



YOU LIVE, YOU LEARN

By Nadiene Jacques' Periods 1, 2, 4, and 6 at X530
Longwood Preparatory Academy

Behind the Book / New York

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Behind the Book's mission is to develop engaged readers and writers in underserved NYC public schools by designing and delivering programs that are multi-disciplinary, culturally responsive, and promote deeper connections to books and their authors.

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Behind the Book • 216 West 135th Street • New York, NY 10030

VISITING AUTHOR: Paul Griffin

TEACHER: Nadiene Jacques

PRINCIPAL: Dr. Asya Johnson

PROGRAM LIAISON: Nadiene Jacques

CURRICULUM DEVELOPER: Roya Nabizadeh

VOLUNTEERS:

Cameca Bacchus

Eric Lenkowitz

Benjamin Drury

Nomi Schwartz

KPMG VOLUNTEERS:

Husnian Ahmad

Bryanna Nazario

Paige Gladstone

Steve Revillo

Michal Karwat

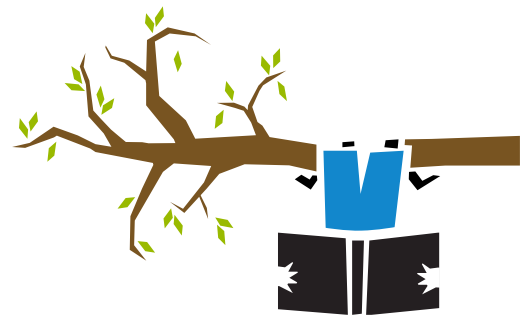
Shonit Sajip

Sean Kind

Tyian Scarlett

Dominique Matarese

Anthony Skoda



PROGRAM FACILITATOR: Elizabeth Valentin

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR: Kelly Choi

TEACHING ARTIST: Alan Bessen

STUDENT BOOK ART DIRECTOR: Adriana Moreno

BOOK DESIGNER: Julian Mahecha

PRINTING: PDC Graphics; coordinated by Sherree Cobb

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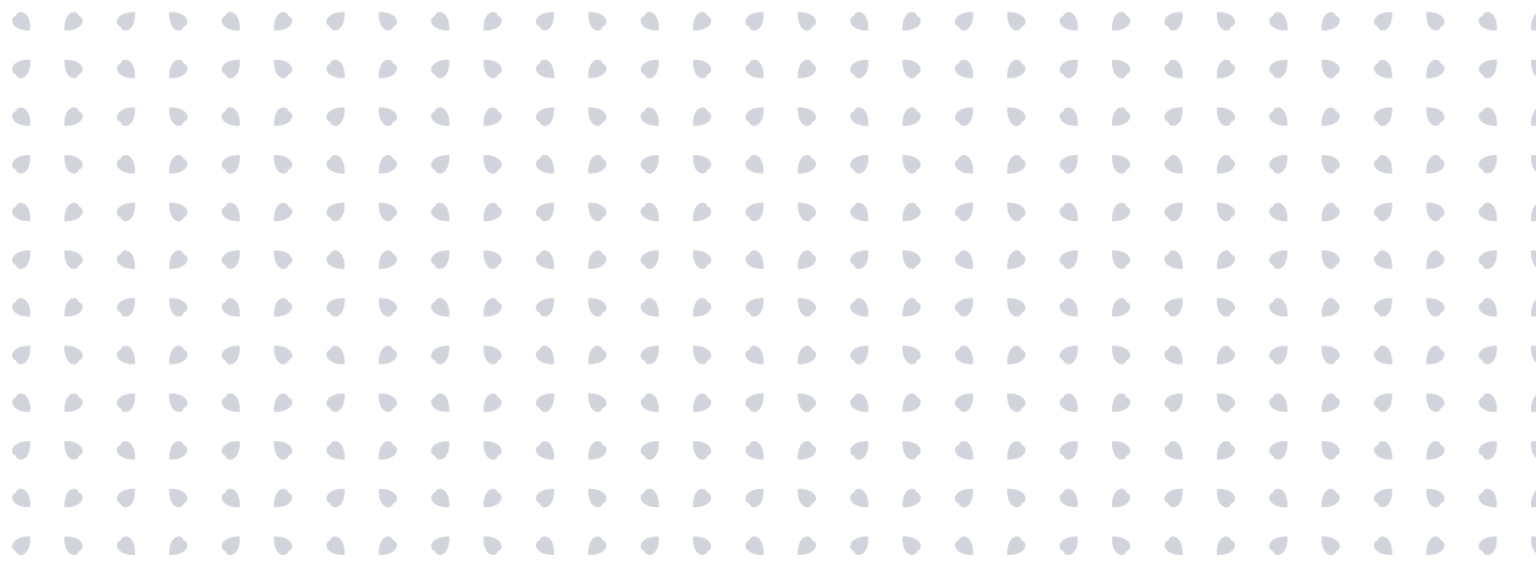
In the interest of honoring student voice, Behind the Book presents students' work as received from the teacher.

We would like to thank our generous funders: The Korein Foundation, who supported the creation and publication of this class book and The Guru Krupa Foundation, whose contribution made this program possible.



DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to our teachers and families who encouraged us to share our stories, to Dr. Johnson and our LPA community, and to everyone who is going through a lot and can relate to our narratives. Also, thank you to Paul Griffin for showing us that our voices and our stories are important and should be shared.



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

What does it mean to ‘come of age’ and how can teenagers successfully transition from adolescence to adulthood? Through in-depth discussions, drama games, author visits, and original narrative writing and cartooning, the ninth graders in Ms. Jacques’ classes were able to consider what’s involved in becoming an adult. They began their exploration by reading Paul Griffin’s novel *Ten Mile River*. The book’s main characters, 13-year-olds Ray and José, have both escaped foster care and juvenile detention and are now barely surviving on the streets. The book’s themes generated lively discussions about friendship, identity, race, poverty, violence, criminal justice, and foster care.

To better understand the book’s characters and the ways to develop a compelling story, the students played several drama games, which gave them opportunities to act as the characters and evaluate the decisions they made. The classes divided into pro and con teams to debate decisions such as accepting illegal but lucrative jobs or asking another character out.

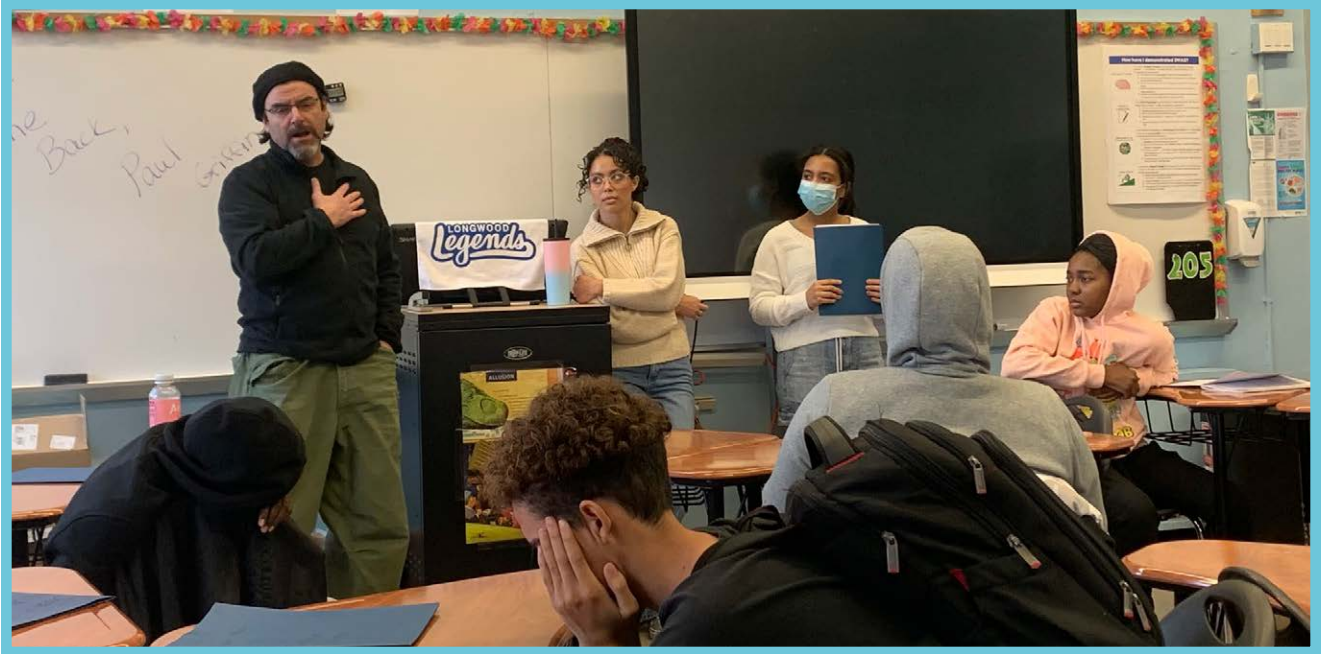
During Paul’s two visits, he talked about his inspirations for the book and the elements of a good narrative. Paul asked students to describe their dreams for the future and how to best achieve those dreams. Members of one class combined free-style rap with beats and performed an original song.

Using the author’s suggestions for creating powerful narratives, the students worked with Behind the Book volunteer writing coaches to draft personal stories based on significant events signaling their journey toward adulthood.

Students learned new ways of illustrating the book’s themes through art. Led by Alan Bessen, professional digital artist and cartoonist, the students explored basic cartooning techniques, including ways to incorporate dialogue. Students were also encouraged to draw abstract designs to express their emotions.

This program gave the ninth graders many opportunities to consider the choices open to them as they enter adulthood and the different approaches they can take to making informed decisions as they mature.

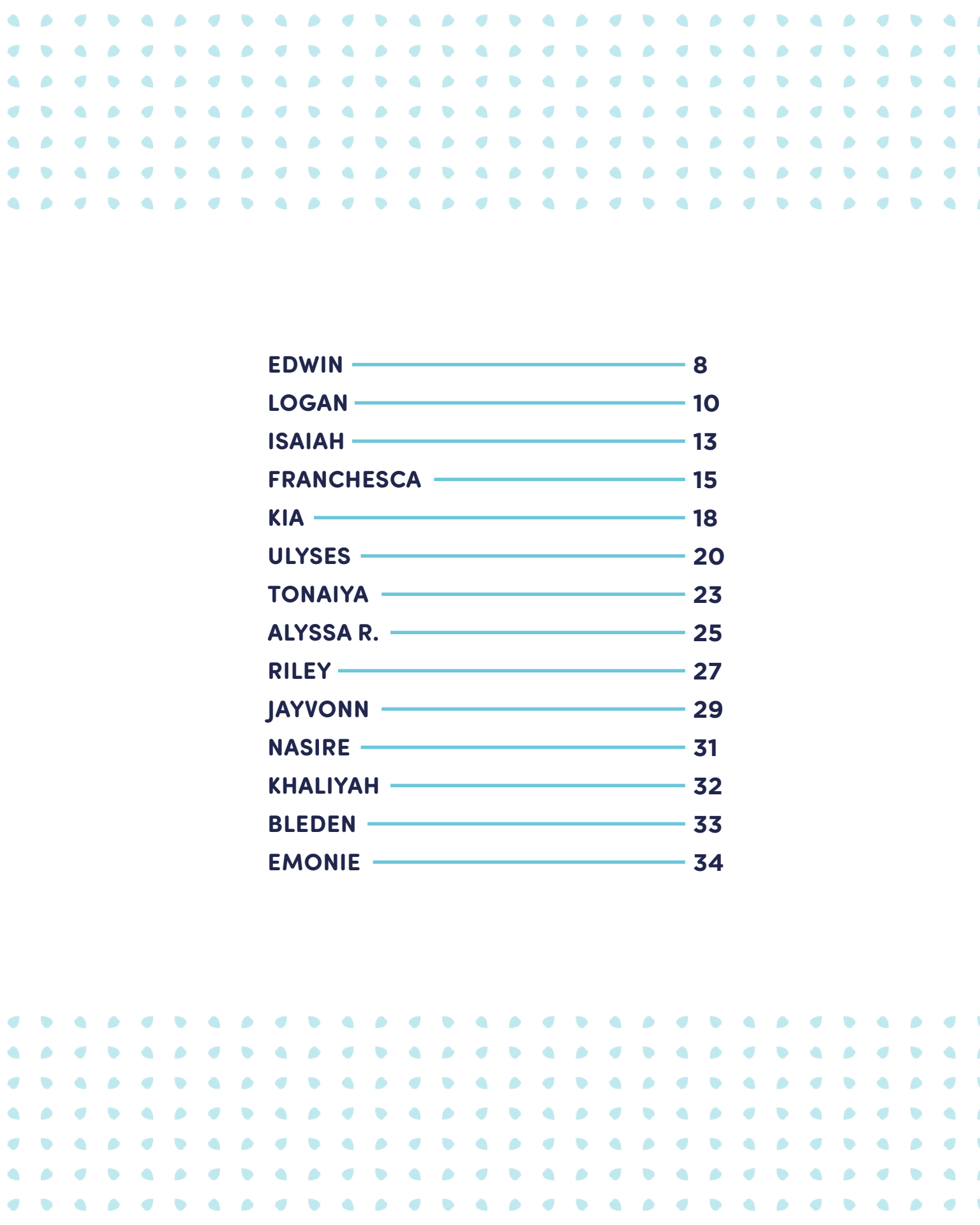
We hope you can see from all our work how this program helped us on our journey.





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By Edwin

My siblings and I had been begging our parents to get us a pet dog, but my parents said that it was too much work. I tried my best to convince them to get a dog, I was hopeless.

The next day we decided that we were going to the mall. I wanted to get new shoes. I saw my mom putting a dog bed in her shopping cart, I sneak up behind her and

I told her, "Mom why are you putting a dog bed in your shopping cart if we don't have a dog?"

She looked nervous. I think she was trying to surprise us by getting a dog and trying to be sneaky by putting a dog bed in her cart.

"We are actually planning on getting a dog," she said.

I was in disbelief. Not in a million years would I think that my parents would agree to get a dog. I was so excited, but she didn't tell me when we were going to get the dog.

We came back home, It had become night at that point. I went to bed, I just kept thinking about the dog. I just didn't know when

I woke up and was getting ready for school. I went to the living room and saw the dog. It was a small white dog. I was jumping up and down.

"No way you actually got us a dog!" I said.

I quickly came to him and picked him up. He wasn't even one year old, He looked like a cotton ball. I am so grateful we got him.





THE LADY DOWNSTAIRS

By Logan

About a month ago, my sister, Leyah and I were home alone while my mom was at work, doing her job so she could provide for us. We were just relaxing, both in different rooms, me playing Roblox on my computer as always, and my sister watching TV in the living room. We were pretty relaxed knowing that we were alone and could do anything around the house, without having to do a favor. We've been alone lots of times, so we weren't worried about anything until this encounter.

It was quiet, it was almost as if I was the one home alone, only hearing the sound effects from the game I was playing and a faint noise of chatter coming from the TV. I was bored, I wanted something else to do other than play video games. Knowing that we were home alone, I went to mess around with my sister.

I caught my sister sitting on the couch. "Hey, what are you doing?" although I already knew she was watching TV.

"I'm watching TV," Leyah replied. "Logan, every time you come up to me you either wanna show me a TikTok, need something from me, or just want to annoy me."

"Geez Leyah I was just checking up on you," I mumbled to her. "I'm bored and I wanna do something," I told her.

"Wanna sword fight each other?" she asked.

With nothing else for me to do, getting more bored each dying second I stand there, we both pick out two random sticks we found in the house and just start clashing, not actual sticks, just sword-like things. To be

fair, I was doing everything in my power to annoy her like the siblings we are.

"Damn you stabbed me! Let me just use my super-duper better cool healing power," I said out loud on purpose. "Oh look I'm feeling better now. Let's fight!"

"That's not even fair!" she yelled.

We were pretty loud, stepping around from place to place, maybe even accidentally dropping our sticks a few times, but it definitely cured my boredom.

Suddenly, my sister and I heard some thuds below our feet.

"Ignore it," I said to her after we had a pause.

Meet Karen. Yes, her name is actually Karen. She's an old woman who has problems with her husband. Apparently, my mom had disliked her for all the time we've lived there, as she would always bang upstairs to be petty. If I'm being honest, this has been going on for years, ever since I was a baby my mom told me. She'd get mad because my almost nine-teen month old baby sister would be walking around the house too loud. We can't control how she walks!

About thirty minutes later, we had already stopped playing our game and went back to doing our things.

Suddenly, the thuds happened again. This time we weren't even doing anything, so I fell for her trap and out of pettiness, I banged back on our floor. From there it was a long pause.

Ten minutes or so later and the doorbell rings.



“Leyah! Go answer the door for me since you’re already in the living room!” I asked her. I still went up to go answer the door since I was 100% sure my sister would continue watching TV, but she proved me wrong when she beat me to the door in the hallway.

She went up to the door, looked through the peephole and mouthed to me, “IT’S THE COPS.”

I thought she was joking. I took it all as a joke. She was probably playing a dumb silly prank, although her expressions looked very legit; Eyes widened, mouth wide open, then closed to look serious but I thought it was all some act.

I looked through the peephole and suddenly chills went down my spine. I froze up. I couldn’t thaw out for about four seconds. To make matters worse, my mom jokingly texted, “Don’t open the door,” and, “You’re going to jail,” as she saw the cops through our Ring camera.

But the door was already open before I saw her texts.

“Is everything okay? Why are you guys here?” I asked the two cops who were currently standing outside my door. They had a stern, yet chill vibe about them. Looking serious for their job, yet being chill after spotting me and my sister opening the door.

“Is Jennifer R. here right now?” one of the cops asked. That was my mom’s name.

She was still at work and me and my sister were home alone. This wasn’t looking too good. I had thoughts flooding my mind about us being taken away with CPS because we were home alone without a parent guardian. “No, she’s currently at the supermarket right now getting groceries, why?” I lied to a cop.

My sister was behind me holding a broom as “defense”. She was terrified. “I’m fourteen, and my sister is ten,” I told the cops out of fear, hoping that would do something. Maybe take their mind off about us being home alone without someone watching us.

“She’s at the supermarket? Alright when did she last leave?” the other cop asked.

“About twenty minutes ago. Can you tell me what’s wrong now?” I lied again. I told two lies to two cops in the matter of a minute.

We had a small chat about the lady downstairs and how she called the cops on us. I told the cops about how long she’s been doing these things.

“Alright, you kids seem pretty relaxed and you seem to be telling the truth, so we’ll be getting out of here now. Have a nice day.” The cops finally leave, I close the door and lock it with all three of our locks, and my sister finally stops holding her breath. “You lied to a cop, Logan.” my sister told me.

“Yeah, I know,” I replied to her, “Were you scared? You were holding a broom the whole time.”

“Of course I was scared! We were home alone and the fricking cops came to our apartment!” Leyah replied.

After my mom got home from work, we told her about what happened, and how we handled it. I went back to doing what I do most, playing Roblox.

To this day, I walk more quietly around the house, unlike my almost nineteen month old sister, and Karen still bangs upstairs. I usually just ignore her now, maybe even use her to tell my baby sister to stop walking so hard, even though I could have her walk around to be petty.





By Isaiah

Hi, I'm Isaiah and when I was ten years old I was honestly really lazy. I would just stay at home, watch TV and go to sleep. My mom and dad hated when I was lazy, especially my dad. He always wanted me to go outside and do something, but I refused to.

"Hey Isaiah, want to go to the park for a bit?" Dad said.

I never wanted to go outside so I always replied with, "No thanks" or I'll make an excuse why I can't go.

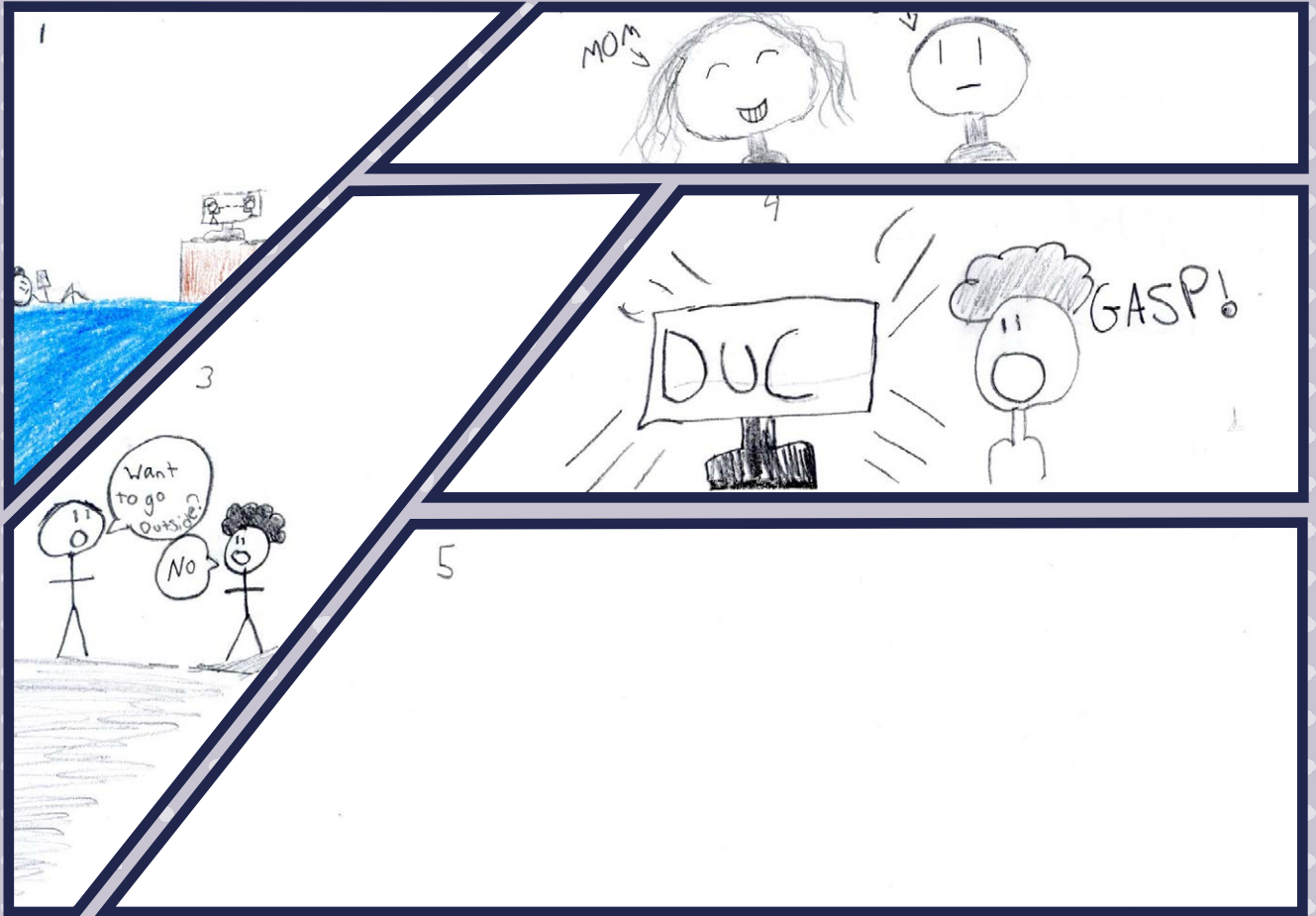
One day I was watching YouTube on my TV until an ad popped up on the screen. The ad was showing "Duke University College," the really good college people want to be in to fulfill their sports dream. The ad showed a lot of sports that I actually wanted to try out "I FINALLY want to try out some sports" the only words he heard were "try sports". After he heard that he froze into solid ice. He ran to his room and got all types of random sports equipment. He approached me with baseball bats, basketballs, tennis rackets, and more.

He brought me outside and we started playing, but the sports we were playing weren't really for me. We played tennis, softball, baseball, foosball and more. The sports I was playing made me feel bored and I didn't really feel thrilled playing these types of sports

When I told him the sports we played were not for me, he started to really focus on trying to find the perfect sport for me.

Then he showed me how to play American football. When I started playing American football it was hard at first, but I kept playing and playing and got better. It was the moment my dad threw the football, my life flashed before my eyes because I really liked playing it.

I liked playing so much I tried out for a football team and got in. I was destroying players and was winning games. Discovering my passion for football changed me. I was no longer lazy, sitting on the couch, I felt like I had purpose. This was a turning point for me and this is the story of Isaiah becoming a football player.



7 YEARS OLD

By Francesca

When I was seven years old my parents separated and my dad moved out leaving me, my mom, and my brother. Since then, I've been going through a lot of stages in my life. I was a child. My mind was like a newborn with no knowledge. I think they thought because I was too small minded they couldn't tell me that I wouldn't understand. My mom and dad never explained to me what happened. I would beg my mom but still no answer. And my dad chose not to tell me at all so there wasn't any option such as,

I was clueless. I started blaming myself for the situation. What if I'm the reason this happened? I tried to convince my mom to tell me, I tried to not cry about it, and also tried to move on, accept things how it was. But I couldn't, I needed answers as quickly as possible. I was going crazy. I felt like a giant person was just laying on top of me and I couldn't move or breathe.

I was eating breakfast one morning in the living. And I got up and went to her and sat on her bed and asked her "When are you going to explain to me? It's not right that you guys don't tell me anything."

But she would just look at me with sorrow in her face like she feels bad and not say anything.

I know when my mom isn't okay, so I asked her, "Mom, are you fine?"

As she grabbed my face and made her way to my hair, as her fingers went through it nicely. "Yes honey, everything is fine."

I went to my room and just sat on my bed thinking... I felt like my head was going to explode. I looked at myself in the mirror and talked to myself. Are they hiding something from me? I had so many mixed emotions, I was mad and sad at the same time. I was confused. I was like a book with no words in it.

I'm always getting good grades, and good reports. But I started getting lower percentages because I couldn't focus in school. My mind was all over the place. I felt like twenty people were talking to me at once. Teachers would pull me out of class and ask me, "Everything okay Francesca? You seem very off today." And I would just say "I'm fine" knowing in reality deep down I'm not. I was at my worst. My mom would get calls from school, and she would tell me. "Honey, please do good in school, don't let this affect your education." But I couldn't. It was too hard to forget about it.

After three years have passed, I was thirteen, I went home one afternoon from school and my mom called me to the living room and told me to sit down. "Come here baby, it's time that we talk."

I walked so fast to the living room, I was waiting for this moment in FOREVER!!! "Yes please, let it all out." While looking her in the eyes with sadness and excitement all at once.

As she started speaking to me her smile started going down slowly and her face turned red like a tomato. "Things happen for a reason not everything is meant to be" were her last words after finishing.

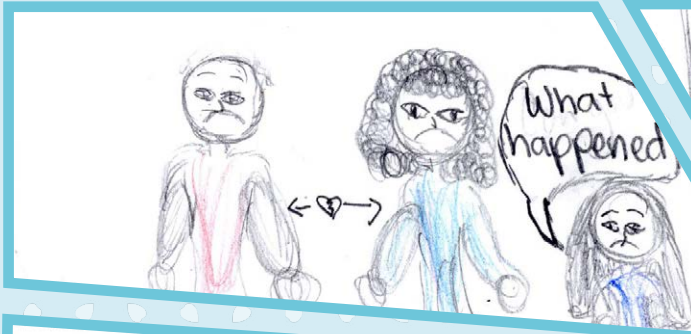


As the tears went down my eyes and spoke for me I hugged her. I was so speechless, I had no words. The only thing I said to myself was wow. She tried so hard to not say anything that would change the way I look at my dad. But she didn't have to say anything at all. The hurt in her face while speaking said it all. After all, I was somewhat relieved because she finally told me but at the same time overthinking the situation more. I wanted to call my dad and ask him if he could tell me now. But I know he wouldn't. He would just mix all the words around. I went to my

room and said to myself, Well it's time that I accept things as they are. Maybe it was for the better.

After that talk me and my mom had, our bond got closer than before. I checked up on her every day. I made sure she felt good. I would randomly give her hugs and say, "I love you mom, you're the best mother I could ever ask for."

And while her head is leaning on my shoulders she would say, "I love you more, daughter."



By Kia

When I was twelve in 2018, I had just started my first year of 6th grade. I already got left back twice in 5th, now I was lucky to make it to my second year of sixth grade in middle school.

At first I would just do my work and homework. But later on when I was on my way to 7th grade, I started acting lazy and refused to do any work. I thought to myself, Why are they giving us all this work? This is too much.

Then Covid started, so I did remote learning. I would think to myself, Oh my gosh, I don't want to do remote learning, this is too much bro. Teachers gave us homework packets during the summer without considering that we didn't want all this extra work. I loved being outside and enjoying the break, but these assignments were so boring. Especially when it was all remote. There were no connections to other students or teachers. I became so sick and tired of remote learning and being in Success Academy. I began being so disrespectful that I would privately text the teachers rude stuff, cause I didn't care about the teachers or the school.

I came to my mom maturely and said, "Mommy, I wanna leave Success, and go to a regular school."

She was like, "Okay."

But as I finished having a conversation with my mom, the computer turned around and looked like it was going to force me to stay. It was angry as a pit bull, and said "You think you about to leave Success? Not on my watch, you not."

I looked at the computer, like he was crazy, before he could even stopped me, I was already finding the new school I wanted to go to and have a better education, and a better life.

Then later, my mom found me a middle school up the block from me called P.S. 129. I did so well and I passed all my classes. Then on June 23rd, 2022 (15 days after my 16th birthday), I graduated 8th grade. Now I'm working hard in my first year in high school as a freshman.

I knew I could do it. I'm so happy I left Success, the school was wack, and John H. Finley P.s.129 was the best choice for me and I love it. I'm 16 in high school and so what, I got left back? But I'm working hard, and making my way up to get out of high school. <3





By Ulyses

During the half day I went to school (because it was parent teacher conferences). I left at eleven. I saw Modou crossing the street, so I followed. We dabbed each other up while he was talking to Adama and Javahan.

We were hanging out at a deli, then another deli, then another deli. Then we stopped at a Mexican deli. I was pretty hungry, so I bought a taco. After a while, I paid and then we left the Mexican deli.

My friend and I were talking about where to go, then Modou replied "Let's go to Allerton."

I said to Modou, "But I want to go home."

Adama left us a long time ago and Modou wanted us to meet Adama. He called Adama and told him to stay at Allerton. "We will meet you there."

"Who's we?" I commented.

He convinced me to go, but in my head I told myself, I'm going to get lost, but f___ it, I guess.

My stomach started to feel very weird like God was sending a message to me, or warning me about something bad will happen and I would regret it... but, nah.

I ignored it.

When we got to the train station at Prospect, we jumped over the gates and waited for ten minutes. During that time, we decided to get on the first cart. The 2 train arrived, we get on the first car, and Javahan and I were talking about if we get lost or die. We blamed Modou because the train smelled like smoke. It seemed like it was going to explode and tons of crackheads only in NY trains stations.

Stop after stop I started to pray to god I don't get lost or die. Meanwhile, Modou was recording me.

When we got to Allerton, I saw an MTA worker on the train tracks and dumbass me didn't pay attention to any sign that the 2 trains weren't running.



When we got down the stairs, Javahan and I demanded Modou take us home He replied, "Chill out! I'll buy you guys donuts."

I demanded Modou take us home but, nah. This guy took us to Dunkin Donuts.

Yusuf entered the Dunkin Donuts and asked us, "What are you guys doing here?"

"The 2 trains aren't running."

Javahan and I stared at Modou like we're going to kill him just like Ted Bundy.

We went outside and I started to panic and my stomach started to growl. I knew I should have listened to my guts. I had a little flashback when I entered the train station. I asked myself what I got myself into.

Meanwhile, Javahan started to argue with Modou getting us lost at a random place we don't even know.

I told them, "Y'all Uber."

They all replied, "We are broke."

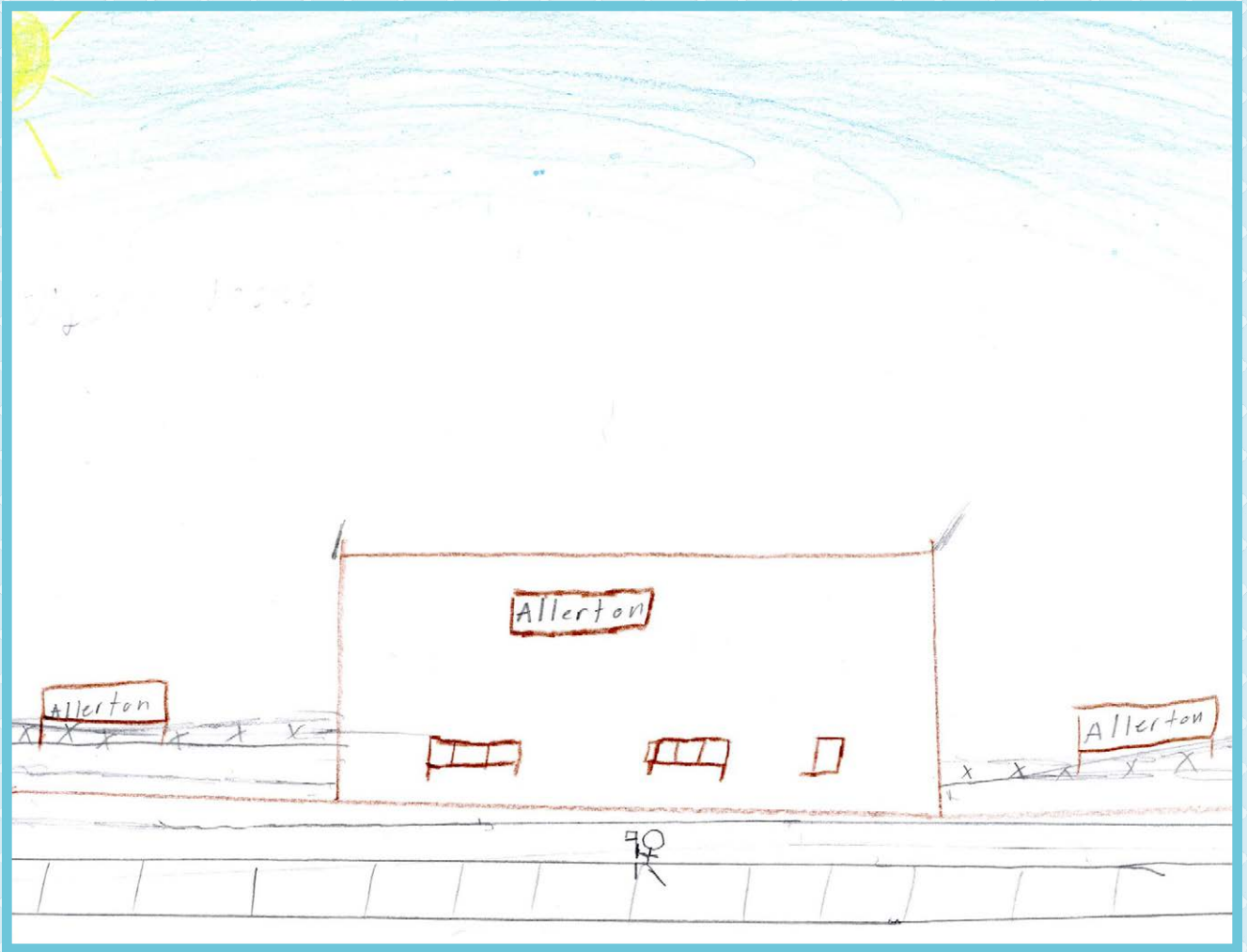
F___, I say in my head.

Yusuf told us, "Y'all better hurry up cause the train is about to leave." So we rushed up the stairs and luckily we made it to the train.

We got off East 180st St. When we got there, it was so quiet you could hear a penny drop. When the 2 train, arrived (express) we got on the train and it was like I hardly knew Javahan because it was so quiet between us. We got off at Simpson and I dabbed Javahan and we went our separate ways.

I walked from Simpson all the way to Hunt Point. I took the 6 bus all the way to Prospect and made it home. When I opened the door my mom and my brother weren't there. I was still traumatized about what happened today. At least I made it home.

What I learned is never trust anyone, even if they are your best friend. Who knows? They probably will get you lost, so just trust your guts.



By Tonaiya

I've been asthmatic for most of my life. I've been in and out of hospital beds since I was a child because of my asthma attacks and shortness of breath. I started to believe the hospital loved my presence.

It was mid-winter and I was around the age of 8-9". I went outside to play with some of my friends in the snow in the park. It was with my friend Ray and Sarah, my friends mom watched us from the benches. It was cold like the arctic and white uncolored snow stuck to the ground. It was always like that in the winter on the west side of Harlem.

It was around 7:00 o'clock when it started to get dark and my mom's friend dropped me off back home. It was only then that I started to feel dizzy and coughing, wheezing even. It felt like I was dying.

My parents walked into my room to see what I wanted to eat, but saw me coughing on the floor. They took me to the emergency room to see what I had come down with.

"Your daughter unfortunately has pneumonia, and with her asthma records she'll be in worse condition than others," the doctor said.

"How bad is it?" my mother said, concerned.

"Well she has to stay in the hospital until she gets stable, but after she is discharged she has to stay home and can't do any physical activities until our next checkup," said the doctor.

I was an active child so staying in bed all day was the worst possible thing that could happen to me at the time. The hospital felt like a second home, it made me feel weak like I couldn't do anything. I viewed myself

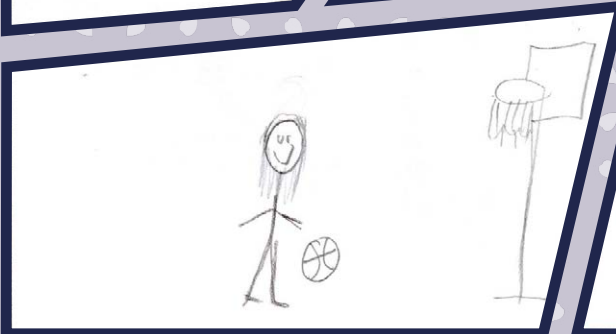
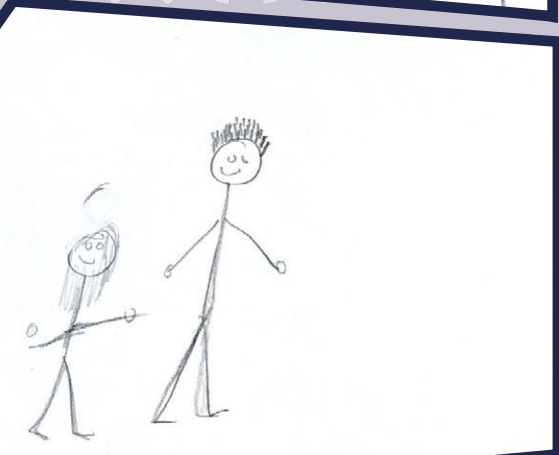
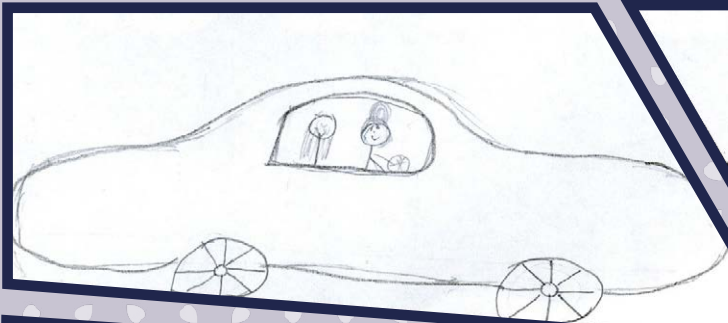
like every other sick kid that needed to be saved by someone because my body wasn't as strong as the other kids. The suffocating fumes of albuterol sulfate choked me every day as I gazed down at the other kids having fun in the playground as I was stuck hooked up to a machine.

Seeing the kids outside having fun lit a spark of hope in me after I saw the patient next door who had asthma just like me happily running out of the hospital with no care in the world. It gave a reason and goal: to want to overcome my sickness. I didn't want to feel bad for myself and let a sickness I can't control weigh me down all my life. So I took action and promised myself I would get better, so I can try every sport and extracurricular activities just like all the other kids. I wasn't going to let asthma take my childhood from me.

After I was discharged from the hospital I was eligible to play sports again after a few weeks' time. I signed up for my school's basketball team around a year later and was soon on the court with the other kids. Happiness filled my heart as I was having fun with all my friends and not on the sidelines watching kids doing the things I wanted to do.

I went through the hardships of not experiencing a normal childhood and it changed my perspective on how I view life. It showed me that people like me that aren't as fortunate as others need to take advantage of the opportunities that they have because my asthma can come back at any time, and I want to use my time to do things that I love.





MY "FRIENDS"

By Alyssa R.

Back in 2018, I had these "friends" in the 5th grade in elementary school. Their names were Emily, Jade, and Kayla. We would do everything together. We were like a family.

One time I was in recess and I asked to use the bathroom. I was minding my own business when my friends came into the bathroom. I was about to call out their names, when I heard my name. They were talking about how ugly I was and I couldn't dress, and how I don't do bad stuff like them. At that moment, I felt heartbroken, angry, and betrayed that my closest friends would talk about me behind my back like that. They will never do something like that. What did I do to them so they can talk about me???

Once they got out of the bathroom, I told myself that I was going to get payback one by one.

The next day in school, I was going after my first friend Emily. She had really good grades back then because she will always have a cheat sheet in her bag. During lunch, I went to the principal's office and told her that Emily had a cheat sheet in her bag, and told her that Emily had been cheating for a few months. And the principal said she will call her in her office after lunch is done. After that I haven't seen Emily since it turns out she went to summer school and after that she changed schools.

Emily was out of the picture. Now it was time for Jade. Jade was the leader of the friend group and she would bully little kids in our school, but the thing that is kind of funny is that she can't fight, so meanwhile

I talked to a girl that Jade was talking bad about what she was saying about her. "Hey amber" I said, "Oh, hey, Alyssa do you need anything?"

"No, I'm good but I just came to tell you what Jade had been saying about you."

"Oh, okay."

So when lunch time came, Amber yelled out "YO JADE, I GOT SOMETHING FOR YOU."

She jumped on Jade in front of everyone.

Jade was asking me for help and I just sat there eating my food, minding my business.

Emily and Jade were out of the picture. Now it's time for my last friend Kayla.

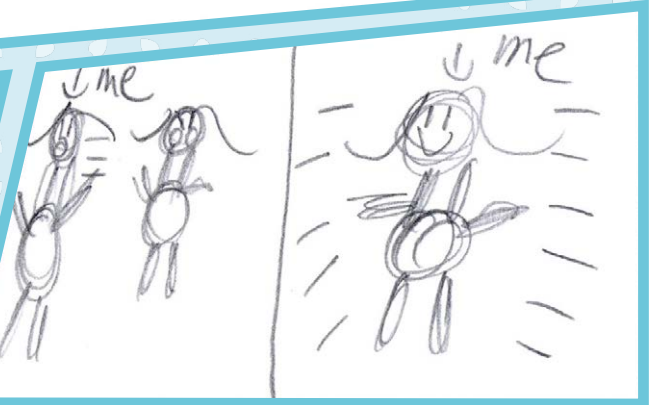
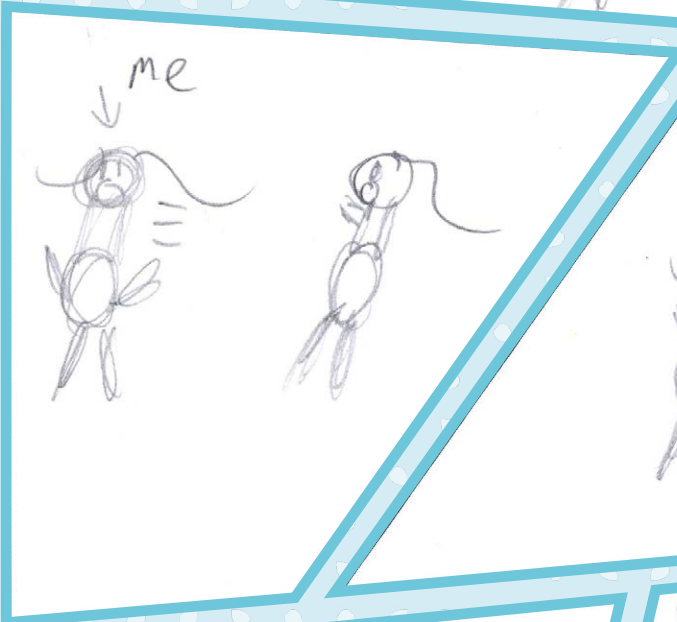
Kayla loved to cheat on her elementary school boyfriend with other boys. Her boyfriend would not believe the other kids.

So when Kayla was with a different boy, I recorded them and showed it to her boyfriend. He told her they were done and she was heartbroken. Then she changed schools.

I was done with getting payback on my "friends". I felt good doing all of this because I know I didn't do anything to them, but they still did it anyway. I basically forgot them for a while until now. That is the story on how I got payback on an enemy in school.

The lesson that I learned from my experience is that people will talk about you or hate you for the dumbest reasons. And if people like that act like that, cut them out of your life because you don't need that negative energy in your life.





By Riley

In life there are several turning points one can come across. It is something a person can or cannot control. Especially, the decision one makes is able to completely change the dynamic of the way you live.

If I have to say it was the day that I thought I would never be able to use my left foot again.

It was a very difficult time that I went through. It was during a school day where I was in dance class halfway through the period where the teacher decided to have everyone have a dance competition to see who can be the team leader.

I was doing ok. I was the second person left. It was between me and a classmate. She went and danced first then we finished. It was my turn.

I was midway through a dance move when I felt a very weird sensation in my foot.

Next thing I know, I'm in the hospital. It was so cold and scary. I hated being in the hospital. It always gives me a weird feeling in my stomach.

I was with my mom, but even though I was with her, I was still scared. The nurse came in and took me to get x-rays. After that it took a long time to get the result. The doctor

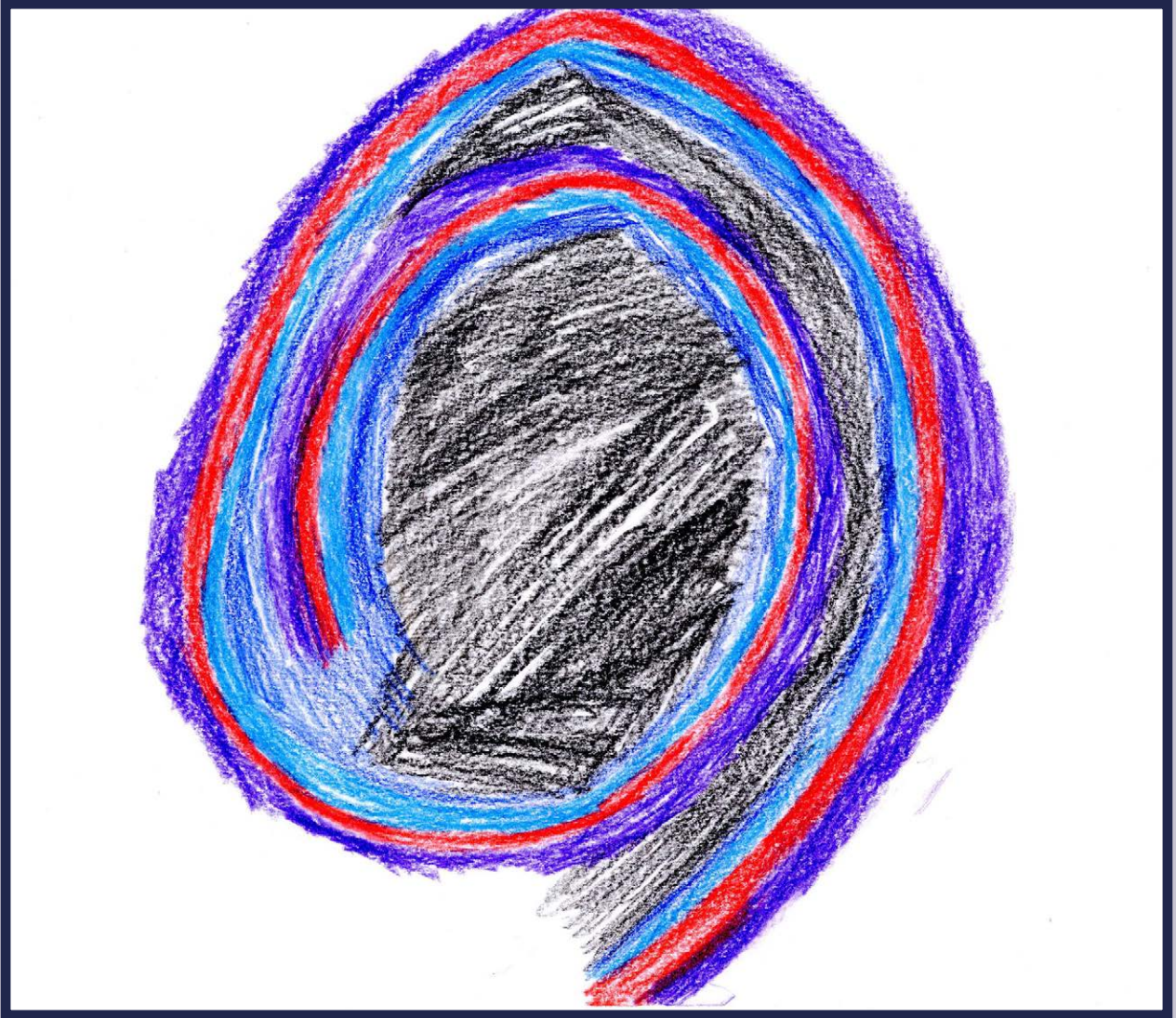
came and told me that I had messed up a muscle in the bottom of my foot. My heart was pounding from the fear of the unknown of what was going to happen next

When I left the hospital I was left with these pairs of crutches that I could not walk with. I felt like I was going to fall on my face every time I took a step.

Two months had passed by and we had gone back to the hospital for a checkup when they told me that I was ready for physical therapy. It took some getting used to the fact of me trying to use my foot again also the pain was unbearable. But after a month of physical therapy they gave me the boot so I could start walking.

I was happy that I was out of the crutches. But I was not so happy with the result with the boot either. The boot was the worst. I felt like a rocking chair every step was with a rock in it. After a while I was finally able to get out of that boot.

Occasionally I go back to being in the boot because of the foot. But then I am able to get out once I feel better. Since I went through with that process I think that I can do anything these moments in life are the things that made up my life we



By Jayvonn

During my 8th grade school year I got into a fight with one of my old friends. We got into a fight because he said he was saying bad things about my friends. I was not letting that slide so I slapped him twice. He tried to hit me back but the teachers pulled me back. The only reason I got suspended is because the teachers saw me slap him. This didn't end well because I got suspended for a week for "bullying" and I missed a week of work.

A month later after that little fight he came back to me saying "he want to fight again

after school". I said, "ight," and we waited into after school. I think one of the teachers heard our conversation and told the other staffs because when we got out the school the school safety was outside waiting for us. They told us if we fight then we were getting in school suspension.

We waited into we got away from the school and got it on.

After that fight we stop beefing because we realized there was no point of us beefing.





MY LITTLE SIBLING

By Nasire



By Khaliyah

I grew up in Jamaica with my family for half of my life. I had friends, I was going to a good school and was pretty happy with life. That all changed one day when my dad filed for me, my brother, and my mom. By December 10, 2019, I would be moving and starting my life all over again, a fresh start some would say.

When I first came to America everything was different. I felt different. I would have to start a new school with new people who I didn't know but that's what life is about meeting new people.

Along with new schools, my family was falling apart, especially my dad, even though he was the one who brought us to America. My dad didn't even have a place for my family to stay so we had to move from hotel to hotel and that was really stressful and hard. My dad would tell me how "I'm garbage" and how that "I should've been born lifeless" and so I cut all ties with him.

After a while my emotions started to get the best of me. I started to feel lonely and depressed but I tried my hardest to settle into my new life. I went to therapy and I talked through my feelings and I got better.

My family and I eventually moved into a new house and were stable. My mom got a job and so did my brother. My mom eventually after working very hard bought her first car in America.

Eventually I made new friends after three years and got accustomed to the fact that I have moved to a new country and had to start over. I left everything behind in the past along with my old life and people who hurt me. Now I'm much happier with life and everything is going my way.

I now play basketball, go to a good high school which will help me prosper in life and my family is happier than they have ever been.



By Bleden

Back when I was 7-8 years old, I used to live in a building that brought me many memories. I had a best friend that I did everything with. We went to school together, we used to chill out in each other's houses mostly every day. We called each other brothers because of how close we were. We would always play with a toy called Beyblades. It was a game where you had a spinner and battled each other. He always used to win.

One day, the landlord called my mom's phone and told her that we had to move out. She was in shock. She gathered all of us and told us what had happened.

"Sit down," my mother said.

All of us were in disbelief when she told us. We were all in the living room and the whole room was just quite in shock. My mom had called my best friend's mom to tell her what had happened and they both were in shock.

"I can't believe this," my mom said out loud.

Damn, I can't believe we're getting kicked out and losing everything, I thought.

All those memories we made we were going to lose.

The day we moved out everyone was crying because we were all like family. My family and my best friend's family were in front of the building with each other saying our goodbyes. First, my mom started to cry. Then everyone else started to cry. I guess you could say it was like a domino effect. Our mothers knew each other for so long they became close just like me and my best friend did.

To be honest that was a very sad day for me because I kind of lost my best friend and that tight relationship we had together. I still keep in touch with him, but he moved all the way to Colorado so far away. Our bond is still there but not as strong. We talk like once every 2-3 weeks because of how far away he is.

By Emonie

In my life I might be the most curious person you may ever meet in your life. My life is a hot mess, it's either I'm losing something or I'm losing myself.

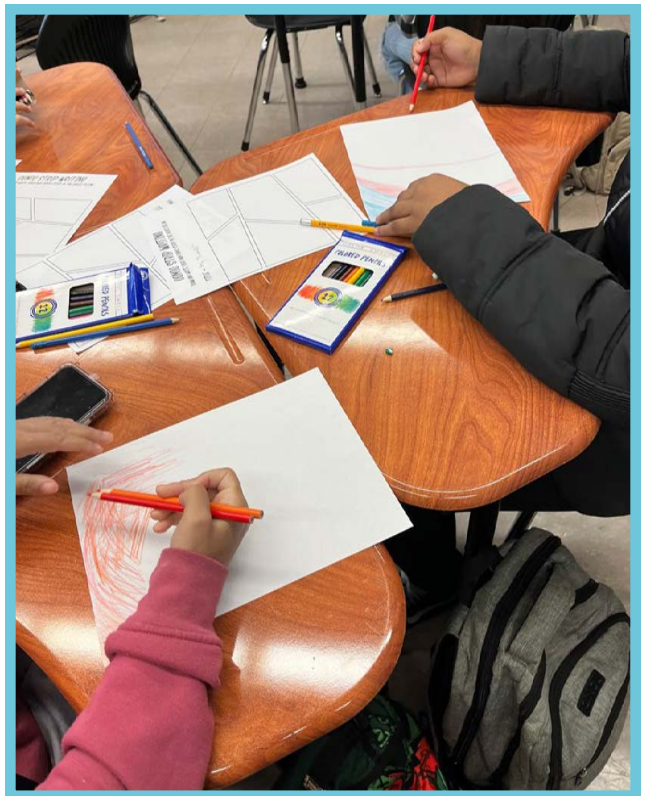
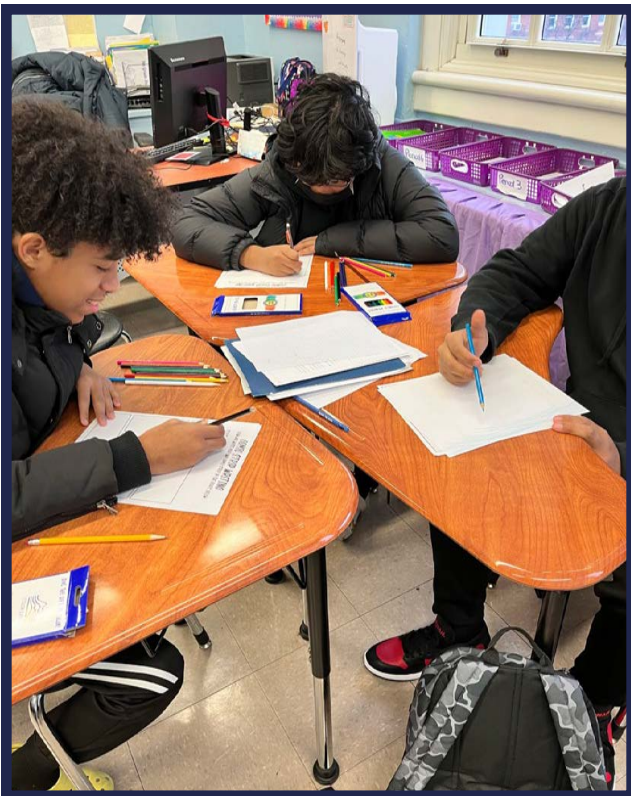
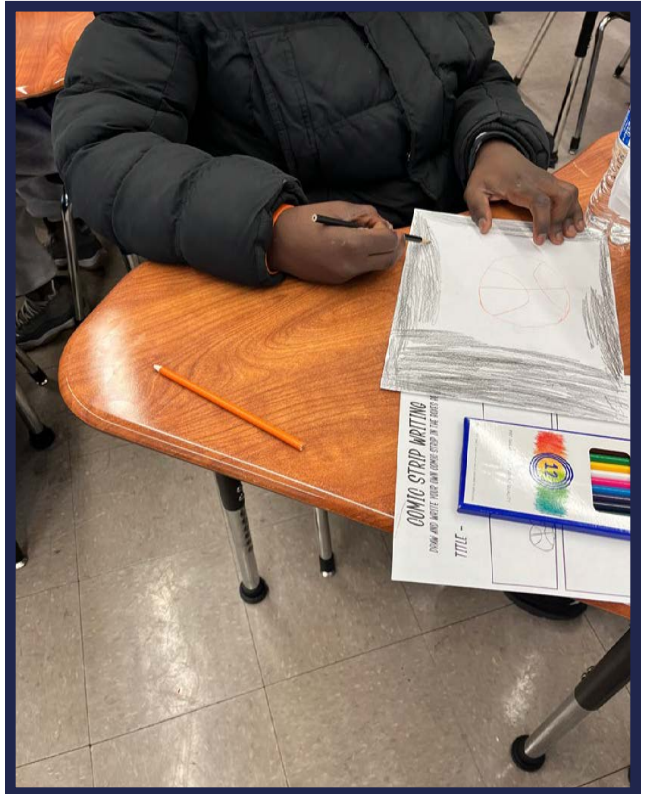
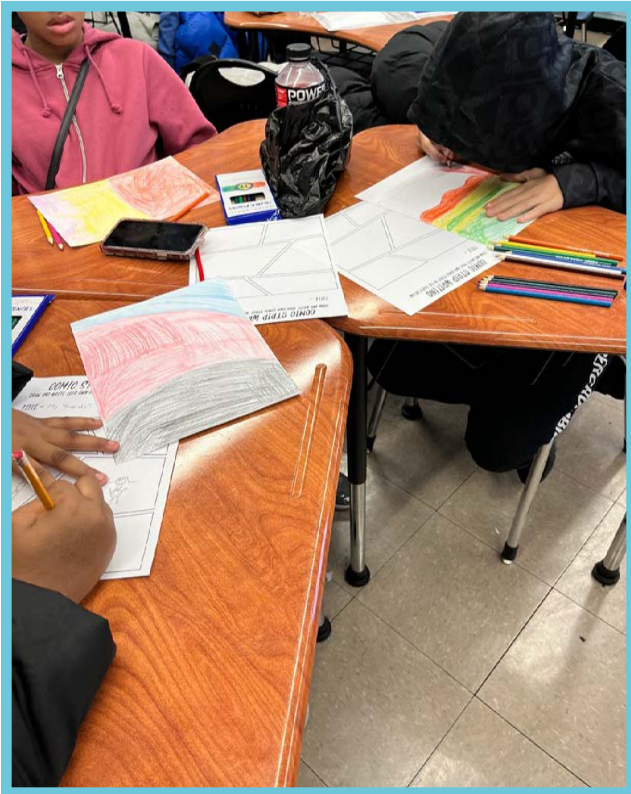
I had to be around ten years old and I and my mom were at 42nd street and we were shopping for clothes for me. When we left the clothes store we were going to start heading home and I saw this store with toys in it. I wanted to see them, so I ran off. My mom didn't bother to LOOK FOR ME. Well from my side she didn't.

When I was finished looking at the toys, I left the store and called for my mom, but

she wasn't answering. I began to cry looking around all of Times Square for my mom

A police officer came up to me and asked me what was wrong. I told him that I lost my mom. He told me that he would find her and we went all around the stores to see if we found my mom. When we found her, she was eating a hot dog not panicked at all that I wasn't with her.

I asked her why she wasn't looking for me and said "I was watching you this whole time. You didn't go far. I just wanted to see if you would be able to find me I was watching from a distance.





PERIOD

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By Jose

To begin and put this story in my perspective, I'm going to explain it the best way I can for people who aren't familiar with these types of events.

Start this story; it takes place in 2021, not giving any date or time for obvious reasoning. Still, it took place in 42 street times square, NYC. At the time of this, many things were going on. The beef was heavy at this time; people everywhere on the train were fighting people dying in their buildings. Everybody was on very high alert around this time of the year.

I will give the people and me different names so that people can't get in any real trouble for a story. The characters are bill bobby and Joe, and we believed we had a bright idea to go to Times Square. So, people had a lot of stuff going on at that time, so we entertained the train on our way to times square 42 street, and we realized on our way there it could have been a lot better idea. I felt it in my gut, but I was just like, let me have fun for a while because I wasn't doing anything around this time other than being outside with my friends.

We arrived at our destination and began walking up the train steps. We decided to go

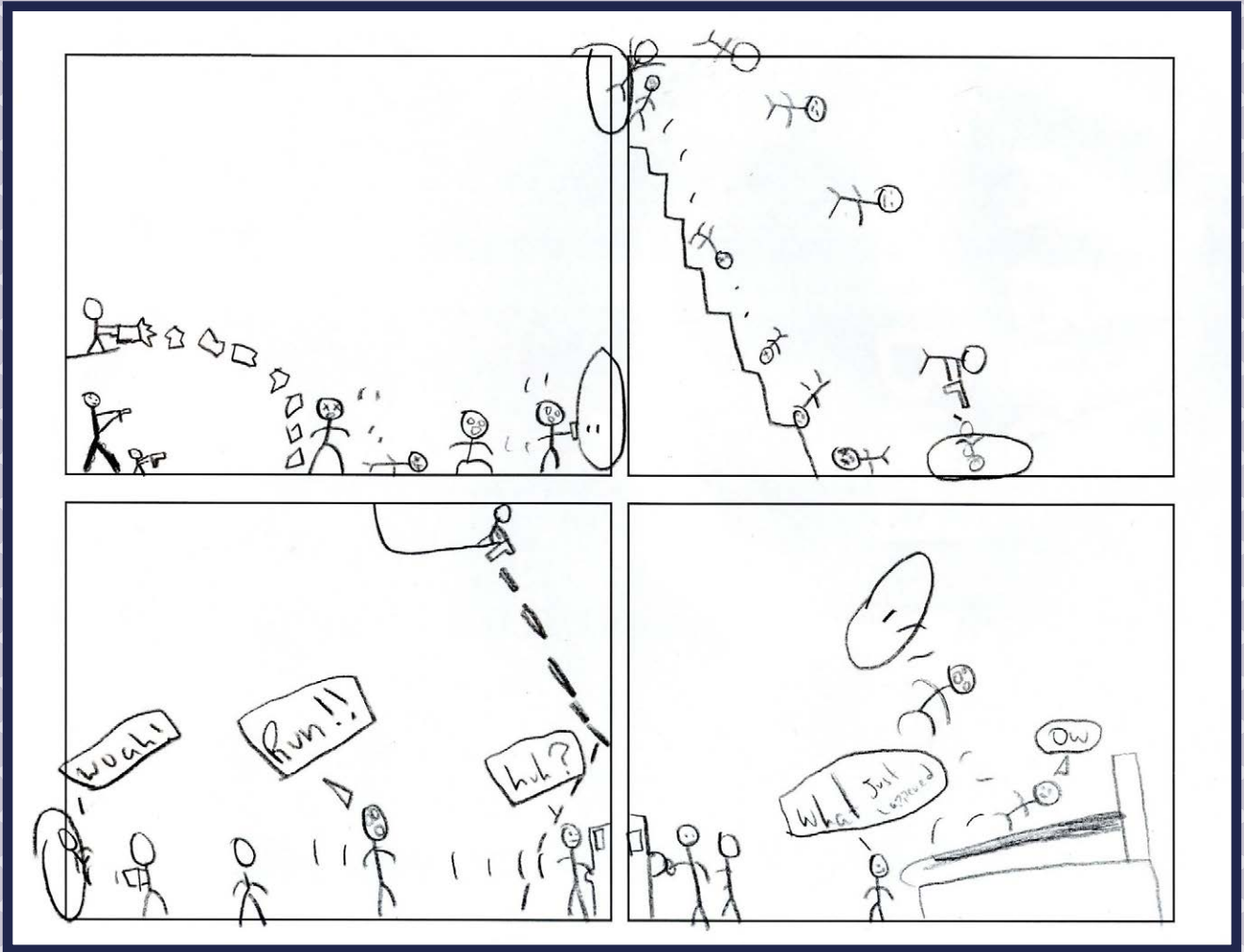
to Dave & Buster's because we were bored and had some money.

We started walking in the Dave & Buster's direction. When we had only reached half a block on 43rd street, an all-tinted black cop car stopped, and all four cops hopped out and started chasing us. I'm not going to give specific reasoning on why they were chasing me. Still, they were looking for somebody in that group. so

As they hopped out, I turned around to run because if I ran straight, I would be running toward them. So as all of this was happening, we all ran away in different directions. As we all knew, that Bill ran through the parking lot to the right and the back. Bobby was cutting thru cars after running across the street and was able to get away, but one of us ended up being caught. Also, I was never caught, but Joe, on the other hand, was not ready.

Before we all split up, I said run because you can't fight an officer. They can do a lot with that information in a court of law at the end of the day if caught, so I decided to escape, and that's precisely what I did.





By Noely

Karla, my sister, has always been my favorite person. She is the person I go to when something happens. She's the person who helped raise me, taught me life lessons, defended me, and spent time with me whenever she could.

My sister lived in Tampa Bay, Florida, almost four years ago. She eventually decided to move back to New York, but she suddenly started to feel sick around the same time. My mom noticed that my sister's stomach began to expand like she was three months pregnant. Despite me and my mother's worries, Karla thought it was nothing to be worried about. Little did we know it was a lot worse than we thought.

One month after Karla started working again, she began to feel dizzy and fainted. Since she worked in a hospital, the doctors gave her an MRI scan to find the problem's source. That day she found out that a tumor, the size of a newborn, was attached to her uterus.

I remember the phone call like it was yesterday. My mom and I were sitting in the car outside my aunt's house, and her phone rang. It was her. She was crying. I couldn't hear what she was saying, but I knew it was terrible by the look on my mom's face.

"Tumor? Cancer?" The words were muffled, but it was clear what they were. *What was going on? Who has cancer? What tumor? Karla? No, she can't!*

I started sweating. "what is going on?!" but it was like she was frozen.

Finally, she said, "Karla has cancer." I could feel my heart skip a beat.

"What..?" I honestly couldn't believe it. "No, you're lying; she doesn't."

We sat in silence for what felt like hours. "She has a tumor" I turned to look at my mother's face. She was pale like she hadn't seen the sun in years. "It has cancer inside it."



After three weeks of analysis and making sure my sister was going to be okay, the day of the surgery to get the tumor removed came. I was told the surgery would be risky and almost three hours long. That day I had school, I wouldn't hear if it was successful until after school ended. Those were the longest eight hours of my life. I didn't know if my sister was okay or even alive. *What will I do if she dies? What will happen to the family if she dies?*

When the clock hit four, I was out the door and calling my mom. She was okay; they got the tumor out, and she could come home in a week. A sense of relief came over me.

I got to see her at the hospital the next day. I walked through the halls, and the scent of older people made me cringe. I walked into my sister's room, she looked tired, but she

smiled when she saw me. We ate hospital ice cream, and I helped her walk down the hall.

While walking, I asked her, "It's gone, right? Cancer." I questioned. "It won't come back." "There's a chance, but for right now," She smiled, "I'm gonna be okay."

Almost four years later, she's raising my two-year-old nephew while working at a cancer hospital, happy and healthy.

Now that I am older, I better understand loving the people around me because you never really know when you can lose the people you love most. I've never been hit by a truck, but if I ever lost my sister, I'm sure that's how it would feel. I'm grateful that I still have my sister, who was able to fight this battle with her family.



By Michael

I was with my friends, and I was like eight, and I was chillin' on the block with my friends, and we were "odeee" bored. So we went to the 99-cent store, and I saw pokemon cards. I wanted some, so I crept up to the cashier, took a pack of cards, and just walked out of the store. I stole it because I didn't have any money.

I got home, and my mom was waiting for me, and she was like, "give it to me," and

I was like, "what you mean, ma" then she started screaming at me. Then she hit me in the hands with the belt because I stole it, and I got punished.

After all the commotion, reprimanding, and crying, I fell asleep. Then I woke up and took a shower, and my mom made food.

In conclusion, I learned not to steal, but I did anyway but never got caught.



By Jason

My story is about when I had to move from my home country, The Dominican Republic, to New York City. One day my young parents decided to move to New York City. I had to leave my entire family from my dad's side. Once I arrived in New York, I had to adjust to the filthy and dangerous places in New York.

Growing up in New York was rough. The place always smelled; the smoke made it worse. But when I first picked up a basketball, I fell in love with the sport. It was fun to play against people who were better than me because I played almost every day with my brother as I got better. I remember the first time I picked up a basketball. I was 6-7 and at the park with my brother and dad. We were playing, and I would play every day from that day. My brother was the biggest opponent I always tried to beat because we tried to prove who was better. From then to now, we properly played about 200-250 times because we were always competitive regarding each other. I remembered when my brother and I were playing, and the person to score won, we played rough and well, but I ended up winning. There were also many times he won and many times I lost. There is a court in the Bronx that I always go to, and the place that I go to is why I am today because I played on that basketball court for so long. I went when it snowed or rained. I always practiced no matter the weather because it was fun. I also played it with friends and sometimes stayed at the park for hours a day, especially in the summer when everyone was outside. I hate New York because it's a bad place to live in. After all, it's so trash it should be shut down.

Then people from my mom's family moved to North Carolina. I used to go to the Dominican Republic every summer. Still, I started to go to North Carolina every summer. I last visited the Dominican Republic six years ago because I like North Carolina more. It's way better, and most of my family live there, only people from my mom's side. Almost everyone from my mom's side is female, so they don't understand much about sports. I remember when my uncle came to NYC for the first time in years because he had moved to North Carolina. My uncle played basketball and was good in high school. He was 6'4, and I was 5'6. This was almost two years ago, too, and we were doing a 3pt shooter with my brother. I proved to be the best shooter out of the 3. My uncle hadn't seen me play in years, so he was surprised when I shot lights out.

I shot, and I predicted I would make it. I turned back and said, "bang." My uncle was shocked because I was shooting very well. He said, "good shot," then proceeded to make his next shot because we were playing 500. He was trying to win as well as I was. I was trying very hard to win against my brother and my uncle, and at the same time, I am the youngest of all of them, so I was primarily a 3-point shooter. My brother was furious because if you make it, you add points to others, and if they miss, they get added points. We add each 100 every shot, so you're eliminated when you hit 500 points. My brother kept getting destroyed, and he said, "how?" because I had never shot like this. Then later that day, we all decided to go

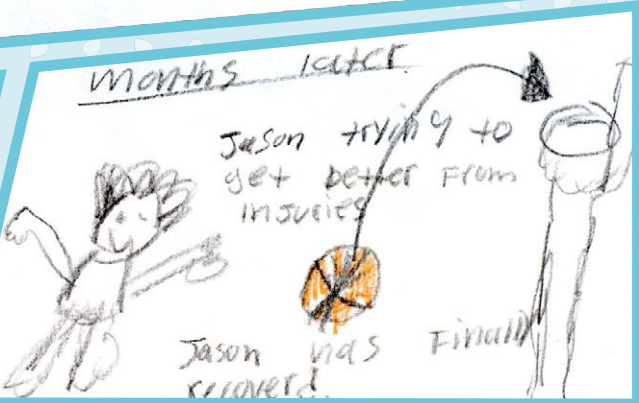
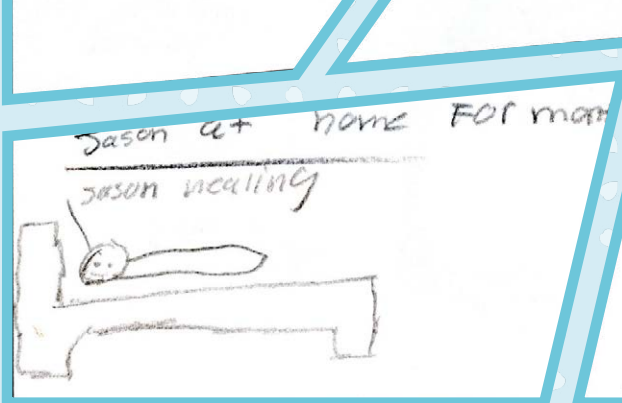
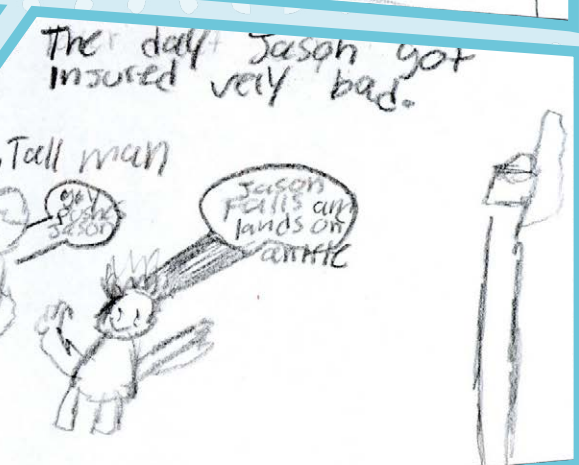
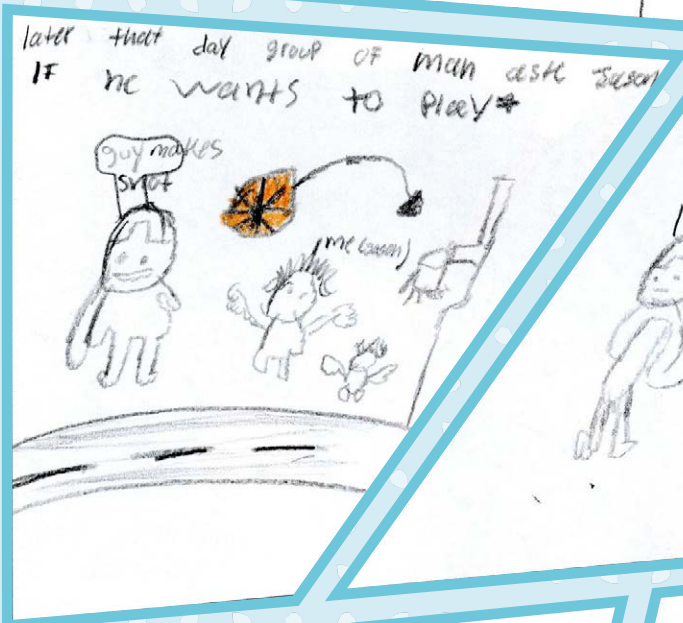


back home because this was in December, so it was freezing; we were

all done for the day, so we ate, watched tv, and went to sleep. My brother and uncle said, "I was trash" because they have a competitive mindset, so they hate losing, and Jason, I responded, "y'all lost." Then I continued to play basketball, but when the winter came, I won't go outside for 2-3

months, depending on how cold, and long it lasted. But when the winter season is over, I love to grind. Nowadays, I go to play basketball less than I did before because playing it for so long got

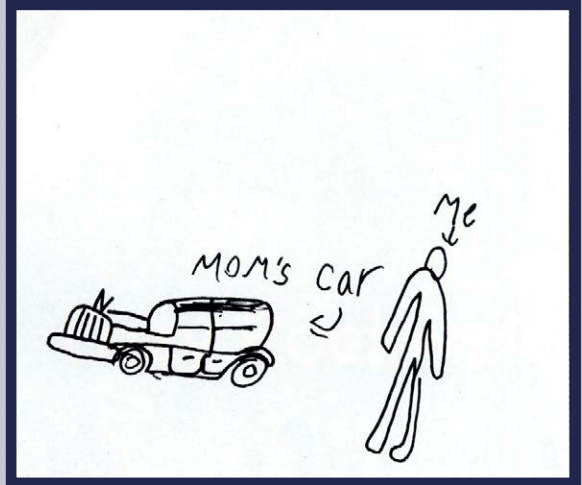
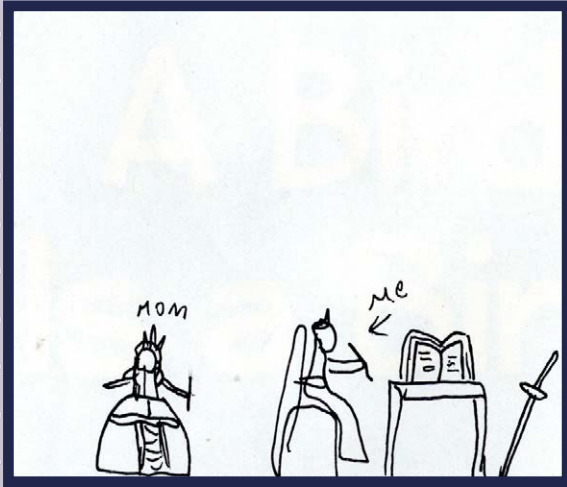
repetitive, and it's getting boring. The goat, Jason, is slowly getting tired of the sport and will be retiring soon, sadly. Jason is getting old, and his age is taking a toll on him.



By Elijah

I like to draw and sketch and read, but I draw most of the time. I want to be like my mom so I watched how she drew, and I also learned from YouTube to train myself to be better at drawing.

One day I showed my art to my family, and they loved it. They put it on the refrigerator. It was a drawing of a frog-god hybrid and it's been on the fridge for about 10 years now.



By Mbene

I have gone to this charter school called Bronx arts. I went there for the past nine years of my life. It was such a good and welcoming school. I made a lot of friends that I still know to this day. This staff member started the same year I started elementary school. She was such a lovely lady. Her name was Ms.Raccah. At that time, I was so short; she would wear beautiful dresses, have short curly hair, and wear heels every day. Every time she visited us in middle school, I'd hug her, ask how she was, and talk to her a bit.

Our graduation finally arrived. We already had our senior trip and prom and took senior pictures.

The day before, we practiced entering and walking inside the cafeteria; it was raining, so our school had to have our graduation in the cafeteria. It's finally the day, "Parents, would you kindly stand up and congratulate our class of 2020" A fellow staff member said. All the parents stood up and started to welcome, congratulate, and clap for us. We finally settled down, and it was time for the staff to give out awards. I felt I wouldn't get an award based on how I thought I did in school. I would "mainly" be in the hallways; everyone used to call me the queen of the hallways, and besides, I wasn't even thinking about getting an award. My principal gave out the first principal award. Then Ms.Raccah came up to the stage with a clear tall award. She wore this very nice long dress with high heels. She was almost the same height as me. She had a fantastic smile and personality.

"This person I have known for nine years. She started kindergarten when I was first

hired at the elementary school." I was talking to Zayliani, teasing her, and was like, "Zee, that's going to be your award." The silence broke out, and the person she described was me. "She is Mbene!" Ms.Raccah held the award while smiling

I was shocked when Ms.Raccah presented the award to me. I wasn't even expecting to get an award. In my mind, I was thinking about how I deserved this award. It was like I was a celebrity who had just won a prize. 20+ families were looking at me. I was very nervous; my hands were so shaky, and I started to sweat a bit.

The award was clear and had my name in white. I held it in my hand proudly. The award was big and tall; on the bottom, it said Executive Director's Award. Ms.Raccah wrote a speech about me, how we met, and how I'm well-behaved.

She finished the speech. I walked off the stage feeling so relieved. Walking down the stage, a lot of parents congratulated me.

After I sat back in my seat, I thought back to everything she said and realized that she saw the positive side of me even when I sometimes could not. I felt like she saw something in me, which is what the award meant. I felt so motivated. I knew it was finally time to say goodbye to middle school and move on to high school. Despite being scared and nervous about high school, I knew I could conquer anything.

After graduation, I had to attend this orientation at Longwood Preparatory Academy school.





By Justin

One day, at 6:30 AM, I Woke up, brushed my teeth, took a shower, and put on some clothes. My mom made me some breakfast which was some excellent oatmeal. It was boiling, but it was so good at the same time. After that, I went to school so early. Finally, we arrived at school and sat there for 30 minutes, then we went outside for about 20 minutes and went to class. Every day we used to go outside, get some fresh air, and then go back. That's when the class started. My friends began to go to class. Our class was on the second floor. The first period of class in elementary school was math. I wouldn't say I liked math. The first period was one of my minor favorite subjects to do. Two periods later, it was lunchtime, when we could all play games, communicate and have fun. The whole 4th grade always played sports outside, like soccer and basketball, but it was raining hard. It started pouring. It was terrible weather. Time passed by, and it was time to go to after school. I couldn't wait for after school. It was so exciting every day we had fun. They also had an activity every

Friday. Also, I wanted to play basketball free throw. Whoever makes the most free throws wins and gets a prize. Most of those who won the award and next also wanted to participate in the relay race, which I ended up doing. I told my teacher, "could you sign me up for the relay race and basketball I asked" "Sure you can," the teacher said. The event began. The first event was cartwheels, so I sat there for a few minutes. I didn't do the event since certain kids from each grade participated. Then it was the most important event. The event that I always liked was the basketball free throw. Many kids like me participated in the event, but it was three kids per grade. I was the first one on the line. It was my first go in the basketball free throw. I bent my knees, rolled the ball, shaking like winter, bounced, and shot the ball. I made it because they were other people better than me, so I later lost. Knew still had to win the relay race, so I didn't give up. It was time for me to go first person in line vs. 5th graders. In my mind, I thought they were so difficult because they were older than me. I was in

4th grade at that time, and I ran as fast as a cheetah. My heart was pounding. I started to feel that I didn't have air, so I drank water. I felt better; however, it was my second time running, and I still thought I had received no air. It was the final stages of the relay race. I was still having breathing problems, and I couldn't stop. We somewhat won the relay race. Mom picked me up, and we got home. I was scared to tell her the symptoms. But I wanted to tell her, so I told her hours before I told her I was feeling no air, so we went to the clinic. We took the elevator.

I was scared to meet the doctor, so I started watching YouTube videos until the doctor called my name. Sat down, and the doctor started talking. We talked about losing air, and she put me on this air thing. I didn't know what it was. We returned to the doctor's office and said, "your child has asthma." The doctor was very short. I was so shocked my brain thought that it was a bad thing. We went to the pharmacy, and mom and I went to pick up the asthma pump. I knew

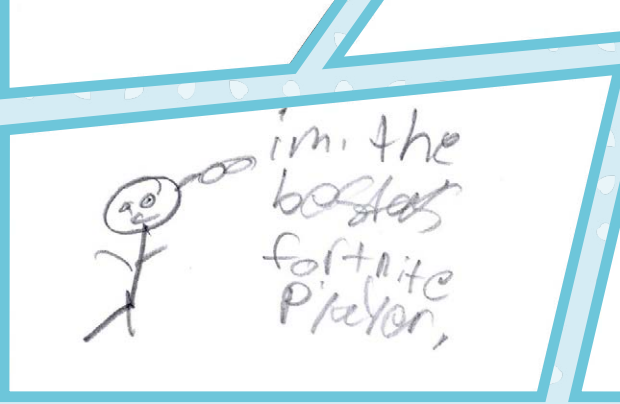
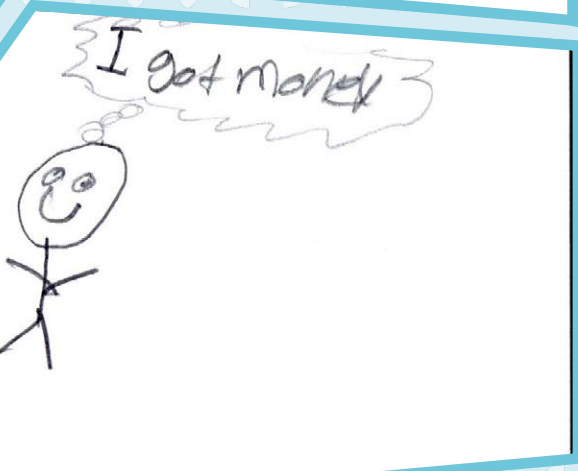
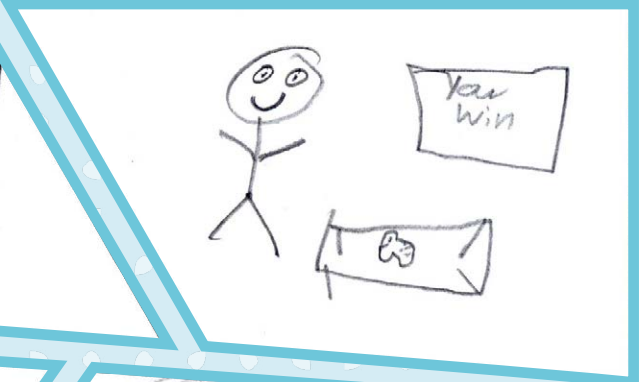
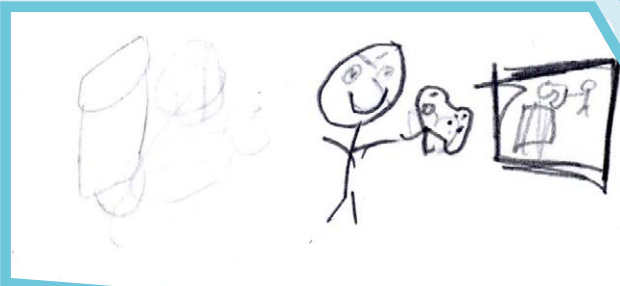
it was familiar because I saw my friend in elementary use it until my mom taught me how to use it. My mom and I went back home, and I learned how to use it. I felt like there was additional air inside me. I started using it more and more after what happened after school. It's been one week since I started living with asthma. It was after school in the afternoon. I didn't want to play basketball anymore. I wanted to do a relay race, nothing else. My teammates wanted to win and also wanted to win. That was the goal. I wanted to start last since I have asthma. My teammates began running, but the 5th graders still topped the group. They were unstoppable. I began running and felt that I was losing too much air. Unfortunately, we as a group lost the match, but we took 2nd place. But that moment didn't stop me from running and doing relay races all the time. I knew I didn't have to not give up because of my asthma. After that, I was in 5th grade and started to do more relay races and started to do more activities after school.



By Esteven

It was like 5:23 in the afternoon when I was on my motorcycle. I lost control of it and broke my arm. Afterwards, I told my dad and he got scared immediately. I got into my dad's car and he took me to the hospital. While he was driving, I called my mom and I had to calm down because my mom has heart problem and high blood pressure. It can be really bad for her if she gets too

excited, so I called her and I was like "maa I'm in the hospital but I'm okay." She was like, "what happened?" I responded with, "I was on my motorcycle and I lost control of it, and the fall I took really hurt my arm. I don't know if I broke my arm, but it feels like it." So, the x-ray did show that it was broken, and my immediate reaction was like "what the f---!"



By Jayden H.

It was a Friday afternoon, and I was walking home from school, and all I saw was light skin, tall, short hair running at me. It was one of my homeboys, Marcos.

He came to me and said, "Call the group chat when you get upstairs."

"All right, I will after I eat something," I said back to him.

I went upstairs and ate a sandwich. Then I called the group chat. Marcos and my other homeboy Joshua picked up. Marcos wanted to go to Joshua's house to go to the park and have fun. We all agreed and went over to Joshua's the next day.

When I saw Joshua, I Didn't realize it was him. I only saw his giant afro and a tall person waiting outside his house.

After we all got there, we went to the park so I could play Marcos in a 1v1 basketball.

We were there for a good 3 hours; then we realized it was getting late.

On the way home, Marcos told me he had a good idea.

"Yo, what's the word with ding dong ditch house on our way back to Joshua's house."

Joshua says his down, but I am not sure I wanted to do that. Then I thought about how you only live life once, so I might as well have fun.

So I say, "ok, sure, let's do it, but I am not going first."

So we all agreed to do one house each. We get to this tiny house on the corner of the street, but Marcos and Joshua are arguing about who goes first while I am getting ready to run. I didn't even want to do this, but I didn't want to kill the mood, I thought. Then finally, Marcos lets Joshua go first. But he had to record it first. Joshua agrees and hits the door, then runs left. Marcos runs right into the street. Like a dummy am still at the door, trying to decide which way to run.

Suddenly I see the doorknob move, and I run into the street. Marco started laughing at me while we were running because of how I was running. I would be, too, because my

pants were not tied right, so I had to hold my pants up while I was running. Marcos and I ran two blocks before we stopped. At this point, we were ready, sweating like crazy, but we suddenly saw Joshua. You might think that's not a bad thing with your right is not a bad thing. It was what I was running from. All I saw were five black/light skin guys running after him. It looks like something out of a movie. Then Joshua starts yelling.

Run, guys runnnnnn!!!

You don't gotta tell me twice. I drop everything and anything in my hand and start running. I started running, and as if we were a pack of wolves, we all ran differently. I ran left, Marcos ran right, and I don't know what happened to Joshua to this day. All I knew was that he got away before all of us. When I ran, I was chased by a grown man who looked old enough to be my dad. He starts yelling at me

"Wait until I get you. I'm going to make you wish you stayed home."

All I could think about was what he could do to me if he chased. Would he call the cops or just hit me with a mean right hook?

I was both scared and happy. You might be thinking I am crazy, but this happens not every day. I felt like I could run all day. My Adrenaline was going crazy. I don't think I ever had more fun running. Then suddenly, I felt like I was going to die, and I couldn't move. My, I guess, my Adrenaline ran out. I was terrified and tired, but then I looked behind me and saw nothing. Then it hit me. I wasn't getting chased, and I was running for no reason. Then every step I ran hit me all at ones. No lie; I don't know how I made up with Marcos and Joshua. All I know is that I got to where I had to be. When I saw Marcos and Joshua, they started where I was; what takes me so long? Why do you so red? Question after question. I just wanted to drink water and sit for the next hour. When we got upstairs, I told Joshua I was going home, and Marcos came. I went home and had the best sleep of my life.

By Anonymous

I didn't have any problem with him before this. I always kind of felt weird around him and even weirder when we were alone. Then one night I woke up and saw what I thought was my mom. So, I leaned in to give her a kiss from "him". I've also seen "him" in my room naked at night. Then the last straw was when "he" touched me inappropriately in the morning.

That same morning "he" touched me, my mom went to wake me up two minutes later. I told her what happened after she convinced me to tell her what's wrong saying "Ma I don't feel well my stomach hurts, can I not go to school today". She then said that I couldn't stay home and then said "You can't skip school unless you give me a good reason why I should let you not go today". As I told her what happened, not even 10 minutes ago. I could see her face distorted with different emotions. You could see she was sad but you could also see anger and hints of disgust, despite her

having one of the prettiest faces I've ever seen, that made me start to shrink. It made me disgusted with myself after digesting what I had just said.

My mom kicked "him" out that same morning. I knew my mom and brother were mad but I didn't know what to feel at that moment. I felt so weird after that, like I had done something wrong to deserve that from him. I also became uncomfortable around guys who I'm not close to. I realized after I told my best friend in middle school 'Dariyel' or 'Dari' for short what happened that it wasn't my fault. In other words, I became more talkative with my mom and my brother about my feelings. In other words, I've become more comfortable with myself again and I also keep my emotions to myself. I'm also getting less shy around guys as I become more comfortable about myself and my body. I'm able to speak my mind more knowing that I wasn't looking for that to happen and that I didn't ask for that.

By Hiro

It was a brisk Wednesday afternoon in April 2020, when I was in my zoom class with my microphone muted and camera turned off my little brother was with me playing super smash bros on my switch. On the dresser of my room about 4 feet tall sat all 4 of my pet beta fish one was orange another was red there also was a blue and a pink one. my sister Makayla adored the red one so a week prior she taught it how to jump using rubber bands and treats. Now while I was playing my game. I was in the middle of a heated battle with a guy from Japan not minding the current math lesson being taught on my computer. And then PLOP!

Now there are 2 things that I thought to myself at the moment, either my brother threw something on my bed and the other was that something just jumped at me. Lo and behold I was right as I was thinking I snapped my neck to the right when my little brother screamed "AHHH THE FISH HE JUMPED!" I thought it was one of his usual pranks he loved to pull but I saw it. my

red betta fish flopping around on my bed. I screamed to my brother "GET ME A BOWL TO SCOOP UP THE FISH!"

After around 10 seconds of waiting he came running back saying "Makayla didn't wash the dishes so we don't have any bowls."

As I heard this I ran to the kitchen. I looked around for anything that could hold water. I saw on the side of the sink a freshly washed empty jar of mayonnaise that my mom was going to use for her homemade sofrito recipe.

As I filled it with water, I wondered to myself would my fish get hurt from that fall by this point I felt the water touch my fingers as it overflowed into the sink. I dumped some water out and then ran to my room. I used my hand to scoop him up since I didn't have my net and placed it into the jar. After a while of him recuperating I put him back in his bowl and watched him swim happily. I told myself, Now I know to cover their bowl so they don't jump and die.



By Kasin

When I was six years old, I was always interested in music. I had this mini-iPod, which I would use to listen to music daily and daily. This was when I was first introduced to music, and I loved it. When I turned 14, I decided to start writing my music. I used writing music as an escape, but I had a problem.

I had trouble writing lyrics for my songs because of the pain the lyrics brought me just by remembering them. This was a problem because the music was an escape from life, but I couldn't make it work. The rapping helped me cope and deal with my issues. The stuff I was going through started to build up over time.

This constantly filled my head with bad thoughts.

When I entered high school and started going to the music studio, it helped me. It was a very spacious yet compact

environment with many computers and, pianos, headphones scattered everywhere. There was this tall black prism box that was quiet when you spoke. The only sounds were the humming of your voice.

"You think I could record a song?" I spoke.

"Yeah, step inside," my producer replied.

I stepped inside the dark black box and recorded my first song, "Spiritual." This was a turning point in my life where I knew this was what I wanted to do.

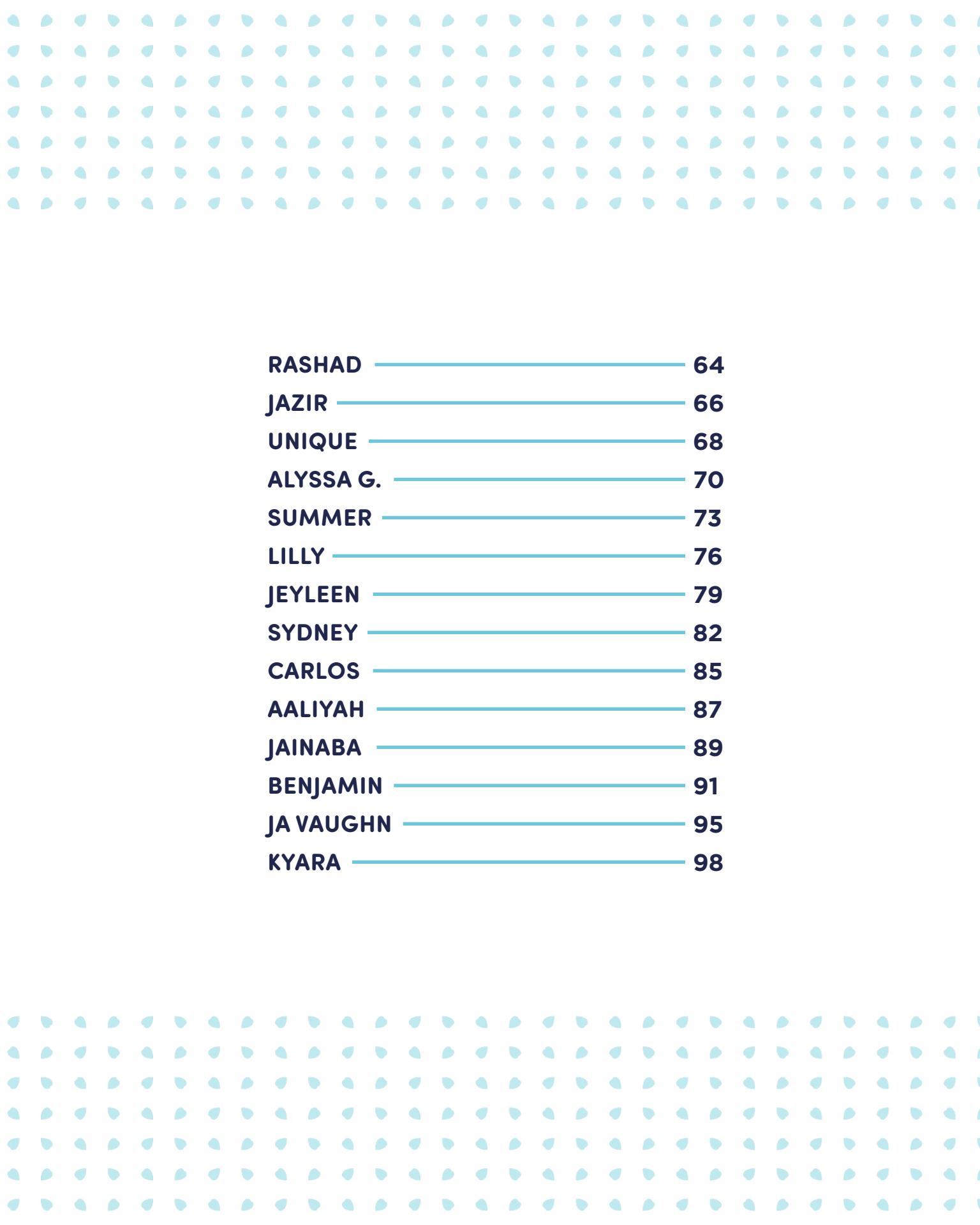
"Sounds good!" I said, walking out of the black prism.

We worked on those songs for 3 hours until I perfected the first verse. Since this moment, I've been working on music almost every day. We would work on songs every week for hours. This helped me with problems that I was facing in life.



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By Rashad

“Bye grandma!” I shouted from the end of the hallway of my grandma’s building,

“Bye Rashad!” my grandmother replied with a small wave back towards me. She looked a bit sad that I was leaving as she closed the door.

I was already at the elevator going downstairs to meet my mother. I hauled the small amount of bags that I had with me to the bus stop. When I got to the bus stop where my mother was waiting for me I gave her a small hug.

It was a cold November morning I had my hands pocketed waiting for the bus, so did my mom she didn’t really like the cold, After 5 minutes of waiting the bus finally arrived

Me and mom both sat in seats next to each other. It was a bit packed but I didn’t mind after a while more and more people got on the bus.

It was very packed now. “Listen out for our stop,” my mom said to me.

As we both sat waiting for our stop the bus driver finally announced our stop. Now I didn’t hear him because it was far too loud and packed for me to notice that it was our stop so my mom got up without me and I didn’t notice a thing.

Then I rode the bus for a couple more stops. About five or six minutes later I looked

To my side, I was alone, I felt scared knowing that I was all alone. My mom got the bus without me. I then stood up pushing my way

to a window. I had no clue where I was. My heart dropped to my stomach as I stood all the way to the next stop.

When the bus came to a halt I stood near the back door. As soon as the doors opened I jumped out of the bus. In a full panic I began to run to the bus stops I had already passed, still lost. Tears began to fall from my eyes.

I dragged both hands across my cheeks wiping the tears from my face. I started to calm my breathing and I calmed down and continued to walk back to my correct stop.

After about 2 minutes of walking I saw my mom at the deli that was in front of my actual bus stop and she looked worried. I started to run towards her Screaming, “MOM, MOM!!”

I ran into her open arms, as she squeezed me tightly. “Where were you?” My mom spoke with a soft tone.

“I got lost,” six year old me replied.

This event made me realize that I had to be more self-aware. After getting lost on the bus I felt scared and alone for the first time in my life. It was the worst feeling ever not knowing where my mom was and no one to help me navigate the world. I thought I’d never see my family again.

This made me want to go places more. Even though I was alone I had a sense of freedom being able to go anywhere I wanted felt amazing. This also made me more cautious outside, I gave more attention to smaller things overall this made me a more independent person.



By Jazir

Turning fifteen. This is the event that has taken place that has made me come out of age.

When I used to live in a different state, I watched the house often a lot and made sure everything was straight. I did this for about two to three months before it came to an end.

On one strange evening, I was making something to eat like usual. My mother told me that I was responsible for watching the house for the entire weekend.

In my head I thought, I have never done this before and I'm gonna have trouble.

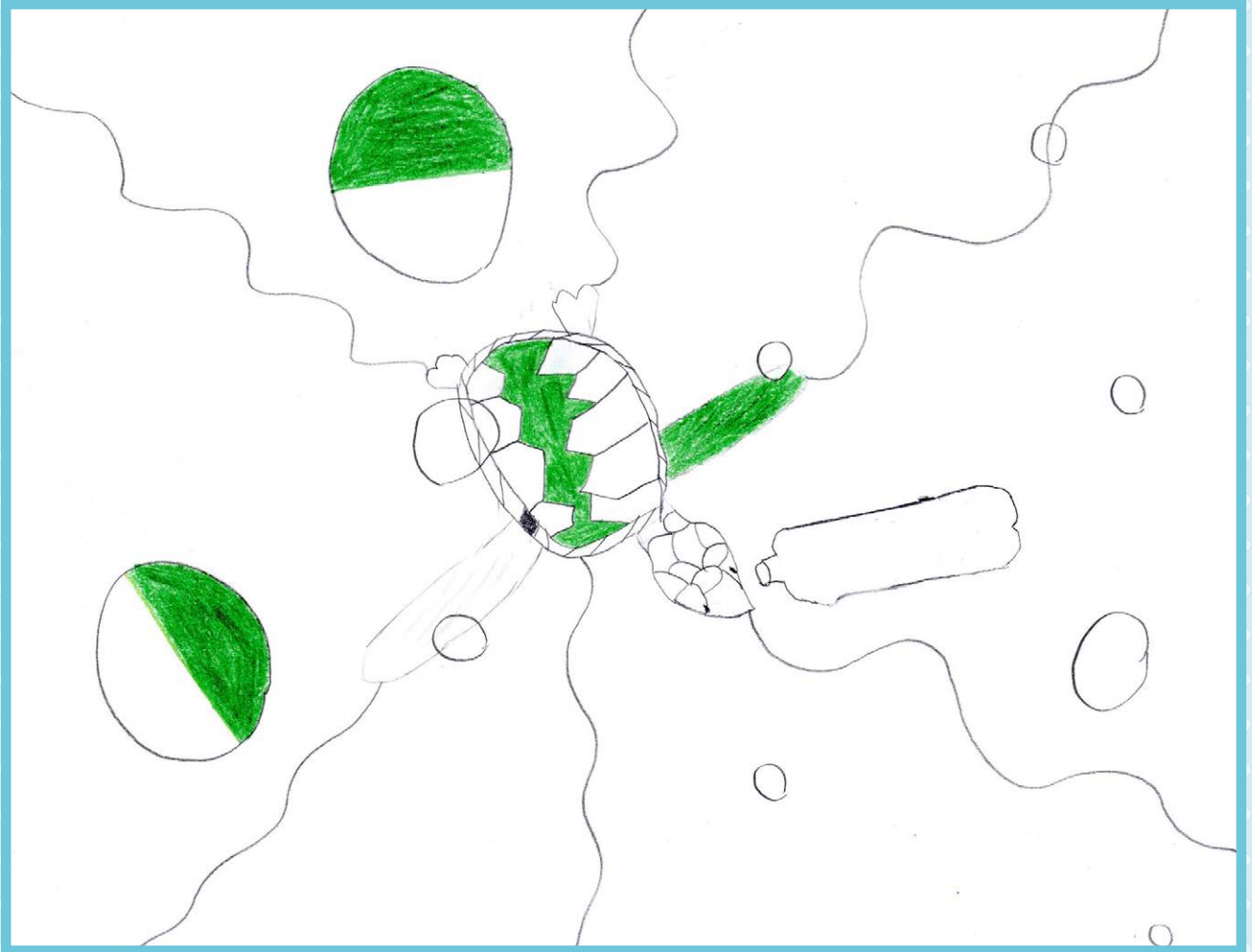
The first night, I was chilling in my room when I heard knocking at my door. I quickly ran to my kitchen to grab something for my protection. As soon as I looked through the peephole, I saw a dark figure shaped like a human outside my door. The person was six feet tall and aggressively knocking on my door.

I jumped to call my mother. She reassured me that it was someone from a previous relationship trying to get in the house.

While I was waiting for someone, I yelled out my window from the second floor telling him to go away. I saw he wasn't moving, so I waited for my father to come and handle him.

Once my father got around the house, he quickly tackled him to the floor and a gun fell out of his pocket. We both saw this and he did not think twice about knocking him out.

Once the cops came and I waited for him to get taken into the car and sent away. This showed me why if one false move was made and the entire situation could have been completely different. This taught me the importance of decision making and matured me for future situations.



By Unique

I was 12 years old when my mom was pregnant. She was about 13 weeks pregnant when she told me. I was having a sibling. My mom didn't tell me if I was having a baby brother or a baby sister. I wanted a baby brother. I wanted a brother so I could teach him how to play basketball, teach him how to dress, and other things.

When my mom told me I was getting a little brother, I was so surprised. I was so happy to have somebody to play with and finally have a sibling. I was thinking about all the fun things I could do with him and things I could teach him.

My mom said she had to talk to me about something. I was worried. She called my name. I came to her room, sat on her bed and answered her with "yes...?."

She said, "I want to talk to you about having a little brother, it comes with a lot of responsibilities you know."

I responded, "Mhmm."

"You wanted a 'lil brother, so when he's annoying don't come crying to me," my mom said.

I laughed.

Six months later I was with my grandma and we was watching stranger things. All of a sudden I get a phone call from my mom

"Hey unique, your little brother is here"

"What you mean" I said

"You got a new little brother you need to take care of"

I was so excited, I felt so happy and joyful. My grandma and I were both happy. She jumped up off the couch and gave me a big hug.

My grandma said, "Having a little brother comes with a lot of responsibilities you know."

I nodded my head, "Yea, I know"

After spending the night at my grandma's house, I went home. I'm waiting for my mom to come home from the hospital. I was so excited, I was playing my game system but I couldn't concentrate. I keep thinking about all the things I would teach him and all the fun we would have.

My mom finally came home with my brother. I was so happy I screamed in joy and woke up my little brother. I sat on the couch to hold him.

"We named him Sadiq. It means royalty," my mom said.

I was so happy I gave him a nickname on the spot. "I'ma name him Q-Man." I was sitting down when my mom put him in my arms.

At that moment I realized I had to become a responsible sibling. I had to be a role model for my little brother. I stop making bad choices and getting in trouble.





By Alyssa G.

Me and my dad always had a good relationship.

Even though he and my mom split, I was able to see him every other weekend and he made those weekends count. He always had fun plans for me and my sister and we would always make new memories together that I will forever cherish. But all of that changed when he got remarried.

He remarried on october 8th 2016. It took place in the U.K because that is where my step mom lives and I wasn't invited for whatever reason. My step mom is Indian and Portuguese so they had a traditional Indian wedding. For some reason I thought them getting married wouldn't change anything but I was extremely wrong and it changed everything.

My step mom is nice and everything but like her being in the picture made it seem like my dad prioritizes her over his own daughters. For example on one of his weekends he was all over his wife and acted like me and my sister wasn't even there which i found

very unfair because it was our weekend not hers. Fast forward a couple of years of him going back and forth from the U.K to NY he decided that he was going to move to the U.K to be with his wife. I saw that as the worst decision he had ever made. I tried to get him to stay. I begged almost every day but it was useless. He made his last week in NY the best of course, we had the most fun and tried to make the most out of it. August 23rd 2017 was the day.

The day my father moved is also known as one of the worst days of my life. I wouldn't let go of him and I said "please dad just stay. Why do you have to go? I need you to be here, not over there." But obviously it was too late and he left. The only thing that made me the very slightest bit better was having Mcdonalds. Except it was pity mcdonalds but at least i got whatever i wanted from there.

I cried for days and started struggling in school. I think my teacher realized there was something up because she pulled me aside



and just hugged me then asked “what’s wrong love? you haven’t been yourself lately.” i bursted out crying and told her everything. I just let it all out. She comforted me for a while then called my mom. I got sent home early because I wasn’t stable enough to stay in school. That teacher helped me a lot and to this day she will always be my favorite.

Well my dad ended up figuring out how I could see him in person and we got that situated. I spent Christmas there. I got to the U.K on christmas day of 2017 i stood till new years then came back obviously. It was a relief seeing him; it felt like home. From what I remember they took me to this really cool winter theme park called Winter wonderland. My stepmom’s family was really nice to me and I had fun spending time with them. I also went to the queen’s palace. It was really cool and fancy. For new years we spent it at my step mom’s sister’s house, and the last thing we did before I left was go to this tea brunch place. It was really fancy and nice. I overall had a great time.

I started visiting more on holidays and it was nice. Like I visited July 9th 2018 and stood the whole summer. It was really nice. I went to the pool a lot as well as the gym. They had cool parks there like it had a seesaw and this weird zipline thing. I surprisingly made some friends over there and I spent my 10th birthday there. It was unicorn themed and it was really nice. There was a bouncy castle and a lot of games and loads of people came. That had to be one of the best birthdays ever. Then sadly the next day I had to go home. That was one of the best summers of my life. I was able to get away from home, forget everything and just have fun.

Fast forward to December of 2019. That was the last time I visited but that time I visited with my sister. It was different from all the other times. Everything was going well but then I got my period. For the very first time. My mom was upset because I didn’t get it with her but my step mom helped me out and took care of me.



ALONE

By Summer

I used to always want to be alone. I thought that everything would be better if I was by myself. I was proven wrong on the first day of school.

The whole morning I was thinking about how my day would go. If it was going to be good, bad, or boring it was all I could think about. I kept biting the skin of my lips while walking and picked the skin on my fingers. I was ready to just get the day over with and tell my mom all about it on our way home.

Hopefully I will make friends today, being alone on the first day is so embarrassing.

The day was like a normal first day, introducing names, getting to know you activities, etc. When the day ended I was ready to see my mom so we could talk all about our day. But when I went outside to go to her I didn't see her.

Maybe she's just late, I thought

So, I waited for ten minutes, leaning on the fence in front of the school, turning my head every time I heard a voice that sounded like my moms, but it was never hers. I was getting annoyed because I was ready to go home. I went back into the building and called her, she told me;

"The train isn't going to be here for another 20 minutes, you have to walk by yourself", she said over the phone.

"By myself?" I repeated, honestly shocked that she trusted me that much.

"Yeah, you have the keys right?"

Just as I was about to answer her a teacher walked up to me and told me I have to leave the building. I rolled my eyes and sighed as I walked out.

"They're kicking me out. Yeah I have the key", I said while walking back out the building.

"Okay, call me when you get home. Don't text me, call me."

I said okay and hung up. After all this time of wanting to be independent and my mom saying I'm too young to be outside alone. I can finally prove to her that I can be alone, that I'm better off alone. But all my confidence faded when I started walking, I felt like I had to pay more attention to things then I usually do and I had nobody to talk to while I was walking.

Why was I so excited for this? It's so boring.

I instantly regretted wanting to be alone all the time because once I am alone, I feel alone.

Once I got home I called my mom and told her that I'm okay, even though I don't know what she thought was going to happen. Then of course she had to tell everybody so the rest of the day was filled with calls from my family asking me if I felt any more mature after walking a few blocks to get home.

After all the calls stopped I actually started thinking about how I felt about walking alone. Before it actually happened I thought that I would feel older and more mature. But then I just felt younger and immature



because I noticed things that I never looked at before when I would be with my mom. There was a homeless man sleeping in front of a building, usually when I was with my mom she would just push me closer to her and father away from the man but when I'm alone I had to notice that and move myself farther away from him.

While I was walking I thought, I wish my mom was here, I miss her.

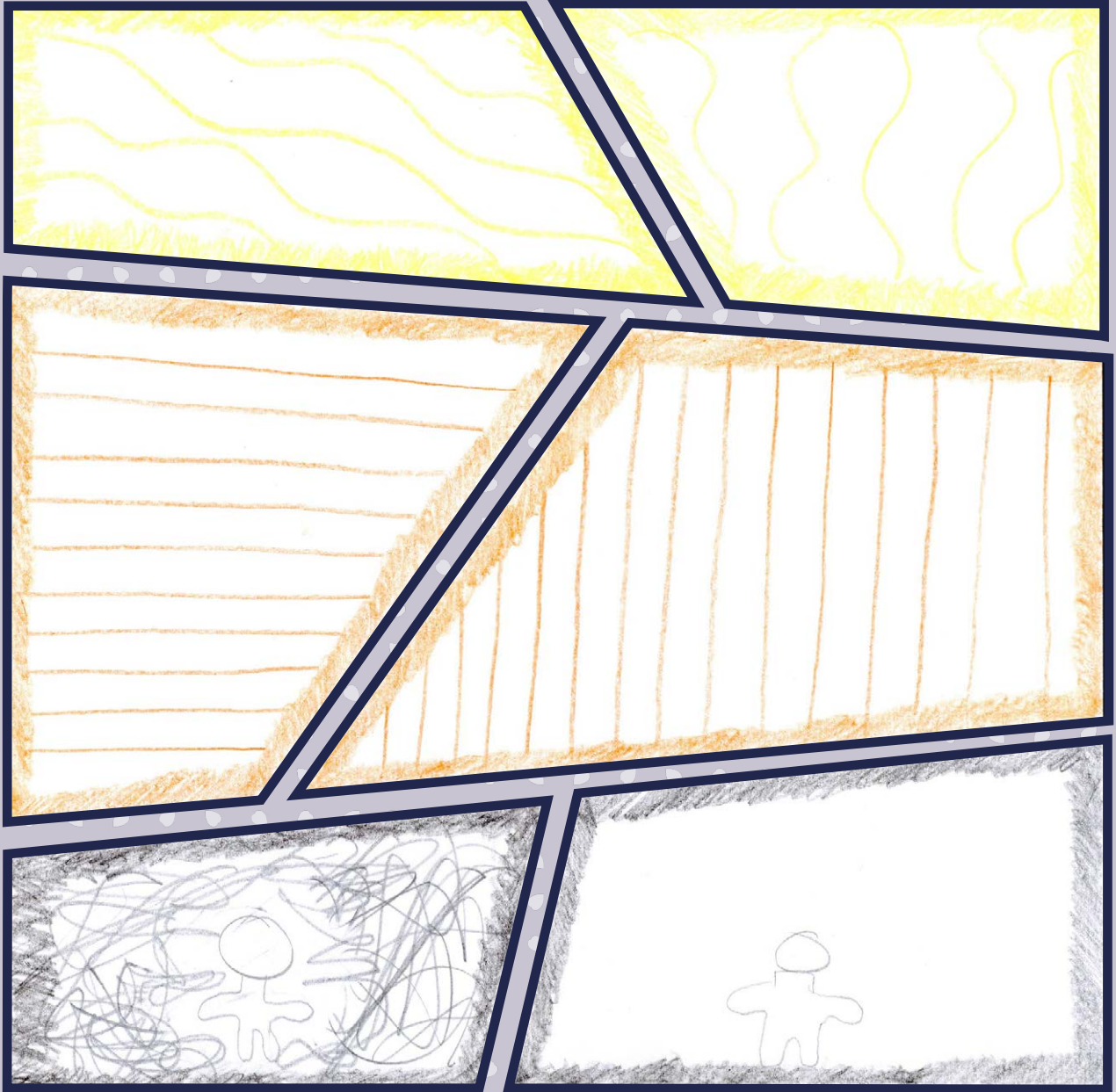
Then I walked past the corner store and my mom would always go to when she picked me up from school. I didn't even go into the

store because it felt wrong going in there without my mom even though I was hungry.

All I could think about the whole way home was walking with my mom even though I was supposed to be ecstatic that I was walking without. The moment she was gone was the moment I missed her the most.

Now that I'm older and I have more freedom I sometimes wish that I was more thankful for the company that I had because now nobody cares if you're alone because they're already used to it. Even though I used to hate it, I miss being smothered by my family.





GET RID OF THEM

By Lilly

My name is Lilly. When I was little I loved my relationship with my father. His name is Joe. He taught me the basic way of fighting, cooking, and more. I loved him so much, I mean who doesn't love a nice father? See I thought he was the best... until I saw the reality of it all.

When I tell you my whole image of him changed, it did. Every time I wanted to hang out with him, he started talking about my mom. None of it was good; it was horrid. I noticed he started to drink, lie, stay out and yell/fight with everyone. He was a huge problem in the house. My brother and I would be having fun and my father would yell due to the "noise" and because of the headache he has from drinking all the time.

Soon enough my mom kicked him out. With him not in the house, it was different. There was less yelling, less fighting, way more quiet too. Even though I loved how quiet it was, I missed him. He was part of my family. When he left I couldn't accept it and I got depressed. I had to start therapy.

Since my family saw how sad I was, even my mom's boyfriend Mike saw. Mike is a nice person. At first, I didn't really talk to him but after I got to know him, he was fun. It was as if he was a better "father" than my actual father. Mike loved to play with me and Jack, we played video games, watched movies, and went out to eat too. He made all of us happy, no yelling or fighting with anyone. My father Joe knew about Mike but didn't like him at all. Joe claimed he didn't like him because he was around me and Jack but that's not the case. The real reason for not liking him was because Mike was always around our mom and our father wanted to get back with her.

Soon enough my family tried to reach out to Joe that way my brother and I could see him. Two days later they told me he answered and that my brother and I could spend the weekend with him.

As soon as we heard that, we started packing up. We were super excited to see him after all that time. Finally it was the morning to go and travel to see him, we jumped out of bed, got dressed and ate breakfast. We left



the house and started to travel into Queens. We got into Queens somewhat around 2:45 - 3:00 pm, the stop we got off at was by our old house we lived in when I was a baby, which was close to my favorite playground in the entire world! I loved that park so much. I remember how I made at least one family member take me there every day. It made me so happy to see my favorite park.

While we were waiting we also saw my favorite pizza place. Soon after that our father got to us at 3:45pm, that's when we started walking to his house while our mom finished getting her pizza and started to travel back home to her boyfriend Mike.

When we got to his house the thing that stood out was the glass chandelier. It was beautiful. The house had a wonderful kitchen/living room. It also had a giant pool in the backyard! After looking around we put our things in a room and we looked around the house even more. I was so happy or at least I thought I was.

My brother and I noticed his behavior and how it didn't change at all. He was still doing the same things he was before.

My brother and I had asked him, "So how have you been?"

He didn't respond. All he did was ask us "how's the house and your mom?"

That's when my brother answered "It's good but different now that Mike lives with us."

When he found out Mike was living with us he got so mad that he called our mom to pick us up and started complaining that he was "watching" us for too long.

Joe stopped talking to me and Jack. I was so upset because I finally realized that he shouldn't be in my life at all. I blocked him out of the picture fully. After he found out I wanted to cut him out of the picture, he tried to come back into my life and "wanted to talk to us more" and actually be a dad. But I didn't care. With him out of my life I got so much better.

After that experience I learned a lesson. If someone is harming you in any way. GET RID OF THEM!

The End.



By Jeyleen

A very big turning point in my life was when a deadly virus called Covid 19 appeared out of the blue. Due to the virus being highly contagious the whole world had to go into quarantine.

When I heard the news, I was smiling from ear to ear because I got to do all of my school work from home and I got to spend more time with my sister. Everything was great at first but then all of a sudden I got really lazy and stopped doing all of my work.

It came as a surprise to me when my grades began to drop. I thought since I was an honor roll student I was off the hook. But warning after warning I still continued to get bad grades and barely passed, even though I had more time to spend with my sister, I felt lonelier than ever. I stopped talking to many of my friends and I shut out from the whole world. Nobody had heard from me or seen me for a long time. I lost many things including myself.

From what I could remember it was March 2020 and I was in 6th grade. It was a very long but fun week in school. It was finally Friday and I was ready to go home. It was the last period me and my friends got to play Kahoot because we did well on our test.

I told one of my close friends, "Come play with me I need a partner."

She said, "Okay, but we might lose because I'm not good at this."

We ended up winning in 4th place.

There were 10 minutes left to class and my friends and I were chatting about how

much homework we had to do over the weekend when all of a sudden our teacher Ms. CAJones had to make an announcement "Our principal Jones let me know this morning that we will be going on a two week break due to a very contagious virus, here I will give you this packet please complete it and bring it back"

TWO WEEKS LATER....

Ughh longest two weeks ever, I said to myself I thought I would enjoy being home all day, but by the second week I was bored out my mind. I missed being with my friends, I missed all of the drama that would go on in school, I missed my favorite teacher, Ms.CAJones, and more. It was the second week of remote learning and I could barely keep up with all of the work my teachers kept assigning to me. I thought I would go back to school on Monday, so I didn't really care. I just said to myself, "I'll complete it when I go back to school."

I was so happy I thought I was going to see my friends again and go back to school, but on Sunday night, my parents and I were watching the news and they announced that students will stay home and continue remote learning. I was so dismayed.

Meanwhile, my mom was thrilled. "Oh, that's very good! Now you can take care of your little sister more and now I won't be worried of you getting sick."

I told her, "Mami, that's not the point. I miss my friends and remote learning is stressing me out."



She said, “Ugh you are always complaining about everything. You need to stop.”

I went to my room upset and I Facetimed my best friend. She wasn't happy about the news either because we weren't going to be able to see each other

FORWARD JUNE....

Sixth grade was finally coming to an end. Not how I imagined or wanted it to, but at least I was passing the grade. I was passing the grade with many warnings from teachers and phone calls home. The only reason why I was off the hook is because I was an honor roll student in in person school.

Over the summer I lost three very close family members and my childhood pet, which caused me to mess my sleeping schedule up really really badly, which caused me to binge eat. I stopped communicating with all of my friends and lost contact with them except for one that always stood by my side no matter what. It caused me to gain anxiety and many insecurities since I had shut out from the world and no one had heard or seen from me.

The only good thing that really happened to me over the summer was the birth of my little brother and the love I gained for baking. I would bake everyday while on Facetime with my best friend. I would bake cookies, cupcakes, cake, flan, and more.

Forward 7th and 8th grade....

It was year seven and I thought I was going to be off the hook like last year but I was wrong.

I wasn't taking school seriously at all. I wasn't joining class or doing any work, which clearly made my grades terrible but little did I know this was going to affect me later on.

It was 8th grade and we were going back to in person school. I was so used to being home and not doing any work, but I knew that was going to change so I really didn't want to go back.

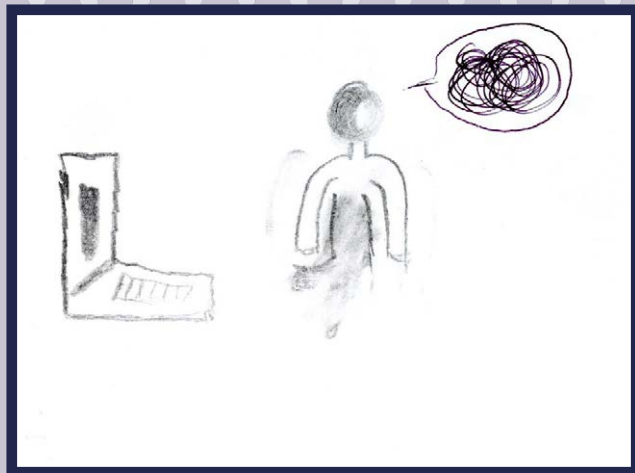
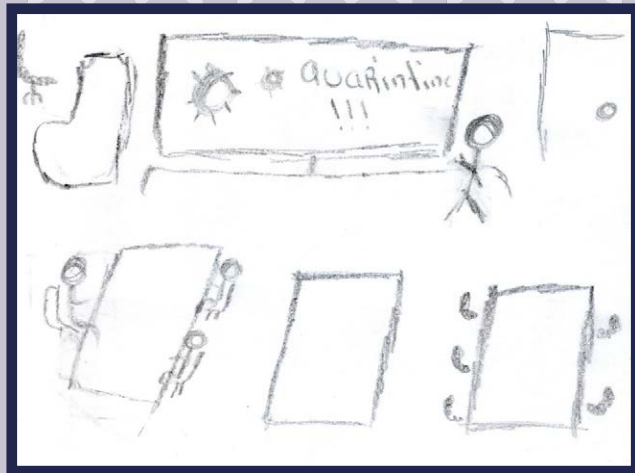
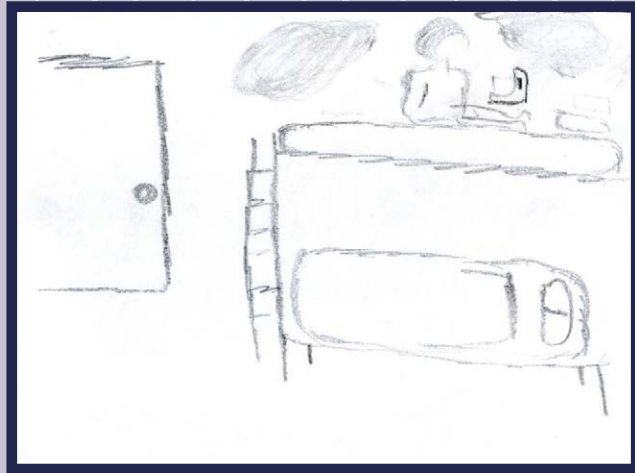
When I went back to school I had terrible anxiety. I couldn't talk in front of a certain amount of people, I couldn't be around a certain amount of people, and I got many panic attacks and more.

Like I had mentioned before me doing terrible in 7th grade was going to affect me, since I did no work in 7th grade I got put in a slow learning class in 8th grade which really bothered me because I was really advanced in all my classes but the other students weren't, so we were never really on the same level.

Continuing on in 8th grade I started talking to my old friends again, and my anxiety disappeared. I stopped having panic attacks. At a certain point I felt like my old self again even though I was still really insecure.

End of 8th grade...

It was the end of middle school. I was so happy. I had a big and loving friend group who made me feel like my old self again. I got my grades back up and graduated with honors. I'm still not the person I want to be but I'm happy with how much I have grown.



By Sydney

I was on the bed watching Miley Cyrus's new music video when my mom yelled, "Sydney, go take a shower!"

I was listening to "Wrecking Ball". What Miley Cyrus did with the wrecking ball was so cool to me. I was a kid who liked swinging on things. Though I liked the idea of it, I never got to do it as often as I wanted to.

"I'm going!!" I yelled back.

I take my towel and then go to the bathroom. I turn on the water, so when I finish brushing my teeth, the bathroom is steamy and the water is warm enough for me to take a shower. When I finish, an idea comes to mind.

I thought to myself, "What if I swing in the shower? It would be so much fun"

I get onto the sink to swing onto the shower bar and without thinking. I let go of my sink and swing onto the bar a bunch of times and then boom. The shower broke.

I fell onto the sink. The sink was glass and had no cabinet so when I fell onto it, it shattered. The glass piece from the sink went into my leg and deeply cut it. It didn't hurt, but I was scared. I didn't want my mom to see that I damaged our new sink. The sink was newly

installed just a week ago. There was no point in hiding it since it was literally impossible. I walk over to the living room where my mother is. The first thing she notices is the big fat scar on my leg.

"Oh my god," my mother says, sounding blank.

She looked like she was about to faint.

"What happened?" my mother asks me.

I hesitantly tell her. She was mad, but not at me.

"I knew there was something wrong with the sink, they put it in so poorly" she said angrily.

A few days ago, she was brushing her teeth and the sink was shaking like crazy when she turned on the water.

"We need to go to the hospital. Put on your jacket and wear shorter pants." She says

She wraps my leg with tissue and tape so the blood doesn't make a mess. The hospital wasn't far so we took the bus. When we get to the hospital, My mom takes me to sign in. When we're done, they give me a hospital bracelet. We sat around for a while, Maybe 2 hours. My mom got upset and went to the front desk.

“Why are you guys taking so long and accepting people that came before?? My daughter is bleeding out” my mom says angrily

“We’re sorry ma’am, they’ll be with you guys soon.” The man working at the front says.

They lied. After an hour and half, they called.

After a long time, they called. A lady takes me to a room and takes my temperature and blood pressure. After all of that, they put me in a wheelchair and took me to the top floor. They were acting like I broke my leg or I was paralyzed.

When they took me to the surgery room, the surgeon was already there waiting for me. He was asking my mom for information about my height, date of birth, blood type and so on.

While all that was going on, I was just thinking to myself about what i’m going to eat when I was done.

“Alright, after sanitizing and numbing, we will start the surgery process.” The doctor says.

I wasn’t the type of kid to cry at those things, I just wanted to know why he was so happy.

“May you please sit outside?” the doctor says to my mother.

“Of course,” my mother said with a smile.

Mid into the surgery, there was a problem. The doctor realized that he forgot to numb me.

“Oh shoot kid, I’m so sorry” he said.

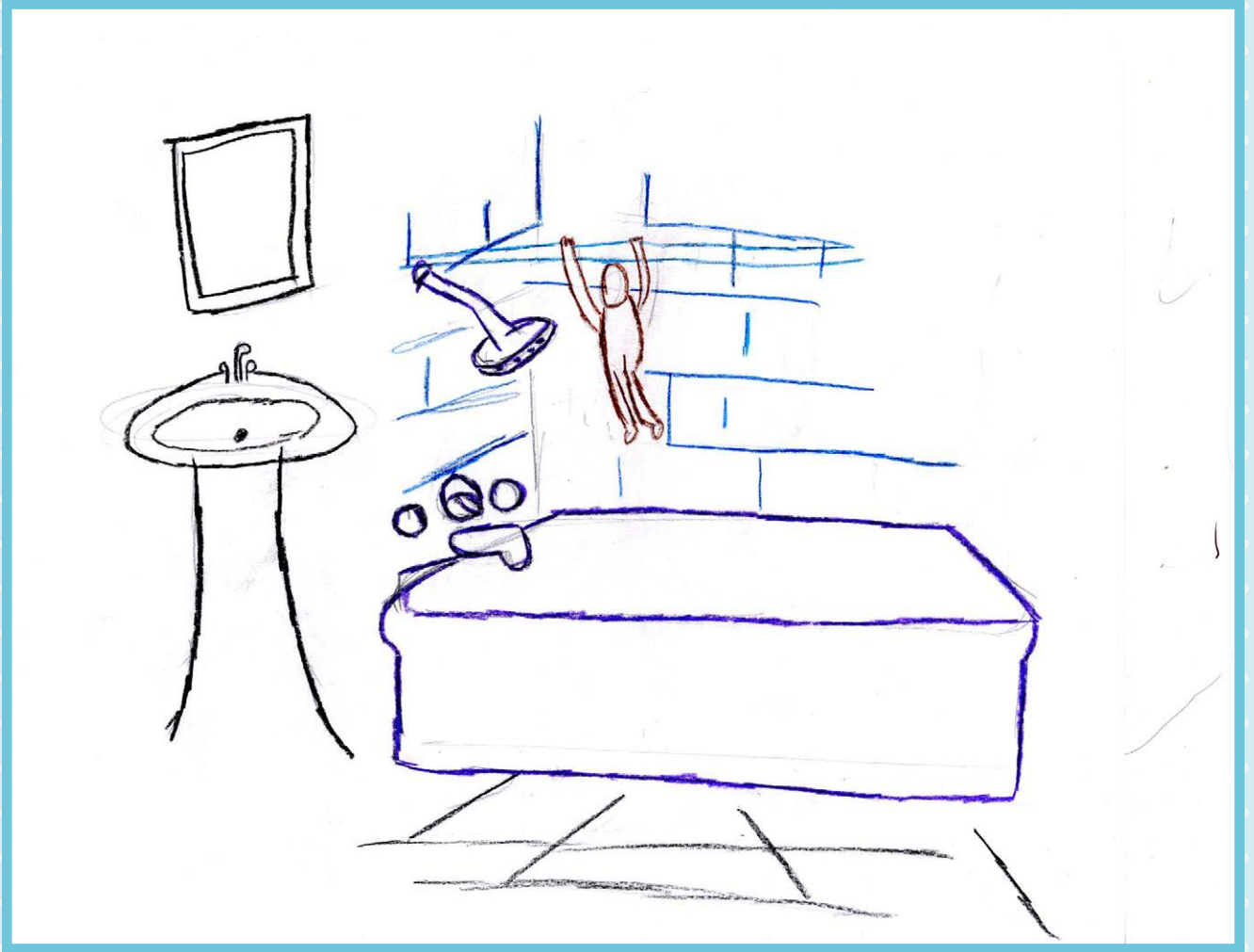
He forgot to numb the part of my leg he was working on.

“It’s okay,” I replied, smiling.

It didn’t hurt at all. The doctor smiled back.

“You’re a strong kid,” he said.

After the procedure, my mother and I went home. These past 6 hours were one heck of a day. I didn’t go to school because my stitches poked my skin and hurt when I walked or ran. This incident was so long ago but till this day, my mother laughs till this day. So do people I tell the story to.



MY PERSONAL NARRATIVE

By Carlos

A time where I felt something affected me was when I had lost my phone. I say this because when I lost it, I couldn't call or text people. I also wasn't able to use apps so I was bored.

It started when one day I was getting ready for school. I had a normal day

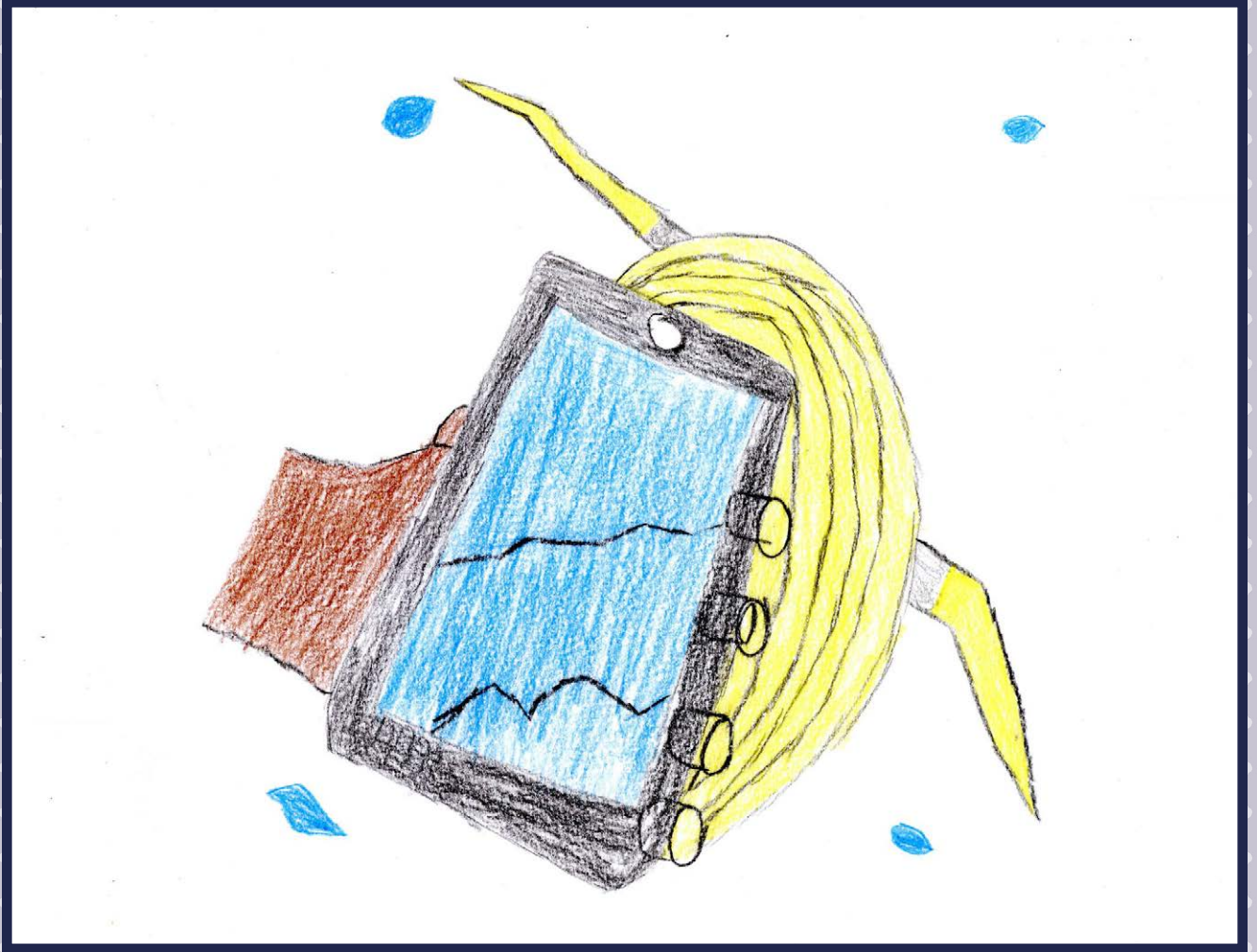
I finished school and went home. I did not notice when I was on a bike I must have dropped my phone because I remembered having my phone walking out of school. I got off of the bike to go back to the way that I was walking to retrace my steps.

I eventually found the phone. My friend said, "Hey Carlos, is this your phone? I found it by the school"

I walked up to him and said, "Yea, thanks! I thought I had lost my phone."

"No problem anytime," he said.

I got my phone back but it was broken. From now on I make sure I always have my phone on me everywhere that I go. There were other times that I lost my phone but this was the first time I lost it to get it broken. I at least had my game with me so I was not that bored anymore. It made me go outside more because there was not much to do at home.



By Aaliyah

For as long as I can remember, my cousin KK was the closest thing I had to a sister. During the summer of 2022 KK and I were inseparable. We told each other everything; our deepest darkest secrets and our feelings towards the older members of our family. I felt like I finally had someone I could trust, and tell everything to, until I realized she couldn't ever be trusted again. This was a turning point for me because it was the first time I felt betrayed by someone so close.

Summer of 2022 was a complicated summer. KK had her friends and I had none. KK was my only friend. Right before the summer started I befriended her friends and we all hung out together during the summer. It was a group of four for the most part. Two boys (Dee-J and Jacques brothers) and two girls (KK and I).

KK went to school with these two boys. They were in the same grade as me but a grade above KK. They were older than the both of us. We went everywhere together; to the park, shopping, to me and KK's family events. I eventually gained my own relationship with the boys and when things went wrong with them I confided in KK because she knew them longer. She reassured me that things were going to be fine.

KK and I would stay up all night just talking about the future, about our birthdays, about how things would be when I get to high school. Making promises to each other that we eventually found out that we couldn't fulfill. This is how I gained KK's trust.

At the end of the summer we became more distant. I was going into high school and she was still in middle school. Everyone found this

strange because they were used to us always being together. This caused some suspicion. This suspicion was because I was distant,

I stopped talking to KK completely with the exception of a few holidays, Thanksgiving being one of them. I was at KK's house for Thanksgiving.

Before I snuck out the houses .KK knew what was going to happen. She was even looking out for me to make sure I didn't get caught. "Don't go down the back stairs, everyone is there," said KK. I believed she had my back. One promise we made was that we would always have each other's back. I stood by this promise because I wanted KK to stand by it as well, but she didn't.

At the gathering I wasn't with KK when the actions were being done.

KK caught me mid-action. "You do you," said KK. "I'll be fine, it's not that big of a deal," I said.

Later, when I went down stairs, I was approached by KK's mother. Once this happened I had a gut feeling, I already knew. I fessed up. I felt so betrayed, as if all my secrets were told to everyone in the room.

The feeling of being betrayed by someone you used to say was your sister hurt. I lost her trust completely. I felt like I had to hide everything from her. I felt as if I was being set up with her backing me up then telling one me. After I was caught I cut most communication with KK. I didn't talk to her for weeks. Until Wednesday, December 21, I texted KK saying sorry and that we should catch up and talk about everything that happened. me and KK's bond is back but it would never be the same as before.





AMERICA

By Jainaba

When I was five, I was living in Turkey with my family. I really loved living in that country until we had to move to America. My family and I took a plane to get there. Taking the plane was a fun experience, until I arrived to America.

I was so nervous and scared. It was like a dream where everything felt so unreal to me. People were speaking a different type of English, an English I didn't understand. Not that I didn't understand English, I just wasn't fluent in it.

Weeks passed by and I started school. When I stepped into the classroom all eyes were on me. My legs were shaking and my heart was beating really fast. It felt like I was running a long marathon. I wasn't expecting to get all this attention on me. I quickly looked down to the floor and walked to an empty seat at the back of the class.

When class started, the teacher handed out worksheets. The only thing I did was there and look confused. I just stared at the paper, my mind was blank. A few minutes later the teacher came up to me and asked if I needed help. I looked at her and said nothing. I was too shy to say a single word.

The teacher knew I needed help and decided to help me anyway.

After class ended it was time to go home. My parents came to pick me up,

“Do you mind If Jainaba stays after school? I feel like she could learn more complex English,” my teacher said.

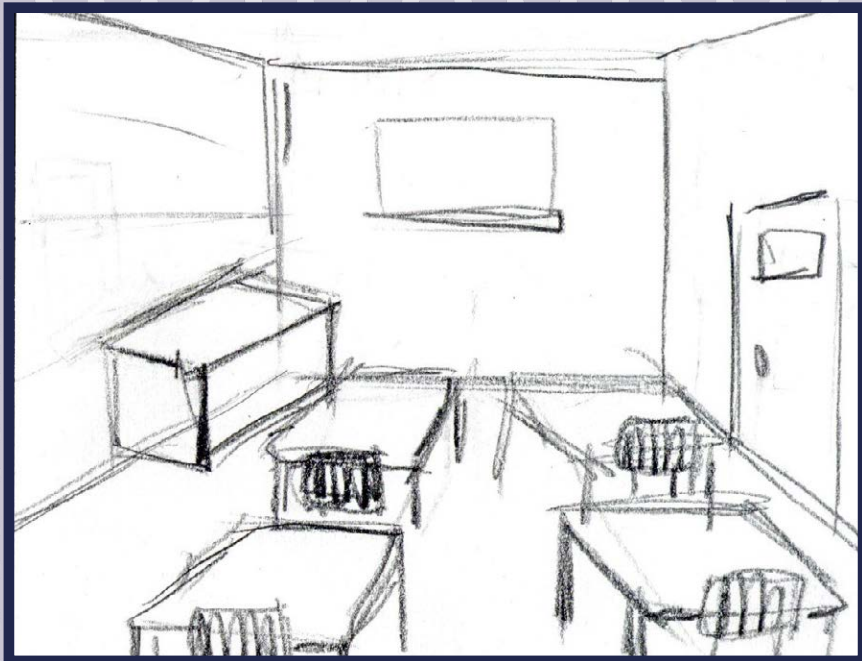
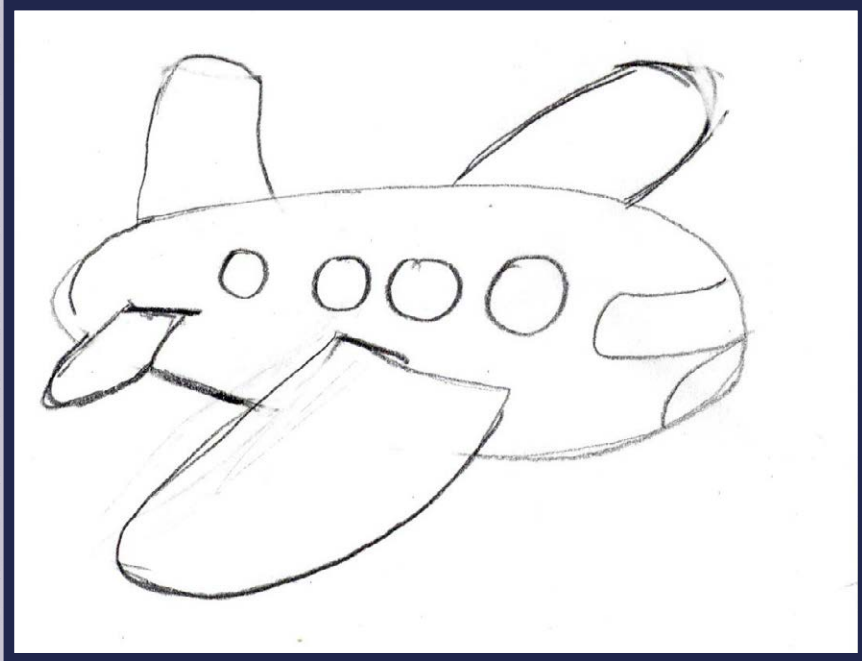
“Of course,” my parents agreed.

I understood why they said, “Yes.”

Everybody was gone, the room was quiet and empty. It was just me and my teacher sitting face to face with each other. I was very anxious. It felt as if the world was slowing down. My teacher started teaching me some basic English words. It was kind of easy at first until she moved on to harder words.

I decided to keep staying after school with my teacher for almost half of the school year. I've learned so much from her and also made new friends. My grades got better and so did my English speaking. One thing I've learned from this experience is to never give up and always achieve your goal.





By Benjamin

I was in the classroom doing my work as usual, nothing had been happening like every other day of school, but I saw one of my teachers going up in front of class. It seems as if he is about to give us some news.

He looked around, "Eyes up everyone."

Everyone in the class is facing him now.

He tells us that apparently were going to be off from school for the next two weeks, until I remember about - the coronavirus spreading to the united states and the fact that other schools had started to close up as well -, this didn't seem too much of a worry so I went on with it as well as the rest of the day.

When I had gotten home after school, I heard something that sounded like the world's worst alarm clock. Until I figured out the sound was coming from my phone, it was an amber alert reading out that all the schools in the country would close for the remainder of the school year.

I wasn't prepared for this, and definitely no other kid was either. But that didn't mean grasping this was impossible, although I've experienced a lot in the past, when everyone had been off of school for months during summer vacations I managed to bounce back into the workload, in contrast I knew this wouldn't stop me and I wouldn't let it.

After those two supposed weeks off, even though I thought we would go back in person, we had started online school since we were not allowed to go back in person. I was ready to do this and would get used to this fast.

"Ok class log in" the homeroom teacher typed in on the chat

Me as well as others all log on to a google class meet

The teachers that I had during my normal schedule still taught us what we had left on, now I'll admit this felt weird and a little difficult but I still managed to get through the rest of that day, my science teacher talked about physics, art taught us about shading, English has us reading a book.

When the day had ended I laid on my bed and let down a big sigh, and thought to myself that Man, this is gonna take a while to get used to, my body shivered with exhaustion, I noticed my door started to creek and my mother walked in.

"So um, how did your online school thing go?" she said while leaning against my door frame and crossing her arms giving me a stern look.

"I'm really not sure," I told her while leaning up in a sitting position. "It's not hard but I don't think this is going to get used to easily I think I'll give it about two or three days and then I'll be adjusted but still, didn't think it start out like this".

There was some silence between my mom and me

"Well you're gonna have to get used to it, you have to do this for the rest of the year and so will everyone else" Mom said, shaking her head at me before she started to leave my room.



As the weeks passed I started to feel the strain of doing online school, never thought doing online was going to start to take a toll.

“Ok class today we are-”

The science teacher got cut off when they noticed that the teachers screen had gone black.

That’s the third time that’s happened this week.

I groaned in frustration

“Hold on, um give me a second to let me fix it.”

I mumbled in annoyance, I promise if this happens again I’ll lose it.

The screen had been turned back on and the teacher started up the lesson.

Then, after about an hour in my art class my teacher was having trouble trying to use a computer, my brain was going to have a headache. If I had a nickel for every time something went wrong online I’d be a Rockefeller.

“I’m sorry class.”

Great. This is happening again.

“And there we go.”

My art teacher smiled in satisfaction, but I put my head on my right hand in annoyance.

How is he not able to use a computer properly if you’re doing work online?

Finally in the last period of the day for me, my English teacher was reading a chapter from our book but then there was crying in the background. I definitely knew the crying was coming from their baby. She then had to log off early when there was twenty minutes left.

“I’m so sorry class, we will continue this tomorrow and remember to finish the chapter,” the English teacher said before logging off, leaving me and the rest of the class in silence.

By the time May had started, I didn’t have the capacity to continue on with school. My mother started to get calls from school essentially every week. Furthermore, the once high grades I maintained started to fall dramatically. But at this point, I could care less about anything.

“Why do I keep getting calls from the school, what are you doing?” My mother said annoyed.

“Why do you care?” I said in a snappy tone.

“Because you’re my child and I want what’s best for you” She said while pointing in my direction.

“Oh big wow, new flash I’m my own person so leave me alone”

Have to admit, the way I talked to my mother did disgust me to my core. Never have I once acted this way towards her.

She let out a tired sigh before dragging me back towards my room to do god knows what she’s going to do

“Hey, what are you doing?”

She didn’t respond and as we got back to my room, we had sat on my bed

“So, what’s been doing school wise?” she questioned with her eyes slanted quite a bit

I choked on air about telling her what she tells me to grow up and deal with it, but I still decided to tell her.

“It’s just.... Hard,” I said looking down exasperated, “I can’t get used to this, I’ve never been in a place like this before, I’m sorry”

She shook her head

“Oh honey, it’s not your fault don’t blame yourself listen to me”.

I looked her in the eyes

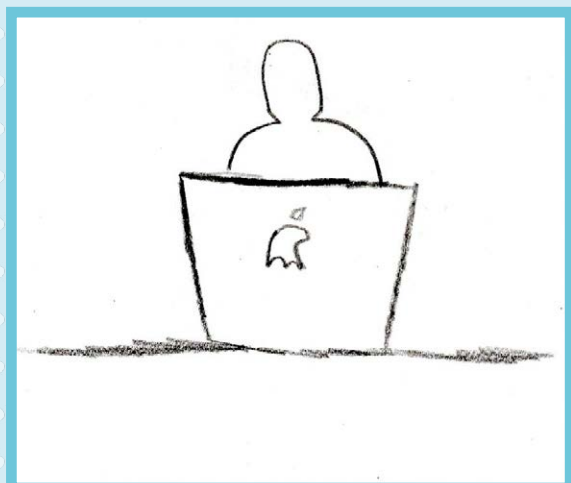
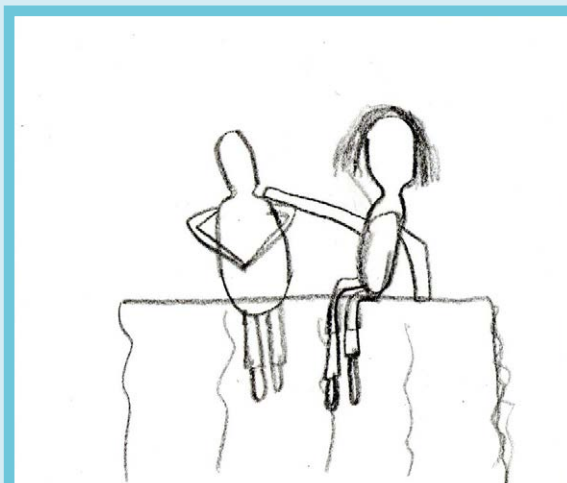
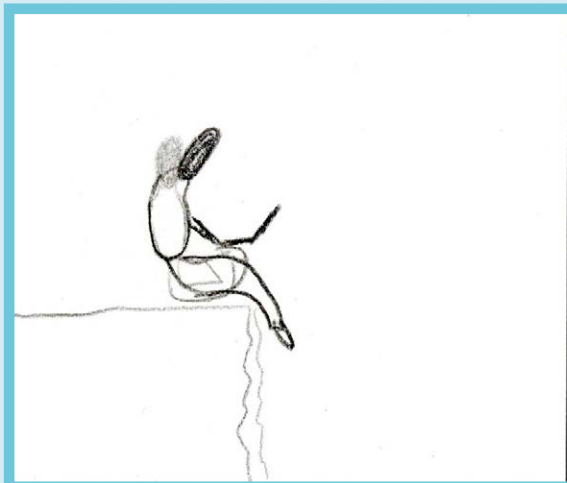
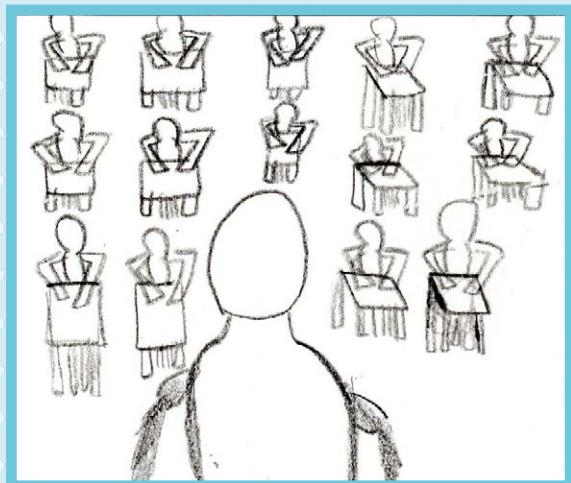
“The way everything works in this world, it’s all random. You can fall, you can rise. Nothing ever goes how you imagine it. It goes by how you make it. Determination and willpower is how you control your fate.” I looked surprised at her statement. I’d never thought of it that way. She was right; everything that’s happen in my life was all controlled by my willpower.

Over the next few weeks, my grades in all my classes started to rise again. I was passing all my classes one more.

“Keep up the work Benjamin!” my English teacher exclaimed while giving me a thumbs up.

“Nice work in that quiz!” the science teacher said while reviewing other people’s quiz grades.

By June, I passed with a GPA of 3.6. I never felt better in my life, thanks to my mother. She got me through my lowest point. She taught me I always control what I do with determination, and I will never forget that.



By Ja Vaughn

I've always wanted to play basketball since elementary school but I couldn't complete that achievement because I was never really allowed outside on my own and I never knew how to play basketball. Before Covid hit, I would play basketball almost all the time. Ever since Covid started I've had time to practice. I've taken the time that I was able to practice playing basketball. I took those opportunities to work more on my game and better myself.

One day while I was in the park practicing with my cousin who I grew up with since we were babies. "Yom", "pass me the ball!" I said to my cousin with my hands open.

Looking around, a small little breeze of wind hit me as I got a feel of the ball again feeling like a bird flying and gliding through the windy skies "Hopefully I make this shot" I say to myself, dribbling the ball between my legs and shooting a three. It misses and rolls out of bounds. I was starting to feel like a predator after its prey escaped.

"I got your rebound," he says.

"Here, "my cousin said as he passed me the ball.

"Keep shooting," he said

"Alright," I said.

"You're going to make it," he says.

"Alright," I said, unsure.

As I was missing a lot of my shots I angrily said, "Oh my god," as I continued to get angry from missing my shots. At that point I developed the wanting to give up feeling.

"You got this bro", my cousin said, motivating me.

I decided to change from shooting three pointers to doing layups. After making three layups in a row I say to myself, Just keep going and you'll get better and better.

"Good job," my cousin said as he passed me the ball for another shot.

As I continued to play and I started making more layups I said to myself, Keep going, you got this.

I changed the speed of my jump shot to slow and I was making a few more threes than before. Finally, I got the hang of basketball again.

Next thing I knew, I was better than before making many shots, dribbling better than before, getting more rebounds. I went home and watched videos on how to better



myself in basketball. I was proud of myself for not giving up and knowing that people believed in me. This gave me a feeling of accomplishment.

A turning point for me was when I started to see my skills increase in basketball and the motivation for basketball increasing.

It was a good experience for me because I learned two lessons: to never give up and that I have to fail to succeed. Perfecting my layups a little back to three point shots I worked hard that day. I built up my stamina, I gained a lot of speed from playing and practicing.

I almost gave up that day but I didn't. I started to believe in myself more and knew the next time I played basketball I would play better. I'm glad I didn't give up easily. I finally completed an achievement I always wanted to complete since elementary school. Ever since that day I've been practicing ten times harder than I was before. This made me more interested in basketball and changed my mindset about basketball. I recently accomplished my main achievement which was making the basketball team. This made me realize that I can actually achieve my goals and achievements.



By Kyara

Before March 2020, life was normal. I went to school in-person, was with my old friends, and there wasn't a disease that impacted most of the world. COVID-19 impacted me academically and mentally wise.

During COVID-19, people began to distance themselves from everyone and I distanced myself from my old friends. Being so used to being near everyone, I have felt very alone and isolated since I stopped getting to see them. Also, my communication skills with others decreased and became socially awkward. I thought to myself, How can I overcome this and better myself? At that time, I began to find myself and my hobbies in what I liked. Hobbies I discovered that I enjoyed were cooking and playing sports. Doing these hobbies expanded my relations with my mother, and within myself.

Later on throughout the year, vaccines were created and people began to become social around people. I was thinking to myself, Oh my god. Is it finally over?

In late 2021, school became in-person and during the late year it was hectic. I was getting adjusted again to the school environment. At first, my school grades were doing really badly. Then, I had no friends in the beginning

of the school year because I was adjusted to the isolation from the past couple of months.

I used to have this math teacher who would give us amazing advice about life. One day, I was on this field trip and it went really bad. After the trip was done and we went right back to the bus, me and the math teacher were having a conversation about what had occurred during the field trip.

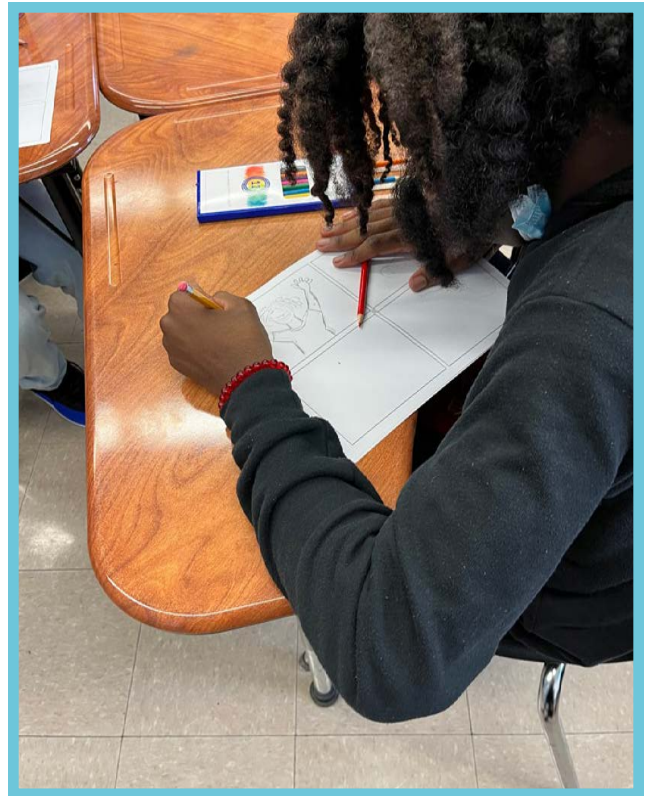
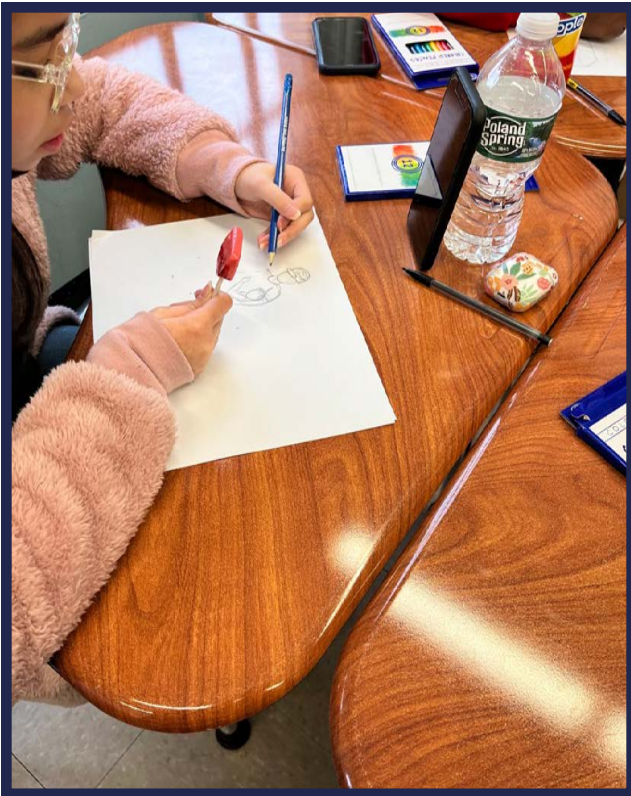
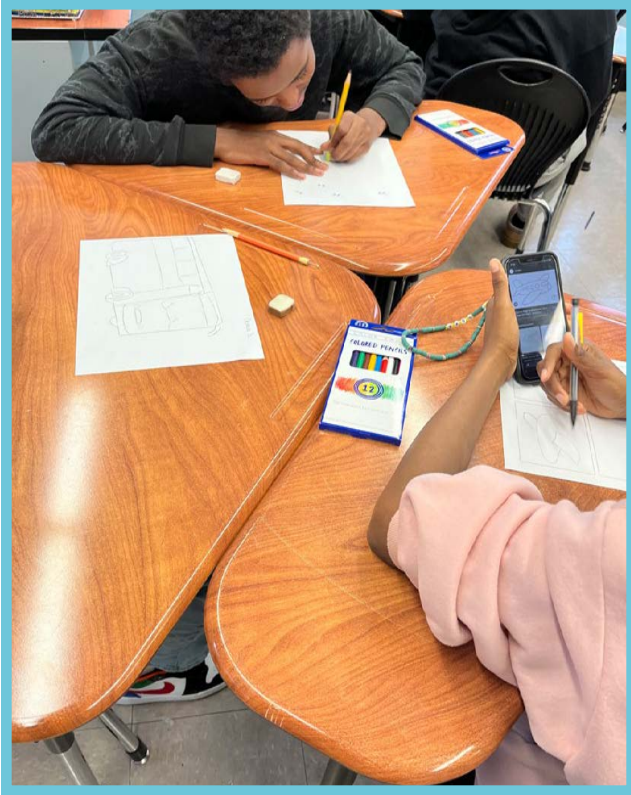
After I'd told him everything, "Never change the way you are, Kyara," he had said.

These words struck me because no one had ever told me such words and it made me feel a little better, especially everything that had occurred prior to COVID-19.

To this day I'd say he's one of my favorite teachers for teaching our class how to be responsible and to be wise, always believing in us. After then, 8th grade was a little different from the past of my grades and it taught me how to combat the feeling of isolation and to go back to the old ways prior to COVID-19.

COVID-19 taught me things such as self-care, adjusting to schedules and how everyone is not treated equally but overall how to bounce back from it.







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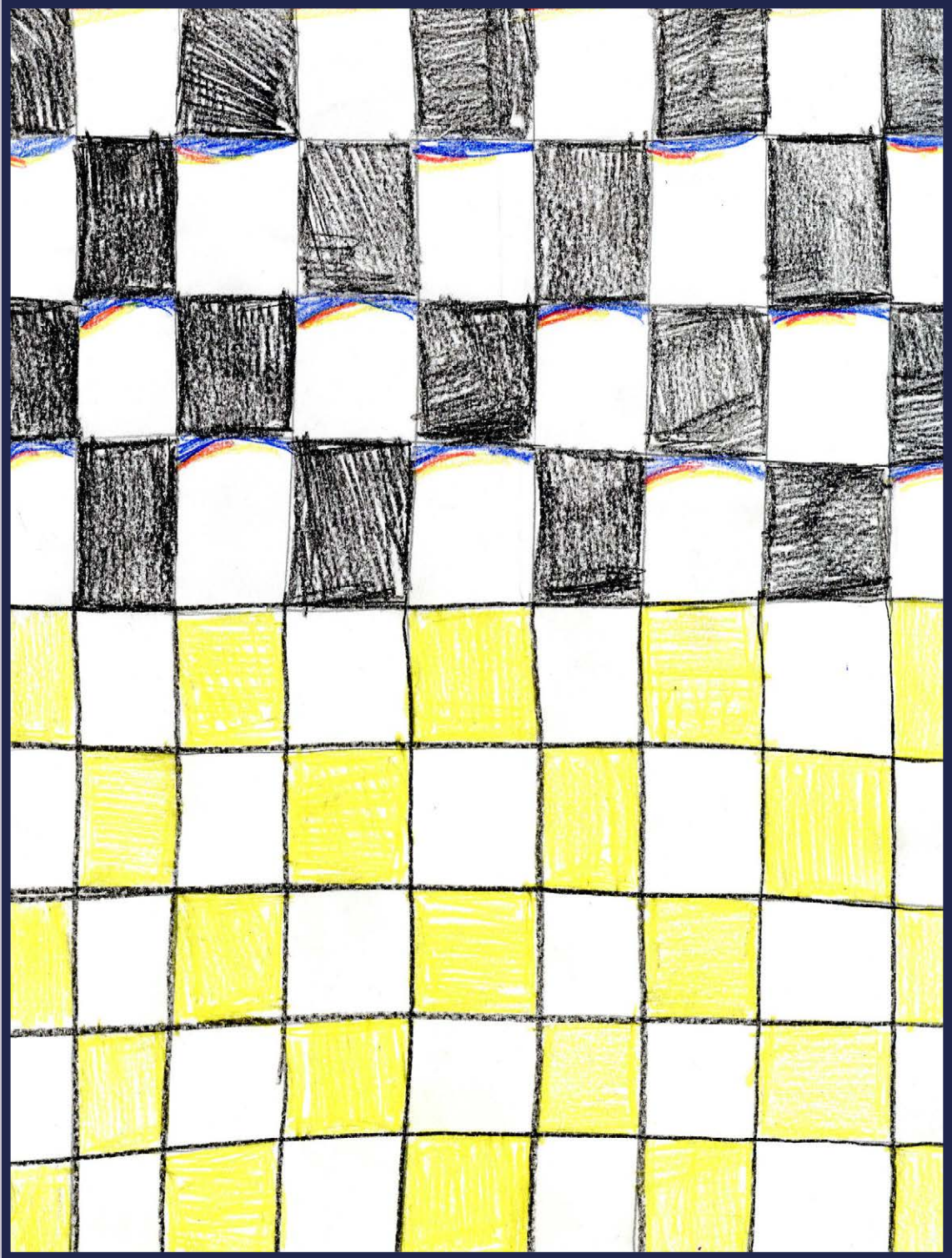
By Janitza

When I was a baby, unfortunately my biological father decided to walk out my life. Everything was fine, until my mother became pregnant with me. When I was born, my biological father wanted to be there for me, but at his own time. My mother disagreed with his opinion and that's when they decided to go their own ways.

When I was about two years old, my mother met my stepfather and he took the responsibilities that my biological father never did. Since I was so young at the time, he was all I knew as a father. As I got older, we grew a close relationship and I started

to call him "Dad". I really appreciate that because he chose to be a part of my life and I am glad that my mom met him.

This past summer, my biological father went to my graduation. He got my number, but he still does not make as much of an effort to see me as I would like. I grew up to accept that he is not a part of my life, but that is okay because I have my mother and my stepfather. Besides, I wouldn't want it any other way. Although I am super grateful to have my step father in my life, at times I do still feel angry and get emotional that my biological father has chosen to not be in my life.



By Jordan

My mom likes to complain about everything so I am always bored when I go out with her. If she doesn't like what we are doing, she'll complain until we have no choice but to go home. Me and my siblings were always mad at her for this. She gets mad when she doesn't get things her way. But on this day, I was so tired of her that I did something I would never expect to say ever.

One day my sister came to our house and asked, "do you guys want to go to a new aquarium that opened up? it's nice outside" I excitedly said, "sure! I don't want to stay home during my spring break". My mom disgustingly said, "whatever, it's better than watching tv all day". My sister happily said, "ok then, let's get on the road".

We entered the aquarium. The Aquarium was small on the outside. It looked small, like a tiny school of some sort. My mom said, "This isn't impressive."

But when we walked in, the place was giant, in every corner, many animals. It was like a wonderland with fish in it. Vibrant colors every turn you make. Many excellent paintings of marine life too. My mom said, "this is so boring".

I was too amazed at the animals, I ignored her. My mom kept complaining that she was bored. I was getting so aggravated that I

snapped on her and said, "why do you always have to ruin everything by complaining?!"

I wasn't even thinking about anyone, I just stormed off, all alone, observing the animals on my own.

I passed the sharks and was amazed at how big the animals were. I said, "where to next?" I went to look for the map I had and it wasn't in my pocket and I realized that my sister still has it, I was lost and alone. I was lost because we were in a new aquarium and it was my first time there. My sister called me on my phone and said, "where are you?", I said, "I don't know, I don't have the map, you have the only one". My sister said, "I'm on my way, meet me at the lobby". I said "ok." I started walking until I saw the lobby, traveling around the place hoping to find the exit.

After about 30 minutes, I finally made it to the lobby and saw my sister. My sister said, "I'm glad you're ok, don't scare me like that again." I said, "I'm ok now." My mom saw me and said, "I'm sorry I made you mad" I said, "it's ok I forgive you." Finally, the disaster was over. When we left the aquarium, an ice cream truck pulled up the block and we all got ice cream. On that day I learned something. Sometimes in life, you have to forgive and forget.



By Alexys

My Mom was pregnant with my baby sister. My Mom went on vacation for a couple of days. My mom was rushed to the hospital where she gave birth to a cute little potato, my baby sister. One day, when me, my brother, and my big sister are chilling at home my mom calls her and says, "I gave birth to a baby girl." Me and my brother and Sister say "Yay! Yay! I can't wait to see my mom in the hospital the next day."

I was so happy to see my mom. She was tired but she was Beautiful and the baby was amazing beautiful with her cute little face. We have to leave the hospital. I was crying all the way home. I thought to myself, I help fix my baby my sis room. I got pizza and watched Tv. My mom came home 2 days later, and everybody was happy.



By Dahmari

When I was 8, I tried soccer and it didn't work out. After I was done with playing soccer, I tried basketball around when I was like 10 and I liked it.

One time I was playing basketball, George dropped me off to practice. On his way back home is when he got into a problem. And my brother is not much of a troublemaker he does what he has to do, go home and go to work. My brother went to Wake Forest college to play basketball. He liked it but he had a kid during his time playing basketball. When my brother had his kid, he had responsibility and stopped going to school to take care of his kid.

My team and I was doing a defense drill, while we doing the defense drill my coach got a call and he told the team "Keep on doing the drill" while he steps out. When he came back in, he was staring at me telling me to "step out". When he told me to step out, I was nervous because I did something wrong but he told me I "have no time it's an emergency." So, I hurry up and got changed while I'm trying ask him questions, he was just ignoring me my coach new my brother since he was 5 and now, he 17 so he was also hurt that my brother had got shot. I got fully dress and my mom paid me a cab and i hopped in and went straight to the

hospital. When I got there, I was so scared because nobody told me why i was there my coach told me I just had an emergency I finally arrived I hopped out the cab walk to the hospital called my mom to come get me from downstairs. When she got downstairs, she was crying so hard screaming "WHY MY SON?" and way more she tried to stop but she couldn't help it and my sister was in the room crying hoping my brother will survive.

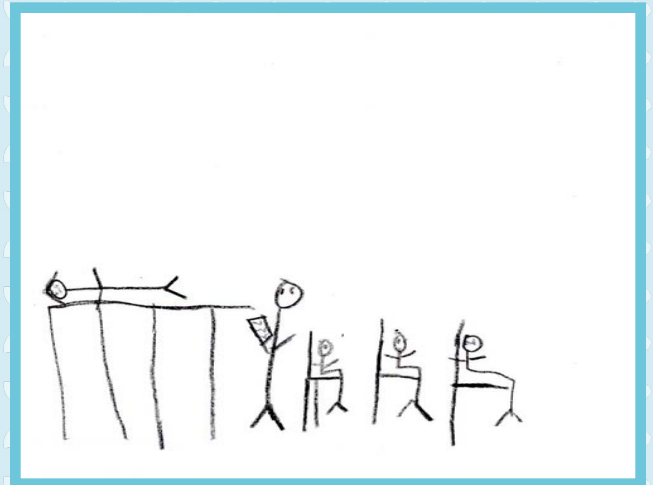
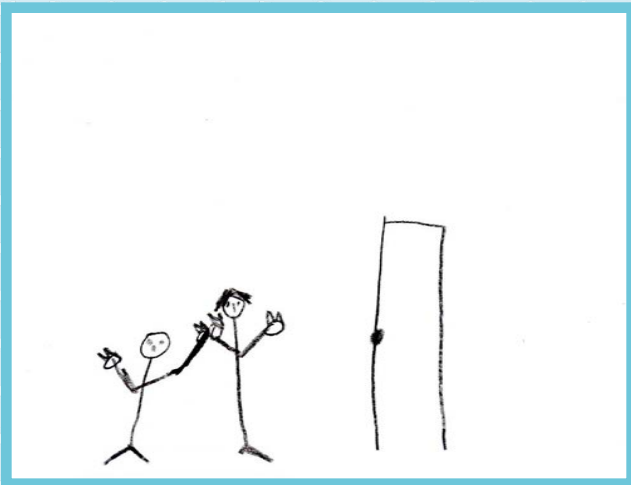
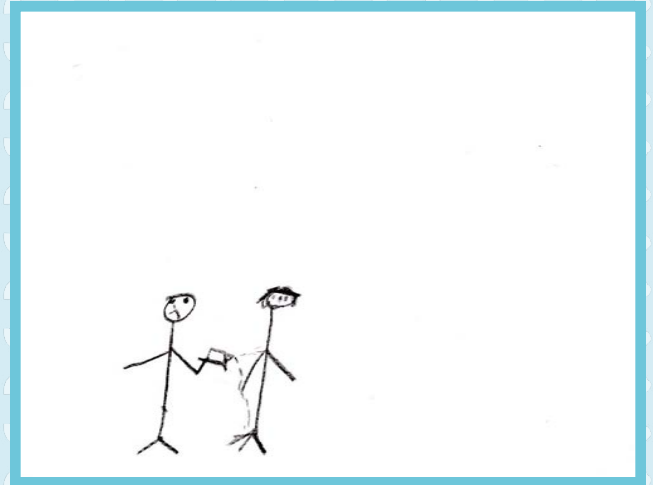
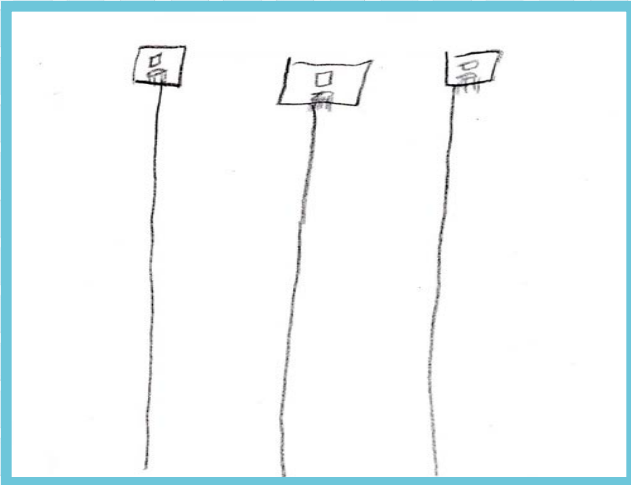
He tried to walk away from it but the other person was not trying let the problem go. And the person he had a problem with he went to school with in 2nd grade. So, my brother did not want to go fight the person because he grew up with him since 2nd grade so he walked away. He started making a scene than that is when he shot my brother in his leg 3 times.

Then a neighbor from my building saw him and called my mom right away. She told my mom that "your son had gotten shot I'm take him to the hospital". As soon as my mom got the call, she rushed to him.

When she got to him, she had tears coming down her face hoping that we don't lose him on that Wednesday.

So, I knew my brother was in pain so I stayed with him in the hospital as long as I could tell he healed.





THE LIFE OF MOVING FROM PLACE TO PLACE

By Samira

Moving to a new place is always hard and scary, especially if you don't even have a place to live. When I was 4 or 5 years old, I moved to New York from Puerto Rico because there was bad stuff happening in the government and my mother wanted me to have a better education and a better breeding. Some of the things happening were people getting robbed, a lot of schools were closing at the time and also the pay is too little to afford living there.

At first, I was excited to move because there was going to be a lot of new things for me. A new life was about to start, I was going to be able to get into a new school, make new friends, even learn a new language. Another thing was that my mom would get better than she was in Puerto Rico and would take good care of us. I also felt like me and mami would not be fighting all the time and maybe a new air would help us to not fight all the time. Also, my uncle made it seem like a dream to come to New York.

When we came here everything was so big that I had to bend my neck up to see the big buildings and the streets were so big and different from where I just came from.

We were so excited to be in New York but my uncle took us the same day to the place where you apply for shelter services. We went to the shelter uncertain of what was going to happen next. After we spent the whole day going from one floor to another, talking to a lot of case workers, they explained to my mom there that to be able to apply we have to be in the city for 30 to 45 days at least to take over our case. So we went to the only person that could help us, my uncle and aunt. They welcome us with open arms or that's what we thought.

We weren't able to fit in the house because it was just a one-bedroom apt. and there were a lot of us. As the time went by my mom got help from the government to buy food. After living with my uncle for over two weeks we went food shopping because there was nothing to eat no more. My aunt used all of my mom's food money to get groceries.

The next day, I was hungry so I went to the refrigerator to get a snack but before I was able to grab anything, my aunt came and said, A: "What are you doing?"



I replied with S: "Trying to get a snack, why?"

A: "Because you can't get a snack"

S: "Um why can't I"

A: "We only eat once a day at this house and because i say so now go wait for dinner"

S: 'Oh ok"

I then went to the living room to watch TV to get my mind off my hunger. After a few weeks living there became a problem between my mom and my aunt, so my aunt asked my uncle to kick us out.

We went back to the shelter and were there all day and with no news if they were going to take us. When we found out they were going to take us it was around 2:00 am or 3:00 am only to get back to the shelter in Brooklyn from The Bronx at 5:00 am in the morning and that is how we spent 8 years moving around in the shelter.

We moved from Brooklyn to The Bronx and in the Bronx, we moved into four or five different shelters. It was uncomfortable for

me because I couldn't invite anybody to my house or travel anywhere because we couldn't sleep outside more than two days or we could get kicked out.

Through all the struggle we went, it was all worth it because as of right now we have an apartment. At first it was hard to get the paper that the social worker needed because the person that was supposed to help us didn't do much for us. When we were going to the appointment to check the apartment the social worker took a long time to get ready and was supposed to go by bus. Then when she was ready, we were late and my mom was mad at her so she said "we are going to text because the bus is full of people." My mom said "ok but better get there fast." I could tell my mom was mad and who wouldn't be when we got a first apartment appointment ever.

This year I went to Puerto Rico after 9 years and I had a great time. I live happily with my mom and my brother and sometimes my sisters and my grandmother sleep over too.





THE LOST RING

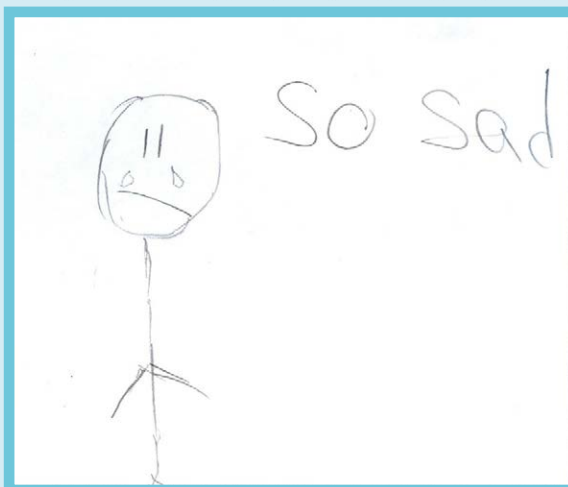
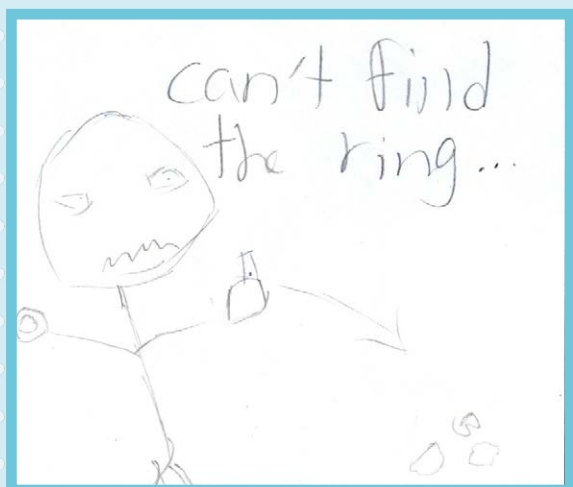
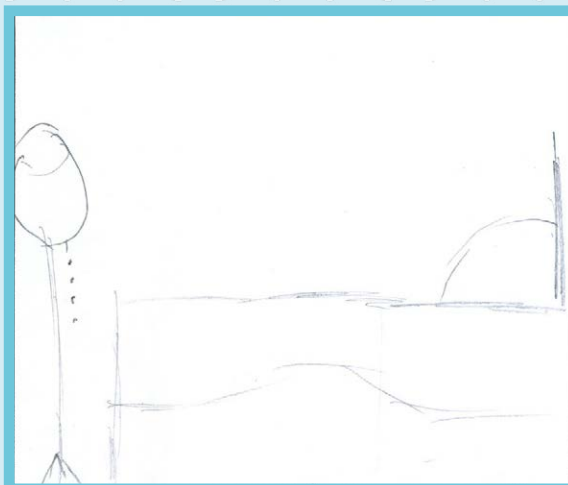
By Emily

By the way, this isn't the first ring that I lost. I'd have been going to this Christian church called "Palabra De Vida". My mom bought this ring from a pastor that sells real jewelry. I said, "Wow thanks". My mom says, "No problem." The ring was pink and silver and was very expensive for my mom to buy.

My mom noticed me not wearing my ring and always asked me about what happened to it. I'd made sure my mom doesn't remember about my ring. The last time I placed it was on my dresser near my perfume and lotion. Also, my room was such a mess during the time I lost the ring. Like, my room is so messy, I couldn't find my bookbag under a pile of clothes. My heart was rising through the roof at that time. I tried looking for the ring, but I didn't find it. So, until this day, I haven't told my mom about the missing ring because if I tell her then she'll be very upset

at me for not being responsible. Sometimes I feel so guilty about losing the ring because I'm 15 years old and I can't even take care of my jewelry safely. I even pray to God sometimes about the ring missing and that I can't be trusted. This situation changed me because I was always responsible for my belongings and gifts, but this is the first time I ever lost a ring that was important to me. For example, I'm really responsible for my house keys, homework, iPhone, air pods, etc. Next time I should buy a jewelry box to keep my ring inside. Also, I was shocked/surprised because I never lost jewelry before that was a present for me and that came from a Christian church. Usually, the rings that I get and receive are not really silver, but this ring is. That's what makes me so stupid for losing the ring.





THE TEST

By Zayliani

My name is Zayliani. When this incident happened, I was an 8th grader at the time. Ever since I've been introduced to science, I've been bad at it. Science is one of the subjects I've always struggled with. On top of that, I don't like to ask for help due to being shy. Which most of the time would result in me failing or being confused. I would be scared of the teacher yelling or people laughing at me so I would stay quiet.

We prepared for the state test all year round, and with all that time I still felt like I didn't get close to enough support to help me on the science state test. Weeks before the state test I would come home and complain to my mom about how nervous I am.

"Mami I don't think I'm ready, she doesn't help me when I'm clearly struggling in her class," I whined.

"I keep telling you to advocate for your learning. Staying quiet isn't going to get you anywhere. Teachers can't read minds Zayliani," she said firmly.

I decided to walk away since my mom rarely understands. I went into my room and looked for all my science notes from the beginning of the year. I studied until my head hurt

"This better pay off," I thought to myself.

I went to bed knowing that studying is most likely not going to help. I was so nervous I kept tossing and turning, and couldn't sleep. Finally, I fell asleep. And just like that... It was the day of the test.

I got up, brushed my teeth, and ate breakfast. My mom always has me eat before tests.

I was so nervous I felt like throwing up afterwards. But I didn't, thankfully. I ate my omelet and sat on the couch waiting for the time I usually leave, which is 7:15. My dad texted me, wishing me good luck like he always does before any test. And my mom gave me a small pep talk before I left.

"Don't stress, take your time, try to think about what you've learned. Goodluck. I love you," My mom said in a soft tone.

"Ok mami, i will try. I love you too," I replied.

"Bye, I'll see you later," she said as she went in for a hug.

I grabbed my lunch and walked to school trying to walk slowly to stall. But before I knew it I was already in front of the school at 7:40 getting greeted by my principal. He was always in such a good mood greeting us with so much energy. I walk inside and start walking to the cafeteria. When I got inside, I sat with my friends and talked to them until 8:00. Where we started going into separate rooms for testing. "Good lucks" getting told to everyone.

"Good Luck guys... I'll see you soon," I said to my friend group

"Thank you! Goodluck to you too," They all replied

We hugged each other goodbye while teachers were telling us to stop socializing and get to our testing rooms.

I walked into room 105, the social studies room. Desk separated and I got that weird feeling in my stomach. I sat on the desk that had my name on it. All desks had a water



bottle and 2 pieces of mint for the test. I sat down and we waited for the students to come in. Around 15 minutes my teacher started reading the rules. Then the words came out

“YOU MAY BEGIN” my teacher said.

The pages of the test being flipped made me so nervous. But I eventually started my test. I looked at the scantron

“50 questions...?” I thought to myself

From the nerves I was continuously shaking my leg. Watching and listening to the clock tick waiting for 3:30 to come.

“TICK.....TICK.....TICK”

The minutes felt like hours. Everyone else is flipping their pages and I’m still on the first page. Finally, 12:15 comes around. Teachers passing out the school lunch, I hated the smell of their lunch. They gave me a burger with soggy fries. The thought of the burger made me gag, knowing I’ve gotten sick from it before. I took out my sandwich and Pepsi from my lunchbox while the teacher put on “White chicks” We all ate our food. Talking quietly because we couldn’t be too loud.

I finished my food and put my head down for a nap. I was so tired I felt like I didn’t get any sleep. It felt like right when I closed my eyes, it was time to start testing again

My teacher walked past me and lightly tapped me

“Continue testing,” she whispered

I slowly got up and rubbed my eyes. Grabbing my test

“I’m on question 30... I got this”

About an hour and 30 minutes later, I finally was able to close my test and rest. I put my test on the side of the table, along with my pencil. I put my head down and went to sleep until 2:30. I woke up to the sound of people making noise.

“WERE FINALLY DONE!!!” one kid shouted.

“YESSSS” another kid said

“Quiet down please... We’re about to head out for recess in 5 minutes. Help me put the desk back together”

I got up, my legs felt numb since I was sitting for so long. My class helped put the tables back together in rows and seats of 2.

By the time we were done it was our time to go outside. Everybody was running out of excitement finally being able to stand up. I went outside and I saw my best friends and we all ran up to each other and hugged.

“I MISSEDD YOUUU,” my friend Mbene said.

“I missed you more” I exclaimed.

My friend serenity was still hugging me, shaking me back and forth.

We played volleyball, talked about the test, and we all agreed that we struggled on the test due to not getting the help we needed in order to succeed. The hour went by so quickly, it was time to go back inside and get our stuff from our lockers and go home. Everybody in the halls stopped to talk to their friends, and teachers yelling trying to get us home.

“DON’T STOP TO TALK TO YOUR FRIENDS DO THAT OUTSIDE,” One of the deans said.

“I’ll call you when I get home,” I said to my friend Serenity

“Ok, bye,” she said as she hugged me.

I started quickly walking out and waited at the front of the school for my dad to pick me up. When he finally got to the school after 5 minutes. He asked me how i think i did and what I would like for dinner.

“Can we have Milk Burger?” I asked.

“Sure, well order at 6,” my dad said

“Thank you!” I replied happily.

Milk Burger is my favorite burger place to order from. I was so excited.

When I got home, my mom greeted me and asked how I thought I did.

“I’m not sure. I’m not confident though,” I replied to her with a sigh.

“Oh...Ok. I hope you did well.”

“Thank you, I hope so too,” I said while walking away to my room.

I took off my bookbag and put it on the floor, I hung my coat up on the rack in my room, took my shoes off and put them in their shoe box, and I went into my closet and grabbed my pjs so I can take a shower.

I took a nice hot shower, and I got out and called my friend Serenity as I said I would. Before I knew it, it was 6 o'clock my dad called me out and asked what I wanted from Milk Burger

"A burger with cheese fries please. Thank you," I said smiling.

"Ok. no problem"

When the food came after 35 minutes, we ate the food together and watched a horror movie. When we were done eating, and watching movies it was 9:00. I laid in my bed and got ready to sleep so I wouldn't be tired for tomorrow.

I was fast asleep in less than 5 minutes.

A couple weeks later at 6:15 A.M my alarm went off, waking me up out of my sleep. I got up, brushed my teeth, put on my uniform and my dunks, and did my hair. I took a blueberry muffin to hold myself up for the day. I sat down on the couch watching the news that my mom puts on every morning. Waiting for 7:15 to come around so i can start leaving

7:15 came around and I grabbed my coat, my bookbag and headed out the door. I quickly went down the stairs to my house, and the stairs outside. I opened the gate and started walking. It's about a 15-minute walk.

When I got to school it was 7:40. They told us to go to our advisory since it was Friday, we have 40 minutes in advisory. Serenity was in my advisory so I put my coat and bag in my locker and looked for her. When I found her, we went to our advisory and watched videos on a school laptop someone left overnight.

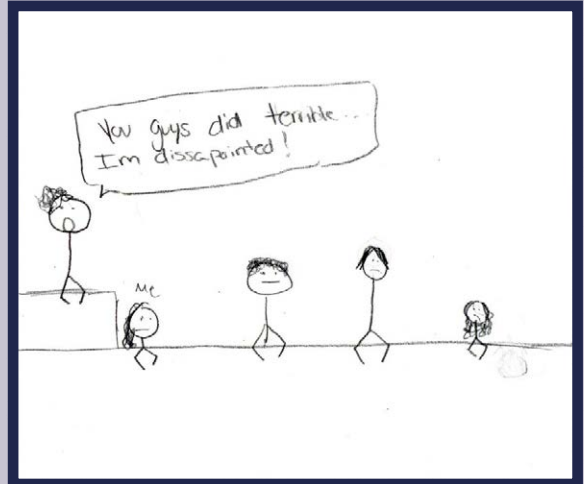
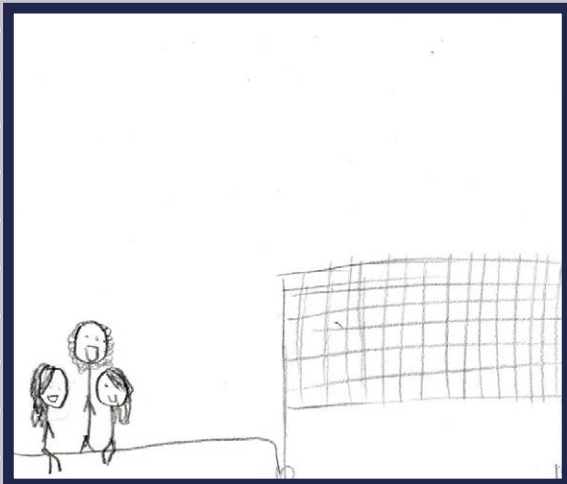
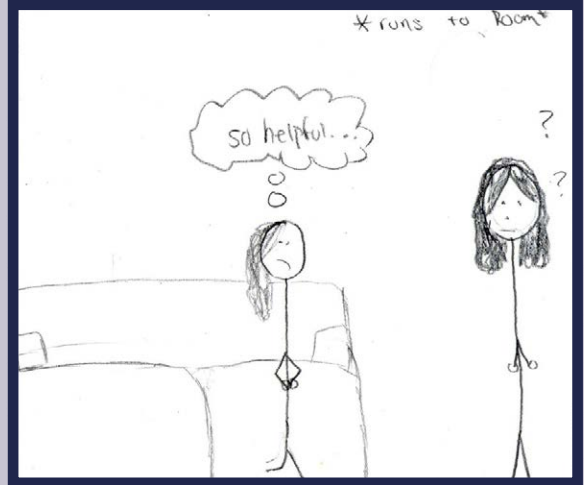
The 40 minutes were over and it was time for class. And I had science first... I was not looking forward to seeing how she was going to react. Since she told us yesterday, she gets the grades. When I walked in, she didn't greet me how she normally did. I can already tell we were about to get screamed at. When almost everybody came in. She started going on her rant.

"I think it's obvious. BUT I'M VERY DISAPPOINTED IN YOU GUYS, VERY," she said yelling.

"Only one person did sort of good. The rest of you didn't. I prepared you ALL year for this test."

"Not really." I thought to myself. If I would have said that she would have started yelling all over again.

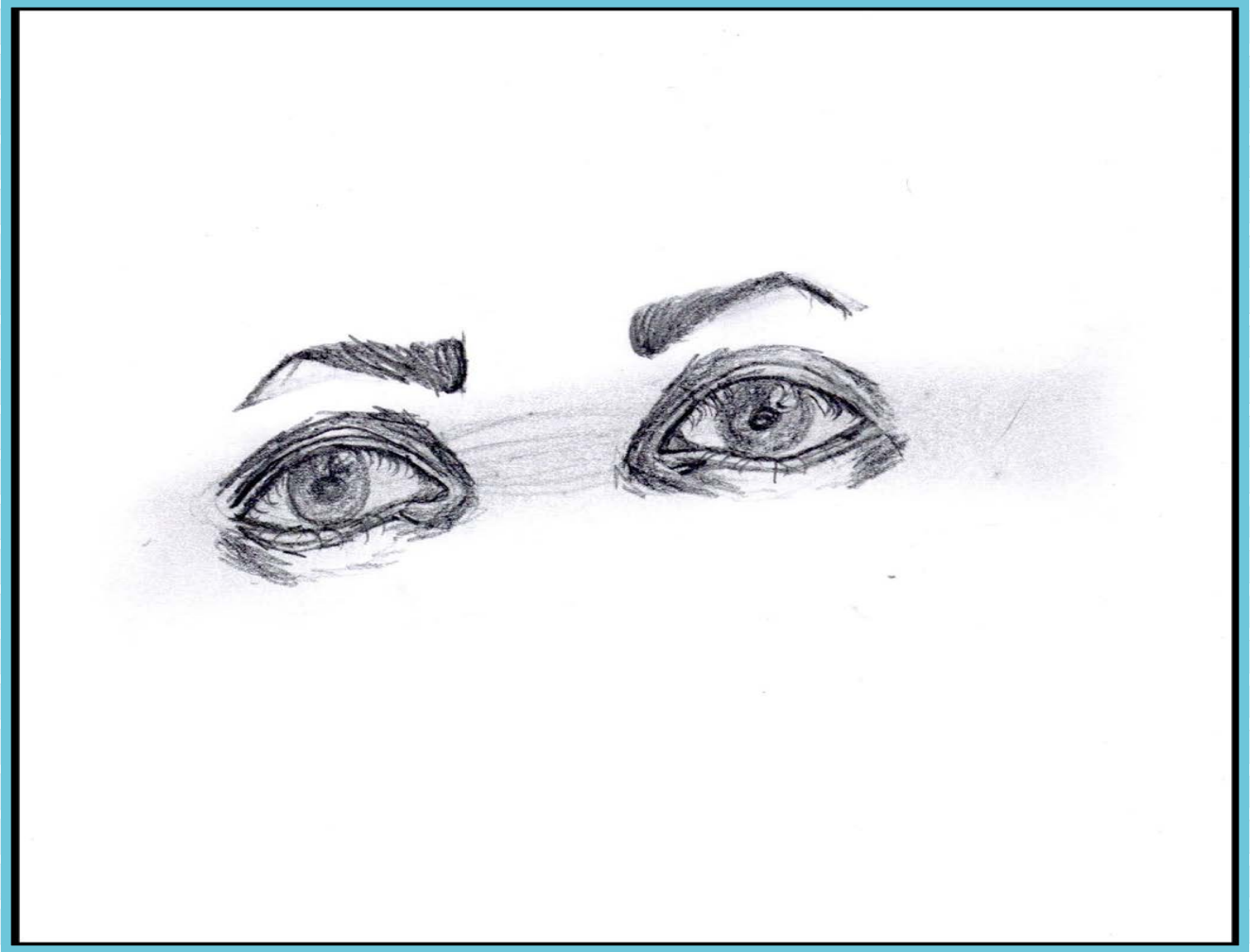
A piece of advice I have for people is to not stay quiet, ask for help.



By Gleusi

Coming to America was exciting for me after years I could see my mom and grandma. New York was beautiful like it was show in the movies. I was amazed by the big buildings and the lights in times square that I've never seen in my life. Everything was different from my countries the people, the way people act, the weather, school, the language, and the culture. The people in New York weren't talkative with strangers like in my country, the people act were mean sometimes the treat me like i was someone different because of where I come from and my language, the weather changes make me get sick easily and it was difficult at first because i was not use to it, United States school make me feel like I was different the kids here treat me different and did not want to be my friend because I was new and didn't understand there language. I was quite and in class because no one want to talk to me I missed my friends from Dominican Republic. The culture was different from what i am use to for example thanksgiving, July 4th, and Halloween. The us surprised me in many ways in my country houses were not build

that way here they were colorful and I would rarely see a building, the first time i took the train i was surprised of how easy it was here where I live people only took the train or bus for important things, people here buy things like pizza or McDonalds or any junk food for me it was impossible to get it when I wanted. Not having friends missing some family, friends and the people i am use to see was very difficult for me I wanted to go back have my friends and do the things i use to do without people finding it rare. I miss the beach, the rivers, the weather and the way i lived in my country. The language makes me feel insecure going to school not understanding anything the teacher say make me feel sad because I did not understand what people say about me. One day in school a girl starts looking at me and then talks to her friends while looking at me a then they laugh I knew she was talking about me because she pointed at me. Going home I start to cry because the girl bother me since school started she say things about around the school and I couldn't do anything because I did not talk or understand English.



By Kaylee

For as long as I can remember, when I was younger from four to six years old, I used to always play my games and toys by myself. I would get super bored and it felt super lonely knowing other people had siblings to play with. However, eight years ago on November 14th my little brother was born. From that day forward, I was the happiest person in the world and I still am.

It felt good having someone to play with, but as he grew up it became challenging to take care of him because he started to be hard-headed and wouldn't listen to me which caused us to get into arguments over stupid things.

There was a day that I was in my mom's room hanging out with her and watching a movie with her. It was a shark movie and me and her love watching shark movies together. The movie was about two and a half hours long.

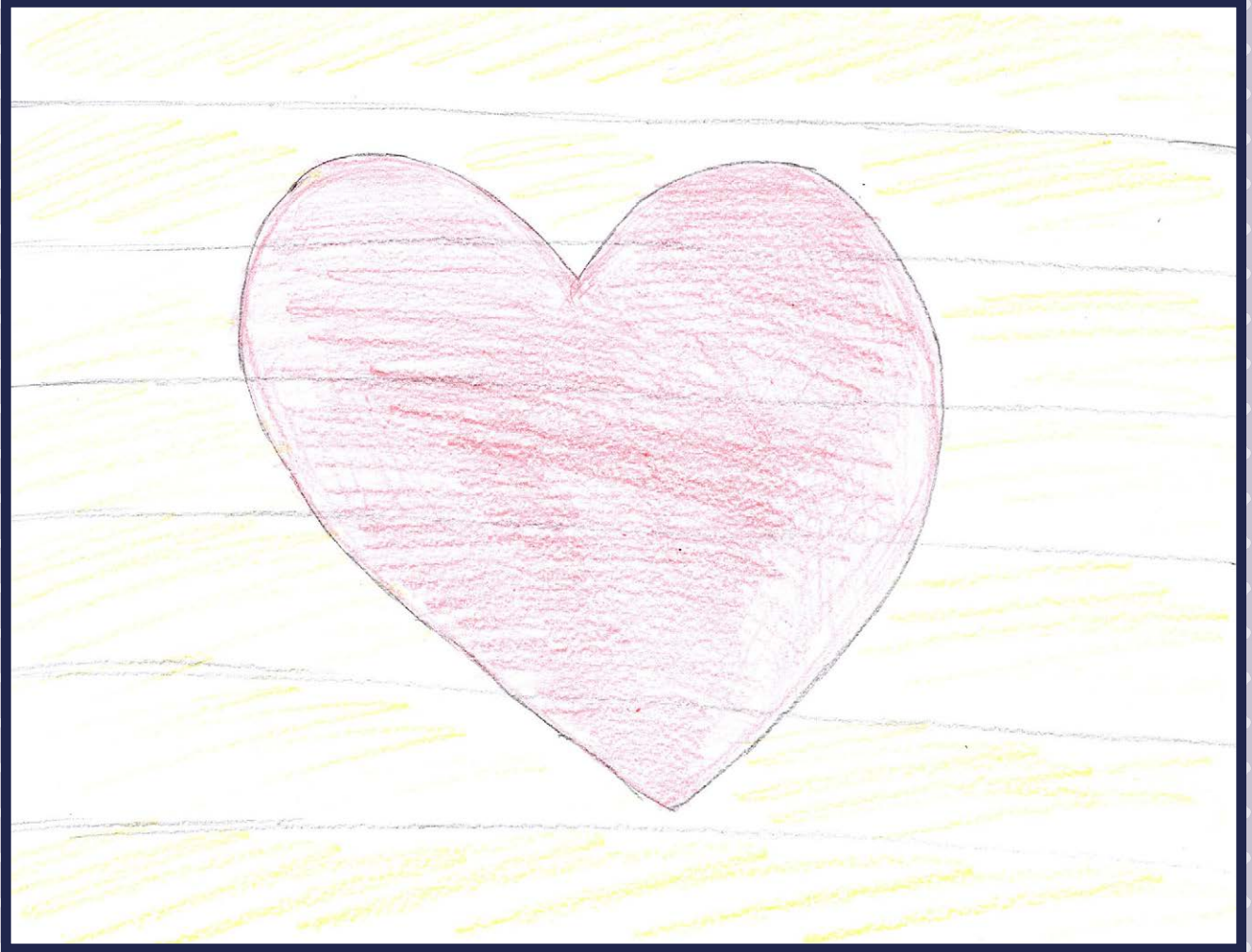
I walked into a bunch of marvel action figures. I looked at my brother and he stared at me with a big smile. I told my brother, "Poppa, pick up your stuff right now." (Poppa is a nickname we gave him when he was born and we've been calling him that ever since.)

He looked at me. "I don't want to pick them up."

We kept going back and forth which caused us to get into an argument. We would get into arguments over him bothering me when I didn't want to be bothered. Also, sometimes we would get into arguments because I didn't want him doing dangerous things.

As he started to get older, me and my little brother started getting into more arguments because now he knows more than what he knew when he was younger. One example is us getting into an argument about who should sit where on my mom's bed cause us three were all about to watch a movie. The way we solved our arguments was by apologizing to each other and talking to each other. Another way we solved our arguments was by joking around with each other or making jokes about other people. I began to realize that all siblings argue with each other and no sibling relationship is perfect so it's okay to have a disagreement every once in a while, but I can say that I am truly grateful to have a little brother in my life and I really care and love him.





LEAP OF FAITH

By Joshua

My family and I went swimming for the summer to a lake a friend of mine suggested. On our way to the lake, we saw people walking there. My mom said that they might have parked somewhere down the road. I replied by saying “shouldn’t we do that?” my dad said “there might be parking over near the lake”. The drive was a total of two hours, in those two hours there wasn’t much to do except be on my phone and listen to music. The one thing that was bothering me was that my little sister and my little cousin kept asking if we were there yet the whole car ride was “are we there yet?” over and over again. I did see a couple of deer but that’s about it.

My dad was parking when I heard people talking about a cliff, “have you jumped off the cliff yet?” he asked, “no have you?” I heard that and got excited because I love heights. I told my mom to hurry, she replied “be patient, calm down,” “I can’t calm down.” I thought to myself, I want to go to the cliff and jump off. After that I was talking to my cousin on our way to the lake. I asked her if she heard about the cliff. She said “no, is there one?” I said “yes, I want to jump, do you?” She didn’t answer after that. I got worried because she doesn’t really know how to swim much. After that we were walking to the lake and I asked her “are you ok?” and she answered, “no, I’m kind of nervous.”



AGREE TO DISAGREE

By Jennifer

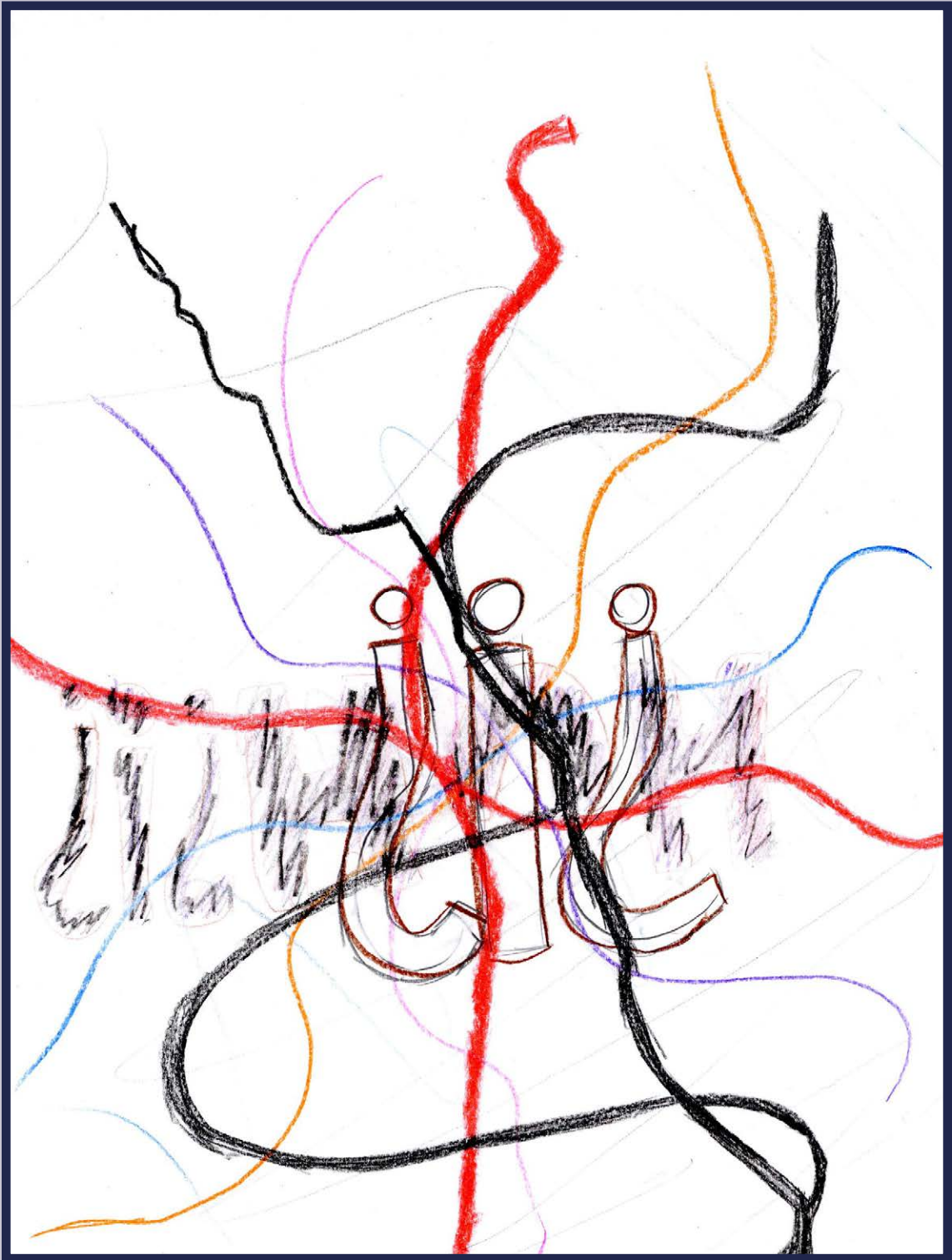
Hi my name is Jennifer and this is my story on how I realize that people are very judgmental on what you do to your body. In the end of summer sixth or seventh grade I asked my mom a question on why she doesn't let me cut my hair. The response that I got from her was that it made me look like a girl. Got confused on why hair made you look like a specific gender it sounded stupid. "Hair is hair" I don't get it. She said if I were to cut it, I would look like a boy. I didn't care. She gave me an idea about what I should do to my hair. Around 5 pm my sister Jessica came from work; told her I was going to cut my hair. She said "Dora the explorer, Dora haircut?" I looked at her with a serious face and said "no an undercut". Jess "why?" told her why. She nodded her head approving on what I'm going to do. *She didn't react like mom did. It was nice* "I'll pay for the haircut." Jessica said.

Next thing we do is go to the barber shop near my home. I was nervous not because my mom was going to get mad but what if people looked at me weird and what if it's not a fit cut for me. When we got to the shop everything that I was thinking went away. My turn came quicker than I expected and the cut was done. It looked decent but next time I will surely do a different style on the cut.

On my way home my head felt a Briefs of air since hair was no longer there it was nice.

I opened the door of my home and the first thing I saw was my older sister Cindy. Her reaction was priceless. She looked like I just Committed a crime. She asked "why? Your hair was beautiful... Why cut it? You look like a guy now" "okay..." *like what she wanted me to do with what she said I didn't care.* My mom came out of the Kitchen and since she heard our voice, she looked mad and disappointed. Not the first time I saw that face I wanted to laugh. It was funny how my hair can make people mad. She started to argue with Jessica on how she was the one that gave me the idea to cut it. I told her that it was me that came up with the idea and why was she mad it's just hair it means nothing. She was madder than before.

It took her three weeks for her anger to go away. Despite that she got normal with my hair. It was an improvement since now she lets my brother Jonathan have long hair. But She told me to no longer cut it so I'm I going to listen to that no I'm still cutting little by little when the hair gets long. I mean it's not her hair to begin with. I'm my own person so let me do what I want with my own body. And why do people have to have opinions that others don't ask for I don't get people why be mad if it isn't you. You can do whatever you feel like that would satisfy you on your body just be careful and think things through.



By Ranfis

My name is Ranfis and I'm from the Dominican Republic. I am 14 years old. The Dominican Republic is not a first-rate country or anything like that, but it is doing very well. When I was just a kid the country was in a "crisis". The economy was terrible, and the president did nothing more than rob the people and leave them with nothing. There was almost no water or electricity in the area I lived in, and it was very common to find someone stealing. Children and adolescents gathered in groups of 3 or more to steal from people who walked alone.

THIEVES AND ICE CREAM

I remember one day when I was with my cousin just walking around the neighborhood while we ate vanilla ice cream. We saw a small crowd in the distance and decided to get closer to see what was happening. We saw man being held hostage, a man who had gotten into theft and they caught him, he was tied up with an old rope, he had multiple wounds, Blood flowed down his face as his eyes radiated regret. On his face from the blows he had received, he was semi-naked, and the man who had him tied up threatened to throw himself off the roof if the police didn't come and take that thief

away. I just looked without understanding what was happening, and after a while, my cousin decided to take me home, I never knew what happened to the thief.

FREEDOM

Part of me is happy that I am in the United States, but the other part misses the freedom that I had when I lived in the Dominican Republic. I miss the food from the Dominican Republic, I miss going out every afternoon to play, and I miss my cousins and my mom, but sometimes I feel that people have a lot of freedom. People can build what they want where they want as long as the prosecution doesn't notice. I remember running away from home just to be able to play with my friends, doing stupid and very dangerous things without anyone saying anything to them. human trafficking, arms trafficking, drug trafficking, and corrupt police, what else can I say? I don't know why people continue to enjoy the good part of the Dominican Republic, and it's okay, I mean, if you want to see the good part, it's fine, but you have to pay attention to the bad part, we need people to pay attention to the bad things in the country so that can fix it, we can't ignore problems forever

ROD

Once I went with my stepmother to visit one of her friends, I went in and greeted her with a simple "hello", after greeting her and I go to her patio with my brother, we see that there are some colored blocks similar to Legos, I go to pick them up, I notice that there is one on a water tank and I went over to pick it up but I tripped over a metal bar, the metal bar almost went through my knee but the game deflected it and ended up tearing off part of the meat that covered my knee, I tried to walk while I called my mom, it looked like a fountain of blood, staining everything where I walked, I couldn't feel anything but I knew it was bad because I felt the blood running down my leg

"Ma, ma, ma," I said

"Ahora que?" she asked without knowing what had happened to me

She stops talking to her friend and goes out to the patio just to see me there, standing up somehow, her friend quickly went to get some rags to help me not bleed to death. The hospital wasn't that far away so I got on the motorcycle and started driving in the direction of the hospital.

"¡No quiero que me cosan!" screamed for fear of needles

After we got to the hospital, we went to the emergency room and they gave me some stitches but I was much better, after that my mom took me home and let me rest.

FIRE

I've done stupid things but some people go too far. I remember my brother and his friends almost set fire to a hill

"This is a bad idea," I told myself.

I knew I wasn't going to convince them to stop so I just stayed to see what happened. luckily, they couldn't do it and the fire went out quickly. I knew I had to do something but I knew they weren't going to listen

the place smelled strange as if it had smoked, the plants around it burned and began to release smoke. I sighed and walked away because I didn't want to see anything to do with what they were doing.

"That's not my problem," I said. I came home and didn't say a single word about what my brother was doing to make my mom mad, they sat me in front of the tv while I ate cereal and everything was fine for the rest of mine

Now I realize that I did not do what I had to do and that is to stop them, if the fire had not gone out it would have created a fire and someone could die. but since

what? that was more than 4 years ago, but it made me understand that just because someone doesn't listen to you doesn't mean you don't have to do something, you're not going to let them keep doing those stupid things, you're not going to let them cause harm to other people, no You are going to leave them alone even knowing that you are younger than them, you cannot expect an idiot to become intelligent from one day to the next, you have to let them know what they are doing so that they do not regret it later, You know what it feels like, right? Do you know how it feels to regret, does it feel? horrible and I'm telling you because I felt regret, and then there is no way to remove that feeling, oh you forget what happened oh you spend the rest of your life with guilt

A few days later a man comes out, he seems to be about 20 years old, black as coal, with

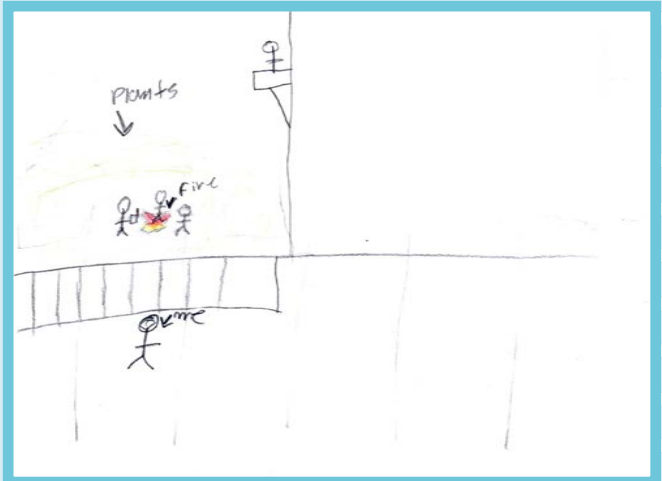
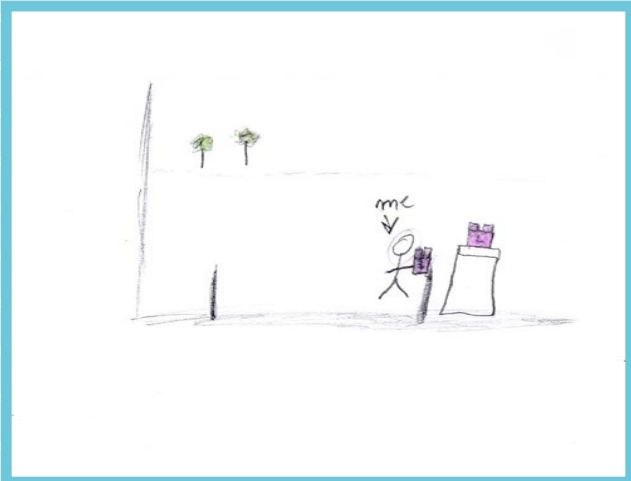
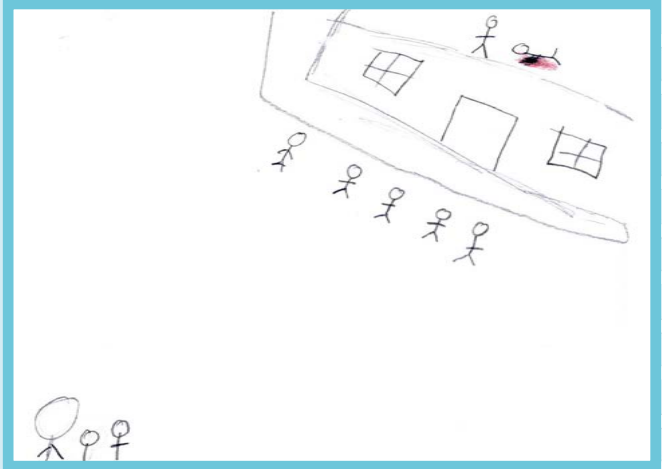
a machete in his hands looking for those who almost burned his land.

the land was a space between the other houses, it had the remains of a house and many plants from which too many insects came out

I remember that the man grabbed my arm and asked me who it was

"I don't know" I answered him. The man released me and kept looking. I stayed silent knowing who I was looking for. I remember that the machete was rusty, almost blunt but it was still very dangerous.

After that I came home and saw my brother playing with some toys, once again I was silent, I didn't say a word about what happened to my mom, luckily the man returned to his house and I never saw him again.



By Malique

In 2020, My aunt passed away. I can tell you guys about it. My auntie made me and my family happy. My aunt's name is Avalon. She was a woman of God. She was also a loving person. One thing I loved about her was that she had her own business. She sold clothes. In addition, I will go to her house and watch movies every Friday. We watched Pirates of the Caribbean. It made me feel good inside. One day she took me and my cousins to the Ivy beach. My aunt pulls aside and tells me "I will like if you take care of your cousins for me, please, you are my favorite nephew" she

said. "Ok aunt I will do my best for you and cousins I will be there for them" I said. She asked, "Are you sure??" With a smile on my face responded, yes, I am sure." "Ok good thanks you I love you Malique." "I love you too auntie."

When my aunt passed, I feel down like I couldn't do everything in life but I have to be strong for my cousins. In other words, she wants me and her sons to be happy with that I will always be there for my cousins my aunt will guide me and her kids to the right round. From there on I am happy.



BEING RUDE TO MY PARENTS

By Muhamed

When I was seven years old, I started being rude to my parents. When they told me to do stuff, I would say, "No. Whatever, I don't want to do it."

I was doing too much, showing that I was the rudest one in the family. My mom was getting tired of me.

When I was eight years old my parents told me that I'm going to Africa.

I came home from school and I began to do my homework in the living room.

"Hey Muhamed." Mom said:

I said: "hey Mom what happened?"

She said: "sit down."

I started getting scared because I thought I was getting in trouble.

Mom said: "I got some bad news. You are going to Africa." Mom said:

I started panicking.

The Country's name is Senegal. And that's where my family is from. In West Africa. Senegal is a small country and it has a lot of sand. After they told me that I was going there, I said, "No!" and started crying. I felt bad and scared because I didn't want them to hit me. But if you did not do what they

told you they would hit you more than once. And this was my reaction. "No, no, no! I will stop my behavior!"

They booked me a flight. I was crying because I didn't want to leave my two little sisters. They told me that I was going to be there for only five days. And there were like twenty-three to thirty kids and three teachers. I realized that after I went there for more than ten days. But I had to stay for four years.

Then I realized that you have to show respect to your parents. If not, one day they will leave you and you will be the only one.

When I came back to America my mom didn't say anything to me. I just do the dishes, sweep, and take out the trash without her telling me. And that's how I became a different person.

Going to Africa really changed me for the better because I'm doing stuff without them telling me to. And I'm still doing that.

But while I was in Africa, I had to learn something. It's like a Bible but in a different way. It's called the Quran. And I had to finish the whole book. My Parent's and Family were proud of me.

SENEGAL



MOVING TO A NEW LIFE

By Keilyn

When I was just ten years old, I watched how my parents packed their suitcases at 2:00 AM because me and my sisters were already packed by them. I am part of a small family. There is my father, my mother and my older sister who was 13 years old. I felt confused about where my family and I were about to go. It made me a little suspicious because I looked at my mother crying and my father in a hurry. I remember my dad telling my Mom "we are in danger, we have to go" then I saw how quickly we got in the car and we went to the bus station. At first I thought that we were only going to the normal bus stop that we used in the town but when we arrived I saw that it was not to, it was one of those buses that traveled to other cities. Seeing everything I asked my parents "where are we going"? while my mom cried she told me and my sister "don't worry everything will be fine" I'm Honduran a big country that has different cultures. One of them is named Garifuna. That's my culture. We speak a language called also the same way as the culture. But as I was saying I just woke up in a different country, the U.S.

I didn't know the language or how things worked, I didn't know anything about it. When I started to go to school, it was hard for me to make friends because of the

language. It was hard for me to include myself in school activities and to interact with my cousins who were born here. For my first 2 years I felt sad. I felt like I didn't belong here.

There was this moment where I had an argument with some girl in the school, but didn't know how to defend myself, so I ran to the bathroom crying and hurt inside feeling insufficient.

While I was on the floor crying, I felt somebody touching my arm. I thought to myself, Who's this person behind me, bruh?

She asked me "what's wrong?" "you okay?" I thought to myself mind your business and it was her. She held my arm and helped me get up, she took me to her office and we started to talk about my feelings. named Ms. Lund. She was a teacher from the school that helped me in everything she could. started to give me books to read at home and she also started to teach me English.

I spent all months learning the language. It was easy for me to join in school activities, to make friends and also to interact with my family who were born here. Happy that I adapted to the new system. The years passed and now it is easier for me to interact with other people but I will keep learning more English.

By Jayden F.

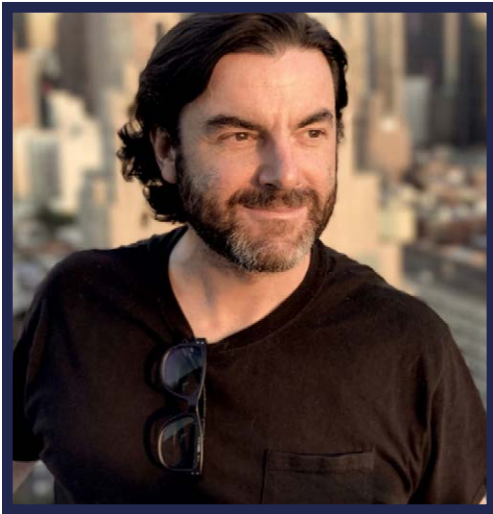
On my fifteenth birthday in March, I went on vacation with my family to Florida to see my cousin. I woke up, ate breakfast and got ready to go to the airport. When I was at the airport my mom had to buy the tickets and the line was really long. When my mom got the tickets and then we went to the plane. When the plane took off, I was listening to music and sleeping. When the plane went down, I looked out the window and it was really dark. We went outside and waited for my cousin's mom to pick us up and it took a little long for her to get to the airport.

When she arrived, we opened the car door and went inside. She told us that are cousin

was happy we were coming. When we came out the car, we went inside my cousin wasn't there and I asked my aunt where she was and she said that my cousin was at school. While my cousin was at school my other cousin came here from the airport. We played outside with my brothers and sister. After that my cousin was about to come out of school so we went to the bus stop so we could get her.

When the school bus came, she came out of the bus and was happy to see us because she hasn't seen us in a while. When we went to the house upstairs my mom was happy to see her and gave her a hug and then my grandma her a hug too.

ABOUT THE VISITING AUTHOR



Paul Griffin began writing his first novel as he finished college in 1988. That novel and many others went unpublished. Meanwhile, he worked on the truck docks and in construction, as a dog trainer and a driver, teacher, tutor, EMT, butler, bartender, waiter, cook and dishwasher (alongside Vin Diesel). Twenty years to the day after Paul graduated Dartmouth, Penguin/Dial released his “first” (twenty-fourth) novel *Ten Mile River*. Paul lives in NYC with his family and canine friends.

ABOUT THE STUDENT AUTHORS

The Freshmen class at Longwood Preparatory Academy began their high school literary journey by reading the novel *Ten Mile River* by Paul Griffin. The students continuously identified literary devices and analyzed the text, quickly realizing the hard work that comes with writing a narrative. When Paul Griffin visited the scholars, he shared with them the importance of being able to tell their stories; that this skill would open many doors for them in their lifetimes. Inspired, the ninth graders got to work by brainstorming, studying the elements of a story arc, learning how to use literary devices in their own writing, and, most importantly, saw the value in their stories and their lives. We hope you enjoy reading what they have lived through, and what they have learned from it.



ABOUT BEHIND THE BOOK

Behind the Book brings authors and their books into classrooms to build literacy skills and foster a community of lifelong readers and writers. Working with classes from Pre-K through 12th grade, our series of workshops is designed to bring books to life and inspire students to reach their full potential. Behind the Book is embedded in the class curriculum, nurtures critical thinking, creativity, and self-confidence in New York City public school students. All programs meet the Next Generation Learning Standards. The staff who has been behind the books this school year include: Executive Director Andrew Frank, Director of Programs Anmarie Paul, Program Manager & Volunteer Coordinator Alexandra Berndt, Program Administrator Kelly Choi, Curriculum Developers Keturah Abdullah and Roya Nabizadeh, Program Facilitators Tatiana Colgin, Amere Cortijo, Shirly Hernandez, and Elizabeth Valentín, Program Interns Avanti Tulpule, Kaylee Young-Eun Jeong, and Grace Riginos, Director of Development Amanda Carr, Development Manager Roshana Nabi, Operations Manager Christy Hood, Marketing and Communications Strategist Vivian Cruz-Rivera, and Student Book Art Director Adriana Moreno.



Behind the Book

NEXT GEN LEARNING STANDARDS ADDRESSED

WRITING

- › W.9-10.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.
- › W.9-10.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

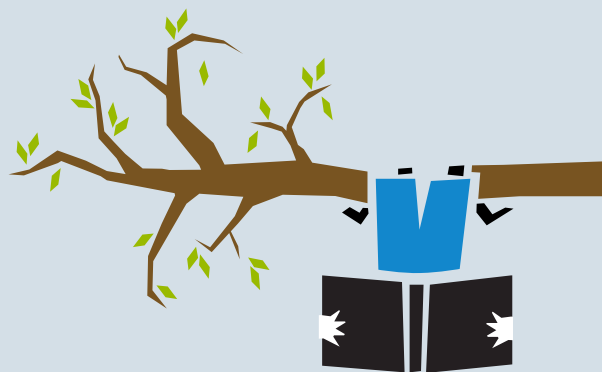
READING

- › RL.9-10.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- › RL.9-10.3 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.
- › RL.9-10.5 Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.



Behind the Book

BtB empowers the next generation of readers and writers by nurturing critical thinking, creativity, and self-confidence in our students.



www.behindthebook.org