

Mountains Forever



Edited by Para Limbu
Artwork by Param Meyangbo

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by Para Limbu, Project Leader, Mountains Forever



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Foreword



Mountains Forever is more than a book about mountains. It is a book of stories about mountains by mountain children and youths for their counterparts in other mountain countries across the world. It began as a collection of short stories from 20 countries. The idea was forwarded to the Asia Pacific Mountain Network (APMN) – a project of ICIMOD funded by Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and in recent years the Asian Node of the Mountain Forum Network – by Spiny Babbler, a young people's media organization in Nepal. The small grant award given by APMN supported adventures in prose and paintings about the mountains by young mountain people.

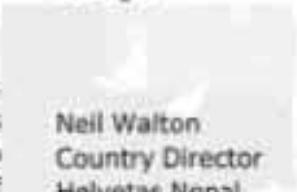
The paintings themselves, all produced by a young mountain woman, Param Meyangbo, constitute the illustrations to the stories which evoked in the artist the vibrant colors of the mountains and the vivid imaginations of the young authors. ICIMOD is proud to be a part of this endeavour, to experience an awakening in the next generation of enthusiasm for their mountain world and a desire to describe it in their terms – terms of joy rather than gloom.

I take this opportunity to thank Neil Walton and Helvetas Nepal for co-sponsoring the publication of this book with us to celebrate the International Year of Mountains (2002). Thanks are also due to Neil and his team for finding for us the young author and story from Switzerland. I would also like to thank the Spiny Babbler team led by Pallav Ranjan for their unfailing enthusiasm for this work. It is indeed gratifying to find such strong echoes of our own enthusiasm for mountains and their people in the future generation of workers for mountain development.

J. Gabriel Campbell
Director General
ICIMOD

◀ helvetas Nepal ▶

Helvetas is very pleased to share support for the production of this book. Even though mountains have always been there, this kind of cross-country story-telling by children themselves has not. Let us hope this small contribution helps to bring children and adults a little closer together and adds to the sharing of cross-cultural perceptions and feelings.



Neil Walton
Country Director
Helvetas Nepal



Spiny Babbler

This book you hold in your hands is the output of young people of twenty nations. It was two years ago that Spiny Babbler received some support from the Asia Pacific Mountain Network to initiate "Mountains Forever," a project that would encourage young people to learn and present mountain environments, cultures, and lifestyles in creative ways.

Para Limbu was already spearheading Spiny Babbler organization's arts related multi-national involvements. Selected Short Stories of Australia and Neighbouring Islands, Selected Poems of Europe, Selected Poems of the United Kingdom, an extensive website at www.spinybabbler.org were some efforts that were going on. She is also the editor of *Pen and Ink* for International PEN's Nepal Chapter, an organization with a hundred twenty chapters in seventy-four countries. It was she that led this new project "Mountains Forever" across four continents.

The challenge facing Spiny Babbler was to initiate contact with governments, youth clubs, educational institutions, and related networks and through them to youths. The project had to encourage youth in as many countries as possible to learn and research mountain environments, cultures, and lifestyles and write about them. Spiny Babbler had to select a wide range of stories and essays based on research, imagination, and legends and come out with products that would help share this knowledge with an international audience.

The creations that have come out of the project have helped Spiny Babbler come up with several outputs. These include a webpages concentrating on this project within www.spinybabbler.org, a book of stories published by Spiny Babbler as *Young Minds of Twenty Nations*, and this book *Mountains*

Forever published by the International Centre of Integrated Mountain Development with Helvetas Swiss Development Agency.

While presentation of the outputs of this project in other forms are being discussed, Spiny Babbler realizes how important it is to involve young minds in sharing their concerns and joys and reaching out and communicating their ideas, knowledge, and love for this world, particularly the mountains that they live with. At this time, Spiny Babbler features an average one hundred youth volunteers who are working with arts in ways that help the mentally ill, people facing life-threatening conditions, girls at risk, and others. The work of these young people in Nepal and the young people of four continents who share with us these stories are genuine and heart touching.

Whether fantasy, solid research, folklore, simple statements, or science fiction, I hope that you enjoy these creations. And I sincerely thank Neil Walton at Helvetas and Greta Rana and Beatrice Shrestha at ICIMOD for making this particular output of the project possible.

Paliav Ranjan
Founder
Spiny Babbler

The Twenty Nation Essay and Short Story Program

by Para Limbu
Project Leader
Mountains Forever

It has given me much pleasure to work with this international anthology of short stories and essays. Authors from 20 countries, aged mostly in their teens, share with us sixty short stories and essays. Based on issues related to mountain life and environments, the heartbeats of these stories and essays flow from the Australian continent through the deserts of the Middle East to the high Himalayas. They represent rich cultures and generations of learning.

I have enjoyed reading and selecting these creations from around the world. I feel the flow of their energy and spontaneity: the creations are refreshingly fun, delightful, and informative. I wanted to encourage and involve children from many different nations to share their thoughts and feelings with us. Some of the stories are above the standards of excellence that I had envisioned, most of them are admirable, there are some which stand for the active participation of young people from different parts of the world.

I feel the program has generated awareness among participants from diverse cultures and traditions. It has emphasized the need for them to care for their environment. Some of them have expressed curiosity in knowing about other participants and being able to access and read the creations of their "friends". I think the program has been able to nurture values in the participants: values that make them appreciate new cultures and their own national and local identities.

The response from these young people has been infectious. Just two days ago, Ibragimov Odil from Kazakhstan wrote to me asking for information on the book and related photographs for publication in their class newsletter. He wondered if he and his friends could send in more stories! Many of them feel "honored" in being able to participate in this program and look forward to seeing their work published in print for the first time.

I remember the time I received the first submission from Russia. I excitedly read it aloud to my colleagues. Maria Barannikova had written "They [mountains] look like the steps to heaven." I knew that instance that this project could be nothing less than inspirational. Many of the stories and essays in this book borrow from local religions, legends, or cultures. They talk about the beginning of creation long before humans existed and remind us of our deep connection with



mythologies. Some of the stories – especially those from Kazakhstan, Japan, and Bangladesh – have been put together through research and study. Among them, Sri Lanka's Rasika Akalanka Akuramboda describes the Khumbu region so explicitly that one believes she has already been to Nepal! Stories like "Mountain of Sleeping Giants" by Atish Kumar from Fiji or "Poor Man and the Beetle" retold by Nek Bano, Ashima, and Rahat from Pakistan introduce us to local folklore. Some of the stories take us far into the realms of celestial imagination: as Massalina Madina from Kazakhstan writes, "Mountains are the abode of gods".

Participants have also come up with refreshing characters: they are as memorable as they are genuine. It is easy to shape these characters in my mind. I instantly fell in love with Ploddy the Panda in Lauren Taylor's "Black and White." Then there is Mizanoff from Ananna Madhury's "The Birds." I also like Nusrat's conceptualization of the "Autobiography of Mont Blanc". The fun and adventure in "The Mountain of Dreams", the comic twist in "Gold on the Mountain", and the surprise ending in "The Challenge" are other elements I especially enjoyed.

It has taken me two years to come up with this book. Let me describe to you how this book and products related to this multi-national project came about. In the beginning of 2000, Spiny Babbler received some support from the Asia Pacific Mountain Network for this project. I gladly accepted the responsibility entrusted in me to carry it out. I started out by sending out invitations to various organizations and individuals to participate in the project. In my effort to reach out to countries from varying topographical and climatic regions, I had to cross many cultural and geographical boundaries, albeit through letters, faxes, and emails. The project was originally supposed to concentrate on countries of the Asia Pacific region. Gradually, over the months, it began to gain a larger coverage.

It was easy to access data on schools in territories like Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore through the internet. I was able to send invitations to many educational institutions of these countries and anticipated an influx of contributions. Some of them required stringent follow-up and help from key individuals.





With non-English speaking countries, there was an obvious problem: participants had to write in a language that was not their own. Zohra Khanum went out of her way to coordinate with the young people of Nasirabad and Hassanabad in Northern Pakistan, the effort resulted in distinctive stories such as "Eat Spoon". A teacher who was teaching basic writing skills to second year English-major students in China explained, "We do not have a writing course in the first year although I have been suggesting it for at least six years... I had to get permission from my 'boss' to tell the students about the contest." The response from some of these countries was most unexpected. Beautifully written stories came from Kazakhstan, Russia, Japan, and Iran. I think that the help that many teachers, especially English teachers, gave their students in writing these stories and essays was crucial.

At the end of eight months, supposed to be the original project phase, I seemed only part way through. The summer break, final exams, and winter holidays in schools and colleges impeded progress. As there were still many tasks left to be done and more places to reach out to, I requested for time extension and got down to identifying other communication sources. By this time, I felt it was important to reach out to countries at the national level. I mailed invitations to government bodies. At first, I was skeptical as to whether any of them would acknowledge my enquiry let alone respond to it. It came as a nice surprise when I received letters from Turkey, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Fiji, and Thailand. Some of them forwarded my invitation to their colleagues and most expressed interest in not only this but similar intercultural projects if they were to be held in the future. They genuinely hoped that the work of their young people would come up to the project's expectations and be included in the products brought out by the project.

Mid-way through the project, I was struck by an idea – what better way than to reach out to young people than through the young people themselves. Through the help of a friend, I was able to contact different youth leaders ranging from Australia to Vanuatu. The response from them was very encouraging. Rieko Kubota from Sophia University, Japan, remarked that it was more interesting to write a short story than watch a documentary regarding environmental issues. Joyce Koh from Singapore expressed interest in continuing to be in touch with an organization like Spiny Babbler. And Charith Pelpola from Sri Lanka commented that the programme qualified to be publicized internationally and helped the process. Being the editor of *Pen and Ink*, a publication of PEN International's Nepal Chapter, also helped: the organization has 120 chapters in seventy-four countries. Among them, the Taiwanese, Australian, and New Zealand Pen Centers agreed to disseminate information regarding the project and gave wholehearted support.

I tried to see whether countries like Laos, Myanmar, Afghanistan, or Iraq could be involved as well. I contacted Voices in the Wilderness. I learned that schools in the country lacked basic infrastructure and most probably would not be in a position to participate properly. Though I feel the more inaccessible and politically remote nations are, the more necessary it is for them to become part of intercultural exchange processes like Mountains Forever. However, time had come, sadly, to start wrapping things up.

I also feel the young people participating in this project have been patient with me and the project. I remember myself the impatience of youth. The project that started two years back and its visible outputs are coming up now. Some of the children needed certificates of merit, supposed to be sent out with the contributors' copies, for university and college applications a year back. As they mailed information for the contributors' section, I began to know more about them personally.

Now came the difficulty in selecting stories. Due to the constraints placed by the publication team, I had to select and choose. In many ways dropping a story was a difficult process. Even though some stories did not make it into this book, in my heart I appreciate the effort and contribution of these young people to this project.

Once the stories were put together, Spiny Babbler prepared the publication *Young Minds of Twenty Nations*. Upon discussion with Greta Rana, Head of Communication and Outreach at ICIMOD, another book, *Mountains Forever*, with color paintings to enhance the stories was suggested and the centre's publication unit proposed to support such an endeavor. Four months of full-time work by Param Meyangbo at Spiny Babbler resulted in the production of sixty-one vibrant paintings. I feel that these paintings back-up the children's creations artistically and effectively. A website was prepared within www.spinybabbler.org. Neil Walton at Helvetas Swiss Development Agency also agreed to support the publication of this new color book. I am thankful for their support.

Looking back on the project, I realize that it was a remarkable process for me. I was able to initiate a conscious effort for multi-national awareness-building and outreach. Government bodies, youth and environmental organizations, educational institutions, and individuals contributed much to this effort. The program reached out to some children living in remote areas.

I believe that coordination and encouragement from many individuals and organizations, including my colleagues at Spiny Babbler, and, especially, young women and men, have made *Mountains Forever* and this multi-nation project possible. I have rejoiced in being a part of such a creative and stimulating experience and I am glad that, through this book, we can share and delve into a fantastic world created by the youth of twenty nations.



ELIZABETH GIFFORD

The Fool on the Hill

There are few, if any, mountains in the place she calls home, and no serious hills or high places. This region sits alone between a desert and an ocean, a little living space with a cluster of skyscrapers to try to convince the world it is a real city. But the hills are not to be taken seriously, not even those that cause a smudge on the horizon and make one's ears pop when returning from a day of picnicking. They are merely small bumps in the scenery, as if the ground warped, swelled slightly with age and sighing, let itself hang loose in parts.

But there are places she can go to gain a sense of proportion of the landscape, if an idea of here/there is what she needs. This is where the rest of the smoothed-out world slips away at all sides, and it is easy to imagine she is the only person on earth.

On one of the insignificant rises in the countryside previously spoken of, there is a monument to the fallen soldiers, sailors and airmen, all wreaths and flags and disarmed missiles aiming at a faceless enemy out in the harbor. She used to come here when things slid out of proportion. Those times when the past and the present twisted together, and she thought she saw the future stretching straight and hideous before her, when it all became too much and she needed solitude to clear the tangled mess. Tourists came up here to see the little muddled town of Fremantle spreading out below them like the contents of a tipped-out toybox, complete with abacus flats, true-noise cars and an over-complex town-hall spire. It is common opinion that Fremantle can be seen with one look without the effort of climbing up the monument hill. But still the visitors and travelers come in their paint-peeling Greyhound convoys and tacky see-the-sights

trams. What they think of the port town panorama below them she can only guess. It is her home, but to them probably it's just another collection of buildings and trees they scrawled vaguely on to the slate of memory. Some things are temporary in consciousness, but others stick like painful burrs. The sallow skin tone of someone who terrified her, the stale metallic taste of loneliness, the melting dye of sweets she ate on an afternoon that she wishes she could forget, though it lingers on and on. The mind is variable, remembering in hues of emotion, scent and sound, but most of all feeling, for we are emotional creatures, feeling our way through day after day, year after year.

The port sits by the river and sea, cranes and floodlights reaching high into the winter-furred sky, tickling the underbelly of the clouds with their mathematic edges. Fat round oil drums squat next to sensible building-block stacks of containers, a contrast in shape that has been etched into her mind from afternoons of staring at the same scene. Just what was in those containers, she would wonder. Timber? Antiques from China, Bali, Taiwan? Shoes for export? Or someone's life in its stored household form, an entire existence packed into boxes and tea chests? She would think about being that person, that lucky one who was laying away worldly things and wandering out into the divide. It seemed so easy and yet so impossible; to be able to turn and walk away from the spinning, jeering whirl of life as she knew it.

The sea breeze can sidle up deviously on this hill, curling around the ankles like a sly puppy, then nipping through coat and scarf be-



fore there is even time to shiver. It's a town of breezes, Fremantle. Or, more often than not, bone-chilling gales flung straight off the ocean, still icy with Antarctic spray.

But if it's storms and gales that are wanted, there's a better place to go than here. She can see it from the hill, the south mole over near Bathers' Beach, a man-piled stretch of rocks headed with a red birthday candle lighthouse, reaching out into the water. On rough days, she sits and watches as storms roll in past the islands, wrathful clouds gathering strength as they feed off one another, steadily growing in a bass crescendo towards the shore.

Look to the east now, turn away from the ocean with its illogical flights of fancy. See suburbia stretching out into the horizons, a carpet of green-red-brown, endless. This was what contained her, roofs and roads as far as the eye could see, teeming with unseen activity, systems, rules. All the insecurities and home-spun nightmares would dance through her thoughts as she looked out over those little boxes, and she would tear out the grass around her feet, ripping out fistfuls in anger, resentment, fear. Most of all, fear that she would become trapped in the cycle of boredom and hate forever, and live out the rest of her life in a split-level mortgage and tv movie existence, never questioning, satisfied with being unsatisfied. Her consternation caused the patch of grass where she went to sit each day to be plucked bald, a paler patch on the rolling blanket of green. Two birds, small and angular, wing their way above the line of vision. Follow their aerial antics, layout sault, dive, loop, kick out or pike, twist, recover. A curious path to the peak of the Norfolk island pine, a tree that is common enough, but each one a green-spiked tower of strength, lifting its branches up like proud, stern yardarms.

But from up atop, a sense of dimension can be gained; when distance and altitude (however slight) diminishes everything in size, so too it diminishes importance. The world may be closing in, inner demons manifesting themselves through disagreeable or frightening people, but climb above it all. Roll back into the green carpet of grass,

let yourself be absorbed by the vast blue eggshell sky. The rest of the world slips away, paramount empty blueness swallowing up any selfish human arrogance there might be inside you. Once you learn how truly insignificant you are, merely a lucky concatenation of atoms, you gain a sense of hopeless, hopeful freedom. Hopeless because you are an infinitesimal speck on a speck on a speck, floating through your brief existence, mattering as much as the dandelion down which blows on the spring breeze down the monument hill in a fluffy dreamcloud.

Hopeful because... because you got here at all. For while existence may not seem to amount to much, make what you can of what you have. Its sum total is eternally more than non-existence.

The sun has been ingested by the long bank of cloud over the ocean. It all melts into a harsh golden mass, spreading and losing shape as nightfall wanders closer. In the half-light, she can see that the spot where she used to sit is no longer raw and stark. At one time, it seemed like the grass would never grow back, that the cycle would perpetuate itself and the green blades would always bear the brunt of her misery.

It seemed forever at the time. With the greedy pain of semi-childhood, everything swells and feeds on itself, time, unhappiness, everything. But she grew, things changed, and she learned that mountains can crumble into the sea, high places erode into low and in turn be built up again. It is the pattern of hills and valleys that takes some settling into, a long journey that only she needs the courage of a single step to begin. This is a place that reminds her of the proportions of life, and how easy that single step can be. Swell or dip to fit the landscape, gain the inward eye through your sample of one. Come up to the top of the hill and remember your place in the world, just where you fit into the blue-green-brown speck floating in oblivion. Take time out to rise above the rest of the world on this not-too-high highground, and let the never-ending pale parachute sky help you make sense of it all.

ADITI AHMED

The Mountain of Dreams

"Mountains are like dreams," my grandfather used to tell me. "You do not know which wish of yours will come true and where you'll be headed when you are on a mountain."

Mountains – these sky-high lands that touch soft white clouds – are dreams, which we want to explore. Sometimes, in this dream, I can feel the ground of the Himalayas beneath my feet and a violent ice-cold wind hitting my face and chilling my whole body. A desire for adventure builds up in me and I am filled with excitement and fear. I am challenged and I want action. In my dream, I travel through my grandfather's tales of adventure he told me of when I was a child. One of his stories will remain forever etched in my memory.

It was a cold night, a time when my grandfather usually told me about his adventures. Before starting, he handed a book to me. I

opened the book, went through it, and saw pictures of strange looking creatures with queer writings and a few notes written by my grandfather on the last few pages. I read his notes, but I could not make anything out of them. "What's a yeti, grandpa?"

"Read it child," he said softly, not looking at me. I read his notes twice, but I still could not make out what he had written. The book looked ancient and I could see that grandfather had taken good care of it.

"I still don't understand, grandpa. Why don't you say anything? Who are Victor and Kinore? What is this book all about? Say something grandpa." I was beginning to feel concerned, grandpa had a faraway look on his face, and I feared something had happened to the man I respected very much. I sat there staring at him.

After fifteen minutes, he looked at me and said, "It was the abominable snowman in the mountain of our dreams. The mountain where Victor and I faced one of God's most amazing creations."

"The what?" I asked.

"Shh... listen child." And so he began his story.

"Victor was my college mate in England and together we did the most exciting things. Exploring mountain areas was a passion we both shared. Together, we explored the Alps, Mont Blanc, and Elbrus in Europe and Kilimanjaro in Africa. But we felt that for us the most remarkable mountain was Everest in the Himalayas. Victor and I had always dreamed of exploring the Everest region.

"June 1, 1967. Victor and I reached Tibet. Our university gave us a summer break of two months, so Victor and I decided that it was time to explore the mountain of our dreams. We checked into a motel and decided to explore the city. We loved it instantly. It was just what we had imagined.

"The next day we met a Tibetan guide who gave us some interesting information. 'If you want to explore the Everest region,' he said, 'You must be aware of the yeti or the abominable snowman as you call it. The creature is dangerous and if it sees you, it will take you to its secret hideout, keep you there, and kill you. It is fond of alcohol and it can smell liquor from miles away, so you should make sure that you don't take any. The yeti especially likes young, beautiful girls and it is said that it takes them away and mates with them.' We returned to our motel rooms. Victor and I couldn't help feeling amused at the Tibetan's story. We knew that people in England would laugh at his tale, but personally I had this sense of hope, a hope that the yeti did exist.

"We spent the following day buying supplies and hiring porters for our expedition. The guide, who also owned a shop, provided us

with camping gear and food stock. He also introduced us to one of the best mountain guides in the city: Kinore who was a Tibetan. The following day we started our journey.

"The weather was comfortable at first and we enjoyed the green valleys filled with flowers and trees. The air was fresh and cool with the sweet smell of wet grass hanging in the air. We walked on and on, resting for some time and then continuing. We walked through dense forests and crossed rivers and streams. By evening, the weather had become chilly and we took out our jackets. We stopped on a cliffside and made camp. Then we had dinner and settled in for the night. While Victor and Kinore were sleeping soundly, I opened my bag, took out my torch, pen, and notebook and wrote down the day's happenings. I opened a separate pocket in my knapsack and looked at the two small whisky bottles. I did not tell Kinore that I had brought them with me. It would be used as bait to get closer to the abominable snowman. I placed the bottles beside my sleeping bag and poured some whisky outside our tent. Keeping our tent zip unlocked, I retired for the night. I did not know when I fell asleep.

"Nothing interesting happened that night. The next day, we walked on and on until we reached the colder plains. It began to snow heavily. 'I must warn you,' Kinore said all of a sudden. 'If you are caught in a snowstorm, there is no chance of survival. So we must stay close together.'

"The following day, we reached higher altitude and the place was completely covered in snow. We camped near a snow dune and once again I kept the whisky bottles beside my sleeping bag. During the night, I heard a strange noise. I opened my eyes and raised my head. In my drowsiness, I could make out the outline of a large creature. I tried getting out of my sleeping bag, but the zipper got stuck. By the time I managed to open my zipper, the creature had fled. I



looked around and I saw the two whisky bottles missing. Later, I found your grandmother's picture missing from my notebook.

"The next morning Kinore asked us why we wanted to explore Everest. 'It's simple,' Victor said, 'We want adventure and excitement.' Kinore eyed us suspiciously. 'You might think that we are in search of the yeti,' Victor said, 'Well, we're not.' 'Yes we are, Victor,' I said. Kinore and Victor stared at me in disbelief. 'Zebel,' Victor said, shocked, 'You know very well that the yeti does not exist.' I said, 'I think I saw the yeti Victor. I think I saw it last night. Well, I don't know for sure if it was the yeti, but the possibility is high.' 'Oh,' Victor said, annoyed, 'So you *thought* that you saw the yeti. Great, now we are pursuing something that we aren't even sure it exists. You think you can catch the abominable snowman, Zebel?' 'Victor,' I said, 'Aashna's picture and two whisky bottles are missing. Where do you think they are now?' 'That doesn't prove anything, Mr. Ahmed,' Kinore said. 'Yes it does, Kinore,' I said confidently, 'It proves that someone like the yeti was in our camp last night and it took away the bottles.' We trudged on in the snow. 'Do you want to catch the yeti, Zebel?' Victor asked in a whisper. 'No Vic,' I said, not looking at him. 'I just want to see the yeti and get information on it.'

"We stopped for the night. Victor and Kinore were fast asleep when suddenly the strange creature entered our tent. It looked around for whisky bottles and not seeing any, it took off. 'This time I'll follow you, yeti,' I said softly. I also made sure I took with me my pen and notebook. It was snowing hard and I could hardly make out anything. I saw the figure running away from our campsite and I ran after it. Victor then woke up during the commotion. 'Zebel!' he shouted, 'Where are you going? There's a snowstorm coming. Don't go!' I kept on running after the creature. I ran and ran and after some time, it finally struck me that I was lost. I looked around but

could not see anything. I was scared to death and beginning to feel exceptionally weak. My legs gave way and I fell to the ground. Everything went black.

"I woke up to find myself inside a cave. When I looked up, I saw a hairy face. I screamed at the top of my voice and then I became unconscious. I woke up again. The cave was empty. I looked at the walls. They were filled with drawings and strange writings. It was then that I saw the drawing of your grandmother's picture on the wall. I took my pen and started copying the drawings and writings on my notebook. After some time, it began to get cold. I could see that my hands were turning numb and blue. The fear came back to me and I cried out for help, but there was no answer. I fainted again.

"I woke up to find Victor and Kinore beside me. I was in a hospital room. They said that they had found me behind a rock on a cliff. After Kinore left, Victor came up to me and said that he had seen my notebook. He said that he had found it lying beside me. 'You really saw something in that cave, Zebel,' he said, smiling, 'I think you saw the yeti.' I smiled back at him."

"That was incredible, grandpa!" I said, "Your dream came true. You have discovered the truth about your dream."

"No, child," he said, "I don't. I've only seen it, but I don't know anything about it. The drawings and writings are beyond my understanding. But I explored the mountain of my dreams and I did not let anyone take it away from me. Don't let anyone take away yours."

"No, grandpa," I said, "I won't."

AMER DASTGIR

Lost

Ray Donald was sixteen years old. He and his family had just moved to Utah from Boston the previous year. Rick Anderson was the first friend he made at school and they had become good friends. Rick had introduced Ray to most of the students in the class and he had helped Ray settle into his new school. The two of them were friendly with twin sisters Lisa and Lucy Johnson, who studied in their class, and the four of them had formed a group.

"Hey Rick! What's up?" asked Ray.

"Nothing much I guess. How about you?"

"Same here. Life's been such a drag. The summer's coming up and I have no plans whatsoever. I'm probably gonna spend my time

sleeping or staying up late, watching movies. You know, the usual."

"I know, but I wanted to do something interesting this time. It's the last day of school and I still haven't decided. I'm upset about our trip being cancelled. My sister had to get sick now."

"That's rough. But why don't you go later? The holidays are three months you know."

"My parents think that by the time she's recovered and feels better, it'll be too late."

"Then maybe Lisa, Lucy, you, and I should do something together during the holidays. I'll think of something and let you know. There goes the bell. Let's go to class."

"Hey you guys!" said Lucy and Lisa at class. "Bet you guys can hardly wait for this term to get over! Well, neither can we though we have nothing planned for the summer".

"Nothing at all," added Lucy.

"And you think we do?" remarked Rick sarcastically.

"Well, guys usually have something planned beforehand. Maybe you don't," said Lisa.

"I was just telling Rick that the four of us should do something together. What do you think?" asked Ray.

"That'd be fun, but what can we plan on doing?" asked the girls.

"I told him I'd think of something and let you know. But I think I've got an idea. Oh! There's Miss Hopkins. I'll tell you guys later."

After school was over, the four of them walked home together.

"Okay tell us your brilliant idea, Ray," asked the others.

"I was thinking of maybe going to the Rockies. They're close by, there's fresh air, beautiful scenery, and we'll get a chance to spend a few days in the wild. I can't think of a better idea. What's stopping us?"

"Our parents for one thing. Do you think that they would let us go? It's a great idea but too good to be true."

"Hey, we are responsible enough. We're sixteen, we're not babies. I think if we asked properly, they'd say yes," said Lucy.

"It's worth a try. Anyway, I'll go ask my parents now," said Ray.

"Me too," said Rick. So they parted. The next day the four of them met at the twin's house and they were all allowed, but after a lot of persuasion. There was excitement in the air and the four proceeded to plan their trip. At the end, it was decided that they would leave the following weekend and they marked the trail on a map which they would use to see the Rockies.

The following weekend arrived. They met at Rick's house at seven in the morning and after receiving advice on how to find their trail in case they got lost from Rick's dad and checking if they had all their things over a hundred times, they were finally on their way.

The scenery when they got to the Rockies was breathtaking. There were mountains everywhere as well as greenery. The chirping of birds could be heard from all around. On the first day, they followed their marked trail assiduously and they kept checking their map every fifteen minutes to make sure they were on the right track. Towards the evening, they climbed one of the lower mountains and they set up camp at a clearing at around seven and went to bed.

The next day they continued on the trail and the scenery became more beautiful. Gradually they forgot about their trail and followed an eagle to its nest. They were able to get a sight of its chicks.

"Look at the mother feeding its chicks," exclaimed Ray.

"They are adorable," sighed the twins.

That was when Rick suddenly realized something was wrong. "Hey you guys, where are we? This spot isn't on our trail. Oh God, we're stupid. We shouldn't have followed that eagle. L.. L.. I think we're lost!" said Rick looking into the map.

"No. No way. This can't be!" cried the girls. "Are you sure?"

"Yes I am sure. What do we do now? I have no idea where to go," said Rick getting frantic.

"You guys, stay calm. We'll think of something. I'm sure we will," said Ray trying to remain calm.

"Well, think of something then if you're so intelligent Ray," said Rick frantically.

"Didn't any of you listen to Rick's dad's instructions?" asked Ray.



"No, we were too excited," said the others. "That doesn't mean you weren't listening."

"Well, I think he said that the moss always grows on the north side of a tree and the Rockies are east of Salt Lake City. So we have to go west."

"Ummm... okay, let's get going then," said the others.

"What? Now. Are you all crazy? It's too late. Though it's only five, the sun's already beginning to set. It's too late.

"What do we do then?" asked Lisa.

"We have to stay calm and hope for the best," advised Ray.

"That's all we can do now, I guess," said a sullen Rick.

The hours passed slowly and they were silent with worry. They had a sleepless night and they woke up early in the morning. Ray was the first one up. He looked for a tree and he found the moss growing on it. He then figured out which direction was west and all of them silently packed their things.

"Okay, let's go," said Ray. It was the first thing he said to his friends since the time he got up. He was trying to sound cheerful. As they walked away from the tree – what they felt was their only friend in the whole of the Rockies – they began to feel frightened. They continued to go westwards obeying Ray as he showed them the way. They were relying on him to get them out of this situation.

The day passed slowly and the children's food stock gradually began to run low. That day they had to make camp again and set up one under a large redwood tree.

"Do you think we'll make it out alive, Ray?" asked Rick in their tent.

"I hope so, Rick. I hope so. I'm sure we will find a road tomorrow and we can take a lift from there. What I'm worried about is

our food supply. I could kick myself for allowing you guys to go after that eagle."

"Don't take it out on yourself. We wouldn't have listened to you anyway."

The next morning they woke up and they were glad to see the girls were more cheerful and talkative than yesterday.

"What's the next step?" asked Lucy.

"We'll just continue going westwards, it's the only way according to the map," said Ray.

They continued to walk westwards until they reached a clearing. That was when they realized that it was not a clearing but the side of a road.

"I don't believe it!" they all shouted out at the same time. "We made it; we actually made it!"

They were rejoicing when a car came speeding by. They were caught by surprise and they couldn't call in time for help. Just when they were beginning to feel dejected, they heard the sound of another car approaching. This time they were ready and all of them waved, shouted, and jumped about to attract the driver's attention. To their joy, they noticed it was a police car. The car pulled over and Ray told the officer about their situation and he asked the officer if they could be given a lift to the nearest town. The officer agreed and he dropped them at the bus station from where they made their way back home.

"What are you doing here so early? It hasn't been many days since you left," commented Rick's father.

"Well Dad, it's a long story. A very long story...."

NUSRAT NAUSHEEN KHANDKER

Autobiography of Mont Blanc

I am fed up. Everyday the wind brings me news of destruction from some part of the world or other. I do not like it at all. When humans were born, I thought they would live together peacefully and happily. I thought that they would take care of nature and preserve the environment. I hoped that there would be peace and harmony on earth and there would be no enmity, bloodshed, and war. Alas, I was wrong.

I, Mont Blanc, am the highest mountain in the Alps. I was born millions of years ago in Europe. My birth or formation was rather turbulent. When the earth was being formed, violent storms, gales, and quakes changed the landforms. The crust was pushed up by tremendous force and many mountains were formed. I was one of them.

In the beginning, the earth was terribly hot. There was no rain

for thousands of years. There were no life forms – plants or animals – on the earth. My only friend was the wind. I got news from him about the rest of the world. One day, many, many years after my birth, he told me that algae had begun to form on earth. At first I did not like algae when it started growing on me. It felt slimy! But soon I was happy when many trees and bushes started to grow about me. They made me feel as if I was wearing an emerald gown that had lovely shades of green. Later on, I wore a bluish white ice cap on my head and had small springs flow down my body. I marveled at these new changes.

Thousands of years later, the dinosaurs started to appear on earth. They were gigantic creatures and some of the plant-eating dinosaurs fed on the trees growing about me. I was soon providing them with enormous amounts of food for their huge appetites. I

spent my time watching them eating plants and hunting prey. It was terrible to see how the stronger ones cruelly attacked and killed the weaker ones. They fought with each other mercilessly. The powerful ones ruled like tyrants. I did not like this at all. But then I understood one important lesson: only the fittest survive in this world. One had to fight in order to survive and if one were weak, one would soon disappear from the world.

From time to time, the earth would experience climatic changes. Fearful gales and hurricanes came. Of all the natural calamities, I hated the earthquakes. They always formed huge cracks on me. These climatic changes stunted the growth of trees and plants. They did not grow well. As a result, the dinosaurs that survived on them suffered and died away. The flesh eaters also suffered as the plant eaters died out. Soon all the dinosaurs became extinct.

Millions of years later, man came along and I immediately liked them. The first men looked like apes and ate berries, nuts, and fruits. They also killed animals and birds and ate their flesh raw. Soon they learned to walk, talk, and make clothes for themselves. I was happy for them when they discovered fire by rubbing stones or dry sticks together. Now they could cook their food and keep themselves warm. Man started to look for ways to grow crops. I played an important role here. I let the small springs on me flow down as rivers. I got news from the wind that people were using the water from the rivers to drink, cook, bathe, and wash. Later on, they used the water for irrigation. The wind told me how men had begun to lead better lives. I felt happy and delighted.

As the years continued, people living nearby riverbeds began to improve their lifestyles. They soon built up the first few civilizations in the world. They began to make houses, furniture, pottery, and other things required for daily life. I became fascinated to hear

how men were inventing many new things and becoming prosperous.

Slowly, cities started growing around me. People from all over the world came to see the Alps. Today I am one of the main tourist attractions in Switzerland. People played the Olympic games near me. Thousands of people came to watch the games and they took pictures of me. I felt great.

One day, people did something that I will never forget. They cut a huge tunnel through me and named it St. Gotthard Pass. The people used the tunnel to get to the other side of me. Many tour buses pass through this route. Tourists marvel at the natural beauty of Austria, Switzerland, and me. The people also cut a winding road down one of my southern slopes. At first, I was happy when so many people came to visit me. I felt like the center of attraction in the region. Later on, it became boring and monotonous, as all they did was ride in cars or buses. I began to look forward to seeing new and other interesting things.

The wind brings me news of the whole world everyday. Much of it is about bloodshed and war. I am also informed that men have engaged themselves in another act of destruction: they are ruining the environment. I begin to feel worried about the welfare of the people living in this world. Would they too fight amongst themselves, damage the environment, and become extinct like the dinosaurs? People do not understand the warnings of nature. Nor do they sense the danger ahead. They continue to fight and kill each other. They continue to damage the environment.

I am worried, very worried. I have lived long enough to sense the danger mankind is heading towards, and unless they do something about it, all is lost.



ANANNA MADHURY

The Birds

It was a cold winter in Siberia. There was snow everywhere. Nothing but the white snow enveloped everything. There was no water, but frozen ice on the rivers. No leaf was visible on the trees and they looked as if somebody had painted them white. The sun was also not visible for days. No one wanted to go out during those days, and no food was available anywhere. It was so cold that sometimes I felt as if my blood was clotting inside me. My wings were becoming stiff....

My name is Mizanoff. I had never seen winter before. I was

born on a happy spring day and such a terrible winter was a surprise to me. One day I was sitting, shivering at home on a tree. All of a sudden, someone knocked at the door. I opened it slightly. With a gust of snow, Squadino entered. Squadino was my friend. He and I were born on the same day. Sometimes he stayed with me. He asked me for some food. I was sorry because I didn't have any food to give him. He kept silent for sometime and then he said that no bird could survive this bitter winter for long. This was the law of nature. During winter, all the birds from Siberia left for



warm areas. He hadn't known about these things before. His grandmother had told him about it. He said that he was leaving for a far-off eastern country named Bangladesh with his friends tomorrow morning. He wanted me to go with him. I agreed instantly because the severe cold and hunger were becoming intolerable to me. He told me to get ready tomorrow in the morning and flew off in the cold.

The next morning I was ready. He came and we started our long flight. At one place, we wanted to stop. This was the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal. But our team leader stopped us telling us that we would be late in reaching our destination. Tiredness was beginning to take over our wings and since there was no food, no place to take rest, we felt death was obvious. Suddenly we started to feel the cold lessening and the air becoming warm. Squadino cried out and said, "Minazoff, look down, see what a beautiful lake beneath! It is surprising that it is not frozen and fishes are swimming in it. The grasshoppers are flying on the riverbanks and colorful boats are sailing on the lake."

We went further down and saw fields filled with crops. The leader said that this was our destination. We landed on the ground, happy at last to find that there was nothing except food everywhere. We decided to settle there, eat, and move around all day and rest at night nearby the lake. We were happy there.

At times people with children came in boats to catch fish and collect water lilies. We were not afraid of them. They were our friends. They did not disturb us. They sometimes hurled food at us. We almost forgot the memories of our home in Siberia. One thing

that was surprising to us was that the children were very thin! They looked unhealthy. Squadino asked me, "In spite of having such rich paddies, why are these children looking poorly fed?" I could not say anything because I did not know the answer.

We were beginning to enjoy our stay. One day when we were in the fields, all of a sudden, we heard an unusual loud sound: boom, boom, boom! We panicked and flew towards the sky. Though all of us flew up, some of us came down screaming at the top of our voices. I cried out for them. Squadino, my friend. He had gone too! Afterwards, I found out that he and the other birds had been shot dead. Our leader told us that it was not safe for us to stay in the area anymore. The people were shooting indiscriminately. He said, "If we stay here our group will decrease gradually." We started to fly again in search of a safer place. On the way, our leader said that each year, many of us died like this and people enjoyed cooking and eating our flesh.

After hearing these words, I became sad. Squadino hadn't been able to come with me. My eyes filled with tears. I remembered Squadino and all the other birds who were killed by humans. They were cruel.

You can call us migratory birds. You can tell that we are your guests. What harm have we done to you? Why do you shoot at us? We are birds, we are friends, we are not your enemies. Then why do you kill us? Why, why, and why?

ALTAMASH A. RAHMAN

Through the Door

Our town was dominated by mountains. They surrounded us like a mother's womb. The mountains kept us safe and protected us from the outside world. The sunrise and sunset brought about vast shadows of the mountains, which receded as the sun rose higher or fell lower. We were used to the sight of these mountains. Most people thought nothing of these giants except that they were benevolent entities. I, on the other hand, thought that they resembled a pair of jaws closing around us.

I lived at the center of the town with my mother, father, and three brothers. Our family was poor and life was extremely hard, but as much as my father tried, he could not make enough to raise four children. My father wanted to send us to school, although he rarely had the money to pay the school fees. My brothers and I felt like a burden to our parents and we were considering different options to help them. We even contemplated running away from home.

It was one fine October day that our decision was made for us and forced upon us. It started somewhere around mid-day. Father and mother had gone to the Town Hall for the weekly meeting, but my brothers and I stayed at home as it had been declared a holiday. Rats had overrun our fair city and the previous night, someone had got rid of these creatures that even the dogs feared. My brothers and I were out in the garden, running around the house, celebrating the joyful news. Suddenly, a tune began to play from somewhere in the distance. It was a charming and melodious tune and made the four of us stop in our tracks. My brothers and I were drawn to it. I suddenly began to feel sleepy and my legs felt heavy. Then as abruptly as it had started, my drowsiness disappeared and I felt on top of the world. Energy began to surge through my body and I felt like jumping, laughing, and dancing. My brothers and I held our hands together and we all began to jump and dance about. In this happy mood, we noticed a small crowd of children that was dancing along the street. We joined them and soon nearly all the children of the town were parading the streets seemingly heading nowhere.

As we danced onwards, I noticed that it was getting late and that my brothers and I had to be heading home. But as I attempted to stop and tell my brothers, I realized that my attempts at controlling myself were becoming futile. My legs seemed to have a movement of their own as they dragged me onwards, skipping and dancing

tirelessly. There was nothing that I could do and we seemed to be heading away from the city.

Suddenly, in the distance, I noticed a figure skipping along ahead of us. We seemed to be following him. Minutes passed and those minutes turned into hours. We went on gaily for almost two hours, enthralled by the music, until we finally arrived at the foot of a mountain. It towered thousands of feet above us as we neared the end of the path. The man was standing just ahead of us now, but as I tried to catch a glimpse of him, my eyes seemed to turn the other way.

We continued onwards and we finally reached the end of the path. The music continued, but the children including myself had stopped dancing. Not an eyelid twitched or did any child so much as sneeze as a solid wall in the mountain swung open as if attached to a hinge of some sort. One by one, every child stepped through the door and into the void beyond.

My turn came and when I stepped forward, I glanced around to look at the mysterious figure. This time I was not stopped. A tall, well-built man, donned outrageously in a long and loose-fitting yellow and red garment looked back at me. In his hand was a flute. As I looked up into his face, he smiled at me. I smiled back at him. Then I entered the door into the mountain.



FAIYAZ TALUKDAR

Bigfoot

We were at Snow Lodge up in the mountains when we experienced the greatest adventure of our lives: an encounter with Bigfoot!

Naveed, Enayet, and I had gone up to the mountains to spend three days in complete peace and solitude. When we arrived, the temperature was below minus zero degree and it was freezing cold. I was wearing a full-sleeved shirt, sweater, and jacket to keep myself warm. The lodge had a nice, big room with a fireplace and my friends and I found it relaxing to stretch out in the large armchairs after the two-hour jeep ride. We rested until the afternoon and afterwards we

went out to explore the area. The only interesting thing we saw was a cave, but as it was getting dark, we decided to return.

As we were going back to the lodge, we saw strange footprints in the snow, almost thrice as big as a normal man's. We were surprised. I thought maybe someone from the lodge was playing a prank on us and I let the incident pass without much thought. That evening we went to sleep after watching a good English film.

During the night, I got up to drink a glass of water. And that was when I saw a hairy, wild-looking face looking through the window



at me. I fell down in fright and passed out. I woke up when someone splashed water on my face. It was Enayet. I told him what I had seen. He too got scared. We then dressed up and decided to go outside with our torches and investigate. There were huge footprints in the snow beside our room's window; similar to the ones we had seen earlier outside the lodge. We returned to our room and informed Naveed about our findings. The next morning the three of us discussed the footprints again and we decided to follow them. After walking for quite some time, we arrived at a cave. It was the same cave we had seen during our exploration the other day!

I suddenly had a terrible thought. What if those footprints belonged to Bigfoot? I had read about Bigfoot and according to the local legend, he was a beast living in the Himalayas. Although we knew we were walking into danger, the three of us gathered our courage to venture into the cave, switching our torches on. After a while, we could hear strange sounds coming from inside. As we went on, we heard the noise and felt it led us further inside the cave. Although we were feeling scared, we continued to follow the sound. When we came to a chamber, the noise stopped. Then Naveed gave out a scream. Enayet and I immediately directed our torches towards the direction he was looking at and both of us gave out a

loud cry. In the corner of the chamber, we saw a tall, hairy figure. When it turned around to face us, we saw that it had a hideous face, with hair all over its body. It had long arms and legs with huge hands and feet. It had to be Bigfoot! I was very frightened. It gave out an angry roar and came running towards us. We then ran for our lives and we could hear its feet thumping on the ground behind us. The sound was getting fainter when, suddenly, Naveed tripped and fell. As he got up, we started to hear a sound of something crumbling. The cave was coming down! I shouted at my friends to hurry and we made a dash to get out of the cave. As the walls began to crumble faster, we could hear Bigfoot roar. The sound was coming nearer. When we were just coming out of the entrance, the roof of the cave came crashing down. We heard a terrifying roar and then nothing more. Badly shaken, we started our long walk back to the resort. None of us could believe what we had experienced just a moment ago. We immediately packed our bags and left the mountains.

Whenever people mention visiting the Himalayas, I caution them and ask them to be careful as I am reminded of Bigfoot! After all, not everyone has an encounter with such a terrifying creature, do they?

LAUREN TAYLOR

Black and White

"Ohhh!" I groaned trying to get back to sleep, after being awakened by an unbearable noise outside. What was that horrid thumping outside my cave? It sounded somehow familiar. As I listened longer, I knew where I had heard it before. My mind went back to the time when I was two years old and my mummy and daddy decided to make this cave our home. It took a long time to get to the cave, and we didn't have any bamboo for days. Well... until we reached a village in a valley from where my parents and friends had been chased out and up this mountain. My mum and dad both died from starvation and exhaustion while traveling from our last cave to this one. They didn't get to eat for a week and a half. A week and a half is a long time, when you normally eat for sixteen hours a day.

Oh! My black ear on the left, that noise is ghastly. It's like a thunderstorm with no rain I thought as I snapped back to the present.

"Wake up, tweet, tweet, tweet, quick, come on, there's going to be an emergency meeting... TODAY!" chirped Bongo Bluey from outside my cave.

"I'm hungry, I'm hungry," I moaned as I suddenly awoke in a fit of anxiety. I looked out into the sun to find Bongo twirping in his jolly manner. I padded out for a bit of fresh air, just to find huge yellow things looming over my cave. I couldn't make out what they were, but I suspected that they had made the noise.

Over to my right, in a small clearing of trees, there were five human beings, all eating. I must get some bamboo, I'm starving, grumbled my stomach. But my thoughts went back to those human

beings. I'd better stay away from them; they could be dangerous. I plodded off to a place where there used to be trees, but now all that was left was stumps. I wondered, who took them? I arrived at my favorite eating spot, and a few minutes later, I began thinking about the past. I found this bamboo spot last year with my little sister Pokadott. That was before human beings killed her with guns. They skinned her and took her fur. It was terrible. I tried to save her, but I couldn't get to her in time. My grandpa didn't leave our cave for two weeks. Then the week he did, he died of old age. He was fifty. "Ouch!" I cried coming back to reality. I'd tripped over a log and fell to the ground hurting my knees. "Oh! My black ear on the right." Then I remembered the emergency meeting. I'd totally forgotten it.

"Hi Ploddy, how are you? You've got those big yellow, loud things right outside your cave, haven't you?" Hooted Odd Dott owl rather nosily as I entered the room in which the meeting was being held. "Yah, they really get on my nerves. The most annoying thing is that I can't just tell them to go away. Did you know that human beings often carry guns?"

Back at my house I was thinking about what happened at the emergency meeting. I was really scared because we were going to have to move. That's what the emergency meeting is all about. We had to move somewhere else, just like when I was younger. But this time it would be a lot worse, I had no one to take care of me. I was all alone. We didn't even know where we would end up; all

we knew was to head down the mountain and move away from the human beings. It's all because of them; they're taking over our trees. They're ruining our homes and village.

Why do human beings have to do this to us? I'm only five and living all alone. Last time they did this, my mum and dad died from starvation. Next it'll be me, I know it, I just know it and I've just finished my spring cleaning as well.

"Ooooooh! My black ear on the left!" I moaned as I started packing. At the bottom of my cupboard, I found my mum's footprint tile. I felt a tear run down my cheek, a small, wet, delicate one. I really missed all my family. Everyday I think about them and all the things they have done for me. They risked their lives for me; I wish they could have lived longer so I could have got to know them better. I finished packing then hid from the human beings. I felt like I was going to burst; all my tears swelled up inside me. I loved where I lived now; I had loads of friends. I wish the human beings would go somewhere else.

There's not going to be much food for the next few weeks. All the trees are now just stumps. We are going to have another meeting this afternoon. Probably to organize when we're going to be leaving.

"Well, personally, I think we should set out tomorrow afternoon so that we can get a place where it's possible to sleep by tomorrow evening," I said sharing my point of view with everyone at the emergency meeting.

"Ya, that would be a good idea, how about 11 a.m. That should give everyone time to pack. What do you think?"

"Ok, yes, sure," everyone replied in a chorus.

I didn't sleep much last night so I'm really tired, which isn't a good start for a long journey. We're leaving in fifteen minutes and,

all our luggage is being loaded onto a pull-along raft that was made last night. "Oh! Ok. I'm coming," I reply to the shout from outside my cave. We must be leaving early, well... bye, bye my lovely house, bye, bye. A tear runs down my cheek. I'm crying.

We've been walking for hours now; all the trees are stumps now. Human beings are eager to take away our homes. My legs are aching already; I think we're now going to stop for the night. This is torture lying out here on the dirty mud, shivering. I don't know if I can cope, already one of us have died. Poor Bluey, he got caught by a falcon.... At the moment, I don't even know if I want to be alive or not.

After one week.

This is my first night in my new cave on the other side of the mountain. There are plenty of trees here, and it's warm.

It's nice to have stopped traveling after a week and, I'm not starving now. I found a small bamboo grove. But it's not at all that good. On the way, five of us died from exhaustion and starvation. At times, I wish I were one of them. Now I need to make lots of new friends, and make my cave a home. Oh, why, oh, why.

I don't understand why this has to happen. It would have been much easier to stay where we were. The next time this happens, we'll have to move away from this mountain. I think this experience has gone far enough. As I ponder, I see a pair of eyes glimmer in the distance, peeking out behind a tree. After a few minutes, a little panda, about the same age as me, comes padding out towards me. "Is there room for another where you sleep?" she asks in a timid voice. "Sure," I reply and at last the new place begins to feel like home.



CLAYTON DU PLOOY

Race to the Top

It was the third day of our school field trip to Wutaishan. That afternoon we were going to climb five kilometers up a mountain and then visit a Buddhist temple at the top. There were four of us who wanted to race and see who could get to the top first. We were Eric, Jin Ho, Mr. Tumba, our teacher, and myself.

At the beginning of the hike, Eric, Jin Ho, and I went up while Mr. Tumba took the shortcut. We did not think that it was fair for him to take a shortcut, but that did not stop us from being determined to get to the top before him.

It was about halfway when I lost Jin ho and Eric, and that my calves began to ache. At the time, I saw Mr. Tumba ahead of me, but I stopped for a drink of water and, by the time I got going, I had lost sight of him. In the distance, I saw a Chinese lady and wondered if she had seen him go past her in the last few minutes. I asked her in Chinese because I felt that she would not speak any English. Luckily for me, I had studied Chinese for three years and I was able to communicate with her. She said that he had gone through the bushes and was heading for the top of the mountain. I said thank you and started walking through the bushes.

I was going through the bushes when my calve muscles began to hurt even more. The pain would start building and trouble me until I got to the top. I went on climbing and I did not stop until I saw Mr. Tumba. I found him after ten minutes and that's when I started to run. Buckets and buckets of sweat were pouring down my face. By the time I caught up with Mr. Tumba, Eric and Jin Ho were coming up from the other side and they were looking good. We had about ten meters left. All of us started walking faster.

I was giving all I could; my muscles were aching and my calves felt sorer than before. But we all enjoyed one thing: we all got to the top of the mountain at the same time, and got one of the Chinese people there to take a picture of the four of us. We were so tired that we just dropped to the ground and waited twenty minutes for the next group of people to arrive.

By the time everyone had got to the top of the mountain, we wanted to go down to the bottom of the mountain and get on the bus to go back to the hotel.

As we made our way down, my friends and I took the time to take some pictures of the beautiful scenery. I told everyone to come through the bushes because it was a shortcut and that I had come up that way during my climb to the top. No one wanted to come with me so I said that I would meet them on the other side and I waited for them to get a head start before I began walking. They arrived at the spot where I was waiting for them, and I told them that I had got there ten minutes earlier. Their jaws dropped as they asked each other how I did it.

We were nearly at the bottom of the mountain when I wished that I had brought along my mountain bike: it has full suspension. On the way down, Jin Ho picked some flowers for a girl who wasn't able to come because she was sick.

I recommend a climb up a mountain. But please don't get ill or you will have a bad time and your friends and family won't enjoy it as much without you. That's what happened when Berit got sick; our camp environment changed and although we had a good time, it was not as good as it would have been with her.



BART VAN WIJK

The Great Wall

Finally I have returned to China to conquer one of the ancient wonders of the world: the Great Wall of China. I had always dreamed of walking along the total length of the Great Wall and not just a few kilometers. With my team that included Jonathan, Justin, Mike, and Tim, we put my dream into reality.

When the cab turned into the parking lot, an area known as the Shahaquan Great Wall, the sight was beautiful; it was worth a picture and the sun shone brightly on the wall.

On the top of the wall there weren't that many tourists, something I hadn't expected, but somehow this added to the atmosphere, and made things right for conquering the ancient structure.

We started walking southeast. After covering a few kilometers, we saw no one except some birds and an amazing view. We had lunch at around twelve o' clock and it was starting to get pretty hot. Lunch was Chinese food that I hadn't eaten in ages.

If we were lucky, we would reach the highest point of the Great Wall in the afternoon, which was 675 meters above the sea level and still seven kilometers away.

The sun was reaching its highest point, sweat was running down my back, and my water bottle was running dry. This trip was going to be a tough one, but I had to accomplish it, I just had to. At 1.30 we stopped again and we were still four and a half kilometers away

from the highest point. I drank the last of the water from my bottle and looked at my thermometer. The temperature was above thirty-four degrees. Tim started arguing that he didn't want to go any further, since he was beginning to get very tired.

I thought that it was fine by me and set off with Justin and Mike for the astounding sight which was still a two-hour hike away. Jonathan and Tim would catch up later.

Justin, Mike, and I grabbed two extra bottles of mineral water and some noodles from our bag that we had purchased before starting off. We hiked up one of the steepest parts of the Great Wall.

There it was! The highest part of the wall. Not many people have been here. It was only forty-five steps away from me. Finally we reached the top of the wall and the sight was breathtaking. It wasn't foggy or cloudy so we could see far into the distance along the rugged mountains. Reaching the top filled my heart with joy and happiness because it was a dream come true. Suddenly several eagles flew over the mountain, a rare sight to see in China.

That night we celebrated the accomplishment of our dream. The trip wasn't finished though because we still had to travel for a few more weeks, but still I feel reaching the top is something to start with.



THERESA SONG

Flowers and Friendship

The river flows slowly between two separate mountains and the birds are singing from the tree branches. The sky feels so high and wide that you can't see the end. I slowly breathe in the fresh air and then puff it out. It is refreshing. The sky is so blue that it makes the whole world greener. I keep on walking up the stairs of the mountainside one by one. I feel tired after taking twenty to thirty steps. Everyone from class here seems full of energy, but not me. My legs are shaking and my heart is beating so fast that I find it difficult to breath in and out.

Miss Hall said I could stay behind if I found it difficult to go up, but I didn't want to. I wanted to see what was at the top of those 1,080 steps and how I would feel afterwards. I kept trudging up the steps, but when I arrived at the top, my class had already taken photos and it was time for us to leave.

I looked at the surrounding mountaintops and I felt nervous and impressed. I looked down upon the valley, Buddhist monasteries, and I could see many nuns and monks busy praying. We also climbed around three mountains to go to a small temple on the top of one of them. I was the last one again, but I wasn't the only one. This time

my friends stayed with me. I used all my strength to push my two legs, which were feeling like two heavy stones pulling me down to the ground. Sweat rolled down my face. One of my friends, who stayed with me, had asthma and she had more trouble than me in climbing the stairs, but she helped me supporting me with her arm.

Slowly, we made good progress and reached the top. We both were happy and proud of ourselves. Even though we were the last ones and everyone kind of made faces at us, we didn't care because we had more time to climb than any of them and, we had the opportunity to share the most beautiful friendship.

When we walked slowly down the mountain, I became engrossed in my surroundings. As the sunshine increased, it seemed to me that the colors of the flowers looked brighter and more colorful. Everyone started to pick them up for a classmate of ours' who was sick and had to stay behind. It was nice of them to do this, and I hoped the flowers would make her happier like the way they made me happy when I first saw them. Yellow, red, pink, and purple flowers! I'm sure she would like them.



LUNGTEN ZANGMO

The Call of the Mountains

My father is the only son in the family, a family of five women and two men. The other male member is his father. Since my father is the only son and the eldest child in the family, he is responsible for all of us at home.

From the moment he can recollect, my father looked after the livestock in the valley of Lungtse, a remote village in Bhutan. Today, this part of his childhood reminds him of how he survived different experiences.

He would take his yaks to a lonely mountain area and leave them to graze. Then sitting on a nearby rock, he would let his mind go free. His thoughts would travel across the snow-clad mountains and by the time he gathered them together, dusk would have arrived.

On one such journey, he found himself trapped in the snowy mountains with his yaks. Despite the cold, he made a thorough inspection of the landscape. What caught his eyes in the middle of nowhere was a beautiful puppy that stood alert, smiling at him. The charming little thing captivated him. Looking at it for a long time, he could see the pride it was carrying. The puppy had the enchanting landscape all to itself and enjoyed the beautiful surroundings of the valley. My father envied it.

On another journey, a bear growled at him for intruding into its territory. Papa felt bad and sorry for the animal. In his wonderment on seeing how the animal was surviving the wilderness, he realized he was surviving too.

As he clearly remembers, it was the first day of the second Bhutanese month that he realized the wealth of flora and fauna in the mountains. The foamy specks of snow touched him. The cold meant nothing to him. His admiration for his surroundings and the happiness within him gave him summer-like moments.

Then he looked at the mountains. He could see them all. The mountains, which were sometimes bare, were now accepting the refugees gracefully. They seemed to say how beautiful they were now. And he agreed.

Later, he was enrolled in school by his parents. But whenever he was permitted, he made a trek to his dear mountains. He loved them fondly.

Today, we live in an isolated cottage in a corner of the town. My papa has chosen a place where we can look upon the mountaintops and admire the scenery below.

Sometimes, I ask my papa why we live so far away from the plains. He says: "Mountains Forever!" And I agree.



ROCIO DE LA SERNA

The Camp

A long time ago, there were two boys who were best friends. Their names were Pedro and Michael. Their teacher announced one day that their school camp was going to be in Thailand.

Michael said, "It's a great idea." The teacher said that Pedro was at home sick and he would need to be informed about the trip so Michael went to Pedro's house to tell him about the camp. That weekend the boys hurriedly packed their clothes and chatted about the exciting trip ahead. On Sunday night they met their class at the airport and off they flew to the Land of Smiles.

Once in Thailand they headed for the mountains and in the bus, Michael and Pedro talked a lot of stuff, like video games, computers, and cars. The kids were also feeling excited because they were going to climb a mountain. The mountain was big and there were a lot of animals, birds flying, insects making clicking noises, a lot of trees, plants, and flowers. They had to gather information for their

assignment such as how the animals lived and how the trees, plants, and flowers grew.

When they were on the top of the mountain, they saw a lot of houses and their teacher told them that the mountain had the shape of a crocodile.

They saw waterfalls and elephants. The elephants seemed gentle and magnificent. Pedro and Michael sat and observed them for hours. They were pleased that they were able to be part of an experience on top of a mountain.

A week later, the boys with their class traveled back to China. This time when the boys chatted on the bus they didn't talk about video games, cars, and computers. Instead they talked about elephants, mountains, and nature. They dreamed about being part of a group which helps preserve nature so that others can enjoy it in the future.



NINAN TAN

Around Those Mountains

I finally made up my mind and packed my bag for the next day: a tent, blanket, warm clothes, compass, and all the other equipment I would need for two days – forty-eight hours with the mountains. The next morning, I woke up at five o' clock. I lay on my bed and rolled around then I finally got myself on my feet, and walked to the window.

The sky was blue and the sun shone on my face. I went to dress myself up for breakfast. I pulled my bag down the stairway through the corridor to the main door. Then I went to the kitchen and toasted some bread. I took some jam from the refrigerator. I also made some sandwiches and other snacks for my trip and put these in my bag; my bag had now become as big as an elephant. I put on my sneakers and began to ride my bicycle. I took the path

on the right and turned back to look at my home sweet home. I rode until my home was out of sight. Finally, I could not see my town either and, after some time, I arrived at the foot of the mountain range.

These attractive mountains with clouds on top of them are so mysterious: as if gods live on top of them. I looked at them and said to myself that this was the place I was going to stay for a whole day. I kept on riding my bicycle up a slope of one of the mountains. Then choosing a nice place I erected my tent on a comfortable pile of grass. It wasn't a big tent, but it had enough space for one person to rest in. I emptied my whole bag and took a rest. At three o' clock I left my tent and decided to go exploring. It was colder than I expected it would be so I put on warm clothes.



I headed in the direction of the forest area. I lifted my feet one by one slowly so that I wouldn't get tired quickly. It was a pretty long vertical walk and on the way, I stopped for brief rests. When I looked back I could see my town in the valley; it looked as small as a coffee bean. I breathed the fresh air and filled my lungs; I had never felt so well. I was excited and I broke into a run, feeling the cool air on my face.

I finally reached the forest. I first sat on a rock to catch my breath. As I closed my eyes, I could hear the birds and the wind. They made me feel joyful. Then suddenly it became cold and chilly.

I quickly opened up my eyes and I saw in front of me a damp, white silk blanket. I realized that it was a cloud. Of all the things, a cloud! I admire these mysterious mists. Did gods live on them? Or do they still live on them now?

I couldn't sit any longer; it was getting dark. I thought of collecting some sticks to light a fire for the night so I searched and found enough to build one. After that, I began to walk back to my tent. Going down wasn't easier than going up; the path was covered with little stones that rolled off as you stepped on them.

My legs were sore and I was feeling tired when I reached my tent. I took out my blanket, snuggled into it and slipped out a bag of chips and a couple of sandwiches. I wolfed these down. The night passed quickly and the next day I again visited the forest. I

found a spot there about 20 meters away, where a big oval shaped rock sat. It was completely flat as if it wanted someone to sit on it. I had thought about reading for the day and brought along a storybook. For a while, I sat on the rock enjoying my book. When it was five o' clock, I returned to my tent and slipped inside my blanket to get warm. After some time, I got out and picked up the sticks I had collected the previous day. I searched for some big stones and some twigs. With these things, I was able to start a fire. At first, I couldn't stand the smoke; there was too much of it, but eventually the smoke started to disappear as the wood began burning merrily. I roasted some dry meat, which I had brought from home; it tasted delicious. When I finished eating, it was already dark. I picked up my torch and went inside my tent. I was tired. Usually at home I don't sleep before 11.00 p.m., but I was exhausted so I lay down and soon fell asleep.

The next morning it was six o' clock when I got up. I changed my clothes and packed my bag. I took down my tent, packed it, made sure I had everything with me then I was off on my bicycle riding down to the bottom of the mountain range. Once I looked back and thought, I'll be back sometime, maybe next week, next month, or next year, but I know I can't stay away from mountains for the rest of my life. I'll be around these mountains forever, promise.

RAJESH ANTHONY

In the Wilds of Joske's Thumb

He waited beside the dusty road until the car had turned and driven back, the driver giving him a last puzzled look and a wave as he went. When the car was no longer visible he shouldered his heavy pack to which was strapped his sixteen inches long fishing rod and set off into the space covered by scattered pine trees. He could not see the top of the mountains for he was too close under it and the trees also obscured the ridgeline. He followed the broad back of the mountain upward, pausing now and then to check the direction on his compass. The ridge was taking him as Priti had said, due north.

Eleven o'clock in the morning, nothing and no one to see, the sun hot on his back, the pine needles crunching under his boots, he ought to be within a mile of the summit of Joske's Thumb within five or six... say by five o'clock. Then he ought to see the last hour or two of daylight a good visual picture of the mountain from up there, fifty meters higher than he was now, and the trees thinner or even non-existent. Then, after dark, he'd cross the eastward face, aiming to pass at least a quarter of a mile below the summit. Once he was anywhere near the river it ought to be quite plain whether the Fijians were or were not preparing for a major operation in that area.

He checked that the cork of his water bottle was tightly fastened, adjusted the pack straps more comfortably on his back, and bent down to climb again. The ridge rose steadily and sweat began to darken his shirt. His pack was heavy besides gym shoes and a change of clothing, he carried a sleeping bag, a lightweight cooking pot, and dehydrated food to last him for seven days. In addition to the pack, he carried a light haversack on one side and his fishing gear on the other. From time to time he stopped, mopped his brow, and turned so that as he rested, the pack leaned against a tree; he could look southward between the tall stems of the pine. Nothing dominated the horizon that way.

One o'clock... three o'clock... four o'clock. The big deciduous trees had disappeared and now the pines were thinning out. He could see a little ahead where the trees ended: beyond the ridge were scattered bushes, pine scrubs, and a bare rounded summit. He thought he detected some hardness in the shape, as of a man made wall or concrete roof. He was about half a mile away. He went on more cautiously until, moving over to the right side of the ridge, he found a nest of tumbled rocks and low bushes, the buds were ready to burst. From there he could see the summit and also,

along the eastern slope, the ridge he intended to traverse after dark in order to by pass the Indian army post on the summit.

He took off his pack, stored it under a rock, and settled down to survey the landscape before him with the utmost care, trying to remember every detail, the slope he intended to cross and how it would change, the rock footings and scrub here, a stretch of rain trees directly beneath the summit falling away eastward to the rocks beyond, the compass bearing he would follow, the time it would take to reach the northward falling ridge. Then he ate a bar of chocolate and he prepared himself for a nap.

He sprang awake, a small crack loud in his ear as his hand broke a kind of bush beside him... twilight creeping up from the valley, but not here yet, the sun gone. What had awakened him? He put on his pack, and then lay flat, peering up the ridge in the direction of the Indian summit post. No sign of movement there. He searched methodically down the ridge with his eyes, until the slopes blurred and faded in the darkness of the lower earth, nothing there.

The second time, being awake, he heard the strange sound clearly – strange because it did not belong on this silent mountain, where now the last thing of red from the sun set half an hour ago, had vanished, leaving the earth cold and the rocks gray. Again he heard the clink of steel on stone, and it came from behind him. He crawled quickly around the tumbled rocks, not caring about lookouts in the summit posts, for they were too far and it had become too dark for them to see. Lying still, he peered south. Almost at once he caught the edge of a movement and his eyes focused... a man wearing a khaki beret was coming up the hill. He could see nothing below the waist, but on his shoulder the man was carrying what seemed to be two long bars of wood wrapped in canvas. What the hell was that? He was about fifty yards away, moving slowly upwards through

the scattered limits of the pines. His hair was long and black. Albert picked up another man to the first one's right, another to his left; they were carrying weapons; he recognized a rifle and a sub-machine gun.

Crouching, he began to run across the slope, as he had originally planned. The darkness was suddenly almost total, and he stumbled and fell among bushes and stones large and small. But even as he ran he knew he was covering the distance painfully slow, for he was tired, and the heavy pack, which he had not found supportable during the day's long climb weighed him down and robbed the strength from his thigh muscles now that he was running for his life.

There was a light to his right, far below in the valley and a light too up in the summit post. When he reached the section that he had carefully studied from his hiding earlier, he ran across it, two hundred yards of stone all clinking and clashing under his boots, starting innumerable small rockslides. At the far side, where stones gave way to a short turf, he stopped, kneeling, and listening intently. If the men in beret were still coming, he'd hear them on the scree. He counted seconds, trying to hold his breathing silently... ten... twenty... forty-five... a minute... a minute and a half... he heard the sound of stones moving, no clink of metal now but stones susurrating down the slope as the men's weight set them moving.

He rose heavily and ran on, north across the face of the slope. The light in the valley seemed to be in the same place, it looked a long way off; the light at the summit post had vanished. The slope must obscure it, or perhaps it only showed towards the south and east, he could not tell. He stumbled on through the rocks that he had seen and studied. He had cursed the darkness, and the absence of the moon, but now, moving among these huge granite boulders he thanked god for them. For in the moonlight his pursuers could



not have failed to see him, now and then outlined like a black moth against a pale face of granite.

Yet, what were they doing? When he listened to them back there on the scree they had seemed to be coming on steadily, as though driving sheep... he had felt then that if they wanted they could have come upon him much sooner, and afterwards could have come up fast on him, doing twice his pace across the mountain, and shot, stabbed or bayoneted him without any trouble.

He reached the ridge line that fell north down that ten meter slope Priti had told him to drop into the trench of the Naikorokoro Creek. Perhaps here he'd shake off the silent, loping pursuers; perhaps they would think he had continued on down the ridge. Perhaps...

Forms rose up around him and pounced. He sank to the ground under three, four men. A pair of strong hands was at his throat and he began to struggle with frantic desperation for his life. "Quiet, shhh!" A voice hissed in his ear, "Friends."

He relaxed his struggle for a moment to test the meaning of the words he thought he had heard. The grip on his throat relaxed as much. He muttered, "Who are you?"

The voice said again, "Friends." Albert realized that one of the men was kneeling over him, pressing his face to his and whispering in his ear. "Let me up, who are you?"

"Quiet", the voice reiterated, but the grip on his throat loosened and hands helped him up. He heard faint sounds and breathing and in the starlight made out more men coming from the direction he had come, to join his assailants. They were all muttering to each other in a guttural language which he did not understand. But he understood clearly that his sense of being herded was literally true; the men behind him had driven him neatly into the arms of men

waiting in the Naikorokoro Creek. They had obviously been expecting him to come this way and no other. A mystery here, but no time to solve it now.

Another voice spoke close to him, "Who are you?"

"Albert Baker, European subject. I was..."

"I'm Lieutenant Frank Moore, Guides." "Are you hurt?"

"We have to move off now, on down this stream."

Albert recovered something of his wits and said, "What are you holding me for? You are in Indian controlled territory."

The lieutenant said, "Please, no arguments, Mr. Baker, I have my orders." He spoke a few words in the guttural language, and unseen hands took the pack from Albert's back. The lieutenant said, "We will be moving fast, and you will have a hard time keeping up, even without the pack. These are highland Fijians and they speak only Fijian, except that we taught them all to say 'quiet' and 'friends'... we'll start now. Keep close behind me and my orderly will be behind you."

"With a gun pointed at my back?" Albert asked.

"A knife too," the lieutenant whispered. There are Indian patrols on this mountain tonight too, looking for you."

They started moving. The stream's course was steep and long and their movements fast but careful. Every ten or fifteen minutes the party, which seemed to be about twelve in all, stopped and listened. Albert only heard the sighing of the wind in the trees. The trees had replaced the bare rocks and short grass soon after they started and once he heard the cry of an owl. As they went on hour after hour, his legs grew heavier. He gritted his teeth and forced himself on. He would not give them the chance to use the strange object the first man he had seen carrying. The whole affair was odd, more than odd, it was. He stumbled and fell, saving himself at

the last moment by catching a tree trunk. He leaned against it breathing heavily.

The lieutenant stopped and turned. "Tired?"

"No," he said, "Go on."

"We'll rest here until dawn. The next bit's too tricky to attempt in the dark."

"Why? Where are we going?"

"This area is not Indian controlled as you said. It's a no man's land. But the Indians have been patrolling it heavily for a week now especially tonight, when they were looking for you and if we go down the Naikorokoro creek we are likely to run into them. So I propose to turn west across the mountain. Then we will reach our outpost and supporting base."

"You're going to do that in daylight?"

"We have to anyway, my men are highlanders, and they can beat any Indian on a hill."

The young man's voice was full of pride, and Albert forbore to say what was on his mind... that the Indian army had also mountain men. If it came to a confrontation the outcome would rest on the particular circumstances of the case and the leadership displayed.

He found a comfortable spot and gathered pine needles to make a bed. A man brought his pack and he lay down, using the pack as his pillow, and waited for sleep to come. The stars blazed above, the giant firs stood like a darker army about him in the night. The air was balmy, for they must have already come down forty feet or more. He thought he heard the roar of the river in its bed below, but decided that it must be his imagination or the wind through the branches. The Fijians were lying against trees and there was one standing motionless, a weapon at his side, looking out. Sleep came.

It was near eleven o'clock in the morning; just twenty-four hours after Albert had started up the mountain ridge, when the lieutenant peering down the slope under a shading hand said triumphantly, "We're safe!" That's our supporting base. He pointed down, across the blackened stumps of an ancient forest fire. Albert saw an encampment, small tents by the river, men moving about. The Fijians crowded round, laughing. They were fine-looking men, mostly tall and all lean and hard. One was older with a grizzled mustache and three chevrons on his sleeve, the rest young and, except for the long black curly hair, clean-shaven. They wore leather sandals on their feet, with no socks, carried their ammunitions in a leather cross belt with pouches, and appeared to be otherwise unencumbered except for a water bottle and a little bag which, as he had seen during a dawn halt, contained dried fish and cassava.

Albert then asked him, "You said you were guides? That's a regiment, isn't it?"

The lieutenant replied, "I'm a guide, seconded to the scouts. These are all scouts." His voice was full of the same pride that had filled it earlier when he spoke of his men's ability on the mountain.

Now he came up, smiling. "We'll go down now, and you can have a real rest until I have to send you on to headquarters."

"When will that be?" Albert asked.

"Tomorrow. Tonight, eat well and drink, water only for my men, they're good Fijians but I happen to have some whisky and when Turaga ni karisito isn't looking I'll take a little. You will like some?"

"I certainly will," Albert said.

"Let's go then."

ANARE TAWAKE

Mountain Views

I love to see panoramic views early in the morning when my mind is filled with thoughts on mountains. Through the valleys and over the fields, I'm there to be free. We have mountains around our school. Trees grow on them. These mountains either make you feel fear or you will revere them.

Once upon a time there lived a family. This family loved exploring a mountain. One day the head of the family said, "All of you go and explore the mountain, it is just 20 minutes away from home, and then write down what you can see from the mountain top." So the next morning, Thomas, the eldest in the family, went. As he left home, he started noting down everything he saw. When he reached the mountaintop, he again noted everything he saw and returned home. The next person in the family went and returned. He brought back the same notes. It was time for the youngest one to go. As he left, everyone was worried as to whether he could come back home or not. He left home; half way through he was tired so he took a nap, not realizing that it was getting dark. His family members became worried, as he had not arrived home after dark. The next morning, he followed another path which led to the same mountain. From there, he saw beautiful views in the distance. He traveled to one of these places and, as he got close enough to know what was on the land, he began to feel content and happy and forgot about going home. He built a small tent good enough for him to

see from inside what he heard outside. He was joyful about this newfound place he had seen from a distance. Before evening settled in, he began to explore the area to make sure that there was no danger or strangers around. Afterwards, he felt tired and went to sleep in his tent.

The next morning, the birds woke him up. He began to worry about his family members. As he was walking around his new and beautiful garden, he began to hear voices. The voices were coming from afar and, as he began to look around, he saw everybody in his family shouting and laughing with joy because they had found their lost brother and son. The family moved to the beautiful garden and they made it their new home. They enjoyed being here and thanked the almighty for saving the life of the youngest member in the family. They enjoyed the surroundings and, in the evening, they went off to sleep. As dawn broke out again, everyone began to enjoy the scenery around them – a beautiful view of the sea, the sun rising in the red sky, and the flowers in the garden that gave off a lovely fragrance.

So standing on a mountain you may feel fear. But don't be afraid because mountains will always be there. Be strong and you will learn to respect them.



ATISH KUMAR

Mountain of Sleeping Giants

We had spent the day on a mountain, the Mountain of the Sleeping Giants, as we usually did when I went to visit my grandpa. Rather a dull day it had been, I remember, in April, too cold to climb the mountain and there had been nothing much else to do so I joined my grandpa as he rounded up the cattle down in the valley and walked with them, stick in hand, prodding their sides.

My grandpa could spend hours like that, perfectly happy among the slow red cows and oxen, because he was used to them and knew and respected each of them as an individual.

While resting, grandpa leaned against his stick, screwed his face up against the sun, listening to the silence of the mountain filled up by birdcalls and other strange sounds. It seemed as though the birds were singing to entertain me sensing my loneliness on top of the mountain. I also enjoyed the cool breeze which smelt of the fragrance of different kinds of flowers.

For a moment, I wondered where this smell could have come from. But I couldn't find the source. Grandpa was also enjoying the smell and laughed at me. I wasn't sure why. Then softly he asked,



"You are searching for those flowers, which give out this nice smell, weren't you?"

I replied frustrated, "Yes, grandpa, but I'm unable to locate where the smell is coming from." Grandpa told me that it was not only the smell of the flowers which made the place interesting, but that there was something else which had to do with the formation of the mountain.

"First of all, can you tell me what kind of shape this mountain has?" Grandpa asked.

I was too small for my age, but I had good understanding and quick learning skills.

I replied, "I'm not sure, grandpa." Grandpa then took me to the very top of the Mountain of the Sleeping Giants. We left the cattle in the valley for grazing. It was a bright, sunny day. My grandpa carried me on his shoulders and climbed the mountain using short cuts.

After reaching the top, grandpa took me to a place where I saw huge body-like rocks lying on the top of the mountain with two heads in opposite directions.

We stood on the belly of one of the huge giants. I could see nice flower gardens, handicraft shops, and people moving about like dots.

After seeing this, I became a little confused and grandpa told me, "This mountain is named 'The Mountain of the Sleeping Giants'. It is huge in size and has a great significance."

"What significance, grandpa?" I asked.

"Well, since you are so interested in learning about it, listen carefully to the story which I'm going to tell you now."

Grandpa sat on a rock and I sat at his feet. Then he began... long ago, it was believed that there used to be two giants: one male and the other female. The two of them lived as a couple. It was becoming difficult for them to search for food. One day, they decided to take a rest in a valley after searching for food everywhere.

They sat down covering a large area. Then the breeze brought to them the fragrant smell of different flowers, which made the giant couple fall asleep. They both lay down facing each other in opposite directions and kept sleeping for thousands of years. Unlike other mountains that have the same geographical history, the origin of the Mountain of the Sleeping Giants is completely different.

This story is believed to be true by many Fijians today. From that day onwards, in order to commemorate the memory of the giants, the Fijians carry out different religious activities and old practices. Every morning you can hear the *lali*, a Fijian cultural drum, which has a sound that reaches far into the distance. Some perform fire-walking ceremonies and others have set entertainment programs for those who visit the mountain and smell the flowers from the gardens on the other side of the Mountain of the Sleeping Giants. Many villagers sell handicraft items and make their living at the foot of the mountain.

The story, the different activities, and the fragrant smell - all are part of the Mountain of the Sleeping Giants.

ANTOINE TAMRAKA

Mount Salado

My childhood memories of wandering through the woods in the highlands of Pentecost Islands is like a short piece from a movie. There is color and sound and the action comes alive for a few moments before fading out again.

"This is a great place to stay," my grandfather would often say as he returned from a successful hunting trip. When I grew up, I learnt to become a hunter myself. I often followed my grandfather in the woods hunting for birds and wild pigs. He used to say, "Climbers with sturdy legs are needed on this mountainous island."

I learnt a lot of things from grandpa, like the names of the trees in the dark virgin forest and hunting skills which I apply during my

weekends. One of the things which I enjoy doing the most is to whistle like the birds and lead them out from their hiding places. I love watching their colors by the mountainside.

I was 13 at the time. Early that morning, the sun shone brightly. Its rays flashed like a burning torch scorching the branches of a tree on Mount Salado. As the sun was shining brighter and brighter, it seemed as though the mountain was burning. Then it was quiet, the sky was looking blue, and a peaceful day had just begun. The cries of babies and their mothers' soothing tones broke the stillness of the morning.

All of a sudden, there were movements on Mount Salado. In

the sunlight in the reflection of the waterfall, an eternal vision that captured the beauty of the ancient Gods of Olympus appeared. Some distant bird called and gentle echoes of water flowed down the nearby stream. The sun was now higher up in the blue sky. Mount Salado had become the focus of my eyes, my mind, and my spirit. As I stood there gazing at the mountain peak, I began to enjoy the sun's warmth.

There was a voice calling me, reminding me that breakfast was ready. Mum had prepared some bananas cooked in coconut milk. There was a bowl of prawns cooked with mushroom collected from the woods the day before. I sat there enjoying the delicious dishes mum had prepared, cooked the traditional way with local spices.

Once again I was outside, gazing at Mount Salado. It looked splendid. The mountain was covered by a luxury of vegetation, a land of sun warmed evenings, soft shadows, and secret smiles. Refreshing and pure, this vast vegetation.

The next couple of hours, I was in the woods making my way to the top of the mountain. The warmth of the day filled me with a life force. I raised my eyes upwards, and I could see birds of every kind everywhere. It was amazing! Some were spreading their wings and stretching their legs while singing, some were hopping from branch to branch, and there were some who just sat there enjoying the warmth of the morning sun after a long, cold night.

In the middle of the day, I reached the peak of this magical mountain. I was standing in a wide-open space, overlooking a village. I could see people moving about busy carrying out their daily tasks. Some were making their way to their farms; some had been out much earlier and were now returning. Women and children spent this part of the day on the riverbank: fishing, washing, and collecting water for home.

Then I returned to my short but powerful dream. I felt that in the stillness of Mount Salado, I had found the secret beginnings of a new life. I began to carve hills and slopes bit by bit and trees with leaves. A gentle, cool breeze swept through my face, awakening my inner senses. All around me was an aura of contentment and stillness.

Mount Salado is covered with beauty that continuously ebbs and flows. There is always this harmonious blending of natural music – falling water and calling birds. It was the first time in my life that I'd been inspired to think like this. The experience has reminded me of visible and invisible links with nature.

Meanwhile I heard my grandfather's words once again inside my head. "This is a great place to stay."

I've just discovered how much joy nature can provide. I begin to ponder whether grandfather himself had experienced this feeling and knew how precious Mount Salado is.



JAMES RATUYADA

The Magic Mountain

I had a dream of a lifetime. It was a dream of a land, sent from up above. All of a sudden, I was standing beside this colorful mountain from which a stream of gold flowed. I climbed up to a point where I could see angels stretching their wings to fly. They were singing in a choir, holding hands up to the sky. I tell you it was paradise.

Suddenly the scene changed. I looked around. I saw boys chasing each other, while girls were picking up flowers. I was standing in their midst shining like a star, surrounded by the clouds and, again, I felt like going up to the peak of the colorful mountain where angels stretched their wings to fly. I felt like I was floating; I looked down and saw a cloud lifting me higher up towards the peak. I was raised higher than the rest. It was like a magic carpet ride, being up there in the air, floating. Then I felt the force of gravity pulling me down again. Two angels picked me up from the cloud and left me on the peak. I saw angels fly around me: they were glittering so brightly that I could not see their faces.

A strong wind blew me off and I realized I wasn't on the peak

anymore. I was floating. I said to myself that this was impossible, but I was definitely flying without wings. Then I realized that there was only one mountain and found out what a great mountain it was. Every living creature longed for this mountain. It was like the mountain of hope. Eagles built their nests on this very peak. This was where the babies learned to fly and everyone or rather everything succeeded. Evening grew near and, as I looked around, dark clouds began to fill up the sky. I could see only a small speck of light.

The angels flew toward this light and disappeared. Every creature was being summoned and attracted by this light. The only thing, which stood firm, was the colorful mountain. Again I was at the foot of the mountain when a strong wind blew. It was actually a tornado. It sucked me up like a vacuum. I was about to go through the tunnel of the light when it closed suddenly. I fell to the ground and, at the same time, I woke up still half asleep on my bed realizing it was only a dream.



BINUT KUMAR

Nainital

Our school closed on May 15 for the summer vacation. After studying hard and giving our examinations, I wanted some rest and enjoyment. Some days passed and I received a letter from my aunt. She invited me to spend my summer holidays in Nainital. I decided to go.

I had a wonderful holiday that summer. My aunt is hospitable. She went out of her way to make my stay comfortable and the beauty of Nainital fascinated me.

I climbed up a hilltop with my cousin. From here we enjoyed the sight of smaller hills. In the distance, we also saw the peaks of the Himalayas.

By the side of the lake is a skating ring where many boys and

girls would come. The floor is made of hard wood. We used to go to the rink to see others skating, thinking about skating ourselves. Sometimes we also skated and then we forgot all about our surroundings. The world seemed to go round and round with us.

In the evenings, we would go and listen to the band playing at "Flats". Evenings in Nainital are always pleasant. It is a treat to watch the reflections of the electric lights dancing on the ripples of the lake. We went for picnics to Bhimtal and Hanumangarh.

Thus, I passed my summer vacation happily among the hills of Nainital. I felt refreshed. It was a new and memorable experience for me. I passed my days free of care.



ANKIT SAHAY VERMA

A Visit to Mars

I had gone to visit Mars during my last summer vacation. Mars is the fourth planet from the sun. It is half the size of earth. During my visit, I observed that the surface of its southern hemisphere is filled with many craters. The northern hemisphere holds vast lava flows and gigantic volcanoes that are the largest in the solar system. There is a huge rift valley called the Valles Marineris and it is large enough to swallow up the Rocky Mountains. Thousands of branching channels are concentrated near the equator and snake across the plains. These channels resemble river systems found on earth and they may have been formed when conditions on Mars were much different from what they are today.

Scientists say that life once occurred on Mars. I touch the sur-

face of Mars. It is soft and wet. This indicates that there *was* life. When I reached Mars, I put on an astronaut suit and carried an oxygen cylinder. My body became weightless.

On Mars, a day is almost exactly the same length as the earth's and like the earth, it tilts on an axis. This results in different seasons. The change in seasons gives the planet 161 kilometer/hour winds and causes raging dust storms. Mars has two moons which may be captured asteroids.

Visiting Mars was interesting and amazing. If anyone asks me which planet I like the most and want to go to after earth, I'd say I want to go to Mars. I learned and found out many important things through my visit.



HINA SAEED

First Time to Mars

In my entire life, it was the first time I was visiting Mars. I was excited and everybody was in a jolly mood.

I seated myself in the space ship and I soared higher and higher. Looking out of the window, I could see the earth miles below. Then I watched the wonderful spectacle of stars that wheeled round me. I do not know how long I was on the spaceship.

We finally landed on Mars.

As soon as I came out of my cabin, I was surrounded by many people. They were very tall. They had a light, green complexion. Their language was totally different from our language.

They took me around the city and I was treated like an honored guest. It was simply astonishing to see the great progress the Martians had made. I could not help feeling that regarding technological progress, we were hundreds of years behind them.

Their life was highly sophisticated. They had little work to do,

and most of their work was done by automated machines. This gave the Martians ample time for amusement and recreation. I saw a telephone and a television combined into one. It enabled one to talk face to face with another person sitting hundreds of miles away.

I was also astonished to see the vehicles without drivers. There were neither traffic signals nor traffic policemen. The vehicles would automatically move sideways to avoid a collision. Since there was no danger of accidents, the traffic moved at tremendous speed.

I was amazed to see many beautiful things. Mars was a wonderful place. There was no pollution and everybody looked happy.

I became sad and I did not wish to come back to earth. But I knew I had to because earth is the planet where I was born and my father and mother live.



PM 2001

AYESHA RITWIKA DASGUPTA

The Mountain Quest

Prince Fredrick II of Magnolia was a handsome young man who was used to getting his way all the time. All the young women he met thought he was the best thing God had ever created and never ceased telling him so. His father, King Fredrick I, was aware how swollen-headed his only son was becoming, so he decided to ask his wife, Queen Olivia, to contact some of her old friends from Up-Above House.

All these friends of hers who lived at Up-Above House, had a huge stock of books which they themselves had written containing ideas on how to put people in their places. King Fredrick thought it was high time his beloved son was taught that life was not at all fun and games and women and fun. After talking it over with his wife, the king sent for his son immediately.

The prince, meanwhile, was busy making plans with friends of his to go on a holiday somewhere. They were all seated by the clear, blue pond which was filled with colorful fishes. It was situated at the center of a beautiful garden filled with flowers of all kinds, except roses, because the king hated roses. There were trees that were taller and broader than normal ones, majestic statues made of blue glass and a little silver bridge across the pond. An outsider would have been amazed at the breath-taking view, but the prince and the others who were regular visitors at the palace, took it for granted. The messenger sent by the king found the prince in the garden and told him that his father wanted to see him immediately. The prince said goodbye to his friends and went off rather unwillingly to the palace to meet his father. He was surprised to see his mother there as well. This was an indication that something

serious was going on. They never got together to speak to him unless it was bad news. His father told him to sit down and listen carefully.

After listening to his father for one whole hour, Prince Fredrick came out of the room in a daze. He had just been told that his mother was suffering from a disease which was fatal. There was just one way she would live – if she ate a particular rare, magical herb within three weeks. Now, this herb could only be found in very few secret places and had to be plucked by a child of the person suffering from the disease, otherwise it would be useless. The king had said that he knew one place where this herb, *cianna*, could be found. When the prince was told its location, he instantaneously felt his heart plummet to frightening depths. He would have to cross three mountains to get it. Not one but – *three mountains!*

How rough could life get? He had no climbing experience whatsoever and he was quite sure he had no athletic skills either. So, how was he going to get to that place? His father told him to set off immediately and drew out a vague map showing how he could reach the first mountain. It was really rough. The king said, the map would probably help him reach the place – then again, it might not.

The prince, taking with him the bare necessities, set off on his journey. After about an hour's walk, he had to stop. His legs were killing him, his backpack was too heavy and he was out of breath. He rested for a while and then went on and though it was steadily getting colder. This time, he vowed he would not rest until he reached the first mountain. He pushed himself to the limit and finally reached the foothills of the first mountain.



He was shocked to find that the mountain was covered with snow. How was he supposed to climb it? Somehow, he slid and climbed, slid down again and set off again; until, finally, he had made his way up one side and then down the other side of the mountain. By then, he was feeling the extreme cold and his hands and feet were numb, but he felt proud of his achievement.

After coming down the first mountain, he was stunned to see that the mountain he was to climb next, had no snow at all. In fact it was filled with tall pine trees and small, pretty, bright flowers. The winter seemed limited to the first mountain. He thought to himself, "Ah, this should be easy." He was very wrong.

In between the flowers, there were thousands of spiky plants and evil smelling shrubs, which gave out horrid, sticky substances. He soon had millions of cuts all over his body and he had started sweating profusely. This was in stark contrast to what had happened to his body earlier. He started feeling feverish and the terrible smells around him were giving him a headache. To top it all, the mountain was really steep and he was just about hanging on with the last ounce of energy he had. Gathering all the determination he could muster, he somehow made it down the second mountain and collapsed. He fell fast asleep.

When he awoke, he had no idea how long he had been climbing or how many days had passed. Hopefully, the three weeks were not up yet. All his stock of food and drink were finished by the time he had come down the second mountain and he had absolutely no hope of finding anything edible nearby. On the positive side, the last mountain he had to climb did not seem too tough a job after what he had already gone through.

This mountain was very different from the other two. It was barren and was a weird reddish-purple in color. But, after his long rest, he decided he was ready to tackle it. Now, his hopes of inheriting a crown and continuing with his easy, fun-filled life seemed like a far-away dream. He was slowly beginning to realize how much more there could be to

life than women and flattery. All that seemed superficial nonsense now, since it couldn't help him with his present problems. He climbed steadily and found some strange-looking trees which were tiny and toadstools that were huge.

There were large spotted frogs jumping about as well. The prince hated frogs and started feeling a little afraid of these giant ones. He tried to avoid them but they kept obstructing his path. This annoyed him and he began to step on them on purpose. To his amazement, they were immediately flattened out of shape and then disappeared completely after a few seconds! Next, he saw that he was coming to the end of his journey – he had already begun descending the last mountain. Now, all he had to do was find the magical cianna.

His father had told him that it was orange in color and if one touched it, the color would come off on his hands and the herb would then turn black. Finally, he reached the plains and saw in front of him, hundreds of trees, shrubs, and flowers. All of them were orange! His father's information had turned out to very helpful indeed! As it was, he was tired and hungry, and now he had to deal with yet another problem. However, deep inside, he felt proud of having crossed all the hurdles on his difficult path without help and successfully. He had actually crossed three huge mountains, and that too, of very different sorts. He decided to touch everything in sight then maybe he would find the Cianna.

As soon as he got to work, there came a very loud rumble from the sky and, as he looked up, expecting a storm, he saw instead, his mother's face smiling down at him. He immediately jumped to the conclusion that she was already dead and he was too late. But he was wrong. She told him that she had not been ill, and that it had all been his father's idea to toughen him up a little and bring out the best in him. The prince didn't know whether he was angry or relieved but in the end he felt, that if this was what it took to make him a better person and his parents proud of him, it was worth it. At least he didn't have to go on touching all the remaining flowers in that huge meadow!

PRITAM BHUYAN

Searching for the Ape

I still work for the Indian National Museum of Scientific Discoveries. But nobody knows my secret. I can only trust my diary to write it down. A few weeks back, being merely a young peon (though I prefer to call myself a "trainee"), I was delighted to find out that I had been selected to go on an expedition to a remote place where a yeti-like creature had been sighted. I suppose I was chosen for my wonderful coffee-making skills! Little did I know that in a few months' time I would be in a place so cold that my coffee making skills would not be required at all.

The national museum would be financing our trip so there was no lack of funds. I was extremely glad to hear this, as I had no resources of my own apart from the meager salary paid by the museum. I was completely in the dark as to where we would be going. The only thing I knew was that we were to be leaving on December 6 and we were instructed to prepare ourselves for snow. There were rumors circulating in the office that if our expedition was successful we would be given fat bonuses. I was in seventh heaven after hearing this and made up my mind to do my very best to please my superiors. I was still wondering about our destination. My boss told me that I would be briefed in time.

One freezing December morning, while I was having a cup of coffee, I heard footsteps thumping up the stairs to the miserable hovel of a flat I called home. It was a man from the local courier company. He handed me a large sealed envelope. I signed on the dotted line and came back in, eager to see what the envelope contained. There was a bulky, official-looking dossier in the envelope bearing the seal of one of the most famous wildlife organizations in the world. There was a

complete set of instructions for the expedition, including the things I would need to take, a couple of maps, fact sheets and a large glossy photograph. I settled down for a long and interesting read. What caught my attention immediately was the photograph of a large footprint embedded in the snow. I was astounded, as I had never seen such a large footprint before. What astonished me even more was that the footprint looked alarmingly human. After reading the whole document, I took a deep breath then yelled in joy. I was going to the Andes.

The next few days passed in a blur. I was rushing against time, getting my things packed, informing people, paying off the rent and the numerous bills which I had avoided for so long. The next thing, I was in Calcutta International Airport, meeting my fellow expeditioners. The other members of the team were four men and two women. They looked a jolly lot. I was glad, as I didn't want six grouchy companions. Having boarded the aircraft I drank champagne and settled into my seat for a blissful nap.

The first things I saw when I woke up were the craggy mountaintops of the Andes. It was a majestic sight – those fierce peaks. I felt a rush of pure thrill and excitement. We got off at the airport and piled into a coach which was awaiting our arrival. During the long, arduous journey to the camping site, I became better acquainted with the others. They were all experts, famous in their respective fields and were slightly contemptuous of me – a mere peon. They mostly ignored me and sometimes ridiculed my opinions. Not as jolly for me as I had originally thought.

We arrived at a small camping site at the top of a mountain. The view was spectacular and terrifying. If you walked a hundred feet or so you looked down into a steep gorge. We met our group leader and the financier of the whole expedition, a jolly looking Englishman with a thick bushy moustache. The first day, the Englishman, Mr. Graham, gave us a briefing in the large tent, which served as our office as well as dining hall. He showed us some more photographs like the one I had received earlier. The photographs, however, appeared to be much newer and I could see every detail perfectly. Our exploration was to search for further traces of the ape called the "Abominable Snowman of the Andes".

It was a week since we arrived and we had not seen any sign of "Andy", as the creature was jocularly referred to. The experts in our camp were getting irritable and impatient with the long, fruitless wait. That made them take out all their ill temper on me, the most unimportant person around. I suggested to them, that perhaps they were not following up the clues correctly and got more rude words in return from them. Just then, one of our Brazilian bearers, Rico, came sprinting into camp shouting something incomprehensible. We waited eagerly for the translator to do his work and the resulting information electrified us. The "abominable snowman" had been spotted, by Rico, near the gorge. When we reached the dense, rocky area, we saw a trail of footprints leading into a cave. The bearers took one look at it and fled. To my alarm I heard a rapid series of clicks, which sounded very familiar. I turned and saw some people from our expedition loading high-powered tranquilizers. They weren't taking any chances. Being small and thin, I managed to squeeze myself into the group which entered the cave.

We were advancing cautiously, when we were greeted by an ear-splitting yowl and something charged at us from the depths of the cave. In the contracted beam of our flashlights we were able to see a large puma with its fangs bared. It seemed to be looking straight at me. It was a spine chilling experience, looking into those deadly, pale yellow eyes, which shone like a car's headlights. Someone fired a high-powered dart

into its flanks. Within a few seconds the dart took effect and the great cat sank into a motionless sleep. We stole away quickly. I was wondering how on earth the footprints had led to nothing.

During the next few days we saw more pumas and smaller animals, but no yeti or apes. There were a wide variety of animals and I was kept busy with my old battered camera which had survived a million dents. One day, there was a minor earthquake. I had just woken up and felt the earth rumbling. I rushed outside in time to see in the distance, a large column of snow disappear into the ground. Our camp was not damaged too badly and no one was hurt. After the earthquake subsided, I heard grumbles and moans from all the people. It had been two weeks and we had found nothing but pumas and earthquakes. Yet the experts were sure that the yetis were there - probably in large numbers - and very cleverly evading us, their trackers.

Even I was getting a little bit disheartened. Except for a few footprints which could have been made by the local fauna, we didn't have any concrete evidence that any "abominable snowman" existed in the Andes. So we finally decided to break camp and head off down the mountain. When we were loading into the bus, I swept the mountains for the last time with my binoculars. To my amazement, I saw a few hairy creatures and another group just staring at us from a distant snow covered, sunlit slope. They looked very human indeed! I was spellbound. I did not say anything at all. One part of me wanted to shout with elation at my discovery while another part of me wished to respect the privacy of these remarkable creatures who had successfully eluded our whole team of experts for so long. In the end I held my tongue and climbed into my seat in the bus.

I knew that I would never forget my experience in the snow swept beautiful mountains of the Andes - for out of all the experts in our team, only I, a lowly peon, was privileged enough to catch sight of these shy and fabulous creatures. That was their special gift to me. In return, I pledged silence and ensured their freedom from mankind's greed.



RONOJOY BAROOAH

My Mountain Story

Since I was a little boy of five, I despised mountains. The very thought of them sent shivers down my spine. But I had no logical reason for not liking them. I thought them to be places where demons and ghosts reside, waiting to push a traveler from the cliffs. Many people thought me to be suffering from vertigo. But I had no fear of heights as I frequently climbed out to the roof of our three-storied house. My hatred developed quite naturally, since the first time my father described them to me, he said that they were "huge" and "dominating". Actually, he did say many more things about them but these were the two words – enough to inspire mixed feelings in most children – which left a dreadful impression on me.

I studied in my hometown, Dibrugarh, until class three. On my ninth birthday, I learned that the following year, I would have to join a boarding school in Mussoorie, a hill station in Uttar Pradesh. On hearing this, I became absolutely terrified and stubbornly refused to go. I created such a commotion that my parents threatened to send me to the monster that supposedly lived in my backyard. My parents had made use of this legendary monster quite a few times to make me "behave" – and with great success. I had no choice. There was a month left before I had to leave. Each night, nightmares haunted and tortured me. But eventually, as the time of my departure drew near, I gathered all the remaining shreds of my courage and was ready to accompany my parents on that fateful trip to the mountains.

As we climbed the mountains of Mussoorie in our taxi, I shut my eyes all the way, expecting demons to lunge at me any moment. But

the sweet fragrance that came in through the windows with the cool breeze at first puzzled me, and then made me change my mind and open my eyes for a peep.

The sight that greeted me was probably the most beautiful I have ever seen in my entire life. To one side of the road were lines of beautifully shaped pine trees and forests of oak and teak on the surrounding hills. Wild flowers blossomed in between them, displaying a myriad of colors that blended so perfectly that I could have hoped to see such perfection only in my dreams. On the other side was the beautiful valley of Dehradun, its flat expanse stretching out until it merged with the sky in the far horizon. My mind was filled with joy and peace. But after eight years of believing that mountains were terrible places, my misgivings still didn't leave me immediately.

In the end, my stay in St. George's College turned out to be the best years of my life. My original ideas about mountains changed gradually. From the fresh scents of mountain flora to the crystal clear shimmering water of numerous streams, there are countless things which contribute to making the mountains wonderful places to live in. Not only the scenery, but also the people were wonderful. They were kind and offered help whenever needed. All in all, the whole atmosphere in Mussoorie was warm and beautiful. To this day, I wonder how I could have misjudged one of the most beautiful places in the world. Although I've come back to the plains, I have every intention of visiting the mountains again.



MORTEZA HATAMI

A Goose With One Leg

Once upon a time there was a king in a faraway land, who loved to eat the best foods. Once on a beautiful and shining day, the king told his cook to roast a big goose for dinner. The cook went around and found a fine, fat goose, plucked off its feathers, and cleaned it.

After that, he put it in the oven for roasting. Several hours later, the goose was ready. The cook took it out and put it on the kitchen table.

"Hum, how nice it smells!" He said "I ought to eat a little of it to see if it is well-cooked." He pulled out one leg of the roasted goose and began to eat it. When he finished eating it, he became afraid. "What will the master do if he sees this goose?" He thought his master might get angry.

At dinner, he turned the goose over so that his master might not see the missing leg. As the king used to look at his food carefully before eating, he looked at the goose and shouted angrily, "Haven't you roasted the whole goose? Where is the other leg?"

The cook didn't know what to say. He thought for a minute and

then said, "Sir, this bird had only one leg. "A bird with one leg? That's impossible," shouted the master. Suddenly the cook remembered that when the geese go to sleep, they put their heads under their wings, pull up one leg and stand on the other. He said, "Sir, if you come to the river, I'll show you geese with one leg."

As the king was eager to know about the missing leg, he went to the river and near the water, they saw some geese standing on one leg. The cook pointed to them and said, "You see, sir, these geese have one leg each." His master looked at them, went a little nearer and shouted, "Boo...au." His shout frightened the geese so they quickly pulled out their heads, put down their legs, and ran into the water.

The king shouted, "Now, what do you say, cook? You see that when I shouted, each goose showed two legs."

"Yes sir, you're quite right, but I caught the goose when it was asleep." The king smiled at this answer. Then suddenly both of them began to laugh loudly.



MEHDI RAHMI

The Fox's Wisdom

Once upon a time an old man was passing through a desert. Suddenly a big bush appeared in front of him. He approached it and wanted to dig it up. But he suddenly stopped. An enormous snake had got stuck in the middle of the bush. At first he was afraid. He wanted to return, but he wondered, "Poor snake! If he makes a slight move, the thorns will pierce his skin and he will starve if he doesn't move. I should help him."

Then he picked up a sack and a stick by which he extracted the snake from beneath the bush. He was very glad to help him but his happiness didn't last long for the snake said,

"Get ready! I'm going to bite you."

"Is that my reward?" The man, who was really surprised, asked unhappily.

"Yes, my dear friend!" the snake answered with a smile. "I think so and we will ask somebody else if you disagree."

"Okay, let's go check it out," the man said doubtfully.

The first creature they saw was a cow that was grazing.

"Do I deserve wickedness in spite of my favor?" he asked.

"Yes," the cow replied. "Let me make it clear. I was a good milk cow. I used to calve once every year. I also gave many benefits to my master. But the master has just sold me because I'm getting infirm to a butcher who's thinking of slaughtering me. Did I deserve to be treated so?"

The old man, who was intensely at sea, told the snake, "This is not enough. We should ask somebody else." The snake accepted with a nod. Afterwards they reached the oldest tree in the desert. He asked the question again.

"It's so in mankind's opinion," the tree answered. "I used to bear

fruit so much and refine the air. I have got a big shadow which draws the attention of tired passengers. After all everybody who comes here either scratches me or sits beneath me. In addition, they cut my branches and say it's ideally suited for an ax handle!"

Much as the old man fell into despair, he begged the snake miserably, "Just one more chance."

"O.k.," the snake said. "But that would be the last one."

A fox which hadn't been able to catch a hare, turned up out of the blue and a faint hope flickered in the old man's breast. He knew that foxes were wise animals. So he asked him,

"What's the reward of giving a favor?"

"Why do you ask me such a strange question?" The fox said. He told him the story and his situation.

"I don't believe it," the fox said craftily. "How would you have pulled the snake out of a bush if he has got stuck there. Above all, how would you have placed such a gigantic snake in this tiny sack? Come on! That's incredible." The snake, whose patience had run out, cried, "Look, how I go into the sack."

Then he entered it. Immediately the fox gave a sign to the old man and, he tied the sack with a string. Finally he got rid of the wicked snake. So the fox got ready to run after the hare.

"I'm most grateful," the old man told the fox with a sigh.

"Don't forget," the fox said. "Never be friendly with a poisonous snake. Never ever. You'll hurt yourself if you have mercy on your enemy. That's just the way things are!"

They separated but the evil snake was trapped by his ungrateful attitude.



KRISTIN KOBAYASHI

The Life Thread of Kappa

If we tried to ask a group of students to name a few famous mountains or mountain ranges, what kinds of results would we end up with? There can be the Alps, Mount Everest, the Rockies, the Appalachians, Ural, Caucasus, Andes, Atlas, Mount Kilimanjaro, and so on... but wait! We are forgetting one area! This mountain is the "icon" of Japan. This mountain is Mount Fuji, or as we call it, Fuji-san.

Everyone must surely know or have heard of Fuji-san! Some people recognize it as the "blue mountain with a white zigzag at the top". Of course, I see it much more differently. Because I live in Tokyo, which is a section of the Kanto Plains, I get to see Fuji-san

on every clear, sunny day, especially in the winter. Some claim that the Tokyo side always looks the best, but I believe that Fuji-san gives off the same beauty on any side. In addition to its outside beauty, there is also an inner beauty. When I say inner, I do not mean the mountain's inside, like the layers of rocks and dirt. I mean the stories and myths that have been around and "inside" Fuji-san for many years. One of my most favorite ones is the "The Life Thread of Kappa." According to this myth, it is Kappa who created some of the important things we know or see today.

Once upon a time, on a mountain where the ocean surrounded every side, a little creature named Kappa lived. He was short, thin



in figure, and green. He had a hard plate on top of his head, which was also green, but it shielded him from the strong rays of the sun and the heavy drops of rain. Some say that Kappa is an ancestor of another creature that is similar like Kappa in looks, but this creature scared the people of the villages and lived in the rivers. It is also natural to think that Kappa was a frog, for he was very green in color, and had webbed feet and hands. Kappa walked upright, like a man, and had two legs and two arms. He was the only creature that lived on this high mountain, and he was also a god, having supernatural powers.

Kappa's daily life was measured in a golden thread. As each day passed, the golden thread would magically disappear. Kappa would usually spend his days looking off at the everlasting horizon. On some days, he went to the crater, which was located at the pinnacle of the mountain, to enjoy a day in a hot spring. It is said that the steam from Kappa's hot spring is what creates the mists on the mountains. For food, Kappa had grapes, oranges, peaches, and apples, which symbolizes Japan's fruits of each season. After Kappa was finished with his meals, he would throw the seeds far off the mountain. These were scattered in different areas of Japan so that those areas would be enriched with those same fruits. Today, you can get grapes and peaches in Yamanashi prefecture, oranges in the

Izu peninsula, and apples at the surrounding areas of Fuji-san. On other days when he was not in hot springs, Kappa made a fire in the crater and danced all day and all night. The smoke from the fire made the gray clouds of the skies, and Kappa's dancing steps symbolized Japan's *taiko* sound, or Japanese drum sounds. Kappa's quick, swift moves are thought to be what causes the strong winds. On some occasions, Kappa became very frustrated and angry. The reason behind this is unknown, for there was really nothing to get mad at. When he did, it was very quick but deeply lasting. These were explained as Japan's earthquakes. Kappa's life was basically in these routines, but sometimes it changes, and for these days, there were new creations.

In this myth, Kappa is the reason of some of today's natural "causes". We do not know what has happened to Kappa. We do not know how long his golden life thread was. Its length could have been infinite, for some say that people still see him today. Climbers of Fuji-san today still look for traces of him. Sometimes, mysterious tracks left behind on the trail is referred to as Kappa's tracks. In contrast, Kappa may be resting in peace on Fuji-san. We will never know, and we can never find out, but we do know that his legend is still alive today.

TURSUNHANOVA MALIKA

The Zailiski Alatau

I love my native town Almaty. Because it is my motherland and it is beautiful and great. Almaty is surrounded by mountains. I live at the foot of them. From childhood, I have been fond of them. In my opinion, they are among the best mountains in the world and belong to one of the most beautiful regions on this earth: Zailiski Alatau.

What makes the region charming are the high mountain landscapes covered in a carpet of flourishing, aromatic flowers of different species. Several tiny water run-offs gather into streams whose turbulent waters noisily gush along the rocks and rapids as they flow through narrow gorges. The misty spray from the frothing water gives the surrounding air some sort of coolness. On a sunny day, a rainbow hangs over the roaring waterfalls.

The eternal and majestic steppes and deserts, valleys intersected by meandering rivers and streams, and the refreshing mountain air tinted with the scent of wormwood gift the region with inimitable beauty. The sunrise or sunset beyond the white-turbaned mountains, the endless sea of the colorful feather grass array of the taiga forests, and the snow-capped mountains fading in the horizon are unforgettable sights. The peak of the area's beauty can be seen in spring and autumn when forests, mountains, and deserts all blaze with different impressive colors.

The sky over the cold peaks mostly remains clear and majestic. How much fascination is hidden in the compositions of green and blue verses about these great rocks. There seems to be a mysterious

attractive force inherent in these granite sculptures created by mother nature.

Scattered nearby are the formless and odd blocks of granite. Step aside and give the rocks a concentrated look and see how the rocks turn to life. A little further is the granite sculpture of the double-humped camel with a great warrior standing nearby proudly in armor. Those with the gift of communicating with inert objects have much to hear, because these rocks are candid and have a lot to tell: memorials of the Bronze Age, symbols of the eventful history of this place. The fantasies of man have rewarded these places with a lot of legends, tales, and stories. For readers I would like to present its rivers, forests, and wildlife.

Rivers

The pearls of the Zailiski Alatau mountains are its lakes and rivers. There are two main rivers: Bolshaya and Malaya Almatinka. Many tales and legends surround these ancient rivers which take their sources from the amalgamation of three streams that ensue from the frontal moraine of two powerful glaciers.

On the map they look like tap roots with a dense network of adventitious roots. Bolshaya and Malaya Almatinka send all the water contributed by numerous rivers and rivulets to the parched plains. Not all the water, however, makes this journey to the end. They skip and gush down the mountain slopes in haste like beauti-

ful girls hurrying to a date. But some lose their way and find themselves in the hot embraces of the steppes. And they begin to long for the Bolshaya and Malaya Almatinka rivers until not a drop of tear is left to be shed.

People accord the Bolshaya and Malaya Almatinka rivers with love and respect, calling them Almatinka Batyushka (father) because they link a lot of hopes and expectations. The life of the region depends on their bracing water and those of their younger brothers and sisters – rivers, rivulets, brooks, and springs – which generously feed them with their water. Proud, mighty, and old but with an ever-young spirit like the mythic Hercules, they accomplish many heroic feats in the name of life. They communicate in many forms with those who call on their life-giving streams.

Bolshaya and Malaya Almatinka are really laborious, therapeutic rivers that flow on this planet. Little wonder they are legendary.

Forests

Zailiski Alatau's forest is a conglomerate of deciduous and coniferous trees. The forest harbors plants with valuable nutrients and medicinal properties; plenty of berries, mushrooms, and cedar nuts; and fur-bearing animals and birds. All these serve as an attraction for the local people, but nevertheless there are still places in these dense forests where the human foot has never stepped.

In spring, the mountains are colorful. The dark coniferous boughs of the pines put out new branches, new young delicate cones, and from the slightest wind, let loose golden pollen. Winter covers the coniferous forest with a snow-white canvas. All the trees stand orderly in knee-deep snow waving frost-covered crowns. Every branch and every pine blends with the white background. Everything seems

to warm up the air. The slightest wind sends afar the aromatic resinous odor. There are times when the wind blows along with this aroma – the noise, laughter, and calls of the mushroom and fruit pickers. In winter, when one is drinking tea with jam made from the fruits picked from the forests, one cannot help but remember with gratitude these forests.

Wildlife

The region is rich in fauna. In all, more than three hundred kinds of different birds and about sixty kinds of mammals can be found here. The forest is home to the deer, elks, wild goats, wolves, lynx, wolverines, and polecats including the "boss" of the forest, the brown bear. Rodents include the flying squirrel, chipmunk, and other squirrels. The numerous birds found here live in close association with the rivers and lakes in the taiga forests. Often one can find black storks and goosander.

Around the lakes we find the nests of gray goose, widgeon, marble duck, and mallard. In the blind corners of the forests, we find the capercailie, hazel hen, woodpecker, and bulbuls. This is also the favorite habitat of the sea eagle and other fish-eating birds like the silver seagull, black-headed herring gull, and dotterel. The lakes and rivers have a lot to offer. During the spawning season, there is so much lenok that it is possible to fish with bare hands at the estuaries of the rivers that fall into the lake.

Many of the birds and animals that inhabit the region have been listed in the Red Data book.

As you can see, I love the Zailiski Alatau region. It will always stay with me wherever I am. And we must learn to save what we love. It is our wealth.



MICHAEL MILLER

Mt. Fuji and the Spider's Web

After five grueling hours of climbing, I finally reached the peak of Mount Fuji. It was hard for me to comprehend that I had just ascended a 13,000 feet mountain. The sheer beauty and elegance of the dormant volcano is impossible to describe unless one has seen it for oneself. The perfect gentle slope and snow-capped summit resemble an illustration a pre-schooler would create. Standing on the top of the country, I looked out at the breathtaking view of Japan. I couldn't help but marvel at the magnificent mountain that I was standing on. As I began to look towards the horizon, a sharp contrast began to develop. Where I was standing, the air was clean, fresh, and revitalizing. At that altitude the air was void of any form of pollution. As I glanced, however, towards the urban areas I saw thick clouds of smog and dirt. In many places, it was so dense that I could barely see the cities.

Naturally, I began to think of how humans affect the land that they inhabit. In the movie "The Matrix" humans are portrayed as a type of virus that uses, depletes, and destroys their environment in order to survive. In the course of our history, we have caused numerous animals to become extinct, polluted the air we breathe, and depleted many of the earth's natural resources. One could make a strong case that we do, in fact, behave similar to viruses that live off a host animal.

Environmentalism is a controversial issue because there are many different varieties of pollution. When one attempts to solve the problem of pollution one becomes overwhelmed because one does not know where to begin. There are copious problems that plague our planet such as air pollution, water pollution, and animal extinction.

Who can really say that one is more important than the others? Therefore, it seems like a monumental task to try and surmount environmental problems. How does one set about trying to "save the world"?

A first good step for one to take is to start with oneself. The first steps will probably be small and seem insignificant, such as recycling and conserving water. True, if only one person in the entire world practiced these techniques it would not make much of a difference. If every person, however, takes the initiative to become involved, the task becomes much more achievable. There is an African saying that states, "One spider's web may be weak, but if enough spiders combine their webs they can stop a lion."

Another way for one to become involved in environmental protection is to urge governments to become more proactive. In democratic societies, one can voice opinions through voting. Voting is a powerful instrument that sends clear, unmistakable messages to a government. It is a golden opportunity for a person to express their feelings in a legal, unimposing manner. Additionally, one will be far better received by politicians because it is in their best interests to please voters.

As I stood on the peak of the mountain, I could not help but wonder what the landscape would look like in another 50 years. If industrialization remains the same and people do not take an active stance, the view could be very ugly. Imagine a world where one cannot breathe oxygen freely. Imagine a world where one cannot drink water because it is too polluted. That is not a world I wish to live in. Therefore, I, for one, will do my part to keep this world clean.



JENNIFER PRENTKIEWICZ

The Challenge

He climbed up the ragged, rocky slopes of the mountain. "I'm almost there," he panted to himself, continuing along his tedious journey up to the top of the mountain.

He had been traveling for over three days now and he was exhausted. He realized, however, that if he kept up his pace, he could be upon the great mountain summit by nightfall.

Suddenly, his foot slipped, and he began to fall backwards. Thoughts of tumbling down the mountain filled his head. He grabbed frantically at anything. After what seemed like minutes, but really was only a few seconds, his hand came in contact with a jagged rock. The rock held him in place seconds later he would have crashed to the ground.

After recovering from his near fall, he re-adjusted his backpack. Leaning against the rock that saved his life, he paused for a minute to catch his breath. After a moment of relaxation, he continued up the snowy, rocky slopes. He breathed on his mittened hands to warm them. Although it was extremely cold, he could feel sweat on his back. His breath came in short gasps. "Almost there," he told himself again. "You can do it."

His legs ached and his feet hurt. He desperately wanted to sit down and rest, but his determination to reach the top by sundown forced him onwards. Nothing could stop him from conquering this mountain and reaching his goal.

Finally, he could take it no longer. He was exhausted. He found

a snow-covered rock to sit upon, and took out his water bottle. The water felt ice-cold to his throat. Slowly, he began to relax. He lay sprawled upon that uncomfortable rock for moments, feeling the serenity of the mountains and the warm sunshine upon his face.

Realizing that he was wasting precious time, he jumped up. Replacing the water bottle in the pack and adjusting the backpack on his back, he continued on his journey. Every step he took led him closer and closer to his goal.

He continued on for another hour or so, feeling along for the best route up the steep slope. The setting sun struck his face, and he realized the cause. He was almost at the peak. The sun was on the other side of the mountain and with every step he took, more and more of the sun covered his body. The sun seemed to warm his soul more than his actual body. Motivated, he scrambled up the last couple of steps to the top.

Finally, he had reached the great summit and his goal. He threw down his bag and overjoyed, he spun around and around in circles, arms outstretched, face towards the stars. "I made it!" he shouted into the wind. A big beam spread across his face.

If only he could have seen the sunset, or the stars directly above his head. If only he could have seen the beautiful view of the city, streams and valley down below. If only he could see the birds circling overhead, welcoming his arrival. He could not see these things however, for he was blind.



ALEX PRUNER

Gold on the Mountain

The year was 2039. The earth lost all of its population of humans and animals, except for the squirrels who lived out in the open plains. Two squirrels, Alex and Tait, were collecting nuts, grains, and other foods before the winter came. As they were walking along a trail, Alex came upon a bottle that was half covered in the dirt. He dug it out and shouted, "Hey Tait, look at this old thing. How much do you think the pawn shop will buy it for?"

"Oh, maybe five peanuts," Tait answered while rolling his eyes. Alex began to observe deeply into the filthy bottle and noticed there was a piece of paper in it, so he removed it out of the bottle. It read: THE GOLDEN NUT, found on top of Mt. Gold, is a golden nut

said to bring peace, love, and health to whoever keeps it in their possession.

"Wow, wouldn't it be wonderful to have a Golden Nut, Tait?"

"That's a big joke Alex. You don't believe that do you?" Replied Tait. Tait wasn't interested in the Golden Nut as much as Alex was.

"Besides, do you know how far Mt. Gold is?" asked Tait.

"It's over the hills and through the woods, past grandmother's house!"

"Come on Tait! We can do this. It's not that far. We have nothing better to do anyway," explained Alex.

Tait agreed and the two adventurous squirrels headed out to-



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ward Mt. Gold, over the hills and through the woods, past grandmother's house.

The squirrels finally arrived at the bottom of the mountain after the long strenuous walk from their home.

"Wow! Look at that. That mountain is so enormous."

"Yeah, it looks awfully dangerous," said Tait. But all Alex could think about was the Golden Nut. He had to have it in his possession. There was nothing that could stop him.

There were three major parts of the mountain that they had to climb. The first part was a long hike up a very steep slope. Alex, being in such good shape, as he was, wasted no time and dashed up to the second part. Tait, on the other hand, was larger than Alex, so it took him a while. After every few yards, Tait stopped to catch his breath.

"I'm never going to make it," gasped Tait. Getting very irritated by this, Alex went down and helped push him up.

The second part was a narrow path on the edge of the cliff that went around the mountain. Tait was not afraid of heights; therefore, he had no difficulties getting ahead. Alex, however, was terrified by heights. Walking on the edge with their backs pressed against the wall, he desperately tried to hold on while slipping on loose rocks. His heart was pounding. He was having a difficult time getting across, but with Tait's aid, they made it to the last stage safely.

The last obstacle they had to challenge was a climb up a 90° cliff.

There was no easy way of climbing that cliff. There was no place to grab and they were too small to reach the top.

"Hey, lucky thing I brought this rope with a metal hook attached to it, huh?" said Alex.

"Yeah, then we can use it to climb up to the Golden Nut!" Tait replied.

Alex, being the stronger one, swung the rope around and threw it up to the top. When the rope was secured, the two squirrels began climbing. Half way up, they both stopped to catch their breath.

"Darn! We still have a long way to go!" complained Tait.

"Come on! You can do it. We can't turn back now." As Alex cheered, Tait was able to gain his confidence back. Alex finally stretched his hand up to the end of the mountain. He used all of his remaining energy to pull himself over. As he helped his friend make it over, he yelled, "We made it, Tait! We've reached THE GOLDEN NUT."

It was the most astonishing thing they had ever seen. With the sun shining upon it, you could see its magnificent ray of light. It brought pure joy and happiness to their hearts, and they could soon feel the power of the peace, love, and health surrounding them as it was promised.

As the two squirrels watched the exquisite sunset and overlooked the land below them, Tait asked, "How do we get down?"

TAKASHI SHIRAISHI AND HIROO SATO

Forests Forever

There once was a small village at the foot of a mountain. The people living there were self-sufficient and grew vegetables and wild plants. The people may have seemed poor, but they lived happily. The children of the village always played in the forest at the foot of the mountain. One day, the children gathered in the forest to play a game.

"What are we going to do today?" one of them, Hirotaka, said.

"How about playing tag?" Yuji, another boy replied.

"Play tag again? We do that almost everyday."

"Well, how about playing hide and seek?" Yuji offered.

"Hide and seek?" said Hirotaka. "Let's play something else!"

"Okay, let's go to the top of our mountain," another boy suggested.

"We must not go! The adults always said not to because there is a huge snake up there!" cried Yuji.

"You believe that rumor? There is no such monster," said Hirotaka.

"But, if there is a monster up there what will we do?" asked Yuji.

"I will go up there to find the truth," exclaimed Hirotaka.

"Wait!" Yuji said. But Hirotaka ran into the forest and up the mountain without listening to his friends.

They ran after him against their will. At first, Hirotaka was in high spirits as he bravely entered the deep mountain forest. As birds began twittering and disappearing gradually, he became more and more scared. Hirotaka kept going though to find the large snake

because he had told his friends he would. He was too proud to back down.

Suddenly the group of children, with Hirotaka at the front, heard the peculiar sound of a large snake approaching. They all ran as fast as they could, screaming back down the mountain. But one of the children failed to get away in time. It was Hirotaka who stood paralyzed to confront the monster. He was shaking with terror as he heard the sound of falling trees approach him. He thought he would be eaten by the large snake. He closed his eyes and prepared to die, but nothing happened.

Hirotaka couldn't hear the strange sound anymore, but just someone walking towards him. He opened his eyes with terror. A man wearing a hard hat looked at him worriedly.

"Are you okay?" asked the man. "Are you injured?"

Because Hirotaka was so shocked, he couldn't say anything for a long time. Finally he said, "Did you kill that large snake?" In the direction he pointed there was a large immovable yellow thing.

The man smiled. "Oh, that is not a snake. This is a machine which can work hundreds of times harder and faster than humans."

"Did that machine die?" asked Hirotaka, confused.

"The machine was never alive, so it cannot die," replied the man.

"What are you doing with this machine?"

"We are cutting down trees with it to build houses," replied the man.

Hirotaka looked around and saw many stumps instead of trees. He was shocked to witness this sight.

"Why did you do such a stupid thing?" asked Hirotaka with his arms folded.

The man was at a loss, but finally answered, "We were asked by the village."

"You are telling a lie! The village would never accept such a thing," cried Hirotaka as he ran away.

"But, but, oh wait..." the man yelled.

Hirotaka ran as fast as possible to tell his friends what he had discovered. As soon as he arrived back in the village he went straight to the village chief. He told him frantically about what was happening up in the mountain forest.

"I am sorry, Hirotaka. Our village does not have a special attraction or much money," the chief tried to explain.

"Why... I cannot understand. We enjoy our simple lives here at the foot of the mountain and we love the forests!" said Hirotaka.

"But you see, the population density is decreasing because young people are moving to the cities. Older people and children are left here. We must cut the trees to survive," explained the chief. "We need the money that comes from the timber. I know our forest will be lost, so we only cut in a restricted area."

"But, you must understand... please!" cried Hirotaka. The chief could do nothing for this sad boy. Maybe one day Hirotaka would understand.

Twenty years later...

The place where the village was is now a big town. There are trains and wide roads filled with many cars. One cannot believe that there used to be a forested mountain here. Only one small forest is left. This remaining forest is being destroyed in the name of development. The leader of this development was once a young, passionate boy named Hirotaka.



SHAWN SOUTHERD

Sunny and Twilight

Once upon a time, when even humans weren't around on earth, there were two gods that ruled the forces of nature. One was the sun god, whose name was Sunny, and the other was the moon god, named Twilight. Sunny ruled the forces of nature during the day, and Twilight ruled the forces of nature during the night. One day, as Sunny was about to end his work for the day, he decided to have a chat with Twilight.

"Hey Twilight!" shouted Sunny. "I think it's time that we should see who's stronger."

"What are you talking about, we don't need to contest; I am certainly stronger than you."

"Well, why don't you prove it by showing me how strong you are, and see if you could beat me at a challenge?"

"Sure, I accept the challenge, but you choose what we could contest in order to find out who's the strongest."

"I was thinking we could decide who's the strongest by creating a mountain on our great land."

"How on earth could we possibly do that?"

"All you have to do is take the many rocks we have around us and stack them one on the other. Whoever stacks the rocks the highest wins the contest."

"Well, what would the winner get for making a mountain?"

"The winner would get to rise from the tip of the mountain, and assume control over the forces of nature during his rule."

"All right then, let's begin at noon, tomorrow."

The next day at noon, both of the gods met at the rocks located in the center of their great land. "Let the competition begin!" shouted

Sunny, and off they went, piling rocks on one another. The task of piling rocks, however, was a vigorous task, since they weighed so heavy. Both gods were working at a fast pace during the first few minutes, but they slowed down as time passed by. After a while, Twilight realized that his mountain was very unstable, since he had randomly piled the rocks without considering the rock's size or shape. On the other hand, Sunny was doing terrific in creating a mountain from the largest rocks at the bottom to the smallest on top. Consequently, after some time had passed, Twilight's mountain collapsed.

"Damn. I just lost the contest," Twilight said ashamed.

"Ha, it just shows you how mental strength can overpower physical strength. The fact that you were stronger than me physically had nothing to do with the outcome."

"Okay, you win this time, but I won't make the same mistake the next time."

Despite the fact that Twilight had lost, he remained a friend of Sunny. Sunny looked at his mountain and said, "Wow, now I get to rise over the top of my mountain, and take over the forces of nature during my given time." After this day onwards, Sunny was able to rise above his mountain; therefore, making the entrance of a champion over the great land. After thousands of years had passed, humans began to call the great land that they lived upon Nippon or "the land of the rising sun", for the spectacular sun rises every morning with the beautiful landscape of Mount Fuji in the foreground, and the bright sun in the back. The sight is absolutely breathtaking.



GETMANOVA ALEXANDRA

Land of the Golden Fleece

Introduction

Caucasus is a gigantic isthmus located between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. It has always had a romantic appeal for travelers. Thousands of years ago, the routes connecting Northern and Eastern Europe with Asia Minor and the Greek colonies passed through here. The Argonauts were the first foreign tourists, so to speak, to visit the Black Sea coast of Caucasus and the ancient Georgian Kingdom of Colchis. Prometheus, who brought fire to mankind in defiance of Zeus, was chained to a cliff in Caucasus.

Thousands of years have passed since then, but people are still attracted by Caucasus: its mountains, glaciers, ancient castles, and caves. Today, thousands of tourists come here during all seasons to enjoy the beautiful scenery of this exotic and hospitable land. They climb the peaks of the Caucasus region; descend to the bottom of the Sukhumi Bay to see the ruins of ancient Dioscurias, sometimes called the Black Sea Atlantis; admire Lake Ritsa; and bathe in the warm waters of the Black Sea. They also enjoy traditional Caucasian hospitality and Georgian cuisine and superb Georgian wines.

A Georgian meal follows a strict order established by ancient ritual and sanctified by tradition. Either the oldest or the wittiest

and most resourceful person present is chosen as leader of the table – the *tamada*. If there are many people, the *tamada* assigns assistants – *tolumbashi*. The *tamada* holds sway at the table, his toasts is an exact, inviolable order, and everyone must listen carefully to the beauty of his style and the meaning of his words. One must not interrupt the *tamada* when he is making a toast. His helpers and then the others can only add to and develop his toast. If you want to make a toast, you must get the *tamada's* consent or you risk an awkward situation. The feast is usually accompanied by jokes, music, a dance contest, and Georgian songs.

A great deal of wine is drunk at a Georgian meal, so judge your capacity – the moment might come when you will not be able to drink a toast and will offend your hosts. In a restaurant strangers may send you wine or fruit or invite you to their table. Do not be surprised – this is common in Georgia. You should approach them and, standing, drink to their health and thank them.

Tourists also visit the many ancient architectural monuments, historical reserves, and national military parks. The most popular part of Caucasus, the Black Sea coast, is a huge arc which lies be-



tween the Taman Peninsula and Batumi. This is a place where you can spend a memorable vacation, improve your health, and return home with many lasting impressions. Motoring along the Black Sea Highway, which follows the coastline, will give you a chance to visit many of the famed seaside resorts and towns.

Whether by ship or by automobile, your trip will be a pleasant one because you'll see the Black Sea Coast of Caucasus, the land of the fabled golden fleece.

History

The first more or less reliable data on the Caucasian Black Sea coast comes from Greek and Phoenician sources. Around the sixth to seventh centuries B.C., the colonies were founded by Greek merchants who traded successfully in the area. Merchants from neighboring regions flocked to the rich bazaars of these colonies.

Some of the towns later became the capitals of local states. Thus, during the fourth to sixth centuries B.C., Prasis was apparently the center of one of the most ancient slave-owning states in Georgia, the Colchis Kingdom.

In the first century A.D., the Romans conquered the Colchis Kingdom and firmly established themselves along the entire coast. Another ancient Georgian kingdom, Iberia, withstood the conquerors and remained independent. It played an important role in the development of relations between Rome and the East during the early centuries of our era.

In 337, Georgia adopted Christianity, becoming one of the first countries in which the new religion became the state religion. This helped to unite separate parts of the country and disseminate the written language which evolved during the third to fourth centuries B.C.

In the fourth century, at the time of the great migration of the people, the Byzantines replaced the Roman legionnaires on the Caucasian Black Sea coast. They revived the Greek colonies and gradually established relations with the Black Sea area. At that time, the Slavs had already begun settling along the northern coast of the Black Sea.

Climate

Mountains and the sea create the Caucasus. Warm air masses from the Black Sea are blocked by the Greater Caucasian Range protecting the coastal area from the cold northern winds. The climate of the western part of the coast (between Novorossijsk and Sochi) is of the Mediterranean type with a dry and hot sunny summer and a rainy and comparatively cold winter. The bathing season lasts from the middle of May to the end of October. Since the mountains between Novorossijsk and Sochi are low, cold air masses brought by the northeastern wind occasionally reach the coastal area.

The climate of the southeastern part of the coast between Sochi and Batumi is that of the humid subtropics. The bathing season lasts from April to December. Cold winds sometimes penetrate the southeastern part of the coast, causing a sharp drop in temperature.

In the mountains, the winters are quite cold with lots of snow. This is the season for winter sports. The mountain rivers, which rush down to the sea, contain vast amounts of energy. The flora is unusual. There are palms, rhododendrons, pines, and evergreens like the tea plant, laurel, cork oak, tangerine, and many other subtropical plants. The climate of the Caucasian coast is most favorable for walnut, chestnut, fig tree, pomegranate, persimmon, and grapes.

The Black Sea

The Black Sea has a great influence on natural conditions and the climate of the Caucasian coast. It was once a part of a vast semi-saline basin, which also included the Caspian Sea. They separated at the end of the tertiary period. Later, great hollows formed at the bottom of the Black Sea as a result of a number of tectonic faults.

A cross-section of the Black Sea basin resembles a deep bowl. The underwater slopes are especially steep at the shores of Crimea and Northern Caucasus. The rivers Vulan, Mzymta, Bzyb, Kodori, Inguri, Rioni, and others that fall into the Black Sea all have their sources in the Caucasian mountains.

The Black Sea coast has hardly any large peninsulas or capes except for the vast Crimean Peninsula which extends far into the sea. The coastline along the Colchis Lowlands changes frequently, for the sea here is advancing into the land.

An observant traveler will notice the changing colors of the Black Sea waters. Near Odessa they are gray green, near the Crimea emerald green with a blue tint, near Abkhazia sky blue, and deep blue near Batumi. This is due to a number of factors: the intensity of the sunrays, the depth of the water and its salinity, the amount of plankton, etc.

Sochi

Sochi is the gem of the Russian Black Sea coast, occupying a comparatively narrow plain in the foothills that is cut by gorges and gullies along which small rivers flow down to the sea. The mountains shelter Sochi from the cold breath of winter. When cold north easterly winds rage on the other side of the mountains, cyclamens and mimosas blossom in Sochi and people enjoy the sun and the beaches.

Sochi offers tourists, among others, two spots for exploration: Mt. Bolshoi Akhun and Krasnaya Polyana. The climb of Mt. Bolshoi Akhun begins near the Sputnik International Youth Camp. Cypress trees, pines, cryptomeria, and cedars line the mountain road. To the left are orchards and summerhouses belonging to the inhabitants of Sochi. Tourists also enjoy a fine view of Orliniye Skali (Eagle Cliffs) and a fantastic chaos of huge rocks rising to a height of 337 meters. The Agura River has made its way to the sea through Orliniye Skali and Mt. Akhun, which were once a single whole.

Akhun means "high dwelling". Old timers still remember the ruins of the stone structure which crowned Mt. Akhun 50 years ago. All that remains of it now is a fragment of one of its capitals on display in the Sochi Local Lore Museum.

There is a legend about the brothers Akhun and Oryol, chieftains of a tribe of shepherds, and of their sister Agura. The strong and fearless brothers were always ready to come to the aid of anyone in trouble. Once when an enemy attacked a neighboring tribe, they called their men to help their neighbors. But the sides were unequal. Both brothers and all their bold warriors were killed in the battle that followed.

Agura wept for her dead brothers and her tears were so abundant that they formed a river. As it is often the case in fairy tales, her brothers had not been killed after all, but merely wounded. Recovering from their wounds they returned home, but too late. Agura, beside herself with grief, had thrown herself into the river of tears, which was then named after her. Grief turned the brothers to stone. Ever since then the mighty brother mountains Akhun and Oryol have stood watch over their sister, the Agura River.

In 1936, a 30-meter Romanesque style stone observation tower was erected on top of Mt. Akhun, providing an excellent view of

the mountains and sea. There is a small museum of local lore on the second floor of the tower. Akhun Cave is located further down the mountain.

The mountain resort of Krasnaya Polyana (Red Meadow) is one of the most interesting tourist centers in the Western Caucasus. The resort stands on a terrace between the Mzymta River and its tributaries and is surrounded by high mountains. Orchards abound in Krasnaya Polyana. It acquired its name from the vast stretches of ferns that used to grow all about here and turned dark-red in autumn.

The road to Krasnaya Polyana is very beautiful, winding into the mountains from Adler and rising up uninterruptedly to the flat top of the ridge at Golitsyny Village. Further on the route you come to Akhshtyrskoye Gorge where the Mzymta River rumbles deep below. The descent begins here.

Several more turns bring Akhtsu Range into view. This section of the road has been hewn out of the face of a mountain. The danger zones are fenced off. As you enter Akhtsu Gorge, formed by two towering mountains whose peaks nearly touch each other, you find yourself between the overhanging crags and the foaming, crashing Mzymta at a dizzying depth below.

The road approaches a tunnel. At the entrance is a monument to the Red Guards killed during an unequal battle with a White Guard band in 1920. On the banks of the Mzymta, at the other end of the tunnel, is an obelisk commemorating civil war partisans.

The road turns up into the mountains beyond Chvizhepse Village, providing a magnificent view of Krasnaya Polyana at the last section of the mountain pass. The air is wonderfully clear and there are hardly any winds here. The summers are cool and the winters warm. As far back as the turn of the century, it was noted that

patients at Krasnaya Polyana were cured of their ailments by its very air.

The woods that cover the slopes reach down to the village while from the north and east there are only the looming snow-capped mountains and glaciers. Two tourist centers are located here: Gorny Vozdukh with a wonderful garden and orchard and Turistsky Priyut in a nut grove. There is a hostel for tourists on the slope of Mt. Archishkho, once a hunting lodge built for a Russian Grand Duke in 1901. In the near future a tourist center, accommodating 1,000 guests, will go up at Krasnaya Polyana.

Caucasian State Preserve

The Caucasian State Preserve is one of the largest and most interesting mountain and forest preserves in the world, a unique enclave of virgin flora and fauna. The preserve was founded in 1924 and covers an area of 270,000 hectares. High peaks, mountains, and glaciers; deep gorges and turbulent mountain streams; the emerald green of the alpine and sub-alpine meadows; tall pines and broad-leaved forest – all reflect the beauty and wealth of the Caucasian landscape. The flora and fauna of the preserve evolved during the last 50 to 60 million years when some of the West European, Asian, and African species of plants and animals spread as far as the Caucasus. It is impossible to describe the richness of the preserve's flora which comprises almost 3,000 species including those that are endemic to the area.

Tourists on mountain flights are offered a breathtaking panorama of almost 30 peaks rising beyond the snow line (2,700 meters) with Mt. Pseashkho Chugush, Mt. Agepsta, and others exceeding 3,000 meters. Peak Smidovich (3,663 meters) is the highest in the preserve and the preserve also has 50 large and small glaciers.

ANUJ GURUACHARYA

Everest

Hills, to me, have always meant flying squirrels; acorns falling down in plenty on the thick carpets of fallen autumn leaves; on rainy days, raincoats that stick to the backs of our bare legs; long endless roads, its silence disturbed only occasionally by a group of young boys or girls; thick trees; stray dogs; crying of foxes; and strange noises at night which forces me to pull the blankets tightly over my body from head to foot until the hot air inside gets stale and suffocating.

It's already been a few years since, but I can still smell the sickening odor of the green bushes of September which withered along with the vanishing of those thick, gray monsoon clouds and feel the fear of rotting, damp clothes that hung on the line for a whole week.

I can still remember the short hours after school, during which a small gang of me and my friends used to run up a pathway and

arrive at an edge with thistles sticking to our socks and tiny thorns scratching painless, thin, white marks on our naked forearms. We named the place Everest, though it was large enough only to be a tiny plateau on the cheek of a huge hill.

Acorns lay on the ground even more abundantly than the leaves that shrouded the oaks and we climbed down with our pockets bulging with those small stone like fruits to aim at the other boys on the way back to our cottages. At times in autumn, when the wind was happy, it would rush about in a frantic manner in and out of their branches to touch the flesh beneath those withering, brown leaves, transporting us all to a fantasy, to a bursting joy we couldn't comprehend. We felt it pierce our clothes, ravage hungrily all over our body, and pull our hair while we tried to catch those falling

leaves with the hope that it brings good luck.

On such days, I would often bring my mouth organ with me and blow on it madly, accompanied by the madness of the running wind, those tall trees, the shrubs, and everything: for one of my seniors had told me that that was how he'd learn to play it.

"Just keep blowin', kid. Keep blowin' and keep to the rhythm of all that's around you."

So I kept blowing to the rhythm, and the madness slowly flooded through me.

By the end of the year, beauty had made us drunk with her wine and the fresh air had cleaned all the blood in our lungs. Then on one cold evening when the summer madness of the green fields and the autumnal madness of the falling leaves had passed, Sabin, too, came along with us to our Everest.

I'd known him as a person who used to tear pages off his history note books, alone at the back of Aaron Hill, making paper planes of them, and flying them down from a small slope, flanked by hanging bushes and shrubs to a few scattered houses of the villagers below. With him, I, too, had once experienced the joy of seeing those planes glide smoothly through the cold air against the misty silhouettes of Kanchenjunga and a long zigzag of other mountains that stood eyeing the small, so called Aaron Hill, a name as exaggerated as our Mt. Everest.

The warmth of Sabin's voice overcame ours' in its unusual shrillness and the real singsong spirit. He looked around for a long while after we reached Everest, his face deceiving none of his thoughts, as he rolled his eyes from Adrian to me and finally spoke, "Don't you chums know nothin' about this place? No one told you about this being haunted?"

Ugen gave a quick look from where he was behind a tree, while I noticed Adrian begin to fumble with his fingers, biting his lips, his white face red. We were all stunned for sometime; yet Sabin still denied that he was bluffing even though I threatened him with my fists.

"I tell you guys, this place's haunted. Believe me. They say they were taking a boy to hospital one night through this very shortcut; but he died on the way. So they buried him right here, the place he took his last breath midst the spooky dark air and the midnight confusion. It's really dreadful, you know, and that's the truth. I mean it." He was shaking his head and moving his hands all the while as if he really did mean what he spoke.

We were all silent. I held the organ tight in my grip. We didn't really know if what Sabin had said was the truth or not; anyhow the words gnawed our ears, imagination and fear lashed at us. We stayed there for only about half a minute or so and ran fast all the way down, never actually to come back to that place again to our dear old Everest.

Midst all these I realized that our Everest, the hill upon which it rested, and the surrounding mountains were watching, listening silently upon all that everyone did; but not a word it spoke in response, be it the ringing of the church bells, the sad hymns of mourning that sang itself from the graveyard, the mad music from my organ, or a thousand other voices.

I'm older now and no longer a child, but I still do believe in those brown falling leaves, even though I no longer kiss the same hilly air, even though the rhythm of things do not follow the tune of my organ.



MADINA MASSALINA

Abode of the Gods

Since time immemorial, mankind has been connected with nature. It was and still is a source of energy, endless inspiration, and vital force. Afraid of natural elements, humans ironically turned to nature for shelter and salvation. They asked for rain, sunlight and believed in nature's omnipotence. They worshipped and deified it.

One of the objects of man's worship became mountains. Today, they still amaze and fascinate us by their power and potential force. In ancient mythology, mountains were the abode of the gods and saints (Olympus, Sinai, Etna). What is the reason of people's deification and worship of mountains?

I suppose that the key lies with the people. The mountains that surrounded the people frightened them as they did not have the power to reach such heights. The power which nature possesses is also not accessible to us and during the pre-industrial period, people strived to find explanations of different natural phenomena. In a way, mountains connected people and the endless sky and the heavens which people found divine. Even nowadays, a mountain is like a stairway connecting two elements – the earth and the air.

Having made a little excursion to the past, I will return to the present. Many centuries have passed, generations have come and gone. We now live as civilisations, but the mountains remain unshakeable and everlasting. They tower above us and the towns like many years before.

Mountains, you are irregular, but what can be more stirring and exciting than your irregularity, virginity, and savagery. Oh mountains, even the ancient goddesses – Aphrodite, Athena, and Diana – are incomparable with you because they are the creation of mankind; you are a creation of time and nature. Until today, humans

have no power over you because you are a god: you can give everything and destroy everything. When people need strength and growth, they take everything necessary from your natural wealth. And you sometimes rise in anger, ruin the surface, throw out lava, and open the earth wide.

Over generations, mankind has achieved much. A man is not anymore an unprotected and timid creature idolising the natural forces. His lifestyle has become comfortable because of science. But has man subdued nature on the whole and mountains in particular? No doubt, he has climbed all the peaks, but has this given him the right to govern and control mountains? I feel it has not.

I turn to the ancient mythology again, particularly to the myth of the Tower of Babel, where humans were punished for their desire to climb to the heavens and be glorified and ranked among the saints. It is the same now. An industrialised and scientifically developed human creature is trying to stand above mountains, but he will not for he can suffer from them. To say more correctly, he will suffer from his own ego and will be revenged for alienating himself from the natural roots. Only maintaining the natural balance and respecting mountains as a source of livelihood, will man be abundantly endowed with a mountain's gifts.

There is a current misgiving, which is quite real, regarding anthropological activity and interference. Anthropological research has increased and it can destroy nature entirely. The destruction will come from the former defenceless man, but not from the natural elements. Mountains will remain eternal as long as we protect them, love them, and admire them.



GORBUNOVA NATALYA

Karkaraly

After a multi kilometer travel on the boundless steppes of Central Kazakhstan, we reach a surprising world of beauty and harmony. We see the mountains of Karkaraly. It is not known what laws nature used in creating many million years back this Karkaraly: an oasis in Saryarka.

Rising above the steppe, as an island above the sea, the mountains of Karkaraly fascinate all and all. On the mountains, lakes are filled up by pure water and the wood is dark green and filled with a smell of pine.

In summer, there is both heat and rain. During July, the wood is full of berries: raspberry and wild strawberry. Their aroma fills the air. And mushrooms? There are lots of them.

Autumn is dry and sunny. In all the seasons of the year, the air in Karkaraly is pure and clean. In spring, the valley looks like a

light-blue carpet. It is like a dream. The flowers blossom in multicolors. There are violets, pansies, and lilies. The unique aroma of lilacs gives to us love and youth!

To describe the whole beauty of the mountains is impossible. With this article though I shall be glad to know if even one heart wakes up and feels compassion for nature's most beautiful creations which we sometimes destroy by our own hands. And I want to address to all the people on our planet: stop for once and look around at the beauty of the world! You see, life is given once and it is given to humans to perform good deeds and nurture love for others, not to develop hatred or evil. The beauty of the Karkaraly mountains is able to do just that for us.



IBRAGIMOV ODIL

Stairway to Heaven

"Better than mountains are only those mountains
which you have never climbed."

- Vladimir Vysotsky

Climbers ascending mountaintops always thrill me. What motivates these people? Do they feel a taste of freedom? A taste of victory? Who knows what pushes them on to these seemingly inaccessible heights.

But as you lift your head and take a look at the birds, it reminds you of your dream - to rise above the highest point and see stretched out before you a new world. A world that is calling to you to feel the wind around you and fly with the birds in liberty.

To ascend a mountain or move in conditions of thin air, temperature fluctuations, moisture, and ultraviolet radiation, you must have good health and be physically fit. But most important of all, it is your courage and tenacity and the desire to reach the top in spite of the dangers. And there are many such dangers! Even a small stone that rolls downwards from under your feet is a sign of danger. Avalanches, hails, rock slides, fissures, icy covers, changes in weather conditions, etc., put the climber's life at risk. In such perils, organizational skills and discipline and everyone's support are needed.

Mountains are beautiful anytime. During one day, mountains change their look. When morning comes, the sunrise changes the snow-covering tops of mountains from a rosy color to a bluish tint. The air is fresh, you fill your lungs with it, but you can never have enough of it. Then when the sun has completely risen above the

whiteness of snow peaks, they appear dark. It is necessary for you to wear sunglasses in order to avoid snow blindness. At sundown, the rays of the sun create a magical play of tones on the snow tops. In the mountain area, it gets dark quickly. The black velvet sky is filled with numerous, bright stars of immense beauty. You want to reach out and touch them from your tent.

Sometimes, a bright sun and a cloudless sky will create blinding brilliance on a mountain. Sometimes, parts of a mountain are covered by the mist and they seem to hang in mid-air. On the slopes of mountains are three vegetable belts: timber, subalpine, and alpine. Fir, spruce, and pine are interleaved with the oak, ash, and beech. There are many fruit trees like the wild pear, plum, apple tree, and walnut. In the sub-alpine area, the combination of colors is striking: gigantic campanulas, large roses, yellow daisywheels, and others. Colors make a bright, mosaic carpet of the meadow. The varied inhabitants of the mountains are the chamois, roe deer, brown bear, river trout, and many types of birds.

Mountains have the power to attract. A person who has once visited the mountains, cannot imagine life without them. One feels the desire to walk barefoot on wet, grassy alpine meadows; admire the valley's rich colors; enjoy sweet smelling aromas and breath in the clean mountain air!



1000 No. 2

HAE YOUNG SONG

Korea's Four Seasons

I wish to write about the climate of my country Korea. We have four seasons: spring, summer, fall, and winter. Spring is literally spring. Everything starts to live again. It is a warm season. It is however, quite cold in March because of the occasional cold spells. In this season, generally people wear light shirts with long sleeves.

Summer is hot. Due to increasing pollution, it is getting even hotter. Personally, I hate the summer, especially the hot summers. I'm afraid that it will get extremely hot. There is also one thing I am upset about. People use air conditioners to overcome the heat. The air conditioners produce CFC (chlorofluorocarbon), which destroys the ozone layer.

Fall is the season of reading books, isolation, and memories.

When fall comes, many trees turn into different colors like red, yellow, brown, and so on. Fall's climate is similar to spring's. I like fall because I like chilly climates. I especially like the cool breezes. My family likes to climb mountains in the fall. In the fall, mountains become colorful. They are beautiful.

For me, winter is the best season of all because it snows. This year, it snowed the most than any other year. I think white snow is a blessing from heaven. Of course, too much snow does much harm to us for example, traffic blockage, ruined crops, and so on. Though winter is cold, I like winter the most because I prefer being cold rather than hot. When it snows, we go out and play and make snowballs. It's interesting. This is my story about our country's four seasons.



KIM DIMA

Poets, Painters, Mountains, and Me

According to geographical definition, mountains are the convex part of the earth which has a foot, a top, and a slope. But if you have climbed up a mountain even once and looked around from its top, this definition doesn't satisfy you. Words fail you as you describe mountains and your feelings exactly. It is difficult to describe how great and magnificent they are!

Mountains are extraordinarily diverse. Some of them are made up of stones and some are covered with grass, bushes or trees. Some mountains are steep, some have smooth inclines, and their heights range from 100 meters to 9,000 meters. But they are all beautiful. And the more you climb mountains, the more you begin to love them and the more peaks you dream of climbing.

When you look up at a mountain, you tend to feel remote from your troubles and worries. You feel the power and age of these rocks which are more than a million years old. They were created before living creatures came on earth and were witnesses to many events. Different kinds of plants and animals appeared and died away, wars were begun and ended, people were born and passed away, but the mountains have stayed where they have been.

When you stand on a mountaintop and look down and around, you feel euphoric. You wish to stretch out your arms and fly like a bird and you feel it is possible. You feel happy, free, and powerful. You want to live and love. Your soul is full of noble sentiments and you would like to share your happiness with people all over the world.

On a cloudless and clear night on a mountaintop, when the sky is full of stars and they look like small brilliant points, you think about God, space, and other planets, and wonder about the uni-

verse. Sometimes, I feel like painting the sunrise over the mountains. I find the sunlight on snowy tops lovely; the snowtops sparkle in the sunshine and clouds look like hats.

Mountains have inspired many famous artists, poets, and writers to create masterpieces. Mikhail Lermontov was greatly inspired by the superb view of the Caucasus Mountains and wrote exciting poems about them. Svyatoslav Rerih drew inspiration for his pictures from mountains: he lived and painted in the Himalayas.

But mountains are not only beautiful and peaceful. They can be dangerous. In my point of view, only the brave, kind, and strong-willed should explore mountains and reach their peaks. They say you can conquer a mountain's peak only with good friends. If your friends are with you when you are in trouble, they are true friends because they will overcome all difficulties you may experience on mountains.

As for me, mountains are like bridges that connect the land we live on with heaven, a place where our souls are close to God. Standing on a hilltop, I always feel myself an integral part of the universe. "Better than mountains are only those mountains which you have never climbed," said Russian poet Vladimir Vysotsky in his popular song.

I agree with his words. Unexplored and unconquered mountains are the best, because you hope and you look forward to set your foot on new unexplored territory. Since there are young and old mountains on earth, there will always be many mountains and peaks to explore. Mountains help you to see what is around you and the people surrounding you. We admire mountains and, no doubt, they will attract us forever.



BIBHUSHAN SHAKYA

The Mountain Barrier

For those who think that the Kingdom of Nepal extends only up to the Himalayas in the north, they mistake the dry valley of Manang, hidden behind the Annapurna mountain range, as a part of Tibet. Having been separated from the rest of the country by one of the greatest mountain ranges on earth, this region receives little rainfall from the clouds and is too remote to receive much help from the country. That is why, the land remains barren and the people have yet to see the fruits of development.

On one particular day, the morning sun shone upon a group of people traveling on foot with great burdens on their backs, near the Lugla Pass, one of those few passes that made going to and

coming from Tibet comparatively easier. Having started a good hour before daybreak, these people now decided to take a rest and, having got rid of their burdens, they sat down on the bare sandy soil.

The leader of the group was in his late sixties. For the past four or five decades of his life, this had been his work – taking locally made goods such as handicrafts, wooden baskets, and blankets across the border and selling them for a reasonably good price in Tibet. He would then buy loads and loads of necessary things which mainly included food and household devices and carry them all the way back to his homeland Manang.



PM
2001

He, however, hated this job. He hated having to depend heavily on a foreign land for survival. All his life, he had hoped for some concern, some support, some aid from the land beyond the Himalayas, the land that he belonged to, the land called Nepal. Several times, he had talked to people who had come to Manang from that distant valley of Kathmandu, mainly the ones who had visited the district after having landed in Jomsom. These people seemed to understand his problems and had returned giving him promises to raise the issue once they reached the capital city, but he had simply hoped too much from them. Some progress had been made in the district – he had witnessed the opening of a school, a bank, a health post, and the coming of many other facilities – but there were many things that he had dreamt of which still remained unseen and unheard of in his valley.

With such bitter thoughts he looked up at the cause of the whole trouble – the Annapurna mountain range, which rose high and clear in the distant horizon. The snow-covered mountains seemed to laugh at him and his helplessness. Then, as he sat looking at those mountains, all of a sudden, out of nowhere, came into his heart a feeling of determination, that he would one day be able to conquer this great obstacle put in his way by nature.

God knows how much deeper he would have gone into his thoughts had he not been brought back to reality by the voice of one of his companions, who announced that everyone was refreshed

and ready to go. For a few moments, he remained silent and motionless, while his companion, not being able to know from his inscrutable face what thoughts were running in his mind, stood uneasily, not knowing what to do.

He finally got up, carried his part of the burden, and led his group through the Lugla Pass. While his body was doing this, his mind was still looking into the future, at the long, tiresome journey that he would have to make that day. Once more he would have to spend his day in the markets of Tibet. Once more, he would return home, tired and weary, with a burden of all the necessary goods. And, at the end of it all, the day would be like any other day.

The experiences of life had made his eyes deceptively limpid, but anyone looking into his eyes at that moment would have seen a faint ray of hope. There is still hope, he was saying to himself, that one day, the might of nature, the Himalayas, would finally have to kneel in front of humans; that those high snow-covered peaks would one day no longer remain an obstruction between the nation and the small district; that one day, good transportation and communication facilities would arrive in spite of all the difficulties. There is still hope, he assured himself, that one day, all the people of Manang, as well as those of the neighboring district Mustang, could live a life free of hardship, uncertainty, and setbacks, like any other citizen in the Kingdom of Nepal.

JOSHUA DEANS

Clouds of Doubt

A cursory scan of the car park revealed ten eager trampers kitted out with bulging packs, solid tramping boots, Swandri shirts and rugby socks. Rick Collins took this all in with a note of scorn.

"They all look stupid," he grumbled to himself.

Those who had come to know the spiky-haired, short eighteen-year-old, had found him to be generally untrustworthy, complaining and selfish. He had no idea that the following weekend would change his life forever.

It was early autumn and there was a slight chill in the air. The six males and four females were assembled in the car park, making final preparations for a weeklong tramp in Fiordland. On this expedition they would be exploring some more of the remote areas of the park. One of their main reasons for doing this was so that they might be able to study a few of the native animals in their natural environment. The only reason that Rick had come on the

trip was because Chris, the tramp leader, was one of his Polytech tutors and persuaded him to come, thinking it would do him some good.

At 10 am, Chris gave the "We're off," signal and dense, dark native bushes soon enveloped them. The rhythmic sound of their boots scuffing along the stony walkway, spooked birds out of trees and sent them frantically flapping away in a rush of feathers and falling leaves.

The smell of decaying vegetation met Rick's nostrils and he immediately squawked his complaint.

"This stinks and I can't see properly."

"You'll get used to it," replied Chris in his calm, collected tone.

Somewhere nearby a creek gurgled its way through the roots

of hundreds of trees, then washed and swished down to the sea. The varied textures of bark were like patchwork and their branches extended up as if they were hands reaching for the ever elusive sun. Little ground ferns stood like little men with green hair do's; in other places they covered the ground like a luxuriant green carpet.

After around six hours of tramping, with a stop for lunch, the posse reached a grassy clearing and set up camp. The smell of cooking camp food soon wafted through the quiet bush.

"When's tea ready," whined Rick, "I bet it's yucks."

Silence greeted him. A beautiful golden sunset was slipping behind the treetops and the last birdcalls of the day rang out sharp. Their appeal was wasted on Rick. After the meal, Chris took out his little diary and announced the next day's plans.

"Ok, tomorrow I think we'll do a bit of exploring around one of the more remote fiords. The weather forecast says it will be sunny so I bet we'll have a lovely day."

Everyone then retired to bed to get enough sleep for the next day's excursions.

The early morning sun punctuated the crisp air and glistening frost crystals. People breakfasted then packed up. Rick just moped around. Once everything was ready, they moved off in the direction of the fiord.

The rough track led them along sharp ridges and through deep valleys. On their way, they caught views of the motionless water reflecting the clear azure sky and the shear sided mountains jutting straight up from the shoreline.

When they reached Dusky Hut, they swapped large packs for smaller ones and took warmer clothes, food, and water. Walking out of the hut, Chris noticed some clouds on the horizon but that did not worry him.

At lunch, the line of clouds had advanced. But the group had discovered a fresh pile of kiwi dung and everyone, except Rick and Bradley, was excited. These two decided to explore and meet the others in an hour. As they were leaving, Rick questioned Bradley as to why he hadn't followed the kiwi.

"Oh, I just came for the fun of a tramp," came the easy-going reply. After half an hour's wandering away from the track, the pair came across a large slip, dropping away into a long valley.

"Wow," exclaimed Bradley, "that looks dangerous."

The pair continued for another five minutes then turned and jogged back because it was growing cold. As they were coming past the landslide, John's foot slipped on a root. Fortunately, it came down on a rock.

"Phew" he breathed.

Then the rock gave way! Down he plunged, rolling like a rag doll, with rocks plummeting after him. He hit the bottom with a sickening thud.

The look on Rick's face was one of shock and he was rooted to the spot for a couple of seconds, then he snapped out of it and began scrambling down the slide. He soon discovered that doing this dislodged more rocks that went hurtling down, narrowly missing Bradley. So, he gingerly moved to the bush on the left hand side.

As he was descending, he felt a large drop of water hit his cheek. A glance upward revealed menacing black clouds, but more on his mind was getting to the bottom. Upon reaching Bradley, he found him still breathing, so he heaved him over his shoulder and stumbled over the bloodied rocks to a large beech tree where he placed him underneath. One thing he remembered about First Aid was that you had to keep the victim warm. The biting wind and increasing rain would soon chill Bradley so, after covering him with all their



warm clothing, he gathered materials to build a shelter with. The product was a fairly good "A" shaped job.

He then crawled in to inspect Bradley. Breathing was erratic and pulse weak, but he was hanging on. His head had lost a large patch of skin, an arm and a leg were probably broken, and that was all he could find. Realising now that he was cold, he crawled outside to run around.

The first thing he noticed was that the wind had stopped blowing and there were now white snowflakes falling. Never having been in snow in his life, he just stood staring in wonder. But he quickly realised that this meant danger.

Rick suddenly felt a great surge of helplessness sweep over him. He fell on his knees and broke down into tears. Once he recovered, he saw it was getting darker and colder. Crawling back into the hut he looked towards John. A flicker of eyelids.

"Bradley!" he screamed.

"Uh," came the mute reply.

"Bradley, I'm so happy you're awake, can you keep any food down?"

A piece of squashed banana was placed in his mouth. The stiff jaws moved up and down and it was swallowed, but kept down. Sleep now came over Rick like a wave and he shut his eyes, cold though he was and slept. A long night was frequented with dreams of flying kiwis leading people off cliffs.

Morning came with numb fingers and toes. Rick uncurled from his cramped position and found some chocolate to eat. He crawled outside to look around and found himself in shin-deep, freezing snow. Back in the hut he leaned over Bradley, "You awake?"

"Yep."

"Here have some water."

Bradley's cracked red lips opened just enough to let water trickle in. The two decided after a couple of minutes of limited dialogue, that it was necessary for Rick to go for help. Although he may not make it, he knew that he had to go.

Pretty sure he could remember the way back; he started on his journey. After trudging through the snow for half an hour, Rick totally lost his sense of direction and felt quite dizzy. Sleepiness fell over him and he thought he heard something off to his right. Rick Collins stopped in his tracks, dropped to his knees, and fell into an exhausted unconsciousness.

When he awoke, he thought he was in a dream. Chris was sitting on his left and in a hospital bed on his right lay the beaten form of Bradley. When it all clicked, Rick was as overjoyed as his broken body would let him. Chris smiled down and received a beaming grin.

Bradley was treated for several broken bones including a fractured skull. Rick was treated for hypothermia and severe dehydration. It turned out that the helicopter had followed Rick's tracks in the snow right back to the make-shift shelter.

When every thing had calmed down, Rick was awarded for his bravery and quick thinking in the situation. After all this, there was a change in Rick's life. He started to lose his old attitude and gained more friends because of this. He always handled tough situations well and never complained when they came about. He and Bradley became great friends and did nearly everything together, including a lot of tramping.

RETOLD BY NEK BANO, ASHIMA, AND RAHAT

Poor Man and the Beetle

Once upon a time there was a poor man and his wife. They lived in a small town and each day the man would go out to the pastures to collect wood. One day, when he came back from the pastures, he knocked on the door but his wife did not open the door for him. When he asked for the reason, she told him that she had given birth to a baby beetle. The man thanked God for the baby, but he was sad because he had nothing to give his wife.

Suddenly the beetle spoke, "Why do you worry father? Go to the cattle shed and you will see that you have a herd of goats and sheep."

The father went and was surprised to see a large number of animals. He slaughtered a big goat. Then he wanted some butter for his wife but he knew that the container was empty. Again the beetle told his father to look again and he would find butter. It was so.

One day the beetle told his father that he wished to marry the princess of the country. He ordered his father to go to the palace and tell the king. At first the father refused. He said, "The princess will not marry a beetle."

The beetle insisted that his father set off for the palace again.

The father, however, planned to deceive his son and he covered himself with mud and made it look as if he had been beaten. The beetle knew his father was not telling the truth and made him visit the king. The king then accepted the proposal but put forth some conditions. The father returned to his son and the beetle accepted the conditions.

The conditions were that the father should organize a procession of camels with great wealth on their backs and one that stretched from the palace to the beetle's home. This was done and the wedding took place. The princess was not happy to be married to a beetle.

One day, after the marriage, there was a big polo match and the pretty princess Shamoli Guss went to the match. A handsome young prince was playing and Shamoli Guss was impressed by him. An old lady sitting next to her said, "The beetle skin is behind the door in your house. Go home and you will find it. I suggest you to put the skin in the fire and burn it before your husband comes home."

The princess did as the old woman advised. While she saw the skin burn, she saw the prince coming towards their home. "You are burning me!" he shouted and he jumped into a huge bowl of milk. He sank into the milk. "Look, Shamoli Guss, look at me. I am half drowned."

But she did not look at him. Instead she threw a piece of coal at him. Again the prince shouted at her, "Look, Shamoli Guss, look at me, I'm already up to my neck in this milk! But again she did not

look at him. This time she threw a piece of apricot at him. Again he shouted, "Look, Shamoli Guss, look. The milk is now up to my mouth." When she did look up, she could see there were bubbles on the surface of the milk. He had disappeared. She carefully filtered the milk again and again, but she couldn't find him.

Shamoli Guss went in search of her prince. In her search, she met a herb called Sopat. She asked, "*Wali wa Sopatay Brin walis Lalisy Ghushapur jananay japashi garay lutchum Gushpor thoor thoor*. Have you seen my Laily Ghushpor, the charming prince?"

Sopat replied, "I have just seen him now. I didn't know you were chasing him, otherwise I would have stopped him."

"Dear Sopat, be green forever," said Shamoli Guss and she carried on with her search. She next met a crow. The crow told her that he had seen his dead body and eaten his eyes.

"May you carry bad news at all times," she said. She prayed and proceeded further.

Now she met a poplar tree and asked, "*Waliwa jurpa brinwali waliwa jurpa brinwali jananay ganay japashigar lutchum Ghushpor thoor thoor*. Have you seen my Laily Ghushpor?"

"Yes, just now I saw him traveling with the fairies."

After a lot of search, she eventually reached fairyland and found her Laily Ghushpor. The fairy mother of Laily Ghushpor helped them both and they returned from fairyland. They made their way back to their own village and lived there happily ever after.



RETOLD BY GHULLIM

Eat Spoon

Once upon a time there were some *merukut* gold panners. They went to an island in the middle of the Hunza River. There were seven men altogether. They worked all day and noticed that the level of the river was rising around them. When evening came, they could not leave the island because the water was too deep.

The water did not go down the next day, or the next day. They were very hungry so they decided to draw lots among themselves to decide who amongst them they would eat. This continued and they ate each other until there was only one man left. He had become huge and strong. He had become a demon. When his hunger increased, he looked up at the mountain and there he spied a light in a hut.

Since he was big, with great strides he crossed the river and left the island and climbed the mountain to the hut. Inside the hut, he saw a man but the giant was too large to enter the hut. He decided to wait by the door until the man came out. The man inside the hut was cautious and wary. He was aware and had heard of danger on the mountain. He had seen the large shadow of the demon and suspected something was wrong. He stayed inside the hut.

He took out a goatskin sack used to make churned milk and filled it with milk. He hung the skin at the entrance of the door and made a small hole at the bottom of the sack. He placed a cup below the sack so that the milk would fall into the cup and make a sound. The man started to talk as if he had a companion. He told his companion that they would eat some food after he had urinated. As the goatskin sack leaked water in a small stream, he began digging

another part of the hut's wall. He dug as fast as he could so that the demon would not suspect what he was doing.

When he made a hole that was big enough for him to escape, he slipped out of the hut quietly. He ran and he ran. He ran to the top of the mountain. He was so pleased with himself that he cried out loudly, "I have escaped the demon, I have outwitted the fool." However, the giant standing by the hut's door heard these words and found out what was going on. He immediately began to chase the man. The man, realizing his own foolishness, ran as hard and as fast as he could to his village nearby. When the man reached his village safely, he fell into his mother's lap. Because he had run so hard, he died from burst heat, better known as a heart attack these days.

Men from the village came and saw the poor man's body. They saw the giant and began to chase him. The giant ran back again to the mountain. He found an old, large juniper tree that had a cavity big enough for him to hide in. He hid inside the tree. But one of the villagers had seen him. When other villagers arrived at the tree, they knew who was inside it. They brought wood and made a fire. As the fire consumed the tree, three puppies, *boyos*, came out of the tree and escaped. The demon had turned into puppies! Each puppy went to a different section of the mountain, each to a different *nullah*. Then there was a great calamity: floods, mud, and boulders tore down the mountainside. That is why the mountain has large gashes running down its side today.



MOIN-UD-DIN

Nature Guards Us

Dinnal was living in a small village of Nagar State. It was situated in the great mountainous range of Karakorum. He was not a highly qualified person, but he was an active social worker. He worked with the community to preserve the environment. He got his informal education from one of his village *khalifas* (local religious leaders) who himself was not educated, but helped Dinnal to read and write letters. There was no school in Dinnal's village. The only school was in Gilgit, another state, but his poor economic condition and the then rules of the state did not allow Dinnal to go for further education. Therefore, he spent his youth in the high mountains and pastures with his cattle.

The hill near to his village had a thick forest with precious and beautiful trees and flowers. Sometimes he would go there with his friends to hunt. Usually they hunted mountain goats and birds like Himalayan snow cock, chukor, and manj pheasants. Sometimes they tried to kill snow leopards and white bears, but only when these animals harmed their cattle. The villagers fulfilled their need for firewood and construction material from the forest. There was no system to control the cutting of forest but their needs were limited; therefore, the villagers did not experience any problems. Sometimes village blacksmiths set old and dry trees on fire to get coal. But they were allowed to burn only a few trees.

At the age of twenty-five, Dinnal went to Karachi in search of a job. There he got a job in a paper mill. He began to start a new life. With the help of his educated colleagues, he learned to read newspapers and started thinking about national and local issues. He was happy with his new life but sometimes he recalled his village life, his friends, and particularly his village's clean environment. Sev-

eral times he thought about the beautiful mountains, the juniper trees, and wild flowers. But it was not possible for him to go back to his village because he had to help his poor family.

One day one of his village friends came to see him. Dinnal was puzzled. The friend told Dinnal that half of the houses in their village had been destroyed and many people and livestock had lost their lives due to a flood. This news shocked Dinnal greatly and also surprised him because he had never heard about a flood in his village. He immediately decided to go back to his village and help his parents and the village people.

When Dinnal reached his village, he found that the flood had destroyed almost everything and the whole village was in grief. He too felt grief in seeing his village in this way. Suddenly he noticed that the hill nearby his village did not have any forest. He went to one of his friends and asked him about the situation. His friend told him that several months back, some blacksmiths had burnt a few trees for coal but soon the fire became out of control and the whole forest was set alight. The villagers were unable to extinguish the fire and within nine days, there was just ashes remaining instead of the thick forest. Then Dinnal understood the real cause for the flooding. It was because of carelessness and unawareness of the people.

This incident changed Dinnal's life. He left the city forever and became an active social worker in his village. Since then he has been very active and attends meetings and workshops and conveys environmental conservation messages to the community. He is also active in afforestation programs and anti-hunting campaigns.



MARK PANTALEON, VINCENT BANZUELA,
RONNEL GABRILLO, AND ALDRIN SAPALONG

We Climb Mountains

She loved mountains. She taught us to love the mountains. She continues to care for mountains. For so many years we have attended Good News Deaf Centrum. We would walk with our teacher to the nearby hills where sleeping on the soft grass was luxury and the shining of the moon and the heavens at night was a delight.

Occasionally, we would come upon a fallen nest and scramble up a chosen tree to put it back, hoping that the mother bird would not see us. Many a times we would bring back to the Centrum dry wild flowers, leaves, and sleek stones from a river. Then the trees were gone... the forests, the wild plants, the grass, even the moun-

tains! In their place, stood piles and piles of cement blocks and mountains of sand, gravel, and stone. Even the virgin streams were not spared. The alarming phenomenon was called "urbanization", "sub-divisioning" and even "housing". The birds came no more. Even the wind did not blow that way again. Our silent signs of protests were not heard, trucks and workers moved on... digging... leveling... building... and building. The forests were no more to be seen... the mountains – their features and their faces were gone. Forever.

Teacher Terry continued to teach us about mountains. But this



time... she pointed out that the mountains we so loved were back. We were the mountains that people climb, touch, and walk on. When we smile, when we lend a helping hand, when we give out comforting signs. We were the mountains with the trees when we gave our shoulders for others to lean on. We were the mountains with plants and animals when we taught others to grow with us. We were the rivers and streams of the mountains when we healed and eased the pain of others.

The challenge had been sounded. The sign of the times was clear. Our hearing impairedness did not hamper our commitment to be the vanguards of Mother Earth. In 1998, we joined the Maryknoll Sisters, where sisters Ann Braudis, Dolly Mitch, and Peg Dillon were all nature lovers. A new mission – to protect mother earth – was created.

Busol is our *murong*... our friend... and our mountain. In its heart, lies an endangered watershed, a precious source of water for our city and nearby areas. Upon its bosom, grow pine trees, young and aged, surrounded by climbing vines and flowering plants. Upon its brow, are newly planted pine seedlings... life that will emerge to give more shade and keep the mountain green and lush.

Whenever our teacher would bring up the prospect of visiting Busol, our eyes would sparkle and we would jump with joy. Armed with work tools, we would ride a jeep with our favorite driver and travel to Busol. There we would gently weed around each tree and support weak saplings and clear the area of any clutter left behind by uncaring individuals. We could feel each tree being grateful for having more space for its roots to spread out and its branches to reach out wider and higher. We could feel the breeze blowing gen-

tly as if caressing our sweat away. Then we would sit briefly for a respite from the "tilling" and the "weeding". Our learning continues as our teacher tells us about how lucky we are to have these moments of peace with our mountain. She explains that many children like us have never climbed a mountain... much less loved a mountain. And she tells us many mountains are waiting to be set free.

There were times many of us were displaced and marginalized because our hearing was impaired. Maryknoll gave us a home. Our feelings of self-confidence, personal enrichment, and empowerment have found roots in its fertile environment. Where before our talents and capabilities were belittled and ignored, Maryknoll provided us all the time opportunities, ways, and means to nurture these talents... letting us grow creatively. Where before being hearing-impaired was a setback and a failure, Maryknoll mellowed the pain and disappointments. Where once we had nowhere to go, Maryknoll opened doors, windows, and its heart to become our home.

We journeyed so long until we found Maryknoll... a mountain of faith, compassion, and endearment. While educating people here and there to care for mountains and all other living and non-living things, Maryknoll is herself showing the way for others to follow by being a mountain of peace and justice... a mountain for the integrity of creation. Our dear teachers in Maryknoll... this place will be our blessed mountain forever.

ISURU GANEARACHCHI

Save the Glory of Grace Mountain!

I was awakened by the burning heat of the sun, falling upon the rock bed, where I had laid last night. It wasn't the sort of daybreak I usually experienced though. Ever since I could remember, my day dawned with the sweet music of little birds flying around, looking for breakfast. Those were truly the golden days.

Things have changed a lot since then. Birds no more fly around Grace Mountain. Most of them left their nests, as they feared that they would lose their lives and their families with the trees that were cut down. This was the fate that fell upon many other animals.

I suddenly felt very lonely, sitting up here on the higher part of the mountain. The greenery that used to sooth my eyes had begun to fade little by little. I could see the streams below, running slowly and thinly. They once used to flow swiftly and thickly like a young fairy running away from her friends, leaving her long silver cape flying behind her. Oh dear... how many tiny fishes must have lived in these streams. I remember how I used to play with them when I was a little cub. How many times must I have watched them dance in the water... but now, everything seems like a distant memory, almost like a dream that will never come true. How cruel can life be sometimes? But then, to be honest, I guess it wasn't life that was cruel, it was those two-footed beasts who were the curse of Grace Mountain. They had no right to invade our land like this and turn our lives upside down.

But my thoughts were suddenly shattered when I heard a loud bang. What was that? It came from somewhere near our cave and it sounded like a fire tube. Oh, I hope my dear mother is safe. I quickly rose from where I sat and ran towards our cave. My mother had

become weak after she caught her paw in a snare set by those two-footed wild beasts. Oh, no, mother. She was lying at the mouth of the cave in a pool of blood, unconscious but still alive. I never thought that the sight of blood could make me feel shocked like this. I quickly licked away the blood and checked how bad her wound was. A fire piece had dug into her paw. Oh, these heartless devils! I looked up to see them loading their fire tubes again, most probably to fire at me.

Oh no, you don't, I growled. No one is going to get away after hurting my mother. I charged at the two-legged creatures who were holding fire tubes. I grabbed at one of their arms and struggled hard to keep hold of it. The tube fired with a thunderous blow at the morning sky. He was terrified and started to scream. Then I turned to the other who was just about to run away. I dug my teeth into his arm.

No one is going to run away from me. You two ought to learn your lesson not to hurt us animals any more. I growled and held on. Just about then, I heard other voices and saw a few more two-legged creatures appearing from the woods. I quickly let go of the beast, roared at the new comers, and ran over to my mother warning them to stay away. She was still unconscious. I licked her wound once more. I could feel tears flooding my eyes, blocking my vision. I quickly recovered and saw that other humans (I later got to know what they were called) were not harmful. They were healers who called themselves veterinarians. They cared for animals so I backed away allowing my mother to be taken into their care. But I sat close by. You could never trust a two-legged creature, no matter how nice they

seemed. The tall and pale skinned human looked sympathetically at me.

"Now sonny... do not worry, we will save your mother."

I continued to sit close by and rested my chin upon my paws. Just how different can these humans be? As far as I am concerned, these two-legged beings are the most defenceless creatures in the world. They have nothing physically to protect themselves with except for a big mouth to yell with and a head which they think is powerful. Their skin is so soft that the slightest bite could create a deep wound. And yet they are the most dangerous living creatures on earth. They are the ones who can build and destroy everything at the same level. But sometimes, I wonder how helpless they would be without their fancy weapons. "Selfish creatures," I call them. "Rude, mean, and ruthless." Always trying to claim everything on earth for their own selfish purposes.

I wonder why they can't live in harmony as we do here in the forest. But I should also admit that there are good humans as well, like the veterinarian over there, who is carefully rubbing mum's wound with wool. I guess it is their needs and hearts that make them so different from each other.

My mind took me to the past, when we once lived in peace. There were no two-legged creatures around. Those days were lovely. The mountain had a lot of animals. We all had plenty of food and pure water to drink. Then, all of a sudden, the nightmare came. The humans came destroying the peace like a hurricane blowing across the mountain.

They transformed Grace Mountain into a place with nothing left to be glorious about. I remember my grandpa telling me how it happened. I myself experienced the changes that occurred. The refreshing drops of water, which used to fall upon us from the sky, appeared no more. Grandpa told me it was because they cut down so many trees just to make fancy things to sit on. I don't understand why they cannot just sit on the ground like us.

They also built a big monster on top of Grace Mountain. It was called

a "factory". It was horrible. It exhaled smoke that contaminated the air. The birds got very sick and their feathers were stained black. The toxic water from the factory got mixed with the streams and the water became undrinkable and unliveable for the poor fish. The stream banks now contain so many colored rubbery things no animal can eat. Grandpa said that they were called "polythene" and that it was very bad for our ecosystem. Slowly many of us starved.

How could they do this to the glory of Grace Mountain? It is so unfair. We all must live, not just them. This mountain as well as the earth belongs to everyone. They say that they do it for "money", a bunch of tiny papers. I see no value in them. Even the dry leaves falling from the trees are compost for the soil. Then these "humans" think that they are the only intelligent beings around. I suppose it's because of that that they cannot see what they are doing to our lovely mountain. Can't they understand that what they are doing to this place and the animals is going to affect them as well?

The vets seem to have finished their job. One of them, as they move away, looks at me.

"Don't worry little leopard, your mum will soon be all right; just take good care of her. It's because some of us are thoughtless that you animals are losing your freedom in your own forest."

Oh... thank you, god of mountains, for not making me an orphan. At least some humans can see the truth. I still doubt that though... He took out some meat wrapped in one of those polythene bags, unwrapped it, and tossed it over to me.

"Here boy, eat it... It's some pre-cooked ham..."

I sniffed it. It was meat all right, but... my mind was on something else. I pointed my nose at the bag, which he had thrown away and growled.

"Hey... take that bag with you. It is 'our' mountain that you are polluting...!"



MARIA BARANNIKOVA

Thoughts on Mountains

A person who has seen mountains will never forget the moment. Mountains are higher, wiser, and older than people. In fact, they look like steps that reach heaven. For example, Gods of ancient Greece lived not in the sky, but on Mount Olympus.

People have a tendency to go higher. And maybe the mountains inspire people to build houses which are not high for the first time but then by people's wish and labor turn into skyscrapers. It is not hard to imagine what feelings people had in pagan times when they saw mountains, if even now in our century of technology, when many things are possible, we have a feeling of inexplicable and involuntary esteem while looking at mountains.

I would like to tell you about my acquaintance with the mountains. My father and I were at a resort, which is situated in Altai. Altai is a mountain range, rather old and big. The resort, where we were, is rimmed by mountains. It seems that mountains make a large cup, on the bottom of which you can see buildings and little moving dots who are people.

It was a warm sunny day. So we decided to go for a walk after breakfast. As I said before, the resort is rimmed by mountains, so you don't need much time to reach the foot of the hill, about ten minutes. I think it is better to call it a hill because it is not very high, but quite enough if you want to ski. In winter this hill is used for skiing.

So we drifted up, talking and looking at the nature around us. After some hours we reached the top. There we stood on the curb and looked at the sight below us. We saw the immense blue sky with the sparkling sun, saw the plains which lay over the hills and overflowed with the sun, and further away was a little town which had the same name as the resort.

And suddenly I felt an inner tide. I had a wish to soar like a free bird over our busy, smoky world filled with noise and buzzing sounds to the beautiful and high sky which is so close and so far at the same time. I will never forget this moment.

Mountains have always attracted people. Mountains are mentioned in all the kinds of the human arts: poetry, prose, paintings. But mountains also give us pleasure, health, and strength. Many people go to mountain resorts to recover when ill. Though mountains can be dangerous, people still go there. I think such a trip gives you assurance that you can overcome all the hardships because you, a little and powerless human, can, for the first time, conquer these menacing giants and have a chance to stand on the top of the world feeling free and proud.

Ascend a mountain, feel the freshness of the air, bathe in the chilly water of a mountain river, look at these enormous stones which are much older than you, and harmony will settle in your soul.



EVGENIA KOPTYUG

Sunrise on the Beach

On the beach at sunrise, I will always remember that beautiful morning in Bulgaria. I woke up very early and decided to go on the beach, because I wanted to see the sunrise. When I got there, I stopped and listened. It was quiet, except for the crying of the seagulls in the distance, and the faint whispering of the little waves, washing over my feet. The sea looked calm and serene. Its surface was of a beautiful color, sort of blue, black, and green mixed together. Some reflections were wavering on the water, since the sun was rising.

I looked around me. On my left, the lovely Balkan Mountains stretched on and on, the sun slowly creeping over them. I could

begin to see the village, nestled there. The red roofs of the houses seemed bright against their pale walls. I looked at the sky: the small, pink, puffy clouds were disappearing. It was becoming bluer and bluer. The sun was rising. I saw a lovely golden path reflected on the water. Shimmering and wavering, it seemed to pull me to it. I swam towards the path. I had a strange desire to touch the golden surface with my fingers. But I couldn't reach it. It kept going away from me. I think it was a magical moment. The rising sun, cries of the seagulls, mountains, a golden path on the water - nature can be beautiful and inspiring. That morning on the beach will remain one of my most memorable experiences.



PM
2004

SERENE GOH

Papa's Lesson

She had watched the village grownups go herb gathering all her life. They would disappear into the dense forests in the early morning mists with empty rattan baskets on their backs and return later in the evening with peculiar roots and strange smelling leaves. These were the herbs, the treasures of the mountain that had sustained her village through generations. The rich city foreigners came regularly to buy the herbs from her village, each time complaining incessantly of the dirt and grime, of the mud and water which bore the fruits they paid high prices for.

It was on her ninth birthday when Papa decided to show her the treasures of the Mountain. She remembered herself swelling up with pride when she first joined others in herb gathering. As she doubled her pace to keep up, papa told her, "Understand the Mountain. Follow its trails and be observant." So she looked around, memorizing nature's map, where an old birch tree marked a left turn and a flowing river signified the start of the treasure ground. She observed how large black ants cooperated with one another, and watched frogs for signs of eminent rain. She took hints from

the curvature of the land and built a strong friendship with the mountain and its friends.

When Papa saw she had grown akin to the land, he taught her more. "Learn to judge a ripened fruit," he said, "Haste will destroy all hard work. Better to be patient and persevere." So the girl tagged along behind the best herb gatherers, watching their seasoned hands push apart the weeds and with one swift but gentle motion, extract a ripened herb. Then she saw how the gatherers placed a few seeds where the herb once was and put back the soil. It was their way of repaying the mountain for its kindness. And at times when the mountain bore no sign of mature herbs, the gatherers persevered deeper into the forest and higher up the trails, until their patience and hard work were rewarded. The girl grew to love the mountain.

But as time went by, the greedy city folks demanded more and more from the generous mountain, leaving little to sustain the village folks. So the girl left for the city where she took a short course on the art of selling and became a property agent. Her colleagues advised her to be aggressive, to compete with the rival company and succeed in the property field by destroying her competitors. Inevitably, the girl felt lost in this new world, where "the big fish eats the small fish." Each time she found a potential customer, each time she found herself losing them and searching again. One month passed and she had not sold a single property.

Shattered, she thought of the mountain again. The memories of herb gathering, of the trees and rivers and frogs, and of her

papa comforted her tremendously. Then, as if a nine-year-old child again, she heard her papa's voice saying, "Be patient and persevere." And just like before, those words gave her courage and she began to work at her job once more.

"Understand the mountain. Follow its trails and be observant." The mountain girl read up on the property market, on the success stories of property agents before her, and on the pros and cons of different property locations. She dug deep into the workings of the market and even read up on consumer behavior. She followed market trends closely and kept an alert eye on properties on sale. Instead of being aggressive, she worked behind the scenes, doing research on prospective customers and available properties.

"Be patient, persevere. Learn to judge the ripened fruit." The girl saw how some customers deliberately postponed the signing of contracts and how they acted as though they were being cheated. She was patient with these difficult customers, always amiable and never threatening. Her sensitivity, sureness, and stunning way with words eventually persuaded these customers to make commitments. The girl also observed how desperate some house owners were, how they must be in financial difficulty and willing to sell their house more easily. She also noticed the impatient nature of some customers and made sure appointments were made so that all parties were on time. She learned to pinpoint satisfaction found on a customer's face and then, at the most opportune times, offer a price and close a deal.

In her second month as a property agent, the mountain girl sold more than ten properties and became the top agent in the company. Her colleagues were surprised and her boss called her into his office and told her, "I don't know how you do it, but your methods work." Deep in her heart she knew. It was her upbringing up on the mountain, among friends, among nature; the lessons she learned when she joined papa and the rest of the village in herb gathering. They were part of her now ingrained deep within the recesses of her soul. This was timeless advice that papa had given her and it remained with her long after he left this world.

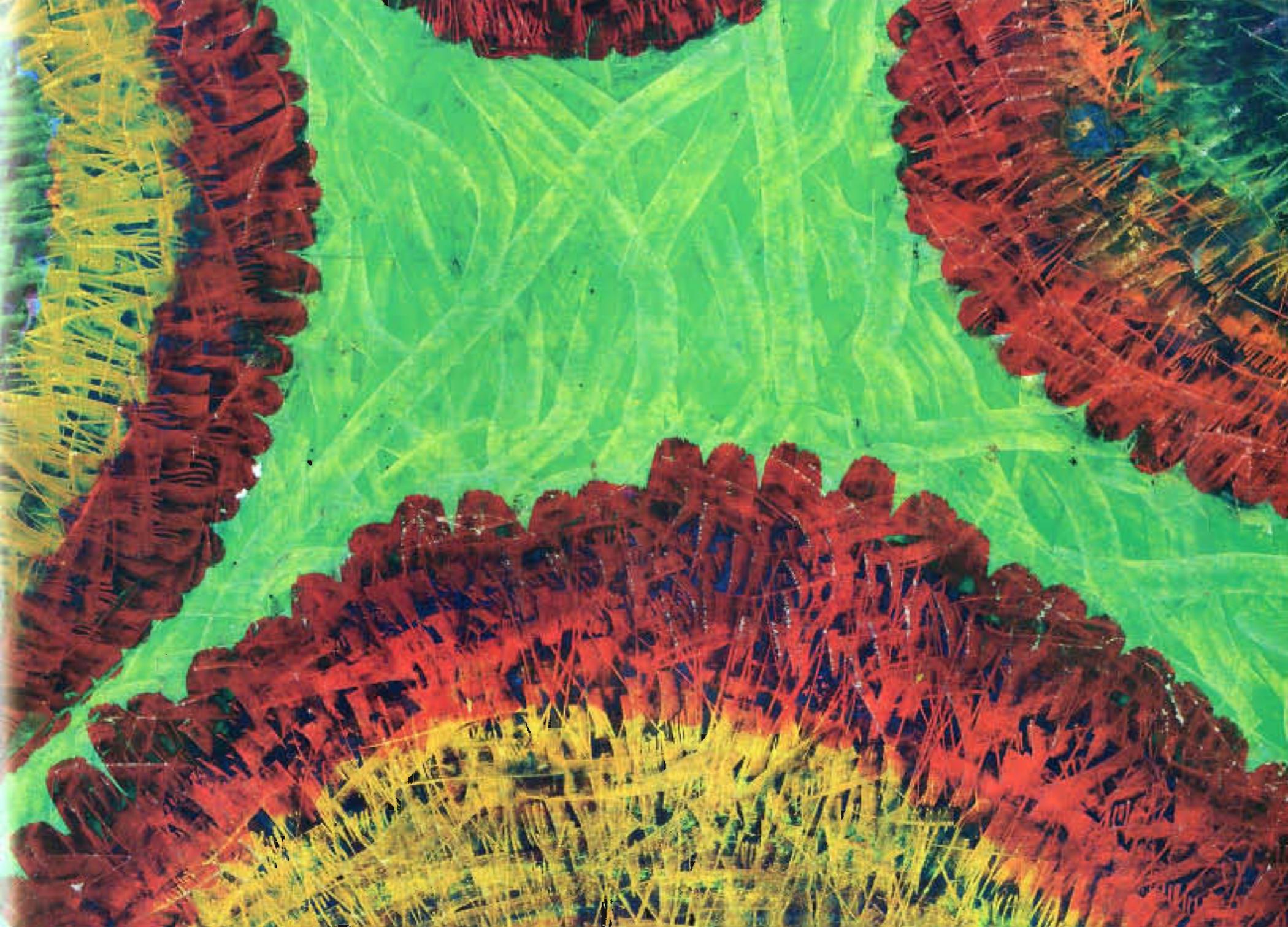
The day she received her first paycheck and congratulations from her boss and colleagues, she thought of the mountain again. She remembered her papa's words before she left for the city. He told her, "You are a mountain girl, remember that always. You are born a survivor. Strive to be self-sufficient, but never become complacent. See how majestic the mountain is, and yet she does not forsake those lesser than her. She has provided for our village for many generations now, and has given her trees and herbs and water to the city folks. They do not appreciate her kindness and have come to take away her virginity and beauty. But someday, someday much too late, they will finally see the mountain as she is - a living part of nature, just like themselves. By then, the mountain will be bare. Yet her overpowering spirit will remain and her commanding presence in the world will serve as a poignant

reminder that man cannot conquer the mountain - man can only live together with the mountain if he understands and respects the wisdom of nature."

The mountain girl knows what she must do. She continues to succeed as a property agent through sheer hard work and shares her knowledge with her colleagues. In her spare time, she dedicates herself to "Saving the Environment" by educating the public on the fragility of the ecosystem and the importance of understanding the growth and recovery of nature. As a property agent, she knows that there is an increasing need for living space as the world's population continues to multiply. But as a mountain girl, who has lived in the heart of nature, she also understands that people should take from nature in moderation. Just as the herb gatherers plant new seeds and replace overturned soil, so must society continue in reforestation, to ensure the survival of nature and man himself.

Years later, a little girl drew a picture of a majestic mountain in an art class. It was "Environment Week" at school and the art teacher wanted her students to draw what they treasured most in nature. The little girl ran home happily with the "A" grade drawing in her hands and showed it to her mother. "Mama! It's your mountain!"

The mountain girl smiled. Yes indeed. It was mountains forever.



PETRINA LEE SHI YIN

Redhill

There is a story about a hill far in the south of Singapore, a hill that seems to glow because of its red, rich soil. There is a story, even now, about this hill upon which plants seem to bloom and grow, thrive and flourish. Its name is Redhill.

Listen, now, for this is the story that is told.

It came to pass that there was a small village on Redhill back then (and it makes no difference when "back then" was, just that it was a long time ago, and that there was a village on the hill). Redhill was yet unnamed and untamed by progress. It was a large hill by the sea, and an important one at that, for the people of the village

grew sugar cane on their hill. They ate, drank, and sold sugar cane and were dependent on the hill for survival.

This was a village entirely unmemorable and ordinary, save for three things: a little boy, a wicked king, and multiple swordfish attacks on the village from the sea to the south of Redhill.

The little boy, the son of the village head, was born and bred on the hill, scarcely a decade old and fiercely proud of his village. He lived at the top of the hill with his family and despite his childhood, he was a great help to them and to his village. The true extent of his worth would only emerge later.



The king, a large man with a small heart, was a tyrant and an envious man. He cared little for anyone but himself, and did not do anything without motives that served his own ends. As a result, nothing was done to help the villagers when the swordfish attacks began, which brings us back to our tale.

They came from the lands below, it was whispered, sent up from the very depths of the ocean, and indeed, from beyond even there. Survivors, white haired and shaking, spoke of fish armed with the weapons of hell, came to take their souls away to a place of unimaginable pain. The villagers were afraid and rightly so, for they had lost great numbers to the swordfish. Fear of approaching the sea meant that sugar cane had insufficient water, and the crops began to turn brown and wither.

It was then that the little boy had his epiphany. He ran to his father, the village head, and with breathless words and larger gestures, outlined his brilliant idea to him.

That night, when the villagers knew the swordfish to be absent, whether asleep or taking the souls of the damned down, they crept in with long sticks of sugar cane, planting them in one long row across the edge of the hill. They worked with haste, and soon the side of the hill bordered by the ocean was fenced in with a line of sugar cane.

When the light of dawn broke into the edges of the night, the swordfish returned and renewed their attack upon the village. They plunged, head first, toward the shore. Sinking their blades into the sugar cane that greeted them, they then tried to pull free and retreat back into the waiting ocean like they had done so many

times before. For the first time, however, they encountered some resistance. Unable to pull free, the swordfish writhed and thrashed about under the hot sun until they finally died, and with them died the threat to the village.

The villagers celebrated for several nights, the crops grew once more and they feasted on sugar cane and fish. The boy was hailed as a hero, and as the story spread across the country, so did his legend. The people of the village respected and listened to him, and he in return gave them good advice. For a while, things were all right.

Now, the tale could have easily ended here, for the evil had been vanquished and the danger had passed. But the account of the boy's deeds had spread and spread far. Soon it made its way to the ears of the king and scared that the boy's power would eclipse his own, he made plans to have the boy killed.

One night not long after, the king's minions crept up the hill into the village where the boy lay sleeping. They thrust their swords deep into his small body, and spilled his blood over the earth.

The boy's blood flowed down the hill, and the soil that it touched was stained a vivid shade of red and thereafter remained that way. From then on, crops were abundant and fruitful on the hill like no other place in the land, and the villagers recognized this to be the soul of the boy, protecting his village even in death. Thus, the hill was named Redhill after him and the crimson shade of the soil, so that his sacrifice for his village would be remembered and honored forever.

ANDRI BRUGGER

Mysterious Footprints in the Snow

During summer vacation, our family drove to Campo Blegne in Ticino. The following morning mum and Curdin, my little brother, drove dad, my sister Madlaina, and myself to the enormous stone dam of Lake Luzzone. This stone dam has a height of about 150 meters. On top of this dam is a street and we followed this street to reach the other side of the valley. While standing on top of the dam, we noticed men who controlled the huge dam and its waters. They were standing in a kind of cage that was attached to the top of the wall. They used special instruments to look for deficiencies. This work is important otherwise the dam could give in and the whole valley would be flooded. On the other side, we had to pass through a tunnel which I felt was very long because it was so dark inside. I was happy indeed when we saw light on the other side for inside was not only dark but cold and damp too.

Now the path led us up a steep slope. The sun was burning. We crossed a saddle where a strong wind was blowing and thus reached, quite exhausted, a plain.

The Plain of Greina is a valley high up in the Swiss Alps flanked by snow covered mountains and slopes of scree. The plain itself looks green and brown in some parts where the grass has dried. A stream which we had to cross several times meanders through the lovely plain. How wonderful if we had enough time to stay and

play. We did on a few short occasions though.

Marmots whistled aloud before they ran away when they noticed us. There were also shepherds looking after their cattle. When my parents were young, the Nordostschweizer Kraftwerk AG wanted to flood this plain in order to produce electricity. People organized themselves against the project and in an unforgettable ballot they voted against the project.

After traversing the plain, we reached a shelter where we intended to spend the night. We were glad to have reached our goal for the day and found other hikers who had arrived before us. We registered with the warden and put on slippers. The warden showed us around. There was a large dormitory for about twenty people. Madlaina and myself at once put aside for ourselves the two best mattresses. Then we explored the surroundings of the cabin until we were called in for supper.

We got supper in a bowl: soup and potatoes. Here milk is prepared from powder. I did not like it. But I do understand the reason for doing so: all food is flown in by helicopter. Powder takes much less room than fresh milk and is much lighter. It can be stored for much longer too. Since we were tired, we went to sleep right after supper.

When we woke up the next morning it was bitterly cold. Therefore I preferred to remain where I was: in my warm and cosy sleeping bag. But then I thought perhaps snow had fallen in the night. When I asked Madlaina she answered, "I don't think that there is snow outside for we are in the middle of summer." Yet she agreed to go out and have a look. We dressed very quietly and warmly and slipped through the door and down the stairs. When we opened the door, we were amazed: there was indeed snow, about 10 centimeters of it! It was incredible! With our feet in slippers only, we moved about three paces away from the door, grabbed snow and made a compact snowball each. Then we returned to the dormitory as quickly as possible so that the snow would not melt. On the tips of our toes we reached the place where dad was sleeping and rubbed his cheeks with snowballs. He yelled and at once every one was awake. They were astonished when they heard from us how much snow had fallen and all the children dressed up and ran outside to see for themselves.

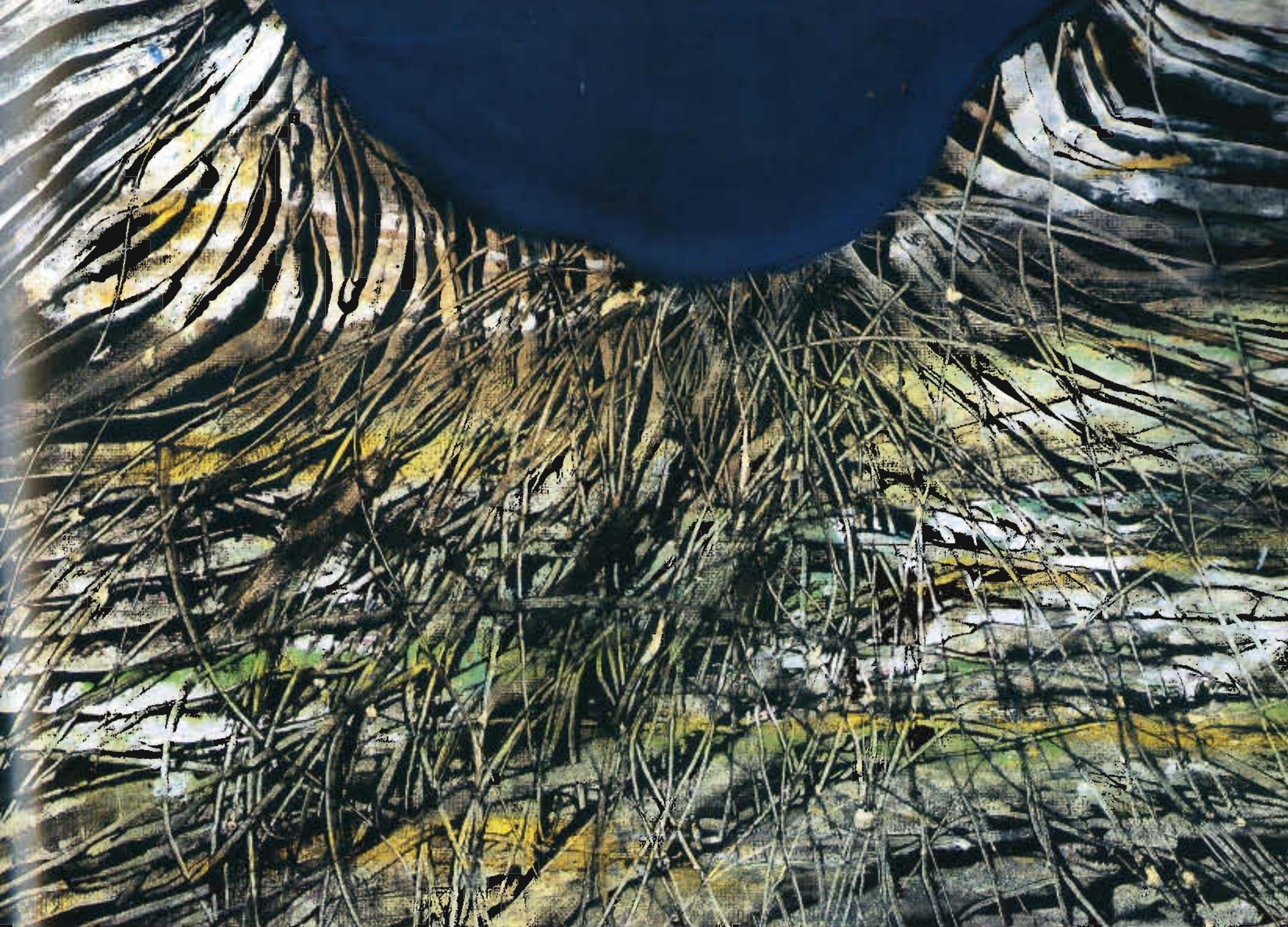
After a fine breakfast, we prepared our picnic lunch, packed our rucksacks, and continued our expedition. We trudged through the snow and after about 100 meters noticed animal trails. We realized that one kind of footprints must be a large cat's, the other a hoofed animal's. The trails went along the path so we could easily follow them. After a couple of meters they turned off to the right and we noticed a little far away – a lynx. We supposed it was following a chamois's or deer's trail. Because the wind blew from behind us, we could watch the rare animal for a while but as soon

as it noticed us, it disappeared and hid behind a hilltop.

When midday approached, the snow melted away and we continued to move on along grass and scree. I was relieved because now the pass was clearly visible again. We finally left the Greina Plain by crossing a somewhat flat saddle. I am thankful to those who voted against the building of a new dam, otherwise we would have missed this beautiful walking tour.

We had lunch at a waterfall. The stream had plenty of water, part of it must have been melted snow for it was not completely clean. We continued to play along the stream, enjoying the warm sunshine. During our descent, we built several small barrages. Suddenly, dad said, "We must hurry now because Mum and Curdin will arrive at Vrin, the highest village of Lumnezia Valley, to meet us."

Madlaina and myself had some difficulties parting with the stream. We enjoyed a piece of chocolate and went on steadily. Very often the path looked more like a stream's bed and it was obvious that it would be a stream on rainy days or in spring when the snows of winter melt. We hopped down the slopes. Later we felt tired and hot and slowed down again. I was happy indeed, when, after a sharp bend of the path, I noticed the spire of the village. Soon after that Madlaina exclaimed, "Look, Andri, I can see the car with mum and Curdin!" There they were. We started running and reached the car in about five minutes and returned home together, happy and tired.



RASIKA AKALANKA AKURAMBODA

Beneath Sagarmatha

We lived north east of Kathmandu in Khumbu. Our house was situated in a small Sherpa village. It was surrounded by beautiful views. From our house, on a clear day, I could sometimes see the mountains covered with snow. Although our house was small, it was a refuge for us from the cold.

One day, when I was returning home, I saw my mother looking at me from the window and waving at me. I waved back. Soon I was inside the house and closed the wooden door before the cold wind could get inside. My sister was cooking in the kitchen that adjoined the living room and the smell of food made me feel hungry.

In our house, we had a small place where we kept a statue of

Buddha and lit lamps beside it. We were Buddhists. Our windows had wooden panels to stop the cold from coming in. Sometimes during the night, when it got too cold, we used blankets to cover the windows.

My sister served me garlic pancakes in a plate. Since I was feeling very hungry, I ate the pancakes quickly. After dinner, I went to my room and lay down to rest on my bed.

Slowly the memories of the past came back to me and I saw my dear father.

That day was very cold. My father, mother, my little brother,

and younger sister were the members in my family and we owned two small plots of land.

The pine trees around our house were covered in snow. Except for a robin which was singing nearby our house, the environment was quiet and peaceful. Only the whirling sound of the northern wind could be heard.

Mother brought hot cakes and tea and laid them on the round dining table. It was tea-time and, sometimes, on occasions like these, my father enjoyed talking to us.

"Son do you know what Kathmandu is called?" We enjoyed it when father involved us in conversations like this. It made us think less about the cold.

"No, father. Please tell us." My brother asked as he put a hot piece of cake into his mouth.

"The city is known as the land of the golden temples because it has many beautiful temples. Do you know that our country also has many beautiful and valuable birds, animals, and mountains? We are lucky to live in a country like this."

"Oh, father please tell us more," urged on my little brother who was becoming excited. All of us were dying to find out more about our country's cultural and natural wealth.

That year, during the spring season, my father organized a trek for us to see the Everest Mountain from close range. My father, uncle Jakalan, sister, and I decided to go whereas my mother stayed at home with my little brother. We packed all the food and camping gear we needed for the trip and, before setting off, we offered our

prayers to the statue of Buddha for a safe journey.

It was a new experience for my sister and me to travel like this. All of us were wearing heavy jackets and trekking boots. As we began walking, we started to enjoy the fresh air and scenery. The mountains shone white in the sunlight.

We saw various animals. We caught a glimpse of a fox with light brown fur. We went along thinking about the many things our father had described to us and wondered what we would see.

Then a squirrel sped along the snow and climbed a tree. We were lucky to sight Kingfishers, woodpeckers, and other migratory birds that father spotted. As we journeyed along, we were aware that someone was following us. This proved true when we heard a slight noise from among the trees. All of us looked towards the direction suddenly fearing trouble. Could it be a wild animal? We were caught by surprise when we saw the deer. It raised its head, flipped its ears, looking at us for a moment, then sprang and disappeared into the wilderness. Our father explained to us that the deer was one of the world's most rare species. It was called the *Kasturi* and was hunted by people to make a rare and expensive perfume. That is why, he pointed out that we had to protect and take care of these animals as much as we took care of our own lives.

After walking for a while, our uncle Jakalan said it was time to rest. He released his rucksack. We then took out food, sat down, and ate hungrily. Although we didn't have the warmth of the fire at home, we felt happy to be in beautiful surroundings. As I was munching on biscuits and looking around, I suddenly spotted a bird.

"Father, look, I see a bird... isn't it beautiful? Oh father, it looks like our national bird, the one I read about in my text book."

"Ah, yes, child. That is the Impeyan Pheasant or *Danphe*."

"Oh, look at its feathers. They're like a rainbow!" I said excitedly.

Afterwards we put up our tents. Dusk came and we helped father and uncle Jakalan to build a fire. Then everyone sat around it and my uncle, sister, and I together listened to father's stories.

In this moment, the beauty of my surroundings enchanted my mind. I felt that such a place of loveliness could not be described by words.

The next day, we had breakfast and continued on with our journey. As we walked, we also looked around for new sights. After a while, we spotted something with horns... and then a goat appeared.

"That is an Ibex goat. They're experts at climbing mountains," explained father.

After some time, a cat-like animal appeared further away on some rocks. From what we could make out, his fur had grey spots. We felt scared as it kept looking at us.

"It must be the snow leopard," my father said softly. Then as quickly as it had appeared, it disappeared into the woods. Another surprising thing we saw was the Red Panda. It had a white face and was smaller than the Chinese panda. It too disappeared without a trace.

Finally, my sister and I were told that we were nearing the close-range view of Everest, *Sagarmatha*.

Excited, we thought how great it was for us to see the world's

highest mountain. All of us were amazed to see this majestic mountain. To me, it looked like as if Everest was a white giant that owned the blue sky and the clouds.

We rested there. Our journey had come to an end and for the moment, we just wanted to relax and enjoy the view. While my uncle, sister, and I began unpacking some food, father went further up to explore the area. Then everything happened in a blur.

There was an avalanche. My uncle, sister, and I quickly hid under the shelter of a huge rock. The snow came down with a huge swoop and, as I crunched on my knees trembling, I remembered with a sinking heart that father was missing.

My whole body began to shake with fear. My sister realized what had happened and began to cry. Uncle Jakalan looked grim. All of us knew that father would not make it alive. Our fears proved to be painfully right because afterwards we found him buried under the snow.

Warm tears trickle down my face. Then I feel a breeze coming through the window, as if trying to console me. Time and again I ask myself: why did such a magnificent mountain have to bury my father, the one who had admired the mountain so greatly and told us, his children, much about it?

Although my father is gone, I find solace in the knowledge that he sleeps forever in the Himalayas like the many brave Sherpas who have lost their lives while climbing Everest. A place which he loved with all his heart and taught us to love as well.



CHANDHI GOONASEKERA

Mountains Are Forever

It was a radiant day. Sarath had just received the greatest news and he couldn't wait to tell Nimal about it.

"Oh, here you are. I've been looking all over for you!" exclaimed Sarath as he saw Nimal at a table at the Mountain Inn. "I have great news." Nimal listened to him rather amused. Everyone knew that Sarath was a person who got excited over the most insignificant of incidents.

"All right, calm down and tell me what it is this time," said Nimal.

"Well, some people from a company have planned to tunnel through the Udawatte Mountain on which the forest stands and build a shopping complex."

He waited in eagerness for Nimal's reply. What he received

was certainly not what he had expected. "What? When?" gabbled Nimal.

"Hey," said Sarath dismayed at Nimal's outburst. "Why look so worried? You know that this is a chance of a lifetime, it should be taken."

Nimal was already heading towards the exit, a deep frown upon his face. He slammed the doors and headed towards his best friend Ruwans's house. Thoughts whirled inside his head. He couldn't stop thinking about what would happen to all the birds and animals who had made their home on the Udawatte Mountain. The beautiful old trees, which had stood on the mountain for hundreds of years were also in danger. He wondered why the people had decided to take such a decision.



**SAVE
THE
MOUNTAIN**

He reached Ruwans's house and just as he was reaching out to ring the doorbell, the door flung open and Ruwans's elder sister pushed out of the house, laughing and shouting, as if all of her troubles had suddenly come to an end, her friends were trailing closely behind her. "Oh, hello, Nimal!" Ruwans's sister, Sayuri said excitedly. "They're going to build a new shopping complex. Isn't it great! By the way, Ruwans is at home, but I'd advice you to keep out of his way, he's a bit upset over something or the other." And she left, moving towards the restaurant, just waiting to spread the news.

Nimal grimaced after them. He just couldn't understand why everyone thought that a new shopping complex would be wonderful. He walked into the house, raced up the stairs and burst into Ruwans's room. It was a typical teenager's room, except that the walls were covered with pictures of trees, mountains, and other natural beauties, most of which by Ruwans, for he was an artist. He spent most of his time drawing nature and he was just as much of a nature "freak" as Nimal was.

Ruwans turned in surprise as Nimal dashed into the room. Nimal could tell that Ruwans was in a bad mood, and he was sure that he knew the reason why. "Oh, hi! I suppose you've already heard the 'latest news'," Ruwans said sarcastically. "It's all over town," mimicking his sister.

"Aha," replied Nimal, nodding, "Everyone thinks that it's a good thing and no one thinks of those poor animals or trees; not to mention the mountain itself."

"I know, but what can we do about it? I don't think we'll be able to persuade the workmen to give up even if they did decide to listen to us, the citizens would be against us," commented Ruwans.

"When is this scheme going to start?" asked Nimal curiously.

"Well, I figure that it'll start in around a week or so," answered Ruwans, "But if the people go on showing more enthusiasm, they will start the project in two or three days."

"Well, that doesn't give us much time to do anything? Even if we posted a petition to an environmental organization, it wouldn't reach them in time. We'll have to think of something more efficient; not only to save the mountain but to educate the people as well. And I think I have just the thing to do," remarked Nimal, his eyes growing bright.

"I'll do anything to save that mountain. Did you know that the mountain is home to hundreds of different animals, trees, and birds? The banyan or Indian fig tree, mahogany tree, and the na tree are among the commonest trees found in the Udawette Forest. And the porcupine, mouse deer, and toque monkey are well-known residents. There are also a wide variety of snakes. There are the Indian cobras, green tit vipers, and the green whit snakes. It's a pity that people don't know about these facts or I'm sure they wouldn't feel too enthusiastic about the project," said Ruwans, "But what were you saying, did you say that you know what to do?"

"Yes," Nimal said pointedly, "But it's getting rather late; I'll tell you all about my plan tomorrow." And he left and headed towards home.

The night air was cool and refreshing. Nimal knew that the Udawette Mountain played a part in making the environment safe. He looked in its direction and saw the mountain's dark shape loom over the city. He wondered what it would be like with a concrete building in its place.

The next day, Nimal met Ruwans in the park. He had thought about his plan all night and was sure that it would work. "Morning,

Ruwans," greeted Nimal. "About my idea, what I propose is a protest. I'm sure that we'll be able to catch their attention if we try to do something daring..."

"Like starving ourselves to death if it comes to the worst?" Asked Ruwans rather astonished at Nimal's suggestion.

"Well, yes and no. I think we should do something that is connected to the mountain. Let's gather some children who share our opinion and go and chain ourselves to the trees on the mountain. In that way, they wouldn't dare to start the excavation for fear of harming us."

"Yes, I think you've got it," broke in Ruwans. "We can make a few posters declaring some facts about the mountain and save the mountain and inform the citizens at the same time."

"That's what I meant when I said that you would be able to show off your artistic skills, yesterday," said Nimal amused at Ruwans's enthusiasm.

"So when do we start? We don't have much time, the news reporter said that excavation will start in three days."

"Yes, but you can't tell anyone about this yet, especially your parents. They'll just try to stop us," said Nimal.

"All right, but we'll have to get at least ten children or they won't think that we're serious. I'll take care of the posters," promised Ruwans.

"Fine, I'll get the supplies and the friends. We'll go there in the morning before anyone wakes up. We'll have to get enough supplies to last at least two to three days. Until then we'll have to keep our fingers crossed."

The day of the excavation dawned clear and bright. Nimal and his team had already taken their places, chained to the first trees at

the foot of the mountain. Posters lay all around them. The digging was due to start in half an hour.

There was a large crowd gathered on the diggers' side. They were waiting for the auspicious moment to see the digging start. Among them, were Sarath and Ruwans's sister. The young protesters rechecked and secured their chains. All of them felt nervous worried that the diggers wouldn't consider their pleas. But, at the last moment, Nimal felt courage surge through him and it was thus that he started the protest, shouting, "Save the mountain, it is not yours to destroy!"

The protesters took up the call, which brought the crowd running to see what the commotion was all about. Nimal could just make out Sarath's face gaping at them through the trees.

"Look at these posters. This one says, 'This forest holds many endangered species, among them the flying fox and the three striped palm squirrel.' I thought that it was just a clump of trees."

"Look at this one," shouted another person. "Did you know that a mountain affects the climate of the surrounding areas? Well, I don't think it's worth sacrificing this place for a concrete building."

"Here's another, cutting trees can increase the risk of flooding."

And so, as most of the people were convinced that it was better to have a mountain than a concrete building in its place, the authorities had to leave. Nimal and his friends were delighted with their success, but it suddenly occurred to Nimal that, with or without the help of friends, mountains were creations of mother nature made to last through time and hardships.

PRASADINI LEWANGAMA

Trees of Hope

The moon begins to light up the cold night sky. The floating dark clouds sometimes hide the moon like the way the bulldozer eats away the trees of "hope". At this time, darkness reigns as far as the eye can see. Then the sad, mournful cry of an owl pierces through my soul, echoing the sad feelings within me. I want to die.

But the rocky cliff is holding me up bravely. He does not know that in a few minutes, I want to let myself fall downhill into the endless void, where there is no present or future before me. My dear "hopes", soon I shall be falling into your arms, leaving everything behind, coming to you whom I have loved and treasured all my life.

"Suzy... what are you doing here, at this time of the day?"

"Nothing, just thinking."

"Look, sis, you shouldn't be out here alone. Anything can happen to you."

"Oh, Peter, don't be so worried, it is these trees on this mountain that have been so kind to me when I am lost and lonely."

"Now, dear sister, don't argue with me. Let's go home."

Darkness does not stop me in my tracks. I know my way around here among the trees. I have spent most of my time growing up in this area, although many things have changed since the old days.

During the day, when the sun was high up, we used to walk under the trees protected by their shades; there used to be so many of them. I used to wonder whether heaven was like that. But some people from our village never let us enjoy that dream. They

destroyed it like the many trees of "hope" they cut down with heartless machines. The trees fell down in loud crashes and they were swept down the river and sold. They brought money to the people, but also were the cause of death and, sadly, my parent's deaths too. During the last monsoon, the river became so mighty and ferocious that it flooded our entire village. My brother and I were shocked when we heard that our home and parents had been swept away.

We arrive at home. It seems like brother is a bit annoyed at me. I enter his room to see him staring at our parent's picture. Tears slowly run down his cheeks. This is far more touching than a loud sob or cry; it is far more helpless and sad.

I sit beside my brother. He is crying, traveling back to his old memories. I watch him sadly. Then I look out of the window... I see a tree, alone in the moonlight. It makes me feel calm, looking at it. I nudge my brother and tell him to look up. The tree is magical and together we watch enchanted. It is during moments like these, that the trees of "hope" make us feel better.

My brother has calmed down.

"Isn't it strange to still feel hopeful about life after what happened?" I ask.

"Hmm..." Peter says quietly, "Nature has a wonderful way of making you see something beyond your own sorrows."

I quickly hug him, knowing in my heart that my brother and I cannot let go of our hopes. Never.



MARISA MANOROT

Medicine Mountain

There was a boy who lived in a big city full of scientific technologies. But the boy was suffering from breathing problems because the city was too polluted.

His teacher gave him an assignment during his holidays. He was to write an essay. At the time, his father was a volunteer and was told to go and work and help a far away village on a mountain. His father asked his son about going along with him so that he could gain some new experiences.

At first, the boy refused to go with his father because he thought that there wouldn't be anything interesting to do but he changed his mind after a lot of persuasion from his father. Afterwards he realized how wrong he had been.

When they arrived, they were given a warm welcome. Everyone was friendly. There he met a boy who in a short time became his good friend. Spending time in the village gave him many new insights. People who lived in the village led a simple life. They were good to him and helpful. It was hard to find people like these in the city where he lived. Although they had no television or comfortable things, they were happy.

He began to value the mountain and its inhabitants. Life on the mountain was not just suffering and hardship as he had thought before. Here, he could breathe fresh air which slowly cured him. The food was also fresh and had no chemicals. On the hill, there were no industries or vehicles to pollute the air.

He learned about different aspects of nature. When he was younger, he had thought that cutting trees was not harmful because it fulfilled the needs of people. But now he understood that tree felling destroyed the very basis of life. It meant having less oxygen in the air.

He realized that the mountain gave so much to the people and felt that everyone had to save the mountain because when a mountain was saved, everything on it – the forests, rivers, lakes – were saved. From the forests, rivers, and lakes, people fulfilled their basic needs – fuel, drinking water, and shelter – and were able to survive. That is why, he thought, "We must save the mountain and liked the saying 'mountains forever'."



BRET MAHONEY

Wonder Called Everest

Since the dawn of time, man has marvelled at the beauty of mountains. Like heavenly statues created by the hand of God, they symbolize a strong presence, an unchanging link between the void of yesterday and the uncertainty of tomorrow. Man has always had a fascination for mountains, whether it be depending on them for the necessities of life, or raving them for their priceless resources. Also, they provide a great place for one to get to know one's true self, to test the waters, so to speak. Whether it is the mountain's natural beauty, or the sense of adventure one gets from climbing that causes a person to lust for the lofty summits, makes no difference. Perhaps it is the breathtaking view from the top, a pale contrast to even the loveliest works of Renoir or Monet, that makes us seek out the highest and largest peaks.

Regardless, it is true that the gods of the mountains call out to each and everyone that has ever dared to set foot on their domain.

When people think of great mountains, the first one that pops into mind is the mighty Mount Everest. Located in Nepal, the towering mountain holds many secrets that only the fewest and the bravest have dared to seek out. For many, many years, climbers tried in vain to ascend to the mountain's peak. In 1921 the British began a major exploration of the north side of the mountain led by George Mallory.

Mallory's expedition and another that took place soon afterwards were unable to overcome the strong winds, avalanches, and other hazards and reach the summit. In 1924, a third British expedition resulted in the disappearance of Mallory and a climbing companion only 800 feet from the summit. More attempts were made throughout the 1930's and in the 1940's, but all were futile.

Then, on May 29, 1953, as the tenth British expedition, Edmund Hillary, and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay of Nepal successfully completed the first successful ascent ever. The whole way to the top, the duo battled massive snow and ice avalanches, hurricane force winds, and the icy cold temperatures. And if these challenges weren't enough, there was always the constant threat of a blinding snowstorm that can make visibility measurable in inches instead of yards. Despite all of the hazards, however, the climbers completed their quest, and planted the British and Nepalese flag on the summit. To this day, the peak stands as a reminder of the men who died while attempting the climb.

To some, these hazards make the climbers seem foolish to even attempt the ascent, but these opinions couldn't be further from the truth. Before a person sets out to climb a mountain such as Everest, they devise a detailed plan, telling exactly which route to take and what equipment is going to be needed.

The climbers also undergo strenuous training before they make an attempt on the summit. Not only must the climbers be physically prepared, they also need to be mentally prepared. The toll that the mountain has on the body and mind is enough to cripple even the strongest of men. It takes a keen, sharp person to be able to overcome the fears of what are going on around him and proceed to the summit.

Even with all of these risks, the great mountain's call rings loud and clear in many people's ears. Though all may not attempt to reach the mountain's peak in body, everyone who receives the summons climbs in spirit. And those who do actually make it to the top are just representatives for the rest of the world.



THIPARPA THAMAMONGOOD

Geney's Journey

On a peaceful night under the full moonlight, leaves were blown by the wind around a pretty tent near a high mountain. A small group of children were on holiday during the summer. They sat around a white candle the only thing shining. An old man began to spin a yarn as he normally did everyday.

"Once upon a time in a village near a mountain in Chile there was a boy named Geney. Geney's father owned a cotton plantation on the slope of the mountain. His mother was a miner. They were not rich, but not so poor either. The mountain was high; nobody had ever seen the top of it. There was a legend about it. The legend

said that there was a lot of treasure there. Once a man had nearly reached it, but he was never seen again. We thought that he died in a mysterious way. Anyway, it was a fertile mountain, many rivers originated from it; the soil under it was productive. So the crops grew perfectly. All the people in the village were comfortable and happy because they lived in a good environment. They would have lived together in happiness forever if what I am going to tell you all had not happened."

"What is it?" the girl exclaimed while the little boy's eyes were slowly closing. The oldest boy patted him on his arm to wake him up.



"Six years later, his mother decided to let Geney study at a high school in town. So Geney had to leave his hometown. Unfortunately, many terrible things happened at the village. Fewer and fewer minerals were found in the mine until finally the mine was closed. His mother became unemployed. His father had to work harder than ever before.

"Geney didn't know what happened at the village because his mother didn't want him to worry. She wanted him to graduate. Then one day, Geney received a letter. 'Someone sent a letter to me; it must be from my parents. How wonderful!' Geney exclaimed. He opened the envelope hastily. That's right, his parents were the senders, but the news didn't make him happy. He lay on the bed feeling sad. He thought hard to decide what he should do.

"The next morning Geney went back to his village by train. He was disappointed. He saw everything had changed. 'There is a lot of pollution in my village now,' he said. Then he went home. His mother opened the door for him. She couldn't talk a lot because she was ill. His mom told him that his father was working on the mountain. After that, an old man called him to come outside. He was Geney's old teacher. He told him about the village. 'You must be astonished with the changes that have taken place. The mine's proprietor, Mr. Hawkman, became a house seller. He built houses around the mountain and sold them to western people at high prices. Mr. Hawkman is a bad man. He was mean to everyone even to his own people. He is the richest man among them and makes them work as servants.' At night, Geney slept confused.

"The next morning, the teacher came hurriedly to Geney's house to tell the hot news. 'Mr. Hawkman, a corrupt man, has ordered his crew to take a helicopter and place some bombs on the top of the

mountain. He wants to burst the entire mountain to expand his project. Now the bombs have already been placed. He also commanded us to move out if we didn't want to die,' the teacher announced. 'But we have some hope. Mr. Gadwick, my spy, has found a map to go to the bombsites and can explain to you how to defuse the bombs,' he added. 'O.k., I'll do it,' Geney said.

"The next morning he started implementing his plan. Geney began to climb the mountain. He carried one backpack which had a lot of equipment inside, including a map and information on the bomb's structure. The ground was dry and hard. He didn't find it strange that there weren't many plants growing on the slope. As he continued walking, the rough ground made his feet hurt. Sometimes, he had to go through bushes and they scratched his arms. Insects attacked him. He was annoyed, but his mind was set on reaching the top.

"Up in the mountain, there was a jungle. It was full of green trees, but people couldn't live there because it was cold and there were many wild animals. On the fourth day, Geney's supply of food finished so he had to hunt for animals.

"On the eighth day, he reached the top of the mountain. It was covered in clouds. He felt suddenly better although his body was hurting from his trek. He went to a river to find some fish for breakfast.

"On the twelfth day, he had to climb a wide cliff. He used ropes to climb it. When he looked back, he could see everything in the horizon. When he looked at the top, he could see very clearly that it wasn't far away from him.

"The next day Geney found an old piece of paper fluttering in the wind. It was a letter. The man who wrote it had left it before he

died. The letter said that he had nearly reached the top and that he could see everything on the top, but he couldn't climb it because of his illness. The letter also said that there wasn't any gold or money to be found, but that the real treasure was the adventure of climbing the mountain. He felt that he was sure that the person who found his letter had used all his/her perseverance, courage, and intelligence to climb the mountain.

"Five hours later, Geney found the bombs. This meant that he was the first person to reach the top of the mountain! But he didn't care about that at first. He opened the box of bombs and following the instructions that were written down for him, he started to defuse them one by one. They were time bombs and they would explode in one hour. Geney began to cut the electrical wires. At last, there were three wires left: red, blue, and green. The instructions didn't tell him what to do about them. The timer hadn't stopped ticking so Geney decided to choose. 'Red, blue or green,' he thought. He cut the red wire first because he thought that it meant dangerous things. He assumed that the green wire meant the trees and the blue one meant the rivers. Suddenly the timer stopped ticking.

"Geney was delighted. Now he was standing on the top of the mountain, the highest place in his village. He could see everything below. He was proud to be the first person on the top.

"Geney came down the mountain with the evil bombs. He had spent thirteen days to climb up, but he spent six days to come down.

He came back to his village cheerful. There had been a demonstration to resist Mr. Hawkman's project led by his teacher. The government of Chile had found out everything. Finally, Mr. Hawkman and his crew were arrested. Everyone in the village joined hands to make the mountain green again and they lived happily with the mountain forever.

"The principle from the story is, it is hard to be successful in your life, but it doesn't mean that you can't reach your goal. It is like the poor boy Geney's adventure. His ambition was to reach the top of the mountain which nobody had done so far. He could do it because he persevered and he believed in protecting the mountain. That was the biggest and the greatest trophy in his life. What do you boys want to be?"

"I want to be a doctor," one of the young boys replied.

"So you must work hard in class like the way Geney climbed the mountain," the old man said.

Then a voice came through a blanket, "I want to be an astronaut, why should I have to climb a mountain?" asked the youngest boy who was always asleep.

DULANJALEE SENEVIRATNE

The Mountain of the Holy Footprint

"Clear had the day been from the dawn,
All chequered was the sky,
Thin clouds like scarfs or cobweb lawn
Veiled heaven's most glorious eye."

- Michael Drayton: "A Calm Day"

Located beyond a valley, amidst a rural setting is the holy creation of nature: the mountain Shri Pada (holy footprint). This mountain, which is regarded as a symbol of religious harmony, is revered by Buddhists, Christians, and Hindus alike.

In the religious books of Buddhism, where the literary creations of the great Buddhist monks of all times are documented, details about this particular mountain have been included. They say that

Lord Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, visited Kelaniya, a city rich with cultural and religious values. Once the religious acts of preaching and "alms giving" ended, his lordship moved gracefully towards the mountain. On top of the mountain his lordship placed and engraved the holy footprint on the ground with his sacred left foot. Thus, due to this religious incident, the mountain obtained the name Shri Pada (holy footprint). Christians believe that the sa-



cred footprint belongs to Adam; thus, to them it is Adam's Peak. The Hindus, too, have their own beliefs. Until today, people all over the world continue to respect these religious beliefs, and the mountain Shri Pada also symbolizes the peace and prosperity of the nation.

Besides its religious significance, the cloud-capped mountain Shri Pada is well known for its natural beauty. Mostly pilgrims are amazed to see the breathtaking view of the sunrise from Adam's Peak. I, a Buddhist monk, living in a monastery located at the top of the peak, have experienced this magical moment. As the sun rises slowly, the sky is lit up by brilliant orange rays. For a monk who is practicing meditation and prayers, the mountain's atmosphere is ideal.

The early morning breeze is cool, and as the mist gradually fades away, the whole area begins to warm up. The sun's yellowish beams add color, life, and joy to the mountain's atmosphere like the unerring touch of a master on a painting. The bordering banks of the brooks are dotted with weeping willows and great beeches. Beyond these, oaks and Cyprus trees rise up and add serenity to the area. Streams flow smoothly through grasslands, their surfaces glistening under the sun as though a gigantic hand has scattered diamonds over them. And the mountain range looks magnificent against the blue sky.

With the morning hours, comes confusion. The calm atmosphere is disturbed by the ringing voices of youngsters who are out on an educational tour. As they pass through the national heritage, they hail in a religious chorus, "Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!" bestowing their respects for the mountain Shri Pada. During the day, people of different faiths come to us, the monks, for blessings.

Yet amidst such calm happenings, there are disturbances. Pollution is taking place. The mountain area is being littered with plastic bags and objects. Deforestation is taking place. We, the monks, held a formal discussion and finally sought aid from officials. And our struggle began.

During this period, we tried to remain calm. We believed that our problem had to be solved with patience. We prayed and meditated day and night. Finally our chief monk talked to the people involved in the conflict. His lordship was able to gain their understanding and concern. But I feared that these thoughtless beings would still try to pollute and destroy our environment again.

Once I was enjoying the fresh air after a rainfall, when I caught sight of a faint rainbow in the eastern skies. What did this creation of mother nature signify to me? Maybe our rays of hope... our hopes that Mount Shri Pada would be conserved and protected forever.

Contributors

Ahmed, Aditi's wishes to become a lawyer. A student at Sunbeams School, his short story "The Mountains of Dreams" is the inspiration behind the cover of *Mountains Forever*. He likes to collect clothes and lives in Bangladesh.

Akuramboda, Rasika Akalanka's dream is to become an artist. She loves to draw as well as write and wants to help the poor in Sri Lanka. Her article, "Beneath Sagarmatha," is well researched.

Alexandra, Getmanova of Kazakhstan wants to become a journalist and enjoys reading books on history and geography. Her essay "Land of the Golden Fleece" details information on the history, culture, and climate of Caucasus.

Anthony, Rajesh's ambition is to become a good tradesman. A graduate in mechanics, he enjoys fishing, working with computers, and playing soccer. Aged 20, he lives in Fiji and contributes, "In the Wilds of Joske's Thumb."

Bano, Nek; Ashima; and Rahat retell a folklore entitled "Poor Man and the Beetle." The young writers from Gilgit, Northern Pakistan, bring out the cultural essence of the villages in the story.

Banzuela, Vincent; Gabrillo, Ronnel; Pantaleon, Mark; and Sapalong, Aldrin study at Maryknoll Good News Deaf Centrum in the Philippines. Together they wrote "We Climb Mountains" which talks about how the school has helped them to discover new talents. All of them

enjoy outdoor activities and have a deep love and respect for their "mountain" friend Busol. Their hobbies are craft-making, pigeon raising, and playing basketball.

Barannikova, Maria from Russia was the first person to send an article to this program. She is a tenth grade student at School #130. Her school has an extensive English language course and she writes that she will never forget the moment she stood on top of a mountain for the first time.

Barooah, Ronojoy is 17 years old and studies at the Assam Valley School in India. His ambition is to become a software engineer and he enjoys playing computer games, reading, exploring new places, and playing the guitar.

Bhuyan, Pritam's hobbies are surfing the internet, reading books, watching movies, and playing the piano. Aged 14, Pritam hopes to become a chef, a pilot, or a computer engineer when he grows up. He lives in India.

Brugger, Andri, 10 years old, is the youngest participant of the program. He wants to become a professional footballer when he grows up. He lives with his sister Madlaina, brother Curdin, and parents in Hombrechtikon, Switzerland.

Dasgupta, Ayesha Ritwika studies in Assam Valley School and enjoys playing tennis, reading books, listening to music, and playing the guitar. She is 17 and is Indian.

Dastgir, Amer studies at Sunbeams School, Bangladesh. Aged 13, he aims to become a musician or a lawyer. His hobbies are playing badminton, swimming, and learning to play the violin. He loves spending time with his cat.

Deans, Joshua received the invitation to the short story program from the Head of English Department of Mountainview High School. The only participant from New Zealand, his contribution is the story "Clouds of Doubt."

Dima, Kim's interests range from the arts to sports. He studies in ninth grade in Kazakhstan and feels many great creators are inspired by the mountains to write poetry, make paintings and music and agrees with Russian poet Vladimir Vysotsky's views on mountains.

Ganearachchi, Isuru of Sri Lanka likes hiking to places with a lot of history. In her story "Save the Glory of Grace Mountain!" she gives an account of what a leopard cub thinks about human beings. Among her interests are reading, writing poetry, gardening, and listening to music.

Ghullim retells the story of the people of Nasirabad and Hassanabad in Northern Pakistan. Nasirabad and Hassanabad share a common pasture and the people of these areas told the interesting story "Eat Spoon" to Ghullim.

Gifford, Elizabeth of Australia is 17 years old and works at Cirque Bizirque, a circus school. An acrobat and an aerialist, she enjoys teaching the skills of the circus to children.

Goonasekera, Chandhi's ambition is to become a pediatrician. She enjoyed participating in the short story program and hopes that a program like this will help generate awareness among people regarding the environment of Sri Lanka and other places. She is learning first aid skills.

Guruacharya, Anuj of Nepal started writing poetry and short stories from the age of 13. An early morning jogger and a lover of music, he thinks natural history, psychology, and ethnology are fascinating.

Hatami, Morteza studies at Shohada e Karegar High School in Iran. The school is equipped with contemporary computer facilities and Morteza likes his school. He contributes "A Goose With One Leg," to this book.

Goh, Serene studies at Raffles Junior School in Singapore and describes the relationship between a girl and her mountain in "Papa's Lesson." The young writer shows how the heroine grows up to understand the values of being a mountain girl in a world that is filled with greed and competition.

Khandker, Nusrat Nausheen's ambition is to become a doctor and she is interested in reading, playing basketball, and participating in debates. She lives in Bangladesh.

Kobayashi, Kristin's ambition is to travel the world. A student of Yokota High School, Japan, she enjoys skiing, shopping, and spending time with friends, much of it chatting on the internet.

Koptyug, Evgenia of Russia loves writing stories and drawing. Her work has been published in Australia's *Kindred* and *The Local History*; Sweden's *The Cultural Horizons Magazine*; and New York's *The Laws of Life*; her drawing was on this book's cover.

Kumar, Atish is in the final year of studies at Montfort Boys Town, Fiji. Aged 20, he is interested in traveling and making friends. His short story "Mountain of Sleeping Giants" is taken from a Fijian folklore.

Kumar, Binut's ambition is to become an air force pilot and serve his country. A student and an Indian, his favorite subject is biology because he can relate it with his interest in the environment. He has one brother and sister and enjoys playing badminton, writing short stories, and sketching.

Lewangama, Prasadini of Sri Lanka is a student of Mahamaya Girls' College. She is a keen gardener and loves climbing hills. She collects stamps and wants to study engineering.

Madhury, Ananna is from Viqurunnisa Noon School, Bangladesh. Interested in learning about other people's cultures, she hopes to become a foreign relations professional. Her hobbies are reading and painting.

Mahoney, Bret's "Wonder Called Everest" talks about the physical and mental endurance required for climbing a mountain and the respect he has for climbers. A student of Guam Adventist Academy, he enjoys skating and music and is interested in sports and cars.

Malika, Tursunhanova's essay "The Zailiski Alatau" is well-researched and says that Kazakhstan has "great mountains." With a love for skiing, the high school graduate wants to become an economist and especially enjoys watching the Discovery Channel.

Manorot, Marisa studies at Regina Coeli School in Thailand and describes the values of a mountain. The self-awareness of a little boy in the story "Medicine Mountain" is fascinating.

Massalina, Madina wishes to serve as a doctor and wants to establish a clinic of international standing. Interested in participating in youth related activities, her article "Abode of the Gods" adds to the wealth of stories and essays from Kazakhstan.

Miller, Michael's story "Mt. Fuji and the Spider's Web" talks about issues that are close to his heart. Aged 17, his ambition is to study for a MBA and start his own business. His hobbies are reading and writing. He studies at Yokota High School, Japan.

Moin-ud-din comes from Murtazabad Hunza Village in Northern Pakistan. A seventh grade student, Moin-ud-din's "Nature Guards Us" describes village life in rural Pakistan.

Natalya, Gorbunova is a modest and serious girl. The youngest participant from Kazakhstan (she is 14 years old), she hopes that her essay will make readers realize why it is important to protect nature.

Odil, Ibragimov of Kazakhstan enjoys reading Uzbek and Russian literature. His other interests are learning the English language and playing chess. To him, mountains are beautiful and dangerous and he says that he "cannot imagine life without them".

Plooy, Clayton Du's ambition is to play professional sport. Aged 14, he studies at the Western Academy in Beijing. In his short story "Race to the Top" Clayton provides a personal account of how he and his friends climb up a mountain to visit a Buddhist temple in Wutaishan.

Prentkiewicz, Jennifer is looking forward to joining college and she lives in Japan. Aged 17, she studies at Yokota High School and enjoys chatting on-line. She is interested in writing and loves the internet.

Pruner, Alex's passion is riding motorcycles. He also enjoys surfing, snowboarding, and driving cars. Aged 17, his ambition is to join the United States Air Force Academy and become a pilot or lawyer. He is also interested in working with computers and sports.

Rahman, Altamash's ambition in life is to live with dignity. An avid reader of adventure books, he enjoys playing computer games and listening to music. A student of Sunbeams School, Altamash lives in Bangladesh.

Rahmi, Mehdi contributes a charming story entitled "The Fox's Wisdom". Mehdi from Iran studies at the Shohada e Karegar High School and enjoys folklore.

Ratuyada, James's short story is "The Magic Mountain." He lives in Fiji and is in his final year at Montfort Boys Town. He enjoys sketching and singing and hopes to work as an artist when he graduates.

Saeed, Hina hopes to help bring peace and prosperity to the world. A student of City Montessori School, India, she enjoys reading and writing short stories. Her ambition is to become an IAS officer and serve her country.

Sato, Hiroo studies at Shikino High School in Japan and enjoys spending time with friends. He loves baseball and is exploring different areas to learn what he wishes to do in the future.

Seneviratne, Dulanjalee wants to fight for women's rights and help the disadvantaged in Sri Lanka. Aged 14, Dulanjalee enjoys reading mysteries and classics.

Serna, Rocio de la studies at the Western Academy in Beijing. When she grows up, she hopes to become a doctor. She enjoys playing hockey and shopping with her friends.

Shakya, Bibhushan is the editor of *Godavarian*, a magazine of St. Xavier's School in Nepal. He is learning much through his editorial experience and enjoys reading, writing, and painting. His favorite subjects are astronomy and science fiction. He enjoys playing soccer and cricket.

Shiraishi, Takashi of Shikino High School in Japan enjoys working and playing with computers. He also loves soccer and is interested in economics.

Song, Theresa of China enjoys reading books and visiting shopping malls. "Flowers and Friendship" describes her love for nature and the outdoors. Aged 14, she plans to become a designer when she grows up.

Song, Hae Young learned about the short story program through the world wide web. A student of Taejon Science High School in South Korea, Hae is interested in earth science and loves to watch the snow fall.

Southerd, Shawn's ambition is to be well-educated. He is 16 years old and studies at Yokota High School in Japan. He contributes "Sunny and Twilight" to this collection.

Talukdar, Faiyaz's short story "Bigfoot" is inspired by the Yeti (said to be found in the mountainous region of Nepal). Faiyaz of Bangladesh likes to spend time reading books and playing basketball and hopes to become a computer programmer when he grows up.

Tamraka, Antoine is 28 years old and is interested in human behavior. He is studying to become a mechanical engineer. Antoine lives in Fiji and enjoys hunting, writing, and drawing.

Tan, Ninan enjoys drawing and hopes to become a cartoonist one day. She studies at the Western Academy in Beijing and is 14 years old.

Tawake, Anare is interested in community work. A student of Montfort Boys Town, Fiji, he enjoys playing rugby and reading books and wants to become a good tradesman when he grows up.

Taylor, Lauren's ambition is to go scuba diving in the Great Barrier Reef. Aged 13, she studies at the Western Academy in Beijing and enjoys swimming and golf. Her short story "Black and White" describes the plight of pandas in China.

Thamamongood, Thiparpa (Aime) has thought of many things that she can do with her life. She either wants to become a doctor, a scientist, an astronaut, or a business woman. A student of Satee Phuket School in Thailand, she enjoys computer games and is learning to play Thai musical instruments.

Verma, Ankit Sahay studies at City Montessori School, India, in grade eight. The thought of population explosion scares him. He hopes to become an engineer when he grows up. His hobbies are reading and playing cricket.

Wijk, Bart Van loves to skateboard and paint. A student of the Western Academy in Beijing, his ambition is to become a professional scuba diver.

Yin, Petrina Lee Shi's "Redhill" is a story of honor and faith. The young writer, a student of Jurong Junior College, describes a young boy's heroic desire to save his village from "evil". Petrina gives the story an impressionable ending that leaves one's heart aglow.

Zangmo, Lungten, aged 18, studies at Sherubtse College, Kanglung, Bhutan. Her ambition is to become a doctor and she enjoys writing short stories and reading books. She is keen on gardening, embroidery, and making friends.

Meyangbo, Param is director of the arts program at Spiny Babbler. Her work has featured on the covers of *Selected Poems of the United Kingdom*, *Selected Poems of Nepal*, *Young Minds of Twenty Nations*, and other titles. Her two solo exhibitions, "Enamel Works, 1998" and "Meyangbo Creations, 1999" attracted national attention. She has been selected "Young Achiever" by *Wave* youth magazine and "Personality of the Week" by Hits FM Radio. She has completed art series for ICIMOD, UNICEF, and the Asia Pacific Mountain Network. Pepsi has featured a Nepalese calendar based on her artwork.

