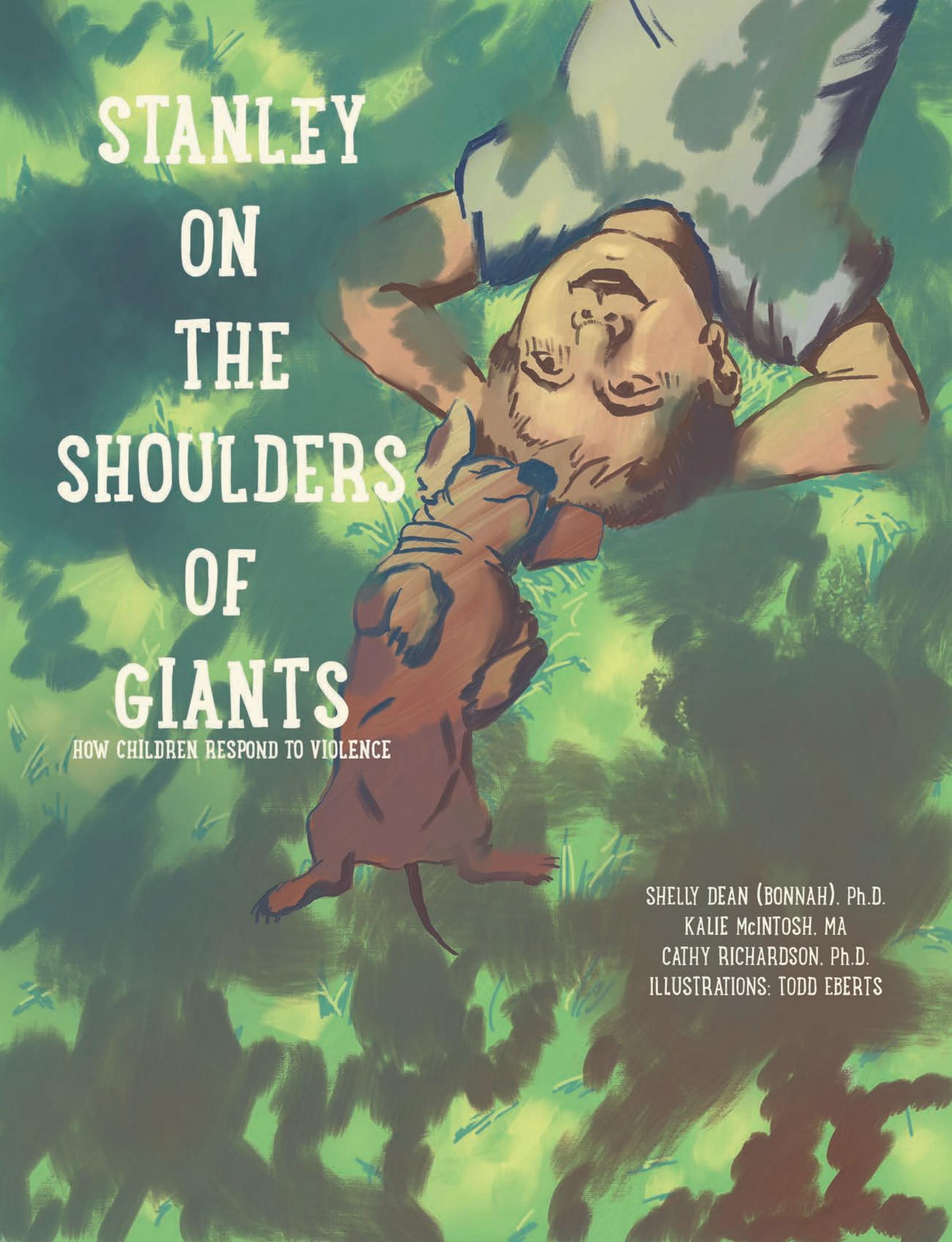


# STANLEY ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

HOW CHILDREN RESPOND TO VIOLENCE

A stylized illustration of a young boy with dark skin and short hair, wearing a brown t-shirt. He is standing on the shoulders of a much larger, muscular man whose arms are raised above his head. The background is a dense, green, textured landscape that looks like a jungle or forest. The boy is looking upwards with a thoughtful expression.

SHELLY DEAN (BONNAH), Ph.D.

KALIE McINTOSH, MA

CATHY RICHARDSON, Ph.D.

ILLUSTRATIONS: TODD EBERTS

Stanley on the Shoulders of Giants  
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# Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the children, and their mothers, who have ever stayed at a Women's Shelter. It is dedicated to children (and former children) everywhere who have despaired at violence, longed for justice and love, and resisted attacks on the spirit. It is dedicated to mothers who try to keep children safe and to fathers who are gentle in their relationships with women and children and firm in the struggle against male violence. It is written in homage to dignity, justice, and hope. It is one account of children's suffering and to the victories that can be found in small acts of living.

**This project was generously funded by the Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter.**



**Women and Gender  
Equality Canada**

**Femmes et Égalité  
des genres Canada**



# Acknowledgements



Stanley: In real life, Stanley is a 10-year-old dachshund/boston terrier cross. He goes by the names of either Stanley or Manly.

He is very happy about being a character in a children's book, because he loves children.

Stanley was rescued as a young pup.

We want to acknowledge our colleagues for their contributions to our knowledge of children, and the ways that young people respond to violence:

Dr. Allan Wade & Dr. Linda Coates: Centre for Response-Based Practice

Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter, Calgary, Alberta

Yukon Women's Emergency Shelter, Whitehorse, Yukon

Liard Women's Aboriginal Society (LAWS), Watson Lake, Yukon

Intake, Assessment and Collaborative Practice team with the Ministry for Children and Families, Duncan, British Columbia

Peter Söderström, Marianne Karlsson, Sweden

Danish Women's Emergency Shelter, Copenhagen, Denmark

Interior Community Services, Kamloops, British Columbia



## About the Authors



**Shelly Dean (Bonnah)** has been working for children, and their families, for 25 years. Throughout that time, she has been seeking to understand the private logic of young people who act with craftiness, courage, fear, mischief and love to protect themselves and those around them. Shelly works with the Centre for Response-Based Practice in the Interior of British Columbia, Canada, and lives in Kamloops with her family and their dog, Stanley.



**Kalie McIntosh** works for children and youth who have experienced a wide range of adversity, grief and loss, violence and traumatic events. At the core of Kalie's work is the understanding that a person's dignity must always be upheld, and she focuses on finding the ways that people work hard to maintain their dignity every day. Kalie is originally from Thunder Bay, Ontario and currently resides in Kamloops, BC with her husband and their pets.



**Cathy Richardson/Kinewesquao** is a founding member of the Centre for Response-Based Practice. She is a professor at Concordia University, Director of the First Studies Program and has a Ph.D. in child and youth psychology. Cathy is Métis and grew up on Vancouver Island. She has three children and lives in Tiohtia:ké/Montreal on the territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka.



**Todd Eberts** is a freelance illustrator and fine artist living in Kamloops, BC. He earned a Bachelor's of Arts Degree in Philosophy at Simon Fraser University, graduating with First Class Honours in 2009. Todd constructed an art education out of multiple resources, including online art schools, life experience, and an atelier group in a rainy Vancouver alleyway. Todd Eberts' background in philosophy and a love of story continues to influence his creative practice. His work has been exhibited locally in Kamloops, BC.



# Introduction

This children's book has been developed by a group of professionals who have worked in the field of domestic violence for many years, and have specialized in understanding how children respond to and resist violence.

## THIS BOOK IS WRITTEN FOR:

- Children who have experienced violence
- Parents who are helping their children
- Professionals who work for children
- People who have perpetrated violence who are interested in understanding children's experience of violence. It is a book for those who care about creating safety, including freedom from fear, for all children.

## OUR HOPE IS THAT THIS BOOK WILL:

- Help children identify their own responses and resistance to violence
- Help parents view children as active, imaginative people who use their behaviour to manage their circumstances
- Help professionals working for children to use a response-based approach, and avoid pathologizing or misunderstanding children who have experienced violence
- Help people who have perpetrated violence to understand their responsibility in scaring (and other forms of harming) children and their families. We believe that violence is a choice.

Children respond to and resist violence against their mothers, themselves, their siblings, and others whom they love in a wide variety of ways. They are responding to violence itself, and the humiliation that is created from it. In fact, many children describe the humiliation of violence as the most injurious assault; the sting of humiliation that is an affront to their dignity and creates the most lasting pain. Their responses to the fear and danger of violence are quick, careful, protective, and can range from slight actions to grand gestures.

As professionals, we pay attention to a 6-year-old who makes a comment such as, "*I thought it through*" and give it the same credence as the obvious action of *hiding under a bed*. It is often the unseen, unnoticed, silent responses of thought, prayer, holding their breath while carefully listening, or making an oath to themselves that their children will never have to experience what

they live through, that indicates the steady action that children are taking when someone around them is violent.

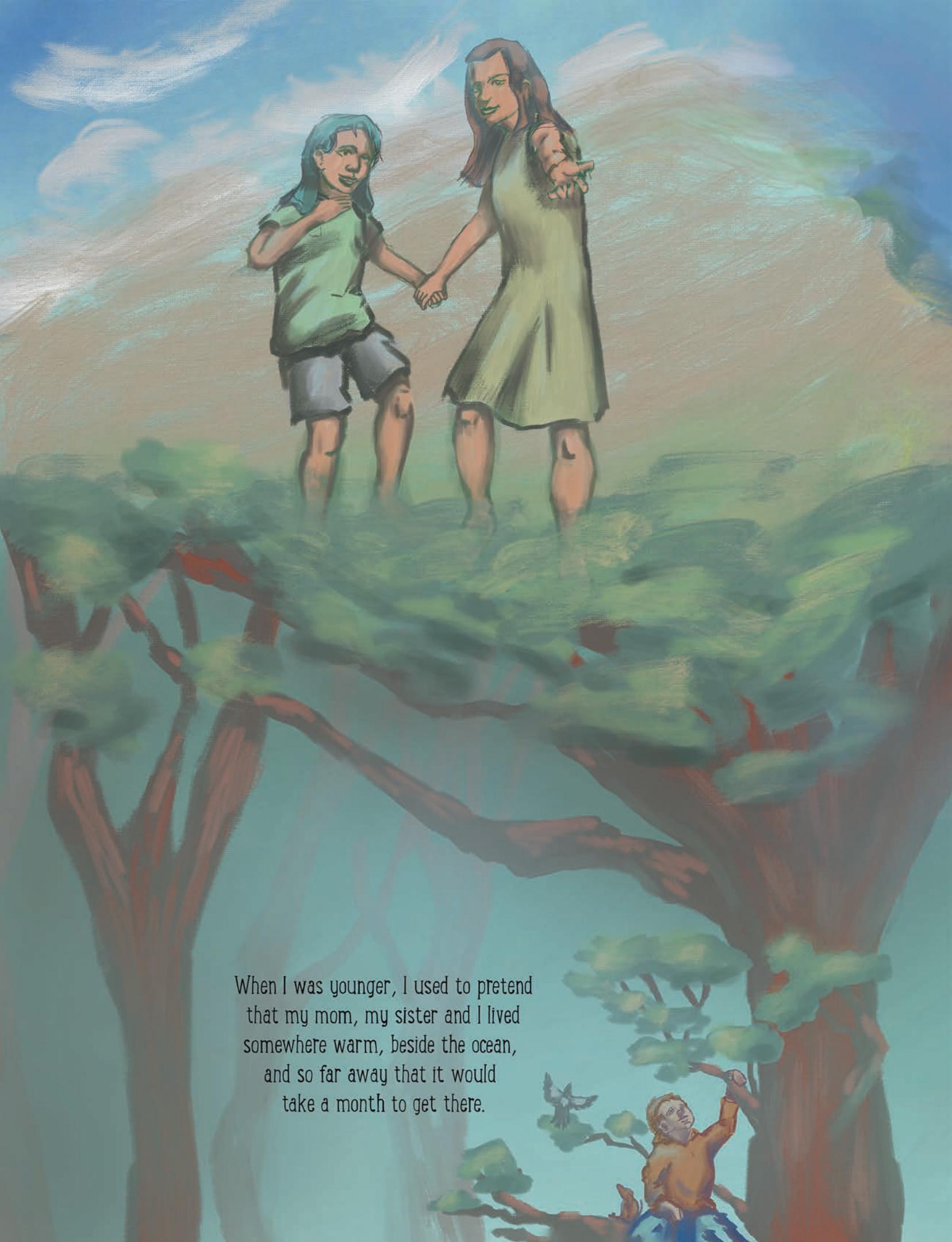
The ability to respond to and resist violence in ways that appropriately matches their circumstances is demonstrated by children of all ages.

I didn't used to  
believe in magic,  
at least not since I was  
little.

My name is Arlo Monte Tala.

My first name means that I have a good  
**IMAGINATION** and my mom says I have lots  
of **DEE-TERM-INATION**. Lots.  
I've always been like this.

My last name means I'm a lot like  
a wolf. My middle name is after a really cool  
golden-doodle. That must be why I love dogs.



When I was younger, I used to pretend  
that my mom, my sister and I lived  
somewhere warm, beside the ocean,  
and so far away that it would  
take a month to get there.

A colorful illustration of a young boy with short blonde hair, wearing a white t-shirt, sitting on a woman's shoulders. He is holding a brown teddy bear. The woman, wearing red glasses and a green top, is smiling and holding a baby in her arms. They are outdoors with a large bird flying in the background. The scene is set against a backdrop of mountains and a clear sky.

**Stanley** is my oldest and best friend. I've had him since the day I was born.  
I know he's a stuffed animal. I've always felt better when he's beside me.

My big sister, Alexia, gave  
him to me when she was only  
two years old.

Her name means **PROTECTOR**,  
and that is what she is.

She helped look after me  
for my whole life.

Stanley comes with me  
**everywhere**. He sleeps with me every  
night, right under my arm.

To everyone else, he's just a stuffy,  
but to me he's a **box hound**,  
and he has a cool personality.

It's ok that nobody knows what  
a box hound is. I made it up  
just for Stanley.

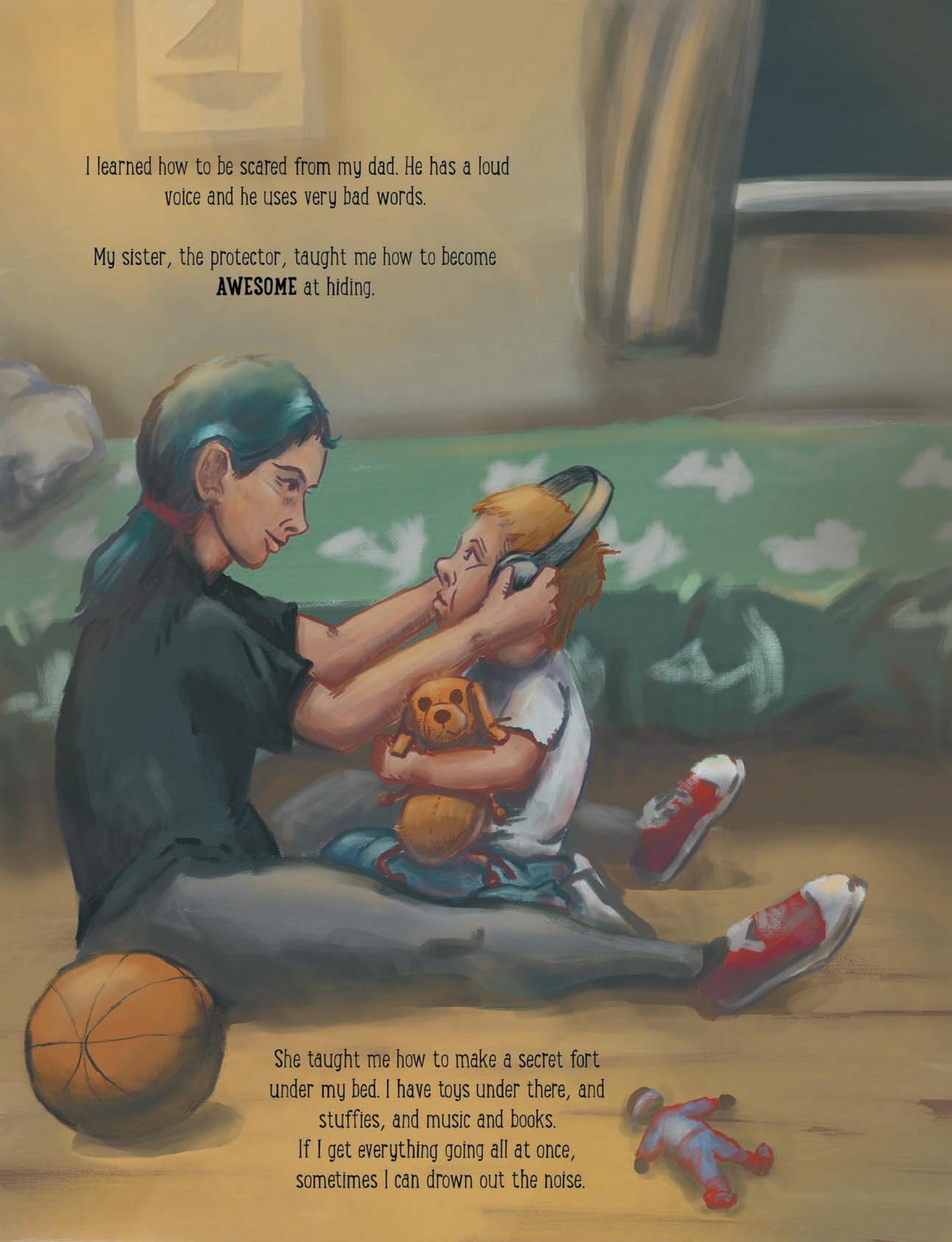
His name means  
that he **tells the truth** and  
**he's loyal**, which suits his  
kind brown eyes and his funny  
little face.

My sister said he came with  
straight legs, but I've  
**CUDDLED HIM CROOKED**.

Sometimes, I can't  
tell the difference  
between magic  
and my imagination.

I do know that one day,  
for hours and hours,  
Stanley was a  
**REAL DOG!** A living,  
breathing, licking  
box hound.

I've never been so happy  
about anything in my life.  
Because it was the day  
I had never been more  
scared in my life!

A painting of a girl with blue hair and a boy sitting on the floor. The girl is holding a yellow teddy bear and has her arm around the boy's shoulder. The boy is wearing headphones and listening to music. A basketball is on the floor to the left, and a toy figure is on the right.

I learned how to be scared from my dad. He has a loud voice and he uses very bad words.

My sister, the protector, taught me how to become **AWESOME** at hiding.

She taught me how to make a secret fort under my bed. I have toys under there, and stuffies, and music and books.

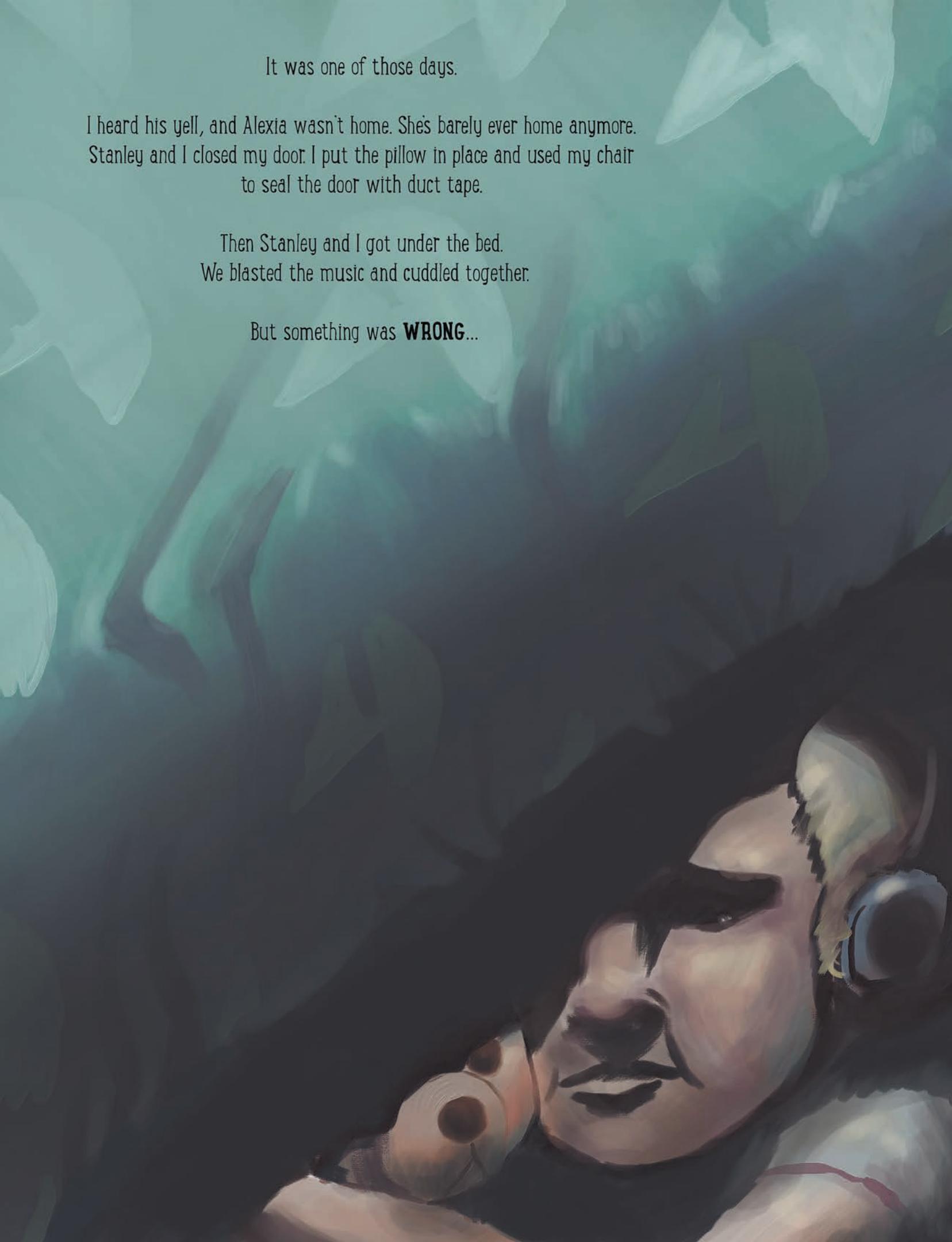
If I get everything going all at once, sometimes I can drown out the noise.



I learned about the "**TRIPLE SEAL**"  
from mom. She's got some really great  
ideas!

She didn't want me to come out of  
my room to try and help her anymore.  
She taught me to seal myself in my  
room by closing the door, putting a  
pillow under the crack in the door  
to keep the noise out, and duct taping  
around the door so that nobody can get  
in.

**THAT'S THREE SEALS.**  
My mom buys me **LOTS** of duct tape!



It was one of those days.

I heard his yell, and Alexia wasn't home. She's barely ever home anymore. Stanley and I closed my door. I put the pillow in place and used my chair to seal the door with duct tape.

Then Stanley and I got under the bed.  
We blasted the music and cuddled together.

But something was **WRONG**...

This day was **LOUDER**, and **SCARIER**.

We heard something break and I started to cry.  
I cuddled Stanley tight. His legs were tangled around me at funny angles.

I guess that's how they got so crooked.

His chubby little body kept me warm, and I talked to him while I patted him.

Just like we always did.

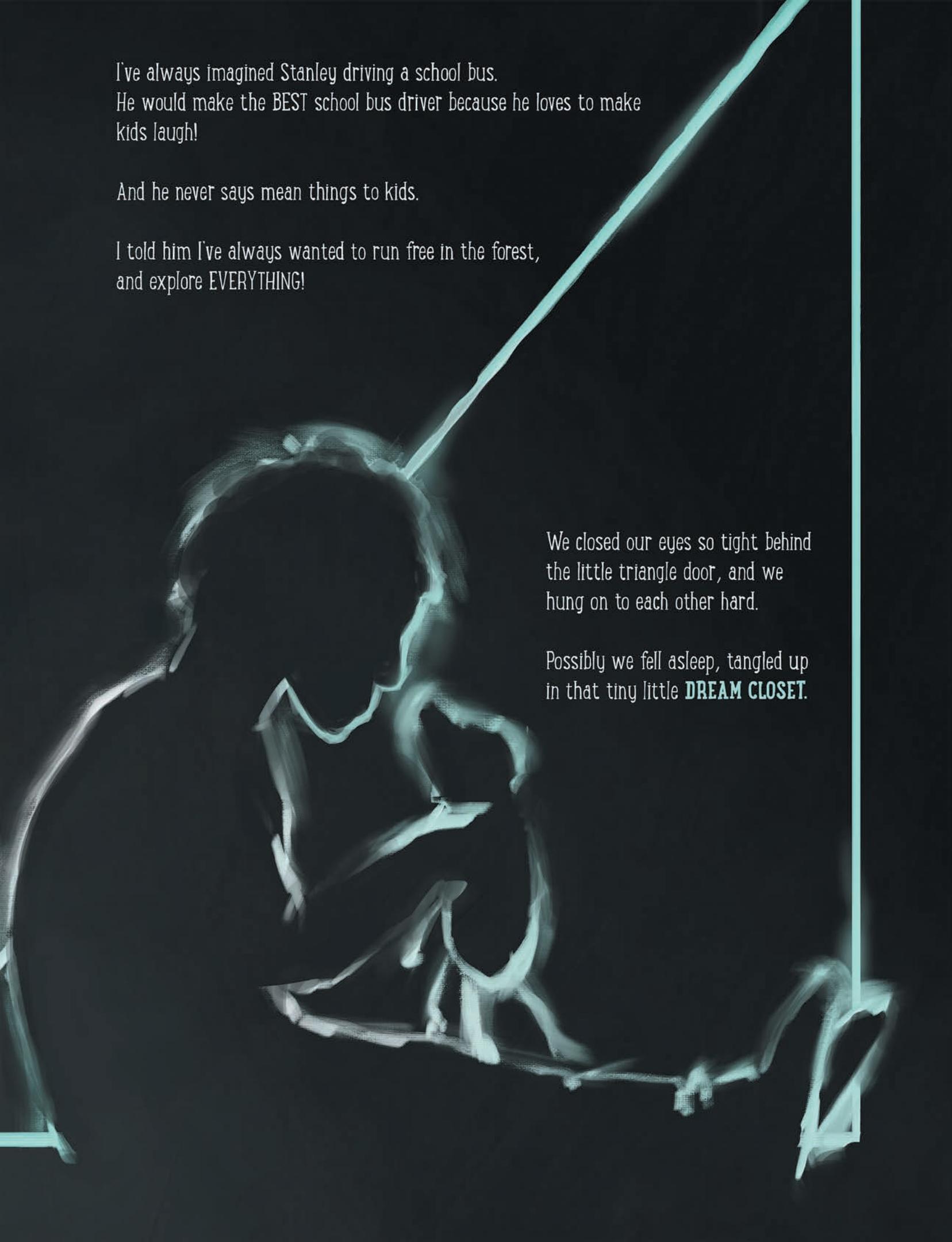


I took one deep breath and then scrambled out from under my bed with Stanley under my arm. We slid across the floor to the half-sized closet door in the corner of my room. I used to be scared of this attic closet when I was a baby, but now I understand that it's a secret place full of surprises and adventures.



Stanley and I tucked ourselves inside  
and closed the door. I whispered in his ear:

"Stanley, have you ever had a dream?"



I've always imagined Stanley driving a school bus.  
He would make the BEST school bus driver because he loves to make  
kids laugh!

And he never says mean things to kids.

I told him I've always wanted to run free in the forest,  
and explore EVERYTHING!

We closed our eyes so tight behind  
the little triangle door, and we  
hung on to each other hard.

Possibly we fell asleep, tangled up  
in that tiny little **DREAM CLOSET**.

A soft-focus illustration of a young girl with short brown hair, wearing a white t-shirt, sitting cross-legged on the ground in a lush green forest. She is looking towards the right side of the frame. A small brown and tan dog sits in front of her, looking back at her. The background is filled with large, textured tree trunks and branches, with sunlight filtering through the leaves.

When I opened my eyes and looked all around, we were sitting in the middle of a forest!  
It was full of trees and birds and had moss all over the ground.

My arms were still around Stanley, and that's when I felt the pounding of his heart  
and his warm breath on my cheek.

### **STANLEY WAS A REAL DOG!**

Somehow, I didn't even feel surprised.



I started to sing  
and dance while Stanley barked  
as loud as he could because  
he was so happy!

Stanley always wanted to run and play  
and have an adventure in the woods.

I didn't waste any time! I knew he wouldn't  
need a collar or a leash because he's not a  
regular dog. He doesn't like the feeling of  
something around his neck.



Watching Stanely come alive would make any kid smile. Even on a **very sad, very mad, very scary day**. He doesn't look like he would be able to run very fast, because his feet all point in different directions from being cuddled so hard and snuggling so close. But he's a strong boy, and he can run like the wind.

**Like a miniature rocket!**

He was smiling as big as I was: happy to be alive and  
feel the earth under his feet.



I learned about the forest from my grandpa. He taught me about the trees  
and how they talk to each other and protect each other.

Did you know that if a tree is thirsty, other trees will send it water through their roots?  
Stanley and I ran straight to what is now my favourite tree.

I told Stanley all about how trees protect each other and can warn each other about insects coming to eat  
their leaves. They do this by changing the way they smell.

I told Stanley that's just like how he protects me.

A large, gnarled tree with many branches and a thick trunk. A person is climbing the tree, wearing a white shirt and blue pants. A small bird is perched on one of the branches.

Our favourite tree is big and  
gnarly, and the leaves don't grow  
as much as they do on other trees,  
but it has the best place to hide.

The thing I like about the  
forest is that all of the  
trees **belong** here.  
They don't all look the same.  
They aren't all as strong and  
they aren't all the same size.

A colorful illustration of a young boy and his dog in a large tree. The boy, with light brown hair and a white t-shirt, is perched on a thick branch, looking down with a smile. His dog, a reddish-brown labrador, sits on a lower branch to his left, also looking down. The tree has large, textured brown bark and green leaves. The background is a soft-focus view of a forest. The overall style is painterly and whimsical.

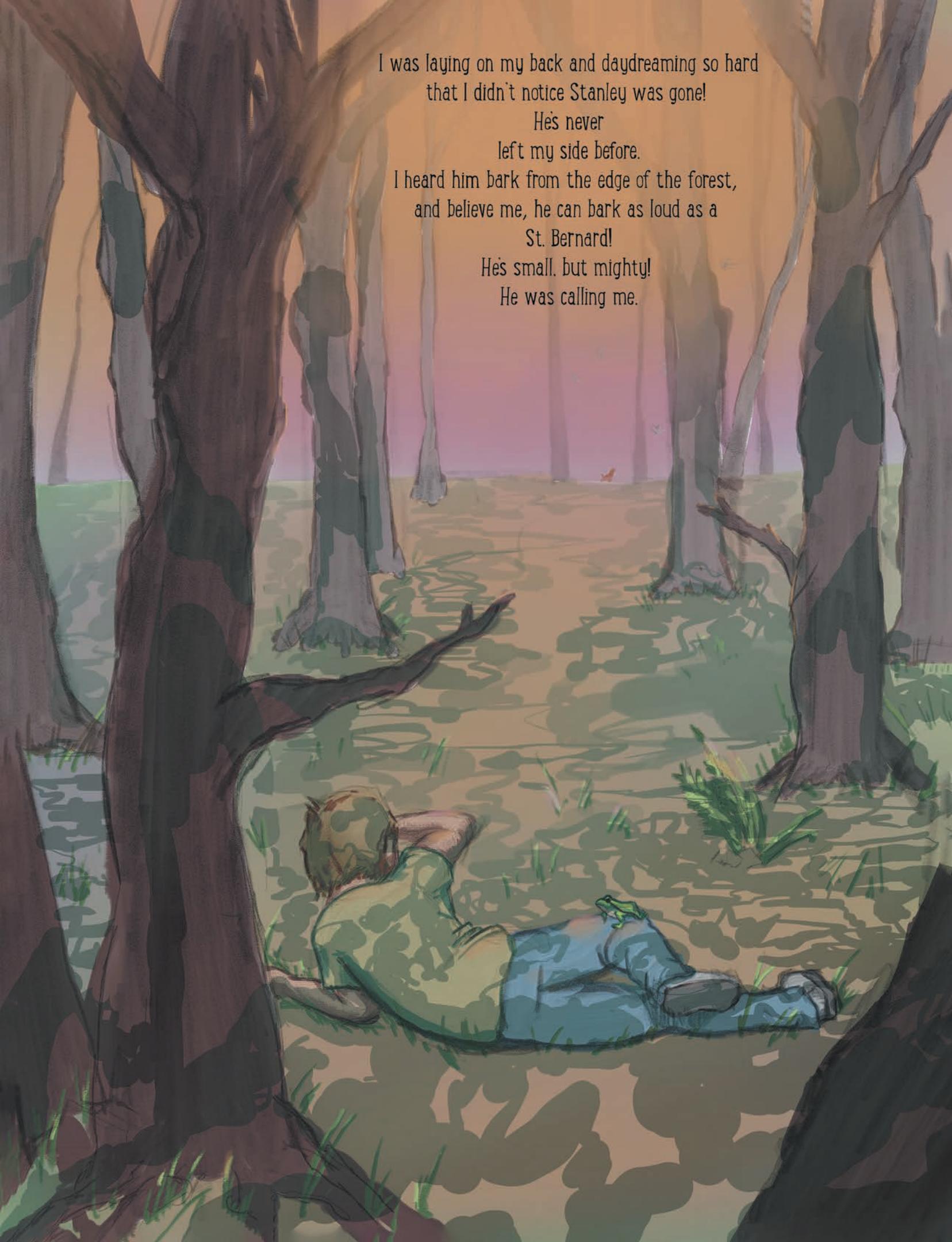
Stanley and I climbed to a spot that was so secret we knew that no one could find us.

Now it's a place that only we know!

Well, except for my mom. She would know where my hiding spot was.  
She **always** knows stuff.

We stared up at the leaves on  
the trees, which looked like  
a colourful blanket keeping us  
safe from the great big world.  
Stanley loves to do whatever I do!

We jumped to the ground  
and landed right on our feet.  
Then we were laying on our  
backs, with the dirt and moss  
and sticks gently scratching us.

A painterly illustration of a person lying on their back in a swampy forest at sunset. The person is wearing camouflage pants and a blue t-shirt. A small green frog sits on the person's right shoulder. The background shows tall, thin trees silhouetted against a pink and orange sky.

I was laying on my back and daydreaming so hard  
that I didn't notice Stanley was gone!

Hes never

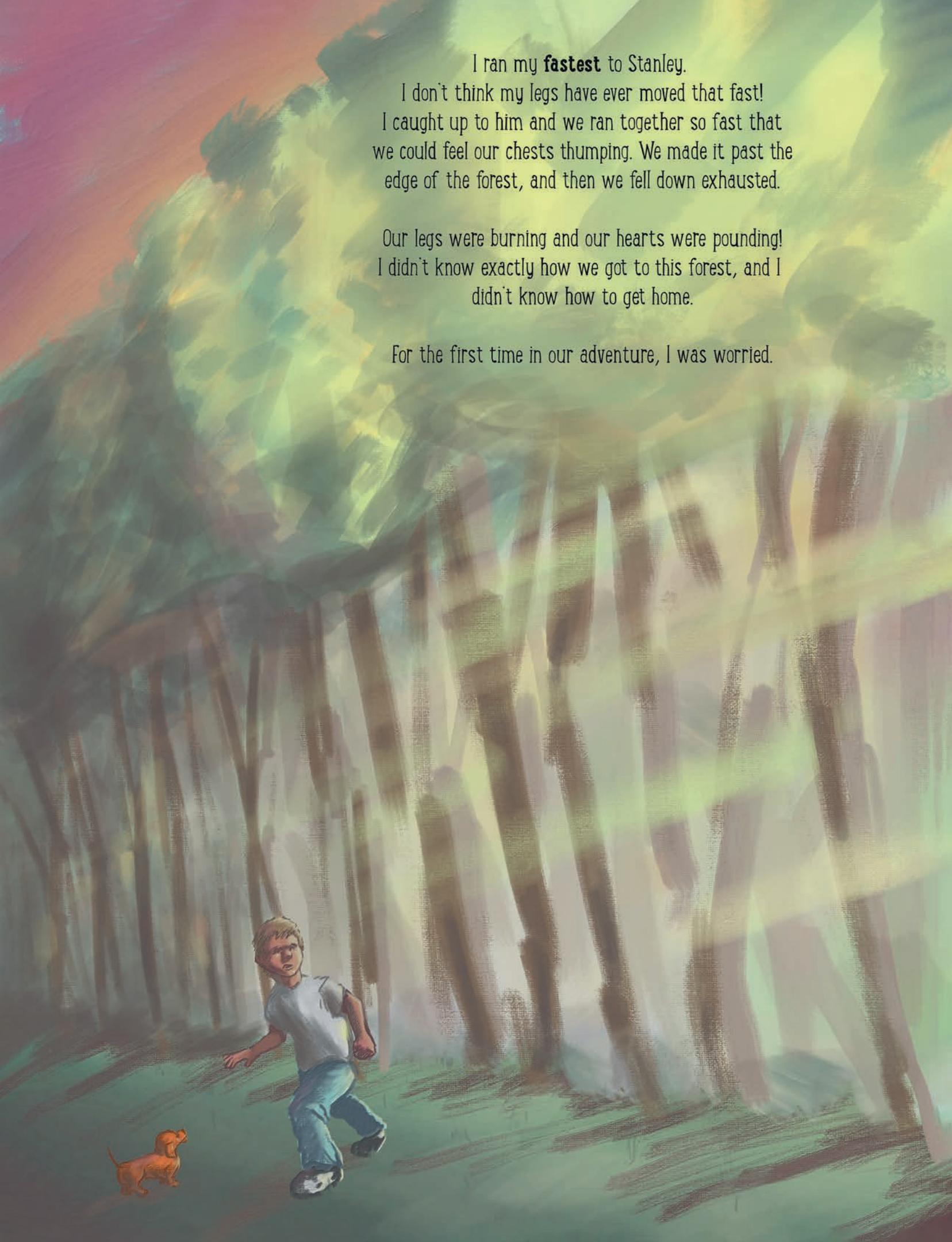
left my side before.

I heard him bark from the edge of the forest,  
and believe me, he can bark as loud as a

St. Bernard!

Hes small, but mighty!

He was calling me.

A colorful illustration of a young boy with brown hair, wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans, running through a dense forest. He is looking back over his shoulder. A small, brown dachshund dog is running alongside him. The forest is filled with tall, thin trees and bright sunlight filtering through the canopy, creating a warm glow.

I ran my **fastest** to Stanley.

I don't think my legs have ever moved that fast! I caught up to him and we ran together so fast that we could feel our chests thumping. We made it past the edge of the forest, and then we fell down exhausted.

Our legs were burning and our hearts were pounding! I didn't know exactly how we got to this forest, and I didn't know how to get home.

For the first time in our adventure, I was worried.



Stanley saw the look  
on my face and the tears  
in my eyes. He smiled,  
licked my face, and  
wandered a short distance away.  
I followed him down the path.

When I caught up to him, I saw Stanley climbing into  
a shiny orange SCHOOL BUS! He was even wearing the special  
kind of hat that only school bus drivers wear.  
I jumped on board! I knew Stanley would take us home!

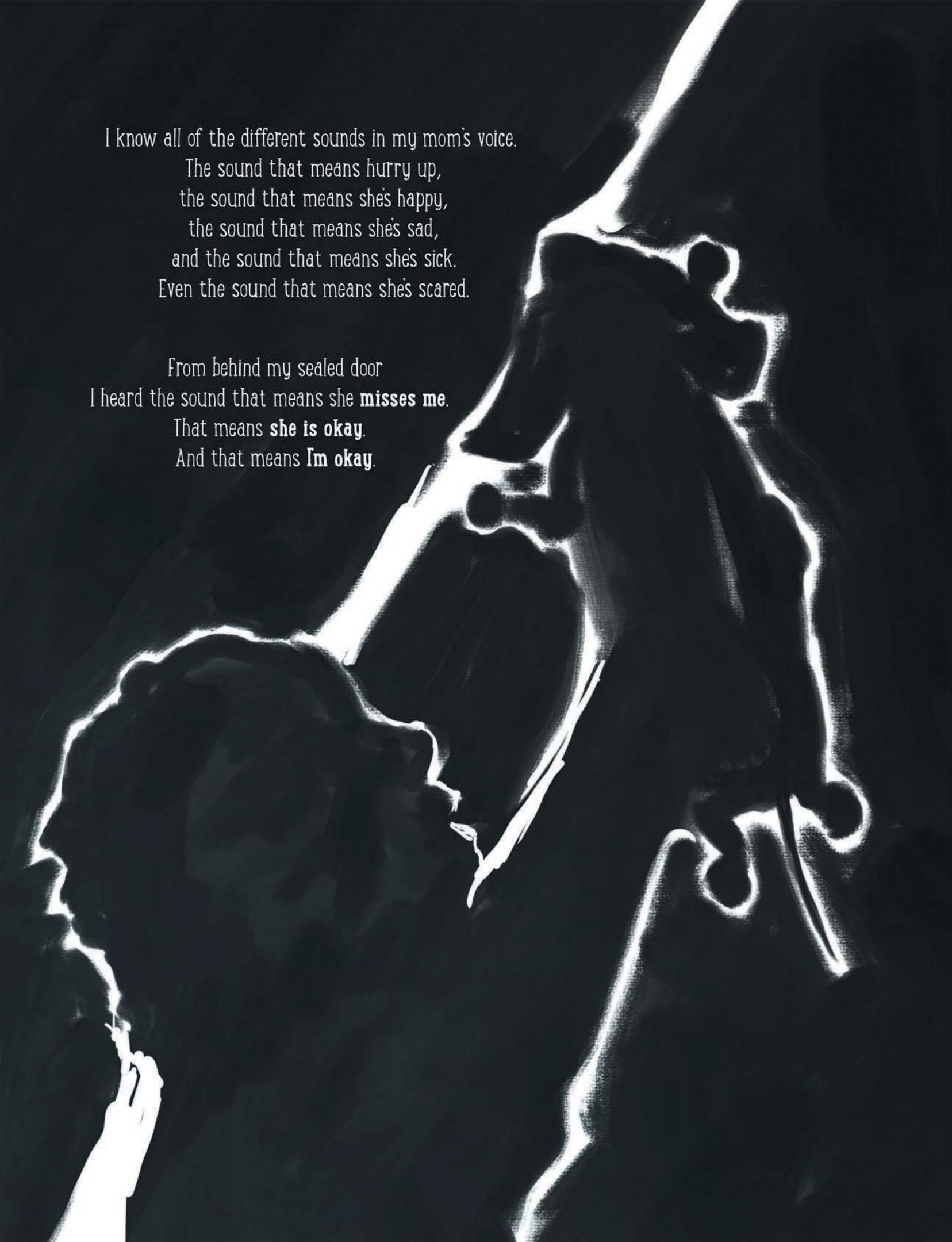
I've been in cars, on a bus, and even on an airplane....  
but that school bus ride with Stanley was the **BEST** ride of my life!  
He drives like a race car driver, and we sang all of our favorite songs as loud as we could!

I don't know how he got us home, and I don't care.

Maybe it's magic, or that determination my mom talks about.  
We were still laughing and singing, and crumpled up inside the tiny little  
**dream closet** in my room.

Over our voices, I heard my mom calling my name  
from behind my sealed bedroom door.





I know all of the different sounds in my mom's voice.

The sound that means hurry up,  
the sound that means she's happy,  
the sound that means she's sad,  
and the sound that means she's sick.  
Even the sound that means she's scared.

From behind my sealed door  
I heard the sound that means she **misses me**.

That means **she is okay**.  
And that means **I'm okay**.



As I opened the tiny door to go to  
my mom, I looked down at Stanley.

He's my best friend.

He decided it would be ok  
to be a stuffie again.

# **THE END**

# Stanley on the Shoulders of Giants

*How Children Respond to Violence*

The title of this book, *Stanley on the Shoulders of Giants*, comes from the idea of ‘standing on the shoulders of giants’, which is a metaphor of little people standing on the **shoulders of giants** and expresses the **meaning** of “discovering truth by building on previous discoveries”.

The wisdom of Stanley, and his interactions with Arlo, honours  
our ancestors, our mentors, and our intuition.

## Reflection Questions

1. What difference does it make to look at how children respond to a situation rather than how they are affected by it? How did Arlo respond to being scared?
2. How do a child's actions, in a risky situation, point to what they value or long for?
3. How can parents and professionals acknowledge the courage in children?
4. What does it mean to see a child helping other children or their mothers as their "capacity" rather than "parentification" or "over-responsibilization?"
5. What do children look for to create comfort and safety during violent or abusive episodes in the home?
6. How do children use imagination to help them be strong, courageous or to feel protected?
7. How do children typically try to help their mother when she is in danger?
8. What is a positive social response by family, friends or professionals, to children and mothers who are experiencing violence or abuse?
9. How can others in the family's circle help address family violence/abuse without blaming the victim?
10. Responses and resistance are often oriented to preserving and asserting dignity. The violence itself may be only the first in a series of indignities delivered through negative social responses. Our central task, whatever else we do, is to uphold the dignity of the victim.
  - a) How does Arlo "resist" the violence/abuse of his father?
  - b) What happens when professionals "pathologize" children's resistance (e.g. see it as symptoms of illness rather than deliberate, tactical acts of protection?)

**PARENT & PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE**  
**CHILDREN'S RESPONSES & RESISTANCE TO VIOLENCE**  
**(S. Dean (Bonna), C. Richardson & A. Wade, 2020)**

**It takes a community:**

Working with children responding to violence and abuse is a community responsibility. Grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers, coaches, and other community members have a great deal to contribute. If it takes a village to raise a child, as the saying goes, it takes a coordinated and intentional community to respond helpfully to children who have experienced any form of violence.

It would be tragic, then, if family and community members felt unqualified for this task, as though the job of helping violated children was for specialized professionals only. Mental health and community service professionals, including transition house workers, have key roles to play. Professional knowledge is important but should not be seen as superior to the knowledge of family and community members.

This is not to devalue professional knowledge, but rather to highlight the existing knowledge of families and communities that is too often undervalued. After all, criminal justice and mental health professionals cannot claim to have solved the problem of violence against women or to have developed foolproof ways of working for children.

When a child wakes with a nightmare, it is a family member or parent figure whom responds. In recovering from violence, children benefit most from what healthy families and communities already provide; safety, security, warmth, clarity, consistency, love, fun, activity, work, home, structure, culture, engagement.

**Resistance to Violence:**

Victims invariably resist violence and abuse – as it occurs, immediately after, and even long after. In cases of long-term violence, such as partner assault, victims often resist before an attack. Resistance may be overt, consisting of persistent verbal and physical struggle. These are the most widely recognized forms of resistance in criminal justice and mental health settings.

More often, though, open resistance is too dangerous and will result in more violence as the offender tries to suppress that resistance. Victims are forced to use a combination of tactics, some overt or nearly overt, others completely disguised and indirect. In some cases, the only possibility for resistance is in the privacy of the mind.

**Children are Social Actors**

- Children are willful, imaginative, active, resourceful, and dignity-seeking people, who possess a strong sense of self.

- Children interpret their surroundings, their safety, and the safety of others, and act accordingly.
- Children are capable of using their behaviour to influence others, and to influence their environments.
- Children initiate behaviour, maintain behaviour, and end behaviour for specific and often private reasons that are connected to their safety, or the safety of others.
- Children can move from one environment to another, and act differently in each.
- **Behaviours** are one way in which children respond to, and resist, the circumstances of their lives and in many ways, this is their most readily available form of communication and resistance to circumstances that are often kept secret, silent, and deeply troubling.

**Children are social actors, rather than passive witnesses to violence.**

- Children are story-tellers
- Children are truth-seekers
- Children are justice oriented
- Children communicate with their behaviour

***“We don’t create a fantasy world to escape reality, we create it to be able to stay.”***

Lynda Berry, Playwright

Children find ways to protect their siblings, even when it is ‘forbidden’. Some try to escape, or create ‘safe enough’ hiding spots, like closets or under the bed.

Children have a history of hiding siblings to protect them from becoming victims or from the sounds of violence in the home. Older siblings often put on music and headphones to protect smaller children.

They may run to a neighbor’s house, or take a phone to dial 911 to elicit help during the assault of their mother.

**Some examples of children’s resistance may include:**

- He wet the bed
- She got into a physical fight with her little brother
- He cried every time he saw a 4-door, red car
- She got straight A’s in school
- She got failing grades in school
- He refused to go to school, due to ‘anxiety’

## **Social Responses:**

Children want to tell the truth. They decide if they'll tell the truth, and to whom, depending on their assessment of risk to themselves and those they care about.

If they've received negative social responses in the past, or they anticipate them in the future, they may imagine the response that they need. Stanley is an example of this, and there are many, many more.

### **Social responses and non-violence**

For many years we have heard the claim that children who experience violence and abuse are likely to go on to abuse others. While there is a grain of truth to this claim, it is largely false and must be challenged.

First, while it is true, as far as we know, that most men who use violence were themselves subjected to violence as children, it is also true that most people who were subjected to violence and abuse as children do not go on to harm others as adults.

We know that girls are subjected to violence at least as often as boys. If children who were subjected to violence were likely to go on to use violence, we should see as much violence from adult women as we do from men. Statistically, this is not the case.

The key factor in whether children who are subjected to violence go on to use violence is the **quality of the social responses they received**, early on and later. If the child and family receive socially just and effective social responses, the child is much less likely to use violence in future.

## **Dignity & Safety:**

Safety, both physical and mental, is a part of dignity but also an important focus in its own right. In some cases, a person might find it necessary to abandon the need for dignity to survive violence or protect others. Women who remain with violent men to protect their children know first-hand how challenging this experience can be.

At the same time, it is important to remember that much more than physical safety is at stake in cases of violence: Safety also means safety from humiliation, including the humiliation of being blamed for the violence.

Safety means safety *to . . .* not just safety *from*. Safety to be one's self, to express one's own identity and aspirations, to confront injustice, to tell the truth. Safety to discipline one's children now that the worry of being criticized for doing so is gone . . . and so on.

*Dignity is connected to Safety.*

*Dignity is connected to Care.*

*Dignity is connected to Safe Touch.*

*Violence is always an affront to Dignity*

“When someone is crying, of course, the noble thing to do is to comfort them. But if someone is trying to hide their tears, it may also be noble to pretend you do not notice them.”

—*A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Lemony Snicket

