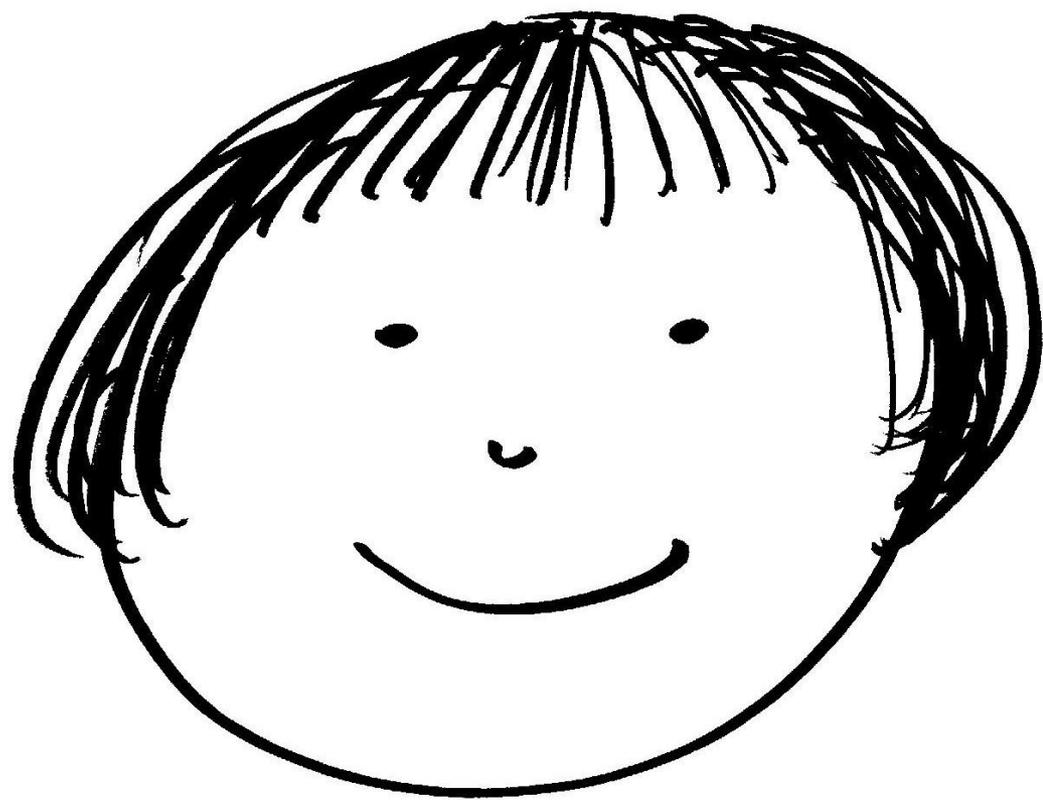
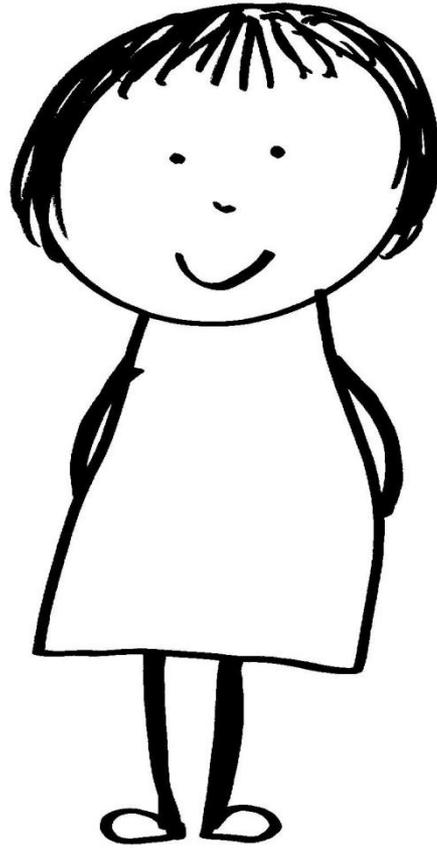


# My Story



Hi, my name is Anne and this is me  
when I was 4 years old.

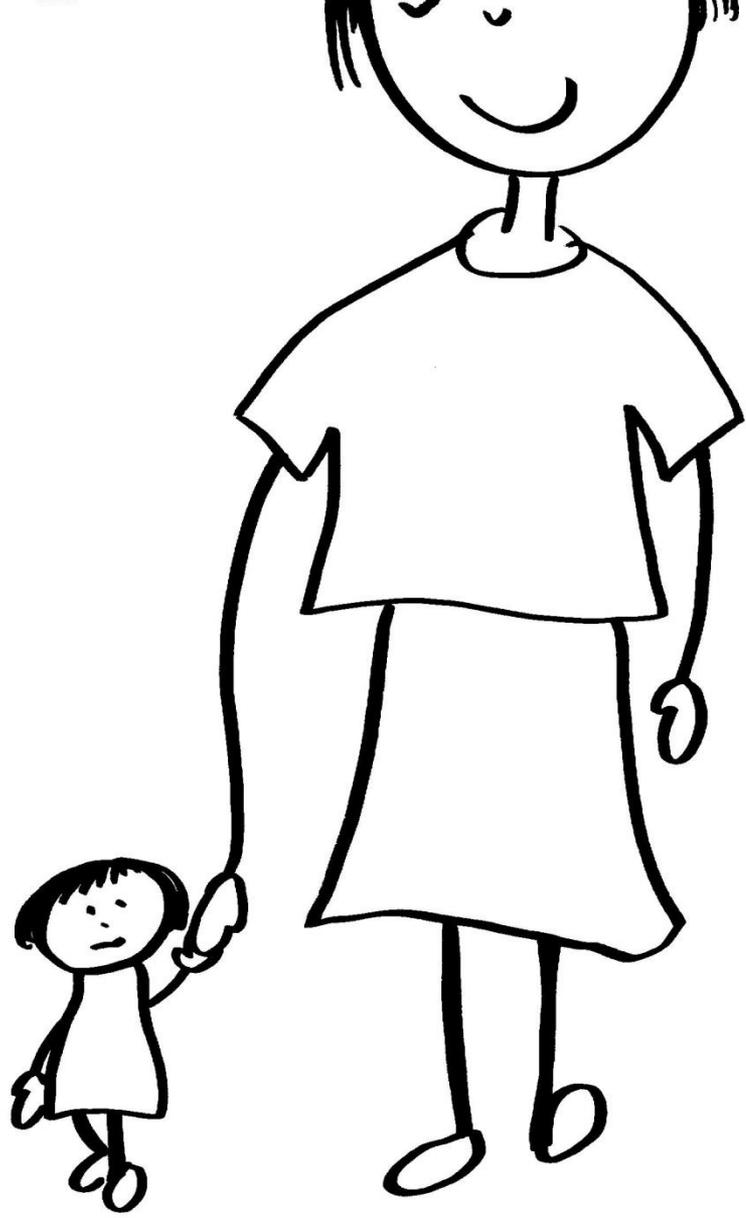


As a child, I loved colours, especially  
rainbow colours.

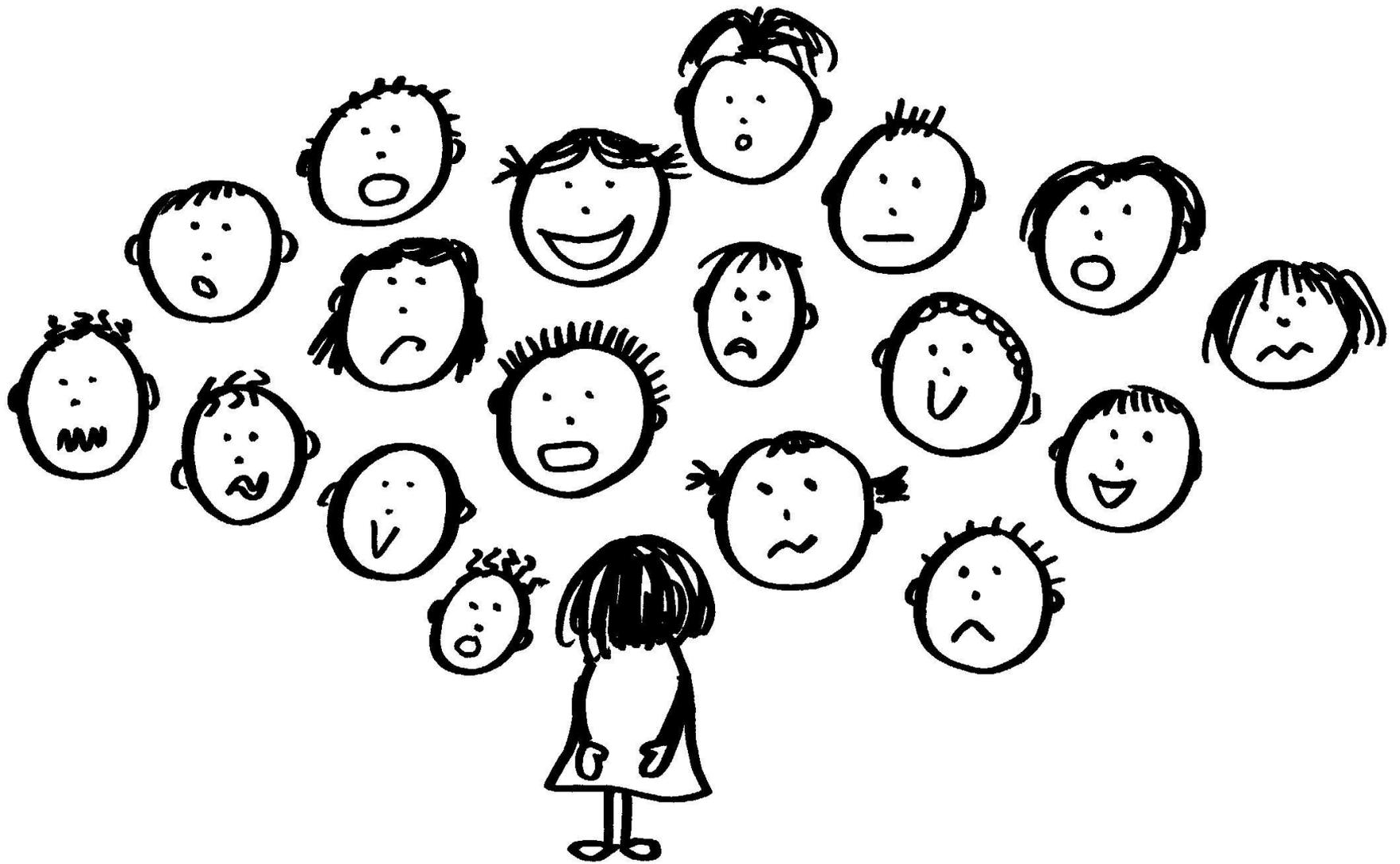
We lived in a house with a large garden  
and I used to dream about decorating  
the trees with multi-coloured ribbons.



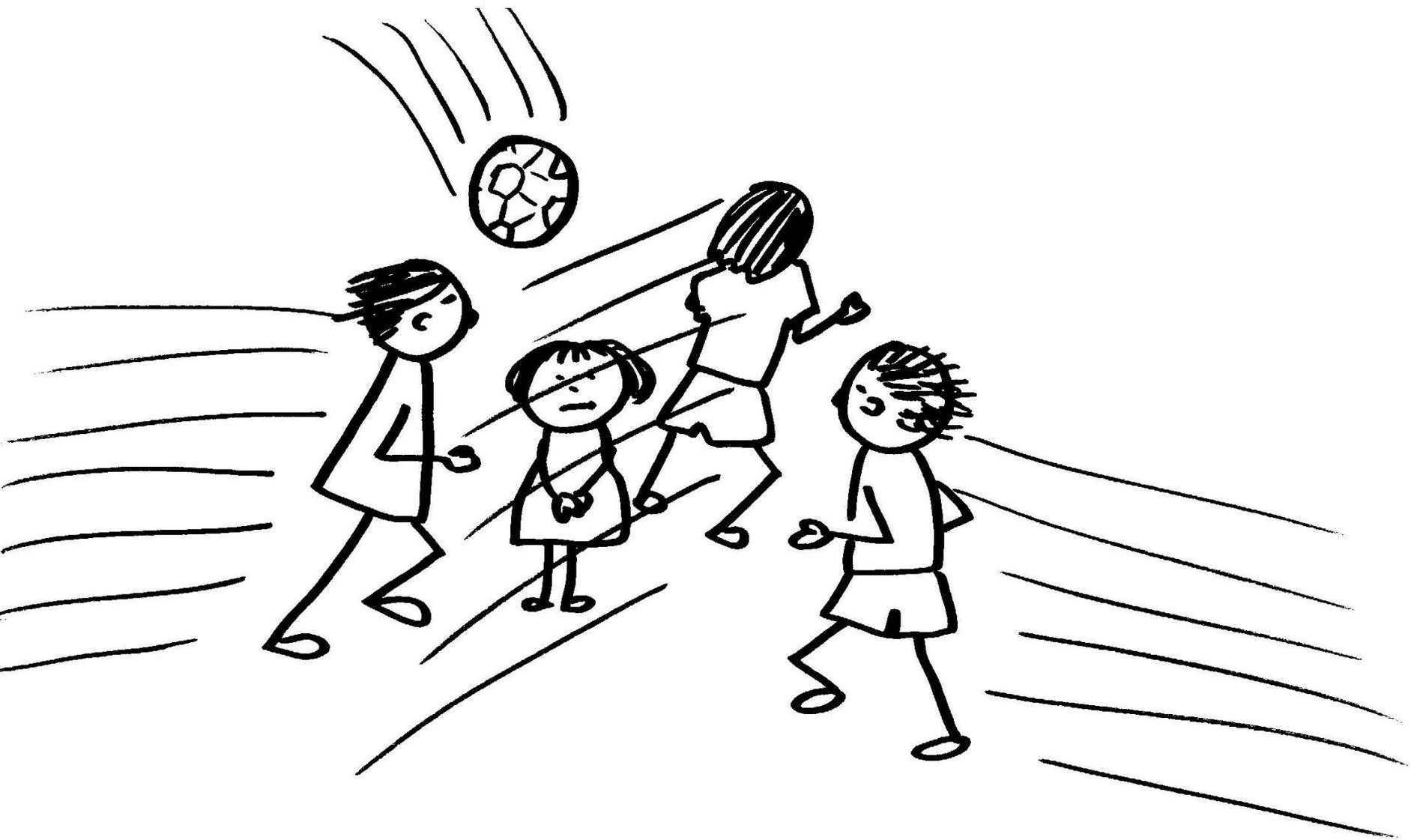
This is my first day of school. Even though I was small, I felt especially small that day.



In the classroom there were so many strange faces, sounds and smells, I just wanted to escape.



Being in the playground felt  
especially scary.



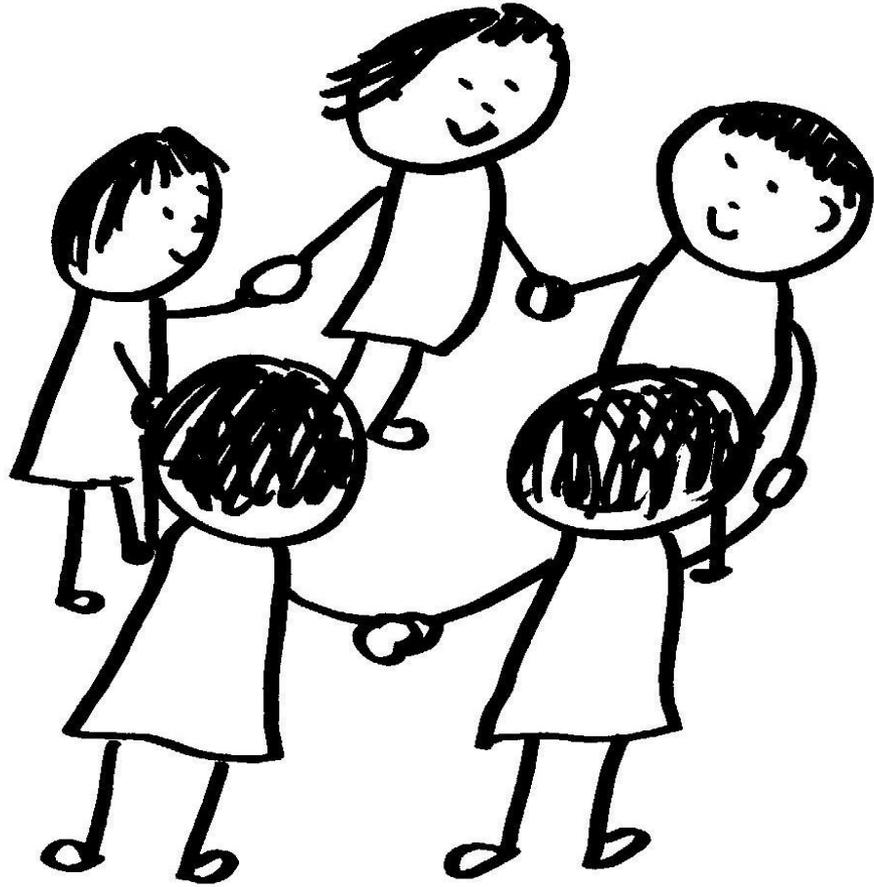
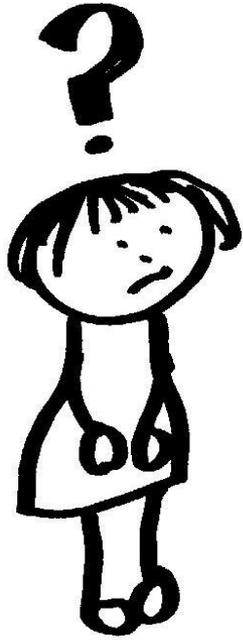
Other kids would crowd too close to me, or barge and shove past me like I was somehow invisible.



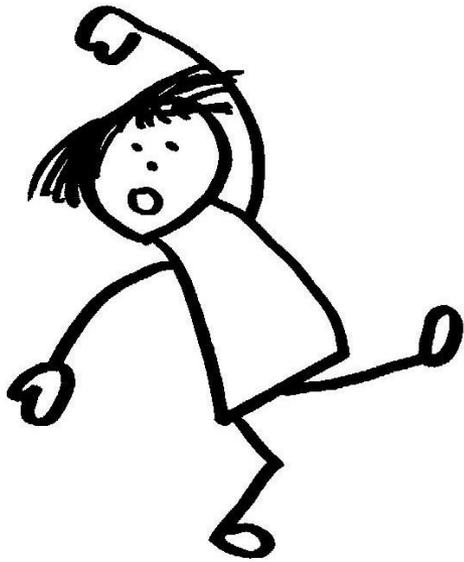
It was only when we did Art that I  
really felt at home.



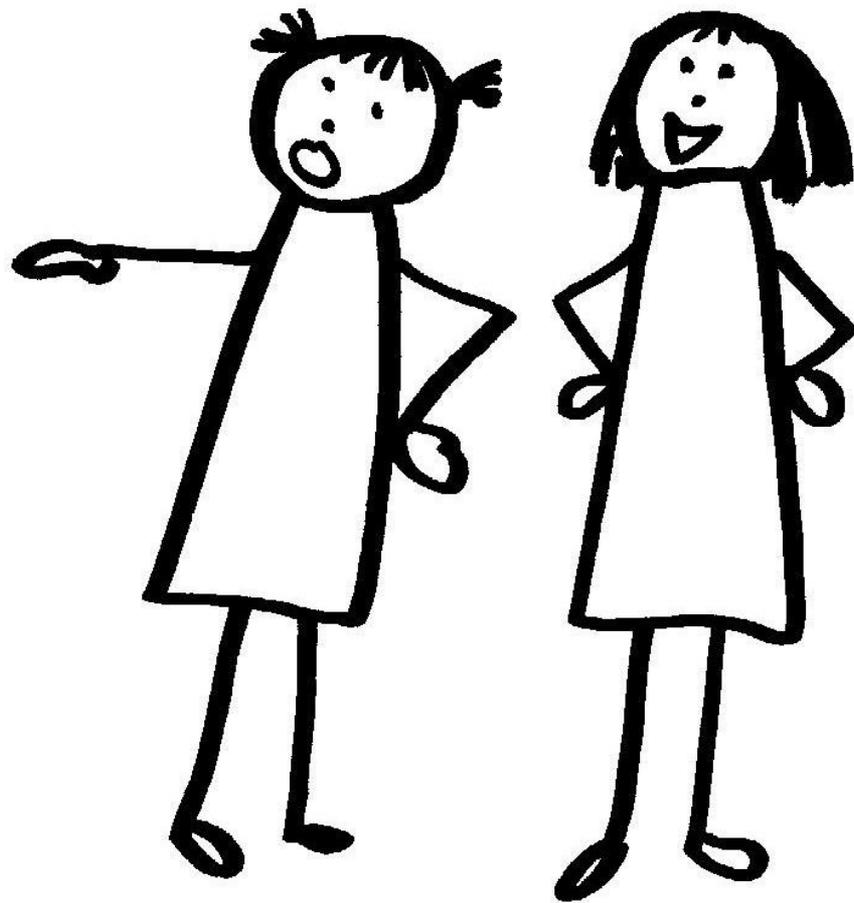
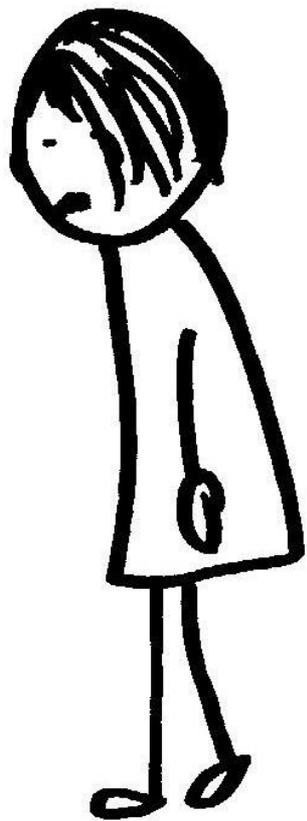
In the playground, I felt like everyone else knew how to make friends, except me.



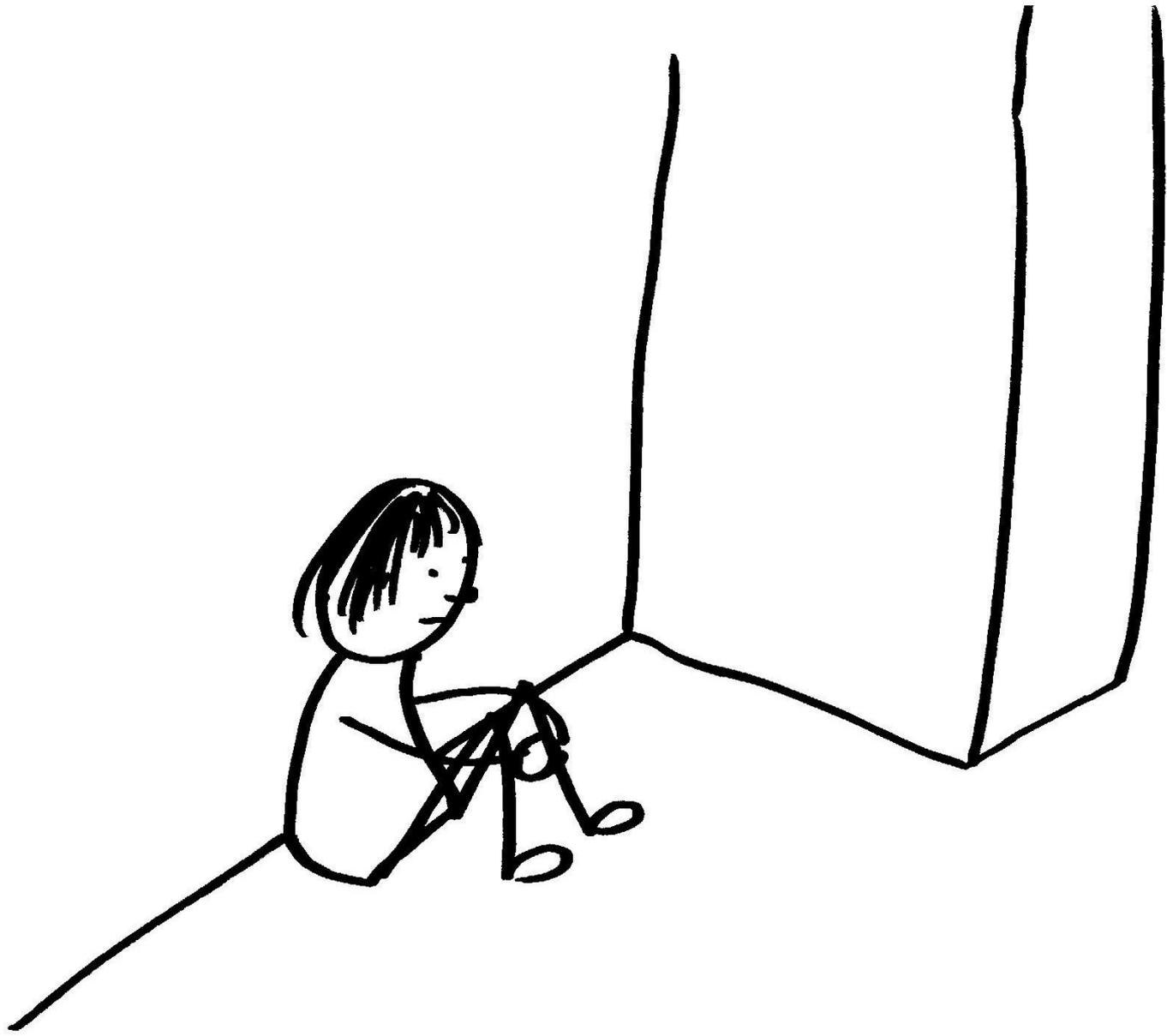
And when I tried to join in, I just  
didn't seem to 'get it.'



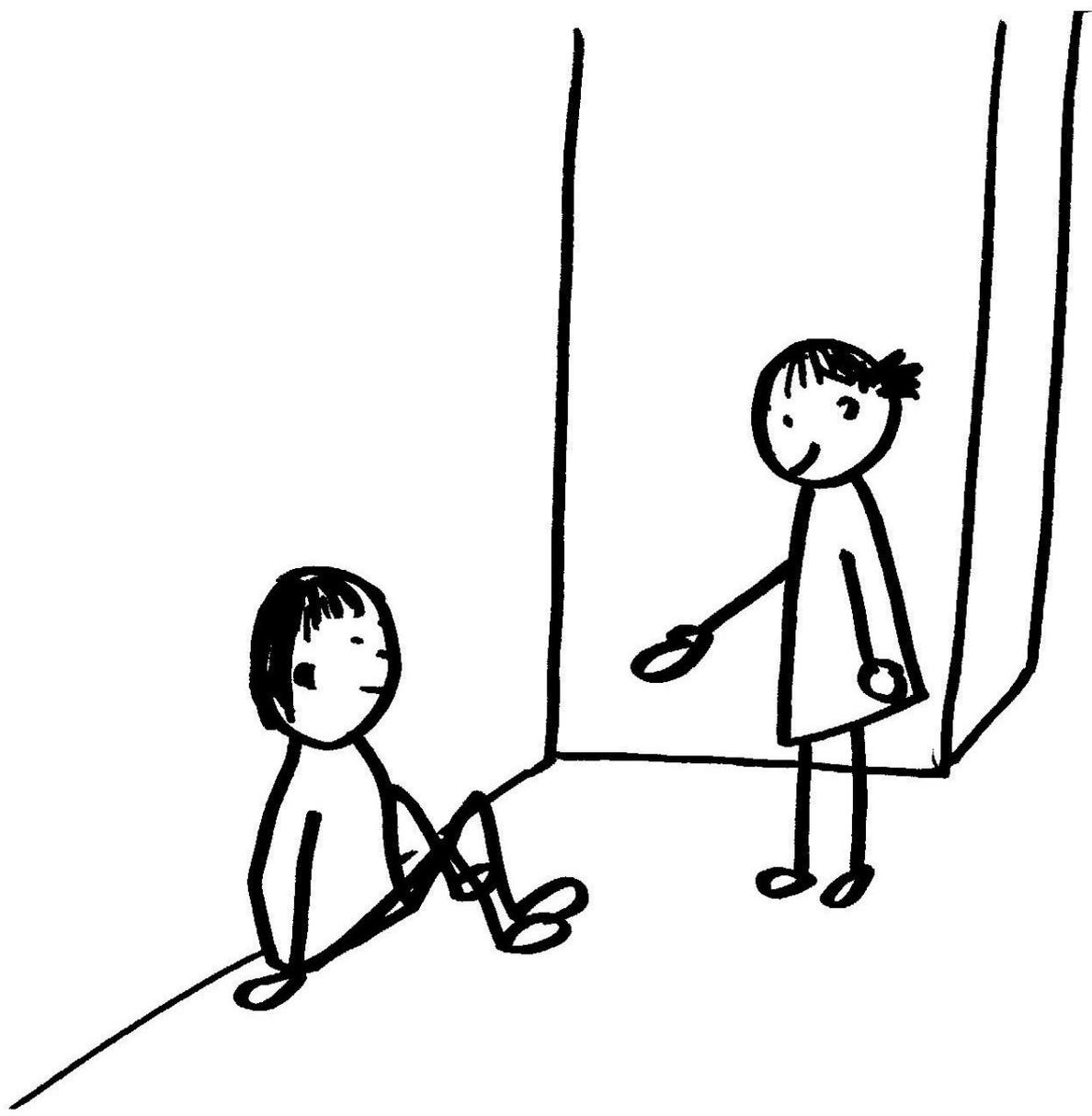
Sometimes the other children  
laughed at me and called me  
names, just because I was a bit  
different.



A lot of the time it was easier to be  
by myself.



From time to time, kind children  
would ask me if I wanted to play.

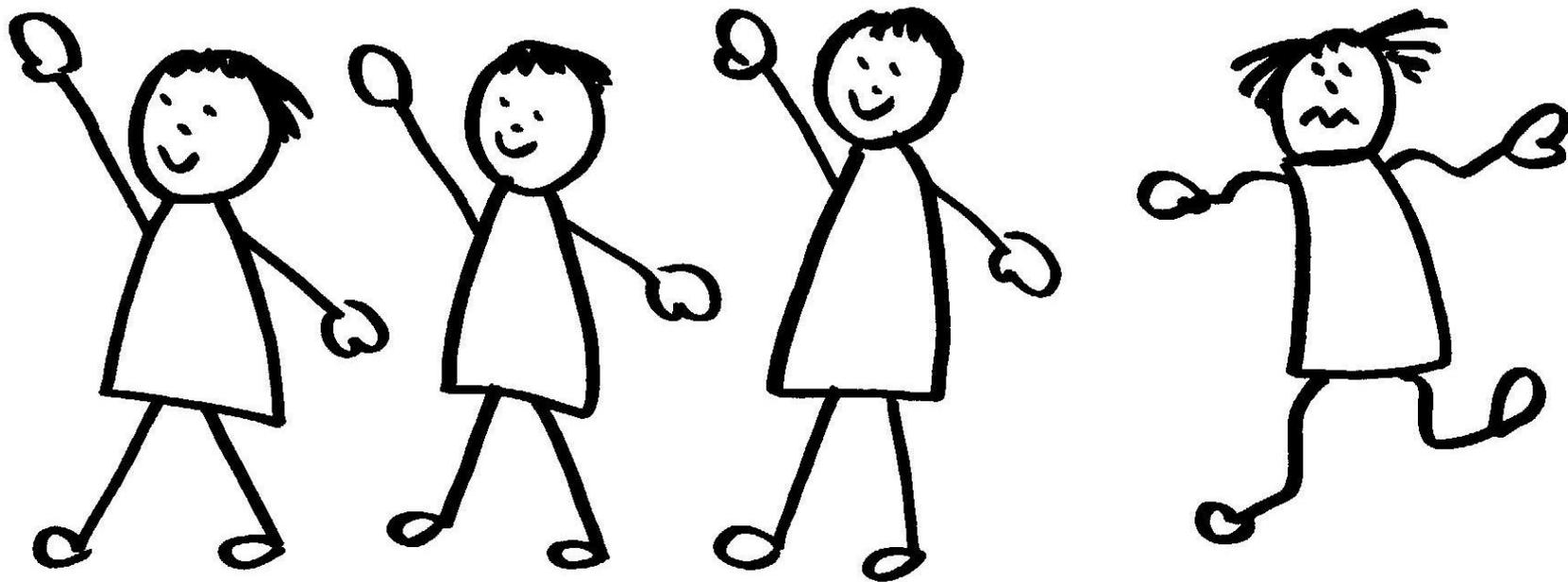


But I still felt different and awkward.

The other children noticed this.

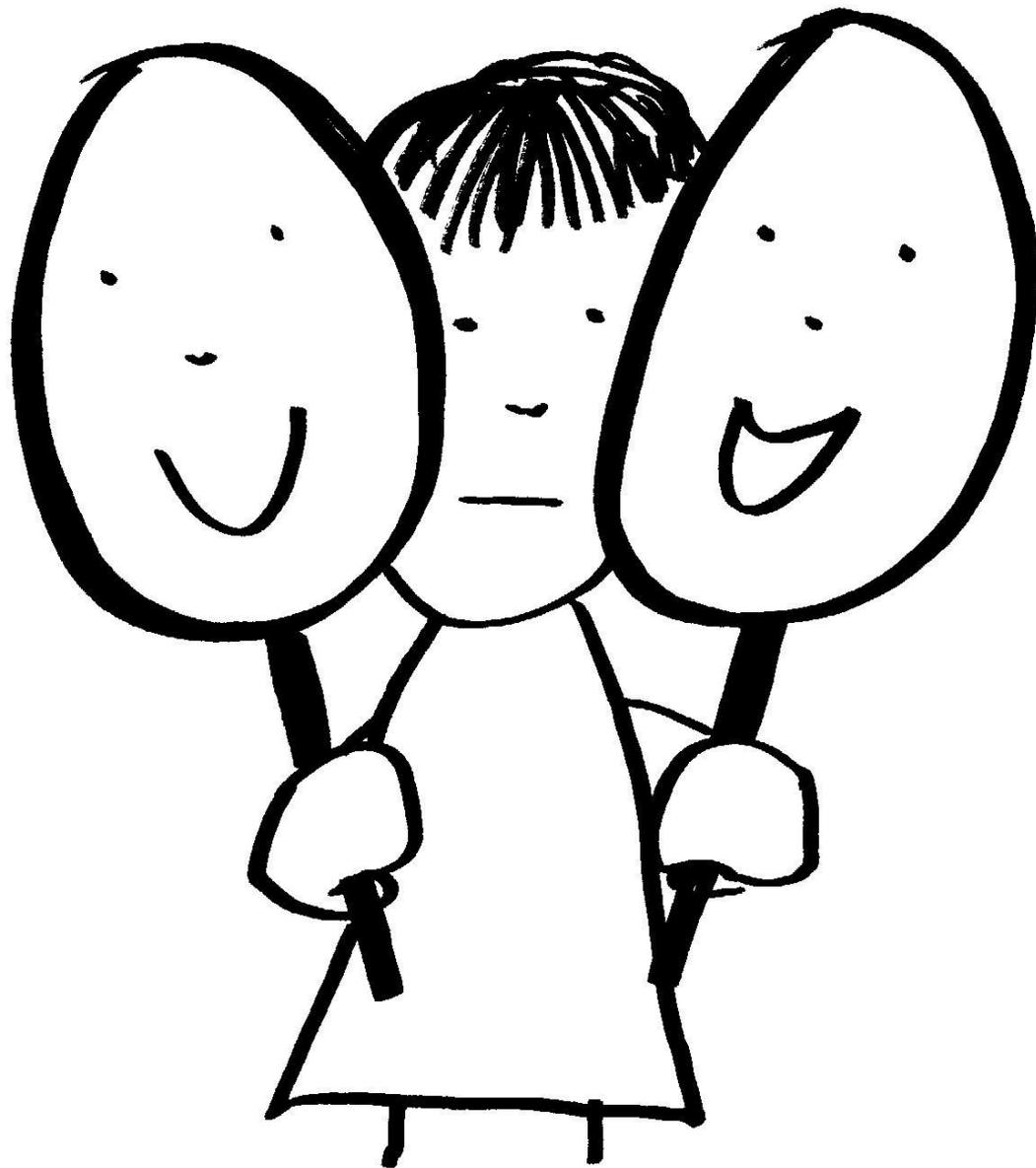
They didn't seem to like 'different'.

They preferred being with children  
who were like them.

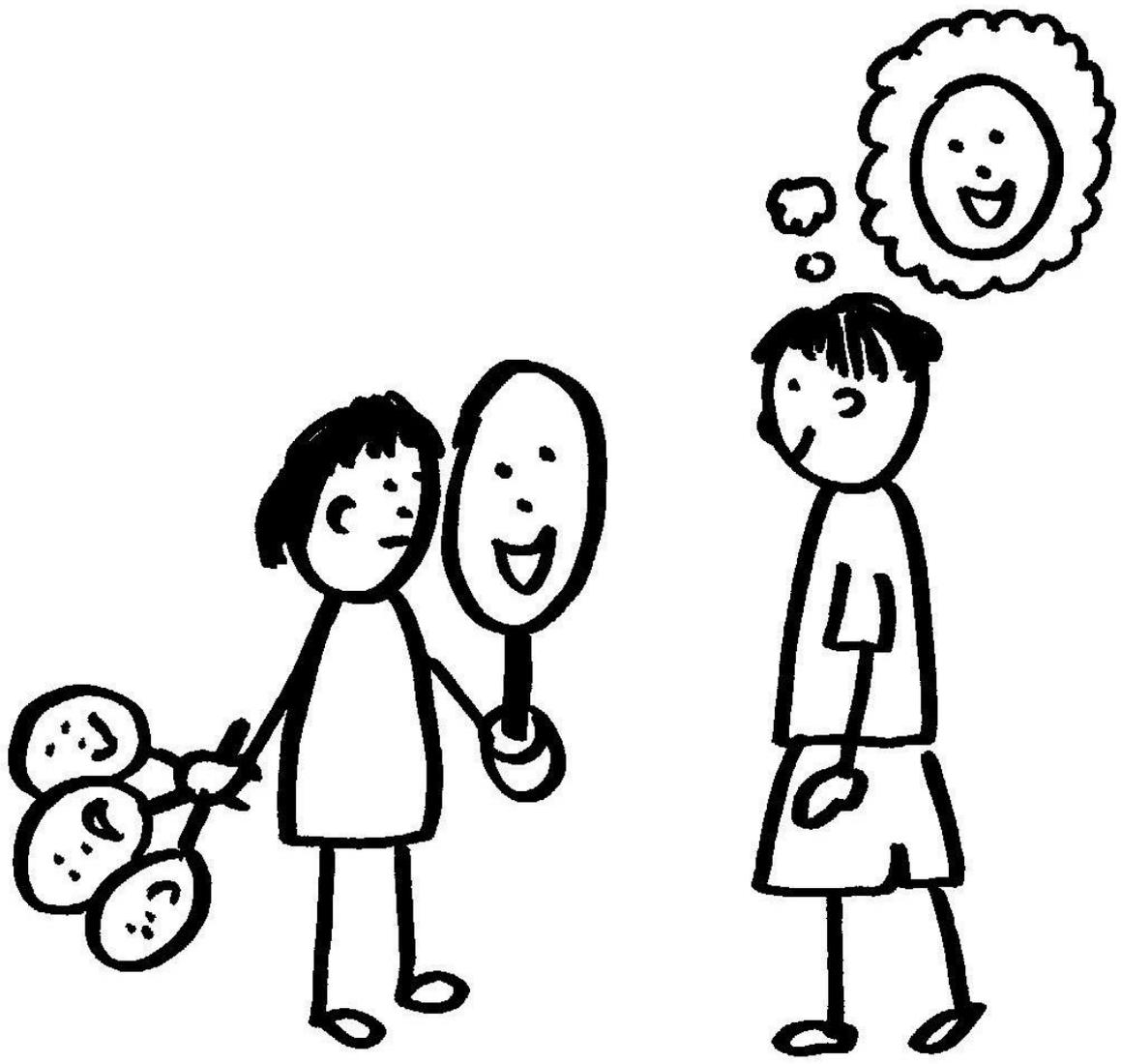


I decided that if other children  
didn't want to be with me as I was,  
then I would have to pretend to be  
more like them.

Maybe then, they would like me.

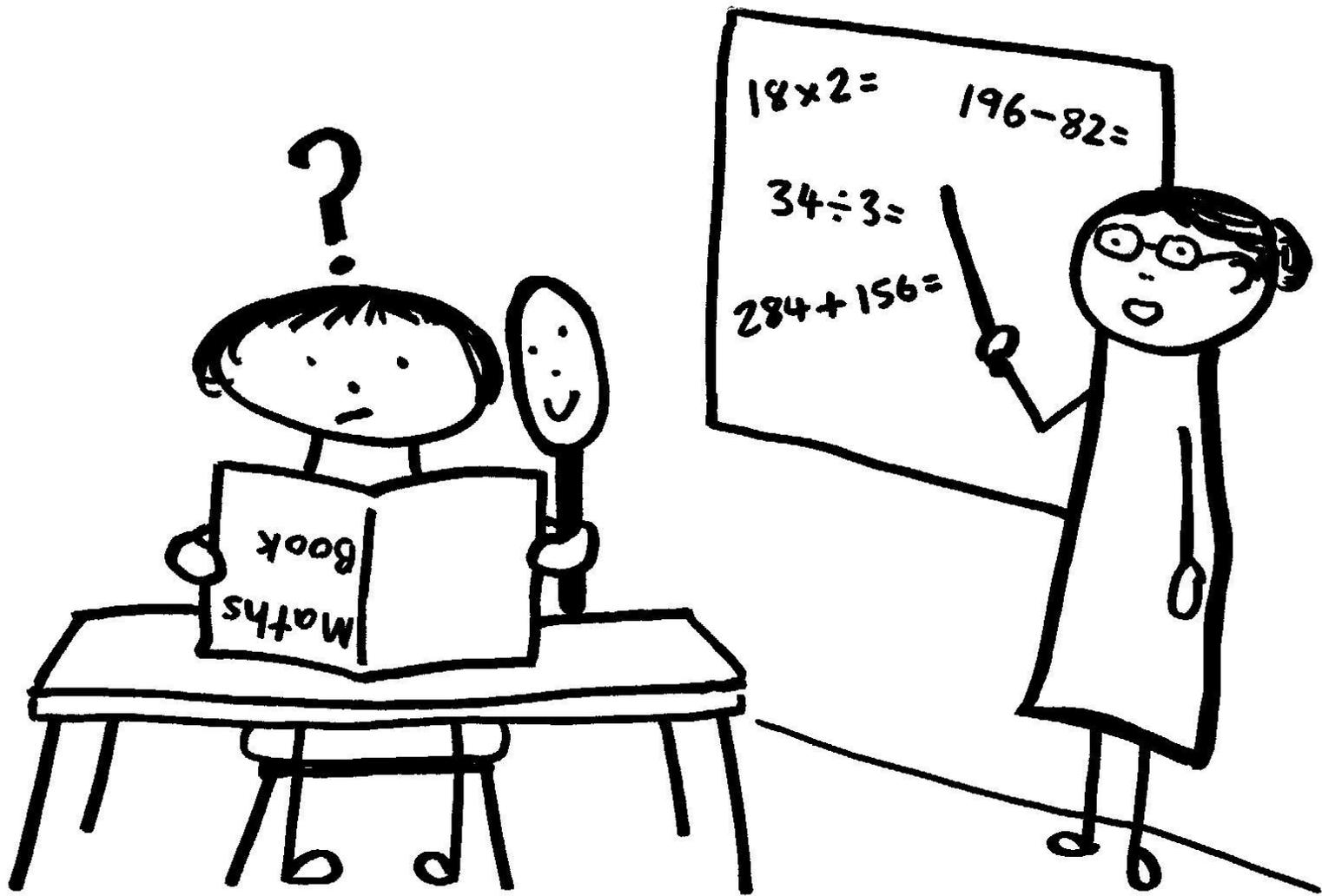


I got very clever at working out how other people expected me to be.  
If someone expected me to be happy, I could do a happy face...



In class, I thought the teacher wanted me to be clever and know the answers, so I pretended I knew what I was doing.

But this meant I found it really difficult to ask for help when I really did need it.

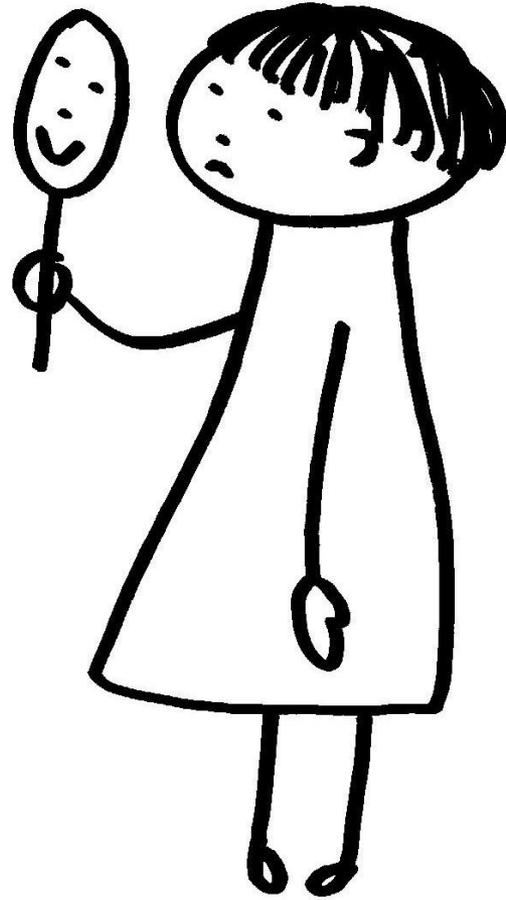
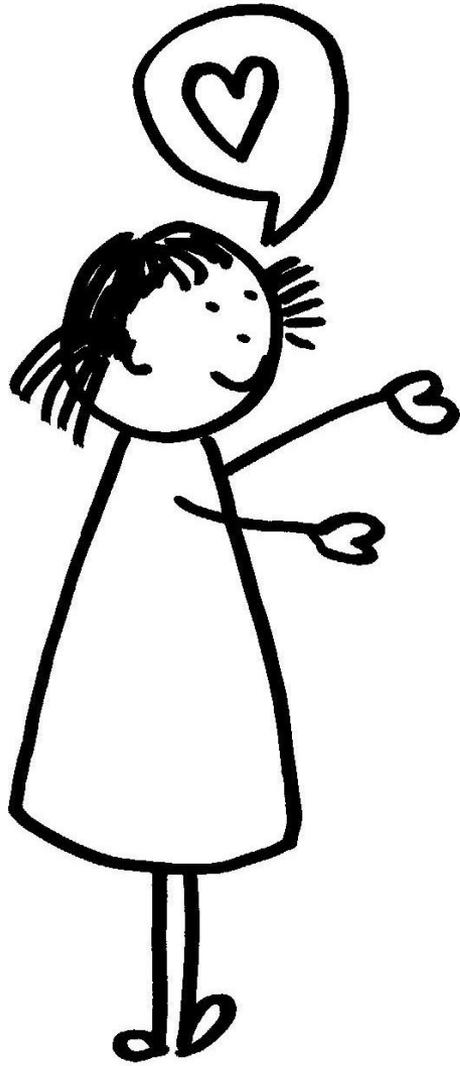


But there were times when the pretending did  
work.

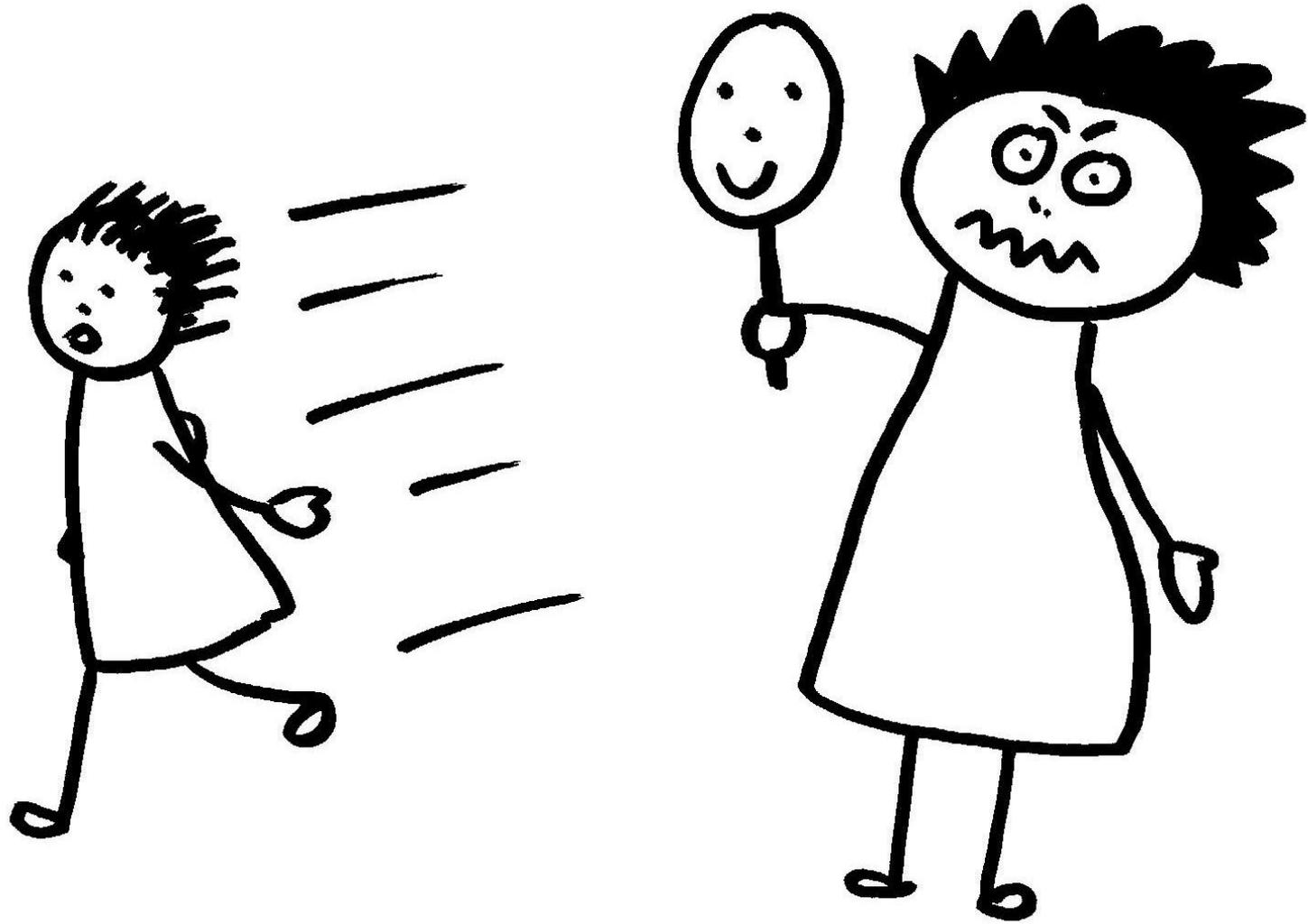
Sometimes other children wanted to be friends.

But this didn't make me happy.

Why? Because I figured they were just liking the  
pretend me.



I thought that if they saw the real  
'me' behind the mask, they would  
change their minds.



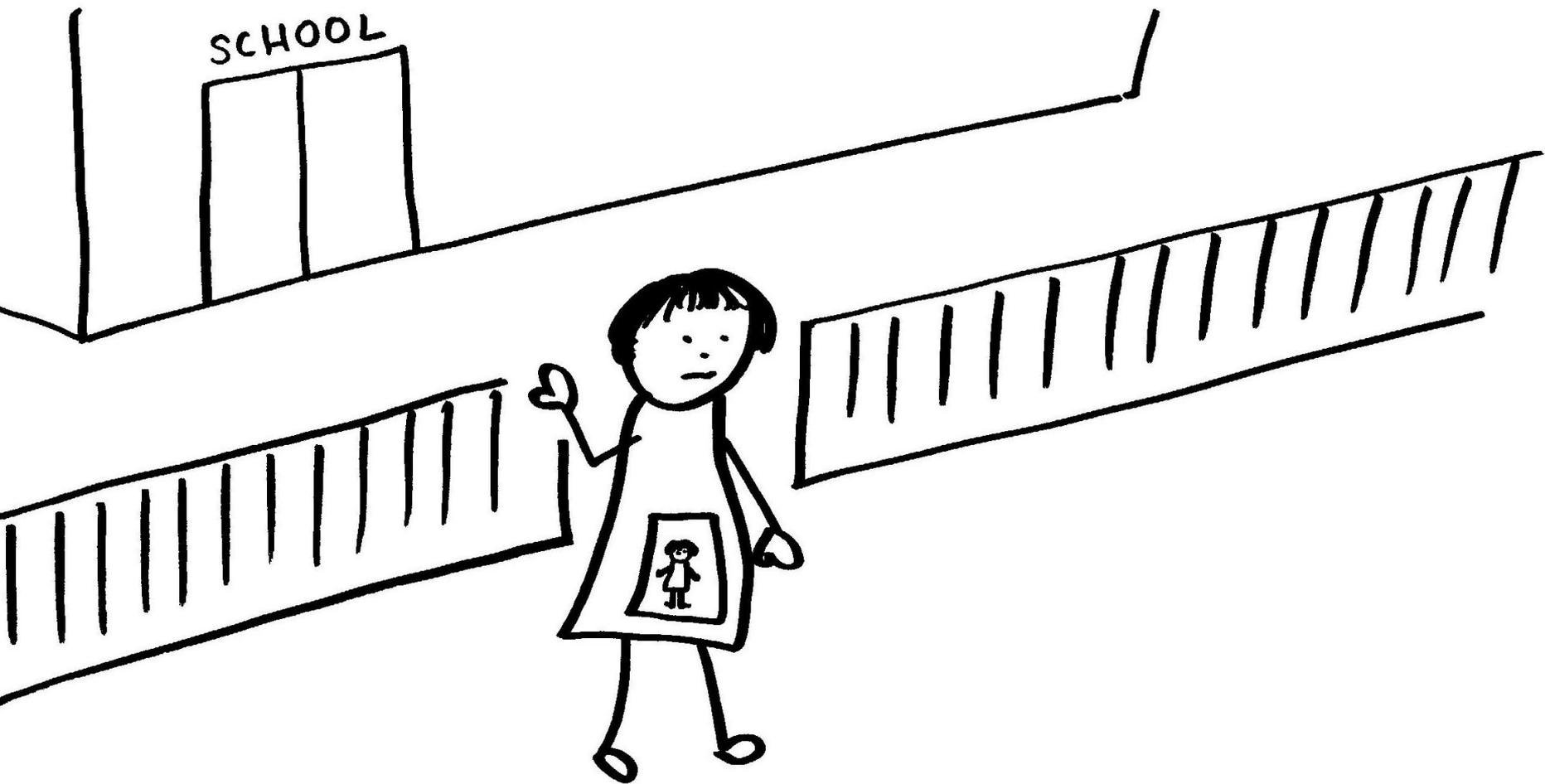
Every day as I walked to school my head would fill with worries and fears about the day ahead.

I felt like I must have done something wrong to feel like this.

I was too ashamed to tell anyone else about what was going on behind the masks.



When I left Primary School I  
thought I could stop pretending.

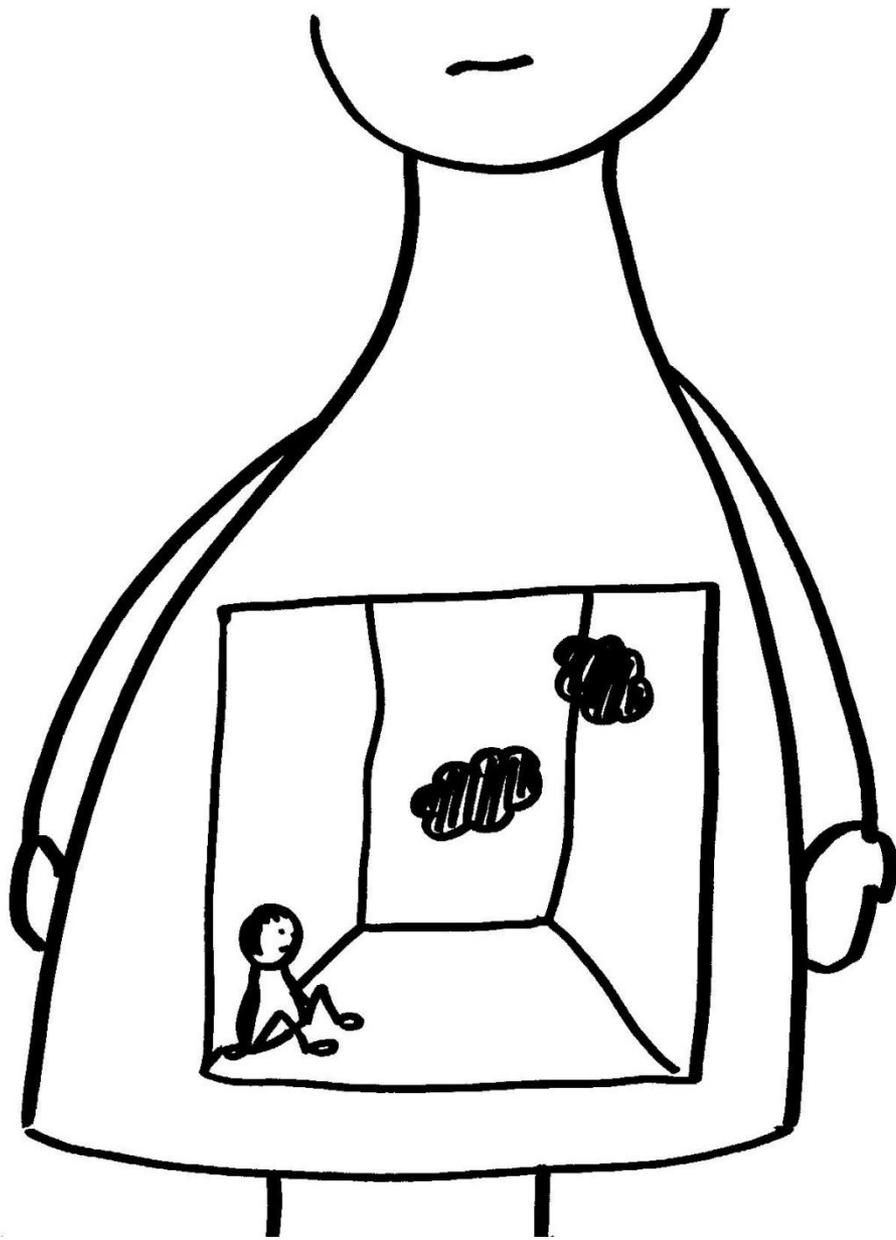


SCHOOL

But no, I still felt different.

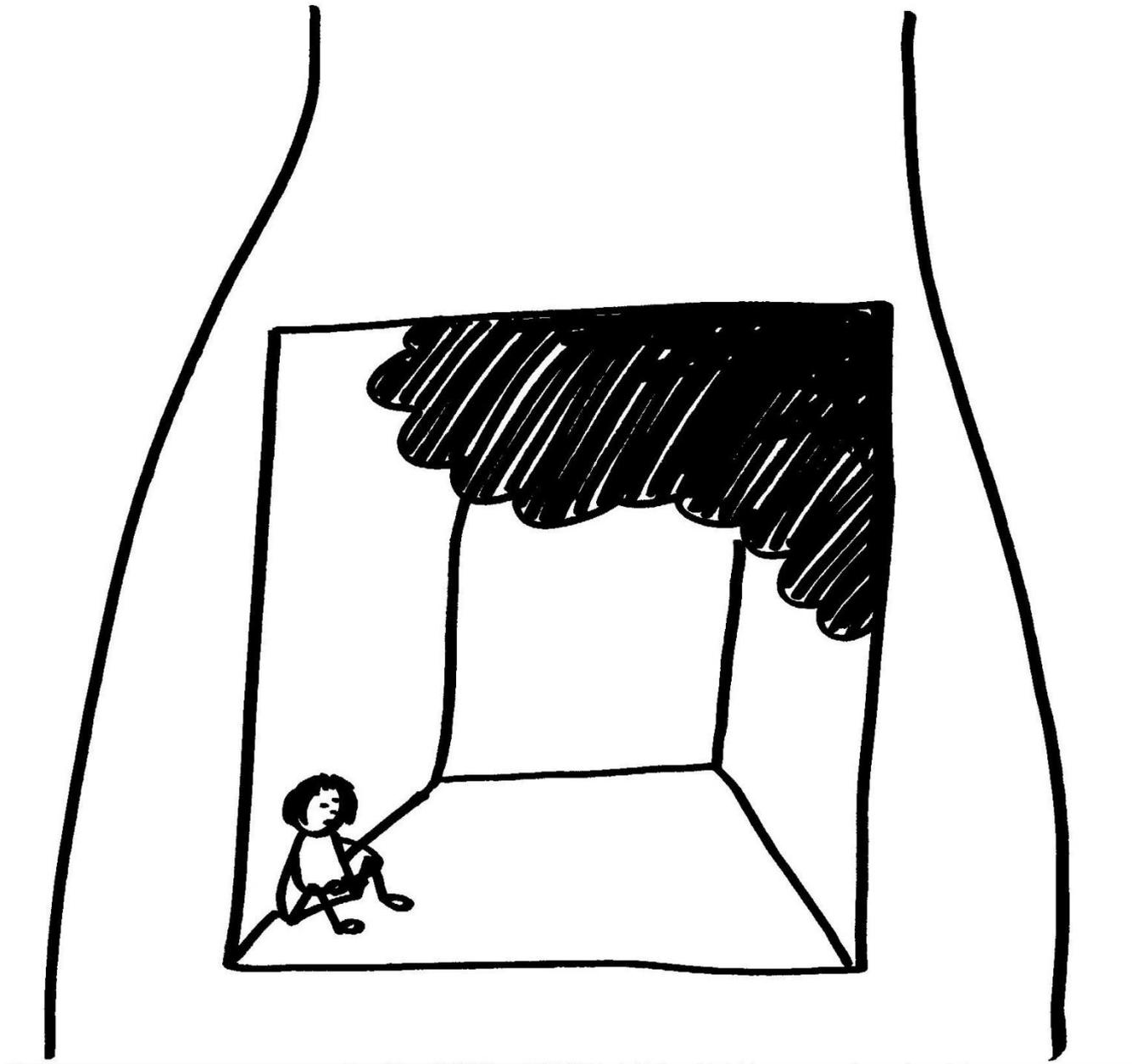
I still had to pretend, in order to be  
like the people around me.

Inside though, was hidden the real me,  
along with these black clouds.



The black clouds were all the painful memories and fears.

As I grew up, whenever I felt afraid or anxious, the clouds just got bigger and more threatening.



Pretending that I wasn't scared or  
anxious was hard work.



I felt like I was the only person in  
the world who had to pretend to  
fit in like this.



I found ways of distracting myself,  
of pretending to myself that I was  
ok, but these things just made me  
feel more lonely and ashamed.

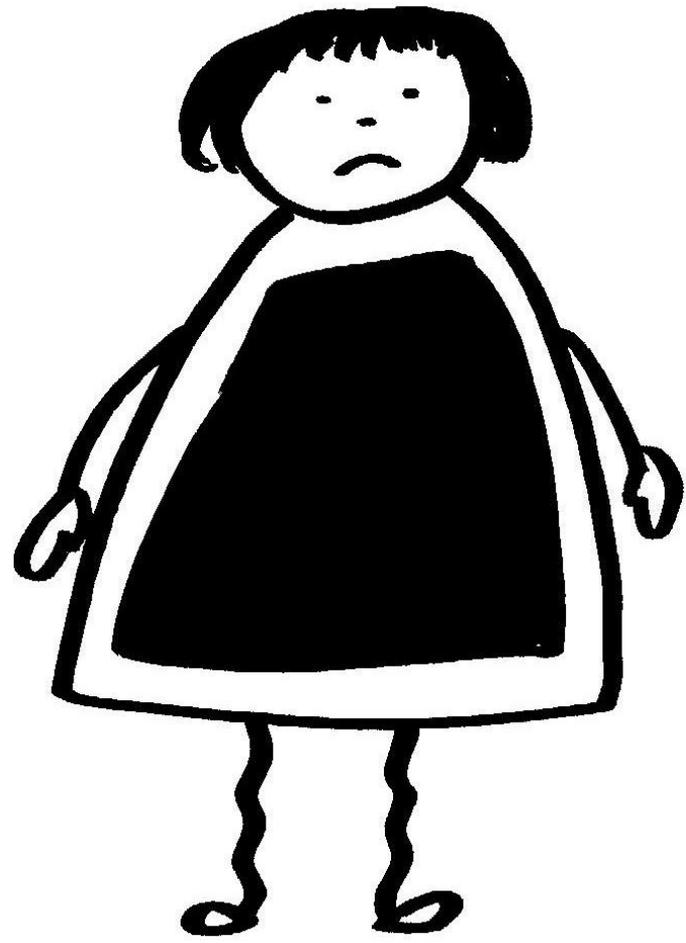


Sometimes I tried to make myself  
extra busy, then maybe for a while,  
I might forget about what was  
going on inside.

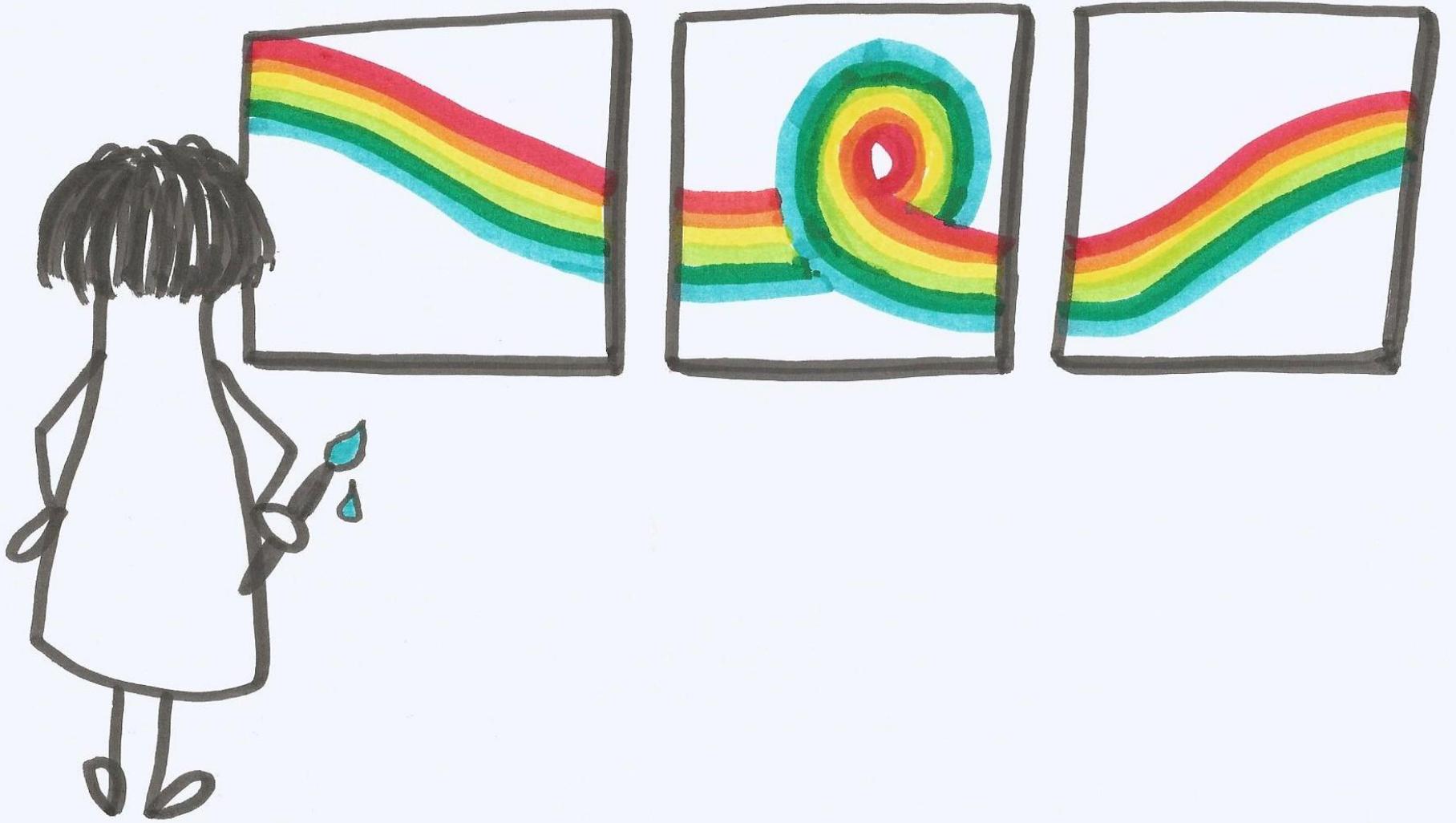


But the more I tried to ignore them,  
the bigger the clouds became.

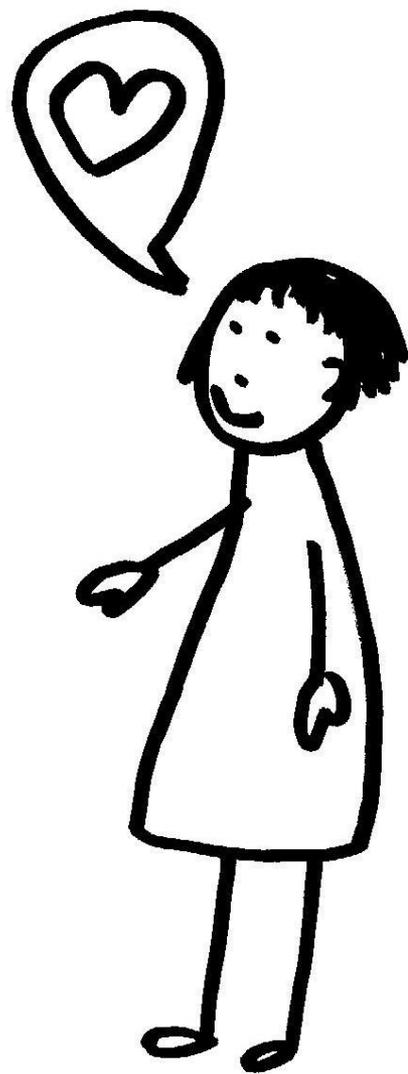
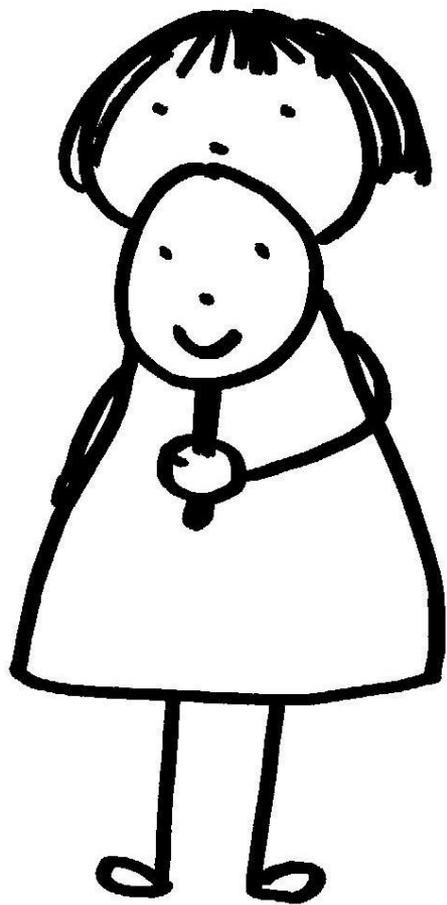
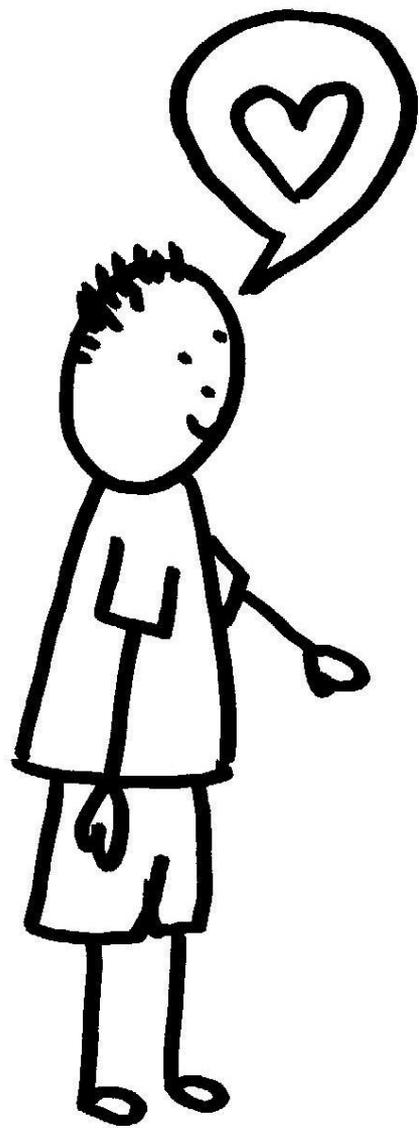
They slowed me down and made me  
feel tired and grumpy.



It was only when I did what I  
enjoyed doing that I felt a happy.



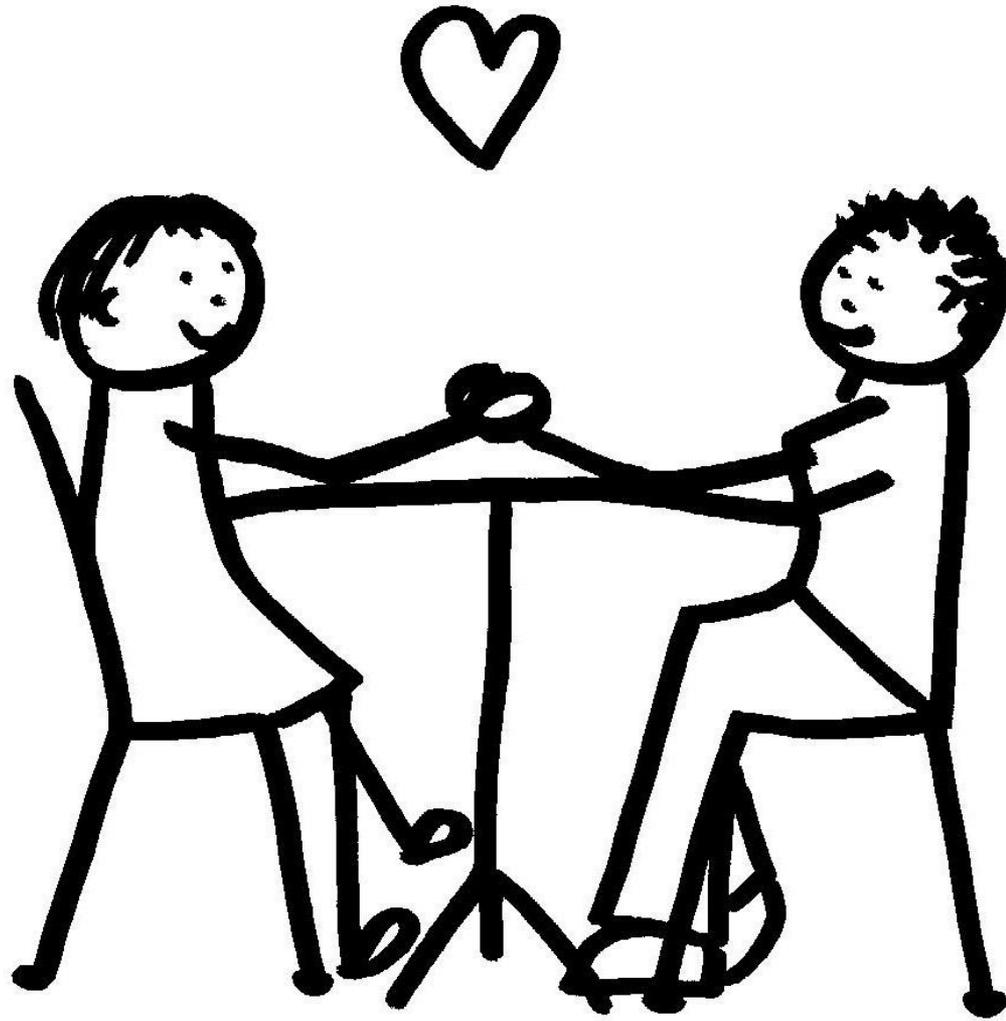
When people said they liked me. Or if they said I was clever, talented, funny, caring, pretty or kind, I just couldn't believe them, because I still believed that the real 'me' inside was not loveable.



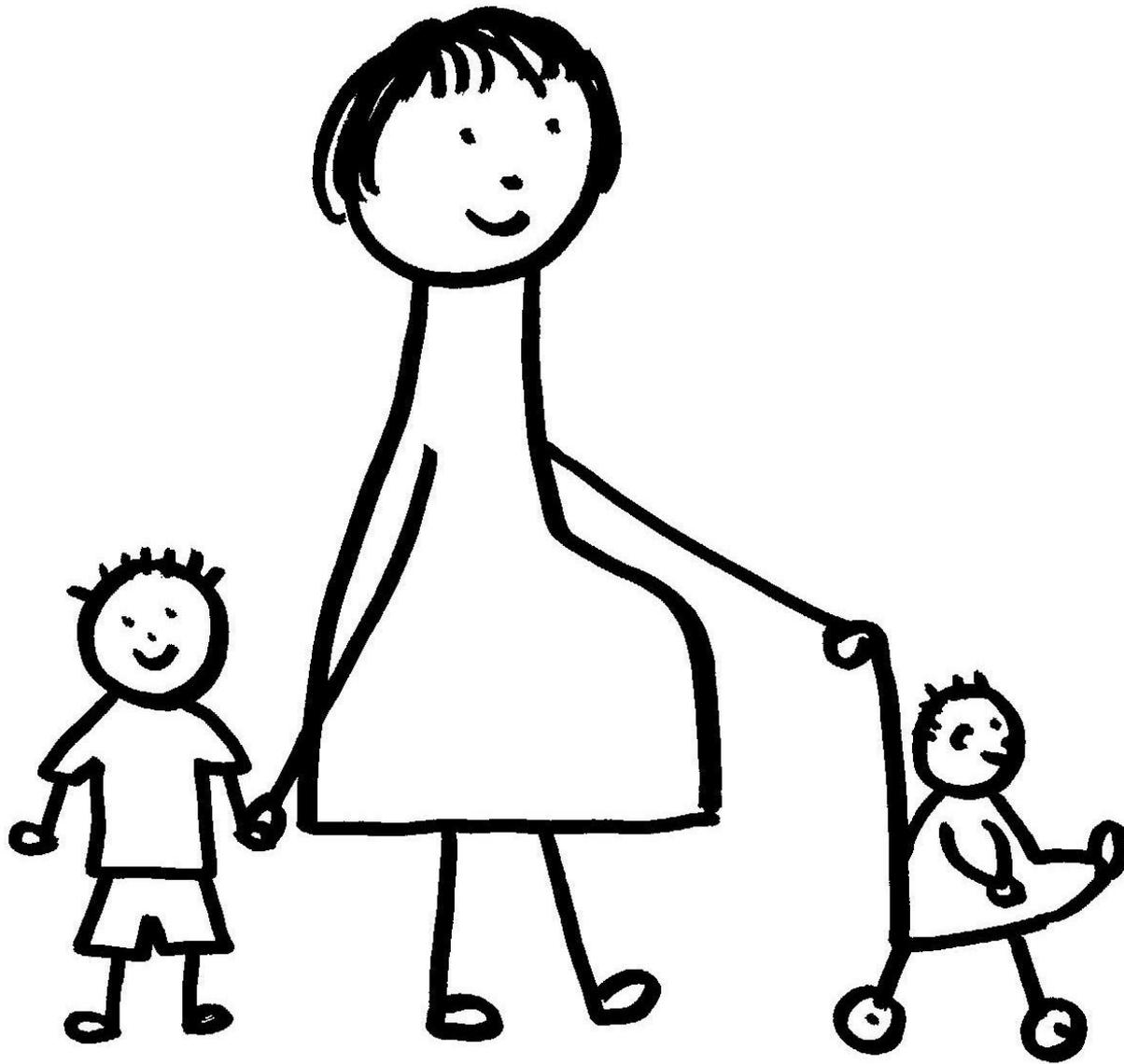
It's funny how the most unexpected things  
happen when you are grown-up.

I met a man whom I love and we got married.

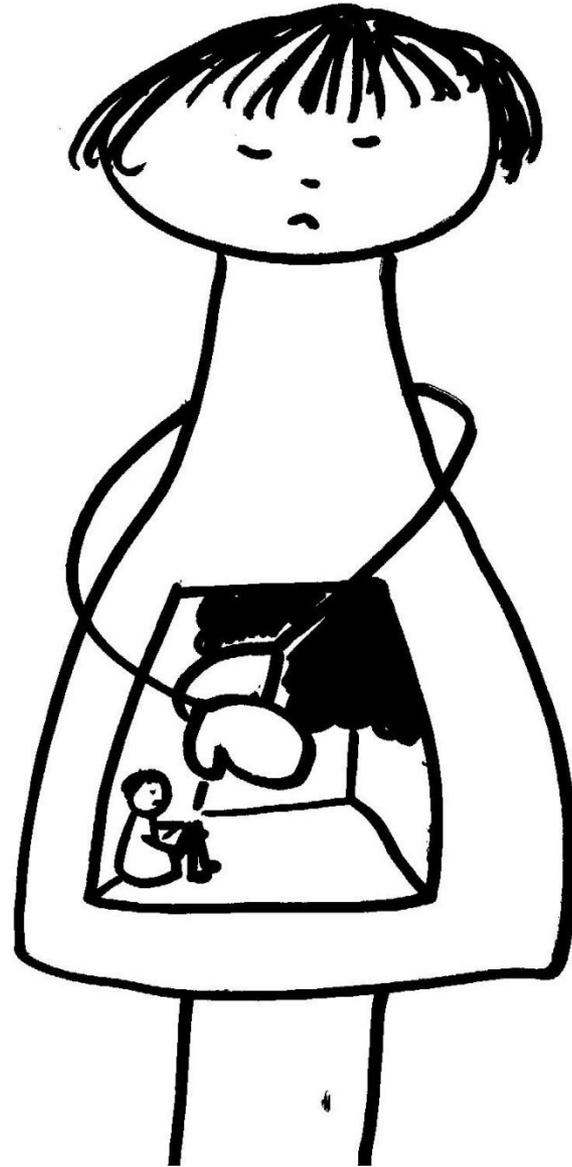
I tried to tell him I wouldn't make a very good  
Mummy as I wasn't great with children.



But thankfully, he didn't believe me.  
Now we have three beautiful boys.  
And one of the most special things  
about having children is that they  
love you just the way you are.

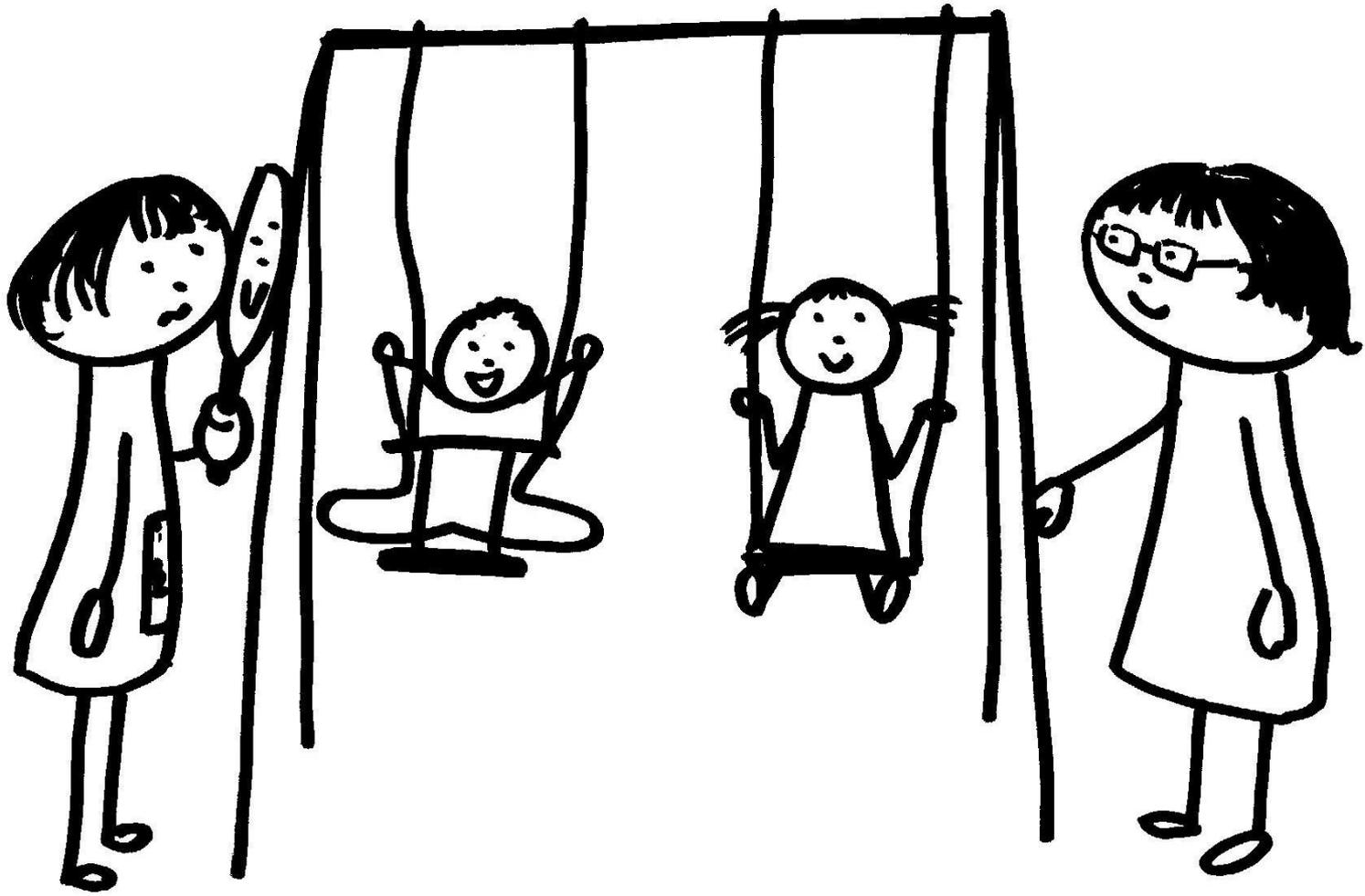


But I still couldn't love me just the  
way I was.



I still felt I needed to pretend not to feel scared when I was in places like playgroups or playgrounds.

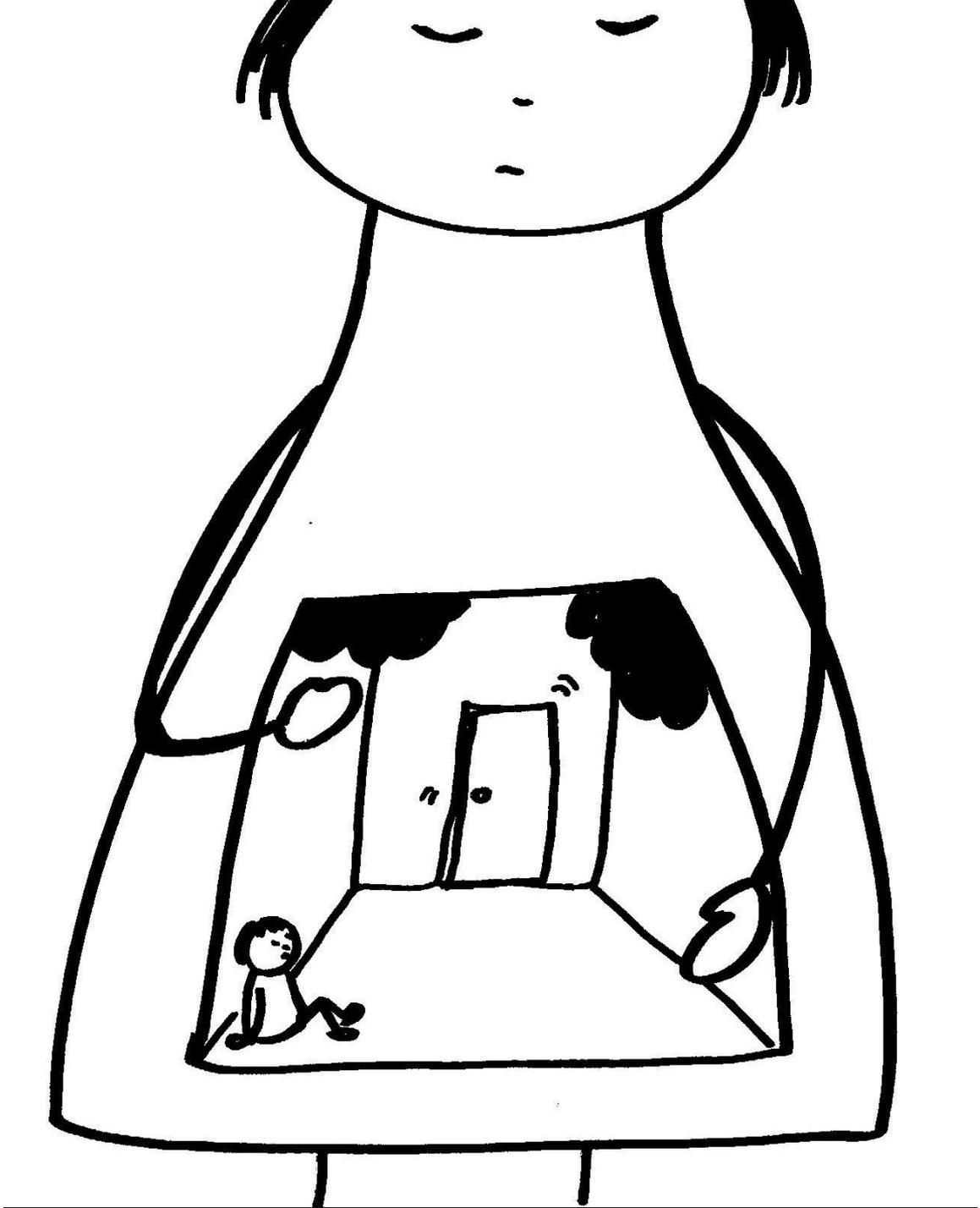
It reminded me of feeling scared when I was a child in the school playground.



But, then one day, something  
changed.

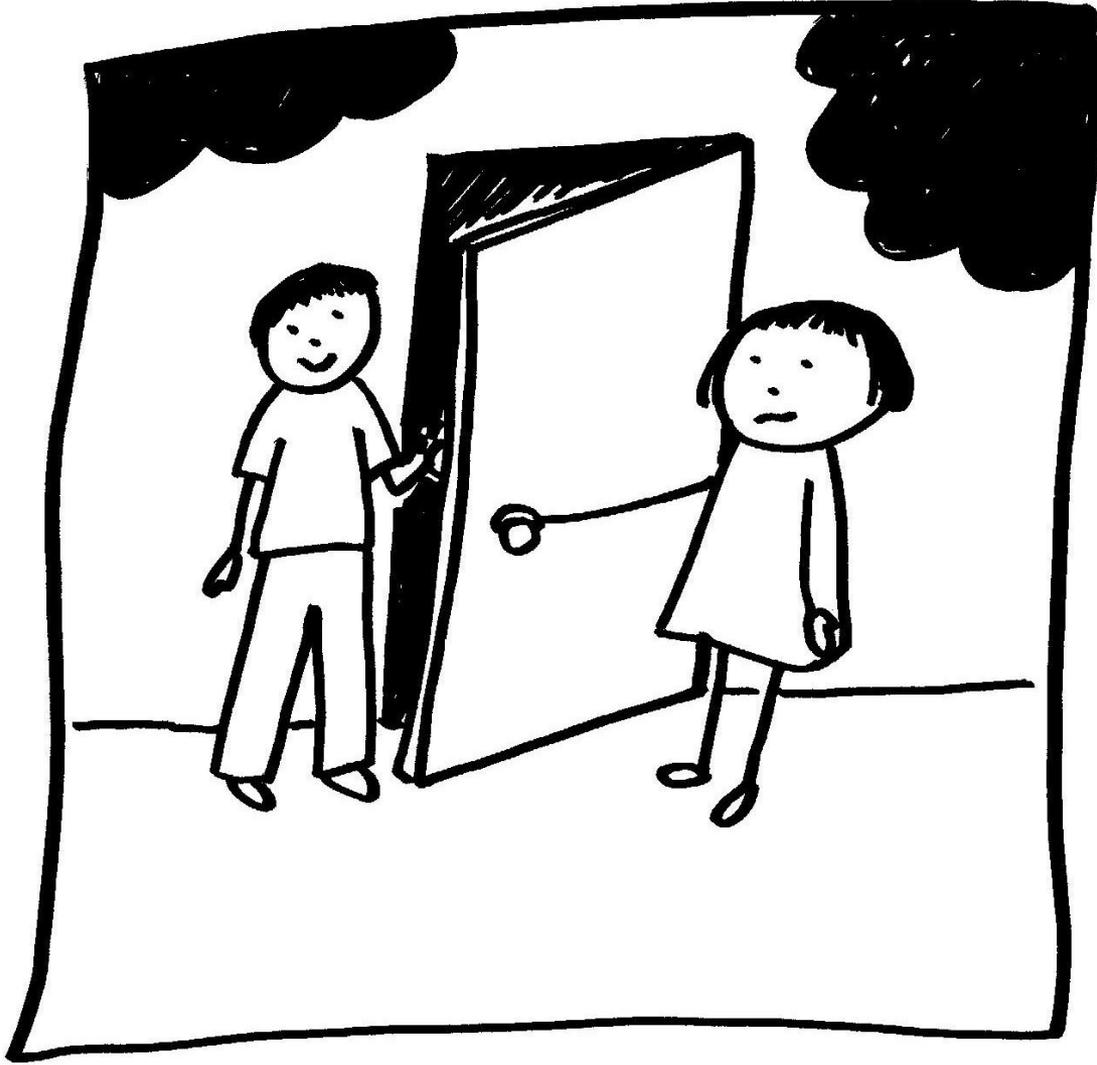
There was a knock on the door of  
the room inside.

Could I pluck up the courage to  
open it?

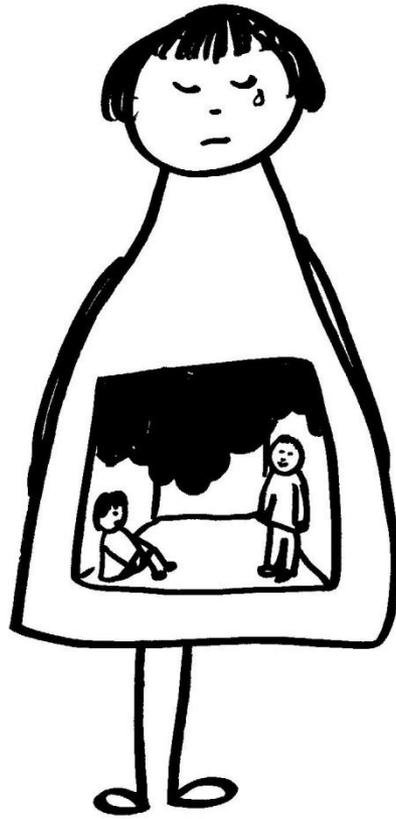


I was just too tired of fighting the black clouds on my own, so I decided to open up.

Choosing to open the door and become open to the compassion and love of other people, changed my life.



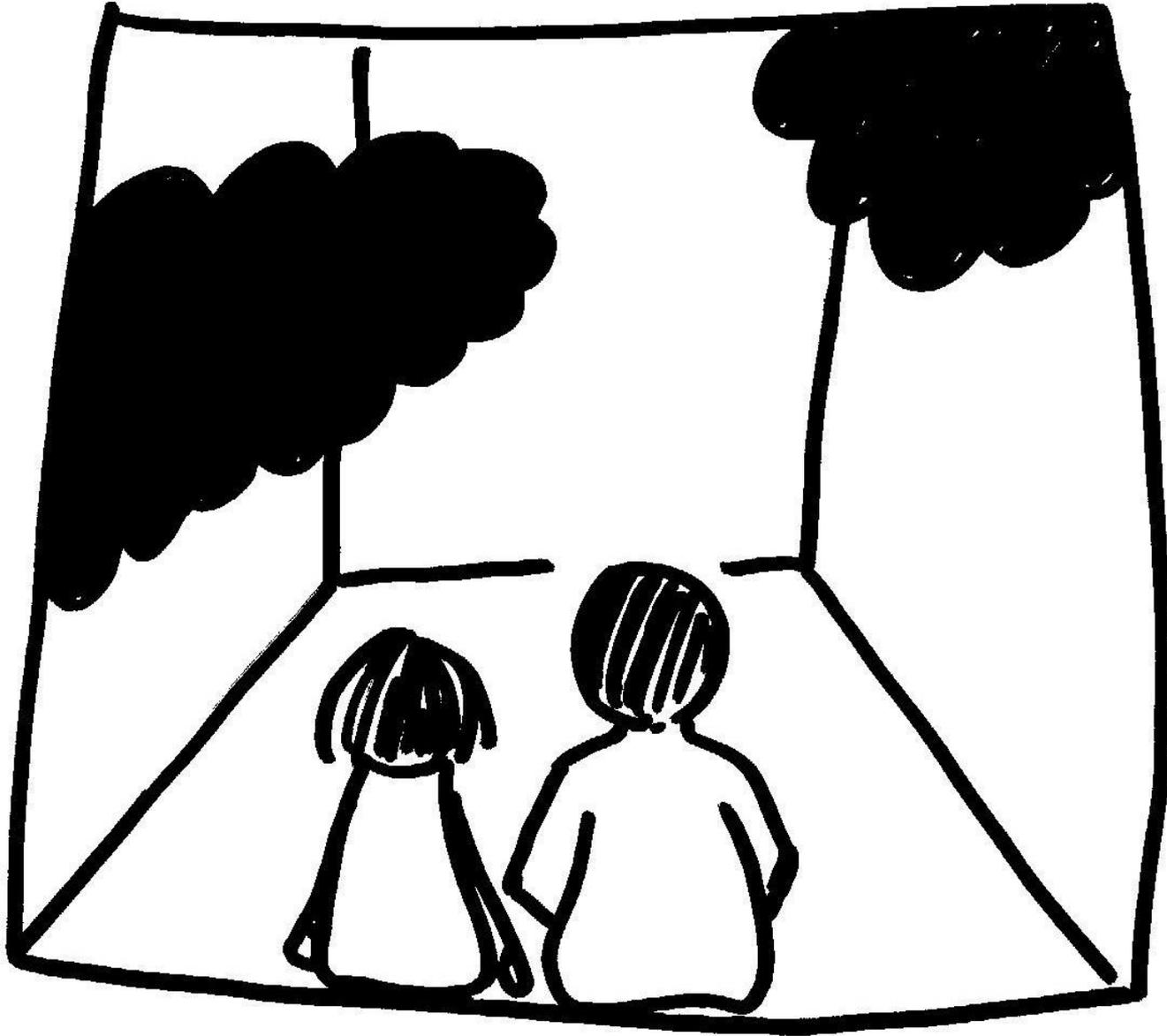
Because, when I let people in, when I let them see the real me and the black clouds, they didn't run away. They told me that everything would be OK, and that we could face things together.



Suddenly, I knew I no longer had to  
face life on my own.

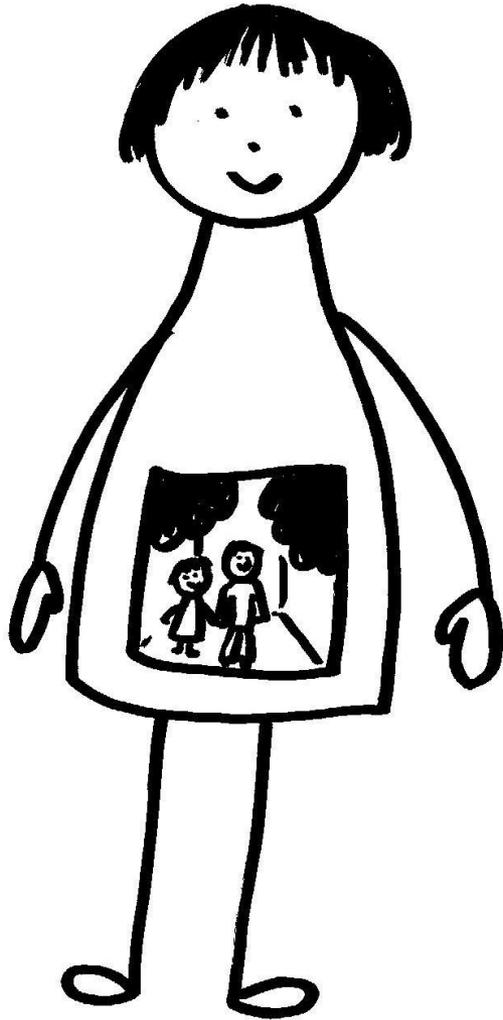
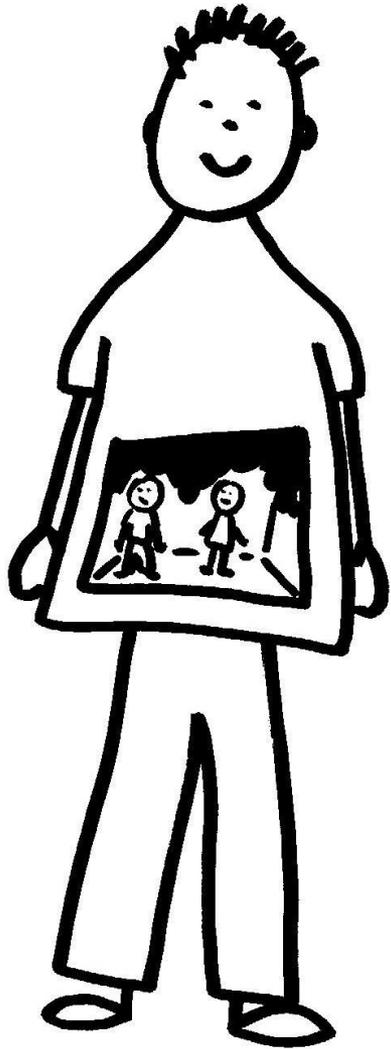


Even the black clouds looked less  
scary now I had friends to share  
my fears with.



I found that when I listened and trusted those around me, that the most amazing things could happen.

I found people who had been through experiences just like me.



When I overcame my fears and stopped pretending, then other people seemed to like me just as I was, even if I was still different to them.



I looked at the things I found  
difficult in life.

I went to see a specialist doctor.

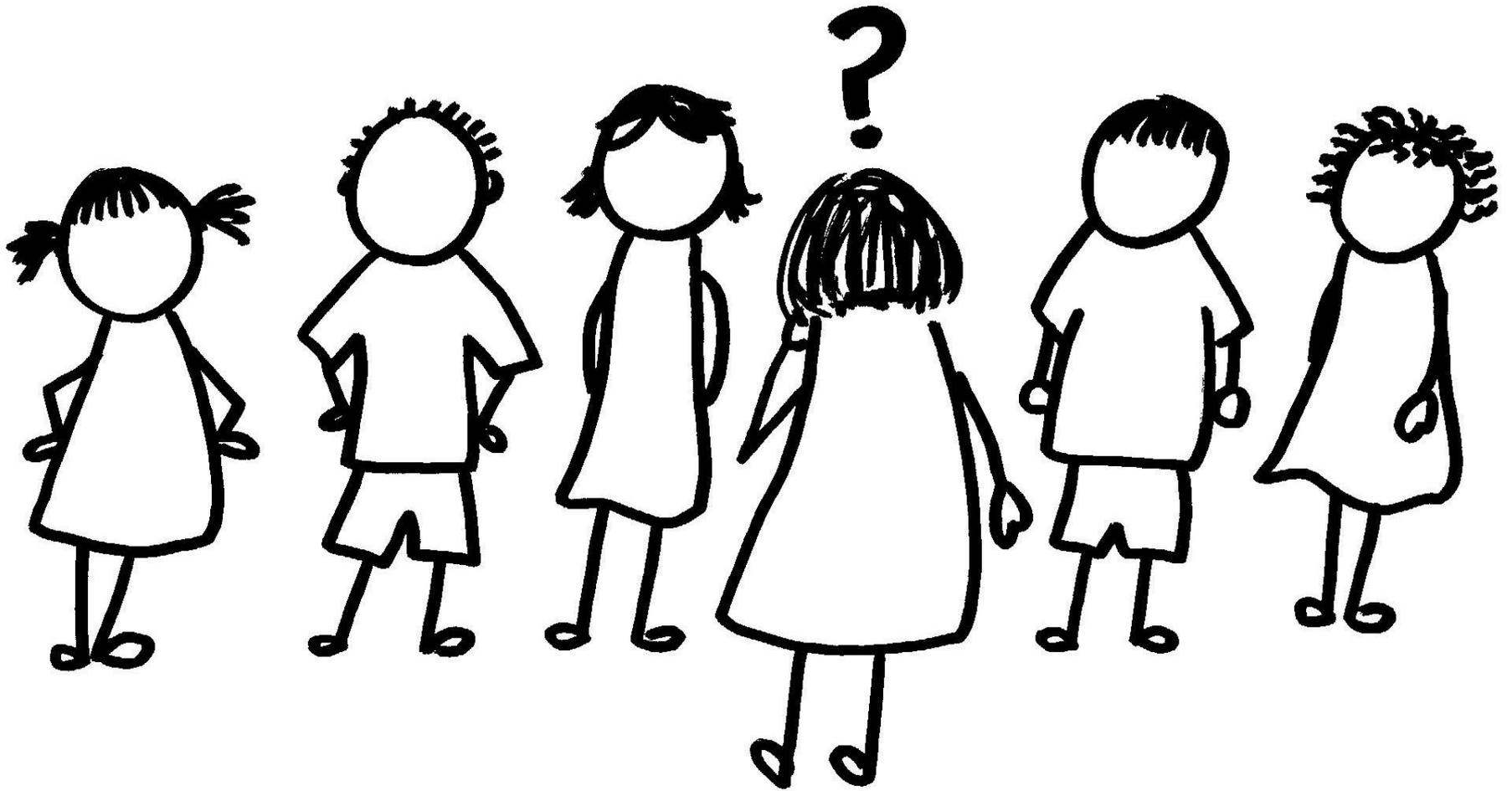
She said I had something called  
Asperger's Syndrome.



People with Asperger's can find it difficult to read what other people are feeling or thinking.

Knowing this, helped me to understand why I struggled to make friends in the playground.

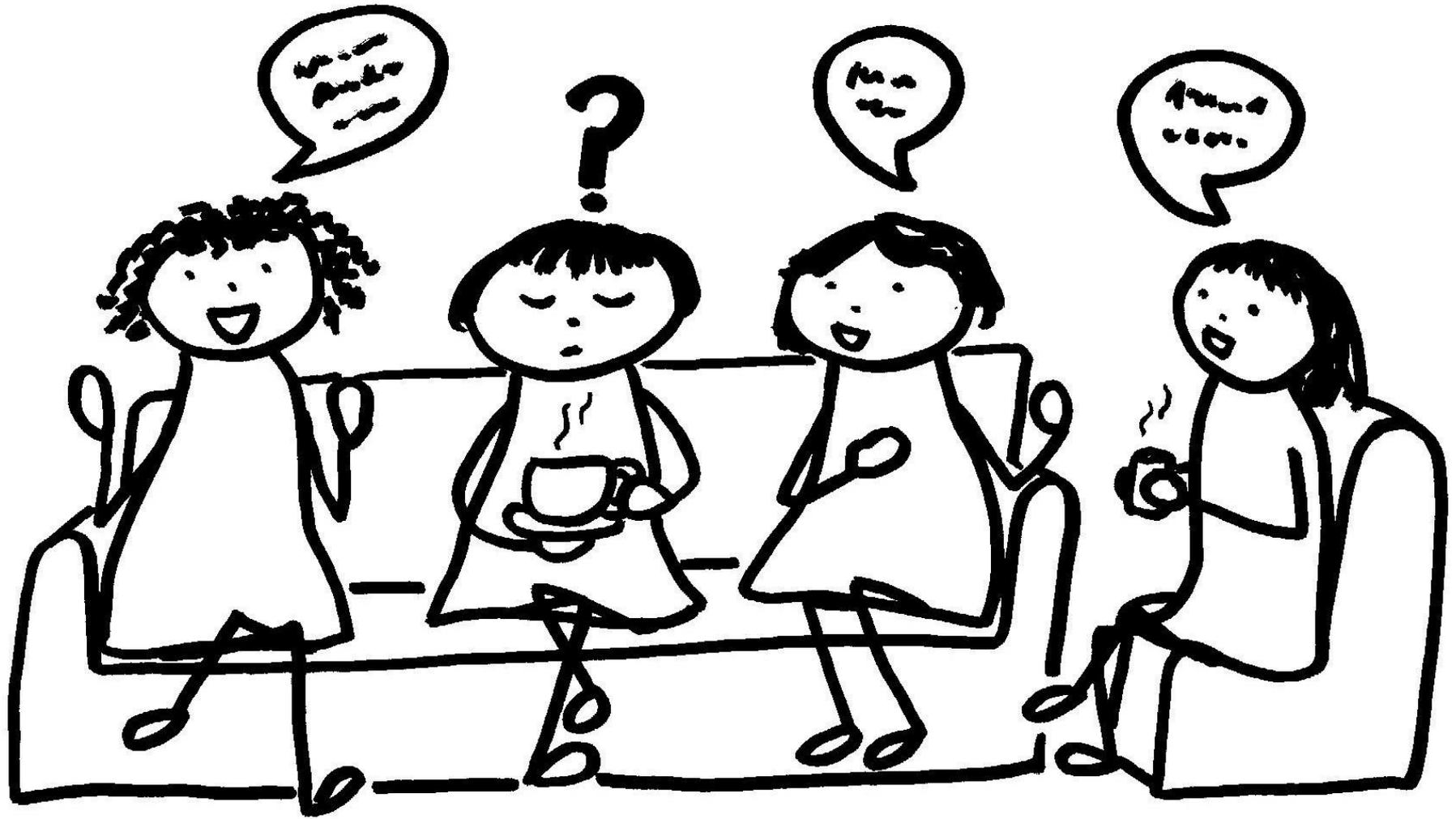
It wasn't because I was stupid or dumb, I just didn't see and understand people in the same way that the other children do.



Knowing I have Asperger's as an adult, has helped me understand why I still find some things difficult.

But it doesn't stop me doing these difficult things, because I have realised something important.

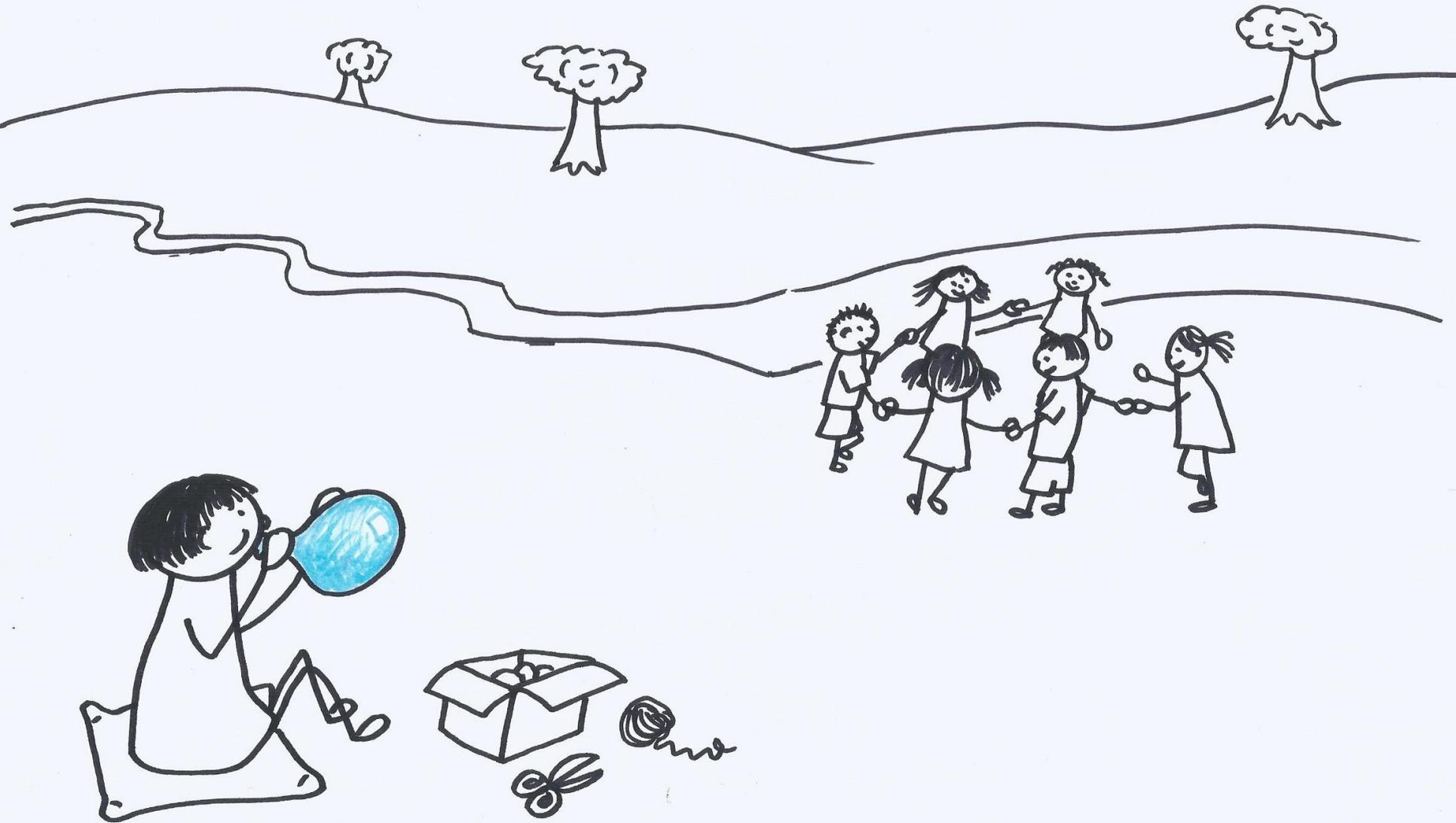
I find these things difficult simply because I have Asperger's. It is not anything I have done wrong.



Having Asperger's can mean that you think a bit differently about life.

Some people with Asperger's have extraordinary talents because of this.

In fact being a bit different, and thinking a bit differently, can mean that you can see things...

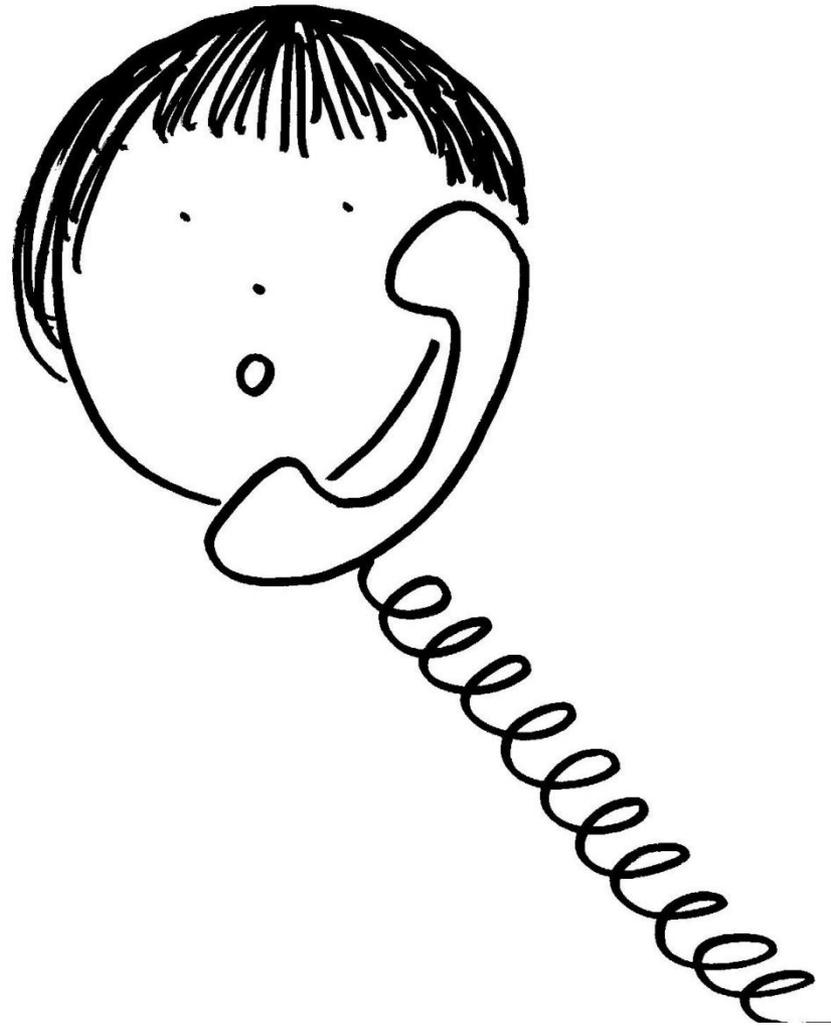


...from a completely different  
viewpoint.



Then, one day I got a phone call. It was from the Head Teacher of the school my boys went to.

It was also the school where I went as a child. She asked me if I would like to start working there as a dinner lady.



**“NO!!” Screamed the little girl inside  
me.**

**“Stop! I might get hurt again.  
Remember how much I got hurt  
there before.” She said.**



I remembered how scared I had felt each day as a child going to school.

I still went, though, each day.

I had faced my fears before, I could do it again.

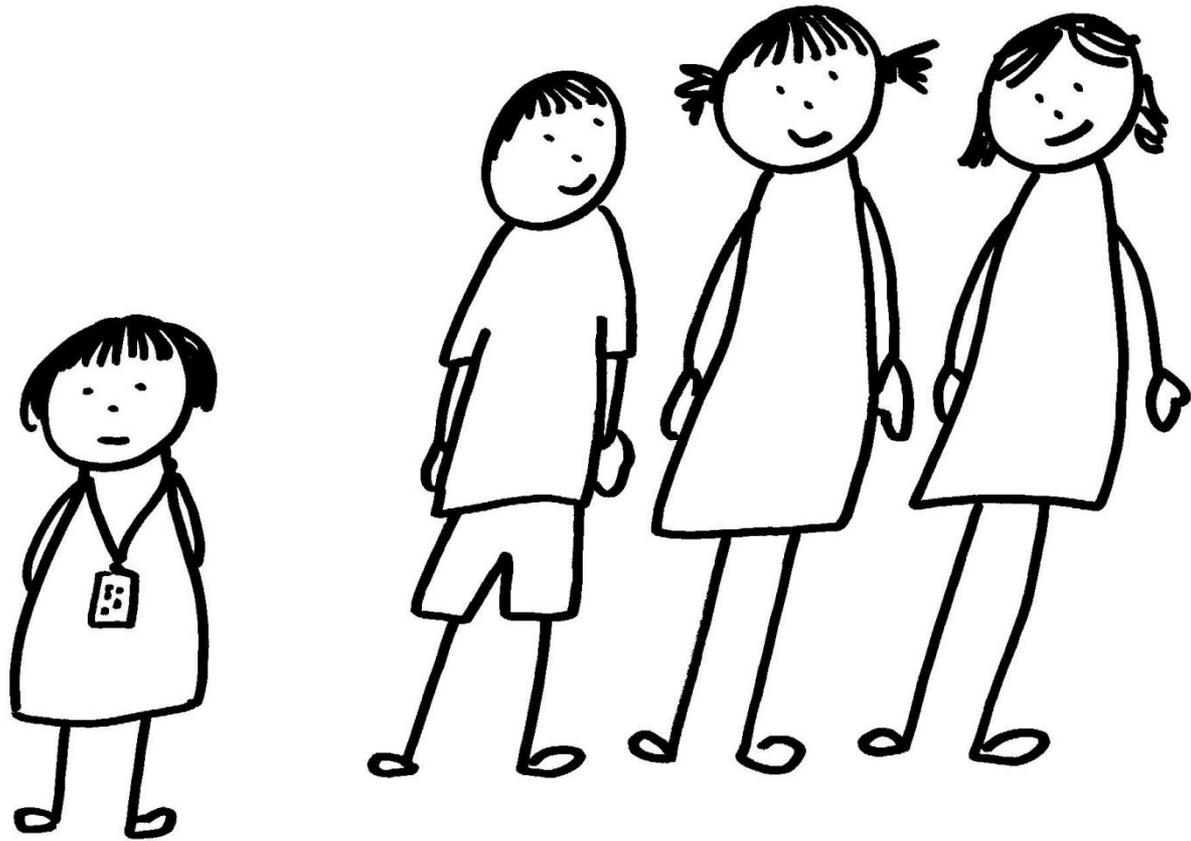
And now I knew I didn't have to do it on my own. I could ask for help if I needed it.



So I decided to go for it and I said "Yes."

The first time I walked back onto the playground as a dinner lady, I felt like I was the little 4 year-old girl again.

Only this time I knew I wasn't alone. I could trust, and not hide behind masks.

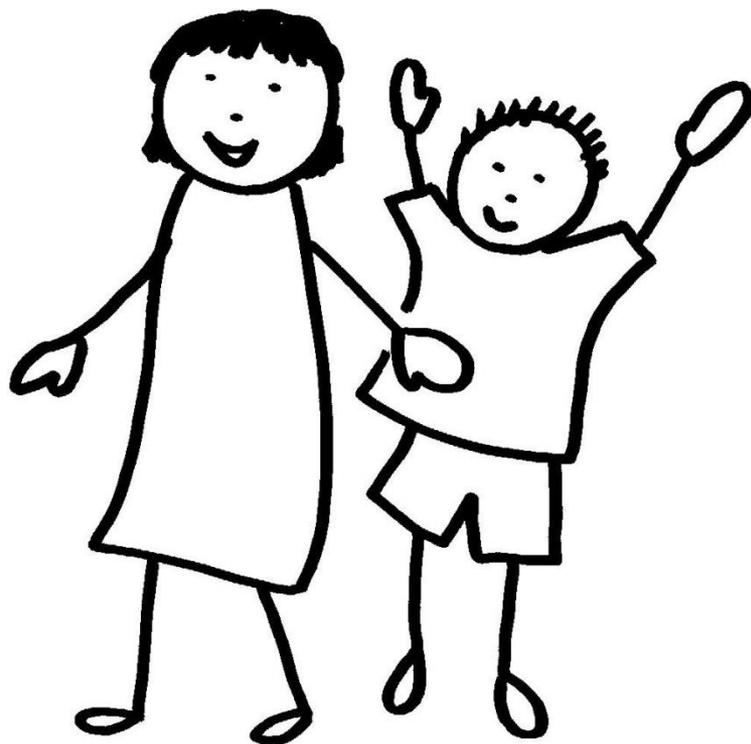
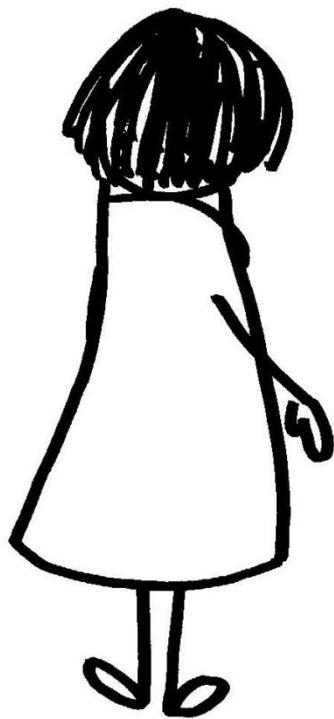


Even though I felt apprehensive each day I walked into school, gradually things changed.

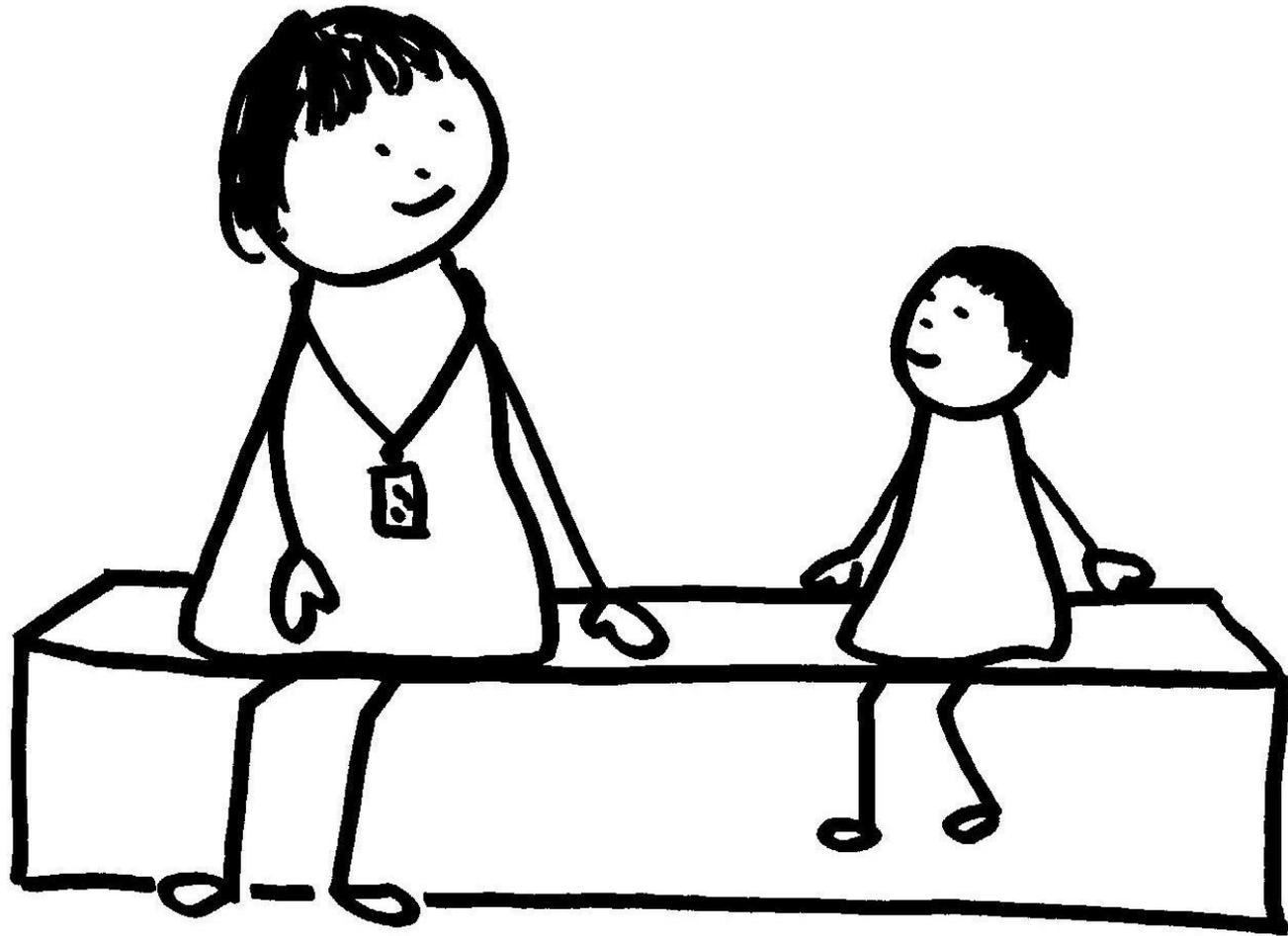
Something amazing happened.

I found that the children were nowhere near as scary as I had imagined them to be.

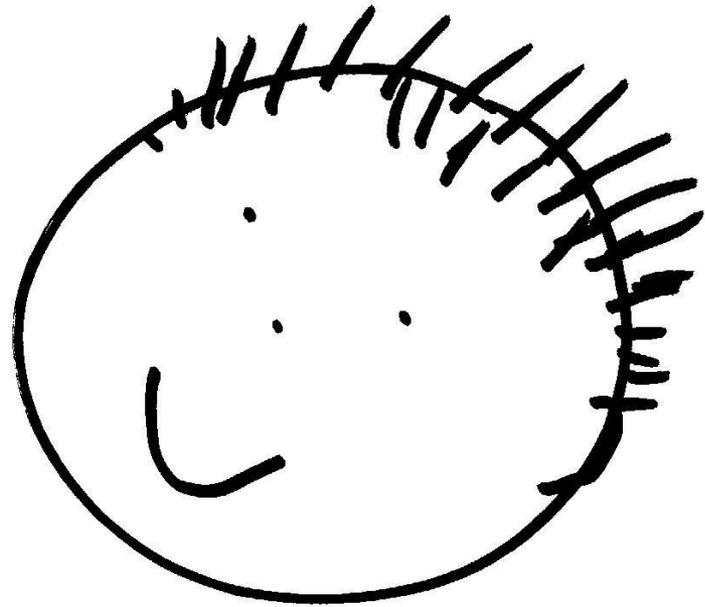
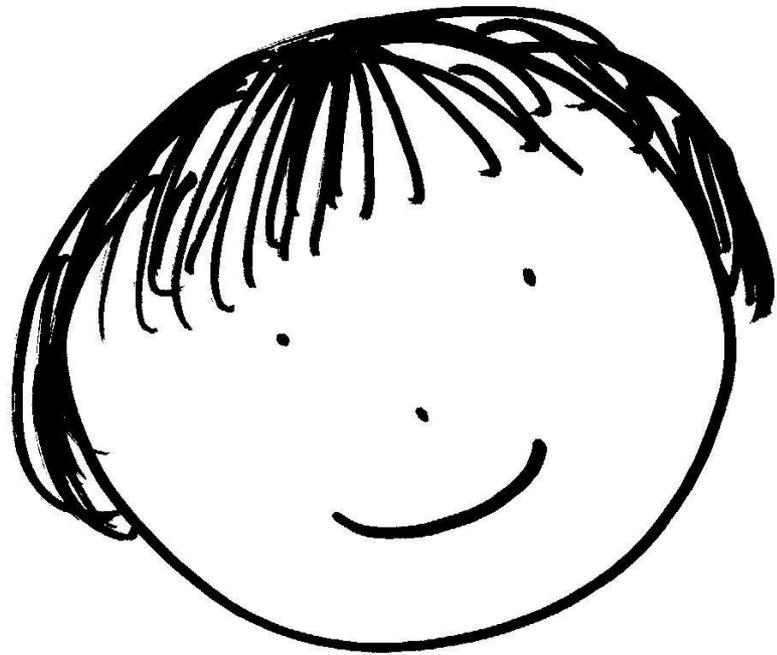
In fact they were rather wonderful. They were friendly and kind and they ran to help each other out when one of them was upset or hurt.



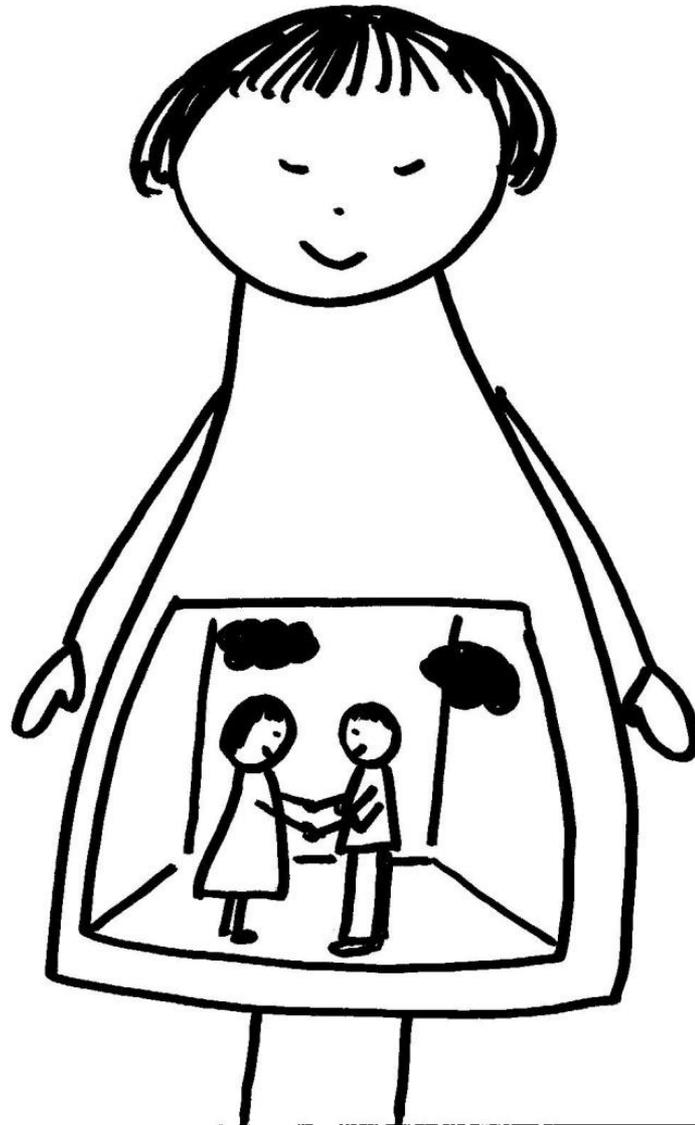
Being with the children in the  
playground filled me with hope.  
And when I was able to help them  
out, it kind of helped me too.



In fact, every time one of the children smiled or I saw one child being kind to another, it made my painful memories become less painful, until they were just memories.

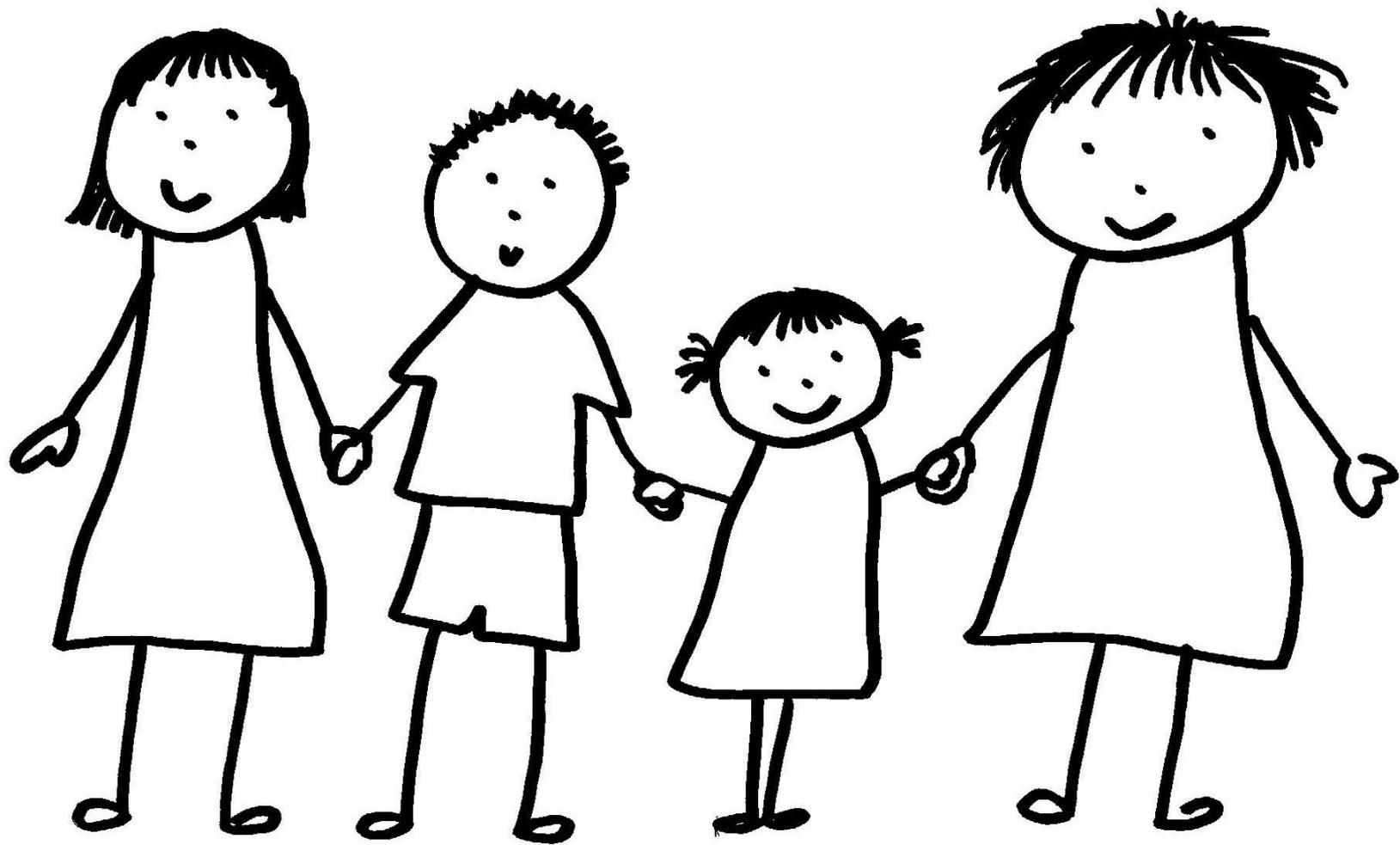


I am so glad that I was able to face  
my fears of the past, through  
learning to trust others.



And I am so grateful to the children  
there for being the wonderful  
young people they are.

They are all especially loveable!



Facing Asperger's alone meant living a life  
in fear.

Facing Asperger's together means having  
the strength to overcome fears.

I really don't need to pretend anymore.



This has been my story so far.  
I have learned a lot along the way.  
And there is still a lot more to learn.  
But I know I do not have to do life on my own.  
And neither do you.

Whatever you are afraid of, you do not have to face that  
fear alone.

Nor do you need to do anything special, nor pretend to  
be someone you are not, to be loved and enjoy  
friendship.

You are loveable, exactly as you are.



The End

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2014