

# Stone Soup

*The Magazine by Young Writers & Artists*



*Illustration by Carly Thaw, age 13, from "The Boarder's Battle," page 16*

## BATS AND PEARLS

A fruit bat and a muskrat form an unlikely friendship

## WHERE MY FAMILY IS

On a boat to America, Maggie relives the devastating Irish famine

*Also:* New stories from Andrew Lee and Jonathan Morris

# An Indian Monsoon

By Sanjana Saxena

Illustrated by Aditi Laddha

“IN A FEW MINUTES, we will be landing at Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport in Mumbai. Please fasten your seat belts. Thank you for flying Air India and hope you have a wonderful stay in Mumbai,” the pilot’s voice echoed. As the plane descended under the clouds, I looked out of the window and got my first glimpse of Mumbai.

My family had decided to return to India after living in the U.S. for twelve years. As I thought of white and fuzzy snow falling into my hands, a few scattered lights twinkled in an island of darkness. This was so different from Chicago. There the city had glowed like a Christmas tree!

Coming out of the airplane, the first thing I noticed was the large number of people. Hundreds of baggage handlers, policemen, officials and many hangers-on were running back and forth like a swarm of bees. The air was also very hot and humid. My father had told me this happened because of the monsoon. He explained to me about these rising winds from the Arabian Sea that brought much relief from intense heat and were essential for Indian farmers. But this year, the monsoon was different.

The city was facing its worst flooding in a century and as we drove to Pune (100 miles from Mumbai), our destination, I saw the havoc that the rains had caused. There was water everywhere, dogs and cows lying on the streets, destroyed shantytowns and millions of people living in squalor. It seemed, on that day, the most wanted thing in Mumbai was a dry place to sleep!

After that horrible view of Mumbai, we were now on an ex-



Sanjana Saxena, 11  
Menlo Park, California



Aditi Laddha, 12  
Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India



*In Pune, my aunt came over to meet us and brought tea and samosas*



*The best part was that, within a week, I had made new friends*

pressway to Pune that seemed to pop out of a U.S. travel book. My father was beaming. "Wow! We never had roads like these when I was growing up in India. This is better than Chicago!" he exclaimed. The driver was talking on his cell phone—I had not expected that in India. As the early morning sun came (we had landed

at two AM), I saw the most beautiful scenery that I could imagine. It was green everywhere, rolling hills of the Sahyadri range surrounded us on both sides and there were hundreds of seasonal rivulets that were flowing down. I felt that I was in Hawaii! In Pune, my aunt came over to meet us and brought tea and samosas.

Although I had never met her before, she seemed to know everything about me.

In a week, I started at an International School in Pune. Its name was (believe me, this is going to be funny) the Mercedes-Benz International School. There were children and teachers from over twenty countries, and during our breaks we played baseball, cricket, soccer and “dog and the bone.” I was happy that my class teacher was an American—Mr. Winch, from Cambridge, Massachusetts. At least I wasn’t the only new one. He was a superb teacher and I learned well in his class. I also taught him a few words of Hindi!

After fourth grade, my parents moved me to an Indian school. It was a world apart from my school in Chicago or the International School. There were many kids in my class and the classrooms were not air-conditioned. The teachers were very strict and we had tests very frequently. The class had a broken ceiling—the facilities in the school were a little run-down.

But the best part was that, within a week, I had made new friends—Sheerja, Disha, Laxmi, Akansha, Meghna, Simran and Parinaz. They would break out in loud laughter when I would read “z” as “zee” instead of saying “zed” or spell “color” instead of using the Indian English spelling of “colour.” But that was just a little fun part. They also had many questions about America. “Is everybody rich there?” “Is it

very cold in Chicago?” “How is baseball different from cricket?” or “Do you miss your friends from Chicago?” I answered that America was a big country—pretty, rich and a lot of fun.

Time was flying by and I started to adjust to all the things that make India special—family, friends, festivals, food and my friend Sheerja. But my father was having second thoughts. He would often say, “India is still very poor,” “America has the best universities,” and “Can I make an honest living here?” I did not fully understand all the discussions that he had with my mother, but soon I found out that he had found a job in California and that we were moving to Menlo Park.

The only thing I knew about California was that it was called the Golden State and it was not as cold as Chicago. I was sad that I would be leaving my new friends in India—we exchanged e-mail addresses and promised to keep in touch. A long flight and a stopover in Chicago and soon I was at a school in Menlo Park.

It was a beautiful day when I started at my new school in Menlo Park. The teacher asked me to introduce myself to the class. After I said a few lines, the teacher thanked me and said, “Oh, what a beautiful day, Jana has brought an Indian summer to California.” I touched my lips; I did not want to tell her about the Indian monsoon!

