

StoneSoup



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StoneSoup

*The magazine supporting
creative kids around the world*

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Editor's Note

This is an issue about potential, possibility, and change. In Isabel Swain's story "Innocent but Dire Words," a young poet dreams of a better future for herself, while in Vandana Ravi's short story, a girl dreams of simply another place. In Grace Jiang's poems, nature comes to life again, after its seasonal death and hibernation, and in Andrew Wu's story sequence "Nature in my Eyes," nature changes in our eyes, as we attempt to see it from the angles and experiences of different creatures. Change is inevitable: we change, the world changes, time moves along. And, in the spaces between, in the time when it feels as if nothing is changing, we dream of the change that might happen. And yet when that change finally does occur—when yet again the rose blooms—it still feels miraculous. After reading this issue, I hope you will feel inspired to think and write about change—in the world or in you, past or future, real or imagined.

Happy summer!



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On the cover:
"Flight Through the
Cosmos"

by Hannah Parker, 13
South Burlington, VT

StoneSoup

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Fist, acrylic



by Claire Jiang, 12
Princeton, NJ

Innocent Yet Dire Words



by Isabel Swain, 12
Portsmouth, RI

A book lover dreaming of a better life uses poetry to cope

Like the mythical creature,
It calls out a sound.
Just not a pleasant one;
A torture in its own way.
Siren.

I hold my ears and tell myself to breathe. *One, two, three, four . . . 12, 13 . . . 20. This will pass; don't worry. It's just a siren, you don't have to have another Freak Out, Lila. It's okay, it's okay. See, it's leaving? Okay, okay.* I open my eyes, slowly uncurl myself from my Freak Out Stance, and take one last deep breath.

I shake myself off; it's over now. I peer out the dirt-encrusted window and see a hazed-out dawn. I look at the clock which shows me that it is 6:17. Two hours and 13 minutes left. In the far distance, a careless person pushes a little too hard on the gas and their car makes that God awful noise that makes me wince despite myself. After doing a pointless once over of the three-room shack that is supposedly for two, I scan this "house" (not home) for a woman who doesn't deserve the title of mother. I prefer to call her by her first name, Ilene. She's barely

ever here. Figures. Last night was the Fourth of July; she probably ran off to San Francisco with only the clothes on her back trying to fill her never-ending want for "adventure." She's nicknamed her spontaneous outings "longings" in order to make them sound more magical. Let me assure you, it doesn't work.

After I do my usual morning routine—make the bed, dust the window (singular), eat breakfast (dry cereal)—I get dressed and ready to go. By now it's 6:50, which means one hour and 40 minutes . . . Well, better just treat it like it's a normal day, even when my stomach is churning as a way of calling out, *Don't do it!* I just hope that Ilene's back on time.

Once I've located and thrown on my only decent pair of shoes, I thrust the door open and breathe in the hot air.

A moving ghost,
Too large to maintain.
Clear as day, yet blinding.
I stumble through like a wounded
soldier;
Life

Before I give myself over to the

overwhelming humiliation that will happen in about an hour and fifteen minutes, I decide to go to my comfort place, the library. My neighborhood is not spectacular in any way, except for maybe the dusty, old makeshift library. To me, this ancient building is the closest thing I've ever had to a home. I love the way it's always been there for me as though it was the parent I never had. The people and books there have become my family to run to whenever I need a home base. It's the only place I know that didn't move when I did.

When Ilene first had me, she was still living with her parents because she was so young. A month after I was born, she ran away on a train to this small town in Nevada. For the first two years we lived with Wanda, an old widow who took us in. However, she died the day before she and Ilene were going out to look for potential apartments for us to stay in. Since nothing in her will was dedicated to us, we were left to our own devices. It took my mother three months to find a steady job that she could use as a money source. And even then, it only lasted for six months. When she finally had enough money to buy us a somewhat bearable apartment, it was a small, overheated two-room that was extremely uncomfortable for a four-year-old and her single mom. Since then, we've been evicted from 32 various apartments, shacks, and Airbnbs. Usually, we overstayed our welcome or my mother hadn't paid the rent. Either way, we still moved our 10 or so possessions to yet another dingy, uncomfortable place in the same dingy, uncomfortable neighborhood.

Needless to say, I've gotten pretty used to reliving the same nightmare over and over again. As I unthinkingly play one-person soccer with a rock along the sidewalk, I rehearse exactly what I'm going to say in one hour and five minutes. I've had everything planned down to the syllable for three weeks now. I'm just praying they don't ask anything about my living situation. Ilene better be there and sober, or else I'll be immediately excused. No parental guardian, no acceptance. This is the only opportunity I've ever had, and I will not let my self-centered, sorry excuse for a mother dictate whether or not it goes my way for once. I feel myself start to panic.

The definition of fear,
Powerful yet the weakest.
I find myself consumed.
It rules my thoughts,
Anger

When the library's welcoming facade comes into view, I release a tired breath in an audible sigh. It's a beautiful place built of brick and wood. Morning glories reach all the way to the top as though they are trying to protect the knowledge that lives here. The faded windows have frames of magenta that come straight out of a fairy tale. But this is just the outside—so little compared to the interior that I long ago memorized. A dozen spacious rooms with stained-glass windows taken right out of a church. Soft leather seats surrounding dim fireplaces. And then, the shelves themselves. Their oak wood carvings tinted with well-worn paint. They are the perfect

pieces to hold the most wonderful things on Earth.

I'm practically skipping towards the door when I'm hit with a shock of ice-cold water. My gasp is involuntary. It takes me a few freezing moments before I look up to where the attack came from. My gaze focuses in on a broken gutter. The bolt holding it to the side of the roof falls to the ground as if to shove it in my face. *Well, this is perfect, isn't it. Now I have to go back to my house and change into awful-looking clothes.* In my head, a battle is unfolding over whether I should still go into the library or not. This is something that comes with the Freak Outs: anxiety and confusion over very small and unimportant things. I decide that I still have time to pick out one or two books for my later reading pleasure.

When I enter the library, the librarian looks up at me and scowls. She must be debating whether or not let me browse in sopping wet clothes. After only 30 or so seconds she looks back at the computer she's sitting in front of. Her quick fingers with long, talon-like nails scrape at the keyboard. It's the exact kind of background babble that you'd expect from a library in Nevada; it is dry and annoying, just like the weather.

I make my way over to my favorite genre's shelf. Historical fiction. I love losing myself in events that happened in the past. Something feels so great

about being a part of something that can never change. It feels solid and hopeful. I've read books on everything from World War I to the Trojan War. Usually in the perspective of a young teenage girl with dark black hair. These books are very predictable once you've read them all your life. My hands skim the worn-out copies, and they cover my hands in a thin layer of dust. I decide on a novel about a war in ancient times. These are my favorite because they're so mysterious. I mean, the story is basically just an illusion of time. While I file through the pages, my mind wanders. Specifically, drawn to the events ahead.

Two weeks ago, I had walked into the library first thing in the morning. In my peripheral vision, I had seen a pin drop. No, that's not a joke on how quiet it should be in libraries; I literally saw a pin drop. My head turned toward the source, and I found a poster floating to the floor.

My hand reached for it out of curiosity. The crisp, new edges were orange, as was the rest of the paper. But the appearance doesn't matter, it's the content that I'm here to tell.

Brand New Opening!!!

The New School on Evergreen Avenue, Smith Hill, will be opening very soon and prospective students are welcome to interview on Friday, July 27 at 8:30 a.m.

This is something that comes with the Freak Outs: anxiety and confusion over very small and unimportant things.

**All above the age of 10 are welcome!
Cost will vary based on information
gathered at the meeting.**

**Please note that no child will be
accepted into the Smith Hill School
if they do not have a legal parental
guardian with them for the meeting.**

In my head, possibilities had taken over. *What if you could convince Ilene to do this? What if you got in? What if you went to school?* This is the kind of thing I'd been waiting for my whole life. Finally, something could go my way. Then, I folded up the paper and stuffed it in my pocket. I rushed out of the library, and I didn't remember the pin I left on the ground until I was halfway home. I figured I would have to wait awhile until Ilene got home and then even longer to get her in a good enough mood to actually ask her about the interview. But I was pleasantly surprised when I found her lying in bed at home.

"Hey, Mom." Though it pained me to call her that, I knew it gave me a better chance at yes. "Are you asleep? I have something I need to ask you."

Ilene smiled—I assumed because of my unusual affection towards her. Funny how she finds so much pride in being lied to.

"I'm awake, honey. What do you need?"

"Well, there's this school that is opening up, and they are having interviews to apply soon. But, I can't go without a legal guardian and I was wondering if maybe . . ." This was hard for me to finish because I knew she could crush my newfound dreams with one innocent yet dire word. " . . .

I was wondering if you would come with me?"

I heard Ilene sigh in thought. She seemed out of it, and I hoped that would bend to my favor. Her nail touched her forehead—something I do, too. I hated myself every time I did it because the movement, so small, connected me to her.

"Well, I suppose it wouldn't hurt, would it?" She said after a moment's consideration. I couldn't believe it was that easy.

Looking back on it now, that should have been a sign that it wouldn't work. I mean, if Ilene never makes it back to the house on time, then it really would have been a sign. For now, though, I just have to focus on the best possible outcomes.

Once I check out the book, I turn around to face the door. It is huge, with smooth varnish that makes it glisten even in the artificial lighting. Step after step, I walk towards it. I don't know why but I've always been intimidated by this door. I guess it is the force that decides whether or not I can enter my favorite place—figuratively, anyway.

**Most are greedy for it, but
Few can possess the trait.
Like money, it takes over.
Wonderful yet harmful;
Power.**

When I open the door, my movement is greeted with the humid air of the summer. I find myself wishing for that shock of cold again. Now, the damp spot on my clothes is just making it more muggy and hard to move. I start the short trek back to my place

This is the kind of thing I'd been waiting for my whole life. Finally, something could go my way.

and walk along the run-down sidewalk. Multiple plants are invading the cracks that fill the concrete. They look like they have escaped from a prison too deep to notice and are soaring up to the sun while they can. I can relate to that. Once I reach the hill that overlooks my abode, I can see a figure standing by our door. My shoulders relax as I'm reassured that she is here.

I stumble down the hill towards the two shadows: one of a shack, one of a woman. I try not to trample the flowers that have popped up along with the rest of spring, although I'm pretty sure a few were sacrificed in the process. When I make it to the bottom, I realize that this woman is not, in fact, my mother.

Her posture is too perfect and her hair is up in a too-tight bun. I bet her face is red from tension underneath all that make-up. In her skinny arms is a clipboard that has unnaturally crisp white papers on it. I almost laugh at the scene: a proper businesswoman in the middle-of-nowhere Nevada standing beside a run-down shack that's decorated with rust and rot. I almost laugh until I remember she's not Ilene. *Why is she here? Where is my mother? I won't be accepted, I won't be accepted, I won't be accepted . . . keep it together, Lila.* But already my thoughts have been thrown onto the back of a bucking horse; they won't stop moving and are just trying to hold on.

The thought of them brings
revenge.

They are twisted sisters,
Moving together always.
Their cousin: regret;
Betrayal and trust.

"Who are you and why are you here? You may not know it, but right now, I'm supposed to be in an office. With my mother, starting the one opportunity that I have ever had. And yet here we are, and please, do tell, why that is."

I speak in a deadly peaceful voice, like the calm before a storm. My words are clear as day, and I sound about ten years older than I actually am. I'm trying to unnerve her; I bet she's never heard a 13-year-old talk to her like an adult. It works; the woman's face falls and she looks momentarily concerned. For me or for herself, I don't know. The woman who may just about ruin my entire life smiles a plastic smile that could easily make the healthiest person in the world be sick. She pulls together her face like a pro; I'll give her that.

"Hello there, darling! I'm Carla Hemingway from the Nevada Child Protection System. I'm here because your mother, Ilene Quortiez, was found unconscious on a park bench in San Francisco and was brought to the hospital. I know this news must be shocking and that's why . . ."

My mother is in the hospital? She left me for real this time? What happened, exactly? Why is she unconscious? Has she woken up? Will she wake up? What if she doesn't? I try poetry but it doesn't work. My last thought before I fall into the never-ending spiral is, "I told you it was San Francisco."

Peaceful yet confusing,
Drifting as though you weigh
nothing.
Welcoming darkness,
Holds you in a lull.
Oblivion.

When I wake up, the first thing that registers is the pain coming from my head. My head that's full of thoughts and poetry, the one that is my friend and foe. It's been there for me as the source of my five senses and an extra: taste, smell, hearing, sight, touch, and thought. My most powerful weapon has been diminished into a helpless object on a hospital bed. It is now the source of my pain, both physical and mental. This is when the memories come back. The horrific events come running in all at once as though they are fighting for the most grief.

In the near distance, I hear a loud beeping noise that can only come from a medical machine. My first instinct is to go into Freak Out Stance, but it hurts to even think about moving. Instead, I try poetry, but it seems as though my words are not coming. They are abandoning me. I gasp. Beside the bed, a figure rouses. I don't know who it is, but the person looks genuinely happy to see me awake. This is weird because

nowhere in my memory does her face ring a bell. Granted, I am in a hospital bed with a traitor for a head, so I probably shouldn't trust what I remember. I would like some answers, though.

As if on cue, the plastic woman named Carla struts in. She leans in beside me and says, in a voice that sounds like a shout, the most unnerving words I've ever heard:

"Hello, darling. I'm glad you joined us. Your mother is in the ICU and has been diagnosed with severe head trauma. The Nevada Child Protection System and I have decided that you will be placed in foster care upon your recovery. I know this may seem like a shock to you and we don't want to cause any stress . . ."

Just, please,
Leave
Me
Alone in my
Grief

The Rose

by Grace Jiang, 11
Ontario, Canada



A little seed falls on the ground,
it becomes a little sprout.
When the wind blows,
it starts dancing all about.

It sways from side to side,
it bobs up and down.
The little sprout is growing,
it has become a rose.

The rose is growing,
it is taller than a little mouse,
it is taller than a rabbit,
it has become the size of a dog!

The rose stops growing,
it stands in the same spot,
for many, many days
until winter comes.

The frost and snow come,
now it must hide underground.
So, petal by petal it withers away.

The next year it happens again,
and again,
and again . . .



Fawn in a Clearing, chalk-colored pencils



by Meredith Rohrer, 10
El Cajon, CA

The Four Seasons

by Grace Jiang

A golden leaf falls on Little Deer's nose,
he jumps around playfully,
"Fall has come! Fall has come!" he calls.
His father bellows, "We must go find more food
or the cold white sheet will bury it all!"

Little Fox jumps around in the white powder,
that once had millions of flowers in it.
Now it is cold and wet.
He whines to his mother, "I must go play with Brown Bear!"
His mother whispers, "You must wait till spring."

Spring has come!
Little Horse is only a month old,
yet he jumps as high as his mother.
"Look! Look! I see a bush of daffodils!"
He prances over to the bush and sighs, "Spring is here."

Two happy birds sing,
"Summer has come!
Food is plentiful,
but we must eat lots
because fall is soon to come."

It is fall again,
Little Deer has grown up.
Now he has his own mate and child.
A fawn calls, "Fall is here! Fall is here!"
He smiles at the fawn and calls,
"We must go find more food
or the cold white sheet will bury it all!"
He sounds just like his father.

Possibility

by Vandana Ravi, 12
Palo Alto, 12



At the first whisper of the unicorn's warm breath in my ear, my worries begin to fade. I lean back against a burnt tree stump and close my eyes. I can feel the dewy grass of the clearing tickling my ankles above my sneakers. The heavy summer wind falls like a mantle on my shoulders. A bitter-tasting lump has formed in my throat, but I let myself sink into the warmth.

Words flit through my mind. Descriptions. *Serene. Sun-drenched. Dappled wood. Magical. Paradise.* They comfort me, as they always do. I steady my mind, focusing on them, on their shapes and colors and structures, the myriad ways they fit together. *Solace. Consolation. Assuagement. Relief.* The unicorn nickers softly. I reach up and rub its muzzle. I let my heart brim with the feeling of luckiness, that I have such a friend to love, such a place to stay. The only place that stays the same. No matter what.

I hear a girl's voice behind me. I turn around. She has two short pigtails and a pink, sooty face. She is grinning. I grin back. The unicorn grunts. I mouth her name, the silent word bursting with joy. For a moment, I pause awkwardly. But she doesn't care about my height, or the fact that I have never, will never, be able to speak to anyone but her. She squeezes my hand and leads me away, the unicorn clopping behind us.

When I am with her, the lump in my throat begins to disappear. So that 20 minutes later, I am able to whisper two words. *Thank you.* And she smiles and nods and squeezes my hand. *Friendship.* It's a beautiful word, the color of winter sunsets and summer tangerines. My mind lingers on the image, and the time passes by. Words float out of my mouth now, light and sweet like spun sugar. At the same time, they form in my mind, as always, unspoken. *Gratitude. Serendipity. Liberation.*

And then all of it is shattered. The sound of a bell ringing echoes against my eardrums, loud and insistent. I can feel the worn, tattered cover of a book in my hand. The golden-lit clearing is gone. The ground underneath me is cold.

Students fill the hallways and cluster around lockers. I should be one of them. The lunch break is over. It is time to enter the world again, to be subject to a classroom of pitying stares . . . to try and find the courage I left behind in the unicorn's world.

I rise and wrap the book in my coat. It is close to falling apart. I cannot count the times I have slipped it into my backpack, always comforted by the image on the cover: a sooty-faced, pigtailed girl leading a unicorn into the forest.

Photography Portfolio: Hannah Parker



by Hannah Parker, 13
South Burlington, VT
Camera: Nikon CoolPix L830

Editor's Introduction

Since November 2017, we have published 15—and, with this issue, now 20—of Hannah Parker's photographs. This issue also marks her fourth *Stone Soup* cover. Hannah lives on a farm in Vermont with goats, a dog, chickens, cats, and a bunny. Given her surroundings, it's no surprise that her subject has always been nature—from flowers and landscapes to her own pets and wildlife.

Though her subject has remained the same, in the two years we've been publishing her work, Hannah's approach has changed and matured. Her early photos often depicted nature in straightforward ways: a flower framed in the center of the photograph, for instance. Even early on, however, she had photographs that had a hint of strangeness, that forced us to see something very normal—a dog, the full moon—in a new way, because of how she framed the subject.

Over time, Hannah's photographs have all become stranger—and so more beautiful and more interesting—as she has experimented with editing techniques alongside new angles and frames. In this portfolio, you will see an oversaturated, almost alien-looking landscape; flowers that look as tall as trees; a landscape reflected in a raindrop; and ghostly daisies.

Even though Hannah has now turned 14, we look forward to continuing to publish the works she submitted in the months prior. We hope her work will inspire many of you not only to take photographs but to rethink your approach to common photographic subjects!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emma Dodson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Emma" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Dodson".



Fog over Stowe



Queen Anne Silhouettes



Reflections in a Raindrop



Ghost Daises

Nature in My Eyes

by Andrew Wu, 11
Canton, MI



CHAPTER 1

The Seed

I am a seed who was planted by Native Americans into the rich, fertile soil of the forest paradise of the wilds of Michigan. Each day, forest would grow, and water would flow, Nature would do its thing. This never-ending cycle of creation was the lifeblood of Mother Earth's greatest creation, Life. I am Life, and you are Life. Everything that moves, grows, and flourishes is Life.

Each day Nature would repeat itself. Soon, I began to grow. I emerged from the fertile soil and saw what appeared to be a blinding ball of fire hanging in the sky. The warmth this object gave me was enough to make me happy. I could feel my sprout growing in this heavenly warmth. Was this the meaning of life and Nature itself? Every day I basked in the object's warm rays. I then classified this object as God. At night God would lower down out of view, taking his warm rays with him. Then another object would rise up at night, which was not warm and much smaller. It never appeared to take one shape, with a slight change in the structure of the object every night. It had a certain glow, making it seem unnatural and mysterious. I then came to classify this cold object as Gloom. Gloom would calm me down, and allow me to rest.

One day at sunrise or what was supposed to be sunrise, I couldn't see God. He just wasn't visible. I wondered

why and quickly discovered strange floating balls of cotton were blocking out God. I classified these cotton balls as the Shields of Vision. They kept getting darker and darker until, I felt a drop of what I'd never felt before, which was touchable but not solid and broken when touching anything. It made me feel better than when God was out. It felt like nourishment, a soothing drop of liquid. Thundering booms followed the rain. I called these Boomers. The next day when God was visible again, I was especially happy because I have not gone through a day without God until yesterday. God was especially bright for some reason today, and he seemed to outshine Nature itself.

A few weeks later I had become a big sprout growing out of the ground. I saw more of the wondrous world upon me, huge lumps of rocks with white peaks, plants of my own kind, trees of a tremendous height. I saw Nature! Nature was beautiful, elegant and grand!

A few months later I grew into what Native Americans called "naadąą" or in American language, "corn." Days went by and I grew taller and taller. Inside the bulb on top of my stalk grew a fine, tender kernel of corn. As the days went by I began to feel older, crinklier. A few months ago, God had bathed me in soothing warmth, but up to this point I felt like

Everything that moves, grows, and flourishes is Life.

he was burning me with inhospitable heat. I felt dry with God visible. I felt burnt and wanted no more. Eventually crows started eating my corn, and a few days later, my corn was an empty cob and fell out.

By then I was reduced to nothing but a dry empty stalk lying on the ground. Now I had learned the true meaning of Life: be created, wither away, create, and destroy. I had been created as a seed, created a corn cob, absorbed water, and eventually withered away myself. This was my fate and I was ready to accept it.

CHAPTER 2

The Insect

I am a minuscule insect inside an egg, a small egg. These eggs were laid by another of my own kind. I was just a puny creation of Nature and the Universe itself. I would hatch into a marvelous spectacle of Nature. I would discover the meaning of Nature and accomplish what no insect has accomplished before. I was soon to be hatched and discover amazing things, but for now I had to wait a couple of days.

A few days later, I hatched, along with the other eggs that were laid by my mother. Each of our tiny limbs and joints emerged from out of the shells from which we were made. This was the first time I had seen the outer world, which was a spectacle of true beauty. I started to walk away from my birthplace, my sisters, and brothers. It was something completely new, something that was almost telling me to solve the mystery. But the mystery of what? The mystery was Nature perhaps, or could I somehow solve myself? The idea of solving mysteries was a pleasant thought to my head.

As the days passed, I began to shed my old skin and grow a new one. It may not seem very interesting, and actually it seemed weird, but this is how Nature works. It creates new things and replaces them with newer things. This is Nature. I had settled to a spot 10 miles from my birthplace. I

live in a Pine Tree next to a majestic 130-foot high waterfall. At this point I was a decent sized Stag Beetle, and my jaws were two centimeters long each. I had my own territory, and my brothers and sisters had theirs. Occasionally, I found a trespasser and, as usual, I threw them in a place they would never get out of. I was basically the King of Bugs in my domain. But I felt empty, incomplete, and it was like a part of my life was gone before I was born. For some reason, from the start of my life, I wanted to solve a mystery. But this mystery was a mysterious mystery. I myself didn't even know what this mystery was.

When I was roaming around in my domain looking for food, I came across the miracle of life— a deer was being born. I was watching, and felt like I had to find the meaning for this, some mystery that relates to everything. Did the mystery relate to life? If so, this could be the biggest clue to solving the mystery.

As days passed, I began to think about this mystery. I began to discover more clues. However, I was not aware that I was aging and withering away. I was running out of time to solve the mystery. I could feel myself getting closer and closer to catching it, but it seemed to keep scampering away. I felt like I was missing an important key to the mystery. All the clues lined

together to form Nature. I had to solve Nature, why it took place. I had to do it before I withered away, but none of the clues, alone or combined, gave an answer.

I was running out of time, I could feel my aging but still no answer. "Wait," I thought to myself. "Nature doesn't exist as one, but many; there is no one answer to that many things. Nature happens because of itself. It is a cycle that happens in the wild." Had I found the answer? Did I solve one of the greatest mysteries on Earth? If so, I would wither away with pride, with a hope of someone new taking my place. This was my fate. Nature was doing its thing: to Create, to Destroy, and to Replace. Goodbye, green world. See you soon.

*I was basically the King of Bugs in my domain.
But I felt empty, incomplete.*



Eyes of the Savanna, acrylic

by Alicia Xin, 13
Scarsdale, NY



CHAPTER 3

The Fish

An egg was once laid in a pond. Inside that egg was a fish; that was me. As my egg began to soften and thin, I slowly began to break free. I emerged with an unknown purpose which I would soon begin to realize. As I hatched along with all my brothers and sisters, I began to realize that I looked different. I looked more like a Koi Fish than a Salmon. Well, even if I looked different, I bet I was smarter than the other fish. I felt wise, knowledgeable, like I'd had another life before this. I slowly followed a stream leading from the pond to a small lake. My instincts told me to go there. I was not aware that this was the place where I would discover the mystery that I would solve.

I followed the stream and encountered a fork in the road. I knew which way to take by instinct. I took the right path and eventually followed it to a small lake. I saw not many of my siblings had made it—only 40 percent of them had made it. I did what any Salmon would do: I started looking for food. There were big insects swarming but none of them were in reach. The hunger I felt was immense even compared to huge lakes. As a response to my hunger, I jumped up four feet and snatched an unexpected Beetle. The bug filled my hunger, and I was no longer starving.

As I began to swim around in my

new, temporary home, I began to wonder. I wondered about what made this place seem so special. It just seemed like a regular lake, but there was more to it. I felt this lake was an answer, an answer to some great, important, unanswered question. I wondered about this "Question." It could be something related to Life, Nature, or anything along those lines, though those topics seemed "solved" or "figured out."

I noticed birds cheerfully chirping as if nothing wrong could happen. Everything seemed so peaceful.

Maybe the answer to peace was the thing I had been looking for. It all seemed so clear now. If the answers to Life and Nature were already solved, Peace would be the next. This seemed like an easy topic, but it wasn't as easy as it sounded. There must be a deeper meaning for all of these. I felt I needed to solve this. This was my life mission, and I had to do it. If I failed to solve Peace before I died, I would even regret living. This became my life goal.

A few days later, I swam around my lake in search for clues about Peace, but found nothing. If there were no clues to the answer to Peace, did that mean Peace was only a result of Chaos? Have I just solved a great mystery of the world? Even though that was unlikely, it seemed like I had. I thought some more and it made sense. I had just solved the idea of Peace. I

I felt this lake was an answer, an answer to some great, important, unanswered question.

could live the rest of my life in Peace,
enjoy the wonders of the world and,
more importantly, live my life the way
it should be.

CHAPTER 4

The Bear

As a bear cub, I always wondered about Mother Earth, our home planet. My mother told me that we lived on a planet named Earth who is everyone's proud mother. I admired Earth mainly because of her size and power. She was not to be reckoned with. My mother told me about the Gods who created Mother Earth. These Gods were even more powerful than Mother Earth. I wondered why the Gods created Mother Earth, maybe for Peace? Maybe just to create something, or even to bring happiness to the Universe. Whatever the reason, I'm sure it's a good one.

As I grew older, I started going off on my own to explore the wilderness. I saw butterflies, flowers, and lakes. The Sun that cast his light upon Mother Earth was out. Mother Earth's surface seemed perfect and almost completely natural. Why was Mother Earth so perfect and what was her reason for existence? As I explored, I found nothing that gave hints to my question. It seemed like Earth was here because of a major coincidence. Everything seemed natural, and everything was in the place it was supposed to be. How can something so Natural have everything in the exact place? Living creatures are the most amazing creations of Mother Earth. They have diverse forms, though each originated from the same ancestor. No other

known planets have such diverse life. It was probably just a big coincidence. But that coincidence has made Mother Earth one of the most special places in the Universe.

When I was one year old, my Mother sent me to live alone. I lived next to a river, where I would eat fish every day. This supply of fish was the perfect kind of food. Mother Earth was the only thing keeping me alive, and she was one of the only places where there was life. None of this seemed to be planned out. This was only a coincidence. That seemed to be the reason for Mother Earth's existence and various forms of life. The only possible answer to Earth's greatness was the greatest coincidence of all time.

Now, when living on my own, I felt in charge of an entirely new aspect. Every day, now and then, I would find something peculiar. Some days were just more special than others. It was strange to think a normal day was more special than another normal day. I lived my life normally and occasionally ran into another bear, and I would snarl and they would go away. When I was younger I felt more excited, but now I feel monotonous about my day. Every day is just the same as another. I wish something amazing would happen.

One day, when looking for food, I found a peculiar rock at the bottom of

a crystal-clear river. I went forward and picked it up. What I noticed about this rock was that it was as clear as the lake itself. I could only see the rock because of its outline. It looked special as if it was a gift from the Gods. I decided to keep this rock, and as soon as I had it with me, a huge school of salmon crossed the river to my side. I was shocked at the sight of so many salmon. That day was the best day. I had found the sweetest and ripest berries, the best weather, and no competitors. I knew this was the rock's cause. This rock was a miracle, a grace, something I wished to keep forever. I could live happily with it, accomplish my dreams, and live my life the way I wanted.

Why was Mother Earth so perfect and what was her reason for existence?



Sun Flower, acrylic



by Sloka Ganne, 9
Overland Park, KS

The Place Where It Isn't



by Eliana Schaffer, 11
Los Angeles, CA

One girl's quest for perfection

There was a space. The space was empty, but, if you think about it, it wasn't an absence; it was a presence. It didn't belong. Inside her heart, there was the absence, or presence. In her heart was an empty space, or filled space, and it just didn't belong. The rest of her heart, though, could take years to describe thoroughly. There was art, there was math, there was writing, there were jokes, and there was family. What was missing? In the very back, there was sorrow, but sorrow had its place. Of course, it was hidden. Everyone has sorrow hidden in them. It is human.

But everything about this girl was normal. Except for the absence, she felt as if she was complete. Not special, not out of the ordinary, but she was fine. You could almost say she was perfect, but even in perfection, there are flaws. You see, even in perfection, it is hard to learn, to improve, and to do better. You cannot set goals, not achieve, for what is there to achieve in perfection? The perfection, as the girl saw it, was something she loved. But not until she learned of what that perfection did to her did she realize what it took from her.

Every day, she would watch the

other children get scolded, and taught, and corrected. She laughed and thanked the gods for what she had achieved.

Two days later, the girl was crying. She was crying, and crying. For she was told by her teacher that she had to stay home from school.

"Why?" the girl cried out. She was upset at the teacher. So, so, so upset. For that teacher, unintentionally, had spoiled her lifelong journey toward perfection. She had never cried. Even as a baby. Now she let it out, and, surprisingly, it felt good. She approached her teacher. Screams and screams were aimed at the teacher. The teacher looked hurt. What was hurt? It didn't make the girl happy. There was something else, like the opposite of happiness. Then, she hugged her. It was a solution. Why would she need a solution?

The solution helped. It filled up the hole of hurt. The hurt was still there, but it was covered, and the covering made her happy. It was an accomplishment, and that felt good.

The Monsters

by Ivy Cordle, 9
Princeton, NJ



Some people think that monsters
are bad, that monsters are scary
hairy and mad, but maybe
just maybe if you hear a roar
outside your bedroom door
and you invite the sound in,
maybe you won't see a scary,
bad, mad, monsterest creature;
you'll see a scared, sad, lonely
creature instead.

And when you say "come to my bed,"
you see the monster shrink
just a thread, and when
the monster is snuggled up
close, you feel the monster
shrink a foot. By the time
you've laughed and played
a game, the monster is
the same size as the helmet you
wear when you're
polluxing the polluxes out of your hair.
After you read the monster
a book about a band, the monster
could fit in your hand. As your
eyes were trying to stay awake,
the monster disappeared just like
that but all you can do is
hope the monster hopefully,
just hopefully, will come back.

Letters to the Editor

Dear *Stone Soup*,

I recently got a subscription to *Stone Soup*, and I love it! It is the perfect opportunity for me because my biggest passions are reading, writing, and drawing. I have not submitted anything yet, but I most definitely will in the future.

On a different note, after reading this particular newsletter, I wanted to say that there was one thing that really stood out, mostly because I could relate to it. The other day, while I was at school, my grandma, who was babysitting me at the time, read through my latest *Stone Soup* and was very impressed. She was even more surprised when I got home and told her the entire magazine was written by children my age! Afterwards, my grandma showed the issue to my parents, who also thought the work was exceptionally good.

So, when I read the segment in the Saturday newsletter about *Stone Soup* being for everyone, not just children, I completely agreed. I just wanted to make sure you knew that your statement about *Stone Soup* being for adults too has most definitely been proven true. Just ask my grandma!

Sincerely,
Charlotte McAninch, 11
Chicago, IL

This letter was written in response to our March 9, 2019 Stone Soup Saturday Newsletter.

Dear Ms. Wood,

Having a piece accepted by a magazine is an amazing experience—more than anything, it's a validation, a sort of proof that hours of reading, writing,

and revising have paid off. My favorite thing about *Stone Soup* is the wide range of publishing opportunities it offers: a nature lover can blog about their finds, a composer can send in a piece of music, a reader can write about what they read, and there is still space for stories and poems.

Stone Soup's website is what started me on book reviewing; when I found out that “writing about books” could actually be published, I started to dig short commentaries out of my notebook and turn them into multi-paragraph pieces. Getting a review published was immensely encouraging for me, and I began to write more and more, eventually venturing into the world of short stories and poetry. Reviewing has changed the way I read and think about what I read. In a way, being accepted by *Stone Soup* changed my life.

The stories which are featured in the newsletter every Saturday are, I think, a great way of giving newsletter readers a taste of what's out there—without even visiting the website or opening the magazine. I wonder if, perhaps, you could also feature poems or content from the blog more often; shaking things up might bring more attention to the different genres published in *Stone Soup*. I really enjoy reading the writing of kids who are my age. For me, it's a form of inspiration—if they can do it, so can I!

Some really beautiful, evocative writing appears in *Stone Soup* every month. I'm continually being impressed by what my peers can do, and it gives me the determination to keep going. Thank you, *Stone Soup*!

Sincerely,
Vandana Ravi, 12
Palo Alto, CA



Do you have something to say about something you've read or seen in Stone Soup? If you do, we'd love to hear from you, and we might print your letter on our Letters to the Editor page! You can write us a letter via our Submittable page (choose "submit" on our website menu and follow the link), or leave a comment on our website.

Honor Roll

Welcome to the *Stone Soup* Honor Roll. Every month we receive submissions from hundreds of kids from around the world. Unfortunately, we don't have space to publish all the great work we receive. We want to commend some of these talented writers and artists and encourage them to keep creating.

Fiction

Alexander Antelman, 12
Anya Geist, 12
Savanna Hopson, 13
Keira Krisburg, 11
Macy Li, 13
Grace Malary McAndrew, 12
Ilya Rosenbaum, 11
Alexa Troob, 12

Poetry

Sascha Farmer, 11
Ruth Gebhardt, 11
Leah Koutal, 11
Zaid Nazif, 10
Zoe Smith, 11
Alexa Zielkowski, 12

Art

Sage Millen, 11
Cameron Purdy, 9
Kathleen Werth, 9

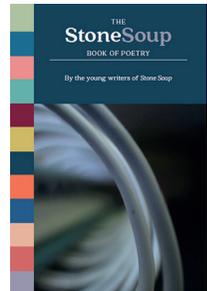
Plays

Liana Zhu, 10

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- Books—our collection of themed anthologies (fantasy, sport, poetry, and more), and the *Stone Soup Annual* (all the year's issues, plus a taste of the year online, in one volume)
- Art prints—high quality prints from our collection of children's art
- Journals and sketchbooks for writing and drawing

... and more!



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