

My Friend The Bully



by Robert Barco
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About this book

This coming December I will be 44 years old. Since the age of 18 I've spent all but a few months of my life in jail.

As a young boy, primary school was a form of torture, day in, day out. I would come home in tears with cuts and bruises, often missing toys, clothes, even my pushbike.

My parents thought I should be able to defend myself and put me into judo tuition. Six years later, at the age of twelve, I'd won a number of State judo titles. I was starting high school confident, fit and strong ... and violent. No-one would be bullying me again. In the first term of Year 7, the first kid that tried to intimidate me spent the next fortnight in hospital. All the other kids thought I was so cool. My pattern of behaviour was established.

In prison I gained the insights of a university education. I understand now that it was the wrong way to protect myself. Violence is not an answer, and it is never a solution.

Kids like the one I was – like Dale – need to see that there is a right way of dealing with bullies, so I wrote this book for them. And I want all kids to know that 'assertive passivity' shows a strength of character which will always win out. Non-violence will always be the better way.

I would like to thank the following people for their input into this book and for their support and encouragement: Jared Kailahi for his great pictures; teachers Kit Shepherd and Susan Wallace; Senior Education Officer Jane Rossley. I'm also very grateful for the support of Gloria Larman, CEO of SHINE for Kids, in getting this book into print.

– Robert Barco, November 2009

Dale

My name is Dale. When I was seven years old I would get up early so I could get ready for school.

Then came a time when my mum had to call me two or three times to come and get breakfast. I didn't feel like I wanted to get up any more and I didn't look forward to school ... just getting through each day was so difficult.

My mum would call out to me over and over. "Dale, Dale!" she would call.

"OK, I'm getting up now Mum," I would say. I would quickly wash my face and brush my teeth because I knew I was running late. I would grab my backpack and Mum would give me my lunch.

And when she went into another room, I took some extra food from the fridge and hid it in my backpack.



Off to school

I would say goodbye to Mum and start my walk to school. When I got to the dirt track, I ran as fast as I could, as I didn't want to run into Big Jim. I knew that he got to the dirt track at 8.10am and it was usually 8.05am when I arrived. I had no time to lose – I had to run so that I would miss him and get to school first.

At school in the morning class I would stare out the window wondering what the day had in store for me and what lunchtime would bring.

I didn't like lunchtimes because Big Jim always took my lunch. This day came just like all the others. It was very bright, hot and sunny. He took my lunch and as always, I was hungry for the rest of the day.



On the way home

On the way home I ran, so I would avoid Big Jim and I got home all hot and sweaty. "Dale," my mum called out, looking at me with surprise in her eyes: "Are you OK? Why are you so dirty?" she asked.

I was too embarrassed to tell her, so I said I fell over on the dirt track.

"Dale, I know you're not being honest. What's wrong at school?" she asked. I didn't feel good about not telling Mum the truth.

I knew that I had to tell her what had been happening. "There's a boy at school, Big Jim, and he's as big as Dad and he takes my lunch everyday and chases me on the dirt track."

Mum then asked me to sit down so we could figure it out together.

Mum's idea

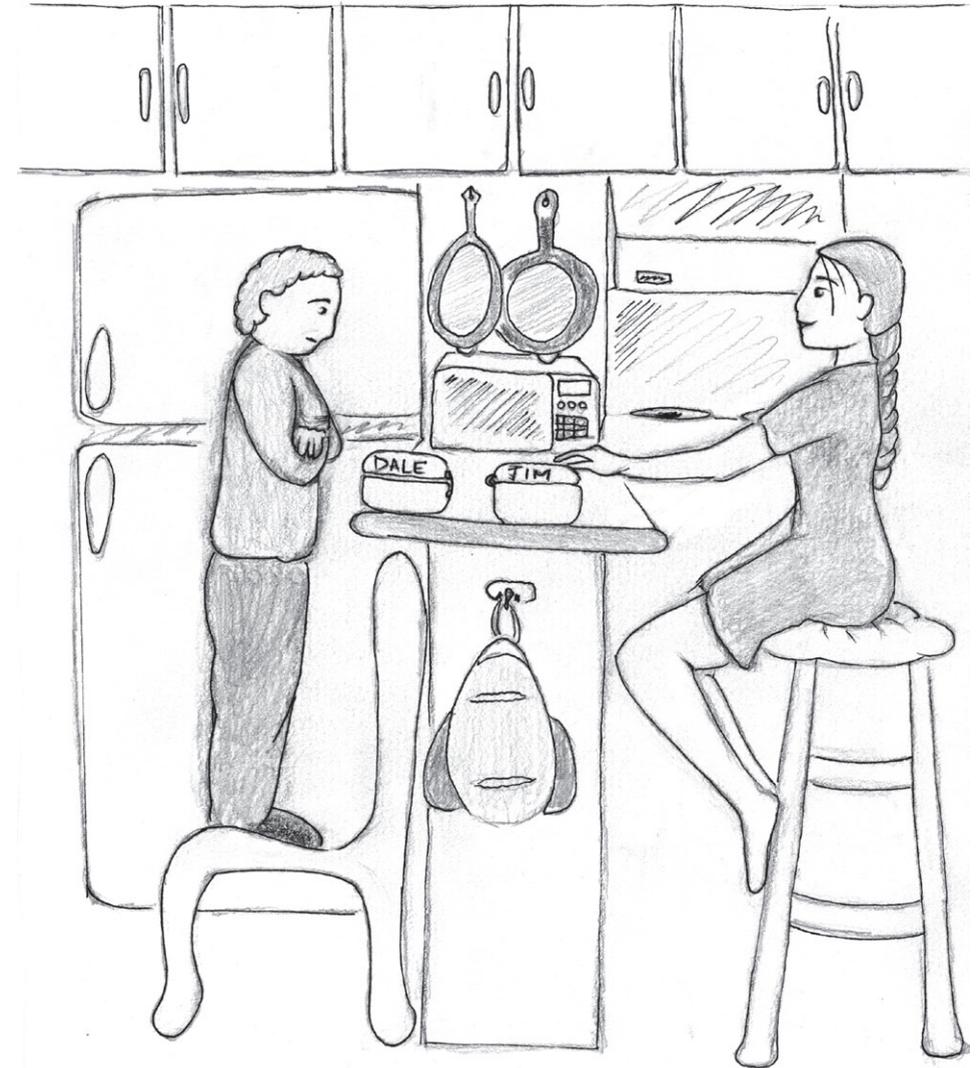
Mum always had good ideas; I knew she would help me work out this problem.

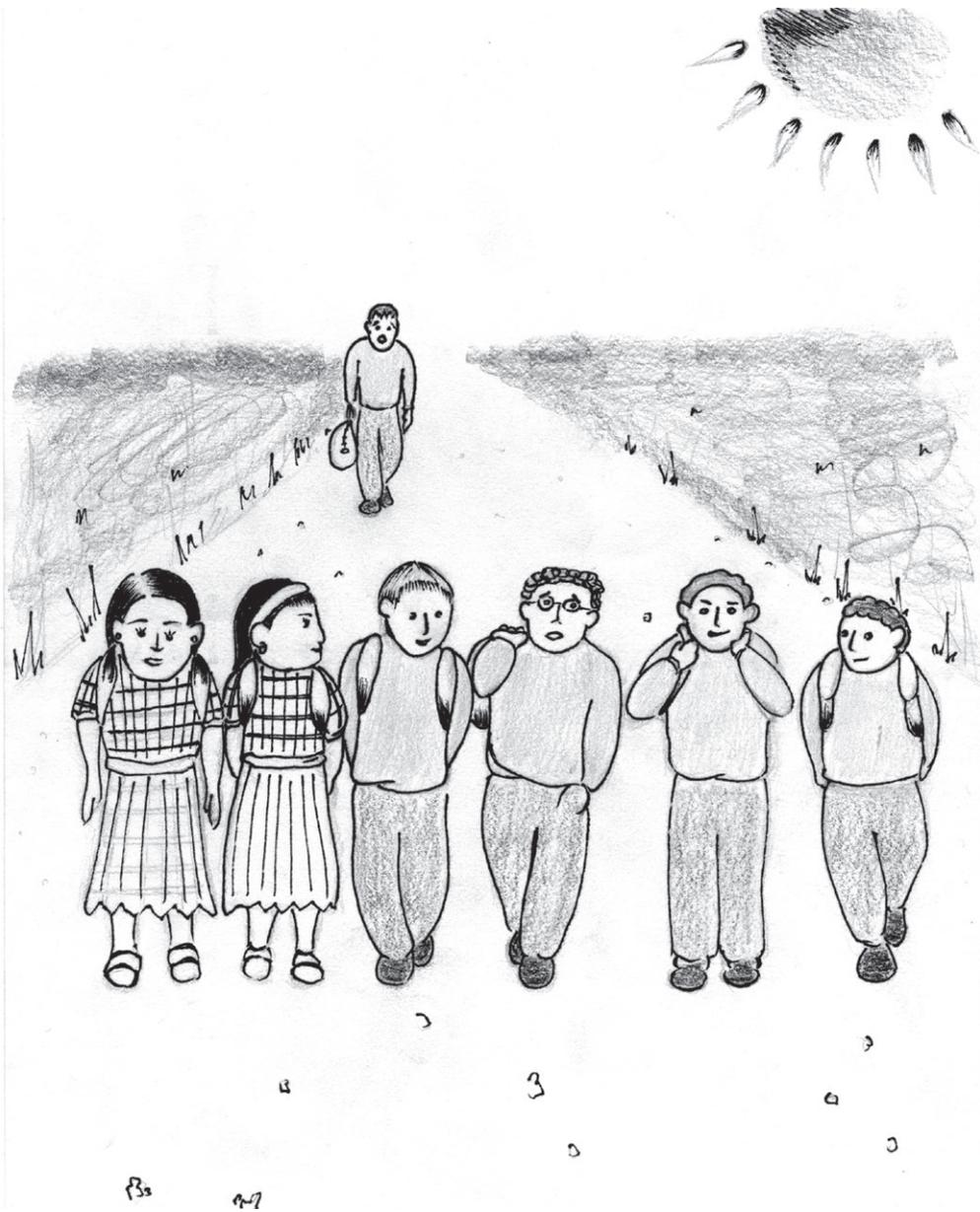
We sat down at the kitchen table and she said, "Dale, I will make you an extra lunch – and I want you to give it to Big Jim before he takes *your* lunch."

I was confused. I didn't understand why she wanted to do this. "Mum, why do you want me to give Big Jim lunch?"

"Well, Dale, he's a bully, and if you give him a lunch he can't take it from you, because you're actually making a choice to give it to him."

I didn't understand but I trusted my mum.





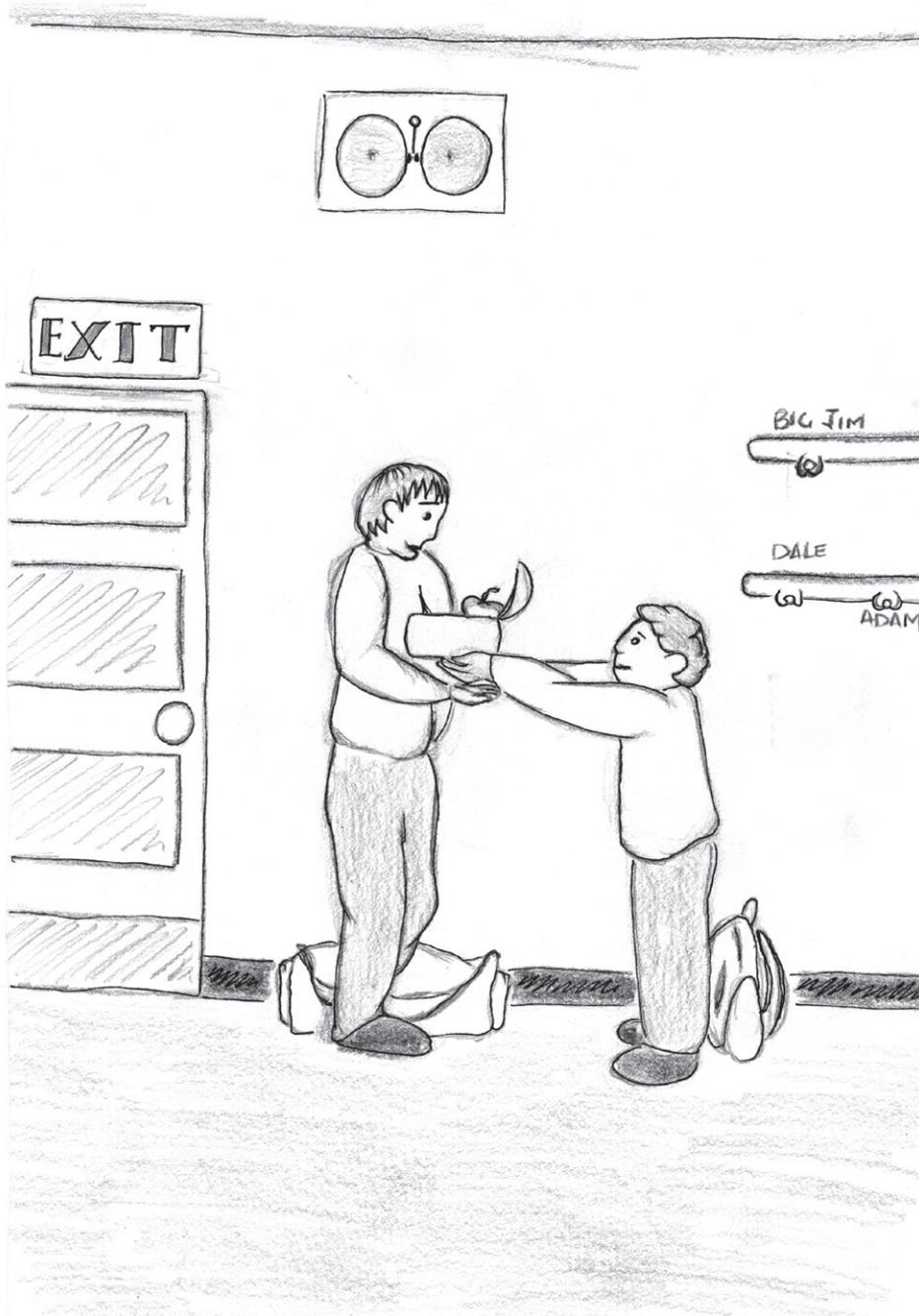
A new day

The next morning was bright and sunny and I woke to familiar voices. "Dale," my mum called, like every other morning, only this morning was different. All my friends were at my place.

There were Kelly, Elizabeth, Michael, Adam and Peter. "The six of you are walking to school together from now on," she said. We didn't understand why until we got to the dirt track. Big Jim was there. He looked very surprised to see all of us together, and I couldn't work out why he didn't chase me.

We all walked to school and had time to play on the grass. I felt happy and I was looking forward to my day at school.

Ding-a-ling-a-ling! rang the school bell. It was time to go to class.



Lunchtime

It was soon lunchtime and Big Jim came up to me.

Before he could say "Give me ..." I handed him the yellow lunchbox with 'JIM'S' written on the lid. My mum had prepared it earlier that morning.

Big Jim seemed very surprised and gazed at me as if he didn't know what to say. He took the lunchbox and walked away without saying a word. At home time, he handed the box back to me.

My friends and I walked home together on the dirt track. Big Jim stood at the edge of the track waiting for me, but he got a big surprise when he saw five of my best friends with me. Pretending not to see us, he looked away.

Home time

When I got home, I felt different to other days and suddenly I realised that I wasn't hot, sweaty and very hungry.

"Dale, you look very pleased with yourself this afternoon," said my mum. "Did you give Big Jim the lunchbox I prepared?"

"Yes Mum, and he even gave me the lunchbox back!" I replied.

"We'll pack him a fruit salad for tomorrow," she said.

That evening my mum and dad said they wanted to talk to me. Mum said, "Do you know why I gave you an extra lunch for the boy you call Big Jim?"

I thought about my mum's question and then said, "No, Mum, I don't."

She explained, "Dale, there are probably a number of reasons why he is a bully and one of them is that it makes him feel strong if he takes something from you."



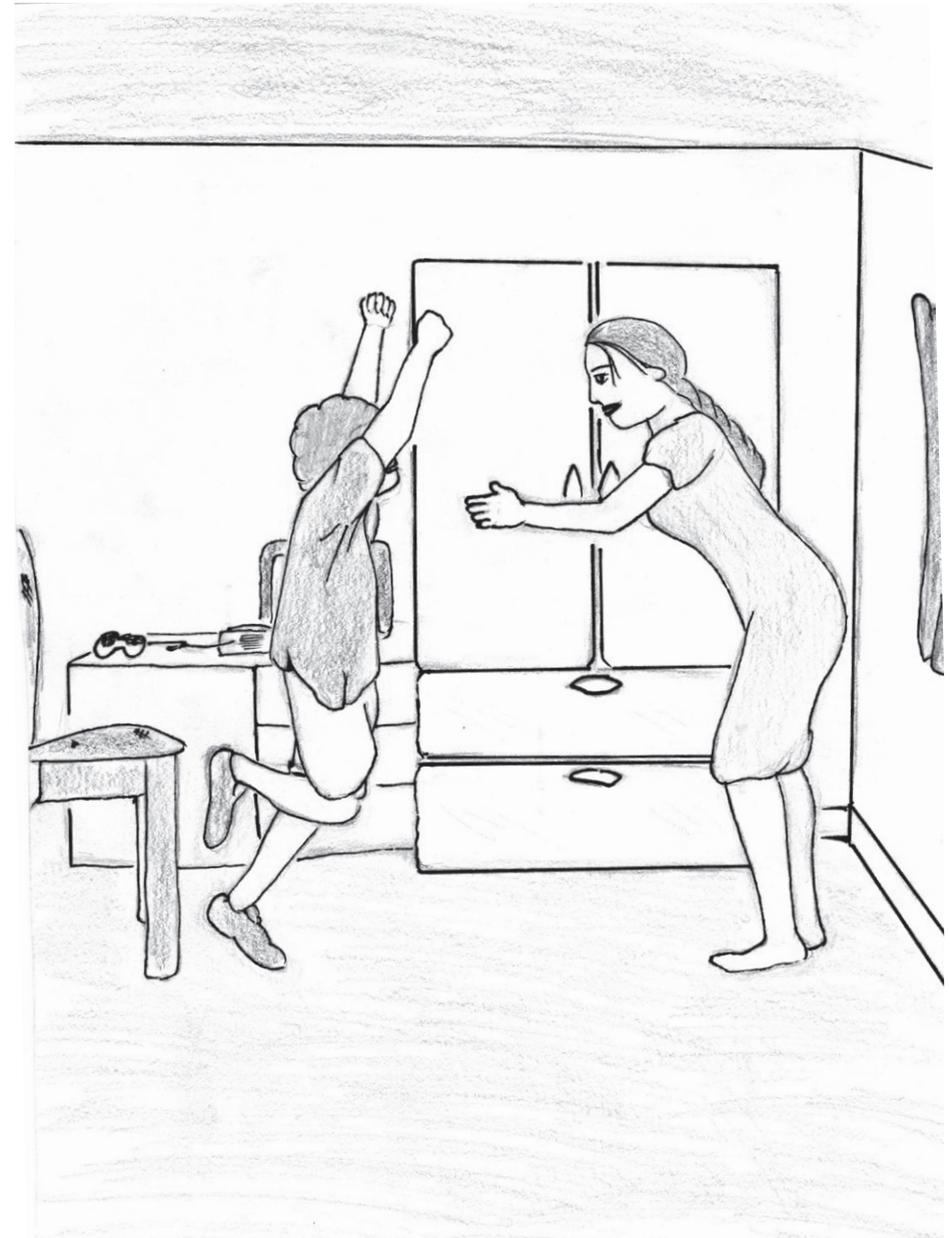
Power is taken

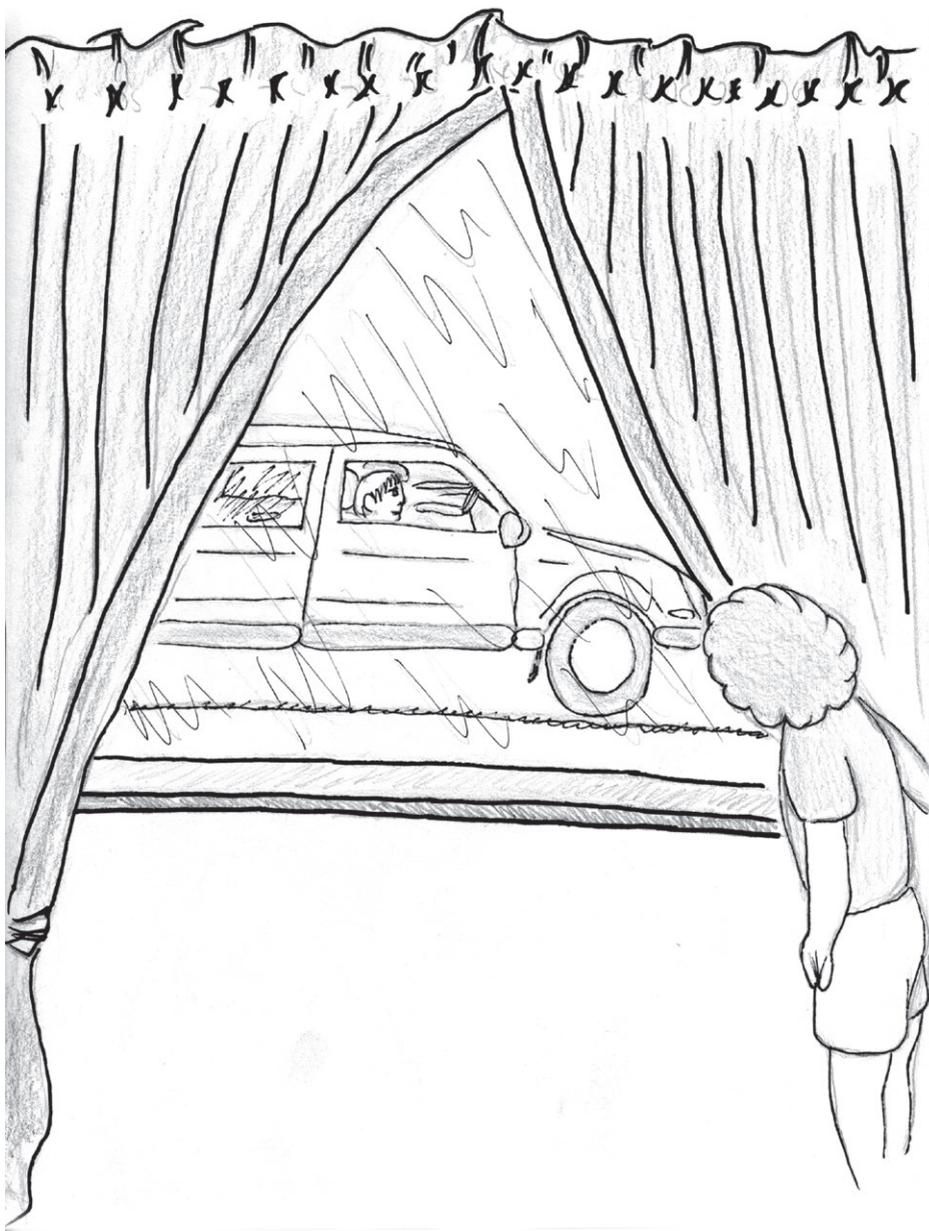
My mum went on to explain that if I gave the lunch to Big Jim before he took it, then I am actually taking that power away from him and offering friendship. I started to understand what she meant. If I gave him a lunchbox, then he couldn't *take* it!

Mum then explained how she had called all my friends' parents and explained to them that she would like all the children to walk to school together, as there had been some bullying going on and there was safety in numbers.

I started to understand what my mum was doing. She was making sure Big Jim couldn't take my lunch anymore or chase me at the dirt track either. Mum was taking away his power.

"WOW! My mum is smart," I thought to myself.





A treat

"As a treat," Mum said, "your dad has gone to the video store to hire a DVD and you can invite your friends over to watch it." The DVD was the latest Harry Potter film and we all loved Harry Potter.

When Dad got back from the store, he had someone in the car with him. "OH NO!" I thought to myself. "It's Big Jim, what's he doing here?"

Before I could think anymore about it, Mum explained that they had invited him over for a slumber party. It was Friday, we had the weekend ahead of us, and all my friends were sleeping over.



Big Jim arrives

Dad walked in the front door with Big Jim, who had a bottle of soft drink with him. "I brought some drink for the movie."

We all sat in shock and I was thinking: "What have Mum and Dad done, bringing him here?"

Mum took me into my room to explain why she had invited Big Jim over. "Dale," she asked, "how many friends does Big Jim have?"

I couldn't think of one single friend. "None," I replied.

"Do you think that may have something to do with his bullying?" asked Mum.

I thought about her question. I said, "Do you think Big Jim will want to be friends with my friends and me?"

"Yes Dale, I think he will," said Mum.



Sleepover

We all sat in front of the TV and my dad put the movie on. My mum gave us all fruit salad and ice cream while we watched the film. Big Jim said, "Thank you, Dale's Mum." I'd never heard him say 'thank you'!

That Friday night sleepover was the best night. All my friends were happy, and we all talked about Harry Potter at breakfast.

While we were all having breakfast, my dad said, "How would you all like to go to the Waterworks?"

"Yeahhhh!" we all cheered, but Big Jim did not say a word.

"Jim," Dad said, "I spoke to your parents and they said that it's OK for you to come too."

The Waterworks

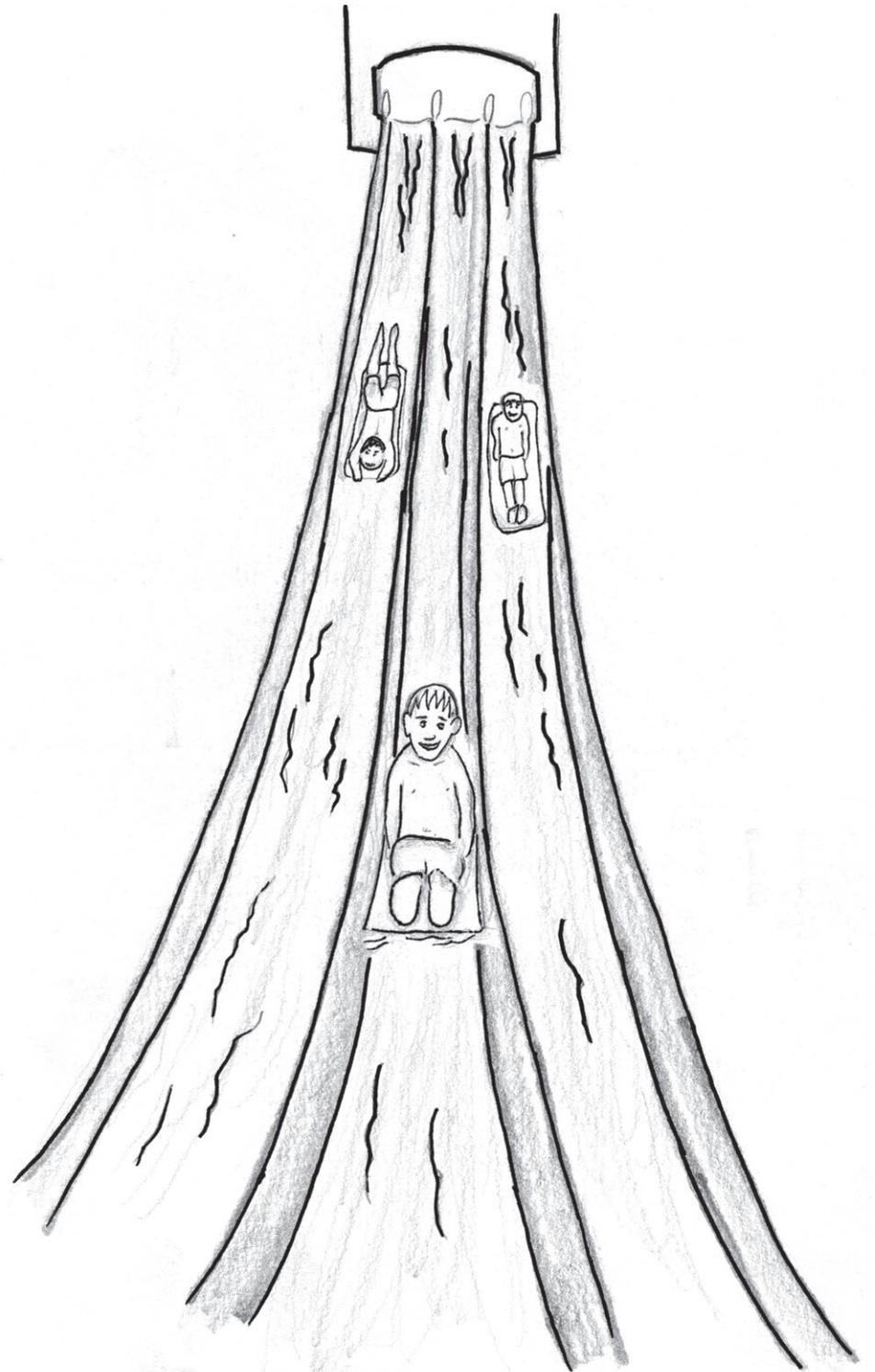
I could see a smile starting to break on Big Jim's face and he suddenly yelled out: "WE'RE GOING ON THE WATER SLIDE!"

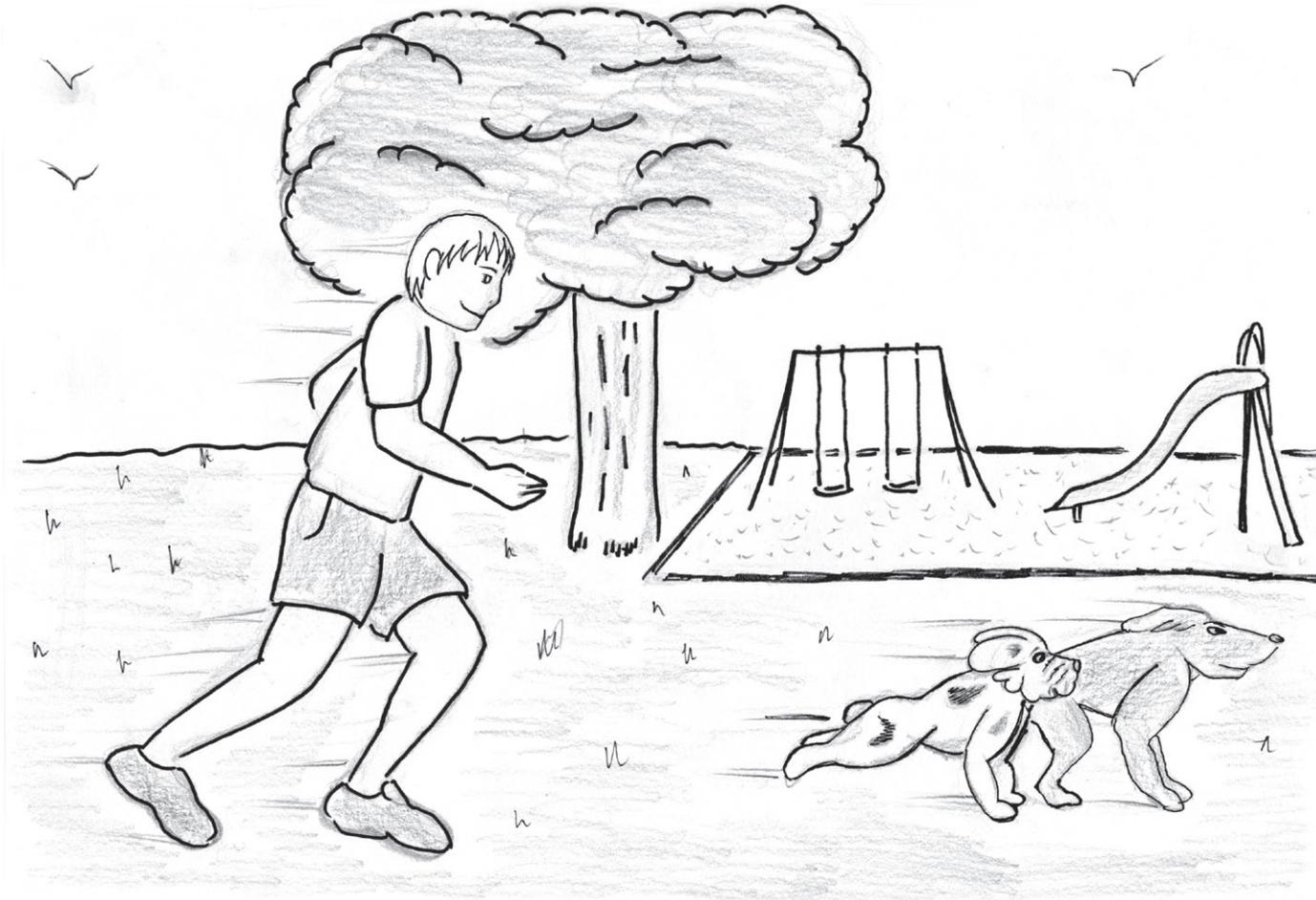
"Is Big Jim our friend now?" I asked myself.

We had so much fun at the Waterworks – we all went on so many slides and rides. Big Jim won three prizes and I was so surprised when he gave them to me.

When we got home, it was still early in the afternoon and Mum and Dad said, "How about we all go to the park?"

So we went to the local park to play with our two dogs Jaffa and Coco.





The park

In the park we took Jaffa and Coco for a run and play on the grass. We all played with the dogs and threw a frisbee for them to chase. Big Jim was running, laughing, and chasing the dogs. It was the first time I had ever seen him having so much fun.

When we were having a rest, Big Jim came over to me and said, "Dale, I like being your friend."

"Do you want to be in our group of friends?" I asked.

"Really?" he asked.

I called over all my friends and said, "Jim's one of us now!"

"YEAH!" everyone cheered.



Jim becomes "one of us"

Our group of friends was now one person bigger – and that person used to be the school bully.

The next day at school Jim gave me an apple and asked if I wanted to go over to his place after school.

I went home after school and told my mum all about my day. Mum said, "It seems Big Jim is starting to see how nice it is to be a part of a group of friends."

Mum called Jim's parents and arranged for me to go to Big Jim's and for my dad to pick me up at Jim's at 5.30pm.

Jim's place

When I arrived there, I saw that his place was not like mine – it was small and old. Jim's mum and dad were old too. I was confused but I didn't say anything about it. Jim's mum and dad seemed very nice.

Jim said, "What do you want to do?"

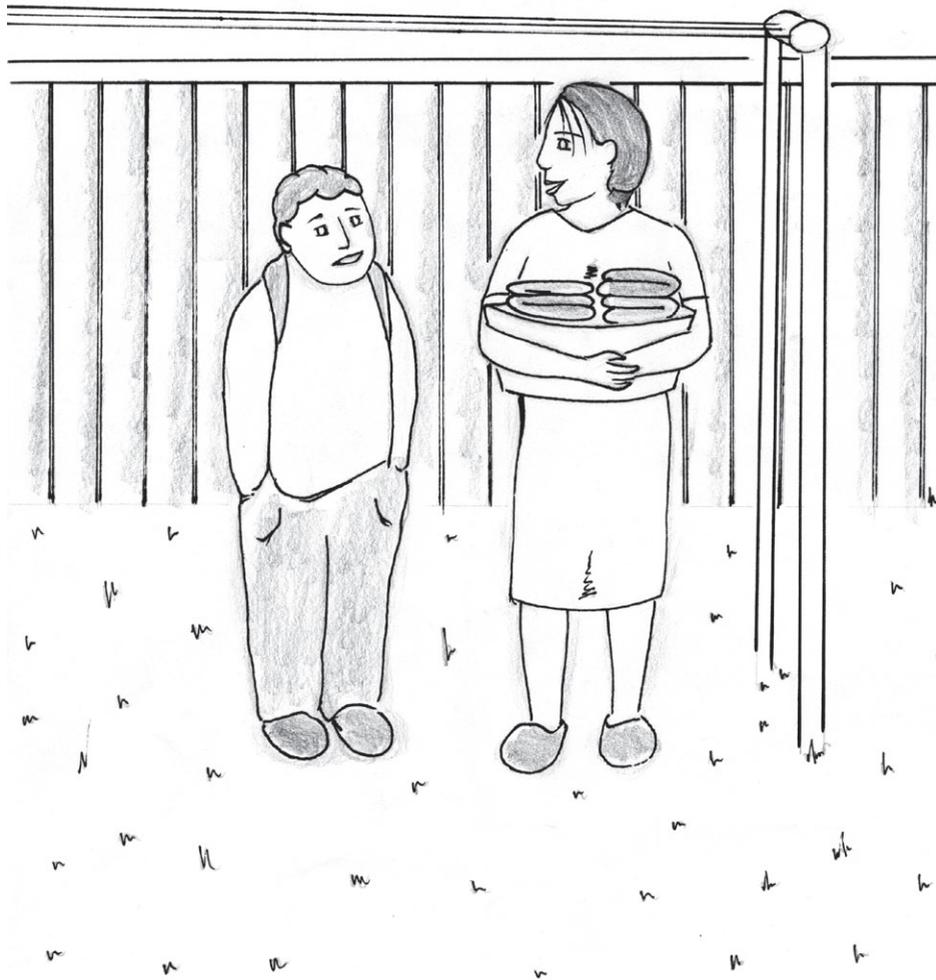
I said, "How about Playstation?"

Jim said, "My Playstation is broken so we can't play that."

I looked around Jim's room and I could see he didn't have very many toys or games. I saw an old totem tennis game so I said, "How about we play totem tennis? I haven't got one of those."

Jim smiled. He was happy we could play one of his games that I didn't have.





After being at Jim's

My dad picked me up and we went home. My mum asked me what I thought of Jim's place.

I said, "Jim's mum and dad are very old like Nanna and Pop." Mum explained that they were Jim's grandparents and they had raised him since he was a baby.

I told Mum that Big Jim didn't have a Playstation or many games. Mum said, "Jim's grandparents are pensioners and can't afford those types of games."

I began to see how very lucky I was: I had so many games and toys and two Playstations, and lots of toys I didn't play with any more.

Dale gives Jim a gift

I asked my mum if I could give Jim my old Playstation, as I didn't use it any more now that a new one was out. "If I give Jim my old one, we could play it when I go over to his house," I said.

"That's a great idea, Dale," my mum agreed.

The next day at school, I told Big Jim and he looked at me stunned. "OK," he said, "but it's still yours and it's just staying at my place so we can play it."

"OK," I laughed and we shook on it. Jim was a very proud kid and he didn't want anyone to think he needed to be given a Playstation.

Big Jim was now a part of our group of friends. We won the tug'o'war at our school carnival because we had Jim's extra weight.





A lesson learned

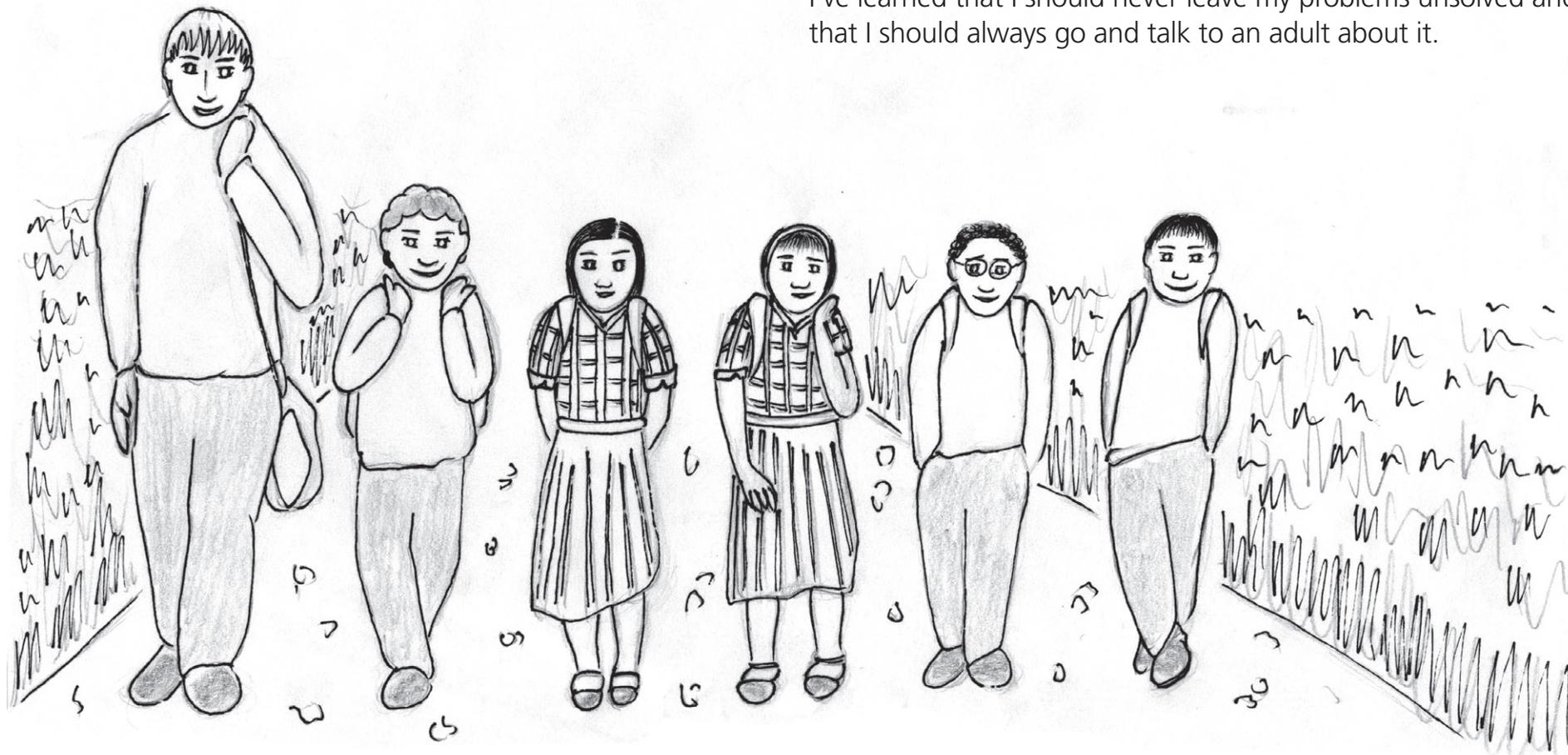
My mum had shown me that Jim never had his real parents and his Nanna and Pop raised him, and he didn't have a lot of toys and games like I did, and he didn't have any friends at all.

Jim started bringing a lunch to school to swap with me, so all of us started doing it, and we called it our lunch club. Jim really liked the idea of us having a club.

My mum now says he just needed some friends and needed to feel he was a part of a group and do all the things other children our age did, like sleepovers.

No more bullying

The school bully had become my friend and he no longer bullied anyone. After a while we didn't call him Big Jim any more – we called him BJ for short. We all walked to school together and BJ waited for us at the dirt track – not to chase me, but to walk with us. We all played together each day at school and on weekends.



My mum is the first person I go to now whenever I have a problem I can't solve. She always comes up with great ideas on how to fix things. Sometimes I've gone to my dad when I had a problem and other times I've been to see Nanna and Pop.

I've learned that I should never leave my problems unsolved and that I should always go and talk to an adult about it.

My Friend The Bully

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Illustrations ©2008 Jared Kailahi

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On the way home I ran, so I would avoid Big Jim, and I got home all hot and sweaty. "Dale," my mum called out, "are you OK? Why are you so dirty?"

I knew that I had to tell her what had been happening. "There's a boy at school, he's as big as Dad and he takes my lunch everyday and chases me on the dirt track."



With the help of his perceptive mother, Dale learns what lies behind Big Jim's bullying – and how to make the situation better for everyone.

My Friend The Bully is a tale related by a 9-year-old boy called Dale, to be read by children aged 7–10 years. The narrative is based on real-life events: Dale is actually author Robert Barco, now in his 40s with a degree in social sciences, welfare and youth work and currently studying for a masters in child welfare.

The book traces the processes enacted by young Dale, his family and friends to deal with the trauma of being a victim of bullying. Its story allows children of a similar age to Dale to make a connection with the plight of others. It offers strategies in providing passive/assertive gestures that are empowering in dealing with the bully.

The book provides a positive parental role in the character of Dale's mother, and also avoids the reinforcement of gender stereotypes. It elicits empathy for both victim and bully, highlighting that there are two sides to every story – and solutions to every problem.

The illustrations are by Jared Kailahi, a fellow inmate of Barco's who, at 24 years old, had never had an opportunity to use his drawing skills until contributing to this book.

My Friend The Bully will find its place wherever young children read: at home or at school, whether for pleasure or under instruction.