

“A Mountain of Truth” by Karen L. Hamp – Awarded Judges Choice

Photo – Both Sides Now

“Mom, come look out the window!! Quick!!” Benjamin shouted to his mom as she picked up the last of the breakfast dishes, and gave the baby a final bite of cereal. “Please hurry, mom, it’s important!! I don’t know...C’mere quick!”

Benjamin was five, endlessly curious, and creative. Johanna smiled, and hurried to the window to see what her son was looking at. “Look mom. It’s a huge creature! On top of the mountain! Look, that white one, Mom. See? Sort of like an elephant, and sort of like...a ...ah I don’t know exactly... a snow monster!! It’s crawling along the top of the mountain. Look, Mom, look!!”

Johanna saw the cloud through Benji’s eyes. It really did look like some kind of animal. She hesitated, believing in helping children test reality, but also strongly believing that Ben’s gifts of imagination and creativity were valuable and important. She attempted to gently resolve reality and imagination.

“Benji”, she paused and smiled at him. “it’s a cloud, but I can see that it looks like a large animal or monster. My goodness!”

“Mom, it is a snow monster! Look at it moving. Look at it reaching out to get more snow off the mountain. Look how it can change shapes. It can stay on the mountain and not fall off!! Just watch!! ”

“What do you think it’s doing?” Johanna asked. She quickly checked on the baby out of the corner of her eye as Benji excitedly spoke.

“Mom, he’s getting more snow, to take back to his babies. That’s how he keeps them healthy and feeds them. They grow bigger when there’s more snow. Like snowmen, you know? His babies grow when he takes snow home to them. Don’t you see? Hey, mom, maybe he grows too as he rolls across the top of the mountains. Maybe he’s like a giant snowball. Do you think?”

Mom, there isn’t much snow up there this year- maybe that, ah...a...um...“climachange” thing you told me about. Do you think he’s hungry? Mom, what if the snow all disappears, will he and his babies die? Mom, where do you think he lives? Where is his home? Where does he go in summer? Do you think that snow monsters have a lot of babies? Do they need vitamins like I do? How do they talk to each other? I don’t know much about snow monsters.”

The questions rolled out of Benji’s mouth just as surely as the cloud continued rolling across the ridge of the mountain. Ben’s questions set off different questions in her mind: “What will happen to this world as the climate changes? Will Benji and his children and grandchildren even have a world they can live in?”

There were no answers, of course. Not even for grown-ups, let alone for 5 year olds. No answers about what would be happening to the mountains and the earth, and no answers about snow monsters except the ones Benji created today. And hopefully, Benji, and those like him could use their creativity to create some viable answers to the world’s problems in the future. But for now, there was Benji’s snow monster, almost at the end of the mountain, helping itself to snow to take home to its babies. Indeed!!

Benji was still absorbed in the scene but felt his mother’s momentary pause and turned around. “Mom, what’s wrong?”

“Benj, I was just thinking about this world we live in. I thought about your questions, and what might happen if the world changes. And then I thought about your wonderful imagination of the snow monster.

And then I thought about how more than one thing happens at the same time. Like my feeling sad about the future, and feeling happy about your snow monster story just now. Or me seeing a cloud, and you seeing the snow monster. Or when your kitty died, and we thought about all the good times, even while we were crying about him being gone. And you remember that at church we say how we live in two worlds at once. We live in God’s world, and breathe in His breath all the time, and at the same time we live on the earth

and breathe oxygen.

Do you understand what I am saying? There are often two things, or even more, going on at the same time and in the same place. And if we pay attention, we know that both are happening. And we can choose which one to think about."

"Yeah, mom, like just now. I was looking at a cloud and a snow monster, huh? I know it was a cloud. I believed you. But I also know it was a snow monster to me. They were both happening. You let me choose which thing to pay attention to. I like that you're my mom, and you let me choose, you don't boss me which one to pay attention to — well, sometimes, but most of the time I get to choose.

That was fun to have a snow monster to study for a while. But now-right now I feel sad that we are calling it a cloud and I am not pretending any more. It was real to me. And I believed it and loved it." A hint of a tear ran down Benji's face, as he struggled to come to terms with another part of growing up; as he grieved letting go of his snow monster story, and paid attention to a cloud and what his mom was saying. Soon he turned and smiled at his mom.

Johanna hugged him, "You have such a wonderful and creative imagination. Your thinking about the snow monster was a beautiful story. And then when we talked about how the world is, you could see that it was both a snow monster and a cloud and that both were real in some ways." She thought about how much easier it was for most children to switch focus. She thought adults were more likely to get stuck on one point of view.

She turned back to Benji. "Benji, never stop showing people the beauty and the pictures you see, even when they are really clouds. And remind others that the pictures they sometimes see may be really clouds on mountains, even when they look like snow monsters. Imagination and stories have a purpose and can help people see the world differently, and have fun, and even sometimes help invent new things in the world. But knowing that they are clouds, or what they really are, matters too. Both things are important. They both matter."

Benji hugged her back, and went to the window to see if the creature had really completely gone from his view. It had, and he turned away from the window, and looked at his mom again.

What's next this day, Mom? It's a good day."