

Dear Ms. Langton
by Betty Rogers

When I was 11, I read a book by Jane Langton called *The Diamond in the Window*. It remains one of my all-time favorites, and believe me, I've read hundreds of wonderful books since then.

The Diamond in the Window is about a young sister and brother who go on a series of adventures in their dreams after finding a poem etched into a window in their attic. It's set in Concord and filled with references to Thoreau, Emerson and Louisa May Alcott. Eleanor and Eddy's dreams become increasingly suspenseful and realistic, until they solve the mystery of their long-lost aunt and uncle. Erik Blegvad's exquisitely detailed drawings make the book even more perfect.

At age 11, I was enthusiastically learning about transcendentalism. Years later when I read *The Chambered Nautilus* I remembered the dream where Eleanor and Eddy are captured in a huge seashell, in danger of drowning until they have a selfless thought that causes the shell to release them. I'm sure the book played a part in my choosing to major in English. I've had a gazing globe in my yard for years in homage to Ms. Langton's flawless finishing touch.

Every once in a while I thought about writing to her to thank her for her wonderful book. One day in August of 2004 I decided to try to find her. It was almost too simple: I Googled her name and up popped her website (www.janelangton.com) and email address. This is what I wrote her:

Dear Ms. Langton,

I've been meaning to write to you for a long time to thank you for writing *The Diamond in the Window*. I first read it as a child, and was simply enchanted. Later in college when I studied Emerson and the transcendentalists, they all felt like old friends. And a gazing globe has always had a place of honor in my garden.

I wouldn't be surprised if you've heard this story before, but I wanted to tell you about my visit to Concord. I was living in Austin in 1996 when my job ended and I decided to take a long road trip. I was planning to visit a friend in Amherst, so thought I'd try to see Concord, too. I had wanted to go there ever since reading your book. Of course, I'd always thought that the house was your imaginary creation, but I wanted to see the historic sites you'd written about and that Mr. Blegvad had illustrated so perfectly.

Through great luck I was able to stay with the brother of another friend in Boston whose wife happened to be a congregationalist minister in Concord. She offered to drive me there and let me spend the day wandering around town while she worked.

It was a gorgeous, brisk day in October. I found Sleepy Hollow Cemetery and paid my respects to so many of my heroes who are buried there. On the way back toward the Alcott house I noticed the visitor's kiosk was open, and on a whim I asked the attendant if she'd ever heard of your book. She smiled and said yes, and that the house was 2 blocks away. When my mouth dropped open in almost tearful astonishment, she smiled again and said, "That's the reaction I always get when I answer that question."

Needless to say I hustled down the street as quickly as I could and then just started laughing in delight when I saw the house. I took photos of it against the crystal blue sky. Then I went off to tour the Alcott and Hawthorne houses (and found his wife's name written in the glass just like you'd said it would be). The next day I came back to Walden, where I walked and said hello to Henry's spirit.

The reason I've wanted to tell you this story is because I hope it makes you son proud of the lasting value of your wonderful book. Thirty-odd years after first reading it, it still had the power to guide me to an unforgettable experience. I truly cherish this book and you for writing it.

Of course, you've written many, many wonderful books since then and I'm doubly impressed that you can also illustrate them. You're amazing! But it's the Diamond that stole my heart. Thank you for that perfect gift.

Best regards,
Betty Rogers

The next morning I had one of the nicest surprises in my life: an email from Jane. She started with "that's the sort of letter a person likes to find in her inbox," and went on to tell me about her plans for her latest book. We exchanged a few more emails but she said she was too lazy for a real correspondence. I was thrilled to have had *any* correspondence.

In 2007 I enrolled in a class called *The Soul of the Entrepreneur*. (In Austin, a name like that raises few eyebrows.) A friend had taken it and was so convinced it was just what I needed that she offered to pay for me to take it, too. What the hell, I thought. I'm not doing anything else on Thursday nights.

I'd vaguely thought I'd use the class to learn about marketing my handmade greeting cards. I brought *The Diamond in the Window* to class to show them my idea of perfection. Somehow or another I started talking about the left brain/right brain work I was doing. Dana, the teacher, said I lit up when I talked about it. We brainstormed about what to call it. She suggested The Window to the Diamond.

I loved the idea of playing with one of my favorite sets of words in the English language to make it perfectly represent my work. So I sent Jane Langton another email:

You might be interested to hear that I've started teaching about 'non-dominant' handwriting. It's such a powerful and soothing way to get in touch with one's inner/essential self and I want to share it with everyone. I'm calling my workshop 'The Window to the Diamond,' partially in honor of your splendid book and partially because that's exactly what this kind of writing is. I hope you don't mind my playing with your title. If anyone comes up and asks me if I know about a book with a similar name, I'll probably hug them!!

Jane wrote right back: "The Window to the Diamond! Golly!" I knew I was on to something.