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KID



LEGENDS

**TRUE TALES OF CHILDHOOD FROM THE BOOKS
*KID ARTISTS, KID ATHLETES, KID PRESIDENTS,
KID AUTHORS, AND KID SCIENTISTS***

STORIES BY *DAVID STABLER* ILLUSTRATIONS BY *DOOGIE HORNER* AND *ANOOSHA SYED*

INCLUDES TRUE STORIES ABOUT



J. K. ROWLING



NEIL DEGRASSE TYSON



CHARLES SCHULZ



GABBY DOUGLAS

PLUS PEYTON MANNING, JEFF KINNEY, PABLO PICASSO, AND MORE!

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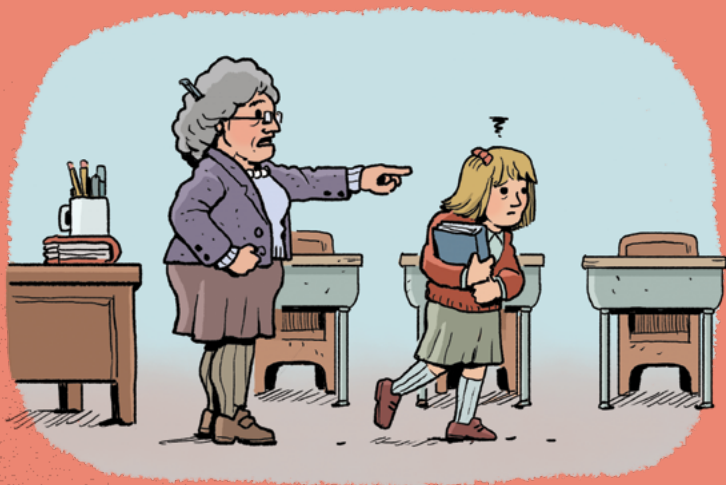
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PART

ONE

IT'S NOT
EASY BEING
A KID



MEAN TEACHERS,
DANCE LESSONS,
AND *SELF-DOUBT*

THESE

KID LEGENDS

FACED
(AND DEFEATED)
ALL KINDS OF
PROBLEMS.

J. K. ROWLING



She created the amazing character Harry Potter, but her time in school was anything but magical. J. K. Rowling had to fend off a bully, defy the low expectations of her teachers, and overcome her own shyness on the way to becoming one of the world's most famous authors.

One summer day in 1990, a 24-year-old aspiring writer named Joanne Rowling found herself stuck for four hours on a train bound for London. As she gazed out the window, an idea for a new character popped into her head. He was a boy wizard, and though she didn't yet have a name for him, she knew just what he looked like and exactly what kind of enchanted school he would attend.



Sometimes the best ideas come in a flash, like magic. It took six years for Jo—who now called herself J. K. Rowling—to write the first Harry Potter adventure. When the book was finally published, it made the author an overnight sensation.

J. K. Rowling's life also began with a rail trip, in a manner of speaking. Her parents met on a train

traveling north from England to Scotland in the winter of 1964. It was love at first sight, and they were married the following spring. Jo was born on the last day of July in 1965.

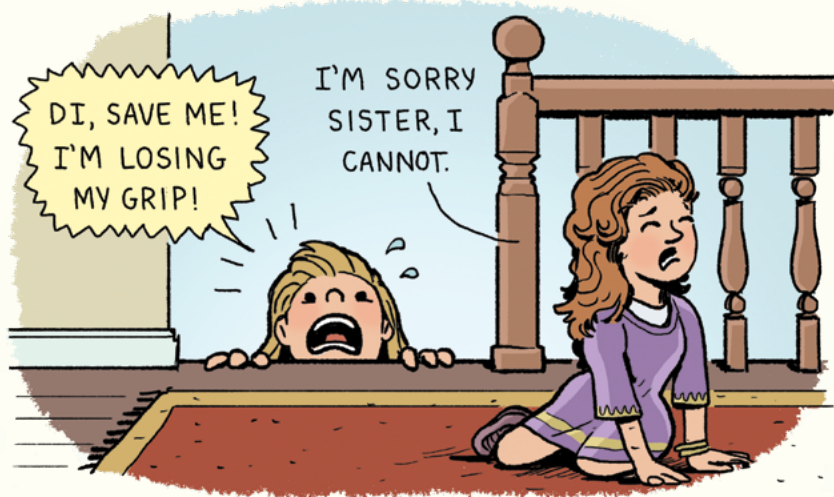
Jo's father, Peter Rowling, managed an aircraft factory. Her mother, Ann, worked in a laboratory. They began reading to their daughter when she was very young. One of Jo's first memories is of her father reading to her from *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame. Jo had measles at the time, but even as an adult she still remembers the characters from the book: Mole, Mr. Badger, Ratty, Toad of Toad Hall, and all the others.



When Jo was almost two years old, her mother gave birth to another baby, a girl named Dianne. To keep Jo occupied while her sister was being born, Jo's father

gave her a ball of Play-Doh. Even years later, Jo still has a vivid memory of “eating the Play-Doh” while her sister was being delivered.

During their childhood, Jo and Di were constant companions. They loved to play games together, especially involving make-believe. Their favorite was called the “cliff game.” Jo would grab hold of the top step of their staircase and hang on as though she was about to fall off a cliff. Then she’d plead with Di to rescue her before she plummeted down the steps.



Di never did. Time and again, Jo let go and plunged to the floor below. Then it was her sister Di's turn to hang off the cliff.

Jo and Di also liked to make up stories, mostly about rabbits. The sisters desperately wanted a pet rabbit of

their own. They even named their dog Thumper, after the rabbit in the Disney movie *Bambi*. But they could never catch a bunny to bring home with them.

Instead, Jo made up fantasy stories, which she read aloud to her sister. In one story, Di fell down a rabbit hole, where a family of bunnies gave her strawberries to eat.



Di loved hearing her sister tell stories and begged Jo to retell them over and over. To help remember them, Jo started to write them down. The first story she ever set to paper was about a rabbit called Rabbit who caught the measles. While sick, he was visited by his friends, including a giant bee named Miss Bee.

At age seven, Jo wrote her first adventure story, an action-packed thriller called “The Seven Cursed Diamonds.” It wasn’t her best effort, but as she continued to imagine new stories, Jo began to think

that she would like to be a writer someday. She didn't tell anyone for fear they would dismiss her dream. She thought her stories were not yet good enough.

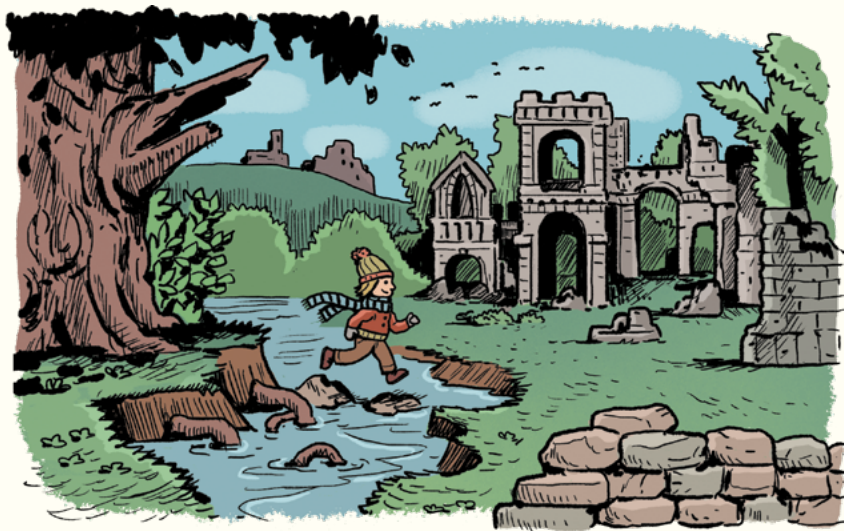
Around this time, Jo and Di became friends with a brother and sister who would provide the inspiration for Jo's most famous character. Ian and Vikki Potter lived down the street from the Rowlings in the village of Winterbourne. At Jo's suggestion, the four friends dressed up and played Witches and Wizards. Ian would don fake eyeglasses and his father's long coat to portray the wizard, while Jo made up spells and potions for the three girl witches to cast.



Something about Ian's costume—and his distinctive last name—stuck in Jo's mind. She would return to them later . . .

When Jo was nine, her family moved to a new home in a tiny town in the English countryside. The ancient village of Tutshill was home to a real castle that dated back to medieval times, many centuries ago. Inside was what people believed to be the oldest toilet in Britain.

Just a short walk from their house was a forest where Jo drew inspiration for her imagined adventures. “My mother used to give me a sandwich and a drink and I’d be in the forest until nightfall,” Jo recalled.



In the fall, Jo enrolled in Tutshill Primary School. It’s never easy being the new kid, but for Jo it was especially hard. If Jo thought that her talent for story-telling would make her popular, she was about to learn that the opposite was true.

On the first day of school, Jo met her new teacher: a

short, severe-looking woman named Mrs. Morgan. She instantly struck fear in Jo's heart by handing out an arithmetic test—math was Jo's worst subject. Even more frightening, the quiz was full of questions about fractions, which Jo had not yet learned. Despite giving her best effort, Jo scored a zero.

After grading the test, Mrs. Morgan instructed Jo to sit in the far right row of desks.



This, Jo discovered, was the “stupid row,” where the teacher put her poorest-performing students. The “clever” kids sat on the left. “I was as far right as you could get without sitting in the playground,” Jo later remembered. But Jo worked hard and finally earned a promotion to one of the left-hand rows.

Jo's difficulty fitting in continued in middle school;

she later described her younger self as “quiet, freckly, short-sighted, and rubbish at sports.” Jo arrived at Wyedean School expecting the worst. She had heard a rumor that on the first day of class, the older students would dunk the head of a new arrival down the toilet—and then flush it. That never happened to Jo, but she did have to confront a bully for the first time.

Although Jo didn’t start the fight, she refused to back down when the other girl started punching her. For a few days, Jo became a hero among the other students for standing up to her tormentor. But Jo knew the truth. The only reason she hadn’t gotten flattened was because her locker held her up, like a human punching bag. She spent the next several weeks peering around every corner in case the bully was waiting to ambush her.



Eventually, Jo found a better way to deal with her problems at school. Instead of battling bullies, she began writing about feisty heroines who fight back against evil villains. She made friends with other quiet, shy kids, and together they spent their lunchtime telling long stories that, Jo recalled, “usually involved us all doing heroic and daring deeds we certainly wouldn’t have done in real life.”



As she got older, Jo grew less quiet and less shy. She ditched her glasses and started wearing contact lenses, which made her less scared of being punched in the face. She began to excel at her English and foreign language classes, although math and science remained a challenge. Her chemistry teacher described her as “a daydreamer who never answered questions about

science and hated taking part in experiments.” (Jo later got her “revenge” by making him the model for Severus Snape, the sinister Professor of Potions at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.)



By Jo’s final year of middle school, she was widely regarded as one of the smartest and most capable students at Wyedean. The teachers voted her Head Girl, a kind of class president. When dignitaries visited, it was Jo’s job to show them around. She was also in charge of organizing school assemblies. Jo said later that she based the character of intelligent, resourceful Hermione Granger on herself during this period.

Although Jo’s school days were difficult, they did prepare her for the challenges she faced as an adult. As a single mom, she struggled to pay her bills and get her

literary career off the ground. She spent many afternoons writing in coffee shops while her baby daughter slept in a stroller beside her. But she persevered because she had faith in the power of her imagination.

In 2001, after she won worldwide fame as the creator of Harry Potter, J. K. Rowling returned to Tutshill Primary for a visit. She was hailed as the school's greatest living graduate. In July 2006, the Wyedean School library was dedicated in her honor. Her storybook life at last had a happy ending.



Want to learn more about your favorite authors?
Check out *Kid Authors*.



PEYTON MANNING

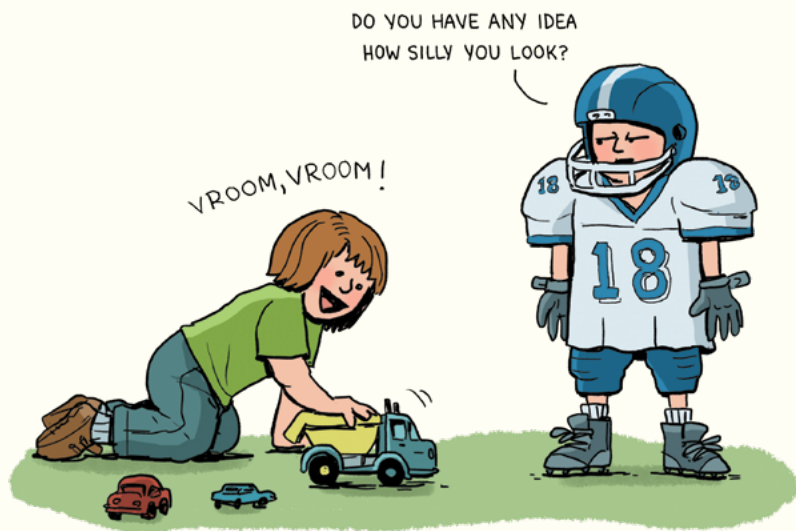
★ *Lord of the Dance* ★

Peyton Manning has played quarterback in the National Football League for more than fifteen seasons. He has a reputation as one of the game's greatest players in critical moments. But the most pressure he ever faced didn't come on the football field—it came on the stage. Long before he was a Super Bowl champion, Peyton Manning was his middle school's master of the tango.

If ever anyone was born to play professional football, it was Peyton Manning. His father, Archie Manning, was the starting quarterback for their hometown team, the New Orleans Saints. His older brother, Cooper, was a natural athlete who would grow up to be the star wide receiver on their high school team.

Peyton dreamed of following in the footsteps of his father and big brother. Being an NFL quarterback was his goal. Football was his passion—he didn't seem to care about much else. One time, when he was three, Peyton refused to play with a boy who didn't share his love for the game.

“He plays with trucks,” Peyton said disapprovingly. “I play football.”



On Saturday afternoons in autumn, Archie Manning would take his sons with him to the Saints' football practices. The boys hung out in the locker room with the players and took hot baths in the team whirlpool.



On Sundays after the Saints' game, the boys would invade the opposing team's locker room to meet the players and ask about offensive strategy. Sometimes they'd pick up discarded athletic tape from the locker room floor and use it to make their own football. They'd go out on the Louisiana Superdome field and throw passes until their dad called them to go home.

As much as Peyton loved the game, football didn't always come easy. His brother Cooper seemed as if he was built to run and catch passes; Peyton was awkward by comparison. He was also terribly accident prone. One time, while riding in the car with his mom, he fell out

the door and cut his head on the road. Another time, while lifting weights with his dad, he tripped and fell face first into a rack of barbells.



But no matter what mishap befell him, and no matter how hurt he was, Peyton picked himself up and kept going. Courage was a trait that would help him throughout his NFL career, where tough decisions and bone-crushing tackles are part of the game.

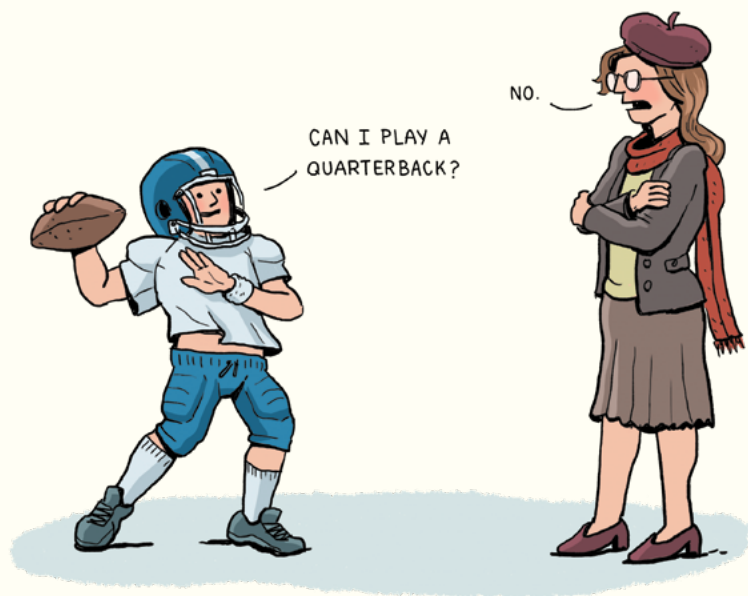
Another important quality a quarterback must have is the ability to handle pressure. Peyton didn't learn that quality only on the football field. He learned it on stage in front of an audience of family, friends, and neighbors. He learned it beneath the hot spotlights, under the spell of the South American dance known as the tango.

When Peyton started eighth grade, he had the choice of taking a computer class or a musical theater class. Determined to save most of his free time—and

brainpower—for football, he chose the theater class. After all, he thought, how hard could it be?

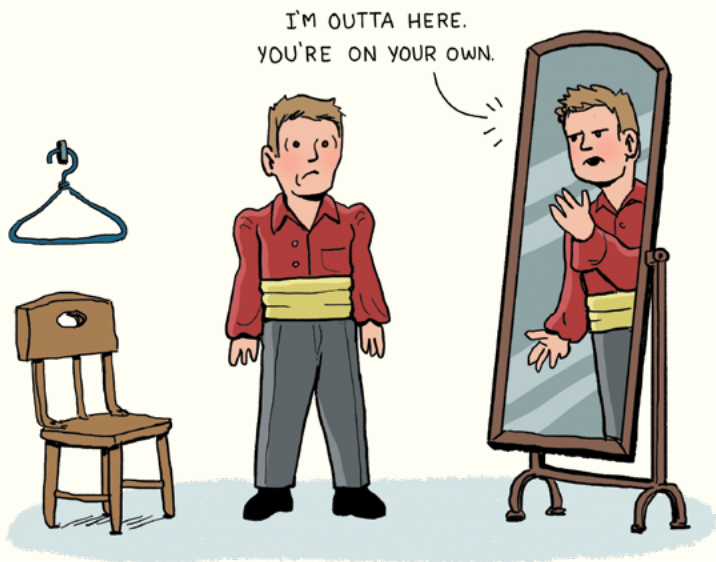
A week into the semester, he found out.

“You have to be in the school play,” his teacher informed him. “It’s a requirement for the class.”



Over the next few weeks, Peyton tried so hard to wriggle out of the production. But as the saying goes: the show must go on. In Peyton’s case, the show was called “The Boyfriend.” He was assigned the part of Miguel, a headstrong bullfighter who performs a show-stopping tango with Lola, played by his classmate Sabra Barnett. Not only would he have to dance, he would also have to dress like a Spanish bullfighter.

Peyton's costume consisted of a red ruffled tuxedo shirt, tight black pants with a yellow cummerbund tied around his waist, and high-top patent leather shoes. He was mortified.



Even worse than his outfit, Peyton learned that the musical would be performed twice—once on Friday night, for the students, and again on Saturday night, for the families of the cast. Peyton would be forced to dance in front of his parents, his older brother Cooper, and his younger brother Eli. And there was nothing on earth that frightened him more than being on stage in front of his brothers!

Peyton faced a difficult decision. He could try to get out of the play—maybe pretend to be sick or fake a

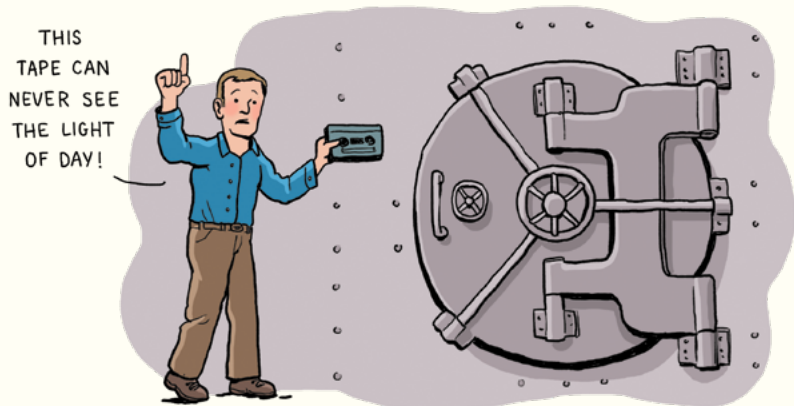
sprained ankle on the day of the show. Or he could huddle up with his theater teacher, study the dance moves, and learn how to tango. Peyton knew the choice he had to make.

On the night of the first performance, Peyton took the stage to raucous applause—and a little laughter—and proceeded to delight the crowd with a spirited performance as Miguel. He stomped, he snorted, he wiggled his fingers above his head like a bull’s horns. “I went full-speed on that tango,” he later said.



The next night, he was back at it all over again, this time for his whole family. “If they’d had an eighth-grade highlight film,” said his mom, “Peyton’s tango would have made it.” In fact, someone in the audience did make a video recording of the show for posterity.

But it was many years before Peyton would allow anyone outside his family to watch the video of his performance. “Don’t look for it,” he warned anyone hoping to see him dancing as Miguel the bullfighter. “It’s deep in the Manning vault, I can assure you.”



And there it remained until one day the footage popped up on YouTube. No one is quite sure how it got there. Maybe one of Peyton’s brothers decided to have a little fun at his expense.

By that time, he had already become an All-Pro NFL quarterback, famous for coming through in the clutch—at critical moments—as huge crowds screamed and cheered from the stands. A silly little video wasn’t going to bother him.

At a press conference before his first Super Bowl in 2007, Peyton was asked if the upcoming game was the most pressure he had ever faced. Not even close, was his

reply. Dancing the tango in front of family and friends was much tougher. “Now that’s pressure,” he said.

The next day, Peyton went out and led his team, the Indianapolis Colts, to a victory over the Chicago Bears to win the world championship. “It was a wonderful team game,” he said afterward. “Everyone did their job.”

He may have been talking about the Super Bowl, but Peyton could have said the same thing about his middle school musical.



Want more stories about famous sports stars?
Check out *Kid Athletes*.

CHARLES SCHULZ

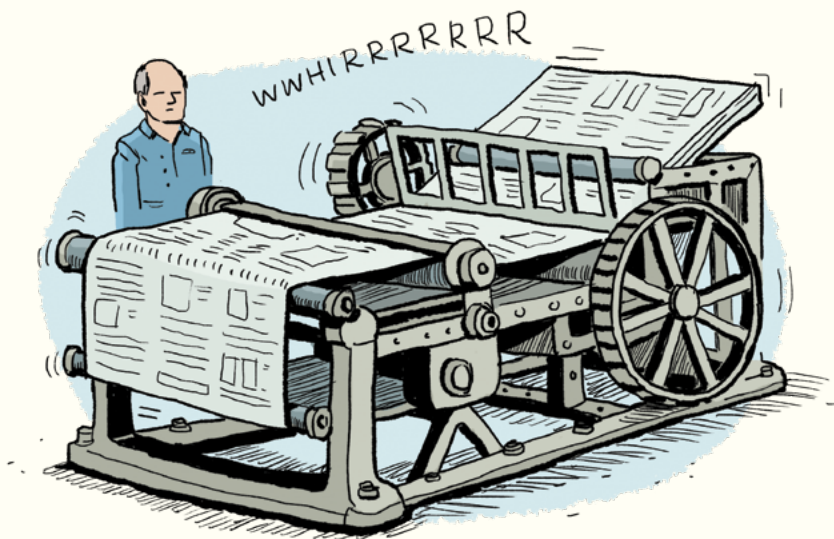


The Shy Guy

Long before he created Charlie Brown, Snoopy, and the rest of the Peanuts gang, Charles “Sparky” Schulz was just a quiet kid with a sketchpad who felt uncomfortable sharing his drawings with others. Only by overcoming his shyness could he make the leap from secret doodler to superstar cartoonist.

Charles Schulz's father, Carl, loved comics. In the 1930s he owned a thriving three-chair barbershop in St. Paul, Minnesota. Every Sunday, Carl would buy four newspapers just so he could follow the adventures of Buck Rogers, Little Orphan Annie, and other cartoon characters who populated the “funny pages.”

Charles, Carl's only child, came to share his father's passion for the newspaper comic strips. As a young boy, Charles was called “Sparky,” named after a rickety race-horse in the comic strip “Barney Google.” On weekdays, Sparky helped his dad in the barbershop. On weekends, he would head over to the office of the town newspaper. He'd press his nose against the glass windows and watch the weekly funnies roll off the presses.



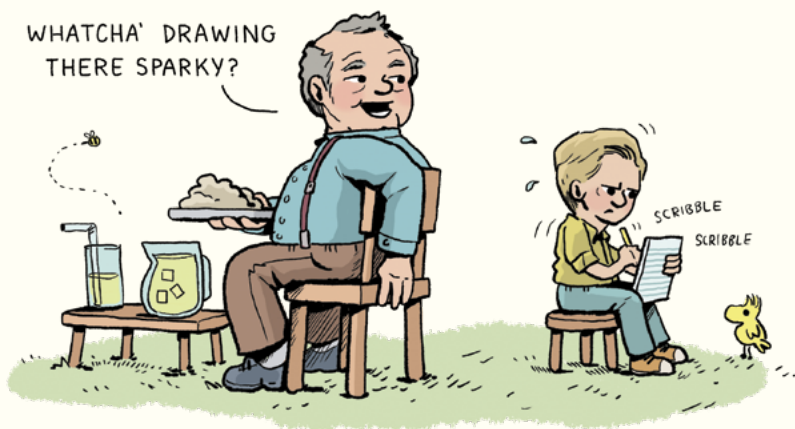
Sparky soon learned that he could do more than just read the comics. He could draw them. At the end of a long day spent cutting and sweeping hair, Sparky and his father rode home together on the streetcar. On cold winter evenings—and Minnesota had many of those—Sparky would sketch scenes from their day, using his finger to draw in the steam-fogged window.

Sensing that their son had a knack for illustration, Sparky's parents gave him a small chalkboard to carry around. Sparky spent hours drawing pictures onto its dark surface. When he grew older, he moved on to sketchpads. He always kept a sharpened pencil in his pocket, in case the urge to doodle should strike. On more than one occasion, the pencil point poked a hole in his trousers.



At first, Sparky kept his drawings private. He was shy and didn't like to call attention to himself. At family gatherings, he sat alone with his face buried in his sketchpad. He rarely joined in conversations with his relatives, but sometimes an aunt or uncle would ask what he was drawing. "Let him alone!" Sparky's mother would admonish them.

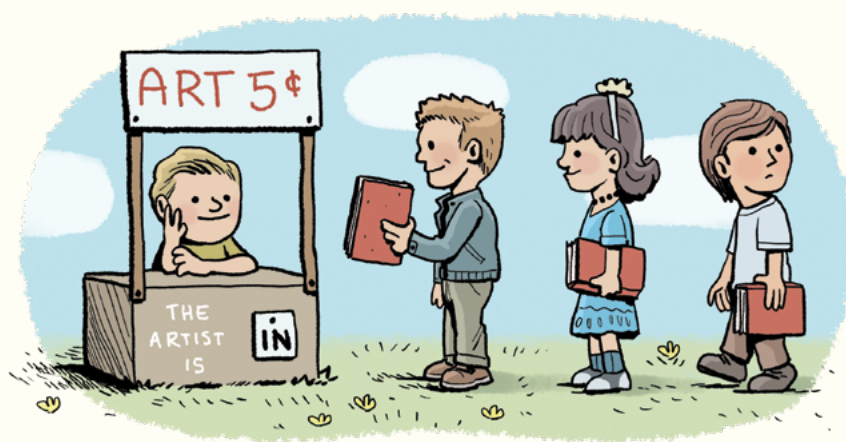
One time, Sparky's parents took him to visit his Aunt Clara in the Wisconsin countryside. Clara's son Reuben also liked to draw. In fact, Reuben impressed the adults with his drawing of a man sitting on a log. Sparky took one look at his cousin's sketch and thought, "I could do better than that!"



When Sparky was in kindergarten, his teacher handed out crayons and asked the class to draw something they had seen. Inspired by the harsh Minnesota winter, Sparky drew a man shoveling snow.

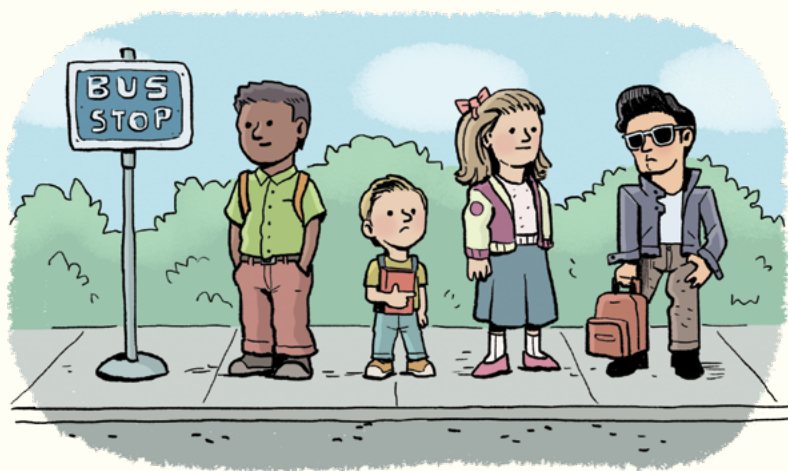
Then he added his own flourish: a leafy palm, a tree he had learned about from his Uncle Monroe, who lived in California. A less open-minded teacher might have criticized Sparky for letting his imagination run wild. Instead she praised his originality, saying, “Charles, you’re going to be an artist someday!” After receiving such praise and encouragement, Sparky was a little less reluctant to share his art with other people.

Then one day, Sparky’s friend Raymond showed off the cover of his looseleaf binder. On it he had drawn a man riding a bucking bronco. Sparky had never thought to display his drawings like that. Soon his own binder was festooned with sketches of cartoon characters like Mickey Mouse and Popeye. When his classmates noticed, they asked him to decorate their notebooks as well. Sparky was elated.



A newly confident Sparky began to excel at school. His grades soared, and he was allowed to skip the fourth grade. That seemed like a good idea at first, but it wound up being a terrible setback on the road to overcoming his shyness.

That's because Sparky was now the smallest kid in his class. He longed to be selected for the school Safety Patrol, but was turned down because he was too short.



Not only that, but the older kids weren't as impressed by his artwork as his younger classmates had been. When he was singled out for an award in penmanship, he could hear the other students snickering behind his back as he got up from his desk to receive his pin and certificate.

Once again, Sparky retreated into his bashful shell.

He rarely spoke in class and tried to hide his drawing ability. His grades began to suffer, and he was forced to repeat the eighth grade.

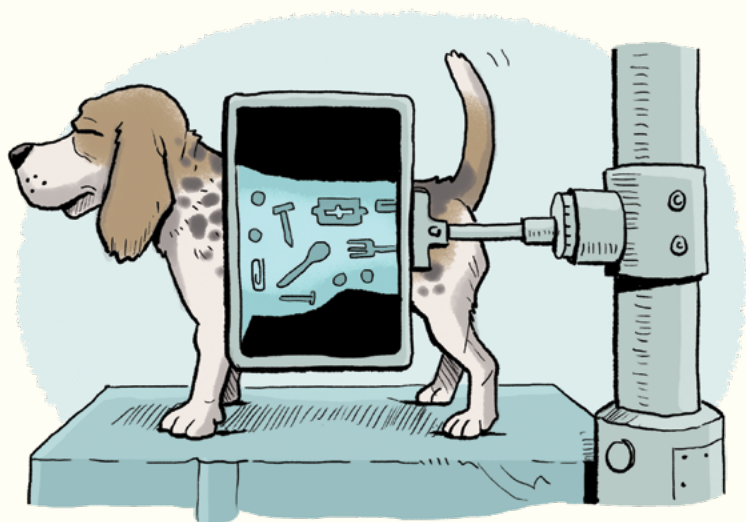
In junior high, Sparky even lost confidence in the one thing he knew he was good at. When assigned to write about William Shakespeare for English class, he came up with the idea to illustrate the paper with his own drawings. But then he decided against it. To his dismay, another boy followed through on a similar project and received high praise.



But inspiration was not far away. It took the form of a mischievous black-and-white beagle who convinced Sparky to believe in himself again. No, not Snoopy, although Sparky would one day base his famous creation on his childhood pet. This dog was called

Spike. And he was known to eat anything he could get his paws on.

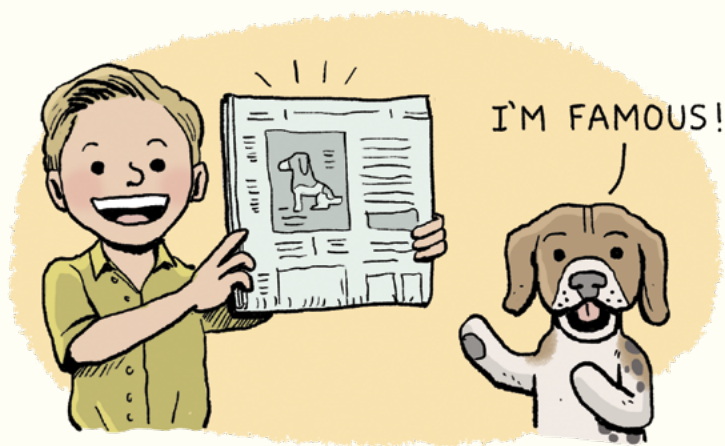
Spike once scarfed down an entire rubber ball. Another time, he jumped onto Carl Schulz's dresser and gobbled up a wad of money from the barbershop. The pooch appeared to be indestructible—no matter what Spike ate, it just seemed to pass right through without causing him any problems.



One winter night, when Sparky was fourteen, he decided to use Spike's misbehavior as the inspiration for a cartoon. He drew a picture of the gluttonous beagle sitting up and added the caption: "A hunting dog that eats pins, tacks, and razor blades is owned by C. F. Schulz, St. Paul, Minn."

He signed his cartoon "Drawn by 'Sparky.'" Then

he did something unusual for such a shy boy. Instead of hiding the drawing in his sketchbook, he sent it to the editors of the “Ripley’s Believe It or Not” comic strip. To Sparky’s surprise, they agreed to publish it. On February 22, 1937, Sparky’s drawing appeared in more than 300 newspapers worldwide.



Sparky was immensely proud of his achievement. Although he remained shy and suffered many setbacks as an artist—including when his high school yearbook committee rejected his drawings—he never again lost faith in his artistic abilities. And eventually others saw his skill, too. As a young man, he applied for a place in a correspondence course at the Federal School of Applied Cartooning in Minneapolis. His work was so good that the school offered him a position as an instructor.

The job was perfect for Sparky. The quiet introvert

who had disliked showing his art to others was now encouraging students to share their illustrations with him. Even better, Sparky had more time to work on his cartoons, including one about a group of kids and a pet dog. His creation—“Peanuts”—became the world’s most popular comic strip. Its main character, Charlie Brown, was just like Sparky: a boy filled with self-doubt who takes inspiration from his brash, mischievous beagle.

Charlie Brown may never have received the recognition he deserved, but Charles Schulz certainly did. He was rewarded with the admiration of millions of comics fans worldwide.

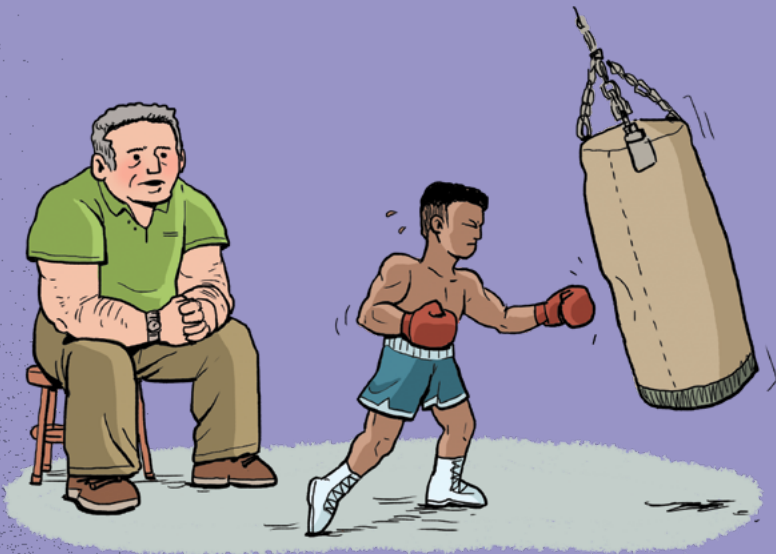


Curious about other artists? Pick up a copy of *Kid Artists*.

PART

TWO

PERSEVERANCE



EVERY KID LEGEND

AGREES ON

ONE THING.

**IT'S IMPOSSIBLE
TO PRACTICE TOO MUCH.**

THESE

KID LEGENDS

NEVER

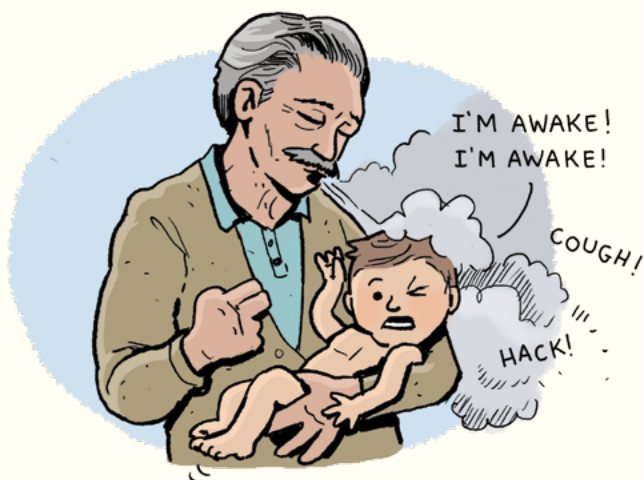
GAVE UP!

PABLO PICASSO

Problem Child
Makes Good

"Every child is an artist," Pablo Picasso once observed. "The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up." All his life, he chafed at the rules imposed on him by others. But what some people saw as a rebellious quality was in fact an imaginative and innovative spirit that could not be contained.

Pablo Picasso entered the world howling. Seconds after he was born, one of the hospital physicians, his uncle Don Salvador, leaned down and blew a huge cloud of cigar smoke in the newborn's face. The baby grimaced and bellowed in protest—and that's how everyone knew he was healthy and alive. At that time, doctors were allowed to smoke in delivery rooms, but this little infant would have none of it. Even at birth, he refused to accept things as they had always been done.



The baby was named Pablo Diego José Francisco de Paula Juan Nepomuceno María de los Remedios Cipriano de la Santísima Trinidad Martyr Patricio Clito Ruíz y Picasso—whew! He was known to his friends as Pablito, a nickname meaning “little Pablo,” and he learned to draw before he could walk. His first word was *piz*, short for *lápiz*, the Spanish word for pencil. It

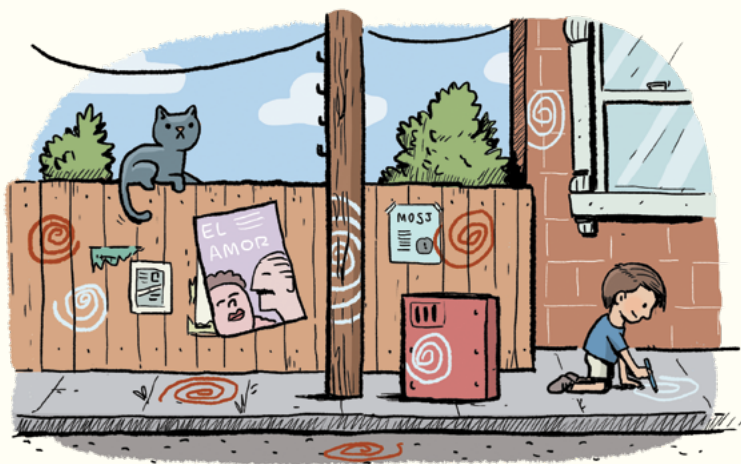
was an instrument that would soon become his most prized possession.

Pablo inherited his love of art from his father, Don José Ruiz y Blasco, a talented painter. Don José's favorite subjects were the pigeons that flocked in the plaza outside the Picassos' home in Málaga, a town on the southern coast of Spain. Sometimes he would allow Pablo to finish paintings for him. One of Pablo's earliest solo artworks was a portrait of his little sister, which he painted with egg yolk.



But painting was not yet his specialty. Drawing was. Pablo mostly liked to draw spirals. When people asked him why, he explained that they reminded him of churros, the fried-dough pastries sold at every streetcorner stand in Málaga. While other kids played

underneath trees in the Plaza de la Merced, Pablo stood by himself scratching circles in the dirt with a stick.

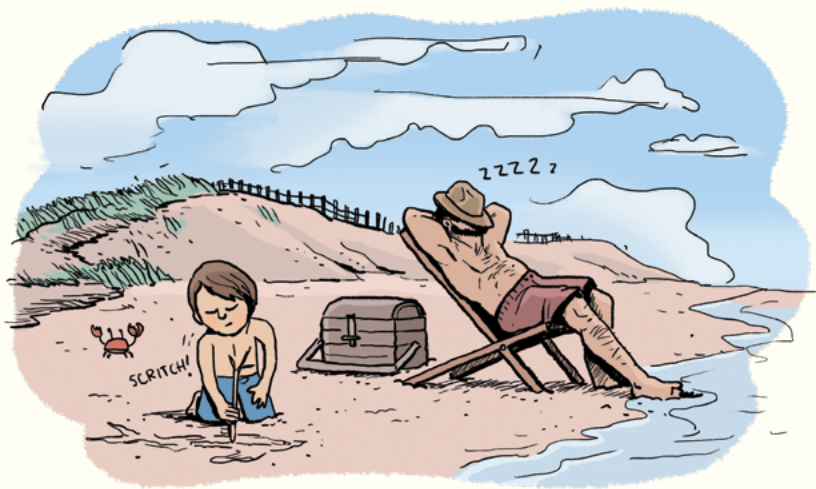


At school, Pablo found it hard to concentrate. Rather than completing classwork, he filled the margins of his notebook with pencil sketches of animals, birds, and people. His teacher grew exasperated with his lack of attention. She wrote a note to his mother saying: “Pablo should stop drawing in class and pay attention to his lessons.”

It was clear that Pablo hated rules, and he took every opportunity to disobey them. When adults told him what to do, he did the opposite. He once got in trouble for coloring the sky a bright red instead of the “normal” blue. Pablo was often banished to the “calaboose,” a bare cell with white walls and a bench, which served as a holding pen for unruly students.

“I liked it there, because I took along a sketch pad and drew incessantly,” Pablo later said. “I could have stayed there forever drawing without stopping.” He even began misbehaving on purpose so that he would be sentenced to detention and sent to the calaboose.

The one person who understood that Pablo wasn’t acting out for no reason was his father. One day when Pablo’s mother caught him drawing on the wall with a nail, Don José took him to the beach to blow off steam. As Don José stretched out to take a nap, Pablo sat beside him and drew a dolphin in the wet sand.

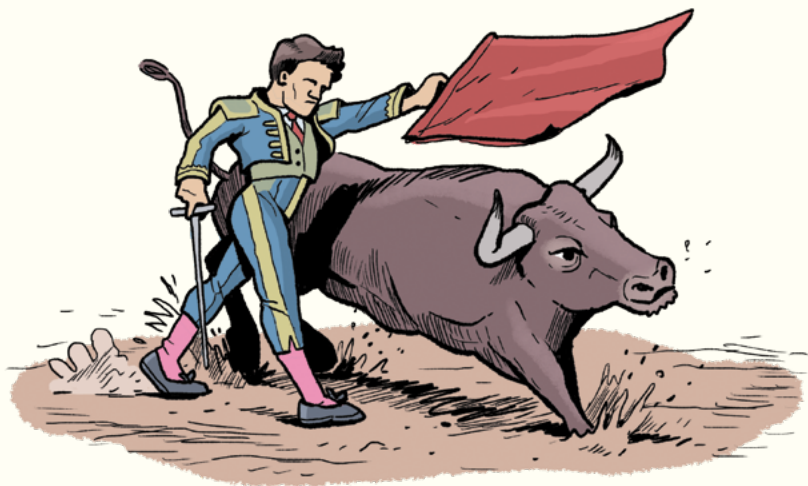


When Don José awoke, he was astonished by the beauty of his son’s drawing. “Could it be Pablo who drew this?” he wondered.

That afternoon, Don José took a closer look at the image Pablo had drawn on their living room wall.

What at first looked like random scratches soon took shape. Don José recognized a reindeer and a bison running away from a group of men on horseback who were armed with bows and arrows. At that moment, Don José knew what to do to get Pablo to stop misbehaving. He decided to take him into his studio and teach his son how to paint.

From that day onward, Pablo and his father were inseparable art partners. In search of new subjects to portray, they began going to the bullfights. Pablo was mesmerized by the sight of the brave picadors as they charged ferocious bulls.



He saw El Lagartijo—"The Lizard"—one of the most famous bullfighters in Spain, and he met Cara Ancha, the celebrated Andalusian matador. When he was only nine years old, Pablo completed his first

painting, *Le Picador*, a portrait of a man riding a horse in the bullring.

Two years later, Pablo's family moved to a new town, La Coruña, on Spain's Atlantic coast. Don José got a job as an art teacher at the local college. Even though he was much younger than the other students, Pablo enrolled in his father's class. He also took courses in figure drawing and landscape painting. By the time he turned thirteen, Pablo's skill level had surpassed his father's. Don José was so impressed that he handed his son his brushes and vowed never to paint again.



When Pablo was fourteen years old, his family moved again, this time to Barcelona, where Pablo enrolled in the prestigious School of Fine Arts. His teachers quickly noticed his skills and allowed him to skip two grades. But just as in Málaga, Pablo had

trouble adhering to the school's rules. Before long he was back to his old tricks, cutting class so that he could wander the city streets, sketching interesting scenes that he observed along the way.

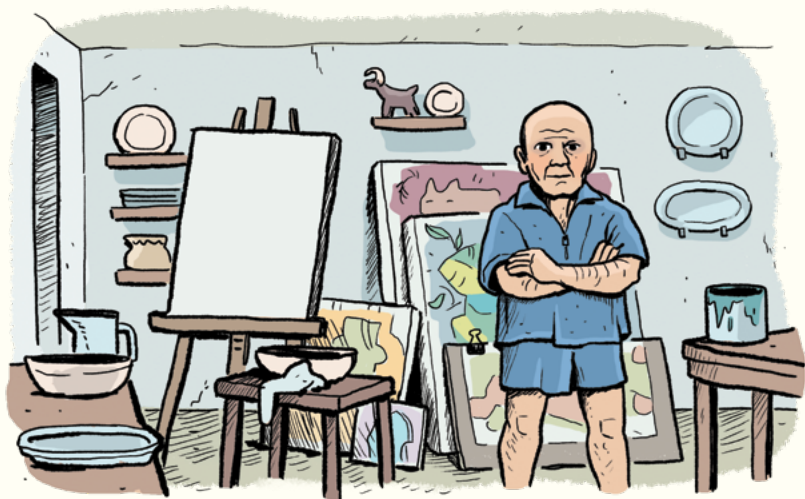


Pablo repeated this behavior at his next school, the Royal Academy of San Fernando in Madrid. This time, Pablo's father refused to tolerate his son's antics and stopped his allowance. At age sixteen, Pablo found himself on his own for the first time, forced to support himself on nothing but his artistic ability.

It has been said that the older Pablo grew, the more childlike his art became. During some periods he painted almost entirely in blue or depicted only circus performers. During his Cubist period, he painted people and objects broken down into geometric shapes. When he died in 1973, at the age of ninety-one, Pablo

left behind more than fifty thousand artworks in a wide variety of styles and materials—paintings, prints, ceramics, sculpture, and more. He was considered the world's best-known artist.

When it came to making art, Pablo Picasso lived by his own rules. Wherever inspiration led him, he followed—something that would not have surprised anyone who had known him as a child growing up in his native Spain.



Loved what you read? Pick up a copy of *Kid Artists*.



MUHAMMAD ALI

AND

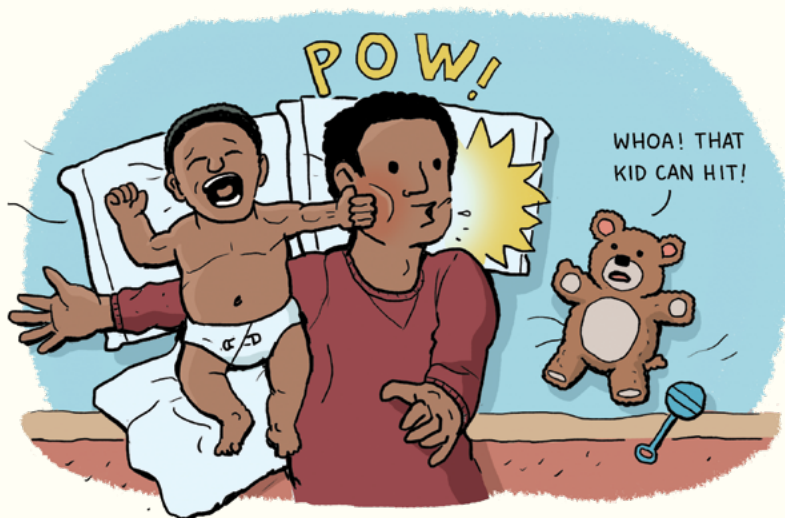
★ *The Case of the Missing Bicycle* ★

Long before he took the name Muhammad Ali to reflect his newfound religious faith, a rowdy and rambunctious kid named Cassius Clay displayed all the traits of a great heavyweight champion. He was brash, he was fast on his feet, and he packed a wallop. But it wasn't until he lost his most prized possession that he discovered the real fighter within.

Cassius Clay may not have been born a heavyweight, but even as a kid, he knew how to throw a punch.

At birth, Cassius weighed six pounds, seven ounces—just about average for a baby born in 1942. But like all great boxers, he quickly figured out it's not the size of the man in the fight, but the size of the fight in the man. Or in his case, the infant.

One day when Cassius was six months old, he was lying in bed next to his father, Cassius Sr. He stretched his little arms to yawn and accidentally slugged his dad in the face, almost knocking out his front tooth.

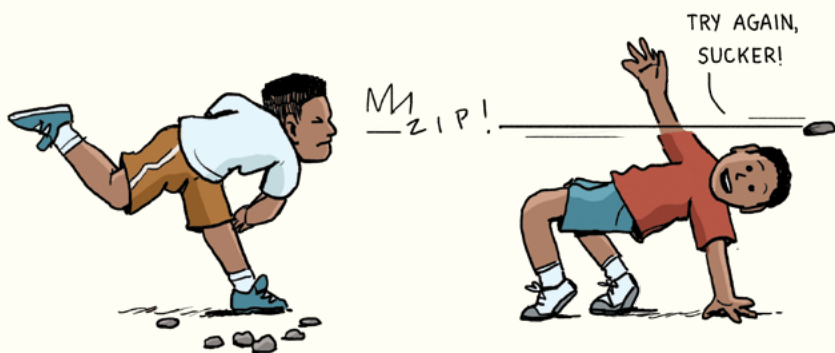


Cassius's dad later called the blow his son's "first knockout punch."

Right then and there, his parents should have known that Cassius was born to box. But just to be sure, he

kept giving them hints. He took to walking on his tip-toes, like a fighter dancing nimbly around the ring. And he never stopped talking, as if constantly egging on an opponent. Cassius's mother, Odessa, even started calling him "G. G." for all his "gibber-gabber."

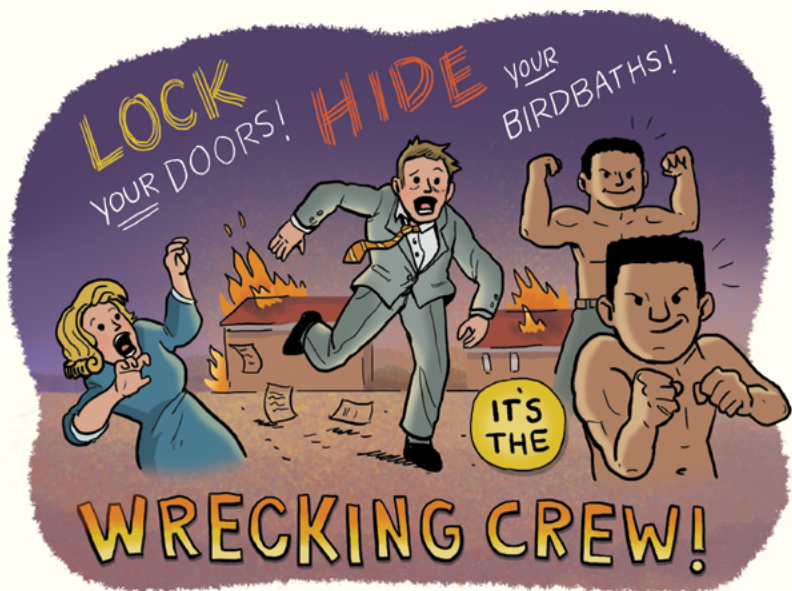
Then there was the peculiar brand of dodgeball that Cassius liked to play. He would challenge his younger brother Rudy to throw rocks at him. With the lightning-fast reflexes he would later show in the boxing ring, Cassius quickly dodged every flying stone.



No matter how many rocks Rudy threw, he was never able to hit his big brother.

Sometimes Cassius's pugnacious disposition got the better of him. For example, he had a bad habit of getting up in the middle of the night and throwing everything in his dresser onto the floor. No one knew why he did it, but his parents counseled him to keep his temper under control.

Cassius and Rudy often got into trouble in their neighborhood in Louisville, Kentucky. One time they destroyed a birdbath in the yard of one of their neighbors, Mrs. Wheatley. People started calling the Clay brothers “the Wrecking Crew” for the damage they caused. Some even started bolting the doors to their houses whenever Cassius and Rudy came around.



That wasn't the kind of reputation Cassius wanted. He realized he would have to find a better outlet for his energy. Fortunately, he was soon presented with the perfect opportunity.

When Cassius was twelve years old, his parents gave him a new bicycle, a red-and-white Schwinn that cost \$60. It was just about his most prized possession.

One day he was out riding his new bike with his friend Johnny Willis when a rainstorm overtook them. To stay dry, the boys parked their bikes outside Louisville's Columbia Auditorium and headed inside, where a large bazaar was under way. Cassius and Johnny spent the day browsing the booths and eating ice cream and popcorn.

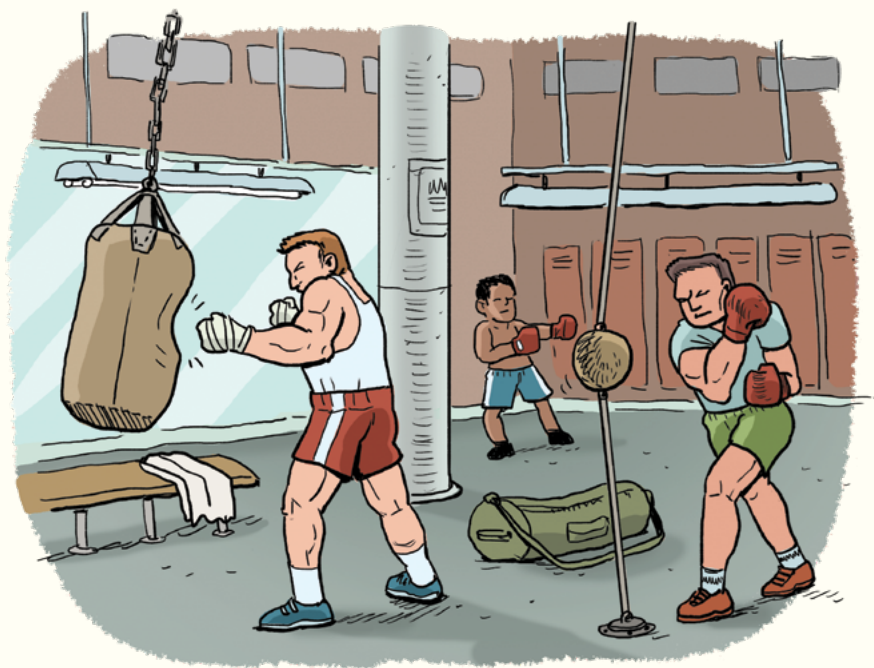


At the end of the day, when they returned to retrieve their bicycles, the new red Schwinn was gone!

Tears filled Cassius's eyes as he felt his anger rising. What should he do? He had no idea who took his bike, but he did have an idea of what he'd like to do to that person when he found out.

As luck would have it, Cassius found out that a police officer was in the basement of the Columbia Auditorium.

Boiling with rage, Cassius stormed into the basement. But when he opened the door, what he saw was no police station. To his surprise, he discovered a gym filled with men and boys punching bags, jumping rope, and sparring in the center of a velvet-lined boxing ring. If he wanted a fight, it looked like he'd come to the right place.



“Where’s the policeman they told me about?” Cassius asked.

Someone pointed to a kindly looking white-haired man who appeared to be in charge of the gym.

“I’m Joe Martin,” said the man.



“You’re gonna whup him, huh?” Martin replied.
“Don’t you think you ought to learn how to fight first?”

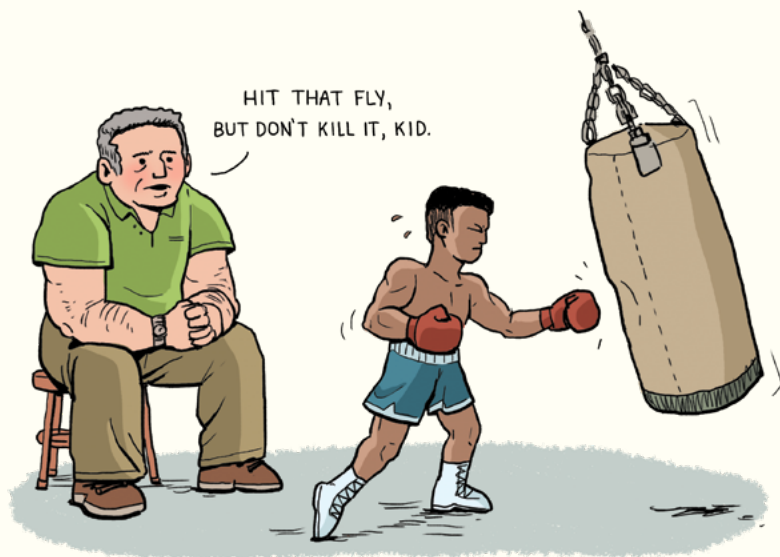
That thought had never occurred to Cassius. All his life he’d been throwing punches, ducking flying rocks, and promising to pummel anyone who crossed him. He’d never realized that there was a right way and a wrong way to fight.

So when Joe Martin offered him boxing lessons at his gym, Cassius jumped at the chance. The search for the bike thief was put on hold and his training in the ring was begun.

Cassius became a dedicated trainee. He spent almost every waking moment learning to box at the gym. Joe started by teaching him the fundamentals: how to stand, how to punch, how to move his feet. When

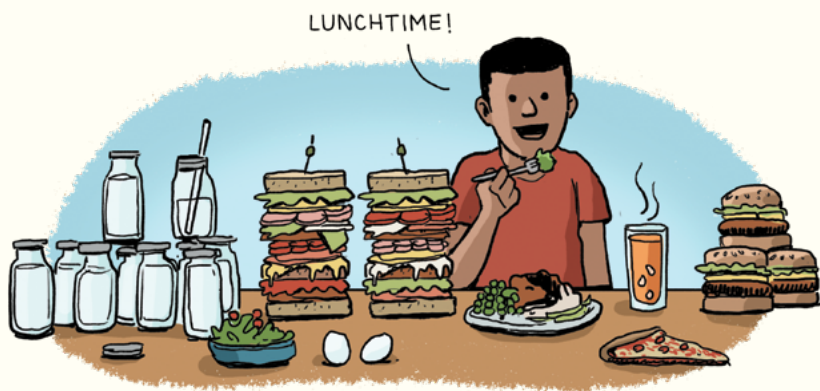
Cassius took his turn punching the heavy bag, Martin showed him how to throw rapid-fire jabs instead of big haymakers that would tire him out.

“Cassius, imagine there’s a fly on that bag,” Martin said.



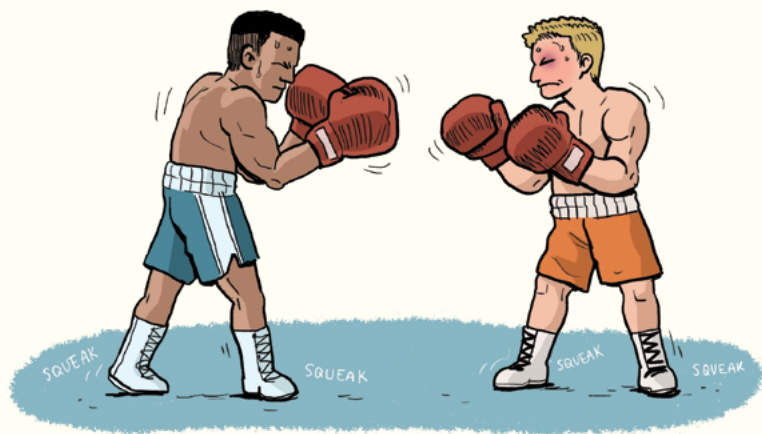
Almost immediately, Joe saw that his new student possessed one of the most important attributes a boxer can have: speed. Cassius knew how to anticipate an opponent’s punch and then dodge out of the way at the last possible second. He never seemed to blink, not even for an instant, always keeping his eyes locked on the hands of his opponent. Cassius was so fast with his eyes, Martin said, that you could hand the other boxer a screen door and he wouldn’t hit Cassius with it fifteen times in fifteen rounds.

To complement his quickness, Cassius used fitness and nutrition to build up his body. Some days, he got up at four in the morning and ran several miles before heading over to the gym. For breakfast, he drank a quart of milk and two raw eggs. At school, he needed two trays to carry his huge lunches.



Cassius refused to drink soda pop, because he didn't want to put on weight. Instead, he carried around a bottle of water with a clove of garlic in it. By the time he was done training, he was fit and trim and weighed 89 pounds.

After six weeks of lessons, Cassius was finally ready to step into the ring for the first time. His opponent was named Ronnie O'Keefe. As they squared off under the watchful eye of a referee, the two young boxers looked tiny in their oversized fourteen-ounce boxing gloves.



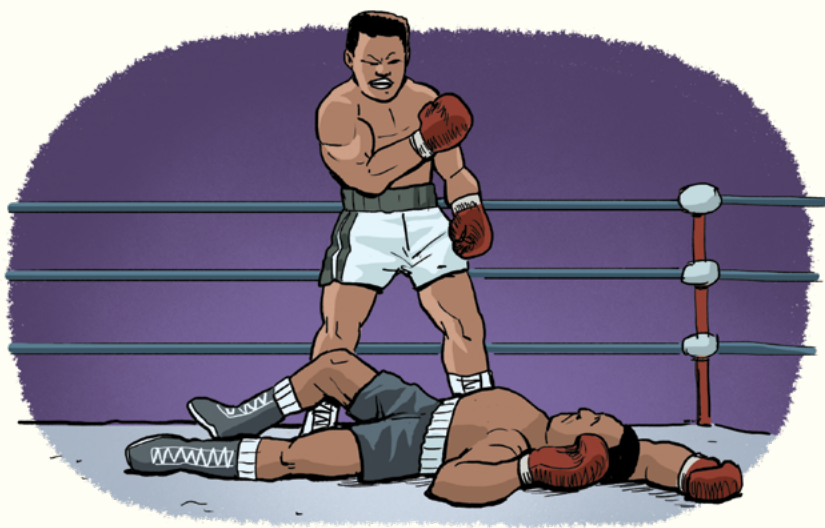
For three one-minute rounds, Cassius and Ronnie boxed their hearts out. Then they tapped gloves and went back to their neutral corners. Cassius managed to land a few more punches and was awarded a narrow victory. “I will be the greatest of all time!” he proclaimed as the referee raised his arm in triumph. It was the first of many times he would make that claim.

No one knows whether Cassius ever got his bicycle back, but the detour he took the day it was stolen put him on the path to greatness.

Over the next six years, Cassius Clay won 100 of the 108 bouts he fought. By the time he turned fourteen, he was recognized as one of the most promising amateur boxers in America. Just four years later, he was selected to join the U.S. boxing team at the Olympic Games in Rome. He won the gold medal, mesmerizing fans with

his lightning footwork and bold, brash personality. He then went on to become one of the greatest heavy-weight champions the world has ever known.

His old life as Cassius Clay would soon change, as would his name, when he joined the Nation of Islam. It was then that the legend of Muhammad Ali—forged in a basement of the Columbia Auditorium—truly began.



Want more? Look for *Kid Athletes* at your local bookstore or library.

Neil deGrasse Tyson

Look Up!

A make-believe trip into outer space turned an ordinary kid from the Bronx, New York, into a “star child” fascinated by moons, planets, and suns. That kid was Neil deGrasse Tyson. When he grew up, he brought that passion into the classroom and onto TV, becoming one of the world’s most beloved science educators.

One starry night, in the autumn of 1957, the life of nine-year-old Neil deGrasse Tyson' changed forever. In the middle of a vast, domed amphitheater, the house lights dimmed and a booming voice announced:



Comets streaked. Planets whirled. The moon waxed and the constellations appeared. A meteor vaporized, leaving a glowing trail in its wake. Seated in the dark, Neil was transfixed by a celestial light show the likes of which he had never seen.

This was Neil's first visit to a planetarium—the Hayden Planetarium in New York City—and his first encounter with the wonders of astronomy, the science of observing the sky.

When the lights rose, Neil realized that what he had just seen was only an amazing simulation projected

onto the theater's dome. Nevertheless, Neil's interest had been piqued, and his imagination fired. He decided then and there that he wanted to follow the stars for the rest of his life.

"The study of the universe would be my career," he said later, "and no force on Earth would stop me." From then on, whenever someone asked Neil what he wanted to be when he grew up, he proudly answered:



What seemed like a journey of a thousand light years was in fact just a short ride on a subway. Neil grew up in New York City, not far from the Hayden Planetarium, in the Castle Hill neighborhood of the Bronx. Later, he lived in Riverdale, in the fittingly named Skyview Apartments. Neil was the second of three children. Both his parents worked for the U.S. government.

Neil attended public school in New York City, and he did not distinguish himself in the classroom. One teacher complained on his report card that Neil should spend less time socializing and more time studying. “Your son laughs too loud,” another remarked to Neil’s mother during a parent-teacher conference.



But there was one teacher who saw potential in the young boy. She knew that Neil was interested in the stars and planets. So when she saw a newspaper ad for an astronomy class at the Hayden Planetarium, she cut it out and gave it to him.

The visit to the planetarium left Neil feeling that the universe was calling him to study it. But he still didn’t know how. Then, one day, a friend named Phillip lent him a pair of binoculars.

“What am I supposed to do with these?” Neil wondered. “Look in people’s windows?”

“No, silly,” Phillip said. “Look up!”

And when Neil did, he saw a whole new world of wonder. That night, he used the binoculars to gaze up at the moon, mesmerized by the giant craters on its surface. Magnified by the binoculars, the moon was no longer just a circle in the sky—it was another world waiting to be explored.

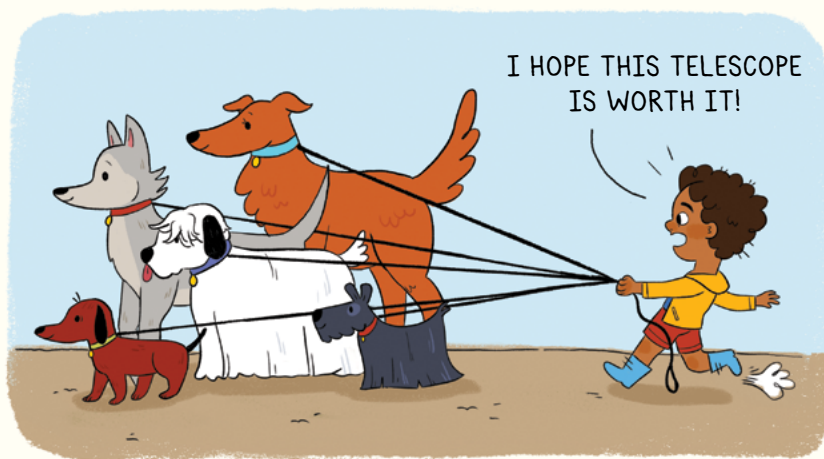
Then, when Neil was eleven years old, his parents gave him his first telescope. It was small, but it seemed infinitely more powerful than the binoculars. Now Neil could see way past the moon to the planets beyond. Even far-off Saturn, whose majestic rings Neil had read about, seemed as close and as clear as his own outstretched hand.

I SEE THE MAN
IN THE MOON!



Neil could not get enough of his new hobby. In fact, his fascination with the universe soon outgrew the power of his beginner's telescope. He needed a larger instrument. But that would cost money, and his parents were not very wealthy.

Determined to have a more powerful telescope, Neil started a dog-walking service in his apartment building. In time, he had earned about half the money he needed, so his parents chipped in the rest.



Neil's new telescope was a thing of beauty: a five-foot-long tube that "looked like a cross between an artillery cannon and a grenade launcher," as Neil once described it. It came with a long extension cord that had to be plugged into an electrical outlet. Neil also bought a high-tech camera so he could take photographs of the things he saw in the sky.

One night, Neil brought his new telescope up to the

tar-covered roof of his building to test it out. A dentist who lived a few floors below let Neil plug in the cord inside his apartment. But a kid dragging around telescopes and cameras is bound to arouse suspicion. Another neighbor saw him, thought he was a burglar, and called the police.

Two officers quickly arrived and climbed up to the roof to make sure Neil wasn't up to no good. Neil assured them that his expedition was all in the interest of science. He encouraged the officers to peer through his telescope while he told them facts about the planets:



The officers had to agree. It really was pretty amazing.

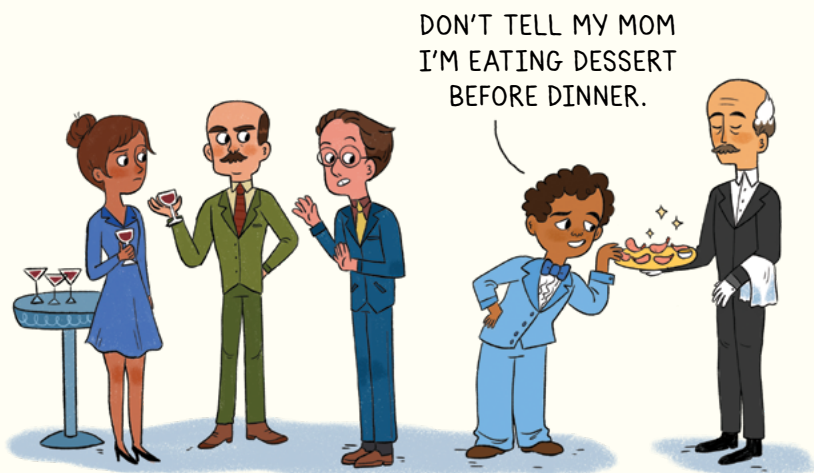
Neil continued with his astronomical investigations for the next several years, eventually earning admission to the prestigious Bronx High School of Science.

The summer he turned fifteen, Neil signed up for “space

camp” at the Hayden Planetarium, where his adventure had begun. For the next month, Neil studied the stars and talked to scientists about the universe.

He also took a class with the planetarium’s director, Mark Chartrand III, who became his first role model. Dr. Chartrand had a way of using humorous examples to make complex scientific ideas understandable to everyone. Neil received a certificate for completing the course, signed by Dr. Chartrand, which he still has to this day.

On returning home from camp, Neil was asked to give a talk to fifty adults. He told the audience all about what he’d learned at the planetarium. The sponsors of the talk paid Neil \$50—more money than he had ever earned in a single day. “That’s one hundred dog walks!” Neil marveled, thinking back to his old job.



Neil's presentation was so poised and polished that other astrophysicists started to take notice of him. Carl Sagan, a renowned astrophysicist and host of the TV show *Cosmos*, wrote a letter asking Neil to consider enrolling at Cornell University, where Sagan taught. Neil was highly impressed by Professor Sagan, whose shows and books made things like quarks and black holes sound as cool as comic books and video games.



In the end, Neil declined Professor Sagan's offer and decided to attend Harvard University. But their connection would one day be renewed. In 2015, several years after Carl Sagan died and Neil had succeeded him as America's best-known astrophysicist, TV producers asked Neil to host a new series of *Cosmos* programs.

In 1996, Neil returned to the place where his love for astrophysics began—the Hayden Planetarium—but

now he was its director, a job he still has today. Neil revived Dr. Chartrand's tradition of presenting every astronomy student with a graduation-style diploma. He signed each one, as a way of honoring the scientists who came before him.

Like Dr. Chartrand and Professor Sagan, Neil uses humor and plain language to convey his enthusiasm for the science of astrophysics. That common touch has helped make Neil deGrasse Tyson one of the most popular and respected scientists in the world.



Want to keep reading? Pick up a copy of *Kid Scientists*.

PART

THREE

FAMILY MATTERS



BROTHERS, **SISTERS**,
PARENTS,
RELATIVES—
ALL OF

THESE

KID LEGENDS

HAD AN
IMPORTANT
MEMBER ON
THEIR SIDE.

JEFF KINNEY

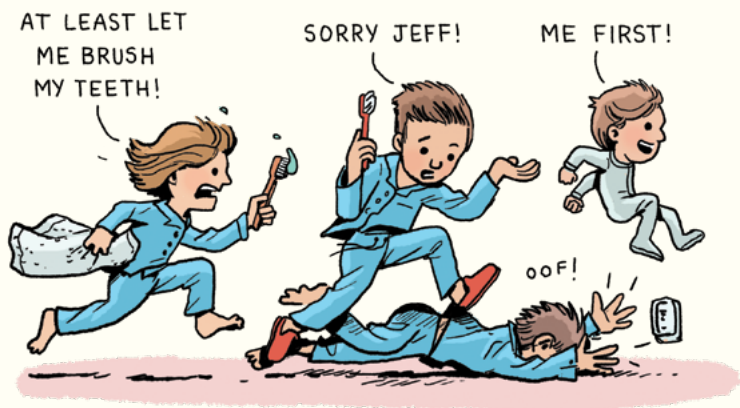


“I was never a wimpy kid,” Jeff Kinney has said. “But I had my wimpy moments.” In those moments, the overlooked middle child turned to the work of Judy Blume and other classic authors for the inspiration that led him to create the best-selling *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series.

In Jeff Kinney's *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, the hero, Greg Heffley, is constantly bedeviled by his cool older brother Rodrick and his spoiled younger brother Manny. In real life, Jeff Kinney had three pesky siblings to deal with—each one seemingly determined to remind him of the special torments reserved for the middle child in a family.

Jeff's older brother and sister, Scott and Annmarie, were waiting for him when his parents brought him home from the hospital. In fact, Scott immediately pronounced the hefty ten-pound baby "a doorbell," the three-year-old's word for "adorable."

Jeff's younger brother Patrick came along three years later, meaning that Jeff was almost perfectly sandwiched between two warring camps. The daily competition to see who would be the first to use the single bathroom reserved for kids was intense.



It didn't help that Jeff considered himself the smart one in the family, which he reminded his siblings of at every opportunity. For revenge they played tricks on him. One time, when Jeff was seven, they pulled off an epic prank that went down in Kinney family lore.

School had just let out for the year and Jeff was looking forward to sleeping in on his first day of summer vacation. At the crack of dawn, his older siblings roused him out of bed and told him that he was late for class.

"You slept through the whole summer!" they informed him. "You even missed our trip to Disney World!"

In a panic, a still sleepy Jeff scrambled to get ready for school. He was halfway out the door when he realized he'd been bamboozled. Call it "The Rip Van Winkle Caper."



Jeff hoped that things would change when Patrick was born. Maybe Scott and Annmarie would direct their practical jokes at their youngest sibling instead. But that didn't happen. Quite the opposite, in fact. Patrick quickly became the favorite son.

"My younger brother was the new cute one and my two older siblings were the teens," Jeff later recalled. "So I was somewhere stuck in the middle."

It seemed as if Patrick could do no wrong. One time their parents caught him drawing a life-size self-portrait on the pantry door. Jeff was so sure his brother would be busted that he could barely contain his glee. But Brian and Patricia Kinney thought the drawing was a masterpiece, evidence that he was the artistic genius in the family. They didn't even make him erase it. For years, Jeff seethed every time he passed by the pantry. He was sure that if he'd done that, he would have been severely punished.



Harassed by Scott and Annmarie, jealous of the attention lavished on Patrick, Jeff realized that life as the middle child was never going to be fair. Instead of looking to exact revenge on his siblings, he sought solace in stories about kids dealing with the same sorts of problems.

One day, Jeff went to the bookshelf and pulled out a novel by Judy Blume. *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* told the story of a nine-year-old boy named Peter Hatcher, who had an obnoxious younger brother named Fudge. To Peter's consternation, Fudge never gets punished for misbehaving.

The story immediately struck a chord with Jeff, who liked the way the author used humor to describe real-life situations. He went on to devour Judy Blume's other books. *Freckle Juice*, the tale of a boy who whips up a concoction to give him freckles, was his favorite.



Jeff didn't always feel like reading stories that made him think of his own life. Sometimes he just wanted to escape into an imaginary world. For that, he turned to fantasy stories by J. R. R. Tolkien, Terry Brooks, and C. S. Lewis, as well as the stash of comic books.

There were war stories, like *Frontline Combat*, and tales of knights, pirates, and musketeers retold in *Classics Illustrated*. But Jeff's all-time favorite comic was illustrator Carl Barks's *Uncle Scrooge* series, which chronicled the adventures of Donald Duck's wealthy uncle on his travels around the globe.

Jeff's father encouraged his son's love of comics by cutting out strips from newspaper funny pages and taping them to the refrigerator. That was how Jeff discovered *Calvin and Hobbes*, *Bloom County*, and *The Far Side*, three of his favorite comics growing up.



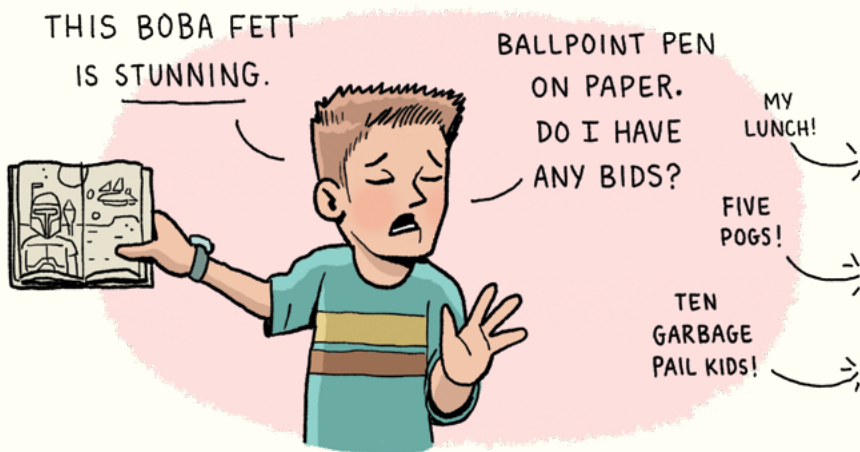
At school, Jeff started to draw his own cartoons in a sketchpad. He took an art class and learned to draw the people and things he saw around him. Before long, drawing was all Jeff wanted to do. When the other kids were outside playing sports or swimming, Jeff would hide out in the school bathroom so the coach couldn't find him. If it got cold, he would wrap himself in toilet paper to keep warm.



By middle school, Jeff's pencil sketches were getting huge—literally. He drew immense four-foot-tall drawings that attracted the attention of his teachers. They started putting his work on display inside a glass case in the school lobby.

Patrick became Jeff's biggest fan. One day, without asking permission, Jeff's little brother brought one of

his sketchbooks to school and passed it around. The other kids were amazed at Jeff's realistic renderings of *Star Wars* characters. Some even offered to buy Jeff's drawings. But when Jeff found out what Patrick had done, he was furious. He didn't think his drawings were good enough to be put up for sale.



It was many years before Jeff worked up the courage to sell some of his drawings. In college, he spent three years sending his cartoons to newspapers, hoping someone would buy them. But all he got was rejections. "I realized that the problem was that I couldn't draw well enough," he admitted. "My drawings weren't professional grade."

Then one day Jeff hit upon the idea of creating a character based on himself as a child. He would present the boy's sketches and observations in the form of a

diary. That way, it wouldn't matter if the drawings didn't look professional. He was inspired by reading a Harry Potter book. "He's brave, he's magical, he's powerful," Jeff said later, "and I wasn't any of these things as a kid, so I wanted to create a character who was more like I was."

For the next four years, Jeff wracked his brain trying to remember the details of his childhood. He spent hours on the phone with his siblings, writing down every funny story they could recall: all the pranks that Scott and Annmarie played on him, the fights he had with Patrick, and his adventures in school.



When he had enough material to fill a dozen sketchbooks, Jeff showed his work to an editor at a comic book convention. To his surprise, the editor told him his work was just what publishers were looking for. A short

time later, Jeff signed a contract to write the first book in the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series.

More than ten years and a dozen books later, Jeff is one of the world's most popular authors. Over 180 million copies of his *Wimpy Kid* books have been sold. Jeff and his wife, Julie, even own their own bookstore, An Unlikely Story, in his adopted hometown of Plainville, Massachusetts.

No one is happier for Jeff's success than his brothers and sister, who know what an important role they played in making this frustrated middle child the writer he is today.



Don't miss more true tales in *Kid Authors*.

★ JOHN F. KENNEDY

★
AND THE



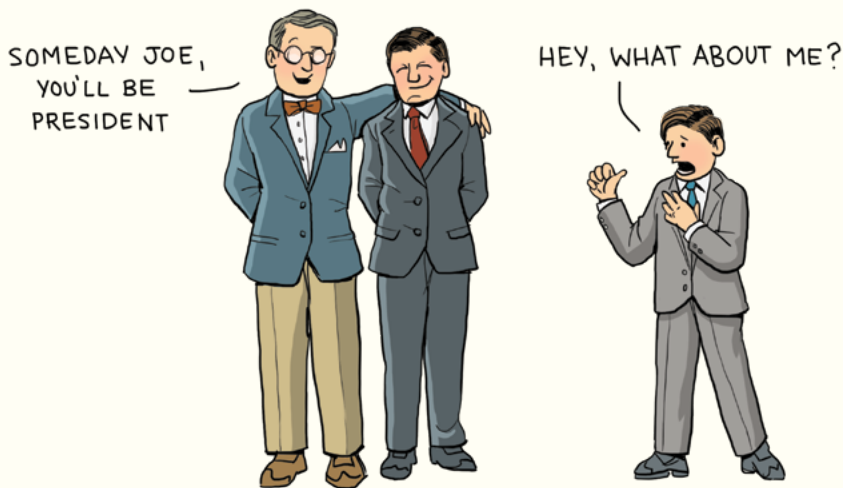
BORN 1917

He was the youngest man ever elected U.S. president, but he was no kid. When he took office in 1961, John F. Kennedy had already survived a slew of childhood illnesses, fought in a war, and written a book about courageous American leaders. But the biggest challenge faced by “Jack” may have been escaping from the shadow of his older brother.



“If you bring up the eldest son right,” Jack Kennedy’s mother once explained, “that is very important because the younger ones watch him. If he works at his studies and his sports until he is praised, the others will follow his example.”

That was certainly the rule in the Kennedy household. Oldest brother Joe got all the praise while the next-oldest, Jack, was treated like a pale copy of the original. From the time the boys were little, their father went around telling everybody that Joe would be president of the United States someday.



Eager to please his parents, Joe reveled in his role as “Golden Boy.” But that didn’t sit well with Jack. To him, Joe did not seem like a role model. He seemed like a bully.

When they played catch, Joe wouldn't throw the ball to Jack. He'd throw it *at* him.

When they played football, Joe liked to slam the ball hard into Jack's stomach, then laugh uproariously as his little brother doubled over in pain.



The brothers also staged epic wrestling matches. Joe used his superior size and strength to easily pin Jack to the canvas.



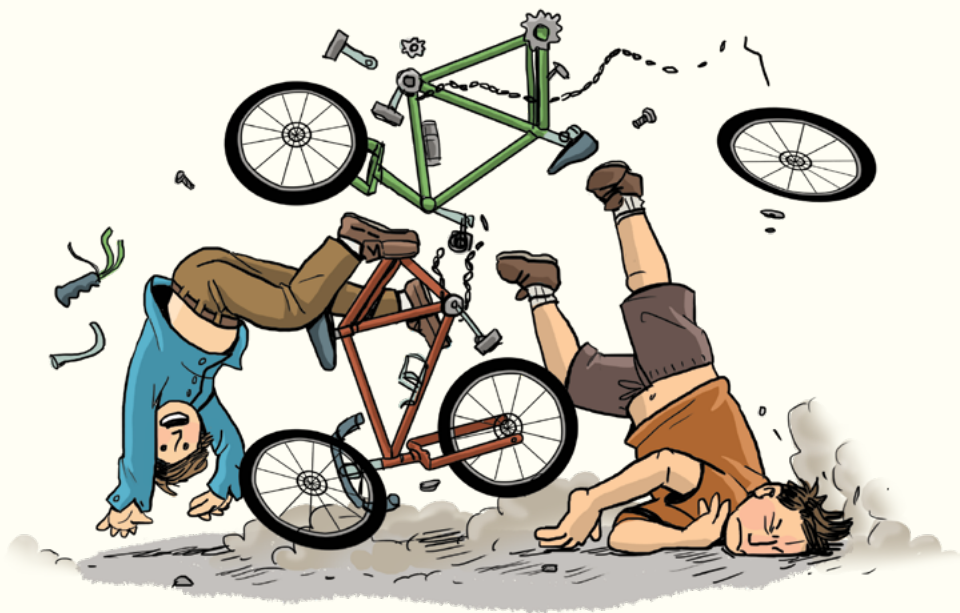
One time, when the boys were playing on the beach, Jack put on Joe's bathing suit by mistake. Joe grew enraged and chased Jack into the ocean, where he tackled him and began fighting him as the waves crashed around them. A family friend had to break them up before either was seriously hurt.



And then there was the disastrous bike race. One day, Joe challenged his brother to cycle around the neighborhood. Each took off from the same spot headed in opposite directions. They pedaled furiously around the block to see who could return to the starting line first.

As the competitors sped toward the finish, it looked like anybody's race. But neither brother was willing

to concede defeat. Instead of stopping, they collided head-on.

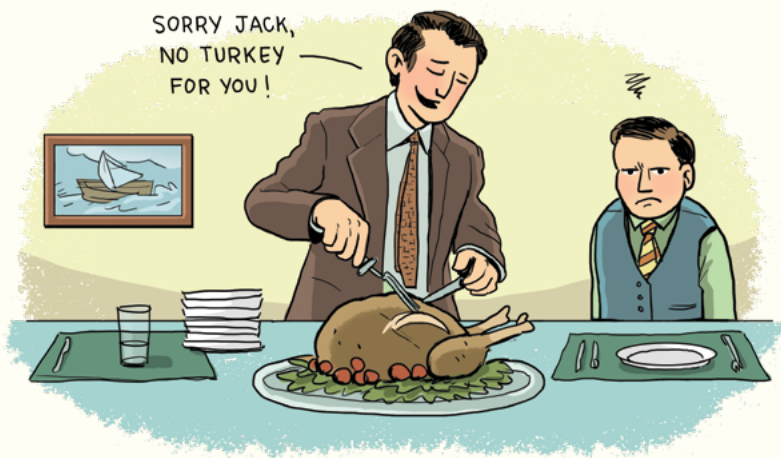


Joe walked away without a scratch. Jack was not so lucky. His injuries resulted in twenty-eight stitches. “At least I showed him I won’t back down,” Jack told himself.

Jack took every opportunity to exact even a small measure of revenge on his rival. At dinner one night, Joe was served his favorite meal of roast beef with orange meringue. As usual, the other Kennedy kids had to wait until Joe’s plate was filled before digging into their own. Seeing his chance, Jack dove across the table, snatched the beef from Joe’s plate, and stuffed into his own mouth. A full-on, two-fisted brawl broke out.



But Jack's moments of triumph were few and far between. Indeed, Joe's status within the family only grew. When their father was often away on business, young Joe stood in for him as head of the household. At dinner, he sat at the head of the table, carving knife in hand, and meted out punishments to the other children. "I'm in charge!" he'd gleefully declare whenever Joe Sr. left town.



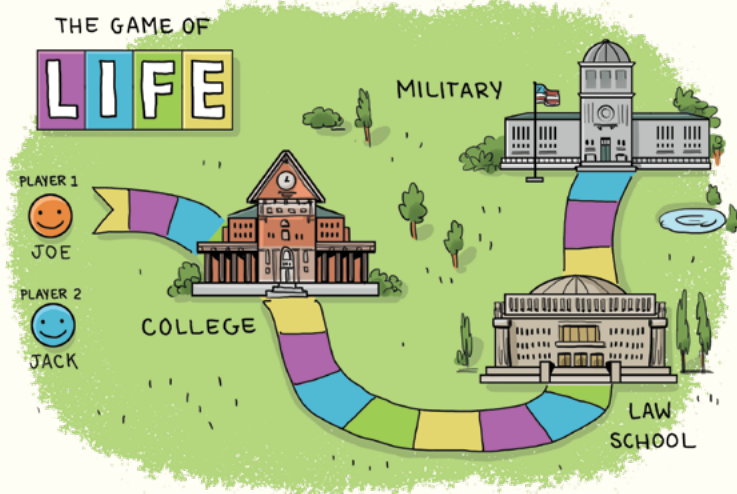
And the crazy thing was, Jack's younger siblings seemed to love their brother Joe! They didn't consider him a bully; because their real father was often out of town, Joe was the next best thing. He spent many hours playing catch with his younger brother Bobby or swimming with their youngest brother, Teddy. He cheered on his sisters at their sporting events and taught them all how to sail. Whenever Joe returned home from school, the younger siblings would run over and jump in his arms, just as they did when their father came home.



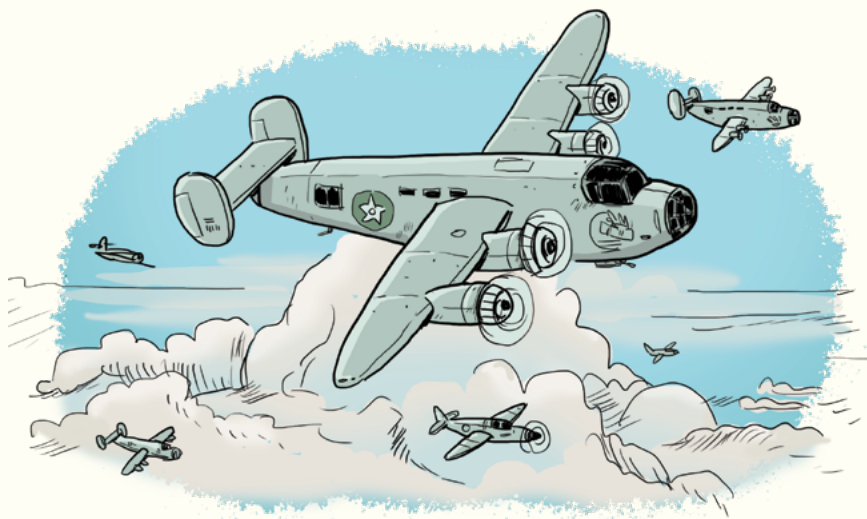
It took a long time, but eventually Jack came to see Joe in a new light, although they never became close. One year, when Joe went away to camp, Jack briefly assumed the duties as head of the household in their father's absence. By summer's end, Jack was begging Joe Sr. to let him go to camp with Joe the next year. The responsibility of being a role model was too tough to bear.



By the time he was a young adult, Jack understood that the pressure of living up to Joe's example had taught him important lessons: how to be tough, how to compete, and how to win. He followed Joe to college, then on to law school, and then into military service. At each step, Jack's achievements exceeded those of his older brother, something even his demanding parents could not fail to notice.



In 1944, Joe was killed in action while on a dangerous bombing mission during World War II. He was only twenty-nine years old. It then fell to Jack, the next oldest of the nine Kennedy children, to fulfill their father's dream and become president of the United States.



Which is exactly what happened. John F. Kennedy entered the White House on January 20, 1961, when he was just forty-three years old (making him the youngest president ever elected to office). He helped advance the U.S. space program and inspired Americans to work together to send the first man to the moon. Today, many polls still rank him as one of America's most popular presidents.

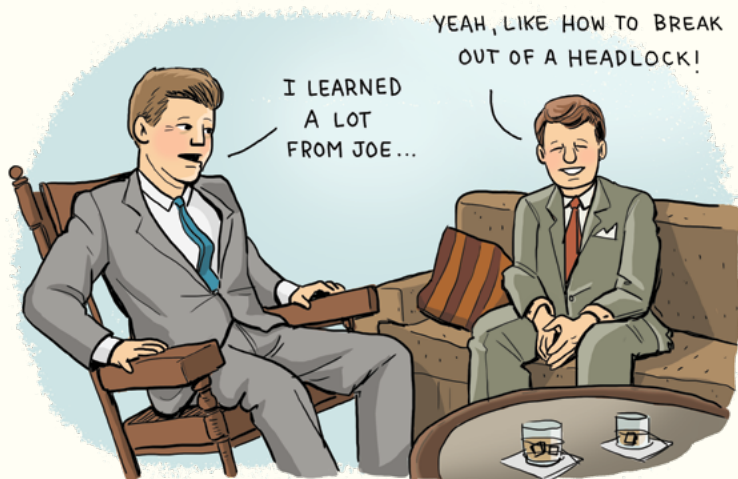
As an adult, John F. Kennedy admitted that he owed a lot of his success to his big brother Joe. Yes, they fought

like crazy, and at times they seemed to hate each other. But the constant competition inspired the younger Kennedy to work harder, play faster, and study longer.

In a book of reminiscences about his older brother, he wrote the following:

Joe did many things well...but I have always felt that Joe achieved his greatest success as the oldest brother. Very early in life he acquired a sense of responsibility towards his brothers and sisters, and I do not think that he ever forgot it.

I think that if the Kennedy children...ever amount to anything, it will be due more to Joe's behavior and his constant example than to any other factor.



Learn more presidential history in *Kid Presidents*.



GABBY DOUGLAS

★ *Grace under Pressure* ★

Gabrielle “Gabby” Douglas took home a gold medal in 2012 as a member of the “Fierce Five” U.S. gymnastics team at the Olympic Games. But she wasn’t born fierce. Though she may have always known how to stand tall on the balance beam, Gabby had to learn how best to stand up for herself when those around her tried to knock her down.

The road to Olympic victory is full of obstacles. To become the first African American gymnast to win an individual all-around gold medal in the international competition, Gabby Douglas had to overcome many challenges—including bullying by some of her own teammates and teachers.

For Gabby (called “Brie” by her family), gymnastics was always easy. Even as a baby, she was already squeezing her tiny hands around the bars of her crib, just as she would one day do with the uneven bars.

At an age when most kids were learning to walk, Gabby was climbing and jumping around. As a toddler, she liked to clamber onto the top of a closet door and then leap off like Supergirl. Couches and chairs were springboards for her airborne adventures.



Sometimes Gabby's daredevil antics attracted unwanted attention. One day, as she was careening through the playground in a toy car, a bully approached and pushed her out of the driver's seat. Luckily for Gabby, her older brother Johnathan was there to help.



It would not be the last time Gabby would have to deal with bullies.

Gabby's childhood became consumed with rolling and tumbling. When she was three, her older sister Arielle taught her how to do a cartwheel. By the very next day, Gabby had moved on to handstands, flips, and other tricky maneuvers. Within a week, she was doing one-handed cartwheels.

Amazed by her sister's progress, Arielle told their mom, Natalie Hawkins, that Gabby should start gymnastics lessons. But Natalie worried that her daughter would hurt herself, and she refused.

Over the next few years, the girls worked hard to wear down their mother's resistance. And although Natalie remained afraid that Gabby might injure herself doing gymnastics, she knew that lessons would help her daughter learn to do the movements properly. Without the supervision of a trained adult, who knew what she would jump off next?



So when Gabby was six, Natalie signed her up at a local gym that offered weekend gymnastics classes. Soon Gabby was receiving formal instruction for about six hours a week.

After two years, Gabby was ready to move on to the next level of training. Her mother found another gym that provided more rigorous instruction. The goal there was to train young gymnasts to compete and win tournaments at the highest level, including the Olympics.

At first, Gabby thrived at her new gym. She made friends and learned techniques and strategies from her coaches. But as she improved at gymnastics, Gabby noticed that some of the students began treating her differently. Sometimes she'd see the girls whispering to one another when she entered the locker room. As soon as they saw Gabby, they'd stop talking.



Then, one day, when it was time to clean the chalk off the uneven bars after class, one of Gabby's teammates greeted her with a cruel taunt. "Why doesn't Gabby do it?" the girl asked. "She's our slave." Gabby was terribly hurt by the remark, but she didn't confront the girl or say anything to her instructors. It wasn't until years later that she found the courage to talk about the incident, though she never forgot about it during that time.

Another time, one of Gabby's coaches made fun of her appearance. "She needs a nose job," he joked in front of the other girls. Once again, Gabby gritted her teeth and continued with practice. But when she got home that night—and on many other nights—she cried alone in her room.



Gabby knew she'd been bullied, and she suspected it was because she was the only African American girl in the class. But she was afraid that if she spoke up, she'd be isolated even more—maybe even thrown out of the gymnastics program altogether. So she held her tongue and kept the hurtful comments to herself. She didn't even tell her mother.

Over time, the bullying took a toll on Gabby's performance. She finished in tenth place at her first junior

gymnastics competition. At another event, she placed sixteenth and failed to qualify for the U.S. national team. In practices, she butted heads with her coaches. Convinced that she needed to test herself, she begged them to let her try out increasingly difficult routines. But where Gabby sought excellence, her coaches seemed satisfied with mediocrity. One time, after Gabby finished in fourth place at a tournament, her coach was amazed.



"I thought you might be ninth or tenth," he said, "but never fourth!"

Gabby had finally reached her breaking point. How could she have faith in her abilities if her own coach thought so little of her? She knew that it was time to stand up for herself, put an end to the bullying, and find a coach who believed in her.

Luckily for Gabby, she found just such a mentor. Liang Chow had coached U.S. gymnast Shawn Johnson to a gold medal at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, China. He ran his own gymnastics academy in West Des Moines, Iowa.

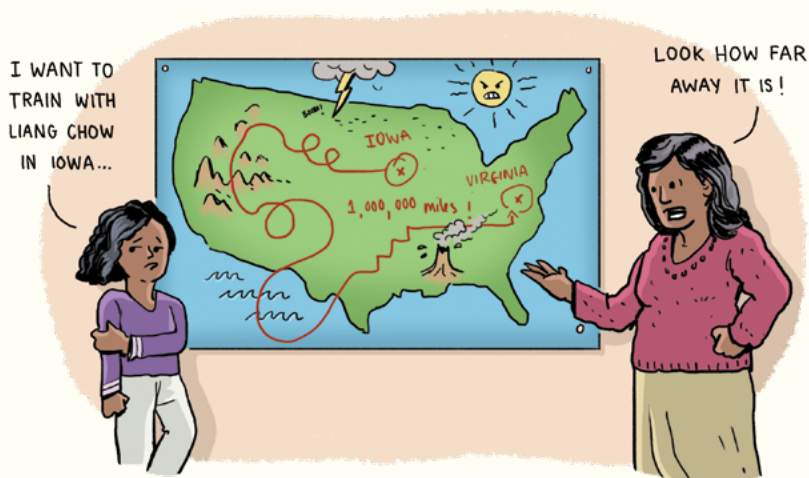
In the summer of 2010, Coach Chow traveled to Gabby's hometown of Virginia Beach to teach a clinic and look for new talent. On his first day in town, Gabby worked up the nerve to introduce herself and show off some of her skills.



Coach Chow was impressed. He was also friendly and patient, taking the time to show Gabby new moves and expressing confidence in her abilities.

Gabby left the clinic determined to break from her current gym. Now all she had to do was convince her mother to let her go.

“If I’m going to make it to the Olympics, I need better coaching,” Gabby told her mom. Natalie Hawkins understood—especially after Gabby revealed details about the bullying she had endured. But the next thing Gabby said threw her for a loop:



Absolutely not, Gabby’s mom replied. “There’s no way I’m sending my baby across the country.”

But Gabby knew she had to take a stand for what she believed in—she had only two short years before the next Olympic Games! Faced with her mother’s refusal, all she could feel was frustration and anger. “If I don’t change coaches, I’m quitting gymnastics!” she declared, and then she stormed out of the room.

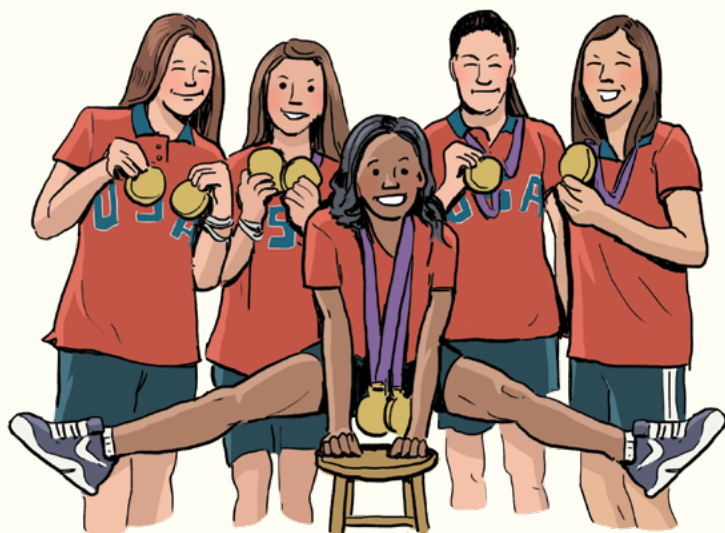
When her anger cooled, Gabby realized that threatening to quit unless she got her way was not a smart idea. Teamwork was the way to go. Once again, she enlisted her sisters Arielle and Joyelle to help convince their mother to change her mind. Finally, after much begging and pleading, they wore her down. Natalie realized that when her youngest daughter set her heart on something, she wouldn't let go. She agreed to let Gabby leave home to pursue her Olympic dream.



In October of 2010, Gabby packed her bags and made the thousand-mile trip from Virginia Beach to West Des Moines. She moved in with a host family and began training with Coach Chow six hours a day, six days a week. Gabby missed her family. There were days during the long, frigid winter when she thought about giving up and returning home to sunny Virginia Beach.

But with the help of her new coach, Gabby consistently improved on each apparatus. She led the U.S. team to a gold medal at the 2011 World Championships in Tokyo and then collected gold, silver, and bronze medals at the U.S. National Championships in 2012.

Later that year, the sixteen-year-old phenomenon—now known affectionately as the “Flying Squirrel”—led the American gymnasts to victory in the team competition at the Olympics. After all the bullying she’d experienced, and all the hard work she’d put in practicing, Gabby had finally found a team with whom she could shine. She was now one of the fabulous “Fierce Five.”



Looking for more stories about Olympians?
Read *Kid Athletes*.

TURN THE PAGE

FOR SOME

FUN FACTS

ABOUT YOUR FAVORITE

PRESIDENTS,

ATHLETES, ARTISTS

AND AUTHORS.

Author **RICHARD WRIGHT** sold his first story when he was just fifteen years old.

|||||

BARACK OBAMA's first job was scooping ice cream at Baskin Robbins. He has hated ice cream ever since.

|||||

World-renowned artist **VINCENT VAN GOGH** loved to collect insects.

|||||

Artist **ANDY WARHOL** disliked school so much that, every morning, a grown-up had to drag him kicking and screaming out of the house.



AAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!



Today she's known for her fearlessness on the racetrack, but there was a time when **DANICA PATRICK** was afraid of almost everything—like bugs, the ocean, and the dark.

|||||

Basketball player **YAO MING** grew up thinking he was too tall to fit through a doorway—let alone make it in the professional basketball leagues of the NBA.



KID LEGENDS ARE JUST LIKE YOU!

Hilarious childhood biographies and full-color illustrations reveal how history greats coped with regular-kid problems.



Every president started out as a kid! Forget the legends, tall tales, and historic achievements—before they were presidents, the future leaders of the United States had regular-kid problems just like you. John F. Kennedy hated his big brother. Lyndon Johnson pulled pranks in class. Barack Obama was bothered by bullies. And Bill Clinton was crazy clumsy (he once broke his leg jumping rope). *Kid Presidents* tells all of their stories and more with full-color cartoon illustrations on every page. History has never been this much fun!



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Every great artist started out as a kid. Forget the awards, the sold-out museum exhibitions, and the timeless masterpieces. When the world's most celebrated artists were growing up, they had regular-kid problems just like you. Jackson Pollock's family moved constantly—he lived in eight different cities before he was sixteen years old. Georgia O'Keeffe lived in the

shadow of her “perfect” older brother Francis. And Jean-Michel Basquiat triumphed over poverty to become one of the world's most influential artists. Kid Artists tells their stories and more with full-color cartoon illustrations on nearly every page. Other subjects include Claude Monet, Jacob Lawrence, Leonardo da Vinci, Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Frida Kahlo, Beatrix Potter, Yoko Ono, Dr. Seuss, Emily Carr, Keith Haring, Charles Schulz, and Louise Nevelson.



Forget all of the best sellers, the sold-out book tours, and the crowds of fans seeking autographs. When the world's most beloved authors were growing up, they had regular-kid problems just like you. Laura Ingalls Wilder's family never stayed in one place long enough for her to make friends. Langston Hughes had to deal with his parents' divorce and his mother's struggle

to make enough money. And J.K. Rowling was so shy that bullies picked on her at school. Kid Authors tells these stories and more with full-color cartoon illustrations on nearly every page. Learn all about the young lives of Stan Lee, Jeff Kinney, Sherman Alexie, Jules Verne, Zora Neale Hurston, J.R.R. Tolkien, Edgar Allan Poe, Lucy Maud Montgomery, Lewis Carroll, Mark Twain, and Roald Dahl.



Forget the moon landing, the Nobel prizes, and the famous inventions. When the world's most brilliant scientists were growing up, they had regular-kid problems just like you. Albert Einstein daydreamed instead of paying attention in class. Jane Goodall got in trouble for bringing worms and snails into her house. And Neil deGrasse Tyson had to start a dog-walking busi-

ness to save up money to buy a telescope. *Kid Scientists* tells these stories and more with full-color cartoon illustrations on nearly every page. Learn all about the young lives of Stephen Hawking, Temple Grandin, Nikola Tesla, Ada Lovelace, Benjamin Franklin, Marie Curie, Isaac Newton, Rosalind Franklin, Sally Ride, Rachel Carson, George Washington Carver, Vera Rubin, and Katherine Johnson.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATORS



Authors **DAVID STABLER** and illustrator **DOOGIE HORNER** have created many books. Their collaborations are *Kid Presidents*, *Kid Athletes*, *Kid Artists*, and *Kid Authors*. David Stabler lives in New York City, and Doogie Horner lives in Philadelphia. **ANOOSHA SYED** is an illustrator and character designer for animation. She lives in Toronto.

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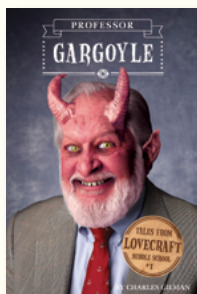
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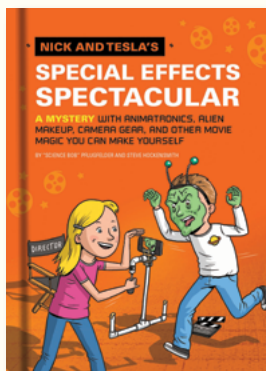
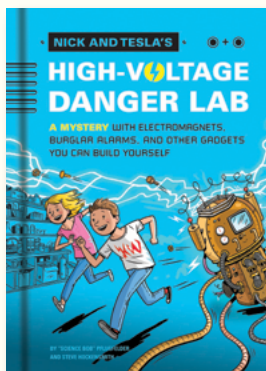


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