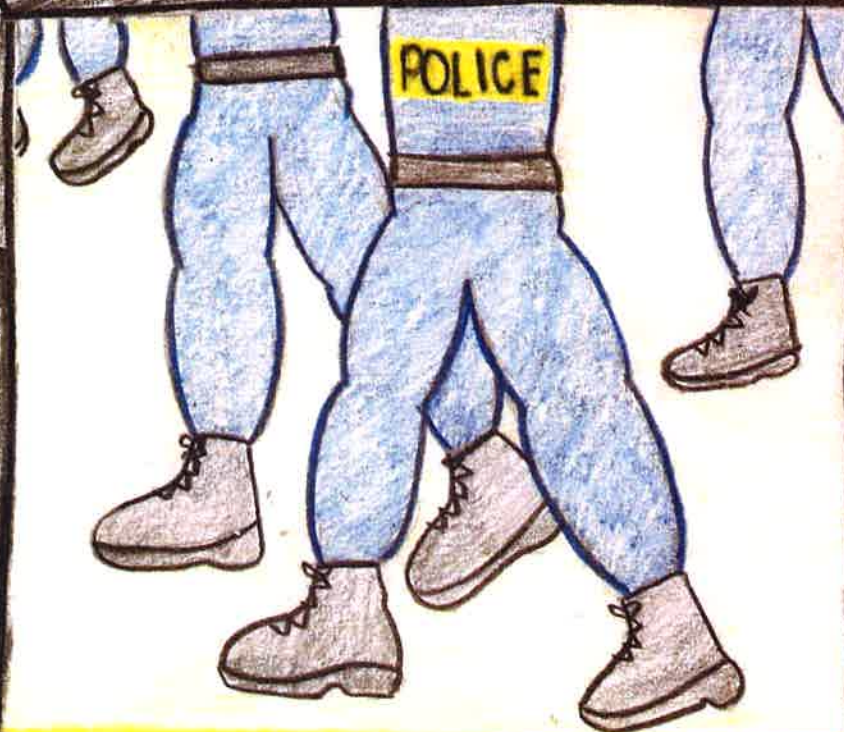


# My Dark Secret



Story & Pictures by Katie Trimble



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# My Dark Secret

By: Katie Trimble

Dear Student Readers,

If you or someone you know is being abused, do not keep it a secret. Tell a trusted adult about it. If you talk to someone about the abuse, maybe that person can help stop it from happening again. If you just want to talk to someone about troubles at home, you can always talk to your teacher or school counselor. That is big reason they are teachers. Don't let yourself or others get hurt again. Get help, who knows; maybe your story will have a happy ending.

Katie Trimble

Dear Adult Readers,

The issue of children who have incarcerated parents is not a widely know issue. It is an issue that is pushed on the back burners of society. People do not want to relate or think about these people who are in or have been in jail because they are criminals. Children of incarcerated parents are sometimes referred to as the “forgotten victims” of crime, the “orphans of justice” and the “unseen victims of the prison boom”. These kids do not deserve to become orphans. They deserve to be loved and cared for like every other child.

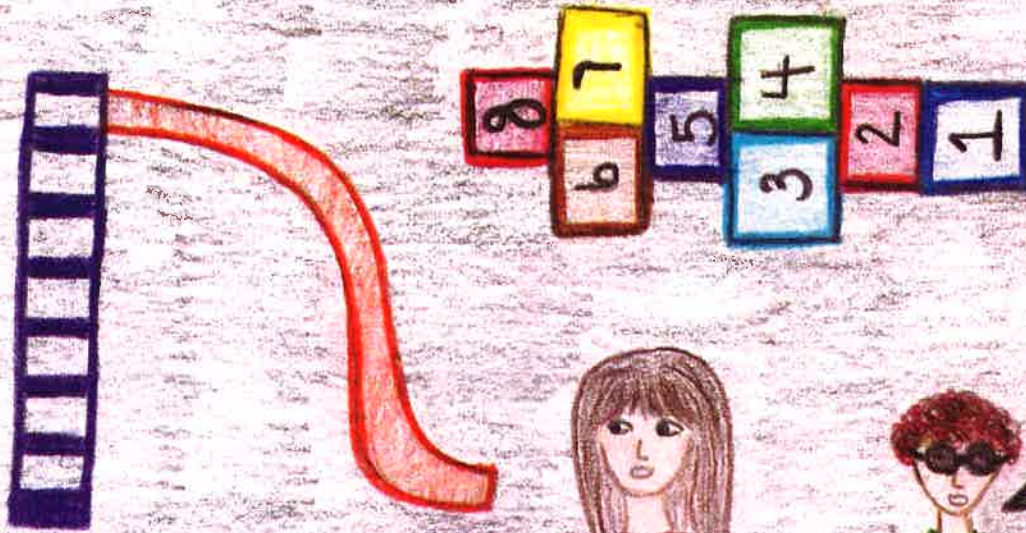
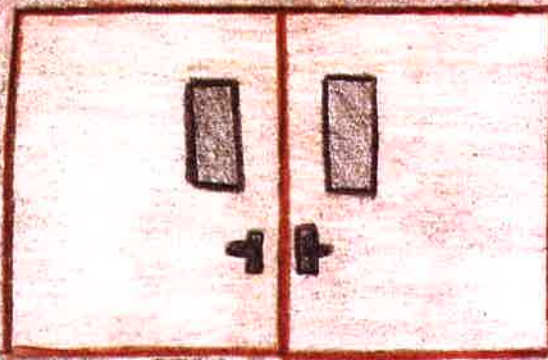
To visit their mom or dad in prison, some kids have to miss school or drive sometimes twelve or more hours to a prison to get a 30-minute conversation that takes place behind glass with a telephone or computer screen. To even be able to see their parents they have to go through metal detectors, be sniffed by dogs and sometimes searched. If their parent has committed a violent crime, then most likely the child will not even be able to have physical contact with their mom or dad.

This issue needs to have more recognition in our communities. People need to come together to help these children get through the roughest period of their young lives. Children do not deserve to go through all of these as the girl did in the story. But if they do, they should have the support of the people around them to help boost them back up to safety. Helping these kids out in a small way could potentially save them later on in life. Don't just sit on the sidelines. Help these children out and become their lifeline.

Katie Trimble

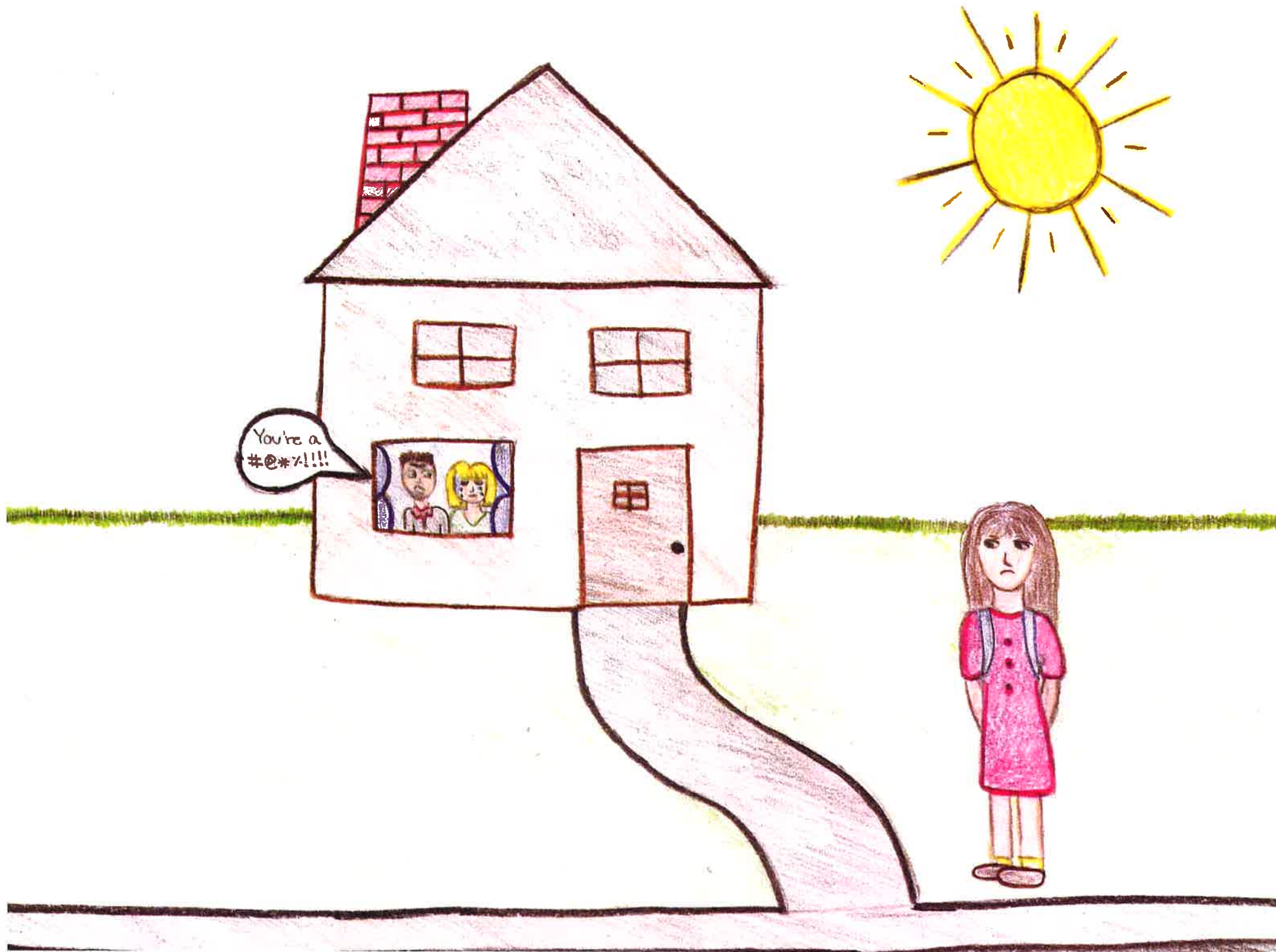


Windfield  
Elementary





My name is Melody, and I am a 7-year old first grader at Windfield Elementary School. All of my friends think I am normal. I wear pink, play tag, and bring treats on my birthday. But I have a secret, a dark secret.



When I am at school, I pretend that I am happy, have a good life with a good mommy and daddy. But I have a secret. I do not have a good life. My daddy is always hitting my mommy, calling her names and making her cry.





No, he didn't hit  
me, I fell down...

She is lying

I want daddy to stop, but I am afraid. What if daddy stops loving me and he starts hitting me and calling me names like he does to mommy? When someone asks mommy why she is crying or how she got a bruise, she lies and tells them she fell down.



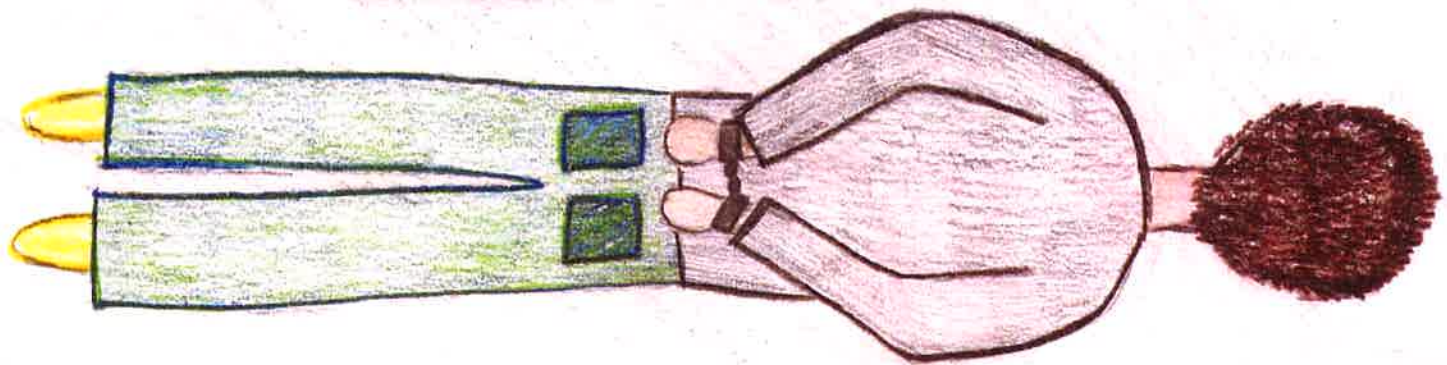
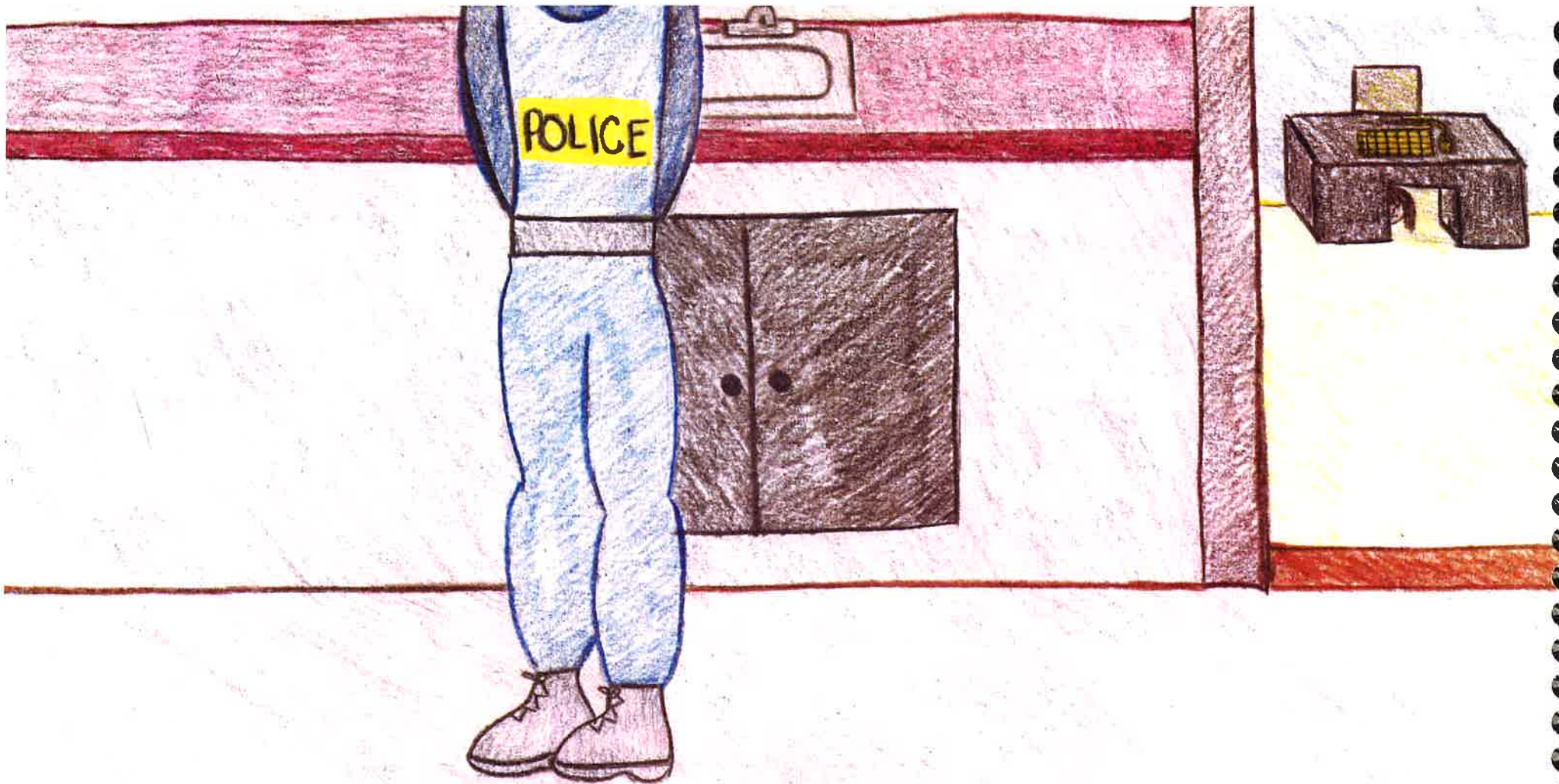




Last night, I was brushing my teeth when I heard a loud bang on the front door. I went to see who was there and the door suddenly crashed down to the ground. I screamed and ran to hide under the desk in the living room.

I saw feet, so many feet, running through my house. The feet belonged to police officers with big, scary guns. They were looking for my daddy. I was really scared.

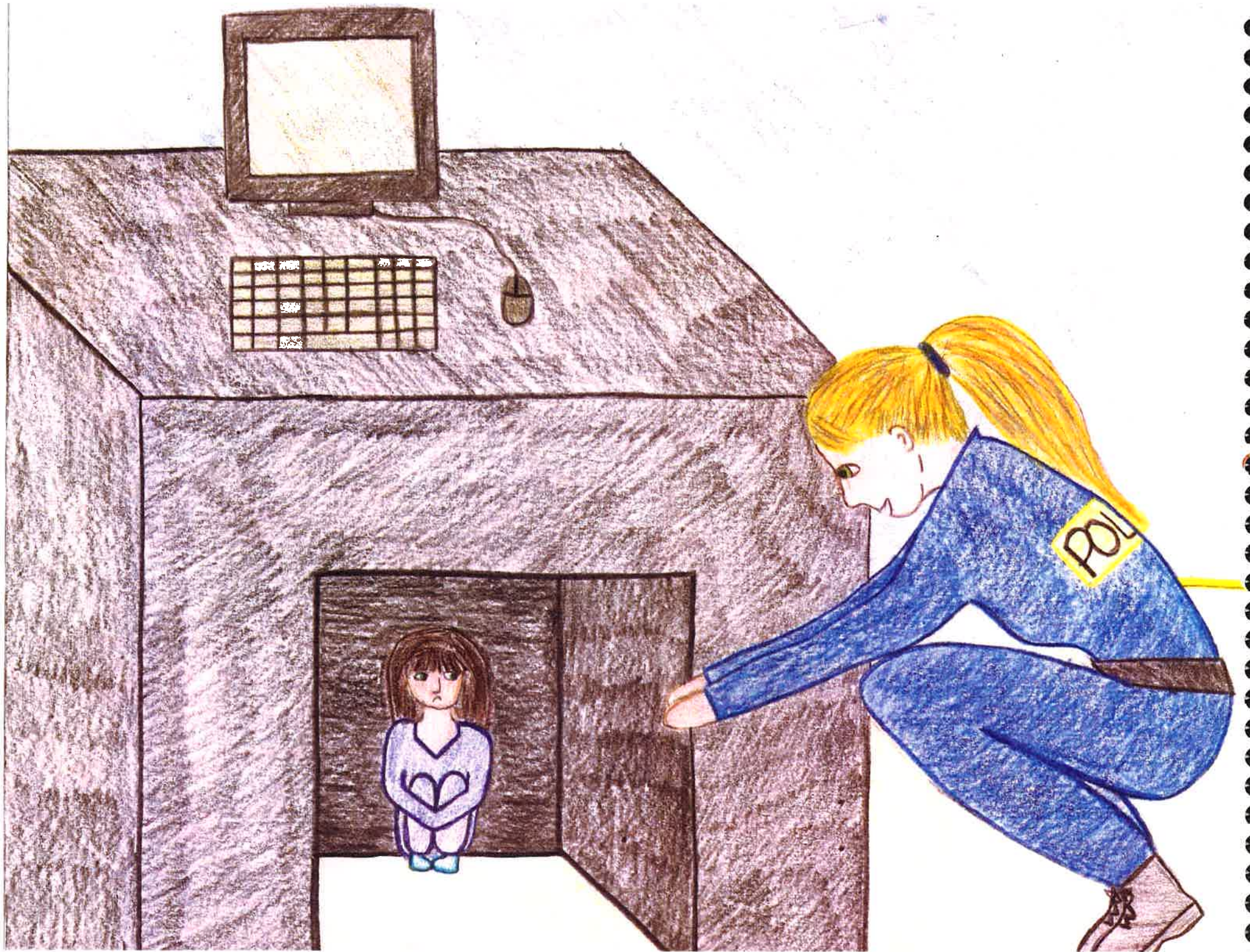




The police found daddy in the kitchen and made him lie down on his tummy and put his hands behind his back. They tied up his hands with shiny metals things called handcuffs. After what seemed like forever, they took him outside to a police car.

Mommy was screaming and crying and a police officer was holding her back. She tried to hit the police officer, but he ducked and took her to her room to lie down.







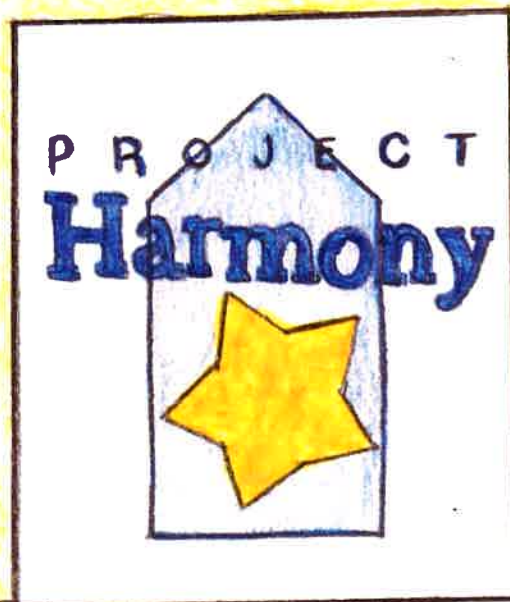
I stayed under the desk hidden from everyone. I was afraid that if they took my daddy, they might take me.

A police woman peeked under the desk and asked "Will you come out sweetie?"

"NO!!!!" I screamed, "BRING MY DADDY BACK!"

"I can't do that right now, but you know what I can do?" she asked, "I can get you something to eat to make you feel better, what do you say? I won't hurt you honey. I'm here to help you and your mommy." I slowly crawled out from under the desk.

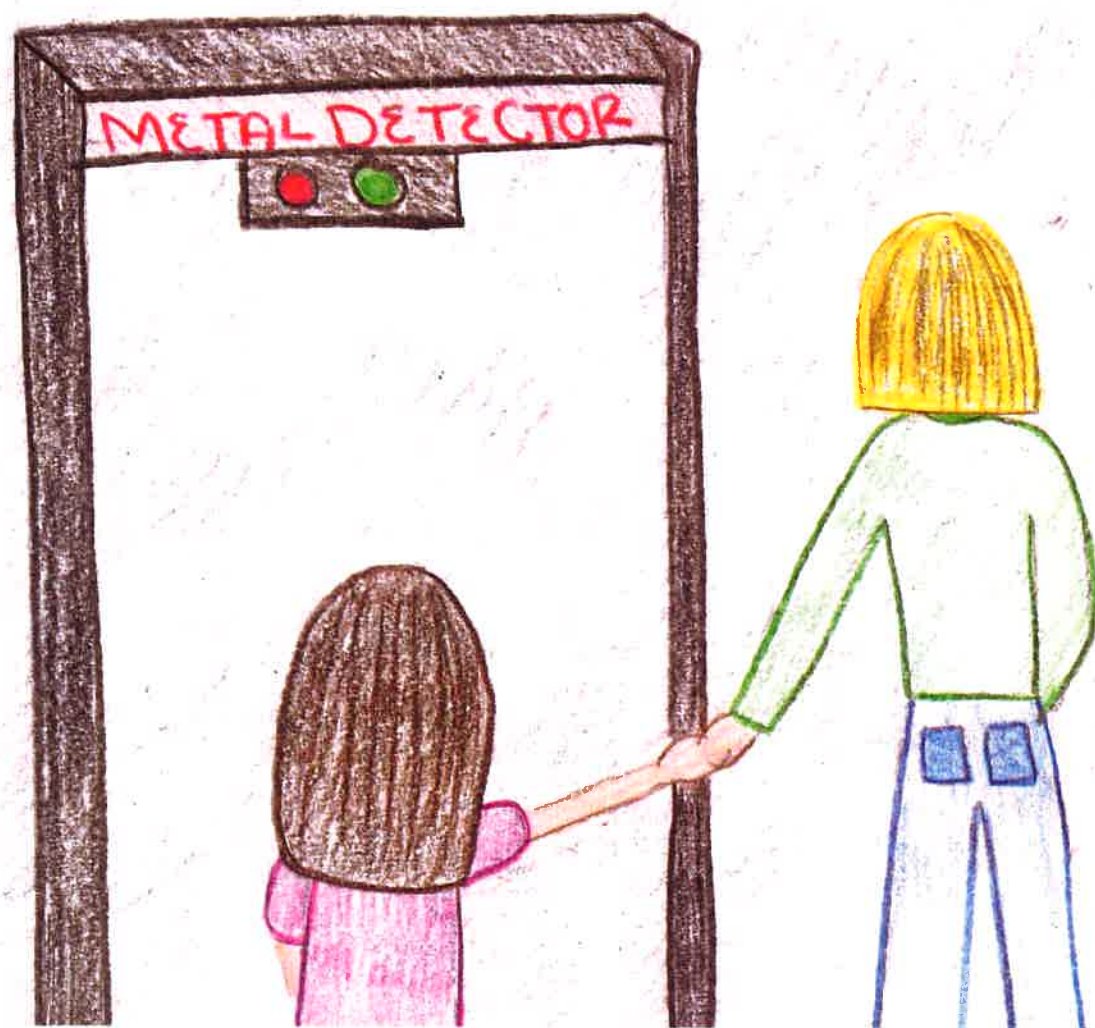
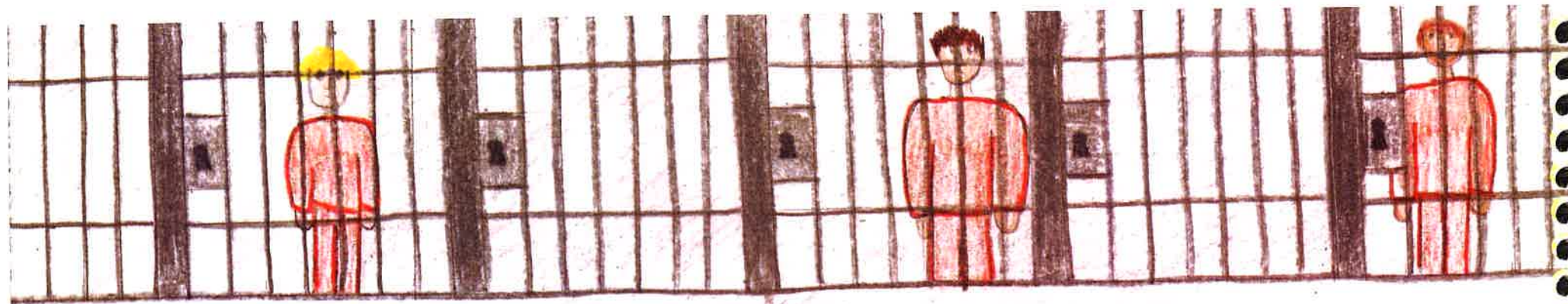




The lady policer officer was really nice. She took me in her police car to a place called Project Harmony. She said that some nice people were going to ask me questions about my family. I got to sit in a bean-bag chair and hold a fluffy, pink teddy bear. They told me I was safe and would not get hurt anymore. They asked me if daddy ever hit me or did anything bad to me.

But I said, "No, daddy never hits me, only mommy. But then he says he is really sorry after mommy starts to cry."





Daddy was taken to jail almost 4 weeks ago. Mommy and I went to go visit him, and it was really scary. There were guards everywhere. They looked big, mean and made me feel sick.

Before we saw daddy, I had to walk through a metal detector and it made a really loud beeping noise because I was wearing a necklace. I was not allowed to give daddy a hug. All I could do was look at him through a computer screen and talk to him on a phone. I hate the jail. I wish daddy could come home.





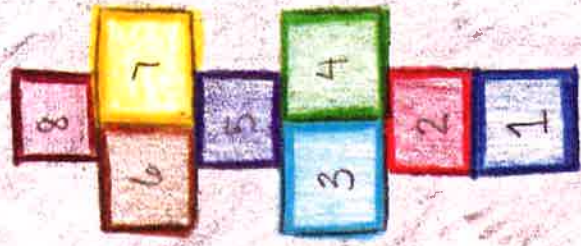
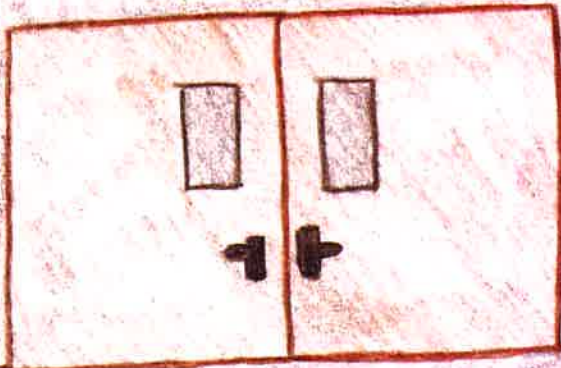
Guilty!

JUDGE

When daddy had to go to court, mommy and I went to go support him. Mommy said that court is a place where people decide if daddy can come home or if he has to stay in jail. We sat in the back of the room and listened to the lawyers talk back and forth. They used big fancy words that neither mommy or I understood. After several hours, the Judge, who makes the final decisions, decided that daddy was going to stay in jail for hitting mommy.




Windfield  
Elementary



Melody's  
Weird!



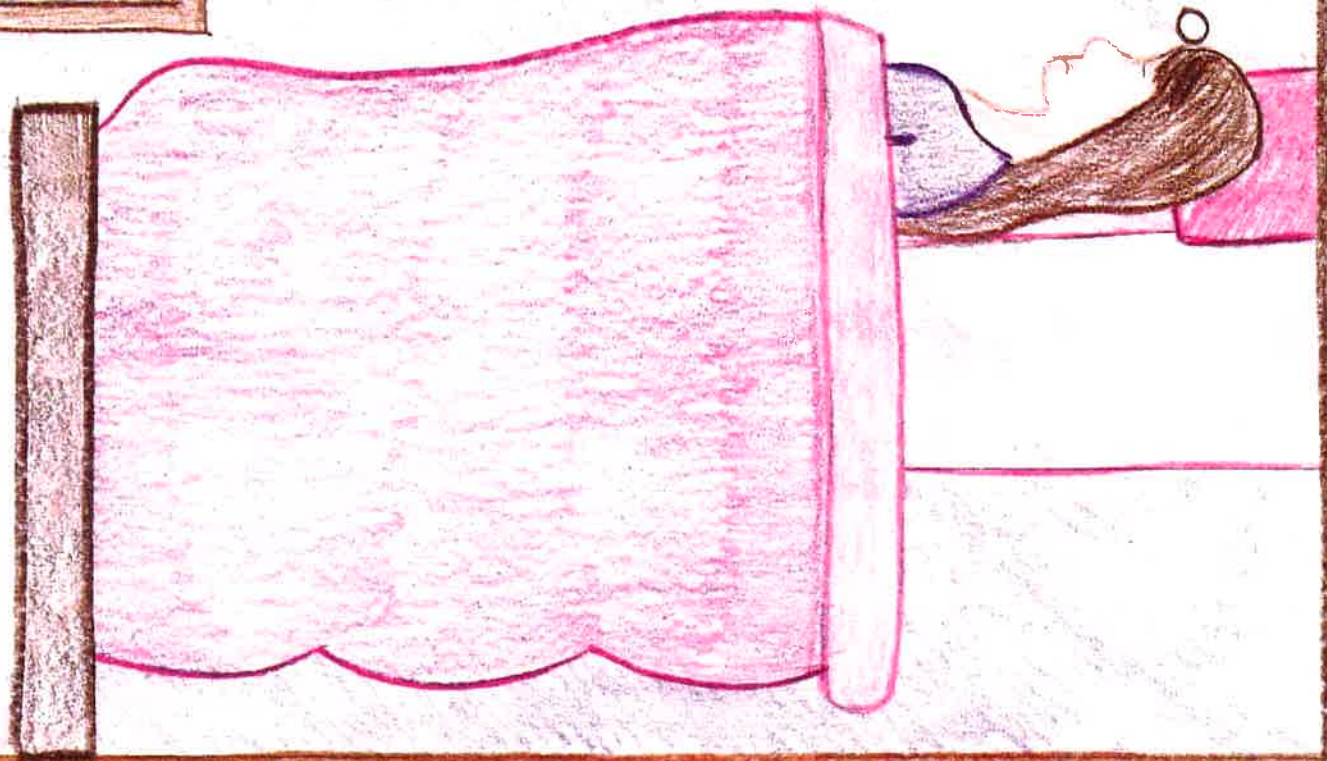
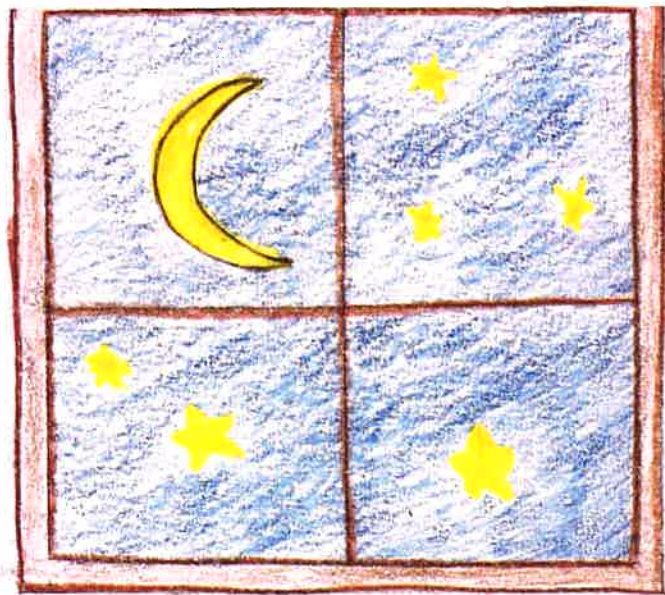
Her daddy  
is in jail.

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Ever since daddy went to jail, my life has been different. Mommy had to get a job and she is not home as much as she used to be.

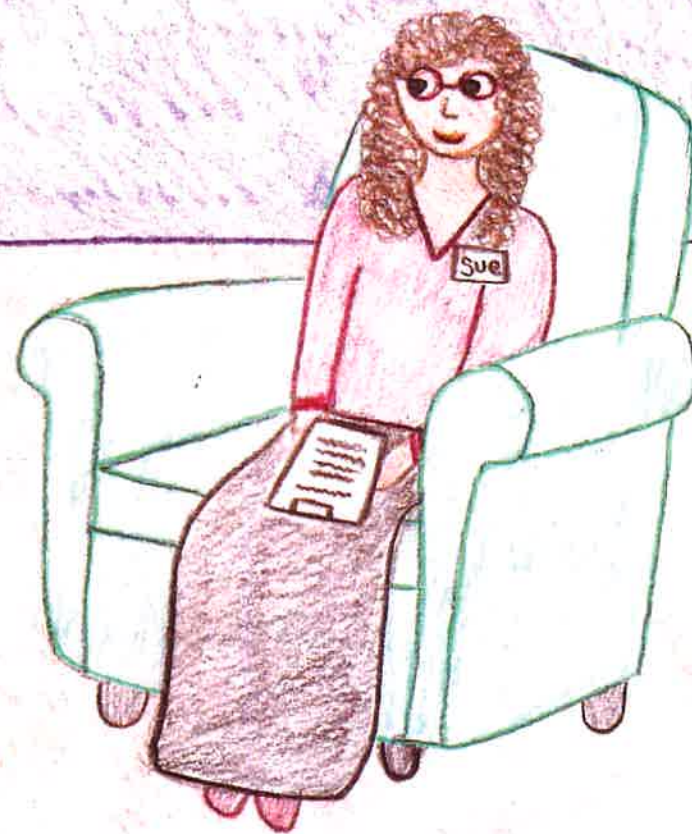
My teachers and friends do not treat me the same. My teacher is always making sure that I am okay and tells me I can always talk to her. Some of my friends do not want to be near me anymore because they think my daddy will hurt them. People call me names and make fun of me because they do not understand and they are afraid.





Sometimes I wonder why daddy really went away. I feel like it is my fault that he had to go to jail. I lay in bed at night and think that if I had been a better daughter, he would not have gotten mad and he would not have hit mommy. If he had not gotten mad then he would not have had to leave me to go to jail. I think it is all my fault. Mommy found out how I felt, so she told me I needed to talk to someone else besides her.





Mommy makes me go talk to a pretty lady named Ms. Sue. Ms. Sue is a family counselor. She has me tell her how I am feeling about myself, mommy and daddy. Ms. Sue tells me that it is not my fault. She says that I could not have stopped daddy from getting mad and going to jail. She says it was his choice.

She then says, "All of the choices we make have either prizes or consequences, but is up to us to make the right choice."

I want to make all of the right choices.



To: Daddy

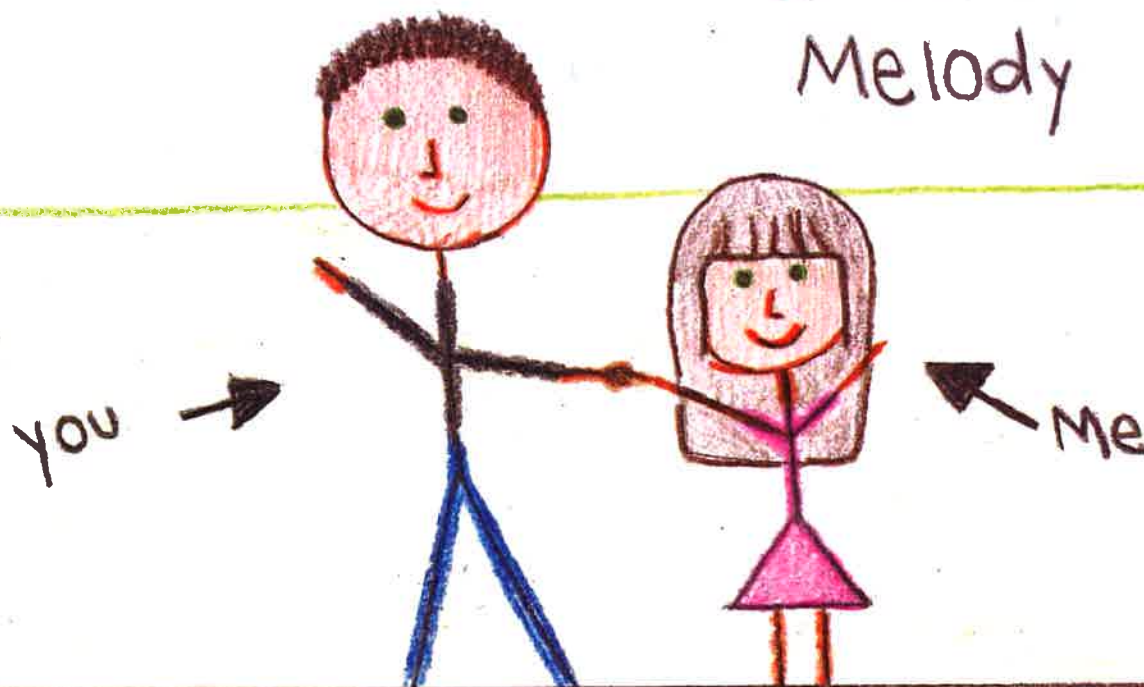
From: Melody



Dear Daddy,

I forgive you. I love you too!

Love,  
Melody



It has been several months since daddy went away. I think about him every day. Ms. Sue helps me write letters to daddy. So when he comes home again we can still have a relationship like before.

I received a letter today in the mail from daddy. In the letter he told me that he was getting help to control his anger. He said that it was never my fault he got mad, it was his. He told me I am still his little girl and he still loves me very much and he alway will, no matter what.



## General Information & Facts

### Project Harmony:

- Mission Statement--The mission of Project Harmony is to protect and support children, collaborate with professionals and engage the community to end child abuse and neglect.
  - Project Harmony's Services include: Forensic Interviews, Medical Exams, Assessment and Referrals & Multidisciplinary Teams
    - Forensic Interviews--Used by law enforcement and child protection services. A child interview specialist will perform a videotaped interview with a child telling of their abuse.
    - Medical Exams--Medical and nursing staff who specialize in evaluating children who are suspected to have been abused.
    - Assessment and Referrals-- Mental health professions take in each child's situation and needs to refer them to the appropriate therapy or support group. They also help families to "understand the system".
    - Multidisciplinary Teams--Teams consist of law enforcement, child protective services, medical professionals, prosecution, school personal, Project Harmony Staff and other professionals. These people make sure that children do not fall through the cracks of the justice system.
- Location: 11949 Q Street (the southeast corner of 120th and Q), Omaha, NE
- To Report Child Abuse: In Nebraska: 1-800-652-1999  
In Iowa: 1-800-362-2178
- Website: <http://www.projectharmony.com>

### Children's Behavior:

- Children in these situations act out for many different reasons.
  - Guilt--They feel responsible; they believe it is their fault that one or both of their parents went to jail.
  - Anger--Angry with the police, their parent(s) and themselves.
  - Confusion--Police are supposed to protect, but when they are the ones taking parents away, kids become confused.
  - No Control/Power--They have a greater risk of either becoming a bully or a victim. Bullies want power and control, which is something these kids do not have at home.
  - Parents likely to reoffend
  - Foster Care possibilities

### Facts:

- The biggest reasons people with children commit violent crimes are due to either alcohol & drug abuse or mental illness.
- Around 70% of children with incarcerated parents will likely be incarcerated themselves later in life.
- About 24% of children with an incarcerated father will be suspended or expelled from school.
- Jail vs. Prison: Jail--Sentences range from a year or less.  
Prison--Sentences range anywhere from one year to life.
- Incarceration: When a person goes to jail or prison.



#### Important Things to Tell These Children:

- Teachers/Adults: These children need someone to listen to them, to hear their fears and not judge them.
- Reassure them that they are loved unconditionally and valued.
- Everybody makes mistakes--it is not the child's fault if their parent(s) make mistakes.
- Make sure they know their parents still love them.

#### Foster Care:

- Children with an incarcerated parent live with either the other parent, other relatives or are placed in the foster care system.
- In the foster care system, kids are bounced from house to house trying to find the right fit.
- There are good homes that have loving foster parents.
- Unfortunately, there are also many bad homes that provide more abuse and neglect.

#### Counseling:

- Counseling is one of the best options for a child who has had parent arrested and incarcerated.
- Talking to a school counselor will help these children out.
- Support Groups can help families get through the tough times.