



"I like reading because books can take you anywhere. You never know what will happen next!" —Janie Groetsch, Create a Character Contest winner

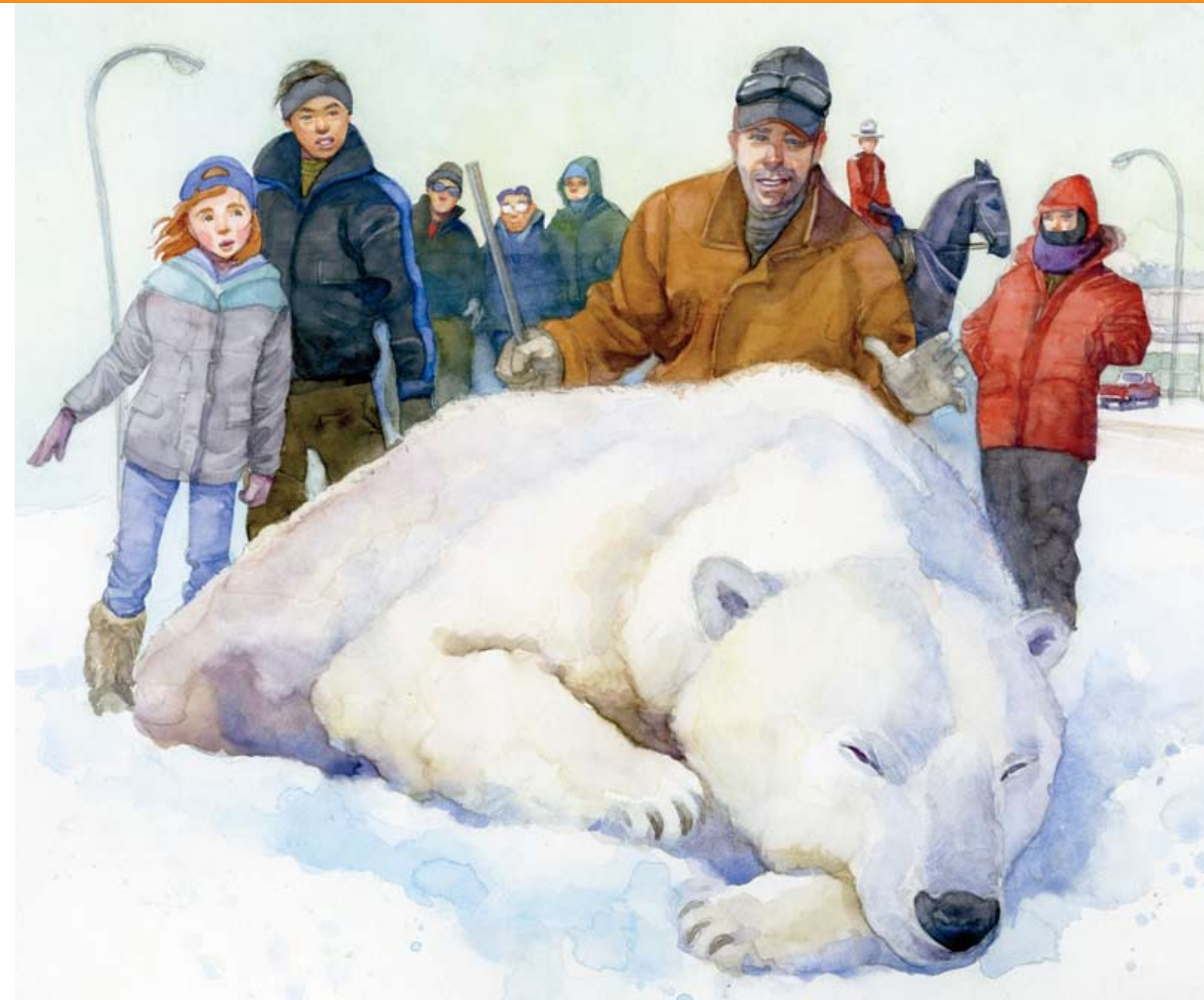


"If you can read, you can do anything! Every good thing that has happened in my life was launched by a good book." —Roland Smith

OF Dirty Nose

BY ROLAND SMITH • ART BY CORNELIUS VAN WRIGHT

BASED ON THE CHARACTER OF "SAMATHA," CREATED BY JANIE GROETSCH, 10
BENNETT WOODS SCHOOL IN OKEMOS, MICHIGAN
TEACHER: MR. BANAS



"... THAT'S WHAT WE CALL THE POLAR BEAR," Saghani said.

"Why?" Samatha "Sam" Woods asked.

"In the winter when the tundra is covered in snow, the only way to spot a polar bear is by its black nose," Saghani answered. "Smart polar bears cover their noses with their white paws to trick you. A bear that smart will kill you."

"The bear, or bears, we're looking for won't kill us," Sam said.

"But your father might, if he finds out we're looking," Saghani said, as he poured gas into the tank of his snowmobile. "This might not be a good idea."

Sam's father was Dr. Bennett Woods, wildlife veterinarian, conservation biologist, ecologist, San Diego State University professor, and author. Saghani was right. Dr. Woods would not be happy if he knew what they were about to do.

He was in Manitoba, Canada, on a year-long sabbatical to study the impact of climate change on Arctic wildlife. Sam had flown into the small town of Churchill to spend her spring break with

him—and she couldn't have been more excited about it. When she arrived, her father was chasing a polar bear through the streets of town with a tranquilizer rifle.

Sam and her father's Inuit assistant, Saghani—who had picked Sam up at the airport—caught up with Dr. Woods just as he let the tranquilizer dart fly. The polar bear trotted another two blocks before sliding to a stop in the middle of the snow-covered street.

Her father gave Sam a smile and a quick hug, then went to work on the sleeping polar bear, surrounded by a crowd of at least 50 locals, students, wildlife agents, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and research assistants.

He checked the polar bear's vital signs, then started the examination, speaking out loud so everyone could hear him.

"Female." He looked at her teeth. "Three years old, maybe four. Lactating. Thin. Not much body fat. She probably just came out of the den."

Lactating meant that she had milk, which meant that she'd had cubs. (Polar bears usually give birth to two cubs—sometimes three.)

"Where are the cubs?" Sam asked.

Her father shook his head. "Died in the den. Or they had an accident. Or a male polar bear came along and ate them. All we know is that she's been wandering around town for two days and we haven't been able to harass her out onto the ice. I suspect losing her cubs confused her. If she hadn't lost them, she'd be out on the floe

teaching the cubs how to snag ringed seals."

"What will you do with her?"

"We'll put a radio collar on, then take her to the polar bear jail for a week or so. When I get back, we'll haul her a few miles out onto the ice and let her go."

"Polar bear jail?" Sam asked. "What's that?"

Look for one of my words on this page!

They rolled the bear onto a stretcher and put her into the back of a truck. Saghani, Sam, and her father followed the truck as it drove the polar bear to the jail located on an abandoned military base north of town.

“How can you be certain her cubs are dead?” Sam asked.

“It’s very unlikely she would leave her cubs if they were alive,” her father answered. “Four months ago, the cubs were blind and deaf and weighed one pound. When they emerged from the den, the cubs weighed 25 pounds. Instead of hunting seals on the pack ice, she **depleted** all of her reserves to **nurture** the two of them. A bond like that is only broken by an unfortunate accident. If the cubs were alive, she would be with them.”

Sam knew better than to argue with her father, especially about polar bears. He was one of the world’s authorities on *Ursus maritimus*, or the “sea bear.” He was also a bit abrupt and intense, or “focused” as he called it, when he was working in the field. Suddenly, she remembered something he’d said earlier.

“In town, you said ‘when I get back.’ Where are you going?” Sam asked.

“I’m not really *going* anywhere,” her father answered, “but I’m going to be busy. A group of international climatologists arrived this morning. Their host, Dr. Tarshish, was called away for a family emergency, and I’ve been tapped to be their tour guide. You’ll be on your own for the next few days. Well, not exactly alone . . . Saghani has volunteered to hang out with you.”

“Babysit,” Sam said.

Saghani smiled. “Not unless you’re a baby.”

Her father laughed. “Sam wasn’t a baby even when she *was* a baby.”

Polar bear jail was in an old Quonset hut. Inside, there were 20 “cells” made out of cinder blocks with steel-barred doors. They carried the stretcher into one of the cells and rolled the bear onto the concrete floor. She was the only inmate. Sam’s father administered

an antidote to the tranquilizer. The bear was sitting up before he exited and closed the door.

“What will you feed her?” Sam asked.

“Nothing,” her father asked. “If we feed her, she’ll wander back into town. We don’t want her to associate anything positive with this experience. When we take her out onto the ice, we’ll drop her in a good seal-hunting area. She’s thin, but she can wait a few more days before she gets her grub.”

Sam’s father gave her a kiss and twisted her San Diego Padres baseball cap bill forward—something he did every time he saw her.

“Sorry, kiddo. But we’ll still have a couple days together after the climate people leave. I know you’re always looking for a good adventure, but stay out of trouble. Not that you can get in trouble in Churchill, Manitoba.”

But Sam could get in trouble anywhere in the world—and she couldn’t let an opportunity like this one pass her by. Although she loved and respected her father, she had a hunch the polar bear cubs were still alive.

Saghani drove her back to town. By the time they got there, Sam had talked him into taking her out onto the tundra to follow her hunch.

“This might not be a good idea,” Saghani repeated, topping off the snowmobile’s gas tank. “And you’re not going to like it out there. It’s miserably cold.”

“I’ll like it,” Sam assured him. “And all we’re doing is driving out onto the tundra. If we happen to see two polar bear cubs without a mother . . .”

“We grab them,” Saghani finished the sentence for her, then laughed. “Have you ever caught a polar bear cub?”

Sam shook her head.

He handed her a ski mask and a pair of goggles. “You’ll have to lose the baseball cap. Either that or lose your ears to frostbite.”

Reluctantly, Sam put her favorite cap in her pack.

They roared out of town, pulling a sled

loaded with their packs, nets, catch poles, dog kennels, and a 12-gauge shotgun, in case they had to scare a big Ol’ Dirty Nose away.

Sam thought the trip would never end. She thought she might freeze to death or go deaf from the sound of the snowmobile and rattling sled. She thought Saghani might be teaching her a harsh lesson in Arctic etiquette. Maybe this *wasn’t* a good idea.

Finally, he slid to a stop in front of a long snow-covered ridge, or esker, and shut the infernal machine off.

“Polar bear alley,” he said, swinging off the seat. “We had three collared females holed up here. They all left their dens in the past two weeks. We got **aerial** visuals of them on the pack

ice. Two of the bears had twins. One had triplets.”

Stiffly, Sam joined him on the frozen tundra and removed her frosted goggles and ski mask. The cold air stung her face and eyes.

Saghani pointed to the esker. “You can see the dens from here. Your father and I were here last week.”

Sam could see the disturbed snow leading up the slope to all three dens. They were about 30 yards apart. “You went into the dens?”

Saghani nodded. “Bears have been denning here for hundreds of years. The ground is stable.”

“Did you look for other dens?”

“We did a quick survey, but we didn’t see any others.”

“But there could have been others, right?”

“Bears come out at different times,” Saghani





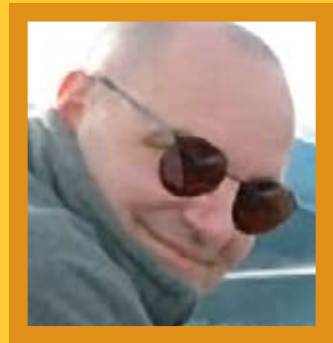
Create a Character Contest Winner!

Here's the team that brought you "Ol' Dirty Nose"

Janie is in 5th grade.
She created the character
Samatha . . .



. . . And beloved author
Roland Smith wrote
the story about her.



said. "Let's get back on the snowmobile and . . ."

They heard the sound of another snowmobile coming toward them.

It stopped next to them, and the driver pulled off his goggles and ski mask.

Her father.

He looked up at the esker. "I started thinking about your hunch," he said. "I told the climatologists that I had an emergency. Stopped in town to pick you up." He smiled. "Not surprisingly, I found out you had already left. I should have known you'd take matters into your own hands. Let's go see if there's a fourth den. Hop on."

Half a mile down the long esker, they found a fourth den. A few feet up the slope was a perfectly-formed bear print smaller than Sam's hand. Twenty-five feet above the print, two tiny black noses, each the size of a button, rested on the edge of the broken den against the white snow.

"This is the part that makes your mouth go dry," her father said. "Let's turn the snowmobiles in the right direction and keep them running."

"How difficult are they to catch?" Sam asked.

"Not difficult at all," her father answered. "But if they aren't the right cubs, there's a mother in the den with them. I'll climb up and check. If I come running down the slope and jump on behind you, you'll know they aren't the right ones. An angry polar bear can run 30 miles an hour."

He climbed the esker on all fours with a flashlight. The noses disappeared into the dark den. He pointed the flashlight inside, then turned around and shouted, "Bring the catch poles and the kennels."

The next morning, the marauding female was tranquilized again. They carried her out of her cell and put her into a cargo net attached to helicopter skids. The cubs were put inside the helicopter in their kennels.

An hour later, the helicopter hovered and descended. Her father jumped out onto the pack ice and released the net. Saghani and Sam unloaded the kennels.

"Let the cubs out," her father said. "They won't go far from their mother."

The cubs climbed onto their mother and tried to nurse.

Her father administered the antidote. Within seconds, the female lifted her head.

"Time to go," her father said.

Everyone climbed back into the helicopter.

From high above, they watched the she-bear and her two cubs begin their hunt for seals on the frozen ocean.

"Lucky for them you showed up," Sam's father said.

He twisted her San Diego Padres baseball cap bill forward and smiled.

"Lucky for me," he added. ■

How did you find out you won?

My class was just finishing Language Arts when my teacher announced that I had won!

What advice do you have for other kids who want to create a character?

Why not create a character that is just like yourself, in an adventurous situation? Your thoughts are interesting. Express yourself!

Who or what inspired your character?

I love animals, and I'm very concerned about the environment. I wanted my character to be a girl just like me who could have a fun adventure and help an animal in need.

Who are your favorite authors?

J.K. Rowling and Carolyn Keene.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

I want to travel the world as a zoologist, and be an ice hockey coach.

Why did you pick Samatha?

Choosing from so many wonderful characters was difficult. In the end, I picked Samatha because she was the character that was most like me. As a former research biologist, I have worked with polar bears in zoos, and I've been "too close for comfort" with them in the Arctic.

What is your favorite part of writing?

Before I write a story, I do a great deal of research. This is my favorite part of the writing process because I get to learn new things. A close second is inventing the characters that I would love to meet in person.

What is your advice to young readers?

Every author I know is a huge reader. If you want to be an author, you have to read—and write—every day. Writing isn't hard, but it does take practice. Every story I write is practice for the next one.