

*When I Was Young
in Worthington: 1880s
Robert's Life*

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Dedicated to Miss Swarengin, Miss Wood and Mrs. Watson

In 1960, my teachers assigned me a genealogy project. I was supposed to interview an older relative and write a report about their childhood. I chose my great-granpa because he was nice and old. Grandpa was born in 1867. In 1880 he would have turned 13. This is his story. . .



I remember when I was young in Worthington. I was trying my hardest to finish school at Worthington Academy while having to work at the same time. I got only \$1.25 per day for working at the blacksmith. But back then it was enough money to get by. I had four other siblings and of course I was right in the middle. I had two sisters and two brothers.



“Boy, you better get goin’. You’re goin’ to be late for your first day!” Ma yelled up into the loft. I had just finished my morning chores and was hurrying to get ready for work.





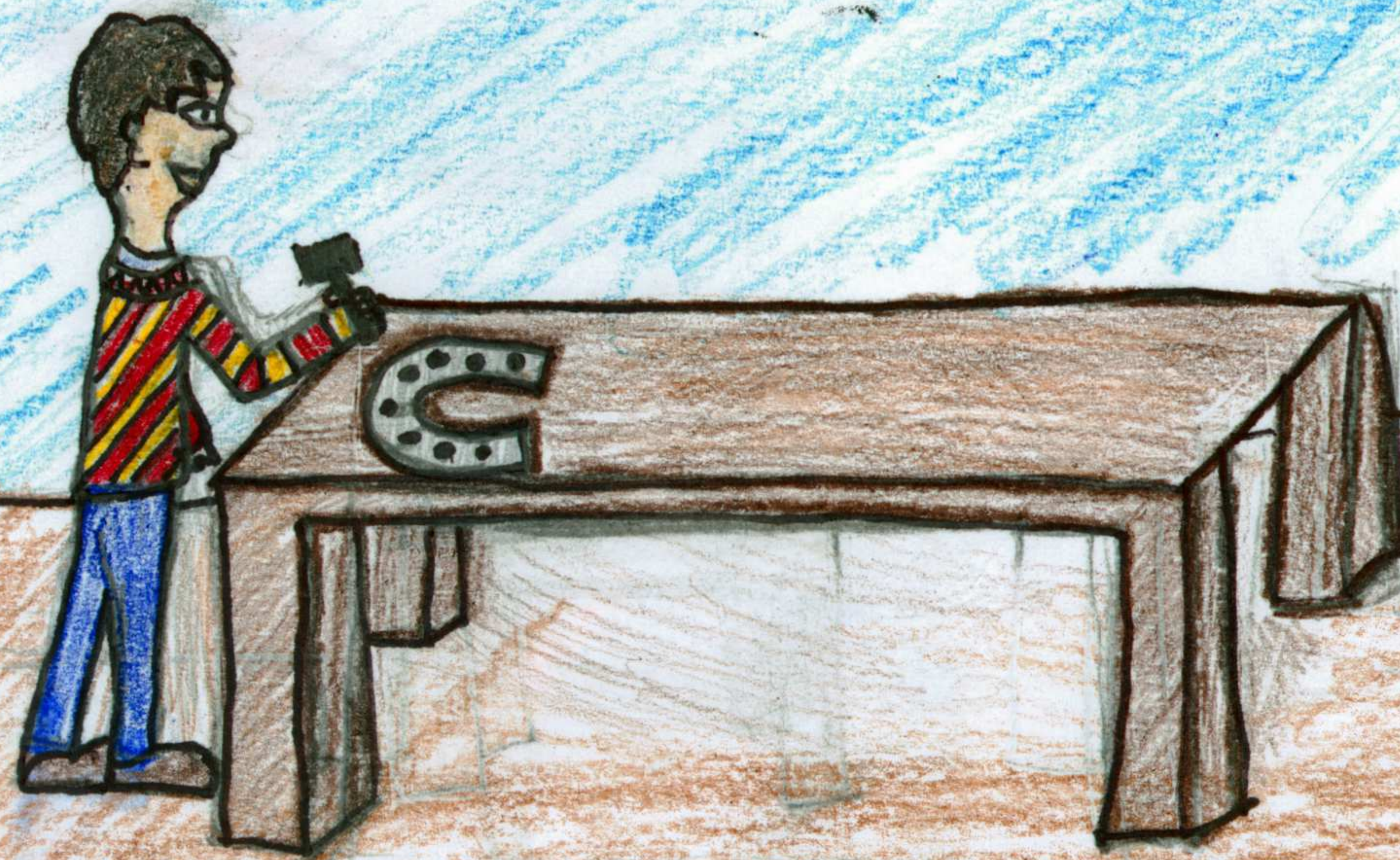
I was running as fast as I could to work when I ran across my friend who was riding on her new Coron bicycle. I really wished my family could afford a bicycle for me. I reckon her pa must be wealthy. I said, "Hello, Margaret." She smiled and said hello back. I just smiled at her.

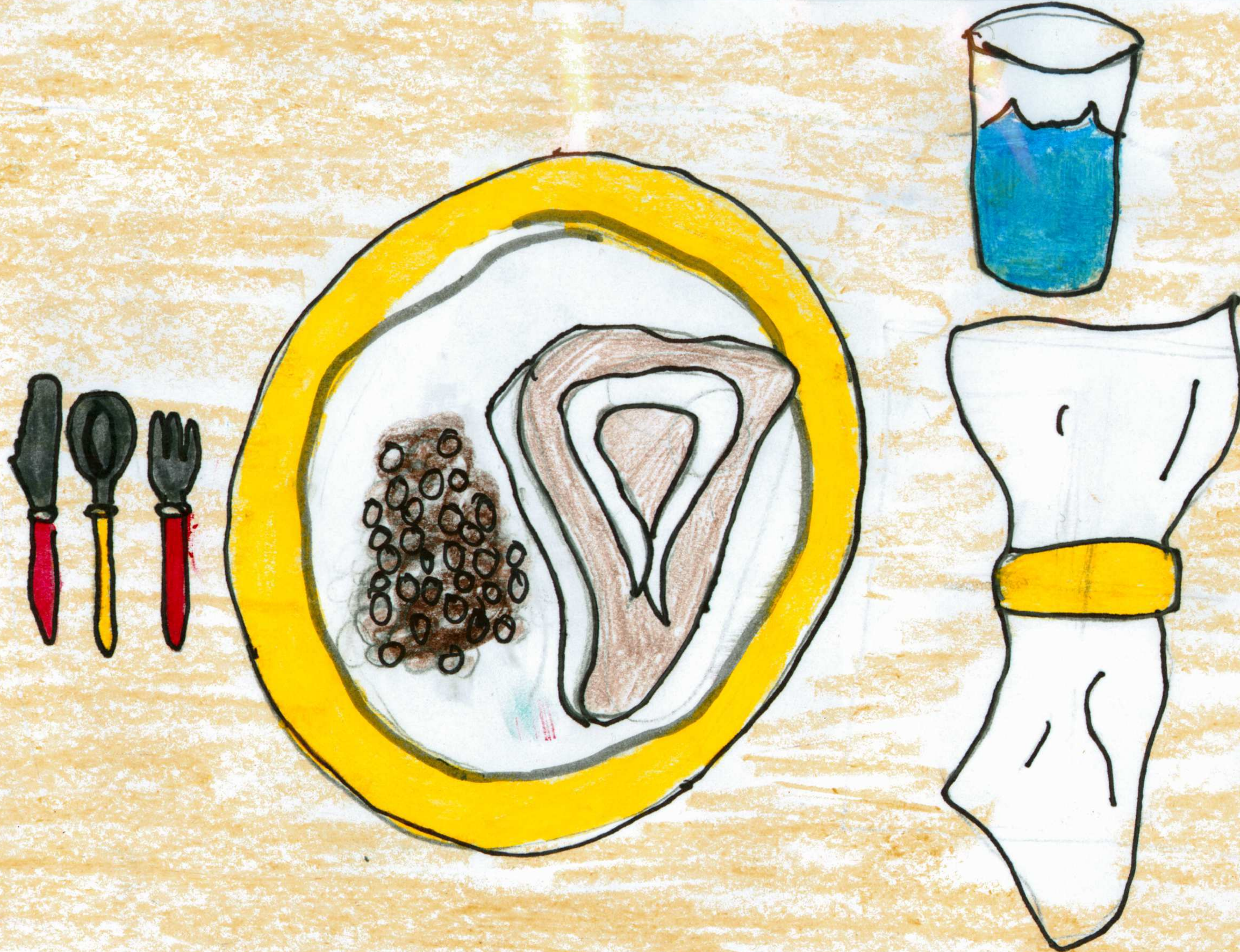
I arrived at work and once I got there my boss started yelling at me and gave me a warning saying that the next time I was late he would have to let me go. After that I started right away at my new job. I worked at the blacksmith shop in town. Basically my job was to help make the hoss (horse) shoes. Since it was my first day I was a little questionable in what I was supposed to do. Throughout the day the other apprentices gave me some pointers to help me out. I worked as hard as I could.



When I got to the blacksmith's the next day I made more hoss shoes then I ever had before. Then suddenly my boss came up to me and told me that by next Thursday I would start making \$2.15! I couldn't wait; I was so excited I worked extra hard for the rest of the day! After work, I went to St. John's Episcopal church with the rest of my family. Little did I know that this would be our last visit as a family.

After church my friends and I played baseball. After that I ate dinner and went to bed.



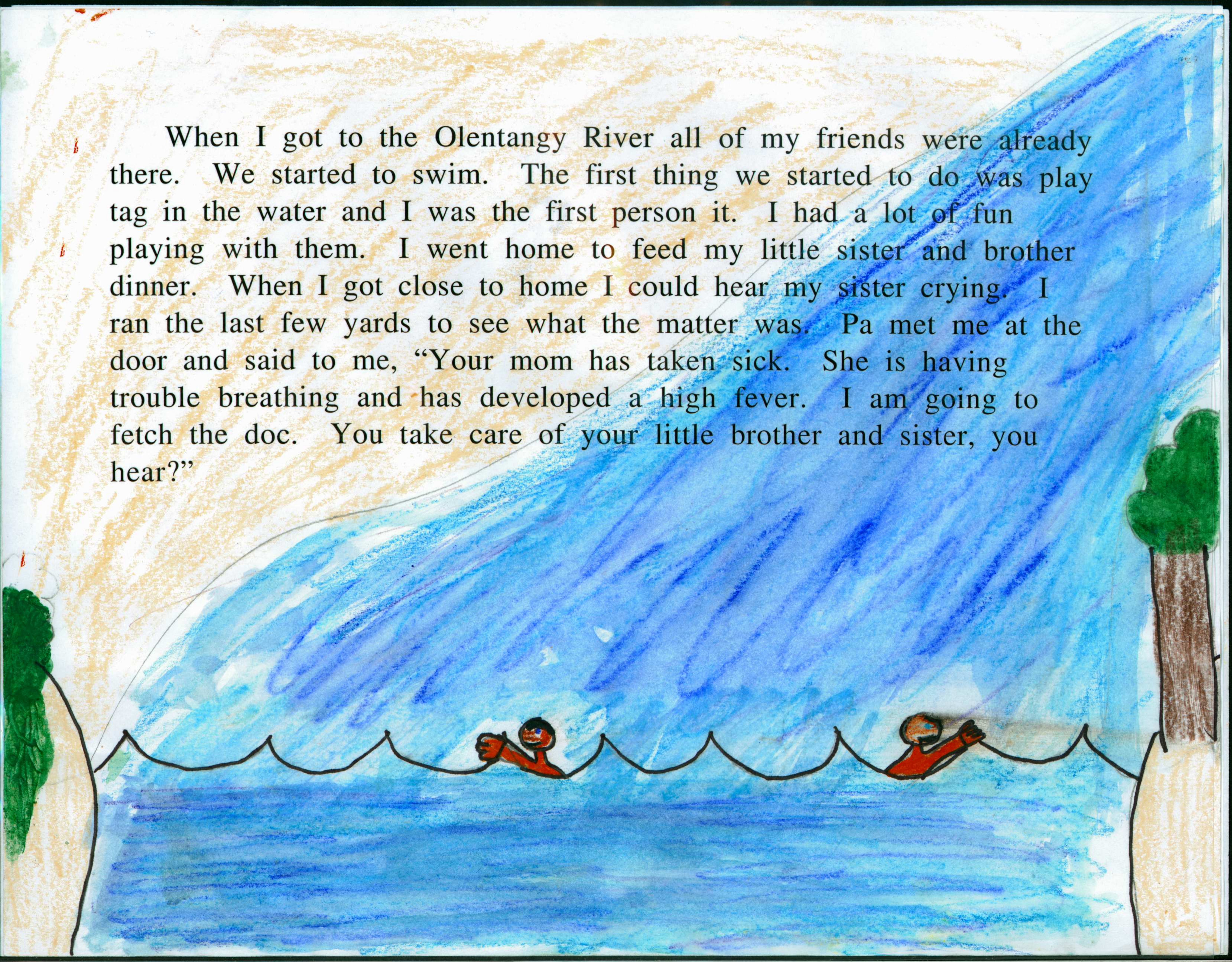


When I got home I had a great dinner of pork and beans. It was wonderful! Ma complained a bit of a sore throat, but I didn't think much of it. I was exhausted, so I did my chores and then I went to bed.



On Thursday I waited anxiously for my payment. When my boss gave it to me I was really happy. I was enjoying it when my boss called me back to work. After my hard day at work I had another delicious dinner. It wasn't really late and my best friend came to my door and he asked if I wanted to go swimming at the Olentangy River with him and a couple of our friends. I asked my mom if I could and she said, "If your chores are finished." So I was off.

When I got to the Olentangy River all of my friends were already there. We started to swim. The first thing we started to do was play tag in the water and I was the first person it. I had a lot of fun playing with them. I went home to feed my little sister and brother dinner. When I got close to home I could hear my sister crying. I ran the last few yards to see what the matter was. Pa met me at the door and said to me, "Your mom has taken sick. She is having trouble breathing and has developed a high fever. I am going to fetch the doc. You take care of your little brother and sister, you hear?"





I was scared. I knew her chances weren't good if Pa felt the need to get the doctor.

Pa returned with the doctor in tow. He went in to see Ma while I tried to reassure my brother and sister. My older brother and sister were still at work, so they didn't even know about Ma. I crept over to listen to Pa speak with the doctor. "It doesn't look good, John. It looks like diphtheria, which means the young'uns will have to go."

Diphtheria meant almost certain death. Mary and Timothy would have a good chance of catching diphtheria if they stayed here. Just as they were talkin' my sister and brother walked in. They both looked like they were tired and didn't want to hear anything bad, but I knew I had to tell them. "Ma has diphtheria. The doc is here and he said she doesn't look good. Mary and Timothy have to go stay with Aunt Grace." I said, all in one breath. Their mouths dropped and Hannah ran into Ma and Pa's room. Soon after I heard loud, long sobs comin' from there. I went to bed; this was all too much to handle.

The next day, my house seemed empty since Mary and Timothy were gone. When I got to work I had a hard time working because I kept thinking about Ma.

When I got home, my dad was home unusually early. Something had to be wrong.

"Son, your Ma has passed away. I'm real sorry. There's not much more to say."

(At this point my granpa broke down. He took a few minutes to move on and continue the story.)

Every week after that, I would visit my mother at her grave and put her favorite flowers around it. Then I would start to cry.

My life continued on. My little brother and sister returned to our home. My older brother and sister continued with their work.

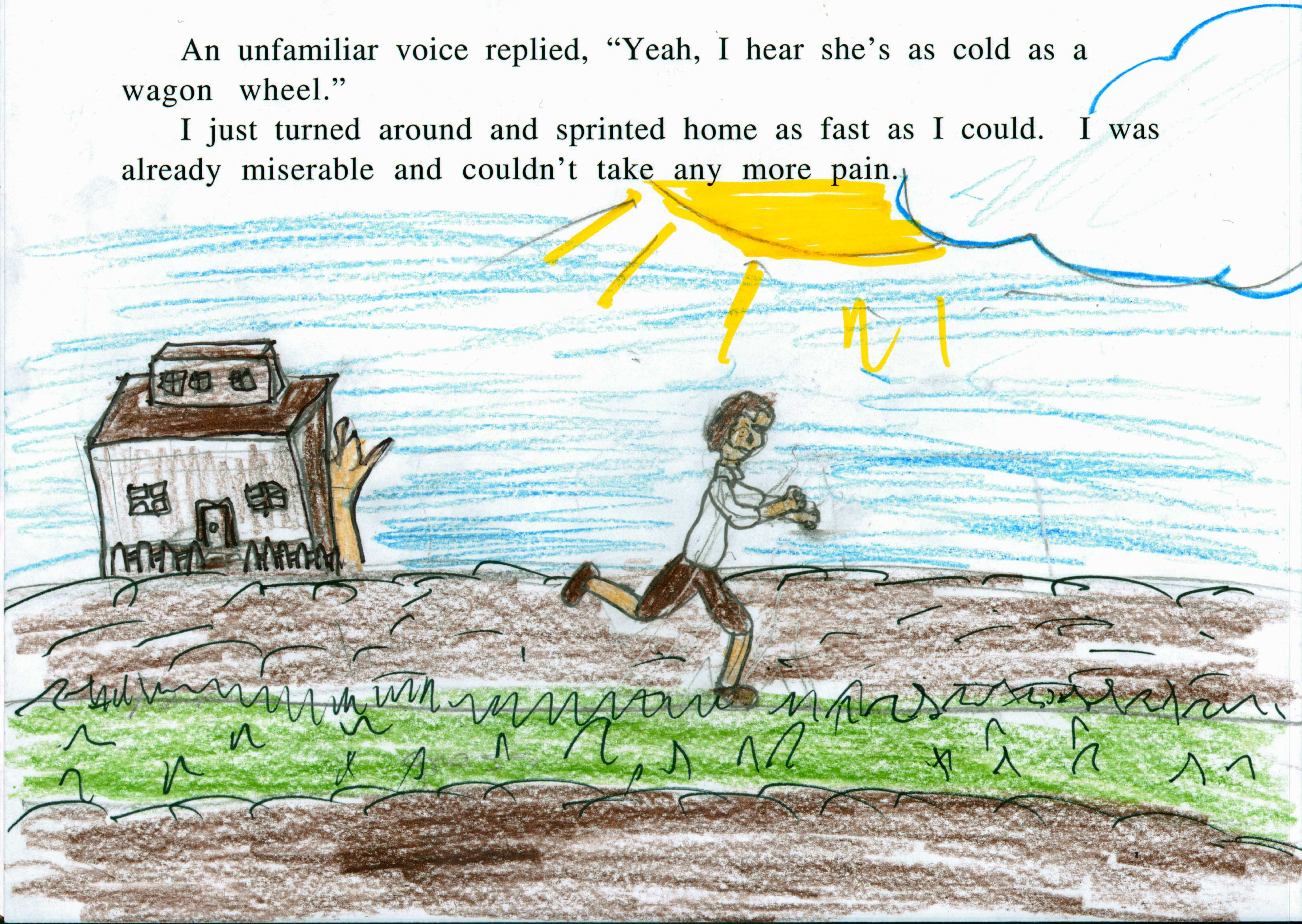




One day I walked by my friend Billy Shudder's house. He lived near the "Big Bug" (rich) families. One lady was having a tea party with her friends. She was wearing a very fancy dress and a really unusual hat. When I was little I had wished to be as wealthy and fine as the rich folks. Their houses had silky curtains and beautiful fresh flowers in huge gardens. I started to go to Billy's. As I came near the house, I could hear Billy's voice. "I sure do feel sorry about Robert's ma."

An unfamiliar voice replied, "Yeah, I hear she's as cold as a wagon wheel."

I just turned around and sprinted home as fast as I could. I was already miserable and couldn't take any more pain.



That was a tough time in my life. Things got better, though. Worthington grew larger as the years went on. In 1880, we built our first jail. In May of 1881, a telephone link was established between Worthington and Columbus, although many families didn't have telephones in their homes for many years. The Johnson family built Twin Oaks, an impressive home on Flint Road. Gas street lights were installed in Worthington. A one-room school house (Wilson School) was built on Olentangy River Road, and a Children's Home was opened. The electric lamp, celluloid film, the Kodak box camera, and Dr. Pepper all were invented in the 1880s. So you see, even though I lost my ma that decade, other things were gained.

