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This is the Mother, This is the Father, This is the Child.

Cheryl Hawkins Johnson

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This is the Mother,
This is the Father,
This is the Child.

by

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Illustrations by Tee

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the
Degree of Master of Science in Education
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This is the Mother, This is the Father, This is the Child is about a weekend in the life of two separated parents and their child.

With divorce, separation and original-single-parent families at an all time high, there is not enough children's literature that explains or presents the situation and seeks to comfort the child who has little or no control over these circumstances. One major problem is that parents are uptight, confuse their roles and resist many adjustments that would be healthy for all.

In A Month of Sundays by Rose Blue, Matthew seems to live for Sundays with his father. Despite the fact that he now lives with his mother, he has lost communication with her. She now appears impatient and doesn't listen to him as she used to because she is overwhelmed by the changes in her life, the changes in residence from suburbs to city, and the changes in being a full-time homemaker to that of a working mother.

In I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip, by John Donovan, David feels totally alienated after his grandmother with whom he was living dies. He goes to live with his mother who feels "responsible" now but doesn't know, understand or appreciate what her son is all about at this point in life. His father is now remarried, but doesn't know him either. His mother

tries to change her life to one that is totally evolving out of her "motherly" role. She compensates for all that she sacrifices through drinking quite heavily.

In the third book by Constance C. Green entitled A Girl Called Al, Al (Alexandria) is lost because her father is a generous check mailer who never shows up. Her mother leaves Al alone in the world a lot to fend for herself. Her mother has buried herself in a career-girl fashion world where her home is a place to change her clothes and exchange a few brief moments with her daughter. The story is told from the perspective of Al's classmates and companion who lives down the hall from Al.

In the new book called Me Day by Joan M. Lexau, Rafer is looking forward to his father coming over or at least sending a card on his birthday. His father had left the family after he lost his job and felt that his wife was "in control". He even refuses to meet his son at home for his birthday. When Rafer and his father finally meet at a store a few blocks away from home, Rafer asks his father if he "undivorced" him too. The story ends with Rafer's father assuring him that despite what happened with Rafer's mother and himself that he still feels the same about his son.

In writing my children's book, it's my hope that many readers, children and adults will begin to deal more with real issues of feelings, values and rights of people in this type of situation. Many people view this situation as harmful and negative in many ways, but I feel that a support system for this situation as it is, is necessary because people as long as they are alive must be given the chance to grow and develop. Their lives must not be highlighted in terms of failure but, in terms of learning experiences that lead to further growth and development.

Images are important. I wish to present a positive image of a family with a different arrangement that is working for them. I hope for children to see that the role of parents is a special role but, many times it is a role that is in conflict with other roles. Piaget's learning theory teaches that learning is assimilating different experiences into previously learned schemata or structures. He follows by talking of learning on a higher level as accomodating to a new situation by using what we have learned previously to make healthy adaptations to new or novel situations. These are a few of Piaget's technical observations of what life is all about.

A child remains under the auspices of adults for many years. It is important that children see adults with roles other than that of parenting.

This book was written for children in the upper elementary school grades. Because the child in the story is younger than the children that this book is directed at, it is my wish that this element will help the children reading the story to be able to look outside of themselves more objectively in discussion of the story. This I feel will help older children to feel for the younger child in the story as well as to understand the adults. I hope there will be various levels of sympathy, empathy and objectivity expressed and felt.

It is my major concern that this book become a catalyst in the exploration and examination of feelings of children both within and without this situation.

"There is a knock at the door" said Michael "It must be Daddy"

"Gee, I hope he brought his big black and red umbrella because it's coming down in buckets out there," called out Mommy Shelia from the kitchen.

Mother opened the door. Daddy Donald entered with a wide smile upon his face.

"Hi folks. How's everybody?"

"Fine" said mother "And how about yourself?"

"Oh I'm makin' it" said Donald as he reached out for Michael.

Michael jumped up on Donald too excited to say a thing.

"Oh good, you did remember to bring your umbrella."

"Michael, go get your rainboots on," said Shelia.

Michael left the room to search beneath his bed, and the bottom of his closet for the boots.

Donald and Shelia sat down on the couch in the living room. "Michael's been talking about this weekend with you all week long." said Shelia.

"Well, I'm looking forward to it myself. I rented a Chevy so we'll be going in style."

"I found them" cried Michael as he burst into the living-room where his mother and father were talking.

"Well we'd better be on our way because it's a couple of





hours drive. Shelia, Michael will be back Sunday night at about nine. And I will be over next Wednesday to do that paint job. I should be able to knock out that room in a few hours."

"O.K." said Shelia.

"You all have a good time."

"Come on Daddy Donald" said Michael.

Donald picked up the small valise by the door and nodded and smiled at Shelia.

That night after the rain had stopped, the telephone rang out.

"Hello, Shelia, this is Don."

He sounded like he was far, far away.

"Just called to say that all's well. And we've arrived safely."

"How long did it take you?"

"Oh longer than the time when you and I came several years ago because those winding, flat, mountainous roads were quite slippery from the heavy rain this evening."

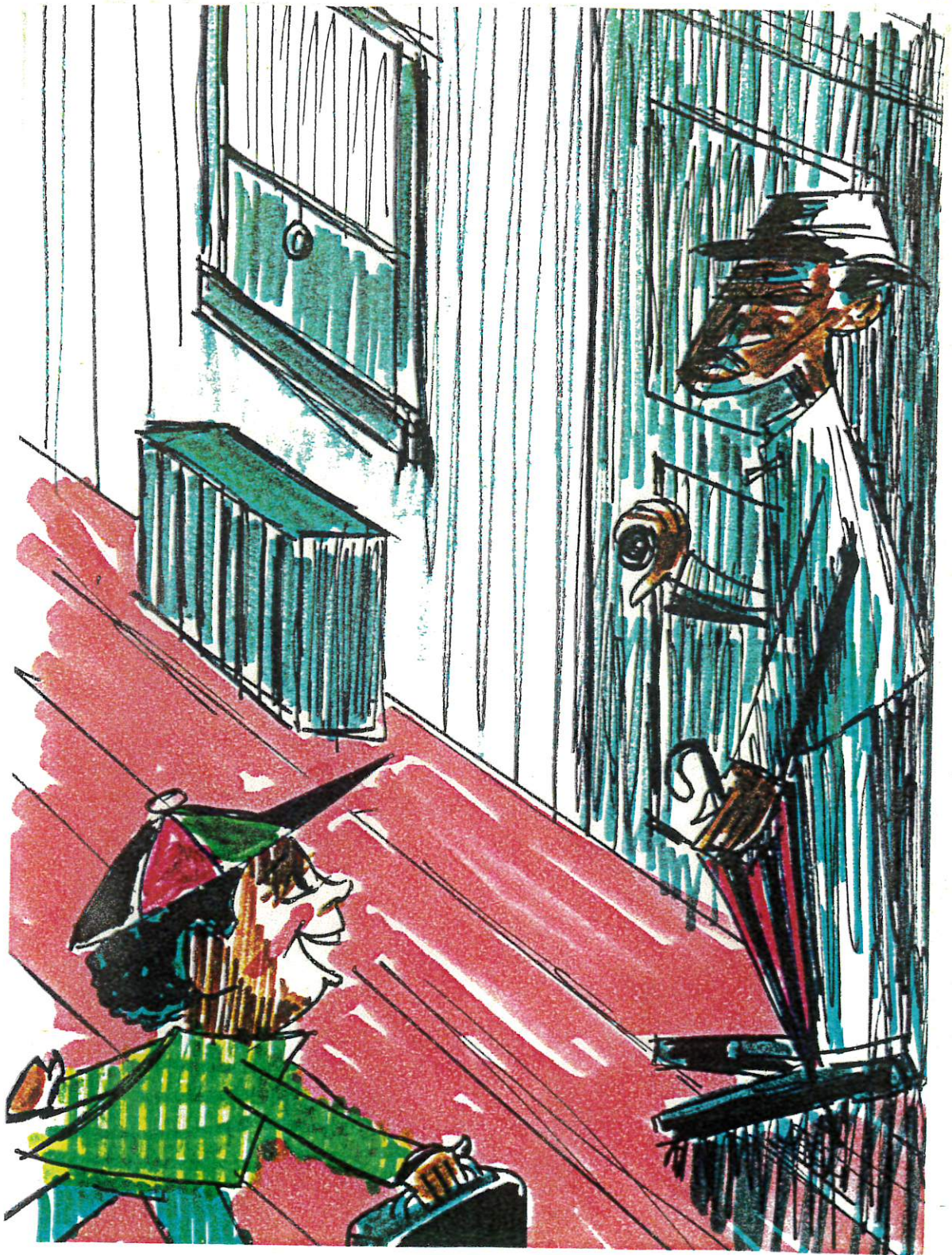
"Let me speak to my son, Don."

"Hi, Mommy" said Michael.

"Hi there big boy. Glad you're safe and sound. You take good care of Daddy."

Shelia sent a kiss through the phone and Michael sent one smacking back at her.

Well the next day was Saturday. Shelia had lots of chores



to do, like all the things that she was too tired to do during the week after work like: washing clothes at the laundromat, vacuuming the apartment, mending two pairs of Michael's dungarees and more. By sunset she was lonely. She had had enough solitude. At about 6:30 that evening Shelia phoned Natasha, one of her best friends, "Hey miss lady ain't heard from you in a while, where have you been hidin' out?"

"Oh I've been stickin' pretty close to home, Tasha. Michael had been sick, but he's O.K. now. He and Don have gone to the mountains for the weekend."

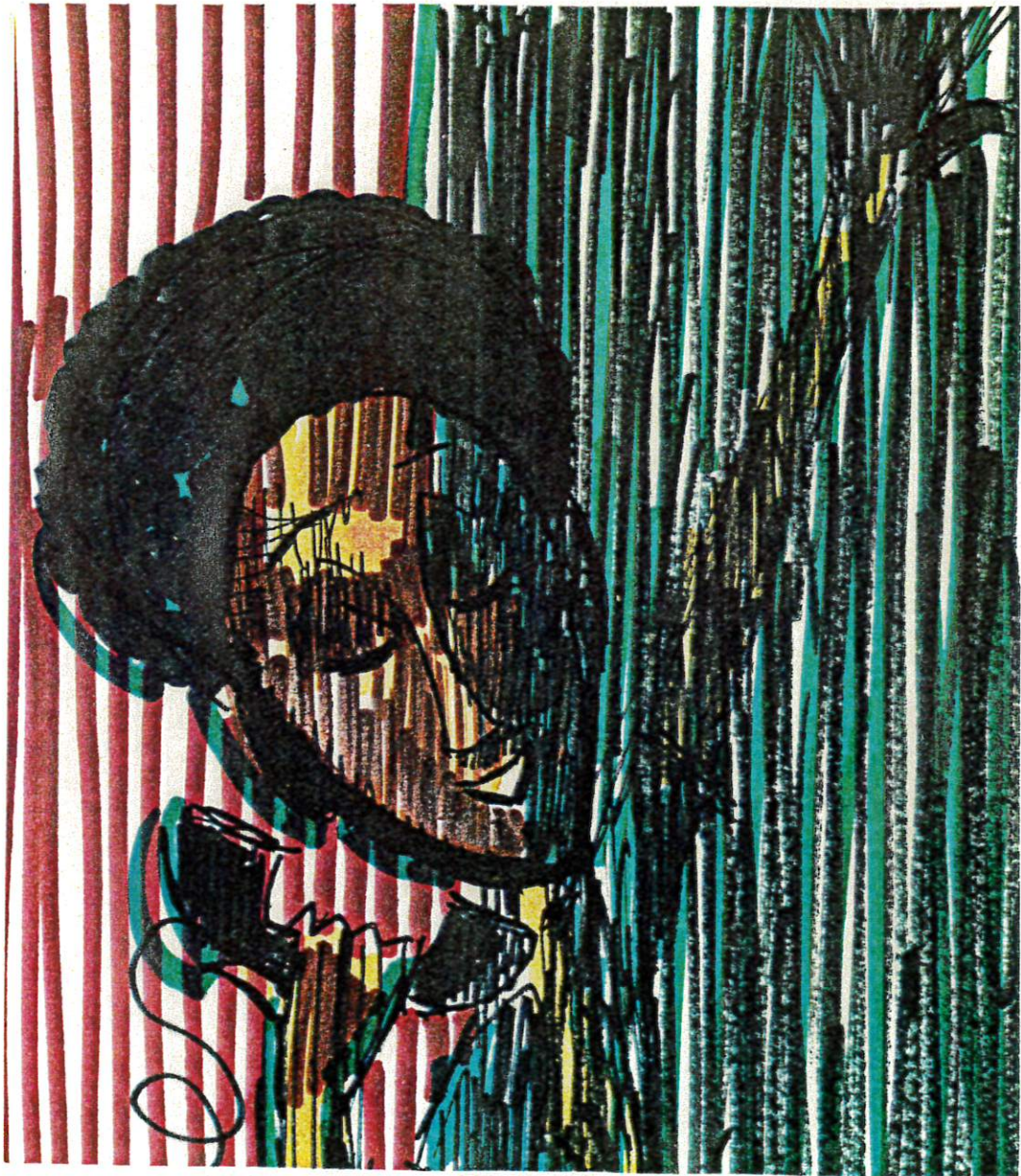
"Well, why don't we go out to a discoteque or somethin' tonight. When is the last time you went dancing?"

"Gee, I haven't been in a long time; it sounds like a great idea. I'll come over about nine and meet you at your place, O.K.?" "Fine with me." They had a ball that night.

Shelia slept late the next morning.

That was a treat in itself. Had Michael been in the house she would automatically awaken early to give him breakfast. This morning she lay there even after she did awaken and wondered how Michael and Don were doing.

Then she smiled to herself and said, "I don't miss Michael that much, but I sure will be glad to see him when he gets back. I hope he remembers to bring some rocks for our collection."





Shelia finally got up, washed and dressed. She cooked some brunch and headed for the newsstand for the Sunday papers. The day was relaxing. Shelia puttered about doing bits and pieces of many things that kind of got the house together. She collected mail that was in different places around the house. She sorted it, saved some and threw some away. She planted in soil four sweet potatoes that she had rooted in glass jars that were lined up on the window sill. She took a few hours out to read the newspaper. She cut out all the sales that she was interested in like children's clothing sales. She found all kinds of things to keep her busy.

Before she knew it, it was nine o'clock.

The door bell rang "ding, dong" Shelia peeked out through the peep hole to be on the safe side although she had no doubt about who it was.

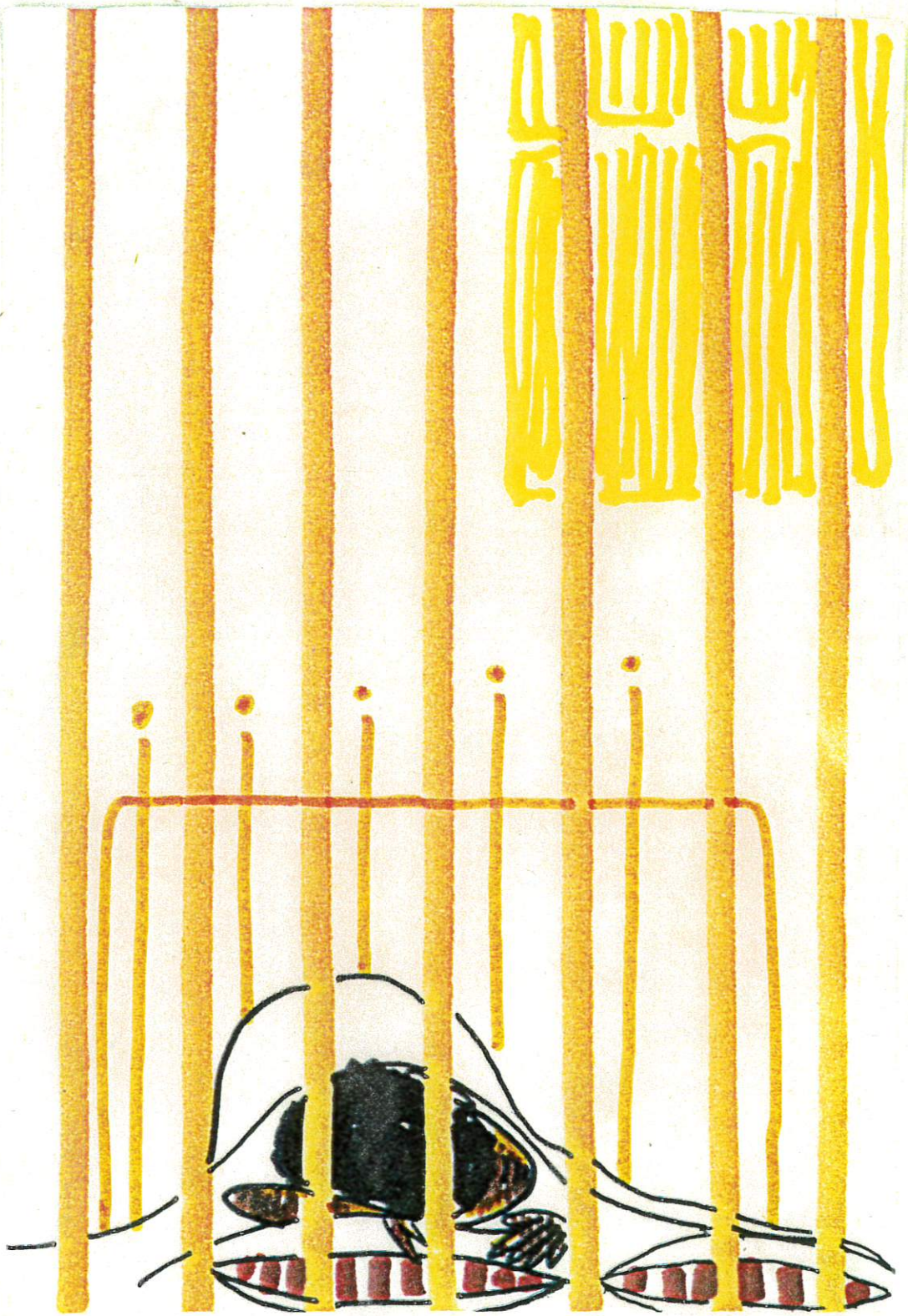
"Open up" cried Michael.

Shelia couldn't get the door open fast enough.

Michael hooked his arms onto Shelia's shoulders and bent his legs up so they could not reach the floor.

Don looked exhausted. He handed Shelia an envelope with a check for Michael's new clothes and shoes.

He said, "Shelia, I had the check on Friday, but you know how forgetful I am.





She just looked at Don with that funny little look that she always used on Don when he had forgotten something important. "Gee, I'd better be going." He finally sat Michael's bag down on the floor just inside the door.

"I'm double parked. I'll call you on Wednesday after you come from work so I can find out what time will be convenient for you for that paint job.

"Okay, dokey I'll be expecting to hear from you."

"Bye Daddy and thanks a whole lot."

They closed the door behind him.

"Mommy I went swimming in the lake."

"Well now you can do a quick swim in the bathtub while you tell me all about your weekend and I'll tell you about mine. Daddy Donald seemed so tired so I'm sure you two men had a great time."

"I'll go to my room and take my clothes off and bring you the souvenir that Daddy bought for you, O.K.?"

"Hurry now. Remember our work week starts tomorrow.



Suggestions for using This is the Mother

This is the Father

This is the Child

It would be a good idea for one person, the teacher or a student to read the story aloud to a group. The story should be followed by a group discussion and hopefully children will discuss their own feelings about their own families.

Children could write their own stories about their family experiences. Children could dictate short stories to the teacher.

Another good idea would be to role-play a scene based on this story. Children could decide to behave similar to the people in this story or differently. For example children might role play a sad version of the story or an angry version.

If the teacher feels that this story has implications for a social studies curriculum about the family, children might do some interviewing of children from other classes. The project might be enhanced by children working on a mural of the various family arrangements that they learn of. The children might do some graphing of some of the results that they glean from other schoolmates.

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