

The Writers' Slate

The national literary exchange
for students and teachers.

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Author Sue Mayfield, winner of the Heartland Award for her novel *Drowning Anna*, spoke at the Literature Festival on October 19, 2005 in Lawrence, Kansas. Following the Festival Ms. Mayfield was kind enough to answer several questions about her writing.

If you would like to learn more about her writing process, her other books, and where she gets her inspiration you may visit her website: www.suemayfield.com.

Ms. Mayfield is British, and therefore many of her books are only available at bookstores in Great Britain. However, they are also available through online booksellers. When you order please be aware that *Drowning Anna* is published in Britain under the title *Blue*, so don't order copies of both because they are the same book!

Did you have any particular inspiration for *Drowning Anna*?

My starting point was a newspaper cutting about a girl who had committed suicide at the age of 16 despite being clever, popular and attractive -because of perpetual bullying by another girl. I was interested to examine why someone who seemed to have a lot going for her could have her self-esteem so drastically shredded by someone else - to the point where life seemed unbearable.

How did you prepare to capture the scenes of high school bullying so accurately?

I spent about 6 weeks meeting-with and talking-to seven girls in 8th grade who volunteered to work with me in their lunchbreaks. Initially I asked them about bullying, about their own experiences and about the pressures they felt under and the way they reacted to these pressures. Then I devised the characters of Anna, Hayley and Melanie and asked the girls what each character should be like for the story to seem real and convincing. Six months later when I'd written the first draft of the book I went back to them for feedback and eventually made quite a

lot of changes in response to their comments and suggestions. It seemed very important to get the details right so that the story felt authentic.

Anna's parents seem largely unaware of her school problems. Do you think this is common?

I think Anna's parents are busy and preoccupied. They both have demanding jobs and they have recently moved house so they have a lot of things to juggle. They are both high achievers and transfer their own perfectionism onto Anna which is unfair but understandable. They don't listen to Anna as well as they might but as a parent of three teenagers I know I'm guilty of this - especially when life gets over busy! I was also especially interested in the type of bullying which is hard for adults to detect because of being so secretive and covert. The things that Hayley does are, in themselves, quite small and inconsequential - petty perhaps. I can imagine Anna's parents thinking the incidents a bit trifling. But what is bad is the way these individual acts of unkindness accumulate so that Anna feels overwhelmed by the frequency and variety of Hayley's tactics. Once Anna's parents know what has been going on they respond in a rather heavy-handed way but I think they do this from the best of motives.

Drowning Anna incorporates three points-of-view. Was it difficult to write this book since your writer's voice had to change with each chapter?

Not really. I enjoy switching from one narrative voice to another. What was tricky though was synchronising the diary entries with Melanie's narrative. I didn't want Anna's mother to find the diary too early so there are some incidents which Anna describes in her diary which come a long way after the same incidents described by Melanie. I hope this isn't confusing for readers - I had to plan the chapters carefully so it all worked out!

What prompted the decision to release this book in the U.S.?

Hyperion bid for the US rights at auction and outbid another publisher - which was all very exciting. I'd love them to publish my other books too.

Why did the title change from *Blue*?

The editorial staff at Hyperion didn't like the title *Blue* and suggested *Drowning Anna*. I like both titles though I think overall I prefer *Blue* because of all the layers of meaning. Blue meaning melancholy, but also the blues of Anna's bedroom, her notebook, the lake she sees when she walks up a mountain with her father, the blue of underwater and icebergs etc.

Confusion sometimes arises when people buy books online because they order both *Blue* and *Drowning Anna* and then realize it's the same book!

Are there other changes that you had to make between the British and the American versions?

No, there are very few. Just the odd word like bin/trash.

Do you have plans to release your previous titles in the U.S.? (If so, under what titles?)

I'd love the other books to be published in the US. It's kind of out of my hands as these things are handled by the Rights departments at the two publishing companies.

I know you have a new book, *Driver*, to be released in the U.K. in January. Any plans for a U.S. release?

It's actually called *Damage* now and there are no plans yet to publish in the US but I hope this will eventually happen. Meanwhile I hope American readers will buy it through Amazon.com!

I read that you studied for a year in Alabama. What led you to Alabama?

I was offered a scholarship at Jacksonville State University for two semesters as part of a programme for foreign students called 'International House'. It was great fun.

Now that you are writing both children's and adolescent books do you have different writing approaches for each age level?

Writing for younger children is simpler - stories are less complex and layered - but they have to be tight and pacy. Writing for older children allows me to develop ideas a little more. At the moment I'm writing for just pre-teens (aged 9-12) so I'm avoiding themes and language which are too adult and am focusing more than usual on plot and action.

White Snow Bright Snow

Softly, gently in the secret night.

Down from the North came the quiet white.

Drifting, sifting, silent flight.

Softly, gently in the secret night.

White snow bright snow, smooth and deep.

Light snow bright snow, quiet as sleep.

Down, down without a sound.

Down, down to the frozen ground.

Covering roads and hiding fences.

Sifting in cracks and filling in trenches.

Millions of snowflakes tiny and light.

Softly, gently in the secret night.

Natalie Kievets

3rd Grade

Chesterland, Ohio

The Lifescanner

"Have you found anything interesting so far, Doctor?" Captain Klimberly asked Dr. Zorn, head of biological research on the Lifescanner.

Dr. Zorn hadn't seen the captain come into the room, but now he looked up from the large microscope he was peering through.

"I've been looking at all sorts of things from the planet we're orbiting," said Dr. Zorn. "The specimens were collected by the expedition that left the mother ship a week ago. They just got back this morning.

"Here's a life size photograph of one of the typical life-forms on the new planet."

The biologist went to a corner of the room, where a huge piece of rolled up paper leaned against the wall. He picked it up and let it unroll on the floor. On it was the life size picture of a resident from the planet that Captain Klimberly's expedition had recently discovered.

Of all the odd creatures the captain had seen on her travels through the galaxy, this was one of the strangest. Its body was longer than Dr. Zorn was tall, and that wasn't counting its two lengthy antennae. It had four wings and six legs, with a pair of bulging eyes on its head.

"It's not the sort of alien I'd like to run into," said J. R. Klimberly. "Are they civilized creatures?"

"No, this is part of the planet's wildlife," said Dr. Zorn. "I'm estimating that there are millions of different species, but almost none are technologically advanced. There is one civilized species-much larger than this one here."

"What's that species like?" asked Captain Klimberly.

"Well," said the biologist, "their technology isn't as advanced as ours on the home planet. They've invented agriculture, but haven't figured out how to manage their resources properly.

They still wash tons of good soil into the ocean, and dump gallons of poison on their crops to try and kill off pests. They've been clearing away all sorts of natural ecosystems and destroying most of their biological resources."

"What about industry?" asked the captain. "Do they have factories?"

"Yes, but its as bad as their agriculture. They release gasses into the atmosphere that are causing the whole planet to warm up much too fast, and they let lethal chemicals leak into their air and water."

"Do you think it's a doomed planet?" Captain Klimberly asked.

Dr. Zorn looked thoughtful. "Possibly. It may be headed for a mass extinction. Most of the several million species will die out, including the civilized ones. I'd say that's very likely unless the technologically advanced creatures realize what they're doing and turn the trend around."

"Well, I'd better be going now," said Captain Klimberly. Dr. Zorn's discoveries were interesting, but there were lots of things to attend to on the Lifescanner.

She turned to leave, but happened to glance once again at the photograph of this planet's strange wildlife before walking out of the room.

"I wonder what the civilized creatures call those things," she remarked.

"Well actually," said Dr. Zorn, "we heard one call this alien by name while we were on the planet doing our survey. They pointed at it, and yelled the word cockroach. "

"Cockroach," Captain Klimberly repeated as she straightened her horns and ran a hand through her thirteen eyestalks. "An interesting name."

She walked away, leaving Dr. Zorn to finish examining a soil sample from the planet Earth.

Nick Engelfried, 11th Grade

Hillsboro, Oregon

Into the Water

I quickly slipped into the cool, wet lifejacket while the sun beat down on my back. A shiver ran down my spine as if someone unexpectedly blew on the back side of my neck, causing my shoulders to shrug and tense up. The damp outdoor carpet of the boat felt like a sheet of sandpaper against my smooth, sensitive feet. The scent of gasoline filled the humid summer air as the motor churned. The fishing boat rocked back and forth in the bustling bay while I carefully stumbled towards the motor. I took a few quick strides and leapt off the end of the boat, immersing my entire body in the cool lake water. The water caressed my sunburnt body; a sense of refreshment engulfed me. "Whoosh!" I heard the noise as the water covered my ears. The clamors of the busy lake scene were dampened as my head disappeared under the water. All of my worries disappeared, and a sense of relaxation came over me, as if I had just received a full body massage. Under the water I caught a glimpse of the sun beaming down through the surface, disturbed only by the frequent movement of the waves. Some water sneaked up my nose and I experienced the unpleasant fishy taste of the lake. Abruptly the life jacket tugged upwards with welcoming reassurance. As my head popped out of the water, the sounds of the busy lake came back, and my brief trip into the underwater paradise came to an end.

Daniel Conlin

Grade 12

Mankato, MN

MYSTERY ISLAND

"Oh, help!" Groaned 12-year-old Chelsey, "I don't want to go to Grammy's this week!"

"But sweetie," said Chelsey's mom. "Grammy really wants you to come." Chelsey paused and thought it out. If she went to Grammy's house in Bos Ferry, she would miss out on the Geography Club sleepover. But, on the other hand, if she didn't go she might not see her cousin Amanda for a long while. Oh dear, she thought. Chelsey loved geography and knew a lot about it. She also remembered she loved the Boseville public library for its many geographical books.

"All right mom," She said. "I will go."

After a six hour flight, which seemed like six years to Chelsey, and an hour long drive, they finally arrived at Grammy's.

"Why Chelsey Anne Clairwater, you have grown!" said Grammy.

Chelsey groaned inwardly, she hated this part of the visits the most. The hug, the comments about how tall she was, then the long discussion about how long her hair was and how she looked.

"I am going over to the library down the street," said Chelsey, "to er. . ., study geography."

This was an awesome excuse for Chelsey to get out of the house before Grammy started the speech on her looks. But on the way down to the library, Chelsey saw her Uncle Randy.

"Chelsey, great to see you, I have to show you something," Uncle Randy said. So Chelsey followed her uncle down to his basement, by the large computer. "This," he said excitedly, "is an email from the Geographical Society about a newly discovered island in Lake Nish. Now," he continued, "a Mr. James Winter has gone missing ever since the day our taxes

are due. I, personally, don't blame him; the taxes here are pretty high -just kidding Chelsey. But anyway, back to James. He needs to get back, or the police will find him and arrest him! He is said to be on the new island. If James comes back he just has to pay his taxes and live peacefully."

"What can I do?" asked Chelsey.

"You can go find James and bring him back! I just can't manage it at my age,"

Uncle Randy explained.

"But what if I fail?"

"You won't," Uncle Randy assured her.

"But my mom..." began Chelsey.

"I have already asked and she approves, knowing that you couldn't possibly get lost because of your great skills in geography," he finished.

"Okay," Chelsey said, "I'll go!"

A few days later, Chelsey was on a boat toward what she liked to call a 'geographical piece of mystery'. When she arrived, she started searching right away; but the fog made it hard to see much of anything. After an hour of fruitless looking through the fog Chelsey plopped down on a dew and moss cover rock. 'It's going to take me forever to do much of anything', she thought. 'Considering I have only looked over a quarter of the island'.

Just then, she slipped off the rock, landing hard and twisting her ankle. "Ouch," she said.

Then she noticed something odd. Her 'ouch' was echoing all around her. Then it hit her, she was inside a cave!

As her eyes adjusted, she looked around. She was beside what looked like the remains of a camp. There was an abandoned fire pit and marks where a man must have slept.

"I must be on the right track," she said aloud.

She then tried to stand up to look around some more, but standing up hurt. "Oh, help!" she cried. And this time, not only did her voice echo, but another voice answered it.

"Are you all right," she heard someone call. Ghelsey's heart was pounding, how long had this voice been there?

A man emerged out of the darkness. "Who are you?" Chelsey asked. She was very frightened but also hoping, praying that this was James.

"I am James Winter," the man replied, reaching down to help Chelsey. He noticed Chelsey looked tired, and hungry. She also noticed he was tall and had a couple of week's growth of beard.

James served Chelsey some dinner and told her about himself. He had indeed been running away from paying the high taxes. Chelsey explained the situation of the police. After an hour of arguing about James' dilemma, James agreed to return home if Chelsey helped him raise the money he needed. Chelsey, of course, agreed and called her uncle on James' cell phone.

Once back at her Grammy's, Chelsey called the Geographical Society and explained the situation and how she planned to raise the money. She had no doubt that her leader would say yes, he was a very kind person. The society leader told her not to worry, that the money would soon be there. Chelsey also had her own fundraisers, by making maps and giving them to stores to sell.

They soon raised the money James needed, and a lot extra. James was surprised at how quickly she had raised the money, and he used the extra money to fly Chelsey and her mother home first class.

The island remained private as a property for the Society to use, and Chelsey went home knowing that she had done what was right and had gained a new friend from doing just that.

Courtney Bessenkool, Grade 6, homeschool

Calgary, Alberta, Canada

The Child's Tale

The Child's Prologue

A small child sat upon a stool, grubby of face
But bright of eye. "Gentles," she said, "take your place,
Gather `round to hear my tale. `Too young', you say,
`For a story of worth'; but only hear it, I do pray
Do not deem worth by age of teller,
And, I say, throw me not in the cellar;
And pray stay judgment till afterwards.
My tale Is about a girl, like to myself, happy and hale.
And though she's young, there's things she knows
Known not by old miser in all of his woes,
Nor known by young squire, or by fair lord,
And of most import, not by those of the sword."
She smiled most brightly, well pleased with her word,
And started her tale; all leaned forward and heard.

The Child's Tale

Once, in the past, there dwelt a great king,
Who had all he longed for, every last thing
But for wonder. In his dying years
He longed for something besides hunting deers.
He asked his advisors, "By what design

Could I bring to me something to make wonder mine?"

"Sire," they answered, "have you not everything

That will make you known e'er as a glorious king?"

He smiled at the praise, yet was still not content

He needed a last bit of true wonderment.

He searched through his libraries, finding no answer,

Till one day he found, seemingly by chance or

By some greater plan, a book telling of beasts

Strange and mysterious, not believed in by priests

Or other men of upstanding and worth.

The king, seeing this book, laughed out loud in great mirth

And grand wonderment at what he had found.

Away to the stables, for his horse and his hound

He went out in great company, in the hopes to see

At least one of fine wondrous creatures three.

The first of these creatures a phoenix was called

But among the gentry this bird wasn't recalled.

The second a griffin, the king tried to seek

But now birds and cats are all mild and meek.

The third he then looked for, the unicorn pure

And this time it seemed that his quest would be sure.

His advisors cried, "Sire, we think it not wise

Do you not know of the price of this prize?

'Nobody shall ride the unicorn,' it is said,

Could you not ride gentle horse in its stead?"

"Indeed I could not," said the king, quite resolved,
And set out to get his good people involved.
One thing he still needed: an innocent girl.
Not one noble born; not the child of earl
Or a duke of the land, but a sweet country lass
With no preconceived fancies, no spite and no sass
To poison her heart or to make her unfit
For luring the unicorn to gold bridle and bit,
And so capture the animal for king's entertainment.
To all country farmers the king did explain it
And they offered their lasses to do this great honor.
The king chose a young girl called Mary O'Connor.
This Mary was not yet ten years of age
And had never yet seen any animal in cage.
She saw to capture wonder would be honor indeed,
But knew that unicorn would not suffer to be steed
Even for an old king of glory and great name.
So, quietly, she pretended the capture was a game.
Sitting beneath a great tree, with gold bridle in hand,
She hummed a soft tune, gazed skyward, and planned.
When the unicorn came, laying head in her lap
She pretended to have dozed off into a nap.
"Good sir," she whispered in unicorn's ear,
"There's a plot against you, I do fear.
A plot to make you alike to a horse

The king is to ride you, and not a thing could be worse."
"Good child, fear not," the great beast whispered back,
"Though the king won't thank you for this, alack.
Good speed to you, girl; good deeds are rewarded.
And now I must go; no time may be afforded."
He galloped away, `cross the great grassy plain
And up the king's men started after in vain.
As for the king, he took the loss very hard.
He turned to the girl, his face terrible. "Guard!"
He cried, "Arrest this girl! For she has betrayed
All that she promised when she offered her aid."
Mary held her head high. "Sire, 'tis not so -"
But the king would have none of it. "Out you go!"
He proclaimed, "Away from this kingdom!"
Mary nodded, lamenting the lack of wisdom
In the great king. "If you love unicorns much,"
The king continued, "Then go build a hutch,
Among the beasts, and come not in my sight
Yes, away with you, now, and quickly take flight!"
Away Mary ran, from the ignorant king
And so came to a valley of eternal spring
Wherein unicorns dwelt, in their own paradise
With manes like to gold and horns like to ice.
When Mary came to them, they looked in surprise
Saying, "Who is this girl, with wise dark eyes

And tears on her face?" One unicorn stepped up,
Looked at Mary closely. "Why, 'tis the pup,
The lass, who saved my life," he gladly proclaimed.
"Tell us, child, what is it you be named?"
"Oh," she said, startled, "Why, I'm nobody."
The unicorns looked at each other excitedly.
"Nobody rides the unicorns, dear,"
Murmured a pretty one, next to her ear.
She looked in surprise as it kneeled down
And before she could protest she was wearing a gown,
She was up on its back, holding onto its horn,
Laughing, "I'm nobody, so I ride on unicorn!"
And so it shall ever be that those of high birth
Shall get only as much as they're worth;
While those of wisdom, young and true
Will always get the good things they are due.

Sierra Brezina

12th Grade

Reyes, CA

Breakaway

"I don't know if I'm going to make it," stated Dad. There was an annoying perverse tone in his voice, which made it sound like he had better things to do. This made me kind of annoyed.

He was driving fast in his sleek, blue BMW. I went through it every week. There was always a problem at work. Mom was in the Pocono's with my brothers and sisters. My dad and I had to leave there because of this game. He dropped me off at Grundy, with its big red neon lights. I lugged my heavy bag into locker room 7.

"Hey, Bear," my teammates mumbled.

I saw, like any other week, a sea green rubber floor with black freckles. There were chipped wooden benches circling the room, holding many pounds of hockey players. The walls were originally painted white, but from shooting pucks black streaks shot across the wall like shooting stars. I always notice a familiar foul hockey odor that doesn't smell so pleasant too. I started getting dressed and something came over me. Tenseness. Everybody was tense. Then Coach came into the locker room, everything stayed the same. Silent.

"Come on guys," yelled Coach, "get pumped!"

There were about 5 weak "yeas" in that raising statement. Butterflies flapped their light wings in everybody's stomach, including mine. My palms turned clammy and I was sweating a little.

"What...are you guys scared? Yea, these kids are big, and you will get hit if you are not careful." he warned.

There was silence.

"You guys have a system though. Your not gonna let some bigfoot kid scare ya are you?"

Again silence.

"It will be a good high intense game, but I think you can do it if you're not a bunch of pansies." Coach used that phrase frequently when he thought we were scared. He walked out and said he ready in five minutes. I gazed across the room and what I saw was an army of warriors. Our sticks are our weapons, our pads are our armor, and our goalie is the country that we need to defend and protect. Looking into those glistening warriors' eyes, I saw cowardliness. At the same time intimidation and valiance lingered in there. I pulled the pride out of my smelly bag and put it over my shoulder pads. That pride was an orange, white, and black jersey. It showed that I was from the well-known Pennsbury School district. After strapping my helmet on and sliding on my gloves, I grabbed my stick. Now I sat there waiting for coach to give us new orders.

He hurried in and said, "O.K. guys lets get out there and have a good warm up. Falcons on three! 1, 2, 3, Let's-Go-Fal-cons!"

I walked out of that locker room with a whole new attitude, and I was out to beat a big, strong, arrogant Bensalem Owls ice hockey club.

I hit that ice and sliced an edge into the recently polished ice.

In the stands the fans were ecstatic chanting, "Lets Go Fal-cons"

And then they would stomp their feet boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! It's such a great feeling knowing that your folks are so proud of you. Even though mine weren't there. Now the time came for us to shine. After warm ups, coach huddled us together in front of the bench to have a pep talk. My heart was running, and I was jittery because I'm so passionate about this sport. I started the game off at left wing and, my turn to go out was third. When the player I relieve skated to the bench, my coach opened the squeaky

door for me to go on. It's always like a green light for me to go. Exploding out the door, it looked like a rocket was tied to me. Our Shift is always 40 sec long because we need to rejuvenate on the bench. I sipped some cold water and played hard for the rest of the period. It was a 1-1 tie at the end of the first. Now it was the start of the second period. The puck plummeted out the refs hand, and our team won it back. I skated at top speed to my breakout spot along the boards. Our defenseman guided the puck onto my stick. I'm supposed to pass it to the centerman at this part, but he wasn't open so I decided to skate with it. On the blade of my stick, I carried the puck back and forth. I felt my stick get lighter. Quickly glancing- down, through the cage of my helmet I needed to see if the puck was still there. Then, it happened.

A giant was waiting for me at the blue line. He was very sullen, but packed a hard knockout punch. This kid, or I think man, was colossal. At 5 foot 9 and 180 pounds Brad South hit me like a bird flying into a glass window. I had my head down, and paid for it. The beast hit me, and without a doubt it looked like a hit on a Gatorade commercial. My eyes shut almost automatically, and I made a loud grunting noise. Saliva and sweat went flying off my body. My arms waved involuntarily in a clockwise motion. I dropped my stick, and my right-handed glove went flying in the crisp air. The sound echoed in the rink. That sound was my helmet hitting the hard cold ice. I was incredulous to what had just happened. The last name on the back of my jersey was hidden under my back. There was a loud ringing in my head, and my eyes were still glued shut when coach came sliding on his black Nike's to me.

He knelt beside me and asked, "Are you okay?"

I managed to slip out a yea.

"Uh, Bear...you can open your eyes now."

Chuckling deliriously they slid open. He gave me a comforting smile. I wasn't really lying there because I was hurt. It was just in pure shock. How would you feel if a truck hit you like that? Coach helped me up and I coasted to the bench. I scanned the stands and dad wasn't there to smile at me. That whopping hit took me out for the rest of the second period. Some time passed, and my head was still light at the start of the final third period. Our team needed me, so I thought I would try. We started the final period with a score of 2 to 1 us. The next goal would be huge if we got it. When we started, I noticed South was out there too. He was kind of hard to miss. All that was going through my mind was a repetitive and panicky, "Oh my Lord!"

The puck was dumped, and it started sliding to me. I blinked heavily kind of in slow motion, and my hands became clammy and sweaty instantly. At that point I would have rather jumped off a bridge than have the puck come towards me.

Then something stuck out. It was pretty crowded back in our end. I counted, 1, 2, 3, 4...5," blue shirts in our zone.

Breakaway! Taking a huge gulp of air; I smirked, and all the terror vanished. Like a car shifting into gear I started pumping my arms and legs. I picked up the puck and turned. Skating as fast as possible at their goalie, I easily had them all beat. It was only the goalie and me. I skated on the left side of the ice and started turning on an angle at the top of the face-off circle. There was only one open spot just to the right of the goalie's right shoulder. I looked down, and fired one of the best wrist shots I've ever taken. It was a good, strong shot.

Looking Up I saw, "Ting!"

It hit right off the slightly rusted spot where the post and the crossbar meet. The puck flattened down like a shot duck and hit the nylon. An inch higher and it would have missed.

I raised my weapon of goal scoring and shouted, "Yea, Woooooo!"

After all my high fives and smiles, I glided to the bench to retrieve my breath. Looking up into the stands, dignity filled my body. There was my dad. Standing proudly on the bleachers with two thumbs up and a big smile. My eyes started to burn by salty delicious tears. While tingling, my heart slowed, and bliss seemed to be stuffed in it like a fluffy teddy bear. I sniffed the yellow-green snot back up my nose, and grinned a pure huge smile. Sweat ran in between my nose, and it tickled me before it jumped off onto my shirt. I stood up, and coach opened the door. Green light!

Andrew Patterson

7th Grade

Yardley, Pennsylvania

**HAVE A FAVORITE BOOK YOU WOULD LIKE TO
RECOMMEND?**

Please send your review, along with the title, author, publisher, and copyright date so that other people can easily locate your book!

Books of all genres, for all age levels welcome!

Send your review to: Shelly McNerney, Editor
7619 Hemlock St.
Overland Park, KS 66204

The Elephant Child

In the darkest room of the marble temple, voices could be heard. They were deep and resonant, and they carried through the palm trees and across the river. A little black crow was attracted by the noise, flapping his little black wings up and down, `till at last he alighted on the branch of the temple's ancient banyan tree. He cocked his little black head to the side and listened, and looked into the temple for, as you know, little black crows are very curious creatures.

The voices came from big black elephants with big tusks and long, long trunks. The elephants were talking as softly as they could in their deep voices, but the crow caught it all for, as you know, little black crow ears are very sharp. They were all excited about something... The little black crow was excited, too. He hopped once on his right foot, and he hopped once on his left foot, and he found himself on the windowsill of the temple, his feathers all ruffled from excitement. He craned his little black head forward, and even though his ears were as sharp as only crow-ears could be, he was hardly able to pick out the smallest voice...

It belonged to a little grey elephant and, as you know, little grey elephants have very large ears. In fact, his were so big that they made the rest of him look small. And this is never good, especially if you're not that big to start with. The little grey elephant-child was trying his very best to be heard. He trumpeted and shouted, and only stopped when a big elephant told him to "hush." The crow felt sorry for him.

The big elephants were talking about taking part in a festival the next day. One of them said he would wear a red-gold cloth made from the fibers of rare reeds from the mangrove swamp on his broad, broad back, and another proclaimed that she would have a

sheet of shiny gold on her trunk. They were all so happy for themselves that nobody but the little black crow noticed the elephant-child at all. Lifting his ebony wings, the little black crow sailed away through the air, determined to do something.

The next morning, the sun's glad light shone on the sleeping form of the elephant-child. His ears spread out, fanning him as he dozed standing up for, as you know, elephant ears are very useful. He opened his wide black eyes as he felt the feet of the little black crow on his back. The crow said:

"Come with me, little one!"

The sad little elephant-child stood up and dashed his trunk to the ground in despair.

"All the others have gone to the festival, and I have been left behind," he wailed, "for I am too small by far to be seen in the parade."

To this the crow replied,

"We have things to do and places to see," he proclaimed, "and we don't need a procession to be seen!"

So he and the little grey elephant-child left the sunny place by the temple, and headed for the great mango tree by the swamp.

"Is it very far away?" the elephant-child asked.

"You will see."

They came through shady paths, eating bananas that fell ripe and yellow through the green, green leaves of the trees, either through the insistent pecking of the little black crow, or pulled down by the trunk of the elephant-child. Soon they came upon the great mango tree. "Here it is, friend, not far at all!"

The elephant-child then saw the most wondrous sight. There were children everywhere, and when they saw him, they let out screams of joy. He was hesitant at

first, as all careful elephant children are. He stood there swaying gently from side to side, snorting softly and moving his wrinkly trunk about, sniffing the air.

"Go on, friend," urged the crow, with soft and insistent pecks.

When he did, he found that the children were not going to hurt him, but fuss over him.

"Look at his trunk!"

His trunk was inspected from every angle, children giggling when they felt an occasional breeze.

"See his ears!"

His prominent ears were appraised as they waggled back and forth.

"Feel his skin!"

Small hands rubbed the prickly little hairs on his sides and back. They fed him rice balls, coconut meat, sugar cane, and mangos `till his little tummy was fit to burst.

The day wore on. Eventually, a few pecks on the head remind him it was time to go. As he left, the children followed him `till he was out of sight. None of them would forget that afternoon.

It was late when the elephant-child got back. The big elephants had returned and they were cross about their day. They were not fed all day, they complained. They had to march and stand in the hot sun. The people played loud music next to their sensitive ears. The elephants grumbled and snorted and threw dust in the air. The elephant-child just smiled quietly with his new friend, the little black crow.

Mahesh Vallath, 8th Grade

Carbondale, Illinois

"Come on!" my dad beckoned to my mom, my sister, and me as we dodged huge rain pellets and dashed away from the beauty of Notre Dame Cathedral. I stuck out my tongue as I drank in the fresh, cool, rainstorm air. Heavy rain drops pounded on my arms, face, and hands as all of Paris, France was doused by the unexpected storm. The rain was so dense it felt as if I were walking through sheets of liquid. Nearby the thunder roared ominously like a volcano about to erupt. One thousand drummers beat their drums, each to their own beat. I felt a warm, tickly sensation creeping up my legs as steam from the just sweltering pavement rose up from the ground. I looked upon hundreds of blurred figures scurrying along like mice through the constant downpour. As we neared the small off-street we rushed towards the shelter of the bakery to escape from the relentless, non-forgiving rain. I sniffed the drifting fragrance of freshly-baked sugar crepes coming from the small patisserie.

I breathed in again to inhale the delightful aroma as my family and I finally reached the awning of the small pastry shop. I heard the sizzling of buttery grilled sandwiches and watched cooks flipping the fried food as we waited, sheltered by the awning, for the rain to cease. Under the cloth overhang the distinct plip plopping, plip plopping served as pleasant background music for the anxious businessmen hurrying still from one place to another. My family sat down in the brasserie to have a quick snack while the rain thundered on. The buttery crepes melted in our mouths as the palette of grays of the sky, buildings and pavement melted into each other through the curtain of rain. Soon, I glimpsed shafts of light trying to shine through the dense rain clouds. Slowly, the skies began to clear up and the sun began to shine once more. As the clouds reluctantly parted and the sun was revealed, I was reminded of disappointed troops dispersing just having lost a war, being forced to surrender to the enemy. This is a rainstorm I will remember forever.

This was my first visit to Europe, and as we dashed through the heavy rain, I was reminded of how blessed I was to be with my family in such a beautiful place. It was about 3:00 in the afternoon in mid-July, 2004, on the lie de la Cite, a tiny strip of an island in the middle of the Seine River which runs through Paris. We had already conquered London and were hurriedly pursuing the sights and scenes on our second day in Paris. I realized how fortunate I was to experience this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. This realization hit me as the rain hit my skin. This wasn't just another museum or monument; this was my own personal experience and one of my most memorable moments on the trip. I loved the history and the architecture and the curvy streets of Paris, but this experience was special in a different way. The rainstorm was like a moment stolen in time when my family and I had a moment to reflect without having to rush somewhere else. I knew that this would soon be a memory that I would treasure for the rest of my life.

As we headed out into the reemerging sun, we checked our watches, looked at the guidebooks, glanced at our rain-speckled pants and smiled at each other. The moment was over, but the memory of the rain, the escape and the cozy intermission was still fresh.

Jessica Barzilay

5th Grade

Encino, California

THE DEVIL RIDERS

He had been in the Mesopotamian desert for three months. He was one of those foolish rich boys. They say he ran away from home to join the army. He wasn't well liked. Jonathan Chesterson was the most boyish of all the new privates. He had red cheeks and his stringy blonde hair looked like it was plastered to his head. Some of the meaner men kicked him as he walked around the camp. None of the officers liked him. I remember Colonial Wallace saying to me, "Sergeant Green, I have never seen such a runt in this army." It was almost funny to watch him in drills, puffing along with his cheeks as red as the sun which constantly shined on us. The boys and even the officers called him "Runt Johnny."

While the war on the Western Front raged on, we fought in the desert. While the other men there were fighting the Germans, we were fighting the Turks, who were lead by Ishan. We were one of the infantry regiments lead by William Marshall. All I wanted was to get away from Johnny. Something about his presence annoyed me. I was stuck. I felt bad to yell at him, but I had to, the rat had no discipline in him. I fought relentlessly to get him transferred; his unpopularity was not good for the men. Johnny didn't seem to care about this. He tried to do what he was told, and put up with the men's bullying. I might have felt sorry for him but the fact that he just didn't seem to care that he was hated, overshadowed my pity with anger. All my feelings added up and made me push the boy hard. On April 30th 1917, we fell in with the main army and attacked the boot shaped peninsula at Band I Adhaim. We succeeded in taking the peninsula and 300 Turkish prisoners. It seemed Chesterson did nothing and lagged behind in the charge. I asked Colonial Wallace for permission to punish the boy. I found out that he had not run away, but just stalled , and that was enough for me to take his rations. I might have been too harsh with him, but it was for his own good.

Later there was a large sandstorm. During the storm Ishan's army came and we defended the peninsula amidst the great storm. The battle was massive . But I had fought many times before and was used to the explosions and the death. Despite the sandstorm, I was ready. The battle began and as the men started to fire, something caught my eye; I saw Johnny running away from the field. In a rage, I chased the runt. He might have seen me but he didn't care. He pushed a troop of soldiers out of the way, and jumped into a trench. He scrambled out of the trench and bolted. He disappeared into the clouds of sand. I continued after him. He saw me emerge from the sand cloud. I fired a warning shot, and in anger I screamed, " You fool, you damn fool , how dare you boy, how dare you?" I chased him onward, and I forgot about the battle.

As the sandstorm cleared, I saw him slowly panting along. The sun was scorching on my back, as I ran on and caught up with him. When I got to him, I found that his leg had been scraped by a bullet. He was on all fours with sand over his knees, and a ripped shirt. I didn't care about his pitiful state. I just drew my leg back and with all my might I kicked him straight up the ribs.

" How dare you, you coward, you scum." I shouted. I couldn't help but hate him, he had gotten me lost, lost in the desert.

The sun was glaring down. It was his fault; it was all that stupid boy's fault. I did not look at him. He ruined the meager life I had. I hardly had a family, my wife left me 2 after two years into our marriage and I had no children. I thought how he probably had more of a life than me. "He was ruining himself more than me, the stupid boy." I thought. I didn't say this to him. I didn't want to look at him. I checked to see what I had on me. Many of the things I was carrying had fallen off in the pursuit and all I had left was my pistol, canteen, and a few rations. I was scratched up but I saw he was in an even worse state than I thought. Apart from being scratched up, his cap had fallen off, blood was trickling from his wounded leg into the sand, and my kick seemed to have shocked him to the point that he looked petrified. I thought I might have

killed him, but I didn't care. As far as I was concerned Johnny murdered me. He got me lost, he brought me to this burning hell, he killed me. I didn't care if he didn't do it on purpose. Just being who he was, was enough to get under my skin like a disease. I thought all this quickly. I waited for a few seconds not knowing what to do. Finally I calmed down a bit, and as my anger and hatred died down I went over to Johnny. He was lying in the sand. It looked as if he was crying, but I could not tell for sure. I felt some pity, and even though my hatred had died down, it was still there waiting to flare up again and attack. I told him to get up in a very shaky voice, but he did not budge. I was certain I saw silent tears streaming down his face. I forced myself into a cheery voice, as if there was nothing at all wrong. "Get up there lad. We best get ourselves moving," I said.

I then proceeded to help him up. When he stood up he seemed happier.

Once up, he said in a very quiet voice, "I am sorry."

Then I really felt pity. I gave the boy a drink from my canteen. I had absolutely no inclination of where we were or which way we had come; my mind was so shaken. He asked me what we were to do. I said we should wait where we were and think. Perhaps we weren't far from our friends. So despite the burning, sun we sat down and talked. I couldn't believe I was talking to this boy like an equal. I almost liked the boy, he seemed smarter than I thought he was. He asked me if we could move on. I suddenly had more courage. We got up and started walking. I had no idea which way to go. The sandstorm swept away all our foot prints. We walked in the direction that we thought we had come from but we didn't know for sure if it was the right way. The sun kept glaring down, and I started panting and walking slowly. Johnny didn't seem to mind so much. Maybe he was trying to show me that he was courageous.

Two days had passed. It felt like death should have come hours ago. I wasn't so forgiving with Johnny. I acted more angry at him. He wasn't so awake now. He, like me, was

moving slowly and panting. Both of us drunk too much water. The parts of our uniform that we left on were drenched in sweat. We forgot all strategies of finding direction and survival. We just trudged on. In the afternoon of our second day, Johnny seemed to go into a fit, and he started running. I screamed at him to come back. The scream took all the energy out of me as I collapsed. When I woke up I heard the thundering of hooves. I saw Johnny beside me sleeping. I nudged him and asked him if he heard them. He said no as he started to get up, but then he paused. He looked scared.

"I hear them," he whispered.

We saw riders in the distance, but we couldn't tell who they were. Something about them made both of us more scared than we ever were. We ran until they were out of site. On the 4th day we heard the Devil riders again, and once again we ran. We started 4 hearing them, and sometimes seeing them every few hours. Every time we heard them we ran, for something about them struck fear into our souls. Sometimes we would find a dead animal or a dead man. But whenever we got close to try to eat the animal, or take the dead man's possessions, the Devil riders would come near. Each time we heard them they came closer, and each time they came closer they drove us deeper into madness.

It was the 7th day. We couldn't move unless we heard the Devil riders. The fear they struck in us made us alert, and forced us to run. On that same day we came to the top of a sand dune. On the bottom was a Turkish camp. When I saw human civilization, a faraway knowledge flooded back to me. I realized that those Devil riders were just my imagination. I wondered if Johnny had come to his senses too. I turned to ask him, but he had an expression of panic on his face. He said he heard them again. When he told me, I tried not to believe him, but slowly I began hearing hoof beats against my will. That noise of fear started creeping back into my head. I turned around without wanting to and saw them thundering towards us. We knew they would take us to Hell. Johnny started running towards the Turkish camp. He stopped and he turned

around telling me to run. But for me the hoof beats began to die away. I told him they were nothing but our imagination, but it was clear that he still heard them. I knew that staying still and not running was literally painful to him. He kept beckoning me to follow. Panic stricken, he made his way back to me. He wrestled my pistol away from me and held me at gun point.

"Come sergeant please," he screamed. This poor boy was trying to force me to run, he was trying to save my life. I tried to reason with him, but he was beyond that, he had completely gone insane. I ordered him as a superior to drop the gun.

"I'm sorry for you sir. I'll get help. I'll be back," he was crying as he said it. Then he saluted me and ran into the camp. He left me speechless. I just stood there, paralyzed, then I fainted. I never saw Johnny again.

EPILOGUE: I was found by the British army later. I was too shaken mentally to be fit for service anymore, so I had to go home. Johnny tried to save my life. I used to think that I would never truly like him. There is still a part of me that doesn't. I cannot help it. I naturally didn't like him from the start, but more of me is grateful to him, he became my friend. Every night I think of Johnny, and every night I hear the hoof beats.

Maxfield Sklar

8th Grade

Hamilton, MA

I Do It for myself and No One Else

I went to a public school for seven years of my life and I never really fit into any of the cliques. I wasn't a cheerleader or interested in boys, sports, or TV. I would have rather done my homework or read than gossip with the other girls about who was "cool" and which boy was "cute." I didn't like hanging around people that found faults in others to try to make themselves seem "cool." I also didn't like hanging around people who made their decisions based on what others said and did. The girls, who didn't gossip or rely on other people, bothered me in different ways. They made fun of me because I cared about my schoolwork so much. They said things to me about how i was "the smart one," or the "perfect one." I'm not sure if the girls that made fun of me were trying to compliment me on my hard work, or if they were just trying to amuse themselves. But still, no matter what the reason was, I was deeply hurt by it. I didn't want to be singled out even if I was different. No one wants to be made fun of constantly, day after day. I had to come to the realization though, that there weren't any other girls that I knew of that cared about school like me, or that didn't want to gossip about others. Even in a grade of 200 people, if I didn't want to sit alone at lunch, I had to pick one of the groups, no matter how unhappy I would be. The group I chose happened to be some of the girls that made fun of me. This group just happened to make fun of me less than others did. Then everyday, I had to endure some "smart" comment at least once. It was rough to go to school and know that all I had to look forward to was a group of girls that didn't respect me for who I was. If I didn't hang around with them though, I would have been all alone, and that would have been more humiliating.

There was one girl in the group who didn't make fun of me on a daily basis. We had been together since kindergarten. We took ballet classes and were in Indian Princesses and Brownies together. She even made the effort to call me on the weekends to get together. This

was nice because no one else in the group did. We spent a lot of time together, and most of it laughing. She was always fun to be around. Although she made fun of my grades every now and then, she didn't do it too much and it was therefore easier to get over. Sometimes she even stood up for me when the other girls made fun of me. After a while, I started to trust her and ended up telling her who my first crush was. She was the only one I told and I don't think she ever told anyone about it. Knowing that I could trust her, made our friendship even stronger. She was my best friend. Or at least that's what I thought.

In the fifth grade our friendship changed though. It was a gloomy fall afternoon and thick gray clouds were plastered in the sky, showing no signs of clearing up. My mom and I thought it would be the perfect day to be lazy and watch a movie. As we were watching the movie, the phone rang suddenly. It startled me so much that I jumped off the couch. I answered the phone and was excited to hear my friend's voice on the other end. A call from her always meant an invitation to do something with her.

"Where are you?" she asked in a somewhat irritated manner. I

was puzzled. "What are you talking about?"

"Wait," she said. "You didn't get my e-mail?"

I had no idea what she was talking about, so I asked her to explain. She told me that she had sent me an e-mail, inviting me to a sleepover at her house, with the other four girls in the group. I hadn't gotten the e-mail but figured she may have sent it to the wrong address. I then anxiously waited for her to ask if I was coming. She did, and I got so excited that my heart raced at an unusually fast pace. I ran over to my mom and told her that I had gotten invited to a sleepover.

"Can I go, Mom? Please, I really want to. Pretty please?" I begged her excitedly. She agreed, told me to go pack, and said she would take me over right then. I told my friend the

good news, hung up, and raced up the stairs to pack. I was going to a slumber party! About ten minutes later, the phone rang again. I answered it, not realizing that two minutes later I would be wishing that it hadn't rung.

"Hello," I said.

A shy response of "Brittany...", answered, and I instantly knew it was my friend. "... I-I don't think you should... come anymore. I just... don't want you to come."

I was devastated. I tried to fight back the tears long enough to sound energetic and say, "Okay, well, maybe another time."

"See you at school," she said.

"Yeah, bye," I replied, feeling the tears closer to the brim of my eye. I hung up, and the tears started flowing. I couldn't make them stop, or slow down. I ran down the stairs to my mom, as they flowed faster, and faster. I was crying hard enough that I could barely explain the situation to her. I couldn't even explain it to myself- why wouldn't my best friend want me at her party? My mom cradled me in her arms for hours, continually telling me I had done nothing wrong. She kept trying to come up with reasons why my friend may not have wanted me there, all the time saying that it was the girl's loss that I wasn't going to the party.

Thousands of possibilities of "Why?" crossed my own mind. I didn't know if I had done something wrong or if she had misunderstood something other girls told her about me. Maybe she thought I was talking about her behind her back. Maybe she thought I would bring down the party by talking "smart." I wasn't sure what her motives were. I didn't know whether to be angry at her for taking back an invitation, or to be sad that she may have listened to other girls and changed her opinion about me.

I finally calmed down but had no interest in going to school on Monday and seeing the girl. I ended up going to school though because I didn't think it was right to skip school for being in a fight. School wasn't too bad after all, because we both avoided each other for the rest

of the year. We never made eye contact and luckily didn't get stuck together for any projects. Then in sixth grade, she confronted me in the hallway after I got a 100 percent on a test.

"Why do you always have to get good grades?" she rudely asked while we were both alone.

I was still angry with her about the party a year before, and I was done letting the "smart" comments roll off my shoulder. I looked her straight in the eye, and said, "You won't even be working for me someday." After that, I walked away, and we haven't been in contact since then.

I realize that this was probably a mean comment to say and she may not have deserved it. She wasn't a bad student either, so to that effect, the comment didn't really make sense. I just wanted her to know that I didn't appreciate being rejected from the party. No one should have to go through something as upsetting as that. I think I was also trying to tell her that by not keeping her word, her life in the business world could be disastrous. I highly doubt she got the meaning in the comment I made, but it felt good to finally stand up to someone and let them know that I wasn't going to let them make fun of me any more.

A year after our hallway confrontation, my parents sent me to a private school where my grades are valued. Now, people ask for my help rather than making fun of me. I even have friends that have the same characteristics as me. Even if I didn't change schools though, I learned an important lesson in my experience with the girl. It isn't important what others say and do. If they can't even keep an invitation, they aren't worth getting upset over. Plus, why should it matter what other people think about my grades? In the end, I am only getting the good grades to benefit myself. It doesn't affect anyone else but me.

Brittany Jarrett, 9th Grade Dublin, Ohio

My First Seven Minutes

My heart raced as I ran off the field and gave a high five to Ashley, the rejuvenated teammate who came on as my substitute. "Nice hustle," she said as she jogged briskly past me. Out of breath, I joined my teammates on the bench.

I had thought the season would end weeks before. I was completely wrong. I couldn't believe that I, an eighth grader, was playing in a varsity sections game. That Thursday afternoon after practice, the team and I walked back to our bags, tired from a long day of conditioning and scrimmaging. I stopped when I heard Coach Makela call over for me to stay after. Wondering if I had done something wrong, I scurried over to her.

"As you know, sections are coming up, and we need to fill the varsity roster," she explained. "Coach Palmer and I were wondering if you would be interested in playing up on the varsity team."

My heart skipped a beat, and my body filled with excitement. I couldn't help but smile, like I had just won the lottery. My jaw dropped. I couldn't believe I would actually be on the varsity team! "Yes ...of course!" I tried to say calmly.

Then Coach Makela explained that I would practice with the varsity squad for the rest of the season and would get my new jersey soon. I couldn't wait to tell my family and all of my friends that I would be playing on varsity.

Jumping into my mom's car, I screamed, "Mom! Coach Makela just asked me to play on varsity for sections!"

"You're kidding! That's great, Annie!" she exclaimed.

The next practices were tough and so exhausting. Constant drills and sprints definitely wore me out. I had to work my hardest to prove to everyone that I deserved to be there. Don't be

last... ust finish ...only a few more, I told myself. I must have stood out like a sore thumb because I was about half their size and the only eighth grader there. Most of the girls were juniors and seniors. The majority of the team wasn't so welcoming, for they probably didn't want an eighth grader on their team. Motivated by my fear of rejection, I put 110°1° into everything ! did in practice.

A week before the big game, Coach Makela gave me my very own varsity jersey: #17. The smile on my face would not go away as I tried on my red and white jersey. I couldn't wait to play.

At last the day of the game arrived, and I was ready. Proud to be wearing my varsity jersey to school, I watched secretly to see if anyone noticed what I was wearing.

Two forty-five rolled around, and it was time to get on the bus. I sat nervously in my seat for the entire hour-long ride. Surrounded by older, more experienced, and more confident girls, I sat mostly in silence while thoughts of possible embarrassment and disappointment clouded my mind.

"Annie, are you ready for this?" asked one of the older girls, pleasantly smiling.

"Ha, of course!" I tried to say confidently as I quickly sat up straight. My stomach filled with butterflies, and f realized I was nothing close to ready.

The team shuffled off the bus and prepared for warm-ups. We began with a drill called `Colorado,' where we go one-on-one with a defenseman to the goal. On my turn, I went against Christa Clavel, the best sweeper on the team, the one I envied most. She maintained complete composure when under pressure. Her skills were unbelievable; she rarely let anyone slide past her to the goal. Defeated, I felt even more frightened and intimidated. We continued to stretch, and then I passed the ball around with Meredith. Only a year older than I, she seemed carefree, for she had played on varsity many times before.

Game time arrived. I sat on the ice cold bench for the entire first half. Joining the team for the half-time pep talk, I could barely keep my mind focused. The Second half started, and the clock kept on ticking. Now relieved, I thought that I wouldn't have to get in and play and risk disappointing the team. After watching intensely for the majority of the game, I heard Coach Makela yell, "Annie, get ready and come on over."

My heart dropped. I was so nervous and almost in shock. Quickly taking off my warm-up pants I scurried toward her.

"You'll be going in for Molly at outside left mid. Play hard and you'll do great," she told me.

"All right, sounds good," I whispered.

The referee's whistle signaled that I could go on the field. Hearing sharp sound, I hesitated before I called in for my substitute. I attempted to loosen up and run casually onto the field, but it was patently obvious how tense I was.

I don't remember much of what happened during the seven minutes on the field. All I know is that I ran around, trying to run wherever the ball was. I wasn't quite sure where to go. The caliber of speed and the quality of ball touch was much greater in varsity play than anything I was used to on JV. I left the field in disbelief. I had actually received playing time in a sections game. Leaving the field, I heard "Great job," from Coach Makela. A sense of relief filled me. As an eighth grader, I never would have expected to be playing on varsity. As a junior, before each game I still get nervous, but nothing compared to my first seven minutes.

Annie Schroeder, 11th Grade

Mankato, Minnesota

Ten Ways to Read a Book in Comfort

Do you ever have trouble sitting down to read a good book? Do you have a good book but just don't know where to start? Well I am here to help! I have written ten stupendous ways to just relax and read. I hope you enjoy! One way to read a book in comfort is in front of a warm, crackling fire. During a cold blustery evening get some large pieces of wood, light them, and just settle in with a thrilling novel.

Oh yeah, if you are going to do this right you are going to need a really exciting book, one with a juicy plot and a good ending. If it is a sunny day outside and it is nice and warm, you should go outside and read. It would be even better if you had a hammock where you could relax and read. That is my absolute favorite way to read, outside, on a sunny day, in a hammock.

If you are mad or annoyed because of your siblings (which happens to me a lot), go and read a book in your room. Just storm right in, lock the door, and read your book in your bed in peace.

If it is a warm day, you can go in your hammock, right? Well, what about a cold day? What I like to do on a cold day is get some hot chocolate and read my book with some delectable cookies.

Whenever I am at an exciting part of the book and cannot put it down, I just read right through a meal! Get your favorite sandwich, chips and fruit, and just read while eating.

Downstairs I have a humongous beanbag. It has my name on it, so do not think you can use it!

Anyway, I love to wallow on that big thing and read.

It you have some boring chores to do, and your mom is looking for you, I have a solution!
Take your book and hide so that you cannot be found. Just read away.

My dad likes to sleep on the couch, but I like to read there instead. You could get a blanket, if it is necessary, and read away. If you want to enjoy this technique, take your shoes off and just relax.

I don't know about you, but after school, I like to have a snack. Usually I split a nice big bowl of popcorn between my brothers and myself. Yes, this is a perfect opportunity to read your book. Just make sure that no one interrupts you while you are reading away.

My last way to read in comfort is to get out a small tent, or to find a small area to sit in. Then you will need to get your book, and all the blankets and pillows in the house, and just lie there and read.

I hope you enjoy my ten great ways to read a book in comfort. Why don't you go and try them all out now and see which fits your fancy? I bet you will find a excellent and comfortable way to read!!

Daniel Clancy

Age 11

San Carlos, California

Naked

I stare up at the green tent, glowing in the morning light. My body wants to escape from its restricting cocoon bag. I step out and the sun is opening its eye over the mountains. Beside the unzipped portal door sits a small aluminum cup filled to the brim with chai tea. It was hot twenty minutes ago, but now is cold. I sip its sweet spiced flavor as I prepare my means of transportation, my feet. I struggle to find my first aid kit in the mess of three girls' backpacks, when I notice some kids five feet away staring in awe at my straw colored hair. I smile and continue searching. They were there last night too, until they recognized that we were asleep inside the green box. I find my first aid kit and pull out the mole skin, of which I only have one piece left. With my pocketknife I cut a piece just big enough to cover the newest blister on my right foot. I slip on my Gortex boots, and with untied laces trailing, shuffle toward the food tent.

The sunlight kisses my fair skin and the mountains of northernmost India sing a sweet song to me. They call me, plead for me to come. In their valleys I discover villages and people, who in America could only exist in photos of previous trekkers. These extraordinary mountain dwellers traverse high peaks to deliver expired Coca-Cola on donkeys and reuse the bottles until they break. I find fascinating children who know how to work a field and tend sheep, but remain disinterested in jump ropes and toys. These people have stares that look past your eyes and seemingly gaze into your being, especially the elders. It reminds me of war stories, where men would return home with a "look" in their eyes. I see this look in them, not the children or young adults. It is as if they're trapped--trapped in their soul by some unimaginable force.

It was this same force I felt in the Buddhist monastery. Religion is not a fad here, like America sees yoga and Zen. I remember the paintings in the chant room. Blue gods with gold embellishments danced on the wall, while I tried not to trip over the sitting mats and uneven floor boards. I saw pictures of these gods and spirits I had read about before coming. The images

aren't in a book or a National Geographic museum. It's real--tangible. In the mornings I hear the chants of a nearby monastery. The cries and songs of monks ring in my head as I begin my day at five o'clock. We walk through these places where we feel religion in the air. I sing in my head and keep walking.

The thin air makes every breath demanding. As my pack sits on me I feel every ounce of weight wearing me down. Inside my boots, my dead feet walk on. Blisters rub and chafe their tender edges. I cringe. My mole skin supply is running low, and band aids don't stick to sweat. The pain is numbing but I continue. I have to divert my attention from it to keep from screaming. The only way to go is up, and the mountains tease. There is no perspective and the distance drags on and on. This desolate backcountry doesn't grow any trees, just weeds and an occasional ugly shrub. I distract myself by watching rocks or the boots of a fellow trekker. Soon my thoughts wander off the dirt paths and glaciers I'm walking on and back to my sore feet.

It is the tenth day that I have conquered these mountains. I have beaten my body by taking thousands of steps on their strenuous surface. Yesterday, the hardest day so far, I almost broke down. I realize this will probably be the hardest physical thing I'll ever do in my life, and to succeed will be a mental victory. Today we walked nine and a half-hours to get to the village where we camped. I fell behind when I felt like I was going to throw up, probably because I ate my friend's oatmeal breakfast for her. There was an old woman walking on our highest pass yesterday morning with long braids and Buddhist adornments that revealed her age. She walked one hundred feet and then sat down to rest. Her pace was noticeably slow, and as I approached her she, once again, took a seat alongside the trail. I sat beside her, feeling tired myself, but not so much tired as wanting to jump off the mountain and have God take me to heaven. As she looked me over, her piercing eyes became fresh, like a little girl, and she said some words to me in Ladakhi. I smiled, and we ate my dried apricots together. Moments later I trekked on, leaving the bag with her, knowing its resealable feature would be used until its demise. I forgot about

how dirty I was feeling and how ready to leave I was. I told no one about my experience with the old woman.

It was later that evening that two other team members and I got lost. We went over the last pass and lost the footprints. There are so many trails and when covered with rocks, there are no prints left behind. We wandered around a valley for two hours before we saw someone in the distance. We found the camp, but along the way, I found a small, pink-petaled flower. I flattened it in my journal and thought nothing more of it. Today, I opened my journal and the blossom fell from its pages onto my lap. I carefully picked up its fragile body that somehow grew at 16,000 feet, despite harsh conditions and altitude. It grew for no one's benefit but its own. It is beautiful, but also strong because it lived in a place where no one could imagine that it would survive. I saved it from a future of nothingness to remind me.

I think of how quickly I arrived here. In a mere twenty-four hours we drove to one of the most desolate backcountries in the world, a place where I am foreign because light skin is scarce. A world I briefly live in. I pass by. Tomorrow I will once again be plucked from this place to hike on to the next. I avoid thinking of home and the common blister. Contentment lingers around my tent and surrounds my thoughts, but never stays. I recognize I am here to survive, for myself if no one else. Contentment would deprive me of my strength to continue.

Next week I will plant myself back into lowan soil, but for now I sleep in a bag that suffocates me and I attempt to wash myself in a freezing glacier stream. My hair is matted and dirt is embedded in the pores of my skin. Everything with me is dusty; the nice boots that break my skin and shorten my nerves, and my pack that was once blue in color. My right calf aches every time my foot contacts the earth. I can't find my fingernail clippers. Here I am stripped of my makeup, which usually hides my face. Here I am stripped of everything. I walk the Himalayas, glowing in my nakedness.