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Visualizing the Possibilities*
Louisa's Journal Entry: January 5, 1995

by

Louisa Cruz

What an experience! Today, I took my class of 5 and 6 year olds on our second ice-skating trip to Central Park's Lasker Rink in New York City. What a joyful, exhilarating experience! Felix** is such a phenomenal ice skater! He seems to be a totally different person when he is on the ice. He's confident; he focuses so completely on what he's doing; he's happy!

I remember the first time I took the class there last year, when Felix was just 5. I remember that as soon as we got there he attempted to figure out this whole ice-skating thing and he got it in no time at all. He glided over to me gracefully and said, "Look, Louisa, I'm ice-skating; I learned all by myself." As soon as Felix hit the ice, he was a skater.

This was happening at the same time as the Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, and I'd asked the kids to watch the skaters on TV each night for "homework." I remember I saw Dan Jansen skate the night he won the gold medal; his poised body as it passed the threshold and, just moments after, his wife's face, ecstatic at her husband's victory. What an amazing moment!

It must be so fulfilling to find the thing you were born to do, destined to be great at, and to have the opportunity and the resources to do it. I found myself wishing today that I could make this happen for Felix, for all my students. There are so many ways in which the world tells children what they are not good at. If a person can find the thing they can be good at or love to do, if they have the opportunity to be at the right place at the right moment in time, if they have the encouragement, if they can get the resources and the tools in order to even work at being good at something they enjoy ... what a miraculous thing!

Felix is now 6 years old, an August baby, a fraternal twin. He was born and has always lived in New York City. He was born to a Puerto Rican father and Dominican mother in a neighborhood of Washington Heights, an area in New York known for the large numbers of immigrants who still arrive daily from all over the world, particularly his mother's homeland. He is the youngest of six children in his blended family.

Felix's body is smaller than average; he stands less than 4 feet at 6 years of age and is rather slender. He has even-toned, olive brown skin and jet black hair, so straight it looks spiked. His eyes, too, are jet black, rounded, piercing, framed by thin black lashes and brows that accentuate his features.

I would use the word "dreamy" to describe Felix. He seems to be constantly resting his body on anything that is near him: his elbow on the low table in the middle of the large grey rug that is our class meeting area and library; his feet on the rack under my chair while he listens to me read a story. He generally seems somewhat removed as though he were in a different time zone. Often, he lays outstretched on the rug, with his arms propping up his neck and legs crossed at the ankles. He curls his lips up at the edges in a subtle smile and looks at me out of the corner of his eye with

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** Children's names are used with their permission.

his head slightly cocked to one side and he utters: "... but, I'm tired ..." in a singsong voice. The fact is, he captures every detail of everything that happens around him.

Today and each time he ice-skates he is poised and ready; his small, agile body—like the steel blades on his skates, sharp and positioned against the unforgiving ice—ready to glide, to soar, to race.

Felix speed skates, his arms swinging out, slicing the air. His back is arched, body bent forward at the waist. His feet are planted firmly below him, his heels parallel with each other after each stride. He races from one end of the rink through the middle to the other end. He notices no obstacles in his path then, because when he's skating there are no obstacles. His eyes and nostrils pointed forward, he reaches for his goal—to get to the other side of that rink. Gliding along, he's in his own world.

He loves to compete at the rink, especially against adults. In fact, he only races with adults. Today, for fun, he challenged me numerous times. Each and every time he left me in the proverbial dust!

Faviola, his twin sister, tried to even things out by grabbing onto her brother to give me a head start. Useless. Less than pointless. "You're letting him win!" she screamed, laughing: "You're faking it!" I assured her that I wasn't as I gasped for breath. She wouldn't give in. He knew; he laughed at us both. That dreamy, confident smile came across his lips and turned into a laugh as I shouted, "Felix, the ice-skating champ of Muscota, two years in a row!," our hands joining in the air in a high five.

As I write this, I recapture the joy of the moment, the cold air on my face, the excitement of this event that we shared, the dreamy smile of the victor. We shared something magical out there today. Something so miraculous, so elusive.

Today, I felt the satisfaction of doing my job well.

I aspire to make my days with the children I get to know each year like this experience we shared. I want so to give them the sense that doing a good job at something—ice-skating, baking a birthday cake, painting, drawing or writing a story, building a structure out of wooden blocks, finding a partner to work with, building a friendship—is possible; that *they deserve* to have these experiences, daily.

So often, life imposes limits on people, on children, especially. Unfortunately, school is usually a place where those limits are underscored constantly. I think of school as a place where the emphasis should be on the limitless possibilities children have; a place where the ever-present, tiny miracles of growth and discovery are being nurtured and celebrated.

Over the years, I've come to realize that this is, indeed, an awesome task, a huge responsibility. It requires nothing less than undying faith and tenacity.

When, in the course of a day, I can envision the skater, the baker, the builder, the writer, the good parent, the friend, the scientist, the dancer, the teacher ... in my students, I am so incredibly fulfilled ... I am aware of the limitless possibilities ... I am in awe.