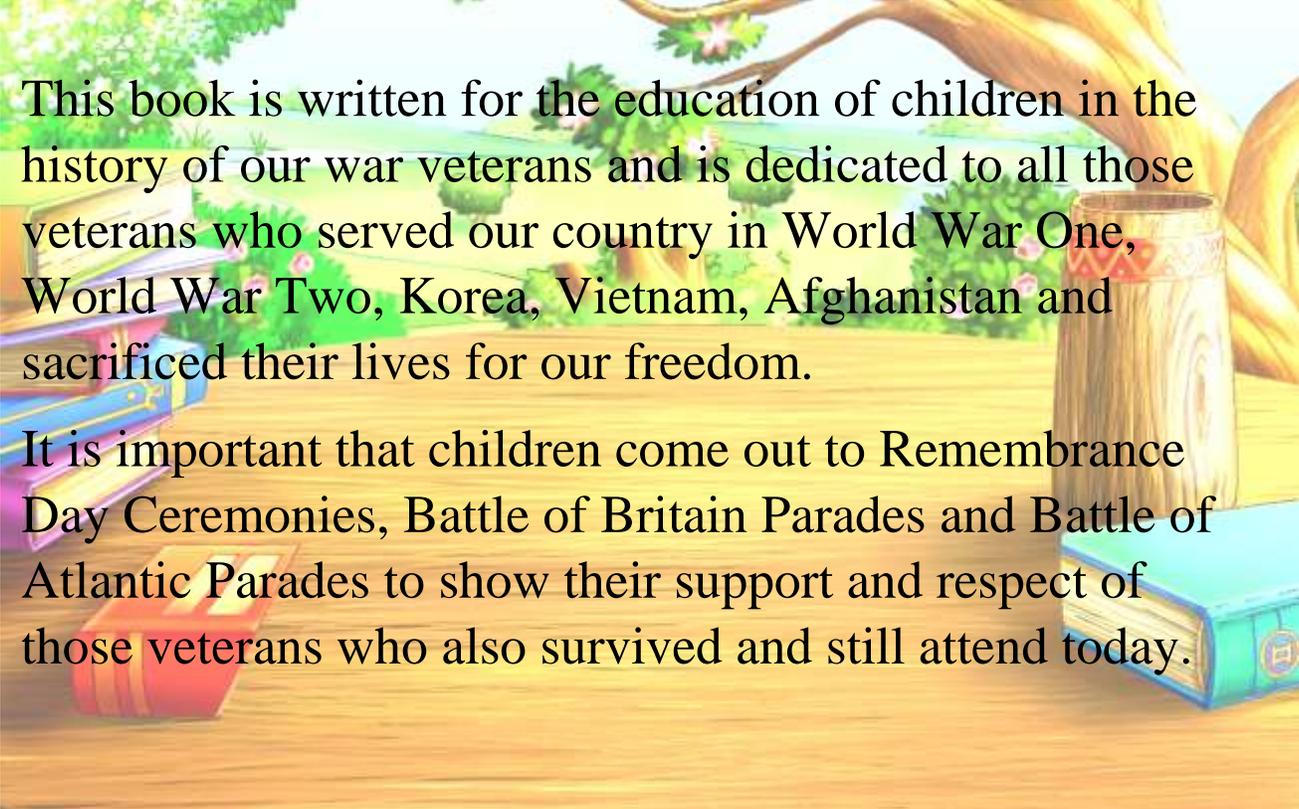


The Cantankerous Mr. Coombs



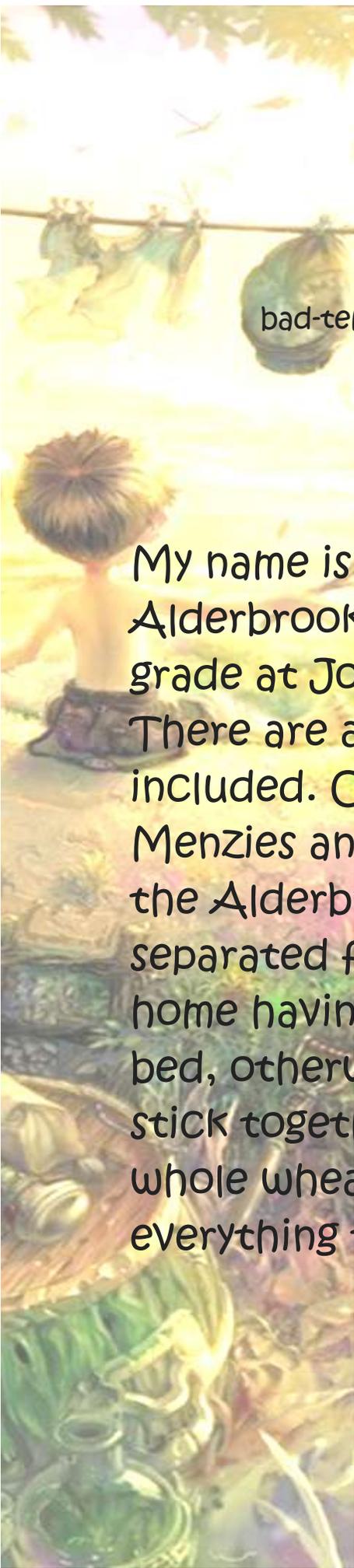
Story by Cliff Mah

Dedication



This book is written for the education of children in the history of our war veterans and is dedicated to all those veterans who served our country in World War One, World War Two, Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and sacrificed their lives for our freedom.

It is important that children come out to Remembrance Day Ceremonies, Battle of Britain Parades and Battle of Atlantic Parades to show their support and respect of those veterans who also survived and still attend today.



Can·tan·ker·ous
kan'taNGk(ə)rəs/

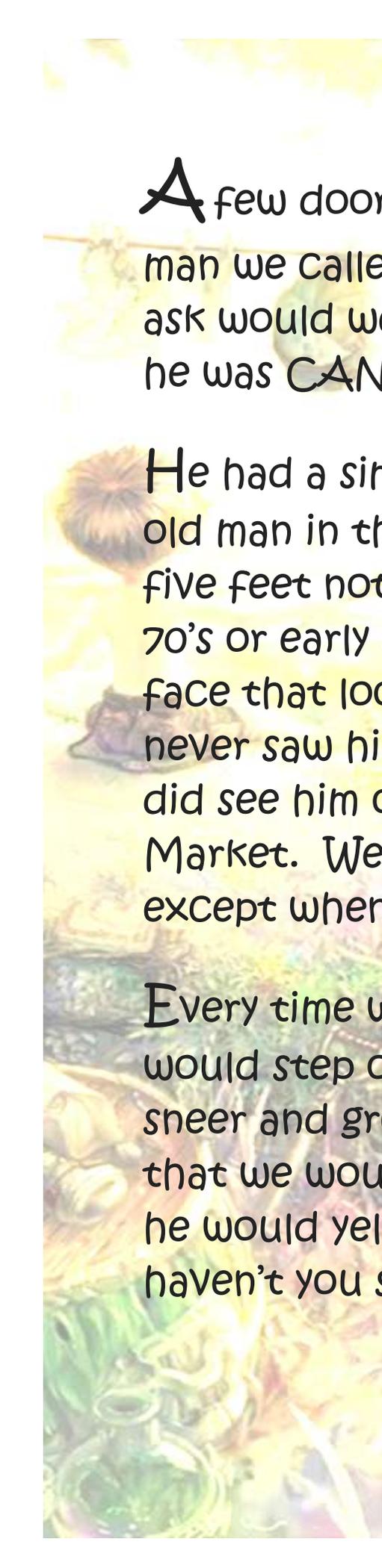
adjective: cantankerous
bad-tempered, argumentative, and uncooperative.

My name is Matthew Corrigan, I live at 1226 Alderbrook Crescent and I attend seventh grade at Joseph Coombs Elementary School. There are about 500 students enrolled, myself included. Oh, and I have two friends, Josh Menzies and Carly Pederson. We call ourselves the Alderbrook Musketeers. We are never ever separated from each other except when I am at home having meals with the family and going to bed, otherwise we are never separated. We stick together like peanut butter and jam on a whole wheat sandwich. We do almost everything together at school and after school.

Josh is a great friend but has this attitude sometimes that he is god's gift to everything and Carly is a great friend who cares about everything and everyone.

Both of them are in most of my classes and did I mention that we are never separated. It's like Josh and I are conjoined twins who are joined at the hip. I would not be who and where I am without them, but enough about them.

Our family and friends live on Alderbrook Crescent, a quiet street with about a dozen houses, a cul de sac, basketball hoops, road hockey in winter, skateboarding in summer and just minutes from our Elementary School. One of our fun things to do is to set up ramps in the school yard and ride our bikes like it was a motocross track. We would take a spill now and then and get scraped up but we would jump in victory when we made it without a scratch.



A few doors down my street at 1234 lived a man we called old man Coombs. Why you may ask would we call him that? Well in one word he was CANTANKEROUS.

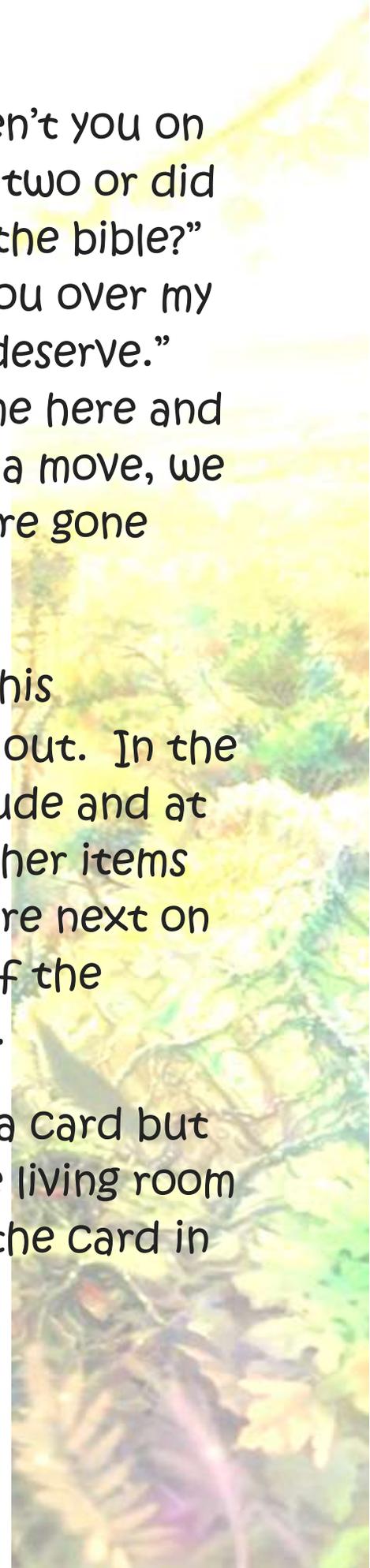
He had a similar attitude to the cantankerous old man in the movie "UP" who stood about five feet nothing and looked to be in his late 70's or early 80's. He was grey all over and had a face that looked like a California prune. We never saw him coming and going too often but did see him once in a while at the Alderbrook Market. We felt that he mostly kept to himself except when the kids came by.

Every time we would ride past his house he would step onto the porch of his house and sneer and growl at us waving his cane. Thinking that we would be trespassing on his property, he would yell "hey you kids stay out of my yard, haven't you seen an old man before?"

Josh was quick to reply, "Yeah, weren't you on the ark counting the animals two by two or did we see you in the Old Testament in the bible?" "Why you smart Alec, I should take you over my knee and give you the spanking you deserve." "Yeah!!" sneered Josh, "You just come here and try that." As soon as Coombs made a move, we scrambled out of there fast. We were gone before he could get to the gate.

We did not know what to make of this behaviour but we were soon to find out. In the past other kids did not like his attitude and at times had tossed toilet paper and other items at his house. Tomatoes and eggs were next on the list until those kids moved out of the neighbourhood and that all stopped.

One Christmas we tried to give him a card but he stood there in the window of the living room shaking his fist at us. We did leave the card in his mail box and went away.



3rd Brit. I.D.

- We later tried to make contact with this man but without success.

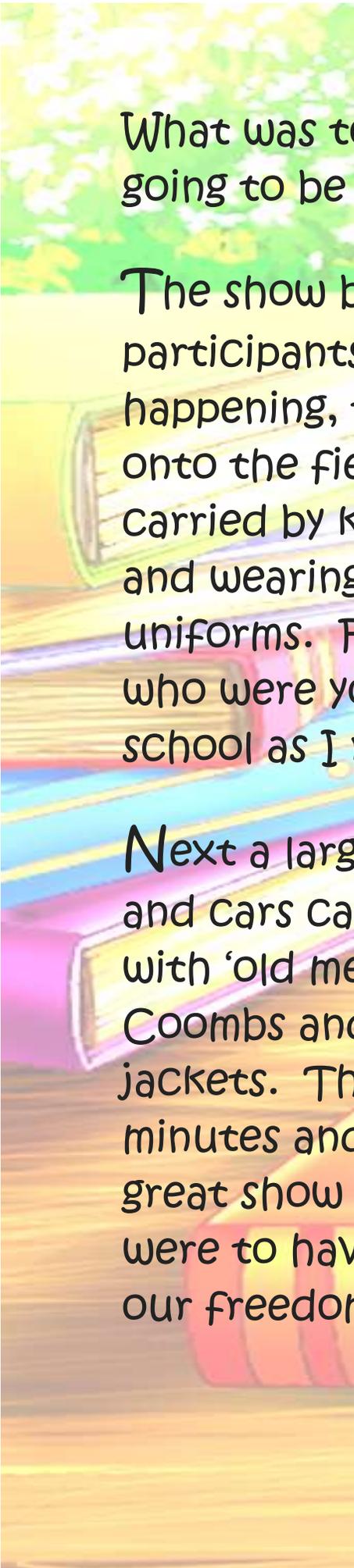
My friends Josh and Carly would walk with me to the corner market only to be confronted by 'Old man Coombs', but more about him later.

We were all in grade seven and our favourite subject was history. Our teacher was Mr. Steve Jensen, a very knowledgeable man in his mid twenties, well dressed, and he knew a lot about history, especially about world war two. His grandfather had served in the war with the infantry on the beaches at D-Day. In this year we were doing a project about D-Day as it was 71 years since the famous battle was fought and Remembrance Day was around the corner. Mr. Jensen told us how his grandfather's division came onto the shore on what they called a landing craft and as they landed, the ramp came down and the soldiers rushed forward onto Juno Beach.

Mr. Jensen wanted us to do research on who was there and make a list with a little paragraph on each one.

We would put them up on large poster board. He knew someone in the community who had uniforms from the war and he would borrow them, dress up mannequins and put them on display with our posters.

Another activity that Mr. Jensen arranged for us was to be there at the "Salute to Veterans" to honour those who fought for our freedom. This was done at the halftime show of the Lions last home game of the season. As it was, the Lions were doing poorly with no chance at the cup, but that did not matter, we got to be at a football game for free.



What was to come up in the halftime show was going to be exciting.

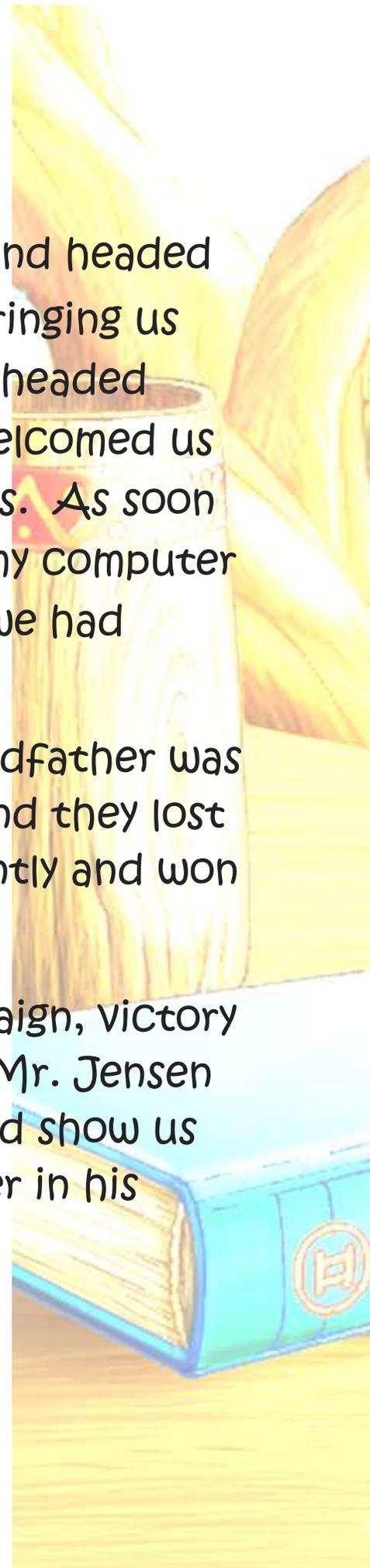
The show began with the announcement of the participants and program. As this was happening, the marching bands marched out onto the field with a very large Canadian flag carried by kids, some of whom were our age and wearing various green, blue and black uniforms. Following them was a bunch of kids who were younger than us but attended our school as I recognized a few of them.

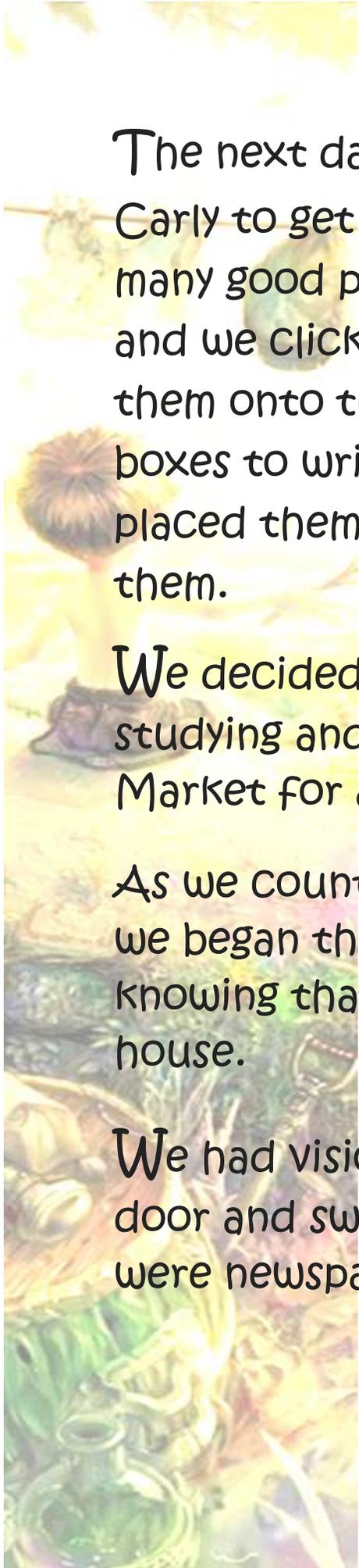
Next a large group of military looking trucks and cars came out onto either side of the field with 'old men and women' as we would call Mr. Coombs and they were wearing medals on their jackets. The show went on for about fifteen minutes and then they marched off. It was a great show and it made me feel how lucky we were to have these men and women fight for our freedom.

As we poured out of the stadium and headed home we thanked Mr. Jensen for bringing us here. We boarded the skytrain and headed home to our waiting parents who welcomed us home with open arms and warm hugs. As soon as I got into my bedroom I opened my computer and began doing research on what we had learned at school.

Mr. Jensen mentioned that his grandfather was with the Third Canadian Division and they lost a few good men. They fought valiantly and won many awards.

His grandfather had received Campaign, Victory and service medals totalling eight. Mr. Jensen was proud to bring them to class and show us along with photos of his grandfather in his uniform.





The next day I got together with Josh and Carly to get to work on our project. We found many good photos of the men at Juno Beach and we clicked and saved the images to paste them onto the poster boards. We made text boxes to write about the photos and then placed them below or to the right of each of them.

We decided that we had enough of the studying and wanted to go to the Alderbrook Market for a snack and refreshments.

As we counted the coins and bills in our hands, we began the courageous trek down the street knowing that we had to pass by Mr. Coombs's house.

We had visions of him coming through the door and swinging his cane at us but all we saw were newspapers gathering on the door step.

I said "let's keep on going, maybe he's out at the market"

"Yeah" replied Josh and we continued on.

"I wonder why he is so cranky?" I said.

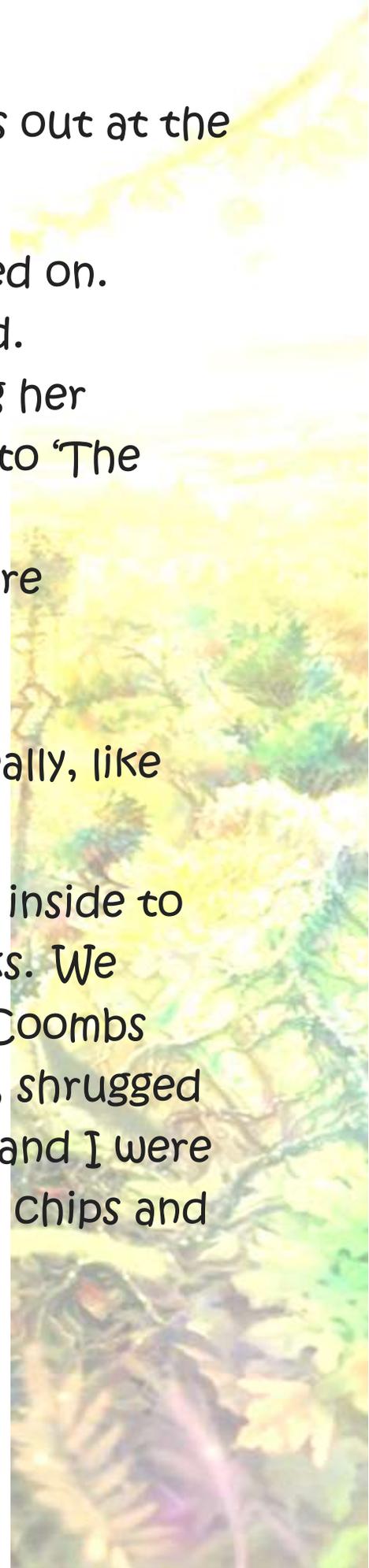
"Beats me" said Carly while adjusting her headphones on her Iphone listening to "The Beat" on the radio.

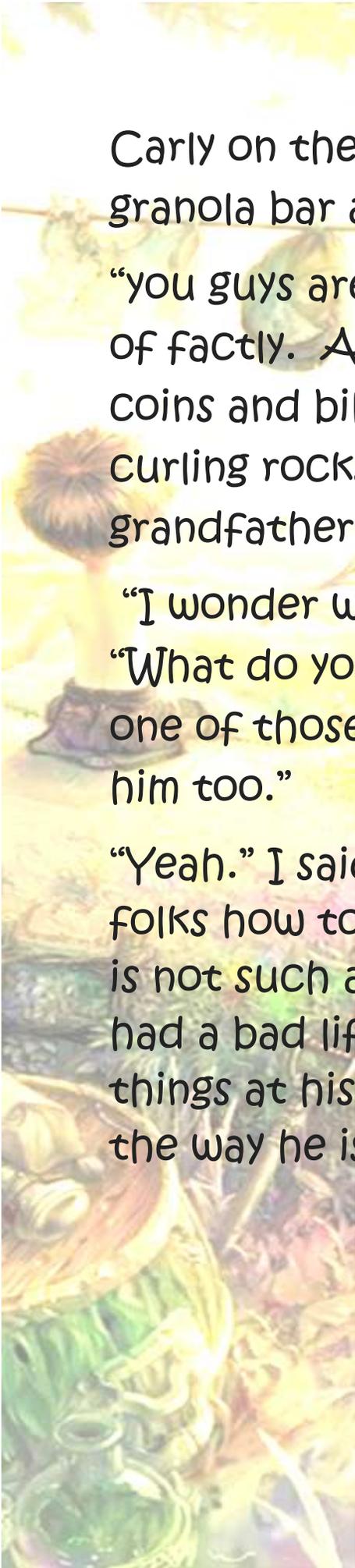
"What are you listening to that is more important than us?" I asked.

She began to sing to the music,

" I really really, really, really, really, really, like you."

As we reached the market we went inside to check out the cold drinks and snacks. We looked around and did not see Mr. Coombs anywhere. We looked at each other, shrugged our shoulders and carried on. Josh and I were not health food nuts, so we grabbed chips and pop.





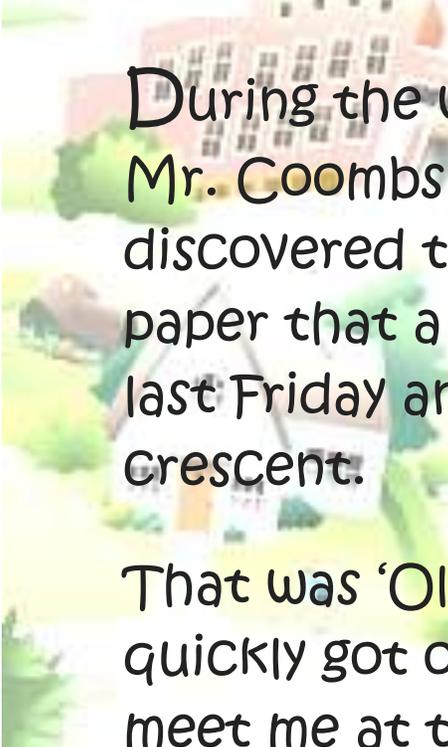
Carly on the other hand was and she grabbed a granola bar and a fruit smoothie.

“you guys are going to get fat!” she said matter of factly. As we reached the counter our coins and bills slid across the counter like curling rocks on those sports shows that my grandfather would watch.

“I wonder what he is up to?” I asked
“What do you care for?” retorted Josh “you’re one of those who makes rude comments about him too.”

“Yeah.” I said “but I am learning from the older folks how to respect your elders and maybe he is not such a bad person after all. He probably had a bad life and with those kids throwing things at his house last year, that’s why he is the way he is.”

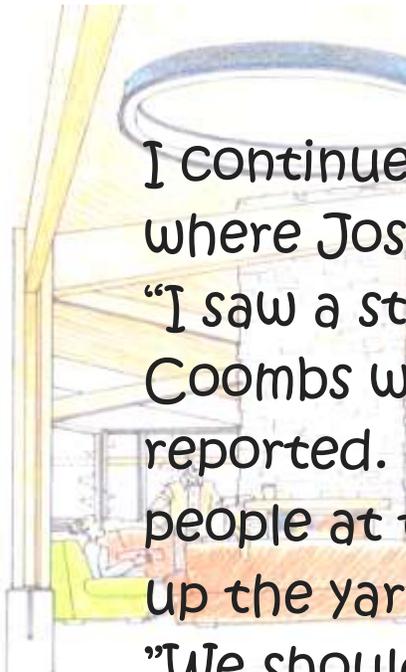
“Maybe you are right” said Carly skipping to the beat. After a few more hours we had our project ready for school on Monday.



During the week I did some inquiring about Mr. Coombs but did not find out much until I discovered that there was a story in the local paper that a Walter Coombs had passed away last Friday and he lived at 1234 Alderbrook Crescent.

That was ‘Old man Coombs’ I thought and quickly got on the phone to Josh and Carly to meet me at the library just a few blocks from the market.

As I passed Mr. Coombs house I could see people there moving stuff out and picking up the newspapers that had gathered on the doorstep. The people seemed sad and they hugged each other then continued what they were doing.



I continued down the street to the library where Josh and Carly were waiting.

“I saw a story in the paper about a Walter Coombs who passed away last Friday” I reported. “As I was passing his house, I saw people at the house moving stuff and cleaning up the yard. The people looked sad.”

“We should do some investigating about old man Coombs.” suggested Josh.

We made a bee line to the library computers to do some research on Mr. Coombs.

“You know...” offered Carly, “I noticed that Mr. Coombs has a similar name to our school.”

“Let’s check out the history of the school on the website.” Josh suggested.

They opened up Google and entered Joseph Coombs Elementary School. The website popped up and Carly clicked on the link to the history page and began to read out the words.





“Joseph Coombs Elementary named for a world war one officer who fought at Vimy Ridge in 1917. He fought with the Canadian Infantry Corps and received the Military Cross for valour as well as three other Campaign and Victory medals. After the war he went into real estate and sold buildings and property throughout Toronto and Montreal. Over the next 20 Years he made millions.

He had a son named Walter Quincy Coombs born in 1920 who also served in the military with the Third Canadian Division in world war two at D-Day.”

“Hey!” said Josh, “Didn’t Mr. Jensen say that his grandfather served with the Third Canadian Division?”

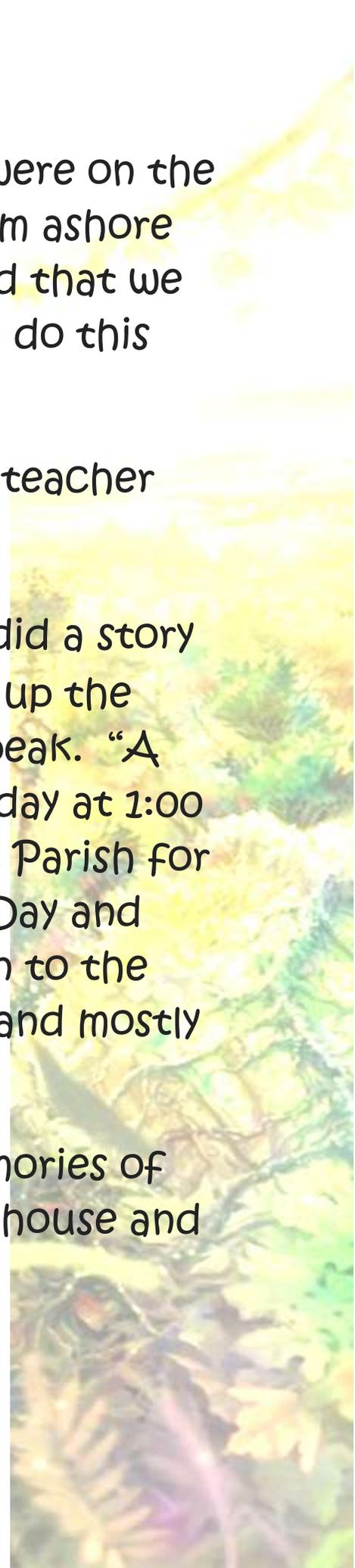
“Yeah!” I replied “I remember him saying that.” After some searching, it was discovered that Mr. Coombs had served with Mr. Jensen’s grandfather at D-Day.

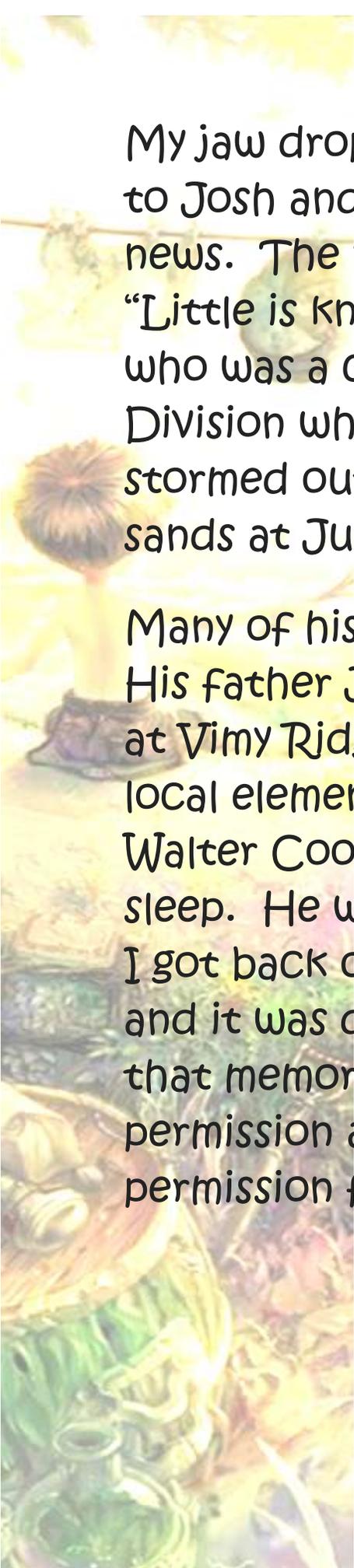
They were in the same division and were on the same landing craft that brought them ashore onto the beach. It was then decided that we would scrap our original project and do this one instead.

This would be a big surprise for our teacher Mr. Steve Jensen.

That evening the local news on TV did a story about Mr. Coombs. My dad turned up the volume and the reporter began to speak. “A memorial service will be held on Sunday at 1:00 P.M. at St. Martins Roman Catholic Parish for a man who served his country at D-Day and passed away recently. He was known to the neighbourhood to be cantankerous and mostly kept to himself.

But from time to time there are memories of the local kids throwing things at his house and making comments about him.”





My jaw dropped and I quickly got on the phone to Josh and Carly to tell them to turn on the news. The reporter carried on.

“Little is known about Walter Quincy Coombs who was a corporal in the Third Canadian Division when he and his fellow comrades stormed out of the landing craft and onto the sands at Juno Beach, June 6, 1944.

Many of his comrades were lost on that beach. His father Joseph Coombs had served valiantly at Vimy Ridge in world war one and one of the local elementary schools is named after him. Walter Coombs passed away peacefully in his sleep. He was 88 years old.”

I got back on the phone with Josh and Carly and it was decided that we would like to be at that memorial. I went to dad and ask for his permission as well as my friends getting permission from their parents.

“Why would you want to go to old man Coombs memorial after all he has done to the kids in the neighbourhood in the past?” my dad asked.

“He used to come at us when I was young.”

I snickered and said “Did you egg the house?”

“Heck ya!” was dad’s reply.

“Well..... Things have changed since then.” I commented. “We learn to respect our elders and anyways, it would be good for us to see what kind of man Mr. Coombs was. By being at the memorial and possibly meeting the family, that may happen.”

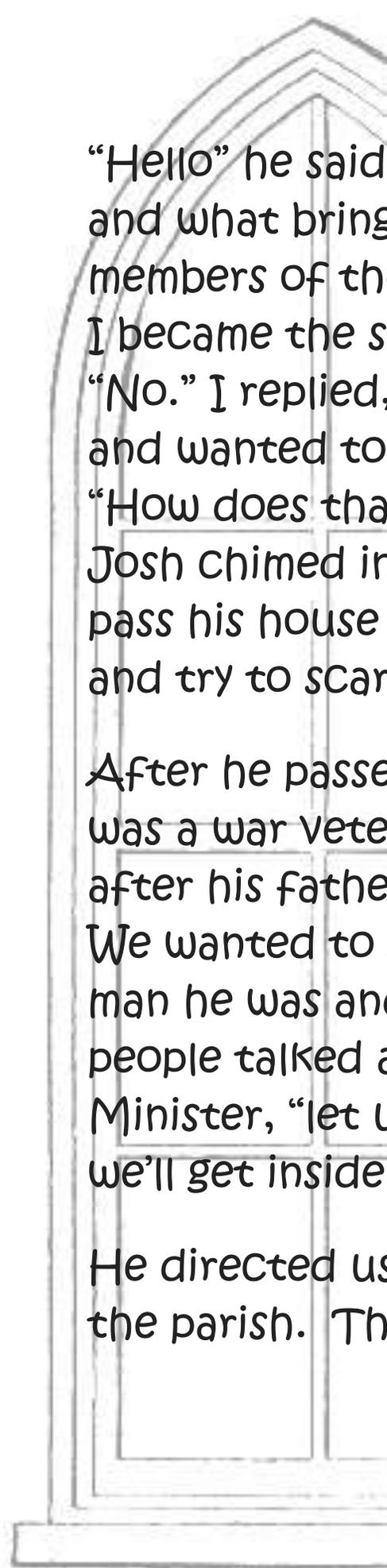
“Yeah.” dad said, “I see what you mean. I am very proud of you for doing that.”

“Thanks dad.” I said “Would you be able to drive us there?”

“Would you be able to mow the lawn later?” my dad said sarcastically.

“Dad!!!!” I protested

I immediately called Josh and Carly and arranged for them to be picked up on Sunday at noon.



“Hello” he said, “My name is Father Gunnop, and what brings you kids here? Are you members of the family?”

I became the spokesman.

“No.” I replied, “We heard about Mr. Coombs and wanted to come by.”

“How does that relate to you kids?” he asked
Josh chimed in. “in the past year we used to pass his house and he would shake his cane at us and try to scare us away.”

After he passed away, we discovered that he was a war veteran and our school is named after his father who was also a war veteran. We wanted to see for ourselves what kind of man he was and whether he was the man that people talked about.” “Well then” said the Minister, “let us not waste any more time and we’ll get inside.”

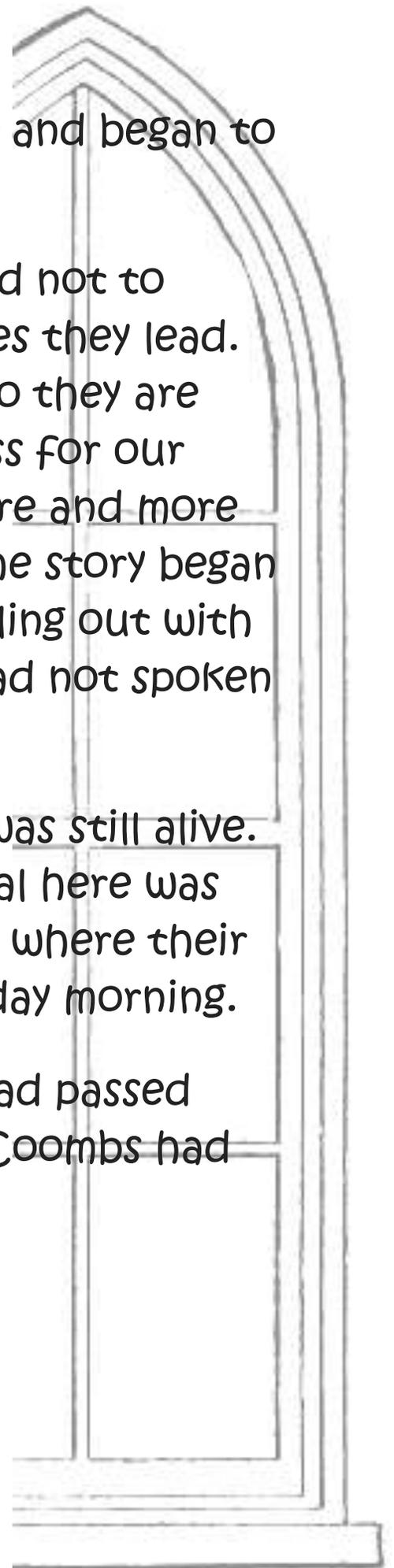
He directed us inside and we sat at the back of the parish. There were a lot of people there.

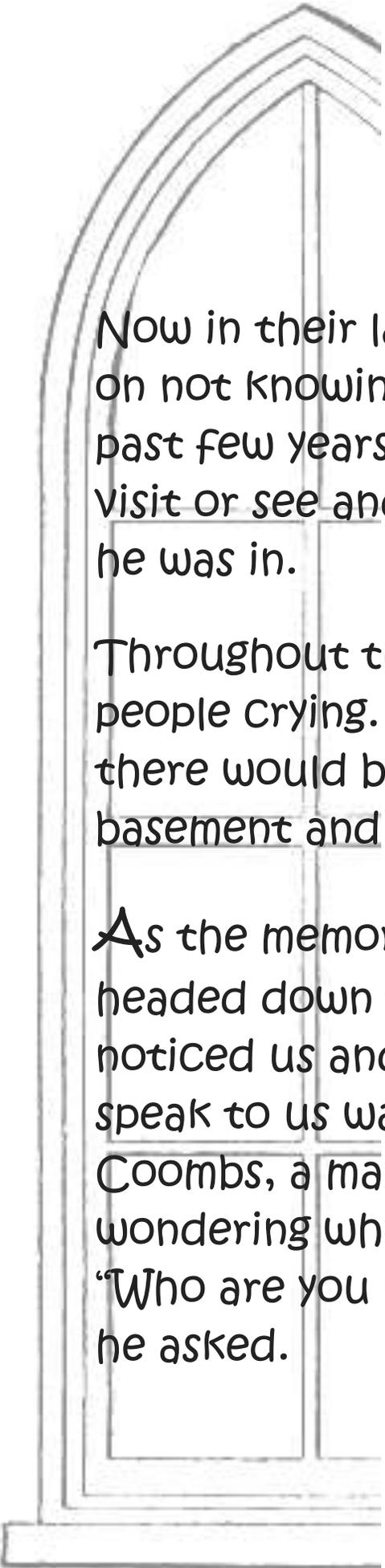
The minister went up to the front and began to speak.

He spoke about why people die and not to judge them too harshly for the lives they lead. God loves all people no matter who they are and his son Jesus died on the cross for our sins. After the minister spoke more and more people got up to remember him, the story began to come out. The family had a falling out with their father many years ago and had not spoken with him for all those years.

The family was surprised that he was still alive. The reason for having the memorial here was because as kids themselves, this is where their father 'dragged' them out on Sunday morning.

Shortly after that, their mother had passed away and for all these years, Mr. Coombs had raised them on his own.



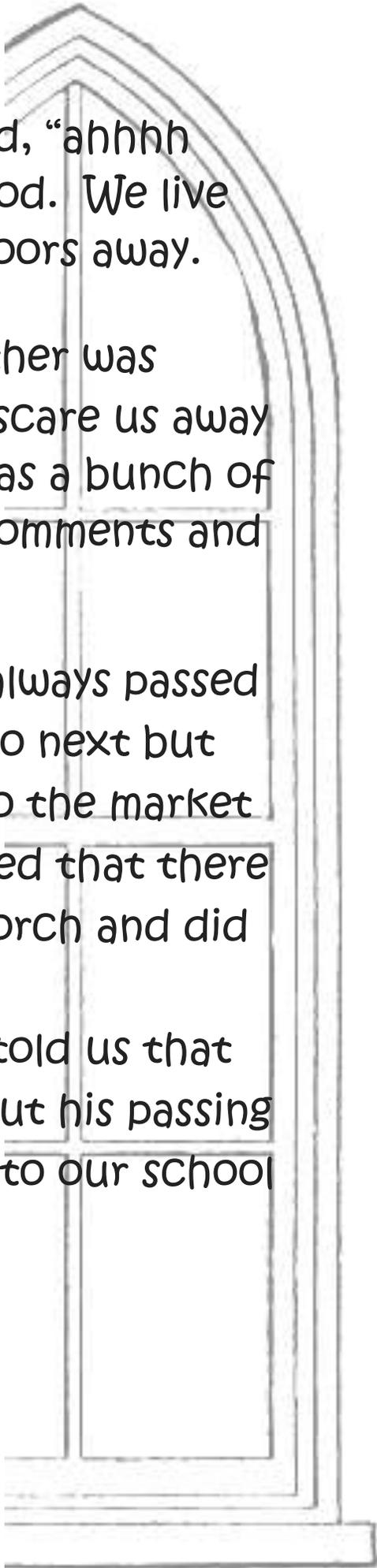


Now in their late 50's and 60's, they had moved on not knowing about their father. For the past few years he had no one to come by and visit or see and that put him in the state that he was in.

Throughout the memorial you could hear some people crying. Father Gunnop mentioned that there would be a reception in the parish basement and all were invited

As the memorial ended the people got up and headed down to the basement. The family noticed us and came over. The first one to speak to us was the son. His name was John Coombs, a man in his late fifties who was wondering what brought us here.

"Who are you kids and what brings you here?" he asked.

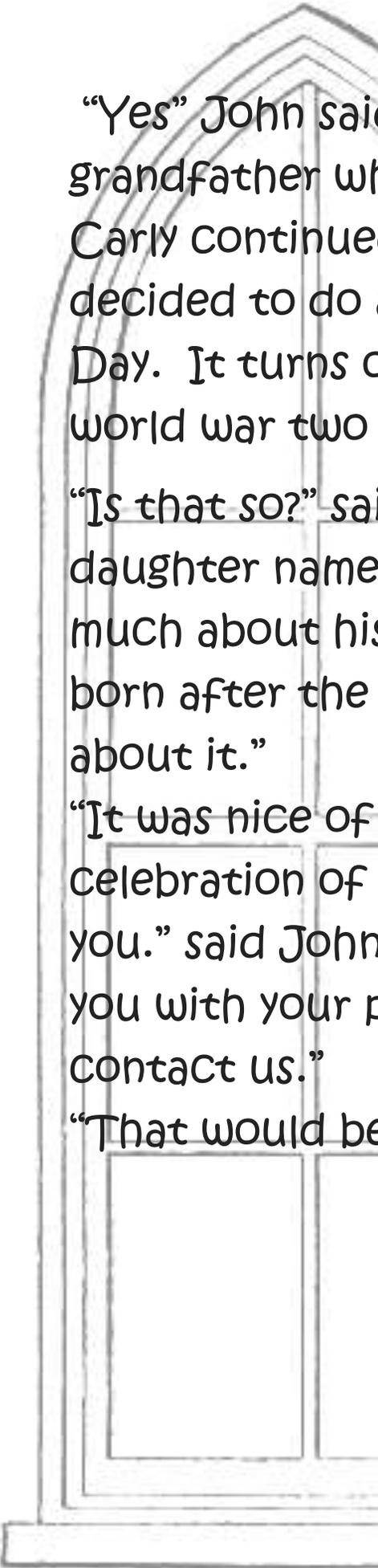


“We knew Mr.....” I said and paused, “ahhhh your father from the neighbourhood. We live in the same area and I live a few doors away.

As we said to the father, your father was alone and would sometimes try to scare us away from his house. Last year there was a bunch of older kids who would make rude comments and throw things at the house.

When we went to the market, we always passed the house fearing what he might do next but we did not see anything. We got to the market and did not see him there. I noticed that there were a lot of newspapers on the porch and did not know what to make of it.”

Carly spoke next. “Matthew then told us that he saw something in the paper about his passing and that the last name was similar to our school name.”



“Yes” John said, the school is named after our grandfather who fought in world war one.”

Carly continued, “We soon found that out and decided to do a project on it for Remembrance Day. It turns out that your father served in world war two with our teacher’s grandfather.”

“Is that so?” said another family member, a daughter named Janet. “We did not know much about his military life because we were born after the war and he did not speak to us about it.”

“It was nice of you to come out and see the celebration of life and for us to get to know you.” said John, “Anything we can do to help you with your project, please feel free to contact us.”

“That would be great” Carly said “Thanks”

They gave us their contact info and we headed out of the parish and quickly phoned dad to pick us up. Within ten minutes dad arrived and we climbed in. As we drove away dad asked us, "How was the memorial?"

"There were a lot of people there" I replied.

"We got to meet and speak to the minister as well as the family. They were very nice and they gave us their contact information if we need any help on the project."

"That must have been very nice of them to do that." said dad

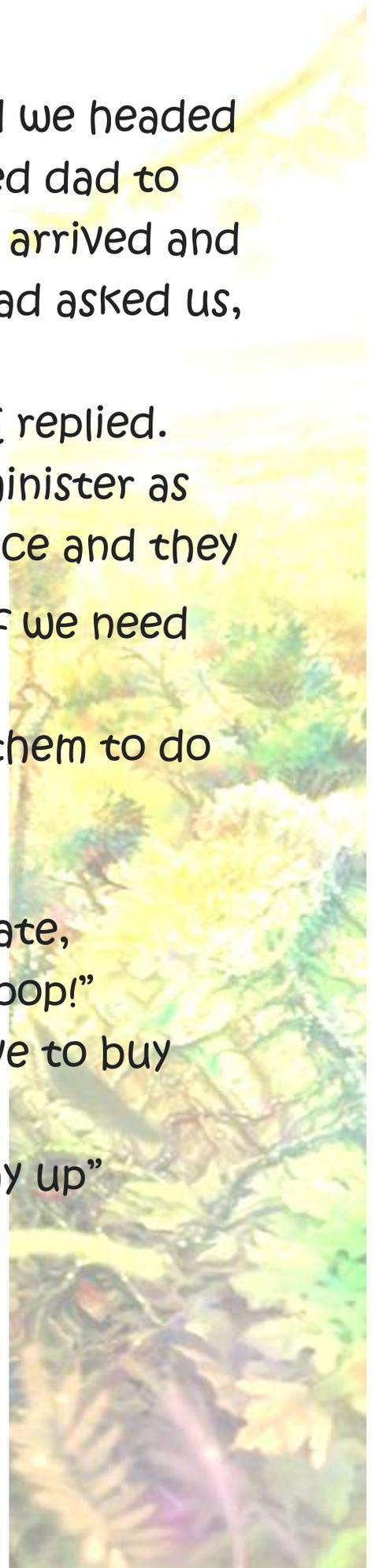
"Yeah" we all replied together.

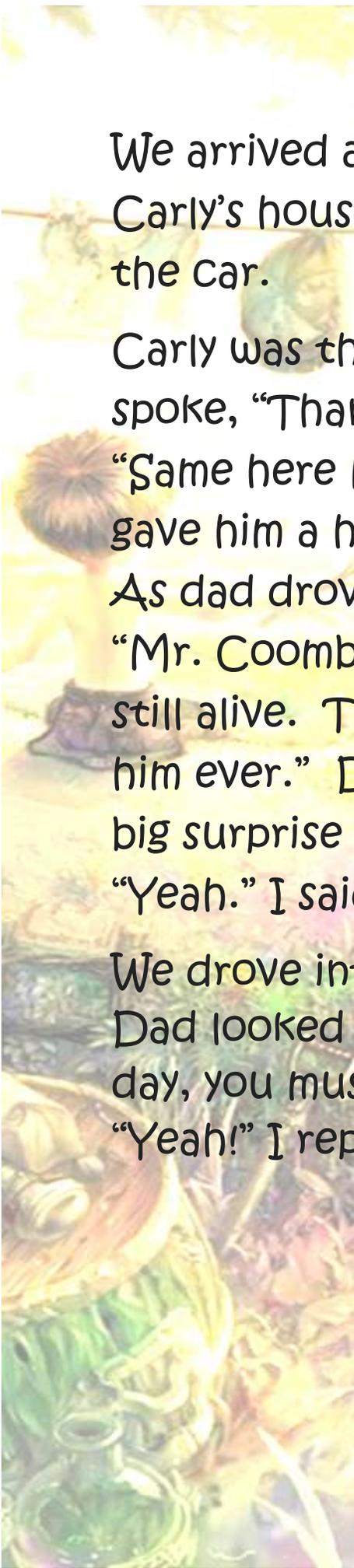
Josh was first out of the starting gate,

"Jinx....both of you owe me a soda pop!"

"Oh man!" I moaned, "We always have to buy you a soda."

"Them's the breaks." said Josh...."pay up"





We arrived at the corner where Josh and Carly's house was and they began to get out of the car.

Carly was the more polite of the two and spoke, "Thanks for the lift Mr. Corrigan."

"Same here Mr. C." Josh said, "Later dude." I gave him a high five and they closed the door.

As dad drove away we had a chance to talk.

"Mr. Coombs family did not know that he was still alive. They almost gave up hope of seeing him ever." Dad chimed in. "It must have been a big surprise for them to find him."

"Yeah." I said "Probably a big shock."

We drove into the driveway and parked the car.

Dad looked at me and said "You've had a busy day, you must be pretty tired."

"Yeah!" I replied as I got out of the car.

“Well me too son.” Dad said “Back to school for you and work for me. Straight up to brush your teeth and right into bed. No computer or phone, OK?”

“K” I said and headed straight for my room. I got into my PJ’s, turned off the lights and put my head on my pillow.

The lights went right out until what seemed to be the middle of the night when I was having a deep sleep and dreaming.

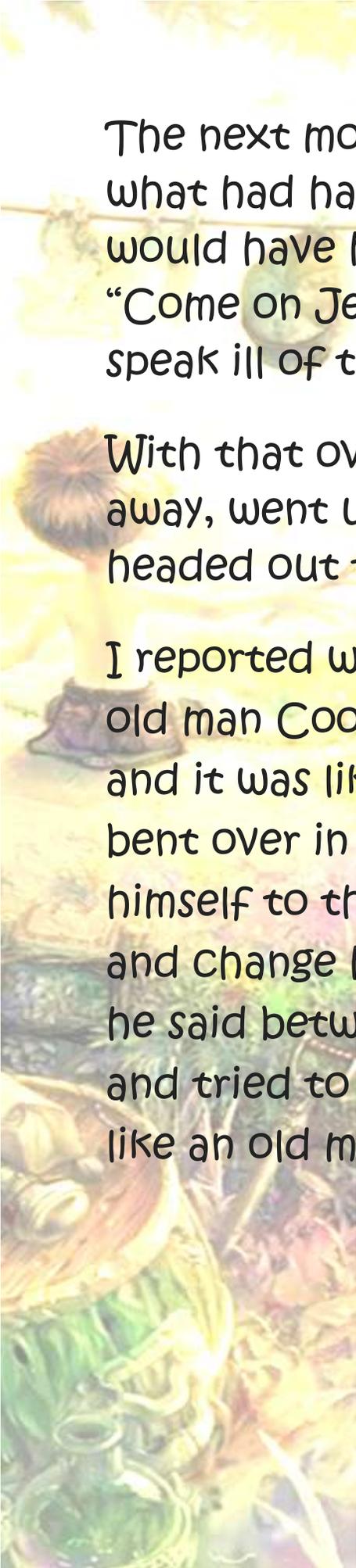
I was walking down the street with my skateboard under my arm and my headphones on my Iphone blaring away to what sounded like a Bruno Mars song when all of a sudden something was walking behind me and I walked a little faster. I could feel my heart jumping out of my body. I yelled, “Hey if that’s you Josh, you better cut it out.” Then it tapped me on the back and I turned around.



To my horror it was old man Coombs with his cane and he had that cantankerous grin on his face when suddenly I awoke and sat right up in bed. I quickly turned the lamp on and looked at the time, three in the morning.

My clock radio was on and Bruno Mars was playing. Having the radio on at night helped me go to sleep easier. I was sweating for a moment but soon felt relaxed and I got up and went down stairs to get some water. As I turned on the tap my mom came in. "Are you OK sweetie?" she said and I replied, "Just a weird dream, nothing big." "OK." said mom, "Get back to bed quick your dad is sound asleep." "K" I replied and put the empty glass in the sink. I went back up to my room and laid back down on my pillow, turned out the light and cautiously went back to sleep one eye at a time.



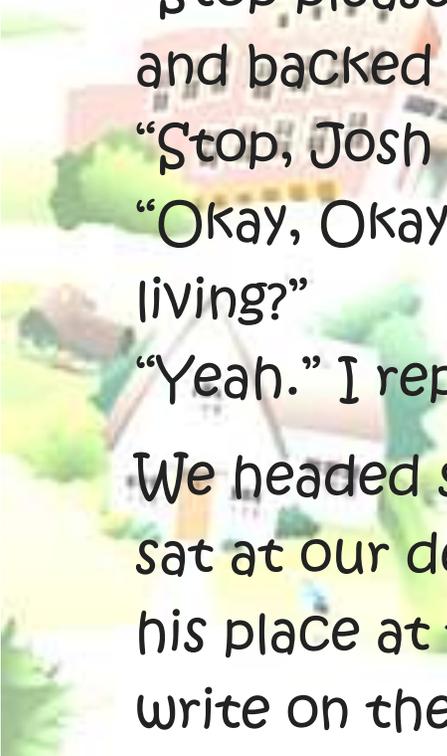


The next morning I had told my mom and dad what had happened and my dad chuckled. “I would have had to change my shorts.”

“Come on Jeff.” My mom said, “We shouldn’t speak ill of the dead.”

With that over with, I got up and put my dishes away, went upstairs to get my back pack and headed out the door to meet Josh and Carly.

I reported what happened to me in my dream with old man Coombs and that grin.....it was so real and it was like he was still behind me. Josh was bent over in hysterics as he tried to control himself to the point that HE almost had to go and change his shorts. “You must be kidding!” he said between snickers. He picked up a stick and tried to poke me in the back making noises like an old man.



I spun around and raised my fists.

“Stop please!” I pleaded. Carly was on my side and backed me up.

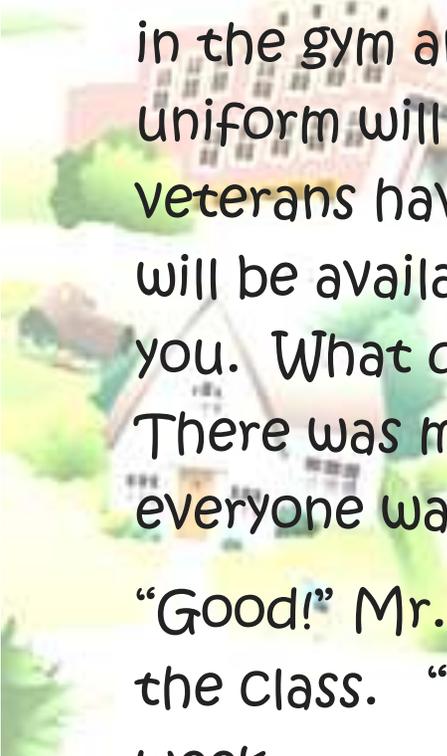
“Stop, Josh and quit being such an idiot.”

“Okay, Okay, I’m sorry” he said, “Forgive me for living?”

“Yeah.” I replied, “Let’s get to class.”

We headed straight for Mr. Jensen’s room and sat at our desks. Mr. Jensen entered and took his place at the front of the class. He began to write on the board and then faced us and spoke. “Class,” he began, “the day before Remembrance day we have a huge surprise for the school. Some of the students have gotten permission from the principal Mr. Lockhart to wear their cadet uniforms to school.”

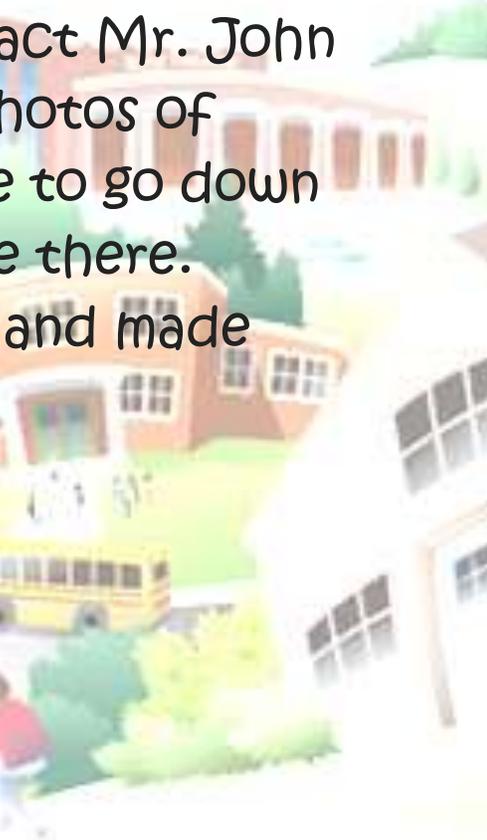


An illustration of a school building with a red roof and white walls, surrounded by green trees and a yellow school bus parked in front. The scene is set in a bright, sunny environment.

On that morning we will have a general assembly in the gym and while we are seated, those in uniform will march on with flags. As well veterans have been invited to attend and they will be available to do a group chat with all of you. What do you think?"

There was mixed chatter in the class and everyone was excited about it.

"Good!" Mr. Jensen said and we carried on with the class. "Now class, as we discussed last week....." He then told us to have our projects ready to display in the gym.

An illustration of a school building with a red roof and white walls, surrounded by green trees and a yellow school bus parked in front. The scene is set in a bright, sunny environment.

After school we were able to contact Mr. John Coombs and arrange to get some photos of Walter and Joseph. They were able to go down to the museum and talk to someone there. They went through the old photos and made copies for him to give to us.

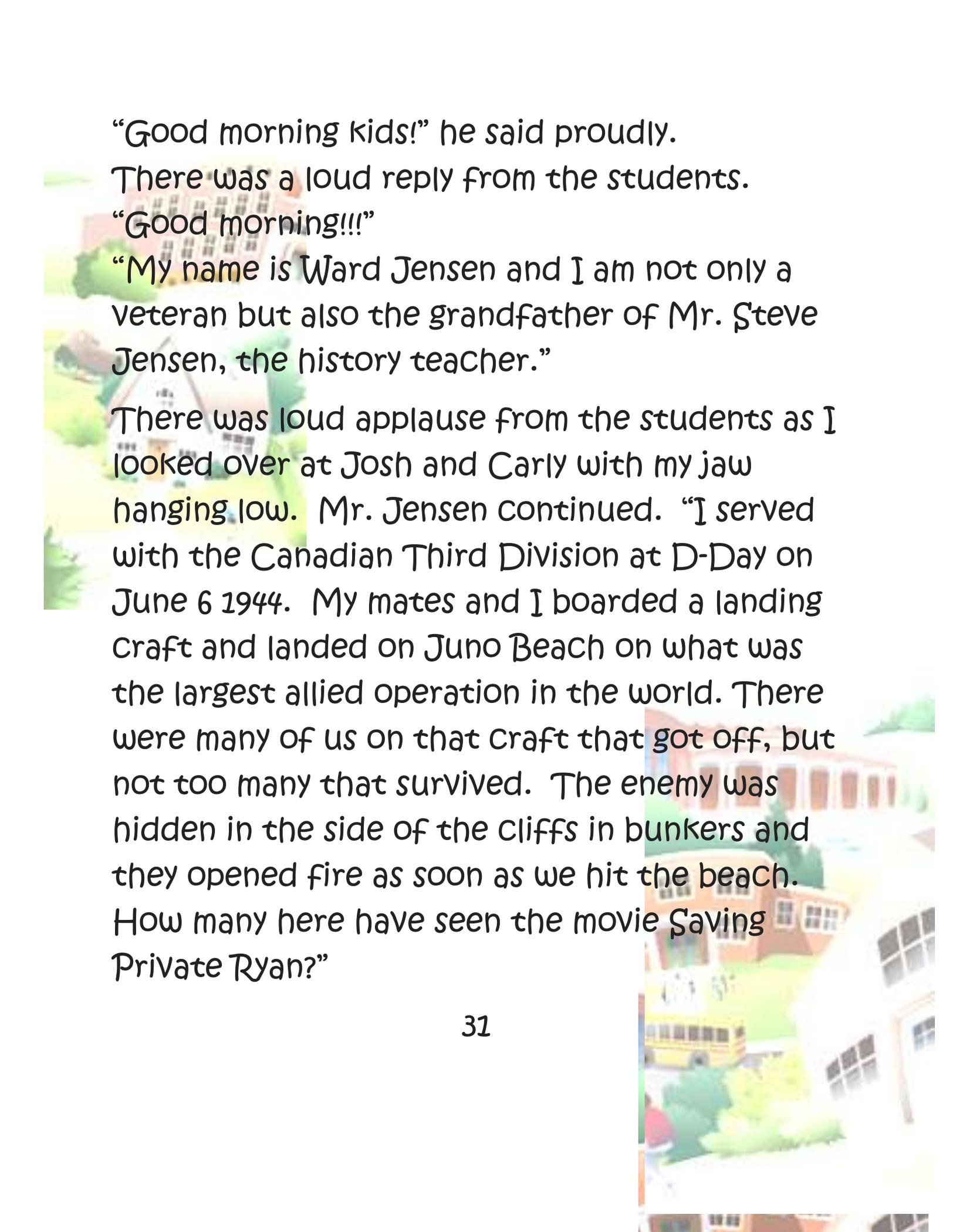


When the day came at last, we all held on to our projects as we headed for the gym. When we entered, there were stands set up to place our poster boards on. Shortly after that we took our place in the chairs and watched as the flags came in followed by the veterans. There was a Canadian and BC flag as well as what looked like cadet flags. There were about eight veterans who followed behind.

They had their medals on and looked smart. The national anthem 'O'Canada' was played by the school band and we stood up as the veterans saluted. When the song was done, we all sat down.

One of the veterans got up and walked over to the stand with the microphone and he introduced himself as he began to speak.





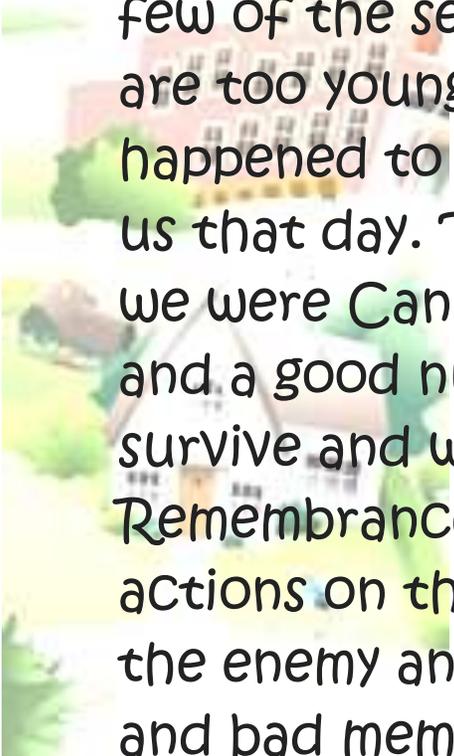
“Good morning kids!” he said proudly.

There was a loud reply from the students.

“Good morning!!!”

“My name is Ward Jensen and I am not only a veteran but also the grandfather of Mr. Steve Jensen, the history teacher.”

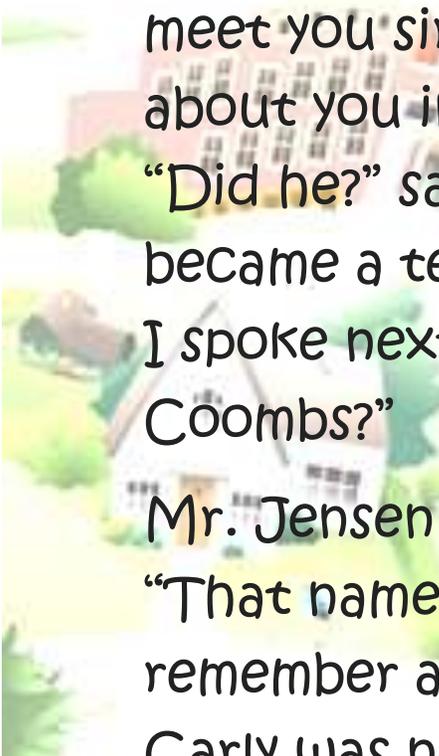
There was loud applause from the students as I looked over at Josh and Carly with my jaw hanging low. Mr. Jensen continued. “I served with the Canadian Third Division at D-Day on June 6 1944. My mates and I boarded a landing craft and landed on Juno Beach on what was the largest allied operation in the world. There were many of us on that craft that got off, but not too many that survived. The enemy was hidden in the side of the cliffs in bunkers and they opened fire as soon as we hit the beach. How many here have seen the movie Saving Private Ryan?”



A lot of the teachers put their hands up and a few of the senior students did. “Most of you are too young to know this movie, but what happened to them in that movie, happened to us that day. They were American soldiers and we were Canadian but it was all the same. I and a good number of my mates were lucky to survive and we still meet up at the legion on Remembrance Day and other reunions. Our actions on that day, was a huge victory over the enemy and we returned home with good and bad memories.” His eyes began to tear up but he carried on as well as the other veterans.

After all the speeches and last post for which we stood was over, Josh, Carly and I had the chance of meeting the great Mr. Ward Jensen with his grandson at his side. It was like meeting a famous celebrity, a hero, we were in seventh heaven.





Josh spoke first. "It is such a great honour to meet you sir. Mr. Jensen our teacher told us about you in class and your battle."

"Did he?" said Mr. Jensen, "Well that is why he became a teacher and a good one he is at that."

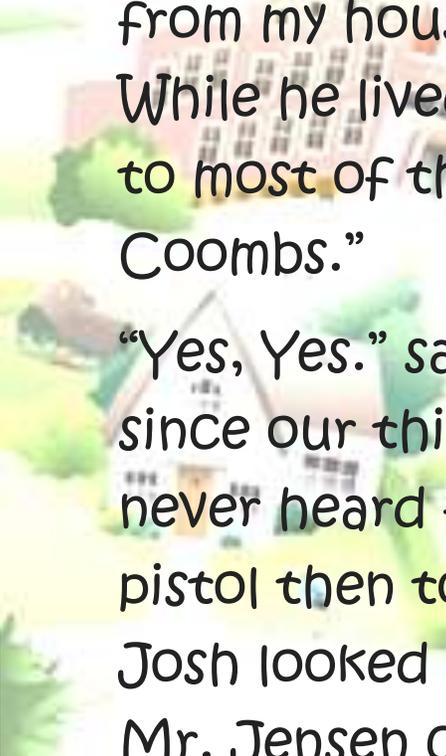
I spoke next. "Did you know a Mr. Walter Coombs?"

Mr. Jensen thought for a moment then said "That name rings a bell.....now I do not remember all of my mates but let me think."

Carly was next. "Our research shows that you were in the same division and same landing craft when you landed on the beach."

"Yes, Yes.....Walter Hasty Quincy Coombs, the man who could not wait to get off the landing craft and into the thick of it, yes I do remember. How do you know him and is he still around?"





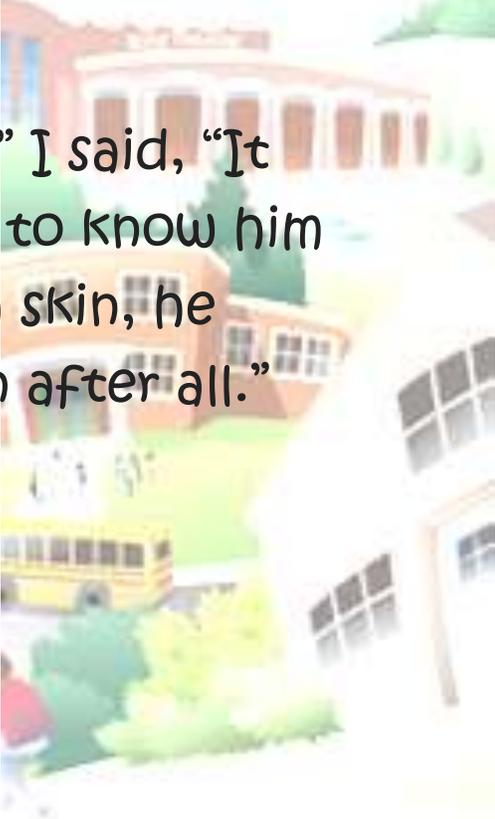
“No sir.” I replied, “He lived a few doors down from my house and he passed away last week. While he lived down the street, he was known to most of the kids as the cantankerous Mr. Coombs.”

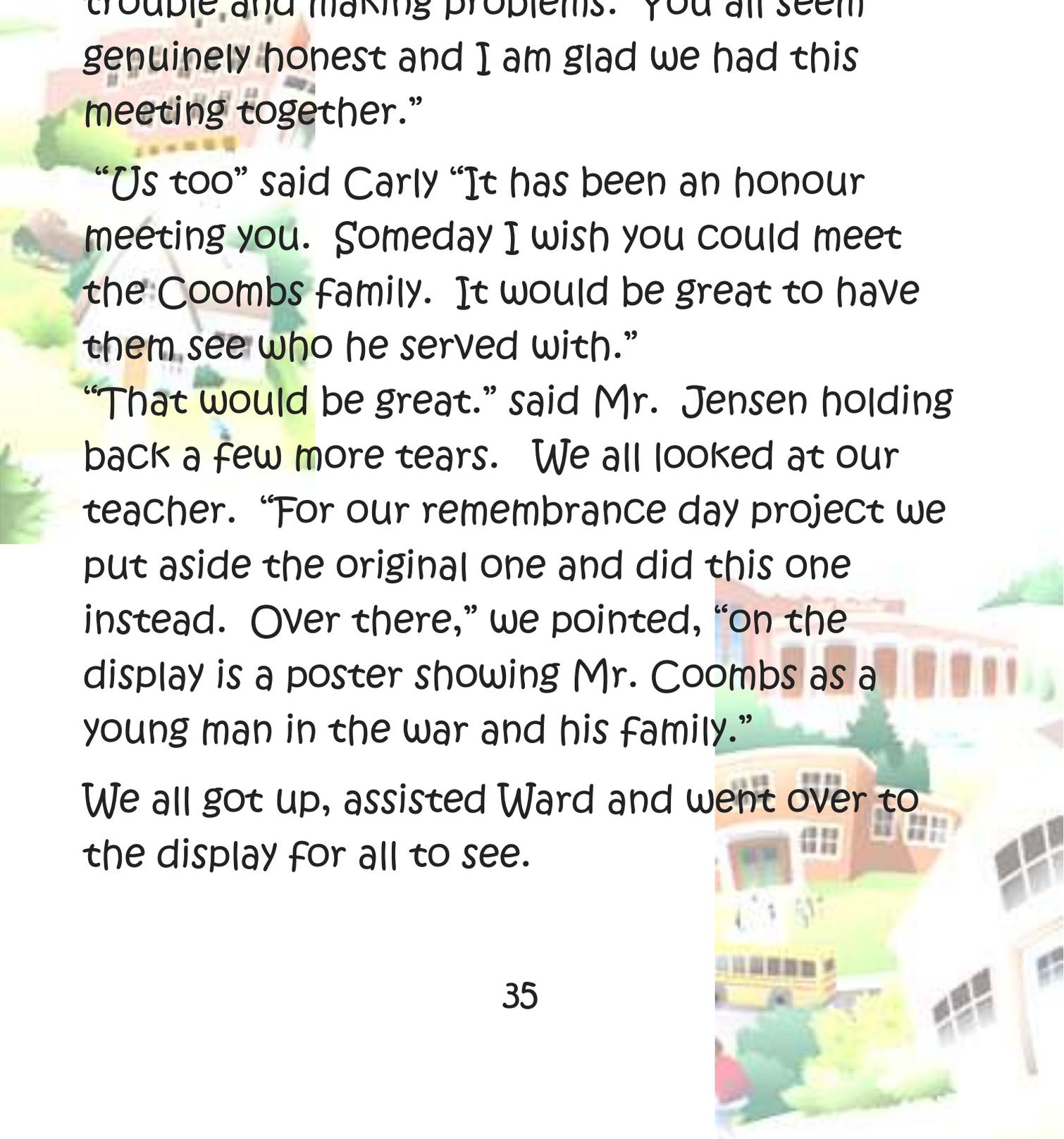
“Yes, Yes.” said Mr. Jensen, “I had not seen him since our thirty year reunion back in '74 and never heard from him since. He was a bit of a pistol then too.”

Josh looked curious.....”Excuse me sir?”

Mr. Jensen continued, “Oh he had a bad temper back then, after a few drinks he wanted to pick a fight now and then but otherwise was OK.”

“We are very sorry for your loss sir” I said, “It was too bad that we could not get to know him better. Maybe under all that tough skin, he probably was not that bad of a man after all.”



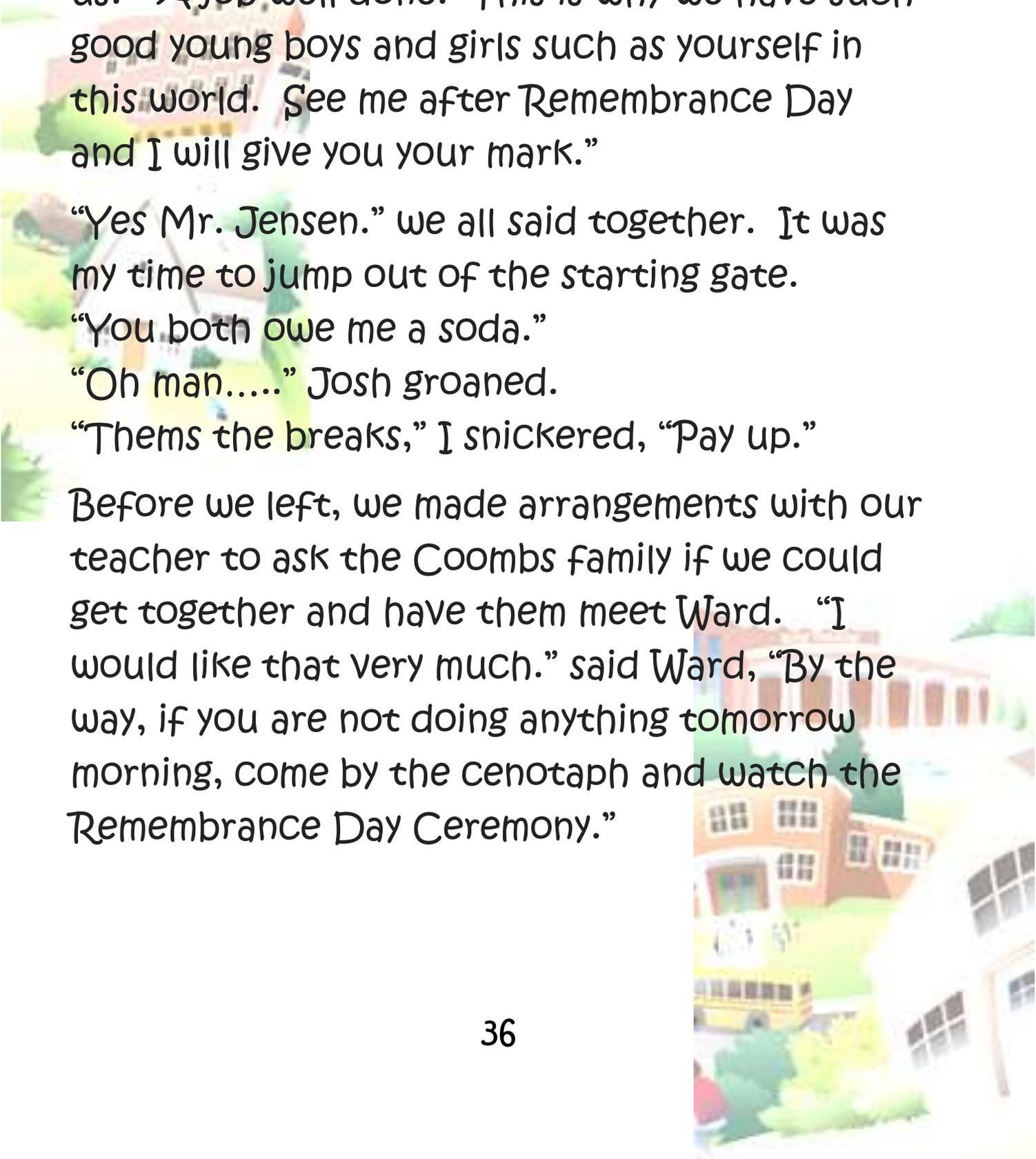


Mr. Jensen began to well up, “Why thank you kids, I guess they were wrong about you being trouble and making problems. You all seem genuinely honest and I am glad we had this meeting together.”

“Us too” said Carly “It has been an honour meeting you. Someday I wish you could meet the Coombs family. It would be great to have them see who he served with.”

“That would be great.” said Mr. Jensen holding back a few more tears. We all looked at our teacher. “For our remembrance day project we put aside the original one and did this one instead. Over there,” we pointed, “on the display is a poster showing Mr. Coombs as a young man in the war and his family.”

We all got up, assisted Ward and went over to the display for all to see.



Our teacher was very surprised as he looked at us. “A job well done. This is why we have such good young boys and girls such as yourself in this world. See me after Remembrance Day and I will give you your mark.”

“Yes Mr. Jensen.” we all said together. It was my time to jump out of the starting gate.

“You both owe me a soda.”

“Oh man.....” Josh groaned.

“Them’s the breaks,” I snickered, “Pay up.”

Before we left, we made arrangements with our teacher to ask the Coombs family if we could get together and have them meet Ward. “I would like that very much.” said Ward, “By the way, if you are not doing anything tomorrow morning, come by the cenotaph and watch the Remembrance Day Ceremony.”



“Sounds great.” said Carly, “We will ask our parents and I know they will say yes.” We shook hands and said our goodbyes.

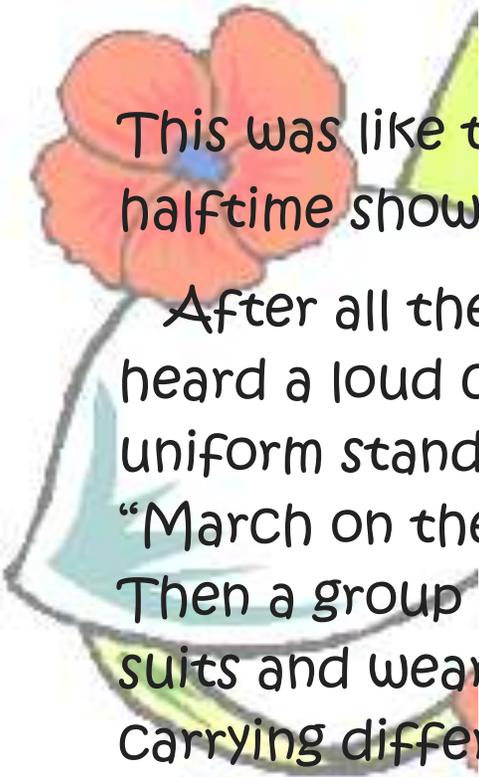
The next morning my dad drove us to the cenotaph and as we arrived, there were lots of people there. We said goodbye to dad and made arrangements to call him after the ceremony for a pick up.

“Wow.” Said Josh “Look at all the people.”

“Yeah” I replied, “Isn’t it great?”

We looked around to see if Mr. Jensen was here but with so many people we decided to get to a good viewing point and look for him later. Carly lead us to a good spot where we could see the cenotaph. Next we saw a procession of people in uniform as well as many kids also in uniform marching in a long line onto the cenotaph and form a large semi-circle.





This was like the parade that we saw at the halftime show at the Lions game.

After all the people were formed up, we heard a loud command coming from a man in uniform standing in front of the cenotaph. "March on the Colour Party!" he called out. Then a group of older men and women in blue suits and wearing funny hats were marching on carrying different flags. Another uniformed man gave a command to stop and turn towards the cenotaph. The band began to play O'Canada and everyone saluted. After that there were messages from a minister and then a few hymns were sung. Then the words came across the PA system. "We call you by name."

Another man replied, "But sir these men do not answer." The first man spoke again. "For as much as they do not answer,





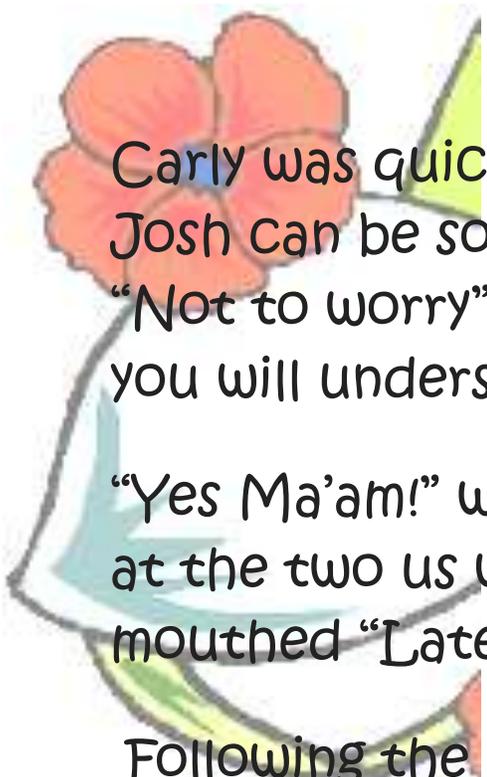
They shall grow not old, as we that are left
grow old:

Age shall not weary them, nor the years
condemn. At the going down of the sun and in
the morning, we will remember them, we will
remember them." As this was happening, we
could hear guns blasting in the distance and a
group of airplanes flew over us.

We all looked up in awe and saw how amazing it
was. Then we heard a trumpet playing while
everyone saluted. It was the last post, the
same song we heard at Mr. Coomb's memorial.

Then as Josh put it, we heard what sounded
like a cat trying to get out of a bag. A lady in
uniform next to us chuckled and quietly said to
us, "They are called bagpipes and he is playing a
lament. Next we will hear a reveille and then
they will lay wreaths in memory of the fallen."





Carly was quick to reply. "Forgive us ma'am, Josh can be so uncouth at times."

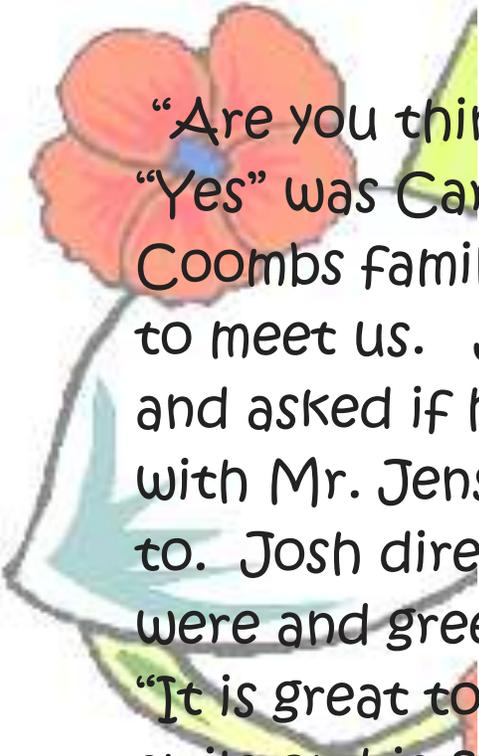
"Not to worry" she said, "As you grow older, you will understand."

"Yes Ma'am!" we all said together. Carly looked at the two of us with a grin on her face and mouthed "Later"

Following the music, the band played more hymns as each group was announced and they came forward and laid a wreath on the cenotaph. Each one laid the wreath, took a step back, saluted then marched away. By the end of the ceremony, the cenotaph was covered in wreaths.

As the groups marched away, we looked around and saw Mr. Jensen. Then Carly tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to Mr. Coombs.



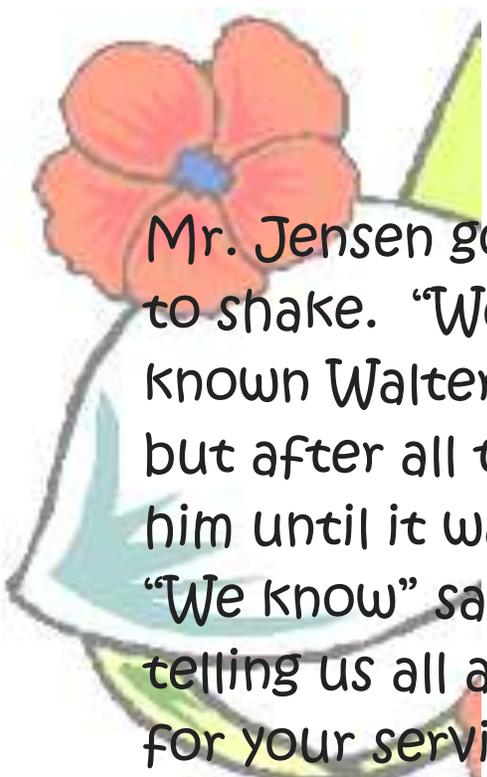


“Are you thinking what I am thinking?” I asked. “Yes” was Carly’s reply. We went over to the Coombs family and said hello. They were happy to meet us. Josh went over to see Mr. Jensen and asked if he could join us. It was agreed with Mr. Jensen wondering what we were up to. Josh directed the Jensen’s to where we were and greeted us.

“It is great to see you here.” He said with a smile on his face.

He was in his blue suit and medals and funny hat. We laughed a bit about the funny hat. “This is called a beret” he explained “And we wear our legion badge and branch number on it.”

I stepped forward. “Mr. Jensen sir, we would like you to meet someone special.....This is Mr. John Coombs and his wife Janet. He is the son of Mr. Walter Quincy Coombs.”



Mr. Jensen got emotional and put out his hand to shake. “Well isn’t this a grand moment! I had known Walter in the war as he served with me, but after all these years I had not heard from him until it was too late”

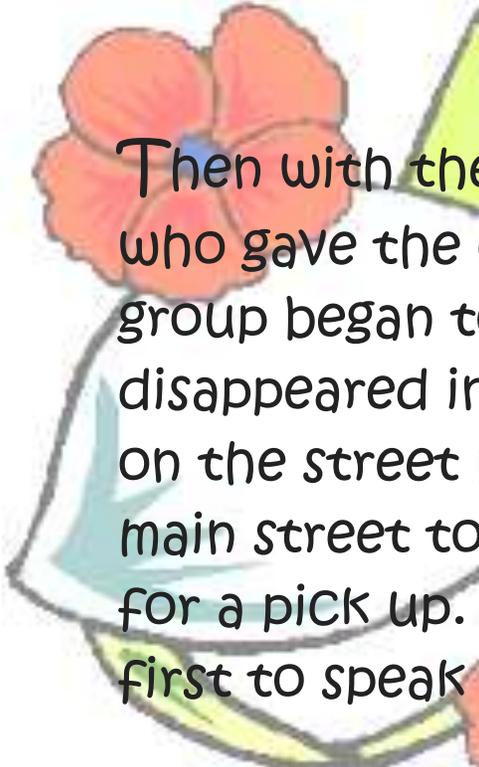
“We know” said John, “These kids have been telling us all about it and we want to thank you for your service to our country. We provided the photos that we got from the museum for their display.”

“And they did a splendid job” praised Mr. Jensen.

“I concur” said our teacher.

After all the formalities were over, we agreed to keep in contact over the years.

We walked over to the main street and were impressed by the long line of veterans and military people that was formed up.



Then with the command of the man in front who gave the command to step off, the whole group began to march up the street. They disappeared into the distance and the people on the street headed home. We headed up the main street to call dad and have him meet us for a pick up. A market was near and I was first to speak about making promises.

“OK mates, it is time to pay up.....sodas around if you please.”

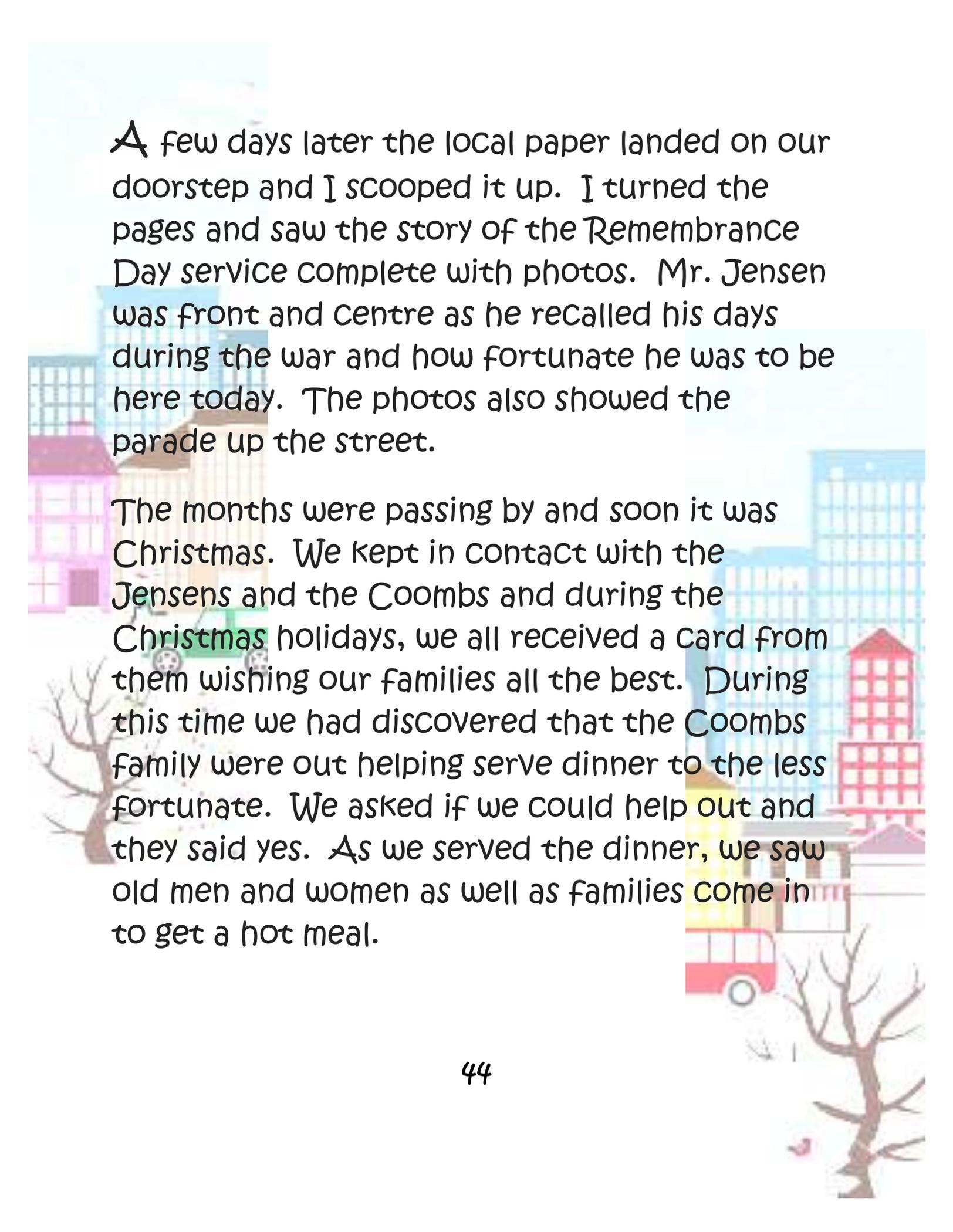
After getting our pop, we waited outside the market for dad to pick us up.

Carly spoke up. “That was a great parade. I have learned a lot from this and I hope you both did too.”

“I am so glad that Mr. Jensen got to meet Mr. Coombs.” I said.

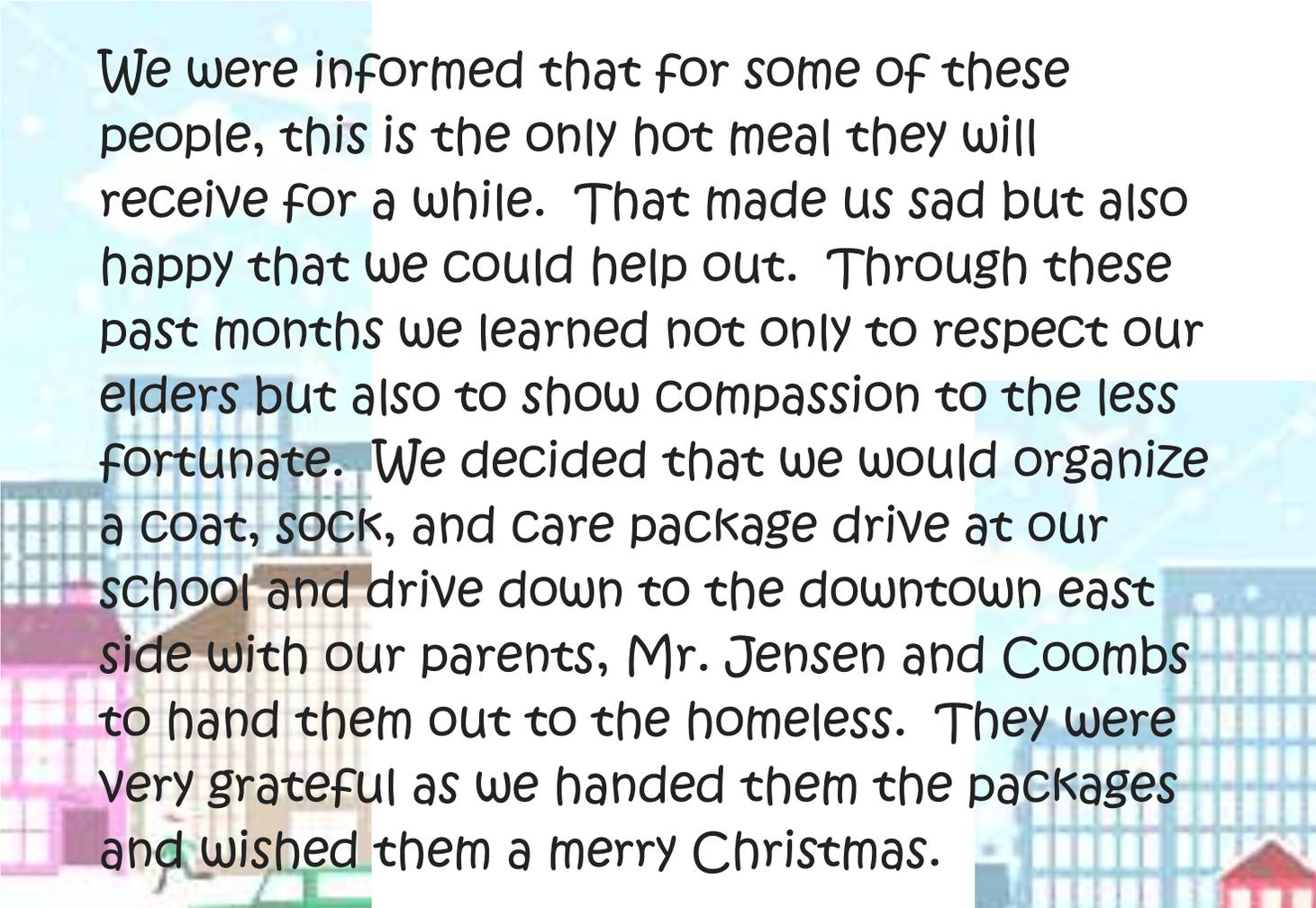
“Yeah” was Josh’s reply. “They were very nice people”



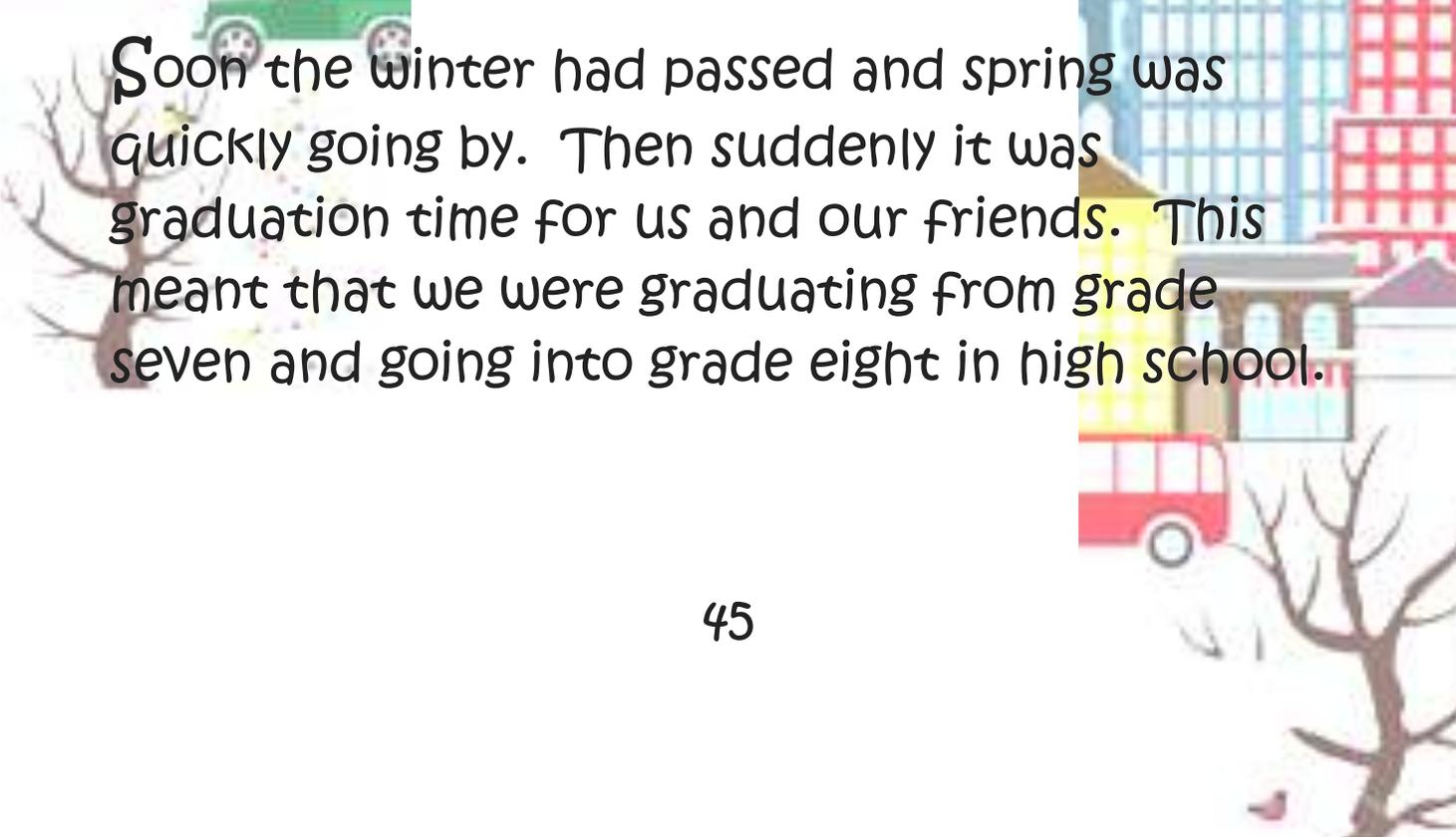


A few days later the local paper landed on our doorstep and I scooped it up. I turned the pages and saw the story of the Remembrance Day service complete with photos. Mr. Jensen was front and centre as he recalled his days during the war and how fortunate he was to be here today. The photos also showed the parade up the street.

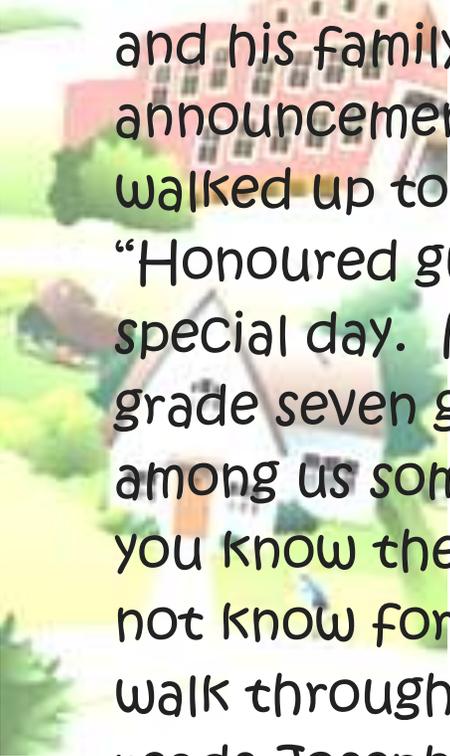
The months were passing by and soon it was Christmas. We kept in contact with the Jensens and the Coombs and during the Christmas holidays, we all received a card from them wishing our families all the best. During this time we had discovered that the Coombs family were out helping serve dinner to the less fortunate. We asked if we could help out and they said yes. As we served the dinner, we saw old men and women as well as families come in to get a hot meal.



We were informed that for some of these people, this is the only hot meal they will receive for a while. That made us sad but also happy that we could help out. Through these past months we learned not only to respect our elders but also to show compassion to the less fortunate. We decided that we would organize a coat, sock, and care package drive at our school and drive down to the downtown east side with our parents, Mr. Jensen and Coombs to hand them out to the homeless. They were very grateful as we handed them the packages and wished them a merry Christmas.



Soon the winter had passed and spring was quickly going by. Then suddenly it was graduation time for us and our friends. This meant that we were graduating from grade seven and going into grade eight in high school.

An illustration of a two-story school building with a red roof and several windows. There are green bushes in front of the building.

The biggest surprise came during our graduation when we saw that John Coombs and his family were here to make an announcement. The principal Mr. Lockhart walked up to the microphone and spoke.

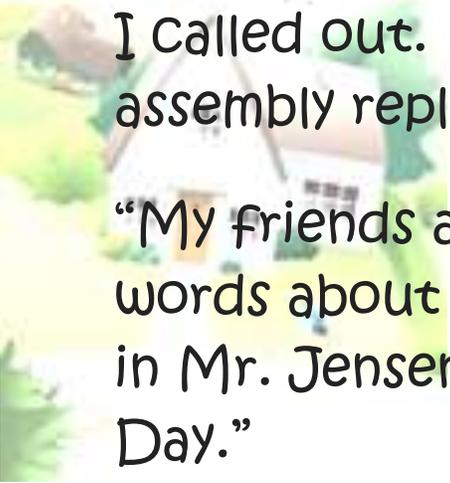
“Honoured guests and boys and girls, this is a special day. Not only are we congratulating the grade seven grad class of 2015, we also have among us some very important guests. All of you know the name of this school, but you do not know for whom it is named after. As you walk through the main doors you see a sign that reads Joseph Coombs Elementary School, but does anyone know who the namesake is?”

Previous to this assembly, we were asked by our teacher Mr. Jensen if we could get up in front of the school and explain who Joseph Coombs was and we said that were honoured to do that.



The three of us got up onto the stage and approached the microphone. I was chosen to be the spokesperson with Carly and Josh making a few comments.

“Good morning Joseph Coombs Elementary”



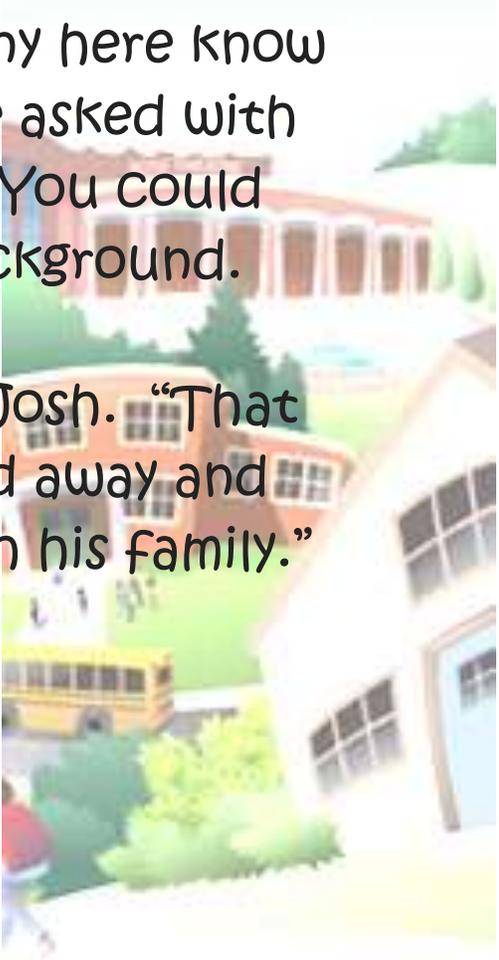
I called out. With a loud response the whole assembly replied “Good morning”

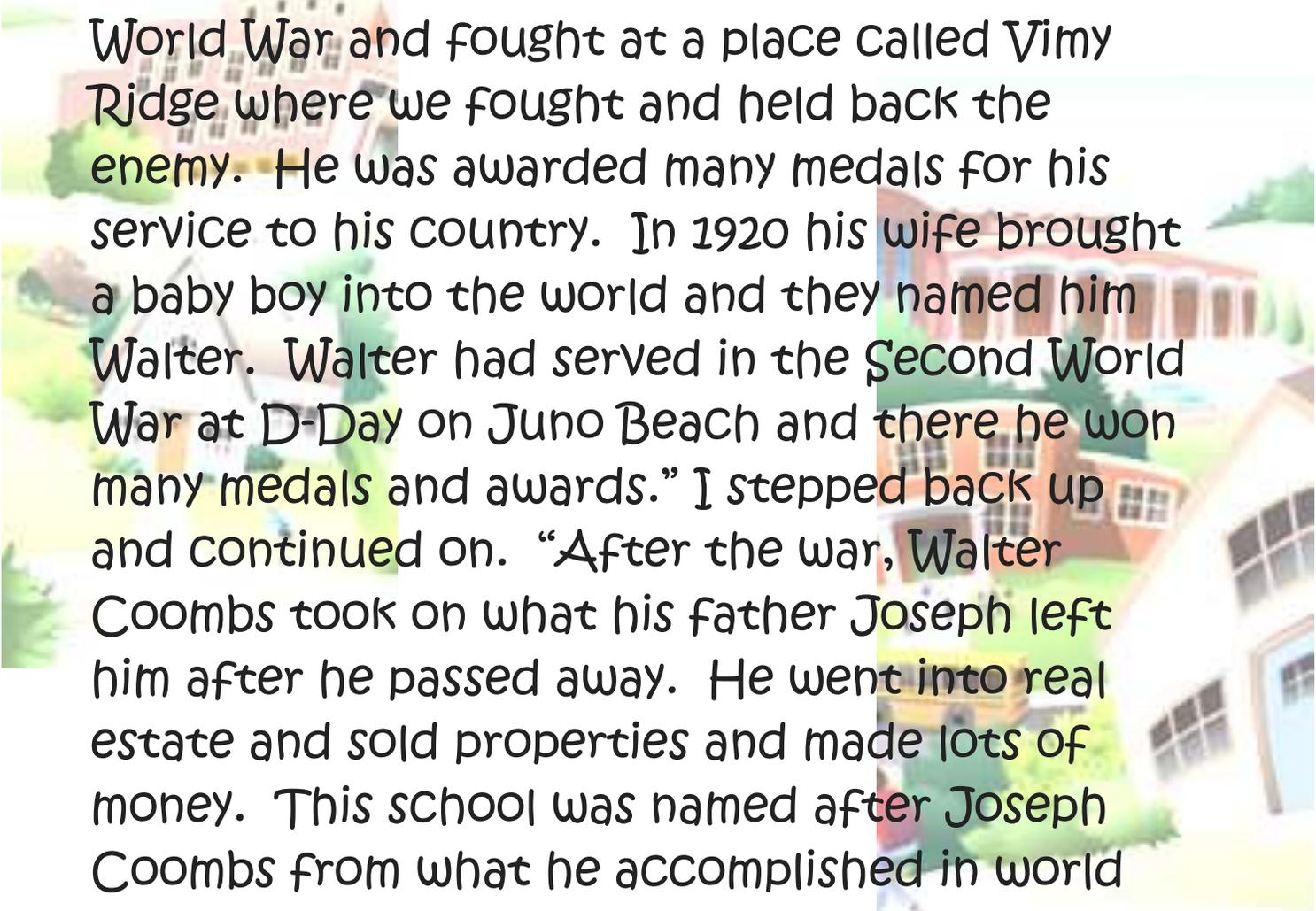
“My friends and I were asked to say a few words about Joseph Coombs. We did a project in Mr. Jensen’s history class for Remembrance Day.”

Josh was next to speak. “How many here know a man named Walter Coombs?” He asked with some kids looking at us curiously. You could hear some of the talking in the background.

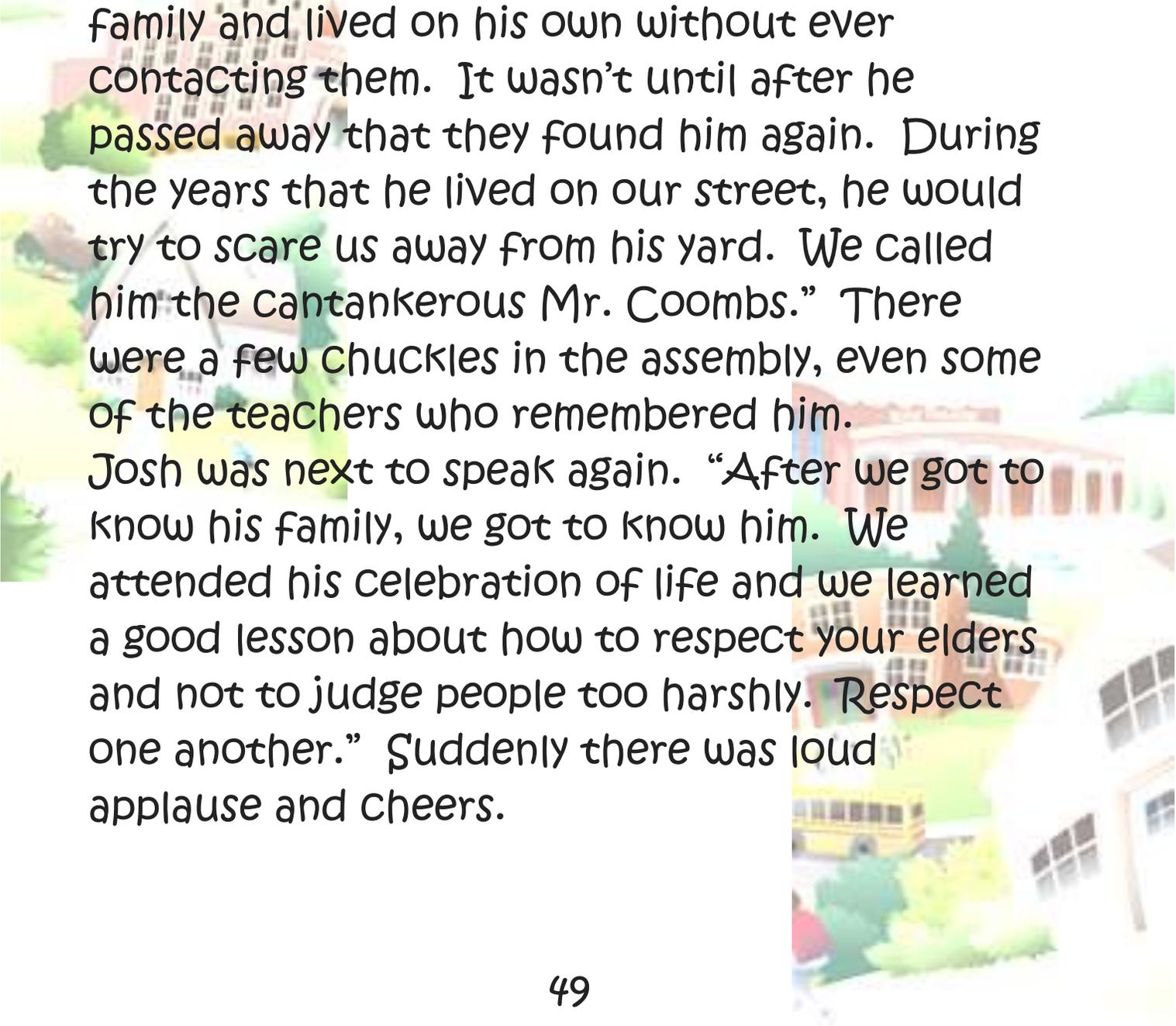
“Old man Coombs?”

“Yes old man Coombs” continued Josh. “That is how we knew him until he passed away and we got to know him better through his family.”



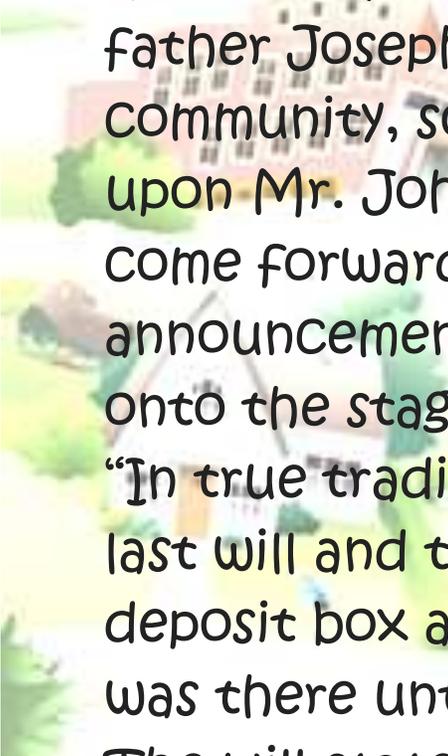


Carly stepped up to the microphone and spoke. “Joseph Coombs was a veteran of the First World War and fought at a place called Vimy Ridge where we fought and held back the enemy. He was awarded many medals for his service to his country. In 1920 his wife brought a baby boy into the world and they named him Walter. Walter had served in the Second World War at D-Day on Juno Beach and there he won many medals and awards.” I stepped back up and continued on. “After the war, Walter Coombs took on what his father Joseph left him after he passed away. He went into real estate and sold properties and made lots of money. This school was named after Joseph Coombs from what he accomplished in world war one and within the community. He made many gifts to various charities and they benefitted from these gifts.



Later Walter Coombs became a stranger to his family and lived on his own without ever contacting them. It wasn't until after he passed away that they found him again. During the years that he lived on our street, he would try to scare us away from his yard. We called him the cantankerous Mr. Coombs." There were a few chuckles in the assembly, even some of the teachers who remembered him. Josh was next to speak again. "After we got to know his family, we got to know him. We attended his celebration of life and we learned a good lesson about how to respect your elders and not to judge people too harshly. Respect one another." Suddenly there was loud applause and cheers.

Mr. Lockhart returned to the microphone and spoke. "Mr. Walter Coombs did what his father Joseph did. As Joseph gave to the community, so will Walter now. I will now call upon Mr. John Coombs the son of Walter to come forward to make an important announcement." John and his wife came up onto the stage and John took the microphone. "In true tradition" he began, "My father had a last will and testament locked away in a safety deposit box at the bank. Little did we know it was there until we went to clean out his box. The will states that in honour of my father Joseph, I Walter Coombs bequeath the amount of one hundred thousand dollars to the school named after him to allow future students and the school to benefit from this, signed Walter, the Cantankerous Mr. Coombs."



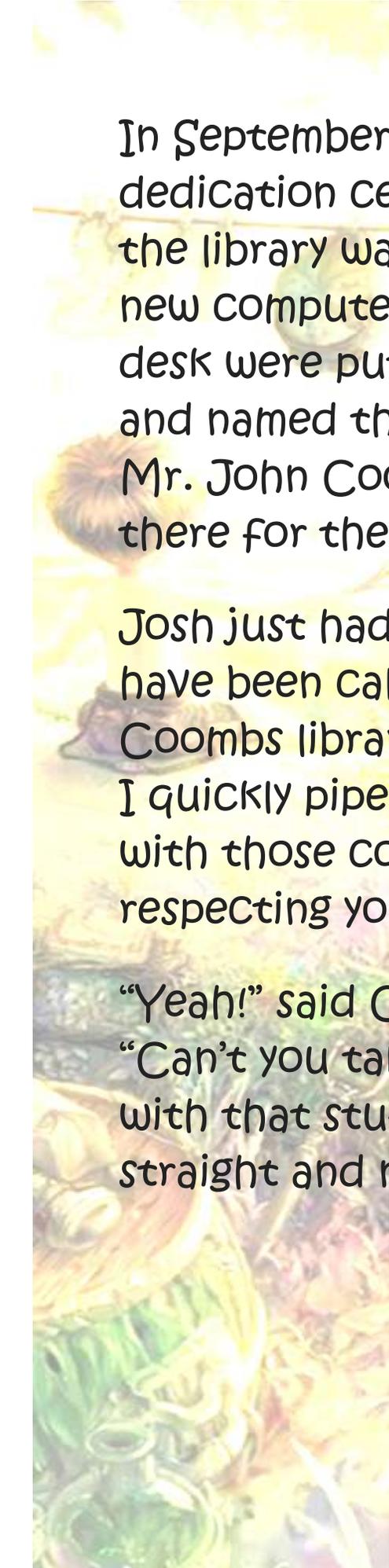
The assembly broke out into loud cheers as the principal shook hands with John Coombs and hugged his wife Janet. The three of us had a lump in our throats as we watched all what was going on. Mr. Lockhart said one last message.

“ Our staff want to thank Matthew Corrigan, Josh Menzies and Carly Pederson for coming up and enlightening us with this wonderful story of the school and Mr. Coombs. We would like to present them all with our certificate of appreciation and wish them well at their next school as they move up into grade eight.”

There was a thunderous roar of applause and cheers as we all took a bow and then exited the stage.

It was later over the summer that a plaque was made to honour Mr. Joseph Coombs and Walter Coombs for their efforts.





In September when school started, there was a dedication ceremony for the plaques. As well, the library was renovated over the summer and new computers, shelving units and librarian's desk were put in. The library was rededicated and named the Walter Quincy Coombs library. Mr. John Coombs and his wife Janet were there for the ribbon cutting ceremony.

Josh just had to get the last word in. "It should have been called the Cantankerous Mr. Coombs library or old man Coombs library." I quickly piped in. "Trust you to ruin a good day with those comments. Whatever happened to respecting your elders you dufus?"

"Yeah!" said Carly sarcastically.

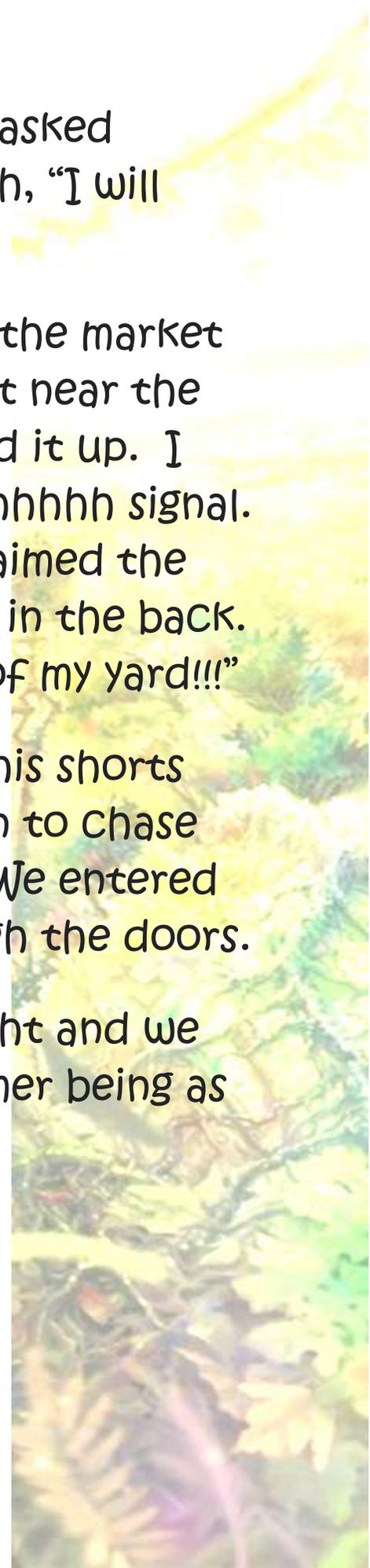
"Can't you take a joke?" said Josh, "I'm all done with that stuff. From now on I am on the straight and narrow."

“What do you know about that?” I asked
“I’m in grade eight now” replied Josh, “I will
learn to do it.”

We left the school and headed for the market
to get a drink and snack. As we got near the
market, I spotted a stick and picked it up. I
winked at Carly and gave her the shhhhh signal.
I slowly snuck up behind Josh and aimed the
stick at him, then lightly poked him in the back.
Then I said “Hey you kids, get out of my yard!!!”

Josh almost had to go and change his shorts
but he quickly recovered and began to chase
me down the road to the market. We entered
the market and disappeared through the doors.

“Can’t wait til grade eight.” I thought and we
carried on for the rest of the summer being as
usual, the Alderbrook Musketeers.



We will begin our eighth grade at SeaCrest Secondary School and as we looked at each other, we gave a high five and shouted “All for one and one for all!!!”



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