



finding home

by Glen Herbert



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You may have seen Kita. If you haven't seen Kita themselves, maybe you have seen their homes, their moss gardens, their swimming puddles, or the little clearings in the forest where they play soccer. Kitas, of course, are the little people who live in the forest, enjoying the woods and helping it whenever they can.

Many, many years ago, the Kita didn't live all together. Instead, they spread out through the forest, living alone or in groups of two or three. They went about their day doing all the Kita things Kita do: they got up in the morning to tend to their moss gardens before having a dip in the swimming puddle or gathering berries and mushrooms for lunch. In the afternoon, they would each have a good nap so that they could stay up for one of their most favourite things of all: campfires! At a campfire, Kita would tell themselves a story or two, sing a few songs, and then watch the campfire until they were feeling tired or grumpy or were

otherwise ready for bed.

One day—again, this is many, many years ago—a Kita named Sanjay Kita spent his day in the usual way, doing this or that, and ending his day at his campfire telling his favourite stories and jokes, paying especially close attention to remember to laugh at all the right places. And then he got to thinking. And this is what he thought: “I wonder if other Kita tell the same stories as I do?” Of course, he didn't know. As he went to sleep that night, it was that niggling thought that lingered in his head.

The next day as he was wondering if he should have marmalade or salsa on his cranberries, the thought was still there, but now there was even more of it. He thought, “I wonder if other Kita tend their moss just like I do?” And then he thought, “I wonder if they water the roots after picking a few of the flowers, or if they pick first and water later? And do they get it all done before lunch, or does it take them longer some days than others?” Of

course, never having spent a day with another Kita, he had no idea.

These kind of thoughts began to follow him wherever he went, and every day seemed to bring more of them. He wondered what kind of swimsuits other Kita wore, and if at lunch they ate berries first and then mushrooms, or if they did it the other way around. Do they eat grilled cheese for breakfast, lunch and dinner some days, and if they do, do they look over their shoulder to see if anyone is catching them at it.

Sanjay Kita's first great idea

After a few more days of this, he began to form an idea, and this was it: he would go on an adventure to see, if he could, just how some of the other Kita had their lunch and went for swims. And while he was at it, he thought he might also listen to see if he could hear what songs they sang and what stories

they told themselves around the campfire. So he packed up his backpack with the things he would need—his sleeping bag and his goldfish crackers, his sleep toy and his water bottle—and after a good night's rest, he set off.

The first day, he walked all morning and some of the afternoon, then turned around and went back because he forgot to turn off his waffle iron. Or at least he thought that he might have. You really can never be too sure with waffle irons. (In the event, he found that he had indeed remembered to turn it off, but, really, it's always a good idea to double check.)

Once back he found a few other things to putter with until his courage was screwed up enough for him to set off again. When he did he travelled from dawn to dusk, stopping only to rest a bit and smell any new smells that were happening by. Then he got a bit stuck because there were a few potato bugs that needed



Acorns without tops is a sign of that Kita are living in the area.
They use the tops for buttons and dishes.

looking at. After a day of that, he set off again. It was a bigger day than he ever thought that day could be. You see, that was the day he happened across the moss garden of another Kita and, luck of luck, there was the Kita busy tending it. She had picked some flowers, and was busy watering the roots. (He marked that down in his notebook: *picked first, watered after. weird!*) Her name was Bellflower, or so it said on her mailbox.

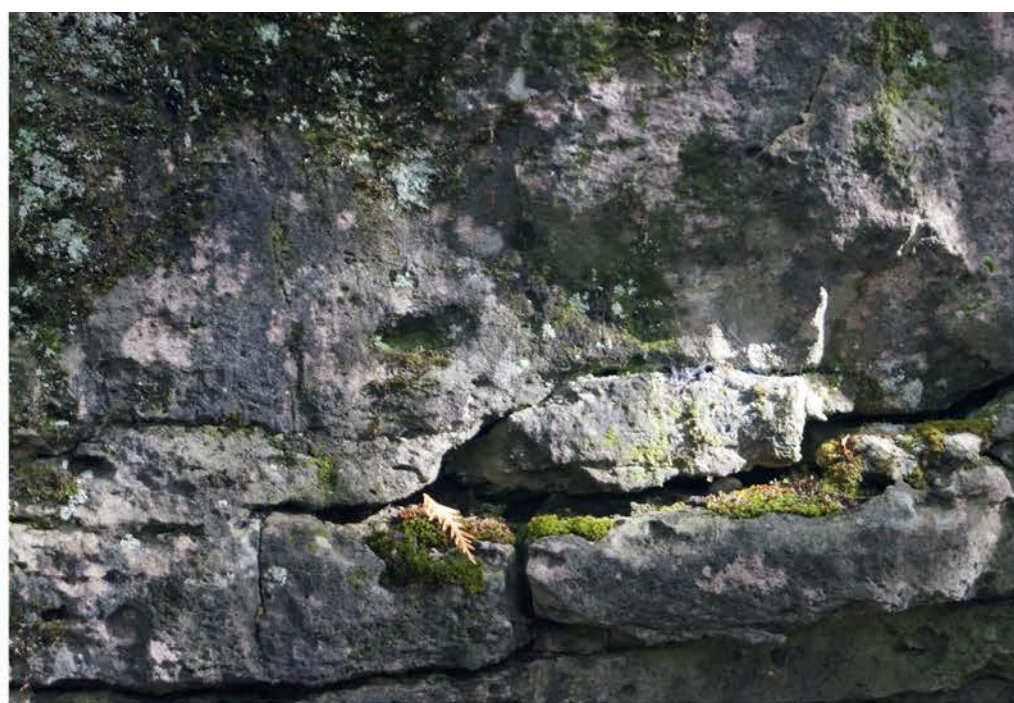
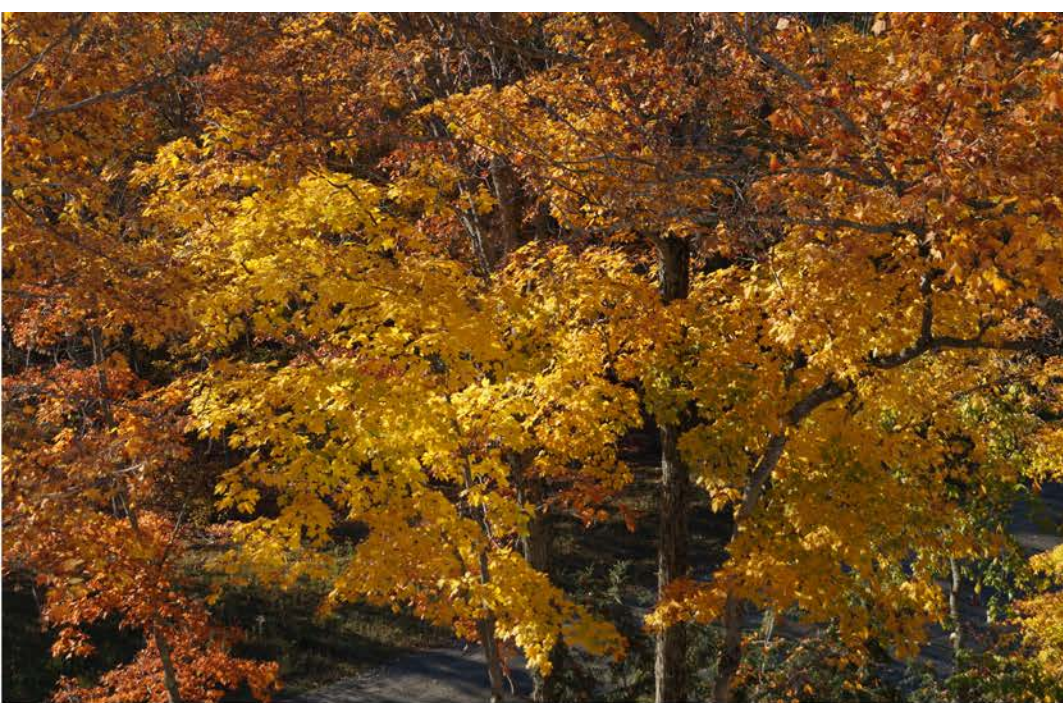
After a bit of wandering about feeling shy, he decided to say hello. But when he got there in front of her, all ready to say what he had to say (he was going to say “Hello, lovely morning for tending moss, isn’t it?”) it came out a bit wrong and sounded more like, “are you done with that mushroom, ‘cause I’ll eat it.” Indeed, that’s exactly what it sounded like because that’s actually exactly what he said.

Luckily Bellflower didn’t have any idea that this wasn’t just the thing that strangers said to each

other when meeting, nor did she realise that “Good Morning” or “yes it is a nice day” wasn’t perhaps the most exact thing to say in response. Instead she said “no, but there’s another one over there you can have.” Sanjay found that Belleflower was very friendly, and she was happy to share even more of her mushrooms, and her swimming puddle, and to hear about all the things that he had been getting up to. And as their day wore on, he began to explain some of the niggling thoughts he’d been having, and wondering if she ever, perhaps, didn’t have these niggling thoughts too. You know, from time to time. As you do.

She admitted that, well, she wasn’t sure if she had or hadn’t, but that nevertheless they were pretty good thoughts with some pretty interesting questions attached to them. And on hearing them, she also thought of one of her own, which is “what is the correct response one is to give when asked if one is finished with a mushroom or not? Is ‘no’ OK





if it's the truth? Or is 'yes' always more polite, whether it's true or not?"

That night when they settled down to the campfire after a dinner of grilled cheese— Bellflower had girl cheese (that's what she thought was the right name) only for dinner, and ate all the crusts first, then the inside part. After dinner, Sanjay sang his favourite song, which Bellflower didn't know. Then Bellflower sang her favourite song, which Sanjay said he kind of knew, but wasn't sure, but did an admirable job of faking it through the "alive alive-o" part. Then Sanjay sang "Sunflowers" and of course Bellflower knew that one, so they sang it together. They also found out that two voices singing the same song sounded pretty nice, even if you didn't sing all the notes quite right. (In fact, some of the wrong notes sounded even better than the right ones.) Then they each told a story. Bellflower's story was the funniest, but they liked them both. And even

though some things were different and some were the same, everything was fun to share.

After about a week, when they had run out of songs to teach each other, Bellflower wondered, "Maybe if we found another Kita we'd have even more stories and songs to share." And then she wondered, "And maybe if we had girl cheese twice a day, it might not be such a bad thing." And then, after a long pause, she wondered, "And I wonder if other Kita wear such funny looking bathing suits as Sanjay does?" (She thought his bathing suit was pretty funny looking, but she didn't say that out loud.)

They were all good thoughts, and good questions, and neither of them had any idea of what any of the answers could be. So the next morning, they packed up their backpacks and away they went to find another Kita.

After three days of hiking they didn't find a single Kita. They found three! Now there were five



Kita dwellings are often found at the foot of a tree, though some may be built among rocks or even in some rare cases directly beneath a moss garden.



Kita all together at the same time, more than had ever been in one place at one time in the history of all Kitadom, so far as any of them knew. They had some different stories and songs, and some that were they same. One liked to eat her mushrooms first, and then her berries. Only two of them wore the same colour t-shirt, and all of them except Sanjay were horrified at the thought of salsa on cranberries.

The new Kita also ate something that Sanjay and Bellflower had never heard of before: it was a dipping sauce made from tomatoes. They called it “ketchuparamanakitatetrazine” which Sanjay and Bellflower couldn’t say, so they shortened it to just “ketchup.”

And what fun they had! Well, at least until they tried to play soccer. With five Kita, the teams were always uneven—two against three—or if they played two-on-two, one Kita had to sit out. After a couple days of arguing about the rules and trying to

divide five players into two even teams, they decided this: they needed to go find another Kita who could help even up the teams and to tell them what the rules of soccer should be.

So they went and on the first day they didn’t find a single Kita. They found two! Which didn’t help soccer, because it’s just as easy to divide seven Kita into two teams as it is to divide five. But once again they found that the more Kita there were, the merrier everything seemed to become. They kept going to test the idea, and indeed whenever they found more Kita, they found that it was true.

Before long there were more than a *hundred* (which was their word for “a lot!”) Kita travelling together testing out the idea. But by then it started to get harder to move around because none of the Kita ever needed to go to the bathroom at the same time. With everyone all needing to go to the bathroom at different times, they weren’t able to get very far at all before the sun started to set and it



Moss gardens are typically round, or roundish, and often include a single leafy plant. Kita don't eat moss. They grow moss gardens simply because they like to or because they find them beautiful.

was time to set up camp. Some days they could see their last campsite when sitting at their new one. They just weren't getting very far at all.

Another great idea ...

And that's when Sanjay had his second great idea. Actually, it was both an idea and a question at the same time, and this was it: "What if we stopped moving?" And then he thought, "And what if, when we stopped moving, we just let other Kita come to us?"

Sanjay in particular thought these were great ideas (or questions, or whatever they were) even if he was the one who thought them. After all, he'd been hiking for longer than anyone, and he missed tending a moss garden, or having your very own soccer pitch. So together the Kitas looked for just the right place to stop moving and wait for other Kitas to come to them. They wanted somewhere with a lake for swimming, but lots of

trees too. Moss was important, and so were berries and mushrooms.

And when they found just the right place they set up their sleeping bags and their snacks, and settled down. They made space for all the kitas that they hoped would want to come and stay. And others did come, and the group continued to grow bigger and bigger. What a place it was! And if you've never heard more than 100 Kita singing "Sunflowers" at one time—certainly none of the Kita had—well, it's quite something.

After a couple weeks, Beula Kita, one of the youngest, wondered if the place where they were living had a name. "After all" she wondered, "all the Kitas have names. Why shouldn't their places have names too?"

They all thought, "hmm." And no one could remember if there was a name, or why there wasn't a name. So they decided there probably wasn't one and that they should make one up. In Kita, "kita"



means Kita, so they thought that should be part of it. In Kita, “Wana” means home, so they put it together to make “Wanakita” which in the Kita language means “home of the Kita.” And that’s what they call it. It’s a place not far from where you are sitting right now. You could get in a car and go there if you didn’t have to be home in time for dinner, which you do. Anyway, it’s a long enough drive for you to have a nap in the car, but not so long that you’d have to spend a night in a hotel along the way. Not unless you really wanted to.

And so today the Kita have a place with a name and more songs, more stories, and more fun playing soccer than ever before. They have friends to talk to, and to disagree with, and to pass the ketchup. Different Kita do things differently, and Sanjay certainly has the funniest swim suit (but in a good way). If you look carefully when you walk in the forest you can see their houses and their moss gardens and their pools and their soccer pitches.

You can also find lots of their friends, too: squirrels, and frogs, and chipmunks, and even people. The Kita are forever making new friends and inviting them to come, share stories, and talk about the best way to eat a girl cheese sandwich (which they sometimes do for hours), or to argue about what the rules of soccer really are. They have a motto, too. A motto is a kind of a rule, but not a rule like “Don’t jump on the bananas” or “Don’t ride your bike with your mouth full.” A motto is a rule that is fun to follow. The Kita motto is “soba nachi parki tuta” which means “everything is better when you do it together.” And they do! And it is! Once in a while, Sanjay will try to tell himself story—laughing at all the right places and clapping at the end—but it just doesn’t feel quite right. It’s hard for him to remember that it ever did.







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