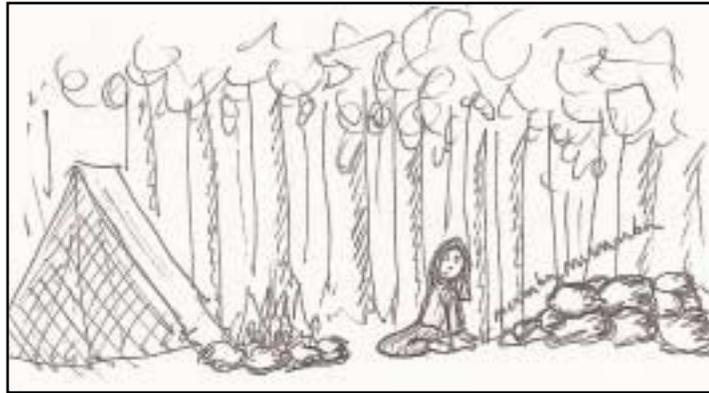


# \* Rocktalker ◦

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A short story, sort of, by Stuart Baum  
*To be read aloud.*

Illustrations by Zoë Baum

\* For My Children, Who Are My Sun And My Moons ○

Not too long ago and not that far from here, there was little girl who could talk to rocks.

Her first name was Lucy. I wish I could tell you that her last name was Stone or Quarry or, even, McAdam, but it wasn't. It was Katz.

When she was very young, she thought that *everyone* could talk to rocks, but by the time she was in Kindergarten she believed that she was the only one who could.

One day in school, every one of the children was asked to tell the class something special about themselves.

One of the children said he had a wart on this big toe, which was true, but no one thought it was *that* special. Another child said she could whistle through her nose, which everyone in the class thought *was* pretty amazing, though you had to be very, very quiet to hear her.

Lucy told the class that she could talk to rocks. Most of the other children laughed and rolled their eyes. The teacher said it would be very special, indeed, if it *were* true.

One of the children, and not even one of Lucy's friends, asked, "What do rocks *say*?"

Lucy responded, "Nothing very interesting, actually. Just where they were before and sometimes what they saw long, long ago."

Most of the children forgot about Lucy's special ability by the time it was their turn to say what made them special.

At recess, though, Grant, the mean kid in the class, held up a rock he had found and demanded, "Hey, *rocktalker*! What does *this* rock say?"

Lucy listened, but before she could hear what it had to say, Grant threw the rock away. He had tired of the game. "Sheesh! What a weirdo!" he said.

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Here is how it works:

Lucy didn't so much *talk* to the rocks since they weren't really interested in what *she* had to say, but they did tell her things as she went by.

Things like:

*There were once Indians here.*

Or:

*I was many, many miles away until the ice brought me here. That was a long, long time ago for people. But not so long for me.*

Or:

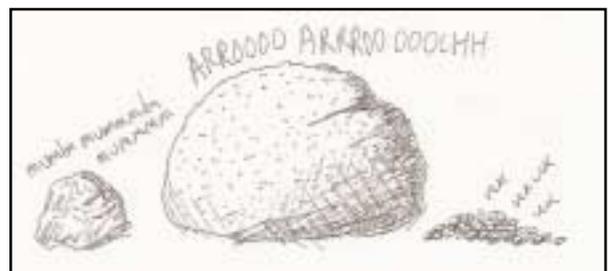
*I used to be part of a mountain.*

They didn't speak in words, as you and I do. It was more that they put pictures in Lucy's head with their soft, grunting sounds. Picture like a large mountain and a missing place where the rock used to be.

Okay, it sounds odd, perhaps, but most things that are true *do* sound odd, especially if you say them out loud.

Let's say you are walking through the woods. You hear a few birds chirping certainly. The wind rustling the leaves. Crickets or frogs or something else underneath all that. If you are lucky, you'll hear the *tap tap tap* of a distant woodpecker. And, every now and then, the *scree-iitch* of a squirrel or a chipmunk or, even a snake, darting through the underbrush.

Lucy hears all that but also hears the soft, deep mumbles of the rocks in the stone walls *mumba-mummba-murrrmm* and the almost purring grunts of the pebbles on the path *uck-uck-uck* and, every now and then, the groan of a boulder far away *arrrroooo*, *aroochhh* or much closer *AROOO-oochhh! Arroo-OOGH!*



When the rocks and stones and boulders can tell she actually hears them, they become even louder and even more insistent. They want her to hear their story and understand, since so few other people can.

The sound is almost deafening and if you were walking with Lucy in the woods, you might see her, every now and then, cover her ears with her hands as if she were near a construction site.

Now you know what it sounds like and perhaps you no longer think it is such a great ability, but, most of the time anyway, Lucy can let it all wash over her as you do with the crickets and the birds and the frogs. And, if she listens carefully, she hears something worth hearing.

Now that you know how it works, let's get back to the story.

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One weekend her Father took her older brother and her camping in Wisconsin. When they pitched their tent, Lucy told them that their used to be Indians just down the hill a few steps. So the three of them went hunting for arrowheads.



Her brother found one. Her father found two. Lucy found fourteen. And the nicest ones as well.

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A number of years later, her whole class went on a field trip to Nature's Classroom. It was mostly a different group of children than her Kindergarten class, but Grant was still there.

They were all sitting on rocks around a campfire listening to someone talk about the area.

During a pause, Grant yelled across the fire, "Hey, rocktalker!" Are the rocks mad about the fire?" He laughed until the teacher shushed him.



The teacher explained that the native people used to bake pottery right on this spot. The rocks agreed and told Lucy where some pottery was still buried.

Lucy asked the teacher if they could dig for some pottery. The teacher said it would be fine, but they shouldn't expect to find anything,

Everyone started to dig in different places, but Grant followed Lucy and dug near her. They both found some clay shards and Grant found a small bowl that was mostly whole.

The next day Grant came over to Lucy. He looked to see if anyone else was around and Lucy was worried that he might punch her.

But instead, in a very soft voice, he asked, “Can you *really* talk to rocks?”

She nodded.

“Can you find me another pot?”

She shrugged, but then asked out loud to all the rocks in the area, “Any more pots around here?”

Grant looked around to see if he could see any of the rocks talking, but nothing seemed to happen.

“There is more under that bush,” said Lucy. When Grant dug under the bush, he did find some more pottery shards, one of which was painted with orange and black stripes. He put it in his pocket and said nothing more about it.

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If that were the whole story, it would be pretty amazing I think, but probably not as exciting as you might have wanted. Good thing there is more to Lucy’s story than finding pottery and arrowheads. In fact, there is more to Lucy’s story than what I am going to tell you next. But this next part is worth hearing.

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If you were able to fly, for example, you would probably want to learn more about birds. If you could breathe water and swim to the very depths of the ocean, I expect you’d want to know more about fish and squid and, even more likely, sharks.

So it should come as no surprise that Lucy learned a great deal about stones and rocks when she was young. For this reason, she became very interested in the Pyramids, which led her to learn about an archeologist named Reginald Pravey.

Reginald Pravey was one of very many archeologists studying the Pyramids. But he had one thing that made him special to Lucy. In his speeches, he says, (and you have to imagine the stuffy English accent since I am not so good at doing it) “The care that the Egyptians took with these stones is what really should be studied. It’s as if they revered the stones more even than they revered the pyramids or their Pharaoh.”

You can imagine why this caught Lucy’s attention and why she wanted to help Mr. Pravey.

She learned that Mr. Pravey was speaking at a local college and she decided to attend his lecture. You have to remember that this is a nine-year old girl sitting in on a lecture for college students and professors.

The lecture was about as boring as you might expect. While Pravey had sample stones and some stone-working tools for show and tell, most of the lecture was just talking. He spoke about how the Egyptians formed stones into squares, the tools they used, where they got the stones, and from what kinds of materials the stones were originally formed. Lucy knew he got most of it right, but not all of it. What she did not know for certain, the stones told her. She didn't correct his mistakes, however, since the errors were not important.

He also said he believed there was another pyramid made from these exact types of stones, a 'practice' pyramid he explained. He picked up one of the stones and explained that it was a perfect 1/20th replica of the stones used to build the pyramid at *Meidum* (a location in Egypt where one of the first, and not-so-successful pyramids was built) and that it was made at about the same time.

He said the Egyptians practiced making pyramids, so they could learn about the construction and determine how many stones they needed, exactly how large they had to be, and if there were any tricks. He said he doubted they finished this trial pyramid, and likely took most of the stones with them to Meidum.

One of his goals, Pravey said, was to find this practice site. He believed archeologists would learn more about building pyramids at this one spot than they had from anywhere else.



After the lecture, when a few teachers came forward to talk to Mr. Pravey, Lucy asked him if she could look at the rocks and tools.

He said, "But of course," as if he were speaking to another adult, not a child. For Lucy, this made all the difference. She liked him wholeheartedly and decided to help him find his practice pyramid. As we know she could.

While Pravey continued discussing rocks and tools with the other professors, Lucy talked to (or more like listened to) the rocks and stone samples. One of them, a broken brick-shaped clay-colored stone, told her what Pravey wanted to know.

She brought the stone over to Pravey and handed it to him. It never occurred to her that she was interrupting the discussion. He took it and immediately used it to explain a point he was making to the other teachers.

Finally, he turned to Lucy and asked matter-of-factly, “Why did you hand me this stone?”

She replied simply, “It was made at your practice site.” Then she spoke as if she were describing a picture. “When you are facing the mountains, to the left, most of the way, you will see two waves with a white bird ... I do not know what the bird is called ... trapped in between. It’s at the base of the wave on the right. It’s in the shallow indented place for rolling out grain ... I do not know what this thing is called.”



Everyone, of course, was silent as they listened to Lucy. A few professors chuckled and walked away. Another continued talking as soon as Lucy stopped, but Pravey got a far away look on his face and then, slowly, said, “I think I know where you mean.” He did not ask how she knew.

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It took Pravey almost six years (archeology does not happen fast) but he found it. The practice pyramid was almost exactly as he expected and, also as he expected, archeologists *did* learn a great deal about pyramid building from his *and Lucy's* discovery.

He named the site “Lucy’s Trial Site,” but archeologists refer to it as “Pravey’s Practice Pyramid.” I think you can understand why.

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You might think that Lucy joined Pravey and became a famous archeologist herself. She did not. And while it took me a long time to get to this point in her story, I will now tell you what happened to Lucy.

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Everyone’s life has a turning point. A moment, sometimes big, sometimes small, that changes what your life will become.

There are three types of turning points:

The first is when you make a sudden decision and then work to make that decision into your entire life. For example, you suddenly decide: ‘I want to be a fireman!’ Or ‘I want to be a ballerina!’ Then you work years and years until it becomes true.

The second type is when one small decision leads to another small decision and soon enough these small decisions grow to become your life. For example, you start riding horses, which leads you to working in a stable, which leads you, many years later, to owning a horse farm.

The turning point in Lucy’s life was the third kind: when something happens and your life, as a result, is suddenly changed. For an example of this, just listen to the rest of her story.

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Lucy is now seven years older than when we last saw her at nine, making her sixteen. Reginald Pravey has discovered his pyramid and is excavating away. Every now and then he takes the time to send Lucy a postcard, which makes both of them happy.

Lucy is on a vacation with her parents in the mountains of Colorado. It is summer. She is hiking through the woods with her Dad when she hears it. At first it is a low rumbling, as if there were many people whispering the same word all at once, but, as you know, these are the rocks. They are saying, “Krakatoa.”



Krakatoa is a volcano in Indonesia, which erupted just over a hundred years ago taking the better part of an island with it. Everything on the island – and most of the island itself – is now below the ocean. Imagine if there had been a large city on that island when the eruption occurred.



But the rocks all around Lucy weren’t talking about Krakatoa itself. They were talking about another volcano that was going to explode *like* Krakatoa. The volcano was located in Cayambe, Ecuador, which is in South America just between Colombia and Peru. The volcano was angry and was going to erupt. Or, as the rocks say, ‘go *Krakatoa.*’

Lucy knew what she had to do.

She stopped on the path, grabbed her father by the shirt and declared, “We need to move to Ecuador.” Recall that she was only sixteen.

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That was thirty years ago, when I was much, *much* younger and many years before you were born. Lucy, of course, moved to Ecuador, to Cayambe, and lives on the volcano.

Each morning, she walks the three-mile path to the little hillside town and enjoys her breakfast of *bizcochos*, which are small biscuits with string cheese.

Along the way, she talks to the rocks, more like listens, and they are happy to finally have someone who can understand them. Every afternoon, she walks to the top of the mountain and reassures the volcano that it will be all right. That there is no reason to erupt. That many thousands of people are counting on it.

It is a beautiful place to live, Cayambe, with its flower farms and nearly constant sunshine. And, on the edge of town, you can find the place that Lucy loves best: Puntiachil, with its two small pyramids. One for the sun. And one for the moon.

This is where she sits and writes her letters and postcards to her parents, to her brothers and to Reginald Pravey. And, every now and then, she sends a postcard to her old school friend Grant.

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Today, at this very moment in fact, she is sitting at the pyramids writing a postcard to Reginald Pravey.

She writes:

*Dear Mr. Pravey,*

*The weather is lovely. The volcano is fine. I look forward to your arrival.*

*I am sure you will enjoy visiting our little pyramids. They will enjoy your visit as well.*

*Sincerely,*

*Lucy Katz, rocktalker*



\*            The End            ○

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\* For more stories, reading lists, and writing activities such as “FinishMe” stories... \*  
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