Shoemaker Village

Volume 21 - August 1998

GIANT DISCUSSION FORUM! 7 PAGES THIS MONTH!



The Knights of the Square Table reaches a critical moment!

Short Story written by Sean Malseed, author of *The Untitled Story!*
New Writers Join *Village* Staff!
Expanded *Humor from the Village Square*!
Pioneer Road Construction Continues!



DETAILS INSIDE!

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Editor's Pages

Information you should know

Welcome to the August issue of *Shoemaker Village*!

To start off with good news, we have had several new subscribers join the *Village*. While it was originally thought that, with the imposing of a charge for the *Village*, readership would drop, we are now celebrating our highest circulation ever! We hope that our readers will continue to support the *Village*!

We also have two special contributors this month: Tony Hoffman, who agreed to write an editorial on the validity of gym in schools, and Amanda Sandoski, who has joined our staff, hopefully for the long term. Amanda, who lives in Merion, PA, was met over the Internet by our assistant editor, Matthew Care, on July 6, while noticing his profile and wishing him a happy birthday. Amanda has agreed to contribute editorials for The Discussion Forum every month, and occasional short stories.

You may have noticed that the *Village* this month was slightly late. This is due to our proofreader, Jean Sokolowski, acquiring a migraine headache the night of the deadline for submitting articles. Therefore, the *Village* was postponed to the next available date, which happened to be almost a week after the original one.

This month, we feature *News from the Curries*, which delighted many readers a few months ago. This section features news from the Curry family, who moved on August 25, 1995 from their former home in the neighborhood to their new one in Collegeville. To celebrate the three-year anniversary of the Curries' move, we have featured *News from the Curries* this month. We would also like to thank Mr. Scott Curry, who keeps us regularly informed of happenings in his family.

Over the Internet, we received several requests for the first issue of *Shoemaker Village* that was published (May 1997). Unfortunately, this issue was published through many files, some of which are in Apple format. At the present time, we are working on a solution to convert the files. We hope to be able to supply this and the June 1997 issue over the Internet soon.

Two readers also requested that we discontinue publishing the section listing readers that have stopped reading the *Village*, one of them writing: "It looks like you're accusing them of some sort of crime!" When the small section was first started, it was in the intention that subscribers be recognized for their contributions to the *Village* for the last time. However, due to our readers' comments, we will discontinue that section beginning this month.

On the subject of the Internet, we are happy to announce that we have turned over the management of our pages to Matthew Care, our assistant editor. As our new webmaster, Matthew Care hopes to keep the pages updated at all times. "I can't stand the thought of un-updated pages," he recently wrote in an E-Mail in acknowledgment to his new position. Matthew also hopes to post all previous issues of the *Village* online soon.

We are sorry to report that we will not be able to publish Christopher Sokolowski's short stories any more due to an incident at *Village* headquarters. Although censor Jean

Sokolowski was very adamant about excluding the reason for this, we can say that Christopher has been **permanently** banned from the *Village*, with no apologies to be accepted in the future.

Last month, we announced that we were attempting to publish enlarged copies of the *Village* for our visually impaired subscribers. We have begun publication this month, due to the increasing demand. If you would like to convert your subscription to an enlarged copy at no additional cost, please send a letter or an E-Mail to the address on the Acknowledgments page.

We are sorry to report that Matthew Care, writer of *The Tomb of the Unknown World*, has sadly discontinued his story. Although we do not know the cause for the discontinuation, we suspect that is was due to lack of interest in the story. If anybody would like to have the story back, please send a comment to the *Village* and Matthew reports that he will honor any request from our readers.

Also, Sean Malseed, who provided us with the beginnings of his sure-to-be excellent novel, has discontinued the novel. When asked (through the Internet) if he had anything to contribute this month, he did not answer and placed the *Village* on his ignore list. Although many readers have asked for this story, it seems that Sean is unwilling to contribute. However, if you enjoyed the story, send an E-Mail to **seanm@nni.com** to ask him to continue it.

That's all for this month. Next month's issue will be published one week early, on August 21, due to the availability of some of our staff. Until then, have a great month!

Acknowledgments

Shoemaker Village STAFF

Editor Stephen Sokolowski

Assistant Editor Matthew Care

Proofreader Jean Sokolowski

Storywriters Matthew Care, Amanda Sandoski

Publisher Henry Sokolowski

Steven Conway, Henry Sokolowski

This month's story contributors

Stephen Sokolowski, Matthew Care, Steven Conway, Sean Malseed, Amanda Sandoski

New subscribers this month

The Edwards Family, Amanda Sandoski, The Reiser Family

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The next issue of *Shoemaker Village* will be published on Friday, August 21, 1998.
All contributions for the next issue must be received by Tuesday, August 18, 1998.

Next month's topic in The Discussion Forum will be *Pressure on Today's Students.*

Coming Next Issue

Volume 22- September 1998

Find out all that happened over August in neighborhood news!
Don't miss all the important information regarding Back-To-School events!
The Discussion Forum is growing! Don't forget to tell us your opinion!
The Knights of the Square Table continues!
More great stories, news, comedy, and more!

ALL IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF *SHOEMAKER VILLAGE*!

Puzzle Page

S	H	O	E	V	I	L	L	U	B	M	O	T	I	S
T	O	W	E	R	S	T	N	O	V	E	L	S	N	A
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A	U	G	U	S	T	R	O	M	U	H	L	C	C	R

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Square
Unfair
Untitled
Virus
Village
Webmaster

Neighborhood News

August 1998

PIONEER ROAD RECONSTRUCTION RESUMES

Last month, we reported that the reconstruction of Pioneer Road was far from complete. This month, our suspicions were confirmed.

Construction resumed during the month of July, after several delays.



Construction workers worked hard to regain lost time.

It is unknown why work on Pioneer Road was stopped for most of the month of July, but workers were going strong on July 24, 1998, when this photo was taken.

Neighbor Jean Sokolowski, who lives on the corner property near the construction, recently commented, "They must be behind schedule. I don't know how much work was done while I was away [on vacation], but it doesn't seem like much." Workers worked Saturdays in the latter part of July to finish the project quickly.

It is still unknown when the construction will be completed. Neighbor Henry Sokolowski, Jean's husband, recently commented, "It doesn't look like they have much left to do!" When the work began with the removal of a tree that had caused several accidents in the past, it was projected to be finished by the beginning of the summer.

"I just hope it gets done soon," Jean said. "Every time the construction occurs, it triples my commute time, --which now amounts to 6 minutes!"

OTHER NEWS TIDBITS

-Wedding bells will be ringing at 2040 Butternut Drive, as future mother-in-law Peg Reiser announced that her daughter, Diana, was engaged to Mr. John Donovan, of North Hills, on July 4, 1998. This came as no surprise to future father-in-law Mike Reiser as he already known for a month prior to the happy announcement. The couple are planning to "tie the knot" on August 28, 1999.

-Robert Wilkowski and Amy Ott, who have been planning their wedding since October 1996, will be married on September 12 at OLGC parish. More details will be published next month.

-A severe storm hit the area on June 30, 1998, causing damage to the neighborhood area. Leaves and twigs littered the streets the night of the storm. Henry Sokolowski, who lives in the neighborhood, commented, "I've never seen the pool so dirty!"

News From the Curries

Thank you again to Mr. Curry for keeping us informed of happenings in Curryland.

UNEMPLOYMENT FIGURES DROP

Reports are in that one of the Curry family has hit the workforce. David Curry has recently started at the Collegeville Inn as a busboy in his pursuit to obtain funding for a car and insurance "scheduled" for December.

WILLIAMSPORT DREAM ENDS

Michael Curry's dream of playing in the Little League World Series has come to an end with a recent loss to Coventry. Nonetheless it was a great "run" and Mike performed superbly for the Lower Perkiomen Indians.

NEXT NANCY LOPEZ

Allison Curry believes she will be the next female star of golf after successfully completing golf camp at Skippack Golf Course. Said Allison, "That 20-foot drive was beautiful, long and straight."

MICKEY IN SIGHT

Currys have begun the painful task of planning their next vacation, a trip to Disney World. While the boys aren't too excited (they have been there before), Allison is ecstatic. The "vacation" is targeted for sometime in the beginning of November.

WASCALLY WABBIT

Mr. C is besides himself over an aggressive (and hungry) rabbit. "This thing is eating all my expensive landscaping flowers." Mr. C. has resorted to a "Humane" trap to try to catch the critter.

Humor from the Village Square

A LOOK AT COMPUTER VIRUSES

Adam and Eve virus: Takes a couple of bytes out of your Apple.

Airline virus: You're in Dallas, but your data is in Singapore.

Anita Hill virus: Lies dormant for ten years.

Arnold Schwarzenegger virus: Terminates and stays resident. It'll be back.

AT&T virus: Every three minutes it tells you what great service you are getting.

The MCI virus: Every three minutes it reminds you that you're paying too much for the AT&T virus.

Bill Clinton virus: This virus mutates from region to region and we're not exactly sure what it does.

Bill Clinton virus: Promises to give equal time to all processes: 50% to poor, slow processes; 50% to middle-class processes, and 50% to rich ones. This virus protests your computer's involvement in other computer's affairs, even though it has been having one of its own for 12 years.

Congressional Virus: The computer locks up, screen splits erratically with a message appearing on each half blaming the other side for the problem.

Dan Quayle virus: Simplye addse ane ee toe everye worde youe typee..

Elvis virus: Your computer gets fat, slow, and lazy and then self destructs, only to resurface at shopping malls and service stations across rural America.

Federal bureaucrat virus: Divides your hard disk into hundreds of little units, each of which do practically nothing, but all of which claim to be the most important part of the computer.

Freudian virus: Your computer becomes obsessed with marrying its own motherboard.

Gallup virus: Sixty percent of the PCs infected will lose 38 percent of their data 14 percent of the time (plus or minus a 3.5 percent margin of error).

George Bush virus: Doesn't do anything, but you can't get rid of it until November.

Government economist virus: Nothing works, but all your diagnostic software says everything is fine.

Mario Cuomo virus: It would be a great virus, but it refuses to run.

Michael Jackson virus: Hard to identify because it is constantly altering its appearance. This virus won't harm your PC, but it will trash your car.

New World Order virus: Probably harmless, but it makes a lot of people really mad just thinking about it.

Nike virus: Just Does It!

Ollie North virus: Turns your printer into a document shredder.

Oprah Winfrey virus: Your 200MB hard drive suddenly shrinks to 80MB and then slowly expands back to 200MB.

Pat Buchanan virus: Shifts all your output to the extreme right of your screen.

Paul Revere virus: This revolutionary virus does not horse around. It warns you of impending hard disk attack--once if by LAN, twice if by C:.

PBS virus: Your PC stops every few minutes to ask for money.

Politically correct virus: Never calls itself a "virus", but instead refers to itself as an "electronic microorganism".

Right To Life virus: Won't allow you to delete a file, regardless of how old it is. If you attempt to erase a file, it requires you to first see a counselor about possible alternatives.

Ross Perot virus: Activates every component in your system, just before the whole thing quits.

Ted Kennedy virus: Crashes your computer but denies it ever happened.

Ted Turner virus: Colorizes your monochrome monitor.

Texas virus: Makes sure that it's bigger than any other file.

UK Parliament virus: Splits the screen into two with a message in each half blaming other side for the state of the system.

Warren Commission virus: Won't allow you to open your files for 75 years.

REAL LIFE BUSINESS QUOTES

1. As of tomorrow, employees will only be able to access the building using individual security cards. Pictures will be taken next Wednesday and employees will receive their cards in two weeks. (Fred Dales, Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, Washington.)

2. What I need is a list of specific unknown problems we will encounter. (Lykes Lines Shipping)

3. E-mail is not to be used to pass on information or data. It should be used only for company business. (Accounting manager, Electric Boat Company)

4. This project is so important, we can't let things that are more important interfere with it. (Advertising/Marketing manager, United Parcel Service)

5. Doing it right is no excuse for not meeting the schedule. No one will believe you solved this problem in one day! We've been working on it for months. Now, go act busy for a few weeks and I'll let you know when it's time to tell them. (R&D supervisor, Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing/3M Corp.)

6. My boss spent the entire weekend retyping a 25-page proposal that only needed corrections. She claims the disk I gave her was damaged and she couldn't edit it. The disk I gave her was write-protected. (CIO of Dell Computers)

7. Quote from the Boss: "Teamwork is a lot of people doing what 'I' say." (Marketing executive, Citrix Corporation)

8. "How About Friday?": My sister passed

away and her funeral was scheduled for Monday. When I told my boss, he said she died so that I would have to miss work on the busiest day of the year. He then asked if we could change her burial to Friday. He said, "That would be better for me." (Shipping executive, FTD Florists)

9. "We know that communication is a problem, but the company is not going to discuss it with the employees." (Switching supervisor, AT&T Long Lines Division)

10. We recently received a memo from senior management saying: "This is to inform you that a memo will be issued today regarding the subject mentioned above." (Microsoft, Legal Affairs Division)

11. One day my boss asked me to submit a status report to him concerning a project I was working on. I asked him if tomorrow would be soon enough. He said: "If I wanted it tomorrow, I would have waited until tomorrow to ask for it!" (New business manager, Hallmark Greeting Cards.)

12. Speaking the Same Language: As director of communications I was asked to prepare a memo reviewing our company's training programs and materials. In the body of the memo, one of the sentences mentioned the "pedagogical approach" used by one of the training manuals. The day after I routed the memo to the executive committee, I was called into the HR director's office, and told that the executive vice president wanted me out of the building by lunch. When I asked why, I was told that she wouldn't stand for "perverts" (pedophilia?) working in her company. Finally he showed me her copy of the memo, with her demand that I be fired-and the word "pedagogical" circled in red. The HR manager was fairly reasonable, and once he looked the word up in his dictionary and made a copy of the definition to send back to her, he told me not to worry. He would take care of it. Two days later a memo to the entire staff came out - directing us that no words which could not be found in the local Sunday newspaper could be used in company memos. A month later, I resigned. In accordance with company policy, I created my resignation memo by pasting words together from the Sunday paper. (Taco Bell Corporation)

13. This gem is the closing paragraph of a nationally-circulated memo from a large communications company: "(Company name) is endeavorily determined to promote constant attention on current procedures of transacting business focusing emphasis on innovative ways to better, if not supersede, the expectations of quality!" (Lucent Technologies)

Physical Education Standards at UMHS

In my opinion, the standards that students are expected to live up to in gym class are too strict. Upper Moreland High School is a prime example. At UMHS, the expectations are ridiculous. The grading system is divided into halves: 50% toward participation and 50% toward skills grades. Let's tackle the participation grade first.

Although to many of our readers it may seem easy to get a full 50% on the participation grade, this is one of the problems with UMHS's physical education program. Gym is placed so high on the list of priorities that students must make up missed classes after school--these classes are 1½ hours long--or lose 6 percentage points off their final grade. In the entire year, I have never heard of anybody staying after

school for this stupid make-up class. If you forget your gym clothes, points are also deducted from this total.

Fifty percent of UMHS's grades are formed out of the "skills tests" that the teachers administer. This seems fair at first. The grades for the tests are impossible, however. Because the grades are based upon percentile rank (with the Presidential Physical Fitness Award, mentioned in other essays), in theory a student would have to be better than everyone else in their class to earn a perfect score. For example, a 14-year old boy must run one mile in under 6 minutes to earn an A+.

The result of these strenuous tasks are low grades for the students. I, not being a star athlete, scored grades lower than a B- in all three marking periods of gym class, making it my weakest class of the year. I have been kept off the honor roll two out of those three times because of the grade I received in gym. Matthew Care, assistant editor of the *Village*, received higher grades only because he participated in less activities due to his visual impairment.

There is also another disturbing fact related to what I mentioned above. Take into account that the top five people in my class at UMHS are all athletes. As a result, they receive higher grades in gym and are able to maintain their positions at the top of the student body. **THIS is *WRONG***! Students should be judged by their academic prowess when graded, and gym should not be a factor. In the ideal situation, gym would be graded for effort only. Another interesting fact: four out of those five people are girls. Maybe that says something about the enormously deflated standards of the girls?

However, this all comes back to what was discussed in May in The Discussion Forum, the trend of the lowering importance of academics as compared to extracurricular activities. I have said this before and will repeat it again: Extracurricular activities should remain extracurricular! A prime example of this was myself, who, back in elementary school, was looked upon as one of the smartest in my class. However, as time passed, I became overshadowed by star athletes and such, who tend to be looked upon with a greater awe than someone who is merely smart.

My mom, for example, is ALWAYS arguing about how her sons are not involved in activities, and

things like that. She also does not believe that the *Village* is extracurricular, even though at the current time five teachers receive it. I hold in my belief that this will eventually lead to the cancellation of the *Village*, and much sooner than anybody thinks. I will repeat again: extracurricular activities show NOTHING about a student's academic prowess, and should not be a requirement for high school students.

The bottom line of this is that gym standards need to be improved--or done away with completely!

Gym Standards - Fair or Unfair?

I think that the gym standards the students must meet are very fair. The teachers do their best to make the standards challenging but not totally impossible. For all the women readers, this next statement is not meant as a putdown. Females are generally the weaker of the two sexes. However, there are women whom I have seen who are a lot stronger than some of the men I know. I am definitely not strong. For example, I can barely do a pull-up. On the other hand, the standards that are set by the President's Council on Physical Fitness are way out of line. The way that the standards for the Presidential Physical Fitness Award are made is that nationwide students are tested to see how many of one exercise they can do. After they test the boys and girls, they average the results and that is the standard. My gym teacher told our class that a fifteen-year-old boy should be able to do ten pull-ups while a girl of the same age only needs to do two. I think that is pretty unfair. Only two people in my gym class met the Presidential standards and they were both girls. To remedy this situation, there should be one standard for boys and girls. If that occurs, more boys and girls will be able to meet the standards. If a new set of standards is not made, there could be one or two students who will miss getting the Presidential award by one or two seconds.

Standards of Physical Education in Schools

Correct me if I'm wrong...

The time was when teachers were strict and school was a place of learning. And even the students who didn't want to learn did because they didn't want to get punished. There was a greater respect for authority and when an adult told you to jump, you asked how high. And none is a better example than the mighty gym teacher...am I correct so far?

There was a guy you did not want to mess with, and I emphasize "guy" because I'm sure it was quite unheard of for women to teacher physical education. He had a sweaty t-shirt, baseball cap, and green teeth. Adorning his neck was a whistle that looked like it'd been found on a bus. Most importantly, he was the end-all of authority. So why'd you pay attention to him? The answer was real simple. If you messed up, he could make you do push-ups till you dropped. So when he said, "take a lap!" you did it and quick. If you got in trouble you might have to go see him in his office alone after class, and that was bad news.

But times have changed and the total breakdown of respect between teachers and students has crippled the "fear of God" technique in schools. Because laws have changed so much, teachers have had to drastically change their methods of instruction. I think this is most evident in gym teachers. It's quite amazing how far they've had to evolve (none should be offended-this is not to say that they are a lower form of life-I'm just making a comparison).

Notice the title of my story, "Standards of Physical Education..." It's not even called gym class anymore. I believe that P.E. teachers are finding it difficult to find their nitch in schooling. P.E. covers so much more than it used to. From Health & Child Development to Driver's Education & Computer Literacy. And the teacher is to be responsible for all of this. While they're not major courses and could be easily mastered, it's still a lot to think about.

The other thing to think about is the standards on which gym is graded. Now it's only *partly*

based upon how fast you run the mile. Physical attitude will take you most of the way, but now it's also if you "participate," and "have a positive attitude." But wait...it gets better.

If someone were to break their leg, they obviously couldn't play softball. So, of course, the next logical step is to make them write a 10-page report on the history of softball...makes sense to me (in a way it does, but I think it's very stupid). I'm a visually-impaired person so I can't play most sports (the only thing I can play is golf which I enjoy and do play regularly). But I'M NOT GOING TO WRITE A PAPER ON ANYTHING! It's not my fault I can't see and I can't participate. Teachers have been most helpful and accommodating, though; e.g., while everyone is playing softball, I'm in the weight room or running laps on the track.

The national physical fitness tests are the culmination of the gym course. Mile run, sit-ups, pull-ups, etc.. I did horribly in all of them. The standards for boys and girls are very different for these tests. Unlike some, I'm not complaining, but I'm not defending it either. For pull-ups, girls pass, basically, no matter how many they do. Boys need to do six just to get a passing grade. But this is to be expected. High school boys have much more upper body strength than girls. It is apparently thought that boys should be able to run faster, too, though I don't agree with that standard.

I've addressed many issues in this piece. I'm just calling 'em as I see 'em. You make your own conclusions. I find nothing irreparably wrong with the system of P.E...nothing that I can't deal with or can mention.

Let me just finish by saying that it's very hard to live in an age where young people are to do well in school, excel in sports, be conscious of their sexuality, and drive, all at the same time. I'm not saying that teenagers have hard lives. I more than anyone am disgusted at how often social issues and "stress" are blamed every time a kid messes up! But at the same time, it's not easy. But hey, isn't that what being an adult is all about...learning to cope with all that?

My View On the Standards in Physical Education at the Upper Moreland High School

I think the standards in the subject of physical education (gym) at the UMHS are equal for everybody no matter how athletic you are. All you have to do is try your best and you will do just fine. Or you can do nothing at all and fail. It's your choice! Even if you don't come to class prepared, you can still make them up by going in after school and riding the bike for about 5-10 minutes.

Some people who aren't as athletic as others succeed more than the people who are athletic. This is because they carry a positive attitude toward gym, and they try harder. That's all it takes. That and coming prepared to class with the proper attire. If you do these things it's practically impossible to get a bad grade. If you still do, then I suggest that you "brownnose" a bit. Then, if that doesn't work, "BROWNNOSE" A LOT! If that still doesn't work, then you may need to seek some help, QUICK! But that usually is NOT necessary. I, for instance, could have done a little better in gym; but if you think about it, there is always room for improvement. During the last semester there was a rumor that a certain student, who will remain anonymous, got a negative number in gym because he/she was never prepared and he/she never bothered to make up the classes that he/she missed. If you are one of those people who don't come prepared to class and you don't bother to make them up, then you are just plain out lazy and that is your problem, not the teacher's or the standards. I was always told that you can do well in anything and everything as long as you try your best. If you are the type of person who doesn't do this, then you should try.

In eighth grade I didn't get the honor roll once and I was angry. It was partly because, no matter how hard I worked in this one particular class, the teacher always found some way to rip me off points and grade wise. It was also partly because I didn't do my very best. But in this past year, I worked my butt off and I got honors every marking period. I did even better in the second semester when I had my hardest classes, especially on my finals.

This just goes to show you that, if you try your best, you can succeed in anything. Gym is the

easiest course in my opinion. You have to try too hard to get a bad grade in that class. And, there are people who try to do bad. But next year when you have gym, try your best and I promise that you will get at least a “B.”

Brazen Sword

Sean Malseed

The light retreats farther and farther into the horizon as the weary group of thieves trudges onward through the dense foliage of the forest. Truall looks back at his followers, knowing that they cannot continue through the perils of the darkness setting upon them. They need to find a place to rest, and perhaps the lake up ahead will do. So, with a motion to those behind him, the five-some marches on, plodding through heavy vines and bushes and past plants and trees, until finally they are upon the water. An old sign lays near the shore, the base rotted through, with the letters indecipherable from time. They are red, however, and large. Truall looks at the sign, and then looks onward to the lake. An ominous haze hangs over the area, telling them in a rasping voice to turn back. Truall ignores the silent pleas and points to a flat patch of shore, with no big rocks, and the five of them march toward it. As they approach the shoreline, however, an uneasy feeling permeates their tiredness. The lake is black, with a sheen of moonlight over its surface. Below the surface, small, soft swishing noises are heard. A few feet back, some of the thieves have already lain upon the ground. You, too, are tired, but cold as well, and you look toward Truall with hopeful eyes.

"Tregney!" he shouts, as he throws you a large, ragged piece of cloth. You rap yourself in it and wander toward the others who have already retreated into their dreams for the night. A sense of warmth comes over you, and you sit on the moist earth. You unsheathe your small sword and lay it in the sand next to you. You feel the heaviness of sleep beginning to pull upon your eyelids, when suddenly you hear a violent splash, killing the calmness, accompanied by several screams from the few men standing near the lake. Several huge tentacles appear from the depths of the darkness. Through the haze and the eerie light from the moon, they seem to have a greenish-red tint. These tentacles slash about wildly in the air, as more come up from behind. Truall pushes aside a screaming man and draws his sword. He holds it in the air, poised to slice the nearest tentacle. One comes, he swipes, and it quickly goes back out. Another comes in, and again Truall slashes at it and misses. The tentacle retreats, only to be followed by another.

The tentacles concentrate all of their efforts on Truall, as the rest of your cowardly comrades retreat into the plant life surrounding the lake. Only you stand on the beach, with your sword drawn but hanging motionless at your side, watching the frantic swordsmanship of your brave leader. Two tentacles lash at him, and Truall lashes back with his blade. This time, however, it hits, and his sword cuts deep into the flesh of the beast. A scream echos beneath the dark waters, and the enraged tentacles flail wildly about in the air. Then, in a furied frenzy, several tentacles lash at Truall. A blood-freezing scream comes from the direction of the battle, as Truall is lifted into the air, still stabbing downward at the tentacles which encase his torso. The tentacles, high with victory, slip quickly back beneath the blackness of their origins, as does Truall.

And so your memory ends. So often do your dreams mark the return of that horrid night, haunting you with the fearful yet brave cries of Truall. That night marks the disbandment of your former group of thieves, having been shown to be cowards in reality. You had retreated into the night and had taken your chances among the wild animals in the forest. The next morning you had awakened, with no idea where you were or how you had ever come about sleep. You had shed your shell of thief that night and were reborn an adventurer. A lone adventurer, and before you lies a life of which you had always dreamed, but the group of thieves never could have provided. You had set out deeper into the forest that morning, with your small sword drawn, and left your fate in the hands of the gods....

You stand up and stretch. You had one of the best nights of sleep that you can remember in a long time. This cave was the perfect place to sleep. It was shallow, assuring you in the silent voice that so many other things have had that nothing else makes it's home within the rock fortress. You had piled soft vines and large leaves inside, near the rear of the cave, and had wrapped yourself in your cloak. The night had been cool, but not cold. You feel quite refreshed, and you draw your sword from its sheath at your side. You ponder its sharp blade, shining but not without small blotches of red from the most recent

encounters. You place it back in its sheath and step out of the cave into the warm sunlight. Such a sense of goodness up on the small forested cliff and down into the miniature valley below. The sunlight lights everything with a radiance not common to the areas from which you have most recently come. Very few clouds lay scattered in the blue sky, remnants of the storm you fought your way through the day before. You have come to learn that such is the calmness that follows a dramatic event. You pick up your backpack, your only ally other than your sword, and don it. You step out of the cave and jump off the small cliff down into the soft flowers and vines below. You walk through them until you reach the treeline surrounding this small haven, and step in. You push through the crawlers and the creep-vines for a long while, with no change in the scenery. You become hungry and think of killing a small animal, perhaps a rabbit, and having your morning meal. You scan the distance for just such a creature but instead notice something quite peculiar. It is a wall. Blocked by trees, bushes, vines and ferns but still clearly visible is a red brick wall, about as high as you are tall. You make your way toward it, out of curiosity.

The wall is a bit taller than you had originally speculated. However, the problem lies in the barbed wire making its home along the top, preventing any unwanted entrance. Or exit. You scale the wall and stand on the small ledge that is in front of the wire. You jump, flying clear of the wire, and land perfectly upon the ground. You look around. Nobody turns their head. It must be normal for people to enter and leave over the wall. In the distance, past low city buildings, you see a guard tower. It is much too far off for anyone to see your entrance into the area. You spot, also somewhat in the distance, a general store. The hunger you forgot comes back into your present train of thought. Luckily you have a few htykn to spare. You walk down the brown cobblestone road toward the store, with people walking about, doing their business as usual as though you aren't even there. You get to the store, but no one is behind the counter. You stand there a minute or two and even ring the golden bell sitting atop the white wooden counter, but no one responds. Quite peculiar. However, you are quite famished. You decide to take a loaf of bread and a canteen of water off of the shelf behind the counter. No one will even notice. After all, the

store clerk should have been there. You reach over, stretching as far as you can go, and grab the items. You are de-extending yourself back over the counter to your former stance, when you hear a small voice come from the counter.

"Hey! Put that back!" it wheezes. "You've got no good right to just barge unwanted into a perfectly happy city and go around pillaging stores."

You stretch back over the counter and look down below. A head is hanging out of a small compartment in it, with an annoyed look on its face.

"Why are you hiding?" you ask, evicting a fearful face from the strange person inside the counter.

"Be.. Be.. Because the.. the.. the guards are coming after you."

"What guards?"

"The guards up in the guard tower."

"They could see me?"

"Quite easily. Now put back my stuff and go away!"

You look down again at where the man is and then walk out of the store, merchandise in hand. When outside, you see a man in an armored uniform walking about, looking in the opposite direction. He is a tall man and looks quite muscular. You decide that it would be in your best interest to avoid that man all together. You look in the other direction and see another guard, this one staring right at you, crossbow aimed. You dive toward the left, narrowly missing the arrow which barely misses the other guard as well, and winds up smashing and breaking in two on the brick wall behind. You shoot back into the shop, and dive over the counter. You can hear the two guards coming. You fling open the door behind the counter, and run through the storage area as fast as your legs can take you. You fling open the back door, and flee through the city. With reckless abandon you realize that you are on a course directly for the guard tower. You attempt to change your course, when you see that you are too late. At least twenty guards, armed with crossbows, chase you not far behind. You run your fastest, headed for the wall, and life again. You narrowly avoid several arrows as you fly over the wall and to the ground on the other side. You lie there

for a second, in relief, glad to have proven yourself better than a group of skilled, armed-to-the-teeth guards. It is when you stand up, however, that you realize that you have gone directly through the barbed wire, and have gained many wounds in doing so. The wounds are not much, only along your arms mainly, because of the metal breastplate and the metal guards on your legs. You know of a medic, whom you first met as a thief long ago, who resides in this forest, near the walled city, so you head out in that direction. Next time, you muse, you need to pay more attention to your location. Had you known it was that walled city, you would have steered way clear of here.

Single Sex Education vs. Coed Schools

Amanda Sandoski

When it comes to education, the majority of children in this country attend coed schooling, either public or private. It's accepted as the norm, and most kids would probably turn their noses up at the thought of going to school with only the members of their gender. Yet I, as an example of a girl who has had the opportunity to attend both coed and single sex schools, can tell you that single sex education is sensible, worthwhile, and overall beneficial to a young person's learning, as well as their general motivation and belief in themselves.

Usually what you find in coed schooling is a slight sense of friction between the genders, simply caused by a want of equality for everyone in each class. This may seem harmless and can be easily overlooked, but sometimes the idea tends to be taken too far, and one gender may become offended or put off by the other. Any of various things may occur: the teacher may pay a bit more attention to the boys than the girls, the girls may get better treatment for being calmer or more well-behaved, the girls may not feel as motivated as the boys, etc.. None of these things happen on purpose, but they are more common than you'd think. In single sex schools, there is more personal attention given to each gender, since the two are no longer competing with each other. There is a more intimate talk and atmosphere within the school, and everyone gets a fair chance to get the help they need and have a feeling that they are not being set aside in any way.

Another prominent benefit of single sex education is the decrease of pressure put on the students about how they should look and act. When you are around the opposite sex everyday at school, it is hard to not worry about your looks or personality and feel insecure about yourself. But when you are around your own gender, many of whom are close friends, you tend to not worry about such things. This is a great help for when you really need to concentrate on your work and just don't have the time to worry about these trivial matters, as is the case with many students.

Yet even with the great improvements in learning shown by single sex education, the most

important benefit would still have to be the strong sense of pride and self-esteem brought out in each gender. The schools concentrate on making each individual sex recognize their strong points and achievements, and encourage them to go out and show the world what they can do, regardless of whatever is trying to hold them back. You simply cannot get this in coed schools, the main reason being that they have too much pressure to treat the genders equally and are not able to give close attention to one or the other.

Although I will admit that it is important for children, especially adolescents, to socialize and learn to get along with members of the opposite sex, I do not believe that this is a big factor when it comes to school and getting an education. As someone who has experienced both kinds of schooling, I can truthfully say that the benefits of single sex education make it well worth the separation of the genders, and it is a great choice to consider in the future years.

Trees

by Matthew Care

trees

blowing in the wind or still

totally indifferent to the world

when hippies hug trees do they hug back?

necessary for life

trees and people

trees and animals

neither could exist without the other

oak trees

elm trees

birch trees

all trees

inhale CO_2

exhale O

inhale

exhale

inhale

exhale

cut down to make furniture

lovely chairs and tables

and when they fall by wind or blade

they leave behind a mark they've made

the soil rich

new trees will grow

unless fire or water destroys soil

trees make oxygen

gooood trees!

trees exist before, during, and after me

The Knights of the Square Table

Chapter 12, Part 2

Everybody stopped dead. "What was that?" Mike asked, panic-stricken.

"Stop!"

"There it is again!" Katie exclaimed. The strange voice continued on; but seeing that there was no danger ahead, everybody decided to remain in the tower.

They climbed higher up the stairs. The voice continued as a whisper but nothing else happened. The balcony of this tower was much the same as the others. There were three doors in this one, too. The left one was locked, the right one opened into an empty room, and the middle one opened into stairs similar to the ones that they had found in the tower from which they had come. They ascended the stairs to find that they were exactly the same length as the ones that they had gone up before, and reached the top in about ten minutes. The door at the top of the stairs was locked.

"OK, how are we supposed to get in?"

"Try the stone," Christopher suggested.

Chapin took the suggestion, and a few minutes later they were in a room similar to the one that they had been in before. They opened the door on the far side with the water stone, and proceeded up the next set of stairs.

This was like the tower to which they had ascended before, so there were no surprises. When they got to the top, however, they were met by an astounding sight.

From their vantage point, they could see the other two towers clearly, even though they were miles away. One of the towers looked normal, but the other was radiating a bright yellow light.

"That must be the post that was energized by the Hadar Stone!" Katie exclaimed.

Chapin held the stone up to the center of the tower as they had done before but nothing happened.

"What's wrong?" Dave asked.

"I did the same thing that Katie did in the other tower," Chapin replied, "but it doesn't work here!"

There was an awkward silence, and several of the group members were forced to shield their eyes because of the combined blinding lights of the sun and the distant energy-charged tower.

Suddenly there was a loud crash, and the pedestal opened up. It rose to a height of about six feet, and then stopped, waiting for the stone.

Chapin rose up and touched the stone to it. Immediately there was a blinding flash that left the party seeing spots in their eyes for hours after.

The pedestal began pulsing with pale blue light until it was entirely engulfed. Christopher, who was standing too close, had to move back quickly. There was another flash, and suddenly the pedestal shot out a stream of light toward the other tower. The tower with the Hadar Stone did the same. They met in a violent eruption and merged into one white stream connecting the two towers. The colors dispersed evenly, creating a uniform stream.

When this was done, the tower began to shake. It took but a moment to convince Christopher that it was time for the group to get out.

They ran down the stairs as fast as they could. Halfway down, a strange event occurred.

"It stopped!" Katie exclaimed.

Indeed, the shaking had stopped. Everybody loosened up a bit, not having to worry about falling down the steps or losing their balance.

"Let's get out of here and then we can discuss what to do next," Christopher suggested. Everybody followed him out of the degrading tower.

They stepped out into the open air in mid-afternoon, and there was no further episode inside the tower as they had been leaving. Christopher suggested that everybody return to the tower where Sean and his knights were.

It only took them an hour to return to the first tower. When they arrived, they held the Hadar Stone up to the point on the wall where the door should have been, and it appeared. Walking inside, they were greeted with curious glances from the knights. Not much had changed since they had last been here, and many knights were now sleeping from pure boredom.

They spotted Sean on the other side of the tower and went toward him. He saw them coming and walked to the far corner of the tower, so that the knights or other unforeseen forces could not hear them.

"I saw what happened," he said when they were within earshot.

"You felt the shaking, too?" Katie asked.

"Yeah, and I thought the tower was going to fall to pieces. A lot of my men were scared, even those that acted bravely in the past."

"There are lights in two of the towers, too."

"I know. When the shaking started, I went up the stairs to see what was going on. Although it had stopped before I reached the top, I went up and looked out the window, and I saw the faint outlines of a bright light. I guess that that was the tower that you had 'energized'."

"Do you have any idea where we can find the third stone?"

"I don't know," Sean replied. "But you'd better hurry. My men have been sitting here for days. We're running out of food, and their morale is low. If we stay here much longer, they could desert us."

The conversation came to an end on that somber note. Sean walked back to a knight who had been patiently waiting with a question. The rest of the group remained where they were.

"We have been looking for the third stone this whole time," Christopher began. "But it's obvious where it is!"

"Where?" Dave gasped.

"We have it right here, of course! The strange red stone that nobody could hold!"

"I never thought of that," Katie commented. "We had it all this time?"

"But," Dave said, "there is a problem. Why can't anybody, even Christopher, hold that stone?"

There was a pause.

"I mean, if it is the stone for the remaining elemental, then Christopher should be able to hold it and open a door in the remaining tower."

"That's right," Katie said. "So this stone must represent something else."

"What?"

That question went unanswered. They did nothing more and went to bed that night, puzzled.

The next morning they set out from the tower with a plan to search the area in case the stone for the ice elemental was somewhere around the area. Most of the knights were invited out of the tower to help. Seeing a release from their boredom, the knights eagerly accepted.

They formed a long line of about 450 people, stretching from the two towers at the end of the field in which they stood. Each person was spaced about 30 feet apart in either direction.

Although it took twenty minutes to get all of the knights organized, the plan eventually went off without a hitch. After an hour of walking, they had come up with exactly...nothing. Exhausted, they returned to the tower, while Sean, Katie, Chapin, Dave, Mike, and Christopher remained at the far tower to discuss their poor fortune.

Standing below the unlit tower, they could see the two other towers in the distance, shining brightly in the late morning fog, connected by a stream of green light.

"This doesn't make sense," Christopher said. "If Chapin is the earth elemental and Katie is the future fire elemental, why are the stones blue and yellow? Why not brown and red or something?"

"We should be going back," said Christopher, looking around at the barren wasteland that stretched around them for miles on end. When they returned to the tower, they spent another sleepless night pondering the mysteries of the towers.

So it continued for another week. Every morning they tried a different way to find the stone, and every morning, they failed. They didn't even know if the stone were near the towers. It was mid-August now, and everybody knew that they had to get moving soon or they would freeze on the way to Yavin's

fortress during the cold winter. Their time outdoors was beginning to be limited by the decreasing daylight hours. Their food was beginning to run short, and Sean estimated that they now were within one week of starvation even at the strictest ration levels. Although Sean had sent several knights to hunt for food, there were no animals in the vicinity, and no forests for miles around. Sean told the party that he had orders to bring his knights back to the city if they were running short of food, and that that time was rapidly approaching.

This day, they were moving the knights to the unlit tower so that the group didn't have to travel back and forth every time they searched for answers.

Mike, Dave, and Katie were walking in the middle of the party when they were crossing the middle of the field.

"Wow!" Katie exclaimed. She had been doing some calculations on a soft piece of wood with a rock, attempting to figure out what day it was. "It's already August 14. We've been here for a day over two months!"

"The summer's almost over and there's still no way home," Dave replied sadly.

"I believe we'll find a way home," Katie said.

"If we do," Mike said, "we'll be old, sorry-people."

"Look on the bright side," Dave continued. "We won't have to go back to school in a month."

Everybody laughed, and then there was silence. Occasionally the murmur of two knights talking could be heard. The gloom that had set over the knights seemed to be contagious.

Suddenly Katie screamed. What had appeared to be normal dirt had given way to a hole. Mike reached down to save her but found that there were stairs in the hole.

"Stop!" Dave yelled.

The knights halted and Christopher, who had been riding at the front of the pack, turned around to see what was happening.

"I'm fine," Katie said and proceeded to climb out of the hole. When the group was able to inspect the hole, they were amazed at what they saw.

The hole was narrow, but deep. Stone stairs led down into the ground as far as they could see. The inside was pitch dark.

"What is this?" Chapin asked as she rode over on her horse to the scene of the commotion.

"I don't know," Christopher said. "What should we do?

"We can't just stand here while you explore," Sean commented. "What should we do?"

"It would be best to go back to one of the towers," Katie suggested.

"Fine. Let's go to the tower with the earth elemental so that everyone can enjoy a change of scenery, and Katie can come with us. Chapin, will you lead the group to the tower?"

Without another word, Chapin began to walk east toward the tower that they had not visited yet. The knights followed, leaving the rest of the group alone to examine the hole.

"Katie, we need some light," Christopher said as they descended the stairs into the hole.

Katie took the Hadar Stone out of her pocket where she had kept it and concentrated until it began to shine brightly, illuminating a short distance in front of them. Although it wasn't enough to see the passage clearly, it was better than the pitch darkness that they had had a minute ago.

They followed the stairs until they were well under the ground. After a hundred feet or so, they stopped. Old tunnels stretched out in front of them in three directions, presumably toward the towers.

"Which way should we go?" Dave asked.

"Let's split up," Katie suggested.

"No," Christopher said. "We only have five people. We can't risk one of you going alone. Let's stick together."

"This still remains--" Mike said. "Which way do we go?"

"Let's go this way," Dave suggested, "toward the tower that we can't open. Maybe there's an underground entrance."

"That sounds good," Christopher replied, and they set off in a forward direction. The only light

was that of Katie's stone. Even with its luminosity, the tunnel was still treacherous. In several places, they were forced to stop where the tunnel had degraded, or where there were mysterious artifacts that were lying on the ground.

Finally, after a while, they reached the end of the tunnel. Ahead was a clearing similar to the one that they had discovered in the destroyed town so long ago.

In the middle, there was a green ball, shining like the Hadar Stone. Indeed, when Katie brought the Hadar Stone up to it for closer inspection, it began to shine even more brightly, illuminating the whole chamber. It was no more than twenty feet across, the pedestal in the middle only three or four feet tall. This room was not as high as the other, though, being only about eight or ten feet to the peak of the ceiling.

"This might be the stone!" Dave exclaimed eagerly.

"Don't be so anxious," Christopher warned. "This stone might hurt us like the red one!"

"He's right," Mike said. "We should be careful."

"That makes sense," Katie said, "but how do we carry it out? Somebody has to touch or pick up the stone to see what happens!"

"That should be Christopher, because this stone probably represents him," Mike said.

"Let's try," Christopher agreed. He slowly moved his hand toward the pedestal, as if he would be able to sense some evil inclination of the stone before he touched it. However, there was no warning. He suddenly thrust his hand forward and picked up the stone. It began to shine incredibly bright, but Christopher seemed unaltered. The rest of the group looked at him in awe.

Christopher dropped the stone into his pocket calmly, as if nothing had happened. "I'm OK," he reassured Mike, Dave, and Katie.

"We've found the stone," Mike said. "Now let's get out of here."

"I agree," Dave suggested.

They backtracked out of the tunnel, no further cause for concern happening. When they had reached the surface, they set out toward the tower where the rest of the knights were located. It was afternoon by the time they reached the tower, and the heat was growing quite oppressive.

They spotted Chapin outside the tower, waiting for them. Because the walls were soundproof, there was no way of letting her know to let them in with the stone.

She made a door in the wall and entered with the rest of the group. The knights were standing inside, bored, but waiting for news.

"I have an announcement," Sean said loudly to get attention after all were inside. "We have found the stone!"

A loud cheer rose throughout the tower. Knights jumped around, and Chapin looked at the party in surprise. When all of the partying had died down, Sean looked around the tower.

"Let us go outside and watch our heroes place the final stone in the remaining tower. We don't know what will happen to the towers after he does."

The obedient knights quickly gathered what little food and water they had and their few personal belongings. They headed for the door to the tower, and like before, it took them some time to exit the building. When they had, Chapin closed the door for the last time. Sean rode to the front of the knights, who had assembled in rows, and led them forward. They set off for the tower in good spirits, even though the day was growing short.

By the time they had reached the final tower, it was almost twilight, but it was agreed that they hurry up and place the stone in the tower to avoid staying another night and using too many supplies. This one was almost identical to the other two, but there was one main difference: this one looked as if it were falling apart, not like the "untouched for centuries" look that the other two towers had.

The stairs were wooden in this tower, and as a result many of the steps had rotted away with time. There was debris lying over the floor, and even some of the bricks that held the stone walls together looked brittle.

"Should we still try?" Katie asked Christopher after seeing the state of the tower.

"We have to," Christopher replied. "If we want to defeat Yavin and return home."

There was no argument, and the party began the grueling task of ascending the stairs. They were forced to remain on their hands and knees, inching up the stairs a few feet at a time. Christopher went first, and traveled far ahead of the party, so that if there were a problem with the stairs, he would be the first to know.

It took them quite a while to reach the upper balcony, which, like the rest of the tower, was identical to the one in the other tower, but was degrading rapidly. They had to step carefully to avoid holes in the floor, but they all made it safely to the narrow staircase. The staircase was not in as bad shape as the other parts of the tower, and they had no problems climbing it to reach the upper floor. Once they had reached the "invisible" stairs, it was possible to continue up at normal speed without the threat of injuring themselves in some part that was degraded.

When they reached the top, they could see the other two towers, the one that Katie had activated with the Hadar Stone, shining bright yellow, and the one that Chapin had activated, shining bright blue. The beams of energy mixed, forming a bright green light that connected the two towers.

Christopher approached the center of the tower, holding the shining light aloft above his head. This time, the pedestal that was to be energized slipped out of the floor immediately.

"Here goes," Christopher said. "I hope that this works!" He touched the stone to the pedestal.

At first, it seemed like nothing was going to happen. Then, the stone began to glow brightly, surrounding the pedestal in bright green light. Suddenly, there was a flash, and beams of shining light escaped from the other towers, and headed toward the pedestal. Christopher stepped back, along with the rest of the party.

The beams of light connected in mid-stream with the two that the tower that they were on had sent out. There was a loud crash, and all three towers were suddenly connected by blinding white light. Suddenly, there was a boom, and the towers began to shake. Slowly at first, then they began to pick up momentum.

"Let's get out of here!" Dave screamed in terror. He rushed toward the stairs, which were groaning and creaking with the rest of the tower. Everybody followed as best they could without stepping through a hole in the already damaged stairs. When they were a few steps down, there was a loud bang. The door at the top of the tower vanished, and turned into a stone wall.

"That was close!" Mike exclaimed as he ran, screaming.

"Hurry! We don't want the next door to close on us," Katie said, ignoring the comments of the other two and concentrating on running as fast as she could.

The tower was shaking hard enough, by the time that they reached the bottom of the stairs, that the room that they were about to enter was in disarray. The floor was littered by falling stones from the ceiling and walls. A massive landscape of the outside that was somehow hanging on the wall had fallen down and been ripped into a million pieces.

Everybody ignored the state of the room, however, and concentrated on getting to the stairs as fast as possible. They sprinted across the room and down the opposite stairwell. This one was falling apart with the tower, and boards here and there were loose and missing.

Suddenly, there was a scream. "HELP!" Dave exclaimed, but from where! A board had given way about halfway down and Dave had crashed down two turns of the stairwell, through the rotting wood, stopped by a metal pole that held up the staircase below.

The party rushed toward him. There was a large cut on his arm, and it seemed as if he were unconscious.

"He might have internal injuries!" Mike exclaimed over the roar of the rumbling tower. "We can't risk moving him!"

"What are we going to do?" Katie said. "Let him stay here and die?"

"We have to get him down!" Christopher yelled, "and QUICK!" The tower around them was falling apart by the seams. Christopher and Chapin hoisted Dave onto their shoulders and carried him down as fast as they could. Even so, by the time that the remaining members of the party had made it

down, the tower was shaking so much that it felt as if it could fall apart at any minute.

At the bottom of the second set of stairs, they were met by a sight so incredible that Chapin froze to look at it, almost causing Christopher to drop Dave down to the bottom of the tower. The entire stairwell that had gone down to the bottom of the tower had collapsed under the shaking tower.

"What are we going to do now?" Katie screamed in terror. "We're going to die up here!"

"Concentrate on the stone," Chapin replied. "Maybe we can figure out something!"

Katie thought as hard as she could of a way out of the tower, but she failed. Then she saw it: if only she could float down the empty space slowly. She pulled out the Hadar Stone and wished as hard as she could that she was out of the tower. The stone began to glow, and before she knew it, she was floating several inches above the floor.

"Look!" Christopher said, pointing at Katie. Chapin and Mike looked over to see.

"Quick, grab on!" she said to Mike. She held out her hand. Christopher and Chapin wished that they, too, were also floating, and began to do so. The three, holding Mike and Dave, were able to float down safely to the bottom level of the tower.

At the bottom, Sean's knights were running about, scared that the tower would mean their doom. "Where were you?" Sean exclaimed over the noise. "Hurry, open the door!"

Christopher rushed over to the nearest wall and held the stone up to it. Immediately, an opening appeared in the wall, and the knights rushed toward it. Sean led Christopher, Chapin, Katie, and Mike out of the tower first, and ordered a group of knights to help carry Dave out.

The tower was falling apart in chunks now, the roar deafening and large stones falling from outside the tower as well. The knights who were exiting the tower had to move quickly to avoid rubble that fell from the top of the tower.

Soon, there were several hundred knights standing outside the tower. They were in a cluster several hundred feet away from the tower, away from the range of the falling debris.

Suddenly, without warning, there was an earth-shattering bang, and the tower began to collapse inward. The light from the top of the tower was still visible, even though the tower was crumbing under it. The knights at the door picked up their pace, colleagues shouting encouragement. The tower was half-gone now, a large section of it falling in the direction opposite the waiting knights, causing them to back up even further. They could see the other two towers in the distance crumbling the same as this one.

They watched in horror as the tower crumbled and the knights who were still in the tower scrambled out the doorway. Then the worst happened. A large chunk of the tower fell off in front of the door. One knight was crushed, and the doorway was completely blocked. Chapin turned away as she heard the screams coming from within as the last of the tower crashed downward, burying the remainder of the knights alive.

When all was silent, Sean said, "Is everybody alright?" Six knights came up, each with minor injuries, the severest being a mere broken arm. When they had been healed, they took a count of the live knights. There were 406. 52 had died in the tower. Sean suggested a moment of silence for those that had given their lives for their town.

After all this was done, a few knights took the bodies that they could find and burned them in a makeshift grave made of stones and dirt. Then the party rested. When the morning came, there was still a feeling of dread that hung over the party. However, many knights were also glad to be moving on. The white triangle, over the night, had remained, and had sent down a shaft of light into the middle of the clearing, above the trapdoor that they had accidentally fallen into the day before. They set off as best they could, among the rubble that had been thrown everywhere.

It was mid-morning when they reached the exact center of what remained of the towers where the light was shining. The trapdoor had vanished as if it had never existed.

"What should we do?" Chapin asked Christopher, puzzled.

Mike reached out to put his hand under the light, but he quickly removed it. There was a large burn on his palm that he had held under it. "Take care of him!" Chapin ordered, and Sean quickly came.

"Try the stone!" Dave suggested. Christopher, not knowing what else to do, rolled his stone into

the light. Immediately, it changed color.

"Hey, look!" Katie exclaimed. She held the Hadar Stone under the light. It changed in color to orange. When she removed the stone, however, it did not change back.

"How were you able to hold your hand under the light?" Chapin asked.

"I don't know. It didn't hurt," she replied.

Chapin put her stone under the light and it changed to a brownish tint.

"Katie," Mike suggested, "try standing under the light."

"Won't she....die?" Dave asked.

"It didn't hurt her before," Christopher replied.

"OK," she said, apprehensive. "Here goes."

She put one foot under the light, and then the second foot. Suddenly, the light changed to a pinkish color. There was a bright flash. The knights gasped at the unbelievable sight, unable to take their eyes off what Katie.....was.