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"My part comes first."

"No, mine does."

"Guys, it doesn't matter who comes first."

"I said it first, Eleanor."

"Jeremy, I never get to be first in this house!"

"Guys, this is your dad speaking!"

Silence. Don't let it slip away.

"I can put your parts on opposite sides of the page. There won't be any first."

And so it is.

1994 December 13

Hi,

This is Jeremy. On my seventh birthday, last January 16, Dad and I took off for New Zealand. When we got to Auckland, we didn't get our bags. They had been left in Honolulu. I was afraid I would lose my model planes. Then Dad lost our airplane tickets. Dad was about to panic—I was a little scared, too—when Dad spotted a cleaning person carrying our ticket packet. We rented a car and drove to Whitianga, a beach resort on Mercury Bay. It took 32 hours to get from Albuquerque to Whitianga, so we were tired when we got there. Dad bought a swim suit and some underwear in case our bags never made it. I decided I could use the shorts and underwear in our carry-on bag. We ate some dinner and went to bed before the sun set.

Our bags arrived late the next day. The owner brought them to our room, and I was the first to spot them. Dad and I had a great time on the beach for four days. I dug in the sand and jumped over waves. Dad body surfed and read and thought. At least he said he was thinking. I didn't believe him. After the beach we spent a week in Rotorua, where Dad went to a conference. We saw bubbling mud pots, hot pools, and geysers—even a geyser that goes off every day at 10:15 in the morning when somebody pours soap into it. One of the things I liked best about New Zealand was that you get french fries with every meal, but the ketchup tasted weird. Dad said he especially liked being able to escape winter to enjoy two weeks of summer.

It took another 32 hours to get back to Albuquerque. It was cold and snowing when we got back. On the way home from the airport, our car slid down the steep, icy hill near our house. Mom was driving. That was a mistake. I was screaming, "We're going to die," but Mom kept the car on the road. Dad was annoyed when the pipes froze that night. He had to go across the street to our neighbor's house to take a shower. I didn't mind because I don't like to take showers or baths.

I'm in the second grade at Georgia O'Keeffe Elementary School. We gave reports on animals, so I gave a report on kiwis. Most of the kids didn't know that kiwis are flightless birds from New Zealand.

Mom has a new job as Director of Benefits and Risk Management at Horizon Healthcare. Mom says they're headquartered in Albuquerque. She's the boss over lots of people. I think she likes that, but I wish she had gotten a job in an airplane factory.

Sometimes I ask Dad which he likes better, sunny days or cloudy days. He always says he likes sunny days and that's why we live in New Mexico. I like cloudy days.

I'm happy that I haven't broken my arm yet this year. I broke it twice last year.

Best Wishes,

Jeremy

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Hi,

This is Eleanor. I'm five years old. I'm in kindergarten at Manzano Day School. I was in preschool there last year. I ride a bus to school. I have to wake up early because my bus picks me up at 7:20. I like to read, and I like to write stories. Sometimes Mom and Dad can't read my stories because I spell words the way they sound to me. Next year I'm going to go to Jeremy's school.

Mom went back to work in April, so Jeremy and I have a babysitter named Kim for when we're not in school. We like her a lot. She plays with us and likes Star Trek as much as we do.

Dad said Jeremy couldn't tell about our vacation last summer, because he got to go to New Zealand and I didn't, so he could tell about that. Aunt Sherry and my cousin Josie went with us on our vacation. Grandpa and Grandma Caves were supposed to go, but Grandma went to the hospital for surgery just a week before the trip, so they couldn't go. Grandma is all right now. We went on a train ride that lasts all day. Dad says it's an old steam train called the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad and that it goes from Antonito, Colorado, to Chama, New Mexico. It was fun, but Mom and Dad and Aunt Sherry liked it the most. Josie and Jeremy and I got bored in the afternoon and played cards. We hiked a lot on the trip because Dad likes to hike and makes us do it. We hiked to the bottom of the Rio Grande Gorge. We played in the river at the bottom, but it was a dumb idea, because it was *very* hot and *very* steep hiking back to the top. I got to ride a horse and go fishing in Red River. At Bandelier we took a *very* long hike, and we also climbed four *very* long ladders to a cave high in a cliff. We went a long way on our vacation, but Dad said it wasn't really very far, because we just barely got out of New Mexico. Dad said it was like vacationing in our own backyard, but it didn't seem that way to me.

We spent Thanksgiving with Uncle Kenny in California. We went to a lot of places with Uncle Kenny, his friend Mary, and my cousin David. I like animals a lot, so I especially liked seeing the sea lions on Pier 39 in San Francisco. I also liked going to Marine World, where we saw whales and dolphins. Jeremy, David, and I played tug-of-war against an elephant—there were lots of other people on our side—but the elephant won.

Jeremy and I share a room at home. That way we aren't as scared at night. Jeremy has the top bunk, and I have the bottom bunk. I have lots and lots of stuffed animals all over the room and in my bed. I take one stuffed animal to school every day—usually one of my favorite bears, Blueie, Orangie, Snowball, or Cutesie—but they aren't allowed out of my backpack except on the bus.

Best Wishes,

Eleanor