

# THINGS AND THE MIND



Everyday materiality, places, spaces,  
and student mental health

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## Acknowledgments

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Smarten is funded by UK Research and Innovation and their support is gratefully acknowledged (Grant reference: ES/S00324X/1).

Any views expressed here are those of the project investigators and do not necessarily represent the views of the SMaRteN network or UKRI.

## In a few words

How often do you think about things and places around you and the ways they affect your wellbeing?

This is, we believe, the first graphic novel in English that is co-developed with a group of students about their mental health. It will speak volumes to many readers through the nuances of visual communication, comments, reflections, and memories.

Nine students who have had prior and/or have ongoing struggles with wellbeing and mental health provided scenarios for the novel. They shared their subjective accounts of how everyday “matter” - personal or indoor items, food, body, built or natural environments - affected or affect their wellbeing.

The project started during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although most narratives focus on students’ experience before the outbreak announcement, they are also relevant to the intensified relationship with indoor and outdoor things and spaces during the lockdown.

While the stories consider the link between physical or spatial materiality AND student mental health, they revitalise and emphasise the primary importance of human relationships and connections for one’s wellbeing.

We hope that you’ll find this novel relevant, stimulating, and thought-provoking!

The project team

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## In more words: a graphic memoir about students' experiences of mental health and the material world

Comics and graphic novels are unique media of communication. We use the term “comics and graphic novels” to account for the way stories in sequential images have been referred to by their authors or readers. A graphic novel refers to a complete narrative that does not require a prequel or sequel and is not part of a series as commercial comics often are. We adopt a widely recognised definition of the medium by Scott McCloud (1993, 20) as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer”.

The characteristics of comics such as multimodality (merging visual and verbal communication), blending of sequential and simultaneous communication, and emphasis on the creator’s voice can afford powerful tools for inquiry (Kuttner et. al, 2020). The combination of visualisation, metaphors and character-driven narratives can increase accessibility of scientific subjects and dry academic language and reports to engage diverse audiences (Farinella, 2018).

Comics can address the issues of representation in qualitative research by portraying the complex nature of human experience beyond the single dimension of text (Galman, 2009). Their multi-layered structure can also aid researchers to link “practice” and “theory” (Al-Jawad, 2013). Theory needs to be situated in practice and comics offer a potent medium of practical “materialisations” of theory or concepts. This is not merely to illustrate things but representations and illustrations themselves can be inquired, interpreted, and reshaped in a community of inquiry once they are created. This means that graphic novels can be used for subsequent learning and research as triggers for conversation.

Of particular interest in our study is the genre of graphic memoir or autobiographical graphic novels and comics (El Refaie, 2008). A graphic memoir presents lived experiences from an authentic perspective of the author(s), as in globally recognised *Persepolis* by Marjan Satrapi or *Blankets* by Craig Thompson. Graphic memoir is a powerful tool to bridge the gap



between someone's or some group's lived experiences and our own understanding of them.

A view of comics as children's literature, superheroes stories or the media that serves best to address some struggle (e.g. help struggling readers) or typology (e.g. suit "visual learners") should be overcome. Although comics do engage children and help specific educational struggles or orientations, and tell superhero adventures, they are so much more than that. The underappreciation of the comics medium needs to stop and possibilities for comics-based education and research at universities need to be further developed. Through a variety of drawing styles and topics across the graphic novels and comics landscape, these media can trigger deep aesthetic and visceral experiences that evoke an immediate sense of relatedness and compassion. Indeed, as Katy Vigurs stresses:

*Visual and graphic representations can help a wider range of readers to empathise with research participants' experiences and to understand some of the underlying factors and potential implications. The research-informed comic can also prompt emotions (such as anger, frustration, confusion) that might be less likely or less obvious when reading the same information in a written report.*

(Priego, 2016)

Although there are clear benefits of comics-based research, published studies have rarely involved university students as creators, other than for example the work by Vigurs et al. (2016). In 'Higher Fees, Higher Debts: Greater Expectations of Graduate Futures?', Vigurs et al. (2016b) apply a comics format to represent the findings of her research report on the perspectives and experiences of university graduates who were part of the first generation to pay higher university tuition fees. Their use of comics to portray research data helped to communicate the message of the research findings in a powerful, engaging, and personal way (Priego, 2016). In our project we embedded the co-design element with the participating students from the start of the project.

Another strong reason why the comics format was suitable in our research is related to its main concern: how everyday things and environments affect student mental health. The character of the medium to bring any element of everyday materiality to the fore of the reader's attention provides a sense of an immediate and embodied encounter with students' authentic feelings. It draws attention to the environments and things within them that "frame"

students' subjective sense of wellbeing, affected in either a negative or positive way.

The element of creativity was strong as the medium facilitated creative freedom in terms of representational choices. Everyday things and environments were deliberately interpreted and exemplified broadly. Our examples to participating students included different indoors or outdoors "things", such as "technologies" (e.g. washing machine, toaster, mobile phones, laptops), environments (e.g. parks, university library, home) and even nutritional "matter" such as food and beverage (e.g. fast food, coffee).

## Representing the materiality of student mental health

We live in the times of student mental health crisis. According to the 2016 study by YouGov one in four UK students describes themselves as having a mental health problem. Through the narratives in this graphic memoir, we consider student mental health and wellbeing in relation to everyday materiality and by doing so we present a new field of research in student mental health. Our definition of student wellbeing and mental health is adopted from the University Mental Health Charter (Hughes and Spanner, 2019, 9) as follows:

"Mental health refers to a full spectrum of experience ranging from good mental health (internal equilibrium) to mental illness.

Mental health problems or poor mental health will refer to a broader range of individuals experiencing levels of emotional and/or psychological distress beyond normal experience and beyond their current ability to effectively manage. It will include those who are experiencing mental illness and those whose experiences fall below this threshold, but whose mental health is not good.

Wellbeing will encompass a wider framework, of which mental health is an integral part, but which also includes physical and social wellbeing. This uses a model provided by Richard Kraut, in which optimum wellbeing is defined by the ability of an individual to fully exercise their cognitive, emotional, physical and social powers, leading to flourishing.

Student wellbeing will adopt the general definition of wellbeing above, but we recognise that in addition, students' engagement with academic learning

is a key component part of their experience and makes a significant contribution to their wellbeing.”

Aligned with our key focus on materiality of wellbeing and mental health, the conceptual framework of our research is the “material turn” in social sciences.

The material turn has shifted the attention from the mental towards the material with a specific focus on materiality and the mutually constitutive relationships between people (their socio-cultural practices or psychological states) and the material world (Overholtzer and Robin, 2015). This view goes beyond the subject-object divide and instead recognises the different entanglements between humans and things: humans depend on things, things depend on other things, things depend on humans, and humans depend on humans (Hodder, 2014).

The defining characteristic of the new material studies, the core claim from which all their multifaceted positions flow, is the assertion that things have specific agency, which is of course different from the voluntary agency of humans but it is deemed to exist.

The inclusion of materiality in mental health research is largely unexplored. It has an untapped potential to create new approaches to care and intervention in mental health (Malafouris, 2019). Considering the effects of materiality on our emotions, cognition and behaviour and entire life world can help us gain the knowledge necessary to inform the construction of places that support and enable our wellbeing and good mental health (Larsen, 2011). For example, this can have particular salience for planning university environments in terms of architecture, interior decoration and design and inform wellbeing service provisions as well.

However, connecting graphic novels and mental health is certainly not something new! The “graphic medicine” community has been doing this for some time. In short, graphic medicine (see Williams (2012) and Farthing and Priego (2016)) can be seen as a special branch of medical humanities focusing on the relationship between the graphic narrative and issues and experiences pertinent to health and medicine. The medium of graphic novel is particularly suitable to portray the entangled nature of our relationships with everyday objects and spaces and can also act as a unique resource in the analysis and conversations about these relationalities and entanglements.

## The Stories

The stories that you will encounter show and tell a wide range of experiences and feelings. We are of the opinion that these stories are powerful data in their own right, as each one of you dear readers would relate to them in your own unique way. You are the person who will discern your own “findings”, or if we may say, discovery and journey in these narratives.

We provide the following insights for anyone who prefers or requires a little bit more framing and reading about “findings” in the classical sense of research:

### **Technology has a polarising, and often negative, influence on wellbeing:**

The stories confirm the salient role of mobile technology such as laptops and mobile phones in influencing students’ wellbeing. In particular, communication technologies fluctuate in-between being the means of connection and disconnection with other humans (students, neighbours, friends, family members). Their isolative role is particularly salient, where entertainment uses of technology are related to loneliness and lack of social interactions. Mobile phones mediate social media content that is overwhelmingly reported to have negative effects on students’ subjective sense of wellbeing and self-image. Laptops and mobile phones seem omnipresent and indispensable for student coursework, digital communication, and entertainment.

### **Everyday things and environments are “emotional triggers” for wellbeing:**

The novel’s narratives commonly highlight a particular thing (a bracelet, a gadget, a mug, clothes, a camera, a mobile phone, particular food or drink, cigarettes, a laptop, stairs) or indoor and outdoor environments (library, house, dormitory, nature, gym, club). These “material triggers or anchors” act as salient experiential, emotional and reflective springboards for reflecting on student wellbeing and how it links to those materialities, often in negative terms. Such triggers are used to mediate social or individual situations that show particularly challenging experiences and behaviours such as: imposter syndrome, procrastination, working while studying, the effect of hormones and deeply embodied and obstructive feelings such as anxiety, annoyance, or low self-esteem. On the positive side, particular practices, environments, and things are positively related to the sense of wellbeing.

**Things and environments should serve social interactions:** Although things and environments are placed centrally in the narratives, they seem to be most beneficial for wellbeing when they mediate socialising and social relationships.

**Body image puts pressure on students:** A concern with personal appearance looms big in our stories, where students talk about what they aspire to look like, experiencing moments of not being presentable enough, comparing themselves with social media role models or entering a difficult relationship and behaviours with food and body image. This raises questions about standardised beauty ideals and pressures that students feel to meet social and peer expectations. It may also signal a sense of liberation once these things are faced and reflected on.

**Accommodation can be a decisive factor for wellbeing:** Particular accommodation types and conditions (and the change thereof) make significant impact on students' narrated wellbeing. Poorly lit and small rooms are presented as particularly challenging spaces.

**Messy rooms are sending messages of inner (emotional and mental) struggle:** There is also a connection made between one's struggling feelings and room's messiness that further emphasise the role of living environments in wellbeing.

**Nature takes a grand role in positive wellbeing:** Nature, such as green outdoor spaces, canal or hiking areas, natural phenomena, spaces and organisms such as naturally lit rooms, the outdoors, plants or pets take central place in students' narratives as having a soothing, nurturing and revitalising effect.

**University experience is significant for one's sense of identity and growth:** University experience comes across as crucial for students' identity formation and transformation – the things and environments present a tangible and important interactive (and animated) backdrop for social interactions.

...

Our vision is for the graphic novel to be applied and appropriated for exploring and discussing mental health as part of mental health literacy and curriculum, at relevant universities' programmes, through wellbeing services and various health and charitable organisations, and beyond, among anyone struggling with their wellbeing or simply interested in graphic novels.

## From the students' perspective

How was it to participate in the project?

*It was great. It was a place to tell my story in such a creative way; a story which I'm sure a lot of people can relate to. I feel proud of my contribution - I never thought it would turn out as good as it did and I was so nervous about putting it out there but it is liberating in a way.*

*I was very happy to help in my contribution to a piece of work that could help or inform others in the future. Personally, it opened my eyes to my own feelings about the physical environment and its effects on my own emotions, it was very thought-provoking during completion.*

*It was really beautiful to participate in this project... I hope my contribution helps current students to not feel alone in their struggles, and to see that everyone goes through difficult times while studying.*

*I really enjoyed taking part in the project... I found it to be a fulfilling outlet of self-expression. Going over my mental health journey as I was writing the narrative made me proud of how far I have come.*

How have you changed through your project participation?

*It taught me to take a step back and realise what is causing my anxiety and how to deal with it.*

*I think more about the things I have around me and I am more aware of what affects my mood in any which way so I can understand and adjust – it makes me feel more at one with myself.*

*I realised how much objects really influence and participate in our mental health.*

*It made me realise how embedded we are in our environment, and its importance on our wellbeing. I have become more attuned to how my moods change in different places and with different objects.*

*I feel more inclined to share my experience after seeing it translated into a graphic novel format which makes it seem more palatable and easy to appreciate.*

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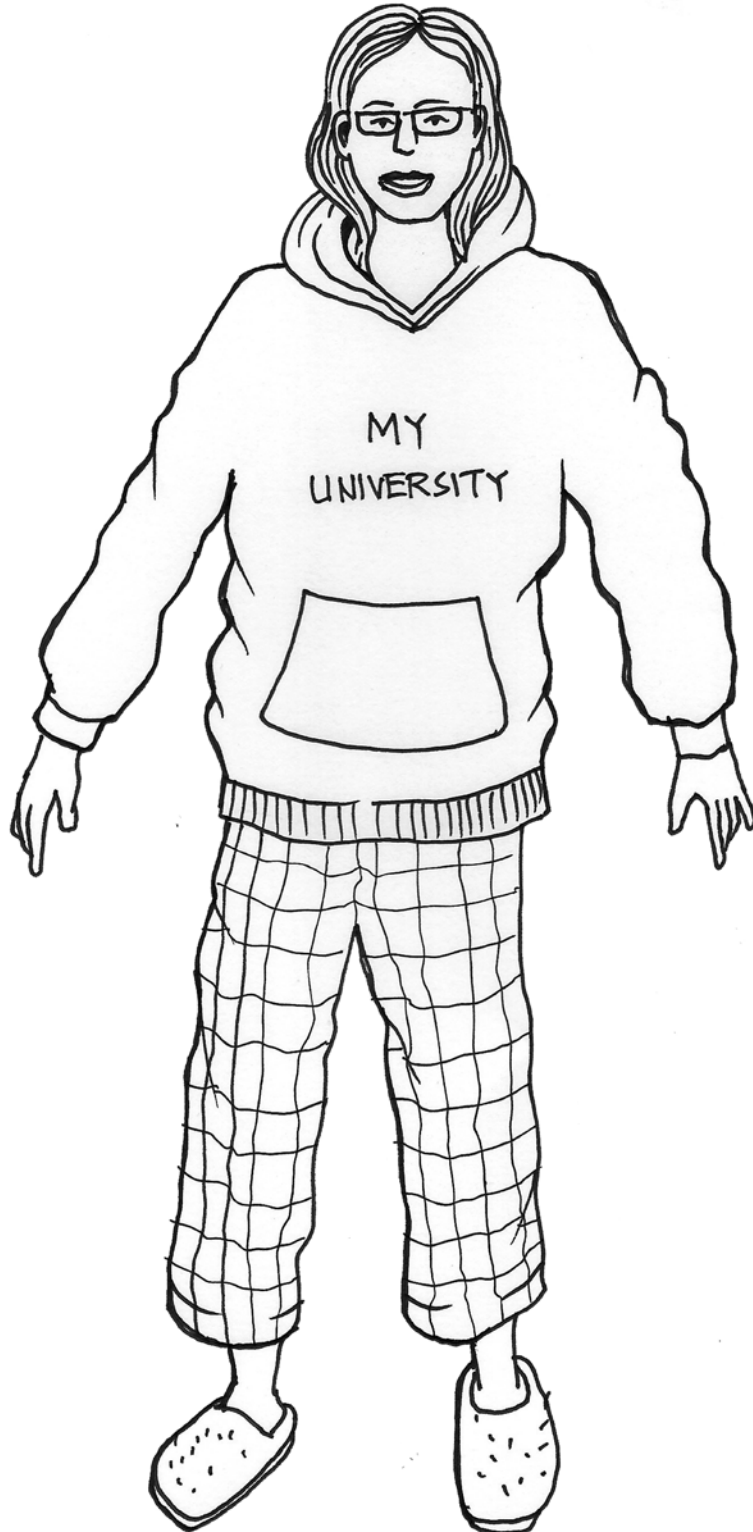
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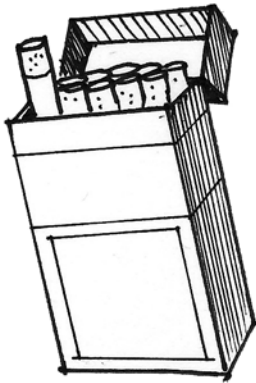
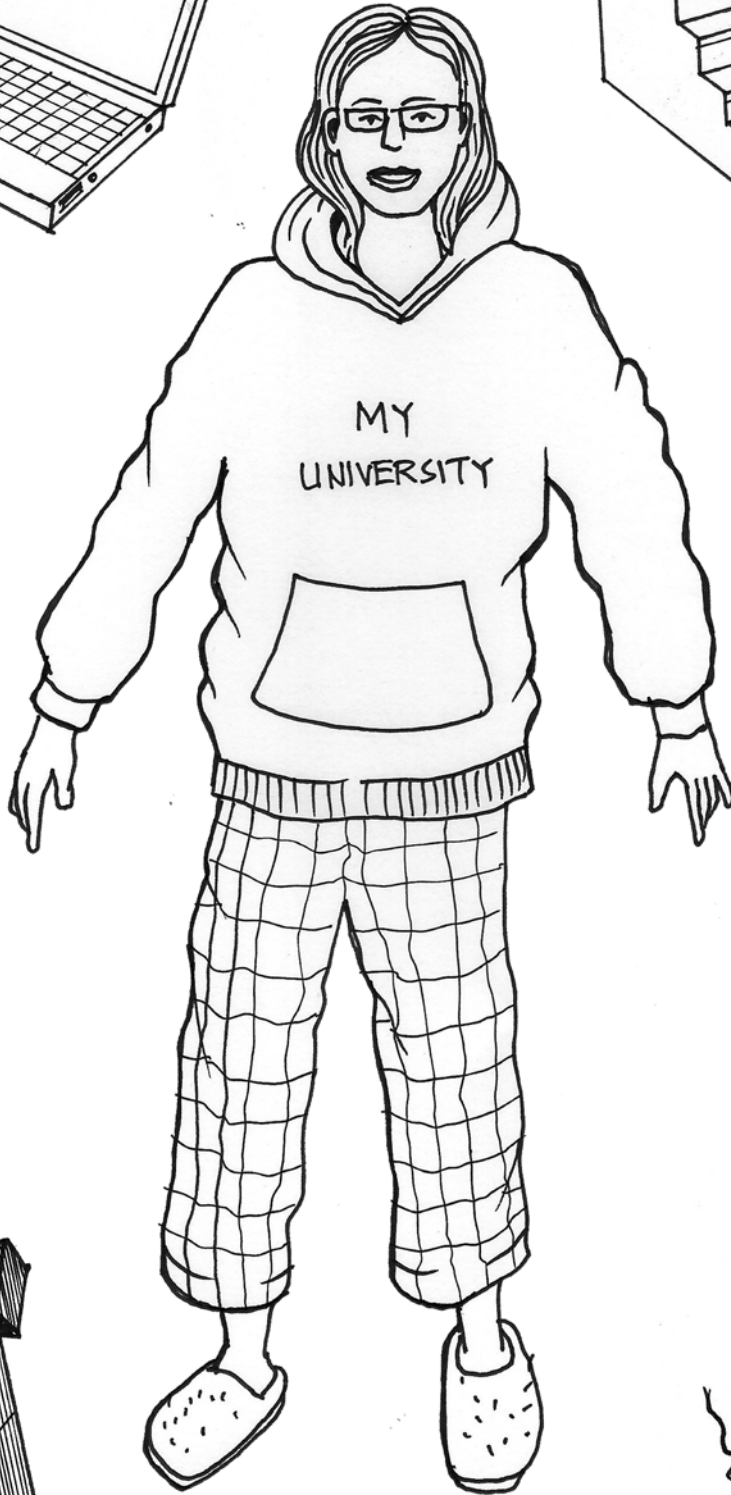
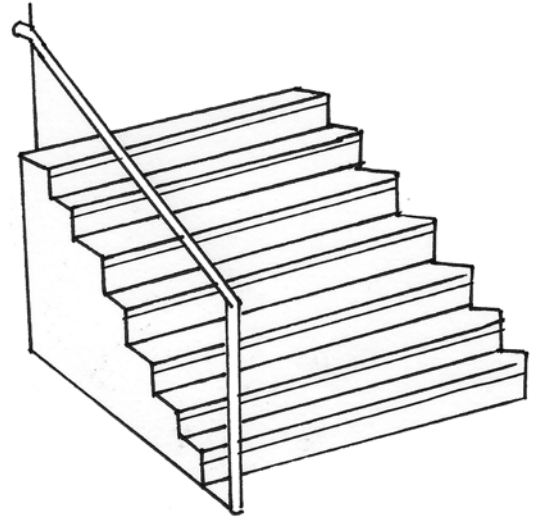
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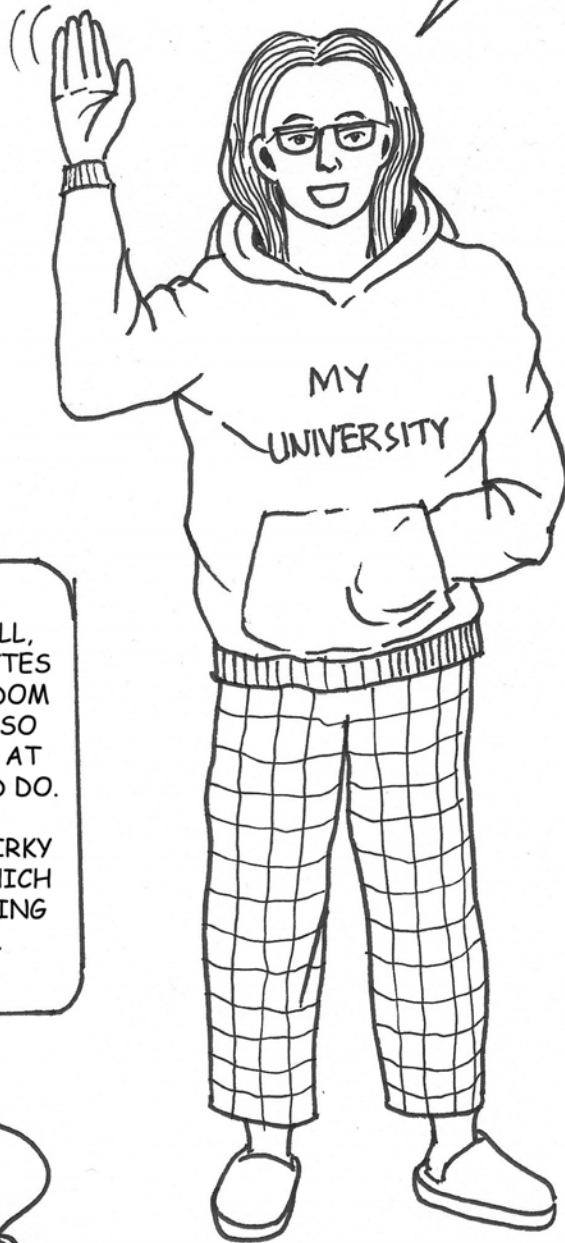


# GABY'S STORY





HELLO! I AM GABY, A SOCIAL SCIENCES STUDENT. I AM GOING TO TELL YOU A STORY FROM MY 2ND YEAR OF UNIVERSITY, A TIME WHEN I FIRST LEARNED ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH.



THERE WERE MOMENTS WHEN I WANTED TO GIVE UP ON MY DEGREE.

WHEN I WAS COMPULSIVELY BITING MY FINGERS.

AND SCRATCHING MY FACE.

I LIKE BEING CHILL, SMOKING CIGARETTES & WATCHING RANDOM THINGS. BUT I ALSO LIKE SUCCEEDING AT WHAT I START AND DO. SO, IT IS A PARADOXICAL, QUIRKY COMBINATION WHICH I AM STILL LEARNING TO DEAL WITH.

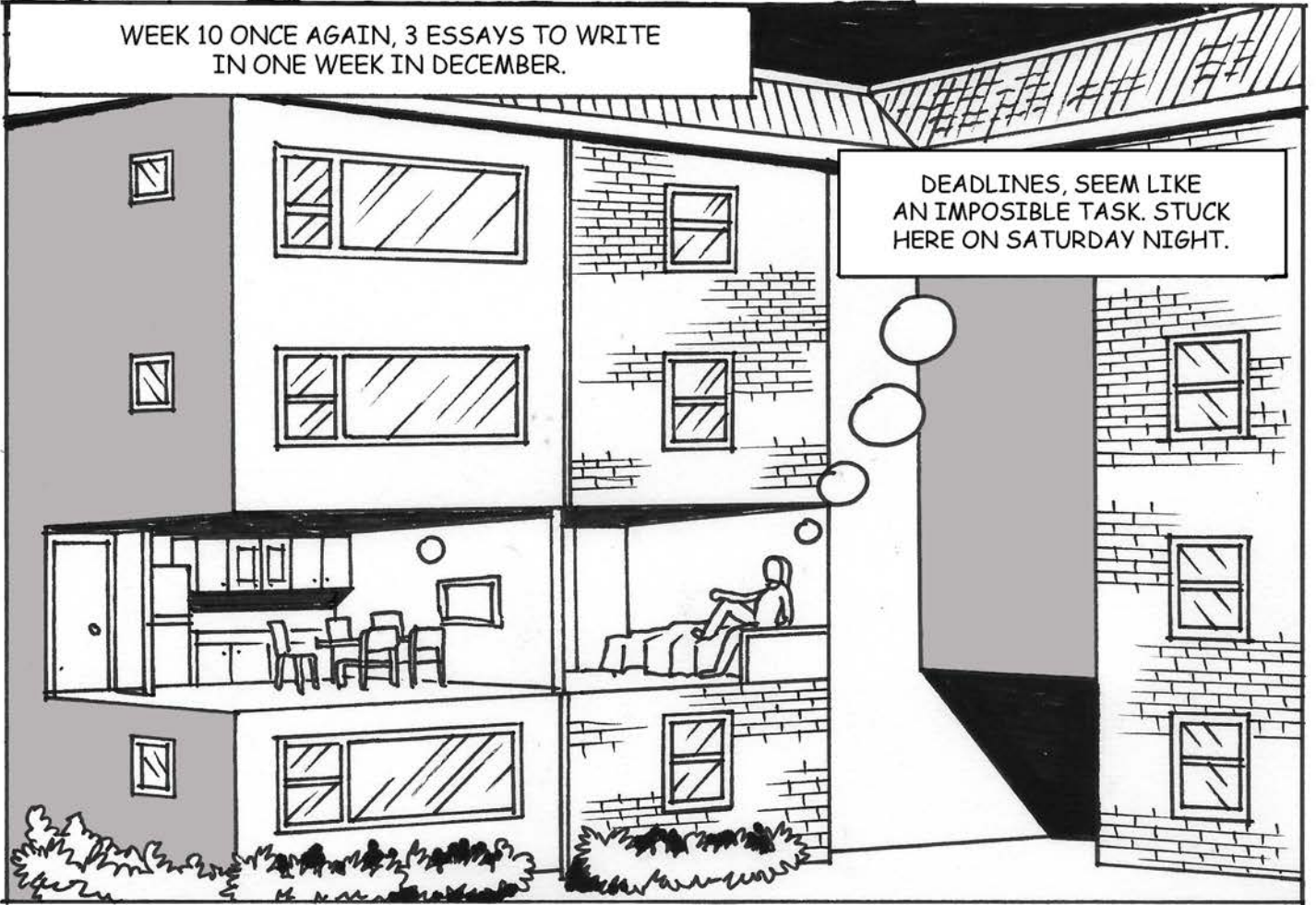
IT WASN'T ALWAYS FUN BUT LOOKING BACK IT WAS A TRUE JOURNEY.

I LEARNED ABOUT MYSELF AS MUCH AS I LEARNED ABOUT THE WORLD.

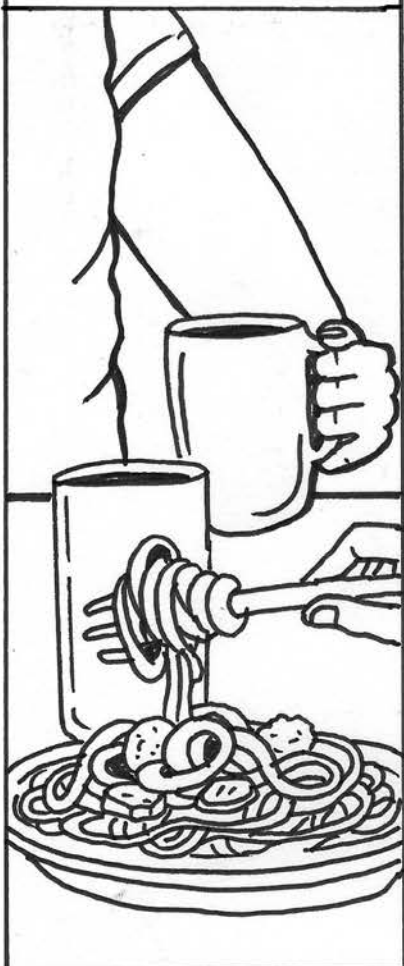


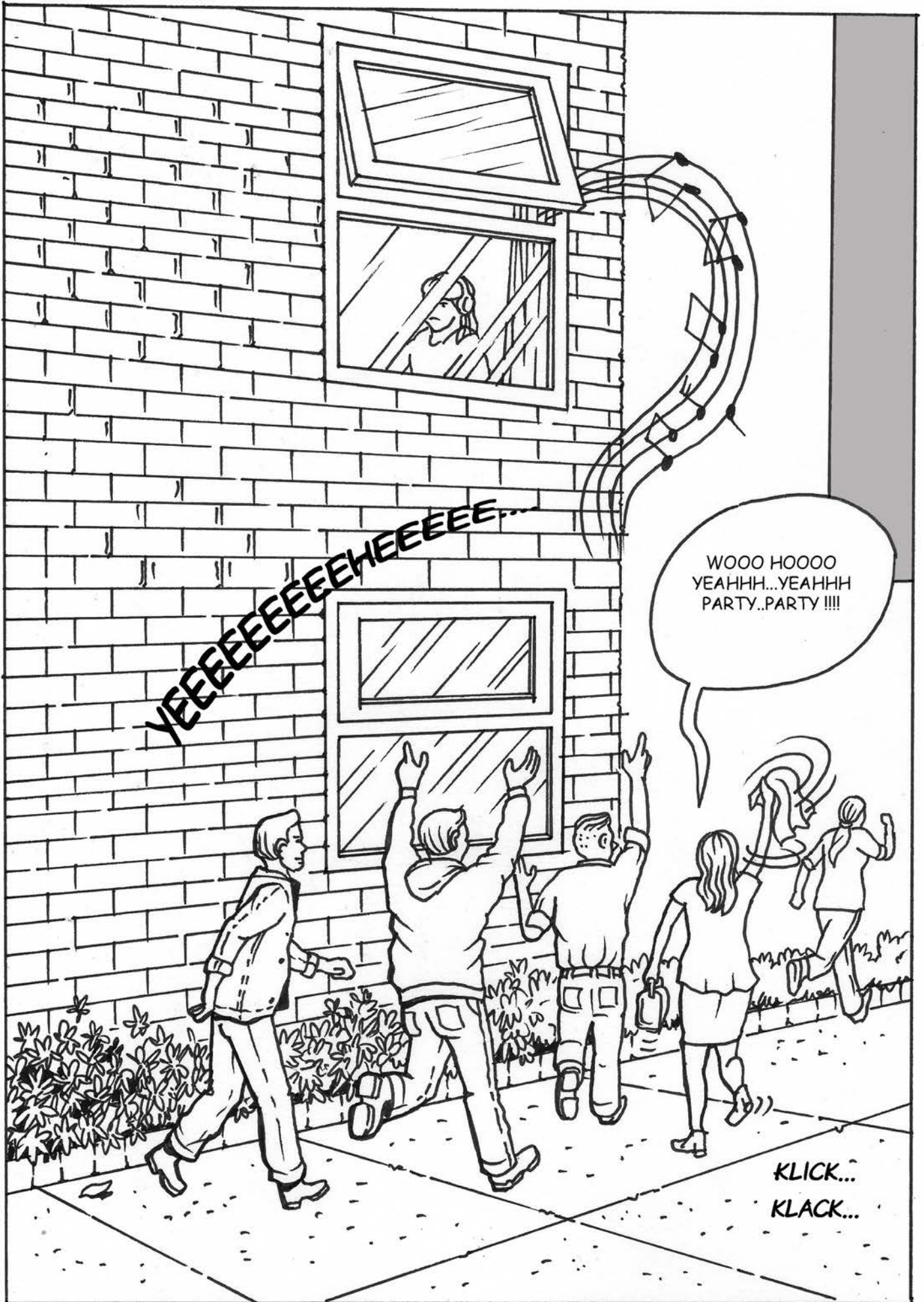
WEEK 10 ONCE AGAIN, 3 ESSAYS TO WRITE  
IN ONE WEEK IN DECEMBER.

DEADLINES, SEEM LIKE  
AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK. STUCK  
HERE ON SATURDAY NIGHT.



AT 10 PM...





YEEEEEEEEEEEEEE...

WOOO HOOOO  
YEAHHH...YEAHHH  
PARTY..PARTY !!!!

KLICK...  
KLACK...

IT HAPPENS EVERY TIME. I HAVE LEARNED NOTHING FROM MY FIRST YEAR. ALL SEMESTER I TRY TO PLAN HOW TO TACKLE MY DEADLINES, AND I NEVER STICK TO THE PLAN.

WHAT ARE WE PAYING ALL THIS FOR?  
THIS FOR?  
FOR YOU TO FAIL?



WHY?



...AND THEN I PLAN AND PLAN TO BE LIKE THEM BUT IT NEVER REALLY HAPPENS.

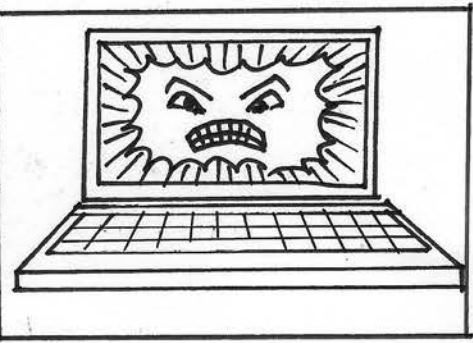
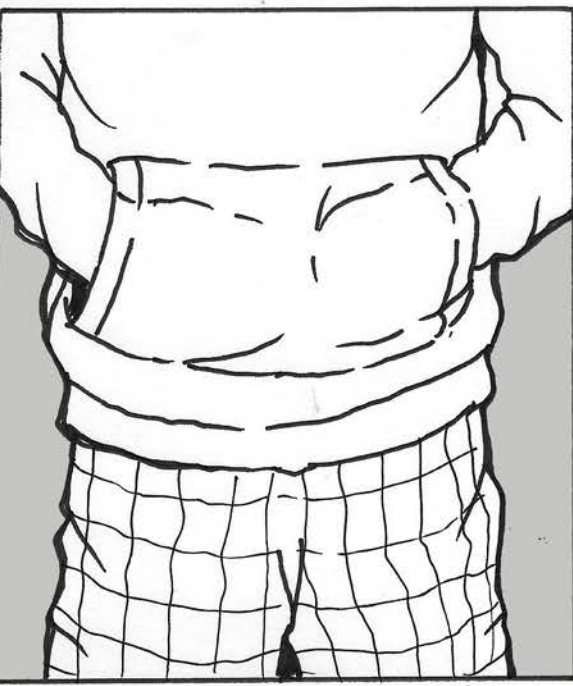
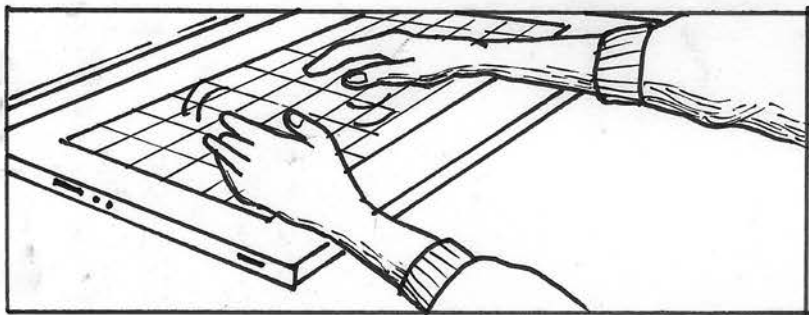
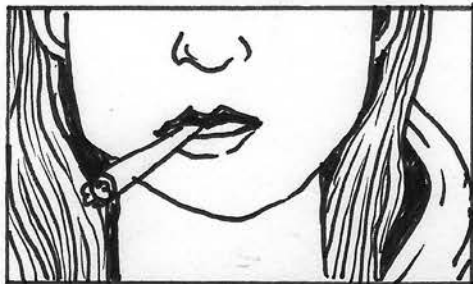
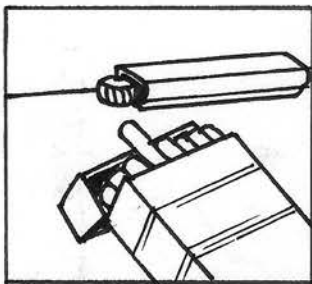
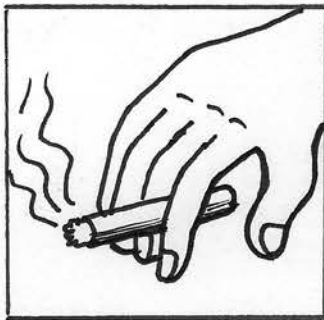
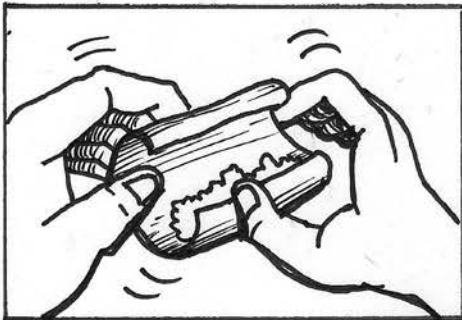
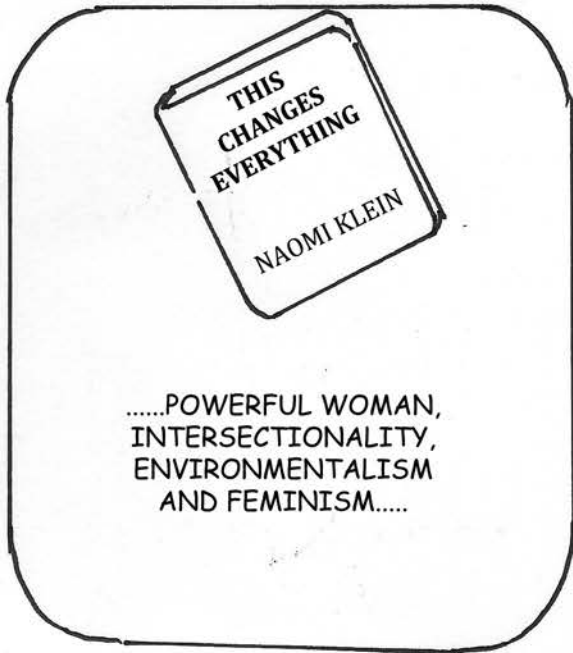
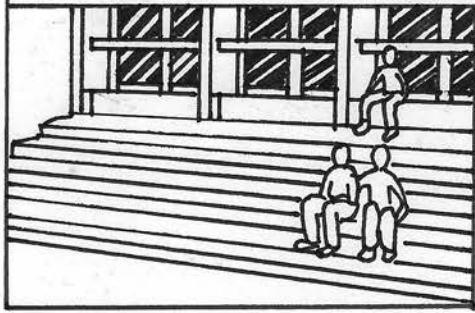
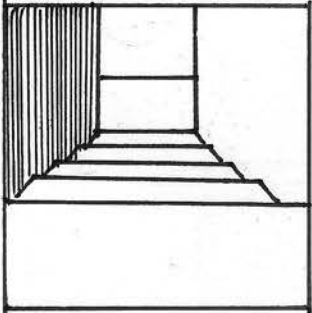
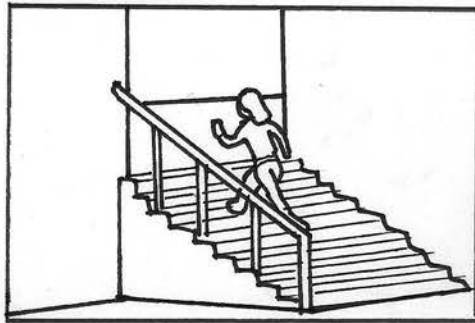
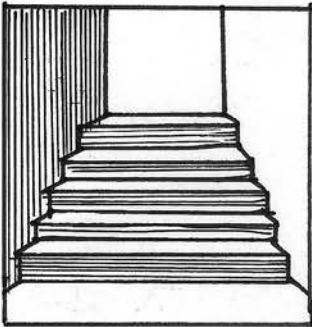
KEEP SILENCE  
IN THE LIBRARY



WAS THAT WORTH  
ANYTHING?







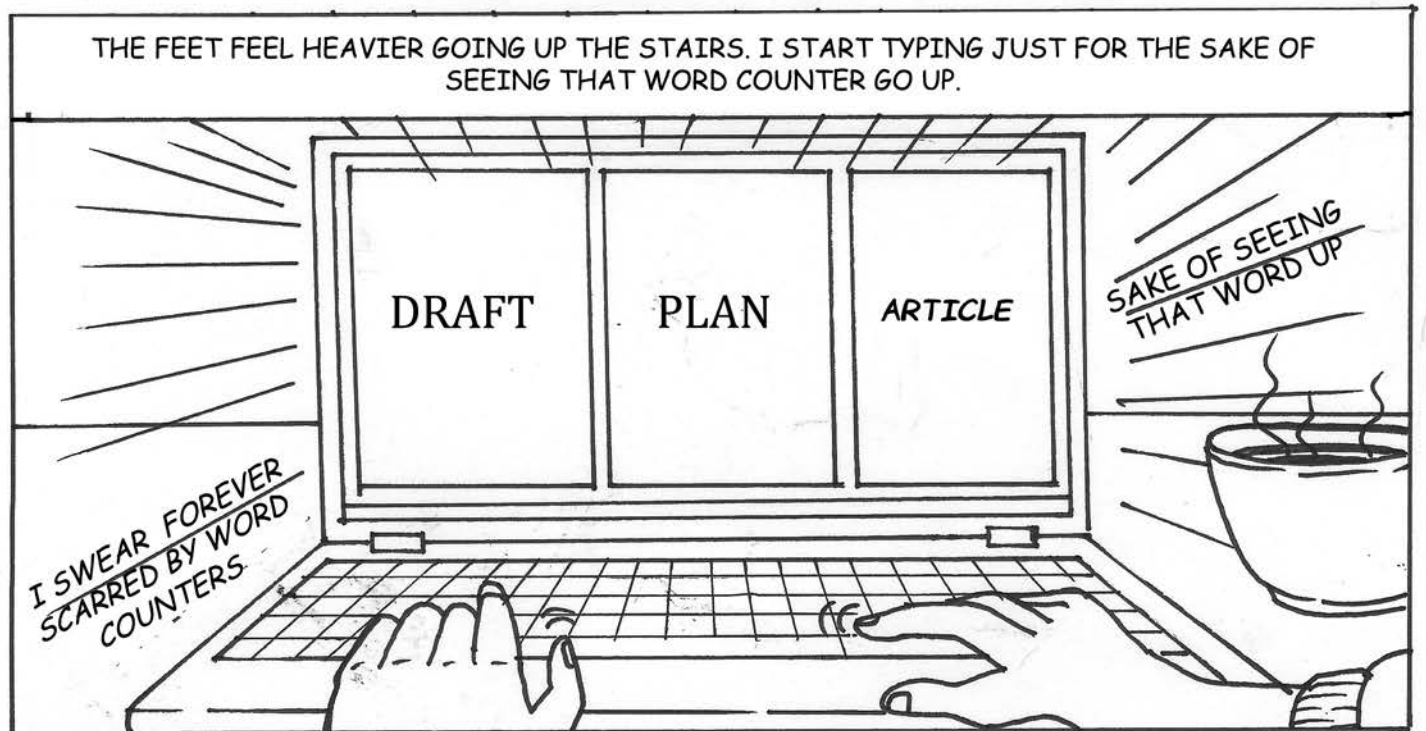
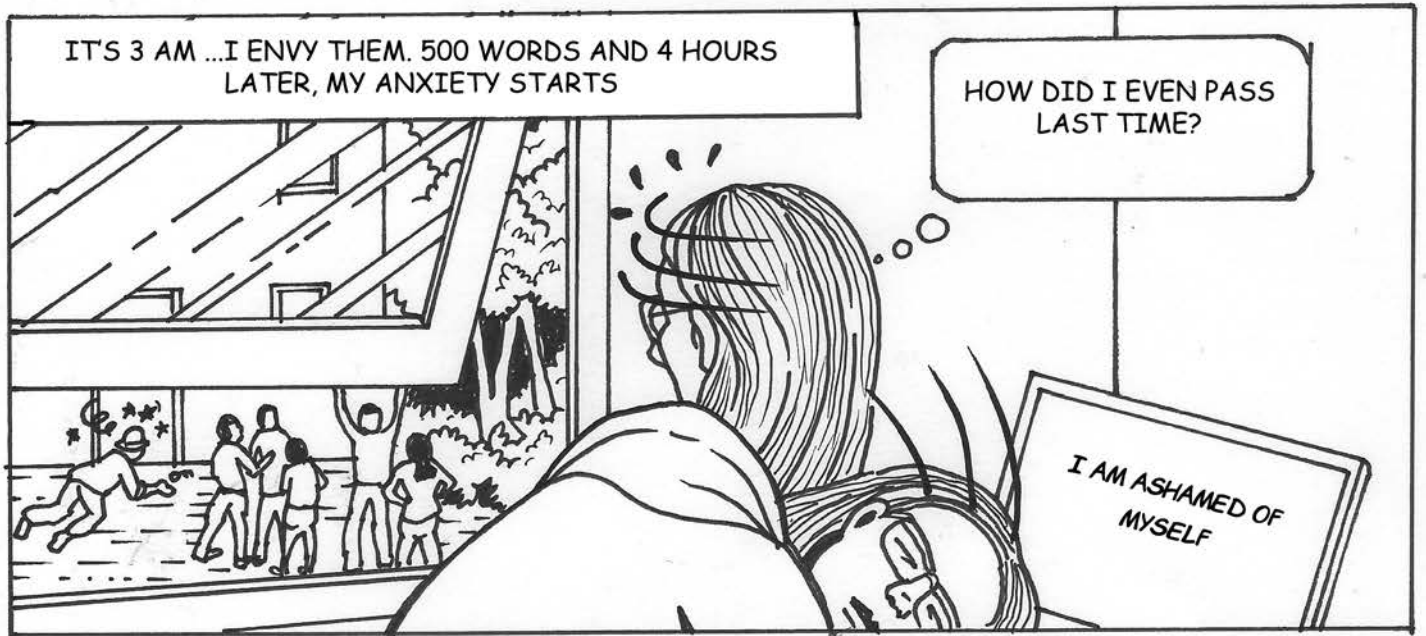
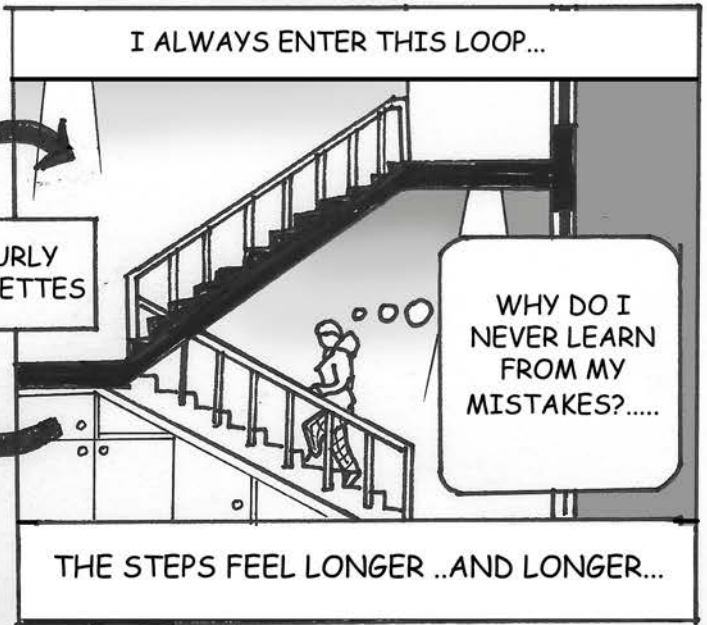
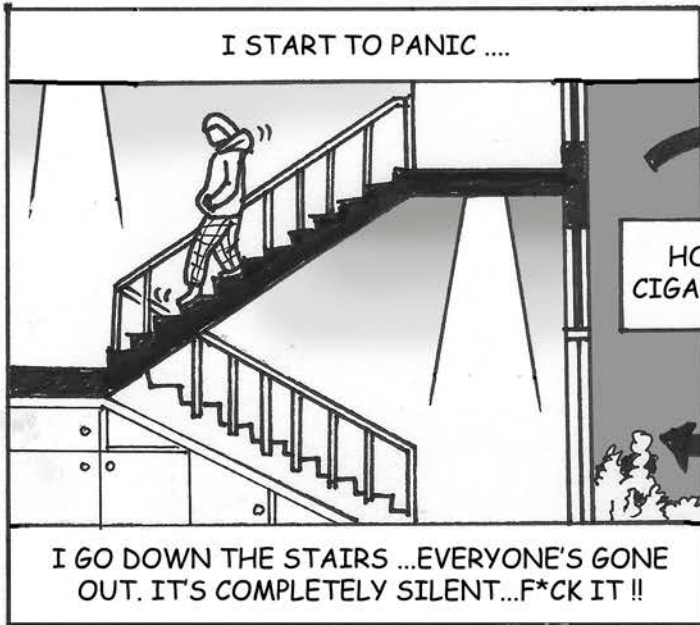


GOING DOWN THE STAIRS.



IT'S 11 PM.

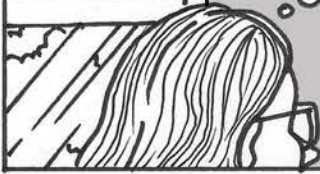




05:00 AM. 5 TRIPS DOWN, 2 HOURS LATER I ONLY HAVE 700 WORDS.



WHY DID I WASTE ALL NIGHT?  
I COULD'VE AT LEAST SLEPT,  
I'VE DONE NOTHING.



MY CHEST HURTS  
MY FEET ARE  
HEAVY  
CIGARETTES  
6 HOURS LEFT  
PANIC !!

I HATE THESE  
STAIRS.

07:00 AM.



I WON'T HAVE  
ANOTHER BREAK  
UNTIL I HAVE 2000  
WORDS.



THOSE WERE THE MOMENTS I HATE MOST.



11:30 AM.



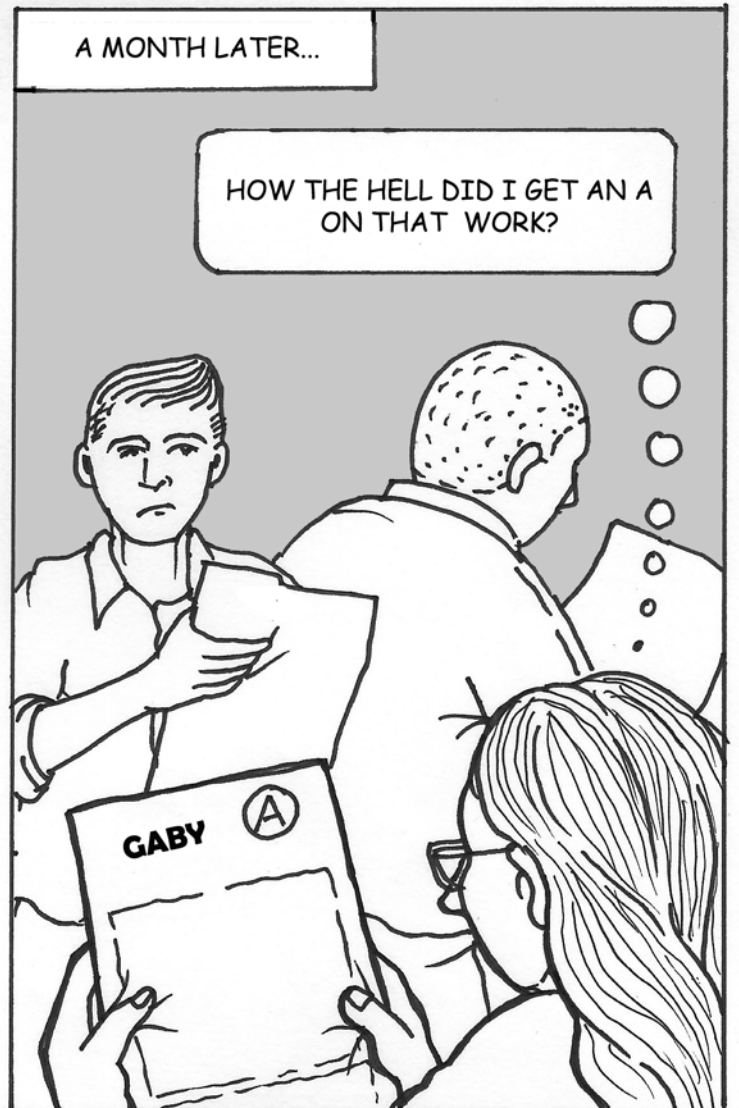
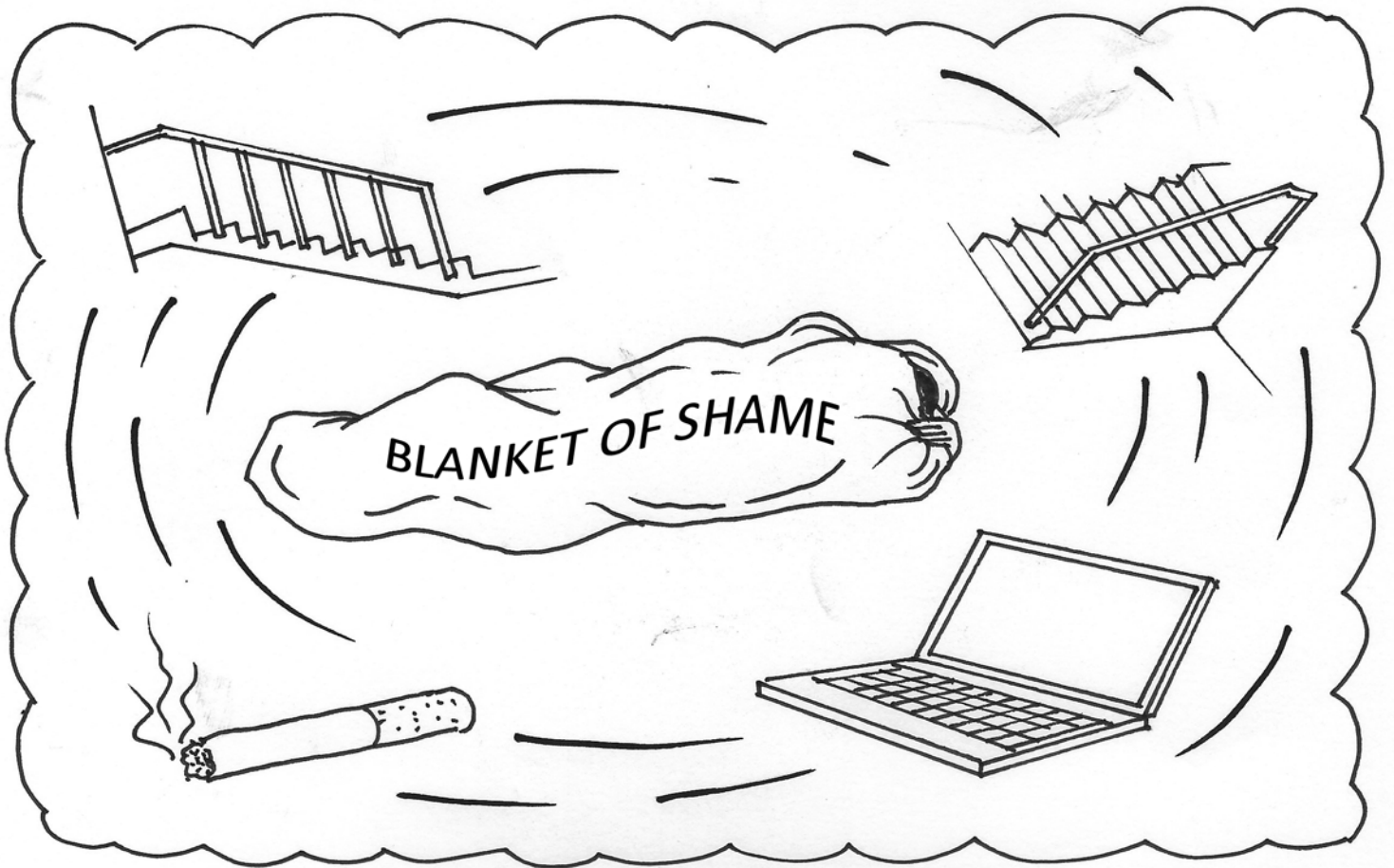
... I'LL FINISH IT EVEN IF IT  
IS THE DEATH OF ME.  
I STILL HAVE TO WRITE MY  
CONCLUSION...

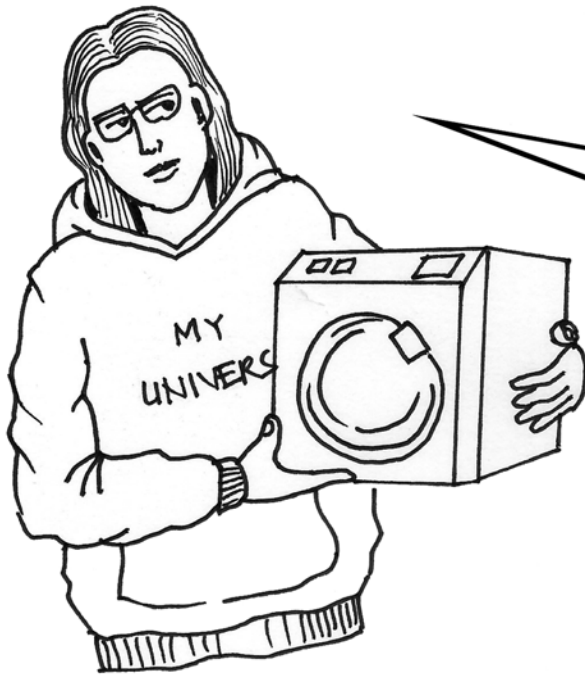
MY SECOND  
COFFEE



MY HANDS ARE **SHAKING** 11:59 AM  
WHILE I TYPE A RANDOM CONCLUSION...







DOING LAUNDRY WHEN I WAS LIVING ON CAMPUS WAS SOMETHING THAT WAS TROUBLING FOR ME (BOTH BECAUSE IT WAS EXPENSIVE, AND BECAUSE IT SOMETIMES DIDN'T WORK WELL), SO I KIND OF DEVELOPED THIS NEGATIVE EMOTION AROUND WASHING MACHINES. HOWEVER, THE RITUAL OF GOING OUTSIDE THE HOUSE TO DO THE LAUNDRY WAS ALSO HELPFUL SOMETIMES AS A WAY OF "HEALTHY" PROCRASTINATION.

THE FIRE ALARM DRILL ON EVERY WEDNESDAY MORNING WAS QUITE ANNOYING, ESPECIALLY SINCE I WAS A NIGHT OWL. ALSO, WHENEVER A FIRE ALARM ACTUALLY RANG AND WE HAD TO GET OUT, SOMEONE WOULD GET A FINE AND NOTHING WOULD ACTUALLY HAPPEN, WHICH SEEMED QUITE UNFAIR TO ME. I COME FROM EASTERN EUROPE AND IN MY CULTURE SMOKING INSIDE A PLACE YOU RENT/LIVE IS NOT UNCOMMON.



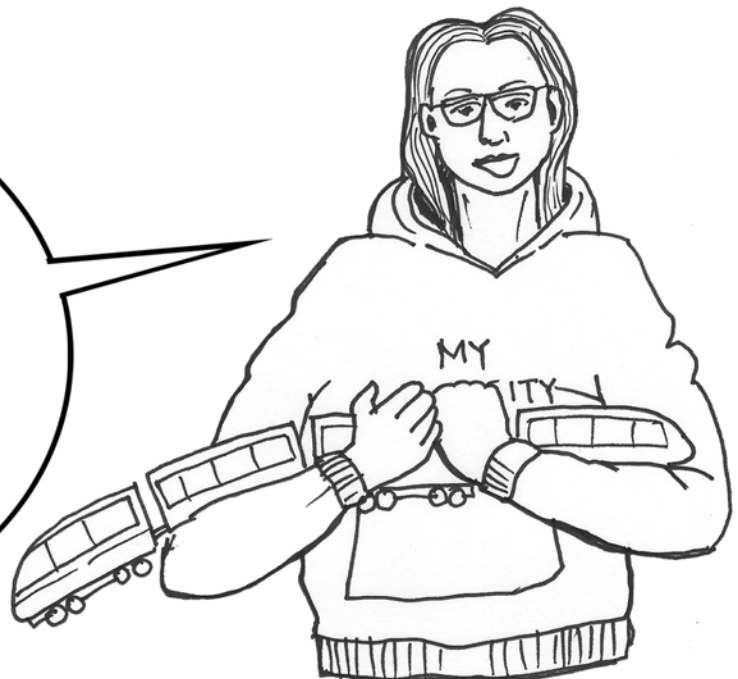
POSITIVE BECAUSE I LEARN SO MUCH FROM THEM AND I LOVE TOUCHING AND SMELLING THEM. NEGATIVE BECAUSE I HAVE A TENDENCY TO NOT FINISH THE BOOKS I START READING. WHENEVER I HAVE TO WRITE SOMETHING I END UP BEING SURROUNDED BY MANY BOOKS, NOT KNOWING WHERE TO LOOK ANYMORE.

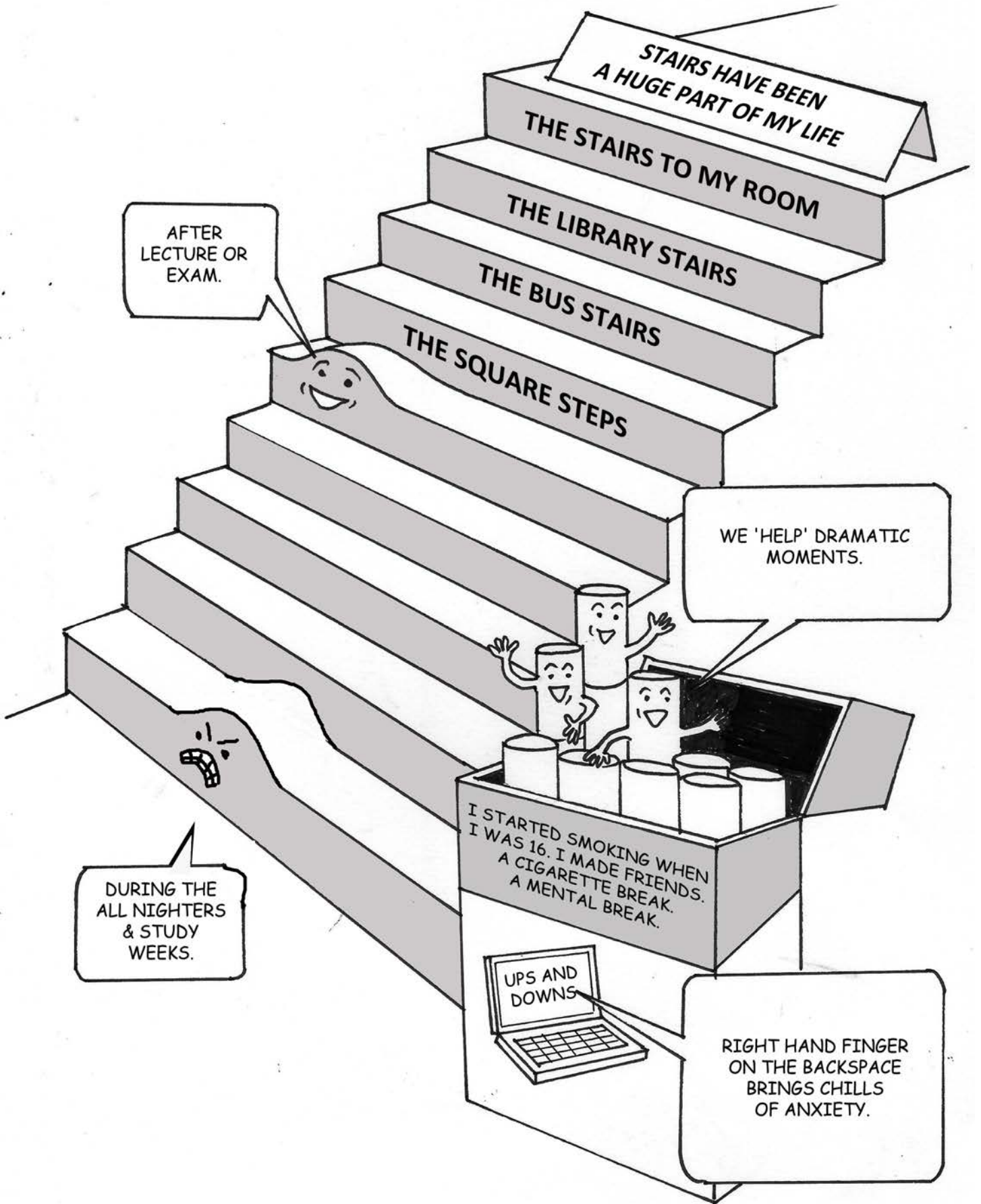
WHEN I THINK OF A MUG,  
I INSTANTLY THINK OF CALM,  
SOFT AND HAPPINESS. I LOVE  
DRINKING BOTH TEA AND COFFEE, WARM  
OR COLD. BEFORE I CAME TO ENGLAND I  
NEVER HAD TEA WITH MILK, BUT I  
LEARNED THAT TEA WITH MILK CAN BE A  
CURE FOR PRETTY MUCH ANYTHING -  
TIREDNESS, A CONFLICT AMONG  
FLATMATES, A BORING LECTURE,  
ANXIETY, THE COLD, ETC. THAT  
SENSATION OF HOLDING A MUG  
OF TEA WITH BOTH HANDS IS  
SOMETHING VERY  
SOOTHING FOR ME.



THE FIRST DOUBLE-DECKER  
I WAS EVER ON WAS IN  
LANCASTER GOING TOWARDS  
CAMPUS. SITTING AT THE FRONT  
WINDOW ON THAT BUS WITH MY  
FAMILY IS THE FIRST MEMORY I  
HAVE OF BEING ON CAMPUS.  
ALTHOUGH I HATED WHEN THE BUS  
WAS LATE OR CRAMMED, I ALWAYS  
HAD A POSITIVE FEELING  
TOWARDS IT.

THE TRAIN COULD BE  
AN ENTIRE STORY! WHENEVER  
I FLEW TO UNIVERSITY OR BACK HOME  
A 1-3H TRAIN JOURNEY MEDIATED MY  
TRANSITION. I WOULD LISTEN TO  
MUSIC AND SAY GOODBYE OR HELLO  
TO THIS PLACE WHICH WAS MY HOME  
FOR 3 YEARS. I CRIED ON THE TRAIN, I  
SMILED ON THE TRAIN, I HAD 3  
SUITCASES SOMETIMES ON THE  
TRAIN AND I TALKED WITH LOVELY  
BRITISH WOMEN ON THE TRAIN. A  
RIDE ON THE TRAIN ALWAYS  
BROUGHT ME A FRESH  
PERSPECTIVE.





STAIRS HAVE BEEN  
A HUGE PART OF MY LIFE

THE STAIRS TO MY ROOM

THE LIBRARY STAIRS

THE BUS STAIRS

THE SQUARE STEPS

AFTER  
LECTURE OR  
EXAM.

WE 'HELP' DRAMATIC  
MOMENTS.

DURING THE  
ALL NIGHTERS  
& STUDY  
WEEKS.

I STARTED SMOKING WHEN  
I WAS 16. I MADE FRIENDS.  
A CIGARETTE BREAK.  
A MENTAL BREAK.

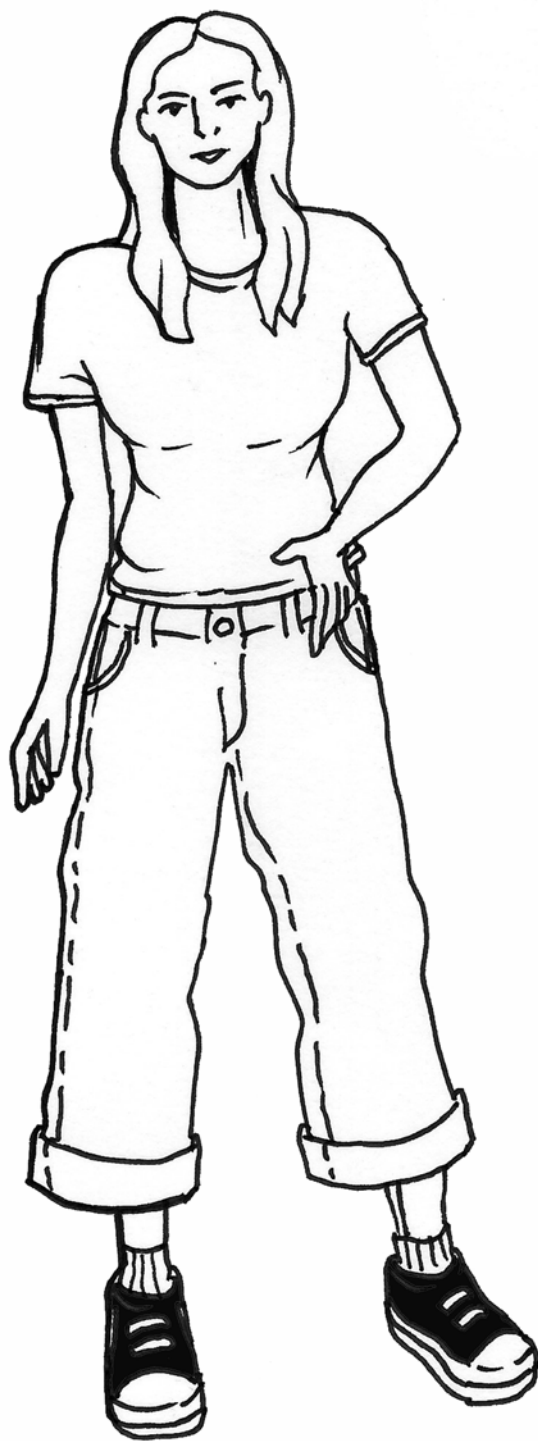
UPS AND  
DOWNS

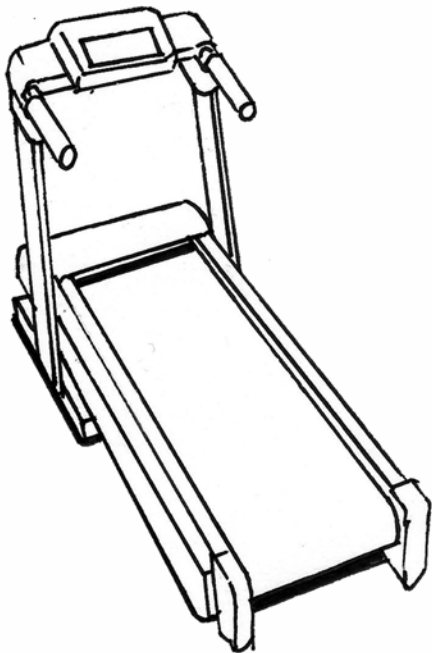
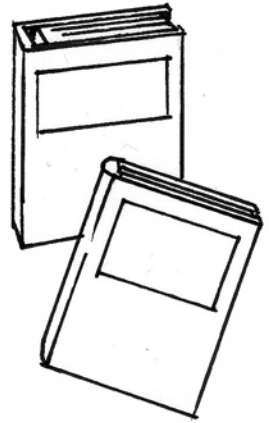
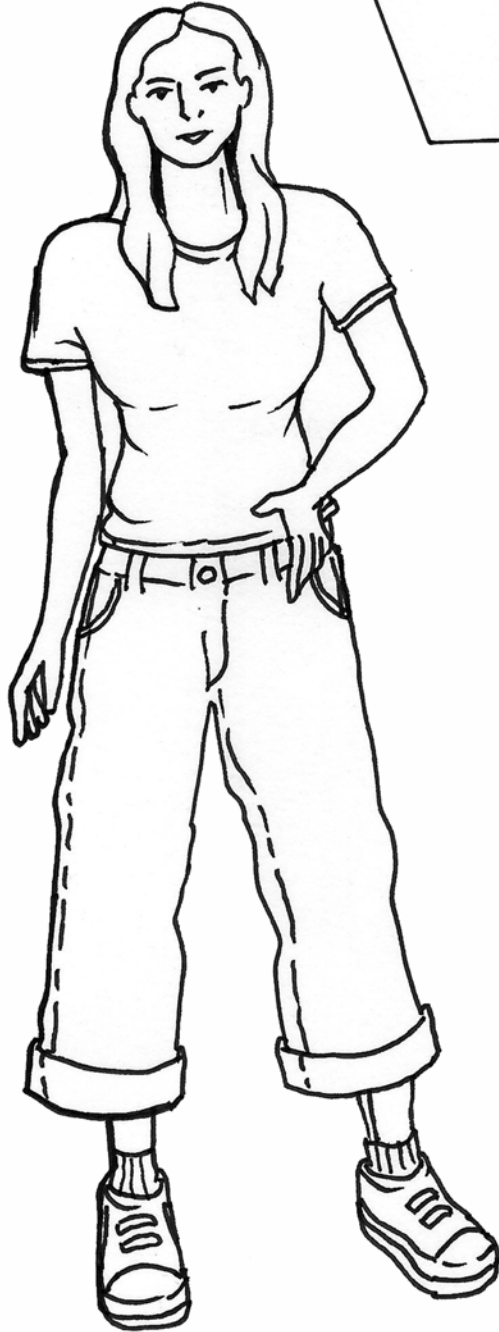
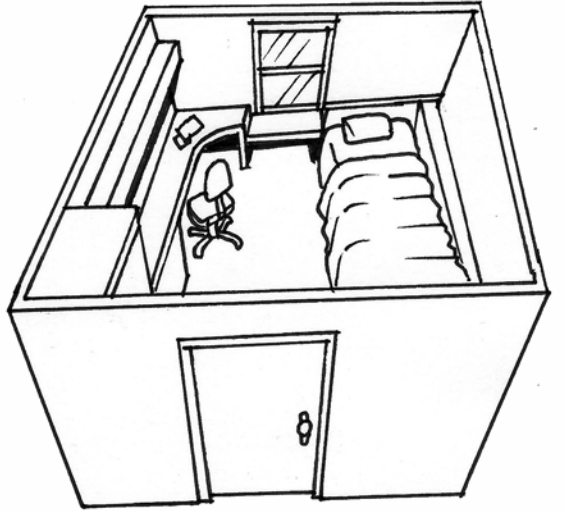
RIGHT HAND FINGER  
ON THE BACKSPACE  
BRINGS CHILLS  
OF ANXIETY.





# IMOGEN'S STORY





HEY I AM IMOGEN. I LOVE GOING FOR WALKS OUTSIDE AND LISTENING TO MUSIC, PLAYING NETBALL AT UNIVERSITY, EXERCISING AT THE GYM AND SPENDING TIME WITH MY FRIENDS.



LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT HOW MATERIAL THINGS AND ENVIRONMENTS AFFECT MY EMOTIONS AND WELL-BEING.

BEING OUTSIDE AND GOING FOR HIKES AND WALKS MAKES ME FEEL HAPPY. THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE ON HIKES HELPS ME TO CLEAR MY MIND ON THINGS THAT HAVE BEEN MAKING ME FEEL ANXIOUS. OPEN AND GREEN SPACES GENERALLY MAKE ME FEEL POSITIVE AND FREE OF DARKER THOUGHTS.



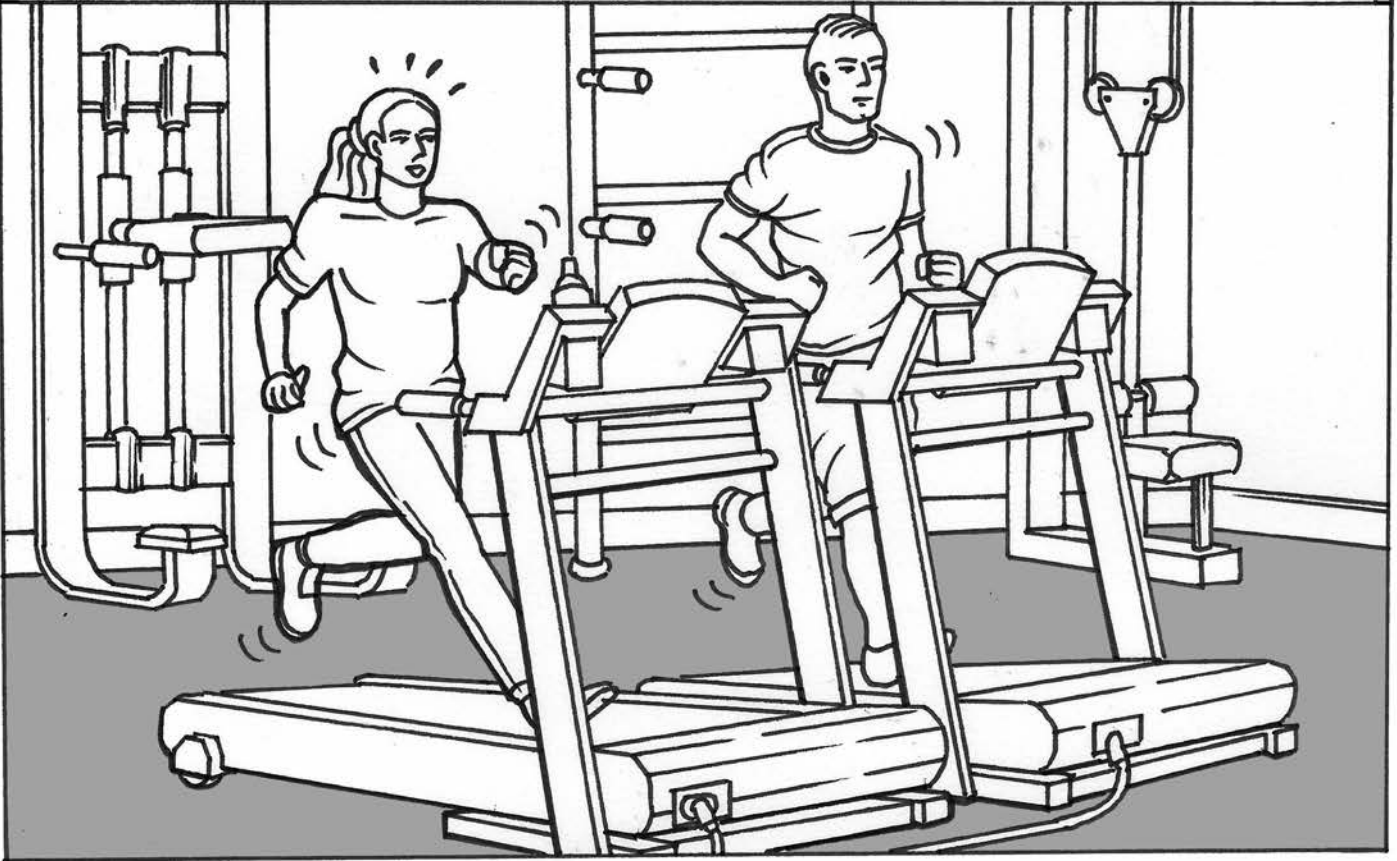
ON A NIGHT OUT, IN A CLUB, MY EMOTIONS CAN GO ONE OF TWO WAYS. MY EMOTIONS SEEM TO BE HEIGHTENED REGARDLESS. WHEN I AM OUT WITH FRIENDS, I CAN BE HAVING A REALLY GREAT TIME, THE MUSIC MAKES ME FEEL EXTREMELY HAPPY AND ALL OTHER WORRIES SEEM TO DISAPPEAR FOR AN EVENING.



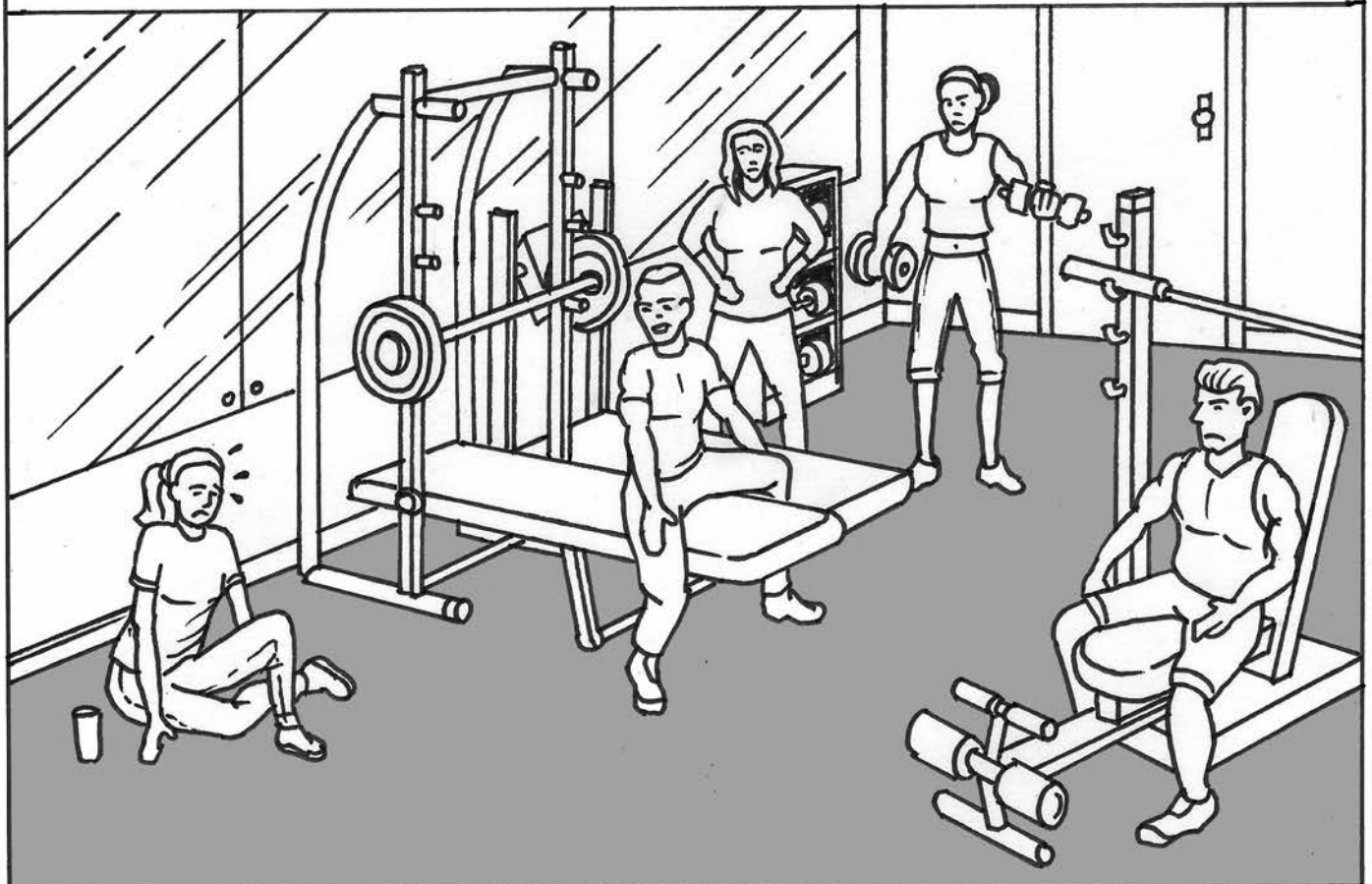
ON THE OTHER HAND, IF I'VE BEEN WORRYING ABOUT SOMETHING SPECIFIC DURING THE DAY SUCH AS WORK OR A RELATIONSHIP, THIS WILL BE INTENSIFIED WHICH CAN MAKE ME FEEL EXTREMELY LOW AND EVEN UPSET IN SOME CASES DUE TO THE CONFINED AND DARK SPACE OF A CLUB, AS WELL AS THE CROWDED SPACE.



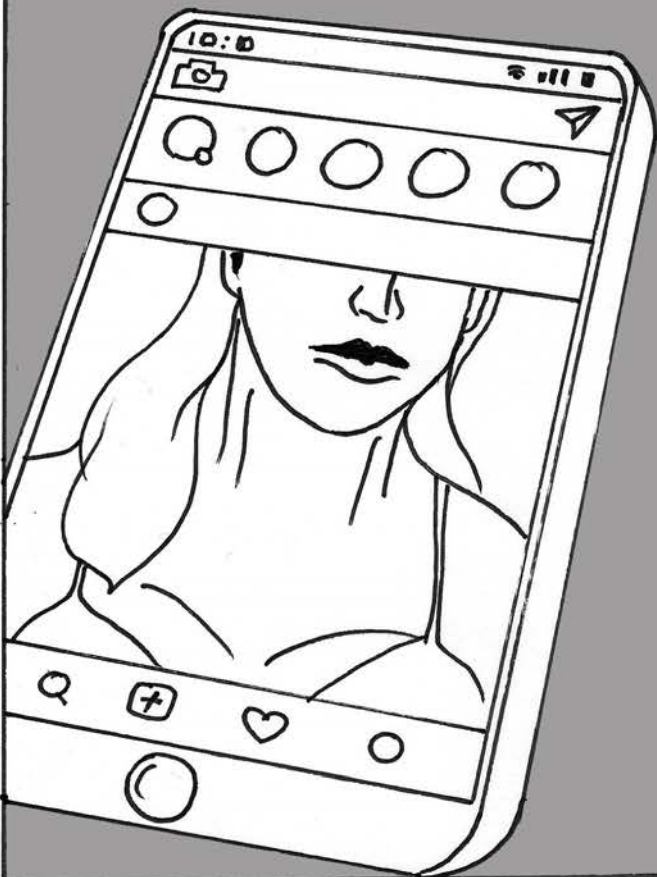
DOING EXERCISE IN AN INSIDE GYM MAKES BOTH ME AND MY BODY FEEL GREAT AFTERWARDS.  
THE RELEASE OF ENDORPHINS MAKES ME FEEL GOOD ABOUT MYSELF.



HOWEVER, WHILE BEING INSIDE THE GYM WITH LOTS OF OTHER PEOPLE I CAN FEEL INTIMIDATED  
BY OTHER PEOPLE'S SKILL OR AS THOUGH OTHER PEOPLE ARE LOOKING AT ME.  
THE GYM CAN MAKE ME FEEL QUITE SELF-CONSCIOUS.



SOCIAL MEDIA, ACCESSED THROUGH MY MOBILE PHONE, I WOULD DESCRIBE AS HAVING A LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH. FOLLOWING ACCOUNTS WHICH ARE BODY POSITIVE/CONFIDENT AND UPLIFT OTHERS CAN BE REALLY BENEFICIAL FOR MY MOOD.



HOWEVER, THE DIRECT COMPARISON OF MYSELF TO OTHER PEOPLE ONLINE...

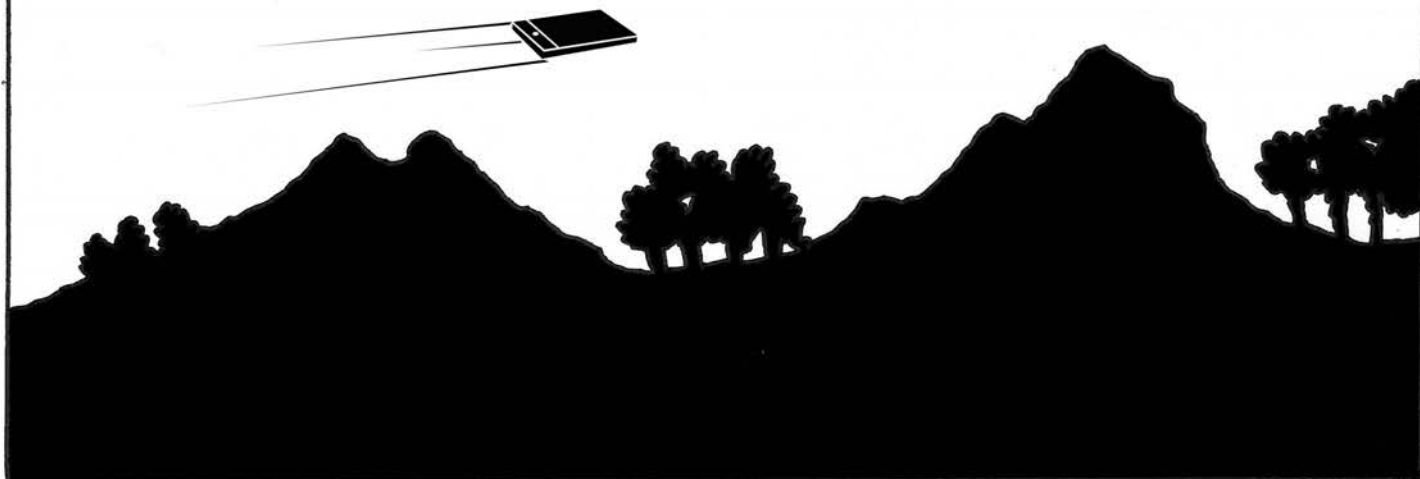


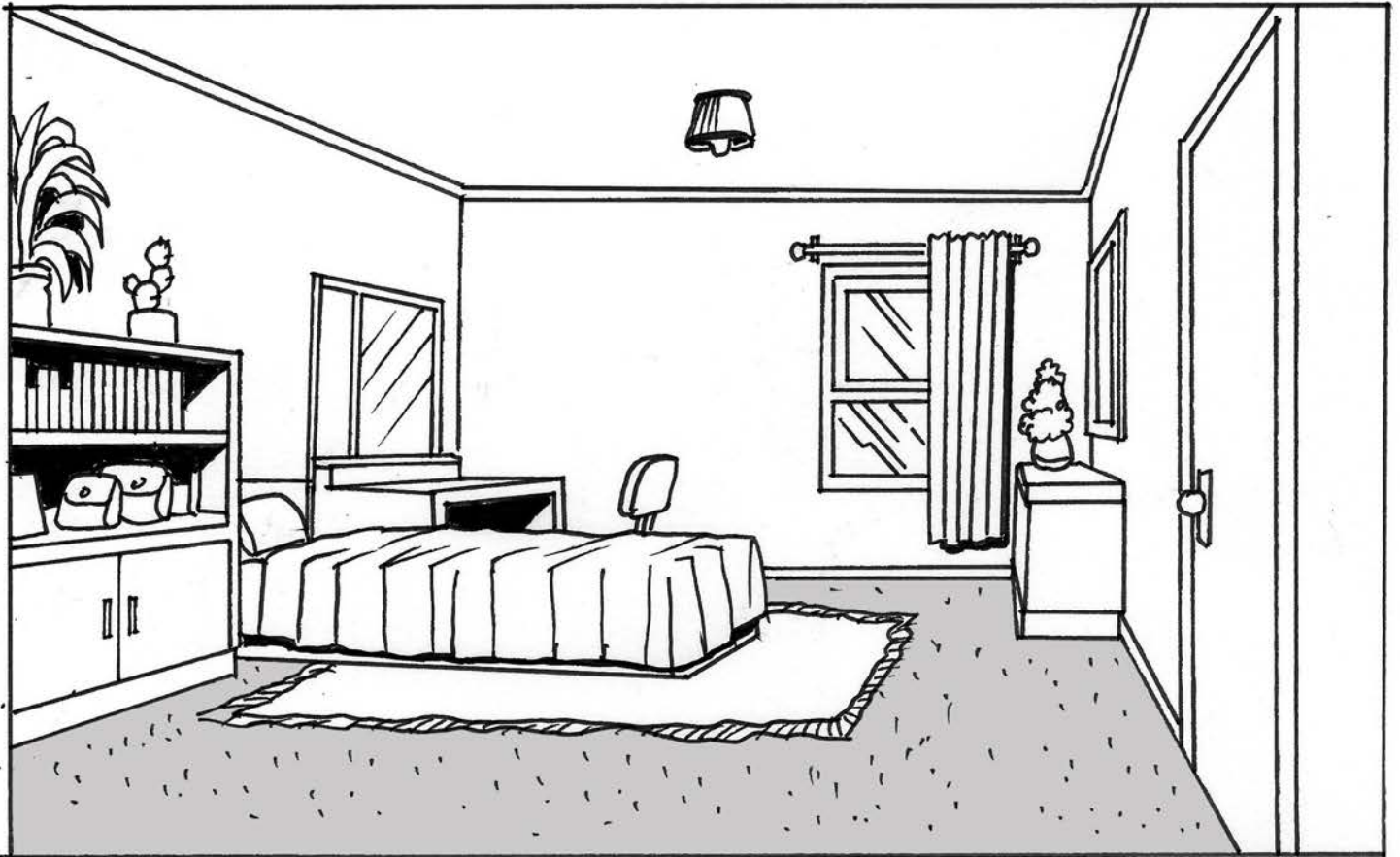
...CAN MAKE ME FEEL ANXIOUS AND INSECURE.



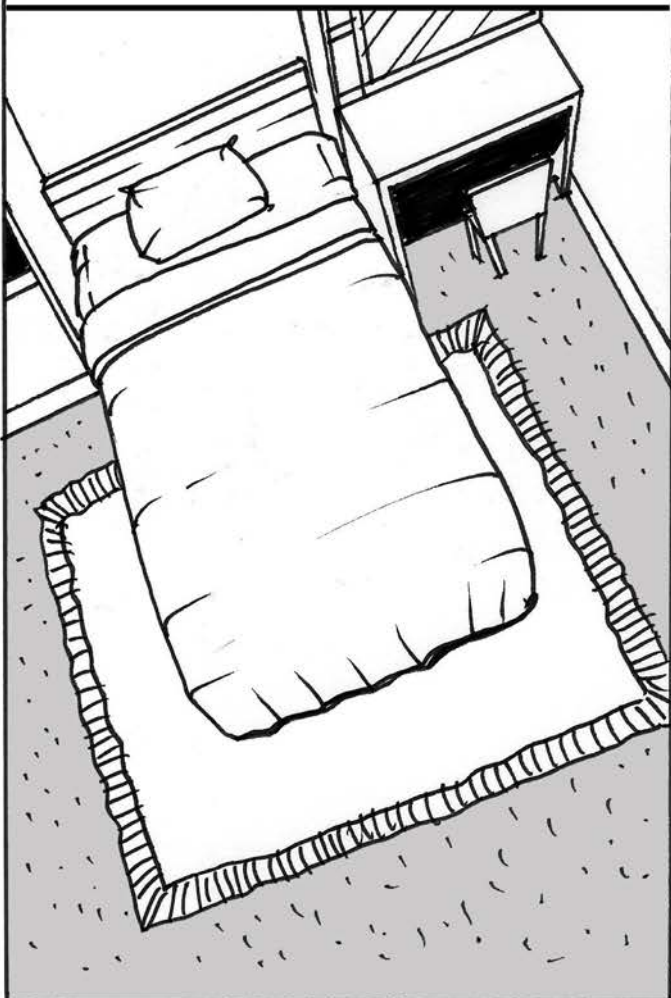
IN GENERAL, I FEEL AS THOUGH MATERIAL THINGS AND MY ENVIRONMENT DO HAVE A GREAT EFFECT ON MY EMOTIONS AND MENTAL STATE. MY PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT APPEARS TO HAVE AN OVERALL POSITIVE IMPACT ON MY MOOD WITH OPEN, GREEN SPACES IN PARTICULAR MAKING ME FEEL GOOD MENTALLY.

SOME PLACES CAN HAVE THE OPPOSITE EMOTION AND IF I'M ALREADY IN A SAD PLACE MENTALLY, CAN DEFINITELY EXACERBATE THIS. HOWEVER, MATERIAL THINGS ARE BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE WITH SOCIAL MEDIA AND A MOBILE PHONE HAVING THE MOST PROFOUND NEGATIVE FEELING ASSOCIATED

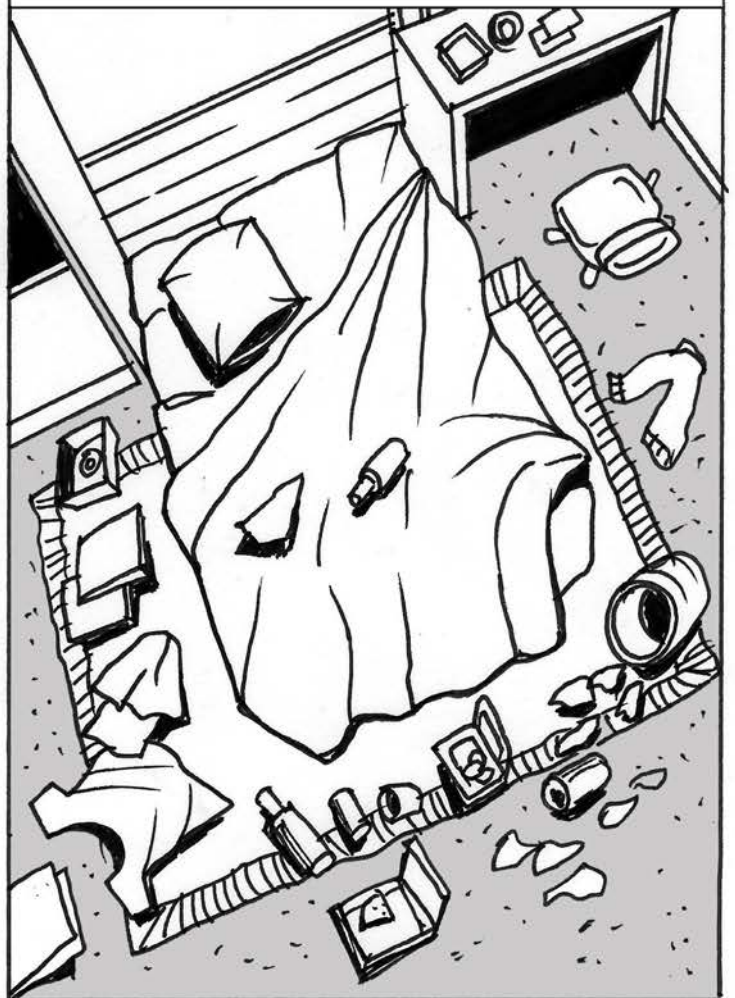




ON A NORMAL DAY, THE ROOM WOULD LOOK LIKE THIS.

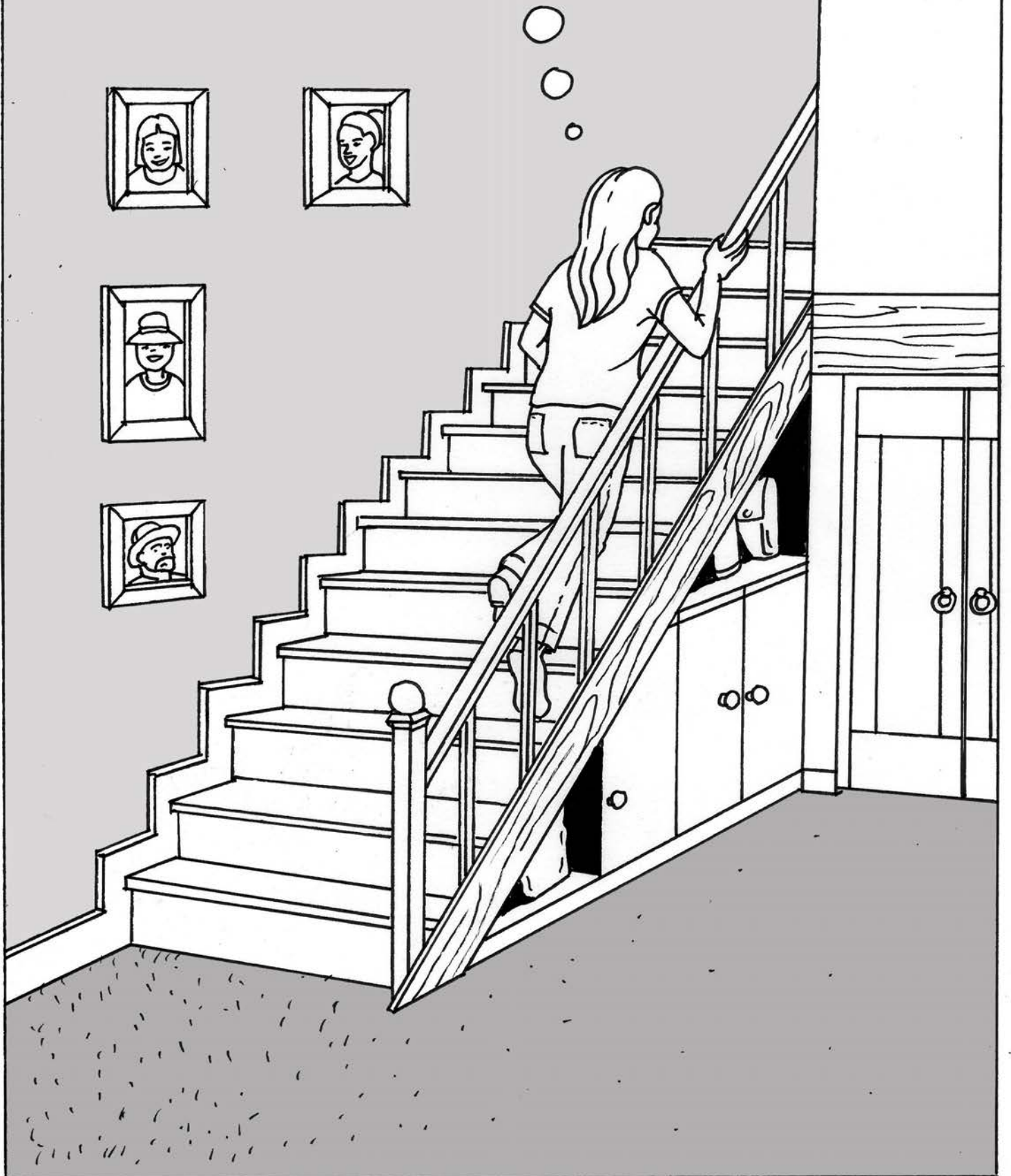


BUT THE ROOM IS A COMPLETE MESS WHEN MY THOUGHTS ARE SAD, ANXIOUS AND ANGRY.





I'VE HAD A REALLY TIRING DAY, I FEEL REALLY ANXIOUS BECAUSE I'M BEHIND ON DEADLINES AND I FEEL ON-EDGE.

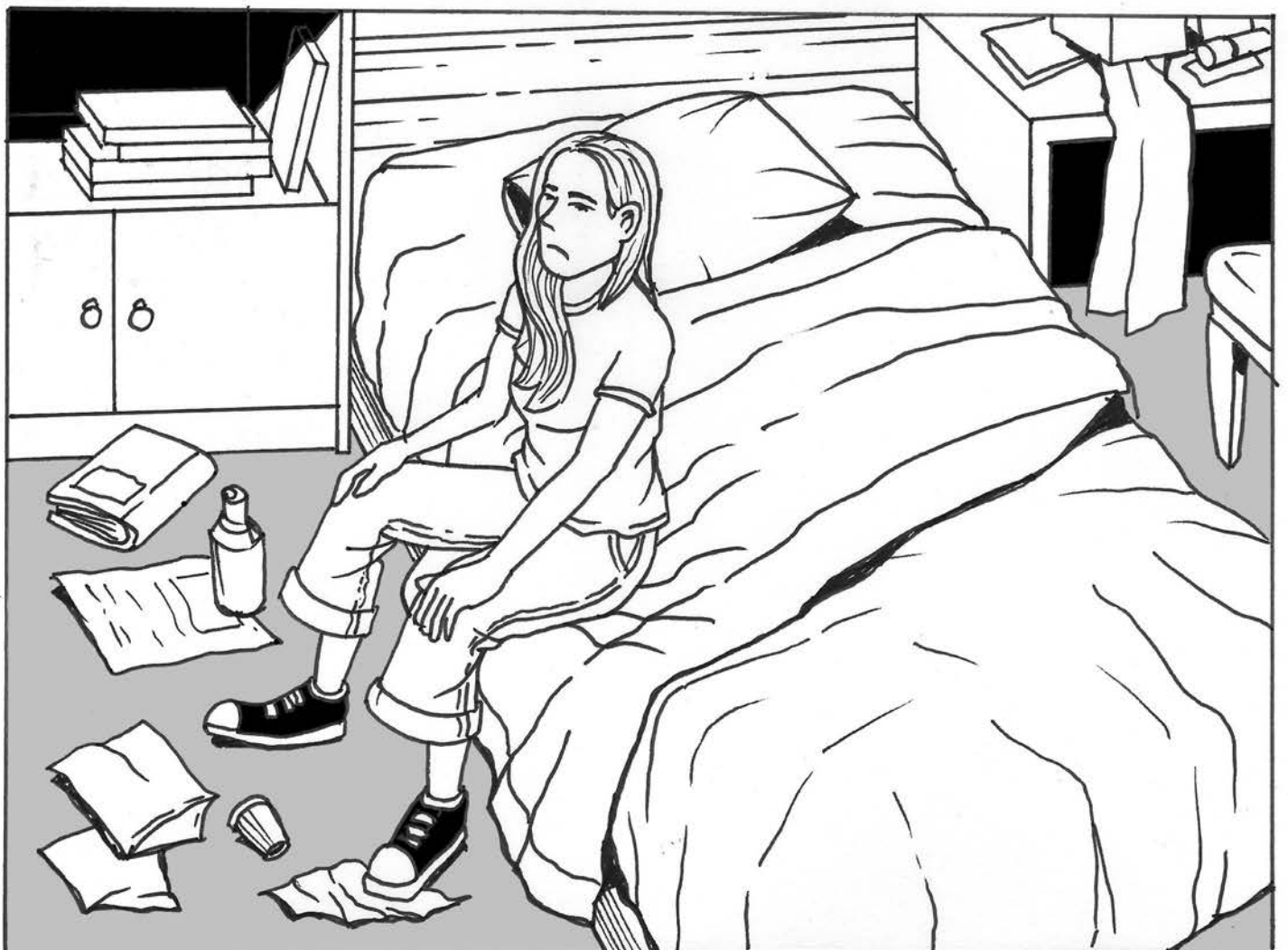




I NOW FEEL TEN TIMES WORSE THAN I DID WHEN I WAS WALKING THROUGH THE FRONT DOOR. MY ROOM IS A MESS AND I FEEL LIKE MY EMOTIONS HAVE TIPPED OVER THE EDGE.



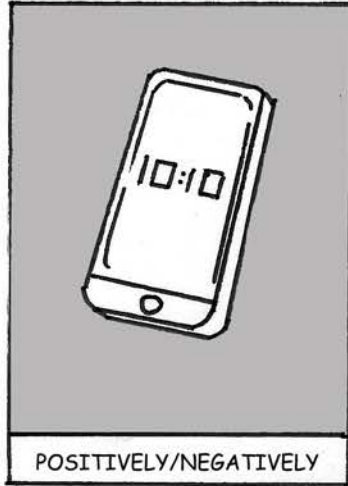
MY THOUGHTS SWARM MY MIND AND I FEEL OVERWHELMED. AS WELL AS THE FAST APPROACHING UNIVERSITY DEADLINES, OVERTHINKING PAST CONVERSATIONS WITH FRIENDS SPARKING MY ANXIETY.



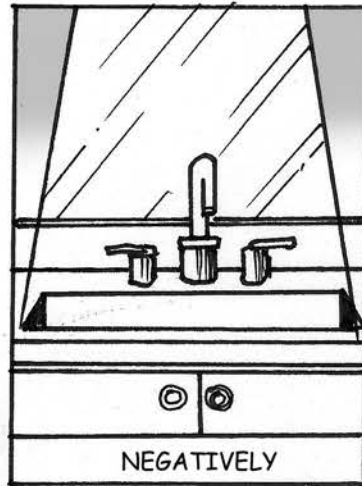
IT'S NOT THE FACT THAT THE ROOM IS MESSY, AND I HAVE TO TIDY IT - AS A TASK - THAT MAKES MY EMOTIONS TURN MORE UPSETTING. THE MESSY ROOM, COMBINED WITH THE DARKNESS, MAKE THE SPACE FEEL MORE CONFINED AND SMALLER, IN TURN THIS IS WHAT CAUSES ME TO FEEL MORE DOWN AND ANXIOUS.



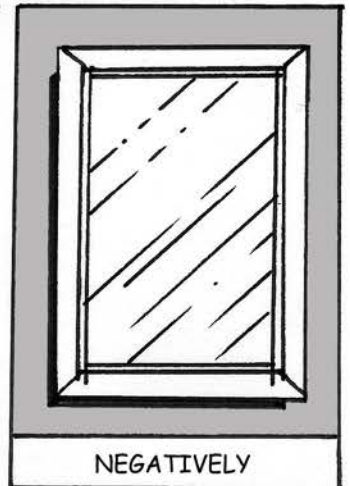
FINALLY, I WISH TO ADD SOME EXAMPLES OF MORE MATERIAL THINGS/PHYSICAL PLACES WHICH AFFECT MY MENTAL WELLBEING...



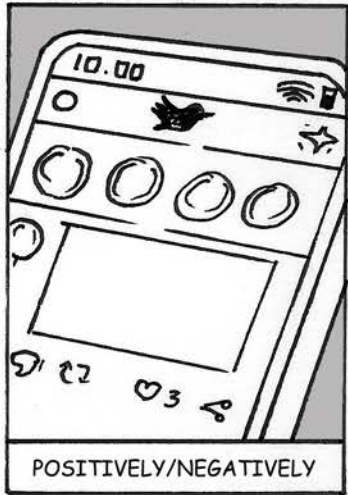
POSITIVELY/NEGATIVELY



NEGATIVELY



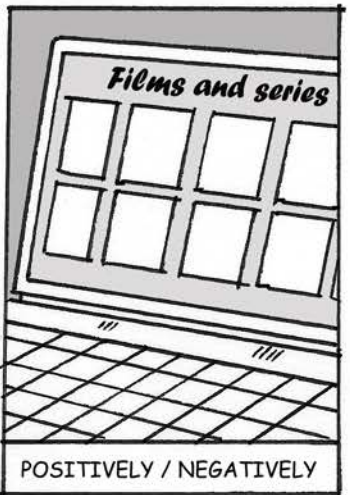
NEGATIVELY



POSITIVELY/NEGATIVELY



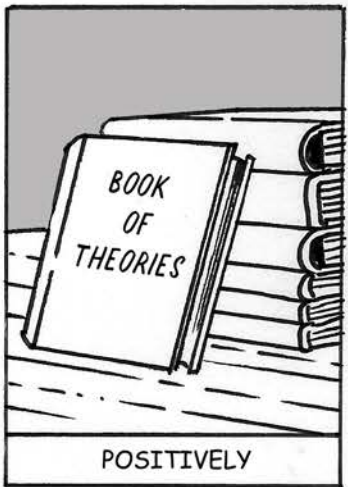
NEGATIVELY



POSITIVELY / NEGATIVELY



POSITIVELY / NEGATIVELY



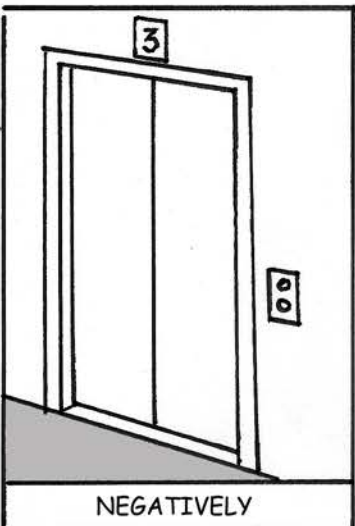
POSITIVELY



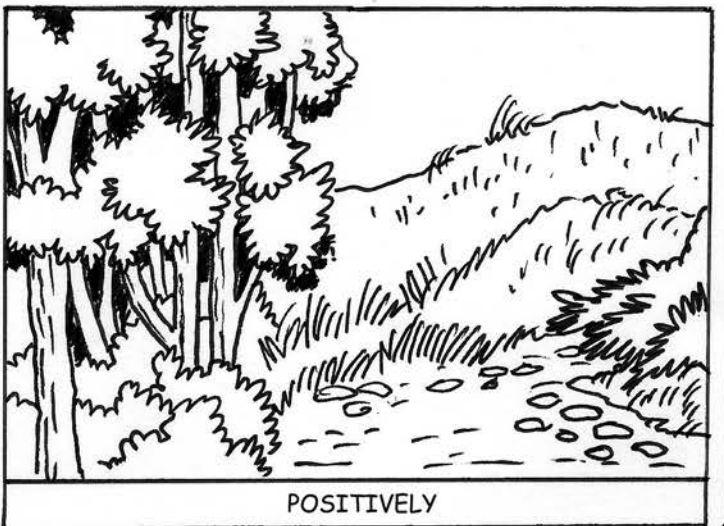
POSITIVELY



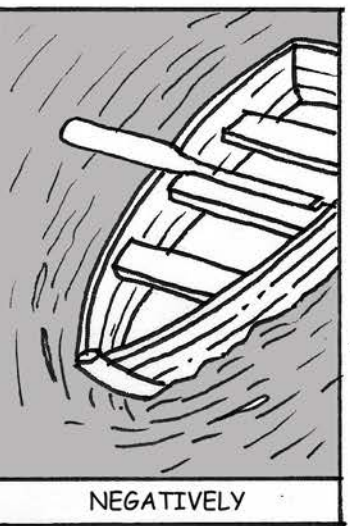
POSITIVELY / NEGATIVELY



NEGATIVELY



POSITIVELY

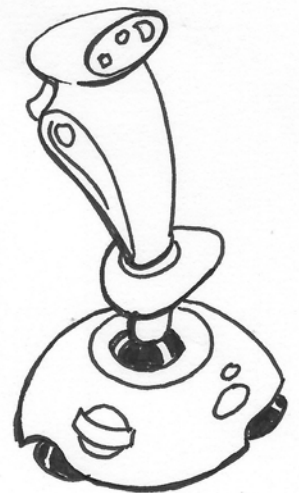
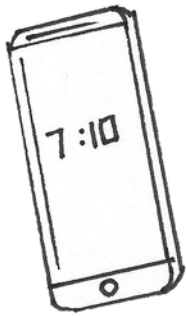
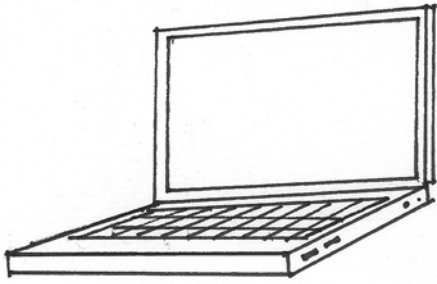


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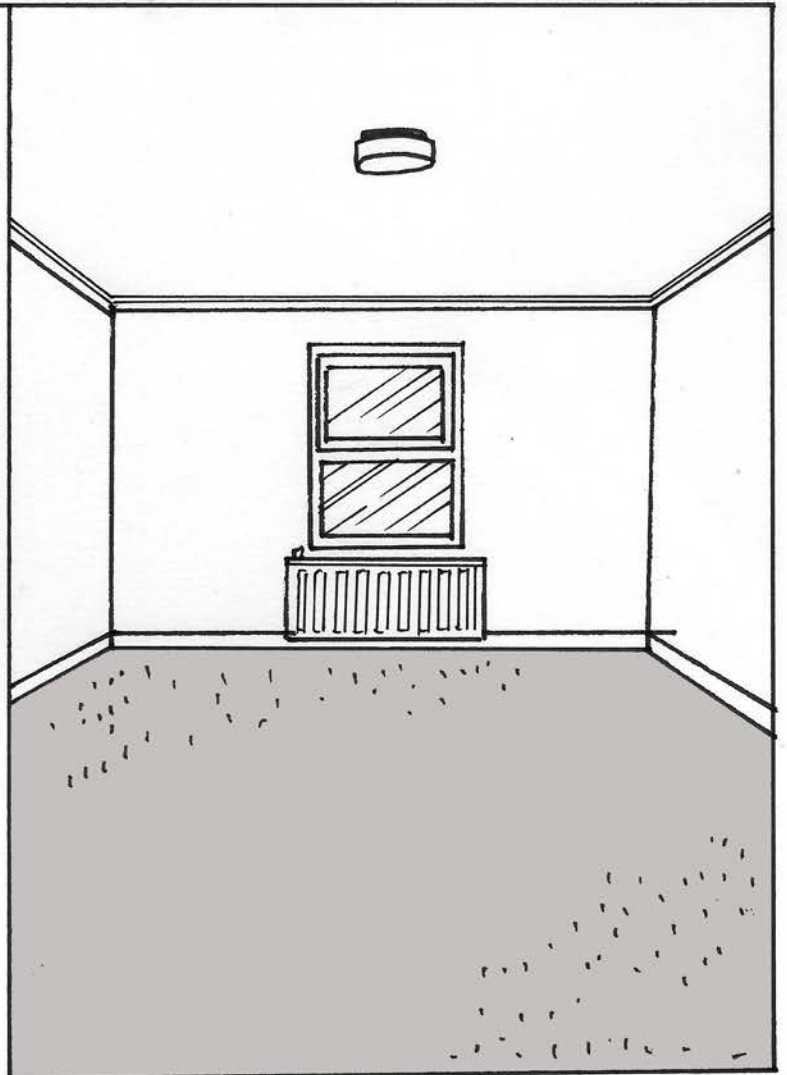


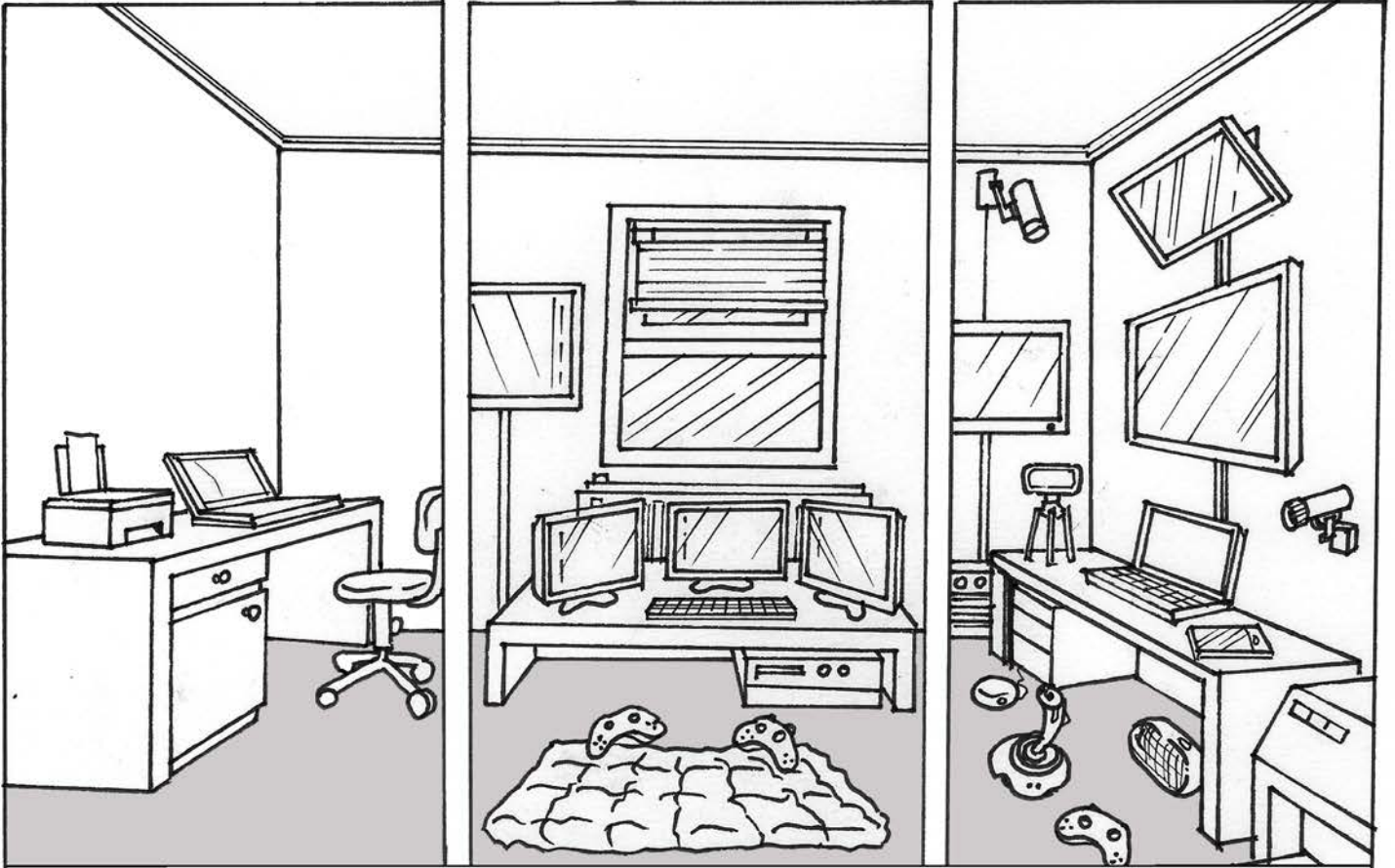
# JOEL'S STORY







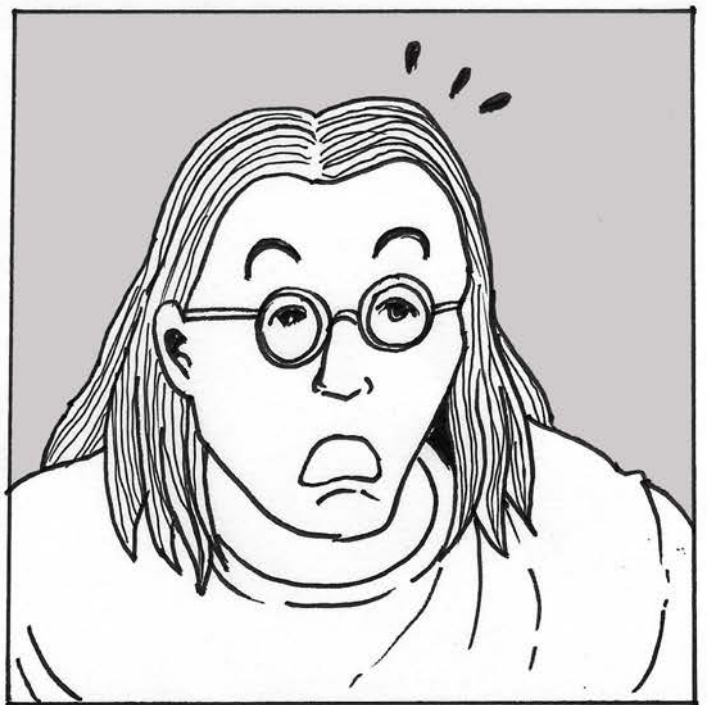
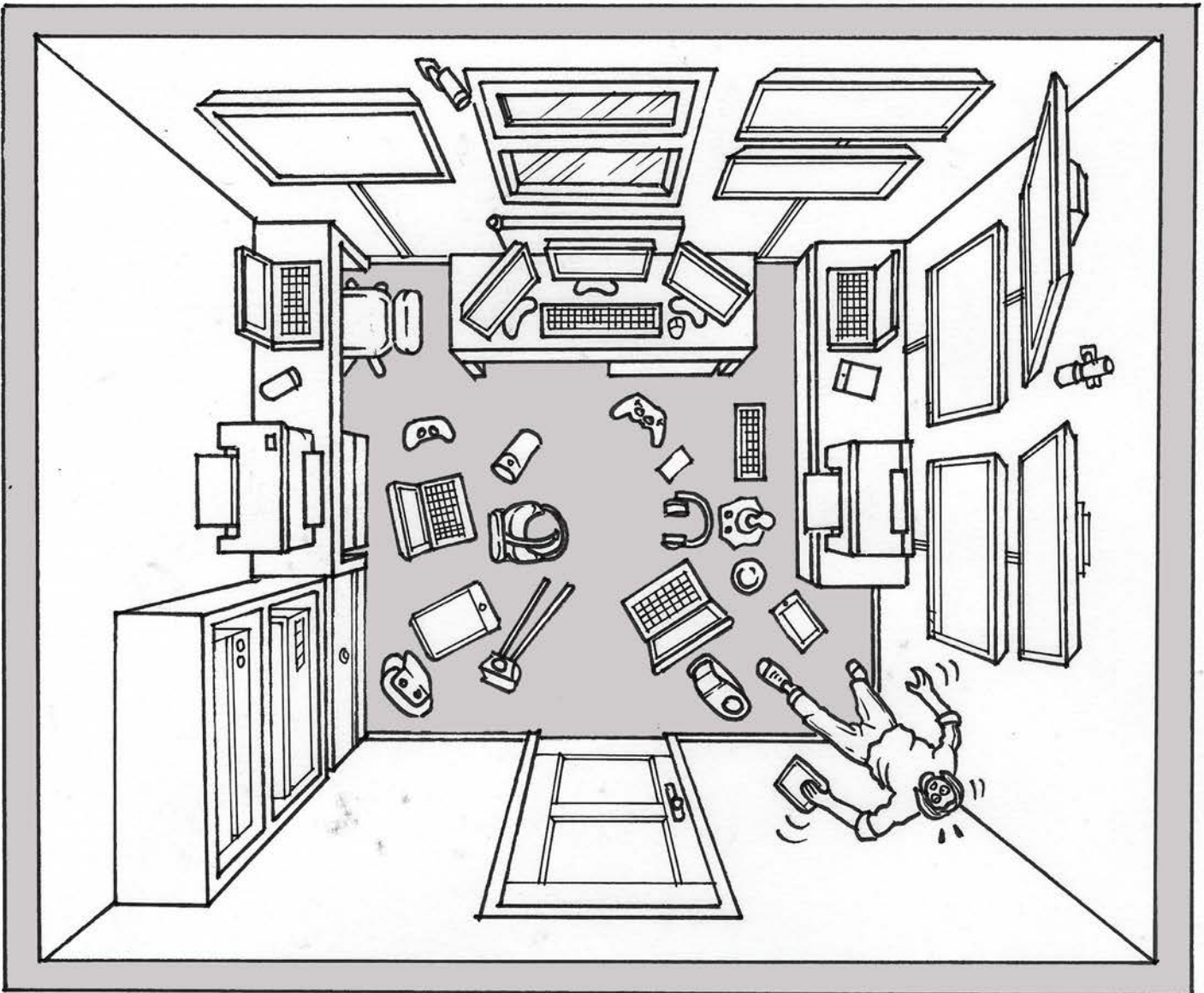




THE ROOM BEGINS TO FILL WITH ALL KINDS OF ELECTRONIC GADGETS AND GIZMOS.



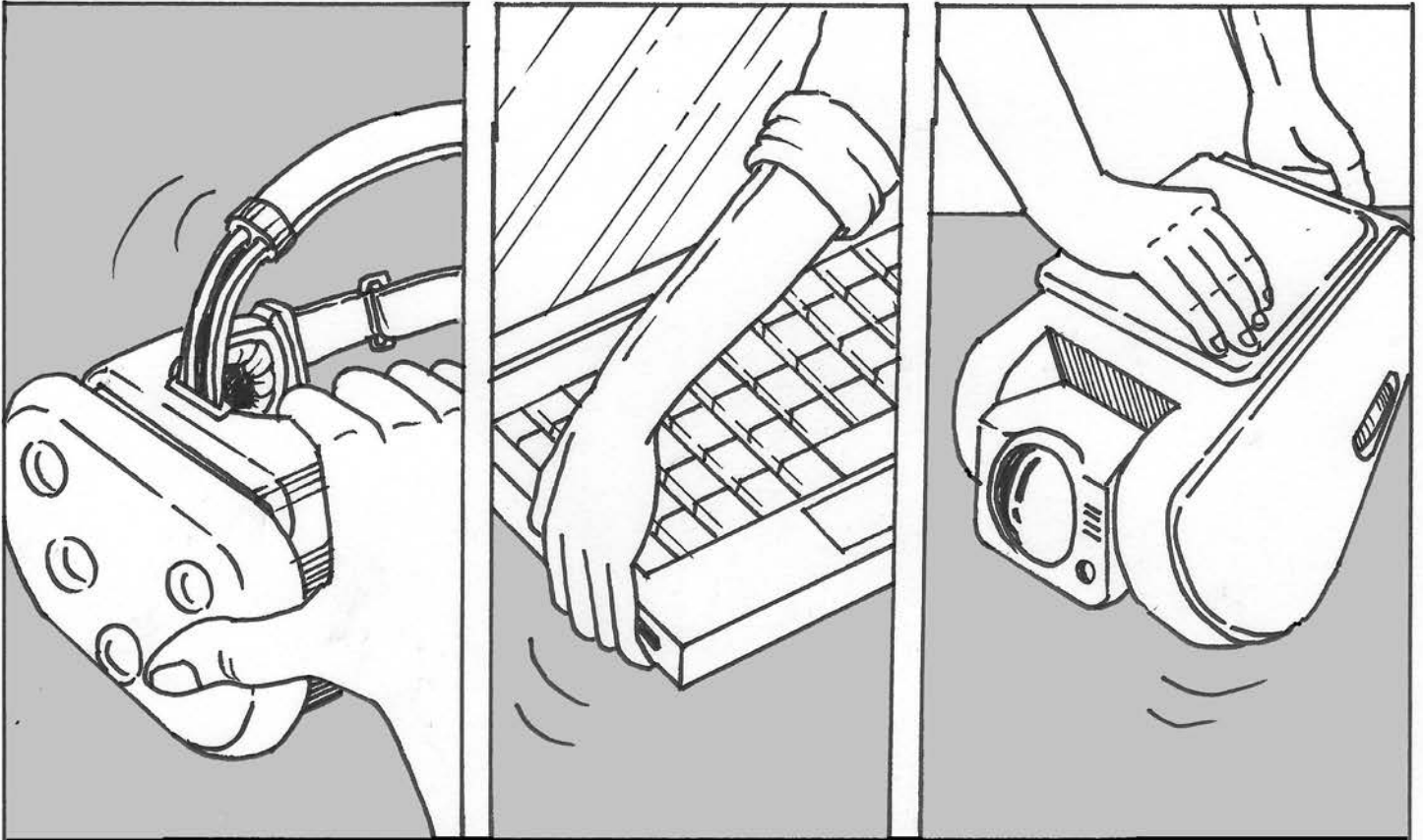
THINGS ARE OUT OF PLACE AND ALL OVER THE ROOM.





MOVING ALL THE THINGS FROM THE OLD ROOM...AND THEY BARELY TAKE UP ANY SPACE.

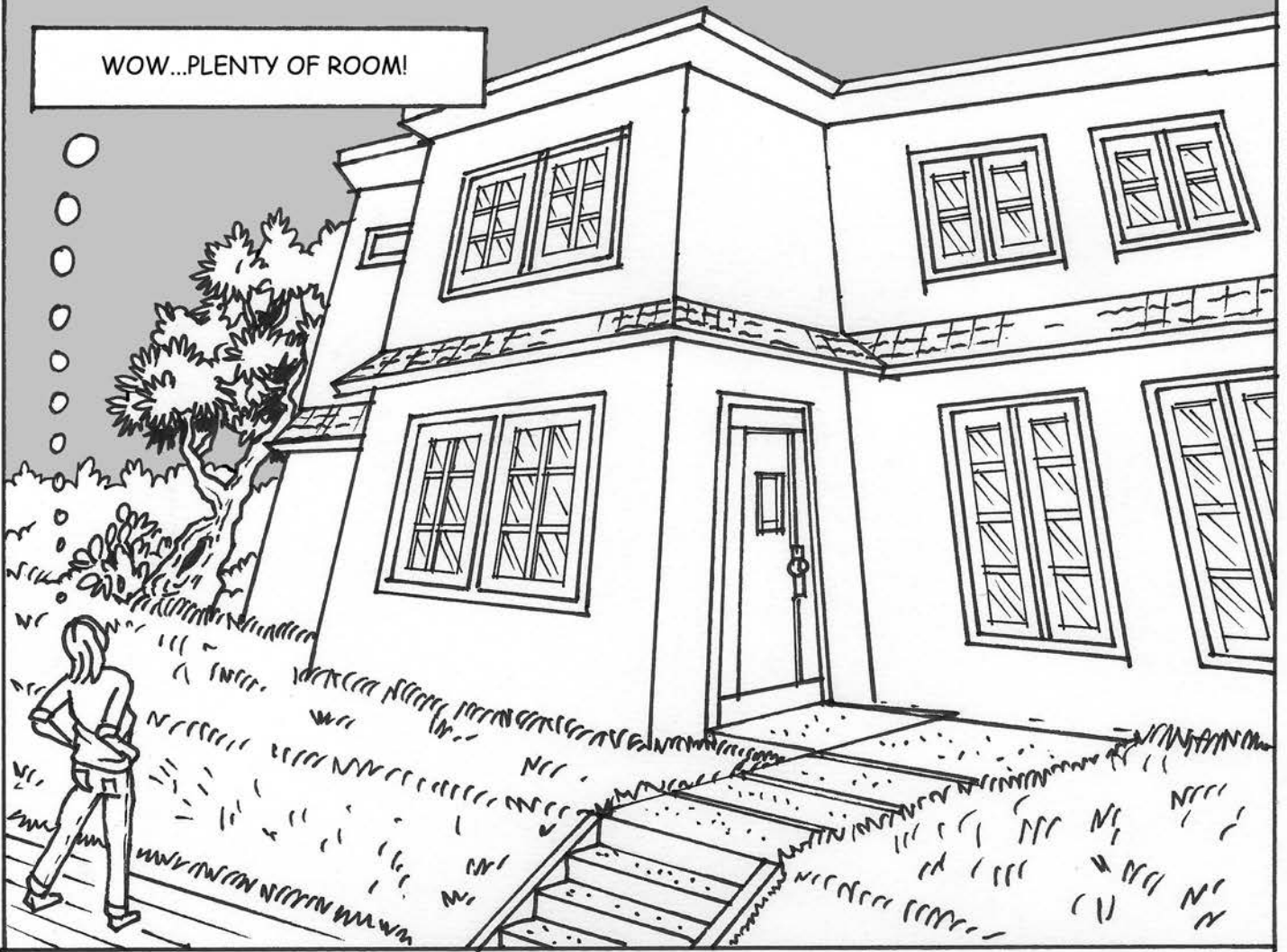




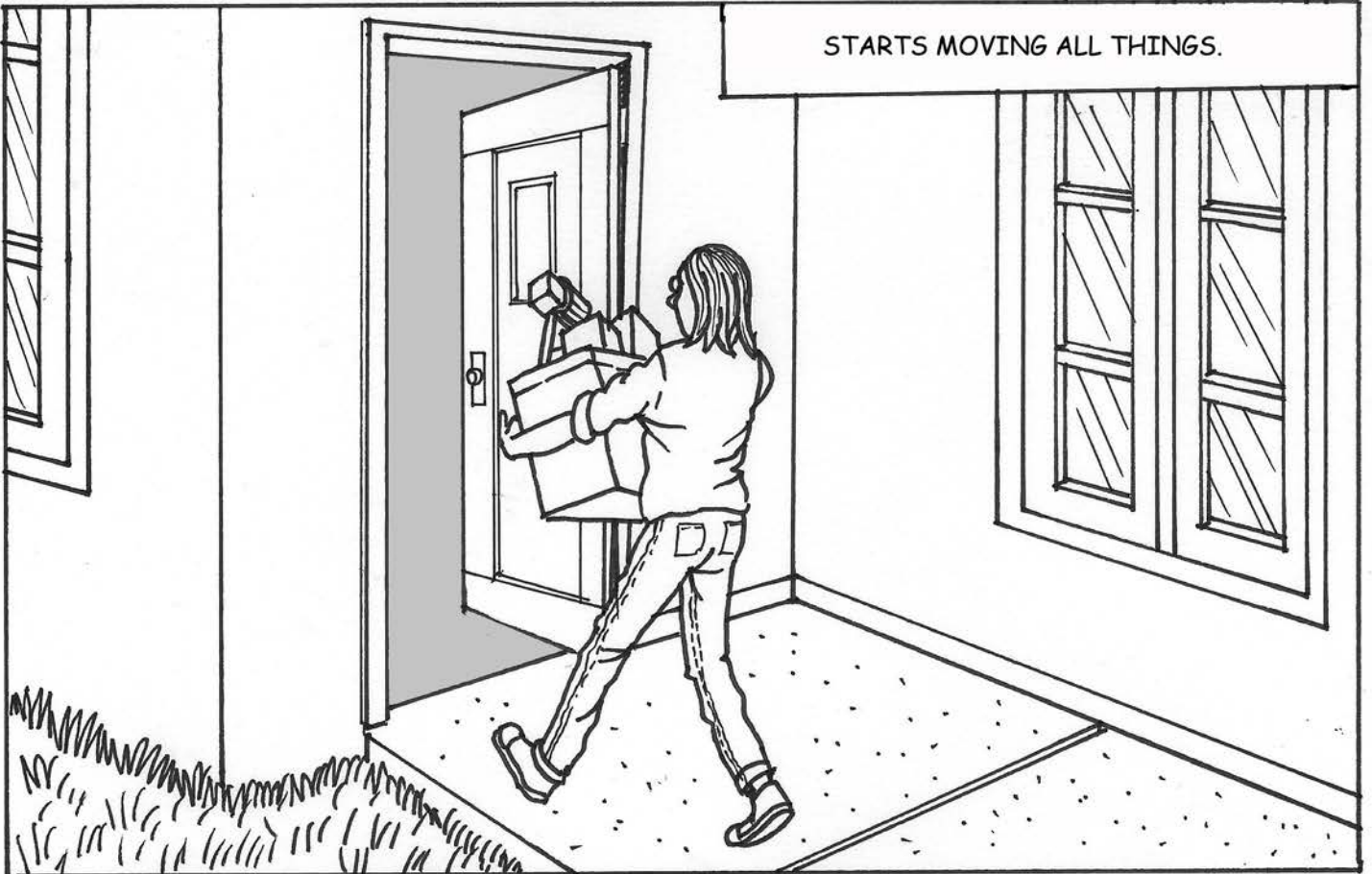
ADDING MORE THINGS AND PIECES TO THE ROOM  
TO MAKE IT FEEL LESS EMPTY AND MORE FULL OF "LIFE".

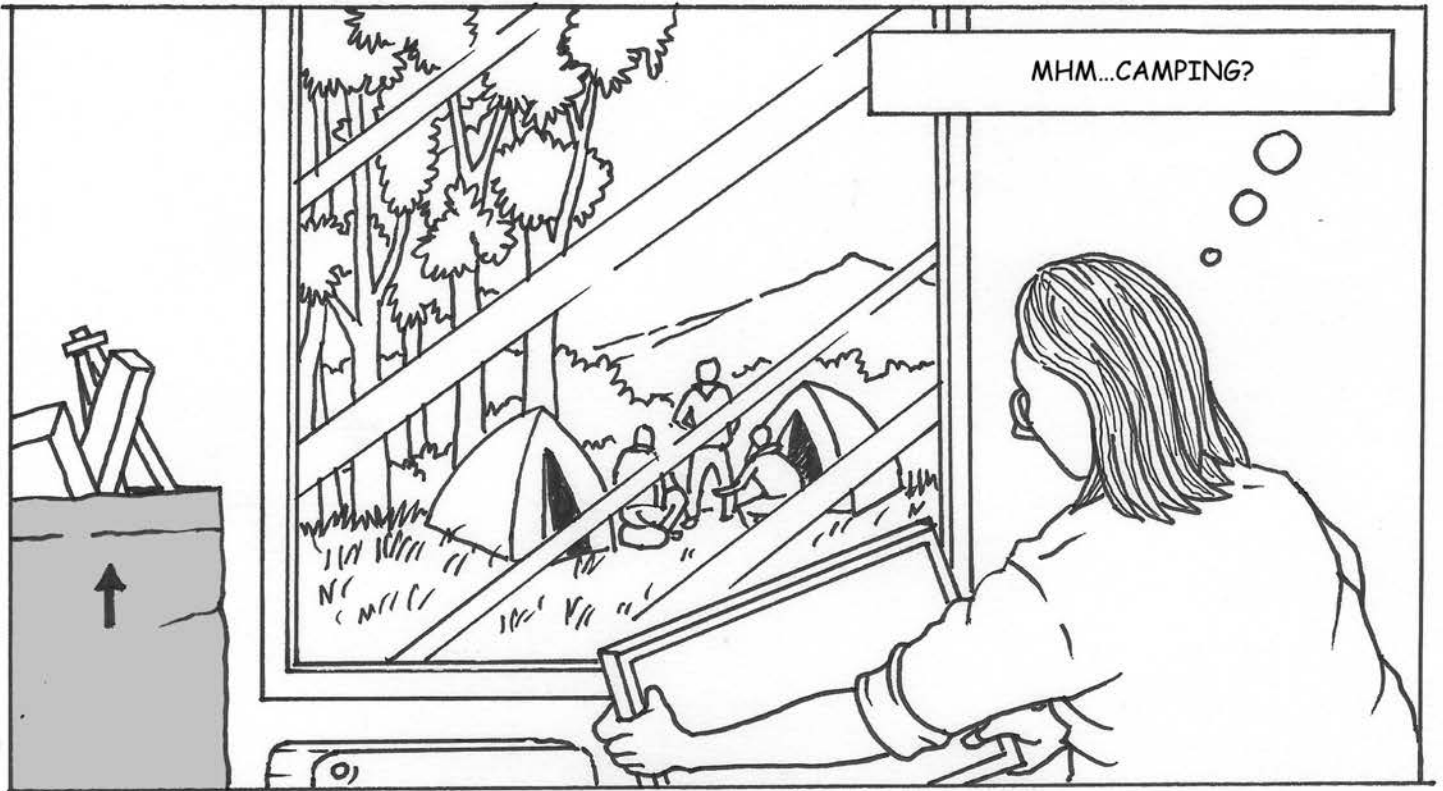


WOW...PLENTY OF ROOM!



STARTS MOVING ALL THINGS.





THE SUN SET IS BEAUTIFUL.

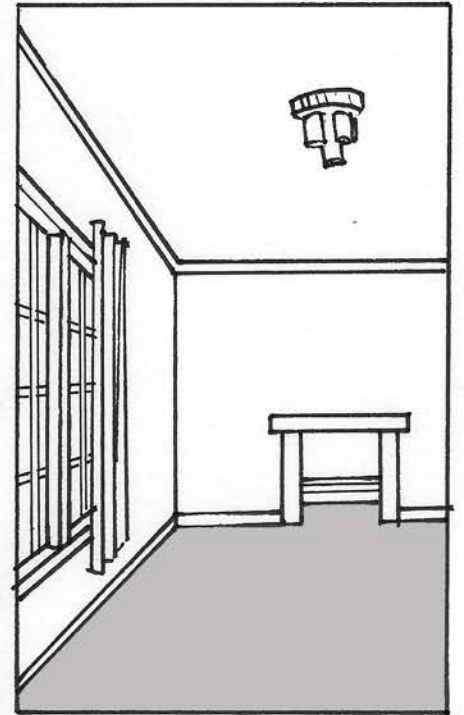
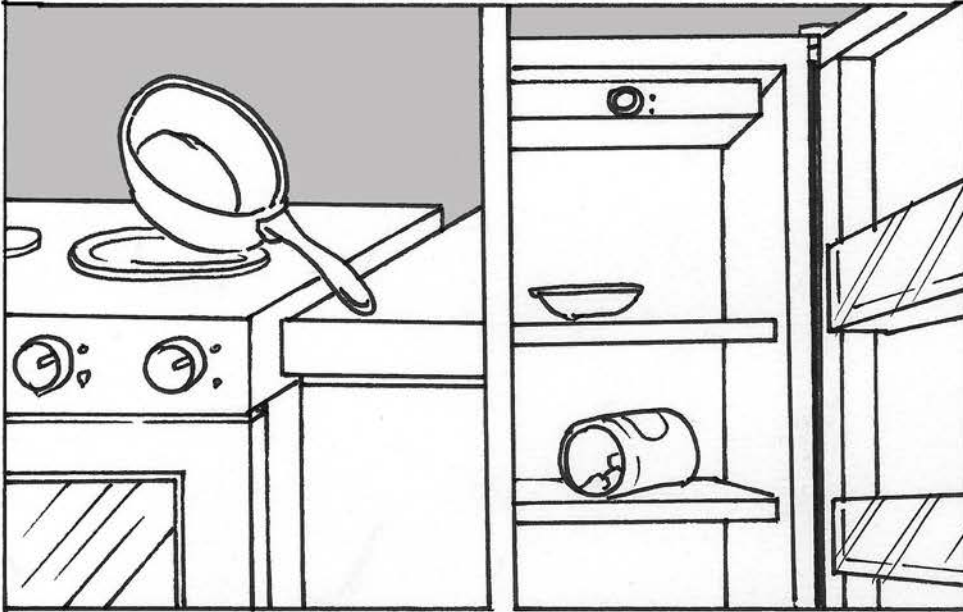


NO LIGHTS ON FROM NEIGHBOURS... NO CAMPFIRE LIT.

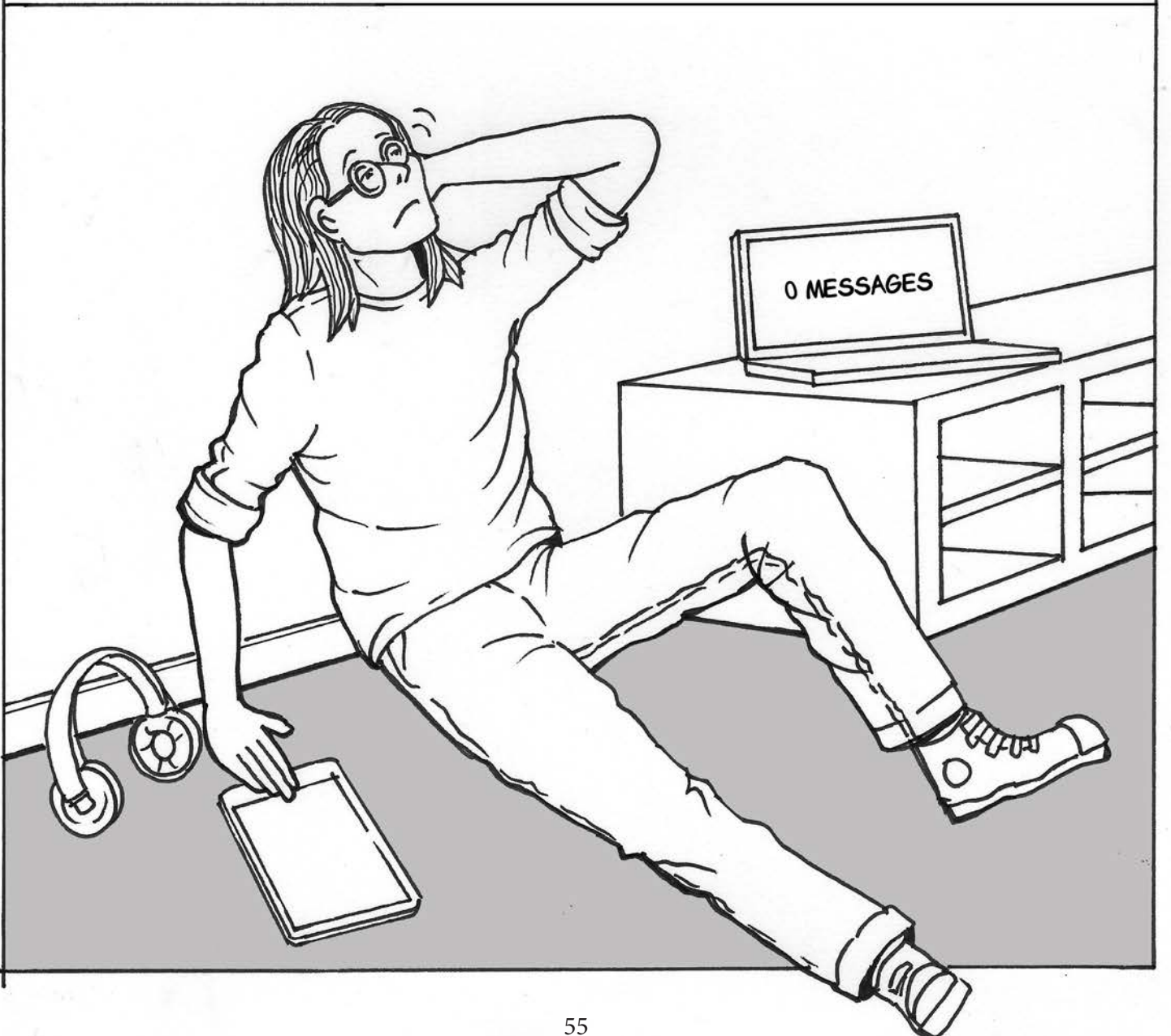




NO FOOD ON THE STOVE...



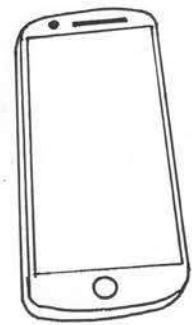
NO LIFE TO BE SEEN...





# ZOE'S STORY







MY FACE IS BLURRED COMPLETELY, MERELY A SMUDGE SO NO HAIR OR FACIAL FEATURES ARE RECOGNISABLE.

I AM QUITE A BLAND CHARACTER WITH NO RECOGNISABLE FEATURES.

I FEEL LONELY IN MANY ENVIRONMENTS.

I NEVER FEEL TO BE ANYTHING MORE THAN A BACKGROUND CHARACTER TO PEOPLE'S LIVES.

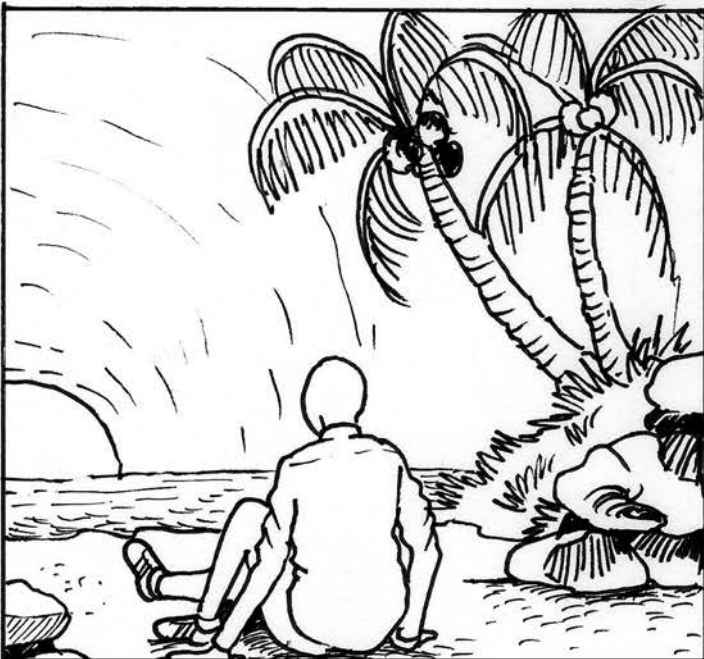
HEY, I AM ZOE AND I LOVE TO READ BOOKS WITH A NON-FICTIONAL ELEMENT. MY FAVOURITE BOOK IS 'SAPIENS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF HUMANKIND' BY YUVAL NOAH HARARI.

AS I SEEK TO UNDERSTAND THE WORLD AS IT IS TODAY. AS SOMEONE WHO IS PURSUIT OF UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD AROUND ME.



MANY PEOPLE HAVE PETS FOR VARIOUS DIFFERENT REASONS, BUT MANY PEOPLE, WITH OR WITHOUT PETS, DO NOT ACTUALLY REALISE THE PEACE AND JOY THAT A PET ACTUALLY BRINGS.

MY DOG IS A SMALL BUNDLE OF JOY AND THIS MAY SOUND PECULIAR TO MANY, BUT SHE HAS BROUGHT ME THROUGH SOME OF MY LOWEST POINTS.

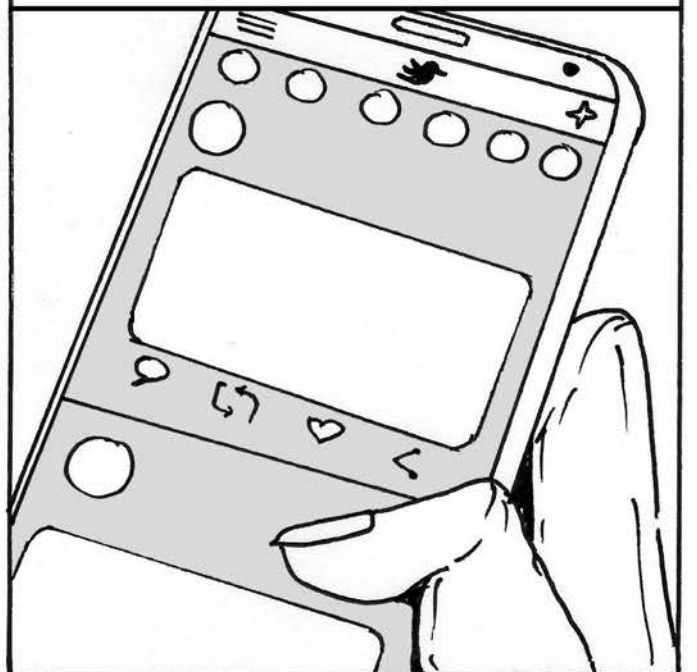


SUNSETS BRING WITH THEM AN ARRAY OF COLOURS, PEACE AND TRANQUILLITY. NO MATTER THE STATE OF MY WELLBEING OR MOOD AT THE TIME, A SUNSET WILL ALWAYS LEAVE ME FEELING REFRESHED AND THANKFUL FOR LIFE.

I TEND TO FIND MYSELF WATCHING SUNSETS ON A BEACH AS THE WAVES WRAP AROUND THE ROCKS AND CLIMB UP THE SAND - A SOUND THAT ALLOWS FOR MINDFUL REFLECTION ON MY DAY TO PREPARE FOR WHAT I HAVE TO COME IN THE FOLLOWING DAYS.

I ALSO FIND MYSELF ALL-CONSUMED BY THE WORLD AROUND ME, PARTICULARLY WITH THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE WAY OF STUDENT LIFE THAT IS PORTRAYED WITH CONSTANT DRINKING AND PARTYING, BUT WITH THE OTHER SIDE THAT IS EATING HEALTHY AND MAINTAINING A HEALTHY WEIGHT AND BODY SHAPE.

SOCIAL MEDIA IS AN ACTIVITY THAT I ONLY FULLY TOOK TO UPON BEGINNING UNIVERSITY.



EATING OUT HAS ALWAYS BEEN A BIG STRUGGLE FOR ME AS I PRESS MYSELF TO BE A CERTAIN WEIGHT OR LOOK A CERTAIN WAY, LARGELY TO DO WITH THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND HOW SOCIETY PORTRAYS THE 'PERFECT PERSON' TO LOOK LIKE.

ALTHOUGH I HAVE ESCAPED THE DEEPEST PARTS OF MY BAD RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD AND NO LONGER SUCCUMB TO SEVERE RESTRICTIVE EATING, MY FIRST THOUGHT WITH FOOD IS NOT IMMEDIATE ENJOYMENT BUT THE EFFECT IT WILL HAVE ON MY BODY AND WHETHER IT IS A 'BAD FOOD' - A FOOD OF MERE INDULGENCE WITH LITTLE NUTRITIONAL VALUE.

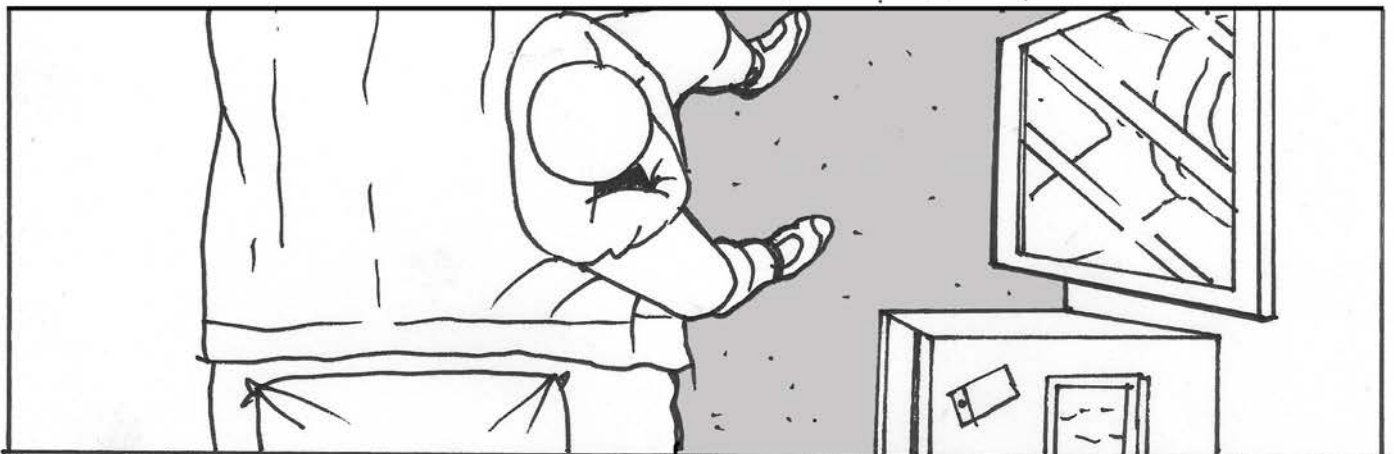


THE NIGHTCLUB IS A PLACE I SEEK FOR A SENSE OF ESCAPISM AS I DROWN MYSELF IN ALCOHOL AS THAT IS THE ONLY TIME I FEEL THAT I FULLY FIT IN. BUT A PLACE FULL OF ESCAPISM IS A PLACE OF DEEP LONELINESS AND STARK REMINDERS OF THE FACT THAT I AM ONLY EVER AROUND WHEN PEOPLE NEED ME THERE, NEVER WHEN THEY WANT ME THERE.

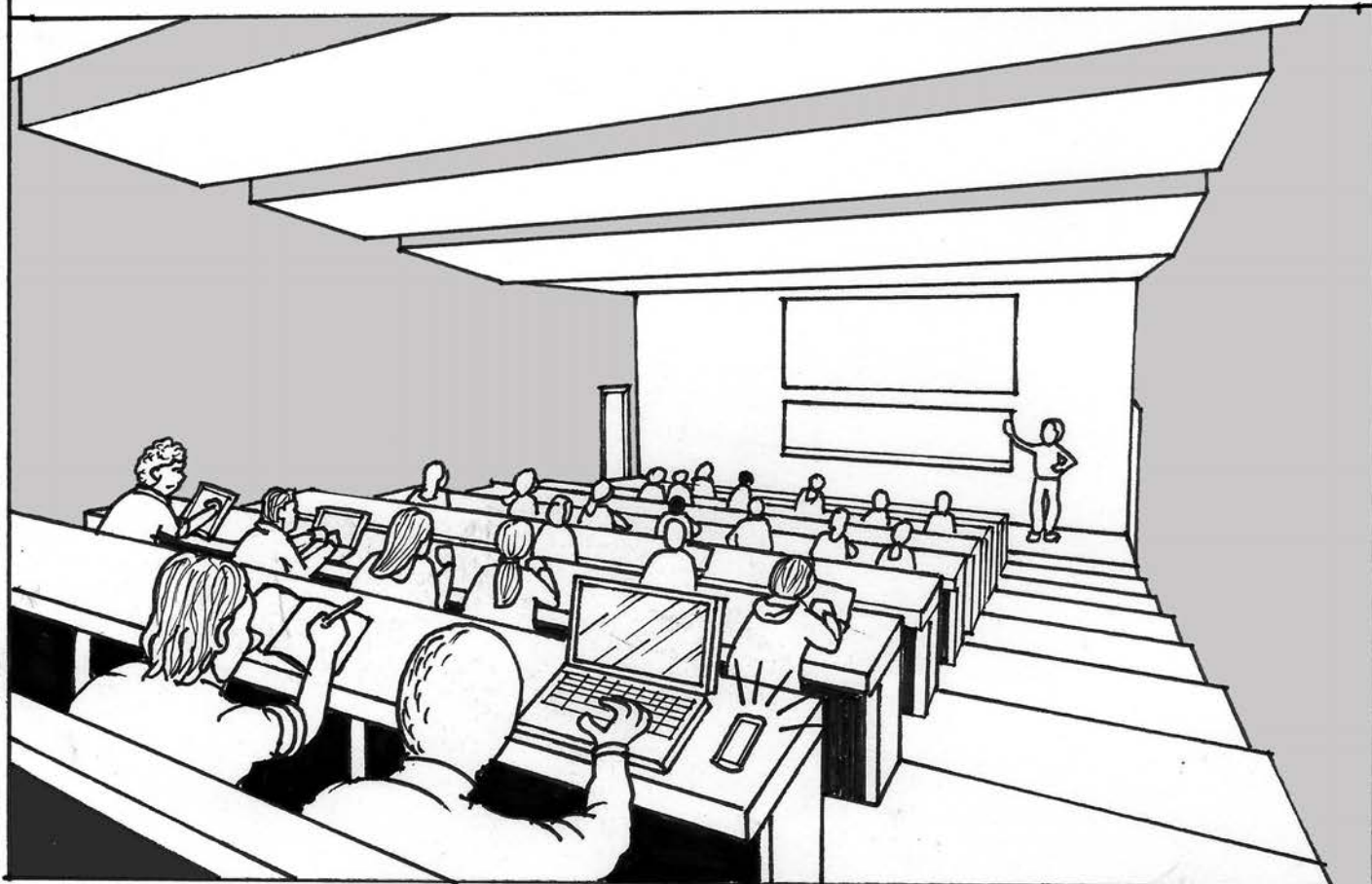
I OFTEN FIND MYSELF STOOD IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CLUB OBSERVING WHAT IS GOING ON AROUND ME, REALISING HOW DISTANT, BUT SO CLOSE, EVERYONE IS, AND OFTEN BEING IGNORED OR PUSHED OUT AWAY FROM MY FRIENDS BECAUSE OF HOW CROWDED THE ROOM ACTUALLY IS.

MY BEDROOM HAS ALWAYS BEEN A DIFFICULT PLACE TO FIND SOLITUDE AND FORTITUDE IN AS IT IS A PLACE ASSOCIATED WITH LONELINESS AND ESCAPISM TO HIDE MYSELF FROM THE WORLD FOR HOURS AT A TIME.

FOR MANY, THEIR BEDROOM IS A SPACE AWAY FROM ALL THE NOISE AND FOR RECUPERATION AND MINDFUL FOCUS, HOWEVER, MINE IS VERY OFTEN USED FOR THE OUTPOURING OF EMOTIONS, AND HOURS OF STARING IN THE MIRROR, PICKING EVERY PART OF MYSELF APART CONTRIBUTING TO A RESENTMENT FOR MYSELF, WITHIN MYSELF.



I AM SAT IN THE MIDDLE OF A LECTURE THEATRE WITH PEOPLE SURROUNDING ME.



MY PHONE LIGHTS UP WITH A NOTIFICATION ON MY HOUSE GROUP CHAT.

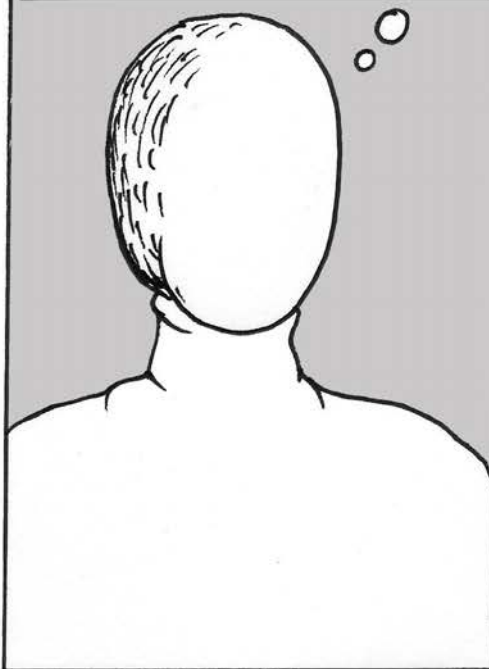


SOUNDS LIKE A NICE IDEA.

BUT WHAT WILL I EAT?

THE FOOD IS NOT NECESSARILY HEALTHY WHEN I GO OUT TO EAT.

I NEED TO CALCULATE MY CALORIES !!



Hey gals, I was thinking we should go out for a meal tonight if everyone is free at 7pm? Xx

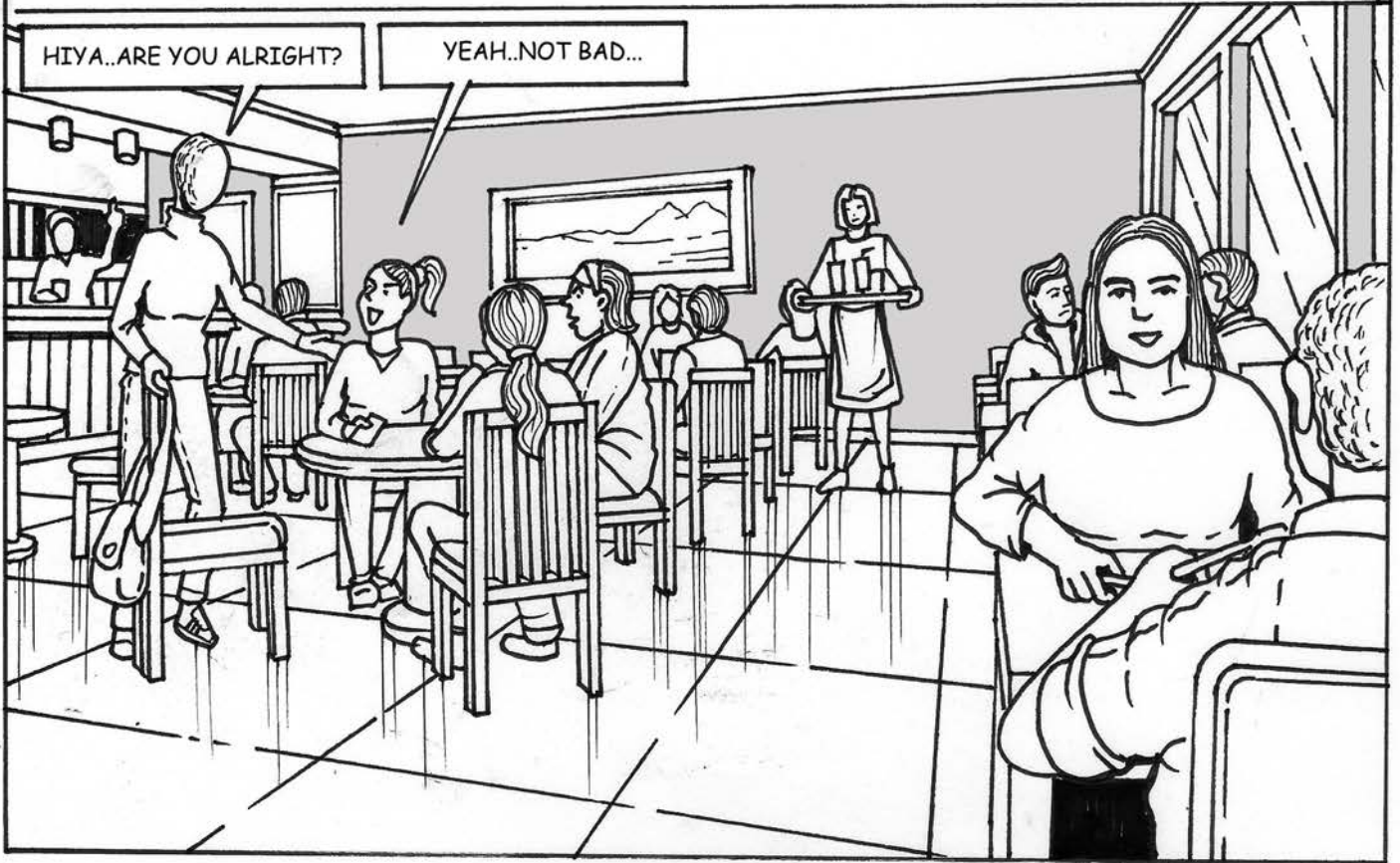
I will be there!  
Sounds great!



I HAVE ARRIVED AT THE RESTAURANT STRAIGHT FROM THE LIBRARY.

HIYA..ARE YOU ALRIGHT?

YEAH..NOT BAD...



WOULD YOU LIKE TO ORDER SOME DRINKS?

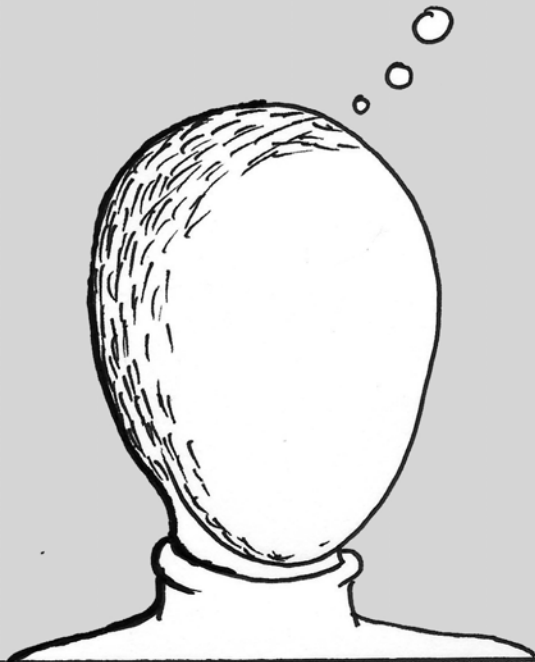
CAN I PLEASE HAVE A CUP OF TEA?

CAN I PLEASE HAVE SOME DIET COKE?

ME TOO PLEASE!

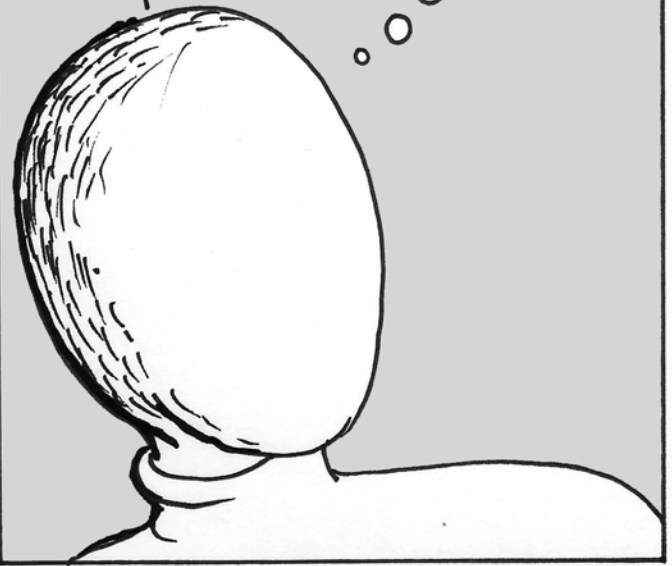


WHAT DO I WANT?  
IT NEEDS TO BE HEALTHY  
I CAN'T HAVE  
A FIZZY DRINK - TOO SUGARY.

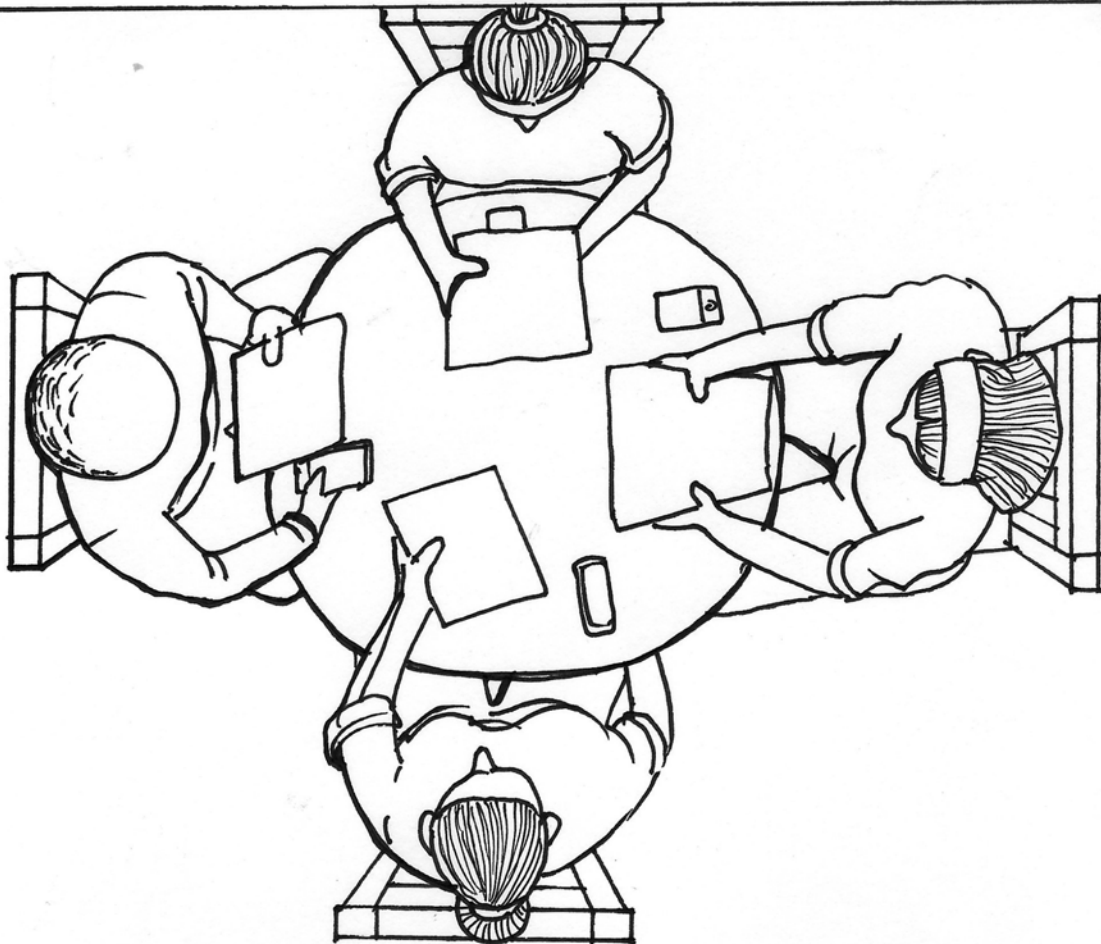


CAN I HAVE SOME WATER PLEASE?

WATER IS SO BLAND  
WHY DID I DO THAT?



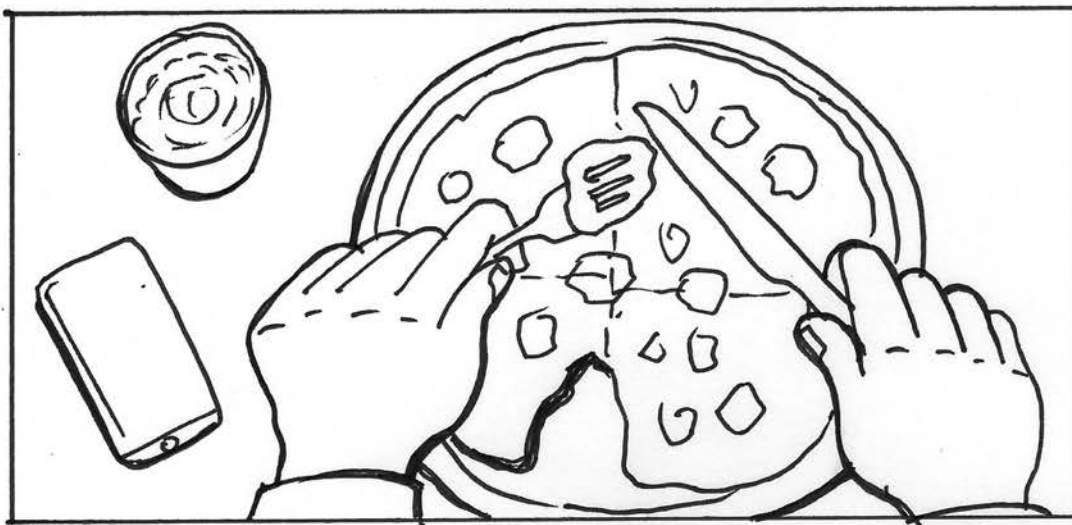
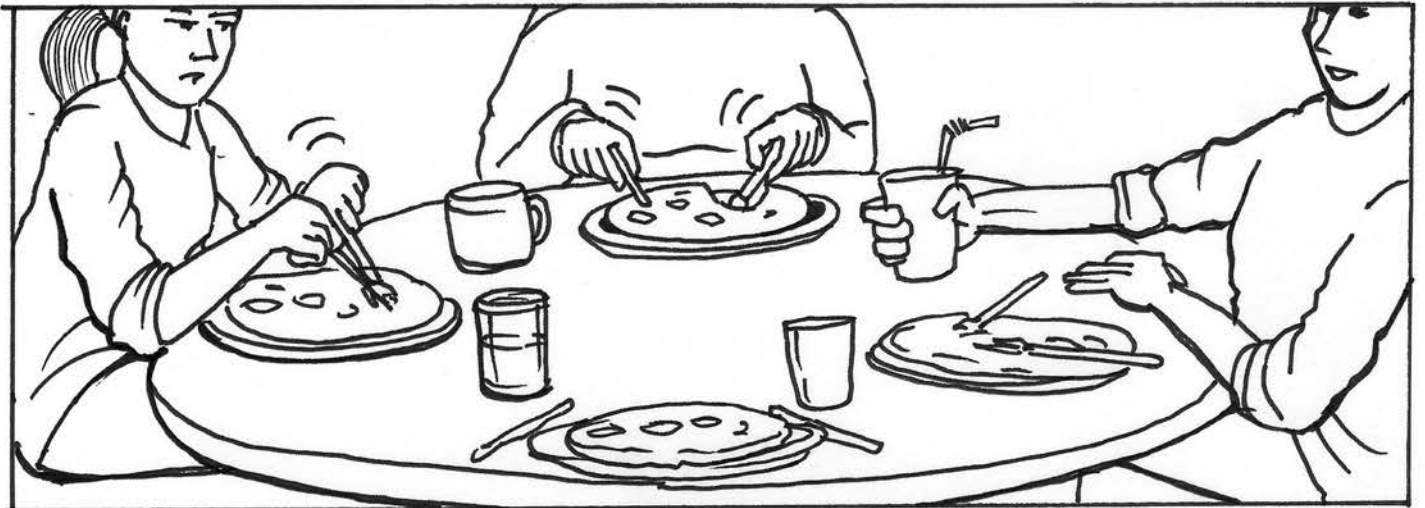
WE PEEK OVER THE MENUS SOME MORE. I AM GROWING ANXIOUS ABOUT ORDERING AS THERE IS NOTHING REMOTELY HEALTHY FILLING ON THE MENU AS IT IS A PIZZA RESTAURANT.



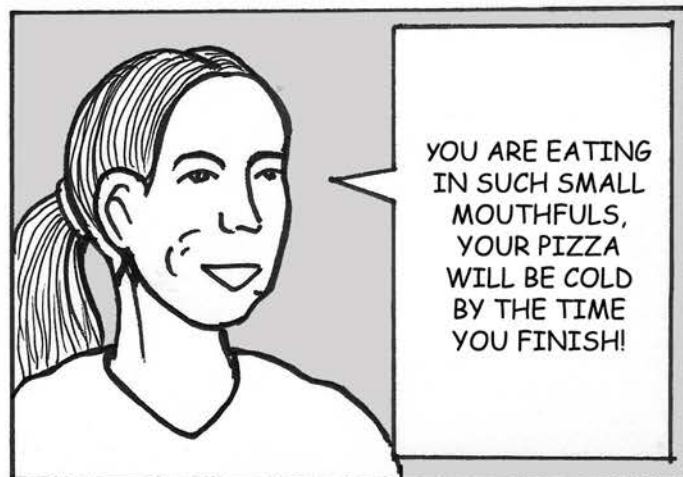


THE WAIT IS BECOMING STRESSFUL. I AM STRUGGLING TO STAY ENGAGED IN CONVERSATION WITH MY HOUSEMATES AS I PLAN AND STRESS OVER HOW I AM GOING TO EAT THE PIZZA WITHOUT GUILT.





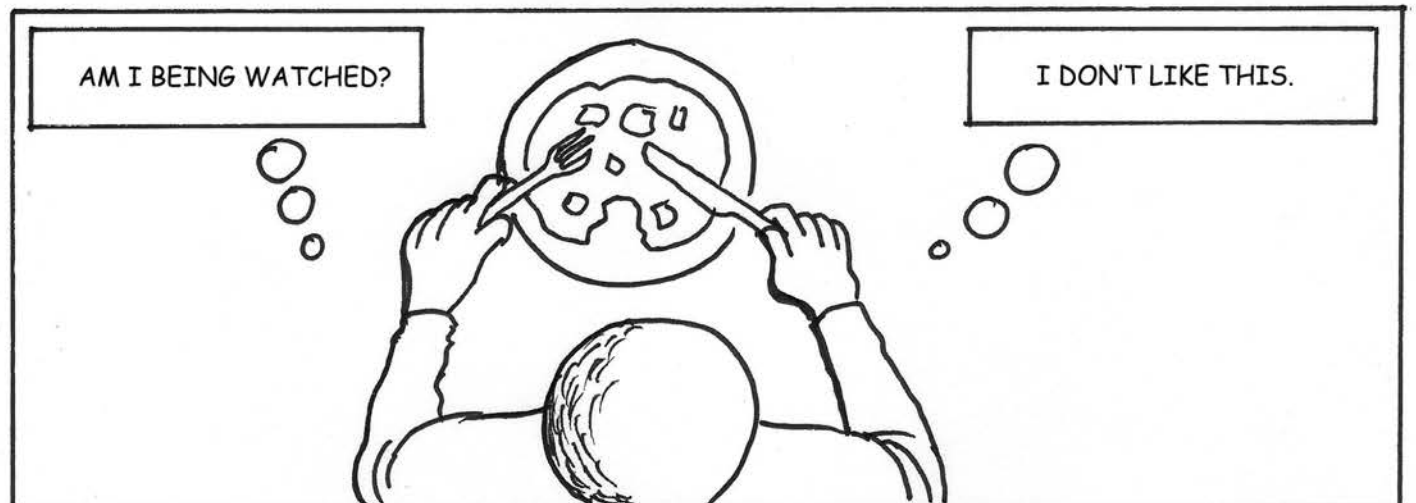
I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL THE SENSE OF GUILT THAT WILL CONSUME ME AS I FINISH THE PIZZA.



YOU ARE EATING IN SUCH SMALL MOUTHFULS, YOUR PIZZA WILL BE COLD BY THE TIME YOU FINISH!



HE HE HE HE....

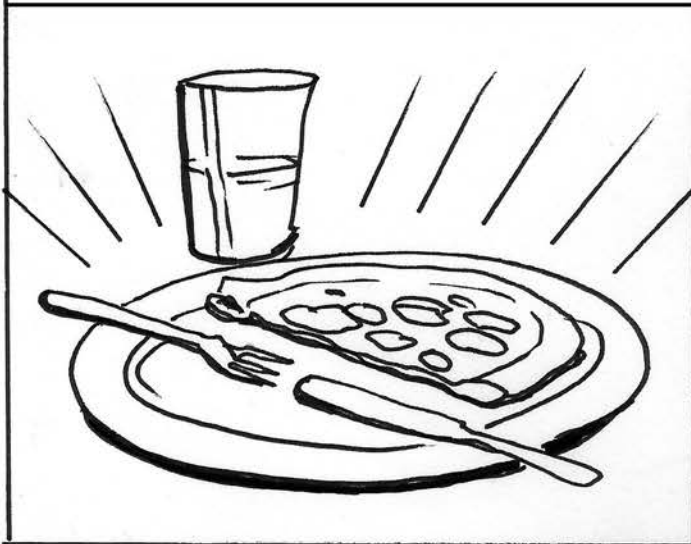


AM I BEING WATCHED?

I DON'T LIKE THIS.



I HAVE LEFT HALF OF MY PIZZA.....

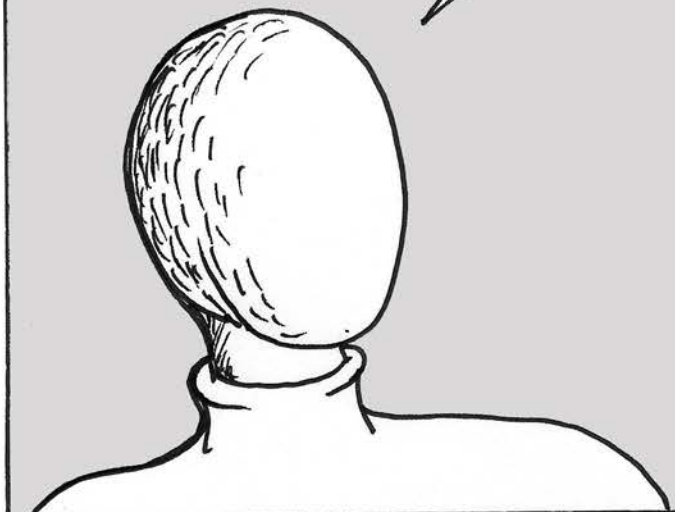


THEY PROBABLY THINK I HATED IT.



IT WAS REALLY NICE THANKYOU!  
CAN I PLEASE HAVE IT TO TAKE AWAY?

NO PROBLEM!  
WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE THE DESSERT?

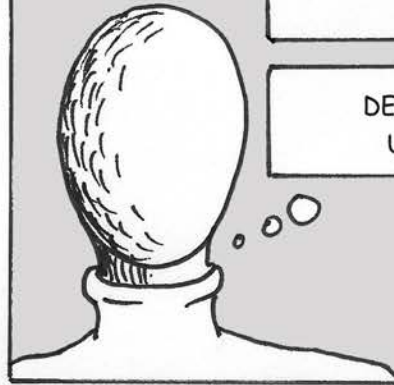


ALL 3 OF MY HOUSEMATES AGREE TO GET DESSERT.



I FEEL SO AWKWARD,  
I DON'T WANT DESSERT.

DESSERT IS TOO  
UNHEALTHY.



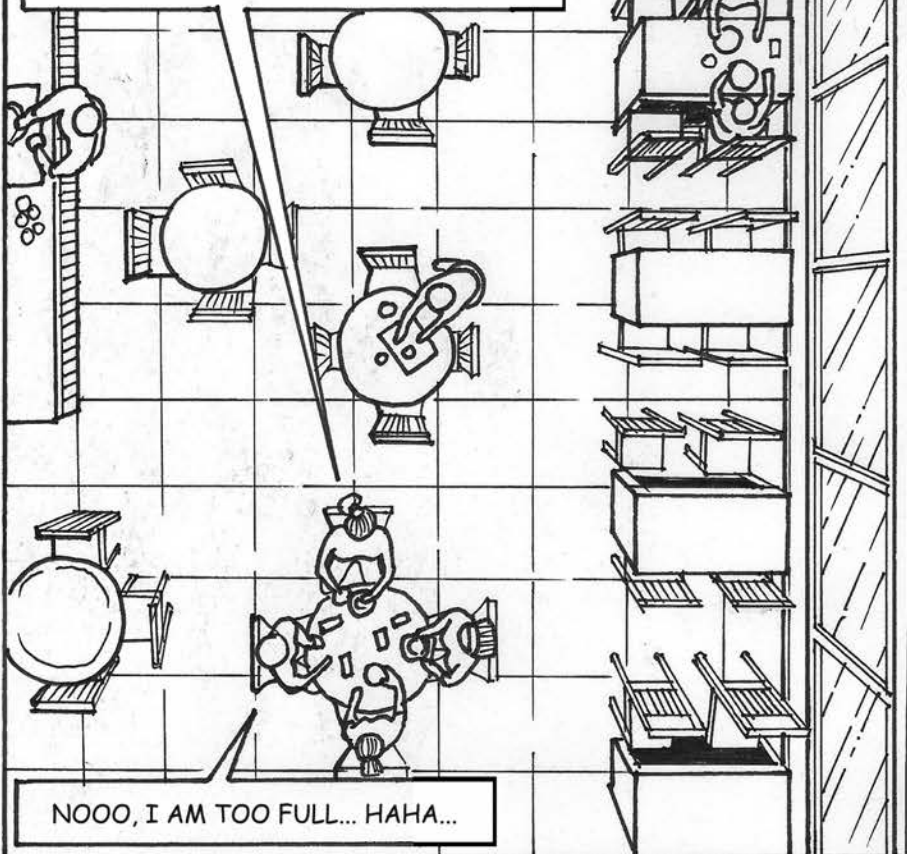
THIS IS  
YOUR TAKE  
AWAY  
PIZZA...

THANK YOU!!



THE RESTAURANT IS GROWING QUIET AS  
IT NEARS CLOSER TO CLOSING TIME.

ARE YOU GETTING ANY DESSERT ZOE?



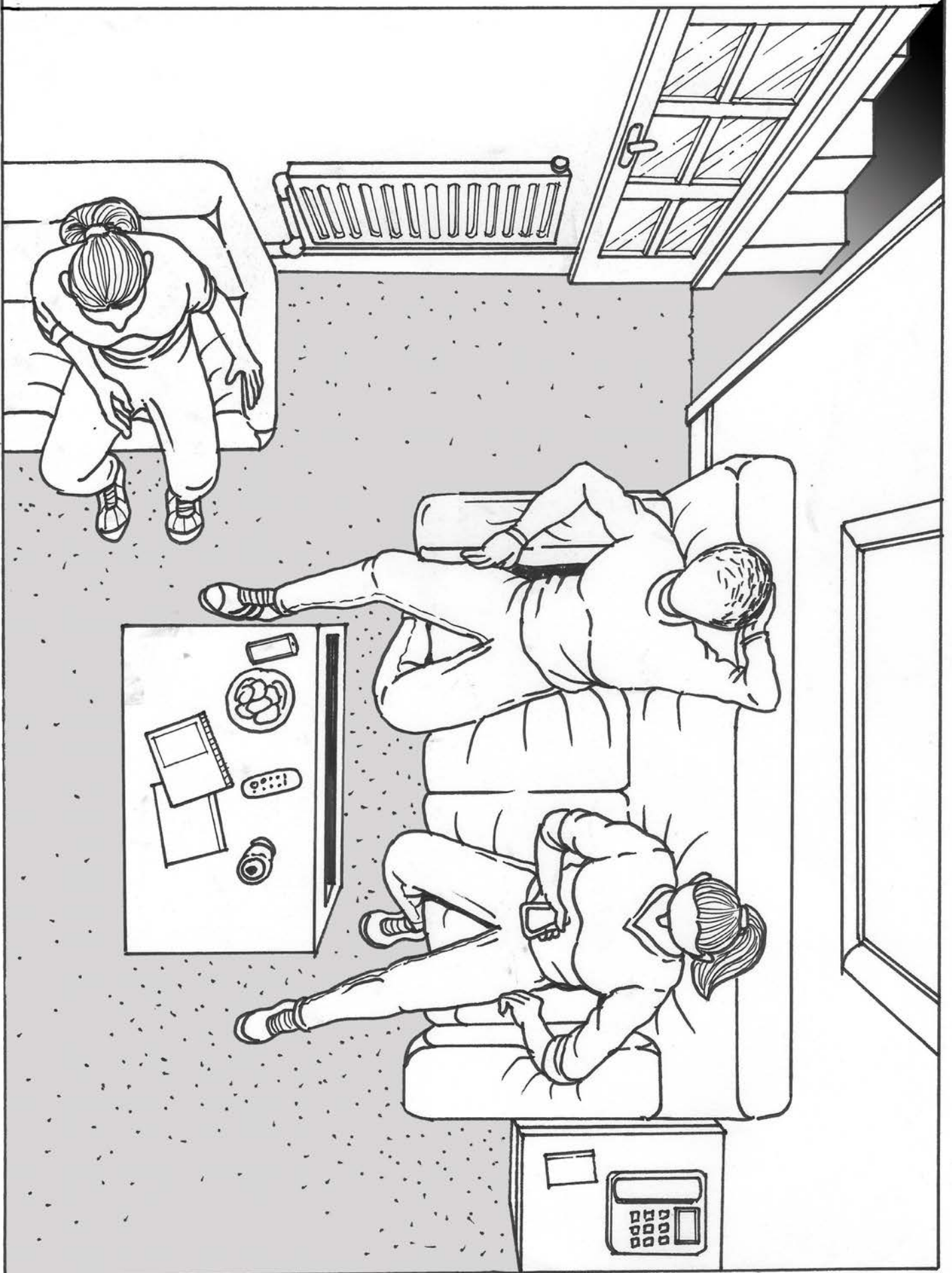
NOOO, I AM TOO FULL... HAHA...

I WOULD LOVE SOME...

I KNOW I WOULD FEEL  
SO GUILTY THOUGH...  
I CAN'T GET DESSERT  
WITHOUT EATING THE  
MAIN.



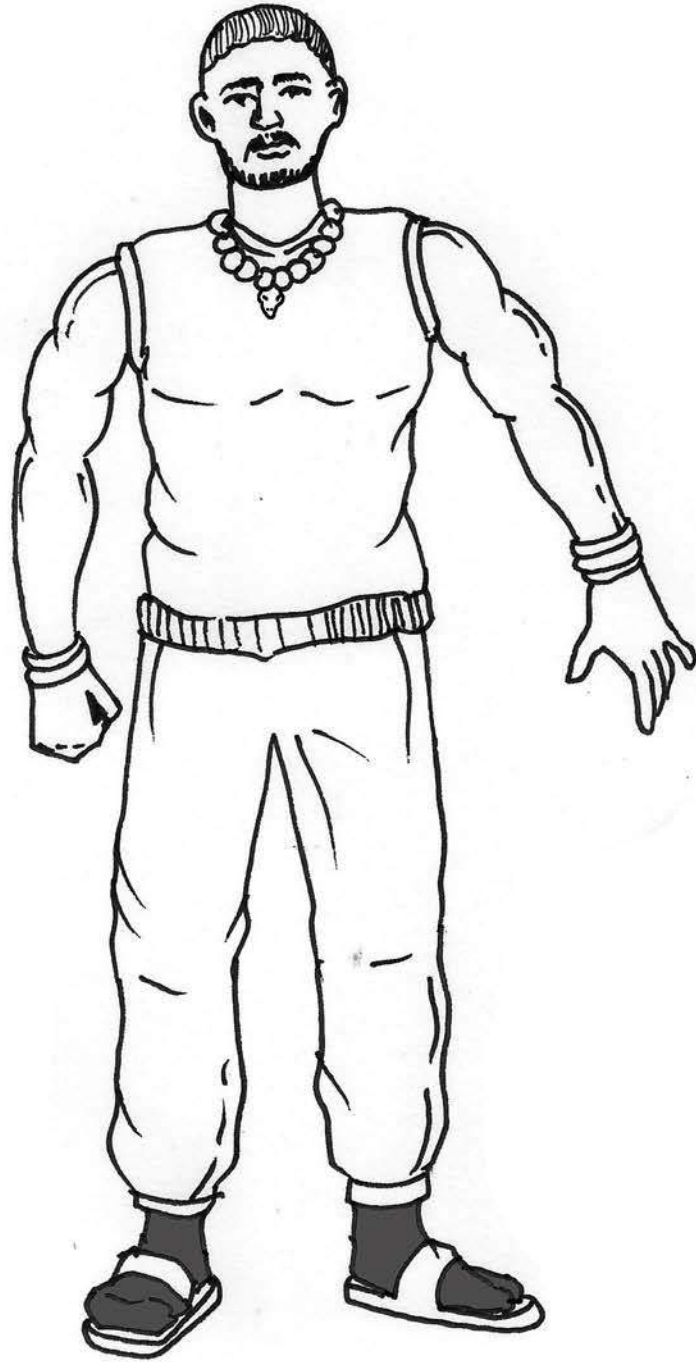
I AM SO BLOATED ... I FEEL SO GRIM ...I SHOULD HAVE STAYED HOME.  
IT WAS NICE TO GO OUT THOUGH.

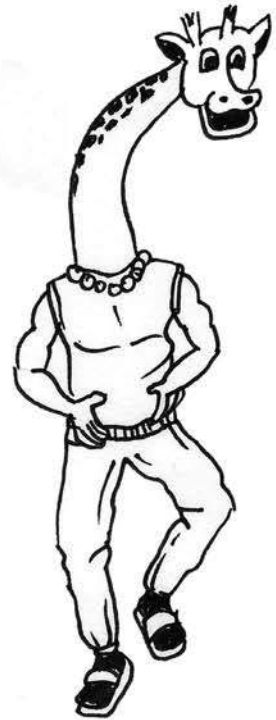
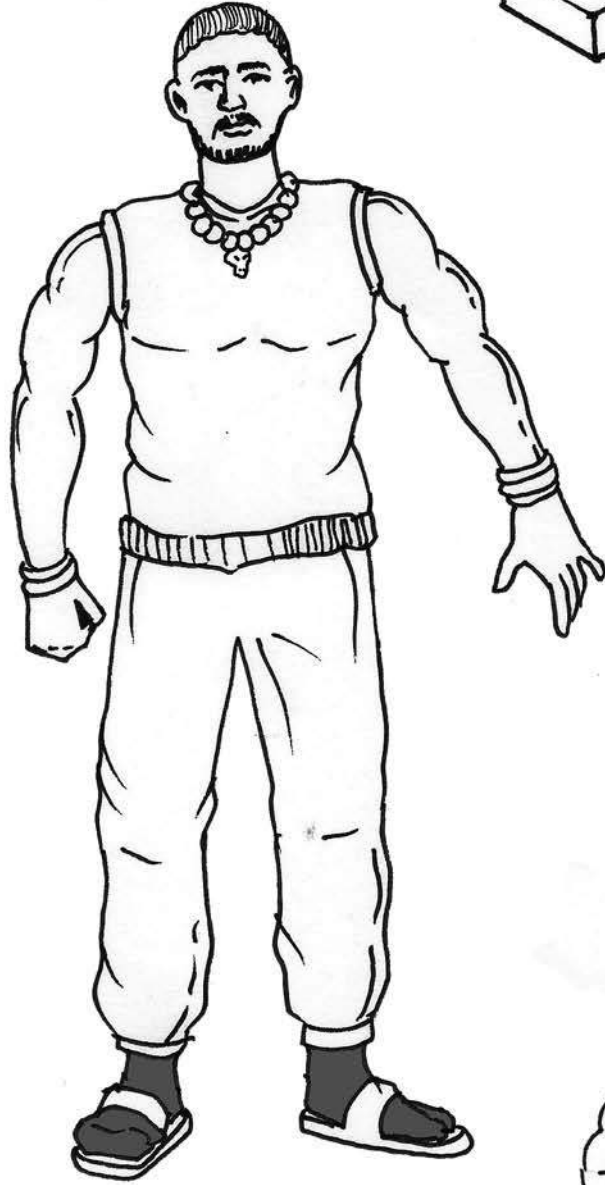
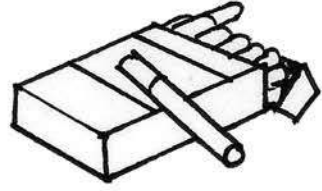
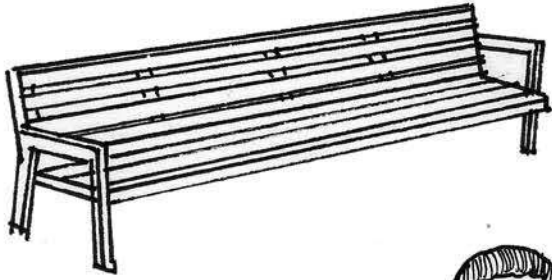




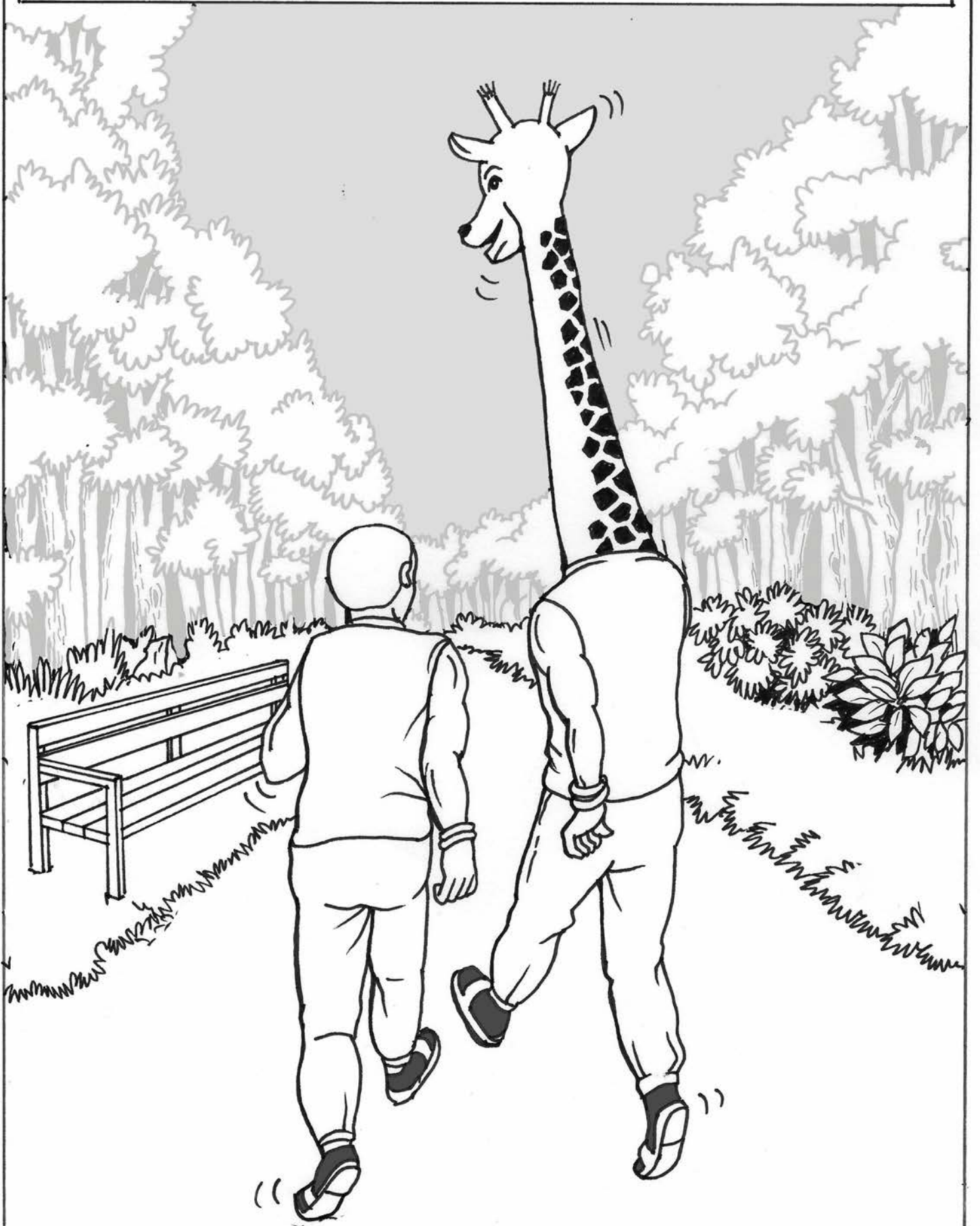


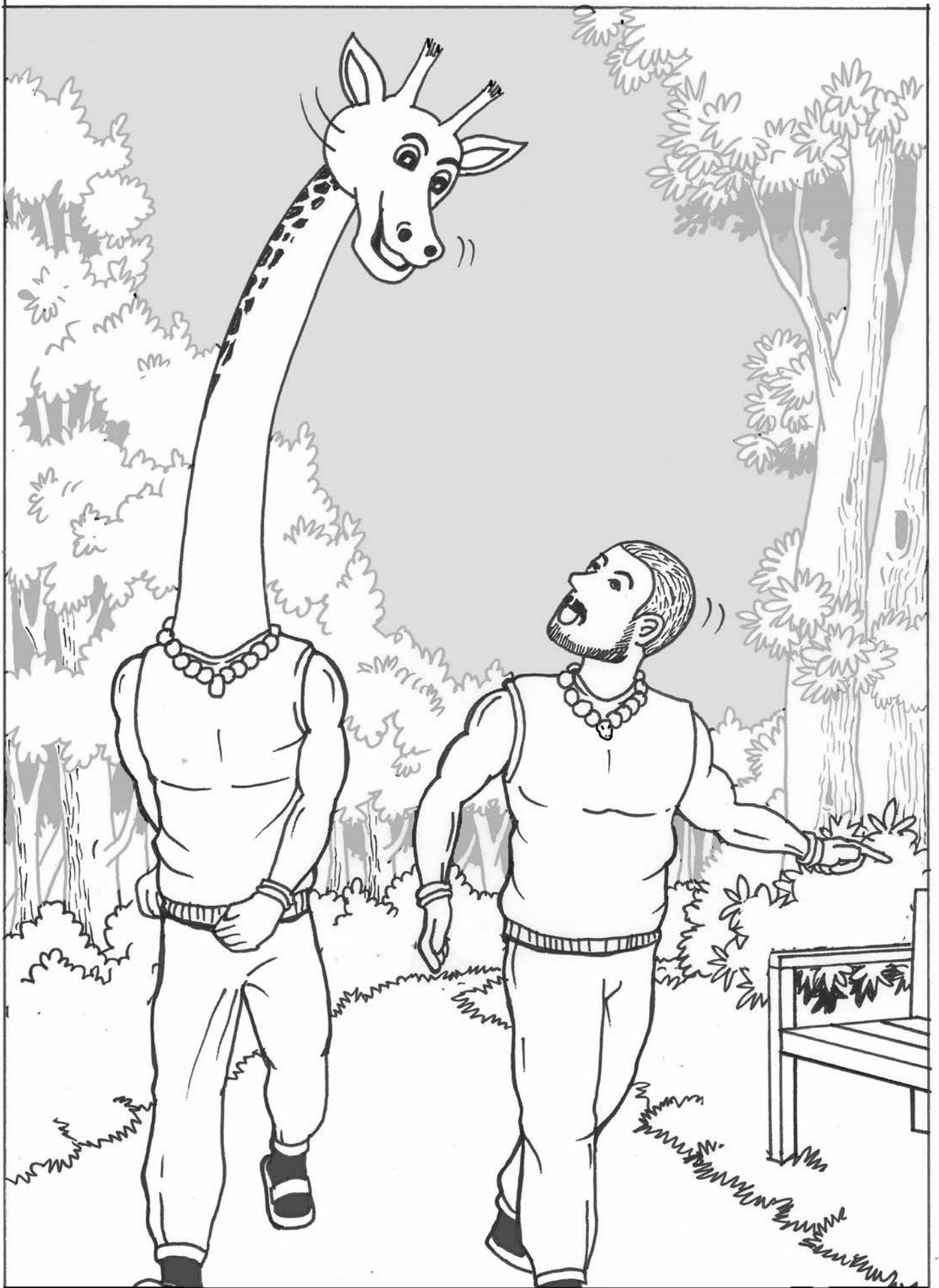
# JAI'S STORY



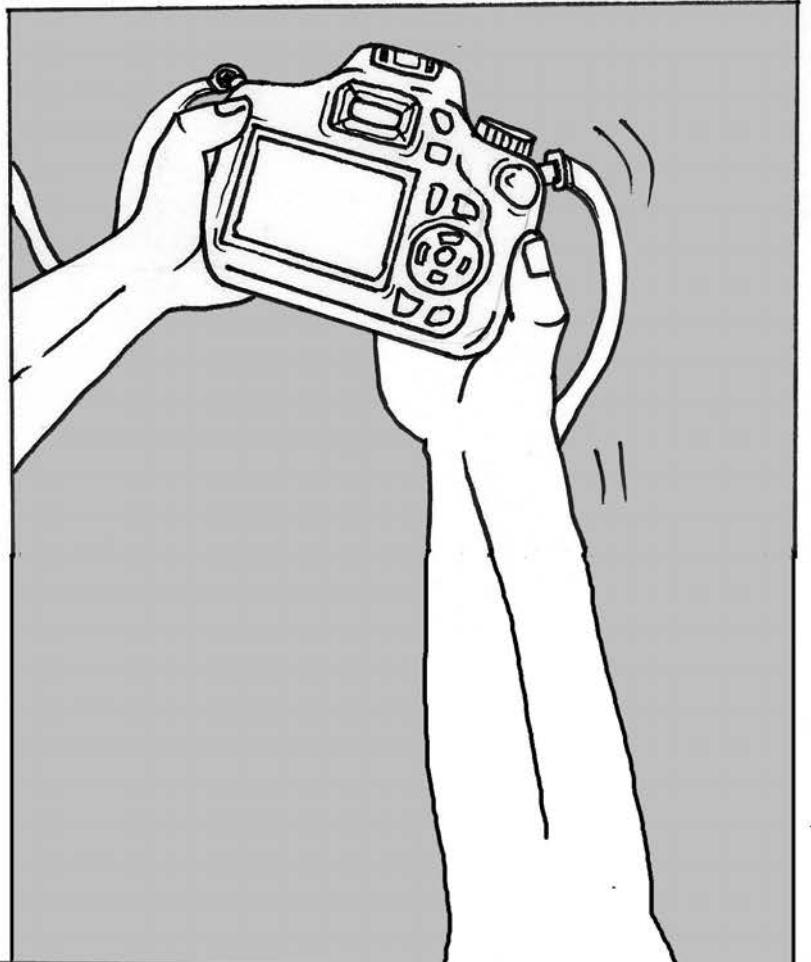
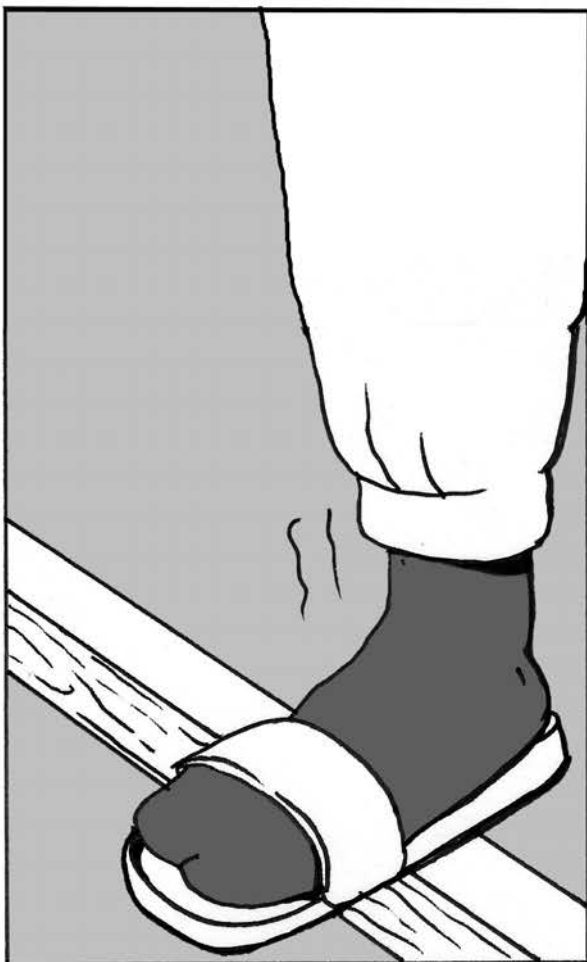
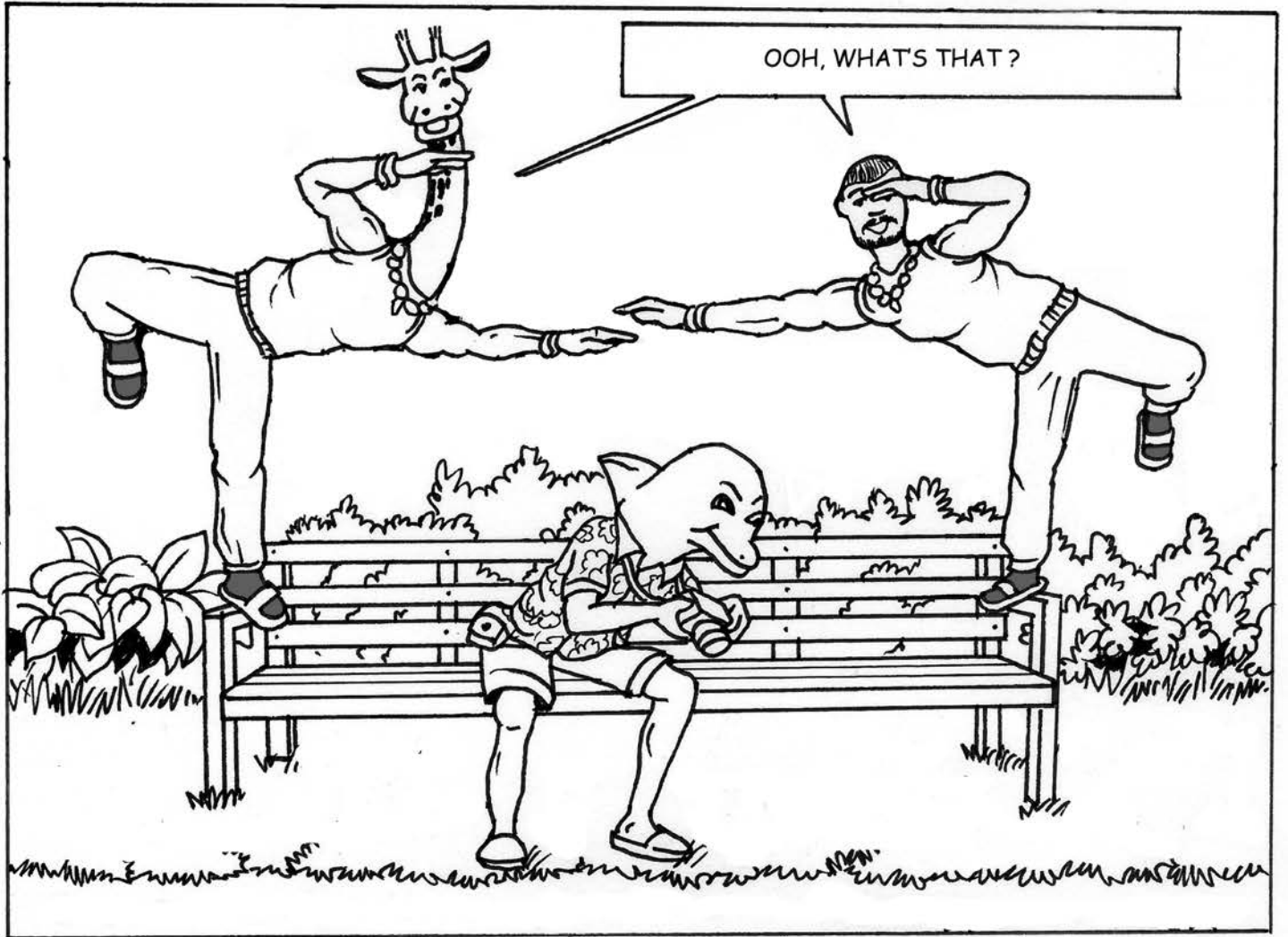


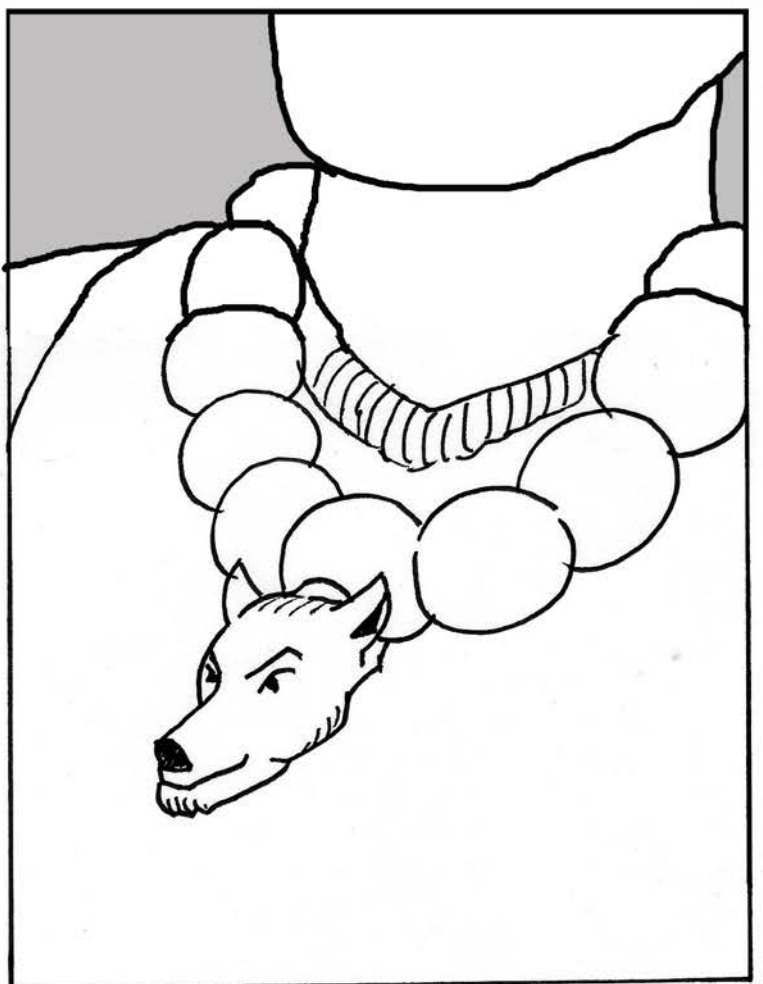
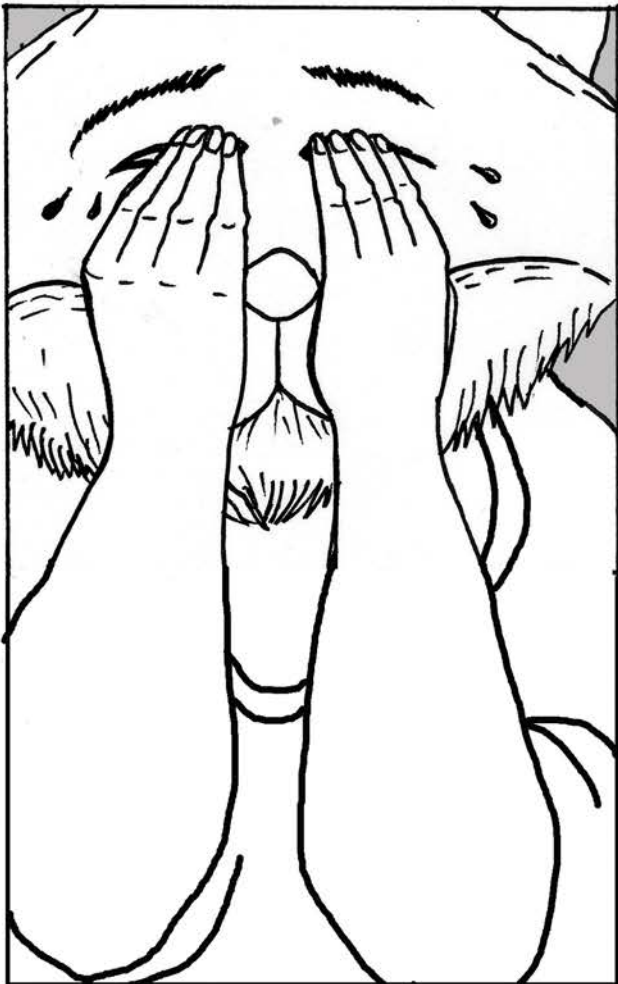
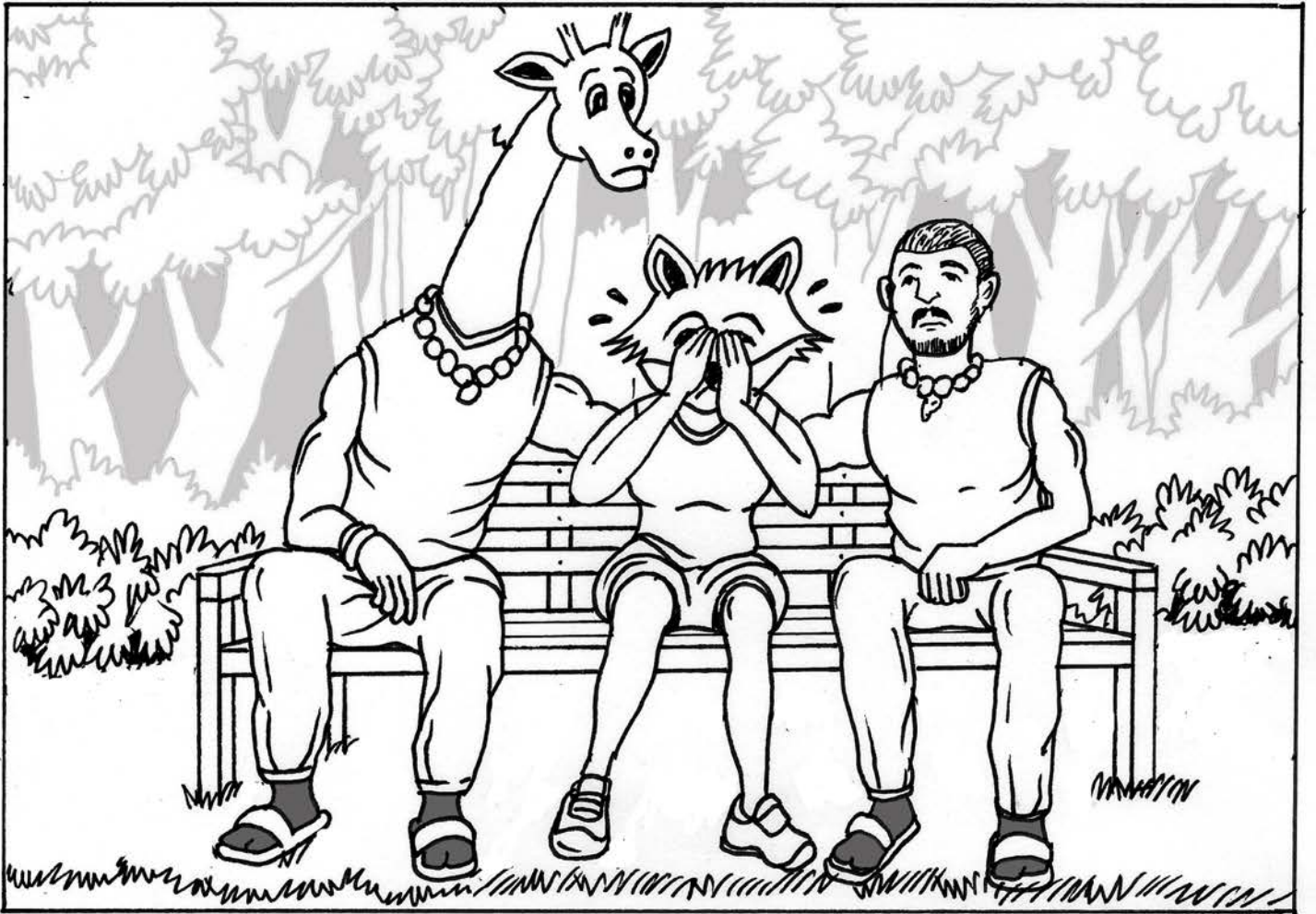
IT'S A SUNNY DAY WITH A CLEAR BLUE SKY...



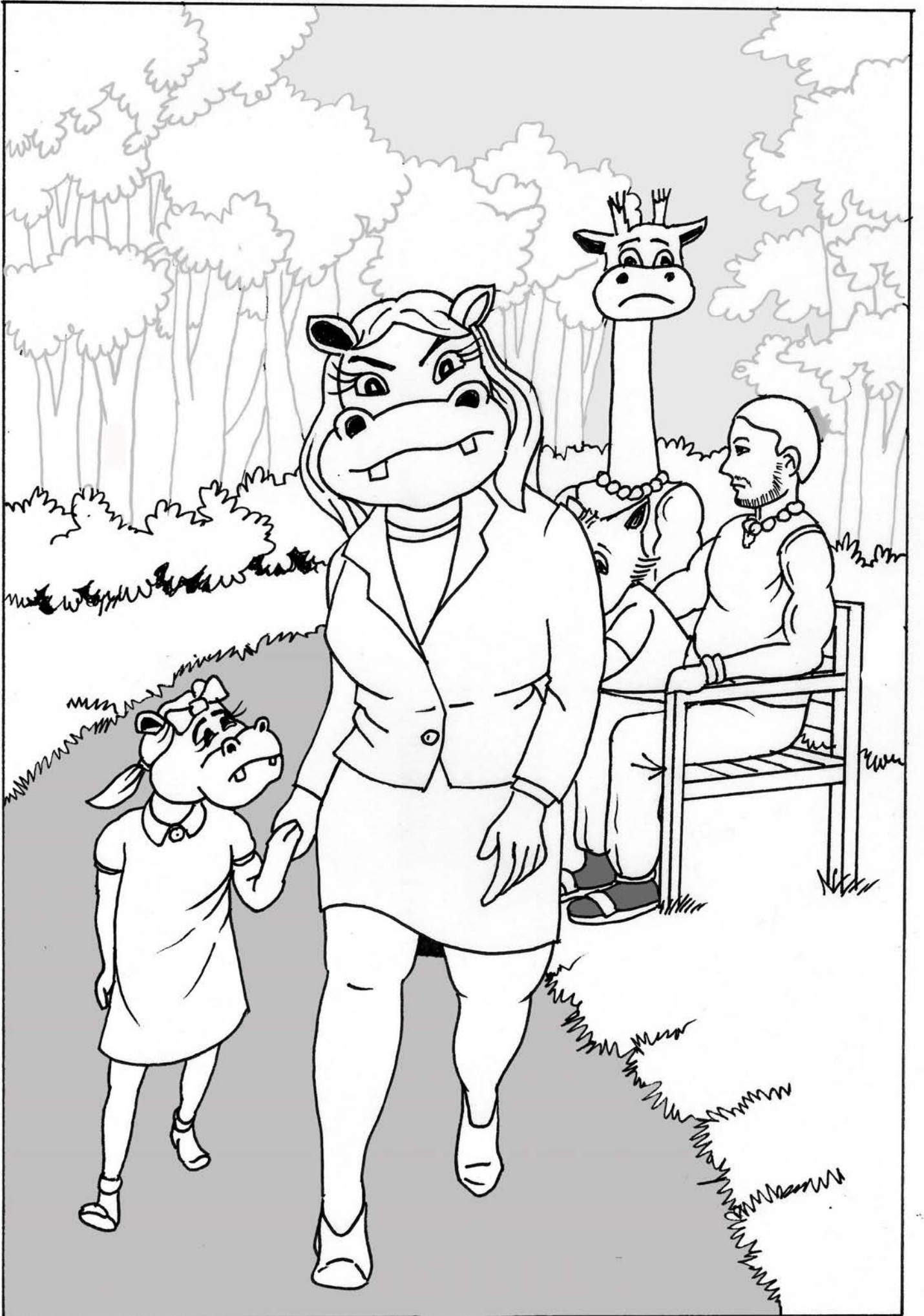


SKIES LIKE THIS ALWAYS MAKE ME FEEL LIKE NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS, I'M GOING TO BE ABLE TO ENJOY MYSELF AND MAKE THE MOST OUT OF THE SITUATION.





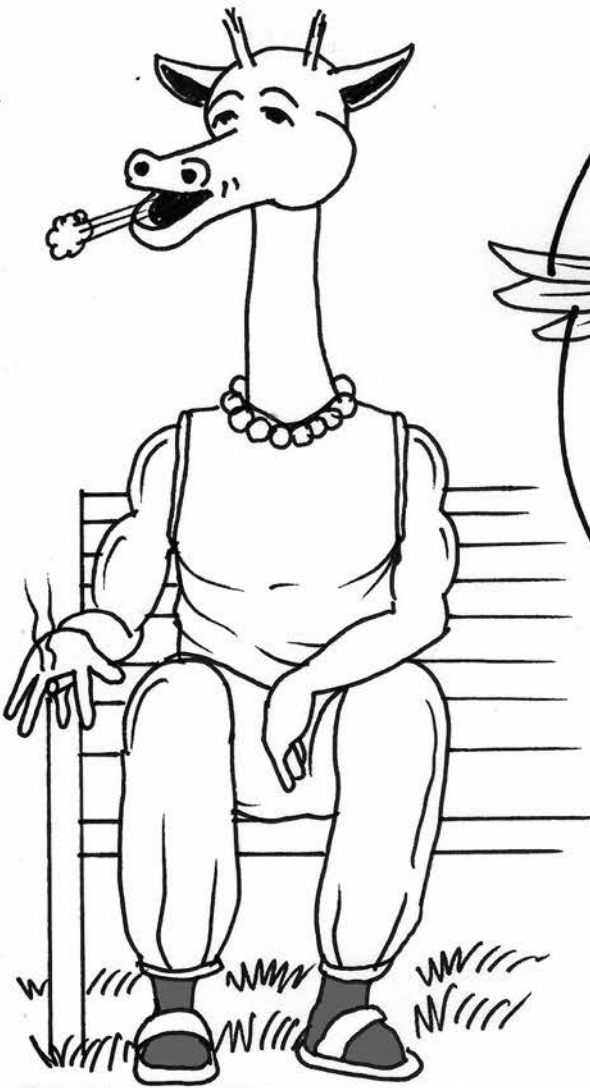
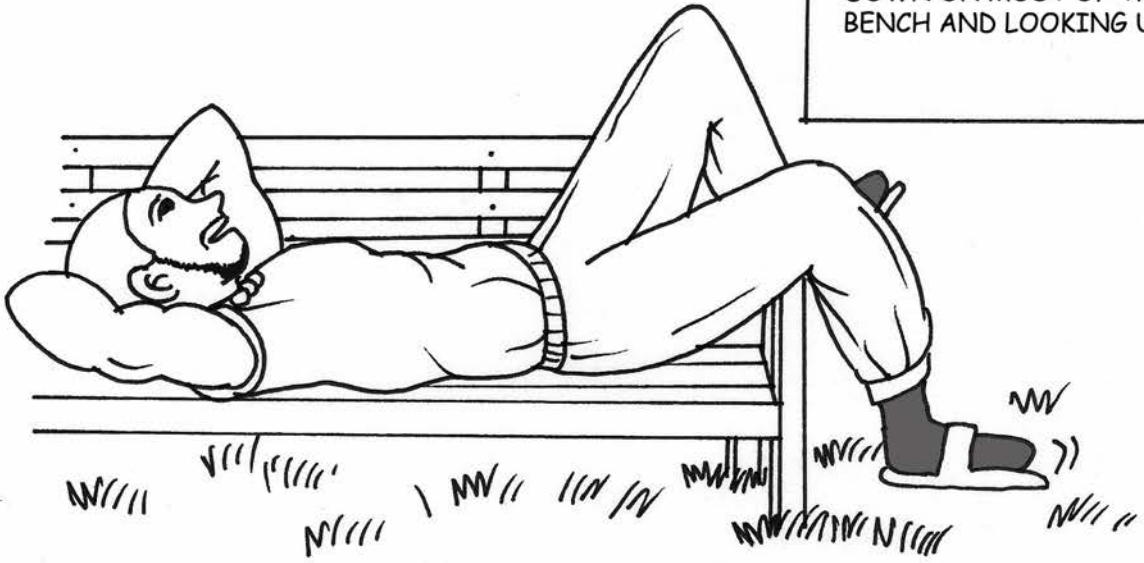








HUMAN ME IS LAYING  
DOWN ON MOST OF THE  
BENCH AND LOOKING UP.



GIRAFFE ME IS COUGHING... FROM  
SMOKING A HAND-MADE  
ROLLED-UP CIGARETTE.



THE FEMALE IS AN 155 CM  
ANTHROPOMORPHIC DEER WITH A  
SHORT NECK AND BIRD WINGS  
FOR ARMS.

HOUSE OBJECTS MOSTLY HAVE A POSITIVE EFFECT ON ME SINCE I CAN USE THEM TO MAKE FOOD OR GET RID OF DUST... BUT THEY ALSO CAUSE ME TO HAVE CHORES, WHICH CAN BE ANNOYING OR DISTRACT ME FROM WHAT I ACTUALLY NEED/SHOULD BE DOING.



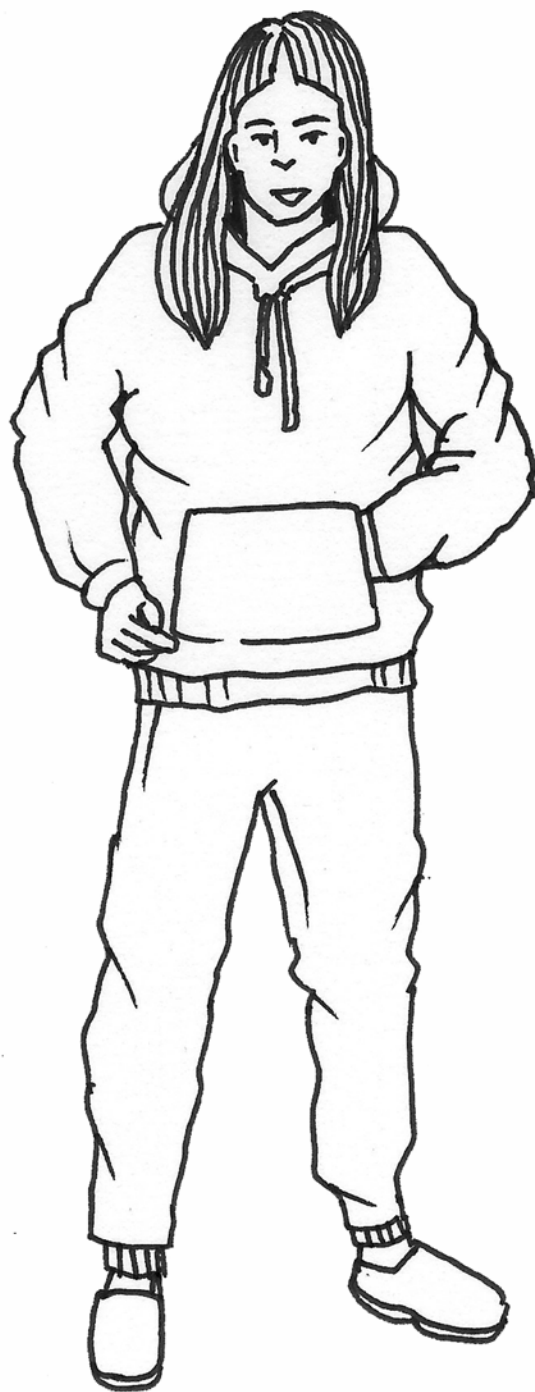
I LIKE TO LAY DOWN OR EAT WITH MY HANDS FOR EXAMPLE. IT CAN MAKE ME FEEL RESTRICTED IF I HAVE TO DO THINGS IN A CERTAIN WAY OR I DON'T HAVE THE OPTION TO DO MY OWN THINGS. I HATE CAFFEINE, THE WAY IT MAKES MY MIND FEEL, I STAY AWAY FROM COFFEE. ALCOHOLIC DRINKS ARE A SOCIAL THING, NEVER DRINK BY MYSELF. I LOVE EATING, THE FEELING OF FOOD GOING DOWN MY BODY.

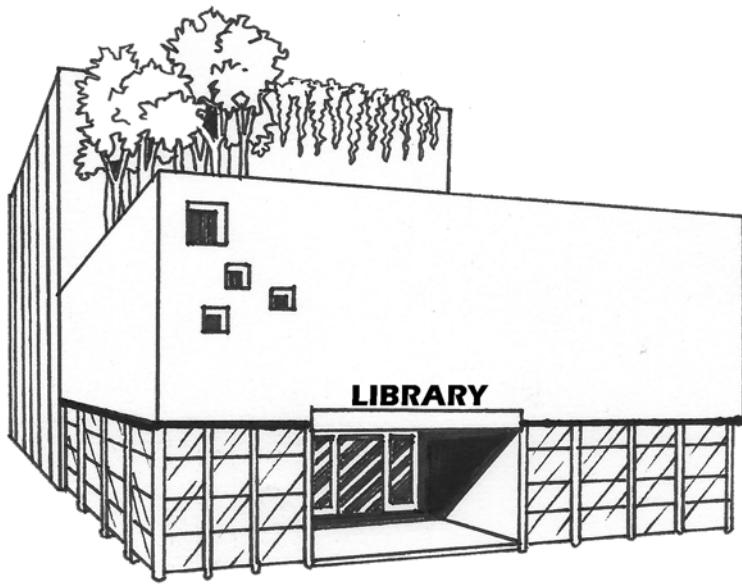
UNI HAS HAD A PROFOUND EFFECT ON ME AND MY GROWTH. IT HAS MADE ME WAY MORE INDEPENDENT HAVING LIVED ON MY OWN FOR THE FIRST TIME AS WELL AS MEETING PEOPLE FROM A WIDE VARIETY OF BACKGROUNDS AND EXPERIENCES. IT ALLOWED ME TO HAVE A MUCH REALER TASTE OF THE REAL WORLD AND HOW TO BETTER WORK WITH PEOPLE.





# EMMA'S STORY

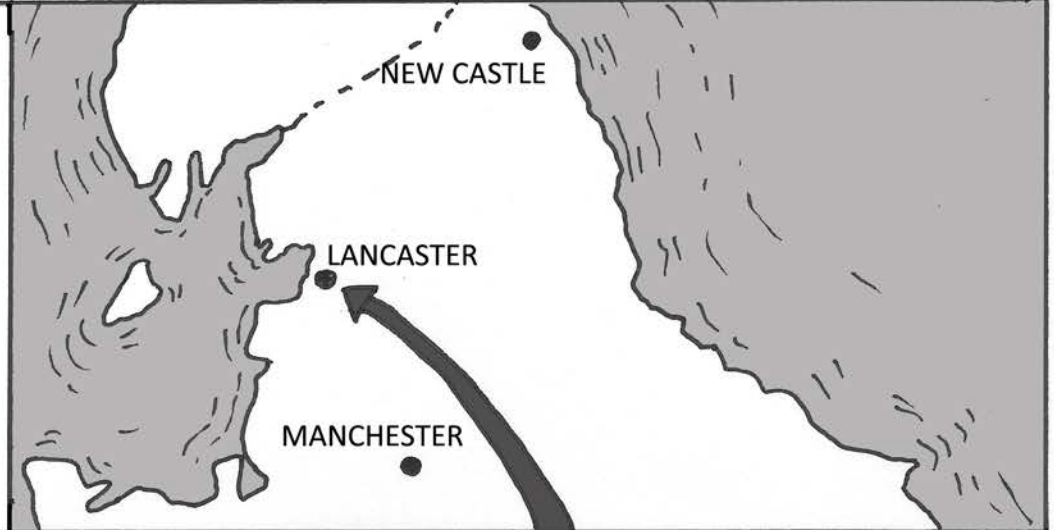




I AM NOW GOING TO TELL YOU MY STORY OF HOW THE LIBRARY ENVIRONMENT USED TO AFFECT MY EMOTIONS AND WELL-BEING.

IT WAS MY FIRST YEAR OF UNIVERSITY. I HAD JUST MOVED TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COUNTRY.

SUDDENLY HAVING TO LIVE IN A DIFFERENT ENVIRONMENT FELT OVERWHELMING AND GETTING USED TO LIVING AWAY FROM HOME FOR THE FIRST TIME WAS SOMETHING I HAD TO ADJUST TO.

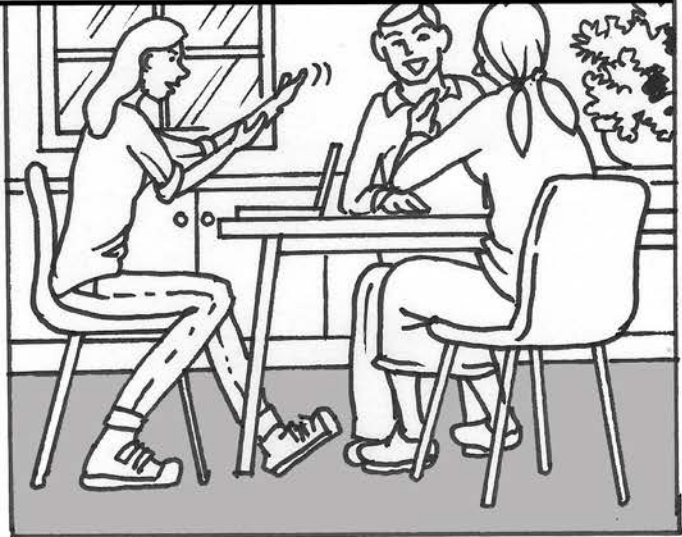
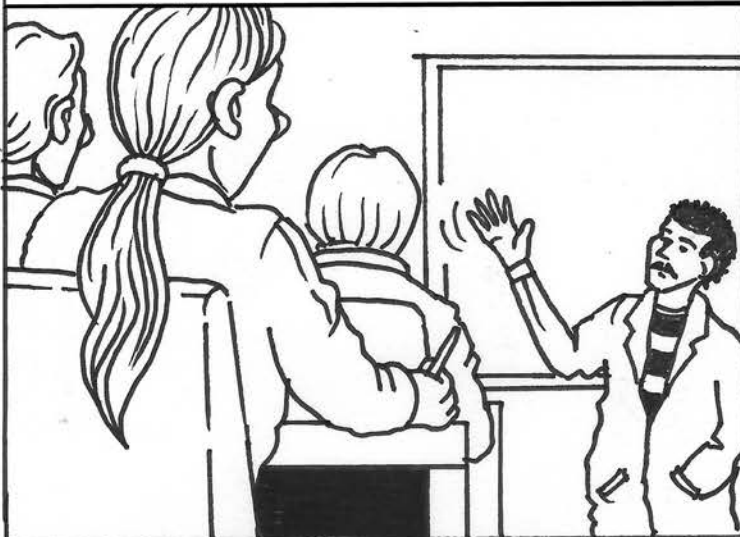


THE DAY MY PARENTS DROPPED ME OFF AT UNI, ME AND MY NEW HOUSEMATES WERE IN GOOD SPIRITS, EXCITED FOR A NEW CHAPTER IN OUR LIVES TO BEGIN.

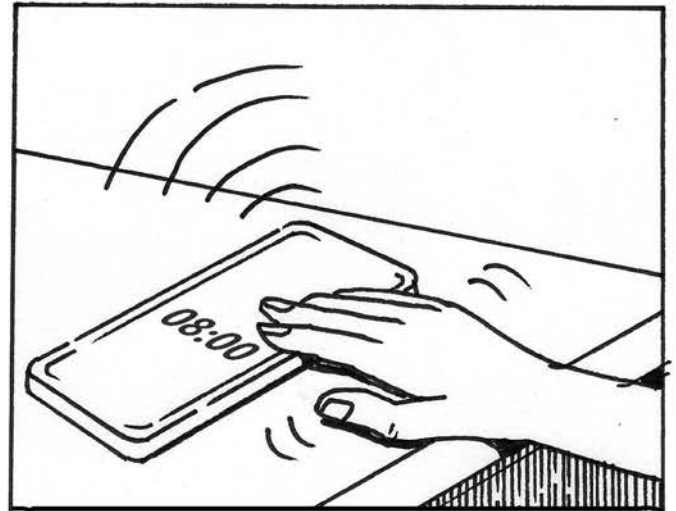
HI, I AM EMMA..



FIRST TERM WENT WELL. I MADE LOTS OF NEW MATES AND I WAS ENJOYING MY COURSE. HOWEVER, SECOND TERM BROUGHT A TURN IN MY LIFE THAT I HAD NOT EXPERIENCED BEFORE...



IT WAS THE FIRST WEEK BACK AFTER THE CHRISTMAS BREAK. I STILL HAD LOTS OF COURSEWORK TO COMPLETE AND TESTS TO REVISE FOR.



THE NIGHT BEFORE I WOULD ALWAYS SET MY ALARM FOR 08:00 AM.



THE CAFFEINE WAS ESSENTIAL.



I WOULD BE IN THE LIBRARY AT 9:00 AM.

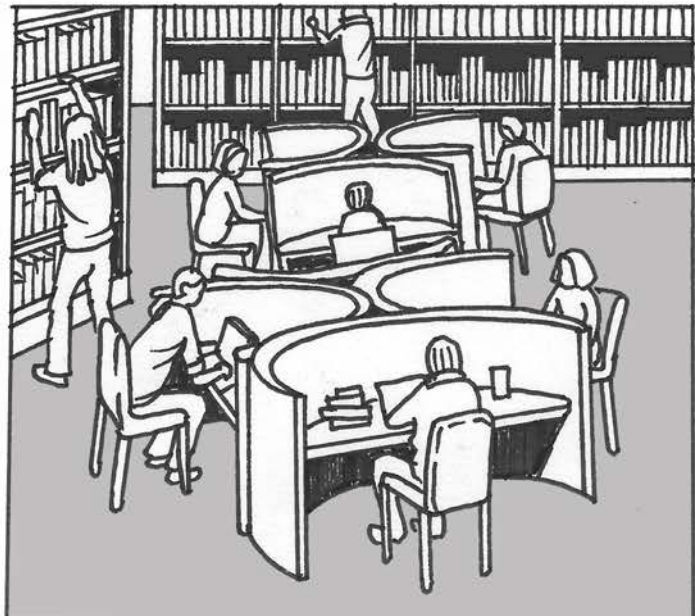


BUT ONE DAY, THE LIBRARY WAS SUDDENLY BUSIER THAN USUAL..THAT DAY I HADN'T MADE ANY EFFORT IN MY APPEARANCE. I WAS WEARING TRACKSUIT BOTTOMS AND A BAGGY HOODIE.



I WASN'T WEARING ANY MAKE-UP. I WAS TOO TIRED FROM ALL MY STUDYING. I COULD NOT BE BOTHERED TO MAKE MYSELF LOOK PRESENTABLE. THE DARK CIRCLES UNDER MY EYES WERE VERY MUCH APPARENT.





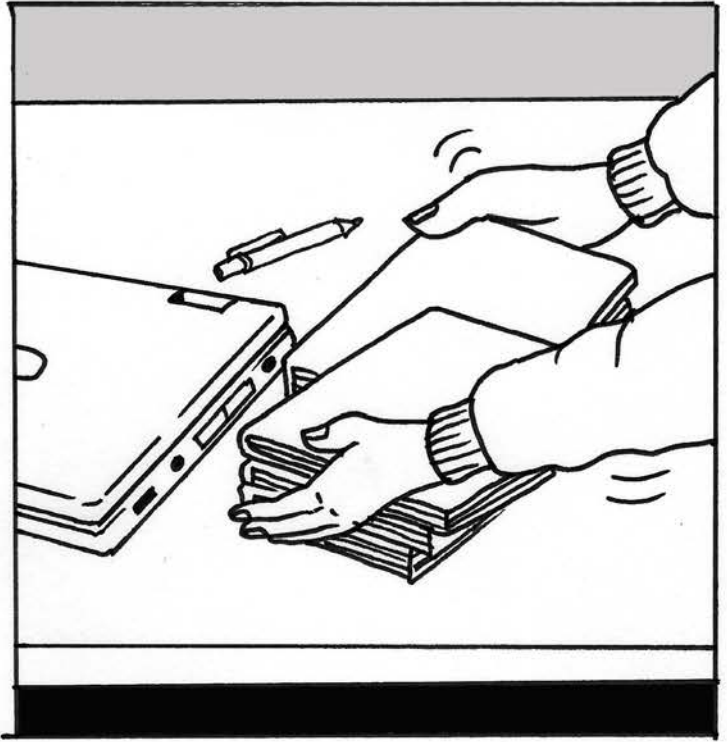
EVERYONE IS WORKING HARD AND WEARING NICE CLOTHES. THEY HAVE THEIR LIFE TOGETHER, EXCEPT ME.



EVERYONE THINKS I LOOK UGLY. I FEEL DEGRADED. I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH TO BE AT THIS UNIVERSITY.



I MANAGED TO FIND A SPARE SPACE TO STUDY BUT IT WAS RIGHT IN THE CENTRE WHERE EVERYONE WALKS PAST.



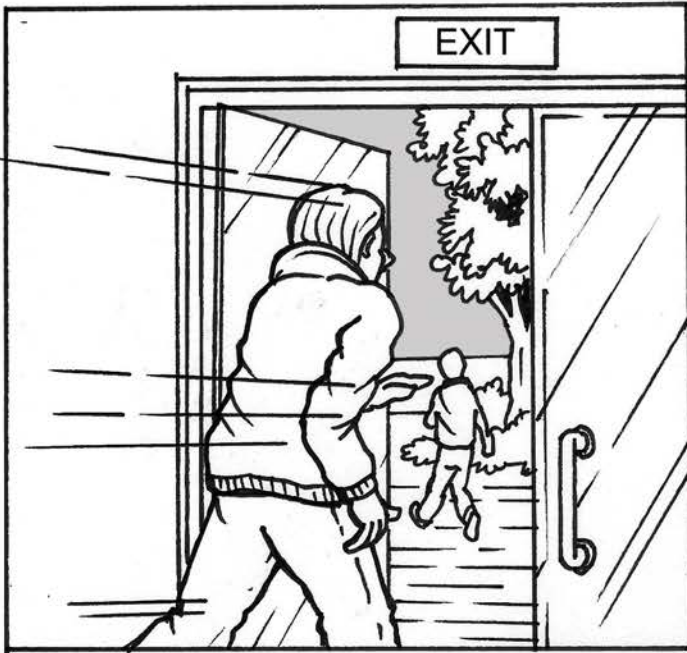
I SUDDENLY FELT CLAUSTROPHOBIC.



MY HEART WAS RACING AT 100 MILES AN HOUR AND I HAD AN OVERWHELMING FEELING OF MY TEMPERATURE RAPIDLY RISING.

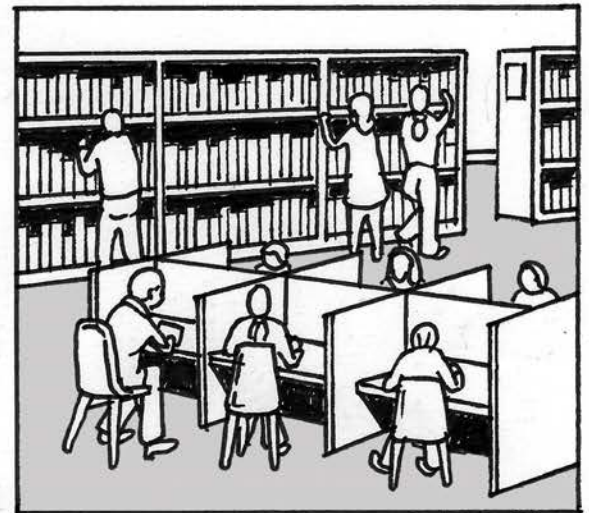
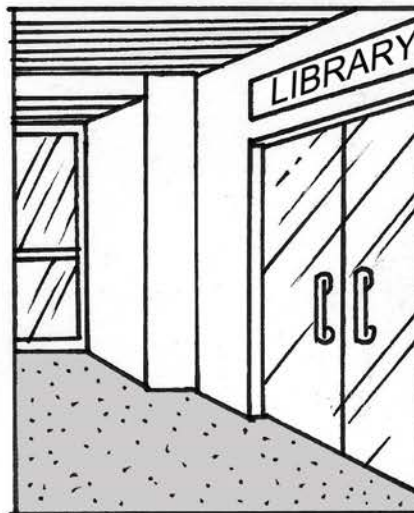


I STRUGGLED TO BREATHE AND IT FELT AS IF I WAS DROWNING, I COULDN'T GASP FOR AIR.

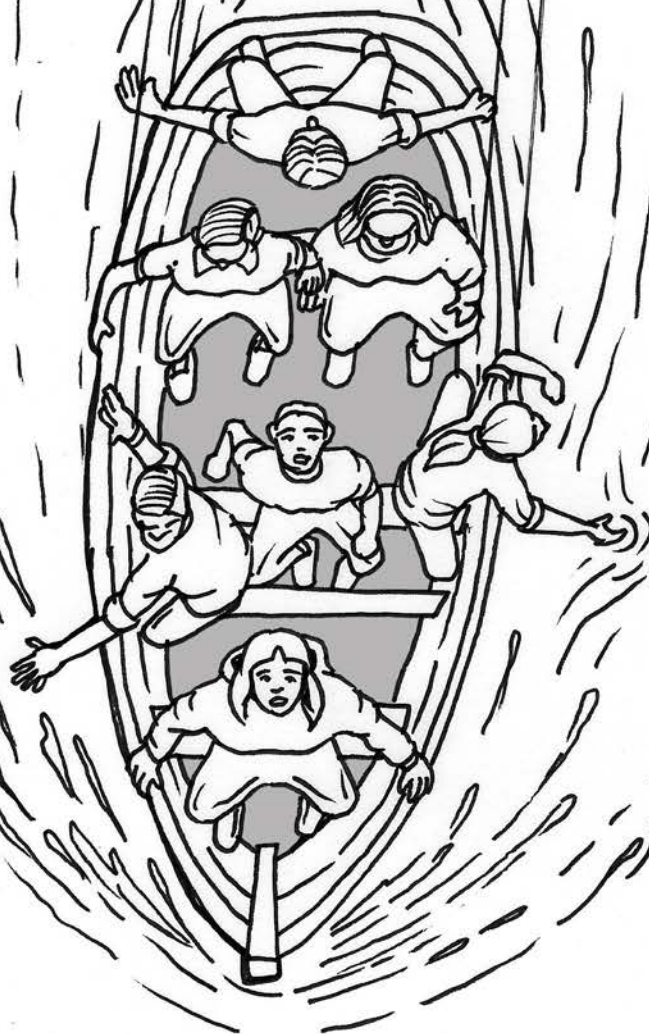


I NEVER WANT MY MUM WORRYING ABOUT ME BECAUSE SHE GETS SO ANXIOUS ABOUT ME BEING UP NORTH AWAY FROM HOME WITHOUT HER.

LIVING IN A UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT CAN BE REALLY TOUGH. FOR ME IN FIRST YEAR, THE LIBRARY WAS SUCH AN INTENSE PLACE AND HAD AN EFFECT ON MY MENTAL HEALTH.



BECAUSE WHEN I WALKED IN AND SAW A SEA OF PEOPLE ALL WORKING, I IMMEDIATELY ASSUMED THEY WERE ALL CLEVERER THAN I WAS AND HAD THEIR LIVES PUT TOGETHER. IN REALITY, I THINK WE WERE AND ARE ALL IN THE SAME BOAT AND THE FACT THAT A LOT OF US BEHIND THE SCENES ARE STRUGGLING AND YET HELP IS OUT THERE NEEDS TO BE SPOKEN ABOUT MORE.

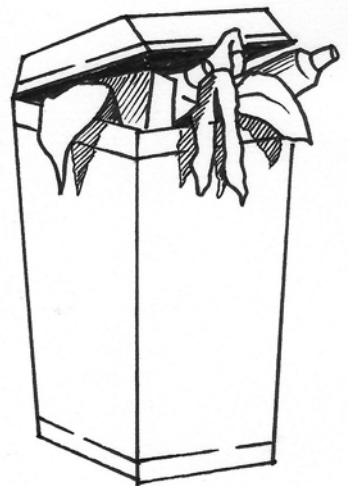
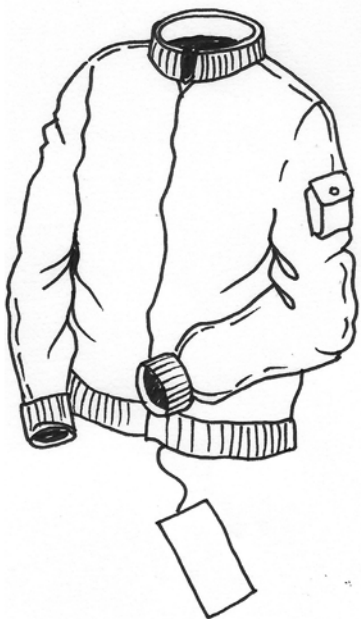
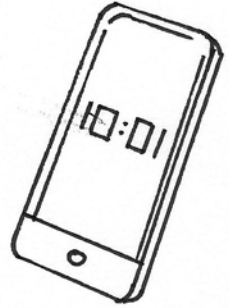
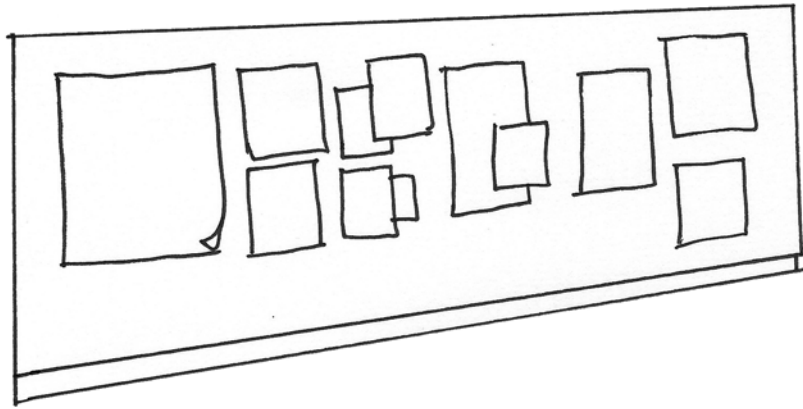







# DANNY'S STORY









HI, I'M DANNY, MALE  
AND I LIKE SPORTS,  
CATERING FOR  
ANIMALS, MAKING  
MONEY AND VINTAGE  
FASHION.

I WOULD LOVE TO BE  
TALL, BUILT AND BLONDE.  
IF I COULD PICK MY  
EXTERIOR, I WOULDN'T  
WANT TO BE IN ANY WAY  
ALIENATED FROM  
SOCIETY.

TALL AND BUILT  
TO MATCH THE  
CONVENTIONAL  
STANDARDS OF  
BEAUTY.

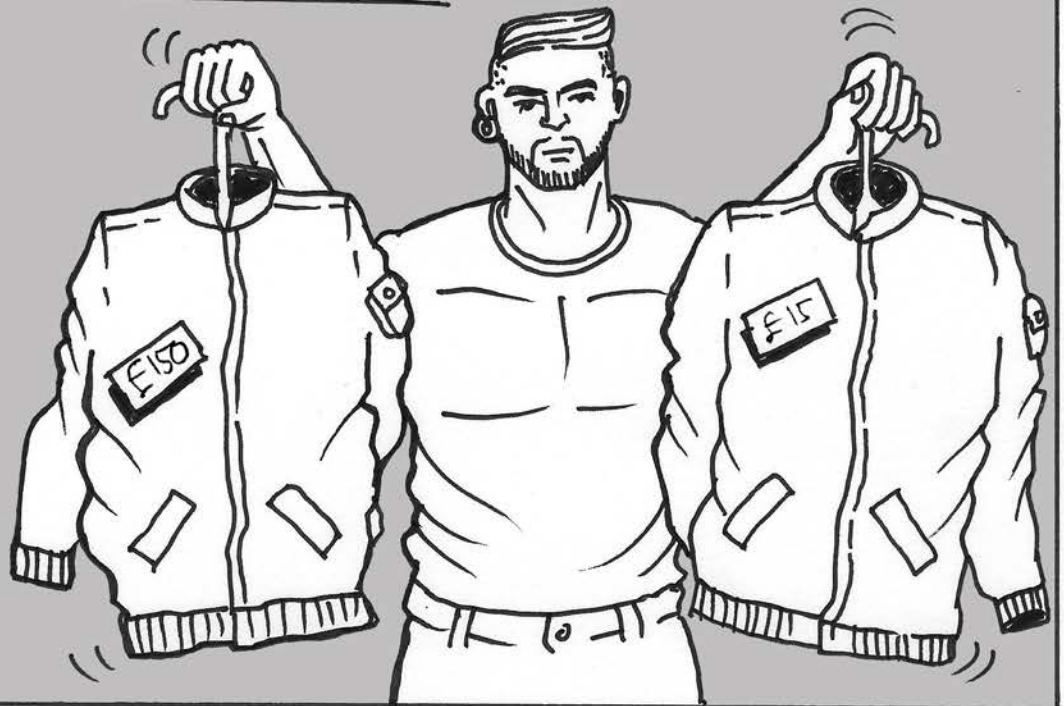
IT CREATES A GREATER  
LIKELIHOOD TO EXCEL AT  
SPORT, COMMAND RESPECT  
AND EASILY BE  
SELF-CONFIDENT.

BLONDE HAIR BLUE  
EYES ARE  
TRADITIONALLY  
THE EUROCENTRIC  
BEAUTY  
STANDARDS.

TO PROJECT ON A HIGHER  
SOCIAL STATUS COMPARED  
TO THE MAJORITY.

WHICH ARE THE MOST  
WIDELY ACCEPTED  
PHYSICAL FEATURES AND  
OFTEN PRAISED.

THE RELEASE OF DOPAMINE FROM WASTING MY MONEY ON FLEETING EMOTIONS FROM PURCHASING TOP-END CLOTHING OR TECH (WHEN CHEAPER SUBSTITUTES DO THE SAME JOB) MAKES ME TEMPORARILY HAPPY.



THE ONLINE WORLD THROUGH THE PURCHASE OF LAPTOPS, COMPUTERS, OR PHONES POSES ITS CHALLENGES.



THE ACCESS TO SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS ALLOWS ACTIVISTS TO REACH OUT AND ALLOWS THE COLLABORATION OF LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE FOR THE GREATER GOOD.



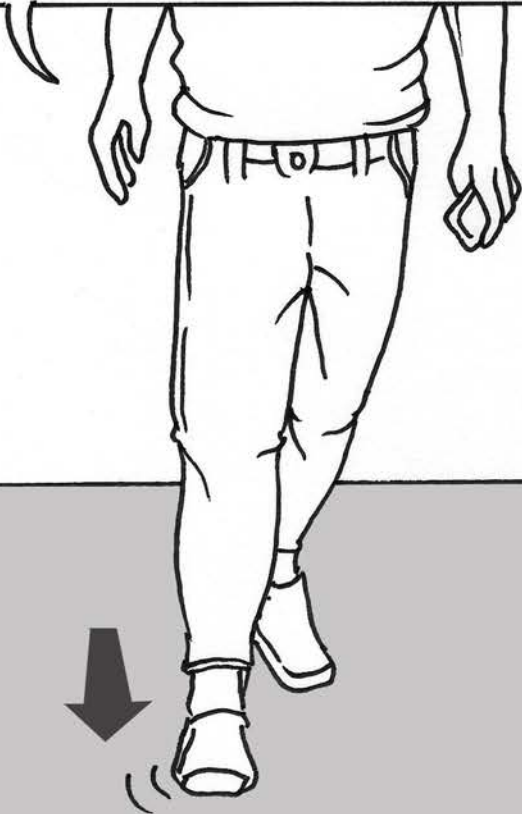
AT UNIVERSITY, MY EMOTIONS ARE DULLED.  
I SPEND MOST OF MY TIME TALKING TO FRIENDS FROM HOME.



PERHAPS IF I DIDN'T HAVE ACCESS TO THE INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONES, I WOULD TAKE MORE  
ADVANTAGE OF THE GREAT PEOPLE THAT SURROUND ME AT UNIVERSITY.



PLATFORMS SUCH AS INSTAGRAM EMBRACES A FLEX CULTURE AND ALLOWS EVERYONE TO PUT THEIR BEST FOOT FORWARD.



WHEN SEEING THIS, I THINK I SHOULD BE ON THE SAME LEVEL, IT TOYS WITH MY EMOTIONS.

BUT THE LOGIC IN MY BRAIN ALSO TELLS ME THE MAJORITY OF THE TIME THE FULL STORY ISN'T BEING TOLD.



THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT DISRUPTS MY EMOTIONS MORE SIGNIFICANTLY. HOME IS WHERE I'M HAPPIEST.

I AM OFTEN ONLY HOME BECAUSE OF HOLIDAYS...

SO, I DO WHAT I WANT, WHEN I WANT AND WITH WHOEVER I WANT TO DO IT WITH.



THE FREEDOM IS WHY I'M SO HAPPY, I HAVE NO EDUCATIONAL OR WORK RESPONSIBILITY. I HAVE TIME TO SELF-REFLECT AND PERSONALLY DEVELOP MYSELF.

WHEN I'M NOT PHONING HOME, I'M TAKING CARE OF MY RESPONSIBILITIES WHICH I DON'T ENJOY.

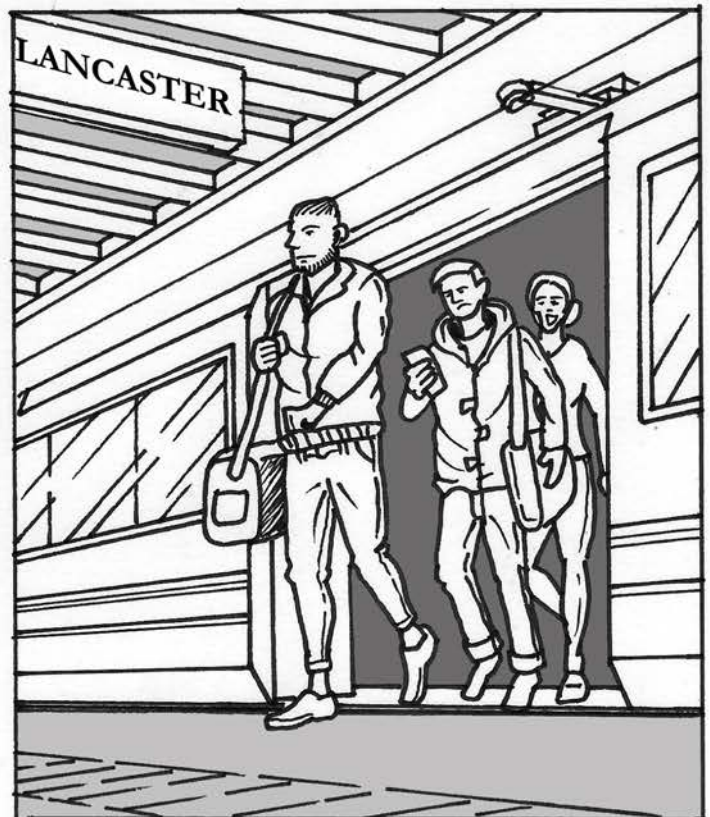
MOST OF THE TIME I AM WORKING WHILE AT UNIVERSITY SO I CAN SUSTAIN LIVING THERE. WHEN I'M NOT AT UNIVERSITY I FEEL LIKE I'M ON HOLIDAY.



WHEN NOT IN WORK I'M WORKING TIREFULLY IN THE LIBRARY AS I MISS LOTS OF LECTURES TO WORK



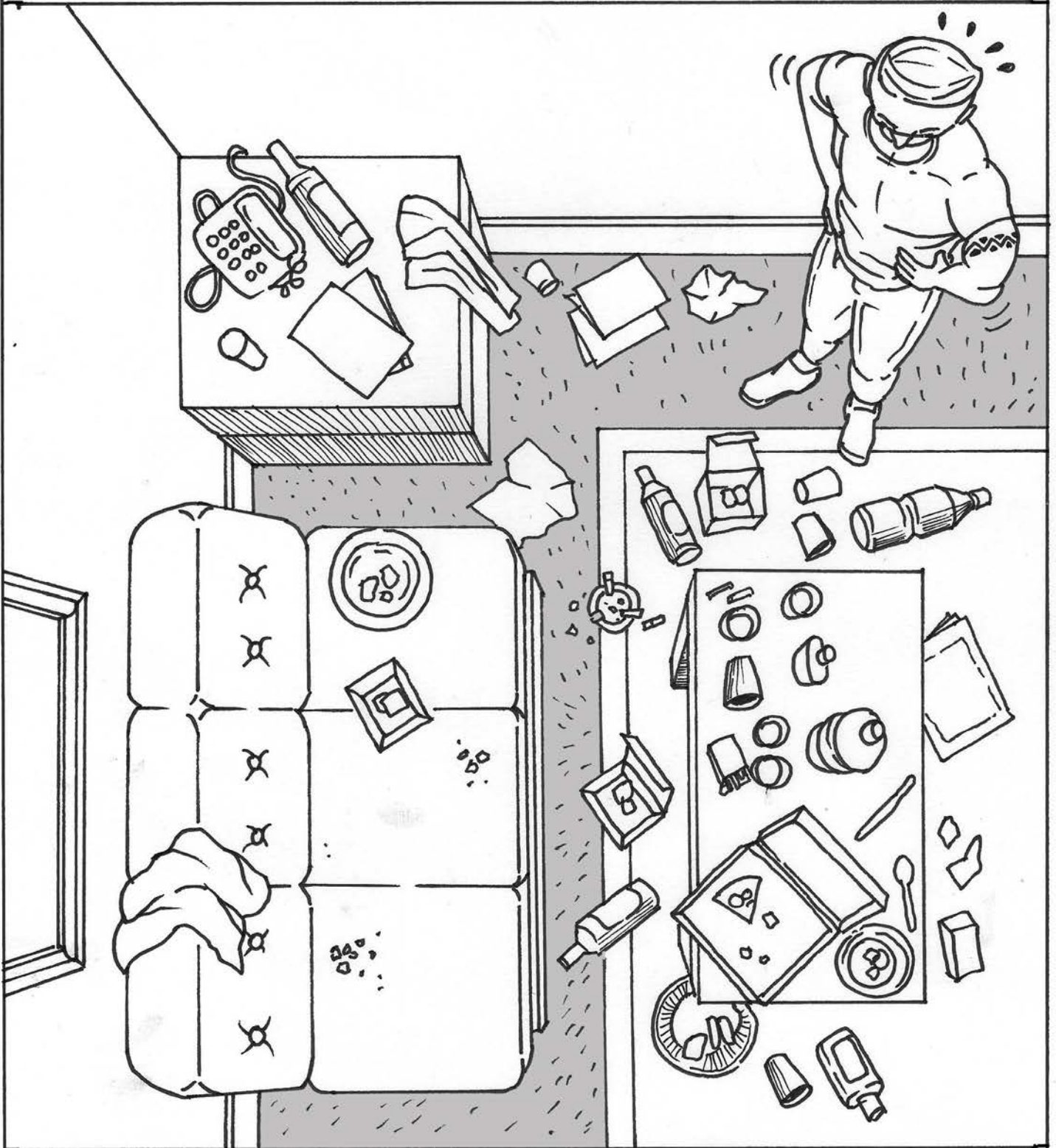
IT'S LOCKDOWN CURRENTLY AND I'M LIVING AT HOME.



I RECENTLY WENT BACK TO MY UNIVERSITY FLAT TO PICK UP SOME BELONGINGS. JUST FROM BEING IN LANCASTER, I IMMEDIATELY FELT LESS POSITIVE.

BEFORE I LEFT LANCASTER INITIALLY, THE HOUSE WAS CLEAN AND WELL RESPECTED, BUT I RETURNED TO A DISGUSTING, DRUG-RIDDEN DEN WHICH I BARELY RECOGNISED.

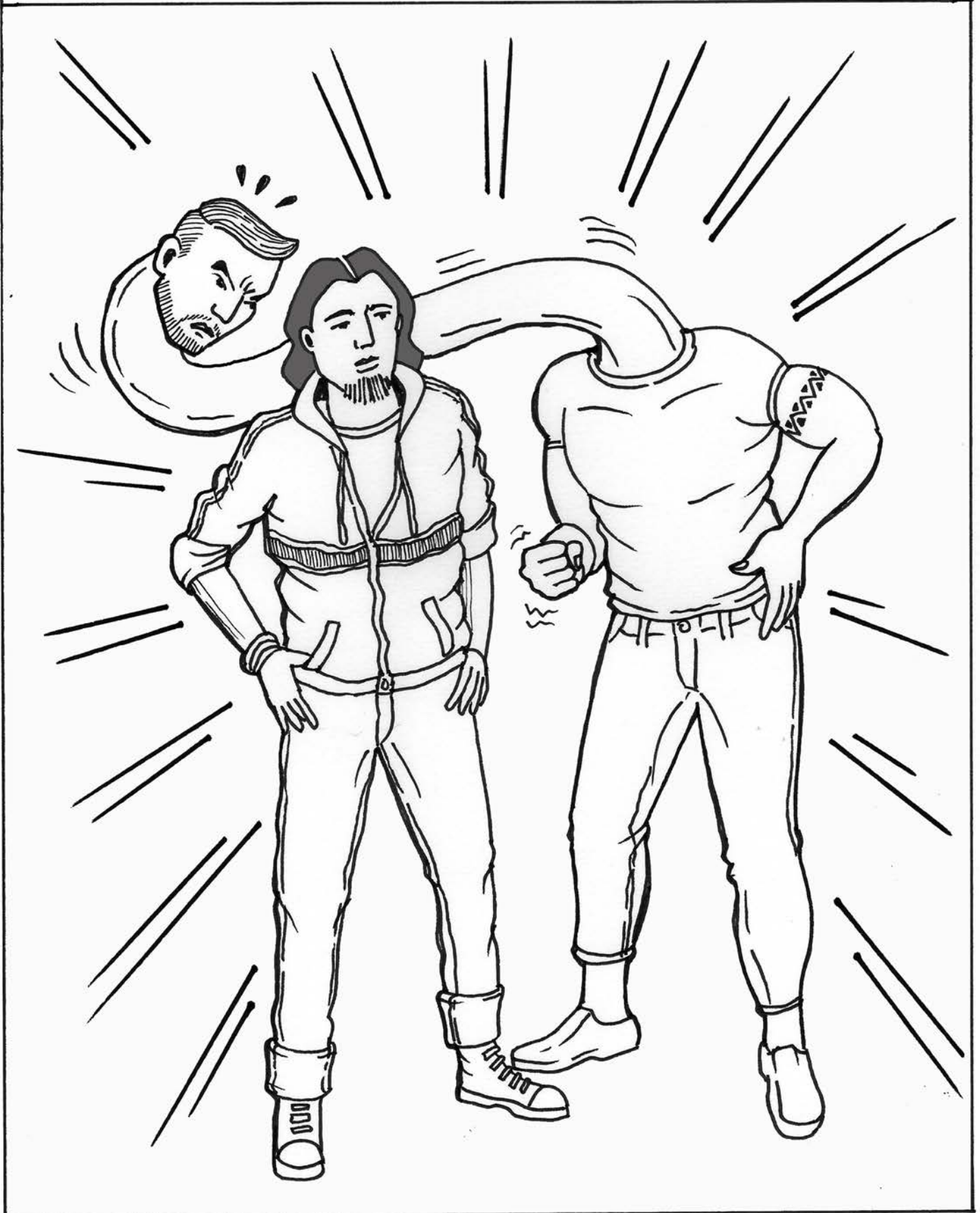
THE IDEA OF LIVING IN AN UNCLEAN HOME ALONE WHILE WORKING FULL-TIME AT A JOB I DON'T ENJOY BROUGHT THE NEGATIVITY.



BEING IN THE HOUSE AND SEEING MOULD, HALF-SMOKED SPLIFFS LEFT IN CUPS AND EMPTIED BAGS (OF WHAT I BELIEVE TO BE COKE OR KETAMINE) DAMPENED MY HAPPINESS INSTANTLY AND DAMPENED THE PREVIOUS HAPPINESS I FELT FROM REMINISCING OVER MEMORIES IN THE SAME HOUSE.

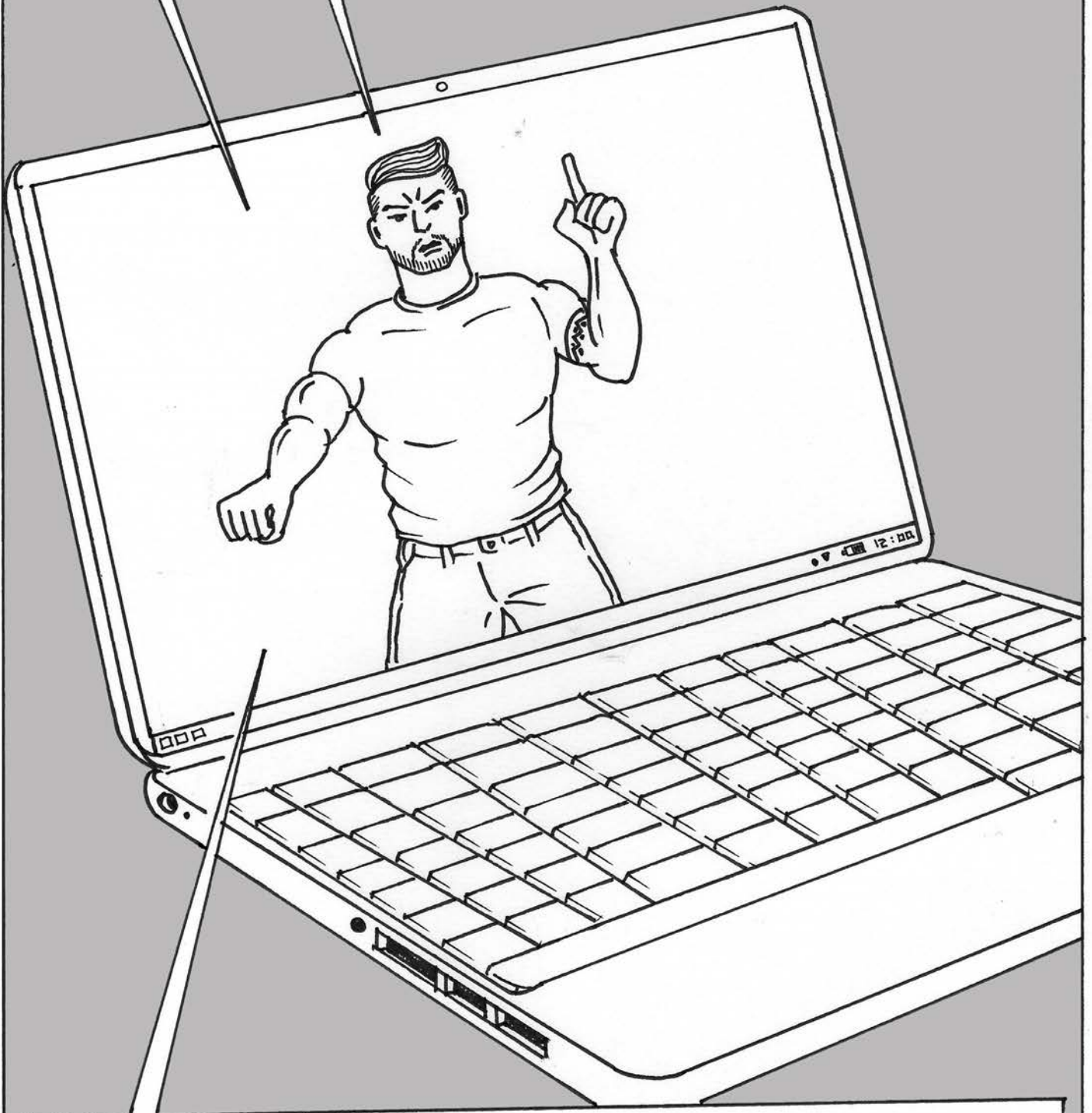
WHAT SICKENED ME THE MOST WAS MY FLATMATE WAS STILL LIVING THERE IN THESE  
DESPICABLE CONDITIONS.

THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AROUND ME INSTANTLY MADE ME FEEL NEGATIVE TOWARDS  
MY FLATMATE, EVEN THOUGH I DIDN'T KNOW IF IT WAS HIS FAULT OR NOT.



THE ONLY THING I THOUGHT TO DO OVER THESE DAYS IN LANCASTER WAS TO USE MY LAPTOP AND PHONE TO SCAN SOCIAL MEDIA.

THIS HEIGHTENED MY ANGER, SEEING FELLOW STUDENTS LIVING IN HARMONY THROUGHOUT THE LOCKDOWN.



I FELT THIS WAY BECAUSE I COMPARED MY SITUATION TO THEIRS. I AVOIDED ANY SOCIAL CONTACT WITH THE FLATMATE BECAUSE OF HOW I FELT FROM GOING ONLINE AND THE ENVIRONMENT I LIVED IN.



RELUCTANTLY, I ENDED UP SPEAKING WITH THE FLATMATE AND DISCOVERED THE UNCLEANLINESS OF THE HOUSE WAS ACTUALLY AT THE HAND OF A DIFFERENT FLATMATE.

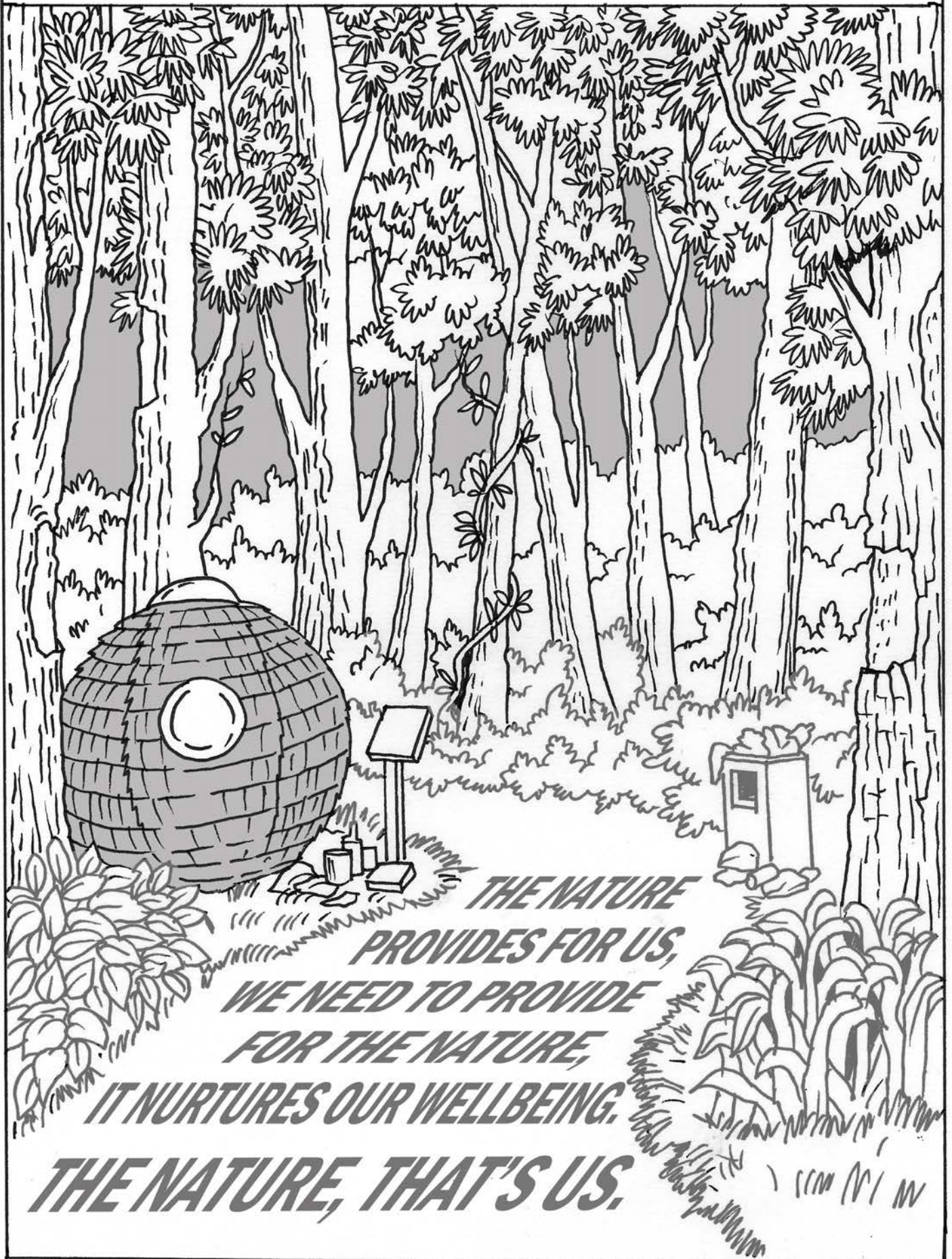


ON CAMPUS I FEEL A SIMILAR WAY, IF I SEE A LACK OF RESPECT FOR OUR SURROUNDING AREAS I AM ALWAYS PUT IN A BAD MOOD, ANYTHING FROM LITTER TO HUNDREDS OF POSTERS ON THE SAME WALLS.



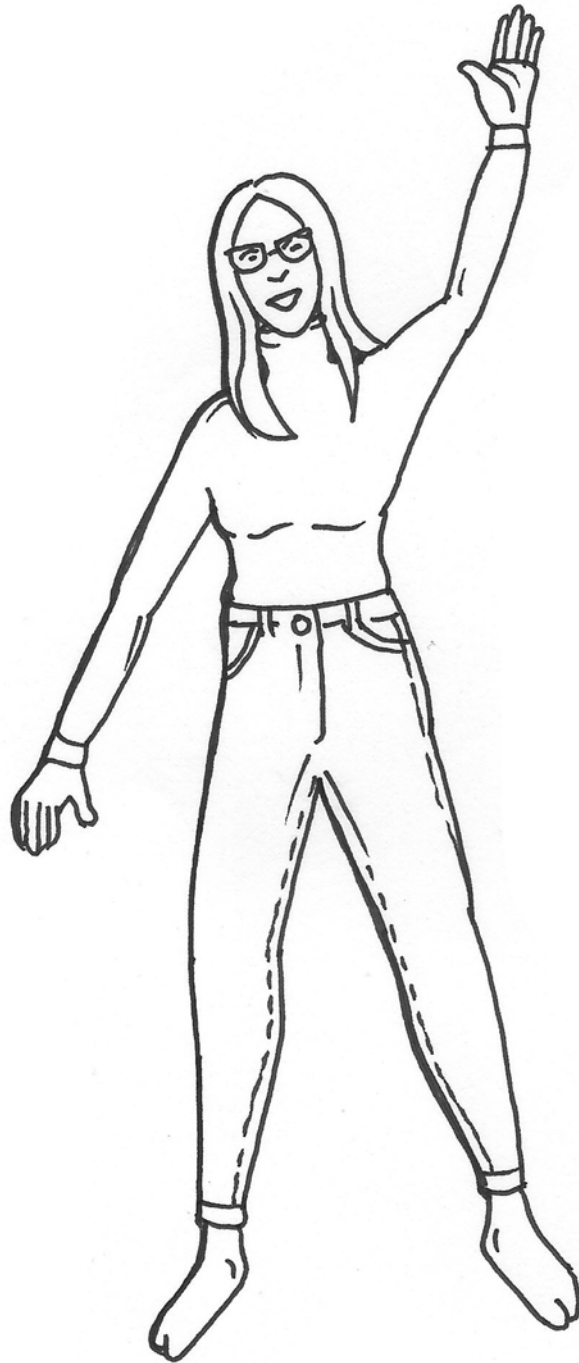
THE STUDY PODS NEAR LICA MAY AS WELL BE A PUBLIC BIN BUT IT'S NOT JUST THE STUDENTS TO BLAME.

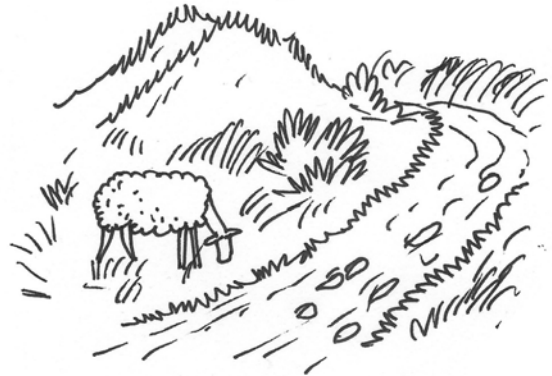
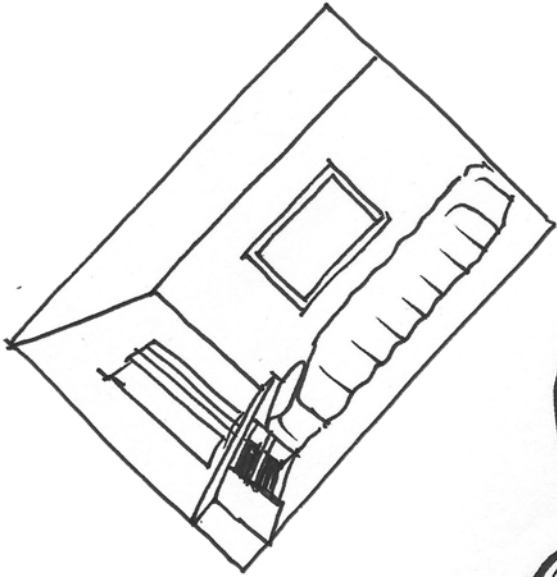
THE PROVIDED BINS ARE CONSTANTLY OVERFLOWING.





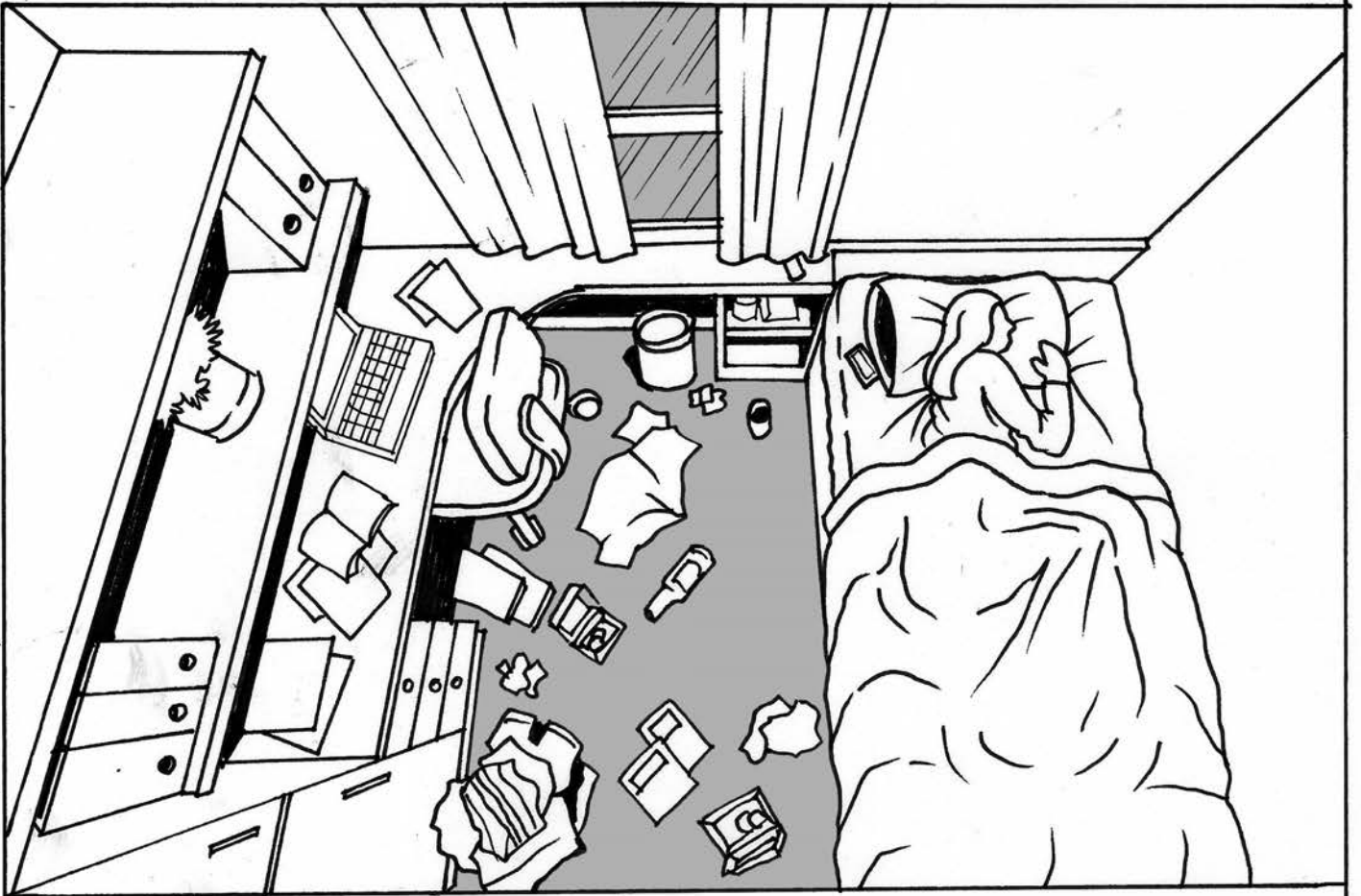
# MONIKA'S STORY





IN MY FIRST YEAR I LIVED IN AN ENSUITE ROOM ON THE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS.





I AM IN MY UNIVERSITY ROOM SLEEPING IN BED.



THE ROOM IS SO MESSY.



I HATE BEING HERE...  
I CAN'T GET UP...  
I'M SO TIRED...  
I HAVE SO MUCH TO DO...  
I FEEL SO ANXIOUS...  
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO...  
I FEEL SO TRAPPED....

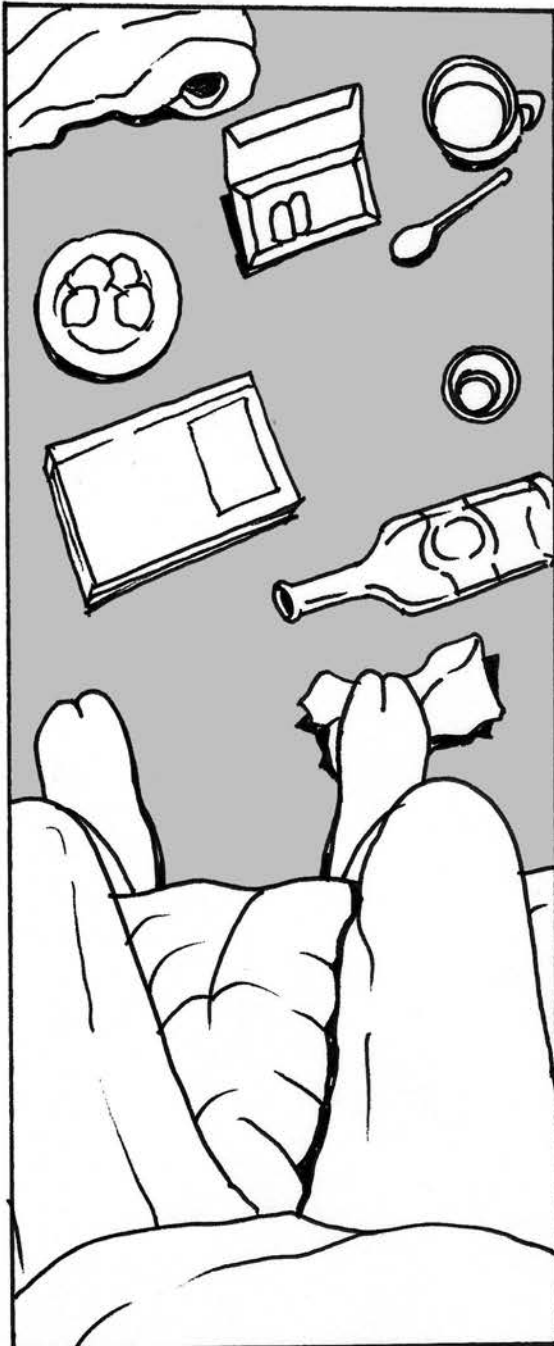




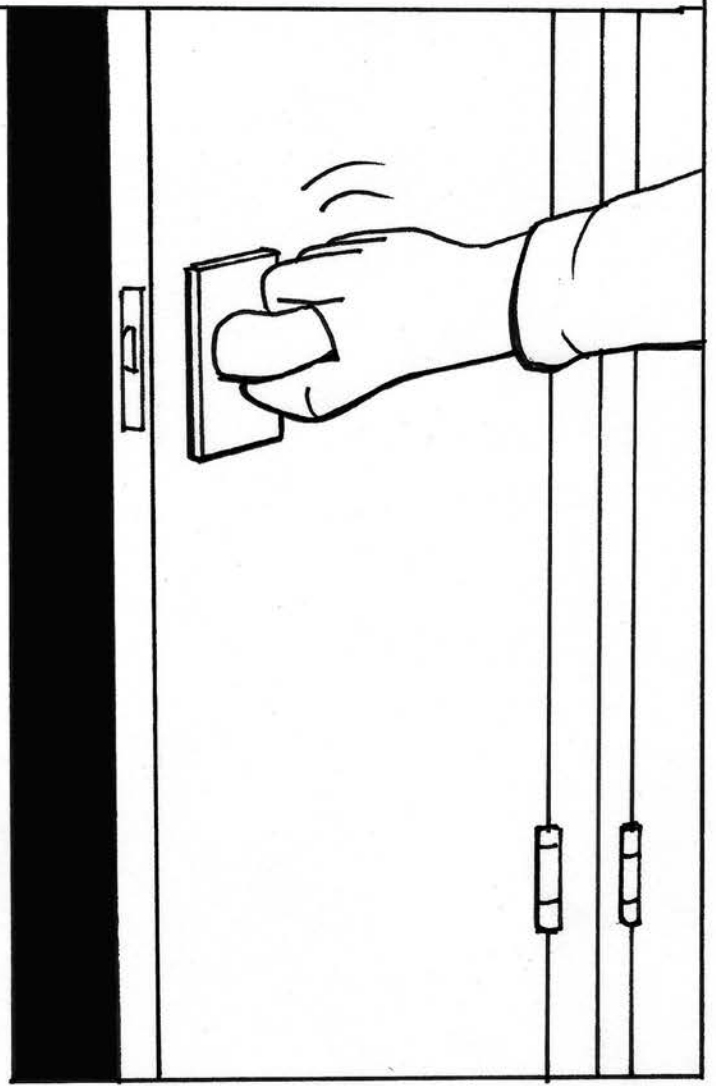
I FALL BACK TO SLEEP.

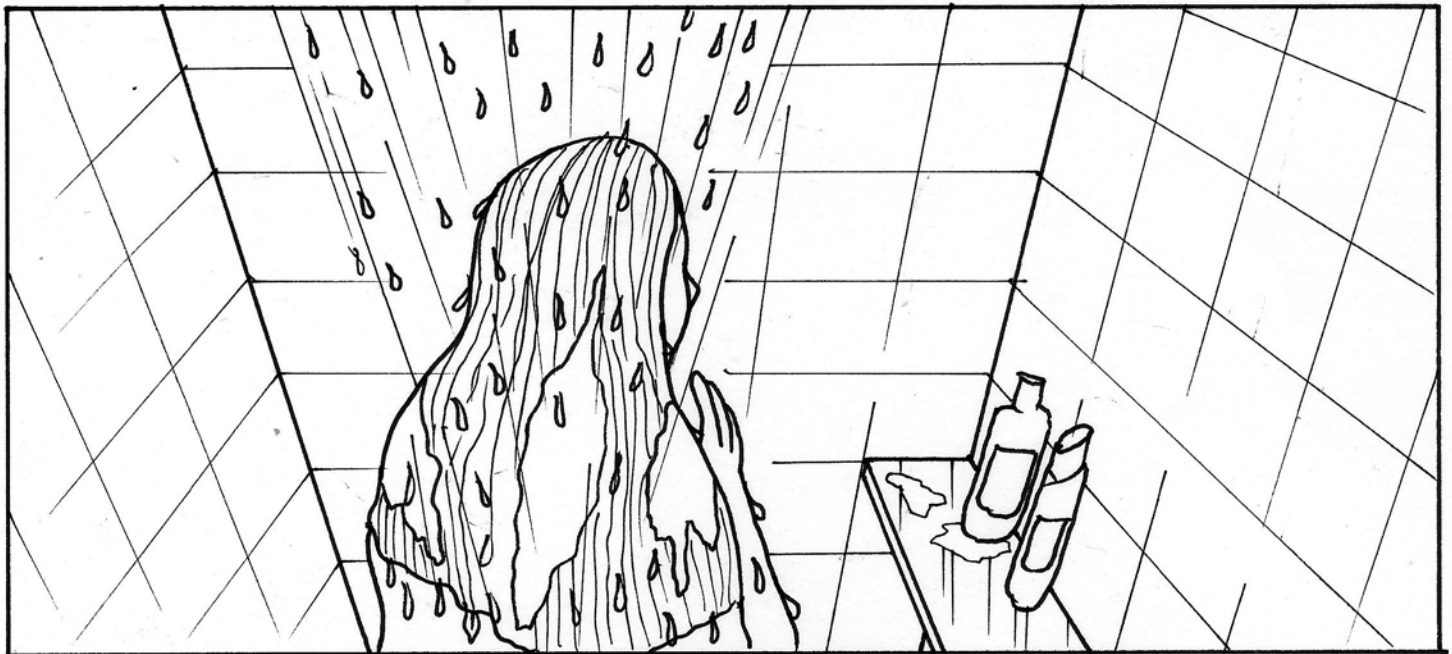
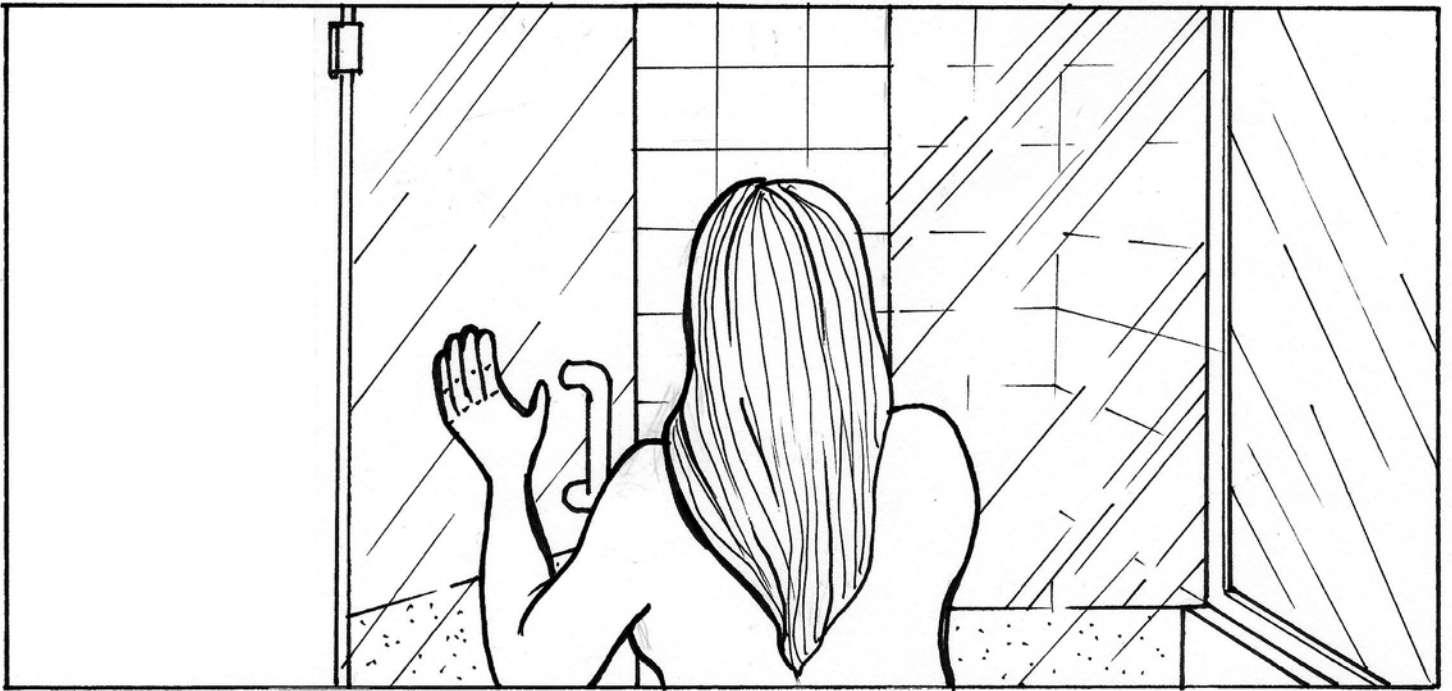


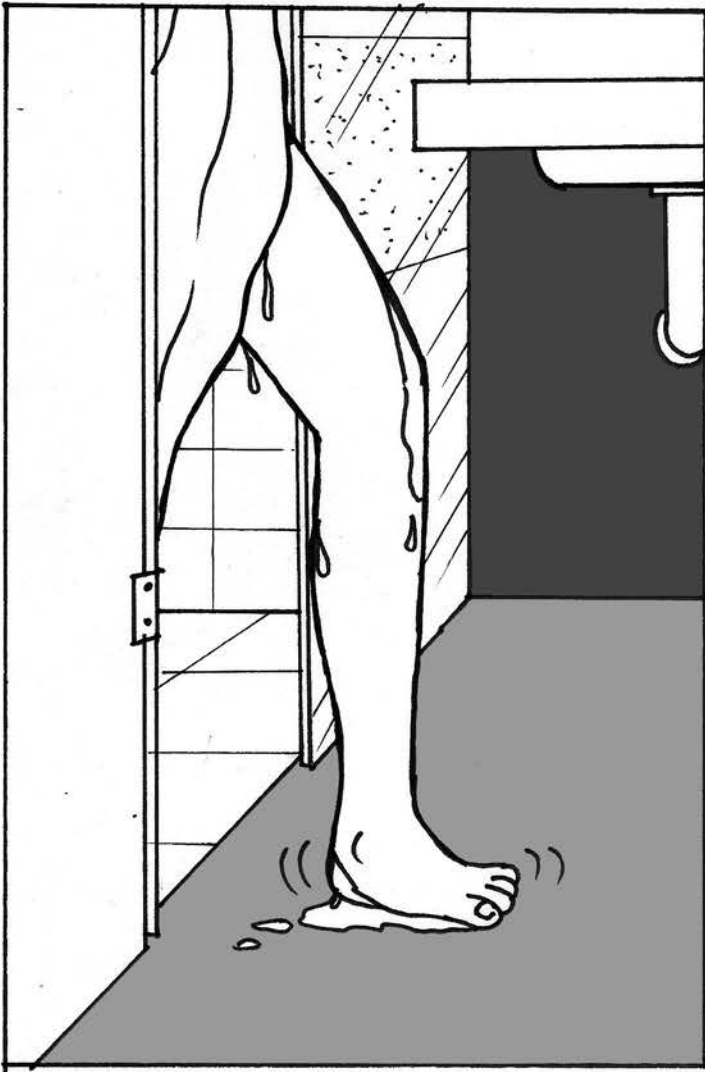
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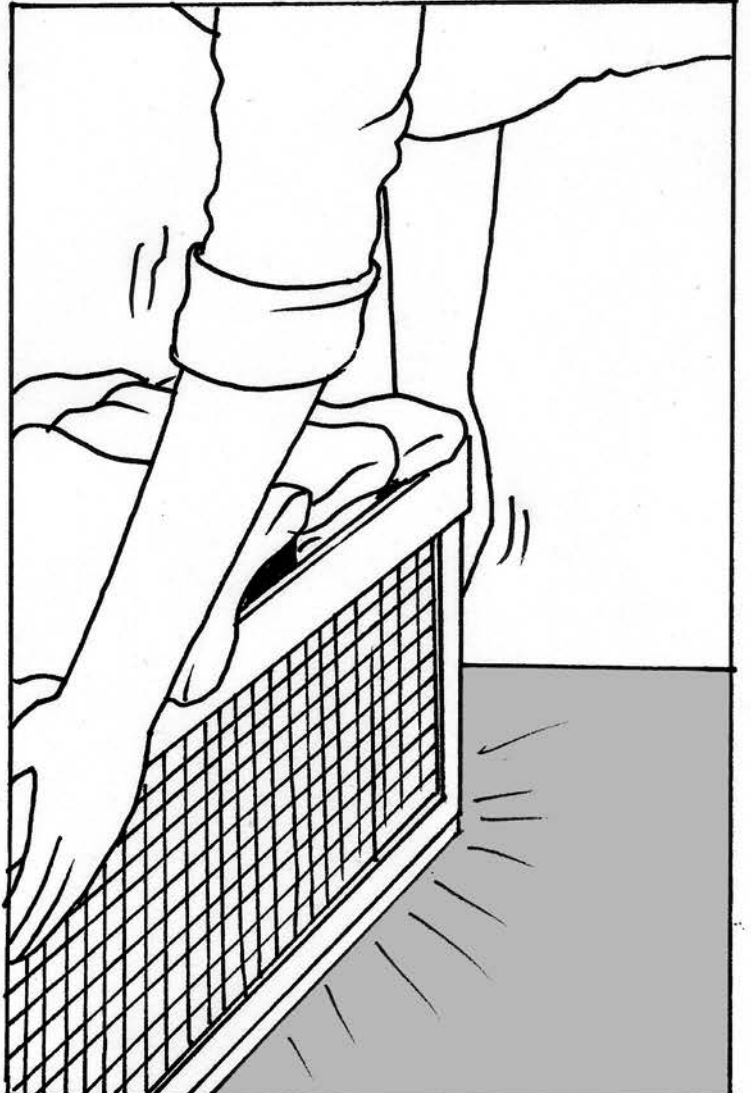
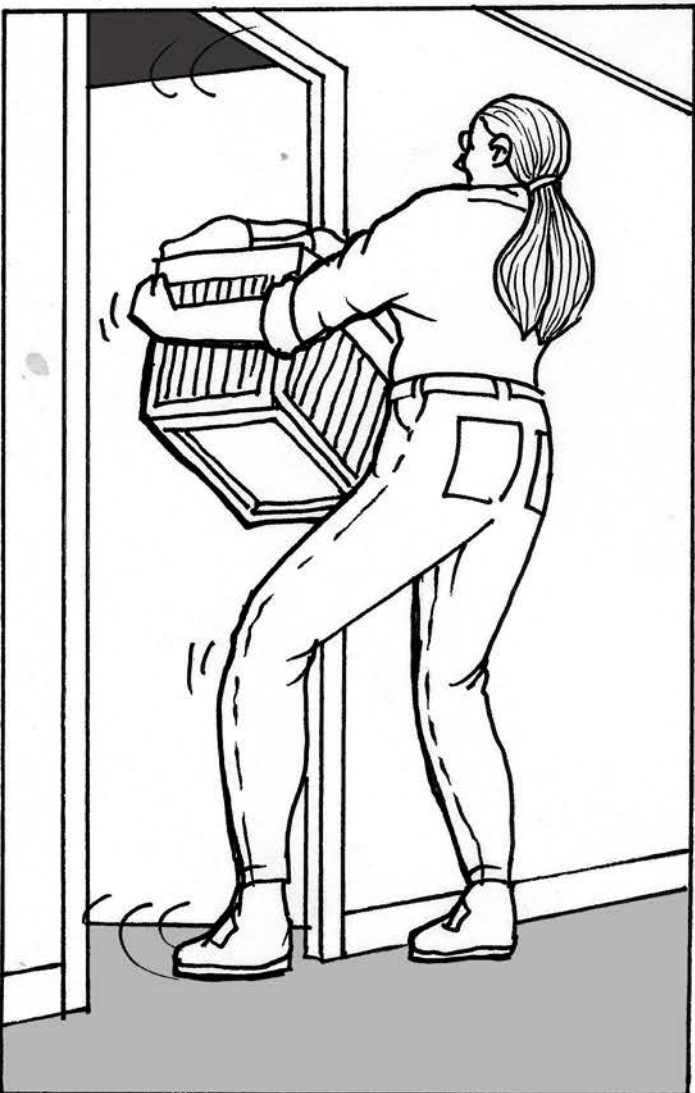
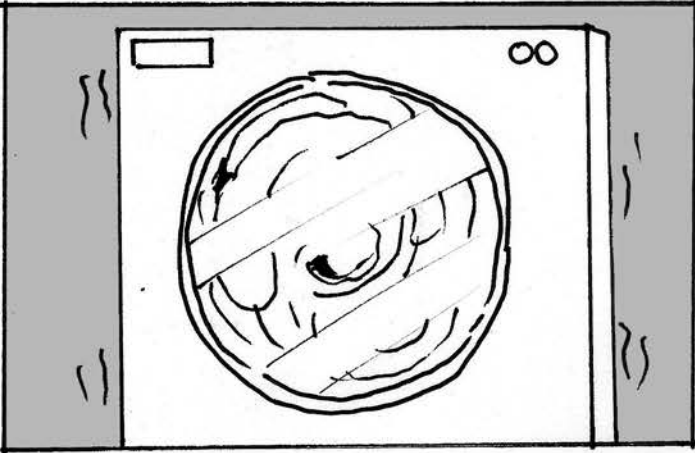
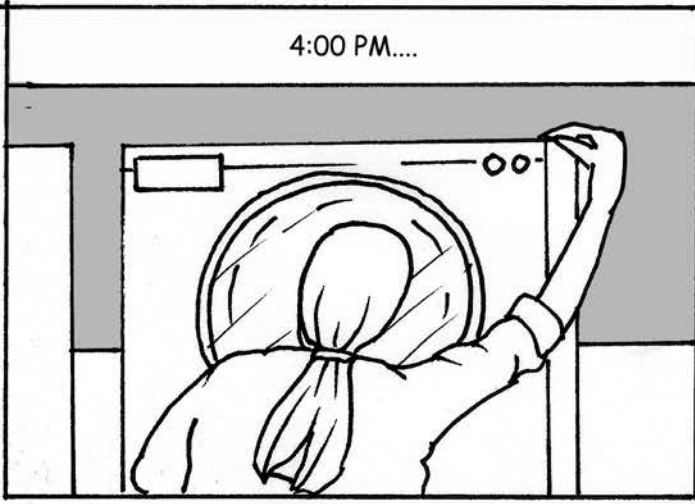
I GO TO THE BATHROOM.



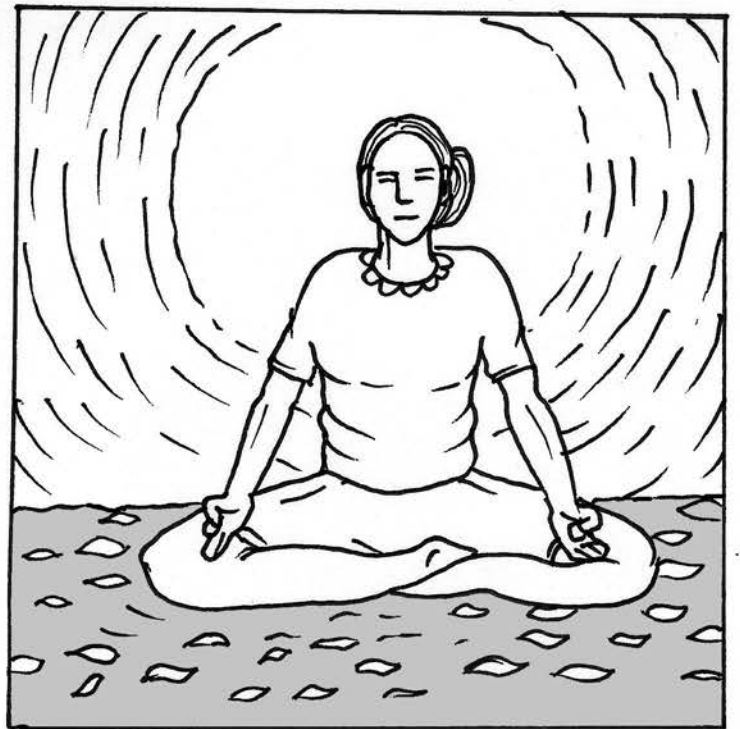
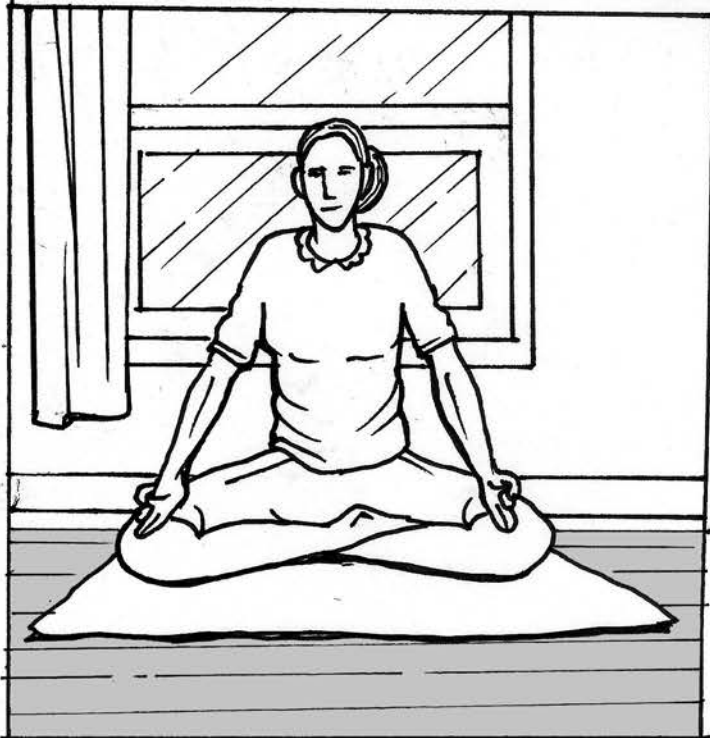
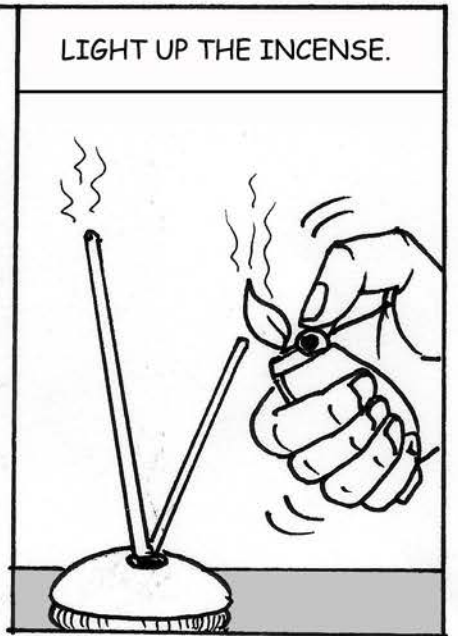




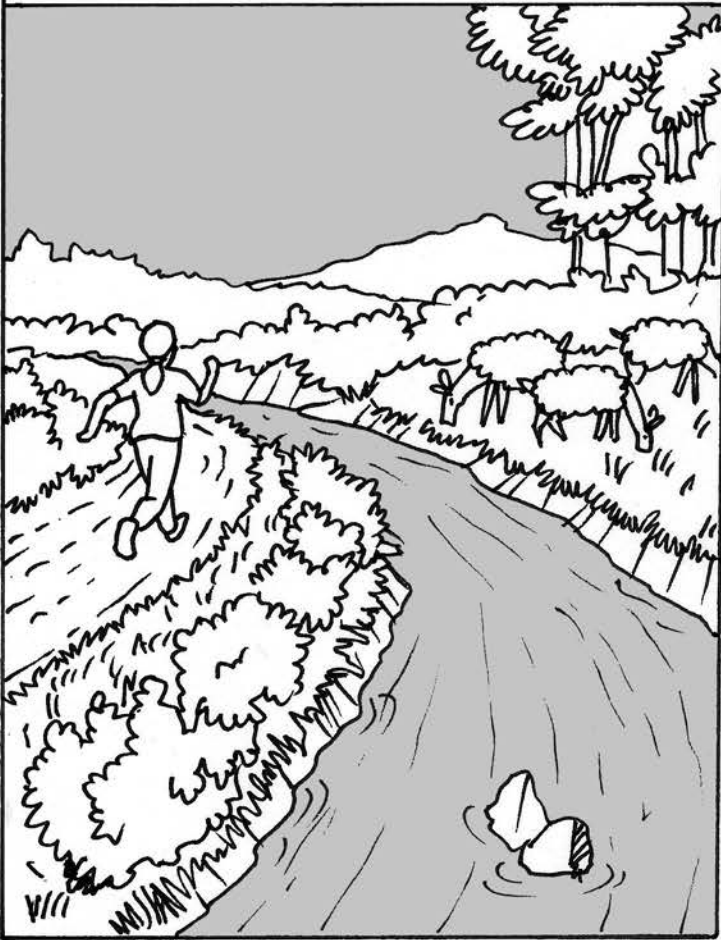
4:00 PM....



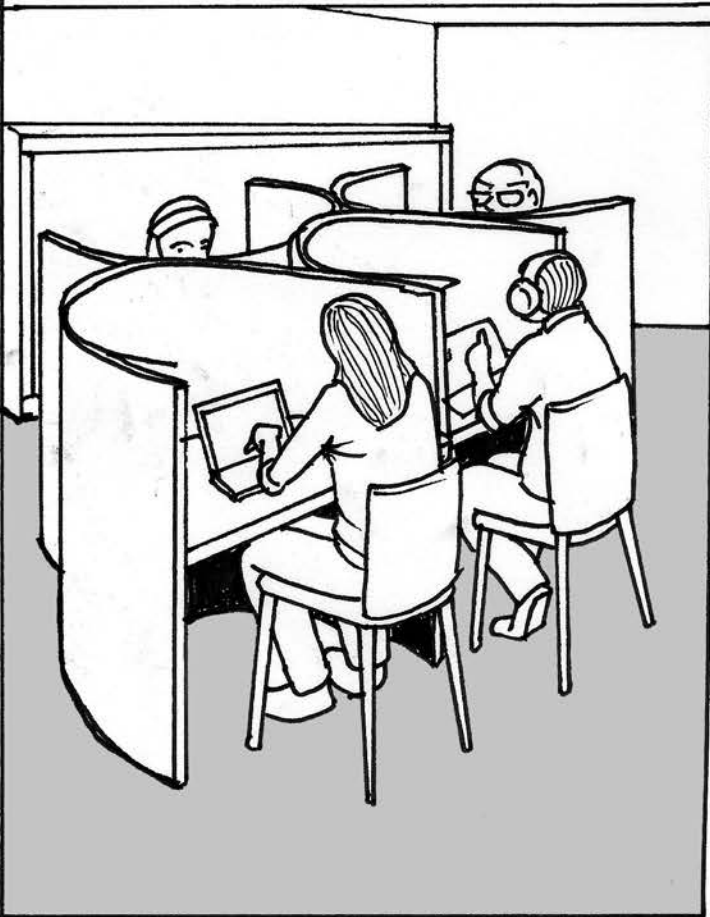




08:00 AM...WALK ALONG THE CANAL.



01:00 PM...IN THE LIBRARY.





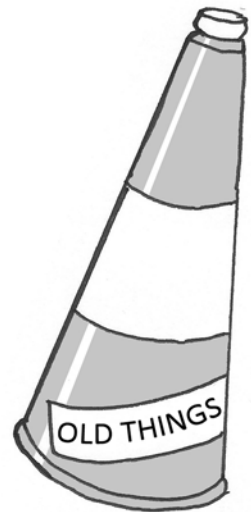
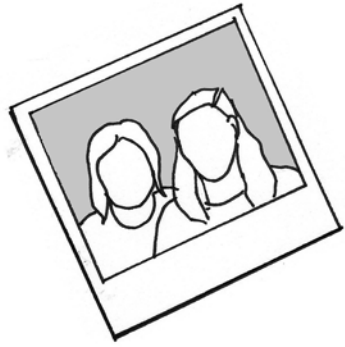
05:00 PM ..IN THE LIVING ROOM.





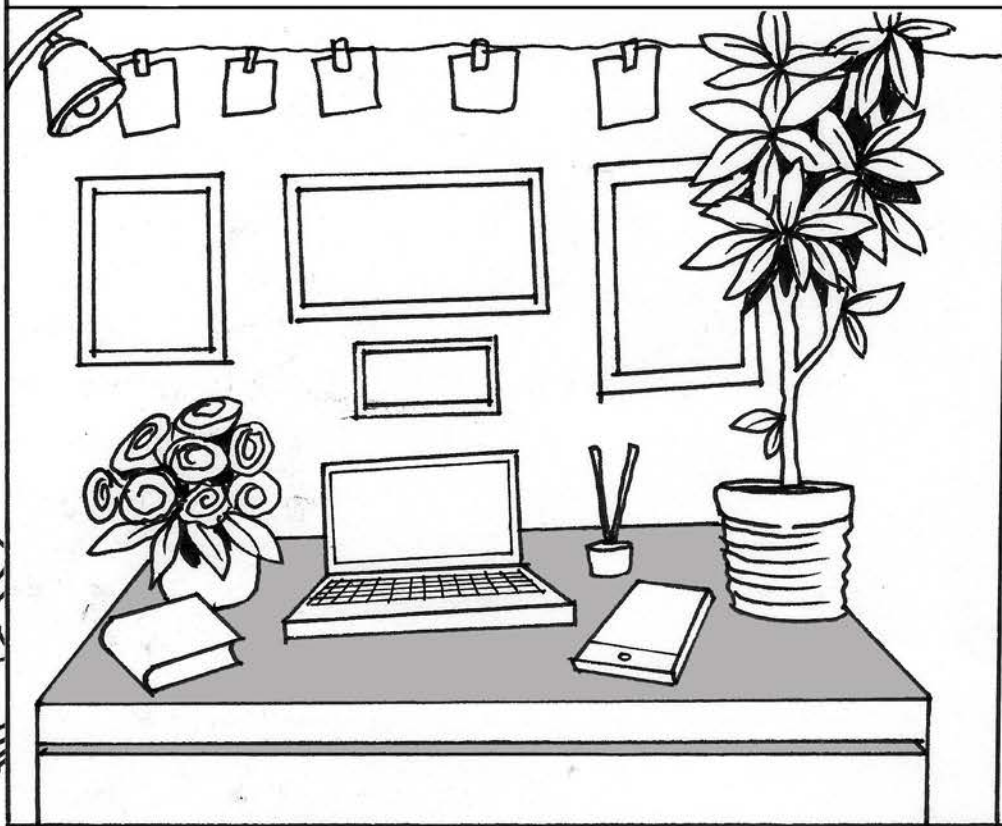
# ALICE'S STORY



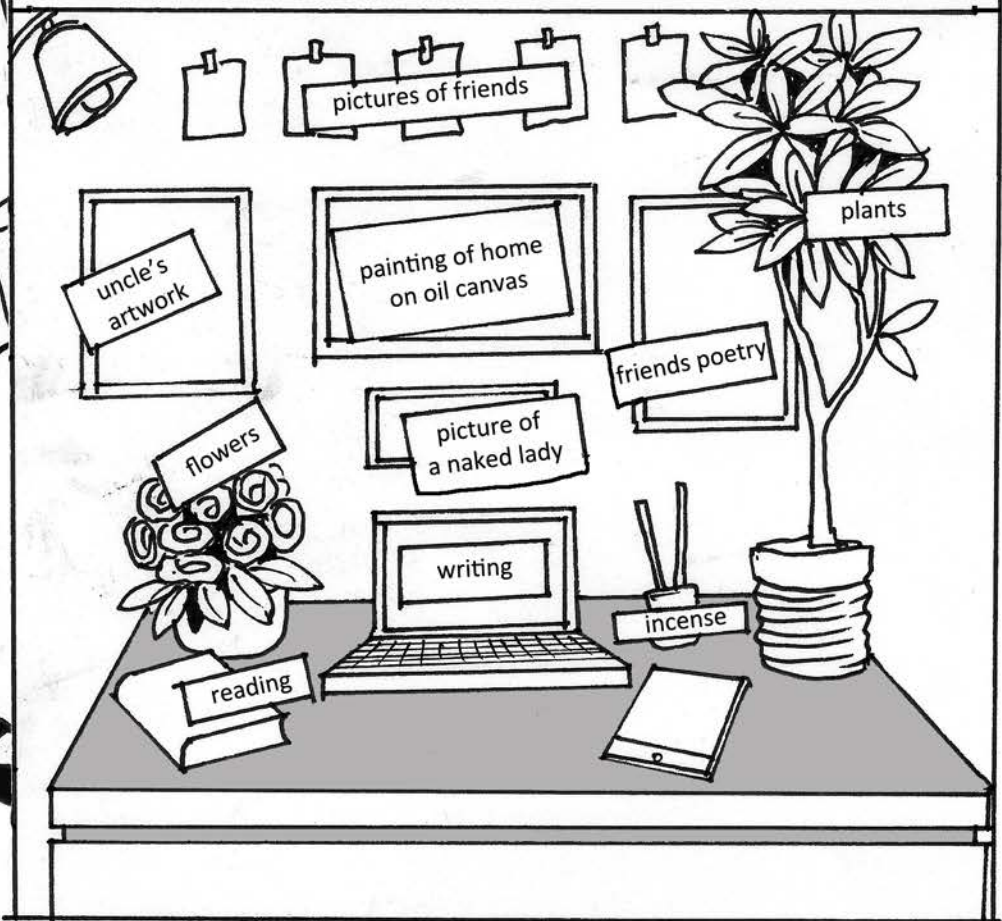


HI, I'M ALICE...

THE FIRST THING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ME IS THAT I'M AN INCREDIBLY VISUAL PERSON, I LOVE TO SURROUND MYSELF WITH BEAUTIFUL THINGS.



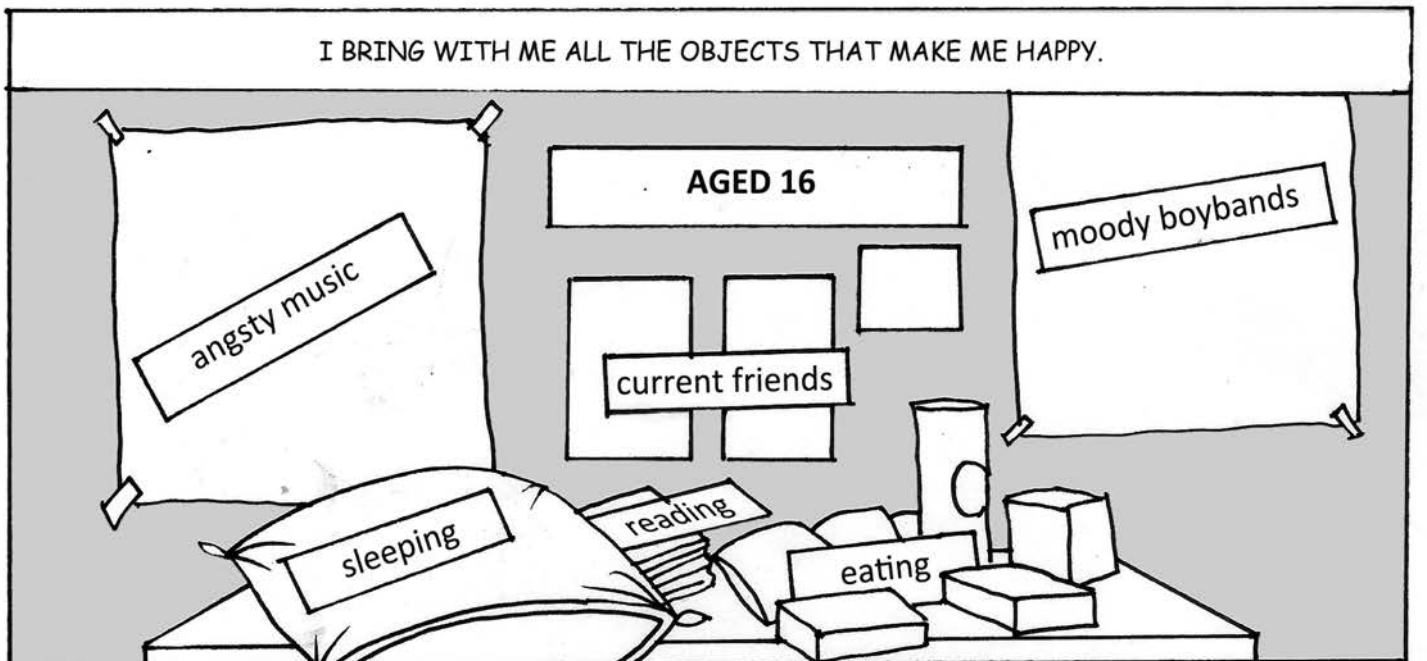
MY ROOM IS AN EXPRESSION OF WHO I AM, THE THINGS I LIKE AND THE PEOPLE I LOVE.



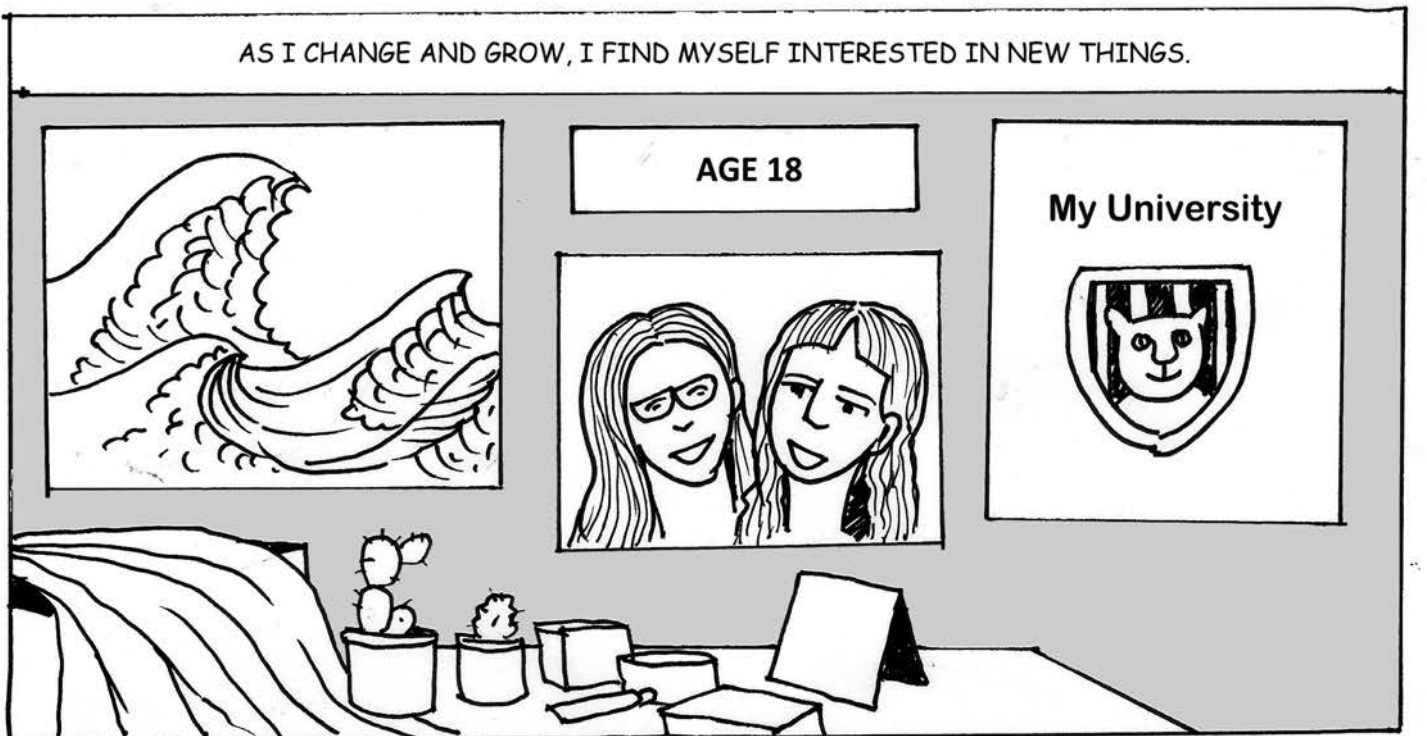
AS I MOVE INTO NEW SPACES...



I BRING WITH ME ALL THE OBJECTS THAT MAKE ME HAPPY.



AS I CHANGE AND GROW, I FIND MYSELF INTERESTED IN NEW THINGS.



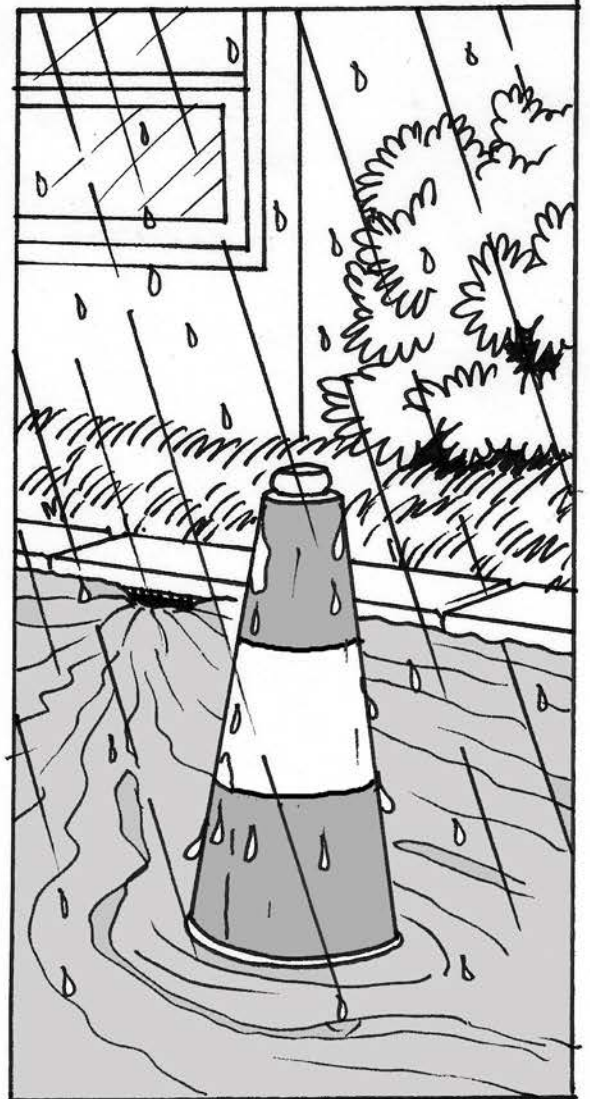
ITEMS ONCE TREASURED ARE THROWN AWAY.

MY BEST FRIEND...

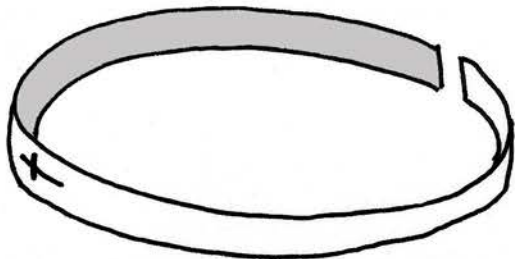
ALICE THAT'S  
A TRAFFIC CONE!



I'LL NEVER LEAVE  
YOU, BEST FRIEND.



BUT SOME THINGS ARE TOO SPECIAL TO LEAVE BEHIND. SUCH AS THE FIRST GIFT I EVER RECEIVED, WHICH WAS A SILVER BRACELET FROM MY GRANDMOTHER.



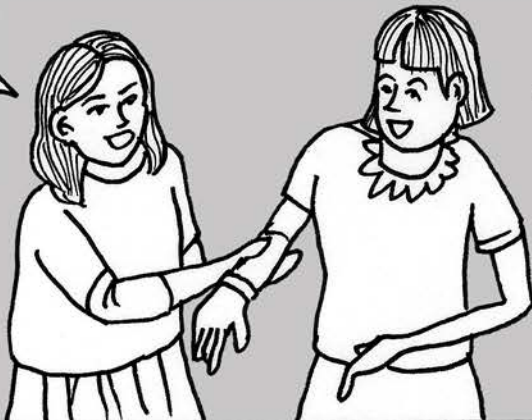
AT FIRST IT WAS JUST A PRETTY THING, ONE OF MANY. BUT AS I GREW OLDER AND LEARNT OF MY FAMILY'S HISTORY, OUR COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP WITH RELIGION AND IDENTITY POLITICS,

I UNDERSTOOD HOW THE SIMPLE SYMBOL ENGRAVED UPON MY WRIST HAD BECOME SYMBOLIC OF A DECADE-LONG BATTLE FOR FREEDOM AND ACCEPTANCE.

IT WAS THE FIRST THING PLACED ON MY BODY AS A NEW-BORN BABY AND I WORE IT FOR A LONG TIME AFTER THAT WITHOUT EVERY TRULY UNDERSTANDING WHAT IT MEANT OR WHY SHE GAVE IT TO ME.

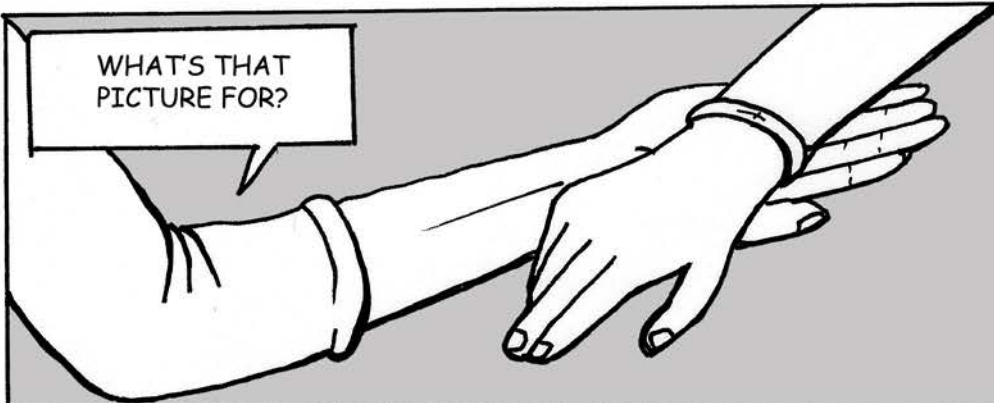


I LIKE YOUR BRACELET.



THANKS, MY GRANNY GAVE IT TO ME WHEN I WAS A BABY.

WHAT'S THAT PICTURE FOR?



I DON'T KNOW. I THINK IT'S TO MAKE IT LOOK LESS BORING.

HA HA HA HA...



HE HE HE HE HE.....



MY FAMILY ORIGINATED FROM IRELAND AND HAD LIVED THERE FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS BEFORE THE TROUBLES BEGAN.



THE TROUBLES IS THE NAME GIVEN TO THE THREE-DECADE LONG RELIGIOUS CONFLICT FOUGHT BETWEEN TWO OPPOSING SIDES; NATIONALISTS AND UNIONISTS, OR MORE COMMONLY IDENTIFIED AS THE WAR BETWEEN THE CATHOLICS AND THE PROTESTANTS.

THE PROTESTANTS



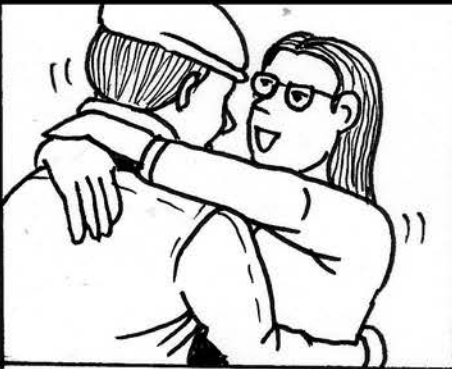
THE CATHOLICS



THE STREETS THEY'D PLAYED ON THEIR WHOLE LIVES BECAME WAR ZONES; TERRITORY OWNED BY TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS THAT DIDN'T CARE FOR THE FACES LOST IN THE BIGGER PICTURE.



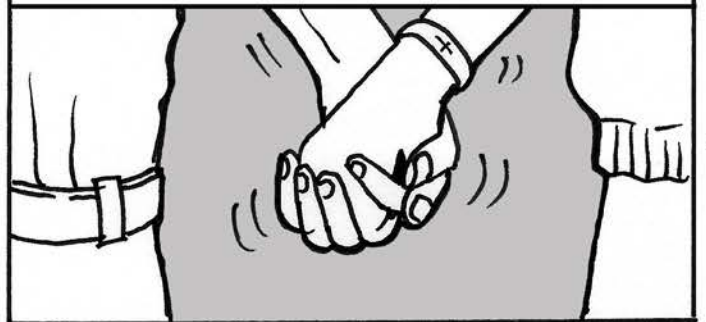
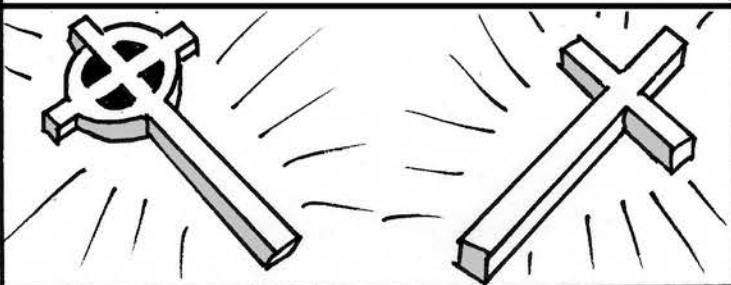
A CATHOLIC MARRYING A PROTESTANT WAS UNHEARD OF, ABSOLUTELY FORBIDDEN AND A TABOO CONCEPT IN AND OF ITSELF.



WHEN MY GRANDPARENTS' RELATIONSHIP WAS DISCOVERED THEY WERE GIVEN TWO OPTIONS: EITHER JOIN THE TERRORIST GROUP WHICH WAS CURRENTLY THREATENING THEM,

OR BE TURNED OVER TO THE OPPOSING TERRORIST GROUP WHICH WOULD MOST CERTAINLY KILL THEM.

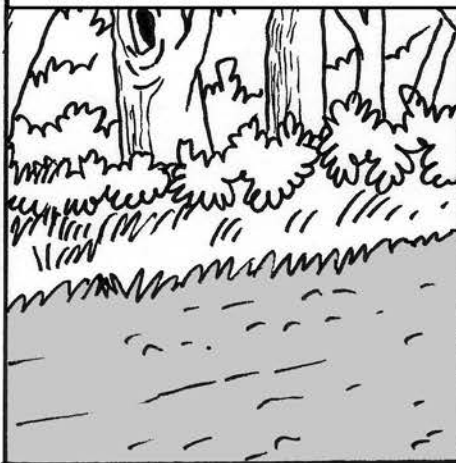
SO, THEY MANIPULATED A THIRD OPTION AND CHOSE THEMSELVES, FLEEING THE COUNTRY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, UPROOTING THEIR WHOLE LIFE AND SEVERING FAMILY CONNECTIONS.



MY GRANDPARENTS MOVED TO A PLACE WHERE THEY COULD REINVENT THEMSELVES AND REJECT THE CONFINES OF THEIR RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND WITHOUT JUDGEMENT.



DISCARD THE DIVISIVE RHETORIC ENDORSED BY THE CATHOLIC / PROTESTANT BINARY AND INSTEAD CHOSE TO EMBRACE CHRISTIANITY.



FOR THE FREEDOM AND FLUIDITY WHICH IT GRANTED THEM IN THEIR RELIGIOUS PRACTISE.



FOR MY GRANDPARENTS, RELIGION WAS BOTH THE BEST AND WORST THING TO HAPPEN TO THEM. IT ALMOST COST THEM THEIR LIFE BUT WAS SIMULTANEOUSLY THE ONLY THING WHICH GAVE THEM THE STRENGTH TO CONTINUE AFTER LOSING ALMOST EVERYTHING TO LOVE.

Love is at the heart of everything



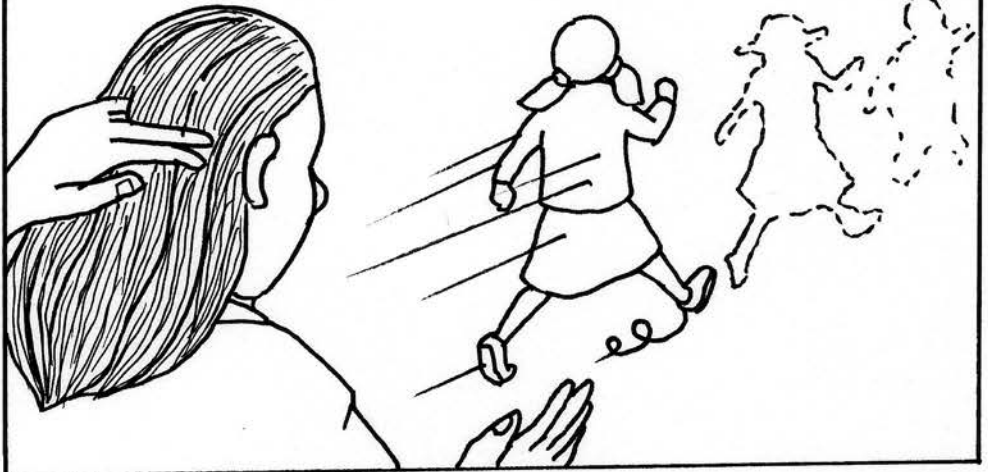
TO LOVE THYSELF, LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR, LOVE THE LORD IS THE BEST THAT ANY PERSON CAN DO.



STOP THAT!!



LOVE IS A FUNNY THING. THROUGHOUT HISTORY WE HAVE SEEN THE UNIFICATION OF PARTNERS UNFAIRLY PROHIBITED ON THE GROUNDS OF RELIGION OR DIFFERENCE - MY GRANDPARENTS FELT THE INJUSTICE OF THIS FIRST-HAND AND REJECTED IT, FLEEING TO A PLACE MORE UNDERSTANDING.



THEY NEVER SAW THE IRONY IN THIS; FORBIDDING SAME SEX LOVE BECAUSE IT DIDN'T ALIGN WITH THEIR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS. SOUNDS AWFULLY FAMILIAR, IF YOU ASK ME.

DID YOU HEAR THAT JESS HAS CAME OUT AS GAY? GRANNY SAID SHE CAN'T COME INTO HER HOUSE ANYMORE! CAN YOU IMAGINE?

GRANNY TOLD ME THAT GAY IS UNNATURAL.

FAGGOT!!

ABOMINATION!

DYKE !!

AUNTY CHASED TWO GAYS OUT OF THE BAR LAST NIGHT FOR KISSING, IT WAS SO FUNNY.

MY MUM SAID IF I EVER CAME OUT AS LESBIAN SHE'D KICK ME OUT OF THE HOUSE!

IF I WAS GAY I THINK I'D KILL MYSELF.

DISGUSTING, UNNATURAL !!

CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET?

I WOULDN'T LET A GAY ANYWHERE NEAR MY CHILD.

WOMEN ARE JUST GAY FOR ATTENTION.

GROWING UP IN A SMALL TOWN SUCH IDEAS WERE COMMONPLACE, THEY WERE ALL I KNEW. WHEN I FINALLY LEFT THAT MICROCOSM OF OUTDATED BELIEFS AND RELIGIOUS FANATICISM, I WAS FRESHLY TURNED EIGHTEEN.

MY FIRST DAY OF UNIVERSITY WAS PROBABLY ONE OF THE MOST MIND-EXPANDING EXPERIENCES OF MY LIFE; IT FELT LIKE MY WORLD HAD EXPANDED AND IMPLoded ALL AT THE SAME TIME.



I MET PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE, PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT GENDERS, SEXUALITIES, RACES, RELIGIONS, PERSONALITIES, BELIEFS AND ABILITIES.

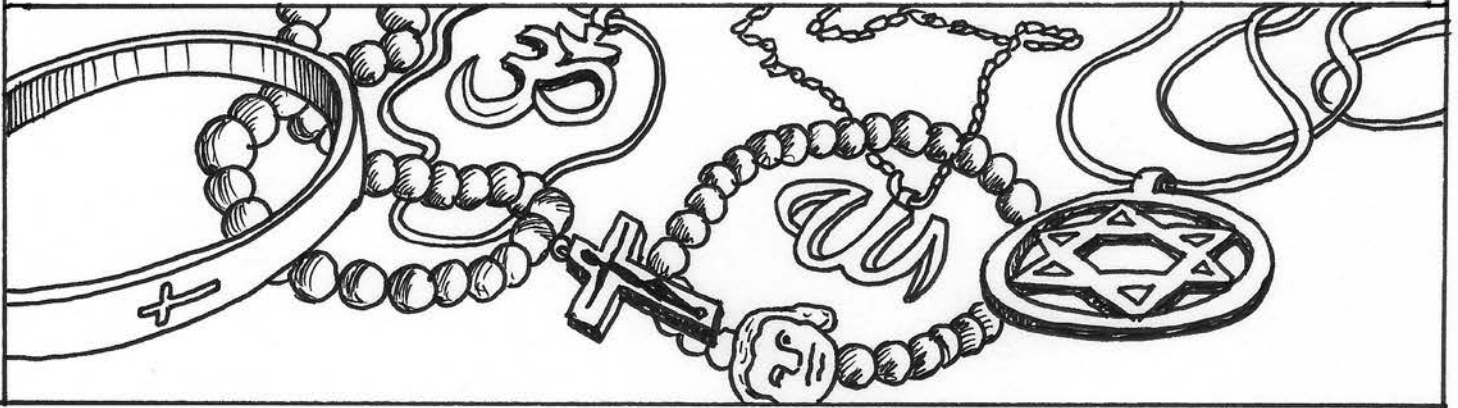


I DISCOVERED WHAT IT MEANT TO FEEL TRULY ACCEPTED, FOR MY DIFFERENCES TO BE CELEBRATED AND ENCOURAGED RATHER THAN PUNISHED AND DIMINISHED.

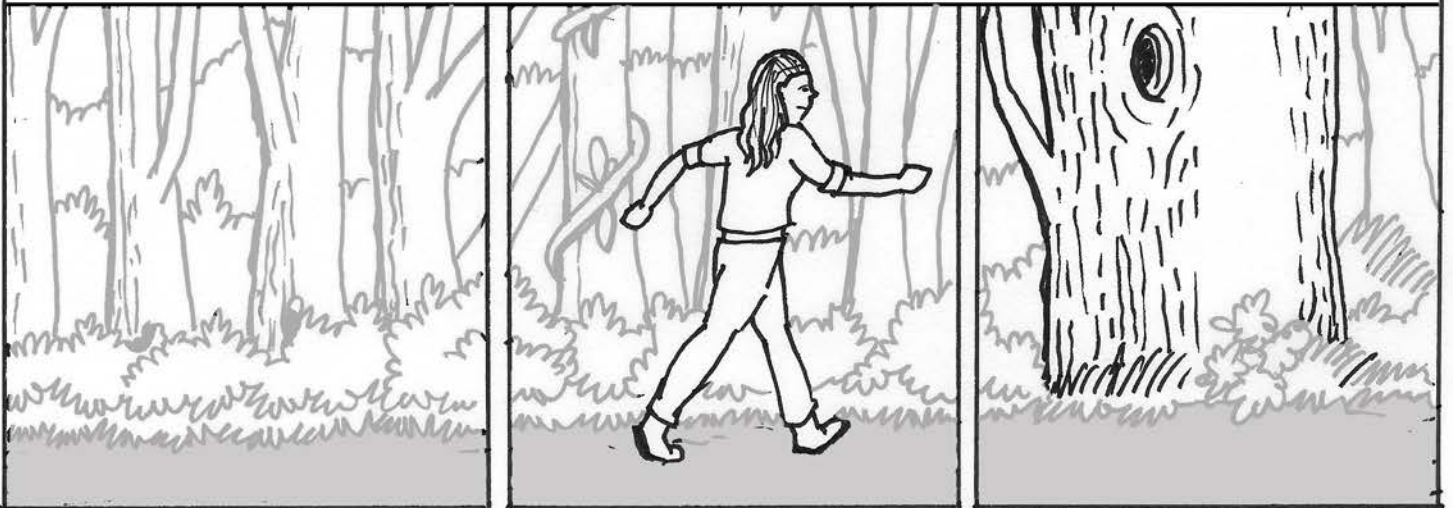


I LEARNT SO MUCH FROM THE PEOPLE I MET AT UNIVERSITY AND WILL BE FOREVER GRATEFUL FOR LATE NIGHT CONVERSATIONS SPENT DISCUSSING OUR FAMILIES AND BACKGROUNDS, HOW RELIGION AND SEXUALITY HAS INTERSECTED IN SO MANY DIFFERENT WAYS ACROSS SO MANY DIFFERENT PEOPLE'S LIVES.

HEARING WHETHER THEY CHOSE TO ACCEPT OR REJECT THEIR FAMILY'S PRINCIPLES, I DISCOVERED MANY PEOPLE HAD A BRACELET LIKE MINE, OR SOME EQUIVALENT AND WITH A STORY TO MATCH.



REALISING AND ACCEPTING THAT I WAS A QUEER WOMAN IN UNIVERSITY WAS AN ENDLESSLY REWARDING EXPERIENCE FOR ME AS IT CREATED A SAFE SPACE IN WHICH I COULD BE MY TRULY AUTHENTIC SELF, AND IT GAVE ME THE COURAGE TO BRING THAT HOME WITH ME.



YET IT FELT LIKE NO MATTER HOW MUCH I CHANGED, THINGS AT HOME ALWAYS MANAGED TO REMAIN EERILY THE SAME. LIKE A ROOM UNTOUCHED AFTER SOMEONE DIES, THINGS REMAINED AS THEY ALWAYS WERE, IDEAS GATHERED DUST LIKE OBJECTS OF UNQUESTIONED TRUTHS.



BEFORE I HAD THE CHANCE TO LEVEL WITH MY FAMILY AND TELL THEM I WAS GAY I WAS OUTED BY ONE OF MY COUSINS.



INSTEAD OF COMING OUT ON MY TERMS, MY SEXUALITY WAS EXPOSED LIKE SOME DIRTY SECRET THAT I WAS SUPPOSEDLY TOO ASHAMED TO ADMIT TO. IT CREATED A NARRATIVE OF EMBARRASSMENT AND SHAME THAT I ALWAYS WANTED TO AVOID.



IT FELT LIKE THE RUG HAD BEEN PULLED FROM UNDERNEATH ME AND I WAS TRANSPORTED BACK TO THE LITTLE GIRL I WAS BEFORE UNIVERSITY, BEFORE I'D UNLEARNED ALL OF THEIR SELF-TORMENTING CATHOLIC GUILT ABOUT MY OWN IDENTITY, BEFORE I'D LEARNED TO ACCEPT MYSELF AND THEM TOO FOR ALL OF OUR FAULTS AND DISCREPANCIES.



FALLING DOWN THAT RABBIT HOLE, I HAD TO CONFRONT THE ASPECTS OF MYSELF THAT I COULD NOT CHANGE BUT MY FAMILY SO DESPERATELY WISHED THEY COULD, I FELT THE GAP BETWEEN US BEGINNING TO WIDEN.

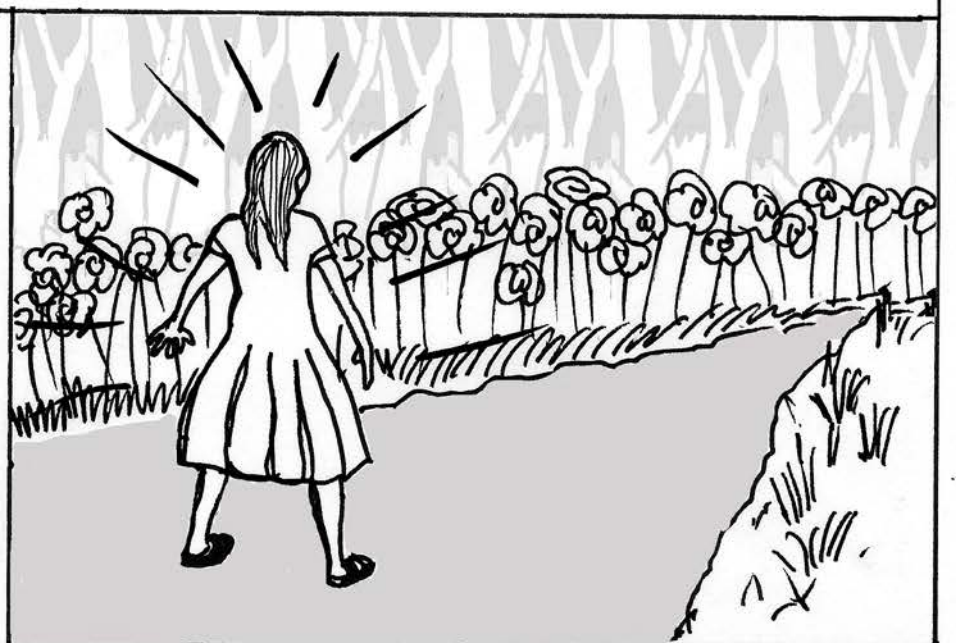


I WAS NEVER SURE WHICH END I'D COME OUT OF - IT WAS LIKE I HAD TO CHOOSE BETWEEN MY FAMILY AND MYSELF OR THEIR RELIGION AND MY SEXUALITY. IT WAS ALL VERY CONFUSING FOR A YOUNG GIRL WHO WANTED TO FIND LOVE IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHICH WOULD CONDEMN HER TO HELL FOR IT.

SO, FOR A WHILE I JUST HID MYSELF, HID FROM MY FAMILY, FROM THEIR TEACHINGS, FROM ANYTHING RELIGIOUS.

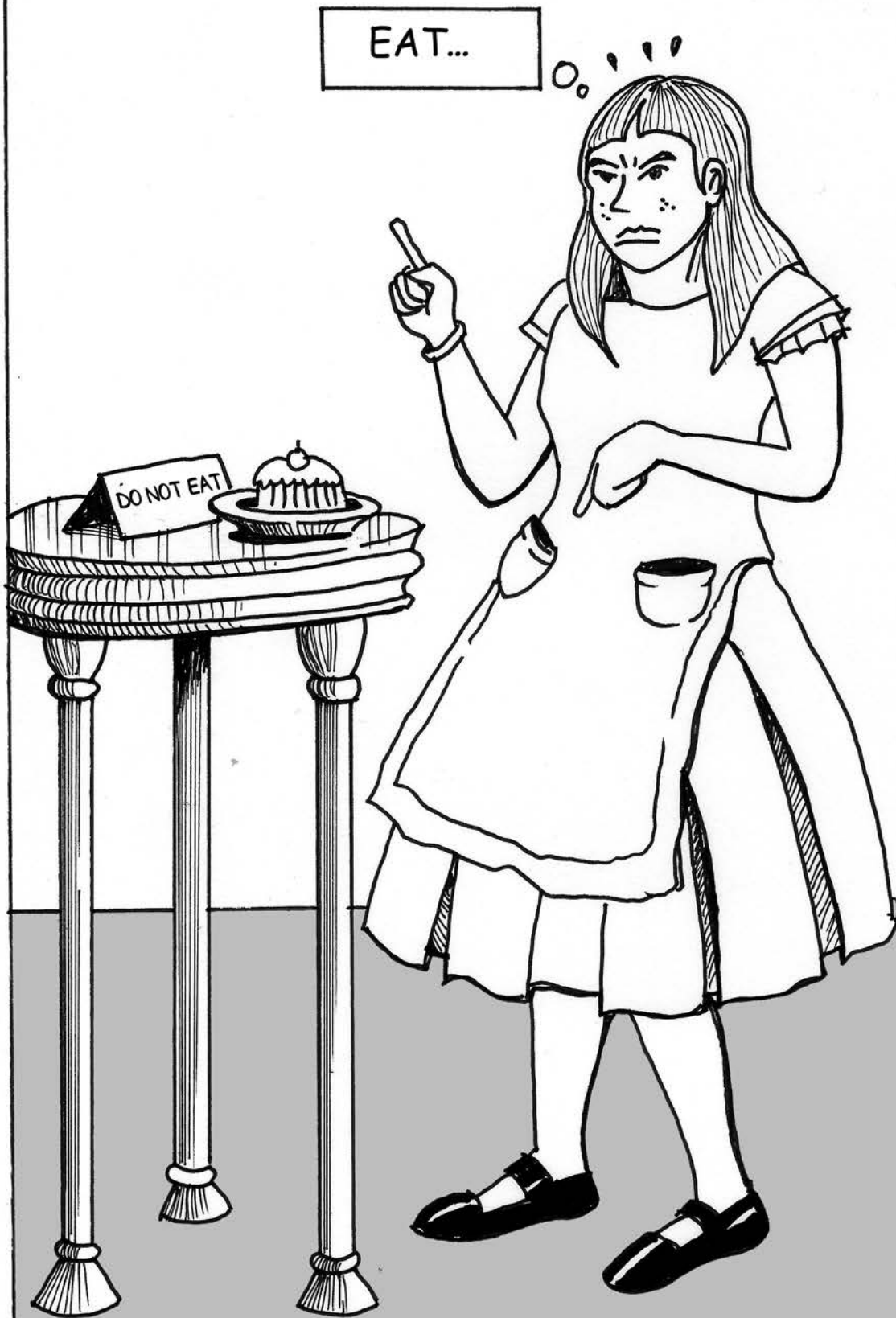


RELIGION BECAME AN OBJECT OF HATRED FOR ME, A MARK OF THE TRULY IGNORANT, MOST INTRINSICALLY PREJUDICE AND SELF-SUSTAINING MEMBERS OF OUR SOCIETY.

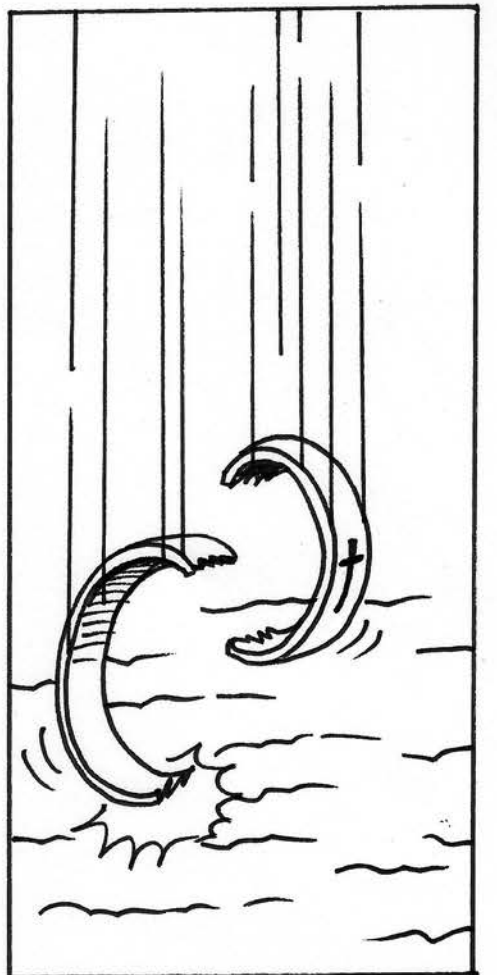
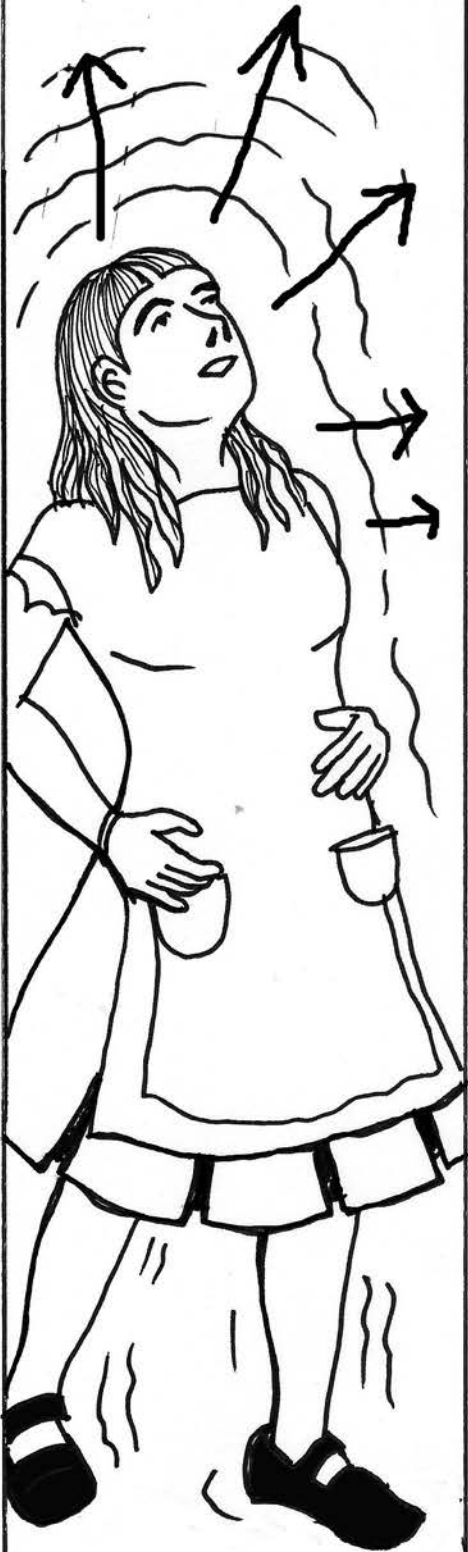




AND I TRULY BELIEVED THAT, FOR A WHILE. I WOULD DO THINGS MY FAMILY TOLD ME NOT TO...



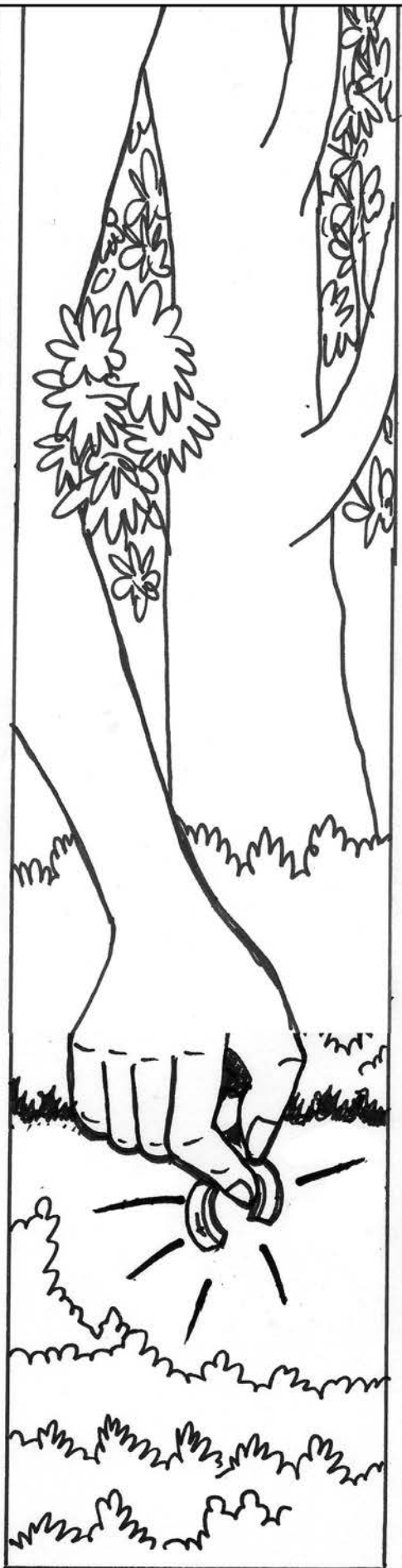
BECAUSE I THOUGHT I KNEW BETTER...



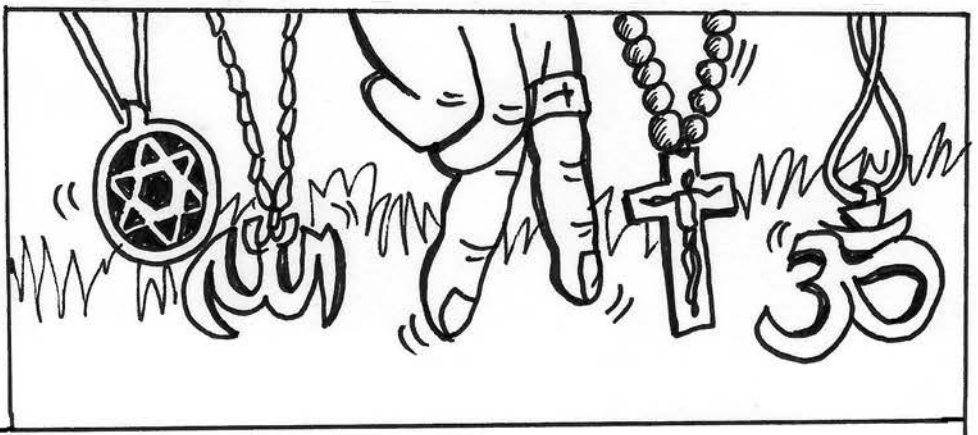
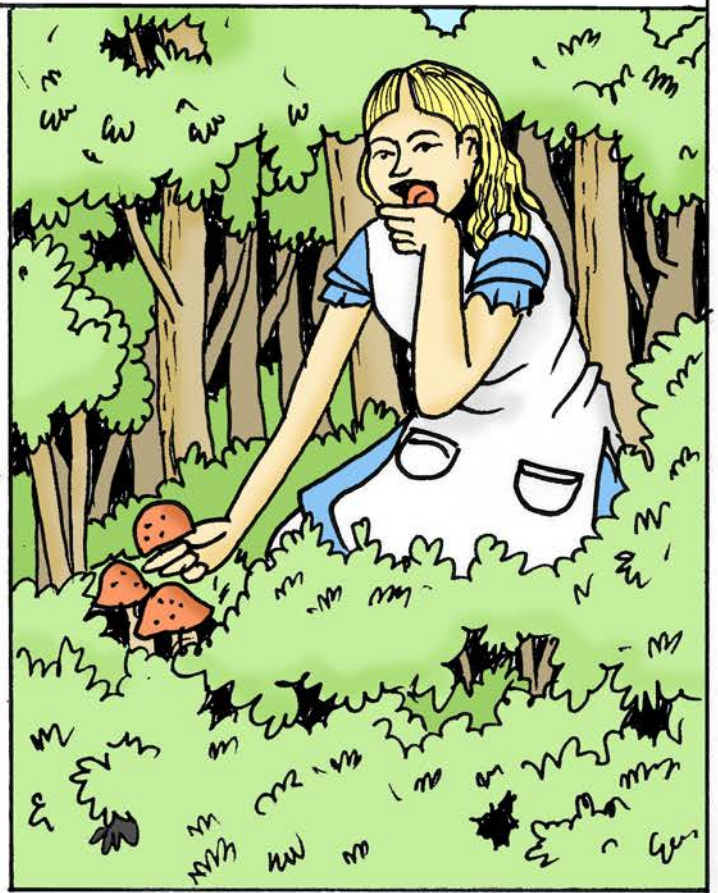


YET AS I GREW OLDER, LEARNT NEW THINGS, MET NEW PEOPLE, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY  
MOVED AWAY TO UNIVERSITY.

I BECAME BETTER EQUIPPED TO UNDERSTAND MY FAMILY, WHAT THEIR FAITH MEANT TO THEM AND WHERE I FIT IN AMONGST IT ALL. I KNEW THAT THE WORLD WAS BIGGER THAN THEIR BELIEFS AND THEIR LOVE FOR ME WAS STRONGER THAN ANYTHING ELSE IN IT.



I DID A LOT OF THINKING. I SNAPPED THE BRACELET THAT ONCE MEANT SO MUCH TO ME, THEN I HAD IT FIXED AND TURNED INTO SOMETHING ELSE.

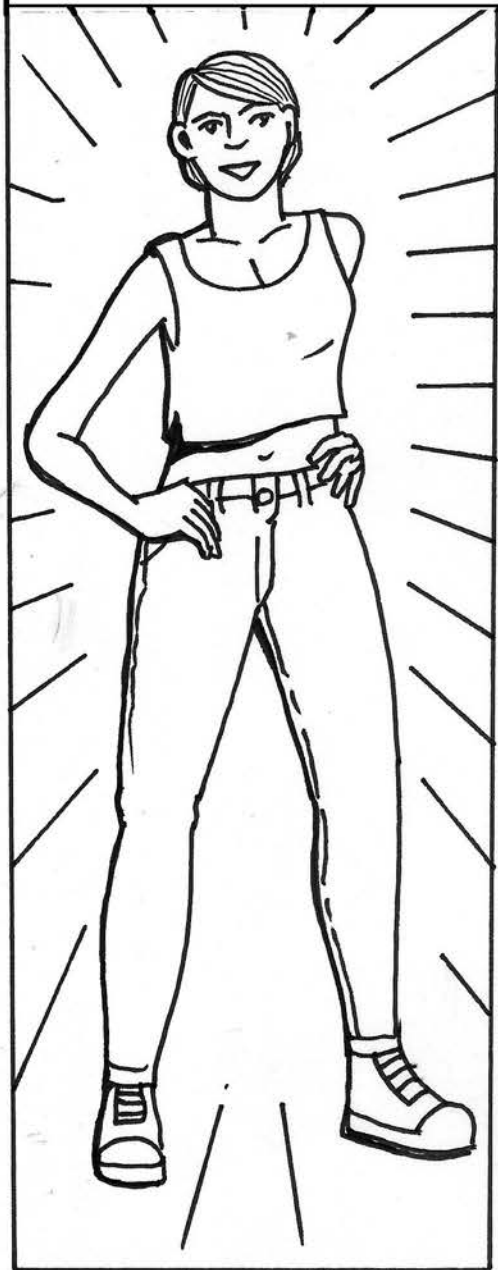


THOUGH I AM NOT RELIGIOUS, I UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE ALL CONNECTED, AND I PREACH A PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE THAT IS NOT TOO DISSIMILAR FROM MY GRANDPARENTS. THERE IS BEAUTY TO BE FOUND IN ALL THINGS. THE DIFFERENCE THAT WE ENCOUNTER IN OTHER PEOPLE HELPS US TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OURSELVES.

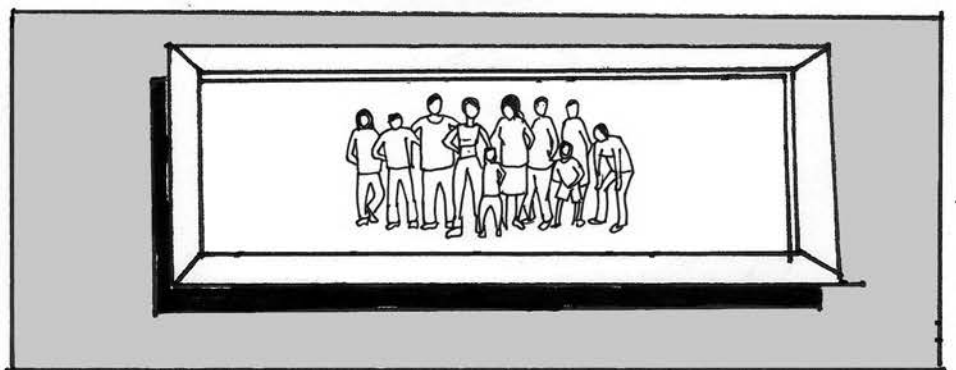
BEING OPEN WITH MYSELF, MY FAMILY AND MY IDENTITY - ALLOWING ALL ASPECTS OF MYSELF AND MY ENVIRONMENT TO INTERSECT AND COLLIDE LIKE THE NEURONS INSIDE MY BRAIN ALLOWED ME TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANT TO BE WHOLLY ONESELF WITHOUT FEAR OF REJECTION. NOT JUST AT UNIVERSITY, AWAY FROM MY FAMILY AND JUDGEMENT, BUT AT ALL TIMES.



BEING COMFORTABLY, WHOLLY MYSELF ALL THE TIME REMADE MYSELF INTO SOMETHING BETTER, MORE CONFIDENT AND ALIVE.



THIS RING, ONCE A BRACELET, REMINDS ME OF MYSELF. THE COMPLEXITY OF IDENTITY, TRYING TO FIT A MOULD THAT ISN'T RIGHT FOR YOU, UNAWARE THAT THERE'S ALWAYS A THIRD OPTION, A WAY OUT, OR SOLUTION TO YOUR PROBLEMS. SOMETIMES IT'S A RING, SOMETIMES IT'S A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION, BUT IT IS ALWAYS FOUND WITHIN.





“This is a profound work of art and research. Nataša’s and Andi’s work uses the medium of a graphic novel to provide an accessible and thought-provoking window onto the day to day mental health experiences of students. The students involved here did a fantastic job in sharing scenarios of their lived experiences of how everyday environments and things relate to their wellbeing. In focusing on small details, Things and The Mind gives in-depth snapshots piecing together the complexity of mental health challenges faced by today’s students. It has been a privilege through SMaRteN to support this work.”

**Dr Nicola Byrom**, King’s College London, founder of Student Minds, the UK’s student mental health charity and SMaRteN’s Principal Investigator

• • •

"I found the book really interesting and I, for one, found the students feelings and stories all very relatable. The preface explained in a couple of sentences what I struggled to convey in two years as UK Comics Laureate. So, congratulations to the team for producing such an expansive tome on the narrative tool."

**Charlie Adlard**, comic book artist (The Walking Dead) and UK Comics Laureate 2017-19

• • •

“I find this original graphic novel – which focuses on the relationship between objects, spaces, and student mental health – truly fascinating. Asking students to talk about their possessions makes perfect sense as an ‘in’ to getting them to talk about their vulnerabilities, but I have not seen it studied before, let alone made into a comic.

I find it particularly interesting as someone who suffered poor mental health as a student and to whom objects and environments held an almost unbearable, at times, resonance and symbolism. I also remember how, having so little money to spend on material items, the choosing of objects and clothes was critically important, and those precious items held a place in our emotional psyche that we perhaps lose in later life.

Leaving home, often for the first time, and attending university can be both exciting, and terrifying. In these days of lockdown, I can only imagine the transition must be harder than usual for our new cohort of university students, who are missing out on the social bonding of freshers festivities. I distinctly remember my own going to university, many years ago now, and carefully choosing what and which items I was going to take with me to make my tiny breeze-block room more homely. This engaging work – an innovative use of graphic medicine – makes explicit how material factors affect wellbeing and includes important points for policy makers.”

**Dr Ian Williams**, comics artist, physician and writer, founder of the GraphicMedicine.org



Educational  
Research

