

# SUNNYSIDE PLAZA

Kindness  
starts  
from  
within.

New York Times bestselling author

SCOTT SIMON



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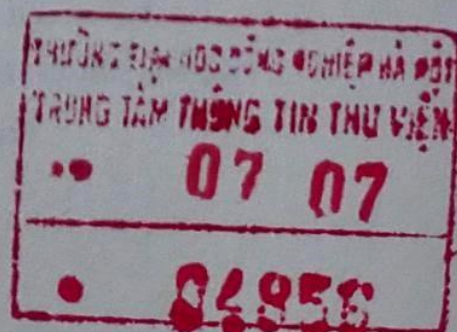


By Scott Simon  
GIFT OF THE ASIA FOUNDATION  
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QUÀ TẶNG CỦA QUỸ CHÂU Á  
KHÔNG ĐƯỢC BÁN LẠI



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*In memory of Cecil and David Rosenthal:*

“Moses’ arms soon became so tired he could no longer hold them up. So Aaron and Hur found a stone for him to sit on. Then they stood on each side of Moses, holding up his hands. So his hands held steady until sunset.” (Exodus 17:12)



## CHAPTER ONE

I CAN'T READ, BUT I LEARN A LOT OF THINGS. BRICKS are made of clay. Vitamin D comes from the sun. The sun is millions of miles away. There are 8 times 4 squares of tile on the ceiling of my room. I see that 2 times 8 plus 4 are cracked, and 2 times 8 plus 1 have brown stains. Smooth, strong, and satisfying. There are 4 times 8 plus 4 stairs from the third floor to the first. Venice is in Italy, but also in Ohio and Florida. Fast, fast, fast relief! Florida has alligators and crocodiles. They're not the same, but both bite. Snap, crackle, pop! Or your money back. Gets those hard-to-reach areas. Shirts have 8 buttons, but I button



7 because I don't button the top. I notice things. Today is April two-four and at six-zero-four in the morning I came down the 4 times 8 plus 4 steps to work.



I work in the kitchen of Sunnyside Plaza and live upstairs, too, on floor 3. There are 4 other people in my room—Mary, Pilar, Trish, and Shaaran—and Ray, Julius, and Tony next door. There are 5 people in the room next to us and 4 people in the room next to them. There are 5 rooms, too, on floor 2.

When I get downstairs in the morning, I always take 8 paper bowls at a time from the kitchen to the dining room. I do this 8 times, so there is a bowl for everybody and a few left over.

Conrad, the cook, was already in the kitchen. He has a big soft red face and a singsong voice.

"G'morning, Sal," he called. "Check the spoons, too, please."

The white plastic spoons were in a small steel tub. I counted 8 spoons 7 times, and then 6 more spoons.

"There is 1 for everybody," I told Conrad, "and 1, 2, 3, 4 extra." He sipped coffee and looked over at stacks of sliced bread.



"Ham sandwich lunch today," he told me. "I'll see if we have enough slices of cheddar, too. You like mustard or mayonnaise on yours?"

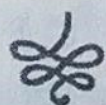
I made a face.

"I remember." Conrad laughed. "Nothing on yours, Sal Gal. Have some breakfast, dear, before they all come down. It's the most peaceful time of the day. Not a problem in the world can't be brightened by sunrise."



I live here because my mother got sick when I was in her stomach and then she couldn't take care of me. She went somewhere and hasn't come back. I lived in a few different homes and finally got here, to Sunnyside Plaza.

I'm 8 times 2 plus 3. My mother will be back when she can take care of me.



Sometimes at night, I wake and think I hear my mother in the hallway. I hear her voice—or hear someone's voice, and I'm sure it's her. I hear someone take a step and think it's her. I think she's just about



to throw open the door. I hear her say, "Hey, Sal, let's get out of here!"

It's hard to get back to sleep. So I sing to myself, a song she sang to me and I still hear: *Hush, little baby, don't say a word....* I hear that song in my mother's voice.

My name is Sally. Sometimes Sal Gal, Sal Pal, or Sallie Pallie. It helps me feel like different people when I want.

Someday, I want to go to the North Pole, too. I want to know how to swim. I want a dog.



"Hey, Sallie Pallie," said Darnell. He was usually first for breakfast. "Cheerios here?"

"Picture on the box," I told him.

"Love my Cheerios," he said. "Little bitty wheels roll down my throat. Roll around in my belly." Darnell had a big belly, and he patted it like a drum to a tune only he knew. "Dah-dah-dah-da-dee, Cheerios going into me!"

And then Mary, my best friend, and David came down soon and poured some cornflakes. Then Julius



and Tony and Pilar. There were 2 cartons of milk and 3 cartons of orange juice, and Tony shook cornflakes into a bowl and poured orange juice over them.

"Eeeew!" said Pilar.

"You're crazy!" went David, but Tony just said, "I like them that way. Corn and orange. Corn is orange. Orange corn."

"You are crazy," Darnell agreed. "Can I try?"

A red light from outside flashed and blinked over our tables. Dorothy, a nurse who worked all night, stepped out quickly.

"Just eat your breakfast, folks. I have to let in some people. No problem. Just enjoy your cereal."

The front door buzzed. Dorothy opened it. There was 1 man and 1 woman in dark blue who pushed in a small bed on wheels. Dorothy said the elevator was in the back, and the woman said, "That's okay. We can carry this. Let's just get up there."

We heard their heavy boots on the stairs. They whispered, but we couldn't hear what they said.

"I'm drawing a cat today," Darnell told everyone. "Like the cat I have with my mom."

"Bunnies better," said Pilar.