our generation®

A Garden Where Friendship Grows

FEATURING **NAHLA™**

BY SUSAN CAPPADONIA LOVE
ILLUSTRATED BY TRISH ROUELLE

our generation®
This is Nahla's story.

NAHLA™

A Garden Where Friendship Grows

BY

Susan Cappadonia Love

Illustrated by Trish Rouelle

An Our Generation® *book*

Maison Joseph Battat Ltd. *Publisher*

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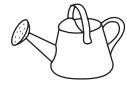
EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!

*Big words, wacky words, powerful words, funny words… what do they all mean? They are marked with this symbol *. Look them up in the Glossary at the end of this book.*



Chapter One

RUNAWAY KITTY

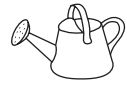
A few months ago, the kids and teachers at my school ate 814 pounds of zucchini. Thirty-seven wheelbarrows full of them! That's a lot of long, green vegetables!

We ate those squash for breakfast and lunch and even dessert. We ate them until we couldn't stand to eat one more bite.

So why *did* we eat all those zucchini? It's a strange story, and it all started with a bumper sticker that I saw on my way to school one day.

I was riding in the back seat of the car and my dad was driving. I was telling him ideas for my science project.

I explained to him that a couple of days earlier, my teacher, Mr. Fritz, had told our class to think about what each of us would like to do for a



science project.

"What's one question that you are really curious about?" Mr. Fritz had asked. "Be a detective and discover the answer for your project."

Picking just one question? Impossible! I thought. *There are way too many things that sound interesting.*

"How about," I asked my dad, "which freezes first: shampoo, water, olive oil or chocolate

syrup? And why?"

"That would be an interesting experiment," my dad agreed.

"Or, how can parrots repeat words? Do they understand them?" I suggested. "Or, why do I yawn when I see someone else yawn?"

My dad nodded his head. "Good questions, Nahla."

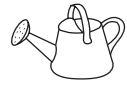
I glanced* out the window and started to worry. "Traffic is terrible today," I huffed. "I hope we aren't late for school."

"If we are, you'll be in big trouble with the principal," my dad teased.

I giggled at his joke. "Da-ad! The principal is my mom!"

My dad knew that, of course. My mom had just begun working at Riverway Avenue Elementary School, which is also my new school. We had both started there when our family moved into the city a few weeks earlier.

Usually I rode to school with my mom, but on that morning she had an early meeting, so my



dad was dropping me off on his way to work.

I noticed a funny-looking bus in the next lane. It was bright green and had a blue bumper sticker that read:

BUY IT FRESH
BUY IT LOCAL

"What does 'Buy It Fresh, Buy It Local' mean?" I asked my dad.

"It means buying produce from farmers who live in areas near where you live," my dad explained.

"What's produce?" I said.

"Vegetables and fruits," he replied. "Some produce in stores is brought by trucks into the city from farms that are hundreds of miles away.

"When we buy local, produce is fresher. It's better for the environment*, too, because less gas is used to get food from the farm to our kitchen."

"How can a farm fit in the city?" I asked,

looking at the skyscrapers and other buildings all around us.

"There are farms near the city and, believe it or not, there are gardens *in* the city, too," my dad told me.

"Where?" I asked.

"You'd be surprised," my dad said. "People plant vegetables in community gardens, in their backyards, and in pots on windowsills and porches. There are even some gardens on roofs."

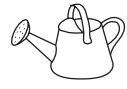
"Gardens on roofs!" I exclaimed. That sounded like a very strange idea.

We can't go onto the roof of the building where our apartment is, I thought, *but we do have a window.* I wondered if growing a garden on my windowsill would really work. Could I get enough veggies to sprout on a windowsill to make a salad?

Aha! I'd found my science experiment question!

Now if I could just find a best friend, I thought.

I hadn't really made friends at my new



school yet. It's not that other kids didn't *like* me. It seemed that they hardly noticed me.

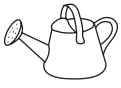
Thank goodness I have my cats, Sparkle and Maya, to snuggle with at night. They purr while I stroke their soft fur and tell them everything about my day. They're very good listeners.

But at school, I was a little on the quiet side. And it *had* only been three weeks since I'd started at Riverway Avenue Elementary School.

Plus, having a mother who is the principal can sometimes make things tricky. When it comes to rules…well, she makes everyone stick to them. And that includes me.

The only times I *definitely* felt noticed were on Thursday mornings when Mr. Fritz handed back our math quizzes and announced to the class, "Once again, Nahla got every answer right."

When that happened, I could feel everyone's eyes on me. Twenty-two pairs of them, to be exact. *Do my classmates think I'm a teacher's pet*?* I worried.



"Don't forget to give the front door an extra-hard push shut," my mom reminded me that evening, as we entered our building. "It's been hard to close."

I gave the door a shove and clomped up the stairs behind my mom to the second floor.

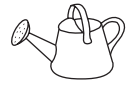
She unlocked our door and held it open for me. As quickly as an Olympic runner, Sparkle scooted between my legs and out the door. I spun around to scoop her up, but she had disappeared.

"Sparkle!" I cried. "Come back!"

When my mom and I leapt* downstairs to find Sparkle, we discovered that the front door of the building was open a crack, just wide enough for a cat to slip outside.

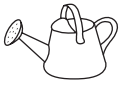
Tears filled my eyes. I'd been the last one to come inside and hadn't shut the door all the way. It was my fault that Sparkle was missing!

Running down the front steps and onto the sidewalk, we looked under the bushes on either side of the steps and called Sparkle's name. We hurried down the street, asking people if they'd



seen a fluffy white cat. No one had.

It would be dark soon. Sparkle would be hungry and scared. Maya would miss Sparkle, too. *Where oh where is my sweet, precious kitty?* I worried.



Chapter Two

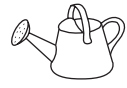
GARDEN GONE WILD

After searching for Sparkle for over two hours, there was nothing more we could do but go back home and make "Lost Cat" posters to hang around the neighborhood. That way, if someone saw her, they'd know whom to call.

Discouraged and upset, I sat down on the living room floor and got to work making posters with markers and paper.

R-R-R-RING! R-R-R-RING! R-R-R-RING! My mother quickly picked up the phone. "Hello?" Her eyes brightened. "Oh! That's wonderful! We'll be right up!"

"That was Londa!" my mom told me excitedly. "When Sparkle escaped, she ran *up*stairs, not *down*stairs! Londa has been calling us while we were gone!"



I jumped up from the floor. "Oh, thank goodness!"

"MEOW!" Maya agreed happily.

Londa is our upstairs neighbor and a retired* teacher. The day we moved in, she brought us a plate of homemade banana bread to welcome us to the building. Since then, she's become a good friend of our family.

Londa was waiting for us at her door. She placed Sparkle in my arms.

"Don't ever do that again," I said, kissing the silky white fur on the top of her head. "I was so worried about you."

"Why, you two probably haven't even had dinner since you've been searching for Sparkle all evening," Londa said. "Come in and have some potato soup. I think I made enough for 20 people!"

We sat around Londa's dining room table while she poured steaming soup into bowls and sliced a loaf of bread that was fresh out of the oven. My dad arrived home from work just in time to join us.

Over dinner, I explained my windowsill garden science project. “I’m going to try to grow enough veggies to make a salad.”

“That’s wonderful!” Londa told me. “Gardening is one of my favorite hobbies. In fact, I’m in a gardening club. We call ourselves the ‘Happy Planters.’”

I looked around Londa’s apartment. There was a teeny-tiny cactus in a teacup on a shelf, but no other plants in sight.

“You’re wondering where my garden is, right?” Londa added with a smile.

She went over to the bookshelf, picked up a framed photo and gave it to me. The picture showed lots of large wooden containers that were about the size of refrigerators lying on their sides. They overflowed with green plants.

The containers were arranged like slices of a pizza all around a big blue barrel that looked almost as tall as I am.

“Those are raised garden beds,” Londa stated, pointing to the containers. “And that blue

barrel catches the rain, which we use to water the plants.

"This is the community garden that I belong to," she told me. "The land used to be filled with weeds and garbage and, well, it was a mess."

She continued. "People in the neighborhood, including me, got together and decided to make it into a place that everyone could share. The city gave us permission to clean up the lot and create a garden there."

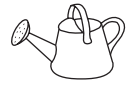
Londa looked very proud. "My gardening club shares the containers. We all help plant seeds and weed and water. And the Happy Planters sell their veggies out of the farmers market mobile*."

"A farmers market…*what*?" I asked.

Londa reached for another picture frame and handed it to me. "It's an old bus that we painted bright green and turned into a traveling farmers market."

"I saw that bus!" I exclaimed.

Londa nodded. "We drive to neighborhoods around the city and sell the food we grow. We



took out the bus seats and added wire bins to hold the produce."

A bus that sells food. It certainly sounded interesting.

"We started with not much more than sunshine and seeds," Londa said. "It just goes to show you how tiny seeds can grow into big ideas."

She pointed to my empty soup bowl. "As a matter of fact, the potatoes in the soup came from

our garden."

I was amazed. "Where is your garden?"

"It's five blocks away," she said. "Would you like to see it sometime?"

We all agreed that we'd really like that.

The next morning, when we opened our door, there was a surprise waiting for me. It was a paper bag with a tag attached that read:

A gardening starter kit for Nahla!
Just add dirt, water and sunshine ☺

Inside the bag was a package of carrot seeds and two tall stacks of empty yogurt containers to use as pots for growing the seedlings*.

After school, I went to see Ms. Darling, the school librarian. Because my mom is the principal, she stays at school working long after the students

go home. I stay there, too.

I don't mind, though. It means I have the whole library to myself, which is great, because reading is one of my favorite things to do.

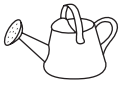
"Have you ever seen a garden on a roof?" I asked Ms. Darling.

Ms. Darling looked up from the computer on her desk. "Hmmmm…no, but let's find out more about it."

There was a sparkle in her eyes. Ms. Darling lives for this kind of question. She loves poking around in books for information.

She directed me to two shelves full of gardening books. We chose seven books and carried the stack to a table. One explained how to start a garden on a windowsill. It's called a container garden, because the plants grow inside a pot, jar, can, basket, milk carton or in a creative container like a plastic beach bucket or an old rain boot.

Later, Ms. Darling helped me use the computer to search for pictures of roof gardens.



We were both surprised about how many we found.

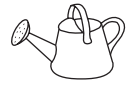
Some were very simple, with plants in pots of all shapes and sizes. Others had big, rectangular raised garden beds like the ones in Londa's photo.

If all these people can garden on their roofs, I thought, *I'm sure I can grow enough vegetables on my windowsill to make a simple salad.*

That night on the way home, my mom and I had stopped at a hardware store to buy more seeds and seedlings, including lettuce, zucchini, carrots, cucumbers, red and yellow peppers, eggplants and pretty flowers. We had also bought a 10-pound bag of potting soil*, a gardening apron and gloves, a trowel* and a watering can.

Right after dinner, I hurried to help do the dishes. Then I covered the table with newspaper and spread out my gardening supplies.

Next, I filled the yogurt containers with soil and read the directions on the backs of the packets



to find out how deep to make the holes. I dropped one seed into each hole, covered it with soil and sprinkled it with water.

Finally, I lined up the pots on a windowsill where they would get the most sunlight. The windowsill salad science project had begun.

A half hour later, I took a peek to see if the seeds had sprouted yet. Nope. I checked again at 7:30 p.m. and again before I went to bed. Still, no

little leaves poking up through the dark brown earth* in the containers.

"C'mon!" I encouraged the plants. "You can do it! Grow!"

Waiting for the tiny leaves to appear was definitely not going to be easy.

A couple of weeks had passed, but sometimes I still felt lonely at school. No one seemed to need a new friend.

Cameron's desk is to the right of mine in class. On my first day, he bragged that he was "the potato chip king" and announced that he ate Crispy Crunchies potato chips for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

I believed him. Every day at snack time he quickly munched his way through two lunch-sized bags of chips.

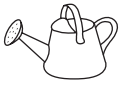
Other kids often want to trade snacks with Cameron and bug him to share his chips. He waves them away, but I get the feeling he secretly likes the

attention.

Then there's Beverly, who sits right behind me and is one of the funniest kids in class. She's always making jokes and likes playing tricks on her friends. But she'd never played one on me.

A girl named May Lee sits in the back. She always has her nose stuck in a paperback book. When she gets to a good part in the book, she hides it on her lap so the teacher won't see that she's reading instead of paying attention.

While my garden was growing bigger and bigger, my friend group at school was not growing at all.



Chapter Three

UP ON THE ROOF

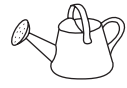
"I can't find my blue shoes," my mother sighed one morning a few weeks later. "I wanted to wear them to school today. Where in the world could I have put them?"

"I'll help you look just as soon as I finish watering my garden," I told my mom.

The plants were getting huge and had outgrown the yogurt containers. Londa had helped me re-plant them into terracotta* flower pots. We needed more room for the pots, so we added a plant stand.

Tomato, zucchini and cucumber vines* spilled over the windowsill and plant stand. Leafy carrot and radish tops had sprung up, bright and cheerful.

I could hardly see the floor. But suddenly—



WHOA!—a patch of bright blue caught my eyes. I lifted up a zucchini vine and there on the floor were the missing shoes.

"Nahla," my mom said, with her hands on her hips. "This science project is out of control. It's taking over the living room!"

I agreed. But what could we do about it?

"Maybe Londa could put these plants in her garden," I suggested, as I dialed her phone number.

Londa thanked me, but said that the Happy

Planters' garden was already so full they had nicknamed it the "jungle."

It was time to find a larger place for my science experiment, but where?

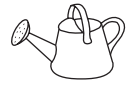
"Too bad we can't go on the roof here," I said. "We could put the plants up there."

"Well…" My mom tapped her finger on her chin. "There's a roof at school. What do you say we bring your plants there and give it a try?"

My windowsill science project was changing into a rooftop science project. Londa was right. Sometimes a few tiny seeds *can* grow into big ideas.

Later that week, my mom and I carried large cardboard boxes filled with my potted plants into the school. Thank goodness there's an elevator that goes up to the roof. There were so many boxes we had to make four trips!

I don't think I've ever stood on top of a building, I thought as we made the first trip up to the roof. *Will it be scary up there? Or windy? Will*



my plants blow away?

I was amazed when we got to the roof. "It's huge!"

"At one time the school was going to build a basketball court up here," my mom told me. "That's why there's a tall fence around the roof."

She continued, "And that picnic table is where the teachers and other people who work here have lunch on sunny days."

My plants, which had looked so big in our living room, looked quite small on the roof. I couldn't help thinking, *With such a large roof and so many seeds left over, I could turn my tiny science project into something enormous*!*

"What you need," my dad pointed out that night, "are raised garden beds like Londa's."

"Are you volunteering to build them?" I teased my dad.

He's an expert at woodworking*. When I was a little girl, he made a toy chest for me. He's

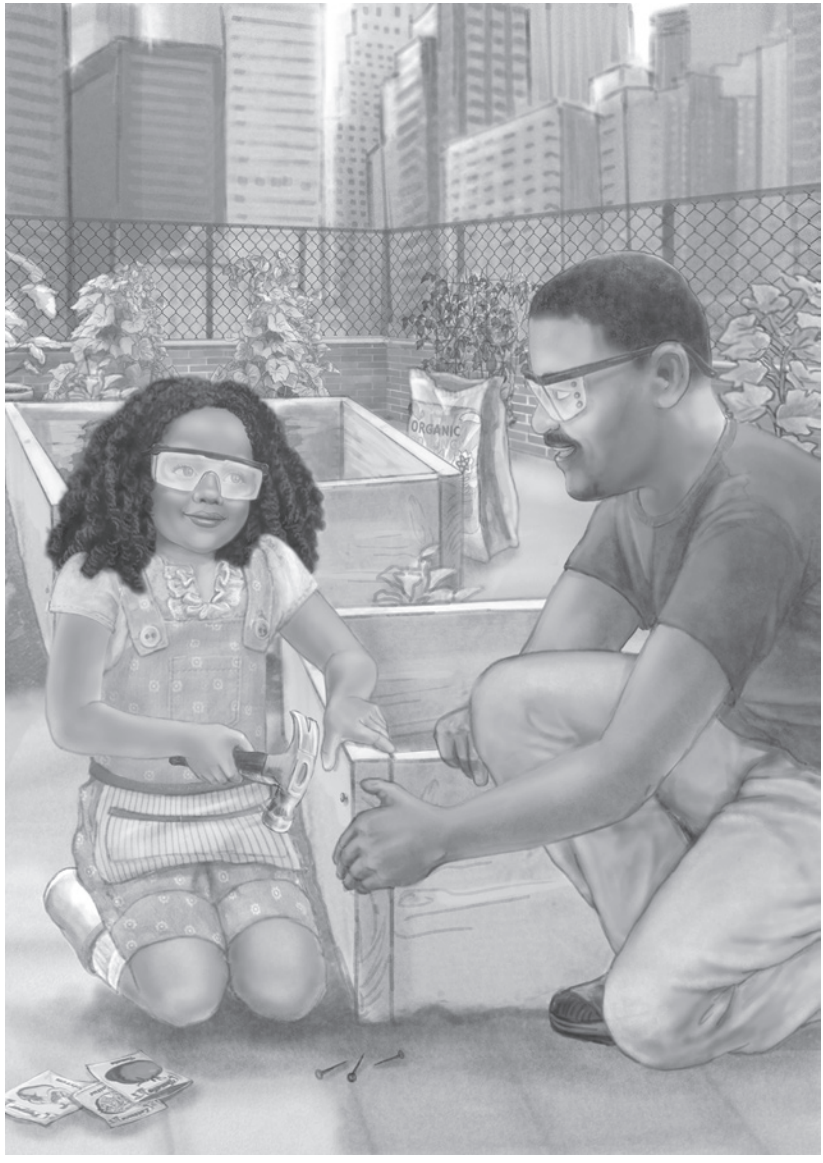
also made two tables, one for each side of our sofa.

"Anything for science," my dad joked.

On Saturday, my dad and I went to the hardware store and bought wood, nails, screws, dirt and all the supplies we needed to make two raised garden beds.

We could not resist stopping in the garden department. By the time we left the parking lot, our car was filled with more plants, including onions, tomatoes, pumpkins, squash, green beans and basil. There was a big sale on zucchini plants, so we bought lots more of those, too, before heading for the school.

When we were finished building and planting, we made a small oval sign with a stake on it and stuck it into one of the raised beds. It read:


ORGANIC

Gardening wasn't the only project I was working on. I was also teaching myself to roller-skate after school.

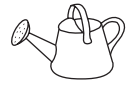
While Mr. Wissler, one of the school's maintenance* crew, mopped the hallway floors and buffed* them to a smooth, glossy shine, I would lace up my roller skates.

I practiced gliding, stopping and turning corners. With my earbuds in and my MP3 player on, I skated through the empty halls as happy as can be.

Finally, my very first cucumber was perfectly ripe and ready to pick. *How cool is this?* I thought proudly. I was so excited that I felt like I might burst if I didn't share the news with someone.

My mom helped me cut the cucumber into thick circles and pack them into a container. At snack time, I opened the lid and the fresh smell of cucumber filled the air.

"Would you like to try a slice of the cucumber I grew?" I asked Cameron proudly,



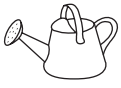
holding a slice out to him.

He made a face like he smelled a stinky sock. "No way!" he hollered. "I can't *stand* vegetables!"

As he shouted, a bit of spit shot out of his mouth and it landed on the slice of cucumber that was still between my thumb and finger.

"Potato chips are the ONLY vegetable I eat!" Cameron yelled through a mouthful of half-chewed food.

He then tipped his head back, lifted the potato chip bag up to his lips, emptied the crumbs into his mouth and licked his fingers. Yuck!



Chapter Four

HERE WE GROW AGAIN!

Lots of thoughts raced through my head as I looked from Cameron to the ruined cucumber slice, including *How gross!* and *Grrrr!*

Cameron's rant* seemed to alarm May Lee, too. It takes a lot for her to pay attention to anything besides the book she's reading. She frowned at the tiny spot where the spit had landed on the cucumber.

May Lee turned to me, pointed to the container of cucumber slices and spoke softly. "May I please try your cucumber?"

I quickly dropped the germy cucumber slice onto a napkin and held out a fresh slice for her.

May Lee nibbled the green from around the edges of the slice, and then popped the rest into her mouth. CRUNCH! CRUNCH! CRUNCH!

I eat cucumbers exactly the same way, I thought.

"You grew this? Delicious!" May Lee said.

I felt a smile in my heart the rest of the day.

I had gotten permission to go up to the roof to take care of the garden during lunch breaks, when teachers are also there. From the rooftop, I can see a bike path that runs along the river behind the school. The path is popular with bikers, runners, walkers and roller skaters. My mom and I planned to go skating on the path one afternoon very soon.

The teachers eating lunch on the roof often ask me a lot of questions about gardening.

"What are you putting on the plants?" (Answer: a natural spray that keeps the harmful bugs off garden plants.) "What's it made of?" (Answer: garlic, onion, spices, dish soap and water. Bugs hate it!) "How do you get so many butterflies in your garden?" (Answer: we planted colorful

flowers that make nectar* and smell nice, too. Butterflies smell their way to our garden!)

Keeping up with all the weeding and watering was tough. *I need help!* I thought. *I'll never make friends if I keep spending my lunch hours on the roof.*

Too many plants and not enough friends. It was stressing me out! Luckily, I could let off some steam* by roller-skating after school. Whizzing* through the halls, my troubles seemed to melt away while I listened to my favorite songs.

Thanks to Ms. Darling, who helped me find a book called *Roller-Skate Like a Pro in Two Weeks*, I was balancing on one skate, skating backwards and even trying a little jumping.

One day at snack time, while most of the kids around me were talking and laughing, I was wishing that I was part of the conversation, too.

Maybe I can change that, I thought. I'd brought the very first carrot that had grown in my

READ
BIG

garden—and I was hoping to share it. It was cut into four long pieces.

I looked around. I knew what Cameron's feelings were about veggies, so I decided not ask him if he'd like to taste a carrot stick.

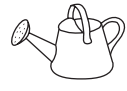
I hoped May Lee would like to try one, though. When I asked, her eyes lit up.

Beverly surprised me by saying she'd like one, too.

"Thanks, Nahla," Beverly said as I handed her a piece of carrot. But instead of eating it, she rested the carrot stick between her nose and her top lip.

"Like my mustache?" she joked, which made a bunch of kids laugh. Next she snapped the carrot stick in half and put the two pieces under her top lip like long vampire teeth. She looked pretty funny.

"Hey," May Lee said to me as she ate her piece of carrot. "I've been looking for you at lunchtime. You're not in the cafeteria. Where do you go?"



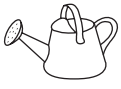
"Up to the roof," I told her, and then described Sky Garden.

"You spend your lunch hour with a bunch of vegetables?" Cameron asked with a disgusted* look on his face. "That sounds like a total nightmare."

"Huh?" Beverly said. "A garden on a roof?!"

I felt twenty-two pairs of eyes staring me down again. I remembered when my dad had first told me about rooftop gardens. The idea had sounded strange to me, too.

There must be a way I can get them to understand how great the garden on the roof is, I thought glumly*.



Chapter Five

THE BEST KEPT SECRET

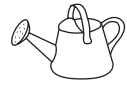
Mr. Fritz flipped the light switch on and off twice. That was his way of letting the class know that snack time was over and we should clear our desks.

"I'd like to ask each of you to share with the class a little about your science project," Mr. Fritz said.

My classmates talked about their interesting projects, such as: How does a windmill make electricity? How do birds make nests with their feet? Why does peeling onions make you cry?

When it was my turn to speak, Mr. Fritz said, "Nahla, please tell us what your project started out as and how it has changed."

I explained to the class about the traffic jam, the bumper sticker, the windowsill garden and the



rooftop garden.

Beverly looked at me with surprise.

"Would it be OK with you, Nahla," Mr. Fritz asked, "to show your garden to the class? We have the principal's permission to do that."

I happily agreed. With Mr. Fritz in the lead, we walked single file to the elevator that led to the roof.

The kids in my class were as amazed as I once was that a garden could grow on top of a building.

"I wish I could garden up here," Brielle said.

"I've always wanted a garden," Daniel told me. "You're so lucky."

A lot of the kids in my class asked if they could help.

I thought about the Happy Planters. "What if we started a Gardening Club?" I suggested. "Anyone in class who is interested could join."

Cameron wrinkled his nose, squinted his eyes closed and shook his head no.

"I'd join!" "Me, too!" "Yessss!" the other

kids chimed in.

Suddenly the roof was buzzing* with excitement about the new club.

"I'll check with the principal to see if it's possible," Mr. Fritz told us.

"She'll definitely say yes," I said confidently. "Yay! I can't wait to start the club!" For the first time, I felt at home at Riverway Avenue Elementary School.

Unfortunately, later that day, Mr. Fritz told us we could not begin the Gardening Club. "The principal will be stopping by during class tomorrow to speak with you about it."

"Vegetables stink anyway," Cameron said. "Who needs 'em?"

"We never get to do anything fun," Joseph muttered*.

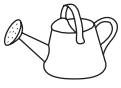
"Mean principal," mumbled Brielle.

I could tell the kids were frustrated. And because the principal was *my* mom, it sort of made it seem like *my* fault.

Why won't Mom approve the Gardening Club? I thought. It didn't make sense to me and it sure wasn't making me any friends.

After school, it was time for some serious skating to help me forget about my classmates' disappointment in me and my mom.

One of my favorite songs came on my MP3 player and I did a fancy spin. WHEEEEEEE!



Suddenly, May Lee came around the corner and we almost bumped right into each other.

"Oh!" May Lee said with surprise. "I came back to school to get my backpack. It has my soccer uniform in it."

May Lee stared down at my feet. "You garden *and* skate at school?"

She must think I'm weird, I thought.

"I have roller skates, too," May Lee continued. "Can I skate with you sometime after school?"

I almost jumped for joy. "That would be fun!"

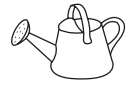
"Will you teach me how to do that spin?" she asked.

"Sure!" I exclaimed.

May Lee grinned. "Great! So, I'll see you tomorrow."

As she walked to the front door of the school, I reached into her locker, grabbed her backpack, and sped down the hall on my skates.

"Wait!" I shouted, racing to catch up with



her. “Here’s your stuff!”

“Oh my goodness,” May Lee said with a laugh. “Thank you, Nahla!”

She unzipped her backpack. “I almost forgot to give you these.” She handed me a small, clear bag that held two red radishes. Each was cut to look like a flower with petals.

“I know you like vegetables,” she added. “My mom helped me make these radish roses for you.”

They were almost too pretty to eat.

“Awww,” I said, “that is so nice of you.”

“That’s what friends are for,” she told me, as she waved goodbye and skipped toward the door.

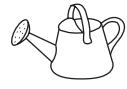
That night, Maya curled up on my lap and Sparkle snuggled right beside me on the couch.

Their eyes were closed, but I was pretty sure they heard me tell them all about school that day. How most of the kids thought Sky Garden was incredible. And how some of the kids wanted to

start a club.

I explained how Mom told me that the whole class needed to be together to discuss the reason why the Gardening Club couldn't start. She said that it wouldn't be fair to the other kids if she talked about it with me first.

When I told my kitties the most important news of all—I'd made a friend—they both began purring. I guessed they *were* listening after all.



Chapter Six

PLEASE SAY OK

I had butterflies* in my stomach the next day when my mom entered our classroom. The rooftop Gardening Club was my chance to make friends. Was my mom going to shut down the idea?

My classmates sat up straight in their chairs when the principal walked through the doorway.

Please say OK, I hoped. *Puh-lease!*

"Hello, class. Let me begin by saying," my mom told everyone, "that I think it's a great idea to start a Gardening Club."

She continued. "However, there are a few things that need to be done first. The roof will need to be inspected to see if it can hold up the weight of a larger garden.

"Also, every school club must have an

advisor. An advisor is an adult who agrees to be in charge of the club. This person helps set the rules, is in charge of the safety of students and is there whenever the club meets. So, before the club begins, you will need to find an advisor.

"Finally, each club member will need to have his or her parent sign a permission slip that says it's OK for you to garden on the roof," my mom stated. She passed out the permission slips.

"Once these three things are done, the Gardening Club can begin," she told us.

Brielle raised her hand. "Maybe Mr. Fritz can be the advisor."

"I wish I could," Mr. Fritz said, "but I am already the advisor for the Music Club. I did ask a few of the other teachers, but they are also involved in clubs."

I heard sighs from around the room. It looked like the Gardening Club might be finished before it even began.

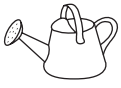
May Lee and I discovered that we have more in common than eating cucumbers the same way. We both love reading and skating, live in the same neighborhood *and* have two cats!

When May Lee's mom had to start working late on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, May Lee stayed at school on those days and rode home with my mom and me.

Right after school, we shared our snacks. Then, as soon as we showed my mom that our homework was done, we put on our roller skates, helmets, elbow pads and kneepads and skated together.

May Lee was quiet at first, like me. But once we got to know each other, we weren't quiet at all. In fact, Mr. Wissler told us we were laughing so loudly that he could hardly hear himself think.

Tuesdays and Wednesdays became my very favorite days of the week.



The following Saturday, Londa gave my mom, my dad and me a tour of the Happy Planters' "jungle."

"And how is your Gardening Club at school going?" she asked me.

"It's not going at all," I complained. I told Londa the sad tale of how we couldn't find an advisor.

"Sign me up!" Londa ordered. "I'll be the

advisor. I was a teacher, love kids and am into gardening. But we'll have to ask the principal, of course." She winked at my mom.

"That's fantastic," my mom said. "You are the perfect person for the job."

I jumped up and down and twirled in a circle. "Hooray!" I cheered. I couldn't wait to call May Lee and tell her.

By the next week, eighteen club members had turned in their permission slips. Many parents volunteered to help, too.

The Gardening Club was on! With Londa's help, we made a list of rules:

Gardening Club Member Rules

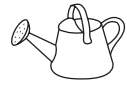
1. Remember that everyone's help is important.
2. Wash hands before and after gardening.
3. Each club member will be responsible for watering and weeding.
4. The garden belongs to every member and the school.

5. Ask an adult for help if you need it.
6. No tricks of any kind, please.
7. Club hours are on Mondays and Thursdays from 12:15–12:45.
8. Please eat your lunch before the club begins (11:45–12:15).
9. Have fun in the garden! Tell jokes! Whistle and sing songs!

Right away we broke rule number seven. Sort of, that is. The club met two weekends in a row to do projects on Saturday mornings.

First, a few of us took the fresh veggies the club had picked to the Happy Planters' farmers market mobile to sell them.

We had our own bin at the front of the bus for school-grown vegetables. May Lee and I used colorful markers and a piece of yellow paper to create a small sign to hang on the bin that read: "These goodies are proudly grown by the kids at Riverway Avenue Elementary School."



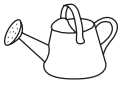
With the money we made, and the money that the school gives to each new club, we were able to buy some supplies, including gardening gloves, watering cans, hand rakes, trowels and garden scissors.

The next Saturday, Londa, my dad, most of the kids in the club and many parents worked together to build more raised garden beds. Beverly's father works for a construction company that donated the wood and nails.

The Happy Planters brought seedlings that they had started weeks earlier but could not fit into their "jungle."

Londa and I showed the club how to loosen the soil, sow* seeds and use rainwater collected in a big blue barrel for sprinkling the plants.

Next, the club decorated garden markers with the pictures and names of the plants so that we could keep track of what was growing and where.



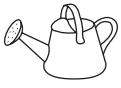
One day, Mr. Dobb, the chef in the cafeteria, was making spaghetti sauce and ran out of basil, a type of herb* that he puts in his sauce for flavor. He rushed up to the rooftop to ask if he could grab a handful of basil leaves.

"Will you take a look at this beautiful garden!" Mr. Dobb exclaimed. "I had no idea you were growing so much food. Say, do you have an extra red pepper you'd be willing to share? Maybe an onion? Some parsley?"

That was the beginning of a scrumptious* idea. The cafeteria and the garden could help each other.

The cafeteria began using the rooftop's garden-fresh veggies to make the breakfast and lunch menu at school much tastier and healthier.

Mr. Dobb and the other cooks saved food scraps such as carrot tops, onion skins and apple cores so we could make compost. We added them into a large barrel and mixed in grass clippings and leaves. Worms like to live in it and, over time, they help turn it into better dirt to use in the garden.



As thanks for all the veggies and herbs that Sky Garden supplied to the cafeteria, the cooks gave us a pink wheelbarrow.

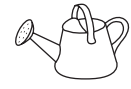
Not only was the wheelbarrow useful for carrying the veggies from the roof to the first-floor cafeteria, it also helped the club members as we weeded and watered.

Mr. Dobb and Mr. Wissler hung a huge poster in the cafeteria that was made by the school Art Club:

What's cookin'?
Our own rooftop garden veggies!

Sky Garden was getting a lot of attention. The assistant principal, Ms. Carter, asked Londa and the club if we'd like to be part of the morning announcements that all students hear on the speakers in every classroom.

May Lee and I volunteered right away. We spent an hour writing down what each of us would say, and then practiced our speech over and over while we were roller-skating.



The next morning we were both excited and nervous talking into the microphone:

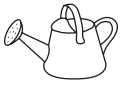
Nahla: Good morning, Riverway Avenue Elementary School! Here's what's *growing* on in Sky Garden!

May Lee: Have you ever been inside a tunnel made of cucumbers and vines? Or seen a zucchini fence? If not, it's time for you to visit the school's new rooftop garden.

Nahla: Just a couple of weeks ago, the Gardening Club practically had a forest on its hands! There were zucchini and cucumber vines growing everywhere and in every direction.

May Lee: But not any more! Luckily, Londa, the club advisor, showed us how to train the vines to grow over a wooden stand made by students and parent volunteers. It created a living tunnel. The plants are also covering the fence on all sides of the roof. When our principal saw it, she was heard to say, "That must be the most delicious fence in the city!"

Nahla: See Sky Garden for yourself and meet Nate, the garden gnome. This cute little statue has

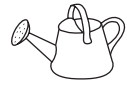


a bushy, white beard and round belly, and wears a tall, pointed red hat, blue coat and black boots.

May Lee: Tours of the garden are every Tuesday during the last 15 minutes of lunch hour, starting by the water fountain in the cafeteria. Admission is free if you can answer this trivia question: Is it possible for an onion and a potato and an apple to taste the same? The answer is posted in the front office.

Nahla: And here's a veggie giggle from Sky Garden. If you throw a zucchini in the air, what comes down?

May Lee: Squash!



Chapter Seven

WE LOVE LOCAL!

When school first started, the roof had been a sunny spot for teachers to have lunch. Within a few months, it had been turned into a green, urban* garden.

With the wood that was left over from making the raised garden beds, the club created and painted birdhouses to bring more wildlife to Sky Garden.

Kids and adults had worked together to turn the rooftop into something that the school was proud of.

It was no longer just "my" garden. I decided that it was time to change the sign. With a paintbrush and a few brushstrokes, I changed the wording, placed the sign back in the garden and smiled. *That's better,* I thought.

"So, as I was saying," I told Sparkle and Maya as we snuggled on the couch just before bedtime. "A few of our plants won't grow no matter what. They just wilted* and died.

"Londa told us why. Some plants can grow better in certain parts of the country than others. There are plants that like warmer temperatures and others do better in colder weather.

"Some of our plants are full of so many ripe veggies we don't know what to do with them all! Every Monday and Thursday, the club collects the veggies in straw baskets and brings them to the cafeteria in the wheelbarrow.

"But there are still vegetables left over! Can

you imagine that?"

I gently scratched Sparkle behind her ears and Maya under her chin.

"Londa came up with a good idea. She suggested that the Helping Hands Kitchen where she volunteers could always use fresh vegetables."

Maya meowed softly.

"Maya, did you just ask what the Helping Hands Kitchen is?" I asked. "Well, that is a good

question and you're a smart kitty for being curious about it.

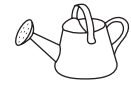
"It's a place that serves free, home-cooked meals for people who do not have money for groceries. The garden helps people have a healthy dinner.

"Remember how I'd hoped to grow a salad for my science project? The garden has actually grown enough veggies to serve 73 salads at the Helping Hands Kitchen! Our flowers decorate their dining tables, too.

"What did you say, Sparkle?" I asked her, stroking her tiny paw. "Oh yes, most of the students *are* really happy about the new recipes the cafeteria is trying. The Art Club just made another big poster for the cafeteria that reads:

We Love Local!

"But…not *every*one loves the garden veggies," I sniffed. "There is one person who makes faces at the healthy lunches and whines that they are revolting*. We all know who *that* person is.



"Plus, the maintenance crew went to Mom's office to complain. Mud and dirt from the garden is being tracked through the school. It's creating a lot of work for them to clean up."

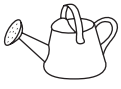
I couldn't help but smile when I told my cats the next part.

"Beverly knows that ladybugs and some other insects like spiders and bees are important in gardens. Just as I was about to sit down at my desk, she announced that one of the garden bugs was visiting class. *And* it was sitting on my chair!

"She'd made a centipede* sandwich which was actually really cute!

"It tasted good, too, with a head made from a sweet cherry tomato, bits of radish for the eyes, antennae* and smile, and circles of bread stuck together with strawberry jam for the body. And of course, about a hundred little legs made out of cucumber."

As far as tricks go, it was yummy!



Chapter Eight

BRAGGING RIGHTS

Snack time wasn't lonely for me anymore. There was always someone to talk with. But I noticed that Cameron had been quieter.

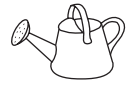
Before the Gardening Club, he'd gotten a lot of attention. Kids were always pestering* him to share his Crispy Crunchies. But that was happening less and less.

A lot of the snack time talk was about the garden, which was booming, meaning it was growing like crazy! The club members were proud and kids would often start bragging wars.

"*My* radish grew as big as a tennis ball!" one kid might boast.

"Well, *mine* grew as big as a basketball!" someone else would reply.

But not all were fibs. I said that I'd picked a



zucchini that was as tall as my rain boots, and that was actually true!

With a couple of afternoons of practicing, May Lee was able to do spins on her skates. After she got the hang of that, we started making up silly dance moves and naming them.

There was the Swervy-Wervy Glide (swerve* to the left, swerve to the right, glide-glide-glide), the Double Rah-Cha-Cha (one knee up, shake it all about, snap fingers, repeat with the other knee, snap fingers) and the Spin-A-Roo Special (spin, arms cross and clap opposite knees three times, hop, spin).

May Lee invented my favorite skating move, the Wild Wheelie Wiggles (touch your toes, wiggle, arms up high, wiggle, clap twice, wiggle, flap elbows like a duck, wiggle).

We must have done that move for fifteen minutes straight and laughed every single time.

Sometimes, after my mom had finished her

work for the day, May Lee and I were having so much fun we didn't want to leave.

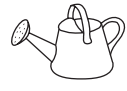
"OK," she'd tell us. "Let me see your best Wild Wheelie Wiggles and then we'll head home."

The next time the club met, we filled a basket with veggies and gave it to the maintenance crew. We wanted to let them know that we were sorry we'd made a mess and more work for them cleaning up.

We told them how the club had made a braided mat out of gardening rope and that we added this to our Gardening Rules:

10. Please wipe your shoes on the mat after gardening.

Ms. Carter asked the club to give the school more news about the garden during the morning announcements. Of course, May Lee and I jumped at the chance:



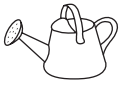
May Lee: Good morning, Riverway Avenue Elementary School! Here's what's *growing* on in Sky Garden!

Nahla: Orange French fries? Green lemonade? Spaghetti made from vegetables? They might sound strange, but they taste great!

May Lee: The harvest* from Sky Garden is making its way into our cafeteria and kids are gobbling* up dishes created from the school's fresh veggies. We highly recommend the sweet potato fries, cucumber lemonade, zucchini spaghetti, pickled radishes, vegetable lasagna, eggplant and tomato towers, stuffed peppers and zucchini pancakes. Yum!

Nahla: Vegetables aren't just good for your health—they're good for your heart, too. Every Friday afternoon after school, extra veggies from the roof garden are delivered to the Helping Hands Kitchen. It feels great knowing that people are enjoying meals made using vegetables grown on our roof.

May Lee: Would you like to get cooking with the Gardening Club? Cooking classes begin next Tuesday. The first recipe is Chocolate Chip



Carrot Cake. You can bake your cake and eat it, too! Admission is free if you can answer this question: What vegetable looks like a bushy tree, but is part of the cabbage family? The answer is posted in the front office.

Nahla: Here's another veggie giggle from Sky Garden. What kind of vegetable do librarians like?

May Lee: Quiet, peas!

Chapter Nine

IN A JAM*

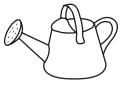
Zucchini bread, zucchini salsa, zucchini soup, zucchini pizza, stuffed zucchini boats, fried zucchini sticks, grilled zucchini, roasted zucchini—way too much zucchini!

We'd carted 37 wheelbarrows of zucchini from the rooftop garden to the cafeteria. That meant that the cooks were serving it every day and in every which way. That's how the entire school ended up eating 814 pounds of zucchini.

I could only imagine how Cameron felt about that. The other kids in school weren't much happier either. Everybody was sick of it!

Even the Helping Hands Kitchen had more zucchini than they could use.

The club wondered what to do with the three big baskets of them that we'd just picked.



"Nahla, why did you plant so many zucchini?" Brielle complained.

I shrugged. "I guess I did go a little overboard*."

"A *little*?" Joseph asked.

"OK, a lot overboard," I admitted. "I didn't think all 71 zucchini plants would actually grow."

"Don't get me wrong," Daniel said. "I like zucchini…but I don't think I can eat another bite of it."

Everyone groaned and nodded in agreement.

"What are we going to do with them all?" May Lee asked.

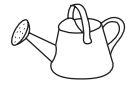
Londa had the answer. "Zucchini jam."

"Ewww!" everyone replied at once.

"C'mon, you guys," I said, sticking up for Londa. "Give zucchini jam a chance."

Again the group looked at me, and their expressions were not what I would call sweet. It was clear what they were thinking—STOP WITH ALL THE ZUCCHINI!

"Listen, it's delicious," Londa said with a



laugh. “I promise you won’t even know there’s zucchini in the jam. What you really taste is the pineapple. My grandmother used to make it and it was a special treat to spread on biscuits.”

I pointed my finger up in the air. “I have an idea. If we make the jam, would you be willing to sell it in the Happy Planters’ farmers market mobile?”

"Great plan," Londa agreed. "Whatever money we make can be used next year to buy seeds and supplies for the club."

Whew! We'd get rid of the zucchini *and* no one would have to eat it again until next year!

During cooking class, we learned how to measure and mix the ingredients for the zucchini jam and put it into glass jars. It was a lot of fun.

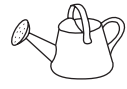
"Now that we've figured out what to do with the zucchini," I said while I stirred the last batch of jam, "what are we going to do with all the tomatoes?"

"How about a rooftop garden party to celebrate a great growing season," May Lee suggested.

"Let's call it the Get Fresh Tomato Fest!" I added.

"Yeah!" Beverly cheered. "We could invite the club members, their parents, the teachers, the school staff…"

"And don't forget the Happy Planters," Joseph chimed in.



Throughout the kitchen, kids shouted, "Hooray!" and "Wah-hoo!"

By the end of the week, the Fest was planned. The club had made and passed out invitations. Mr. Dobb and the cooks in the cafeteria said they would create special recipes for the party, starring the tomatoes grown on our school roof. Mr. Fritz sings in a band and they volunteered to perform at the Fest.

Everything seemed to be going great—until the principal visited the club on the roof.

My mom looked serious. "Remember the promise that you made a while back about keeping the stairs free of mud and dirt?"

We all nodded silently.

"The maintenance crew has let me know that there has been mud tracked into the hallways again," she told us. "Not only is it messy, it's also unsafe. Someone could slip and get hurt."

I shot a glance at May Lee. I could tell from

the puzzled look on her face that she couldn't understand what had happened either.

Using the rug we'd made was part of our club rules and there was also a reminder posted by the entrance to the garden that read:

Please Wipe Your Feet

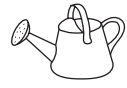
"If this happens again," my mom told the kids, "we'll have to end the Gardening Club. It's important to keep our school clean and safe."

After my mom left the roof, some of the club members seemed upset.

"Gee whiz, she's so strict!" I heard someone mutter behind me.

"If the Gardening Club is shut down," Joseph grumbled, "the Get Fresh Tomato Fest will be, too."

The cafeteria and Helping Hands Kitchen both depended on Sky Garden for fresh produce. I hoped the club wouldn't disappoint them.



Luckily, there were no more reports of mud in the halls and finally, the morning of the Get Fresh Tomato Fest arrived.

BRRRRRR! I thought, as my mom and I stepped outside our building on the way to school.

Even though it had gotten chilly outside lately, I was sure it would still be a great party.

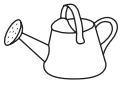
I could hardly wait and neither could my friends. That morning seemed to last a whole *year*.

At last the lunch bell rang and the club rushed to the roof to pick veggies for the cafeteria to cook for the Fest.

When we got there, we were in for a terrible shock*.

There was not one ripe tomato to be found. No peppers, no green beans, NO RIPE ANYTHING!

What had happened to our veggies?! And how could we host the Get Fresh Tomato Fest when there were no tomatoes?



Chapter Ten

ROOFTOP PUZZLER

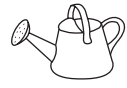
Was somebody trying to ruin the success of the Get Fresh Tomato Fest?

Was it Cameron, the potato chip king? Everybody knows he hates vegetables. Was it Beverly, who loves to play tricks? Or maybe it was the maintenance crew, who had complained to the principal about mud being tracked through the school?

All my friends were upset. Londa looked as confused as everyone else.

No one could make sense of this. The day before, the plants had been covered with vegetables ready to pick.

I asked if I could go to my mom's office for help. Londa gave me permission and I sprinted toward her first-floor office.



As I was about to turn the corner, I spied something bright red just inside the maintenance closet doorway. I stopped suddenly, backed up, and then slowly peeked inside.

I couldn't believe my eyes. I was staring at three huge baskets of tomatoes! Plus, there were baskets of peppers and green beans and more.

The closet was full of Sky Garden vegetables!

What are all these veggies doing in the maintenance closet? I wondered. *And who picked them?*

I spotted Mr. Wissler, hurrying toward the storage closet with a stepladder under his arm.

"Oh there you are, Nahla! I just went to your mom's office to see where I could find you."

I was too surprised to speak. What was going on? Mr. Wissler did not look like he felt guilty about taking the veggies. He was grinning from ear to ear.

"I wanted to let you know these were here," Mr. Wissler spread his arms wide to show me the vegetables. "I heard on the TV news weather

report last night that there was going to be an early frost*, so I came back to the school to pick the veggies.

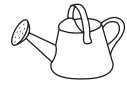
"After all the hard work you kids did to grow the vegetables, I didn't want the cold weather to ruin them," he said.

"Frost," I repeated, remembering how cold it had been that morning. Without the kindness of Mr. Wissler, the vegetables would have been spoiled.

"Thank you, Mr. Wissler!" I said. "That was so so so nice of you."

"Oh, it was nothing," he told me. "I enjoyed myself, being up there in that peaceful garden. Why, I might take up gardening myself next spring."

He continued, "Now let me call the rest of the maintenance crew to help get these baskets down to the cafeteria so the chefs can get food ready for tonight."



GET FRESH
TOMATO FEST

The cafeteria cooked up a storm* for the Fest. There was also some very silly food made by kids in the club, hilarious* games, music and dancing.

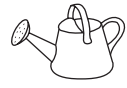
May Lee and I agreed that it was the perfect rooftop party. On the drive home that night, we wrote the next morning announcement:

Nahla: Good morning, Riverway Avenue Elementary School! Here's what's *growing* on in Sky Garden!

May Lee: The Gardening Club hosted the first Get Fresh Tomato Fest on Thursday night. Mr. Fritz described it as "veg-tastic" and Ms. Darling said that she "couldn't believe how the students had turned a roof into such a beautiful outdoor classroom."

Nahla: The cafeteria made all kinds of mouthwatering food with the tomatoes from the garden such as tomato soup, tomato lollipops, which are skinny breadsticks with cherry tomatoes on top, spicy salsa with chips, spaghetti sauce and pasta.

May Lee: Some of the kids made dishes with



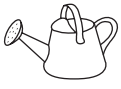
vegetables, too. Beverly made her special centipede sandwiches, which were a huge hit. May Lee created clever racecars with cucumbers as the cars, cucumber slices as the wheels, and cute cherry tomato drivers. Joseph scooped out tomatoes, stuffed them with beans and rice, and decorated them with funny faces using olives as eyes, carrot noses, and celery slice smiles.

Nahla: We played lots of hilarious games with veggie themes including "pin the stem on the pumpkin," "ring around the radish," "tomato toss" and "tic tac turnip." There was dancing, too, thanks to music performed by Mr. Fritz and the 86th Street Band.

May Lee: A special prize will be given to the person who correctly answers this garden trivia question first: What is the only fruit grown on the school's roof? Hint: it's red. Maybe you're wondering what the prize is. It's a basket of long, green vegetables that begin with a "Z." *Just kidding!* The answer is posted in the front office.

Nahla: And here's another veggie giggle from Sky Garden. Why did the potato go to the doctor?

May Lee: Because it wasn't peeling well!



Chapter Eleven

ROLLING TO THE RESCUE

There was a ton of food left over from the party, so after school the next day, my mom and I loaded up the car with veggies for the Helping Hands Kitchen.

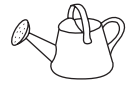
We were in a rush. The cooks at the kitchen were waiting for us so they could make a vegetable stir-fry for dinner that night.

Finally we had all the baskets packed in the trunk, jumped into the car and buckled up. My mom turned the key. No roaring of the engine. No radio. Uh-oh.

"What's wrong?" I asked. "Why aren't we moving?"

"Oh dear…" My mom turned the key again. "The car battery is dead."

I gasped. "But they're expecting us to be



there any minute."

My mom sighed. "I know. Even if we walked, we would get there too late."

Without the car, we couldn't get the vegetables to the kitchen. And without the vegetables, the kitchen couldn't make dinner for a lot of hungry people who were counting on a healthy meal.

If only we had bikes, I thought, *we could put the veggies in the baskets on the handlebars and cycle to the kitchen.*

I thought about all the bikers, walkers, runners and roller skaters right now who were whizzing along the bike path that I'd seen from the school roof.

"Mom!" I said, bursting with excitement, "Why not roller-skate with the wheelbarrow on the bike path to the Helping Hands Kitchen? It will be a lot faster than walking."

I knew she kept her roller skates and helmet in our car.

My mom hugged me. "That is pure genius,

Nahla!"

"Pink wheelbarrow to the rescue!" I joked.

We parked the wheelbarrow alongside the trunk of my mom's car and quickly piled it high with all the vegetables.

As soon as we had laced up our skates and adjusted our helmets, we zoomed down the sidewalk two blocks to the path.

People gave us some funny looks as my mom pushed the pink wheelbarrow and I scooped up tomatoes when they rolled off.

"What are you laughing about?" my mom asked, but she was grinning, too.

Just before we entered the bike path, a yellow school bus drove up beside us on the street. HONK-HONK! HONK!

I looked up to see faces we knew in the bus windows. May Lee, Beverly, Cameron, Brielle, Daniel, Joseph and other classmates were waving wildly and pointing at us. They laughed as they saw their "strict" principal on skates.

About a week had passed when I got permission to go up on the roof to check the last of the veggies. It was cold and there were only a few vegetables left ripening on the greenish-brown plants.

I spotted something behind the tomato plants. *It must be the pretty yellow bird that lives*

in the birdhouse, I thought. I tiptoed to the next row of plants to get a better look. Was I in for a surprise!

The last person I ever expected to see on the roof was standing right in front of me. And the potato chip king was eating a tomato like an apple!

"Um, hi Nahla," Cameron mumbled, his mouth full of tomato.

"Cameron, you like tomatoes!?" I exclaimed.

"Oh yeah, I eat one almost every morning before school," Cameron said. "They're like my fourth favorite vegetable."

"What are your second and third?" I asked. But I thought, *Is this the same veggie hater who sits across from me in class?*

"Potatoes are number one, of course," Cameron said. "I like the crunch of carrots and celery, so they tie for second place. Lettuce, sweet peppers and cucumbers are in third place."

"Have you ever thought about trying a salad?" I asked. "You might like it."

"Yuck!" he said, sticking out his tongue and rolling his eyes up.

"But…" I began, and then decided not to argue. I was just glad that he was actually trying vegetables.

I glanced down, trying to think of what to say next. I noticed that his shoes were caked with mud. *So that's who has been tracking dirt from the garden into the school all this time,* I thought.

"We're having the last Gardening Club

meeting on Thursday," I told him. "We'll be clearing out the dead plants and getting the garden ready for winter."

"Oh yeah?" he said.

"After the cleanup, the cafeteria is serving an end-of-the-season picnic for the club on the roof. It's not too late to join. Do you want to come?" I asked.

"Eh," he said in a not very interested way, "I don't know."

"The chef is using our potatoes to make homemade potato chips," I told him.

"Really?" he asked. "Hmmm, in that case, sure. I guess I could help out."

Chapter Twelve

THE CLUB ON WHEELS

Once winter set in, there was no gardening to be done except in the small windowsill garden in Mr. Fritz's classroom.

My classmates and I had looked forward to our Gardening Club meetings on Mondays and Thursdays. We were disappointed not to have a special project.

No digging, no planting, no planning, no singing or goofing around on the top of the school. Lunch hours were not the same.

Luckily, I still had afterschool skating with May Lee. She'd added a few more moves to the Wild Wheelie Wiggles (plug your nose, wiggle, do the doggie paddle, wiggle, thumbs in ears and flutter fingers, wiggle). It looked and felt very silly, which made us laugh until we could hardly catch

our breath.

"You should call that the Wild Wheelie Wiggles *Giggles*," Mr. Wissler said, as he passed by us.

"Beverly and some of the other kids would love this move," I told May Lee. "You know, I was thinking…no, never mind, that would never work."

"What were you thinking?" May Lee asked. "C'mon, tell me."

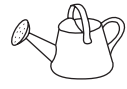
"I'm warning you," I told her, "it's a wacky idea."

"Is it as wacky as growing five gazillion zucchini on the roof of a school?" she asked with a twinkle in her eyes. "If so, I already like it."

"Since there is no more gardening until the spring," I told May Lee, "what if we started a Roller-Skating Club during school?" I said. "It would be fun and good exercise, too."

"For the whole class?" May Lee asked.

"I was thinking for the whole school," I replied.



"I love love love love LOVE that idea!" May Lee shouted.

During snack time the next day, May Lee and I talked with the class about the Roller-Skating Club. Every single person agreed it sounded like a great plan.

Mr. Fritz told us he would speak to the principal about it. She came to talk to our class that afternoon.

I felt the butterflies in my stomach again as my mom walked into the classroom. *Uh-oh,* I thought. *Will she think the idea is good or bad?*

It turned out that she thought the idea was terrific, *but* there were a few questions. Where will all the kids get skates? Who would be the advisor? And finally, she said she had to consider the safety of the students at our school.

I could see her point. Having all the students skating around the hallways might lead to some crashes and wipeouts.

Later that day, Londa came in to speak to the class about planning for the spring Gardening Club. Kids from other classes wanted to join the fun in the garden.

Londa told us that in the spring, the club would be divided into two groups: the first half of the lunch hour and the second half of the lunch hour. That way everyone would get to garden and to eat lunch.

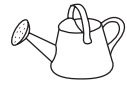
As she was leaving, Cameron raised his hand and Londa called on him.

"Do you know how to roller-skate?" Cameron asked her.

Londa was surprised at the question because it had nothing to do with what we were talking about. "Not that well," she admitted.

"Oh," Cameron said, disappointed.

"But my good friend Lou, from the Happy Planters, is a roller-skating teacher," Londa said brightly.



Londa explained that Lou's business is renting roller skates, helmets, and elbow and kneepads to schools. He comes with a truck full of skates and gives lessons, too.

Everyone started talking at once, excited that we might have found the answer to our problem.

"Lou says his roller-skating program turns a school gym into a roller-skating rink!" Londa said. "Let me talk to the principal and if she says it's OK, I'll see what Lou can do."

For three long days, the class waited for news about the skating club. Finally, on Thursday afternoon, Londa went to every class and passed out permission slips and spread the good news: she and Lou were the advisors of the Let the Good Times Roll Skating Club.

The first club meeting was in the gym. We learned how to adjust helmets, elbow pads and kneepads, and practiced how to fall safely.

From then on, every club meeting followed

the same schedule. First we warmed up our muscles with leg stretches, side bends and arm circles. Then came free skate. The last five minutes was a group skate doing the Wild Wheelie Wiggles—with lots of giggles, of course!

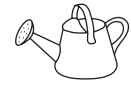
May Lee and I asked Ms. Carter if we could make one last morning announcement and we got a thumbs up:

May Lee: Good morning, Riverway Avenue Elementary School!

Nahla: Two clubs that began this year at school taught us that what our advisor, Londa, said is true: ideas are a lot like seeds. It's amazing to plant them and watch them grow.

May Lee: For example, an idea for a science project turned into a rooftop garden club and an outdoor space that grows fresh veggies for the school cafeteria. And it provides food that the Helping Hands Kitchen uses to make healthy, free meals.

Nahla: And an idea for a silly skating move called the Wild Wheelie Wiggles grew into a roller-skating club that has the whole school



dancing on skates, including the teachers!

May Lee: Without ideas, there would be no such things as roller coasters, trampolines, teddy bears, bridges or bicycles. All inventions* start with ideas, and some were discovered by accident, like sticky notes, x-rays and microwave ovens!

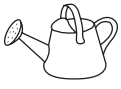
Nahla: But we would not be using any of these if people didn't try their ideas out.

May Lee: So the next time you have an idea, even if you think it might not work, think again. Maybe it can! Put your idea out there and put your excitement behind it.

Nahla: Our friend Cameron helped us find this trivia question. What popular, crunchy snack was invented by a cook to annoy a customer who kept complaining? The answer is posted in the front office.

May Lee: And here's a riddle from the gym roller rink. What's the hardest thing about roller-skating?

Nahla: The floor! Ha!

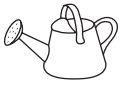


RIVERWAY AVENUE
ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL

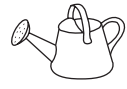
Glossary

*Many words have more than one meaning. Here are the definitions of words marked with this symbol * (an asterisk) as they are used in this story.*

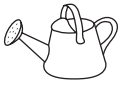
antennae: *two long, thin feelers that stick up from an insect's head*
buffed: *polished*
butterflies, as in "butterflies in my stomach": *a nervous feeling*
buzzing: *filled with excited sounds and activity*
centipede: *a long, thin, insect-like animal that has many legs*
disgusted: *showing that something seems unpleasant*
earth: *dirt*
enormous: *very large*
environment: *world*
frost: *white ice crystals caused by freezing temperatures*
glanced: *looked quickly*
glumly: *sadly*
gobbling: *eating quickly*



harvest: *vegetables or fruits grown in a garden or on a farm*
herb: *a plant used for flavoring food*
hilarious: *very funny*
inventions: *something made that never existed before*
jam, as in "in a jam": *a bad situation*
leapt: *jumped*
maintenance, as in "maintenance crew": *workers who keep a place clean, safe and running smoothly*
mobile: *a vehicle used to transport something*
muttered: *spoke in a low voice or grumbled*
nectar: *a sweet liquid made by flowers*
overboard, as in "go a little overboard": *do something with too much excitement*
pestering: *bothering*
pet, as in "teacher's pet": *a student who gets special attention from the teacher*
rant: *speak in a wild, angry way*
retired: *no longer working at a job after a certain age or number of years*
revolting: *very unpleasant*
scrumptious: *delicious*



seedlings: *young plants*
shock: *an upsetting event*
soil, as in "potting soil": *a special dirt mix for growing plants in small pots*
sow: *plant*
steam, as in "let off some steam": *get rid of strong feelings*
storm, as in "cooked up a storm": *did something with excitement*
swerve: *move quickly in a different direction*
terracotta: *a brownish-orange clay often used to make flower pots*
trowel: *a small tool held in the hand, used for scooping dirt or plants*
urban: *city*
vines: *plants with long, climbing stems*
whizzing: *moving quickly*
wilted: *drooped*
woodworking: *the art of making things from wood*



Answers to the Gardening Club's trivia questions:

Q: *Is it possible for an onion and a potato and an apple to taste the same?*

A: Yes, when you plug your nose! Much of what we think we're tasting is actually what we're smelling. Try it with your eyes closed.

Q: *What vegetable looks like a bushy tree, but is part of the cabbage family?*

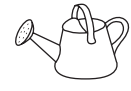
A: Broccoli.

Q: *What is the only fruit grown on the school's roof?*

A: This is a tricky question! Scientifically, tomatoes are the fruit of the tomato plant, but they are served as vegetables.

Q: *What popular, crunchy snack was invented by a cook to annoy a customer who kept complaining?*

A: It's said that the potato chip was invented in the mid-1800s. A customer complained that his French-fried potatoes were too thick, so the cook made them too thin and crispy to eat with a fork. The customer thought they were delicious and more and more people started to order them, too.



Sky Garden
Crossword Puzzle

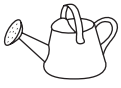
What's on the roof at Sky Garden?
Make copies of this page and use the clues to solve the puzzle! The answers are on the next-to-last page (no peeking!).

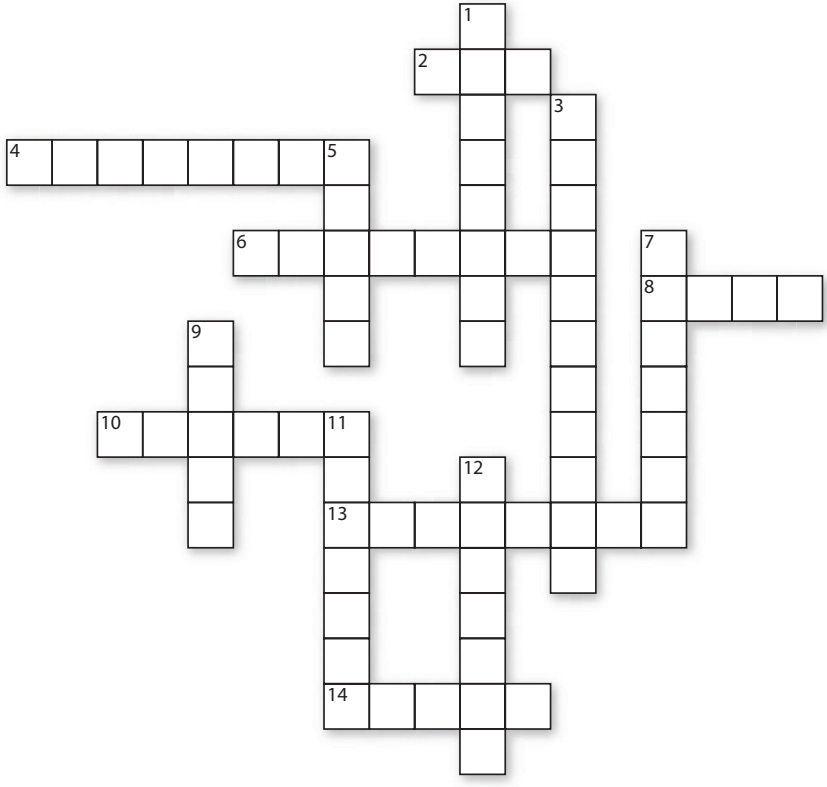
Across

2. A playful, enjoyable time
4. A toy on a long stick that spins in the wind
6. What comes from the sun and helps plants grow
8. What falls from the sky and waters the plants in Sky Garden
10. A small tool that looks like a shovel, is held in the hand and is used for gardening
13. Red fruits that are eaten as vegetables
14. What the roots of plants grow in

Down

1. Long, green vegetables that the Gardening Club used to make jam
3. A small cart with one wheel at the front and two handles in back that is used for carrying Sky Garden's vegetables
5. The Gardening Club advisor
7. The kids in the Gardening Club
9. A cute statue of a tiny man who has a white beard and a pointy hat
11. A leafy plant that's used to make salads and sandwiches
12. Long, orange vegetables that grow underground

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The Power of a Girl

For every *Our Generation*® product you buy, a portion of sales goes to Free The Children's Power of a Girl Initiative to help provide girls in developing countries an education—the most powerful tool in the world for escaping poverty.

Did you know that out of the millions of children who aren't in school, 70% of them are girls? In developing communities around the world, many girls can't go to school. Usually it's because there's no school available or because their responsibilities to family (farming, earning an income, walking hours each day for water) prevent it.

Over the past two years, Free The Children has had incredible success with its Year of Water and Year of Education initiatives, providing 100,000 people with clean water for life and building 200 classrooms for overseas communities. This year, they celebrate the Year of Empowerment, focusing on supporting alternative income projects for sustainable development.

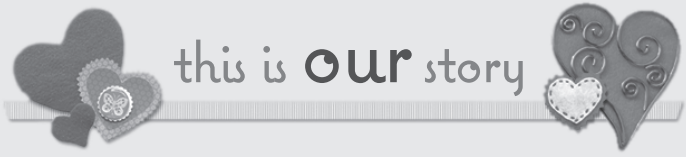
The most incredible part is that most of Free The Children's funding comes from kids just like you, holding lemonade stands, bake sales, penny drives, walkathons and more.

Just by buying an *Our Generation* product you have helped change the world, and you are powerful (beyond belief!) to help even more.

If you want to find out more, visit:
www.ogdolls.com/free-the-children

FREE THE CHILDREN
children helping children through education

Free The Children provided the factual information pertaining to their organization.
Free The Children is a 501c3 organization.



We are an extraordinary generation of girls. And have we got a story to tell.

Our Generation® is unlike any that has come before. We're helping our families learn to recycle, holding bake sales to support charities, and holding penny drives to build homes for orphaned children in Haiti. We're helping our little sisters learn to read and even making sure the new kid at school has a place to sit in the cafeteria.

All that and we still find time to play hopscotch and hockey. To climb trees, do cartwheels all the way down the block and laugh with our friends until milk comes out of our noses. You know, to be kids.

Will we have a big impact on the world? We already have. What's ahead for us? What's ahead for the world? We have no idea. We're too busy grabbing and holding on to the joy that is today.

Yep. This is our time. This is our story.

www.ogdolls.com

this is my favorite school story:

Answers to the Sky Garden Crossword Puzzle:

Across

2. fun 4. pinwheel 6. sunshine 8. rain 10. trowel 13. tomatoes 14. earth

Down

1. zucchini 3. wheelbarrow 5. Londa 7. friends 9. gnome 11. lettuce 12. carrots

About the Author

Susan Cappadonia Love lives in a purple house in Milton, Massachusetts with her husband, Scott, and daughters, Sophie and Olivia. They all love to get their hands dirty in the garden and eat sweet tomatoes in the summer. Susan has written twelve previous books in the Our Generation® Series, as well as other children's books.

About the Illustrator

Trish Rouelle has been drawing since she was first able to hold a crayon. Back then it was mostly horses or funny pictures of her brothers. Now she lives in northern Vermont where she draws, paints and photographs the beautiful landscape when she is out on her mountain bike or hiking with her husband, Jeff, and their daughter, Ella.

This story came to life because of all the wonderful people who contributed their creativity and vision, including Joe Battat, Dany Battat, Karen Erlichman, Sandy Jacinto, Loredana Ramacieri, Véronique Casavant, Véronique Chartrand, Jenny Gambino, Natalie Cohen, Karen Woods, Patti DeRosa, Barbara Holland, Salako Holland-Barrett, Pam Shrimpton, Joanne Burke Casey and Elizabeth Barron.

this is our story®

A Garden Where Friendship Grows

A few tiny seeds have grown into a very big idea! Nahla's science project turns out to be the start of a group garden on her school's rooftop. During their lunch hour, students put on their gardening gloves to plant, weed and water. Thanks to the school, yummy veggies are turning up everywhere, including the school cafeteria and the Helping Hands Kitchen.

School spirit is at an all-time high. But it seems like not everyone is happy. Somebody is trying to ruin the success of the Get Fresh Tomato Fest, the rooftop garden party.

Is it her classmate who calls himself "the potato chip king" and makes faces when he sees all the new healthy choices at the lunch counter? Is it the girl who loves playing tricks? Or maybe it's the maintenance crew, who complained to the principal about dirt being tracked through the school. Nahla™ is determined to save the day and the garden.

It's impossible to separate **Our Generation**® characters from the generation of girls who read about and play with them, for they are one and the same. They're changing the world by making their households greener. They're baking cupcakes to help charities. They're writing in their journals, practicing for recitals, doing cartwheels down the block and giggling with their friends until they can hardly breathe. **Our Generation** is about girls growing up together. "This is our story" reflects the community of these amazing girls as they laugh, learn and create the narrative of their own generation.

Ages 7 and up
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