

## **Searching for Candlestick Park** **by Peg Kehret**

### About the book:

It is not easy for a twelve-year-old boy to travel from Seattle to San Francisco on a bicycle, especially when he's carrying a cat. And it is not easy to find a father with no known address or telephone number. Spencer Atwood is trying to do both.

### About the guide:

This guide includes discussion questions and projects appropriate for children's book clubs, literature circles, and classroom discussions. It is intended to provoke thought and insight into the themes of this book which include parent relationships, facing one's problems, animal rights and self sufficiency.

### Author Interview:

1. Spencer feels strongly about becoming a vegetarian. Did you have similar feelings as a kid? What and when did you decide what to do?

When I was growing up, my dad worked for a meat company, so meat was always an important part of my family's meals. I didn't know about vegetarianism until I was an adult. As I worked with animals and learned about factory farming, I gradually developed my own beliefs and became a vegetarian. Except for my husband, who made the decision at the same time I did, no one else in my family is a vegetarian.

There are many reasons why people choose not to eat meat. Some do it because a plant-based diet is better for the environment; some do it for health reasons. I chose this lifestyle for humane reasons; I love animals and I don't want to eat them.

2. How do you create your likeable, yet flawed characters?

My characters grow from the inside out. I usually start with a sense of how the character feels about a problem. I may not know what the character looks like (I rarely write physical descriptions of my main characters) but I know how he or she feels about a particular situation. The character develops as the action progresses.

3. When did you become involved with animal welfare?

I began volunteering for the Seattle/King County Humane Society in 1974 and have worked for animal-related causes ever since. I did many different jobs for the Humane Society and soon became interested in helping animals on the national level.

Education is a huge part of animal welfare; most of the problems are caused by people who don't know any better. I hope my books encourage kindness to all creatures, two-legged as well as four-legged. A high point of my career was receiving the Henry Bergh Award from the American Association for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) for Saving Lilly.

I'm now involved with Pasado's Safe Haven, a group that has innovative ways to help animals and also works for stricter animal cruelty laws.

4. Do you outline your novels or follow where they lead?

I've never been able to outline. Every time I try, I end up writing a scene. If I try again the next day, I write another scene. Soon I have so many scenes that it's easier just to write the book than to try to do an outline.

Before I start a book, I usually have some idea of how it will end, but I don't know how I'm going to get there.

5. What other writers have influenced your work?

I read widely, both adult material and books for children but there are no specific writers who have influenced my work. My own style has evolved with practice. My subject matter grows out of my personal interests and philosophies, and my characters come from the feelings I have about myself and other people.

Pre-reading:

Read the "About the book" aloud to students. Predict what obstacles Spencer will have to face on his journey. Why do you think he's running away? Will he make it to San Francisco? Will his cat survive the trip? Will he be able to find his father without any contact information? How? What will he learn on his journey?

Discussion Guide:

1. How difficult would it be to live with the financial stress Spencer and his mom must feel? What, do you think, would be the hardest part? Why? Where are they going to live? Why?
2. Are animals often abandoned like Foxy when family circumstances change? Why? How can you help? What does Spencer do?
3. Why is Spencer's plan flawed? What things does he not consider about his journey? What will go wrong?
4. How does Spencer know that his dad lives in San Francisco? What does his mother think he should do with money instead of buy tickets? Do you agree?
5. Do you think Spencer is justified in his plan for leaving his mom? Who is more wrong in this situation? Should kids ever run from home? Why or why not?
6. Spencer takes things that aren't his along the way. What does he take and how does he deal with his guilt? Does he intend to pay back the items? How do you know? Is stealing ever justified? If so, when?
7. Unlike many novels, the setting for this one changes over the course of the events. How does that add tension to the story? Of the places that Spencer stops along the way which one is the scariest to you? Which one has the most promise? What does he learn at each stop?

8. Spencer does some reckless acts out of his desperation to get closer to San Francisco. What are they? Which do you think is the most worrisome? What does he learn?
9. When Spencer's mom tried to tell him that most animals were raised to become meat, that it was their purpose, he disagreed. "Animals feel pain and fear, just like we do." (p.83) With whom do you agree? Have you ever thought about becoming a vegetarian? Why or why not?
10. Who is Hank Woodworth? How does Spencer know he is worthy of trust? How do you ever know whether to trust someone or not? What does he do for Spencer? Do you think Spencer would've made it without his help? Why does he help Spencer?
11. How does Spencer's dad react to their reunion? Is it all Spencer hoped for? Why or why not? Why can't Spencer live with his dad? What does he realize about their relationship?
12. In the end what happens to Spencer, Foxy and his mom? How do you think Spencer's journey will have changed him? Was he right to have left after all? What could've been the outcome of his actions?

#### Projects:

#### Language Arts:

Rewrite one scene through the eyes of another character (even Foxy)! Take into consideration not just their point of view and opinions but also what knowledge they have and don't have about other characters and conflicts.

#### Art:

Create a collage using images from the book that you either find from magazines or other print materials or create yourself. Think about each part of Spencer's journey as you create the piece. Explain it on the back.

#### Music:

Create a soundtrack for the movie release of the film. What songs would you choose? Why? Create a cover and list the titles of the songs. Include a brief journal about why you chose these songs to represent this book.

#### Social Studies:

In groups of no more than three research information on child runaways. Present your findings in a brief presentation to the class. You must brainstorm at least three questions that you'd like to know the answers to and have at least three resources (only two may be websites).

Science:

Study the science of vegetarians. Research the foods that have the most nutrients per serving and how to get protein without consuming animal products. What foods would you have to add to your diet if you made this decision? How would you maintain your health?

Internet Resources:

<http://www.nrscrisisline.org/>

National Runaway Switchboard- great resources for both kids and parents.

<http://www.nn4youth.org/site/PageServer>

National Network for Youth- terrific information about what it means to be a homeless teen.

This guide was created by [Tracie Vaughn Zimmer](#), a reading specialist and author of the book *Sketches from a Spy Tree* (Clarion). Visit her website to find many more guides to children's literature!