

ARCHIVE · CARLOS DONOSO · 2018

Seven Stories for our Children

Seven short tales written by the author for his sons

CARLOS DONOSO

First written · 2018

For Julián Matías and Juan Daniel.

PROLOGUE

Introduction

Our children are the most precious thing we have, not only because we love them but because they are the men and women of the future. That is why — whether we have children of our own or not — all of us must look after the future of our world by looking after the children in it.

The best way to do that is by being careful about what we teach them, and by taking the initiative: passing on moral values that will help them grow into responsible, happy adults.

Each of us adds a small grain of sand to the future our children represent, and this little book tries to be another grain on that pile, so that the future ahead of us may be the best one possible. For that reason, the stories you'll find here only carry positive, naturalistic, conservationist messages.

I hope you and your children enjoy reading these stories as much as I enjoyed writing them.

LETTER TO THE READER

Dedication

For Julián Matías and Juan Daniel

My dear children:

I wrote these stories, but when I began them I did not know all that would happen in the months that followed. Julián is probably still too small for these tales, and Juan is a little too old. Even so, one day they will be old enough to read these small stories again, and they will be able to take the book down from the top shelf, dust it off, and tell me what they think of it. By then I will probably be so deaf I won't hear them, and so old I won't understand them... and despite all of that, I will still be...

Your father,

C. D. Donoso.

STORY 01

Where are there no ants?

Juancito gets up early and walks to school as he does every day. On the way he meets his friend Carlitos, and the two of them keep going together, chatting. But just as they're about to reach the school, they notice a long trail of ants going in and out of the building.

“Those ants are a problem,” says Carlitos, stepping carefully over them. “They're everywhere!”

“They're at my house too,” says Juancito. “Is there any country in the world without ants?”

“I don't know,” Carlitos replies. “That's a good question.”

When they get to school, Juancito asks his teacher before class begins:

“Teacher, do you know if there's any country in the world without ants?”

The teacher smiles and says:

“Yes and no.”

“I don't understand,” says Carlitos. “Is there a country without ants, or isn't there?”

“There is one country with no ants in the wild,” the teacher explains, “but in most of the homes of the people who live there, there are a few ants — so few that often the people don't even notice them.”

“Which country is that?” Juancito asks, intrigued.

“It’s called Iceland,” says the teacher. “It’s an island in the north of Europe with about three hundred thousand inhabitants.”

“Why are there no ants there?” asks Juancito.

“Because the land is too cold for ants to reproduce,” the teacher explains.

“I want to live there,” says Carlitos. “Ants are a problem.”

“Actually,” says the teacher, “ants are very important. They’re the ones in charge of keeping nature clean — and they keep the school clean too.”

“But there are people here who clean,” says Juancito.

“True,” the teacher answers, “but there are places those cleaners can’t reach. The ants reach those places, and they clean them.”

When class ends, the children go outside. By chance, Juancito and Carlitos see the school principal talking to the wall. They tiptoe behind him without making a sound and overhear him say:

“Please, the ceiling needs to be cleaned. I just looked, and it’s full of dead insects and leaves from the trees.”

Juancito leans around to see who the principal is talking to, and on the wall he sees only a group of ants.

“Is he talking to the ants?” asks Juancito.

The principal jumps when he sees them, and says:

“Don’t tell anyone — well, no one would believe you anyway; no one believes me. We used to have to pay someone to clean the ceiling, but for a few years now I just ask the ants for the favor, and two days later I look up and the ceiling is completely clean.”

“That's impossible!” says Carlitos.

“I know it's hard to believe,” says the principal, “but they've been helping me clean the ceiling for years.”

Juancito and Carlitos leave school amazed, and when they see the trail of ants outside, they step very carefully so as not to crush any of them.

STORY 02

We are one single family

María is at school talking with her friends:

“I'm a direct descendant of the first peoples of this country,” says María proudly.

“I'm descended from Arabs, that's why my nose and my skin are so pretty,” says Paola.

“My mom says my ancestors were Jewish, and that's why we're so clever,” says Claudia.

“My dad says our family is descended from northern Europeans,” says Camila. “That's why we're blonde.”

“I don't know who I'm descended from,” says Patricia. “I'll have to ask my mom to find out what's special about us.”

Their teacher overhears them and asks:

“Did you know that science has discovered that all humans descend from the same family?”

“The same one?” asks María, surprised. “But we're all different. We can't all come from the same family.”

“Actually, yes,” the teacher says, and she explains. “The same thing happened with other species. Do you remember when we studied which species all dogs come from?”

“Yes, they come from wolves,” Camila answers.

“And there are many different breeds of dogs,” says the teacher, “but they all come from the same family.”

“It’s true,” says Paola, thinking. “There are big dogs and small dogs, some very beautiful and some that look scary.”

“Where was the family we all come from?” Claudia asks, her eyes wide open.

“Our human species is called homo sapiens, and we all descend from a family of homo sapiens that, according to scientists, lived in Africa a long, long time ago,” the teacher explains.

“Africa?” Patricia asks, surprised.

“Yes. That family grew, and over time it moved into Europe, then into Asia, and from there reached the Americas,” the teacher explains.

“Do you mean all humans are descended from Africans?” María asks with a worried look.

“Yes, exactly,” the teacher says. “That’s why it isn’t right to feel superior to another person because of our ancestors. In truth, all humans are equal, and we all descend from the same family of African origin. You are part of my family, and I am part of yours. We are one single family.”

The teacher hugs the girls, and they hug her back, happy. They had never thought that all human beings descend from the same family of African homo sapiens.

When she gets home, Patricia tells her mother:

“The teacher explained today that all human beings descend from a family that lived in Africa a long time ago.”

“How interesting! Your grandmother used to say that the Bible also says we all come from a single family,” says her mother.

“Then it's true,” says Patricia. “There's no reason for anyone to feel better than anyone else. We are one single family.”

STORY 03

The blind man of 5th Street

On 5th Street in a beautiful city, there is a blind man who, every day, sells lovely ornaments he weaves with his own hands.

But what is most interesting is that this blind man also tells people how to find the places they're looking for, using the step-counting system that blind people use.

One day, a boy walked up to him and asked:

“Do you know where I can buy a pencil around here?”

“Yes,” the blind man said. “How old are you?”

“Nine years old,” said the boy.

The blind man placed his hand on the boy's head to feel how tall he was and to estimate the length of his steps. Then he said:

“If you're nine years old, keep walking and count twelve steps. After those twelve steps, you'll smell a delicious smell of bread — that's because you're passing a bakery. Right next to it is the stationery shop. You can buy the pencil there.”

The boy walked away counting his twelve steps, then smelled the bread, and next to the bakery was the stationery shop, just as the blind man had said.

A moment later, a lady asked the blind man if there was somewhere nearby where she could buy a gift for her daughter. The blind man said:

“Walk twenty-five steps in that direction and you'll reach the corner. Then turn right, being careful not to bump into a post in the middle of the sidewalk — I've bumped into it myself. From that post, count fifteen steps and you'll hear a lot of noise: that's the entrance to a school. Keep counting until you reach thirty steps, and you'll find a gift shop.”

The lady walked off, reached the corner, and saw the post in the middle of the sidewalk; she had never noticed it before. After fifteen steps, she heard the noise of the children at recess in their schoolyard, which she had also never noticed. Then, at exactly thirty steps, there was the gift shop. The lady walked in smiling, grateful that her eyes allowed her to see.

A little later, a man asked the blind man where the nearest bank was, and the blind man told him:

“Walk twenty steps in that direction and you'll find a step. Then count eighteen steps to the edge of the street. Cross it, and count forty steps more. At about ten steps you'll smell coffee from a coffee shop, and you'll keep walking. When you reach forty steps, you'll feel a kind of silence to your right — that's the bank.”

The man set off and saw the step. Then, when he reached the edge of the street, he became aware that blind people need help to cross. Ten steps later, he smelled the pleasant aroma of the coffee shop. And when he finally stood in front of the bank, he closed his eyes and felt the silence of the bank.

Even though it had been a bad day for him, the man went into the bank feeling lighter, deeply grateful for the gift of being able to see with his own eyes.

The boy who bought the pencil came back to the blind man and asked:

“What can I do to help a blind person on the street?”

“The first thing,” the blind man replied, “is that you must never grab a blind person's cane. All you need to do to help a blind person is let them take you by the shoulder and walk beside you. That is enough to help them.”

STORY 04

Do something good for another living being

On a mountain farm there was a man whom everyone said was very wise. That man had helped many people solve their problems, both great and small.

One day, a boy came to him with a problem. The boy said:

“The other children make fun of me because of the way I talk, and I don't know what to do anymore.”

“What you need to do,” the wise man told him, “is to do something good for another living being. That will make them stop teasing you.”

“Do something good for someone else?” the boy asked.

“Yes,” said the wise man, and the boy left.

At school, the boy remembered what the man had told him, and he began doing good things — even for the children who teased him. Doing that, he started to earn the respect and affection of his classmates, and little by little they stopped bothering him.

Another day, a lady went to the wise man and said:

“I have a lot of mice in my house, and I don't know what to do to get rid of them. I've tried everything and the mice won't go away.”

“What you need to do,” the wise man told her, “is to do something good for another living being. That will get the mice to leave your house.”

The lady walked off very upset, because the advice seemed silly to her — she was always doing kind things for other people. She thought she had wasted her time, and that such a simple piece of advice would not help her.

But a few days later, she found a cat on the street with a hurt paw. She picked it up and took it home to care for it. In no time, the cat was hunting mice, and all of them fled the house.

At that moment, she remembered the wise man's advice — that she “do something good for another living being” — and how it would solve the mouse problem.

A few days later, a man went to the wise man with a very difficult problem:

“I have trouble with my mother-in-law. She can't stand me, and I can't stand her either. I can't take it anymore.”

“What you need to do,” the wise man told him, “is to do something good for another living being. That will help you get along better with your mother-in-law.”

“I've already tried,” said the man. “I've been kind to her, I've done good things for her, but nothing works.”

“Listen carefully,” the wise man told him. “What I said was that you must do something good for another living being.”

The man left without understanding what the wise man meant, but a few days later he noticed how lovingly his mother-in-law cared for her plants and flowers. So he started helping her care for those living beings, and little by little his relationship with her improved. A year later, they were very fond of each other.

Now it was the wise man who had a problem: a fox was getting into his farm and eating his hens. What could he do?

“I need to do something good for another living being,” the wise man said to himself, “but for which one? I know — I’ll get a big dog to scare the fox away.”

He told his wife about his idea of getting a dog, and she liked it very much. So he went out in search of one.

But when he came back home, he was leading a donkey.

“What happened?” his wife asked. “Why did you come back with a donkey?”

“Because a friend of mine can no longer take care of it. It’s an old donkey, and I felt sorry that no one was looking after it well. Tomorrow I’ll go out again and look for a dog to deal with the fox.”

But that night, when the fox crept close to the henhouse, the donkey started making a lot of noise — so much noise that it woke the wise man up, and he saw the fox become frightened and run away. And that is how the wise man solved the fox problem: by doing something good for another living being.

We must always do good to every living being on this planet.

STORY 05

The watchmen with wings

In a large city, there is a beautiful green parrot named Pacho.

Pacho is always visiting the balconies of houses and apartment buildings, hoping people will give him a few seeds to eat. Things go so well for Pacho that other parrots are doing the same, and now in the city there are many parrots who, early in the morning, wake people up at their balconies and windows to ask for a few seeds.

That is why the mayor of the city has asked the parrots for help: she wants them to report any pet they find shut alone in an apartment for several days, and the parrots are gladly doing this watching work to look after pets that for one reason or another get left alone at home for a long time.

For example, Pacho lands on a balcony and starts making noise, singing the way parrots sing. If no one comes out, he moves to the window and looks inside, checking whether there's a pet. If he sees one, he comes back in the afternoon, and again the next day, and the day after that. If after three days the pet is still alone, he flies to the city hall and tells one of the mayor's helpers.

Once he saw a kitten alone in an apartment. He came back the next day and the kitten was still alone, and on the third day still alone. So he flew to the city hall and reported it to Juan, one of the mayor's helpers, who investigated and managed to rescue the cat — the owner had traveled and had not been able to return.

Another day, Pacho helped save a dog that had also been left alone at home and had run out of food and water. Pacho has helped save two little turtles, eighteen fish, five rabbits, a snake, and a hamster, along with many dogs and cats.

And that is why, today, Pacho will be honored by the mayor.

In the city hall auditorium there are many television cameras, ready to cover the event in which a parrot will be decorated for helping save the lives of other animals.

The specialists who handle these ceremonies dress Pacho up and apply a touch of makeup so he looks his best on camera. Then the mayor says a few words of thanks:

“We want to thank the parrots for helping us look after pets that are left alone at home for many days. The lives of those pets matter, and sometimes their owners can't return in time because of some setback. The parrots help us save those lives. On behalf of all the parrots, today we honor Pacho.”

The mayor pins the medal onto Pacho's chest. The people in the auditorium applaud, and then the moment comes for Pacho to stand at the microphone and speak about what it feels like to receive this honor. Pacho says:

“For us parrots, it is a great pleasure to help save the lives of other animals. We know people love their pets very much, and they would never do anything to hurt them, but sometimes things become dangerous for a pet shut in with no food or water. All of us who live on this beautiful planet must look out for one another. That is how our lives become brighter and happier.”

A few days after that, Pacho landed on a balcony, and after singing and getting no answer at the window, he saw an old woman sitting on a rocking chair inside her apartment. Something about it felt wrong, so he came back in the afternoon, and the woman was still in her rocking chair. The next day he came back, and she was still there, alone.

Pacho didn't wait until the third day. He flew straight to Juan and told him what he had seen, and Juan arranged for a doctor in an ambulance to visit the woman.

She was so ill and so weak she couldn't get up from the chair. If Pacho had not seen her, she might have died. And so, Pacho also saved a human life.

If the parrots in your city don't watch over you, you should be the one who worries when you hear that a pet has been left alone in a home for many days. You should also worry if you haven't seen for a long time an old lady you know lives alone. What can you do? You can tell your parents.

STORY 06

Petronio's advice

In a beautiful house in the city, there lived a big dog named Petronio. His family loved him very much, and he made sure to give affection to every member of the family.

Every time his owner took him for a walk in the park, Petronio chatted with the other dogs of the neighborhood:

“Hello Sultan!”

“Hello Petronio!”

“How is your owner?” Petronio asked.

“She is very sad,” Sultan answered. “I stay close to her, quiet, to keep her company, but her sadness doesn't lift. Every day I try to convince her to come out for a walk with me, but she hardly wants to go out.”

“I see... Try this,” Petronio advised him. “When you're alone with her, slip away and stand by the door. She'll call you, but you'll just look at her and walk away slowly. She'll go out looking for you, calling, and you'll go all the way to the house of one of her friends and bark at the door so the friend opens it before your owner catches up to you.”

“I'll try,” Sultan said.

The next day, when Sultan was alone with his owner... he slipped away, just as Petronio had advised.

Sultan made it to the house of his owner's friend and started barking at the door, so that just as the owner arrived, the friend had already opened it. They went inside, and his owner and the friend talked and cried together. After that, Sultan's owner began to feel better — now she was more cheerful.

On another walk, Petronio ran into his friend Fifi, a small dog with lovely pink bows.

“Hello Petronio!”

“Hello Fifi! How's your owner?” Petronio asked.

“She's fine, but she feels lonely. Many of her friends moved to another city, and she's almost without friends.”

“I see... Try this,” Petronio advised her. “When she takes you for a walk, look around until you find a group of people who don't have a dog, and start playing with them. Your owner will call you, and you'll look at her and call her back with a bark. Stay with those people until she reaches you, and then keep wandering among them so she can't pick you up. Maybe those people will start chatting with your owner, and she'll make new friends.”

“I like that idea,” said Fifi. “I'll try it.”

The next day, when Fifi's owner took her for a walk, Fifi watched carefully until she found a group of people — two men and three women — chatting cheerfully, and without a dog of their own.

Fifi ran to them and started to play. Her owner called her, and Fifi barked back, calling her in turn. When the owner came up to the group, Fifi darted between them so her owner couldn't pick her up and carry her away.

The people invited Fifi's owner to sit down and chat. They were five siblings who met in the park once a week to talk. Fifi's owner became good friends with that family, and she never felt that lonely again.

Another day, Petronio was out walking with his owner when he met his friend Rocky, one of those dogs who look a bit scary.

"Hello Petronio!"

"Hello Rocky! How's your owner?" Petronio asked.

"He's in a bad way," said Rocky. "There's a girl who makes him nervous every time she calls him on the phone, and I already know when she's coming over because he gets all jittery. And now my owner is always singing — and he sings very badly."

"I see... There's nothing to be done," Petronio replied. "I've seen this before. Your owner is in love. Soon that girl will come to live with you both, and they'll have very beautiful babies who will tug at your ears — but it's going to go well for you."

"Are you sure it's nothing bad?" Rocky asked.

"When it comes to humans," said Petronio, "nothing is ever certain."

STORY 07

“That thing” around your neck

In the ocean there lived a seal named Cafú, who loved eating fish and playing with his friends. One day, Cafú got home and his family started looking at him in a strange way.

“Where did you find that?” his mother asked.

“Find what?” Cafú asked, a little confused.

“That blue thing around your neck,” his mother said.

Cafú touched his neck with his flipper and realized something really was there.

“I didn't know I had something on my neck,” Cafú answered.

“Come, let's try to take it off,” said his father.

But no matter how hard Cafú's parents tried, they couldn't take “that blue thing” off his neck.

“What does “that thing” around my neck look like?” Cafú asked, since he couldn't see his own neck.

“It's blue and round,” said his mother. “You have it all the way around your neck.”

“Go to the block of ice near where the penguins live,” said his father. “There you'll be able to see what “that thing” around your neck looks like.”

So Cafú swam to that polished block of ice and could see he had something blue on his neck, but he couldn't quite tell what it was.

On his way home, the other seals looked at him oddly because of “the blue thing” dangling around his neck.

“What’s that around your neck?” one of his friends asked.

“It’s an ornament,” Cafú said without thinking.

“An ornament? And it doesn’t bother you?” asked his friend.

“No, it doesn’t bother me. In fact, I’ve always liked the color blue,” Cafú answered.

But Cafú was only saying that to show off. The truth was that he was a little worried about not knowing what “that thing” around his neck was.

When he got home, he asked his mother:

“Have you ever seen an ornament as pretty as this one I have on my neck?”

“No, I’ve never seen anything like it,” said his mother, “and I don’t think it’s pretty, and I don’t think it’s an ornament either.”

That night, Cafú lay worried, because no one knew what “that blue thing” around his neck was.

Late at night, his father came to him and said:

“Your mother and I are worried about what’s on your neck. Tomorrow we want you to go to the island where your grandmother lives, and ask her if she knows what “that thing” is.”

So the next day, Cafú went to see his grandmother, an old seal full of experience.

When his grandmother saw him, she was very surprised, and she said:

“Cafú! Why do you have “that thing” around your neck?”

“I don't know,” Cafú answered. “Yesterday I came home with “this thing” on my neck.”

“Oh, my goodness!” said his grandmother, worried. “Let me try to take it off.”

But no matter how she tried, the grandmother could not get “that blue thing” off Cafú's neck.

“You have to find a way to get rid of it!” his grandmother told him, alarmed.

“But it doesn't bother me, grandma,” said Cafú. “I actually like looking different from the others. I like that everyone notices me when I swim past them.”

“I've seen this before,” the grandmother said. “You have to take it off, because you will grow, but “that thing” will not grow with you, and it will press into your neck until it kills you.”

“It's going to kill me?” Cafú asked, very frightened. “How can I take it off, grandma?”

“The only ones who can help you take “that thing” off,” said the grandmother, “are the beings who throw “those things” into the sea.”

“What beings are those?” Cafú asked.

“They are beings who live only out of the water and walk standing on two legs,” the grandmother explained, “and they cover their skin with other skins to keep warm. They can swim, but they are not as fast as we are. They also eat fish, like us.”

“Where can I find those beings?” Cafú asked.

“They have strange little islands that move and make a lot of noise when they move,” the grandmother explained. “You must listen for the noise those islands make as they move, and find them. They can help you take that off your neck.”

“Alright, grandma,” said Cafú.

Cafú left his grandmother's island and passed again by the polished block of ice to look at himself. Now he could see himself a little better, and he liked “that blue thing” around his neck more and more.

So he ignored his grandmother and went home.

“What did your grandmother say?” his father asked.

“Oh, that...” Cafú answered, “that I should look for some two-legged beings to take it off me.”

“Is it dangerous?” his mother asked.

“Well... it's...” Cafú said, “it will be bad when I'm grown up. I'll wait a little while, and then I'll look for those two-legged beings to take it off me.”

Cafú did not tell the whole truth, and that way he was able to keep “that thing” around his neck — which made every seal look at him and ask what it was.

But little by little Cafú grew, and “that thing” did not grow with him, so, just as his grandmother had warned, it began to bother him. At first he tried to ignore it, but later “that thing” caused him pain. So he had to tell his parents the whole truth.

“I have to tell you the truth,” Cafú said. “My grandmother told me that “this thing” around my neck would not grow with me, and that it

could kill me. But I liked it, so I lied. Now it hurts, and I'm very scared.”

“It's alright, son,” his father said. “It's always better to tell the whole truth from the start. Now let's go find those two-legged beings to take that off you. Where did your grandmother say we could find them?”

“On their islands. They're islands that move and make a lot of noise.”

“I know exactly which ones!” said his father. “Let's go find them!”

Cafú and his father swam out to sea to look for one of the ships humans use to fish in those waters.

But “that thing” around Cafú's neck pressed so hard that he could no longer eat. So Cafú grew weaker and weaker.

Finally, Cafú and his father heard the sound of a ship and swam toward it, but when they reached it, Cafú was so tired and weak that he could not go on, and he began to faint.

When Cafú's father saw him about to faint, he took him by a flipper and placed him in the net the fishermen had lowered to catch fish. So when the fishermen hauled the net up, they hauled Cafú up too.

When the net opened on the deck, the fish began to leap, and a little girl on board was the first to see Cafú.

“Look! It's a seal!”

The sailors saw him, and when they noticed he was breathing with difficulty because of a tight blue ring of plastic around his neck, they

shouted:

“We have to help him! He's dying!”

One of the sailors looked for something to cut the plastic with, and when he managed to free Cafú, the seal began to breathe normally again.

A little while later, Cafú was eating a tasty fish on the boat. Then, while the girl stroked him, she asked the captain:

“Can I keep him?”

“No,” said the captain. “That seal almost died because we humans are throwing away too many things we could be recycling.”

“What is recycling?” the girl asked.

“Recycling is using something again several times before throwing it in the trash,” the captain explained.

Cafú returned to the sea and met his father, and the two of them swam home, very happy. And Cafú never lied to his parents again.

EPILOGUE

Conclusions

Imagination is part of our thinking, and in children it is something especially important.

Scientists have found that the brain's ability to produce images is so fast that there is no time to process the word “no” before the image has already formed. No wonder, then, that when I would tell my daughter, “Don't run,” she would run off!

For her, it was as if I had said, “Run” — because that was the image her small but astonishing child's mind built first.

We want our children to keep the image of the ants doing their useful work, cleaning the planet and recycling organic matter. We want them to imagine the teacher hugging her students while she reminds them that all human beings are one single family.

We dream that when they see a blind person, they will remember the blind man of 5th Street. We need them to see how important it is to do something good for another living being, and to feel how that, in turn, returns to them. And that when they see a parrot fly by, they will remember that we are all responsible for making sure no pet dies of thirst, shut up alone at home.

We also want them to love a dog the way that special animal deserves, and we hope that from childhood they will become aware of the harm we cause to marine life when we dump all our garbage into the seas.

In the end, our dream is that they will be better than we are.

COLOPHON

*These stories were written in 2018 by Carlos Donoso, in Cuenca,
Ecuador.*

They belong to the open archive of the author at carlos-donoso.com.

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