



That Missing Feeling: Interview with the Author



That Missing Feeling author, Amy Ludwig VanDerwater, and author-storyteller, Vida Zuljevic, have been friends for many years. They met when Vida was a school librarian in the United States. Amy and Vida have continued their friendship now that Vida has returned to her homeland of Bosnia where she writes and shares books and stories with children. It is an honor for Magination that Vida chose to translate *That Missing Feeling* and to share it with students across the ocean from where it was written. Here's an interview with Vida about sharing *That Missing Feeling* with children in Bosnia.

Magination Press: What inspired you to translate *That Missing Feeling*?

Vida Zuljevic: When I saw the topic of this book, I thought that it's an extremely relevant one for many children who've found themselves living in two places as a result of their parents' divorce. The topic hit home, too, as my grandchildren went through this difficult family organization. Since retiring in the U.S., I've been living mostly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I've been visiting early learning centers and elementary schools as Grandma Storyteller for reading and storytelling sessions. I'm always on the lookout for good stories to read to the children, and I believe that *That Missing Feeling* should be heard and read by millions of children around the world. Language should be no obstacle to sharing this book with the children I work with now, so I translated it into Bosnian.

MP: To whom did you read the book?

VZ: First, I read it to three second grade classes at the elementary school where I did my student teaching when I was first becoming a teacher, 50 years ago. Then, I read it to two of my granddaughters who have experienced "that missing feeling" themselves. I even gifted a book and a doll I made with a notebook to my nine-year-old granddaughter, who fell in love with the book and the doll as well. She said that she planned to take them to summer camp.

MP: What about the story did you wish to share with students?

VZ: Although *That Missing Feeling* is a story of a girl whose parents divorce and whose life in two homes leads to the missing feeling, the story can apply to all children (and adults) who miss someone or something they love. Listening to Mia's story, children can see that there are ordinary people just like them who miss somebody they love. They understand that there are ways to at least soothe those feelings and redirect them to something positive.

MP: How did the children respond when you read it aloud?

VZ: I like to read and partially tell the story at the same time. With this story, I first asked children if there was somebody in their lives that they missed a lot. They shared. Then, I shared about how much I miss my mother who passed away 14 years ago. Doing this brings the story and me, as the teller, closer to the children's attention. During reading, I'd stop and share some of my experiences about missing my father because my mother and father divorced when I was 2.5 years old. Then, I'd allow a couple of children to share their stories. This lets the children accept the story as something real and something that happens to people just like them. This connection is what helps children really relate to the characters and story to the end. I asked the students to hug a neighbor whenever I read the words "missing feeling". This was very fun to do and served as a connecting glue for the story's theme.

Below you can see some of the children's drawings and writings about people they miss.

MP: Why did you sew a doll?

VZ: I sewed a doll because in my experience—during my active teaching and now—dolls and puppets in children's hands make the main character(s) alive for them. They help children understand the text much better. I pass it around before reading to set the stage saying, "Let's get to know the main character. Look at Mia, what does she have in her arms? What is her facial expression? Tell your neighbor what you think." Then, I set the doll on my lap, and now we have some anticipation among the children; they are eager to hear the story. During the reading, when I see that children have built some feelings for Mia, I pass the doll around again so that children hold her and give her a hug or hand squeeze. For them, the doll becomes one of them, one who needs a friend, and usually, all children are ready to be that friend. Those are magic moments, and I always say that no words can truly describe the bond that the doll makes among us and between each child and the story.

MP: How did you sew the doll?

VZ: Whenever I sew character dolls, I look at the illustration and draw it on fabric. Then, I cut it and sew some parts by hand, and others (straight, larger ones) by using a sewing machine. I create dolls of all kinds, not just for educational purposes, but also because making them is a joyous, creative activity for me.

MP: Is there anything else you would like to add?

VZ: As always when I'm asked this question, I'd like to underline the importance of reading and storytelling to children. The reason is simple: Children LOVE listening to stories, especially those pertaining to their everyday lives. They learn through those stories, and good authors know how to gently weave those life lessons into their stories to help children make some heartbreaking moments in their young lives easier, stay emotionally healthy, and feel safe. And, of course, I recommend the use of dolls and puppets, whether from the store or those you and children can make, like rag dolls, stick puppets, bag puppets, hand puppets, etc. Manipulating puppets and dolls during and after reading or storytelling helps children understand the stories and messages they convey, reflect on their own behaviors and challenges through the stories' characters, feel their emotions, and remember stories much better.

This Article's Authors

Vida Zuljevic, Ed.D., has been an educator for 40 years. She taught K-8 in former Yugoslavia and in the USA, as well as college level courses offered for those pursuing teaching degrees. Though she did not hold the role of a formal teacher during her family's refugee life in Germany, Vida worked with Bosnian refugee families and their elementary school children as a tutor and home liaison. In the six years since Vida's retirement, she has been volunteering her time by sharing her love of poetry by teaching children to love, read, and write poetry. She has also been sharing her passion for puppetry and reading/storytelling by visiting early childhood centers and elementary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the U.S. as Grandma Storyteller.

Amy Ludwig VanDerwater is author of *That Missing Feeling* as well as several other books for children. Her next book with Magination is *The Sound of Kindness*, which will be released in June 2023. [Learn more about Amy's books at her website.](#)