

**What If...**



**My Sister  
Was Adopted?**

# A Community Fundraiser

## Our Mission

The What If...project is a community-wide fundraiser which promotes literacy and the visual arts. The project provides a non-traditional funding source for local not-for-profits.

Local authors, artists and non-profit organizations are chosen to bring together each "What If..." book, to offer a wide variety of subjects for children.

These children's books deal in a delicate and joyous way with many issues. The "What If..." books are beautifully illustrated and full of color, which allows children to become part of each educational journey.



**H**ave you ever seen a fly that is missing one wing? That is who Lily Johnson was. She could not fly like the other kids; she was stuck to the ground. “See Lily,” the doctor had told her when she was five, “your body is like a house that has been built without cement...it’s not strong enough.” “Can we add some cement?” Lily had asked. “I’m afraid we don’t have the right cement for you right now,” the doctor had answered. “I’ll wait till you get some then,” Lily had concluded.

Lily was ten now. Outside it was too windy for a body like hers, so she had to spend most of her time in her room. Sometimes, she wished she had special armor like the knights used to wear, to go out and kick a ball or jump in the snow and climb the trees...but her doctor did not have that for her either.

So she read and drew a lot sitting in her bed, imagining other places and other people.

It was a winter Monday morning when her mother knocked at her door. It was eight o'clock...thirty minutes earlier than usual. Lily opened her eyes with difficulty and saw her mum coming in with a tender smile on her face. She did not stop to say "time to get up, little girl!" as she usually did. She sat next to Lily on her bed. Lily had spent enough time observing people to realize when something was wrong.



“What is it, mum?” Lily asked with a small voice. “There is something important I have to tell



you, dear,” her mother started. Lily’s mum was a beautiful woman. Her face looked as if it had been sculpted by the smoothest hands in the world. Her deep blue eyes were full of kindness and her voice floated in the air like a slight breeze.

“You know how many poor little children there are in the world, Lily?” her

mother asked her.

“A lot, I think,” Lily answered.

“Yes dear, a lot...your father and I have decided to give a home to one of them...” her mother’s voice got lower.



Lily did not understand. What was her mother trying to say? "Are you going to build a house for poor little kids?" she asked. "No sweetie," her mother smiled, "we are going to adopt a little girl who is six years old." Lily was stunned. Hundreds of ideas were getting mixed up in her head. A little girl...who is six. She kept repeating these words to herself.

"She is from South Africa," her mother's voice had become a distant murmur. "Your father and I will pick her up at the social worker's home next week. You will have to spend the day at Grandma's."

Lily was staring into space. "Lily! Are you all right?" her mother asked. Lily's eyes rested on her mother's face. Tears started to form. Lily's voice was quavering: "Is it because of what the doctor said? That I'm as fragile as a dragonfly and my bones can break as easily as a piece of chalk?" Lily started sobbing. "I'm not made like the other children, I know that, is it why you want another one?" Lily's mother took her in her arms.

"Don't you ever dare say that Lily! You're not different and we don't want to replace you!" she grabbed her arms and made her look at her in the eyes. "It has nothing to do with that, Lily! Your father and I have wanted to give you a little sister for several years, but we didn't manage to...things don't always work the way we would like them to, so we have to find some solutions. It is a great chance to help a little girl, you understand?"

Lily was crying. "I'm sorry..."she said. Her mother hugged her tenderly and got up. "Come on now, you have to get ready. Your teacher is going to arrive soon."

Mr. Stevens arrived at nine thirty. He was wearing the funny-looking tie Lily usually laughed at, but she did not notice it this time. He put his leather bag on the kitchen table and Lily sat on the other side. Mr. Stevens was Lily's personal teacher. He was in his thirties and was always in a good mood. That morning, they studied division and fractions, and read some pages of Moby Dick.

But Lily could not pay attention. She was trying to imagine the face of the little girl she was going to share her room with. She was thinking about the reasons her mother had given her, and she was trying to think about what she had done wrong for her parents to want to have another child.







Mr. Stevens' gruff voice dragged her out of her thoughts: "Time for lunch, Lily!" Mr. Stevens had noticed that something was disturbing the little girl. "Did you leave your mind somewhere on Mars?" he joked.

The day went on, and Lily was still thinking about the little "sister." The more she thought about it, the more worried she was. At dinner, she could not eat more than a spoonful of mashed potatoes and a dice of ham.



Her mother and her father were trying to cheer her up by telling fun stories about their days and asking her what she had learned in her lessons. They knew that Lily was upset, but did not really know what to do about it.

Seven days. Before going to bed that night, Lily circled the 29th of February with a big red marker on her calendar. She also put a little cross on the corner of the 22nd. "Only six days left," she sighed.

The days went on, and Lily did not talk about the adoption, but she was thinking about it a lot. Her room was reorganized to make room for a second bed. She looked at her image in the mirror, and got mad at herself for not being the perfect little girl her parents would have surely liked to have.



The more worried she became about the big change that was going to happen in her life, the more feverish she became. She had difficulty getting out of her bed, and was losing strength. On the 26th, Lily was stuck to her bed and could not get her body to move. Her face was very pale, and the same disturbing thoughts were still dancing around in her mind. Her parents called the doctor.

“The child is tormented,” Dr. Stuart told them after spending thirty minutes with Lily. “She probably has a hard time dealing with the idea of the adoption, and her worries take all the strength she has. It will probably take her a little time to go over it. For now, the only thing you can do is keep her warm and have her rest.” Dr. Stuart tapped Mr. Johnson’s shoulder with compassion and left.





The 29th finally arrived. Since Lily could not get out of her bed, her mother told her that Grandma Louisa was going to spend the day with her while they were going to pick up her little sister. Lily's mother spent some time with Lily before leaving to make sure she was all right, and she was not brooding over those ridiculous thoughts again.

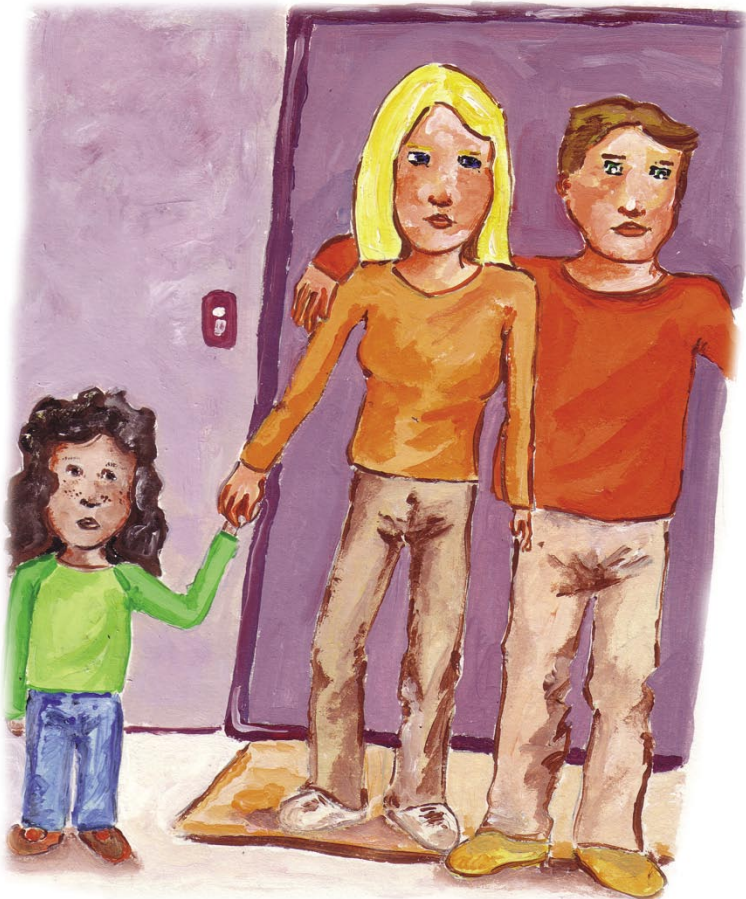
Lily loved Grandma Louisa. She told her stories all the time, made her hot chocolate, and taught her how to cook and knit. She showed her pictures of her grandpa that she never met and told her what he was like, how they met, and how good life was at that time. However, this time Lily was not as excited as she usually was about spending the day with her grandma.

“What do you think she is going to look like, grandma?” Lily asked, still thinking about the little sister who was going to be here in a few hours now.

“Does it really matter, Lily?” Grandma Louisa answered with a smile.

“I guess not...” But Lily was definitely worried.

“Nobody will ever replace you, Lily; you are a unique little girl. Parents do not have other kids because they are not happy with the one they have, they just want to extend their family and give it love and be proud of it, that’s all. That’s the way people are.”



It was six in the afternoon when they came back. Lily and Grandma Louisa were sitting on the bed looking at pictures when Lily heard the noise of the car. She looked up at her grandma with distress. "It'll be all right," her grandma assured her.

Lily's grandma went to the living room to welcome the new member of the family. Mrs. Johnson came in first. She was holding a tiny black hand in her own. The little girl was looking around everywhere, discovering the new house she had been brought to. Her skin was as dark as the night and her bright brown eyes were shining. She had a very small nose and her long hair was waving on her back.

Mrs. Johnson leaned down to her, "Zia, this is Grandma Louisa." Grandma Louisa took Zia in her arms and said: "Welcome, Zia. Would you like to follow me? There is someone very special I want you to meet." Zia looked up at Mrs. Johnson with eyes that said: "should I?" "Go ahead," Mrs Johnson answered.

Grandma entered Lily's room first. Zia was right behind her. Lily looked at her grandma and tried to see who was hidden behind her. Grandma Louisa took Zia's hand and signaled to her to step forward a little. The two girls' eyes met. "Zia this is Lily, and Lily, this is Zia," Grandma Louisa said.



That night was the first time Lily shared her room with someone else. Zia did not talk a lot, because she was a little overwhelmed by all these new things. But for no particular reason, she felt very comfortable with Lily.

After Mrs. Johnson left the girls' bedroom, Zia got up from her bed and went to sit on Lily's bed.

She had a big scrapbook in her hands. She smiled at Lily, who smiled back. Zia opened the book and started turning the pages very slowly, pointing at some pictures from time to time.



Lily's eyes were wide. The book was full of pictures and drawings and songs that Zia had collected in her country. There were pictures of elephants, the desert, a mother and her little baby, the river, the sand, a song about a boy who got lost in his thoughts and never found his way back...everything was so colorful that it could have lit up the room!

Zia was humming a beautiful tune while turning the pages. The last page was a drawing of a small wood house in the middle of the desert. Zia closed the book, gave Lily a kiss on the cheek, and went back to her bed.

"Goodnight, Zia," Lily said.

As soon as she closed her eyes, Lily was plunged into a colorful land. She was standing in the middle of a kitchen where some beautiful African women were cooking and singing. It was as if part of their recipe required them to dance. Lily pricked up her ears. She could hear the tam-tams and the didgeridoos coming from far away.

Suddenly, she found herself on the back of a huge elephant. She was not feeling weak as she usually was; she was full of energy and joy. The elephant started running and Lily was laughing out loud. She could feel the sand passing through her hair in a gust. The huge trees around them were dancing, following the rhythm of the music. Zia passed her with another elephant. She smiled and disappeared.



When the elephant stopped, Lily was sitting around a fire. Zia was there too. An old man was telling stories, and some little kids were jumping and singing. Lily was feeling better than she ever did. The old man turned to her and held out his hand. He looked wise and serene. Lily put her hand in his and felt warmth in all her body.

When she woke up the next day, Lily had almost forgotten that she had been in her bed for almost a week. A feeling of happiness was filling her, and she had no idea where it came from. Zia was already up because her bed was empty. Lily looked at the clock: 9 a.m. It was Sunday. It was sunny and warm.



Lily got up and went to the kitchen. Her mother was cooking breakfast and had prepared a tray to bring to her. Zia was putting some flowers on the tray. “You’re up!” her mother was happily surprised. Zia gathered all the flowers she was about to arrange on the tray and held them out to Lily. The little bunch was forming a perfect circle in Zia’s hands; a circle they all had a place in.

Lily and Zia spent all their time together. Lily helped Zia with her homework, and she taught her how to make hot chocolate and knit. Zia taught Lily all about the colors and the dance. She taught her some songs and filled her dreams with new characters. Now the sky looked different, the wind was smoother, the stars were bright, and Lily’s heart was never cold again.

**The End**



FROM LEFT: Michelle Calka, Helen Kibby, Nitin Gumaste, Dr. John Dailey, Audrey-Anne Bazard

## About this book

This "What If?" children's book and accompanying interactive CD-ROM were produced by graduate students in Dr. John Dailey's Interactive Storytelling class at Ball State University in the spring of 2005.

## Credits

Story & Illustration: Audrey-Anne Bazard

Editing: Michelle Calka

Interaction Design: Helen Kibby

Sound & Casting: Nitin Gumaste