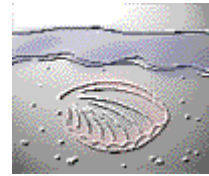


THE ADVENTURES OF ABBY AND ZACK
By Rita Conti

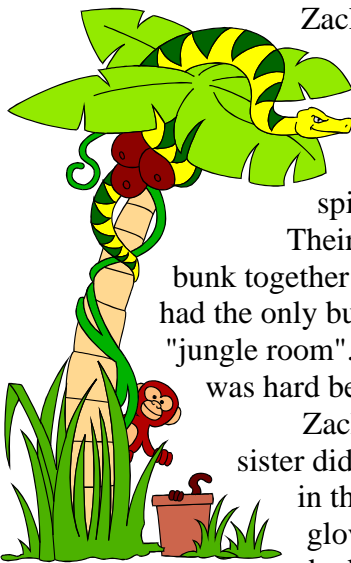


Abby woke up once again in her big brother Zack's room. She had spent the night on the bottom bunk and Zack on the top bunk. She missed waking up in her very own room, but understood this was only temporary. She looked at her arms and hands, but she still had her spots.

Abby's room was painted a soft shade of blue, like a robin's egg. She had a white dresser with matching blue knobs. Her bed was white with a quilt of white seashells printed on a robin's egg blue material. The curtains matched her quilt. Next to her bed on the white night stand was a lamp her Mom made out of a large seashell. Across the room was a large picture of a school of dolphins and under it was a white shelf with her seashell and sand dollar collection on it.

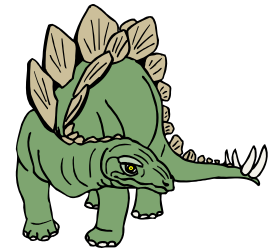


"I miss my room," she whispered to herself. Looking around at Zack's room was a little scary in the dim morning light. There were shadows of creepy things in there.



Zack's room was done in shades of green, his favorite color. He had shelves about the room filled with his "cool" stuff. There was a dinosaur shelf, a dragon shelf, a pirate shelf, a shelf with bugs and the creepiest thing: snake skins. Mom had made him a spider web from yarn and he had a huge rubber spider hanging from it.

Their Mom and Dad said it was easier for them to bunk together while they were sick. Easier for who? Zack had the only bunk beds, so she was stuck there in the "jungle room". Both kids did their best to behave, but it was hard being cooped up.



Zack soon woke and did the same thing his little sister did. He looked at his arms and hands. He, too, was still covered in the itchy dots. Their Dad had given them both a set of soft gloves to wear when they slept or when the itching got to be really bad. Zack can still hear his Dad's warning, "Don't scratch or you'll have scars."

Zack was trying to set a good example for his sister by not scratching, but found it hard not to. He knew she felt as awful as he did. Both of them had fevers with their chicken pox. Both of them hated being stuck in bed and not playing with their friends or outside. Both of them were glad they had each other, at least, to talk to. Plus their Mom popped in on them regularly throughout the day. That always brought a smile to their spotted faces.

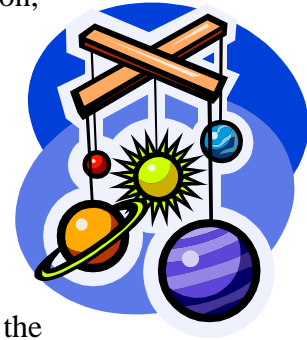
Today looked to be as miserable outside as they felt. As Zack looked out the

window he saw gray skies and heard the rain beating down on the roof. He could hear the wind whistling through the trees and saw them swaying back and forth. He hoped the wind wouldn't get any stronger, but knew from his many eight years of experience that it could.

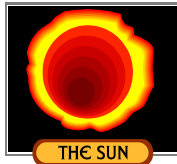
"So Sis, what game do you want to play today? Aggravation, Monopoly, Battleship, Uno?" Zack was growing tired of board games. He wanted to get up, move around, run, or do anything but stay in bed.

"I don't want to play games today," Abby replied. "Can we do something different? Maybe make something? Or do some sort of experiment, anything else?"

Zack scanned his room and spied a box on one of his shelves. "Hey, I found something. How about making this?" he asked with a huge grin. He held up the box that had a kit to make the solar system.

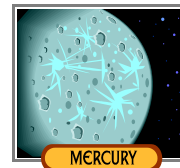


Abby nodded her head enthusiastically. So they sat on the bottom bunk, took everything out of the box, and decided they had better read the instructions first. There were so many pieces. They found out that the instruction book was fun to read. It also told a little about each of the planets.



SUN--our sun is a star which is a huge, hot ball of gas. The Sun gives off all kinds of energy, and without it, there would be no life on Earth. Why? Because it gives us heat and light. Size: 1.3 million Earths fit inside the Sun.

MERCURY--is difficult to see with the naked eye because it is hidden by the sun's bright glare. This planet is scorching hot in the day and freezing cold at night. One day equals 59 days in Earth time. Distance from the Sun equals 35 million miles. Size: 15 Mercurys would fit inside Earth.



VENUS--this planet has clouds of sulfuric acid covering its surface. It's hot both day and night, about 900 degrees. Looking from Earth, Venus is the third brightest object in the sky, besides our Sun and Moon. One day equals 243 days in Earth time. Distance from the Sun equals 65 million miles. Size: the same size as Earth.

EARTH--our home, is the only planet in the solar system with large amounts of what so that life can exist? Water! One day equals 24 hours. Distance from the Sun equals 93 million miles. Size: 50 Earth Moons would fit inside our planet.



Earth's MOON--we have only one, but some planets have several and some have none at all. The Moon helps protect the Earth from meteors. Our Moon spins around Earth every 29 1/2 days.



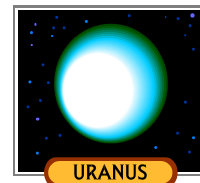
MARS--is similar to Earth in many ways as it has polar ice caps, extinct volcanoes, and valleys. Unlike Earth, it has rusty iron dust on the surface and freezing deserts. One day equals 25 hours in Earth time. Distance from the Sun equals 137 million miles. Size: seven Mars would fit inside Earth.

JUPITER--is the largest planet in our solar system. It is a gas planet so it doesn't have a solid surface. Swirling clouds of gas give the planet the appearance of stripes. One day equals 10 hours in Earth time. Distance from the Sun equals 467 million miles. Size: over 1,000 Earths would fit inside Jupiter.



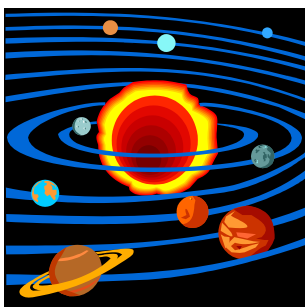
SATURN--is the planet known for its rings which are made up of billions of icy particles. It is the farthest planet from Earth that can still be seen with the naked eye. One day equals 10 hours in Earth time. Distance from the Sun equals 865 million miles. Size: about 800 Earths would fit inside Saturn.

URANUS--has a faint set of rings with a greenish-blue haze that covers the planet. This haze is caused by methane gas. One day equals 17 hours in Earth time. Distance from the Sun equals 1,723 million miles. Size: more than 60 Earths would fit inside Uranus.



NEPTUNE--has the fastest winds in our solar system. These winds stir up gases that cause the planet's blue color. Its freezing winds are 10 times faster than our hurricanes. One day equals 16 hours in Earth time. Distance from the Sun equals 2,698 million miles. Size: more than 60 Earths would fit inside Neptune.

PLUTO--the smallest planet in our solar system. Some scientists are now saying it doesn't qualify as a planet due to its small size and some other specifications. It is the farthest from our Sun and has never been explored. Gravity is so weak here that an 85 pound (39 kg.) earth kid would weigh about 6 pounds (2 ½ kg.) on Pluto. One day equals six days in Earth time. Distance from the Sun equals 3,548 million miles. Size: more than 200 Plutos would fit inside Earth.



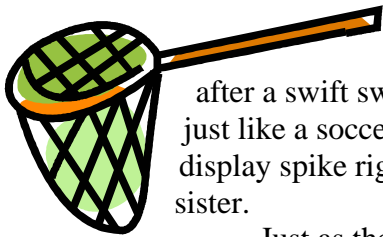
*For more information on our Solar System, please visit this web site:
http://www.kidsastronomy.com/solar_system.htm*

"Wow! That was really cool. I never knew all that stuff about our so-lar-sys-tem," Abby said with wide eyes, carefully pronouncing the words.

"I've got another big book about this and our universe if you'd like to learn more." Zack always got fired up when it came to learning about space. He was mostly in awe that God created all this on Earth and all that in space.

"Not right now. I want to build this," Abby said as she picked up the little balls that were the planets. "Oops, I dropped one," she cried out as she watched it roll under his dresser. "I'm sorry. Now I've ruined it!" Abby was near tears.

"No sweat. Stop being a drama queen. All we have to do is get my butterfly net and stick the handle under the dresser and swipe back and forth. It'll just roll back out," Zack said as he patted her on the head.



So Abby was elected to fish it out. The tiny blue marble-looking planet bounced out from under the dresser after a swift swing from the tiny girl. Thankfully, Zack was ready for it, just like a soccer goalie. "See, what did I tell ya." Zack put it on the display spike right away. "Come on, let's do the rest," he beckoned to his sister.

Just as they were finishing, their Mom came in with a tray. On top of it were plates of dollar pancakes. One plate of pancakes was smothered with maple syrup and the other with raspberry syrup. She also had two glasses of orange juice for them. "Chow time," she called out. "Please set up your TV trays." She placed the plates and glasses on the small wooden tables. "I'll be right back with mine. I think I'll join you today," she gave them both a big hug.

After they all ate their fill, she scooped up the dirty dishes and headed for the kitchen. She called back over her shoulder, "Want to take another herbal bath today? It seemed to help keep the itching down."

"Me first," Abby exclaimed.

"Sure, why not," Zack said as he rolled his eyes, thinking that "herbal" sounded so girly.

After her bath, Abby headed back to Zack's room where she found him reading a book about astronauts. "Your turn," she said. "Can I please look at your u-ni-verse book now?" she asked.

"Sure. I'll get it down for you." Zack kept his books in his closet on a bookshelf his Dad made for him. There wasn't much room for it anywhere else in his room with all his display shelves, furniture, and the fish tank. When he retrieved the book he handed it to her then headed for the tub.



Zack returned to his room finding his sister snoozing. He thought to himself, "Either she got bored or the bath relaxed her or she didn't sleep much last night." He quietly hopped up onto the top bunk lugging the book he had been ready with him.

Before long, anyway he thought it had only been a short time, the door bell rang. Zack resisted jumping off his bed to answer the door. He was hoping...for what...possibly a friend coming over to see how he was doing? He peeked out his window and saw the UPS truck parked at the gate. He heard his Mom say thank you to the driver and waited at the bedroom door to see what he had



delivered. His Mom had a large package in her arms. "Hey Mom, who is it from?" he called out. To his surprise she was coming toward him. "Could it be for me?" he thought.

"Just when needed, your great-grandma has sent you two a care package from England. She's such a thoughtful lady," his Mom said smiling. She set the package down at the foot of the bed. "You can open it after your sister wakes back up, but call me first. I want to see what it is too!"

Zack knew he should be quiet, but he was so curious about the package that he couldn't help himself from fidgeting as he lay on the top bunk, head and shoulders draped over the foot board staring down at the package. He started swinging his crossed legs up and down. Soon the constant thud, thud of his feet hitting the mattress woke his sister.

Zack yelled out, "OK Mom, she's awake now!"

Abby leaned out and peered up at him asking, "Why is it so important for Mom to know I'm awake now? Did I do something?"

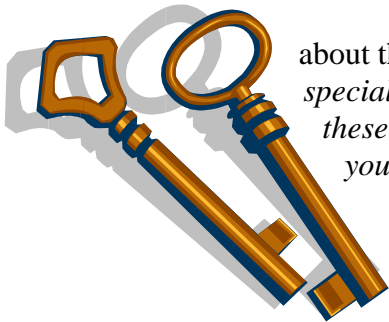
"No silly," Zack replied. "Look!" He pointed at the big brown paper wrapped package.

"Is it for me?" she asked excitedly.

"It's for both of us! Mom said it's from great-grandma. You know the one who lives in England."

Their Mom had walked swiftly to their room, knowing they would yell for her again if she didn't get there quickly. She thought to herself, "What child wouldn't be anxious about a mystery?" She sat on the floor, criss-cross-applesauce, while the kids tore into the package. Paper flying every direction.

Inside was an envelope to their Mom. Abby handed it to her after sniffing it first. She knew great-grandma always put some of her perfume on her letters so they would smell pretty. Then they found 3 more boxes. One of them, the smallest, had scribbled on it: TO MY LITTLE LOVIES-OPEN AFTER THE LETTER IS READ. The other two boxes had Mom and Dad's names on them. Abby again handed her Mom the packages meant for her parents. Then she couldn't wait any longer as she sat there squirming, "PLEASE open it, Mommy!"



They both sat quietly as she read the letter which told about the contents in their package. *"Inside you will find a very special set of keys. You must come over here to England to use these keys as they fit the special doors in my home. I will send you plane tickets when you are ready. HUGS and KISSES."*

So the adventure soon begins. Tune in next month to find out more about the keys and the special doors leading to.....