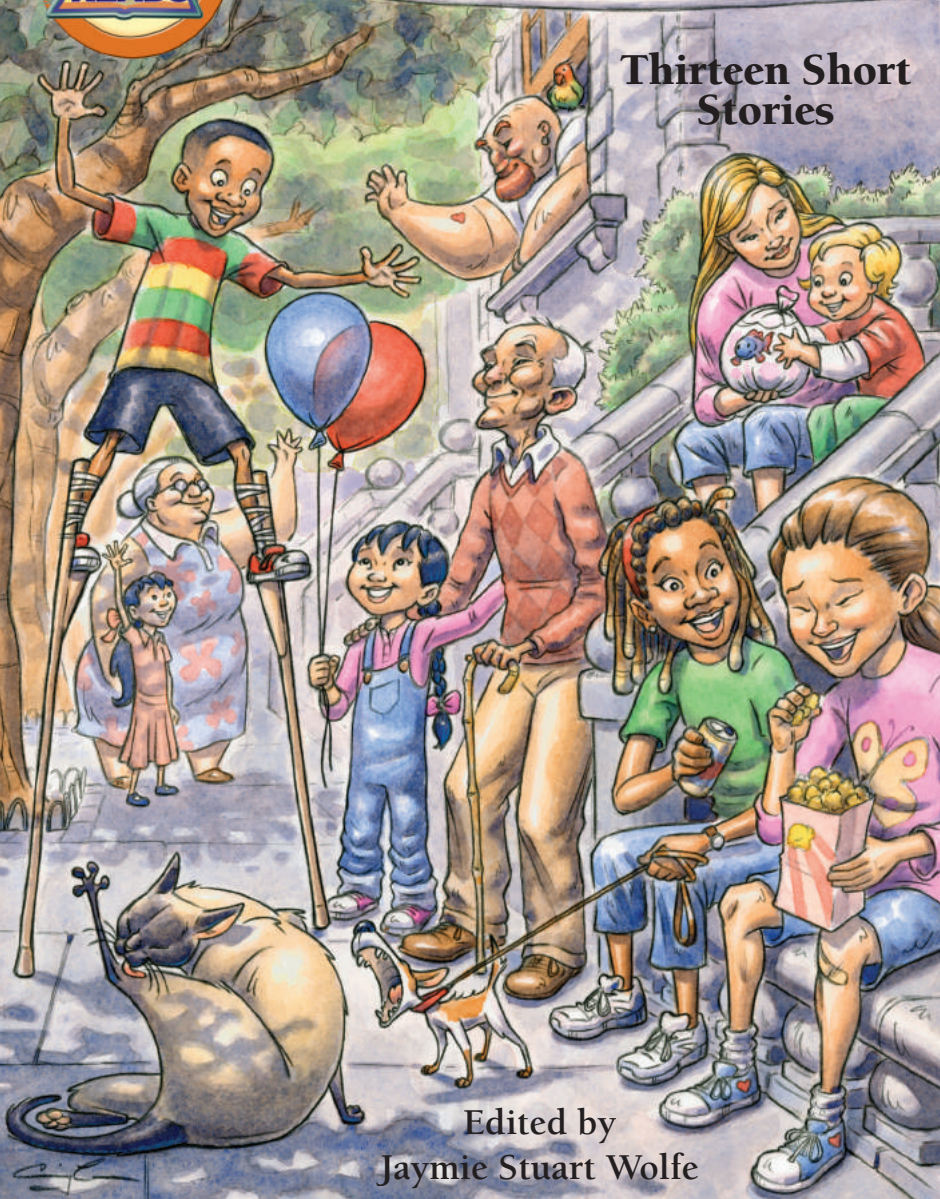




# Family Matters

Thirteen Short  
Stories



Edited by  
Jaymie Stuart Wolfe



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# Clueless at the Zoo

By Diana R. Jenkins

“Can we see the animals now?” asked Katrina.

“That’s ‘animals,’” Mom said with a smile. She always thinks Katrina is so-o-o cute. “And yes, you may.” Her expression became serious when she turned to me. “Molly, you girls need to be back at this picnic shelter in one hour. We’ll have lunch and then go do our work at the volunteer center.”

“Yes, ma’am,” I sighed. We couldn’t see much of the zoo in just one hour!

“You have your cell phone, right?” asked Mom.

“Yes, ma’am,” I replied.

“Are you sure?”

“I have it right here,” I said pulling the phone out of my jacket pocket.

“Good,” said Mom. “And I have mine. Call me if you need anything.”

“Okay, okay,” I said. “Can we go?” Mom frowned at my tone so I muttered, “Sorry, but we don’t have much time.” And we’d already wasted some of it! Katrina tugged on my sleeve. “Come on, Molly! Let’s see the animals.” Like I was the one holding us up!

Mom smiled at her again and told me, “Go ahead. And be careful.”

I led Katrina from the picnic area. When I saw the sign for “Monkey Island,” I said, “Let’s go see the monkeys.”

“Okay!” She sounded as excited as I felt, but she walked at the pace of a speeding snail.

“Come on!” I said, tugging on her hand. “We have to go fast, okay?”

“Okay!” she said, speeding up like a racing turtle. Then she suddenly stopped and shouted, “Look!”



She was pointing up at some geese flying overhead in a v-shape. Geese are cool, but we see them all the time. “Let’s go see the monkeys,” I said. But Katrina kept gawking up until the geese were out of sight. Then she poke-poke-poked along to Monkey Island.

The monkeys were so cute and funny, swinging, and jumping, and playing. Katrina laughed at them for a minute, but then she turned around to watch a squirrel eat popcorn!

“You can see squirrels all over town!” I said.

“Look, Molly,” she said. “Isn’t it cute how he keeps turning it around and nibbling on it?”

“Yeah, real cute. Let’s go see Water Wonderland.”

“Okay!” said Katrina.

I could watch seals and walruses swim for hours, but we didn’t have that much time! I tried to hurry Katrina toward Water Wonderland, but before we got too far, she stopped and shouted, “Look!”

I thought she was pointing at some flamingos so I said, “They’re big! They’re pink! Let’s go!”

Katrina laughed. “They’re not pink!”

Then I realized she was looking at some little brown birds hopping around in the grass. Plain. Brown. Birds.

“Aren’t they sweet, Molly?” she said.

“We have a million birds like that in our yard!” I grabbed her hand and jerked her into moving.

“Ouch!” she said.

“Sorry!” I said, not feeling very sorry at all.

Finally we got to Water Wonderland. Katrina took forever to go down the stairs because she had to put first her right foot, then her left on each step.

When she finally reached the bottom, I pulled her by the hand over to the seals’ display. They looked cool swimming past the window, but who had time to really watch them? I dragged Katrina from the seals to the walruses to the dolphins in record time.

When we came out of the exit, I looked at my watch. “We only have a few minutes left. We have to hurry!”

But Katrina stopped to watch a lady giving her baby a bottle. She even knelt down to check out a bug crawling across the sidewalk!

I couldn't take it any more! "KATRINA!" I shouted, jerking her to her feet. "You've seen a *million* bugs! The zoo has special animals! Get it? *Special!* It's stupid to come to a zoo and look at bugs, and squirrels, and geese, and . . . and babies! *Stupid!*"

Katrina was rubbing her arm where I'd grabbed her. Her eyes were filling with tears. "I'm sorry," she whispered. "I thought they were all special because God made them. The squirrel . . . and the geese . . . and everything." She swallowed hard. "I didn't mean to be stupid."

Suddenly, I felt as low as the bug Katrina had been watching. Lower! That bug had probably never done a mean thing in its whole buggy life! Unlike me!

Why had I made such a big deal about everything? Katrina was just a little kid. She thought that squirrels were just as cool as seals,

and that birds and babies were sweet. Now that I thought about it: wasn't she right? Weren't all God's creatures something special? Including my little sister?

And so what if Katrina was slow? God wanted me to treat her with kindness anyway. And, hey, it wasn't like Mom was never bringing us to the zoo again. After all, Mom had to be the best volunteer that the zoo had!

Katrina wiped her eyes and started walking. "Wait!" I told her. When she turned to me, I took a deep breath and said what I knew I had to say. "I'm sorry, really sorry. I didn't mean it. You were right about the squirrel, and the bug, and everything."

"I was?" she said.

"Yeah, you were right," I said. Then very quietly I added, "And I was wrong."

"I'm not stupid?" The way she looked up at me when she said that made me feel even worse!

"No, you're not," I said. "Sometimes I think you're smarter than I am."

She stared at me with her mouth hanging open. I waited for her to say something, but she just kept staring. Finally, I said, “You *are* smart. Don’t you believe me?”

She nodded, then finally spoke. “There’s a big fly crawling in your hair.”

After I shrieked and flapped my hands around my head for a while, we headed for the picnic area. We had to stop once to watch some bees buzzing around some big purple flowers. You know, bees are very interesting—even if you have seen a million of them!

## Questions to Think and Talk About

# Clueless at the Zoo

1. Do you ever feel yourself losing patience with family members? How do you handle your impatient feelings?
2. For most of this story, Molly wasn't appreciating God's gifts. What blessings are you taking for granted?
3. Why is it important to apologize if you lose your temper with someone?
4. If you only had an hour at the zoo, what would you want to see?
5. Katrina surprised her sister by helping her look at things in a different way. Tell about a time when someone in your family did something unexpected. How did the incident affect your relationship?