Special Like Stina

An Honors Creative Project (HONRS 499)

by

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Purpose of Creative Project

This creative project was developed as a transitional children's literature story. Several different settings are used to help compose a complex story with easier vocabulary to provide a transition from children's picture books to children's novels. The main character was created to appeal to children who are at a particular level ready for transitional books, as well as those children who are not yet at this level, but can enjoy being read to from the story.

The story was created as contemporary-realistic fiction so that it would relate to the children of today. Such issues as divorce, success in life, single-parent families, and working mothers are addressed or alluded to in this story.

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Katherine stared out the window at the steadily pouring rain. She hated days like this because she couldn't play outside with her friends. She had already played with her dolls, and she was bored with them. There was nothing on TV that she liked, and the batteries for her video game had run down.

Oh well, she thought, at least Stina would be home soon. Ever since she was a baby, Katherine had called Kristina, her older sister, Stina. Stina went to junior high school, and her bus was forty-five minutes later than Katherine's. Katherine wished desperately that she could ride Stina's bus, but third graders rode on the first bus.

Katherine sighed, "I hate waiting. I wish Stina was home already." She saw two headlights through the dreary rainfall. Finally, she thought, Stina's bus!

She jumped up from her seat at the window and ran to the front door just in time to open it for Kristina, who was racing through the rain with her books over her head, trying to stay as dry as possible.

"Hi, Stina! Do you wanna . . ." Katherine began.

"Not now, Katherine. C'mon!" said Kristina, racing past Katherine.

"Mom! Mom!" Kristina excitedly cried.

Katherine followed on Kristina's heels, anxious to find out what had her sister so excited.

Their mother was in the kitchen talking to one of her employees on the phone.

"Just a minute, Kristina. I'm on the phone with the
store," she answered. Katherine's parents were divorced, and shortly after the divorce Katherine's mother had started her own clothing business, which was now quite successful.

Kristina laid her books on the table and grabbed a pop from the refrigerator. She tapped her foot impatiently as Ms. Taylor said goodbye and hung up the phone.

"Now," she said. "What has gotten you so excited?"

"You'll never believe what happened to me at school today!" Kristina said.

"You've fallen in love again," Ms. Taylor teased. Katherine wrinkled her nose in disgust. Stina had developed a new hobby when she began junior high--falling in love at least three times a week. Katherine didn't understand it. Boys were, well, boys. They were dirty; they carried yucky things like frogs in their pockets, and they always teased girls.

"I'm sure, Mom," Kristina said, rolling her eyes. "Seriously, you'll never guess!"

"Well, if I'll never guess, then I suppose you should tell me," said Ms. Taylor.

"I was elected President of the Student Council for the whole junior high school!" Kristina burst out.

"You were? Oh, honey, that's terrific!" Ms. Taylor said. "I'm so proud of you!" She rushed over to Kristina and gave her a big hug.

"Congratulations, sweetie! I'm really happy for you," she said, beaming down at Kristina.

Katherine smiled and said, "Congratulations, Stina!"
That's really good!"

Ms. Taylor continued to hug Kristina, congratulating her over and over. Katherine frowned a little and leaned against the table. No one ever fuss ed over me like that, thought Katherine. And I've done good things, too. She began to feel a little bit jealous.

"You should call your father and tell him right away," said Ms. Taylor. "And I'll call Grandma and Grandpa, and Aunt Karen."

"Mom, do you think I could, um, have a little party to celebrate this?" asked Kristina.

"Well, okay, sure honey. We can have it here on Saturday night."

Katherine walked slowly out of the room, leaving Kristina and her mother to their plans.

Big deal, she thought, plopping down on her bed. She could do things like that, too. Katherine felt a little guilty about the way she was acting. She knew she should be glad for Stina--and she was, she really was. Only, she wanted to do something terrific, too. She wanted to show that Stina wasn't the only one around here who could do such wonderful things. Maybe she also wanted a fuss made over her like Stina had gotten.

Well, she thought, I've just got to find something for me to do. Maybe I can be Student Council President for all of Clevenger Elementary School!

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The next day in school Katherine asked Mrs. Johnson,
her teacher, where she should go to sign up for the Student Council. Mrs. Johnson looked surprised.

"Well, Katherine, there is no Student Council in elementary school. You'll have to wait until you get into junior high," she said, then turned to help Tait with his math assignment.

Katherine stood there for a minute, disappointed. Then she began thinking. Her mind worked furiously. She just had to find something. Who in the school would know about things she could do? If there was no Student Council, there must be something else.

"Katherine? Katherine?" she heard Mrs. Johnson say. "You can take your seat now. I'm sure you have some morning work to complete."

"Um, Mrs. Johnson, I need to talk to Mr. Wilson for a minute. Can I go?" Katherine asked.

"Katherine, Mr. Wilson is a very busy man. You shouldn't bother the principal unless it's important."

"But it is important!" pleaded Katherine.

"Then suppose you tell me what it is," said Mrs. Johnson. Katherine explained that she wanted to be involved in an activity, but she didn't know what was available.

"I thought Mr. Wilson might know, or maybe you know something, Mrs. Johnson," said Katherine.

"Well, Katherine, since this is my first year teaching here, I'm not quite sure what the school offers for extra-curricular activities. But couldn't this wait until after school?" asked Mrs. Johnson.
"I have to catch the bus after school, so I wouldn't have time then. Please, Mrs. Johnson, please," Katherine begged. "I promise I won't bother him if his secretary says he's busy--not even a little bit!"

Mrs. Johnson looked at Katherine undecidedly.

"I don't know, Katherine," she said. "Do you have all of your morning work completed?"

"Yes. I've already turned it in."

"How about your math assignment from yesterday?"

"Yep."

"Did you double check every one of your answers?"

"Twice."

"Well, what about your reading workbook pages?"

"I finished those yesterday," said Katherine.

"Well, okay, but be quiet, and don't run down the hallway," she called after Katherine, who was already out the door.

"I won't," Katherine called back.

By the time she reached the office, Katherine was out of breath.

"Mrs. Heath," she panted to the principal's secretary.

"Yes, Katherine?" Mrs. Heath answered, looking up from her computer.

"Is Mr. Wilson in? I really need to talk to him."

"Well, he's preparing for a meeting, Katherine. What's this about? Maybe I can help you."

"I need to find out if there are any activities that I can be in. You know, like Student Council, or something,"
Katherine explained.

"Well, I don't think we have a Student Council. Maybe I'd better let you talk to Mr. Wilson. But you must make it quick, ok?" she said.

"Ok," said Katherine.

Mr. Wilson was sitting behind his desk looking at some papers.

"Mr. Wilson?" Katherine said.

"Yes? Oh, hello Katherine. Come in. How can I help you today?"

Katherine explained how her sister had been elected President of the Student Council. She asked Mr Wilson if Clevenger Elementary School had anything that she could get involved in.

Mr. Wilson's forehead wrinkled up in thought. He tapped his pencil on his desk, thinking some more.

"Hmmm," he said, tapping his pencil.

He suddenly snapped his fingers.

"I know. You could collect the attendance sheets each morning from all of the classrooms and bring them down to the office."

"Um, well, no, that's not what I really had in mind," said Katherine.

"Well, you could help Cassie sell pencils and erasers before school," he offered.

"I don't think that's it, either," Katherine said, shaking her head.

"How about the Girl Scouts?"
"Already in 'em."

"Girl's basketball?"

"Can't dribble the ball."

"Uh, pep club?"

"Mmm, no, not really for me."

Mr. Wilson let out a discouraged sigh. "I'm afraid I'm all out of ideas, Katherine."

"Oh," Katherine said, looking down at the floor with disappointment.

"We do have the After School Choir that Mrs. White directs, if you're interested in that," he said.

"Yeah, I know. I'm already in it. It's just not what I'm looking for. Thanks, anyway, Mr. Wilson," she said, leaving his office.

Katherine walked slowly back to class. She wished she were older. Elementary school kids never got anything like the bigger kids did!

She sat down in her seat, crossed her arms, and stuck out her lower lip. She didn't even care if she looked like a baby. She brooded all morning. She didn't do her handwriting activity. She didn't even let Tait borrow her red crayon when he asked.

That afternoon, Mrs. Johnson pulled out a big book from her desk. Katherine looked up with mild interest.

"Class, today we're going to start a new project. We will be studying some information from the Guiness Book of World Records," she said.
Mrs. Johnson explained that the book told about all different kinds of records, like the fastest car, the person with the longest hair, and the most poisonous snake. She explained how thousands of people try to get in the book each year by either breaking an old record, or setting a new one.

Tait raised his hand.

"Yes, Tait?" said Mrs. Johnson.

"How many people are in the book?" he asked.

"Well, I'm not really sure how many people are in the book. But I can assure you that there are hundreds--maybe even thousands. And it's not just adults. There are some children in the book. Of course, there are more adults than children in the book, but children aren't excluded," said Mrs. Johnson. "In fact, our new class project will be for each of you to look through the Guiness book and find three records that are of interest to you. You can also make up records which haven't been set yet. Then we will practice our creative writing by writing stories about one or more records. We will have a Story Night, and everyone will present his or her story. The best story will win a prize. Any questions?"

The class was buzzing with excitement, but Katherine hardly heard any of it. She had gotten a fabulous idea. She would break a world record and become famous! Mrs. Johnson began passing out a copy of the book to everyone. Katherine waited eagerly for hers. When she finally had it in her hands, she opened up the book and began pouring
through it. She couldn't believe how many records there were! The tallest man, the shortest people, the longest mustache, the smallest cats, and so many more! But Katherine didn't see any records that she could break. After all, she couldn't very well grow a mustache. She continued looking through the book, fascinated by everything she read. She finally came to a chapter called "Human Achievements."

I wonder what this will be about, thought Katherine. She began reading through some of the records. Longest sled journeys, most traveled man, most expensive wedding--there didn't seem to be anything here Katherine could do, but she kept reading. Suddenly, she read "Balancing on one foot". Hey! She could do that! Katherine excitedly read on. Baton twirling, bubblegum blowing, clapping, domino stacking, and on and on. Katherine had found what she'd been looking for. Now all she had to do was pick one she liked and start doing it. She looked through the records again.

"Let's see," she thought aloud. "I think I'll choose bubblegum blowing. I'm pretty good at that."

"Whatcha talkin' 'bout, Katherine?" asked Tait, who was standing nearby.
"Nothing," said Katherine.
"Please tell me, Katherine. Please! Please!" Tait begged.
"Well, ok, if you promise not to tell anyone else."
"Ok. I promise," he said.
"And you can't copy off me. You have to promise."
"Copy what?" asked Tait.
"I'm not telling you until you promise you won't copy," said Katherine, crossing her arms stubbornly.
"Ok, I promise," said Tait.
"Cross your heart?"
"Cross my heart," Tait said impatiently.
"Hope to die?"
"Yeah, yeah, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye, and all that other junk. Now just tell me!" Tait demanded.
Katherine leaned over close to Tait and whispered secretly, "I'm going to break a world's record and get in the Guiness Book of Records!"
Tait snickered. Then he giggled. Then he snickered and giggled a little more. Finally he burst out laughing.
"Hey, what's so funny?" asked Katherine.
"It's just that you--you--in the record book . . ." and he exploded in laughter again.
"So you think I can't do it, huh?" said Katherine, planting her hands on her hips. "Well, you just wait and see Tait McKinney!" she said, as she stomped away.
As soon as Katherine got home that afternoon, she went to her room and dug out a piece of bubblegum from her dresser drawer. She began chewing until the gum was just right for bubble-blowing. Not too soft and not too hard.
She stood in front of her mirror and began blowing. She blew, and blew, and blew, and then POP! The bubble burst all over her face.
Kristina howled in laughter. Katherine turned around accusingly.

"Stina! Why'dya do that for?" Katherine cried.

"I dunno," Kristina said between laughs. "You should see yourself, Katherine!"

"Stina, for your information, I was trying to set a record," Katherine said crossly. Kristina stopped laughing.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know. I won't do it again."

Katherine looked at her unbelievingly.

"Seriously. I won't. I promise," Kristina said, raising her right hand.

"That's okay. It was just practice, anyway."

Katherine went into the bathroom, trying to get the pink, sticky gum off her face. She took the part that was still in her mouth out and began dabbing it on the gum stuck on her face. After a few minutes, it finally all came off. Maybe bubblegum blowing wasn't such a good idea after all.

She went back to her room and looked back through the Guinness book. What else could she do? She flipped through the pages of the book. Pogo stick jumping! She could do that! She had a pogo stick, and it was still daylight outside. But she would need someone to count, and she would need a witness to prove she'd done it.

She could ask Stina to count. After all, Stina could count really high, but Katherine wasn't sure who could be her witness. She went into Kristina's room. Kristina looked up from her homework.

"What's up?" Kristina said.
"I gotta problem, and I was wonderin' if you could help," said Katherine. She explained to Kristina how she wanted to break a record by pogo stick jumping, but that she would need someone not only to count for her, but to be a witness for proof that she'd actually done it.

"That's easy," Kristina said. "We'll set up Mom's video camera and record the whole thing!"

What a great idea! thought Katherine. She ran outside and got her pogo stick out of the garage.

"Hurry, Stina, hurry!" Katherine cried.

"Just a second, I'm coming," Kristina called back. In a few minutes Stina had the camera set up.

"Whenever you're ready," she said. Katherine jumped on her pogo stick and began jumping.

"One, two, three, four, five, six . . ." Kristina counted.

After about ten minutes, Katherine was feeling very tired. Kristina had stopped counting aloud.

"How--many--have--I--done?" asked Katherine between jumps.

"Four hundred eighty, eighty-one, eighty-two . . ." Kristina counted.

This was really hard work! Katherine's legs were getting weaker and weaker. She thought how nice it would feel to sit down in her bean bag chair and watch her favorite shows. All of the sudden, her foot slipped, and she landed on the ground.

"That's it," said Kristina. "I counted five hundred
and two. How many do you need to break the record?"

Katherine had been so caught up in her problem of a
witness that she forgot to make a note of the number needed
to break the record. She half-ran, half-walked back to her
room to get the book. She looked up the record. Five
hundred and two was a lot. Maybe she'd done it! She'd have
her picture taken and put in the book, and everyone would
congratulate her, and . . .

"The greatest number of jumps achieved on a pogo stick
is 130,077," Katherine read aloud. Her heart sank. She
hadn't even been close. She slammed the book shut and threw
herself back on to the bed. She was tired, and didn't feel
like trying to break anymore records tonight. She'd worry
about it tomorrow.

. . . . . . . . . . . . .

In the bus on the way to school the next morning,
Katherine looked back through the book. Kasey looked over
the seat at her.

"Whatcha doin', Katherine?" she asked.

"Reading," answered Katherine, without looking up.

"Well, reading what?"

"A book."

"Well, duh, I can see that. What book?" said Kasey
impatiently.

"The Guiness Book of World Records. The one Mrs.
Johnson gave us yesterday."

"Oh. What for?" asked Kasey.

"If I tell you, promise you won't laugh?"
"Yeah, I promise," said Kasey.

"I'm going to get in this book by breaking a record," said Katherine firmly. She waited for Kasey to laugh as Tait had. But instead, Kasey scrambled over the seat and sat down by Katherine.

"Can I be a part of it too, Katherine?" she asked. "I can do lots of things. We can be a team!"

"Well, I don't know," Katherine said, doubtfully.

"Oh, c'mon, Katherine! It'll be fun!"

Katherine thought about it for a minute. Maybe it wasn't such a bad idea. There were a lot of things in the book that two people could do.

"Ok. It's a deal," said Katherine.

The girls talked excitedly about it all the way to school. They were still talking about it at school before the morning bell rang.

A couple of the boys were listening in. Mark and Albert approached the girls.

"Hey," said Mark.

"What?" said Katherine.

"We wanna help break a record, too," said Albert.

"Go break your own record," said Kasey. "This is just between me and Katherine."

"Wait," said Katherine. She thought about it. "Maybe the more people we have, the better chance we have to break a record. Okay. You guys can help," she said, smiling.

"All right!" exclaimed Mark. He then announced to another group of boys that he and Albert and Kasey and
Katherine were going to be in the Guinness Book of World Records. But then that group of boys wanted to join, and then a group of girls, and then some more boys, and pretty soon, the whole class wanted to work on breaking a world's record, even Tait.

"Okay, okay, okay!" Katherine cried above the buzzing of the class. "We'll all do it together, but since it was my idea, I get to be in charge, and I decide what record we will break."

Everyone agreed, and they all took their seats. All of the students kept peeking over at Katherine that morning as she poured through the book, writing things down on a piece of paper. She refused to let anyone see what she had written, and kept the paper covered with a folder when she wasn't writing on it.

At recess, everyone gathered around Katherine to find out what record they would try to break. Katherine stood on a seat of the merry-go-round.

"Quiet," she ordered. "I've decided what we're going to do."

"What?" asked Kasey.

"We are going to fly a kite," announced Katherine. Everyone looked confused.

"Don't you get it?" asked Katherine. "We'll keep a kite in the air for a long time. We'll each take turns flying it," she explained.

"You mean like in shifts?" Albert asked.

"Yes!" cried Katherine.
The students began discussing Katherine's idea. Katherine tapped her foot impatiently.

Finally, Kasey announced, "Well, I think it's a great idea." Everyone else seemed to agree.

"But we don't have a kite," said Tait.

"I do! I do!" cried Mark. "I got one for my birthday last week, and I haven't even used it yet!"

"Bring it tomorrow. We'll start at recess," said Katherine.

Everyone was so excited that they couldn't stop whispering about it in class. Mrs. Johnson asked several times what the whispering was about, but everyone just giggled.

That night, Katherine could hardly sleep. She kept picturing her name in the record book. Her family would be so proud! She finally drifted off to sleep with images of award ceremonies and trophies.

The next morning she jumped out of bed and quickly got ready.

"My, you're awfully energetic today," said Ms. Taylor at breakfast.

"I know," said Katherine, smiling secretly to herself. That morning during spelling, Mrs. Johnson had to ask the class to quiet down four times.

"I don't know what all the excitement is for, but you must simply get your work completed," she said, shaking her head.
Finally recess came. Mark grabbed his kite and they all followed Katherine outside. She was carrying a piece of paper in her hand.

"Who's first? Who's first?" everyone cried.

"Just a minute," Katherine said. "I've made a list. I think I should go first since it is my idea."

"But it's my kite," challenged Mark.

"That's why you should go second," she stated. Mark agreed.

"And then Kasey, and Albert, and Tait," she continued, reading down the list.

Everyone walked out and stood beside the grassy play area where they often played football and baseball during recess. Katherine took the string of the kite and gave the kite a toss in the air. She began running down the play area, letting out string as she went. It was a perfect day for flying a kite--just enough wind to catch the kite and pull it up, up, up . . .

Everyone cheered and clapped when the kite became airborne. Katherine stood looking up at the kite as it flowed with the warm, spring wind. Mark stood beside her, waiting patiently for his turn.

Everyone oohed and aahed as the kite dipped and twisted, sank and then rose with the wind.

The sound of Mrs. Johnson's whistle signaling the end of recess pierced the air.

"Ok, your turn," said Katherine to Mark.

"Wha--wha--whaddya mean, my turn? It's time to go in,"
"Someone has to do it, and you wanted to be second," said Katherine, handing the string to Mark.

"But I'll get in trouble!" cried Mark.

"Mark, this is a really important thing we're doing. Just think, you'll have your picture in the Guinness Book of World Records, where everyone in the world will see it. You'll be a hero!" encouraged Katherine.

"Well, I dunno," said Mark, doubtfully.

"I'm sure Mrs. Johnson will understand, Mark. Otherwise, why would she teach us about it? Anyway, the worst that could happen is that she'd make you come back inside. Don't worry," said Katherine, walking towards the school building. "We'll all be watching you from our classroom windows!"

Mark didn't say anything. He just stood there, flying the kite, with an unsure look on his face. He watched as Katherine disappeared around the corner of the building, where everyone would be lining up to go inside.

Everyone filed into the room and sat down at their desks.

"Ok, class, take out your math books," said Mrs. Johnson. "We'll be finishing multiplication today." She began writing some math problems on the board. The class kept glancing out the window at Mark, who was still flying the kite.

"Who would like to do this first problem? Ok, Albert. Now the second? Kasey," continued Mrs. Johnson as each
student called upon went to the chalkboard and began working the math problems.

Soon the entire class was busy working on math problems. Mrs. Johnson put down her book and began walking around the room, checking the students' work.

She stopped suddenly. She looked around the room, and then up at the board. She walked over to the coat closet and looked in there. She quickly walked over to the door and out in the hallway, looking up and down it. The students looked at her questioningly.

"Does anyone know where . . ." she began as she glanced around the room. Then her eyes shifted to the windows.

"Mark!" she hissed, and ran out of the room. Everyone ran over and pressed their faces to the windows.

In a few seconds, they saw Mrs. Johnson run up to Mark, waving her hands wildly.

Mark shook his head, and waved his free hand, too. Then he pointed to the window. Mrs. Johnson looked at the peering class with a very unhappy frown on her face. She marched around to the doors of the building, holding Mark by one arm, the kite dragging behind them.

"Uh-oh," said someone. They all scampered back to their seats and buried their noses in their math books, especially Katherine.

Suddenly, a figure darkened the doorway. Katherine thought Mrs. Johnson seemed somewhat taller than she remembered. She sank deeper in her chair.

"Kath-er-ine," said Mrs. Johnson very slowly and
precisely. Katherine peeked above the book.

"Would you please join me in the hallway?" asked Mrs. Johnson, in a not-so-pleased voice. Mark scuffled back to his seat.

Katherine walked slowly to the door, dragging her feet as she went. Mrs. Johnson closed the door.

"Ok, Katherine. Suppose you tell me just what is going on here?" Mrs. Johnson demanded.

"Um, well, it's just that we all wanted to get in the Guiness Book of World Records," explained Katherine.

"What? Get into the . . . Oh my," sighed Mrs. Johnson. "I guess our project has gotten somewhat out of control. Let's go back into the classroom. I think we need to have a little discussion," she said, opening the door.

The class was staring in silence at Katherine and Mrs. Johnson as they entered the classroom. Katherine quietly took her seat. Was she in trouble? Would Mrs. Johnson call her mother? What was going to happen to her?

"I think we've had a little misunderstanding," Mrs. Johnson began. She went on to explain that the idea of getting into the Guiness book was nice, but that it was impractical (not to mention impossible) for the class to try and break a record during school time.

"This could be something you might attempt over the summer, but we cannot use school time to do so," ended Mrs. Johnson. "Now, please take out your history books."

Katherine stared glumly down at her desk. Now she would never get into the record book. She couldn't do it
over the summer because her, Kristina, and her mother were all going on a trip to visit some friends. Besides, Katherine thought, summer was too far away.

"I'll never get to do anything like Stina," Katherine mumbled. "I'll always be plain, boring Katherine."

She moped the rest of the day, and didn't talk to anyone on the bus ride home from school. She didn't even run to meet Kristina's bus that afternoon. At dinnertime, she hardly touched her food.

"What's the matter, Katherine?" asked her mother. "Are you feeling sick or something?"

Ms. Taylor leaned over and felt Katherine's forehead. "No, I'm just not very hungry, I guess," said Katherine. "Can I be excused?"

"Well, sure, but don't you want to help Kristina and me finish planning the pizza party?"

Now I feel really depressed, thought Katherine. "No, not really," she said, leaving the room. Ms. Taylor looked worriedly after her.

The next day was Saturday. Katherine stayed in bed longer than usual that morning. She heard Kristina talking with their mother.

"Mom, I think something's wrong with Katherine," she heard Kristina say. "She hasn't even got out of bed to watch her favorite cartoons."

"Maybe I should go talk to her," said Ms. Taylor. Katherine moaned and covered her head up with the
"Katherine. Katherine," she heard her mother say.

"Are you awake?"

"Yes," said Katherine from underneath the blankets.

"Is there something the matter?" asked her mother, sitting on the edge of her bed. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"No, I guess I'm just tired," said Katherine.

"But Katherine, I think if there's a problem you should talk about . . . ."

"Mom, I said I was okay," Katherine snapped.

Ms. Taylor was very quiet for a minute.

"Ok, Katherine," she finally said. "If you want to talk, though, I'll be here," and she left the room.

Katherine finally rolled out of bed and slowly got dressed. She could hear Kristina and their mother rushing around getting things ready for the pizza party later.

That evening, Katherine heard the door bell ring, and then the excited rush of girls' voices. Kristina's friends were beginning to arrive. Katherine had spent most of the day in her room, moping. When she did leave her room, she would catch a worried look from her mother, but Katherine would quickly turn away and pretend she didn't see.

The bell rang again. This time she heard her father's voice congratulating Kristina on her achievement. He said things like he was so proud of her, how wonderful she was, and so on.

"Blah, blah, blah," said Katherine under her breath.
She threw herself on her bed and covered her head with her pillow so she couldn't hear.

A few minutes later the pillow was thrown off, and she felt herself being swooped up in the air.

"Now what's this I hear about my girl moping around all day?" he said in a semi-gruff but teasing voice.

"Daddy!" Katherine laughed, glad to see him. He could always make her laugh, no matter what mood she was in.

"I think it's about time for you to join the land of the living," he said. "Now, put a smile on your face, and let's go out and see everyone else."

Katherine started to protest, but Mr. Taylor grabbed her squarely on the shoulders, spun her around, and commanded, "March, two, three, four, march two, three four."

Katherine giggled and marched her way to the large dining room. She could never resist her dad. Katherine's mother smiled at her when she sat down at the table. Kristina was laughing and talking with her friends.

Ms. Taylor gently tapped her fork on her glass to get everyone's attention.

"Tonight we're here to celebrate Kristina's wonderful achievement of being elected Student Council President," she said. Everyone began clapping and congratulating Kristina, and someone made a joke about the United States Presidency being next on Kristina's list. Katherine clapped too, but then looked away. She began thinking about her attempts and failures at breaking records.

"So, what kind of pizza do you want? Pepperoni,
sausage, or both?" Ms. Taylor asked.

Katherine looked up and said, "I'm not very hungry. Can I be excused?"

"But Katherine," Ms. Taylor began. But then she stopped and looked hard at Katherine. "Yes, you may be excused."

Katherine almost ran to her room. She threw herself on her bed and sobbed into her pillow. She didn't even bother to turn on the light. Why couldn't she succeed at anything like Stina? Would it always be this way? She felt a gentle hand on her shoulder.

"Katherine? Katherine, what's wrong?" her mother asked.

Katherine rolled over and wiped away the tears on her cheeks.

"Katherine, this looks to me like you're jealous," said Ms. Taylor.

"Oh, Mom," Katherine gushed. "It's not that I'm jealous. I'm happy for Stina. Really, I am."

"Then why all the tears?"

"It's just that--it's just that . . ." Katherine stammered. "It's just that I can't do anything!" Katherine cried, fresh tears spilling out of her eyes.

"Oh, Katherine, that's simply not true," said Ms. Taylor, hugging Katherine consolingly. "You can do so many things, and do them well."

"No, I can't," cried Katherine. She then explained her ordeals earlier that week.
"I see," Ms. Taylor said, after Katherine was finished. "Katherine, did it ever occur to you that you might be taking on too much?"

"No," Katherine said. "What do you mean?"

"Well, Katherine, getting into the Guinness Book of World Records is very hard to do for anyone. It takes a lot of time and planning. I'm not saying that you can't ever do it, but you need more time to plan and find out what you're really good at."

"But those people in the book were able to do it," said Katherine.

"Yes, they were," said Ms. Taylor. "But most of them didn't do it on their first time out. It probably took many years of practice and failure before they were able to succeed."

"Really?" asked Katherine.

"Really," said her mother. "I know that you think you need to achieve something to be special, but that's just not true. Your father and I will always think you're special, and we'll always love you, no matter what."

"Yeah, I know," said Katherine, still unconvincing.

"You'll find something that you are really good at one day Katherine," said Ms. Taylor. "But it takes time, and trial and error. Don't expect to be an instant success on the first thing you try. Why, many times we're not trying to succeed at anything when we finally do. Sometimes it's a surprise when we find out what we're good at," explained Ms. Taylor.
Katherine looked up at her mother thoughtfully. Maybe she had a point.

"So you think I should stop trying so hard," said Katherine.

"Yes, I do," said Ms. Taylor. She gently lifted Katherine's face up towards her own. "Just be yourself. You are a very special person, Katherine Olivia Taylor, and don't you forget it."

Katherine smiled at her mother. Sometimes her mom made a lot of sense.

As Katherine sat thinking in her room that night, she remembered the story assignment she had on the Guiness Book of World Records.

"Oh my gosh! I almost forgot!" she said to herself. She hadn't even thought of a story. I guess I could write on my own idea about the kite, she thought. Only I'll make it fiction.

She worked on her story the rest of the weekend, when she wasn't playing video games with Kristina, or riding bikes with Kasey.

When Monday came, things were back to normal for Katherine. She'd decided to take her mother's advice and not worry about trying so hard. She just concentrated on the usual things—getting good grades, playing with her friends, and being happy. The other kids seemed to have forgotten about last Friday. At recess, Kasey and Katherine played on the merry-go-round.
That afternoon, Mrs. Johnson had everyone make invitations to give to their parents for Story Night on Wednesday, when everyone would present their story, and an award would be given to the best story. Mrs. Johnson said that they wouldn't be putting their names on the stories until after they were judged. She explained that four other teachers would pick the best story, so the contest would be fair.

Katherine gave the invitation to her mother that night, and called her father to invite him, also.

"I think you should wear your yellow dress," said Ms. Taylor as they ate dinner that evening. "Don't make any plans, Kristina."

"Oh, I won't Mom," Kristina said. "Hey, Katherine might even win!"

"Stina," Katherine said. "Don't be dumb. I won't win. Everyone knows that Marjorie Lawrence is the best story-writer in our class. She always wins. Besides," Katherine smiled over at her mother, "winning's not so important, and I don't really care."

Ms. Taylor smiled back at Katherine.

"You never know," said Kristina.

"Yes, I do know," stated Katherine. And with that, she excused herself from the table.

Wednesday afternoon, Katherine raced in from the bus stop. She was excited about that evening. Her father was meeting her mother, her, and Stina at the school, and then
they were all going to Alberto's Restaurant for a big spaghetti dinner.

The phone began to ring, and she ran to answer it.

"Oh, hi Mom," she said, out of breath.

Ms. Taylor reminded Katherine to lay out her clothes for that night, and to start getting ready so they could get an early start.

"I'll be home in about an hour," she said. "Tell your sister to be ready by five."

"Okay, I will. Bye," Katherine said, and hung up.

She went into her room. As she was about to open her closet, she saw a note taped to the middle of the door.

"A special surprise for a special girl. Love, Mom"

Katherine threw open the door. There hung a brand new, beautiful white dress with green, blue, and yellow trim. A matching pair of shoes were on the floor below the dress.

"I love it!" cried Katherine aloud.

By the time she was ready, her mom and Kristina were waiting in the living room. They both looked at Katherine and smiled as she walked slowly into the room.

"Hey, you look great!" said Kristina.

"You sure do, sweetie," said Ms. Taylor. "Ready? Let's get going."

Mr. Taylor was waiting at the school. He whistled at Katherine as she walked in.

"Wow! What a beauty!"

Katherine giggled. "Stop teasing me, Daddy!"

"I'm not teasing. You look spectacular," he said as he
grabbed her hand. They all walked to Katherine's classroom. Many parents were already there. Mrs. Johnson greeted them at the door and told them to go on in and find a seat. The desks had all been pushed aside, and the chairs from the cafeteria had been lined up for everyone to sit on. There was an excited murmur rising in the room. Everyone was nervous about presenting their stories in front of so many people. Katherine felt her stomach flip-flop with the thought. She looked around the room. Over on Mrs. Johnson's desk was a small trophy, and many blue ribbons. Marjorie was over admiring the trophy. Katherine kicked her feet nervously.

"What'sa matter?" Kristina whispered.

"I'm nervous," Katherine whispered back.

"Yeah, I know what ya mean. I was nervous when I gave my speech for Student Council."

"You were?" Katherine asked, surprised.

"Sure I was," said Kristina.

"Well, whaddya do? You know, to help?"

"I looked right at my friends faces. That way I couldn't see anyone else looking at me, and I felt a little less nervous knowing that my friends were there," explained Kristina.

"That's a good idea, Stina. Thanks!" said Katherine.

"Hey, I know you'll do fine. But good luck anyways," whispered Kristina as Mrs. Johnson hushed everyone.

"I'd like to welcome everyone here tonight and thank you for coming," began Mrs. Johnson. She told the parents
about the project they'd been studying. "I think the students have enjoyed it, and learned a lot," she said. "Some of them have even had little projects of their own," she said, smiling teasingly at Katherine. The students giggled, and Katherine blushed a little.

"And, without further delay, let's begin."

Tait was first. He seemed really nervous. He had to start over twice, and his hands shook a little. At the end of his story, everyone clapped. Next was Kasey. Everyone clapped for her, too. One by one, the students read their stories, and received applause for their efforts.

When it was time for Katherine to read her story, she felt a nervous lump in her stomach. She looked out over the audience, and saw Stina motioning for Katherine to look at their parents' familiar faces. She followed Stina's advice, and got through the presentation successfully, although her palms felt very sweaty, and her heart was still beating fast.

She looked at her parents' faces as she made her way back to her seat. They looked so proud that they beamed.

"Fabulous!" her father whispered.

"Outstanding!" Ms. Taylor said.

Kristina smiled and gave a thumbs-up signal as the next student began.

After everyone was finished, Mrs. Johnson got up and asked for another round of applause for all of the students. When everyone had stopped clapping, she said,

"Because each of our students has done such a fine job,
they will all receive a blue ribbon, for they are all winners in my book!"

She called everyone's name one by one. Each student went to the front of the classroom and shook hands with Mrs. Johnson as she gave out the blue ribbons. Everyone applauded for each student. After the blue ribbons were handed out, Mrs. Johnson explained how the best story had been selected. She explained that four other teachers had read each anonymous story, and voted on the best one.

"They looked at the form and the structure of the story, as well as the originality and the imagination."

She walked over and picked up the trophy.

"And our winner is . . ." she looked around the room. Katherine looked over at Marjorie to see her expression when she won.

"Katherine Taylor!"

Katherine's mouth dropped wide open. Ms. Taylor let out a little squeal of delight. Kristina was pushing Katherine, who was dumbfounded, out of her seat.

"Go and get the prize, silly!" Kristina urged.

Katherine couldn't believe it as she walked up to the front of the classroom. Everyone was clapping and whistling for her, even Marjorie.

She accepted the trophy with a smile. Mrs. Johnson leaned down and whispered that Katherine should say something.

"I'm really surprised I won," said Katherine shyly. "Thank you." She quickly walked back to her seat as
everyone applauded.

Mrs. Johnson announced that there was punch and cookies down in the cafeteria, and everyone began filing out of the room.

Katherine's dad squeezed her shoulders.

"Way to go! Now you're my little author!"

"I'm so proud of you, sweetheart!" her mother beamed.

"Yeah, me too," said Kristina.

Katherine felt so happy. She still couldn't believe she had actually won.

That night, after Katherine had gone to bed, she reached out and softly touched her trophy, sitting on her night stand.

"I won. I really won," she whispered to herself.

She thought about her earlier attempts and failures, and how she'd felt so hopeless.

"And to think, I tried so hard at something else that I didn't even realize my true talent," she said to herself.

I guess what Mom said was right, Katherine thought. I just need to give things time. Maybe I'll never be Student Council President like Stina. Maybe Stina will never win a story award like me. But I know now that it's okay. We'll both find things we're good at.

She turned over and pulled the blankets up. She yawned sleepily.

You know, she thought, I guess I am pretty special.

And with that, she drifted off to sleep.
THE END