

# Putting Faces on Places

*I like to imagine a day when my daughters can give a great spin to any globe and know that the colorful patches are filled with colorful people, many of whom they may come to know.*

Susan Sarver

Illustration by Betsy James

Most of us still carry around the baggage we toted about during childhood. It may have expanded a bit, and changed its style a few times for the sake of appearance; still, the threads of childhood impressions that form the fabric of being are too tightly woven to be dismantled

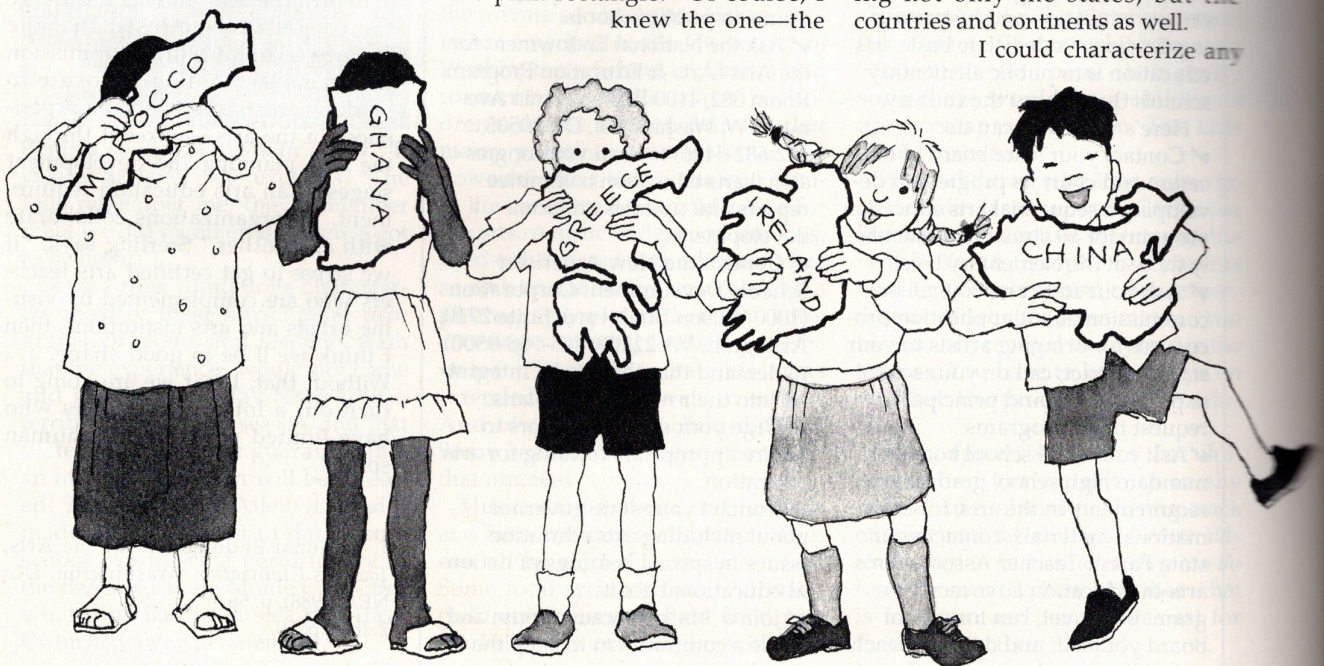
completely by the passage of time. Despite these handicaps, we strive to create more true-to-life impressions for our children.

The other day, while my six year old was playing with the globe, she announced that she was born in Alabama. "You know," she added, "the pink rectangle." Of course, I knew the one—the

pink rectangle stuck between the green truncated flag and the purple pear. I knew my geography. A familiar image of the states flashed to mind like the memory of an old patchwork quilt.

In elementary school, I used this color-shape strategy for remembering not only the states, but the countries and continents as well.

I could characterize any



geographic area by simply finding it on a map and noting its color and its shapely distinctions—a mental trick quite effective in test taking. As I moved through the grades and tackled more sophisticated lessons in geography, I added to my mental sketch the shapes of agricultural products, natural resources, factories, and commercial goods. These details I would commit to memory, all the while wondering, *Where are the people?*

The question returned with my daughter's recent declaration. I wondered about *her* thoughts as she pointed to that pink rectangle. Maybe she thought the ground was really pink—that the rich, ruddy hue of Alabama's soil looked like cotton candy. Maybe she thought the people were tucked neatly beneath the tiny patch.

I was saddened to see her peering at that faceless representation of our planet while singling out the rectangle with which she felt a special connection. I longed to convey that the most significant parts of the model were the faces that weren't there. So at that moment, I took our standard, old globe into my own hands and began to humanize it.

My daughter and I gathered all the "people stickers" we could find—the plastic ones that adhere so well to car windows and bathtubs. With a good-sized

population assembled before her, my daughter determined where these plastic people would live. Their placement on the globe was a serious affair: something akin to a genuine global birth packed with reverence and wonder. She scrutinized the continents and countries; asked about climates, clothing, and family traditions; and then gave each person a home.

The event quickly attracted the interest of my 10-year-old daughter. Acutely aware of the recent war, she picked up a sticker, placed it on the globe, and said solemnly, "This girl lives near the Persian Gulf."

Months passed, and the people began to lose their "stick." Whenever our globe takes a spin these days, the plastic inhabitants hang loosely. Often, they fall from their countries. Quickly rescued by a caring young hand, they stop to visit with their continental neighbors on the way back home. Now and then, they even exchange homes for a while, sampling a cold polar region in lieu of

island life, and vice versa.

Perhaps one day, truly indigenous-looking men, women, and children will dot the territories of our maps and globes. Maybe these inhabitants, too, will be transposable. Until then, my daughters will carry with them the image of our home-brewed orb, with its generic little smiles.

Now, more than ever, children deserve to grow up picturing our planet as something other than a patchwork of color. I like to imagine a day when my daughters can give a great spin to *any* globe and know that the colorful patches are filled with colorful people, many of whom they may come to know. Today's great spinning ball, with its borders and boundaries and territorial names, is incomplete without the people who tend it and walk upon its turf. With them, it will be a true model of the real world.

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