

SHOEHORN

You ever think much about a shoehorn? No, I don't mean a shoe that makes a noise like a trumpet! I mean that little piece of wood or metal or even plastic that you put under your heel to help you slide your foot into a tight pair of shoes. Lots of kids today don't even know what a shoehorn is, probably, since everybody wears sneakers all the time. But a shoehorn is a very neat thing. Cause it's made to do just one job — all the time, every time, forever — and do it in the most simple, most perfect way. Sometimes I wish I were a shoehorn. And had only one thing to do in life. And could do it perfectly all the time, every time, forever.

BURIED TREASURE

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(On knees, running hands carefully over ground.) Hi! You may be wondering why I'm out here in the middle of the school soccer field. In the dark. On my hands and knees. With a soup spoon. Well, duhhhhh! I'm digging for buried treasure! *(Digs.)* My history teacher says that before our town was settled, a pirate captain came ashore to hide a chest of silver and gold. The chest has never been found, but I saw an old map in the library, and I think the treasure is buried right under the goalpost. You'll just have to trust me on that, but I've got a lucky feeling! What will I do with the treasure when I find it? Hmmm, you're right . . . if I have to share it with my big brother and sister, I might as well bury it somewhere else. Or take them to the public swimming pool and make them walk the plank!

HAPPY BUILDINGS

Yesterday, we rode on the train past my dad's old neighborhood where he grew up as a kid. It was full of old buildings. Mile after mile of old, empty, tumble down buildings where nobody lived or worked anymore. Old, tired, grey buildings kneeling by the side of the tracks, falling down a little bit more each day.

My dad didn't say anything, but I could tell he was a little sad. Maybe some of those old buildings still had memories in them. Memories of kids playing in stairwells and families eating dinner together, watching TV or singing to the radio. And I thought if I were mayor of that town, I would take those old buildings and fix them up so kids could play in them again. Make them happy again. Make them stand up again, tall and proud. Make them happy with all the living and laughing and working and playing going on inside them.

Because if we can make more happy buildings in the world, I bet we'll have more happy people.

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LOST AND FOUND

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(Peering around as if in a big room.) This is an amazing place! It's the Lost and Found Department of my brain! Hey, there's my common sense that Mom always says I'm losing. *(Picks up imaginary object from floor, stuffs it into ear.)* I think I dropped some I.Q. points at the video arcade. Oh, here they are. *(Plucks scattered objects from air, swallows them.)* Good to have those back! Now, if I could only find — whoa, there it is! *(Dashes to other side of stage and stares at floor.)* My natural curiosity! And there's my desire to learn right next to it! Whew! That was a close call. I'd better start wearing earplugs when I sleep so my brains don't leak out. Somebody else might have come here to the Lost and Found and walked off with *my* mind!

SWIM, SWIM HOME

Last summer I was at the seashore on vacation. Just before dawn I woke up because I was having a terrible dream. I was dreaming that some animal needed water, needed water so bad it was going to die. Right away I thought about my dog Snapper and my cat Tuffy. I begged my parents to call home and check if Snapper and Tuffy were okay. They did call home, and my pets were okay. But I couldn't sleep, so I got up and walked to the beach. The sun was just rising, and that is usually the best time to walk on the beach because it is not crowded yet. But when I got there, a whole bunch of people were standing around, pointing at something in the sand. I went closer and there was a big fish lying in the sand. It had gotten stranded on the beach during the night, and its fins were flapping and its gills were opening up and closing because it couldn't breathe. "That's my animal!" I shouted. "That's my dream animal who needs water!" I picked up the fish and ran down to the water and threw it in! But the waves brought it back to shore. I threw it in again. And again the waves carried it back! So I picked it up again and this time I ran into the ocean, clothes and all, until the water was up to my chest, and I hugged him and heaved him with all my might as far as I could into the water. "Swim, swim home!" I shouted. "Swim home to your family!" And he did.

FAUCET MONSTERS

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You've got a monster under your bed! Ha-ha-ha! That's crazy! Ha-ha-ha! That's the silliest thing I ever heard, monster under your bed! Ha-ha-ha! Everybody knows they hide in the bathroom faucet. It's a fact! Monsters stopped hiding under kids' beds years ago. A lot of them were allergic to dust and didn't like the fuzz that fell off blankets and got way tired of sharing their space with old shoes and lost toys, so they got into the water pipes all through the house, and that's where they hide. Waiting. Waiting for you to turn the tap to get a glass of water. Or worse, waiting for when you wash your face late at night. (*Mimes washing.*) Waiting for you to lean down over the sink, with your nose just millimeters from the faucet and your eyes full of soap and your hands raised and cupped to catch the water and bring it to your face but all of a sudden you hear a big SNAR-RRRGGG! and a monster pops out of the faucet into your hands and jumps right into your face AAAUUU-UGGGGHHHH!!!! (*Pause.*) Ooohhh . . . I think I liked it better when monsters lived under the bed. Maybe we can get them to meet us halfway and move into the clothes hamper.

EVERY TIME I LOSE, I WIN

(Running up huffing, puffing breathlessly.) Wow! That was an awesome race! I was ahead halfway through, then, I don't know what happened — she passed me and I just couldn't catch up. I better go congratulate her. Well, sure, I always congratulate whoever wins. Don't you? I mean, if you won every race, winning wouldn't be special, would it? Besides, there are a lot worse things than losing a race. Like not trying. And every time I lose a race, it reminds me how fun it is to win.

THINGS I WONDER

We live in a very strange and confusing world. For example, do you ever wonder why scientists don't measure the speed of dark? Do you ever wonder why you never see any fleas for sale at a flea market? Or why it is always the last key on the ring that opens the door? Or if the temperature today is zero degrees, and it's supposed to be twice as cold tomorrow, how cold is two times zero going to be? I wonder if a cow laughed, would milk come out her nose? Or if they will ever make mouse-flavored cat food? Or if cannibals don't like to eat clowns because they taste funny? Or if you can catch a criminal by their toeprints? Or why you never grow taller than your head? Or why a person with a narrow mind usually has a wide mouth? Or why most accidents happen accidentally? Mostly I wonder why I think about stuff like this — or am I just thinking I think? I wonder . . .

HAPPY WILDEBEEST DAY

I like Groundhog Day. If the groundhog sees its shadow, we get six more weeks of cold weather, and that is useful to know. But why should the groundhog be the only animal to get its own day? Every day should be a day to celebrate animals and their role in our daily life. For example, we could have Monkey Day. If the monkey eats five or more peanuts at high noon, it means the circus is coming to town and your parents *will* take you! On Wildebeest Day, if the wildebeest stands on its hind legs, looks up at the sky and gives a sharp squealing bark, it means a large group of hungry lions is nearby and everyone should hide very quickly. You could have Stork Day. If the stork flaps its left wing, your town will have more girls than boys born this year. If the right wing flaps, it means the stork's feathers are too tight, and its elbow itches. And what about Snail Day? If a snail crawls in a straight line for two inches, it means a new French restaurant is going to open up in your neighborhood. If it doesn't move at all, that means it probably got squished. Oops!

INVENTIONS 'R' ME

I am going to invent the world's first Fur-Lined Cocoa Cup. Not only would it keep your cocoa warm, it would smell good, too. Mmmm, hot furry cocoa! And to replace the fly swatter — which leaves lots of mashed-up fly guts on everything and is certainly no fun for flies — I am going to invent a Fly Rocket that grabs the fly at one end then shoots it out the other end into insect outer space. I think a Microwave Hair Cutter would be awesome! You would stick your head inside and set the dial for how much you wanted cut, and it would fry off the right amount and leave the ends nice and crisp. Of course, a great inventor always makes use of current technology to improve life as we know it. Do you see all the phone wires going around the city from building to building? Why not turn them into Pizza Runners? When your pizza order is ready, they send it out on the wires straight to your house! And the electricity in the wires keeps the pizza warm, naturally. I may also invent a Used Chewing Gum Flavor Replacer, a Grapefruit-Eating Shield, a Parakeet Diaper and an Electric Grass Clipper you can attach to your feet and walk around the yard clipping grass and reading at the same time. And I am very definitely going to invent a machine that automatically makes your bed. You just push a button and everything folds up like it was before you slept, including your dreams — especially your dreams about inventing things.