

Master of Education by Thesis

Kathleen Jane Pithouse

(911401451)

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University of Natal, Durban

What *is* this? What *is* this? What *is* this?

A Teacher's Personal Narrative Inquiry into a Memorable Curriculum Experience

Contents

Abstract	iii
Declarations	iv
Chapter One: Opening	1
Chapter Two: Theoretical Setting	26
Chapter Three: Narrative Research Process	37
Chapter Four: A Narrative Interpretation of my Curriculum Experience	46
Chapter Five: Coming to a Conceptualisation of my Curriculum Experience	61
Chapter Six: Closing	69
References	76
Appendix: The Teen Stories Booklets	84

Abstract

In this dissertation, I present a narrative curriculum inquiry that grew out of a personal teaching experience in an independent Durban school in 2001. A grade seven creative writing project in English turned out to be an experience that was emotionally as well as intellectually intriguing to me. After carrying out the teaching work of my grade seven Teen Stories project, I was left with a strong desire to know *what it was* about this particular experience that was so important to me. The focus of my research, therefore, became my personal curriculum experience in the context of the Teen Stories creative writing project.

In the course of this thesis, I describe how my desire to come to a deeper understanding of my curriculum experience led me to search within my life story to discover fruitful truths about myself as a teacher and a researcher. I illustrate my research journey from the fieldwork in the classroom through to the construction of my narrative research text. Drawing on the conceptual work of scholars such as Dewey (1916; 1934; 1963), Denzin (1989), Clandinin and Connelly (2000), and Conle (1999; 2000), I endeavour to share, make sense of and theorise my personal story of a significant curriculum experience. The study moves outwards from my personal experience to a conceptualisation that I believe has the potential to contribute to the development of new modes of curriculum practice for me and other members of my South African teaching community.

Declarations

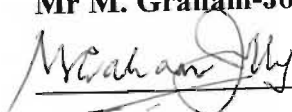
I affirm that this entire dissertation is my own work.



Kathleen Pithouse


As the candidate's supervisor, I have approved this dissertation for submission.

Mr M. Graham-Jolly

 Date: 25 November 2003

As the candidate's supervisor, I have approved this dissertation for submission.

Dr R. Moletsane

 Date: 13 November, 2003

Chapter One

Opening

I open this narrative research text with a descriptive story of a memorable experience in my life as a teacher. My intent is to tell a revealing, evocative story that will provide an opportunity for my reader to come as close as possible to 'reliving' this curriculum experience with me (Richardson 1994:521). In the construction of this "self story" (Denzin 1989: 43-44), I have drawn from a range of "small fragments of experience" (Clandinin and Connelly 1994a: 421): my memories, field texts in the form of teacher and learner journals, field notes in the form of lesson plans and reflections, learners' class work and some of my teaching materials. To ensure confidentiality, I have used pseudonyms when quoting from my learners' journal entries. For clarity, I have corrected any spelling and punctuation errors that appeared in the original journal entries.

In 2001 I began my study for the degree of Master of Education by thesis. At that time, I was teaching at a small, well resourced, independent Catholic girls' school in an affluent suburb of Durban. For part of my Honours course-work during the previous year, I had developed and implemented a grade eight English curriculum unit, based on issues of gender and identity. I felt that this curriculum unit had been very successful. The girls had enjoyed the work and had found it interesting and relevant. The learning activities had seemed to facilitate a real understanding of the issues, as well as to enhance targeted English language skills. For my qualitative MEd research project, I was planning to

develop, implement and evaluate a grade seven English curriculum unit that would centre on questions of adolescence and identity. I wanted to work towards broad, open-ended learning aims. I saw this fieldwork as an extension of what I had done the year before.

While I was busy trying to formulate my research proposal, I had to accompany the grade sevens on a three-day stay at an adventure camp. Although I had arranged this outing because I knew it would provide a fun-filled and worthwhile learning experience, I couldn't help being rather resentful of what felt like an intrusion into my limited time for academic study.

I had taken grade sevens to the adventure camp before and was not expecting to be surprised by my observations. This time, however, the learners were given the opportunity to participate in team problem-solving exercises. I was fascinated by what I saw. The learners seemed to come alive during these exercises. Each girl was involved and interested. There was a palpable sense of excitement as the team members tried to work out and implement strategies for achieving goals such as carrying a heavy water jar across a suspended rope or completing an obstacle course. As I watched each group, I felt myself being drawn in by the learners' enthusiasm. I wanted to join in the activities and share in the heated discussions, conflicts, compromises, defeats and triumphs. I also felt a sense of loss and a kind of shame. I realised that I had never experienced this level of sustained, shared energy in my classroom. My learners usually seemed to enjoy and benefit from our learning activities, but I had never taught a class in which every person was so intensely engaged.

When I returned to work on my research proposal, I felt dissatisfied with my ideas for the grade seven curriculum unit. I yearned to bring about a learning experience that would facilitate and sustain the powerful interest and excitement I had observed during the teamwork exercises. I wondered how I could stimulate that kind of energy through the course of a language-based learning activity.

I began to explore literature on collaborative, classroom-based curriculum practice and on including learners as researchers (Fine and Sandstrom 1988; Steinberg and Kincheloe 1998), thinking that this might provide some insight into the phenomenon I had witnessed at the adventure camp. I thought about the kind of learning activities that would have aroused my interest when I was in grade seven. I tried to think of a more exciting way in which to use my earlier idea of exploring adolescent themes through an English curriculum unit.

Over the next few months, I developed an outline of my Teen Stories writing project. At this time, my research focus was on looking into learner interest and motivation in the context of curriculum practice. To facilitate this exploration, I hoped to infuse the curriculum project with the lived experiences of my learners and with issues that were of engrossing importance to them. In addition, I intended to include the learners as active participants in collaborative decision-making about, and reflection on, our curriculum practice. I discussed my ideas with the school principal and received permission to use the last ten weeks of the school year for this project.

I started the Teen Stories project by issuing each learner with a personal invitation:

September 2001

**YOUR INVITATION TO
OUR GRADE 7 TEEN STORIES WRITING PROJECT**

Dear

In English we have been reading stories about teenage experiences. We have thought, talked and written about these stories. All the stories that we have read have one important thing in common: they were written for teenagers by adults.

I believe that the time has come for you to write your own stories about teenage experiences. I would like to invite you to take part in our **Grade 7 Teen Stories Writing Project**. The aim of this project will be to use the Writing Process to produce a class collection of Teen Stories for our school library. These stories will be written for teenagers by teenagers.

During this project you will write short stories about teenage experiences. These stories can be written individually, in pairs or in groups. Towards the end of the project, you and your fellow learners will select some of the stories to be published in your class collection. Each learner in the class should be the author or co-author of at least one story in the collection.

As we work on our **Grade 7 Teen Stories Writing Project**, I am going to ask you to spend the last five minutes of every English lesson recording your thoughts and feelings about the project in your Journal. By writing down your opinions on the project, you will help me to understand what we are doing well and where we

could make changes. I am also going to write down my thoughts and feelings at the end of each lesson.

I hope that this project will be an exciting and rewarding experience for all of us.

Yours sincerely

Ms Pithouse

My thinking was that this invitation might stimulate learner interest from the start. The girls would then be given the opportunity to vote. Although I was anticipating that they would decide to undertake the project, I did realise that offering my learners a choice meant that I might have to change my fieldwork plans.

Fortunately for me, the invitation to take part in the project did seem to spark my learners' interest. I was pleased that they understood why I was inviting them, rather than instructing them, to participate. In both classes, the vote was unanimously in favour of the Teen Stories project:

Getting the invitation was exciting. (Leigh)

I think it was a clever idea to hand out invitations. It was nice that we got to vote just in case some people didn't want to do the project. (Callie)

I liked the invitation because it made me feel important. (Colleen)

After the voting, we discussed my research intentions and the issue of informed participant consent. I gave out letters in which I asked each learner and her parents to give, or not give, written permission for the inclusion of her project work in my research:

September 2001

Dear Grade 7 Parents

As you may know, I am presently studying for the degree of Master of Education. My field of study is Curriculum Studies. With the consent and support of our school principal, I am focusing my research for this degree on the curriculum work that I do with my grade seven English classes.

I would like to include your daughter's class-work from our upcoming **Grade 7 Teen Stories Writing Project** in my research. I will only include your daughter's work in my research if I receive written consent from you and your daughter. I undertake to draw upon your daughter's work in a respectful and ethical manner.

I would appreciate it if you could discuss this matter with your daughter and then complete and return the attached reply slip as soon as possible.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Ms K. Pithouse
Grade 7 English Teacher

Mrs Y.V. Eldon
Principal

I tried to make it clear to each class that no one was under any obligation to give consent. I explained that we would all participate in the writing project, but that for research purposes I would only use the work of those who gave permission. I felt relieved when the girls all appeared to understand these points. I received consent to use the work of fifty-four out of the fifty-six grade seven learners.



We started work with an introduction to the general techniques of short story writing. I had prepared a reference sheet as a learning resource:

GRADE 7 REFERENCE

WRITING AN EFFECTIVE SHORT STORY

Usually, a short story is a fictional (made-up) account of how someone faces and solves a problem. An effective short story is a short story that works well. A short story that works well communicates in a just few pages how someone faces and solves an interesting or unexpected problem.

You can use the following checklist to find out if your short story works well:

1) Have you started with a simple story idea?

Make sure that you start with an idea of a problem that someone might face. This problem should be intriguing, but also fairly uncomplicated and believable. Your story idea can be made-up or it can be based on fact.

2) Have you developed your story idea by asking the following questions?

Who has this problem?

What is this problem?

When does this problem occur?

Where does this problem occur?

Why does this problem occur?

How does this problem occur?

3) Have you organised the plot of your story into a beginning, middle and end?

The plot is what happens in the story. Make sure that the plot of your story has a clear beginning, middle and end.

4) Have you included memorable characters in the story?

The characters are the people in the story. Make sure that each character in the story is someone whom your readers will remember long after they have read the story.

5) Have you created a realistic setting for your story?

The setting is where and when the story takes place.
Make sure that you have created a setting that fits your story.

6) Have you used effective sentences and paragraphs in your story?

Make sure that all the sentences and paragraphs in your story are effective (see reference pages 2 and 3).

7) Have you used the Writing Process to help you to create an effective short story?

Make sure that you have used the Writing Process to plan and develop your story (see reference page 4).

(Johnson 1997: 138-152)

My plan was to discuss the short story reference sheet thoroughly in class and then ask the learners to write down important terms such as 'plot', 'character' and 'setting' in their vocabulary books. However, things turned out to be a bit chaotic. The learners were excited and eager to start writing their stories; they seemed to find it quite hard to stop and listen. There were some queries about the necessity of using the writing process when writing short stories. We discussed this and most seemed to accept that the writing process would be useful, but I could see that some thought that it was going to detract from the 'fun' of the activity.

The bumpy start to the project left me feeling rather deflated and ineffectual. I was saddened, but not surprised, by this journal entry:

I think this lesson was boring, but most work done at school is supposed to be boring. (Abigail)

Nevertheless, I felt encouraged when I read other more optimistic journal entries:

Today we discussed the reference page. It wasn't fun, but it was important. (Naidene)

I think that there will be a lot of creativity involved. This project gives us a chance to write our own stories and put them into a book. I'm also quite glad that we can choose who we want to be with and have as many stories as we want.
(Maria)

I am so, so, so excited because when we start writing I will feel like a real writer.
(Jenny)

Earlier in the year, I had given my learners a reference page on the writing process. We had used this page as a general guide for previous pieces of writing:

GRADE 7 REFERENCE

USING THE WRITING PROCESS

The Writing Process is a tool to help you to produce effective pieces of writing. An effective piece of writing is a piece of writing that works well. A piece of writing that works well communicates your ideas clearly. The Writing Process can help you to produce many different pieces of writing, for example, e-mails, letters, reports, reviews, diary entries, stories, poems, plays and film scripts.

You can use these steps to follow the Writing Process:

1) PRE-WRITING

This is when you gather and organise your ideas by:

- thinking / brainstorming.
- discussing.
- reading / researching.
- taking notes.
- planning.

2) WRITING A FIRST DRAFT

This is when you get your ideas on paper by:

- writing a rough draft.

3) REVISING

This is when you make your piece of writing better by:

- reading your first draft.
- deciding what works and what doesn't work.
- rearranging words or ideas.
- adding in or taking out parts.
- changing words or ideas to better ones.

(Your thesaurus will be useful for this step.)

4) PROOFREADING

This is when you make your piece of writing correct by:

- checking your first draft carefully for spelling, punctuation and grammar errors.
- making sure that you have used full sentences.
- making sure that all the words have been used correctly.

(Your dictionary will be useful for this step.)

5) PUBLISHING

This is when you share your piece of writing with others by:

- illustrating it.
- binding it in a book.
- recording it on a tape / reading it aloud.
- performing it / presenting it / setting it to music.
- displaying it in a public place.
- making it part of your personal collection of work.

(Johnson 1997: 30-45)

I was hoping that I could work together with my learners to adapt this general writing process framework for use in our Teen Stories project. I envisioned that this adaptation would gradually evolve as the project progressed. To begin, I asked the girls to move into groups to create and present posters of their ideas about pre-writing for teenage short stories.

The pre-writing poster exercise stimulated plenty of noise and activity in the classroom. I soon became aware that there was some confusion about what was required. In order to clarify the task, I had to stop the groups and give them two pre-writing headings: 'Gather Ideas' and 'Organise Ideas'. I also had to explain more about the difference between an initial story idea and a plot.

As my classroom usually ran quite smoothly, I felt rather panicked by the apparent disorganisation of the pre-writing poster lesson. Some of the learners also seemed to be feeling quite stressed by the less ordered atmosphere, while others appeared to enjoy the opportunity to take the initiative. I was disappointed to see that a few of the learners did not really get involved in the task. Afterwards, I found myself feeling unusually exhausted.

Despite the slow start, the groups did present meaningful and interesting ideas on their pre-writing posters:

Pre-Writing

Gather Ideas:

- * look in the newspaper
- * read books
- * watch the news
- * watch *It's About Me* and *Soul Buddyz* on T.V
- * read *Dr Louise* and *Ask Sue* in magazines
- * ask social workers and psychologists
- * ask our parents
- * ask other teenage friends

Organise Ideas:

- * choose story idea
- * ask questions
- * plan clear beginning, middle and end
- * plan characters and setting

(By Casey, Karen, Lindy, Mandy, Jenny, Nicole and Samantha)

I decided to pin up the completed pre-writing charts on the back wall of each classroom. Because I wanted to make sure that everyone really understood the concept of pre-writing for a short story, I wondered if I should ask each learner to write down her own pre-writing checklist before we actually started gathering and organising story ideas.

However, I worried that this extra request might diminish the story writing enthusiasm. It was a relief to acknowledge my doubts in my journal:

Am I being too controlling? Am I taking the fun out of it? Will there be complete chaos if I don't curb their enthusiasm to jump right in? How do I establish a balance? How am I feeling about my role? Will I feel superfluous? How will they feel about my role? Will they feel that I am shirking my responsibility? Am I? Another thought - neither I, nor my learners, are used to me working on my own as I do when we write our journal entries. How will this affect us?

I started to feel more confident when the learners had started their story pre-writing in groups, pairs or by themselves. All the learners were engaged in thinking carefully about short story elements such as character and plot. I was pleased to see that they used the posters as pre-writing guides. There seemed to be intrinsic motivation for the task and the girls debated ideas animatedly. I felt invigorated by the 'writing workshop' atmosphere.

Everyone was on task during lessons and I was able to spend enough time with each group or individual to engross myself in the pre-writing work. At the outset, many of the learners planned to set their stories in the United States of America. They seemed to assume that any teenage story worth telling would take place in the USA. I tried to not to be too prescriptive, but did suggest that a more familiar, local setting might be more convincing.

After each lesson, I collected the learners' writing process books and then gave written comments on the pre-writing. I found that the story ideas were mostly rather loose and

unwieldy to begin with. I tried to give respectful advice that would help to facilitate good work in class. I was feeling more enthusiastic about the project again:

In this project I feel that I am relinquishing some of my control of the classroom. It's quite scary, but also quite liberating. Instead of me carefully choosing groups so as to avoid conflict, I'm letting them choose their own groups - letting underlying conflict surface and then my role as mediator and counsellor has to come to the fore. Also, with the pre-writing, I have to let them make mistakes and try not to overwhelm them with my opinions. It's a delicate balancing act - like reeling in a fishing-line very slowly - being careful not to lose the fish. I still need to be the manager of the classroom, but maybe not the director. By arranging the groups myself, I may avoid conflict, but perhaps it's not acknowledging conflict that already exists. This will keep me on my toes anyway! I need to remember to explore. I'm feeling my way. But, it's a harder way of teaching. It demands consciousness.

Although most of the girls embarked willingly on their own journal entries in the last few minutes of each lesson, I discovered that it was difficult for some of them to stay focused when I sat down at my desk to write in my journal. After a few lessons, I decided that it would be better to write my journal entries while walking around the classroom. This seemed to somehow help the learners not to feel so detached from me. I discovered that I could write (or rather scrawl notes) and, at the same time, keep an eye out for those who needed advice or reassurance. I read the girls' journal entries after school each day and began to really value this ongoing, frank communication from my learners. They, in turn, appeared to appreciate this 'safe space' in which to express their thoughts and feelings:

I think that journal entries are nice to do. You can have five minutes to sit and think about what you've done in a lesson. (Callie)

Journal entries relax me because it feels like I've told someone. (Kate)

I think that journal entries help you to know what we are feeling, and if there is something we don't like you can improve on it. (Leigh)

Journal entries help me understand what I'm feeling. (Bridget)

Those learners who were less enthusiastic about the journal writing felt comfortable enough to convey their opinions to me:

It's annoying when I am on a roll with my story and then get interrupted to write a journal entry. Our entries are helpful when I want to get rid of frustration. (Toni)

No offence, but I think the journal entries are very irritating. (Lisha)

Journal entries are a waste of time. (Devan)

I had expected the journal entries to centre on the learning experiences of the project and was quite surprised when some emotional and peer difficulties surfaced:

Life sucked today. Problems are cropping up in all forms! Friends, test results and all sorts! (Carmen)

Today wasn't the best because someone was quite ugly to me. I know this is not to do with English, but I am quite sad. (Samantha)

Confidential! Today in English I felt all alone. My friend decided to write a story without me. (Lana)

These 'confidential' journal entries made me more aware of how emotional and social factors impinge on learning. I had not planned to give a written response to the journal entries because I did not want the learners to feel that their reflections were being judged or assessed. However, I soon realised that certain entries needed a response. Lana wrote every day about her difficulties with friendships and her lack of confidence in herself. In the end, she was the only one who did not complete a story. I came to understand that until her low self-esteem and all-engrossing social concerns were attended to, she would not be in a position to do creative work. In her journal, Lana explained her understanding of the problem:

I always start a story, get halfway, and then start a new one. I can't write stories because from grade three upwards I lost my creativity and my ability to spell.

I tried to respond to Lana's journal entries with supportive comments and I met with her at break times to listen to her concerns. Although Lana did not finish writing a story, I felt that the project was useful to her because it brought her emotional problems to the fore and enabled me to recommend to her parents that she see an educational psychologist. For nine months following our project, Lana attended psychotherapy sessions, which helped to build her personal, social and academic confidence.

We moved on to the first draft stage of the writing process with a class discussion. This time, only one group chose to create and present a first draft wall chart. The others decided that they were ready to start their first drafts without making posters.

There was a delay in getting underway with the first drafts when we realised that the learners still needed to decide on the form of their stories, for example, letters, diary entries or first person narrative. I suggested that they choose a short story from our class reader, *Classic Teen Stories* (Byars 1999), to use as a model. I was pleased to see the girls using their vocabulary books, as well as their thesauruses and atlases, as writing tools.

Some learners made rapid progress with their first drafts, while others found it difficult to transform their pre-writing into a story. The girls were learning about the importance of reconsidering initial ideas and about deciding what to include or leave out. They were

also discussing their work using ‘story language’ such as ‘setting’ and ‘beginning-middle-end’. I managed to meet with the learners to discuss each story once and sometimes twice in every lesson. I took in the writing process books at the end of each lesson, and my written advice helped the girls to move forward.

Certain learners seemed particularly inspired by and absorbed in their stories. While a few individuals needed prompting to focus, most learners were self-motivated. Groups were learning about negotiating and compromising. One pair was having difficulty in working together, and so they decided to continue with individual stories. I found that the learners seemed to be able to concentrate on their writing for about forty minutes of each sixty-minute lesson. When they had had enough of story writing, they wrote their journal entries, and then they were free to read their library books or to do ‘fun’ puzzle worksheets.

The learners commented on the progress of their first drafts in their journals:

When I started, I roared off with my ideas. I think that they have been overflowing in my head. (Jenny)

We are moving forward nicely and steadily. (Colleen)

I’m not going to say that it’s easy writing the first draft because it is actually much harder than I thought. (Leigh)

We progressed well today and are finally starting to get somewhere. (Bridget)

My story is confusing me. Can you please give me some advice? (Samantha)

Today we worked better than yesterday. (Isabella)

We are taking a long time because we are not agreeing. (Sandy)

It's nice to work in groups on a story because you can hear all the different ideas and you can really use your imaginations. (Jane)

At first it was hard to start the story, but now that we've got it, it is going so nicely. (Mandy)

Can't wait to finish our story. It's going to be very exciting! (Lisha)

I can't wait until the next lesson. (Penelope)

Today was ok, but our group was very rowdy and I felt as if I was the only one contributing to the story. (Abigail)

I could write all day. I think my story is good! (Callie)

My story has changed totally! I think it's better this way. (Jenny)

Those girls who completed their first drafts early opted to work on revising and proofreading posters. Once again, there were some useful points on the charts:

Revising:

Make Your Story Better!!

- * look for interesting adjectives in your thesaurus
- * your setting must sound real
- * make sure that your characters are interesting and believable
- * make sure your readers can relate to your characters
- * make sure your story makes sense

Proofreading:

Make Your Story Correct!!

- * check your spelling in your dictionary
 - * check your punctuation with a friend or Ms Pithouse
 - * make sure you have used full sentences
 - * make sure that all the words have been used correctly
- (By Samantha and Callie)

I was expecting to find that revising and proofreading would be the learners' least favourite part of the writing process. I was, therefore, delighted to see how seriously many learners attended to this finicky work. Most of them chose to revise and proofread their own story and then ask a classmate to look at what they had done. The girls seemed

to be thinking carefully, and they were using their thesauruses and dictionaries as revising and proofreading resources.

The journal entries helped me to identify those learners who were beginning to understand the importance of being active, critical readers of their own work:

For my revising and proofreading I use the posters that we made a lot. They are a very good source because they help me step by step. (Kate)

Today I learnt new words, adding and taking out where necessary. I am really enjoying it. (Melinda)

Revising and proofreading takes a long time, but we're making our story the best we can! (Anna)

At first, I thought that revising and proofreading was a waste of time, but I've found that it is VERY useful. (Mandy)

I've learnt that checking makes all the difference. (Linda)

We have almost finished our revising and proofreading. I feel very relieved. (Natalie)

The more negative comments on revising and proofreading made it clear to me that certain learners needed extra encouragement and individual support at this stage of the writing process:

The revising and proofreading is the hardest part in the writing process. (Devan)

Revising and proofreading is BORING! (Toni)

I hate revising and proofreading. The computer has spell check! (Lana)

When some learners were ready to start typing out their final drafts, I spent time with each class negotiating the publishing of the individual stories. I introduced this activity with a general discussion of democratic decision-making rights and responsibilities. The

discussion seemed to work quite well, and we were able to vote on matters such as page format, font, borders and illustrations. Not everybody contributed publishing ideas, but each girl listened to the suggestions and participated in the voting. One class chose to publish all the stories in the same way, while the other decided to allow more freedom of choice.

After the publishing deliberations, we continued with the writing process:

Most of the learners are now on revising and proofreading or on publishing. Some are planning new stories. Motivation still seems high and almost everyone is engaged. Fiona and Caty need a lot of prompting and aren't making much progress with their story. Caty is losing momentum and seems to be hindering Fiona. Kate asked me to pin up the revising and proofreading poster again, as she is confused about that. I told the class about my MEd thesis supervisor's visit tomorrow. They were quite intrigued and wanted to know if he'd look at their books.

In the course of my regular meetings with my two thesis supervisors, I had asked them to come to my school to observe the Teen Stories project in action. My first supervisor visited when most of the learners were nearing the end of the writing process. He spent time in each classroom, looking at the girls' writing process books and posters, and talking with them about their stories and the project. Both classes seemed to take pride in sharing their Teen Stories work with their 'teacher's teacher'. I think that they believed that they were being taken seriously as learners and as authors.

We set a date for the final drafts. Most learners were still intent on their work. Some learners were writing second or even third stories. The girls appeared to have learnt a lot

from writing the first story, but they did need reinforcement when planning the new stories.

The end of the term seemed to come sooner than I had expected and, suddenly, it was time to finish off the project. I started to worry that I had underestimated the time we would need to spend on the writing process. There was difficulty with typing the final drafts because our school computer room was in great demand by grades one to twelve. I wished that we could have one or two computers in each classroom for publishing.

A number of final drafts came in and I arranged a 'story circle time' for each class to listen and respond to the completed stories. The girls were an attentive audience, and they gave perceptive feedback. Some said that their best part of the project was listening to the other stories.

My second supervisor joined us for the story circle time and her input provided the learners with another adult perspective on their stories. I felt that it was valuable for the learners to have an unfamiliar person in the audience because it gave them the sense that this was an important occasion. I think that the knowledge that a university lecturer had come to our school especially to hear their stories made the girls feel like 'real' authors.

After the story reading sessions, we made class decisions about assembling the two story anthologies. Some learners were restless, and they found it quite hard to stay on task. Owing to several interruptions, we ended up having to rush through the decision-making

process. There were passionate debates, and a few learners had difficulty in accepting the outcome of a vote. Despite some dissatisfaction, we did decide on the book titles, dedications, contents pages, the order of the stories and page numbering. Individuals volunteered to design book covers and title pages. The girls asked me to write an introduction for each anthology.

I was feeling very anxious about only having a few lessons left in which to put the books together. In addition, I had to complete my assessment of each learner's project work before writing my grade seven year-end reports. By this stage, the learners were quite distracted by the approaching Christmas holidays, and two girls had still not completed their initial stories. I wondered how long to wait for the stragglers. Although I really wanted to include everyone, I felt that we were running out of time:

If I repeat this project next year, I'll have to allow more time for assembling the books and for individual assessment. The writing took longer than I thought - but it's been worth it - great stories. Tomorrow, as a precursor to assessment, I want to ask the girls to reflect on their own writing process and on the project. We only have two or three lessons left. Some learners are disappointed that we couldn't do colour printing. Next year, I'll need to consider some financing for that. Kate asked about professional publishing. I'll also need to think about that.

I asked the girls to write a 'Teen Stories Reflection' on: the project as a whole, their own writing process, and any worthwhile knowledge, skills and values that they had gained from the project. The learners approached this task very seriously and they gave thoughtful responses. Interestingly, when we were talking about worthwhile learning, one learner commented that she had not realised how many teen problems had to do with

feeling left out. She said that it had made her aware of the importance of trying to include people.

I tried to involve the learners more directly in the assessment of their project work by asking each one to complete an author self-assessment sheet. I based this sheet on our general grade seven English learning aims: using skills, knowledge and values in competent, critical, creative and cooperative ways. The author self-assessments and my daily notes on each girl's progress enabled me to give every learner a level of achievement for her personal story writing process. The achievement levels were included in the year-end reports.

I had hoped that we would assemble the storybooks together, but we did not have enough class time to do that. I put the two anthologies together during the Christmas holidays, and I gave each learner a copy of her class anthology when school opened again in January 2002. The girls were delighted with their books. I encouraged them to take the anthologies home to show to their families. During the year, several parents told me how impressed they were by the development of their daughters' creative writing skills.

Because I was so proud of my learners' writing, I also distributed some copies of the anthologies among my colleagues. My fellow grade eight English teacher was very excited about the work that had come out of the Teen Stories project. As a result, we decided to follow on from the project with a grade eight poetry-writing module in the first term of 2002.

A bound copy of each book went into the school library, and our librarians commented on the high quality of the stories. The 2002 grade seven learners turned out to be so eager to read the teen storybooks that I had to arrange for additional copies to go into the library to meet the demand.

Once the ‘work’ of the project was over, I was able to take time to reread and savour my learners’ journal entries. I found their reflections on our project deeply satisfying:

This gave us a chance to feel like we are authors. (Jenny)

I liked writing my story because you could write anything you wanted to. (Christine)

I have learnt how to write properly and I could easily write my own stories at home. Thank you. (Toni)

I think that everything we have done was useful, especially for people who needed to let their feelings out. (Kim)

Although I often got irritated with having to write in steps, I see the importance of it now. (Laura)

I think my stories are valuable to me. (Melinda)

I now see that all the books in the library take a lot of work and I respect the authors. (Leigh)

I have never before been able to write a story with someone and put it in a book that anyone else can read. (Natalie)

When I look back at all my work, I feel really proud of myself, proud that I can actually sit down and write a good story. It makes me feel special. (Lindy)

In my learners’ personal responses to the Teen Stories project, I heard echoes of my own powerful feelings about this curriculum experience. This resonance pushed me to try to

come to a deeper understanding of a teaching experience that I had found emotionally, as well as intellectually, compelling (Conle 2000: 190, 202-203). From the communion of feelings and experience, a more explicit motivation for my dissertation began to emerge (ibid: 194).

I became interested in undertaking a written inquiry into my personal curriculum experience in the context of the Teen Stories project. My interest prompted me to consider how to tell this particular teaching story in a way that would enable me to make sense of my experience. I looked forward to achieving a valuable awareness about myself as a teacher and as a human being. I hoped that this new self-knowledge would promote my professional and personal growth.

As I prepared to write my dissertation, I came to realise that, in order to expand my inquiry beyond the boundaries of my individual story and self-knowledge, I needed to take up the challenge of developing theoretical constructs from my lived experience (ibid: 193). I anticipated that this “lived theory” would provide me with conceptual tools to engage with future teaching experiences (Conle 1999: 22-23).

Through reading a range of teacher narratives (Beattie 1995; Craig 2000; Ritchie and Wilson 2000), I became more aware that my teaching journey is interconnected with the work and lives of many other educators. I also became more mindful of the interaction between teachers’ work in schools and their historical, political, social and personal teaching contexts. I considered the pervasive narratives of teaching that encircle South

African teachers, most of whom were 'trained' under the apartheid system of education. This system was determined largely by the ideology of Fundamental Pedagogics, which viewed teachers merely as technicians whose duty it was to present the prescribed official curriculum to learners (Baxen and Soudien 1999: 131). Apartheid era teachers were actively discouraged from interpreting and theorising their teaching experience (Gultig 1999: 61). Despite the post-apartheid shifts in South African teacher education policy, there do not appear to have been widespread changes in teachers' perceptions of their identities and roles (Harley and Parker 1999: 197). Accordingly, I felt a responsibility to carry out my personal inquiry in a way that could contribute to the professional development of other South African teachers, as well as myself (Conle 2000: 208, 212).

And. My research text, therefore, is an attempt to portray, interpret and conceptualise my story of a memorable teaching experience. The desired 'outcome' of the study is the development of a conception that has the potential to generate new modes of curriculum practice for me and other members of my teaching community (ibid: 201; Dewey 1963: 5). Through this inquiry, I strive to 'remake' myself and to offer up "research understandings that could lead to a better world" (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 61).

Chapter Two

Theoretical Setting

In writing this qualitative dissertation, I endeavour to share, make sense of and theorise a personal story of a significant teaching experience. My intention is to move outwards from my personal experience of teaching to a conception of curriculum practice that could contribute to the fruitful growth of teacher work in South Africa.

In this chapter, I step back from my story of a memorable teaching experience (chapter one) to put my inquiry into theoretical perspective. My aim is to show how the conceptual work of scholars in the broad education discourse community inspires and informs this narrative research text.

This study is situated in the field of curriculum studies, in particular, the domain of curriculum inquiry. In my dissertation, I am exploring the “experiential level” (Goodlad 1994: 1263) of the curriculum field. At this level, curriculum inquiry comes as close as possible to actual personal experience (ibid: 1265). The focus is on studying humans and their relations with themselves, each other and their environments in the context of *rob practice* curriculum practice (Clandinin and Connelly 1994a: 414). Experiential curriculum inquiry aims to be practical in the sense of making a constructive difference to the lived experiences of learners and teachers (Goodlad 1994: 1265).

Dewey's writings (1916; 1934; 1963) on the nature and forms of human experience provide the theoretical foundation for this inquiry into my personal teaching experience. The principles of *continuity* and *interaction*, which are central to Dewey's philosophy of experience (Clandinin and Connelly 1994a: 417), guide the narrative interpretation of my curriculum experience that I offer in chapter four of this dissertation.

Dewey explains that his principle of *continuity* “means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (1963: 35). Consequently, when attempting to make sense of my particular teaching story, it is essential for me to keep in mind both the past and future experiences that link up with that story (ibid: 78, 87).

Furthermore, Dewey maintains that because an experience is not static and complete in its self, but is a “moving force”, it can be evaluated “only on the ground of what it moves toward and into” (ibid: 38). For me, this means that to understand the value of my particular teaching experience, I must explore the experience's inherent “potentialities” (ibid: 86). Thus, as part of the interpretation of my Teen Stories curriculum experience, I need to consider how I could use this experience to stimulate further teaching work.

Dewey's principle of continuity also enhances my interpretation of my teaching story by prompting me to look at the vital role that this particular experience plays in my growth as a teacher and as a human being:

[Every] experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality

of subsequent experiences. For it is a somewhat different person who enters into them.

(ibid: 35)

In addition, Dewey's work on continuity reminds me that my seemingly discrete personal experience grows out of the previous experiences of generations of other human beings (ibid: 39). Accordingly, I should not interpret my curriculum experience as if it were something that happened exclusively inside my body and mind at a certain point in time (ibid.).

Dewey's second principle of experience, *interaction*, means that every personal experience is not only connected to the past and the future, but is also the consequence of "a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment" (ibid: 43-44). Thus, my personal teaching story unfolds "in an environment; not merely *in* it but because of it, through interaction with it" (Dewey 1934: 13).

Dewey defines a person's environment as the conditions that "interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had" (1963: 43-44). Other people also form an important part of each individual's environment and, for this reason, Dewey's principle of interaction requires me to understand my personal teaching story as a social process in which I connect with learners, teachers and the wider education community (ibid: 58-59).

Dewey builds on his theory of the nature of experience by identifying and discussing various forms of experience. Relevant to this inquiry, is Dewey's conception of a form of experience that he calls *educative experience*. In chapter four of my study, I use Dewey's notion of educative experience in conjunction with his principles of continuity and interaction to understand my teaching story. Dewey writes of an "organic connection" between personal experience and education and presents education as "a development within, by, and for experience" (ibid: 25, 28). However, he warns that this "belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative" (ibid: 28). Dewey contends that education is a process of growing physically, intellectually and morally, and that a genuinely educative experience is one that facilitates and enhances this kind of growth (ibid: 36). To determine the educative value of my personal teaching experience, therefore, I must consider the personal and professional growth that could result from this experience (ibid: 27).

Furthermore, to be authentically educative, my curriculum experience should allow me to remain open to stimuli and opportunities for ongoing expansion in new directions (ibid: 27). If, on the other hand, my experience impedes or warps the development of further experiences, it is "mis-educative" (ibid: 25). For my experience to be truly educative, it should add to the overall quality of my life by "[arousing] curiosity, [strengthening] initiative, and [setting] up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry [me] over dead places in the future" (ibid: 38; Dewey 1934: 14).

Dewey's construct of a type of experience that he terms *artistic/aesthetic experience* inspires the conceptualisation of my teaching story in chapter five of this dissertation. According to Dewey, "the idea of art as a conscious idea [is] the greatest intellectual achievement in the history of humanity" (1934: 25). He explains that *artistic experience* is the process of doing or making art. This experience involves working "with some physical material, the body or something outside the body, with or without the use of intervening tools, and with a view to production of something visible, audible, or tangible" (ibid: 47). *Aesthetic experience*, on the other hand, is the process of appreciating, perceiving and enjoying something that has been produced by an artist (ibid.). Dewey emphasizes that the artistic and aesthetic are interconnected experiences, and that we should not see them as autonomous processes (ibid.). Thus, in chapter five of my study, I contemplate my teaching story in the light of artistic *and* aesthetic experience.

In Dewey's view, artistic experiences grow from ordinary human experiences (ibid: 11). The artistic experience involves "the clarified and intensified development" of aspects of everyday life (ibid: 46). Dewey discusses various "factors and forces" that favour the transformation of a common human activity such as teaching into a matter of artistic value (ibid: 11). He proposes that artistic experience is stimulated by a sense of intra-personal conflict. Dewey maintains that the artist does not shy away from these moments of dissonance, but rather sees them as a potential source of inspiration (ibid: 15). Thus, the artistic experience is a spiral movement out from an inner tension "toward an inclusive and fulfilling close" (ibid: 56; Dewey 1963: 79). Dewey makes it clear that *the*

work of art is not a product that results from solving a problem, but rather that it is the whole, dynamic, artistic process of “inception, development [and] fulfilment” (1934: 55). To conceptualise my personal curriculum experience as a work of art, therefore, requires me to revisit and re-imagine the whole story of the experience from beginning to completion.

Furthermore, to conceive of my personal teaching experience as an artistic experience, I must take into account Dewey’s passionate belief that the artist “must care deeply for the subject matter upon which skill is exercised”, and that she should wish to share this love through taking up the vocation of art (ibid: 47-48). Dewey asserts that for the artist to successfully share her artistic experience with others, she must cultivate an ongoing awareness of how her audience will perceive her work. To be truly artistic, therefore, her work must also be aesthetic (ibid.). Dewey explains that this interaction between the artistic and aesthetic should engender a heightened vitality in the artist’s consciousness as she engages in “active and alert commerce with the world” (ibid: 19).

To conclude the conceptual portrayal of my teaching story as a work of art I will need to consider Dewey’s view that a genuine artistic experience brings “a fulfilment that reaches to the depths of our being – one that is an adjustment of our whole being with the conditions of existence” (ibid: 17). Dewey explains that after the work of art is done, the artist is left with “the deep-seated memory of an underlying harmony, the sense of which haunts life like the sense of being founded on a rock” (ibid.). Consequently, to be an

artistic experience, my curriculum experience must be “useful in the ultimate degree – that of contributing directly and liberally to an expanding and enriched life” (ibid: 27).

To establish a comprehensive theoretical backdrop for my narrative inquiry, it is also important to include the ideas of contemporary scholars who have drawn on Dewey’s work to propose a narrative view of experience. Scholars such as Clandinin and Connelly (1994a; 1994b; 2000) and Bruner (1986) see narrative as a mode of thought which provides a way of making sense of personal experience. This conception of narrative underlies the interpretation of my personal teaching experience in chapter four.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 189) use Dewey’s principles of continuity and interaction to support their assertion that experience can be understood as human beings in relation “temporally” and “contextually”. Their narrative view of experience is that it happens in a three-dimensional space: “along temporal dimensions, personal-social dimensions, and within place” (ibid: 128-129). Like a story, the structure of an experience, such as my Teen Stories curriculum experience, comprises a ‘setting’ (historical, social and physical location), a ‘plot’ (past-present-future), and ‘characters’ (individuals in relation) (ibid: 2-3; Clandinin and Connelly 1994a: 415-416). As a narrative inquirer, I must seek to understand my experience in the context of its “storied landscape” (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 128).

Bruner (1986: 11) explains that the underlying impetus for a narrative approach to experience is not to establish absolute truth, but rather to portray experience in a lifelike,

believable manner and to understand how human beings come to give meaning to experience (ibid: 11-12). Thus, in this narrative inquiry my focus is on human intentions, actions and consequences. I work to apprehend the particulars of my personal experience, situated in time and place (ibid: 13; Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 19).

According to the narrative perspective, people remember and share their personal experiences in *storied* form because telling and listening to stories are the closest we can come to ‘reliving’ experiences (Clandinin and Connelly 1994a: 415; Denzin 1989: 33). A story of experience is given meaning by the storyteller and is always an interpretive, subjective account (Denzin 1989: 25, 74, 81). Personal stories are connected to and modified by the audience and the times and places in which they are told (Sunstein 2000: x). Thus, each time a person tells the story of her lived experience, the story is adapted (Clandinin and Connelly 1994a: 415). To make sense of my teaching story, it is essential for me to try to penetrate and understand the numerous contexts and changing perspectives from which the story flows (Conle 1999: 15).

Narrative theory also informs the conceptual work that I undertake in chapter five of this dissertation. Narrativists assert that the process of constructing, revising and sharing narratives of experience actually creates psychological and cultural realities in the lives of human beings (Bruner 1986: 43; Conle 1999: 15). Consequently, the act of telling a story of personal experience can have a profound impact on the storyteller’s life (Conle 1999:15; Haarhoff 1998: 3,5). When a person *relives and confronts* a significant or critical experience through narrative, she undergoes a kind of *epiphany* that has the power

to alter the fundamental meaning structure in her life (Denzin 1989: 33, 70-71). In the “re-lived epiphany”, new dimensions of personal character are revealed and the individual is remade (ibid: 33). The effects of such an epiphany can be positive or negative (ibid: 71). The quest for a positive epiphany motivates my conceptual movement from the exploration of my personal teaching experience in chapter four to the visualization of new modes of curriculum practice for myself and for other South African teachers in chapter five.

Contemporary literature on *teacher stories* also informs this narrative research text. Teacher stories are personal experience narratives told in the context of teaching practice (Craig 2000: 17). Teaching is an activity that is both personal and professional; in a teacher story, personal and professional identities are brought into dialogue (Beattie 1995: 135; Ritchie and Wilson 2000: 1, 180-181). Personal narrative is a way for teachers to organise, understand and communicate our professional experiences (Jalongo and Isenberg 1995: 31). Teacher stories also provide those who are not teachers with insights into the complex circumstances and multiple viewpoints of ‘the real world’ of teaching (ibid: 16).

Scholars who study teacher stories (Jalongo and Isenberg 1995; Ritchie and Wilson 2000) suggest that they can form a fundamental part of the process of teachers’ professional development. By relating *and reflecting on* our teaching stories, we can begin to author our own professional growth (Jalongo and Isenberg: 9; Ritchie and Wilson 2000: 1). In

this dissertation, I use narrative to inquire into and to reconsider my professional identity and the way I think about teaching (Jalongo and Isenberg 1995: 100; Beattie 1995: 149).

In order for the impact of my teacher story to move beyond the personal or local, it is essential for me to establish a reciprocal, interactive relationship between experience and theory in this study (Ritchie and Wilson 2000: 15). To theorise my personal experience, I engage in “intellectual practice” (Giroux 1997: 103), which involves using “conceptual tools” (Giroux 1988: 47) to consciously deconstruct and reconstruct my experiential knowledge. According to Giroux (1997: 103), teachers who theorise their professional and personal experience develop an “emancipatory authority” that “challenges the dominant view of teachers as technicians or public servants, whose role is primarily to implement rather than to conceptualise pedagogical practice.” In moving towards a alternative conception of curriculum practice in my dissertation, I hope to contribute to the growth of this kind of teacher authority in South Africa.

My narrative inquiry into a personal curriculum experience will add to a growing body of writing on teacher experience and story. Most of these works emerge from collaboration between researchers and teachers. Recently published narrative studies include an investigation into a teacher’s professional growth and development through inquiry (Beattie 1995), and an examination of how context affects teachers’ knowledge developments (Craig 1995; Craig 2000). Jalongo and Isenberg (1995) and Ritchie and Wilson (2000) explore issues of teacher development and empowerment by presenting and inquiring into a range of teacher stories. A South African study (van Rensburg

[2003]) looks at teachers using narrative as a research tool to examine their teaching experiences. In my study, I am inquiring into curriculum experience as a teacher-researcher. My research text presents, interprets and theorises a personal teaching story.

In this chapter, I have sketched the theoretical setting for this narrative research text. I have shown how the conceptual work of scholars in the wider education field situates and illuminates my study. In the following chapter (chapter three), I recount the research process of my narrative inquiry.

Chapter Three

Narrative Research Process

The subject of this study is a memorable teaching experience that I had during the course of a grade seven short-story writing project. My research aim is to share the story of this curriculum experience with others, to come to a personal understanding of my story and to conceptualise it in order to contribute to the development of a more expansive approach to teaching practice in South Africa.

In this chapter, I describe how my inquiry into the Teen Stories curriculum experience (chapter one) unfolds. For this study, I am working within the research genre of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method that attempts to make sense of life as it is lived (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 78). A narrative inquiry arises from experience, and the narrative inquirer allows experience to show the way (ibid: 188). According to Clandinin and Connelly (ibid: xiv), narrative inquiry is “a dynamic process of living and telling stories, and reliving and retelling stories”. In narrative inquiry, *narrative* is both phenomenon and method:

Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study. To preserve this distinction, we use the...device of calling the phenomenon *story* and the inquiry *narrative*. Thus, we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience.

(Clandinin and Connelly 1994a: 416) ■

A narrative inquiry has three main components (Connelly and Clandinin 1994: 4047-4048). The first component is the *field*, which includes the actual context of and the participants in the study. The fieldwork for a qualitative study in education often takes place in a small, somewhat restricted context (Piantanida and Garman 1999: 133). The physical context of my fieldwork is the independent Catholic girls' school in which I taught for five years. Part of my responsibility at the school was to teach English to two grade seven classes and to one grade eight class. In addition, I fulfilled the role of special educational needs coordinator for the whole school. This entailed identifying learners with special educational needs and monitoring their progress at school. It also involved referring learners for assessments and special intervention where necessary, arranging for educational and emotional/behavioural therapy sessions to take place at school, and liaising with the learners, parents, teachers, school management and outside professionals.

The school in which my fieldwork took place subscribes to the Catholic education ideal of promoting the "common good" (Bryk, Lee and Holland 1993: 289). In my opinion, this school community seems to understand the principle of education for the common good as a commitment to honouring the human dignity of each learner and to forming the conscience of the learners through involvement in charitable work (ibid: 319-320).

Unlike some Catholic schools, however, the school's undertaking to advance the common good does not actively include a focus on inculcating an understanding of and commitment to social justice in all learners (ibid: 341). I believe that an emphasis on social justice should be a vital element of all schooling in the democratic South Africa.

The school in which I taught is well resourced and the facilities are similar to those of nearby, formerly White, government schools. Owing to its independent status, the school receives very limited government funding and its fees are higher than the local government schools. Nevertheless, the fees are lower than the majority of independent schools in the area.

The school caters for two classes of twenty-eight girls per grade from grade one to twelve. About fifty percent of the school's learners are Catholic. Most of the learners come from upper middle-income homes (the exception being those children whose fees are paid by their church or some other individual or organisation). The medium of instruction at the school is English, but the learners' home languages include Afrikaans, Chinese, a variety of European languages, and Zulu. While the majority of the learners are white, there are also black, coloured, Indian and Taiwanese children at the school. Unlike most of the independent schools in the area, this school does not have an academic entrance exam and accepts children with a range of learning needs. Because the school has a policy of inclusion, all children learn in 'mixed-ability' classes.

The participants in my study were fifty-four out of the fifty-six grade seven learners to whom I taught English in 2001. (Two learners did not receive parental consent to participate in my study. Thus, although they took part in the Teen Stories writing project, I did not include their project work in my research.) Forty-eight of the fifty-four learner participants speak English as their first language. The home languages of the other learners are Chinese (one learner), Portuguese (three learners), Spanish (one learner) and

Zulu (one learner). Out of the fifty-four learners, one is black, one is coloured, two are Indian, one is Taiwanese and forty-nine are white. Fourteen of the girls have a specific learning difficulty, one has a hearing impairment, and seven of the learners experienced significant emotional difficulties during their grade seven year.

In the field, I took on the role of participant-researcher or teacher-researcher. At the heart of my fieldwork were the interactions between the curriculum experiences of my learners and myself during the Teen Stories project (Clandinin and Connelly 1994a: 418).

The second key feature of a narrative inquiry is the *field texts*, which form the field 'data' for the study. Field texts are primary narratives that emerge during the study and relate aspects of the researcher and participants' field experiences. The researcher often writes field notes to go together with the field texts. The field texts that inform my inquiry take the form of written journals in which my learner participants and I collected pieces of our private and public classroom experiences during the Teen Stories writing project (ibid: 421). Journals are not simply records of events; they also provide an intimate space for people in the field to mull over happenings, thoughts and feelings (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 103). For the researcher, journals are "memory enhancers that fill in the spaces of forgotten occurrences (outward experiences) and feelings (inward experiences)" (ibid: xiv). To ensure a balance between reflection and information in my field data, I followed Clandinin and Connelly's recommendation of supplementing the journal entries with daily field notes (ibid: 104).

The third fundamental element of a narrative inquiry is the *research text*. This secondary narrative draws on the field, and on the field texts and notes. The research text tells the story of the study, interprets this story and places it in a wider research context. A narrative inquiry, therefore, involves a movement from the situational (the actual experiences in the field) to the conceptual (the written research account) (Piantanida and Garman 1999: 133).

The move from the concrete research context to an interpretive and conceptual study requires the narrative researcher to transform an assortment of field texts and notes into a cohesive research text. It is often in the construction of the research text that the meaning and significance of the field experiences become apparent. To find narrative patterns, tensions and themes for my research text, I sifted through the learner and teacher journal entries, which contained varied accounts of the events of the Teen Stories project and of personal responses to them (Clandinin and Connelly 1994a: 423; Connelly and Clandinin 1994: 4048; Piantanida and Garman 1999: 104).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 105-106) explain that in the writing of a narrative research text it is essential for the researcher to be mindful that her personal approach to the field influences the production of field texts and notes:

[It] makes a great deal of difference if we distance ourselves from events in order to record notes or if we actively participate in events as a partner. Similarly, it makes a difference as we create field [texts] if we see ourselves as recorders of events “over there” or if we see ourselves as characters in the events.

They also emphasize the need to remain aware that during the narrative inquiry process “researchers’ personal, private and professional lives flow across the boundaries into the

research site” (ibid: 115). Consequently, as a narrative inquirer, I need to pay close attention to my experience as a teacher-researcher and to make myself visible in my research text through my own lived and shared stories (Connelly and Clandinin 1994: 4048; Clandinin and Connelly 2000: xxiv).

In addition, I must strive to be sensitive to the stories that were “already being lived, told, relived, and retold” in the classroom and to realise that my contact with my learner participants in my role of teacher-researcher will have resulted in new stories being told (Clandinin and Connelly 1994a: 418). It is also important for me to bear in mind that who I am will have had an impact on the research stories that emerged from the field, and that these stories will have had a reciprocal effect on me (ibid: 423; Conle 1999: 8). Thus, the writing of this narrative research text should become a process of discovery in which I find out more about my self and my learner participants in relation to my research (Conle 2000:194; Richardson 1994: 516, 523). This growth in awareness of my self and of my learners should empower me to expand my identity as a teacher and, thus, to improve my teaching work.

Denzin (1994: 505) explains the narrative writing process in this way:

Understanding and mystery are central to the writing project. [The] writer unravels a mystery, discovering and then understanding what was previously hidden and unclear. He or she cuts to the heart of an experience, disclosing its immediate, as well as deep, symbolic and long-lasting meanings for the people involved.

Clandinin and Connelly (1994a: 417) add that experience is often tangled and perplexing, and so is experiential research. They (ibid.) go on to explain that a narrative inquirer’s

work within a specific context can reveal a range of potentially interesting stories. For this reason, the researcher should strive to remain open to multiple research puzzles and numerous directions for inquiry when embarking on the construction of a research text.

In the initial stage of the writing process of this research text, my research topic was not yet clear to me and I worked through a range of interesting issues that had come forward from my fieldwork. A more defined inquiry focus emerged and developed through the process of narrative writing (Conle 2000: 191) and through reading and rereading relevant literature. Reference to other texts enabled me to consider my inquiry from a broader perspective, and to keep in mind questions of social import (ibid: 209; Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 136). Through my reading, I came to recognise that as a narrative inquirer “it is crucial to be able to articulate a relationship between [my] personal interests and sense of significance and larger social concerns expressed in the works and lives of others” (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 122).

A narrative research text frequently begins with a portrayal of the story of the research project (Clandinin and Connelly 1994a: 418-419). In telling this story, the writer attempts to re-create for the reader the complexity of the context, intentions and processes of the study (Denzin 1994: 505, 507; Piantanida and Garman 1999: 133). This descriptive portrayal provides the basis for later interpretation and conceptualisation (Denzin 1994: 505). In chapter one of my research text, I use the form of a self-story to structure the initial portrayal of my experience. A self-story is a personal narrative, told by an individual in the context of a particular event. The self of the storyteller is at the

centre of the narrative. My self-story forms a narrative of and about my self as a teacher, in relation to an unforgettable curriculum experience (Denzin, 1989: 43-44).

The initial, descriptive portrayal in chapter one provides material for a narrative interpretation of my teaching story in chapter four of this dissertation. In chapter four, I attempt to uncover potentially valuable meanings for my personal teaching experience by making sense of what I have learned in the field and communicating these understandings to my reader (Denzin 1994: 500). My intention is to engage in a creative process that distils and illuminates the multiple meanings of my experience (ibid: 504). I endeavour to unite my lived experience and intellectual practice in the interpretive act (Conle 1999: 26).

Clandinin and Connelly (1994a: 417) advise that a narrative interpretation of personal experience should be “simultaneously focused in four directions: inward and outward, backward and forward.” The terms *inward* and *outward* connect to Dewey’s (1963) principle of interaction between the internal and existential conditions of experience, while *backward* and *forward* link up with Dewey’s (ibid.) principle of continuity of experience. In chapter four of this research text, I engage in the interpretive act by moving inward and outward, backward and forward through my ongoing personal experience, to find and explore a core narrative tension in my Teen Stories curriculum experience (Conle 2000: 193).

A narrative inquiry should move beyond interpretation to the creation of new conceptions (Conle 1999:27). In chapter five, I make use of Dewey's (1934) construct of artistic/aesthetic experience to conceptualise my personal teaching experience. My intention is to awaken "possibilities for reliving, for new directions and new ways of doing things" (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 189). I believe that my key task as a narrative inquirer is to develop a conception of my experience that could play a part in generating fruitful growth and change in the South African teaching community (Clandinin and Connelly 1994a: 418).

In this chapter, I have illustrated the course of my curriculum inquiry from the fieldwork through to the construction of this narrative research text. In the next chapter (chapter four), I offer a narrative interpretation of my personal Teen Stories curriculum experience.

Chapter Four

A Narrative Interpretation of my Curriculum Experience

This study has grown out of a memorable experience in my life as a teacher. In the course of this qualitative research text, I follow the path of narrative curriculum inquiry by presenting my story of a lived teaching experience, probing this self-story for personal meanings and attempting to reconfigure it to embody new possibilities for good teaching practice in South Africa.

In this chapter, I endeavour to understand and explain the personal significance of my Teen Stories curriculum experience (chapter one). To this end, I look at this teaching story as a part of my unfolding life story. I search inward and outward, backward and forward through my ongoing personal experience to uncover, penetrate and lay open the personal tension that drives this narrative inquiry, much as an unresolved conflict or problem propels the plot of a short story (Clandinin and Connelly 1994a: 417; Conle 2000: 195-198).

Conle (2000: 192) explains how a narrative inquirer's life story provides a context for making meaning of personal experience:

[We] are burdened with a past for which we are accountable – even though it is not all of our own making – and with a future that is both unpredictable as well as foreshadowed by preconceived images of it.... Constraints of the past and foreshadowed futures at each point of the writing [of a narrative inquiry] suggest particular horizons within which it can proceed.

My effort to comprehend how my Teen Stories experience follows on from previous personal experiences has evoked a collage of memories from my own schooldays. In trying to recognise the powerful energy that pushes me to do something important with this particular curriculum experience, I have reencountered my uneasy, unresolved relationship with the educational privilege that characterised my school experience as a white, middle-class, high-achiever in apartheid South Africa. In addition to revisiting my discomfort at having been advantaged by the fundamentally unjust apartheid education system, I have also become more conscious of my misgivings about the actual *educative value* (Dewey 1963: 25-38) of my privileged school experience.

The apartheid policy of ‘separate education’ that was in place for the duration of my schooling (1979-1990) meant that South African schoolchildren were set apart according to the National Party government’s system of racial grouping. Furthermore, learners who were categorised by the education authorities as being physically or intellectually ‘deficient’ were excluded from mainstream schools.

In practice, the policy of separate education in South Africa ensured that a rigid hierarchy of educational privilege circumscribed all children’s school lives. While ‘white’ schools received a disproportionately greater amount of government funding and had superior facilities and resources, ‘black’, ‘coloured’ and ‘Indian’ schools were actively disadvantaged in countless respects (Dolby 2001: 21-23; Goduka 1999: 84; Morrow 1998: 243; Morrow and King 1998: xii). The alternative provision made for learners with special educational needs also varied according to race. The majority of special

schools were poorly resourced and many children with special educational needs had no access to schooling (DOE 1997: 11; 21).

During my early primary school years at a white government school, my separation from other South African children because of restrictive categories of race and intellectual or physical ability did not have much personal meaning for me. My social life took place in the confines of a white middle-class suburb. Moreover, I was in the 'A' class at school and did not ever learn together with or forge friendships with the children who were relegated to the 'B', 'C' or 'mixed ability' classes. Although I had some awareness of the system of separate schooling, I did not really know any children of other races or different abilities and so did not *feel* our separation.

On some level, I must have known about the unequal distribution of resources between schools because I caught glimpses of rural black schools on long road journeys. What I did not see were the urban black, coloured and Indian schools. I do not think that I realised then that these schools did not have the libraries, playing fields and swimming pools that were standard features of white schools.

In my later primary school years, I did become more informed about and critical of the discriminatory practices of the apartheid education system. Because modern South African history was not part of the prescribed school syllabus, my knowledge came from unofficial sources such as my older brother. Another source of 'extra-curricula' ideas was my grade six teacher who often made space in our school day for informal Zulu

lessons and discussions about current political issues.

As I approached my teens, I also became more conscious of the practice of intellectual differentiation within my primary school, which offered the A class children additional, purportedly superior learning opportunities and the ‘best’ teachers. I came to realise that my classmates and I were more likely to be chosen for coveted positions of responsibility and less likely to be suspected of misbehaviour. Our less advantaged peers appeared to regard us with some suspicion and resentment and we did not mix socially with them. I remember feeling intimidated and fascinated by the children in the mixed ability classes who seemed to have a reckless glamour that the A class ‘nerds’ lacked.

Despite the privileged treatment that I received as a high-achiever, I remember my senior primary school years as an intellectually uninteresting, often stifling, time. Learning to read and write in junior primary school had been exciting and empowering. After that, however, stimulating learning experiences were infrequent. My academic success was rarely the outcome of joyful learning. I think that it stemmed mainly from a personal sense of responsibility and a desire for adult approval. I gained the most intellectual and aesthetic satisfaction from reading books of my choice (I usually kept one open in my desk and read it surreptitiously at intervals during lessons), and from writing my own stories after school.

I do not remember tackling classroom creative writing tasks with the same enthusiasm as my independent story writing. At school, composition lessons usually involved being

required to write on a set topic for a limited period. This was standard practice in South African schools where creative writing was regarded as a talent that could not be taught and genuinely creative thinking was not often facilitated or encouraged (Haarhoff 1998: 4,11). I know that for many of my classmates, composition exercises or tests were stressful and demoralising ordeals.

At the end of grade seven, I was expected to progress to the local white government high school. However, I wanted to follow my best friend to an independent girls' school in my area. My father had died when I was in grade six, and my mother could not afford private school fees on a nurse's salary, but I was able to attend the school of my choice through an academic scholarship.

At that time in South Africa (1986), independent white schools could admit a limited number of children from other race groups (Dolby 2001: 24-25). I remember feeling a kind of relief (and, I have to admit, a sense of moral superiority) about being able to make a choice to go to a so-called 'multi-racial' school.

Although my awareness of racially slanted educational privilege in South Africa increased during my high school years, my understanding of its impact on other people's lives was still constrained by my mostly white environment. With the exception of two Indian girls, all the learners in my grade at secondary school were white. One of the Indian girls had attended primary school in England and her tales of school life with no uniforms and other unheard of freedoms enthralled me. I do not know where the other

girl's primary schooling took place. I presume she must have attended an Indian school, but I do not remember any discussion about it and I did not gain any insight into her earlier school experiences.

By going to a private high school I moved into an even more 'intellectually exclusive' atmosphere. Like many white independent schools in South Africa, my secondary school required all applicants to write an entrance exam and only accepted learners who appeared to have above average academic potential. As a 'scholarship girl', I remember feeling weighed down by a constant environmental pressure to achieve outstanding academic results. Although the learning opportunities offered to me in high school were not generally much more inspiring than my senior primary experiences, I was motivated to work hard by an unspoken fear of not being good enough. In what I have come to recognise as a way of including my thoughts and feelings in largely disaffective curriculum experiences, I developed a practice of writing for my own pleasure and emotional release outside of school, and then adapting these personal stories and poems to fit the set topics in class.

After high school, I went on to study at university. As an undergraduate, I encountered students who had attended a range of schools under the apartheid system. By studying with people from other race groups, I started to understand more about the discrepancies between our schooling.

I discovered more about the educational deprivation of the majority of South African

children through my experiences as a volunteer tutor for secondary school learners. These learners from black township schools came to the university campus for extra lessons on Saturday mornings. I enjoyed the contact with the learners, but felt frustrated by the limited intervention that I could make. It was at this time in my life that I really began to comprehend the immorality and destructive power of the apartheid system of race-based educational privilege.

It was not until I started my career as a teacher in 1995 that I began to interact closely with learners who were identified as having special educational needs. Through this contact, I started to gain some insight into how it feels for a child in a mainstream school to be set apart by continual academic and/or social and emotional difficulty. I also began to grasp the extent to which the South African school system had failed children with different learning abilities.

In the eight years that I have been teaching, I have become increasingly aware of an internal dissonance with the *mis-educative* (Dewey 1963: 25) system of privilege that enveloped my school experiences in a shroud of separateness and constraint (Goduka 1999: 94). I have recognized my school experiences in the writings of scholars such as Connell (1993: 15) who argues that, “[an] education that privileges one child over another is giving the privileged child a corrupted education, even as it gives him or her a social or economic advantage.”

My personal need to understand how the experience of apartheid-era educational

privilege impacted on my learning and on my self-concept has led me to question the discourses of privilege that were widely taken for granted during my time at school (Giroux 1993: 77; Gough 2000: 3; Ritchie and Wilson 2000: 36). By achieving my own agency within my story of mis-educative privilege, I hope to become be “better equipped to turn [my] own discourses and practices against those which constrain [me]” (Gough 2000: 4).

In the knowledge of this underlying personal and professional tension, I have been engaged in a process of revisiting the self-story that I told in chapter one in an attempt to find out and to make clear *what it is* about this Teen Stories curriculum experience that is so emotionally and intellectually valuable to me. I now recognise that the Teen Stories project enabled me to experience, for the first time in my life, the growth of *a community of authors*. Through reflection on my experience, reference to others’ stories of teaching writing (Five 1999; Gregory 1990; Hoffman and Sharp 1999; Kitagawa 1999; McLure and Rief 1999; Phenix 1990; Roosevelt 1998; Zaragoza 1998; Zaragoza and Vaughn 1995) and broader reading across the education field, I have come to understand that this community of authors developed in my classroom through the interaction of *contribution, sharing and response*, and *ownership*.

From the outset of the Teen Stories writing project, my learners were made aware that I wanted to know their thoughts and feelings about this curriculum experience so that I could use their ongoing *contributions* to develop the project as we went along, rather than simply follow a preordained course of learning (Kitagawa 1999:

154). Because I asked my learners to vote on whether or not to take part in the project, they understood that they were being given some power over the direction of the actual curriculum. Their journal entries revealed that this opportunity to choose made them feel like valued participants in classroom curriculum decision-making. I believe that this initial emphasis on genuine learner input situated the Teen Stories project in a more open, dialogic classroom space than either I, or my learners, had previously experienced.

As the project progressed, my learners continued to trust that I would value and act on their insights into our classroom curriculum practice (Zaragoza and Vaughn 1995: 47). The provision of lesson time for regular journal entries made it possible for each learner to convey both positive and negative opinions about the evolution of the project to me. In addition, the ongoing use of democratic strategies to make curriculum decisions in the classroom allowed each learner to participate directly in determining how the project unfolded.

My desire to remain receptive to my learners' thinking throughout the project meant that I had to make myself more vulnerable in the classroom than I had before (Kesson 1999: 98). It was often quite difficult for me to remain flexible and open to new contributions from the learners and to the necessarily unpredictable course of the story writing process (Goleman 1996: 273; Kitagawa 1999: 155). As the project progressed, it became evident to me that the key resources that I could use to chart my way through this dynamic learning journey were my learners and my self (Ainscow 1999: 4).

The second factor that I believe supported the growth of our community of authors was a ‘writing workshop’ atmosphere that allowed for increased freedom of movement in my classroom and fostered genuine *sharing and response* among the participants in the Teen Stories project (Kitagawa 1999: 148; Zaragoza and Vaughn 1995: 45). Through sharing their stories with one another and me at various stages in the writing process, my learners gained valuable experience of discussing and reflecting on their writing, as well as useful advice about their writing (McLure and Rief 1999: 42; Zaragoza and Vaughn 1995: 45). In many cases, by reading their stories aloud and trying to explain their work to others, the learners became more critical readers of their own writing (Phenix 1990: 31). Moreover, when sharing their precious stories with others, my learners began to realize that they were making themselves vulnerable and that their response to other writers who took the same risk should be as encouraging and helpful as possible (Five 1999: 187).

As a teacher-participant in the project, I took on the important role of paying close attention to and responding to the unique creative writing process of each learner (Ainscow 1999: 6; Five 1999: 187; Roosevelt 1998: 81; Zaragoza and Vaughn 1995: 46). I was able to discuss every learner’s work in regular meetings in class and I also managed to give written advice in the writing process books after each lesson. In this way, I attempted to integrate my ongoing evaluation of each learner’s writing into the course of the actual learning experience (Phenix 1990: 98). By keeping notes on the development of each learner’s writing process, I was able to build my knowledge of every individual’s achievements to inform my end-of-term assessment (ibid; Zaragoza 1998: 93).

At all times, I tried to show my respect for my learners by responding to their writing in constructive and supportive ways. I also endeavoured to make the learners aware that they were free to accept or reject my writing advice (Five 1999: 187-188; Zaragoza 1998: 82).

In retrospect, I realize that my participation in the classroom creative writing process would have been enhanced if I were also writing and sharing stories within the community of writers (Gregory 1990: 1; McLure and Rief 1999: 49).

Although I could draw on my memories of my adolescent creative writing experiences, and I was working on my academic writing at the time of the project, I believe that I would have been better placed to advise and support my learners if I had actively participated in this communal Teen Stories writing endeavour (McLure and Rief 1999: 47).

Sharing and response in the classroom were enhanced by the learners' journal entries. The journals, which had started off as academic journals, became a safe space in which some learners chose to examine and share their personal thoughts and feelings (ibid: 35). Learners were able to mull over and discuss happenings that were of vital importance to them, but that would not usually come up in an English lesson (Goleman 1996: 267). These more personal journal entries enabled me to gain a fuller understanding of and establish deeper relationships with individual learners (Ainscow 1999: 3; Kesson 1999: 98; McLure and Rief 1999: 34). Through reading and responding to these entries I

became more conscious of the emotional responsibilities that teaching entails and of the extent to which emotional and social issues affect learning (Connell 1993: 63).

The third important element of the Teen Stories project that facilitated the development of our classroom community of authors was a feeling of learner *ownership*. Five (1999: 188) explains that ownership occurs in the writing process when learners are at liberty “to follow their own interests, to take some control over their learning, and consequently to accept and feel greater responsibility for it”.

Although my learners were somewhat limited in their choice of topic by having to situate their stories within the broad framework of a teenage story, many of their journal entries expressed their pleasure at being given a chance to write their “own” stories. The learners seemed to feel that their interests, preoccupations and desires were being acknowledged as important because they were able to choose particular story topics that were significant to them (ibid: 187; Goleman 1996: 263; Zaragoza and Vaughn 1995: 43). I believe that so many of my learners were really inspired by and absorbed in crafting their stories because they had a sense that they were free to be true to their own concerns when writing. Zaragoza (1998: 78) confirms the value of empowering learners to pursue their own interests when writing:

When children are given the time and opportunity to choose and develop personal topics, they begin to feel control over the writing process....Writing becomes connected to their personal work, activities and social interactions....Their control over decisions produces the desire and motivation to learn and be active participants in the writing process.

Because the Teen Stories project involved the writing of fiction, my learners had the freedom to imagine new stories as well as to draw on their own or others' teenage experiences (Gregory 1999: 192). While some stories were based wholly on real events, most were created from diverse snippets of experience and imagination that were fused and transformed through the writing process. The extent to which my learners commented in their journals on the creative possibilities of this writing project made me more aware that genuinely creative learning experiences were not an integral part of their school lives (Haarhoff 1998: 46). The Teen Stories project seemed to offer the learners "rich opportunities for individual and collective meaning making" (Kesson 1999: 99). One learner explained that the project enabled her to make use of ideas that had been "overflowing in [her] head." I believe that the project allowed me space and time to acknowledge and cultivate my learners' largely unexplored desire to use written language to actively create their own fictions, rather than merely to decode or transcribe adult narratives (ibid: 93; Ritchie and Wilson 2000: 43; Zaragoza and Vaughn 1995: 46).

The Teen Stories project required me to step back from the chalkboard and to bear witness to the dynamic encounter of the learner-writers "and the world of culture, imagination, morality, hope, and doubt" (Roosevelt 1998: 82). My work in this context of the creation of fiction was to make meaning with my learners by being a serious, appreciative and reflective reader of their stories (ibid: 81-82).

Another significant characteristic of project was that it gave my learners the opportunity to work through, understand and 'own' the processes involved in writing a short story.

According to Phenix (1990: 35), this explicit knowledge of how to go about a task, step by step, is essential to learners' success in writing. I believe that because my learners were guided through the writing process that all authors experience in some form (ibid: 1; Zaragoza 1998: 77), and were allowed to concentrate on each aspect of writing at a time in the process when it was most meaningful, they felt more in control of their own creative writing work. Consequently, almost every learner was enabled to author a story that she was proud of (Phenix 1990: 35-36; Zaragoza 1998: 78).

The demanding, often frustrating journey through the writing process helped my learners to appreciate that good writing involves hard work and commitment and that to produce a final draft of a story is an admirable achievement. Their journal entries and discussions in class revealed that the project had given them an opportunity to feel like 'real' authors, rather than like novices learning to write (Hoffman and Sharp 1999: 8; Phenix 1990: 60). The learners' reflections on the project also revealed that they felt empowered and inspired by this experience to continue writing stories for their own pleasure in the future (Phenix 1990: 94-95, 124).

The learners' realization that they really could be authors was cemented by the knowledge that their stories would be published in a book and placed in the school library along with the work of professional authors (Zaragoza 1998: 77, 83). Phenix (1990: 60) explains how the publication of learners' written work reinforces their sense of ownership:

Our students will develop as writers as they write for real purposes and real audiences....Pride in authorship is probably the greatest motivator there is when it comes to getting students to write and develop as writers. We have taken the first step in creating authors when we publish their work.

My interpretation of the Teen Stories curriculum experience as the evolution of a community of authors in my classroom has grown out of an exploration of my experiences of educational privilege. Through this interpretive work, I have become conscious that the teaching story that I wish to author in the future is one in which educational privilege is not understood as an advantage that is available only for a few, but rather as a sacred and vital civil right for each South African child. I have come to understand that my personal tension with the constraints of exclusive educational privilege has propelled me towards my teaching intention of facilitating inclusive, supportive and genuinely educative classroom curriculum experiences for every learner. I believe that the development of curriculum experiences, such as the Teen Stories project, that privilege the inclusion, affirmation and fruitful growth of every learner's self could give rise to the human interconnectedness, creativity and openness to ideas and experiences that is the basis of truly democratic schooling.

In this chapter, I have tried to make sense of and convey the personal meaning of my Teen Stories teaching experience. I have interpreted this experience in the context of my past and future learning and teaching experiences. In the following chapter (chapter five) I move beyond interpretation to offer a conceptualisation of my personal curriculum experience.

Chapter Five

Coming to a Conceptualisation of my Curriculum Experience

In this dissertation, I engage in narrative inquiry into a personal curriculum experience. In chapter one, I tell the story of my teaching experience in the context of a grade seven Teen Stories creative writing project. I then go on to paint a theoretical backdrop for my inquiry in chapter two and to discuss my research process in chapter three. In chapter four, I interpret my curriculum story in an attempt to gain self-knowledge to inform my future work as a teacher.

In this chapter, I use the ideas that I have offered in chapters one to four to generate a conceptualisation that will move my particular curriculum experience beyond the personal and situate it in a broader context. I also consider the potential value of this conceptualisation for future curriculum work in my South African teaching community.

I begin this chapter with a brief discussion of the factors that influence pervasive perceptions of the relationship between teachers and curriculum in South Africa. Most teachers and teacher educators who are currently working in South Africa attended school and underwent their initial teaching training in the context of the rigid and authoritarian curriculum policies of the apartheid education system. Under this system, teachers were expected to act simply as technicians whose task it was to deliver the official curriculum that had been developed by ‘experts’ (Baxen and Soudien 1999: 131). Teacher education focused mainly on ensuring the efficient delivery of prescribed content. Neither pre-

service nor in-service teachers were encouraged or empowered to inquire into, or to shape, their lived curriculum experiences (Gultig 1999: 58).

It is important to note that not all South African teachers meekly accepted the apartheid state's narrow, technicist construction of their position in relation to the curriculum. This is illustrated by teacher involvement in the development of the People's Education initiative, which challenged the repressive apartheid education system and highlighted the central role that teachers play in actual curriculum experiences in schools (Kraak 1999: 22-23). However, this initiative did not seem to have a widespread influence on the mis-educative (Dewey 1963) apartheid era curriculum experiences of South African teachers (Jansen 1999b: 5).

The present curriculum experiences of South African teachers are being lived out in a demanding environment of prolonged, complex and controversial curriculum transformation (Christie 1999: 190; Jansen 1999a: 3). For policy changes to make a real difference to what happens in schools, it is essential that teachers be given sufficient time and support to engage critically and creatively with the curriculum in their daily work (Deacon and Parker 1999: 72; Harley and Parker 1999: 186; Kanpol 1997: 140).

Nonetheless, despite an obvious legacy of inadequate teacher education and constrictive curriculum experiences, current teacher development in South Africa appears to be of a largely superficial nature and to be based on an extremely limited, instrumentalist conception of the dynamic relationship between teachers and curriculum transformation (Jansen 1999b: 6; Pithouse 2001: 154-158; Gultig 1999: 61).

I do not believe that the Teen Stories curriculum experience that I found so intellectually and emotionally interesting corresponds to the narrow perception of the teacher as a curriculum technician. I have, therefore, chosen to use Dewey's (1934) construct of interconnected artistic/aesthetic experience (see chapter two) as a theoretical framework on which to build a more appropriate conceptualisation of my teaching story. To support this conceptual portrayal, I make reference to the writings of Eisner (1995; 1998) and Greene (1994; 1998; 2000) on the interrelation of art and education.

When developing his construct of artistic/aesthetic experience, Dewey makes it clear that the *work of art* is not the finished piece that is produced by the artist and then witnessed by her audience. Instead, he envisions the work of art as the active course of an artistic/aesthetic experience from beginning to completion (Dewey 1934: 55; Eisner 1995: 2; Greene 1998: 50). To conceptualize my lived teaching experience as an artistic/aesthetic experience, therefore, means that I am theorising the whole curriculum experience. This experience started when I first began to think about developing a grade seven English curriculum unit, continued through the unfolding of the Teen Stories project, and culminated in the writing of this narrative research text.

According to Dewey (1934: 11), artistic/aesthetic experiences are noteworthy forms of everyday life experiences. The teaching story that I explore in this study was part of my day-to-day working experience. By means of narrative curriculum inquiry, I have come

to realise that this particular teaching experience was memorable for me because it illuminated and magnified important aspects of my self and my life as a teacher, just as artistic/aesthetic experiences shed light on and amplify notable facets of daily life (ibid: 46). I now understand that by making space for the Teen Stories writing project in the formal grade seven English curriculum, I was also making space in the actual curriculum for an artistic/aesthetic teaching experience that would feed my own professional and personal growth (Eisner 1998: 88; Eisner 1995: 1).

Dewey (1934: 11, 15, 56) argues that an ordinary daily activity, such as teaching, can develop into an experience that has artistic value when the actor is inspired to respond to a strong intra-personal conflict. Through a narrative interpretation of my Teen Stories teaching experience (chapter four), I have recognized my underlying desire to offer a genuinely educative (Dewey 1963) curriculum experience to each of my grade seven learners. I have become conscious that this curriculum experience was driven by my personal dissonance with the restrictive practices of educational privilege that circumscribed my own schooling. Because I was trying to acknowledge each learner as a unique human being, and could not rely on a general 'recipe' for effective teaching (Eisner 1998: 84), I became involved in a vital, situated, questioning encounter with the lived curriculum of the Teen Stories project (Greene 1994: 498, 505; Greene 1998: 49). Active moves toward resolving inner tensions led to the opening of new, unfamiliar, and often daunting teaching and learning possibilities within my everyday work (Greene 1994: 494, 499). By way of inquiry, I have become conscious that "the wide-awakeness, the thoughtfulness, the sense of the unexpected" (ibid: 494-495), which sets

artistic/aesthetic experiences apart from ordinary experiences, is what enhanced my Teen Stories curriculum experience.

Another force that Dewey believes will transform an unremarkable experience into an artistic/aesthetic experience is the artist's hunger to share her love for her subject matter with her audience (Dewey 1934: 47-48; Eisner 1998: 89). Through my teaching work in the Teen Stories writing project, I was able to share some part of my long-standing love for fiction and story-writing with my learners. By having the opportunity to give life to knowledge and skills that I care deeply about, I could facilitate a classroom atmosphere that fostered a significant curriculum experience for me and for my learner participants (Greene 1998: 48-49; Greene 1994: 495).

Dewey (1934: 47-48) explains that for an artist to successfully share her chosen art with others, she must strive to experience her work from her audience/participants' perspective, as well as her own. To achieve and sustain this balance between self and other requires an ongoing expansion of consciousness and continually new ways of seeing on the part of the artist (ibid: 19). Thus, teaching as an artistic/aesthetic act demands that the teacher is "*artistically engaged*": that she engrosses herself in her work, but also remains aware of what she is doing and how it is experienced by her learners (Eisner 1995: 4-5; Eisner 1998: 85). I believe that because I was involved in a process of curriculum inquiry while I was teaching in the Teen Stories project, my work became both subject and object of my experience (Greene 2000: 2). By having daily access to my learners' thoughts and feelings about the project through their journal entries, I was

able to maintain an awareness of their multiple readings of my teaching work (Greene 1994: 498-499). I was empowered to see through the eyes of my learner participants, as well as my own, and was continuously challenged to review my work from different perspectives (ibid: 494, 499). I also received ongoing affirmation from my learners that supported my own sense of satisfaction and achievement in my work (Eisner 1998: 87).

I would argue that this personal sense of accomplishment in my teaching work is congruent with Dewey's conviction that an authentic artistic/aesthetic experience generates a profound sense of fulfilment that sustains the artist in her future work and plays a significant part in expanding and enriching her personal and professional life (1934: 17, 27). My curriculum experience in the Teen Stories project was not only deeply rewarding (Eisner 1998: 87), but it also pushed me to engage in a process of self-discovery and awakening that I believe has opened new paths and possibilities for me (Greene 1998: 46; 1994: 506). By taking part in, and inquiring into this artistic/aesthetic curriculum experience, I have become more conscious of tensions and intentions that lie beneath and influence my daily work and I have gained a fuller picture of who I am and who I want to be as a teacher (ibid: 46-47, 49-50; Greene 2000: 4; Eisner 1995: 4).

In my opinion, a genuine acknowledgment from all South African education stakeholders that teachers' curriculum experiences can be conceived of as artistic/aesthetic experiences, rather than as simply technical experiences, could contribute to the fruitful development of curriculum work in our schools. To play a part in actual curriculum transformation, we teachers need to expand our own understanding of who we are and of

what kind of work we can do (Kesson 1999: 98). Such an expansion of consciousness requires the re-growth and conscious, sustained application of professional and personal skills that the apartheid education system sought to suppress: self-reflection, critical inquiry, empathy and imagination (Harley and Parker 1999: 197; McLaren 1988: xx; Gough 1999: 63; Pink 1990: 151; Kincheloe 1991: 15; Kincheloe and Steinberg 1999: 241; Kesson 1999: 101). In addition, it requires that the individual teacher regularly experiences her work as something that can be deeply engrossing, fulfilling and affirming, and thus can enrich her life (Eisner 1998: 87; Kanpol 1997:150; Kesson 1999: 93). Through my lived experience, and my reading of the work of many inspirational teachers and curriculum scholars, I have come to believe that if we can live our teaching lives in the knowledge of what is possible, we will more readily open ourselves to the joyful, frustrating, painful and gratifying experiences that we encounter each day in the classroom.

Significant curriculum change in schools also demands a sincere recognition from education officials, policy-makers, teacher educators and school managers that teachers are not merely conduits for predetermined curriculum outcomes (Eisner 2000: 347; Gultig 1999: 71). Even when one embraces teaching as a vocation, it is difficult to sustain the intellectual and emotional energy that good teaching work demands. We often put aside the aspects of our work that truly excite us, and that we do really well, in favour of achieving prescribed, measurable outcomes or meeting external expectations. If we are to aspire towards the ideal of teaching as an art, then we must be allowed the space and time in the school day to cultivate our curriculum artistry and to develop our

own strategies for balancing official obligations and personal fulfilment (Eisner 1998: 88; Eisner 2000: 355; Greene 2000: 3).

As well as time and space, teacher-artists require truly educative learning experiences that not only engender and enhance professional and personal growth, but also offer stimuli and opportunities for continual expansion in new directions. The largely passive 're-training' experiences that are presently being offered to in-service teachers in South Africa do not have the dynamism to overcome our crushing history of apartheid pedagogy (Eisner 2000: 355; Jansen 1999b: 6). A re-imagining of teachers as potential artists could result in an awareness that we need, and deserve, dynamic, contextualised, inspiring and empowering attention and support for the duration of our professional lives (Eisner 2000: 347; Eisner 1998: 88; Marshall and Sears 1990: 17-18):

To improve an art, one needs the assistance of those who can see the character, quality, strengths and limitations of performance and, who are in a position to provide the kind of assistance that will enable the teacher to get better at what he or she does.

(Eisner 2000: 347)

In this chapter, I have briefly discussed the narrow perception of teachers as curriculum technicians that still hinders the genuine transformation of schooling in South Africa. By contrast, I have conceptualised my personal curriculum experience as an artistic/aesthetic experience and considered how this kind of conceptualisation could play a part in acknowledging and advancing the vital relationship between South African teachers and the curriculum. In my final chapter (chapter six), I review the direction that I have taken in this narrative inquiry and consider its practical and intellectual value.

Chapter Six

Closing

The narrative inquiry into curriculum reported in this thesis evolved from a personal teaching experience in an independent Durban school in 2001. A creative writing project in English that I had designed as an opportunity for researching grade seven learner interest and motivation in the classroom turned out to be an experience that was intellectually and emotionally intriguing to me. After completing the teaching aspect of my grade seven Teen Stories project, I was left with a powerful desire to know *what it was* about this particular experience that was so important to me. The focus of my research, therefore, became my personal curriculum experience in the context of the Teen Stories project.

In writing this research text, I have endeavoured to share, interpret and conceptualise my story of a memorable curriculum experience. The ultimate aim of this study was to come to a conceptualisation that has the potential to engender new modes of curriculum practice for me and other members of my South African teaching community. In the course of this narrative inquiry, I have worked to expand my professional and personal consciousness and to connect my discoveries to the lived experience and conceptual work of other teachers and curriculum researchers.

I opened this dissertation with a descriptive story of my Teen Stories curriculum experience. This self-story was constructed from my memories, field texts in the form of

teacher and learner journals, field notes in the form of lesson plans and reflections, learners' class work and some of my teaching materials. The story began with my initial plans for developing a grade seven curriculum unit and then went on to describe the day-to-day progress of the creative writing project in my two grade seven classes. By telling this story, I hoped to make it possible for my reader to enter into my teaching experience and to feel the energy and excitement of the Teen Stories project.

I then moved on to sketch a theoretical setting for my research text. I situated my study in the domain of experiential curriculum inquiry and demonstrated how the conceptual work of scholars in the wider education field supported and clarified my inquiry. The theoretical backdrop for my narrative inquiry included Dewey's ideas (1916; 1934; 1963) on the nature and forms of human experience, as well as the work of contemporary scholars, such as Clandinin and Connelly (1994a; 1994b; 2000) and Bruner (1986), who propose a narrative view of experience. My narrative inquiry was also informed by literature on story-telling and personal experience (Denzin 1989; 1994) and teacher stories (Jalongo and Isenberg 1995; Ritchie and Wilson 2000).

To illustrate the course of my narrative curriculum inquiry, I discussed my fieldwork in the context of the independent Catholic girls' school at which I worked and gave an account of the fifty-four grade seven learners who participated in my research. In addition, I described the process of moving from my actual experiences in the field to this written research account.

I then attempted to make sense of and explain the personal significance of my Teen Stories curriculum experience. The interpretation of my teaching story grew out of an exploration of a key tension in my life story: my school experience in apartheid South Africa as a white, middle-class, high-achiever who was given privileged access to educational resources and opportunities. By revisiting my school days, I became more conscious of the mis-educative (Dewey 1963: 25) nature of the privilege that had kept me apart from children of other races and abilities and thus constrained my learning experiences. I also recalled my sterile, circumscribed classroom experiences of ‘creative’ writing. I realised that the Teen Stories project had given me an opportunity to take part in something that was new and exciting for me: the evolution of a community of authors that had developed in my classroom through the interaction of contribution, sharing and response, and ownership. By way of the interpretive process, I was able to distinguish and clarify my personal teaching ambition, which is to engage in curriculum work that privileges the inclusion, affirmation and fruitful growth of each learner in my care.

To situate my personal experience in the context of broader education discourse, I used Dewey’s (1934) construct of artistic/aesthetic experience to conceptualise my teaching story. I contrasted this expansive conceptualisation with the narrow apartheid-era perception of teachers as curriculum technicians, which continues to limit curriculum work in South Africa. In addition, I considered how the growth of an alternative image of teachers as artists could enhance the transformation of the actual curriculum in South African schools.

Lastly, to close this dissertation, I reflect on the “practical and intellectual usefulness” (Conle 2000: 208) of my inquiry into the lived curriculum experience of the Teen Stories project. On the practical level, I believe that this personal narrative inquiry was a genuinely educative experience (Dewey 1963: 25-36), which gave rise to fruitful growth in my understanding of processes of teaching and learning.

In future, when I facilitate curriculum experiences in the classroom, I will be more certain of the importance of encouraging and making use of ongoing learner input. In the course of my research, I have seen how the inclusion of learners in classroom curriculum decision-making can increase their motivation and interest and can make them feel like valued participants in the learning process. In addition, I have realized how difficult it can be to remain open to new ideas on a day-to-day basis while still keeping in mind the external demands of the formal curriculum and the school structure, as well as my own teaching aims. I now know that I need to work hard to be flexible in the classroom and to allow for and welcome change and growth in the course of the actual curriculum.

The Teen Stories project has also highlighted for me how increased interaction among learners can enhance their curriculum experience by expanding opportunities for shared and individual reflection. Moreover, I have become more conscious of how essential it is for me to respond constructively and supportively to each learner’s work as often as possible. I have realized that I should be better able to connect with, as well as to guide, my learners if I too attempt the tasks that I require them to undertake. I now appreciate

how valuable it is for me as a teacher to participate in the learning experiences that happen in my classroom, rather than just falling back on my memories of school.

My study has also made me more determined to ensure that I allow the real interests and preoccupations of my learners to permeate the actual curriculum. I have felt the powerful energy that is generated in the classroom when learners believe that they can include their own concerns and desires in their learning activities. Furthermore, I have become more mindful of how emotional and social factors can impinge on learning. I now understand that it is sometimes necessary to put aside a learning activity and to focus on attending to a child's immediate emotional concerns. It is also important to be prepared to make time to listen to a troubled learner outside of the classroom and to liaise with her parents or guardian, as well as school staff and any external professionals whose help may be needed.

I have also become more convinced of the worth of offering genuinely creative learning experiences at school. It was very satisfying for me to bear witness to the enthusiasm with which my learners embraced and made use of the creative possibilities of the Teen Stories project. I hope to include many more of these kinds of creative opportunities in my future curriculum work.

One of the most valuable lessons that I have learnt through the Teen Stories experience is that I should continually strive to make it possible for each learner to see herself as an agent of her individual learning process. I now understand

that when learners experience the classroom as a space in which they have the power to act, rather than simply to be acted upon, they can start to experience school learning as an integral part of their real lives.

Academically, my study has pointed me in the direction of future research into the possibility that lived experience of personal curriculum inquiry could assist South African teachers to achieve a vital sense of personal and professional authority. It is my contention that personal authority in teaching can grow out of the self-study that is an integral part of experiential curriculum inquiry. By probing the personal tensions that drive the storyline of a teaching experience, we can empower ourselves to make sense of our classroom settings, to examine our curriculum practices and to establish our own teaching aims (Conle 2000: 212; Kincheloe 1991: 15-18; Marshall and Sears 1990: 17; Schubert 1990: 212, 222). Self-study can also facilitate a personal sense of teacher authority by encouraging us to consider fresh conceptions of our selves as teachers, as well as creative ways of thinking about schools and about the education field (Conle 1999: 27-28; Kincheloe 1991: 16). Furthermore, a teacher who is open to making new discoveries about her self can afford to be more responsive to the authentic selves of her learners and thus enhance her understanding of what is really happening in her classroom (Parker [2003]: 2).

Experiential curriculum inquiry can enhance a teacher's perception of her professional authority by enabling her to link her experiences, reflections and conceptualisations to those of other teachers and researchers. These connections within the broader education

discourse community help the individual teacher to comprehend the wider significance of her own work. She can then use this knowledge to feed and strengthen her future teaching endeavours (Conle 2000: 212; Conle 1999: 22-23; Eisner 1995: 5; Gultig 1999: 67-69). In turn, when a teacher publishes her curriculum inquiry in a research text, she is making a valuable contribution to the education field by helping others to understand what is taking place in the unique, complex environment of her particular classroom (Eisner 1995: 5).

Despite the undeniable importance of the part that teachers play in determining the quality of the actual curriculum in schools, there are few openings in the working lives of most teachers to undertake sustained inquiry into their classroom experiences (Kincheloe 1991: 14; Pink 1990: 142; Potenza and Monyokolo 1999: 236). I believe that by making space in my teaching life to carry out this work of narrative curriculum inquiry, I have enriched my own curriculum practice. Moreover, this study has revealed openings for exploration and development within my South African teaching context.

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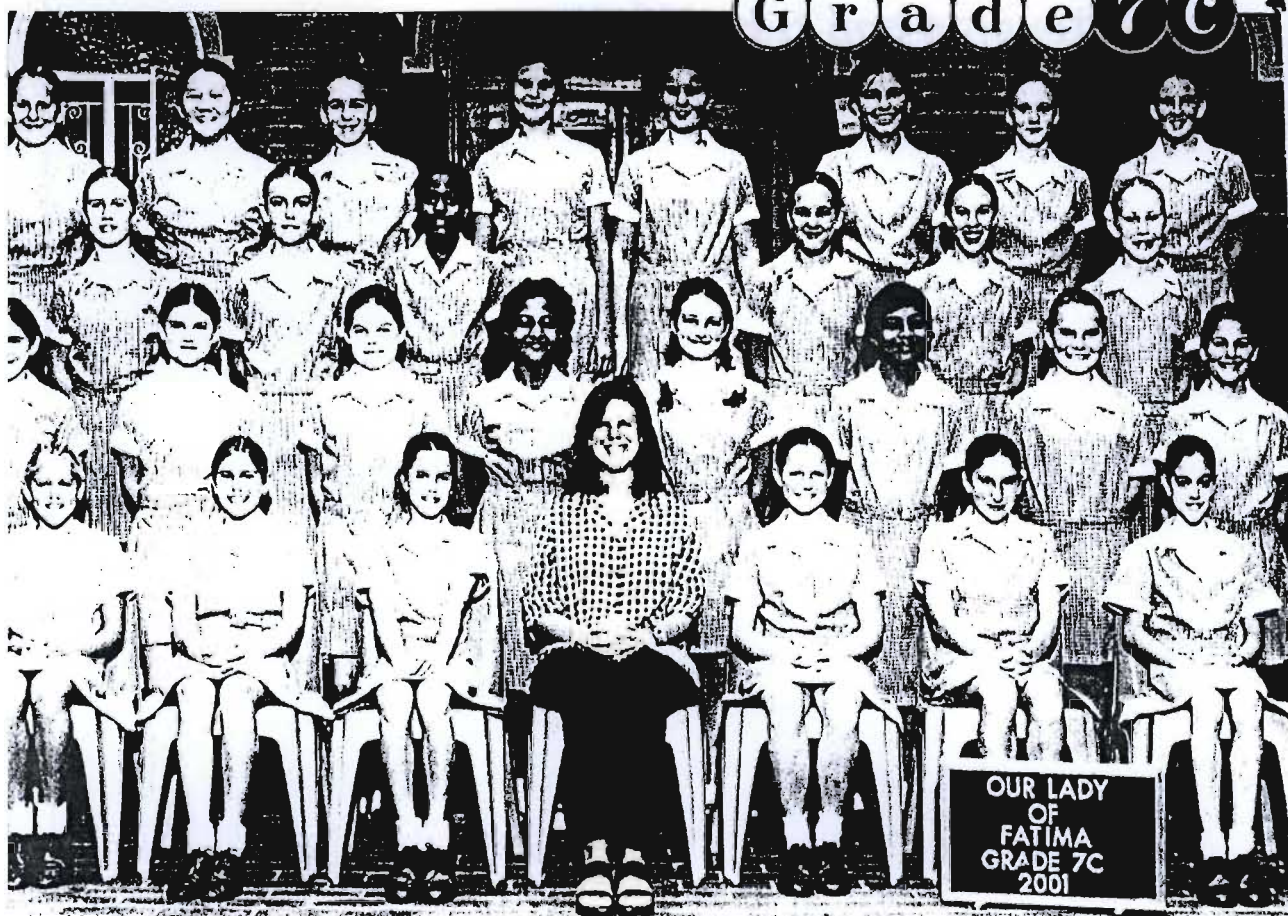
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Appendix**The Teen Stories Booklets**

FOR TEENS BY TEENS

BY GRADE 7C 2001

Grade 7C



DEDICATION

For everyone who made our Grade 7 year possible
and for all teenagers who have problems.

MY LIFE 19

Sheena Ross and Candice Barker

ONE HECK OF A BAD DAY 22

Jennalee Collier and Victoria Phiri

RAGS TO RICHES 25

Cara Hauptfleisch and Hayley Morkel

SHE'S GOT IT ALL! 28

Natasha Sobey and Natasha Shafto

THAT'S IT! 31

Robyn du Trevou, Michelle O'Connor, Keren
Robertson and Amy Rostance

TWINS 33

Rebecca Jordaan and Hayley Lowry

INTRODUCTION

In September 2001 the Grade 7C English class accepted an invitation to take part in a Teen Stories Writing Project. This project involved writing short stories about teenage experiences.

The 7C learners have compiled their stories into this collection, entitled *For Teens By Teens*. Some stories were written individually, some in pairs and some in groups. Each learner in the class is the author or co-author of at least one story.

The stories in this collection have been written for teenagers by teenagers. Enjoy them.

Kathleen Pithouse
Grade 7 English Teacher 2001

Boarding School

By Hayley Lowry

I walked inside, looked around and wondered where everybody was. Kelly was normally in her bedroom, pumping heavy metal music into her ears, and Mum was usually in her studio downstairs painting or sculpting something weird and wonderful. Today, nobody was home! I shrugged and started to do my homework.



My name is Amy Reece. I'm 12 years old and go to Northway Preparatory School for girls. I have one sister who is a stubborn, moody and strange person called Kelly. My parents are divorced and recently my mum remarried a man called Rob. Rob is my worst nightmare, I hate him, because all he wants to do is to send me away to boarding school and have my mum all to himself.

I heard a car pull into our driveway. It was Rob and mum. Where had they been, I wondered. I ran outside to ask them.

"Where have you been?" I shouted as I ran outside. Mum replied in a soft voice,

that she and Rob had something to tell me.

"What?" I asked, in a worried voice.

"You are going to boarding school next year." Mum said seriously.

"No I am not!" I screamed, "You can't, I won't go." With that I ran upstairs and slammed my bedroom door.

I lay on my bed and sobbed for hours. How could my mum do this to me?
"She is so mean," I thought. Just as I was about to fall asleep, I heard a soft knock on the door. It was my mum.

2

"Can I come in please?" she asked.

"Yes," I said.

"Amy," mum started softly, "I think boarding school will be a very good experience for you." With that, she left.

I thought about it for a long time and realized that it wouldn't be that bad after all.

It would mean being away from my bratty sister and maybe I would make some new friends or even meet a boyfriend!

Suddenly I started to get excited. I ran downstairs to find out more about the school. I couldn't wait to stay up all night and chat to my new friends. The fact that I would be able to do what I wanted in the afternoon seemed glorious. I couldn't wait!

Cindy and her Rebellious Horse.

By: Avishka Siphali and Jessica Chang.

" Cindy, Cindy! Hurry up darling, we're getting late!" bellowed Jenny, Cindy's mother. " But Mum, I'm still packing my tack away!" yelled Cindy with annoyance. " Sweet Pea if you are not down here in fifteen minutes, we're not enrolling in that new Sweet Dreams Horse Riding Club!" shouted Mark, Cindy's father. He was getting transferred from his old job and was very stressed. Soon enough, they were on the road.

As soon as they arrived at the house, (which was twice the size of their old house) Cindy, being fourteen years old, gasped and then thought how all her new friends would react when they saw it. She was now going to live in a wonderfully posh house. Being the only child, she later found out that she had a room of her own with a built- in bathroom. Cindy also found out that her wish had come true! She was going to the best school in Sweet Dreams and getting enrolled Sweet Dreams Horse Riding Club.

"Wow! This is huge mom," announced Cindy, looking at the stable of the horse-riding club.

"There is *your* new riding teacher and the owner of the stables," said Jenny.

Cindy soon found out that she could choose her own horse and went straight to the stable to choose one. There were twenty

horses and their colours *ranged* from Black to White to Grey.

Cindy chose a black horse with a snip on its nose. He was called Midnight. Belinda tacked him up and Cindy mounted him.

Midnight went well. When Cindy urged him into a canter

Midnight bolted and Cindy fell off. Belinda asked her if she

was hurt and if she wanted to get on again. Cindy got on and

urged Midnight in a canter again. He bolted and bucked.

Cindy fell off and hurt her arm.

The next morning Cindy began her first day at school with a big

bandage around her arm. Although she felt very embarrassed,

she managed to find her class and she was allocated a new desk.

Unfortunately, she made no friends that day and went home in a

terrible state.

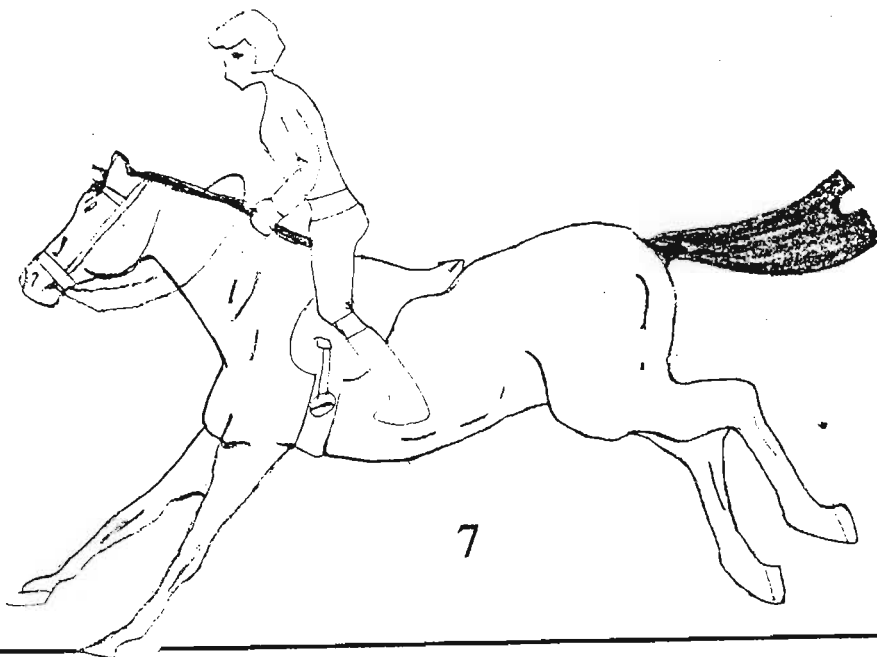
The next day she managed to get a friend whose name was Emily. They shared everything from gossip to secrets to horse riding.

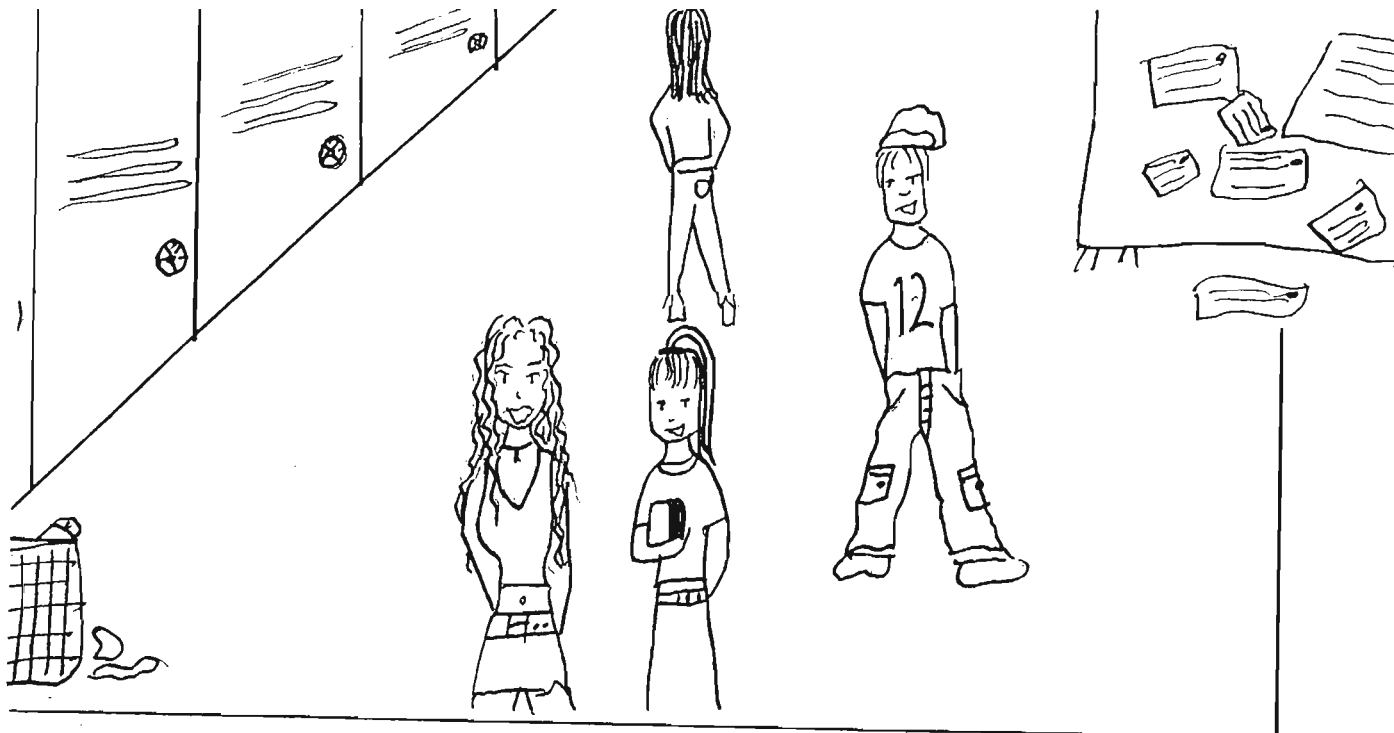
After two weeks, Cindy's bandage was off but her fear of horse riding was still on. Everyday she would tell Belinda that she wasn't feeling ready to ride again! And as for her parents, they knew nothing about this as Cindy lied to them everyday that her riding was progressing extremely well. After a few days, Cindy started to feel guilt written all over her forehead and she realized she needed a plan to save her before it was too late. And that is how Cindy started a program, which was about getting inspiration by watching others ride different horses.

One day, Cindy decided that she would watch a girl named Jessy ride for the first time. But something in the background was distracting her and so she decided she would go and look. She noticed that there was somebody in trouble because the horse

had bolted into the forest. Without thinking at all, she tacked up Midnight and headed for the forest. She caught up with the other horse and soon found out that her friend Tracy with her horse Ginger was in trouble! She just caught up with Tracy and pulled her off before Ginger stumbled over a rock.

After that incident Belinda, who saw how Cindy saved Tracy, rushed over to see how the two girls were. Luckily, none of them was hurt and soon Cindy was awarded a trophy for best rider in Sweet Dreams for the year. Her mom and dad were so pleased with her that they brought Midnight for her. She overcome her horse riding fear and was a hero at the same time. And that's how our story of Cindy and her rebellious horse story ends!





Friends Forever

Authors : Andrea Whiffield, Talia Goddard and Tarryn Edwards

"Have you seen the new guy Sarah?" I asked curiously as we walked through Oxford School's hall on the first day back at school. "Oh my, there he is, don't you think he's so hot?"

As Sarah and I walked into biology class, to my amazement, I realized I was sitting next to the new guy, Zane!

I broke the ice, with some difficulty and started to make conversation, but I had to admit that I did have a major crush on him.

I told my friends about this huge crush, and boy did they think it was bad news. But that was only the beginning.....

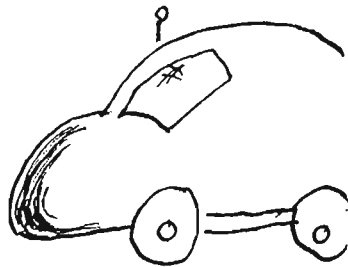
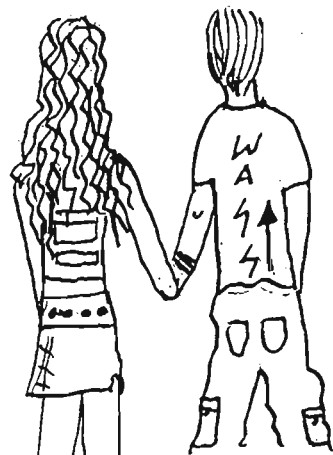
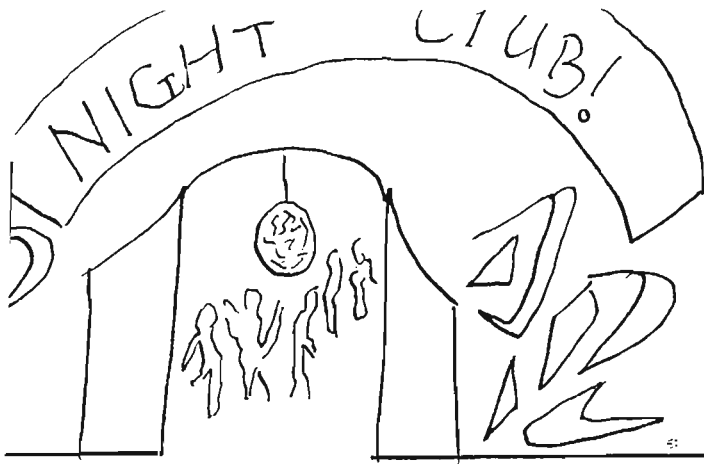
After a few days, Zane and I got to know each other. Before I knew it, he had asked me to go to a club with him. But I knew my parents would never let me go. And, in order to impress him, I had to sneak out the house without my parents knowing.

When we arrived, I had a bad feeling about this. I didn't know if it was about sneaking out or just being there with him.

As we stepped into the club the lights were flashing like lightning, the music blaring.

Worst of all, I felt as if everyone was staring at me. Just then Zane blurted, "Chill out, I will see you at twelve o' clock." "Ok" I thought, let me get this straight. He





is going to leave me alone until twelve o' clock ." What was I supposed to do ?

Well, I came to my senses. But, not knowing quite what to do , I decided to just have fun and go and dance , I mean it was Saturday night!

Things were going fabulous when suddenly the police walked in and I realized that my dad was on club duty that night . And he was walking straight towards me!

I saw Zane and ran to him and told him that we had to go home now.

He shouted "What's the rush?" , " Well, it is getting late and I am getting tired "I said, with an urgency in my voice. " Fine, I'll drop you off at home," Zane replied.

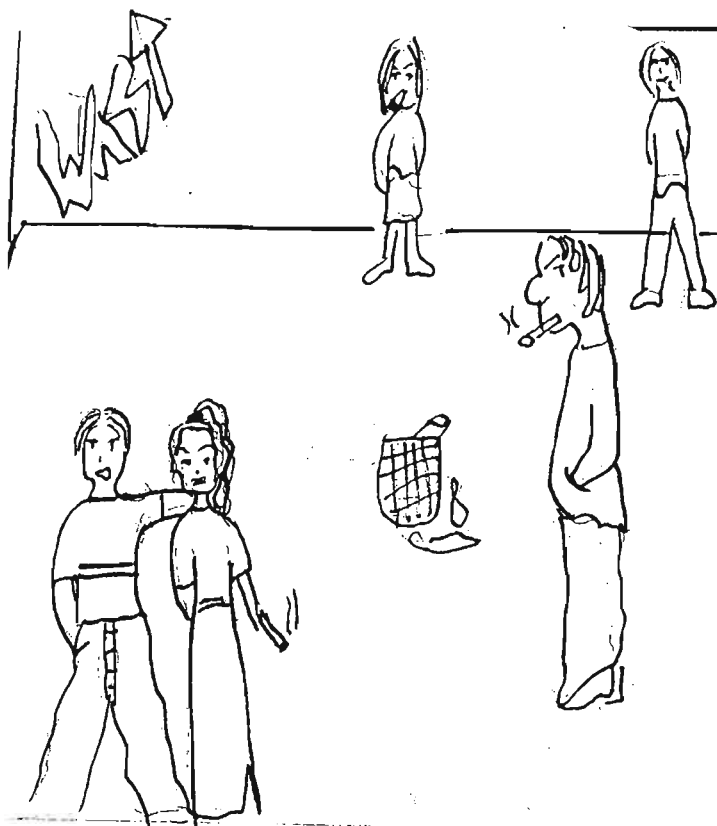
When I got home, to my surprise, my mom was waiting for me in the kitchen. Of course, she gave me the whole boring lecture about sneaking out and returning at midnight. By that stage I was ready to jump into bed, and boy did I sleep well that night!

The next day when I got to school Sarah and Brad were really annoyed with me because I had forgotten to go to the movies with them the night before. I told them the whole story and they said " don't worry, but next time, remember us ! " And if you are wondering who Brad is, well he's one of my best friends and I felt terrible about letting him down.

The bell rang for the first lesson , Brad and Sarah ran off, just as Zane pulled me by the arm and asked me the question which I had always dreaded.....

" Will you bunk school with me, I've got a really stylish place we can go to ." At that point it felt like a thousand knives knives stabbing into me . In order to impress him once again I said " yes. " He took me to a





really nice place in the woods, sort of like a warehouse. There were lots of people there, the kind that Zane would hang out with. And at that moment I felt very out of place. As I was looking around with a sickening feeling in my stomach, Zane said "Do you smoke?" For a few moments I didn't know what to say. But as I realised that everyone was staring at me I said "Yes." He handed me a smoke and, trying my best not to cough, I smoked it.

After that, things just got worse, I

bunked school more often and started to take drugs. I then started hanging out with Zane's crowd and left my true friends.

I would have probably still been in that situation if it wasn't for them. After that, they spoke to my parents, and as you can guess, I got the whole huge lecture once again.

One day as I was lying in bed I realised that from once being someone special, I had turned into a nobody..... ever since I had met Zane. I think that is the time I realised that Zane was bad news and that Brad was the guy that I really loved. Thoughts and feelings rushed through my mind, like a train going through a tunnel. Two weeks later I was back to my usual self; happy, beautiful, popular and hard working!

I thanked Brad and Sarah for all that they had done because they had stood by me the whole time, even when things were really tough, because, after all, isn't that what friends are for?



I need them bad!

Author: Robyn du Trevou

"Too long, too long," I groaned with my head under my pillow. It had been eight months without seeing my dad and four without my brother. My Parents have been divorced for eight months, eight long, horrible months. I've really been battling. I'm not used to seeing one parent at a time!

At one stage, I was so unhappy that I wasn't socialising. I went from an A student to a C student. "What's happening to you, Claire-lee?" my mum had asked.

Claire-lee is my name. I'm thirteen years old. My sister, Sarah, is nine and my brother, Jason, is ten. I've started going to a lady named Mrs Abert who has been helping me sort out my problems. She's very sweet and kind-natured!

"Bring, Bring."

The telephone rang, so I answered.

"Hello! How are you dad, it's so nice to hear from you again," I said, then paused to listen to him, then sighed and said, "I guess it'll be alright." Then put down the phone, Dad had just told me that his trip had been cancelled again, and he was only maybe coming next month. I started to cry a little.

I checked my watch. It was 4:24pm! I rushed down to the kitchen, called mum, then ran to the car. At 4:30 I had an appointment with Mrs Abert at the Medical Centre.

We got to the centre at 4:29 and by the time I got to her rooms it was my turn. As I walked in, I greeted her and she greeted me back.

"Had any problems lately?" she asked me. I nodded and sat down on an enormous beanbag, which sat in the middle of the room. "Like what?" She asked.

I looked at her, then said softly, "I am missing my brother and dad terribly, speaking to them on the phone and writing letters just isn't the same."

"I understand," she answered sympathetically. For the rest of the lesson we did activities and put my thoughts on paper, to make me feel better. Mrs Abert said it would be best if I did this all the days I didn't go to her.

In six days time it's school again and I really have to study for my Maths and English exams. Lately I've been doing extremely badly. But it's really hard to study, look after a nine-year-old (Sarah) and sometimes even cook dinner! "Claire-lee," Shouted Sarah from downstairs, "I need help with my holiday project!" My mum had gone to the shops and left me to look after Sarah, so I went down to help her. By the time I had helped Sarah, bathed, cleared up the dinner stuff, not to mention study, it was already 11:30pm!

Mum went to work at 6:30 the next morning, which left me with Sarah once again, so I decided to organize for her to go to her friends' house. As she left the phone rang, it was my brother. "Hi James," I said, and then made him repeat what he had just told me James had just told me that he was coming in dad's place next week! I was so excited that I phoned my mum straight away. That afternoon I had an appointment with Mrs Abert, I was really glad because I could then tell her too!



But when I got home that evening after my bath, I realised that I was still missing my dad. Every time I brushed my hair I remember how my dad used to say "How I wish I had such Beautiful blond hair as you!" and whenever I get dressed I remember how he used to say "How I wish I was as thin and beautiful as you". My dad always used to make me feel so loved.

My brother arrived the day we went back to school, so I decided to miss that week to spend with him. Mum said that it was fine as long as I studied! We had a great time that week. When we were just about to leave for the airport on Friday, the doorbell rang. "Dad!" I screamed. It was true! My dad was really here, standing in front of me. I hugged him harder than ever. "Claire-lee, I want to hug dad too!" whined Sarah. I just laughed.

After dad had told us how he had switched his flights to come and visit us, I asked him and James to come and sit in the lounge so I could speak to them. "You live in Johannesburg," I started, "That's rather close, though I only see^{you} once every eight months, "I paused " And I hate that!" I suddenly cried out.

"I know what you're saying," dad said. "You want to see us more often."

"Well, that's why we're here and dad's been here the whole week, he's been looking for a new house. We're moving into Umhlanga in two weeks time!" James blurted out.

"Is it true dad?" asked Sarah. Dad nodded and Sarah and I jumped up and hugged each other.

"We'll see you every other weekend now," dad said. At that mom walked in, even she was looking happy!

"It's so wonderful to see you smiling again Clair-lee!"

From then, life changed a lot. Sarah started after-care, my grades went up and I stopped having to see Mrs Abert. James started school with us at Crawford with Sarah and I and, last but not least, mum was promoted and so I didn't have to do her duties any more!

I should have listened...

By: Brittany Adami & Jade Warman

"So are you going to Kelly's 16th disco on Friday night Casey?" asked Sarah.

"I really want to, but my parents know that there's going to be alcohol there and won't let me go, the problem is I said yes to Andrew, thinking my parents would let me go!"

"I've got it! you can pretend to sleep at my house and then Andrew can pick you up and drop you off at my house!"

"That's perfect!" I exclaimed.

I came home and threw my bags on the floor, I told my mom that I was home and she asked me how school was I said it was the best ever.

I asked mom if I could sleep at Sarah's on Friday night she said she would rather let me sleep at Sarah's house than go to Kelly's awful party! I ran straight to the phone, I couldn't believe it actually worked.

"Hi Mrs O'Brian is Sarah there?"

"No can I take a message?"

"Sure, could you tell her that I can sleep over on Friday!"

"So your mother's happy to let you go to the party?"

"Yes she's fine with it!"

"Alright. I'll tell ^{her} as soon as she get home, bye!"

Mom woke me up telling me it was Friday, I was so happy I almost blurted out that I was going to Kelly's party.

"Hi Kelly, hi Sarah, can't wait till tonight!"

I know, it's going to be such fun!" cried Kelly.

"Casey the bus is here, time to go home!"

"Mom we're home!" cried Sarah

"Hi Mrs O'Brian!" I shouted

"Lunch is in the microwave!" replied Mrs O'Brian.

Sarah and I were so excited as Andrew's car arrived in the driveway, but of course Sarah's mother had to embarrass us by telling Sarah to go up stairs and change out of her funky skirt and to put on her new silk pants which Sarah claimed to be pyjamas. She refused and then her mom just let her go.

As we pulled up in the driveway everyone knew it was us because of course Andrew was the richest boy at our school, who had the best car!

It was about twelve o'clock and Andrew was eager to leave, so we got in the car and Andrew asked us if we wanted to go to ICE, that new over 18 club everyone was raving about. I knew my mother would never let me go, so I thought this would be a once in a life time opportunity! Sarah wasn't feeling up to it, so we dropped her at home.

We were finally there at an over 18 club, I was really excited, we danced the time away and before I knew it it was time to go home! Andrew was looking a bit tipsy, but anyway we got in the car, and that was my mistake!

I felt a little scared because Andrew was speeding on a back road. He went straight through a stop street! That's all I could remember.

The next morning I woke up in hospital with pain shooting through my right leg and a cast on my right arm, Sarah was sitting next to me,

"Does my mother know?" I asked weakly.

Sarah said "yes". I was petrified!

She hugged me saying everything was going to be alright!

Andrew went through my head and I asked if he was alright,

Sarah told me he was out at the movies with Kelly, I was shocked, I couldn't believe Kelly would do something like that.

It struck me that all I wanted to do was go out with Andrew and I even betrayed my mother and look where I landed up!

Just then, Mom walked in. I burst in to tears and whispered "sorry!"

Mom came to me, hugged me and told me she was glad I was alright. I asked her if she was angry with me, she said she was dissappointed.

A few weeks later I was invited to Lara's party. I knew there was going to be alcahol and I told Mom straight, She wouldn't let me go and I was fine with it. Richard asked me to go with with him and I said "no". I didn't want to risk my life again, I learnt my lesson...

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE MONEY.

By Andrea Maitre

Jo-Ann walked into the busy hallway of St. John's Senior Primary School with mixed feelings. Excitement, at starting a new school. Nervousness: would she fit in? Make new friends? Do well in class? But the strongest emotion Jo was feeling was clearly joy. Her father had recently got a major promotion and her family was no longer suffering from financial problems. In fact, they were now quite wealthy, and as a result of this they had moved into a bigger house, and Jo-Ann and her brother Michael had started at new, posh schools. Michael, who was fourteen, had gone to Crawford High, across town. "Hi," Jo heard a perky voice say. She turned around to see a girl about her age, with curly red hair, glasses, braces and freckles. The girl wore neon-pink leggings, a bright red top and lime-green sandals. "I'm Penelope", the girl said, "you look new. Need some help finding your way around?"



"Thanks", said Jo gratefully. This girl was a bit of a nerd but at least she was friendly.

Jo followed Penelope to English class.

Later that day

Jo was walking home from school, because her house was just one kilometre away. Her day had been quite good. At lunchtime she had sat with Penelope and her brother, Ryan. Ryan was a really clever guy, but he dressed well and was good-looking, in a dorky kind of way. He and Penelope were twins, but they didn't look much alike. Ryan had wavy brown hair and green eyes, but he had almost as many freckles as his sister. Ryan had been very friendly and he had seemed to like Jo a lot. Jo wasn't too sure if the feelings were mutual. Ryan was nice, but a nerd all the same, and Jo didn't want to be a nerd.

"Hey", said a bored-sounding voice. It was Michelle, the most popular girl in school, standing ahead of Jo on the pavement. She was surrounded by her friends, Jennifer, Kelly and Ashley, all as pretty and popular as she was. "You're the new girl, right?" Michelle asked. "Um, yes," said Jo nervously.

"You wanna sit with us at break tomorrow?, it'll do wonders for your reputation, and you'll meet all the best guys." Jo grinned. These were the kind of friends she needed if she wanted to be cool!

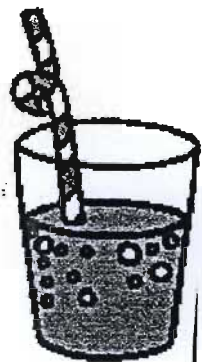
"Great," she said, trying to sound as though she couldn't care less.

"We're going to the mall now," said Kelly. "You wanna come?" "We could give you a great makeover, if you've got money."

"Sure I do," said Jo. "Let's go!"

A few hours later.....

Jo was bored. Completely, utterly, totally and mind-blowingly bored. But, at least she looked good. She had been shopping with the girls for a couple of hours. At first it had been fun. She had had her curly brown hair straightened and styled. She was wearing Nike shoes, Diesel pants and shirt and a gorgeous designer chain belt. She had been introduced to Jennifer's brother, an amazingly good-looking hockey star, and they had gone off on their own for a coldrink.



For a few minutes it had been sensational. Her first day of school and she was out with the guy everyone liked! But after a while Jo tired of Colby's endless talk about sport. He didn't seem to care about anything except hockey and himself.

"Jo-Ann, are you listening? I asked if you wanted to go to the disco with me on Saturday." Jo thought about it. She would be the most envied girl in school if she went with Colby, but he was so boring! Still, it was nice to be 'cool' and accepted.

"Sounds amazing," Jo lied.

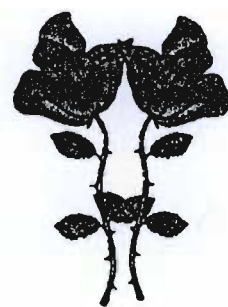
Just then Jo saw Penelope and Ryan walk into the restaurant. They sat at a table not far from Jo, and she could hear them talking.

"Penny, do you think Jo-Ann would go to the disco with me? I really like her!" Ryan said. Jo glanced at Colby to see if he had heard. He was still droning on about how many goals he had scored in the last match, oblivious to Ryan's comment. Jo carried on eavesdropping.

The next morning.....

Jo was dressing for school. After leaving the mall, she had come to an important decision. Jo had gone over to Penelope and Ryan's table to say hi after Colby left to meet up with his friends. Ryan had asked her to the disco and she had told him that she would give him an answer at school. Jo-Ann said goodbye to her parents and left for school, make-up free and in her old, cheaper clothes, the ones that didn't make her feel like someone she wasn't.

As she got to school, she saw Ryan straight away. She went over to talk to him. "Ryan, I'd love to go to the disco with you," said Jo. "Cool", said Ryan happily, "I'll bring you flowers!" Just then Jo realised Colby was standing right behind her and had heard everything. "What a loser," said Colby angrily. He was surrounded by Michelle and her friends, who nodded in agreement. "I'm sure I'll have much more fun without you Jo-Ann, you're passing up a great opportunity!" "Sorry Colby," said Jo defensively. "I know who my real friends are."



My Life

22 April 1996

My birthday is in twenty-four days time. I can't wait.

I want to get:

A new bicycle

A walkman

Some tapes

A new watch

And a dressing table.

I doubt my Mother will buy me all these things.

We are running out of money, although my Father works as a
Sales Representative
for Scrap Metals.

My little sister broke her arm yesterday on the swing.

Shame, poor Ally.

I have to go to the hospital as I have bad stomach cramps.

25th April 1996

It was an average day as usual.

I went to school and did my major maths exam.

I think I did very well.

I went home on the bus and I realised my Father's car was
parked by the garage.

Normally, he would only come back at 5 p.m.

I went inside and my Mom and Dad were sitting in the lounge
with very glum faces.

They asked me to sit down and they wanted to talk to me about something extremely important.

My Mom said softly, that the tests had come back.

Then my Mom told me that I had cancer.

27th April 1996

The next few days, I could hardly bear with my life.

I did not know what to do. I thought about it and said to myself "I only have 9 months to live."

28th April 1996

I went for my first treatment today. It was really scary.

I still don't believe I have got cancer.

How am I going to tell my friends?

Will they think that they can catch it from me?

Maybe they will be my friends and they will understand.

Or maybe they might not.

30th April 1996

I went for my second treatment and I met a girl who had had cancer for three months.

Her name was Kate.

She was short and chubby.

She invited me to her house where they talk about cancer and how to deal with it.

At first I was a bit fearful about it, but when I thought about it, it didn't seem that dreadful.

2nd May 1996

Kate told me not to hassle ,because I thought my hair was going to fall out.

If it did, she told me that she would lend me her wigs and hats. I started to feel more normal and I thought "why, it is not the end of the world".

I don't know how this will all end, but I know that my parents, Kate and my faith will stand by me through thick and thin.

PS These days, all I want for my birthday is my health.

By: Sheena Ross and Candice Barker

One Heck of a Bad Day

By Jennalee Collier and Victoria Phiri

I woke up this morning and I knew this was going to be one heck of a bad day. Boy, was I right.



Instead of my dog jumping on my bed and giving me a happy but slobbery greeting, my mom was! Well, what do you know, my dog had died.

Why? Believe me, you don't want to know.

With all the commotion my mom forgot to make breakfast (she doesn't believe in quick meals like cereal. She makes everything from scratch.) So as you should know I'm starved!

I quietly crept into the bathroom for a moment of silence, but, to my horror, as I looked into the mirror I saw myself covered in a heap of pimples. To make matters worse my hair was so fuzzed up I couldn't even brush it. In other words, it got stuck. And just think, tonight of all nights I was going to disco with the hottest guy, Grant!

I hope things aren't as bad as this at school.

School man that was bad. I have never experienced anything like it in my life I'm actually really bummed that I have to tell you what happened. Anyway... It all started with Margo my best friend, or so I thought. As I got out the bus grant was in front of me waiting to give me a hug. Then who appears from nowhere, well what do you know, it's the wonderful Margo. She goes and brakes my embrace with Grant and then has the cheek to say in her most friendliest and sweetest way, "Anne, is it ok for me to go to the disco with Grant tonight?"

I was like, "As if Chicky, in your dreams, he's mine!" Then she gets into a huge huff and runs off screaming that I'm her worst friend ever and she hates me (Must be PMS.) And then when I thought that nothing could get worst than this Grant comes up to me and says that I was very inconsiderate to Margo and that he's dumping me for her!

How dumb can you get! I mean Margo of all people! Everyone knows not to waste their time on her! (Don't worry, that's why she's my best friend, I'm always one up on her when it comes to guys. Ha ha!)

The rest of my day was ok. Considering that I failed a test, nearly drowned in swimming and got brake detention for talking in assembly!

Other wise it was GREAT! (Please help me!)



I wasn't really ampt for the disco but I had no other choice but to go. I guess it was because Grant and Margo were going to be there and I didn't really want to see them all over each other again(At school I had to sit and watch them make out! Gross, hey!)

When I got home I tried my best quietly creep up the stairs to my room (I live in an ancient Victorian house, the creakiest of them all!) My mom is very emotional about the dog saga (She says sleeps the best remedy)

As I stepped foot in my room, there sitting on my bed was my four year old brother, Max(The most irritating brother I have ever known in all history!) With the brightest fabric paint I have ever seen. And guess what, he thought he would do a bit of "RE-DECORATING" and painted my room ALUMINUS ORANGE!!!!

I got so mad that I screamed as loud as I could(I'm absolutely positive the roof took off) told my brother to get off the face of the earth, then, I grabbed the closest, hardest object, which was a hair brush, and with my

best aim and my hardest throw, I threw it at him. Unfortunately my brother has really good reflexes (Which I should have known!) and ducked! So my wonderful brush hit my flipping mirror!

Then guess what my brother does, he says to me, "Well, if you don't like what I've done here maybe you'll like this!" and he grabs the paint and tips it all over my wardrobe! So now my clothes are all ALUMIMUS ORANGE!!!!

I practically threw him out my room. Then he laughs and says, "At least I don't have seven years bad luck like you!"

I just sank to the floor and crouched up in the smallest ball possible. Too tired to do any thing especially listen to my mom screaming at everything even my gold fish, I whispered, "As if it's gonna make much of a difference."



RAGS TO RICHES

Cara Hauptfleisch and Hayley Morkel

"Kelly the bus is here," said her mother. "Coming", she said. She rushed downstairs, grabbed her lunch and when she was outside she waved goodbye. The bus was filled with children, some towering, some short, some bloated and some thin, some girls and some boys. She could not wait to tell everyone where she came from and why she moved to a different town. The bus driver said, "Sit down every-one," but Kelly had no-where to sit. So she went to the first seat she saw as there was a space next to a girl, Just as she was about to sit down, the girl moved across taking up the entire seat. This carried on throughout the bus and in the end there was no where for her to sit. Then the bus driver said, "Just sit on the floor". Kelly felt so confused. She looked around and wondered, "Are they like this to all the new girls?" She had another look around and they all were wearing totally different clothes compared to her.

They all went to their classrooms in pairs and she realized that she was all alone, the only one that didn't know anyone, the only new girl! At break she sat all alone until someone said, "Where did you get that jersey from?" She did not answer, "What's the matter, cat got your tongue?" "No, my grandmother made it." The girl she had just met, called Caitlin, walked off telling Kelly she was a loser. The day that she had planned turned out worse than

she thought it would be. The bell rang for home time and she was not looking ^{forward} to the disco that night. She was picked on and felt terrible. She sat down at the kitchen table and talked to her mom about it over lunch. "Mom, I really do not want to go to the disco tonight." "No, you have to go, you will be able to make friends that way."

Kelly stormed out of the kitchen and into her room and did her homework, about 5 minutes later her mother walked in and said "What are you going to wear tonight?"

"I do not know?"

"Well, I bought you a top to wear with your dungarees."

"Thank - you," she replied.

Kelly thought that maybe this disco would not be as bad as she had thought it would be. Later on, at 6:30 pm, her mom was ready to take her to the disco. Kelly had butterflies in her stomach.

When she got there the music was pumping and the lights were blaring. Her favorite song was now playing and she began to bop up and down. The popular Caitlin and her gang came to tune her and said "Got ants in your pants?" Kelly stopped dancing and said, "No, I'm just dancing to my favorite song." The gang walked off and Caitlin stayed behind and said, "You don't fit in this school, nobody likes you, GET A LIFE!"

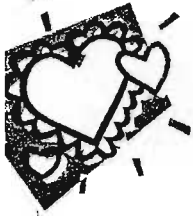
Kelly ran to the nearest call box and phoned her mom to come and fetch her. "When she got home she told her mom and cried her heart out. Later that night she checked the lotto ticket, 7, 4, 11, 2, 9, 37 were the lotto numbers. She stared at the lotto tickets and shouted with glee "WE`VE WON.WE`VE WON.WE`VE WON THE LOTTO!"

4 MONTHS LATER...

The end of the term disco was the next day. Caitlin was jealous that Kelly was the most popular girl in school. The night of the

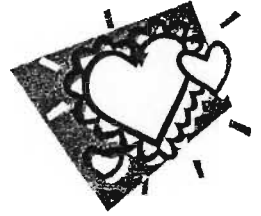
disco came and Kelly was the most fashionably dressed girl and had the best moves to every song. All the boys liked her instead of Caitlin. Kelly felt proud that she had now fitted in.





SHE'S GOT IT ALL!!!!

BY: NATASHA SOBEY AND
NATASHA SHAFTO



As the steel doors of Melissa's new school slammed shut behind her, she felt like she was walking into a prison. All the school pupils stared at her as if they had never seen a human before. She felt like an ant in the middle of a stampede of elephants.

Melissa saw a gorgeous boy leaning against the wall of the corridor. As she walked past him and he winked at her, she knew it was love at first sight. Her fantasy was shattered when a girl came out of nowhere and they joined hands and walked to class together. As Melissa walked into the classroom, she heard smirks, sneers and other comments like:

"She's so perfect, she thinks she's so gifted!"

"Look at the way that she sticks her nose in the air when she walks."

A week later Melissa was so used to sitting alone at break, that she was surprised when a group of popular teenagers came to sit with her, including the hottest boy in the school, Joey Adams. Tagging along behind him was his self-important "girlfriend", Josie Maxwells. After they had got chatting, they got to know each other more and she was invited to a beach party. She thought that the beach party was a perfect place to get to know Joey.

On Friday night Melissa could hardly sleep. She was so excited about the beach party. The next day, she spent the whole morning getting ready just to impress Joey. She wanted to look

completed. At the beach party, she wanted to make a grand entrance. So she hired a limo.

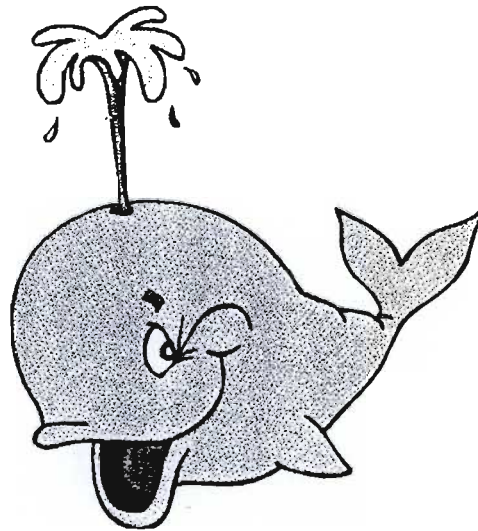
As she got out of the limo, she said, "Don't you just love my limo? It cost R10 000 to hire, but that is how much I get as pocket money a week, so it's nothing." Everyone thought that she was just trying to mix in, but they were convinced she was over-doing it when she took off her swimming robe and she was wearing a one-of-a-kind bikini from the most expensive boutique store in the country.

When Joey arrived, Melissa felt like she was floating in the clouds because he looked so handsome. But as he was going to walk over to her, to say hi, his "girlfriend" pulled him away and said, "Don't go near her, she thinks she is too cool for us!" Melissa felt like crying. She was so embarrassed. She tried to forget about it and flirt with every other guy to make him jealous, but it didn't work. Everyone was being so mean to her and she didn't know why.

Then she realized that no one liked her anymore and she ran home crying. The next day she didn't feel like going to school because she was so depressed. She felt like she had lost something that she could never get back. She thought hard about what she had done and realised she had gone a bit over the top. She went to school and just acted normal. They realised that they were wrong about her and started liking her again. She thought that Joey would hate her after what she did, but out of the corner of her eye she saw him walking towards her. As he walked past, he whispered, "Meet me at the cafeteria at lunch." Melissa was stunned and only after a minute she realised what had happened. As Melissa walked into the cafeteria, at lunch, she bumped into someone, none other than Josie Maxwells, staring into

her eyes with hatred. As Josie was about to slap Melissa, they heard a shout from the back of the cafeteria, it was Joey shouting, "STOP!!!" Josie froze with her ^{hand} in the air, examined her nails as if she had no intention of hitting Melissa. Joey came up to Melissa and said, "Come Melissa, lets go away from these upsurd fools." As Joey and Melissa walked hand in hand out of the cafeteria, Josie fell to her knees and burst into tears.

That night as Melissa lay in bed, she realised that it is much easier being yourself, rather than trying to be someone you're not. Her wish had come true.





Written By: Robyn du Trevou, Michelle O'Connor, Keren Robertson and Amy Rostance.

Kaplosh, "Yuck what is this?" I, Sally Adams, had just been hit by an enormous sandbomb while suntanning under a blistering sun with my gran. I sat up, and there stood a short, chubby, black frizzy-haired, brown-eyed, naughty girl looking proud. It was then when I realised that, that naughty-looking girl was Harriet Dorr, my long lost schoolfriend. We greeted each other and decided to have a milkshake at Catz, the local cafe, to catch up on news about my new boarding school. "Sally do you remember the time we locked the new Grade ones in the bathroom?"

"Yes, we were sent to the principal for that," I replied. "I better be off, it's already half past five, meet you here tomorrow." As I ran home I remembered all the naughty tricks we used to get up to. "I hope she's changed," I whispered softly to myself.

The next morning my gran dropped me at Catz and I met Harry and her brother, Joshua, outside. "Sally, we've decided to go to Waterworld for the day." Waterworld has always been one of my favourite places and I couldn't wait to get there. Once we got there we jumped out the car and Joshua gave us money for the bus ride home. We were having the time of our lives until Harriet saw the sweet shop. The horrid look on her face told me that she was going to steal something. "Harriet Dorr, don't you dare!" I cried. But it was too late. She was already in the midst of her crime. Luckily nobody noticed her steal the packet of chips.



We had been on all the rides except for one. The line was too long to wait for, so Harry came up with a brainless plan. "Harriet Dorr, it will never work!"

"Don't worry. Joshua and I have done it before." Slowly we made our way to the side of the slide. When the coast looked clear, we jumped over the edge. As we jumped, a lifeguard came whizzing out of nowhere and crashed into us. My heart sank. I knew we were in trouble. As we got out the pool, the lifeguard grabbed us by our arms and told us to



leave Waterworld and never come back. Harry thought this was a big joke, but the look on the lifeguard's face told me he was being serious. On the bus ride home I realised that Harry had not changed one bit.

While lying in a bubbling bath I realised that my friendship with Harry was just getting me in trouble. The next evening when Harriet came to my house she asked me if I wanted to go to the night club down the road. Then I realised that it was an over-eighteen club, but before I could answer her, she had already pulled me outside. Suddenly, I lost my temper, "HARRIET DORR! That's it, I've had enough of your naughty tricks. I don't want you to be my friend anymore."

That was the last I ever saw of her. But I felt that not being Harriet's friend anymore was a wise decision and I'm now glad that I can have fun without getting into trouble.



Twins

By Rebecca Jordaan and Hayley Lowry

Casey was a 13-year-old girl who lived with her dad. She had an identical twin sister who lived with her mother. Their parents were divorced when they were two years old. Casey was told that her mother and sister lived far away. She had not seen her mother and sister for eleven years.

Casey slammed the car door and looked around her. This was her new home for the term. Her dad got out of the car to give Casey a hug and said, "Good luck." She gave her dad a kiss and then ran inside to unpack.

Casey was at boarding school and she loved it already. She looked at the list to see who was in her dorm. It was a girl called Sandy. She had a feeling she would become good friends with her.

While Casey was unpacking, Sandy walked in. Casey turned and stared at the girl in astonishment - they were so similar!

"Hello," said Casey.

"Hi, what's your name?" asked Sandy.

"Casey, and you must be Sandy."

"Yes," she replied, surprised.

Sandy asked Casey where she lived and Casey replied that she lived in Durban. Sandy told Casey that her dad also lived in Durban.

"What's that around your neck?" asked Casey.

"Oh, it's a locket my mum gave me when I was young," answered Sandy.

"That's strange, mine looks similar, but my dad gave me mine," said Casey thoughtfully.

Sandy and Casey took off their precious lockets and placed them together.

"They match!" cried Sandy.

Suddenly, the bell for supper rang. The two girls ran out of the room towards the dining room.

After school the following day Sandy said quietly to Casey, "I think we are sisters."

"I think so too," whispered Casey.

"Let's try and get our parents to meet at Sports Day," said Casey excitedly.

"Good idea!" exclaimed Sandy.

At the Sports Day, the girls looked for their parents. When Sandy found her mother, she beckoned for Casey and her father to come over. Both parents were shocked to see each other and their daughters.

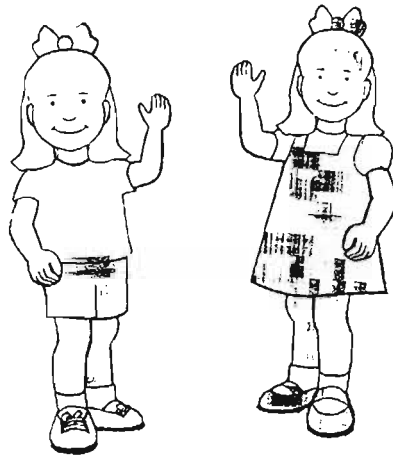
After Sports Day, they went out for lunch and the parents suddenly realized that the girls could not be separated again.

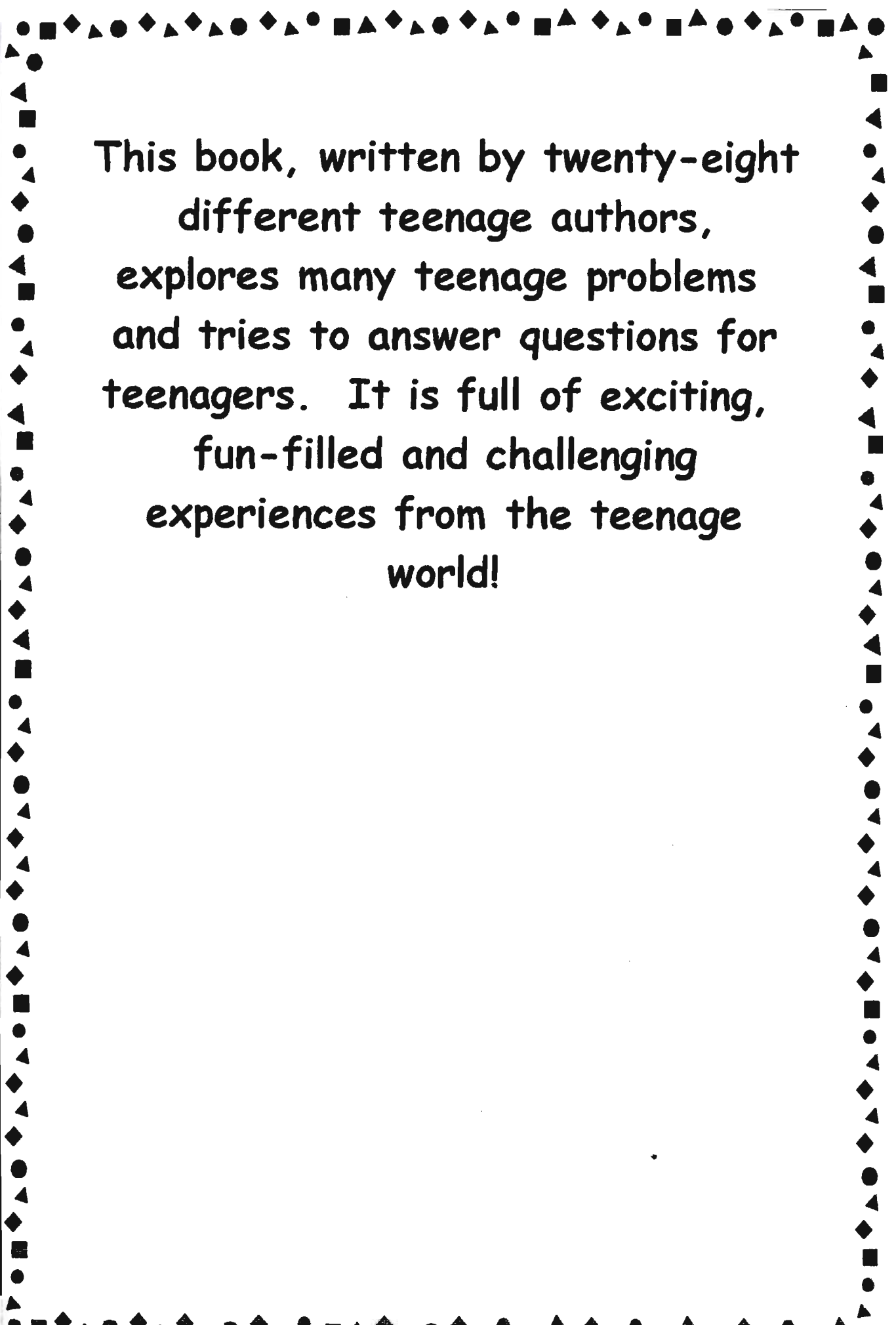
A few weeks later, both parents came to pick up Casey and Sandy from school, as it was the end of term. Both girls were surprised to see their parents together. In the car the girls' mother told them the thrilling news. "We are getting remarried."

"Oh, this is so amazing!" cried Casey excitedly.

"I know, it's like a fairy tale," said Sandy joyfully.

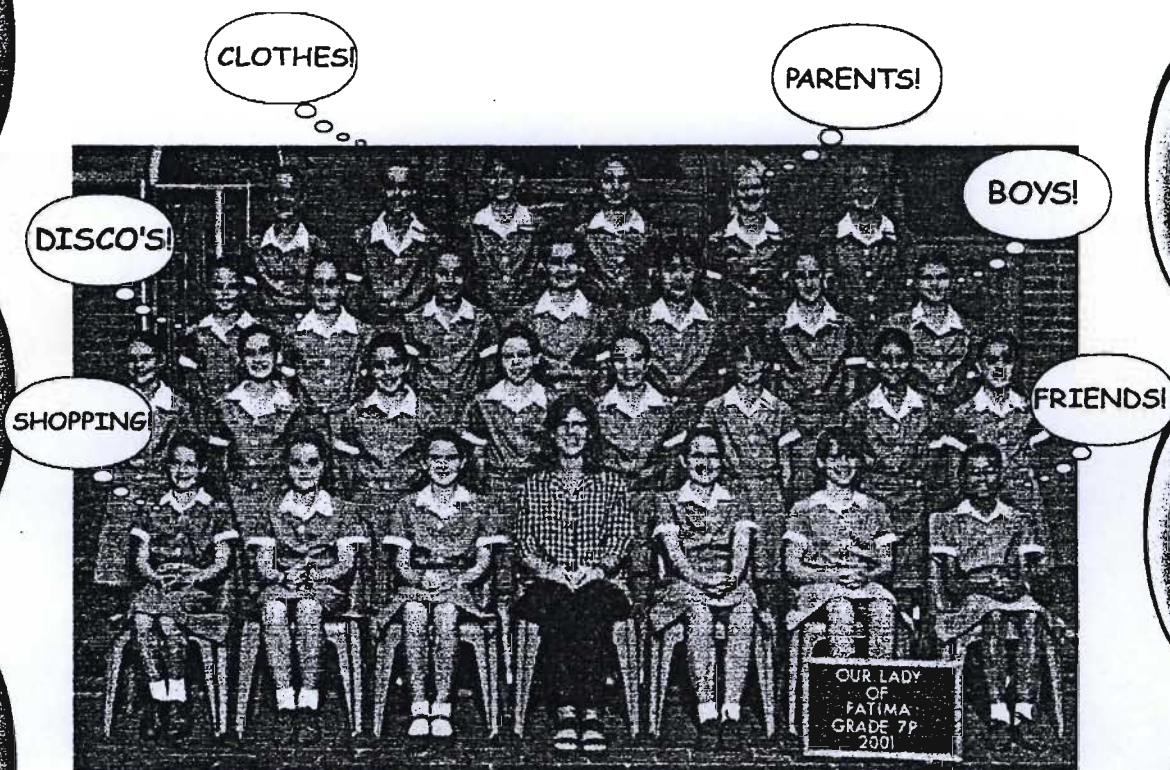
Casey and Sandy's parents remarried and they moved into a beautiful new home in Durban, and the whole family lived happily ever after.





This book, written by twenty-eight
different teenage authors,
explores many teenage problems
and tries to answer questions for
teenagers. It is full of exciting,
fun-filled and challenging
experiences from the teenage
world!

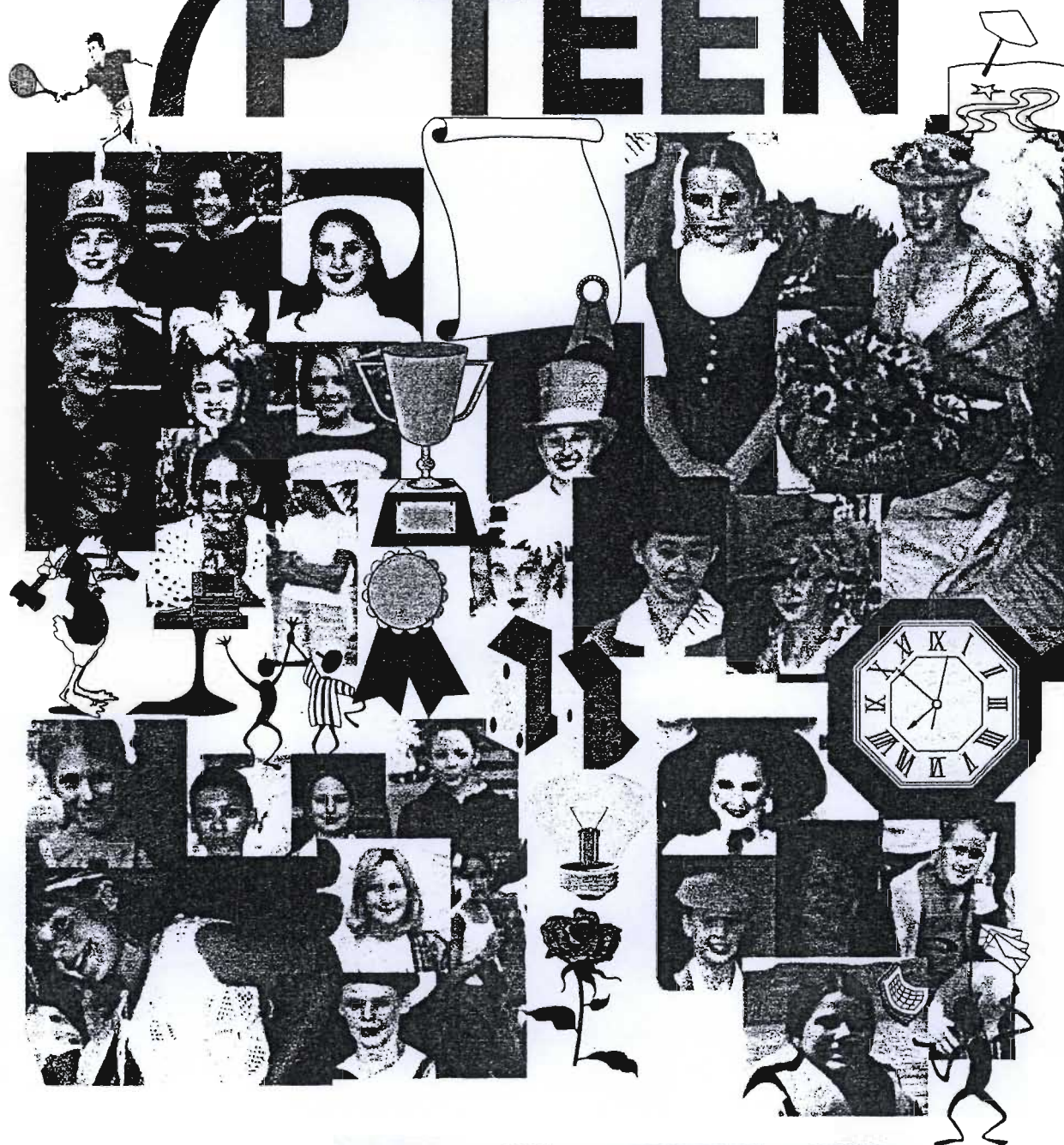
7P TEEN



TALES

A COLLECTION OF STORIES WRITTEN BY GRADE 7P

7P TEEN



TALES

By Grade 7 Pithouse 2001

7P TEEN TALES

BY GRADE 7P 2001

Boyfriends, clothes, parents, important decisions, big changes - teens face them all. Grade 7P have written a variety of different teenage stories.

As we are teens ourselves, we know the troubles teens face. In each story there is a teenage problem. We have written about how teenagers find solutions to their problems. This book was written for teenagers by teenagers!

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Kathleen Pithouse	

A DIARY EXTRACT OF TAMMY'S TEENAGE YEARS	2
Amy Kruger	

ALEXA'S BIG CHANGE	4
Jessica Hargreaves and Sinead Booth	

DON'T DIE ON VALENTINE'S DAY!	8
Carryn Smith	

FAT CHANCES	11
Tannyth Bodin	

FOREVER	13
Jade Chan and Misa Ferry	

IN-BETWEEN LOVE	16
Courtney tod, Cheri-lee Blanckenberg, Dominique Webb and Kathryn Moss	

"IS IT ME?"	20
Julie Grant	
KIRSTEN JACOBS	23
Chantal Chelin	
MANDY'S MAKE-OVER MISTAKE!	24
Jessica Hargreaves and Sinead Booth	
MESSAGE RECEIVED!	28
Courtney Tod and Cheri-lee Blankenberg	
SARAH'S FIGHT FOR LIFE	32
Joanna Levick	
SHAME ON YOU!	33
Carryn Smith	
SHOPPING.... WITH WHAT?	36
Bronwyn Cocks and Candice Duarte	
SUDDEN NEWS	38
Marina Patuel	
TEENAGERS AND THEIR LOOKS	40
Jodi Von Buddenbrock	

THE DECISION 42

Megan Marais

THE INBETWEEN 45

Kirsty Pirie and Bronwyn Cocks

**THE LAST AND BEST CHRISTMAS
WE SPENT TOGETHER** 47

Daniella Dos Santos

THE SPRING DANCE 51

Jodi Von Buddenbrock and Marina Patuel

THE UNEXPECTED MURDER 53

Megan Marais and Vicki-Lee Naylor

TORN APART 55

Julie Grant

TROUBLES AT SCHOOL 57

Vicki-Lee Naylor

WHAT IS CANCER, MRS JONES? 60

Teegan Marais and Kyllie Hogg

INTRODUCTION

In September 2001 the Grade 7P English class accepted an invitation to take part in a Teen Stories Writing Project. This project involved writing short stories about teenage experiences.

The 7P learners have compiled their stories into this collection, entitled *7P Teen Tales*. Some stories were written individually, some in pairs and some in groups. Each learner in the class is the author or co-author of at least one story.

The stories in this collection have been written for teenagers by teenagers. Enjoy them.

Kathleen Pithouse
Grade 7 English Teacher 2001

A Diary Extract of Tammy's Teenage Years

By: Amy Kruger

July 31 2001

Dear Diary

Since the death of my parents I've been staying with my Aunt Jackie. I sometimes feel sorry because she was only married for three years. She married this guy named Stew. If you ask me I think it's a really ridiculous name! Anyway, Stew was a News Reporter and he was on his way to a really important case. He was driving on the free-way when a speeding combi came from behind him and ... I actually don't want to talk about it anymore. Enough about Aunt Jackie. What about my problem? Aunt Jackie is sending me to a new school (which I don't like at all). It's called Brecia High School and it's very small. Oh well, I don't really have a choice.

August 1 2001

Dear Diary

Today was my first day at school. I wasn't the least bit excited and school seemed interminable. I haven't made any friends because I'm too timid and nobody has come to me or said hello. I feel so uneasy at this school, sort of like the wrong piece in a puzzle. I can't wait 'till the day ends.

August 8 2001

Dear Diary

I never want to go to school again. Not after today, not after what has happened! I was embarrassed at school today! During my English lesson I went up to the teacher complaining about an intense stomach ache. I didn't know anything about getting my period. My parents had never told me and now it was too late. Everybody started teasing me and holding their stomachs as if they had stomach cramps. I left the classroom sobbing and I then heard the tap-tapping of shoes behind me. I suddenly stopped and turned. The tapping came to a halt and there stood my teacher. She asked if I'd been told about getting your period and I said, "no". So she sat me down and told me everything. I felt sort of okay afterwards, but going back to class was another

big step that I wasn't willing to take. Mrs Holmes, my principal, gave me permission to leave and go home. I miss my parents desperately.

October 16 2001

Dear Diary

I'm really enjoying school now. I have a best friend now and her name is Caitln. I also celebrated my birthday on October 14 and turned fourteen. I've met a boy called Shaun McCain at school . He is really caring, attractive and not to forget, charming. Aunt Jackie is all right, now that she's over Stew. She also has a boyfriend (a likable one). I love my life.

Written by: Amy Kruger
Grade: 7P

ALEXA'S BIG CHANGE

BY: JESSICA HARGREAVES AND SINEAD BOOTH

As Alexa and her family drove away, she took one last glance at her beautiful mansion and all the luxuries she'd always taken for granted. She wondered why life had to be so unfair. Just a week ago they were living the good life, but three days ago her dad announced that he had lost all his money and his job. He couldn't find another job in Johannesburg, so they had to move down to Durban where there were more jobs available.

The six-hour drive down to Durban was a long and miserable one, Alexa was an only child and was used to lots of attention, but her parents Courtney and Andrew Holden were silent the whole way.

As they drove into Durban, it was a splendid sight. There were lovely spacious houses, Durban was stunning for a moment and Alexa thought things wouldn't be too bad. But she got her hopes up too high and as the car turned around corner she saw the dumpy part of Durban, in the middle of town. The houses were small and old and the car turned into a tiny driveway in front of a run-down, crumbling house.

"Well this is it," her father sighed.

"It isn't too bad," her mother said with little enthusiasm.

"It's the pits," Alexa blurted out, "At least you could have got us a house in the nice part of Durban! This is the dumps."

"Sorry, dear this is the most reasonable place we could find."

They entered the house. It had dull, colourless walls. It had two small bedrooms, a tiny kitchen and a teeny bathroom.

"It just needs a bit of touching up," said Courtney a little hopeful.

"Yes, lets unpack the car," said Andrew.

Alexa just sat there, not budging to help.

The night dragged on, she just sat there for hours, dreaming about her old home. She wished this was just a dream but it was real, **very** real.

Finally, when it was very dark she went inside to her parents.

"Mom," she said stubbornly, "Where am I going to school?"

It was school holidays at the moment but the school term was coming up in a couple of days.

"Well lovie," said Courtney gently, "I think Durban Public, the school down the road, will be appropriate."

"What!" Alexa screamed, "A PUBLIC SCHOOL!"

"Alexa!" said her dad firmly, "We've hardly any money; I told you! You will have to do with a public school."

Alexa threw a tantrum and ran away to her room.

The next two days dragged by slowly and soon it was time for Alexa to start school. All she'd done was hung around the house, sulking!

It was Monday morning, time to start School. Alexa got slowly out of bed. She was scared and anxious. Her mother dropped her off at the front gates of the school.

"Goodbye honey," she said with a smile, "Good luck!" and she drove away.

Alexa walked slowly in. It was a huge, dirty building with millions of kids around it! She was wearing extremely posh clothes compared to all the other children. She walked around with her held high and a disgusted look on her face. All the other children around her giggled and sniggered at her. She found which class she was in and walked in. She was not used to having boys around, so she just sat down quietly. She looked around the classroom and saw boys and girls jumping around screaming and playing.

A shortish, quite good-looking, boy came up to her. Her heart beat very fast.

"So, you are the new girl from Jo-burg, hey?"

"Yes, I'm Alexa Holden," she said to him in a way that sounded like he couldn't speak English.

"Cool!" He exclaimed.

Alexa looked puzzled.

"It's not that cool today, I actually thought it was kind of hot!"

He burst out laughing. She looked at him in a confused way.

"What's so funny?" she asked.

"Nothing. Never mind, I'm Robbie, howzit?" he said.

"How's what?" Alexa said in a very proper manner.

"Aggg! Let me start again. Hello, I'm Robert. Welcome to our school."

"Thank you ever so much," said Alexa.

"Alexa," said Robbie, looking concerned, "You better get used to the way we live and the way we speak or you'll have no friends." And he walked away to the other end of the classroom to his friends.

Just then the bell rang and a young, cool-looking teacher walked into the classroom.

"Yo, Boys and Girls, get into your seats." She said very loudly.

Alexa was used to the petit:quiet teachers of her old school.

"Get into your seats and read," she shouted and she sat down and put her Walkman on and started nodding her head to the music.

Alexa was amazed, she didn't even have a book, so she just sat there and did nothing.

Finally, after two hours of doing nothing, it was time for break. Before the teacher went out, she added, "Oh please will two girls look after the new girl."

"We will," two pretty girls chorused and they ran up to Alexa.

"Hi, I'm Robyn," shouted the shorter girl.

"Hey, I'm Hayley," said the taller girl enthusiastically.

"Come with us, we'll look after you," They chanted.

"How kind of you, that would be wonderful if it is not too much of a bother," said Alexa poshly.

"It's not a problem," said Hayley.

Robyn and Hayley showed Alexa around the whole break, but started getting annoyed with her bossing them around. At the end of break, Hayley was highly annoyed and slipped Robyn a note before the teacher walked into the classroom.

2: Robyn
She's sooooo irritating!
Maybe we should
Keep away from her!
luv: Hayley

A couple of days passed and the many people who tried to be friendly to her backed away. By Thursday, Alexa was completely lonely. After school on Thursday afternoon when Alexa got home, she thought long and hard about why people weren't speaking to her. She thought about her old friends (Victoria, Elizabeth, Sandra and Mary) and realized none of them had made contact with her since her Dad had lost most of their money and now she was making all the friendly people back away from her because she was acting like her old friends, A Snob!

"Tomorrow" she thought to herself, "I am going to act like a normal kid and have lots and lots of friends."

When she told her parents her plan at supper.

They said, "That's wonderful Honey. We are glad you are trying to fit in."

When she walked into the classroom on Friday morning she shouted out to everyone, "Howzit Guys!"

They looked at her in amazement. By the end of the day she already gained four new friends. Hayley, Robyn, Michael and Robbie.

She had a blast on the weekends and went to lots of parties. Everyone loved her just the way she was. She realized that with her new friend she could just be herself, where as with her old friends she always had to impress them with materialistic stuff and false personality. She learnt to love her new home and started appreciating everything she got in life.

THE END

DON'T DIE ON VALENTINES DAY!

BY CARRYN SMITH

Correne fell to her knees. She wanted to scream, but no words came out. She could only stare at the horrifying scene before her.

It was Valentine's Day at Chicago Public Hospital. The day hadn't been too bad, but that night could be different. Correne, her father, Dr Jonathan Carter, and Lucy, a med. student at the hospital, were going to see the last of Jonathan's patients. He turned to ask Correne to fetch some medication for the man in the ward. She knew exactly what to get and where to go. She did this on numerous occasions when her father had night shift. Lucy walked into the ward. Correne made her way to the Pharmacy to fetch the medication while her father walked towards the ward. Correne was the lucky one. As he looked back to see she was going in the right direction, which he knew was silly; the patient stabbed him in the back. The man was schizophrenic and he didn't want to believe the fact that he had a problem. They had kept him in for observation and to give him medication. Jonathan lay in shock on the floor and looking to his left he saw his med. student, Lucy.

Correne entered the ward a few minutes later. She was shocked at the scene before her and she thought her heart had skipped a beat. There her father lay in front of her in a pool of blood, her friend Lucy not too far from his left shoulder. Meanwhile, in the front office, the other doctors were waiting for them. "Maybe someone should go see what's taking them so long?" Dr Paul McCrane suggested. Dr Laura Innes volunteered and made her way to ward 7b. As she came nearer, she saw Correne sitting at the door and immediately she knew something was wrong because Correne was shaking like a leaf in the wind. Dr Innes slowly walked towards the door and she looked in. She screamed.

Jonathan and Lucy were rushed to the ER. Jonathan was semi-conscious but Lucy was totally out.

Another doctor, Dr Alex Kingston, was with Correne in an exam ward. Correne had severe shock. Also in the ward were a detective and a psychologist. She had to give all the details. It was hard to concentrate because she kept having flashbacks. Again and again she saw her father in a pool of blood on the floor of exam room 7b.

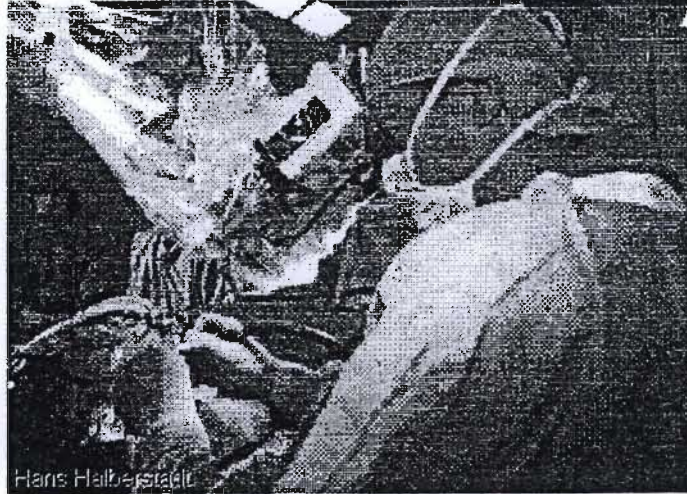
Meanwhile, things weren't going too good in the ER. Jonathan was slipping in and out of consciousness. Lucy was taking a turn for the worst. The knife had hit her in the chest, the tip puncturing her heart, causing internal haemorrhage. The doctors had to do an emergency operation to her chest. Dr Innes and Dr Benson were trying their best to stop the bleeding. After half an hour, they managed to stop the bleeding. But one question bugged the doctors: would it start again? They hoped not. Jonathan was in a better condition than earlier and that kept Correne at rest. She was so scared that her beloved father was going to die. Then whom would she live with? Her mother had died giving birth to her. So she had lived her whole life with her father. Maybe she could stay with her Gran. But she was very old and sick. She had no other living relatives. Would she become a street child? Now she knew the answers.

"Correne? If you want to you can go see Lucy," Dr Innes interrupted her thoughts, "Are you OK? I know you've had a bad night but good news is they're both going to make it." Correne rushed to go see Lucy. She was able to talk, but only in a whisper, "Hi, Correne. Wazzup?" Correne could hear the pain in her voice. "Have you heard about your father?" Correne shook her head. "Oh, so I can't catch up on the gos-" She was cut short by the heart monitor, that suddenly made a flat sound. Correne rushed into the corridor, almost colliding with Dr Innes.

"Lucy, her heart's stopped," Correne managed to say. Dr Innes called Dr McCrane who was walking towards them. They rushed into the ward. Unfortunately, Lucy died.

Jonathan was just fine. Correne went in to see her father. It looked as though he had woken up in a terrible mood. But as she walked in he cheered up. "Hi dad, how are you feeling?" she queried. "Not on top of the world. You know the guy who stabbed me? He almost hit my spinal cord. Almost," he said in a cross voice. "It sounds as if I should be leaving," Correne said, starting to head

for the door. "No," Jonathan said. She turned around, her azure blue eyes meeting his bronze brown ones. "This is only the beginning of a long road," Jonathan told his daughter. "I agree," she replied.



FAT CHANCES

Tannyth Bodin

On one sunny summer day, twelve-year-old Kirsten Jacobs was sitting by herself under a tall, shady tree. (Kirsten was the kind of girl who gets easily led on by others and did things to be "cool"). Kirsten had no friends and was quite overweight. All the girls used to say she was so horrible and gave her ugly looks. They had never tried to get to know her though, so they could not really say what she was like.

That day all the other girls at school were sitting around in a circle. No one even looked at Kirsten sitting on her own. They acted as though she was not even there. It was quiet that break because the Grade one to threes had gone on an outing, so she could hear the girls talking clearly. Susan Brown, the prettiest, most popular girl at school, said she was going to Point Break and invited everyone. You have to be thirteen years old to go. All of the girls were thirteen years old, but she was only twelve years old. She thought for awhile and decided to go and ask if she could go. "May I come to Point Break too?" asked Kirsten, stuffing her face.

"Are you mad?" said Mary sternly, "come if you want to but"

"Thanks I most definitely will." Said Kirsten, brushing the crumbs off her cheeks.

As she walked away she could hear the girls saying "Loser". She started crying and raced off to the bathroom. Now she was unsure if she really wanted to go to Point Break.

The next night her mom's friend dropped her off. She had just one problem, the girls were not there. She waited an hour but there was still no sign of the girls. She had told her mom to pick her up at 11.30pm and it was only 8.30pm. She went around asking if she could use someone's cellphone. One girl lent her, her cellphone. She dialed 0-8-3-4-8-4-0-4-5-9. Her mom answered and said, "I am very annoyed with you Kirsten, you know I am at an important meeting. I will pick you up at 9.00pm on the dot." Then she slammed the phone down.

After fifteen minutes, Kirsten went and waited outside. She waited five more minutes and guess who she saw? Susan and the gang in Susan's mom's car. They went passed and laughed and pulled faces at Kirsten. For the next ten minutes Kirsten sat sobbing because she felt so lonely and unloved. Her mom picked her up. Nothing was said in the car, not even "hello".

Kirsten eventually had a chance to discuss her school problems with her mom. Her mom said she had never realized how unhappy Kirsten was at school because she had been so busy working. Kirsten has changed to a new school called Springstern High, and now has lots of kind, caring friends. She is still a bit overweight but has lost lots of weight. Her mom is also spending a lot more time with her.

Kirsten Jacobs is back to her happy, bubbly self again.

FOREVER

BY JADE CHAN AND MISA FERRY

On Monday morning the teachers announced that the show production people were coming to do Romeo and Juliet. Jane and Michelle had been waiting for it a long time.

The nine o'clock bell rang. Finally, it was time to go down and watch the play. As Jane was walking down the corridor, she caught a glimpse of the boy playing Romeo and instantly had a crush on him. While Jane and Michelle were waiting in the hall for the show to begin, Jane said, "Have you seen the boy playing Romeo? He is so cute. I hope he asks me out". While they were watching the play, Michelle discovered that she had also had a crush on Romeo too. After the show, Michelle and Jane were walking down the passage to their classroom when they heard Romeo in one of the classrooms talking to his friend. "Jane, he is in there. What shall we do? Lets have a look at him," said Michelle "let's look through the key hole and spy on him," said Jane excitedly. As they were looking through the key hole, Jane shouted, "I can see him I can see him!" As they were looking through the key hole the Romeo guy walked out and bumped right into Jane. Startled, Jane stumbled backwards. When she regained her balance, she asked the boy what his name was. He said his name was Justin. And then Jane apologised and introduced herself, "my name is Jane". As Jane and Justin were talking,

Michelle quietly slipped away, while tears in her eyes were growing hot.

Later in the day, Michelle found out that Justin had asked Jane out. Michelle tried to confront Jane and told her that she had been such a “trader” and didn’t even give Michelle a chance to talk to Justin. Days passed when Jane and Michelle never talked to each other. It was obvious that their long-lasting friendship was over.

One hot afternoon, Michelle was walking down the street thinking about the fight she had had with Jane. While she was walking, she saw a familiar face enter a car. Then suddenly, she realised it was Justin in the car. “Should I go over and say hello?” Michelle said to herself. Startled, she saw another figure in the car. When she walked forward to have a better look she realised it was another girl in the car. While Michelle was wondering what the girl was doing in the car, Justin leaned over and kissed her. Astonished, Michelle stumbled backwards. “Justin was cheating on Jane!”. Trying to gather her thoughts, Michelle wondered should she tell Jane or not. Michelle ran home and dialled Jane’s number, “Hello, it’s me Michelle”. Just as she was about to continue, the line went dead. Jane had slammed the phone down on her.



During class Michelle wrote a letter to Jane asking her to meet her by the girl's toilet. During break Michelle met Jane at the bathroom. "What do you want?" asked Jane in a brisk manner.

"I want to talk to you about Justin, he is cheating on you." Jane's face twisted in disbelief. "You are so jealous of me," shouted Jane, as she stormed off to the next class. Michelle's feelings were filled with revenge and hatred.

The next morning, Jane came to a lonely school without Michelle. Later, Jane heard Michelle's name but did not know ~~where~~ it had come from. Then she saw it on the news. Michelle had committed suicide.

Jane was very depressed and realised that nothing should come between friends. Jane tried to forget about it and start a new life.



In-Between Love

By Courtney Tod, Cheri-lee Blanckenberg, Dominique Webb and
Kathryn Moss

IF FOUND PLEASE RETURN TO
JENNIFER CARTER AT
78 WEST STREET, CAPE TOWN.

Dear Diary

Date: 1st January 2000

Hi, my name is Jennifer Carter. I am 13 years old and I go to Crawford High. I live in Cape Town at 78 West Street. My hobbies are going to the beach, the mall, playing sport and hanging out with my friends.

This is my first diary, so I felt I needed to inform you on the most important things about me.



Date: 2nd January 2000

From today until the 20th of January I will be in Australia visiting family. School starts on the 23rd of January and I can't wait because I am starting high school.

Date: 4th January 2000

We finally arrived at my Aunty's house in Brisbane. I have had so much fun and laughter catching up with my family, and meeting people I haven't met before.

Date: 10th January 2000

We have been to so many restaurants and beaches. Their seafood here is divine and their sandy white beaches have awesome waves.

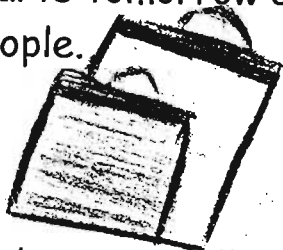


Date: 11th January 2000

I am having so much fun here that I haven't got any time to write anymore. So the next time I'll be writing is the day before I go back to school.

Date: 22nd January 2000

I arrived home two days ago, but I have been so busy unpacking that I haven't had time to write to you. School starts tomorrow and I am so excited, but nervous to meet new people.

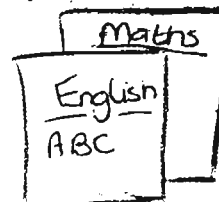


Date: 23rd January 2000

Today was really fun and I found out that I am in Mrs L. Halliwell's class and she is ok. Phoebe, my best friend, and I both take English and Maths but unfortunately all of our other subjects are different. We are both glad that we take these subjects because there this really cute guy called Brett and I have a crush on him!

Date: 27th January 2000

This week has been really boring because all our teachers want us to write essays on ourselves and I am sick of it.

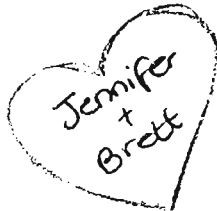


Date: 6th February 2000

Yesterday was Phoebe's party even though her birthday is only on the 9th. At Phoebe's party her dorky, older brother Andrew, confessed that he has a crush on me. YUK!!! A highlight for me at the party was that Brett was there and he asked me out BUT Andrew asked me out first. I don't know what to do because I said yes to both of them.

Date: 7th February 2000

I phoned Phoebe today and she said that I shouldn't worry about her brother because he has been rejected many times before. That didn't help much because I feel even more guilty since he has been rejected so many times.



HELP!!!



Date: 9th February 2000

Brett phoned me yesterday and we arranged to go to the movies on Saturday night. I can't wait! I don't know what to wear so I am going shopping with Phoebe tomorrow.

Phoebe's Birthday!

Date: 10th February 2000

I got a really nice outfit and had a great time but Andrew phoned me to ask me to go to the movies with him on Sunday. Boy, am I going to have a busy weekend!

Movie: No.
Movie No.?
Ticket

Date: 14th February 2000

I'm so excited that I have butterflies in my tummy. Brett's going to be here any minute so I'll write to you tomorrow. There's the doorbell, Bye!



Date 15th February 2000

Brett is sooo boring and self-centred. All he talked about was how nice he looks and how great his hair is and how blue his eyes are and how nicely shaped his chin is and I am sooo frustrated with him. I am going out with Andrew later. I will write to you tomorrow.

Date: 16th February 2000

I saw Brett and another girl kissing while I was on my date with Andrew.

BRETT IS SUCH A JERK!!!



I can't believe I fell for him because he broke my heart. I feel so bad because I destroyed my date with Andrew. I cried and explained everything to Andrew and I now know that Andrew was the best all along. He made me feel so special and told me he understood and that would forgive me.

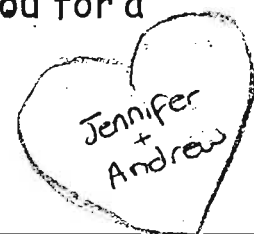
Date: 22nd February 2000



I kissed Andrew!!! Yippee. It was the best day of my life. Don't be cross with me dear diary as I may^{not} be writing to you for a while.

Bye until then

Jen



"Is it me?"

By: Julie Grant

18 September 1999

Monday

Dear diary

Hi, it's me. It's Monday morning and I decided to write before I go to school. Well, yesterday Alex was supposed to meet me at the coffee shop but he didn't show. Strange huh! He probably just forgot or something. I've got to get to school or I'll be late.

BYE

18 September

Monday 12:00

at school

Dear Diary

I'm at school. I'm in history and it is very flat. We're learning about something to do with the Boer War. At lunch break I tried to find Alex but every time he saw me he walked away. I wonder what's up with him? He's been my boyfriend for a year and now he's just ignoring me. Oh no, the teacher's coming, got to go.

BYE

18 September

After school

Dear Diary

The worst thing just happened. I caught Alex and Kim kissing in the parking lot. I don't believe it. Kim's supposed to be my best friend. I hate her. They just laughed when they saw me. I ran as fast as I could to get home. I wonder why he did that to me? It's not fair. Did I do something wrong? I'll get them back. I could just die. I think I will. I will Kill myself.

25 September

Monday

Dear Diary

This past week has been terrible. Kim and Alex have been all over each other. It's so awful. I feel so empty and alone. I've also been examining myself and I think I know why he broke up with me. I'm too ugly. I don't know why I didn't see it before. If I ^{look} carefully, my nose is crooked and freckled. I tried to talk to my mom, but she wouldn't listen. She said I was just hallucinating. My mom NEVER listens. I curled up and sobbed for about two hours. It's the only thing that makes me feel better. I saw this beauty product on T.V. and I've decided to try it. I'm desperate.

BYE

25 September

Monday

Guess what? Alex was at the mall today. With Kim. I couldn't help myself when I saw them. I threw a tantrum. I started shouting at him. I was shouting and crying at the same time. Every one was looking at me. I couldn't stop myself. I let out all my feelings. All of a sudden he got up and started yelling louder than I had. But the thing that hurt the most was that he said the reason he broke up with me was because I wouldn't kiss him.

26 September

Tuesday

Dear Diary

Today Alex wasn't at school. I wonder why? I hope he's okay. Maybe he's too embarrassed. Kim wasn't at school either. They probably ran away together. I have vowed now never to go out with another boy until I am out of school. I have to go eat dinner now.

BYE

27 September

Wednesday

Dear Diary

I broke my vow. Jason, the hottest and cutest guy ever, asked me out for Friday night. I couldn't resist. Well, off the subject of boys, a psychologist came to our school today. I have decided to talk to her. I think it will be very helpful. I have an appointment with her now. Gotta go.

BYE

26 September

later 5:00 pm

Mrs Greenwood (the psychologist) was a great help. She has had the same problems as me. Her boyfriend betrayed her. Anyway, she ended up marrying him. So I guess all problems do get solved over time. I'm in a good mood now. I haven't been in one for a long time. I think I'll close the book on boys and open the book to a good to a great life.

KIRSTEN JACOBS

By: Chantal Chelip

On one sunny, summer day, twelve-year-old Kirsten Jacobs was sitting by herself under a tall, shady tree.

Kirsten was the kind of girl who gets easily lead on by others and did things to be "cool". She had no friends. Kirsten was quite over-weight. All the girls would say that she was horrible.

That day all the other girls at school were sitting around in a circle. No one even looked at Kirsten. They acted as though she wasn't even there. It was quiet that break because the Grade 1-3's had gone on a outing. So she could hear the girls clearly. Susan Brown, the prettiest, most popular girl at school, said she was going to Point Break and invited everyone. You have to be thirteen years old to go. All of the girls were thirteen years old but Kirsten was twelve years old. She thought and decided to go and ask if she could go, "May I come to Point Break too?" said Kirsten, stuffing her face.

Are you mad? "Come if you want to" said Mary Stern.

Thanks I most "definitely" will said Kirsten, brushing the crumbs off her cheek.

As Kirsten walked away, she heard all the girls saying "Loser". She started crying and ran to the bathroom. Now she didn't know if she wanted to go to Point Break.

The following night her mom's friend dropped her off at Point Break. She had just one problem, the girls weren't there. Kirsten waited an hour but still weren't there, so she decided to just leave. She was also feeling guilty that she had lied about it.

Her mom's friend found it a bit unusual because Kirsten had not told her mom a lot about it. So then Janine, her mom's friend, just stopped the car and asked Kirsten what was really going on, well Kirsten just went blank and pale. "You know this is really unacceptable to lie about this. This is a over thirteen club and you are only twelve years old. I suggest next time you tell your mom exactly where you are going and who with". "I know it was extremely wrong but I want to be like others, not just this silly girl who comes to school and does nothing". "Well you really don't have to lie to your parents just because others do. You must not lie to others just to be friends with popular people".

Kirsten eventually agreed. They then went home and Kirsten never had anything to do with those dishonest girls ever again.

MANDY'S MAKE-OVER MISTAKE!

BY: JESSICA HARGREAVES & SINEAD BOOTH

Thursday 1st of September

SPRING!

Morning (before school)

In church on Sunday we heard about how on the first of Spring we can decide to cleanse ourselves and make ourselves new and fresh. I'm sick and tired of being called names by the boys at school and being laughed at by the girls. Seeing that it's the first day of Spring, I've officially decided to have a make-over! Yes, that's right. I, Mandy Moats, am going to have a make-over and going to be asked to dance at the Spring Dance tomorrow night for the first time in my life! I'm going to the salon straight after school.

Me



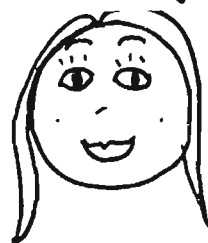
BEFORE

Afternoon

Oh my Gosh! I can't believe it! My old bright red, sticking up hair has been straightened, lightened, high-lighted and is soft and glossy. My face is smooth and there's not a spot in sight! I went on a shopping spree with all the money I saved up. The old me would have spent her money wisely, but the new me went ballistic! I've got the most fashionable, coolest clothes ever. Boy, people at school are going to get a real surprise! For once in my life, I'm looking forward to school. I can't wait till tomorrow!

24

Me



after

Friday 2nd of September

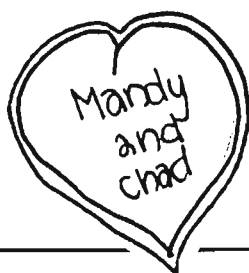
Spring Dance tonight!!

Afternoon

As I walked into the classroom, at school today, all eyes were on me! It was so embarrassing, nobody thought I was Mandy Moats - the biggest nerd in Durban North Senior Primary. People actually spoke to me! Not the nerdy people, popular people! And listen to this - even BOYS!! Erica, Jaqui, Vicky and Sandy (the most popular girls in the grade) asked me to "hang out" with them! This is sooo cool! Janet and Rosey (my old nerdy friends) were sooo jealous! I can't wait 'till the Spring Dance tonight!

Friday Evening (straight after Spring Dance)

Oh my Gosh! It was the best night ever! Everyone loved my new look and the new me and told me I looked stunning in my fabulous new clothes! I hung out with the popular people again and got asked to dance by Chad (the most gorgeous guy in Grade 7). I was in the centre of attention all night and it was the most fun ever! Chad asked me out (obviously I said yes) and I'm sooo excited! I've had a crush on him for as long as I can remember. He said he was going to phone me tomorrow. I can't wait!



Goodnight!!!

25

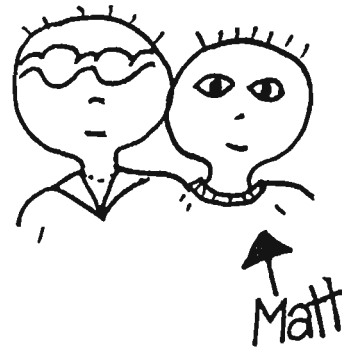
My Spring
Dance
Dress



Saturday 3rd of September

C.J. ↓

DOOM DAY!!!!



You'll never guess what happened today! I went to the Mall looking for some new stylish clothes. I was so cheerful and excited. Then I saw Chad's friends (CJ and Matt) in the Milky Lane. I went up to them and asked where Chad was. They said he had just gone outside for some air. So, I headed outside to meet him. I was so looking forward to seeing him, but when I spotted him, I saw him holding hands with another girl and he was **smoking!!!** I was so angry that I went up to him and slapped him across the face! I hate him! He's such a jerk! I can't believe I ever fell for him! I was so upset. I phoned Erica and the gang and told them what happened. But they just laughed and put down the phone. I didn't know what to do! I was crying so much! I needed to talk to someone and tell what had happened. So, finally I decided to phone Janet and Rosey. They were so understanding after I was so mean to them! Janet invited me over to her house to talk about it. Afterwards I felt much better.



Sunday 4th of September

Back to Normal

I'm over Chad, popularity and good looks. I think it's much better to be yourself and if people don't like you - well, that's their problem! Chad tried to phone me to apologise, but I just ignored him. I went back to the beauty salon and got fixed up to my normal self. It's actually good to have my red hair back! And when I walk down the street, all the boys don't look at me and I feel much more comfortable. From now on I'm just going to be myself, I've learnt a big lesson!

By the way, I'm thinking of dyeing my hair green - What do you think?

.....
ONLY JOKING!



Message Received!

By Courtney Tod and Cheri-lee Blanckenberg

Priscilla @ 42 Cadogan Drive

Enter

Message received!

"At last I've found a pen-pal after looking for two months for someone to write to by e-mail. I have just sent all of my personal details in my first letter to my new pen-pal, Mark!"

To: Mark Jensen

From: Priscilla Hemmingway

Subject: Detailed letter

Dear Mark

My name is Priscilla Hemmingway and I am 13 yrs old. I am really glad you chose me to be your pen pal because I have been looking for a pen pal for soooo long. I have to go now because I have stuff to do. I am having a few problems at school and I don't know what to do.

Maybe you could help?

Write back!

From: Priscilla

Priscilla finished her homework and after dinner that day she went to check the computer. She was so glad as she found she had a letter from Mark.

To: Priscilla Hemmingway

From: Mark Jensen

Subject: Reply to your letter

Dear Pris (I hope you don't mind me calling you that!)

Wazzup??!!

Sorry about your problems!

I don't mind if you write about them because I could help you out bro.

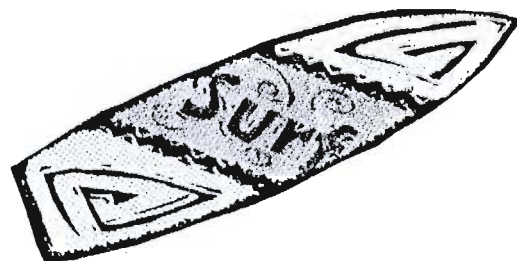
Gotta go. The waves are calling me. Where I live in Ballito the beach is the best place to be.

Hope to hear from you soon!

From 1 kiff guy to another kiff girl

Cheerz!

Mark ☺



Priscilla was ecstatic to hear from Mark and she couldn't wait to write about her problems as ^{she} had never told anyone before.

To: Mark
From: Priscilla
Subject: Problems

Dear Mark

It's great to hear from you. I am so glad that I can finally tell someone about my problems.

Problems

1. At school only my teacher likes me.
2. I hate my appearance. (I have red frizzy hair, glasses braces and the ugliest figure you have ever seen)
3. I am dying to be in the popular gang
4. I am always left out when it comes to pairs and groups.
5. My parents act like I am not there!

Help!!!!!!

If you have any advice or ways to solve my problems, it would be greatly appreciated.

Hope to hear from you soon.

Priscilla (Pris)

Priscilla felt so relieved because at last she let go of everything that was trapped inside of her. She was desperate for Mark to reply but she was scared that he might not want to talk to her anymore after she'd written about her problems.

Priscilla checked the computer every hour but Mark had not replied. This made her very nervous as she thought he didn't want to be her pen pal anymore. Finally, 2 weeks later Mark replied.



To: Pris
From: Mark☺
Subject: Apology and reply

Hi, Pris

Sorry I haven't written for ages.

I am glad you feel you can tell me about your problems.

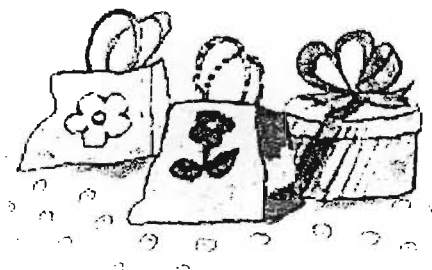
I am going out in a moment but I just felt I should e-mail you quickly since I haven't written for so long.

Write to you soon

Mark☺

Priscilla checked the computer and her heart skipped a beat as she saw Mark's letter. She couldn't wait to reply so she wrote back straight away. She was really desperate to tell Mark her great news.

To: Mark
From: Pris
Subject: Great news



Dear Mark

YOU WON'T BELIEVE IT!!!

I am moving to Ballito and since there is only one high school there, I'll be going to the same school as you.

This solves all of my problems and now I know that my parents do care about me because we are only moving because they thought it would be better for me. Wait a minute, there is still one problem, I am still not popular! Well, I suppose this might never happen.

Gotta go and start packing!
From Pris

Mark was very surprised to hear from Priscilla and wrote back immediately to tell her that all her problems were solved.

To: Pris
From: Mark
Subject: Problem solved

Dear Pris

I am honoured to tell you that all of your problems are solved!
You don't have to worry about not being popular because when
you come to Ballito you will be one of the most popular girls at
school, since I have told them about your letters and they think
you are great.

Can't wait to meet you!

From Mark☺

Priscilla was so glad to hear this news. In between the packing
Priscilla managed to write her last letter to Mark.

To: Mark
From: Pris
Subject: Final letter

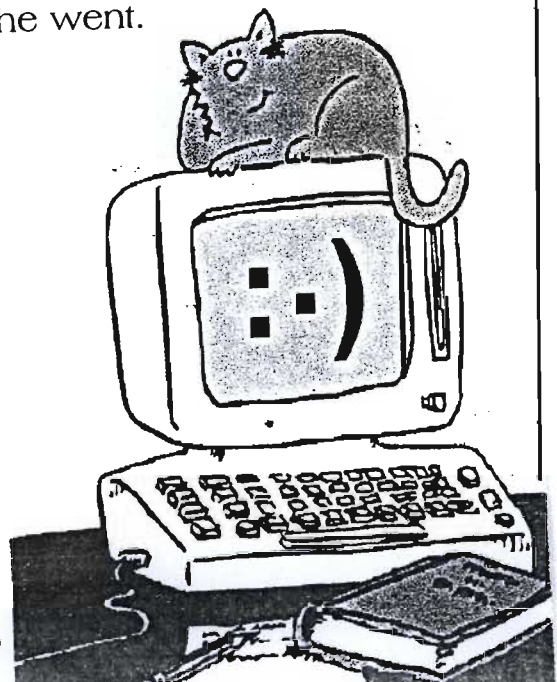
Dear Mark

You can't be serious, this is great! I have never been so excited in
my life.
Can't wait to see you!

This will be my last letter to you as I am going to see you on
Monday.

From Pris

And so Priscilla's new life began in Ballito. She was the most
popular girl wherever she went.





SARAH'S FIGHT FOR LIFE.

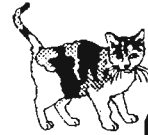
Joanna Levick

22 August 2001

Everyone has been kind to me, even Claudia Mcdulphor , I think that it is just because I'm anorexic . I can only go to school for four hours not eight hours because I have to go to Urasa which is this clinic where they teach me and keep an eye on how I am eating. These clinics are like total torture but I feel safe there because I know that the people there are like me.

Sarah *

23 August 2001



Everyone is ignoring me {once again}. I felt repulsive at first until the unpopular kids asked me if I would be their friends. They really are delightful people but they think I'm a bit bizzare and hesitate to ask me any questions. I think I've found my true friends. Claudia Mcdulphor is so horrible to them that I feel like boxing her in the stomach whenever I lay my eyes on her. I even made a friend at Urasa. Her name is Dominique. She is so friendly. I'm begging to love life again.

Sarah *

24 August 2001



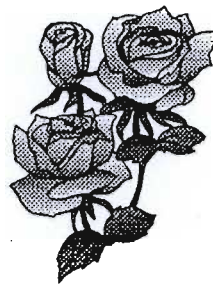
Last night was terrible!!!!!! Our alarm system went off and I didn't wake up so my mom was worried and rushed me to the hospital. So here I am sitting in the hospital for no reason. The doctor said that I must stay here to see if what my mom said was true .She thought I was unconscious or something. Just when I was enjoying life, this had to happen! WHY ME?

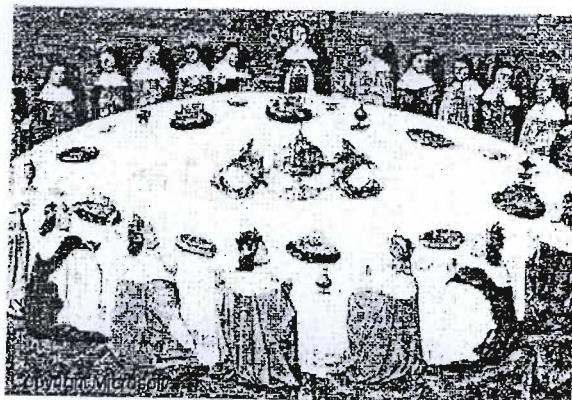
Sarah *

4:00

All of my friends from school and Urasa visited me . They brought me delicious chocolates, charming teddies and fragrant flowers. The doctor said that I can be discharged at six o'clock and that everything is super. I have had a delightful day and I feel so special knowing that people care and love me. I have learnt to love life and to cherish the friends and family I do have. You must try as hard as anything to make as many friends as possible!!!!!! I love my life.

Sarah*





"Shame on you!"

By Carryn Smith

"Ow!" cried Liam as the older boy punched him.

"Serves you right!" Qasim jeered. "You're too wimpy to become a knight!" His friends Leonardo and Aaron burst into laughter. Just then, they heard a voice from behind them, "Bullies! You are so cowardly that you pick on people younger than yourselves! Shame on you!" It was Lalisa. She was a third year page (a child training to be a knight), as was Liam. Qasim, Leonardo and Aaron were all squires in their third year. "Oh look! It's The Girl! I'm so scared!" Leonardo said sarcastically. Lalisa, along with several other girls, were not afraid of trying to become knights. They thought it was fun. They were treated exactly the same as the boys and had no special privileges. Lalisa was one of a group of pages and a couple of squires who were trying to stop bullying. They would ask the younger ones if the bruises they bore were from training or from bullies. Qasim and his gang were the only ones who were still tormenting first and second year pages.

"Where's the rest of your gang? Too scared to have a fight?" Aaron asked.

"No, actually they're right here," she said as 20 or more others came from around the corner. "Still in the mood for a fight, Qasim?" By then they had already started running away from them. "Liam, you must be more careful. They look for lone pages with eyes like a hawk. Just like you. Watch it!" Lalisa said. He nodded and went to his rooms to get ready for dinner.

After supper, the training master, Sir Jeremy of Ophir requested Liam, Qasim, Leonardo and Aaron to see him. Liam had russet-brown hair and bottle-green eyes, which were showing he was really scared. Qasim was a tribesman from a desert in the north. Leonardo was heir to his fief called Borfex. He had khaki-coloured eyes and raven-black hair that came down to his shoulders. Aaron had flaxen-blond hair with sapphire-blue eyes.

"Now boys, I heard you were fighting," Sir Jeremy was saying to the four boys in front of him.

"No, we weren't. We fell down the stairs," Qasim told the training master.

"Oh? Is that so? Then how come you are all so battered and bruised? You couldn't all have fallen down the stairs." They couldn't say yes. They'd all get into huge trouble. "For fighting, when the sun reaches the 3 on the dial on Sunday, you will all go clean horse gear for an hour."

He then dismissed them and when they walked out, Lalisa and Angus, the dog the pages and squires called their mascot, tagged along beside Liam. Angus was really Lalisa's dog, but she wasn't allowed to say so because they weren't allowed pets. He was brindle with ivory-white socks.

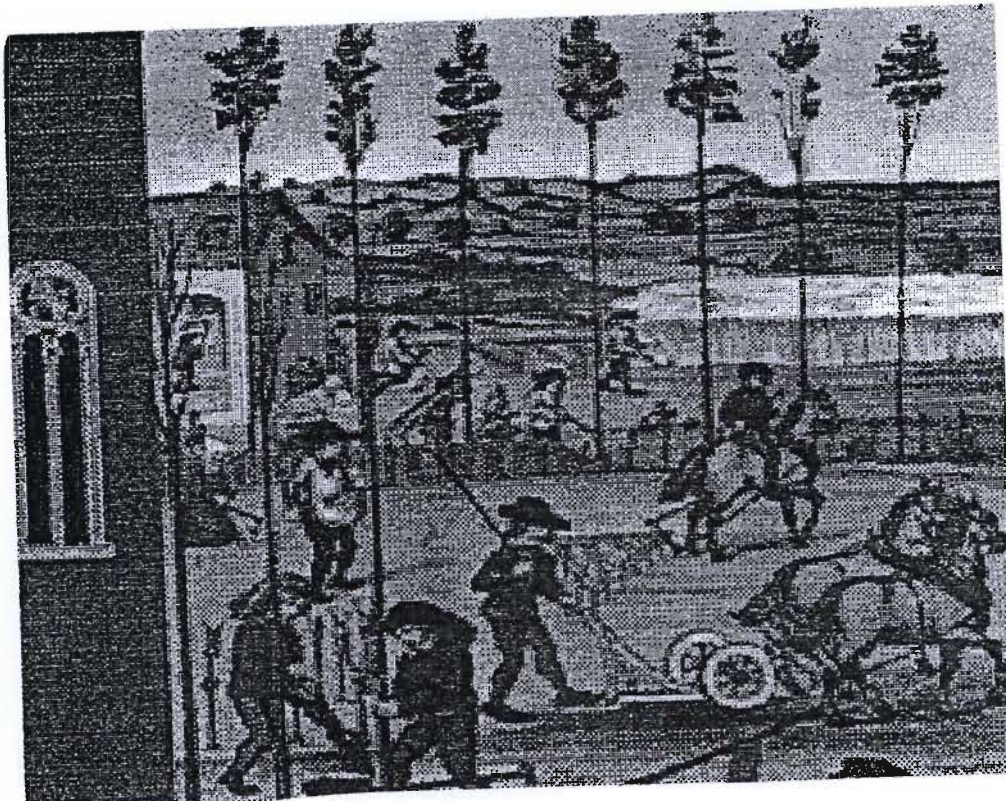
"Do you think bullying will stop in the palace?" Liam asked Lalisa.

"I doubt it, but we can help stop it being very bad."

"I agree," a boy nicknamed Munchkinsaid as he walked past them.

The next day, while at armed combat training, Liam was paired up with Qasim. By the end of the lesson, Qasim had beaten the poor boy half to death. Sir Jeremy sent him straight to a healer. Sir Jeremy had seen Qasim was trying to hurt Liam and ordered him to stop. Qasim had totally ignored him. At lunch, Sir Jeremy asked for Qasim to see him after his meal.

That night, Liam and Lalisa had a big celebration because Qasim had been asked to leave the palace for rudeness and unruly behaviour.



"Shopping... With What?"

By Bronwyn Cocks and Candice Duarte

"WOW!"

"Geez Louise!"

"This place is HUGE!"

They all stared around them in amazement. Gateway was the biggest mall they had ever seen. Mandy and Robyn had decided to hang out at the "funkiest" mall around. They had also invited their boyfriends, Corrie and David. The teenagers walked around trying to find something cheap to buy because they were really low on money. They wanted something... anything, to prove they had been there.

The group had walked everywhere, from the Food-Court to the Entertainment Centre, the clothes section and everywhere else. After two hours, Mandy and Robyn had discovered that the shops were way too expensive for their price range. After earning their money waiting on tables, they had both spent their cash on the "coolest", most expensive C.D. around.

Robyn and Mandy both spotted a stunning dress, but it was in the most high-priced boutique in Gateway. David and Corrie persuaded the girls into shoplifting the dress, although they did not want to.

"We can't do that!" they answered in unison.

"It's not a major thing!" mocked David.

"Come on. It's only your first time," Corrie said temptingly.

"You mean you've done it before?" Robyn said accusingly.

"Oh well. I suppose it's that a big deal anyway." Mandy replied.

"Oh, okay." Robyn said reluctantly. Robyn was wearing a baggy jersey over her skimpy top. That was an advantage. As they were entering the shop, Corrie hissed quietly, "Just look casual."

"Why?"

“Cause there’s a security guard eyeing us suspiciously,” David replied, “Act like you know what you’re doing...”

As they were leaving the shop, the security monitor started beeping loudly.

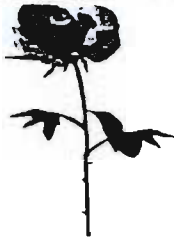
“Run!” bellowed Corrie.

The shop clerk and the security guard came dashing after them. It looked like they were going to get away, but at the last moment another security guard stepped in front of them.

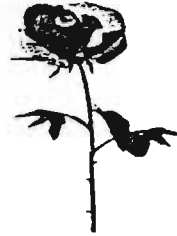
Officer Lok had already phoned all of their parents. They were all sitting tensely in the police station, waiting... waiting for what? None of them knew. Mandy and Robyn were called into the interrogation room, where their parents were waiting for them. Their parents froze them over with their icy glares. “Sit down” Officer Lok had ordered.

The questioning seemed to take forever, but finally the girls got it over and done with. They had got off easily with one week of community service because they were basically good kids. The boys, however, had gone on trial because of their criminal records.

Mandy and Robyn had got off easily and they were grateful for it. They decided to cut off their relationships with David and Corrie. They had learnt a valuable lesson and decided never to do it again. Mandy and Robyn had started their lives afresh.



Sudden News



By Marina Patuel

One day, early in the morning, myself, Michelle, James, my cousin, Tess, my sister, Greg, my brother in law, Maria, my mom and Bruno, My sister's father in law, were on our way to the Kruger National Park.

When we arrived, we unpacked our clothes and went for a game drive. The park was leaf-green on the tops of the trees and a yellowish-brown on the ground. We spotted a lot of different kinds of animals. After the game drive, everyone went to the dinner table to eat supper. We ate tasty pizza and greek salad.

After supper, James, mom and I went to bed. The beds had mosquito nets and the rooms were made to look very African.

In the morning I woke up, had a shower and got dressed. James, Bruno Greg and I went for a walk with the ranger. We learnt about various plants and wildlife. At the end of the walk we went back to camp and had breakfast. For breakfast we ate traditional egg and bacon and drank freshly squeezed orange juice.

Afterwards I went to my room and read my book. My cousin came along and we started talking to each other. As we were talking, I heard screaming and crying. I went outside and asked what was going on. Bruno said "There has been an accident". I said "I don't understand, tell me what has happened?"

He replied sadly, "Your brother, John, has been in a scuba diving accident". I felt very sad. Soon mom told me that he had died. Everyone was crying. We packed our things and left. In the car everything was quiet. Finally we arrived at John's and Madelein's house. Everyone was there. We were crying. There was plenty of food but I couldn't eat a thing.

Three days had passed with hardly any eating and plenty of crying. On the day of the funeral we were all feeling glum. Only the family could attend. John's children, Allysa and Tammy, as well as Madelein, Greg, Tess, Bruno, Mom, Dad (Martin) and I went to the funeral. We were allowed to look in the coffin. I did. John looked terrible, but he looked peaceful.

The next day was the memorial service. There were a lot of people there. I didn't even know most of them. Inside the church, most of the family, including myself, read in front of everyone. We said many prayers and sang three songs. We all drove to Tess's house. All the food was vegetarian. I didn't eat much of it at all. I met some people around my age (thirteen). I also spoke to the adults and swam in the pool with my new friends.

It was a gloomy week but now I am back at home carrying on with my normal life. I have written a poem to help me when I am feeling down.





Teenagers and Their looks

By Jodi Von Buddenbrock

Dear Diary

27 January 4:17 pm

Tomorrow is the first day of school. I am so nervous. We arrived here two weeks ago. So sorry I haven't written in so long. I am so ugly! I have so many pimples and my hair, it's like a birds nest. Today when I was getting my stationary two girls saw me. They looked at me and pointed and laughed at me. I hope they don't come from my school! I could have killed them. My mom, Kathy, is so cool. She bought me all these new clothes. I love her.

Susan

Dear Diary

28 January 5:00pm

Today I started school. It was the worst day of my whole life. You know those girls at the shops who teased me, it would only be my luck but they are in my class, Lara and Deven. It was break and I was sitting by myself. They came over to me and told me that I was the worstlooking girl in the school and that I was fat. I cried the rest of the day. My mom bought me a whole box of chocolates for being so brave. I have to remind her sometimes that I am thirteen and not a baby. But I love her all the same.

Susan



Dear Diary

30 January 7:15pm

Today a girl named Gill came to me at break and asked me to sit with her. She is so sweet. She has long blond hair with very olive skin. She is beautiful, she is coming to my house tomorrow. I think we will be good friends. At big break, when I went to the bathroom, Lara was there. We got into a big argument and all of a sudden she hit me across my face. It was so sore, it left a big red mark on my face.

Susan

P.S My face is still sore.

Dear Diary

31 January 8:00pm

When I woke up this morning I had the biggest zit, on my face, I have ever seen. I tried to cover it up but it didn't work. When I got to school Lara and Deven saw me and came over. She told me that my zit is so big it is the size of her mother's whole face. I cried so she told me that I could be one years old girl. Gill came over to my house today. We had so much fun.

Susan

Dear Diary

1 February 6:00pm

Deven and Lara teased and bullied me so much today that I had one huge bruise on my leg. My mom was so cross. She told me that I must try a new style of looks. So I have invited Gill to my house tomorrow. I am going to try something new.

Susan

Dear Diary

6 February 4:45pm

You will never guess what happened. Gill came over the other day and we changed a few things. I look gorgeous. My clothes are attractive and I am cool. Deven and Lara like me now. I don't like them. Gill's and my friendship is so delightful.

Susan

Dear Diary

8 February 1:45pm

Deven and Lara are so jealous of me. I am so popular now. Gill is the most wonderful friend. I hope we can be friends forever

Susan

The End



The Decision

Megan Marais



June 14 Friday

Dear Diary

Wow, did I have a great day? Oh yes!

I got 89% for a Geography test (which I learnt really hard for). And, of course, it is Friday. But it isn't just any old Friday; today is our two-month anniversary. Bobby left a Cherry-red rose and a letter taped to my locker door. The note said he was going to surprise me. He's so romantic! I'm going shopping with Nicky and Shannon later to buy the latest outfit.

(I'll write after I get home tonight)

Later:

I hate Bobby, I despise Bobby, and I detest Bobby!!! I'm too sleepy now, but I'll write every single gruesome detail in the morning.

June 15 Saturday

Dear Diary

I'm in such a rotten mood. I feel like going to sleep and never waking up again.

Last Night:

I was aflame. Bobby arrived and we took a slow drive up to the Palm Grove, Mountain Cabins. We arrived and checked in. As I opened the door to our room, the sight took my breath away! There were exquisite red roses everywhere and in the middle of the room was a candle-lit table set for two. We ate a delicious dinner.

Then came the trouble. Bobby said he had something for me. I thought it would be a ring or something. He brought out a packet what looked like white powder. I was first puzzled and then it hit me. It was drugs. The word rang through my head. I was so confused. What should I do? Should I take them or shouldn't I? It was like I had two minds. One telling me to take them and the other told me not to take them. But the voice telling me not to overruled the other voice. I told Bobby he was a challenged moron. I punched him angrily and ran. Ran, ran, ran, I kept running. Through the rain crying my heart out, I carried on running.

I fell down to my knees and just stayed like that until someone tapped me on the shoulder a few times. It took me a while to lift my head. When I did, a policeman was standing looking at me. He took me down to his office and phoned my parents. They came shortly, both looking pale, and took me home. I slept for a long time. It's just hit me; Bobby is the most popular boy at Larkford High. What will everyone think? It will be all over the school already. I can't go. Oh no. I want to die!



June 16 Sunday

Dear Diary

I moped around in my pyjamas all day. I'm so miserable. I'm so lazy. Oh help me!

June 17 Monday



Dear Diary

Wow! Did I have one weird day? It started off a terrible day, but ended up being amazing!

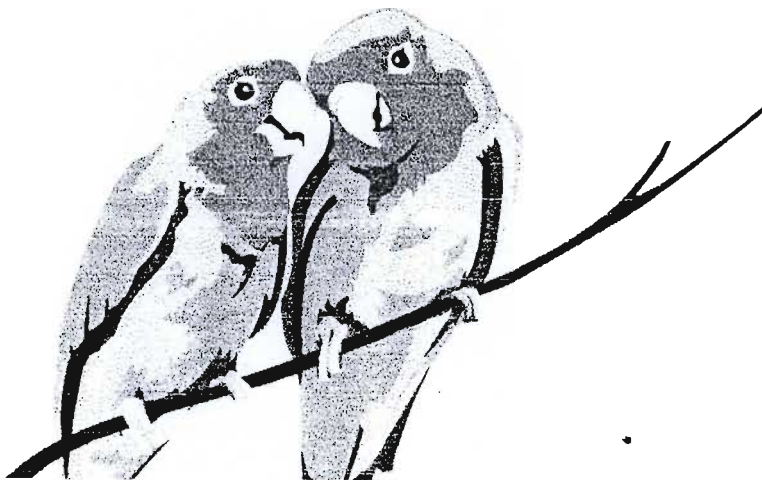
Here's the story:

I woke up this morning (faking I was sick) but mom didn't believe me. So I ended up going (much to my disgust).

I walked to school feeling as if a puppy's tail was wagging so fast inside me. As I stepped into school, everyone started rushing towards me. My head started spinning. What are they going to say? I went into a daze. People were telling me something. I couldn't hear what they were saying. What's wrong with me?

I woke myself out of the daze. Shannon and Nicky came rushing up to me. I thought that they would think I was stupid. They came up and said that I was so brave. I was quite astounded, they later told me what everyone thinks about me. I, Christy Greene, am the most popular girl at Larkford High!

Life is great!!



THE INBETWEEN

By Kirsty Pirie and Bronwyn Cocks



"Hello, hello? Can anybody hear me? Why aren't you answering me? What's wrong with this place?"

Jessica stood there, engulfed in mist, with her back to the room. She looked out the window at the stunning sunrise.

As she turned, she saw a body on the floor. Jessica screamed. She realized that the body was hers. How could she be standing here and why was there a pill bottle on the floor next to her? The room turned black as death and the body was white as snow. The lights turned on.

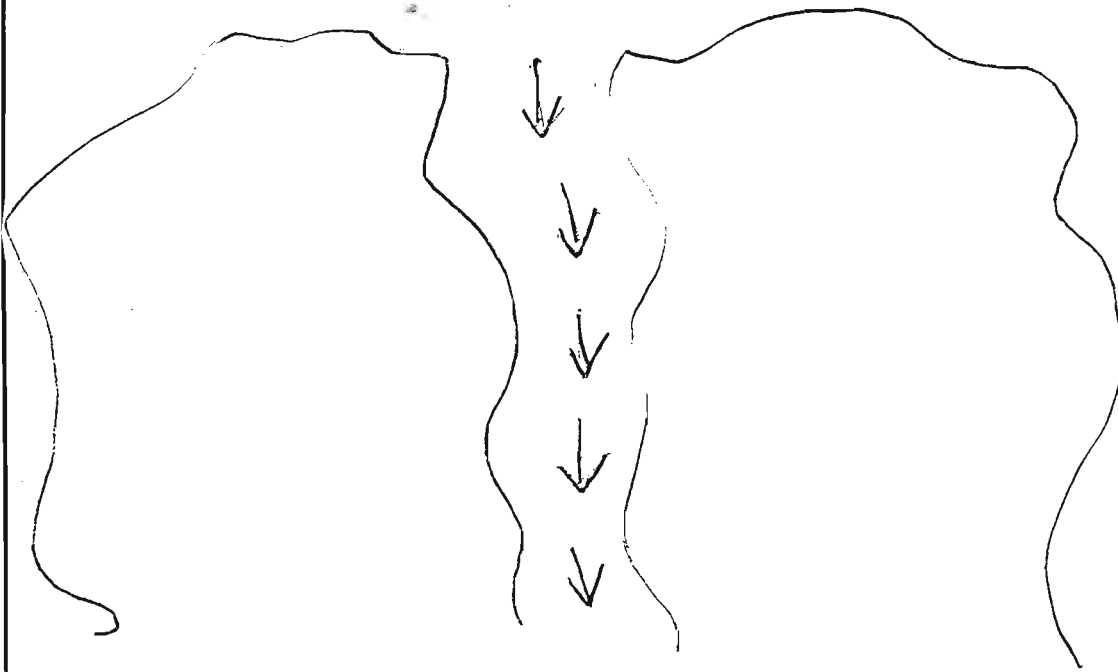
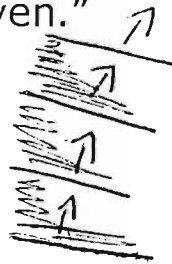
"Click." Mrs. Parker, Jessica's mother, walked in. At first she did not see Jessica's body on the floor. Jessica started sobbing when she saw her mother. She realized she could not go back, the only way was forwards. As Mrs. Parker saw Jessica's body she started to speak, "If only I could have told Jessica about her father." Jessica stopped weeping and listened. The last time she saw her father was ten years ago, and that was when she was seven.

Mrs. Parker was shocked but she managed not to cry. "Your father was a gambler... he gambled away his life." She then ran out the room.

Jess saw two staircases, one was a gleaming white and the other covered in red and black flames. Which one should she take? Jess always dreamed about meeting the devil. Slowly she descended down the black stairs. When she was half

way down, she realized she was making a grave mistake. Nervously, Jess walked back up the stairs and reached her room again. She knew the truth.

Jess saw the shining white staircase. She ascended the stairs and as she reached the top, she turned to see the policemen running around her room, tiny as ants. Jess then twisted around. A giant oak door stood in front of her. She heard angels singing. Then a voice cried out, "Come in, enter the door to Heaven."



THE LAST AND BEST CHRISTMAS WE SPENT TOGETHER

Written By: Daniella Dos Santos

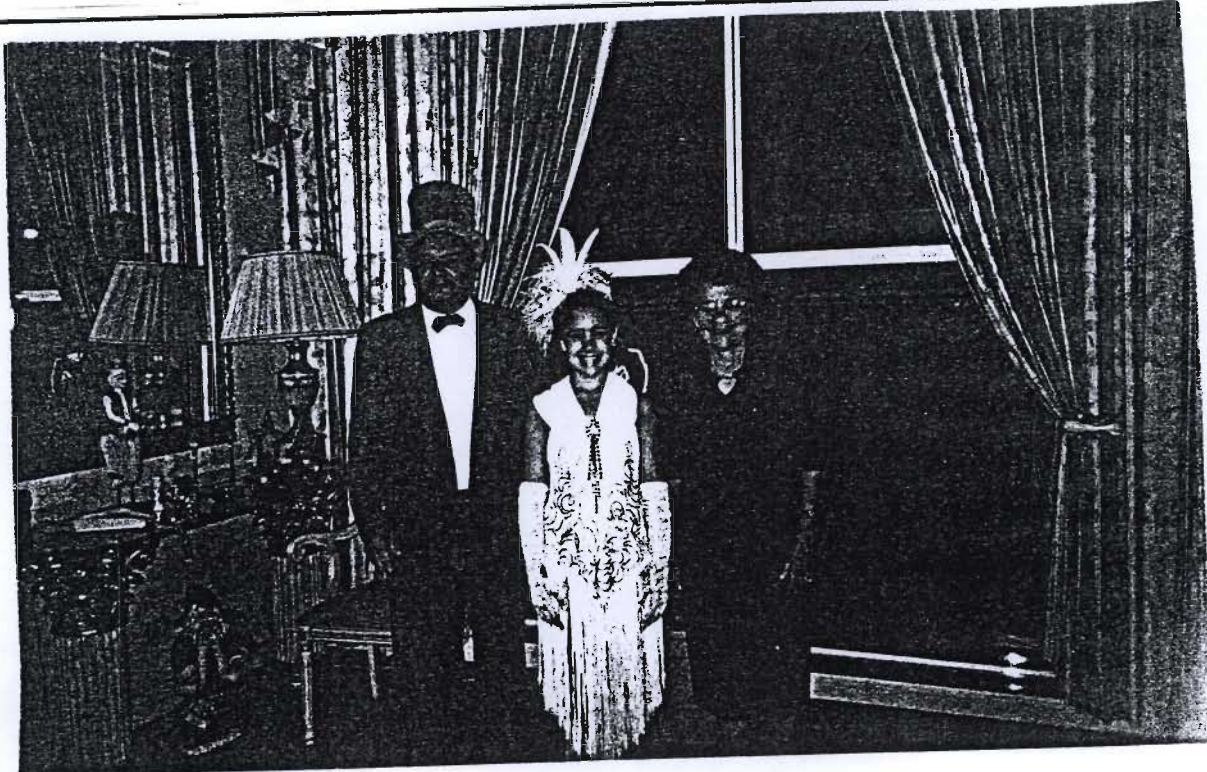


On a warm, sunny day both my mother and father were in the kitchen. My mom was frying and my dad was finishing off the prawns on the braai. It was one of the best days of the year! Not a cloud in sight. It was just my family, the sun, and I. For lunch we had Tiger Medium Prawns on a bed of rice and fried chips with lemon and garlic sauce. There was silence in the

house. I was down by the pool with the rest of my family enjoying the luke-warm water. Brandon, my second cousin, and my Rhodesian Ridgeback puppy were also enjoying the pool for their first time.



After relaxing by the pool we decided to decorate the Christmas tree. There was so much festivity in the atmosphere that nobody wanted that day to end. As evening drew on we decided to have our dinner. Our dinner was mouthwatering with succulent, juicy turkey with gravy, cold meats, roast potatoes and cauliflower and tangy cheese sauce. For dessert we had crème brûlée, Alaska pudding, Traditional Christmas pudding and Portuguese custard tartlets. After dinner we went into the lounge and talked about the year and the experiences we had had. It was about ten o'clock at night and we all went upstairs to put on our very best clothes for midnight mass. We left for midnight mass at eleven o'clock because I was dancing the Liturgical dance. My grand parents were very proud of me. My grandfather wasn't feeling too well because he had an aching chest. We all decided to open presents, which my mom handed out to us.

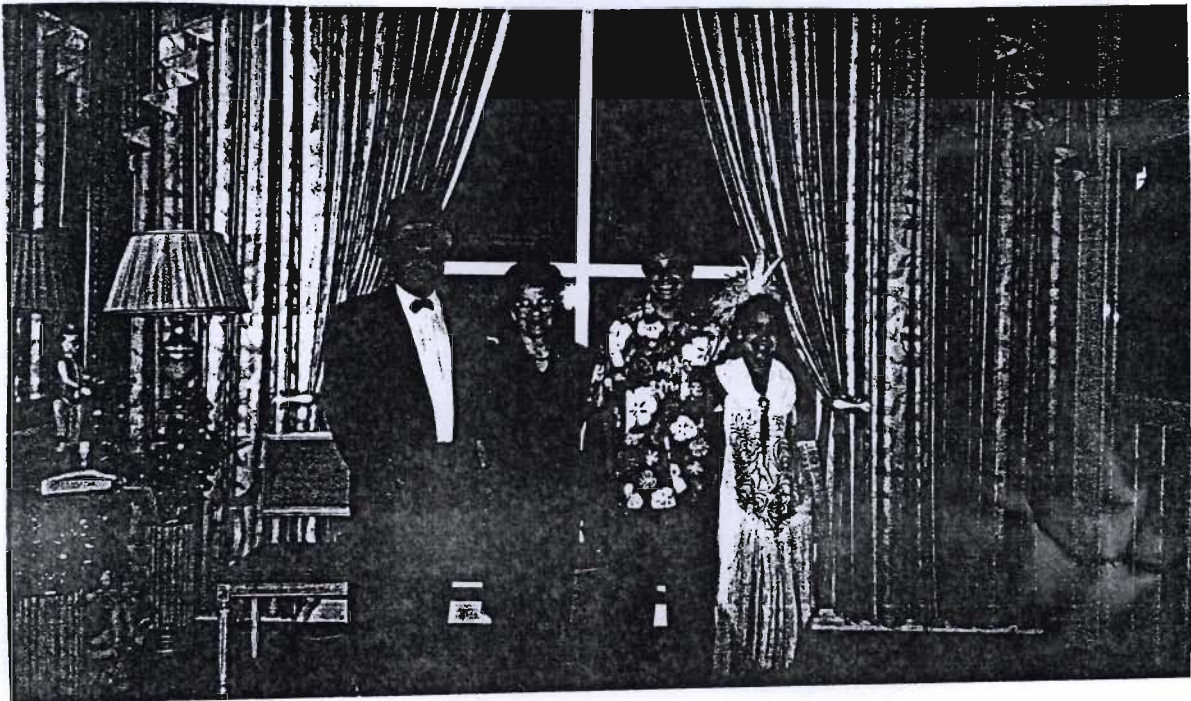


A few days later it was New Years Eve. I couldn't believe that we were entering the 21st century. We all had to dress up. My grandfather dressed up as Willie Wonka from *CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY* by Roald Dahl. My family and I went to a party in Kloof. It was so exhilarating.

We danced all night. By the time I left I had no shoes on because my feet were so sore! We left Kloof at about four thirty in the morning. When we got home we all went straight to bed!

The next day when we woke up my grandfather was having cardiac problems. He said that he was okay but we went to the doctor and he gave us some medicine. On the following day my grandparents left for Portugal because that is where they lived. My grandparent's doctor suggested that he have an operation to clean his arteries. As soon as he arrived in Portugal he booked the theatre for the operation. We all prayed for his speedy recovery. The day that he was supposed to go for the operation, it was cancelled.

Then the following Tuesday he went to have his arteries cleaned. It was a cold, gloomy Tuesday that he went to have the operation. It was only meant to take an hour but had taken about three and a half hours. My grandmother phoned from Portugal and said that something was wrong. So we just prayed and prayed. About ten minutes later my grandmother phoned again to say that my grandfather had died. It was the worst thing that had happened. He was my hero. How could that happen to my grandfather? That whole day tears kept running down my face. As I remember the TERRIFIC moments we spent during Christmas, I felt a pain in my heart. It felt like a thousand Knives going through my heart. I kept wondering how could the best Christmas turn out to be the saddest.



I promised myself that I would always try to be like my grandfather, my best friend and the greatest role model I have ever had. As I look back on the years that I spent with him, I now know that I am very privileged to have known such a great man and have realized that nobody can replace your hero, your friend and, most important, your grandfather. That Last And Best Christmas will remain ^{with} me always!



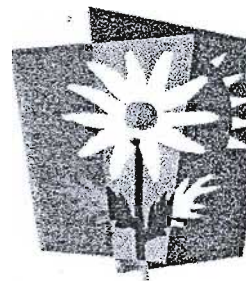
The Spring Dance

By Jodi and Marina

It was a sunny Wednesday morning. Nick and Cindy were in form period, Nick was the most popular boy and the best surfer in his age group. Nick wrote a letter to Cindy (who was not that popular) asking her to go to the Spring Dance with him. After form period Cindy told Nick she would go with him to the dance. Kelly, who is Cindy's best friend, asked Cindy "Who are you going to the dance with?" Cindy replied, "I'm going with Nick." Kelly was astonished.

On Friday morning Cindy woke up with a fiery, red rash on her face. She tried to cover it up, but nothing worked. At break Nick came to her and said, "I'm not going to the dance with you if you're looking like that." And he walked away. Sean saw that Cindy was upset about something and thought it was about the dance so he asked her. "Cindy would you like to go to the dance with me?" Cindy replied. "I was going with Nick. But he didn't like the rash on my face. And I don't know if you would like it either." Sean said, "I don't mind. What matters is the inside, not on the outside." Cindy replied, "Thanks you are so sweet. Pick me up at six tonight."

It was six o'clock and everyone was ready to go.



When they got there, there were crimson Chinese lanterns leading into the hall. Inside the hall there was baby blue and snow white chiffon drapery. Each table had a high vase of flowers. White or blue table clothes and each name engraved in gold on a card.

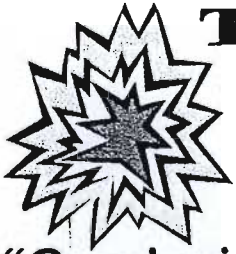
As they entered the beautiful, decorated hall, everybody looked at Cindy and they were all saying how exquisite she looked, in her elegant pale pink dress with diamond straps and her dainty silver shoes with her layered brown hair.

On the first dance, Nick saw Cindy and Sean dancing and he couldn't see the rash on her face. Nick was popping with jealousy.

At the end of the dance they ^{had} a wonderful time.

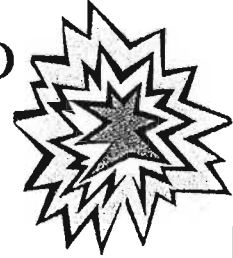
The End





THE UNEXPECTED MURDER

Megan Marais and Vicki-lee Naylor



“Good night Mom, love you!” Brook said while walking up the stairs to her bedroom. “Tomorrow is the start of a new year. And these holidays have been magnificent! What an awesome party mom threw for my friends and I,” she thought as she slid under the warm covers and fell asleep.

After school, Brook was walking home in a very cheerful mood because she had had a wonderful day at school and she was looking forward to lunch ~~that~~ afternoon with her mom. As she approached the huge door, she felt a shiver down her spine as she thought something was wrong. She ignored the shiver and walked inside.

She put her bags down and called to tell her mom she was home. There was no answer. She got another shiver down her spine. Something must be wrong! She kept calling for her mom while she was walking up the marble stairs. Her mom was always there when she got home. As she approached the passageway, she saw blood stains on the pink-painted walls and soft white carpet. She screamed and ran to find her mom. She looked in every room except the last room. She must be in there. She was shaking as she

entered her mom's room. There she was lying dead in a pool of blood!

She stood there staring open-mouthed, crying at her mom. Her mom was DEAD!

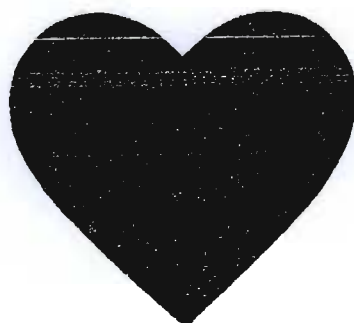
She ran to phone for an ambulance. The paramedics arrived shortly. Looking for a pulse, one of the paramedics looked up and said sadly "I'm terribly sorry, but she has been dead too long to revive her!" Dead, dead, the word rang through her head. She felt all alone in the world. She burst into tears. All she wanted to do was die!

6 months later

Dear Diary



Life is on the mend. I'm living with dad and his family. I'm getting along better! As from this day, I'll be living in England. Life is different here in England! A few weeks ago we found out who murdered my mum - it was Alfred, our gardener! I couldn't believe it. I was amazed! Why would he do such a thing? It seems as if there is an empty hole inside me. But I love my mom and I know she stills loves me.



TORN APART

Julie Grant

Standing here next to my father, at my mothers funeral, I don't understand why it happened. Why she had to go. Everything was perfect, Almost everything. I feel so alone.

As a tear trickles down my face I look up at my father. His face is blank, stiff. I feel extremely desolate. My father is a very silent, powerful man. I thought he would be a lot more depressed by my mothers death. But he wasn't. He was just silent. A statue of my father by my side.

I clutch the locket my mother gave me. Suddenly, I feel anger. She left us. She could have fought the cancer, but she gave up. She died. I looked into the coffin. There she was. Calm, peaceful, with the other half of the locket around her neck. I started to weep.

When we got home. Well, when I got home, my father had a meeting, I locked myself in my room. I took all her photos and smashed them and I took the last part of my mother I had left, my locket, and I threw it away.

"Hey Candi, howzit?"

"Hi Nad."

It was the Monday before my mothers death. I was at school with my best friend Candice.

"How was your weekend?" said Candice.

"Great, I went to see my mother at the hospital yesterday. She seems to be doing quite well."

"Yeah, I hope she gets better!"

We had no idea what would happen the following week.

When I got home from school I looked in the fridge and grabbed a snack. Then I started on my homework. There was a message on the answering machine. "I will be home after eight." said my dad's voice on the machine. Great, I can watch T.V. Ding dong, the bell rang. Who could it be? I peered through the key hole. It was my gran.

"We're going to see your mother!" she said with a big smile.

"Okay," I said. I went into my room and got into my best clothes. I always liked to look good for my mother. "I'm ready!" We got into the car and drove off.

When we arrived at the hospital we went up to my mother's room. We heard shouts from inside. My mum and dad were having a row. He had no consideration even though my mother was dying. Well, they all said she was dying, but I ^{didn't} believe them.

When we entered they stopped shouting but I could tell my mother had been crying.

"Hi dear," she said in her usual, welcoming way. My mother had not lost her hair, so I guess that was part of the reason I thought she was going to live. We talked most of the time. I love my mom, she was so wonderful.

I got home and had a shower, got into bed and slept. I didn't see my mother the whole week until.....

I was at the hospital visiting my mother when she just stopped breathing. The doctors rushed in and took her away. They reported later that she was dead. Dead. The word rang through my head. Like a thousand demons nagging at my brain. My mother was dead. I didn't believe it, I didn't accept it.

I stayed with my gran for about two weeks. I couldn't go home. My dad was never there and, even when he was, he showed no sign of love or sympathy. It was like living in a prison. My gran loved me, she cared for me, we cried together.

My best friend Candice was a great help too. She was always there for me. "I'm so sorry!" she would say every moment. "I know, I miss her so much," I would say and then I would dissolve into tears.

My gran decided to take me to a priest to tell me that my mom was in a better place with the Lord. He was a big help. I went on a trip with him to visit different churches. We are good friends now. It is like he has taken the place of my father. I pray for my mom everyday. I still love her and I know she loves me.

Troubles at School

By: Vicki-Lee Naylor



Dear: Diary
Monday, 16 July
Melissa's back!

Christie and Katie both ganged up against me today. I just find that so unfair. William and Thomas are both being drags and they ran off with other girls, so that means I have been left alone again as usual.

Bye

Dear: Diary
Tuesday, 17 July

School seems a bit better, a new girl started today, her name is Angela. She's so cool. It seems like Christie and Katie are best friends and that upsets me because they were meant to be my best friends, oh well who cares. The nice thing is Thomas has been a bit better to me today "maybe we will get back together."

Hopefully.

Bye

Dear: Diary
Thursday, 19 July
Hi!

Sorry, I forgot to write yesterday, I was just so busy with extra-mural activities, which made me very tired. Angela, my new best friend, has invited me to the mall on Saturday, which is going to be very fun. I'm so happy, Thomas broke up with his

girlfriend this morning. Maybe we will get back together.
Anyway, we received a letter to tell us about the Social that we
have twice a year, which I am really looking forward to, but I'm
not to sure who I am going with yet.
Hopefully, Thomas.
Bye

Dear: Diary

Wednesday, 25 July

I'm Speechless, I don't believe it, I wanna scream! Thomas
asked Katie to the Social. I HATE THOMAS. I don't
understand my life. It drools, but that's old. William has asked
me to the Social, which in a way is quite depressing, but I said
"Yes", I don't even like him at all.

Just to say I'm totally heartbroken!

Bye

Dear: Diary

Friday, 27 July

Today at school Angela comforted me because of the whole
Katie, Thomas thing. Tonight's the Social, Angela has not been
asked out by anyone, which is quite depressing for both of us.
William is coming to pick me up at 7:00 this evening. Thomas is
picking Katie up at 6:00 because they are going out to supper
before the dance.

7:00

William arrived 10 minutes late and that made me go berserk. I
had to hold his hand walking down to the dance, ugh! I sat at a
table with Katie and Thomas and they were being all goggle-
eyed to each other. William took me home at 9:30 and asked
me if he could have a good-night kiss. I did. It was not that bad.

I enjoyed myself a lot.

Bye

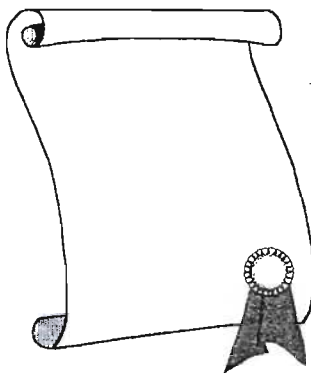


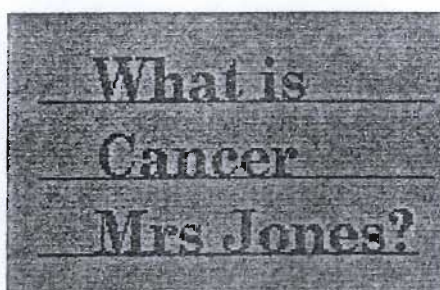
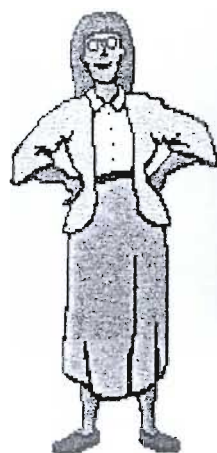
Dear: Diary

Monday, 30 July

For some odd reason today at school Katie was cross with Thomas and ran off crying in the bathroom, followed by Christie and William. "Why William? He doesn't even like Katie." At break Angela told me some really bad news: that her father got a Job transfer to Australia. I felt like crying, but I stopped myself. She's leaving on the 17 August. Thomas asked me if I would like to go to movies with him as friends, on Saturday evening and I said, "Yes". My dream came true. Thomas likes me again. My life's not a misery anymore. After this, I think I'm going to go back to my normal life routine and forget about BOYS.

Bye





By Teegan Marais and Kyllie Hogg

Hi, my name is Brett Byars. I am twelve years old. A few weeks ago, I found out that I had cancer. I was terrified when I first found out, but I have learnt to accept it.

I go to Cotton Fields Primary School and I'm in the seventh grade. When my friends first found out that I had cancer they acted as if I had some contagious disease. None of my friends wanted to play with me or even speak to me. I was very upset about this, but my mother told me that they would also have to adjust to it, just as I have.

I'm lying in a hospital bed right now in a lot of pain. The doctors have told my mother and father that I have a very serious type of cancer and that I will need very strong chemotherapy. They say without the chem I will only live a few weeks, maybe even months if I'm lucky. The thought of dying frightens me, but, before I die all I want is for my friends to accept me as their friend again.

I would like to share with you what has happened in my life over the past few weeks, after I found out that I was sick.

Johnny Anderson is my best friend - we have been best friends since Grade One. Johnny was always a good friend to me, but lately, he doesn't even want to look at me. I feel like I have no friends anymore. I never went to school for a few days after I got the news of my illness as I was frightened and sort of embarrassed. My Mom phoned my class teacher, Mrs Jones, she is really very nice. My Mom told her why I hadn't been to school but that I would be back the next day.

The following day at school, the boys were all asking me why I hadn't been at school. I asked Mrs Jones to tell them. Well, was that a mistake!! I knew that the boys would have had to find out, but I do not think they expected something this bad - well then again - nor did I.



The next week I started my first treatment of chemotherapy. A few weeks later I started to loose my hair and the boys started calling me ugly names like 'baldy' being one of them. A few times I vomitted at school and my classmates put plastic bags in my desk.

One day at school during P.E. I had to sit down for a while because I was getting stomach cramps and dizzy. When we were in the changeroom after P.E. the boys started to call me a 'looser' and a 'freak'. I was so upset that I raced off to the toilets and just broke down and cried. Johnny came looking for me and found me crying. He said he was very sorry and that he still wanted to be my friend. He asked me if I would ever forgive him which I assured him I did and that I did really still want him as my friend. Johnny hugged me and told me that he would get me through this and be at my side through it all.

Three days later some of the boys were starting to accept me as their friend again, but, they weren't to sure. Johny was at my side ^{and} that was all that mattered.

Later that week I fainted in the playground and the next thing I knew, I was lying in a hospital bed and that is when I started sharing my experiences with you.

I'm feeling a bit better now, but, I'm still in alot of pain!

'Wait'.....there's a knock at the door. "Come in".....I wasn't expecting anyone, but to my suprise I saw Mrs Jones and following behind her were all the boys from my class. "What a lovely suprise!", I said happily.

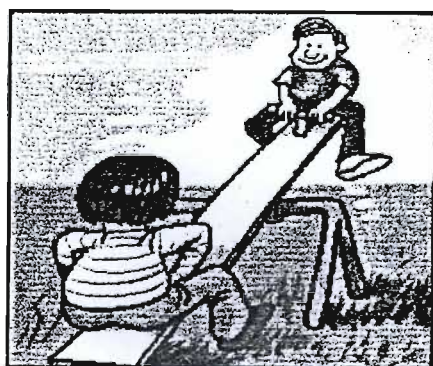
"How are you feeling Brett?" asked Mrs Jones. "I'm feeling fine, I guess".

"We thought we'd pay you a visit" said Mrs Jones "and the boys have a little suprise for you". With this all the boys lifted their caps and I saw that they had all shaved their heads. That was the nicest thing that they had ever done for me.

"Thanks guys, I realiy needed this - this has given me alot of strength and hope and I'm sure I'll get through this with your help.

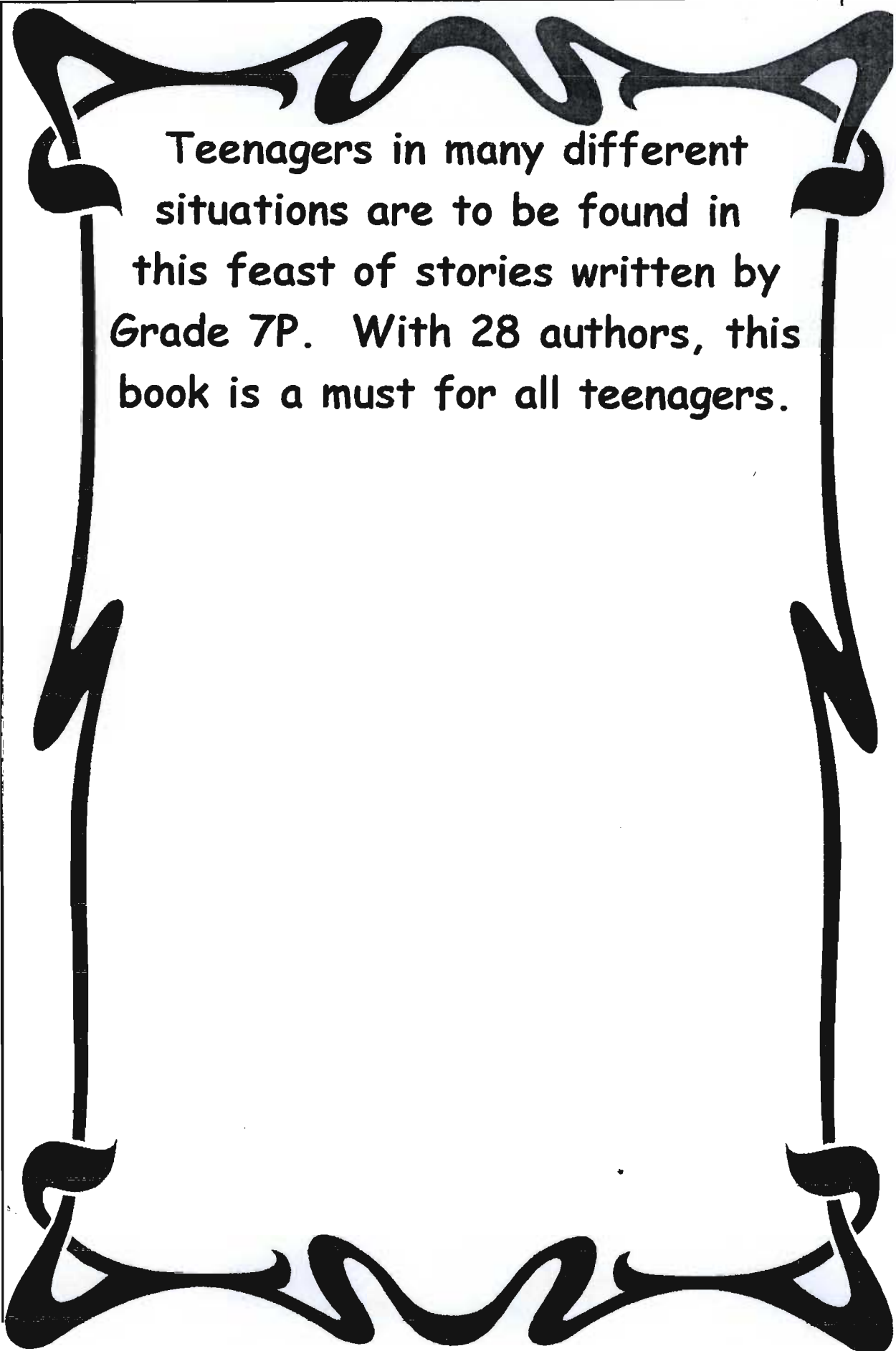
I've been going to school and participating in all the sports at school. I'm still doing chemotherapy and my hair is starting to grow back and I feel I'm getting stronger. I could have never have done it without the help from my friends, because all I needed was their support. Sadly I do have the risk of the cancer coning back.

My motto is to live each day as if it were your last because, you just don't know what may be around the corner!



DEDICATION

For each friend who contributed a story to make
this book work.



Teenagers in many different situations are to be found in this feast of stories written by Grade 7P. With 28 authors, this book is a must for all teenagers.