

GROWING IN MY GRAY

Part II.

EXPOSING MY ROOTS;



WHERE DID I COME FROM?



* Toenail polish is an homage to proto-humans, who used both hands AND feet equally.

MY MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS

My maternal grandma, Anna Bloom, was the eighth of ten children. She was born in a suburb of Warsaw in 1898. Russia controlled Poland at that time, and if you were Jewish, you didn't want to live under the Czar's rule. The Cossacks went on raids called "pogroms," where, my grandmother said, soldiers would come on horseback and beat people up (and, I'm sure, much worse.)



[I traced this picture (badly) from a photo of U.S. Immigration police attacking refugees who were attempting to cross the border from Mexico—a more recent example of HORSES being used by law enforcement as weapons against vulnerable people.]

GRANDMA

THE JEWS REALLY WANTED TO
GET OUT OF THERE

A couple of my grandmother's brothers were arrested for distributing Socialist leaflets and were sent to a prison camp in Siberia. Somehow they escaped and got on a steamship to England.



and eventually wound up in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

When she was 16, my grandmother was sent to the U.S. to meet up with her brothers. She said that the voyage was terrifying - a young girl, all alone. She said that a man offered her a banana, but she was too scared to accept it, never having seen one before.



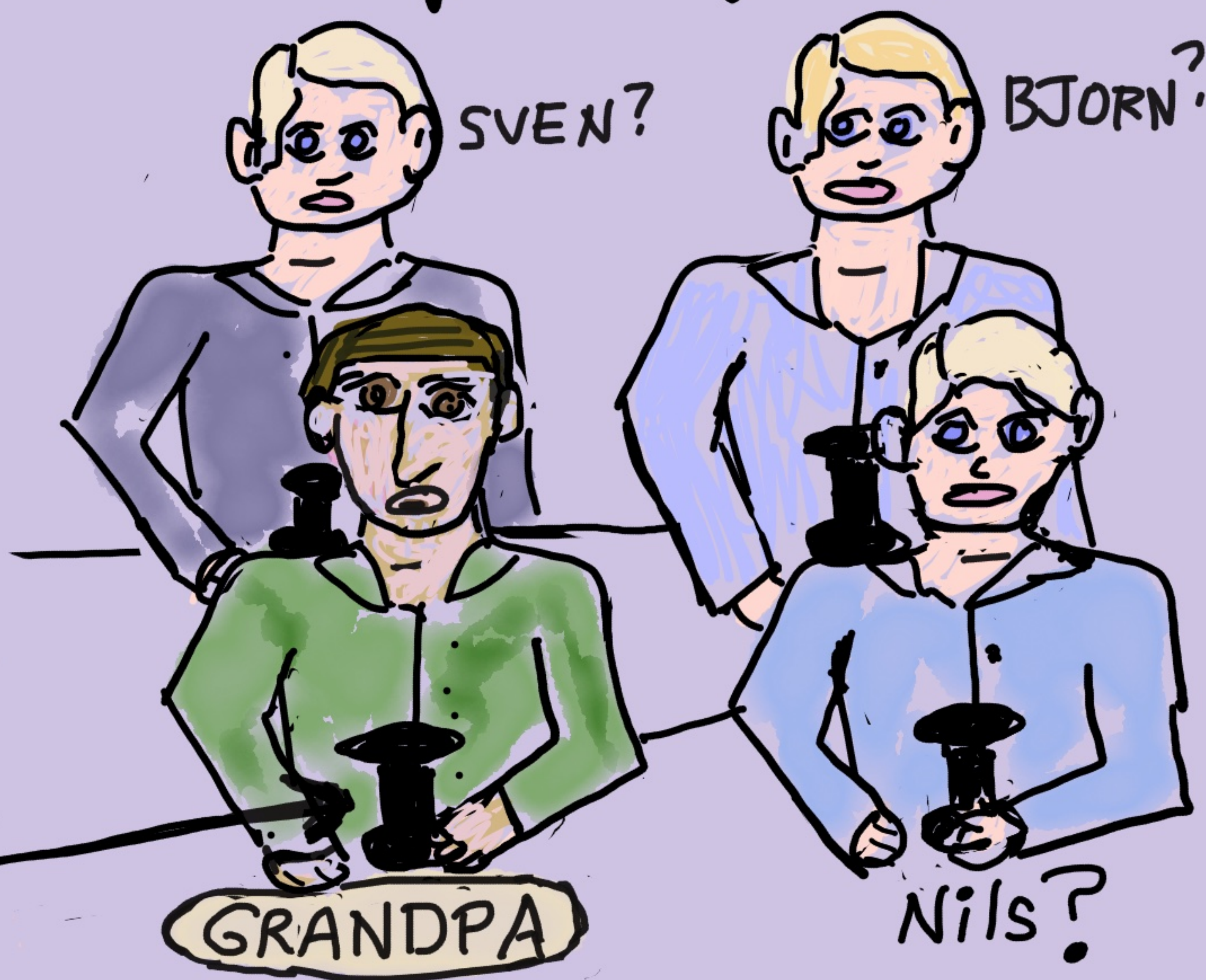
As a child, I didn't doubt this story. But later, when studying psychology, I thought, "Hm..." However, to paraphrase Herr Doktor Freud →

My grandmother got to Minneapolis and reunited with her siblings. Eventually she met my grandfather, Louis "Louie" Bloom, who had emigrated to the U.S. from Minsk, Belarus (another part of Czarist Russia) at the age of 9.

(many many Jews emigrated to the US in this time period - to avoid not only the pogroms, but conscription into the Czar's army, in which the anti-Semitism was brutal.)

(this is, maybe, something that might be made in a factory?)

God morgon.



My grandfather worked in a factory. Because most of the other workers were Swedish, he learned a little bit of the language.

My grandparents got married and in 1917 my Uncle Arthur was born. They moved to Coney Island, Brooklyn, New York, and on March 10, 1921, my mother was born.

the boardwalk was completed in 1923.

The Steeplechase was opened in 1897.

The Ferris Wheel was opened in 1920.



Based on an old postcard
OF CONEY ISLAND

MY MOTHER'S CHILDHOOD

Here are the few things my mother told me about her childhood:

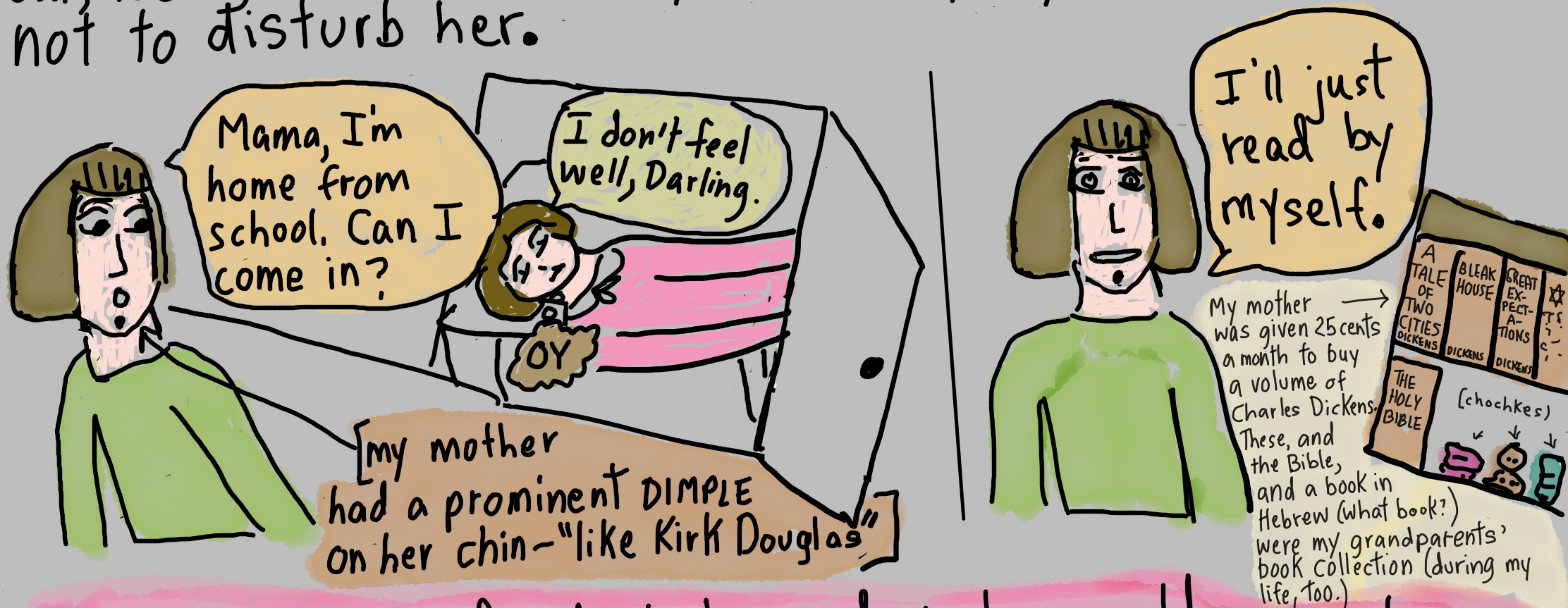
- She was an excellent student, BUT my grandparents didn't care about that because she was a girl and was going to get married and be supported by a husband. They paid for my uncle to go to pharmacy school, because he was not a good student and would not have done well in college. My mother went to Brooklyn College, which was free - and probably much more demanding than pharmacy school - but my mother was resentful.

My mother told me that she liked to study on her bed with a cat on her.



THEME: MY MOTHER WAS RESENTFUL.

My grandmother thought my mother was a "perfect daughter." My mother said she worked hard at that. My grandmother often felt nervous and was afraid she was about to have a heart attack. My mother said that, when she came home from school, my grandmother would frequently be lying in bed with the lights out, feeling ill in some unspecified way. My mother made sure not to disturb her.



My mother was afraid that one day she would come home from school and find that my grandmother was dead.

However sick my grandmother felt during the day, she would get herself together by the time my grandfather came home from work, always putting on a dress and lipstick, and then making dinner promptly.



My grandfather pretty much ignored everyone and wanted to be left alone to listen to the radio, but my mother said that my grandfather teased her a lot, which upset her.

When I was already grown up I found a note my mother had written to HERSELF when she was about 10. It said that she had shown my grandfather a picture of a girl she had drawn. My grandfather laughed and said it looked like a COW.

In the note, my mother VOWED (to herself) never to show my grandfather anything else she ever did for the rest of her life.

JUNE 5, 1932
I will never
trust my
father again!
I SWEAR!



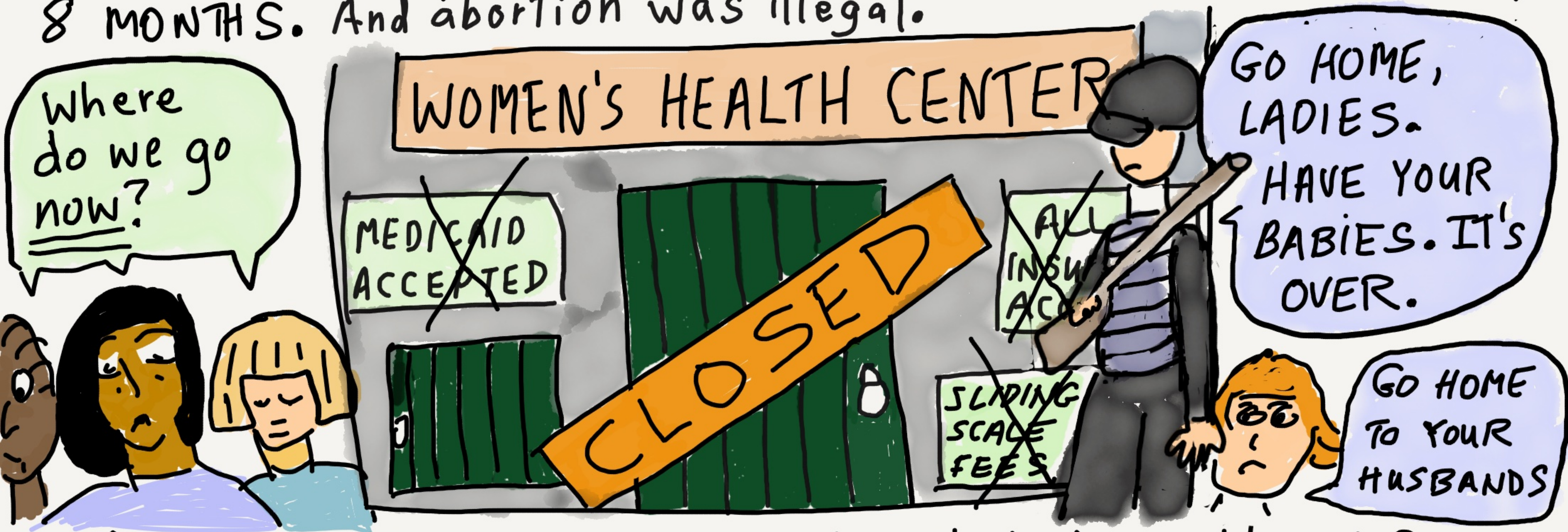
HERE'S ANOTHER THING MY MOTHER TOLD ME:

My grandmother had an abortion "on the kitchen table." A doctor (?) came to the house. All my mother would say was that it was "horrible."



A POLITICAL Moment:

In 2020 we observed the centennial of the passing of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which gave women the right to vote. It blew my mind to realize that, when my mother was born, women had been able to vote for only 8 MONTHS. And abortion was illegal.



And now, just as in my grandmother's time, the U.S. government has decided that the legality of abortion IS NOT a given.

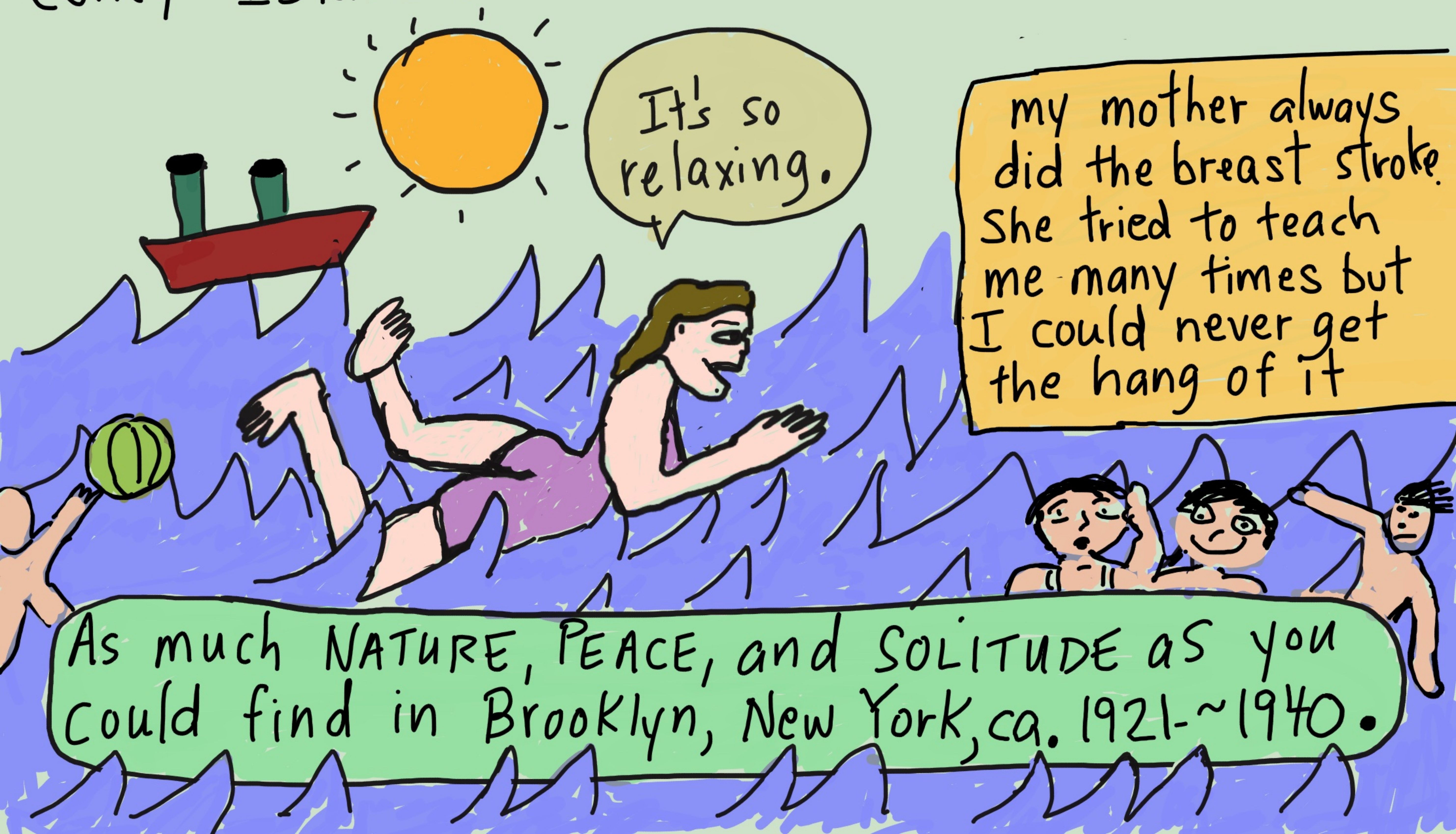
One other memory my mother told me:

As a kid, she visited some cousins who lived in Chicago. They took her on a tour of the famous stockyards, where, she said, she saw things that she would never forget (and which I would then never forget, even though she didn't even tell me what they were).



QUESTION: Did my mother ever tell me anything good about her childhood? WAS there anything good about her childhood?

Hm... I seem to remember that she told me that she loved to swim in the ocean at Coney Island.



MY FATHER'S SIDE OF THE FAMILY

I know very little about them because they **DIED.**

My father, Sidney Margoshes, was born on November 26, 1920, in the Bronx, New York City. His mother, Sara, died during gall bladder surgery when he was no more than 6 or 7 and his sister, my Aunt Shirley, no more than maybe 3 or 4. My father had one photograph of his mother, which showed that she was extremely fat.*

My father didn't speak about her at all, but my Hebrew name (a lot of Jews have these) is BARUCHA SURA,



GRANDMA SARA
WHOM I NEVER KNEW

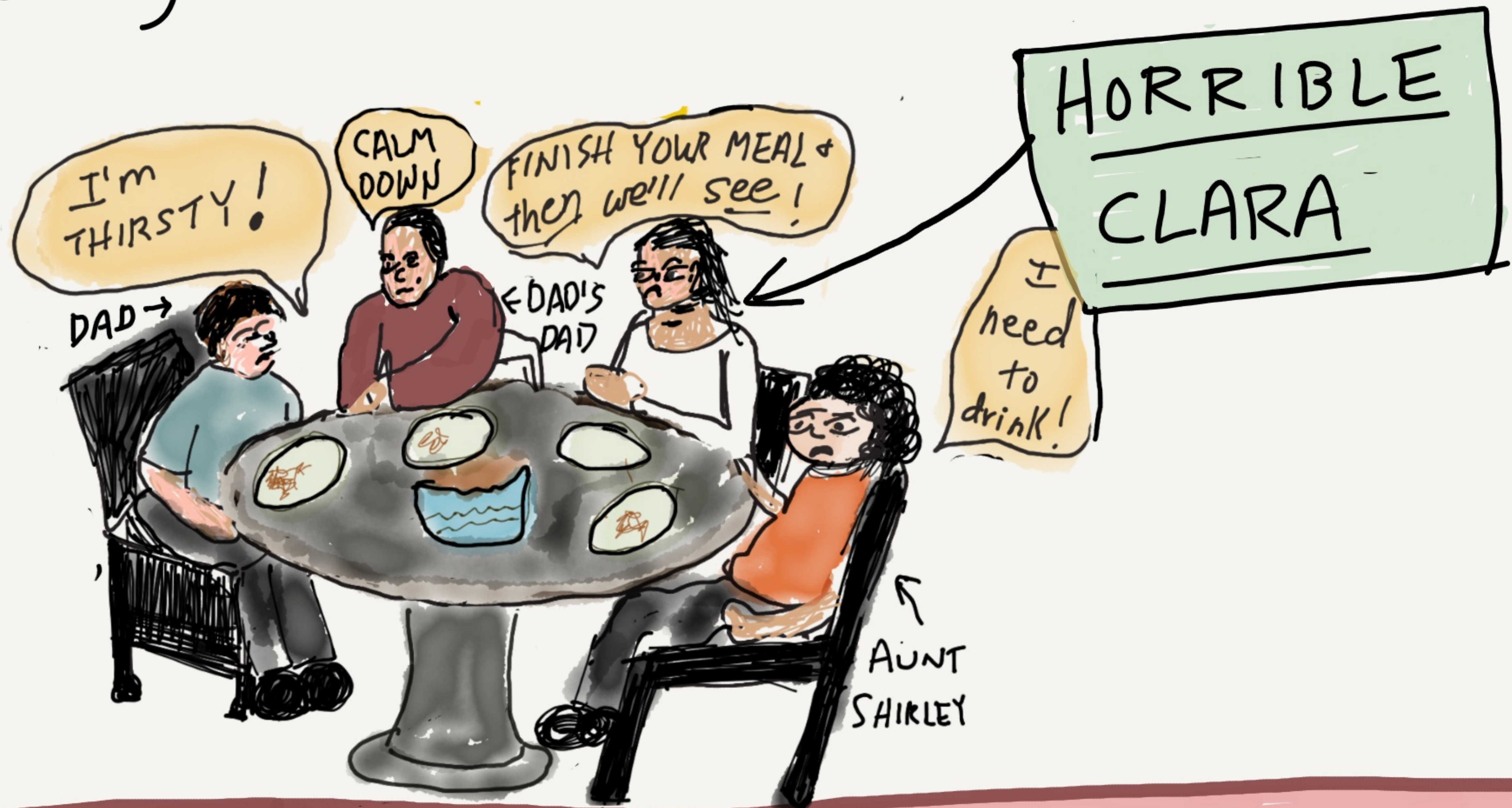
which means "Blessed Sara," and I feel sad that my father and my Aunt Shirley lost her so young.



(me, still sad)

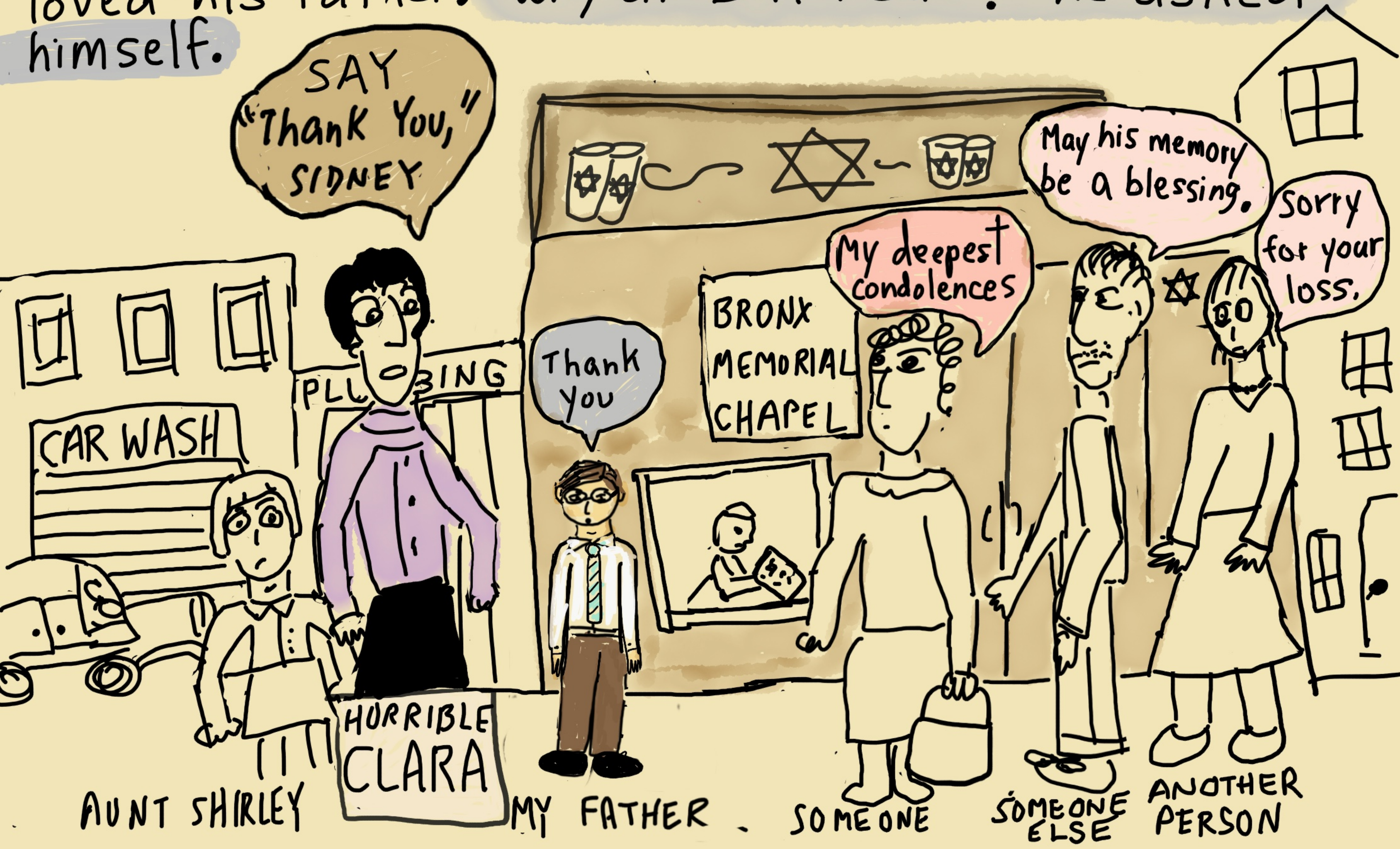
(*My father HATED fat, and I always wondered if this was why.)

My grandfather QUICKLY remarried—to a woman named Clara. When I asked my father what was so bad about her, all he could say was, "She didn't let us have any water during dinner." But there was obviously MORE.

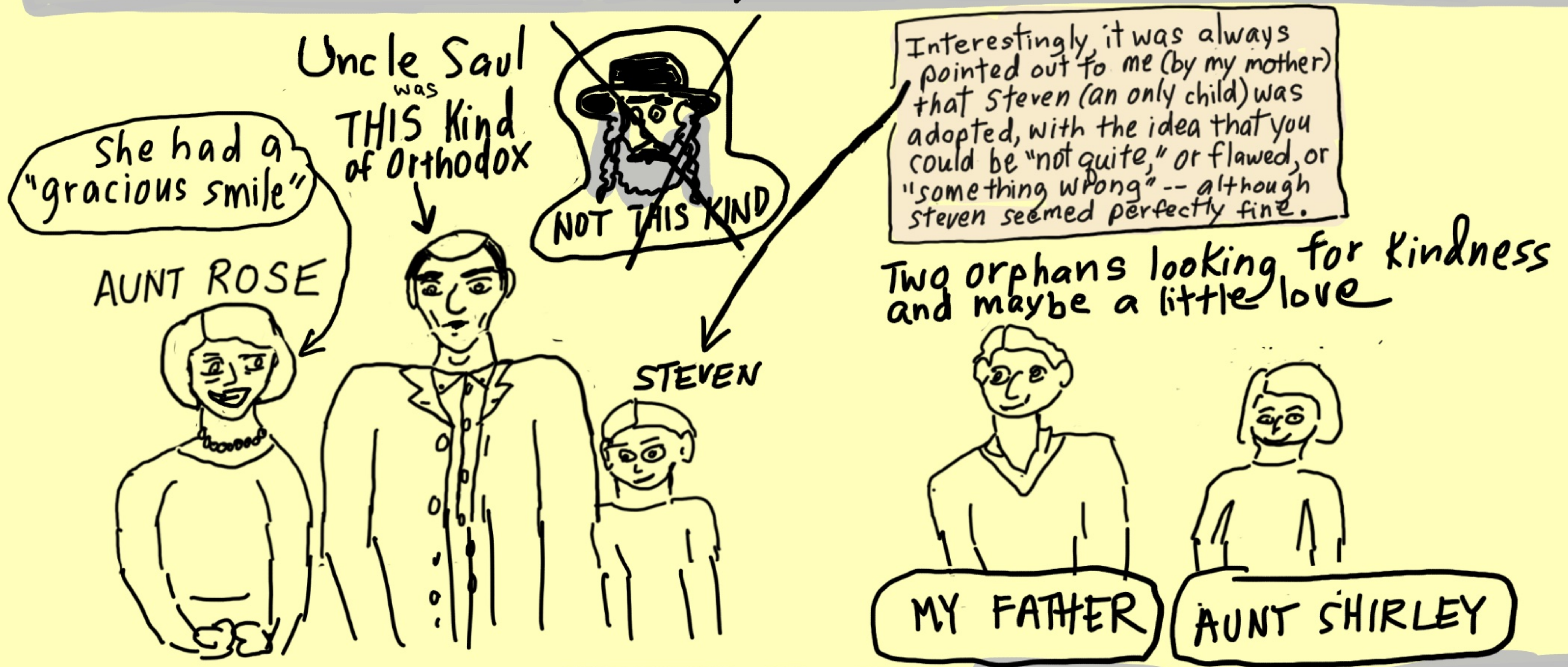


I used to call my father "Cindersidney" because he had an evil stepmother. He loved this.

And then, when my father was about 12, his father died of tuberculosis. My father said that he felt nothing, which seemed so strange, because, he said, he loved his father. "Why am I not sad?" he asked himself.



Very soon after my father's father died (my father always stressed the word "very,") his stepmother went back to her hometown of Chicago, and my father and my Aunt Shirley went to live with their Uncle Saul, Aunt Rose, and their son Steven.



My great-Uncle Saul was a "macher" (Yiddish for "big shot.") He was a lawyer and also the President of the Ocean Parkway Jewish Center (an Orthodox Jew but not a "Hassid.") He did his duty and gave a home to his niece and nephew, but my father said there were "no extras."

When my father got to college, even though tuition was free (!) there were expenses like books, so my father spent summers bussing tables at KUTSCHER'S, a resort in the Catskills.



When I was growing up, my father loved to refer to these times, often saying after a meal, "I'll bus," expressing either nostalgia for those simpler days—or relief that he had moved on—PROBABLY BOTH.

THEME: My father was more comfortable in a subservient position than in a position of power.

MY PARENTS MEET:



(My fantasy, derived from movies of this era I watched as a child.)

Wanna go for a malt after class, Marion?

Sure, Sid!



Both my parents went to Brooklyn College, part of the then-tuition-free University of New York. My mother told me that she had a crush on my father, and would stalk him, making sure she was in the hallway outside his classroom when he emerged.



[This was in 1938, right before World War II]

They became girlfriend and boyfriend, and eventually my father proposed and my mother accepted - with one condition:

YES, Sid, I'll marry you -- but ONLY if you change your name from Margoshes to MARSHALL!

(many "assimilated" Jews changed their names then)



Really?
Well, if that's what it takes to have you -- OKAY!

BUT...

My father did NOT change his name - and my mother married him anyway.

THEME: My father could not tolerate any CHANGE.*

(*understandable, given his traumatic childhood). AND SO, I got saddled with the HUMILIATING name of MARGOSHES.

Sid + Marion Margoshes
Married January 25, 1942

My parents
had only
one photograph
of their wedding.
They hired a
professional
photographer,



but he
never gave
them the
pictures, and
absconded with
their money.
This photo was
taken by their
friend Hal.

Then my father was drafted into the Army.

My father was stationed in upstate New York. His job was to guard German prisoners. He said they were mostly nice young men. One was an artist, and my father paid him to paint a portrait of my mother from a photo of her:



[*and by forced conscription]

The painting hung in my parents' dining room throughout my childhood. Now it hangs in the bedroom of my own home.

My father said that, for awhile, the soldiers had to check the bulletin board every day to see if they were about to be sent overseas to fight in the Battle of the Bulge. They were terrified, because many men were dying over there.

Hey, Buddy, would you mind checking for my name on the list? My eyes aren't too good.

Sure thing!



You're not on there -- but I AM!!

GULP!

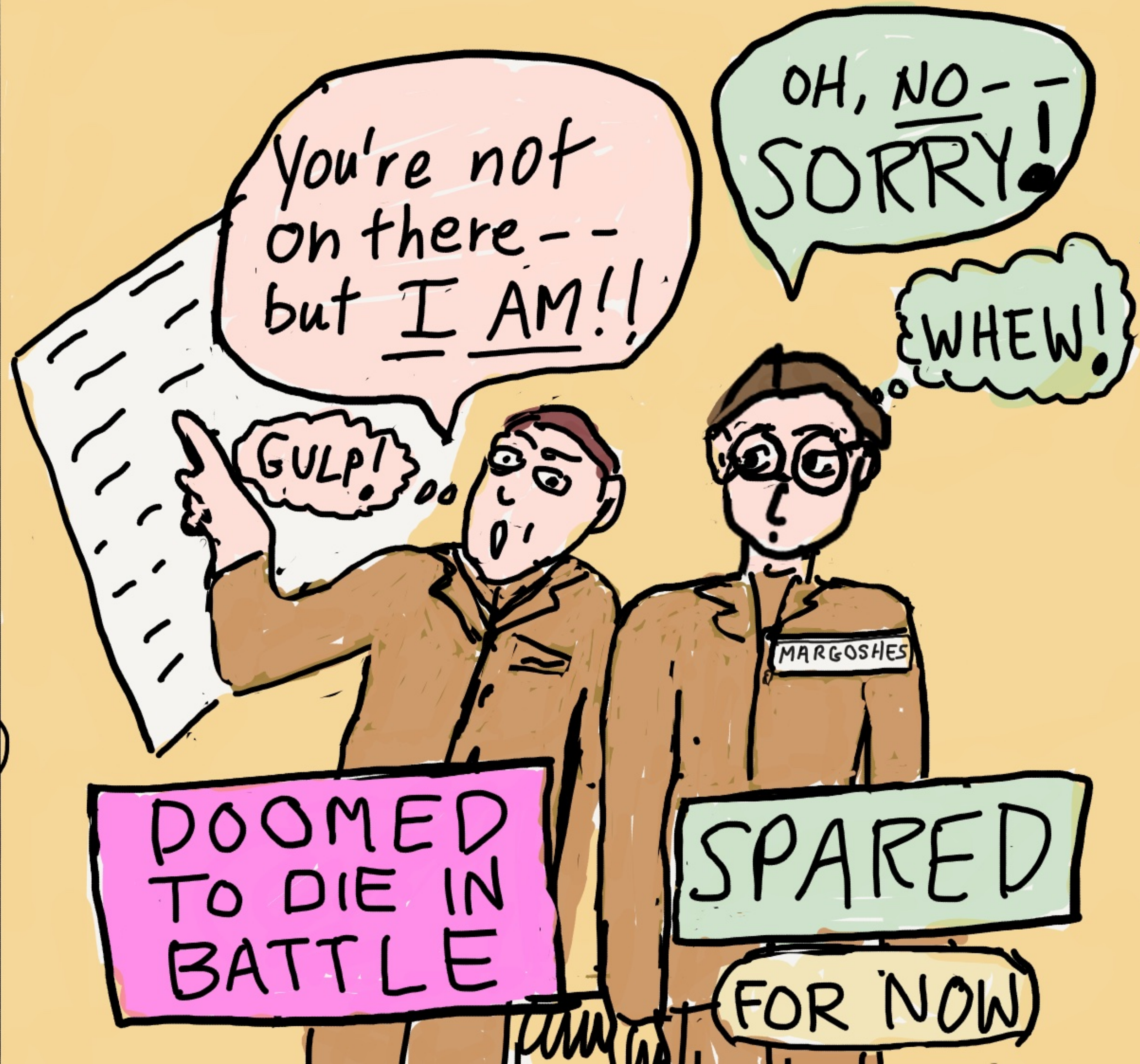
OH, NO --
SORRY!

WHEW!

DOOMED
TO DIE IN
BATTLE

SPARED

(FOR NOW)



When my father was in the Army upstate, my mother (who had majored in biology) worked as a bacteriologist for the New York City Board of Health.

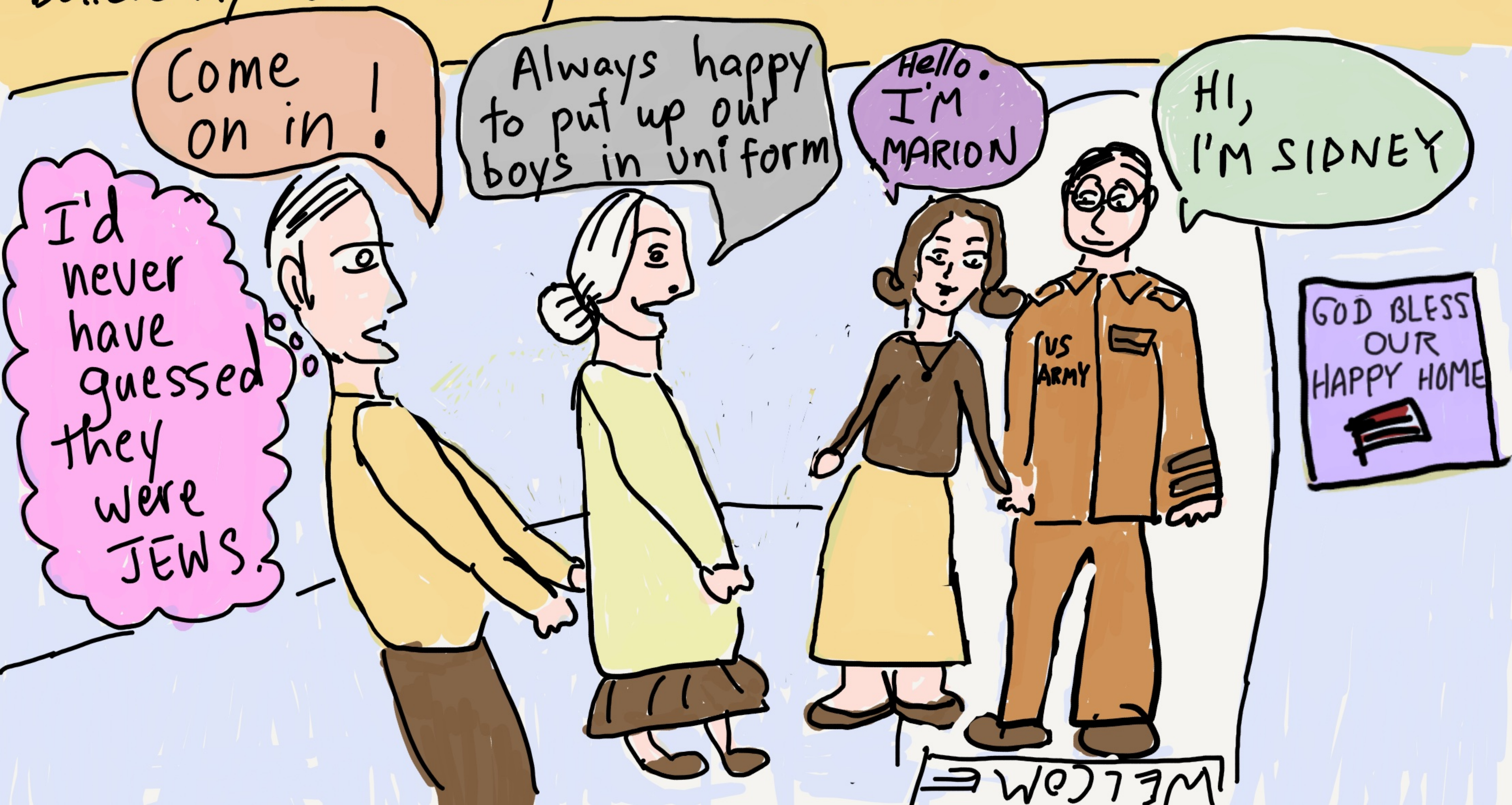


Later on in the war, my father was transferred to an army base in West Virginia. My mother was able to go with him. At first they were housed at the Greenbrier Hotel, a historic structure that still stands. They had never seen anything like this in their lives, and my mother continued to speak of it all during my childhood.



Then, they were put up in the home of a couple of local residents - a couple whose names I don't remember, even though my mother mentioned them MANY times during my childhood -- The TWO important things about them were:

(1) They were kind, and I think this meant something to my mother about an appealing form of WASPY, particularly SOUTHERN WASPY congeniality (see e.g. the dinner table scene in Annie Hall, where the NYC Jewish (LOUD, belligerent) family is contrasted with the Wisconsin (always "pleasant") family.) I believe my mother always wanted this...



(2) They did not serve enough food! And this was, apparently, a characteristic of white Protestants. PORTIONS were small! And, for the rest of my life, whenever seated at the table of a white Protestant, I have always made it a point to ASSESS the portion sizes. In general, I would say that the WASPS I know serve PLENTY of food. And, therefore, I think that the sparse amounts my parents experienced were more a function of the times (the 1940's; wartime?) and the geographic area (the south), and maybe a more particular subculture than my parents were aware of. BUT I DON'T KNOW.



I guess at one point my father went "on leave," or SOMETHING, because in February 1945 my sister Carol was born in Brooklyn while my father was stationed upstate.



*Now known to
cause cancer.)



My mother lived
with my grandparents
+ my grandma helped
with the baby.

[NOTE: Somehow
it never matters to
me how many
fingers somebody

has. I try to force myself to draw five fingers but I just
CAN'T MAKE MYSELF CARE. Someday this may become its

OWN CHAPTER.

After the war my great-uncle Saul got my father a job selling shoes at Macy's. And after that my father got a job selling girls' sportswear at a manufacturer - and that is what my father did for the rest of his life.



This is a posture that I HATE thinking of my father assuming - and, yet, metaphorically, I always have thought of him this way.

My father always said that he REALLY wanted to be a lawyer. My mother somehow blamed my Uncle Saul for insisting that my father be "only" a salesman, and maybe she blamed my father a little bit too, for not doing what he (said he) really wanted (and my mother also STRESSED that my father could have gone to law school For Free on the G.I. Bill), but she also understood that [my father was an insecure person who did not feel capable of doing very difficult things.]

THEMES: Father - insecure; Mother - Resentful

OKAY, that's enough DEEP BACKGROUND. Frankly, I was getting a little BORED and even DEPRESSED, thinking about all those PEOPLE FROM THE PAST and their STRUGGLES, but maybe, MOSTLY, I was feeling kind of EMPTY, because of my ABSENCE in these accounts, due to my STATE OF PRE-EXISTENCE.

When do
I
appear?



[although, of course, most of the people I've been writing about are in a state of POST-EXISTENCE.]

WELL, LUCKILY, MY STATE IS ABOUT TO CHANGE:

I was born at Maimonides Hospital
in Brooklyn, New York, USA, on October 1, 1950.

I was delivered
under general
anesthesia, which
was the norm then.
My mother said that
the woman in the bed
next to her was
screaming,



MOMMY!!
MOMM-
EE!!

Which my mother
thought was so
silly, because once
you were in that
situation there really
wasn't anything your
mother
could do
to help
you.

TOO LATE!
But don't worry--
You'll be unconscious
soon!



my
logical
Mom.

ME

Apparently, the birth went smoothly.
However, since the WORLD SERIES was going
ON (NEW YORK YANKEES vs. PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES),



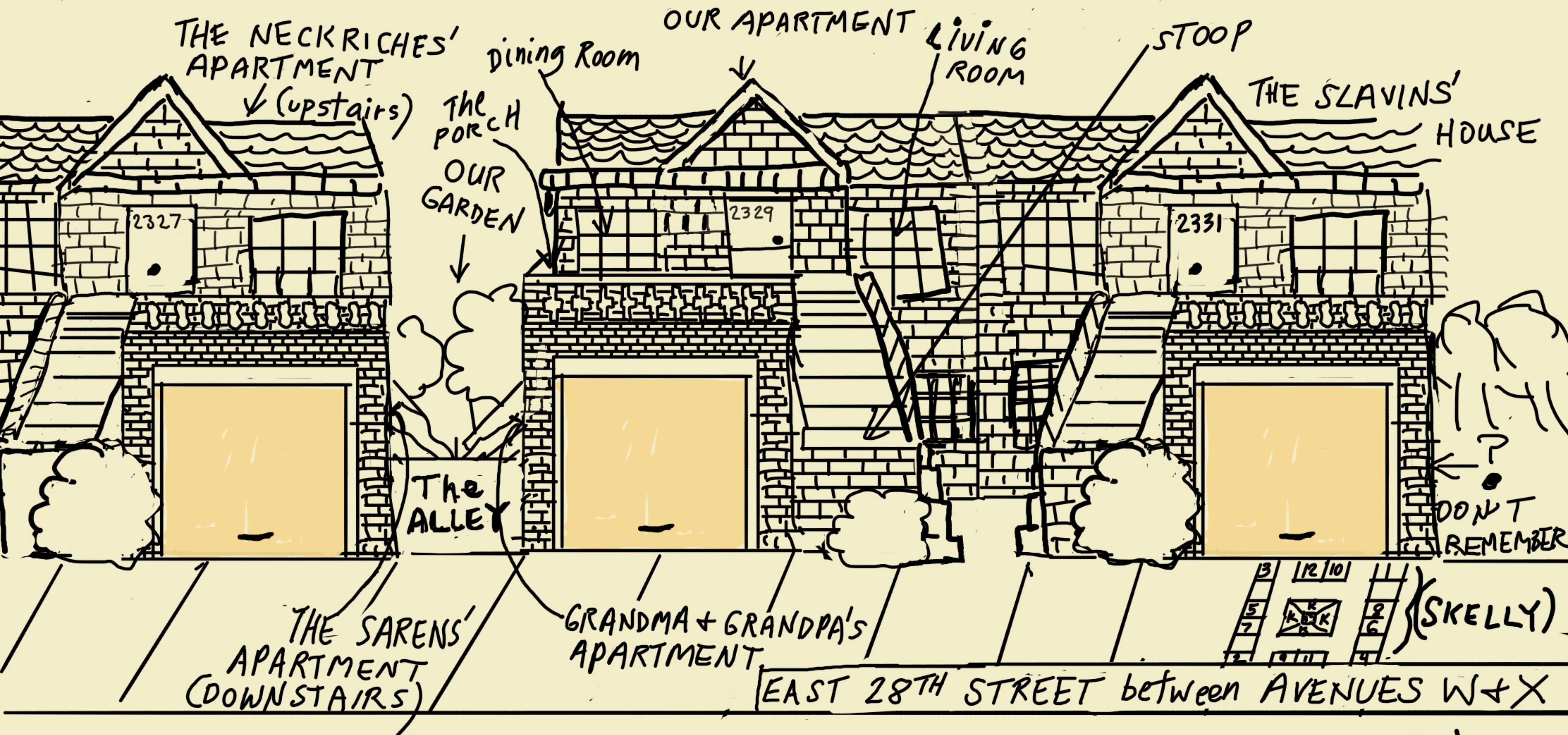
the whole medical staff was glued to the
one TV on the floor, and my mother couldn't
get ANY HELP AT ALL!

After a few days, my mother and I went home to the apartment in the NYC Housing Projects where my father, mother, sister + I lived. My mother always STRESSED that this was a MIDDLE, not LOWER, income project.



I have no memory of this time.

When I was two, we moved into a two-family house that my grandparents bought. We lived in the upstairs apartment and my grandparents lived downstairs.



And that's where the next 14 years of my life — — until I went off to college at age 16 — — took place.

The upstairs (my parents, my sister, and I) / downstairs (my grandparents) dichotomy played a HUGE role in the development of my world view.

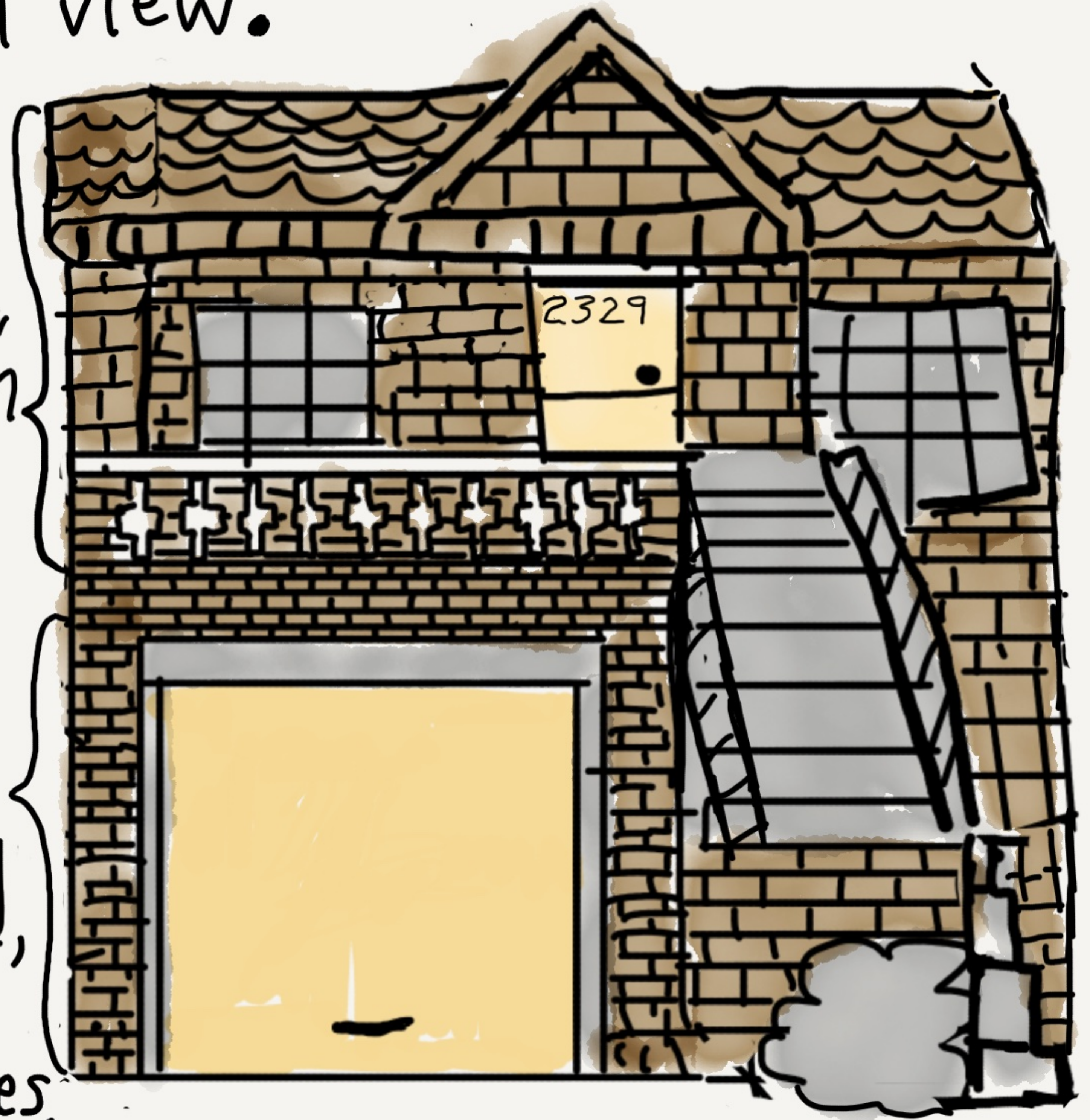
UPSTAIRS

represented modern, mid-century, American middle class's life,

WHEREAS

DOWNSTAIRS

represented old world, Eastern European (Jewish) culture + values,



TO BE CONTINUED...