

BILL BELEW

Making of The Giant Forest -
Alternate Ending

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Why This Addendum

I get asked questions. I don't always get asked the questions I want to be asked.

For instance, I'd like to be asked:

1. Where can I buy your book?
2. Can I tell all my friends about your book?
3. Can I buy a few hundred copies of your book to give away as gifts?
4. Can we use your book online in our reading group of 2,000 people, or 200 people or even 20 people who meet in the local coffee shop?
5. Can I review your book on my YouTube channel to my 2,000,000 subscribers?
6. Would you like to be on my podcast to 20,000 people who will be listening live?
7. Can you and your daughter be the keynote

speaker at our upcoming school district conference?

Instead I get asked:

1. How did you get your 11-yo daughter to focus on writing this 50,000 word book with you?
2. How did you practically make that happen – the co-authoring process?
3. How involved was she in the whole writing process?
4. Why do you have two endings?
5. Are the endings really significantly different?
6. Can we tell you which ending we like the most?
7. Are you two working on anything else?

I can answer both sets of questions, of course. I'd rather answer the first set, but I am delighted to answer the second set as well. The second set is what this addendum is all about.

The answers, to be sure, will best be understood by those who have read the book. <= Shameless plug. Which can be bought on Amazon. <= another shameless plug by ones, twos, 20s, up to ... pick a number. There! I answered some of the first batch.

The answers to the second batch will be the bulk of this addendum. If I do not answer all your questions, well, there are a half a dozen ways for you to reach out and ask. I promise, I will do my best to answer them for you.

Thanks for reading. Thanks for asking.

2

How a Dad and His 11-year old Daughter Collaborated to Co-write a Novel

“**I** can’t even get my daughter to tell me how her day was, shoot! What she had for lunch and you got your daughter to write a 50,000+ word novel with you?! Really?”

Yup, really.

For six years I drove Mia to and from the small private Christian school that she attended. The one-way commute took us about 20-25 minutes to get there, and that long again to get back home. In between, there were trips to after school Chinese school or to the pool for her swim training. All in all, we spent more than an hour each day in the car, five days each

week for 180 days each year for six years. If the school needed a chaperone, I was all over it. Does five days at camp with a bunch of rowdy 5th graders sound like fun? Not to me, either. But I did it. Because my daughter was there.

Our favorite hang outs were a local library or Barnes & Noble. We spent hours and hours - me working at the cafe, writing or thinking about writing and her relaxing in a corner reading books and books and books.

Of course, we did not talk the whole time. We did not 'super bond' or anything like that. I am thrilled to confess that there was NO traumatic experience in our lives that would have resulted in us being inseparable. To be sure, she'd rather hang out with her friends than with me. Whew! She told me multiple times and I was glad to hear it.

But we did get to know each other pretty well. And we enjoyed talking to each other. To be sure, at times, most of the time I probably did more talking than she did. But, we talked. We spent time together - forced as it may have been - but still we spent time together. And I determined to make the absolute most of that time. Gladly so, too, I will joyfully admit.

When Mia did talk, her favorite subject was a book she was reading or wanted to read. I drove to a half dozen counties and library districts to become a member and get a library card so we could reserve more books online. Her mother gets credit, too! She spent a lot of time reading to Mia when she was little. Her private elementary school gets points as well for encouraging reading.

It wasn't till we got to around the 5th grade that I realized that Mia was reading a LOT of books for the 2nd, 3rd or more, time. She, we, had exhausted the books that appealed to her at her level and slightly above. She could read at a higher level, but the content was, in my opinion, not appropriate. A 10- or 11-year old doesn't need to read about romance, first kisses and first other events. Not yet, anyway.

We looked and looked. Remember all those libraries, physical and online I joined? We kept coming up empty.

“Hey, Mia. Why don’t we write our own book?”

“Okay, dad.”

And that was it.

Writing a novel together, something neither of us had ever attempted before seemed like the natural thing to do. Really. What do we know? What did I know?

In my mind, I had a very short list of requirements. I wanted the book to be something that was real-to-life. No winged creatures, or time-travel, or magic or piggybacking on someone else's story – think fanfiction. I wanted to come up with new characters and keep it real.

That ... and I wanted Mia to like the book. Among other things she is brutally honest. She would tell me when the story or the twist stunk, didn't work or just wasn't interesting. She also recruited a handful of her classmates to read along as we wrote the book. I figured if we could keep their interest, we might be on to something.

“When’s the next chapter coming out?” became an oft asked greeting in place of hello when Mia went to school or went to pick her up. Encouraging.

Practically speaking, the book was written in Google Docs ... and shared via email with all the beta readers. There were literally hundreds of comments, suggestions over the course of writing the book. About six

months later, the first draft was done.

The second draft added more than one-fourth in volume from the first draft - 44,000 => 55,000 words or so. All the while, Mia and I discussed the changes in the book during our commutes. She got first dibs on reading the rewrites. Then her friends and their parents chimed in.

Another month or so and after the critical eye of an editor - best selling adventure writer - and we did a 3rd draft ... and called it 'finished.'

She went back to school after summer vacation and now it's come to me to see who else might be interested in reading the book ... you know, the 20s, 200s, 2000s or more.

3

Who Did the Illustrations

Mia has an older brother who is considerably older than she is. Benjamin is his name. He worked as a ‘tweener’ for a Japanese animation company.

Mia is a ‘tweener’ as well. But a different kind. Mia is between single digits and being a teenager.

Benjamin did all the hard work of tying key animations together. He’s in the credits of “Ghost In a Shell.”

The chapter headers are not representative of just how talented he is.

He’s an accomplished classically trained pianist who doesn’t like to perform. But when he does, he wows

crowds.

He's a sculptor.

He composes.

He writes and draws graphic novels.

He's a music director for local theater troupes.

And he makes a living in an exceedingly tough field - art.

And he never complains. He just does it.

Much like his little sister, or maybe she is like him, he doesn't know what he can't do ... like write a novel before writing a short story. Benjamin makes things happen.

If you tell Benjamin he has a one in a hundred or even a one in a million chance, he'll respond, "Well, that means it can be done!" As long as it's not impossible, he'll put his hand to the plow and make something happen.

Benjamin did the cover as well. Look carefully and tell me what you see in the trees.

Benjamin not only sees things in his mind's eye, he can create something so you and I can see it, too.

Mia has stories.

With some collaboration and good old fashioned stubbornness, the book got done.

Speaking of short stories - here might be a good place to share one I wrote about Benjamin.

Bumblebees

“Whether you think you can or think you can’t, you’re right.” These words are attributed to Henry Ford, the automaker.

My dad had another way of putting it. “Bumblebees can’t fly,” he always said. “Their wings are too small and their bodies are too big. The laws of physics are clear... they can’t fly,” he said. “But they don’t know that. So, they fly anyway. If you think you can do something, you can.”

Never say can’t is what he meant. Where there’s a will there’s a way. It was that sort of thing.

* * *

Benjamin wanted to be a scientist but gave it up to pursue a career in the performing arts instead. Among other pieces, he plays Rimsky-Korsakov’s

“The Flight of the Bumblebee.” I think he does that for a reason.

Benjamin also does as he pleases. After playing the piano for nearly 12 years, he suddenly gave it up along with his piano scholarship to pursue life as an animator. It didn’t matter much what advice he was given to the contrary, nor who gave him the advice. He didn’t listen to me, his father. He paid little attention to his teachers. His friends proved unreliable confidants. Instead, he listened to the little voice inside that said, “You can do what you put your mind to.” After all, it was his life and he was determined to do as he pleased. This is not the same as only trying to please himself. He was going to follow his dream, perhaps fly like a bumblebee.

Benjamin taught himself and in the end successfully passed interviews, screenings, portfolio submissions and tests to get accepted as a ‘tweener’ (The person who draws all the pictures that hold key animation ideas together) for a large Japanese animation company – the one of *Kill Bill* fame.

He worked hard – Japanese hard – from 7:30am to 10:00pm, including train rides. Still, in the late evenings after he came home he practiced at the piano. Not because he was told to, but because he wanted to.

Sometimes he called me long distance, “Papa, I’m sorry. I only practiced two hours today.” More often

than not I had to tell him to take a break. He never had to be told to practice.

Benjamin decided to participate in a state-wide (they are called prefectures in Japan) piano competition in western Japan. He planned to do it just for the fun of it. Perhaps he would add the results of the competition to his resume, if they were satisfactory. The other contestants chose a Beethoven piece – *Moonlight Serenade*, or a Mozart concerto – something light-hearted that everyone would recognize, or a Chopin etude – even non-classical music enthusiasts could hum along or tap their feet. Benjamin, however, chose to perform an extremely difficult Bach Toccata – two melodies going on at the same time but played out of synch. He played it flawlessly.

Benjamin is not a genius. One of his teachers defined for me that a genius musician or even an exceptionally talented piano player could learn a new piece in a relatively short time, usually within four to six hours of continual effort. Benjamin must spend four to six hours each day for four to six days, or more, to keep up with those ‘geniuses.’ Calling someone talented is often an excuse for not making the sacrifices that are necessary to excel. Benjamin does not commit himself to a schedule; rather he commits himself to learning, no matter the sacrifices he must make. His ‘talent’ is to work hard. But then, a father would think that about his son, wouldn’t he?

Benjamin won the prefecture-wide competition; took first place in the open division. His competitors came from all over Japan, including other young men and women who had graduated from music schools and so on. There were congratulatory remarks flying everywhere and his normal stern disciplined countenance turned briefly upside-down into a smile. Someone even thought to call his teacher, Kosugi-san, a renowned pianist throughout Japan, and congratulate Kosugi-san on a job well done by one of his pupils. Kosugi-san responded, "There is no need to congratulate me. Benjamin never listens to me. He always does as he pleases." The boy was just a boy. Perhaps he listened more than was thought, but in the end, he did what he thought was best.

Someone overheard one of the judges remark, "I would never play that piece in a competition."

"Why?" another judge countered.

"It's too difficult."

"Yeah, and...?"

"I would play something easier so I would have a better chance of winning. I can't believe that young man chose such a difficult piece."

"You're right. But the boy still played it and in this place."

"Benji, did you hear what those judges were saying about you?" his mother asked.

"Un," was his reply, in Japanese. It is a one syllable

version of the English equivalent “Uh-huh” and means the same thing.

Later in the evening, Benji telephoned me internationally to let me know about the competition. After recounting the above he concluded by telling me, “Papa, I didn’t know I wasn’t supposed to be able to play such a difficult piece in a competition. I thought I should play something I like, something I could put all of my effort into.”

“Yep, Benjamin, you should do what you want,” I said.

Benjamin responded, “Papa, I guess I was a bumblebee that day.”

Benjamin unintentionally has set an example for his little sister.

So, Mia ... reads and writes.

4

Friends Come in All Flavors - The alternate ending

Everyone nearly jumped out of their skins when Sycamore screamed, a big-boy scream, not a little girl scream, “Barb!!”

The other four looked at one another wide-eyed, then looked at Sycamore.

“Barb?” they all said together as if on cue.

“Yeah! It’s Barb. Barb rescued me when I fell through the bridge into the creek. Funniest thing. I thought I was saving her, but it turns out it was her who was saving me.”

Nobody bothered to ask Sycamore why he wasn’t stuttering anymore, or what happened to his slurred

speech, or why he wasn't talking in his usual slow cadence. That would be something to delve in some other time.

What everyone wanted to talk about was a similar experience each had but with different animals.

Suddenly everyone began to jabber at once.

"Squadrons of butterflies ..." Roci began.

"Flotillas of beavers ..." Sycamore started.

"Platoons of beetles ..." Aimi commenced.

"Packs of dogs ..." Mousi barked.

"Corps of badgers ..." Sybil dug in to join along in the conversation.

Nobody listened to what each other was saying. All of them were interrupted by the sound of padding of something slapping on water. It was Barb trying to get their attention, which in the end she did.

"Saved again! But this time from not caring about what one another went through." Sybil said grinning.

“You go first.”

“No you!”

“No, I won’t. You!”

“Oh, I gotta hear your story first!”

It wasn’t clear who said which command first but it did become apparent that instead of focusing on self, all of them realized it was better to think of their friends first. And that, in time, each would get a turn to tell their story.

All the kids laughed heartily.

“Life is more fun when we think of others first rather than ourselves,” Mousi said tapping into her own experiences.

“Mousi. You go first.” Roci piped, not realizing that perhaps for the first time ever, she was genuinely willing to let someone else go ahead of her. “Tell us your story. I really can’t wait.”

The others nodded in agreement.

In turn, each told the others how they had gotten

into their respective predicaments and how each had been saved by the most unlikely of means.

“A cliche comes to mind. *God provides in mysterious ways. Or is it a cliche?*” Aimi asked nobody in particular.

Everyone was relieved that she had finally stopped laughing.

Barb, looking over her shoulder in a way that only beavers can wobbled towards the waterfall.

“She wants us to follow her!” Sycamore said confidently.

“Where? Into the waterfall?” Mousi wondered out loud.

“Look! There’s a large hole cleft, a cave or maybe it’s a tunnel behind the falls,” Sybil interjected. “One of my friends is there to lead us. Let’s go!”

Nobody questioned if it were wise or not to follow the lead of the animals. They just followed.

“Sycamore. You’d better go first.” Roci proposed. “Not because we want you to face the danger first. But

because you are the biggest. If you can get through, then all of us are sure to be able to make it as well. But if you are last and the tunnel narrows and we make it through, you might not be able to get through. We are NOT leaving you behind.” Roci emphasized the not.

“I’ll go last,” Aimi volunteered.

There was no dispute. The kids seemed to be of one mind.

At first they walked upright. Before long they were hunched over, then on their hands and knees. Some fireflies flickered to give them intermittent glimpses of where they were. Their conversation gradually grew more halting and finally they were not talking at all. They were focused on crawling and hoping to find a light at the end of the tunnel ... literally.

“The fireflies have stopped. It sure is dark in here. Can anybody see anything?” Aimi asked.

There was a dark silence.

“Anybody?”

Nothing.

The Bunch had lost contact with one another.

“I’m out!” Sycamore proclaimed. Nobody heard him. He looked around and discovered nobody had followed him out.

“I’m out!” Mousi squealed as she stood up and looked around. She saw nobody.

“I’m out!” Roci whinnied. Silence was the response she got also.

“I’m out!” Sybil said loud enough he could hear an echo off the walls of the kitchen where he had first gotten lost.

“I’m out!” Aimi whooped finding herself on the very path she had followed that led her away from the camp. This time, however, she could see the lights from the camp and felt confident in finding her way back.

Sycamore was back at the railway tracks. Mousi knew her way home and Roci, too, was positive she was on the path of return to camp.

In moments, the five young people each found themselves reunited in the large field outside of Mt Her-

mon's conference center.

From inside the conference center they could hear a raucous noise. Foot stomping and clapping. Singing. They saw lights flicker through the windows.

The five hesitantly walked toward the conference center and into the lobby. They made their way through the lobby heading toward the main auditorium.

As they stepped into the two aisles leading down to the main stage, Aimi, Roci and Mousi on one side, Sybil and Sycamore on the other, there was a thunderous ovation from all their fellow campers. Whistling and foot stomping accompanied the cheers.

As they approached the main stage where the camp director, Miss Wolfe, was waiting, the Bunch could see five huge monitors across the back of the stage. At the foot of the monitors were each of their names - Mousi, Roci, Sybil, Sycamore and Aimi. Each of them were being displayed on the monitors with their names. They saw themselves walking toward the stage.

The large group of about 50 campers in front of

Aimi's display were all doing some form of a funky robot, break dance bringing a head scratching bewilderment accompanied with a huge smile from Aimi. Aimi could see that the group had indeed been watching her on her adventure.

Sycamore, Sybil, Mousi and Roci each also had a group of campers in front of their respective displays. Their groups each had been keeping an eye on them. Each group was doing some action that reminded them of their experience. Roci's group was strutting horse style but standing in place at the same time. Roci smiled.

Sybil's group looked as if they were swimming breaststroke through the air. He soon determined that they were mimicking his tunneling actions.

“Welcome back!” Miss Wolf said with arms wide open.

The entire group of campers cheered in unison.

“Please have a seat and let me explain to you how you have taught us all the value of friendship. You five were specifically chosen to be the first to go through the adventures of Virtual Reality Rooms here at Mt Hermon. Beyond just wearing glasses to enjoy

other experiences, you can actually walk into a room and think, feel themselves in a completely different place.”

Miss Wolf went on for sometime, using terms and phrases like ” ... Christian life ... integrating Silicon Valley technology ... camp experiences ... surrogate families ... deepening friendships.” Her talk ended with: “Our theme this week at camp will be ‘*True Friends Stick Closer than Family.*’” And ending with, “Perhaps when you are enjoying your camp experience among the giant forest of redwoods everyone here will find life-long friends.”

The campers applauded loudly and long.

Miss Wolfe turned the pages of her notes and spoke into the microphone:

“Group 1! To the Beaver Cabins. Group 2! To the Badger Cabins ... Group 3! To the Butterfly Cabins ... ”

Anticipating a week of new experiences and friendships, all the campers started filing out of the conference center in an orderly fashion towards their respective cabins. All of the campers except for the Beetle group. They went to their cabins while doing

the robot break dance ... in slow motion, of course.

=====

Discussion Questions:

1. Who do you go to first when you need help?
Friends or family?
2. Have you ever been completely fooled?
3. Where is your favorite place to explore for new adventures?

5

How the Endings are Different

There is one sentence in each of the two endings that makes the biggest difference:

Ending # 1

The Bunch was specifically chosen to be the first to go through the adventures of Virtual Reality Green Rooms here at Mt Hermon.

Ending #2

You five were specifically chosen to be the first to go through the adventures of Virtual Reality Rooms here at Mt Hermon.

The difference is that in Ending #1 the adventures of Virtual Reality Green Rooms and in Ending #2 the

adventures of Virtual Reality Rooms.

In Ending #1, the story takes place in VR Green Rooms. In Ending #2 the story takes places in VR rooms.

In Ending #1, each of the kids step into a green room where they, the kids, create/tell a story that the other kids can watch.

In Ending #2, the kids venture into virtual reality rooms where the Camp directors tell the story using the kids as props.

Ending #1 - the kids in charge of their story.

Ending #2 - the camp directors are in charge of the story.

See the difference? See the big difference?

Should the camp be permitted to allow the kids to wander into rooms that are, of course, not real? But the kids do not know this and they, the kids, experience whatever it is that the camp directors think is safe and, in the end, instructional for all the campers?

Or ...

Should the campers, the five, be able to tell a story using props they choose via the Green Screen behind them, and they can do as they please while also being instructional?

Are we at the mercy of the gods? Is our destiny controlled, manipulated by some force from without? Or do we control the story we tell about our lives?

Put the children in green rooms and let them tell their own stories or put them in virtual reality rooms and let someone else tell the story about them.

This book, of course, is not meant to answer the question of who is in charge of our lives. Though, I (the dad) think we have free will. But that still doesn't matter.

The book is a story about cooperation and mostly the value of friendship. The value of friendship especially when family is not there for you.

Which ending to you like best? What does that say about you and who you think is in control of our lives?

6

144 Questions for Your Kids

At the end of each chapter there are three questions each of all 48 chapters = 48×3 = 144 questions.

No. Mia and I didn't ask and answer for each other all of these questions.

But ... we did talk through many of them.

I don't know a parent, though I am sure there are some, who wouldn't like to have better communication with their children.

The problem with most parents, and I say this from the perspective of having kids old enough to be the parents of my daughter's classmates, is that parents want to talk to their kids about important 'stuff'

without ever having talked to their kids about what's important to them.

Kids will listen to you if you have taken the time to listen to them. That is, you showed them how to listen.

Parents want to ask their preteens, early and late teens hard questions when they have never really established the lines of communication until after it's too late.

Many of the questions the reader will see at the end of the chapters are questions/discussions that Mia and I had at some point. Quite often, after/while we were writing the chapter at hand.

I recommend that parents read this book together with their children. No. Parents and children don't need to sit next to each other and read out loud. However, while your son or daughter is reading a chapter, the parent can be doing the same. When it's dinner time, the story becomes the discussion point ... as well as what is going on in the kids' lives. Parents will find out what is happening in their children's lives without asking. Kids will learn to share as deeply as their parents share.

One of Mia's favorite questions for me is, "Tell me a time when you got in trouble." Or some variation of that. I should write a book. Oh, wait! I did. Just not the book about how I got in trouble ... yet.

I think it was Teddy Roosevelt who said he discovered the secret to getting his kids to listen to him. "Find out what they want to do and tell them to do that." A corollary perhaps. If you want to spend time with your kids, find out what they want to do and do it with them.

Start by listening. Then talking, reading, asking, sharing ... and end by listening again. Really listening.

The Discussion Questions are available in a stand alone booklet of their own. They can also be found at the end of each chapter in groups of three in the book *The Giant Forest*.

Here they are if you want to just give it a go with your child. If there were one right way to do things everybody would do things the same way. What works for you and your child/ren may not work for others and vice versa.

My number two son gave me some excellent advice not long ago when it came to going to the gym or not

and what to do or not do when I got there.

He said simply enough, “Go. And do something. That’s better than just thinking about it and not doing anything.” Great advice.

My advice – start talking to your child/ren. Start today. Ask them something. Talking about something is better than not talking at all.

The Discussion Questions from the book The Giant Forest – all in one place, one list.

1. Have you ever felt betrayed by someone you really trust?
2. Have you ever betrayed someone that trusted you?
3. Who do you consider the most reliable person that you know?
4. Do you have any questions you’d like to ask God? What are they?
5. What question do you wish God would ask you?
6. Do you have friends who think they are better than everyone else?
7. Do you think your friends are always honest with you?
8. Are you always completely honest with your friends?

9. How do you identify who is your true friend?
10. Who is the most loving person you know?
11. Is there anyone that you think you simply could never love?
12. Have you ever experienced unexpected consequences because of some kindness you showed?
13. Do you sometimes make fun of others or see your friends tease others?
14. How do you feel when you think someone is making fun of you?
15. Who is the most loyal friend you have?
16. Have you ever been by something you thought was supposed to be very simple to do?
17. What do you do when you find yourself lost or disoriented?
18. Who do you turn to when you need help getting yourself out of a pickle?
19. Have you ever tried too hard to make friends?
20. Have you ever been a friend to someone because they gave you something?
21. What do you think is necessary to become good friends?
22. Do you know anyone who is very arrogant and overconfident?
23. Have you ever found yourself in trouble because you thought you could do something, but really couldn't?
24. What's your first impulse when you find your-

self in big trouble?

25. Do you know anyone who has a hard time ‘fitting in?’
26. Have you ever felt like you didn’t belong?
27. Who is the most reliable friend you have?
28. Have you ever gone on a venture even though you were not sure what to expect?
29. Have you ever been surprised/disappointed by something you looked forward to?
30. What kind of legacy do you think you would like to leave?
31. Have you ever felt that you were being threatened physically?
32. What are you most afraid of?
33. When you are scared, who do you turn to for help?
34. Have you ever done your very best and it still was not enough?
35. Have you ever found yourself in a completely hopeless situation?
36. How do you recover when you fail?
37. Have you ever received an unexpected opportunity?
38. Have you ever felt like you missed out a golden opportunity?
39. Do you think it is better to wait for opportunities or to try to create new opportunities of your own?

40. What's the biggest problem you have ever faced?
41. Have you ever faced a problem that you thought was way too big for you?
42. Who do you turn to when you are in over your head?
43. Do you know anybody who always seems to be on a different page than everyone else?
44. Do you sometimes help people who can't figure things out?
45. Who helps you when you have problems you can't solve?
46. Have you ever received help from an unexpected source?
47. Have you ever had to say 'thank you' to someone you didn't want to?
48. Have you ever thought a problem was bigger than it really was?
49. Do you know anyone who is very slow but still very smart?
50. Have you ever thought someone was not very bright, but they really were?
51. Would you rather be really fast and get fair results, or really slow and get top results?
52. Have you ever felt like God wasn't listening to your prayers?
53. Have you ever received something very differently than what you were wishing for?

54. Have you ever been glad to NOT get what you had hoped for?
55. Have you ever made a mess of things even though you were trying to help?
56. Has anyone messed up a plan of yours even though they were trying to help?
57. Have you ever wondered whether you were actually helping or hurting someone?
58. Have you ever refused help, then wish you hadn't?
59. Do you know of a time when a very tiny push made a big difference for you?
60. Have you ever almost blindly trusted someone even you thought you shouldn't?
61. Do you know anybody who would give up everything to protect you?
62. Is there anybody that you would give up absolutely everything to protect?
63. Have you ever felt safe but not safe at the same time?
64. What's the most terrible smell you have ever experienced?
65. How do you decide when something very unpleasant is about to happen?
66. Have you ever tried to get out of a predicament only to find yourself in a worse spot?
67. Have you ever been completely bewildered about the way something has turned out?

68. Have you ever thought that something was impossible, but yet it wasn't?
69. Is there something that at one point you thought you simply would not, could not ever do ... but then found yourself doing it?
70. What famous person would you like to be named after?
71. When do you act really silly?
72. When do you feel very content?
73. Do you think animals have emotions?
74. What animal would you like to be able to talk to?
75. What question/s would you like to ask your pet?
76. Have you ever ignored good advice only to find yourself in a worse situation?
77. Has it ever turned out well for you after you reluctantly followed someone else?
78. How do you know when you have made a good decision?
79. Have you ever pretended to be someone you are not?
80. Are you able to admit easily when you are wrong and need help?
81. Do you have the experience of first fearing someone/something, then trusting them?
82. Have you ever been confused by simple directions?
83. Have you ever had a hard time getting someone

to understand you?

84. Have you ever felt unloved?
85. Have you ever found yourself in a really tight spot?
86. Have you ever been angry at someone for no good reason?
87. Do you have something about yourself that you would really like to change?
88. Have you ever let someone down?
89. Has anyone, you parents or your kids, ever let you down?
90. Do you have a world that you like to imagine you are a part of?
91. Have you ever tried to make an old enemy a new friend?
92. Have you ever wanted to do something even those around you told you not to?
93. How do you decide when to give up and when to continue on an idea?
94. Do you have a best friend?
95. Is there anything you would not do for your best friend?
96. Have you ever gone to great effort to help out a friend?
97. Have you ever been at a loss as to what to do?
98. What do you need before you completely trust a new friend?
99. Have you ever felt you were foolish for trusting

someone too soon?

100. Which do you think is stronger - love or hate?
101. Have you ever forgotten to say ‘Thank you!?’
102. Have you ever wished for help from someone who was usually there, but at the time wasn’t?
103. Have you ever felt sorry for yourself?
104. Have you ever had to dig deep to find power to get out of a tight spot?
105. Have you ever gone from one difficult situation to another more difficult one?
106. Have you ever lost a friend and didn’t know why?
107. Have you ever overheard something that you wish you hadn’t heard?
108. How hard will you try to restore a friendship?
109. Have you ever felt left out of a group activity?
110. Have you ever purposely left a friend out of an activity?
111. Have you ever been thankful that things did NOT go the way you went?
112. How do you feel when someone tells you a secret?
113. How do you feel when you learn someone close to you has kept a secret from you?
114. Who do you trust with your deepest secrets?
115. Have you ever thought you understood a situation completely only to learn too late that you had completely misunderstood?

116. Have you ever pretended to be someone you are not?
117. How do you decide when you should be completely transparent with your friends?
118. Have you ever been paralyzed with fear?
119. Have you ever done something that at one time you could not have imagined doing?
120. When you are desperate for help, who is the first person you turn to?
121. Have you ever thought things could not get worse, only for them to get worse?
122. What's the biggest challenge you have ever faced?
123. Have you ever regretted making a promise that you were later afraid to keep?
124. Have you ever finally given up on a plan only then to have something work out?
125. Have you ever had to make a choice between things that were equally important to you?
126. How long will you wait for someone you deeply love to return to you if they have gone away?
127. When is the most tense time you have ever experienced?
128. Have you ever completely misunderstood what two people were doing or saying to one another?
129. Have you ever found yourself in the position where the decision of another will determine your immediate welfare?

130. Have you ever found an answer to your prayers only AFTER you had completely abandoned hope?
131. Has help ever come to you from a place you had not possibly imagined?
132. Have you ever offered help to someone who would not expect it?
133. When you cannot talk to a family member, who do you tell your deepest concerns?
134. What are the qualities you like most about your closest friend?
135. Have you ever found friendship and kindness from unexpected places?
136. Is it possible for a situation to be serious and funny at the same time?
137. What is the funniest situation you have ever witnessed?
138. Have you ever laughed uncontrollably?
139. Have you ever seen a friend in a new way after having gone through a difficult situation?
140. Have you ever found that the way out of a predicament was the way you least expected?
141. Do you think friends grow closer together in good times or in hard times?
142. Who do you go to first when you need help?
Friends or family?
143. Have you ever been completely fooled?
144. Where is your favorite place to explore for new

adventures?

Invitation to Vote

Please visit our website:
P www.growingupaimi.com

and tell us which ending you prefer.

We'd love to know why also!

8

The Castle Labyrinth

Chapter 1

“Who would have thought?” Ajai pondered out loud.
“The children would rather sit inside than run about,
climb trees, splash about in the creeks nearby.”

“Well, daddy. Perhaps there was a time when they had too much jungle, you know. Miss A loves to take them places without them leaving their new home. They can visit and learn and still feel secure. You know, loved,” Lashi observed. “The kids seem to love books. To love books more than toys. They love it when Miss A reads to them.”

Lashi’s daddy whispered, “I had my reservations

about Miss A being left with these children so deep here in this jungle, but ...”

Lashi interrupted, “She wanted to go where no one else would go, to do what no one else would do, to share love with those who had at some time experienced an empty pit in their stomach of feeling completely unloved.”

As the children rubbed their own arms in a way to send flying the wet rain that landed on them from the sudden rainfall, they chattered and laughed heartily. As one arm got a bit drier, a friend, a brother or sister standing alongside often caught the drip sent unintentionally in their direction. Nobody got angry. They were all family. And they were happy to be inside instead of under an oversized leaf.

Lashi, her daddy and several others who had delivered supplies via Jeep from the home mission pressed up against the outer wall of the one room schoolhouse that also tripled as a dormitory and a kitchen for the children in this deeply remote areas of the subcontinent. From outside they could hear the exchange going on inside.

“Children! We are going to start a new book today.”

Stomping of feet and high fives (they had learned that children in the US do this to one another when they are happy) and whoops bellowed out. The announcement of the beginning of a new book was the only time the chorus of children would interrupt Miss A when she was talking. Miss A didn't mind. There was no hurry. She had time to wait for them to settle down. There were no after school swim or guitar lessons to attend. Nobody had a 'date' with Netflix. They ruckus usually lasted less than a minute when a new book was starting.

The children had also learned to quiet down one another. The older children had become very reliable under Miss A's tutelage. Miss A didn't have to manage all 527 alone. She had help. She had help from children who had grown some since arriving at the home, from older children who now knew that there are adults who loved them and could be counted on to be there for them. Miss A was not just teaching the children, she was also making teachers of some of the children.

Miss A cleared her throat with a heart, "Ahem."

Within moments all the children were sitting atop their neatly folded blankets which had become seats. The younger children sat up front and older children

in the back. Miss A's helpers stood alongside the walls on each side of the large group. Nobody had to be shushed. Everyone eagerly waited for Miss A to start ... including the helpers.

Miss A opened the book and began reading:

At one time, all teachers were children, too.

All the children laughed at the image they each conjured of Miss A being a child.

Miss A paused until the laughter died down. Because ... nobody was in a hurry.

She restarted the book.

At one time, all teachers were children, too.

Aimi and some of her friends in the 6th grade, Moe, Skeeter, Jordan, Rachel, Jot and Rose walked dejectedly across the quad. Their teachers were letting them down. Letting them down hard.

A dozen or more hands simultaneously reached for the ceiling.

“Yes, Geevan. You have a question?” Miss A asked.

“What’s a quad?”

Miss A didn’t mind this kind of question. She knew that if the children were being inquisitive, they were also showing genuine interest. Besides just a few chapters into every new book the questions stopped as the children became familiar with new locations and the vocabulary that was required to explain.

“That’s a great question, Geevan. If you’ll remain patient just a bit, let’s first see if we can learn what something is by reading about it rather than just being told what it is. Okay?” Miss A said tenderly so as to not discourage more questions when they were really required.

Miss A had often said before, “There’s a time when children stop learning to read and begin reading to learn.

“Shall I continue?”

More than 500 pairs of eyes wide open with anticipation shouted “Yes!”

“Where was I?” Miss A asked herself. The children all smiled as Miss A acted older than she really was.

Aimi and some of her friends in the 6th grade, Moe, Skeeter, Jordan, Rachel, Jot and Rose walked dejectedly across the quad. Their teachers were letting them down. Letting them down hard.

January 27, 2031

I heard a thundering crash. The skies that surround this beautiful home of ours that we call Earth seemed to have been split open much like an egg that had been cracked. Lightning flashed as if the button on a galactic camera had been clicked. Finally a deafening roar of thunder sounded as if all the freight trains in the subcontinent were rumbling through the gates of heaven at the same time.

“Children!” I cried out. “Quick! Run inside!”

Cheers of glee echoed off the trees that surrounded our little compound located deep in the jungle where I had been called to serve as a teacher to a large one room schoolhouse. Make that very large. There were more than 500 students in my classroom. That is not an exaggerated number. There were 527 students to be exact and I knew all their names. I love each and every one of them dearly.

Funny as it may sound, the children I serve would rather be inside sitting quietly listening to me read to them, and explain to them what it is I am reading ... and teaching them to read for themselves. The children and I have been to Narnia, to Olympus, to Little Whinging ... to the Santa Cruz Mountains of Silicon Valley. And too many places in between. Today, I started a new story for them - The Castle Labyrinth.

It was harder to get started than I thought. But I am especially looking forward to reading this book to them.

Good night, journal!

Invitation to Connect

There are several ways to stay in touch.

The preferred way is for you to share your email. We will stay in touch with updates, appearances, new books and the like. You may have already done that and it's why you are reading this. But you may have come upon this addendum when you bought the book.

Go here to share your email

Website - www.GrowingUpAimi.com

We are on:

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Instagram - <https://instagram.com/growingupaimi>

That's probably enough choices.