

DOLLIE'S HOUSE



A Story of Laughter, love, &
Inclusion

Writer: Colene Smyer Hank

Illustrator: Sonja Samala



DOLLIE

1 John 4: ...8, 11-12

“God is love. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”

As you prepare to read “Dollie’s House”, it is important to understand why she was such an inspiration to, not only myself as her niece, but all who crossed her path. However, in order to grasp the characteristics that made up her dynamic personality that was filled with such enormous joy and laughter, so much that it would light up an entire room, it is important to focus on the Source of the abounding love that made her who she was all her days on earth; that being her Creator, God the Father.

The framework for comprehending what prepares the human heart and mind for appreciating and internalizing the magnanimous depth, importance, and impact of love on mankind can only be accomplished by focusing on its originator, God himself, a task that requires humility and the acceptance that no man has searched the mind of the Lord, or been his counselor just as the book of Isaiah states.

Therefore, let us begin with the author and historian, Jon Meacham’s words found in his book, The Hope of Glory, regarding such. **“When I am asked, as I occasionally am, how it is that I can believe in God, I answer as honestly and straightforwardly as I can. I believe in God on the same evidence that I believe in love: Both are invisible forces with visible effects. Sometimes these effects are noble, redemptive, warm, thrilling, and transporting; sometimes when love goes wrong and turns to self-regard, or to jealousy, or finally to hate, then it produces corruption and disorder.”**

Meacham continues by stating, “We must make our peace with mystery or else we might go mad. For me, faith is complicated, challenging, and sometimes confounding. It is not magical but mysterious.”

Yet, in spite of the challenges presented above, the Holy Bible states the greatest commandment from God is to love him first and then our neighbor as ourself; behavior required from each of us that is not easy by any means. If you have ever been confronted with loving someone who is unlovely, you will find the path to accomplish this is an enormous mountain to climb. Yet, climb we must.

My Aunt Dollie, an ordinary human trying to fulfill the desire of God for her life, had to deal with the same challenges we all face, and failed just as we do many times during her journey.

Yet, she marched on toward Zion by making the most of situations and allowing God to lead the way. And...while doing, would rare her head back exclaiming, "Laws have mercy. I do declare", followed by fits of laughter that shook her entire body.

Dear readers, she simply got it and allowed God's light to shine through her body and actions in such a way that dark rooms became illuminated as she included all present into her world. All God's people were important and accepted. Simply stated. Exclusion was not in her vocabulary.

Then, when taking her final breath, the words from her lips spoke volumes. Instead of her usual declaration that proceeded a burst of healthy laughter, before departing, she recognized her Savior and Lord by calling out, "Oh, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!" He truly was the love of her life that exuded from her entire being!

Finally, as you allow the words from her story that is told by the old house in which she lived for many wonderful years to soak into every fiber of your being, you are implored to study the illustrations carefully that so beautifully make the plot pop with excitement that were created by a young lady named Sonja in her sophomore year at Springfield Catholic High School whose behavior and mannerism reminded me of my Aunt Dollie. She is wise beyond her years and has a tremendous zest for life that prompts her to arise each morning feeling she has a song in her heart to sing. Her family members will describe her effervescent personality that radiates sunshine to one and all as a precious gift to behold.

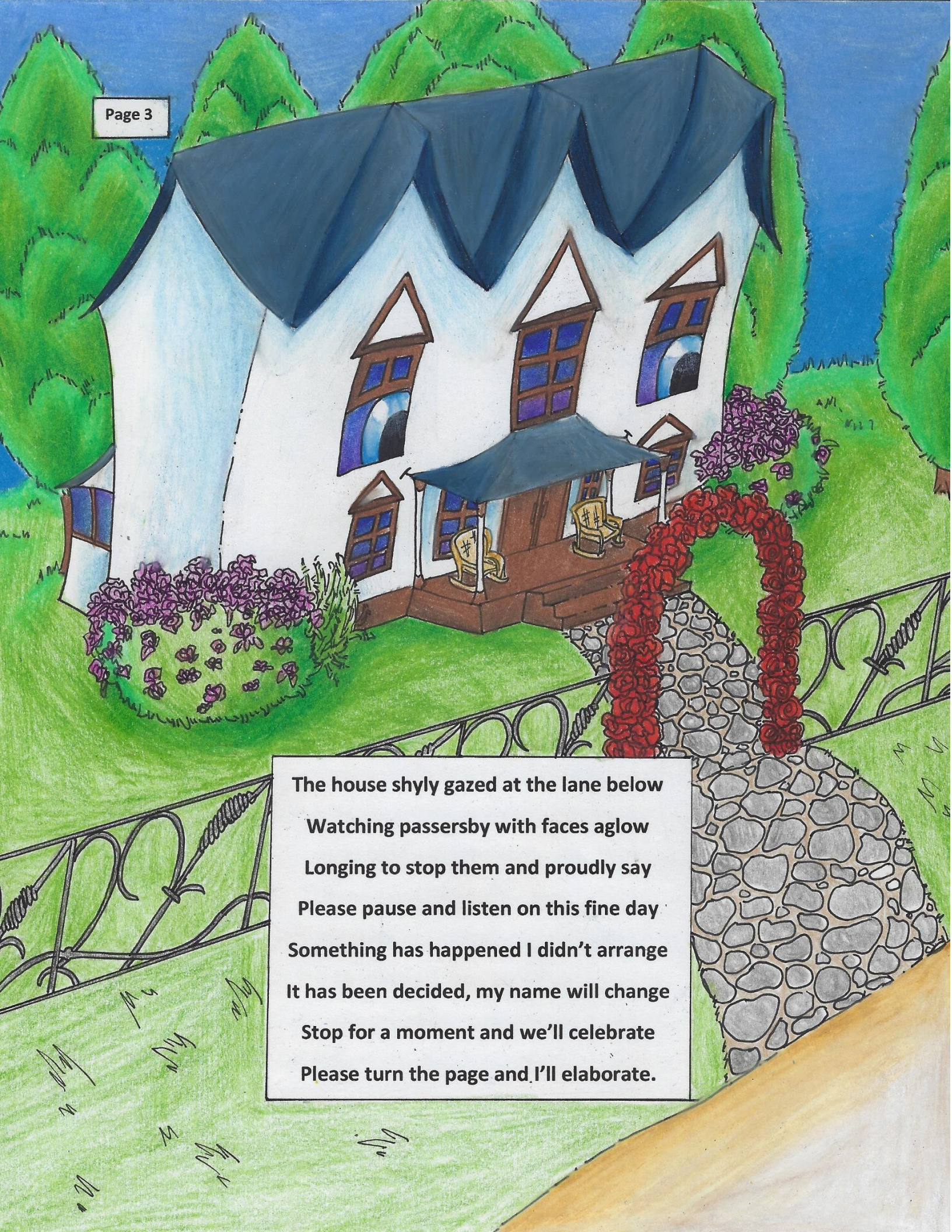
Thus, when you analyze the individuals she drew, you will note that she has crossed generations and recognized the importance of including all God's children into her life. No matter the race, color of skin, economic status, physical challenges, or age, all are members of God's creation and to be valued. Folks, Sonja is a rare jewel that God allowed me the honor of meeting. I prayed for an illustrator that had the depth of talent and range of understanding to draw the images you see and GOD PROVIDED.

May God bless you as you read this story written for all ages! And...above all, "Laws Have Mercy! I do declare!" Rare back and laugh!

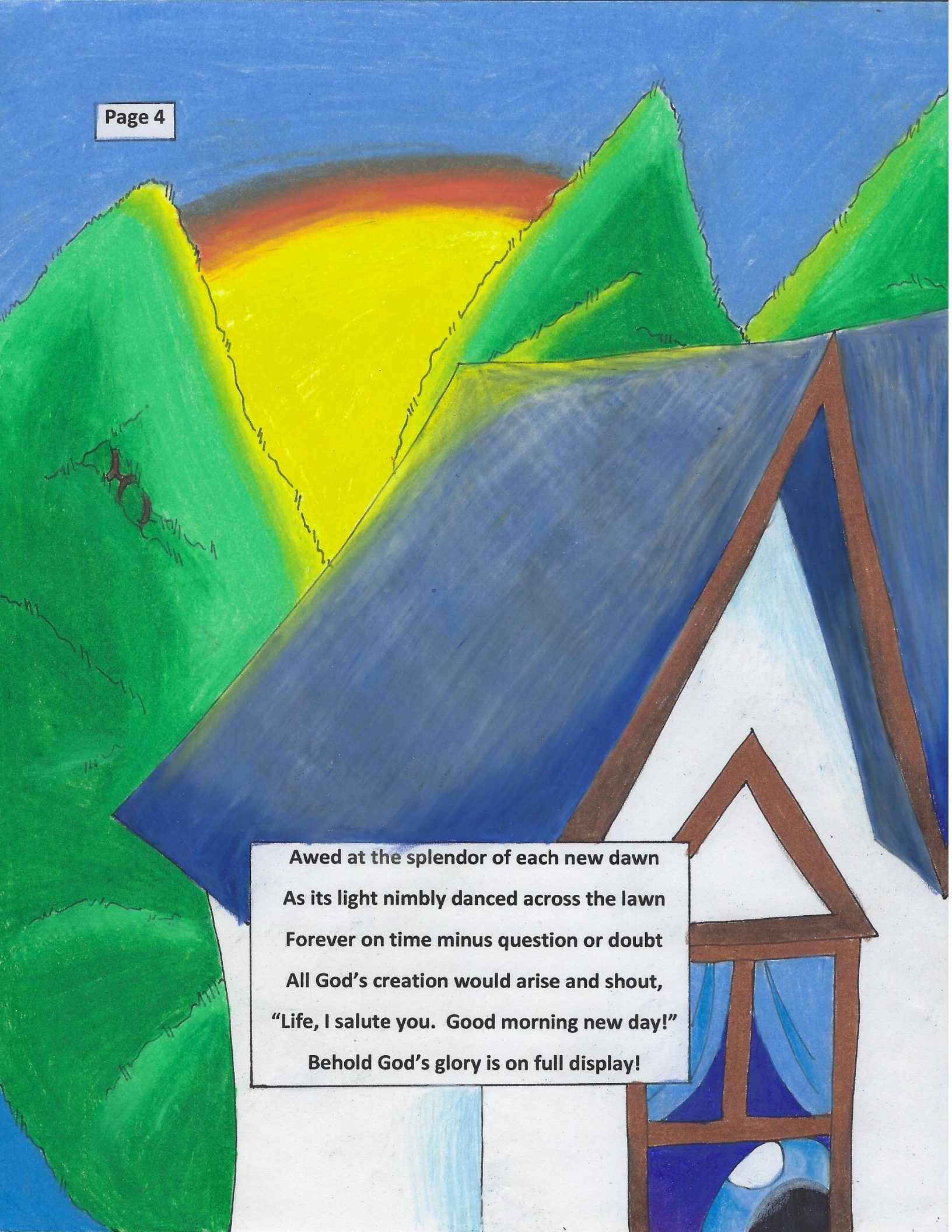
Dear readers, just as God's love was made complete in Aunt Dollie, my prayer for all of us is that we allow our glorious and omnipotent Father to do the same in our lives. Without him we can do nothing, but through him, all things are possible. Amen!



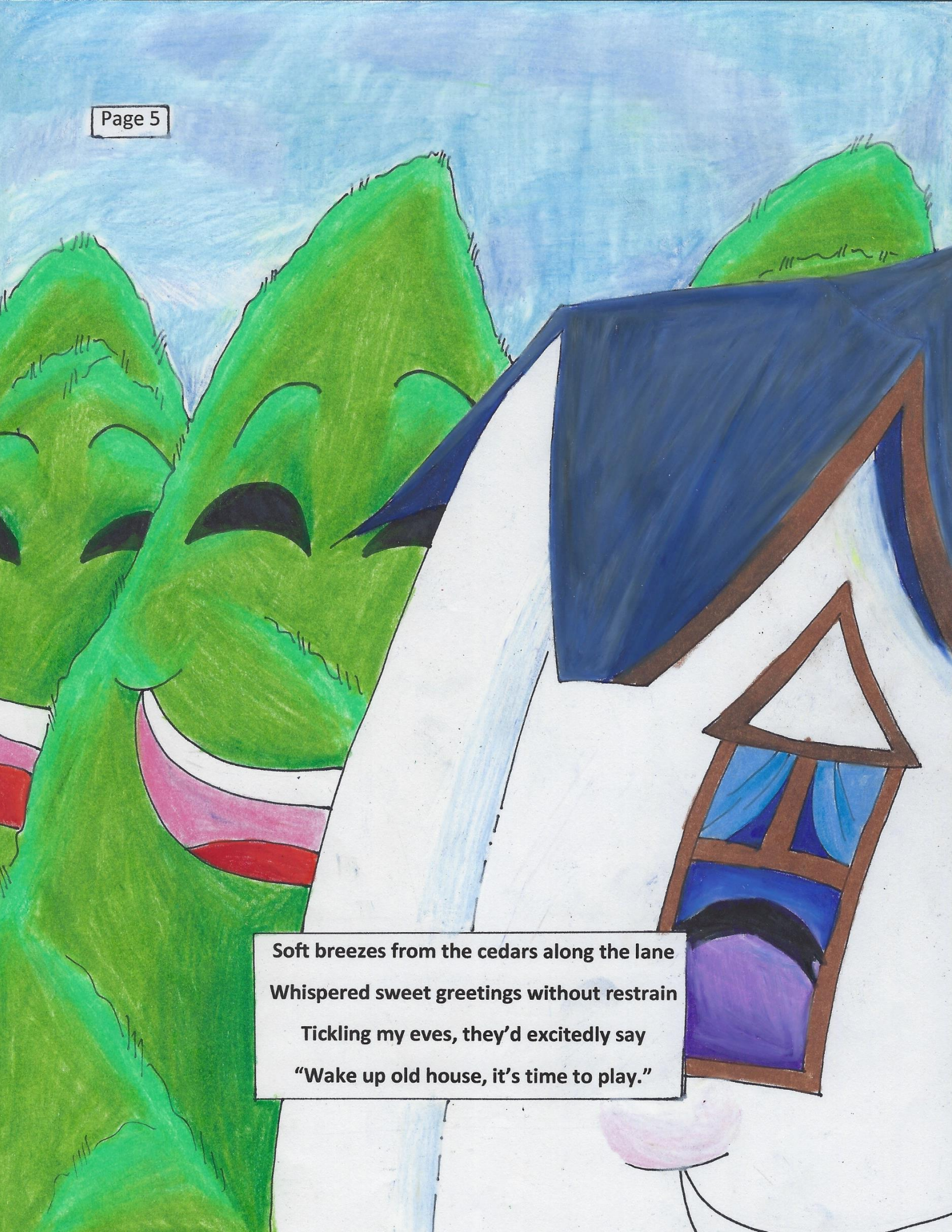
*Love,
Colene*



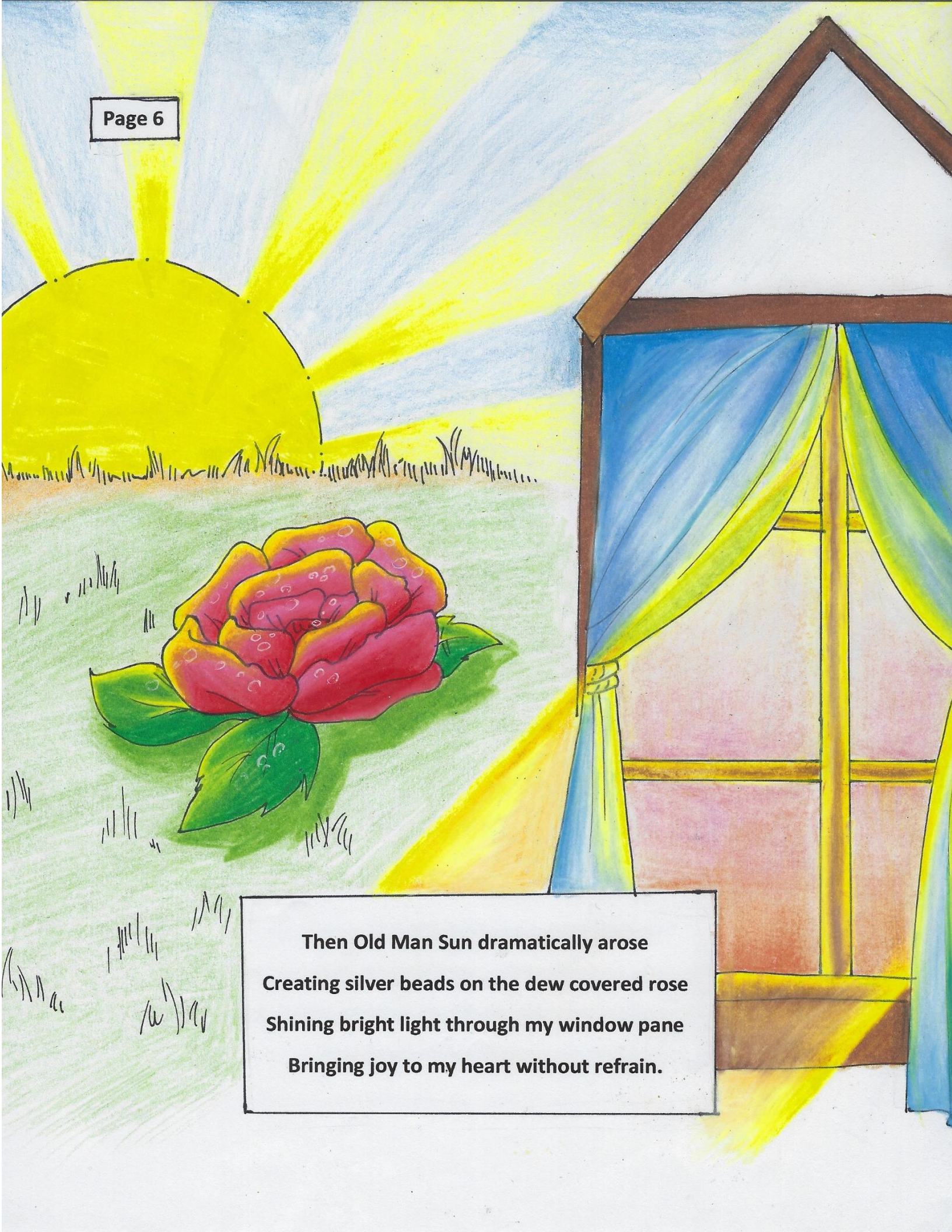
The house shyly gazed at the lane below
Watching passersby with faces aglow
Longing to stop them and proudly say
Please pause and listen on this fine day
Something has happened I didn't arrange
It has been decided, my name will change
Stop for a moment and we'll celebrate
Please turn the page and I'll elaborate.



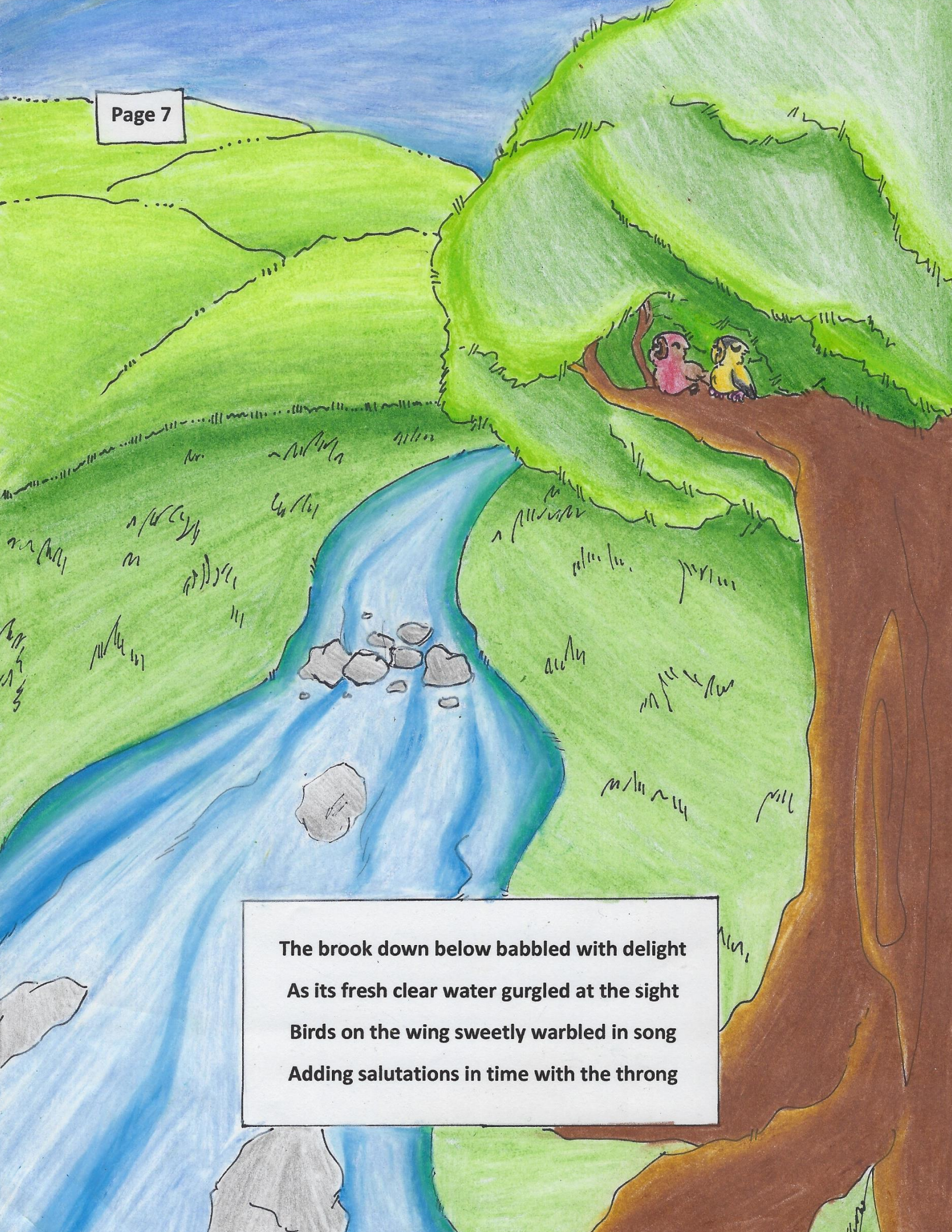
Awed at the splendor of each new dawn
As its light nimbly danced across the lawn
Forever on time minus question or doubt
All God's creation would arise and shout,
"Life, I salute you. Good morning new day!"
Behold God's glory is on full display!



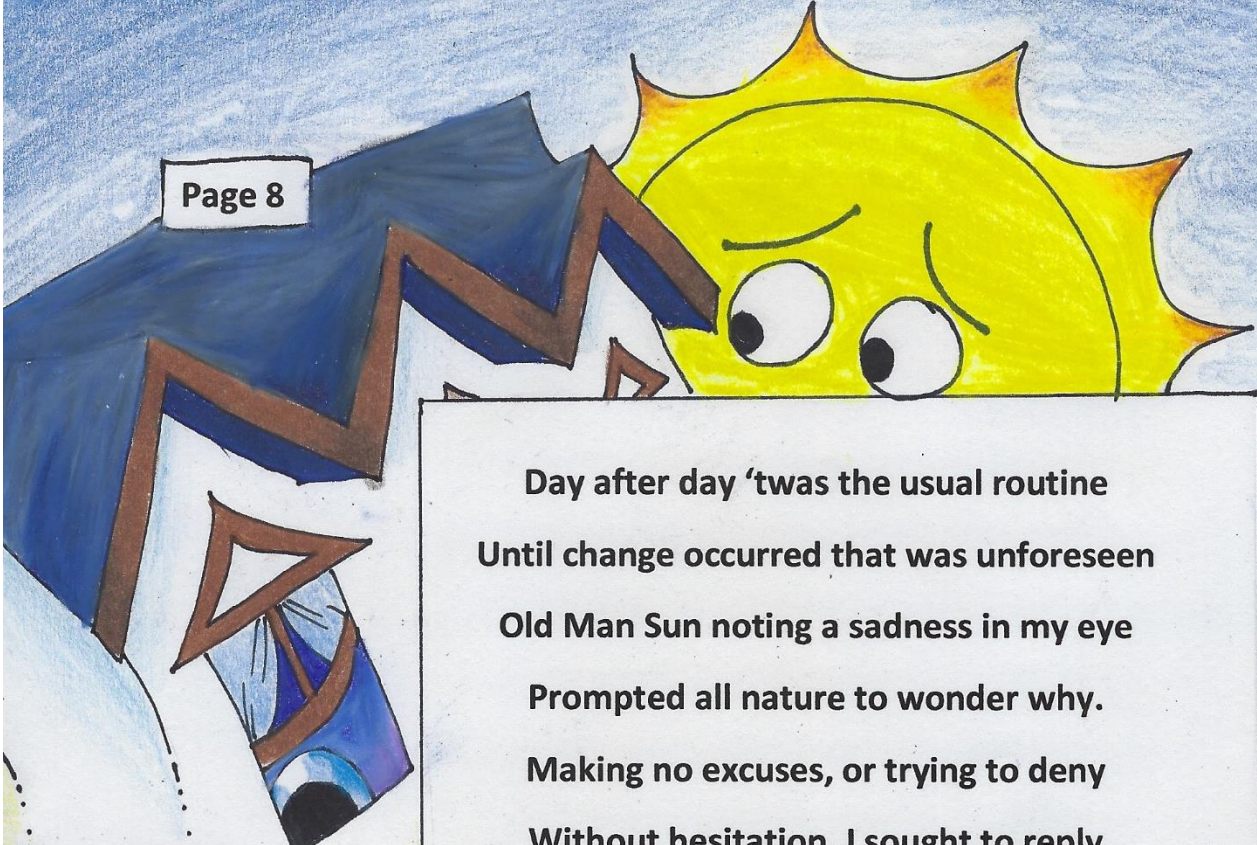
Soft breezes from the cedars along the lane
Whispered sweet greetings without restrain
Tickling my eves, they'd excitedly say
"Wake up old house, it's time to play."



**Then Old Man Sun dramatically arose
Creating silver beads on the dew covered rose
Shining bright light through my window pane
Bringing joy to my heart without refrain.**



The brook down below babbled with delight
As its fresh clear water gurgled at the sight
Birds on the wing sweetly warbled in song
Adding salutations in time with the throng



Day after day 'twas the usual routine
Until change occurred that was unforeseen
Old Man Sun noting a sadness in my eye
Prompted all nature to wonder why.
Making no excuses, or trying to deny
Without hesitation, I sought to reply
Laughter's the very soul of those we meet
For lifting one's spirit, it's, oh, so sweet
A house with wide walls I'd like to be
Filled to the brim with witty repartee
Where gurgles and giggles are heard inside
And everyone is welcomed, no one denied
Whose greeting mat's intent is always apparent
"Laughter in this house," its official declarant.



Laughter
In This
House





Wedding!

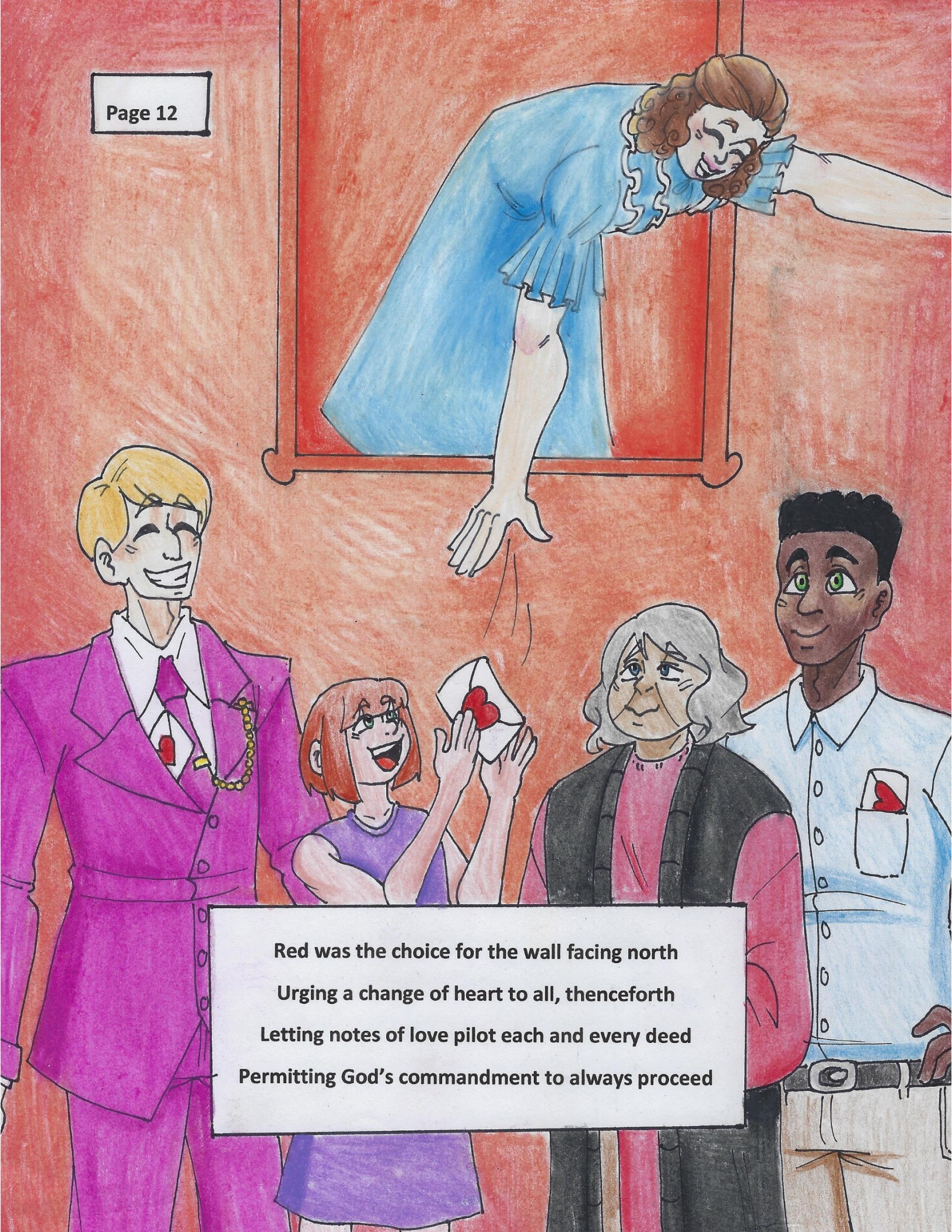
Then suddenly one day came a giant surprise
As a missive was delivered before my eyes
The one and only son had decided to marry
Get ready everyone! No time to tarry!



A bride named Dollie gaily arrived on the scene
Blessed with a wit that was notably keen.
Then changes occurred that rocked me to my core
Jarring each room from ceiling to floor
Revisions were rumored with things aflutter
Causing those inside to stammer and mutter.



Watching young Dollie was a full-time job
Prompting old hearts to excitedly throb
New colors appeared for each and every wall
No job too big! No task too small!
Loudly sound the drum roll! Bring out the fife!
This old house is coming to life!

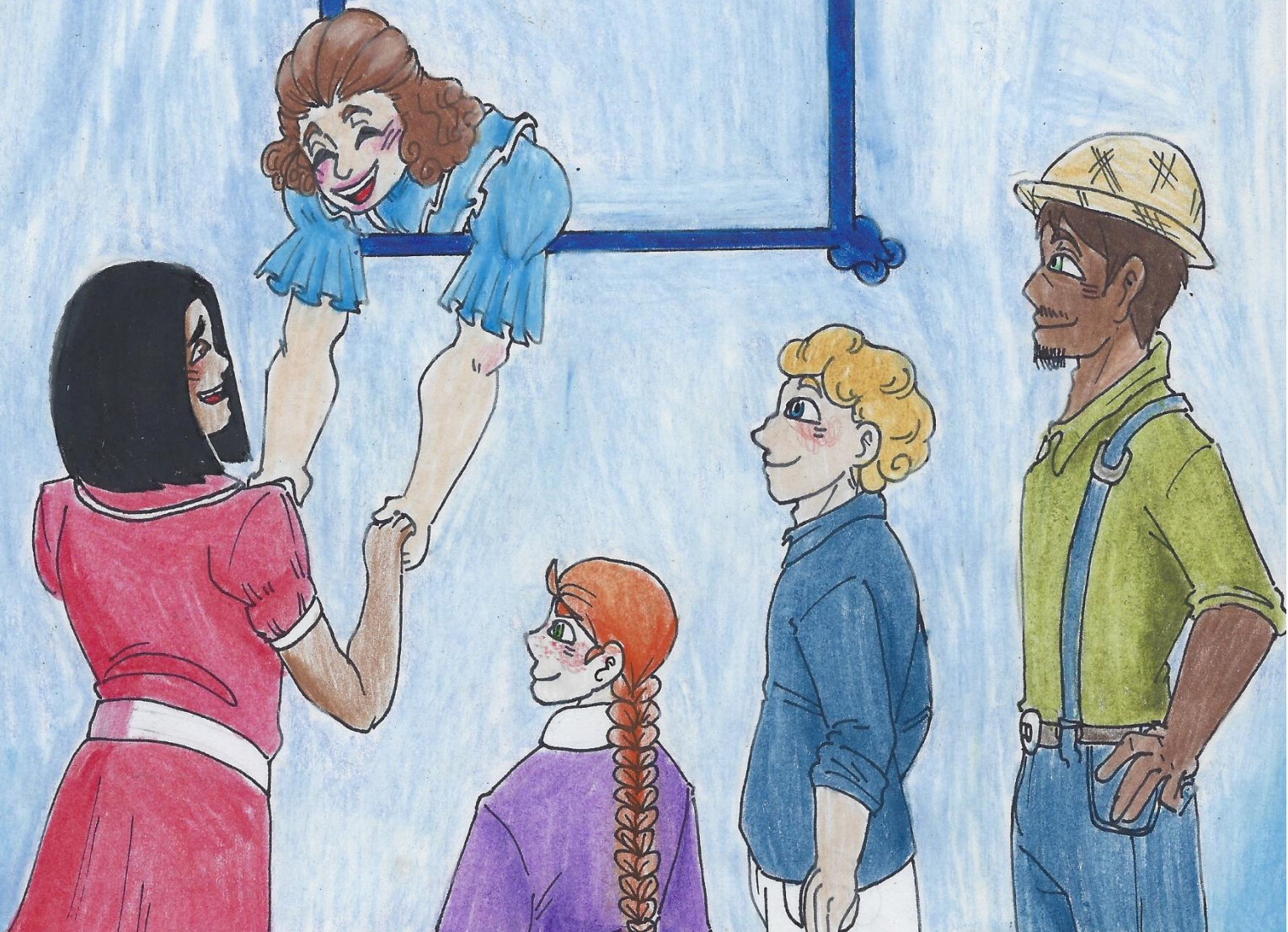


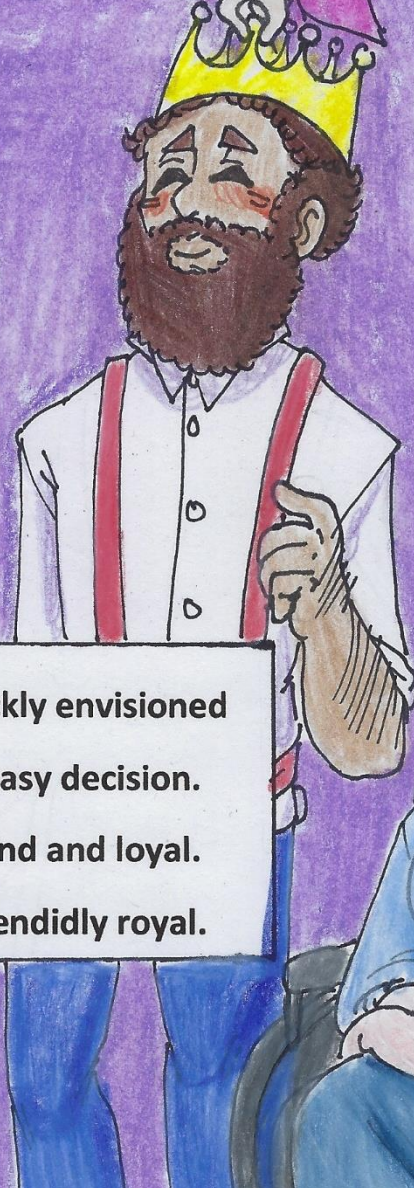
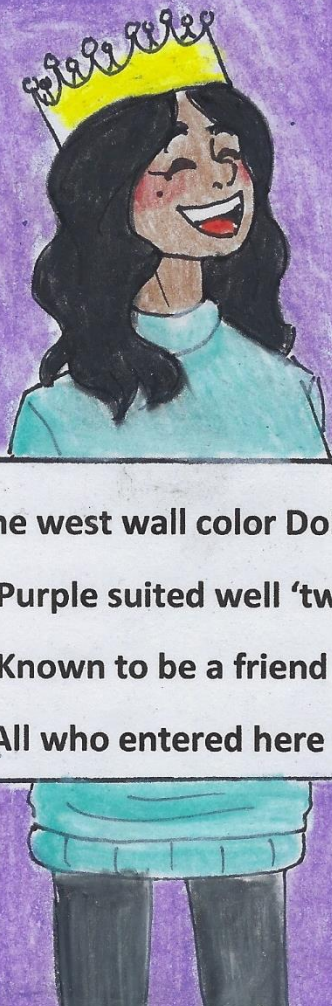
Red was the choice for the wall facing north
Urging a change of heart to all, thenceforth
Letting notes of love pilot each and every deed
Permitting God's commandment to always proceed

The south wall glowed in yellow sunshine
Heralding God's plan for a future divine
Trusting in the Lord to make things right
The light of hope inside would ever burn bright.



Blue was the answer for the wall facing west
Signaling how to act when put to the test
"All will be alright", was her usual reply
When things went cockeyed and ran awry.

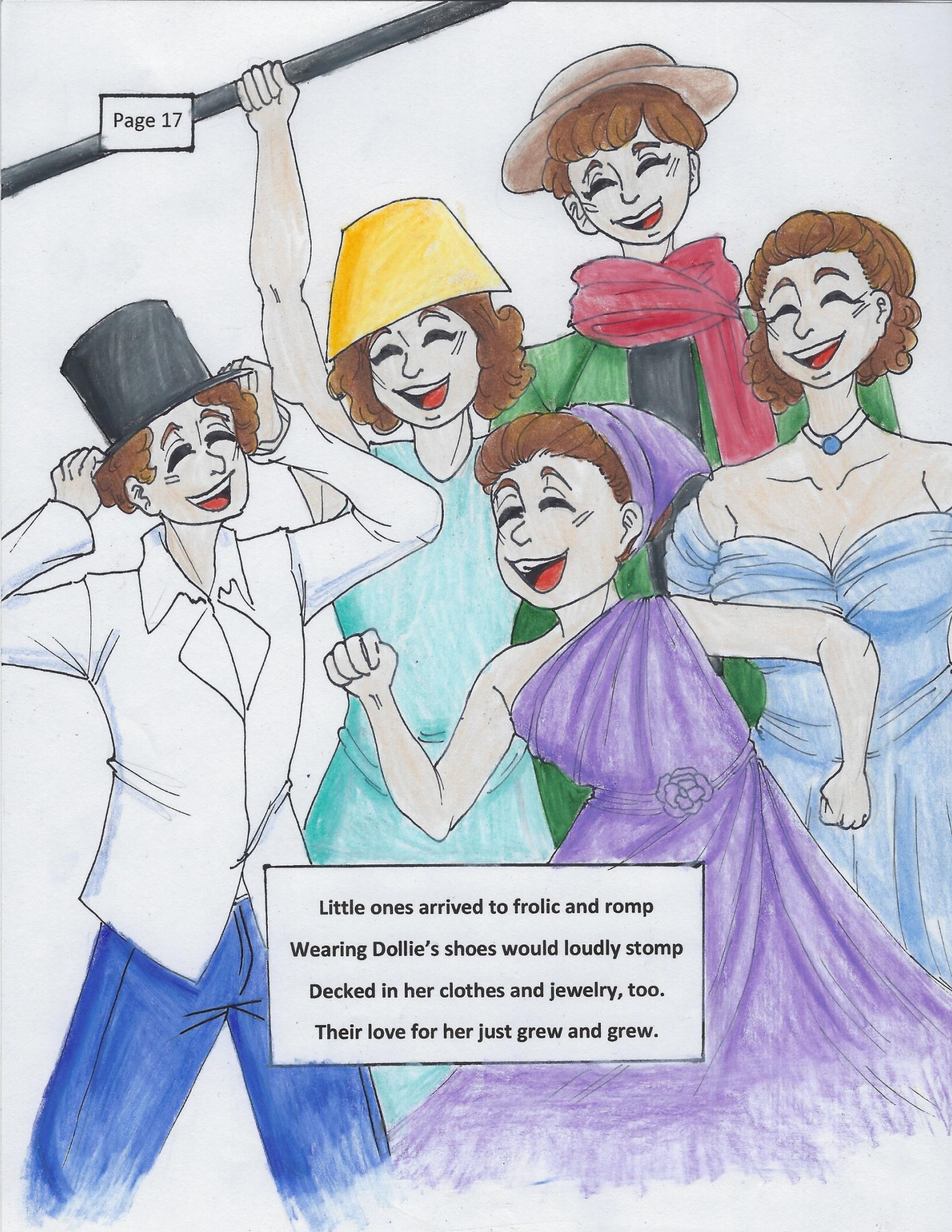




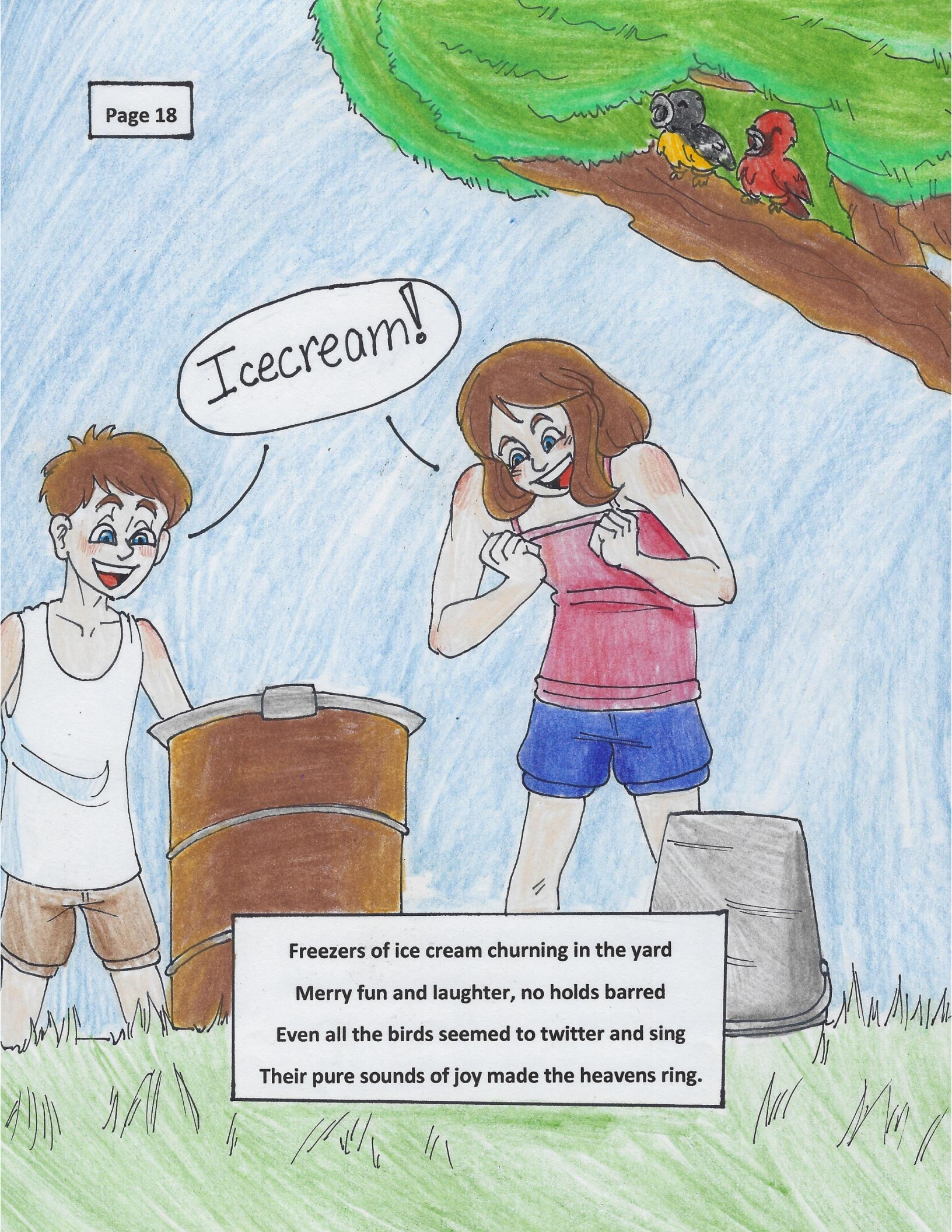
The west wall color Dollie quickly envisioned
Purple suited well 'twas an easy decision.
Known to be a friend both kind and loyal.
All who entered here felt splendidly royal.

Over the years, my walls rocked with joy
Melodious sounds nothing could destroy
Rattling my windows with laughter galore
Musical strains folks grew to adore.



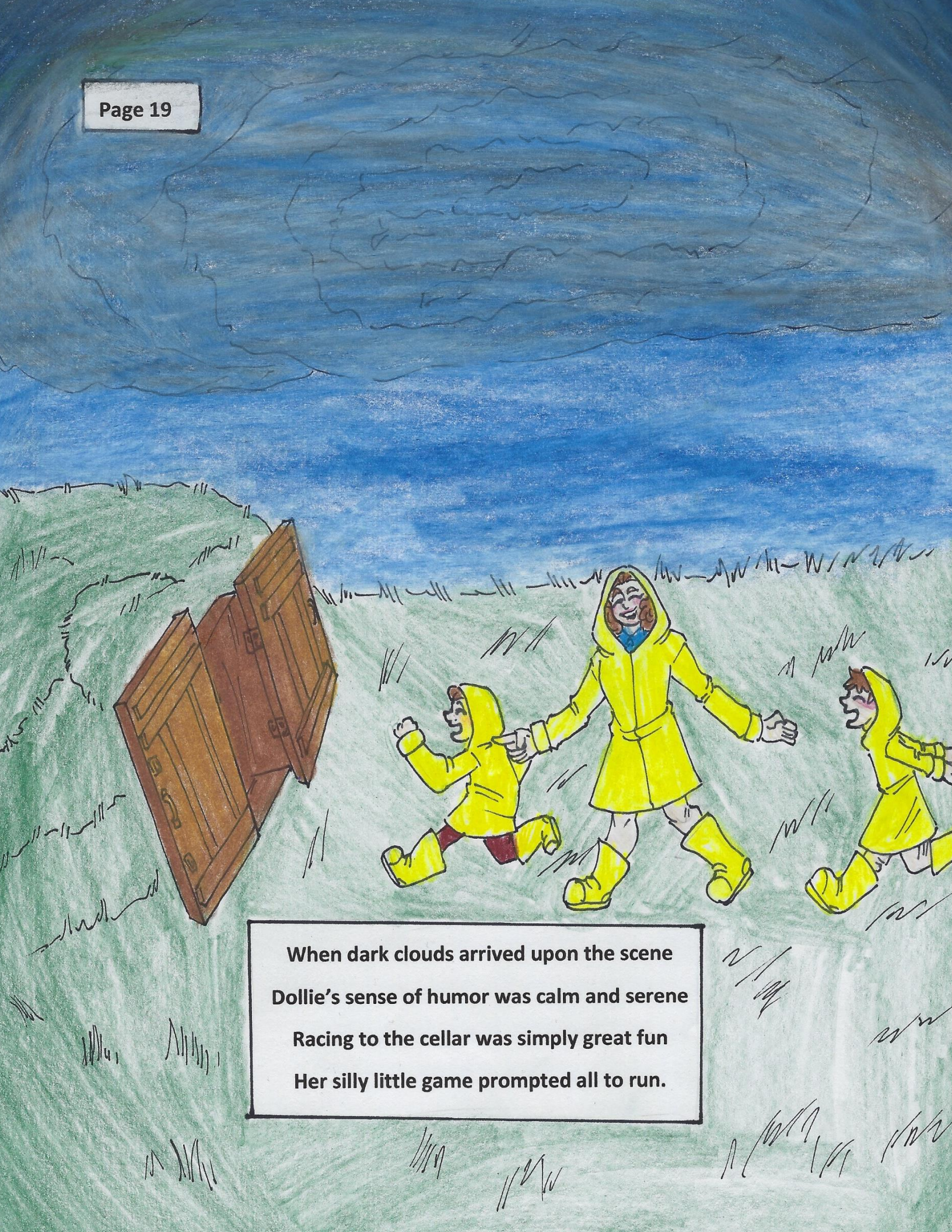


Little ones arrived to frolic and romp
Wearing Dollie's shoes would loudly stomp
Decked in her clothes and jewelry, too.
Their love for her just grew and grew.



Icecream!

Freezers of ice cream churning in the yard
Merry fun and laughter, no holds barred
Even all the birds seemed to twitter and sing
Their pure sounds of joy made the heavens ring.



When dark clouds arrived upon the scene
Dollie's sense of humor was calm and serene
Racing to the cellar was simply great fun
Her silly little game prompted all to run.

Steely Chapel Church each Sunday she would go
Arriving full of vigor with face aglow
Teaching little children with joy and delight
About God for all being love and light.

God made her happy 'twas obvious to all
For sure she believed and answered his call
Wrapped in humility, compassion was extended
Jesus was her Savior, to whom she'd surrendered

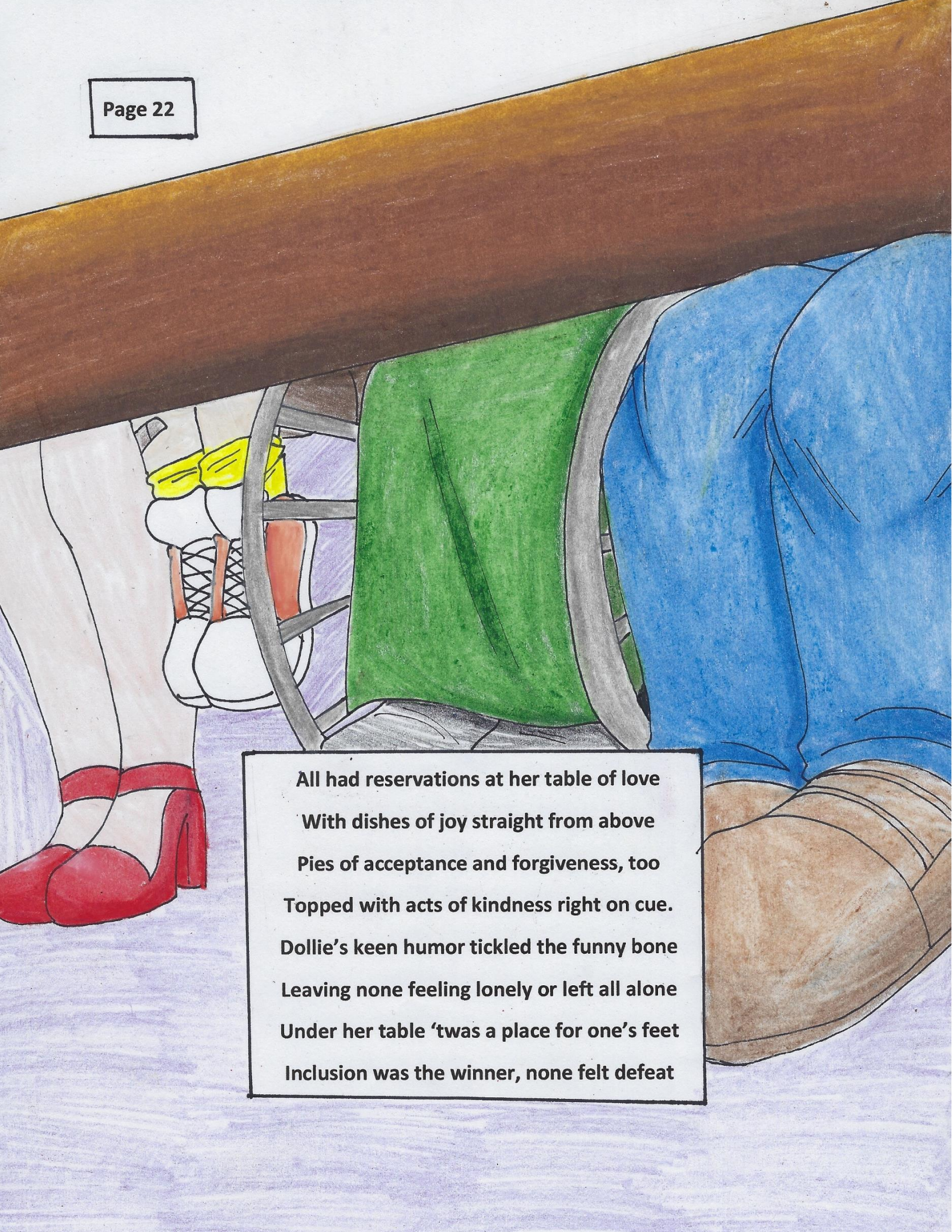


LAWS HAVE MERCY

When "Laws have mercy", carried in the air
All sadness and gloom had better beware.
"Twas her prelude to laughter others had heard
Meant resisting her joy was hopelessly absurd
Choked full of life and unencumbered
Frowns and snarls were totally outnumbered

It penetrated hearts and changed those around
Building foundations that were safe and sound
Love knows no boundaries and can't be contained
Changing dark to light, failing to be restrained





All had reservations at her table of love
With dishes of joy straight from above
Pies of acceptance and forgiveness, too
Topped with acts of kindness right on cue.
Dollie's keen humor tickled the funny bone
Leaving none feeling lonely or left all alone
Under her table 'twas a place for one's feet
Inclusion was the winner, none felt defeat

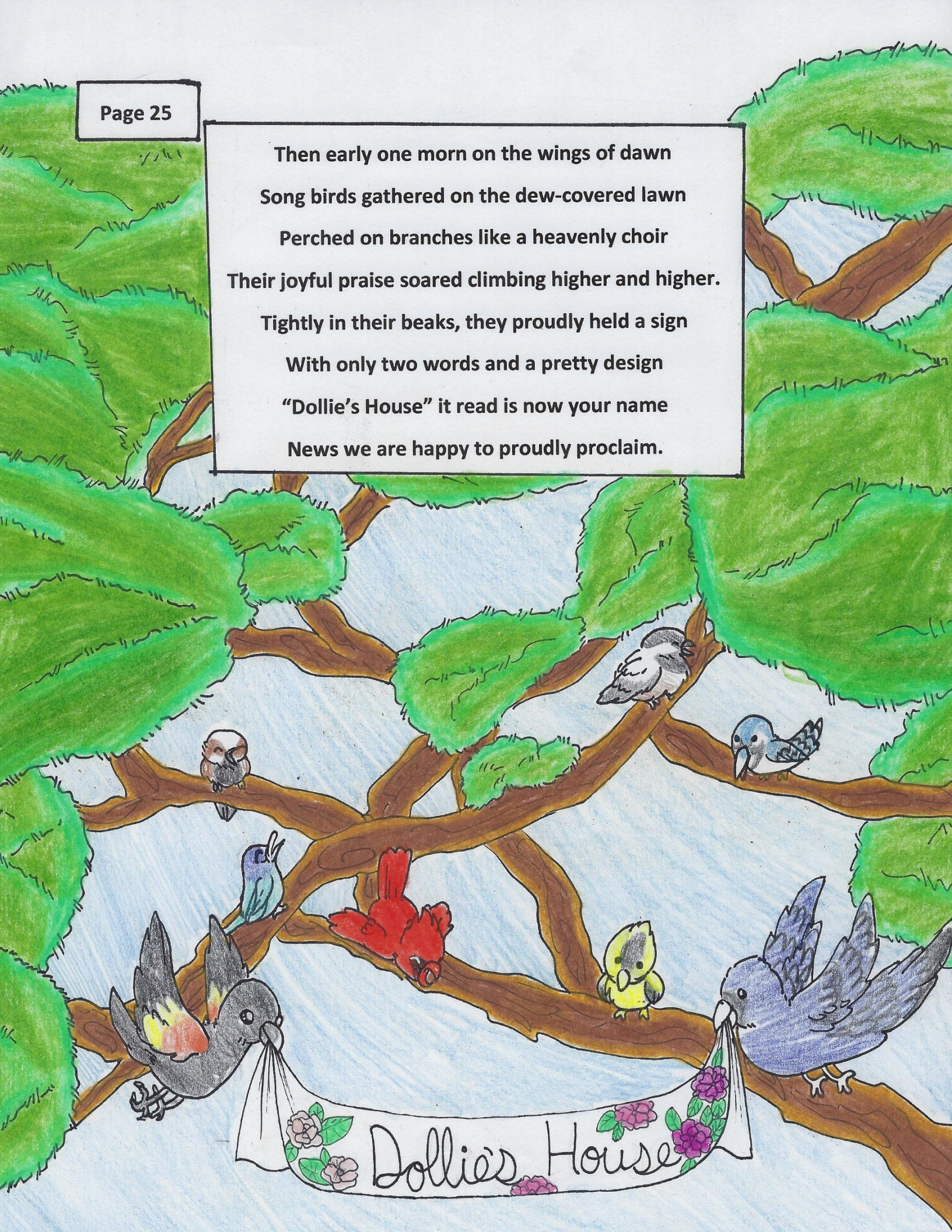
As day turned to night and time moved ahead
Contagious joy and laughter grew and widely spread
As love tore down walls built on hate
It prompted evil actions totally to abate.





Wide walls I wanted, a surprise I got
A blessing far greater than ever thought
Dollie's laughter on the wind did quickly carry
Recognized by others as legendary
It bounced off hills and echoed in hollers
Changing hearts of both mothers and fathers
Flowing over rocks as it gurgled in the creek
Unsuspecting strangers it did diligently seek
Frowns and dower faces were forever banished
Compassion sweetly reined and selfishness vanished.

Then early one morn on the wings of dawn
Song birds gathered on the dew-covered lawn
Perched on branches like a heavenly choir
Their joyful praise soared climbing higher and higher.
Tightly in their beaks, they proudly held a sign
With only two words and a pretty design
"Dollie's House" it read is now your name
News we are happy to proudly proclaim.



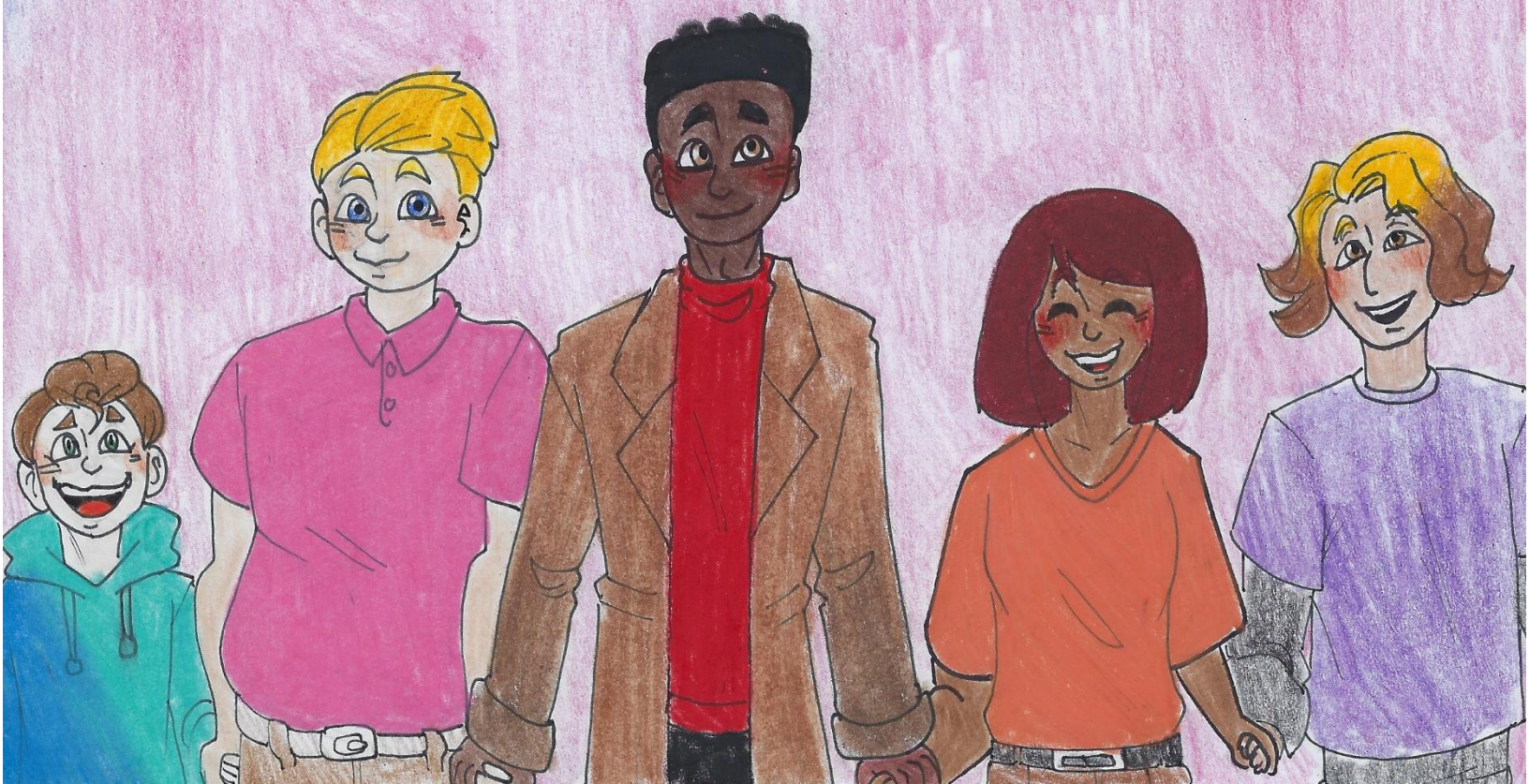


Due to joy and laughter always inside
The walls of your heart are forever wide
All God's creation welcomed and included
No one left behind, or ever excluded.

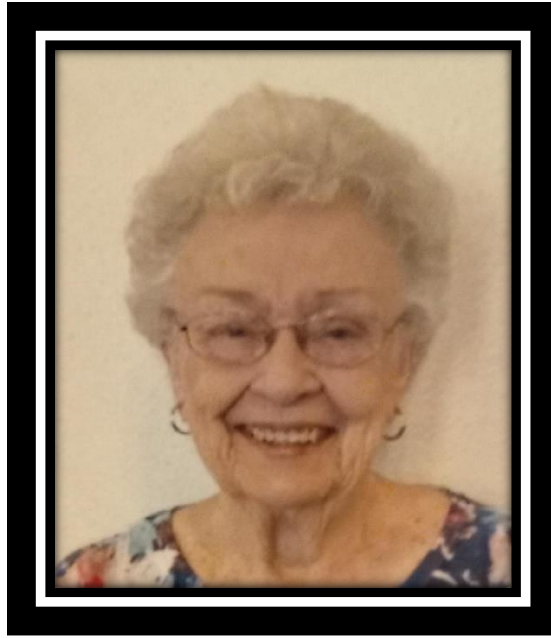


One final thought before I bid adieu
Is advice clearly stated just for you
While roaming these hills, be acutely aware
Listen for these words to quickly fill the air

"Laws have mercy! I do declare!"
Spread joy and laughter everywhere.
Reach out to others showing you care
Letting love ride on the wings of prayer.



In Appreciation



Special Thanks for Support and Love Throughout This Project From:



Betty Waters Carlson



(Daughter of Carl and Dollie Waters)

Dear Readers,

As a newlywed, the challenges Dollie faced the moment she called the house you have just witnessed come to life in the story, “home”, were immense indeed; circumstances that would be undoubtably daunting to the most experienced individual, much less someone of her young age. Not only would she be adjusting to marriage, but already settled and waiting inside were two more inhabitants, her husband’s mother and his bedridden grandmother, both of whom would heavily rely on her for comfort and care.

Additionally, in God’s good and perfect time, a sweet little bundle of joy arrived on the scene that was given the name, “Betty”. Are you getting the picture of how wide the walls in Dollie’s own young life had expanded within record time? Yet, regardless of all these complicated circumstances, the statement always used to describe how Dollie handled it was, “She just stepped in, took hold, and appeared to not be bothered by anything as she laughed and took it all in stride.”

Amazingly, as Betty lovingly provided all the background information necessary for establishing a thorough understanding of all the elements that would play into the story, the admiration already felt for Aunt Dollie grew by enormous leaps and bounds in the writer's mind.

Not only had her walls of life expanded due to the elements described above, but broadened even more by the responsibilities of being a farmer's wife that included milking and raising garden stuff that had to be canned for the winter season.

Looking back on the situation, Betty stated that with so many relatives having been teachers, she was unable to recall a time when she wasn't being instructed by some member of the family.

Since her great grandmother was a Kansas state spelling champ in 1928, she took immense pride in teaching "Little Betty" how to spell for hours at a time. Having taught forty years in Western Kansas, receiving an education was paramount in her mind.

Consequently, when "Little Betty" entered school, she was already proficiently reading with such ease that she was appointed as a tutor for older students needing assistance.

Attending a rural school where several grades were educated in a one room setting, her brain resembled a sponge as she soaked in the exciting concepts taught to older children.

Looking back, she cherished the freedom to pledge the flag, sing patriotic songs and pray daily, so much, that she labeled them as "true blessings". And...being accustomed to the great outdoors, she loved the softball games, Red Rover, Duck-Duck Goose and Stink Base.

Additionally, Betty considered the Christmas programs at the school and church nothing short of fabulous because of all the singing and festivities that they encompassed. Wearing rosy cheeks, classmates would locate the perfect tree in the woods and decorate it with hand-made paper chains, ornaments, popcorn, and cranberries. In fact, music was so valued by Betty that four additional years of private voice lessons were provided by her family which resulted in a beautiful trained voice that she used in all facets of her life.

Since the value of education was imprinted so deeply into her core as a child, Betty pursued her BS in education from Southwest Missouri State, followed by a Masters in Education in Topeka, Kansas where she taught second grade.

While there, she met and married Sam Carlson, (48 years) who later became a principal; a union that would bless them with a son, Derek who then bestowed on them two grandsons, Alex and Brady.

Being a member of the First Baptist Church in Willow Springs, Missouri since 1978, Betty has taught Sunday School, served as a member of the choir, and been a leading voice in many Cantatas, and still serves on the Benevolence Committee. Today at age 86, Betty truly enjoys music, learning in Sunday School, and being renewed by stimulating sermons.

Last, this writer must extend a special thank you to Betty for sharing Aunt Dollie with my sisters and I throughout childhood. We were frequent visitors in her home having a ball playing dress up and loudly clomping around in shoes that were several sizes too big. The more noise we made; the louder Aunt Dollie laughed! "Laws have mercy. I do declare."



Dress up at Aunt Dollies House



Meet The Illustrator

Sonja Samala



As you view the beautiful illustrations created for “Dollie’s House” by Catholic High School Sophomore, Sonja Samala, it will take only moments to conclude that you are witnessing God’s hand at work in the life of a special person he has blessed with enormous talent. As the old house tells the story of a beloved aunt whose heart was filled with love for all those she met, the emotions it exudes will flow from each page to the very core of your soul. Even the golden radiance from the sunbeams streaming through its old window panes will produce such warmth within your heart that you will be immediately drawn into the plot.

Then, as you witness Dollie, whose laughter echoes over the hills and hollers of the Missouri Ozarks touch the lives of all God’s creation, no matter the age, race, or economic status, your joy will be complete. In so doing, it will also become evident that these illustrations required enormous talent, imagination, and compassion; feelings that were generated from a young student whose love for her fellowman should serve as an example for all of us to follow.

Ladies and gentlemen, after hearing Sonja’s mother describe how her daughter faces each day, it will soon become clear why God chose to bestow on one so young the enormous talent that produces such beautiful work from her hands.

Her mother shared that upon arising each morning, wearing an enormous smile, Sonja will proclaim great excitement about wonderful things that she feels will unfold. Although she can not name them, there is no doubt but that her day will be glorious. Given this, is it not evident why the Lord reached down and blessed her as a young person he has chosen for his purpose and pleasure?

After asking Sonja when she knew being an artist was her greatest desire, this was her reply:

“I never had any other feelings for art besides love and happiness. Art is what I excel at and it helps bring my ideas to life. It especially makes me feel accomplished more than any other task I may do. I like the balance that it brings to me and the art I make.

And, the reason I chose to pursue art as a career is because I knew this would be an area of expertise I could completely excel at and put my all in. It makes me extremely happy and gets me through the day.

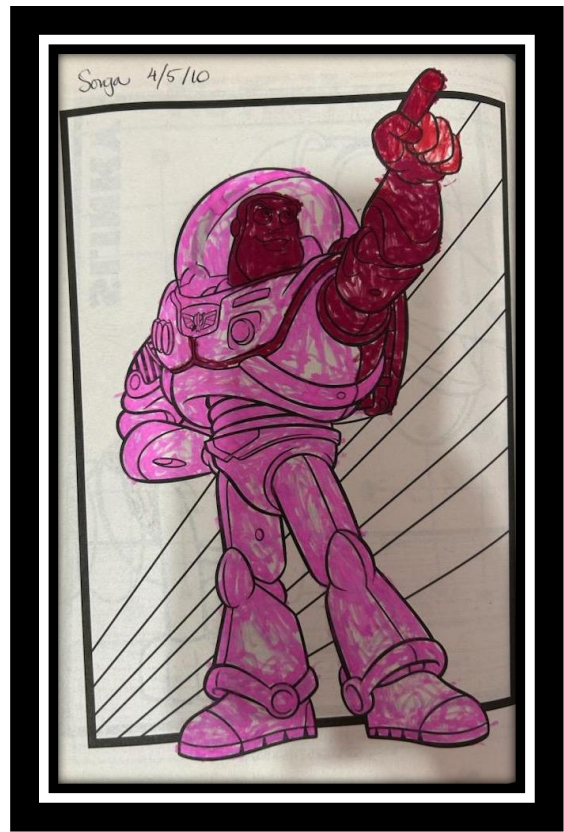
Even better, if I was able to make someone smile due to my artwork, my joy would be complete.”

Certainly, after you view the pieces of art below created on her journey of life thus far, I am certain you will agree that the future that awaits her hard work will be nothing short of extraordinary, all because she does it for the glory of God.

1 Peter 4:10

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.

(Sonja’s artwork below)

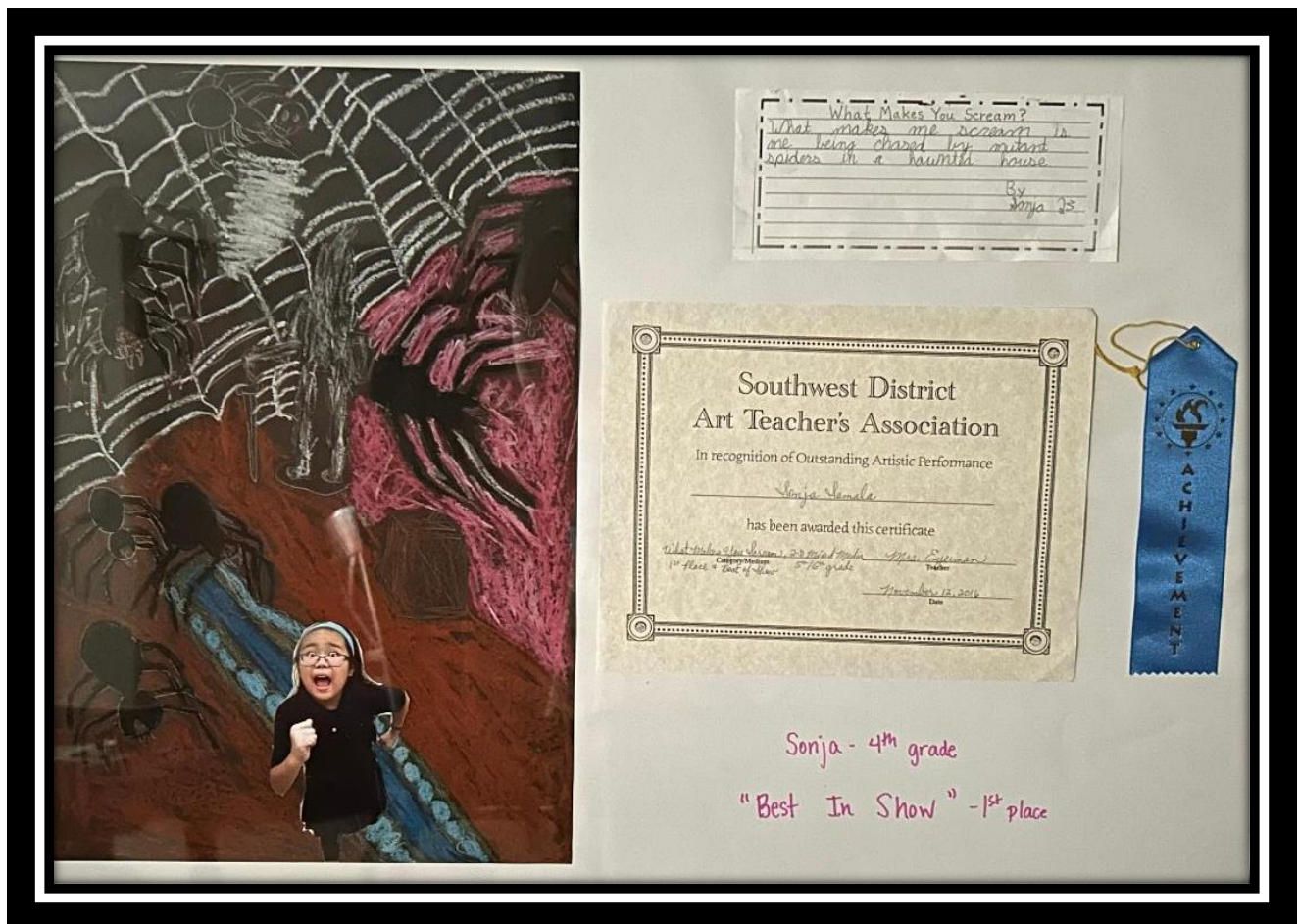
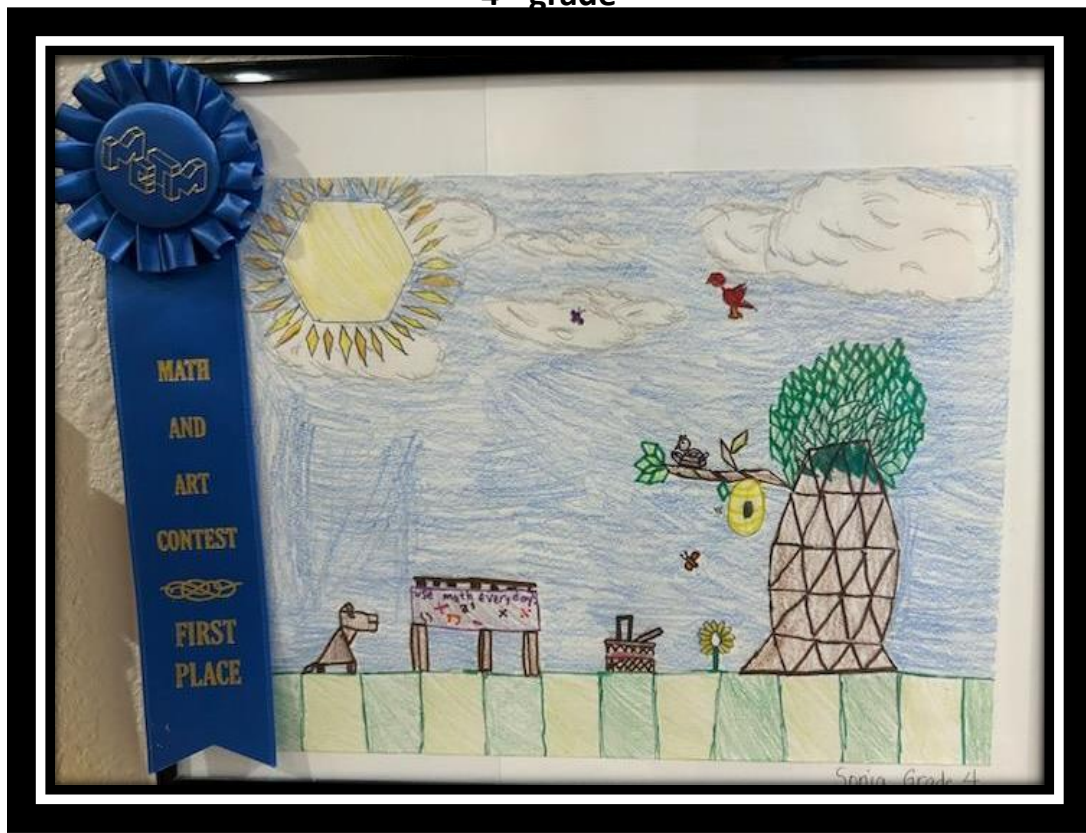


Sonja learning to color within the lines at age 3



Sonja Blue Ribbon in Math & Art Contest Grade 1

4th grade



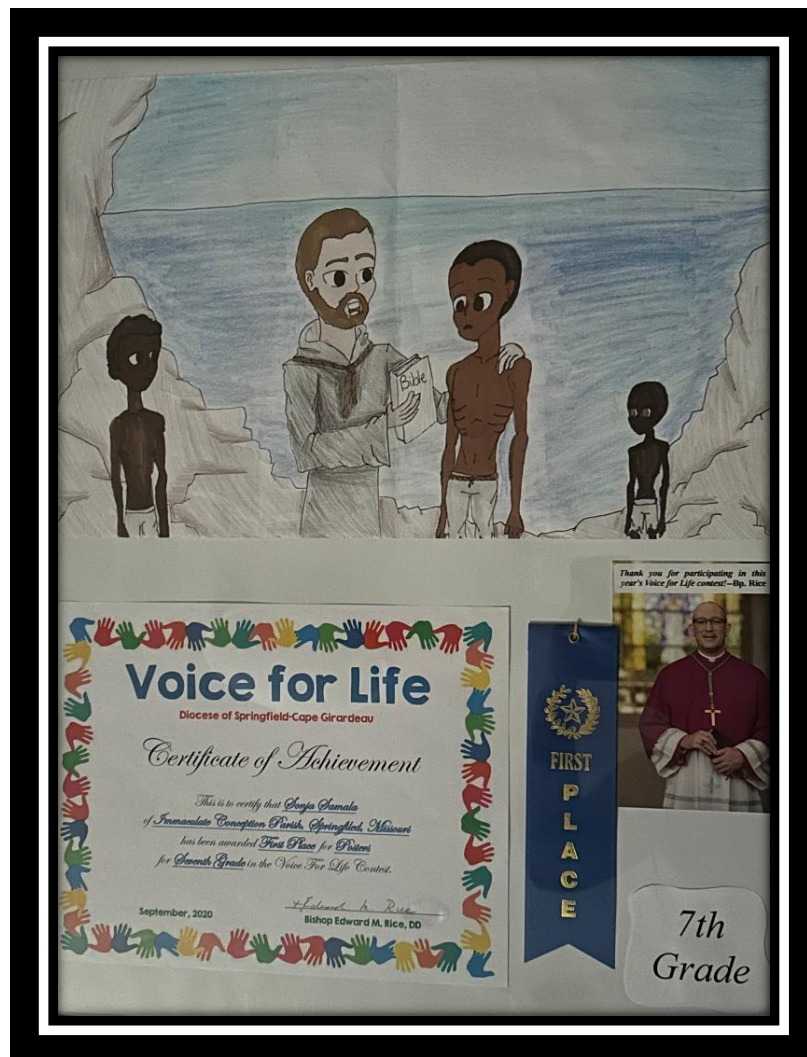
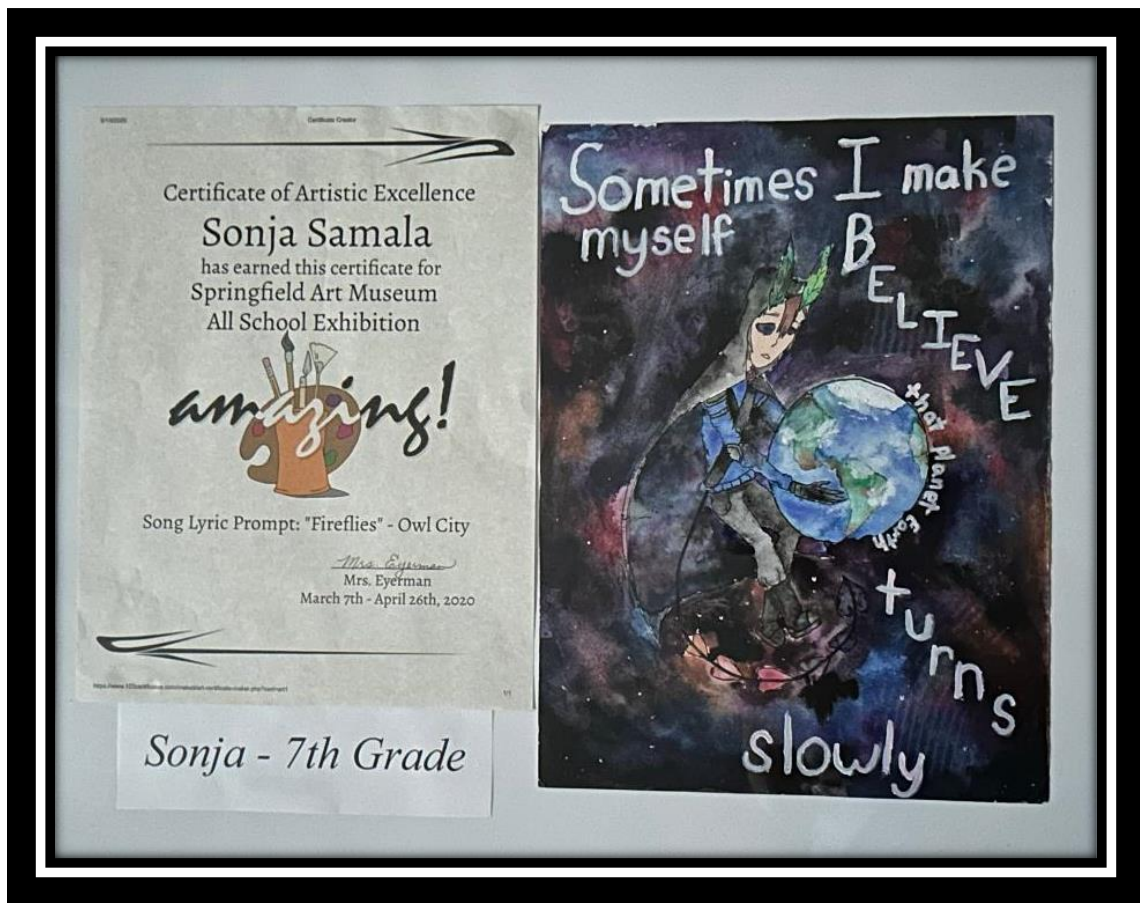


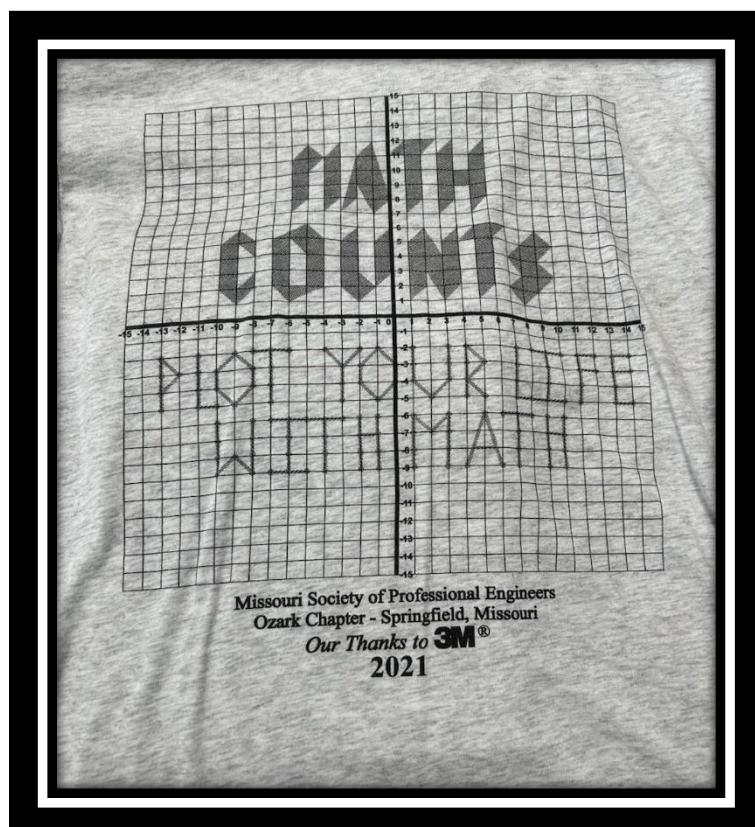
4th Grade

5th Grade









8th Grade Shirt Design

Freshman year



Sophomore Year

