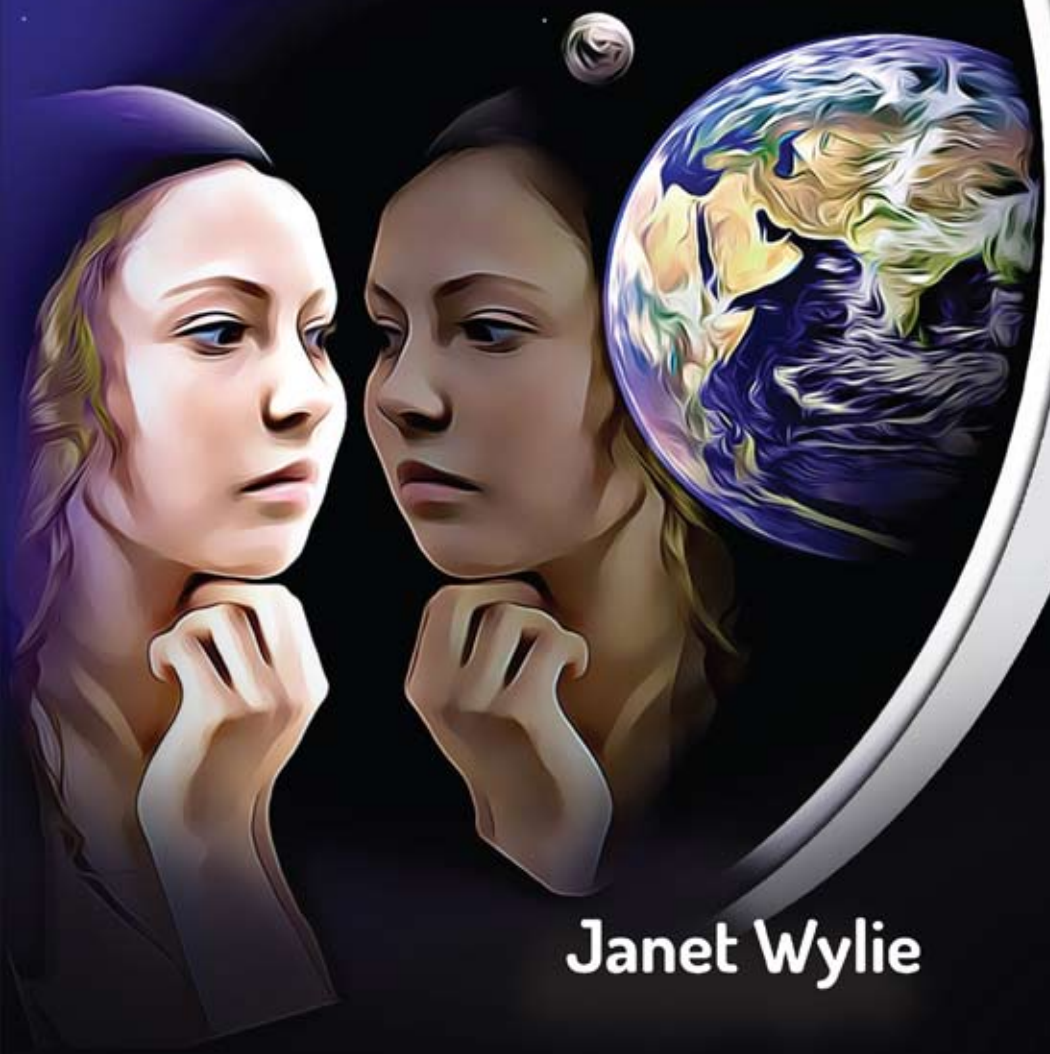


SPACE HOME 7



Janet Wylie

To my children's, children's children.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or, in the case of historical events or persons, used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is likewise intended fictitiously.

Copyright © 2022 Janet Wylie

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or in any manner whatsoever without written permission from the publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

For further information, contact:

Tumblehome, Inc.

201 Newbury St, Suite 201

Boston, MA 02116

<http://tumblehomebooks.org/>

Library of Congress Control Number 2022947559

ISBN-13 9781943431816

ISBN-10 1943431817

Wylie, Janet

Space Home 7—1st ed

Printed in Taiwan

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Copyright 2022, All rights reserved.

TUMBLEHOME, Inc.



SPACE HOME 7

UNCORRECTED ADVANCE READER COPY.
FOR REVIEW PURPOSES ONLY.
NOT FOR RESALE.
NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Janet Wylie

September 2077

Part 1: Leaving

Chapter

1

“Mom, can I go over to Chloe’s?”

“Breakfast.” Mom points to the breakfast table.

It’s set with a cereal bowl and a glass of milk. She’s in the middle of the kitchen floor surrounded by boxes and yellow tape. “And your dad needs help when you’ve finished.”

“Right, but after that? Please... it’s my last chance.”

“Miarra, do you really need to go? It’s so hot that the AC isn’t coping.” Mom wipes her brow with her elbow as she struggles to cut the tape she’s holding with scissors. “Live-time her on your fot, can’t you?”

“Duhh. Dad’s already taken it.” No electronics are allowed on the shuttle. In the space home we will have to use the fots that link to the space net, no arguments. It’s one of the Guardians’ rules, one that really annoys me. I know that the Guardians helped stop the Dry War and, under the State of Emergency, the President has given them the authority to restore California. But why do they have to control everything?

Mom raises her eyebrows. “You’re right. No need to be rude about it, though.”

Oops. Mom doesn’t like being corrected. She turns her attention back to the box she’s struggling to tape.

“Can I help?” I move to her side and hold the box lid still while she finishes the taping job. My hair falls down around my face.

Mom’s smile returns as we add the closed box to the finished pile.

“Please, Mom, can I go over to Chloe’s after I’ve helped Dad?”

Mom’s hands go to her hips. Her sea green tee shirt is already sweat stained.

Maybe more explanation will help my cause? I try again.

“She was gonna come over here, but she’s got to stay home to look after Janina while her mom takes their things to the transfer station.”

“I haven’t got time to give you a ride. I’m already running late.” Mom glances up at the clock to confirm the fact.

“What time’s your appointment?”

“At ten.”

“That’s the same as Chloe’s mom’s appointment. Does that mean we’ll be on the same shuttle?” I dare to hope. If Chloe and I are on the same shuttle then we’ll definitely be in the same space home.

“Look, sweetie. You know I’ve put Chloe’s family down on the form as our preferred roommates in the space homes. And they chose us, too. That’s all we can do.”

“I know.” I feel my face getting hot. “I just wish I knew for certain.” I warm to my theme. “And I wish we didn’t have to go at all.”

Mom shakes her head. “Miarra, stop getting wound up. There’s no option. You know that.” Her jaw is set. “We don’t have time for this. Hold the door open, will you?”

I sigh. I know I should stop upsetting her. None of this is her fault. I hold the door and Mom puts the boxes out front, and then turns back to me.

“Look, go over to Chloe’s if you must, after you’ve helped your dad. And please try to look on the bright side.”

“OK.”

“Did you finish packing your own box?”

“Yes,” I nod.

“Bring it down here then and remember to brush your teeth and put on your sun gear before you go out.”

“Right.”

I down the remains of my soggy cereal and, after a pit-stop in the bathroom, go to change my clothes and collect my box.

My personal possessions box is a grey shoebox-sized container into which I’ve squeezed everything I can. I am not allowed any more space. I spent forever yesterday choosing what to take. There’s no point in opening it again, I think to myself. I grab my thinnest white leggings and a long-sleeved shirt and review my choices for keeping as I get dressed.

No toys. Twelve-year-olds don’t need toys. Or books. Miss Sampson, the space coach, calls them an *Earth luxury*. Everything that I could ever read in space has been digitized. I glance over at the books left by my bed. They will all go into storage. My fossil and rock collections are coming with me, though. Once I’m stuck in orbit, I’ll take them out and they’ll remind me of the solid Earth below. The same for my giraffe, rhino and lion figures carved from redwood. And my photograph album from Grandpa. It’s full of old photos of California landscapes, including pictures of Martenello’s vineyard, his vineyard. It used to be located right

here, at the end of Salinas Drive. All of my photos and blog posts about nature are digitized and archived away, but it will be good to have some concrete pictures from Grandpa's days when I'm in the space home.

I tie my hair up into a ponytail, pick up the box and walk downstairs. The paper I have wrapped around all the rocks and fossils prevents any rattling, so I'm hoping nothing will get damaged in flight.

"Where shall I put it?" I ask Mom.

"Over there with your dad's and my things." Mom points to the other four grey containers. Grownups get to have two personal storage boxes. "And I think that's everything," she says with satisfaction.

I help Mom take the personal possessions to the pickup truck.

"See you later," she says, as she climbs in.

"I'll go and help Dad."

He is outside the front door. We wave as Mom pulls away, a small determined figure at the wheel of a too big pickup truck. All the things we care about are in there, ready to be inspected, cleaned and irradiated before transfer to the space home.

Dad turns to me. He looks as down as I feel.

"OK, Miarra-mine. We need to move all this lot to the curb." He points to the miscellaneous piles that stretch outside on either side of the front door and make our home look like a trash yard. "You move the small things over there. All the electricals that you can carry go to the right of the mailbox. The stuff for storage goes on the left of the mailbox. And the trash bags we'll leave back here 'till last."

"I can lift big ones, too, you know." I say. I don't want to

sound petty, but this idea that just because I'm short, I'm not strong, it's so irritating. I did not inherit Dad's genes for tallness and calm, but I did get his sticky-out ears and good muscles. I glance at his ears and smile.

"Whatever works, sweets," he says, regarding me with his long-suffering look.

After six trips up and down the drive, I take a break. I watch my father continue to move up and down, six or seven athletic strides before he bends for the next load. He actually is way fitter than me. Not surprising, I guess, since he used to own a gym.

Up and down the street the same process is happening outside each of the neighbors' homes, except those that are boarded up. The frustrating thing is that everyone, at least most of the grownups, actually wants to go. Kids got no say in the matter. My dad told me that the vote in Windsor was 83% in favor of leaving; kids to stay at the space homes, parents switching off between the space homes and the Moonbase. Everyone who is staying in Northern California is either old, or doesn't have kids and is involved in the reconstruction, working for the Guardians' industries. Windsor will become a ghost town. There will be no school here, no kids to teach. Sad. Totally, totally sad.

"Dad, how long, do you think?"

"How long what?" He is bending to add a box of lamps and their shades onto the storage pile.

"You know, 'till we come back?"

"Miarra..." He straightens up, takes off his baseball cap and wipes the sweat from his brow with the back of his arm. "You know I don't know. I could say, six months, a year, I could say two years, but you know I don't know. That's just

the way it is.” He turns around and walks back up the drive for the next load.

“OK.” I follow him back to the house. I’m sounding like a whiny kid, I know, but this uncertainty is tough to take.

“Will the house still be ours when we come back?”

“Of course. What a funny question.”

“But how do you know it will even be here?”

He picks up his next load.

“Because this place has survived sandstorms, drought, war and the earthquake. It’s gonna be here.”

That actually makes me smile. “Now you’re exaggerating.” I know that the earthquake of 2067 knocked out the Golden Gate Bridge, but it did not affect 231 Salinas Drive, Windsor.

I look at the remaining boxes. Maybe three, four more loads should do it? I balance one box on top of another, straighten up and turn. The top box tumbles to the ground.

“Shit! I mean, Shoot.” The contents spew everywhere.

“No big deal,” Dad says. “It’s just garden stuff for storage.”

Stuff that hasn’t been used for decades by the look of it. I retrieve a rusted trowel, a hand drill, gardening gloves rigid with age, balls of string and netting. I’m beginning to wonder how it will all fit back in the box. Two green plastic plant pots separate from each other as they roll away and there between them is a small brown paper bag. I bend to pick it up. Inside are four flat, sealed packets. I shake them and hear a dry rattle. Each has a picture on the front, and instructions on the back. The labels read, *Thyme*, *Lavender*, *Rosemary* and, the most curious of names, *Hens and Chicks*. Seeds.

“Hey, look, Dad.”

Dad takes the packets and sorts through them.

“Christ, where did you find them? They must be years old.”

“Can I keep them?”

“They won’t let you take them on board.”

“I know.” But I keep them for now anyway. I put them in the waistband of my leggings for safekeeping. Maybe Chloe and I can think of something to do with them. “I’ll go and get the tape for this box.”

Fifteen more hot minutes of work and we can finally see the wall of the house again. Time to bail.

“Mom said I can go to Chloe’s when we finish. Can I ride over there?”

“Sorry, sweets. Your bike needs to go into the storage pile now.”

“But what’s the point of that?” I think quickly. “It’s already too small for me. I’ll definitely have grown out of it by the time we get back.”

Dad takes off his cap again. The peak is dark with sweat. He scratches his ear. “I suppose you’re right.”

“And if we put it in the trash pile it’ll get recycled, right?”

“Right.”

“So, I could ride it one last time today?”

Dad smiles.

I’ve won!

“OK. Off you go, I can manage now.”

Chapter

2

I look around as I ride. It's all very well to say that we'll come back. I don't want to leave. It's always *The Guardians know best...* How do three super-rich Alpha Guardians and their Guardian employees know best about my life?

A high-pitched sound, like an angry swarm of bees approaching, makes me look up. There's got to be a drone around somewhere. Maybe a traffic one? I have that eerie feeling that it's behind me. Following me? The back of my neck prickles. But I'm not doing anything wrong. I've got my helmet on, there's no law against biking even if it is hot. I pedal faster. The noise gets louder. Chloe's front yard is ahead. I turn into her drive and glance back to see the metal spider zoom past, its helicopter blades whirring. I unclench my jaw and dismount.

Chloe and her baby sister, Janina, are outside under their enormous sun-yellow shade. I can't believe what I am seeing. The shade is angled on the ground so that it keeps the sun off a kiddie pool. A paddling pool! At least a quarter full of water!!

"A pool!" I prop my bike against the wall. The baby is

in the water, her dark skin lit golden by the sun shade. She splashes both arms like a demented hummingbird. Chloe has her butt on the ground next to the pool and her feet in the water.

“Hi, Miarra.” Chloe waves.

“Your mom let you fill it?”

“She doesn’t know. She’s gone to the transfer station. I found it when I was emptying the garage. And I thought, why not!”

“Right.”

“I mean, we’re going tomorrow and I’ve only put in a few buckets of water. And look how happy she is...” Chloe looks first at Janina and then at the upturned bucket.

She drips water over Janina’s head. Janina yelps with glee.

“Can I come in?” I feel like a kid again even as I say it.

“Of course.”

Chloe bum-shuffles to one side of the shaded area and pats the earth next to her. “Here.”

The baby splashes up another storm of water in greeting, so much so that she almost topples over. Her crinkled hair is plastered to her head.

“Whoa, kiddo.” Chloe rights her little sister.

I take off my sneakers and put my feet in.

“Ohhh, that tingles. So nice...”

Janina resumes her splashing.

“Janina, please...”

She splashes harder.

I sit down next to Chloe.

“How’s it going?” she asks.

“Oh, you know. It’s the end of the world. But...”

“I know. Life goes on. In space, that’s the only difference. Still, look on the bright side. California’s gonna heal.”

“Don’t you start! You sound like an advert for the Guardians.” I sigh and stare at the water. “I don’t know how I’m going to stand being cooped up.” It’s true. I’m the worst in the class at mindfulness and yoga and hypnosis and all the calming stuff that we’ve been learning. And how do you blog about nature when you’re stuck in a space home?

Chloe pats my shoulder. “It’ll be OK.”

Janina splashes my face. “Miaaow,” she says.

“I think she just said your name.” Chloe says.

“Miaaow, Miaaow,” Janina repeats. She gives me a triumphant smile.

I grin. How can I NOT grin at that! “Hi Janina,” I say, and feel the anger cloud lift. “No, I think she thinks I’m a cat.” I splash Janina back and turn to Chloe. “What if we’re not in the same space home? Mom thinks we will be, but she doesn’t know for sure. Why couldn’t they at least tell us that?”

“We will be. You’ll see,” Chloe says. She sounds like a mom speaking.

I smile. She is such a good friend.

“At least in the space home you’ll have plenty of time to practice violin,” I say. Chloe is unbelievably good at violin. She’s the living definition of *gifted*.

“True. It’s great that they are letting me take it.”

“Was it instead of your personal box, or can you bring both?”

“Both. I guess the idea is that the space home needs music. Mom took it to the transfer station with everything else today.” She turns to dribble water over Janina again. “D’you

think they'll let me practice violin instead of weightlessness training?" She sounds hopeful. Chloe has never loved athletic stuff.

"Maybe. But don't worry. You'll get the hang of the gravity thing. You just have to be ready when they switch the field back on."

"OK, Miss smarty pants. You can help me with that. Anyway, the other thing I'm going to be busy with, is this one." She points to Janina. "Because they're going to need me to babysit. Either Mom or Dad won't be there, remember." Chloe shakes her head at Janina like a careworn mom. The little one smiles back and mimics her head-shake.

"I can help with that too," I say. The baby is really cute, honestly.

"Baby-sitting can get pretty exhausting, you know. I wish my mom didn't have to do all the moving stuff on her own."

"Oh, yeah, your dad isn't here, is he? I keep forgetting." I trickle cool water through my hand.

"Yeah. He went to the Moonbase almost four weeks ago. It seems like forever."

"That's gotta be tricky. My mom and dad are both working flat out and there's two of them."

"He voted for the first shift, so Mom can get Janina settled."

"Tough. My dad gets to come with us to the space home first. Then he's off for his first stint." I feel like pinching myself. Is this all really going to happen? But it IS happening. Chloe's dad is already on the Moon.

"I don't know why we couldn't all stay at the Moonbase," Chloe says.

“I asked my dad about that. He said, *Too many eggs in one basket*, whatever that means. If we’d lived in LA, at least we’d have stayed on Earth.”

“Whoa. Inside a dome in the desert. Give me a space home any day,” Chloe says.

“I dunno.” At least I could have kept up my nature blog. But it’s not worth arguing about. We both fall silent and watch Janina play. I can feel water soaking up the side of my leggings. I bend to roll them up, and the scratchiness at my waist reminds me, the seed packets!

“Hey, look what I found when I was helping Dad.” I wave them at Chloe.

Chloe examines the labels and shakes the packets.

“Cool. Nobody grows seeds anymore.”

“Yeah, they were in with a load of old garden stuff.”

The baby makes a grab for them and Chloe pulls her hand back just in time.

“No, Janina.” She hands them back and I return them to my waistband for safekeeping.

“You gonna bring them with you tomorrow?” she asks.

“No way. They’d be confiscated.”

“So, what are you going to do with them?”

“I was thinking, shall we hide them somewhere? Then we can plant them when we come back.” *And then if they grow, maybe I can plant grape vines too, one day*, I think to myself. Grandpa would have liked that. I see in my mind’s eye rows and rows of green vines heavy with bunches of ripe grapes.

“That’s more like it,” Chloe says. “Now you’re looking on the bright side. Where should we put them? Where would we find them again?”

We paddle our feet in the pool as we think.

“It’s got to be somewhere that won’t burn,” Chloe says.

“My dad says our house will survive.”

“And he knows that because...?”

“Now who’s being negative!” But I have to admit she’s right. Dad can’t really know for certain. “All right then,” I say. “It had better not be in the house.”

“What landmarks always survive? What survived the fires?”

“Not much. Everywhere is so dry.” I suck on my damp ponytail. And then—a brainwave...

“I’ve got it! Stichen’s cave.” I’m patting Chloe’s leg in excitement. “Remember? The field trip?”

Janina splashes with renewed vigor.

“Genius.” Chloe wipes water from her eyes. “Let’s go this afternoon. Do you remember the way?”

“Sure. It’s not too far. But we’ll need to bike. It’ll be fun. The seeds can become our own time capsule.”

“Waiting for us to come back,” Chloe agrees. “No more splashing, Janina. We can’t get those seeds wet!”

Chapter

3

It's my last afternoon on Earth. After lunch at home, I wait in the shade of the old olive tree at the end of Salinas Drive. Five more minutes, then I'll just have to go alone. My mom and dad think I'm taking a farewell ride around town, which is almost the truth. They might have balked at the idea of me biking to the cave. But I have to be back before dinnertime.

Yes! I see a flash of color ahead, Chloe's helmet. Chloe's obsessed with the color orange. It looks good against her dark skin. I pedal towards her.

"You made it! I was getting worried."

"Of course. Do you remember the way?"

"Sure, follow me."

I lead the way as we head out of town. I don't want Chloe to think I'm crazy but I am pretty excited to visit Stichen's cave again. The funny thing is that I didn't even know of its existence until our sixth-grade geography field trip. How amazing is that? To have such a place thirty minutes bike-ride away and not known it was there? Mrs. Greatrix, our geography teacher, wanted us to actually *see* limestone formations, not just read about them in books. And it was a really good call by her. The stalactites and stalagmites are

awesome. I've been a couple of times on my own since and blogged about it. The cave's got bats and a sandy floor and you can sit there in the cool stillness and think about all the ages that it has existed. Maybe I *am* crazy.

"I'm officially at your place, remember," Chloe shouts as she comes up alongside. "Mom'll go ballistic if she finds out."

"Did she mind about the water this morning?"

"I tipped it away and put the paddling pool in the storage pile before she got back."

"Smart move."

There's not much traffic on the road. But as we approach the fire corridor, I hear the sound of a drone for the second time today.

"Is it coming this way?" Chloe asks. She looks back and her front wheel swerves towards me.

"Watch out." I swerve away and brake, and we both come to a quick stop.

"Sorry," she says.

We stare up at the drone. It is hovering almost overhead. The heat of the day bounces back off the road, and sweat trickles down my neck.

"Should we go back, d'you think?" Chloe asks.

"We're not doing anything we shouldn't," I say. "It's only another few miles. I'll bet it turns back once we're over the corridor."

The fire corridor is a wide stretch of tarmac that marks the edge of the town. It's like this big circle that is supposed to act as a break to prevent more wildfires burning the city. My dad says it's *Closing the gate after the horse has bolted*. All

I know at this moment is that if I stand here much longer I'm going to melt.

We go on, and the drone doesn't follow us. Twenty hot minutes later, my legs ache and my pedals will hardly turn against the gradient.

"Too steep," I shout as I get off my bike. Chloe's lagging behind, even though she's at least four inches taller than me. "Nearly there. Let's walk the rest."

"Did you remember to bring water?" Chloe says as she catches up. "I forgot."

"Yeah, I did. Let's get out of the sun first. Just round there." An outcropping ahead casts the road into welcome shade.

Around the bend, the escarpment towers above us. The exposed rock face is striped in grey and beige interspersed at intervals with dark clefts, like the spaces between a giant's teeth. The nearest cleft has an arched entrance, Stichen's Cave. I think of Mrs. Greatrix's awe-struck expression as she said, *a classic example of a limestone cave, smoothed by the action of water*. The water bit must have been a long time ago. Right now, there's no water in sight, not a drop.

"About that water..." Chloe props her bike against the cliff.

I dig out the two metal water bottles I'd packed in my backpack and hand one over. My mouth feels scoured by sand.

"That was some steep hill. I didn't remember that from the field trip," says Chloe.

"Duh. That's because we came in the school bus." I unpack the torch, the trowel and the metal box into which I've packed the seeds. The box used to house my bead collection,

but who needs beads now?

“Ready?”

“After you.” Chloe takes off her helmet and damp curls spring up.

I shine the torch through the archway into the darkness beyond.

We stop just inside the entrance and listen. I hear a faint rustling noise. Bats. Chloe grips my arm.

“What’s that?”

“It’s only the bats at the back of the cave. They won’t bother us,” I say. I hope I’m right. They’ve never been a problem when I’ve visited before.

I shine the torch around the wall inside the entrance and then trace it backwards and forwards over the floor of the cave. The surface is dry, covered in sand. I grind the heel of my sneaker into it.

“Here, hold this.” Chloe takes the box. I plunge the trowel at the sand. It pings off like a ping-pong ball on a table-tennis table.

“It’s as hard as moon-rock. No way can we dig a hole,” I say.

“How about hiding it under a pile of rocks?” Chloe suggests. “It’s not like anyone’s gonna be looking for it.”

“True.”

“Let’s get the rocks from outside.”

She’s already heading back towards the entrance. I follow her out.

We work together until we’ve piled an assortment of a dozen or so rocks at the cave opening. I go back inside to search for the best place to hide the box. The bat noise seems louder. I imagine bats flying into my hair.

“Any luck?” Chloe shouts from outside.

“Shhh!” I say and run out again. “The bats are getting rattled. Yes, I think so. Pass me the box.”

I put the box onto the ground, and with the torch propped on a boulder for light, I pile the stones on top. Within minutes the cairn is complete, a foot-high mound. It’s perfect. I wish that I still had my fot so I could take a photo.

“Finished,” I say as I get back to the entrance. “Do you wanna see?”

“I guess.” Chloe takes the torch.

“It’s not far in. Just behind the outcropping on the left of the entrance.”

While Chloe’s gone, I grab my notebook and pen from the back pack and sit down on a flat rock. We do need some record of where the box is. Who knows how long it will be until we come back? I make a quick sketch of the inside of the cave to show its site.

“Good job,” says Chloe as she emerges. She sits down next to me and examines the sketch. “Call it seeds of the future,” she says.

“OK. Seeds of our Future,” I write above the map. “X marks the spot.”

“How you gonna take that with you?” asks Chloe.

“It’s just a piece of paper. I’ll keep it in my pocket through security. No problem.”

“Here.” I turn the page of my book and start a second identical sketch. I write the title again, tear off the page and hand it to Chloe. “You do the same.”

“OK, crazy girl,” she says. “We’ll be back.”

About the Author

Janet Wylie is a retired professor of developmental biology, who has had the joy of studying embryonic development for a living at the same time as helping her children grow up. Now she is a novice writer of fiction for middle school readers, buoyed by the help of other writers and the enthusiasm of family and friends. In *Space Home 7* she hopes to provide a science fiction adventure in space. She aims for kids to imagine life in space homes orbiting Earth in 2077, and to suggest to them the dangers of, and possible responses to, misinformation in people's lives.

Author website: <https://wyliewords.com>

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to my writing buddies, Linda Daniels, Gretchen Gossett, Jill Harrington, Melissa Haylock, Ali Murphy, Catherine Peacock and Eva Sullivan for their deep reading and endless support, and to Pendred Noyce, leader of Tumblehome Books, for seeing this story to publication.

