

The Little Masters

by Rama J. Vernon

All children are little masters. The signs of a child's divinity seem to manifest at different turning points within their lives and with some, not until adulthood. Children today are inheriting a world that is very different from their predecessors. According to many parents throughout this country and other parts of the world, the younger generations seem to be coming in with a wisdom that far exceeds their chronological earth years; a wisdom or knowing that has taken many of us who are a few generations older years to acquire. They come in, as one Russian healer once said, "standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before." "If we can only let our bending as the bow be in gladness," Kahlil Gibran in *The Prophet* has said. We must support and strengthen our children so they can become an instrument for positive social change.

Ben Pickney, age 12, has won top student scholastic awards four consecutive years, represented his school twice in a district-wide scholastic competition (Madison Brain Games), and recently passed college entrance exams by a comfortable margin. His father attempts to give balance to

Ben's unusual achievements: "He's boisterous, curious, constant and energetic—typically twelve in many ways. He even delights in annoying his sister."

Ben's father, John, shows pride in memorable stories of his son. "At birth, Ben was a perfectly formed, chubby little Buddha with the jolly disposition to match." A few months before his third birthday, Ben was at a neighbor's house performing a feat of strength with a pumpkin. The neighbor said jokingly, "I've heard of you. Aren't you known as the Man of Steel?" The little Buddha child looked thoughtful for a moment and then said, "No, you must be thinking of someone else, because I don't steal. I share things."

Throughout the years, Ben's family and friends noticed his remarkable similarities to the Buddha's teachings of acceptance, compassion and love. His understanding of people and the gift of non-judgment even in the face of criticism is exemplified in the story of his substitute homeroom teacher. Even before the class started, she came to the conclusion that Ben was a problem child, the one who needed watching the most, and she began to treat him as she negatively perceived him. It escalated into her threatening to send him to the principal's office. Without malice, Ben said, "In a way it was funny, but I was still getting kind of mad. I knew the principal would just laugh, so I decided to think pleasant thoughts about the teacher for the rest of the day. I thought some positive brain waves might help, and I was sure they couldn't hurt."

Like a Zen Master, Ben could at times cut right to the truth in his assessments and wise advice that far exceeds his twelve chronological years on earth. Ben's father relates the story of a friend who had long-term emotional problems and

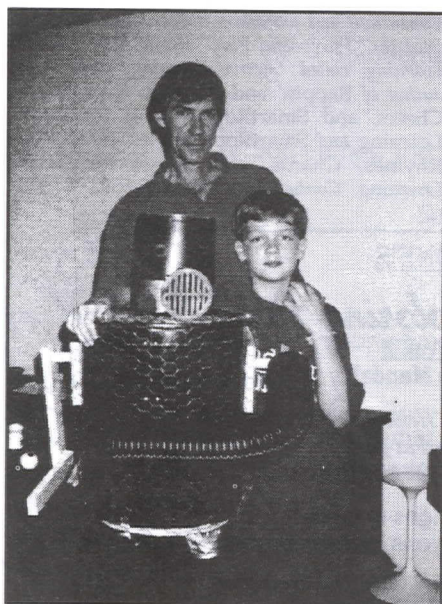


Ben Pickney

stopped by their house on an errand. "Our friend seemed particularly disassociated that day. When the man left, I made a comment about how I'd like to help him. Ben, who is a deeply compassionate and caring person, surprised me in saying, 'That would be nice, but why?' I stammered something to the effect that he seemed like such a sad case. Ben replied, 'I like the idea of helping him. That's very compassionate but I don't think he'll benefit from your pity.'"

Ben's charity and timeless wisdom run like a steady stream through all his life's endeavors. A friend of his forgot his lunch money at school, so Ben offered to share his lunch. A cafeteria aid refused to let his friend enter because he didn't have a lunch. They explained that they intended to share the one that Ben had just purchased. The aide said that wasn't allowed. Ben said to his friend, "You eat the lunch—you're always hungry. I'll wait outside." The aide said that wasn't allowed either. Ben put the tray down and said, "If my friend is to be hungry, I couldn't enjoy being full," and they left.

He's straightforward and comfortable around people of all ages. At the age of nine, he insisted on accompa-



John and Ben Pickney

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nying his father to hear a talk by a Vice Presidential candidate. At nearly midnight on a school night, the floor was finally opened to questions. Ben's hand shot up. When the candidate recognized him, he got off the chair he was standing on, walked up the aisle in order to be heard, and asked in his child's voice, "My friends and I would like to know how you intend to improve public education?"

He is a builder of visions, dreams and edifices of practical realities out of every material he encounters. Ben's life-long fascination with robotics has resulted in countless robot prototypes—from small, motorized models to large mechanical versions. The robot in the photograph (pictured half-way through completion) has mechanical arms (which are operated on levers in the back), lighted eyes and a tape-recorded voice. Ben's architectural constructs are new each time and carry with them his explanations of their history, limitations and developmental difficulties. He theorizes on how his dreams and constructs apply to our lives as they are today, and how they would apply to the future generations.

Human foibles are most agreeably viewed by Ben, not with the eye and mind, but with an amused, joyous and non-critical heart. "He has an expansive sense of humor which reveals his depth of caring. He has never found anything funny about people experiencing pain or humiliation. Others find valuable lessons in his humor by learning to laugh with others and not at others, even when he is the object of derision." Ben usually ends his conversations at home with "I love you," whether friends are there or not. "No one ever asked him to say it," his father remarks. "He started it years ago and hasn't stopped. I asked him once if kids ever teased him about it, and he said a friend started to, but he just rolled his eyes and ignored it and the friend didn't continue. When my reaction was judgmental of the friend, Ben said he tried much harder after that to

understand his friend, because he felt anyone who thought that the phrase "I love you" was a source of shame needed a little extra care.

Does Ben represent the generation of the new millennium who seem to be coded differently than his predecessors? Is he representative of hundreds of thousands of youth who seem to have come into this world, not to destroy by perpetuating the wars and violence of the previous generations, but to help construct and build a new world for all future generations? Is he one of many who have chosen to enter into this planetary field of work with their elders in bringing forth a new state of consciousness as we journey together across the threshold of the coming millennium?

It is important now that we hear the inspirational stories of the Ben Pickneys of this world and the many other youths who do not have to strive to learn the hard-earned lessons of the past, and to unlearn the conditioned responses that have blocked and hindered the soul's full expression.

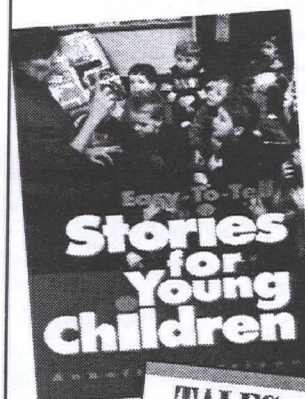
Ben represents the new youth, who come not to compete or territorialize, but to serve through their own examples of cooperation, compassion, understanding and love.

One day, about a year ago, after meditating with his father as he sometimes did, Ben shared the vision that came to him. "A group of light beings gathered above me. They were looking down, smiling and waving. I looked up and smiled. Soon I found myself floating up to join them. They clustered around me. They welcomed and embraced me, and I turned into light. Together, we all floated away."

Thank you, Ben. Thank you for your presence and the state of being you bring to all whom you touch within your life.

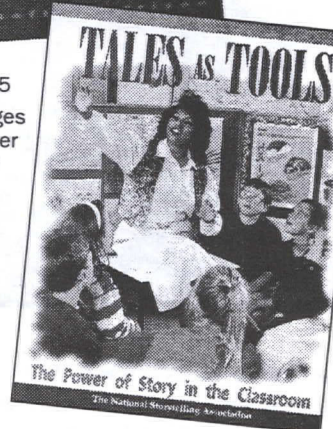
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