

A Surprise Message

by RV Staff Writer E.T.

On the way home from school one day, Eli found an old balloon. This wasn't just trash — it was a real treasure!

Eli walked to school every day. When the final bell rang, he walked home, too. His trip took him across the playground, past the t-shirt factory, and across the main street. From there, Eli often cut through a vacant lot where a house used to be. The house burned down years ago, but there were still flowers and trees to show that people used to live there.

One day, Eli watched a blue jay fly into the old maple tree at the vacant lot. The bird sat on a low branch and shrieked loudly. Blue jays were always the loudest birds in town, but Eli wasn't afraid of them. The jay squawked once more and then flew up to a higher branch.

With the bird gone, Eli noticed that the branch wasn't empty. There was a bright red streak dangling from the branch. Eli walked toward the tree to get a closer look.

The red streak was actually an old balloon. Eli thought he should throw it away. It was litter, which wasn't pretty. And what if a bird tried to eat it?

Eli picked up the floppy piece of red rubber. There was still a long string attached. Eli began to wrap the string around the balloon so it would be easier to carry.

At the end of the string, Eli was surprised to see a plastic bag. Even more strange, the bag wasn't empty. There was a piece of white paper inside.

Eli was curious. What could it be? He opened the bag to find out.

The piece of paper was folded into a small square. Eli unfolded it. It was a letter!

Eli read it aloud:

Dear Friend,

If you have found this letter, it means my balloon finally popped. I used the balloon to see how far my letter would travel. I launched it from Wisconsin on May 1. Please write back to me and tell me where and when you found it.

Sincerely,

Joe Valentino

Eli was excited. Wisconsin was a different state, so the balloon traveled very far. He ran home to get a pen and paper to write back to the address included in the letter.

Eli spent the rest of the afternoon writing to Joe Valentino. He answered Joe's questions and asked what he liked to do for fun. Eli was happy and hoped Joe would be his pen pal and friend.

Questions

1. What makes Eli notice the balloon in the tree?
2. Why does Eli pick up the balloon?
3. Why is Eli excited about the letter?
4. What would you say in a letter to Joe Valentino?