

# StoneSoup

A blue-toned illustration of a dog sitting on a swing. The dog is silhouetted against a large, glowing full moon. The swing is suspended from a large, dark tree branch. The background is a deep blue, and the ground is covered in snow. A smaller, bare tree is visible in the lower left corner.

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# StoneSoup

*The magazine supporting  
creative kids around the world*

Editor

**Emma Wood**

Director

**William Rubel**

Operations

**Jane Levi**

Education & Production

**Sarah Ainsworth**

Design

**Joe Ewart**

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## Editor's Note

How would you react if your parents abandoned you and the only home you had ever known burned down? Or if your closest friend were being bullied at school—and you felt powerless to help? What would you do if your mom didn't show up to pick you up after school, or if you found out you needed surgery to remove a tumor on your head, or if your very best friend moved hundreds of miles away and into a different time zone? The stories and personal narratives in this issue all wrestle with experiences that push their characters and narrators to the limit—that test them and, in most cases, ultimately make them stronger.

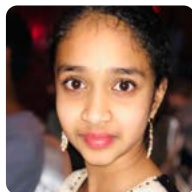
These pieces felt appropriate for our February issue. Winter, as a season, always reminds me that life can be cold, lonely, and difficult. That the flowers won't always be blooming, the sun won't always be out. As we see in Rachael Ding's "The Old Woman" in this issue, the seasons are the most essential metaphors for the seasons of our life—the seasons that come as we age, but also as we go through different phases of life. Some phases are full of life and happiness, and some are full of difficulty and even loss. The pieces in this issue remind us of that—and show us the life and strength that exists even within the winter.



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*On the cover:*  
Wolf on a Swing,  
Acrylics

by Sloka Ganne, 10  
Overland Park, KS

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New York, NY



# The Life of Beverly Henderson



by Jamison Freis, 12  
Thousand Oaks, CA

*Beverly, abandoned by both her parents as a baby, at 13 befriends a raccoon named Bandit and sets out to find her father*

I was born in 1950 and a few hours after I was born, my mom died—or so I was told. We were in Ketchum, Idaho. My name is Beverly Henderson. I am part Irish and the rest of me is all American. My father was disappointed when I was born because he wanted a boy.

He put me in an orphanage. I never saw him again, but I have small pictures of him in my head. He was handsome, with brown hair, brown eyes, and tan skin. His skin was so smooth that it made butter feel rough. I lived with him for three years.

At the orphanage, I went to a cheap school, and they fed us cold food, they had rats in the classroom, and I was one of the only girls. The only other girls were Lily and some other girl I never learned the name of. She was quiet as a mouse and graceful as a pigeon. Lily, however, was nice. She was 9 years old at the time. Lily lived with a poor family, and she had one brother, two sisters, and her mom was pregnant with one more.

At the time I was about 10, and I was the smartest in school. Everyone

was dumb, and they never really tried to do anything. Lily was the only person who would eat the cold lunch with me, and she was the second smartest person in the school.

I can still remember the day when I set a trap for a rat. Everyone always had some weird junk in their pockets, so I always took it from them. Half the stuff was useless, but the other half helped me build the trap. I built a cage with sticks, a little plate, and a piece of glass. When the rat stepped on the plate, the door closed tightly, leaving the rat stuck in the cage. I used some of my cold lunch as bait and part of a box for the door. The teacher made a bet with me for \$3.50. Back then, this was enough to buy a full meal. I set the trap and prayed that I would catch something. I went back to the orphanage and prayed more. I had dinner with the nice lady who worked there, and she gave me a bowl of warm chicken soup.

I went to bed and had a dream that the teacher gave me \$10. It was an amazing dream. I bought loads of candy and a violin. I tried playing

violin, and it was bad. I'd thought it would be cool. I woke up after I ran into a wall in the dream. In real life, a book fell on my face. The bookshelf above my bed was wobbly.

My roommates avoided me whenever they could. I went to school eager to see the trap, and when I walked into the classroom, which smelled like mold and sadness, a huge furry animal stared at me. I don't remember exactly what my teacher said, but he was upset when he gave me the money. We put the rat in the woods, and I put my money in my pocket. I needed something to put my money in, so I used a can from the garbage. Lily came to school late, and she told me she wasn't allowed to go to school anymore. She was moving to California. Her mother and father thought there was more for them there. I was devastated. I had only gone to school with her for a week, but she meant a lot to me.

The next day, Thursday, March 16, 1961, I was late for class. Lily leaving had affected me. I woke up late and when I got there, our school had burned to the ground. I went back to the orphanage and tried to study math by myself. That same day, I went outside to look at the school that had taught me and given me \$3.50 and my first friend.

When I was finished reflecting, I went back and saw the orphanage burning to the ground. It collapsed before my eyes. My whole world was falling apart, literally, and I needed something, somewhere to go. My money had been in there along with all my belongings. They were all

destroyed. I searched in the ruins and found an animal. It was a small raccoon. Its back left leg was stuck under a piece of a burned-up bed. The small raccoon looked into my eyes, and I let it go. I fed it some raw fish from the trash can of a restaurant, and he loved it. He stayed near me, even when I walked into town.

Since then, adults have taken me to different orphanages, but I have escaped from every single one. I could never imagine living in another orphanage after what happened to the one I lived in. The raccoon usually helped me escape, by stealing the keys, pooping in the owner's bed to distract them, pretending to have rabies, you name it. I named him Bandit because he was always stealing things and the little mask on his eyes made him look like one. Over the months, he found money for me to pay for food and clothing. We did everything together.

When I first found Bandit, he was the size of my hand. He had since grown to be the size of two basketballs. His tail was big and fluffy, and when I touched it, I thought of a pillow with feathers on the inside and sandpaper on the outside. Bandit was sweet. He would curl up to me in my sleeping bag, he would protect me from other people, and I would protect him from getting stepped on.

The months went by, and I had a problem. I found a familiar man. He was walking into a fancy restaurant with a fancy woman. She was dressed like a rich person, and he was dressed like a rich person. He looked just like my father. I am positive it was him—nobody else's skin was that tan and

## *The months went by, and I had a problem. I found a familiar man . . . He looked just like my father.*

smooth, nobody else's mustache was that perfect, nobody else was that . . . way . . .

He ate lunch with her, and Bandit stole her keys. I congratulated him and put them on the floor next to her. The outdoor table was lit with one candle in the center of the table. I watched them from another table, and they seemed to be talking about a wedding. My father was wearing a ring and so was she. I left the restaurant, and my father saw me. He saw a raccoon following me and ran after me.

"Miss! There's an animal following you!" He yelled in those exact words. He threw a fork at Bandit, and Bandit jumped up and down screaming at the fork. I picked him up and ran away. Many people saw me and were talking about stuff I didn't hear. I walked with Bandit for about two minutes until I put him down and we sat on the floor for five minutes until I saw a big truck that said "Animal Control" on the side. A man got out, shut the door, and grabbed a long stick with a loop of wire at the end. He wrapped it around Bandit's neck and Bandit screamed like he did before.

I started yelling, "Let him go! Let him go! He's mine!"

The man kept pulling him and pushed me away and said, "Stay back miss, these wild animals are vicious, and they will bite, so stay back." He glared at me and was choking Bandit. I grabbed his arm and yanked him

onto the floor. I took Bandit as the man rolled on the floor, trying to catch his breath. I ran away holding Bandit and hid in an alley behind a dumpster. Bandit was wheezing but I kept him quiet. The man got back in the truck and left holding his fingers and with a bloody lip.

I walked with Bandit to . . . well, I don't know where I was trying to go, but I got to a beautiful place. There was a small pond in the middle and there were about six floors of incredibly crafted rooms. I remember every detail of the statues that lined the outside of the roof. Each lion statue was roaring and had a luscious mane that looked as if you could brush it and it would move. I shoved Bandit into my shirt, and I walked up to the man at the front desk. He was reading a newspaper about a girl who stole a raccoon and ran off, but also about how she broke a man's fingers. I was in the papers. They wanted me for theft and assault. Wow, a 13-year-old girl wanted for protecting an animal . . .

Bandit stayed still in my shirt and made me look fatter. I walked up to the man, and he immediately put down the paper and said, "Hello, ma'am, what kind of room would you like to have?"

I responded, "Well . . . what rooms are available?" The man obviously knew I was a child but was desperate for some customers.

"All the rooms are available! We have absolutely no customers!" He



exclaimed with joy. I was confused about why he was happy, but it put me in a better mood. "Wait, never mind, there is one suite that is not available. Someone booked it online, and they are paying a high price for it. Our rooms are usually free, but he really wants this." The man talked a lot and I wondered how he kept thinking of things to say. I don't remember what he said next, but it was something about why a fire truck is red. Then he said, "Sorry about that. As you can see, I am a bit long-winded and my name is Jerald, but please call me Jerald." Again, I was more confused. He had now been talking to me for about five minutes, and Bandit was beginning to squirm. I interrupted Jerald and told him to lead me to a room.

"Um . . . sorry to interrupt, but will you please show me to a room?"

"Of course. That is my job, after all." One second passed. "So, the room I am thinking of is one of our three master suites. It has a spiral staircase, some bookshelves, two large beds, two kitchens, an office, and a hot tub." As we went up the elevator, he had not one question about the huge lump in my shirt. He could just jibber jabber till the cows came home.

Sadly, Jerald is not with us anymore. I would love to just hear him talk again. I used to think that he was annoying, but now I see what a wonderful person he was. He left this world to save me.

Anyway, back to the story: he took me up to a suite with all the stuff he talked about. At the same time, I felt Bandit's claws digging into my stomach. We had arrived at the suite,

and it was the best thing I had ever seen at the time. As soon as I walked in, there was a very big couch with a TV. To the right, there was a fireplace and a desk with a phone and the room service menu. The ceiling was about 50 feet up, and the staircase, which was like a spiral of ebony wood, led to three doors. The room to the right had a kitchen, the one in the middle had a couch, a TV, and a large bed. The room to the left had a very big bed and a big bathroom. Downstairs, there was a big library and an office. In another small hallway, there was a kitchen and a dining room. There was more in this free hotel room than in any other place I had been. Jerald had left, and Bandit started curling up on a pillow. I patted his back and lay on the couch. It was so comfortable, I fell asleep almost instantly.

I dreamt of my father sitting on a blanket in the park having a picnic with me. He had a small mustache with a single grey hair, and he was wearing beige cargo shorts. I felt his hand on my shoulder and opened my eyes. Bandit was hiding under the kitchen table, and I just lay there, wanting to have the dream again. His hand was still there, I thought I was crazy, but his hand was still on my shoulder. I looked over the back of the couch, and there he was, his grin warmer than ever. There is no way to express my feelings at that time. My eyes filled with tears, and he began to become a blur of colors.

"Pinch me," I whispered in a shaky voice.

He said, "It's me." A tear trickled down my tense face. "I'm sorry for

leaving you.” I instantly jumped up and hugged him to death. He was here! My father, whom I hadn’t seen in 10 years, was hugging me.

To most, or to you, this might be strange, and you are maybe about to stop reading this story, but imagine your father coming home after 10 years. You only have small pictures in your head of your father. Imagine your only home burning to the ground. Imagine your only friend being taken away from you. Imagine you are an orphan, and you have nowhere to go, and no place to call home. For me, life was a struggle at 13. Fourteen to 26 were no better.

My father and I had dinner. I introduced him to Bandit. Bandit smirked at him, and I tried to keep them apart. Then we turned on the TV and fell asleep on the couch. I woke up in the middle of the night. Bandit was in the kitchen fiddling with the stove. I got up, careful not to wake up my father and watched Bandit while hiding. He seemed to be turning on the stove and had a pile of clothes next to him. He grabbed a worn-out T-shirt and dropped it on top of the orange flame. I gasped. He looked over his shoulder and saw me.

“Ummmm . . . Hi?” I said.

He hissed and showed his white pearly teeth. He pushed a button on the microwave and jumped out the window. I turned off the stove and followed him. I ran to the elevator and pushed “L.” I saw him run away, and I saw Jerald sleeping on a pullout bed. I ran to Bandit and on my way out, I pulled the fire alarm.

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Meanwhile, there was a bomb in the microwave, and it would go off in 50 seconds. The T-shirt that Bandit had set aflame was lighting a rug on fire, then the curtains. Beverly’s father got off the couch, put his slippers on, and slowly walked down the many stairs. He thought this was just a drill. He didn’t see the fire spreading across the hotel. Beverly glanced back to the hotel and saw the curtains on fire. She stopped and ran back to the hotel. Ten seconds later, Beverly saw Jerald sleeping, and she slapped him in the face and told him to leave. Jerald saw the building coming down, and he pushed Beverly out of the lobby. The building fell, squashing Jerald. A tear fell from Beverly’s face as she tried to accept the fact that Jerald was gone forever, and he had just saved her life.

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Beverly then remembered her father. “Father! Father! Are you ok! Father! Dad!” she yelled. The pauses between each word got longer. Beverly’s voice started to crack as she stared at the hotel. “Da-dd-y!” She ran around the building and saw her father on the ground, covered in ashes and with scratches all over his face. Just when she thought things couldn’t get worse, she saw a burst of flame come toward her, and everything went black . . .

---

Everything went black. I didn’t know where I was. All I could remember

was Bandit blowing up Jerald and my father. I heard sirens and voices. A man's voice, a woman's voice, a crying baby, and everything got less and less real. Everything got darker and darker, even though everything was already black. I tried to wake up, but my eyes wouldn't open, my body wouldn't move. It stayed that way for what felt like an eternity. Occasionally, there would be a voice, but there was constantly a beeping sound. I couldn't breathe, but I was alive anyway. All the things around me were calm. Nothing had been "calm" in my life. There had always been some energy and some drama happening. Not here. I was still as a rock and there was no Bandit, no dad, no mom, no help. *Why me?* I tried to figure that out for the entire time of the blackness.

One random time, my eyes popped open, and I felt more alive than ever. I was ready to go kill Bandit, but I was in a very weird room. I was dressed in a weird sort of white gown with blue dots. My arms felt like twigs, and my left leg felt like nothing. My right leg had also felt like a twig. I ripped the blankets off and ripped off these tubes and wires that were all attached to me. I took one step on the floor and fell. I looked at my left foot and saw nothing. There was no foot. Just a stub with rough skin covering it. A strange man came and as soon as he saw me on the floor, he picked up this thing

and talked into it. I couldn't hear him. There was no voice: he just mouthed some words into a black object with an antenna popping out of it. About four doctors came in and helped me up. I was so confused. I couldn't hear anything.

I hoped this was a dream. Everything had fallen apart. Literally and figuratively. Bandit had betrayed me, my father was blown up, I lost a foot, I was now deaf, and the only homes in my life had gone up in flames.

The man in a white coat was talking but I couldn't hear him. I tried saying, "I can't hear you." I said it but I didn't hear it. "I CAN'T HEAR YOU!" I yelled at the man. He looked at a woman dressed the same as him with a worried face. They took out a strange small white, shiny board thing. Then another person came and brought him a black marker. He wrote on the board.

"Hello. My name is Dr. Brown. You were sitting next to a bomb when it went off. You are lucky to be alive." He let me read it, then he wrote more. "You have lost your left foot. You also appear to have your hearing temporarily blown out." He erased it again and wrote, "You were also in a coma for 13 years." As soon as I read the last four words, I was shocked. Thirteen years. Sleeping for 13 years.

I took the board and wrote, "How old am I? What year is it?" in shaky

*Just when she thought things couldn't get worse; she saw a burst of flame come toward her, and everything went black . . .*

handwriting.

“You were 13 when you went into the coma, so you were in the coma for 13 years. You are 26 years old. The current year is 1976. You are also an orphan. Your mother died last week.”

When he wrote that my mother died last week, I screamed. Bandit had put me in a coma, and my only chance to see my mom was gone.

He erased the board and wrote, “She came in here to see you, and she did a blood test, and you are her daughter. She was also very rich. She had a will and it said that you and your sister will inherit everything.”

# The Angel

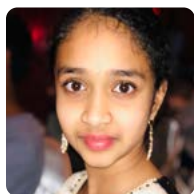


by Bo-Violet Vig, 13  
Los Angeles, CA

*What a little angel she is*  
Whisper the Jewish Sunday-school ladies behind gloved hands  
As I flounce down the hall  
All dressed up in my blue silk party dress, the one with the frills on the bottom  
Another gift from Daddy's friends in Chicago  
*A special dress for a special girl like you*  
My proud parents beam with pride when I stand behind the microphone in the  
school auditorium:  
*Oh, say can you see...?*  
The only first-grader allowed up on stage  
*What good manners she has*  
The waitress at the diner smiles over the counter at me when I ask for a straw  
*These are the three keys—thank you, you're welcome, and may I please*  
Hands pressed together firmly each Yom Kippur  
*Oh God and Father, creator of Heaven and Earth, I penitently acknowledge my sins...*  
I can't bear to tell a lie, come home crying if I do  
*Mommy, Mommy, I was the one who took the last cookie from the jar!*  
I wish that God made more little girls like you, sighs the mother of Jack Davidson, who  
got expelled from my school for punching a kid in the stomach  
Would you care for a cupcake?  
*No, thank you. My mother says it has too much sugar.*  
Want a bag of chips?  
*No, thank you. My mother says they have no nutritional value.*  
I come home proud and happy from school  
The blinding red A-plus in the corner of my drawing too hard not to notice  
*Have you ever thought of putting your daughter in the gifted class?*  
Time for the school play  
I stand in the wings in my blue-and-white-checked dress, dark hair twisted into two  
neat braids  
All ready to go on, dance my way down the yellow-brick road  
*Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high, there's a land that I heard of, once in a lullaby...*  
*How talented she is!* Everybody tells me  
But "Nothing gold can stay," my mother recites every time someone tells me I'm an  
angel,  
Shakes her head and glances sadly out at the setting sun,  
Puffy white clouds fading away into the dusk.  
*Straight out of Heaven.*



Arch of Life, *iPhone X*

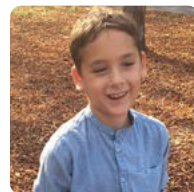


by Sloka Ganne, 10  
Overland Park, KS



# The Magic Pen and the Superhero

by Tudor Achim, 9  
Tampa, FL



*Jeremy finds a magic pen that will help him fight his school's bullies*

Jeremy was a dreamer who constantly hoped for an adventurous life, full of supernatural encounters. Like most boys at his age, Jeremy also wished for superpowers and extraordinary adventures. But despite excellent grades and various school achievements, Jeremy was constantly miserable because he was a victim of bullying.

His love and passion for mathematics got him the nickname “Nerd,” which was anything but kind. But what gave Jeremy comfort, especially in the dark days when older boys bullied him, was the unconditional love of his family and the amazing friendship he shared with a little boy named Michael.

Michael had a tougher time than Jeremy, as older boys always mocked his appearance and skinny framework. Often, Jeremy wished he could turn into a superhero so he could protect his friend and all the kids who were constantly bullied.

He wanted to invent a fantastic object or something that could revolutionize the whole world, making it a better place for everyone around him. His invention would erase hate, pain,

and differences among kids. And one day, his secret wish was answered.

It all started with the day when he found a beautiful pen on the street. At first, Jeremy thought the pen was an ordinary one, but then he saw that the writing instrument had magical qualities. After a simple touch of the pen, his homework would write itself. So Jeremy tried to see if this would work even with his English composition—and yet again, in just a few seconds, an essay was written without any effort from his side.

Then Jeremy's plans became more ambitious and he drew two big wings that were attached through a belt to his body, and he flew into the night, overpassing buildings and cities. For five days, Jeremy drew things he'd always wanted, like a pair of magical ears with which he listened to people's thoughts or a suit that would make him invisible. He played like this until he realized that superpowers meant nothing if they weren't shared with his friends. Thus, he drew another magical pen for his good friend Michael.

The next day, Jeremy left for school having hidden the two

enchanted writing instruments in his pencil box.

After meeting his good friend, Jeremy recounted everything about his latest adventures with the pen. Following his story, he offered the second pen to his friend. To his great surprise, the boy refused the gift and went on to ask, "And how do you intend to use your new-found powers against those bullies?"

Jeremy told Michael about his plan of becoming a powerful superhero who would beat the bad boys the way they used to beat him. But instead of enthusiasm, he saw fear on his friend's face. He asked Michael which part of the plan burdened him.

"I'm concerned because you don't see that this pen and your new powers are transforming you into a different person. Using an unknown force against those boys doesn't make you better than them. I don't think I want to be friends with someone who wants to dominate others through power. I like my old friend, the good Jeremy, but I dislike this power-hungry superhero."

And Michael left Jeremy all alone and very confused.

At the end of the day, the bad boys who were always bullying the younger kids stopped in front of Jeremy's class. This time, they were harassing a blonde girl, pulling her ponytail and screaming names at her.

Jeremy wanted to draw a sketch of his super suit so he could save the girl from those horrible kids, but then he saw that an older child intervened. The brown-haired boy defended the young girl exactly like a comic book superhero and stopped the villains without

even moving a finger.

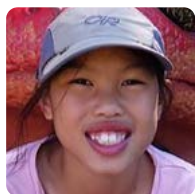
It was then when Jeremy understood that younger kids like him don't need magical pens but rather friends like that teenager who have the courage to go up against bad boys and do the right thing.

The youngster didn't attack the bullies because aggressiveness is a distinctive feature of super-villains. Instead, he showed them that he could be as ferocious as them. Of course, the bullies didn't expect to find someone who would stand up against them, and when they found that person, they proved to be cowards, running as fast as they could from the danger.

That day, Jeremy understood that superheroes live among us and they don't need super-wings or super-suits.



The Tower of Toronto, *acrylics*



by Justine Chu, 12  
Fremont, CA

# Alone

by Ugochinyere Agbaeze, 11  
New York, NY



*“What if I’m alone forever?” the narrator wonders when her mother isn’t waiting at the bus stop*

*Boom! Crackle!* It was dark and rainy, and as the clouds cried, lightning flashed through the sky like a gun being fired. The sky darkened. But in our school bus, there were always rays of sunshine. Our school bus wasn’t really a school bus, but more like a van. That didn’t really bother me and my friends, because we were always busy doing things to pass time. We did things together, like homework, or played truth or dare, or even watched movies on my friend’s phone.

But like always, people would start to get dropped off and disappear like cookies from the cookie jar until it was just me and my friend Gabby.

“Don’t you ever get lonely when it’s only you on the van?” Gabby asked.

“Sometimes, but not really,” I said. But inside I knew that I was always lonely when it was just me. She looked at me with her eyebrows up in her questioning way, like she was searching for what I was really feeling.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” she asked me again.

“Yes, I’m okay. Really, I am,” I said reassuringly. We stopped in front of her house, and as she was about to leave she said, “Well, I’ll see you Mon-

day. Bye!”

“Bye,” I said as she shut the door. As we were leaving, I looked through the window and saw her bright polka-dot umbrella open up and bloom like a flower as she walked toward her building.

The van grew quiet without the voices of the jokers and the happy. All there was now was stillness and quiet. I had nothing to do but sit. *Why am I always the last one?* I thought. I leaned on the window and looked outside, only to find cars driving by—where they are going is left a mystery to everyone but the person who’s driving. On the sidewalk, there wasn’t a single soul to be seen. It was also a beautiful sight with raindrops that would water the plants and the wind that would tickle your neck until you put on your scarf or zipped up your jacket. But the darkness that hid behind this beauty was in the thunder’s booms and crackles that would scare cats and dogs, making their hair stand on end.

As we reached my stop, my eyes searched through the field of rain for my mother’s bright-green and white umbrella that would be wrapped in her warm hands. But I couldn’t find

her. *Maybe it's because it's too dark to see. She must be somewhere around here*, I thought. So I asked the driver if I could go outside to see if she was coming. I went outside in my black raincoat and looked for her. I still didn't see her. I wouldn't accept the fact that she wasn't there, so I decided to look for her.

I went up the block to see if she was just arriving from the supermarket, but I didn't see her. I went down the block to see if she was turning the corner on our street, but she wasn't. As much as I wanted to believe that my mom was somewhere here, I had to accept that she wasn't. No matter where I looked, how much effort I put into finding her, how long I waited, she wasn't there, period.

I shook my head, though I knew that wouldn't help the situation. *Where could she be? I wondered. What can she be doing that is more important than picking me up, that she would just leave me here?* A sea of questions with unknown answers filled my head as if this problem were a puzzle that I couldn't solve. I heard the van roar to life and drive away, leaving me behind. Fear fell upon me. I felt like an ant in a world full of darkness.

The only thing I could do was walk up the stairs and wait till someone got me. As I walked up the stairs, I thought, *What if no one gets me? What if I'm alone forever?* As I reached the top step, I plopped down and sat as if on command. I stared past the field of rain, past the buildings and into nothing. My eyes stung as tears tried to make their way down my cheeks.

It felt like the time when I was

small and my mom was busy with work and my brothers never seemed to notice me and would never play with me. It felt depressing with no one there to give me the love I needed, no one to give me comfort. With no one to talk to and no one to play with, I had to accept the fact that I was alone, and no one would be there. But I didn't accept the fact that I'd just be by myself and sad for the rest of my life. I knew that my mom was busy, but I knew that she still loved me and that my brothers just acted like boys. Still, after a while, I wanted to have a sister, a person I could play with because I couldn't just keep playing with myself forever. I asked my mom if I could have a sister, and she said that I'd have to pray hard if I wanted one. I never gave up on that dream. I had hope, and on March 13, 2012, my sister was born.

Voices I knew well interrupted my thoughts. I turned around in joy to find my siblings coming out of the building and my grandma behind them, scolding them for making too much noise.

"Mommy went to buy something, so she told us to pick you up. We were kinda late because Aja and Ernest were playing around," my sister said.

"No, that was Ernest who was playing around, not me!" my brother Aja said.

"No, that was you!" my brother Ernest said. I rolled my eyes at them as they began to fight about whose fault it was and wrapped my sister into a tight hug.

"Never do that again," I whispered in my sister's ear.

"I won't. I promise," she said.

# Fear

by Nanae Koyama, 11  
Lexington, MA



Fear is a  
bubble.  
It can  
fold up  
or pop.  
It can  
surround you  
like a swarm  
or keep  
you behind  
an elastic wall.  
You  
choose  
whether to  
stay in  
or step out.



# The Old Woman

by Rachael Ding, 13  
Cupertino, CA



## *A woman passes through each season of life*

Once, there was a little girl with two pigtails. She was a joy to all those around her and was constantly happy. Her backpack was a bright red, and her shoes were a colorful pink. Her small feet carried her across a new street, and she skipped and skipped her way toward a woman who wore a placid face and held a silence that even the innocent little girl could hear. The woman didn't look up, but instead kept on raking those beautiful autumn leaves. The girl passed by with the smallest glance at the strange woman and then skipped all the way to her first day of school.

At school, she learned and learned and played and played. The girl lost her pigtails and then her ponytail and finally had her hair down straight. She was one moment the happiest person on Earth, then the next moment crying through school. She was in a constant state of tears and laughter and much-regretted idleness. She stopped her skipping after a year and started running after three, for bullies ran fast. But in time, she slowed down to a walk. Her red backpack was lost and so was her green one, and at some point she had none. And finally, after all that change, winter came, and she went down the street again.

She was nervously walking, tripping over her heels and carrying a stack of books. She headed toward

the old woman whose face remained unchanged except for her hair, which had become grey. By then, the woman walked with a limp but still kept on shoveling and shoveling snow. Her tired rags were dirty and smelled of a stink that made the girl remember a much darker time. However, the grown child had only a whispered thought of the sad woman. She instead looked toward the future.

In college, she learned and studied some more. The grown child became a young adult, and then a lady. She learned the rules and the laws of the world. After some time, she understood unfairness and started growing attached to the independence of adulthood. Her days were filled with another round of battles. She was shunned, hated, loved, disliked, envied, and many more things. Her hair was dyed a bold red, and her bitten nails suddenly became shiny and covered with a new layer of polish. She tripped less and developed a gracefulness. But, once more, the seasons changed, and spring came.

The dead branches littered the ground and the new blossoming of flowers could be seen everywhere. The birds sang a lovely song, and the sun shone over the land once again. The girl, now a woman, headed toward her new job and walked with solemn dignity. The street was silent except



Fall Portrait, *Painter Essentials 5*



by Mia Fang, 13  
West Lafayette, IN

for the clicking of the elegant heels that the young woman wore and the shuffling of worn shoes. The owner of those shoes was the sad woman who was picking up large fallen branches. She had finally become old. Her hair was turning white and wrinkles had appeared on her skin. Her limp had turned into a stumble, but she kept working with a stubborn resilience. The young woman didn't even look at the old woman anymore. She kept her head held high and walked onward.

The young woman worked and worked and learned manners too. She made some new friends who took her a long way, and she grew a bit more. The woman's heels turned to boots, then to sandals. Her evenings, once filled with parties, eventually became dates. The woman soon turned into a bride and then to a wife and, at some point, a mother. And after all that growing, it turned to summer, and the mother strolled onto the same street.

The sky was a bright blue, and the birds were singing a happy song. The mother took slow, deliberate steps with her stomach the size of a balloon. Her hair was curled and had lost its red tint. Her face was full of happiness and a glow surrounded her. But the glow did not reach the old woman who still stood on the street. She was slowly trimming the bushes. The old woman had shrunk to the size of a child. Her face drooped, but her eyes still held defiance in them. However, the new mother saw nothing and continued walking toward motherhood.

The days turned into nights and then into days. The mother was filled with worry and happiness and sadness. Her baby cried and cried, and she wept and wept—for one moment

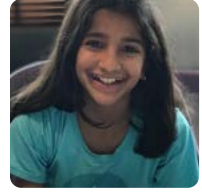
the baby grew too fast, and the next the baby seemed to not grow at all. The mother always gave up each evening and started anew each morning. The baby turned into a girl, then a woman, then a wife and finally a mother herself. The new grandmother looked upon her children and grandchildren and thought about how far she had come. Her hair turned grey and her eyes dull. And slowly, again, the winds blew by, and the weather became cold, for fall had come once more.

Leaves fell softly onto the ground. The grandmother walked with a deliberate ease through the wild weeds and puddles. The bushes and trees were overgrown, and leaves littered the ground. Near the side of the road lay an old wooden rake. A rake that she knew was part of some long-forgotten memory.

There was a sad song in the wind. A song that told a story. The grandmother suddenly stopped and listened. She didn't hear words, but instead, a soft lament that swayed the trees. She looked around and sought for the reason to mourn. There was no one around. No funeral was arranged, no memory, nothing of the woman remained except the voice in the wind. The grandmother stared at the empty road and realized who was missing. Her heart shattered and tears streamed down her cheeks. She wept on the ground for the old woman and cried until the sky was no more.

When finally she stopped, she looked up to see the rake that had been forgotten too. The grandmother stepped forward and picked up the rake. Then, she began to rake the beautiful autumn leaves.

# The Creases of Time



by Tara Prakash, 12  
Chevy Chase, MD

Time—did it slip through my fingers, flow  
Subtly as water? My little big brother,  
Running across the pastures with his kite, where did that go?  
Footsteps trailing mine, hands clasped tightly—my mother.

I can see the time pass in the creases of my  
Grandfather's eyes, his skin lined with the trick of time. If only  
It wouldn't go so fast, then we wouldn't need to say so many goodbyes  
All too soon. If just once, my world could live forever . . .

But if all worlds lasted forever, when  
Would new ones be born? Babies gaze at the world with big eyes, bright,  
Seeing things they've never seen before. The old watch with  
Eyes that have seen too much, the pale that follows a dark night.

Time forces us to make use of what we have, unfurled,  
It forces us to say goodbye and hello to the ever-changing world.



Reflection, *iPhone 8*



by Margaret Fulop, 11  
Lexington, MA

# It Will Never Be the Same

by Alexa Chiang, 11  
New York, NY



*Left alone after her best friend moves away, the narrator struggles with loneliness*

Just a day ago, I saw my best friend, Yaëlle. But as my eager eight-year-old eyes scanned the crowded recess yard, there was no sign of her. My heart dropped as I remembered she had moved to her hometown in Switzerland. I slouched, and my eyes stared at the dirty asphalt so the kids around me couldn't see my tears. I sulked over to the fence and tried to get comfortable, but the unforgiving, gritty cement lining the edges of the yard seemed to want to make me as uncomfortable as possible. *Why did she have to move?* I put my head on my knees and squeezed my eyes shut, trying desperately to block out the chatter of kids as I rocked back and forth. All my closest friends had moved away already. One to Japan last year, and now one to Switzerland this year. *Who would I play with now? Could anything replace my friendship with her?* My world became a blur and my stomach knotted itself. But deep down, I knew what I really wanted to know was this: *Would I ever see her again?*

I replayed the sound of her voice in my head, not wanting to forget the chipper, upbeat sound I had heard so many times. Our conversations flashed

through my head, and I smiled when I thought about the time Yaëlle tried to make me laugh while I had to keep a straight face.

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“Bloop, bloop, bloop,” Yaëlle said, making a fish face. “I’m inflating like Marge in *Harry Potter*!” she continued in her ridiculous imitation of a British accent. She used her hands to pretend she was getting bigger. I held back a laugh, and, not wanting to lose the game, I took a deep breath, trying to remain serious. Yaëlle stood on her bed and bounced up and down, her wavy brown hair flying all over the place. She looked more like a monkey than Marge. She jumped off the bed, and when she started falling down, she screamed, “Uh oh! I guess Marge can’t fly after all!” She landed with a thump on the carpet, dramatically collapsing. We both burst out laughing, rolling across the floor. I turned red from smiling so much, and my stomach hurt from laughing so hard.

“That was good,” I said breathlessly.

“No, it was brilliant!”



“Well, that’s what I meant.”

“Duh! It was the best thing ever!”

She raced over to her desk and picked up pieces of cut-up paper. She threw them in the air over my head and screamed, “Yes!”

“You seriously made confetti?”

I asked in disbelief, shaking off the colorful paper stuck in my hair.

“Why wouldn’t I?”

“I really don’t know.”

“Anyway . . . I did it! I did it!” She did her ridiculous victory jig, and I doubled over in laughter again. I couldn’t have felt happier that day.

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Unexpectedly, a dodgeball hit the fence, sending a tremor through it, which made me lose my train of thought. I whirled around wildly, startled by the sudden movement. After I realized it was nothing, I leaned against the fence again. I watched as fellow students dashed across the massive yard, and I longed to be doing the same with Yaëlle. In second grade, we had chased each other around the yard every day and giggled in delight as we ran. We would exchange hugs before skipping to our separate classes, and I would leave recess feeling elated. She told jokes and riddles everywhere we went and was a joy to be around.

When a pair of bright blue sneakers stopped before me, I looked up hesitantly. June, one of the fifth graders and the most popular kid at school, looked down at me, hands on her hips. My muscles tensed as I tried to decipher her expression. Pursued lips,

disapproving eyes. This couldn’t possibly be good. *What does she want from me?* June had never wanted anything to do with me before—why would she now?

“What are you doing?” she asked sourly.

“Nothing,” I replied quickly.

June scrunched up her face. “Oh, right. You’re that girl’s friend. What was her name again? Yall?”

My heart pounded against my chest. “Yaëlle,” I whispered. If Yaëlle had been there, we would have laughed about her wrinkled expression. How she looked like a shriveled-up raisin when she did that. But I just stared at the ground to avoid her gaze.

“Yeah, whatever her name was. Why don’t you go play with your other friend?” That time, I didn’t respond. “Right, she moved away too. I remember now. Well, that’s too bad for you.” She smirked and skipped away, joining her group of friends. I watched them burst out in laughter, and my heart sank like an anchor in a sea. Right down to the very bottom.

That day at lunch I sat alone, staring at the other kids, longing for a friend. Kids strutted past me, seeming not to acknowledge my place in the world. If Yaëlle had been there, she would have comforted me by putting a reassuring hand on my back, her soothing voice guiding me through my problem. As soon as I felt better, she would be back to cracking her jokes, and it would be as if my problem never happened. Unfortunately, the only person who saw me was the patrol lady, who gave me a strange look. She

approached me, and I suddenly wanted to shrink into the shadows and remain there forever.

“Are you okay?” she whispered, trying to act concerned by knitting her eyebrows together. Her eyes looked tired, and I realized I was just another kid out of all the kids she had to tend to. She didn’t actually care. I wanted to throw up at her attempt, but I just clenched my fists under the bright blue tabletop. Inside, I was a bubbling cauldron, emotions bouncing around.

“I’m fine,” I said politely, trying to mask the fury in my voice. She looked relieved at my words, abandoning her act all together.

“That’s good to hear.” She smiled at me and added, “If you need help, just ask, okay?”

I nodded, playing along.

“Well, then I’ll be on my way.” With that, she stood up and walked away, her heels clacking against the grimy cafeteria tiles. I let out a sigh of relief.

Later that day, as I shuffled past the burgundy brick building I’d visited so many times, I paused. I looked up at the window that reached Yaëlle’s bedroom, and I found my fingers fidgeting. *Would I ever be in that apartment again? Who would occupy the apartment now?* I sucked in a sharp breath, and an unsettling feeling overcame me. I peered up at the window, and the dark emptiness of the home made my backpack seem a hundred times heavier.

Every time I went over to her

house, without fail, Yaëlle’s mom had a silver pan dotted with freshly baked cinnamon buns awaiting our arrival. I would immediately smell the sugary aroma floating from the oven. Her mom, still dressed in her red apron, would present both of us with the tray as if it were a gift, which it truly was. My eyes would light up as I received the delicately crafted pastry, the swirls of golden brown formed into a perfect spiral. The icing was drizzled on in zigzags, dripping down the sides. They would warm my stomach and boost my spirit, washing away all my worries as if they were simply nothing.

I then recalled how many times I had played cards at her apartment, and how her little brother would run in and mess up all the cards. We would just shake our heads and sigh, not caring to scold him. I even missed him, the way he gave us his innocent little smile, and how he would look up at us with his cute turquoise eyes. I remembered how we would slide down the staircase railing, trying hard not to fall off and end up just inching down the railing instead. I took a deep breath, and it took all my will just to keep going. But as I walked the rest of the way home, I drooped like a wilted plant. All I could think of was her.

As I did my homework at home, my pencil drifted sadly across the page like a piece of paper drifting hopelessly across an ocean. I would always do homework at Yaëlle’s, and we would

*The dark emptiness of the home made my backpack seem a hundred times heavier.*

take turns making each other laugh. The silence made me feel vulnerable and delicate. I shivered.

I dropped my pencil and jumped on my bed, burying my head in my pillow. All I wanted in that moment was to be with her. My world spun as tears silently dripped down my face, soaking my blanket. I put my forehead against the wall and tried to collect myself.

I instinctively scrambled off the bed and went to the sink to splash cold water on my face. I grabbed a laptop and pulled up Skype. I held my breath as I clicked her icon. At first, nothing happened; the screen stayed stubbornly blank. I bit my lip. *Would she pick up?* As if responding to my thoughts, Yaëlle popped up on the screen.

She looked the same. A desk lamp illuminated her sparkling turquoise eyes. I smiled, and she smiled back.

“Hi!” she said, breaking the silence.

“Hey!” I said, grinning from ear to ear, instantly forgetting about my worries.

“Did you ace that math quiz?” she asked excitedly, bouncing up and down in her chair. She made it seem like it was just a normal day and like she wasn’t thousands of miles away.

“I smashed it!!!”

Yaëlle giggled. “I knew it!” she said as she pumped her fist. We laughed, told jokes, and talked about school until it was time for Yaëlle to go.

During our conversation, I felt we were right next to each other, but I was snapped back to reality when Yaëlle said goodbye. The screen went black, and I forced myself to tear away from the computer. Yaëlle wasn’t going to come back. I dove into my bed and

curled into a ball beneath the layers of blankets.

I shut my eyes and tried to fall asleep, but in every scenario I could imagine, Yaëlle was missing. At parties, she’s nowhere to be seen, and I’m standing in a corner with no one to talk to while all the other kids have fun. In the recess yard she’s gone too, me sitting alone against the fence. I sighed in disappointment and braced myself for the dreadful days that lay ahead.

# Skull Tumor

by John Lash, 12  
Charlotte, NC



## *An unexpected illness changes a boy's life*

"Sit down," my mom said with a smile. "Let me tell you the story of when God came through for you."

It all started when I was a little baby. My mom saw something particularly important on the right side of my head. A bump? *That's strange*, my mom thought, but she had no choice but to forget about it for the time being. So she slept on it and slept on it, and she slept on it even more.

Then she finally decided to do something about it. She set me up for an appointment with the doctor who we normally saw. We found out that there was a problem with my head, but the doctor didn't tell us what the problem was.

In any case, that doctor couldn't help. He was not the right doctor for the surgery. In the car on our ride up to Duke University to meet another doctor, my mom couldn't take anything off of her mind and was thinking about the surgery, and if this was going to be the right doctor to do it. My heart raced like a cheetah. Exhausted, we finally arrived to see the Duke doctor after a long, stressful car ride.

We arrived at the office where they were going to do the surgery and waited there for a huge amount of time. The doctor, calm and confident, came into the room and said hello to

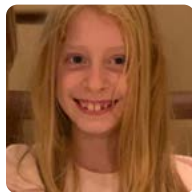
me. He was one of the nicest doctors I had ever seen, and I knew that he was going to do well on this surgery. My mom was crying the whole time. She could not stop because she was scared about what could happen during the surgery.

The surgery happened. I don't remember much of what happened during it. But I remember waking up and my mom crying and thanking God for all He had done for me and my family and the blessings He put on us.

This was not one of those things that just comes and goes in your life. During the surgery, they put metal in my head. I am not allowed to play football, lacrosse, or hockey for the rest of my life. As you can see, this has had an impact on my life but could have been worse without God. But today I am still acting like it never happened to me because there are many things in life that you have to overcome.

# Sounds of the Night

by Elizabeth Ableson, 7  
Darien, CT



The water ripples,  
The nightingale sings,  
The leaves swish in the wind.  
The night can be so loud.

# 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 that comes our way. We want to commend some of these talented writers and artists and encourage them to keep creating.

## Fiction

Steven Cavros, 9  
Oliver Cho, 12  
Mylan Gardner, 10  
Simon Oyama, 11  
Michelle Ying Zhang, 11

## Poetry

Siddhi Bhaskar, 12  
Bliss Chua, 8  
L. Hudson Kau, 12  
Lauren Kendrick, 11  
Delaney Sherr, 13

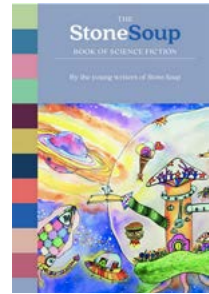
## Art

Analise Braddock, 8  
Steven Cavros, 9  
Elise Ko, 9

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