

Inspirational Kids' Stories



**Stories with morals for
children.**

by Alex Kouleshov

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Story 1

THE GOSSIP GREMLIN

Value: Gossip

“Happy birthday, Princess!!!!” Mom and Dad presented the large box to 12-year-old Courtney with such great pride.

“What is it, what is it, Daddy?” Courtney squealed with excitement. Courtney tore through the paper, very aware that the box had holes poked in the top. “Is it a pet, is it?” she squealed and then she stopped and just stared down in wonder.

Standing in the middle of the box, just barely 3 inches tall, was a tiny human-like figure. Human but not human. It had arms and legs, a head and a face, but it was so oddly shaped. Its legs were furry and the fur was a flow of purples, greens and pinks. The feet were not feet at all but tiny hooves. The hooves had toes with sharp, tiny toenails for gripping. The torso, arms, neck and face were similarly wildly colored, so bright it hurt their eyes, and its head was pointy so it always looked surprised and fascinated.

Courtney named the gremlin Stanley. Every time she called its name, it squeaked and did a dance. Stanley stayed in his box, very happy at first, but then he slowly got sick.

One night, Courtney was watching Stanley and talking to Amy on the phone.

“Amy, did you see what Janie was wearing? Wow, it was so stupid! She has such ugly clothes!” Just then a big squeak erupted from the little box. Stanley jumped to his feet and did a dance. “Amy, it’s Stanley. He got better. We were gossiping and he suddenly ate something and got well. He eats gossip, Amy, he eats gossip!”

And it was true. Each time Amy gossiped, Stanley grew larger. Then came the Thursday when Amy broke the rules, and she sneaked Stanley into her backpack and took him to school. Oh, the giggling that went off in the halls when all of the 6th grade girls gathered to hold Stanley and pet him and tell him how cute he was. And then they started.

“Nikki called Cassie a dumb girl.....”

“Sandra has ugly hair.....”

“Linda was mean to Susan.....”

And with each tiny piece of gossip, Stanley did a little yip, did a back flip, danced and grew bigger and fatter. The girls didn’t notice it happening, but as the gremlin was handed from girl to girl, he slipped to the floor. The click of his toenails on the school floor was never heard.

“Courtney, where’s Stanley?” Amy whispered when class had already started. For the next five minutes the students and Mrs. Lexington the teacher were sure Courtney had lost her mind, throwing the things in her backpack everywhere.

“Courtney, what’s wrong?” Mrs. Lexington scolded from the front.

“I lost something, something important.”

“Well, you will find it when you get home. I understand your mommy does everything for you,” Mrs. Lexington gossiped in a very snotty way. Suddenly, from the back of the room near the door, came a low-pitched yip. All eyes turned and Stanley stood on the assignments table. He was now 3 feet tall and very fat. The gossips today were so good for him.

The students began to panic at the appearance of the large, surly gremlin. It gave a low yelp, then danced and flipped, but Stanley was so large by now that he broke the table and escaped into the hallway. The frightened students rushed into the halls, seeing tufts of multi-colored fur flying everywhere. Mrs. Lexington was on the phone to Mr. Bixley, the principal, hysterical with the news of the gossip gremlin.

“Joe had bad breath.....”

“Leslie cheated on the test.....”

“Mrs. Lexington is an old maid.....”

“Jesse broke the law once.....”

The gossip food streamed from every gathering of students, in the bathrooms, classrooms and hallway. The flood of gossip became so strong it could be seen as a green cloud moving rapidly toward the gym. Suddenly, a lone figure came marching down the hall, a large commanding man who shouted orders. The students sprang into action to obey. Mr. Bixley spoke with such authority he didn't need a microphone.

“Students, to the gym. We are going to put a stop to this. The doors to the gym burst open before Mr. Bixley and the students flooded in behind him and then stopped. There at the other end, a full 20 feet tall and fat and ugly, was Stanley. Mr. Bixley and Stanley faced each other like cowboys in a western duel. The principal spoke.

“Heather, come here, tell the truth.”

Heather moved to the front, to a microphone the AV guy had quickly brought up.

“Leslie didn't cheat on the test. I lied. Leslie is a good person.”

“Phillip, Jessica, Sarah...tell the truth,” the principal commanded.

One by one the students stepped forward and spoke the truth into the microphone, correcting their gossiping lies. Each time, Stanley moaned, grabbed his ears and cried big green gremlin tears.

“Now, Courtney – come here – tell the truth,” Mr. Bixley ordered.

Courtney stepped up, looked nervous and then said loudly into the microphone, “JANIE HAS PRETTY CLOTHES!”

That was all it took. Stanley fell back into the bleachers and moaned so loudly the students held their ears. He did a forward flip and then *just like that* with a loud BLIP, he vanished, leaving just a puddle of green gossip goo on the gym floor.

“EVERYBODY BACK TO CLASS!” commanded the good principal and with that, there was never again another gossip gremlin in Courtney’s town.

Story 2

GRANDDAD'S DOG REX

Value: Be yourself

We always suspected Granddad was unusual. There always was a bit of a mystery about his past. But when we got on his lap and he told us about things that happened when he was a little boy, well, somehow we knew it was all true.

“Let me just tell you about when I was your age,” Granddad would say.

“Things were much different when Granddad was a little boy from how it is now for you children.”

“How, Granddad? How?” I begged. I loved Granddad’s stories.

“Well, Steven, in a lot of ways, but for one thing, when I was a child, all the animals could talk.”

“No way, Granddad,” Susannah complained.

“Yes, Susanna, and the animal that seemed to have the most to say was Rex.”

“Your dog, Rex, Granddad?” Harrison asked.

“That’s the one. Why, I remember one day when Rex came to me and told me he wasn’t satisfied being a dog.”

“Was it the dog food, Granddad? Didn’t you give him good things to eat?” I wondered.

“No, it wasn’t the dog food. Seems Rex had been looking around, at other animals, at humans, even at other dogs, and he just wasn’t satisfied.”

“What did you tell him, Granddad?” Jenny asked.

“Well, I didn’t tell him anything, Jenny. I learned that Rex does better if he learns lessons for himself. Just like you children do. Seems Rex had been to the circus, snuck under the tent and had seen the high wire act. That’s what Rex wanted to be -- a high wire trapeze artist, walking on the wire.”

“But dogs can’t walk on wire, Granddad,” Susanna noted. “It’s hard for them to hold the balancing pole in their paws.”

“Well, that’s right, and when he tried it by walking on the back of the couch, well, he fell right off and yipped and yipped and yipped.”

We all laughed.

“Well, that didn’t seem to teach him his lesson, children, so he tried something new. This time he had been in the garden and it seems he had been chatting with a snake.

Apparently, the snake bragged a lot and convinced Rex he should become a snake.”

“Granddad!” Harrison spoke up. “Dogs cannot be snakes!” He poked Granddad as he lectured him. “They would have trouble making that hissing sound.”

“Yes, and Harrison, when Rex practiced his slither, he accidentally wrapped himself around the toilet and could not get out for a while.”

“What did you do, Granddad, did you leave him there?” wondered Jenny.

“Well, no, your Grandma was pretty crafty with her knitting needles. No need to go into details, but after some additional yelping we got him out. He was pretty embarrassed about that episode, I can tell you that. Rex told me later that he felt that the snake project was poorly planned, but he knew for sure what he was going to be.”

“What did he decide, Granddad?” Harrison wanted to know.

“Well, Rex had been watching TV, and he decided he wanted to be Miss America.”

“MISS AMERICA???” Jenny objected. “But REX is a boy dog!”

“That was a drawback,” Granddad admitted.

“But Granddad,” Susanna interrupted, “does he know about the swimsuit competition?”

“Well, children that was a problem. When we got it on him, Rex not only looked silly, it slowed him down when he chased squirrels. Finally, it was Grandma who talked some sense into him.”

“Grandma could speak dog?” Harrison was amazed.

“Oh, fluently. She finally sat him down, got him a cup of tea and explained to him what you all know, don’t you children?”

“Yes, he has to be himself. That’s how you get people to like you – be yourself, Granddad.” I instructed. “Did she teach him to use his natural talents?”

“Yes, Steven, she did. She showed him that we loved him for what he was already good at.”

“What was Rex good at, Granddad?” wondered Susanna.

“Oh, scratching himself, barking, frightening squirrels. He was a very talented dog.”

“A talking dog? Can that possibly be true, Granddad?” wondered Harrison.

“It could possibly, Harry. Just possibly.”

“I wish Rex and Grandma didn’t die, Granddad,” said Jenny sadly.

“Oh, they are together right now Jenny,” Granddad said whimsically.

“In Heaven, Granddad?” She brightened up.

“Oh, no, Jenny. Not in heaven. Grandma and Rex aren’t dead. They are just together. In another place. And it isn’t far from here, children. Would you like to go see them?”

“YEAH!!!!!!” All of us cheered. And we meant it, too.

Story 3

IT ISN'T EASY BEING MARCUS

***Value: Things are not
always what they seem
to be***

It's never easy to be the new kid in school. But it gets to be doubly hard when you are a kid like Marcus. First of all, those glasses, big and thick with ugly black rims that were always were falling down his nose. So much about Marcus was just odd and out of place. His clothes were always wrinkled and way to large for his very skinny body. And the colors. This year it seemed that all the cool people were wearing black – usually leather. But oh, no, not Marcus. His clothing was every possible color in horrible clashing patterns going everywhere, like he was wearing 1000 ugly ties someone patched together.

Joey wanted to help. He watched as Marcus walked down the hall. Marcus was amazing, unaware of what a geek he was. Marcus walked right down the middle of the school hallway those big floppy clothes hitting everyone, catching up pieces of paper and dirt in them, making a small storm front as he strode down the hallway with a flourish like he owned it. He did that until someone stuck his foot out or hit him from behind and Marcus went flying on his face, books everywhere.

“Why do you let them do those things to you, Marcus?” Joey would say, helping him up.

“Hey, that last one hit me real good,” he would laugh. “You gotta admire that kind of strength in a guy.”

Nothing got him down. Girls laughed at him. People made up rhymes about him. Marcus just learned the rhymes and helped organize them into some pretty well written songs. Joey continued to stay close to Marcus. He felt he wanted to protect Marcus, plus there was a mystery about the guy who was so strange yet so happy about himself. So, part of it was sympathy and part curiosity about the mystery of this strange kid named Marcus.

Marcus walked home alone every day. But this time, Joey walked with him. He had heard that there might be trouble. And it came on them pretty suddenly. Joey felt himself knocked to the ground and rolling away from Marcus. He had trouble getting up, and when he did he saw Marcus standing in the middle of a vacant lot. All around him were older boys. Joey didn't recognize them all, but some of them were from the football team. And they were all mocking Marcus.

“Hey, you think you can take us all?”

“Those sure are pretty clothes!”

“Hate to see your funny clothes all torn up.”

And other taunts like that and worse. Joey tried to figure out where he would attack first to try and help Marcus, but before he could move, an amazing thing took place. Like a tornado made up of rainbow colors, Marcus' body changed into a swirl of movement. Arms and legs flashed everywhere. Nobody could keep up, least of all the bullies. Joey could only see the form of his friend and, somehow, his eyes. The arms and legs moved too fast. Like lightning striking, his body flashed from bully to bully. The solid 'THUMP, THUMP, THUMP' echoed out, and each one yowled and flew to the ground from the blows. The shouts of panic and attempts to mount a defense or attack were like a riot going on, but Marcus seemed to target and drop each bully with incredible speed and accuracy.

At one point, Joey had to duck when Marcus threw a punch. A large, frightened senior named Edger tried to run in vain before being flattened by the blows from the hands of Marcus. When Joey could take his eyes off of Marcus, he saw a piece of paper on the ground that had fallen from his pocket in the battle. He picked it up and it read, 'Marcus Henderson, black belt'.

And then it was over. The bodies were sprawled on the ground like broken toys, some moving, some not. Before Joey could go over to Marcus to say how

amazing that was, he moved toward the street. There, a long black limousine had shown up. Joey had not noticed it in all the excitement. The front door opened and a tall, lanky chauffeur stepped out and opened the door for Marcus. On the door of the limo was a sign that read, 'Henderson Industries', which Joey recognized as the biggest business in the city.

As Marcus stepped into the limo, he waved at Joey and laughed, and then he said, "See you later, Joey. Maybe you can come over and play video games some day."

The limo moved away slowly without rush. Edgar walked over, still hurting from the thrashing he took. He said to Joey, "Well, what do you think of that?"

"I know," Joey responded. "Things are not always what they appear to be."

Story 4

FAGAN THE DRAGON

Value: Envy

“I am, Mr. Henderson. I just am,” Fagan said with emotion. “I am the ugliest dragon ever, and I have a big, fat nose.”

Mr. Henderson flew from his perch in the olive tree to the top of Fagan the Dragon’s nose. He was a tiny, red bird with yellow spots and had always liked Fagan, despite that big, fat nose.

“You are not ugly, Fagan,” explained Mr. Henderson. “What makes you think that way?”

“I just am. I am uglier than all the other dragons. I hate everything about me. I am so dissatisfied,” Fagan said, big, green tears working their way down his scaly face and bunching up around his big, fat nose.

“There are no other dragons. Not in our forest. You are very popular. All the chipmunks love to eat the junk that gets between your toes, and just look how the baby monkeys use you for a jungle gym. Why, for all you know, you are the prettiest dragon in the forest. Oh, my, just a moment. It seems to be raining...such a nuisance.”

Mr. Henderson looked up in the sky and fluffed out his brightly colored wings and sang his special song: “Chirp, Tweet, CHIRP,” and *just like that*, it stopped raining.

Fagan looked up in the sky with amazement. A magic bird is a handy thing to keep around your cave. Today it was their picnic in the grove that gave them time to just talk. “I just don’t know how you do that, Mr. Henderson,” Fagan remarked with admiration.

“It’s all in the feathers, my boy. It’s all in the feathers,” the small bird answered with a shake of his tiny frame.

”Well, what you say about the chipmunks and the baby monkeys may be so, but I am not the prettiest dragon in the forest. I am the ugliest of all dragons,” the dragon said, not knowing whatsoever if there was another Fagan here, there, or anywhere, for that matter. “I look at the loveliness of the other creatures of the forest and I know for sure, Mr. Henderson, that is what I want.”

“Who in the forest is lovelier than you, Fagan the Dragon? Name one,” challenged the little bird.

“Well, look just over there at Peter the Pelican. Look at those long, pretty legs and then look at my short, ugly ones with these big, fat toes,” Fagan complained.

“OK, then, old friend. You shall have your wish for pretty legs.” And with that, Mr. Henderson chirped his enchanted song, “Chirp, Tweet, CHIRP.”

“HEY!!!” The objection was first heard from Peter the Pelican. The elegant bird no longer held his position high in the air but now moved about the forest floor, stumbling on large, flat, green feet, huge toes sticking out from his chubby, feathered body.

“Mr. Henderson, what did you do?” Fagan inquired. “Whoa, whoa, HELP!” he suddenly squawked before he got his answer. Now, so much taller, those skinny legs struggled and wobbled under the massive size of Fagan’s impressive dragon frame. Fagan stumbled this way, bumping into an elephant, and then that way and this way, and then – CRASH – he came toppling to earth face down, eyeball to eyeball with the very irritated pelican.

“Chirp, Tweet, CHIRP.” Mr. Henderson sent the spell quickly, seeing the problem, and Peter and Fagan were safe on their own legs again. “Now see how much better your real legs are than Peter’s. You look much nicer this way,” complimented the bird to his good friend.

“It’s not nice at all. Look at these ears, all short and spiky. They are so tiny...they never keep me warm at night. Not like Donny the Donkey. His ears are so pretty and long and floppy. Much better than my ears.”

“Chirp, Tweet, CHIRP.” Mr. Henderson fulfilled Fagan’s wish before he finished expressing it.

“COUGH SPUTTER SPIT.” Fagan inhaled at the wrong time. Long, fluffy, furry gray ears sprouted from the dragon’s head, replacing the short, sharp, green ones with yellow spots. A loud braying could be heard from behind the bushes as Donny noticed his wonderful beautiful ears had been replaced with these tiny, spiky things.

“Mr. Henderson, make them stop hitting me!” the big dragon yelled as he shook his from head side to side, those hug ears slapping his eyes and nose rapidly.

“Chirp, Tweet, CHIRP.” The skillful bird made both animals right again.

(Possibly a replacement or one more incident in which Fagan exchanges his breath with the giraffe because the giraffe eats the sweet mangos. But Fagan gets the burps and the giraffe sets a fire with fire breath.)

“Now see, Fagan, every time you envy something in someone else, you are very unhappy when you get what they have. You are always better off the way you are. You see that now, don’t you?”

But Mr. Henderson didn't get his answer. Before Fagan could think of what to say, he felt tiny feet running all over his toes, those baby chipmunks tickling between his toes, and then he felt those little bodies scurrying up his scales and beginning to leap from his wings and swing from his big, fat nose as the baby monkeys began to play. Fagan's giggles, as he played with these little ones, was all the answer Mr. Henderson needed.

Story 5

THE SQUIRREL NAMED PICASSO

*Value: Trust
authorities*

“Amy, this is Mrs. Morris, Juan’s teacher. Something’s wrong, can you and Amanda help?”

The call sent a shock through Amy’s body. She and her twin sister, Amanda, so liked the little boy from two doors down, Juan. He was such a sweet boy, and he always had a wonderful, warm smile for the two twelve-year-old girls.

“What happened, Mrs. Morris?” Amy asked almost frantically. Mrs. Morris was Juan’s teacher, and she seemed to take a special interest. Mrs. Morris and Officer Henry were the ones who tried the most to help Juan. “Juan has run away, girls,” Mrs. Morris explained. “Do you know where he would have gone?”

“Dawson’s Woods,” Amy said without hesitation. She knew he went there a lot. She never had the courage to go into the woods to look for him though, because they scared her. “Amy, we have to go there, to get Juan,” Amanda told her sister. “I’m scared, Amanda,” Amy answered, but she knew they had to. Something inside them knew they could not turn their backs on Juan right now.

The girls entered the woods, holding hands fearfully. How would they find Juan in here? Just then Amy reached in her pocket. There she found a folded note.

It must have been put there by Juan the last time she hugged him. ‘Look for Picasso, Amy’ the note read.

“Picasso? Who is Picasso?” she said out loud to Amanda.

“I am Picasso!” The high-pitched voice pierced the woods. They looked around and could only find an unusually large squirrel standing on a stump.

“That’s not possible,” interrupted Amy. “Squirrels can’t talk.”

“Well, some can but not many speak well,” the squirrel answered with a slight English accent. “Come with me, Juan needs you to help him find them.”

“Find who?” Amy had to ask.

“Why, the Wizard and the Queen,” he answered.

It was all the girls could do to keep up with the squirrel. As they ran, things flashed by that could not be: a horse with a horn in its head, a half-man, half-elk, looking over some plump berries, and an elephant, a giraffe, and a huge lion dining on tacos, discussing philosophy with a winged monkey.

“Amy, are we dreaming? These things cannot be!”

“They are real, Amanda.” The familiar voice jumped out at them as they huffed and puffed from the run. It was Juan, sitting on a tree stump, petting a very contented crocodile, who was on his back so Juan could pet his belly. “Oh, I see you are surprised,” said Juan. “Don’t be upset, this is the place where I am safe.”

From the brush, they could feel the eyes on them. The magnificent lion was watching to assure that Juan was safe. The girls approached their friend slowly. “This is Henry...he likes belly rubs,” Juan said, looking at the crocodile that seemed to be purring. “Up there is Randolph. He eats eggs and blows bubbles,” Juan informed them, gesturing to the towering figure of the lion.

“Why are you here, Juan?” Amy asked when the girls knelt next to him, hugging him happily.

“Because I am happy here with my friends. They keep me safe and never hurt me. Tell them, Picasso.”

The large squirrel leaped from a low branch to the leaves nearby. “It’s true, Amanda. Amy, it’s true. Juan is safe here. He will never be hurt here. The Wizard and the Queen will protect him forever. They come soon.” He talked funny, that squirrel.

“Juan, Juan, who hurts you? Why can’t you go home?” Amanda pleaded, so worried about her little friend.

“My step dad hits me, Amanda. Lots. He kept hitting me until I ran away. Randolph came for me. I rode on his back to Dawson’s Woods. Nobody will ever hurt me again. The Wizard and the Queen will make sure of that.”

“But who are the Wizard and the Queen?” Amy wanted to know. Just then trumpets sounded, and there was wonderful music all around. White lights exploded through the trees, and all of the animals, the strange and magical ones, and even the normal ones, ran and bowed down. The Wizard and the Queen had arrived.

“Psssst, Picasso, who are the Wizard and the Queen?” Amanda whispered, bowing so she could only see the ground.

“Behold, human, see their glory, the safe ones, the Wizard and the Queen.”

A magnificent splendor appeared as though from the sky. From a blinding flood of light came two figures. The light poured over them into the woods, and then, as though he just knew, Juan stood up. He stepped forward to the edge of the powerful light and he

extended his arms.

“I have to see.” Amy jumped up.

“No, Amy, don’t!” Picasso shouted out, but it was too late. Amanda was close behind her as they reached the almost angelic light and touched Juan, who was weeping. Amy wrapped her arms around him and felt his chest heave with sobs, and Amanda held his hand, looking at him.

Just then, it was all gone. The forest was not there...just the three children huddled together at the edge of the field with the two adults who were the Wizard and the Queen, the ones who would truly help Juan.

“Mrs. Morris!” Amy squealed in delight.

“Officer Henry!” Amanda recognized their old friend.

“You have done well, girls. Come here, Juan.” Juan broke from his friends and ran to Mrs. Morris, crying out loud from his sadness.

“It’s okay, girls,” Officer Henry said, as he picked up Juan so tenderly. Just behind them the girls could see his squad car and the school on the other side of the woods. Juan’s teacher and the policeman would take care of him now.

“Juan was right, Amy” said Amanda. “The Wizard and the Queen won’t let him be hurt any more.” They laughed and cried, knowing he was in the care of adults who really did care about him and would make sure he was safe. Safe forever now.

Story 6

LANCELOT'S BELT

***Value: A good turn is
returned with gratitude***

Edward and Phillip loved the forest near their village. It had been years since the brave King Arthur lead his mighty knights through these lands and made them safe as part of Camelot. So, all their lives, the boys loved to play in these enchanted woods and were thrilled to occasionally find a knife, the tip of a helmet or shield or some other artifact of those exciting days. Since they were children, their favorite game was “Knights of the Round Table”, where they took turns being the noble Lancelot or Sir Robin or King Arthur himself, slaying the dark enemy knights, the dragons or the evil wizard himself. Now, as they ran into the forest at age thirteen, those games never lost their thrill.

However, dangerous times had fallen upon the village where Edward and Phillip lived. Their parents worried about the boys playing in the forest. King Arthur did not control the forest any more. It had fallen into the hands of rough men, thieves, murderers and worse. Yes, worse. Evil things, deeply terrible beings, both natural and supernatural, haunted those woods, especially as night began to fall. Edward and Phillip only knew that they were scolded. “You boys stay out of those woods, especially at dusk.” But they went anyway. When you are thirteen, adventure is far more important than safety.

The boys ran laughing into the forest just as the sun began to dip. Nothing mattered more than to kill the dragon. Of course, there was no real dragon, but to them it was a deadly beast. They ran from tree to tree, jumping and laughing and swinging their sticks that had magically become mighty swords to smite the dragon and its evil henchmen.

“Take that from King Arthur, foul beast!” Edward declared bravely, swinging his mighty sword.

“Have at you demon from the pit!” Phillip sang out, leaping from a downed tree. The squirrels of the forest fled nimbly away not knowing they had become the evil trolls, henchmen of the dragon of the North Country. Their voices echoed throughout the forest. Eyes and ears, both friendly and unfriendly, listened attentively.

Just then Edward stopped with a gasp. Phillip ran into Edward, knocking him forward, then stood stunned as well. There on the ground lay a very real figure. It was a human, an adult, very large and long.

Phillip stepped forward carefully. The body did not move, but it was breathing. He laid face up, unconscious.

“What’s wrong with him, Phillip?” Edward asked fearfully. Phillip continued to inspect and then announced his findings proudly.

“His leg is pinned, see?” Phillip stepped forward and, indeed, the man’s left leg was directly under a branch that had clearly fallen as the man traveled. There was some blood, but the biggest problem was that branch. The man moaned but did not rouse.

The boys worked fast. Edward, the thinker, devised a series of lifts and levers just using rocks and logs nearby, and before long both boys lifted, and slowly the branch rose from the leg of the wounded man. As it rose, the man seemed to come to consciousness. The mysterious man did not speak but somehow comprehending, he moved his leg out. The tree fell back, but he was freed.

Edward was first to the man’s side, then Phillip, both helping him stand and then getting him to the path. The boys did not speak, but they worked without fear or fatigue, moving him along to the path to the edge of the forest on the far side from the village. Just then, the man’s hands moved. Patting the boys on the shoulder, he moved away from them, sending the signal he would go on alone. Before leaving he looked back and nodded and then he was gone.

Evil times returned. Raiders attacked. Edward found himself running into the woods with Phillip, this time retreating from terrible enemies. The village burned and screams were heard everywhere. Phillip cried out for his parents and sisters.

“No, Phillip!” Edward tried to stop him, but his friend ran back into the battle. Suddenly, a swarm of white horses flooded the camp. The glory of their armor was unmistakable.

“It’s Arthur!” the cry went up. It was true. Good King Arthur had vanquished the evil invaders once again.

“Bring those two boys forward!” came the loud command from the mounted figures standing in victory in the village. Strong hands pulled Edward and Phillip forward from the crowd of villagers, and they trembled in fear for their lives. “Lift your faces, young ones,” the boys heard the mighty king command. As they did, their eyes fell on his lovely face as he removed his helmet to look at them.

It was the man in the forest. The mighty Lancelot looked down on them with a beaming smile of gratitude for what they had done. He released his belt, the magical garment that had seen him through so many battles. To the gasps of even the king and the

knights, he handed it to Edward and to Phillip and said softly but firmly, “Thank you, good knights.” The boys knelt before their king as the heroic party thundered away, leaving the land safe again.

Story 7

PETE CLEANS UP

Value: Hygiene

Monday morning the barnyard was just bustling with excitement. The invitations to the big Christmas party were coming out today. Everybody wanted to go. Ralphie the Rooster announced that Owen the Owl would be releasing them at noon. Clarissa the Cow was already picking out her hat. Dennis the Dog knew that the food would be extra special this year.

“Oh, I hope I get to go. I do hope so,” Pete the Pig said, just jumping from hoof to hoof with excitement. He could barely wait in his sty when Ralphie the Rooster went around with the invitations. Pete waited with barely contained anticipation as Clarissa the Cow got hers, Dennis the Dog got his, Harriet the Horse got hers, and finally Teresa the Turkey got hers, but no invitation was given to Pete the Pig.

Pete was just heartbroken. All his friends came over as he cried for being left out. “I just don’t know what happened!” Pete said with big pig tears on his pig cheeks.

“Well, honey let’s find out,” said Teresa the Turkey in a comforting way. It was a little hard to understand her – there was always a bit of a gobble in everything she said. She called to Ralphie, “Ralphie, come over here, Hon...why didn’t Pete the Pig get an invitation to the Christmas Party?”

“Well, let me look,” Ralphie responded, looking through his clipboard with all the invitation lists carefully clipped there. “Pete, Pete, Pete the Pig. Oh, yes, here we are. Owen the Owl says that everybody coming to the party must meet the minimum standards to look and smell nice to be admitted.”

“Minimum standards? How can I meet those? I am just a little pig,” complained Pete.

“I will help you,” announced Dennis the Dog. He woofed and scratched himself, considering the problem, and then sat up and pointed and announced the answer. “Nice clothes. That’s what you need Pete, nice clothes.”

The word spread fast all over the barnyard to find Pete the Pig the best clothes for the party. Clarissa the Chicken donated her best feathers, but they made Pete sneeze. Paulie the Pony had some spare fur from his mane, but that made Pete dance around from the tickling. Finally, Morris the Mouse snuck into the farmer’s bedroom and got Pete a nice shirt and shoes. Pete tried and tried to make those work, but when he presented himself to Ralphie the Rooster for approval, his pig body stuck out everywhere and he just kept falling down.

“I know what will help,” announced Harriett the Horse, after pawing the ground and thinking. “You need finishing school.”

Before long the barnyard was overrun with activity, being set up to provide the finest finishing school for poor, confused Pete the Pig. The lesson in how to walk and sit down properly went very slowly. Harriet the Horse just knew that a good trot would do the trick, but every time Pete the Pig tried a nice bouncy trot, his big hips kept hitting things and knocking them over.

“No, no, no,” Clarissa the Chicken clucked. “Pete must wear an eye patch, walk with a cane and smoke a pipe.” The cane was the easiest to find, because there were lots of branches in the barnyard, but each time Pete walked with it, the stick broke. Pete was such a fat little pig. The eye patch made him dizzy, and the pipe smoke made him feel sick to his big piggy tummy.

“Oh, nothing works. I don’t know what I am going to do. I will never get to the party this way,” moaned Pete, back at his sty with his family.

“Petey, come here.” The little pig heard a comforting voice speak softly to him. It was his mother, the big sow at the end of the pigpens. She wallowed in the very best mud there and Pete went to her and sat on her hoof to listen. “Petey, you are the best pig you can be. You love garbage to eat, you wallow in mud better than anyone I know and your oink is especially pretty to everyone in our pen. But you are going out of your home when you go to the party. You have to be like the others at the party. And there is a problem.”

“What is it, Momma?” Pete asked, so eager to learn.

“You smell like a pig, Pete,” said Pete’s mommy. “And we love that, but to go to the party you have to clean up. Go to the stream where Farmer Smyth is today. He will wash you.”

So Pete the Pig obeyed his mommy and went to the stream. Farmer Smyth, knowing of the party, washed Pete with soap and lots of scrubbing. Oh, the squeals and cries that could be heard all over the farm! In the end, Pete was so clean he hardly knew himself. Ralphie the Rooster said Pete was the cleanest piggy he had ever seen and gave him the invitation to the party. Pete went and had a wonderful time dancing

and playing games and eating all of the wonderful food. When it was over, he covered himself again with the ooze from his sty and was a happy little pig again. He had learned a very big lesson about the importance of hygiene.

Story 8

THE BOY WHO WAS SUDDENLY THERE

***Value: The dangers of the
Internet***

One minute the chair next to Sandra was empty and then it wasn't. She leaned over to get a book and when she sat up, there he was. He turned to her and smiled a very mischievous smile and a little squeak of surprise came from her voice.

"Who are you?" she whispered to the strange boy, hoping not to attract the teacher's attention.

"Who are you?" he answered in a mocking tone.

"Where did you come from?" she asked cautiously.

"Nowhere," he whispered, "I was just suddenly here."

"Today, class, we are going to talk about how money is printed," the teacher said loudly, getting everyone's attention. The boy who was suddenly there turned to Sandra and whispered:

"Watch this." Like a shot the boy was on his feet and in front of the class, taking the pointer from the teacher and leaping onto the desk.

"Hey, who are.....?" the teacher objected, but he moved too fast. His hands moved with the speed of

electricity. He waved the pointer and images appeared on the wall – money presses, and they were moving. Voices boomed out, lectures made by famous people telling the story. Encyclopedia pages appeared like magic and flooded to the desks of the students, and three dimensional diagrams floated so close to the students they could reach out and almost feel them, except they weren't real...just images.

The students made startled and delighted yelps of appreciation, and it was all so magical and amazing. Then, with a flash, it was gone and the boy who was suddenly there stood by the door.

“Hey, who are.....?” the teacher tried to ask, but he was gone too fast.

Sandra dashed into the hall frantically looking for her brother Joshua. She turned the corner and collided with him, almost knocking him down. “Joshua,” she gasped out of breath, “did you see it? Did you see.....him?”

“Yes, I did, we have to hurry,” Joshua said with a frightened look on his face.

“Where did you see him, Joshua?” Sandra asked.

“Everywhere, Sandra,” he answered. “In the gym, the cafeteria, near the football field, in the library. Everywhere I looked, he was there...he was just suddenly there.”

They ran as much as they could for all the traffic. Everywhere they looked the world seemed so full of noise and clutter.

“Joshua!” a voice stopped them. It was Megan. “I wanted to answer you...yes, I do love you.”

“I didn’t say that Megan,” Joshua answered, confused. “Who told you that?”

“Well, somebody did and he sure looked like you. It was some boy. I don’t know who it was, Joshua. I am so frightened. Who was it? He was just suddenly there.”

They didn’t walk, they ran. It seemed to be everywhere. “We have to get home, Sandra,” gasped Joshua, running. “We can’t let it take over our family.” They ran but suddenly Sandra stopped.

“There he is,” she gasped, pointing into the science lab. The teacher was in the corner staring in mute amazement or shock; it was hard to tell which. And there he was, in the middle of the room, waving his arms and making images appear and disappear so

fast it was hard to keep up. No mistaking whom it was, although he didn't really have a name. It was that boy who was suddenly there.

“STOP!” Sandra yelled. The students looked at her for a moment, but it was like their eyes were glazed over. Joshua ran into the room frantically waving his arms and running right at the boy. Images scattered and began to scramble. Dinosaurs with human heads and hands. American presidents with bodies of birds. Famous inventors with hairstyles of Marilyn Monroe.

The boy who was suddenly there made himself impossible to keep up with. His feet moved over the furniture, making every room his.

“Who are you?” shouted Joshua.

The boy had scampered over the bookshelves, never disturbing a real book, and he stopped before he leapt away and looked at Joshua. “Well, who are you and won't you tell me your address and phone number and, oh, yes, your credit card number will do also.” A laugh erupted from his skinny frame that was both frightening and addictive to listen to.

“JOSHUA!” Sandra called out, panic in her voice. “We have to get home now. Before HE gets there.” The

two ran with all their strength to their home and burst into the house. Too late. They got to the back to find the twins sitting at the boy's feet. They were listening to him with all their attention, so much that they never heard their older siblings enter.

“And you don't need real friends, children,” he was saying. “Just me. Look at these photos. These are fun and good for you to learn about.”

“NOOOOOOOOOO!!!!” Joshua heard himself say. His body shot across the room, propelled by something even more powerful than the boy who was suddenly there. He shot like a cannonball, propelled by his love for his brother and sister who sat in the boy's terrible spell.

The impact was like a train wreck. The boy who was suddenly there gasped and fell under Joshua, captured, unable to move and get away. The twins just saw legs and feet flying as Joshua tackled the boy, sending papers and images flying everywhere. Sandra quickly gathered the twins to her, giving them real human contact and got them outside where there were birds and flowers and oxygen.

When she returned, her mom and dad were in the room staring down. Mom looked confused, but Daddy

was holding the boy by the head as Joshua twisted his ears.

“Now you will tell – no more lies, no more twists and turns,” demanded Joshua.

“No, Nooooooooooooo.” The boy resisted, wanting to get away but not able to do that and keep his ears.

“You will tell now, you strange thing that confuses people, giving them truths so many times, then mixing them with falsehood. You wonderful, terrible thing. Who are you? Tell use your name, all of it, your full name,” demanded Joshua’s father.

“It’s only one name, sir, but you will know it well. If not yet, in lightning speed you will know it.”

“Then say it you or you will not get your ears back.”

“It isn’t many words. My name is easy; it’s just one word,” he said, catching Joshua’s eyes and holding his gaze. “Remember this name because it won’t go away,” he said, moving his gaze even to the older generation. “And that word is,” he whispered, almost a hiss now, “Internet”.

Story 9

THE LITTLEST WIZARD

Value: Patience

Each year the village of Nattahnam sent their most mischievous child to the mountain to learn to become a wizard. The wise old Wizard Nilrem lived in mysterious caves and magnificent splendor from the many rewards his magic had brought him. But Nilrem had a soft place in his old heart for Nattahnam, and he agreed to teach one boy a year the mysterious crafts of becoming a master wizard. Almost always, the children came back with fingers burnt and a habit of hiding under their mommy's skirts until they were 20 after they went to the mountain.

“This year it will be different,” swore Leopold. Leopold had been selected for the honor of going into training up on Sirap Mountain where Nilrem lived. The lessons went slowly at first. Leopold was impatient with the magic lessons, but days passed into months and somehow Leopold learned.

“You have done well, little wizard,” wise Nilrem chuckled, as they practiced a simple spell which caused tree frogs in their nearby forest to sing lovely opera tunes. “By this time last year, your friend Jakob had run home crying when he cast a spell into the mirror, trying to see how handsome he was, and turned himself into a duckling.”

“Yes, Master Nilrem. I remember when he returned, late at night. We often wondered where that quacking was coming from.” They both laughed at poor Jakob. “But Master, show me to cast a big spell.”

“No Leopold, you must have patience.”

But Leopold did not have patience. He studied the spell books and watched his master as they traveled the worlds and beyond the worlds on wizard business. One deep winter day, they stood atop Sirap Mountain looking down at the admiring villagers.

“Oh, great Nilrem, display your power,” the people begged. Even Nilrem was capable of being flattered. With a flourish, his arms shot above him, waving his massive cane, and he spoke the spell: “Raz-ter-Lordes-el-sah.” The sky burst into thousands of burning lights, all sparking and exploding, raining glorious flames down on to the villagers, where the sparks landed in the snow and sprang up dandelions.

“NOW, GREAT LEOPOLD WILL SHOW HIS POWER!” the littlest wizard suddenly proclaimed without being asked. His little arms waved over his head like they were twigs in a breeze, and his high squeaky voice squeaked out the spell: “Raz-ter-Lordes-el-sah.”

The sky did not burst with fire. But from the little stick that Leopold used for a cane, a spark sputtered then squirted out and flew in a high arch over the village. It finally landed at the feet of his parents below. But instead of hitting a dandelion, it pierced the ground, searing a perfectly round pinprick of a tunnel that kept burning until it burst out on the other side of the world.

Laughter flooded the valley, and Leopold pouted and retreated to his alcove to pout some more.

“Don’t be discouraged, little wizard. Your spells are effective, but you must grow into them. Patience is the mightiest magic that adds the power to the spells,” counseled the wise Nilrem. In the weeks ahead, Leopold stepped out too many times without asking.

Each time he saw the mighty wizard produce such powerful magic, he repeated the spells just as he had learned. When Nilrem captured an army of evil spirits in twines of pure ivory, casting them into the sea, Leopold stepped up and faced just one foul-smelling beast and spoke the spell. Instead of being captured, the evil thing just laughed and picked up Leopold and ate him. Oh, yes, it took several clever spells for Nilrem to retrieve his student from that sticky belly and cast the spirit into the sea with his companions.

But Leopold was determined. “That’s good that you are determined and stubborn, young wizard,” complimented Nilrem. “Determination is the boiling water from which the strong tea of patience is brewed.”

One fall day the ugliest danger came to the peaceful village of Nattahnam.

Leopold bolted from his bed at that first terrible roar. He rushed into the hall to find Nilrem already flying through the gold-lined halls of his castle with his wizard garb in place. Leopold joined his mentor on the balcony and cried out at what he saw. Looking down on Nattahnam from the balcony, a massive dragon stood over the village. So tremendous was the beast that its giant legs stood on either side of the village as he towered over it, spewing fire.

“It’s Hsub. She returns after her 5000-year sleep. I thought I had turned her into stone for longer than that,” moaned Nilrem. But Hsub was shattering the air with her angry roars. In a flash Nilrem was on the balcony wall and poised to strike. “Stay here, little wizard, do not engage this beast. She is too much for you.” And with a loud cry, Nilrem attacked.

The battle was furious. His magic was powerful, but so was hers. Each time he struck her, changed her or threw her down, she charged back. Her skin was crusted with the rock that had been her home. Leopold was frozen, terrified, as he watched his master get picked up and thrown into the hillside. He was lit on fire, only to extinguish himself and join the battle again.

“He’s losing,” Leopold muttered. He could hold back no longer. He leapt from the balcony and slowly made his way down the hillside. Hsub and Nilrem did not see Leopold, who made it to a large rock just underneath the towering left wing of the mighty dragon above. And there, Leopold used his two best qualities: his perfect eyesight and his tiny size. Searching the dragon’s belly, he spotted the one almost impossible-to-see spot that was not covered. It was a round space, no more than inches in size, just over her heart.

Just then, fire erupted from the dragon and filled every inch of the sky just over Leopold. Her cries were awful. Leopold heard his master cast a spell, but it was cut short. There was a crash just between Hsub’s feet. Leopold watched in horror as his master fell wounded to the ground. Nilrem lay prone at the monster’s feet, moving but unable to defend himself. She was poised to kill him.

Leopold had to act. Stepping out from his hiding place, he snuck to a spot just between the dragon's feet. Still she did not see him, because he moved so carefully and so patiently. From that spot he took aim, lifted his tiny staff and yelled in his high soprano voice: "Raz-ter-Lordes-el-sah".

Fire sprang from the end of his staff. Not an explosion, but a thin stream, shot out just like the one before. But it obeyed his eyesight and flew straight up and struck the underside of the evil dragon. It found that exact spot and, just as before, it burrowed into her flesh, a perfectly round hole burning directly on target to her heart where it burned right through it and burst out the other side of Hsub. The monster fell to the ground and died with a horrible crash.

He had killed her. His master recovered and granted him the title of Apprentice Master Wizard. All over the valley and even in his hometown of Nattahnam, Leopold was a hero. But best of all, he had learned that magic isn't in the spell, it is in the wizard. It isn't his power that makes the magic wonderful, it's his patience.

Story 10

THE WIZARD OF BASEBALL

***Value: Being popular
versus true friendship***

Donny was one of those boys whom everyone said “had it all”. Looks, brains, talent and money...all of those things seemed to fall on Donny like rain. Above all, he had an absolutely amazing talent at baseball. From pitching to fielding to hitting, even as a child his talent seemed to be on the same level as a New York Yankee, which what he was sure he would be one day. In fact, his nickname all over town, at school, church, everywhere, was Donny the Wizard of Baseball.

Everybody liked Donny, too. He was easily the most popular kid in his class, in the school, and, in fact, the whole town. A few who were very jealous of Donny suggested he was the most popular kid in the entire universe.

“Donny?” his friend Isaac once asked him, “how popular do you think you are?”

“Isaac, I am as popular as a person can be and why not? I am the Wizard of Baseball”.

Why not, indeed? Donny towered over the other boys by at least a foot. He stood tall with a perfectly postured spine. His chest was big and his skin was tan. He had wavy blond hair and perfect teeth. Nothing was outside of his grasp. Donny’s family had owned the largest manufacturing company in the state for over 100 years, so money never was far from

Donny. When he went to restaurants or out with friends, all of the expenses were always on Donny. Merchants extended credit to Donny, which never happened to other kids his age, but they did it for Donny because, they said, “Nothing but the best for the Wizard of Baseball.” The bills were always delivered to his parents, and they were always paid in full.

Donny did love the attention. At the games, people would chant his name, especially after he hit a home run, which he often did. But there was that one boy Donny always noticed. His name was Isaac, and Isaac never seemed impressed. Isaac was always working. He had small jobs on the ball team but did not play. But it was Isaac that was always cleaning or picking up after others. After games, when all of Donny’s friends were going on ahead to the party, Donny met Isaac and they got to know each other.

“Isaac, you will come to the party, won’t you? I want you to,” Donny would tell him, as he got ready after the game.

“You have tons of friends, Donny.”

“Isaac, I don’t understand you. You never let me buy for you. You don’t seem amazed by how I do out there. And yet you come in here and we talk. You

have tons of friends, don't you, Isaac?"

"Just three, Donny, and you are one of them."

Everything about Isaac puzzled Donny: his quiet nature, his total lack of interest in Donny's talent, looks, popularity or money, but even more how valuable the time they shared was. Of his hundreds of admirers, Isaac was the friend Donny valued most, and Isaac didn't even admire the Wizard of Baseball.

The accident was terrible. And it happened while Donny was doing what he loved the most. Donny was running after yet another of his many grand-slam hits. It was a rare hit that was not a home run, and Donny was running full speed toward home when the baseball, the catcher and Donny all collided. It was a horrible collision. Donny was hurt very badly.

Donny drifted in and out of consciousness for several days. Each time he looked up through his hazy gaze, made groggier by the drugs he had to be on for pain, there were no adoring fans, no crowds of faithful friends and followers. He squinted that first time, and then he saw the face that was always there every time he awoke. It was Isaac.

Donny's parents met Isaac on the third visit he made to see Donny.

"Are you Isaac?" said Donny's father.

"Yes, sir."

"I wanted to meet you. To tell you the truth, son, Donny is a little confused about you."

"Yes, sir, why?"

"You have been up here every day since he was hurt haven't you, Isaac?"

"Yes, sir, it's important."

"Isaac, you have been more faithful than we have. Donny will never play baseball again. The accident will leave scars on his face. That's all very hard for us to take. He had big plans for himself: a career in the major leagues and endorsements. We were sponsoring him for a very large career. That's all over now. His friends don't come by either. Donny is aware of all of this, but there is just one thing he asks about."

"What is it, sir? I would be happy to help out."

"He asks for you, Isaac. The Wizard of Baseball, with all his abilities has one big lesson he learned from all this, and you taught it to him, Isaac."

Isaac was stunned. He had no idea his small help for his friend was that valuable to Donny. “What lesson, sir?” he said emotionally.

“That you taught him what it is to be a true friend. For all his popularity, now when he needs someone the most, here you are. He has learned that the popularity of hundreds isn’t worth a thing next to the devotion of a good friend.”

Story 11

MAGIC MOM

*Value: Love your
parents*

Simon had magic. Amy ran to her room to play with Simon every chance she got. He was much better than other children's imaginary friends, because he had lots of magic. Amy sometimes thought she liked Simon even better than real friends or her family. She went to him even more than to Mommy or Daddy, because they always made rules and lectured Amy.

Simon could change things. "What should we change today, Amy?" he would often say. But she never had to say, because Simon always knew what to do. He changed Fred, the family Irish setter, into a wonderful magical bird that could fly and take Amy away to a place where parents didn't yell at her. She loved that game until she got yelled at for riding the dog.

Amy played on the floor of the kitchen as Mommy worked on supper. Simon was there, but Mommy didn't know it. He was magic like that. Suddenly, Simon jumped up and ran all around the kitchen, around Mommy's skirt, saying his spells and waving his hands. Magic dust flew from his hands all over Mommy, and then there was a wonderful flash and Mommy was tall and skinny and beautiful and dressed in a long, flowing white dress.

“What are you making, Mommy?” Amy asked the beautiful enchantress. Suddenly, Amy was not at home but in a magical castle full of wonderful, strange beasts and fairies, and Mommy was stirring a big pot that had sparks flying from the top. She was the good white witch, Momelda, making a magic potion to bring peace to all the wars in the world. “What goes into your magic potion, Momelda?” Amy said, skipping over in the magic red shoes that had appeared on her feet.

“It’s a powerful magic, Amy. It will destroy the Black Ogre so he can’t eat Fred tonight. It has skin from a frog and kitty cat meows and two million jellybeans and three bumble bees. See, it is already sizzling.”

And it was. The potion popped and threw swirls of steam into the air that formed into fairy girls who dove back into the pot. What wonderful magic this was. Amy giggled and looked over as Simon jumped to the counter and spoke over the pinto beans in the can. Suddenly, each bean grew arms and ugly legs and a nasty snout and began to prowl the countertop, snorting and making such a mess.

“SNORKLEDORFS!” screamed Momelda, who was formerly known as Mommy. She was quick with her wand and spells. The Snorkledorfs scrambled up the

side of the pot, sizzling from its heat and falling down on the tiled floor of the kitchen, giggling and running up the cabinets for more fun.

“Fred, Fred!” screamed Amy, running and giggling from the kitchen. “Help Mommy with the Snorkledorfs.” In the living room stood Simon, and he was looking toward the front door. The front door stood wide open, letting the mosquitoes in, and a magical fog poured through the pillars of the castle that had appeared there.

“Fred is a little busy now,” Simon said, with the funniest laugh ever. He jumped up on the sofa back, crouching like a monkey. Suddenly, through the door burst a mighty steed, huge and noble, belching smoke from his nose, but with very confused eyes. It was Fred! But he was humongous! He stood easily 7 feet tall and had muscles everywhere. Fred pranced with large leaping steps all around the entry hall.

Fred looked very confused. How had he become a prancing stallion? But he held his head up and snorted and charged into the living room, knocking over Amy’s Barbie dollhouse. Then Amy looked up, and on Fred’s back was a towering knight, dressed in full battle armor, holding his angry horse barely in check and charging into battle.

Amy, squealing with excitement, jumped up on the fireplace and danced and clapped, looking up at the big, dangerous knight looking from left to right with his hand on his sword. Just then, from the bathroom, the black dragon appeared. Simon rode on him and then jumped off just before the battle.

Oh, the fire and spitting that that shot out of the big, ugly dragon in their living room! It spat fire that singed Fred's fur and made him yelp. The knight turned his steed and charged the dragon, swinging and slashing his sword. Finally the nasty dragon lay dead, squashing Amy's Barbie collection under its smelly body.

Amy looked up at her hero, the big strong knight in his armour so shiny and pretty. Suddenly, from the kitchen, Momelda the beautiful princess witch appeared and sighed so loudly it scared Fred. "My hero!" Momelda said with a voice full of love. Just then the wonderful knight took off his helmet.

"Daddy!" squealed Amy, and her handsome dad swooped up Momelda and rode the huge, scared dog out the front door and off into the sunset.

Suddenly, there was a whirl of magic dust and wind cleaning up the mess, and then with a huge

WHOOOOSH, Amy blinked and she was on the floor of the kitchen playing with her Barbie dolls.

“Oh, it’s beef stroganoff tonight, sweetie,” Mommy said in her plain housedress over at the stove. Amy smiled, knowing the secret.

“I love you so much, Mommy. You are a wonderful princess and Daddy is our hero.”

“He sure is, Amy,” Mommy sighed, puzzling over a pinto bean that seemed to have legs and a snout. “He sure is.”

Story 12

ROBIN HOOD AND THE PIRATE

Value: Unselfishness

Captain Blood yelled orders at his murderous band of cutthroat pirates as they approached the tiny cove on the shores of Britain. As the long, black ship approached and the sailors secured it, Captain Blood spotted his old friend on shore.

“Avast, Robin!”

Robin Hood and his Merry Men leaped from their camp near the beach and ran out to meet their old friends. Robbers and thieves like them, the two bands often shared a meal and their many stories of adventures and battles won. The Merry Men swarmed aboard the pirate ship to greet their friends and help them bring their pirate loot ashore.

The party was tremendous that night around the campfire. The pirates all broke out their most colorful costumes and jewelry and pranced around, displaying how rich they looked and how much they liked their clothes and fancy things. Little John laughed at their antics, but as they looked around, the Merry Men smirked at their simple green uniforms they wore all the time.

“Robin, your men dress so drably. You steal great treasures from the king. Outfit them in fine things. Make them proud to serve in your band. Come, let’s examine your fortune,” said Captain Blood.

The pirates all staggered over to where the chests that held Robin's fortunes were stored. But when the chests were opened the pirates gasped.

"They are empty. Robin, you have been robbed!" gasped the pirates. The Merry Men laughed with such delight, the pirates drew their swords in alarm.

"Stow your weapons, good friends," Robin laughed, patting Captain Blood on the shoulder. "No robberies here. We gave it all away. We gave it to the good villagers who live nearby. They used it to feed their families and care for their communities. It is what we like to do."

The pirates were stunned, as though they had met a whale that could fly or saw the stars of the sky explode. Giving away their treasure? Unheard of.

"And your men never fight and kill each other for more than their share of the loot?" Pirate Pete asked with confusion.

"Never," answered Little John. "There are no shares. We keep just enough for supplies and all goes to the people. We are here to serve them."

“Aaaaaaaaarrrrrrrrr. But the wealth of your battles is all yours. You, too, can have all the glory you see on us in our clothes and gold and silver things. These are the rewards of the pirate’s life. What about your futures, your wants and desires?”

“We want for nothing,” responded Robin. “We need nothing, we are simple and therefore wealthy.”

“You talk in riddles. This is foolishness. We must escape your madness. To the caves, men,” ordered the surly pirate king. The Merry Men waved to them as they saw and heard them marauding into the forest, up the paths to the hills where their secret caves were hidden, where inside, all of their fortune was stashed after each successful war and taking of treasure.

The Merry Men busied themselves with camp life and with comforting the animals of the woods and the simple village folk who were frightened by the rough men of the sea. Just then, the squirrels went running and the bunnies bolted from being fed by hand to hide in their bunny holes. A tortured cry went out from high in the hills, easy to understand despite the distance.

“ROBBED!!!! WE HAVE BEEN ROBBED!!!!”

It was a long night, listening to the crying and wailing of the pirates in the hills. It quieted before dawn. Captain Blood was the most desolate in his grief. He knew Robin and his men would never have done this. Only a former crewmate would know this location. Mad Morgan, the vilest of all, did this. Only he could have been such a traitor.

Slowly, the pirates made their way down the mountain toward their ship. "I must bid farewell to my friend Robin," the Captain announced, sending his men on and donning simpler clothes to enter the village without alarm. As the captain walked about unnoticed, he saw something that amazed him. Everywhere he looked the people were coming out and greeting Robin Hood and his men. Mothers brought out wonderful food and businessmen gave them goods and wealth, sometimes more than they needed or wanted.

Children played at their feet, staging made-up games of battles with the Merry Men, winning or losing all within minutes, then getting up and running away with delighted giggles. Young girls made garlands of lilies and wove dandelions in their hair, never missing a chance to hug a neck or to give a smile to the heroic thieves.

“Good Captain, hello,” he heard just then. The happy and youthful voice of Robin called to the pirate as he recognized the captain even without his pirate costumes. The two friends strolled along the village paths, and each time a child ran up to play with Robin, a parent or merchant gave him a warm handshake, or a young girl gave him a hug or something pretty to put on, the Captain just stared in mute wonder.

“I have learned a big lesson from you today, my friend,” the Captain said to Robin as he prepared to depart and return to his ship.

“What is that, Captain Blood?” asked Robin.

“That it is you who is the wealthy one. By being selfish with my wealth, I have become the pauper and by being generous with your wealth, you have riches uncounted that will never fade or be used up: the love, admiration, companionship and generosity of people who love you.”

Story 13

THE GREAT GODS

Value: Humility

Once upon a time great gods ruled the world. This was before our time, but back then they were mighty and magical and could do anything. There was mighty Zeus, King of the Gods and Hera, his wife. Athena ruled as Goddess of War and Poseidon was God of the Sea. Oh, they were so very wonderful and heroic and powerful. And all of them loved nothing more than to be worshipped by humans.

“All worship me, for I am the King of the Gods,” Zeus bellowed from Mount Olympus, home of the Gods.

“You pompous fool!” Hera retorted, with a fury that stirred the clouds. “They nod at you, but true worship is reserved for me, whom they adore.”

“I command the love of the humans.” Poseidon erupted from his perch nearest the sea. “For all who give honor to the sea honor me, and no living thing can exist without the sea.”

These fights raged as they invaded every possible part of the humans’ quiet lives to put on a show of power and gain the momentary joy of praise and worship. If a group of weary sailors was struggling with the mighty sea all day with no success, Poseidon would rise from the depths and shower fish upon their decks, often sinking the boat. He was always hurt that the humans were ungrateful.

“I have 12 more prayers today than any god. I am truly loved.” Apollo often boasted but, indeed, all of the gods were vain. They carefully counted their worshippers and prayers and strutted around Olympus like proud peacocks if their count was the greatest that day. If, by some tragic blow, a god was not the most beloved, every scheme and trick to draw in more praise, worship and prayers was employed to swing the winning number over and give that god or goddess true bragging rights.

One god alone cared nothing for the competition for most-loved. And that little god was Zozo. So unpraised was Zozo that his name never made it into the great poems and tales of the times. Zozo was God of What People Need, and it was he that would cause a small rain when the crops were sickly, bring luck just when it was needed or a tickle a child to make him laugh, just when a desperate soul needed to hear that laugh.

Zozo was seldom seen on Olympus, where the gods went to be glorious. “Zozo, why don’t you dwell with the other gods on Olympus, so your prayers could be counted and you would be admired for the great love the people have for you?” asked Minerva, the young

daughter of Arnesius, who was the cobbler in the town of Braxus, where Zozo so often dwelt. For a young girl, and a human at that, she was unusually bright and very much at ease with the homely god.

“Because this is where I am most needed. I am the God of What People Need, and I cannot know that unless I am right here with you and your parents and all the humans who need me, Minerva.” Minerva ran to Zozo and hugged his neck, a prize so treasured on Olympus that every god would trade oceans full of treasure for just one hug on the neck from a young human child.

The flood that struck Braxus was truly terrible. The people cried out, desperate for the gods to send help. Their cries ascended to Olympus.

“Zeus,” counseled Cupid, “if you save the people of Braxus, surely your worship and praise count will soar above all others. See, even now, Apollo, Aphrodite, Poseidon, Hades and even Hera rush earthward to aid them and show their mighty power. You must hurry. Go now. Zeus roared with agony at the idea of being beaten in this hour so golden with a chance to excel and defeat the others at gathering praise.

He would go to Braxus and show his wonderful power.

And what a show it was. The people cowered in their ruined huts or under trees on tiny makeshift rafts as the gods came rushing in with a magnificent explosion of fire and power that could not be matched. Zeus caused lightning to fire from his hands. Hera waved her fingers and wonderful colors sparkled amongst the ruins of the city. Apollo, Poseidon, and many others strode about sending storms, waves, locusts, frogs and every imaginable miracle to strike each other, and so humiliate their brother and sister gods and inspire love for themselves in the people.

All through the display of divine self-love and ego, Zozo worked. While the giant gods strutted about, echoing their greatness against the mountains and forcing the people to bow down, Zozo fixed houses, healed children, rescued chickens, and found livestock. The people worked hard side by side with him, amazed at this god with all the powers of the great ones but able to shoulder their worries and be the God of What People Need.

Suddenly, a figure dressed all in black from head-to-toe, with a big black hood, stood in the midst of the gods right in the middle of Braxus.

“It’s Abacus, the God of Counting. He knows the number of prayers and worshippers...he keeps the numbers,” Aphrodite remarked, as she helped Zozo clear fallen trees from Minerva’s family farm.

All of the gods begged Abacus to declare them the truly great god of Braxus and the one who received the most worship.

“NO!” Abacus said firmly. “It is none of you gods with your bragging and fire shows who truly deserve praise and prayers. It’s this one -- Zozo.” A gasp went up from the people and the gods. “For he knows that to truly lead is to serve, and he works without praise, with humility. It is Zozo’s humility that truly makes him the greatest of all of the gods.”

Story 14

TRANQUIL- ITY LAKE

Value: Courage

Shahira and Romulus had been lions at Tranquility Lake since they were cubs. As cubs they learned well the values all animals of the lake cherished. The lake provided comfort, food and peace to all who lived near it. It was to be protected and cherished.

“Mom, why don’t we kill the elk or the deer that live at Tranquility Lake?” Romulus asked when he was beginning to learn to hunt.

“Those are our neighbors, Romulus. We always care for our own. We always protect those who live in our community.” His mother taught him well.

But Romulus found plenty of adventure elsewhere in the vast wilderness all around them. His sister, Shahira, laughed at him as he charged about, trying to growl and roar like Daddy. She went on hunting expeditions with him when they became young adult lions, but she was far less impulsive in her choice of games. Where Romulus was happy to aggravate a fledgling jackal and chase it all about until it turned and fought, Shahira quickly saw danger, maybe before it was truly there, and retreated behind her brother to let him get scratched on the nose and learn his lesson.

The wisdom of age didn't come right away to Romulus. He grew into a mighty beast, large and muscular, swift and cunning in his hunting skills but also bold, cocky, and proud. He loved bragging about his many exploits. Shahira worried so for her brother when he left the safety of Tranquility Lake for adventure and excitement. "Come with me, Sister," he would beg her. "Together we will chase the big game, challenge the mighty and rule even more lands far from our sweet lake home."

But Shahira stayed close to home, close to her new cubs to care for them and protect them. She delighted in his stories when he brought food home for his family and hers, too. "You should have seen how they ran when I charged the buffalo. My roar chills their blood with fear," Romulus boasted, so full of pride in his might and power.

The power of his wisdom did not keep up with his pride and strength of body. He thought how easy it would have been to frighten or harm the little cat-like creature with the stripe down its back. He didn't understand that spray, though, when the skunk covered him with it in defense. When the awful smell got to his nose, he just roared in unhappiness. Shahira laughed a deep tummy laugh at her nasty-smelling brother, but she felt sadness at how lonely

he must be, having to live way at the other end of the lake away from everybody until his stinky fur aired out.

Then one night, Tranquility Lake was under attack. The fierce wolves descended on the peaceful lake with a fury. The cries of their neighbors roused Romulus and Shahira in their beds. Instantly, Romulus charged into the battle, his blood boiling with anger and aggression to be used to defend their home. Shahira made a shield between the battle and her cubs, pushing them back into hiding and protection.

The wolves had attacked before, but Romulus had always defeated them. This time they were many in number. The battle raged for what seemed like hours. Romulus pounced and clawed and bit and flung wolf bodies again and again, but they just kept coming. Their bites began to harm him. Shahira, from hiding, could hear his wails as he took more and more damaging wounds.

He felt himself going down. *This cannot be*, he thought, as his powerful paws and legs failed him. His view was hazy with sweat and blood as he dropped to the ground, too wounded to fight on, and he saw the wolves charging toward him to end his life.

Just then Shahira was everywhere. Her roar was even fiercer than Romulus' roar had ever been. Her roar was full of love for her brother and her motherly instinct to protect. She moved so swiftly, no wolf could respond. Her attack was so sudden, so angry and powerful, that their numbers were no match for her. Again and again the wolves scattered as she pounced and downed one after the other. All the cubs could see from their shelter were wolf bodies being flung into the air to land on bushes or badly hurt far away from Romulus.

When they fled, their yelps were heard in every niche of Tranquility Lake. The cubs came out to help Shahira care for their wounded Romulus.

“Shahira, you are one hundred times more courageous than I,” Romulus said gratefully, as she cared for his wounds.

“No, Brother, I was full of fear as I attacked them. But I could not let them kill my brother. I love you too much to let that happen. My need to protect you and my children was more powerful than my fear.”

“Then you have shown me what true courage is, Sister,” the mighty lion concluded. “Courage is not

being fearless but conquering your fears in service to a noble cause.”

Story 15

TREASURES IN THE ATTIC

Value: Theft, saving

Kimmie and Anna loved to hunt around in the old boxes and trunks in the attic. Mommy said there are things up there that go back generations. Once, Granddad told them there was a trunk with magic in it from King Solomon's courts. But Granddad told a lot of stories.

One day, Anna found a trunk they had never seen before. She opened it and it was full of colorful scarves and odd books in another language. Then at the bottom, she found a pretty ceramic bottle with a stopper.

"Maybe it's perfume. Let's see what's in it!" exclaimed Kimmie, full of excitement. Then she pulled the stopper out. But it wasn't perfume. A belch of blue, stinky smoke came pouring out, and the bottle got so hot that Kimmie dropped it.

"Hey, watch it, that's fragile," a voice rang out. The smoke cleared and there stood a tiny little person waving his arms, standing on the top of a closed chest nearby. "Whew, that smoke gets smellier each time I come out of there," the tiny man said with disgust, waving his arms. "You would think a Genie would get better smelling smoke!"

"Did you say Genie?" said Kimmie with awe.

“Yeah, that’s right. My name is Kevin,” the tiny man said.

“Like in Aladdin? Do we get three wishes like he did?” said Anna hopefully.

“Everybody knows about the three wishes,” said Kevin the Genie. “OK, OK, yes, you get three wishes...don’t waste them.”

“Each?” squealed Kimmie.

The Genie looked at Anna in surprise and was outraged. “She’s a grabby one, isn’t she? What are your names?”

“We are sorry, Mr. Genie,” said Anna.

“Kevin.”

“We are sorry, Genie Kevin. I am Anna and this is Kimmie. We are so surprised and excited to meet you. You don’t have to give us any wishes at all. What can we get you? Something to drink?”

Kevin smiled broadly and spoke to Kimmie. “See, that’s nice. Someone who thinks about what the Genie needs. If only you could make me as large as a human. Then my powers would not be limited.” Kimmie just smiled her prettiest smile. “OK!” Kevin

suddenly exclaimed. “I like you two...you are sweet, cute and you think about others every so often. Yes, three wishes for each of you.”

“Oh, we are so excited!!!” Kimmie said, hopping up and down.

“Sure, everybody is,” said Kevin, “at first...”

“I want a polka dot monkey named Bruno,” Kimmie screamed, giggling, clapping and hopping from foot to foot.

Kevin mumbled some syllables in another language and then jumped up and flung his arms in the air. That smelly blue smoke erupted above him and then they heard the squawks of a monkey.

Both girls swirled around and gasped to see just what Kimmie said she wanted. There near the steps a monkey perched and then leapt from the rail to the boxes all around the room. His polka dot fur was pink with bright yellow spots.

“I want a magic door to Neverland,” Amy declared, standing and holding her arm high in the air to make her point.

Kevin repeated his steps, mumbling and then - “Poof!”

“Look, Anna, there!” Kimmie pointed.

In the corner of the room next to the window, a small door had appeared, about half the size of a regular door. In a flash, Bruno jumped over and flung it open. The attic was flooded with light from the door, and the girls ran to gaze down as though high in the sky on an island. Above it they could see flying figures, lead by one dressed in green. A pirate ship rested in the cove.

“Look, Peter, up there, a door. Two girls are there. Come, lost boys, let’s help them learn to fly.” The girls could hear a tiny female voice, perhaps of a fairy, calling out.

Anna slammed the door and put her back to it, gasping. “It’s Neverland. Peter Pan, Wendy...it’s all of them. It’s all real!”

The days following were full of fun and wishes. Every day the girls came with more wild, exciting wishes. “I want woods filled with talking giraffes,” wished Kimmie.

“I want birds to always bring me candy bars,” Anna invented.

“I want the lake to be full of Mermaids,” Kimmie wished, and it was granted.

Finally, late one night, they came to Kevin with sad eyes. “Grandma is sick, Kevin,” Kimmie cried. “Kevin, I wish Daddy had magic to heal Grandma.”

“I’m sorry, Kimmie, you used up all your wishes. But Anna, you have one saved. You are wise, and you can save that wish and make sure it is one that you are sure will be a wonderful thing. Don’t be sad, girls. Most people waste their wishes, but a few save them for what is really important.”

Anna thought a long time about her last wish. When she decided, she whispered it to Kimmie, who giggled loudly, squealing, “Yes that’s perfect!”

“Kevin, I wish you were as big as a human,” said Anna, looking at his tiny shape lovingly. Suddenly, the blue smoke burst from the bottle and swept around Kevin. The girls stood back, and Kevin grew and grew until he was taller than they were, taller than Daddy – 10 feet tall, with brown skin and his face covered with hair.

“Your wish was the greatest of them all. It was for someone else. Now I am not limited. I grant you unlimited wishes. Run now, girls, go get your parents and drive fast to Grandma’s house. She is well now, and when the celebration is done, come see me again.”

“And think of hundreds more wishes that will help other people.”

The girls ran down the stairs, leaving in the attic a puzzled polka dot monkey, a door with Neverland behind it and a grateful Genie named Kevin.

Story 16

BEAUTIFUL DIANA

**Value: Creativity, Hold on
to your childhood**

Cody heard his cell phone go off in his pocket. He knew it was Hannah. She was the only one with this number. As soon as he heard her voice, he knew she was upset.

“Hannah, meet me at our old friend,” he told his sister. ‘Our old friend’ was a code word they had for a massive old oak tree in a field opposite the school where they would meet.

She was crying when he got there. Quickly, he held her as she wept about the insults the other girls had used. “It’s just because I won’t drink or do drugs or some of those things with boys that they want me to do. They call me such awful names, Cody. It makes me want to just give up,” she sobbed. He felt such anger towards those girls. It made him feel, too, like just running away from all that stress, dropping out of theatre and band and everything because of how hard it was just to be a kid sometimes.

Cody held his sister as her sobs subsided, and then he reached over and patted their old friend, the trustworthy ancient tree. Suddenly it moved. Both of them jumped as the large hole in the side of the tree began to stretch and grow taller and wider. In moments it had become a doorway.

Dozens of tiny creatures scrambled from the tree and began to pull Cody and Hannah by the hands.

“Cody, what are these things?” Hannah exclaimed.

“Tree Elves, Hannah.” I recognize them from those pictures I saw in that book about the Druids. I had no idea they were real!” The elves pulled the two into the door. Suddenly, the outside world disappeared.

They found themselves running in the dark. Dozens of elves pulled them rapidly along the dark path. They had no idea where their feet would land.

“Cody, I am frightened,” Hannah gasped.

“Just try to keep up, Hannah”.

The path was full of peril. They passed steaming lava pits, fires blazing out of control, and then ran over a huge long narrow rock bridge that spanned a bottomless chasm. Cody could hear his sister gasping and crying some from the fear and the stress.

“Look, Hannah, a door!” Cody yelled, seeing a huge oak door just ahead. The elves swarmed ahead and scrambled up the door, into the locks that sprung

open. The door heaved and opened under their combined force and Cody and Hannah were thrust inside.

The door slammed shut, and they were alone and quiet in a big hollow stone room. Before they could gasp, the room was suddenly flooded with light. A tall, elegant woman entered, robed in a shimmering gown and waited on by a tiny young girl.

“Kneel for Beautiful Diana,” the girl commanded.

“Don’t be afraid, Cody and Hannah Rutherford. I want you to meet someone. Come forth!” commanded Beautiful Diana.

From the darkness two human adults appeared. Their faces looked sad and tired. The lady had lines of worry in her face. It was a beautiful face but so drawn and washed out by years of hard life. The man too had worry on his face and sadness in his eyes, but his mouth scowled.

“Look at them children,” Diana instructed. “Long ago something died inside of them. Something wonderful that lived in them died. It was their creativity, their love for life and all things new and wonderful, their romance and their excitement. Those things died in them.

The children in them died. Look upon her face, Hannah. Her spirit died when her friends laughed at her and destroyed her desire to go on. Look at him, Cody. His spirit died when he let life rob him of his art, his ideas, his creativity.”

“Who are they, Princess Diana?” Hannah said, moved to tears by the sight.

“They are you. He is Cody 30 years hence. She is Hannah as a woman. This is how you will be if you let yourselves die like they did.”

“No, no, no! Please Princess. What can we do?” Cody begged. “Isn’t there some magic we can use right now to save them?”

“Yes, there is magic. Prepare yourselves.” Beautiful Diana lifted her wand over the four figures and a spell descended. Adult Cody and Adult Hannah watched as the beautiful children each changed into a swirling mist and floated in place, their faces smiling out from the fog. Then slowly, their wispy forms swirled around the adult bodies and mysteriously merged inside them.

Instantly, the worry and anger and care disappeared from the faces of adult Cody and adult Hannah. The light returned to their eyes, the fire to their souls.

“Diana, we are whole again!” exclaimed Cody. “You healed us! It’s magic!”

“Go quickly, the door is closing!”

Elves flooded the chamber. The two adults rushed from the room. Running to keep up, they crossed the chasm bridge, past the infernos, past the lava and along the darkened path to the very mouth of the cave. They looked out of the door gaping in the middle of their trusted oak tree at the world of their childhood. Holding hands they prepared to depart when a light shown just a few feet behind.

There stood Beautiful Diana again, her arms out to them.

“Don’t forget, Cody and Hannah. Never let anyone destroy the children within you. Never again. Promise me.”

“We promise, Beautiful Diana.” And before the words were finished, they stood next to their old friend holding each other, children again. They stepped back, looking into each other’s eyes, and a delighted giggle burst from Cody matched by the squeal of delight that escaped Hannah. They ran toward the school, happy and light inside again. Forever more they shared that wonderful secret inside that

nothing could rob them of their hearts ever again.

Story 17

OTIS THE OGRE

Value: Friendship

“Huge, ugly and hungry,” Otis the Ogre moaned to Terrance the Troll. Terrance came over every day for tea and snacks, and evil as he was, even Terrance became concerned when the snack included a villager. “That’s what they say about me, Terrance. How can I make a friend if they think of me like that?”

Otis wanted a friend. He was sure that would make him happy – someone who liked him and would play with him.

“Huge, ugly and hungry,” Otis whined, holding his huge, green head by the bumps in the scaly skin.

“Actually, Otis, those are the things I like the most about you,” Terrance said reflectively.

So, Otis set out to make a friend. The tiny village of Whoop Dee Do lived in constant fear of the visits from Otis. Standing like a mountain over them, his voice shook the buildings and trees and his breath caused the livestock to pass out.

“Today is my 3000th birthday, Terrance. Today, I want a friend. As Otis approached Whoop Dee Do, the villagers ran forward with birthday presents. Large stacks of rotting fungus, fish eyes and belly button lint that the villagers had collected all year lay glistening in the sun before him.

“NOT ENOUGH!” Otis bellowed. “I want a friend. You, Horsehead, you shall be my friend. You must tell me I am beautiful.”

Horsehead the Whoop Dee Do-ite was terrified. He searched for a way to tell Otis he was beautiful. Finally, he could only get close to a compliment. “Oh, Mr. Otis, your ugliness is supremely wonderful. You make all ugly things blush, because you are truly the finest of all things ugly. The gods of ugly truly have blessed you,” said Horsehead, hoping that would do.

“YOU ARE NOT MY FRIEND!” Otis bellowed, big tears in his eyes. So, he did the only thing a sensitive Ogre could do. He ate Horsehead and complained.

“You know eating them doesn’t help,” Terrance observed as Otis beat his chest and swatted birds from the sky in frustration. The next day Otis was crankier than ever. He marched into Whoop Dee Do and demanded loudly that someone step forward to be his friend.

“TODAY, I WANT TO PLAY DODGE BALL WITH MY FRIENDS,” he thundered. The tiny villagers scattered, but Otis spread his huge hand and captured the Wiggletoes quintuplets. “You will be my friends,

Wiggletoes,” he demanded. “Prepare for dodge ball.”

The game went badly. The quints worked together wonderfully, but when they threw the tiny ball, Otis just kicked it into the ocean. Then he brought out his ball that was bigger than the town hall. He heaved it with his massive ogre strength. It caught Horace, Ethel, Lucy, and Edgar Wiggletoes. Their squeaky yelps were heard as the ball carried them away far into space where each landed on a different planet to start new alien races.

Otis glared in anger at poor Morris Wiggletoes. “YOU ARE NOT MY FRIEND!” Otis screamed.

“You shouldn’t have eaten Morris,” scolded Terrance the Troll. “You know how his mother worries.”

The second day after Otis the Ogre’s 3000th birthday was worst of all. He ran into the village, which he should never do because it causes lava to be pushed out of the mountaintops. But today he tried not to yell.

“TODAY!”

“Otis?” scolded Terrance.

“Today, I will have a friend. You will sit with me and discuss my favorite things. YOU, Elbowgrease, you will be my friend.”

Elbowgrease turned to run, but he was plucked up and carried back to Otis’ huge ogre cave.

“We will eat lunch. Sit!” he demanded. Elbowgrease sat and shook with fear. Otis brought out the plates, both of which were larger than three houses a Whoop Dee Do-ite would live in. Otis laid the plate down and – FLOP – a glob of goo from Otis’s kitchen pot landed on the huge plate. Elbowgrease turned green with disgust as he looked at his “lunch”, which was a foul smelling mash of something nobody could recognize or know if it was even dead yet.

“Now, we discuss the big issues,” Otis said with a thundering echo. “We discuss tapeworms and nose hair.”

Elbowgrease could stand it no longer. The fear, the big plates, the weird, moving food was making him woozy. Otis’ breath gushed across the table, changing the colors of everything it touched. Elbowgrease went stiff and fainted.

“YOU ARE NOT MY FRIEND!” Otis cried out in frustration.

The third day after his birthday, Otis sat on a big rock and looked out over the village. “What will I do Terrance?” he moaned sadly. “Nobody wants to be my friend. I don’t even know what a friend is.”

“Well, me either, Otis,” Terrance reflected, “but eating Elbowgrease didn’t make him your friend. He just gave you a tummy ache.”

“I only know this, Terrance,” said Otis sadly. “Somewhere in this world is my best friend. A friend who will stay with me no matter what. A friend who thinks I am pretty and who likes what I like. A friend who is loyal and faithful and likes me for who I am.”

The sun slowly set and the villagers of Whoop Dee Do looked up on the mountain at Otis and Terrance, sitting next to each other. As Terrance put his twisted troll arm around Otis, they all hoped somehow the two would find that friend they needed.

“I only hope so, Otis,” said Terrance. “And I hope when you find him, you won’t eat him.”

Otis’ green, slimy lips turned up on his face as he sat with Terrance, and somewhere in his huge, ugly and hungry ogre heart, he knew he had found that friend after all.

Story 18

THE PRETTY ONE AND THE SMART ONE

Value: Forgiveness

“For twins, they could not be more opposite,” their Uncle Dave often remarked about Erin and Erica. In fact, the girls were identical. Even though they were both very pretty, it was always Erica who was the pretty one. It wasn’t that Erica was not as smart as Erin, but it was always Erin who was the smart one.

When the terrible thing happened, everyone was so upset.

Mom and Dad, Uncle Dave and Auntie Marian and all their cousins remembered when Erica and Erin performed together when they were tiny, singing Christmas songs for everyone who would listen. They both had so much talent and charm.

The terrible thing wasn’t a tragedy to the outside world. The girls just suddenly stopped talking to each other. Nobody knew what really happened. It all started over a fight for a hairbrush.

“What do you need it for? You don’t care about being pretty,” Erica snapped at her sister in such a mean way. Erin felt like her heart was ripped out when Erica said that. Erica had never said out loud what everyone knew. Erica was the pretty one.

“I thought I would at least show you how it works, since you never know how anything works,” Erin shot back. Even as the words left her mouth, Erin hated how it felt to say them. Erica stood up and glared at Erin with a look of anger, shock, betrayal and deep hurt. The tears welled in her eyes as she looked at her twin like she did not know her.

“You are so mean. You are just so mean,” she wept, backing away from Erin and knocking over her chair. Even though her heart was filled with anger, Erin wanted to run to her beloved sister and hold her and tell her to forgive what she said. But she could not. Anger ran things, not her heart.

The girls burst from the room, screaming insults at each other until Mom and Dad rushed up to stop it. Nothing could be done. Both girls swore they would never speak again.

For months they did not speak. Just to ease the horrid tension, Daddy fixed up another room for Erica to move into. It wasn't as good, and though no words were said, you could feel the resentment dripping from the furniture.

It was awful. School ended and vacations were planned. The adults were just frantic about vacations. They finally decided to let Erin go with Uncle Dave

and Auntie Marian to visit Great Aunt Bette, and Erica would go with Mom and Dad to Iowa to visit Grandpa Max.

“Where is your sister, Erica?” Grandpa Max asked immediately when she entered his room to see him in his wheelchair. She loved him so much. He was always her favorite grandpa and she his favorite granddaughter.

“We don’t need her, Grandpa Max. She would just ruin things – she is mean.”

“Oh, Erica, no!” She heard the gasp come from his old, cracked voice. She looked into his kind face and the look horrified her and gave her nightmares for the rest of her life. He looked at her like he was looking at a stranger. “Erica,” he said in almost a whisper, “what have you done? When you take her away from me, you hurt me, not her, and you hurt all of us.”

“Hello, Erin, honey, come give Great Aunt Bette a big hug.” Erin ran to her sweet Great Aunt and gave her the biggest hug ever. They hugged for at least a minute, but then, suddenly, Aunt Bette looked at Erin and petted her hair and said, “What’s wrong, Erin, something is very, very wrong, isn’t it?”

Nobody had told Aunt Bette about the fight. Erin burst

into tears and spilled her emotions to her aunt. “And I just can’t forgive her, Aunt Bette. I can’t do that ever.”

“Erin, I never told you about my sister, Emily, did I sweetheart?” Erin shook her head no. “Emily and I were so close, as close as you and Erica. But we got in a fight when we were just starting to date. It was a silly fight, over a boy we both liked. I know we both knew it was silly, but we let it separate us. The boy we forgot, but that anger grew and got stronger every day. It was like the anger had its own life. It was like it was some evil force living in me.”

“Finally, I was so bitter and sad, I just wept at any given moment. I decided to call my sister, but I put it off. Then it happened, Erin. Emily died in a plane crash before I got to tell her how much I loved her. She was taken from me and that anger lived on. I lost so much, Erin, all those years of loving my sister, over a silly fight and because I could not forgive.”

Hundreds of miles away, at the exact same time, Erica and Erin burst into tears. Daddy somehow knew what to do. He rushed Erin from the room and to the study where the phone was.

“Roger, it’s Dave,” Uncle Dave answered on the phone at Grandpa Max’s house. “I was just getting ready to call. Put Erica on quickly.”

The girls cried on the phone and talked for over an hour. That resentment and anger flew from their hearts. They felt so happy inside, like tiny baby girls again. All of the adults just thrilled to hear the laughter on each end of the phone. When they got back together, that awful extra bedroom went away and they became closer than ever. And best of all, Erin helped Erica get better grades. And with Erica’s help, Erin became prettier than ever.

Story 19

THE WISE MONKEY

Value: Don't do drugs

Four silly monkeys were eager for adventure. Chee Chee, Bernard, Owsley and Anton jumped and played, rolling on each other down the hill, laughing.

“I’m bored with this forest. I want danger,” said Chee Chee.

“I know a magical place we should go for danger and excitement,” shared Owsley.

“WHERE, WHERE?” They all screeched and jumped high, doing flips.

“Ouroboros,” said Chee Chee with a whisper.

All the silly monkeys gasped.

“But what happens in Ouroboros?” asked Bernard fearfully.

“All of the monkeys walk on two legs, wear tuxedos and speak French,” Owsley whispered, because it is secret knowledge. “But we must get wise old Levi to take us there.” Levi was the wisest old monkey in their tribe. He knew everything. Surely he would take them to Ouroboros.

“Levi, will you take us to Ouroboros?” whimpered Anton, as all four silly monkeys bowed before the fat, wise, cranky old ape.

“You do not know the secret codes, the secret words, the secret wink or the secret walk,” objected Levi. “But I will take you, and you will learn on the way. But be warned, the path is difficult, full of dangers and temptations. You must resist all of them to gain citizenship in Ouroboros.”

Four silly monkeys cheered with excitement. After some tearful goodbyes to their mommy and daddy monkeys, they set out, following the old gray ape.

Boredom bothered the silly monkeys. “Levi, we want fun and excitement. This is not fun or exciting!” complained Owsley loudly from the rear of the line.

“Is it fun you want?” came the hissing sound from behind him. Owsley wandered away from his friends to find the voice.

“Who’s there?” he asked fearfully, scanning the brush.

“Just me, Belial. Look, see? I am a monkey just like you.” The figure stepped out from the bush. Belial didn’t look just like a monkey. His spine was straighter and his hair was long and combed. He seemed friendly and he was very pretty. He frightened Owsley.

“Look, see! I have a pill here. It guarantees fun. You eat it and wonderful things happen. It is called ‘Lovely Silly Delicious’. You should have one. Here, I give it to you.” And with that the beautiful monkey placed the pill in Owsley’s hand.

“LSD? Hmmmm, well, I do want more adventure. Yes, thank you, Belial.” And with that, Owsley swallowed the pill.

The other monkeys heard the trees crash and Owsley squeal and laugh.

“Look at me, I am growing larger and larger!” he shouted in delight. Owsley began to expand. He grew high above the trees, expanding in every direction. Owsley laughed, extending his hands like he could capture the stars.

Suddenly his voice turned from excitement to fear. “I can’t stop it. Levi, make it stop!”

But Levi could do nothing. Soon, Owsley grew so large he expanded completely out of sight and disappeared into the sky.

“Look, I can see him,” shouted Bernard, and they all saw his face in the evening moon. Owsley’s eyes were sad and frightened for he would never be small again.

The silly monkeys and Levi moved on. “Oh, this is too hard,” complained Chee Chee, now at the back of the line.

“I can help you so nothing is every hard.” Chee Chee heard the voice from behind him. He fell behind and followed the voice to a clearing where a fire was burning. “Greetings, Chee Chee, come sit by my fire. I am Belial and my fire smells so nice. I have a special wood that I can burn in it, and if you smell the smoke, you will be able to fly like a bird and not have to walk and hurt your feet. They named the wood after my mother, Diane Ophelia. But I just shorted that word to D-oph. Please try some, you will fly.”

So Chee Chee tried the D-oph. At first he didn't feel anything. In a surge, his blood seemed to boil inside him, and he felt for sure he could fly. He burst from the forest yelling and running to his friends. “Look, look, look, I can fly. I smelled a special burning wood so now I have super powers.”

But before Chee Chee could display his powers, he forgot them. In fact, Chee Chee forgot everything. He forgot about Ouroboros, who his friends were, who Levi was, his parents, and all the things he learned in school. Slowly, Chee Chee climbed a very tall tree

and just sat there, staring off into space. His mind was empty; he felt neither happy nor sad, just empty inside.

“Leave him, friends,” advised Levi. “He will be empty forever now. Let’s move, and please be careful of temptations.”

The walk was difficult, with much climbing and long hours of boredom. “I don’t want to go to Ouroboros to be wise. I want wisdom now,” mumbled Anton, as he fell far behind Bernard and Levi.

“I can make you wise,” the voice hissed. “Levi lied to you. You can have all the wonders of Ouroboros here and now,” Belial whispered from the bushes. This time Bernard heard the voice also and ran to help Anton. He found him facing Belial who was standing next to a bush with pretty purple berries. “Just eat one of these berries and you will have all wisdom, my friends. They are free and it works fast. It works so fast, we just call them speed berries.”

“I want one,” Anton yelled, and before Bernard could stop him he jumped forward, picked a berry and ate it. Instantly, Anton grabbed his furry head and moaned loudly. “My head is filling up! So many things!” Anton screamed, stumbling toward the forest out of control. “Too much knowledge. Too much for a silly monkey.”

His cries became frantic; his babblings made no sense. Anton had lost his mind.

“Be gone, Belial.” Bernard heard the firm voice of Levi behind him. Obediently, Belial bowed and disappeared also.

“Come along, Bernard, there is no help for Owsley or Chee Chee or Anton now. They gave into temptation, but you have not. You are indeed the wise monkey. And observe, we are at the gates of Ouroboros and you alone have earned the privileges there by having the courage to work for them.”

The gates swung open and Bernard stepped in. He turned to thank Levi, but the wise old monkey had disappeared. He was gone without even seeing Bernard as he rose up to walk on two legs, tried on his tuxedo and learned to expertly speak French.

Story 20

TREVOR COMES UP

Value: Friendship

“Trevor comes up.”

That’s what they say. All over New York City, that is the phrase anyone uses to describe that ugly fear that grips your stomach late at night.

“Trevor comes up.” It means something happens to people sometimes...something nobody understands, but it gets them and nobody knows why. It’s like those people you hear about that just disappear and you see their faces on the milk cartons. What happened to them? Well, “Trevor comes up” is always the answer.

They say that on a cold Christmas night, a little boy named Trevor wandered from his home near Central Park. He just wanted to feed the ducks, but he wandered where he shouldn’t go. Everybody knows that under New York City there are miles and miles of deep tunnels, subways and sewers. Some say the catacombs of New York are miles deep with dozens of levels, most of them sealed up where monsters live.

They say Trevor fell into an open manhole and got lost under there. But he didn’t die. He learned to live. He learned unspeakable skills to fight, to kill, to stalk and to survive in that horrible place. And he changed. He stopped being a little boy and became a hideous

monster. Every so often, Trevor came up and took people away, and dragged them down into the tunnels and caves with him. Nobody ever knew what he did with them down there.

“Daddy, when will Trevor come up again?” Stevie asked from his bed.

“There is no Trevor, Steven,” Stevie's dad explained. “That’s just something people say. Don’t be afraid. Trevor never comes up.”

But Stevie wasn’t afraid. He wanted to meet Trevor. He knew in his heart that Trevor was real and that there was good inside of him. That night, long after Mommy and Daddy went to bed, Stevie slipped out, got dressed and stepped out on the balcony of his room that looked down on the park. It was quiet down there in the park. Steven silently watched two people sitting on a bench. He was handsome and she was pretty. They talked and kissed and hugged.

Just then in the clearing in the park behind them, a manhole noiselessly moved. Slowly, two huge arms flopped out, and very carefully they lifted out the body of a huge, hairy, muscular creature. It was totally nude, but its hair covered all except its face, which was deformed and twisted.

“Trevor!” gasped Stevie. He wanted to yell to the young couple to run, but he didn’t. He just watched. Slowly Trevor stood to his full height, which must have been 10 feet. But he did not advance. He just stood still watching the couple quietly.

Suddenly, from nowhere, muggers charged the couple. In an instant the three robbers knocked the couple to the pavement. Before the male lover could respond, he was being kicked and beaten. The pretty girl was screaming as one robber pulled at her purse.

Suddenly, a roar erupted behind them. Trevor charged into the fight. He was vicious. He flung the gang members into the air. He clawed and bit them. They barely escaped alive and the couple ran into the night screaming. “IT’S TREVOR! HE ATTACKED US! TREVOR CAME UP! TREVOR CAME UP!

Stevie dashed from his room and out of the apartment and down the stairs. He ran through the lobby so fast, that Roscoe the doorman couldn’t catch him.

“Stevie, come back!” Roscoe yelled, “Trevor came up!”

Stevie dashed across Fifth Avenue and into the park. He pushed through the brush and bushes. All around him Stevie could hear the panic, but he knew what really happened. Finally, after being scratched and falling and getting his pants wet and dirty, Stevie burst into a tiny hidden alcove in the bend of a stone bridge.

There he saw the monster close up. Trevor sat still, crouched down on his legs, bent and shivering. Stevie didn't move. Trevor didn't see him at first but stared down at the pavement. Trevor was crying.

"Trevor?" Stevie said softly. The monster looked up and Stevie saw his eyes. They were so sad, so afraid, and so lonely.

"Don't hurt me," the monster said, and the voice coming from his massive, monstrous body was that of a tiny boy, just like Stevie's.

"Trevor, I'm Stevie. Don't be afraid. I am just little, like you."

"I'm huge, I'm a monster," wept Trevor.

"You aren't a monster, Trevor," Stevie said compassionately. "You're just scared, aren't you? You are just a little boy."

The monster and the child embraced. “Everybody hates me,” Trevor said sadly. “They think I kill people and hurt animals. I don’t, Stevie. Never.”

“I know Trevor, I saw what happened. You saved those people. You are a hero. Come with me, let’s tell them.”

Stevie led the frightened Trevor to the street. There a crowd gathered around the badly battered criminals who were being arrested. In the crowd stood Stevie’s worried parents, Roscoe the doorman and the boy and girl who were attacked. They held each other, shivering in the cold.

A woman screamed, “IT’S HIM! IT’S THE MONSTER. TREVOR CAME UP!” The crowd started to panic.

“STOP!” a man yelled. It was Stevie’s dad. “Steven, are you OK?” The whole crowd stared in amazement as the tiny 8-year-old boy lead the huge monster by the hand to the sidewalk.

“Dad, I am OK,” he said to his father, and then he spoke louder. “You are all wrong. Trevor didn’t hurt those people!” he said, pointing at the young man and girl who were attacked. “He helped them. He saved them!”

“NO, NO, NO, TREVOR IS A MONSTER. TREVOR COMES UP. KILL HIM!” the crowd screamed, getting wilder and more frightened the longer they looked at Trevor.

“NO!” A voice spoke louder than any of them. “Steven is right!” It was the pretty girl. “Trevor saved us. He is our hero. Trevor is good, not evil.” With that the brave girl walked over to Trevor. And then she hugged him.

“HOORAY FOR TREVOR. THE HERO OF NEW YORK!” the crowd yelled with excitement, and they rushed to Trevor to hug him and carry him on their shoulders.

Trevor became a hero and all of New York loved him. More and more people came out and told stories of miraculous times when some big thing stepped in and saved them from danger in Central Park.

From that moment forward, Trevor lived in honor in the park as its official guardian, its protector, and the one who looked out for children and lovers.

And from then on the phrase, “Trevor comes up” was used to describe an angel, a magical troll who loves all and is loved by all. And Trevor never forgot the little boy who saw the good in him, and then had the

courage to step up and give his friendship where nobody would give it.

Story 21

BABY PENGUINS

Value: Help the poor

Chloe and Ziggy waddled between the adult penguins one by one on the beach.

“Wow, they are sure fat,” Chloe observed as the two baby penguins made their way through the huge adult penguin bodies napping on the rocky coastal ocean front beach. Ziggy giggled and played tag with his sister waddling rapidly ahead of her in as much of a run as little penguins are capable of doing.

Chloe and Ziggy were good children, so their mommy and daddy penguins let them run and play as far as they wanted as long as they could get back to the herd before mealtime. They explored all of the caves and coves and cliffs and nooks and crannies of the rocky shore. One day Ziggy suddenly exclaimed, “Chloe look over there!”

“Oh, wonderful!” she exclaimed with excitement, and they both waddled quickly down the rocks to a tiny cove nobody had ever found before. It was cut off from the ocean, but it was a large pond, more the size of a small lake, still and beautiful. “Look at them all, just look, Ziggy!” she gasped in wonderment.

What she saw were fish. More fish than either little penguin had ever imagined before. They were swarming all over the tiny cove. There were so many

of them that they were literally leaping on top of each other and out of the pond onto the rocks, only to slide back into the water.

Oh, how the brother and sister penguins feasted. They ate all the fish they could handle, and then just laid there moaning until they could waddle away fat and sharing a wonderful secret. Each day they snuck back over for a big feast again, feeling so special that this was their cove and nobody else's.

“Ziggy, this isn't right. This cove could feed our whole herd. We should share it,” Chloe remarked, gobbling down a particularly fat sea bass.

“Maybe, I don't know,” Ziggy responded. “Maybe just a few at first.”

So they brought a few of their best friends to the secret cove. The feasting was unrestrained. The laughter echoed off the rocks as the young penguins dove into the cove, playing and throwing fish to each other and eating all they could fit inside their fat penguin tummies.

Finally, Chloe and Ziggy and Hogie and Helen and ZaZa all lay moaning on the rocks.

“What's so silly,” said Hogie, “is my parents are probably the richest penguins in the herd. My

dad brings home more fish than we can use, and mom trades the fish with the other rich penguin moms for pretty rocks and shells to wear. She has the most expensive ones, too.”

“Mine, too.”

“Mine, too.”

“Mine, too,” all of them agreed. Their parents were the penguins who knew the most powerful, the richest penguins of this tribe, and most of the neighboring tribes up and down the coastline.

One day, Ziggy was walking along the beach back in the large nesting area of the herd just kicking the water and thinking about their good fortune, when he met a very tiny, skinny baby penguin. He was shocked and thought she was a newborn, but she was so skinny and she looked sick. He asked her questions and was stunned to learn that she was his age, but her family was very poor.

“My dad died. He was killed by a fishing boat, and we have 48 children in our family and Mom has trouble finding enough fish for all of us,” she said. Her name was Megan and Ziggy’s heart just broke. He ran crying to Chloe and told her the whole story.

“Well, we must share our cove with Megan and her family,” wept Chloe when she heard. Happily, they shared the idea with their friends.

“NO!” ZaZa declared angrily. “This is OUR cove. It’s our property. That’s why we are rich. If we give it away to just anyone, we won’t be rich anymore.” He stomped his feet and had a tantrum about it. Hogie and Helen shouted in fear and rage at the idea of losing their secret cove to a bunch of poor penguins.

“If you start feeding just Megan’s family, then all of the poor children will come and eat and there won’t be enough for anyone,” Helen objected.

“Don’t you dare tell them or we won’t be your friends anymore,” Hogie threatened Chloe and Ziggy. Oh, how they agonized. What to do, what to do? Finally, it was Ziggy who made the decision.

“We have to share it with Megan and her family,” he said, with tears in his big penguin eyes. Chloe agreed. Oh, the joy they felt when they brought Megan alone to the cove and showed her, and then she brought her starving family to the cove and they ate their fill and started to get fat like Ziggy and Chloe. But true to their words, all of the children’s friends stopped playing with them.

It was a happy day when Quinn, the leader of the tribe and Chloe and Ziggy's uncle, returned from his long trip. But it didn't take long before what happened with the cove exploded in a controversy at the big herd meeting, and penguins large and small were shouting and honking and making threats against the children for what they had done.

"STOP!" his thunderous voice yelled. Quinn stood with effort, his massive frame seeming to become gigantic in front of the cowering tribe of hundreds of penguins of every age and size. "I have made my decision!"

All of the penguins waited for Chloe and Ziggy to be banished.

"Chloe and Ziggy are heroes!" Quinn bellowed. A massive penguin gasp swept the crowd. "They alone know the true heart of the creator of all penguins! Don't you foolish, fat birds see that? We are family, all of us. If one of us prospers, we all prosper. If one of us suffers, all of us suffer. Chloe and Ziggy brought healing to the suffering in our big family. Celebrate them!"

And they truly celebrated. The party lasted for weeks, and then every penguin was given access to the cove, which never seemed to run short of fat fish for everyone to eat.

Hunger was healed in that happy penguin tribe, all because two baby penguins listened to their hearts and risked all to help a poor friend.

Story 22

MG AND THE PIGS

**Value: Don't talk to
strangers**

A tall, attractive woman walked out onto the stage. “Hello, my name is MG. Well, that’s sort of my rap name. I am really Mother Goose. You remember me. Sure you do. Well, I just wanted to ‘yak at ya’ about that goofy story that seems to have gotten around about those three dopey pig types and their problem with the wolf. You see, sure the wolf was a pretty nasty guy, but your heroes were not squeaky clean either.”

“Hey, MG, this is Hector, you know...the first little pig. What you talking about anyway?” The squat little pink pig walked out onto the stage, pointing at MG with his squat front paw. “That wolf was a maniac; he attacked me without warning!”

“Now, let’s just think about that, Hector. Remember when you went to the market? Who did you meet there?”

“Oh, yeah, I remember now, girl.”

“When you went to buy your building materials, you were going to buy brick, but you didn’t, did you?”

“Well, the brick store was a rip off! They wanted ten times what the straw store wanted. Thank God that friendly stranger helped me do that math!”

“The tall stranger with the long, gray fur and the thin snout and beady eyes? Remember his name? You should, you turned to him and asked for his help. He was just standing there, his back against the wall, reading a book called ‘Good recipes for Pig Dinner’ and you interrupted him and said, “Hey, Mister, can you help me figure out what to build my house out of? Brick is strong, but do I really need that much protection? Nobody will hurt a fat pig like me, will they?”

“Was that bad?” Hector questioned.

“Yes, it was bad. That was Levi the Wolf. You invited him to your site and he helped you build your house, and then you gave him the key. No wonder he ate you up and burped when he got done,” MG said sarcastically.

“He didn’t actually eat me. But he did chew me up pretty good.” Hector pouted, sitting down with his face in his paws.

“He totally messed up.” The voice came from the edge of the stage as another pig walked on, this one taller, white with black spots.

“Oh, sure Bruno, you’re the one to talk,” MG taunted the new pig. “You didn’t do much better.”

“Oh, come now, M Goose.” He strutted about, obviously a bit in love with himself. “I built the finest pig house in the valley. Big columns in front, the finest wood, not that straw junk like dummy over here used.”

“Yeah, right, ‘Mister Planning’, that’s you,” Hector laughed, sitting there pouting. “Who was it that sold you that wood?”

“That tall French guy with the beret. Kind of a funny looking man,” Bruno remembered.

“FRENCH GUY?” Mother Goose laughed out loud. “You thought he was French? Was it the long snout, the bad breath and the sharp teeth that gave you that idea?”

“Well, yeah?” Bruno said defensively. Both Mother Goose and Hector started to laugh. Hector’s laugh was more of a snort, which caused him to fall over on stage, snorting and grunting.

“That was Levi the Wolf, you big goof!” MG informed him.

“It was?”

“Yes, didn’t the long, gray hair and the pointy ears tip you off?”

“Well, I did wonder about that.”

“And later he came by to sell you fire insurance; he demonstrated it by burning your pretty wood house to the ground!” roared Hector.

“But I, but I, but I.....”

“And then he ate you all up and spat out your bones. Was that the time you realized that was the BBW?”

“BBW?” Bruno questioned MG.

“THE BIG BAD WOLF!”

Bruno flopped down next to Hector and pouted along with him. “He didn’t eat me all up. He ate me up a little bit. But I got better.”

“You both were foolish,” another voice said, as a third pig, taller still and all black except for a small white dot on the end of his nose, walked on stage.

“Felix, I am glad you are here,” Mother Goose said. “Tell your brothers how you recognized Levi.”

“I didn’t!”

“Then, how did you know whom not to believe?” both foolish pigs asked.

“First of all, think ‘brick’ next time, you dopes. Didn’t Dad teach you anything? But let’s not go into that right

now. I don't know whom not to believe. I know whom to believe. I believe those I know. Sure, I met a strange looking fellow, too. He said his name was Piggly Wiggly and that he was from a particularly tall and hairy line of little pigs."

"Well, even I would not have fallen for that," Hector scoffed.

"Oh, you would have so fallen for that. You would have made him your business partner," teased Bruno.

"It doesn't matter. I didn't care. I didn't know this person. It didn't matter what he was, whether he was a piggy or a mongoose or a pelican or the man in the moon."

"You have met a pelican?" Hector asked, amazed.

"There's a man in the moon?" Bruno wondered.

"Boys, you are missing the point," interrupted Mother Goose "It isn't what Levi wasn't, it is what he *was* that tipped Felix off. He was the one thing Felix never trusts."

"WHAT DON'T YOU TRUST?" both piggies screamed from curiosity.

"He was a stranger," Felix answered. I don't talk to

them, I don't go with them, I don't give them money, I don't believe their stories and I don't let them in my house. A stranger. Until Levi was ready to stop being one of those, I would never trust him."

"Well, silly pigs, we learned another lesson besides quality building materials from your brother today. Can you both tell me the important lesson today?"

"Yep, MG, it's easy to see, never trust Frenchmen with sharp teeth and bad breath."

"No, that's not it. Can you guess it, Bruno?"

"Yes, we learned the most amazing thing today, Mother G," Bruno said, standing with his chest out.

"Tell us all Bruno," MG said.

"We learned there is a man in the moon."

"Oh, boy, they will never learn," Felix said, slapping his head and walking off stage.

Story 23

MY CAT THINKS SHE IS GOD

*Value: Dreams and
Ambitions in Life*

“Oh, it’s a bad thing to be home alone on Halloween, Peter,” Jennifer said with some fear in her voice. They were safe, though. The house was locked up and secured. They were upstairs and they had plenty of pizza and soft drinks to enjoy while their parents were at their party.

Peter and Jennifer got their pizza and started flipping channels to find something on TV that was not scary. “Here is something... ‘Myths of Halloween’,” Peter announced with excitement. They turned that on and learned all about where vampires came from, who invented Frankenstein and so many other interesting things.

“It was the Gypsies of Romania, Bohemia and Transylvania that brought us most of our legends,” the narrator informed Jennifer and Peter. “And according to the gypsies, on Halloween night, this one magical night of the year, all the spirits are loose on the earth and all the animals can talk.”

“No way!” Jennifer said dropping her popcorn. She looked around and Peter was gone.

“Peter?” she called out. “PETER!!!!”

Just then Peter walked out of the bedroom. He was white as a sheet. “Fluffy is back there.” Fluffy was

their cat. “Our cat thinks she is God.”

“God?” Jennifer gasped in amazement. “Fluffy is God?” she said, flabbergasted. “You mean creator of all things, all powerful? All knowing? Fluffy?”

“I think that’s what she said.”

“All bow!” came that high squeaky voice that used to only say “meow”. Fluffy walked into the room with that same self-important strut she always used.

“Fluffy, how could you think you are God?” Jennifer asked the 12-pound tabby cat. Fluffy hopped up on the ottoman and licked her toes.

“I am God and that’s all there is to it. Quit being so negative. Just let me have this one little thing plus a new chew toy and I will be happy.”

“Do all the animals think you are God?” Peter questioned the little cat, getting her a kibble treat.

“Well, I couldn’t say,” Fluffy answered, looking off and reflecting on the question. “I can’t talk to Bruno about it.” Bruno was their housedog, a yappy dachshund

with a bad back. “He thinks he is Abraham Lincoln.”

“Do all the animals think they are something really great?” Jennifer asked in amazement.

“Well, let me see,” Fluffy thought out loud, clearly having to concentrate. “You know those four squirrels I chase in the back yard? None of them think they are God, especially not the big fat one.”

“Well, that’s a relief,” Peter sighed.

“No, he is John Lennon,” Fluffy continued.

“What about that big bull dog Mr. Henderson walks?” Peter asked.

“He thinks he is Alexander the Great.”

“The big, black crow that always steals the big seed?”

“Yeah, you think that’s a crow,” fluffy informed Jennifer. “That’s really Albert Einstein. He loves to do math with all that bird seed.”

“And that obnoxious goose at the park that poops on my shoes?” Peter said with a shudder.

“Take it easy, Peter,” Fluffy scolded. “That’s the Pope.”

Both kids sat down with a flop on the couch, just amazed at all this new knowledge. Fluffy leapt from the ottoman to Jennifer's lap and started purring and arching her back. "Fluffy, you are such a pretty girl," Jennifer cooed, and Fluffy purred more and flipped over to have her tummy rubbed.

"I know I am not God, Jennifer," she purred softly. "And Bruno knows he isn't President Lincoln. All healthy animals dream big dreams and think big thoughts," the tiny beast said.

"I dream big dreams," said Peter. "I dream of being an astronaut some day."

"I think big thoughts," Jennifer said proudly. "I think that maybe I will be the first girl President of the United States," she said, looking off in space as though looking at the future. "But those things are so far away. They seem so impossible."

"Dream those dreams, Peter. Think those thoughts, Jennifer, and never let them go," Fluffy the tiny cat advised the children. "That is the way you will become something bigger and better. Just like the squirrel and the goose and even Bruno, you want to be something wonderful. You are healthy animals," Fluffy said,

playing with a string. “And look on the bright side,” Fluffy purred on.

“What’s the bright side, Fluffy?” Peter asked.

“Easier for you to be an astronaut than for an obnoxious goose to become the Pope,” laughed the cat.

Story 24

THE ANSWER AT THE END OF TIME

Value: Obedience

They didn't feel like bad kids. They were good kids, but since everyone said they were bad kids, well, they just acted and dressed like that. Isaac, Martin and Leo were on good terms with the rest of the street gang, but they were best friends with each other. 'The Wounded' was the name of the gang and they had to wear red and green bandanas. They all wore them, but deep inside they felt silly.

One adult didn't care a bit about being afraid of them or their gang, even when they carried knives and such. Miss Green, the public librarian, was never afraid of them. When they came to the library and all the parents got nervous, it was Miss Green that smoothed it all over. Miss Green talked to them, teased them, and taught them that inside they were good.

That's why finding out that Miss Green was really sick was the worst thing that could happen.

"It's fatal, the thing she has," Isaac told his friends when he met them in the woods near the library.

"NO!" Leo reacted emotionally. "She is the one person who knows who we really are. I won't let her go. I will go through any danger to save her. There has to be an answer."

“There is an answer,” the deep voice echoed from the dark in the woods. The boys stared in shock in the direction of where the disembodied voice came to them. “The answer is at the end of time,” it finished.

“Who are you?” Martin questioned.

“Don’t ask questions. You said you would face any danger. Well now is the time. Are you prepared to be totally obedient to save Miss Green?”

“YES!” Leo shouted before the other two could even think of the answer. But their answer was the same.

“Then follow me and remember, the path will be dangerous so you must be completely obedient. You will not see me; just follow my voice and above all, you must be obedient. No matter what. Obedient. Do you understand?”

“We do!” they answered all together and then with one mind and one heart they charged into the dark place in the woods. Their hearts were beating in their mouths, but they charged into the darkness together.

Isaac, Martin and Leo had no idea what or who they were following. They heard him or it just up ahead, but there was always a shroud of darkness around the figure. They heard breathing, footsteps, sounds, and

hands breaking branches but never an actual figure to see and trust.

Hours passed, hard hours. “Ahead is danger!” the voice suddenly erupted from the moving darkness ahead. “Do not hesitate. You will cross a deep ravine. Do not look down. Keep your eyes fixed on me. Do not ask questions. You will cross the ravine on a tightly drawn rope. Run on to the rope, run fast and with assurance. Fix your eyes on me and you will not fall. Do not look down.”

“But how can we fix our eyes on something we cannot see?” Martin questioned, whispering from the back.

“Shhhhh, just obey, Martin,” Leo whispered. The forest opened and they could only sense the ravine. Isaac and Leo shot directly onto the rope, watching the moving darkness with all their focus and attention. They felt the rope grip the middle of their naked feet below. Martin, too, ran confidently out over the ravine, balanced only on that tiny rope. But suddenly he looked down.

The yelp was sharp and terrified. Both boys ahead were off the rope. They called out, “MARTIN, MARTIN!”

Too late. Martin began to fall, but instead of falling, something engulfed him and he was changed, shrunk, morphed and evolved all in just seconds. There was a blinding flash. Then instead of Martin, a lovely butterfly flew out over the ravine.

“He was afraid to fall. Now he will never fear again. He will fly. He failed because he did not obey,” the dark voice spoke not far away, softly, sadly. “Follow me now, boys, we run!”

The pace doubled. Isaac and Leo gasped to keep up.

“If the answer is at the end of time, we sure are in a hurry to beat the clock,” Isaac complained.

“Danger ahead. It is large and frightening. Do not let it catch your eyes. Its eyes will poison your mind and you will be eaten alive from the inside by worry and anxiety. Do not meet its eye. Keep your eye on me constantly, on your goal. Don’t confront the anxiety beast,” warned the voice from the void.

A clearing suddenly appeared. The void was at the end of it, moving fast. Both boys watched and ran like the wind. Neither knew they could run so fast. Suddenly, it loomed ahead and just a few feet to the left of their pathway. The smell was overpowering,

and its growl turned their insides to stone. Its size blocked all view of anything else.

“Don’t look at it, Leo!” Isaac yelled frantically, in the lead. Leo tried and tried, but then it roared with such power its breath knocked Leo off the path and he rolled over and over on to his side. When he rose up his eyes met those of the beast.

“OH, GOD, HELP ME!” his terrified voice screamed to those ahead. Isaac had reached the end of the clearing, but he felt unseen fingers stop him from going back.

“It’s too late. He knows the fear now,” the voice whispered. As before, the beast did not get Leo. Instead he was engulfed, changed, evolved, morphed and then there was that flash. Instead of Leo, a sweet harmless bunny hopped about on the floor of the clearing.

“Fear was his enemy and his thoughts were his prison. Now he is an innocent beast with no mind to think with. His thoughts will trouble him no more. He failed because he did not obey.” Isaac gasped at the outcome. “Follow now. The end of time is just ahead.”

Fearful things, awful beings, horrible dangers, and despicable temptations lurched and lunged at

Isaac as he ran right behind the void, but he did not avert his eyes from the goal ahead.

“When I tell you to jump, JUMP!” the voice commanded. Before Isaac could answer, it ordered, “JUMP!”

He was in the air and then his feet came down on stone.

All was quiet. He was alone on a large stone plateau. A slender man with warm eyes stepped forward. “You have succeeded. You have won the prize,” he whispered. When he heard that voice, he knew this was the being inside the void. The man produced a small ceramic jar covered with ancient writings and paintings. He handed it to Isaac. “This will heal your librarian. You have found her cure. You found it here at the end of time. And the magic you used was a simple one. Do you understand the magic?”

“No,” Isaac said, holding the jar so carefully.

“You succeeded because you obeyed. You did not look aside, you kept your eye on your goal without doubt or hesitation and you obeyed your calling. And because you have learned this magic, you have found the answer at the end of time.”

Story 25

THE BLACK WALNUT

*Value: Magic in
everyday life*

It was hard for William's dad. When his mom went into the hospital with that terrible disease, both William and his dad cried a lot.

"It's not curable," the doctor said. "It's only a matter of time," he said, sadly. Slowly both William and his dad tried to think about her dying soon. Every day William's dad went to the hospital and saw her, and every day he came home tired and sad. One morning William found his dad up early working anxiously at the kitchen table.

"What's all this stuff, Dad?" William wondered.

"Oh, it's a proposal I am presenting at work today. I have to sell this contract or I won't have enough money to pay for Mommy's hospital bills," he said, with worry in his voice. "But that isn't a problem for an 8-year-old boy to worry about. Here is a black walnut – go feed the squirrels."

William's dad handed him a big, fat, black walnut. They had a big bag of them in the garage from a tree in the back yard. They seemed useless. Their shells were impossible to open. The black walnut seemed like their problems, impossible to fix.

There was a small grove behind their house that had a path that went to the stream. The stream was busy

this time of year because of all the rain. William walked along, tossing the black walnut into the air and catching it. He had an old song in his mind that went, 'Do you believe in magic?'. He wished there was magic even in dumb little objects like this walnut.

Just then he stopped. There, sitting on a stump, was a small, orange squirrel. It was standing on its hind legs, looking at him in the most peculiar way. The squirrels in this grove were not very brave, so this was unusual. It seemed to watch that walnut. Then it did an amazing thing. It hopped down and ran right up to William's feet. William jumped back with surprise, and the walnut fell to the ground. In a flash the squirrel captured the walnut and carried it off, hopping back on the stump with the walnut in his mouth. But before it scampered away, it looked over its shoulder and nodded at William. It was so peculiar.

Mr. Hannaford, William's dad, stood in front of the huge meeting room looking at the powerful executives, who had just heard his proposal. They were silent, their faces stony and cold. He tried not to show his anxiety. He looked out the open windows at the groomed lawns and flowerbeds of the company campus.

“Mr. Hannaford, I think we will have to take your proposal under.....” the vice president started to say with negative tone.

“Oh, no,” he thought, “they are not going to buy it.” He put his hand to his brow nervously and looked at the tree outside to stay calm. Just then he saw something odd. There on the lowest branch was a squirrel. It had something in its mouth. William’s dad squinted to see what it was, because it looked like a black walnut.

“Mr. Smith, just a moment,” the company president interrupted. “Mr. Hannaford’s proposal was just what we need. We will be moving forward with his plan.”

Well, the congratulations flowed and William’s dad was just amazed. As he cleaned up after the room was empty, he looked at that tree and there was that squirrel. It jumped down and ran to the window and jumped onto the sill. It looked at William’s dad and just nodded and dropped what it had. William’s dad went over and picked it up. It was that black walnut he had given to William that day.

The next morning as his dad got ready to go to the hospital, William walked in the woods, thinking about the miracle and playing with that same black walnut.

He thought about his mom and how sad he was inside for her sickness. Then that song popped into his mind, ‘Do you believe in magic?’.

“Click, click,” William heard. It was an unmistakable sound only a squirrel makes. William looked around and spotted the tiny animal on a fallen branch looking at that black walnut.

“Well, you certainly deserve this.” He threw the walnut near the squirrel. It scampered over and picked it up and ran up the nearest big oak, but half way up it stopped and nodded at William.

“William, come with me this time,” his dad called out, and William ran to the house to go see his mom. In the car his dad prepared William for the worst. “The doctor called last night. It’s bad William. This may be your mom’s last day.”

They got to the hospital and slowly walked toward the clinic where she was being cared for. The hospital was easily 50 miles from their home. Suddenly, William stopped and grabbed his dad’s arm. “Look Dad!”

There in the tree just outside William’s mom’s room was that squirrel. He looked at William and his dad and then he just nodded, holding that familiar nut in

his mouth...that huge black walnut. Dad and son raced into the hospital room. Instead of a room being prepared for a death, the nurses and doctors raced in and out, urgent and excited.

“Something has happened, Mr. Hannaford,” the doctor said, gasping. “She came out of her coma this morning, about an hour ago. We did more tests. The results will be here any moment.”

“An hour ago.” William reviewed in his mind. “That was when I was in the grove.” They entered her room and a gasp of joy came from William’s dad, seeing his wife sitting up and smiling. Both William and his dad ran and hugged her.

“It’s a miracle,” the nurse said reverently, opening the window of the ground floor room. The doctor came in and looked at them while the three embraced on her bed.

“There is no way to explain it,” he said, looking at the test results on his clipboard “The cancer is disappearing. It’s going away. Its half what it was yesterday and shrinking, Mr. Hannaford. William, your mom is being healed.”

Just then they heard a clunk. William turned and saw the squirrel diving out of the open window, its curly tail flipping as it ran back to the tree. William got up and walked to the window and picked up what had been dropped.

“What is it, William?” his mommy said curiously.

“I know what it is,” William’s dad said softly, with astonishment in his voice. William turned around, tossing the item into the air and catching it and looked his dad in the eye. Both of them knew something magical had occurred. In his hand William held that same big, fat, black walnut.

Story 26

TWIGGY PIGGY

*Value: Beauty is on
the inside*

Twiggy Piggy was the most beautiful piglet ever. She won every prize at the county fair every year she was entered. This year would be no different, even though it would be her last. Everyone knew when a piglet reached Twiggy's age, at her last fair she was sold to some kind family to go live with them. Everybody knew that.

“Oh, Twiggy, you are just so pretty,” her best friend Schmoopy Sow said, clapping her hands as Twiggy strutted about trying on a new hair bow in her hair. She only had the one hair, so it looked so pretty with a bow attached to it. Twiggy was thinner than the other piggies and always walked like she was a model.

“I want to be a model in New York and Paris and Kansas City,” Twiggy always told Schmoopy. “I bet when I win that last prize, my new owner will take me to Kansas City to model,” she bragged. She was a proud piggy. But she was lonely. Many nights as she sat in front of her mirror admiring herself and worrying about how to be prettier, she heard all the piggies in the sty over at Schmoopy's place, laughing and singing and eating and having such a good time. Schmoopy was nothing but ugly. She was fat, covered in slop and had a big ugly wart right on the end of her nose. Twiggy could not understand why everyone loved her so.

When others needed help, it was Schmoopy who always tried to help. When she got old enough, she was the first one to find a boyfriend and then to get married. Potsie Porker loved Schmoopy dearly, and they were happy as two pigs in the stinky mud together. Twiggy never could have a pig for a boyfriend. All that smelly slop would surely hurt her chances to be picked to model in Kansas City.

The big day came, the final judging for the top pretty piggy at the fair -- the one to go with Mr. Smoky, the rich buyer from Kansas City. Schmoopy and Potsie peeked under the tent from outside, their silly piggy rumps sticking up outside, their tiny, curly tails wagging in happiness for Twiggy because surely she would win. It was almost time for Twiggy to come out when Potsie looked up from where he peeked under the tent skirt, and he saw and heard Mr. Smokey talking to his friends.

“Get ready, this next one is my favorite,” he remarked with a low growling laugh. He smoked a stinky cigar and the ashes fell from it and landed on Potsie’s nose. “Her name is Twiggy and she has won for the last three years. I have been watching her closely. If she wins, I am going to buy her for our big roast pig

feast for our customers this year. She will look so pretty roasting on a fire with an apple in her mouth.”

“SQEEEEEEEEEEEEAAALLLLLLLLLLLLLL!” the noise went up as Potsie jerked under the tent and went running all around under the bleachers, howling in anger and fear for his friend. Schmoopy could only squeal just as loudly and chase him all about until they dashed between the big guard’s legs and out onto the fair grounds.

“What in heavens name is wrong with you, Potsie?” Schmoopy demanded.

“That was Mr. Smokey. He isn’t going to make Twiggy a model in New York or Kansas City! Schmoopy, he is going to cook her and server her for dinner for his rich friends!”

“AND THE WINNER THIS YEAR ONCE AGAIN IS TWIGGY PIGGY, THE PRETTIEST PIG IN THE WHOLE COUNTY!” They heard the announcement go out to wild applause.

“Hurry, we have to save her!” Potsie squealed, dashing toward the other end of the tent. They got there as they put the ribbon on Twiggy on the platform at the end of the catwalk where the models came out.

She was beaming with pride, looking at Mr. Smokey lovingly as he was about to slip his leash on her pretty neck.

“SQUEEEEEEEEEAAALLL!” Potsie’s loud voice rang out. Chaos broke out. The two ugly pigs ran between the people’s feet, knocking them over and toppling tent posts and curtains and everything in their way.

“Hurry, Twiggy, run! They are going to eat you!” Schmoopy yelled, and the three terrified pigs stampeded out of the tent, and off the fair grounds. They didn’t stop running until they were buried far under their slop in their own sty at home.

“You saved me, Schmoopy. You are my hero, Potsie,” Twiggy gushed, kissing him all over his ugly, messy face.

“Don’t get dirty now, Twiggy,” the other pigs teased her as she joined the big party, laughing and being a really piggy mess.

“I don’t care about that now. Now I know that real beauty is what Schmoopy has. She has the beauty that comes from caring for others, the beauty that comes from the inside, not from the outside.”

All the pigs oinked their approval.

Story 27

GHOSTS

*Value: Don't be a
phony*

“Guess what?” Sidney whispered excitedly to Mary. “I can talk to ghosts!”

Mary just looked at her friend with incredible disbelief and wondered if maybe he had gone insane. “You mean you just talk to nobody and you think ghosts hear you?” she attempted to clarify.

“No, Mary. I can bring them up. They appear before me and I can ask them questions. Last week I summoned up Abraham Lincoln and you know what he told me? He said that he hated that darn beard and that his hat was hard to keep on his head.”

“Where did this happen?” she questioned her good friend, who was not prone to lies or fantastic stories in the past.

“This room, it only seems to work in this room.” Mary looked around. The room in her cousin’s house they were in was totally empty. It was an upstairs bedroom that had been cleared out for painting. They stood dead in the middle with only the lone light bulb above them for furniture. Sid walked over and closed the door. “We decide what ghost to call up. Then I go over to a certain place on the wall, hit it and say that name and they appear.”

“Well,” Mary said, beginning to almost believe it could be true. “You always wanted to be in politics or rule a country or something, right? What about Alexander the Great?”

Sid made a puzzled expression then shrugged and walked across the room and stood before the wall looking for the spot. He made a fist and used it for a hammer and hit the wall – ‘WUMP, WUMP, WUMP’ – and then said firmly, “COME HERE, ALEXANDER THE GREAT.”

A sound like static electricity crackling shot through the room. Mary yipped a tiny scream and jumped back, and Sid ran to her side. Slowly, a white mist formed on the floor just a few feet away. It took shape and there, sitting on the floor, one leg up and his head down, was a figure. It did not move, although it was clear it could.

“Are you Alexander the Great?” Sid said cautiously. Slowly, the hazy figure raised its head and looked at them.

“Wow, look at his face. He looks so tired, so old.”

“I am not old. I died young,” the figure said to her. Mary gasped, hearing the ghost speak.

“You ruled the whole world. Was that really great?” Sid asked quickly, knowing the appearances don’t always last long.

“It was difficult. So many lives depended on mine. And yet I wanted more, more, more. When it was clear I had conquered all, I became depressed. No more reason to live.....”

“But Alexander, your name is in history as.....” Mary started to object, but the figure faded and was gone. “Wow,” she said softly. “Let’s do it again. I want to meet someone glamorous,” she said excitedly.

“OK, let’s see here,” Sid said, going to the wall. He held his fist up and began to pound.

‘WUMP, WUMP, WUMP’. COME HERE, ELVIS PRESLEY,” he commanded. ‘WUMP, WUMP, WUMP’. COME HERE, MARILYN MONROE,” Sid spoke again.

‘WUMP, WUMP, WUMP’. COME HERE, JOHN LENNON,” and then he stepped back. That electricity shot to the air and also a feeling of a breeze that gave both kids goose bumps.

“Well, here we are then,” they both heard the British accent say and when they looked up, there stood the

three ghosts Sid had called for: Elvis, Marilyn and John.

“WOW!” Mary said with wide-eyed amazement.

“It’s OK, sweetie, we are just people like you,” Marilyn Monroe said to Mary, smiling just a sweet and pretty smile.

“Was it really wonderful being loved by everyone?” Mary asked shyly.

“It isn’t wonderful at all,” Elvis answered. “You can never be yourself. You always have to be like a big cartoon version of who you are.”

“Yes, and it’s quite lonely too. You can’t just sit and talk with people. The fans run and attack you. You spend a lot of time hiding. It’s really a sad life,” John said, gazing off like he was looking back on his life.

“But you are still famous for being so talented, so exciting, so glamorous,” Sid remarked.

“Yes, and then we all started believing we were that great,” Elvis observed. “We got full of pride. I put on these fancy clothes to make people believe I was that cartoon. It was a big lie.”

“You can’t be yourself with anyone. You have to be what they made you into. It’s so phony. You can’t be

insecure, sad, lonely, stupid or even silly,” Marilyn said with a light sob in her voice.

“You two have something we could never have. You have real friends, you can be honest, and you have time with each other. When you are glamorous, you are never for real and you do not have time for anyone,” John Lennon added.

“We have to go now, but each of us has some important advice for you,” Elvis said.

“Oh tell us, please,” Mary begged them.

“Let people be who they really are. Get to know the real person when you meet people and make friends. Be for real with them,” Elvis advised. He smiled that ‘smirky’ smile that made him famous and then he disappeared.

“My advice is somewhat the same,” John Lennon said, walking over to the wall where they came in.

“Don’t be a phony. Don’t invent some pretend version of who you are just to make people like you like we did. If you show all your yucky parts but also they real person in you, you will have real friends.” He took off his blue shades and his eyes sparkled with warmth toward them, and then he was gone.

Marilyn walked over to the wall and just smiled. “Bye-bye, kids,” she said with a perky voice.

“But don’t you have advice for us?” Sid interrupted her. Marilyn looked over her shoulder and smiled a big, toothy smile. “More of a request for Sidney. Call me back, but don’t call me Marilyn Monroe. Call me back as Norma Jean Mortenson. That’s my real name. That’s who I really am. Then I can come here in shorts and a sloppy sweatshirt and we can play cards. OK?”

“OK!” both kids agreed with a cheer.

Story 28

GYPSIES

***Value: Stealing is
wrong***

Billy sees magical Gypsies. Sometimes they swarm in through his window and carry him to their Gypsy camp to dance and sing and play fun gypsy games with them. One day Billy went running through his small town of Feith, and everywhere he looked the Gypsies ran with him. Suddenly he ran right into the legs of Police Officer Rehtaf.

“Hold it there, Billy,” Officer Rehtaf laughed, barely holding the wiggly little boy. “Running through the town all by yourself?”

“YES!” Billy giggled, wiggling free and running away. Billy knew the Gypsies had magic and only he could see them. He was magic, too, that way.

Billy always got away when he had the Gypsies with him. Sometimes they went with him to the grocery store with Mommy. “Billy” Olaf, the leader of the Gypsies, would whisper, “Steal the candy. It’s OK...we are Gypsies. It’s not illegal for us to steal. People expect it.”

So Billy stole the candy and he got away with it. He always did when the Gypsies ran with him. The next day they became bolder. First, the Gypsies followed him around the house and helped him learn to steal from his mom. He stole money lying loose on the table, and then he even got into her purse.

“But Mommy needs her money to buy our food at the grocery,” Billy complained to Olaf.

“Don’t worry,” Olaf and all the Gypsies laughed. “Things we steal are magically replaced. If you take a dollar, magic will give her two dollars. So, in a way you are helping her by stealing. Stealing for the Gypsies is magic!”

“Wow, magic,” Billy said with a low whistle. He took the money and he was never caught. He never was when he stole for the Gypsies.

“Today, you get to go by yourself Billy,” Olaf told him in the morning. “Go steal three bags of candy and run to our special place, and we will use the candy for our big Gypsy dance and party. You know how you love those.”

“But Olaf, I am afraid to steal without Gypsy magic,” Billy complained.

“Don’t worry. You have stored up the magic. You are almost a Gypsy now, and when you become a real Gypsy, you will have the Gypsy stealing magic.”

But Billy didn’t have the magic. Just as soon as he walked out the front door of the market, the alarm went off. Billy burst into tears and ran from the store. Running as fast as he could, Billy panicked, feeling his

throat cry and close up from the fear. Billy ran down streets and up alleys and then around a corner.

Suddenly he felt big hands on him. Officer Rehtaf picked Billy up squirming and crying and tried to talk to him. "Billy, Billy, what did you do?"

"I stole, Officer Rehtaf, I stole."

"I know you did, Billy. I know you did yesterday, too. Were you alone today Billy?"

"Yes, no, yes, yes, yes, I don't know. Oh, I just don't know," he wept, but he wiggled out of the policeman's hands and dashed down the alley. He could hear the big cop running after him, calling his name, but he got away and got to the secret place where the Gypsies were.

"Olaf, Olaf, use your magic. I got caught. Help me!" Billy gasped, seeing the head of the Gypsies with his band of merry friends singing and dancing. Suddenly, they became very serious and their faces were not fun and happy but sad and scary. They glared at Billy.

"You got caught?" Olaf scowled.

"Yes, Olaf, please help me."

"Gypsy's never get caught. You have betrayed the

mighty Gypsy nation. You do not deserve the magic. Instead, you must be punished. You must pay for what you have done. You must pay with your life.” The army of Gypsies moved closer to Billy, angry and dangerous.

“That’s enough, Olaf!” the stern voice came from high above them. Officer Rehtaf stood staring at what was happening, hands on his hips and looking very unhappy. Billy burst from the Gypsy mob and ran to him and hugged his legs. “You know you are not welcome here. NOW GO!” The policeman ordered and when Billy turned around, the Gypsies were gone.

“You knew?” Billy asked his friend Officer Rehtaf as they walked back into town.

“Yes, policemen know about evil and how it lies and how it tries to steal the heart of a good boy like you, Billy. Now you must do the right thing. You must go to the market and apologize to Mr. Applebee so you can arrange to pay him back. Then you must confess to your mom that you stole from her, too. That will make everything okay, Billy.”

“The Gypsies lied and told me they had magic that made stealing okay,” Billy said sadly.

“That is a lie, Billy. There is no magic that makes crime okay. You have the magic now to make

everything good again. You have honesty. That's the magic, Billy. Honesty is what makes everything feel right again."

Story 29

LITTLE ELEPHANTS

*Value: Kindness to
animals*

Charlie loved animals. He always had. He was one of those people who were so comfortable with animals that they just naturally came to him and loved him, too. He was the one who could calm an angry dog or get that mean cat to purr like a sweet kitten. He dearly loved them and seemed to understand them, too.

But like all children, Charlie had friends who were not like him. His best friends Jim and Rodney didn't care about animals one way or another. That is why one day, when Charlie came to the baseball field late to play, he got nervous when he saw Jim and Rodney gazing down just under the big black walnut tree near the back of the field.

As Charlie approached, he noticed that they were laughing, and they were laughing at something small and hurt at their feet. It was a bird. It had fallen from the tree and its wing was damaged. Rodney laughed, looking at it struggling next to his huge foot.

“We hit the ball into the tree and it must have hit this dumb bird. Look at how ugly and small it is. If I dropped this ball on it, well, that would be it,” Rodney threatened. Without thinking, Charlie grabbed the ball and threw it over the fence into one of the yards behind the baseball field. Then he picked up the

bird and petted it. Immediately, the bird began to sing and Charlie found its nest and gently put it back.

The next day, Jim was over to visit Charlie at his house. “Rodney was pretty mad at you about that baseball and bird thing Charlie,” Jim said.

“I don’t care. I didn’t want him to hurt that bird. He can just be mad.”

“You really like animals don’t you, Charlie,” Jim observed as they left Charlie’s house and stepped into the back yard.

“Let me show you something,” Charlie said in a very secretive way. The two crossed the back yard to the big flowerbed along the fence in back. The two crouched down and Charlie parted the flowers. There in the fertile soil there was a clearing.

“Are those what I think they are?” gasped Jim. As he watched, first one, then two more, then three more tiny elephants walked out of the forest, which was really the flowers, waving their tiny trunks back and forth and trumpeting proudly. “Elephants? But they are only like 3 inches tall. Are they babies?”

“I don’t think so. Look at them. They are the shape of full-grown elephants, just in miniature. Only I know

about them and they know me. That one is the leader – his name is Trombone. Then here we have Sax and Trumpet and Oboe and Flute and Harpo over there.”

“You named them for band instruments?”

“Sure, why not. Harpo is for the harp, but I just liked the name that way, too.”

Both of them laughed and the afternoon flew by as Jim got to know this tiny herd that lived in the flowers at Charlie’s house. Every day Jim came over to visit the tiny herd of wild elephants, and they discussed how it might have come about that Charlie found them back there. “Maybe it’s like Narnia or Oz or Gulliver or something. Maybe they are from another world, a tiny world and they just got stuck here,” Charlie speculated.

Whatever the explanation or no explanation, the boys loved those tiny animals, making sure their little flower jungle had everything they needed. Then one day, Jim showed up and he could see on Charlie’s face that something was wrong with the elephants.

“Oboe is missing,” Charlie said with a sob. Oboe was the tiniest elephant in the little herd and he had been a little sick. Jim and Charlie were beside themselves. First they checked with the herd. The rest of the little

elephants were also agitated, trumpeting and thrashing in the leaves and grass as though they might find Oboe down there.

“Let’s look around the yard and house...maybe he just went exploring,” Jim said, but then he just froze. He saw Charlie looking down at the bull of the tribe, Trombone, and Trombone was looking Charlie right in the eye. His trunk was flapping in an angry and violent tantrum as he bellowed his rage. Charlie held the little elephant’s gaze and all Jim could tell was that Charlie seemed to understand.

They picked apart that yard almost twig-by-twig, looking. They ventured into the side yards and even inside the house, although there really was no way little Oboe could get there. Suddenly, Jim grabbed Charlie’s sleeve. “LOOK, that gate is slightly open.”

The boys ran back to the gate that emptied into the big field behind the house. They stepped out, calling for the little elephant and pulling the weeds and grass apart hoping the little sick elephant hadn’t gone very far.

“Looking for this?”

Both boys froze. They turned together and there stood Rodney. He had his head cocked

And slowly he extended and opened his hand. There, lying in his hand, down but still moving, was Oboe. The little elephant honked and trumpeted when those fingers got off of him, and then with all the power in his round, gray body, he stood up.

“Just look what I found, Charlie,” Rodney taunted. “This is one of your little special friends, isn’t it? Just look how small he is. Well, well, well. Bet you would hate it if this little elephant ever got hurt.” And at that, he raised a brick high above his head looking down at Oboe in this other hand.

“TROMBONE, NOW!” Charlie suddenly shouted out. Like an explosion, the thunder of the giant bull elephant erupted from behind Rodney. The roar knocked Jim down and when he got up he looked up behind Rodney. An elephant as big as a house was towering over the tiny bully. Before Jim could even think, the bull elephant grabbed Jim by that raised hand and yanked him high into the air.

Oboe flipped out of Rodney’s hand and Charlie caught him. Jim looked up and recognized the elephant. “It’s Trombone! He’s gigantic.”

Rodney was screaming in terror as Trombone swung him, grasped in his huge trunk high in the air. Suddenly, Trombone rose up on his back legs and towered as high as a six-story building, roaring in rage and vengeance.

“TROMBONE, STOP!” Charlie suddenly shouted out and like some kind of magic, everything froze. The huge elephant dropped to his front legs again and slowly, he lowered Rodney to the ground.

“That beast was going to kill me!” Rodney said, shaking like a leaf. Suddenly, Charlie charged forward and took Rodney by the shirt and pulled him so close their noses touched.

“He could have killed you. He could have crushed you like a tiny bug just like you could have crushed that tiny bird that day. But he didn’t. He showed you kindness you did not deserve. He knows something you don’t know, Rodney. He knows that all animals deserve love, respect and kindness and pain and damage is not recreation when it comes to how we treat the animals God put on this earth.”

And with that, Rodney pulled free and ran like a scared cat through the big elephant’s legs all the way home to think about his lesson. Nobody ever saw Trombone or Oboe again.

The story got around and became a myth in town, but only Jim and Charlie ever really knew what happened to the little herd of elephants living in Charlie's mother's prize flower plot in their back yard.

Story 30

SPACE SHIPS

***Value: Respect other
cultures***

From the windows of the pavilion hall you could see space ships coming out of orbit and moving into a landing pattern. There were space ships of every shape and color and size from every developed civilization across the galaxy. They just kept coming and coming to the Intergalaxy Stellar Conference on trade. This conference alone brought a delegation from almost every civilization that could launch a spacecraft. Enemies, friends, and aliens of every description mixed together in the huge conference buildings to work through their differences for the purpose of buying and selling to each other.

It was a pretty boring conference for a bunch of kids, but it was fun to meet kids from all the other planets and species and such. Mike made friends easily. Before long his two conference running buddies were Flangeflo the Shnopyte and a creature who had 12 legs and whose mouth was at the end of a long snout. Their race was called the Hugeriations, but his name just sounded like clicks and whistles. It took 15 minutes to say it, so they just nicknamed him Buster.

“Wow, there are so many different creatures around here, guys. This is so much fun. Did you see the kid with like 1000 ears all up and down the left side of his body?” Mike laughed.

“What about the Hohohoillians? Not just two arms but arms coming out and dropping off and growing all the time, so they are like in a constant state of changing,” remembered Flangeflo. “That would be hard to handle, I think,” he reflected. “And everyone’s clothes are so colorful and different, as well as their ways of talking. Even with the translation machines, it’s so strange to listen to.”

“My dad says it’s evil how the Savinarians dress and we can never eat with them because they are diseased,” Buster finally added unhappily. “Our world has been at war with the Savinarians for 60,000 years.”

“But why, Buster, what do you want them to do or change to make the war go away?” Mike asked, confused.

“We just cannot live in the universe they live in. They are inferior to us and their very existence causes us to suffer and hate,” the child Hugeriation said with a voice that was like something he just learned but didn’t understand.

“Our leader, Granza the Grand, has been ruling our world for 10,000 years,” Flangeflo said reverently. “He says we can trade with other worlds, but we must not talk to others or learn of your cultures. My dad said I can come here but I must not learn anything.

My dad is kind of a rebel like that. We don't understand why there is so much hate among all these races."

The three sat in the food court of the huge pavilion hall eating their Remdack Worms and Slime Fries and watching the amazing assortment of strange-looking creatures wander by. An Yllismirf with a giant funnel for a head seemed to deliberately bump a delegate of the federation of Kaerbaemevig, who rolled by on wheels for feet. Growling spits were exchanged and weapons drawn, but the delegation police were quick to separate the two species that so hated each other.

"All of the tribes and racial groups seem to hate each other," Buster observed. "There is no cure."

"No," Flangeflo interrupted. "Look at that delegate near the Starbucks booth. They are the Slegna. My family went on vacation to their world. They know no war. Their delegates are on all the peace counsels, my dad told me. Their society looks for the good in all races and species."

"Our world is ravaged by war," Buster moaned. This planet is like heaven to us. Everywhere you look on our world there is destruction and illness and poverty,

because all we have is poured into war and the elimination of species we hate.”

“Well,” Mike the human interrupted. “We are not that bad off, but war is constant on our world, too. And yes, so many of our cities are run down and desolate.”

“The Slegna world is shining and full of schools and museums and theme parks. The Slegna can pour every ounce of their work into making their society better and stronger, because they spend nothing on hate or war. You should see their planet. It’s like your wildest dreams of a perfect place.”

“We must get to our fathers and help them represent the Slegna way to the delegates,” Mike said sadly.

“Hatred and war don’t help anyone. Real peace comes from accepting others and looking for the truly great in all races, no matter how they look, speak or dress,” concluded Buster, knowing that even now, these words would be treason on his world.

“All we can do is try,” Flangeflo concluded. “That’s all we can do.”

Story 31

THE PERFECT PLACE

Value: Home

“You are an obnoxious little brother and I don’t have to take this!” Heather screamed, standing over Steven, her face red with rage. Steven, just 8, was the one person who could drive her into such a fit.

“Oh, yeah, well where are you going to go?” the child taunted his 14-year-old sister.

“I’ll just go to.....”

“Don’t say it!” Heather heard from the door and there were Brad and Samantha. They grabbed Heather and maneuvered her out the door.

“Wait, tell me, what was she going to say?” Steven followed, pestering the older kids for the secret knowledge they held. He followed them for several blocks until Brad found the fence with the secret hole in it and they all slipped under.

“Wow, that was close, you almost told him,” Samantha gasped.

“Not me,” Heather laughed. “Anavrin is our special place. It’s just amazing nobody knows that it is just on the other side of the creek behind those trees. It’s a perfect place, a city with no evil and no pain.”

Heather and Brad and Samantha had only visited Anavrin twice. They had been to that place in that

little bend in the river so many times. But one day, they found it. It was just a door. It floated above the ground easily as though gravity didn't control it. But when the kids stepped through it, the amazing and massive city of Anavrin seemed to spring up all around them. The walls rose hundreds of yards into the air, with balconies and rooms and fountains. The floors were pure ivory and jade and the people all dressed in the finest of satins and silks.

There was no way to explain it or describe it. The three friends walked about in wonder, touching things and fearing they would get in trouble. "Far from it," a sweet little old lady who had lived in Anavrin for 100 years said. "Anavrin is yours to take. We want you to love it and never want to leave it. I never have."

Oh, they had such a wonderful time. The food was so sweet, even the meats and vegetables tasted like pudding and flowed down their throats. They cried big, round tears when they knew they had to leave, and they saw big, round tears on the cheeks of all their sweet friends they met that day in Anavrin.

A week later, Heather, Brad and Samantha sat by the creek bed, waiting until the door appeared again. Without thinking, they dashed through it and again

were in the perfect world of Anavrin. This time the king of Anavrin met them and gave them the grand tour.

“We have to leave at 6 o’clock,” Brad said, pointing at his watch, always the responsible one.

“Oh, ho, ho, watches have no place in Anavrin,” the king laughed and with a flick, Brad’s watch jumped from his wrist, turned into a dove and flew away.

“Hey, that was my best watch!” he objected, but the laughter of the girls was impossible to resist. This time they also gave them their own cottage in a particularly lovely street in the vast city of Anavrin. There they napped and ate and celebrated, because they almost seemed to be citizens.

“Heather,” Samantha remarked, “did you notice some of the workers were sort of glaring at us as we rode along with the King?”

“I did notice that,” Samantha answered. “That one glared from under his hat and then made the most evil smile. I never expected to see that in Anavrin. It’s like heaven here.”

They decided to overlook some of their fears and they still had a wonderful time. “Well, time to go,” Brad announced, still able to figure out the time. But when

they went to the door, the king was there along with about a dozen other citizens, smiling and hugging them.

“We don’t want you to go,” they wept. “Stay with us forever.”

“No, no, we can’t do that,” Samantha answered sweetly. “We must get back home.”

“NO!” the King said suddenly, and the children jumped. But then his face softened and he lead them to the magic door, and they were able to go through it and back home.

The children sat on the creek bed and discussed Heather’s obnoxious brother. Suddenly, the door appeared again. For some reason the kids felt some hesitation, but then Heather jumped up and squealed, “Come on!” All three charged through the door.

The celebration of their return was wild. The citizens lifted the kids to their shoulders and carried them, singing almost insane tunes as they carried them toward their cottage.

“Hey, stop that!” Heather suddenly squawked. “Someone is pinching me.” The other kids began to squirm some, too, as fingers of the adoring citizens seemed to be trying to pinch off pieces of the kids

where they held them aloft. But they had a wonderful meal, eating an especially large number of pies and cookies, and then they rested in their cottage.

“Ohhhhh.” Brad suddenly sat up. “Something is wrong. My stomach hurts.”

“Mine, too,” Samantha complained. “I feel unhappy inside. That food wasn’t right. It’s like it wasn’t food that people should eat.” All three began to pace, feeling more and more yucky inside. Also it seemed the colors of the cottage and even outside in the trees and ponds were turning grayer and grayer. Suddenly, the King’s face appeared in the window, full of smiles.

“We are so glad you have come to stay with us forever. Whenever guests come, Anavrin turns so bright and colorful. We want to help you resist the evil wish to go home. My assistants are locking your door now to keep anyone from taking you from us.” They heard movement at the door and heard the locks snap shut. “Tomorrow you will get your permanent jobs in the mines or the cotton fields.”

He disappeared. Heather burst into tears. Their perfect place had become ugly and frightening and the food made them sick. “I want to go home,” she cried loudly.

Suddenly, there were the sounds of a fight outside.

“Let go of me, you big creep!” There were sounds of hitting. “Heather, you idiot, you in there?” It was Steven.

“Steven, Steven, get us out!”

“How can he be? He is only 8!” Samantha said emotionally.

“Oh, he can fight. Three years of jujitsu have made him pretty tough,” Heather said.

SMACK, SMACK, SMACK, SMACK, SMACK – they heard the sounds of conflict.

“Quit crying, you big baby,” Steven taunted as he soundly trounced the soft and sickly guards. The kids inside heard the keys being worked and suddenly the door swung open and there stood Steven. “Come on, Heather, Mom is going to kill you for being late.”

The kids raced from the cottage and followed Steven along the paths of Anavrin and to the door. They dove out and splashed down in the creek before the stunned Anavrin citizens could stop them.

Back home, the kids ate good foods and hugged their parents and sisters and brothers and got together to celebrate being safe.

“I am so happy to be home. It isn’t all perfect like Anavrin was at first, but I know I am safe here, and I can eat healthy food and my family really loves me.”

“Yeah, even that dorky brother of yours – Steven. He loves you enough to beat the snot out of a lot of the people in Anavrin.”

They all laughed and thought about what a hero the little creep had been back there and how they would never stop being grateful for what he did for them.

Story 32

THE WEATHER MAN

***Value: Protect the
environment***

Danny was so excited. The class was taking a field trip to where his daddy worked. They were going to the TV station to learn all about how local news broadcasts work. Mrs. Flaming said they would be able to get inside the traffic helicopter and even see themselves on TV on the broadcast set where the news anchors worked. But what Danny was most excited about was that his daddy would be able to show off what he does. Danny's daddy was the weatherman.

Ms. Bentley helped all the children stay together as they took their tour of the studio. Everything was so interesting, from the cameras to the sets to the make-up rooms. They even got to meet a lot of the local celebrities who were on television every day. During the question-and-answer sessions, the kids' hands were in the air non-stop, yelling "pick me, pick me!" as they shouted out questions to the nice people who taught them how television worked. The performers and producers and all the people at the station were very nice and patient.

Finally, they came to the weather center.

"Children, I want to introduce you to Mr. Johnson. He is the chief weather man for Channel Six and, guess what, he is Danny's father," Ms. Bentley said, and

Danny felt so proud. His dad smiled and greeted the class. He had been working on his evening weather report, but he took the time to show the class all around the weather center, explaining how weather worked and about the satellites and the storm chasers and the instruments and computers, too.

The question-and-answer period was loud, with everyone wanting to know something. Danny's dad patiently took each question.

"Pick me, pick me!" Ashley waved her arm in the back, and then Mr. Johnson pointed at her. "Why does everyone blame you for the weather? You don't make the weather happen, do you? You just report it."

Everyone laughed, expecting Mr. Johnson to laugh, too, but he sat there quiet for several moments not speaking. He seemed to be thinking about something serious. Finally, he looked up at the children.

"There is a room in the weather center I never show on tours. But since you are good and extra smart kids and since you are Danny's friends, I want to show you a room that we weather men all know about but we don't talk about it much. Would you like that?"

“YAAAAYYYYYY!” the children cheered. They followed him to the back of the weather center and down a hall where the offices were. Then he got out a special key and opened a big, black door. It swung open to a large dark room with lots of screens and computers inside. He gestured for the children to enter.

Mr. Johnson led them to the far end of the room where there was a wall-sized screen. “Now, children, I am going to introduce you to someone. He is the boss of all weathermen everywhere. His name is Eli.”

With that he turned on the screen. The lights flashed and then the kids spotted him. Eli came, working his way from the back. He was tall and thin. He had long, white hair and a white, pointy beard but in every other way he looked like most everyone’s grandpa.

“Eli is the weather wizard. He doesn’t predict the weather; he causes it. Eli can make it rain and control the weather all around the world,” Mr. Johnson explained.

“That can’t be true!” said a lanky boy named Fredrick near the front of the group. Eli looked into the screen as though he could see them.

“Hello, children. Well, Mr. Johnson, I see we have a skeptic. Shall I put on a small demonstration?”

“I think so, Eli,” Mr. Johnson agreed. “OK, Fredrick, watch this,” Eli said, and all the children were puzzled that he knew their names. He waved his hand in a big wide arch. Suddenly inside the dark room, everyone heard a tiny crack and then saw a flash of lightning not more than an inch long.

“Hey, what’s happening?” Fredrick suddenly shouted, and then everyone giggled as a tiny storm cloud formed over Fredrick’s head and began to rain just on him. He waved his hand and laughed with delight at the trick. Then Eli waved his hand and it stopped.

“Can you really control the weather, Eli?” Danny asked.

“Yes, Danny. See up here on these monitors. I have monitors of the clouds, the oceans, and the forests all over the globe. I can move the clouds around, change the tides and influence the moon and the way the fish swim to make the weather behave as I wish. Well, mostly I can,” Eli said proudly.

“Tides? The Moon? What does that have to do with weather?” Ashley raised her hand and then asked.

“Oh, everything Ashley,” Eli answered her.

“Everything is tied together in the environment. The weather is changed by what happens on earth, in the forests, and in the seas, too. The ocean tides are changed by the gravity of the moon. It’s all one complicated system that even Mr. Johnson and I do not fully understand. It’s a miracle the way it was all put together.”

“What do you mean, mostly you can?” Danny asked with worry.

“Look and see,” Eli said, and the monitors changed. They saw horrible sights of factories belching out smoke into the air. They saw bulldozers flattening forests for land. They saw garbage being dumped into the ocean and oil falling off of ships contaminating the beaches.

“Pollution, children. Even Eli can’t fix that. It changes everything. When the clouds are polluted, they don’t obey their regular laws and things go wrong. When the trees are destroyed, our air gets messed up, which changes how we breathe and how wind works. But worst of all, when we put poison chemicals into the air, some of it goes up and destroys the protection around the earth so the sun starts to burn

up plants, land, and even people. It doesn't get cold like it should any more."

"Is that global warming?" Danny asked.

"Yes, Danny," Eli answered.

"But what can we do? We are just children!" many in the class called out. "Talk to your parents, maybe even your congressmen so they protect the environment. Don't let factories destroy all the trees. Don't let chemicals go into the air to cause global warming. It's not just up to you, it's up to all of us," Eli answered.

"Let's all go home and plant a tree today," Ms. Bentley suggested. "That will be our assignment and those trees will make oxygen and make our environment better for all of us."

"YAAAYYYYYY!" they all yelled with excitement, and they left the TV studio much smarter about weather and the ways we can all work to protect our world.