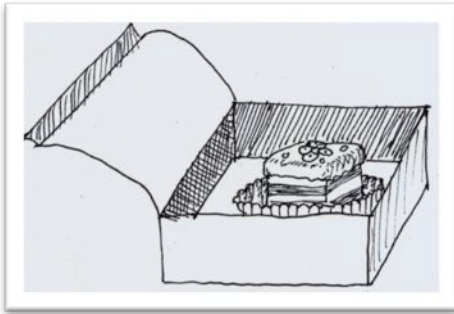


My Friend Kimmi Could Really Spell Things



By Stuart Baum
Illustrated by Zoë Baum

Readers note: This story is meant to be read aloud to children ages 5-14 ... as if it really happened to the reader.

This is story from *my* childhood. About *my* friend Kimmi Hall. But before I tell you about the adventure Kimmi and *I* had, I want to tell you about our school spelling bees.

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Kimmi was the reason that our school stopped having spelling bees. It's not that she was such a bad or a good speller. It was because when she correctly spelled a word, if it was an noun – an object or a thing – that *thing* would magically appear nearby. And then, about an hour later, it would magically disappear again, returning to its original place.

It was the *appearing*, however, that caused all the trouble during spelling bees.

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During second grade spelling bee, Kimmi's first word was magnet. She got it right. M-a-g-n-e-t. When she sat down at her seat, she smiled as she showed me the magnet she had in her hand. I thought it was funny that she had a magnet, the word she was asked to spell.

Her next word was u-n-d-e-r. She got it right, but nothing happened, since “under” is not a noun, not an object. At the time, I had no idea, though, that anything could happen.

Her next word was ‘kite.’ As soon as she spelled k-i-t-e, a blue kite with a long multi-colored tail flew into the classroom from an open window. The teachers were upset by this and thought some of the older children were playing a prank.

Next, she was given the word 'crab'. She spelled it k-r-a-b. That's not right. Crab starts with a 'c.' It's spelled c-r-a-b. Looking back, I realize it was a good thing that she spelled "crab" wrong.



One day, a few months later, I was watching television in my living room and, during a commercial, I looked up to see Kimmi sitting next to me. At first I wondered how she was able to sit down next to me without my noticing her enter the room. Then I realized that the television was off, that it was not the same television as ours, and that I was somehow in *her* living room. She had her math book out.

"Can you help me with my math homework?" she asked.

I was good at math and had already done my homework, otherwise I would not have been allowed to watch TV, so I showed her how to do the problems. After we completed the math sheet, Kimmi turned on her television and we watched the rest of the show. Sometime during the show I realized I was back in my own house. I thought this was a dream and that I must have fallen asleep for a while.

It wasn't until Kimmi and I became good friends in third grade that I understood her power.



During our third grade spelling bee, three interesting things happened: a t-u-r-k-e-y appeared on the stage; Johnny was suddenly wearing an a-p-r-o-n and the room became very cold and misty when Kimmi correctly spelled f-o-g-g-y.

She was eliminated when she misspelled whale, by forgetting the "h." Good thing, huh?



Oh, her full name is not Kimmi Hall, it's Kimmificent Antonia Hall. Everyone called her “Kimmi,” but every year, at the very start of the year, when the teachers read out our full names to the class, we all thought she had the weirdest and maybe best name ever. Kimmificent Antonia Hall.

There was a reason for this name, which I will explain later.



Kimmi was not a great speller, which we now know is a good thing. She was also not very good at math, since every time the teacher assigned a particularly hard math homework, I appeared, magically, at her house to help her. She would simply spell my name and ... **poof!** ... I would appear in her living room or bedroom to help her with her math homework.

I wonder if we would have been friends if I also struggled with math.

Anyway, after a while, I got used to magically appearing in Kimmi’s living room. Even though I was only eight years old, I knew she had a special power. No one else seemed to be able to spell things to make them appear. I certainly couldn't.



During our fourth grade spelling bee, one of the teachers was hit on the head with a large p-i-c-k-l-e, pickle, which seemed to fall from the ceiling as soon as Kimmi spelled it correctly. All the students in the

class laughed and laughed, but the teachers did not think this was funny, especially not the teacher who got hit in the head with the p-i-c-k-l-e.

A few minutes later, as soon as Kimmi spelled l-i-g-h-t-n-i-n-g, lightning, correctly, we all heard a loud ... **crack!** ... and the power in the whole school went off. Everything went dark. That was the end of the spelling bee for that day, and the last spelling bee that our school ever had.



Why am I telling you this about Kimmi? Two reasons. Reason one: it's funny. Every time I see a p-i-c-k-l-e, I laugh out loud, remembering how the pickle fell from the ceiling and hit our teacher on the head. Reason two: I'm going to tell you a story about an adventure Kimmi and I had together, and you need to know Kimmi's magic power to make any sense of it.

Do you understand her power? If not, I can explain it quite quickly. When she spells something, even a person, that thing magically appears nearby. And then it disappears again in an hour. Understand?

Great! Here is the story.



This happened years ago, when I was eleven.

One Saturday, during lunch, I suddenly appeared outside Kimmi's house. My mouth was full and I was still holding my soup spoon.

Before I could even swallow the mouthful of soup and say 'hi,' she blurted out: "My uncle is missing! That's why I spelled you."

She explained that her parents were worried since they had not heard from her mother's younger brother, Kimmi's uncle, in more than a week. He was in Paris (which is the capital of France) for a conference and had disappeared.

"Oh, no!" I said. But then I remembered how I got here, soup spoon and all. "Why don't you just *spell* him here?"

"That's what I'm going to do," she said, "but I want you here to help."

"OK," I said. "What's his name?"

"Robert," she replied. And then she spelled his name out slowly and loudly: "R-O-B-E-R-T!"

No sooner had she said the "T" than a small boy in a blue striped jacket and pants appeared.

Kimmi and I looked at each other. This was clearly not her uncle. She said to the boy, "You're not Robert."

He quickly snapped back, "Yes, I am."

"Well, you are not the *right* Robert," Kimmi responded.

This seemed to make the little boy even madder. "I am *so* the right Robert and it's my birthday today!"

“Happy Birthday,” I said since it seemed like the thing to say to an angry small child you magically spelled away from his birthday party.

This seemed to make him happy again, but he then asked a very reasonable question: “Where am I and where is my party? I was at my party and now I am not.”

Just then, fortunately, we heard a woman’s voice yell from down the street, “Robbie! Robbie!?! Where did you go?!”

Kimmi and I walked Robbie down the street to his birthday party, already in progress.

His mother looked relieved and then angry, chiding Robbie, “You can’t just walk away from your party!”

I felt sorry for Robbie, so I did something I know I shouldn't. I fibbed. “He came over to invite us to his party, but we’re too busy. Thanks, though, Robbie,” I added. “And Happy Birthday!”

“Yes,” said Kimmi distractedly, as she dragged me away from the mother and the child, “yes-happy-birthday-wrong-Robert-we-have-to-go.”

We walked back to her house.

“That’s why I wanted your help,” she explained.

I felt bad about lying, or, fibbing, but we really could not let anyone know about Kimmi’s spelling power.

“Funny,” she said. “I really thought that would work. When I want *you* I simply spell your name. She started to spell my name.

“STOP!” I yelled. “I am *already* here. If you spell my name, we might get some other kid from that party, or who knows from where!”

“We need my uncle’s *full* name,” Kimmi declared. She ran into her house, leaving me on the sidewalk. I started to follow her in the her house, but ... **poof!** ... I was at my house. Recall that her magic spelling only lasts for about an hour.

This time, instead of waiting for her to spell me, I jumped on my bike and rode back to her house.

As soon I got there, Kimmi was running outside with a piece of paper in her hand. On it was written: *Robert Steven Hall* in her Mom’s handwriting.

Kimmi spelled it out. “R-o-b-e-r-t S-t-e-v-e-n H-a-l-l.”

Instantly a man appeared, a few feet way. He was walking towards us, fingers typing away on his phone. He was wearing a green plaid shirt and blue jeans and looked like any other adult to me.

“Yay!” I said.

Kimmi said matter-of-factly, “That’s also not my uncle.”

Suddenly the man looked up from his phone and he seemed to be very surprised. He stopped in his tracks. He looked at the houses to the left, to the right, behind him, ahead of him and then at us, his head jerking in all directions like a chicken.

He looked back at his phone, then up at the street, and then at us again.

He was clearly confused. "Where am I?" he asked us.

Kimmi sounded disappointed when she responded, "On Parker Street."

More as a surprise than a question, the man replied, "What?!?"

Kimmi repeated in the same tone of voice, "On Parker Street."

The man sounded even more confused, "*Parker* Street? *Where* is Parker Street?"

Kimmi looked at me and asked, "How did that not work?"

I replied, "I guess there are lots of Robert Steven Halls in the world."

The man looked at us as if we were wizards, which, in a way, we were. "How did you know my name?"

Again, I thought quickly. "Long story," I said. "And you will never believe it." I pointed down the street. "If you walk to the end of the second block and turn right, you'll find a small diner. Order lunch and before you are done eating, you'll be home again."

"I'm sorry," the man said, now a little annoyed. "I don't understand."

"There is really no good way to explain it," I said.

I looked at Kimmi. She looked right at the man when she said, "It's not my fault he has the exact same name as my uncle."

The man shook his head, as if we were crazy or playing some sort of children's game, and walked away, in the direction I mentioned. I yelled after him, "It only lasts about an hour and then you'll be back where you started!"

He looked over his shoulder at us. He was still shaking his head. My guess is that, when he returns home, he'll think it was all a dream.

"What now?" I asked.

"We're going to Paris," Kimmi declared. "P-A-R-"

"WAIT!" I yelled. She looked at me, curious why I stopped her. "We do NOT want to bring Paris here," I said. "Remember, that's how your magic works. When you spell something it appears nearby. We do not appear near it. If you spell Paris, we'll get the whole city right here." I concluded, "I don't think that's a good idea."

She nodded. "You're right. I'm just worried about my uncle now and mad that there are so many Roberts in this stupid world."

I came up with an idea. “If we spell something *from* Paris, such as a box or a large cabinet, and then hide in it, we will be transported to Paris when it returns after the hour is up.”

“You think your idea will work?” she asked.

“I do,” I replied. What I did not add, though, was that I thought it was probably a bad idea for two eleven-year old children to go to Paris on their own. But I said nothing and we put my plan into action.

Kimmi spelled, “b-e-d f-r-o-m P-a-r-i-s,” since she thought it would be more fun to ride on a bed than in a box or a cabinet, and ... **poof!** ... a nice looking bed appeared on the sidewalk across the street. It had a metal canopy with scrolled metal headboard and footboard. The bedspread was gold and there were lots of dark orange and gold pillows on it. Hard to explain, which is why I drew a picture:



It looked so comfy that Kimmi and I immediately ran across the street (looking both ways for cars first, of course) and hopped right onto it.

We lay on the bed talking about what Paris might be like. The hour passed by very quickly and then ... **poof!** ... we were suddenly in a room that perfectly matched the bed. Very fancy! We quickly jumped out of the bed, ran out of the bedroom and saw that we were in a French house just as fancy as the bed. We ran down the fancy gold painted stairs, out the fancy gold painted doors and ... into Paris!

How did we know it was Paris? Of course, we had no idea except that’s where the bed was from, since Kimmi spelled it that way. And it looked just like I had always imagined Paris to look.



The small street was made from cobblestones instead of being paved. The buildings were old and fancy and made from stone, not wood or metal like ours. And there were black metal chairs and tables with people sitting at them eating lunch ... right in the middle of the small street! Again, easier to show than to tell:

But we couldn't stop to eat. We had to find Kimmi's uncle named Robert Steven Hall. And we had a whole hour!



Now I have to explain something and it's pretty complicated. When Kimmi spelled things, they appeared near Kimmi for an hour and then returned back to exactly the same spot. When she spelled the bed, it

disappeared from the fancy golden room and then, an hour later, re-appeared in the same exact spot. This time, though it had two children on it. Kimmi and me.

But no one had spelled *us*. So we were not going to return magically back home an hour later. We were simply in Paris until we could find another way home.

Did I know this at the time? No. But something felt wrong with my plan. More wrong than two young children traveling to Paris without telling their parents? Maybe not.

Anyway... back to the story.



Once we were on a street in Paris, we realized our plan was only half-baked. We had no idea what to do next or how to find her uncle, a normal looking man, in one of the world's largest cities, especially since we didn't speak the language.

So what would you do if you were in Paris? We did the only thing we could think to do: We looked for the Eiffel Tower.

It was pretty easy to find. As soon as we walked down to the end of the street, we saw the Eiffel Tower off in the distance. It was a long way away, but we decided to walk towards it. At the time, as many ideas do, it seemed like a good idea. Maybe her uncle would also want to see the Eiffel Tower and was there looking at it? What else do people do in Paris?

So we walked and we walked and we walked. And we walked some more. As we walked, we got hungrier and hungrier. We passed bakeries with incredible-looking pastries in the windows and chocolate shops with even more incredible-looking chocolates in them. This made us even hungrier.

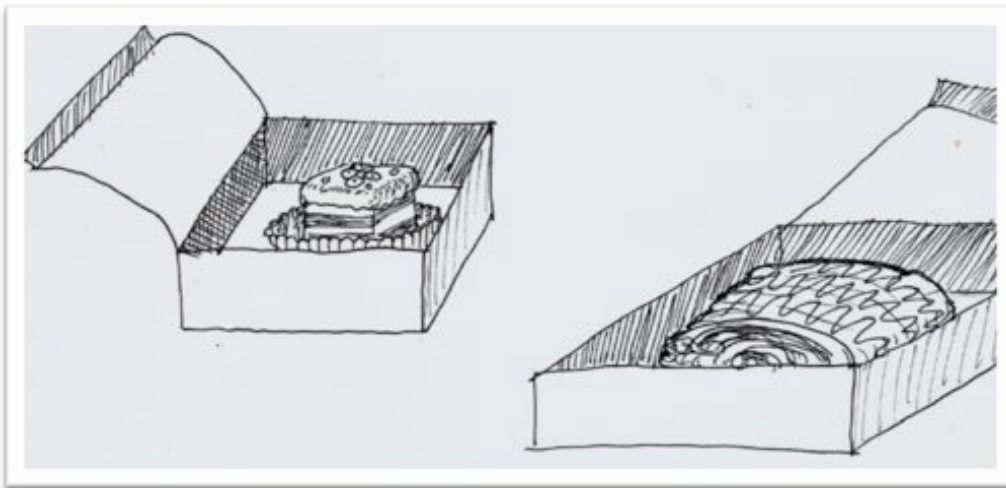
I reached into my pocket and found a ten dollar bill. That should be enough for a couple pastries, I thought. Kimmi had eighteen dollars in her pockets. So we had plenty of money for snacks. But when we showed the money to the woman behind the counter, she shook her head and said something we didn't understand. She reached into her cash register and pulled out a few gold coins and red- and blue-colored bills. She smiled nicely. Then slowly, this time in English, she explained, "We only accept Euros for money here."

I asked, "Do any stores take American dollars?"

She shook her head, 'no.'

I sighed since I did not think we were going to get any pastries today, but when I looked at Kimmi, I saw she was smiling and had a sparkle in her eyes.

We left the store and before I could ask her what she was thinking, she spelled out two words that were painted on the store's window, "p-a-i-n a-u c-h-o-c-o-l-a-t" and "p-e-t-i-t f-o-u-r." **Poof!** Two small blue boxes, tied up with ribbons, appeared at our feet. We each grabbed one and opened them.



I looked into my box and saw a single, very small square pink frosted cake. Since it was only one piece, instead of the f-o-u-r four, I figured it must be the chocolate dessert she spelled.

I looked into Kimmi's box and saw she had a bread roll with chocolate drizzle on the top.

"Doesn't p-a-i-n spell 'pain?'" I asked.

"P-a-i-n spells 'bread' in Paris," Kimmi explained and, to make her point, a bread as long as an umbrella and as thin as my arm appeared right in front of us, leaning against a tree. Fortunately it was wrapped mostly in paper, so it did not get dirty.

"Spelling is even more complicated in France," I said. "How do you spell 'cheese' or 'butter' in French?" I asked. "Or 'jam?'" I thought any of these would go nicely with our bread.

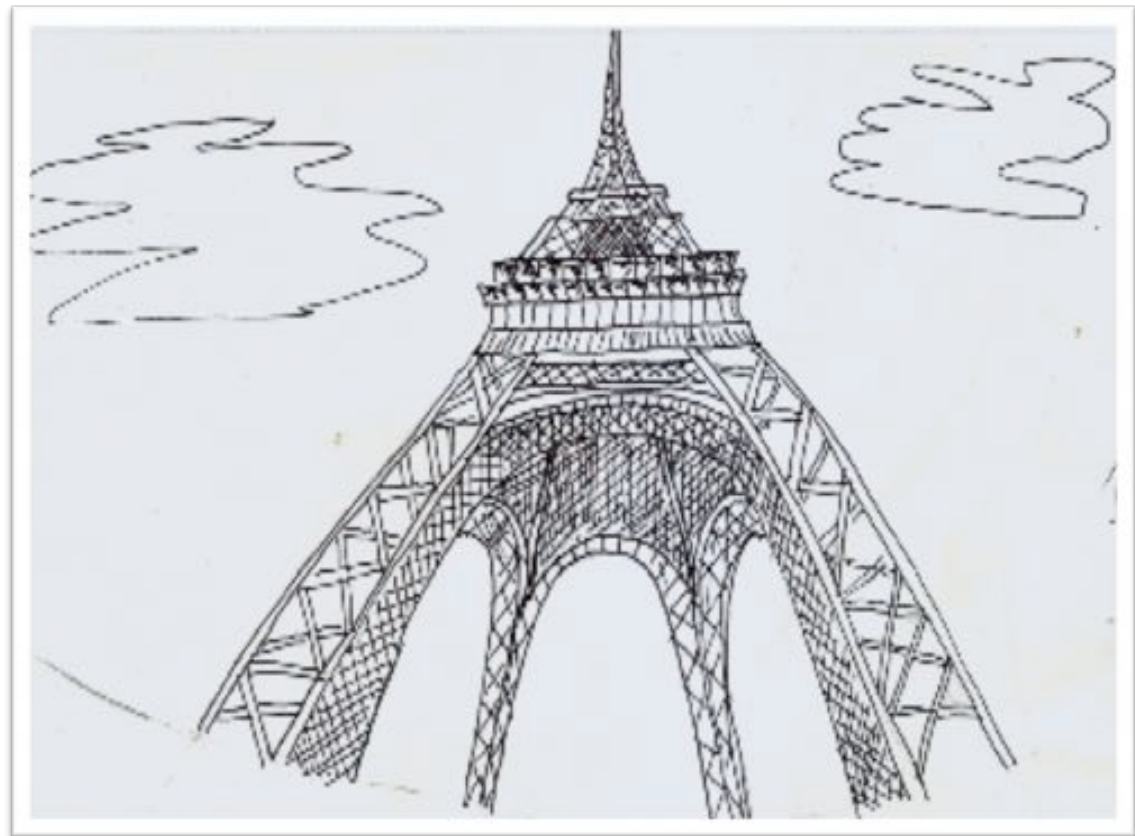
Kimmi shrugged. I just know that 'bread' is "p-a-"

"STOP!" I yelled. We did *not* need more bread.

We ate our desserts, each having half of each other's, and, since we were still very hungry, next ate the long, thin bread.

Then we continued walking to the Eiffel Tower, which got bigger and bigger as we got closer and closer. Soon we were standing in a large crowd underneath it. There were so many people that, even if her uncle were there, we would have to be very, very lucky to find him.

To be honest, though, I forgot I was looking for Kimmi's uncle. I was in Paris at the Eiffel Tower! It was incredible. I could stare up at the iron building for hours! Here is a picture I drew of what it looked like staring up from the bottom:



It was one of the most amazing things I had ever seen in all my eleven years. I looked over at Kimmi to see if she agreed, but she was gone! Kimmi was no longer standing next to me!

I looked around and she was nowhere to be seen. There were so many people, and the more I looked the more I realized I was all alone in Paris. As excited as I felt a few seconds ago, I was that terrified!

Not only was I alone, but I was not the one with the magic spelling power. I was alone in Paris with only ten dollars, ten useless American dollars, and no ability to spell my way home, find a place to sleep, or even magic up any food!

Before I could even begin to think of a plan ... **poof!** ...I was sitting in a metal chair at a metal table, very like the one we saw in the street earlier, (look at the earlier picture) sitting next to Kimmi and across from a man with a beard and a very big smile.

“Sorry,” said the man, “I did not know Kimmi had a friend here.”

Kimmi explained. “This is my Uncle Robert. He can *spell*, too.” By the way she said the word ‘spell,’ I knew she meant more than simply being able to say the letters that make up words.

Her uncle, who had a very friendly deep voice, explained more, “I heard from Rachel, Kimmi’s Mom, my older sister, that Kimmi was looking for me and disappeared. No one had any idea where she was, so I decided the best thing to do was spell her to me. She told me she was at the Eiffel Tower and had a friend. I figured you would be scared to suddenly find yourself all alone, so Kimmi spelled your name and here you are.”

He waved his hands toward the table, where there was a cheese plate with lots of small pieces of meat and bread. “Eat up,” he said. “You must be hungry.”

“But,” he added, “Before you start eating, please tell me how you got to Paris.”

We explained how we spelled the bed from Paris and rode back on it.

Her uncle said, “That’s *incroyable*. Incredible! I’ve had this same spelling power since I was a child and it never dawned on me that I could travel by spelling things to me then getting inside or on top of them for the return trip. *Very* clever.”

Kimmi told him that it was my idea and I felt very proud.

We also explained about the wrong Roberts that Kimmi kept spelling to her.

He said, “That’s why you, Kimmi, or more completely *Kimmificent Antonia Hall*, has such an unusual name. This way, if she ever gets lost, like what happened today, I can be sure I would get only *this* Kimmi when I spelled her name, instead of some other confused Kimmi.”

“Or someone whose birthday party it is,” added Kimmi, now with food in her mouth. She didn't usually talk with food in her mouth, but adventures make people hungry. Especially adventures in Paris.

We ate our cheese, meat and bread. Then we got more desserts. I asked for the rest of the three ‘*petit fours*,’ which made her uncle laugh and say, “You are a very, very clever child!” though I didn’t understand then why he said that.

We waited the rest of the hour, magically re-appeared at the Eiffel Tower (Kimmi first and then me a few moments later) and waited for her uncle to walk there. He quickly found us and, as I really wanted, the three of us took the elevator all the way to the top.

It was an incredible view! As *incroyable* as I had hoped. You could see all of Paris from up there!

When we got back to the bottom, Kimmi's uncle said in a very serious, adult-like voice, "Okay, children, your Moms and Dads must be sufficiently worried about you now."



It was *easy* to get home. We walked a few blocks away, to a quiet street, and then Kimmi spelled "m-y o-w-n- b-e-d" and her bed appeared right in front of us. We sat on it and waited.

While we were waiting, Kimmi's uncle brought us two glasses of the most *incroyable* hot chocolate I have ever tasted. It tasted just like regular chocolate, only liquid and warm. Before we finished the hot chocolate ... **poof!** ... we were back in Kimmi's bedroom. And we still had the hot chocolate in our hands, fancy cups and saucers and spoons and all.

And that was the end of Kimmi's and my Paris adventure.



That was years ago. Kimmi and I grew up and she moved to another town and, well, as people do, we lost touch with each other. I guess she never had any more problems with math.

But, once, not too many years ago, I noticed that my bed had magically disappeared.

Now, beds do not magically disappear on their own, so I knew what was about to happen. I went into the kitchen to make two cups of hot chocolate: one for me and one for Kimmi. And then ... **poof!** ... my bed magically reappeared and sitting on it was a much older, but still very mischievous, Kimmificent Antonia Hall, the girl who could spell things. We talked and talked, mostly about our adventure in Paris. And then she spelled her own bed and rode that back home.



Speaking of beds, it's time for *you* to go to bed, since you never know what adventure awaits tomorrow.

But first, one last thing, and it's *important*: When Kimmi visited the last time, she told me that she has a child, a little boy, who can also *spell* things. And by *spelling* things, I think you know what I mean. So, if you are ever near a little boy who spells a word and that thing, that object, magically appears near you, please say hello to Kimmi's son for me.

Oh, and even more importantly. If you and that boy decide to go to Paris to rescue *his* uncle, please tell me first.

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