



StoneSoup

NOVEMBER 2020

VOLUME 48 / ISSUE 10

StoneSoup

Writing and art by kids, for kids

Editor's Note

Living in isolation, often with just our families, has meant that many families have spent more time together than ever. I have experienced this on both ends—as a parent and as a daughter. This summer, we braved the flight out east to stay with my parents in Connecticut for six weeks. It was the most time I had spent with them since I lived at home right after college! It was a very special visit because, after months of waiting, they got to meet their granddaughter for the first time. Seeing them as grandparents, and becoming a parent myself, has made me appreciate all they have done (and continue to do!) for me.

Parents have a central role to play in all the stories and personal narratives in this issue—and not always a positive one. Leo Tolstoy famously opens his novel *Anna Karenina* with this maxim: "All happy families are alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." But I disagree—I think every family, happy or unhappy, is unique in its own way. I hope this issue inspires you to reflect on your own family—or to dream up a story about a fictional one!!



On the cover:
Squash Fest (Acrylics)
Taeyi Kim, 11
Seoul, South Korea

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Stone Soup (ISSN 0094 579X) is published 11 times per year—monthly, with a combined July/August summer issue. Copyright © 2020 by the Children's Art Foundation–Stone Soup Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located in Santa Cruz, California. All rights reserved.

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Stone Soup, 126 Otis Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060. Periodicals postage paid at Santa Cruz, California, and additional offices.

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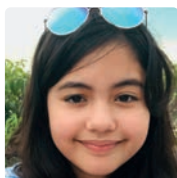
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The Great Imperfect World (Watercolor)
Margaret Fulop, 11
Lexington, MA

Cheating

Two students, living on different planets, strive for excellence at school—with very different consequences



by Kyler Min, 8
Vienna, VA

Evelyn could never forget Sophie's eyes—they were like black holes that sucked up every answer that Evelyn had written down. Even though Mrs. Walls watched the students closely, Sophie still managed to glance around the privacy boards a few times.

It was at the beginning of the second grade, when all the students took a test called MRA. The student with the highest score in the class would be selected to join the Gifted and Honors Class.

After Evelyn returned home, her mom asked, "How was your test?"

"It was good." Evelyn frowned. "I tried my best, but the questions were difficult."

"Really?" Mom said. "Can you give me some examples of the hard ones?"

"Give a few examples of human evolution."

"That's challenging. I don't expect anyone else in your class can answer that, except you!"

"But I think Sophie answered it correctly," Evelyn said.

"How do you know?" asked Mom. "Did she tell you her answers?"

"No, but I saw Sophie peeking through the privacy board," Evelyn

said. "She could see all my answers."

"Wow, she is *some* person!" Dad smirked, joining the conversation. "You just transferred to this school, but she already knows that you are academically inclined. She also knows you are the type of person who will not tell on her. Finally, she can make quick moves—even under great pressure. She will make a great politician in the future!"

"Stop it, Dad!" Evelyn said. "Maybe her score will be higher than mine. Maybe she will go to the gifted class."

Mom put her arms around Evelyn and said, "No matter if you are selected or not, we are always proud of you! We are still going to the food festival on Kepler-15u next year, like we promised!"

"Thank you so much!" Evelyn cried. "I love you!"

There were two basketball courts, a play castle, and three sets of swings on the playground of Stenwood Elementary School. They were not that fancy, but still, the playground was the students' favorite area. If the weather was good, the students were allowed to

play there during recess. In one corner of the playground, behind a blue steel bench, was Kyler and Arjun's "secret base," which the boys called KSB1.

On one sunny morning, the playground was crowded with many kids playing tag. Kyler and Arjun knelt inside KSB1, not wanting any taggers to see them. That was when Arjun dug into his pocket and took out a shiny blue pill with letters printed on it.

"What is that?" Kyler asked.

"Mrs. Romero gave these pills to us yesterday. She said if we take them, we won't be sick during the spring season. This year, the germs could be more dangerous than ever," Arjun explained.

"But Mrs. King said I shouldn't rely on pills to fight any disease," Kyler said.

Kyler was a student from Mrs. King's Gifted and Honors Class. Kyler and his classmates were in the advanced academic program. They exercised outdoors much more frequently than regular students, ate only organic foods, and most importantly, fought all kinds of diseases without the help of any pills.

"You have to be physically and mentally strong," Mrs. King had said to Kyler quite a few times. "As a reward, you will earn a special medal upon graduation. Your parents will also receive a golden certificate from the state!"

Kyler had never seen his parents in person. Stenwood parents worked on a remote planet called Kepler-15u, which was 350 light-years away from Kepler-22b. Students could video chat with their parents every week, but they couldn't meet them in person

until graduation, when a space cruiser would take them to Kepler-15u.

The State Honor Roll had always been a topic during Kyler's video conversations with his parents—they were very proud that Kyler had been selected as an honor student. They told Kyler that they had put a bumper sticker on their space shuttle. During one video chat, Kyler's mom was even wearing a T-shirt that read "Proud Mother of an Honor Student." Kyler could not imagine how thrilled his parents would be if he earned the medal. He had dreamt about that moment so many times.

"I know—you're one of those dudes," Arjun grinned, "But you're the only normal 'honor' student I have ever seen. Take the pill anyway. Mrs. Romero said that this time the germs can be fatal. It's better to be prepared."

"What about you—if I take your pill . . . ?" Kyler asked.

"Uhhh, it's ok." Arjun tilted his head sideways. "I can tell Mrs. Romero I lost my pill. She'll give me another one."

Arjun tilted his head to the other side. "One pill is enough to keep you healthy for a whole season, but Haithem has taken a few pills already. He thought they tasted better than candy. Nobody cares much about regular students anyway."

"Thanks, bro," Kyler said. "You make a great friend!"

"Shhhh. Hide quickly! Shlock is coming. We don't want to be tagged!" Arjun exclaimed.

Both boys stopped talking. They peered through the holes to check the taggers. Kyler didn't plan to take the pill, but he truly appreciated Arjun as

A terrifying idea popped into Kyler's head. The idea was so crazy that he even forgot he was in pain.

Why don't I take Arjun's pill?

a friend.

I wish I could still have Arjun in the neighborhood after graduation, Kyler thought, so that we can still be good friends.

"Blow," Mrs. King ordered as she handed Kyler yet another tissue. He had already used up two boxes of tissues. He guessed that he had finally developed an allergy to the wild plants around the playground, as many older students had.

I'm a big boy now, Kyler thought to himself. He also felt a little sorry because he had laughed at those big kids who suffered from allergies every spring. *How could I have been so mean?*

However, a few days later, the allergy that seemed mild in the beginning became serious, and more and more kids in Kyler's class developed similar symptoms.

"A cup of tea a day will keep the pills away," Mrs. King chanted. These days, she prepared a lot of organic green tea for her students. She even put some organic honey crystals in it, and the students loved it. Although Mrs. King smiled to her students as usual, Kyler felt that she was really worried about something.

Within a few days, he couldn't go to class as he had started to cough, and then his body burned with a high fever. Above the headboard of each student's bed, there was a red button. If a student pressed the button, the

health assistant would come to take care of him. Kyler would not even raise his head to look at it, but he could see the button clearly in his mind. He knew that if he pressed it, he would get treatment immediately, but that also meant he would have to be transferred to a regular class.

"I will never press that button. Never!"

"I will never let my parents down; I would rather die as an honor student, or—wait a minute..."

A terrifying idea popped into Kyler's head. The idea was so crazy that he even forgot he was in pain.

Why don't I take Arjun's pill?

Kyler had totally forgotten about the pill. The idea sounded so absurd when Kyler was healthy, but now he felt the pill was calling his name from the nightstand.

Kyler used all of his energy to open the drawer and take out the blue pill. His whole body started to shiver, partly because of the fever, partly because of the excitement over doing such a bad thing. He put the pill in his mouth and started to chew.

It does taste better than candy—Haithem was right! Kyler thought before he passed out.

The next morning, Kyler woke up with his pajamas soaked with sweat. He found Mrs. King peeking her head in.

"Good morning, Mrs. King," Kyler said. "It's so good to see you."

"I'm so glad you're better," Mrs. King looked at Kyler through her

still-sleepy eyes and breathed a sigh of relief. She had been up since midnight last night, as many of her students had pressed their red buttons for help. Mrs. King had been checking one bedroom after another the entire night long with the school health assistant.

Mrs. King gently placed her palm over Kyler's forehead and quickly drew it back, as if scalded.

"What?" Kyler asked, "Do I still have a fever?"

"Ha, got ya!" Mrs. King laughed. "Your temperature is totally normal! You scared me to death last night."

Mrs. King gave Kyler a gentle hug. "I knew you were my strongest boy! I think you can come back to class soon. Without you, the classroom has been so quiet!"

Two days later, when Kyler returned to his classroom, he found that there were only 11 students left. The rest had been transferred to regular classes. Also, Kyler noticed that his friend Leya was no longer showing up during recess, and she was not even in a regular class. Leya had been such a tough girl, tougher than most boys—she never minded the bug bites on her arms, the same ones that bothered Kyler so much.

When he asked Mrs. King about Leya, she patted Kyler's head and pointed to a faint star over the treetop. "She is with her parents right now on planet Kepler-15u. She could not study in Stenwood anymore."

These days, Mrs. King had been so busy taking care of her sick students that she felt her energy was running low.

"It's time to request a new battery

set at the next teacher workday," Mrs. King said to herself.

Evelyn's family received her MRA report by the end of the year. Her score was very high, but, to be safe, they waited for the official notification in April to celebrate her gifted and honors status. Evelyn's parents were so proud that they put a "Gifted and Honors Parents" bumper sticker on their old Odyssey spaceship.

The spaceship had been serving the family for a few years. It was a family spaceship that could travel at a top speed of warp six. Evelyn's daddy was docking the ship at the main harbor of planet Kepler-15u when Evelyn asked, "Can I park the ship please? I'll be extra careful."

"Okay, but I'll keep my feet on the pedals," Daddy said. "You can take the steering stick."

Evelyn sat on her dad's lap and started to steer the ship. The ship swayed left and right until it finally rumbled to a stop. Mom rose from the passenger seat and started to check the video she had just shot.

"I can guarantee you that no part of Dad is in this video. I will send the video to Grandpa. He'll think that you can land the ship all by yourself!" Mom winked at Evelyn, and they both laughed.

"Come on, move. Let's get into the city quickly. The food festival ceremony is about to start," said Dad.

Evelyn and her family shoved their way through the crowd and entered a big building with a "Larry's Teeter" logo. The family passed by the human section. On the shelves, different grades of humans were displayed

inside shiny crystal boxes. The most expensive ones carried beautiful organic certificates. "Human raised with 100% organic diet. No antibiotics, no antiviral, no added hormones" read a banner printed at the bottom of the boxes.

Name: Kyler

Sex: Male

Age: 12.

Certified Organic Human,

Certification No. 2244703,

Stenwood Farm, Planet Kepler-22b.

On the back, it said, "Best by: 06203342."

The boy's certificate reminded Evelyn of her MRA test. When she answered the question about the origin of the human race, she had written down Kepler-22b. But, in the last minutes before she submitted her test papers, when Sophie wasn't peeking, Evelyn erased the answer and wrote down "EARTH."

Evelyn shook her head as a faint smile appeared on her face. Maybe that was the reason why she, not Sophie, had been selected to be a gifted and honors student.

The Moon



by Chloe Ma, 9
Naperville, IL

The moon is a silver bead, strung in the necklace of the sky.
Every night, it slides in align with the Earth.
Then we see it, small but bright.
Shimmering.
It sheds its light upon us, elegant and soft.
The light's only a reflection of that larger bead.
It is not real.
Yet we see the light, a bright silver illusion.
It is the silver magic.
It dangles the entire night on a thin strand.
As a hand slides the necklace, the bead disappears.
Another, golden, glowing bead slides in.
Day has come.



Bridge (Oil pastels on cardstock paper)
Sloka Ganne, 10
Overland Park, KS

Actual Dads

The writer celebrates her experience growing up with two dads



by Beatriz Lindemann, 12
Miami, FL

“Which one’s your actual dad?”

I get asked that a lot. They are both my actual dads. They both raise me and love me. They both always care for me, are always there for me, and always push me to be the best person I can be. They have both been my actual dads ever since they had the idea of having a little girl. They have been my actual dads since the day I was born in a California hospital. They were the very first ones to hold me.

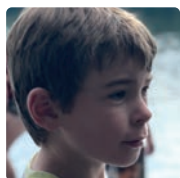
They were my actual dads when I was a newborn, and I still smile at the pictures of the flight from San Diego back to Miami. My two dads held me the whole time looking at me like I was some sort of miracle. One of them was reading *The New York Times*, and I was in the crease of his elbow while he was holding the newspaper. This picture makes me laugh because he still, 12 years later, reads *The New York Times* every morning. When I was little, I would race my little sister outside to get the newspaper first. It was so important to wake up early and get my dad his paper. That was part of my morning ritual. It is much harder for me to wake up early now. I have changed, but my dads haven’t. They

still look at me “like I am some sort of miracle.”

They were my actual dads at my ballet recitals that started when I was very little because I wanted to be a ballerina. Every year, they would take me to *The Nutcracker*. I remember we went backstage, and I met the Sugar Plum Fairy. She gave me an autographed pointe ballet slipper. I pointed out to my dads how perfect her hair was and asked them if they could do that for me. When I would get ready to dance, to be honest, my dads weren’t really good at doing my hair. I loved them anyway.

In third grade, I started Flamenco dancing. My dad would always call it “flamingo,” like the bird, instead of Flamenco. I would get so annoyed! Dad humor. He is a birder, so he knows the difference. I didn’t look or feel like a pink bird; I felt like a famous dancer from Spain performing in front of thousands of people, even though I was on an elementary school stage in front of my school with six other girls.

They were my actual dads when I got accepted into an awesome middle school. They were so happy and supportive. I had studied hard for the



Rainbow Down a Hill (iPad Pro)
Nolan Mealer, 10
New York, NY

I had said I had two dads, and one girl said; that I “didn’t have a real family because I didn’t have a mom.” Boom. It was like something inside of me had popped.

acceptance test. They believed in me and said that I would get in. They were proud of me, and it was one of the best feelings ever.

They were my actual dads at my first jazz/hip-hop dance show at my new school. I was so excited for them to watch me because I had worked so hard. That was a very proud moment for me because I was at my new school, and I was dancing in front of all my new friends. But in the end, the two who mattered most were watching me, my dads.

Singing has always, and will always, be one of the biggest parts of my life. They have been my actual dads during my voice lessons—always watching me practice over and over again. When I perform, they record my performances and send them to everyone they know. I am always embarrassed, but I understand that they are proud of me and that it makes them happy to share videos of me. The stage is my happy place. I used to compare myself to everyone else, but now I just compete with myself. Every time, they always say how much better I’ve gotten and how proud they are.

They have been my actual dads watching me act in plays and musicals, and they always clear their schedules months in advance just to watch me. I have always been a drama queen, so, of course, I auditioned for the musical at my school. They went all three nights to watch me, which showed how proud they were. My dads knew how

much it meant.

They were my actual dads when they sat me down and had “The Talk” with me. It was weird to me, but I know that they felt it was important. Later, I realized how awkward it must have been for them. They were always concerned for me because I was the oldest daughter without a mom. At first, it was hard, but it got much easier to talk to them about things. They are always trying to make it easier to talk to them about private things that they think are important. Our communication has gotten a lot easier the more we talk.

They have been my actual dads comforting me when I cried because a mean kid popped my protection bubble. It happened out of the blue. And it happened very quick. It was my first experience of bullying; it made me confused and so sad. I was in kindergarten, and we were on the playground talking about our parents. I had said I had two dads, and one girl said; that I “didn’t have a real family because I didn’t have a mom.” Boom. It was like something inside of me had popped. I remember it like yesterday; my heart was broken. Having two dads was all I had ever known. They were my parents. To me, they were amazing. I loved them with all of my heart, and I still do. Later, I realized that the girl who said that didn’t know better. She didn’t get it. I have had many similar experiences, and they have made me stronger and smarter. Whenever

people tell me those things, I just don't listen to them. I know they just don't get it.

My dads are bears protecting their cub—always there for me. They always want to know what's up and what I am doing. They are still there for me when I need them, and when I don't. Whether it is school, friends, or whatever is on my mind, they always listen to me. Our relationship has changed a lot as I have gotten older. My actual dads say that I am growing up so fast.

They have been my actual dads since my first breath.

They are the dynamic duo dads, perfect people who are my parents.

They make me unique, and they are so special.

They are both my dads.

They are my actual dads.



Loyal Friend (Prismacolor Pencils)
Parinita Chandrashekar, 12
Bridgewater, NJ

Not Mom's Best Friend

Arthur's mom is furious when his dad brings home a dog



by Jamison Freis, 12
Sherman Oaks, CA

Beatrix pushed Arthur again, and Arthur grew a new bruise on his head and a new scrape on his arm. Beatrix is the school bully and is always picking on other kids. Arthur is one of those kids.

Arthur's dad thinks that he should get a dog as a friend because Arthur has trouble making friends. Arthur's mother hates dogs. Arthur would die to get a dog, but his mom, Jen (short for Jennifer) says no. At school, Beatrix puts on make-up in class and bullies everyone who doesn't worship her. Every day, Beatrix wears a half-top and really short shorts. Beatrix is a cheerleader and has perfect teeth. She and her cheerleading squad push people, make fun of them, laugh at them, and spill their lunch out.

Later that day, Arthur was throwing free throws on the basketball court when all the other boys were playing soccer. Arthur missed every single one and licked his braces every time he missed. As Arthur was playing, he saw Beatrix coming at him. She said a few mean things, but Arthur kept dribbling and missing. Arthur heard something about his horrible playing skills. Then

Beatrix walked away with her two sidekicks.

At the end of the day, Arthur came home and his father called him to the kitchen.

Arthur set his bag on a chair and said, "What?"

"I have a surprise for you!" his father said proudly. "But first, how was your day?"

"Well, Beatrix pushed me again," Arthur mumbled.

"Okay, but this will still be the best day of your life!"

There was a large crate on the floor with small vents on the sides. Arthur hoped it was a dog, but he knew his mother would never allow it. His father opened the crate and a yellow Labrador retriever jumped out and started licking his face. The dog knocked him over, and Arthur was happier than at any other time in his life.

"What's his name?" Arthur asked his father.

"Her name is Sunny," his father answered. "No other person would take her from the shelter because of

I hate dogs, Jen thought as she walked far into the woods with Sunny, trying to avoid touching her.

her behavior.”

“She seems fine to me,” Arthur said with confidence.

“That’s what I said!” he exclaimed.

“The man told me to just wait, and she would be a monster.”

“Except for the part where her body is all muddy and scarred,” Arthur said while he looked at her paws. The two gave her a nice bubble bath that she seemed to enjoy. Sunny had soap bubbles all over her, and his father made her a beard. They laughed and rinsed her with the hose. She shook her whole body and it felt like gallons of water came off her. They dried her with a nice big towel and she happily pranced over to the house. Her fur was now as soft as . . . something that is really soft.

Arthur took Sunny outside and played fetch, or tried to play fetch. Arthur heard his mother’s car coming down the long driveway, and Arthur sprinted inside with Sunny.

They both were tired from the warm sun and heard Jen coming. Arthur had asked his dad if Mom knew about the dog. His father exclaimed, “Heck no! If she knew about this, she would kill me.”

“Well, she is coming in the house as we speak, so . . .” Arthur hesitated. His father was about to say something, but she walked in the door before he could. She stared at Sunny and dropped her purse. She blinked and brushed the golden-brown hair out of her face.

“Oh my god. You guys got a dog!” she yelled, and the chandelier in the

dining room shook. Arthur imagined steam coming out of her ears. Sunny whimpered and gave Jen the puppy eyes.

Jen did not talk to Arthur but was yelling at their father the whole time. At dinner, Jen locked Sunny outside on a leash. They had chicken and broccoli for dinner with a side of beans, and Arthur stayed silent, still thinking about Sunny. Arthur fed his leftovers to Sunny, and she greedily gobbled them down and started whimpering for more. Arthur patted her head and placed a blanket outside for her. Arthur went to bed and drifted off to sleep.

I hate dogs, Jen thought as she walked far into the woods with Sunny, trying to avoid touching her. They reached a river about half a mile into the middle of nowhere. Jen looked at Sunny, who was giving her the puppy eyes; they sparkled in the moonlight. Jen tied the leash on a tree loosely and ran back to the house. She came in the door panting, and she poured herself a glass of wine. She sat on the couch and fell asleep.

The next morning, Arthur came downstairs and looked for Sunny. She was sitting on the deck waiting for food. He fed her some beef with spinach, and he noticed that her leash was untied. Arthur’s mother came down the stairs and said to Arthur, “Good morning, honey. How is the

dog?" Jen was expecting to hear "She is missing," or "I don't know," but she heard:

"Good." Arthur smiled. "She seems hungry, though."

Jen frowned and looked outside the glass door. Sunny was sitting there and smiling at her, and Jen swore that she winked. Over the next half hour, Arthur was getting ready for school and covering his bruise with his mom's make-up. She was downstairs getting ready for the drive to school by putting her coffee in a cup, brushing her hair, getting the keys, and getting her phone charger. Arthur put on his clothes, brushed his teeth and his braces, and put his homework in his bag. His mom drove him to school in her truck and quickly went back home.

Jen put Sunny in the back of her truck and drove past Arthur's school and reached an empty alley. Jen chained Sunny to a pole and drove off.

"Take that, stupid dog," Jen said nastily. "You won't come back now!" She drove to work and felt a little bad for Sunny but did not regret her decision. She had a meeting and did very well.

At school, Arthur was hiding from Beatrix and was avoiding her at all costs. As Arthur came around the corner, Beatrix was right there! He knocked her books and phone out of her hand, and she immediately started hitting Arthur. He ran away and she followed with her gang of cheerleaders. They were running out of the school when a school teacher saw them and yelled, "Stop! Where are

you going?!"

The other girls stopped, but Arthur and Beatrix kept running. They were running on a trail in the woods when Arthur came to a stop. Beatrix punched his back and looked to see what he was looking at. It was Sunny, with no collar and her lips curled back. Her huge, white, sparkly teeth scared Beatrix and she stayed still like a statue. She also hated dogs because she'd been attacked by one as a little girl. Arthur walked up to Sunny proudly and patted her head. She licked her lips and smiled at him with her body. Beatrix ran away before she could beat him up, and Sunny walked home with Arthur. They had only missed an hour of school, and that last hour was dance class (with Beatrix). Arthur and Sunny stayed home until their parents came home.

"Maybe, just maybe, Mom might like you if I tell her you saved me," Arthur said to Sunny. Then Arthur thought he was going crazy talking to a dog. Arthur sat on the couch and fell asleep. Sunny went into their parents' room and started eating things. She ate Jen's shoes, her dress, the TV remote, and even the toilet paper. Sunny ran back downstairs with some fabric on her paw and some toilet paper on the other paw. She licked Arthur's face and woke him up. Arthur saw the stuff on Sunny and ran to check the rooms. His room was clean and the guest room was clean, but his parents' room was trashed. It had toilet paper, shoes, lipstick, fabric, and other stuff Arthur didn't even want to know about.

"Mom is going to kill you," Arthur said to himself and to Sunny. His mom

was coming home in 20 minutes and her room was a mess. Arthur started cleaning the room and only got about a fourth of the way done when he heard his mother come in the door. Arthur walked outside the door and Sunny ran down the stairs to Jen. She saw where Sunny came from and went to look in her room. Arthur hid in the bathtub and held his breath. What happened next made Arthur's ears ring.

"ARTHUR!!!!" Jen screamed at the top of her lungs. Arthur came out of the bathroom and his mother saw him. Arthur got many lectures about watching his dog and about how much money Sunny had cost her. Arthur's punishments were: no allowance, no dessert, extra chores, to clean his mom's room, and that Sunny was never allowed inside again. Arthur still loved Sunny. Her love was so powerful toward Arthur, and she had saved him from getting beat up by a 13-year-old cheerleader.

Arthur tied Sunny up on a leash and went to bed. He had finished cleaning his mom's room and the rest of the house. Arthur's father was coming home late tonight because of work. Arthur went to bed and was thinking about Sunny all night.

Again, Jen tried to get rid of Sunny. This time permanently. Jen loaded Sunny in the back of her car with a large suitcase. Jen drove two miles away, over a bridge with a river under it, and drove up the same river to a deep part of it. Jen was nice to Sunny and told her to sit in the suitcase. Jen closed the suitcase and zipped it up quickly. Jen hesitated before she kicked her into the river, but she did

it. Sunny floated away and Jen got back in the car. Before Jen could close the door, someone opened it and hit her on the head with a hard object. Everything went all black.

A man dressed in all black dragged her out of the car and took her wallet, her keys, and her phone. He had a black ski mask on made of cotton and his long-sleeve shirt was a thick sweater to protect him from the cold outside. He wore black jeans with a thread poking out and black sneakers with a brand-new tread.

Jen was on the floor, tied to a tree, when she woke up. She felt like she had been passed out for an eternity. She woke up to the man yelling and hitting some blurry animal. Everything was still blurry to Jen, but she thought the animal was Sunny. She thought that was crazy since Sunny was long gone, but her vision came back and it was Sunny. She was biting the guy and growling. He was grunting and trying to get away, but Sunny would not let him go. Sunny pushed him into the river and he hit his head on a rock; he was about to drown, but he saved himself and swam away.

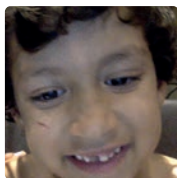
Sunny walked over to Jen and stared at her in the face. As this was happening, Jen looked into Sunny's eyes and she saw a poor dog who had been through a lot. This made Jen feel like she actually loved the dog instead of hating her guts. Sunny chewed the ropes off, and Jen drove her home.

Jen never tried to "lose" Sunny again. Sunny was loved by the whole family and started training to be a service dog. Sunny never chewed anything besides Arthur's shoes, and

Arthur never found out about what Jen did to Sunny, or that Sunny saved her, and Jen never found out that Sunny rescued Arthur. Sunny has forgiven her people like all dogs do. Every time Jen woke up, she would remember and be happy that Sunny had saved her.

I wrote this story to show that no matter how much you hurt your dog or make a mistake with your dog, they can always forgive you and help you. With my dog, every time I mess up, she forgives me and moves on with her life. She is a happy dog, and she loves everybody.

The Mental Mind Music



by Eli Nimchonok, 6
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

The mind is birthed in the day
but in the night it is silent

Every day the mind has a memory
and removes the math

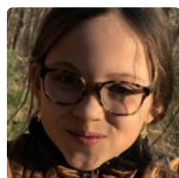
When the mind music comes
you hum.

The Ancient Cell

Some wars lead to the
ancient Egypt story
that keeps on going

It is so ancient
it's God in heaven
with the sun and moon

When the cell comes
you sleep.



Patterns (Mixed media)
Analise Braddock, 9
Katonah, NY



Brave (Mixed media)
Analise Braddock, 9
Katonah, NY

The Mystery of Mike

When Mike goes missing, detectives travel through space and time to find him



by Panagiotis Apatsidis Gunaratnam, 9
London, UK

CHAPTER 1: WESTWAY PRIMARY SCHOOL MYSTERY

Westway Primary School children were like bees because they were busy and they always had something to do. And at playtime they would all go out into the playground and squeal with delight as they ran to the swing to get there first. There would always be little fights here and there, about who told the teacher what or who would beat who to the front of the line or who would be the boss and tell their friends what to play. The playground had a seesaw, a slide, a roundabout, a football court, and a climbing frame.

The teachers in Westway were kind and clever, especially Mr. Steve in class 16A. The head of the school, Mr. Jenkins, was strict, but only when he needed to be. The school nurse, Mrs. Claire, knew how to treat children who were hurt or sick in a jiffy. The deputy head, Ms. Matthew, was easy, controlled, and steady. The head teacher, Ms. Moorlands, was grumpy, annoying, and never in a good mood.

Mike, an intelligent and kind child from class 3B, was the youngest in his class. His best friends were Tom, Harry, and Dick. His teacher was Mr. Andrew who loved him 100%. Being the youngest in his class might be tough, but he managed to get through it. Mike was very popular in his class; other children, especially Harry, would come to him and ask him millions of questions, such as:

“Why does the Leaning Tower of Pisa lean?”

“What is 40×100 ?”

“Who was the meanest king in history?”

But on one day, it didn't seem right. Something bad had happened.

Mike, sitting in the front row, was happily learning maths. But for the other children it seemed boring. After 30 long minutes, the maths lesson was over and the children gleefully ran out to the playground and Mike got pushed on the floor.

But on that bright and scorching day, that was the last time the children saw Mike. Now he was missing! The news spread like wildfire, and the school was in a panic. Fortunately, Ms. Moorlands knew exactly what to do!



Study in Geometry (Acrylics)
Caitlin Goh, 13
Dallas, TX

CHAPTER 2: THE SEARCH PARTY AND THE HAUNTED PALACE

There were police and 150 detectives looking for clues, the children were worried, and the teachers were trying to calm them down. Mike's family was in tears, the head teacher was explaining the story to the chief detective, and everybody was panicking until 12 clever detectives spotted a trail of footprints that looked like Mike's.

Immediately, they followed the trail, which took them quite a while and led them here and there, but they wouldn't give up. It took them 42 HOURS! Can you believe it?! Finally, the footprints took them to a haunted palace which looked millions of years old; they had no choice but to enter. As they entered, they could hear sudden noises and booms. Inside there were cobwebs which hung from the corners of the ceiling; mice and rats running here, there, and everywhere; and from the attic window they could see bats flying so fast and perched on the windows' top edges. The walls were painted in a sort of spooky, light ghost-green shade, and the scary dead tree outside made it look creepier.

CLANK CLANK CLANK went the staircase as they climbed down with only a feeble candle. Finally, they reached a door saying, WARNING: CAUTION, DO NOT ENTER FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY. Beneath, it said, HIGH VOLTAGE!

CRREEAAKK went the door as they opened it—they thought the hinges needed oiling. In their

amazement, they didn't blink, didn't move a muscle, and only stood there gawping!

CHAPTER 3: THE SEARCH PARTY AND THE PAIR OF SHOES

Before their very eyes they saw an ancient throne room which smelt like a mildewed cellar mixed with rotten apples that had been in a box for 50 years. On the queen's throne there was an old-style crown, a pointy spear, and a small box. On the king's throne it was exactly the same. They searched all over the spooky palace, but Mike was nowhere to be found.

As they exited the palace, the chief detective spotted Mike's handprints and footprints smeared all over the roof and said to the others, "How silly we are! Look over there on the roof: Mike's handprints and footprints." The detectives and police went to the other side and saw Mike's footprints.

Just past the train station on the high street there was an old lady named Mrs. Blueberry who was walking her dog, Buttercup. As she passed the small pond, she spotted a pair of brown shoes. Now she wasn't the kind of person who would just leave them there and walk away, so she looked carefully at them and looked at the poster saying MISSING, and beneath it a picture of Mike and realized that the shoes were Mike's. She rang the detectives, who were just past the train station, and told them that she had found his shoes. They said they would come straight away. Time passed—10 minutes, 15, 20, 25—until 30 minutes later they arrived

The chief detective saw Mike's fingerprint on the button which said "650,000,000 BC." Uh-oh. That was the time the asteroid hit Earth.

and saw the shoes. On the other side of the pond they saw bare footprints heading northeast, and they followed them.

CHAPTER 4: THE SEARCH PARTY AND THE OLD TIME MACHINE

As they followed the footprints, they saw a treehouse which looked very ancient and mystical. They couldn't decide whether it was good luck or bad luck—whatever it was, they went in. It looked creepy, but they were brave. They looked around. A detective named Simon saw a sign hanging from the ceiling. They read it 10 times and noticed a note saying:

ROOMEN 2: TIMEON MACHINEONTE.

They followed the arrows and opened a door which said:

IF YOU OPENTO THEIS DOORESTO
YOU WILO GAZET ATE THEIS
UNFORRGETEBLEO RICHESTOS.

When they opened the door, which made a *CRREEEAAAK* noise, they didn't move a muscle.

They realized that the notice was correct: in front of their very eyes were treasure chests, trophies, and medals. But the best thing that they saw was a very old time machine. They saw Mike's footprints going inside it, so they went in. The chief detective saw Mike's fingerprint on the button which said "650,000,000

BC." Uh-oh. That was the time the asteroid hit Earth. He pressed that button and they went up and away.

CHAPTER 5: THE SEARCH PARTY AND THE AGE OF DINOSAURS

As the machine reached 650,000,000 BC, they saw a mega T-rex eating another small dinosaur. When it caught sight of the detectives, it charged at them. Everyone ran for their lives. They ran for 30 minutes and they were puffed out, but the good news was that they'd lost it. They searched all over the island, but Mike was nowhere to be found.

As they climbed back into the machine, the chief detective saw that it *wasn't* Mike's fingerprint; it was a prehistoric child's print. Mike's print was on the Stone Age button, so they had to go—and another *WHOOSH* went as they flew.

CHAPTER 6: THE SEARCH PARTY AND THE STONE AGE HUMANS

The time machine landed at the time of the Stone Age, when humans had evolved. The chief detective saw a massive cave and two hairy men beside it. They looked ugly, hairy, disgusting, enormous, and fierce. The detectives looked extremely terrified.

The men caught sight of everyone, and the detectives ran for their lives. The cave men shouted "OO, OO, OO, OO!" They chased the detectives for

two hours, but then they were gone. The detectives saw footprints and followed them until, in a small, watery cave, where the tracks faded a little but then grew bigger and bigger, they saw a small boy. The detectives swam closer and realized that it was Mike!

They grabbed Mike, who was looking scared, hungry, and tired. The detectives relieved him of his fears, and they swam out of the cave. They ran into the time machine and went back to the present and prepared a reunion party for Mike, his parents, and the school. Mike's parents were crying with joy that he was reunited with them and promised him that they would never let anything happen to him. All the Westway schoolchildren were so delighted to see Mike, and they all wanted to play games with him for the rest of the day.

The reunion party had amazing food: It had cakes, pizzas, spring rolls, burgers, Indian food, and all the sweets and snacks that anyone can ever imagine. Mike and his friends all danced to their favorite music until they were so tired. Mike was so grateful to go back home holding his parents' hands. He was really excited to lay on his bed and cuddle his favourite toy, Woody.

Wrong side



by Lucy Hurwitz, 10
Newton, MA

I wake up on that side of bed.

My leg's my arm,

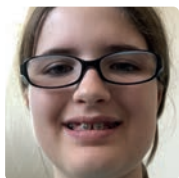
My arm's my head.



Shattered Landscape (iPhone 7)
Leah Koutal, 12
Wayne, PA

Regrets and Broken Gas Pumps

A boiling summer day, a gas station, and a complicated family



by Sydney Burr, 13
Chino, CA

I'm pumping gas in the summer sun but the only gallons I can think about are the gallons of sweat that I'm sweating although it doesn't make a difference anyhow and there are no good movies out and the flock in the sky has wandered to float far away above the mountains so there's nothing to stop anyone from frying an egg or themselves on the sidewalk. The dull lifeless hot air is not stimulated until a breeze awakens but the breeze is even hotter and the skating rink is closed for refurbishment and the darned pump isn't working so I collapse into the driver's seat and pull forward to try the next pump which I don't think is encouraged but I'm too hot to think. The blue of the sky is a hazy blue because of the smog and I'd get an electric car because I don't want to contribute to the pollution or keep dealing with this pump which isn't working either but I can't afford one and I can't afford Disneyland but I couldn't really send Anna there anyway in this heat plus there's no one to send her there with either.

My mom is outside cussing at the gas pump like it's Dad and I'm

in the car and can almost hear my skin sizzling because the car is like an opposite freezer in the summer when the sun is shining and the air conditioning is off and my life stinks. Ms. Hawthorne always pointed out that I write a lot of run-on sentences but my mom says that's okay because most people think in run-on sentences and writing is supposed to express thoughts. I don't know if she's right but I do know she was right when she told Joel not to ride his bike in the street and I think she was wrong when she said some things I won't repeat about Dad. Joel looked just like Mom and so do I but I wish I didn't and she spends most of every summer trying to figure out how to get me out of the house because I'm always home then since I have no friends to hang out with but she doesn't really care about that. Or me, for that matter. She fought hard for visitation rights and won them but I can't help but think that it was only out of spite because she was so angry at Dad. I think she still is but she hardly ever talks about him and he doesn't

talk about her either when I come on weekends. I don't think either of them really, truly miss Joel, but I do because he understood me and we could share a look every time Mom made a lame joke. He had dark eyes like mine and Mom's but that was before he got mowed over by a pickup truck which was before the divorce back when Mom made a lot of jokes and still loved Dad and me. The driver was texting. I don't have a phone and I don't want one now anyway. I saw what was left of Joel's bike after the collision which was just a mess of twisted metal but I didn't see Joel and I didn't want to anyway. There were only a few people at the funeral because Joel and I have only one aunt and one uncle and one cousin and Joel has no friends which just goes to show how much we have in common. Had, I guess. He was nine. I was eleven, twelve now, lonely and very, very hot, baked by California sun like a few million other fools.

I wonder when Mom will give up on kicking the pump.

We the People



by Galen Halasz, 13
Saranac, NY

People want to say a lot of things.

People think they know a lot of things.

People want always to be in the right.

People think they're always on the good side of every fight.

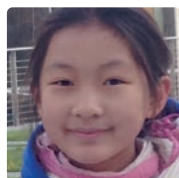
People say be open to new ideas.

People mean their ideas.

People are stupid.

I am stupid.

We are stupid.



Orange Headscarf (Acrylics)
Claire Jiang, 12
Princeton, NJ

The Miscarriage

Alina is happier than ever when she learns she's going to have a sibling



by Alina Khilchenko, 11
New York, NY

The cold breeze hit my face when I walked through the school gates. My hair was flying in the air. The tips of my fingers were becoming numb from the cold. Red, orange, and yellow leaves falling everywhere. I could hear people talking and kids laughing. When I turned around, I saw my mom in her beautiful winter coat and dark blue jeans. Her dark brown hair was going different directions in the wind. Her cheeks were red like fresh-picked apples. She looked nervous and excited, her smile big and her eyes running back and forth. When I walked up to her, I saw her beautiful brown eyes staring straight into mine. She said she had great news . . .

A few years ago I remember sitting in bed with my parents. They started talking about how great it would be to have another baby. Suddenly all of my emotions changed. Out of nowhere I started crying because I thought I wouldn't be their favorite anymore. Later that day I was sitting in their bed staring at the ceiling, my face still as stone, my eyes wide open, staring into nowhere.

My mom began talking again. I felt the same way—scared. What was she going to say? Everything changed after these words . . .

“You are getting a sibling,” she said. Her voice was filled with happiness. My eyes were full of tears. I have been an only child my whole life. I felt frozen. I felt sad and scared. Then we started walking home. As I walked into the lobby, I could feel the temperature changing from freezing cold to comforting warmth. I could feel the last tear trace down my cheek as I walked toward the elevators. I heard a ding, and the elevator doors opened.

My mom's keys rustled as she reached for the door. I walked right after her. My mom then turned around and said, “I didn't believe it at first either. I went to CVS three times just to get some other pregnancy tests.” We started laughing for no good reason.

I wasn't scared to get a sibling. I was scared it would change the relationship between me and my mom; maybe she wouldn't have time for me anymore. My whole life, I had

My mom was standing there with a smile on her face and in her hands was a strip of black-and-white pictures. It was a picture of the baby.

told my mom everything—every secret, every thought, every feeling I had. She was always there for me. She listened to me, understood me. I was scared she wouldn't anymore.

"We're going to have so much fun! You will take them to school, teach them how to read, dress them up," Mom said with a wide smile, her eyes glowing the brightest I have ever seen. I knew she was happy. Somehow my mom and I were connected. When she was happy, I was happy. She made me feel loved and understood all the time.

"I would have someone to look out for," I said. Soon we were fantasizing about how it would be. We laughed, we smiled. I wrapped my arms around her as fast as I could. I could feel the warmth and comfort. Her hair gently brushed against my face. I was happy and excited for what adventures would come along next. Soon I heard the phone ring, and my mom rushed to get it.

"Hi, why are you calling?" My mom asked. I knew it was my dad. My mom came close to me and said, "Your dad wants to ask you something." I grabbed the phone as I hear his voice say,

"How are you feeling?" I knew he was asking this due to what I just found out.

"Awesome. I'm so excited!" I knew this would be one of the happiest things that happened to me this year. I knew the baby would be something small but would make my world so much better.

A week later, I could smell the antiseptic everywhere as I walked into the doctor's office.

"Sit down, please," the doctor said as me and my parents walked towards the round black table. "May I just ask you a question?" he asked in his calm, deep voice.

"Sure," my mom responded.

"How long has it been since you had your first child?" he asked, and soon I looked up from my phone knowing he was talking about me. "Ten years," my mom said calmly.

"Okay. Follow me, please. I just need to check something," he said as my mom stood up from her seat and went after him.

I didn't know where they were going. Right away all the bad thoughts rushed to my head. *Is everything okay? Why are they going away?* I thought. As soon as they left, the room was filled with silence. My dad and I sat there, waiting. As I looked around the office, I saw many pictures of kids, adults, and babies on the light-gray walls. It seemed like each one had its own memory and story. I knew that soon we would be on those walls. I looked at my phone and saw that it was already 4:30. They were still not back. *Where were they? What happened? Was everything okay?*

Soon I heard the door creak loudly. My mom was standing there with a smile on her face and in her hands was a strip of black-and-white pictures. It was a picture of the baby. A smile appeared on my face. In months, I

would have this tiny person in my life to look out for, to love.

A few weeks later I remember the warm summer breeze, the sun shining on my face. As my parents and I were walking down the street, my mom turned to us and said,

“Let’s go into that store.” Her smile was wide, her eyes shining bright. As I turned around, I saw a store full of baby clothes, cribs, blankies, stuffed animals—it all seemed so cute and tiny. As we walked into the store, I could smell sweet vanilla. I could hear people talking about what to buy.

I turned to my mom and asked, “Are we getting something?”

She looked at me with her deep brown eyes and said, “It’s too early to start buying things.” We had really just found out, so I got it.

We lived normally for months, excited. We looked through almost every baby magazine, thought about tons of baby names, unique ones, basic ones. We thought about whether it’d be a girl or a boy.

“It’s a girl,” my mom said. Her smile got wider every day. It seemed she was happier than she had ever been. I knew that I was happier than I have ever been. I was already imagining myself picking out clothes for her, teaching her how to read, buying her gifts for every single one of her birthdays. Being there for her when she was sad, being there when she was happy.

And then came the day when everything changed. The warm, comforting sun hit my face as I

studied for my math test. I felt like something bad was going to happen. I was going to my mom to ask her when we were leaving for Russian school. As I walked into the room, I saw my mom lying in bed crying. It seemed like she was about to call me.

“What happened?” I ask.

“Something is wrong. Call your dad,” she said with her voice shaking. I ran to my room as fast as I could, grabbing my phone, trying to find my dad’s contact.

“Hey, Dad,” I said in a shaky voice. I knew that he knew something was wrong.

“Hi. What happened?” He asked.

“Something happened with Mom. I really don’t know. When I came into the room she was crying,” I said, sobbing. It felt like tens of hundreds of weights had fallen on my back.

“Put your mom on the phone,” he said. I ran toward my mom and gave her the phone. Her eyes were red and her smile gone.

“Mom, Dad wants to talk to you,” I said. I heard them talking about my mom calling the doctor, my dad coming to get her.

“Okay, okay,” my mom said as she hung up the phone. “Alina, go get a bag and get me a fresh pair of clothes, please. Dad and I have to go to the hospital.”

Right away, I rushed to get all her stuff, and when I was done my dad knocked at the door. My mom got up from the bed and went down with my dad. I kissed them goodbye.

“I love you,” I said.

“I love you too,” my mom said.

I sat at the table, my tears still pouring. All I could think about was

What was happening to my mom? Where was she? What were they doing? My mind wasn't able to let go. Once in a while tears, streamed down my cheek.

where my mom was and what was happening. As my tears dropped, they left wet stains on my math paper. I had a test the next day I thought I would fail. My brain wouldn't work properly. Everything was messed up; nothing was right.

My dad called me and said I could go over to my best friend Lise; he had talked to her mom. My best friend, Lise, lived in my building, just a few floors below me.

"Ok, thank you! Love you. Bye," I said as I ran to get my keys. The elevator was cold like the air outside.

I knocked at the door. Three seconds later, Lise opened it. She hugged me, and I felt like I had at least someone there for me. We ran into her room and she grabbed her iPad and turned on *Friends*, the only show that could cheer both of us up.

Later we moved into the living room. Still no call from my parents, and I was worried, more worried than I have ever been. When it was already getting late, Lise's mom said, "Why don't you stay here overnight?"

"Sure. Let me just ask my dad," I said.

"Hey, Dad. Can I stay here overnight?" I asked.

"Sure. Just go to the apartment and get your stuff," my dad replied.

"Ok, bye, love you," I said.

"Love you too. Bye," he said.

"Sure. I just have to get my stuff," I said to Lise's mom.

Lise and I ran to the elevator. My keys jingled in my hand. As I opened

the door, I dashed into my room, packing my school stuff, pajamas, clothes, toothbrush, and soon I was ready to go.

After getting ready, we were sitting in bed talking. Soon, Lise's parents came in to say goodnight. It made me miss my parents. They would always go into my room to tell me that they loved me and to say goodnight. This night was different. They weren't there. When her parents left the room, I started crying and my face turned red. My cheeks were wet.

"Everything is going to be okay," Lise said as she turned around, and soon fell asleep. I spent most of the night thinking. *What was happening to my mom? Where was she? What were they doing?* My mind wasn't able to let go. Once in a while tears, streamed down my cheek. The thought of something bad happening kept me from falling asleep.

School was a nightmare. All day I was scared something had happened. When someone asked me why I was sad, I started to cry, not knowing how to stop. When the day was finally over, I saw my dad standing outside, ready to take me home.

"Alina, you'll have to wait a little to have a sibling," he said.

I knew what he meant. Everything was falling apart. I started sobbing without context, not saying anything. I hugged him as hard as I could.

As we walked into the apartment, I saw my mom and as fast as I could, I ran up to her, crying. We went to sit in

their bed to talk. I remember my mom sitting on my left, dad on my right. We cried together and my mom said, "Bad things will happen. We can't prevent that. But what we can do is love, be happy and grateful for what we have, and what we will have."

That night I remember hugging my parents, feeling the appreciation for what we do and don't have, the comfort and love.

Little Boat



by Evangeline Flynn, 10
New York, NY

A boat on the horizon of crystal clear water, meeting the rainbow sky,
A beautiful watercolor for all to see,
Bobbing up and down, serenely, so peacefully,
Swaying and rocking in time to the rhythm of the waves,
Lulling us to sleep.
So mesmerizing ...
So hypnotizing ...
A stray wooden water car.
It may look lost but it is not,
Sailing smoothly across the never-ending glassy sea.



Lighthouse (Oils)
 Alicia Xin, 13
 Scarsdale, NY

Balancing My Nerves and a Bike

The writer, unathletic and fearful, can't help comparing herself to her bold, sporty sister



by Audrey Young, 11
New York, NY

My mom used to like telling people about how she was in labor with me for over 36 hours. She would laugh and say that I was so comfortably curled up inside that I didn't feel like coming out, and when I was finally forced to come out (two weeks late), I stretched out my arms and legs like a starfish all the way down.

Physical activity was just not my thing. It never was, not since I was born. According to the family photo albums, it took me two-and-a-half years to learn how to walk. That led me to hate the playground. I was probably one of the few kids who did. Running around, climbing rope ladders, getting sand thrown in my face and my shovel stolen. Just the thought of having to climb the ladder to the top of the slide with a whole bunch of pushy kids behind me, I would get butterflies in my stomach, my legs would feel like cooked noodles, and sweat would start trickling down my forehead to the tip of my chin. Even now, it brings me back to that Shel Silverstein poem "Whatif," where he talks about all the doubts and fears that dance around

inside of him.

When my sister was born, it all got worse. Apparently she was in such a rush to get out of my mom's stomach that she almost fell onto the floor. My sister came out screaming so loud that she busted a hole in her lungs, and had to stay in the intensive care unit for a week. Those family albums show her walking, then running, and then riding a skateboard, when she was three years old.

When I was five, my parents started pushing me to join all sorts of activities, which unfortunately were all physically demanding. Gymnastics, swimming, soccer, tae kwon do, and even golf. ae kwon do was the worst. It was a big room filled with kids kicking and punching stuff. Why would I ever do that? I cried, wet, salty tears pouring down my face, fists balled up, feet stuck to the ground, as my mom tried to gently nudge—and then finally shoved—me in. It was like those scary movies where people get forced into a torture chamber. I remember thinking, *Why are they making me do this? I obviously don't want to do it!* When we

left, I was so relieved that I didn't even care that the other kids were staring at my blotchy, red face.

When I got older, around seven or eight, it was gymnastics for both me and my sister. We were in different classes, but I could see her across the gym, having the time of her life, swinging across the bars and jumping on balance beams. I, on the other hand, couldn't even figure out how to do a simple cartwheel. I could see myself in the mirror doing this crabby, bent-over thing. My sister, who was two years younger than me, was doing stuff I never expected to learn. As much as I longed to be able to do anything that looked good, I knew I would never be able to. The feeling of hopelessness and disappointment was so thick and heavy that sometimes I couldn't breathe. And jealousy too. There was a horrible piece of me that wanted her to mess up. Not totally fail, but just enough so that I might feel better about myself.

A couple years ago, when my mom brought up the idea of learning how to ride a bike and how cool it was, I instantly thought of the disasters that had happened when I was younger. I looked down at the beige rug covered in ornate designs so that I wouldn't have to look at her. Then maybe she would forget I was there. My sister was exuberant, jumping up and down, squealing with anticipation, begging to go now. My hands were clammy and had found a binder clip to play with clumsily. That was when my dad marched triumphantly into the room with a brand-new, shiny, purple bike. He told us that it was the best bike to learn on, and if we got good, we

could get a second one so we could ride together. He said it like we were all super happy to do this, like we had planned this together a long time ago.

But we hadn't, at least not me. I sat there at the mahogany dining table, my heart beating faster, my head hurting because of all the blood rushing to it. I was numb, not sure what to say, trying to think what I should do. My mom told me to go to the park with my dad so I could learn first. But I was frozen. So, she decided that my sister could go first. I was relieved but still troubled, knowing that I would still have to learn later. *Grow up, I told myself. Grow up, grow up.*

They left, my sister squealing with delight. I continued to sit, glued to my seat. My hands now fiddling with a rubber band, the rubber weaving in and out, forming an intricate design. My mother came over and plopped down next to me in the cushioned beige chair, her laptop in hand, its rose-gold border gleaming in the bright ceiling light.

"You know, I understand how you might not like these things," she said as she scrolled down the page on her screen, not looking at me.

"It's not that I don't like sports; it's that I don't like trying new sports," I said defensively, instantly regretting the words that had just come out of my mouth. My dad always talked about how sporty he'd been as a kid, my mom was always willing to try anything and never seemed to feel embarrassed, and my sister was perfect. In this family, saying stuff like what I just said was basically admitting that I was a big loser.

My mom looked up at me over the

“Nobody is good the first time out. Nobody *already* knows how to ride a bike.”

rim of her charcoal-black glasses perched on the bridge of her nose. “The point of trying out all these different things is that you never know what you’ll end up liking or being good at. If you never get out there and try, how will you ever find out?” She rested her head on her fist, pausing to take a breath. “Nobody is good the first time out. Nobody *already* knows how to ride a bike.”

I shrugged and frowned, which caused my mother to tilt her head sideways and look me up and down, her lips pressed together, as if deciding what type of person I would become. My head was filled with thoughts, doubts, and fears, my mouth trying to let the words out. But I knew there was only a little space, for one or two, before she would start lecturing me again. As if reading my mind: “If you’re concerned about being compared to someone else, you’re not. No one is judging you. We know everyone has different strengths, including you.”

I wanted to say, *I should be better than my sister! I’m older, so I should be her role model! She shouldn’t be mine!* But I didn’t. I could feel tears welling up and my throat swelling. I didn’t want my mother to see, so I looked down and hid my face in my hair. I swallowed, trying to get past the lump in my throat, wondering how I was supposed to have courage and not be afraid of little things like riding a bike.

My mom sighed, raising her eyebrows in an arch. Getting up from her chair, she said, “Give yourself

a break and realize that everyone stumbles before they can walk.”

An hour and a half later, my dad came home with my sister. She was filled with joy, begging to know when she could go out and ride again. I was still sitting in the exact same place. From the kitchen, my mom raised an eyebrow and tilted her head at me. My dad stood there with a glass of water, “You know, you should give it a chance. You see how happy your sister is.”

As soon as he said that, I sighed, and thought, *Again with the comparing?* I said out loud, “I know, but she’s totally different than me!”

My dad looked at me, his eyes twinkling in amusement, and said sarcastically, “You think?” He cleared his throat and got serious. “Look, if you don’t want to give this a try, we understand. But we think you can do it, just like millions of other people, young and old, and we actually think you will like it if you give it a try.”

I frowned and rolled my eyes. “Fine. I’ll try it, but I can’t guarantee I’ll like it.”

My dad smiled, “Of course. That’s all we ask: just give it a chance.”

I slowly put on my cerulean blue sneakers, my fingers fumbling to tie the laces, my heart feeling like it was going to explode. *It’s now or never*, I told myself.

I followed my dad down the street to Central Park, through crowds of tourists and barking dogs, numb with dread. We passed into the lush greenery and along the dirt path, leading away from the ashy grey stone gateway. *This is it*. But my brain told

me that I didn't truly want to do this. I had visions of blood flowing out of big open gashes spread across my arms and legs.

We got to the flat cement area next to the volleyball courts, where the skateboarders ride. There were all kinds of people out that day, and I self-consciously looked around to spot anyone who might be watching me. My dad held the bike and told me to throw my leg over and jump on the seat. I got on the bike and it wobbled dangerously and my heart jumped painfully in my chest. But he held the handlebars firmly.

"I'm going to hold on to you. Don't worry," he said reassuringly. "Just start pushing down with your feet, like you used to do with your tricycle."

One push after another, the bike slowly started to budge. I started to push my feet down harder. The pedals were surprisingly easy to move, but the bike tilted from side to side and I kept my eyes glued to my feet. I was sure that I would fall if my dad wasn't holding me up. We went back and forth on the pavement several times, and my thighs started to burn. But then I realized it was easier if I wasn't looking down at my feet, measuring each push. I started to look forward and suddenly my feet moved more easily and it felt like I wasn't tilting so much. My dad was still holding on, but now he had to run to keep up.

Finally, on the ninth or tenth time, I said, "I think I can do it myself!" He looked at me with a mixture of happiness and surprise, and then, he let go. I started peddling like crazy at that point, my legs suddenly not burning at all, feeling light as feathers

falling off a bird, moving faster with each down motion. I was flying. I took deep breaths, smelling the fresh green spring air mingled with salty hotdogs and mustardy soft pretzels. I could see the skateboarders in front of me, feel the wind blowing gently against my face. I felt free, as if my arms were wings, and my feet were lifting me up from the ground. I squeezed the hand brakes and slowed down to stop. I turned to look at my dad. He was smiling, proud and happy: "Great job!"

I smiled. "Can I keep going?"

As we walked home, I was oblivious to the fact that the vendors were packing up their trucks and that the sun was almost down. I had a grin stretched so wide and for so long that my face hurt. I could hear the birds chirping happily, giving me a sense of hope and a new beginning. I thought to myself, *That wasn't so bad at all! Maybe I'm better at this physical activity thing than I thought!* My dad was saying something about how he was right all along, but I wasn't listening. I felt like a huge weight had been lifted off my shoulders.

When we got home, my mom asked, "How was it?"

I smiled, "Great!" I paused and then continued: "I learned how to ride a bike, and it was really fun!"

She had a huge smile on her face. "Well, good!" She poured me a glass of water and I took it from her, walking over to my chair at the dinner table where I had been glued with fear just a few hours earlier. The coldness shocked my fingertips and I sat down, again feeling numb, but this time because of all the wonderful feelings swelling in my heart.

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

Aparajita Ashwin, 11
Kira Bardin, 12
Veryan Johnson, 13
Maeve Kristian, 12
Lysandre Marot, 11
Alexandra Menechino, 12
Adelaide Riedl, 12
Evelyn Worcester, 13

POETRY

Malan Chopra, 8
Aashi Gupta, 9
Thomas Alexander Mangan, 10
Hayden Park, 11
Dmitri Pshenichkin, 7

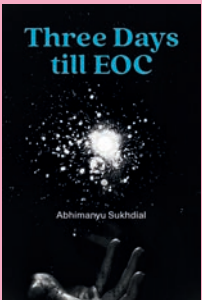
ART

Lyla Gasirowski, 4
Nina Reddy, 6

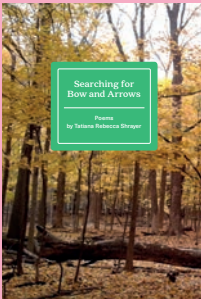
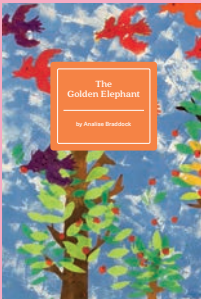
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