

"What Lies Ahead"

In the early 1990s, a winning essay takes a boy to New York City where he learns important lessons about America and the world.



written by **Ellyn Bache**

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■ Greenville, SC

My cousin Sara comes to my house every day after she gets out from school.



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Back at home, I found my cousin Sara watching “Saved by the Bell” on TV. Sara was in sixth grade in a different school. She got out earlier than I did, so she came to our house until her mother, Aunt Molly, picked her up after work.

The downside of this was that, by the time I got home, Sara had either taken over the TV set or was playing Super Mario Brothers on my Nintendo while listening to my Nirvana tape on my Walkman. It was not always easy to reclaim any of the above.

Other than that, Sara was okay. Some days she dressed like a preppie, ready to be shipped off to boarding school. Other days she was all Grunge, in torn

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jeans and flannel shirts, looking like she was ready to head off to Seattle to start her own all-girl garage band.

That day she was somewhere in between, in jeans without a single rip in them and an only-slightly-grungy green sweater. When I told her about the essay contest, she was almost as keyed up about it as I was.

“See, I have this theory,” I told her. “It’s that a lot of things that have happened recently show that we’ve made the world a better place, and this will continue into the future.”

“How do you figure?” Sara asked.

“Remember Desert Storm a year ago, when President Bush sent our troops to kick Iraq out of Kuwait? A lot of other countries helped out because everyone wanted to make the Middle East safer. Now the Soviet Union has broken up, so life will be better for the people in that part of the world. Things get better all the time because of things we’ve done. It makes sense, doesn’t it? Mrs. Lurich is going to love this!”

Sara looked sort of blank. She’s not very interested in politics. “I thought the essay is supposed to be about technology and culture, too,” she said. “Did you know that at work my mom’s company has something that lets them get information right on their computers, instead of having to look in the encyclopedia or get books out of the library?”

“Really?”

“It’s called the World Wide Web.”

“Wouldn’t that be great?” I asked. “Not to have to go to the library all the time?”

Sara says that
people can send
each other
messages right
over their
computers!



Sara nodded enthusiastically. "There are other things, too. Mom says people in big companies send notes to each other over their computers, and someday everyone will. You'll write it on your computer and send it to somebody else's computer, and they'll read it right on the screen. No paper. No envelope. No stamp."

I gave her a look of disbelief and said sarcastically, "Think of the paper we can save."

Sara ignored me. "Not only that," she said, "but everyone will also have their own car phone. Only it won't be very big, and you won't have to leave it in your car. It'll be so small, you'll carry it around in your pocket."

"Sure. You won't have to keep your phone in your car, and you won't have to keep maps there, either," I laughed. "You'll probably have some kind of gadget

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that tells you where you are and where you want to go. It will actually speak to you. 'In one quarter mile, turn left.'"

Now Sara was laughing, too. "That," she said, "is one thing that will *never* happen."

All the same, I got out my notebook and started writing down everything we thought of, as long as it seemed remotely possible - and as long as it proved my theory that life in the future was going to be better.

For the next hour, we had a real brainstorming session.

Someday, Sara said, people wouldn't have to wait for re-runs to see a favorite TV show they'd missed. They'd be able to record it right on their TV. They could watch it any time they liked.

Someday, I told her, people wouldn't have to buy a whole tape to listen to on their Walkman. They'd be able to choose any song they wanted and store it right on the player. They could listen to R.E.M.'s "Losing My Religion," followed by something from Garth Brooks, followed by a song from an opera.

"An opera! What a combination!" Then Sara frowned and shook her head. "Connor, that's really too much. How do you get the song onto the Walkman? Will there be some kind of recording device inside?"

I had to admit I didn't know.

"Hey, I thought of something!" Sara snapped her fingers. "There are more and more Hispanic kids at school all the time. Maybe someday school will be taught in Spanish."



Since everyone watches American movies, it makes sense that pretty soon everyone will be wearing American fashions.

“And when you call a business to get help with something, you’ll have a choice of hearing it in Spanish or English. And if you buy something you have to put together, the instructions in the box will be in both languages.”

“Hey, let’s not go overboard,” I told her. But since I knew only about two words of any language other than English, I made a mental note to sign up for Spanish when I got to middle school.

Sara said people all over the world would wear American fashions someday, because everyone watched American movies and liked our clothes.

She said someday every town – no matter how small – would have restaurants featuring foods from all over the world, instead of just American foods. “It’s

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already happening,” Sara said. “Grandma says she never tasted pizza until she was an adult. Or tacos, either.”

I hoped that didn’t mean meals of snakes, like I’d heard they ate in Thailand. Or fish that could poison you if you didn’t cook it just right.

But I wrote down Sara’s idea.

By the time Aunt Molly came to take Sara home, we had a long list of things that, in the future, might not seem so crazy. In fact, they might make the world a better place.

I started writing my essay the minute Sara left. I worked on it again after dinner until the Chicago Bulls basketball game started. Months before, I’d vowed that homework was never going to keep me from watching Michael Jordan.

I finished the paper the next day. When I read it over, I was proud of what I’d done.

But as much as I liked it, I had the nagging feeling I was missing something.

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