

Multicultural Children's Literature Focusing on the Experiences of Nepalese-American Children
in the United States

by
Swechya Banskota

A THESIS

submitted to
Oregon State University
Honors College

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degree of

Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Biology
(Honors Scholar)

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Swechya Banskota for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Biology presented on May 26, 2017. Title: Multicultural Children's Literature Focusing on the Experiences of Nepalese-American Children in the United States.

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There is an absence of multicultural children's literature focusing on the experiences of Nepalese-American children in the United States. This marginalizes many Nepalese-American children and their experiences. I wrote a book called *If You Believe* that represents the Nepalese-American children in order to fill this void in multicultural children's literature. In this essay, I demonstrate the lack of multicultural children's literature representing the Nepalese-American children and explain the significance of this lack, I provide reasons for this lack, and I explain why the Nepalese-American children would relate to a children's fiction I wrote and why the story it tells is culturally authentic to the Nepalese-American children. Worldview and cultural authenticity are important part of the discussion in this essay. One of the conclusions I make in this essay is that the current techniques being used to increase the number of multicultural children's books and the number of ethnicities they represent are not effective. Therefore, I suggest measures to increase representation of different nationalities in multicultural children's literature.

Key Words: Multicultural Children's Literature, Nepalese-American, Nepalese-American children, Nepalese-American Experience

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

Swechya Banskota, Author

There is an absence of multicultural children's literature focusing on the experiences of Nepalese-American children in the United States. This marginalizes many Nepalese-American children and their experiences. This marginalization would be best shown using a primary research conducted on the importance of a Nepalese-American children's literature for the Nepalese-American children; however, there is a lack of published literature and research specifically on Nepalese-American children's literature. Therefore, I expanded my focus of research to look at representations of Asian-Americans in children's literature for the following purposes: to make my argument that there is a lack of multicultural children literature representing the Nepalese-American children, to explain the significance of this lack, to provide reasons for this lack, and to explain why the Nepalese-American children would relate to a children's fiction I wrote and why the story it tells and the narrative is culturally authentic to the Nepalese-American children.

Surprisingly, when I researched the availability and lack of multicultural children's literature representing other ethnic groups in the U.S., I found that there are many other ethnic groups and nationalities that are not well represented in the multicultural children's literature. In other words, a lack of representation in children's book is not a problem that just Nepalese-American children face. In a 1976, sixty-six books that contained Asian-Americans as a central character were reviewed by a committee of Asian-American book reviewers under the Council on Interracial Books for Children. The reviewers found that most of the books were about Chinese-Americans and Japanese-Americans and the two exceptions were about Korean-Americans and Vietnamese-Americans. Furthermore, apart from "one

or two, the [sixty-six] books were ‘racist, sexist, and elitist’ and the ‘image of Asian Americans they present is grossly misleading’” (Aoki 383). In 2012, thirty-six years after the 1976 review by the Council on Interracial Books for Children, the Cooperative Children’s Book Center found that out of the 3,600 children’s books they reviewed, Asian- and Pacific-Americans were featured in only two percent of the books, which is about seventy-six books. Their review is limited in that it is not mentioned whether they made the same observations as the Council on Interracial Books for Children. In other words, it is possible that many of the books are racist, sexist, elitist, and misleading. This shows that the focus on creating more multicultural literature in categories such as Asian-American and African-American literature has not helped solve the problem in the lack of multicultural literature. This suggests the need to create and publish more literature to represent different nationalities, rather than create more literature on broad categories such as “Asian-American children’s literature” and “African-American children’s literature.”

It turns out that the problem of the lack of specific multicultural literature stems not just from the lack of writers and stories. Academics, authors, librarians, educators and reviewers were asked to weigh in on why there is a lack of multicultural literature by the group Open Book, which advocates for multicultural children’s literature. Based on the feedback they received, here are some conclusions Open Book was able to draw: “One problem is that multicultural books and authors are not seen as profitable so they aren’t published. When a diverse book does squeak through, it’s shelved in the back of book stores. Publishing houses also have very white staffs, as do book review sections” (Perez). Other research show that there are

many “political and economic factors that impinge on children’s literature” (Taxel 145). Joel Taxel also explains that multicultural children’s literature fits under “niche publishing” and does not support the current culture of publishing, the culture of commodification, in “Children's Literature at the Turn of the Century: ‘Toward a Political Economy of the Publishing Industry.’” This shows that instead of there being a lack of writers and stories, there is a lack of opportunities for writers to publish their stories and a lack of support and encouragement they receive from the publishing industry.

In response to this issue, I have written a children’s fiction book to contribute in the creation of a richer selection of Nepalese-American children’s literature and, also in the process, a richer selection of multicultural children’s literature. The stories and experiences of a Nepalese-American family in the United States and before they come to the United States are unique. Since these stories are diverse and unique, they cannot be represented by a single story alone.¹ Therefore, in my book, I choose to focus on how a family with three young children adapts to the United States after migrating from Nepal through the Diversity Visa Program. Representing a specific migration phenomenon, following the development of the story of a family of five, and tracking the development of the traits of one character in particular, I tell a story that is culturally authentic.

It is also important to know that multicultural literature can be enjoyed by everyone—there is a lesson to learn for everyone involved, and it could certainly be enjoyed by readers not belonging to the cultural group. These kinds of books can

¹ In Nepal alone, “there are 125 caste/ethnic groups reported [as reported] in the census 2011” (“What's the Largest Caste/ethnicity in Nepal?”).

assist readers outside of the culture with “establishing beliefs, racial, and literate identities, as well as sets of literacy, social, and cultural practices” (Brooks and McNair 126).

Lastly, multicultural literature is very beneficial to the group of children that it represents. As previously stated, I am writing my book to represent Nepalese-American children, specifically focusing on an immigrant family of three children, as this best represents children of many ages. As it is very succinctly shown in the context of Vietnamese-American children’s literature, there are many subtleties to be discussed in such a book: “Within children's literature there are occasionally more complex and sensitive insights into the process of Americanization” (Chattarji 421). These sensitive issues are only successfully brought to light when the literature possesses “cultural authenticity.”

Literature possesses cultural authenticity in two dimensions; it is “first having to do ‘with aspects of the cultural, physical, or social environment’ authors choose to emphasize,” and secondly, it “[refers] to ‘authenticating details’ such as grammatical and lexical accuracy of the characters’ dialect, and taken-for-granted information possessed by members of a cultural group” (Brooks and McNair 130). When a piece of literature shows concern for the “cultural, physical, or social environment,” it sets up a scene for the content of the writing. If the scene is accurately represented in a multicultural children’s literature, young readers can easily relate to and see the significance of the story. Second, when it possesses “authenticating details,” readers can join in on the narrative like joining in a conversation that does not feel forced and awkward. If these two dimensions of cultural authenticity are not seen in a literature,

it cannot be called a multicultural literature because it does not do justice to either the culture it is representing or the audience it is trying to reach out to.

All of these factors combined show us that there are a lot of problems that exist within multicultural children's literature, specifically literature representing Nepalese-Americans. Primarily, multicultural children's literature is not very prevalent; this makes it hard for children from minority ethnic groups within the United States, like Nepalese-American children, to find children's literature they can relate to. In addition, the limited collection of multicultural literatures that currently exist lack cultural authenticity. Meanwhile, the focus in creating more multicultural children's literature is heavily oriented on creating more content available in the racial categories. This has proven to be ineffective in expanding the genre because this focus does an insufficient job in helping the multicultural literature genre meet the needs of society today. Finally, there are some problems that exist within the publishing industry that may be indicative of the lack of multicultural children's literature. Overall, my research shows not only a lack of multicultural literature representing Nepalese-American children and how this impacts the Nepalese-American children but also an existence of systematic problems within the multicultural literature creation initiatives and the publishing industry that need to be resolved in order to make multicultural children's literature more prevalent and representative in the future. By looking at the history of support for the writers in the multicultural children's literature genre, in this essay I attempt to identify the reason for why multicultural children's literature has not been able to make significant

progress, specifically focusing on Nepalese-American children's literature. I will be referencing my book *If You Believe* throughout this essay to support my claims.

In my book, I tell a story about how the life of a family of seven is changed forever when the two parents and three children in the family get to come to the United States through the Diversity Visa Program run by the U.S. Department of State. There is much anticipation and the children are very excited. However, when they arrive in the U.S., the family finds that their new life and situation do not align to the expectations they held before immigrating to the U.S. The parents must work long hours to increase financial stability and pay off the money they brought to temporarily sustain the family in United States, and the children find a lot of new responsibilities including the responsibility to take care of each other when their parents are away working.

The children also must hold themselves accountable for being successful in their educational career because the family left many things behind in Nepal, including their beloved grandparents, to give the kids a chance to get a good education. Over the course of the whole book, the children miss Nepal and long to see their grandparents. The main character in the story, Shanti is the youngest in the family and deeply admires her siblings and hopes to follow their path in becoming a doctor or an engineer. However, Shanti is not like her siblings, and she knows it. She

worries that she will not be as successful as her siblings. She must realize that she has unique abilities that will make her successful.

This story is not central to every single Nepalese family that immigrates to the U.S.; however, it may resonate with some of the 20,912 Nepalese that immigrated to the U.S. through the Diversity Visa between the fiscal year 2005 and 2014 per a report published by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs (“Number Use for Visa Issuances and Adjustments of Status in the Diversity Immigrant Category”). This represents thirty-five percent of about 60,000 Nepalese-American that reside in the U.S. today (South Asian Americans Leading Together). Immigrating from Nepal is difficult; Nepal is one of the many countries where the U.S. runs the Diversity Program because of the low rate of immigration from Nepal (Hailu et al.). Because of the cost of visa processing and moving to the U.S., there are very few families that can move through the immigration process associated with the Diversity Visa. Most of the families that can fund their move end up spending their savings and going in debt along the way because they reason “from a personal cost/benefit analysis” that the “relocation will maximize utility” in the long run and they believe that “everyone who lives in the U.S. is flourishing economically” (Bookman 112; Hailu et al.). When immigrant families move to the U.S. and find that their expectations do not align with the reality, they face “increased anxiety due to constant pressures and worries about being able to 'make it,' depression around unrealized expectations, and decreased satisfaction with life as a result of a host of concurrent stresses associated with adjustment” (Murphy 81).

Though this is the situation for Diversity Visa immigrants from many countries and is not unique to just Nepalese-American families, my book is nonetheless a good representation for Nepalese-Americans in particular because of the themes I choose to highlight in the Nepalese-American experience. There are many themes found on the book that makes the book a culturally authentic narrative for Nepalese-American children. These includes the nostalgic memories that many Nepalese-American family and children hold of Nepal, the perception of success in the Nepalese community—the determining factors they use to analyze whether they “made it”—, the intimacy of the family, and the obligation the family feels to become financially stable as soon as possible.² These themes make the book a culturally authentic narrative because they serve to portray the experience of the Nepalese-American children accurately. They also show the worldview of Nepalese-American in general. The themes also accurately demonstrate the inter-family interactions (for the Nepalese-American) and the values they hold.

Every child deserves to see themselves represented in books with authenticating details and zero stereotypes, “so that they can develop positive self-images, gain a sense of self-worth, and cultivate a sense of self-efficacy” (Tang 1). In my book, Shanti serves to represent the experiences of many Nepalese-American children. Shanti wishes to be like her older siblings but fails and feels dejected. She must discover that she has unique abilities that will enable her to be successful in her

² Nepal is one of the top among Asian and Pacific countries to have the highest proportion of GDP be fueled by the flow of remittance into the country (Knight; “Nepal Top Remittance Recipient Economy in Proportion to GDP in Asia in 2015”). This is wonderful because the inflow of money from outside helps the family members and friends in Nepal a lot but this also reflects that there is a lot of pressure for Nepalese-Americans to send back money to family in Nepal.

own way. Children often compare themselves against each other, their siblings, and other older people in their life that they can relate to. They try to copy these figures, but they don't realize that they are completely different people with different abilities. Shanti serves as a role model for many of these Nepalese-American children so that they can also be courageous enough to think outside of the box.

Cultural authenticity in my book is also seen through the expression of a Nepalese-American worldview. "Worldview is the way people perceive themselves, other people, and the world in general and why they feel this way. All groups have worldviews, but nondominant groups are seldom able to share theirs with the world outside their groups" (Gilton 11). Worldview is influenced by experience. In my book, the characters migrated to the U.S. with the hope of escaping from the lack of opportunities to advance in society, lack of resources, and the stagnation in development of the country. When they find that they escaped from these problems by migrating from Nepal only to run into other problems in the United States, they do not feel discouraged. They expect each of the family members to work hard to make their new life in the U.S. flourish, and they are not afraid to ask each other to commit to overcome this hurdle. For example, in my book, when Shanti's parents realize that they are in a financial emergency and that they will have to work a lot in order to survive and to pay back debt, they ask Shakti, Shanti's sister and the oldest of the three siblings, to take care of her younger siblings while they are away working late into the night (53). We soon find out that this includes making meals for the family and helping her siblings with schoolwork, in addition to focusing on her studies (54-68). There is no hesitation in the parents' part when they assign Shakti the role of

essentially the third parent in the house when they are away working long shifts. This reflects on the worldview of Nepalese-Americans: everybody is capable of hard work, and if everybody works together, no task is impossible.

This also reflects how Nepalese-Americans view children: as capable human beings. They are not afraid to assign children big responsibilities. While they do this, they are also understanding of any mistakes the children make along the way and are very guiding. This is seen in *If You Believe* when the parents easily forgive Shakti for procrastinating in feeding her siblings; however, they also treat the subject in a manner that shows Shakti that there is a lesson to be learned from this mistake (66-68). By doing this, they demonstrate their belief in Shakti's ability to grow and develop while learning from her mistakes. This is also seen in the book when the parents tell the kids about financial situation of the family (71-76). They expect the kids to understand the situation and expect the children to continuing helping them reach the goal of making the family financially stable. Through this, we see the mannerism in which Nepalese-Americans treat other people and children, and therefore, see their worldview.

We also see the worldview of Nepalese-Americans when we are given the chance to see the character's self-perception. Besides being willing to commit to the big, group task at hand, each of the characters also takes the initiative to take responsibility not to succumb to the disheartening turn in life without any hesitation; in other words, the characters are brave and courageous. An example of this is seen in my book, also. Each of the parents confidently take on extra shifts at work in order to free the family from a financial burden (53). We also see this in the dream sequence

when Shanti, after falling during her initial attempt at flight, is not afraid to try another way to fly (96-97). Through these, we see the self-perception of a Nepalese-American, a part of a Nepalese-American's worldview. This self-perception shows a strong belief in the self and a belief in the ability to succeed.³

Cultural authenticity of a literature is also established through the credibility of the person authoring the book. In other words, does the writer have the experience to provide an accurate and astute representation of the culture they are talking about? Does the author sharply distinguish the subtleties found in the culture? Currently, most of the books that fall under the Nepalese-American children's literature genre are written by outsider or are meant to create "distinctiveness within a mosaic of competing cultures," by focusing on foods and festivals (Chattarji 425). Chattarji comments on a similar trend in the Vietnamese-American children's literature: "[B]ecause distinctions are predicated on easily discernible and relatively superficial markers, they tend to create stereotypes which [exotify] the Vietnamese, thereby rendering complex culture-specific events . . . into cultural products for consumption by mainstream America" (425).

³ In fact, we can trace this strong sense of self and confidence in one's ability to the famous Gurkhali soldiers:

"The Gorkha (also spelt as Gurkha) soldiers are a dominant force in the Indian Army who have completed 200 years in the Armed Forces since their integration on April 24, 1815. They are courageous in battle and have won many gallantry awards and military honors. Gorkha was the usual designation of the reigning dynasty of [Nepal] and the designation had no ethnic connotation. Historically, the terms 'Gurkha' and 'Gurkhali' are synonymous with 'Nepali' and were derived from the name of old kingdom of Gorkha (Gurkha), a hill town and present day district of Gorkha (~fifty kilometers west of Kathmandu) from which the kingdom of Nepal expanded. As the kingdom spread across the Himalayas from Tibet to Sikkim, the king's warriors, taken from all groups in the area, came to be known as Gorkha soldiers." (Preet et al.).

In my book, I am choosing not to focus as much on the foods and festivals as on the dynamics of a new immigrant family and the challenges that the family may face. Food and festivals provide some distinctive elements for the Nepalese-American culture that can inform the readers but may also create stereotypes. By doing this, I am hoping to provide an authentic narrative that emphasizes the lives of Nepalese-American families and the day-to-day stories. This will be especially important in the form of a children's literature because this will provide the Nepalese-American children a book where they and their culture will not feel exotified.

In addition, my book also fits the definition of "cultural authenticity," as given by Bishop in "Reframing the debate about cultural authenticity". It strongly demonstrates the "aspects of the cultural, physical, or social environment" of the Nepalese-American children, and it has "authenticating details" such as "grammatical and lexical accuracy of the characters' dialect, and taken-for-granted information possessed by members of a cultural group" (Bishop 27-28). Throughout the book, I have used dialects (through words and expressions) that only native Nepalese use. For example, phrases like "Hare Rama!" are left untranslated (78). This is because, even though the phrase is most similar to "Oh my god!" in Nepali, the two phrases have different meanings and a completely different backstory and cultural context that makes it inappropriate to replace "Hare Rama!" with "Oh my god!" By not forcing these specific words and expression into a translation in English, I am preserving the authenticity of the interactions that pass between the characters.

I also choose to focus only on the core family and the interaction within family members because when young children migrate with their family, the part of

family that migrates with them becomes very important to them. This family consists of the few people that have consistently been there for them despite the drastic change in culture, environment, and language. In my book, the family ends up leaving behind the grandparents, many relatives, and friends in the process of moving to the United States. The painful truth of this situation is most succinctly seen when Shanti confides in her mother about her disinterest in moving to the U.S. in the morning of their departure. She tells her about all of the things that she is leaving behind when they leave Nepal (32-35). We also see this family dynamic in the narration of the story. The book is centered heavily around the interactions between friends, neighbors, and relatives before the family leaves for the United States. However, after they move to the U.S., we just see interactions between the five family members: Shanti, Shakti, Sushant, Aama, and Baba. Furthermore, the family-centered narration is important to many immigrant families, especially for Nepalese-American families because of the intimate nature of family relationships and because of the collectivistic values they hold.

The Nepalese society is collectivistic (Strong 92). This is a culture “in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (Hofstede). This is also seen in the book when Shakti is asked to take care of her siblings. Shakti is asked to invest significant time into baby-sitting and chores for the well-being of the family. Shakti never questions the task that is assigned to her and does it with diligence, even when she gets in a fight with her siblings in the process; this shows loyalty to the family. This further emphasizes that the family-

centered narration is appropriate to tell a story of an immigrant child and family in the case of Nepalese-Americans.

The cultural authenticity of the book is also seen through the identity crisis Shanti faces, and it comes with the clash between the Nepalese collectivist culture and the American individualist culture. “Identity is a major issue for any nondominant group in a society. Many ethnic people, particularly people of color, juggle with two (if not more) cultures, and they express the situation in various ways” (Gilton 9). Coming from a collectivistic society, many Nepalese-American families place pressure on their kids to be successful in their education and careers because this determines that the family “made it.” Furthermore, the definition of success is very limited to doing well in school and getting high-paying, white-collar jobs. As kids grow up in the American culture, they may determine that they do not agree with the plans and hopes that their family has for them. Or they may struggle with succeeding in school and find that they are not interested in the career pathway that their family chooses for them. Therefore, the children may face a crisis where their interests and the family values do not align. In this case, the family and the child need to decide between individualism or collectivism. In my book, Shanti’s parents decide to migrate the family to the United States mainly so that their children could have access to better education and resources. Due to this, there is a lot of pressure for Shanti and her siblings to make sure that they work hard to meet this definition of success for their family. Shanti’s siblings “make it”; however, Shanti worries that she will not be able to do the same. She must deviate from the collectivist thinking to find that she has unique abilities that she will become successful in her own way, even

though this success does not fall under the definition of success she and her family holds.

Finally, it is important to step away from my book to focus on the discussion about the creation of a more significant base of multicultural children's literature. A significant base of multicultural children's literature can be created through an industry and community-wide emphasis on making and publishing a variety of books on the nationality and ethnicity level. Currently, there is a race-centered drive to create more multicultural literature, and it has been important historically to do this. It has been "necessary for people within these different groups (such as those from various Native American or Asian nations) to work together" (Gilton 3). It is still necessary for these groups to work together because of the ongoing prevalence of racism. However, this may not be the most effective technique to increase the number of multicultural children's books and the number of ethnicities they represent.

Before the creation of the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) in 1965, there was a limited selection of multicultural books that accurately represent the different racial groups. "The CIBC did several major things to change that. They offered prizes to unpublished writers, analyzed and criticized existing materials on diverse people, and strongly encouraged people from the mainstream to work with authors, producers, and leaders of color" (Gilton 50). The work of CIBC "launched the careers of several notable authors, including Walter Dean Meyers, Mildred Taylor, Sharon Bell Mathis, Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, and Cruz Martel" and the creation of significantly more literature representing people of color (50-51). The CIBC tried to set up such structures for all the races; however, the lack of significant

increase in the quantity of Asian-American children's books over thirty-six years shows that there were some shortcomings in the attempts of the CIBC. As there is a shortage of books, there is also "a serious shortage of Asian American writers who have been published by mainstream presses" (129). Furthermore, there is only "one prize being offered for the writers of Asian American children's literature," the Asian Pacific American Award for Literature (129). The lack of awards in the Asian-American genre reflects the lack of support for potential authors of Asian-American children's literature. Furthermore, there are about forty-eight countries in the continent Asia, so there needs to be some action taken soon to increase representation of these countries. Specifically, there needs to be a creation of literature committees and an award given annually (or biannually) for each of these Asian ethnic groups in the United States. These committees and awards will serve to inspire, encourage, and motivate writers within each of these groups to place their story in a printed form.

Overall, my book is culturally authentic and provides a strong narrative for many Nepalese-American children to relate to. "Children of all backgrounds need a variety of role models, some of whom look like them and come from their culture" (Gilton 73). Therefore, it is imperative that a larger selection of culturally authentic literature representing numerous nationalities be available for children to read as soon as possible. Furthermore, this type of literature is also beneficial for children not belonging to the culture and nationality because it acts as a "window when it lets children see glimpses of the lives and experiences of others who are different from themselves (Lehman et al., 2010), thus allowing them to enter another world to 'view, participate, and empathize, and participate emotionally, begin to appreciate other

people's struggles, and pain, and to develop respect for diversity'" (Tang 1). In addition, with a culturally authentic literature, children outside of the culture are given the tools to understand people belonging to the culture.

In the case of Nepalese-American children, a culturally authentic literature may help their friends understand that their life does not revolve around trekking and climbing mountains because Nepal is most famous for having the tallest mountain in the world. In fact, the prevalence of more multicultural literatures representing the Nepalese-American children may make their country and community more aware of the existence of the nationality. This is because a lot of people are unfamiliar with Nepal, the Nepalese people, and the Nepalese-American people. In addition, multicultural literature is able to communicate the needs and problems, or struggles, of the Nepalese-American children and community. Therefore, this will help them receive aid, attention, and help. If there are more multicultural children's literature representing each of the nationality groups in the U.S., these groups of people would also get the benefits of attention, more understanding, and support from the community.

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If You

Believe

Swechya Banskota

Acknowledgement

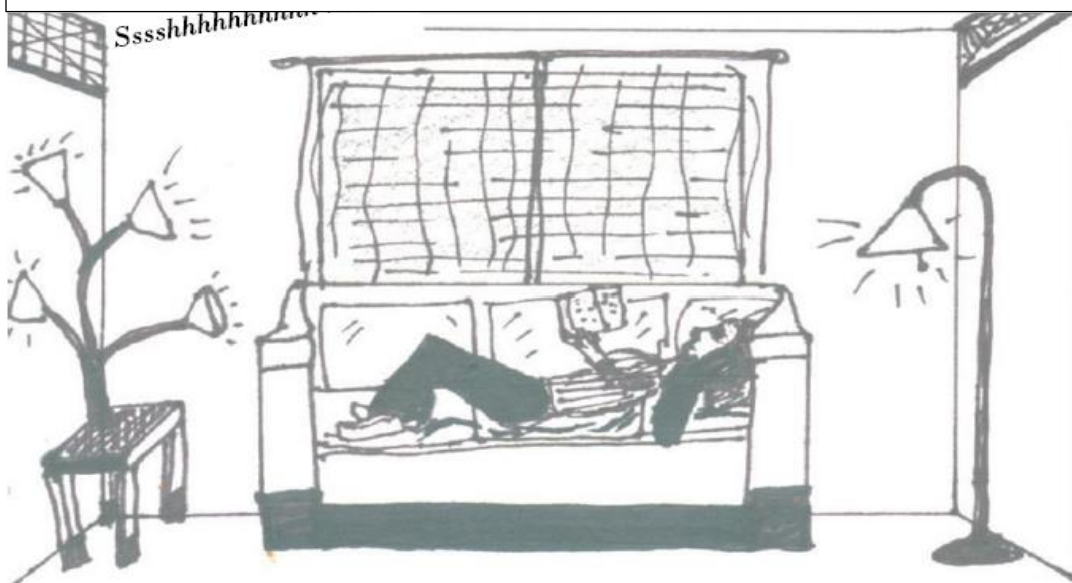
Mamu and Baba, thank you for being a constant source of inspiration and motivation. Sandesh, thank you for being the best brother I could ever ask for. I love you all so much!

If You Believe

The Fall

If You Believe

I was reading a book when. . .



. . . there was loud thunder.



If You Believe



Then, the lights went out, and it was dead silent.

Cricket!

Cricket!

Cricket!

If You Believe

I tried to shuffle my way through the dark towards the window carefully but hit my knee on the table.

Shuffle shuffle

Thunk!

Ouch!

It was eerily quiet, but I didn't mind. I felt something significant coming.

Sssshhhhhhhhhhhhhh . . .

Cricket!

Cricket!

..whooooooooooooooooosh.....

If You Believe

As I inched towards the window, the sounds slowly faded.

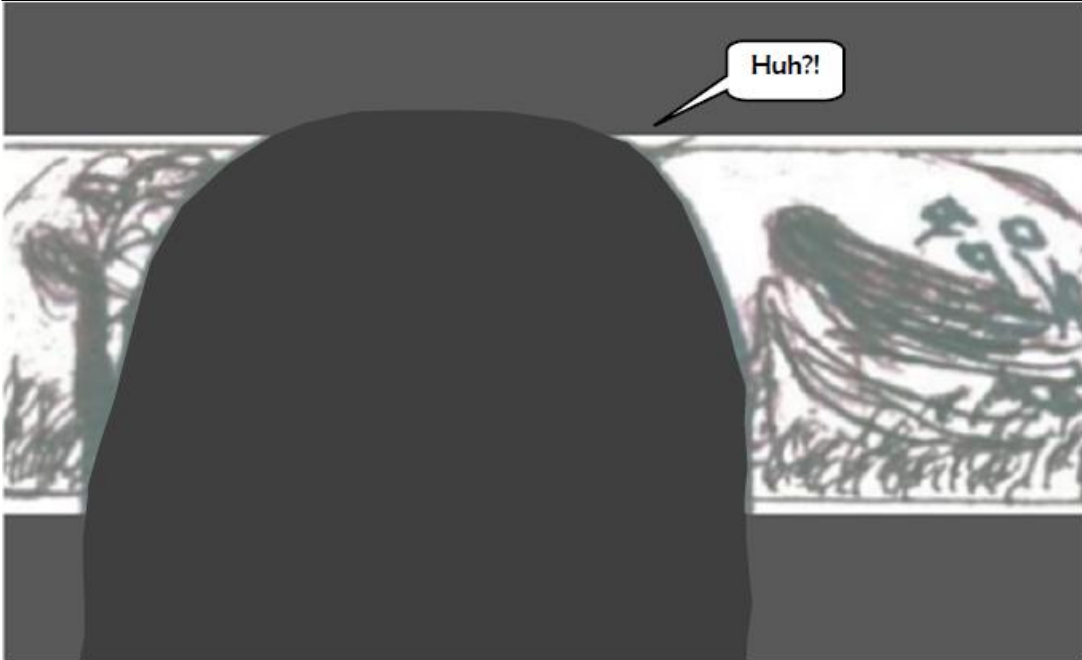


I parted the blinds to peek outside, disturbing the silence in the process.



If You Believe

I saw my older sister, Shakti, standing in the wind, her posture and arms open as if welcoming the incoming storm.



The hissing sounds tried to break the silence.

Sisssssssssssssssss . . .



But I was distracted trying to figure out what my sister was doing. I admired how fearless she looked.



If You Believe



I decided to let the blinds fall and go outside to find out what my sister was up to.



If You Believe

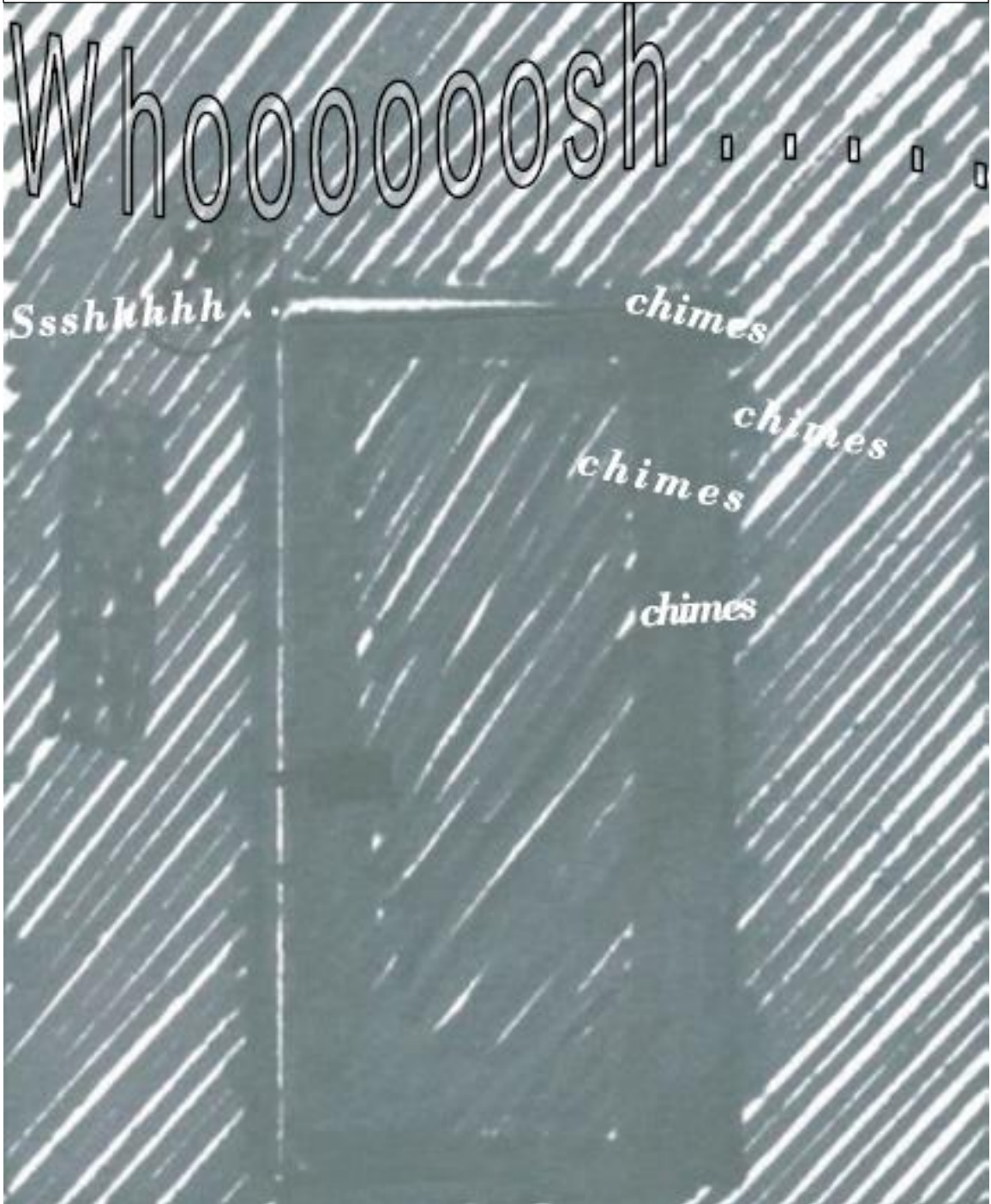
I tried to find my way to the door in the dark, but I jammed my toe on my way there.

CLUNK!

Aa-a-ouch! Why am I so clumsy?

If You Believe

As I neared the door, I found myself running towards it. I got closer, and the mysterious noise grew louder and louder until I was consciously processing the stimuli.



If You Believe

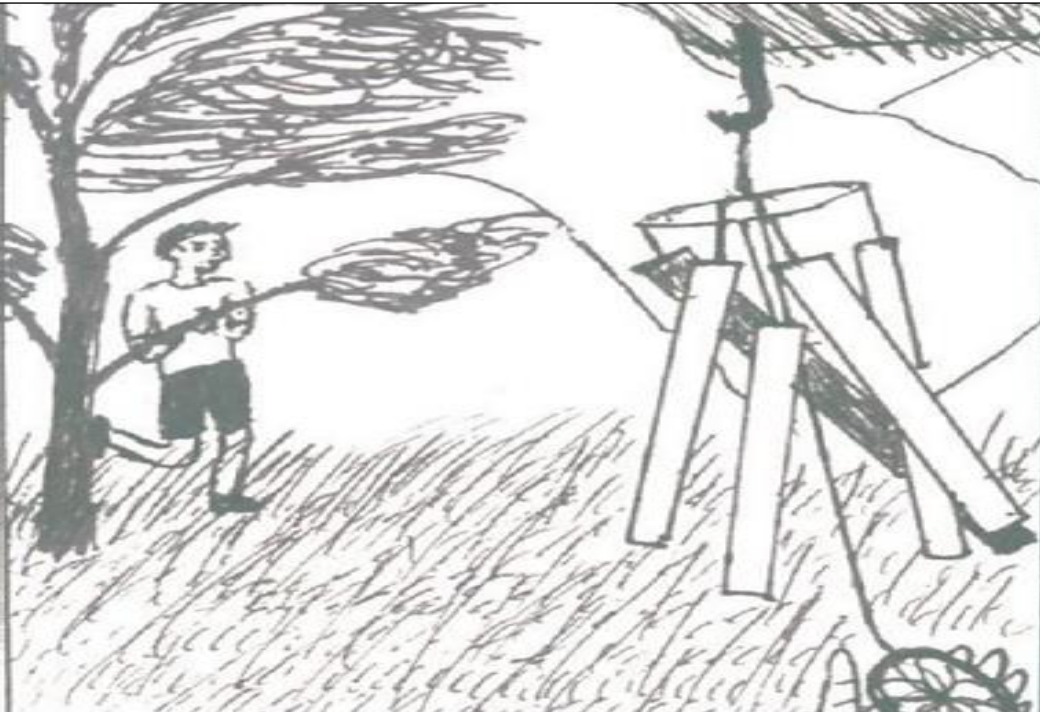
The door flung open when I pulled it, as if it was unhinged.



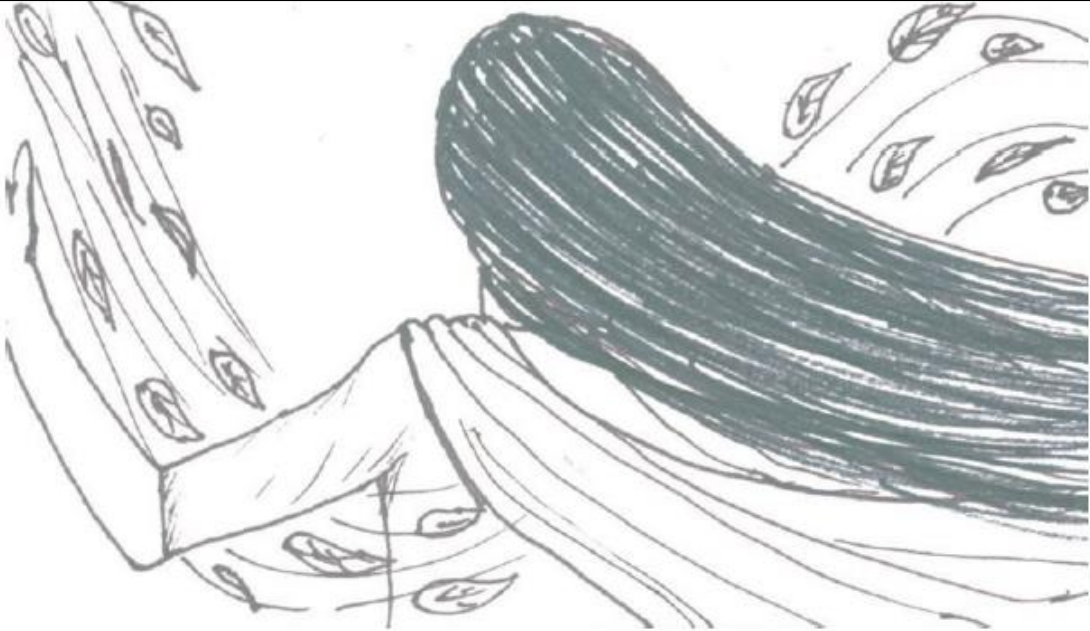
If You Believe



I hadn't realized that my brother was also outside.



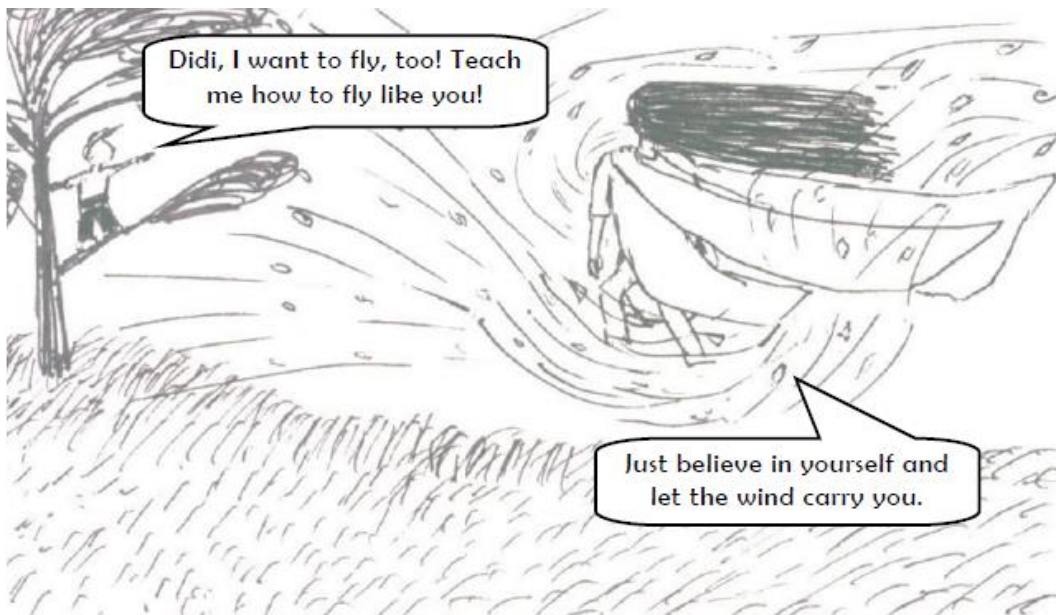
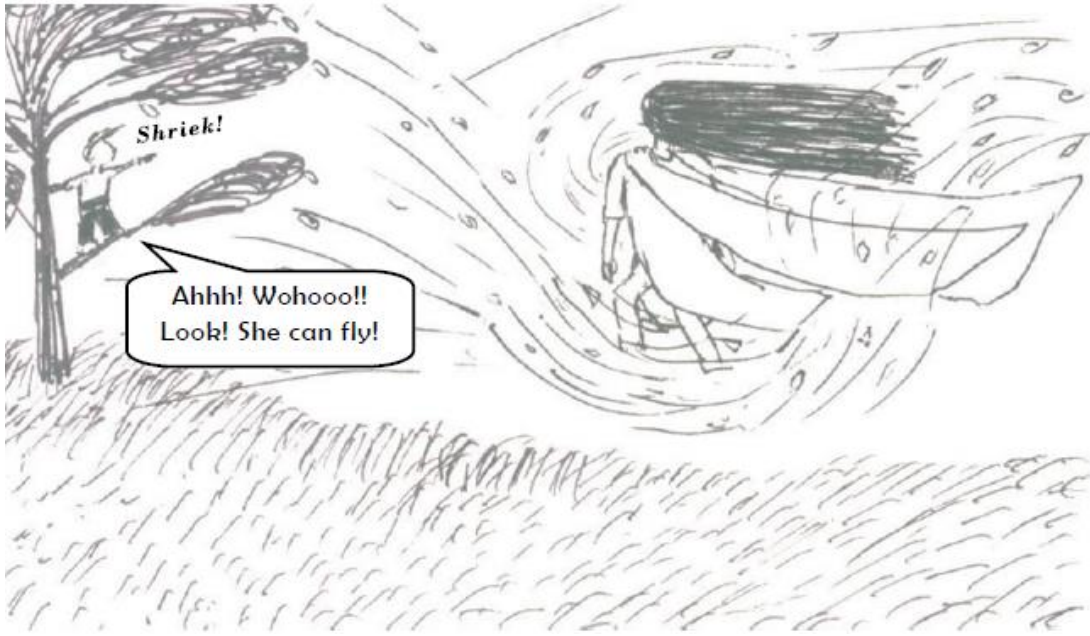
Puzzled, I turned to find my sister gathering wind under her arms, her shawl, and her hair. I was amazed.



Slowly, she caught more and more wind until her feet no longer seemed to be firmly planted on the ground.

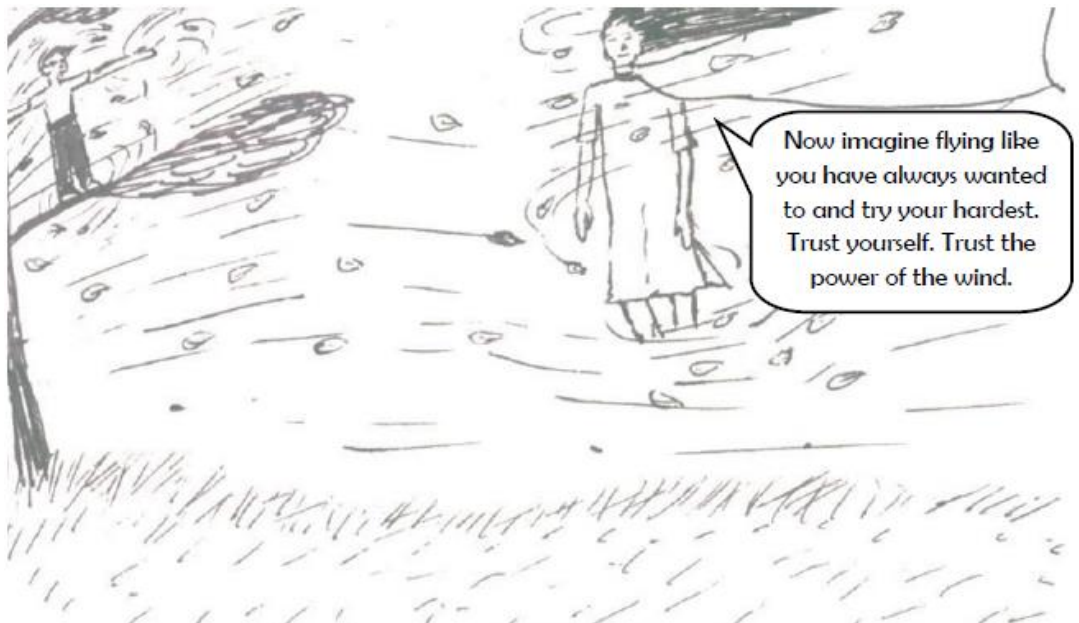
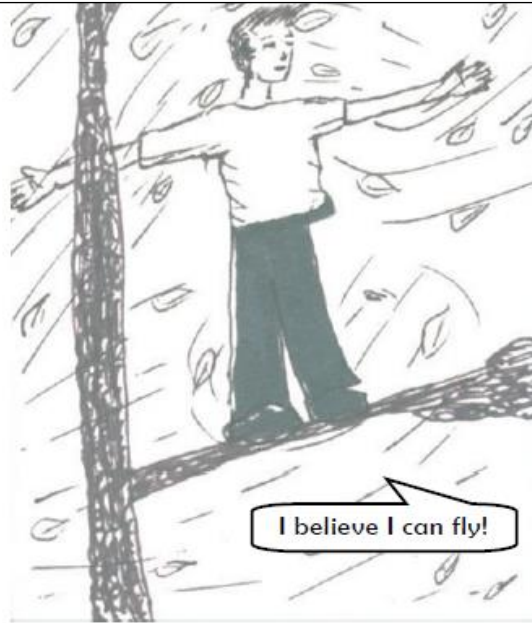
If You Believe

It didn't take her long to catch more wind and be lifted even higher in the air.



If You Believe

My brother took her advice to heart and started to apply it right away! I was still trying to process what was going on.



If You Believe



Oh no!

I could no longer look, so I covered my eyes
before he hit the ground. . .

If You Believe

Agggggghhhhhhhhhhhh!!!



If You Believe

Lottery Winners

If You Believe

When my family was on its way to apply for the lottery that opens doors for millions of immigrants to come to the US, a cat crossed our path. . .



This poor cat would be remembered and demonized by my family for almost five years. . . The most attention a stray cat has probably gotten in Nepal!

If You Believe



Yes, that's me with the crazy hair and kohl all around my eyes!

From left to right: Sushant, Baba, Shanti (me!), Aama, Shakti

(I basically ruined the only family picture we have of when we were in Nepal!)



The picture above is from that day at the DV Center. We decided to take a family picture when we were taking single, passport-size photos for the lottery application.

If You Believe

Half-a-year later. . . Well, we won the lottery and even ended up getting an interview at the embassy. . .



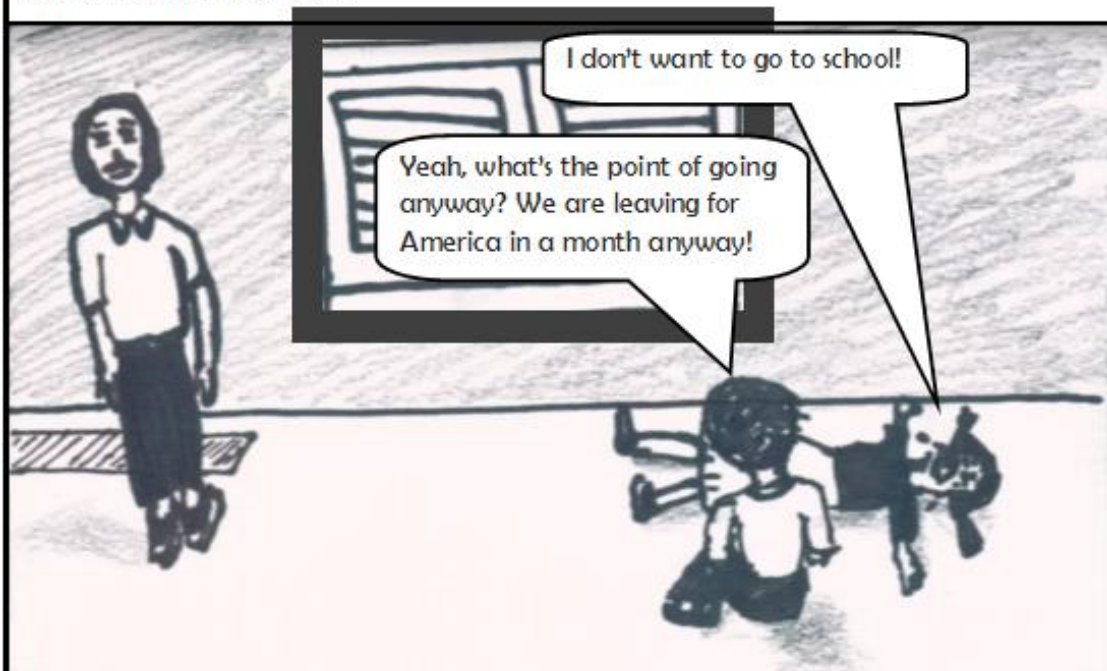
. . . And our visa application got approved, so we forgot the black cat that crossed our path that day—at least temporarily. Our bad luck awaited us in near the future.

If You Believe

In the months leading up to the visa interview, my parents had tried to control us by saying that if we were naughty, the American Embassy wouldn't let us go to the US. However, they used that trick even after the visa approval...



They used that trick a lot...

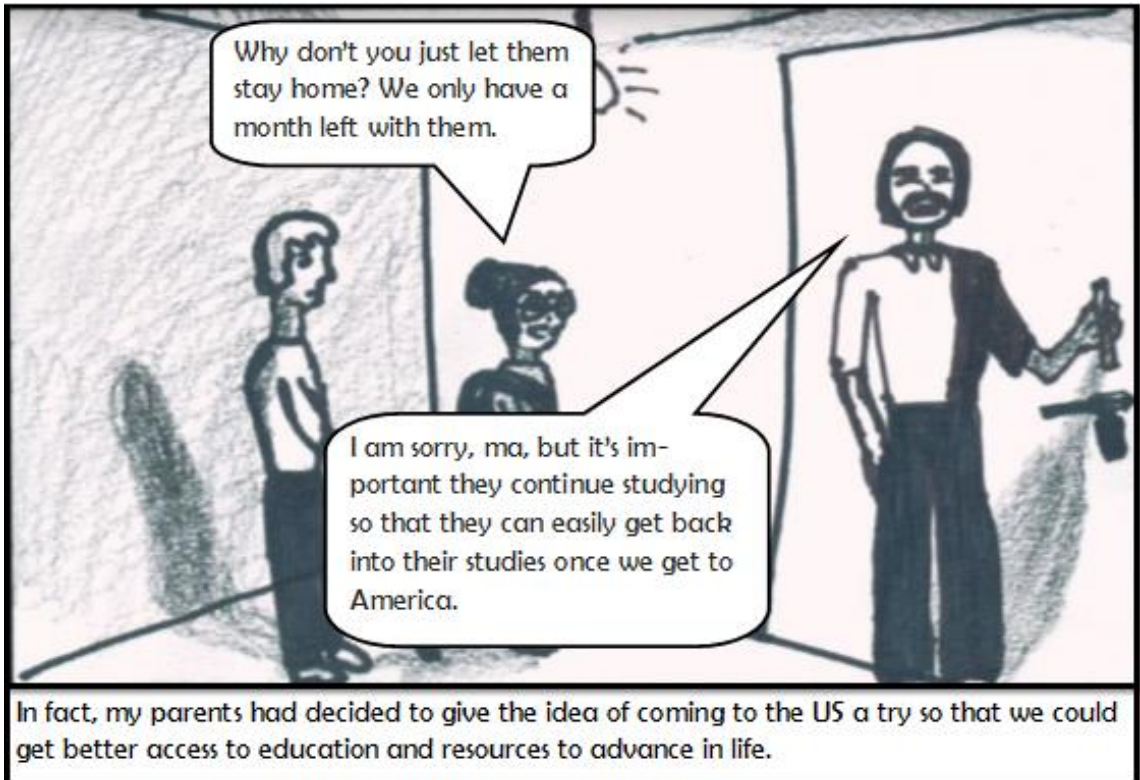


If You Believe

And it worked. Every. Single. Time.



If You Believe



If You Believe

The Breakdown

If You Believe

Pretty soon, the time came for us to depart. We had to leave very early in the morning. The sun had barely lightened the clear sky, so I was able to see the silhouette of the mountains surrounding the Kathmandu valley and even the Himalayas in the horizon.



The clear weather was very rare for the season. It seemed magical at the moment. Nature knew that it would be a long time before we would be able to see Nepal's beauty again.

If You Believe

Even though it was very early, people from my village were all coming towards our house to say goodbye.



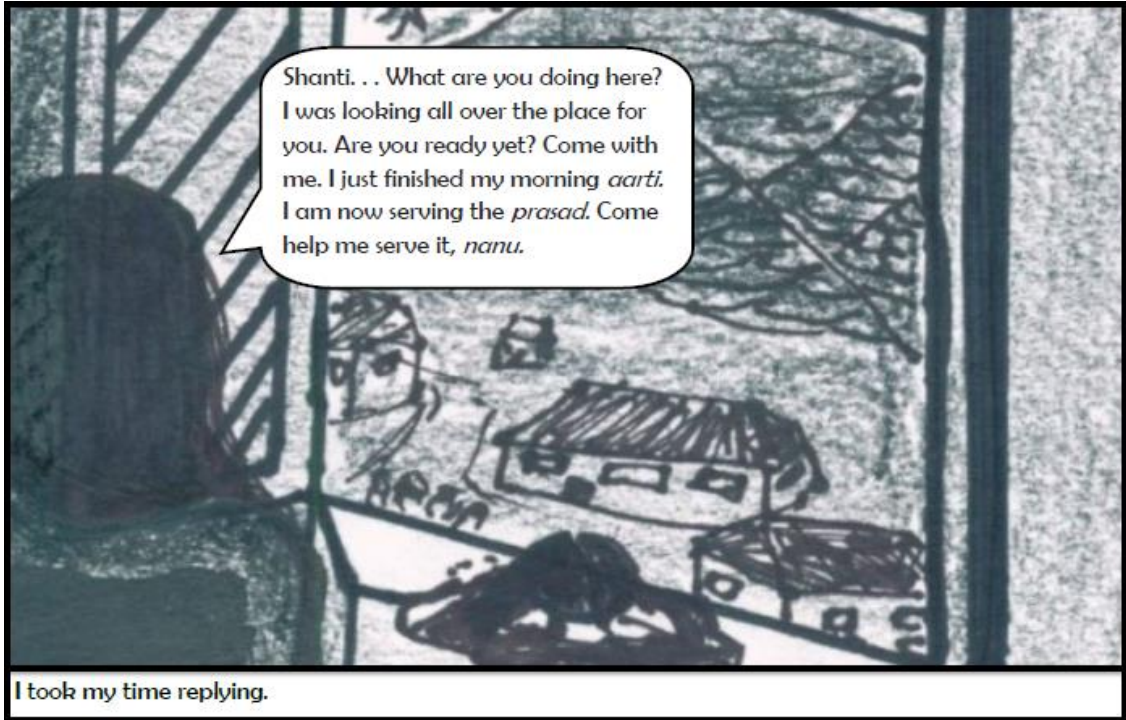
I recognized a few of my friends, my brother's friends, my sister's friends, my parents' friends, and my grandparents' friends. People that frequently came to our place. People I was leaving behind and wouldn't see for a long time.

If You Believe

I guess the gravity of the situation got to me because Aama found me crying by the windowsill. When Aama first came into the room, she said, "Shiva," remembering, not my dad, but Lord Shiva, the Hindu god. She says this whenever she is surprised. She was awed by the sight of light glinting off the mountains on the eastern facing side, making the mountains appear golden and majestic. She was then taken aback by the sight of me crying.

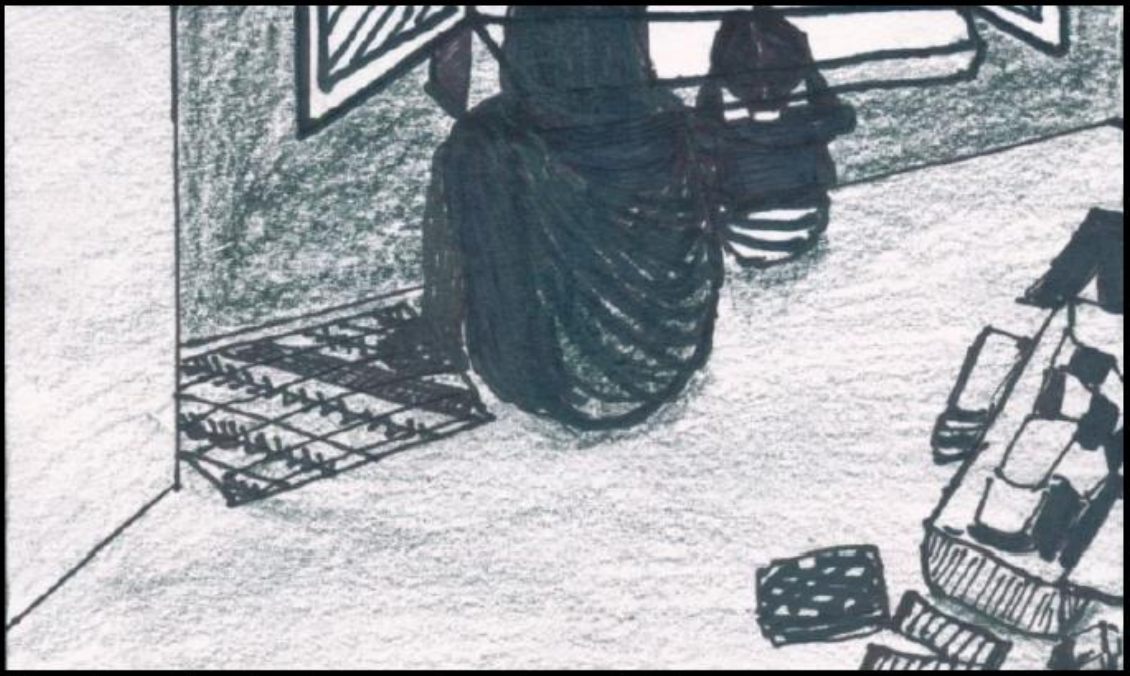


If You Believe



If You Believe

By the time I replied, she had come down to sit with me and watch the view.



We sat there in silence for a long time, sharing the mutual feeling.



If You Believe

We sat in the silence again for a while.



If You Believe

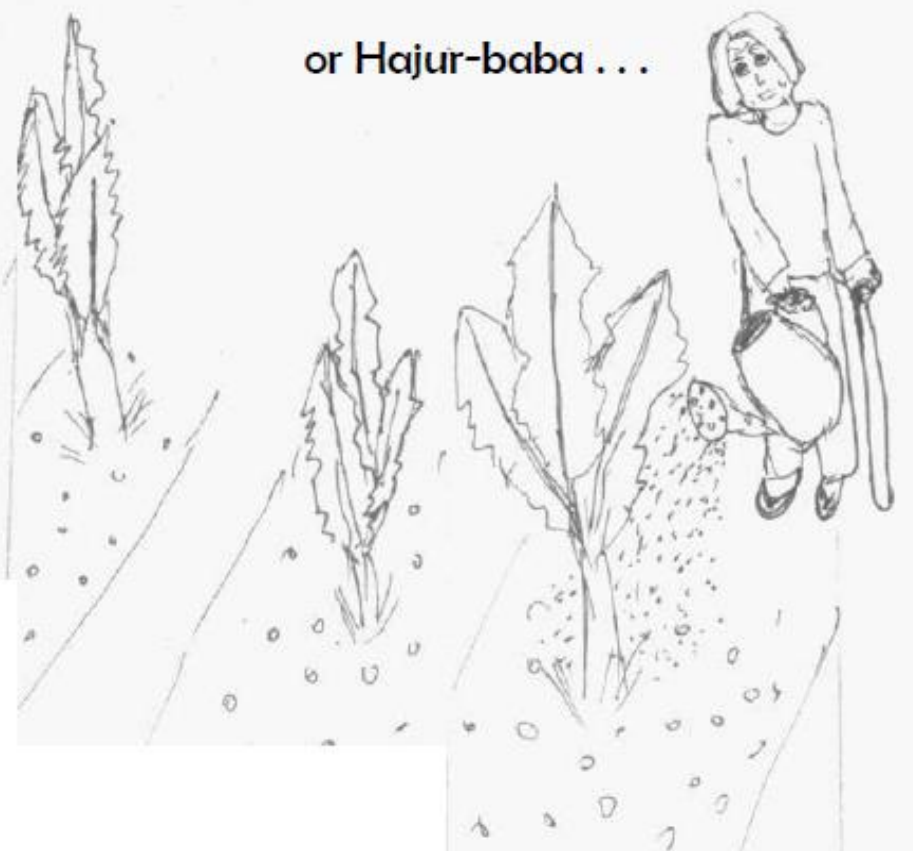


Because I don't want to leave . . .

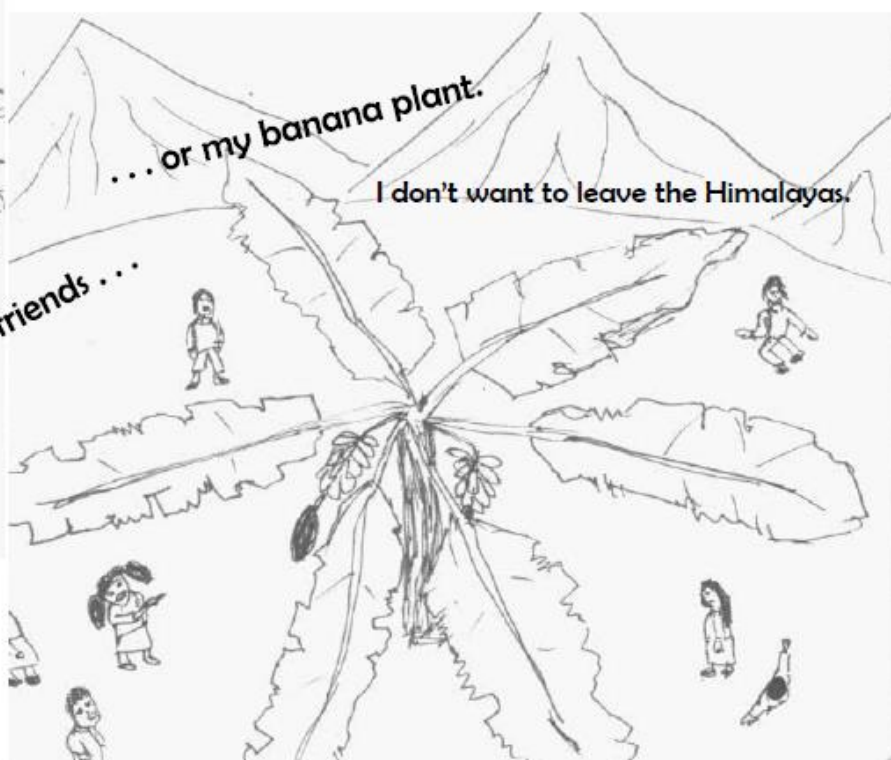


Hajur-aama . . .

or Hajur-baba . . .



If You Believe



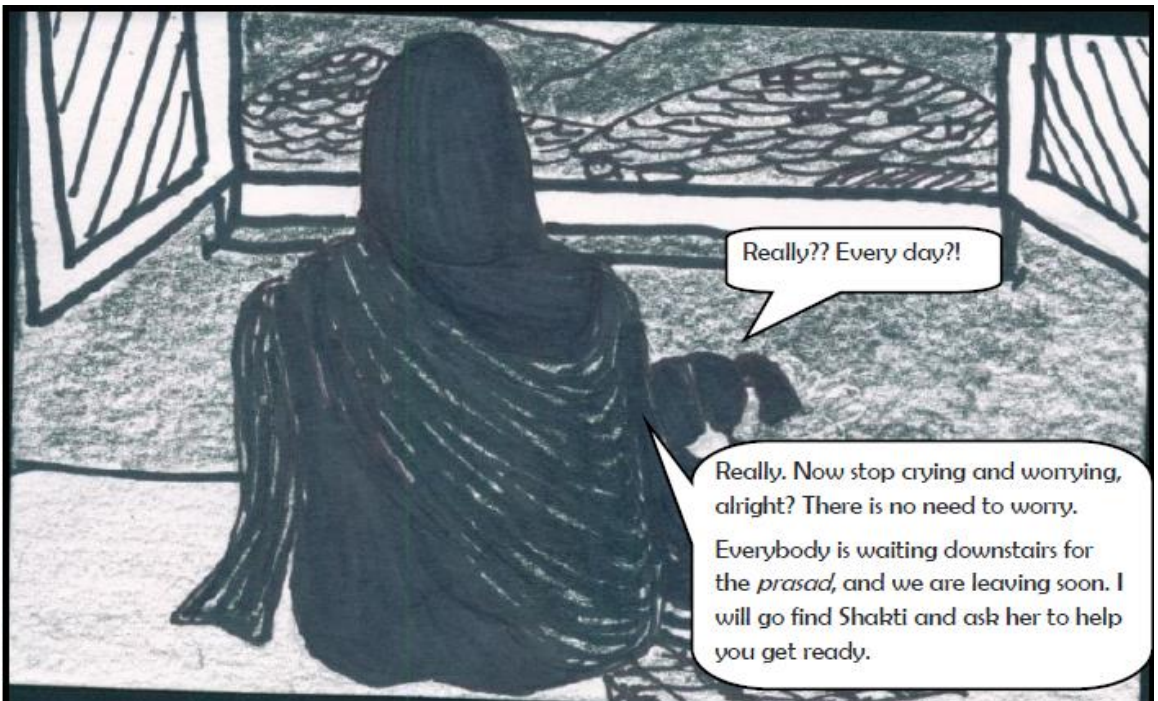
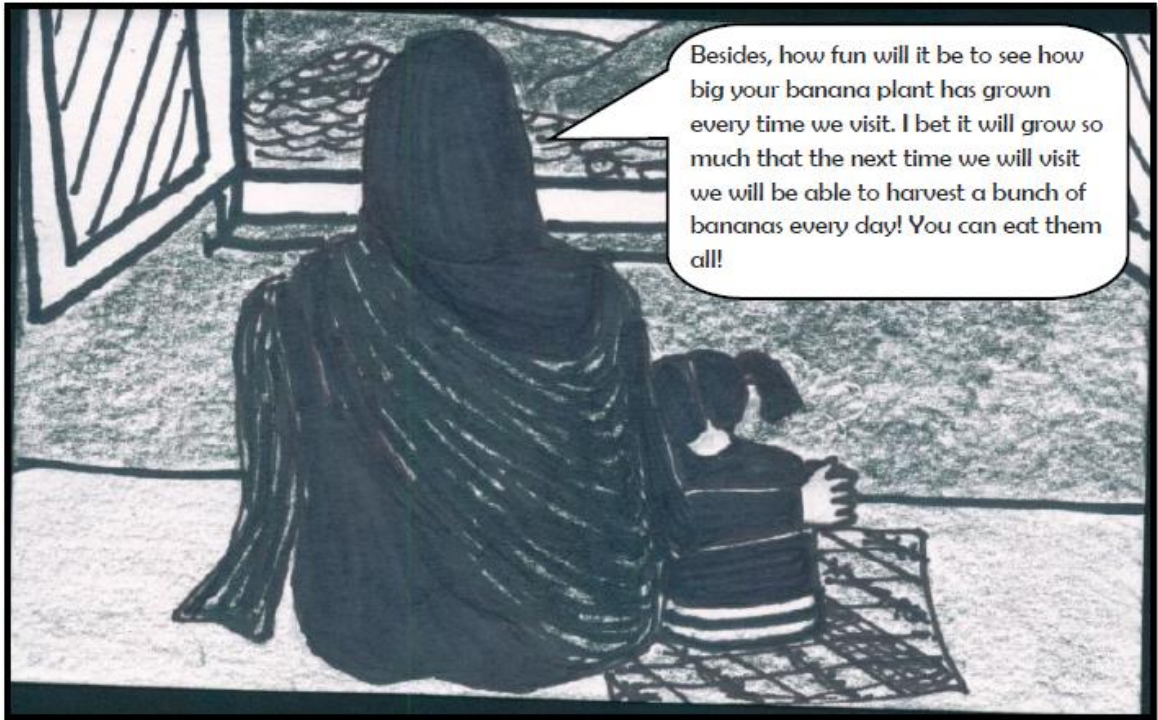
If You Believe



If You Believe

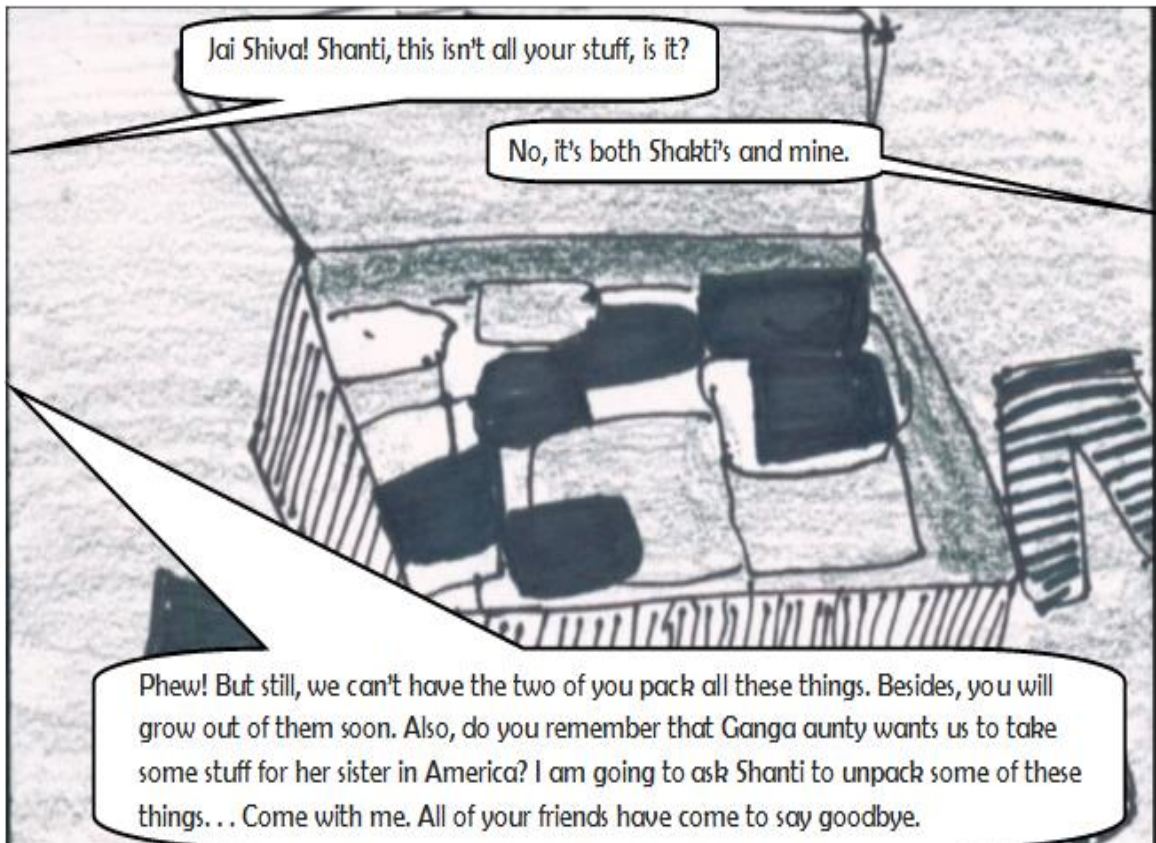


If You Believe



Years later, my mom told me that this conversation worked like a therapy session for her, also. It made her feel strong and ready to tackle the obstacles we would face in the US.

If You Believe



If You Believe

The Farewell

If You Believe

Yes, indeed, my mom was correct. Our tiny living room was packed with people.



My sister and her friends were huddled in one side of the room.



If You Believe

They had become friends at a very young age, so it was understandable that they were heartbroken to part at the age of fourteen. I couldn't even comprehend the pain my sister must have felt at the thought of leaving her friends behind in Nepal.



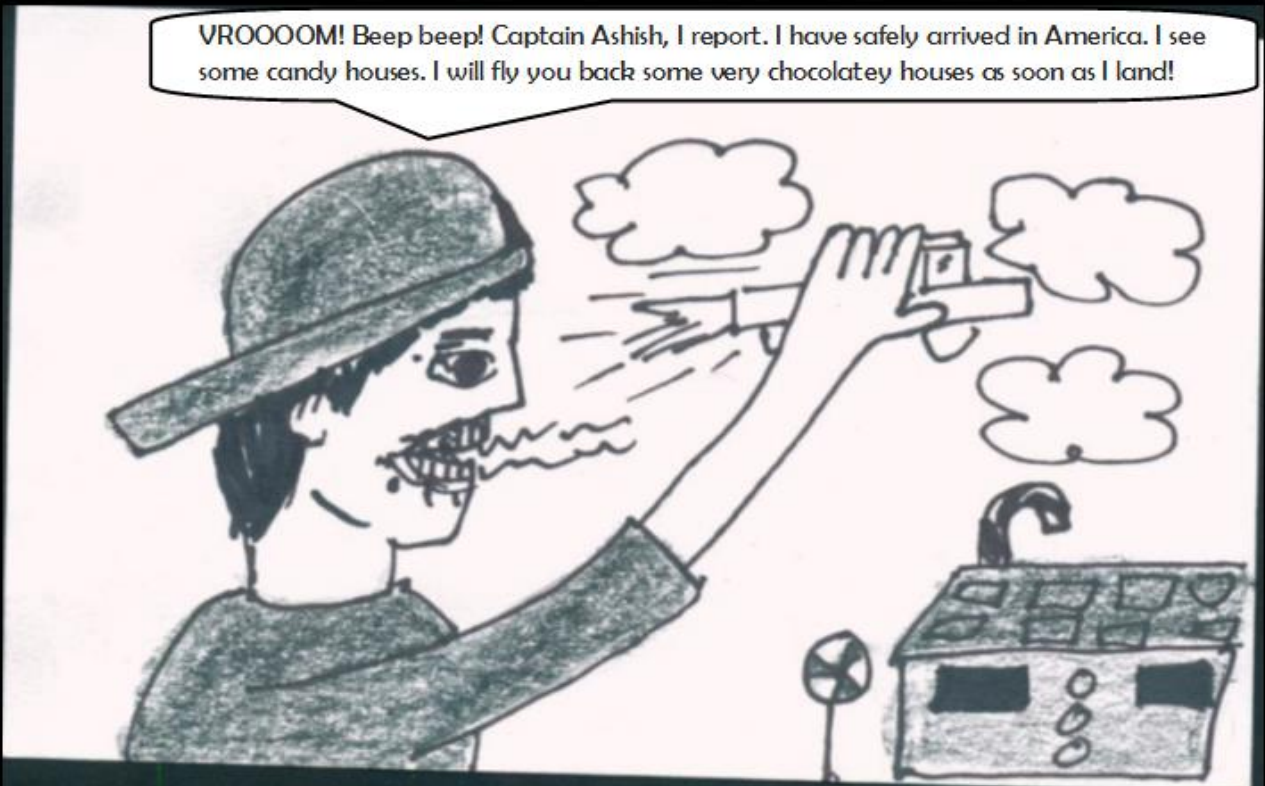
My brother's friends had also come to wish him farewell. They tried to make most of the little playtime they had available.



If You Believe

Like a lot of kids in Nepal, we were misled by some cartoons we saw in TV into thinking that the houses in the US were made of chocolate.

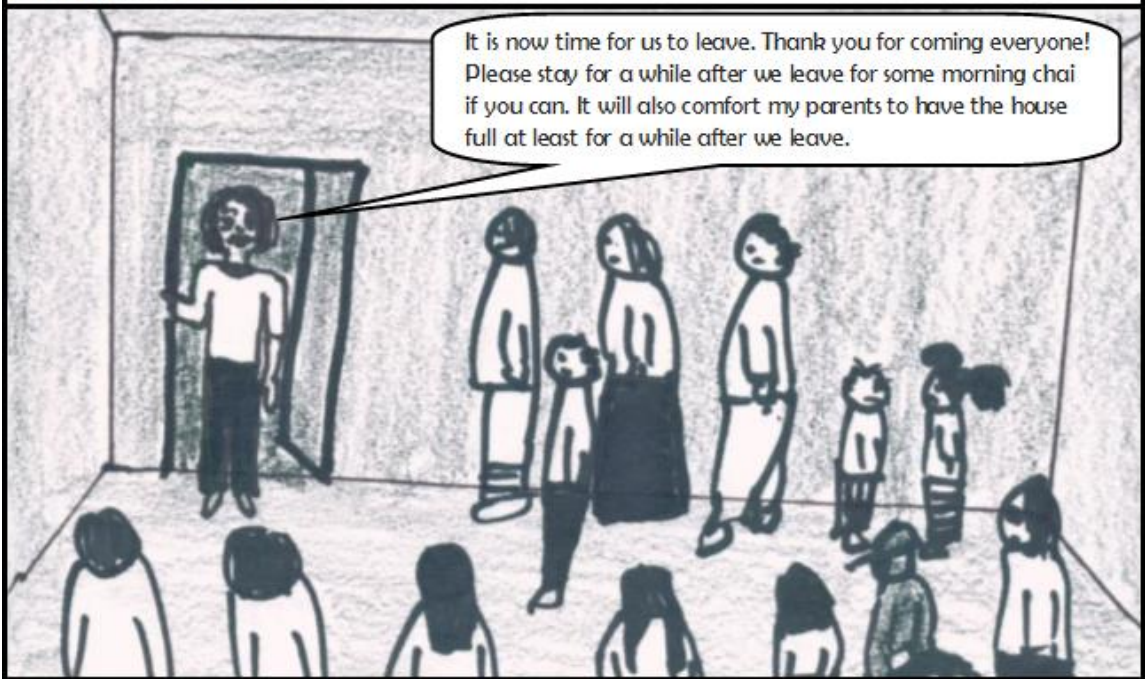
VROOOOM! Beep beep! Captain Ashish, I report. I have safely arrived in America. I see some candy houses. I will fly you back some very chocolatey houses as soon as I land!



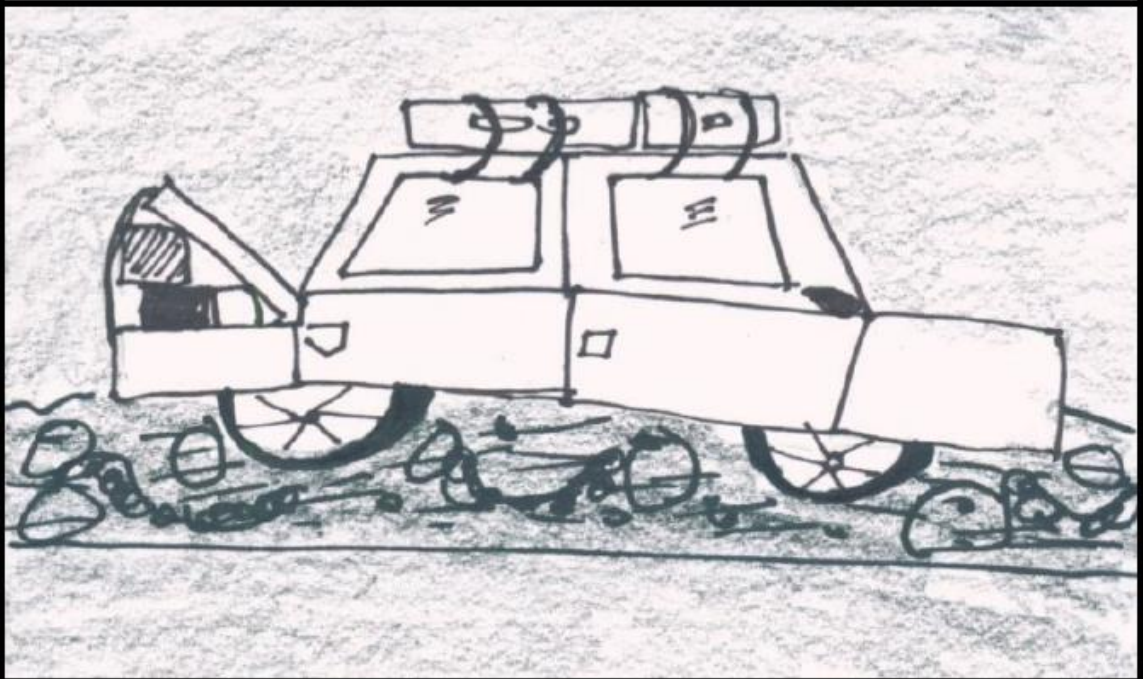
Finding out that it was not true was one of our biggest initial disappointments when we arrived in the US.

If You Believe

My brother was pulled out of his day-dream when my dad came to make an announcement nobody was ready to hear.



Pretty soon, we had everything loaded into the car.



If You Believe

By now, the rest of the village had also come to say goodbye. Our front yard was crowded with tearful faces.



My grandparents had prepared a traditional farewell by making us flower garlands. My mom put her sari's shawl over her head to show respect, but otherwise, my parents were speechless, both by sadness about departing and the gesture.



Out of the corner of her eyes, my mom saw my brother tearing up.

If You Believe

It was our turn, and none of us were prepared to say goodbye.



We stood stunned and dumbfounded, trying to digest all of the farewell wishes our grandparents told us.

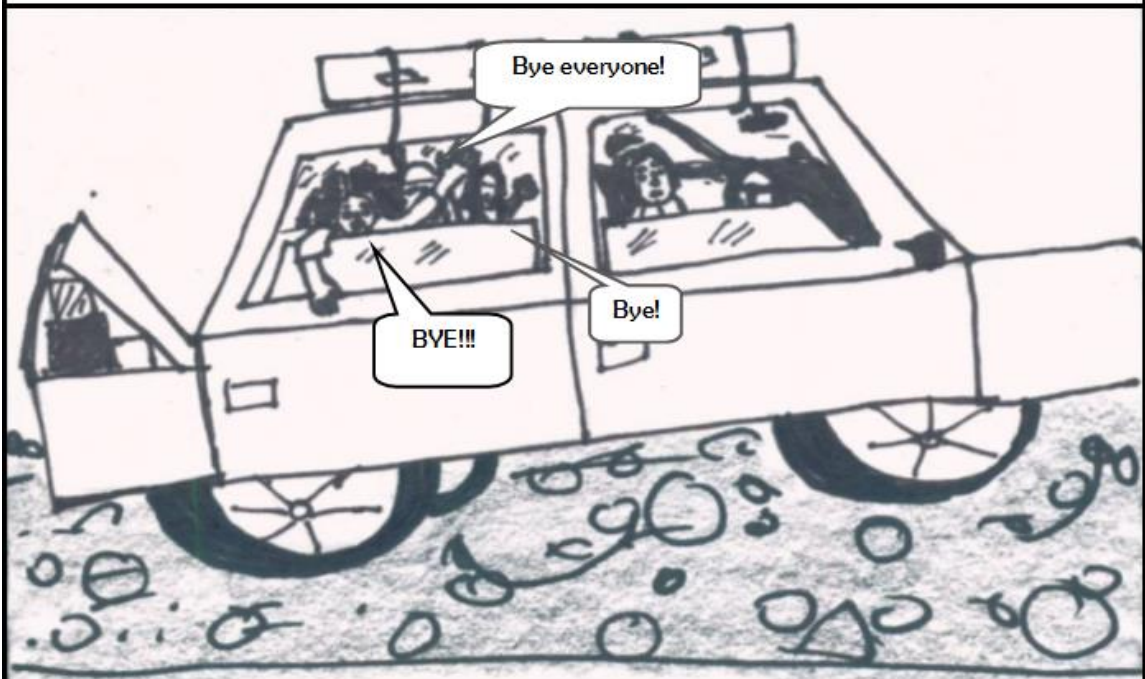


If You Believe

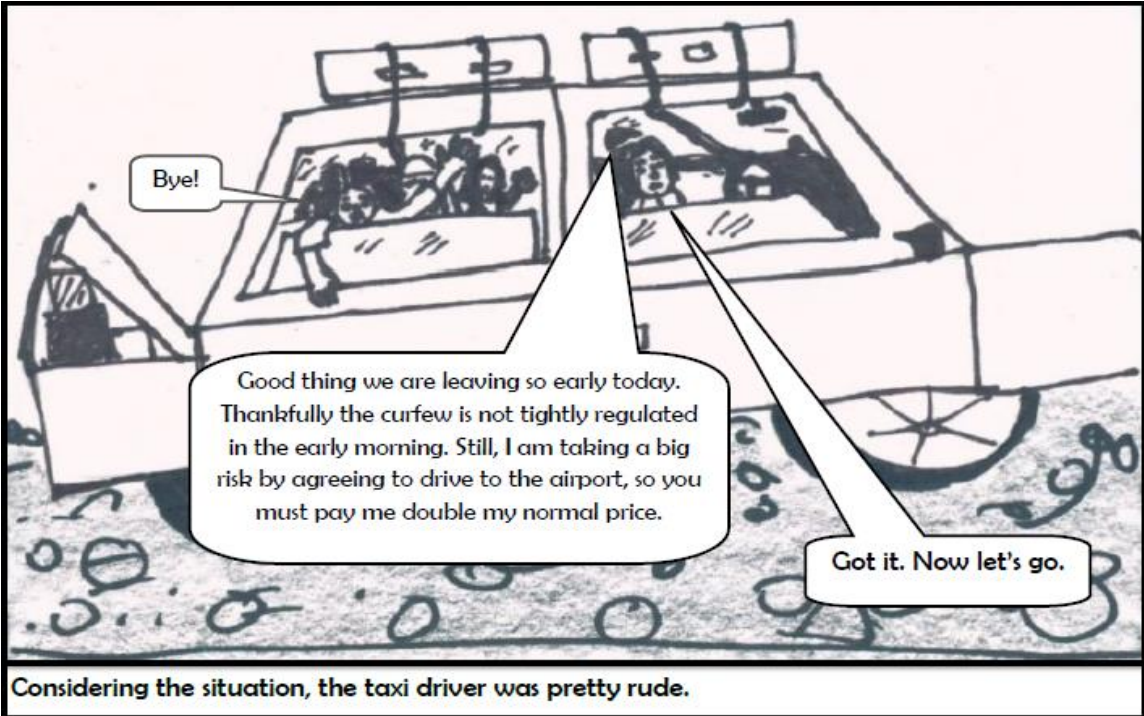
Finally, we came to our senses. I went to hug hajur-aama first and, then, hajur-baba. My brother reached towards their feet to get their blessings, and my sister thanked them and wished them the same.



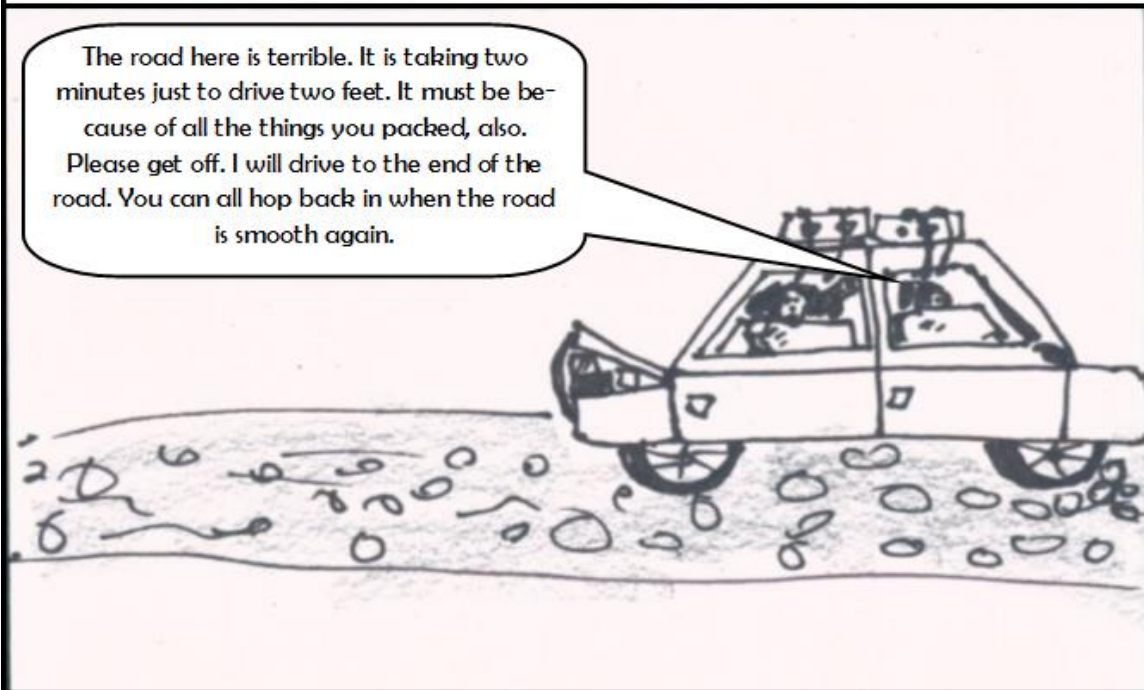
After we had climbed into the car, my siblings and I tearfully waved goodbye from the back of the car.



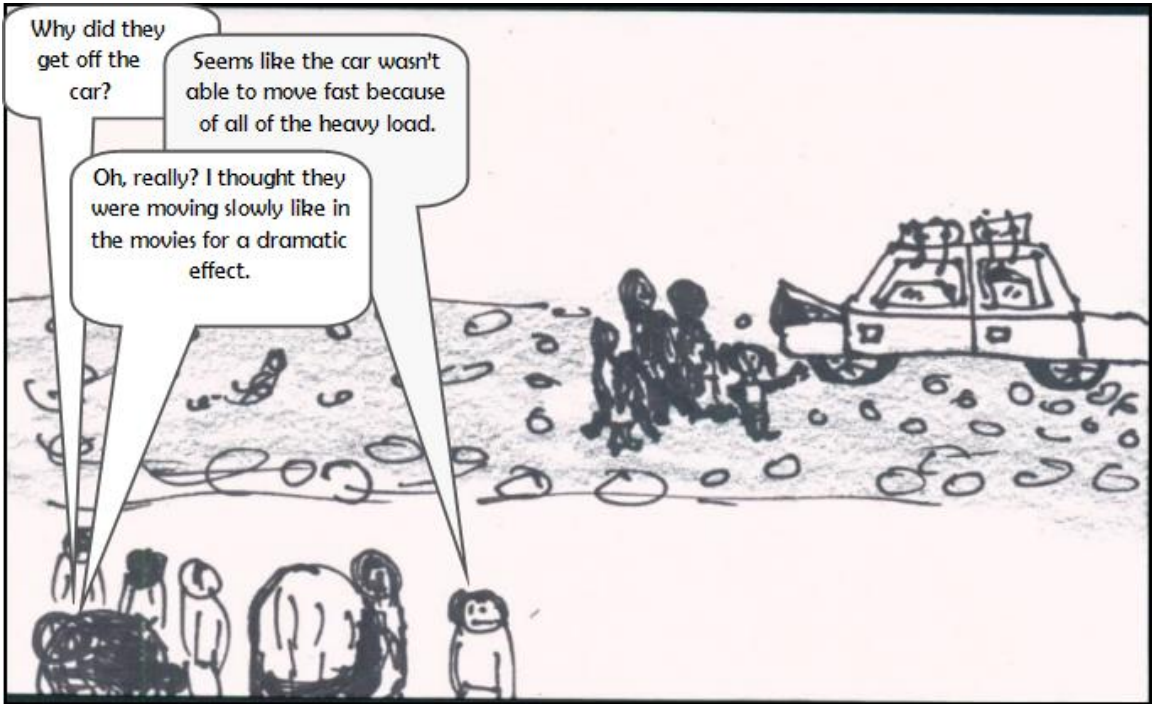
If You Believe



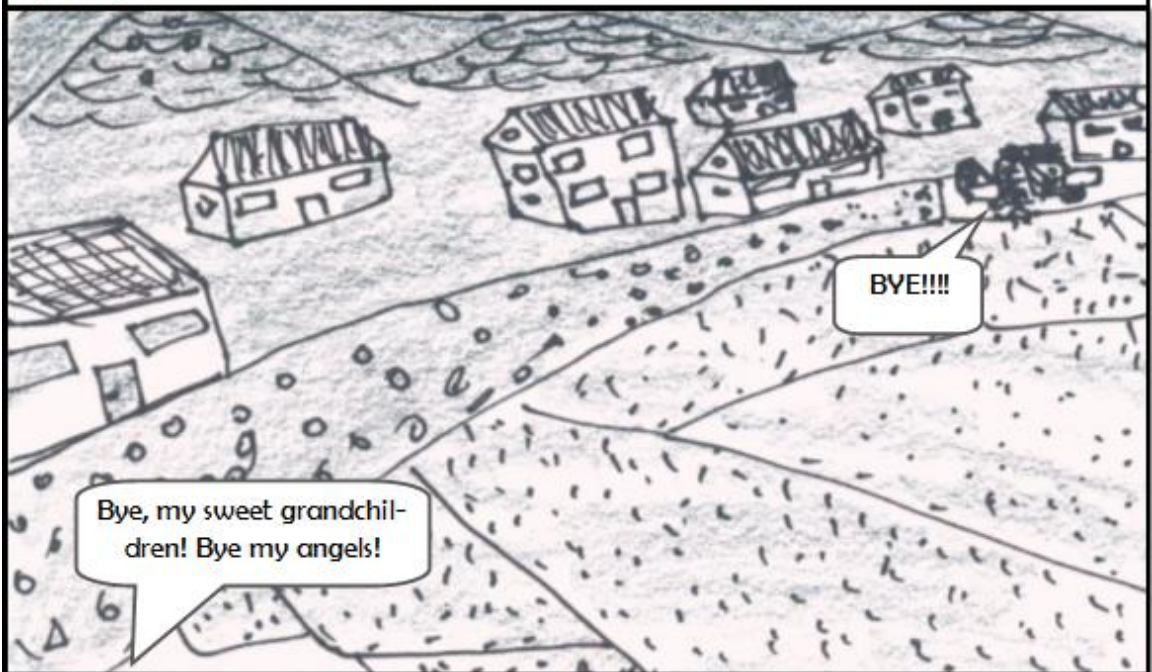
Two minutes later. . .



If You Believe

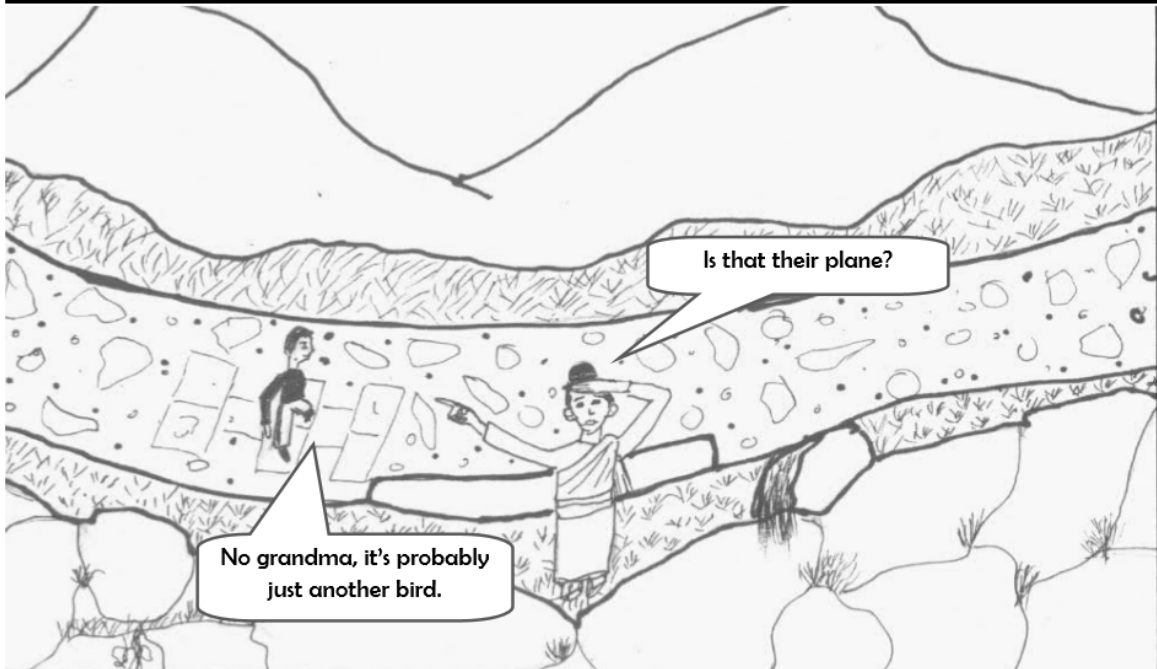


After five minutes, we said goodbye for the last time before hopping on the taxi and driving away.



If You Believe

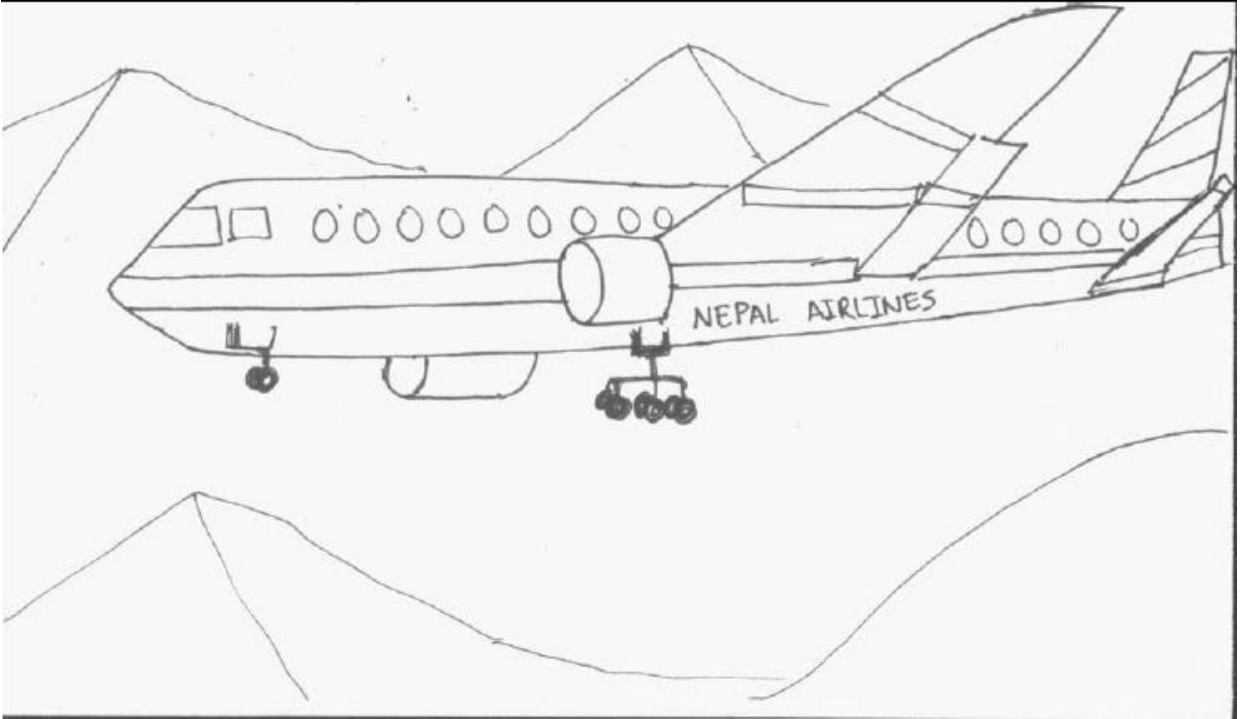
In a village about 100 km northeast of Kathmandu, a five-year-old boy and a sixty-five-year-old woman were waving goodbye to every plane that flew in the sky since 10am local time (the time of our flight).



These were my mom's mom, my grandma, and my cousin. We hadn't been able to tell them goodbye before we left, and we wouldn't be able to see them for a long time either.

If You Believe

In a country like Nepal, landlocked and isolated for the most part of history, goodbyes like this are not very common. In most cases, only death would separate family members.



It would be years before we saw them again; some of the people from our past, we would never see again.



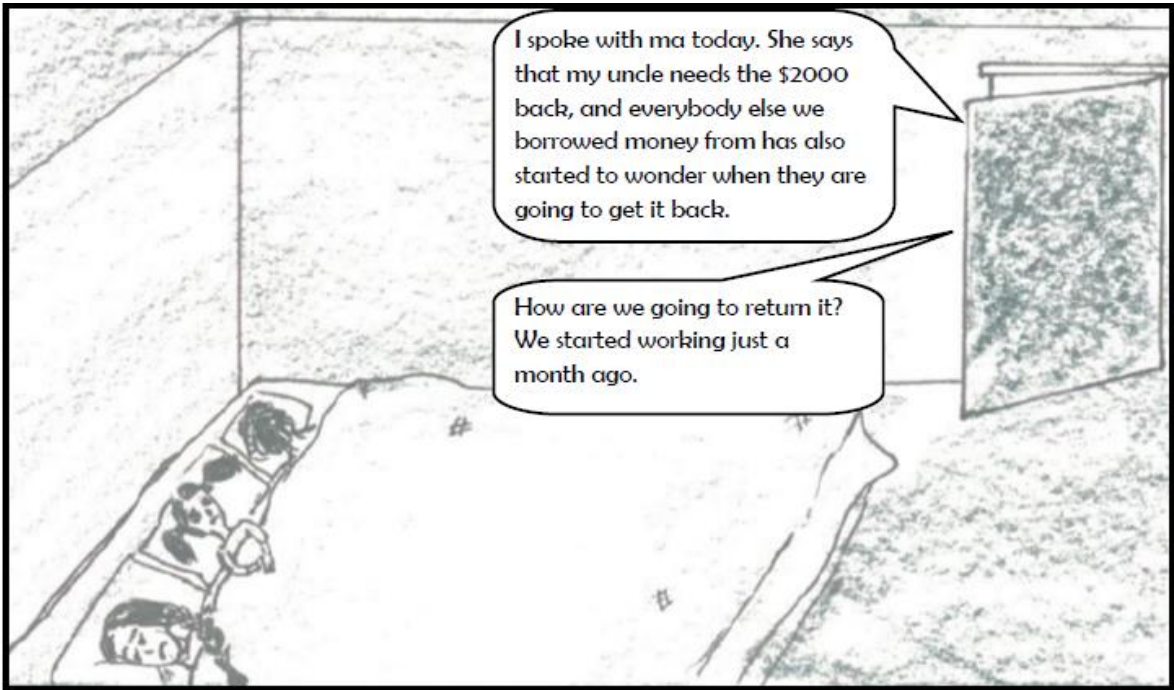
However, we didn't realize this at the moment, when we were flying away from Kathmandu, away from Nepal. We were already thinking about our first visit back.

84

If You Believe

Hungry

If You Believe



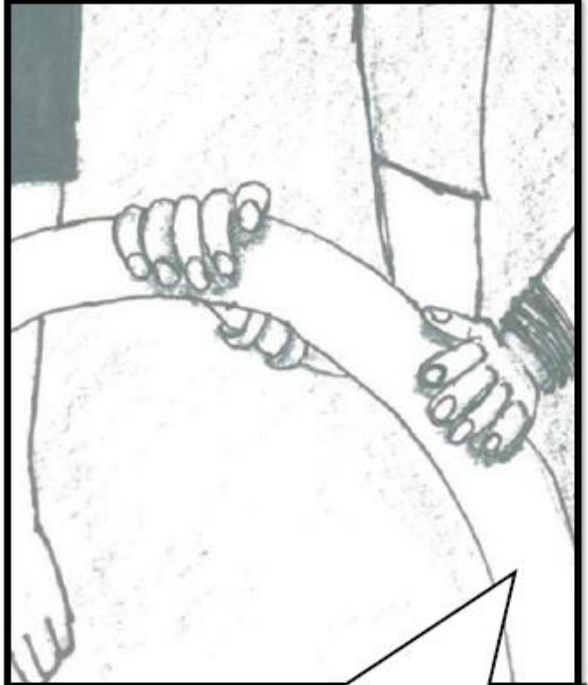
I do not know, but it is about time we returned it anyway. It has already been 3 months; it must be difficult to not have access to such kind of money. We need to return as much money back as possible. We should see if we are able to keep \$1000; we can try to pay that back in a month.



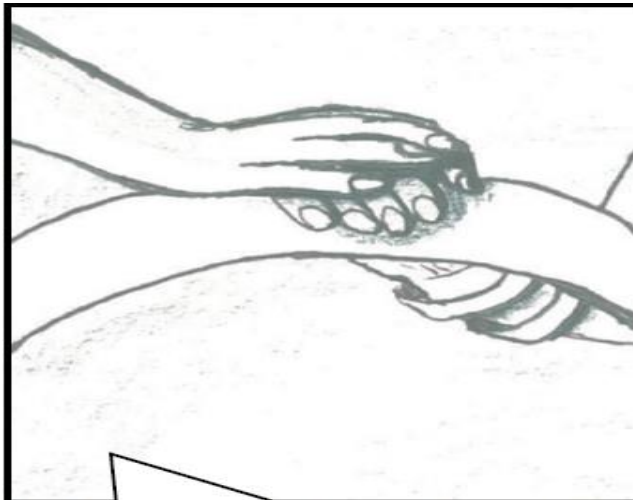
But we are already using that money to pay the rent, and with the little money left-over, what should happen if there is an emergency?

If You Believe

I am going to try to get more hours at work. If I work a lot, maybe we will be able to finally save some money this month.



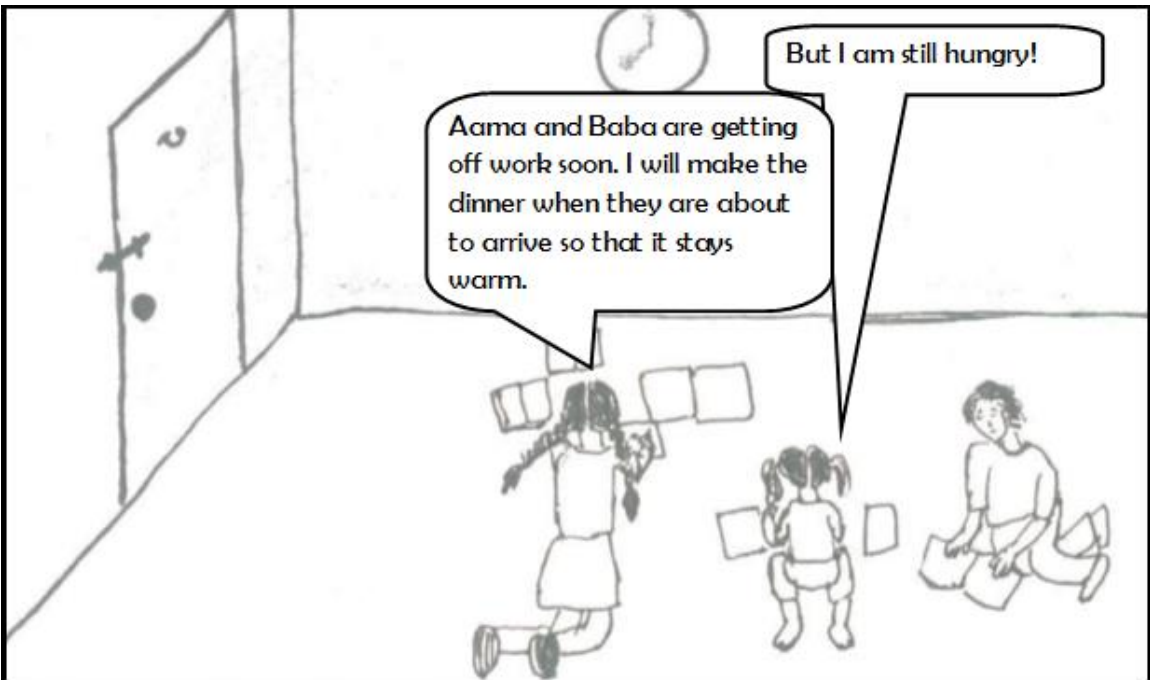
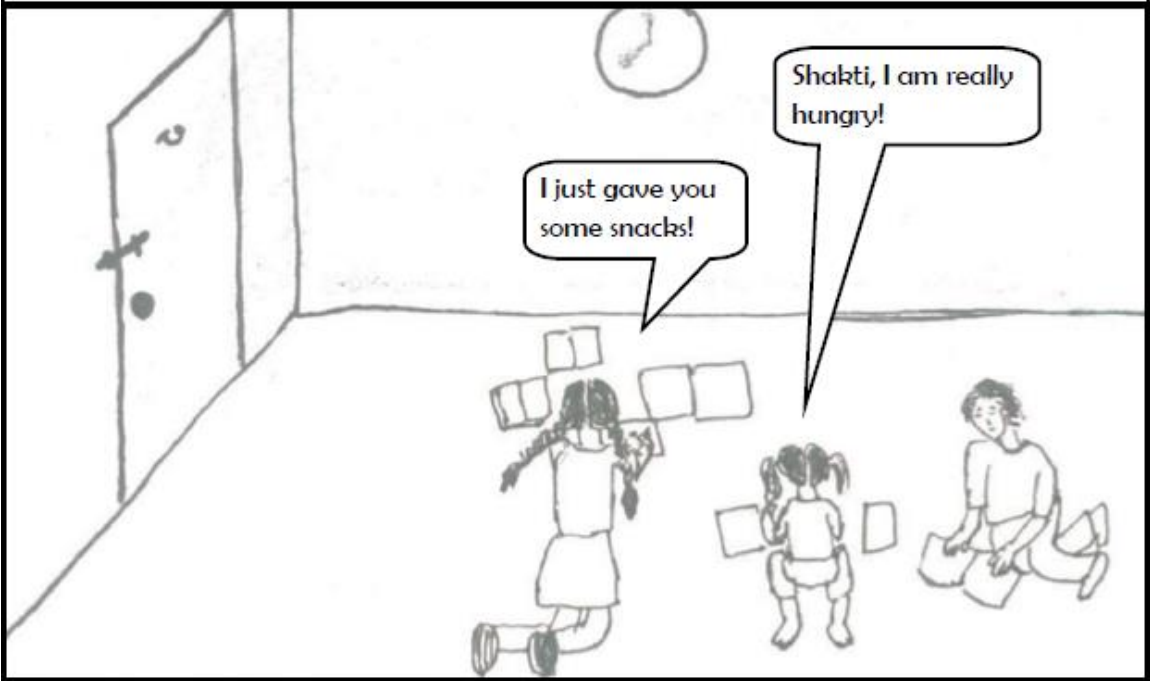
I have also already picked up extra shifts at work. But what will the kids do? They are going to be all alone!



Don't worry—our kids are really smart. Besides, Shakti is old enough now to babysit them. She is really brave, and she will also take care of them really well.

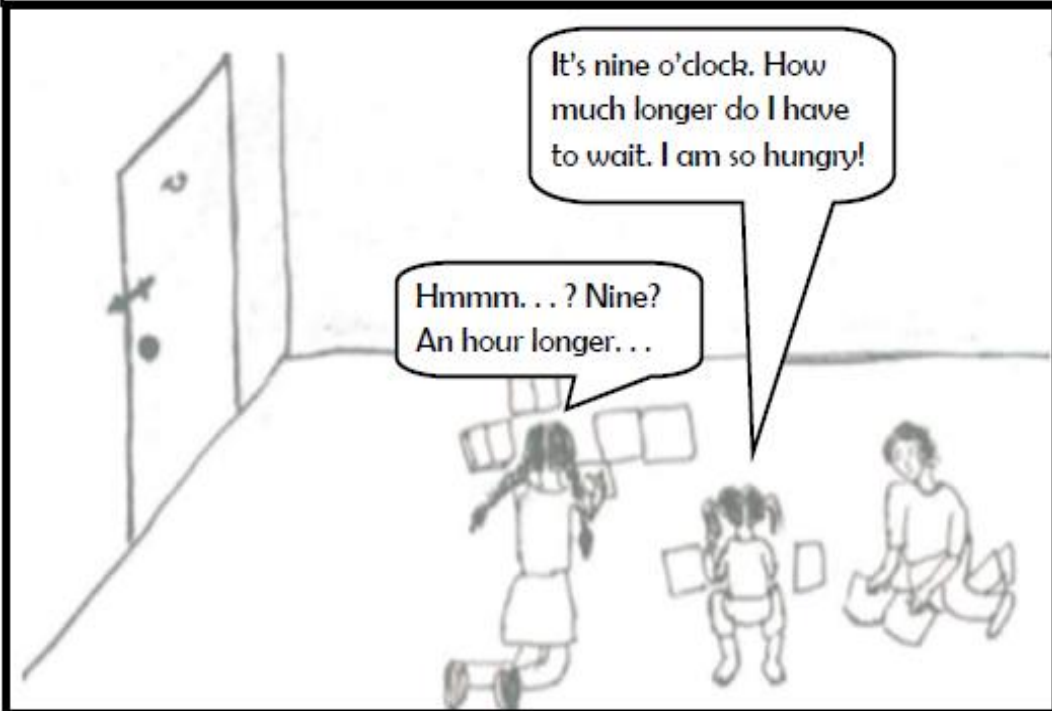
If You Believe

At first, my brother and I would have agreed that they couldn't have been more wrong!



If You Believe

About an hour later...



If You Believe



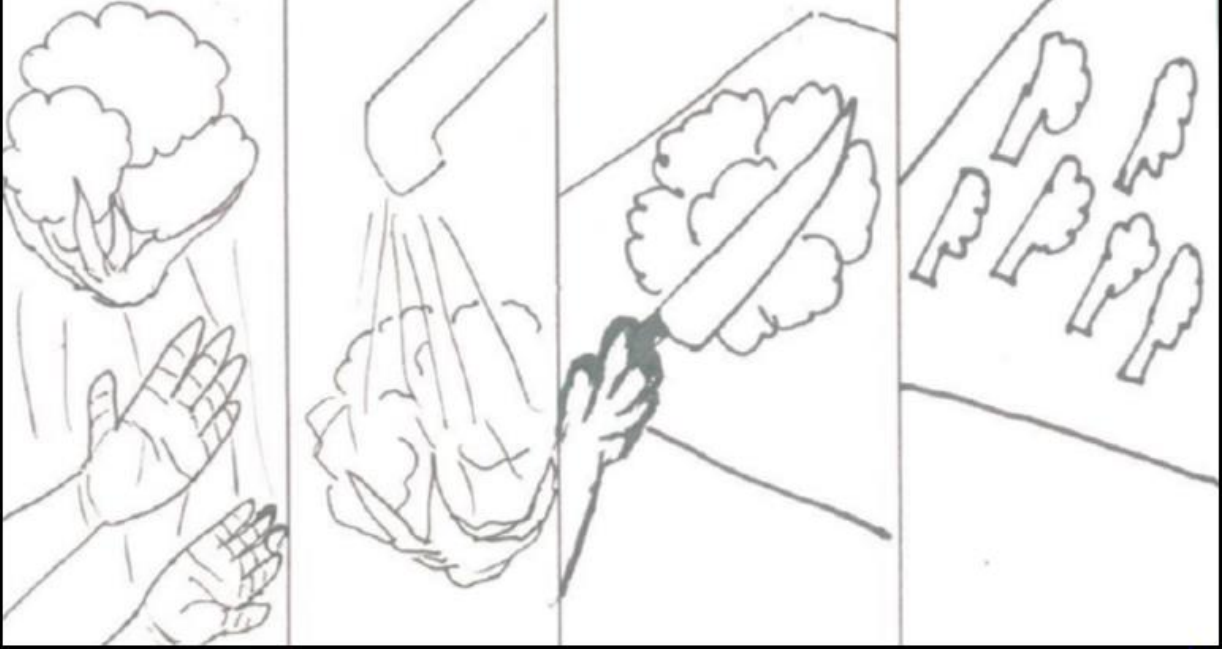
Doododododododooo. . .

Some rice first. Should I make dal? No, it's going to take too long. . . .

Okay. Eggplant curry or Cauliflower curry? Can't make an eggplant curry soup, so cauliflower curry soup it is!

If You Believe

Dooo... dodoo... dododooooo... dodooo...

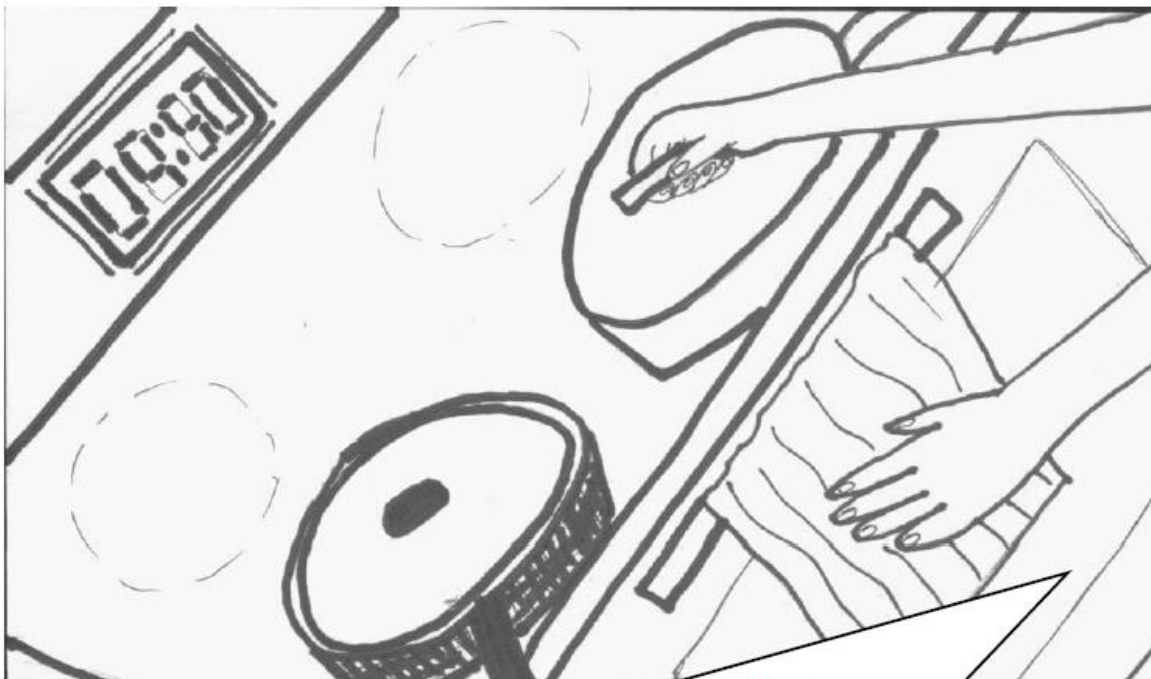


My sister was dedicated to every task she committed to and always pushed us to try our hardest, also.

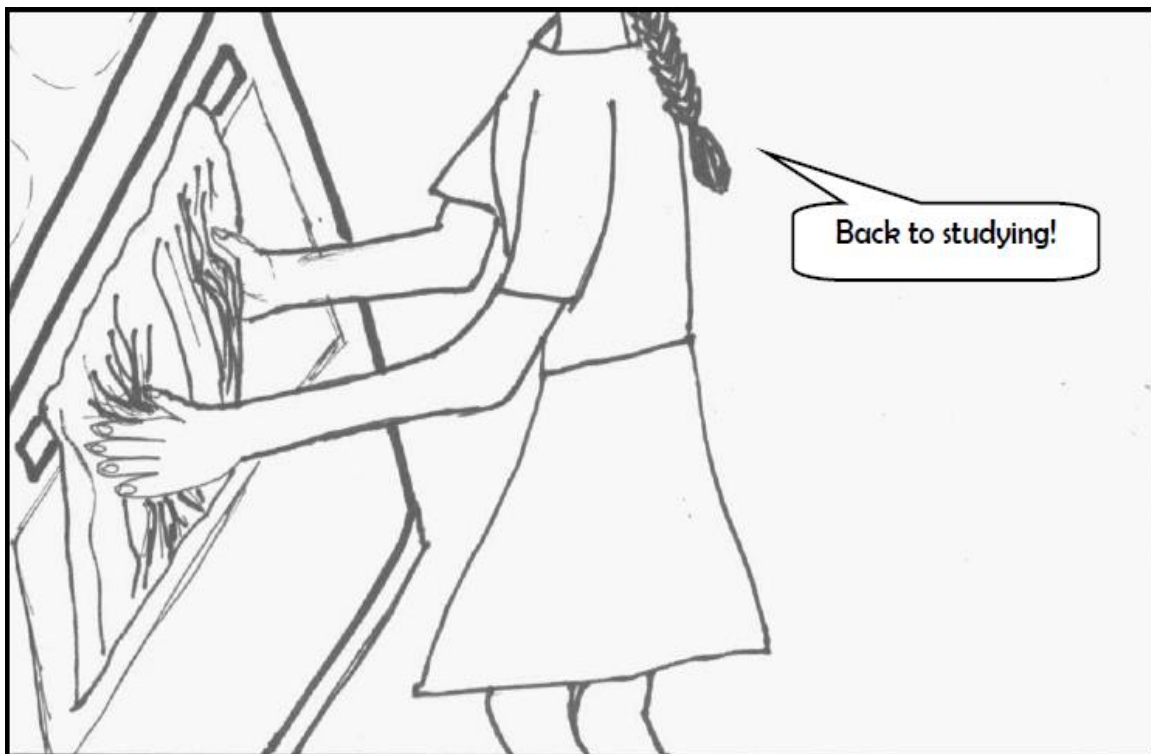


Daada... deee... dododooooo... dadadee...

If You Believe

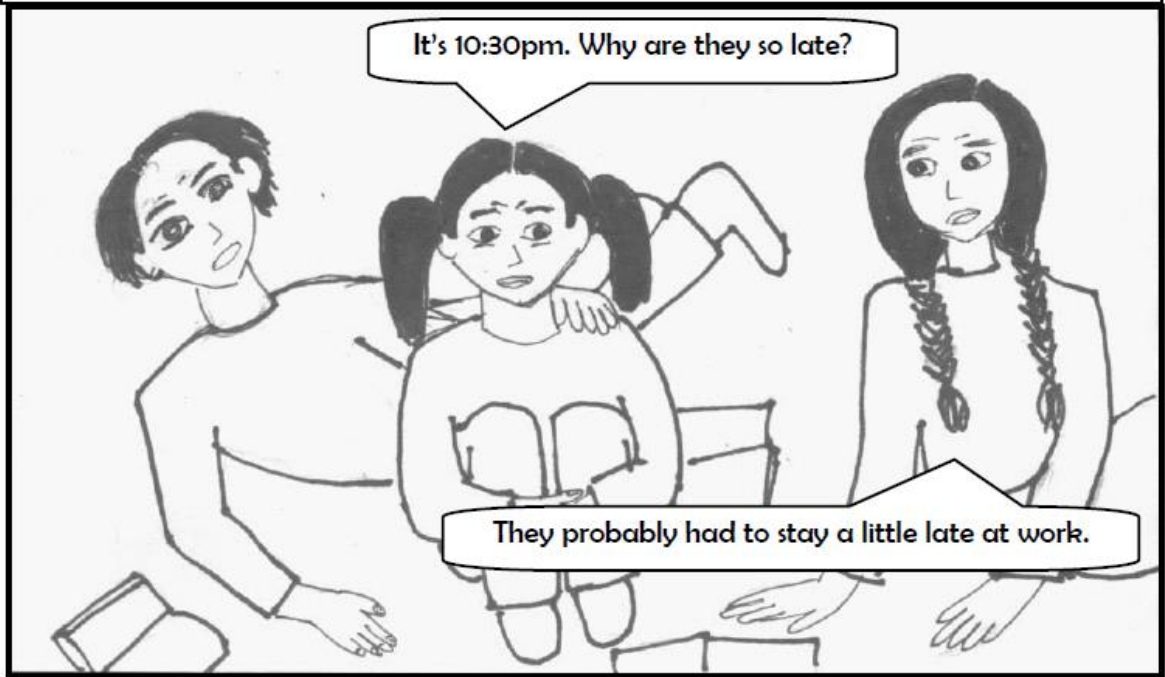


O.K. Ten more minutes and they should be here.



If You Believe

10:30pm, and my parents weren't home yet. . .



They are always late! Do they not care about us? I hate them!



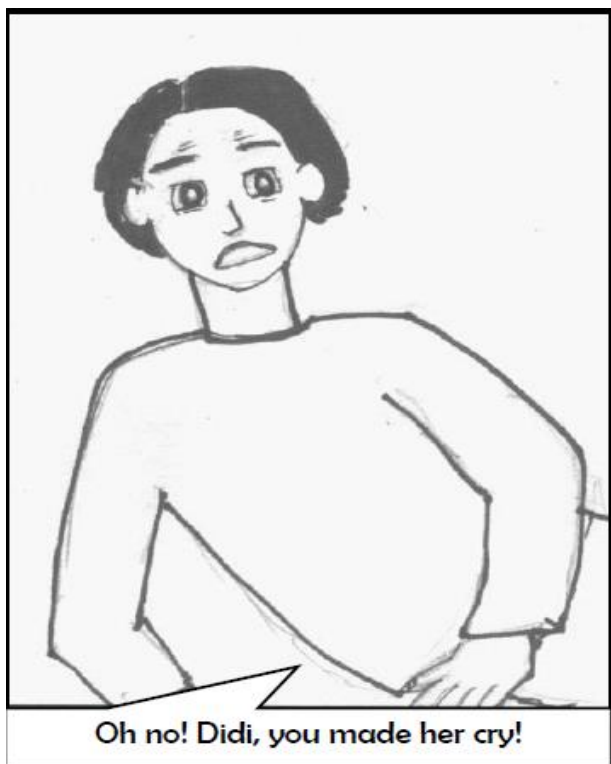
Hey! Watch your tongue! Can't you be patient for an hour?!! They will probably get here soon!



If You Believe



If You Believe



If You Believe



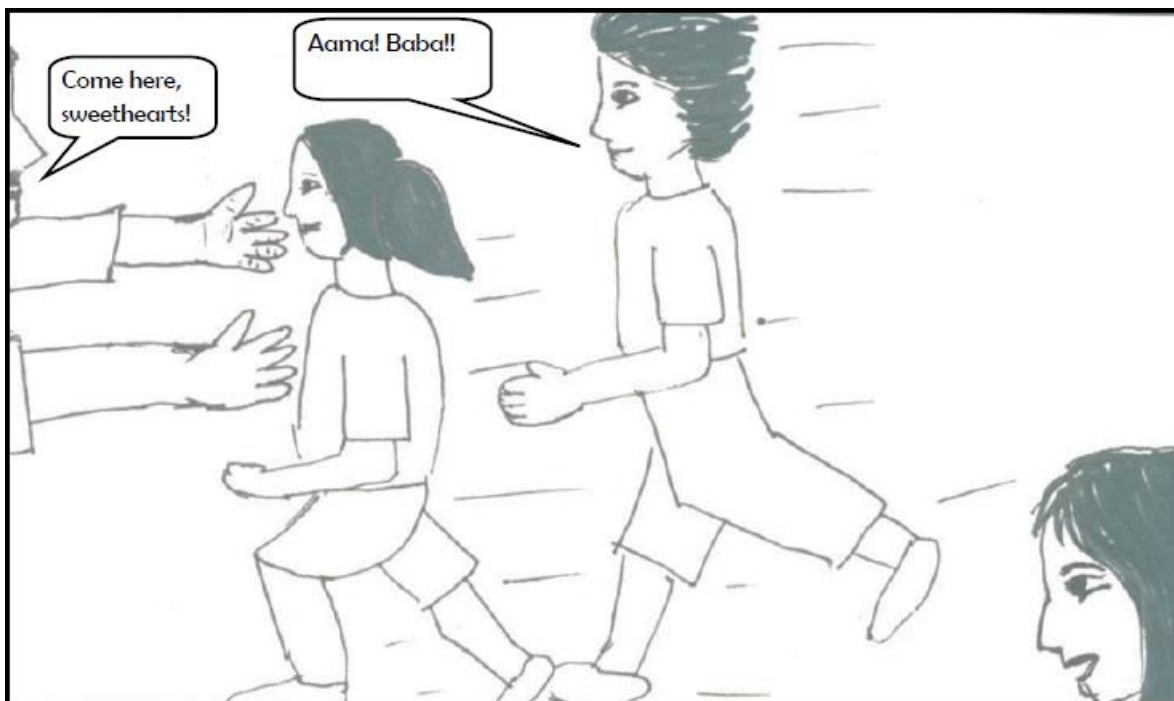
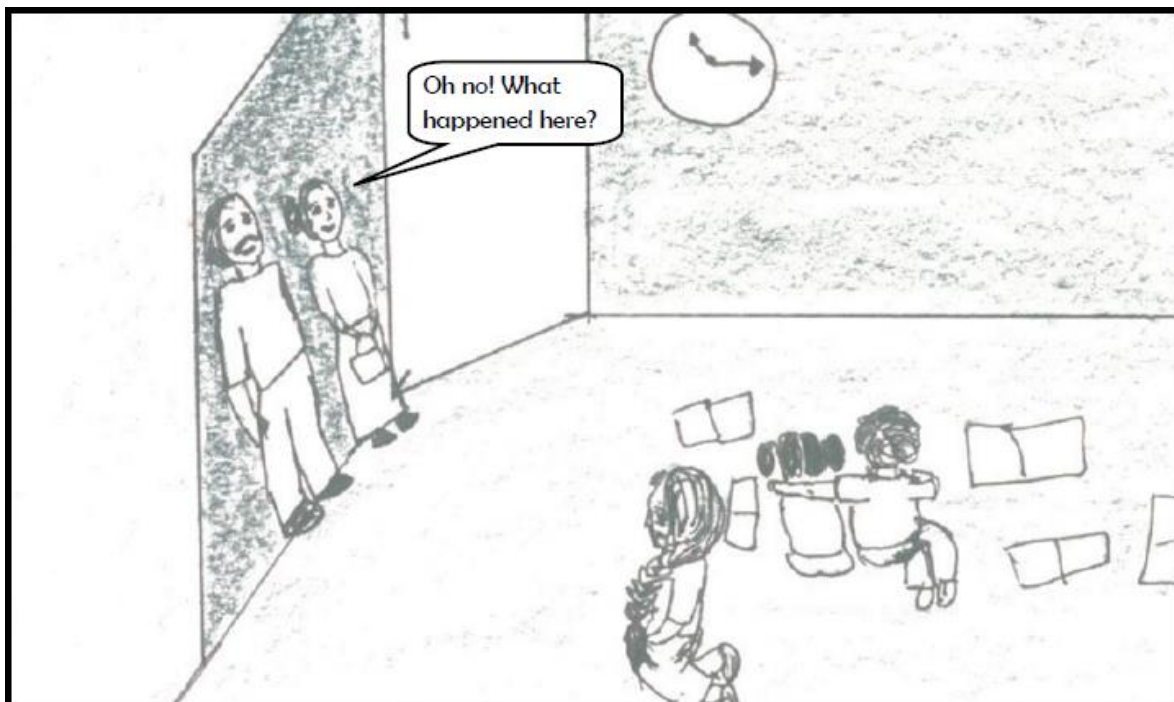
If You Believe



If You Believe

Debt-free

If You Believe



If You Believe



If You Believe



If You Believe



If You Believe

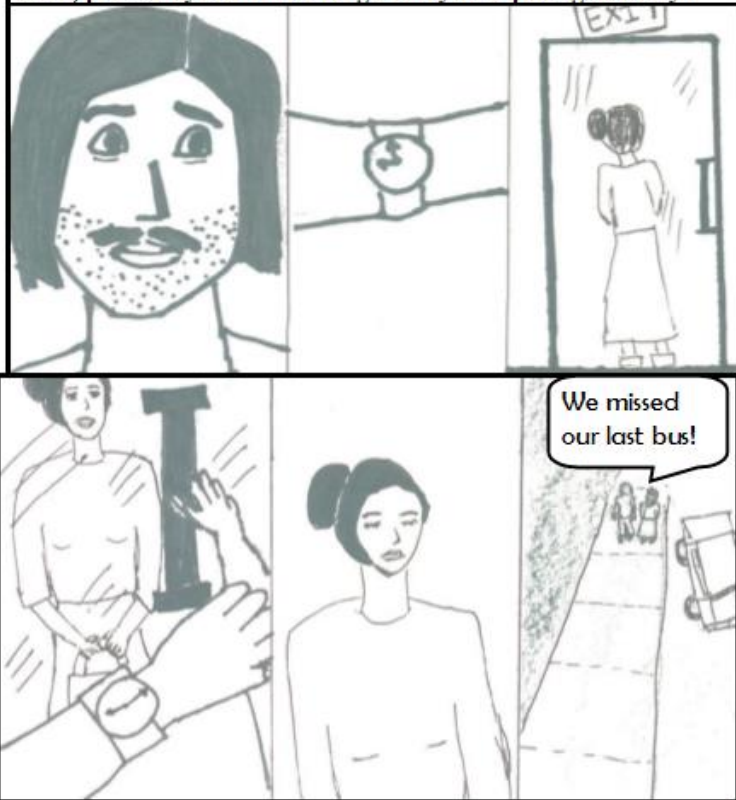


If You Believe

A really long story! We got off work a little late and missed the bus.



Shiva, please stay 15 minutes longer today for a package delivery!



If You Believe



Kids, we have something to tell you.

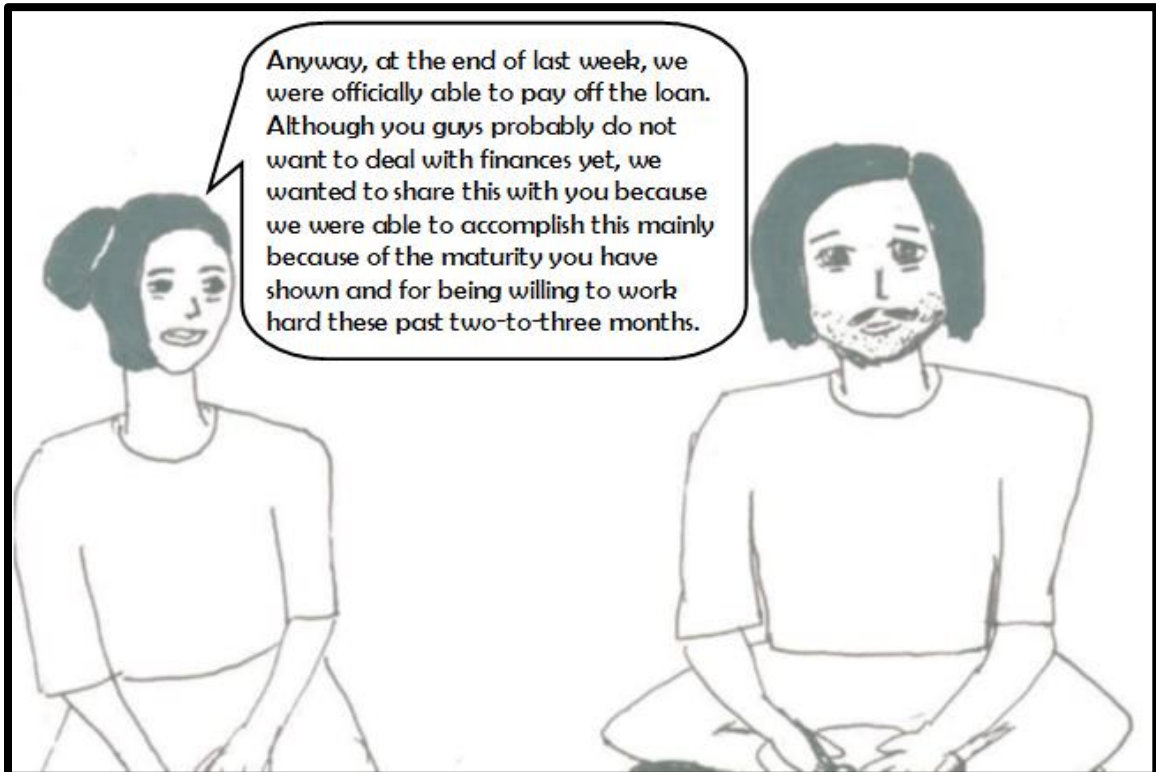
If You Believe



If You Believe



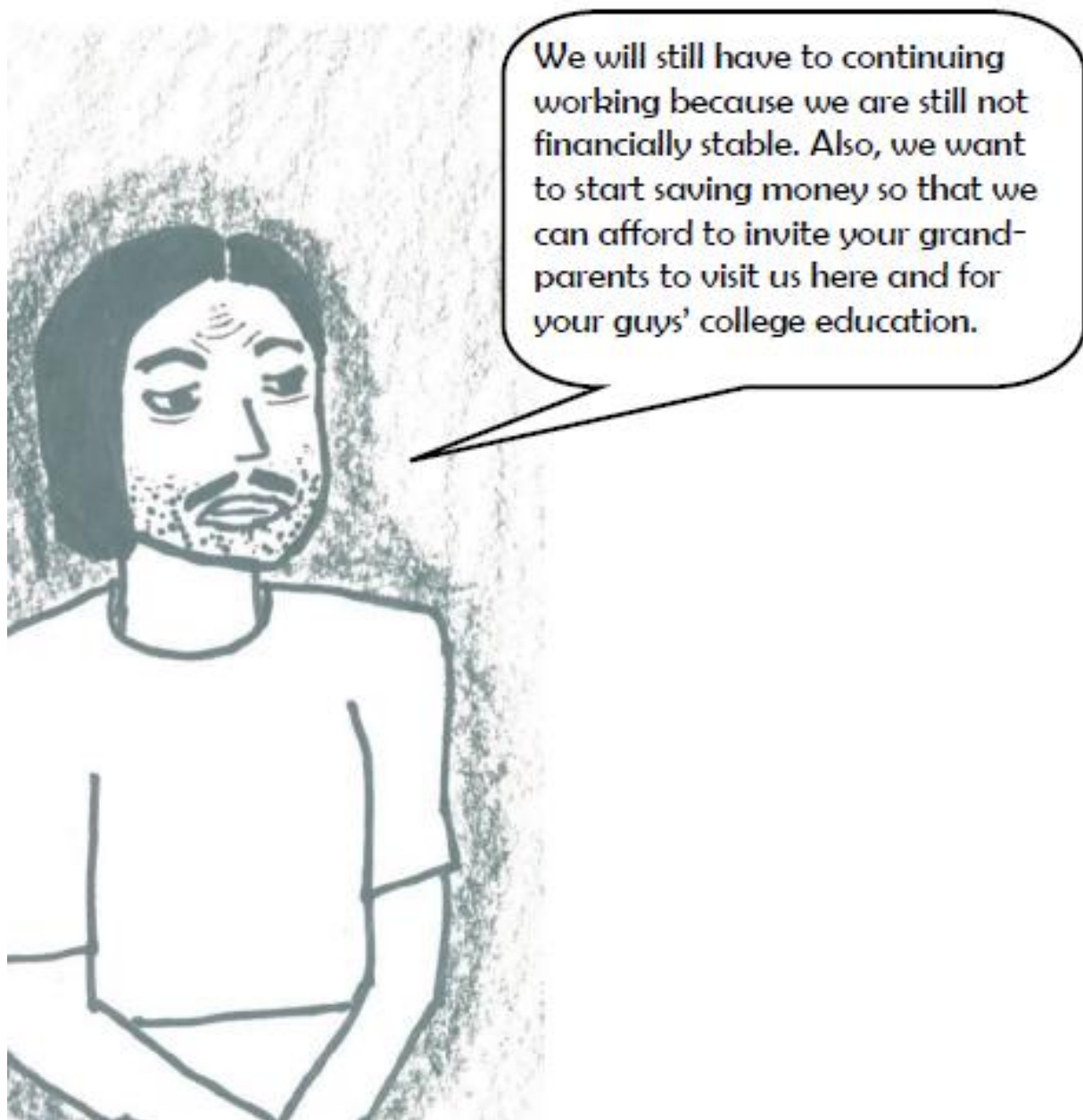
If You Believe



If You Believe



If You Believe

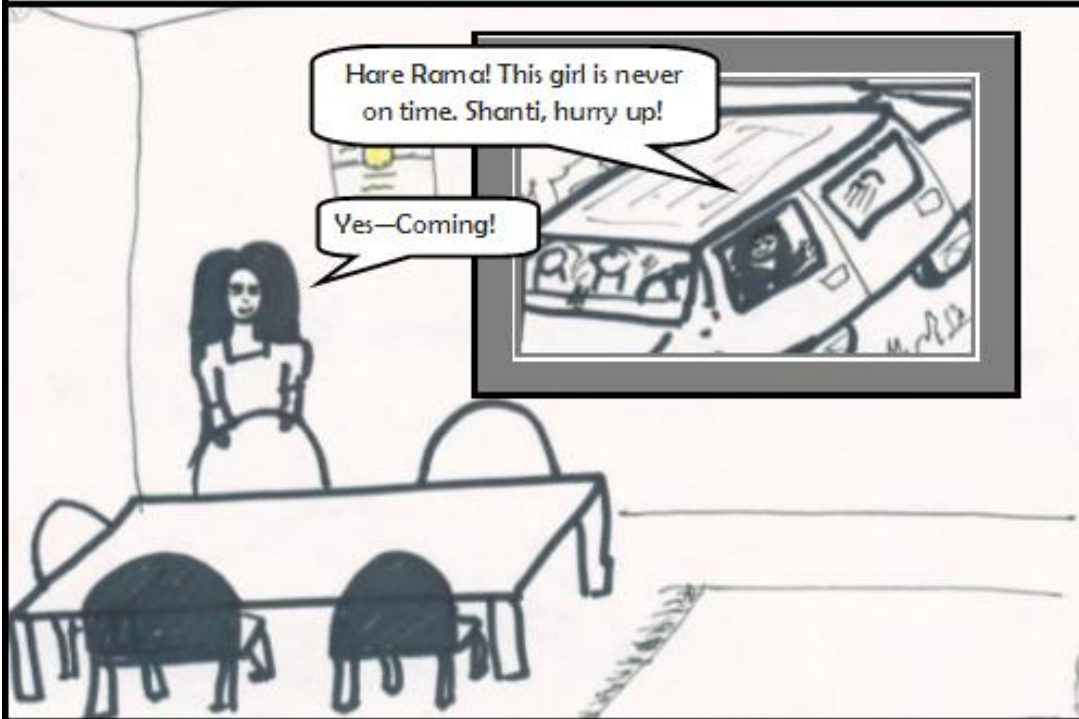


If You Believe

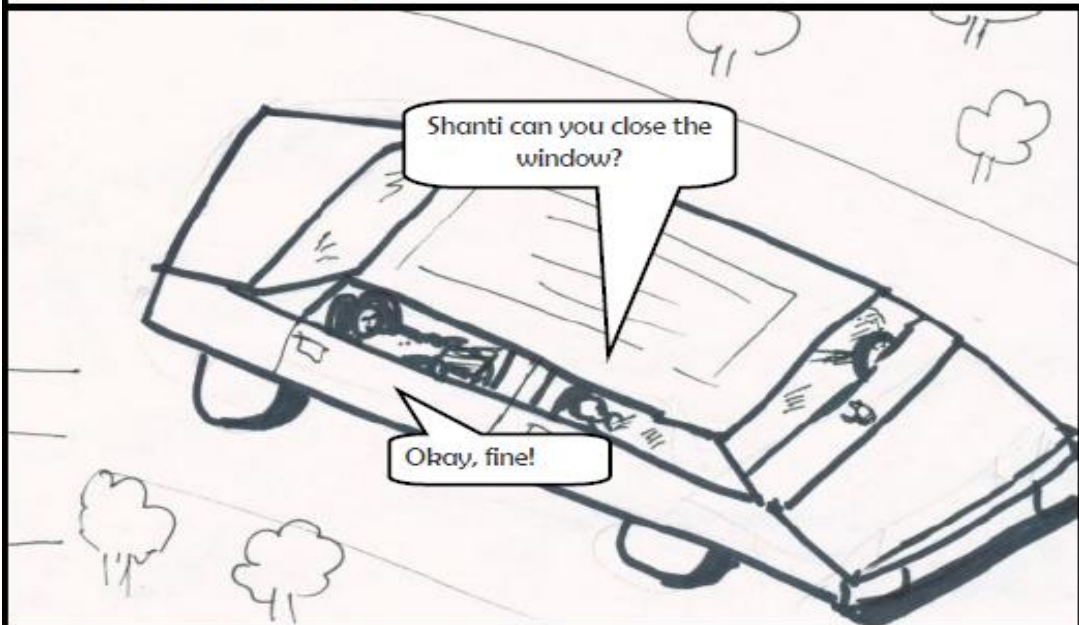
The Road Trip

If You Believe

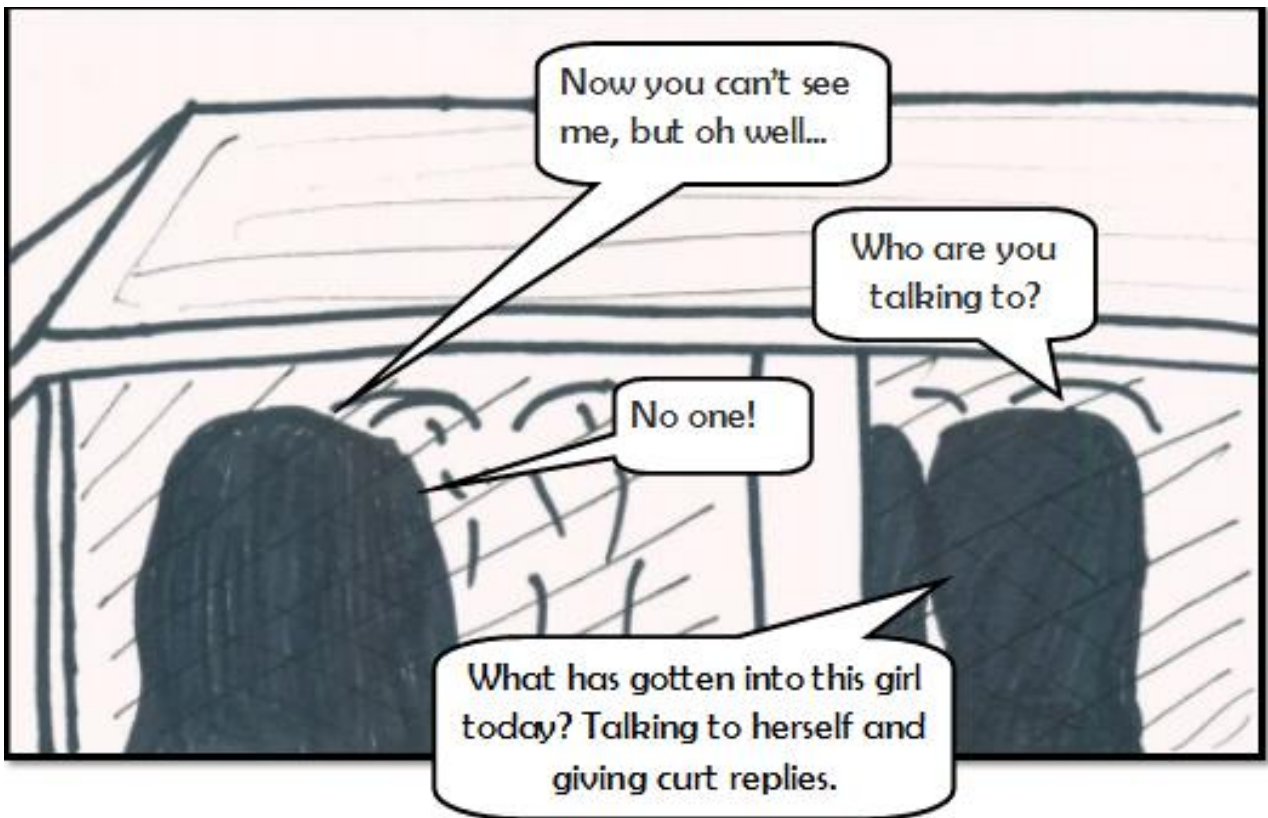
Fourteen years later. . . Today is a pretty big day for my family.



The whole family, including my grandparents, who came from Nepal just last week, is driving down to attend the commencement ceremony of my sister who just finished her Masters degree in Engineering.



If You Believe



If You Believe

I feel bad for not being happy because today is a special day for my family. My sister's graduation signifies a great achievement for all of the sacrifices my parents have made and all of the struggles my family went through. However, this puts a lot of pressure on me. I think that the whole family expects me to pursue a career in either engineering or medicine, and I am not interested in those at all. That's my brother and sister; they are the ones who like and do well in the math and sciences. I haven't figured out what I want to do yet, which makes me even more nervous. . .

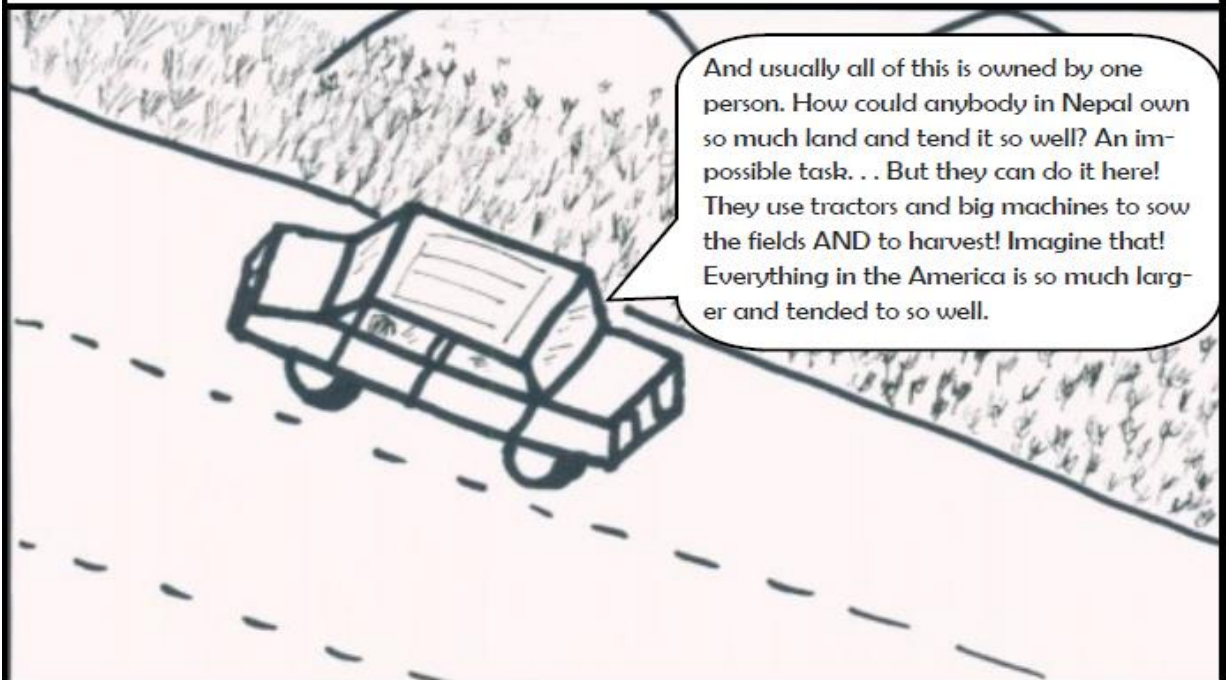


If You Believe

We actually make this trip every 3 or 4 months because my parents get super worried about my sister; even when they know perfectly well that she is perfectly capable of taking care of herself.

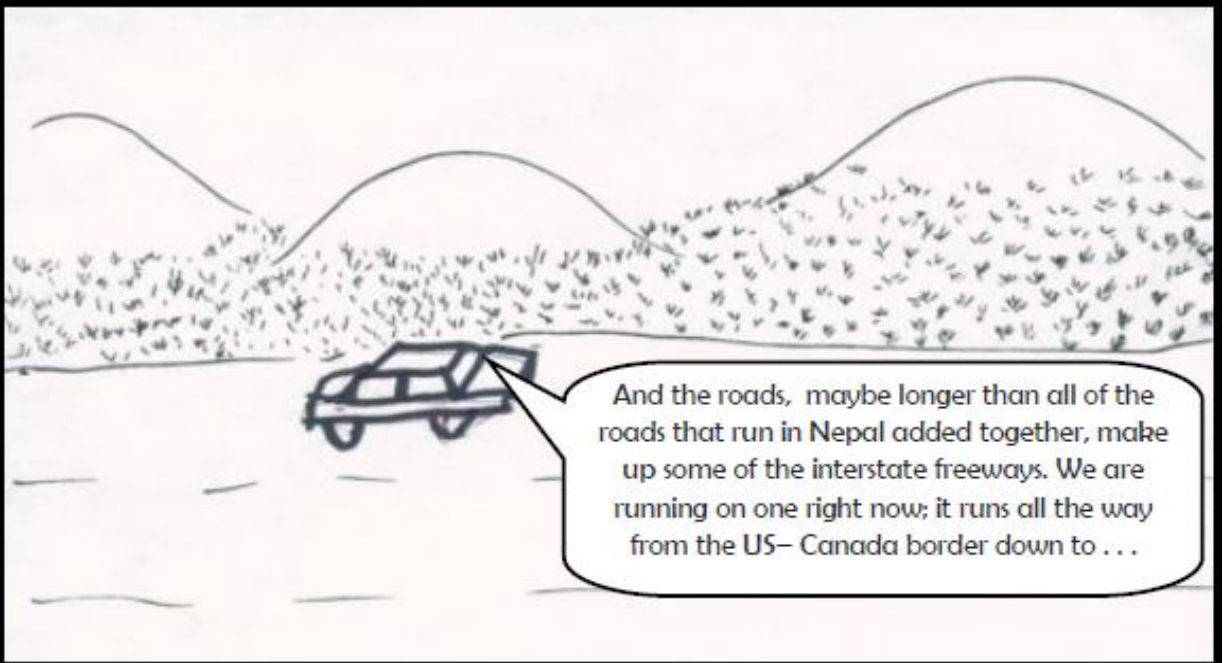


However, it seems like we are making this trip for the first time today because there are so many things to notice and point out to our grandparents, so they don't get bored. . . .

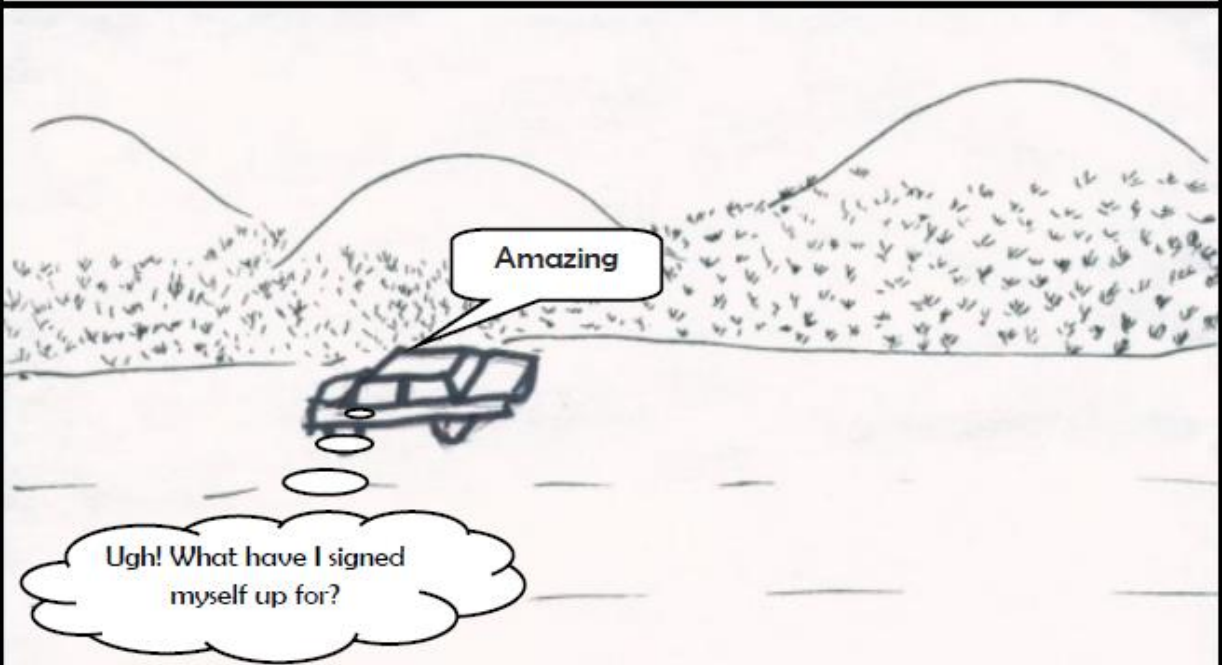


If You Believe

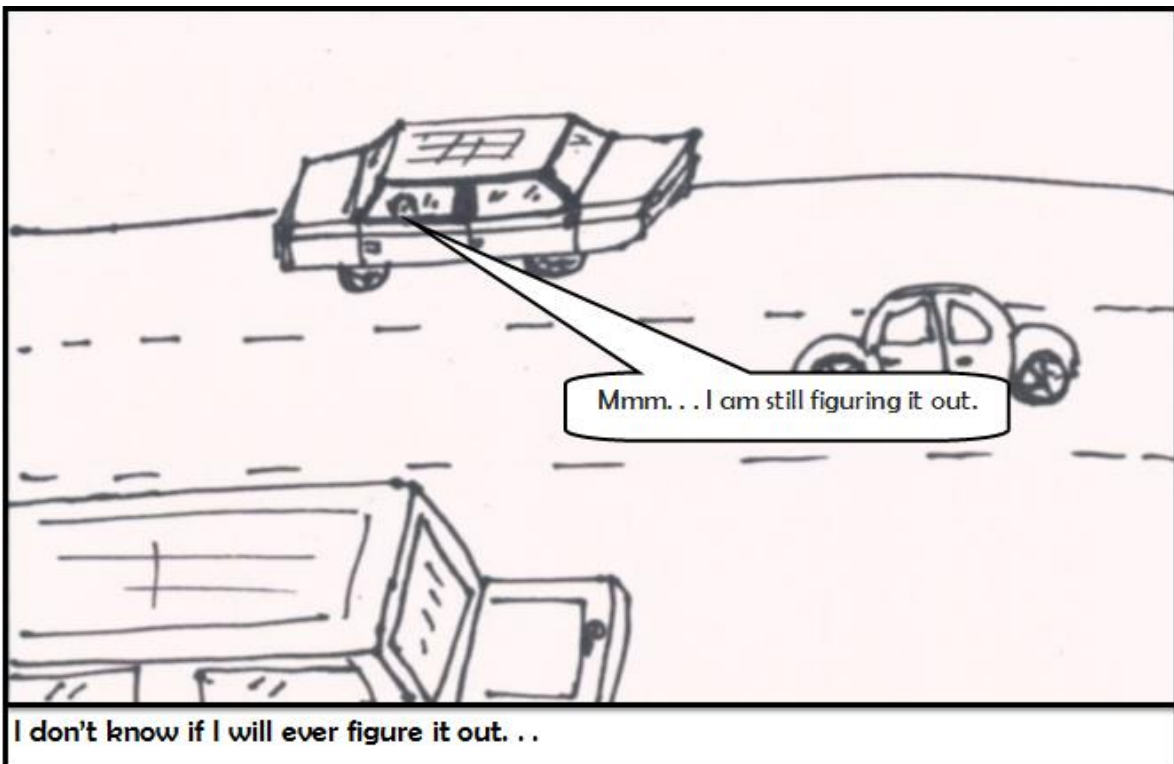
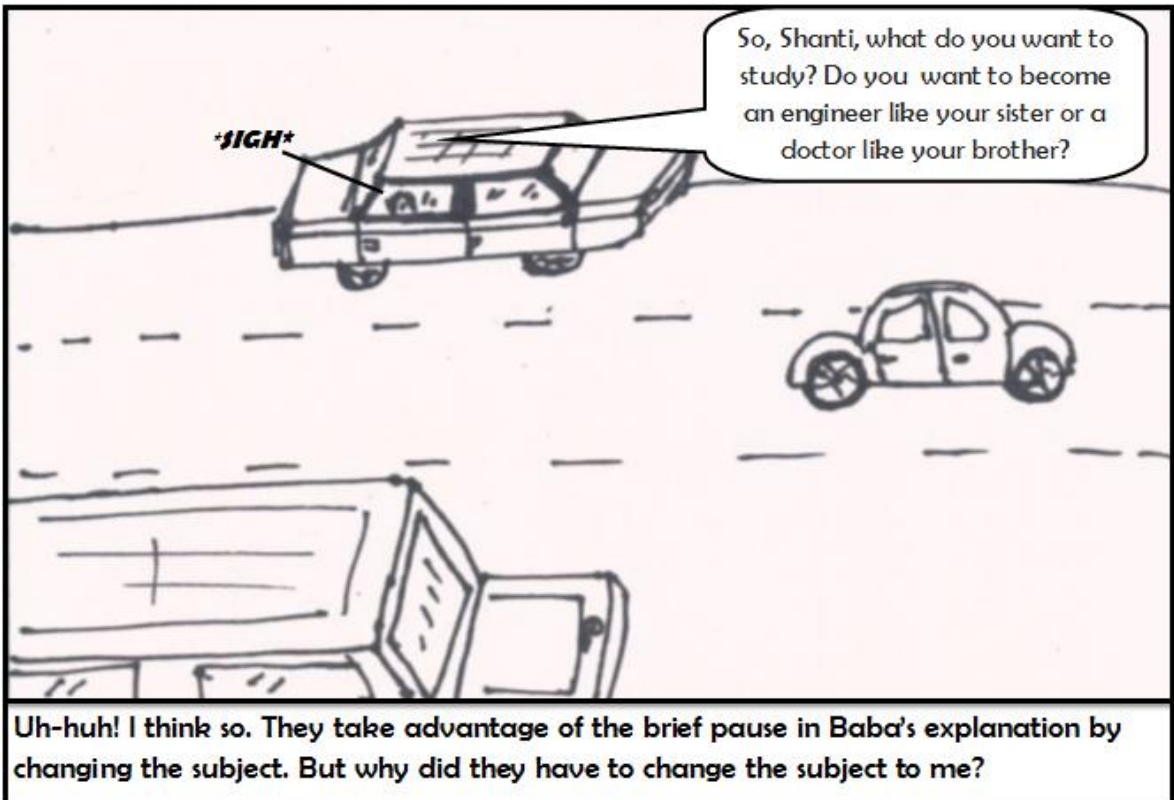
We are trying our best, but it is hard to spin gold out of corns. . . Maybe it would have been easier to with wheats because they actually have straws.



And my dad has taken the responsibility of a tour guide for my grandparents., describing the US and its abundance in a positive light. I wonder if my grandparents are able to see through this.



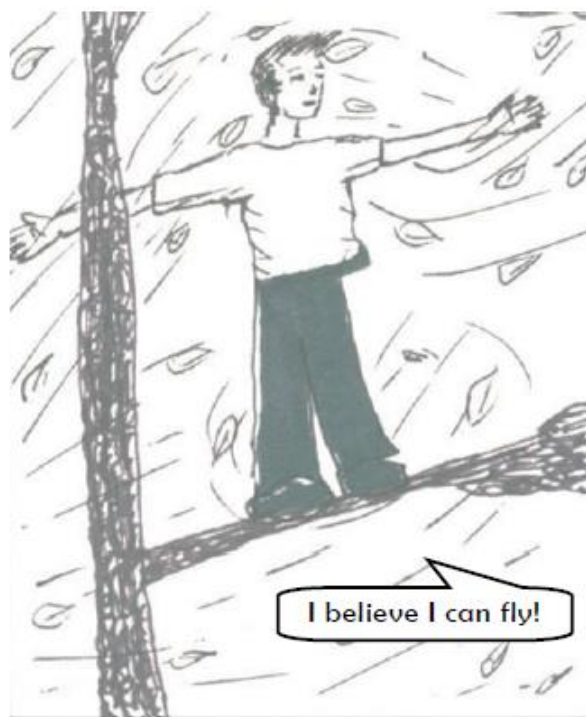
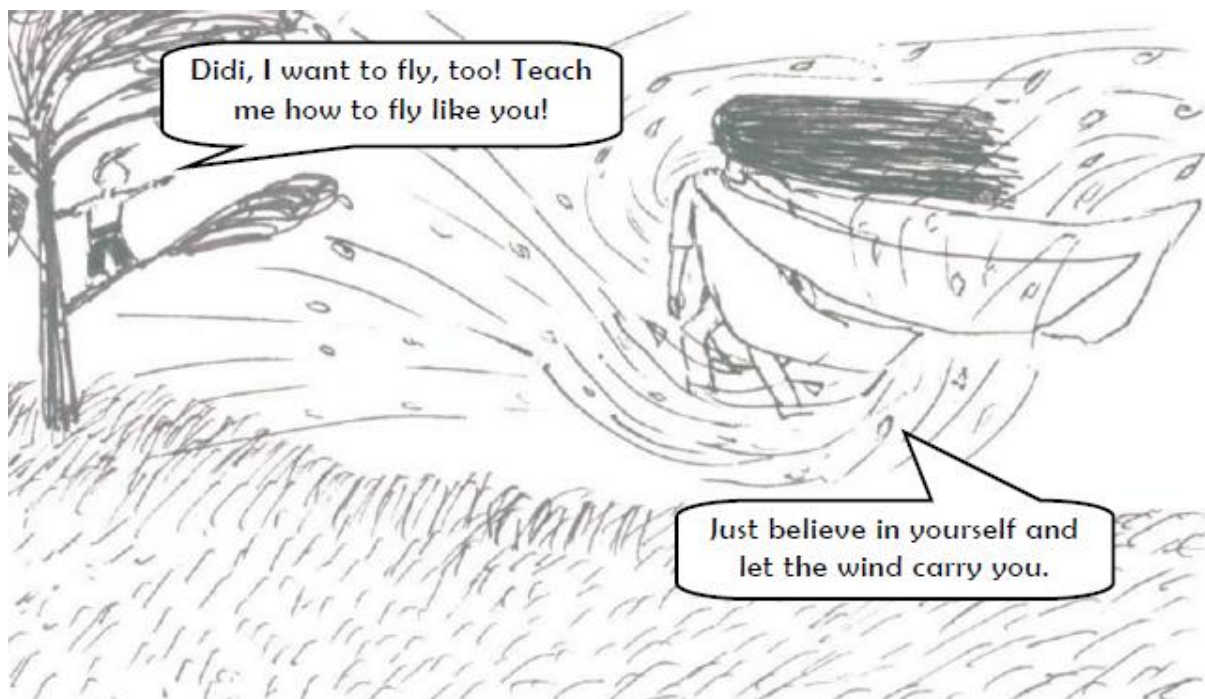
If You Believe



If You Believe

Flying Home

If You Believe



If You Believe



If You Believe



Agggghhhhhhhhhh!!!

Oh no! Dada, be careful!



I could no longer look, so I covered my eyes
before he hit the ground. . .

Aghhhahahaha!!!

I am flying!!!

If You Believe



If You Believe



If You Believe



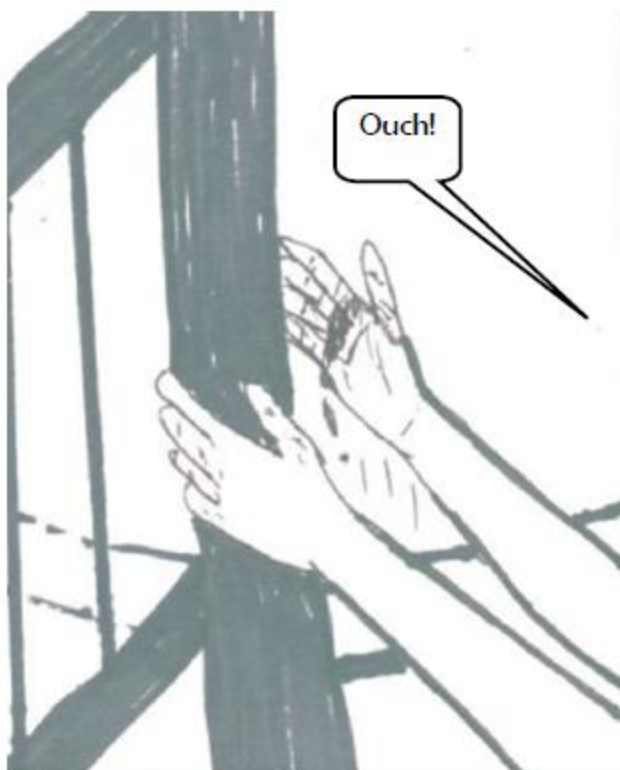
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Shanti, don't feel defeated. You started flying without hearing the rest of my advice. You are unique, and you have unique abilities. Accordingly, you will be able to fly if you give the skills you have a chance rather than trying to copy either your brother or me. The same things applies to everything else in life. You must believe in yourself and give your unique abilities a chance! Try your bike!

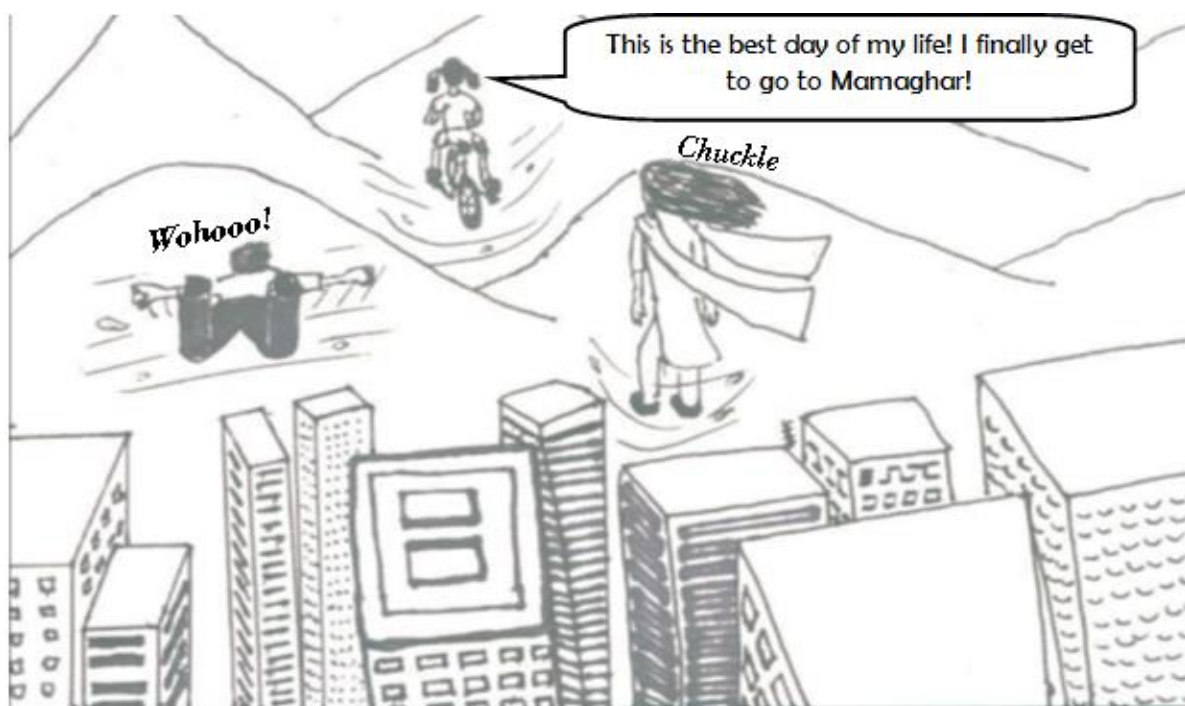
Gasp!



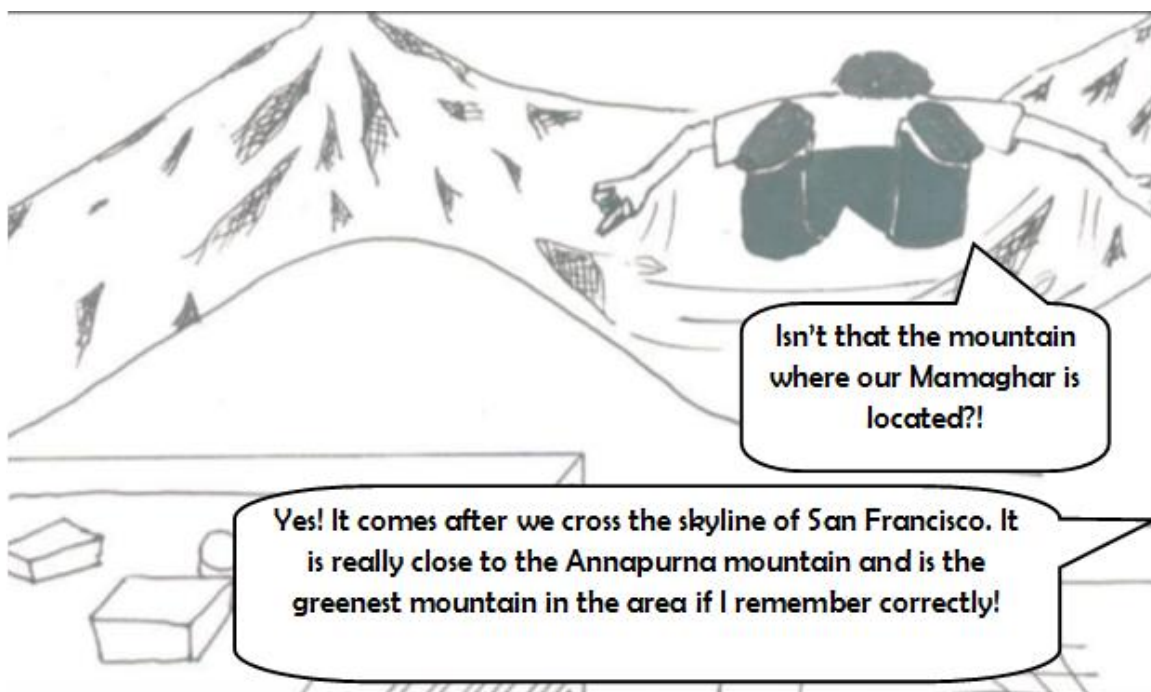
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