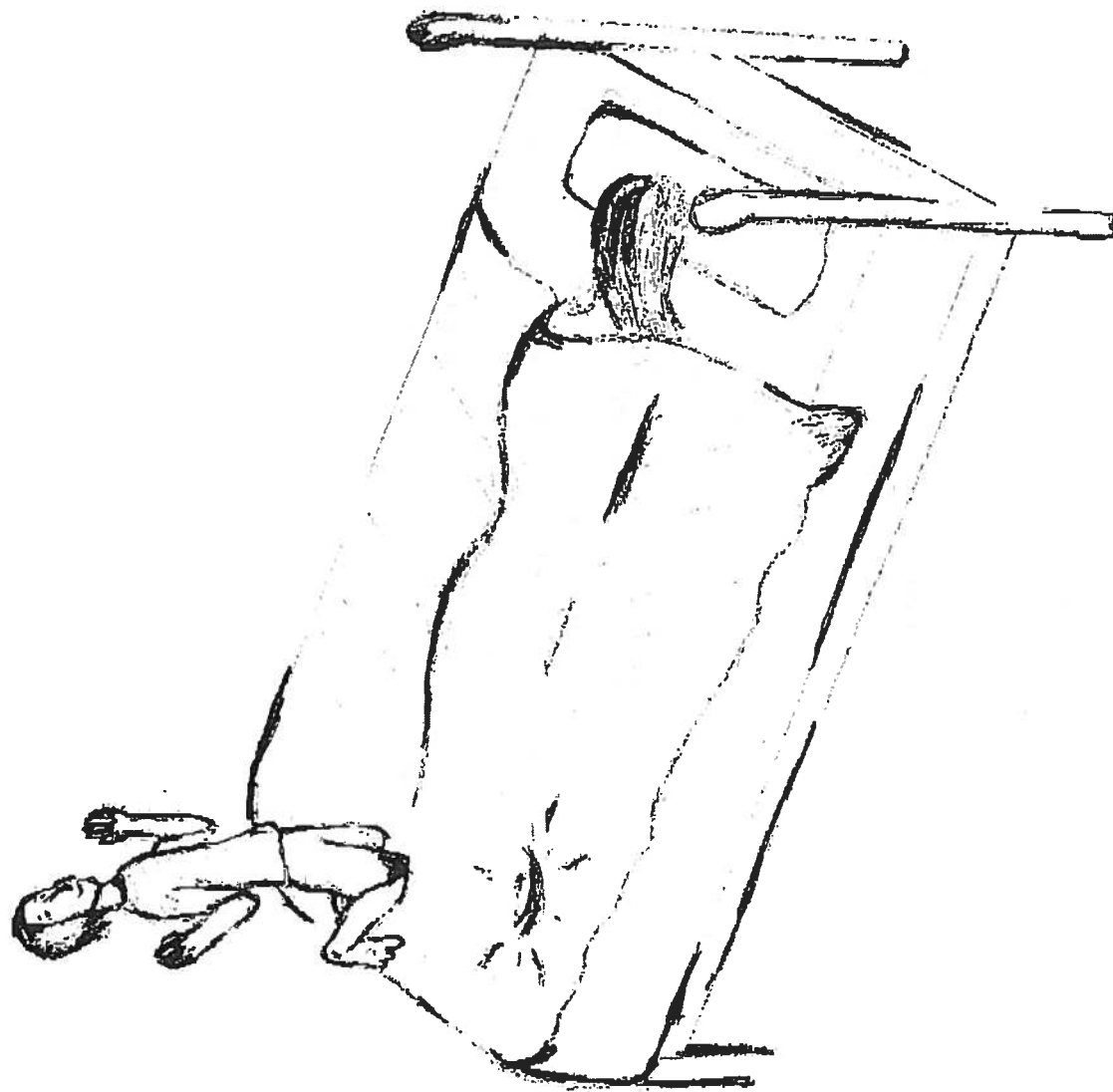


A Day with the Grandfathers

By Tommy Starr



As soon as I got out of bed, I ran into my mother's room to wake her up. I was jumping on her bed like a pup jumping for some treats.

Boozhoo! My name is Tommy Starr.

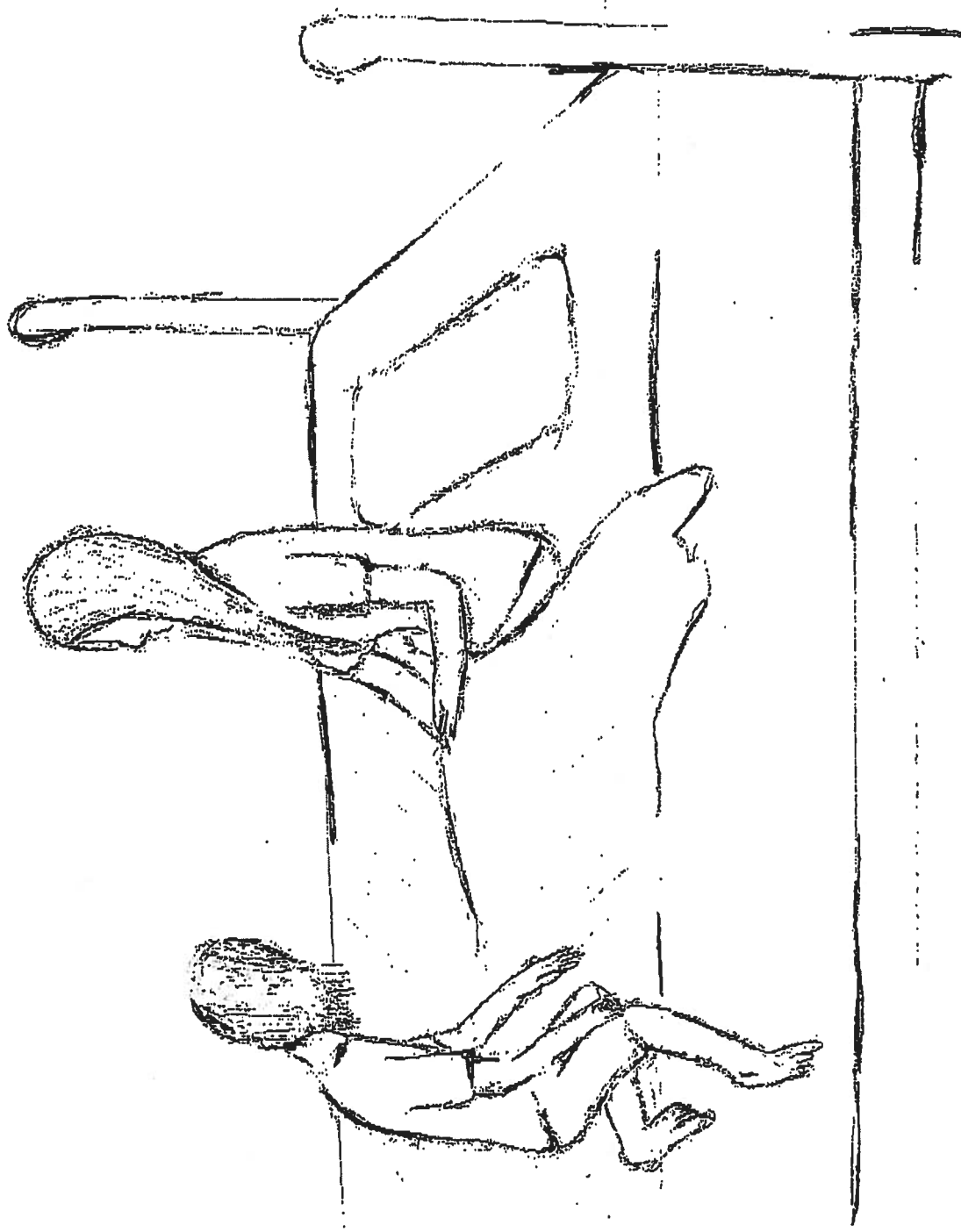
This is a short story on my experience with my native culture and how it affected me. I am hoping to let the readers get a taste of what I experienced and show you how I felt towards it.

While I was a young boy, I always had this deep feeling like something was missing inside me. I was puzzled due to this feeling. I kept asking myself, "What's wrong with me?" "Why can't I feel normal inside?" I felt as though I was a spear with no head. One day, my mom told me to ask my grandpa Gordon for advice since he was the elder of our reserve. I phoned my grandpa and told him how I felt inside and he told me to come over and he would show me our native culture. I was overwhelmed with excitement and ready to greet the next day.

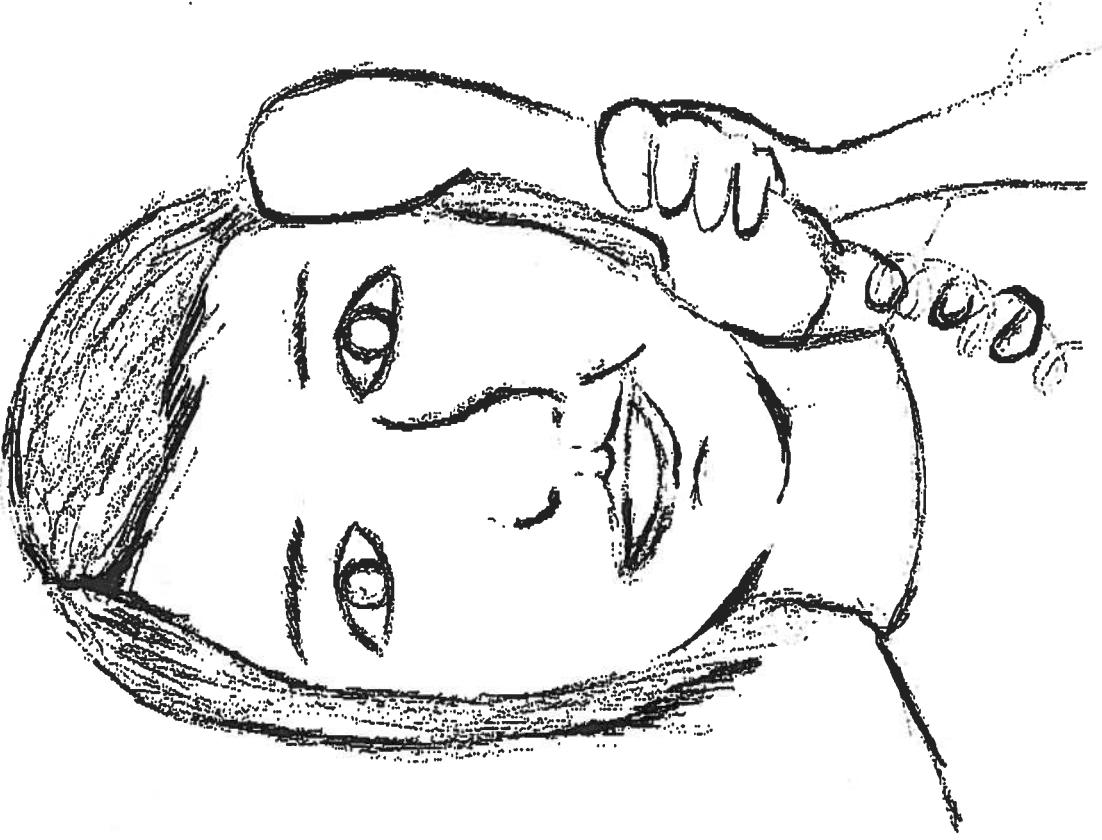
This is my story...



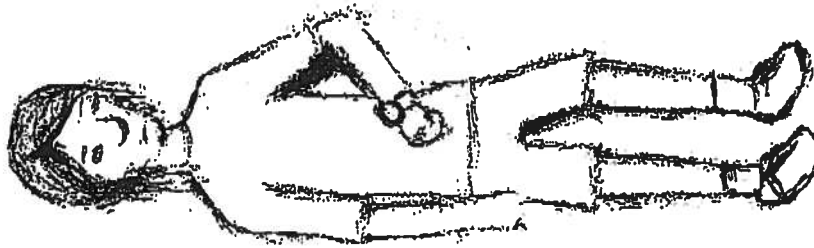
I kept yelling, "Wake up! Wake up!" She sprang out of bed as if she was a cat that was just sprayed with water. I laughed for a brief moment at her actions.



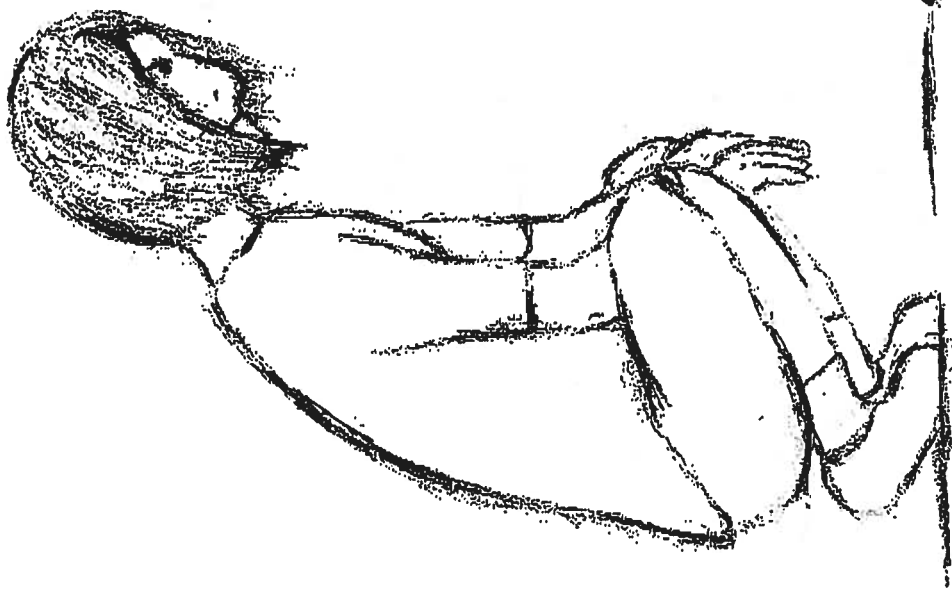
I told her to drive me on our quad. She replied in a tired voice, "Drive yourself or call your grandpa for a ride." I frowned at her and mumbled, "Okay then."



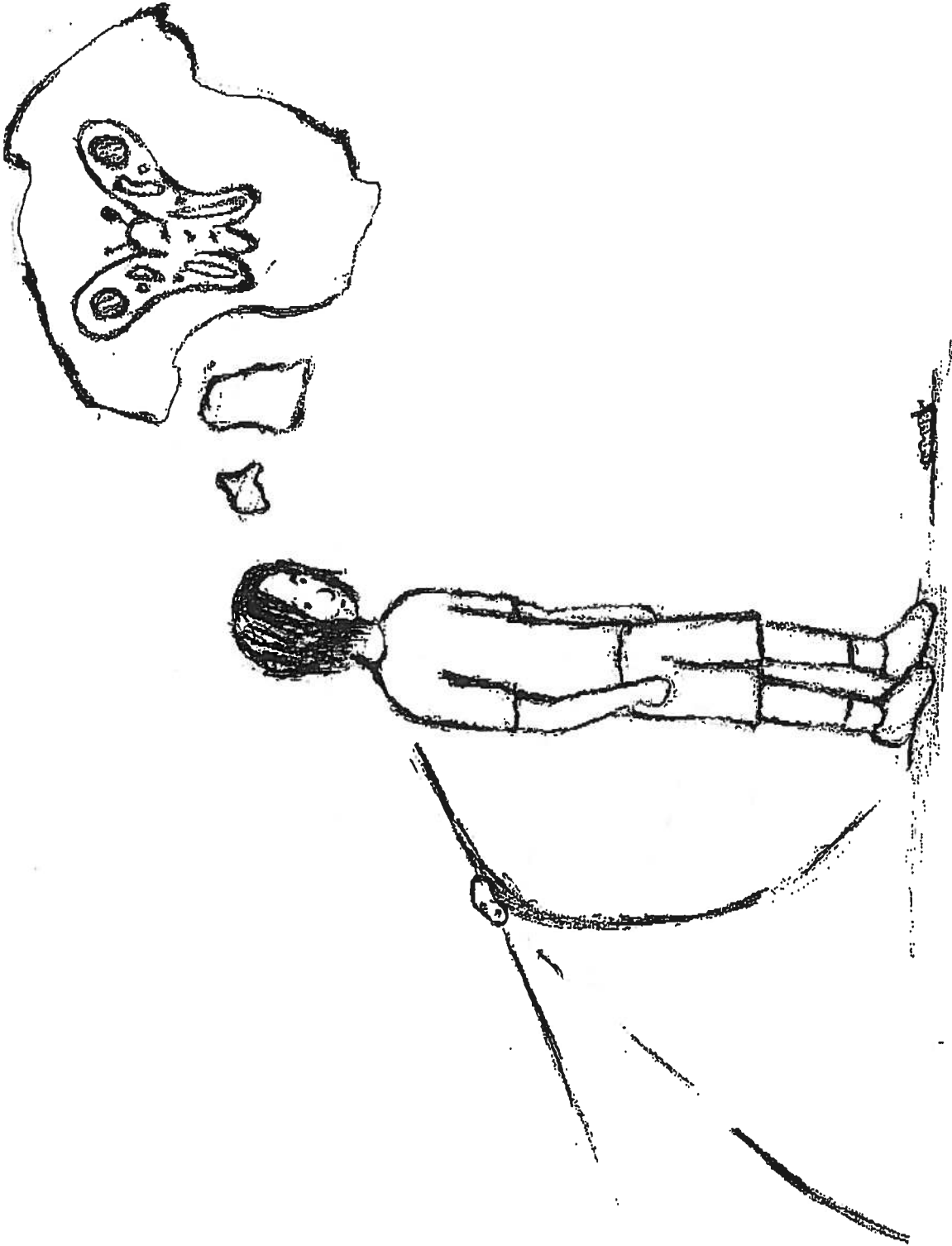
I phoned my grandpa and he said, "Okay, my boy."



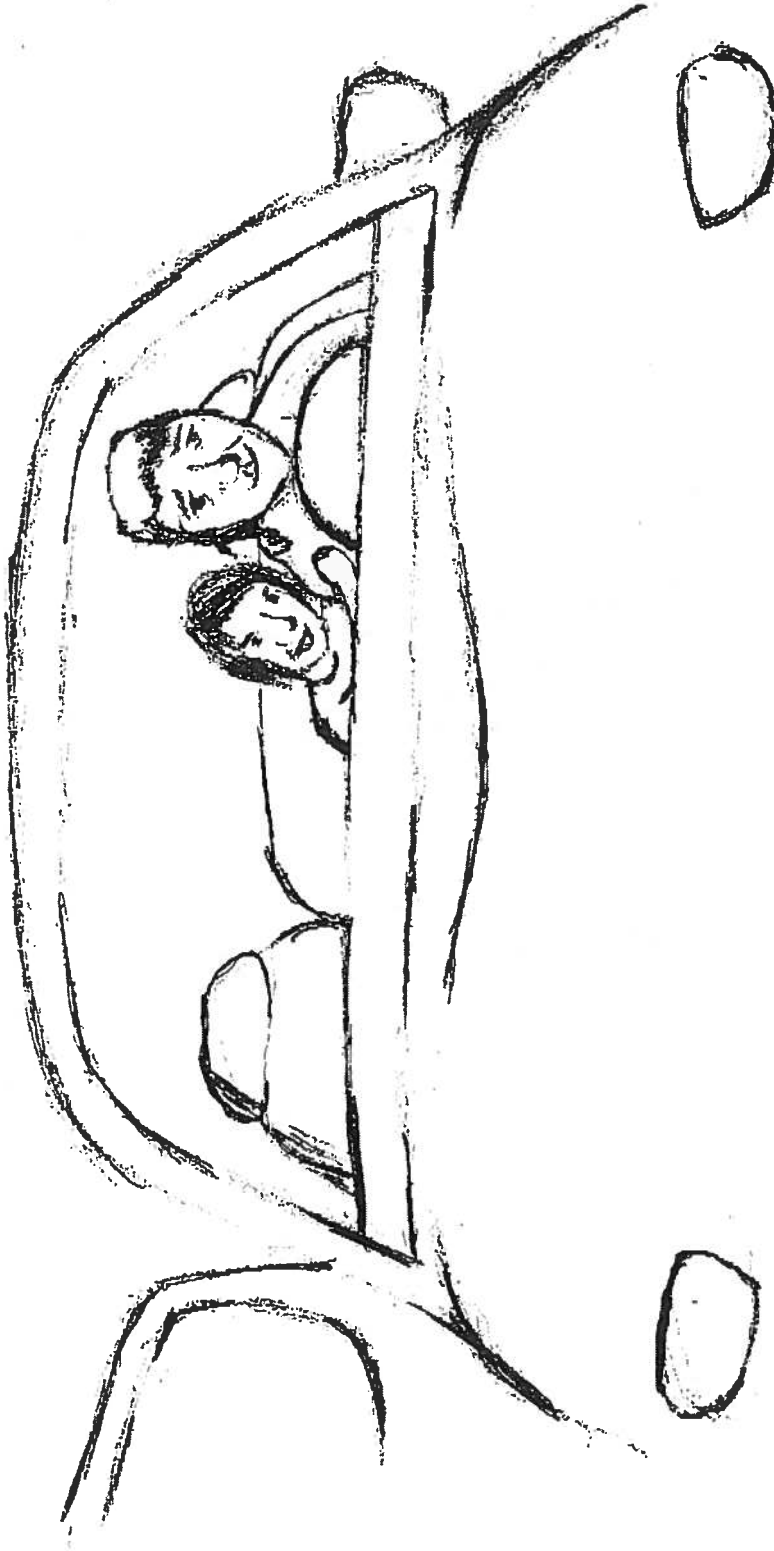
I rushed outside, toward the road to meet my grandpa. I thought I would get to his house faster if I did this. When I got to the road, I waited impatiently tapping my foot on the ground.



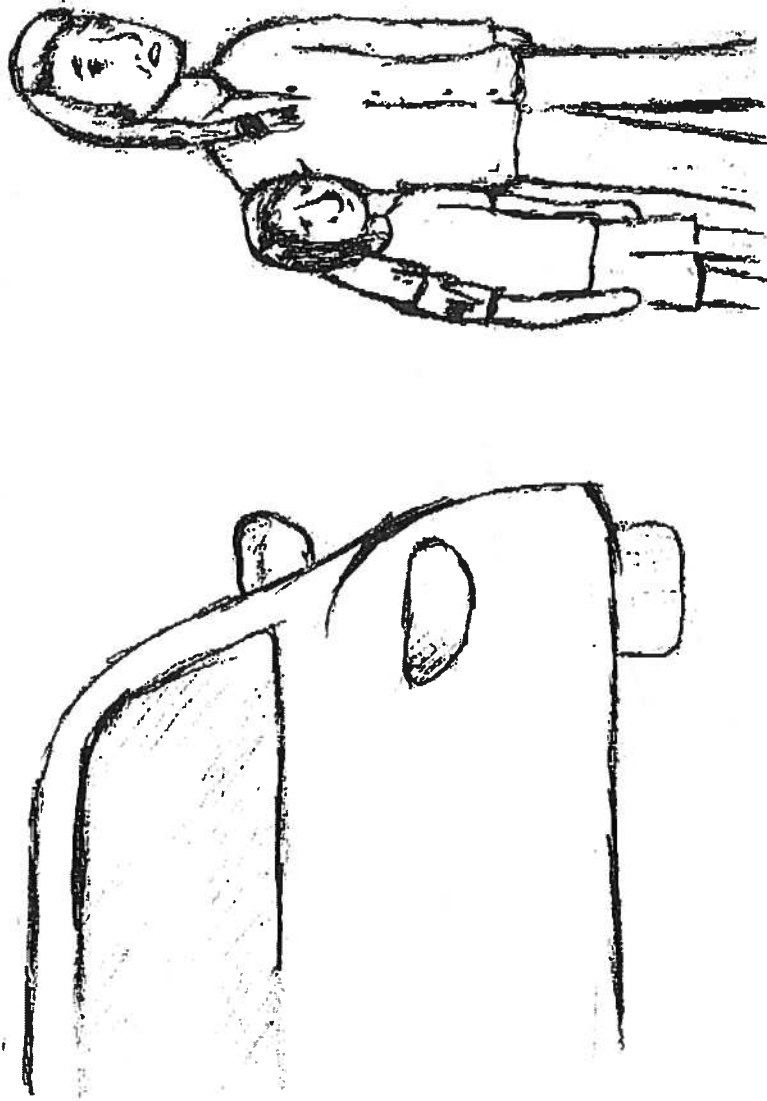
I needed something to entertain me while I waited. I spotted a caterpillar on the road. At first, I was going to squish it, but I remembered my grandpa's words, "We, Natives, are healers and take care of the land. We shall not harm nature, only help it."



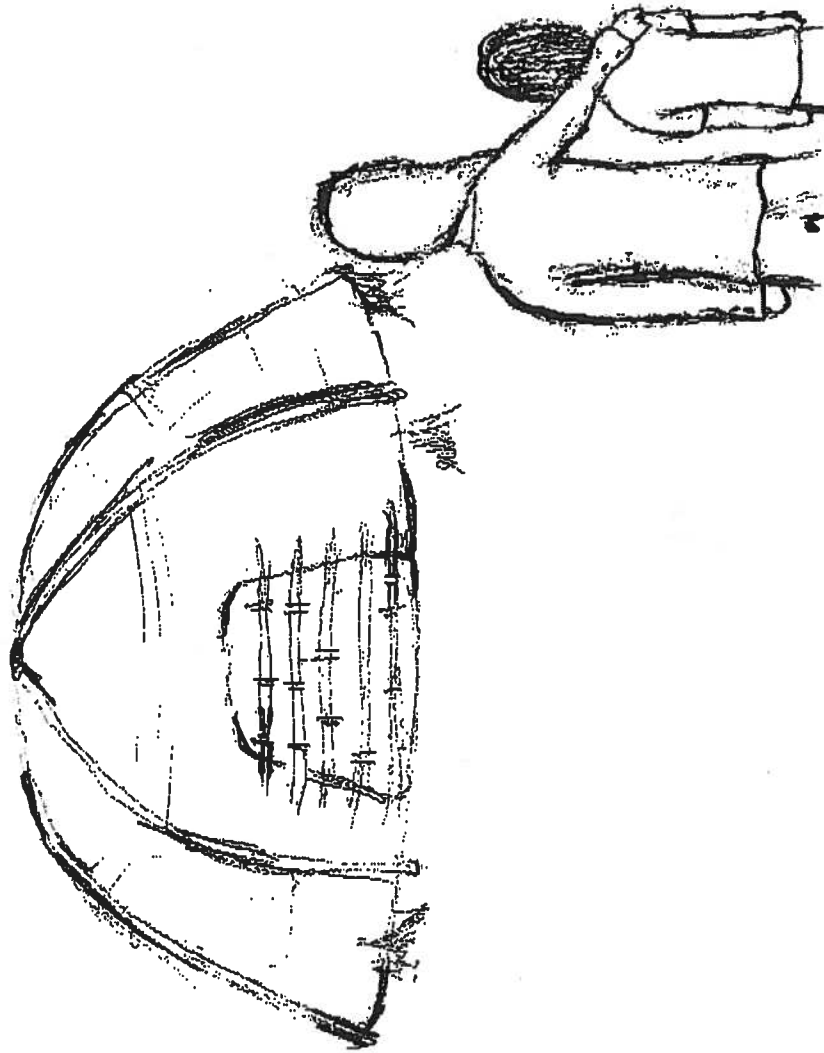
I carefully picked him up and helped him across the road and told him, "You owe me one." As he went crawling away, I wondered what kind of butterfly it would become.



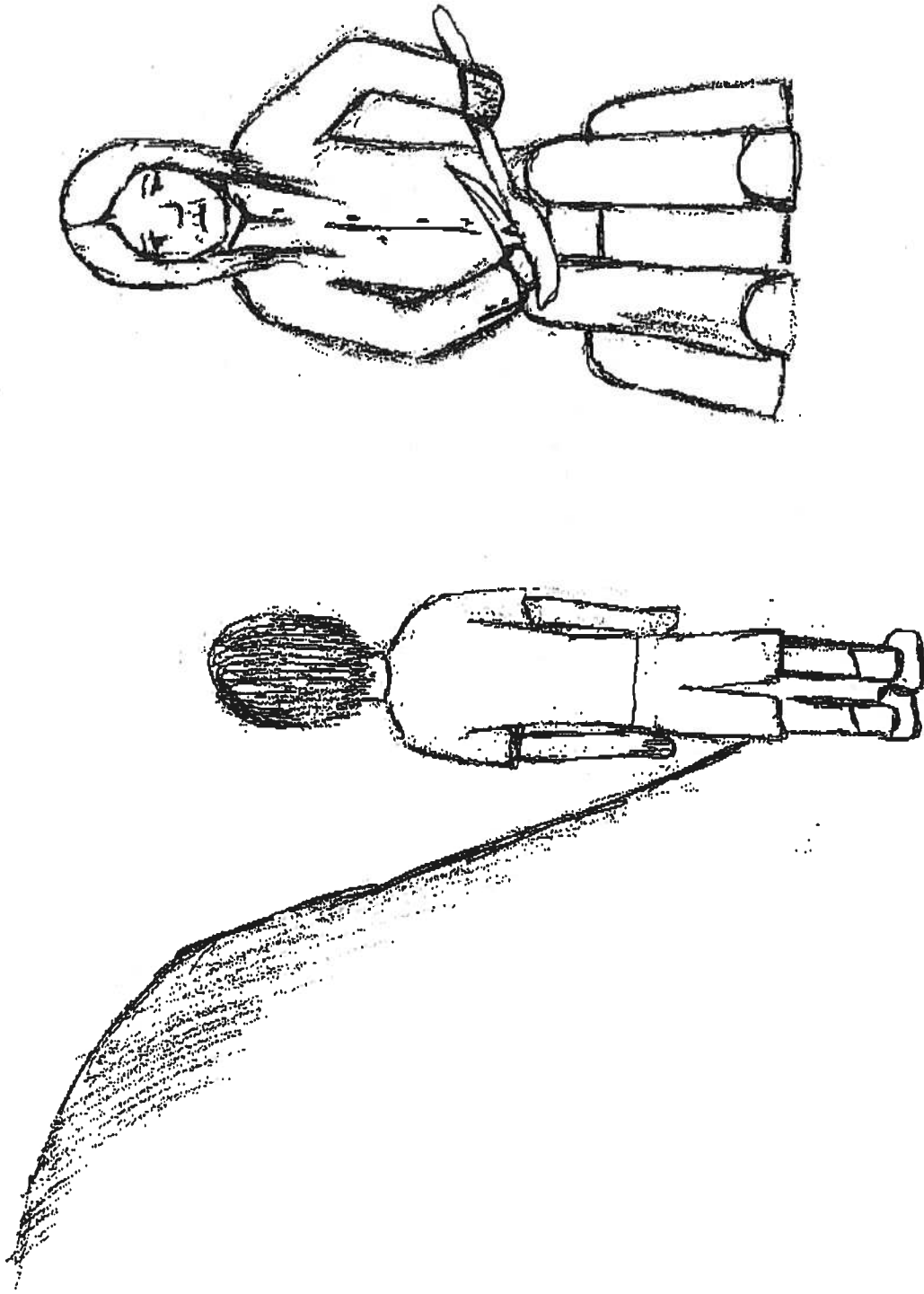
I heard the car approaching and I turned around with cat-like reflexes. I chase my grandpa's car like an excited puppy. My grandpa was smiling and giggling at me. I opened the car door and gave my grandpa a hug and yelled out, "Let's go." He laughed and we rushed back to his house.



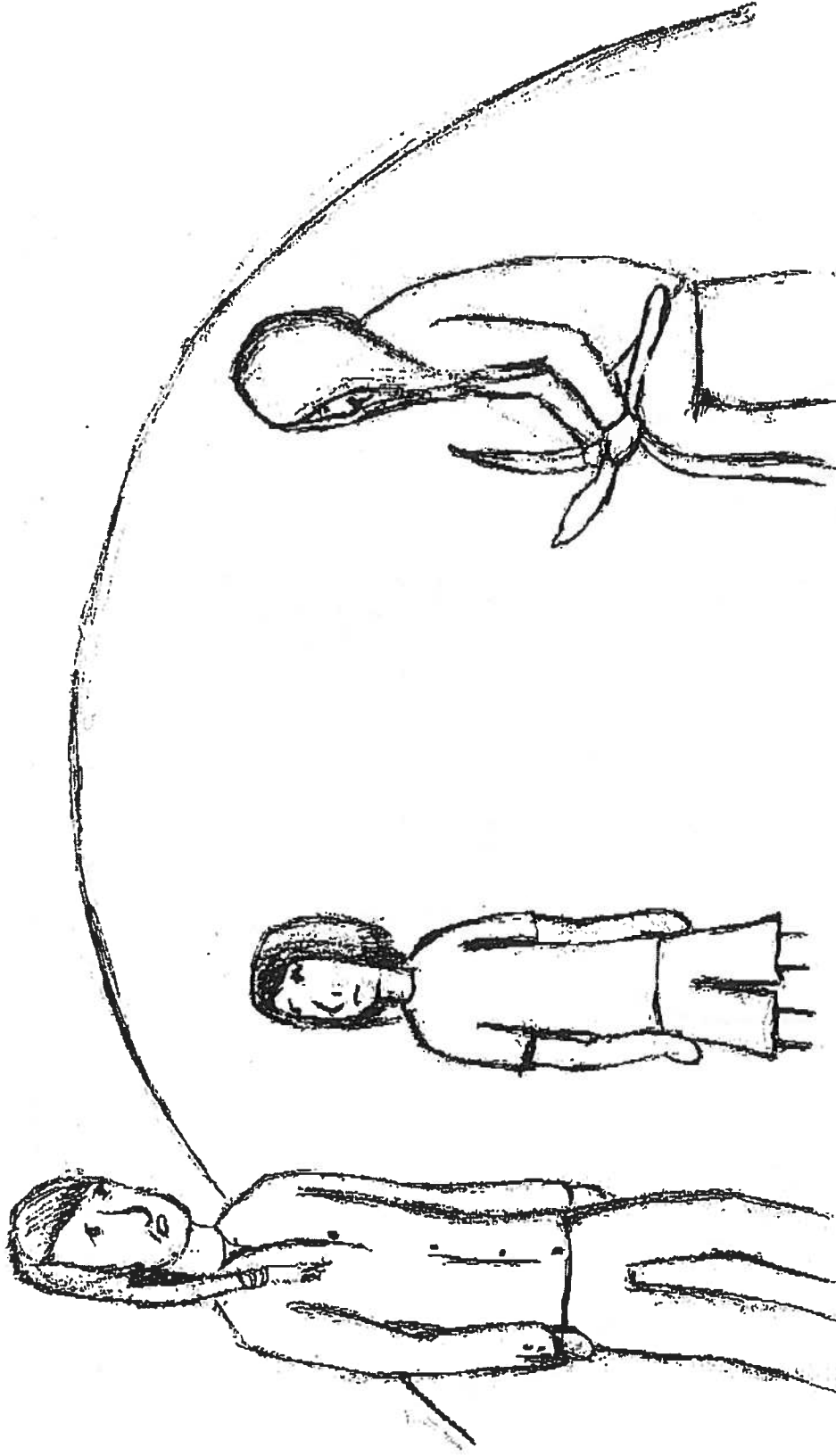
While getting out of the car, my grandpa Gordon told me my great-grandpa Old Zach would be joining us in the teaching. My great-grandpa Old Zach was a real wise man. He has so much knowledge, it scared me sometimes.



As we walked toward the sweat lodge, I asked him what it was used for. He answered, "It's for cleansing your body and getting in touch with your spirit." I was proud to be native and the grandson of a well-known elder.

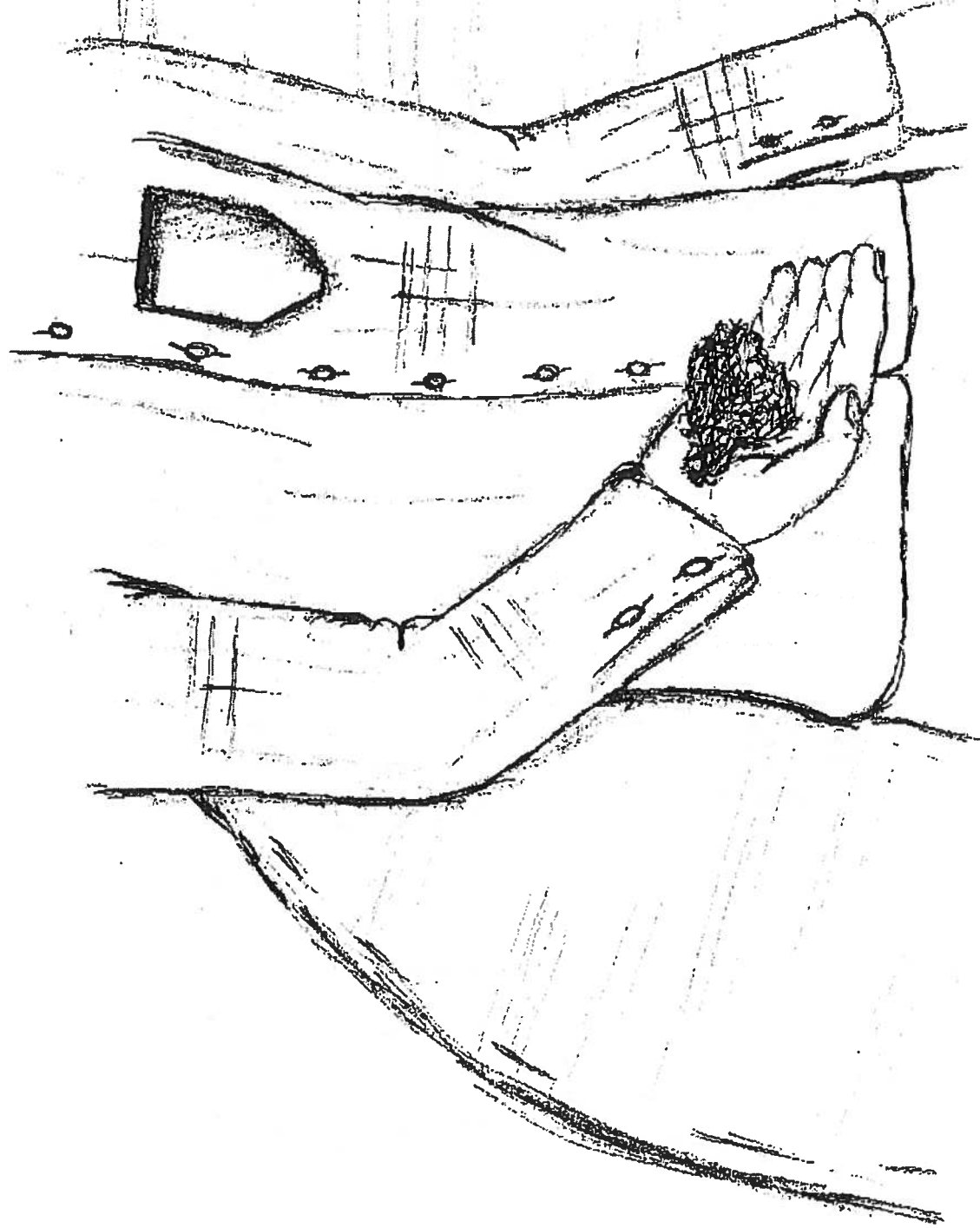


As I walked slowly around the dome-shape lodge, I spotted Old Zach sitting there, sharpening a stick. I stood frozen, watching him work.

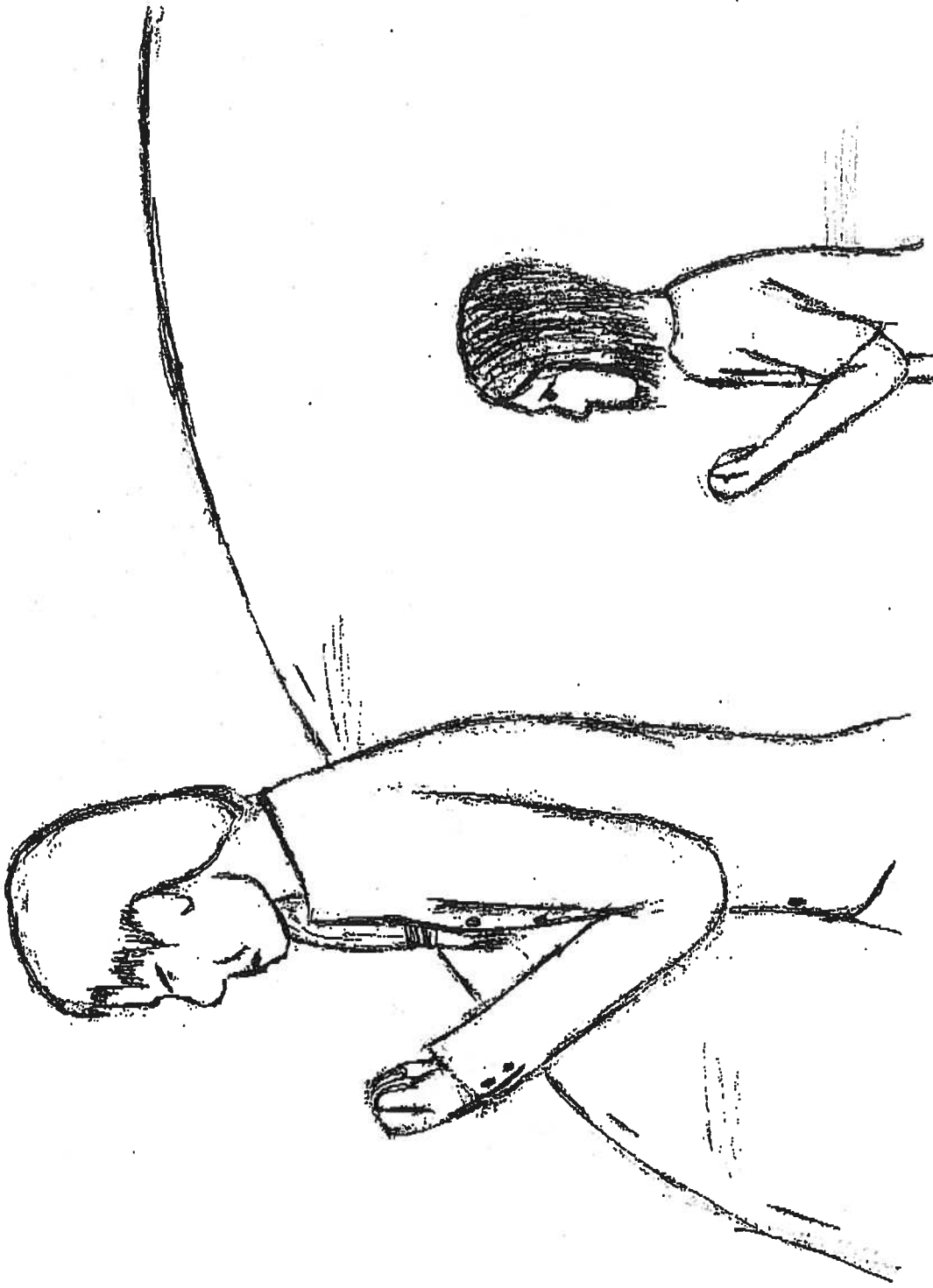


He spoke to me in our language, Ojibwe. I turned to my grandpa Gordon, and squeaking like a mouse, I asked, "What did he say?" My grandpa Gordon replied, "He said fo—."

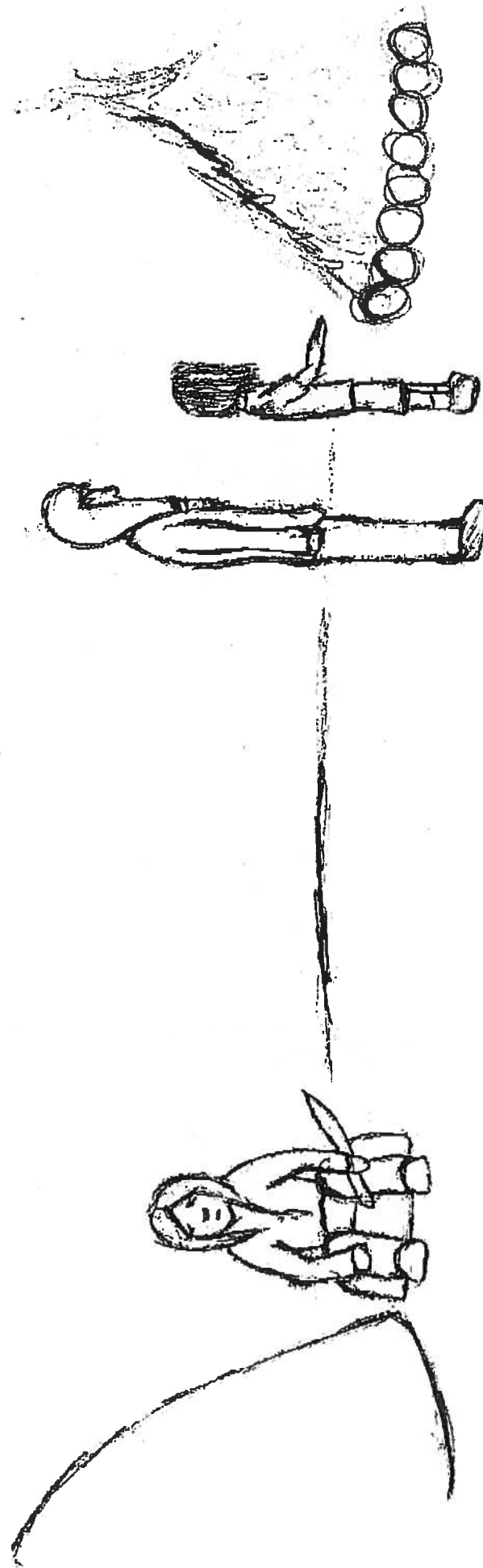
Old Zach said, "Stop, he'll know what it means when the time comes."



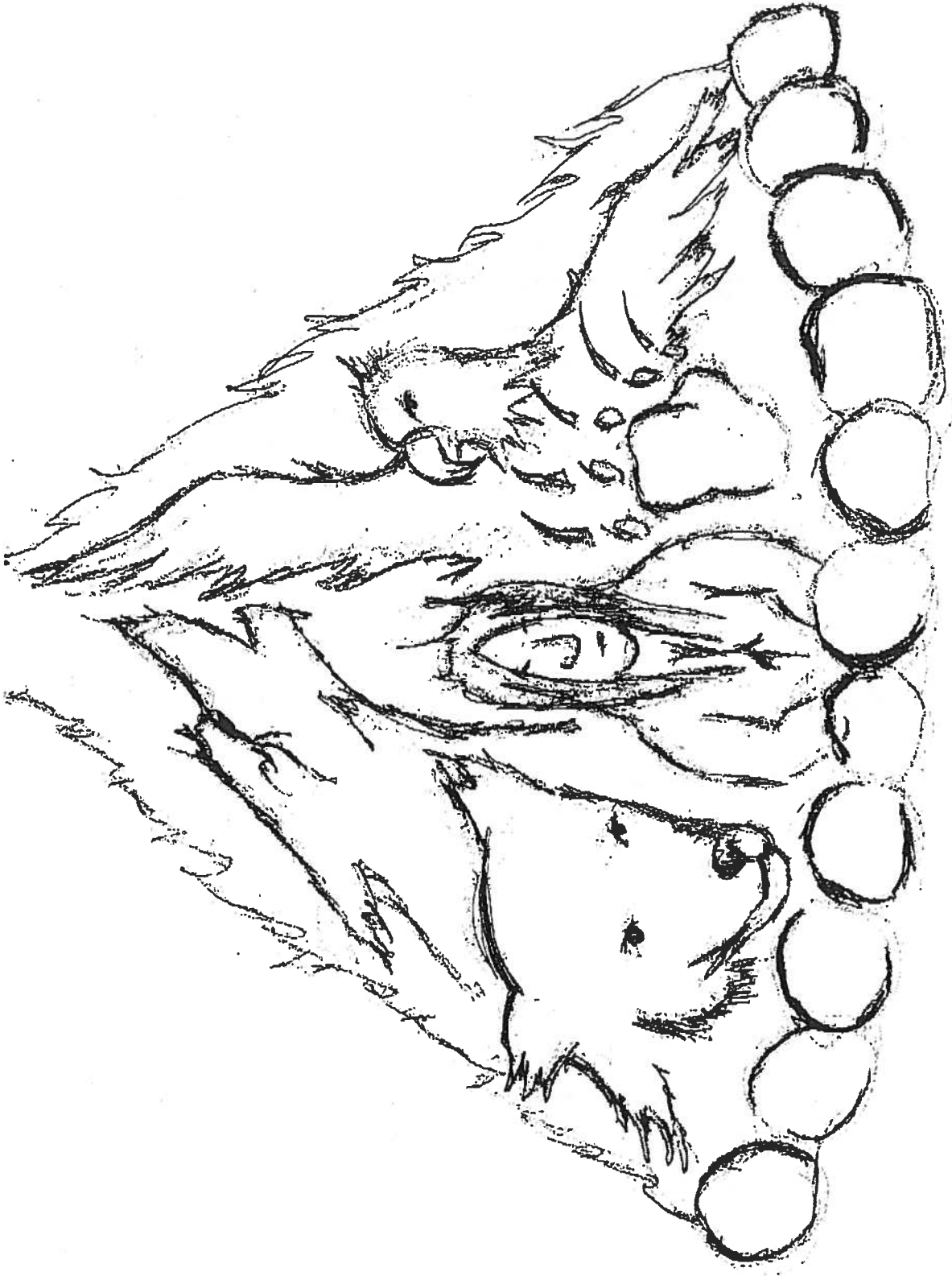
I'm the type of person that has to know everything. "I hate teases...." I said slowly. My grandpa Gordon looked at me and pulled out our traditional medicine, tobacco. "This is what you offer and pray with. Now then, let's begin," he instructed.



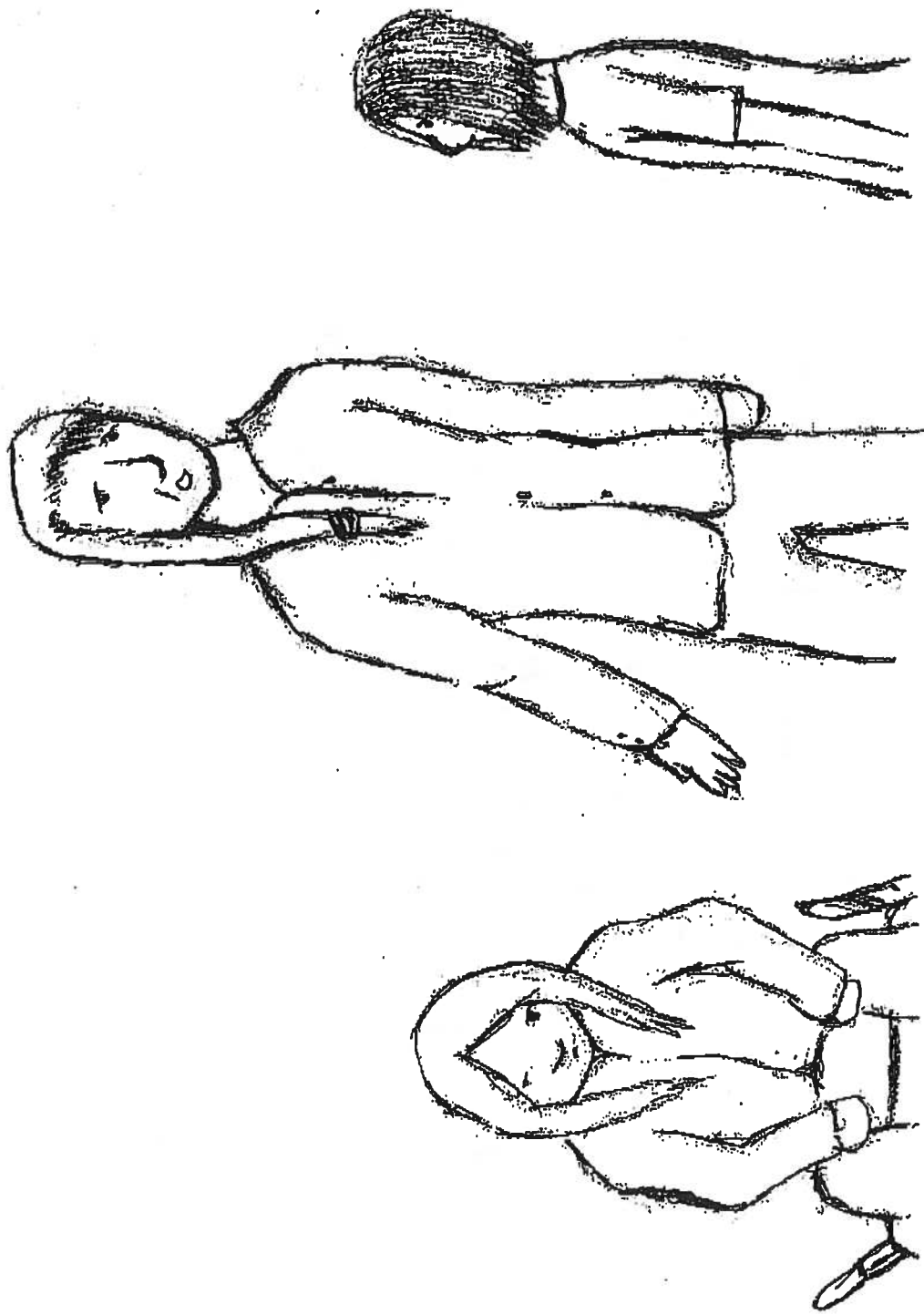
He told me to use my left hand to offer tobacco because it's closest to our heart and soul.
 He told me to follow his movements. I grabbed a pinch of tobacco and followed my
 grandpa's movements, west, south, east and north.



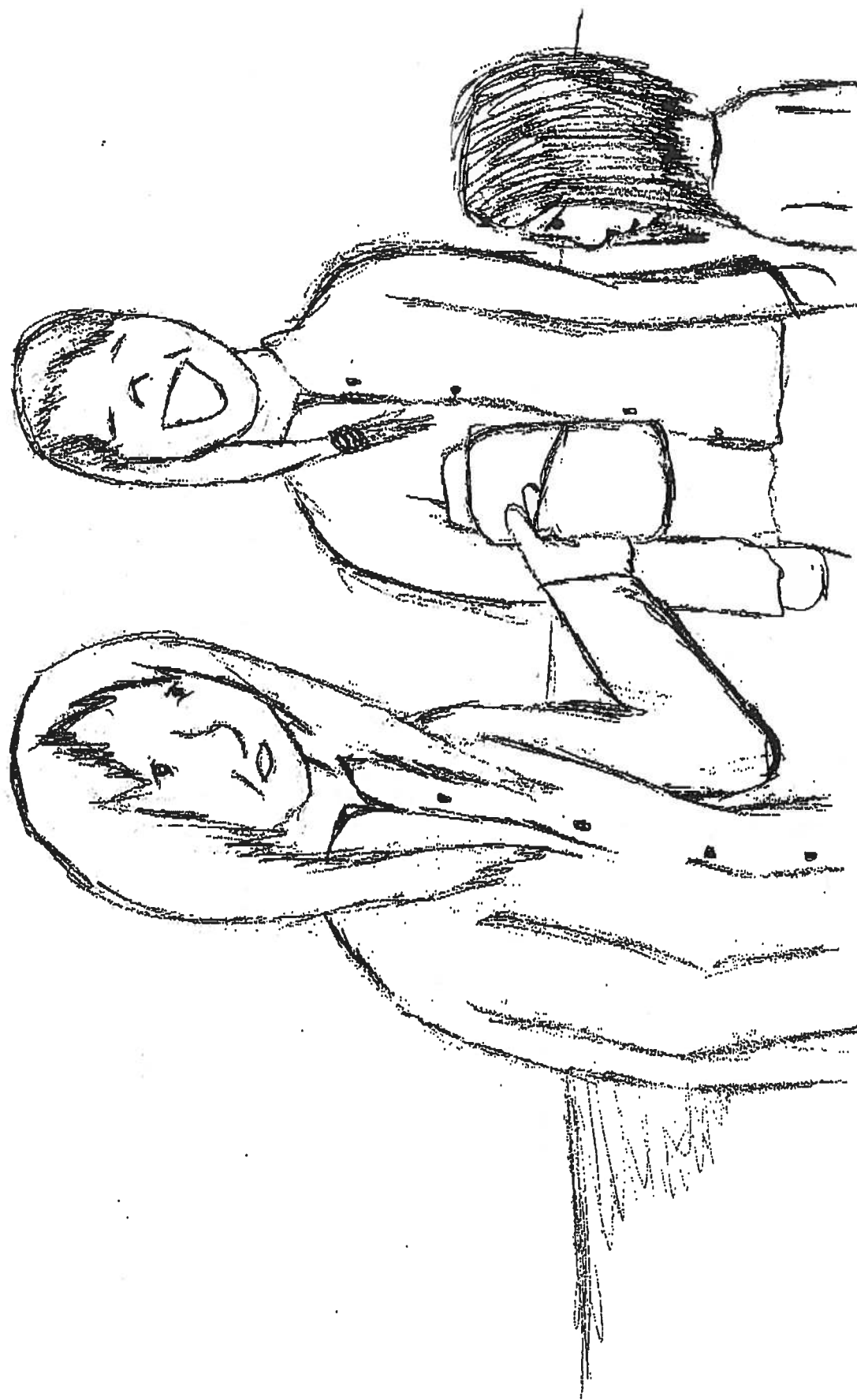
He stood still and told me, "Pray to the Great Spirit, Kitché Manitou and tell him to give you well mind and being." I prayed for a short time and made an offering into the fire.



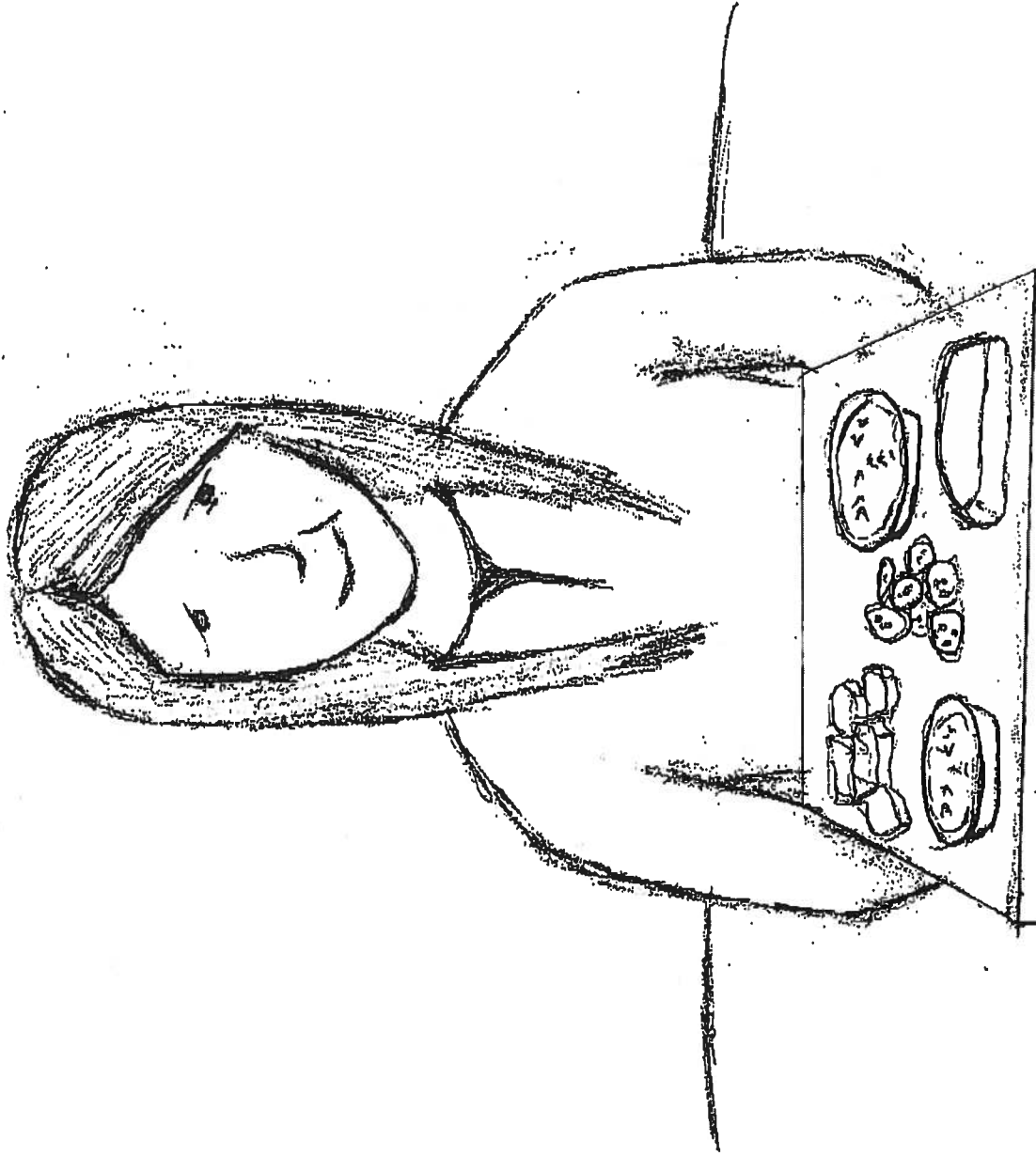
My grandpa asked me if I knew what was in the fire. "Rocks?" I replied, sounding puzzled. He said, "They are called grandfathers."



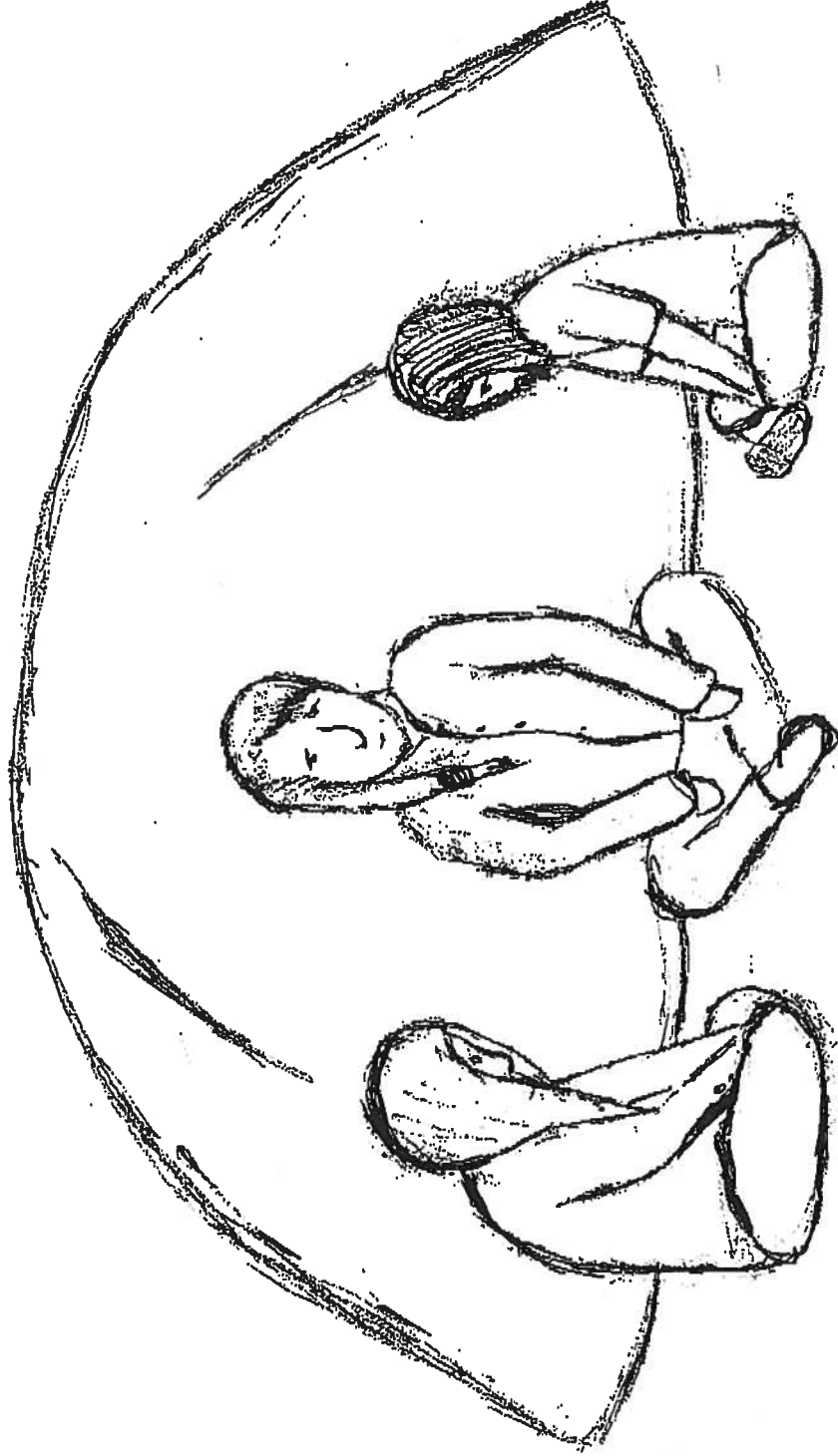
“Grandfathers,” I said. “Yes, my grandson, they are wiser than we all. They’ve lived and witnessed many things over hundreds of years.” My grandpa Gordon sure sounded wise! “Now that you know the praying, we can move onto the medicines. I’ll let Old Zach take this part,” grandpa explained.



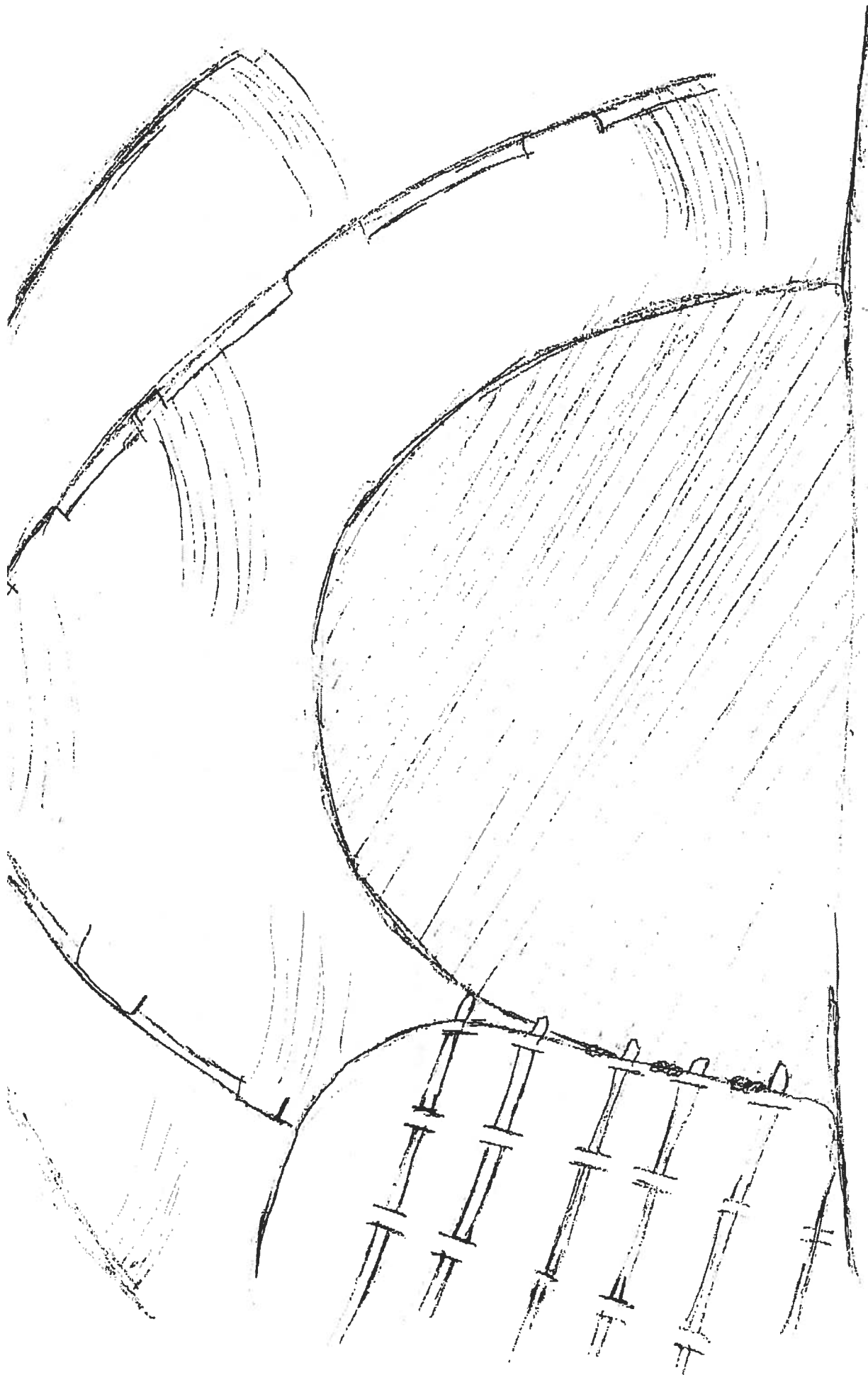
Old Zach stood up and said "You know what 'Vicks' is?" "Yes," I replied, "The stuff you use for colds?" "Yes, you see this? This is our 'Vicks' it's natural bear grease. It heals you ten times faster." My grandpa Gordon jumped in "and it makes you ten times greasier, too!" he laughed like a maniac at his own joke.



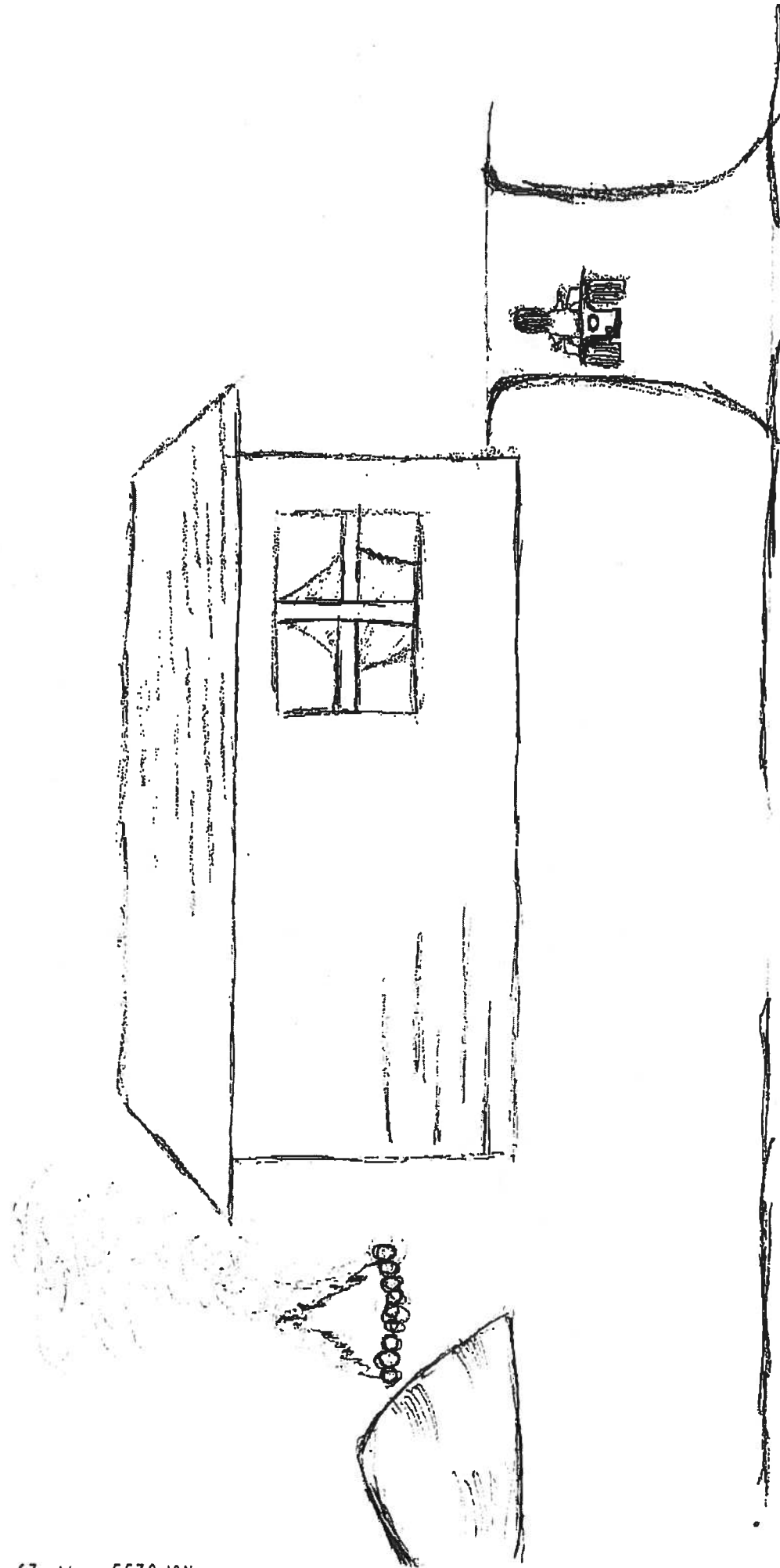
While Old Zach and I ignored him and kept on with the medicines, he was telling me what they are and what we used them for when sick. My grandma Lena came outside to give us lunch and did I love her desserts and treats!



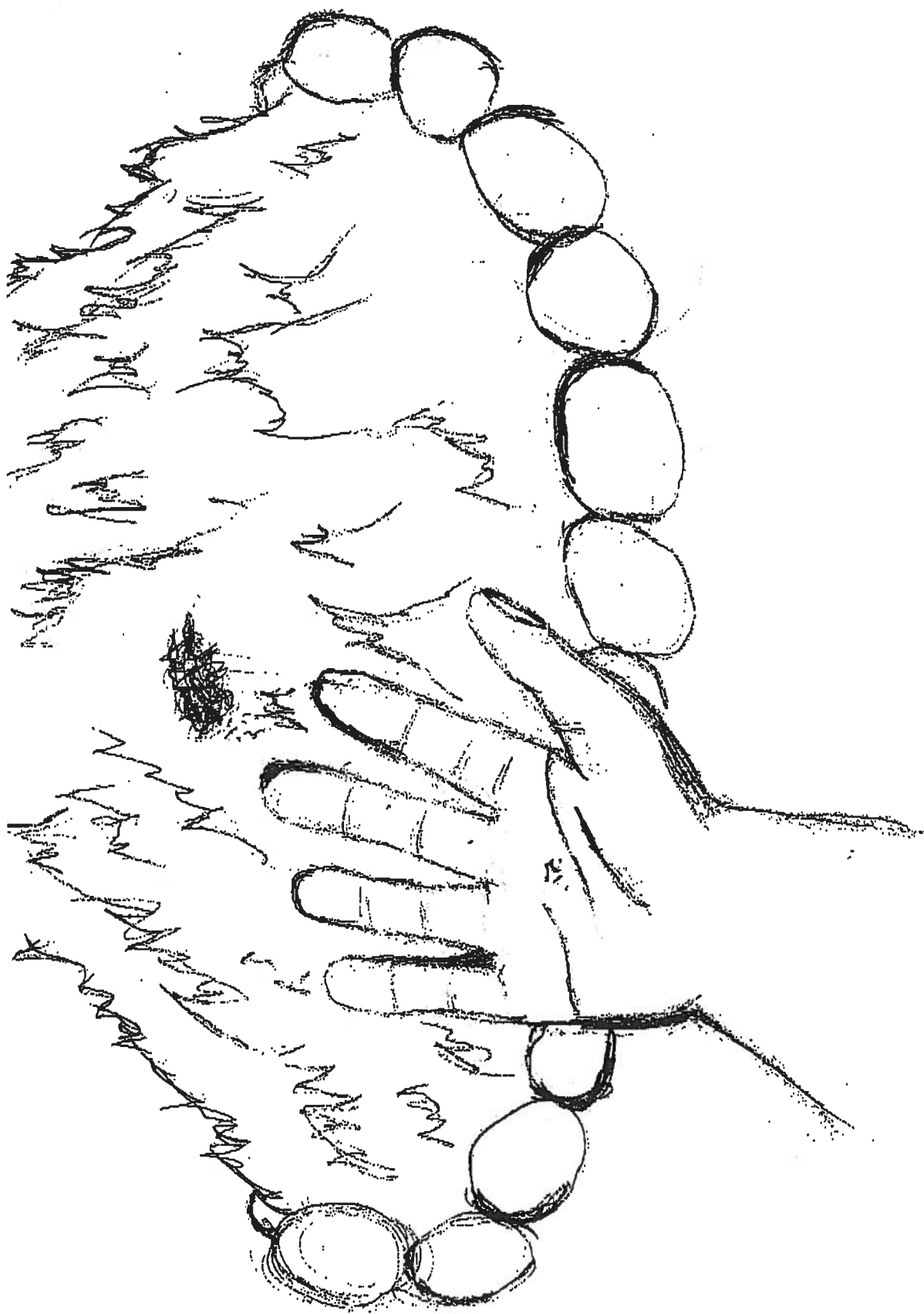
My Grandpa and I were eating and talking about what we would learn next. After lunch, Old Zach asked me "healer, harvester, hunter or caretaker?" I knew Old Zach's category wasn't there. He was a medicine man, bringing good or bad luck on people. But people knew him for the good part of it. His medicine could be why I feared him so much.



I was finished the day and was told I was going to get a spirit name tomorrow in the sweat lodge. Boy was I scared to go inside there, not knowing what I'll see!



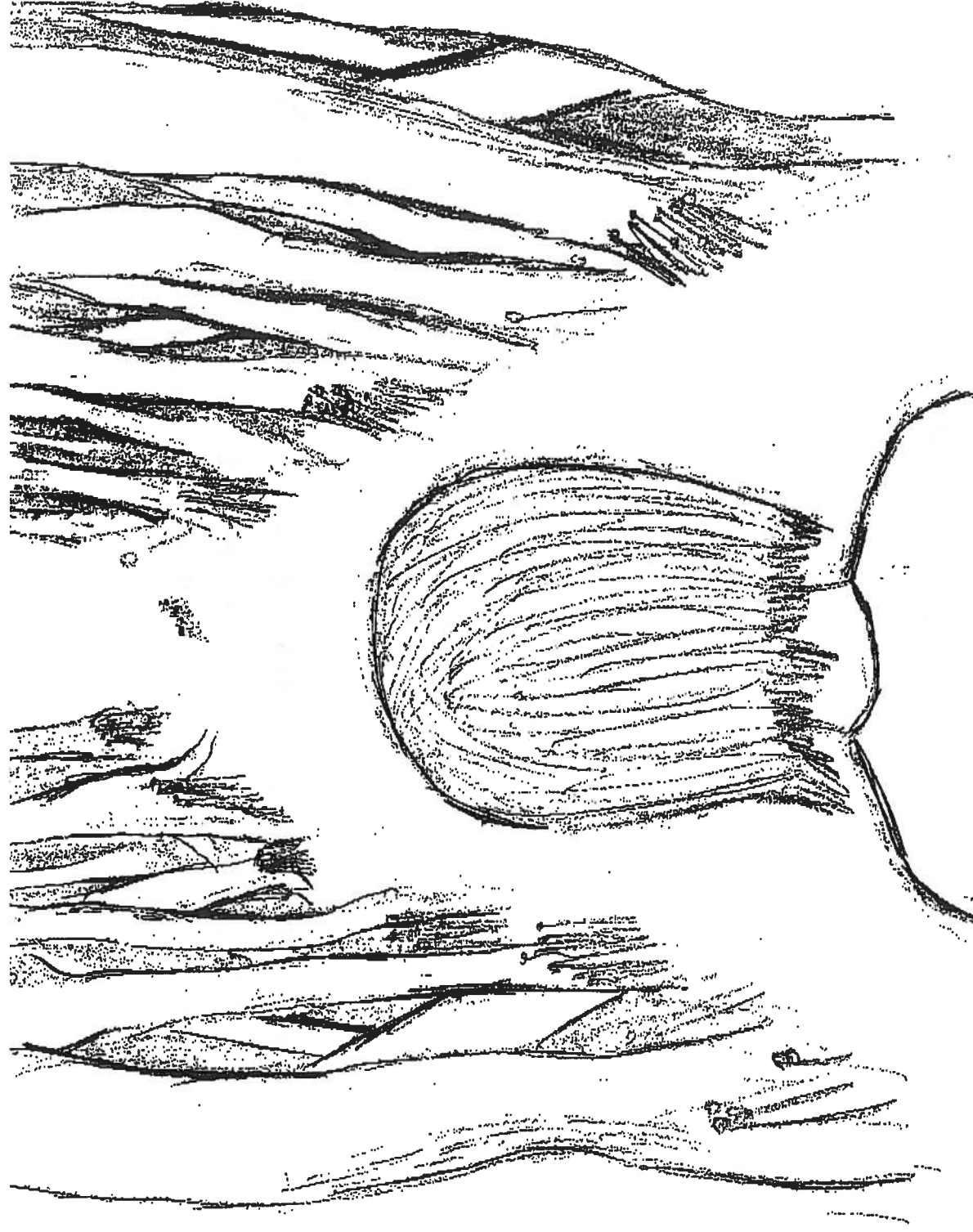
I slept worried and terrified. I woke up early and drove to my grandpas on the quad. When approaching my grandpa's house, I noticed some smoke and knew they were getting ready for the ceremony.



I jumped off the quad and ran to the back. My grandpa Gordon asked me if I remembered what he told me yesterday and I answered "yes." I grabbed a pinch of tobacco and let it drop out of my hand after I prayed. "Follow my steps," he instructed.



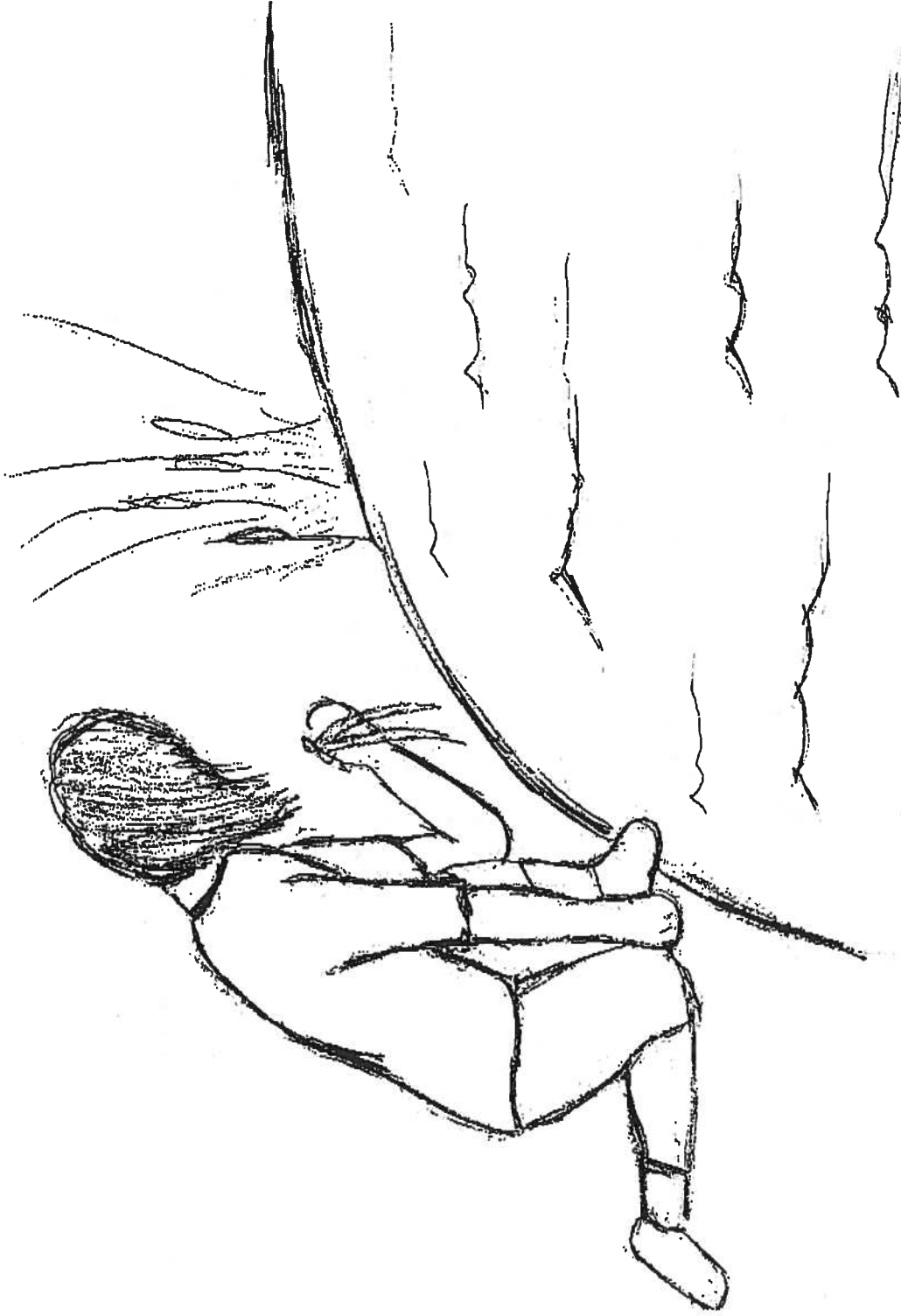
I followed him into the sweat lodge. It was very dark and I couldn't see my hands. My grandpa Gordon started to sing and drum. It was getting hotter every second as I looked around. I started seeing my grandpa's drum glow and white streaks were everywhere.



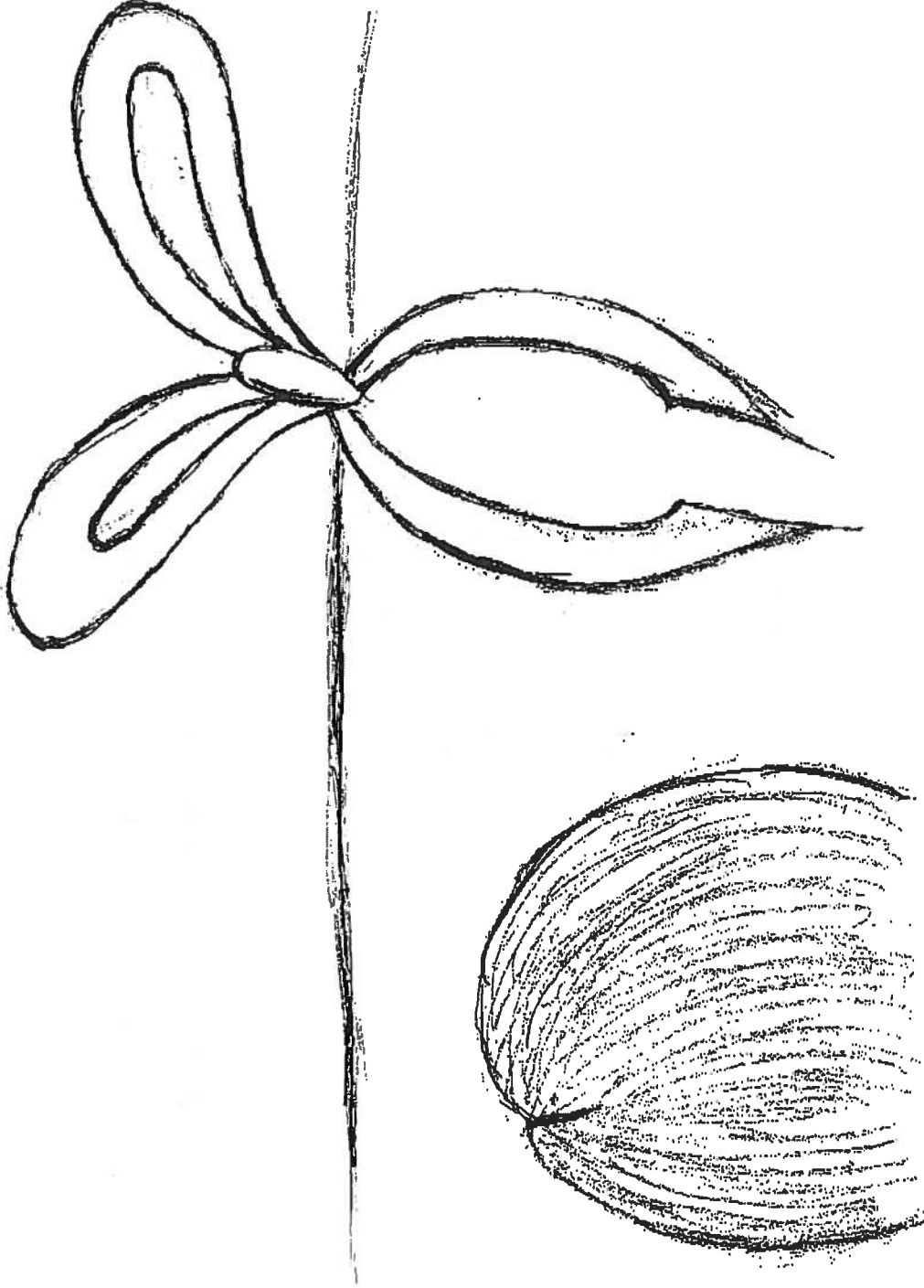
I got slightly terrified and felt myself slipping away slowly from reality. My experience was amazing and changed my life forever! I remember walking through the bushes lost and worried knowing I was missing something from inside. I searched and searched.



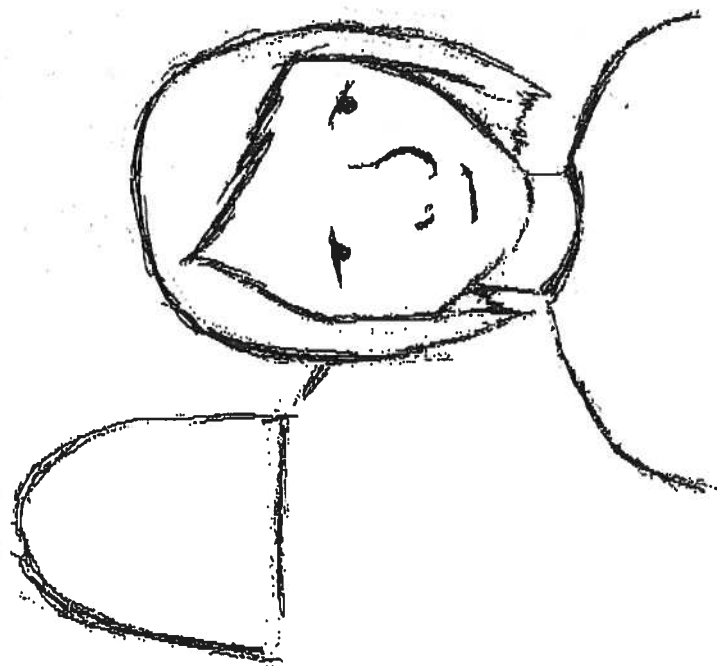
While searching, I came across multiple ribbons on the ground found in different places. I picked up a yellow one lying by a sleeping bear. Next, I picked up a green one, which was tied to a tree, then a red one lying beside a lifeless bison.



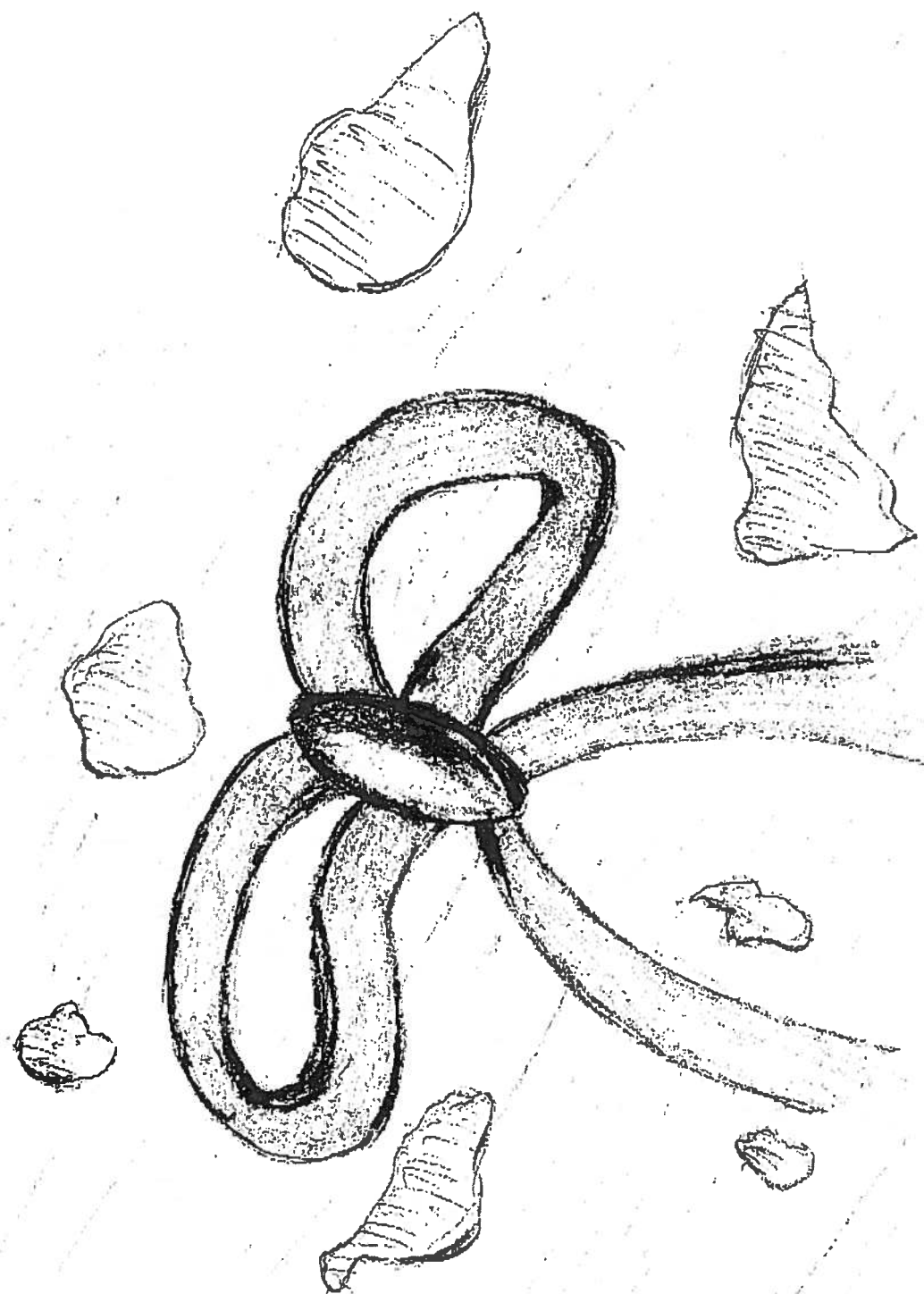
As I was finding these ribbons I was feeling more and more complete inside as if a void was being filled. I later found a blue and brown ribbon along a lakeside but they acted as if they were a fish. I fished it out like a bear and got them both after several tries.



I moved on and came across a ribbon that was orange and looked like a butterfly I was puzzled and figured out what my great grandpa Old Zach meant when he said “follow the butterfly, follow me” because Old Zach’s name was Butterfly man.



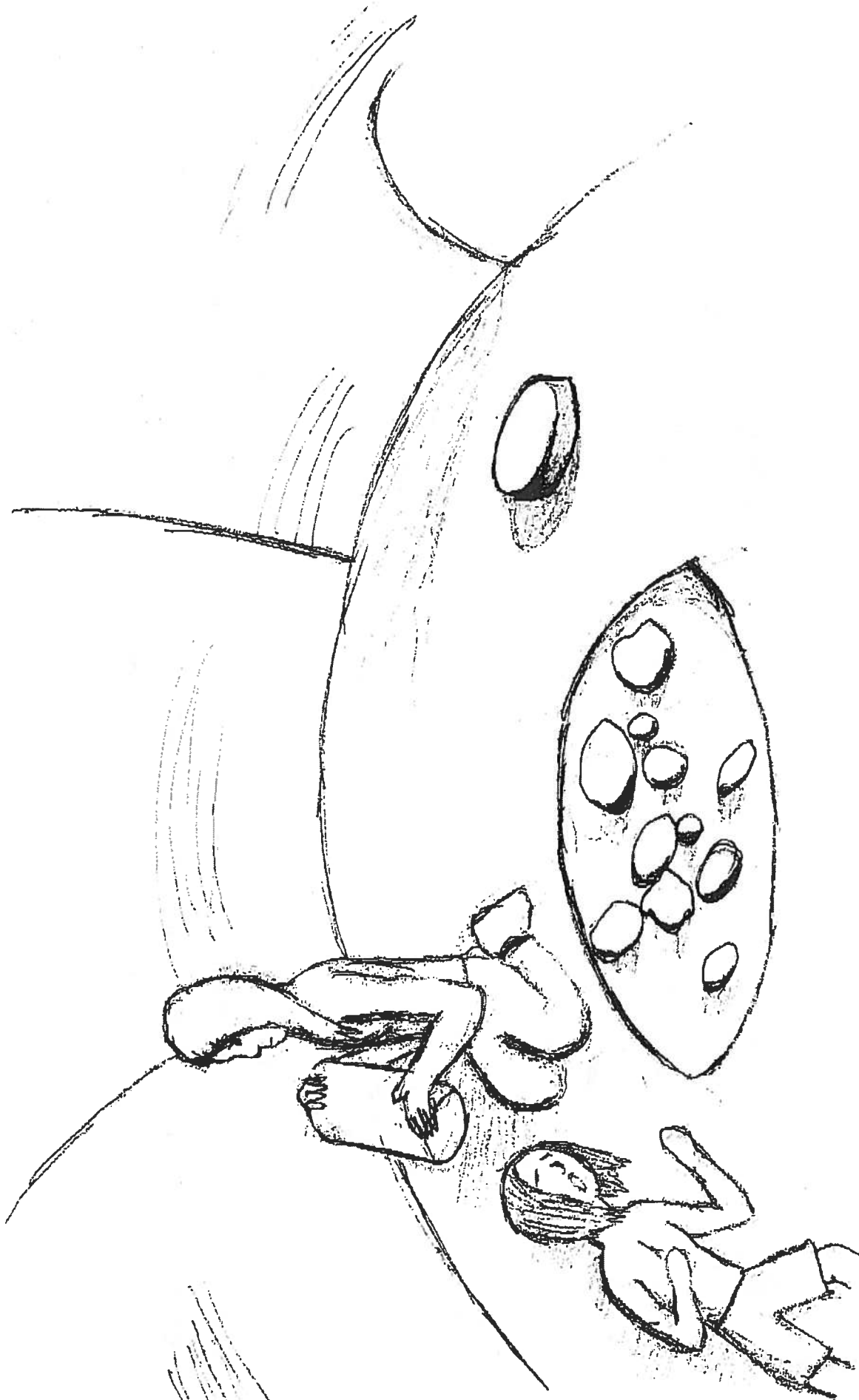
I ran and followed it to this dark black cave. The butterfly was a caterpillar again and I recognized it from the one on the road and told it, "thank you."



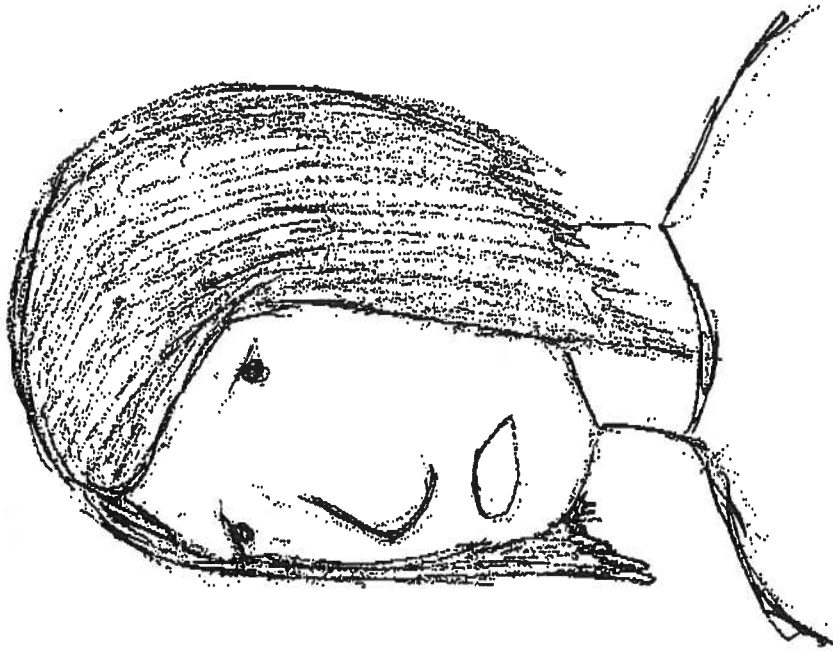
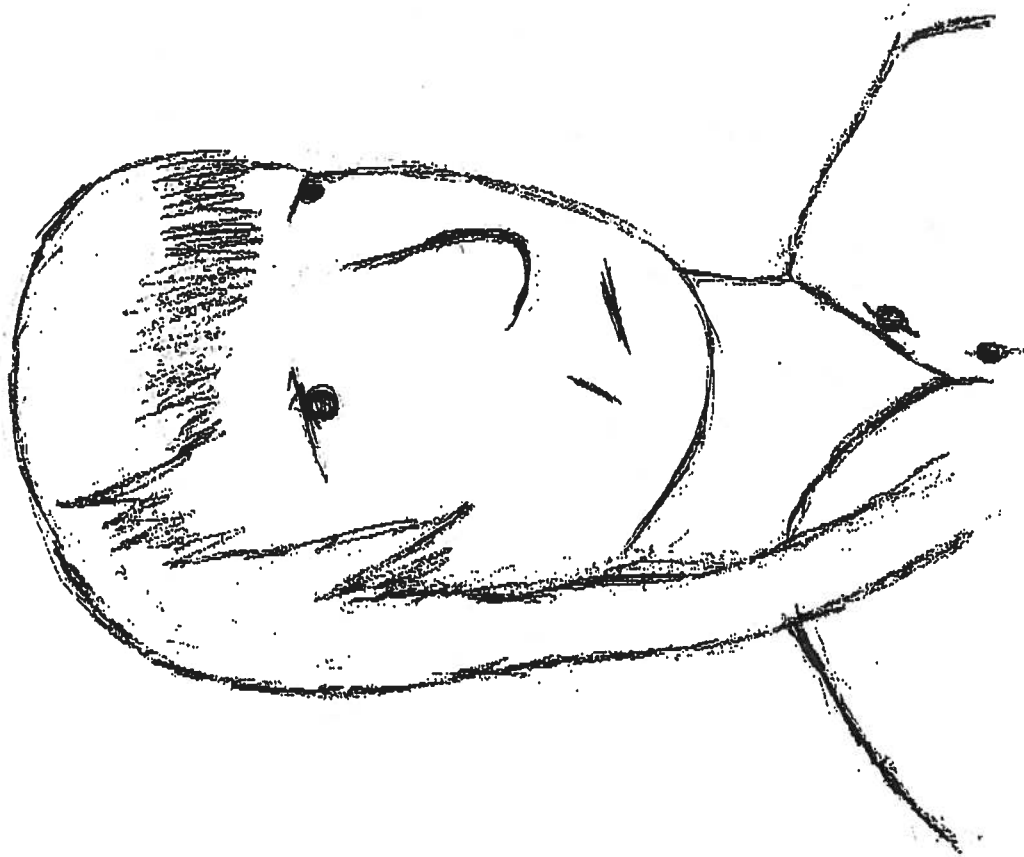
As I approached the dark abyss of the cave, I saw a black ribbon.



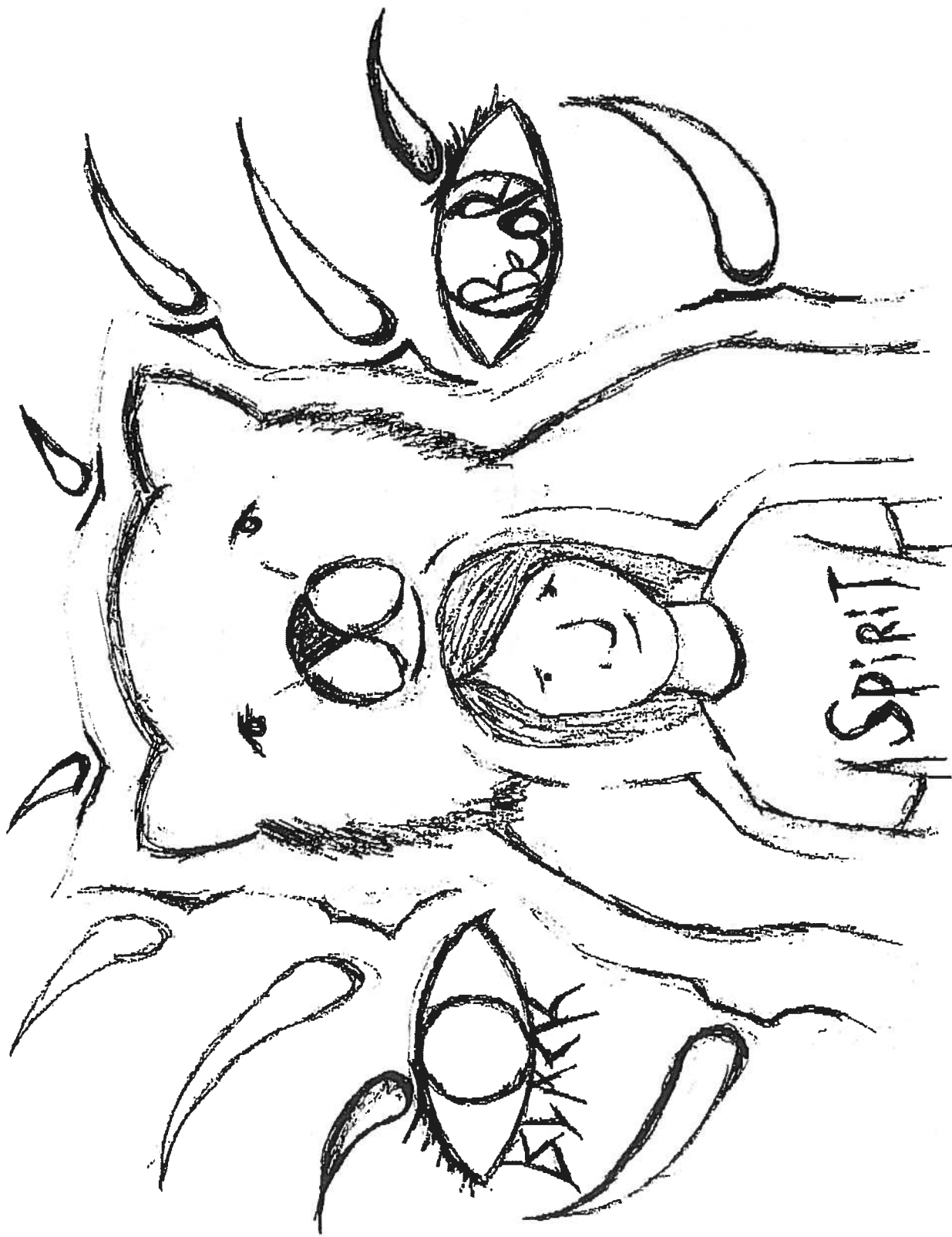
I ran to grab it, but as I grabbed it, I heard a loud growl. Looking up quickly I had seen a black bear charging right at me. As it jumped at me, I stared with fear and it felt as if the bear rushed into my chest.



Splash! "Wake up my boy!" my grandpa yelled. I opened my eyes "What happened?"
"You tell me!" my grandpa Gordon chuckled.



I told him my experience. He was proud of me and gave me my native colors, "yellow, green, red, blue, brown, orange, and at last black." By telling him what I experienced (in dreamland I call it) he knew what my spirit name should become. "Your spirit name will be Black Spirit Bear of the bear clan."



I was so proud and happy that day. Through that experience I felt complete and in peace which matured me into the man I am today.

Author Information

Hello. My name is Tommy Starr. I am a young Native man raised on a First Nation reserve most of my life. I have a passion for writing and my native culture. I respect both of these. I also wanted to share this significant experience with my readers.

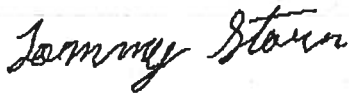
Since I was the age of four I was always curious about my culture. Countlessly, I would watch my Grandpa Gordon Brass and my Great-Grandpa Zack Contois working with medicine and sweat lodges. While growing up, I've learned about respect for people, animals and mother earth.

The teaching my grandfather gave me has helped me to make good choices in my life. I was able to sustain from alcohol, drugs and violence. I have to thank these teachings and my culture, I'm sure they led me to be a potential graduate this year. After I graduate I plan on joining the Canadian Armed Forces. I hope to continue my writing and hopefully share my experiences with my culture and the army.

In writing this short story, my intentions were to show how our culture, values and traditional teachings can lead you to healthy and respectful life choices.

I geared this short story to all ages to continue learning about our culture and traditional practices from our elders. A generation of our elders is slowly passing away and they hold a key to some of our important teachings. All cultures around the world need to embrace our elders' knowledge. This story is in memory of Zackery Contois, also special thanks to Gordon Brass who continues to teach me culture.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tommy Starr".

Tommy Starr

Illustrator Information

My name is Collin Chartrand and I am from Duck Bay Manitoba and currently I am in grade 12, and when I was chosen to illustrate this book I jumped on board.

To bring this story to life was very hard since I don't like doing things anyway, so everything had to be perfect.

I found this story very inspirational and very original, so coming up with the right drawings for the story came easily. Reading the story also gave me lots of ideas to put in and be free.

Also, having to deal the fact that the story was great and having to equal up to the hype was very motivating for me. What's also a bonus for me is that Tommy and I are really great friends so everything worked in a good combination.

Respectfully,



Collin Chartrand

