

THE MEASURE



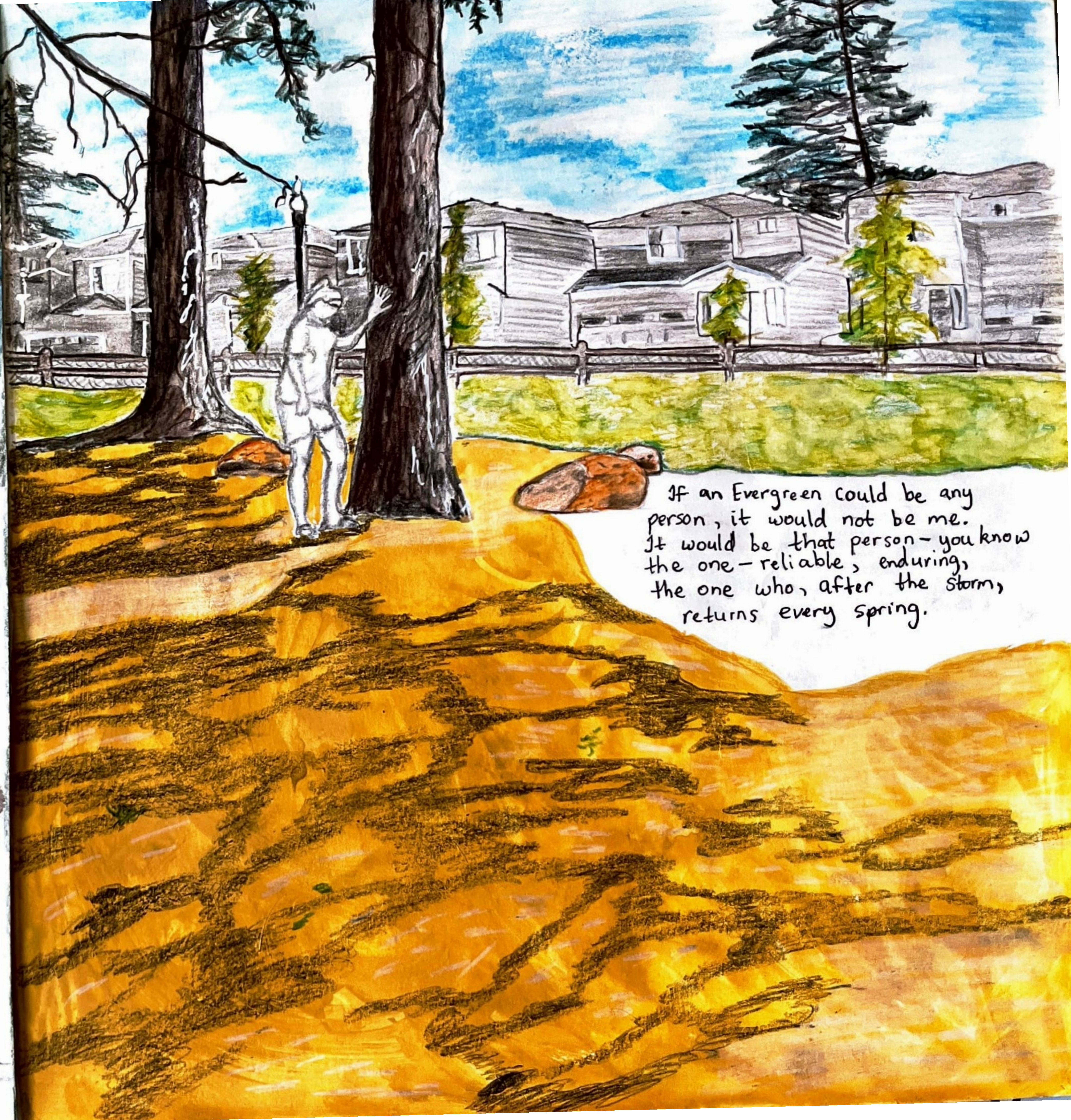
MY MELANCHOLY

BY: TINA V. CABRERA





If I could be any tree,  
I would be an Evergreen  
because Evergreens are  
tall, confident, and  
above all — constant.



If an Evergreen could be any  
person, it would not be me.  
It would be that person — you know  
the one — reliable, enduring,  
the one who, after the storm,  
returns every spring.





When I was young, I loved  
most colors of the rainbow,  
but favored only one  
at a time. My love—  
was fleeting.

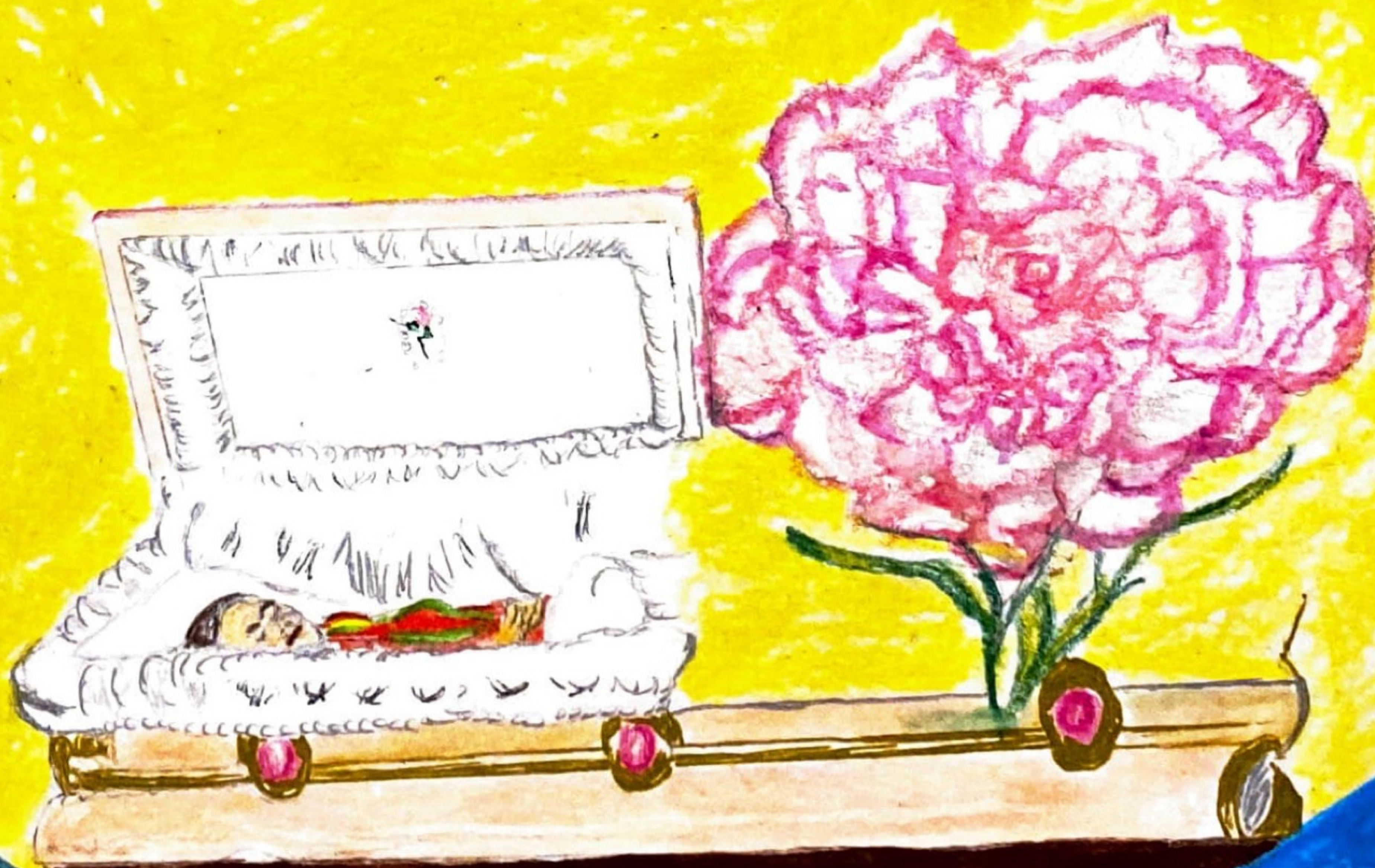
Red, the color of



Mama's red lips,  
red love, red  
rage—



Pink phase, until  
pink became Mama's  
favorite color—pink pens,  
pink clothes, pink car, pink  
carnations on a pink...







Here I am - green grandeur.  
On the cusp of something significant.  
Each tree unique in shape, form, and size,  
yet bound to the same category. Perennial, leaves  
never changing color. Consistency.





g- consistently indecisive start new job  
new writing quickly lose interest fear finality you  
overgrown what have you to fear for wind spreads seedlings full certainly full responsibility let me be seeds of pinecone unafraid fluttering carried away by gusts of wind for I - bursting at seams  
unable to contain all that I was  
first I was body + then spirit





Wore my brother's  
hand-me-downs:  
Boy shirts and  
boy jeans.

Boy body into  
my teens.

My nicknames in  
school were Olive Oil  
and Toothpick.

I remember Jessie  
and his dark eyebrows  
and dark-chocolate  
skin. Teased me  
for my boy clothes  
and boy hair.





The best part of invisibility — flying just shy  
of the popcorn ceiling. Alone in a cloudless  
sky, all of me soaring. Free bird  
dreaming a million things.



CHULA VISTA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
**Special Award**

Tina Cabrera  
FOR Book Float Co  
2/23/81 Mrs  
date

Invisible — even when I won the book float contest when I was 11. Only I knew that my oldest sister did most of the work; shaped the clay and baked.



CATE OF AWARD

Tina Cabrera  
has been awarded Special Recognition for  
Smartest Girl  
17 day of June



Invisible — until classmates asked the SMARTEST GIRL to do their homework.

This is to Tina Cabrera  
Certify that  
has been awarded Special Recognition for  
1st place softball  
this 22 day of

1981



1981



Invisible — picked last for softball.

Sometimes memory is muddled, or outright lies.  
Sometimes feeling invisible and being recognized can happen at the same time.





Like when, in junior high (in History, Math, or Homeroom?) I found a note in my desk in fourth period, I think. Unaddressed, the note condemned - me? - for acting like I was better than everyone else. At first, I thought this letter couldn't be meant for me. I was shy, not stuck up. But then when the anonymous notes continued, I decided I had to find out who wrote them. I'd sneak up to the teacher's desk when he went to the bathroom to look for who else was assigned my seat. Of course I was too shy to even try. Whoever the accuser - they saw me entirely differently from what it felt like to be me. Always in my head, the notes forced me to accept I lived in the world with Others, and must therefore be recognized, one way or another. Thus began the very long phase of life seeing and judging myself through their eyes.





Mama, what is this feeling?

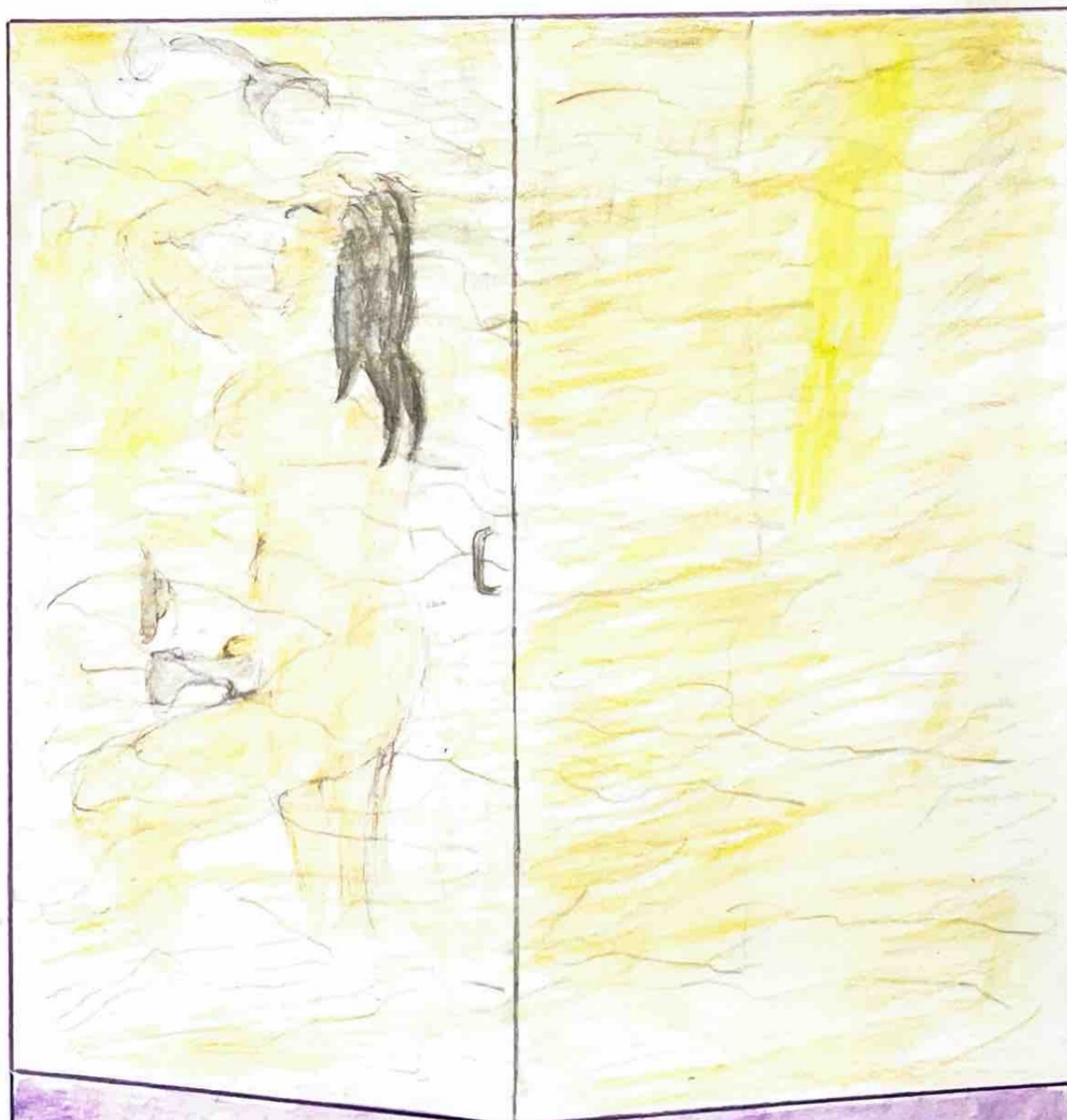
Fingers smell like fishy,  
powdery and sticky.



I wake up from a dream, hand rubbing down there, hard.  
Terrible delight.



Fingers fishy-smelling.  
Powdery and sticky.



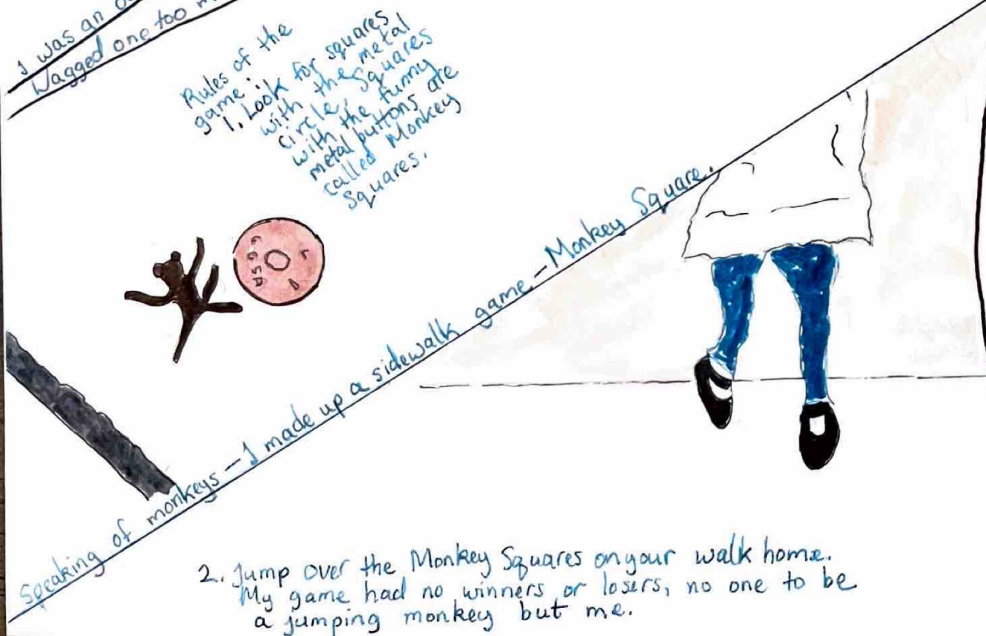
Sometimes, sometimes I rub myself against the  
shower faucet. It's that same feeling,  
you can't get any other way, I think Mama said.  
The power of your own hand,

The one true thing she ever said about the body,  
my body.













What does it  
mean to speak  
with the voice  
of a boy  
named Richard?

Or to dream of  
women lying  
naked on  
top of cars?

To undress  
Barbie and Ken  
and make them  
make the  
kissie kissie  
sound.



Eddie looked old, but not enough to be counted as one of the 144,000.

Eddie drank from the glass of red wine at the Memorial of Christ's death, signaling that when he died, he'd go to heaven to become part of the Bride of Christ.

When I asked, How do you know if you're anointed? I was told, You just know, in your heart, without a single doubt, just as sure as you are that you're either a boy or a girl.



Talk about odd...

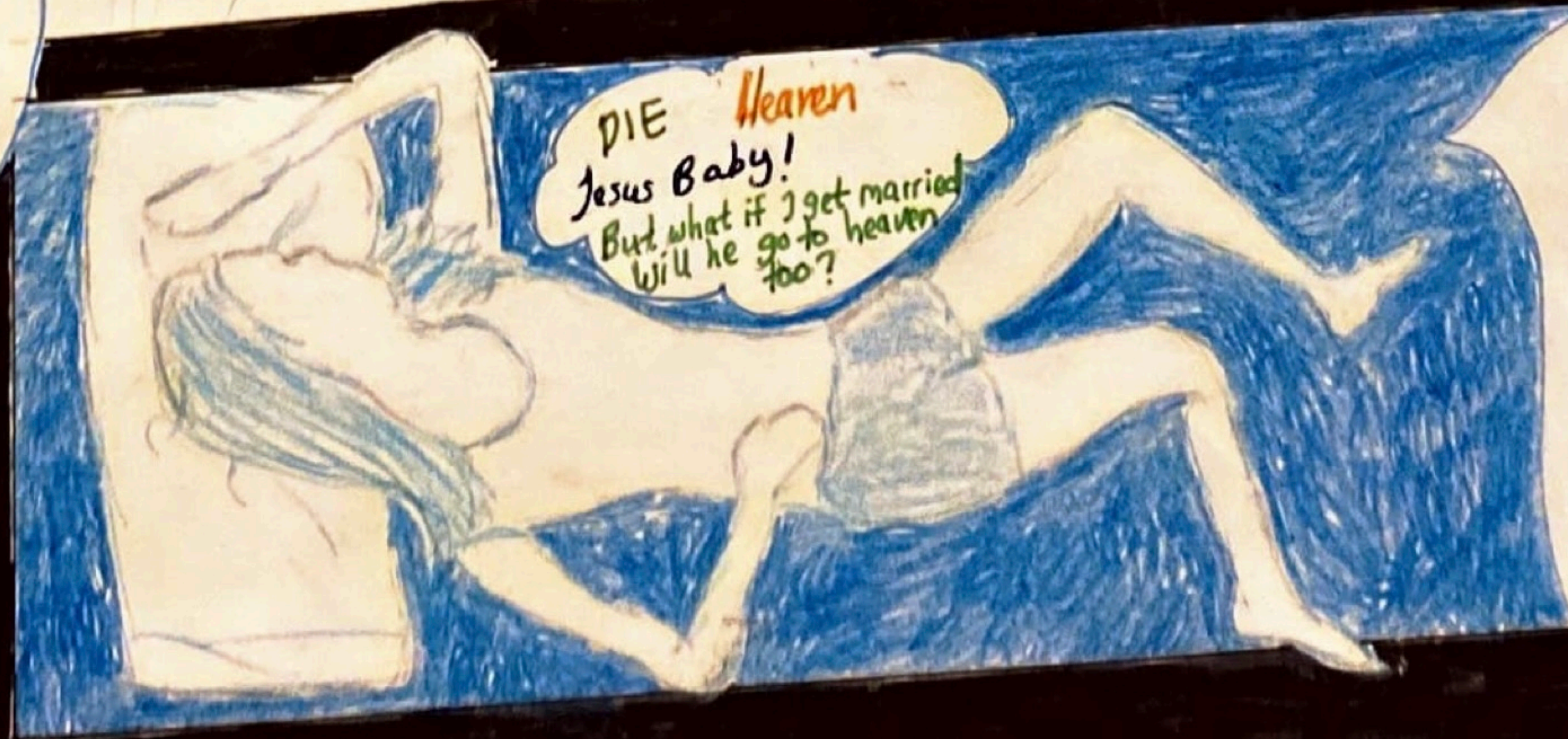


"So Jesus said to them: 'Most truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves.'"



Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has everlasting life, and I will resurrect him on the last day."

- John 6: 53-54 NWT



When I was about 15 or 16, I had a daydream vision that I was destined, like Eddie, for heaven. But that momentary certainty was upended by that evening.



# The WATCHTOWER

Announcing  
JEHOVAH'S  
KINGDOM



My spiritual love affair culminated  
in water baptism at 14—supposed  
symbol of a lifetime  
commitment.

then the **END** will come!!

And this good report  
of the Kingdom

Former **JEHOVAH'S** have passed away



But then a decade  
later, I met a  
beautiful green-  
eyed boy who  
got my heart  
racing.  
When he  
was around,  
no one  
else  
mattered.

Reasoning  
from the  
Scriptures

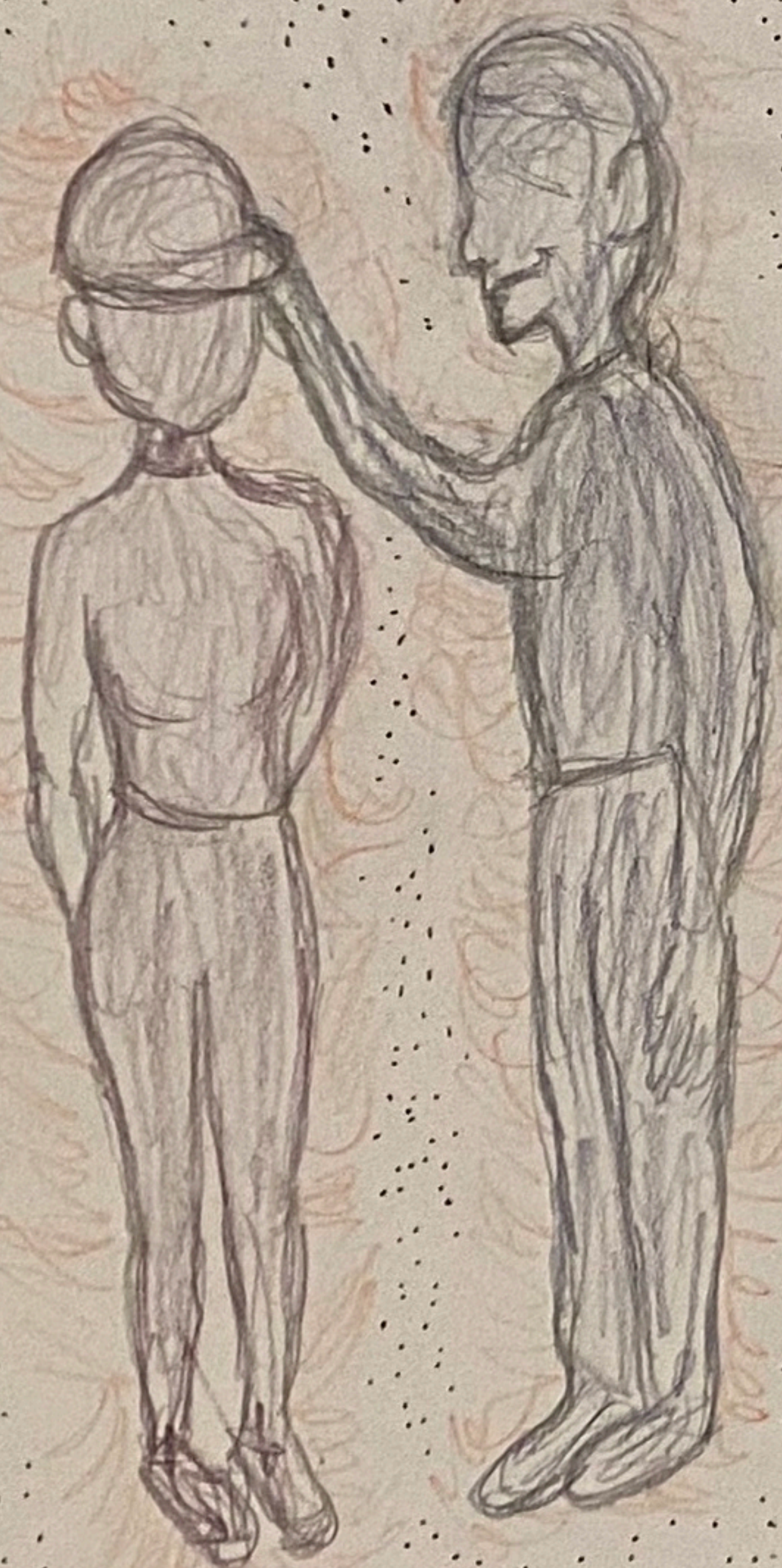
Reason or feeling;  
Does it have to  
be one or the  
other?



I found ways to be alone with him,  
by asking him to be my field service  
partner once a week.  
He'd pick me up in  
his bright blue truck.



And then he met her







And they got married and had a baby, and then she left him, maybe because she met other men. Maybe that man or those other men were much different from him.



And I met others to get infatuated with.

I would like them over and over -

And they wouldn't like me back, not in the way I hoped it could be.



This one-sidedness became a pattern, a need of my own making.

I looked in the mirror for explanation.

Can one ever see oneself as one truly is?



SOME  
LIKED  
ME



BOYS  
&  
GIRLS

SEXUAL  
OR  
PL



GIRLS  
&  
BOYS







The movements of my limbs had always  
been automatic, the indulgence of instinct

-UNTIL-

The first time I felt my body did  
not belong to me was when  
with shocking force  
my arms jerked upward  
body prone,  
and my mouth pried open  
against clench of jaw.

I screamed for help  
to no avail.

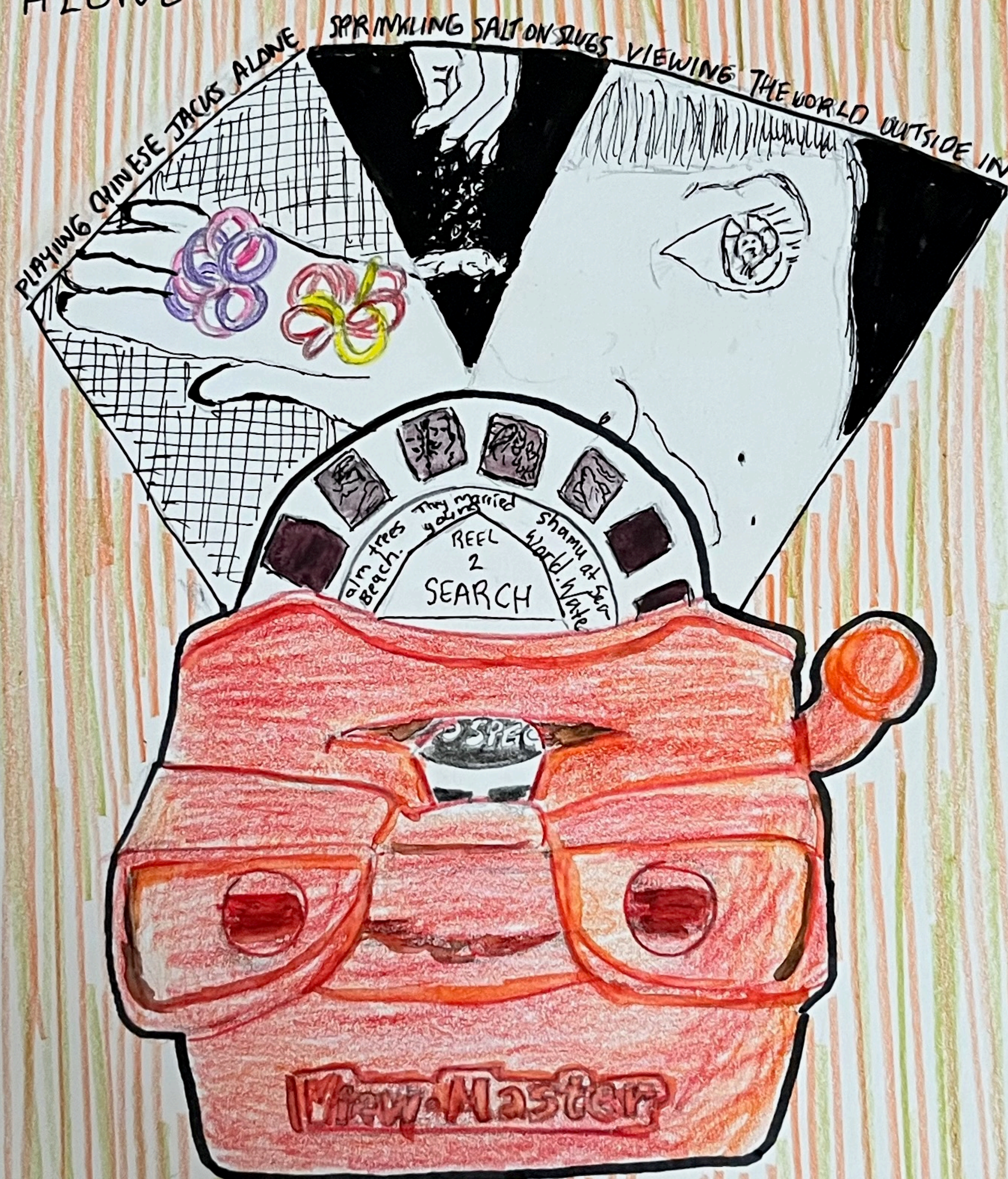
This soft machine  
unhinged from inner will.



YOU LIVE IN THE MOMENT WHEN YOU ARE  
A KID. EVERYTHING EXISTS FOR YOU AND  
YOU ALONE.



YOU LIVE IN THE MOMENT  
WHEN YOU ARE A CHILD.



EVERYTHING IS FOR YOU  
AND YOU ALONE.





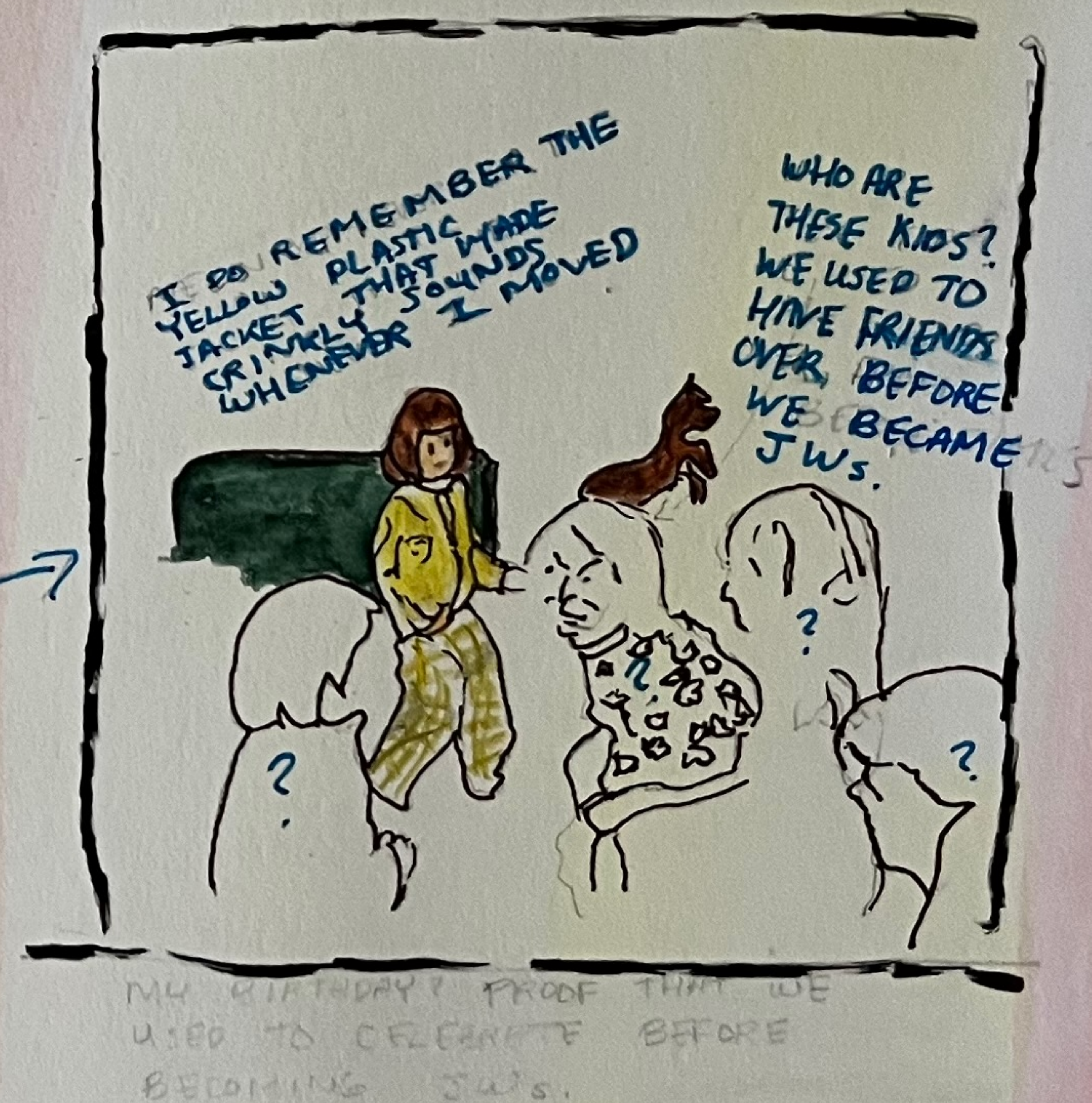
# GARAGE SALE



The first time I realized I would not remain as I was forever was on my 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. Since I couldn't remember being born and didn't care to look in mirrors, I just assumed I had always looked and felt like this since it was all I'd ever known. Until I turned 13 and my merry-go-round would be the next victim of my mother's weekend garage sales. On my birthday, I snuck my Fisher Price merry-go-round into the garage, played it one more time, and wept while singing the Toys 'R Us lyrics: "I don't wanna grow up."



# THE BEFORE TIMES





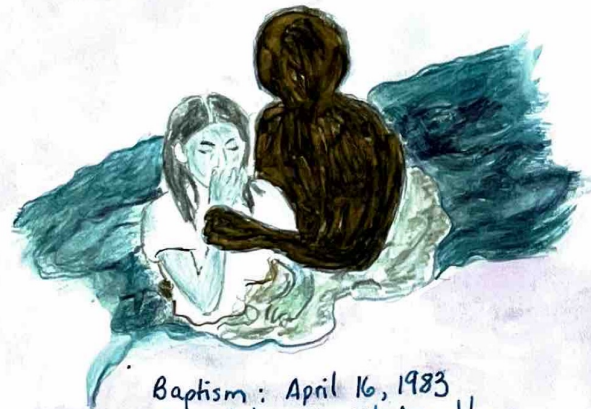
# IMPORTANT DATES



Born 2/28/69



Started period  
9/25/83



Baptism: April 16, 1983  
Escondido Circuit Assembly

You're one  
of the most impor-  
tant people in my life  
I love you very  
much. Continue  
to grow physically  
and spiritually  
and always try  
to please JEHOVAH  
TAKE CARE  
LOVE,  
TINA





# MY FIRST SLUMBER PARTY



## WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN



Jeff, who could have been my first boyfriend, had I realized the necklace as a sign of his crush on me. Had his sister Julie been my real friend or only because her brother Jeff really liked me?



The necklace my puppy Odie destroyed so that I never got to wear the gift. I wonder how it made Jeff feel to never see me wear it to the meetings.

JEFF SAT NEXT TO ME at the Kingdom Hall. Made me feel funny.



Necklace Jeff gave me as a gift for my baptism at age 14.





# MEMORY IN PICTURES



Was this Robbie, the boy who sucked on my hair and lapped water from the airb like a dog?



Cow print coat I thought looked like the one grandma wore in her coffin



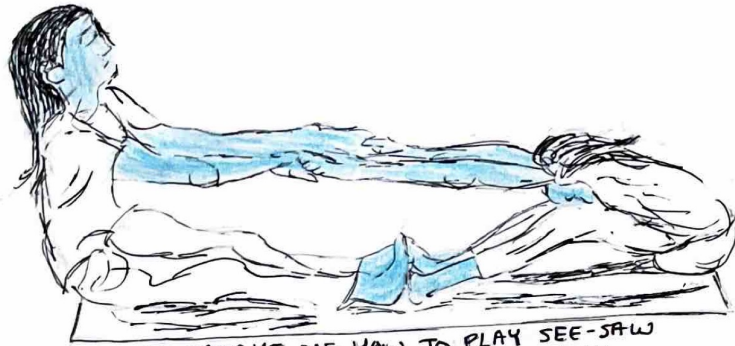
At Disneyland's Pirates of the Caribbean, held on to Papa's neck.

Is this when I said, You're the only man I've ever loved?



Benji the mutt that humped our legs, got smacked on the snout with a rolled up newspaper and nose rubbed in pee when he soiled the carpet. Papa said Mama did the smacking and rubbing when Mama was already dead, just like grandma.

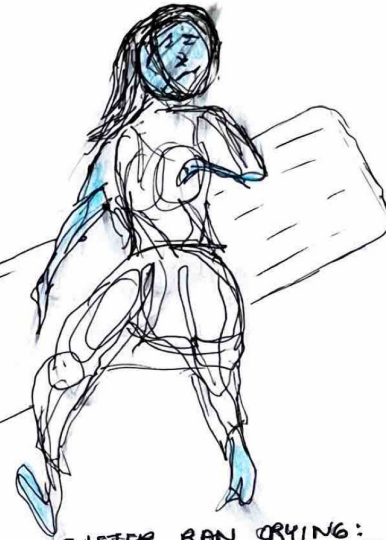




SISTER TAUGHT ME HOW TO PLAY SEE-SAW  
BUT THEN LET GO OF MY HANDS AND  
MY HEAD HIT THE FLOOR WITH A BANG.



PAPA CHASED SISTER WITH THE BUNK BED  
LADDER BAR IN ONE  
HAND AND ME IN THE OTHER.



SISTER RAN CRYING:  
"IT WAS AN ACCIDENT!"



## Papa

I was papa's baby. It's a child I had few chores to do in the house. My three older sisters had the most load. Papa didn't want me to do much, but neither did he spoil me. He had a special way of dealing with me that made me feel so close to him.

I laugh now when I think about the "job" I had. I can hear papa saying, "It's time to do your job."

I wrote a little essay when I was a teen simply called "Papa."

**THE JOB**  
Only me and my older brother had to do the job when we were little. Got squeezed happy during time.

Dyna, the middle child. Neglected at times. I once heard her say of all us kids, I was the one she hated most.



Papa always seemed to be there when I needed him. There are the fears and nightmares in the life of a child. One for me was death. I came home from kindergarten one day scared and afraid. Somehow papa saw through me, "What's wrong?" he asked. My eyes became filled with tears and I ran to him.

"I'm afraid to die papa." I could not stop wondering what death was like. All I knew was that I didn't want to. This fear had suddenly hit me when my grandmother died just a few weeks before. Papa held me tight and spoke soothing words.

Was it Papa I cried to, or was it Mama? Was it both? Did Mama offer me the Ding-Dong? Was it even a Ding-Dong or was it my other favorite sweet—a Twinkie?

Papa started laughing. Then I did. We laughed and we laughed and couldn't stop. I stopped first. I put my skinny arms around his neck and whispered, "I hope you never die." He smiled and brought me to the food cabinet. "Would you like a ding-dong?"  
"Sure."

Eventually the thought of death left my mind. For years after it did not enter my mind... till now.

Is something missing here?  
"You're getting old?"

"There's no need to fear death. ~~But~~ You have many years ahead of you, think of life." I stared straight ahead pondering about that thought. That made sense to me. I'd think of death when I was close to it. Not now. That cheered me up. But then I looked at papa. He was not young anymore. His hair was thinning. He wore glasses. I looked into his big eyes. "But that means you should be thinking of it now... I mean you're



With time people grow. I grew . . . apart from papa. Our minds went separate ways. No longer were we as close as we used to be. "We live in the same house but yet we're millions of miles away." At least he was honest. We had been through so much. He and mama had been through a lot of pain. My three older sisters had eloped, one after the other. Now my brother was engaged. I cannot exactly explain how we drifted apart, but we did. Somehow I couldn't tell papa things like I used to. Now that our beliefs were different, ~~was~~ I just couldn't.

Megiddo



"I cannot tell you that, but you know why I have to."  
"No, I don't think I do."  
"Your mother and I, we're not one flesh anymore. She has her own religion, I have mine. I'm just a father figure. No one listens to me anymore."  
I felt like crying but I decided I would hold it in. He was right.



# PANIC ATTACK

EVERYONE  
ELSE  
THERE



ME  
HERE



PRIZZY



SEE LIPS MOVING, HEAR NOTHING  
HYPER-AWARE





Never just one thing  
made a friend of  
melancholy.



THESE TWO WHO ONCE  
POSED FOR COZY PICTURES  
COULD SHAKE THE HOUSE  
WITH RAGE.

HERBERT W.  
ARMSTRONG -  
YOU WORSHIP  
A MAN!

YOUR  
JEHOVAH JEHOVA  
NOT EVEN  
GOD'S NAME!!

TOOK OUT MY PAIN  
ON MY HAIR.

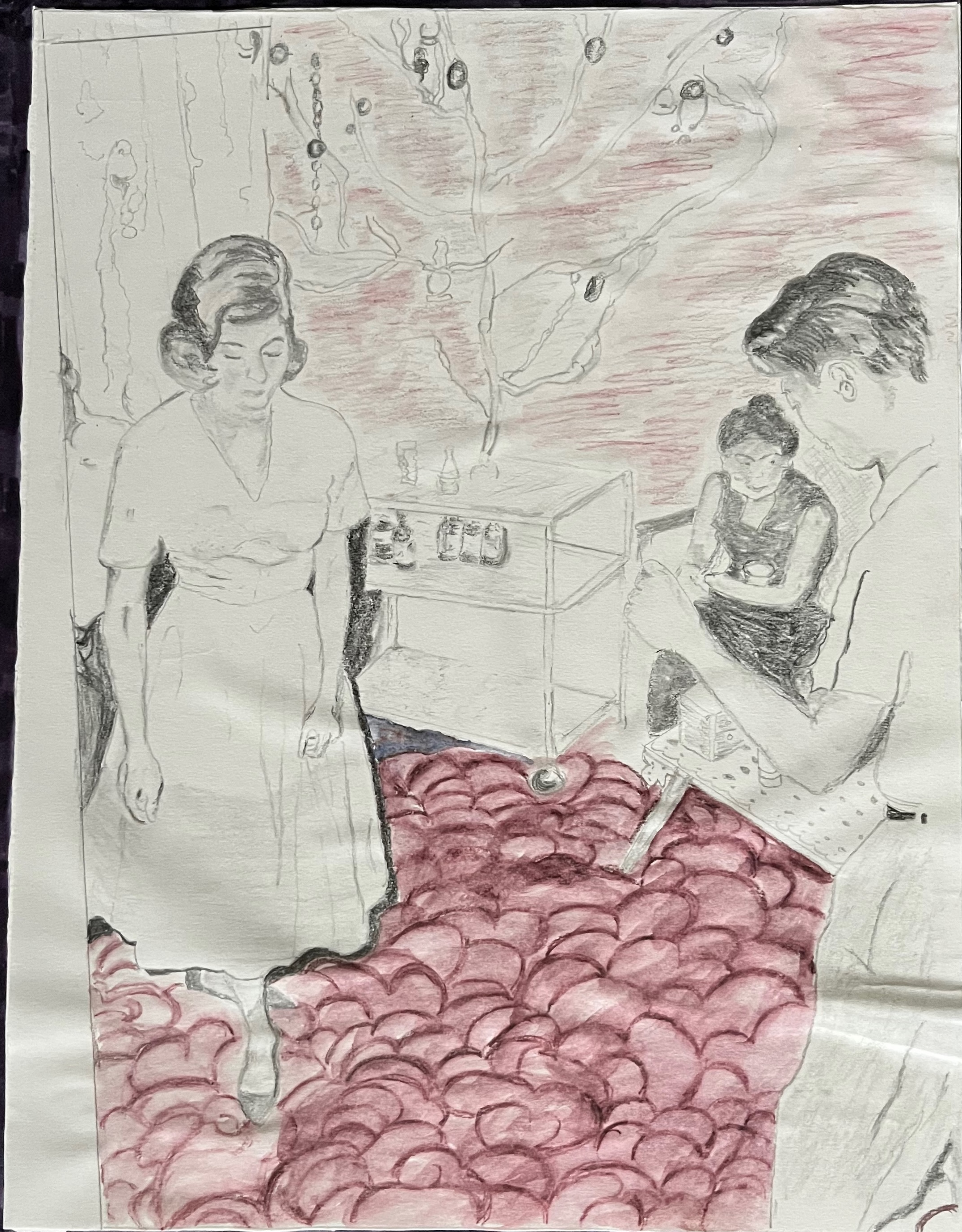
WHY ARE  
YOU HOME  
SO LATE!!

BUT I'M  
25 YEARS  
OLD!





YOU WATCH AN 8MM FILM OF YOUR MAMA, DO THE  
CHACHA, LIPS PAINTED RED, AND YOU CAN'T BELIEVE  
THE BEAUTIFUL LADY IS YOUR MOTHER. YOU  
SIMPLY CANNOT KNOW YOUR MOTHER ANY  
OTHER WAY THAN HOW SHE SITS BEFORE  
YOU TODAY.







### DREAMORY

*Sister—sweaty—grinds on top faceless body in flannel shirt and blue jeans, red hat to match American flag in blue-black bedroom. Sister pauses to wipe off sweat, then goes on riding like a cowgirl on mechanical bull. You rub quick and hard getting off as Sister goes at it unflinchingly, perky breasts bouncing, aching. Then you wake, sweating profusely.*

Far removed from the waking life (or so it seems), this dream is disturbing. Even more than the ones where Sister and her husband separate after 30 years of marriage, Sister who is supposed to be happily married. You recall the reality of your brother-in-law calling a family meeting with you and your siblings when you flew home to San Diego because Sister was dying, and how no one said anything when he coolly remarked that you all must have got the good genes while Sister had something missing, tapping his forehead on "loose screw." How you were surprised and not surprised when he said she was on anti-depressants. And how your two older sisters criticized him for going to work rather than spend those precious final days with his dying wife. Maybe your Sister-sex-dream is not so far off from reality. Maybe she secretly desired to be free of her marriage at too young an age, maybe the dream reflected her true desires not yours, maybe they had problems you could not see in real-life but could only detect under cover of night-dreams.

*Sister steals your camper van and your Honda is missing too. There you go dreaming about cars again as you often do. Sister feels fine with her husband marrying her best friend; humanlike creatures are embedded in the street right outside your childhood home, wrapped in cellophane, but then they unwrap before your eyes. You try to close the garage door, but Sister pushes back and reassures you the creatures are harmless. You open the door, afraid the walking dead are hiding, holding your missing cat hostage.*

Combination of Dream and Memory: Sister's husband really did marry her best friend sometime after her death; you saw Sister's former best friend at your nephew's wedding and the new wife pretended not to see you—would not look you in the eye (or was it you who avoided eye contact); you squirmed in your seat when you saw them sitting next to each other, wondering if they connected before your Sister's death or when it became clear she wasn't going to survive.

*Papa tells you about an actor that woke up one day and decided he was simply tired of living. He then committed suicide. You wonder why he is telling you this, then he jumps off a cliff with you literally holding on to his coattails (as literally as can be in a dream).*

You wake up in midflight with tears in your eyes and immediately get out of bed, pick up your smart phone, and Google "actor who said, 'I'm tired of living,'" not knowing why you are compelled to do so. The name "George Henry Sanders" pops up and says that he was a British actor. You scroll down the Wikipedia page to the part about his final years and death, and the suicide note is brief:

"Dear World,

I am leaving because I am bored. I feel I have lived long enough." Sanders suffered from dementia and depression in his final years from losing his wife, mother, and brother within the space of a year.

Real life Papa, who died of Cancer two years ago, once told you about this actor, though you forget the context, somehow your remembrance of this minor detail remains in your long-term memory, you see it as a true memory with perfect clarity. You knew what it meant when he'd pull the chair out from the dining room table that you had just vacated, that he was gesturing for you to sit back down and listen to his stories before beginning your day. Papa's prostate cancer spread to his vital organs because he refused to see the doctor and when he finally did it was too late; he said he couldn't complain, for he lived a good life and was ready to go. You would tell him (perhaps disingenuously), Don't say that Papa, shrugging away his nonchalance over death, knowing he like everyone else is supposed to die, you just don't want to believe his could be very soon. Was his seeming acceptance code for a real fear or sadness over his oncoming demise?

You know those recurring dreams related to waking reality? Like the one where you're searching for a toilet to pee, and when you finally find one and try urinating, nothing comes out and it hurts until you wake up and stream a bowl-full of urine in the middle of the night?

Or how about those dreams about flying or just hovering near the ceiling above your bed? These kind of dreams are not them. Not Dreamory, but rather signals of urgent present need.

For these other familiar dreams, no matter how hard you try, you can't decide whether or not what feels like a memory was actually a dream or vice-versa. Dream and Memory intertwined like two love-making bodies, Dreamory.

Aren't all dreams familiar to the waking, analyzing brain to some degree? Are dreams meaningful to your actual lived life? Can they teach you something about yourself you would not learn otherwise? Do recurring dreams change each time they are analyzed thereby changing who you are and who you might be?

There exists an abundance of theories on dreams and what materials they consist of as well as how those materials work together. One theory—the self-organization theory of dream—claims that your sleeping brain can transform brain signals into a relatively continuous narrative during sleep. *Frontiers in Psychology* says on the subject that dreams reflect a "dreamer's physiological and psychological activities such as memory consolidation, emotion regulation, and reception of external stimuli." This makes a lot of sense. When you reflect on them the next morning, dreams—though initially illogical—transform into a continuous narrative as you recall them and especially as you unfold their details to someone audibly. Further, dreams often reflect memories—those times when you can't tell between a true memory and a dream, thereby obscuring your understanding of reality. The self-organization theory of dreaming posits that dream content can contain important information about the dreamer. What is it you learn about yourself from dream?

Day Dreamory: While showering this morning, you felt an urgent need to pee, and you almost did right there under the flow of water from the showerhead, and you remember how when you and Sister—who was four years older than you—were little, that sometimes you showered together. You could not tell the difference between warm streaming water and

warm streaming pee down your legs. You giggled and looked at each other's unflowered bodies; all was natural, and you were saving water by taking a shower at the same time. You seem to remember this was Papa's idea. You thought of Sister too, the other afternoon suddenly, the sound of her shaky voice over the phone when she found out she had lung cancer, the shaking of her leg at the ICU, head balding, haven't you recalled moments like these before, haven't you also dreamed about them in distorted form? You don't have as many dreams about dead Sister anymore. She died six years ago, and even then, you had grown so far apart (Were you ever really close?) mostly because you had left the religion that she was still so devout to (Jehovah's Witnesses); you didn't mourn for her as you had for Mama and then Pap. These dreams that you remember vividly, does this mean that somehow after all you do grieve?

Dreamory: Mama commanding us five children to line up in front of the fireplace as she holds a rolled up newspaper in her hand to feed the flames that she threatens will burn us all down with the house that she and Papa bought when you were a baby. Mama is angry about something, probably about Papa not going through with his baptism as a Jehovah's Witness, or over one of their arguments about religion. You are first in line, and Mama's face distorts into anguish, anger, sadness, and/or fear.

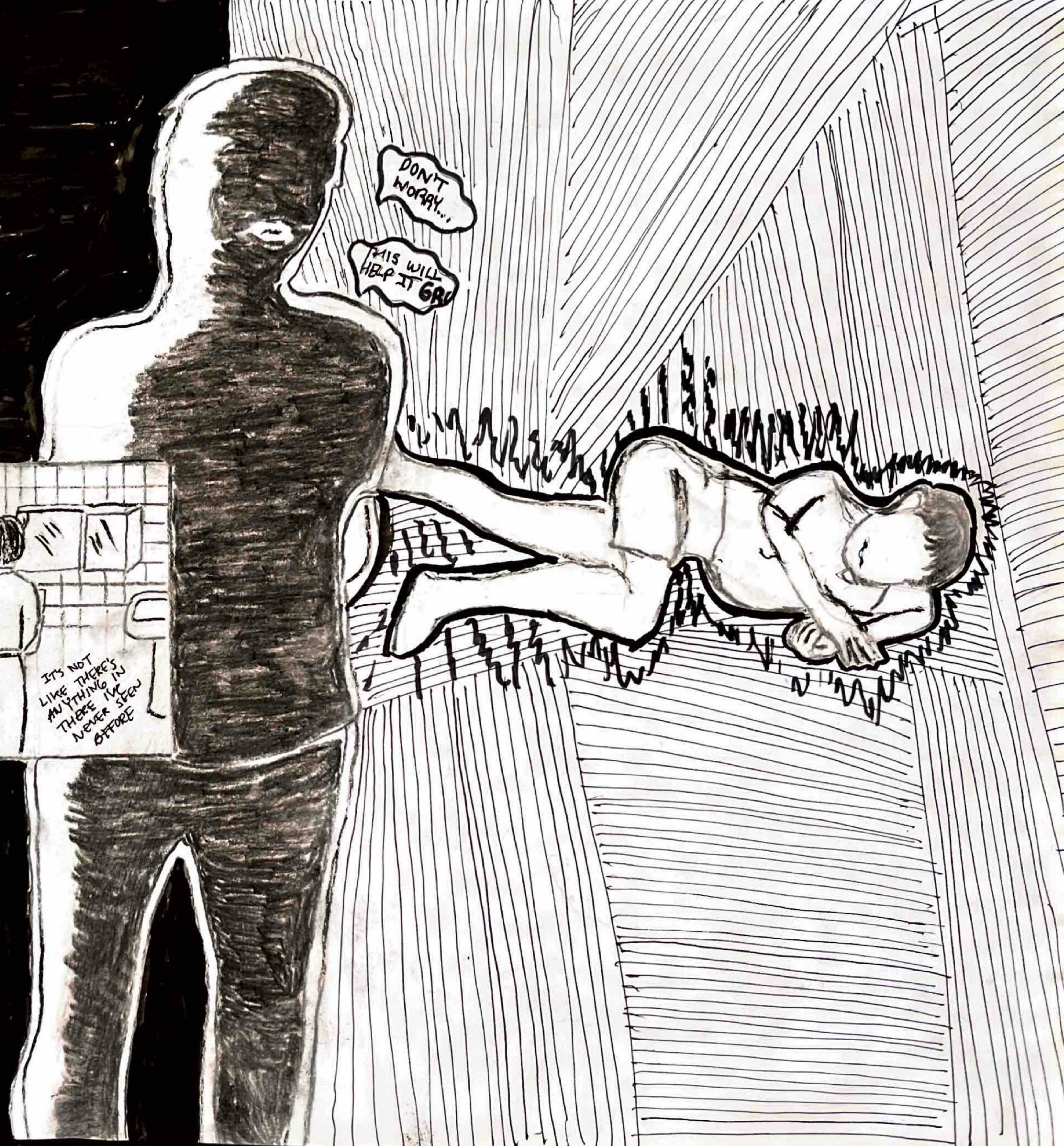
Another: Mama steps hard on the ankles of your two oldest sisters whom she ordered to lay down on their stomachs in the garage transformed into a sala. You have been tempted to ask your remaining siblings if they remember this happening, you could attempt to confirm whether or not these Dreamories occurred in the lived world, but you hesitate. Let them be, let them be Dreamory.



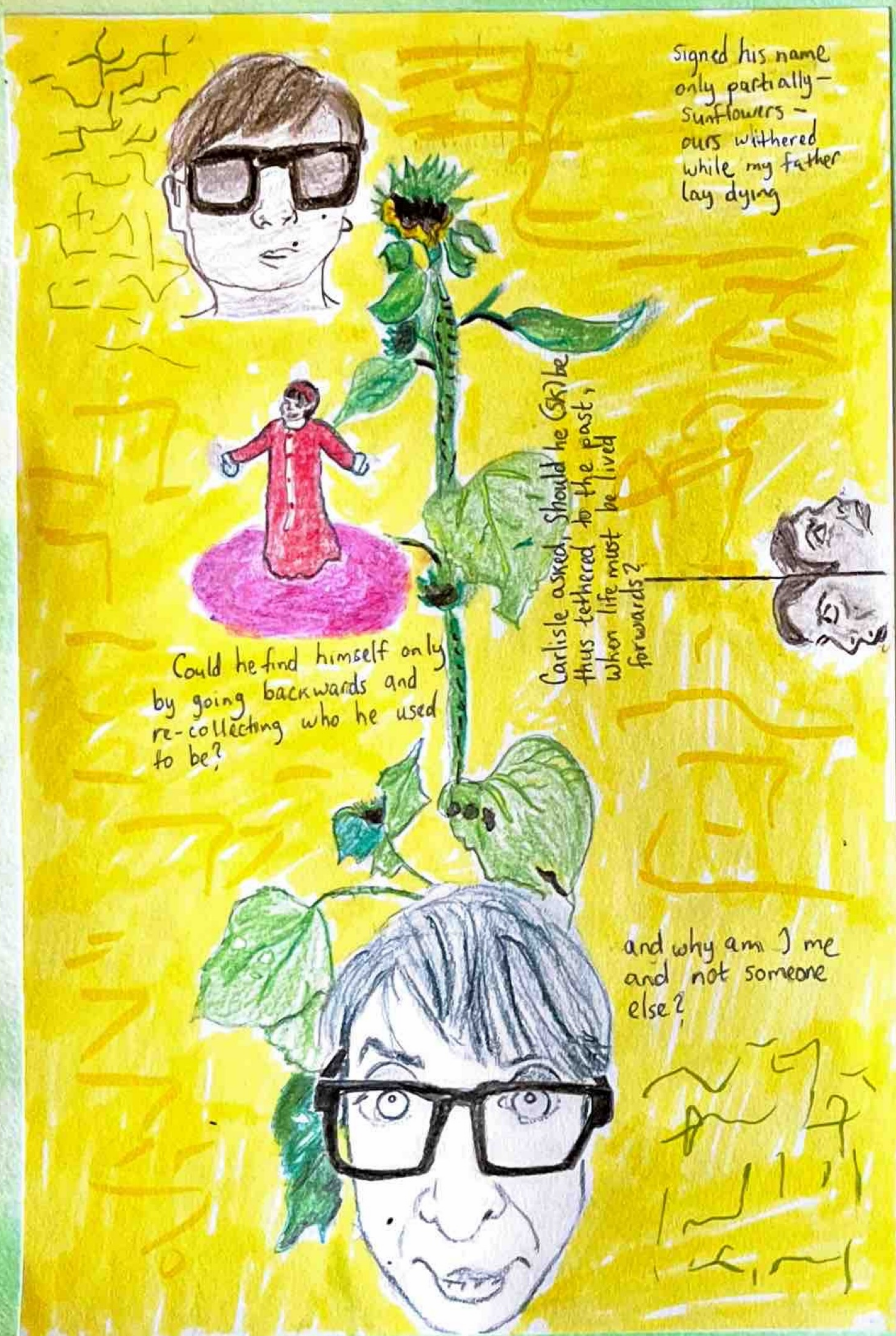


THE PRETTIEST OF MY SISTERS  
TOLD ME, WHEN WE WERE  
BOTH ADULTS...

IT STARTED WHEN SHE WAS  
14 AND DIDN'T STOP TILL  
SHE LEFT HOME AT 18.  
THINGS LIKE...









I AM **NOT**  
MY THOUGHTS;  
THOUGHTS ARE  
THOUGHTS AND  
**NOT** REALITY...

I FORGIVE AND  
ACCEPT MY PAST  
SO I CAN MOVE  
FORWARD... IN  
PEACE? IN  
WONDER?

