

Tales from the Lawn Ave. Lost and Found

By Heather M. Lightner

"Mom, where's my _____?" (You can fill in the blank.) In my house, nine out of 10 times the sentence ends with the word coat. "Mom, where's my coat?" I hear the question every day, and I was beginning to wonder if it was just my son who was "outerwear challenged" until I took a look at Lawn Avenue's Lost and Found the Friday before Christmas vacation.

I had gone to the school's Lost and Found in search of a story rather than a missing article of clothing. My mission was simple: to reunite one item with its rightful (and forgetful) owner — it sounded easy enough. After all, I am Mom, finder of all lost things, so how hard could the task be?

To the untrained eye the Lawn Avenue Lost and Found is nothing more than a depository of anonymous items that have been separated from the person they belong to. But look a little closer and the collection of lost things becomes a little more interesting.

That's what I did. I looked closer at this hodgepodge called the Lost and Found. I found a lunch box, mittens, hats, helmets, books, a pillow, a pair of glasses (didn't their owner need them for class?), a pair of boys gym shorts, and, you guessed it, an overwhelming number of sweatshirts and coats!

What a relief to know that my son Jack was not alone in misplac-



ing his coat. How could so many children have coats in the Lost and Found when it was December? Granted, the December had been mild, but still, didn't these kids miss their coats? The place looked a bit like Burlington Coat Factory!

I had to chuckle to myself as I went through the coats — almost every coat and sweatshirt in the Lost and Found appeared to have a male owner. Okay, maybe I jumped to this conclusion unfairly, but I did not see a single pink or purple coat or sweatshirt in the pile, but I saw plenty of blue, navy blue, gray, and black coats and jackets. One of them, a black Land's End fleece jacket had the name Alex embroidered on the front.

Okay, black fleece jacket with the name Alex on it. I held it up in front of me and looked at the size — seemed about the right size for

a sixth-grader (I know because I have one), so I focused my search on the sixth grade as I sought to reunite Alex and his black fleece jacket.

Assistant principal Mike Franco took me into the office and together we searched the sixth-grade rosters for Alexes. We came up with two students named Alex and one named Alexis. As luck would have it, the sixth-graders were just getting ready to have lunch and were gathering outside the cafeteria — a perfect opportunity for me to find Alex and get his jacket back to him.

Mr. Franco, who knows each child by sight, called out to the first Alex and asked whether he was missing a jacket. No. Hope was dashed momentarily until Alex number two suddenly appeared before us. As luck would have it, sixth-grader Alex Burke was the person I had been looking for — the jacket belonged to him.

Alex was pleasantly surprised to see me holding his jacket in my hand and asked where I had found it. Um, the Lost and Found! The jacket, explained Alex, had been

missing since the night of the Lawn Avenue School holiday concert, three days earlier. "We didn't know what had happened to it," explained Alex. "We didn't know if we had left it at the school."

I asked Alex if he had looked for the jacket in the Lost and Found, but Alex said he "just didn't have time" to look for it.

Because his jacket was missing, Alex had been forced to wear a different jacket, one that had also gone missing and had also been recovered. "Well, we found a coat at the bottom of my closet," admitted Alex, referring to the coat he was currently wearing.

Alex and I chatted for a couple of moments, and I imparted my mom wisdom to him, encouraging him to look in the Lost and Found the next time his coat went missing. He thanked me for returning his jacket to him, and I was on my way.

As I headed out of the school, I laughed, thinking about what Jack would say when I told him about how many boys' coats I had seen in the Lost and Found. And here I thought Jack was unique, with his "Mom, where's my coat" routine — but I guess he's really not that unique when it comes to misplacing coats. It seems that losing coats is a trait inherent to kids, and especially to boys.

I'm not sure what the solution is to the overflow of coats at Lawn Avenue School. Maybe we can break these kids of their forgetful ways and teach them how to avoid losing their coats...or, maybe, more realistically, we should just pray for unseasonably warm winters.

Visit bird sanctuary on 'welcome day'

The Norman Bird Sanctuary opens all its doors on Saturday, Jan. 13, for a Winter Welcome Day.

Visitors are welcome to join sanctuary staff for all or part of the day. Choose from a guided nature walk, Morning Welcome Talk, noontime introduction to sanctuary's educational animals, an afternoon Winter Poetry Walk, or an indoor performance of sanctuary-inspired stories, poems, and songs featuring Zach Ladin with his new CD "Songs of Nature."

The Morning Welcome Talk at 11 a.m. previews a brand new illustrated talk about the Norman Bird Sanctuary, touching on the history of Paradise Farm, the legacy of the artists who draw their inspiration from this scenic landscape, and the unique geology and ecology of this area. The noon introduction to the sanctuary animals and craft project is geared for children and families.

The 2 p.m. welcome tour of the sanctuary grounds includes a Winter Poetry Walk, featuring excerpts from works of well-known poets and local writers. Participants are welcome to bring a brief selection to share that has some sort of relationship to the winter landscape. One way to think about it is to view it as an open-mike hike.

The 3 p.m. performance is titled "Songs for Mabel Norman," featuring sanctuary educator Zach Ladin with his newly released CD of songs that were initially written and performed at the Norman Bird Sanctuary during Ladin's year as an Americorps educator. His lyrics are uplifting and convey a simple, powerful love of the land, along with a deep appreciation for the legacy of Mabel Norman. Ladin's songs will alternate with readings of other sanctuary-inspired stories and poems by other performers.

All activities are free with the cost of admission: \$4 per adult, \$2 per child.

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Thinking of buying a Mac?
Find out all about Apple's Macintosh computers and Apple iPods this Saturday at the Aquidneck Macintosh User Group meeting at the Latter Day Saint Church, 177 Miantonomi Ave., in Middletown. The building will be open at 8:30, the meeting will begin at 9 a.m. and end about noon.