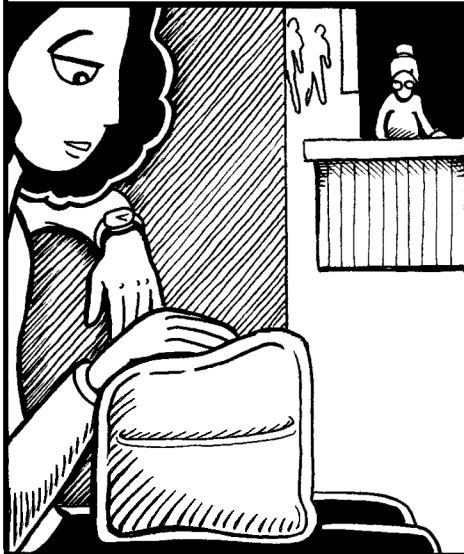




I'M MEETING MOM AND NOREEN IN THE HOSPITAL'S LOBBY FIRST.



THEY'RE GOING TO CATCH ME UP ON DAD'S MINDSET & MEDICAL PROGRESS.



WHAT A NICE SURPRISE. NOREEN'S 4 YEAR OLD DAUGHTER MADE THE LONG TREK TO THE HOSPITAL TODAY AS WELL.

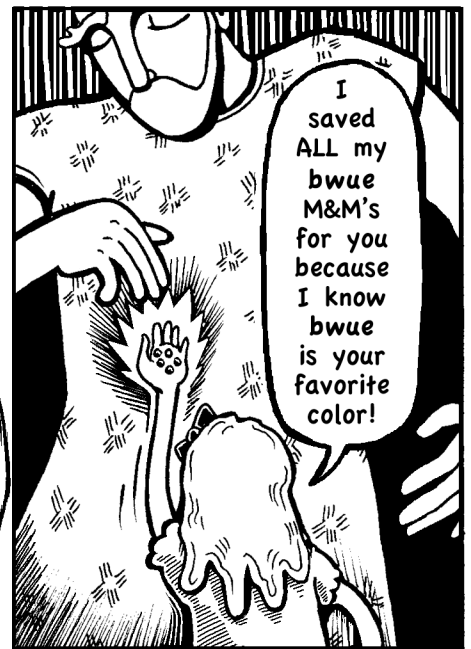


HALEY IS MCPOP'S LITTLE ANGEL... HIS YOUNGEST GRANDCHILD.

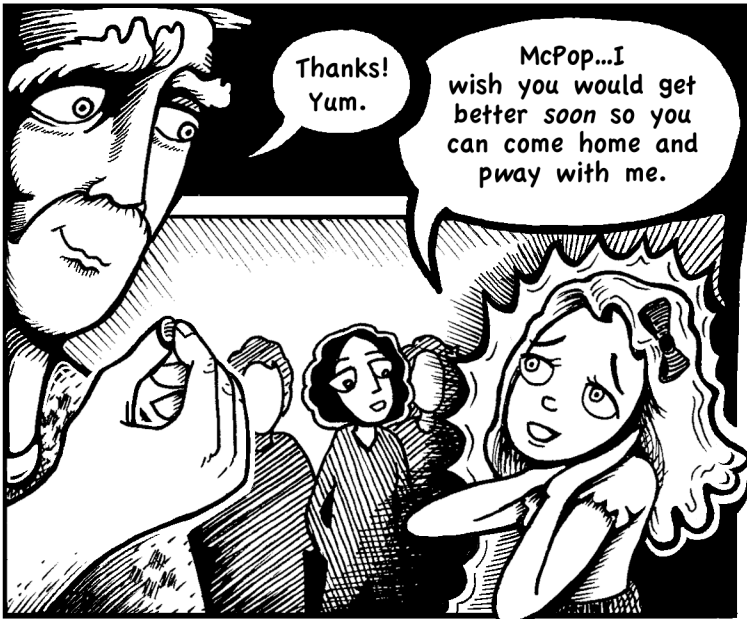


MCPPOP!

I've a SURPRISE for YOU!



I saved ALL my bwue M&M's for you because I know bwue is your favorite color!



Thanks! Yum.

McPop...I wish you would get better soon so you can come home and pway with me.



Snif.

I will...But, in the meantime, You be a good girl for Nana.

I'VE NEVER SEEN MY FATHER CRY, AND, BECAUSE IT LOOKS TO ME LIKE HIS EYES ARE STARTING TO GET WET, I POLITELY TURN AWAY AND CLEVERLY DIVERT ATTENTION.



Hey!

This isn't such a bad view!

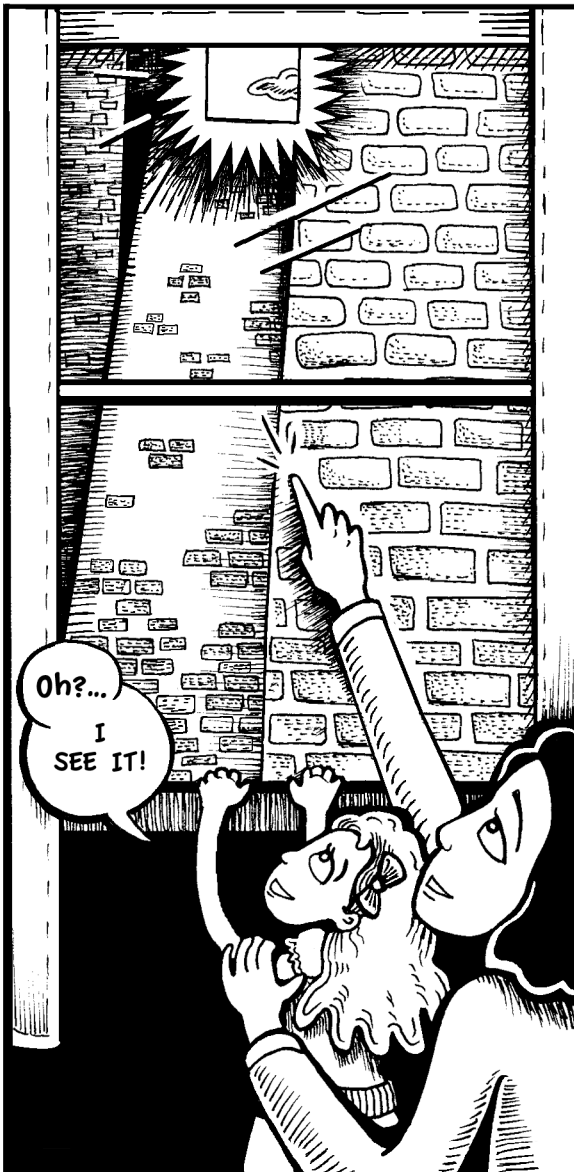
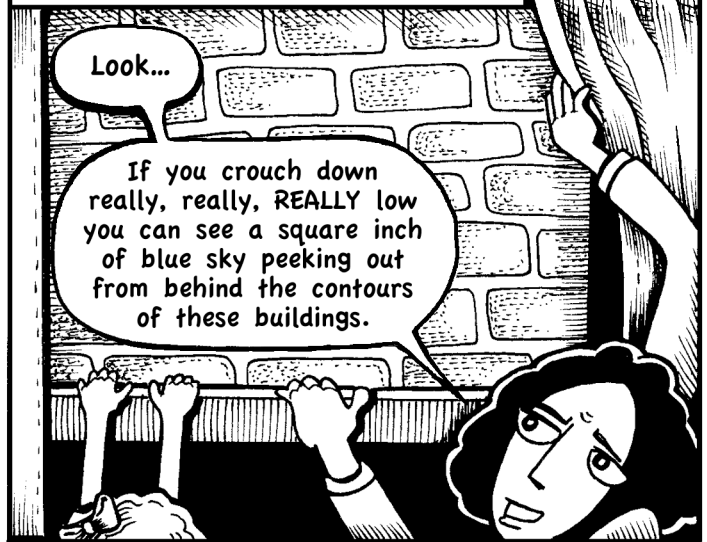
What color do you think that brick is Haley?

Let me see...

I CAN SEE THAT IT'S GETTING HARDER AND HARDER FOR DAD TO KEEP PLAYING THIS ROLE OF FEARLESS, AND UNDAUNTING CANCER WARRIOR.



OR, MAYBE IT'S JUST ME HAVING A HARD TIME PRETENDING EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALRIGHT.



YES, PERHAPS IT'S JUST ME HAVING A HARD TIME PRETENDING THAT THIS IS JUST ANOTHER SMALL BUMP IN THE ROAD TO HIS INEVITABLE VICTORY OVER CANCER.



PRETENDING THAT MY POSITIVE THOUGHTS, UNSELFISH PRAYERS AND BELIEF IN A LOVING AND JUST GOD WILL SAVE, OR AT LEAST, GRANT A RESPECTABLE REMISSION.



Dad...

So, now that they have the pain under control, when can you go home?

The doctor wants to run some more tests. He thinks I may need a "small procedure."

Aunt Monicaaaa

WAIT...
I thought you just had to have a bowel movement to get out of here?

I can't see the bwue any more...



THIS IS RIDICULOUS.

Huh?...
What kind of "small procedure?" I spoke with your doctor yesterday and he said nothing to me about a "small procedure."

Yeah.



NOREEN IS HANDLING EVERYTHING MASTERFULLY. SHE IS ON TOP OF HER GAME.

Where IS your doctor?
Has he been in today, to see you?

I want to talk with him before you agree to anything.

You go girl!
Don't let those highbrowed doctors go unchecked!



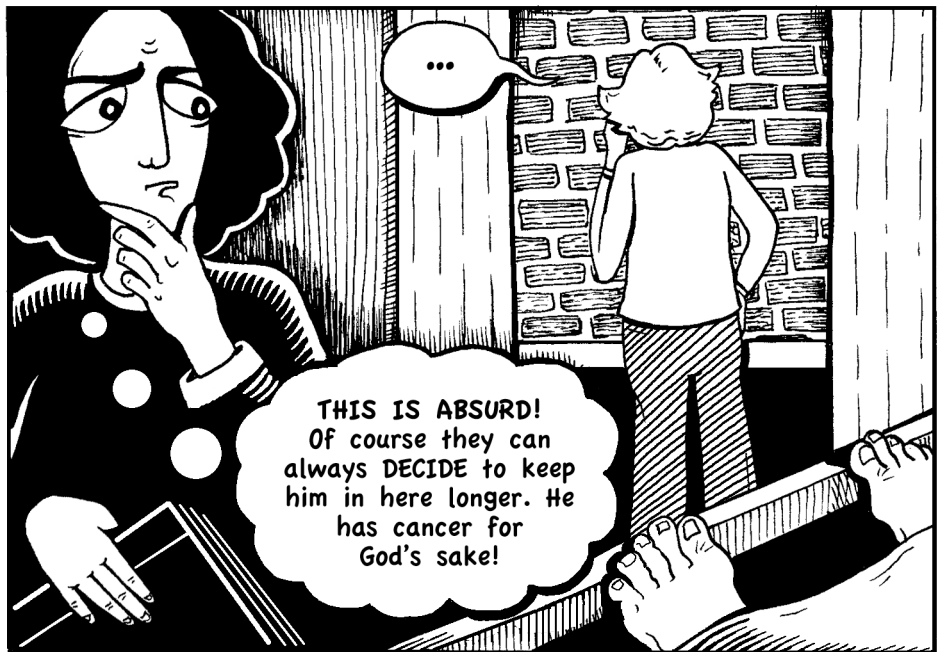
Hmmm...

Remember, this is a "Teaching hospital." Dad needn't be the test subject for EVERY neophyte.

Why would he be concerned about your...

I don't remember.

Dad. Don't worry about it.
...I'm going to call your
doctor right now and
find out what this
is all about.



THIS IS ABSURD!
Of course they can
always DECIDE to keep
him in here longer. He
has cancer for
God's sake!



Haley...

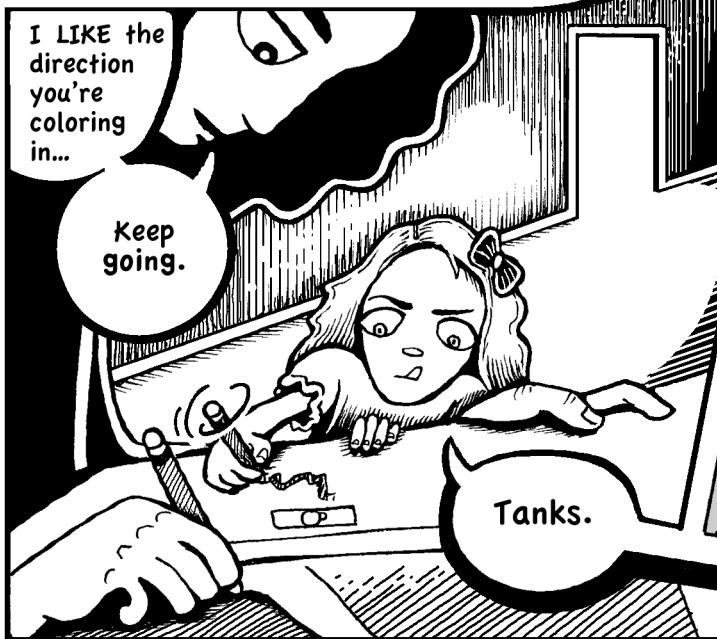
I have a
very important
request to ask
of you...

Will YOU help
me draw up an ESCAPE
PLAN for McPop so that
we can get him out
of here.

YES!



Good thing I
brought these!



I LIKE the
direction
you're
coloring
in...

Keep
going.

Tanks.



ESCAPE PLAN #1: Naughty Nurse

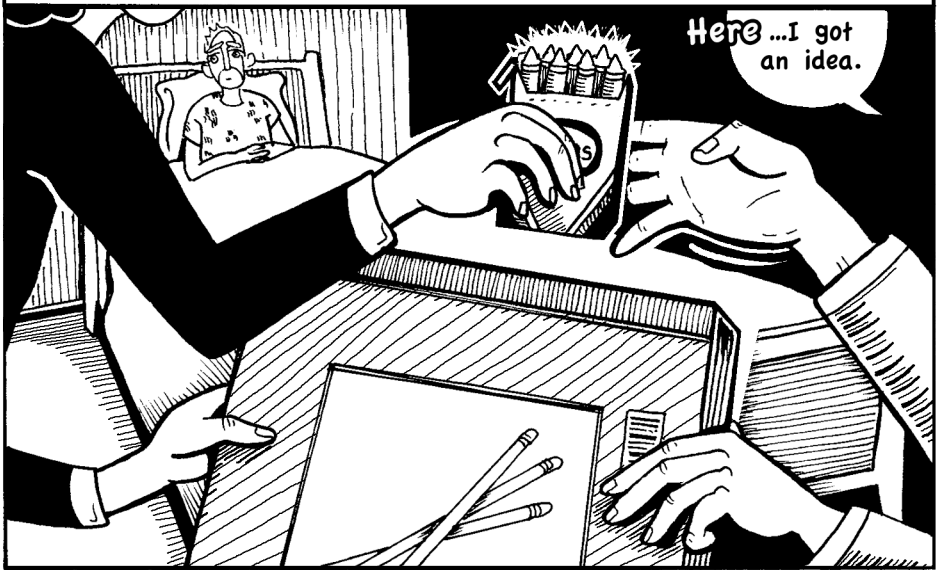
WHAT?

MY SHIFT
IS OVER
ALREADY?

BYE
EVERYONE.

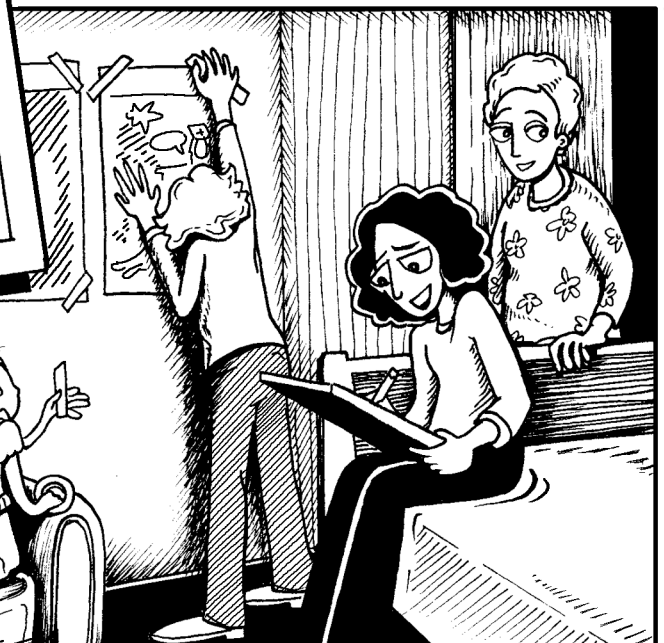


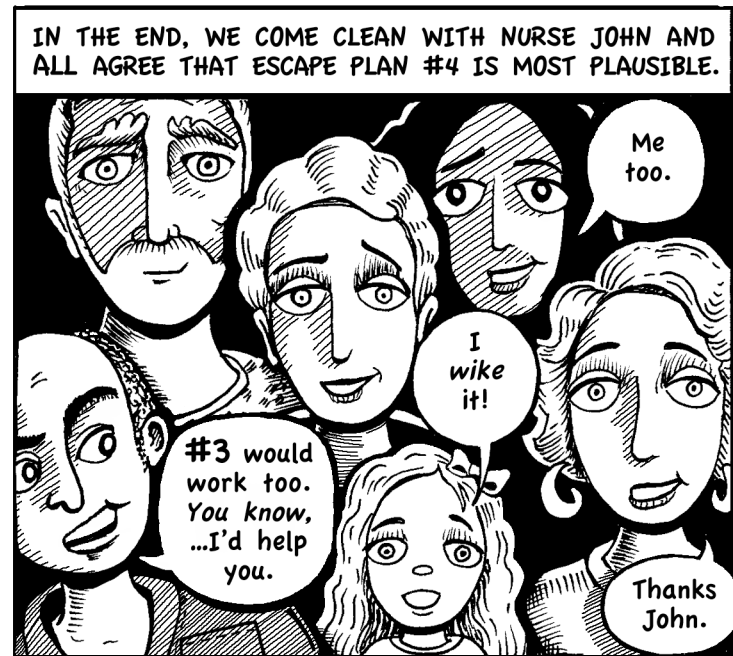
NOREEN IS UNABLE TO REACH THE DOCTOR SO SHE LEAVES A MESSAGE AND JOINS OUR CREATIVE CRUSADE.



WE JOYFULLY MOCK OUR DISHEARTENING REALITY BY RENDERING IT RIDICULOUS.

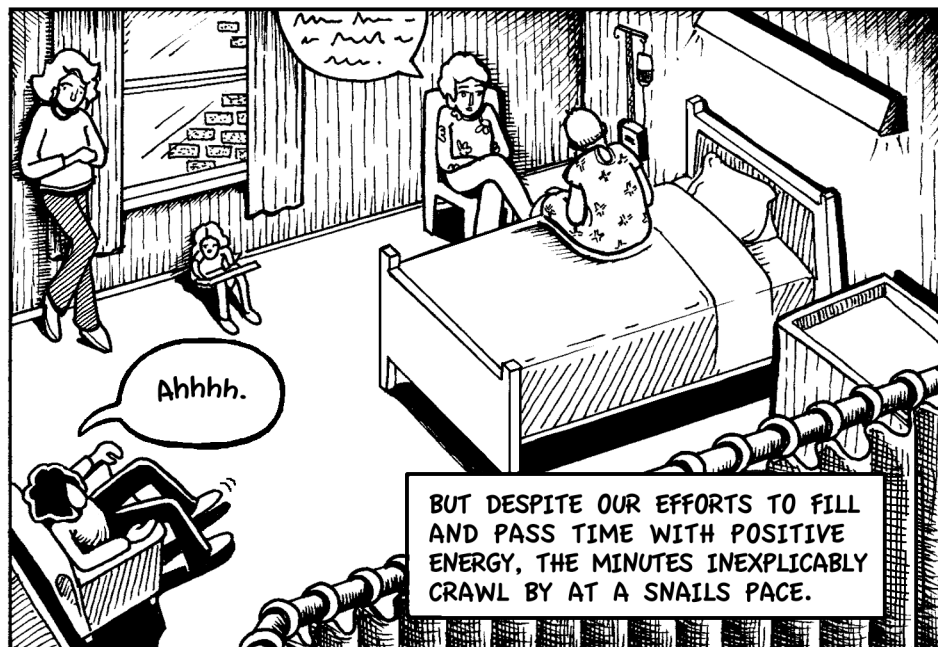
WHAT WE DESIGNATE AS RIDICULOUS CAN'T HURT US.







WE ARE HILARIOUS...TO OURSELVES...AND GLEEFULLY SHARE THIS LIBERATING MOMENT OF DECOMPRESSION.



BUT DESPITE OUR EFFORTS TO FILL AND PASS TIME WITH POSITIVE ENERGY, THE MINUTES INEXPLICABLY CRAWL BY AT A SNAILS PACE.



WE HAVE LOTS OF TIME TO PASS...

What's your roommate in here for?

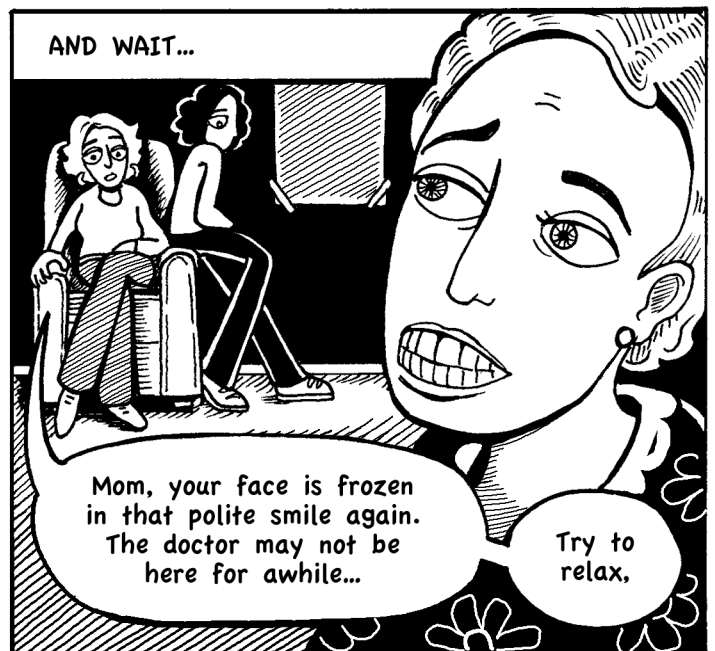
Intestinal issues.



AND SHARE...

My turn to sit.

Nope.



AND WAIT...

Mom, your face is frozen in that polite smile again. The doctor may not be here for awhile...

Try to relax.

AND WAIT SOME MORE...



FOR A GLIMPSE OF HOPE.



Ah come on...

Give me something.

BUT DOCTORS RARELY MAKE ROUNDS DURING VISITING HOURS...



I've gotta get going Dad. My flight leaves in a couple of hours.

No, Please... Don't get up.

AND GOD TOO HAS HIS OWN TIMETABLE...SO I'M TOLD.



Bye Mom.

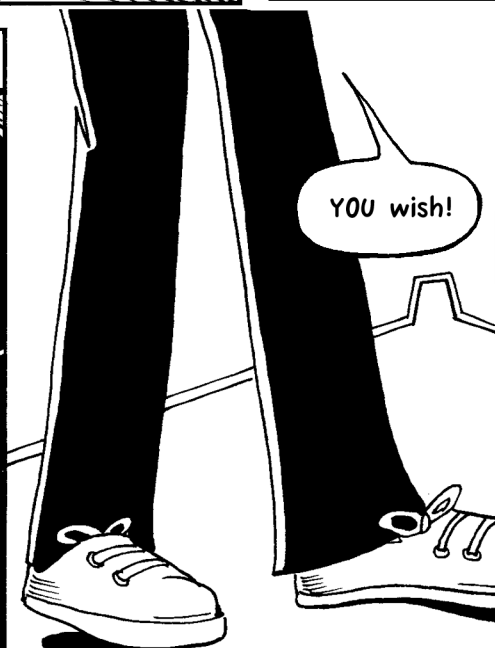
Easy there.

LEAVING IS SO HARD.

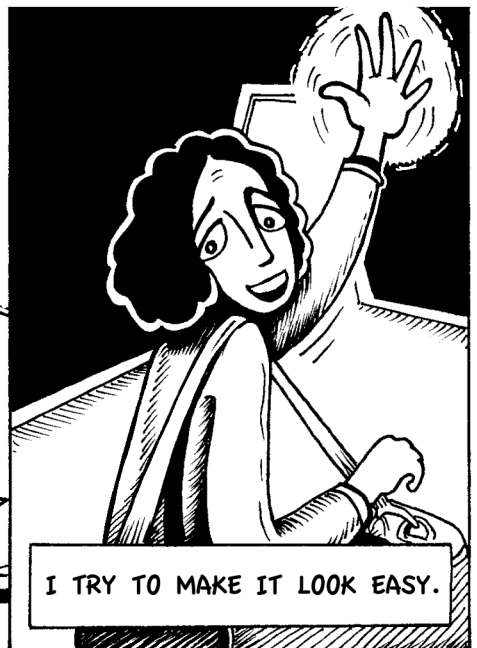


Just get out of here!

I'm their favorite now!



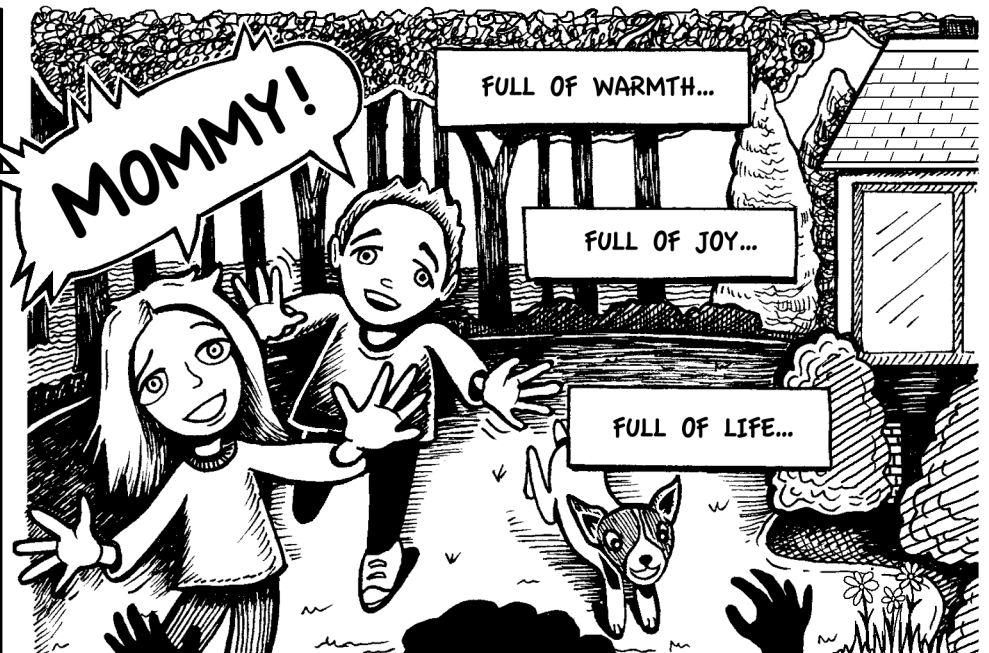
YOU wish!



I TRY TO MAKE IT LOOK EASY.



BUT IT'S BECOME PURE, GUILT RIDDEN AGONY FOR ME TO GO BACK HOME, TO A WORLD...

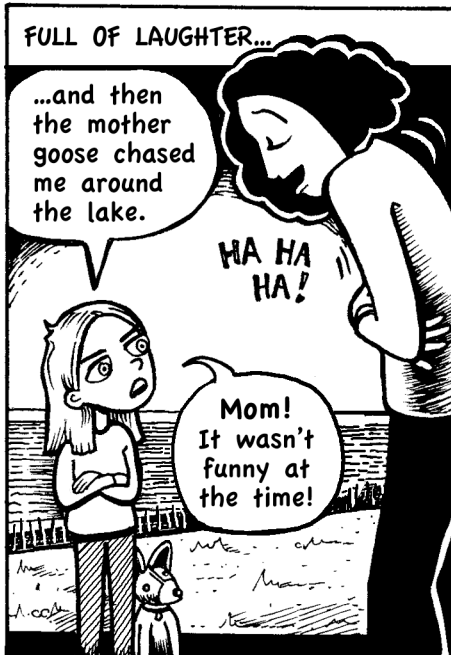


MOMMY!

FULL OF WARMTH...

FULL OF JOY...

FULL OF LIFE...



FULL OF LAUGHTER...

...and then the mother goose chased me around the lake.

HA HA HA!

Mom! It wasn't funny at the time!



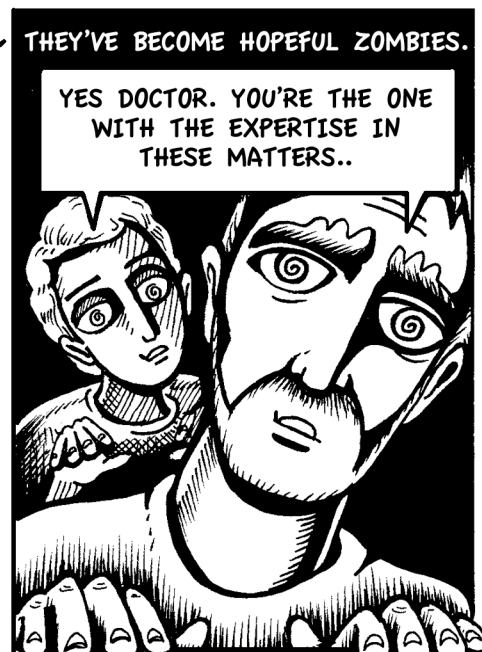
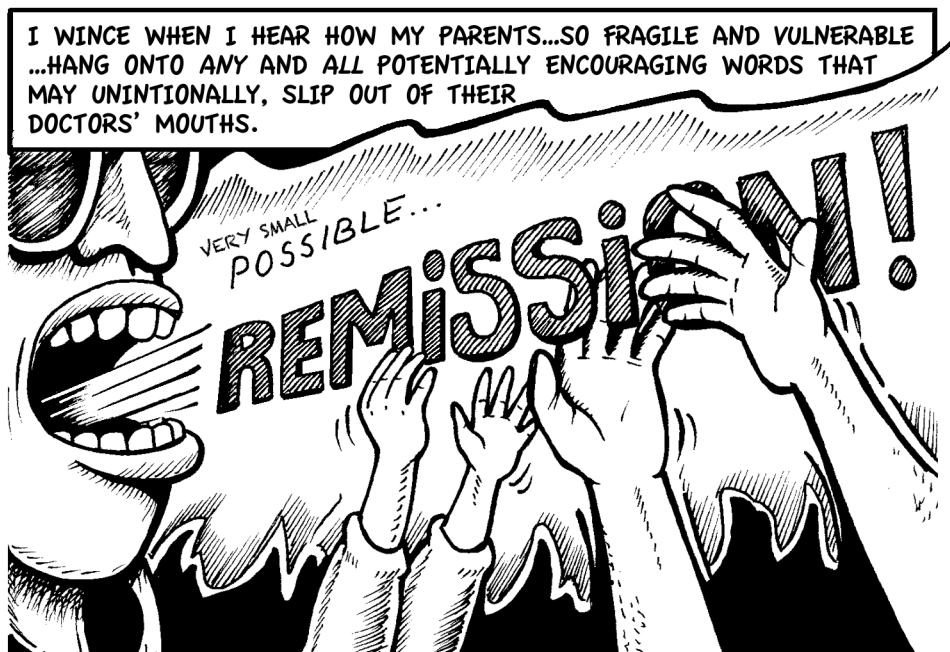
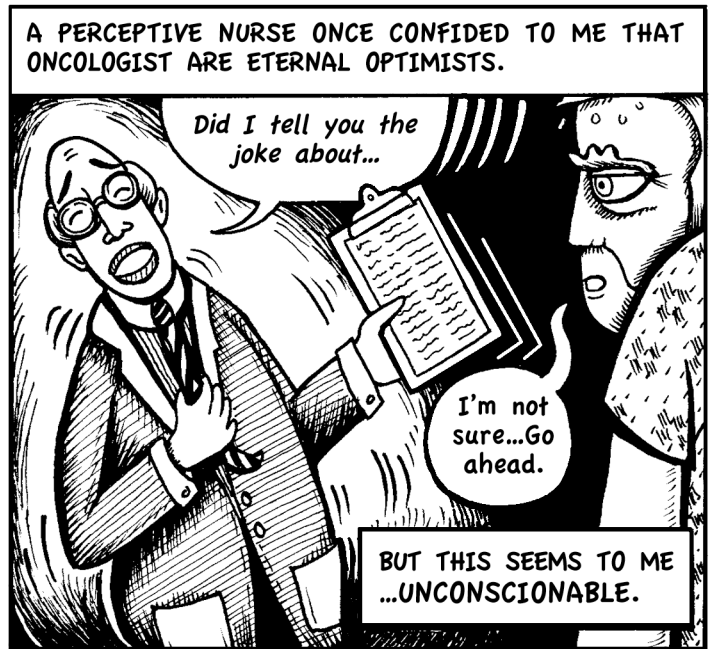
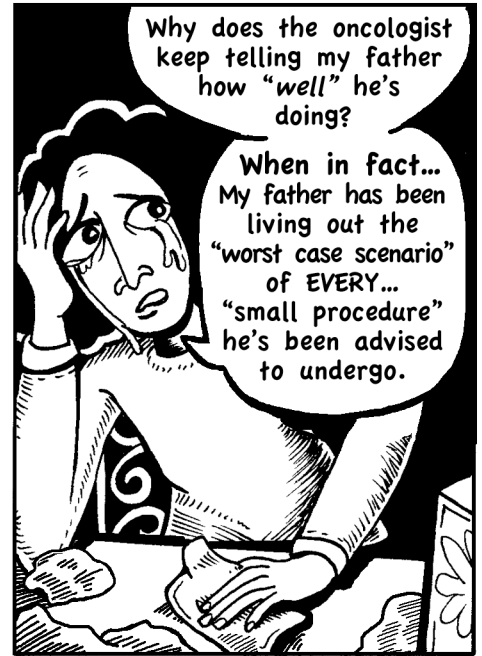
FULL OF EVERYDAY NUISANCES...

DINNER TIME!



...KNOWING THAT MY PARENTS ARE BEING TORMENTED BY LIFE'S TEETERING FRAGILITY, AND RUNNING ON UNSEEN FUMES OF...

HOPE AND FAITH.



But when is enough, enough?! Every life can't possibly be salvaged..... No wonder some doctors have "God complexes." We're giving them that power!.....Though, admittedly, it just feels so wrong to give up on HOPE. Remission could be just around the corner I suppose...



Ahh... Where does the truth lie?!

"Hope" carelessly taunts and manipulates my father while cancer mocks him in a festive display of "Christmas tree" lighting nonetheless...



Life is perverse.

That's why doctors need to be dispensing realistic expectations.



My father's desire to get better should not be exploited!

AND... Stop using him as a guinea pig!

POOR RON. HE'S NEVER QUITE SURE HOW TO RESPOND TO THESE EMOTIONAL CHARGED "CONVERSATIONS" I HAVE WITH MYSELF.



Eh... Maybe?

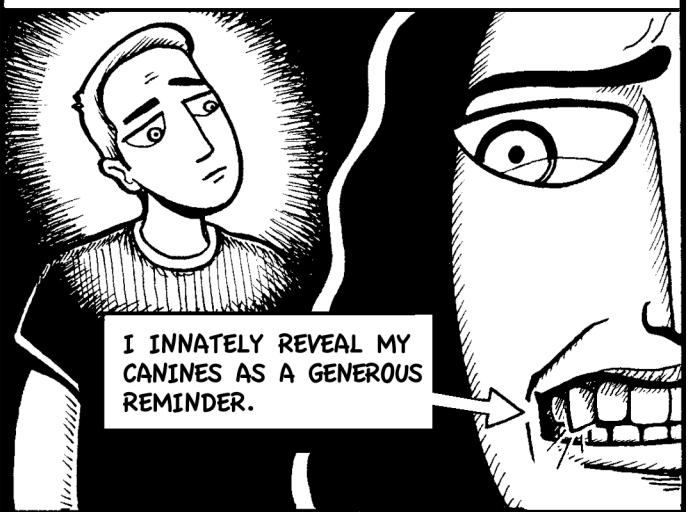
Logically speaking...

HOPE... good.

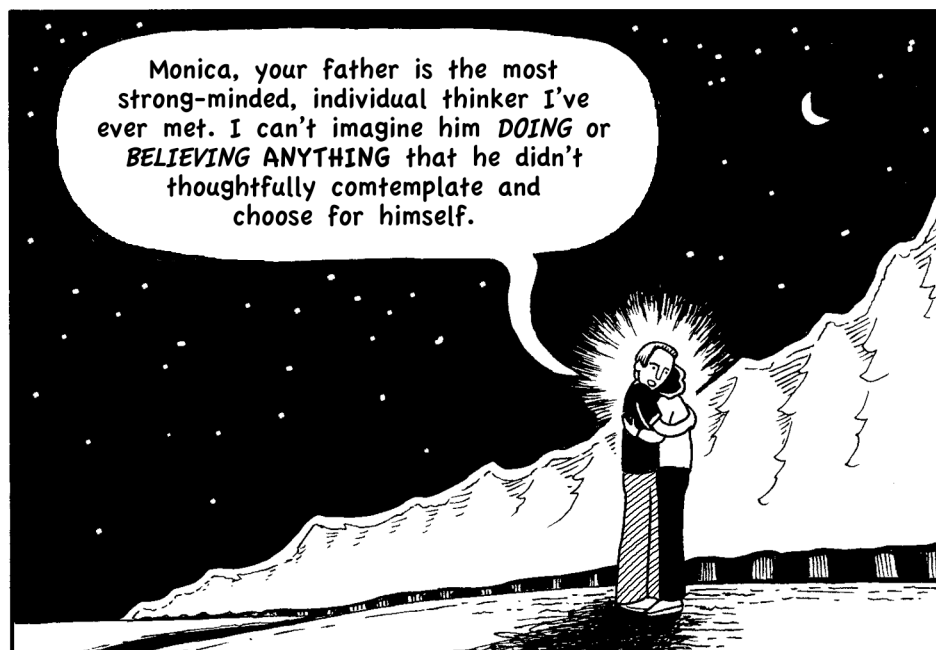
Ehhh...

LOOK

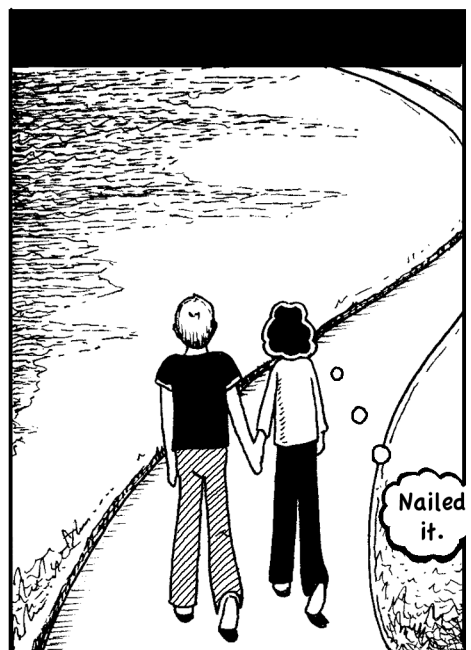
HE IS SURE THOUGH, THAT I'M TEETERING AND THAT IF HE SO MUCH AS UTTERS A WRONG SOUNDING SYLLABLE...I WILL LIKELY, REFLEXIVELY, BITE HIS HEAD OFF.



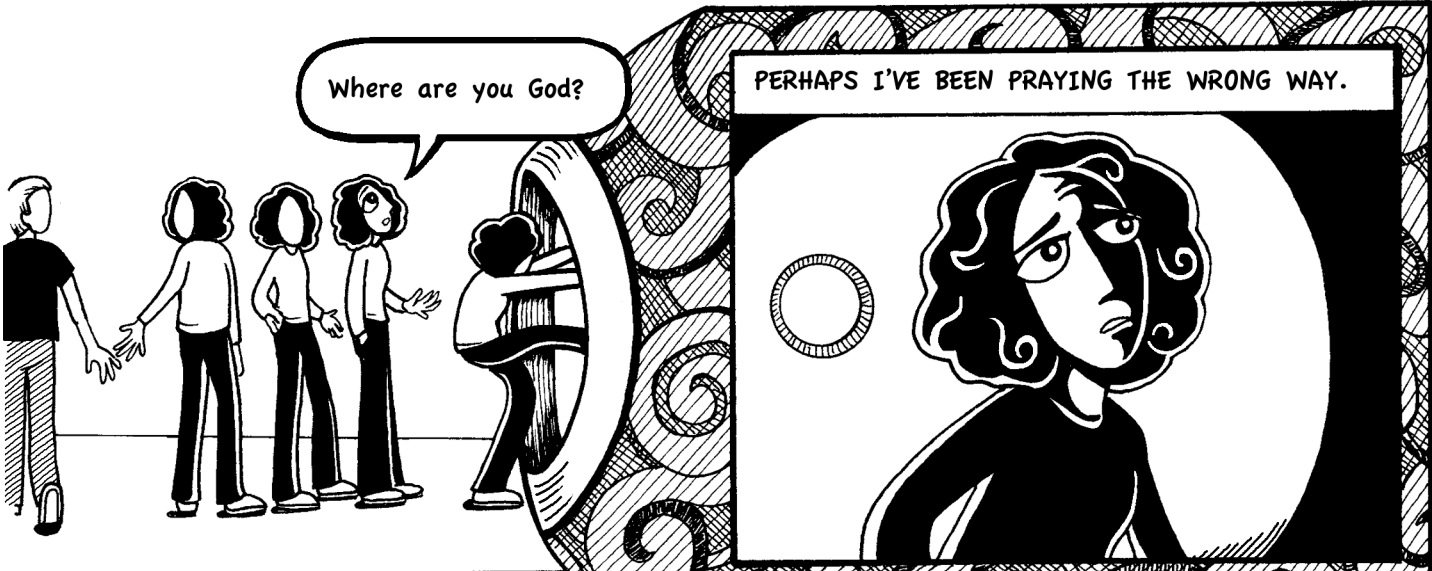
I INNATELY REVEAL MY CANINES AS A GENEROUS REMINDER.



Monica, your father is the most strong-minded, individual thinker I've ever met. I can't imagine him *DOING* or *BELIEVING ANYTHING* that he didn't thoughtfully contemplate and choose for himself.



Nailed it.

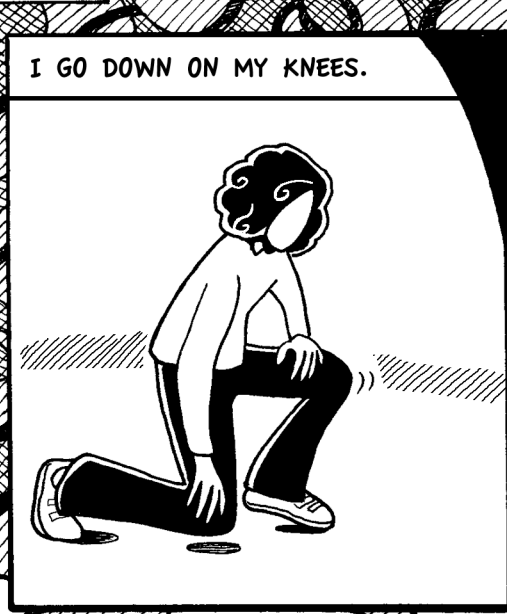


Where are you God?

PERHAPS I'VE BEEN PRAYING THE WRONG WAY.



THIS TIME...



I GO DOWN ON MY KNEES.



PULL BACK MY SHOULDERS,
BOW MY HEAD.



AND, PERFECTLY MATCH MY
HANDS TO EACH OTHER.



THIS IS HOW I WAS TAUGHT TO PRAY AS A
LITTLE GIRL. GOD WILL HAVE TO HEAR ME
NOW...IF I PRAY THIS WAY...WITH PERFECT
POSTURE AND FAITHFUL WORDS.

I START WITH THE LORD'S PRAYER.



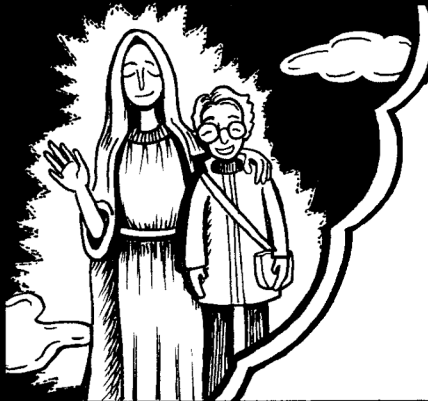
OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN, Hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation...

AND, EVER SO RESPECTFULLY, MOVE ON TO MARY'S PRAYER.

HAIL MARY, FULL OF GRACE, THE LORD is with thee. Blessed are thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Hail, Mother of God, for us sinners, at the hour of our death. Amen.



IN DOING SO, I'M REMINDED OF NAN'S LOVING AND DEVOTED RELATIONSHIP TO MARY, AS WELL AS HER MIRACULOUS, LATE-NIGHT ENCOUNTER WITH HER. IT ENCOURAGES ME.



I VALIANTLY PROCEED, AS I ADMITTEDLY STRUGGLE TO RECALL MY LIST OF MEMORIZED PRAYERS. TRUTHFULLY, IT ALL SEEMS EMBARRASSINGLY INADEQUATE...AND POSSIBLY INSULTINGLY. BUT, I AM SHAMELESS AND DESPERATE TO ATTRACT GOD'S ATTENTION.



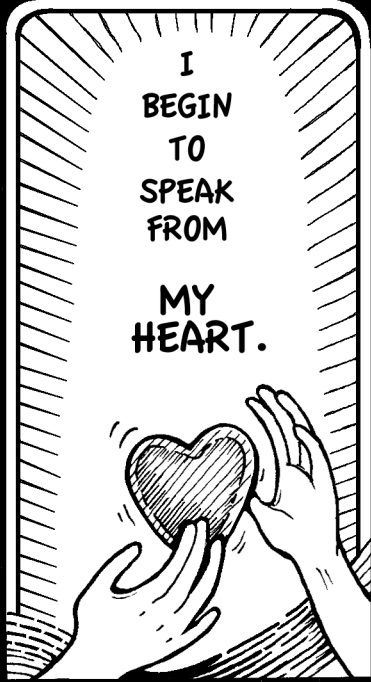
Glory Be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

O my God, I am heartfully sorry for having offended thee, and I detest all my sins because of thy just punishment...

Angel of God...

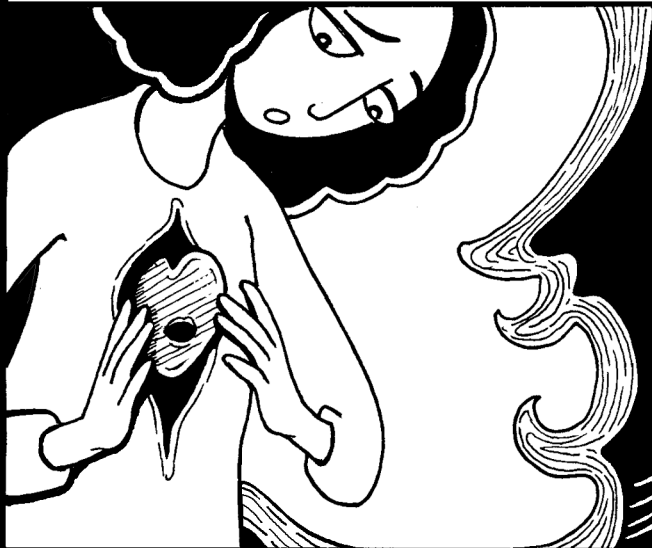
I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, his son. Our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified...

★ FINALLY...

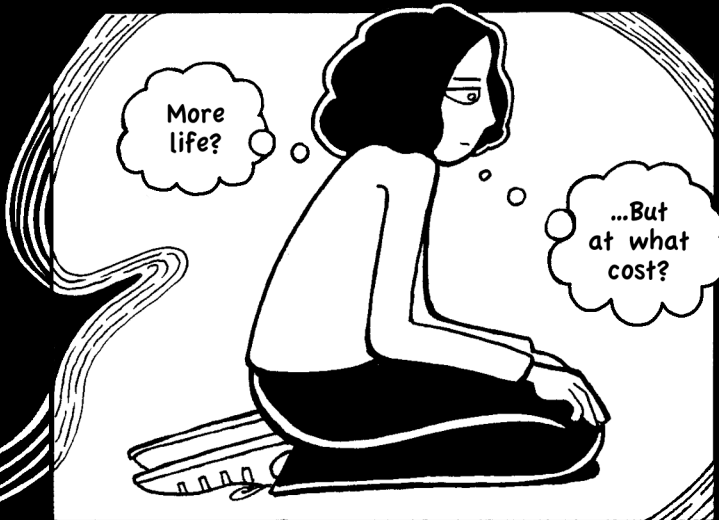


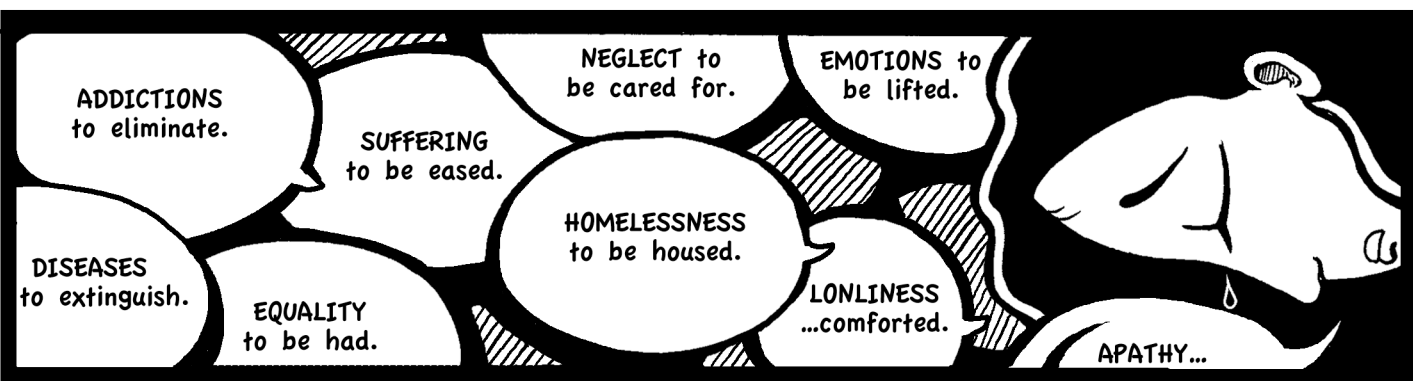
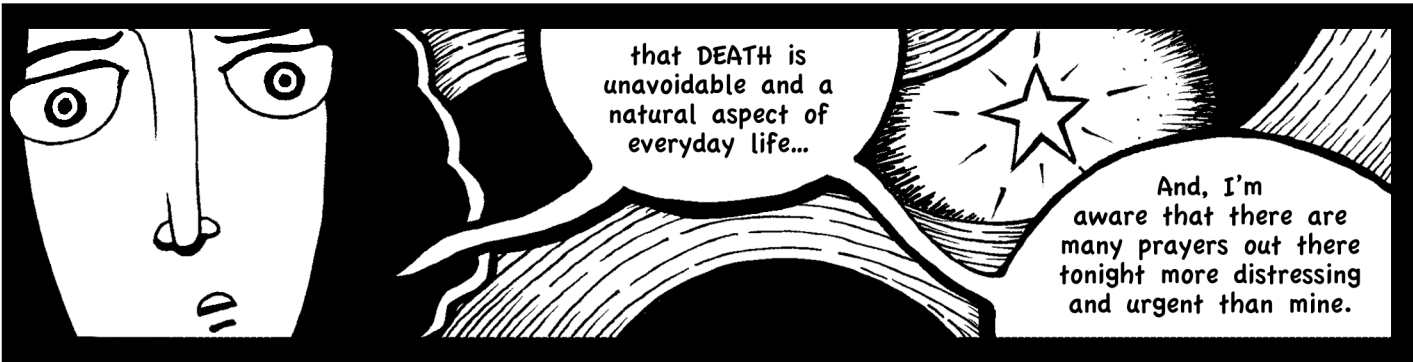
I BEGIN TO SPEAK FROM MY HEART.

BUT NOTHING COMES OUT.



I'M WORN DOWN, HUMBLED...AND NO LONGER CONFIDENT IN WHAT TO SAY OR REQUEST.





HOW CAN MY PAIN MATTER IN THE MIST OF ALL THIS?

