

SIXTH GRADE STATE WINNER

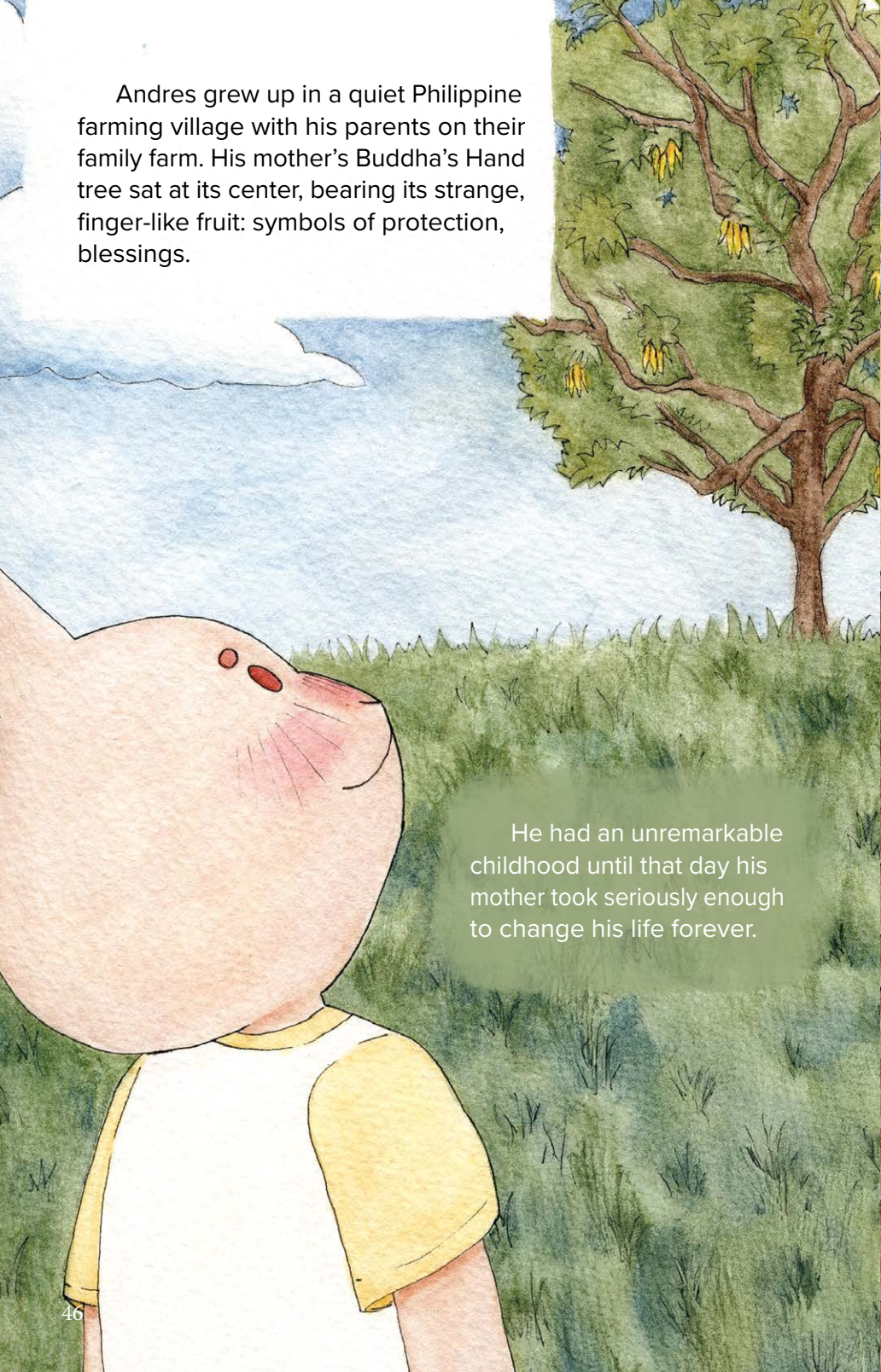
The Buddha's Hand: A Tale of Resilience

BY: J.W. WILDS

RACHEL BIZZOTTO
TEACHER
SANDBURG MIDDLE SCHOOL
LOS ANGELES COUNTY

- ILLUSTRATED BY -
SHELDON
HIGH SCHOOL





Andres grew up in a quiet Philippine farming village with his parents on their family farm. His mother's Buddha's Hand tree sat at its center, bearing its strange, finger-like fruit: symbols of protection, blessings.

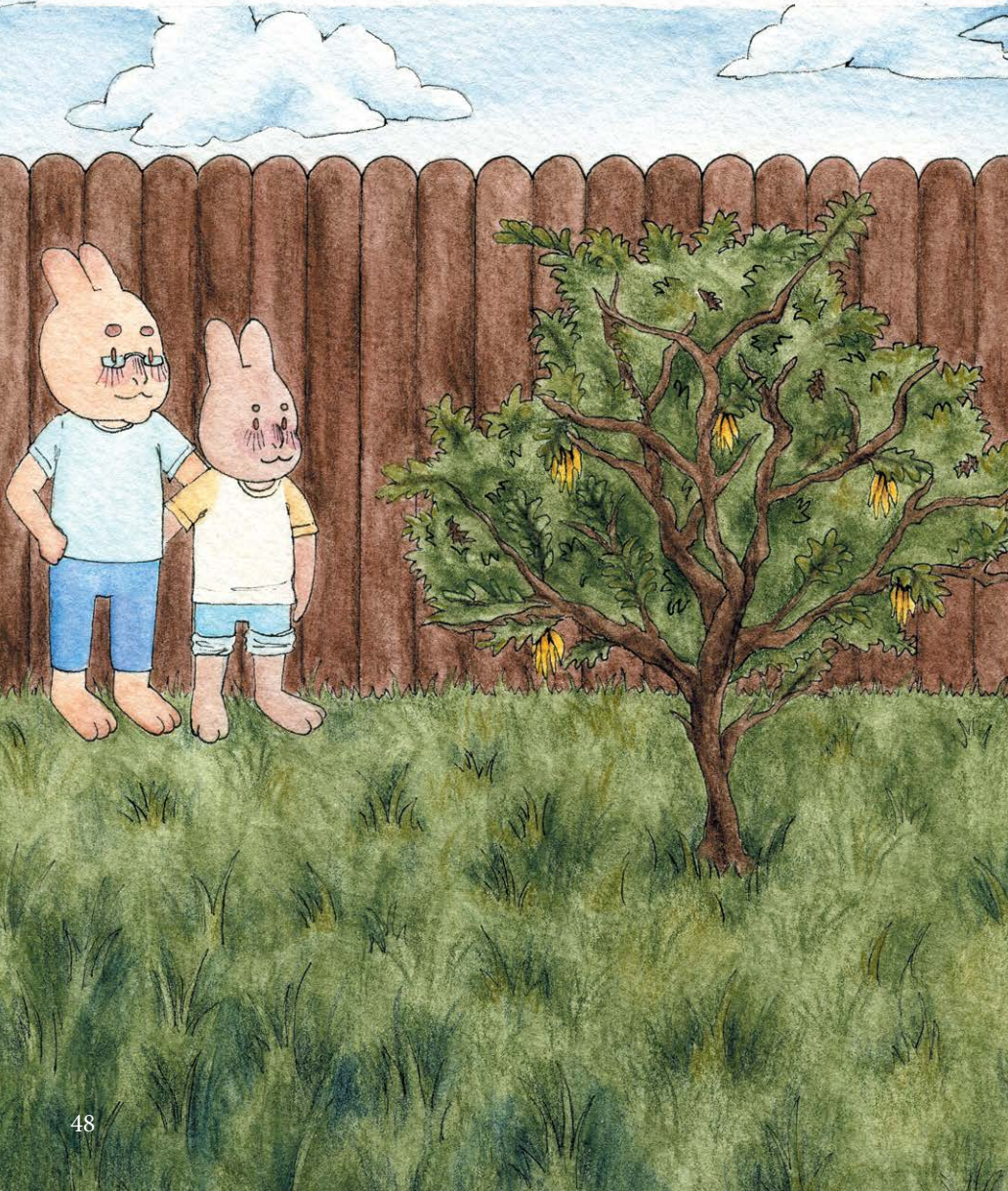
He had an unremarkable childhood until that day his mother took seriously enough to change his life forever.

Since she could not get much help from her doctors, leaving the farm and heading out to California in search of better medical treatment was one of the most painful decisions the family had to make.

They left their motherland with heavy hearts, having a few belongings and one piece of the Buddha's hand tree. When they landed in California, it came as a shock.



Their new home was small, and despite advanced care, Andres' mother's health did not improve; medical bills mounted, and his proud farming father struggled to find work. They did not lead a very stable life, but to provide the sense of home, Andres and his dad planted a small garden in their yard.





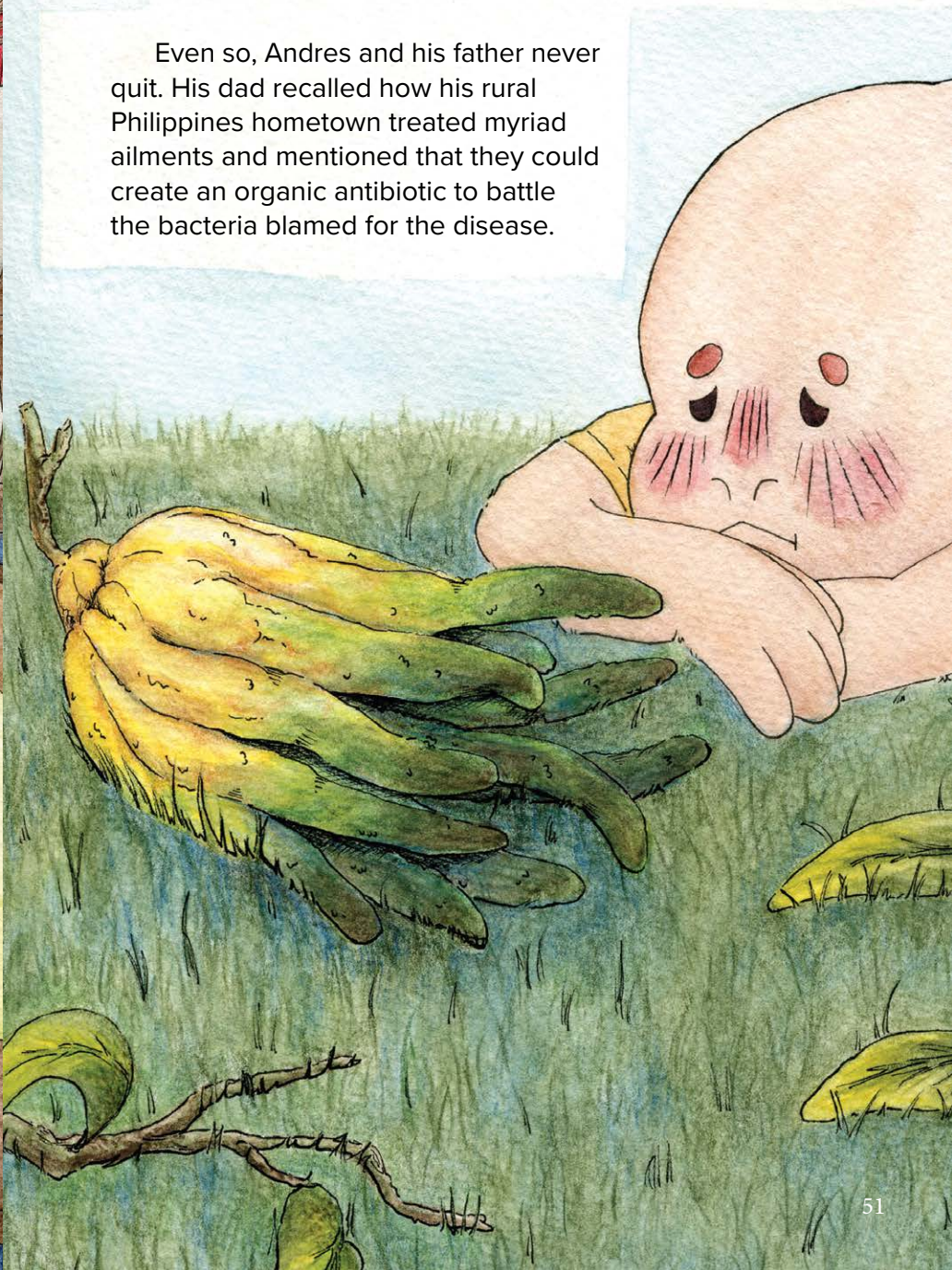
But soon a pernicious threat cropped up in the form of citrus psyllids, minuscule insects notorious as vectors of huanglongbing, or HLB, a deadly citrus disease. Yellowing leaves on the Buddha's hand betrayed the grim fact that it too had succumbed to the malady. Andres was devastated. The tree was one of his few remaining links to the Philippines, and his mother's spirit was dying.

Not one to give up easily, however, Andres sought advice. He met a retired entomologist who advised him to use natural predators - ladybugs and parasitic wasps - against the psyllids. The predator populations gradually started to decline as Andres and his father released these beneficial insects into the garden. They also planted marigold and basil to keep them off.



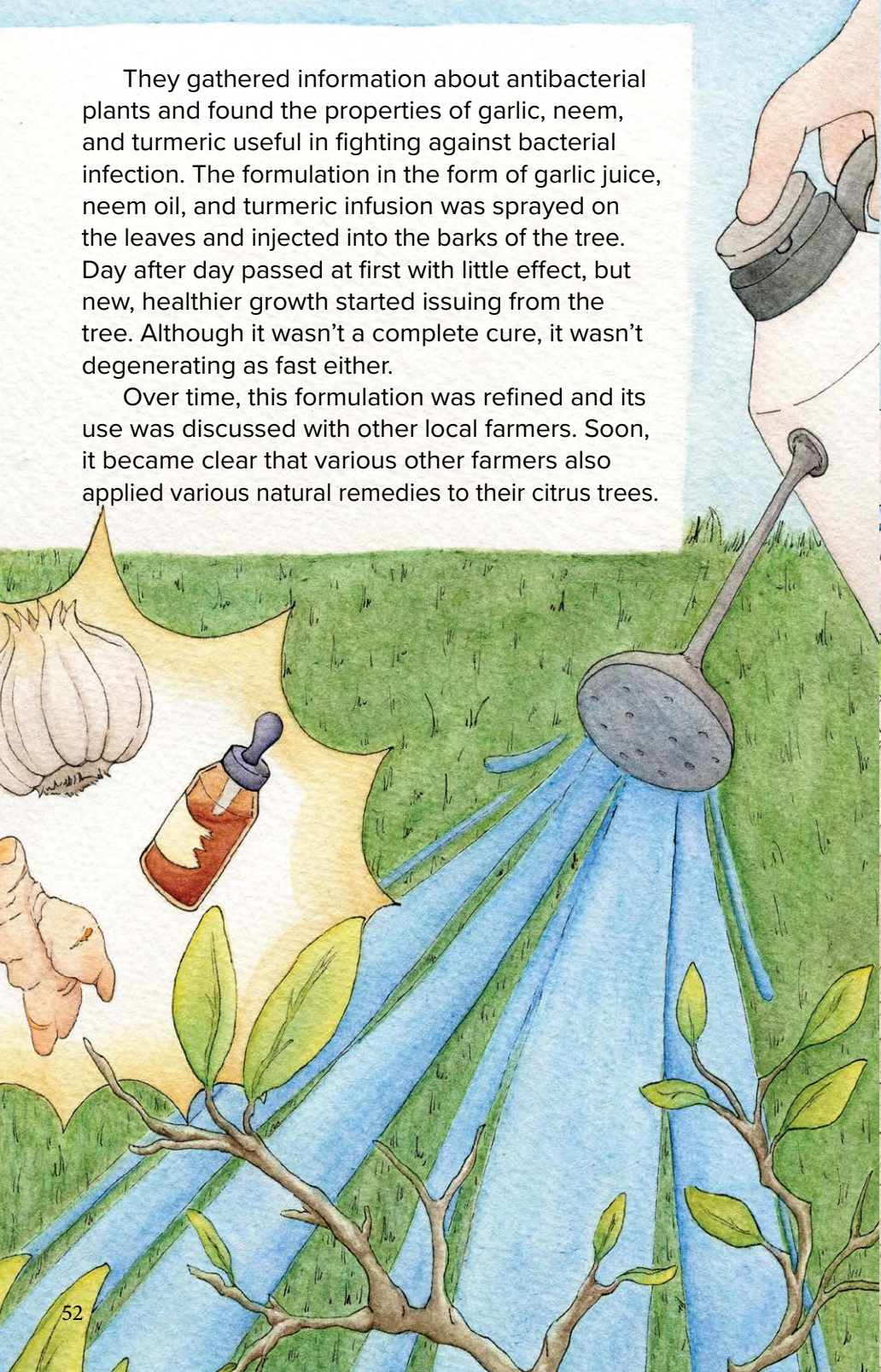
But the larger problem remained: HLB was still marching through the tree. Experts informed them that there was no cure, only techniques to delay it.

Even so, Andres and his father never quit. His dad recalled how his rural Philippines hometown treated myriad ailments and mentioned that they could create an organic antibiotic to battle the bacteria blamed for the disease.

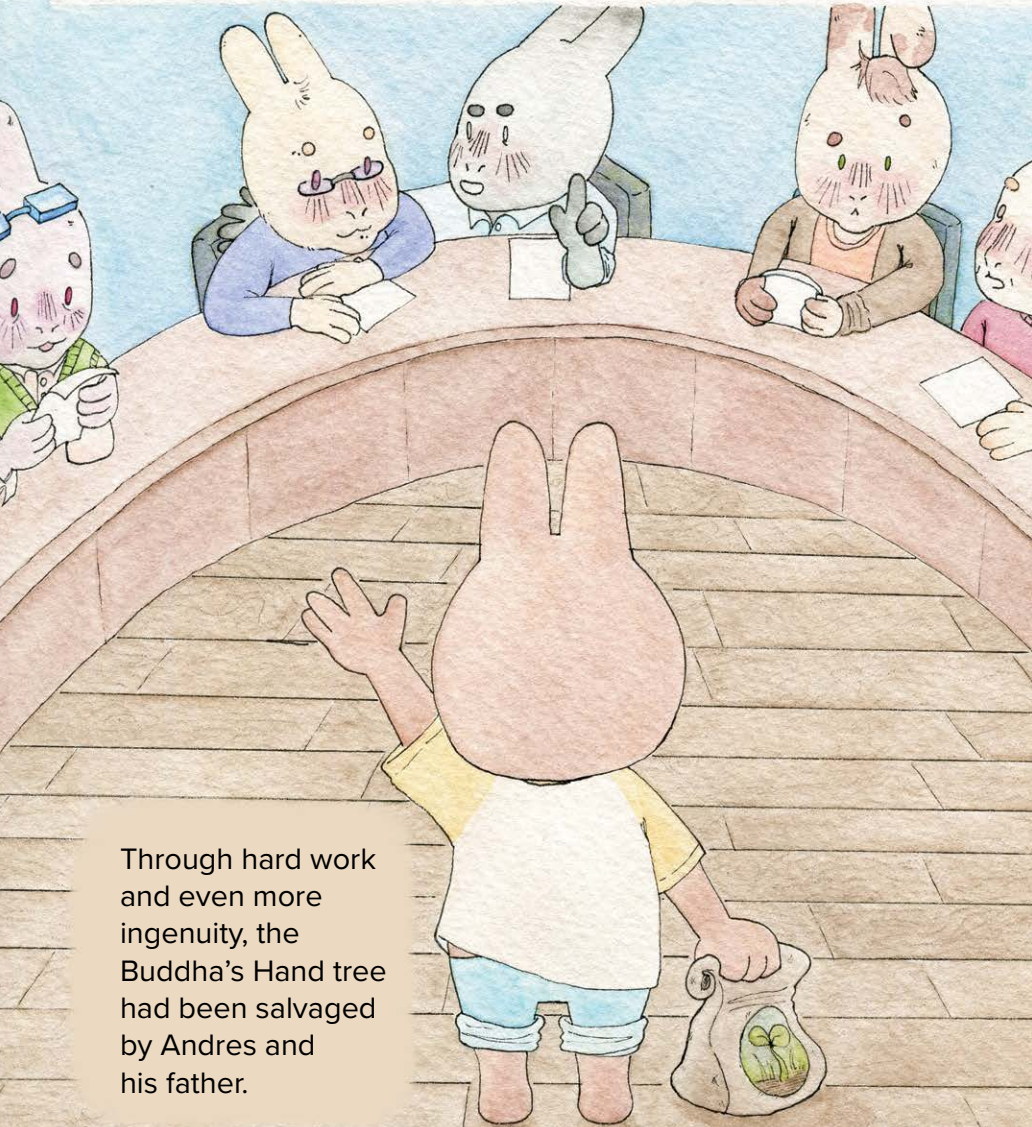


They gathered information about antibacterial plants and found the properties of garlic, neem, and turmeric useful in fighting against bacterial infection. The formulation in the form of garlic juice, neem oil, and turmeric infusion was sprayed on the leaves and injected into the barks of the tree. Day after day passed at first with little effect, but new, healthier growth started issuing from the tree. Although it wasn't a complete cure, it wasn't degenerating as fast either.

Over time, this formulation was refined and its use was discussed with other local farmers. Soon, it became clear that various other farmers also applied various natural remedies to their citrus trees.



The apparent success invited the attention of researchers from the nearby agricultural university, who then invited them to collaborate in research on plant-based treatments for HLB. No full cure was found, but the collaboration also brought a wider sense of natural pathways toward slowing the disease's progression.



Through hard work and even more ingenuity, the Buddha's Hand tree had been salvaged by Andres and his father.

Now it sat tall in their garden, once more bearing fruit, it's odd, twisted fingers symbolizing not just survival but resilience. To Andres, it was a tree that symbolized all his family had gone through: his mother's illness, the struggles of getting used to a strange new land, and their struggle to hold on to parts of the old world.



Years later, Andres beamed with pride as he looked out at the plush lawn. His mother's health had stabilized, but their life in California wasn't exactly how they had envisioned, as they worked out a new meaning of home.

The Buddha's Hand tree, once dying from HLB, was alive and well as proof the Rivera family's resolve to survive was just as relentless. They have faced together the invading pests, the fatal disease, and financial stresses, but they made it.



This hope was standing tall in the shape of the Buddha's Hand tree grown from that poor little cutting. There, the twisted gold fruits spoke to him: "Even when times were really hard, it could be born anew if one would only fight for it."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



J.W. Wilds

6TH GRADE

TEACHER: RACHEL BIZZOTTO

J.W. Wilds' story is personal. When he was younger his own mom was very sick and he incorporated part of his family's healing process into this story. Time and tunes helped J.W. write his story. He spent a month working on his words, receiving input from teachers and peers. J.W. found that listening to music helped with focus and ideas.

Through the writing experience, J.W. learned about organic methods of pest control and about a virus of which he'd never heard-realizing trees can get sick the same way we do! As he spent so much time on the writing process, he also learned that hard work pays off.

J.W. hopes readers learn about citrus greening disease that affects the California citrus industry but mostly hopes readers see that there's always light in the darkness.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATORS



Chloe (Mulch) Schell & Rebecca Feng

SHELDON HIGH SCHOOL
THERESA NGUYEN TRAN VO & AUDREY RUSSELL
ART TEACHERS

Mulch and Rebecca were not familiar with this fruit, so their first step was to acquaint themselves with the Buddha's Hand while investigating how trees can suffer from diseases such as Huanglongbing.

Mulch drew the character designs and Rebecca drew the background art. For the illustrations, they used watercolor pencils, and micron pens to illustrate the different pages.

Mulch enjoyed depicting the different characters as rabbits and coming up with different color schemes. Rebecca liked creating the individual pages and seeing it all come together in the end. These high school seniors thought the story was interesting and embraced the opportunity to feature produce not commonly seen in America.