

Yvette,

from Syria to the Netherlands

Nieuwleusen, the Netherlands

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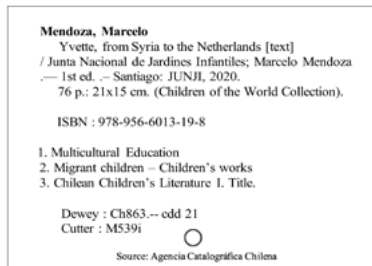
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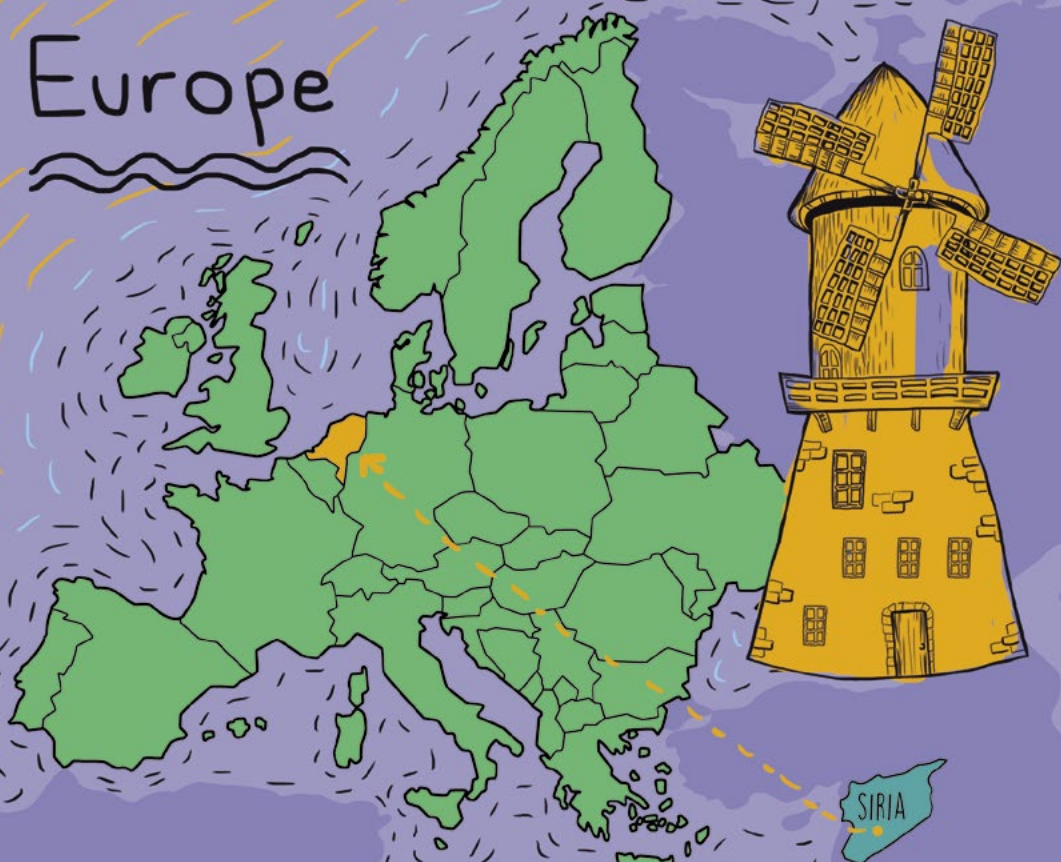
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Research and texts by Marcelo Mendoza
Photos by Álvaro Hoppe



Europe



The Netherlands



Nieuwleusen



ZWOLLE





Boys and girls are always the same at every time and place: curious, playful, energetic, affectionate, enthusiastic, creative. It is the environments they are born into and grow up in that give them a part of their personal identity, and allow them to share unique experiences with children from other countries.

To discover different realities and celebrate the cultural diversity expressed in traditions, environments and experiences is the goal of this book collection, created by the Junta Nacional de Jardines Infantiles (National Board of Preschools) in conjunction with the Bernard van Leer Foundation. Children of the World invites preschoolers, their families and their teachers to discover various ways of life and ways of being a child, through stories and a great variety of photographs from different corners of the globe.

Plentiful rivers, stilt houses, cocoa seeds, wild animals, leafy plants, joyful dances, ancestral rites, children's journeys after their parents' immigration; all are part of the scenes that this collection of stories displays, seeking to enchant adults and children alike and to send the message of diversity as something to respect and share.

Adriana Gaete Somarriva
*Executive Vice-president
National Board of Preschools
(JUNJI, by its Spanish acronym)*



Today's world needs stories that allow us to recognize and value the richness of diversity in all its facets. The JUNJI's Children of the World collection is a wonderful tool for sharing stories about children's harmonic coexistence in various contexts and cultures.

Human beings require moments of leisure, of plenitude, of enjoyment of free time. This collection of stories is a unique opportunity to create these spaces and form magical connections between educators and children. These moments of relating through stories are crucial for personal growth, for sharing with family and friends, for strengthening our community life and enhancing our children's capabilities from an early age.

Here at the Bernard van Leer Foundation, we firmly believe that the best investment we can make is that in children under five years of age. It is for this reason we have worked all over the world for seven decades in over 50 countries, seeking to provide a better start for all children's lives. We trust that in Chile these stories will help strengthen the bonds between adults and children, and that they will help broaden the scope in regards to the lives of children in different corners of the world.

Cecilia Vaca Jones
Program Director
Bernard van Leer Foundation





“This is me! My name is Yvette and I was born 3 years ago in the Netherlands, but I was already in my mommy’s tummy when she came from a very faraway place called Syria.”



“Yvette is our hope,” says her father, Ghassan. “She's the joy in our lives.”

Yvette smiles at him. Yvette plays. Yvette is a happy girl.



Ghassan and his family came from Syria, an Arabic country that has suffered a lot due to war. His daughter's birth in the Netherlands allowed him to smile again after some very sad, harsh years. They were kindly taken in as refugees by this country in the north of Europe.

"She and her brothers symbolize this new life," says her dad.



Banan is Yvette's mom.

Of the Islamic faith, she came to the Netherlands with her two sons, while pregnant with her youngest daughter.

“Here, we have found peace,” she says.





Yvette's brothers are named Mohammed (10 years old) and Adnan (8 years old). They were born in Syria, but they feel at home in this new country. They have new friends, and they like going to school. They also enjoy playing sports, like basketball and football, and having fun on the playsets in the town park.

DAD'S ODYSSEY

Ghassan Al Hariri came to the Netherlands after a painful odyssey¹. In 2011, when the Syrian Civil War began, his house in the city of Daraa was bombed. He was a hotel manager and was taken to prison.

“After going through that, I knew I could survive anywhere,” says Ghassan.

At the end of 2014 he did the impossible to leave the country, in order to save his family. He fled to Beirut, and from there flew to Algeria. He spent 7 days traveling in the Saharan desert, until he reached Libya. Together with other Syrian refugees, he hired a truck to take them to port. There, they boarded a small boat, only 4 meters long. There were 250 people, all stacked on top of each other. They were almost shipwrecked. He arrived in the Netherlands and was taken in by a Refugee Center in Nieuwleusen. In 2015 he brought his wife and two sons over. His wife was pregnant. Months after the family arrived, Yvette was born.

¹An “odyssey” is a long trip full of difficult adventures. Its name is taken from the classic Ancient Greek story, said to be written by Homer.



The town they live in is called Nieuwleusen. It's in the east of the Netherlands, a few miles away from Zwolle, and has a population of 7,000.

They have a Refugee Center, where most of its refugees came from Syria, just like Yvette's family. But they don't live there anymore: now they have a nice house, with a garden they grow tomatoes in, and a workshop.

"We live a quiet life. We have family activities, and participate in events from school or the Town Hall," says Mama Banan.

"It's very pretty where I live," says Yvette, "but in winter you have to bundle up a lot, because brr, brr, brr." It's cold!

"That's been hard to get used to; the snow, the cold, and that for half of the year it gets dark at 4 in the afternoon," says Banan.



A few miles away from town there's a big city: Zwolle. When Yvette gets to visit, she likes to touch a green glass sculpture in front of the old cathedral: a man with wings.

"He's a magic man, because he's going to fly," says Yvette.



NNO VIGILATE ET ORATE 1634

Siphon's
Zwolle

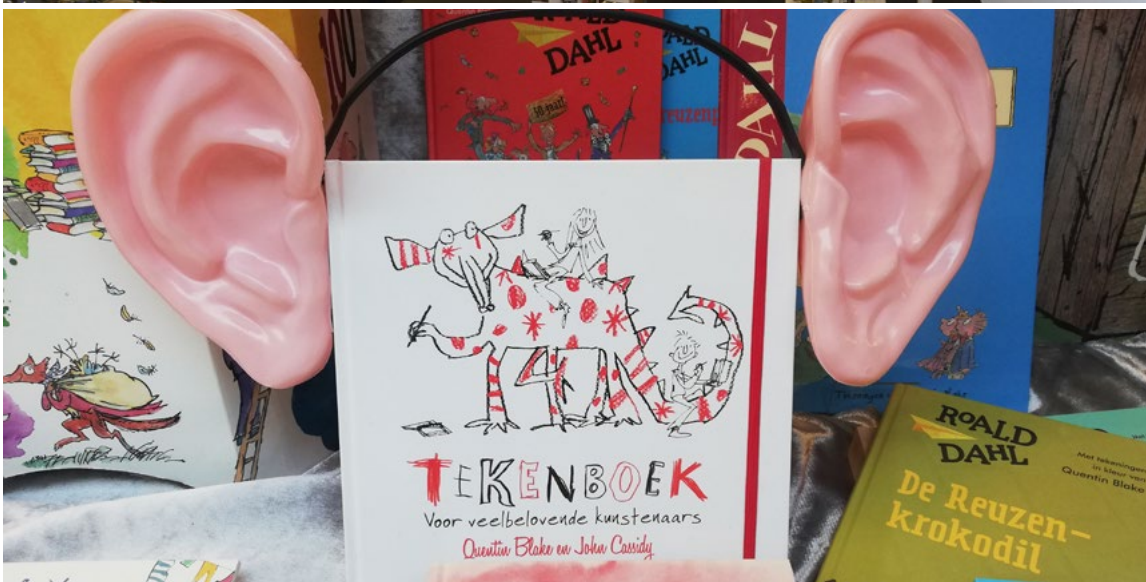
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1890-2015



A few months ago, the whole family went to Zwolle to visit a large bookstore, built in an old church with a huge pipe organ.

“In the Netherlands everything is preserved, nothing is destroyed. This church was abandoned, so they remodeled it and made it into a bookstore, preserving the original building,” says Mama Banan.

“There’s a lot of funny books here,” says Yvette, laughing. “Like this one, with ears.”





Yvette goes to kindergarten at the local school. Her mom takes her, and sometimes by bicycle.

At the school, her teacher waits for her with a smile, just like she does for all the children. Yvette plays and draws there. Nothing is strange to her.

“She’s like the sun,” says her teacher, and hugs her.



de spelletjes
tabel



Due to his professional training and the fact he speaks four languages (Arabic, French, English and Dutch), Papa Ghassan was hired as a social worker at the Town Hall: he helps other refugees in the area adapt to their new lives.

About half of them are Syrian refugees that escaped the war. His children quickly learned Dutch and English, along with their native Arabic.

Since his office is very close to her preschool, Yvette sometimes comes to visit him.

“When I’m older, I want to work in an office, too,” says Yvette.



In less than a month it'll be Christmas.

“And the Three Wise Men will come!” Yvette exclaims.

In this new country, there's a holiday tradition: a month before Christmas, caravans of adults and children alike, dressed-up and painted black, accompany Saint Nicholas and give out candy. They're followed by music and dancing.

Yvette gets very happy when she and her family get to see them on the streets of Zwolle.









One of the things Yvette likes is painting and drawing. Since winter is lit up for Christmas, she also wants to add color to her drawings. She colors in a picture of Saint Nicholas' caravan, printed out by Town Hall.

“When I’m done, I’m gonna put it up in my house,” she says.



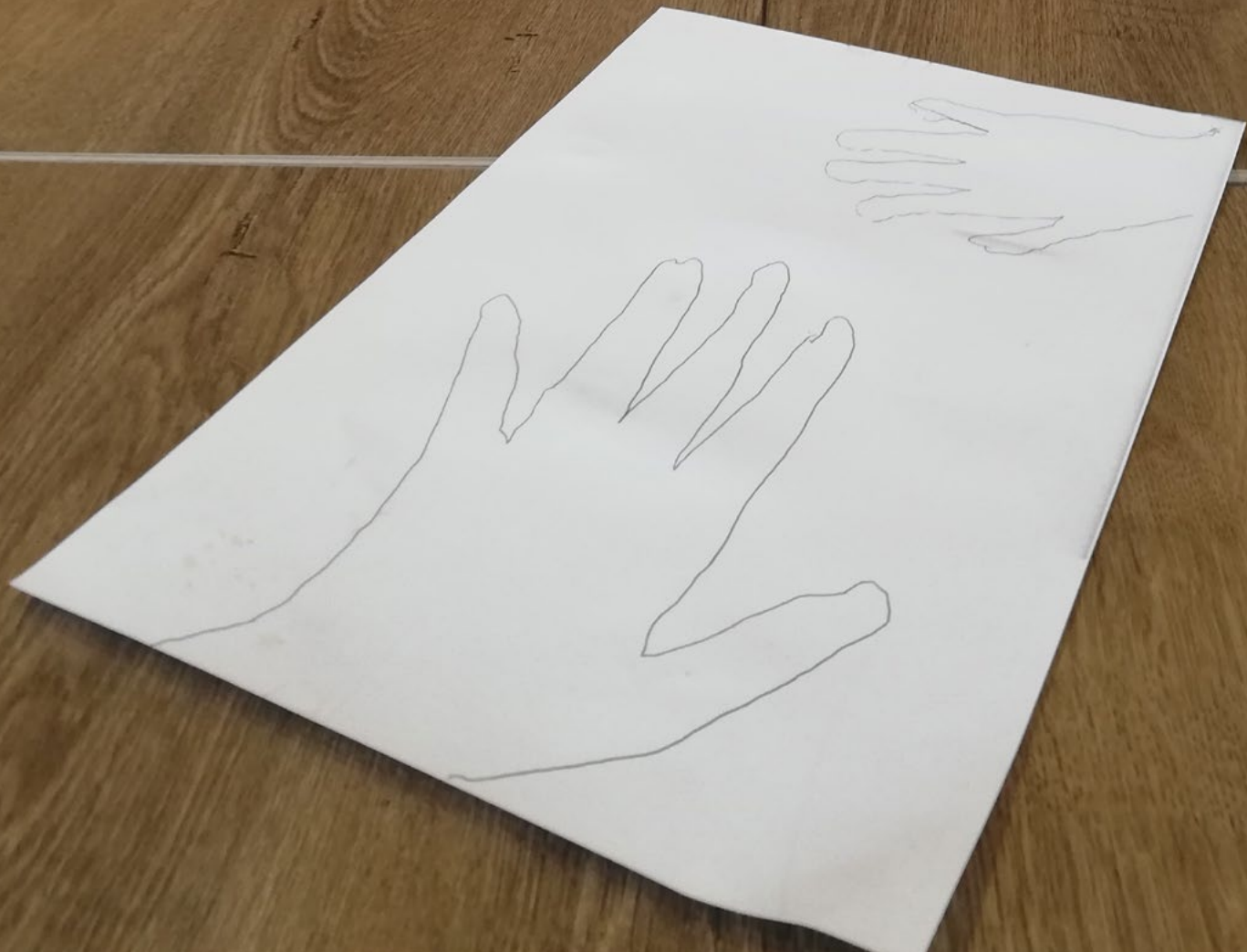
ACTIEF NIEUWLEUSEN
ondernemersvereniging



Kulturhus
De Spil



“Mom, let’s draw our hands! Let’s see who has the biggest one,” she says, laughing cheekily, because she knows hers is much smaller.



There are bicycles in Syria, but never so many as in the Netherlands. Yvette also has her own. She just learned how to ride it, although with training wheels.

“Right now, I only ride it in the yard and outside my house, and always bundled up, because it’s very cold.”



“The Netherlands has the most bicycles in the world,” says Mohammed.

“There are more bicycles than there are cars and people,” says his brother Adnan. “There are bike roads everywhere, and people can take them on the train. Cyclists always have priority.”





“Next to my school is my favorite place: the library, downstairs from where my dad works,” says Yvette. I come here to read stories with my mom after kindergarten.



Yvette doesn't know her homeland. But in her home, they keep a mix of their culture with that of the Netherlands. They prepare green tea and Arabic food. Her mother prays and reads the Quran, the sacred text of Islam. All of her relatives still live there. Her parents and brothers miss them, but they can't go back.

They lived in the city of Daraa, 60 miles from Damascus. It's a very old city, with plenty of history.



“In the Netherlands, there are lots of flowers and no wild animals,” says Yvette, “but there’s a lot of cows, swans, ducks, horses and deer! One time I saw some cows on top of a boat,” she says, laughing.



Yvette's family is grateful to the Netherlands. Sometimes referred to as "Holland" (the name of its biggest province), the Netherlands gets its name due to historically being a group of cities, sometimes located on land below sea level. The Netherlands is a country of explorers that navigated the world, of industry, tulips and dairy products. It's a place where people from different cultures have always been kindly received. It has cities with beautiful parks and a respectful way of life, always traveled by bicycle, despite the wind and cold.

"I love the windmills," says Mohammed.



H O L L A N D
Images

Amsterdam is the capital, where they can bring their bicycles onto the train. It's a beautiful city, with many parks, canals, and a very old historical district. There you can find Parliament, the International Court of Justice, and the Royal Palace.

"In the Netherlands, there's a King and a Queen," says Yvette, putting on a tiara, because she feels like a princess.

"It's a constitutional monarchy," Mohammed adds, more knowledgeable.







“The coolest city is Amsterdam,” says Adnan. That's where they arrived on a plane from Syria.

“It’s very pretty, because you can see hundreds of canals, with little boats where people live,” says Banan.

“They have really tall and narrow houses there, the narrowest ones in the world,” says Yvette, impressed.

“Rotterdam is pretty too, because it has some modern houses that are lopsided,” adds Mohammed.



KWEKER



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REKOS



E L'EUROPE



Since it's almost Christmas, Yvette's town and all the cities are adorned with colored lights. Even in the middle of winter, they bring joy.

"Here, we found the rebirth of our lives. Yvette is the symbol of that hope," Ghassan repeats.



TO KNOW AND TELL

Little Chick Song² (Traditional Syrian song for children)

These chickens are so cute!
They're happy and walking with their mother.
They drank water and said, "Hum, yum, yum!"
They raised their heads and happily thanked God.

هالبيضان ... شو حلوين
عما يدوروا حول أمّن مبسوطيين
شربوا مبيّ قالوا خييّ
رفعوا راسنّ حمدوا ربّن مبسوطيين

² A distinguished Syrian musician wrote about this song: "It's considered one of the most famous children's songs in Syria and other neighboring Arab-speaking countries."



SYRIA AND REFUGEE CHILDREN

Syria is one of the oldest countries in the world, and along with Mesopotamia (current Iraq), is considered the birthplace of Western civilization. The first followers of the Christian religion lived here, and built the first Christian churches. But long before that, the first known alphabet was also invented in Syria. It's capital city, Damascus, is the oldest existing city, with over 4 thousand years of uninterrupted life. Among many other gems, it hosts the ruins of Palmira, a city created by a woman: Princess Zenobia.

Syria is part of the Arab world, and most of its population is Muslim.

Located in the Middle East, a brutal civil war began in Syria in 2011. Along with causing thousands of deaths and much destruction, the war has also forced almost 3 million children out of their homes. Many of them had to flee to other parts of the world, as did Yvette and her brothers.



HEARBEAT (A song for the children of Syria)

[From Jordanian composer and UNICEF Ambassador, Zade Dirani, to the Syrian children made refugees by the war. The song is in Arabic, sung by a Syrian girl. Translation is from UNICEF website]

Amid destruction and fire, our wound is deep
We want to say it loud, but our voice is weak
We may be children, but our cry comes from the heart
We want to erase fear and be the change
We want to say it loud: everything is possible.

Someone listen, someone hear.
We want our childhood back

Together we can hope
We will be stronger and grow
With pain, fear and tears we write this song
Our hearts beat back to life

Our faces will glow and light this long
darkness
Dreams we built together will all come true
We want to say it loud: everything is possible

Someone listens, someone hears
We want our childhood back...



DARAA

The city that Yvette's family comes from is called Daraa. Located about 60 miles south of Damascus, it is one of the oldest cities in Syria, with much folkloric tradition. It was founded by Canaanites, and is mentioned in Egyptian hieroglyphics from the age of the pharaoh Thutmose III, in 1,500 B.C. It is also mentioned in the Old Testament under the name of Edrei. The city is home to ruins, caves and millennia-old houses, a Roman amphitheater and the ancient Omari Mosque, from the era of the Umayyad and Ayyubid dynasties.

The Roman amphitheater in the outskirts of the city is considered a World Heritage Site.

The city is very popular with tourists, as it's a stop for travelers going from Damascus to Amman, the capital city of Syria's neighboring country, Jordan.

حلب
Aleppo
M 45
↓

المطار
Airport
11
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درعا
Daraa
M 45
↓

القطيف
Qatif
المنيطرة
Kunait





COOKING WITH FAMILY

BAKLAVA (traditional Arabic pastry)

Baklava is a type of pastry made with pistachio (a common fruit in Syria) paste or nuts, spread on filo dough and soaked in syrup or honey. Other varieties use hazelnuts or almonds, among other types of nuts.

Ingredients

100 sheets of filo dough

Butter

1½ spoonful of tahini

100 g chopped nuts

100 g chopped pistachios

100 g almonds

1½ spoonful of sugar

1 teaspoon powdered cinnamon

Cloves

1 lemon

Preparation

Crush the pistachios, almonds and nuts after peeling them. Place in a bowl and add the sugar and cinnamon. Place the butter in a container. Select a mold to prepare the dessert in; a rectangular one works best. Grease the mold with some of the butter.

Place two of the filo dough sheets inside the mold, and spread melted butter on each sheet using a pastry brush. After placing two sheets glued together to create the bottom layer of the baklava, spread a layer of the nuts, sugar and cinnamon that was prepared earlier. Place another sheet of dough smeared with butter, and then another layer of nuts. Repeat until ending with another double layer of filo dough sheets, forming the top

of the baklava. Press down carefully to keep the pastry tightly formed.

Place the mold in the fridge for 45 minutes to cool. After removing it, cut the baklava in the shape of squares or diamonds. Heat in the oven for 8 minutes. During this time, heat up a glass of water, 75g of sugar, two cloves, a stick of cinnamon, lemon zest and half a lemon's worth of juice to create a syrup. Heat until boiling, then leave at low heat for 10 minutes. Strain the mixture. Once the baklava is finished baking, pour the syrup over it and add a layer of ground pistachios. Let it cool at room temperature before placing in the fridge for a couple of hours, to serve cold. Can be served as a dessert or as a sweet treat.

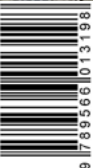
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The **CHILDREN OF THE WORLD** collection reflects the diversity and similarities of childhood all around the world and gives an account, with their own face and voice, of each of their lives.

These stories and photographs show what was before unseen: boys and girls in their everyday lives, cultures and territories, allowing them to be shared in homes, kindergartens and schools, with children and families everywhere on Earth.

