and said, "Miss Brainiac got fooled. ..

I ignored the name-caller. "Then who called me, Alicia? Who played that dirty trick?"

Alicia looked around the group. Her gaze stopped on Morgan, who was trying to hide the fact that she was laughing to herself. "It was a dirty trick, Lou. I don't know who did it-for sure. But that person's no friend of mine. "

Morgan turned bright red. "It was just a joke. Can't you take a joke, Lou?"

"Some jokes aren't funny. Right, you guys?" Alicia said, taking my arm.

Everyone nodded and closed in behind Alicia and me. Morgan's hurtful joke backfired. We all walked away, leaving her standing alone on the playground.

*Lou Kassem*



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## Best Friends

I thought she was my best friend  
The best one I've ever had  
Instead I found out the truth  
And what I learned was sad.

We still call each other friends  
But I feel we're far apart  
Though we see each other every day  
I have a broken heart.

She has made new friends  
And I have made some, too.  
We are talking less and less  
And inside I'm cold and blue.

Each and every night I pray  
That she will finally see  
How much I want our friendship back  
And how much she means to me.

*Whitney M. Baldwirz, twelve*

## My Best Enemy

Examine the contents,not the bottle.

The Talmud

Once again, I was in a new school. So was a girl in my class named Paris. That's where the similarities ended.

I was tall, with a big, moony face. She was petite and skinny with a model's delicate features.

My thick, black hair had been recently cut short into a shag style. Her natural caramel blonde hair flowed to her waist and looked great when she flipped it around.

I was twelve and one of the oldest in the class. She was eleven and the youngest in the class.

I was awkward and shy. She wasn't.

I wore baggy overalls, sweatshirts and lime-green hiking boots. Paris wore rhinestone platform shoes, little twirly skirts and expensive, size-one designer jeans.

I couldn't stand her. I considered her my enemy. She liked me. She wanted to be friends.

One day, she invited me over and I said yes. I was too shocked to answer any other way. My family had moved six

times in six years ,and I had never managed to develop many friendships. No one had invited me over to play since I was young enough to actually play. But this girl who wore tinted li - gloss the latest fashions wanted me to go home with her after school.

She lived in a fun part of town that had two pizza places, an all-night bookstore, a movie theater and a park. As we walked from the school bus stop through her neighborhood, I tried to guess which house might be hers. Was it the white one with the perfect lawn or the brown-shingled three-story house with a silky golden retriever on the front porch?

Was I surprised when she led me into an apartment building, which smelled like frying food,chemical cleaning sprays and incense! She lived on the fourth floor in a two-room place with her mother,her stepfather,her two brothers and her sister.

When we go to the room she shared with her sister,she took out a big case of Barbies-which was my next surprise. I would have thought she'd outgrown them. I had never played with them. But we sat on the floor of a walk-in closet ,laughing as we made up crazy stories about the Barbies. That's when we found out that we both wanted to be writers when we were older and we both had wild imaginations.

When we got bored making up stories, she took out a small case of make-up and taught me how to put on lipstick and blush. I still thought that I looked like a clown;my face just wasn't made for make-up. Unlike me ,Paris looked about eighteen years old in make-up.

We spent that afternoon screaming with laughter. Our jaws ached from smiling so much. She showed me her wardrobe, which had mostly come from a designer clothing store down the block. The woman who owned it used her as

a model sometimes for her newspaper ads and gave her clothes in exchange.

Paris had the whole neighborhood charmed. The book-store owners lent her fashion magazines, the movie theater gave her free passes and the pizza place let her have free slices. Soon I was included in her magic world. We slept over at each other's houses, spent every free moment together. Sometimes Paris and I stayed up the entire night talking. We never ran out of things to discuss ,whether we were making detailed lists of boys we liked or talking about the meaning of life.

She was too poor to have a telephone, so when I was forced to be apart from her,I would dial the number of the pay phone in the pizza place. If I was lucky,Paris would be nearby and answer it.

She was my first real friend since childhood, and she helped me get through the rough of early adolescence. My dark hair grew out and I learned to love being tall. Eventually,I found a shade of lipstick that didn't make me look like something from *Scream II*.

Nothing bad happened in our relationship — except for growing older. We ended up going to different junior high schools and eventually drifted apart.

Since then I've had other wonderful friendships. But Paris taught me an amazing and very surprising thing about making friends: that your worst enemy can turn out to be your best friend.

*Dakota Lane*

## Heaven Sent

*You will suffer and you will hurt. You will have joy and you will have peace.*

**Alison Cheek**

Making the transition from middle school to high school is always a tough one. Luckily, I had my five best friends, Kylie ,Lanie ,Laura, Mindy and Angela, to help me through it. We experienced our most important moments together and shared everything, the good and the bad. Their friendship completed me. With their help ,I went from being a shy little girl to a confident and excited young woman. Life without them was unimaginable ,or so I thought.

The unexpected all began on a beautiful spring day during my sophomore year. Life was perfect. It was a Friday and the weekend was upon us. After my friends and I made our plans, I said good-bye to each of them and gave them all a great big hug. As always,I told them that I loved them and we went on our own ways.

Laura and I decided to go to the mall and do some shopping before we went out that night. As we returned to her

house, I noticed something very odd: both of her parents were home and waiting outside. I knew right away how peculiar this was, since even Laura seemed surprised to see her father home so early. As we approached the door, Laura's father quietly uttered, "Reality is going to hit right now. " My stomach sank and my heart began to pound quickly. *What was he about to tell us?*

Once I found out, I no longer wanted to know what he was trying to say. Seeking comfort, I looked into the eyes of Laura's mother but saw her eyes fill up with nothing but tears. As she tried to speak, she choked on her words. But slowly the words came. The five words that would forever destroy my life were, "There has been an accident."

Images of the people I loved raced through my mind as my heart began to beat faster. My first instinct was to retreat to denial. Nothing was wrong, nothing had happened and no one was hurt. This would all go away and things would be back to normal in the morning. Unfortunately, I couldn't run away from the truth. I sat on the edge of my seat in shock as I was told the news.

My best friends had been in the accident. Lanie and Mindy had walked away. Kylie, however, was in bad shape. I soon realized that no one was telling me what had happened to Angela. As I prepared to ask, I took a deep breath and swallowed hard. Deep down inside, I already knew what I didn't want to hear. I tried to ignore my instincts. After all, Angela couldn't be dead. She was only fifteen!

Then the news came and there was nowhere I could run to escape. Angela was dead. After hearing the news, all I could do was laugh. This had to be some kind of sick joke. My inner refusal to accept what I had been told prevented me from crying. I had no tears. I was in shock, utter shock. From the

moment the accident had happened, each of our lives had been changed forever.

As I arrived at the hospital, the first person I saw was Lanie. Even though it truly was Lanie, this wasn't my Lanie. The Lanie I knew was full of spunk. As I looked into her eyes, I thought I was looking into the eyes of a stranger. For the first time in our lives, she was out of my reach. I was devastated to see her in so much pain. She couldn't even speak to me.

As if that weren't hard enough, I was then told that before I could see Kylie, there were certain conditions that I had to agree to. I was to remain calm and tell her that everything was going to be okay. The hardest part, though, was being told that I couldn't cry, because this would upset her. I quickly agreed. I just wanted to see her.

I walked into the emergency room to find Kylie hooked up to many machines. She was screaming and crying. It was beyond difficult to pretend that all was well when all I could see was the hell that she was going through. My heart stopped. She was in agony and I could do nothing but watch. As I told her that I loved her, I felt my eyes well up with tears, so I turned and ran away.

Once I was outside of Kylie's room, I tried to regain my composure. However, I panicked once again when I found out that Angela's father was on his way over to the hospital to check on the other girls. My only instinct was to run, and that is exactly what I did. I ran as fast as I could to the other side of the hospital. I was not running away from him, but from the truth. I just couldn't bear facing him. I knew if I did, I would have to face the truth that Angela was gone forever. I wasn't ready for that truth. Somewhere deep down, I was still hoping that this was really an awful nightmare that

I was going to wake up from any minute. Unfortunately, it wasn't.

That night all of my friends gathered at Laura's house. We consoled each other and reminisced about the times we had shared with Angela, times that we would have no more. At this point, I was still not allowing myself to grieve. If I did, it would mean that I believed it was true. I knew it was true but I could not accept it, so I didn't.

Later that week was the viewing. The once-vibrant young woman lay lifeless and cold. That was not my Angela; I did not know or recognize that person. What followed was the funeral. That was where the spirit of the Angela that I knew actually was.

It was a beautiful sight to see the community come together to express their love for her. The microphone was open to all of those who wanted to share their personal memories or their love for Angela. Seeing all the people that were there to remember her made me realize that Angela not only touched my life but the lives of everyone she came into contact with. She was my sunshine, and now without her my days were darker. How does a person live without the love, warmth and security of her best friend?

I didn't think my life could get any worse, but I was wrong. Without notice, I was told that my parents were getting a divorce. As soon as I heard the news, I automatically wanted to call Angela. After all, she was the one I always ran to when I needed someone to talk to or cheer me up. But she was gone.

All my friends were still hurting from the devastation of losing Angela, so I didn't think that I could burden them with my new crisis. I ended up feeling completely lost and abandoned. I bottled up all my thoughts, questions and frus-

trations inside of me. I thought that meant that I was strong. It took me some time before I realized that there was someone that would always be there for me no matter what happened :God. He always had a way of coming into my life with open arms when I had nowhere left to run. I soon learned that God has a mysterious way of working. This time, he placed a situation in my life path that enabled me to grow as an individual.

Unexpectedly, Brenda Hampton ,the creator, writer and executive producer of *7th Heaven* ,came to me and asked if I would be willing to do an episode about "dealing with the death of a young friend. "Up until this point, I had not let myself grieve over the loss of Angela. Simply put ,I had been acting. I had put up this perfect facade that I was totally happy. When Brenda asked me if I was willing to do this episode ,I suddenly realized that I needed to let out my emotions and fears if I ever wanted to get over my pain. As a result, I agreed to what Brenda proposed, and she developed "Nothing Endures but Change. ..

At first, I wasn't prepared for the emotional tidal wave that would be released. Filming that episode was both emotionally and physically exhausting. Emotions that I had ignored for so long were now being unleashed, and I did not know how I was going to deal with them. Luckily, this time around I felt comfortable enough to turn to my friends and family for the love, advice and security that only they could offer. I came to the realization that it was okay to hurt. Once the tears came, they didn't stop until weeks after. That was when I realized that even though Angela wasn't physically with us any longer, her spirit had never left my side.

One day, after visiting Angela's grave at the cemetery, I was listening to the radio. I noticed that the songs playing

were those that I always associated with Angela and our friendship. Five of "our" songs played back to back. As I came over a hill, I saw a beautiful rainbow. I immediately got chills all over my body. I knew that this was a sign and it instantly caused me to smile. To all of my friends and me, rainbows had symbolized our friendship with Angela. There she was, as beautiful as ever, just reminding me that she was still by my side and had never truly left me. I cried, but this time out of happiness and joy. I knew then that I have an angel watching over me, now and forever, and her name is Angela.

*Beverley Mitchell*

## Keeping in Touch

*There is one thing better than making a new friend, and that is keeping an old one.*

Elmer G. Leterman

Two years ago my family moved. The day that we left, my best friend and I cried together in my empty bedroom for hours. I was miserable and homesick during the five-hour car ride to my new house. Life was unbearable.

When we finally arrived at my new house, I ran to the phone to tell my best friend my address and phone number. We talked for a little while, but I had to hang up because the long-distance call was expensive.

On the first day of school, I called her to tell her how it went. Then, on Halloween, I sent her a letter and a picture of my new friends and me.

Finally, she wrote me a letter. It wasn't even a letter—just a bunch of pieces of paper saying, "Best friends forever."

When I finally got her E-mail address, I E-mailed her the longest letter I have ever written. I never received an E-mail back, and by the third E-mail letter with no response, my

messages grew shorter and shorter. With each passing day, I got angrier and angrier. I never received a reply from her.

Mom said that I could always call my other friends, that I didn't need to always call her. Give up on my best friend? Give up on the person I had known all my life? The person that I had gone from diapers to Barbies to nail polish with, and who had been in the same class with me from the first through the fifth grade?

My first answer was automatically, "No way!" But after five more E-mail messages, three phone calls and two more letters, I started to consider what my mom had said. Every night for about a week, I stayed up in bed thinking, *Should I give up? Should I keep trying?*

The way I looked at it, if I'm her best friend, she'd take a minute to push a few buttons on the phone, or type a short "hello" on the computer, or scribble a few words on a piece of paper. To me, keeping in touch is part of being a friend and is important. To her, it really didn't seem to matter.

After two years of disappointment, I finally got a phone call from my best friend. She told me how sorry she was for not writing, and about how busy she had been. It was so unexpected, I forgot about everything that happened and how angry I had been at her. I forgave her. I guess keeping in touch just isn't her style, and it didn't mean she didn't care about me.

I came to realize that true friends never really lose their special connection. Even after two years, it felt like we had just talked yesterday. Now she and I write regularly—or at least she tries to, and *She tries hard.*

What more could a friend ask for?

*Emily Burton, eleven*

# Calvin and Hobbes



by Bill Watterson

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## My Big Solo

The day had finally arrived; the day of my big solo. Everyone was there; my mom and dad and my little brother. Uncle Scott and Auntie Tammy had even picked up my grandma from the nursing home so she wouldn't miss the big event.

And it was a big event: the Spring Fling Choir Concert. The whole class was dressed up and I had on a new dress that went on sale just in time for the event.

My name was on the cover of the program in bright yellow with a daisy chain drawn around it. "Cindy Hamond ... Soloist."

I couldn't believe it when I saw my name. Not that it was my name, but that it wasn't Renee Swanson's.

Renee and I had been classmates since kindergarten. She was always wherever I was and she was always ahead of me.

Dance-class recital needs a big finish? Renee was picked.

Selling Girl Scout cookies? "Oh, I'm sorry," the lady at the front door would say. "I just bought twenty boxes from Renee Swanson. Such a nice girl." *Yeah, whatever.*

Softball? She played first base while I watched her from my position in the outfield.

And the school plays? Renee would have the leads while I was cast as her mother or sister or neighbor. I even played her dog once.

The only time I ever came in ahead of Renee was at roll call. Hamond comes before Swanson. Every time! Believe me, I count that as a victory!

The day of the choir concert tryouts was nerve wracking. We waited in the library while Ms. Jenkins called us one at a time into the choir room.

When Ms. Jenkins got to the H's, my heart sped up each time she came to the door. By the time she actually called my name, my whole body was shaking.

When I came back to the library, Renee smiled at me. Ms. Jenkins called her name and Renee calmly followed her. She was still calm and smiling when her tryout was over.

When Ms. Jenkins made the announcement at the end of the week of who had made the special choral group, I wasn't surprised when Renee's name was on her list and mine wasn't. "So," I said under my breath, "what else is new?"

Sudden clapping brought me out of my sulking. Everyone was looking at me. *I've missed something here*, I thought.

Ms. Jenkins beamed down at me and said, "Cindy, you will have to start practicing with me during your study halls. The solos take extra preparation."

*Solo? I got the solo?* I glanced over at Renee. She grinned and gave me the thumbs-up sign. Oh, that's another thing. She is always *so* nice.

Now the day had come. We filed onto the stage and took our places. I was front and center. Ms. Jenkins raised her baton and we began to sing. I could see my mother leaning forward in her seat, her camera already flashing for pictures. My dad was smiling and winking at me.

My big moment was here. The spotlight flicked over me and then circled me in its bright light. Ms. Jenkins nodded and pointed her baton at me. That baton must have shot out

a secret stun ray because I froze right there on the spot.

I couldn't breathe. I couldn't think. Most of all, I couldn't sing. The note started up and then stuck right there in my throat. The choir kept singing softly behind me. Ms. Jenkins began to look a little frazzled.

"You can do it, Cindy," Renee whispered from behind me. "I know you can." I wasn't as sure as she was.

My turn came again. I took a deep breath, opened my mouth and sang out as loudly as I could. All that came out was a rusty-sounding squeak. But in that same moment, from behind me, came the pure tone of the right note. Renee gave me a gentle poke. My voice lifted and matched hers. When the next note came, it was all me.

The rest of the solo went well. And when the concert was over, the applause was thunderous. We even received a standing ovation. Well, okay, it was our parents and they are easily pleased, but a standing ovation is a standing ovation.

When we filed off the stage my family met me with praise and hugs.

Renee was next to hug me. It felt awkward.

"Thanks, Renee," was all I could get myself to say.

Renee flashed me her usual sunny smile. "It was nothing. You've always been there for me. All these years and all the things we've done together!" Renee gave me another hug. "What are friends for?"

*Friends? Did she say friends?*

"You're right," I said slowly, beginning to like the feeling of being her friend. This time I hugged her. "That's what friends are for."

*Cynthia Marie Hamond*

## Now You See It, Now You Don't

*One is taught by experience to put a premium on those few people who can appreciate you for what you are.*

Gail Godwin

I could hardly wait to get to school and see my friends. What would their reactions be when they saw me? I didn't know, but I was sure it wouldn't be like it was the day when I had started school there three years before.

On that terrible day my stepfather, Buddy, had to take me to school early so that he wouldn't be late for work. When he stopped in front of the school, I didn't want to get out of the car. I looked out at the small group of students standing outside the building and suddenly felt sick, but it was too late to back out now. Swallowing hard and trying not to cry, I slowly opened the car door and pushed myself around to get out. I felt awkward and ugly. The body brace I wore held me so stiffly that I couldn't move very easily, but at last I was out of the car. Buddy said good-bye, then drove off leaving me standing there alone.

I felt abandoned. I didn't know anyone there. I wished I were still in my old school with all my friends. My old friends knew all about my brace. They had also known me before I got the brace, so they knew I wasn't really this ... this ... monster that I felt like now.

Some of the kids had gathered near the front doors, which were still locked. I didn't have to look at them to know they were staring at me. I could feel it. And who could blame them? I was sure I had to be the ugliest, strangest thing they had ever seen. *So let them stare*, I thought defiantly. *I'll just ignore them*. I turned my back to them and sat down stiffly on the steps that led from the sidewalk up to the school. Hot, angry tears fell on my new dress, but I quickly wiped them away.

I looked down at my dress. It would be a pretty dress—on someone else. The brace ruined everything. I felt like a freak. I wanted to cry, to run and hide so no one could ever stare at me again. But I was trapped. Trapped inside this hideous contraption made of leather and steel. The leather wrapped around my middle and rested on my hips. Two narrow metal bars ran up my back. A wider bar came up the front to support the neckpiece, which held my head in place. The only way I could turn my head was by turning my whole body.

That morning though, I didn't try to turn my head. I didn't want to see the curious stares of strangers. I should have been used to it. People were always staring at me, or worse, asking me what was wrong with me. I hated being different. And the brace made it even worse. There was no way to hide the ugly thing. It just stuck out there, inviting everyone to gawk.

As I sat there on the steps, I didn't think I could be more

miserable. I was wrong. Even though it was September, the weather was still warm and as the sun rose higher, the shade disappeared. I could feel the sweat begin to trickle down my back and under my arms. *Great! Now I would smell sweaty on top of looking weird.* I wanted the earth to swallow me up right then and there.

But, of course, the earth didn't oblige by swallowing me up. I managed to get through that day, and the next, and all the days for the following three years. In spite of the horrid brace, I managed to make friends, once everyone got used to seeing it. I still felt awkward and ugly most of the time though, and I could hardly wait to get the brace removed for good.

That day finally arrived, one rainy Thursday in spring. I remember being so thrilled when the doctor said I could leave the brace off that I threw my arms around him and gave him a big hug. I told him I would always love rain from that day on. I was free at last!

At first I was going to call my best friend and tell her what happened, but then I decided just to surprise her at school the next day. I could hardly wait for the oohs and ahs that I expected to hear from everyone when they saw me without that dreadful brace. I danced up the stairs to the school building that morning. *Just wait until they see me,* I thought. *Just wait!*

And so I waited. In my first class, no one said a word. What was the matter with them? Couldn't they see how much I had changed? Maybe they were just too surprised to say anything. Probably in the next class, they would notice. Again, I waited. Still nothing. I was beginning to feel awful. Maybe I was just as ugly without the brace! Or maybe my friends just didn't care as much about me as I thought. Then

on to the next class, where I waited again.

By the end of the day, I was feeling hurt and confused. Even Danielle, my very best friend, hadn't said anything, and she knew how much I had hated wearing the brace. I didn't know what to think. I at least had to know what Danielle thought. I was spending the night at her house, so I decided to bring it up if she didn't say anything about it by then.

After a few hours at her house, she still hadn't said a word. At that point, I chickened out and asked Danielle's younger sister, Ann. "Ann, don't you notice anything different about me?" I asked her cautiously.

"Did you do something to your hair?" she asked.

"No. Not my hair," I said impatiently. "It's the brace. The brace is gone!" I turned in a circle and nodded my head up and down to show her. "See? It's gone!"

Ann just looked at me and shrugged her shoulders. "Well, I kinda thought something was different, but I just didn't know what it was!"

It wasn't until later that I realized my friends had long since accepted me for who I was, and they simply didn't notice the brace anymore. With or without the brace, what they saw when they looked at me was their friends.

Anne McCourtie

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# 3

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# ON FAMILY

*When monsters lurked beneath my bed,  
And scary dreams ran through my head,  
When thunder growled those sounds I dread,  
There you were, my father.  
When scuffed-up knees made me cry,  
Soft hankies wiped my sad eyes dry,  
Coaxing me each time I tried.  
There you were, my mother.  
Who held my hand when I was scared,  
Ate candy that he should have shared,  
The things I did because you dared!  
There you were, my brother.  
In times of trouble, times of need,  
I feel such strength surrounding me,  
Without whose love I can't succeed,  
I love you all, my family.*

*Lisa-Dawn Bertolla*

## Hey, Remember When?

When I look back on my childhood I will always remember the bond and memories I have forged with my cousins. There are five of us, including my brother Jack, my cousins Marleigh, Weston and Michael, and myself that are particularly close. Every summer, since I was six or seven, I have spent time with them. Every summer, I bring home unforgettable memories that I know I will keep forever.

Each time I see my cousins, we play a game called, "Hey, remember, when ...," and we remember all the crazy things we've done in the past.

"Hey, remember when Jack ordered room service at the Disneyland Hotel right when we were about to leave? Aunt Pam got so mad that Jack had to pay for it, and we didn't even get to eat the food!" Yeah, that was funny.

"Remember when Kyle lost at the game Spoons, and he had to sell plums on the street corner in a purple dress wearing a sign around his neck that said 'Plum Boy'? Yeah, and the police helicopter and a patrol car showed up because some lady reported a suspicious guy hanging around on the corner soliciting for money?"

"Remember when Jack spent the entire weekend in Lake Tahoe trying to talk like Jim Carrey? No really, everything he said was straight out of a Jim Carrey movie."

"Remember when we were at The Good Guys ,and Weston decided to test the video camera that showed up on the big screens in the store by putting the camera down his pants? That totally got the attention of everyone in the store!"

"Remember when ...?"And it goes on like this for hours.

One summer the five of us were with our Aunt Kathi and Nana (our grandmother) in Palm Springs. During the day it was 115 degrees outside and the pool heated up to more than 100 degrees. So when it got really hot, we went to the coolest place around ;the air-conditioned mall.

One day at the mall we went into a shop that sold home furnishings. One section of the store had two huge racks of pillows. Michael decided it would be fun if we buried him under all those beautiful new pillows. So,if course ,we did. In less than two minutes ,all of the pillows were off of the shelves and on top of Michael and he was no longer visible. We were all laughing and enjoying ourselves when we spotted an older lady who worked at the store coming our way. Immediately ,the four of us quickly walked away ,laughing to ourselves as the saleswoman started placing the pillows back on the shelves. Suddenly ,Michael ,thinking it was us ,jumped out from under the pillows yelling really loudly ,“Raaaahhh!”

The saleswoman jumped about three feet into the air and screamed so loudly that everyone in the store stopped and looked at her. Michael ,realizing his mistake ,started running. Before I knew it ,he was behind us yelling ,“Go ,go ,go !”We were off to the races. The five of us ran out into the mall as the lady and Aunt Kathi ,who had realized that we were in some sort of trouble ,started towards us. We ran several stores down and ducked into Millers Outpost and pretended to be shopping.

When Aunt Kathi caught us, we all had to go back into the store, pick the pillows off the ground and place them back on the shelves. Most importantly, we had to apologize to the lady, who was not very pleased with us, not our aunt and Nana, who were supposed to be in charge of us. The "pillow incident," as we have come to call it, will always have its place in the "Hey, remember when?" game. I think we'll be playing that game when we're all old and sitting around in rocking chairs!

"Hey, remember when Michael had to go out in public in a one-piece woman's bathing suit? ... or how about the time that ...?"

*Kyle Brown, sixteen*

## Families That Care, Care About Families

*We didn't have much, but we sure had plenty.*

Sherry Thomas

My tenth Christmas was one I was not looking forward to. Money was scarce. Dad was a preacher, and preachers for our church don't make much. Mom said we were old enough now to be brave and not count on gifts. Just being together would be enough.

We weren't the only family in our small community who would have a meager Christmas. But the knowledge that others were going through the same thing didn't help much. One night, as my sister and I huddled together in our shared bed, we had a small pity party for each other.

"How can I even wear that same old dress one more time?" I complained.

"I know," said my sister. "I think I might as well give up asking for a horse, too. I've asked for one forever but it just never happens."

"Yeah, and even if we got one where would we keep it?" I said, destroying her last hope.

I couldn't stop thinking about my sister's long-held dream to own a horse and decided I was willing to give up every gift for ten Christmases if only her dream could come true.

The next day, Mom added salt to my wounds by telling us that she had been saving up and shopping around so that we could give the Walters family a Christmas basket.

"If anyone needs some cheer, it's the Walters," Mom reminded us.

"But the Walters, Mom. I wouldn't be caught dead at their front door."

Mom gave me a dirty look.

But I knew she would have to agree that the Walters were the strangest people we knew. Looking a lot like a family of hobos, they could have at least washed their hair once in a while. After all, water is free. I always felt embarrassed for them.

Mom was determined. And it was our duty to load up our little sled and pull the basket full of flour and sugar, a small turkey, potatoes, and bottled peaches over to the Walters, leave it on the doorstep and run.

On the way we noticed that Mom had tucked a small gift for each of the children in among the food. I was distraught. How could Mom be so generous with someone else's kids when our own family didn't have enough?

We delivered the package, knocked hard on the door and ran fast to hide behind a nearby bush. Safely hidden, I looked back the way we had come and realized my sister was standing in plain view. I was so mad. I didn't want them to know our family had anything to do with this.

After the Walters gathered up their basket of goodies and had closed the door, I said in a loud whisper, "What are you doing? I know they saw you!"

"I wanted to see their faces when they saw the gifts," my sister said innocently. "That's the best part."

"Whatever," I said, relenting to the unchangeable. "Did they look happy?"

"Well, yeah, happy, but mostly they looked like, well, like they were thinking, *Maybe we do belong.*"

Christmas morning arrived just a couple of days later. To my surprise, I unwrapped a fabulous-looking dress. I smiled at my parents as if to say, "I can't believe you actually got this for me." Then I glanced at my sister's face, which was full of anticipation. There was only one small package under the tree. She unwrapped it and found a currycomb. *A currycomb? Had my parents totally lost it?* My sister's face was blank and I was thinking, *Is this some kind of a mean joke?*

We hadn't realized that Dad had slipped outside. Just as I was about to speak, he rode up in front of the big picture window atop my sister's new horse!

My sister was so excited that she jumped up and down, then stopped and put her head in her hands, shook her head back and forth in disbelief and screamed, "Oh, my gosh ... oh, my gosh!" With tears rolling down her cheeks, she ran out to meet her new friend.

"Mom, how did you do all this?" I asked. "We were ready for a no-present Christmas."

"Oh, everybody pitched in. Not necessarily trading but just helping each other. Mrs. Olsen at the dress shop let me bring your gift home now, even though I'll be paying for a while. Dad did some marriage counseling for the Millets's son. I hung up Mrs. Marshall's tree lights since her arthritis is getting her down. We were thrilled that Mr. Jones had a horse that needed some TLC, and he was thrilled we had someone to love it. And then for a moment we thought all was lost

because we couldn't figure out where to house the horse. Then the Larsens, down the way, offered some of their pasture to keep the horse penned and well fed."

"I thought since you were giving away food to the Walters that we would never have enough. They really don't have anything to give in return."

"They will some day. But there is enough and more to share. Everything's God's anyway. Doesn't matter who can or can't give. If we just listen to our hearts, the right gifts will end up with the right families."

Mom always knew truth.

I glanced out the window at my sister now sitting on her horse, and thought about how she had described the expression on the Walters's faces when they discovered the Christmas basket. That "belonging" feeling was more precious than any of the gifts. And I thought, *Families that care, care about families. All families.*

That was the Christmas that I learned about the magic of giving.

*Rachelle P. Castor*

## Together , We Can Do Anything

Sticking together as a family has always been important to my sisters, my mom and me—especially after my dad left us. I guess he didn't feel the same way about us as we did about him, and he went off to start a whole new family.

I didn't always want to talk to my mom about my feelings, because she had her own problems taking care of our ranch without my dad around. I was old enough to help out and we all pitched in, but it was still hard on her. I talked to my older sister, Alana, while we worked—and I talked to the Sisters B.

That's what we called our six cows. All of their names started with a B. They were definitely part of the family. I got my first calf when she was three days old. We bottle-fed her and named her Belle. She grew into a beautiful cow who gave birth to two other cows, Brandy and Betsey, and was grandmother to Bootsie. I gave Bootsie to my little sister, Adena. Then I got one other cow that I gave to my older sister, Alana. We named her Blue, and Blue had a calf named Bailey.

All six of the Sisters B hung out and stayed close to each other all of the time. It was clear to us that they loved each other. And we loved them, too. We showed them at local 4H shows and took really good care of them.

When my dad left, he moved down the street from us. We would see him every day, driving down the street in his truck or working in his yard. He never visited us and had a new family to keep him busy. Finally, it was just too painful for all of us, especially my mom. We decided to sell our home and move.

We had to sell all the animals on our ranch, and we wanted to sell the Sisters B together. They were family, in more ways than one. We wanted them to go to someone who would love them like we did, and be willing to keep them together. We put an ad in the paper.

We thought it was an answer to our hopes when a man called and told us he wanted to buy our cows for breeding. He told my mom that he could only pay eighteen hundred dollars for all of them, but that he had other cows, lots of pasture and a large barn.

That afternoon, my mom, my sisters and I went to his place. It looked really nice, and we were happy that we had found the right home for the Sisters B. He looked right at my sister, Adena, and told her that she could visit Bootsie anytime and that he would take special care of her. My mom told him once again that we would only sell the cows to him if he would not sell the cows separately or kill them for meat, and he promised us that he would not.

The next day it was my job to help put the Sisters B in the trailer for delivery to their new owner. They trusted us, and wanted to please us so much that they went right into the trailer without even a fuss. My sisters both had tears on their faces and I could feel tears stinging my eyes, too. But I convinced myself that the Sisters B would be better off in their new home—and besides, they couldn't go with us when we moved.

A week later, while we were having our moving sale, one of our neighbors came up to my mom and told her that she had almost bought my "big red cow" before the cow went to auction. My mom said she had to be mistaken and asked who was selling the cow. When our neighbor told us who it was, I felt sick. We had trusted him, and just a week later he was selling Belle away from her baby and from the rest of her family. He had lied to us.

My mom piled us in the car and we drove to his house. When he answered the door, my mom told him what the neighbor had said and he shut the door right in our faces. My sisters were really crying now, and my mom was begging him to tell us where the Sisters B were, and to sell them back to us. Mom was crying too, but he wouldn't open the door.

I have never seen my mother so determined in my life. She told us she was going to find out where the cows were. She started calling a lot of auctions and finally found one that had a record of our cows, and told us that the cows would be auctioned off the next morning at 8:00.

That night, I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking, *How could someone do something like this?* Finally, the sun started to come up and we were on our way. We arrived at the auction at 7:00 in the morning.

When we got there, we found the cows in a pen. They looked pretty bad. They had cuts all over them and looked thin, but we were just thankful that they were still alive. Belle saw us first, and came right up to where we were standing. They were just as glad to see us as we were to see them. Just then a man came by who was there to buy stock, and he said it would cost us about three thousand dollars to buy our cows. I couldn't believe it! That's why we'd been de-

ceived; the man who bought the cows from us had just wanted to make a profit.

I suggested to my mom and sisters that we get busy praying. We didn't know what else to do; we sure didn't have three thousand dollars to buy back our cows, and we didn't even know how to bid at an auction. We prayed really hard for God to show us the way.

Then Alana had an idea. She had brought some pictures of the Sisters B with her from our showing at the county fair. Every time someone arrived at the auction, she would hurry over to them, show our photos and share our story. The man who had bought the Sisters B from us was watching Alana, and when he realized that people were talking about him, and what he had done, he got all red in the face and left in a hurry. Most of the men that Alana talked to said that they wouldn't bid on our cows when they came out for auction, and that's when we got excited. Maybe we did have a chance, after all!

We waited until almost 11:00 before we saw the first of our cows. It was Brandy. Because we didn't understand the bidding process well, Alana didn't hold her number up fast enough and the men bidding on Brandy didn't see Alana. The price went up too high and we lost her. But then we understood how it worked.

Every time one of our cows would come into the ring, Alana would raise her number, and no one would bid on the cow. At one point the auctioneer stopped the whole auction and yelled that this had better stop, but everyone ignored him. Alana kept holding up her number, and the men resisted bidding on our cows. By 5:00, we had bought back all of the cows, except for Brandy, for twenty-two hundred dollars. Belle, her mother, kept mooing for her baby, and we were all

sad to lose her. Mom used the eighteen hundred dollars we had from selling the cows, and we had to use our moving-sale money to make up the difference, but we had done it. We had them back!

Some friends of ours gave the Sisters B a new home. At first, we didn't get any money for them, but money wasn't as important to us as what could have happened to our cows. Recently, our friends sent us fifteen hundred dollars for the cows. After all we had sacrificed, it was a really nice surprise.

Family needs to love and protect family, and they were our family. Now when we go to visit them, they are always together—just like my mom, my sisters and me.

What happened to us was hard, but we survived and we learned a lot. Although there are dishonest people in the world, there are also many kind people who are willing to help you, even if they don't know you. But the best part is that we did it together. Together, we can do anything.

*Jarod Larson, sixteen*

## Gains and Losses

*The mind can have tremendous control of the body; very few ailments can defeat focused energy and a determined spirit.*

Katherine Lambert-Scrnce

Most of us have experienced unforgettable moments in our lives. The moment that I will never forget happened in my family.

For the first fifteen years of my life, I was the only child in my family. I didn't have any siblings. Fortunately, I've always had my parents, who love and care about me a lot. They help solve any problem and they will do anything for me. What I'd never really thought about is that, someday, one of them could no longer be there for me.

One day, I found out that my mother was pregnant, which was big news in my family. Everyone was excited and happy, especially me. I imagined that I would have a baby brother, and I thought about playing and having fun with him. He would have a cute face and look at me with his naive eyes, begging me to play with him. I was expecting that day to

come soon. I kept asking my mother questions about what my brother was going to look like, what he would eat and when he was going to be born.

Finally one morning, my mother went into labor and she and my father went to the hospital, while I went to school. Of course, I thought everything would be fine. After all, women have babies every day. Thus, I was hoping to see my baby brother as soon as I got to the hospital.

After school, when I went to the hospital, my brother had already been born. But my mother was still inside the operating room, while my father waited anxiously outside. After waiting for a long time, the doctor came out and told us that after my mother had given birth to my brother, they had trouble stopping the bleeding. He told us not to worry; my mother would be fine. Then, he went back into the operating room. Seconds later, lots of doctors and nurses rushed inside. My father and I were growing more anxious by the minute. Waiting was very painful for us, because we had finally realized that anything could happen and all we could do was wait.

At 7 P. M., my mother came out of surgery. She lay on the bed with an oxygen mask and an IV. Her skin was ghastly pale, and her eyes were closed.

"Mom, Mom . . ." I called to her, but she didn't react. The doctor told us that if my mother survived this night, she would be fine. Then the doctors sent my mother to the intensive-care unit.

Inside the room were many instruments for checking blood pressure, pulse rate and heart rate. Standing next to the bed, I tried to talk to my mother, whether she could hear me or not.

"You have to wake up, you have things that you have not

done yet ... You have me, my father and your new-born son. You cannot just leave us ... and you will be fine ... trust me .... ”

I was scared to death. At that moment, I felt that I would lost my mother forever—that she was never going to come back.

Many thoughts flashed through my mind. *What would life be like if the unthinkable happened—life without my mother?* I could only imagine that my life would be full of darkness, sadness and hopelessness. I would lose my closest relative, my dearest friend, and I would never again have the chance to enjoy the love of my mother. Remember, during these fifteen years, my mother was always around, watching over me, no matter what. I could not imagine how I was possibly going to survive without her.

Of course, I told myself that it would not happen, that she might leave me after thirty, forty, fifty or more years, but definitely not now, not yet. It was too early. I wasn't ready to let her go.

After I slowly came back to reality, I noticed that a food of tears was running down my cheeks.

My mother survived that night. You can imagine my great relief when she woke up the next morning. I was so excited. I gave her a big hug as I cried tears of happiness.

My mother told me that she had actually heard the words that I had said to her when she was unconscious. Three times she had almost stopped breathing, but she told herself to stay alive, for us, her family.

Later, many nurses said my mother was incredibly lucky to survive because she had lost a lot of blood. Of course, I gave them the most glorious smile, which said it all.

Today, my brother is almost two years old. On the day of his birthday, I always remember this unforgettable event in my life. I remember that I'm a really lucky person, with great parents and a wonderful little brother.

*Xiao Xi Zhang, seventeen*

## Forever Garrett

*We shared so much laughter, shared so many tears.*

*We had a special friendship that grew stronger each year.*

*We were not siblings by birth but we knew from the start.*

*We were put together, to be siblings of the heart.*

Megan Youpa, 13

I followed Garrett into the kitchen to find Mom. Garrett had been with our family for about a month, and even though I was only five and he was eight, we had been getting along pretty great. Like me, he had a lot of energy and liked to run and play ball. Up until Garrett came to live with us I had played with three boys who lived on our street that were around my age. They liked Garrett right away, and the five of us had been playing together every day. Now, Garrett and I had argued and he was mad at me.

"I want to go back! I don't want to be here anymore," Garrett announced to Mom.

Garrett's face was set with determination and his eyes were shiny with unshed tears. I looked at Garrett and my face crumpled. I started to cry.

"I hurt him, Mommy, I hurt him. I didn't mean to!" I liked

Garrett, and I didn't want him to go back to the adoption agency where he had lived before he came to us.

"You two wait until your father comes home tonight," Mom said as she cleaned both of our faces. Then she made me blow my nose as she said, "He'll have something to say about this."

When my dad got home that night, he sat us down and said that when he and my mom married they had a dream. They wanted to have a big family with both biological children and adopted children. He and Mom had been involved in the civil rights movement and wanted to adopt kids of mixed racial background because they knew how hard it was for these kids to get adopted. He told me that we were lucky to have Martin, my little brother who was a baby, and Garrett come to us.

Then Dad explained to Garrett that sometimes in families there are arguments and disagreements, but that didn't mean that we didn't care about each other. I knew all about that—I had had plenty of disagreements with my sisters and we always got over it. Dad said that Garrett belonged with us now and that was the way it was going to be; we were a family and families stick together forever.

I don't know who felt better after Dad's lecture, Garrett or me, but I do know that I really can't remember having another bad argument with Garrett after that day.

When I was in the third grade, our family moved from Wichita Falls to San Antonio. When I was younger, we had moved a lot because of my dad's job in the Air Force. In fact, my first words were in Italian because we lived in Italy when I learned to talk. But this was the first time that we had moved since Garrett and Martin had become a part of the family.

I didn't like moving. I was pretty shy anyway, and trying to make new friends wasn't the easiest thing for me. There was one exception; when I got on the playing field, whatever it was—soccer, football or volleyball—I felt like I was at my best and I was myself, 100 percent. On the playing field I could make friends. Garrett and I had that in common. We both loved sports.

I used to watch him play soccer and baseball and be amazed at how well he could play and how fast he could run. Not only was he fast, but he was also so competitive that what he lacked because of his size he made up for with his speed and aggressive actions.

Garrett would take me to play ball with the other kids, and when he got to pick his team, he always picked me first. I was his secret weapon. He liked to see the surprised looks on the faces of the boys on the team when I ran circles around them. Even though I was younger than most of the kids and I was a girl, I was a better player. With both Garrett and me on the same team, we couldn't lose.

Pretty soon, our whole family felt settled in our new home and started to love living in San Antonio. We lived right on the base and had tons of freedom to come and go without my mom or dad having to worry about us.

When we were finally all perfectly happy in San Antonio, we moved again. I was in the sixth grade, and for me it was the hardest move I had ever experienced. I had to leave behind the friends I had made and start all over again. Although our move was back to Wichita Falls, I didn't remember very much about living there before and missed my life in San Antonio. I told myself that the moving didn't matter, because my true home was the playing field. I threw myself into every sport that was offered, and I started to feel better.

We had been back in Wichita Falls for about two and a half years, and I was in the eighth grade, when we found out something terrible about Garrett. It was the beginning of his fight for life.

Garrett had chosen to attend a small Catholic high school instead of the larger public school, and he went out for football. During one of the first games, Garrett was tackled and had a hard time getting back up again. One of the dads attending the game was a doctor, and he went over to take a look at Garrett to see if he could help. He noticed that my brother had several large bruises on his back. He knew these bruises were not normal, and the doctor told my parents that Garrett shouldn't play again until he was checked out.

When my parents took Garrett to the doctors they did several tests on him to find out what the problem was. He was eventually diagnosed with aplastic anemia, a disease that happens when a person's bone marrow is either destroyed or not able to function correctly. People with aplastic anemia can bleed to death from internal hemorrhaging. The doctors told my mom and dad that all they could do for Garrett was to put him on steroids, and that might help. Then, they told Garrett that he couldn't play contact sports anymore at all.

I was shocked. My brother, Garrett, not play sports? That was impossible. But it was true. For months, all he could do was watch. I felt horrible for him and couldn't even imagine how I would feel if the doctors had told me the same thing. I think I even felt a little guilty that I could still do everything that we had once done together, and he couldn't.

Then, to the amazement of us all, Garrett went into remission. He was back to his old self, and the doctors gave him the go-ahead to play ball again. Garrett went out for baseball and I was so glad to see him on the field again. We all were.

Life became normal again.

Garrett was fine for several years until he had a relapse when I was eighteen. During the next six years he moved to California to live with our grandmother and to go to college. While on a trip home to Texas to visit our mom, he met the woman who was to become his wife. They had a son, Dillon. Garrett also spent those years fighting for his life. He had to have several series of very painful treatments, but he never gave up. During that time, whenever I would think that I had it rough during training, I would remember what Garrett was going through. I thought if Garrett could go through what he was experiencing, I could tough it out, too. His determination gave me the strength to excel during my games. Garrett was able to come to Atlanta in 1996 and see me play in the Olympics where we won the Gold Medal.

In February 1997, the doctors attempted a bone marrow transplant on Garrett. The transplant itself was successful, but Garrett had many complications. In April 1997, my brother Garrett died at the age of twenty-eight.

In honor of my brother, Garrett, I started a foundation. Once a year, the foundation stages the Garrett Game, an all-star soccer game that raises money for bone marrow research. In 1999, during the half-time celebration, we brought together bone marrow recipients with their donors. It was the first time any of them had met each other and everyone was crying and laughing. It was one of the most rewarding experiences of my whole life and one of my best memories.

Although Garrett didn't live to see us play the World Cup in 1999, I felt his spirit with me every step of the way. I know that he is with me during all of my games, encouraging me to do my best. In my heart, my brother will always live on. In my mind, I can still see him playing — running hard,

with that look of determination on his face. With him as my example, I have been inspired to never give up, to always play to win, to work hard with my teammates and to have my heart in the game. Garrett was one of the best athletes that I have ever known, but he was much more. He was my hero, my friend, my inspiration and my brother ... forever.

*Mia Hamm*

## Supper David

David is the baby. Ginny is the oldest, then Johnny, and then me. Sometimes, we have to help watch David. He plays quietly for Ginny and Johnny but not for me, even when I try to get him to watch cartoons. He will sit still for a little while, but then he'll drag out a book and ask me to read it to him.

David always smells like mustard. His favorite sandwich is mustard on plain hard bread. The smell makes it hard for me to concentrate on reading a book to him. And David sucks his thumb. His thumb is in his mouth for so long that it stays wrinkled, shriveled and wet all the time. It sticks to the paper when he tries to help me turn the pages of a book. When I can't read the words, I make up stories to match the pictures. David doesn't know because he is too little to read.

David loves costumes — he will wear anything. Ginny and Johnny dressed him up in Ginny's fancy green flower-girl dress. They put a yellow dust mop on his head to make him look like a princess. David became "Davaleena" as he twirled around the kitchen and sang in a squeaky voice.

My mother made a costume for David out of a pair of blue long underwear, a blue undershirt, a red dishtowel and red underpants. With his arms straight out in front and the dish-towel flapping behind, David becomes Superman. I made a

sign for his chest that reads "Supper David." Johnny told me that I spelled "super" wrong, but I don't care. David can't spell either.

David never keeps his clothes on. He runs around the house naked. My mother says that David is going through a stage and that children have to learn how to take their clothes off before they can learn how to put their clothes back on. I don't remember that I learned to get dressed that way.

David likes to show off. In the middle of one of my parents' dinner parties, David took off his clothes and ran out the back door. When we caught up with his naked little self, David was busy jumping up and down on top of the car, waving good-bye to the company. My father laughed so hard that he snorted and tears streamed down his face. When the grown-ups were done laughing they went inside. I stayed outside to watch David.

"My mom yelled, "Grandma's on the phone!"

"Vroom, vroom!" said David.

"Mo-om! David is jumping up and down on the front seat of the car!"

"Barbara, please! Not now! Yes, Grandma, the children eat their vegetables."

"Honk, honk," said David.

"Mom, David is pretending to honk the horn in the car."

"Barbara, I've told you that I'm talking to Grandma. I can't talk to you right now. Yes, Grandma, the children are always in bed by eight."

"Wrr, wrr," said David.

"Mom, David is turning the steering wheel in the car!"

"Barbara! Yes, Grandma, the children are always polite."

"Ert, ert," said David.

"Mom, David is moving the handles next to the steering wheel!"

"BARBARA! Yes, Grandma, the children are healthy. Thank you."

Then I noticed that our car was moving. David was backing the car down the hill of our driveway!

"MO-OM, DAVID IS DRIVING THE CAR!"

I have never seen my mother run so quickly. She leaned into the car as it was moving down the hill—picking up speed as it went — pulled David out through the car window, smacked his bottom, and then hugged him tightly. The car hit a tree and stopped half way down the hill. They both started to cry. So did I.

My mother turned toward me, and gave me a hug, too. We all stood like that for a while, and I thought how much I really loved David even though he is a pain sometimes, and how I would have missed him if anything had happened to him. I made up my mind that Mom was a hero.

I decided to go to my room and pull out my construction paper and crayons. Then I made another sign. It said, "Super Mom." Somehow, I didn't think my mother would care if I didn't spell it right.

*Barbara Lage*

## I Flushed It

It was a hot day in Florida. The school year had just ended and it was time for summer vacation. We had just gotten a little black dog who we named One-Eyed. We chose that name because he could only see out of one eye.

Everybody wanted to do something for the dog: feed him, teach him tricks and take long walks with him. Everybody was so happy to have this active, playful, shaggy, sable-coated new addition to our family. Everybody, that is, except my mom and me.

All my mom saw when she looked at the dog was someone else to clean up after. Shedding, messy, muddy, he pounced all over the house. All Mom seemed to care about was getting the house cleaned. My mom began to put Clorox in the tub. There was no messing with Mom when she started cleaning, so I decided to move out of the way. Actually, getting out of the way is a move I'd been practicing for a long time.

Being the youngest in my family has had its advantages, of course. I won't deny that. More than a few times I was spoiled or everyone was convinced that I was the cutest. It wasn't all bad to get this attention.

But being the youngest also came with its fair share of troubles. I was often told what I couldn't do and why. I real-

ize that I practiced getting out of the way because most of the time I was being *pushed* out of the way. "You're too young!" "You're too little!" "You'll mess this up!" they'd often say.

I also knew that my family loved me. They always tried to protect me, help me and take care of me, but I couldn't wait to show them I could do things by myself.

Every time I asked my brother or my sister if I could pet One-Eyed, they would shout, "No!" or tell me that I had germs. Once, they even convinced me that I had so many germs, if I touched One-Eyed he would die! I really believed them and was scared that something terrible would happen to the dog. Once I even confessed to my mom that I touched the dog when no one noticed. At first, my mom seemed very confused about what I was telling her, but then she realized that they were playing a joke on me to keep me away from the dog. My mom scolded my brother and sister, "You better stop teasing your little brother!" Little brother! That's exactly what I was. That really got my blood boiling. I was so mad, I wanted to break something!

I wasn't going to let them make me move out of their way this time! I took one look at the dog and decided, "I'll show them what a little kid can do!" I took the dog into the bathroom. "I'm going to give you a bath!" I said. One-Eyed looked at me strangely; he obviously didn't understand what I was saying. I looked at the sink. *Too small*, I thought. I looked at the tub. "It stinks like Clorox." Then I saw it. The perfect place for a dog bath—the toilet!

I took my sister's shampoo and poured it into the toilet. Then I put the dog in. I was scrubbing all the dirt off the dog with our towels. The finishing touch was to pull down the lever, which I did. But the sound of the toilet made the dog

panic like crazy! He tried to escape, but the shampoo was too slippery. While the water was going down, One-Eyed's legs were going down with it. I was scared, and I didn't want One-Eyed to get hurt. I didn't want to get into trouble or for anyone to find out. I went running down to the garage.

My mom was standing there and laughing, as if she was expecting me. I didn't know what to say. I tried to catch my breath. Then I told her what just happened. I thought she would punish me. I didn't expect my mom would be ... laughing.

As it turns out, I later discovered that my mom knew what was happening all along. She always seemed to be a pretty good spy, I guess.

Oh, and if you're wondering, One-Eyed was fine; but he did stay away from me for a while. Even though we never actually had a conversation about my being the youngest, I think Mom understood what I was trying to do. I was trying to make my own place in our family... trying, maybe sometimes in a weird way, to declare my independence. Flushing the dog down the toilet might not sound like a Declaration of Independence, but for a six-year-old, well, it was my best shot!

*Pier Novelli, twelve*

# Calvin and Hobbes



## FLUSH!



by Bill Watterson

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## This Old Chair

*The meaning of things lies not in the things themselves, but in our attitude towards them.*

Antoine de Saint-Exupery

"Mom! I'm home!" John slammed the door and dropped his books on a nearby chair. "Something smells good." With his nose in the air, he followed the sweet aroma into the kitchen.

"Hi, John, home already?" His mom turned around. She had just placed a sheet of fresh-baked cookies on the counter near the open window.

John reached for a cookie and looked outside. Shafts of sunlight slanted through the clouds, tempting the flowers to bloom. And a robin sang a bubbly song. It was the kind of day that made John feel warm inside. Pop-Pop, John's grandpa, who lived with them since Grandma had died, came shuffling through the door. With his face to the floor as if looking for something he mumbled, "When the robin sings ..." He paused trying to remember what he had started to say.

"Spring is here," John's mom finished the sentence. "And

you know what that means.”

“Sure,” John volunteered. “Our annual fishing trip is coming up.”

Amused, Pop-Pop winked at John while heading straight for the cookies.

“I was thinking more of our annual spring cleaning,” John’s mom suggested. “Tomorrow, John, you have no school and I can use some help, okay?”

“Okay, okay,” John agreed reluctantly.

The next day John and his mom cleaned the house. They cleaned upstairs, downstairs, inside, outside, until everything was spotless. Exhausted, they sank into the couch. Wearily pointing to Pop-Pop’s chair, John’s mom exclaimed, “Oh my! That old chair has got to go. We’ll buy Pop-Pop a new one.”

It was true, John had to agree. The chair was unsightly. It was faded and worn and in some places even torn.

“John, come and help me.” John’s mom sprang to her feet. “We’ll take the chair to the curb. Tomorrow the garbage truck is picking up on our block.”

As they attempted to move the chair, Pop-Pop worked his way through the door. Seeing what was happening, he quickly blocked their way. “Oh, no!” he protested. “You can’t take my chair.”

“It’s old ... It’s worn ....” John’s mom argued, a slight edge to her voice.

“No,” Pop-Pop persisted, trying to push his chair back into place.

“But Pop, we’ll buy you a new one,” John’s mom tried to persuade the old man.

“I don’t want a new one,” Pop-Pop’s voice trembled.

“I give up.” John’s mom let go of the chair. “We’ll discuss

it tonight when Matt gets home."Matt, John's dad, was still at work. With a sigh of relief, the old man sank into his chair and closed his eyes.

"Pop-Pop, why won't you let us get rid of the chair?"John asked when his mother left the room."It's so old."

"You don't understand, John."Pop-Pop shook his head from side to side and after a long pause he said,"I sat in this chair, with your grandma right here, when I asked her to marry me. It was so long ago, but when I sit in this chair and close my eyes I feel she is near."The old man tenderly stroked the arm of the chair.

*It's amazing, John thought, how Pop-Pop can remember things from the past. In the present, he forgets almost everything.* John sat down on the floor by Pop-Pop's feet and listened as the old man went on.

"And the night your father was born, I sat in this chair. I was nervous. I was scared when they placed the tiny babe into my arms, yet I was never happier."A smile now flashed across his old face.

"I think I'm beginning to understand,"John said thoughtfully.

"Many years later,"Pop-Pop's voice broke and he paused a moment before he continued,"I sat in this chair when the doctor called and told me that your grandma was ill. I was lost without her but the chair gave me comfort and warmth."The old man's sadness seemed to grow as he recalled that fateful day.

"I'm sorry, Pop-Pop."John looked at his grandfather and said,"I do see now. This is not just any old chair. This chair is more like a friend."

"Yes, we've gone through a lot together."Pop-Pop fumbled for his handkerchief, and trumpeted into it.

That night, however, when John and Pop-Pop were asleep, John's mom and dad carried the chair out to the curb. It was a starless night. Spring had retreated and snow fell silently from the black sky and covered Pop-Pop's chair with a blanket of white.

The next morning, when John came downstairs, Pop-Pop stood by the window and looked outside. A tear rolled down his hollow cheek. John followed the old man's gaze and froze. Snow-covered, the chair stood at the curb out on the street. The clamor of the garbage truck pulling up to the house shocked John into action. He ran outside. "Wait! Don't take that chair," he shouted, flailing both arms in the air as he rushed to stop the men from hauling the chair away. Then he ran back inside and faced his mom. "Look at Pop-Pop, Mom. You can't throw out his chair." John swallowed hard before going on. "This is not just a chair. This chair has been with Pop-Pop for a very long time. This chair is like a friend."

John's mom turned and looked at the old man. Slowly she walked towards him. With her middle and ring finger, she wiped away a tear. And then she took the old man's face into both her hands and said, "I'm sorry, Pop-Pop. I guess ... I just didn't realize how much the chair meant to you. John and I will bring your chair back inside."

They brushed off the snow with their hands and heaved the chair back inside. They placed it next to the fireplace so it could dry. John's mom stepped back then, and as if seeing the chair for the very first time she mused, "Mm, I guess it does give the room a certain touch of character."

And John and Pop-Pop wholeheartedly agreed that the living room had been rather dull without this old chair.

*Christa Holder Ocker*

## Mom

I was only two and a half when my real mom died. One morning, my brothers and I went to wake her up, but she wouldn't answer us. When she didn't respond to our calls, my oldest brother, Shane, got my dad. The last thing I remember about my real mom was watching the ambulance taking her away from us. Although I was too young to really understand what was going on, somehow I knew that she was gone forever.

After my mom died, my dad started abusing my brothers and me. We were sent away to live with relatives. My brothers were sent to live with their real dad, but their dad didn't want me. I was sent to live with one relative after another. I was miserable almost all of the time. I thought that no one would ever want me. Finally, when I was four and a half, my mom's sister, Bonnie, and her husband, Jesse, said that they would take me, and they became my legal guardians.

From then on, they became my family. I called Aunt Bonnie "Mom" and Uncle Jesse "Dad." I felt really lucky because they also had two older kids that became my older brother and sister, and I didn't miss my brothers as much. I finally felt at home, with a family again.

Then, when I was six, my Uncle Jesse was diagnosed with cancer. He was sick for a whole year, and finally died shortly

after my seventh birthday. I missed him so much. I cried for days after losing him. I still cling to the present he gave me on my sixth birthday.

Shortly after Uncle Jesse died we all moved to a new house in a new town. My mom told us we moved because of a job opportunity she had there that she didn't have in our old town. Now that it was up to her to support us, the move was important.

In our new house, I always felt kind of lonely and so did my brother and sister. We were in a new place and had to try to make new friends. It wasn't all that easy, and we all still missed Uncle Jesse. We kids spent a lot of time alone in our new house because Mom was always working. But we all felt like we could make it if we stuck together as a family.

Then one summer, the beginning of a miracle happened. My mom took us camping, and we took our grandma along with us. My grandma met the man that was staying in the cabin next to ours, and she introduced him to the rest of us. We all ended up becoming friends with this guy, David. He was so funny. He would bring flowers to my mom and also to my grandma at the same time. Maybe he thought we didn't know what he was up to, but we all knew. We didn't mind because he was really a great guy.

After we came back from our camping trip, my mom and David kept in contact with phone calls and by writing to each other. Eventually, they started seeing each other even though he lived in another city and it was a long drive for him. David would visit my mom and take us all out. He even remembered my birthday, and sent a birthday present to me! We all really liked him.

Then, two years after they met, David proposed to my mom. They got married three days before my twelfth birth-

day. Even though they were gone on their honeymoon for my birthday, David and my mom made sure that I still had a birthday party.

After my mom married David, our family moved in with his family, and our two smaller families became one big family. I gained two more brothers and another sister. I guess we are kind of like the Brady Bunch! Our family now consists of my parents, David and Bonnie, six kids plus a son-in-law and a daughter-in-law, and two grand-babies — with another one on the way!

When I look back on it now, I have come a long way from being a sad and lonely little girl passed from relative to relative to being the person I am today — part of a big, happy family. I can't imagine what my life would have been like if my Aunt Bonnie hadn't taken me in. She promised me that she would love me and take care of me — no matter what — and she has done exactly that. Without her in my life, I would have been a motherless child, but because of her I have a great family and the best mom in the world.

With my mom as my shining example, I have learned about strength, dedication and love. Even though I wasn't born to her, she has been my brother in every way. She has been there to hold me when I've been sick, to help me with my homework, to support me when I've needed her and to work hard to take care of all of us. In return, I love her more than she'll ever know. I don't know what I would have done without her. These words are few, but they are from the bottom of my heart ...

Thanks, mom. I love you!

*Apryl Anderson, fifteen*

## THE FAMILY CIRCUS.

By Bil Keane



"Look, Mommy! You have a star  
on the driveway of fame."

*Reprinted by permission of Bil Keane.*

# 4

## ON LOVE

*True treasure is not found in pirate ships,  
in chests of silver and gold.  
True treasure isn't ruby rings  
and jewels from long ago.  
You don't need to use a treasure map  
and find chests beneath the sea.  
True treasure is simply the love.  
and joy found in you and me.*

*Leigha Dickens, eleven*

## Bobby Lee

*Love and kindness are never wasted. They always make a difference. They bless the one who receives them, and they bless you, the giver.*

Barbara De Angelis

I walked home with my little brother every day the same way, past an oil refinery. Mom always told us to walk together and never to talk to strangers. One day, that walk home changed forever. As my brother and I passed the oil refinery, I heard an old man's voice.

"Hey there, children."

I turned and saw a very old man standing there with a sweet smile on his face.

"Hi," I answered, still keeping my distance.

"Would you like a soda pop? I know you walk by here every day. I don't mean you any harm."

I was already hot from walking and carrying my heavy backpack, but I knew what my mother would do once my little brother ratted on me for talking to strangers.

"No thanks. I'm not allowed to talk to strangers," I replied.

"Oh, I understand. And your mama's right. My name's Bobby. Now run along," He said as he disappeared behind the gate of the refinery.

*What a strange man,* I thought. But I also felt bad, thinking I may have insulted him by calling him a stranger.

I went home and reported to my mom what had happened. My mother told me that I was right not to talk to strangers, so I tried avoiding this stranger for the following few days, but it was impossible. Other streets were not as safe to walk on, and every time we passed the refinery, a familiar voice would say, "Hello there, children."

Then one day, my family was taking a walk around the neighborhood. We were just about to pass the refinery when I noticed the gate was ajar. I remember silently praying that Bobby would appear and prove once and for all that he was a "good" stranger. And there he was.

He smiled as he approached my mother, "Well, you must be Little Miss Pretty's mama! And you must be her daddy! It is so nice to meet you."

The genuine smile and surprise on my parents' faces were all I needed to see. They spoke for a few minutes and then, walking home, my parents said it would be safe for us to visit Bobby after school.

My brother and I would stop to visit Bobby after school every day after that. He would invite us into his tiny office to talk about my schoolwork, my friends and sports.

It wasn't long before I started getting a few friends to walk home with me just to meet Bobby. Before long, a group of about fourteen kids went daily to visit Bobby and receive our sodas and gum. Thinking back, I now realize that Bobby bought all those treats just for us ... and there were a lot of us to treat!

We visited Bobby every day after school for about three years! My mother finally decided it was time to do something nice for Bobby. So, with some thought and a lot of effort, she arranged for a plaque-giving ceremony to be held at the refinery on Father's Day. All of the children who visited Bobby, and even some of their parents, were invited. And you know what? Most of them came. On the plaque, my mother had engraved "To the Neighborhood Grandfather," and all of our names were engraved below that. I remember that Bobby cried when he received it. I don't think he'd ever been surrounded with so much adoration in his long life.

The following holiday, my mother gave Bobby an enlarged photograph of the "Neighborhood Grandfather ceremony" with all of us kids standing around him.

One cold afternoon in February, we stopped by as usual, only to be told that Bobby had died. I remember crying for days after hearing the news. He really had been like another grandfather to me.

My mother went with two other mothers to the funeral service. There, right on the coffin, were three items: the American flag folded into a triangle shape (as is customary for war veterans), the plaque we gave him and the photograph of that memorable Father's Day ceremony with all of us kids standing around him. Bobby had no children. I guess we were his children.

To this day I think about him — an old man with no responsibilities to family, taking in a group of "strange" little kids who ended up meaning so much to him. I know now there was a reason why I met Bobby and why a group of us went to see him every day. He was able to die knowing that somebody loved him.

Daphne M. Orenshein

## DENNIS THE MENACE



"I'd trade everything in there for a  
pony an' two bales o' hay."

DENNIS THE MENACE. © Used by permission of Hank Ketcham and © by North America Syndicate.

## Love Lives On

Whatever happens inside of you that makes you fall in love with horses happened to me. I devoured every horse book I could get my hands on, checking them out of our library again and again. *Man O'War*, the true story about the greatest thoroughbred racehorse of all time, was my favorite. I must have read that book ten times. I pictured myself owning the huge red horse, loving him with all my heart, but knowing I could never ride him because he was a champion racehorse, not a pet.

I asked my parents if I could take riding lessons and they agreed. I learned to ride well, made many friends at the stable, and my love of horses and the sport of riding grew.

After a year of lessons, I decided that what I wanted more than anything on Earth was a horse of my own. I asked my parents, and they agreed—if I earned half of the money to buy the horse. I worked all summer and saved one hundred dollars, a fortune in those days. At last, my dad said, “Find your horse, girl!”

Two hundred dollars wasn’t much to buy a horse, and the one I had my eye on was going for five hundred dollars. “A deal is a deal,” said my dad, so I could only watch as the beautiful black mare was sold to someone else. Disappointed, but still determined, I was introduced to a woman who

told me that she had a horse she would sell me for two hundred dollars, but she doubted that I would want him, explaining that she had rescued him from an abusive owner and that he hadn't been ridden in years.

As we walked to the back of the stables, I was so excited that my heart was pounding. The woman explained that she thought I was a good horsewoman and that when she heard that I was looking for a horse — on a limited budget, no less — she had thought that perhaps it was time for this horse to come back to the world.

We walked up to the stall and she opened the door, cautioning me "not to expect too much." I was trembling with excitement as the sunlight spilled into the stall. There he was, an old giant of a thoroughbred, with gray sprinkled through his shiny, flame-colored coat. He turned and looked cautiously at us, and as I stepped into the stall he flattened his ears and bared his teeth. The woman explained that he had been beaten and had a mistrust of strangers, but that he wasn't mean, just afraid.

"What's his name?" I asked.

"We call him Rusty," she said.

"Rusty," I called gently, and his ears came up at the sound of his name. The woman handed me a carrot, and I held it out to him. He stepped forward slowly, but before he took the treat, he turned his head slightly and looked into my eyes. We held the gaze for just a moment, and then he took it from my hand.

When he was done munching his carrot, we led him out into the sunlight. What I saw was the most beautiful horse I had ever laid my eyes on. What most others saw was a twenty-year-old, swaybacked horse, sporting a potbelly.

"I'll take him!" I cried, startling him so that he jerked his

head back and snorted all over me. I laughed and reached up to pet the long, white blaze that ran down the front of his nose, and he lowered his head and begged for more.

That summer we were inseparable, and I spent all my free time riding him. He grew strong and energetic for his age. I often saw the woman who had sold him to me, and she would tell me how good he looked.

That fall, we moved Rusty to a small stable near our home, so I could ride him as often as possible during the school year. I began getting involved in the world of competitive horse showing. Rusty thrived on all the attention and competition, and even though he usually was twice the age of the other horses, the judges loved him, and we took home many blue ribbons during the next two years.

But one morning, as I arrived at the stables to go riding, something was different. Instead of standing, ears pricked forward and bellowing a hello, Rusty was still laying down in his stall when I walked up. He rose when he saw me, nicker- ing softly, and I figured maybe it was just his age getting to him. After all, he was twenty-two years old. We rode quietly that day, stopping for lunch to share the same sandwich my dad about it, he decided to call the vet.

The vet came to see him, and what he said was a shock to us. He believed that Rusty had cancer, and he referred us to a specialist for further tests. My parents and I had talked about the situation, and we decided that due to his advanced age, if the specialist told us that he was suffering, that we would elect to have him humanely put to sleep. I understood this on one level; on my heart level I was crushed.

That morning we loaded Rusty into the trailer and I waved good-bye to him, pretty sure it was for the last time. My parents had thought it would be best if I didn't go with Rusty to

the vet. I had spent the entire night before with him, crying and laughing, remembering all the things we'd done together and the lessons we'd learned. I'd thanked him for being there for me during a tough time in my life when I didn't think anybody cared, but I knew he did. Unconditional love, that's what he had given me.

Later that day, I was lying on my bed at home, all cried out, when my dad came in. He told me, "There is a guy out front who wants to see you." I was fifteen years old, and I figured it was just one of my school friends coming by to talk. I asked my dad to explain that I couldn't come out now, but he said, "Honey, you'll want to see this boy."

I rose up from my bed and looked out the window. There, backed up into our driveway, was the horse trailer, and inside was Rusty! I tore outside and jumped up next to him, hugging his neck and crying with happiness. He stood quietly and took in my love, and when I stepped back, he turned his head and looked into my eyes, as he had done years before, and winked.

Rusty stayed with me for another happy year before the cancer took him. By then, we were a little more prepared.

All these years later, I still miss him. But, even though he isn't here physically, I realize that love lives on, and that Rusty will live in my heart forever.

*Laurie Hartman*

## Dusty, the Wonder Dog

When I was a kid, my godparents, Uncle Nell and Aunt Frances, brought me a four-month-old puppy. She was half German shepherd, half collie. As her pink tongue tickled my face with wet licks, it was love at first hug.

My family named the puppy Dusty. Although I wanted to lay sole claim to her affections, in a family of seven kids, no one lays permanent claim to the family pet.

Dusty was *our* dog, not "*my*" dog. We soon realized that she had the patience of Buddha. My baby sister often transformed Dusty's warm fur into a nap-time pillow — falling asleep on the rug. Like a protective mother, Dusty waited — without moving — until my sister woke.

Dusty doubled as a school crossing guard, too. Monday through Friday she'd walk us kids two blocks to St. Patrick's Parochial, looking both ways to check for traffic before allowing us to cross the street. We'd wave good-bye as we entered the door, knowing Dusty would be waiting at the school door to claim us at the close of the school day.

Of all the contributions Dusty made to our family, one incident stands out far and above all others.

Late one night, Dusty rushed to my parents' bedroom. She barked and barked. When she got no response, Dusty raced upstairs to my bedroom and my brothers' bedroom and

barked again and again. When she failed to fully wake us, she flew back down the steps and returned to my parents' room. Finally, she got Mom's attention.

"What are you doing, Dusty?" Mom snapped, still halfway in dreamland. Dusty persisted. Finally my mother gave in. "Okay, what is it?"

Dusty whined and rushed out of Mom's room. Thinking the dog needed to be let out to relieve herself, my mother followed Dusty to the front door.

When Mom opened the door to let her out, Dusty tore across the street, not stopping to do her business as my mother had assumed. Then she discovered what Dusty already knew. The house across the street — where my best friend, Marianne, and her family lived — was on fire. All of Dusty's middle-of-the-night craziness had served a purpose: she's been trying to call for help.

My mother alerted the fire department immediately. Soon, the firemen in their trucks roared up the street, squelching the blaze and saving my best friend's family from harm and their house from total ruin.

My mother refused to take credit. "It was Dusty," she told the firefighters. "She saved them. Not me."

I put my arms around my dog's neck and kissed her square on the tip of her wet nose. "Thank you for saving Marianne," I whispered into Dusty's tan and black ear. "You're the bravest dog I've ever known."

Dusty wagged her tail and licked my face. That old familiar rush of puppy love overtook me. I smiled and promised to let her sleep in my bed for the rest of her life.

*Mary Saracino*

## The Teacher Who Cared

*A teacher affects eternity; no one can tell where his influence stops.*

Henry Adams

*Mrs. Barrow, room 501, room 501,* I repeated to myself as I scanned the hallways looking for the room number. It was my first day of fifth grade and I was really scared.

I came to the end of the hall and found an open door. Stepping into the room, I suddenly felt out of place. I tried to act normal, but Mrs. Barrow saw right through me.

“Good morning, Courtney. You may pick your seat.”

I glanced about the room and took an empty seat near a girl named Wendy Barber. As the year slowly progressed, Wendy and I became good friends. I felt no closeness to Mrs. Barrow, though. I saw her as “just another teacher.”

Mrs. Barrow had us write a paper on what we wanted to be when we grew up. Some kids asked why. She explained that when her former students graduated, she liked them to come back and share their fifth-grade dreams together, as a memento of their childhood. I decided right then and there

that I liked Mrs. Barrow.

Then, my grandmother, who lived with us, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. About a month later, Grandma slipped into a coma and died. Losing her was unbearable for me. I missed some school because I was so sad.

At the funeral, I was sitting there feeling sorry for myself when I looked up and saw Mrs. Barrow standing there. She sat down next to me and held my hand. She comforted me by reminding me that now Grandma had no more pain or suffering. It had never occurred to me that it was better for my grandma this way. All I thought about was how sad it was for me.

After the funeral, we went to my aunt's house to see the flowers that had been sent. My mom handed me a pretty ivy plant in a pink pot. The attached card read:

*Courtni,*

*I'm sorry about your grandmother. Never forget, I  
love you. You are like one of my children.*

*With love,*

*Mrs. Barrow*

I wanted to cry. I took the plant home, watered it and put it in my grandma's old room. I am in eighth grade now and I still have that plant. I never thought a teacher could care that much about her students; now I know.

I say this with all my heart: Anyone who is lucky enough to have a teacher like Mrs. Barrow in their life, even for a short while, is privileged beyond words. She may not know it, but she means more to me than she'll ever know. I can only hope this gives her inspiration and repays to her a tiny portion of what she has done for me.

To Mrs. Barrow — I love you very much. You're much more than a teacher — you are like a mother to me.

*Courtney Calhoun, thirteen*

## The Act of Love

*I hate pulling weeds!* I thought. *It's hot. It's sticky. And it's Saturday!*

Still, I made sure to pull every stinking weed out of that flower garden. My dad was Mr. Perfecto Lawnman. He could detect a single weed a mile away. And if he spotted so much as one little clover, I'd be back pulling weeds for the rest of the day.

"Dad, I'm done," I shouted from the garden, feeling sure that I had done a good job.

Dad stormed out of the house. "Don't be yelling outside, Kathy," he grumbled. "Use those two feet of yours and come get me."

Suddenly, a sick feeling came over me. It was the kind of feeling I had when my dad was going to find that one stinking little clover.

"Geez," Dad said, waving an irritated finger, "you missed a spot."

I sighed, went to the spot and pulled the weeds. Afterward, I looked back at Dad, still standing there with a scowl on his face.

"Okay," he said, turning away, "I guess you're done."

As Dad walked back to the house, I wondered if I'd ever done anything good enough or right enough for him. Some-

times, I wondered if he even liked me.

Like the night I had taken out the trash without being told. That was a big deal for me. But Dad didn't see it that way. He was mad because I didn't put the trash can lid on tightly enough to keep our dog out.

*Well, I'm sorry, I thought, but I can't help it if Sugar's a trash picker.*

The other day, when I was in a rush to get to school, Dad stopped me at the door. In his hand was a topless tube of toothpaste, the same one that I'd used just moments before.

"Where's the cap to the toothpaste?" he asked, his eyebrows bunching in the middle. "And how many times do I have to tell you? Squeeze from the bottom!" *At least I brushed my teeth, I thought.*

Just then, a sloppy, wet tongue washed over my face, breaking me from my thoughts.

"Sugar!" I said, hugging her tightly. "Where did you come from?"

Sugar looked at me, her big sloppy tongue hanging to the side. I smiled.

"At least you like me." Then standing up, I brushed the dirt from my knees and headed for the house.

Two weeks later, on the morning of another weed picking weekend, I was sick. I was sweaty and feverish and I ached all over.

"Let's go," Dad said, lifting me from the bed. "You need to see a doctor."

"Please, no," I said, in a shallow, sickly voice, "I'd rather pull weeds."

He took me anyway, and the doctor said I had pneumonia. The only nice thing about it was that I didn't have to pull weeds. I didn't have to take out the trash. And since I had to

stay in bed, I didn't have to brush my teeth. If having pneumonia was ever good, it was good then. And as I rested, Sugar stayed with me, lying down beside my bed. She like me.

That night a noise woke me from my sleep. I opened my eyes just a sliver, and I saw a tall, slender form. Enough moonlight shined through my window so that I could see it was my dad. But why was he there? I didn't say, "Hi, Dad," or anything like that, I don't know why. He came up to me and put his hand against my forehead. When he took his hand away, I saw him lay something on my nightstand. He looked at me again, then left.

When he was gone, I reached over to the nightstand and picked up a necklace. It wasn't like any I'd ever seen before. Dangling from a golden chain was puppy in a basket, and the puppy looked just like Sugar. With shaking hands, I held that necklace to my heart and cried. My dad, who never gave hugs and never said, "I love ...." had just said it all.

*Kathy Kemmer Pyron*

## Cry When You Are Sad

*Never apologize for showing feelings. Remember that when you do, you apologize for the truth.*

Benjamin Disraeli

On a sunny Monday in April, I had two loving grandmothers near me, but when Tuesday came, only one was left. One of my grandmothers who was dear to me, had died. I had a feeling that this awful day was going to come soon, but now that it was here, all I wanted to do was cry. But I wasn't brave enough to shed a tear, for I was always taught that boys should never cry.

Later, as the time came for the funeral activities, I had the hardest time keeping my sadness inside.

My relatives soon arrived from all over the country. I really had to hold back my tears now that my relatives were here, because I did not want to look like a crybaby in front of them. I figured out that my parents, my sister and myself were the only ones that had lived in the same town as my grandma. That explained why her death was hitting me the hardest, while my cousins seemed as though they were here

just to get away from home. They really hadn't known her like I had.

Soon, all of my relatives gathered at the funeral home, waiting for the viewing to begin. What I thought was going to be the easiest part of my grieving turned into the hardest.

The moment I walked into the room where my grandma was laying in a coffin, my heart dropped. This was going to be the last time that I would ever see her. At first I was afraid to proceed with the rest of my family up to her coffin, but then I realized that I would have to sooner or later. I grabbed hold of my mother's hand and kept my mind on remembering not to cry.

When I came up to the kneeler, in front of where she was laying, my mother made me do something that almost brought me to tears. She told me to touch Grandma's hand, for that was going to be the last time that I would get a chance to touch her. I reached over to her hand very slowly, afraid of what she might feel like. When my hand touched hers, I was relieved for a moment. She felt the same way she always had, except a little cooler than usual.

When I looked up at my mom, she began crying uncontrollably. I knew this was the time that I really had to be strong. I reached my arms around her and slowly walked with her back to our seats.

During the next few hours, I met many different people. All of them were telling me that they were sorry about my grandma passing away. I just smiled and reminded myself not to cry, because I had so often been told, "Boys should be strong and not cry." I kept reminding myself that soon this night would be over, but the next day would be the actual funeral ... the last good-bye.

My mother woke me early the next morning, making sure

that I looked my best. I promised myself when I was getting dressed that I would hold back my tears no matter what. I had to be strong and help my grieving parents.

When we arrived at the church ,we all waited as they took my grandma's coffin out of the big black hearse. We had to follow it in so everyone knew that we were family. Once inside, we took our seats. My family sat in the very front because we were the closest to my grandma. I was surprised to see that even before the service began ,my parents were crying. I was trying to hold back my tears ,but as the priest began talking about my grandma ,it seemed as though not crying was going to be an impossible task.

About halfway through the mass ,he began telling the people about how much my grandma was loved by her family and friends. He then mentioned how every night I stayed with her while my parents were working. That reminded me of all of the good times we had together throughout my life. In the summer ,we would glide on her swing. In the winter ,we would always ride sleds down the big hill behind her house. There were so many good times that went through my mind that I almost forgot where I was. I began to realize that those good times were gone forever. At this exact thought ,I began to cry uncontrollably. I didn't care anymore about what other people thought of me. It was something that I just had to do. I could not hold back my sadness anymore.

When my father noticed me sobbing ,he leaned me up next to him and we cried together. My father ,my mother ,my sister and I sat next to each other ,crying as if the world was going to end. At this point I promised to myself that if I ever had a son ,I would tell him : "Real boys show emotions. Cry when you are sad ,and smile when you are happy ." This was

the last time I would say good-bye to my grandmother ,but I was a better person for letting my tears show everyone just how much I loved her.

*Jonathan Piccirillo ,fifteen*

## Only Love Lasts Forever

Yesterday, after telling my brother, Rhys, and me to stop playing like wild animals in the house for what she said was the thousandth time, Mom went to take a bath. That's when it happened. We were playing around, bopping each other with pillows, when one slipped from my brother's grasp and smashed the glass dome on the coffee table, shattering it into a zillion pieces!

With her supersonic hearing, my mom heard the tremendous crash and then the sound of glass hitting the tile. Wasting no time, she came flying into the room to find out what had happened. I was sure my brother and I were dead meat and she was going to start yelling at us, but instead she just knelt by the pieces and began to cry.

This made Rhys and me feel pretty awful. We went over and put our arms around her, and she explained to us why she was so upset. Under the shattered glass dome was a white porcelain rose. Dad had given it to her on their first wedding anniversary. He had said that if he ever forgot to bring flowers for an anniversary in the future, Mom was to look at that one. It was like their love—it would last a lifetime.

Now it lay chipped on the floor, one petal gone. We began crying, too, and offered to glue it for her. She said that

wouldn't really fix it. Now that it had been broken, the value of the "limited edition" had lessened. We got our piggy banks out to pay for it, but Mom replied that to her the rose represented Dad's love and could never truly be restored.

As Mom slowly began to pick up the mess, we tried everything we could think of to cheer her up, but even our best funny faces didn't work. Mom just looked away. Rhys and I were even really nice to each other, which always makes her eyes twinkle, but she didn't seem to notice. The tears kept coming down her cheeks as she cleaned up the mess.

After everything was picked up and Mom was on her way back to the bath, I stopped her in the hall and said I had something important to tell her. She tried to go around me, replying "Not now," but I wouldn't let her by. I told her, "I want to say something very important; it's a rule of God."

I put both hands on her shoulders and told her, "All things can be broken, Mom; everything breaks sometime. The only thing that isn't like that is love. It's the only thing that can never be broken."

Mom hugged me very tightly then and finally smiled. She said that I was pretty wise and understood some things that even much older people didn't!

After dinner that night, we had a family meeting. We discussed mistakes and the importance of learning from them. Mom glued the petal back onto the rose. The tiny petal now had a thin, almost invisible line of glue. Then Mom softly said, "Even though other people have 'limited edition' roses, mine is truly unique. Its tiny flaw reminds me of something more important: the realization that only love lasts forever."

*Denise and Rett Ackart*

## DENNIS THE MENACE



"I suppose it's too late to say 'OOPS!'"

DENNIS THE MENACE. © Used by permission of Hank Ketcham and © by North America Syndicate.

## The Reason for Living

*Love cures people—both the ones who give it and the ones who receive it.*

Karl Menninger

I'm only twelve years old, but I know sadness and the fear of death very well. My grandfather has been smoking since he was a young teenager, and now he has a terrible disease called emphysema that ruins the respiratory system.

Ever since my grandmother died, my grandfather has been depressed—mad at the world. He is a very ornery man and has said some hurtful things to nice people. But when he is around me, it's like a whole soft side of him becomes exposed.

Recently, my grandfather got very sick. He underwent surgery on his throat and had to use a machine called a respirator to help him breathe. The doctors thought that his days were numbered, but miraculously he recovered. He was taken off the respirator, but still he couldn't talk. It strained his voice badly to make the slightest noise. While my grandfather was in the hospital, my mother and I flew to Pittsburgh to be with him. We were very fearful we wouldn't see him a-

gain. When we reached my grandfather's hospital room, I was shocked by his condition. He looked so sickly. He was hardly able to even grunt. Somehow though, he managed to mumble, "I ... you."

"You what, Grandpa?" I whispered. He didn't have the energy to answer me. He had exhausted all his strength with those two syllables, "I ... you."

The next morning my mother and I had to leave. I kept wondering just what it was he had tried so desperately to tell me. It wasn't until I was back home in Georgia that I learned what he had tried to say.

A week after we returned home, my family received a phone call from one of the nurses in the hospital. She told us that my grandfather had said, "Call my granddaughter and tell her 'love.'" At first I was a little confused, thinking *Why he would just say, "love. Why not, "I love you?*" Then it hit me. The day we were in the hospital he had been trying to say, "I love you." I was really touched. I felt as if I was going to cry, and I did.

After many painful weeks, my grandfather was finally able to talk. I called him every night. Normally he had to stop after about five minutes because he was too weak. No matter what, though, every time we hung up he would say, "I love you" and "I'd do anything for you." These, along with his moving words, "You're the only reason I live," are the best compliments I have ever received.

My grandfather is still very ill and I know our time is limited. I feel very honored that he has shared his feelings with me. I have learned a lot from this experience. But the most important thing I've learned is that a simple "I love you" is really not simple. It's a reason for living.

*Lauren Elizabeth Holden, thirteen*

# 5

# ON DEATH AND DYING

*She'll stay with you*

*As long as the wind blows  
She'll always be in your heart  
She didn't leave you all alone  
She has eternal life  
Her spirit is always within you  
And if the sun shines in the sky  
And rain should fill the air  
And a rainbow lights up your day  
Know that she is there.*

*Karli McKinnon.ten*

## April Morning

The date was April 19, 1995. I was getting ready for school like I usually did, and my mother, Diana, was getting ready for work. She worked at the federal building in Oklahoma City.

As I left for school, I told my mom good-bye. I told her that I loved her and that I would see her after school. Little did I know that I wouldn't be seeing her after school, and that my life would soon be changed.

Around 1:30, a call came over the intercom, asking for me to come to the office to be checked out from school. I thought, *Cool, it must be my mom.* She would always surprise me like that and take me somewhere.

When I got to the office, instead of my mom, it was my grandpa and my aunt. They were both crying and had confused and worried looks on their faces. I didn't have time to ask what was wrong. They grabbed me and we drove in a hurry to my house.

When I went in, my whole family was sitting around, crying and watching the news. I didn't see my mom there. My eyes glanced at the TV and I saw the building where my mom worked. Most of the building had been blown up. People were coming out bleeding. I knew from that moment on, there was a chance my mom wouldn't be coming home. So I

fell to my knees and began to pray. The only thing that was going through my mind was, *How could God let me down like this?* We all stayed at my house and waited to see if maybe they would find her alive. Hours went by and nothing happened. During that time I saw my mom's friends coming out on stretchers. They were lifeless. I began to feel hatred toward whoever did this and cried even more. I felt useless. I couldn't do anything. But my family was there and they helped me.

Days went by with no answer. I was in shock. All I wanted was my mom to come home and tell me that everything would be okay, but that wish never came true.

One Wednesday morning, two and a half weeks after the bombing, the crying of my aunt and grandma woke me up. I got out of bed to see if they were okay. They told me that my mom had been found.

I was so happy I couldn't believe it. God had answered my prayers! I asked when she was coming home. They said she wouldn't be coming home. I was a little confused. Then they told me that she didn't survive the bomb. Mom worked on the seventh floor of the building. She was found on the second floor. I began to cry, and I thought, *How could God let this happen?*

My mother was the number one thing in my life, and now she is the number one thing in my heart. She did come home on the day of the bombing, not to our home but to her home in the sky. Now I feel that my mom is just waiting for the day when I come home. In the meantime, I will try to make her proud of me and always remember how special she was. Those thoughts and beliefs are what help me get through every day of my life.

*Justin Day, fifteen*

## Ryan's Story

The most daring, courageous and patient person I have ever known was my cousin. Ever since I can remember, my cousin, Ryan, and I seemed to have a special bond. I have two special memories of Ryan when we were very young.

The first one happened on a hot summer day, at Disneyland in California. I can still hear the laughter and voices from people around us. I remember looking up when Ryan pointed toward the sky. My Mickey Mouse balloon and his were tangled up together.

The second memory I have is when Ryan and I were playing with little cars in our grandparents' family room. He had a green car and I had a brown one. I smashed my car into his and broke it. I didn't mean to, and I felt bad. Looking back, I now realize how important and special memories are.

Then my Uncle Rick, Ryan's dad, moved his family to Pocatello, Idaho. I didn't get to play with Ryan anymore, but we kept in touch by phone.

It had been some years since I had heard from them, until one particular evening. Ryan was seven and I was six at the time. After my Uncle Rick and my mom had talked, my mom hung up the phone. That's when she told me that Ryan was sick.

Ryan had leukemia. It was in his bloodstream and eventu-

ally it went into his bone marrow. Can you imagine? A seven-year-old! I don't know how he had the courage to live, each day knowing that he was dying of cancer.

After that, we kept in touch a lot over the phone. Finally, when he was eleven, they came to California to visit us for two weeks. Ryan was able to come because he had wished for this, and the Make-A-Wish Foundation was paying for it. This special foundation tries to make terminally ill children's wishes come true. Ryan wanted to go to all of the nearby theme parks like Disneyland, Universal Studios and Sea World.

One day during this visit, Ryan and I went in-line skating together. We sat down on the curb, and we talked about when we had been little together. He told me his memories of us and I told him of mine. He remembered the balloons at Disneyland. It meant a lot to both of us that we remembered the same things.

Eventually, the two weeks came to an end, and Ryan and his family went back to Idaho. We kept in touch throughout the next year. When Ryan was twelve, he needed a bone marrow transplant, but the odds were against him. The chances of finding a matching donor were one in ten million people, so Ryan had to have an experimental transplant. It had been tried only once before, and the man had died. The doctors took Ryan's father's bone marrow and gave it to Ryan. Ryan lived through it.

About a month before he had this transplant, I talked to him on the phone. I felt embarrassed to tell him that I loved him, but I told him anyway, right before I hung up. Finally, Ryan died. He had so much medicine, and so many chemicals in his body, that his lungs couldn't help him breathe anymore, and they collapsed.

I was sad when he died, yet I felt peaceful about it. I was so glad that I had worked up the courage to tell him that I loved him. Now I'll never be ashamed to tell someone that I love them before it's too late.

Although I miss him, I think it's better that he isn't suffering anymore. Now Ryan walks with God in heaven.

*Kelli Frusher, fourteen*

## My life

*Sometimes life can be a pain  
When your life stays the same  
I've had cancer not once but twice  
And it isn't very nice.*

*I hate cancer really a lot  
It ties my life up in a knot  
Sometimes I think the doctors lie  
At times I think I'm going to die.*

*Before I end up in a coffin  
I'll do my fun things soon and often  
I had my transplant—it wasn't fun  
It's hard to believe that I'm finally done.*

*Sometimes I wish I could roll over and die  
Now I think I'm going to cry  
When you're there you have to roll with the punches  
Especially when it comes to their nasty lunches.*

*When I went to receive what my dad had to give*

*I was the second to do it, but the first to live  
It was hard for us all—it could make you hysterical  
But if you think about it ... I'm a living miracle.*

*Ryan Alexander*

[EDITORS'NOTE: *Ryan was twelve when he died on November 9, 1994.* ]

## I'll Never Forget Him

His name was Matthew. I always called him Matt. He had white-blonde hair and blue eyes. He always had to do everything that annoyed me, but I guess that's what little brothers are for. Inside I still loved him. He was only four when he died of meningitis.

It was a beautiful winter day. I woke up, got ready for school and went to the bus stop. When I stepped on the bus that morning my brother, Matthew, was outside riding his bike. That's what he did every morning.

After a normal day of third grade, I rode the bus home looking forward to playing with my friend, Jessica. Two years ago she had moved next door to us with her parents, her little brother, T. J., and her sister, Brittany. They were all attached to Matt, like they had known him forever. When I got home I went straight to Jessica's house.

At three o'clock that afternoon, my grandmother, who I call Nana, and my other grandmother, who I call Grandma, took Matthew to the doctor. My grandfather said that Matthew was complaining about not being able to move his head or neck.

The doctor examined Matthew and diagnosed him with the flu. My grandmothers were told to give him something for his fever and that he would be fine in the morning.

When they came home from the doctor's office, they put Matthew in my room. I remember getting a sleeping bag and finding a cozy spot in front of our fireplace. I don't know all of the events that took place that night, but my Nana told me what she recalled. She said that Matthew woke up and had to use the bathroom. By then he was so weak that he couldn't even walk on his own. His eyelids were stuck together, and he had little purple splotches on his face and arms. He had to be carried to the bathroom.

I woke up later and heard the ambulance driver in our kitchen. He was saying that he wouldn't take my brother to the hospital in the ambulance because "it's only the flu." Since the ambulance driver wouldn't take him, my Nana and Grandma got ready and drove him themselves. When they were about halfway there, Matthew started to hallucinate. He said, "Sissy, my feet are burning." By the time they were at the hospital and the doctors diagnosed him, it was too late. They couldn't do any more for him.

My mom and dad woke me up at about 6 : 30 the next morning. I knew there was something wrong. It sounded like they were crying. Maybe they were. But when they told me what had happened, I wasn't sure if I was awake or still dreaming. I remember not crying, but inside I felt like it. Later that day, a lot of people we knew came to our house. They all asked if they could do anything for us. But they couldn't bring Matthew back.

Over the next few days, I tried not to think about what happened. I knew my brother was in heaven, but I wanted him back. A few of my teachers took off from work to come to his funeral. For a while, I couldn't concentrate at school, but eventually things got back to normal—as normal as they will ever be without Matthew.

A few years later, at a youth rally, we were asked to write advice on a piece of paper and throw it back into the air. I wrote, "It helps to cry when you lose someone." And today, I know it's true.

*Megan Weaver, twelve*

## An Angel in Disguise

*Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.*

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

When I first met Damon, he was working on a fence that divided our property. My mom and I were in the field across from him. He seemed like a nice enough guy once we were acquainted, but since his kindness was being directed toward my mother, in my mind he became the devil in farmer's clothing.

I had just turned ten and the only man I had ever been around a lot was my father. So when Damon and my mom began to see more of each other, I didn't know how to handle it. My dad had not been a great example of the male species, so Damon didn't have a chance in my heart. To put it bluntly, I hated the man.

The only reason I could figure why Damon kept hanging around was so he could hurt our family and cause us all a lot of pain. Now I couldn't let that happen, could I?

For about six months, Damon tried every way imaginable

to win my approval. He bought me things and was always taking my side in everything, no matter if I was right or not. He let me get away with everything. So, of course, I kept up my attitude even more. I was seeing this grown man begging for me to like him or at least accept him. So for just as long as he tried to win me over, I shot down every single attempt with a harsh word or a hatred-filled look. Sometimes I would do both.

But he never quit. Every time I hurt him, he just kept right on trying. Eventually it began to work and finally Damon and I became friends.

Surprising as it may seem, that crazy old man and I had a lot in common. He understood me more than I thought anyone could. Damon was a lot of fun to be around, and my friends and I loved going places with him. He liked to do all the things we did.

I remember him saying once, "I would rather you kids be with me having fun than be out on the streets getting into real trouble." He loved kids and he wanted all of my friends and me to be safe. He wanted to provide a place for us to call home.

Damon had two daughters. Mom had Nichole, Josh and me. All of our friends became part of the family. Whether we were working or eating dinner together, we always had fun and always found something to laugh about.

Although we didn't always get along, those times are nothing compared to the really good memories I have of Damon. For five years of my life, he was always there. Damon became the father I had never had. We had an unspoken bond between us that made us inseparable. I liked working with him and watching him work.

Right before my sixth-grade summer, Damon and I bought

two bottle-fed bull calves. I called one Floppy, because of his ears, and the other Doofus (Doofus was named after Damon). We had fun with them because it was something we could do together. We built a pen in the barn for them and took turns feeding them about five to ten times a day. Usually Damon was the one taking turns.

He knew how I longed for a horse and, although he wasn't quite "cowboy" material, he made sure that I got one.

Damon not only gave me material things, he also taught me a lot of things about life and how to live it. When I met Damon, I was going through tough times. I had just realized that my daddy wasn't the saint I had thought he was, and like I said, the male species wasn't on my list of things to like. I lived in an unhappy world, and Damon was the only one who was able to get the walls around my heart to fall. I had always kept my emotions bundled up inside, and he showed me that talking was a good thing. I was finally happy with myself and my life, thanks to him.

One day out of the blue, Damon had a cerebral aneurysm. Earlier in the year my Papa Troy had had an aneurysm and had died the first night. So, regardless of what anyone told me, I was thinking the worst. But Damon survived the first night and the next night, too, and we all became hopeful. He was in a room in the ICU wing of the medical center.

After the aneurysm, he also had a few strokes and because of them he could not speak. I did not like going to see him because Damon was not "Damon" without his voice. He also looked so weak and helpless, and it hurt me dearly to go see him. I always got a knot in my stomach when I went to the hospital. But I went with hopes that he would respond to me.

Each time I went, though, I could not make myself talk to

him. Damon was in ICU for about two or three weeks, and for a while he seemed to be getting better.

Then we found out that Damon's insurance would not pay for the type of care he was getting. He would have to be moved out of the hospital. In July, we moved Damon to a rehabilitation hospital in a nearby town. It was the closest thing we could get to home.

After Damon was moved, I only went to see him three times. I hated seeing him in that environment. Around the middle of November, Damon developed some kind of disease in his bloodstream and his health began to gradually decline.

In December, I went to see Damon because my mom said he was a lot worse and that he might like to see me.

When we went into the room, Mom explained to me that if I was going to hold his hand or touch him in any way I had to have gloves on because he was really sick. I was standing beside him watching him struggle for every breath, watching him suffer, and I couldn't do anything to help him. I broke down. I had been holding it in for so long I just couldn't do it anymore.

That night at home I went to bed with a heavy heart. I prayed that Damon would quit suffering regardless of the cost to me. I prayed that I could see him one more time. But I didn't want to see the man lying in that hospital bed. It wasn't Damon. I wanted to see the Damon that I remembered; the one that I hadn't seen in almost seven months. After I had prayed, I was afraid to go to sleep. I was afraid that if I dreamed about him, which I often did, I would wake up to find him gone.

But I didn't dream about him again until Tuesday, December 22. That night I woke up around eleven o'clock to my mother's crying. At that moment, I knew. My brother came

and told me, and I went and sat with Mom for a while. But I went back to sleep shortly and I slept soundly the rest of the night.

In the dream I had that night, I saw Damon on his tractor. He was smiling and I knew it was him. I also realized that he was free from any pain.

On the day of the funeral, I was a wreck. I finally realized it was over. I was going to miss him so much, but then again, I had been missing him for seven whole months.

It is now just over a month since we laid him to rest. As I write this, I still get a little teary-eyed. Damon was the greatest man I have ever met but I never told him. I never even told him that I loved him. I always thought that there would be time for that later.

Now, in everything I see, I am reminded of him. I miss the sound of the tractor and the smell he had when he came in after a long day of work. I even miss the annoying way he laughed. I just wish that one more time Nichole and I would be able to laugh with him.

Life is such a precious thing. Every day is taken for granted. There is a song called "One Day Left to Live," and I think everyone should live by it. It says to live your life like you have one day left to live. Don't live for the future and don't live for the past. Live for right now. Because right now is the only time that matters.

*Megan Jennings, fifteen*

## My Little Superman

I babysat a little boy several months ago,  
When I'd say, "It's bedtime," he always pleaded, "No!"  
I still remember everything we did so well,  
I'd let him stay up late then whisper, "I won't tell!"

We usually made cookies, or at least we'd try.  
They would burn, and we'd laugh 'til we'd cry!  
Movies, popcorn, pillow fights and Nintendo,  
Beanie Babies were another favorite, from the 'Ty' Co.

His role model was Superman, how he loved him, too!  
No one could've known what this boy would do.  
He always brought joy into so many lives.  
Why? Oh, why would he have to die?

He loved to play baseball, and sing in the choir,  
But he had to give them up because his muscles would tire.  
Still, he kept on smiling, through the pain, of course,  
Even when he took a turn for the worse.

After treatments failed and several weeks went by  
Home at last, he came ... perhaps to die.

Family and friends brought a lot of gifts.  
And then one day my sister and I went over for a visit.

We watched one of his favorite movies, called *Child's Play*.

The last time that I saw him was on that day.  
Imagine yourself at ten years old meeting your fate.  
His whole family was with him on this sad date.

They all hugged him and said not to be scared  
They told stories and memories that they all had once shared  
He is an angel now, in a much better place  
And I doubt that anybody will ever forget his smiling face.

Now he is home, and at peace once more  
How I wish that I could come once again to his door  
I will not forget him, I don't think I ever can  
He was a real-life hero ... my little Superman.

*KeriAnne McCaffrey, fourteen*

## Don't Forget to Say I Love You

Two summers ago my family took a vacation, but we stayed in town. We went to downtown Chicago to see museums and to the Navy Pier. I saved all the ticket stubs and pictures from our vacation. I didn't know then how important they would become to me.

A few weeks later, my family had just come home from a party. My dad wasn't feeling good at all. A little while later my mom decided to take my dad to the hospital.

He came home about two days later. It seemed like nothing was wrong, but I overheard a phone call and realized my dad had cancer.

A few weeks later, my dad went back to the hospital to have surgery on his lung where they had found the cancer. That week, I spent almost every night at a friend's house because my mom spent almost all her time with my dad.

When I finally got to go see my dad, we spent all day just being silent and watching TV together. I was uncomfortable with this, and my dad could tell. I was Daddy's princess and he always told me he'd be there for me forever. That's what he said.

Toward the close of the day, we had to leave because he

was starting to feel weak. I forgot to say I love you when I left.

Some days later, I spent the night at my friend Melanie's house because we had camp the next day. We laughed and giggled until ten o'clock.

My mom came over the next day to see me. She seemed really sad. She told me my dad wasn't doing so well. Although I was worried, I left to go swimming at camp. As soon as we pulled out of the driveway, I looked back at my mom and saw that she had started to cry.

When I got home she kept asking me if I wanted a snack before she talked to me. Then, she told me that my dad had died. The two of us cried together for hours. Suddenly nothing felt the same.

My dad said that he would always be there for me. Suddenly I realized something very important. *He would always be there for me, but not in the way that I had thought. He would be watching over me from heaven.*

Now when I'm lonely for my dad, I take out those ticket stubs and pictures, and pretty soon I feel happy. And I'll always remember what he told me: Never go to bed mad at someone, because you never know what can happen and when you will get to see that person again. Always tell the people you care about that you love them, when you have the chance.

Nicole Fortuna, ten

## Grandma's Cloud Game

I worked hard picking that bouquet of dandelions from the field in back of Grandma's house. When I presented my gift to Grandma she smiled and hugged me.

"Oh, child," she'd said, "you warm the cockles of my heart."

"You have cockles in your heart, Grandma?"

She laughed. The best part of Grandma was her laugh. It wasn't exactly the sound so much as the way it filled her whole face, and the way her belly made her white apron wiggle.

Grandma placed the dandelions in a glass jar filled with water. They stayed on her kitchen windowsill until every last one of them was as brown as the wood it was sitting on.

Grandma smelled like vanilla and coffee. I remember the first time we made cookies from scratch. I thought one of the cups of stuff she put into the bowl was "scratch." She explained, "There are two kinds of cookies; store bought and scratch."

She had a secret recipe and it was magical because it didn't matter if we put raisins or nuts or even chocolate chips in the batter, the cookies always tasted like heaven. Grandma gave me her secret scratch recipe and I keep it in my wooden treasure box under my bed.

I also have a four-leaf clover in my box. Grandma taped it to a piece of cardboard for me. We spent two hours crawling around on our hands and knees in her backyard looking for that four-leaf clover. We held hands and danced in a circle when I finally found one.

I loved spending the night with Grandma. She taught me how to play Rummy. I always added up the points because she said I was such a good counter.

The smell of coffee was usually what woke me up in the morning. Breakfast always tasted great. Breakfast started with a big kiss on my forehead followed by orange juice. Sometimes we had eggs, but Grandma knew pancakes were my favorite. She always made more pancakes than we could eat. We crumbled the leftovers and scattered them in the backyard for the birds. I think the birds came from miles around to visit her backyard when I spent the night.

Grandma had what she called a "bottomless" candy dish. We could eat candy in the afternoon and after dinner in the evening. The next morning the candy dish was full again. It always held my favorite kind—white buttery mints. Grandma taught me to hold them on my tongue and feel them magically melt. We held contests to see who could keep their mint on their tongue the longest. Most of the time Grandma won that game.

Grandma's porch swing was my favorite place in the whole world. She sat on one side. I sat beside her and leaned against her, my feet and legs taking up the rest of the swing. I could smell Grandma's cookies in her cotton apron and coffee on her breath as she hugged her arms around me. We found pictures in the clouds as Grandma gave the swing a nudge once in a while with her foot.

Mostly, we talked. We talked about the neighbor's good

corn crop. We talked about Dad's job and Mom's charity work. I told her my most important secrets and she crossed her heart she would never tell.

"Someday," she told me, "when I'm living with the angels, you look up into those clouds and say hi to your old grandma, okay?"

"Okay, Grandma, I will." I never worried about that day because I knew it would never come.

That was two months ago. Mom and Dad are in the house now packing Grandma's belongings. I am sitting on Grandma's porch swing, giving it an occasional push with my foot. The backyard is quiet. There is no laughter. I don't know if I will ever laugh again.

Grandma is here. I feel her presence everywhere. Her kitchen still smells like vanilla and cinnamon and coffee. Maybe she's just playing our game of hide-and-seek and she's out of sight just beyond that old lilac bush she loved so much. I know better, but I sure wish that was true.

A white, fluffy cloud moves across the sky, directly overhead. I look up, remembering our "pictures in the cloud" game. The wind shuffles the cloud as I watch. I see Grandma! There she is, sure as the world! Her wings are spread wide and her white dress is falling in folds around her feet. She has a happy smile on her face!

"Hi, Grandma," I call out, "I love you!" I knew she was there! She just doesn't need this old house and all the stuff in it anymore. I see her gently wave. Smiling, I spread out on the porch swing to watch her as she floats across the sky.

*Nadine Rogers*

## Mr. Oberley's Star

I was nine years old the last summer that we lived next to Mr. Oberley. By then, he was retired and living alone—if you could call sharing a house with about twenty-five cats living alone. Early in the morning, I often heard shouts from his porch.

"Where did you come from?" His voice shattered the morning quiet. "Go away, Kitty! The hotel is booked!"

I smiled, knowing it was another stray. Mr. Oberley grumbled and complained, but never once did he turn away a needy cat. Their happy mewing often drifted out his open windows. Mom and Dad called it "The Cat Chorus."

Mom told me Mr. Oberley used to be a veterinarian. Once, just for fun, he wrote a cookbook for cats. But now he spent his days in the garden, among the daffodils, his arthritic back as stiff as a board. He joked that he was too old to be good for anything but conducting The Cat Chorus.

Sometimes my parents would let me stay up late. One night Mr. Oberley and I sat together, watching the night unfold. We breathed in the sweet perfume of lilacs as lightning bugs flickered like stardust strewn across the lawn. A parade of cats trampled over my stomach before scurrying into the purple dusk.

As the first star appeared, Mr. Oberley squinted into the

sky.

"Life is so much larger than we can imagine," he said. He chuckled softly, rustling my hair. "Usually we think it's our problems that are so vast. Look, Cindy, sweetheart, look over there." He pointed to the largest and brightest star.

"One of these days, I'm going to climb that star and make it my swing," he said. "I'll ride it across the whole wide galaxy and see everything there is to see."

My first worry was, "But what if you fall?"

"I won't fall," he told me. "And just think, from the vantage point of my star I'll be able to watch you grow up. I'll even be able to hear the cats sing."

I thought long and hard about that. The following day, I told Mr. Oberley, in a most somber voice, that I did not want him to go off chasing stars.

"I'll miss you too much," I said. "And what about The cat Chorus? The cats only sing when you're here."

It was true. Last year, when Mr. Oberley visited his sister, the cats had refused to sing at all. I bribed them with their favorite shrimp-flavored treats, but they didn't give one lousy meow ... not until Mr. Oberley came back.

"I don't know," he said, tiredly. "Having a star to ride sounds pretty good when you have a body as old as mine."

Later that summer, Mr. Oberley became ill. His niece, Sarah, came to take care of him. The long, hot days passed slowly as I waited for him to get well again.

One day Mom and I brought him some chicken soup. I was shocked to see how thin he had become. He was almost too weak to lift his spoon. The worried cats serenaded him tirelessly, day and night.

The daffodils and lilac blossoms had wilted, but the roses were in full bloom the day Sarah knocked on our door.

"How is Mr. Oberley?" I asked right away.

His niece took a long, slow breath. "He told me to give you a message," she said finally. "He said you would know what it means."

"He found his star, didn't he?" I said, watching her eyes fill with tears. "Mr. Oberley went to ride on that great big old star."

Sarah nodded yes.

"And the cats?" I asked. "Who will take care of them?"

"I will," said Sarah. She planned to move into Mr. Oberley's house with her husband and young daughter, who was my age.

"Now you'll have a friend," she said.

"But Mr. Oberley is my friend," I insisted.

"Forever and always," said Sarah, wiping her eyes.

After Mr. Oberley's death, his cats refused to sing — except at night, after the first star lit the sky. And when that great big old star appeared, they sang until their hearts nearly burst. I knew then that it had to be true: Mr. Oberley was up on his star, just as he'd wanted.

*Cynthia Ross Cravit*

## Life Is Short

*For you and me, today is all we have; tomorrow is a mirage that may never become a reality.*

Louis L'Amour

"Hey, man, I'm hungry," I said. "I'm going to go get something to eat."

My friend Gabe smiled and warmly responded, "Alright, but you're crazy. I can't stop. The weather's too good! Look for me here at the bottom of this lift when you're done. I'm gonna go take some more runs."

I released my bindings and began to walk in the direction of the smell of hot pizza. I shouted over my shoulder, "I'll catch up to you later."

I didn't think twice about those few little words at the time. My friend, Gabe Moura, and I had been snowboarding all morning. I was too hungry to take another run, so I decided to eat something at the lodge.

I remember the weather that day. It was one of those flawlessly sunny, crisp winter Sundays where it was just brisk enough to get your blood rushing but warm enough to wear

a T-shirt. I had been riding in a T-shirt all day and despite the occasional patch of ice, the snow was great.

Earlier that morning, we had been tearing up the mountain. Huge aerials, blazing speed and unfading smiles were common for us. After a quick slice of pizza in the lodge, I would soon be back on the mountain with my friend. But taking a break from this snow-capped playground was just not something Gabe would do. He continued back to the crowded life line with a sparkle in his eyes. I remember thinking, *That guy is never going to stop riding, not on a day like this at least.*

I finished my lunch and headed back out. The lifts were open and I didn't see Gabe anywhere, so I went on up. I figured he was having fun up there somewhere, and I was determined not to miss out just to wait around down at the bottom for him.

On the lift, I remember seeing a big crowd at a fork in the runs. I assumed it was just another minor collision and that somebody was just complaining about their back again. I rode for a few more hours with an intoxicating combination of adrenaline and excitement flowing through my veins. I recall seeing a crowd at the fork several more times and wondering what Gabe was up to.

The day flew by, and soon it was time to go back to the hotel. As I waited for my mom at the lodge, I saw the other kids Gabe and I had been riding with that day. Mona, one of Gabe's friends, was standing by the parking lot and she looked beat. I naturally figured it was from the insane day of riding we had all had.

As she was standing there with her shoulders drooped, I walked over to her. As I got closer, I saw that she had tears in her eyes. She told me that Gabe had been in an accident

and was being flown by air-evac to Tucson. He was in a coma.

"WHAT!?" My mind screamed, but my voice quivered. She explained that he had collided with a skier at full speed and the back of his head had landed on a patch of ice. The skier had gotten up, said a few words, then disappeared, leaving Gabe on the ground.

The car ride home to Tucson was undoubtedly one of the longest I recall. My mind played cruel games on me while my nerves wreaked havoc on my body. I remember crying uncontrollably and vomiting. That night I called the hospital but there had been no change. Gabe was still unconscious and the doctors had no prognosis.

The next day, my friends and I bought some get-well cards and headed for the hospital. Once there, we were herded into a large conference room with probably two hundred or so people. A chaplain took the podium and informed us that Gabe was brain-dead. They were taking him off life-support, and he would be officially dead within ten minutes.

My comical get-well card seemed so trivial now. My friend, who just yesterday had shared life with me on a beautiful mountaintop, was gone forever.

The ensuing weeks were filled with a funeral, candlelight vigils and mostly struggling to comprehend why. Why did someone so completely innocent, so full of life, die? How could this happen?

It's been about eight months since Gabe died, and I still don't know the answers to these questions. I know I never will. I do, however, know — more intimately now — that all those clichéd sports commercials are so true. Life *is* short. There is no method or reason to life if you just wander through day to day. You must find your passion and live it,

but be safe. There is no reason to take chances with your life. If Gabe had been wearing a helmet he would probably be alive today. Life is fragile enough as it is. It comes and goes as fleetingly as a falling star.

I strive to make my life exceptional and extraordinary ,but it is difficult. You can eat well and exercise daily for an hour at the gym, but unless you truly experience life ,it is all for nothing. It is so much easier to become apathetic or lazy. I see people letting their lives revolve around the TV. I see people overcome by greed and the almighty dollar ,working horrendous hours at jobs they despise.

But I know I must be different. I must strive to make a difference. Gabe is my inspiration. He made a difference ,in life and now in death. While he was here ,Gabe brightened people's days and made the world a richer ,more loving place for his family and friends. His passion for life was something he spread to everyone ,but an extraordinary person like Gabe couldn't stop there.

Just a few months prior to his accident ,he told a family member ,“If anything ever happens to me ,I would want all of my organs to be donated .”

The heart that so many girls fought for is now beating strongly inside of a sixty-two-year-old man ,who is engaged to be married soon. Gabe's liver went to a thirty-three-year-old husband and father. One kidney went to a woman and the other to a man. Two people that could not see before ,do ,thanks to Gabe's eyes. Between thirty-five and fifty people received tissue from Gabe's body.

Gabe not only still lives in the memories of his family and friends ,he lives on in the hearts and lives of fifty other people ,who are now alive and healthy because of him. Gabe set an example for all of us. You never know how much time

you are going to have to live your life, so pursue your passions and make the right choice now. Make your life matter.

*Scott Klinger, sixteen*

[EDITORS' NOTE: *To find more information about helping save lives through organ donation, go to [www.livingbank.org](http://www.livingbank.org). or [www.gabemoura.com](http://www.gabemoura.com).* ]

## In Every Thought

*Some people come into our lives and quickly go.  
Some stay for a while and leave footprints on our  
hearts. And we are never, ever the same.*

Unknown

I don't remember exactly when he came into my life. He was just always there. My grandfather was the most incredible person in the world.

Some days Papa, as I called him, and I would go down to a little creek that flowed into the river and go fishing. He taught me how to cast, reel, and the scariest of all, bait a hook. I remember what it was like to catch my first fish, which Papa called a blue gill. For the first time in my life, I felt I had accomplished something useful. I was proud of myself.

Other days we'd sit on the front porch in the rocking chairs he had made and talk.

But the thing I most loved was when we'd go out to the barn and he'd make things out of wood. He made me my first rocking horse when I was four. It wasn't anything fancy, but

like me, Papa believed if it came from the heart, then that alone made it beautiful.

Above all, anything that could bother a seven-year-old was something that I could always talk to him about. Papa would set me on his knee and listen to me cry. He made the world go away with one hug.

Whenever I needed punishment, he always talked to me about what I had done. He'd ask me why I made that mistake, while every other authority figure I knew went straight to physical punishment. He was the one person who had my respect, and who actually treated me with respect in return.

Something else I admired was that he didn't treat me like a girl who only related to pink ribbons and Barbies. He treated me like a person.

When I turned eight, a horrifying fact changed my life forever. That fact was death.

In September, they discovered that my Papa had cancer. It never sank in, even at his funeral the next February, that I'd never see him alive again.

The agonizing six months of his sickness were long and cruel, especially to my grandmother, who could not talk without crying. I didn't know what death was.

Everything was a big, rushing blur. It was too much for an eight-year-old, so I blocked it out. Whatever death was, it wasn't real to me.

Slowly, I learned I couldn't block it out. There were no more rodeos, no more fishing, no more horses and no one left to talk to. When I walked into my grandmother's house, there was no longer the smell of smoke mixed with coffee and sawdust, which was what Papa always smelled like. Everyone around me was sad, and I was learning what it was like to be sad.

It finally hit me that he was gone. Things started getting rough with guys and friends. I knew if Papa had been alive, he could've helped. Instead I faced the world alone, and believe me, there are many pressures from sixth grade to high school. The world had become very cruel to me, or so it seemed, and I missed Papa. Night after night, I would go to bed crying.

In seventh grade, I hung out with the wrong crowd. One morning, in the bathroom, a girl offered me a cigarette. All of a sudden, something clicked in my mind. Cigarettes are what had killed my Papa.

"No," was my simple but strong reply. Regardless of their comments like "good girl" and "too-good," I stuck with my no smoking policy. Since then, I have been offered cigarettes many times, and I have always replied with a simple "no." I wouldn't want my grandchildren feeling the way I did if they lost me to smoking.

I was too young to figure out what a great role model I had around me when he was alive. But I realize it now. Papa is in every thought I have today. I still have all our special memories in my heart. He always made me believe in myself. Anything I do, he has influenced in some way. No one has ever or will ever have the patience he had with me.

His death taught me many lesson, but the one so harshly instilled in me is that no one, even someone as great as him, is invincible.

*Leslie Miller, fourteen*

[EDITORS' NOTE: To learn more about the effects of smoking, contact the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids at [www.tobaccofreekids.org](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org) or call 1-800-284-KIDS to get involved in its campaign against the tobacco industry.]

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# 6

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# ON ATTITUDE AND PERSPECTIVE

*Each morning when I open my eyes I say to myself: "I, not events, have the power to make me happy or unhappy today. I can choose which it shall be. Yesterday is dead, tomorrow hasn't arrived yet. I have just one day, today, and I'm going to be happy in it."*

*Groucho Marx*

## Big at Heart

*Every man stamps his value on himself ...  
Man is made great or small by his own will.*

J. C. F. Von Schiller

My best friend's exceptionally small. We're in the fifth grade, but Larry's as short as a first-grader. Although his body's small, Larry's big at heart. He has a sharp mind, too. All the kids who know Larry like him a lot.

Sometimes he gets his share of teasing, but Larry knows how to handle it. When some smart-mouth calls him Dopey, Sleepy or Bashful, Larry just laughs and starts humming, "Hi, Ho!"

Larry loves sports, but he can't play some, like football. One tackle and he would be wiped out. But one sport seems to be made for Larry — baseball. He's our star player. The legs that are too short for track and hurdles can pump up and down, carrying him around those bases faster than you can see. He can slide to safety under a baseman before he's noticed. And when he's in the field, he catches and throws that ball like the biggest of us.

I remember when he first came to try out for our Little League team. The coach took one look and shook his head.

"No, I'm sorry, but we need big, strong players. Tell you what — we could use a batboy!"

Larry just grinned and said, "Give me a chance to try out. If you still think I'm a weak player, I'll be the best batboy you ever had!"

The coach looked at him with respect, handed him a bat, and said, "Okay, it's a deal."

Well, obviously no pitcher could aim the ball inside Larry's ten-inch strike zone! He would be a sure walk to first base every time, and the coach knew how to take advantage of that. And when he saw how fast Larry's legs could travel and how well he handled the ball, he bent over, patted Larry on the back, and said, "I'm proud to have you on the team."

We had a winning season, and yesterday was our final game. We were tied with the Comets for the championship. Their pitcher, Matt Crenshaw, was a mean kid who never liked Larry — probably because he could never strike him out.

Somehow we held the Comets through the top of the ninth inning, and we were tied when it was our turn at bat. As Matt passed our bench on the way to the pitcher's mound, he snarled at Larry, "Why don't you go back to Snow White where you belong?"

I heard him and jumped up, ready to give Matt a punch, when Larry stepped between us. "Cut it out!" he yelled, pushing me away from Matt. "I can fight for myself."

Matt looked as if he was going to clobber Larry, but my friend held out his hand and said, "Let's play baseball, okay? I know you want your team to win and it must be tough to pitch to a shrimp like me."

"Chicken, you mean. You won't even swing at the ball!" Then he stamped off to the mound as Larry slowly dropped his outstretched hand.

We had two outs when it was Larry's turn at bat. The bases weren't loaded, but the coach told Larry to wait for a walk, as usual. Larry held his ground for three balls. One more and he would walk to first.

Then, for some reason — maybe because Matt had called him "chicken" — Larry reached out for the next pitch. It wasn't anywhere near his strike zone, but he swung the bat up and around. He connected. We heard a loud crack and saw the ball sail over all the outfielders. They had to chase after it, and Larry's legs started churning. Like locomotive wheels, they went faster and faster, rounding second and third and heading for home. The Comets finally retrieved the ball and passed it to the catcher. Larry slid safely under him as he caught it.

We had our winning run, the game was over, and we were the champs. After we were presented with our winner's trophy, we gave it to Larry and took turns putting him on our shoulders and marching around the field.

I was carrying him when we passed Matt. "Put me down for a minute," Larry said. He walked over to Matt with his hand extended again for the handshake Matt had refused earlier.

"It was a good game," Larry said, "and you came close to winning it ...."

Matt looked at Larry for what seemed like a long time, but finally Matt took Larry's hand and shook it.

"You may be a shrimp," he said, "but you're no chicken. You deserved to win."

Then Larry and I ran back to the rest of our team. We

were all going to the pizza place for a victory celebration. I sure was proud to have Larry as a friend. Like I said, he's big in the ways that really count.

*Mark Schulle  
As told by Bunny Schulle*

## The Best Christmas I Never Had

*To gain that which is worth having, it may be necessary to lose everything.*

Bernadette Devlin

My sister, Yvonne, was fourteen the year our home and everything in it was destroyed. I was seventeen. Our home was heated by a wood-burning stove, and every fall, my family and I would mark dead trees, cut them down, haul the wood and stack it in the basement. The week before Christmas, the basement was half full of dry wood.

Yvonne and I were home from school, and she did as either of us had done a thousand times before: checked the furnace, tossed a few more logs on the fire and slammed the door shut.

At the time, I was upstairs sulking. I had a sink full of dishes to wash, homework to tackle and my grandfather, after a lonely day at home, wouldn't leave me alone. Stomping around the kitchen, listening to him chatter, I thought about how I couldn't wait to get out of this house, this town. *Lightning could strike this very spot and I wouldn't care.* Or

so I thought.

The house seemed a little smoky, but that wasn't unusual. It often became that way after the furnace had a few new logs to chew up. I simply waved the smoke away and kept doing dishes and daydreaming of getting away from my family. My sister's cats were no help; they were as starved for affection as Grandpa, and kept twining around my ankles.

My sister wandered in and said, "Don't you think it's a little too smoky in here?"

I shrugged sullenly and kept washing dishes. But after another minute, we knew something was wrong. The smoke was much too thick. My sister and I looked at each other, then at our grandfather. He was the adult, but he lived with us because he couldn't take care of himself. If there were decisions to be made, my sister and I—high school students—would make them. The thought was daunting, to say the least.

Without a word to each other, we went outside and opened the garage door (foolish in retrospect) and stared in disbelief as smoke and flames boiled out.

We had no time for tears or hysterics. That would come later. Instead, we both turned and ran up the hill. My sister shot through the kitchen door and raced for Grandpa's coat while I searched frantically for my keys. "There's a fire, Grandpa," I said abruptly. *Where in the world had I put my purse?* "We have to get out."

"Oh. Okay," he agreed. Amiable as a child, Grandpa stood still while my sister jerked him into his coat. She made sure he was warm and tightly bundled, forced warm slippers on his feet and hustled him out the door. I was so busy wondering where my keys were and trying the phone, which was

dead, I never noticed that in her great care to make sure our grandfather was protected from the elements, she had neglected her own coat and boots.

I glanced out the window, blinking from the smoke. December in Minnesota was no joke ... and no place for two teenagers and an old man to await help. If I could find my keys, I could get back down to the garage and probably, if the flames hadn't spread that far, back the van out of the garage. We could wait for help in relative comfort, and at least my mom's van could be saved.

Memory flashed; I had tossed my purse in my room when I'd come home. My room was at the end of a long hallway, far from the kitchen. Daughter and granddaughter of professional firefighters, I should have known better. But things were happening so quickly — my little sister and my grandfather were standing in the snow, shivering — I had to get the van. So I started for my room, the worst decision I've ever made.

The smoke was gag-inducing, a thick gray-black. It smelled like a thousand campfires and I tried not to think about what was being destroyed: my family's pictures, their clothes, furniture. I'd gone three steps and couldn't see, couldn't hear, couldn't breathe. *How was I going to make it all the way to my room?*

I wasn't, of course. I instantly knew two things: if I went down that hallway, I would die. Number two, what was I still doing in this inferno? Ten-year-olds were taught better. My sister was probably terrified, and in another moment, she'd come after me. How stupid could I be?

I stumbled back to the kitchen, took one last glance around my home, then went out into the snow.

Yvonne was sobbing, watching our house burn to the foundation. Grandpa was patting her absently. "That's what insurance is for," he said. A veteran of the New York City Fire Department, I couldn't imagine how many house fires he had fought. For the first time, I could see him as a real person and not my aged, feeble grandfather who took up entirely too much of my time with his endless pleas for me to sit down and talk to him.

"I'm going to the neighbors' to call for help," Yvonne said abruptly. She was wearing a sweater, jeans and slippers. I was in sweat pants, a T-shirt and socks. The closest neighbor was down the length of our driveway and across the highway, about a mile.

"Okay," I said. "Be careful crossing the ..." But she was gone, already running through the snow and down the driveway.

Then I remembered Yvonne's three cats, which were, I guessed, trapped in the house. *When she remembered them, I thought, She would go right out of her mind.*

It seemed she was only gone for a moment before I saw her puffing up the driveway. "I called," she gasped, "they're on their way."

"You should have stayed with the neighbors and gotten warm," I said, mad at myself because I hadn't told her to stay put.

She gave me a look. "I couldn't leave you out here in the cold."

"Actually, I'm not that ...," I began, when suddenly Yvonne clapped her hands to her face and screamed.

"Oh my God, the cats!" she shrieked, then burst into hoarse sobs.

"It's okay, Yvonne, it's okay, I saw them get out," I said frantically, reaching for her. I could tell she didn't believe me, but she didn't say anything more, just wept steadily and ignored my fervent assurances—my lies.

As it swiftly grew dark, our burning house lit up the sky. It was as beautiful as it was awful. And the smell ... to this day, whenever someone lights a fire in a fireplace, I have to leave the room briefly. A lot of people find fireplaces soothing, but to me the smell of burning wood brings back the sense of desolation and the sound of my sister's sobs.

We could hear sirens in the distance and moved out of the way as two fire trucks and the sheriff pulled in. The sheriff screeched to a halt and beckoned to us. In another minute he was talking to my grandfather while Yvonne and I sat in the back of the police car, getting warm.

After a long moment, Yvonne sighed. "I just finished my Christmas shopping yesterday."

I snorted ... and the snort became a giggle, and the giggle bloomed into a laugh. That got my sister going, and we laughed until we cried and then laughed some more.

"I got you the CD you wanted," I told her.

"Really?" she said. "I bought you a new Walkman."

We listed all the things we had bought for friends and family that were now burning to cinders. Instead of being depressing, it was probably the highlight of the evening. The sheriff interrupted our spiritual gift-giving to open the door and say, "Your parents are here."

We scrambled out and raced down the driveway. If I live to be one thousand, I'll never forget my mother's face at that moment: bloodless and terrified. She saw us and opened her arms. We hurled ourselves at her, though we were both con-

siderably taller than she was and nearly toppled her back into the snow. Dad looked us over, satisfied too that we weren't hurt, and some of the tension went out of his shoulders. "What are you crying about?" he asked, pretending annoyance. "We've got insurance. And now we'll get a new house for Christmas."

"Dad ... for Christmas ... I got you those fishing lures you wanted but ..."

He grinned. "That reminds me. I picked up your presents on the way home." He stepped to the truck and pulled out two garment bags. Inside were the gorgeous jackets Yvonne and I had been longing for since we'd fallen in love with them at the mall.

We shrugged into them, ankle-deep in snow, while the house crackled and burned in front of us. It was a strange way to receive a Christmas present, but neither of us were complaining.

"We'll have to come back here tomorrow," Dad said. "It's going to be depressing and stinky and muddy and frozen and disgusting and sad. Most of our stuff will be destroyed. But they're only things. They can't love you back. The important thing is that we're all okay. The house could burn down a thousand times and I wouldn't care, as long as you guys were all right."

He looked at us again and walked away, head down, hands in his pockets. Mom told us later he had driven ninety miles an hour once he'd seen the smoke, that they both gripped the other's hand while he raced to the house. Not knowing if we were out safe was the worst moment of her life.

Later we found out the pipe leading from the furnace to the wall had collapsed, spilling flaming coals all over our

basement. If it had happened at 2:00 A.M., we all would have died of smoke inhalation. In less than half an hour, our house transformed from a safe haven to a death trap. Asleep, we would have had no chance.

We lived in a motel for more than a month, and we spent Christmas Day in my grandmother's crowded apartment eating take-out because she was too tired to cook. For Christmas, Yvonne and I got our jackets and nothing else. My parents got nothing except the headache of dealing with insurance companies. All the wonderful things my family had bought for me had been destroyed in less time than it takes to do a sink full of dishes. But through it all I had gained long-overdue appreciation for my family. We were together. That was really all that mattered.

I'll always remember it as the best Christmas I never had.

*MaryJanice Davidson*

## The Hidden Treasure

Old Man Donovan was a mean man who hated children. He threw rocks at them and even shot at them with a shotgun. At least that's what we had heard.

His small farm bordered our neighborhood where my younger sister, Leigh Ann, and I lived when we were growing up. His farm was long, narrow and quaint. It held two treasures. One was his beautiful fruit.

There were many varieties of fruit; pears, apples and lots more I just can't think of. The fruit naturally drew the children to his land. It made them into thieves. But my sister and I didn't dare to take his fruit because of the horrible rumors we had heard about Old Man Donovan.

One summer day, we were playing in a nearby field. It was time to head back home. My sister and I were feeling very daring that day. There was a short cut to our house that went through the Donovan farm. We thought he wouldn't be able to see us run across his property around the luscious fruit trees. We were almost through the farm when we heard, "Hey, girls!" in a gruff, low voice. We stopped dead in our tracks! There we were, face to face, with Old Man Donovan. Our knees were shaking. We had visions of rocks pounding our bodies and bullets piercing our hearts.

"Come here," he said, reaching up to one of his apple trees. Still shaking, we went over to him. He held out several ripe, juicy, red apples. "Take these home," he commanded. We took the apples with surprised hearts and ran all the way home. Of course, Leigh Ann and I ate the apples.

As time went on, we often went through old Man Donovan's farm, and he kept on giving us more luscious fruit. One day, we stopped by to see him when he was on his front porch. We talked to him for hours. While he was talking, we realized that we had found the other hidden treasure: the sweet, kind heart hidden behind his gruff voice. Soon, he was one of our favorite people to talk to. Unfortunately, his family never seemed to enjoy our company. They never smiled or welcomed us in.

Every summer, we would visit Mr. Donovan and talk to him. He told us all kinds of stories we loved to hear. But one summer, we heard that he was sick. When we found out that he had come home from the hospital, we visited him right away. His voice box had been removed. When he placed his fingers on his throat, his voice came out as a whisper. We couldn't understand him, but through his eyes we could tell what he meant.

The next winter, word got around that Old Man Donovan had died. Leigh Ann and I were heartbroken and decided to go to the funeral. We were scared because we didn't know if the family would welcome us.

When we got to the funeral, the family kindly greeted us and said they were so glad we had come. We all wept mournfully, but our wonderful memories of Old Man Donovan comforted us.

During those summers with Mr. Donovan, my sister and I

learned not to judge a heart until you know it. One may just find a hidden treasure.

*Debbie King*

*As told by Ashley King, eleven*

## The Snow Angel

*Love the moment, and the energy of that moment will spread beyond all boundaries.*

Corita Kent

Ever since I was little, my favorite season was winter. I loved to play in the snow and enjoy the hot chocolate.

Unfortunately, winter never gave me the special gift of snow on my birthday. The snow disappeared before my birthday and started after it.

I would ask my grandmother why it didn't snow on my birthday. She would laugh and tell me I asked too many questions. But one day, she promised that she would make it snow when I was enjoying life to the fullest. I thanked her and asked for snow on my next birthday.

That year, before my birthday, my grandmother died. I was at an emotional loss, but angry because she had promised me to make it snow. The day of my sixth birthday, I woke up and ran to my window, hoping to see just one snowflake. Unfortunately, there was no snow. I cried and cried all day because my grandmother had let me down.

Before my birthday every year, I would pray for snow but it never came. I felt mad at my grandmother; she had broken a promise.

By my sixteenth birthday, I had lost all hope of getting my snow, even though I still wished for it. During my party, I had the best time ever! I enjoyed the company of my friends and family, and I was truly happy.

I was outside with a friend when she asked me if I was having a good time. I told her I was having the best time ever! I was enjoying life to the fullest. Then I saw the white snow falling all around. I became like a little child on Christmas morning as I ran around screaming and laughing. I was so excited that my friends looked at me as if I were crazy, and I think I was. They asked me if I had ever seen snow before, and I laughed and said that I had, but that this was special snow. They all laughed at me, but I didn't care.

When I got home, my grandpa told me he had a gift for me. I was confused because he had already given me my gift. He gave me a small white box that had snowflake wrapping on it. The box looked old, and it was turning a little yellow. I asked him what it was and he told me to stop asking so many questions and just open it. I did, and nestled in white paper was a crystal snowflake with a card that said, "Happy Birthday."

I asked my grandfather how this could be. He told me that it was my grandmother's final wish to give me this on my "sweet sixteenth." I cried and hugged him, although he didn't understand. I said a silent prayer to my smiling grandmother angel who I was certain was, and always had been, watching over me.

*Christine Fishlinger, sixteen*

## DENNIS THE MENACE



"Make a wish."



"HOW 'BOUT THAT . . .  
IT'S SNOWIN'!"

DENNIS THE MENACE. ©Used by permission of Hank Ketcham and © by North America Syndicate.

## You'll Be Good for Him

I heard the rhythmic clatter of metal crutches coming down the hallway. I looked up to see ten-year-old Brian smiling at me in the doorway, his blond hair tousled. Every day, Brian arrived at school cheerful and ready to work.

Brian had a great sense of humor and loved his own jokes. He was my first "handicapped" student. Everyone who worked with Brian told me, "You'll be good for him."

Brian worked with the adaptive physical education teacher and swam three morning a week. He kept a busy school-day schedule. Everything he did required more effort than it did for the other students.

One day, Brian agreed to talk to the class about his handicap. The students liked Brian and wondered what he did after school. He told them that he watched a lot of TV, or played with his dog. Brian felt proud to be a Cub Scout and enjoyed being a member.

The students then asked him why he used different paper and a special magnifying lens and lamp when he read. Brian explained that he had a tracking problem, and that he could see better out of one eye than the other. "I'm going to have another eye operation," he said casually. "I'm used to it. I've already had six operations." He laughed nervously, adjusting

his thick-lens glasses. Brian had already had two hip surgeries, two ankle surgeries and two eye surgeries.

Brian explained how he'd been trained to fall when he lost his balance, so that he wouldn't hurt himself. I felt badly when he fell, but he didn't fuss. I admired his fortitude.

He said he often felt left out, then somebody asked if people ever made fun of him. He replied that he'd been called every name you could think of, but that he usually tried to ignore it.

I asked Brian if he ever became discouraged.

"Well, to tell you the truth," he said, "I do. Sometimes I get really mad if I can't do something. Sometimes I even cry." At this point I ended the discussion. I felt the important questions had been answered. The students applauded.

"Can you walk at all without your crutches?" one of the boys shouted.

"Yeah," he said shyly.

"Would you like to walk for us?" I asked him gently.

"Yeah! Come on, Brian. You can do it!" several students shouted.

"Well—I guess," he answered reluctantly.

Brian removed his crutches and balanced himself. He proceeded to walk awkwardly across the room. "I look like a drunk," he muttered. It wasn't smooth, but Brian walked on his own. Everyone clapped and shouted.

"That's great, Brian," I placed my hand on his shoulder.

Brian laughed nervously while I had to hold back tears. His honesty and courage touched me. I then realized that maybe I wasn't as good for Brian as he was good for me—for all of us.

*Eugene Cagliano*

## Scott

It was time for the ice cream social fund-raiser that my small youth group had awaited for many months. The group consisted of five boys; one of them was Scott.

Scott always had a positive attitude. He looked on the bright side of things and never criticized anyone. But Scott was different from the rest of us. He was disabled. Often-times, he was unable to participate in activities. No one ever made fun of him to his face, but at times, people would snicker or stare in his presence. But Scott never worried; he just kept his head up high and ignored them.

Finally, the night of the ice cream social came. We rushed to the church basement and waited with scoopers in hand for the guests to arrive. One by one, people filed in, all hoping to get a nice, creamy glob of ice cream. But what they ended up getting was a hard, frozen mass. We waited for a while for the ice cream to thaw, and eventually it did.

Once the ice cream thawed, we had another problem. It had melted into three pools of vanilla, chocolate and strawberry. But we persisted in serving it. We all had our chance to serve, except for Scott. So, being as kind as possible, we gave Scott a chance to scoop and serve.

As soon as Scott gripped the scooper, our ice cream trou-

bies turned into the World's Greatest Ice Cream Massacre. Milky ice cream was flung in every direction. Scott wouldn't stop. He kept scooping and scooping and scooping. Then, suddenly, in the thick of the chaos, Scott stopped. We looked at Scott. Scott looked at us. And that's when I realized why he had stopped.

Scott was looking at a small, cute girl who entered the basement. Scott stated, "That's m-m-my friend." Our jaws fell open. The most beautiful girl we had seen all night was Scott's friend.

We pushed Scott out of the way, hoping that we could get to serve her. But Scott just looked at us and said, "I-I-I want to scoop the ice cream for her." We backed off.

The girl slowly approached him. Scott stood poised, ready to scoop again. The girl said, "Hi, Scott."

"H-h-hi," stuttered Scott.

She began to make conversation with him by saying, "Look. I got my new braces today." She looked up and gave a wide, bright smile to show off her gleaming braces.

"Th-th-they're neat," responded Scott. The two carried on a short conversation then the girl sat down.

That night I realized that somebody had overlooked Scott's problems and had seen him as a friendly, normal human being.

I realized something else, too. It was time for all of us to see Scott the same way.

*David Ferino, twelve*

## Adam's Apples

*After all, there is but one race—humanity.*

George Moore

One afternoon, my son came home from school with a puzzled look on his face. After asking him what was on his mind he said, "Are all people the same even if their skin color is different?"

I thought for a moment, then I said, "I'll explain, if you can just wait until we make a quick stop at the grocery store. I have something interesting to show you."

At the grocery store, I told him that we needed to buy apples. We went to the produce section where we bought some red apples, green apples and yellow apples.

At home, while we were putting all the groceries away, I told Adam, "It's time to answer your question." I put one of each type of apple on the countertop: first a red apple, followed by a green apple and then a yellow apple. Then I looked at Adam, who was sitting on the other side of the counter.

"Adam, people are just like apples. They come in all differ-

ent colors, shapes and sizes. See, some of the apples have been bumped around and are bruised. On the outside, they may not even look as delicious as the others. "As I was talking, Adam was examining each one carefully.

Then, I took each of the apples and peeled them, placing them back on the countertop, but in a different place.

"Okay, Adam, tell me which one is the red apple, the green apple and the yellow apple."

He said, "I can't tell. They all look the same now."

"Take a bite of each one. See if that helps you figure out which one is which."

He took big bites, and then a huge smile came across his face. "People are just like apples! They are all different, but once you take off the outside, they're pretty much the same on the inside."

"Right," I agreed. "Just like how everyone has their own personality but are still basically the same."

He totally got it. I didn't need to say or do anything else.

Now, when I bite into an apple, it tastes a little sweeter than before. What perfect food for thought.

*Kim Aaron*

## Who Said There's No Crying in Softball?

*Character building begins in our infancy and continues until death.*

Eleanor Roosevelt

Our team was playing softball against a team that we were tied with for third place. I was toughing out the position of catcher, and we were winning. However, my knees started to not feel so tough. In the bottom of the second inning they had started to hurt.

I've had bad tendonitis in my knees, and I just couldn't take any more abuse to them that day. So I limped over to the manager, who is also my dad, and told him that my knees were hurting. I asked if he could have the back-up catcher, Jill, catch for the rest of the game. He called Jill into the dugout and told her to put on the catcher's gear.

One of the other coaches overheard this conversation and came running over. I could tell that he was mad at my dad's decision because he was steaming like a whistling teapot.

He yelled at my dad, "Are you crazy? Jill can't catch—she

has a huge cut on her finger!"

My dad explained to the coach about my knees.

"So what!" The coach rudely yelled at my dad.

Then he furiously walked over to me. His face was red, and I could feel my heart pounding in my chest.

"You'd better get that gear back on and get back out there right now. If you don't, I swear this will be the worst softball season of your life! Every game! Every game you complain about your stupid knees! If your knees keep hurting so much, I don't understand why you even play! You certainly aren't even good enough!" he screamed at me.

I couldn't believe what he said to me. Amazingly, I was able to choke through my tears, "I'm sorry! My knees hurt so bad! If I catch any more I'll collapse!"

"So what! Do you think I care?" he yelled.

By that time I was sobbing hard. The coach stormed off grumbling something over and over, leaving me in tears.

Later that night, I was lying in my bed thinking. Then a very important question came to my mind.

*Why should I continue my softball season if I don't even have any respect?* I asked myself. Then, from somewhere deep inside my heart, I found the answer.

It doesn't matter what the coach thinks about me, it only matters what I think about myself. I love softball and I have a right to play, even though I may not be the best catcher in the world. That doesn't make me a loser. But I would be a loser if I believed what he said instead of believing in myself. I would lose my self-respect. No one, even the coach, can make me quit. All I have to do to be a winner is to keep showing up, sore knees and all. And I will.

*Amy Severs, twelve*

# Calvin and Hobbes



by Bill Watterson

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## The Yellow Piece of Paper

When you're a young teen, it can seem like your parents have no feelings whatsoever. They don't understand when you just HAVE to get that new CD, even though you don't like the music that much. And that you HAVE to buy the new swimsuit, even though it costs sixty dollars for just two inches of material. Or, that you MUST impress the object of your affection by showing up at the movies, even though you'll dump him after two weeks of boredom. And then you have a huge zit and you need a dermatologist RIGHT AWAY, even though no one else can even see the zit.

These were my sentiments exactly. I never cared about my parents' feelings. I thought they weren't like me and had no idea what emotions were. I didn't believe that they could ever feel the same things I could. How could they? In my mind, they were old and cranky and that was that.

Then all that changed.

Snooping through my mom's purse was sort of a pastime of mine. It was usually for money, which—with my mom's permission to retrieve—allowed me to go to the movies or wherever the hot spot of the evening was. It was like an art form to dig through my mom's purse. Messy was one word for it, but I can think of others! I never found anything too

interesting, so I tried to keep my digs quick and to the point, which was getting my money.

One Friday night, while I was looking for ten dollars, I pulled out my mom's black wallet. A piece of yellow paper fell out.

Curiosity killed the cat ... Right?

Naturally, I hesitated.

Satisfaction brought him back.

I opened the piece of paper. It looked like a diary entry of some sort. Maybe it wasn't my mom's? That was highly doubtful, considering it was her sloppy cursive. I read it. It hit me; it was about my brother and his friend who died of leukemia. I didn't remember ever meeting the boy, who died when I was barely three.

I was overcome with shock as I read the contents of the letter. I quickly folded up the piece of paper and put it back where I had found it.

The next day, my curiosity overcame me again. Making sure my mom was out of the room, I got out the piece of yellow paper and read it again. It said:

June 3, 1987

*I saw grief on my son's face today. He is eight years old. His friend died from leukemia. I've seen hurt, anger and bewilderment on my son's face, but never before have I seen grief on the face of one so young. I wonder what he is thinking. I told him that his friend had become an angel. Even though I had tried to avoid the word "died," he immediately realized what I meant. I'll never forget his look. Somehow I didn't expect such an adult expression of an-*

guish. My angel story could not remove the pain of the passing of his friend. We knew for several months the bone marrow transplants had failed and that my son's friend was on limited time. And yet when the call came, I felt shocked. I had just seen him a couple of weeks before and he looked so good. How could God let life rob us of him so soon?

I keep thinking of his mother's pain. Her son died in her arms on the way to the hospital. Where did he go? How will she survive the loss? The pain must be so great. I see her grasping, trying to find her son. As a mother, it pains me to think of her great agony. There can be no experience worse than the loss of one's child.

For all of us, things will now be different. Next year, in the third grade, there won't be a seat waiting for my son's friend to come back. Our parish won't be praying anymore for that miracle. And his mother will be forever grasping, trying to find her son.

I cried a little, thinking about what my brother had to go through at such a young age. A least he had my mom, dad, sister and a little baby — me — to love him and help him through it.

My mom actually did have more feelings than I thought. Maybe my small problems of needing to have a certain CD, of buying a swimsuit, the need to impress some guy or an invisible zit weren't as important as I thought.

I can't say that, after reading the letter, all of those things still don't cross my mind, but I have a new respect for my mom. I don't ask her for things *as much*, and I don't yell and

cry *as much* when she says, "No."

What did change was that I can tell her more about my own feelings, because now I feel that she will understand. I'm glad I found out early enough, before I grew up and left home. I have my mom to talk to, when I need to.

I don't know what would have happened if I had never read that letter. I don't think I want to know. I'm just glad that I did.

*Lauren Thorgjornsen, fourteen*

## Hard Work Pays off

*The road to happiness lies in two simple principles: find out what it is that interests you and that you can do well, and when you find it, put your whole soul into it—every bit of energy and ambition and natural ability you have.*

John D. Rockefeller ■

As a young boy, I grew up with my eight siblings in a tin-roofed shack in Summerfield, Louisiana. I didn't see my circumstance as an obstacle, even though we didn't even have a real toilet in the house. I saw my life more as a card that had been dealt to me and I tried to make the most of it.

I was the youngest of five boys and also had four sisters who had to pull together and take care of each other. Dad wasn't around, so I never knew him well. He committed suicide when I was three years old, leaving Mom with the job of raising and providing for nine kids. She worked at a sawmill running a forklift for fifty dollars a week and had another job at a poultry plant. She was a very hard worker, and in order to make ends meet, she hardly ever rested.

My mom believed in doing all she could do to take care of her responsibilities, so no matter what, she never asked for a handout. You can imagine; we kids didn't get what we wanted, but we always got the things we needed. With my mom as my example, I learned that hard work is the best way to get what you want.

While growing up, I was surrounded with temptations to do negative things like drugs, alcohol and all that. I chose not to go there. Even as a little boy, I knew I was going to be successful. Some people take that to be cocky or conceited, but I wasn't going to let anybody tell me that I couldn't do whatever I set out to do.

Of course, I dreamed about what I wanted to be when I grew up. At first, I wanted be a state trooper, then I wanted to be in the Special Forces. After a while, I decided that I wanted to drive eighteen-wheelers. There was even a period of time that I wanted to be in construction. I wanted to play football in high school; in fact, I still do. But regardless of what I chose, I wanted to make my brothers, sisters and mom proud of me — not only by being successful in what I chose to do, but also as a person who could be looked up to for the right reasons.

Surprising as it might seem, basketball wasn't in my plans. One day, my mom cut a rim off an old water barrel and then held it up for me to throw an old rubber ball through. By junior high, I started playing basketball on a team. I loved to compete. There was a positive high I got by going out and playing against other people and working hard to win. For me, it paid off. I just let my success in basketball take its course but I always put the effort in, every day.

No matter what I've done, some people wait for my down-

fall, saying, "Karl Malone can't do it." Instead of letting people like that get to me, they are actually my motivation and I continue to prove them wrong every single day. I try to do the best job I can in a positive way on and off the court. I realize that no matter what I'm dealing with, there's somebody else out there who has it a little bit worse off. I've been there. And I know that without continued hard work, I could be there again.

I am grateful for the life I've enjoyed as a basketball star. But when I see these shirts that say "Basketball is life," I think *Yeah, right!* It is not life. It can be exciting. But the important thing about basketball is that it gives me a way to do good things for others as I move through this journey called life.

Success is really about choosing right from wrong, making a positive contribution to the world around you and valuing the things that are really important—like family and friends.

While everyone else was looking to popular athletes, actors and musicians as positive role models, my mom was my inspiration, and she continues to be all these years later. She taught me that hard work never killed anybody. My mom is my hero. She, my family and friends bring me more joy than anything else in life does.

At the end of my life, I don't want to be remembered as the kind of person who just sat on his rear end and said, "I've made it." I don't ever want to have to say that I didn't give it everything that I've got. Sure there are days that I don't feel like working hard ... but I do it anyway, 'cause that's who I am.

*Karl Malone*

# 7

# OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

*Lost in dark depression*

*Not knowing where to turn  
I opened the windows to my soul  
To see what I could learn  
I swept up the depression  
Scrubbed the sadness and the hurt  
I put it all in trash bags  
And set them by the curb  
I found stashed in a corner  
Tucked high upon a shelf  
A treasure chest of knowledge  
That I could love myself  
And wherever my future takes me  
I know that I will win  
Because I opened the windows to my soul  
And let the light shine in.*

*Hope Saxton*

## Annie Wiggle-Do

*To live with fear and not be afraid is the final test of maturity.*

Edward Weeks

"Look who's here to see you, Brenda," the nurse said. She led a tired-looking woman to the girl's bedside.

Brenda huddled on her side, facing the wall. When her mother touched her shoulder, she pulled her head closer to her chest, as if making her body smaller would help her disappear altogether.

The nurse patted the mother's shoulder.

"Brenda's still not talking to us," she said in a low voice.

Brenda's mother bit her lip to keep from crying. She remembered exactly how bubbly and happy Brenda had been before the car accident that led to the amputation of her leg. She'd been one of the most popular girls in her sixth-grade class.

When Brenda first awakened from her surgery, she had raged at her mother. *Why had this happened?* Now, she felt like a freak. No one would ever want to be her friend. She

would never date, never have a boyfriend. Then, Brenda had just stopped talking.

"I wish I could bring her friends to visit her," said Brenda's mother. "It's just too long a bus trip, though, about three hours each way."

The nurse smiled. "Don't worry. We have a plan."

Shortly after Brenda's mother left, two nurses wheeled in a stretcher.

"Moving day, Brenda!" one said cheerily. "We need this bed for someone who's really sick. We've picked out the best roommate in the hospital for you."

Before Brenda could protest, the nurses had rolled her onto the stretcher and whisked her down the hall. The room was awash with light, posters and music.

"Here's your new roomie, Annie Wiggle-Do," one nurse told a dark-haired teenager in the other bed. "She's just beginning to get better, so please don't kill her with your corny jokes."

Fourteen-year-old Annie grinned. As soon as the nurses left, she hopped out of her bed and sat on the end of Brenda's.

"I lost my leg from bone cancer," she announced. "What happened to yours?"

Brenda was so astounded she couldn't even form a word.

"You're lucky," Annie continued. "You've still got your knee. They had to take mine, hip and all, see?"

But Brenda's eyes had already found the raw scar and empty hip socket. Her gaze seemed frozen, like a magnet held it there.

Annie scooted back to her bed. "I'd like to socialize, but my boyfriend's due any time now, so I have to get ready."

As Brenda watched transfixed, Annie reached up and took

of her hair! Her head was completely bald.

Annie giggled. "Oh, I forgot to warn you, the stuff they gave me to kill the cancer also killed my hair. But check this out! My parents, my grandma, my boyfriend and some kids from school all brought me wigs!"

From her bedside stand, Annie removed a tangle of wigs. Brown wigs and blond wigs, short-haired and long-haired wigs, curly wigs and straight wigs.

"That's when I thought up 'Annie Wiggle-Do,'" Annie said. "Get it? 'Any wig will do. 'Annie Wiggle-Do?'"

Laughing at her own joke, Annie chose a curly blond wig and arranged it on her head. She just managed to dab on some pink lip-gloss and powder before a group of boisterous teens burst into the room. Annie introduced Brenda to them all. Her boyfriend, Donald, winked at Brenda and asked her to keep Annie out of trouble.

Before long, Brenda began chatting with Annie and her friends. They didn't make her feel like a freak at all! One girl even shared with Brenda that her cousin wore an artificial leg, played basketball and rode a motorcycle. By the time the nurses shooed all the visitors from the room, Brenda felt more like the old Brenda.

The girls talked into the night. Annie shared her dream of becoming a comedy writer. Brenda told Annie about her secret desire to act in live theater.

"Ladies!"

A night nurse came in and shined her flashlight on Annie and Brenda. "It's after midnight," the nurse scolded. "What do you have to say for yourselves?"

"Nothing, your honor," Annie said. "We don't have a leg to stand on!"

They all laughed, but Brenda laughed hardest of all.

As the nurse's footsteps faded down the hallway, Brenda snuggled under her blanket. "Night, Annie Wiggle-Do," she whispered. "I can hardly wait 'til morning."

*Kathleen M. Muldoon*

## Two Percent Is Enough

From the day I was born, I was a sickly, weak child who never had as much energy as a child my age should. When I turned four, everything seemed to go wrong. I had asthma and for the most part I was in constant pain. Every day, I had a nagging side pain that seemed to never go away and I was in and out of doctors' offices many times, but they could never figure out what was wrong. "Simply growing pains," they told my parents.

One night, I had a fever, high blood pressure, nonstop vomiting and my feet were purple. My parents rushed me to the emergency room, where they were told that I needed my appendix taken out. I lay there that night, getting worse by the minute. Finally, purple feet became numb and my stomach was empty of everything. My parents lost control of their emotions. The next morning, my urine was brown. At that point, the doctors knew it was more than my appendix.

The next day, I was taken by ambulance to Children's Hospital under the care of Dr. Kohen, a kidney specialist. I was diagnosed with a rare form of kidney disease called glumerulonephritis. After two weeks of treatment, I was still not responding. My kidneys were only functioning 2 percent of the time and if something wasn't done, I would die.

My parents were faced with choices they never thought

they would have to make: steroids, dialysis or a transplant. They were told that their only daughter was dying and without vast improvement would be put on a waiting list for a kidney transplant.

That night, my dad sat down by my bed and told me that I was going to have to fight harder than I had ever fought before. All of a sudden, I reached up and—mustering all the energy I had—I punched him in the nose! He knew then that I was not going to give up without a fight.

The next morning I was evaluated for a transplant. I was put on a steroid. Within a couple of days, I started showing steady signs of improvement, but my parents were told, "Krissy will never have as much energy as a normal kid, even if she pulls through."

Within four days I was strong enough to return home. For the next couple of months, I was under constant supervision. As a four-year-old little girl, I was taking fourteen pills a day and having my blood taken every other day. Gradually, I was taken off of the medicine and my doctors' visits grew further apart. But still, I was given no chance of a full recovery.

Well, ten years later, I can proudly say, "Look at me now!" I am fourteen years old, I play four sports, I am a member of the National Junior Honor Society at my school, vice president of Student Council, have a 3.5 grade point average, and I am a living miracle to my doctors, family and friends. I thank God every day for giving me my life. Even if you are only given a 2 percent chance of survival, that's all you really need.

*Krissy Creager, fourteen*

## The First Day of Middle School

*The transition into middle school will be the hardest change kids experience during their school years ... Compared to this, the first day of high school is a piece of cake.*

Allan Mucerino, Principal, Ensign Intermediate School

My stomach was tied in knots, and I could feel the sweat soaking through my T-shirt. My hands were clammy as I spun the face of my combination lock. I tried and tried to remember the numbers, and every time I thought I had it, the lock wouldn't open. Around and around went the numbers, left, right, right, left ... *which way was it supposed to go?* I couldn't make it work. I gave up and started to run down the hallway. As I ran, the hall seemed to get longer and longer ... The door I was trying to reach was farther away than when I had started. I began to sweat even worse, then I could feel the tears forming. I was late, late, late for my first class on my first day of middle school. As I ran, people were watching me and they were laughing ... laughing ... laughing... then the bell rang! In my dream, it was the school

bell. But as I sat up in bed, I realized that it was my alarm clock jarring me awake. I was having the dream again. I started having the dream around the end of sixth grade, and as the start of seventh grade drew closer, the more I had the dream. This time the dream was even more real, because today *was* the morning of the first day of seventh grade.

In my heart, I knew I would never make it. Everything was too different. School, friends—even my own body.

I was used to walking to school, and now I had to walk six blocks to the bus stop so that I could take the bus to and from school. I hated buses. They made me carsick from the jiggling and the smell of the fuel.

I had to get up for school earlier than in the past, partly because of having to be bussed to school and partly because I had to take better care of myself now that I was in my pre-teen years. My mom told me that I would have to shower every morning since my hormones were kicking in—that's why I perspired so easily.

I was totally uncomfortable with my body. My feet didn't want to respond to my own directions, and I tripped a lot. I constantly had a sprained ankle, wet armpits and things stuck in my braces. I felt awkward, smelly, insecure and like I had bad breath on a full-time basis.

In middle school, I would have to learn the rules and personalities of six different teachers instead of just one. There would be different kids in all my classes, kids I didn't even know. I had never made friends very easily, and now I would have to start all over again.

I would have to run to my locker between classes, remember my combination, open it, put in the books from the last class and take out different books ... and make it to the next class all within *five minutes!*

I was also scared because of some stories I had heard about the first day of middle school, like being canned by the eighth-graders. That's when a bunch of eighth-graders pick you up and put you in a trash can. I had also heard that when eighth-grade girls catch a new seventh-grader in the girls' bathroom alone, they smear her with lipstick. Neither one of these first-day activities sounded like something I wanted to take part in.

No one had ever told me that growing up was going to be so hard, so scary, so unwelcome, so ... unexpected. I was the oldest kid in my family — in fact, in my entire neighborhood—and no one had been there before me, to help lead me through the challenges of middle school.

I was on my own.

The first day of school was *almost* everything I feared. I *didn't* remember my combination. I wrote the combination on my hand, but my hand was so sweaty it came off. I *was* late to every class. I didn't have enough time to finish my lunch; I had just sat down to eat when the bell rang to go back to class. I almost choked on my peanut butter and banana sandwich as I ran down the dreaded hallway. The classrooms and the teachers were a blur. I wasn't sure what teacher went with which subject and they had all assigned homework ... on the very first day of school! I couldn't believe it.

But the first day wasn't like my dream in another way. In my dream, all of the other kids had it together and I was the only one who was the nerd. In real life, I wasn't the only one who was late for classes. Everyone else was late, too. No one could remember their combination either, except Ted Milliken, the kid who carried a briefcase to school. After most of the kids realized that everyone else was going through the

same thing they were going through, we all started cracking up. We were bumping into each other in our rush to get to the next class, and books were flying everywhere. No one got canned or smeared—at least no one I knew. I still didn't go into the girls' bathroom alone, just in case. Yeah, there was laughter in the hallway, but most of it was the laughter of kids sharing a common experience: complete hysteria!

As the weeks went by, it became easier and easier. Pretty soon I could twirl my combination without even looking at it. I hung posters in my locker, and finally felt like I was at home. I learned all of my teachers' names and decided who I liked the best. Friendships from elementary school were renewed and made stronger, and new friends were made. I learned how to change into a gym suit in front of other girls. It never felt comfortable, but I did it—just like everyone else did. I don't think any of us felt very comfortable.

I still didn't like the bus; it did make me carsick. I even threw up on the bus once. (At least it was on the way home, not on the way to school.) I went to dances and parties, and I started to wonder what it would feel like to be kissed by a boy. The school had track tryouts, and I made the team and learned how to jump the low hurdles. I got pretty good at it, too. First semester turned into second, and then third. Before I knew it, eighth grade was just around the corner. I had made it through. Next year, on the first day of school, I would be watching the new seventh graders sweating it out just like I did—just like everyone does. I decided that I would feel sorry for them ... but only for the FIRST day of seventh grade. After that, it's a breeze.

*Patty Hansen*

## Perfect, I'm Not

"Owwww!" Robert yelled, backing away from me. "That hurt!"

"What do you mean? I just hit you with my jacket!" I said, laughing. Robert was the cutest boy in class, and I had a major crush on him. I hadn't meant to hurt him; I wanted him to like me. Besides, it was just a lightweight jacket.

But Robert didn't act like someone who had been hit with a lightweight jacket. He was crying and holding his left shoulder.

"What's going on?" our sixth-grade teacher, Mr. Mobley, asked.

"My shoulder... it hurts!" Robert groaned.

The next thing I knew, Robert was heading to the nurse's office. And I, bewildered, was marching back from recess and into our classroom with the other kids.

We started our spelling lesson, and I tried to pay attention as Mr. Mobley read the words for our weekly practice test.

Then someone knocked on your classroom door. When Mr. Mobley opened the door, a student volunteer from the office handed him a note. Every pair of eyes was riveted on Mr. Mobley. A note from the office usually signaled big trouble for somebody. This time, the somebody was me. Mr. Mobley looked up from the note and said, "Julie, Mr. Sinclair

wants to see you in his office right away. He says you should take your belongings with you."

*Oh, no! I was being sent to the principal's office. What would my parents say?* With all eyes now turned in my direction, I dragged myself over to the coat hooks and grabbed the offending jacket. Embarrassment floated around me like a dirty cloud of dust.

*How could a stupid jacket hurt anybody?* I wondered as the door clicked shut behind me. I slid my arms through the jacket sleeves and slipped my hands into its pockets. *Huh?* My right hand closed over a hard, round object. I pulled it out. I had forgotten that my brand-new Duncan Imperial yo-yo was in my pocket. I felt my legs weaken. So I had hurt Robert not with my jacket, but with my yo-yo. As I crossed the courtyard to the principal's office, I prayed, *Please don't let Robert be hurt too badly. And please don't let Mr. Sinclair call my mom.*

When I reached the office, the school secretary ushered me in to see the principal without making me wait—not exactly a good sign.

"What happened, Julie?" Mr. Sinclair asked. He came out from behind his big wooden desk and sat on a chair next to me.

"We were goofing around... and ... I hit Robert on his shoulder with my jacket. I ... um ... I guess I had this in my pocket." I opened my palm to show him the shiny red yo-yo I'd bought with my allowance. "I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. I was only teasing. I didn't mean to hurt him." Little snorting sounds were coming out of my nose now, and my shoulders were heaving with barely suppressed sobs.

"I know you well enough to believe you. But Robert has a knot on his shoulder that's about the size of your yo-yo. His

mother is very upset. She's taken him to the doctor."

My head hung so low, it nearly touched my knees. More than anything, I wanted to melt into a puddle and trickle away under the door.

"I'm sure you didn't mean to hurt anyone," Mr. Sinclair went on. "But because Robert was injured, I have to send you home for the rest of the day. Please wait in the outer office until your mother comes to pick you up."

My eyes widened. *Now I'm going to get it!* I thought.

I had plenty of time to think while I waited for my mother. I was always trying to be the "perfect student." Straight A's and praise from my teachers were rewarded with more praise and affection at home from my parents. *What will happen now?* I wondered. I had never been in trouble at school before.

Ten hopelessly long minutes later, my mother opened the door to the office. Her face looked serious. "Come on," she said. "You can tell me about it in the car."

During our short ride home, I told her the whole story. I'd been teasing Robert because I had a crush on him. I hadn't meant to hurt him. We pulled into our driveway. "I'm s-s-sorry, Mom," I said. My body tensed, ready for the punishment I knew I deserved.

Mom leaned toward me, and I sucked in my breath, waiting to see what would happen. *Would she yell? Would she slap me?* I really didn't know what to expect.

My mother put one arm behind me and reached across in front of me with the other. Then she wrapped me tightly in a hug.

"I never told any of you kids this," she said, "but I did something even worse when I was in elementary school. I bit a boy on the arm—on purpose. I got called to the principal's

office, too." *What? My mother, who never did anything wrong, had bitten a boy at school?* The thought was too funny. I caught her eye. "I guess we're just a couple of trouble-makers, aren't we, Honey?" Mom said with a smile.

"I guess so," I said. In spite of the tears streaming down my face, I started to laugh. Pretty soon, Mom was laughing, too.

The next day, Robert was back at school, recovered except for a little tenderness. As soon as I saw him, I apologized, and our lives went back to normal.

But something important had changed. I had learned that life goes on, even when you make a mistake, and that a child can grow up to become a wise adult even after doing something foolish or hurtful. And to my great surprise and relief, I learned that I didn't have to be perfect to be loved.

*Julia Wasson Render*

## Rediscovery

*Believing in our hearts that who we are is enough is the key to a more satisfying and balanced life.*

Ellen Sue Stern

Seven. The age of ballet lessons and Barbie dolls, of learning to add and subtract simple numbers; the time when the family dog is your closest companion. Seven. The age of innocence.

I was a typical-looking child. I had long, straight brown hair that fell past my shoulders. My almond-shaped hazel eyes were always full of adventure and curiosity. And I had a smile that could brighten a bleak winter day.

I was a happy child with a loving family, and many friends, who loved to perform skits on home videos. I was a leader in school, not a follower. My best trait was my personality. I had imagination. But what made me special was not seen from the outside; I had a special love for life.

At age twelve, my life had a huge breakdown. It was then that I developed obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). OCD is a disorder that is the result of a chemical imbalance in the

brain. People with OCD don't think the same way as people with chemically balanced brains. People with OCD do rituals. I started to wash my hands ten times an hour to avoid germs, and I constantly checked my kitchen oven to make sure that it was off. This way of life for me continued for four agonizing years, and by then, my OCD had led to depression. I was no longer the happy little girl I had been.

In the tenth grade I finally confessed to my mother that I was suffering from depression along with my OCD. I couldn't take the emotional pain anymore. I needed help if I wanted to continue living.

My mom took me to a doctor the same week. I started taking medicine that would hopefully cure my OCD and depression. Over the course of a few months, the medicine did help the OCD. I stopped doing rituals. I no longer took four showers a day to avoid germs. But one thing didn't change; I still was overwhelmed with depression. I still was constantly sad and I started to believe that my life no longer mattered.

One autumn evening two years ago, I hit rock bottom. I thought that my life no longer had meaning, because I no longer brought joy to other people like I did when I was little. I decided suicide was the only solution to my depression problem, so I wrote a suicide note to all my friends and family. In the note I expressed that I was sorry for deciding to leave them, but that I thought it was for the best. As I was folding the note, my eyes fell on a photograph. It was a picture of an adorable little girl with natural blond highlights in her brown hair from spending so much time in the sun. She was wearing her red soccer uniform and held a biking helmet in her small hands. She had a carefree smile on her face that showed she was full of life.

It took me a few minutes to realize who the girl in the

photo was. The photo had been taken one weekend at my uncle's house when I was seven years old. I almost couldn't believe that smiling child was me! I felt a chill go down my spine. It was like my younger self had sent me a message. Right then and there I knew I couldn't kill myself. Once I had been a strong little girl, and I had to become strong like that again.

I tore up my suicide note and vowed that I would not rely only on my medicine to help my depression. I would have to fight the depression with my mind, too. I could make myself happy again.

It has been two years since I "rediscovered" myself. I am OCD- and depression-free. I still take medicine to keep my disorder at bay, but the real reason I am healed is because I took action and refused to let depression ruin my life. I learned a lifelong lesson: Never give up. Life is good. Everyone has challenges in life, but everyone can survive. I am living proof of that. Also, it is important to keep smiling, because in the end, everything will work out.

Of course my life can still be a struggle, but I pull through with a smile on my face. I know I can't give up on life. I am here for a reason. Sometimes, I think it was strange that I had to look to who I was as a little girl in order to regain faith in myself at age eighteen. But I think everyone can look back on their early years and see that it was then that they knew how to live in peace and happiness.

I have plans for myself now. Once I graduate from high school this spring, I plan on going to college to major in journalism. I want to be a writer someday. And I am prepared for whatever challenges life may bring. I have a role model to look up to for strength, and who is guiding me through life. My hero is a seven-year-old girl, smiling back at me from a

photo on my desk.

*Raegan Baker*

[EDITORS' NOTE: *For more information regarding obsessive compulsive disorder, log on to [www.ocdresource.com](http://www.ocdresource.com).* ]

## A Little Coaching

*The two important things I did learn were that you are as powerful and strong as you allow yourself to be, and that the most difficult part of any endeavor is taking the first step, making the first decision.*

Robyn Davidson

For me, it was normal to feel lost at the inter-camp track and swim meet. Four camps of kids were ready to lead their teams to a blue ribbon and win the day. Not me. I was too little to be a leader and too skinny to be an athlete. I knew this by the time I was twelve, because my camp counselors and the other kids reminded me of it every chance they got. So when our camp needed a fourth runner in the two-mile race around the lake, I knew I was no one's first choice.

I hid in the shade of a maple tree as they called the names of the runners. My body tensed as I heard a counselor call, "Noah! Where's Noah! He's in this race!"

It was Bronto. His name was really Alan Bronstein, but everyone called him Bronto. He spotted me under the tree and lifted me up by my elbows. It was more than just his

name that qualified him for his "Brontoism."

"Noah, we need a twelve-year-old who hasn't been in other events to run the two-mile."

"But you've got three guys."

"We need four. You're in."

He gave me a push toward the starting line. Trying to save myself from the humiliation of taking last place as four camps watched, I pleaded with him.

"But I don't know the way around the lake!"

"You're in. Just follow Craig," Bronto smiled.

Craig was my friend and the fastest runner in our camp. And then Bronto said, "When you make it to the last stretch on the field, just throw your head back and run."

At the starting line, I stood next to Craig and trembled.

"On your mark ...get set..." The gun cracked and sixteen of us took off. Kicking up dust on the dirt road leading to the lakeshore path, I was determined not to get lost. I stayed close on Craig's heels. A little too close for Craig, I guess, because he shouted at me, "Back off!"

I did. Two guys passed me but I kept my eye on Craig.

It was tiring. The distance was widening between Craig and me. We made the turn from the dusty road onto the muddy, wooded trail that would around the lake back to the field. Through the trees I saw Craig slip and fall out of sight. A runner from another camp passed him.

In a moment, he was up again and running. He yelled to me, "Watch the roots. They're slimy!" Struggling to keep my legs moving, I looked down and saw the tree root stripped of its bark. I puffed over it. Fifty yards later I was out of breath, but I turned up the hill into the sunlight again, which shone on the open field. My energy was spent. I scrambled up, ready to see the rest of the pack crossing the finish line

and was about to drop to my knees and quit, when I saw not the fifteen guys that I thought would be in front of me, but three. The crowd was roaring, but I could hear Bronto over the rest of them, yelling, "Run!"

I threw my head back and told my legs to go. I never looked ahead and I never looked back for those last hundred yards. I felt free. Nobody was telling me what I was, or what I wasn't. My legs were running a race against my brain and I was winning.

I didn't know when I crossed the finish line. Bronto caught me and I collapsed—winded, but happy that I finished. Then I realized Bronto wasn't just holding me up. He was hugging me!

"You flew! You flew, man! Second! You passed two guys!"

There was a crowd of kids around me patting me on the back, giving me high-fives. I had come in second. Craig had finished first ... by a step, they said.

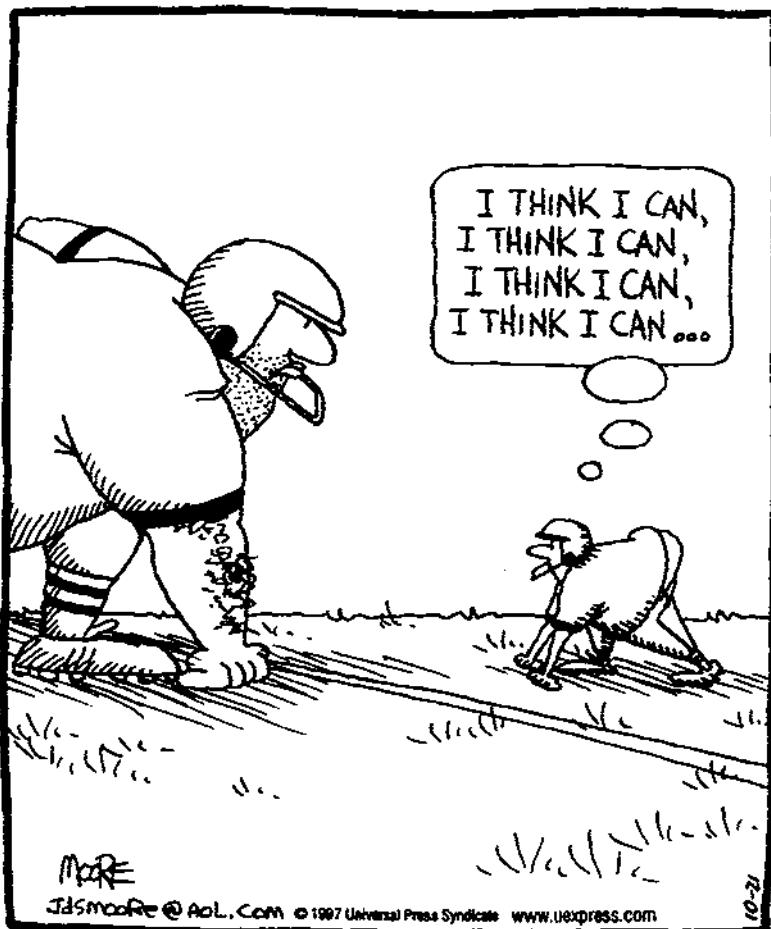
They gave me a red second-place ribbon. Even with that and all the high-fives and cheers of the day, the best prize that I walked away with was my confidence. That year I discovered I could do a lot of things if I put my energy into them.

I never got to say thanks to Bronto right after the race. But during the next events, I spotted him over at the lake. He was coaching a reluctant kid who was going to swim in the freestyle relay. I ran over to cheer him on. With Bronto coaching, I had no doubt that this was going to be another good race.

*Noah Edelson*

## IN THE BLEACHERS

By Steve Moore



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## The Last Runner

The annual marathon in my town usually occurs during a heat wave. My job was to follow behind the runners in an ambulance in case any of them needed medical attention. The driver and I were in an air-conditioned ambulance behind approximately one hundred athletes waiting to hear the sharp crack of the starting gun.

"We're supposed to stay behind the last runner, so take it slowly," I said to the driver, Doug, as we began to creep forward.

"Let's just hope the last runner is fast!" He laughed.

As they began to pace themselves, the front runners started to disappear. It was then that my eyes were drawn to the woman in blue silk running shorts and a baggy white T-shirt.

"Doug, look!"

We knew we were already watching our "last runner." Her feet were turned in, yet her left knee was turned out. Her legs were so crippled and bent that it seemed impossible for her to be able to walk, let alone run a marathon.

Doug and I watched in silence as she slowly moved forward. We didn't say a thing. We would move forward a little bit, then stop and wait for her to gain some distance. Then we'd slowly move forward a little bit more.

As I watched her struggle to put one foot in front of the other, I found myself breathing for her and urging her forward. I wanted her to stop, and at the same time, I prayed that she wouldn't.

Finally, she was the only runner left in sight. Tears streamed down my face as I sat on the edge of my seat and watched with awe, amazement and even reverence as she pushed forward with sheer determination through the last miles.

When the finish line came into sight, trash lay everywhere and the cheering crowds had long gone home. Yet, standing straight and ever so proud waited a lone man. He was holding one end of a ribbon of crepe paper tied to a post. She slowly crossed through, leaving both ends of the paper fluttering behind her.

I do not know this woman's name, but that day she became a part of my life—a part I often depend on. For her, it wasn't about beating the other runners or winning a trophy, it was about finishing what she had set out to do, no matter what. When I think things are too difficult or too time-consuming, or I get those "I-just-can't-do-its," I think of the last runner. Then I realize how easy the task before me really is.

*Lisa Beach*

## The Power of the Pen

*Woman must not accept; she must challenge. She must not be awed by that which has been built up around her; she must reverence that woman in her which struggles for expression.*

Margaret Sanger

The very first speech I ever had to write changed my life more than I could ever have imagined. I was a third-grader when I chose Susan B. Anthony to be the topic.

When I got the assignment, I went to the library and began researching the Women's Fight for the Right to Vote. I learned that Susan B. Anthony led the fight to give women a say in our society. She overcame a lot of obstacles in order to do that. I never really thought about a time when women had no voting rights and that their opinions didn't count.

It was sad that Susan fought so hard for women's rights and never got to vote. She died fourteen years before the passage of the 19th Amendment that gave women the right to vote. But she knew that her goal would be achieved. She said that "failure is impossible," and she was right.

About a week after giving my school speech, my mom read a newspaper article about "The Group Portrait Monument," a statue honoring Susan B. Anthony and other early women's rights leaders. The problem was that few people ever got to see the statue. It was dedicated in the U. S. Capitol Rotunda in 1921, but within twenty-four hours it was taken down to the Capitol basement and stored where it had remained for nearly eighty years.

When I read that article, I was furious! This statue belonged in a place of honor. I felt that it should be in the Rotunda, along with the statues of Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr. and George Washington. Do you know that there are *no* statues of women there?

The article asked for donations because it would take \$74,000 to move the thirteen-ton statue out of the basement. I decided to write a letter with a self-addressed envelope asking my relatives and friends to send a Susan B. Anthony coin or a \$1 bill to me to contribute to the Women's Suffrage Statue Campaign. I really wanted to help get that statue moved out of the basement.

Every day I ran to the mailbox after school. Every night, after my homework, I wrote more letters at the kitchen table. Pretty soon the whole family got involved in the project. My seven-year-old brother, David, licked stamps and envelopes. My mother and grandmother found addresses for people I wanted to contact and my dad drove me around and gave me tons of encouragement when I spoke to big groups. I passed around a piggy bank for donations at the end of each speech. I sent more than \$500 to the fund in the first three months. Pretty soon, I had raised \$2,000. I began visualizing that statue up in the Rotunda next to the greatest Americans in history.

I was discouraged when I heard that four other times, in 1928, 1932, 1950 and 1995, people had tried to get the statue out of the basement and had failed. I learned that the House and Senate would have to vote on relocating the statue. More determined than before, I spent three weeks writing to every representative and senator in the United States, urging them to vote yes on the bill to relocate the statue. This was not about politics. It was about respect and responsibility. Susan B. Anthony fought for my rights, and now I was fighting for hers!

The Senate unanimously voted to restore the statue to the Rotunda, but Newt Gingrich, the Speaker of the House, didn't want to use any tax money to pay for the cost of relocating the statue. Even if we raised enough money, the statue couldn't be relocated without a unanimous vote in the House.

There was only one thing to do ... write more letters! I wrote a letter to Mr. Gingrich *every other week for an entire year!* Boy, did that try my patience! I sent about twenty-five letters to him before I got a reply. He finally wrote a letter saying that a committee would study the issue.

At that point, I figured that I had better write to every member of the House again. By now I had mailed more than 2,000 letters!

My grandmother helped with postage costs by getting her friends and church groups to donate rolls of stamps to help me with the battle. I got writer's cramp from writing letters and discovered that it takes a lot of work to bring about change. But if you believe in something, it's worth the hard work.

My biggest boost came when I was interviewed on radio and TV shows. Then, a bunch of newspaper and magazine

articles came out telling thousands more people about what I was trying to do. As a result of all that attention, I was invited to speak at a fund-raising event for the Woman's Suffrage Statue Campaign in Washington, D. C., in July of 1996. I had never flown in an airplane. My whole family got to go and my brother had a great time. He thought that was a pretty good reward for licking all those stamps!

But the best part was getting to see the statue, even if it was in the smelly old basement. I thought it looked really beautiful. I've heard people say that they think that the statue is ugly. To that I say—it was an ugly time! The three women in the statue have their arms pinned in marble because they were trapped by "slavery"!

I spoke from my heart when I talked to all those people and received a standing ovation for my speech!

After I got home, I continued to write letters. I wouldn't give up! It took women seventy-two years to win the right to vote, but they didn't give up until they reached their goal ... and neither would I!

On September 27, 1996, House Resolution 216, the bill to get the statue moved, passed unanimously. My mom and I jumped up and down in our living room when we heard the news. We just kept screaming, "We won!"

The statue stayed in the Rotunda for a year and then was moved to another place of honor in Washington, where everyone can see it. It will never go back to that awful basement again!

I've learned a lot from this experience ... mostly about respecting people who fought for rights that too many people take for granted. I've learned to have more patience. If there is a problem, don't say "some else will fix it." You have to do it yourself.

I'll turn eighteen in a few years and will be able to vote in the year 2005. When I vote, I'll silently thank Susan B. Anthony for her fight and for helping me discover the power of the pen.

*Arlys Angelique Endres, thirteen  
As told by Carol Osman Brown*

## Tough, Sturdy and Triumphant

*The mind can have tremendous control of the body; very few ailments can defeat focused energy and a determined spirit.*

Katherine Lambert-Scronce

Tears filled my eyes as my parents told me why my arm had been in so much pain during the past three months.

“You have leukemia,” my dad explained.

I didn’t know much about leukemia, but the words still plunged deep into my heart like knives. My parents told me that I had to go into the hospital to have a metal cylinder called a medi-port put into my body. A medi-port has a line through which the doctors would give me medicine to fight the leukemia cells.

I found out that leukemia is a type of cancer that only one out of ten thousand people get. Bone marrow starts making leukemia cells, which take over good cells. *Why did this have to happen to me?* I wondered.

My whole family went with me to the hospital. My parents told me they’d see me after my surgery. Some doctor hooked

me up and made me put on some funky clothes. Then they rolled me into the operating room.

I was so scared. All of the doctors had on masks. They attached sensors to me and assured me that nothing would go wrong. They put a mask over my face, pressed a button and I fell asleep. When I woke up, the surgery was over. I had to stay in the hospital for four days. My doctor told my parents I would have to come to the hospital every other week to stay for four days so that I could get treatments. I had to do this for one entire year—twelve months!

When we reached home, I couldn't believe how much I had missed it. People brought over presents, balloons, cards and food. My teacher came over and gave me a stack of letters from my classmates. I read them over and over. All of them had cried, especially my friends. I didn't get to see my friends anymore and felt sick practically every day. But I got tons of letters from them all the time, and they kept me going!

I have survived this last year, but I still have a lower blood count than healthy people. I have only two more years of treatments to go, and from now on, the treatments won't be so heavy.

I have been overwhelmed with support and prayer. My mom told the Make-A-Wish Foundation how much I loved castles, and I was granted my wish to see real castles in England and Scotland. My whole family gets to go with me and Make-A-Wish is paying for everything!

I know I didn't get through this by myself. My friends and family have been with me every step of the way. I look back and see how far I've come. I will fight this and triumph.

Even though I'm different than most kids because of the leukemia, I'm as tough as a general leading his men into battle, as sturdy as a wall and as triumphant as a man beating

an army. I have been able to do this thanks to everyone who has helped me through, and especially to someone in a high position. Where there is life, there is hope for even the most hopeless.

*Elijah Shoesmith, thirteen*

[EDITORS' NOTE: At the date of this printing, Elijah is fifteen years old, and is in remission—due in a large part to sheer will and his determination to beat his leukemia. For more information on leukemia, lymphoma and other blood-related cancers, call The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society at 1-800-955-4572 or log on to [www.leukemia-lymphoma.org](http://www.leukemia-lymphoma.org). ]

3

# — 8 — ON CHOICES

*Peer pressure is a thing  
that every child goes through.  
But you have to remember  
that to yourself you must be true.  
Know that there are times to follow  
and there are times to lead.  
Do what you think is right,  
do things at your own speed.  
Don't worry about what others think,  
don't worry about being cool.  
Focus on friendships  
and the grades you get in school.*

*Jaimie Shapiro ,twelve*

## Forever Stay in My Heart

*In loving memory of Cassie L. Sweet*

It was late when I heard the phone ring  
I didn't know then the grief it would bring.

She was killed by one thoughtless mistake  
That a few of her friends decided to make.

I can't understand what they had been thinking  
The driver of the car she was in had been drinking.

All I do now is think about her and cry  
And ask myself again and then again, *why?*

I cherish all the memories that we shared  
And remember how much she loved and she cared.

She is gone now, and yet it's still hard to part  
So that's why she will forever stay in my heart.

*Jillian Eide, sixteen*

[EDITORS' NOTE: For information about underage drinking, drunk driving and other destructive decisions, contact SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) at [www.SADDonline.com](http://www.SADDonline.com). ]

## Two Tickets to the Big Game

*I discovered I always have choices, and sometimes it's only a choice of attitude.*

Judith M. Knowlton

Two tickets. Only two tickets to the big quarterfinals basketball game.

Three pairs of eyes all focused on the tickets in Dad's outstretched hand. Marcus, the oldest, spoke the question running through everyone's mind: "Only two tickets? But, Dad, which of us gets to go with you?"

"Yeah, Daddy, who gets to go?" repeated Caleb, the youngest.

"Dad, can't you get any more tickets?" I asked. I might be the in-between sister, but I was just as eager as my basketball-crazy brothers were for a night out with Dad.

"I'm afraid not," Dad answered. "Mr. Williams only has two season tickets. He was thoughtful enough to offer the tickets to Saturday's game to me when he found out he'd be out of town this weekend."

Dad scratched his head. "Caleb, don't you think you're a

little young to enjoy a professional basketball game ...?"

"Am not! Am not!" Caleb insisted. "I know all the best shooters! I know the team's record! I know ..."

"All right, all right," Dad finally had to agree. He shifted his focus and tried again. "Jill, since you're a girl ..."

Before I could respond, Mom came to my defense. "Don't you dare say 'because you're a girl,'" she said to Dad. "Jill's out there practicing at the hoop with Marcus and all of his friends, and she's better than quite a few of them, too!"

"Okay, okay," Dad held up his hands in a "time-out" signal. "I guess I'll have to figure out a fair way of choosing between the three of you by tomorrow morning. I'll have to decide who deserves it most. Let me sleep on it—okay, guys ... and girls?" he added quickly before Mom and I could correct him.

The next morning, Marcus hurried into the kitchen and plopped down at the breakfast table. "Where's Dad?" he asked as he reached for a box of cereal.

"And 'good morning' to you, too," I responded in between sips of orange juice.

"Sorry, but you can guess what I was dreaming about all last night," Marcus explained. "So—where is he?"

"He and Mom went to pick up some books from the library," Caleb answered, digging his spoon into a mound of cereal.

"And he said we should all get started on our Saturday chores as soon as we finish breakfast," I added.

"Chores! He's got to be kidding," Marcus said as he set down his glass of milk with a thud. "How can we concentrate on chores when the big game is a mere eleven hours away?"

"Parents! They just don't understand!" I agreed, popping

the last piece of English muffin into my mouth.

"I'm going for the morning newspaper," Marcus announced. "There's probably a preview of tonight's game in the sports section."

"Wait for me!" Caleb added, slurping the last of his milk and dashing after his brother.

The back door snapped shut as the two boys trotted down the driveway. I looked at the breakfast table in front of me: tiny puddles of milk, bits of soggy cereal here and there, a small glob of grape jelly melting in the morning sunlight. *Well, I thought to myself as I pushed my chair away from the table, looks like Saturday morning chores start right here.*

A few minutes later, as I was washing off the kitchen countertops, I heard the familiar "thump ... thump ... thump" of the basketball bouncing off of the driveway. I glanced out of the kitchen window and saw Marcus practicing his hook shot while Caleb cheered him on. Frustrated, I knocked on the window three times. When the boys looked up, I meaningfully held up a kitchen sponge and dishtowel.

Marcus casually nodded to me and held up five fingers. Taking his cue from his older brother, Caleb did the same.

*Sure, five more minutes!* I thought to myself. *I'll just bet.* I opened the lower cabinet and tossed an empty muffin package into the almost-full wastebasket. I reached for a twister to tie up the plastic liner bag and carted it out to the garbage container outside the back door.

"He dribbles ... he shoots! If I make this next shot, I get the tickets to tonight's game," Marcus teased as he shot for the hoop. "Hooray! Two points! And I get the ticket!"

"Do not" Caleb shouted.

"You guys, Mom and dad will be back any minute," I reminded them as I lifted the lid on the garbage container and

placed the full plastic bag inside.

"Okay, we're coming in to help," Marcus said, dribbling the basketball around and around Caleb, who tried again and again to steal it. "Just one more minute."

"Yeah, just one more minute," Caleb added as he finally managed to tip the ball out of his brother's grasp.

I shook my head from side to side as I began to replace the lid on the garbage container. Then a flash of white on the inside of the heavy black plastic lid caught my attention. A white envelope ... it must have stuck to the lid by accident. But then I noticed that the envelope was actually taped to the inside of the lid, and someone had written the word "Congratulations!" on the front of the envelope, too.

I lifted the flap on the envelope and pulled out a folded piece of paper. "To the one who deserves to go," the paper read, and inside of it was a ticket to the basketball game!

*I don't believe it, I thought. I'm the one that gets to go! But how did Dad know?*

Then I thought back to Dad's comment last night: "I'll have to decide who deserves it most." I smiled. Leave it to Dad to figure out who the most deserving kid really was.

By now, Marcus and Caleb had worn themselves out. They shuffled toward the back door. "Come on, little brother, we'd better get started on our chores if we want to have a chance at getting that ticket to the game."

I turned in their direction and held up the ticket, the note and the envelope. "It might be a little too late for that," I said with a sly grin.

Marcus and Caleb looked at each other with question marks in their eyes, as Mom and Dad's car pulled into the driveway.

That evening turned out to be as special as I'd imagined;

Two seats at center court, and a dad and his daughter cheering their team to victory. It was a long-remembered lesson in responsibility from a dad who let his kids make their own choices and earn their own rewards.

*J. Styron Madsen*

## Fireplug and Dad

*You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose.*

Dr. Seuss

I used to play football when I was a little kid. Okay, let's face it. I was never really a *little* kid. I was always chunky, hefty, short for my age, pudgy, stout, tubby, round, robust, portly. You get the picture.

In fact, I was so big that I got to play football a whole year ahead of my friends. Our Mighty Mites football league didn't have an age limit, it had a weight requirement. If you were heavy enough, you got to play. I was heavy enough at eight years old.

The only problem was, by the time I turned eleven I was too heavy. You had to weigh a certain amount to start playing, and if you weighed too much they made you stop.

Not playing would have been just fine with me. I would have been happier sitting at home reading a book.

But Dad was one of the team's big sponsors and friends

with the coach, so I figured quitting wasn't an option. I went, day after day, week after week, and year after year ... until I was eleven and weighed more than two hundred pounds. I thought that would be the end of it, once and for all. And, in a way, it was.

To make sure each kid was under the official weight limit every Saturday, the referees lugged doctor's scales around with them to every game. All of the "chunky" kids had the honor of joining the referees before each game to weigh in.

If the scales tipped past two hundred, off went the unlucky player's cleats. Then the helmet and the shoulder pads. Sometimes the jersey and the pants, and even the undershirt and the socks! Coach knew I was heading for trouble the day I had to step out of my underwear just to make weight. So he came up with a bright idea. The very next practice he presented me with a T-shirt made out of a black garbage bag.

"Put it on," he grunted, pointing out the ragged holes for my head and arms. "Start running around the practice field and don't stop until I say so."

I'd wave at him questioningly after every single lap, while my teammates sat on their helmets and talked—in between laughing and pointing at me, that is.

"Keep going, Fireplug," Coach would grunt around the mushy cigar in his mouth. "Fireplug" was the nickname he had given me. Although no one ever explained it to me, I figured it had something to do with me being shaped like a fire hydrant.

Every day at practice, I had to run laps in that stupid garbage bag. I'd hear it crinkling beneath my underarms as I stumbled through the stickers and weeds lap after lap. My short, stocky legs weren't exactly graceful, and often I'd trip or fall. The other players would laugh, but not as loudly as

Coach.

I used to sit in class toward the end of each school day and dream up excuses why I couldn't go to practice. Nothing worked, and so there I'd be, stumbling around the practice field with the sound of my plastic shirt drowning out my ragged breathing.

When the garbage bag T-shirt didn't exactly work wonders, Coach arranged for me to use the sauna at one of the local high-rise condominiums.

I rode my bike there the next Saturday. Coach handed me my garbage bag T-shirt and wedged me into a cedar-lined closet with two benches and a red metal shelf full of glowing hot rocks. He poured water on the rocks to build up the steam, and then shut the door on me with a wicked smile.

Outside the little porthole window, I could see him chomping on glazed donuts and sipping a cup of coffee. My stomach roared. Since it was a game day, I hadn't eaten since dinner the night before. Nor would I be eating again until after the weigh-in, when, as usual, I would be too weak to do anything much but sit there and pant until Coach shoved me full of candy bars from the concession stand so I could play ball again.

I sat there swimming in sweat and wondering how long this could go on. I'd been trying my best to lose weight ever since I was ten years old. I brought a bag lunch to school and skipped breakfast, but nothing seemed to work. I tried to be strong, tried to be brave, but there I still was ... teetering on the brink of two hundred pounds and hoping to make it through yet another weigh-in.

Periodically, Coach would pop his bullet-shaped head into the steamy room to see if I was still alive.

I sat there dripping in sweat and realized something was

very wrong with this picture. It was Saturday morning, and there I was, sitting in a sweatbox while the rest of the team chomped on Frosted Flakes and watched cartoons. They were still in their pajamas, while there I was in a garbage bag sweat suit! Why?

Was I being punished for something? Wasn't the running, sweating, hunger and pain enough? What more did they want? I suddenly realized that I'd been knocking myself out for something I didn't even want to do in the first place! It was then that I decided that I didn't have to do it anymore.

My heart fluttered and my stomach flip-floped, but I finally stood up on wobbly legs and walked out of the sauna. At the time, it didn't exactly seem brave. It just seemed right. It made sense. I had finally realized that there was no law in the world that said I had to keep knocking myself out just so Coach would have another strong player and my Dad could have extra bragging rights!

"Did I say you could get out of there?" Coach bellowed when he returned from the pool deck a few minutes later and saw me sipping on a cup of water and enjoying one of his glazed donuts.

I shook my head, but Coach was waiting for an answer. So I told him.

"I quit," I said in a shaky voice that had nothing to do with heat stroke.

"You quit?" He fairly laughed, looming over me. "You can't quit. What would your dad think? Don't you want him to be proud of you anymore?"

But that was just it. If my Dad couldn't be proud of me for just being me, then what was the point? I was a good kid. I stayed out of trouble, made good grades and even made him a Father's Day card every year. Did I have to torture myself,

too?

I shook my head and told Coach it was over. All of it. I wasn't going to starve myself anymore. I wasn't going to make myself try to throw up anymore, or run around the practice filed in a garbage bag dress while the rest of the team pointed and laughed.

That was when he called my dad. But it didn't matter to me anymore. I had finally made up my mind. It was time to be proud of myself for a change, no matter what anyone else thought.

After Coach had explained the situation to my dad, he grunted and handed me the phone. Although my hands were shaking, I was glad I wasn't doing this face-to-face!

"Son," my dad said quietly. "Is what Coach said true?"

"Yes," I whispered into the phone.

"You don't want to play football anymore?" he asked simply.

"I never did," I gasped. Well, if I was going to do this, I was going to do it right.

Dad's laughter surprised me. "Then why did you go through with all of those shenanigans?" he asked "I thought you wanted to be the next big football star!"

I hung up the phone and headed for my bike. Coach just stood there fuming as I pedaled away.

I started carrying myself differently after that. Respecting myself more. I grew a little, shaped up, learned a lot, and eventually, the name Fireplug just seemed to fade with time.

Except for one night, that is. My family and I were waiting for a table in a local restaurant when Coach sauntered in. He greeted my Dad rather coolly and then eyed me with open disdain. "What's the word, Fireplug?" he asked.

Dad looked at me for an instant, and then he finally cor-

rected Coach. "You meant 'Rusty,' right, Coach?"

Coach grumbled something through the mushy cigar in his mouth, but it didn't matter. Our table was ready and Dad kept his hand on my shoulder the whole way there.

And no one ever called me Fireplug again.

*Rusty Fischer*

## Nice Catch!

*When I do things without any explanation, but just with spontaneity... I can be sure that I am right.*

Henri Frederic Amiel

From the moment Kyle heard the loud crack of the Red Sox bat, he was sure the ball was headed over the fence. And he was ready for it. Without ever taking his eyes off the ball, he reached up and pulled it out of the air.

"I caught it!" he yelled to his dad and his grandpa. "And I caught it with my bare hands!"

It was opening day of spring training and they had come out to the ball field to watch the Red Sox play. Kyle's grandma and grandpa lived near Ft. Myers, Florida, where the Boston Red Sox come in late February to prepare for the season.

Later, on the way home to Grandma's house, Kyle kept his head down. He tried to think of a way to convince his parents to stay a few more days.

"Wish we could go back to the ballpark tomorrow," he said. "Maybe I'd catch another ball to put with my Little

League trophies and stuff. And maybe I'd even get some autographs."

"You know that's not possible, Kyle," his dad said. "We're flying out early tomorrow morning."

"I know, I know," Kyle said, rolling the baseball around in his hand. "I just thought you and Mom might decide to stay a few more days. We don't go back to school until Monday, and tomorrow's only Thursday."

"We were lucky to get that flight!" his dad said firmly. "The airlines are booked solid this week."

That night, a huge snowstorm moved into the Northeast. When they arrived at the airport early the next morning, they were told that all flights into Logan Airport in Boston had been cancelled for the day.

On the drive back to his grandparents' house from the airport, it was obvious to Kyle that his dad was upset. It was definitely not a good time to bring up going back to the Red Sox ball field.

But by the time they were back at Grandma and Grandpa's house, Kyle's dad began to joke about the cancelled flight.

"Another day in sunny Florida isn't so bad," he said. "I'm in no hurry to get back to Boston, where my car's probably buried in snow."

"We could go out to the ball field again," Grandpa said. "Unless there's something else you'd rather do."

"The ballpark's fine," Kyle's dad said with a grin. "I'd never go against the wishes of anyone with so much power over the weather."

It was mid-afternoon when another loud crack of the Red Sox bat sent a ball flying over the fence. Again, Kyle reached up and caught the baseball in his bare hands.

As he rubbed his fingers around the ball, a small voice

from behind him called out, "Nice catch!"

Kyle turned around to see a small boy in a wheelchair. Without a moment of hesitation, Kyle handed him the baseball.

"Here," he said. "You can have it. I already got one."

The grin on the boy's face was a mile wide.

"Thanks," he said. "I never held a *real* baseball before."

Kyle's dad and his grandpa looked surprised — very surprised.

But they were no more surprised than Kyle was himself. He couldn't believe what he'd just done. But he wasn't sorry. He could never forget the happy look on the small boy's face. It was worth a million baseballs.

"I'm gonna get some autographs," Kyle said, rushing off to meet the players as they came off the field.

With three Red Sox autographs in hand, Kyle walked back to the parking lot.

"Think the Red Sox will have a good season?" Grandpa asked.

"They looked pretty good today," Kyle said. Kyle's dad tapped him on the shoulder.

"You looked pretty good today yourself, son."

And three avid Red Sox fans left the training grounds, each carrying with him a special feeling of pride. The proudest of all was Kyle.

Doris Canner

## The Gorilla Syndrome

I wouldn't have believed that I could ever be so embarrassed! I was sweating, my heart was pounding like a bass drum in my head and I felt as though the entire classroom could hear it!

Josh, the cute, blonde boy sitting next to me, my secret crush, was looking down at my extremely fuzzy legs! I could feel the heat of his stare. It seemed as though a force field was drawing his dark brown eyes downward to my legs. I swallowed hard and tried desperately to pretend that I was completely enthralled by what the teacher was saying. In reality, she could have been telling me that Martians had invaded the earth, and I would not have reacted. *Oh Lord, please don't let Josh be looking at my hairy legs!*

Time seemed to stand still. The conversation I'd had the previous day with my mother kept whirling through my head like an amusement park ride that wouldn't stop spinning.

"Mom," I said, "Every girl in the seventh grade shaves her legs! I'm the only one who hasn't done it yet! I can't possibly wear a skirt tomorrow unless I shave. I look like some sort of gorilla!"

"Oh, Liz, don't be silly. No one will even notice your legs, I'm telling you. Once you shave your legs, you'll have to shave them forever. Your hair will grow back thicker than

even after you've shaved them, and trust me, shaving is not a lot of fun."

*Oh, why did I listen to her?! She couldn't possibly know how I feel!!*

It seemed an eternity had passed when as last I could feel Josh's eyes moving away from my legs. Inwardly, I breathed a sigh of relief... and then it happened. He said the words that I will never forget as long as I live. "Your mom won't let you shave, huh?"

It was too much. My mouth suddenly felt as though I'd spent forty years in the desert. I couldn't remove my tongue from the roof of my mouth, but somehow I managed a weak smile and shook my head.

He gave me an understanding look of sympathy, but couldn't stop his eyes from, once again, glancing down at my very hairy calves that were now wrapped like giant furry caterpillars around the back legs of my desk.

When Josh looked up, our eyes locked, and the embarrassment I felt nearly immobilized me. Somehow he knew I didn't want to talk about it, and to my great relief, he looked away.

My face felt as hot as a July sun, and I cringed, thinking it had probably turned as red as my hair. My life, as I knew it, was over. My mother had just ruined my life ... the sweetest guy in the world had noticed my woolly legs, and felt *sorry* for me! *Oh my gosh!!! I can't believe this is happening. He feels sorry for me ... how embarrassing! How am I ever going to look at him again? How am I going to make my mother understand what this has just done to me? I won't recover!*

I did recover. Slowly, slowly, my pounding heart began to calm down, and little by little I could once again hear the sounds of the classroom around me. I didn't think it was pos-

sible, but somehow I made it through seventh period and made it home again.

After slamming the front door, I made a beeline for my bedroom and proceeded to throw myself back dramatically onto the bed. With one arm slung across my forehead, I closed my eyes against the image of the expression of sympathy on Josh's face as he was looking at my legs. *Ughhh ... was this some sort of nightmare or did he really ask me if I was allowed to shave?!*

I rolled over onto my stomach, crossed my traitorous legs at the ankles, and wished I had about a pound of rich milk chocolate and two cartons of hot, greasy, French fries.

Instead, I thought hard about what my mom had said about shaving, thought hard about the consequences ... and shaved my legs anyway.

There. I'd done it. My legs were smooth now—except for the half dozen or so cuts. They were shaved though, and I felt extremely pleased with myself.

I did notice, however, that my legs seemed even more pale than before I shaved them, if that was possible. Maybe it was my imagination ... no, they definitely glowed. Great, that was just what I needed, even milkier white skin that showed my spattering of freckles even more. *Oh, well, I thought, at least they are shaved!* I would never have those gorilla legs to look at again.

After pulling on a pair of jeans and a T-shirt, I headed for the kitchen for a long-overdue snack and a phone call to my best friend, Krista.

Although I was exhausted from my ordeal, my sleep that night was restless. I dreamt of Josh and gorillas. He was trying to help me shave their backs and legs. It was absurd, and I was very relieved to wake up the next day. I was also re-

lieved that the weather had turned so cold that wearing a skirt was out of the question. I was able to hide my war wounds with jeans.

I stumbled to my drawer and dug out a stuffed-in pair of jeans. They were only a little wrinkled. As I pulled them on, I noticed something weird. My legs weren't even smooth anymore! I ran my hands down my legs, and then I knew. My mother's words came back to haunt me as I stared at my battered-up, white legs with their newly formed stubble.

Closing my eyes, I sighed and tried to pretend that it wasn't true, but to my dismay, my legs were covered with tiny, black whiskers that were darker than I ever remembered my leg hair being.

I threw myself back on the bed in disgust. *Great, now instead of fur-balls on my legs, I have whiskers that feel as sharp as daggers.*

A week later, I found myself standing in a cluster of giggling girls on one side of the gymnasium at school. It was the school's first dance for the year, and the excitement among my friends and myself was at an all-time high.

Of course, the boys were all on the opposite side of the gym, some trying to look bored, others wrestling around and acting tough. Only a few of the most popular kids were brave enough so far to actually have danced, so much to my dismay, the teacher announced a game where *everyone* would have to be asked to dance.

My heart began to slam in my chest as I realized that I could be left standing until the very last, and I found myself panicking at the humiliation of it all. *I think it's time to go to the bathroom.*

I began making my way through the crowd. Suddenly, a faint scent of spicy cologne filled my nose, as I felt a small

tap on my shoulder. Fully expecting to turn and find that it was my friend Krista who had done it, I nearly fainted when I discovered Josh standing only inches from me.

Still unbelieving, I turned my head from side to side, sure that I'd made a mistake. *Surely Josh didn't tap my shoulder... did he?* I had no more than formed the thought when he chuckled shyly, and asked, "Do you want to dance?"

*Where was my gosh-darn voice when I needed it?* All I could manage was a small smile and a nod. Within moments, I was dancing with Josh ... the sweetest, cutest, best dancer in the whole world.

I was still dancing on air that night while getting ready for bed. My smile was huge as I twirled through the hall-way and into the bathroom to brush my teeth. Standing in my nightshirt, I suddenly caught a glimpse of my legs and realized that the embarrassment I thought I'd never survive seemed almost laughable ... well, almost.

I was better at shaving now. My mom didn't even get mad at me when she found out that I'd shaved against her wishes. She just looked at me and said, "Be more careful next time." I was eternally grateful she didn't make more of a fuss. My dad, on the other hand, was not too pleased that I used his razor ... Well, that's another story.

When I went to tell my parents good-night, I hugged them both extra tightly. I was having a hard time falling asleep. My sister was breathing evenly next to me, and I knew she was already out for the night, but I was still so excited that Josh had asked me to dance.

Suddenly, I felt grateful to my PE teacher for making everyone choose a partner, even though earlier that night I'd felt like shooting her when she started the game. I smiled in-

to the darkness at the thought and felt satisfied that I had just survived the worst humiliation of my life. With that thought came the realization that Josh must still like me despite my gorilla legs. After all, he asked me to dance, didn't he?!

My smile broadened, and with a satisfied giggle, I rolled onto my side and fell fast asleep.

*Elizabeth J. Schmeidler*

## Just Desserts

*D<sub>o</sub> unto others as you would have them do unto you.*

The Golden Rule

"Great dinner, Hon," said Dad, kissing Mom good-bye, then giving a kiss to Sherre, Lizzy and me. "Don't wait up, I won't be home 'til after three."

I was disappointed to see him go. I missed not having dinner together as a family now that Dad had to work nights. He and Mom ate early, leaving the three of us to eat alone.

"Come on and eat, kids," Mom said after homework was done. "It's hamburgers tonight."

We slid into the diner-style booth Dad had made last year before he lost his job as an upholsterer. Little Lizzy was squashed between Sherre and me. The booster seat she had given up since becoming a "big four-year-old" had been replaced with the hips Sherre, now a teen, seemed to have sprouted overnight.

Mom slid a thin hamburger, one by one, onto each bun then—plop, plop, plop—three thick spoonfuls of her taste-

less, lumpy mashed potatoes followed.

Our barely audible "Uhhh," was stopped short by a sharp look from Mom.

"Eat all those potatoes, girls," she said. "They're filling and they're good for you." We nodded. Times were tough and potatoes were cheap.

As soon as she left, I took a bite of the hamburger. The smell of heavenly garlic hit my nose. The taste was sheer bliss, juicy and full of flavor. I gobbled it down in four bites.

I risked a forkful of the potatoes, chewed as little as possible and struggled hard to swallow. *Mom must have been absent the day they taught potatoes in her Home EC class, I thought.*

Sherre and Lizzy were having their share of trouble, too. Sherre gagged and Lizzy looked like she was going to throw up.

I smoothed the potatoes around on my plate trying to make them look less massive. I could dump them in the trash. A pang of guilt shot through me at the thought, knowing how hard Dad worked to put food on the table. Anyway, it'd mean having to pass Lizzy to get to the garbage can, and the little tattletale would tell on me for sure.

Then the idea came to me.

"Look, Lizzy!" I pointed up. "There are footprints on the ceiling!"

"Footprints?" said Lizzy. "Where?" Her gaze followed my finger.

"Up there." I scooped up a spoonful of mashed potatoes.

Plop.

"I don't see anything," she said..

"I see them," said Sherre, picking up my lead and a spoonful of her own. "Look, Liz, over the sink!" Plop.

"I don't see them," Lizzy whined.

"Aw, you missed it," I said. "They're gone."

"I hear too much talking and not enough eating," Mom called from the living room. "No dessert till those plates are clean."

Lizzy turned back to her meal. A puzzled look spread across her face. She took her fork and cautiously poked at the huge heap of potatoes now on her plate. Sherre and I snickered quietly, but Lizzy was silent, unable to take her eyes off the swollen blob.

"I'll be in there in two minutes," Mom said in a loud voice. "You girls had better be through."

Sighing, we re-attacked the potatoes again. Lizzy stuffed her mouth full and managed to get them down with a gulp of water. I choked. Sherre chewed and chewed. Gagging, she spit the whole mess into her napkin.

"Look, Liz," she said. "Those footprints are back!" She pointed to the ceiling. Lizzy snapped her head up. Plop ... plop. Lizzy was still looking up when Mom reached the doorway.

"Elizabeth Ellen Mandell!" she said. "What have you been doing all this time? Your sisters are almost done with their potatoes. Yours have grown!"

Lizzy looked at her plate and gasped. Her lower lip quivered and she began to whimper.

"Never mind the waterworks, Lizzy," said Mom. "There are starving people who would love those potatoes. Eat."

Obediently, Lizzy scooped up another lumpy forkful and tried to eat it. Her face turned red. She sputtered. She tried to swallow. I watched with a lump in my throat as she fought to force them down.

Suddenly I felt clammy and sick to my stomach—and it

wasn't because of the potatoes. I opened my mouth to speak, to admit to Mom what was really going on. But remembering the torture Sherre had put me through the last time I confessed for both of us silenced my tongue.

Sherre didn't seem to notice my guilt. As soon as Mom left the room, she was back at Lizzy like a hawk on a chicken.

"Lizzy!" She said pointing to a spot behind Lizzy's head. "There they are again!" Lizzy turned around in her seat. Plop.

I picked up my spoon and filled it up with the last of my potatoes, then stopped. *No, I told myself. I'd rather eat Mom's mashed potatoes the rest of my life than to watch my baby sister suffer like this.*

I shoveled the potatoes into my mouth and dropped the spoon. It clattered onto my plate. At the sound, Lizzy looked down at her mashed potato mountain. She turned around again to try to find the imaginary footprints, then looked from Sherre to me, a light of understanding in her eyes.

Grasping a spoon in her pudgy little fist, Lizzy began plopping potatoes onto our empty plates.

"Lizzy, are your potatoes gone yet?" called Mom.

"Almost!" said Lizzy cheerfully, loading on some more. "Better eat 'em all up," she whispered to us with a grin. "Or I'll tell!"

Beverly Spooner

# Calvin and Hobbes



by Bill Watterson

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## A Chicken-Noodle-Soup Day

*Lying is done with words and also with silence.*

Adrienne Rich

"I think I should stay home from school today, Mom. I'm sick. Really, I am."

I don't believe my fifteen-year-old sister for a minute. She hates school. This is just another one of her excuses to stay home. Again.

Mom isn't as sure as I am. She's working mom who struggles with guilt for not being home for us. She gives Sandy the benefit of the doubt. Again.

"You can stay home," she says, "but you have to stay in bed. And I want you to eat chicken noodle soup for lunch."

We always eat canned chicken noodle soup when we're sick. It's the only time either of us likes it.

Mom feels Sandy's forehead as she kisses her good-bye.

"You don't feel warm," she says. "Are you sure you need to stay home?"

My dramatic sister lays one hand across her forehead. "I feel dizzy," she says, "and my head hurts. I must have that

bug that's going around."

Mom reluctantly leaves for work.

"I'll call you later, Dear," she says as she closes the door.  
I have to catch the bus for school.

"Enjoy your day, Sister Dear," I holler over my shoulder,  
"and get well."

Sandy waves to me from the kitchen window and grins.

She tries her best to look pathetic when I come home from  
school, loaded down with homework. I hear her scurry into  
the bedroom we share as I open the door.

"Mom will be home soon. You'd better get your act to-  
gether," I warn.

Sandy peers at me through drooping eyes.

"I'm feeling a bit better," she sighs.

"Then why are you still in bed?"

"Paying my dues for a day off," she replies.

"Well, save it for Mom," I say. "You're going to need it. I  
need a snack. What's in the cupboard?"

"Well, I found some donuts, and there's popcorn, and  
Mom hid a package of candy bars on the top shelf."

"Got you, you little faker. Wait until Mom comes home.  
This was a chicken-noodle-soup day, remember?"

"Oh, she'll never know."

Famous last words.

When Mom comes home, I'm at my desk doing home-  
work. I open the door a crack so I won't miss anything.  
Sandy is on the couch, pressing a cool washcloth to her fore-  
head.

"How are you feeling tonight?" Mom begins, in a tone of  
proper concern.

"Better," Sandy says with only an edge of brightness to  
her voice. "I think I can go to school tomorrow."

*Smart move, Sister, I think.*

"The chicken noodle soup must have made you better," Mom says. "Did it taste good to you?"

"Soup always tastes good when I'm sick," Sandy says sweetly.

*Liar, I think. Watch out. You have become an unsuspecting prey.*

"Well, Dear," says Mom, "you just lie there while I get supper. I don't want you to overexert yourself. Are you up to eating your favorite pizza?"

*Probably not, I think, after a day of junk food.*

Sandy manages to say, "I think I could eat a little."

Mom rattles around in the kitchen, stretching pizza dough and filling it with our favorite toppings. I hear her open the trashcan.

I know what's coming next. I think I'll stay right here in my room.

"Sandy, I don't see your soup can in the trash. Where is it?"

*If I were you, Sister, I'd confess now. Otherwise, you're done for.* But my cornered sister attempts a getaway move.

"I pushed the can to the bottom, so I wouldn't smell the chicken. It was upsetting my stomach."

That's a good one, I have to admit. But Mom's not buying it.

"Poor dear," clucks my predator mother. "I'll get rid of it for you."

"That's okay, Mom. I'm feeling better now. Why don't I empty the trash while you get dinner?"

"No need, Dear. Just relax."

I hear a clatter of cans and bottles in the kitchen.

"Oops," says Mom. "I dropped the trash."

I could help her clean up, but think I'll stay here and begin my essay for English class. I have my topic, thanks to Sandy. I think I'll call it, "What a Tangled Web Weave."

Mom's voice remains calm and pleasant. Too pleasant.

"That's strange, Sandy. I can't find the chicken noodle soup can anywhere."

There is a long silence. Sandy makes one last attempt to get out of the trap, but she is definitely the weaker one in this predator/prey game.

"I forgot, Mom. I put the can in the bag on the porch."

I know that there are at least four bags on the porch, all tied up, waiting for trash day—just as I know that Mom and Sandy will play this game to the death.

I have finished a draft about the complications of lying by the time Mom calls me to dinner. We sit at the table in silence. Four bags of trash are strewn on the floor.

Mom and I eat pizza, made just the way I like it, and drink soda. There is a special treat in the oven for dessert.

In front of Sandy sits one solitary mug of chicken noodle soup.

*Donna Beveridge*

## Everything Will Be Okay

*The world that we live in is the one that we create. We create our world with every thought that we think, with every word that we speak and with every action that we take.*

LeVar Burton

The kitten is a scrawny thing with burrs and bits of wood caught in its coat where it still has fur, and pus coming out its eyes and nose. Its big baby head looks even bigger at the end of such a stick of a body. I found it in the woods at the end of my street where I play most days with my friends. This time I was alone. *Lucky for you I was*, I think. *Otherwise, David or Claude might have decided you'd be good practice for their slingshots. Those two can be mean*, I think to myself. I don't like playing with them really, but they live at the end of the street and sometimes you just play with the kids on your same street, even if they're mean, sometimes, even to you.

The kitten makes a pitiful noise.

"Don't worry," I tell it, stroking its scabby head until the

mewing is replaced by a faint purr. "Everything will be okay. I'm going to take you home, and my mom will give you a bath and some medicine."

I tuck the kitten under my jacket and run out of the woods, across the street, down the sidewalk toward my house. I feel the warmth of the kitten through my shirt and start thinking of names.

\* \* \*

I'm only ten, so it will be five or six years before I work for Dr. Milk. My two oldest brothers worked for him part-time and summers when they were teenagers. Now my other brother, Paul, works there. Dr. Milk is the vet out on Ridge Road. He takes care of our dogs, and he will take care of my kitten. I never had a pet that was my very own. A couple of years ago, my father got a new beagle to replace the old one that had died. Patches was his name. He called the new one Bucky and said that Bucky could be mine. But saying a thing is so doesn't mean it is.

Bucky lives in a kennel out back, keeping his beagle smell, which my mother hates, far away from the house. I feed Bucky some days and play with him, but I am not allowed to bring him inside to sleep at the end of my bed or curl up next to me while I do my homework. Bucky is an outdoor dog; he is a hunting dog.

He is my father's dog, really.

\* \* \*

When I am older, I will go hunting with my father the way my brothers have done. I try not to think about this. I want to go, because I want my father to like me. But I don't want to kill animals.

One time when my father and three brothers went hunting, one of my brothers killed a deer. Most times they kill

rabbits or pheasants if they get lucky. Most times they don't get lucky. But this time one of my brothers, I don't remember which one, killed a deer.

The deer was hung by its feet from a tree just outside the kitchen. I could see it hanging there when I sat at my place at the table. My father urged me to eat my venison and talked about the slippers he was going to have made from the hide. I couldn't eat. The thought of the venison made me want to throw up.

I could see the deer's eyes, even from the kitchen table. There was life in them still. Only the deer and I knew that there was life the bullet had missed; it was in the eyes.

I pushed the venison away.

My father said, "That's a waste of good meat."

My brothers teased me. One of them called me a sissy.

My mother said, "You don't have to eat it," and took the slab of gray meat off my plate.

\* \* \*

My mother reaches into my jacket and removes the kitten by the scruff of its neck. She tells me to go down to the cellar and take off all my clothes and put them in a pile next to the washing machine.

"This animal is filled with disease," she says. "We can't let it touch anything in the house."

"We'll take it to Dr. Milk," I say. "He'll make it better."

"We'll see," she says, pushing me toward the cellar stairs, the kitten dangling from one of her hands.

I can feel tears welling up. "But that kitten is mine," I say. "I found it and it's going to be my pet."

She doesn't say anything. Looking up from the cellar stairs, I see her shaking her head at the kitten. Its eyes are clamped shut. I can see the pus oozing out of them.

"You are a sorry sight," she tells the kitten in the same soothing voice she uses with me when I'm sick. "A sorry sad sight."

I feel in the pit of my stomach what the future of that kitten is. The feeling spreads through me like a sudden fever. Down in the cellar taking off my clothes, I cry so hard my body shakes.

When I return upstairs, my mother wraps me in my bathrobe and holds me until I can speak.

"Where's the kitten?" I ask.

"Out on the back porch in a box. Your brother will be home soon."

\* \* \*

Paul will be going to college in the fall. Right now he's a senior in high school. I can't decide if I'm going to miss him or not. He's the brother I know best because he's been around the longest. The others left home when I was even younger.

Paul is the brother who taught me to ride my bicycle and the one who spent an entire Saturday with me and not his friends building a real igloo out of snow and ice. He's the brother who tells me how to be a man.

He is also the brother who plays tricks on me and sometimes the tricks are cruel. When I get angry, he says I don't have a sense of humor. He twists my arm behind my back sometimes until I say I'll do what he wants me to do. He makes promises he doesn't keep.

Paul is seventeen. He shaves every day and kisses girls right in front of me like it was nothing. He works at Dr. Milk's part time and summers.

\* \* \*

I am sitting on the back porch, waiting for Paul to come

home and talking to the box next to me.

"Don't worry, Smoky," I tell the kitten inside. "I won't let anything bad happen to you, I don't care how sick you are. My big brother will take you to Dr. Milk's and give you shots and medicine and stuff and you'll get better, you'll see. My big brother can fix anything."

The kitten is awfully quiet. I wish it would make even a pitiful noise.

We sit in silence. I daydream that I am seventeen. I am big and strong like my brother and I can make Smoky better. I see myself driving to Dr. Milk's out on Ridge Road, carrying the kitten in its box into the back room (which I have never seen, really, only heard my brothers tell stories about), giving it some medicine, reassuring it ...

"Everything will be okay, Smoky, everything will be okay."

In the kitchen behind me I hear my brother and mother talking in low voices.

\* \* \*

Dr. Milk is not there when my brother pulls the car into the parking lot. It is after hours. My brother has a key. I am impressed by this.

"Come on," Paul says in his take-charge voice, "get that box now. Bring it on in here."

He flicks on the light in the waiting room. "You're coming in back with me," he commands. "I'll need your help."

"What are you going to do?" I ask. I am holding the box tight against my chest. I feel Smoky moving around inside.

"What do you think?" he says. "You heard your mother. That kitten is sick, bad sick."

"She's your mother, too."

"Well, she happens to be right," Paul tells me. "With an

animal that far gone, you don't have a choice. It's got to be put to sleep."

I think the tears I jam back into my body are going to kill me. I think if I don't let them out they will kill me. But I won't let them out. I won't let Paul see.

"You do have a choice" is all I say. I hug the box for dear life and move to the door. Paul moves faster.

"Come on now," he says, gently taking hold of my arm, "be a man."

"I'm not a man," I tell him, "I don't want to be."

"You've got to do what's right. That kitten is half dead as it is."

"Then it's half alive, too."

He shakes his head. "You always have to one-up me, don't you?" he says.

I don't know what he means, but I do know that no matter what I say he is going to do what he wants to do.

A few minutes later, we are in the back room. The box is empty. Smoky is inside a big old pretzel can with a hose attached, clawing at the can's sides as my brother pumps in the gas. He is telling me it is good for me to watch this, it will toughen me up, help me be more of a man. Then he starts to lecture me about different methods of putting animals out of their misery, but all I can hear is the scratching. And then the silence.

\* \* \*

At the supper table that night, I don't speak. I don't look at my brother's face or my father's or my mother's. I look at the tree branch outside the kitchen window where the deer once hung. My brother is saying something about taking me to the driving range tomorrow. He will teach me to hit a golf ball.

I won't go with him. I don't want him teaching me anything anymore.

In the fall he will go off to college. I will be eleven. I will be alone with my parents, alone without my brothers.

I get up from the table and no one stops me.

In the living room, which is dark, I sit for a long time thinking. I think about my kitten. I think about the pretzel can. I think about what it will be like not having any brothers around. I feel alone and small and frightened. And then all of a sudden I don't feel any of those things. All of a sudden it's as if Paul had already left and I am on my own and I know some things so clearly that I will never have to ask an older brother to help me figure them out.

I will never work for Dr. Milk.

I will not go hunting with my father.

I will decide for myself what kind of boy I am, what kind of man I will become.

*James Howe*

## A Silent Voice

*If there are people at once rich and content, be assured they are content because they know how to be so, not because they are rich.*

Charles Wagner

The situation seemed hopeless.

From the first day he entered my junior-high classroom, Willard P. Franklin existed in his own world, shutting out his classmates and me, his teacher. My attempts at establishing a friendly relationship with him were met with complete indifference. Even a "Good morning, Willard" received only an inaudible grunt. I could see that his classmates fared no better. Willard was strictly a loner who seemed to have no desire or need to break his barrier of silence.

Shortly after the Thanksgiving holiday, we received word of the annual Christmas collection of money for the less fortunate people in our school district.

"Christmas is a season of giving," I told my students. "There are a few students in the school who might not have a happy holiday season. By contributing to our Christmas

collection, you will help buy food, clothing and toys for these needy people. We start the collection tomorrow."

When I called for the contributions the next day, I discovered that almost everyone had forgotten. Except for Willard P. Franklin. The boy dug deep into his pants pockets as he strolled up to my desk. Carefully, he dropped two quarters into the small container.

"I don't need no milk for lunch," he mumbled. For a moment, just a moment, he smiled. Then he turned and walked back to his desk.

That night, after school, I took our meager contribution to the school principal. I couldn't help sharing the incident that had taken place.

"I may be wrong, but I believe Willard might be getting ready to become a part of the world around him," I told the principal.

"Yes, I believe it sounds hopeful," he nodded. "And I have a hunch we might do well to have him share a bit of his world with us. I just received a list of the poor families in our school who most need help through the Christmas collection. Here, take a look at it."

As I gazed down to read, I discovered Willard P. Franklin and his family were the top names on the list.

*David R. Collins*

## Walking with Grandpa

*The power of choosing good and evil is within the reach of all.*

Origen

Grandfather was a wise and honorable man. His house was not far from ours, and I would visit him often going home after school.

No matter how rotten I had been, I could tell Grandpa anything. My secrets were safe. He always understood. He loved me.

I remember a time when a bunch of us were playing baseball in the field behind Mrs. Ferguson's house. I hit one pitch just right and ... *slam!* It was a home run that soared high and away, and ended up shattering Old Lady Ferguson's kitchen window! We all ran!

Walking home, my best friend, Tom, asked, "How will she ever know who did it? She's blinder than a bat!" He had a point. I decided to stop by Grandpa's. He must have known something was up by the expression on my face. I felt ashamed. I wanted to hide. I wanted to bang my head against a tree a thousand times and make the world just go away—as

if punishing myself could undo things. I told him about it.

He knew we had been warned many times about the dangers of playing where we shouldn't. But he just listened.

"I was wrong," I told him, with my head down. "I hate myself for what I did. I really blew it. Is there a way out? Will she call the police?"

"Well," he said, "she has a problem, just like you. I'll bet if she knew you cared, she would be sad to know that you're afraid of her. I'll bet she wishes you would give her a chance ... a chance to be understanding. It's your decision," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "Just so I don't say the wrong thing, is the plan to pretend nothing happened? Just keep quiet and carry your little secret around ... hide what you're not proud of?"

"I don't know," I sighed. "Things might get worse ..."

"Let's think it through," he said finally. "If you were Mrs. Ferguson, what would you do?"

I had been afraid that Mrs. Ferguson would stay mad at me, so I ran. I didn't know what she might do. On the way home I imagined that she was a mean witch chasing me, and the further away I ran, the more gigantic she grew ... until finally she towered over the whole town, seeing my every move with an evil eye.

"Well," I said, taking a deep breath, "One solution is to tell Mrs. Ferguson I'm sorry and offer to fix her window."

"If you call her," asked Grandpa, "What's the worst that can happen?" I had to think for a moment. I realized that even if she did not accept my apology, it could not be any worse than seeing the disappointment on Mom and Dad's faces.

Grandpa smiled when he knew I had figured it out.

"Doing what's right is not always easy," he said, handing

me the phone. "I'm proud of you." Grandpa did not make me do it. It was always my choice. I knew I had found the best answer, just by thinking it through. That's how Grandpa did things. As it turned out, things were not anywhere near as bad as I had first imagined.

"Owning up to what you're not proud of is the hardest thing of all," said Grandpa. "Choosing to be honest, on your own—even when you don't have to be—makes others trust you and respect you."

Besides, it made me feel really good about myself. No one can ever take that away. *Thank you, Grandpa.*

Mrs. Ferguson and I eventually became really close friends. She was so kind and grew to take a real interest in me. I started doing all kinds of odd jobs around her house after school, which eventually helped me to save enough to buy my first car. She once told me, "Fear can make the smallest things look so much bigger than they really are."

Just before he passed away Grandpa asked me, "Who will you turn to when I'm gone?"

Holding his hand I told him, "Honor is its own reward, Grandpa. And a good teacher lives on through his student. Thank you."

After Grandpa died, everyone was sad. So many people loved him and would miss him. I still talk to him, in my thoughts. I imagine how he would approach things, what questions he would ask ... what advice he might give ... whenever there is a problem. His soothing voice is clear and simple. Grandpa gave me the tools to fix many problems ... and cut them down to size.

And most of all he showed me I was brave.

*Uncle Greg*

# 9

## ON TOUGH STUFF

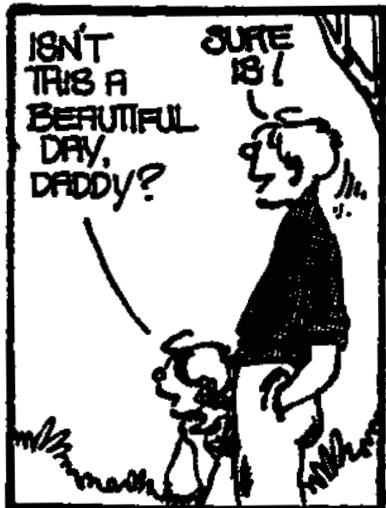
*What a child goes through is hard to explain*

*We've been through stress, anger, hurt, and pain  
Adults know what a child goes through  
Because you see, they've been through it, too.*

*What a child goes through is sometimes insane  
Sometimes people offer us drugs like cocaine  
And now and again on dark, scary nights  
We hear sirens and gunshots because of gang  
fights.*

*Death takes family and friends  
Divorce takes them, too  
Oh, if you only knew  
What a child goes through.*

*Shannon M. O'Bryant, eleven  
and Asbley O'Bryant, thirteen*



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## Kelsey

My little sister, Kelsey, was two years younger than me. I can actually remember the day she was born. It was beautiful outside. The sun was out and there was a nice cool breeze. I went into the hospital to see my new sister, but I was too young to hold her.

Four years later, my brother Dakota came along, and by then, I was big enough to hold my new little brother.

Since Kelsey and I were so close in age, we did a lot together growing up. We were typical kids and we sometimes fought like cats and dogs. But there were also days that we were really nice to one another. We used to play games on Nintendo once in a while, but most of all, we loved to play outside.

My sister was the most athletic person in our family. She was a lot faster than me. As we got older, we used to race all the time, but she would usually beat me. We especially loved to swim, so my dad got us a membership at the pool at our nearby church. We loved that pool. especially the lifeguards and the people who would often go there. We would race in the pool, too, and sometimes I would actually beat Kelsey.

My family life was going pretty good but when I was about eleven, I started to notice that my parents argued a lot. My dad was a hard worker and provided well for us, but

he drank too much and my mom had no tolerance for alcohol abuse. The madness never did stop, so eventually they divorced.

I thought things would never be the same without my dad living with us and that it would be the hardest thing I'd ever have to go through. I realized that our lives would never be perfect due to the stress and strain that was created. But I tried to stay positive and remember the good times my father and I had. Mom and Dad seemed happier this way, and I knew we'd be okay.

My family and my mom's family have always been a close-knit bunch. My Nana and Pops were the best! Nana is a really sweet lady and cares for us a bunch, but Pops was my favorite person in the world. He was funny and silly, and he loved me and my brother and sister a lot.

One day, my pops wanted me to come over to watch some John Wayne movies that were on TV. We made popcorn and root beer floats that night. We were up pretty late and had a great time together. I was spending the weekend with them, which I loved to do. The next morning, Pops and I were going to get up early and eat breakfast together. Pops usually woke up at around 6:30 A. M. My Nana was up but Pops still hadn't gotten up, so Nana told me to go and wake him.

I went to get him, but I knew something was wrong as soon as I walked in. My Pops had died in his sleep early that morning of a massive stroke. I was totally devastated. My whole family was numb and in shock. For months we were all in a sad fog. Still, I tried to stay positive. My Pops was in a better place and although I'd miss my whole life, I knew I'd see him again.

Things were going along all right, but we had our days when it was tough. We did our best to get through them.

Then in November of that year ,my mom was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer. She ended up having a major operation on Christmas Eve. My mom spent her birthday ,Christmas and New Year's in the hospital. I was so worried about her. I didn't know how I should deal with it. I guess I just dealt with it by trying to be as much help as I could around the house.

My mom went through several extensive surgeries and a massive amount of chemotherapy. She went away to Omaha for a few weeks to undergo treatment. I was so worried about her through those times. I was lucky to have such strong and supportive friends and family through it all.

Finally ,Mom came home and was doing pretty well. We had several false alarms but nothing serious. By July ,Mom was feeling good enough to get out with us and have a little fun.

One afternoon ,my mom ,Nana ,brother and family friend Tracy went out to play miniature golf and then we went out to eat. We had a really good day. It was the most fun I'd had in a long time.

When we got home ,there were tons of messages on the phone machine. My dad's girlfriend left us an urgent message asking us to call her as soon as we got home. When we reached her ,she gave us more horrible news. She told us that my dad had died earlier that day of a massive heart attack. My mind was going in all sorts of directions. I had no idea this could happen to my forty-five-year-old father. It was a total surprise to all of us. I did not know what to do or think.

There was a huge visitation for my dad. Then ,as a final good-bye ,we spread his ashes in Lake Okoboji in Iowa where he always used to say he wanted to be put to rest.

After we got things back on track again and going well, I started back at karate, something that I had always loved doing. Kelsey was excited about starting her first year of middle school and I was going to be in eighth grade. At this time, I'd been through more than most kids had, but nothing would prepare me for what happened next.

On September 3, Kelsey and Dakota begged my mom to let them go to the pool. I didn't go because I was mowing the backyard to earn some extra cash. My mom was not going to let them go, but finally they just broke her down. She was very sensitive to the sun from all of the chemotherapy, so she could not go with them. She said they could go for half an hour—just long enough to come back and get me so that I could go to karate.

My mom had just walked through the door and started to change clothes when the phone rang. It was someone from the church. They said there had been an accident at the pool. Mom came running down the stairs to tell our family friend, Tracy, and me. Tracy left with my mom and I stayed at home. I tried to call my nana and ask her if she knew what was wrong. I needed someone to talk to but apparently Mom called her and asked her to come to the pool. So I waited at home patiently for a phone call or someone to come and get me.

Finally, the phone rang and it was my nana saying she was on her way to pick me up. When she got to our house, she sat me down and told me what had happened.

My sister, Kelsey, had been caught in the pool drain. The paramedics came, but they could not pull her out. She was underwater for approximately twenty-five minutes. Finally, they were able to get her out and they rushed her to the closest hospital immediately. When she arrived, they worked

on her and found a faint pulse after about thirty minutes. From there, she was rushed to Children's Mercy Hospital and that is where she stayed on life support. I went in to see her. She was not the same at all; she was not my athletic little sister anymore. She lived for two days, but she passed away on September 5, 1998.

Knowing that I would never see her again, and having to say a final good-bye to Kelsey was the saddest thing that I've ever been through. We had been together through the toughest times our family had even known and we had helped each other out. Now she was gone forever and I was on my own. I knew I had to learn how to help myself out, and to help Dakota, too. If it weren't for my family and friends, I would never have made it through the experience of losing her.

I think my family and I might have a new start with our lives now. I know it will never be the same without Kelsey, but I think the tragedies in our lives have stopped. Mom is in remission and has gone back to teaching kids with special needs. I'm studying kick-boxing and karate and doing really well in school. As for Dakota, he's following in my footsteps and taking karate, too. So far, so good.

One thing I learned from all this is to treat your family with love and kindness. Always give hugs and kisses to them because tomorrow is not promised to anyone. If you do this, then you won't ever have to wonder if they knew that you loved them.

*Shane Ruwe, fifteen*

## Losing Mom

When I was twelve, my parents separated, and I thought that was hard. Then I realized that something else is even harder: losing someone you love very much.

In my opinion “cancer” is the worst six-letter word in the whole dictionary. My mom was first diagnosed with mouth cancer. She spent Mother’s Day in the hospital that year recovering from major surgery. Then, four months later, she was diagnosed with lung cancer. I remember the day so vividly.

When I came home from school that day, my mom’s side of the family was there. They were all crying. My mom said, “Come and sit by me,” and she started crying, too. My heart began to pound really hard and my eyes filled with tears. I definitely knew something major was wrong. My mom was too upset to explain so my grandpa told me. My mom had cancer in both lungs, and she only had a short time to live. My mom and I just sat there and cried together.

My family had to watch my mom go through so much: chemotherapy, radiation, oxygen treatments and the loss of her beautiful hair. She suffered so much, and we couldn’t do anything about it. She couldn’t talk without coughing or losing her breath. She was weak, and she was just slowly dying.

We knew it would happen someday, but not as soon as it did. Everything was over in eight months. I came home from school one day, and my mom wasn't there. She was always my first concern when I walked through the door. She had been taken to the hospital in an ambulance. We went up to see her that night. I didn't get my homework done, but I didn't care.

The next day, my brother Robert and I were called out of school because my mom wasn't doing well. I went to my locker and started crying. Two of my friends came out and tried to comfort me. When we got to the hospital, my brother Chris met us at the elevator and told us the grim news. I tried not to cry in front of Mom because it would upset her, and then she wouldn't be able to breathe. I took a deep breath and went in to see her. It was so hard to see her lying there so helpless. I held her hand, and we tried to talk but it was hard for her. I can't even count how many times I told her that I loved her.

When I left her that night, I had the feeling that it was going to be the last time I saw her alive. When I got home, I called her and we talked some more. I remember the conversation word for word. I told her that she sounded better and that I loved her. That conversation was so special.

The next day, Robert and I were called out of school again. I wanted to cry so badly, but I held back my tears. Chris and my dad were in the car waiting for us. I was so scared to face what was in store for us. When we stepped off the elevator at the hospital, I took a deep breath. I just had a feeling that what I was about to hear wasn't going to be good. My sister came out of my mom's room and she was crying. As I got closer, I could see that everyone else was crying, too. I started to shake. My sister came up to me and

said, "She's gone. She died." I tried to laugh because I didn't want it to be true. The pain I felt was like no other. My sister asked if I wanted to go in and see her, and I said yes. When it was time for everyone to leave, we went over and gave Mom a last hug. When she didn't hug me back, I knew it wasn't a dream.

Some days I really need my mom. When she died, a part of me died, too. However, I knew that I would have to become an adult very quickly. Sometimes I ask myself, *Why her?* She did not deserve any of the pain that she went through. She fought hard for her children. We meant the world to her, and I know she didn't want to leave us.

I always thought my mom would be here for special things like homecoming, prom, graduation and my wedding day. It's hard knowing she's not going to be. She's never going to know her grandchildren or see Robert and I grow up. I would do anything to have her back. I miss and love her so much.

Very few people consider the true dangers of smoking. They think it is cool because everyone else is doing it. But it isn't. It really isn't.

I'm sure that at least one of you reading this thinks that life would be so much better without your parents. I have a little tip for you: Live life to its fullest and love your parents. It's hard to go on without them.

*Diana Carson, fifteen*

[EDITORS' NOTE: *For support in dealing with the illness or loss of a loved one due to an illness, call Kids Konnected at 1-800-899-2866, or log on to www.kidskonnected.org.* ]

## Celebrate the Good Days

*Look to your health; and if you have it, praise God, and value it next to a good conscience; for health is the second blessing that we mortals are capable of; a blessing that money cannot buy.*

Izaak Walton

*Cancer.* It sends chills up my spine as I say it. A six-letter word causes so much pain. I didn't think it would happen to anyone that I knew, until it happened to my mom.

It was in April of what seemed to be a great year. I was in fourth grade with the greatest teacher, Miss DeRosear. It was the year everyone looked forward to because Miss D. was the coolest teacher.

I had just come home from school to find Mom at home. That was odd because she never arrived home before me. Mom was sitting on the couch with Dad. A thousand horrible things started flashing through my mind. *What if Grandma had passed away? I did not have the chance to say good-bye. What if my brother was hurt?*

As I crawled up on the couch next to Mom, she gave me a

kiss and a huge smile, so I relaxed and went on with my normal after-school activities. During the TV show that I always watched after school, Mom started getting phone calls. The calls continued for the rest of the night. Each time the phone rang, Mom rushed to her room. I then knew that something bad had happened.

When Mom came back, I asked, "Mom, why do you keep on leaving the room every time you get a phone call?"

She turned to my sister and me and said, "Girls, I have something to tell you. I have a disease that will make me very sick. I have cancer."

As she said that I felt a sharp pain in my heart. I was thinking, *Why is God taking my mom from me so soon? What have I done?* Little did I know that we were just beginning a very long, painful journey.

The next day on the bus I turned to my friend, Kate. "My mom ..." That was all I could say before I started crying. Kate gave me a big hug and whispered, "I know, and I'm here for you." I knew then that Kate would support me.

As other people found out about my mom's cancer, they all had different ways of dealing with it. When my grandma found out about it, she had a difficult time, because to her, cancer was a death sentence. She had lost her husband, my grandfather, to cancer when my mom was only a senior in high school. Then the time came for Mom to have chemotherapy. Her hair fell out, and she was always sick. I remember all those nights that she was too tired to eat, or she was sick from the chemotherapy.

During the summer, Mom stayed home. On the good days, Mom, Sis and I went down by the pond and made shapes out of clouds. On these days we talked about what we were going to do the next day, week, month or year with Mom. We

never talked about losing her.

Support came from many different people and places. When school started again, Mom had to have surgery. I stayed with one of my teachers, Mrs. Stephens. Mrs. Stephens made me rainbow French toast. It always made me feel better; it let me know that someone cared and made time to make something for me. I would feed it to the dog if I had too much or if I wanted the dog to feel good also. Mrs. Stephens was always there for me with a smile, a hug or "it will be okay" advice.

Sometimes I lost hope, wondering, *Am I losing my mother just like she lost her father?* I spent hours just ranting at God, telling him that he could not take her away! I needed her! He just could not take her away!

After a long six months of losing her hair and throwing up because of chemo, my mom took a turn for the better. She slowly started to recover.

On April 5, 1999, my mom became a five-year survivor. When that day came, we had a big party. Friends came from far and wide to celebrate how special Mom is and her victory against cancer!

If you know someone who has cancer, you can help by doing little things. You can stay with them for a while and just chat or do some chores.

Dealing with cancer is so hard. Don't bottle up your feelings. Talk to someone. Chat rooms are available for kids dealing with cancer, and support groups help kids and teens deal with cancer, too. Do not give up! There will be good days and bad days—some more bad than good. But as I have learned from my mother, celebrate the good days!

*Leslie Beck, fourteen*

## Think Before You Act

It was a cold evening, the night before Halloween, when something happened in my town that no one will ever forget. During lunchtime at school, some girls who were my brother's friends told him about a plan that they had to toilet paper a guy's house. They had already been playing pranks on this guy, and they were laughing about what his house would look like when they were through with it. My brother told me later that he knew what they were planning on doing was wrong, but he didn't say anything to the girls. Now, he wishes he would have.

That night my brother's six friends stayed overnight at one of the girl's houses. In the middle of the night, they sneaked out of the house. They piled into one of the girl's small blue car and set off to play their little prank. When they got to the guy's house, everything went as planned—until they got caught. The guy that they were playing the prank on came outside and saw them. Laughing, they all ran to the car and hopped in, hoping to get away. The guy got into his car and chased after them, trying to identify them. He was right on their tail, and it scared the girls really badly. They were not sure what he would do to them if he caught them, so they went faster.

Then, when they were turning on a blind curve in the

road, they lost control of the car and hit a tree head-on. Three of the girls were ejected from the car and were killed instantly. The other three girls were seriously injured. One of the girls had just enough strength to get out of the car and go to a nearby house. The people who answered the door were afraid of her and didn't even believe that there had been an accident. They said, "Yeah, right, you really got into a wreck," and they would not call the police.

The three girls that died were all honor-roll students and were looking ahead to doing something great with their lives. But all of their dreams were shattered when they hit the tree on that cold night. Only one of my brother's friends was wearing a seat belt, and she was one of the survivors. Now whenever I get into a car, I think about the accident and put on my seat belt. The guy that chased them went to court. All he got was a ticket for running a stop sign and for speeding. I often wonder if he feels anything at all about the death of the girls in that car that he chased. My brother feels bad that he didn't say anything to his friends that day when they told him what they were planning on doing. They still might have gone on their mission regardless of what he said, but he might have saved his friends' lives. We'll never know. So many people have suffered because of a stupid act that was never meant to go wrong. The only good thing that came from this tragic event is that the mother of one of the deceased girls is setting up a teen center in town in memory of the girls that died. Now there will be a place for teens. Maybe that will keep some of them from getting into situations like this by providing a place to hang out and have fun, to talk to each other and hopefully give them a chance to help them think before they act.

*Lauren Wheeler, twelve*

## Getting Better

I was a nine-year-old girl beginning a journey to a whole new place. My mother and I were saying good-bye to our family, and were on our way to Kent, Washington, where we were going to live. My sisters, brother and dad were staying in Billings because my parents were divorced. My parents divorced when I was around two, and my dad remarried when I was four years old.

My mother and I were moving to Seattle because she had been offered a job as a special ed teacher. The only reason that I went with my mother was because she had told me so many bad things about my father, and I was too scared to live with him. I didn't even really want to leave because I wanted to stay with my sisters, but I didn't know what to do about my dad.

Let me tell you, it was incredibly scary to be all of a sudden moving to a whole new place, where I didn't know anybody. My mother and I moved into an apartment. Just after we arrived and we were unloading our things, a somewhat nice-looking guy came walking down the stairs. He introduced himself as John and offered to help us unload our belongings. He seemed quite nice, so we said yes and just kept on unloading. We finally finished unloading so we began to unpack our things.

Pretty soon, my mother and John began to date, and after about three months, John would come over to our apartment all the time. To me it began to feel like they were married. He would stay until really late, and he loved to tuck me into bed. I was not sure how to deal with all of this because something about him scared me really badly. My mother and John decided to get married. I didn't get excited about it.

After the wedding, John started to come into my room more and more, and would stay for a long time. He began to touch me in very uncomfortable ways and I would get extremely scared. I didn't say anything, because I was too scared. Sometimes I would put my hands over my chest and roll over so that my back was facing him. During this particular time, my mother would usually be in her room watching TV, and I did not want to scream. I knew that if I did he would immediately stop and pretend to be innocent, and my mother would think that I was crazy.

A few months after the wedding, my mother and John found a new house. I was given the opportunity to live with my dad again, and based on what was going on with John, I decided to move back to Billings.

My family in Billings was extremely excited to have me back, but when I got home it was hard for me to get close to them. I found myself having a hard time showing any physical affection toward my dad and stepmom. John had confused me as to what was normal and what was appropriate. Any physical contact made me pull away.

My sister and I would go see my mother during every vacation. Sometimes neither of us wanted to, but we were expected to. I used to cry and beg my parents not to make me go. Every time I was there, John would touch me and I would get more scared about what was happening and whether or

not anyone would believe me if I told.

At one point, I told my best friend Lindsey what was happening and she told me to tell my parents. I didn't think that they would believe me so I made her swear to keep quiet, and I didn't take her advice.

My dad and stepmom began to wonder if there was something going on that I just wasn't able to talk about. Then one day, my stepmom decided to have a school counselor come to the house to see if she could help me break through the awkward silence. Rather than tell a stranger what had been happening, I finally burst out and told my stepmom the truth.

At last, I had the courage to tell my family what John had been doing to me. My stepmom, Jean, pulled me close to her and we cried for a long time together.

Soon after that, we contacted an attorney who got in touch with the police in Washington. John was arrested, but it took nine months before we actually went to court. It was really hard on me to face my mother during the trial, but I got through it. All that I have to say is that it was one of the hardest times of my life.

John was found guilty and went to jail, but immediately he hired a new lawyer to appeal the case. Just before he was to be sentenced, he was granted a new trial. He decided to accept a plea bargain and was freed from jail after only five months. As unbelievable as it sounds, he was able to return to his job with the government and is living with my mother. As I suspected, she didn't believe me, even after a jury of twelve adults found John guilty. The family has not had any contact with her in nearly three years.

After the trial, I felt that the attorneys had taken such care with my case and treated me so wonderfully, I wanted to become a lawyer. I want to defend little kids, or anyone

else, who is unfortunate enough to be in the same situation that I was.

I always have hope that one day my mom will see how much she has missed and get back in touch with us kids. There are days when it saddens me and I cry and get furious. I will always love my mother no matter what, and hopefully someday I will be able to accept the choices she has made and the person that she is.

I now live my life the best way that I possibly can. I know who I am inside, and that took a lot of counseling. I also don't think that I would be who I am right now if it weren't for my stepmom and dad and their intuition that something was terribly wrong in my life back then. I can't imagine what my future would have held. Now, it's better than it's ever been, and getting better.

*Tiffany Jacques, fifteen*

[EDITORS' NOTE: To get help with child abuse issues of any kind, call Childhelp USA at 800-4-A-CHILD. ]

## For the Best

*I t is not only for what we do that we are held responsible, but also for what we do not do.*

Moliere

It was two days after the tragic school shooting in Colorado, and I was feeling bad about what had happened to the students there. My school began having a lot of bomb threats and it seemed that police cars were there often. I was standing with my friends, Amberly, and her boyfriend when he casually said, "I'm gonna blow up the school and kill everyone." I asked, "Why would you want to do that?" and he said, "I just do," and walked away.

I was scared because no one had ever said anything like that to me before. I found out when talking to other friends that he also bragged about this to other people. My friends told me that I should tell an adult what he had said, but I was too scared and I made them promise not to tell anyone either.

One day, Amberly and I were talking about what he had said when the teacher overheard our conversation. She took

me out into the hallway and made me tell her who had said it and what they had said. At first, I refused to say a word. She told me it really was for the best, so I told her. I felt awful for doing it. I was angry with her for making me tell who said it. I wasn't sure he really meant it and didn't want him to get into trouble.

He got suspended for two days and had two days of in-school detention after that. I sometimes wonder if I had not told, would he have done what he said he was going to do? The guys in Colorado seemed pretty normal to a lot of people. The bottom line is, you should never joke around about something as serious as killing people. If you do, responsible people have no choice but to have you checked out to ensure everyone else's safety.

After he was suspended, the whole sixth grade had an assembly. The principal and counselors told the students that there was a kid who was making threats and that he was suspended. I decided later to tell him that it was me who told on him so he wouldn't speculate about who did it. I was surprised to find that he was not angry with me for doing what I did. He was able to get help for his feelings and behavior.

Many people are in the same situation that I was in. If your friend is saying threatening stuff like my friend was, then they obviously need help—soon. It seems like when one school shooting happens, then another one occurs not too long after that. If there were any way that you could prevent one school shooting it could perhaps save your own life and many others as well. If I had to do it over again, I would—because it really was for the best.

*April Townsend, twelve*

## A Smile Can Save a Life

The day that changed my life forever started out like any other day for me. I have been a professional speaker for the last four years, since I was eighteen. I travel around the country speaking to middle and high school students about self-esteem, goal setting and helping others. On that day in 1999, I was speaking to a group of students near Fort Worth, Texas. The auditorium was full of applause, hugs and smiles. Such a love-filled morning did not prepare me for the tragedy about to unfold.

After my speech that day, I went back to my hotel room. It was then that I received the emotional phone call that I will never forget.

"There was a tragedy at a youth event, right near where you spoke. Most of the victims were kids. I don't know what their conditions are."

For once, I was speechless. I was also afraid. *Were any of the kids I spoke to today involved?* I wondered. Even though I didn't really know them, I felt a strong connection with the young people who had been in my audience only hours before. I immediately hung up the phone and turned on the radio to find out more. A middle-aged man had walked into a youth rally at a local church and started shooting. In only minutes, he had ended the lives of several preteens from the

church's youth group.

I bought a map, and drove the few miles to the scene. When I got there, it was a horrible scene. Helicopters were circling overhead, and parents were screaming and calling the names of their children. Everyone was crying. I didn't know how to help, or what to do. Then I noticed a group of young people sitting on the street corner and I walked up to them.

To this day, I don't remember exactly what I said. I do remember that we hugged one another and did our best to comfort each other while the crying and screaming was going on all around us. I will never, for the rest of my life, forget sitting on that street corner with those kids—feeling their pain and confusion—and crying with them.

I knew from that moment on, that my life work would be about preventing youth violence.

I began asking questions during my speeches and listening to the students, tens of thousands of them from all over the country. I learned from them what they thought causes violence and especially what they thought could prevent it. Having the students sharing their opinions, and working with them to shape their schools has become a moving experience for me.

I will never forget the eighth-grade girl, Jenny, who told me she was more afraid of sitting alone at lunch than being physically hurt, and that no one ever smiled at her. Or looking into the teary eyes of Stephen, who had sat next to another boy for an entire year—a boy who later shattered his school and many lives. He hung his head as he told me, "I never once said hello to him. I never once asked him how his day was. I never once acknowledged him." I started to realize that these kinds of behaviors are the seeds that can later create violence. My belief was confirmed when I got word about

the man who had shot the kids at the event in Fort Worth. He had opened fire on those kids just to get attention, and because he had felt that this was a way to get back at people who had ignored him.

The most important thing that I have learned is that young people are amazing. I am always so frustrated that the media often depicts teenagers as lazy, unintelligent and violent. They rarely discuss the millions who work hard to get through school, hold steady jobs, support their families and stay clear of trouble. They overcome all kinds of obstacles, limitations and fears every day, in order to move forward with their lives. Such as Maria, the blind girl, who is a star on her school's track team, or John, the school bully, who turned his life around to become one of my best volunteers. Thousands of students put forth an effort every day to help others, and they never even expect to be acknowledged.

Together we can work to respect all different types of people. We can learn what behaviors can hurt and what behaviors can help. Ignoring others or calling them names can create an atmosphere that fosters violence. And, something as simple as a smile can truly save a life.

Young people do have the potential to make their own schools and communities safer. Most of all, we can sincerely value ourselves and others for who they are. Together, we can connect and end the hurt.

*Jason R. Dorsey*

[*EDITORS' NOTE: With the help of mentors and young people across the country, Jason founded the nonprofit Institute to End School Violence, whose goal is to take student solutions for preventing violence and use them to build stronger school communities. Learn more at [www.endschoolviolence.com](http://www.endschoolviolence.com). ]*

## My One Regret

*Don't ever slam a door. You may want to go back.*

Don Herold

Even though my mom and dad still loved each other, my dad's lifestyle came between them and us. Dad always picked his friends over his family. He owned a bar, rode a Harley, and had other hobbies that I do not feel too comfortable talking about.

My mother and father had been divorced for five years when I went to live with my dad. My mom and I were not getting along. As it turned out, I spent most of my time with my twenty-six-year-old brother. My brother took me to school, picked me up and dropped me off at Dad's house because my dad was still the same and spent all of his time either at work or with his friends.

Pretty soon, I started to miss my mom, so I wanted to move back to live at her house. My dad was really upset with me for wanting to leave, even though I hardly ever saw him. I went ahead and moved back in with my mom anyway. Three months went by without my dad and I speaking a

word to each other. It didn't really bother me too much, because my mom and I were getting along, and we had even moved into a new house. Then my whole life changed with just a single telephone call.

My ten-year-old sister and I were the only ones home when a woman called. She did not tell us what was going on, only that my mom should call when she came home.

When mom returned a few hours later, she called and was told that my father had been in a motorcycle accident and that she needed to call the hospital. When she called the hospital they told her to contact my dad's family. My mom became hysterical and started yelling that *we* were his family and that she was his ex-wife and she had his children with her. They still would not tell her anything, except to contact my brother.

I knew that we were too late. I started to cry, but then I stopped. I guess part of me just wanted to hold on to the small chance that maybe I was just overreacting. Deep down I knew that I was not, I just did not want to believe it.

All of us piled into the car and drove to my father's house as quickly as possible. My brother was sitting outside on the picnic table with people all around. When I saw my brother sitting there, I panicked. Right then I knew that he did not have good news for us. My brother squeezed into the car and told us to drive. I can still remember the exact words my brother said—I don't think that I will ever forget them. He said, "Kids, I hate to be the one to have to tell you this, but Dad is dead."

The next few days are still a blur. Everybody tried to act strong. I would catch my older sister locked in the bathroom crying. My younger sister would write messages in her notebook about how she wished that she still had her daddy. I

think that I suffered greater than they did. My father and I never had a chance to resolve our problems. I cannot remember the last time we told each other how much we loved each other. He was mad at me when I left his house ,and I never had the chance to work things out with him.

The only thing that kept me from going insane was my mother. She told me about dreams that she has had about my father. He talked to her in her dreams. He told her that he is watching over us ,and that he loves all of us very much. I want to believe that with all my heart.

I often think about how things could have been different if I had just picked up the phone during those three months and broken the silence between us. I guess I just thought he'd always be there.

The greatest advice that I can give anyone is to always forgive each other—don't let your differences linger over time. You never know what the future will hold.

*Angelia Lee Swift, seventeen*

## The Perfect Figure

*I am as my Creator made me, and since He is satisfied, so am I.*

Minnie Smith

"Oh my gosh, it looks sooo good on you," exclaimed my best friend. "That color flatters you, and I'm getting it for you for your birthday. After all, it's in two weeks!"

I had gone bathing-suit shopping with my best friend. Since we were going into the seventh grade we needed to look cooler. We tried two-piece suits in hopes that we would get more attention from the guys. We wound up purchasing them, and the topic of conversation came up about going on a diet. The only reason for going on one would be to lose a little bit of our "baby fat." I thought all the guys would like me if I was pretty and thin.

So I decided to stick to the diet, even though it would be hard because I am a chocoholic. I had always been a big girl. Not necessarily fat, but tall with a solid build. All the courses in school I took were advanced placement and I played many sports. I thought, *A thin, pretty, smart, athletic girl —*

*everyone will love me.* When I would come home I wouldn't snack, and I cut down on my dinner portions. I had cravings for ice cream, but I just looked at beauty magazines and my bathing suit. The craving disintegrated quickly.

My mom noticed when I dropped five pounds. She told me to stop because I could hurt myself. I promised her I'd stop, but I couldn't. My best friend lost about ten pounds and stopped because she knew she looked good. I started getting complimented by my peers at school. I wore my same clothes which kept getting baggier and baggier. Some people would ask me where my lunch was. I lied to them and made up excuses.

Since I lost weight by dropping lunch, I did the same with breakfast. I tricked my dad into thinking that I ate my bagels, but I fed them to the deer. My weight dropped drastically, and my best friend would threaten to tell my parents if I didn't eat. I fooled her so she thought I was eating, but I wasn't. When I looked at myself in the mirror every day, I saw bulgy thighs that had to go.

My gym teacher confronted me about my immense weight loss. I told her I was losing weight, but that it was all through exercise.

Finally, dark circles formed under my eyes, and I stopped physically developing. It was a struggle for me to even walk up my driveway. I couldn't sleep at night, and I wore layers of clothing in eighty-degree weather but I was still cold. That didn't matter. I still needed to be thinner, and I started wondering how many calories were in toothpaste and communion wafers.

About a month and a half after I had bought bathing suit, I tried it on again and it fell right off me. My mom told me to took in the mirror. I could see my eye sockets, my transpar-

ent skin, the dark circles under my eyes, and my cheekbones popping out of my skin. That was the day I realized how skinny I was.

I went to our family doctor and a psychiatrist. My total weight loss was about twenty-five pounds in one month and a week. It took one year for my body to start working normally again.

Sometimes I want to go back to being thin, but I would *never* do what I did again. It's not worth it. Please don't go on diets when you're young. You will regret them. I know I do. Get help right away because you'll slowly kill yourself and suffer greatly. Don't judge and compare yourself to others. Try to love yourself for who you are, not for how you look. Besides, you probably look fine just the way you are.

*Nikki Yargar, fourteen*

[EDITORS' NOTE: For information regarding eating disorders, log on to the *Eating Disorders Awareness and Prevention Web site at [www.edap.org](http://www.edap.org) or for information and referrals call the hotline at 1-800-931-2237.* ]

## Pale Dawn of a New Day

*R*ecovering is a process, not an event.

Anne Wilson Schaef

I had always had a feeling of dread deep down within me. When it happened, it hit me with such surprise that you would never know that I predicted it.

At the time, I did not know how lucky I had been. I would lie awake at night before falling asleep, hearing my parents fight and yell at each other. Although neither hurt the other, it always ended up with my mother crying ... and that always scared me. I suppose they never thought I could hear them, and they hid their tension from me as much as possible.

One afternoon, my mother told me she needed to talk to me. I never thought of the obvious. My mother sat down next to me on our gray couch with my father on the other side. My mother calmly explained that they no longer enjoyed each other's company and that they would be getting a divorce. As I fought back tears, my mother continued to tell me how they had tried so hard to make it work -- for me.

They said they never wanted to hurt me. They could never know how much it did. They said that even though they no longer loved each other, it did not affect how much they loved me, and that my dad would move to an apartment nearby, close enough for me to walk to.

I could no longer hold back the tears, and I ran sobbing to my room, slammed the door and collapsed on my bed. I clutched my pillow to my chest. Everything flashed through my head, everything I could have done to make it work. I lay there, never wanting to leave the safety of my room, not wanting to accept my new reality. I stared for hours out my second-story window, not really thinking ... not really looking, just sitting out of the reach of my own mind.

I woke up the next morning and trudged to the bus stop. At school, my friends comforted me and I hated it. I was trapped, and everyone made it worse. My friends tried to make me feel better, but they always reminded me of how it had been before. I began to associate the pain of the situation with them and it hurt. I pushed them away, enjoying the solitude.

I found I loved writing, though I shared my compositions with no one. Everything had been turned upside down. No one knew. I only suffered internally. I hid inside myself, remaining the same person externally. My parents, in separate places, acted as though nothing had happened, and that outraged me even more.

My father did not move to an apartment nearby. Instead, he stay in our house. It was my mother who left and moved to the other side of town.

I was informed my father had fallen in love with a new "companion." It hurt immeasurably to watch my father preferring to hold her hand instead of mine. My mother had

found one as well, and moved in with him. I would spend long hours at her house waiting to leave, feeling alone and ignored. I thought I would die.

My writings began to be terrible stories of girls in far worse situations than I, making me feel more fortunate. I moved back and forth between homes every week, and when anything went wrong, it was always the other parent's fault. I woke up every morning to meet the dawn, which seemed to be paler and more frail than ever before. Alone, not allowing anyone into my reality, I cried.

Now, two years later, I almost never cry, for I feel that I have cried my share. I have accepted and moved on. I've become closer to both of my parents, and throughout the trials they go through, I now feel involved and helpful. My mother's companion recently left her and she came to me in friendship, looking for support.

But it still hurts quietly somewhere inside of me. I will never forget, and I will always miss how it was. Even though they fought, we were together and I never appreciated it when we were. As for now, I realize that there is nothing more beautiful than the dawning of a new day and that I must go on.

*Katherine Ackerman, twelve*

# — 10 — ON CHANGES

*Change is the only absolute  
in the world,  
the only thing  
that you can depend on.  
Nothing stays the same.  
Tomorrow will come,  
bringing with it  
new beginnings and sometimes  
unexpected endings.  
You can hold on to the past  
and get left in the dust;  
or, you can choose to  
jump on the ride of life  
and live a new adventure  
with perseverance and  
an open mind.*

*Irene Dunlap*

## My Very First Kiss

I was in the seventh grade when I fell in love at the school-bus stop.

"Who's that?" I hissed to Annie, my best friend.

"I dunno. New kid. Let's find out," replied Annie. Then she approached him. "Hi!" she dimpled.

Annie never just smiled at boys. She dimpled. She had the cutest, roundest cheeks with a dimple in each cheek. I was so jealous.

"I'm Annie. Did you just move here?" Annie lowered her head and looked up at him through her lashes.

"Yeah," he answered.

"This is my friend, Patty."

He looked at me.

I had never seen eyes so blue ... eyelashes so long ... a gaze so intense ...

I FELL IN LOVE.

Everything you have ever heard about falling in love came true for me at that instant. My legs started to quiver and my kneecaps turned to jelly. I felt like I couldn't breathe very well. I couldn't walk, I couldn't talk, I couldn't even see very well. I just stood there, like the skinny geek that I was, looking at him.

His name was Jerry. He had moved into a house only four blocks from mine. Jerry was shorter than me, but that didn't matter. He didn't have much to say, but that didn't matter either. I was truly in love.

I started riding my bike past his house every day, gliding past the big picture window in the front, afraid he was looking out, yet praying and hoping that he was. I was miserable and ecstatic all at the same time. I didn't want to share my feelings about Jerry with Annie, because if I made him look too desirable, she would probably want him. And if she wanted him, she would get him.

Then one Friday I got an invitation to a party. I couldn't believe it. It was a boy/girl party. My first. And my parents said I could go. And Jerry was invited.

The party was at Phyllis's house, and her parents had a room for parties that was separate from the rest of the house. Her parents wouldn't be watching us all the time. Annie told me that meant that it would be a kissing party. Perfect. The sweat was already forming under my armpits.

After two hours of eating potato chips, drinking Cokes and listening to our favorite music, someone suggested that we play Seven Minutes in Heaven. Someone else suggested Spin the Bottle. Spin the Bottle seemed much less threatening than spending seven whole minutes making out in Phyllis's garage. We all voted on Spin the Bottle, but you had to really kiss, not like some kind of kiss you give your grandma.

We all sat in a circle; boy-girl-boy-girl. Whoever had the tip of the bottle land on them had to go into the garage with the spinner of the bottle. If you were a girl, and you landed on a girl, you got another turn until you landed on a boy. Same for boys. Couples went into the garage and came back out, some looking weirded out, and some totally grinning.

Then the bottle landed on Jerry. He went into the garage with Charlene. Then, it was Jerry's turn to spin the bottle. It landed on Brian. Jerry spun the bottle again. It landed on me.

I thought I would die, right then and there. I couldn't even breathe. I tried to untangle my legs and stand up, but everything was jelly. I felt every pair of eyes on me. Somehow, I managed to get up and walk into the garage with Jerry. The door shut behind us.

It was pitch black. I could hear him breathing, somewhere in the darkness.

"Patty?"

"Huh?" Nice. Real smooth.

My eyes were getting accustomed to the darkness, and I could see the outline of his face. How was this supposed to happen? Was I supposed to close my eyes or keep them open? If I closed my eyes, how would I know where his face was? If I kept them open, would I look cross-eyed to him when we got close — sort of like the Siamese cats in *Lady and the Tramp*? What if his eyes were closed and my eyes were open? Or vice versa? Should I pucker up my lips, or just let them relax? Was I supposed to breathe, or hold my breath? Was I supposed to move my face toward him, or wait until he moved toward me?

I decided to keep my eyes open until the last minute, then close them as we got close enough to kiss. I took a breath, moved forward and closed my eyes. Unfortunately, so did Jerry. He must have had his eyes shut, too.

KLUNK!!!

"Ow!" we both said in unison. My front teeth and Jerry's front teeth had collided with the force of both of us moving forward toward the other.

"Ow, I think I chipped my tooth," I whispered.

"I'm sorry, I couldn't see you," said Jerry.

"It's okay. I'll live." I ran my tongue over my front tooth. There was a definite chip right in the front. It wasn't very big, but it was there.

"How do we explain this one?"

"I don't know."

All of a sudden I felt like laughing. It had been too much for me; the nervousness of my first kiss, being with Jerry in the garage (in the dark, alone), my chipped tooth. I started to giggle. Jerry started to laugh, too. Then we heard someone from the other side of the garage door yelling, "What are you guys doing? You're taking too long!" For some reason, that was even funnier than the collision. Then they started pounding on the door.

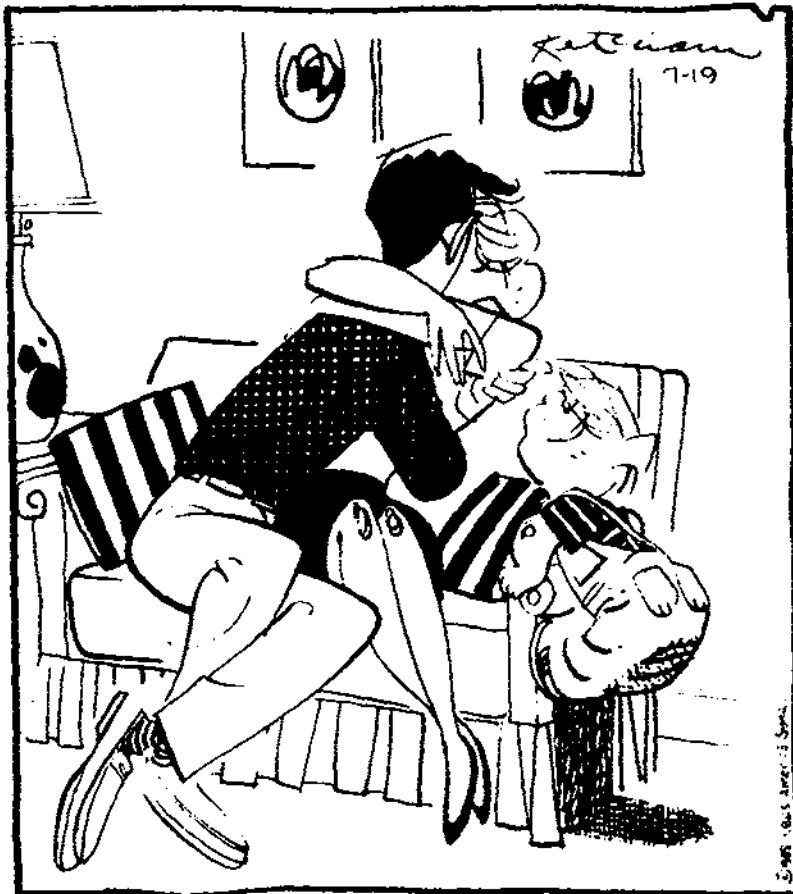
"Okay, let's go." Jerry grabbed my hand as we opened the door and walked into the room. Jerry and I smiled at each other. Annie looked upset. I was in heaven.

The next day, Annie tried to get me to tell her what happened, but I just smiled. I think she was jealous of me for the very first time. I'd like to say that it was the beginning of a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship, but that just wasn't the case. For some strange reason, I started feeling differently about Jerry. I now saw him as he really was; a short boy with bright blue eyes who was my friend. In the eighth grade, I fell in love with someone else.

But every once in a while, when I least expect it, I'll run my tongue across my front teeth and feel the chip in my left front tooth. That's when I remember Jerry—the cutest boy in the seventh grade—and my very first kiss.

Patty Hansen

## DENNIS THE MENACE



"Where do you put your noses?"

DENNIS THE MENACE.® Used by permission of Hank Ketcham and © by North America Syndicate.

## A Life Once Lived

*Every second brings a fresh beginning, every hour holds a new promise, every night our dreams can bring hope, and every day is what you choose to make it.*

Jessica Heringer, fifteen

When I was thirteen, I found myself at home alone after school every day while my parents worked until seven or eight o'clock each night. I was bored and I felt somewhat neglected. So I started hanging around with other kids who were at home unsupervised after school.

One day, I was at my friend's house and she had some other friends over as well. There were no parents at her house and mine were in Nashville; we had total freedom! As we sat there doing nothing, one of the guys pulled some marijuana out of his coat pocket. In this crowd, I was the only one there that had never tried it, so, under pressure to be cool, I did.

As the weekend approached, everyone was talking about a party at my friend's house. I ended up partying with people I didn't even know and had my first experience of being drunk

and high. I was now ruining my life, but as far as I knew, I was making more friends and hanging with a different crowd. The only thing that concerned me was partying on the weekends and looking for something to give me a better high.

One day, when I was in the eighth grade, my best friend and I were bored out of our minds. We thought that it would be really cool to go to my house where no one was home, find the keys to my dad's car and drive all over town showing off to our friends. When we ran a stop sign with a cop car right behind us, we were taken in for stealing my dad's car.

Things at school were equally as bad. I was suspended from school twice for fighting. The second time I was out for three days. I no longer cared about my grades and was literally failing school. I never looked at my parents' opinions as being important anymore. It seemed like I was always grounded, but I would sneak out of the house at night to see my friends. When my parents discovered that I was sneaking out, my dad no longer had any type of trust for me. I had put myself into a position of having no freedoms whatsoever. No matter what, I was never happy, and my parents and I argued constantly. My life was falling apart.

No longer was I the girl who was getting good grades, no longer did I have parents who trusted me, or friends that really even cared. I lost tall that; it was gone.

So one night I sat with a bottle of prescription pills, sure these pills were going to get rid of all my pain. It was late at night so I thought, *No one's at home so who's going to stop me?* I stared at the pill bottle with a deep feeling of hate toward myself. I never thought that an emotion like this could take over my life.

I began sobbing and tears were rolling down my cheeks. I

wondered if anyone was going to care. I told myself that they didn't care now, so why would they care when I'm gone?

Then I heard a car door shut, and I knew my parents had come home. I quickly took as many of the pills as I could with a couple drinks of water.

I sat on the couch with my dad, stepmom and one of their friends. They had no clue as to what was about to happen. We were watching my favorite TV show. Then, the weirdest thing happened. I laughed with my dad for the first time in what seemed like forever. Suddenly, I no longer wanted to die. I realized that I loved my family and that they really loved me. Now what was I to do? I ran to the bathroom and made myself vomit up all the pills.

I lay awake all night thinking. I realized that my priorities were all wrong and if I kept up this behavior and kept hanging around the same people, my life would never improve. I recognized that I was the one who made my life what it was, so I also had the power to change it.

The first thing that I did was stop taking drugs and hanging around that crowd. Within days, I noticed a huge improvement in my self-esteem. Then, right after the first of the year, I switched schools so that I could get away from my "friends" who only cared about partying all the time. It wasn't long before I had made new friends and my grades improved. (I now have a 4.0 grade average—straight A's!)

The new choices I've made totally beat waking up with hangovers and not caring about where my life was headed. I made cheerleading this year and I'm having so much fun. Drugs never made me feel this high.

I'll never know if I was going to die that night, but I do know one thing; I'm glad I didn't. I learned from my mistakes and found that ending life completely is not the way to

go. It is *never* too late to change your direction. Every day, every hour is a new opportunity to begin again.

*Brandi Bacon, fifteen*

## Papa

*When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot  
and hang on.*

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Papa died last night. He was my mom's dad, and I knew him for as long as I can remember.

He told me that if I studied hard and got good grades he'd buy me my first car. He promised. I'm twelve now and the oldest in my family.

I bet he was thinking that the thought of my own car would keep me focused on school. And, of course, if I really buckled down it would take the pressure off Mom.

Mom always said I was born with one foot out the door. Papa knew that. And my quest to grow up quickly and dash out that front door had always been hard on Mom. Papa knew that too, and that's when his voice roared like a lion, "Education, Brian. That's the key!"

Yet, as if he knew what I was feeling, he shook his head back and forth and pretended to whine, "I know, I know, I didn't want to study either." He put his arm around me and

whispered, "But you have to do it," as if he were telling me a secret. Our secret. I think he was just trying to help make growing up easier.

I'll never forget the look on Grandma's face. "Your grandfather," she said, rolling her eyes, almost like she knew what he was going to say before he said it.

But once her eyes stopped rolling, she looked right at him, the way Mom looks at us when she wants us to hear her words. She told him to calm down. "Don't get Brian's hopes up," she said.

But Papa wasn't like a lot of people. He meant what he said.

I think his promises sometimes worried Grandma a little. So he just did what Papa always did. He purred like a kitten and snuggled up to Grandma and pinched her cheeks. Then he made a kissing sound with his lips over and over through the air, the way I'd seen him do it a thousand times before. And then he told her how much he loved me.

He used to kiss my brothers, sister, Mom and I that same way. Mom said Papa came from a long line of cheek pinchers. She said it was a family tradition. His father and grandfather did it too. I think it was the Italian in him.

Papa showed me that you can love people in front of others. He was always kissing us and pinching our cheeks. He didn't care who was watching. I remember how all that squeezing used to hurt at first, but we got used to it. I could tell the Grandma got used to his way a long time ago. I think Grandma knew that Papa needed to love his family up close.

When Papa came to visit he always wanted to be near us. And he brought us books and magazines because he said we should read every day.

He would sit with us and we would read together, I think

he liked to hear our voices. He brought over lots of puzzles, too. He said they were important for exercising our mind. I think he liked to see us learn.

I always felt good about my family after Papa came to visit. His hugs were stronger than anybody's and he liked to laugh out loud with us. He didn't seem to mind our noise. He said we were just being kids. I think he remembered what it was like.

I won't forget the last time Papa was here with us. He came over to hang a fan with a light on it, outside, in our patio. I remember how he worked all day, climbing up and down the ladder, exchanging one tool for another. I helped him for as long as I could, though after a while I got tired. But he kept on working.

He wanted us to be able to eat outside during warm summer nights. He said the fan would help, but it needed to be put in right. And of course, it couldn't squeak.

Last night, the last night I would see him, we all ate dinner together under the light and the quiet breeze from the fan. And not a thing squeaked. In fact, nothing ever squeaked when Papa was around.

Papa always said his tools were his treasures. He never went anywhere without them. I guess he just liked to fix things. I know Mom's going to miss his help around here.

I'm sad that Papa's gone. Today the phone keeps ringing. Lots of people are calling to say they're sorry that Papa died. Mom has put me in charge for a while. She wants me to watch my brothers and sister. She has arrangements to make because Papa died.

Now my youngest brother is looking to me. He says he didn't want Papa to die. He wants to know if he keeps eating those healthy apples, does that mean he won't get old and

die?

I don't have an answer for my brother. I'm sorry. He has so many questions. "You're so smart, Brian," Papa used to always tell me. I think I'm not so smart right now.

"Does everybody get old and die?" my brother asks.

"No," I tell him, "that's not the way it always goes. Sometimes people die sooner than that, from other things. That's why Mom holds your hand when you cross the street and makes sure we're buckled up when we drive in the car."

"Then I don't ever want to let go of her hand and I want to live in the car where I'll be safe," he cries.

"I'm not sure that's the right way to live," I tell him.

"Then I want to be a cowboy. Do cowboys die?" he asks.

"Yeah, cowboys die," I say.

"Then I want to be the president. Do presidents die?" he asks, still crying.

"Yes," I nod. "Even presidents die, I learned that in school. It's better to think about living. It's the right thing to do."

Those words just fall out my mouth. Suddenly I realize what Mom means when she talks about doing the right thing. It's kind of like you really only have one choice. I think Papa would say so too.

My brother asks me one more question. "Brian, is Papa going to come alive again and be a ghost?"

"No," I answer sadly, wishing I could still see Papa. "But maybe we'll see him again up in heaven."

"Is that a long drive?" he wants to know. I start to laugh. I feel like jumping up and down, but instead I hug my brother tightly. He feels so small.

"It's a very long drive," I almost shout, "but when we get there and the gates to heaven swing open, I promise you,

they won't squeak."

All of a sudden I feel a lot better. I let go of my brother and I can see he feels better too.

I think you can be both happy and sad at the same time.

*Brian Normandin, fifteen*

*As told by Mary Normandin*

## Taking a Stand

*I t is better to be a lion for a day than a sheep all your life.*

Elizabeth Henry

The summer before fifth grade, my world was turned upside down when my family moved from the country town where I was born and raised to a town near the beach. When school began, I found it difficult to be accepted by the kids in my class who seemed a little more sophisticated, and who had been in the same class together since first grade.

I also found this Catholic school different from the public school I had attended. At my old school, it was acceptable to express yourself to the teacher. Here, it was considered outrageous to even suggest a change be made in the way things were done.

My mom taught me that if I wanted something in life, I had to speak up or figure out a way to make it happen. No one was going to do it for me. It was up to me to control my destiny.

I quickly learned that my classmates were totally intimi-

dated by the strict Irish nuns who ran the school. My schoolmates were so afraid of the nuns' wrath that they rarely spoke up for themselves or suggested a change.

Not only were the nuns intimidating, they also had some strange habits. The previous year, my classmates had been taught by a nun named Sister Rose. This year, she came to our class to teach music several times a week. During their year with her, she had earned the nickname Pick-Her-Nose-Rose. My classmates swore that during silent reading, she'd prop her book up so that she could have herself a booger-picking session without her students noticing. The worst of it, they told me, was that after reading was over, she'd stroll through the classroom and select a victim whose hair would be the recipient of one of her prize boogers. She'd pretend to be praising one of her students by rubbing her long, bony fingers through their hair! Well, to say the least, I did not look forward to her sort of praise.

One day during music, I announced to Sister Rose that the key of the song we were learning was too high for our voices. Every kid in the class turned toward me with wide eyes and looks of total disbelief. I had spoken my opinion to a teacher—one of the Irish nuns!

That was the day I gained acceptance with the class. Whenever they wanted something changed, they'd beg me to stick up for them. I was willing to take the punishment for the possibility of making a situation better and of course to avoid any special attention from Pick-Her-Nose-Rose. But I also knew that I was being used by my classmates who just couldn't find their voices and stick up for themselves.

Things pretty much continued like this through sixth and seventh grades. Although we changed teachers, we stayed in the same class together and I remained the voice of the

class.

At last, eighth grade rolled around and one early fall morning our new teacher, Mrs. Haggard — not a nun, but strict nevertheless — announced that we would be holding elections for class representatives. I was elected vice-president.

That same day, while responding to a fire drill, the new president and I were excitedly discussing our victory when, suddenly, Mrs. Haggard appeared before us with her hands on her hips. The words that came out of her mouth left me surprised and confused. "You're impeached!" she shouted at the two of us. My first reaction was to burst out laughing because I had no idea what the word "impeached" meant. When she explained that we were out of office for talking during a fire drill, I was devastated.

Our class held elections again at the beginning of the second semester. This time, I was elected president, which I took as a personal victory. I was more determined than ever to represent the rights of my oppressed classmates.

My big opportunity came in late spring. One day, the kids from the other eighth-grade class were arriving at school in "free dress," wearing their coolest new outfits, while our class arrived in our usual uniforms: the girls in their pleated wool skirts and the boys in their salt-and-pepper pants. "How in the world did this happen?" we all wanted to know. One of the eighth graders from the other class explained that their teacher got permission from our principal, Sister Anna, as a special treat for her students.

We were so upset that we made a pact to go in and let our teacher know that we felt totally ripped off. We agreed that when she inevitably gave us what had become known to us as her famous line, "If you don't like it, you can leave," we'd

finally do it. We'd walk out together.

Once in the classroom, I raised my hand and stood up to speak to our teacher. About eight others rose to show their support. I explained how betrayed we felt as the seniors of the school to find the other eighth-graders in free dress while we had to spend the day in our dorky uniforms. We wanted to know why she hadn't spoken on our behalf and made sure that we weren't left out of this privilege.

As expected, instead of showing sympathy for our humiliation, she fed us her famous line, "If you don't like it, you can leave." One by one, each of my classmates shrank slowly back into their seats. Within seconds, I was the only one left standing.

I began walking out of the classroom, and Mrs. Haggard commanded that I continue on to the principal's office. Sister Anna, surprised to see me in her office so soon after school had begun, asked me to explain why I was there. I told her that as class president, I had an obligation to my classmates to represent them. I was given the option to leave if I didn't like the way things were, so I did. I believed that it would have been a lie for me to sit back down at that point.

She walked me back to class and asked Mrs. Haggard to tell her version of the situation. Mrs. Haggard's side seemed to be different from what the class had witnessed. Then something incredible happened. Some of my classmates began shouting protests from their desks in response to Mrs. Haggard's comments. "That's not true," they countered. "She never said that," they protested.

It was too much of a stretch for them to stand up and walk out with me that day, but I knew something had clicked inside of them. At least they finally spoke up.

Perhaps they felt that they owed me. Or they realized that

we'd soon be at different high schools and I wouldn't be there to stick up for them anymore. I'd rather believe that when they spoke up that day, they had finally chosen to take control of their own destinies.

I can still hear their voices.

*Irene Dunlap*

## Loving Equally

*We are taught you must blame your father, your sisters, your brothers, the school, the teachers — you can blame anyone, but never blame yourself. It's never your fault. But it's ALWAYS your fault, because if you wanted to change, you're the one who has got to change. It's as simple as that, isn't it?*

Katherine Hepburn

My parents had been married for eighteen years and dating since my mother was fourteen. Their marriage had been on the rocks for as long as I can remember. They had talked about divorcing many times but never went through with it for the sake of their only child, me.

One of their last fights that I can remember was very physical. My parents destroyed all of each other's belongings, and it soon came to the point where there was nothing left in the house that wasn't demolished. There were holes in the walls and just pieces of everything covering the floor.

My father shoved my mother around and bruised her pretty badly, and I had to witness it all with my fourteen-year-

old eyes.

Before I knew it, we were in court and I had to make the decision of whose hands to put my life into. I had to choose which parent I would live with every day. I felt like my heart was being cut out of my chest and my parents were tugging at each end of it. I loved both of my parents, and I knew one way or the other I was going to hurt one of them. After I thought for a while, I decided to live with my mom even though I knew my dad would be upset.

But it was much harder than I thought it would be. My mom was always talking about my dad and how terrible she thought he was. She still held a lot of anger inside of her heart, and she wanted to get back at my dad through me. I felt like she wanted me to love only her and to despise my father. Because I loved my dad, too, I was upset a lot and we started to argue all the time.

Nine months later, I went to live with my dad because my mother and I could no longer stand each other. I was blaming her for my feelings of confusion and anger. At first, it was better with my dad, but after only a week he started the same thing that my mother had been doing—only in reverse. My dad seemed to want me to have a lot of feelings of hatred towards my mother. I stuck it out at his house for a while. Then I began to see that he wasn't as interested in me as I thought that he would be. He never asked me when I would be home or who I was hanging out with. I had pretty much all the freedom I wanted. Without any curfews or rules, I began to feel like he didn't even care about me. I began partying too much, and my life was getting completely off track.

After I had a few fights with my dad and spent many nights alone, crying myself to sleep, I realized that I had to figure out what to do.

I recognized that there were ups and downs about living with both of them. They both had their faults and made mistakes. Neither of them wanted to admit their own mistakes, and they were both quick to point out the mistakes of the other. There was no way for me to decide who was right or who was wrong. I couldn't love one of them more than the other and leave the other one behind. I decided that I had to love both parents equally.

I could no longer let them influence me and take control of my feelings so easily. I began by asking them to please keep their feelings for each other to themselves. I think that they tried, but it didn't work. When that failed, I realized that I would have to do this myself. I'd just have to try and be strong and ignore what they said about each other. As soon as I made that decision, I felt more in control and my life began to change.

My mom and dad still say things out of anger about each other and they don't speak to one another. But do you know what? That's *their* problem. Not mine. I'm just doing the best I can to be fair to both of them. In my life, it has been a welcome change to not get caught up in their personal battles, but to focus on loving them instead.

Nicole Peters, fifteen

## Just Do It!

*The shortest answer is doing.*

English Proverb

*My vision is getting worse. I can't even see what is five feet away from me without squinting. I know I need to get glasses, but I refuse to. I'm afraid they will make me look dorky. Besides, I can manage without them. These were my thoughts two years ago, when I was in the sixth grade. An embarrassing experience taught me that what I was thinking was wrong.*

School had been out for two months. I was going to go to junior high school shortly, where I was sure that appearances are everything. So the question still remained. *Should I, or should I not, wear glasses?* The question was still in my mind when my family and I attended a wedding late in the summer.

During the wedding, I don't know why, but I felt as if I were ready to explode. Maybe it was the excessive amount of soda I drank prior to the wedding. Immediately after the ceremony ended, I walked quickly to the bathroom. Since it was

an emergency and I couldn't clearly distinguish which door was marked boys, I just opened the nearest door and entered the restroom.

Unfortunately, I had entered the wrong restroom. I didn't know this though, at the time, because all I could think about was to accomplish what I had gone there to do.

After I was done, I went to the faucet to wash my hands. *That's awkward*, I thought, after looking around the squeaky-clean restroom. *How come there are only toilets in here? Could I be in the girls' bathroom?* Abruptly, as if to answer my question, I heard a shrill scream coming from the direction of the entrance to the restroom.

After that incident, I decided to wear the dorky-looking glasses. I didn't really care about what people thought of me anymore, as long as I never, ever, entered the wrong bathroom again.

On the first day of seventh grade, instead of making fun of me, I received compliments from my friends. They thought the glasses made me look more intelligent — more like a grownup.

So if you know something is right, just do it! Don't make premature assumptions the way I did. You can avoid unnecessary embarrassment. It doesn't matter what others think of you. All that matters is what you think of yourself — and that you can see where you are going!

*Son Truong Nguyen, fourteen*

## I Love You,Lindsey

*T*ime is a dressmaker specializing in alterations.

Faith Baldwin

My heart drooped as I forced my unwilling body into the car. It would be miles and miles until we reached our painful destination, where we would have to leave Brandy, my oldest sister. Brandy was leaving home to serve as a volunteer in the Americorps.

My dad revved the car engine and we left the house. Soon, the streets turned into highways, and we were closer to having to say good-bye with every mile. My heart continued to sink lower.

All of the bittersweet memories of growing up with my sister flowed into my brain ... from when I was young and Brandy telling me that my troll was evil, to when I copied her every move because I admired her so much, to when the painful teenage years came and her life was too busy for her younger sister. The anger came back to me too; the anger that came when suddenly my life was too immature for hers.

I didn't understand how come my old companion only

talked to me when I did something wrong or when I annoyed her. *Why did her new clothes make my childish apparel look babyish?* These questions and many more stayed in my head.

Now I knew that my time with her was very limited. Throughout the ride she made wicked remarks that hurt, but this time I knew what they meant. They still hurt me even though I knew that this was the agonizing way that she pulled herself away from us, in preparation for her leaving us at last.

When we reached the place where Brandy was to stay, we did everything that we could to stall the painful good-byes that awaited us, until all that was left were the good-byes. The tears began to stream down my cheeks as she hugged me and told me the words that I hadn't heard in a long time.

"I love you, Lindsey."

I sobbed an answer in response. The family was all tears. We all piled into the car and pulled away. Brandy, still crying, turned her back and walked off. In that one moment, I loved her more than anything in the world. She looked like an adult as she walked away, but as the light from the headlight lit her face, I saw the little Brandy that still wanted to be my friend and still wanted to be a part of the family.

On the long drive home that night I felt as though I had left my heart with Brandy. I couldn't imagine life without my big sister or the endless chatter that Brandy always supplied. Would life ever be the same?

It has taken some time, but now I know that life goes on, even though Brandy isn't here. She is always with me because a part of her is in me and always will be.

*Lindsey Rawson, twelve*

## My Best Friend

We had been best friends since fourth grade. Me and Patty. Patty and me. Just about everywhere we went, people knew we were best friends. She taught me how to play pool in her cool, dark basement, and I taught her how to play basketball on my asphalt driveway. But the best part about having a best friend was taking turns sleeping over on Friday nights, sharing secrets over popcorn and soda, year after year after year.

Then in eighth grade everything changed. Or, I believe I changed and Patty didn't. Suddenly, boys became more than pals to me and my interest in make-up and clothes surprised even my mom. I couldn't believe Patty started the first day of school wearing the same pigtails she had worn forever. I had the latest hair fashion. I felt so confused and guilty at the same time. What was happening? Other girls seemed more interesting than Patty, and I wanted their approval. I felt restless and bored every time I went to her house now.

I started avoiding her and making excuses. Finally, during the middle of the year, as we were sitting on my front lawn, the words burst out. I said, "Go home, Patty, and don't come back." I ran into the house crying and sobbing. Mom sat me down and I told her everything. I'll never forget her words. She said, "Friends will come and go in and out of your life

orever. You are changing and it's okay for both of you to make new friends. What's happening is hard but perfectly normal."Hearing the word "normal" was just what I needed.

The next day, the word was out at school and classmates picked Patty's side or mine. The rest of the year was tough—I missed having a best friend but I also started enjoying the new "me" that was emerging. Patty became captain of the girls' basketball team while I got the lead in the eighth-grade spring play. We spoke to each other but only on the most superficial terms.

Time healed a lot of the awkwardness, and over the next few years we clearly went down separate paths. Still, when I saw her in the halls of high school, I felt a strange sadness and longing. I thought if I went back and "fixed" everything between us, we could somehow start all over as friends. But that was a fantasy. Our differences were too great, and I could only hope she understood.

I'll always remember the years Patty and I were best friends, but Mom was right. Friendships can change, and we have to let them go when it's time.

*Tamera Collins*



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## You Know You're Growing Up When...

You can't fit in the baby swing at the park.

*Kirsten Gunderson, eight*

You manage to squeeze yourself into your old hiding space but you can't get back out.

*Rachael Pavelko, twelve*

You can go on the roller coaster because you pass the height mark.

*Kelsey Gunderson, ten*

You realize the world does NOT revolve around you.

*Lindsay Carlson, fourteen*

You start getting more phone calls than your mom.

*Kim Riddle, eleven*

Instead of getting up at the crack of dawn to watch cartoons on Saturdays, you sleep until noon.

*Lauren Aitchison, eleven*

Food tastes just as good with a lot less ketchup.

*Amanda Long, ten*

You realize it's YOUR underwear that your mother is hanging on the clothesline for all the neighbors to see.

*Janelle Breese-Biagioni*

You go to the movies and you can see something not made by Disney.

*Alex Blake, nine*

Boys and girls no longer have cooties! (I don't know if I'm there yet.)

*Amaelia Macoritto, twelve*

The goofy-looking neighbor kid who plays football with your brother comes over and asks if you're home, not your brother, and he has suddenly transformed into a handsome prince!

*Ashton Howe, thirteen*

You stop giggling at the word "kiss."

*Katy Coleman, thirteen*

You no longer crawl in bed with your mom and dad during thunderstorms.

*Annie Barkley, thirteen*

You tell your mom that you're too old to be hold-

ing her hand while walking in the mall.

*Emily Skees, thirteen*

You won't take a bath with your younger sibling anymore.

*Keley Katona, fifteen*

The waitress no longer assumes you want crayons and a kid's menu.

*Kaleigh Cronin, ten*

You are trying on thousands of clothes just to go to the skating rink (acting like your big sister).

*April Randes, sixteen*

You are asked to say the blessing at a family gathering.

*Craig Lee Watrous Jr., ten*

Your daily vitamins switch from Flintstones to vitamin C.

*Jennifer Luptak, eleven*

You get grounded instead of getting a "time-out."

*Allie Thrower, fifteen*

You start spending an hour in front of the mirror.

*Erin LeSavoy, ten*

You totally flub your first kiss, and you still think that it was wonderful.

*Ellen Lloyd-Reilley, twelve*

Your friend who is a boy becomes your "boyfriend."

*Kendall Nixon, eight*

You have to watch your younger brothers so that your mom can get her first real rest in twelve years.

*Gregory Neel and Morgan Neel, twelve*

Your mom says she'll give you some privacy in the bathroom.

*Faith Khan, thirteen*

You start getting deodorant in your Christmas stocking.

*Tim Robine, eleven*



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# 11

## ECLECTIC WISDOM

*Life is given as a gift,  
So wonderful and new.  
We need to live it day to day,  
Being careful as we do.  
For life can give us many years.  
or only months or days.  
Each moment must be savored,  
And used in special ways.  
Stop and take a moment,  
To help the poorer man.  
Or teach a child something,  
Lend a helping hand.  
Small things take but minutes,  
And one thing is plain to see:  
Great rewards return to you.  
Give the best of life; it's free.*

*Meghan Beardsley, sixteen*

## Redsy

*When we begin to take our failures nonseriously, it means we are ceasing to be afraid of them. It is of immense importance to learn to laugh at ourselves.*

Katherine Mansfield

Redsy was not only the class clown, he was the class terror because he was fearless. He was always in trouble with Miss Farley, our first-grade teacher. Miss Farley couldn't punish him enough to change his behavior. He did whatever he wanted to do, no matter what. He was also the smartest kid you ever saw. We were at the beginning of our first year of school, and Redsy could already count all the way up to one hundred.

But Redsy had a little problem. He couldn't say the *th* sound. He couldn't say the word "three" — it came out as "free." It drove Miss Farley crazy because she thought that he could do it right if he only tried harder. Every time Redsy would get caught doing something wrong, Miss Farley would keep him after school and make him practice his *th's*.

One Friday afternoon, Miss Farley announced that we

were all going to count up to one hundred the following Monday. Sure enough, when Monday rolled around, Redsy was the first one to be called on by Miss Farley to come to the front of the class and count.

As he passed her in the aisle, Miss Farley grabbed his sleeve and their eyes met. She was a mean old woman who strictly insisted on having things done her way. I remember not ever wanting to look her in the eye. We were all terrified of her, except for Redsy. He wasn't afraid of anything.

Redsy started counting fast and furiously the instant he reached the front. "One, two, FREE, four, five ..." The class snickered and Miss Farley started to get red in the face. Redsy got a little flustered too, because he realized what he had just done. He had told us in the schoolyard, before class, that he was going to do it right. On he went; "Ten, eleven, twelve, FIRTEEN ..." The rest of us began to giggle and stifled laughter broke out here and there. Miss Farley stood up and glared at the class. We all stopped and became quiet as Redsy flew on into the twenties.

Then the magic moment arrived. Redsy got to twenty-nine and when he did, the class held its collective breath in unison. Redsy met Miss Farley's stare with utter disregard and cried out, "TWENTY N-I-I-I-I-I-I-NE ... FIRDY!" Then Redsy flew on in a continuous, nonstop torrent, "Firdy-one, firdy-two, firdy-free ..." with a huge smile on his face. The entire class exploded in laughter. We were seeing Redsy at his best — he knew just exactly what he was doing! Our laughter was much more important to Redsy than was Miss Farley's wrath. Miss Farley lunged at Redsy to get him to stop, but he dodged her as easily as a rabbit and continued, "Firdy-four, firdy-five ..." to a rising din of uncontrolled

laughter.

The laughter continued through the forties. When he reached the fifties, the laughter began to subside, and Redsy slowed his pace as he continued to dodge Miss Farley's now-feeble attempts to grab him as he ran back and forth in front of the class. She finally gave up and sat down at her desk, and Redsy picked up the pace. As he flew past "Ninety-free..." no one uttered a sound because we all were afraid of what would happen when he got to the end.

"Ninety N-I-I-I-NE ... one hundred!" he bellowed. Then silence.

Miss Farley remained at her desk with her head lowered, her face in her hands. She was shaking uncontrollably and we became alarmed. After a long moment, she lifted her head and laughter burst out of her like the breaking of a dam. Then the entire class joined in, including Redsy.

Miss Farley finally agreed, for the first time in her long teaching career, that she had been had by the best.

*Barry Fireman*

## DENNIS THE MENACE



"Miss Sitton, who made the loudest chalk squeak . . .  
me or Dewey?"

DENNIS THE MENACE® Used by permission of Hank Ketcham and © by North America Syndicate.

## Tippy

I was late for the school bus and rushing to get ready. My dog, Tippy, ran past me. *What's your big hurry?* I wondered, annoyed. It wasn't like *he* was late for the school bus like I was. When he got to the front door, he laid down in front of it — his way of asking to be petted. I ignored his shameless begging for affection, hurdled over him and sprinted for the waiting yellow bus.

That afternoon, I jumped out of the bus and dashed up the driveway. *That's odd*, I thought. Tippy was usually outside, barking an entire paragraph of "hellos" as soon as he saw me come home. When I burst through the door, the house was quiet and still. I dumped my coat and backpack on the floor. Mom silently appeared. She asked me to sit down at the kitchen table.

"Honey, I have some sad news that I need to tell you. This morning, while you were at school, Tippy was hit by a car and killed. He died instantly, so he didn't suffer. I know how much he meant to you. I'm so sorry," said Mom.

"NO! It's not true!" I was in shock. I couldn't believe her. "Tippy, come here! Come on, boy!" I called and called for him. I waited. He didn't come. Feeling lost, I wandered into the living room. He wasn't on the couch, so I had no pillow for my head while I watched cartoons. Mom called me for

dinner and I rambled to my place. He wasn't hiding under the table, so I had to eat all of my dinner. I went to sleep that night, but I didn't cry. I still couldn't believe that he was gone.

When I got off the bus the next day, the silence grew deafening. Finally, my sobs bubbled up and erupted like lava from a volcano. I felt like I was also going to die from having my insides shaken apart, and I couldn't stop crying or end the thoughts that kept going through my head. *I should have trained him better. If I had been home, I could have called him away from the road. I didn't even pet him when I left. How could I have known that was my last chance?* I cried until I felt hollow inside.

My parents bought a new dog named Tinker Belle. I didn't care. I was busy giving hate looks to people speeding in their cars. *They shouldn't drive so fast that they couldn't stop when they see a dog in the road.* My parents still got the silent treatment from me. *Why hadn't they made sure that Tippy was tied up?* I was mad at Tippy for getting killed, and I was mad at the entire "dog kingdom" for not knowing enough to stay out of the road.

I didn't share my dinner with our new dog. She was too small to be my pillow for television, and her bark was squeaky. When she begged for attention, I pushed her away. I spent a lot of time alone, feeling sorry for myself and wondering, *Why did this have to happen to me? What am I going to do now? Why did Tippy have to die?*

Time passed, and against my will, I started to understand some things. It felt like waking up a little at a time. I realized what little control any of us have over what happens to a dog. Sure, we can train them and tie them up and do everything right, but bad things can still happen. And, in spite of

us, good things can happen too. That's life. The best way to deal with the hard times is to figure out what I need to do for myself to get through them when they come, and to remember that hard times pass.

I also discovered that my capacity to love didn't die with Tippy. I became awfully lonely when I was trying to harden my heart. I began to realize that there were good things about Tinker Belle that were different from the good things about Tippy. I couldn't rest my head on her little body, or pretend to ride Tinker Belle the way I had done with Tippy, but I could fit Tinker Belle into my backpack and carry her around.

I learned that I need to pet my dog whenever I can—and to really enjoy my time with her! Now I pet my dog slowly when I have the chance and quickly when I'm in a hurry, but I never leave the house without petting her.

I now deeply understand the "Circle of Life." Everyone is born, everyone dies, and that's the way it is. If dogs never died, there would be no room for others like Tinker Belle ... and her five cute puppies!

Best of all, realize that Tippy left behind all of my good memories of him. And they come to me every time I call!

*Christine Armstrong*

## What's a Miracle ,Granddad?

*Decisions determine destiny.*

Frederick Speakman

"What's a miracle ,Granddad?"asked five-year-old Sam.  
He looked up at me with his innocent,wide eyes.  
I did know of a miracle. It happened to a friend of mine  
named Bart.

One day,Bart decided he wanted to have a dog. Bart's par-  
ents agreed to let him get a dog from the animal shelter,but  
they wanted to help pick it out. Bart agreed.

The next morning,Bart and his parents drove to the local  
animal shelter. There were two dogs that Bart liked. It was  
very difficult, but Bart finally picked one. He named him  
Scruffy. Scruffy looked exactly like his namesake;he was a  
small,terrier type with hair going in all directions. His color  
was sort of brown and sort of red, and there was even gray  
in there too. He was a very energetic dog, never still for a  
second. He just wanted to play and run around.

Bart's parents did not like Scruffy at all. Scruffy was too  
energetic for them. He was not a good-looking dog. The oth-

er dog, called Lady, was a very pretty dog. Lady had quiet manners and was a handsome beagle.

Bart agreed that Lady was a much prettier dog, and gentler. Since his parents insisted, he agreed to adopt Lady and not Scruffy.

Bart held Lady all the way home. She slept in Bart's room that night and the next night, too. Bart liked having her near him. He started to love that sweet dog.

On the third day, tragedy struck. For no apparent reason, and with no warning, Lady quietly died in her sleep. It was a tragic moment for the family.

Bart cried and cried. His mother did, too. His father cried a little, also. Bart felt heartbroken. Lady had become the love of his life.

The next morning, after they had laid Lady to rest, Bart said, "Mom, Dad, I really liked the other dog, Scruffy. I know he liked me, too. Can't we go back and get him?"

His parents told him to forget Scruffy because three days had gone by, and it would be too late.

"Too late? Too late for what?" he asked.

They explained that the animal shelter only keeps stray dogs for three days, and if they are not adopted the shelter has to do something about it.

"Like what?" asked Bart, not wanting to hear the answer.

"They have to put them to sleep," said his mother gently. His father put his arm around Bart and added, "There are just too many dogs and cats in the city, Bart. The shelter only has so much money, and so few volunteers to take care of them. The animals do not suffer at all. A veterinarian just puts them to sleep. It is done very quietly and painlessly."

"I guess they have no other choice," Bart said. "But let's go back anyway. Maybe we can save Scruffy."

Bart's parents argued against going back. They said it was too late. There was no way that Scruffy could still be in the shelter. They warned Bart not to expect anything but disappointment.

But Bart's parents drove him back to the shelter. Bart's dad parked the car and sighed. He had seen the veterinarian's car parked in the official's spot. He did not want to tell Bart that this was the veterinarian who put the animals to sleep.

The three of them entered the shelter. They went directly to the wire cage that had held Scruffy three days before. It was empty!

"Scruffy is gone," said Bart. "Mom, Dad, he's gone."

"We tried to tell you. Try to understand," said his mother.

"Can I help you folks?" said a voice.

Bart whirled around and saw a young woman in a white coat.

"Were you looking for a dog to adopt?" she said.

"Yes," said Bart. "I want the dog that was here, in this cage. The dog is gone. I want *that* dog."

"The veterinarian was late getting here today because of car trouble. What you want is in that room over there." She pointed to a door.

Bart bolted past her and raced through the door. It was marked "PRIVATE — KEEP OUT." In the middle of the room, on a cold steel table was Scruffy. He was strapped down. His legs were kicking. His big brown eyes were wide with fear and his tongue was hanging from the side of his mouth. Standing over him was the vet, an ugly hypodermic needle in his hand.

Bart jumped into the room. He screamed at the veterinarian, "Stop! Stop, please," said Bart. "I want that dog. Don't

kill him!"

Bart got his dog, and Scruffy still lives with Bart today.  
Do you know what a miracle is now, Sam?

*Lew Talmadge*

## Never Put Rocks in Your Mouth

When I was in the sixth grade, my teacher asked our class the question, "What does 'doing the right thing' mean to you?" She asked us to think about that question over the weekend, and to talk to our parents or anyone else we thought might have a good answer. By Monday, we were to turn in an essay on what "doing the right thing" meant, and be prepared to live up to our answers.

The entire weekend, I wracked my brain trying to come up with something that would impress my teacher and be easy to live by. I talked to my parents, called my grandmother and asked my next-door neighbor. I even asked the mailman! Everyone had good answers, but I didn't feel like I could live up to them.

By Sunday afternoon, I hadn't written my essay. To make matters worse, my parents said we were going to my Aunt Cindy's house. That usually meant that I would have to entertain my cousin Andrea while my parents visited after dinner. Andrea was four and a major pest.

Just as I predicted, my parents told me to play with Andrea while they visited. I turned on the television and found a Disney movie for Andrea, and then I sat down and started to write my essay. I still didn't know what I was going to write about, but it was due the next morning and this was my last

chance.

Soon I felt a pair of eyes on me. It was Andrea.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I have to write an essay about what doing the right thing means to me."

Andrea laughed. "That's easy," she said.

"Okay," I said, thinking, *What could this smart aleck four-year-old possibly know that all of the adults who I had asked hadn't already come up with?*

"Tell me the answer," I said smugly.

Andrea cleared her throat and stood up.

"Doing the right thing means being nice to your family and friends. Doing what your mommy says. Never lie. Eat lots of fruits and vegetables. Don't eat dog food. Take a bath when you're dirty and wash your own private parts. Don't watch icky movies with kissing and stuff. Don't waste water and electricity. Don't scare the cat. Don't ever run away. And never, never put rocks in your mouth."

I stared with astonishment at my little cousin. Then I jumped up, grabbed Andrea and gave her the biggest hug I could. Not only had Andrea answered a very tough question for me, I could easily live by all of her rules. All I had to do was be nice, not lie, keep myself clean and healthy, not scare cats, and never, never put rocks in my mouth. Piece of cake. So when I wrote my essay, I included the story about Andrea and how she had answered my question.

Two weeks later, my teacher returned everyone's essays. I received an A<sup>+</sup> along with a little note my teacher had written at the top: "Always do the right thing—and give Andrea an A<sup>+</sup>, too!"

Shirley Barone Craddock

## The Moment I knew I'd Never Be Cool

*From their errors and mistakes, the wise and good learn wisdom for the future.*

Plutarch

My older sister was born to be liked. She came out of the womb with a cute face, blonde hair, a sense of humor, athletic ability, and what my mom called the “gift of gab.” She went through her childhood with lots of friends, lots of parties and lots of attention. I wanted what my sister had: popularity.

I studied her for years and never came close, so I turned to kids my own age for role models. Jen, the girl I always sat next to in school, threw her blonde hair around, showed off her dimples, put her head to one side when she asked for favors and was easily voted most popular in class. Okay, I thought, *I'll try her tactics.* I threw my brown hair around, smiled without dimples, put my head to one side and asked my teacher for a pass to the bathroom. She looked at me and said, “Why are you doing that with your head? Don’t you feel well?”

That was my cue to try for cool instead of popular. I'd do anything to escape my lack of social status. Cool kids always acted as though they had the world under control, maneuvering around obstacles and adults with ease, and never cracking under pressure. My big chance came when a new girl moved to town and into my class. Nothing seemed to ruffle Tiffany. She was cute, trendy, and best of all, she liked me.

Our friendship lasted four weeks — just long enough for me to learn that Tiffany took European vacations, went skiing in Aspen and bought clothes at Nieman-Marcus. I'd never been outside of Illinois, on skis or anywhere but the Sears preteen department. We were only eleven and she'd already picked out the car she'd get for her sixteenth birthday. Tiffany was way too much for me. I crawled back into my familiar invisibility ...

Until I met Mandy. Mandy's middle name was "rebel." She and her brother, Kevin, smoked cigarettes and stole money out of their mom's purse. *If popularity and cool are out of reach, I thought, I'll take rebellion over facelessness.* I was soon hanging out at Mandy's house, where no adults were ever around to notice what we were doing. I puffed cigarettes, pretended to shoplift and felt powerful for the first time in my life. I did crazy things my parents never suspected, and had a great time bragging about it to other kids. I could feel my status rising. Then Kevin was arrested and sent to a detention center. Never wanting to end up like him, I pitched my cigarettes and headed back into obscurity.

By eighth grade, I was desperate. I tried out for cheerleading at my small school, and by some miracle, made it onto the squad. My head swelled like a melon. *I must have absorbed popularity and coolness without realizing it,* I thought. I took this tiny piece of status and ran with it.

At first, being popular and cool seemed to be easy. I tolerated, agreed with or laughed at the nasty comments of the cool girls who stayed that way by pointing out the uncoolness of others. Things like, "Look at Dana's hair. Think she used a hedge trimmer?" or "Can you believe those shoes Lauren wore last night? She must have borrowed them from her grandmother." Guys weren't spared. "Oh, Tyler. What a crater face!" and, "Yeewww. Bryce actually thought I'd be seen with him in public!"

The better they were at cutting people to shreds, the faster those girls seemed to rise above the masses. Like stand-up comics, they pointed out other people's flaws and made the crowds roar. *Why, I wondered, were putdowns cool? They made my stomach cramp. Was it who said them? The way they were said?*

*Okay, I decided, I can say nasty things about other people for the sake of personal success.* I picked a time and place for my initiation. A budding friendship with the Faris twins gave me a stage. Sara and Shauna were way cooler than I'd ever be. They'd been hanging with guys since seventh grade.

My debut came after church. The three of us were standing around waiting for rides home. I listened to them rip first on girls and then on guys. One guy in particular took the brunt of their hits; first his clothes, then his voice, then his brain, then his looks.

"I know what you mean," I volunteered, as Shauna turned up her nose at the mention of the poor guy's hairy arms. "Some guys are real apes ..."

As the words left my mouth, a not-so-good-looking guy drove past in a blue convertible. *Perfect opportunity, I thought.* I pointed to the driver, "... like that guy — red-haired and u-g-l-y." I made chimp sounds as I watched the

car turn into a nearby driveway. Instead of agreement, I heard nothing from the twins. It was like I was standing on the ocean bottom with my ears plugged. I turned slowly to see Sara and Shauna with necks stiff and eyes impaling me on an invisible stake.

*What? What?* My confused brain was pleading. *What'd I say?*

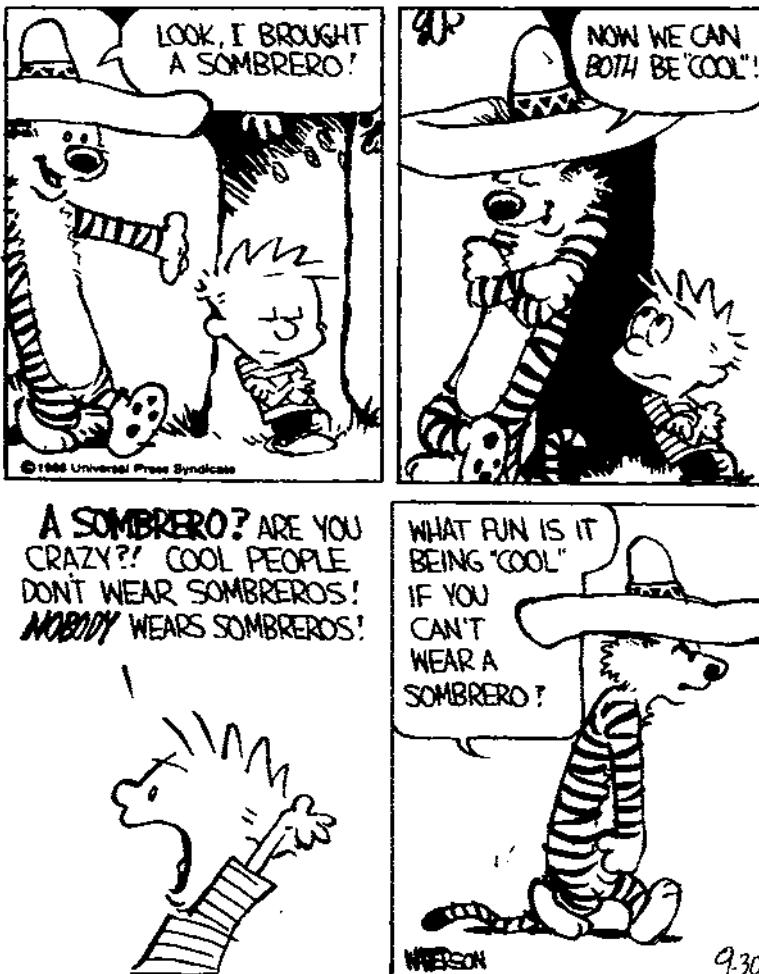
The answer slithered out of Sara's mouth as the twins turned their backs and walked toward the blue convertible. "That red-haired and u-g-l-y ape is our brother."

The rest, as they say, is history. My journey to cool stalled right there in front of church. With face burning and ears ringing, I'm sure I heard an otherworldly voice whisper, *You'll never be popular, cool, or anything else your heart won't let you be. Start looking inside, instead of out.*

It took me a while to get what those words meant. But once I stopped trying to be like other people, life got a whole lot easier. I'm even growing up to be someone I really like.

*D. Marie O'Keefe*

# Calvin and Hobbes



by Bill Watterson

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## Lost

One afternoon, when I was five, my mom and I went shopping at a very large grocery store. While we were in the dairy department, something caught my attention and I became distracted. When I turned, expecting to find my mother, no one was there. My mother had moved on, thinking I was behind her. I panicked! I spun around several times, desperately searching for my mother but to my dismay, no luck. I started running up and down every aisle, with my eyes darting in every direction. I passed the cereal, green beans, spaghetti sauce and pork chops.

Then I spotted someone, wearing a similar outfit to my mom's, with her back to me. I had found her! I sprinted as fast as I could toward the woman. I was running so fast that I could not stop myself and planted my face right into her rear end. As I fell to the floor, the lady spun around screaming. After a quick look at the woman's face, I realized it was NOT my mom! I picked myself up as fast as I could, turned around and ran the other direction.

Not watching where I was going, I stumbled right into a cardboard shelf containing several bags of potato chips. I was so scared, I was crying profusely as the chip bags tumbled down around me.

Fortunately, my mother was standing at the end of the

aisle and had seen the whole thing. Laughing hysterically, she came running to pull me out of my grave of chip bags. She hadn't been as far away from me as I had thought.

I learned a valuable lesson that day. From then on, if I ever thought I was lost in a grocery store I asked the person behind the counter to help me find my mom.

*Casey Veronie, thirteen*

## Kindness Is a Simple Gift

*I*n this world we must help one another.

Jean de La Fontaine

My family and I were taking a well-deserved vacation to Disneyland. I had never been there before and was eagerly anticipating experiencing the magic.

There was another reason that this trip was special. My father was a workaholic who worked long hours. I longed to spend time with him. I wanted to be able to sit down with my father, who I loved more than life, and just talk. It always seemed like there was never time.

The day finally arrived when I was allowed to pack my clothes. I chose only my favorite outfits. I threw in my autograph book and then muscled the suitcase zipper around the overflow of clothes. I set my suitcase on my comforter and smiled. I was ready.

I didn't get any sleep that night. I lay in my bed and stared out the window. I knew that my father's work was going to be left at home, finally.

After a brief breakfast we hit the open road. It was all

smooth sailing for the first couple of hours until I unexpectedly felt a sharp jerk. We coasted to the side of the road, and my dad said something about the engine being shot. We were in the middle of four lanes of traffic, so he decided the easiest thing to do would be to flag someone down and get a ride into town.

An hour later, my dad was still waving his hands at each and every passing car but it wasn't doing any good. Not a single soul would stop to assist my helpless family. Finally Father gave up and decided to walk into town. I was certain it was a very long distance. I pleaded with him to stay and try again, but he was deaf to my pleading. He just said that he wouldn't let anything ruin this trip for me. My heart ached as he put on his coat and began to walk away from our car. My dad has a back problem, and he was too stubborn to admit that he wasn't in any condition to even walk a couple of miles.

Then I saw a figure out of the window. It was a lone trucker. I looked around for his rig. I didn't see it until I realized that his truck was parked on the other side of the road. He had walked across four lanes of traffic to get to us. The feeling I felt at that moment is indescribable. I was truly touched that this man cared so much. Not one other person had taken time out of his or her own selfish life to stop and see if everything was okay, but this man was different. He didn't even know us, and he didn't expect anything in return.

Father got his ride back to town, and our car was repaired. My visions of Mickey were rekindled, as was my faith that angels do exist. Because of that man's actions, my father and I had the opportunity to grow close again, and I still cherish my genuine Mickey Mouse autograph.

None of this would have been possible if that man hadn't given us the gift that he did—the gift of kindness.

*Michael Oknefski, seventeen*

## Our Christmas Secret

*Admitting errors clears the score and proves you wiser than before.*

Arthur Guiterman

It was Christmas Eve when my sister and I decided to open our presents before our mom got home from work. She usually came home about an hour after we got home from school, which we thought was plenty of time to sneak a peek at the gifts under the tree. Since my sister was older, and that put her in charge, she opened the first gift while I was ordered to stand guard at the big picture window in our front room. I was to report any suspicious activity or persons, namely our mother.

I was so excited that I could barely stand still. I also couldn't keep my eyes on the window very long. My head moved from the window to my sister and back to the window again. I felt like I was watching a Ping-Pong match.

"All right!" my sister shouted. She pulled out a jewelry box. "You know what that means, don't you?"

I jumped up and down. "Yeah, it's my turn!"

"No," she said. "It means that there must be some jewelry under here." I watched my sister rummage through the presents under the tree trying to find one she thought was small enough to be a necklace or earrings.

"Hey, that's not fair!" I whined, stomping my foot.

"Are you watching for Mom?" is all that she said. I couldn't do anything except stand guard as she opened present after present. Finally, when my sister's curiosity was satisfied and she had finished wrapping her last present back up, we traded places.

My heart hammered so hard that it felt like my chest was moving in and out. My sister reminded me to be careful so I wouldn't tear the paper, and to wrap the present back up the same way that I had found it.

After unwrapping a few presents, I found it faster to open one end of a present and peek inside. "Cool! Mom and Dad got me headphones for my stereo!"

I pulled the headphones out of the box and was about to put them on when my sister shouted, "Quick! Wrap it back up! Mom's coming!"

My heart hit the floor along with the headphones when I heard what sounded like glass crushing. I knew it was my mother coming down our gravel driveway. My body was as frozen as a snowman.

"Come on!" My sister's face was as white as the paint on the wall.

I shoved the headphones back in the box but my hands were shaking so such that I tore the paper trying to wrap it back up. My sister was yelling at me, which only made my hands shake more. I heard the jingle of keys and the door-knob rattle. I thought I was going to wet my pants! My heart pounded harder as I tried to get the tape to stick.

"Just shove it under the tree and put some presents on top of it!" my sister shouted as she ran to stall my mother.

I had just finished burying the package with my headphones in it when my mother came into the front room. I jumped up and said, "Hi, Mom!" She smiled at me and said, "Hi," back, but didn't appear to suspect a thing. My heart began to slow as I took a deep breath. That was close. Too close!

On Christmas morning, my sister and I smiled for pictures and gave award-winning performances when we opened our presents — again. "Headphones!" I exclaimed. "Thanks, it's just what I wanted." After everything had been opened, my sister and I looked at each other, and our eyes met. Our secret was safe, but somehow Christmas morning didn't feel the same.

My sister and I never opened our Christmas presents early again. I don't know if it was that opening our gifts for the second time just wasn't as much fun as the first time, or if we came too close to getting caught and didn't want to think about what our mother would have done to us.

I also learned something that year about my mother. I found out that she wasn't as dumb as I thought she was. Maybe it was the lack of squeals on Christmas morning or the torn wrapping paper that tipped her off. For some reason, all of the packages for our birthdays, which she usually hid at the top of her closet shelf, never appeared. I never did find out where she hid them.

*Lori Menning*

## What I've Learned So Far

Never try to get corn off the cob with a fork.

When playing in the gym, beware of steel beams.

Never let guys in your room on an overnight school trip.

The condiments at meals are not toys.

Before you give a kid Listerine, make sure that he knows not to swallow it.

NEVER throw up in a vent.

*Melissa Amyx, fourteen*

Don't try to baptize your neighbor's cat, especially with a hose.

*Marleigh Dunlap, thirteen*

Some teachers are there to teach and that's all, but others are there to watch and help you grow.

*Janne Perona, thirteen*

Everything you do in your life cannot be taken back.

Family is the most important gift of all.

Be true to yourself and it won't matter if others aren't true to you.

*Nikki Chance, fifteen*

Don't be afraid to make new friends and expand your relationships with other friends.

*Reanna Grissom, twelve*

Don't trust anyone who knows how to give a wedgie.

*Sylvia, Lares, nine*

If you have something bad to tell your mom, tell her when she's on the phone.

*Brennan Shaw, eleven*

Never let a stain from the past make a mark on your future.

*Jillian Graham, twelve*

Read lots of stuff written in the 1700s, it'll make you smarter.

*Dena Soffer, ten*

Never put your tongue on a really cold metal pole.

*Joshua White, twelve*

Never eat unsweetened chocolate. Yuk!

*Dylan Dudley, seven*

If you give your enemy a second chance they might turn out to be your best friend.

*Mandy Tallant, twelve*

Always pretend you understand what the Spanish teacher is saying.

*Tarek Audi, fifteen*

Never trust your fifteen-year-old uncle to make dinner.

*George Preston, fourteen*

Never eat prunes, no matter what your grandma says.

*Melanie Hansen, twelve*

Never fall asleep during a field trip if your friends have toothpaste with them.

*Filipe Romero, thirteen*

Don't use words that you don't understand to impress someone. It can be very embarrassing.

*Chastity Sezate, thirteen*

Make sure to look at yourself in the mirror before you leave the house, especially if you're going somewhere important.

*Carol Rodriguez, thirteen*

Don't let older siblings get the best of you; that's just what they want.

*Gladys Lau, twelve*

You can't run away from your fears, unless it's a wasp.

*Michael Betancourt, twelve*

If your dad asks you, "Do you think I'm an idiot?" carefully consider your answer.

*Liz Hansen, fourteen*

Your food ends up in your lap when you sit too far away from the table.

*Cory Price, nine*

With my wheelchair, I can run faster than anyone else in my class and I can write faster than anyone with my computer.

*Becca Yurcek, ten*

When your parents yell at you they still love you.

*Santana Hubert, ten*

Pay attention in class. That way, when the teacher calls on you, you won't make a goof of yourself and have to ask, "What was the question?"

*Courtney Stewart, twelve*

Sometimes it's nice to be important, but it's always important to be nice.

*Kaleigh Cronin, ten*

Never play with a baby right after it finishes eating.

Don't bother your cousin when she is on the phone with a guy.

*Jade Mason, thirteen*

When something bad happens to you, think about someone out there who may have a bigger problem.

Never underestimate the power of love and friendship.

Never laugh with a piece of chocolate in your mouth.

*Melissa Quincosa, thirteen*

Don't eat noodles when you are wearing your retainer; they get stuck in there and it's really hard to get them out.

*Ashley Fannon, thirteen*

Even if dinner looks disgusting, it doesn't mean it will taste that way.

Have boys for friends, not just for boyfriends.

No matter how much I learn, there is always stuff I don't know.

*Chelsey Rice, eight*

Having had over nine surgeries by the age of fourteen, I will never again take for granted the gift of walking.

*Vanessa Cupo, fourteen*

If you want to make a difference, get off your butt and do it.

*Danielle Relue, thirteen*

Begging works, but don't rely on it. You don't always get what you want.

*Melissa Lansford, thirteen*

Play the hand that God has dealt you to the best of your ability. You never know what the next card will be.

*Jacqueline Christy, thirteen*

When you are waiting for your mom to finish her haircut, don't spin on the chair or you'll throw up your lunch.

*Lorin Padgurskis, ten*

Never play basketball by your parents' new car.

*Kaitlyn Sweeney, twelve*

Don't flush the toilet when your older sister is in the shower getting ready for a date.

*Weston Dunlap, ten*

It takes years to build up trust, and seconds to destroy it.

*Dijana Atikovic, twelve*

When you are cleaning your room, don't shove stuff under your bed, in your closet or under your dresser. You just end up cleaning those places, too.

*Eddie Holtz, eleven*

Who I am is not what I have but what I try my best at.

*Julie Lundgren, eleven*

When you are sick or sad, laughter is the best medicine.

*Aaron Snyder, eleven*

Keep dreaming and you may be writing the next *Chicken Soup* book.

*Jason Trusso, eleven*

## Afterword

### The End

*This is it, no more, no more  
Now your days will be a bore  
You're out of your mind, going crazy too  
Sigh! now what will you do?  
Without this glorious book to read  
The sequel to it is all you need.*

Paige Holland, ten

We hope that the 101 stories and various pieces in this book have become something more to you than written words. Our highest desire is that they now give you perspective, courage, hope and especially the ability to laugh through awkward moments should you encounter some of these same issues in your preteen years. Thanks for reading. See ya next time!