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A Descriptive Study of an Approach to Teaching Reading in an Open Classroom

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by

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PART I

The following descriptive study of a reading program was made in Public School 3 in Greenwich Village. P.S. 3 is a unique place. It is a public school, in that it operates under the same disadvantages (such as class size and lack of materials) as other public schools. But it is different from most in that the parents of the community exercised their power to literally take over the running of the school. The parents have made P.S. 3 an alternative in education for the community. All parents who live in the school district have the choice of sending their children to P.S. 3 or P.S. 41, the longstanding, more traditional school, a few blocks away. Thus, one unique factor about the students in P.S. 3 is that they are all attending P.S. 3 by choice. Their parents have made a conscious effort to put them in P.S. 3. It is a great burden off a teacher's shoulders to realize that every child in her class is there with the complete sanction, if not downright enthusiasm, of the child's parents.

After first establishing P.S. 3 as an alternative for parents, the original founding parents and interested adults of the community interviewed and hired one head teacher, fifteen classroom teachers, and a secretary. An elected executive board, consisting of three

teachers, three community members, ten parents and the head teacher, votes on and implements all decisions made which affect the running of the school.

The philosophy of the school is still in flux, being modified during the school year, reshaping itself and growing as the school itself grows and changes. The school opened in September of 1971 and was just 18 months old at the time of this writing. Generally, though, P.S. 3 is a place where children are treated as individuals. Each class contains approximately 30 children of different ages. Some teachers work with groups of five and six year olds, like myself, others with six, seven and eight year olds, others with eight, nine and ten year olds, and still one teacher prefers a group where the childrens' ages range from five to ten years of age. In the matter of age-range in a class, the individual teacher's abilities and, as far as possible, preferences, were matched, in accordance with how many students of a particular age were actually in the school. The school's philosophy includes the idea of working within a structure of "mini-schools." That is, on each floor, where there would be four or five classrooms containing children of all ages, the teachers would work together on special projects and workshops. In these workshops, every resource of the community would be utilized to bring the children from all the classes on

the floor together. The parents are the most valuable resource. Parents are always in the school, running small group classes in French, cooking, dance, woodworking, needlepoint, etc. Sometimes parents assist one particular teacher in the classroom, and at other times parents will be given their own space in which to work with children from several classes.

Several specialists, paid by various private foundations, work at P.S. 3. They are all specialists in performing, visual or fine arts, as the parents originally felt strongly about developing a program with a strong emphasis on learning through the arts. Thus, classes receive regular sessions in movement, graphics, music, photography, etc., with each teacher integrating a certain specialist's skill into her own class's program. Thus, even the specialist's abilities are flexibly used, taking into account each individual teacher's interests and abilities, with the individual teacher taking into account her childrens' interests and abilities.

Out of this atmosphere where flexibility and an emphasis on individuality exists, it must be noted that, for the most part, each teacher is left to her own, in planning and implementing what actually transpires in the classroom from day to day. The freedom I have in working with my class is as frightening as it is exciting. Much that happens in my classroom happens because I have

decided to make it happen. The head teacher himself has not had the time to spend with teachers in planning that we all wish he had, and the parents, many of whom are inside classrooms during the day, look to the teachers as the educational experts. The teachers themselves can grab only a few minutes each week to look into each other's classrooms and learn. Thus, after all the discussion which does take place during weekly staff meetings, each teacher must deal with her own class alone.

I come now to my class of twenty-eight children, half of whom are five, legally kindergarteners, and the other half being six, legally in the first grade. The children in my class are typical of most of the children at P.S. 3. Out of 28, five are non-white, and of these five, only two live in Greenwich Village. The other three children, who are children of interracial marriages, come by public bus from the east side. Their parents have used local addresses in order to send their children to P.S. 3. The children from outside the Village area have substantially more disorganized home lives than the other children. They are usually the ones who do not go home at three o'clock, but always go to an after school program, either at P.S. 3 or just as often, at a school near their homes, waiting for a parent or friend of a parent to pick them up. These children are also the ones who might be living with only one parent,

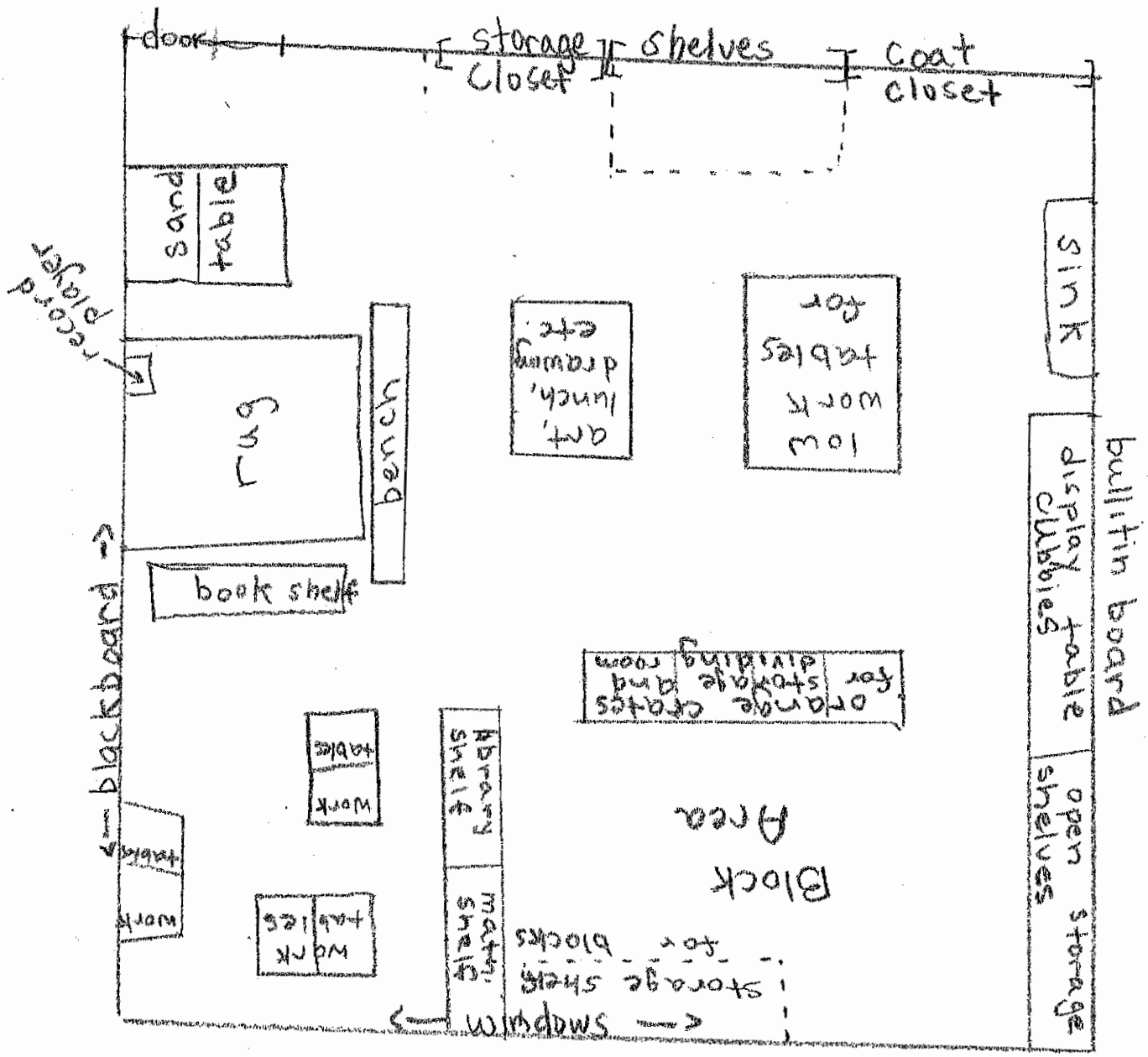
going on frequent visits, which take them out of school, to the other parent.

Most of my class, though, is composed of children who live in the Village or SoHo area. The district is large, and many come to school on a school bus. The children are, for the most part, white, sophisticated, well-traveled and extremely verbal. Many of their parents have jobs in the arts. Many live in lofts or in artists' communities such as Westbeth. The children in my class are open to adults, speaking to anyone who enters the room. It is difficult to speak about them objectively, as I have seen them grow since the start of the year, and for several of them, this is the second year I've been their teacher. It is enough to say that as individuals, each child is clear about what he wants to do. For even the most sweet, docile-seeming little girl in my class, will refuse a suggested activity if it is not involving and interesting to her.

Throughout the entire reading program, the reactions of the children were my most valued and reliable guide to how valid my ideas were. I learned to trust their reactions, both verbal and subtly non-verbal, and based on the childrens' reactions, I would reshape my ideas of what I thought would interest and turn them on to reading.

I had a beginning structure, which I set up at the start of the year. It basically revolved around two ways of working in the classroom; as a large group or individually. As the year went on, activities evolved so that more time is now spent with each child "doing his or her own thing" than was spent in September. I thought for a long time about which activities would be open to each child at any time during the day, except group times. Those activities and the way the room was set up were very important in fostering an atmosphere where reading and writing could go on in the midst of an open and integrated day; where the child reading would not be distracted, and more important, would not feel that he or she was "missing something" during the time he or she was reading. In other words, reading was as valued by me and looked upon as just as exciting an activity as block building or doing a collage.

Floor Plan


door
storage Closet
shelves
coat closet
sand table
record player
rug
bench
book shelf
blackboard
art, lunch, drawing etc.
low work tables for
sink
bulletin board
display table
cubbies
open storage shelves
organize crafts for storage and drawing room
Block Area
storage shelf for blocks
work table
work table
math games
manipulatives shelf
sandpit
1 foot

At the start of the year there were, as I said before, more group times, in which the entire class participated, than there are now. These group times were used for two different purposes. Firstly, we shared musical and sensory experiences such as listening to a story, mixing up cake batter, pounding on drums, doing group dances such as the Hokey Pokey, etc. Many of these shared experiences were carried on by specialists, while I was included as part of the class. Secondly, I led the class in many more cognitive-oriented experiences, such as word rhyming games, writing experience charts, doing a group graph on the blackboard, etc. Many of these group lessons will be discussed in more detail further on in this study.

From a day structured out of defined group activities and individual time to work alone, I began to introduce work habits and projects to the children, individually, one by one, watching as, with time, the whole class caught on to things that were happening.

This is a list of the basic activities available to children <u>at the start of the year</u>, when each child was free to choose what to do: drawing, painting, collage, clay, block-building, table-toys, looking at a book, playing in the housekeeping area.

From this array of activities I introduced, slowly, several more formal activities to particular children.

At mid-year, the list of activities has expanded, to include: working with sand and/or water; listening to records, construction with wood and cardboard, needlepoint, rug hooking, practicing on the balance beam, practicing gymnastics on the mat, and weaving. There are many more activities to be listed, but it is enough to say that whatever possibilities a child sees, he or she can carry them out if the materials, space and adult assistance or supervision necessary are available.

With the many activities available to the children in my class, it is understandable that group times, where the whole class meets, are less, but that small group activities, composed of any interested children, are now more common.

Within the move from more group activities to more individually-oriented activities, I initiated a method of teaching and motivating interest in the formal skills of reading and writing.

PART II

After the first month or so had passed, each first grader received an "alphabet book." It was called this by the children and the label became permanent. The "alphabet book" is, in fact, a picture dictionary. There is one box for each letter. The upper and lower case forms of each letter are printed in the box. Each child was given his or her book individually, usually receiving all of the five pages together and putting them into the correct order, with the A, B, C, D page on top, etc. The pages were stapled together and the child was asked to pick out a letter of the alphabet, any letter, on which to begin working. Then I explained that we would fill in the box with a picture for that letter.

It is interesting that, as many children who chose to begin with the letter "A", an equal number of children chose the beginning letter of either their own or one of their family member's names.

Also, all the children chose to work on a letter that they recognized, leaving letters which they did not know, or found difficult to remember, until the end.

After the child chose a letter, I asked him or her to tell me the name of the letter. At first, I pointed out no differen-

tiation to the child between the upper and lower case letters. After I felt the child was secure with the recognition of all of the letters, either in the upper or lower case form, I began asking for recognition of either one form or the other.

I would then, after the initial recognition of the letter, ask the child if he or she knew the "sound" that the letter made. My aim was to have the child associate a letter with a particular sound. I was not concerned, at the start, with the child being able to blend those sounds into words. If the child didn't know a sound, I would tell him immediately. We would both repeat the sound together a few times. Then I'd ask the child to think of some word that began with that particular sound. I might offer a few suggestions. Sometimes a child would latch on to a word which I said, saying that that was the word he or she wanted to put into the alphabet book. Many times, though, a child would listen to me reel off words and prefer to think of still another word, alone. For example, I suggested the words "nut" and "never" to Danny. He was not impressed. I then told him that the word "no" began with N. His eyes lit up at that moment and he began drawing a picture which would demonstrate the word "no." It is from behavior like Danny's which showed me that the word a child chose did not necessarily have to be a word which brought a

concrete picture of something to mind. Thus, many children chose to draw a picture of an ice-cream cone for the I box, but some did drawings to describe the word "in" and "inside." One girl decided she didn't want to draw at all. She only wrote words, several of them, for each letter. She read, with aid from her memory and her knowledge of phonics, the words in her alphabet book, without help from pictures.

After the child chose a word to illustrate, he or she was left alone to draw a picture. Then I would come back and spell the word for the child. If, in the course of the writing, a child said he or she did not know what a certain letter looked like, I guided the child to look through the alphabet book, and find the letter. In all cases, the children wrote the words by themselves. Many of the children incorporated the letters in their writing into their pictures, either by decorating the letters of the word, or actually placing the letters into the pictures.*

As books began to be filled up, I would review past boxes, asking the children to read to me the words they had written. As time went on, children moved from just looking at the picture and then telling me the word, to looking at just the first letters of the word and saying the word, and then to looking at the first

*See Attachments A and B.

letter, saying its sound, and continuing onto the next letters, thus phonetically reading the word.

My assistance usually consisted of my saying, "If you can begin the word for me, I will help you sound out the rest." Most children responded well to my initial help.*

By the time an alphabet book was completed, the children were used to the idea of "sounding out" the words in their book, although using the picture clues was never discouraged. I concentrated on guiding children to use the first and last consonant sounds, as well as any middle consonants, in order to read their words. The vowel sounds were not really pointed out to the children during the alphabet book stage of their work.

When an alphabet was finished, a child received a "word box," which was usually an empty plastic margarine bowl. Then the child and I cut up a bunch of unlined index cards into small square word cards. At that time, the child went through his or her alphabet book, reading the words, and spelling each word, letter by letter, out loud. I wrote each word on a small card, in lower case letters. By having the children spell out the words for me, and tell me the sounds of the letters too, I found out, quite conclusively, which children still had difficulty recognizing particular letters.

*See Attachment C.

I wrote out each child's word cards leisurely, expecting beforehand to spend ten to twenty minutes with the child. Thus, I had time to take notes on the child's weaknesses in letter recognition and phonic sounds, while we made up the cards. I explained to each child that the word cards were written using only lower case letters. Right after I wrote them, I asked the child if he or she wanted to see if he or she could recognize any of the words on the cards without the pictures to help. Some children could not wait to do this. Most had expended enough energy during the spelling of the words, and preferred to wait a while before attempting to read the cards.

A child's word box was multi-purposed. At the start, each child would go through the word cards, dumping them all out on a table and putting those words which he or she recognized back into the box. There seemed always to be a few words, in every child's box, which were known by sight from the start. This was a great boost to each child's ego and made the task of learning new words appear quite within the realm of possibility. I would assist children with words they did not know, in several ways. At first I would always ask the child to tell me the sound which the first letter of the word made. In this way, of course, vowel sounds were dealt with, as well as letters, whose sounds in

particular cases, were exceptions to the common rule. For example, over the months, the children have gotten to see that the usual hard sound for C, as in "cub," is just as often displaced by a soft C sound, as in circus (a perfect word for exemplifying both the hard and soft c sounds). During the time the child is first reviewing his or her word cards, I suggested that new word cards be put into the box, consisting only of words the child already knows. All the children liked this idea. Small squares of oak tag became filled with words such as: yes, no, T.V., stop, book, zoo, the, and, I, and others, coming directly from each child's experience. These cards were written by the child and left in his or her word box. Thus, now each time the cards were reviewed, more and more words were recognizable.

New words were also added to each child's box from other sources which will be described shortly. The eventual end of a word box will come at the end of the year. At that time, when a box is filled with words, each child will make him or herself a word dictionary. The books will have covers, made out of construction paper, and have pages held together with loose leaf rings. The child will work by separating out all the words that begin with A that are in the word box. Alphabetization of those words can be done by moving the cards around on a table and then

the words can be written into the dictionary in the correct alphabetical order. This project will be done during June, when virtually most of the words a child knows will be in the word box. The finished dictionary will be a culmination of the words that a child has learned to read during the year.

The word cards are added to in one other important way, and this is through the child's writing. After the initial word cards were written by me, and a general reading review of these words was a regular part of a child's day, I began asking children to reach into the word box, pick out one card, read it and make up a sentence or short story about it. This proved to be a valuable tool in provoking thought from many children. If a child had nothing spontaneous to say, the word cards were used as a less creative, but just as valid method of generating the child's imagination. Approximately half of the children in my class always had something they wanted to put down in their notebooks (which were used only for writing sentences and stories). There were two kinds of writing which they wanted to do. The first was fictional, usually involving such heroes as Bat Man, Superman and Gigantor. Sometimes a child would decide to draw a picture with either pencil or magic marker, waiting until the drawing of their favorite hero in action was complete before they added

words. This practice has made many of the children's notebooks turn into illustrated story books. Also, if a child did a particularly good sketch or drawing during the day, the picture would be folded in half and stapled into his or her notebook, waiting to be written about.

The second, and most common kind of writing done in my class, was reportive, factual and self-reflective. Sometimes a child who had been sick and out of school for several days would want to write about how it felt to be stuck in bed for a week. Many times I would ask a question such as, "How do you feel when you are giggling and silly? What kinds of things make you feel like laughing? What are things that look pretty to you? What is the first thing you can remember about your life?" Most children took these questions and the written responses to them seriously. If a child did not seem "turned on" to any ideas I had to offer and had none of his or her own, I would ask him or her to write about "what happened on Saturday?" or "what is your favorite television show?" Many times, these more mundane-sounding questions evoked thoughtful responses and sometimes let me in on some facts about the child's life I had not known. This is exemplified by the following account:

"I was talking to E. in December, about birthdays, and he told me that he was five. I was surprised, having been sure that E. was six and knowing that he is one of the more mature children in the class. He insisted, though, that he was, in fact, going to be six on his next birthday and not seven. I gave up arguing. Later in the week, when E. had absolutely no desire to write down anything, I asked him to tell me why he liked Christmas -- and behold, his response was, 'I LIKE CHRISTMAS BECAUSE MY BIRTHDAY IS FIVE DAYS AFTER CHRISTMAS.' I had to apologize for questioning him, as, in truth, he was in the first grade and only going to be six, as his birthday came just two days before the cut-off date for entering first grade!"

Sometimes, instead of writing stories at all, I would give children phonetic spelling tests, asking them to spell three or four words like they thought the words should be spelled, according to the sounds they heard. The children loved this, especially after it was made clear that the words would not, in most cases, come out spelled correctly. This exercise gives me a chance to evaluate the children's phonics skills and, more important, it gives the children a chance to sharpen their auditory skills and improve their handwriting at the same time.

In relation to each child's writing, whether it be stories, sentences or single words, word cards were used. Out of each sentence or story written, the child would pick three or four new words and copy these words onto empty word cards (a supply of which was always on hand in a jar). Then these new words were added to the group of words the child was learning to read by sight, through phonics, or both. Thus, a child's word cards became an integral part of his or her writing, and vice-versa, whatever the child wrote became material he or she would come across again while reading cards.

My goal, of integrating the reading and writing of a child, so that the importance of being able to read what one writes, and not just form letters, is becoming realized by the children. No longer is reading a separate task from writing -- the two are always done in conjunction with one another.

The material for the writing part of the program came, in most part, from the children. The reading material though, came, in most part, from me. It must be explained that, as a school, P.S. 3 uses no basic reader series. In fact, besides a few old readers from various series, which are to be found in various classroom libraries, and a small variety of basal readers in the school library, put there for the teachers' reference, there are

no "readers" in the school. The school has a fairly well-stocked library, with many storybooks suitable for the children in my class. The books in the school library are widely circulated and at any given time they make up at least one third of the books in my class library. Thus, in regard to imposing any particular structure upon the children who were learning how to read, each teacher was left free to decide how and what to do.

The children are all writing their own stories, captions and titles for pictures, as explained before. Also, as mentioned, there is a wide variety of picture books with varying amounts of words in them, free to be examined and enjoyed at any time. Group activities, designed to promote reading readiness and phonic skills, are numerous and will be explained in detail in the following part of this study.

The more structured reading, however, grew, quite spontaneously, out of the alphabet books and word boxes described earlier. After a word box was filled with the words from a child's alphabet book, which, for most, was before Christmas, I decided that those words might be a basis for a story written just for that particular child. I decided to do the writing myself, rather than have the child make up a story, for three reasons. First, each child had already been using the word cards for writing sentences.

Second, each child had at least twenty-six words with which to work, and that was far too many for one child to incorporate into a single story or thought. Third, I felt strongly that if I were going to ask a child to begin to read a book, from start to finish, the book read should have as much of a personal tie with the individual child as possible.

The question of the form which the book itself would take answered itself in early December. I held a workshop for the parents of the children in my class, and with the help of the directions given to me by a fellow teacher and personal friend, I asked each parent to bind one book. We used oak tag, typing paper, needles, thread and colored mystic tape. The directions were easy enough to follow, and by the end of the afternoon I had twenty finished books. Several parents took home supplies and twenty more books came back to me before the Christmas holiday began. At the workshop, which will be described in more detail in Part IV of this study, my idea for using the bound books as readers crystallized. I felt it would also be a good idea to have the books for children to write their own stories in, draw in, etc. For these purposes, the books will also be used. However, it was several weeks into December when I finally took home two children's word boxes over the weekend. I sorted out their cards

into categories of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and conjunctions. Then I looked at a finished, bound book, and I counted the pages. I decided to write on only one side of the double-face page, in order to leave room for the child's illustrations, leaving nineteen pages to be filled with words. I began to write on note paper, crossing off words on my list of the child's words as I used them. I had a few simple rules in mind as I wrote: I centered the story on one main character, many times a child having the same name as the child I was writing for, or a friend or family member of the child. I repeated words as often as possible, usually the words the child had given me with which to start. I used as many simple words, that the child might already know, as possible. These words included the, and, I, he, it, was, etc. I did not, however, discount using many difficult words. I used words as they fit into the story, never sacrificing an interesting or more meaningful word for a more simple word. I varied the length of each written page, trying to place a page with many words on it after several shorter pages. I wrote without stopping, letting the story grow, trying to have an end in mind as soon after the first plot idea came to me as I could.*

The books were left untitled with the caption ERIC'S BOOK (or whatever the child's name might be) on the front cover.

*See Attachment D.

I gave out the books individually, according to when each child was secure enough in reading his or her word cards, and when I had finished writing the book. I explained to each child that the story was written by myself especially for them and that inside the story they would find the words that were on their word cards. I said they would also find many words they already knew and that I would help them to read new words. We began. I found it helpful to the child to read a page to them out loud, or paraphrase the page, without pointing to any of the words on the page, before the child started to read. This was a method for assisting the child in comprehending the story, so as not to plunge him or her into an unknown world of words, characters, events and places.

After reading the page, I would point to each word, asking the child to tell me the sound of the first letter of any word which was unfamiliar. After a first reading of a page I might suggest a second reading. Depending upon the child's fluency at the start, I might ask the child to point out a particular word on the page. Also, I might ask the child a question about what he or she had just read. Then we might discuss what kind of picture to draw on the opposite page.

As the reading went on, and pages which had been read kept mounting, I would alternate activities connected to the reader.

Sometimes a child might read only old pages to review or sometimes just go on to one new page. I usually began reading sessions with a series of informal questions about the story, up to the point the child had reached.

The reactions of the children to the readers will be discussed further on, but it is generally true that all the children felt happy about having their own books, amused with the story as it progressed, and free from the pressure of having to be up to a certain point at a certain time.

When a child finished his reader, there are two ideas I put into effect. I suggested that the child either read or have me read his or her book to the class (after the book had been titled, of course). Then I will suggest that the reader be traded, temporarily for another child's. Then, according to the child's preference, he or she can read another child's book or else have the book read to him by the other child. The second time readers are read, of course, the pictures will be there to see, and I hope the children reading finished books will have more of a sense of actually reading a story book written for and illustrated by one of their peers.

Also, as I foresee readers being finished from the start of April through the end of May, I am going to use both our school

and the nearby public branch of the library as my next resource in this program. The Hudson Park Library has easily arranged story hours every week. I will be taking my class there for the last eight weeks of the year, during May and June. All the children will sign up for library cards, and I will help those who have finished their own reader to choose a book of suitable difficulty, for them to read during the week. In addition to all the children taking out books of their own choosing, I will encourage the children who have gone through the sequence of alphabet book, word cards and reader, to read one book in between library visits.

The children's feelings about now reading "real," (i.e. library) books, were happy, hopeful and full of pride. A more detailed description of the children's feelings about their readers will follow in the last part of this study.

Spiderman, or Big Bird from Sesame Street) becomes the focal point of many imaginative tales.*

Many times, a group of drawings becomes stapled together and made into a "book." A "book" can consist of several pictures telling a story in sequential order, but often will consist of several pictures, completely unrelated, with written descriptions underneath the pictures, or a group of drawings held together by a common theme, such as: the book of flowers, animals, designs, etc.**

All of these "books" have, thus far, been put together using notepaper. Recently, several five year olds have asked for and been given a bound book, similar to the ones used for the individualized readers. These books are used as the child desires, in order to take home one sturdy, completed "story book," of which the contents have been decided upon by the child. One girl, just five, has been working on a narrative story for two weeks now. She is following a storyline and is doing her own writing. Because of her enthusiasm I find I must and have made the time to spell for her each day. The story book is both her work and her play. The opportunity for her to do all this "work" would be closed in many traditional kindergarten classes where the children are not "expected" to go beyond a certain point in reading. She, though, writes well, can copy sentences I write for her, and can read back

*See Attachments E and F.

**See Attachments G and H.

much of what she writes. She has been given a large head start on her reading skills, and more important, has been allowed to discover letters, words, writing and reading in her own exciting way.*

The methods of all the writing involved in story making are various. A satisfying way for the child to say everything he or she wants is for me to write down the story as the child talks. In this way none of a child's spontaneity is lost between the thoughts of the child and the actual recording of the story on paper. I find it wise, though, when recording, to write clearly, separating words and sentences, line by line, and writing slower than I might actually be able to. Thus, the child, who many times is quite concerned over whether or not I am writing down his or her exact words, can match up my writing to his or her words, with me pointing out key words here and there, to assure the child that I am, indeed, getting his or her exact words down, verbatim. After I have written down a child's story, I might read it back aloud. If the story consists of one or two short sentences, I would have the child "read," the story back to me, assisted by memory of what he or she said, simple sight words, and the knowledge of initial consonant sounds, pointing to each word

*See Attachment I.

as it was read. Then the child could copy the written words, directly underneath where I had written them on the drawing, or else on a separate sheet of paper or in a notebook. If a story is lengthy, a child might underline words known to him or her and copy only those words onto word cards, or onto another sheet of paper. One activity many children like is that of "finding" words in the story. In this way, a child, if looking for the word "book" written somewhere in the middle of three or four sentences, must listen to the initial and ending sounds, associate those sounds with the written letter and pay attention to each written word while looking for the correct one. This activity, in particular, has increased the auditory and visual skills of the children, especially the younger ones, to a high degree.

Most of the children in my class prefer to do the writing by themselves. Even if they do not know how to write a particular letter, they prefer to look for it on the alphabet cards on the wall and then write it, or else have me "draw" the letter with my finger on the paper or in the air, before they write it. At the very least, a child will shove a pencil at me quickly, in order to write a letter the child does not know, only to speed on to the next letter which the child again writes alone.

Unfortunately, working with a class of twenty-eight children, I do not have the time to spell each word for every child who wants to write. I have found several ways of dealing with this problem, of which taking down the child's dictation is just one. Another way is to listen to a child's story or sentence, write it down on a piece of notepaper, reading it quickly but clearly to the child, pointing out each word as I read, and giving the paper to the child so that the child can copy it alone. Thus, I can write quickly and get many children's ideas down on paper, while still offering the child the opportunity to do the writing alone.

This, though, only works well with children who are secure in their recognition of all letters and recognize the concept of individual letters spaced close together to form individual words. Otherwise, the child begins to copy the letters I have written, getting practice in copying and handwriting,no doubt, but not attaching the meaning of what he or she has said to the letters I have written. With most of the first graders, though, this process has speeded up their writing considerably, and has diffused much of the frustration that comes from a situation where I have to leave a child's side in the middle of spelling a word, and the child winds up waiting ten minutes to finish writing one word! One method for a child, especially a six year old in my class, to

write independently, is through the use of the word cards. With each sentence that a child writes, new words are put onto cards. Soon, most of the essential words, such as the, and, a, etc., are on word cards. With a child's familiarity with his or her word cards, comes the ability to put together, on a table, in a tangible and visual form, a sentence, using the word cards. Then I can check the sentence, the order of words in it, discuss it with the child and leave the child to copy it into a notebook. The word card method of writing sentences is especially helpful in differentiating separate words to a child and helping the child to actually see that several separate words make one complete sentence. The hand-manipulation of the cards themselves is a game-like motivation and activity for the children.

Enough said about stories written with help from an adult, and correctly spelled. Stories, words and sentences are written by the children, without help from me, at many times during the day. They are written phonetically. A child says the word that he or she wants to know how to spell, listens to it and writes down the letters representing the sounds which he or she hears. Many times I tell the whole class that for the rest of the afternoon, anything which they want to write, they must write by themselves, without a care to whether or not the final spelling is

correct. This process leads a child to trusting his or her own capabilities -- in both auditory and writing skills. Whatever letters the child does write down, I am sure to find at least one letter which is actually in the word. After praising the child's ability in spelling phonetically, I will then point out the correct spelling of the word, emphasizing all the sounds in the word. The idea that spelling is not always a right or wrong activity, can free many children so that they may begin to experiment with letters, sounds and the ways in which words are put together.

Often I will give individual children "spelling tests" where they must write down the words I give them, according to the sounds they hear. This becomes great fun once they realize that I truly expect them to write down just what they hear and not guess at getting the word spelled correctly. I have never done this exercise with a child who wasn't enthusiastic about knowing the actual spelling of the words after he or she has had his or her try at it.

In addition to all the individual writing done in the classroom, there are always a variety of self-directed and self-correcting commercial games available in the room. Such games as Junior Scrabble, Letter Lotto and spinning wheels which match pictures

with initial consonants and blends, have proven especially valuable. More valuable, though, is the general array of interesting words, pictures, signs and charts which are around the room. Many of them have been done initially by the class as a group and then just left up on a wall or bulletin board. I have overheard many discussions about particular words and ideas which are just "around," and feel that directing the children to "look at and read" the words around the room all the time does more harm than good. The initial group experiences, which will be described below, are enough direct interaction on my part to last quite a few weeks. After the "doing" by the group, the children are left free to explore, at their own pace, the concrete results of their words, as they have been put down on paper.

Activities which sharpen a child's reading skills are done by large and small groups as well as by individual children. Many group reading activities in my class relate to phonics in one way or another. The traditional experience chart, being a story written by the teacher on a large, lined pad, with sentences coming from the children, relating to an experience had by the entire class, is quite valuable. It gives the class a chance to reflect, as a group, on a particular experience, such as a trip to a museum or baking a cake. My general approach when writing an experience

chart is to use the same simple words and phrases, in a similar form, in each sentence. For example:

OUR TRIP

We went to Central Park.

We picked leaves in the park.

We ran in the park.

We had fun in the park.

I let all the children contribute verbally to the chart, explaining that I will write down as much as there is room for on the pad. Then the whole class might "read" each sentence, after hearing me read it. I point to each word every time it is read and emphasize the sounds of the letters, especially the first and last, in the word. A "find-the-word" game might follow, where several children are asked to find the same word, such as "We" or "park" or "in." These words are underlined, written on oak tag and put up in an area of the room designated as a place to keep "class words" and "helpful words to know." At other group times, these words might be written on the board and the children asked to identify them. A useful sight vocabulary can be developed in this way throughout the year.

Also useful is a class scrapbook, consisting of pictures, either cut out from magazines or drawn, pasted onto a page designated for things beginning with one particular letter or blend. The scrapbook can be added to at regular or irregular intervals, by one child or many. The important factor lies in looking at and talking about the entries in the scrapbook, with the whole class, at regular times, such as once a week or once every two weeks. At these times, the sound of the letter or blend is emphasized, with the teacher taking suggestions of things which begin with a certain letter, in addition to the ones already in the book.

Other class books, kept out in an attractive display, are a valuable source of reading material. One such book which my class enjoyed putting together was The Book of Machines. The children were encouraged to draw a picture of anything mechanical, describe it to me or a student teacher, write about it on the page, or have me write it for them, and contribute it to the class book.*

In regard to word families, group games revolving around rhyming words are fun and useful. The most direct method of exploring rhyming word patterns is to write a word, say it out loud to the class and ask the children to think of words that rhyme with that word. This proved a good first lesson for me to discover which children were already at ease with the sound of rhyming

*See Attachment J.

words and which children had difficulty "hearing" the rhyme. Some children get confused between rhyming words and words which begin with the same sound. This exercise helped me to detect these children. After a number of "Can you think of a word that rhymes with _____?" games, I began to write one word on the board, identify it for the class and then change the first letter while the class closed their eyes. Watching the C in cat become a P, the children automatically say pat. Lists of word families were made on long scrolls of paper and hung up out in the hall. Over the course of two weeks, we watched and noted in group meetings the growth of each list. Nonsense words were always permitted as long as the nonsense words fit into the pattern. Rhyming word patterns also became exciting topics for books, drawings and sentences.

The best method of incorporating rhyming word patterns into class activities has been storytime. Many fine children's books, notably Dr. Seuss' books, are written in rhyme. My class enjoyed nothing more than filling in each word at the end of a rhyming couplet.

In addition to group scrap books and experience charts, writing and thinking phonetically was often done during group times. These group phonic experiences worked in two ways, either from me

to the class or from the class to me. I might say a word to the class and ask the class how to spell it. They in turn would give me, one at a time, suggestions as to the spelling of the word, according to the sounds they heard, or else I might take names of letters from individual children in the group, and with the whole group's approval, write the letters on the board.

CAT was spelled KAT.

SPOON might be spelled SPUN and WE might even be construed as YE.

After each class spelling I would write the correct spelling next to the words, and follow much the same procedure as with an individual child, pointing out the rationale for, and sounds present, in the correct spelling. I might also give a more basic task, by saying only a sound out loud and asking them to tell me the letter, which I would then write on the board.

My class though, took part with greater involvement, when they gave me letters to write down. I might be given the letters: KTMPEL.

After writing them on the board the whole class would say the word the letters spelled. A great deal of fun and familiarity with sounds resulted.

One interesting approach to vowel sounds, to which I found many children responded well, is to write various vowel sounds on the board or on a long piece of paper. The class is introduced to the different forms which vowels take, such as long and short, extended or chopped short. Then the class can "sing" or "chant" what is written down. For example:

ee ----- a ----- ahhh ------ oo -----

This exercise is marvelous to record and have the children listen to. Individual children who are familiar with several vowel sounds and the concept of long and short vowels have attempted their own vowel song sheets. The positive effects on each child's sense of mastery of reading, writing and auditory skills during these chanting exercises are extremely encouraging to see. Further advantages in permitting and even encouraging children to spell freely and phonetically can be found in Read's research.[1]

Through all the experiences and tangible learning tools available to the children in my class, many children have learned to read. Many have been excited by the idea of books and being able to read.

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[1]Charles Read, "Pre-School Children's Knowledge of English Phonology." The Harvard Educational Review, Volume 41, No. 1, February, 1971.

The last two parts of this study will deal with the input and interest of the parents into this program, as well as their and the children's reactions to it, in actual classroom practice.

PART IV

Parent Input and Involvement

Parent interest and involvement in the goings-on in my classroom and especially in the reading program came in two distinct ways. First is the practice of having a classroom which is truly open to parents any time, any day. Thus, trying to practice what I believe I verbalized the fact, to the parents of the children in my class, that the door would be open to individual parents whenever they brought their children to or from school. I encouraged parents who brought their children to school in the morning to stay in the room for a while if they had time and mentioned that whenever they wanted to pay an informal visit, it would be okay. These informal visits of parents familiarized them with the activities going on in the class, the way in which I worked in the classroom, the social interactions between various children and groups of children in the room, and the general schedule of the day.

On a more specific level, parents were encouraged and sought after to make genuine commitments to working in the classroom on a daily or weekly basis. If a parent could not commit him or herself to even one morning or afternoon a week on a regular basis,

then the parent's help would always be welcomed by me with some advance notice, preferably by twenty-four hours, but anything more than an hour would do. I have had ten parents working in my classroom since September. Some have come and are still coming one and two mornings a week, to work in specialized areas with small groups of children, such as woodworking, planting, cooking or needlepoint. Sometimes they work in my classroom and sometimes they take a group of children to another room to work. These parents are in contact with me from one week to the next, talking about how their activity went over with the group, which children had any sort of difficulties, either with the activity itself or in dealing with the other children, and possible follow-up or extended activities.

Another, possibly more valuable, time for the parents, has been the impromptu experiences which a parent will have with the children in my class. A case in point is J.'s mother who appeared in the room one afternoon, right after lunch as I was reading a story to the class. When I finished and the children dispersed to various activities, she said she could stay for the afternoon if I could use her help. I said, "Of course," and suggested that she either watch what the children were doing and talk with them informally, or else take out a group game, such as Lotto or Bingo,

and organize a group of children around that. I myself was reading with individual children. J.'s mother circulated around the room for ten minutes or so, talking to children and looking at various displays in the room. She then ran a letter-lotto game for the next half-hour with children gleefully trading their lotto cards off to friends when they got tired of playing. J.'s mother, for whom this was the first time working in the classroom, expressed her feeling of satisfaction with the way the afternoon had gone. She felt she had made a positive contribution through working with a small group.

Both the unplanned and pre-arranged visits of parents were of the utmost importance in fostering a professional trust between myself as a teacher, and the parent as a concerned parent. With each discussion between myself and a parent, our relationship became easier, more informal and the feeling of trust that the parent had in me as a teacher and the specific things I was offering to that parent's child, became greater.

Many times, a parent's unarranged visit started when the parent brought the child to school, or else came by in the middle of the day to give me a specific message or bring a forgotten lunch for the child. The intentioned short visit stretched into a half hour or more as the child began to show his or her parent around

the room, in general, and more often showing the parent his or her reader, stories, art projects and block constructions. These familiarizing experiences, with the child as the guide, have been quite valuable to the parent, as they have communicated their feelings to me at individual conference times. During individual conferences, many parent's feelings about their child's work and general progress in the class were discussed. These feelings will be described in the last part of this paper.

In regard to the more formal steps through which reading was going on in the class, the parents had a more direct input. At the end of December I invited all the parents of the children in my class to attend a workshop in the classroom. The workshop was held on a Friday afternoon from three until five o'clock, when the school building was closed. I sent home letters to the parents via the children, and in addition to the letters, one parent who is the class mother set up a phone chain among all the parents, in order to emphasize the importance of coming to the workshop. Out of twenty-eight parents, sixteen came. I felt fairly satisfied with that number after having worked in schools with no parent-interest at all. I also knew personally that at least ten of the non-showing parents had had previous commitments.

The purpose of the workshop was threefold. First, the afternoon was designed to be a mid-year clean-up. A list of materials needed for the workshop had been sent home with the letters, and parents showed up with sponges, brooms, scrub brushes, steel wool, a vacuum cleaner and bottles of spray paint, as well as screw drivers and screws to make minor furniture repairs. The entire room was taken apart, dusted and scrubbed clean, while, all the while, we all commiserated with each other over the maintenance services in the school, which left much to be desired! We made one major improvement in the appearance of the room, and that was to change the vinyl tablecloths on two large work tables from a filthy black to a bright red and yellow. The parents took more pride in, and felt more comfortable with, a spic-and-span room, than even I.

Second, I asked each parent to bind a book together. All the materials had been contributed by myself and two parents who helped to coordinate the workshop. The instructions were passed around, and everyone sat down. At the start there were ten parents sitting in an actual sewing circle, stitching the middle of the books together! The sewing led to talking, and the talking was, in fact, the third and most important purpose of the workshop. At first, the talk centered around what the idea of sewing

and binding the books was for. Most of the parents were already familiar with the picture dictionaries their children were doing and with the educational concept of having children write their own stories. Thus, I had a starting point for telling the parents about the idea of writing a storybook reader for each child, incorporating in each one the child's dictionary words. The parents were all enthusiastic. The parents of the five year olds, however, felt left out, as their children were not going to receive a reader. One of the parents suggested that the five year olds be given a bound book also, to use as a story book. I took this suggestion up at once, and added that all the children would, indeed, be offered a book to make a storybook out of. I elaborated to the parents that the books could be given out to the five year olds in the spring. By then, most of them would be at their peak of readiness for doing their own writing of stories, and the completed books would naturally culminate near the end of the school year.

The discussion of bound books, and their uses in relation to each parent's child, moved on to the more general area of the children; their feelings about school, who their friends were and humorous anecdotes dealing with their children's behavior with friends in and out of school. By five o'clock, we had made forty

books. Two parents took home materials in order to make more books at home. The room was clean, the tablecloths new, the rug vacuumed and the bench painted bright yellow. All of the sixteen parents felt that it was a shame that more parents, especially fathers (there were three there) had not come. It appears to me that a great deal of communication, and positive interaction between myself and the parents, parents and other parents, parents and the activities going on in the classroom, had gone on during the workshop. Both practical and psychological goals had been met at the workshop, with materials having been made and a genuine rapport having been deepened between myself and the parents. I have felt that as a result of the workshop, parents who have worked in the classroom, or who have just visited, have felt more at ease in talking with me and in dealing with the activities the children in the class are involved in. Another workshop, this time only for spring cleaning and exploring some of the materials the children use, such as Cuisinnaire rods and attribute blocks, is planned for mid-April.

In looking back over the year, I feel that the December workshop was a high point of communication between myself and the parents.

The workshop developed a feeling of everyone working for "our" children in "our" school. The parents were included in the education of the children on an equal basis with myself. There existed a reciprocal recognition between myself and the parents of both my influence on each child as a professional teacher and, more important, their influence as full-time parents. A situation like this, where the meshing of both teacher and parental concerns occurs, is extremely unusual today.

The children also knew that their parents had been involved in the creation of their reading materials. Thus, the children could see that what they learned in school was, indeed, a part of what went on at home, and vice-versa. Such integrated cooperation between the significant adults in a child's life can only assist the child to learn in an integrated way.

PART V

Throughout the course of the parent workshops, individual conferences and spontaneous meetings, many parents have been able to voice their feelings about how their child is doing in reading.

During the parent workshop in December, all the parents were enthusiastic about binding books. Their enthusiasm was threefold. Many of the parents of the six year olds were relieved to hear the word "reader" mentioned. The fact that their child would indeed have one book from which he or she would be continuously reading, made the parents feel secure. They felt that the possession of a reader would give their child a sence of continuity in what he or she had to do in the course of each school day. The fact that each reader would be based on the child's own choice of words added another reason for enthusiasm on the part of the parents. The existence of the readers, as a single, tangible belonging of each child, was viewed as being most important to the parents. Another feeling the parents had about the use of the bound books was that all the children should receive one, empty, to use as they wished. I mention this use of the readers again, as I did in Part III, because the parents emphasized their satisfaction with the finished books, and felt that the whole class

should get the benefit of them, not just the six year olds, who used the books as more formal readers. The strongest feeling the parents had about the books was positive. They felt that the books were physically attractive and fairly durable. These books would be objects which the children would keep, feel safe about using them without having them fall apart, become attached to them as "their" book, and feel proud about. The pervasive feeling between all the parents and myself, at the December workshop, was a cooperative one. We were all involved in making an attractive, durable material for the children in the class to use. This is particularly significant at P.S. 3, an old building, in which many rooms still have only DC currents, the halls are dark, rooms are still laden with desks and materials left from the time the building was not used, and much of the educational material used now has been scavenged and donated. A simple object, such as one clean, well put-together book, presented to a child to be kept by the child, is an invaluable thing at P.S. 3.

Thus, it happened that many of the parents, at the end of December, felt that their children were on the brink of reading and that with the appearance of their readers, would soon actually be reading. Between the start of the new year and the spring, I met with most of the parents of the class individually, to discuss

how their child was doing in school.

In truth, none of the parent's feelings about their child's progress in reading has been negative. The reactions from the parents of the six year olds fall into three groups. The first is those parents who are pleased as can be about their children's skill in reading. The children of these parents number five out of eleven six year olds. All five of these children have a fairly large sight vocabulary and read fairly fluently. These children show no anxiety when they read out loud to me, and they can all read and write stories independently, asking my help only when they want to check if their spelling is correct. They also show confidence in spelling words phonetically when I am not there to help them. These five children have shown skill in comprehension of what they read, and of writing or reading assignments which they carry out. I found that the parent's knowledge of their child's reading ability came considerably after the child's performance in school. For example, four weeks after it was apparent to me that T. was actually reading and using printed symbols to her advantage, I spoke with T.'s mother, who commented that she noticed that T. was beginning to sound out words that she saw around the house. This kind of delayed recognition happened with three of the five children's parents. I feel that

the children, knowing what they could accomplish in school, needed time to become secure in that knowledge, before letting their competence in reading become public knowledge at home. The one remark I heard again and again, from these parents, was that their children were quite proud of themselves and their achievement in reading. All of these parents felt more pleased about their child's rising self-esteem than about their child's actual reading skill.

Another group of four parents also felt pleased by their children's positive feeling about themselves. These parent's children have a smaller sight vocabulary than the first group of five children. These children are still unsure of themselves when they sit down to read a page in their readers, though their assurance and skill in reading their word cards is quite high. These children will need another month, before they can read easily and fluently by themselves. They still need me to sit with them through each word read, and they, more often than not, will ask me how to spell a word they already know, while writing a story. Their parents are not apprehensive about when their child will be reading. They are more concerned that their child's spontaneity, creativity and high spirits not be stunted by too much pressure from me, on them, to read faster and sooner. One parent told me that she judged how her son was doing by his behavior in the

classroom. She said that D. had always enjoyed nursery school, being creative in his use of materials, and making things out of various available materials in the room. She was concerned that this type of behavior did not disappear, and that as long as it did not, she would be happy. She told me that D. had told her very recently that he wanted to learn how to read, and consequently, as I told her, his acceptance of and willingness to do his required work with his word cards and story writing has increased enormously.

One other parent, whose child was in my class last year, remarked on her son's increase in self-confidence in social situations and on his general good feelings about coming to school, as opposed to last year when he often did not want to come. She credits this change in him to the fact that neither she nor I have pushed him too hard in the area of reading skills. As he is gaining personal self-confidence, his confidence in his reading competency is also rising. He is happy in school, and eager, as I told his mother, to take a try at any task I set before him. He is still surprised that he can actually pick out a particular word from a row of ten word cards and his progression towards more fluent and easy recognition of words is growing rapidly. His parents are just concerned that his social behavior keeps growing in the direction it has been.

There is one parent whose concerns differ a bit from all the others. She is mainly concerned about her son's ability to concentrate for longer periods of time than he has been able to up to now, and get down to doing the work which is at hand, without procrastinating. Her son is one of those children who is reading fairly fluently and is capable of carrying out assignments independently. His comprehension of everything he hears and reads is excellent. But his parents, I feel, are correct about where they place their concerns. E. does have a hard time actually sitting down and opening his reader or picking up a pencil and actually beginning to write. His attention span, in most activities, is short. His mother professed to being quite amazed, when, in January, E. brought his reader home and read her the first six pages. But, though happy about his actual skill in reading and comprehension, she is wise not to let her concerns for E.'s self-discipline disappear. E.'s impatience is exemplified by the fact that when he is reading a page he has read before, he will quickly guess at the words and paraphrase the meaning of it, out loud, for me. When I point out to him to slow down and read each word, one at a time, he can and does so, always surprised at his own competency.

I must add, at this point, that I feel most lucky to be involved with parents whose opinions of what is good for their children

coincide, more or less, with mine.

The children themselves are happy with the knowledge of their own progress in reading. From the first time that the words from inside their alphabet books were put onto cards for them to read, they burst with pride and astonishment that this "thing" called reading could really be so harmless and easy as it was!

For example, the second time that E. and I sat down to go through E.'s word cards, E. told me that he could not read any of them; that he was only lucky when he got one correct because he was guessing from memory. We proceeded to go through the cards. E. "guessed correctly" at three-quarters of the cards, stopping after each word to tell me, "But I just remembered it! I didn't read it!" I told him that, by whatever method he was using (memory, guessing or looking at the first letter) he was, indeed, reading! E.'s astonishment and pride in himself, combined a bit with a look of puzzlement, was extremely satisfying for me to see.

Another example of a child's self-recognition of his or her competence in reading happened to A., after she had finished her reader and had a fairly large sight vocabulary. Up until this particular morning, the only purposeful reading A. had done had been in her reader and her notebook. This morning A. picked up the record jacket of an album entitled "Free to Be You and Me."

She began sounding out the word Free, and looked up to ask me if F-r-e-e actually spelled free. I nodded yes and A. looked back at the album. She then read, out loud, the title of the album, quickly, without hesitating in the least. She looked puzzled after she finished, came over to me and remarked to me that she had just read the whole cover, without stopping to sound out or even spend any time on each word! She thought it quite strange but wonderful when I congratulated her and told her that she really knew how to read those words, and that she would be able to read more and more words as quickly as that, as time passed!

The parent's reactions to the reading program going on in the classroom is generally positive. I can now describe the children's feelings.

The six year olds were all excited about finishing their picture dictionaries. When the first few children received their own "word boxes," many of the other children wanted one, too. This general competition among the children, to finish the given activity they were working on in reading, and go on to what another child was doing, worked well. For, along with the motivation of getting on to the next activity, each child was not pushed. I explained to each child that he or she would indeed receive a word box, word cards, and a reader when they had mastered and felt

comfortable reading the words he or she now had to work with. That, of course, made each child want to get on with the work at hand. But during that work, each child became engrossed in what he or she was now doing. Each child forgot, for the moment, the idea of just rushing through it, to get to the next activity, and gained much self-confidence in regard to working with the materials which he or she had on the present level!

When a child did receive a word box, it was of the most pleasure to them to be left alone, in order to go through the word cards one at a time, putting the words he or she knew back into the box, leaving the ones he or she needed help with in a separate pile. All the children showed great satisfaction in seeing the unknown pile get smaller and smaller from week to week! Another satisfying activity for the children was the putting together of sentences, from the word cards. This was done after a child was familiar and comfortable with all of the word cards. It was done independently of me and the sentences which came out of this activity reflect the fun the children had in putting them together. For example, K. went through a zoo phase where her sentences from day to day were:

The eagle is in the zoo.

The ducks are in the zoo pond.

The fly in the zoo lives in a tub.

After that she concentrated on the word house:

This house is a dog house.

This house is a special factory house.

All of these sentences had accompanying pictures and verbal descriptions in K.'s notebook. K. had a lot of fun compiling these sentences, due to the fact that I did not ask her to put together a sentence, by herself, until I knew she knew all the words in her box. Thus, the level of frustration the children experienced, during reading and writing activities, was kept to a minimum.

When the children received their readers, their expectations were met. Many of them gave a sigh of expectant relief when I handed them their book, as if everything they had imagined their friends doing and feeling, they would now be fortunate enough to do and feel! The thing about the readers which impressed many of the children was the fact that, on the first page, they recognized a character's name, usually their own or a friend's or relative's. This was because most of the children had included a familiar name in their picture dictionaries. There was some happy confusion, on the children's part, about how I knew whose name to put in the story. When I explained to the children that I had written the story in their reader for them, using the words in their word boxes, many of the children were incredulous. As they

got into the story, they realized that each child had a different story. They then seemed to exhibit a feeling of pride in their ownership of their particular book.

Of all the assignments, relating to reading, which I had the children do, reading from their book was the one they most enjoyed. From the start, it surprised me to note that the children counted the pages to see how many pages they had until they finished the book. The fact that each book had twenty pages of writing in them, did not daunt one single child. Their interest in the characters in their story was always high, though the idea that their books were there for the purpose of being readers, and not ordinary storybooks, was always present in their verbal references. They liked the idea of having a reader, and now that four children have completed their readers, they do not speak of getting a new book or story, but a reader. Their bound books have not been given up though, as I can see a sentimental attachment to them by the children who have finished them. The books are still in school. The children still refer back to them for the spelling of words they need when writing, and for sharing the words and pictures in their books with friends in the class. One activity several children have recently been involved in is rewriting, in their own words, the story in their reader. This has been done by three children who have completed

their readers. This has fostered a comfortable feeling between the child and his or her reader, as the reader becomes a helpful spelling aid for the child. It is also a most helpful way for me to judge the child's total comprehension of the story, as it relies on the child's understanding of the characters' relationships with each other, the sequential order of events in the story and the mood of the story.

The one feature of the entire reading program which had the greatest influence on the six year old children in my class was the recognition of the fact, by the children, that I took the time to write a book especially for them. Their self-confidence and positive feelings about themselves as individuals rose as they realized that their teacher wrote an entire book just for them. This knowledge demanded that they respect their readers and give the stories in them the time and energy in reading them which they deserved. For obviously, if I took the time to write them, then each child could indeed take the time to read them, which they did. Now that the children will be picking out library books, from which to read, which must be returned to the library, they are very glad that the first book they ever read is theirs to keep.

In deference to the five year olds, I must say that they have received even greater benefits from the six year olds' reading

program than the six year olds. All the five year olds know that the older children have readers and notebooks, and assignments which they must do. I did not push any required work on any kindergarten child, but for at least half of them, their own motivation was enough to have them reading and writing by March. Several children asked me directly for a book, to be their readers. They received an empty bound book, which four or five children have drawn and written in every day, with great concentration and follow-through. When they are working I feel strongly about showing them and their work the same respect and seriousness as I show the six year olds. They have responded to this respect by progressing at their own rate, though quite rapidly, in the areas of penmanship, word recognition and concentration in the work at hand. Over and over again, in the months of February and March, parents of five year olds have come to me with the observation that their child is reading: signs in the street, ads in magazines, storybooks at home and words in books belonging to older siblings. I can only share their pride and enthusiasm, pointing out that though I am happy this has happened, I am even happier that their child has had no anxiety and pressure attached to this natural learning. I already know that next year, the five year olds, beginning as first graders, will be starting the year on a higher level of competence, in the area of reading skills, than the six year olds did this year.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I look back over the last eight months. In that time, more than fifteen children have grown from a point where they could only recognize some of the letters of the alphabet, to a point where they can read and understand sentences and stories.

There are two things I feel sure of, though, after contributing the reading program just described, to the lives of the children in my class. One is that any particular child needs a variety of stimuli around him or her, all the time. Each six year old in my class learned through different, relevant experiences, and at different rates of speed. Within the written word itself, some children used phonics generalizations. As Smith, Gordon and Meredith contribute, in their book Language and Thinking in the Elementary School,[2] specifically in the chapter on the reading process, a child can use, "phonics in a modified sense concentrating on important letters like initial and final consonants...the child may (also) notice and remember the shape of the new word."

A child may also use the function of the word to help him or her to remember it. Some words are mainly functional, having a lack of referential meaning compared to other nouns, verbs and adjectives. According to Le Fevre, a noted linguist, "function

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[2] F. Smith, K. Goodman and J. Meredith, Language and Thinking in the Elementary School, N.Y.: Holt, Rhinehart Winston, 1972, pp. 50-60.

words are the articles, auxilary verbs, prepositions and conjunctions." Thus, words such as is, and, in, the, was, etc., became sight words for many of the children in my class, long before the letters and sounds in those were deciphered or thought about.

Pictures, drawings, and other non-written symbols made by myself and the children also helped particular children to read words and understand their meanings. Thus, different clues within and outside of the word helped individual children in their individual ways to learn how to read. I feel it most important for a teacher to make available to a child every conceivable experience: written, pictorial, physical and audio, in order to let each child take advantage of those parts of the total experience which fulfill his or her particular learning needs.

The success of the reading material, from word cards to readers, which I gave to the six year olds, rested upon another important factor, and that is the dialect of each child. I knew the children and had spent a lot of time talking to each one, during the first three months of the year. Thus, I got to know how the child used materials, executed ideas, and, very important, how verbal each child was and what form and structure that verbal ability took. Thus, I discovered which children's speech fit into accepted standards and which children spoke in incomplete phrases

or incorrect, but correct-sounding to them, grammatical form. I found that a child learned to read a word, phrase or sentence faster and understood it, if the words and sentences matched the way the child spoke. Again, in Learning and Thinking,[3] the authors concur that, "a child must transfer his existing knowledge of language to the task of reading. He can only do this effectively if what he reads is real language, which differs only from oral language in its use of graphic symbols rather than sound symbols." During the beginning of the year, I had time to find out how the children spoke, from talking with them, as well as from observing how each child used the words he or she knew in the child's writing.

The second general principle applying to how the children in my class learned to read is that the events, places, people and experiences encountered by the child in his or her reading material must be related to the child's own experiences. In other words, no reading material can completely succeed if it is imposed on the child from the outside, without giving any regard to the individual child. The child's interests, personality, style of learning, and verbal dialect must be taken into account before giving the child a reader.

In addition to obtaining information on how each child learned, I discovered the important facts about what each child was interested

[3]Ibid. pp. 50-60.

in. The original word cards were the results of pictures picked by the child, to put into his or her picture dictionary. Additional words came from sentences the children, themselves, wrote. The stories in their readers came from the word cards as well as the knowledge, on my part, of each child's particular interests and favorite fictional characters, whether they be real people the child knew, animals, monsters or super heroes! I feel that the child's knowledge of my input into what he or she read was the focal point of the formalized reading program. If, as Smith, Gordon and Meredith contend, "communication depends on some base of shared experience between the sending and receiving parties,"[4] then I can say that the communication between myself and each child on an individual basis has been the most important factor in the way the children in my class have grown this year. This interest on my part, my willingness to write down or spell for the children, anything which they felt they wanted to communicate, was one part of the "shared communication." The other half rested in the very materials the children used, as for each child, those materials were tailor-made for them, using words from their own experiences.

No adult can come to know, in depth, a group of children, sharing their conversations, jokes and unhappy times, without also

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[4] Ibid. pp. 50-60.

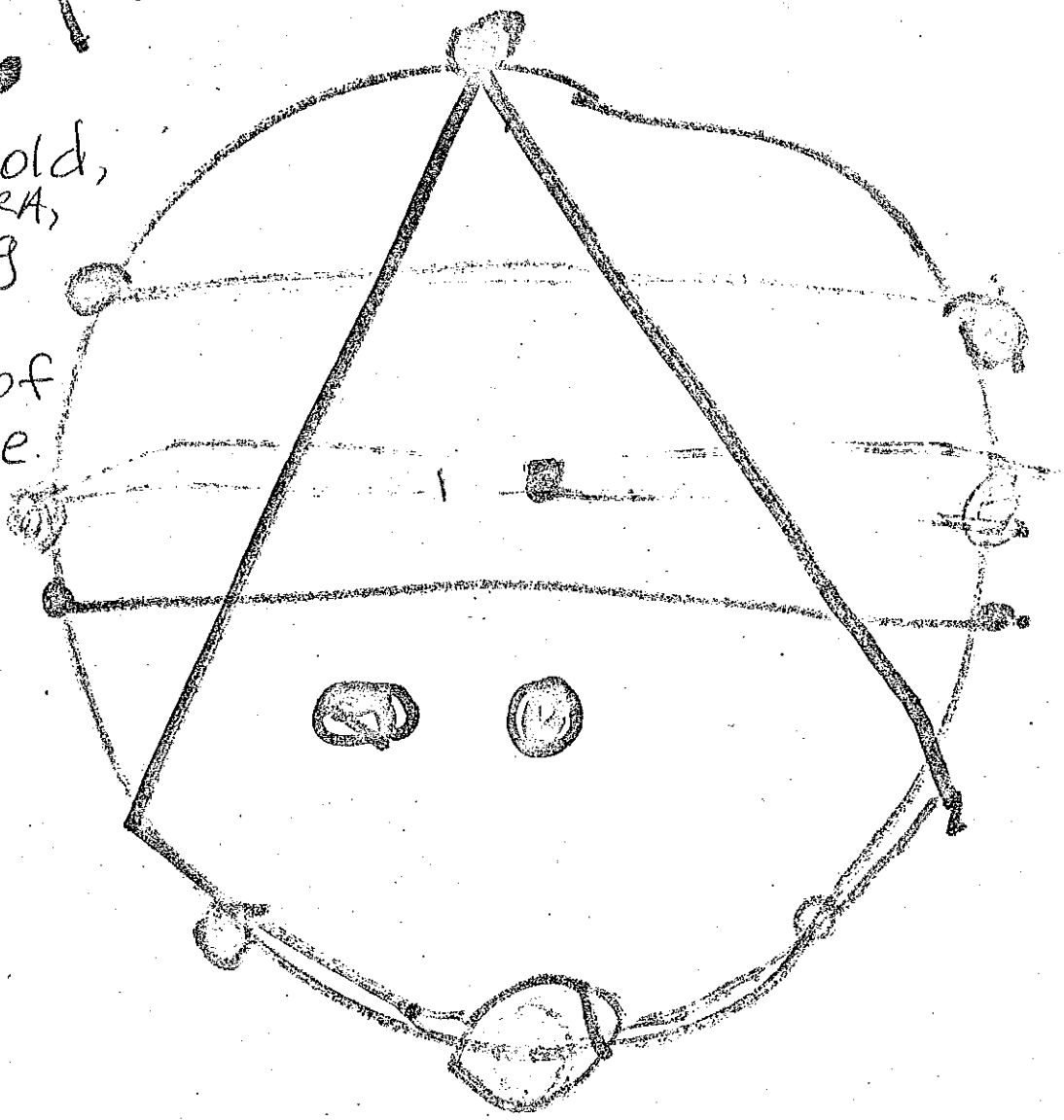
responding to each child's learning needs in just as individual a fashion. I have tried to do just this and feel that it has been a positive learning experience for myself as well as the twenty-eight children in my class.

Bibliography

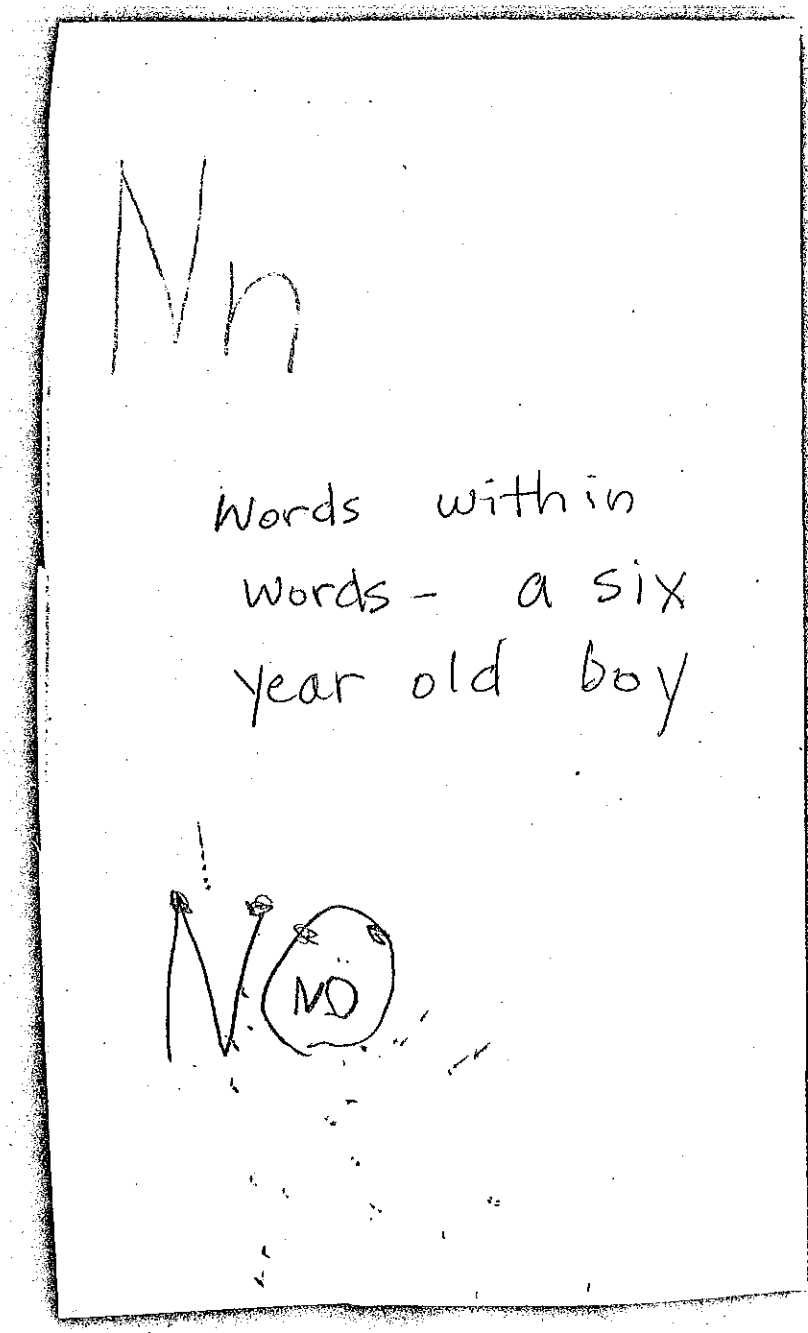
Read, Charles, "Pre-School Children's Knowledge of English Phonology." The Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 41, No. 1, February, 1971.

Smith, F., Goodman, K., and Meredith, J., Language and Thinking in the Elementary School, N.Y.: Holt, Rhinehart Winston, 1972, pp. 50-60.

A five-year old, MAURA, improving on the writing of her name.



ATTACHMENT A



ATTACHMENT B

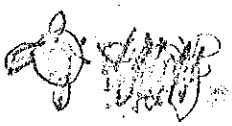
TINA

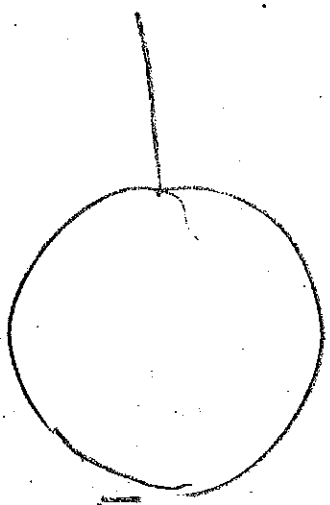
ATTACHMENT C

Aa

Bb

A six year old girl



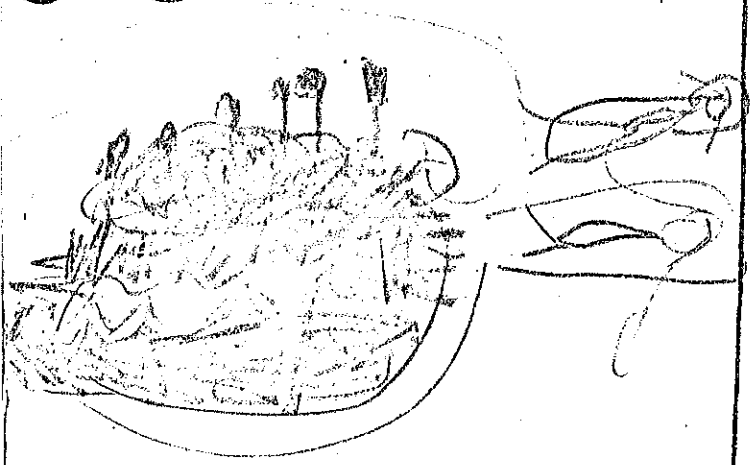


APPLE

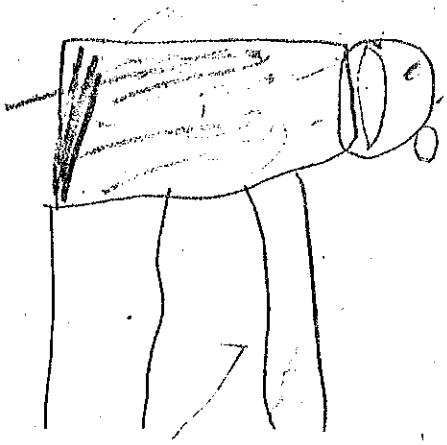
Cc

Dd

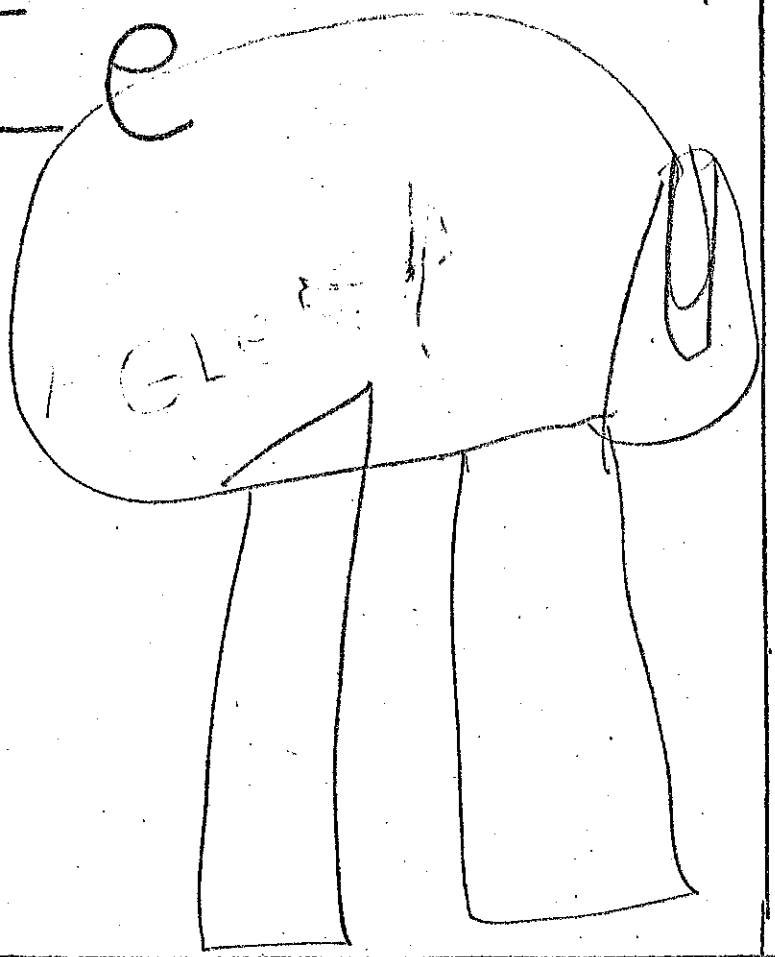
DOG



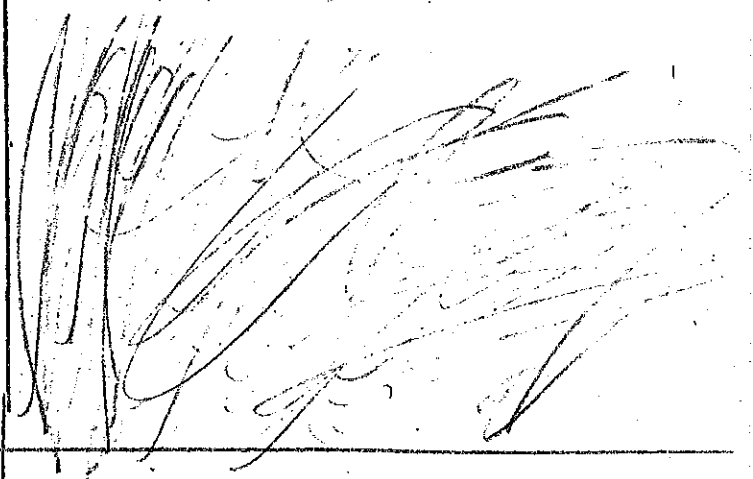
CAKE



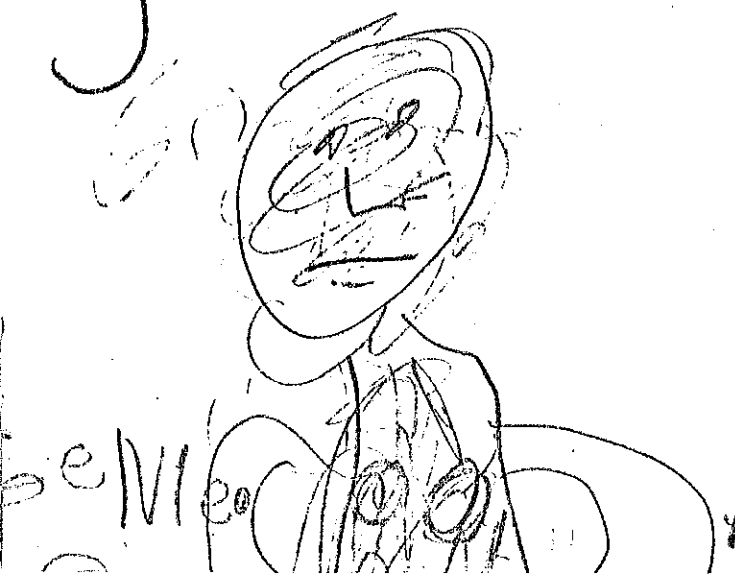
Ee ELEPHANT



Ff FIRE



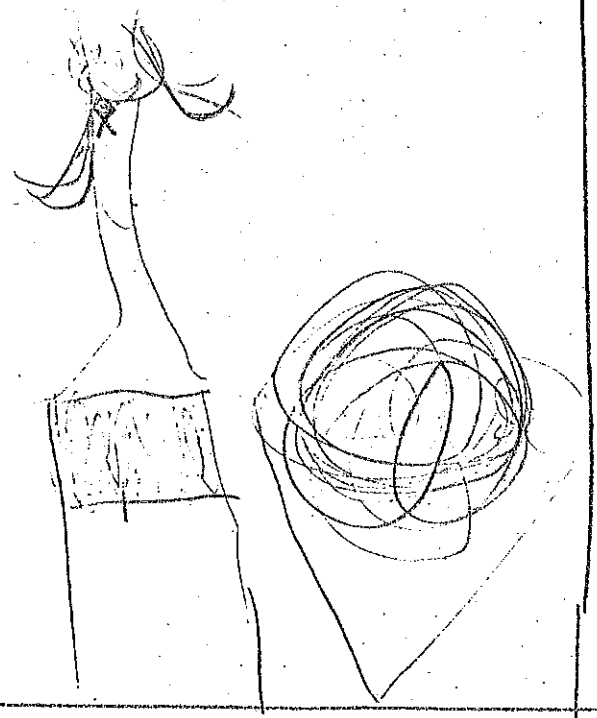
Gg GORILLA



Hh HOUSE

Ii

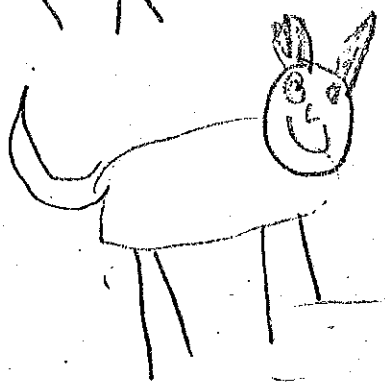
ICE CREAM



Jj

JAM

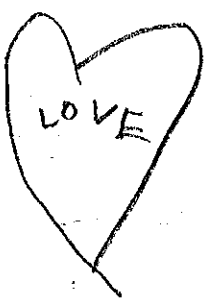
Kk



KITTEN

Ll

LOVE



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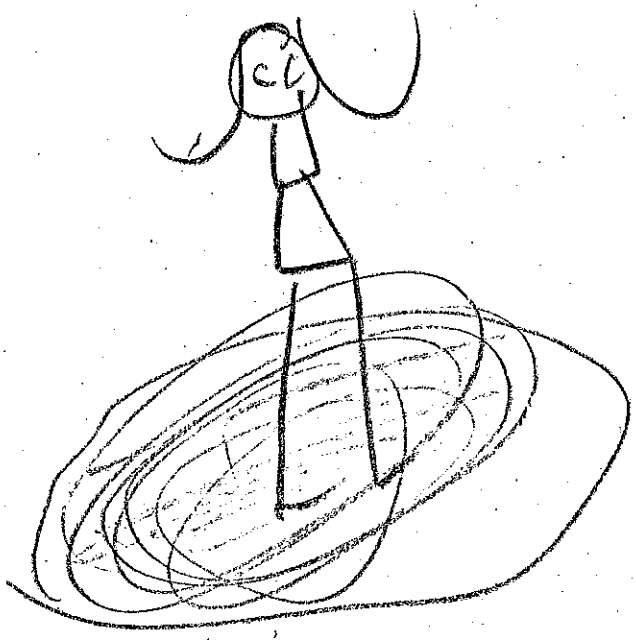

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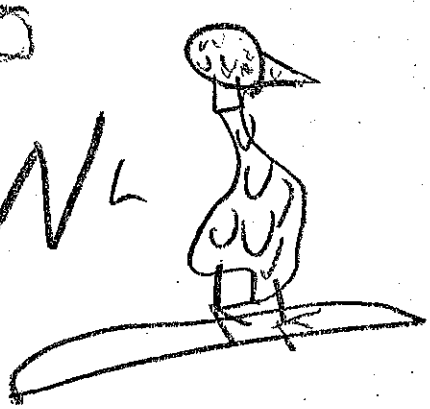
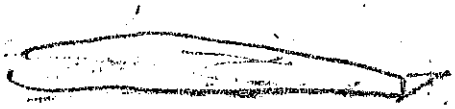
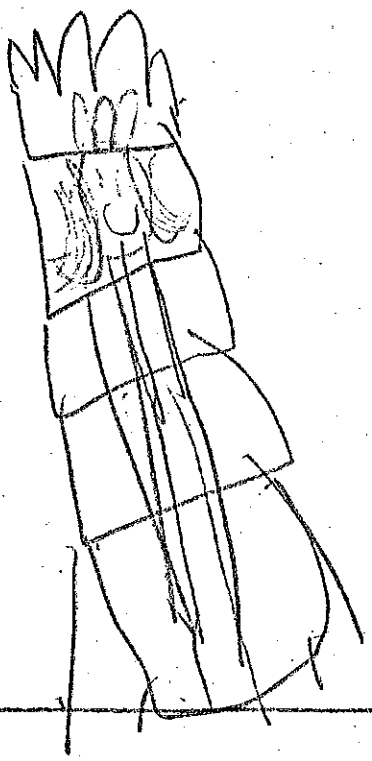


Pp

PENCIL



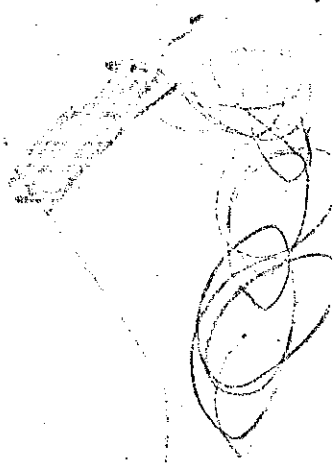
Qq QUEEN

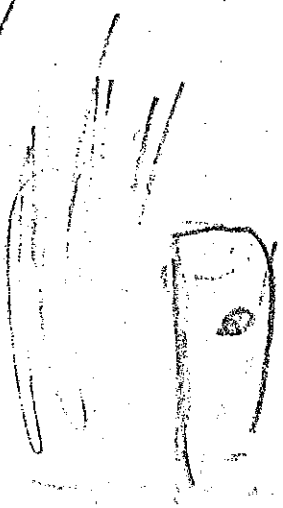


Rr

ROOF 屋頂

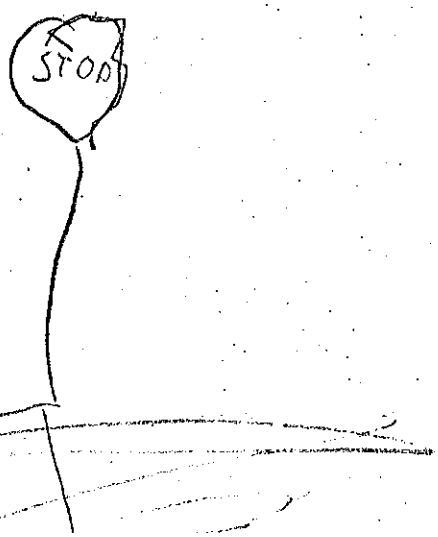
屋





Ss

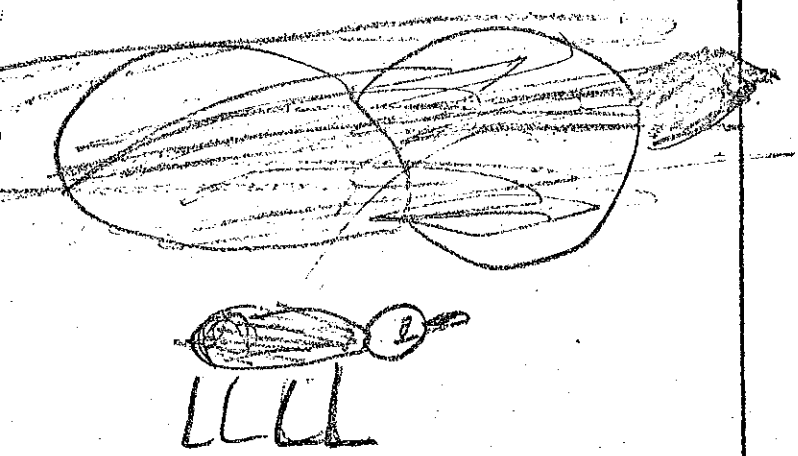
STOP



Tt

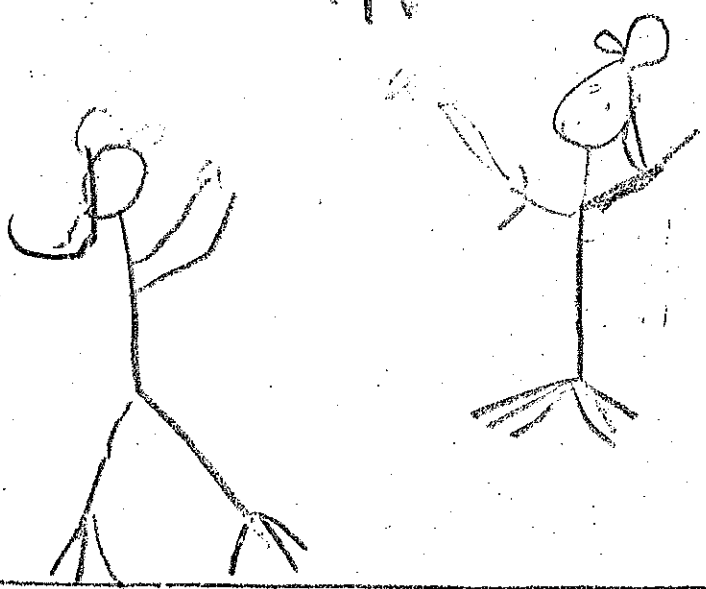
TTNA (herself)

Tt Uu Unicorn Vv

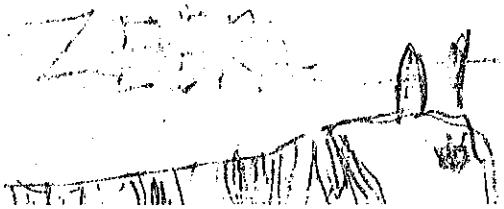


vegetables

Ww Win Xx

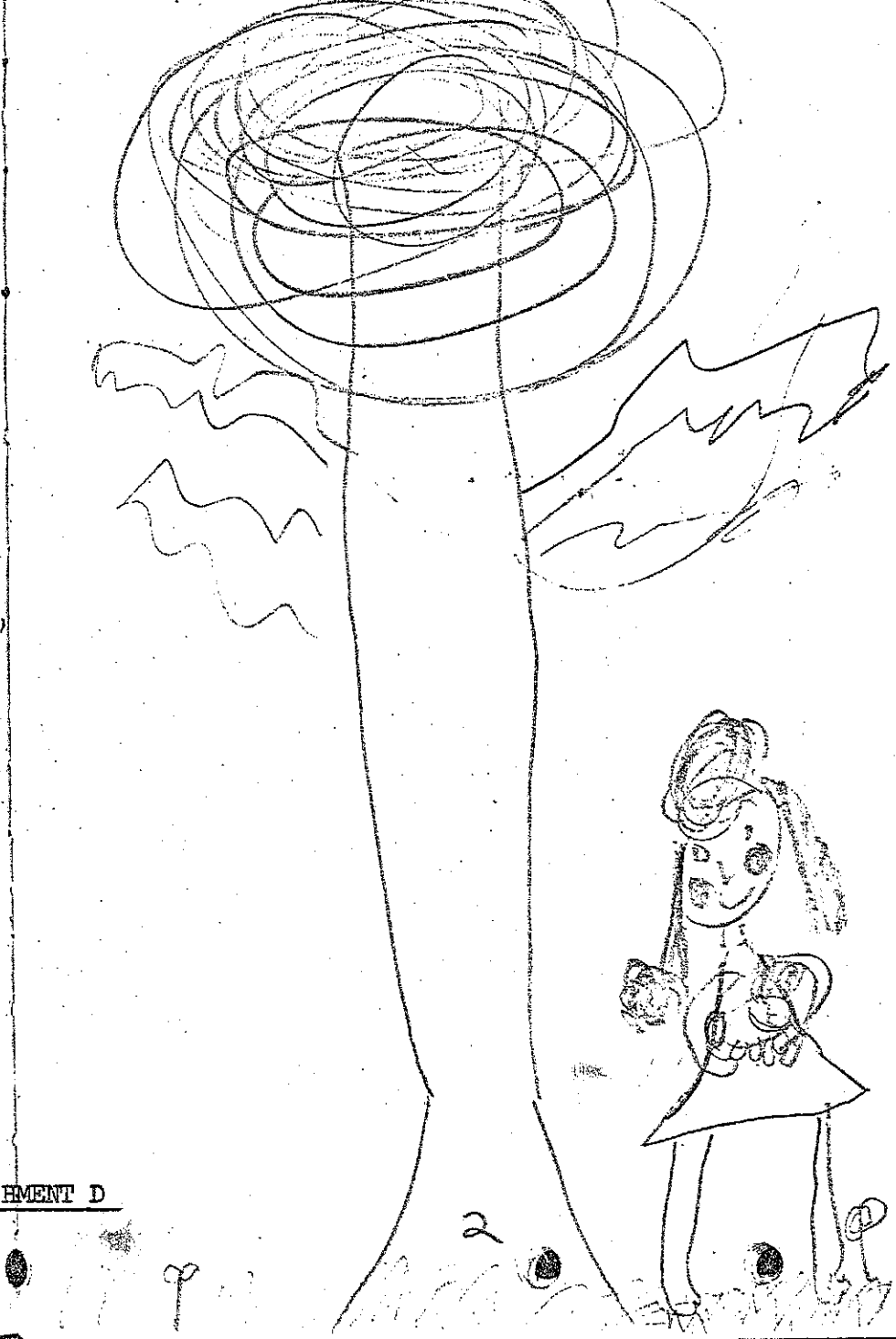


Yy Zz



She had cheeks as red as apples.

She loved trees, plants and animals.

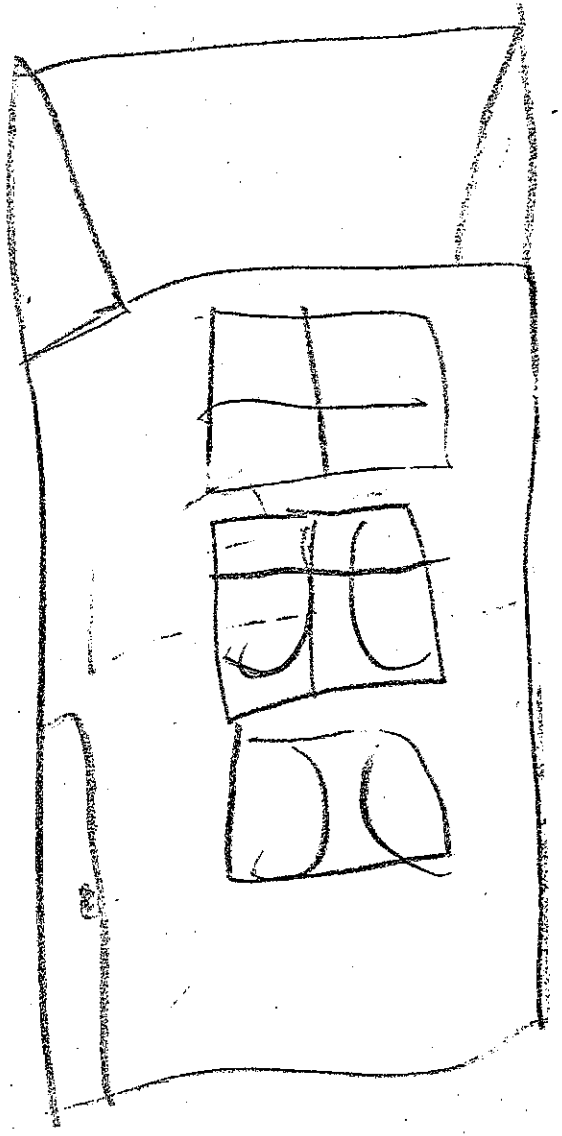


ATTACHMENT D

Tina lived in the city.

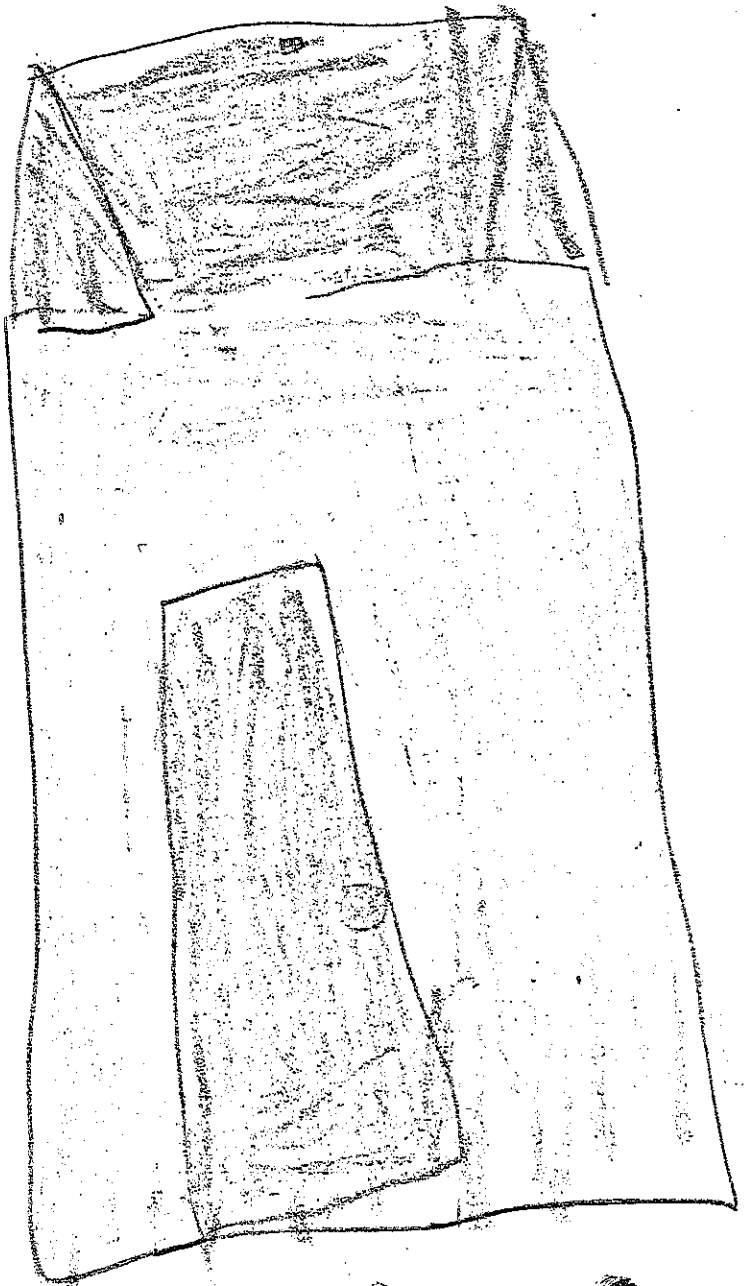
But Tina did not live in a big building.

She lived in a small house.



The house was painted bright orange, like a fire.

The door was painted blue and so was the roof.

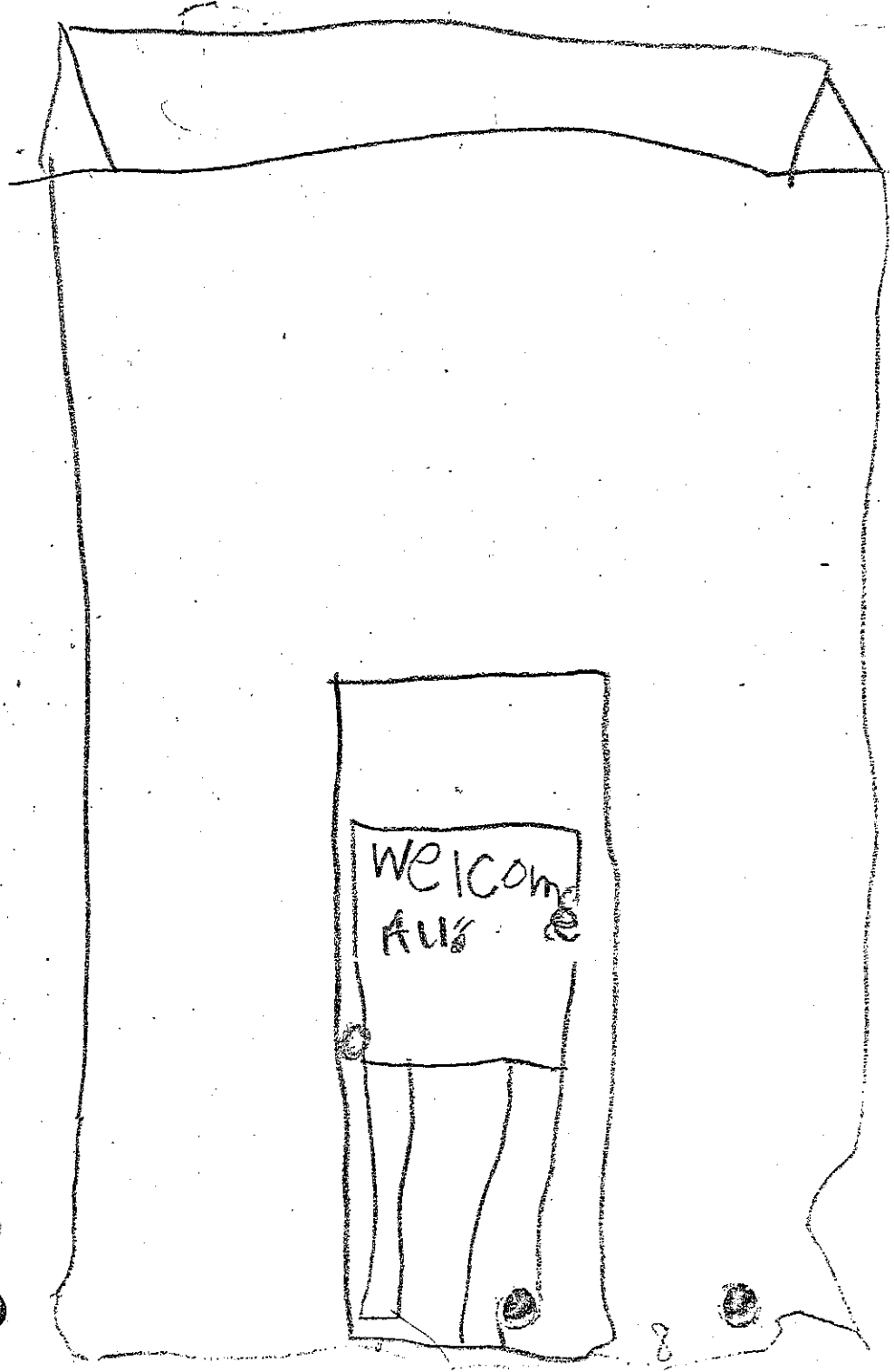


/The house had three signs on it.

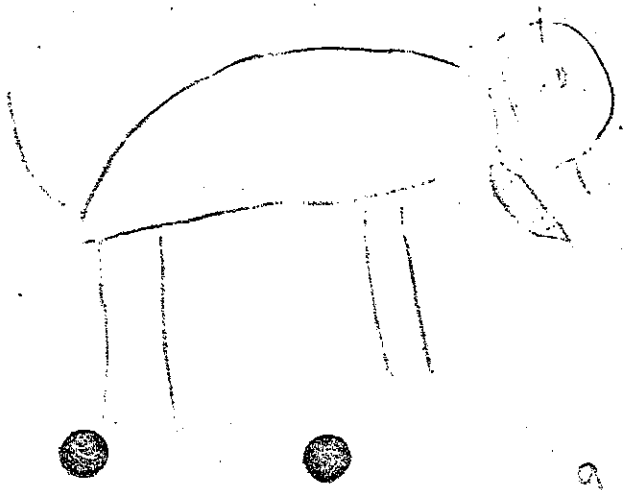
On the door a sign read, "Welcome All."

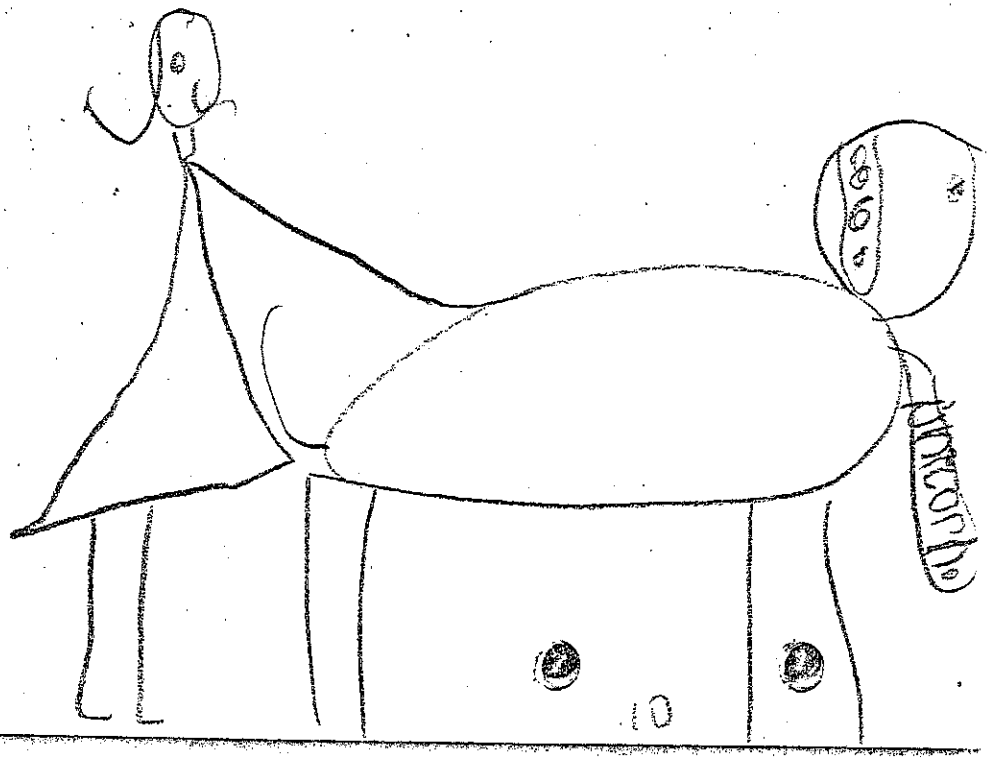
On the back door a sign read, "Exit to Vegetable Garden."

And on the front gate a sign read, "Beware of the dog".



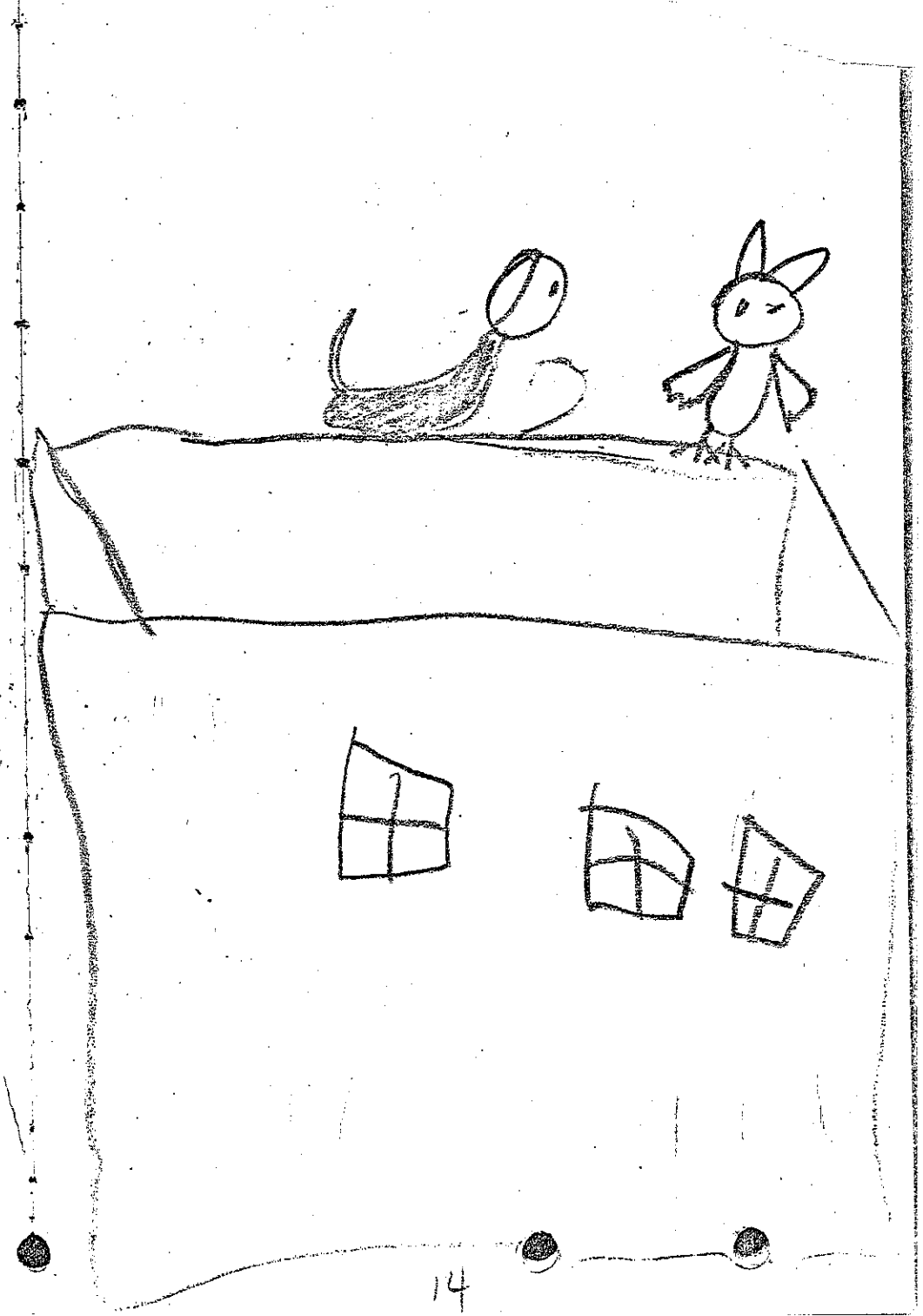
The dog was Tina's pet.
His name was Unicorn,
because Tina liked to
think that unicorns
could be real.



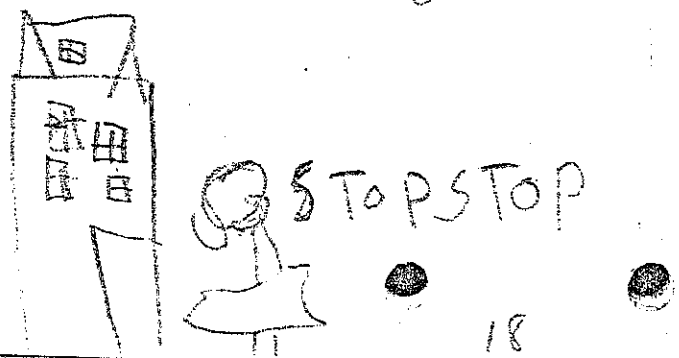


Unicorn made friends with an owl.

Unicorn would sit on the blue roof and talk with the owl.



Tina would work in the garden all the time, until her mother said it was time to stop.

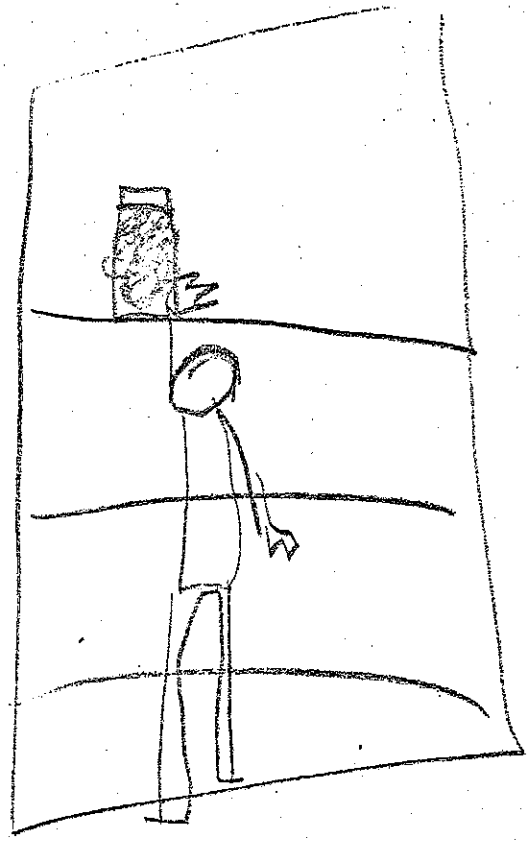


Tina planted all kinds of vegetables near a berry bush.

The bush grew blue-berries as big as baby elephants.

Tina would pick the blue berries and bring them into the house.

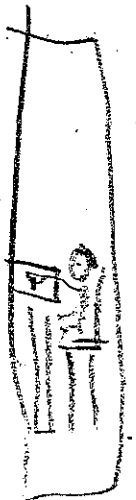
On Saturday, Tina and her brother would make blueberry jam in the kitchen.



The first time they made jam, no one helped them.

Tina's brother wrote down what Tina did with a red pencil.

They never forgot how to make jam after that.

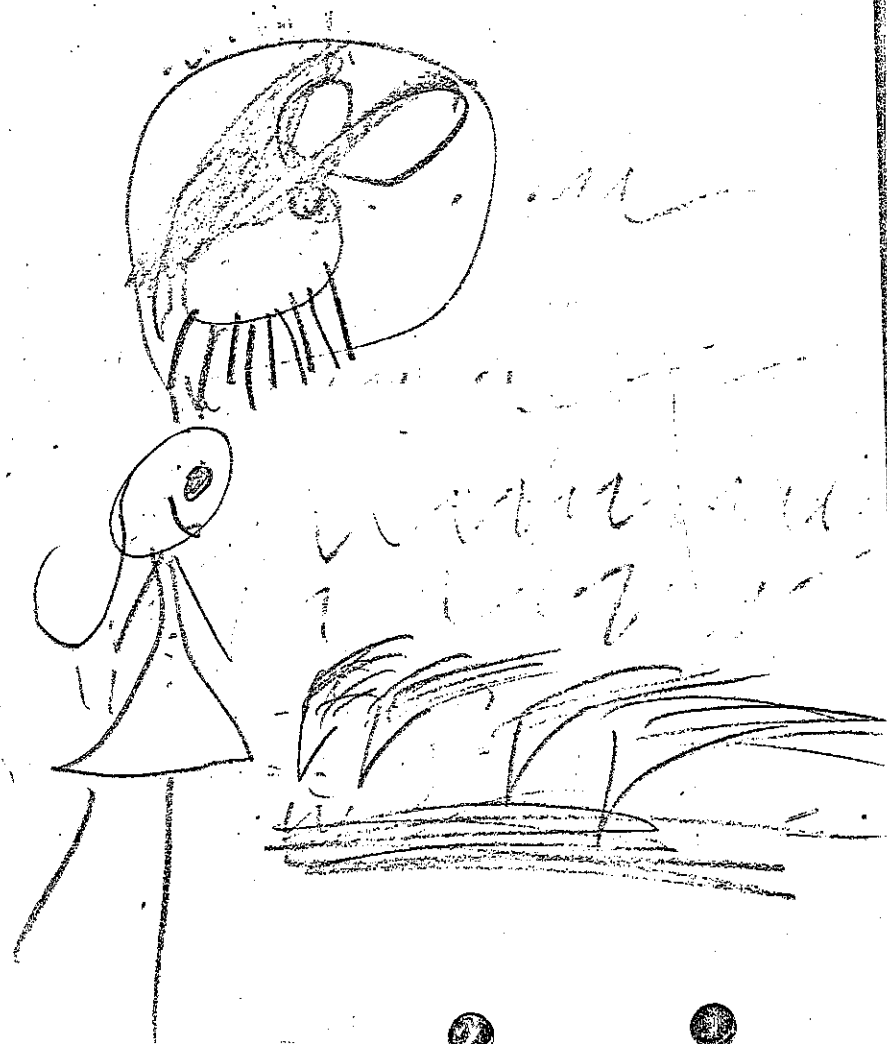


Tina would sit and listen to the sounds around her.

She dreamed she heard the sounds of wild animals- like zebras and gorillas.

Tina was never afraid. She believed that the vegetables in her garden were magic.

She believed that the vegetables would always protect her.



When Tina told this to her brother, he said,

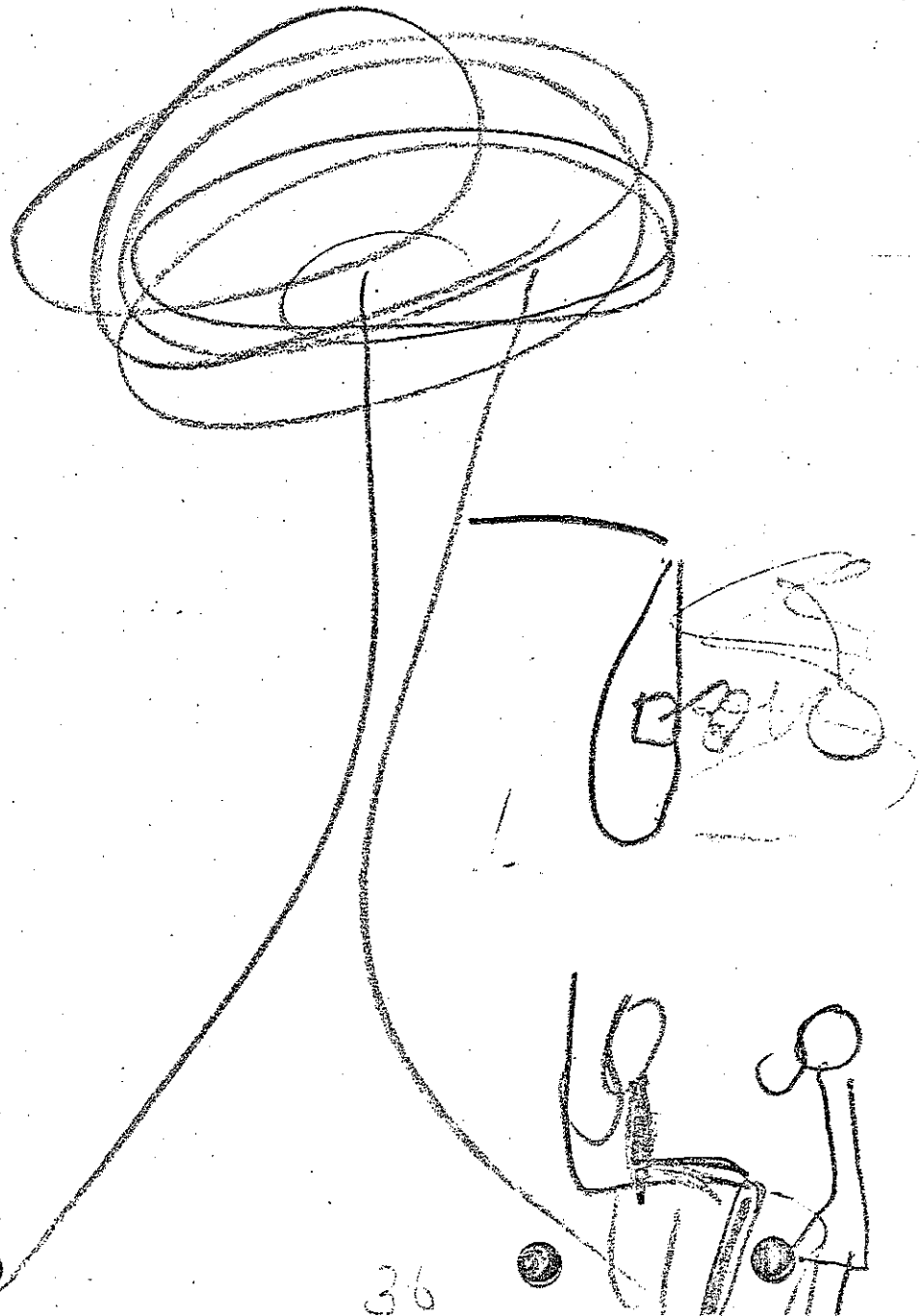
"You are a nincompoop!"

He laughed, "You win a prize for being silly!"

One day Tina was sitting in her garden.

All of a sudden a bee hive fell down from a tall tree.

Tina got up to run away.

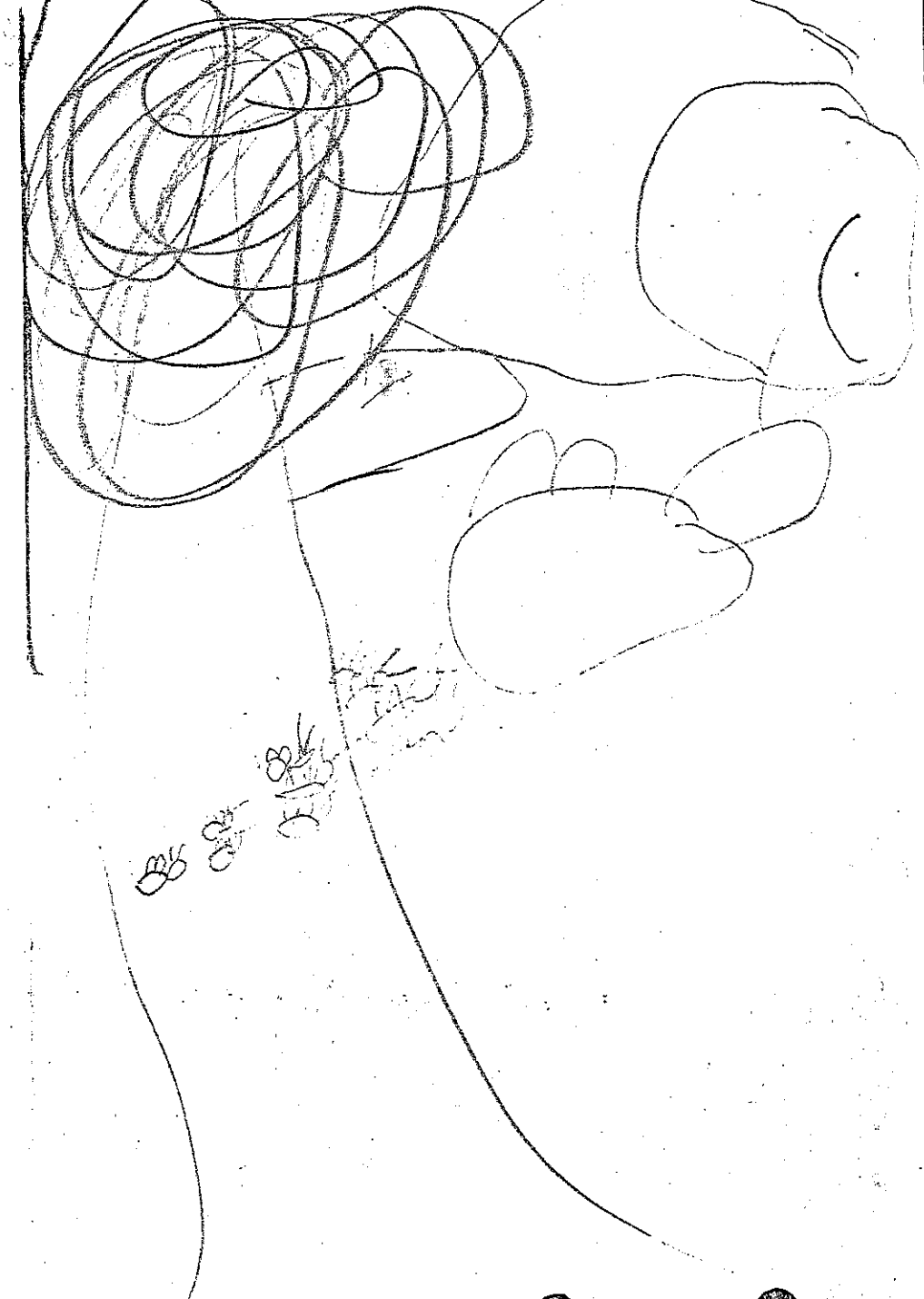


But the bees did not sting Tina.

The queen bee kept them away from Tina.

Then the queen made the hive go back up into the tree.

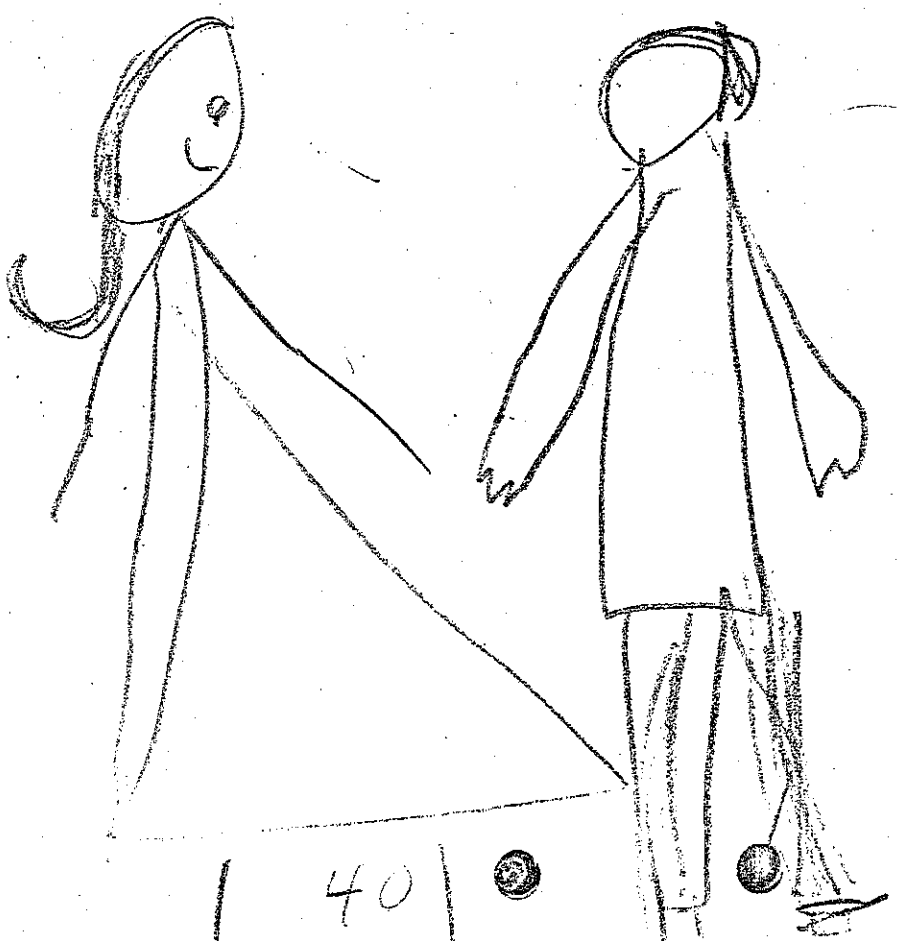
Tina saw it all happen.



That night, Tina told her brother about the bees.

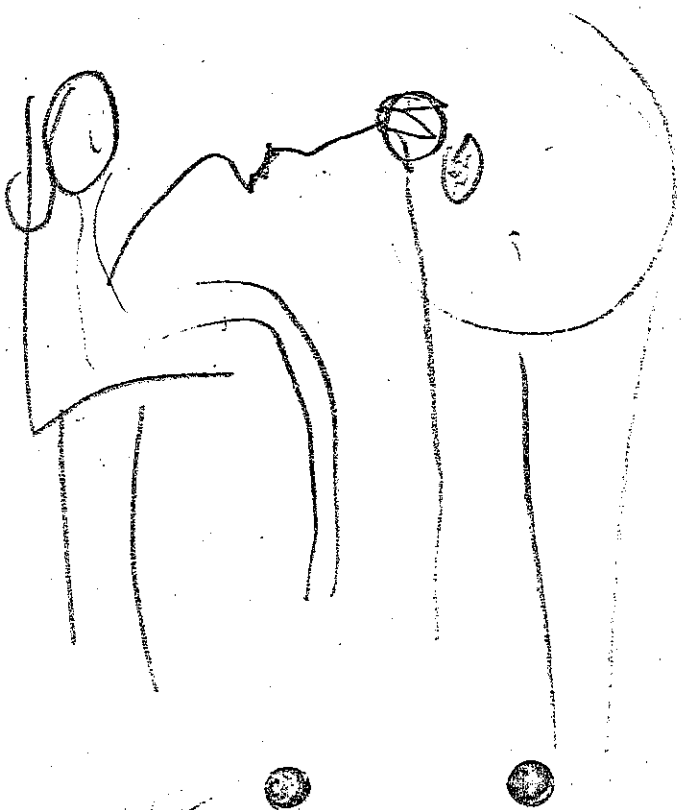
"It was the vegetables that saved me from the bees!"

"It was not!", her brother said.



Tina did not try to make her brother believe her.

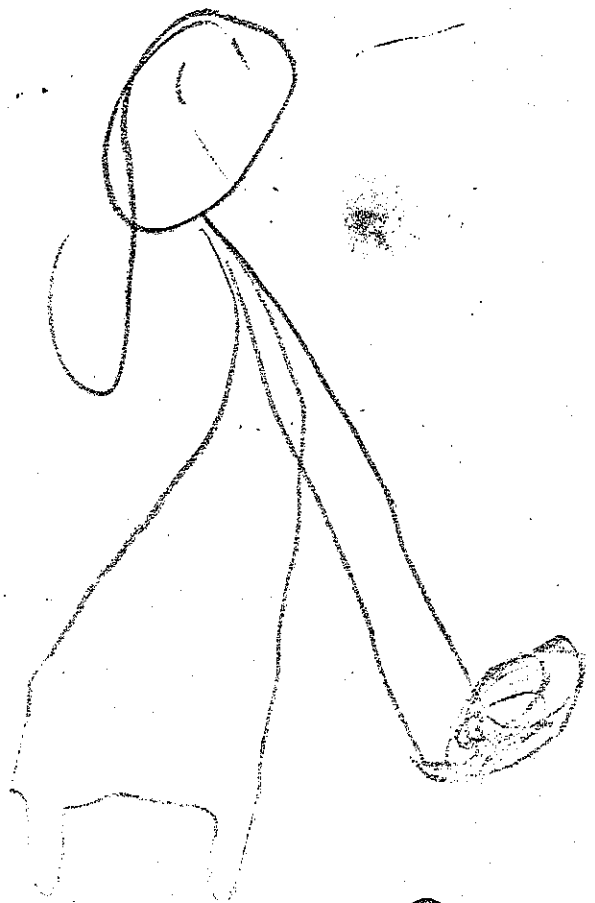
She just finished eating her ice-cream and cake.



Tina saved some ice-cream for Unicorn.

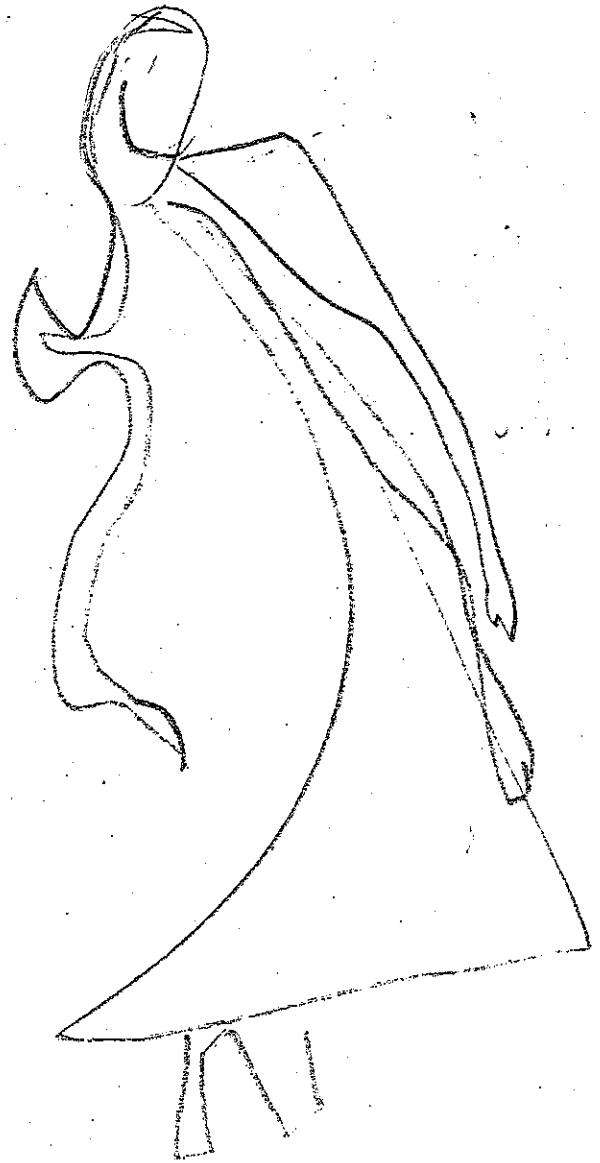
He loved ice-cream.

Then she looked out of the window at her vegetable garden.

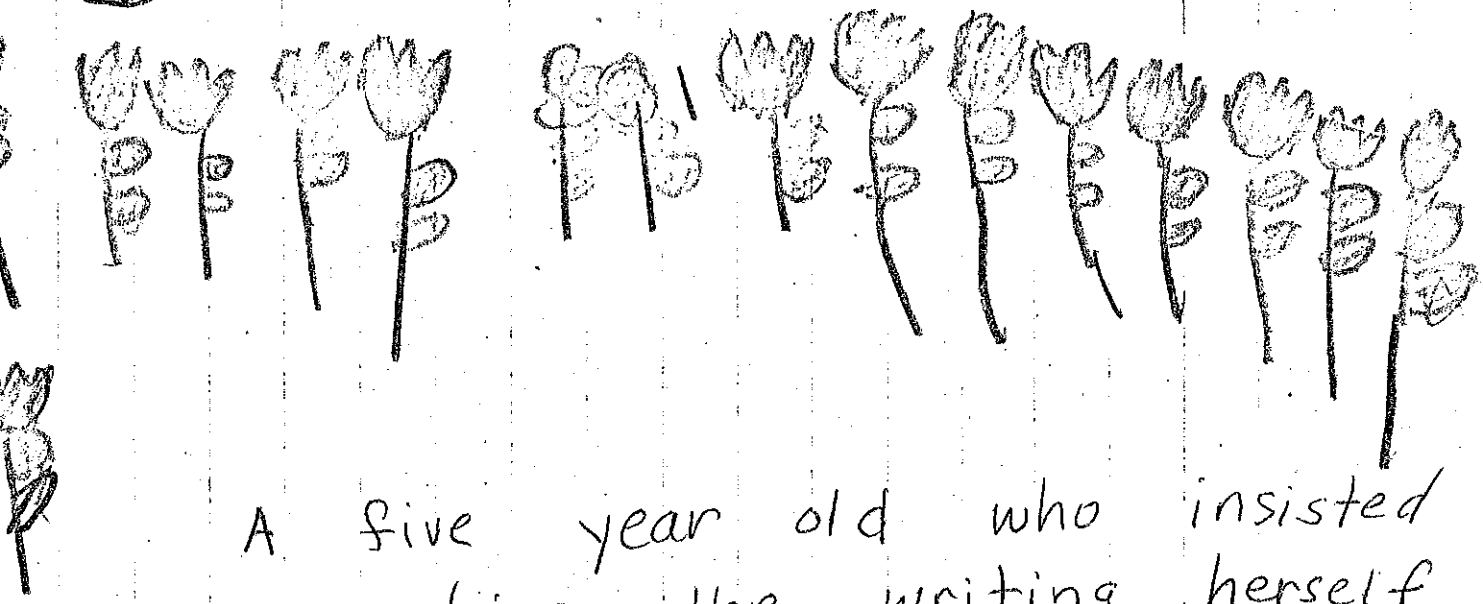


Tina felt happy.

At least, she knew the truth.



FLOWERS ARE PRETTY.
THEY SMELL NICE. Mom RO
I LOVE THEM ALOT.



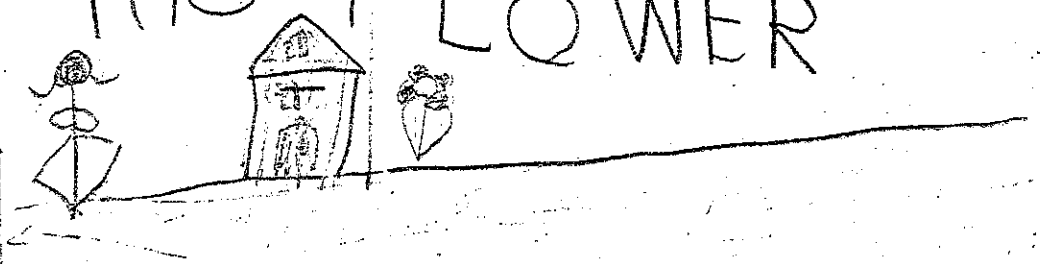
A five year old who insisted on doing the writing herself

All drawings, words and writing came from her. She asked for this book.

A GIRL LOOKING AT The SUN AND The FLOWERS

ATTACHMENT F

A GIRL IS
GOING INTO
THE HOUSE WITH
THE SUN AND
THE FLOWER



ANGELS ON CLOUDS

THEN THE SUN

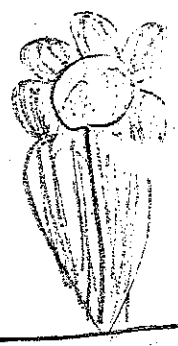
CAME

THERE

A VERY

LONELY

FLOWER



THE MOTHER

CAME THEN

THE LITTLE

GIRL

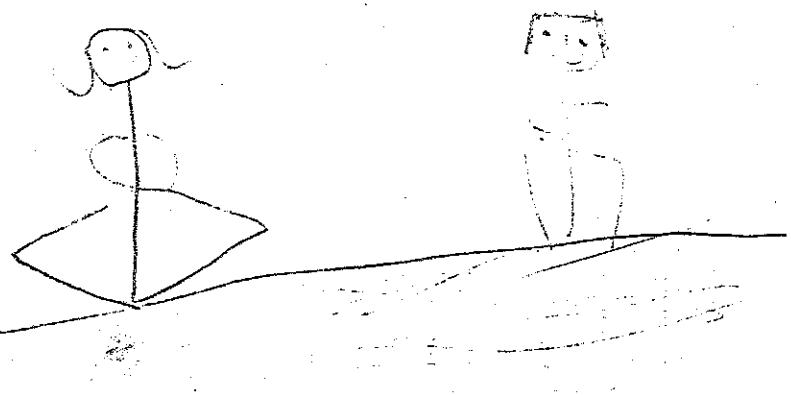
WAS HAPPY

THERE

WAS A GIRL

NAMED

MICHELE

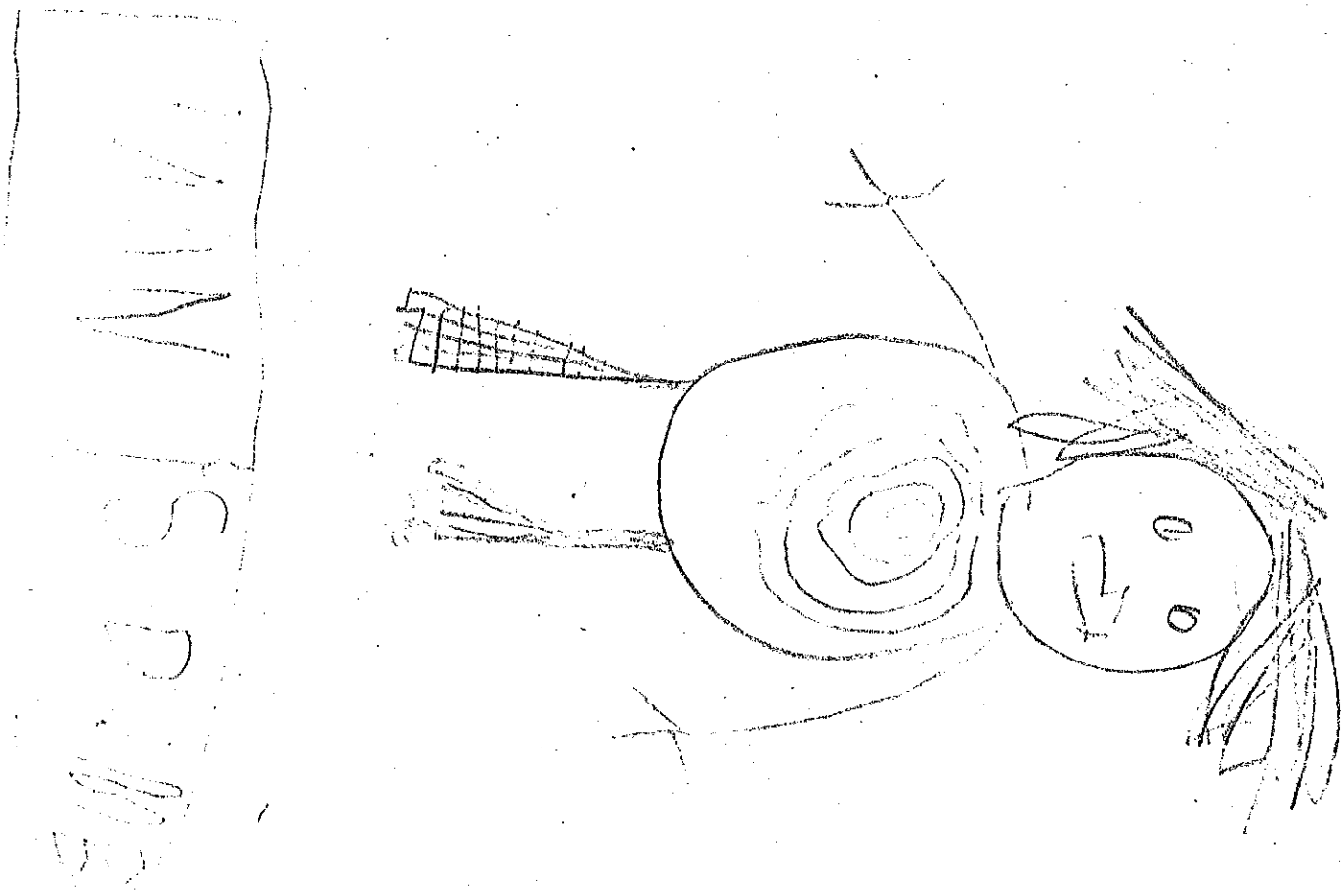


A five's first written words.

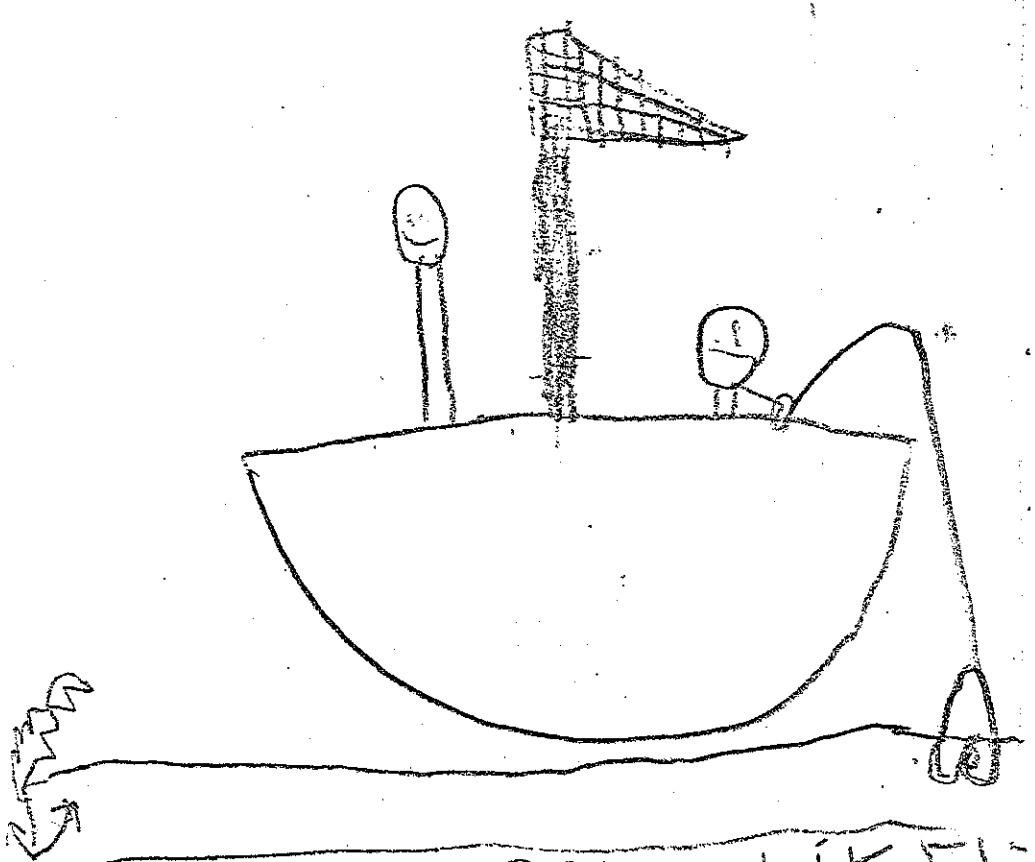
The writing is his.

OCTOPUS IN THE SEA

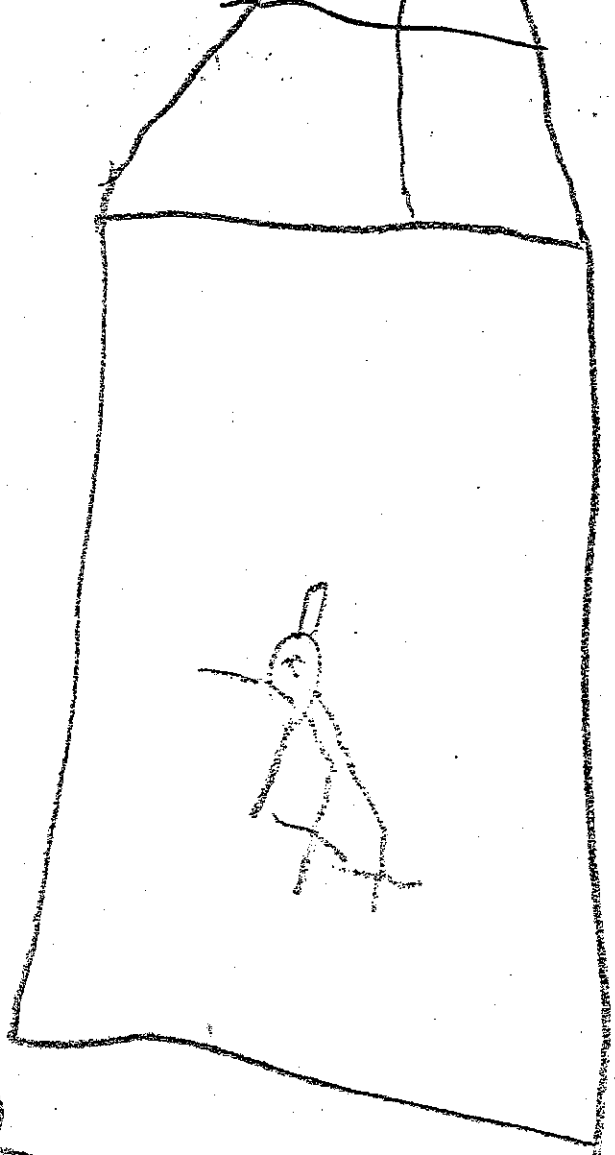
ATTACHMENT G



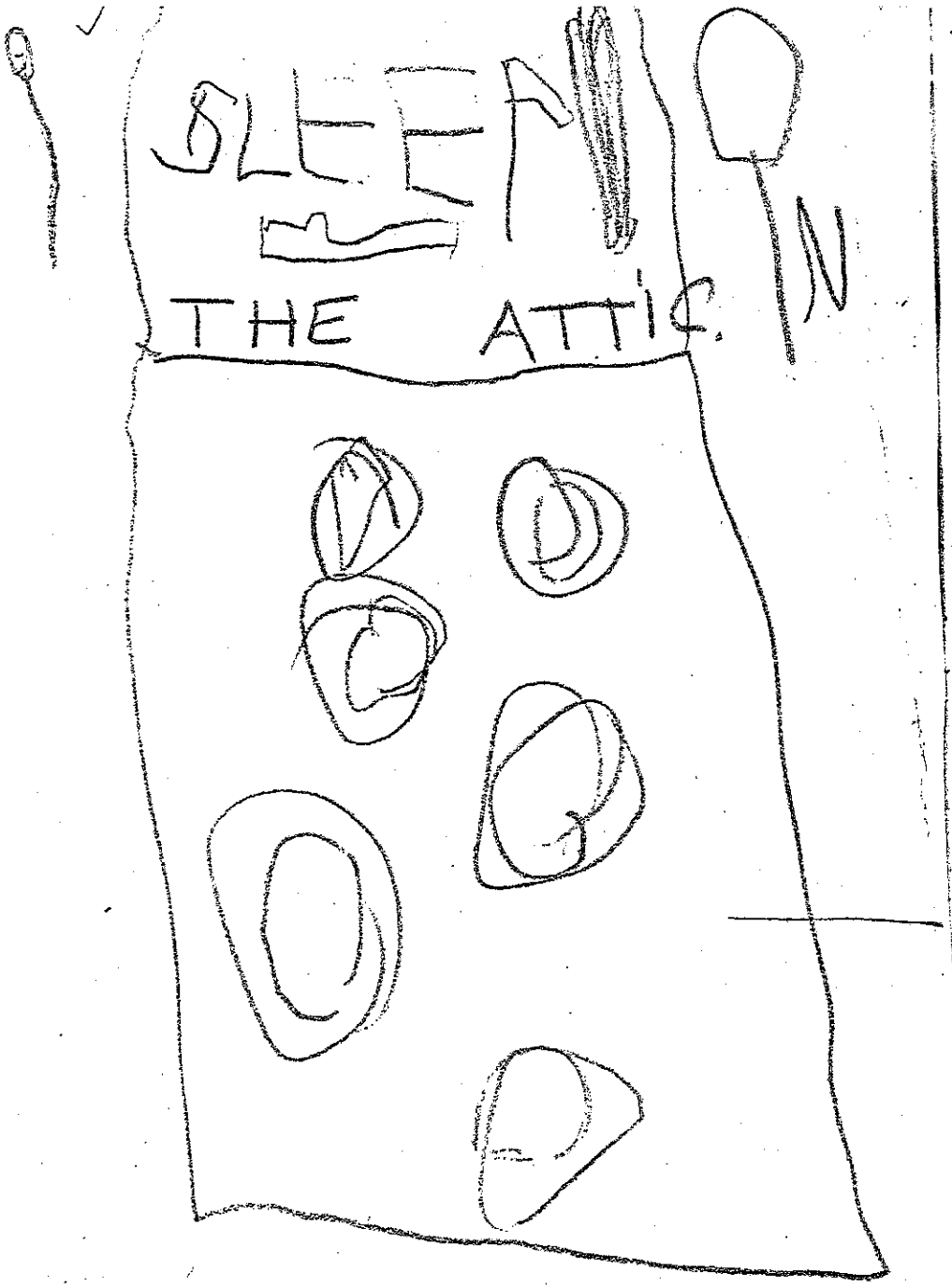
FATHER GO FISHING

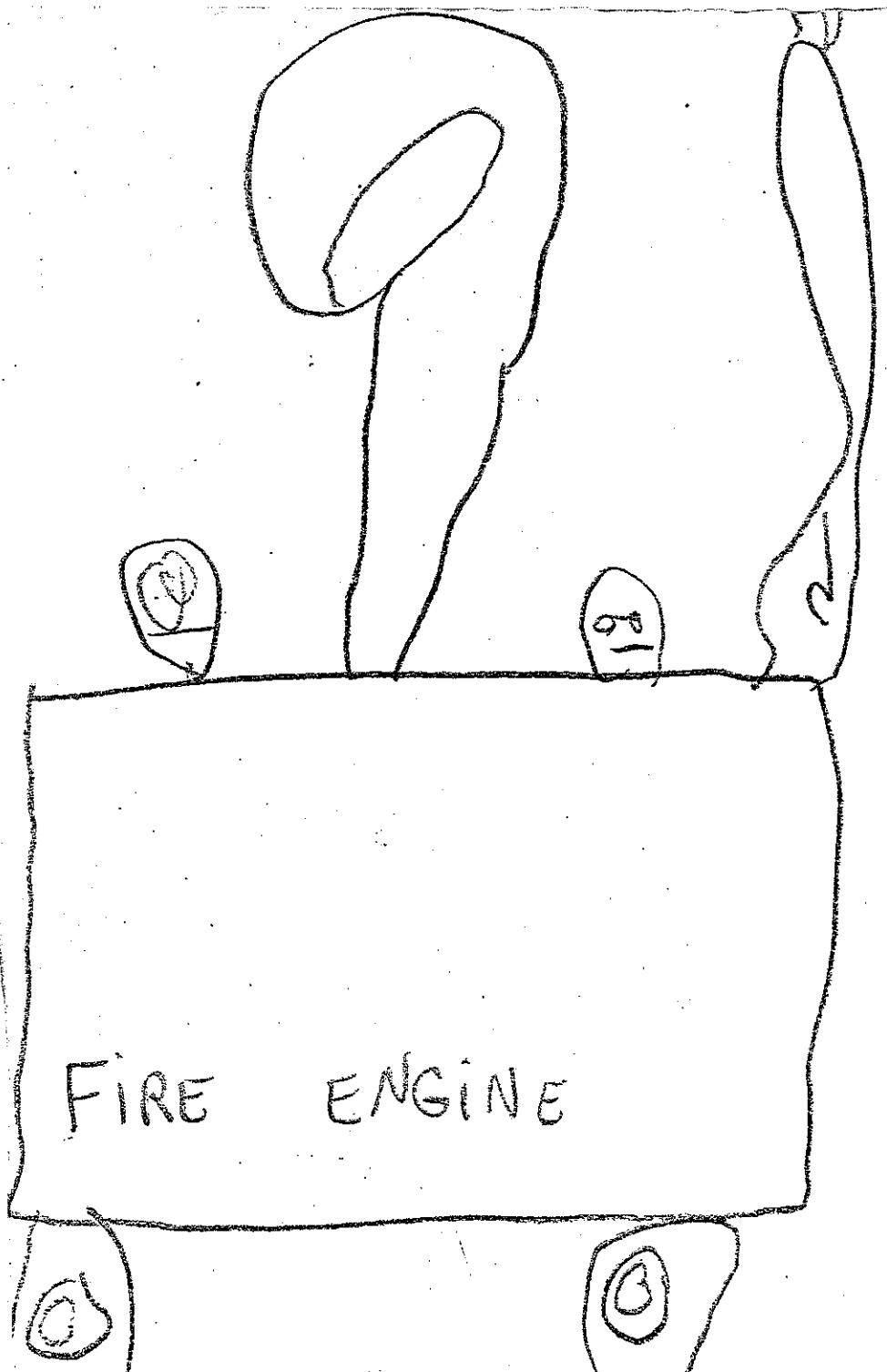


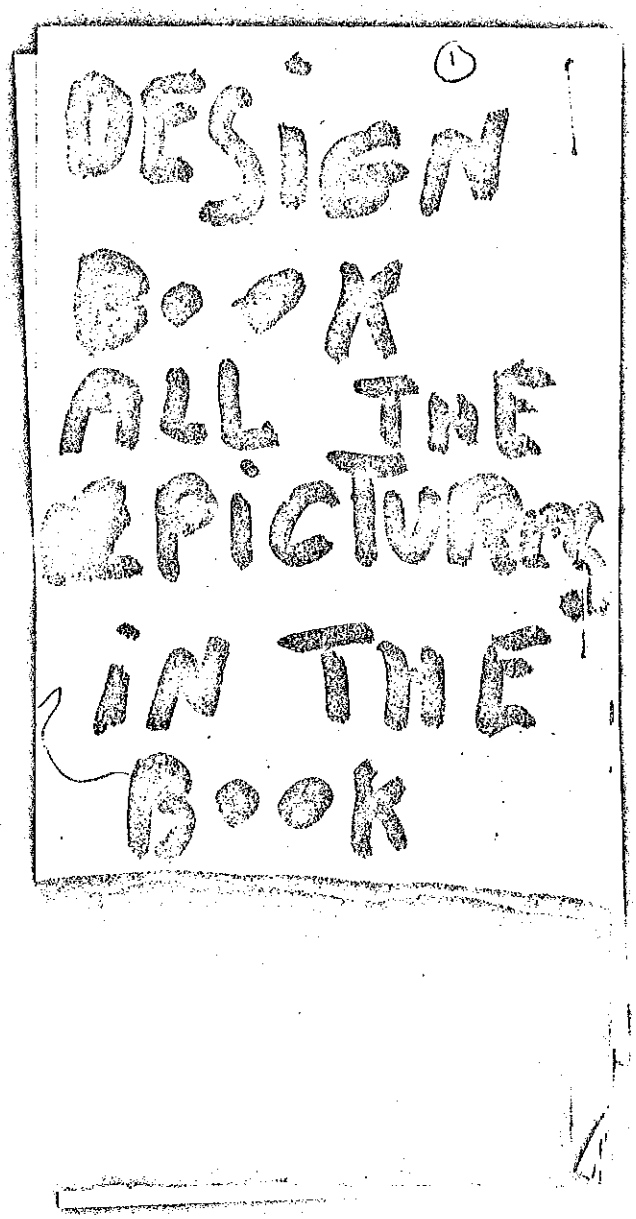
WORM SHAPED LIKE A HEART



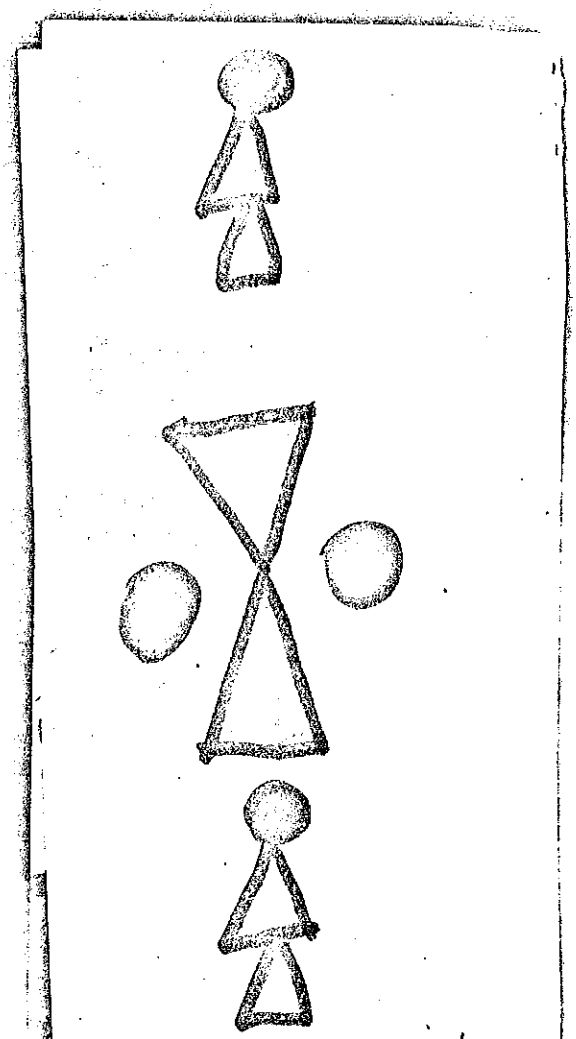
A MOUSE IN A HOUSE.


SLEEP IN
THE ATTIC.

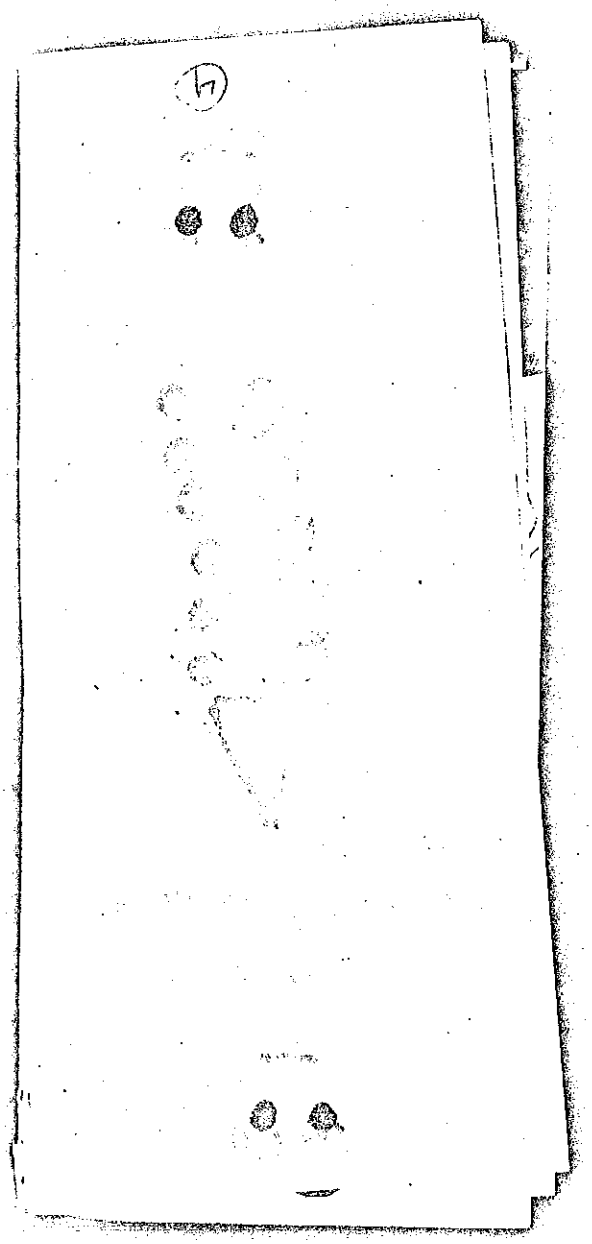

FIRE ENGINE

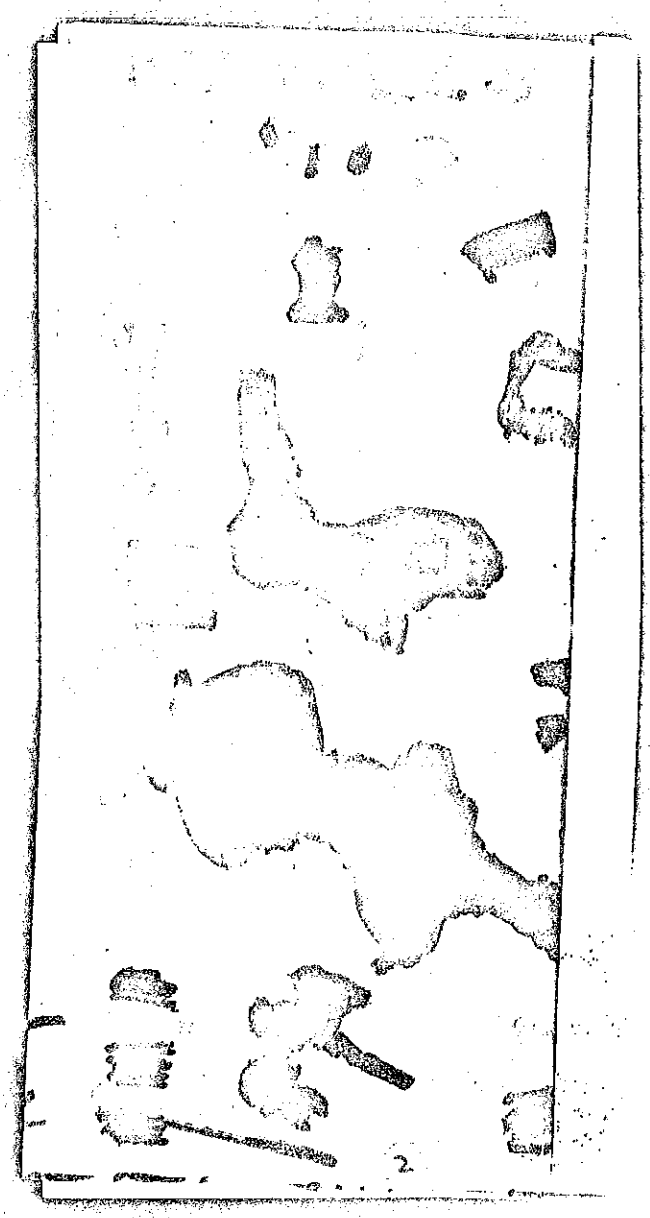


ATTACHMENT H



A mature six
who loves to draw.
(5)

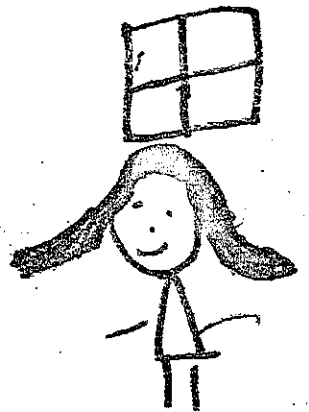

(h)



ATTACHMENT I

and did all the writing herself.

A LITTLE GIRL LOOKED OUT THE WINDOW



IT
GOT
SUNNY
OUT

THEN THE
LITTLE
GIRL
WENT
OUTSIDE

A little GIRL WAS PLAYING IN

THE SUN

THE ZOO MAN SAID THAT THE LITTLE

COULD WORK IN THE ZOO

THE LITLE GIRL FED THE BEAR FIRST

THEN SHE

FED THE

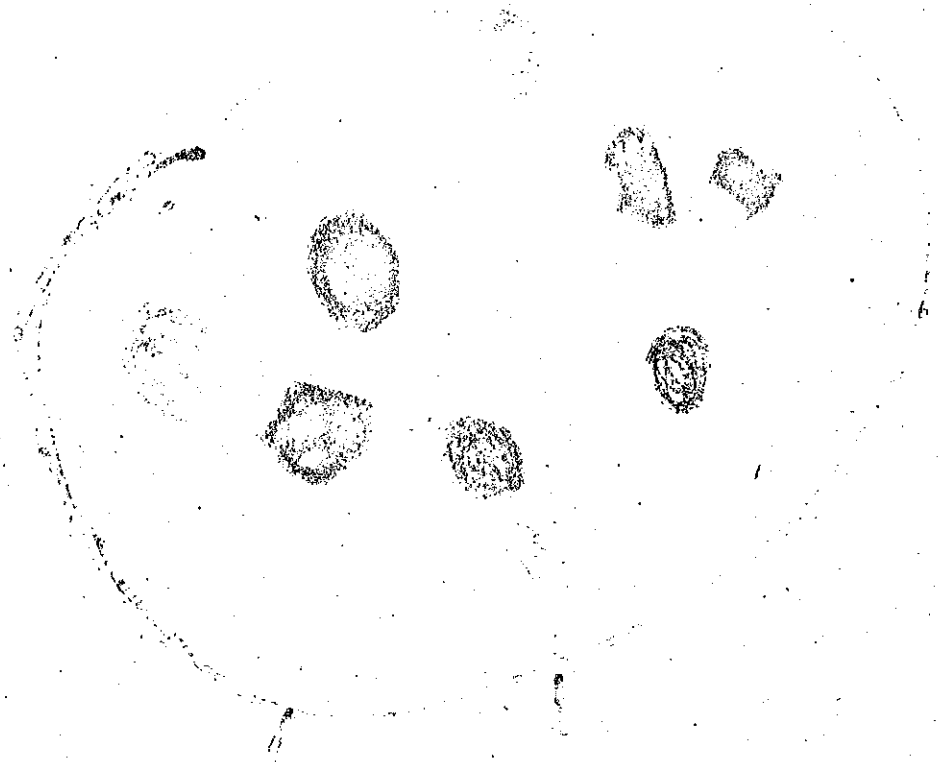
DUCK.

THEN SHE FED THE ZEBRA

THEN SHE WENT

TO GET MORE FOOD.

ATTACHMENT -J



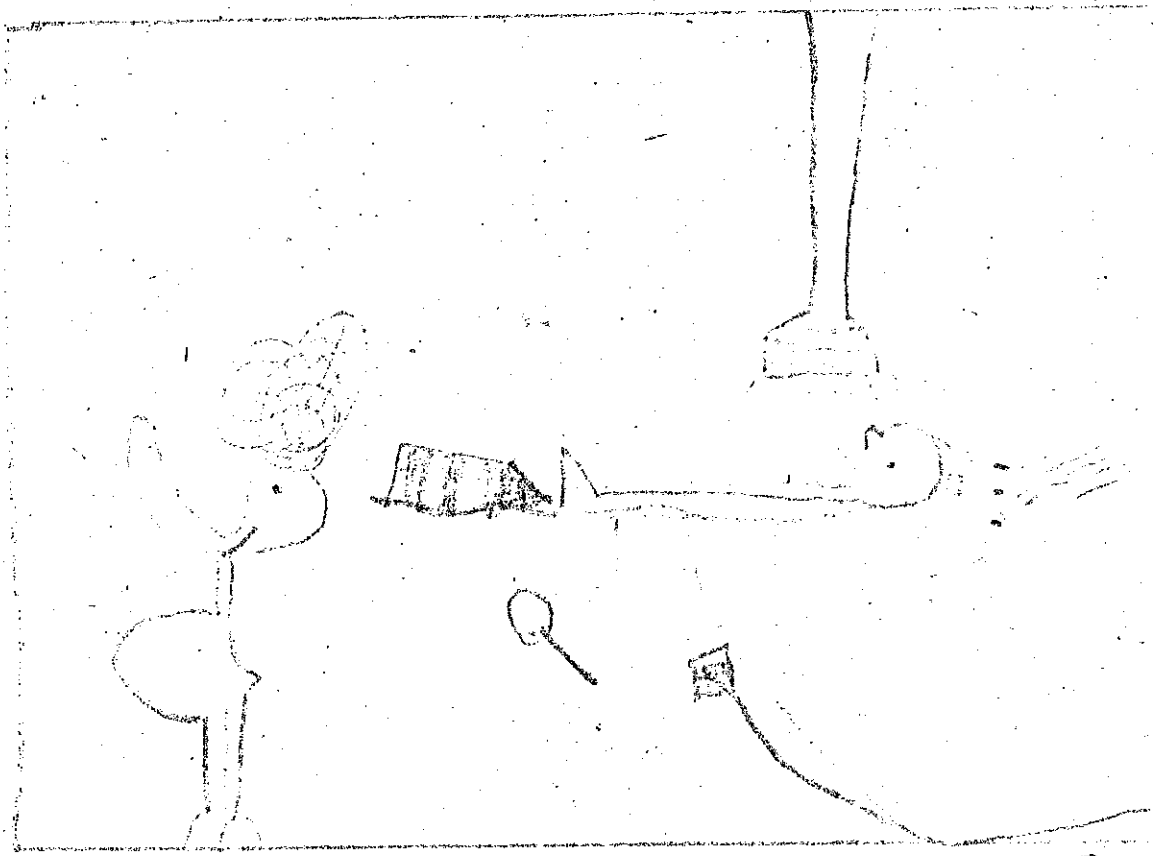
BUBBLE GUM

MACHINE

CATHY

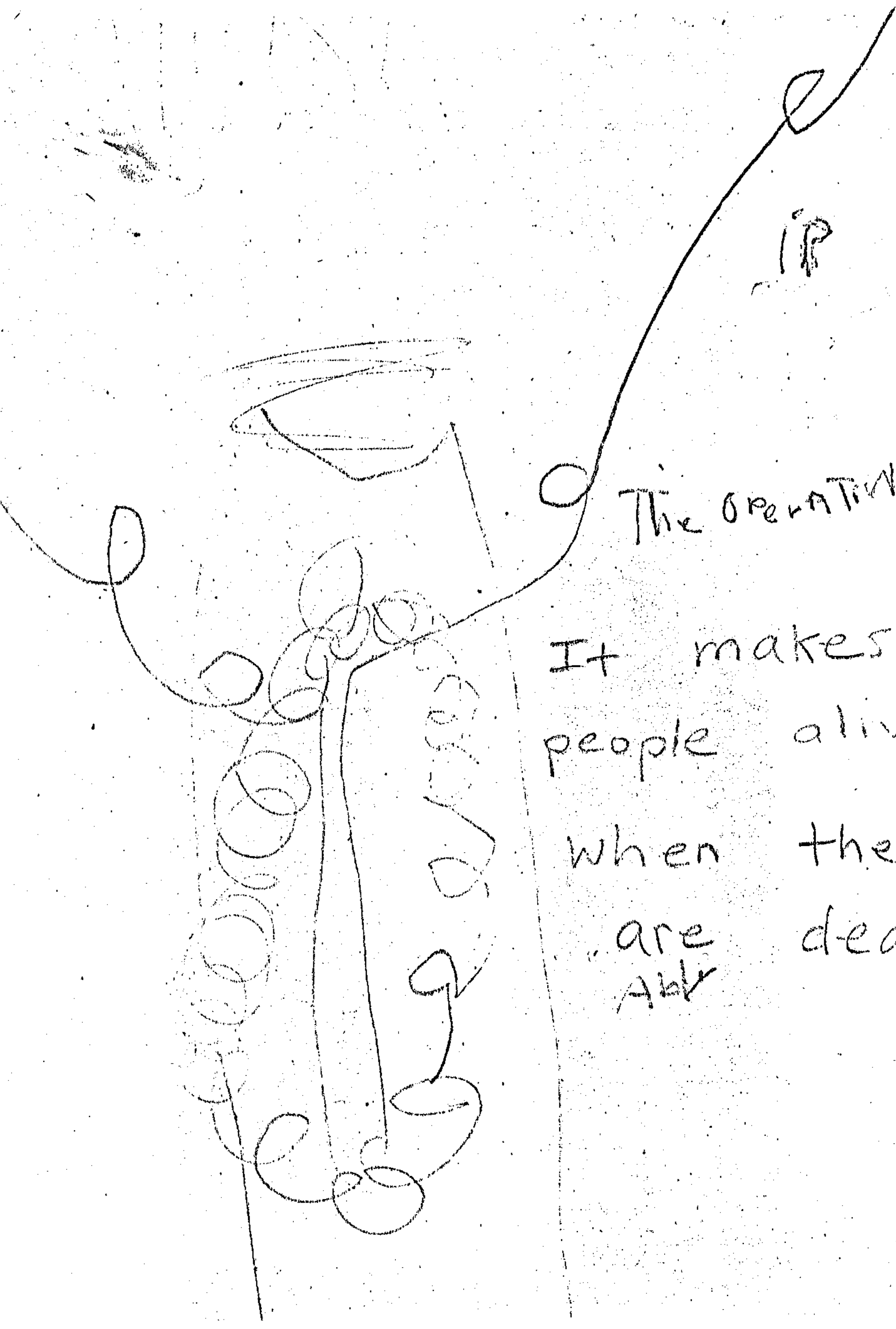
A scientist is studying someone's
this is a certain kind of light and
puts rays into him. The rays go
after he studies his brain.

A SUPER DUPER
MACHINE



SASH

THIS IS BE + MONSTER
MACHINE
IT KILLS PEOPLE



The OperATinMA

It makes people alive when they are dead

Ahh