

# Time Travel Wheels



by Marie Slark, Pat Seth and Kimberlee Collins

Illustrations by Varvara Nedilska

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# **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to all those who lived, died, and survived this institution. You are not forgotten. Thank you to all those who supported survivors to tell their stories, including Marilyn and Jim Dolmage.



# **Acknowledgements**

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# Preface

The Huronia Regional Centre was a government-run institution for people labelled with developmental or intellectual disabilities. The labels people attract have changed since the opening of the institution in 1876 under its original name of the Orillia Asylum for Idiots. Young children and adults lived there. Some children were taken to the institution by their families who were told by doctors that it was the right thing to do. But the school was very overcrowded and unsafe. Many of the people who lived there were neglected or abused, and many experienced trauma. Trauma occurred because of the harms people experienced and because being institutionalized is traumatic. After its closure in 2009, survivors issued a class action lawsuit against the government of Ontario for the inhumane treatment at the institution. This story, although fictional, is based on the very real experiences of survivors. By sharing their story, they hope to shed light on the treatment of people labelled with developmental and intellectual disabilities, and to prevent future instances of neglect and abuse.





## Chapter 1



# Three Stories Tall

Bernard waved goodbye to his mother as he cautiously approached the school. He felt his stomach twist just looking at it—the old building was three stories tall, its towering size worsening his first day worries. Bernard had always disliked change, and this was the biggest change he had ever been through—everything around him was completely different. All his old friends were back home, and this school looked so much bigger than his last one. His old school was familiar, and he knew everyone there and he had seen all the rooms in the building. Every day the activities were the same, the people were the same, the building was the same. His routine was gone now, and he wasn't sure what would happen today. Trying to ignore the knots in his stomach, he wheeled closer to his new school and looked up at the tall, red brick walls with peeling trim. At the top, he read “Orillia Middle School.” At the corner of the building was an old, chipped brick that had 876 carved into it.

Bernard wheeled toward a rickety, gray picnic table and placed his backpack on its worn surface. He glanced at his watch, waiting for school to start. When his mom had



dropped him off that morning she had wanted to go in with him, but Bernard told her not to. He didn't want the other kids at school to make fun of him, and he was already worried that he wouldn't make any friends. Now he wished that she was there with him, to reassure him that everything was going to be alright. He was whispering this to himself when he heard a girl's voice shouting from behind him.

"Hi there! Are you the new kid?"

The girl's voice was loud, and Bernard covered his ears with his hands. The girl ran over to the picnic table and sat down across from him, smiling widely. She threw her backpack on the ground and swung her feet back and forth under the table while she talked.

"I'm Jasmine, but everyone calls me Jazz. Did you just move here? My house is just down the street. I've lived there my whole life. When did you move?" Jasmine raced through her questions and nodded her head toward the new subdivisions dotted with saplings. The houses all looked the same. They were squished together with concrete steps and fake brick fronts. Jasmine talked so fast, Bernard had trouble understanding what she was saying. After she spoke he paused for a minute to grasp what she had said. "I'm...I'm Bernard. I moved here two weeks ago," he stammered. "Do you like this school?"

"I like it here. The teachers are nice and I have friends

here,” she said. “I have art class today, which is one of my favourite classes. But all of my classes are in the resource room, yours will be too probably. Recess is really fun; we play lots of games. Yesterday we played catch and the day before that we played tag. You can play too if you want. Since it’s your first day, you can probably choose the game today.”

“Okay, I like hide and seek. Maybe we can play that,” he replied, more evenly this time. Jasmine smiled even wider, if possible. “I love hide and seek! Can we take a walk though? I don’t want to sit anymore.”

They walked in circles around the school for a while, Jasmine chattering happily the entire time. She told him about everything from the school, to her brothers, to her favourite foods and games. Bernard couldn’t understand how anyone could talk so much and still keep finding new things to say. Still, he didn’t mind her talking and enjoyed listening to her. It distracted him from his worries and even made him think that the new school might not be so bad after all. Jazz seemed to like it there, and aside from her outgoing nature they seemed to have a lot in common—they liked the same subjects, read the same books and even their families sounded alike. As they walked around the school, more and more kids arrived and gathered in groups at the front of the building. They laughed and talked, and some of them played hopscotch or traded cards while they waited for the bell. Bernard and Jazz ignored them and kept walking around the school,

chattering happily about all sorts of things.

RRRRRRRRRIIIIIIINNNNNNGGG!

Both kids jumped at the shrill sound of the bell, and they quickly ran toward the school's back entrance where there was a ramp. Jasmine took the stairs two at a time, her black braids bouncing behind her. Bernard shoved his bag on his lap and made his way toward the blue steel ramp. The ramp was shaky and steep, and it was difficult to hold onto his bag and wheel himself up at the same time. "You want some help? The teacher hates it if you're late. I was late last week and she told my resource teacher and then the resource teacher called my parents. Ugh! I got in so much trouble. But we could just tell her that it took too long to get up the ramp."

Bernard nodded and Jasmine grabbed onto Bernard's push bar. Because the ramp was so steep, Jasmine needed to run to get Bernard and his chair moving.

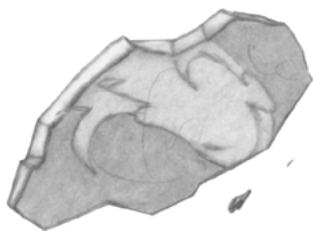






## Chapter 2

**1876**



Suddenly, Bernard's chair began to shake. It shook so hard that Jazz had to tighten her grip on Bernard's push bar and grab onto the railing with one hand. The shaking went up Jasmine's arms and took over her until she lost her balance and stumbled. She let go of Bernard's chair, and he started to wheel down the ramp. Bernard's wheelchair rolled backward, faster and faster toward the pavement. He watched as Jazz fell to the ground ahead of him, her backpack flying through the air as she collapsed. Just then, the steel ramp shattered into a million pieces as if it was made from glass. Shards flew in every direction as if gravity didn't exist. Bernard fell on his side, and watched everything tilt as pieces of blue steel filled the air. Then everything went black.

Bernard could barely open his eyes. His stomach rolled, and he thought he was going to be sick. He slowly opened one eye, and then the other. His stomach rolled again. The brilliant sunlight startled him, and he squinted, unable to see anything. His head lay on the back of his chair, and as he looked up at the blurry sky, his vision adjusted and clouds began to take shape. He lifted his head to see

Jazz lying on the ground a few meters ahead of him. She squinted, lifted her head, and shakily stood up.

“Did we hit something? Wha...Wha...What happened?” Jasmine said while shaking her head. Bernard sat staring at the school with his mouth wide open.

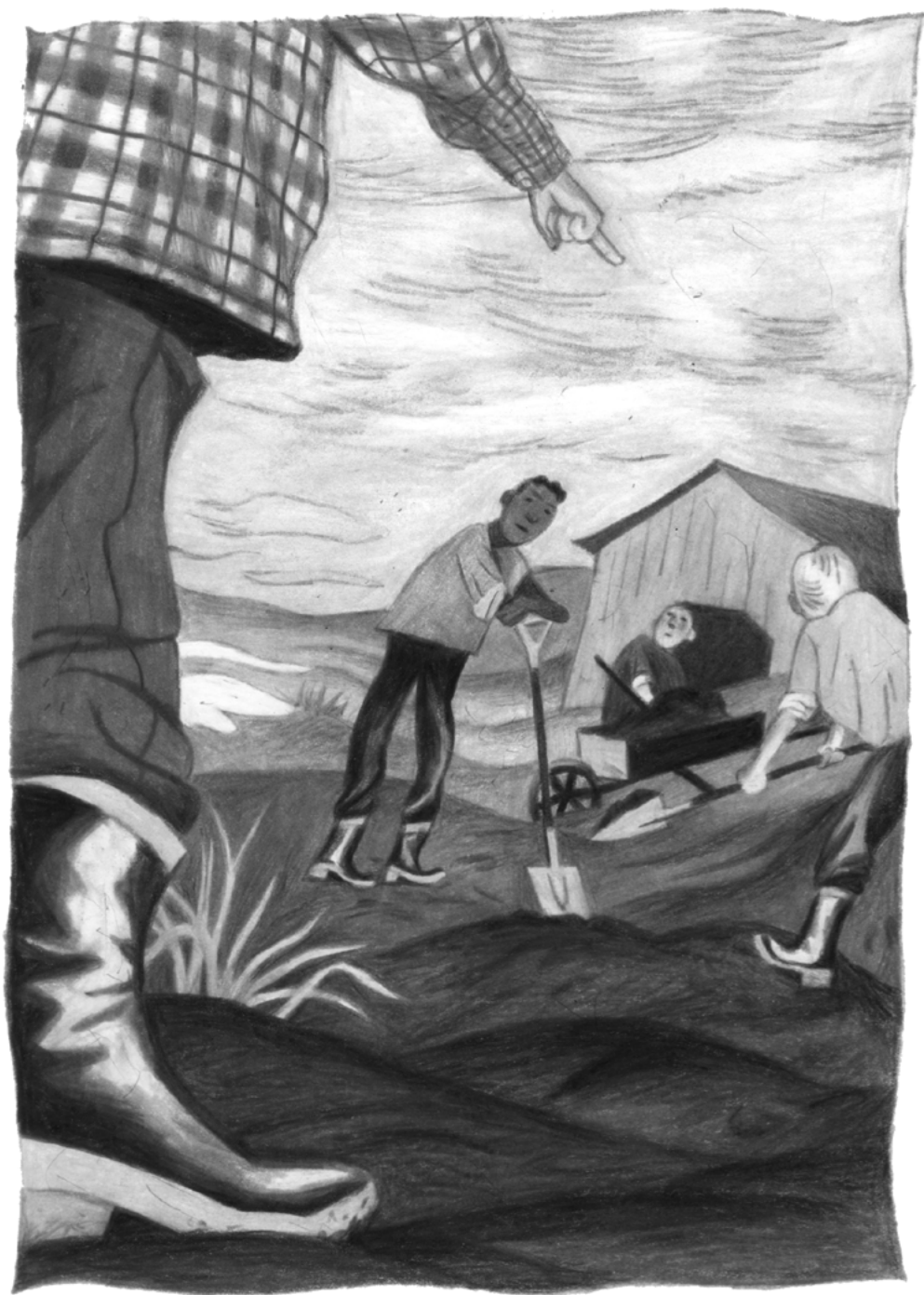
The looming red brick walls with white trim were still there, but the new addition and ramp were gone. There was no longer a sidewalk next to the school, but instead a large, uneven, grassy lawn. The nearby houses had disappeared. In their place were several smaller buildings and a large wooden barn. There were miles and miles of manicured grass and the driveway seemed to curve on forever. It seemed to be the same school, but everything around it looked different, as if they had traveled to some sort of alternate universe.

“Where are we?” he said. He looked back toward Jazz, who appeared just as confused as he was. “I don’t know,” she said slowly, “Maybe this is a dream.” She spoke in a quiet voice for the first time since Bernard had met her. Her lack of confidence made him uneasy, and he kept looking at her, hoping she would say something so that he wouldn’t have to.

Instead, she looked at her arm and held it up in front of her. She pinched it so hard that she visibly winced in pain, and her eyes watered. She didn’t seem to notice him watching her, and she pinched herself a couple more times. She

looked down at her shoes, and examined her hands. She stared at the ground for a moment, then looked back at Bernard. “I don’t think this is a dream,” she said blankly. Bernard wheeled over to the corner of the building and noticed the brick that he had seen that morning. It wasn’t chipped anymore, and it now read “1876.”

*Why isn’t it chipped anymore? Did someone fix it? he wondered.*





## Chapter 3

# Four Boys and a Wheelbarrow

Bernard's thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a man's booming voice. Jasmine's eyes widened and she stood completely still. Bernard looked around for the source of the noise. The man's voice seemed to be coming from behind a barn next to the school. "Maybe he knows where we are," Bernard said as he wheeled quickly and fearlessly toward the barn. Jazz unfroze and ran after him.

As they approached the barn, Bernard could see that the wood was greyed from weather and age. He wheeled around the back corner and saw a stretch of field, sections of which were tilled and smelled of fresh earth. Other patches were green with new shoots and dotted with black and white cows. The sun in the bright blue sky shone brightly, and he noticed several figures standing in the distance. He shielded his eyes with his hand and squinted. Bernard could see the man standing next to a group of schoolboys. The wind carried the sound of raised voices but Bernard and Jazz couldn't make out any of the words. Bernard rounded the corner of the barn when, suddenly, Jazz ran ahead and put her hand out to stop him. "Bernard, wait, they might see us!" she exclaimed.



Bernard tilted his head at her, puzzled. “Isn’t that the point, so we can ask them where we are?” he asked. Jazz shook her head quickly, and she clutched the straps of her backpack tightly with both hands. “But they’re strangers; they could be dangerous, and that man sounded really angry.”

Bernard paused—he hadn’t considered this. He didn’t want anything bad to happen, but they needed to figure out where they were. “Okay, so maybe we should hide and try to see what they’re saying first. That could give us a clue about where we are,” he suggested. Jazz nodded in agreement and pointed toward a small wooden shed next to the schoolboys. The shed was surrounded by a field of tall grass that reached near the barn. Jazz and Bernard crept through the grass and toward the shed. Bernard didn’t feel as confident as before and worried that the man would see them.

Peering through the tall grass, Bernard and Jasmine surveyed the area. In front of them, standing on the large patch of freshly turned earth, was a group of four boys and the man with the booming voice. The boy nearest to the shed was thin and tall, his clothes stained with dirt. He was leaning on a shovel, breathing hard, his dark skin glistening with sweat. Two other boys were heaving shovels full of manure into a wheelbarrow. Their clothes were just as worn, and didn’t seem to fit properly. Their noses were so red from the sun that Bernard winced when he saw them. The last boy was bent over, his shovel tilling

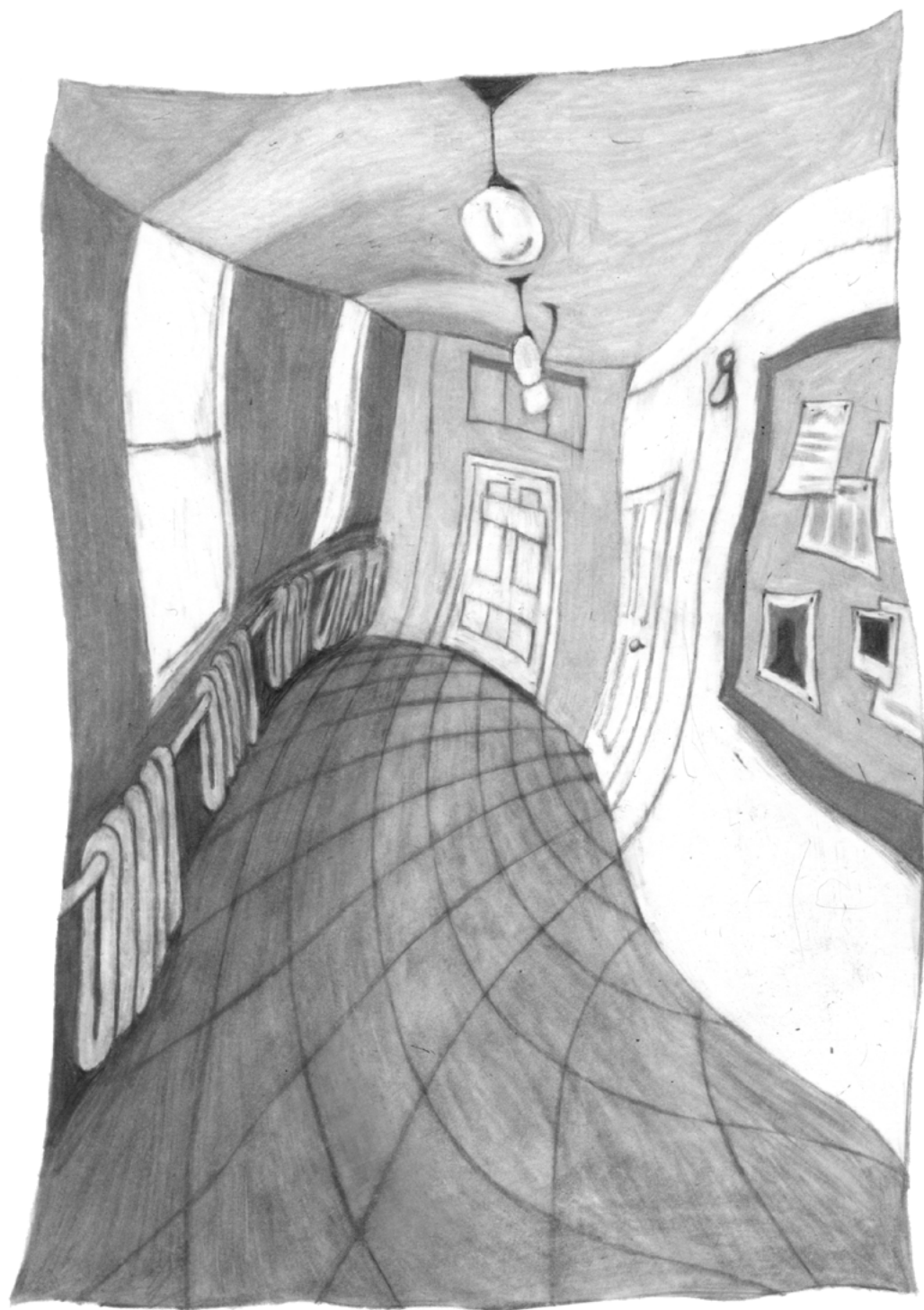
the manure into the soil.

Suddenly the man bellowed so loud that Jasmine gasped. Bernard's heart raced and he worried the man might have heard, but he was too busy yelling to notice. "Get over here, Jones! Do you think this garden is going to fertilize itself?" he shouted.

The boy who had been leaning on his shovel began to trudge back towards the field, his steps slow with exhaustion. Tapping his foot into the dirt, the man had a look of impatience on his hard face. His dark eyes were filled with rage. A deep thud sounded as the wheelbarrow overturned, spilling all of the manure. The boys stared at the wheelbarrow and one began to quietly cry. The older man thundered toward the boys and the wheelbarrow.

"Can't you boys do anything right?!" he demanded. The boys, cowering, began to back up and one tripped over the handle of the wheelbarrow, falling into the pile of manure.

With a dark glint in his eyes, the man quietly threatened, "If you boys don't have this manure tilled into the soil when I return, I will make sure you never leave this field." He turned and strode away from the boys, heading directly toward Bernard and Jasmine.



## Chapter 4

# An Open Window



Panicking, they ducked. Bernard's heart was beating so loudly that he could hear it pounding in his chest, and he looked at Jazz, who was shaking in fright. They stood behind the shed, completely still as the man's footsteps grew louder and louder until he was so close that they could hear him breathing. Rusty hinges squeaked as the wooden door to the shed opened and then slammed shut. Bernard relaxed his muscles and quietly sighed in relief. There was a rustling of papers and Bernard thought it sounded like a newspaper being unfolded. He realized that they had been hiding behind an outhouse. They had to get away from there before the man left the outhouse—he hadn't seen them before, but what if he found them this time? Jasmine must have been thinking the same thing, as she nudged Bernard and pointed at the barn. The two children silently and cautiously crept through the grass field, back toward the old barn. Bernard heard the outhouse door slam shut again and turned his head back to see the man leave the outhouse and walk back toward the children. The distant sound of him yelling made Bernard shudder, and he hoped the boys wouldn't be punished too harshly.

As they rounded the barn, they stopped and turned to face each other now that they were out of sight. Jasmine spoke first, her thoughts tumbling out. “Where and when are we!? I don’t want to be here anymore. I want to go home! We have to figure out how to get out of here.” He shook his head in agreement. “We need a plan. Maybe we should retrace our steps. When we first got here, we were next to the school. Maybe if we go back there we can find a way to get back home.”

Jazz opened her mouth to respond but Bernard was already wheeling back toward the school. Moving toward the walls, he noticed that the red bricks looked fresher and cleaner than when his mom dropped him off at school that morning. Hard wire criss-crossed through the thick glass windows. Jasmine cautiously followed Bernard to an open window.

Bernard gagged. An acrid smell wafted toward them through the window.

“Ugh. Gross. It smells like that outhouse!” Jazz said. Bernard covered his nose with his sleeve. Ignoring the awful smell, he glanced through the window to see boys around his age standing in a crowded room. A blond-haired boy wheeled his rickety old chair over to the window. The wheelchair was so big that the boy almost disappeared into its hard metal and leather seat. Seeing the blond boy’s wheelchair, Bernard winced. He couldn’t imagine



sitting in such a hard chair all day. The blond boy looked over his shoulder to check if anyone was looking.

“How did you get out?” he cautiously whispered.

Bernard and Jasmine just stared at the boy.

“Don’t let them catch you. The last boy who tried to get out spent a week in the pipe room.” Bernard was confused—nothing the boy had said made any sense to him, and it sounded as if the boy was talking about a prison. “What’s a pipe room?” he said. The boy looked at him, shocked. “You’ve never been to the pipe room? I’ve been there three times,” he said. “It’s dark and full of spiders, and you have to sit all alone in the dark for a full day. They send you there when you don’t do what you’re told, or if you don’t eat everything on your plate. Even if you were not trying to be bad and you just got full or made a mistake. You’re lucky they never sent you there.” The boy looked terrified just thinking about it, and Bernard thought about what it would be like to go there. It sounded horrible, and he wondered what the boy had done to be sent to this place.

“What is this place? How did you get here? What’s that smell? It smells like an outhouse. What hap—” Jasmine was interrupted by heavy footsteps echoing down the hall. “Hide!” the blond boy pleaded. Jasmine and Bernard ducked below the window ledge just as they heard the creak of the door as it opened.

“Hey! What are you doing near the window?” said an older gruff voice.

“He was talking to some boys, sir,” tattled another boy.

The older voice bellowed, “I told all of you to stay on the sides of the room and keep quiet. Now you think you can lie to me and disobey the rules? Go out to the hall, both of you, and dig for worms!”

Bernard and Jazz moved away from the window as quickly as possible. Bernard wheeled away from the window as fast as he could—he couldn’t stand the smell. He glanced at the numbered brick, and once again wondered why it wasn’t chipped anymore. Then he noticed that the sign on the red brick wall was also different. Instead of Orillia Middle School, it read Ontario Hospital School Orillia. Suddenly, he realized where they were. He gasped and turned around to face Jasmine. “Jazz... I think I know where we are,” he said slowly.







## Chapter 5

# Ontario Hospital School Orillia

Jazz turned rapidly and looked at him intently. Bernard pointed to the sign, and Jazz furrowed her eyebrows. “I don’t get it...What’s a hospital school?” she said. Bernard paused—he wasn’t quite sure how to explain it. “Do you know what an institution is?” he asked. She shook her head no, and furrowed her eyebrows. Bernard thought back to when his resource teacher had told him about it, and tried to recall what she had said. “This used to be a hospital school, which was a horrible place where people were locked up and treated badly. People who didn’t do well in school, or had trouble speaking and reading—just like us—would get sent here even though they did nothing wrong. The resource teacher from my old school told me that it was bad, but this is worse than I imagined it,” he said. Jazz looked horrified at what he had said. “What? That’s awful! I can’t believe anyone would do that. I can’t even imagine what it would be like to live here,” she said loudly. She then widened her eyes and paused for a moment. She spoke again, softly this time. “Oh no... If they find us, do you think they’ll lock us up here?” she asked.

Bernard’s mind filled with fear. He hadn’t considered

that, and the mere idea of living there made him want to cry. He looked back to see that Jazz really was crying. Silent tears streamed down her face as she stared up at the window. She noticed Bernard watching her and looked back at him. “I don’t want to live here. What if I never see my family again?” She said shakily. Bernard’s face was pale. He didn’t know what to do. He was scared too.

*I don’t know what to do, but it is going to be okay. We’ll get back home; it is going to be okay,* he thought to himself. Jasmine looked up and tilted her head to one side. “What did you say? Huh, I didn’t hear you. Do you have a plan?” Jasmine asked. Bernard looked at her oddly, and then realized that he had been whispering to himself again. He only did it when he was nervous. It made him feel calmer.

“I was just talking to myself,” he said. “How did we get here? The hospital school doesn’t exist anymore; we must have gone back in time somehow,” he thought aloud. “That’s impossible,” said Jazz. “That only happens in movies, not real life, and how do we even get back when we don’t know how we got here?” she asked. Bernard didn’t know how to answer this—he had no clue where they were, or how any of this was even possible. Maybe what they needed was a clue. If they found out what year it was, or if this had ever happened before, maybe that could help them get back.

“We need to go inside,” he said. Jazz stared at him open-

mouthed. “WHAT?” she yelled, then caught herself and lowered her voice. “We can’t go inside,” she said. “What if they catch us and keep us there, and then we never get back!” She shook her head no, while Bernard tried to explain his thoughts.

“We need to figure out how to get back, and we need to know things like what year it is or if this has happened to anyone before,” he said. “It’s risky, but if we’re careful we might be able to get out of here. I don’t know what other options we have—we don’t have food or water, and we can’t sleep outside. We need to get back home before tonight,” he explained. Jazz paused for a moment, and furrowed her eyebrows. “Okay, but we need to be very careful.”





## Chapter 6



# Rows of Girls Sewing

Moving their way around the building, Bernard and Jasmine could hear a hum coming from a nearby window. They peeked nervously inside. The room was filled with tables and rows of girls sewing clothing. All of the girls had their heads down and were focusing on feeding the pink fabric into the machines.

“Get the door, Smith,” ordered a frowning woman standing next to a closed door.

A tall girl ran across the room and opened the door for the older woman, who was carrying a pile of folded clothing. Over her shoulder she yelled, “Keep working girls, Smith is in charge.”

The girl turned around to face the window and Bernard and Jasmine ducked just in time. After a minute, Jazz peered inside to see her sitting at her sewing machine at the far end of the room. She tapped Bernard’s shoulder, and he lifted his head. After observing for a moment, Jazz tapped her finger on the window. A small girl sitting next to the window turned away from her sewing machine and

glanced behind her. She furrowed her eyebrows in confusion as she locked eyes with Jazz, and then Bernard. She turned back to her sewing machine. “What are you doing outside?” she asked quietly, without taking her eyes off her sewing machine. “We don’t know. We...we shouldn’t be here,” said Bernard. Having recovered from the shock of the last room, Jasmine was back to her chatterbox self. “I am Jasmine and this is Bernard. We were heading to school when we ended up here. We were going to be late, so we ran up the ramp and everything went all shaky and somehow we ended up here. I didn’t want my resource teacher to call my parents again, but now I don’t care. I just want to go home.” She played with one of her black braids while she spoke.

The small girl tilted her head to one side. “My name is Madeline, but all the staff call me Clark. Are you from Cottage A? Is that why you get to go to school?” Bernard opened his mouth to speak, but Jazz spoke up before he got the chance. “No. We think we’re from the future, where this isn’t an institution anymore and it’s just a school. We went up the ramp and then it was shaking and somehow we ended up here, and we really need to get back home before they lock us up here but we don’t know how. Can you help us?” She spoke so quickly that her words were impossible to understand, and the girl looked at her in sheer confusion. Bernard looked around, worried that someone had heard. Just then, another girl skipped over, her blonde curls bouncing behind her.

“Hiya Madeline, who are these kids?” she asked. Madeline looked back at Bernard and Jazz in confusion. Jazz repeated a close version of her previous explanation, even faster than before. As soon as she was done, Bernard tried to clarify. “We...well...we’re from the future. I...I...don’t know what happened but we somehow ended up here,” he stammered. The blonde girl smiled and introduced herself confidently. “Okay, my name is Sterling but the staff call me Lyon. They don’t even call us by our first names! I’ve never met anyone from the future before. Are you joking?” Jazz shook her head. “Why are you sewing?” she asked Madeline.

Madeline cut off the thread on a pair of pants, and held it up for them to see. “We’re working. I’m sewing our clothes. Aren’t they ugly?” she asked, glancing at Jasmine’s stylish blue shirt.

“What year is it? Can you help us?” Bernard blurted.

Just then, the woman walked back into the room. She had a stern face with downward lines etched around her mouth. Bernard couldn’t imagine her ever smiling. The woman looked around the room and her eyes landed on Sterling, then Bernard and Jazz. They ducked, but it was too late—they had already been seen. Bernard’s heart raced, and he glanced at Jazz, who was shaking in fear. He hoped that maybe she hadn’t seen them, or she’d think it was a trick of the light. And then she started yelling.

“What are those two kids doing outside! Potts, Davis, come here!” Her voice echoed through the room, its cruel undertones shooting fear up Bernard’s spine. Two young women dressed in faded denim pants and shirts rushed into the room. Their uniforms and hairstyles looked the same as the other girls, but their faces looked older.

“Two patients have gotten out! Why aren’t you doing your job and keeping them where they belong? We cannot have boys and girls mixing. Fix this, or else both of you will lose your privileges. Hurry now, go and fetch them!” she commanded.

“Yes, Mrs. Olive,” the two women said in unison.

Just then, Sterling spoke up. “There was nobody there, you must be imagining things. Stop yelling at us, it’s mean,” she blurted.

Mrs. Olive’s face turned bright red and she strode over to the window, waving her pointer finger angrily an inch from Sterling’s. “Don’t you dare lie to me, Lyon!” she thundered. “I saw them with my own eyes! And that kind of dishonest, bad behaviour will not be tolerated.” Grabbing Sterling by the ear, she pulled her away from the window. “You aren’t getting any dinner, and maybe you need more time in the pipe room! What do you think about that, Lyon?” she screeched.

Jazz and Bernard lifted their heads to look through the

window. The other girls watched as Sterling was dragged out of the classroom. She looked back at them, her eyes wide. She seemed petrified.

Madeline quickly turned to Bernard and Jasmine, her voice filled with urgency. “Run!” she whispered.





## Running on Graves

Bernard grabbed his wheels. His shaking hands slipped and he couldn't get his chair moving. The grassy lawn was so full of bumps and holes that Bernard was sure his chair wouldn't be able to get over them. Jasmine ran up behind him, grabbed onto his push bar and began to run. It was a slow start. Bernard's chair was bumping and bouncing across the grassy field. If only they could get to the driveway then they would have a chance to get away. But Potts and Davis were gaining on them. Bernard and Jasmine could hear their running feet getting closer and closer. Bernard's mind raced and he felt nauseous as his chair bounced shakily, up and down, over the holes and bumps in the grass. He felt sorry for Potts and Davis, and the two girls they'd met. *How long had they lived here? Were they going to be sent to the pipe room if him and Jazz escaped? Would they ever get to leave this place?* Bernard pushed the thoughts out of his mind. Feeling bad for Potts and Davis wouldn't help them escape.

They had crossed the driveway and were headed down the grassy slope when Bernard noticed that they had run over a paving stone. *Odd*, he thought, *to have paving stones in*

*the middle of a lawn.* Looking down, Bernard could see numbers. 1571. 672. Jasmine interrupted his thoughts. “What are these stones? They look like...graves. We’re running on graves,’ she said slowly. Her eyes widened as she came to this grim realization. “I’m so scared, I just want to go home.” She sobbed as she pushed Bernard’s chair over the markers. The terror of this place made his stomach churn, and then he realized that they might never leave. Potts and Davis were still gaining on them, and he had no idea how to get back. He tried desperately to hold back tears as he thought about living there, being yelled at and punished, and never seeing his family again. *We have to get out of here,* he thought. He felt a tear slide down his cheek, and then another. He heard Jazz sniffle, gasping for breath as she ran as hard as she could over the graves of innocent prisoners. She tripped over a rock, yelped, and fell to the ground.







## Chapter 8

# Forget-Me-Nots



Bernard's chair began to shake violently. He grasped his wheels tightly, and looked at Jasmine's limp body on the ground. "Jazz! WAKE UP!" he cried. Bernard's wheelchair was rocking back and forth; he needed her to steady it before it fell over. His hands trembled, his stomach churned and he thought he was going to be sick. He looked around to see the school exploding into pieces, and realized what was happening. His chair tipped over onto one side, and everything went black.

When Bernard woke up, he was upright again and his ears were ringing. The smell of manure had been replaced by the sweet aroma of flowers and freshly cut grass. He mentally prepared himself for the brilliant light that he had experienced last time, and opened his eyes slowly. He squinted to see Jazz standing in front of him, waving her arms wildly in front of his face, and as the ringing stopped he heard her yelling at him.

"Hey Bernard! Wake up! Are you okay? Bernard!" She yelled, and Bernard nodded. "Yes, stop waving your hands like that." She stopped waving and yelling, and Bernard

took a deep breath to calm down. His eyes adjusted to the light, and he noticed that the large manicured lawn looked different. For a moment he thought they were back at school, until he turned around to see that the school was gone. In its place was a beautiful green field dotted with pale blue forget-me-nots. The old grey weathered picnic tables near the school were gone too. In their place was a new covered area with smooth concrete benches and high picnic tables. He noticed Jazz staring at the street where she lived. The saplings were full grown trees now, big and green and covered in leaves. It made the whole street look happier and more comfortable somehow. All of the houses looked different too. Instead of huge concrete steps, there were ramps or paved walkways, new and smooth and not too steep. One house even had an elevator attached to the front. The sidewalk was bigger, and newly paved with smooth concrete. Bernard smiled. He was used to bumpy sidewalks, having to dig his chair out of potholes and being pushed up ramps and stairs. *I can use everything here*, he thought.

“Where are we? Are we in the future somehow?” asked Jazz. Bernard stared blankly at her. “I don’t know,” he said. “It seems a whole lot nicer than the last place.” He thought back to the hospital school for a moment. “Jazz, what do you think happened to Madeline and Sterling?” A look of panic swept over Jasmine’s face. “Do you think they’re okay? That place was awful!”

Bernard didn’t know what to think or what to do. He

wasn't sure if he even wanted to think about what had happened to Madeline and Sterling—the memory of the last place made him feel panicked and queasy, and part of him hoped that this was all a dream, and he would wake up and forget about all of this. But part of him wanted to remember—all those kids and what they went through shouldn't be forgotten, because they needed to make sure it didn't happen again.

He pushed these thoughts out of his mind, and tried to focus on the present. He looked back at the picnic tables, and noticed that there was a large stone monument, forming two cupped hands filled with flowers. Ivy climbed the fingers, and beside the monument stood two plaques, one of which was written in Braille. People sat around the picnic tables, and stood around the edges of the concrete covered area.



## Chapter 9

# The Monument



Without saying a word, or even glancing at Bernard, Jazz headed toward the monument. Bernard paused for a moment, confused, then followed her reluctantly. His mind raced at the prospect of yet another new place, and he felt sick to his stomach. It took a lot of effort to wheel over the bumpy grass, but once he reached the concrete it was smooth and his wheelchair glided along easily. He tried to control his breathing and focus on the feeling of his hands on the wheels and the sun on his face. He took a deep breath in, and slowly breathed out. He wheeled past a basketball court and a garden with tall yellow sunflowers, and as he got closer he noticed two people standing next to the monument. Jazz skipped toward a picnic bench and sat down across from an older couple, and Bernard followed suit. He easily rolled up to the edge, and his chair fit perfectly under the tall concrete table. He glanced at the older couple, who were staring toward the monument with rapt attention, and he followed their gaze to see a wiry man standing at the front and holding a microphone.

“Thank you all for coming today to our remembrance

service,” he said. “My name is Harry Spencer and I am the mayor of Orillia, and this is my town council colleague, Candy Sebert.” Gesturing to a short, kind-faced woman to his right he went on: “We are survivors of this institution, and today, we dedicate this memorial to all those who did not survive.” His voice faltered as it caught in his throat, and he passed the microphone to the woman standing next to him.

Candy, smiling at him, patted his arm and continued. “This monument,” she said, “commemorates the former site of the Huronia Regional Centre, which was used from 1876 to 2009. This was an institution where Harry and I, and people like us, were locked up because we were seen as different. On this day, we remember the past and celebrate a better and kinder future.”

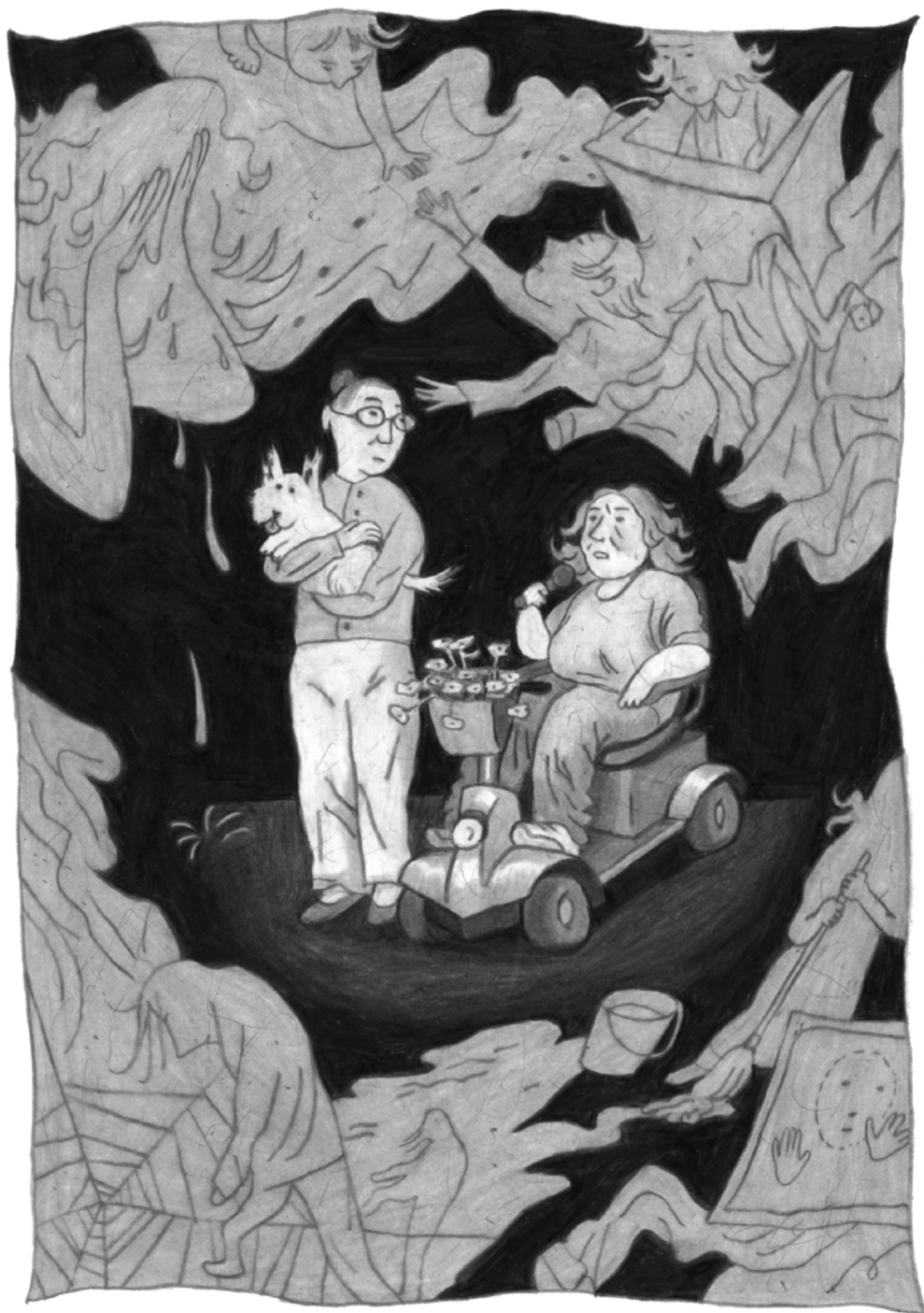
Bernard took in the people listening with rapt attention to Candy and Harry. Several little kids sat playing in the shade, and a younger couple stood next to a black dog. A pale woman stood teary-eyed with a collection of forget-me-nots in her hands. A tall couple stood next to a little girl using crutches, and two women with silver-streaked hair sat at a table holding hands. The crowd stretched on, all the way to the parking lot. Bernard couldn’t make out the people in the back.

Harry’s voice cut through Bernard’s thoughts.

“We have some special guests here today to tell us about

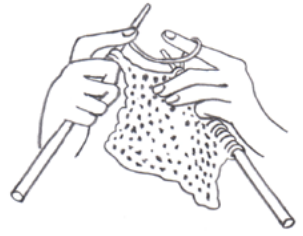


the history of the ground we are on. Please give a warm welcome to Madeline Clark and Sterling Lyon.”



## Chapter 10

# Madeline and Sterling



Two older women stepped out of the crowd and made their way up to the front. Jazz looked at them for a moment, then leaned across the table and tapped Bernard. “It’s Madeline and Sterling!” she said loudly. The people around them looked at her for a moment, then returned their gaze to the two older women. Bernard watched them intently, and it took a moment for him to recognize them. Madeline wore glasses now and her grey hair was tied into a bun, and Sterling was using a scooter decorated with blue flowers. “Are we in the future now? What’s happening? How did they get here? But, I mean, I’m glad they are okay. Boy, I wonder what I will look like when I get to be their age,” Jazz rambled. Bernard couldn’t stop staring at Madeline and Sterling. It was only five minutes ago that he had seen them and yet so much had changed. He watched them slowly walk up to the front and shake hands with the mayor. His colleague handed the microphone to Sterling, who took it without hesitation and looked around at the crowd.

“We want to tell you about this place,” spoke Sterling in her clear and confident voice. “It used to be called the

Ontario Hospital School Orillia when I was here. It was supposed to be a place to take care of people like us, but it was a prison! They treated us horribly. I was sent here when I was only seven years old. I was told I was never gonna leave, and that it was what was best for me. But it wasn't what was best for me at all, and I was just a scared little kid who didn't deserve any of this. Why don't you share your experience here, Madeline?"

At the sound of Madeline's name a little dog yipped at her feet. "Shhh Rascal," she whispered as she gently stroked his head. She adjusted her pink and blue cardigan, and Sterling passed her the microphone. Madeline took a step forward and began to speak. "I came here when I was little. I had brothers and sisters who lived here too. I never knew them, because they kept us separate. But now I know them. This place was supposed to keep us safe and take care of us, but instead we were treated badly and neglected. I never thought I would leave. I never thought I would want to talk about this place. I didn't want to remember. But now I want people to know about this place, so that what happened there never happens again." She passed the microphone back to Sterling.

"After this place closed, we went to court. We brought a class action lawsuit against the government because we wanted people to know our story. We wanted to make sure this would never happen again. But the case was settled, so we never got to tell our stories in court," Sterling continued sadly. "The government apologized for what

happened, but they should have done more! We never did anything wrong; we were locked up for being different. We didn't get a proper education and we had to work, didn't we Madeline?" She said, glancing at Madeline to pass the microphone again before returning her gaze to the crowd.

"I worked making our clothes; they were ugly things but I liked learning to sew and knit. I had to learn to knit with straightened bobby pins. The staff wouldn't give me knitting needles. They never believed that I could do it. But now I make my own clothes," she said as she stroked the sleeve of her cardigan. "We had to share everything. We never had any privacy. We shared clothes—ugly pink things that never fit properly. We had to shower and use the bathroom together and we had to work, looking after the other girls or in the sewing room," said Madeline. "They said we would be looked after there, but it was more like a prison than a home. We didn't get to go to school, it smelled disgusting, and it was a horrible place to live."

The crowd was quiet except for the occasional whir of someone's power chair, the snuffle of a dog, or the happy laugh of a child. Bernard and Jasmine looked around. There was something unusual about the assembled group but Bernard couldn't put his finger on what it was. He was about to ask Jasmine when Sterling spoke again.

"It was hard when we first came back to Huronia," Sterling said as she wiped her eyes. "But now we can come,

we can sit on these benches,” she continued as she waved her hand towards the seating area, “remember and share our stories. We can visit the cemetery and all the graves are marked. There are no patient numbers anymore. Everyone who never got to leave this place is remembered.” Her voice wavered on that last sentence, and she teared up and passed the microphone to Madeline.

“People need to know what happened here, so it never happens again. This is why we go around and tell our story,” Madeline said. “After this place closed people wanted to use the buildings. They didn’t listen to us when we said we wanted them torn down. They told us to get over it and forget, but we can’t forget! We won’t forget what happened here! And we will tell everyone.”

Madeline stroked her dog’s ears and said softly, “The buildings have been torn down and some people are now listening to us, but there are still a lot of changes that need to happen.”

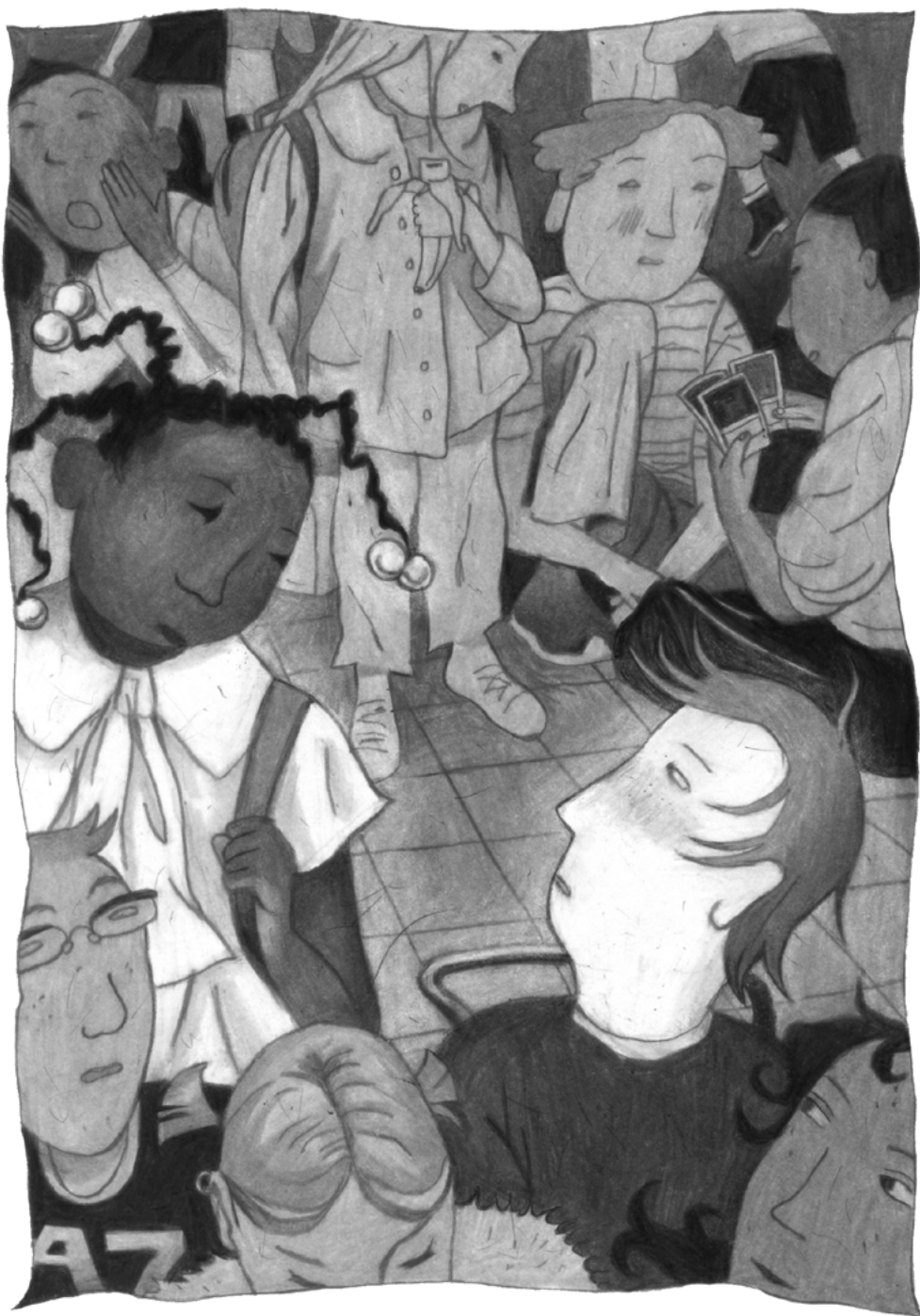
“That’s right. Being different doesn’t make someone a criminal; we are all people. Some people just need some support, but we should be allowed to make our own choices and live where we want. We need everyone to remember what happened here. We need a union of people to remember the past to make sure this doesn’t ever happen again!” Sterling added. She leaned on her scooter, stood up a little straighter and said, “And we need to make sure that people like us aren’t excluded anymore. We should

have the same rights as everyone else! We need housing and direct funding, not group homes!”

The mayor cheered, and the crowd followed his lead. All the people gathered around the monument clapped and shouted, the sounds blurring together. The sun seemed to shine a little bit brighter, and after a moment the mayor raised his hand to quiet the crowd.

“Thank you, Sterling and Madeline. Today’s ceremony is the start of an annual tradition to honour and remember. Before we continue, are there any questions for Sterling and Madeline?”

Jasmine and Bernard looked at each other. They had questions. They needed to know what had happened and how Madeline and Sterling had gotten out of that terrible place. They needed to know how to make sure it never happened again. They needed to know when in time they were now. And they needed to know how to get home again. Bernard looked around at the group of people, and a few hands were raised high into the air. It was then that Bernard realized what was unusual about the group of people that Madeline and Sterling had been talking to. Some of them were disabled and some were not, but it seemed natural that everyone should be together. Everyone belonged.





## Chapter 11

# The Suggestion Box



Madeline and Sterling thanked the crowd and began to make their way to the back of the crowd. Jasmine tapped Bernard's shoulder. "I want to say hello," she said. Before Bernard had time to respond, she had already left her seat and was running toward Madeline and Sterling. Bernard wheeled away from the table and followed her hurriedly. The ground started to shake again, and Bernard tightened his grip on his chair and mentally prepared himself for the violent quaking of the ground. He knew what was happening this time, and felt worry in the pit of his stomach. *What if we're going back to the hospital school?* Bernard thought. He imagined himself and Jazz being locked up in that institution with the horrible smells, the overcrowding, being forced to work and sent to the pipe room. He whispered these worries to himself as he held the table, steadying himself with all his strength. He looked up at the sky, counted to three, and looked back at Jazz. She grabbed the table tightly with both hands and closed her eyes tightly, but the shaking got worse and worse. Bernard's chair started rocking back and forth, and Jazz lost her grip on the table and fell to the ground. The people around them were still like statues, frozen in time, and

the benches started to shatter into pieces. The shards of wood floated through the people as if they were ghosts or holograms. Not a single shard touched their table, almost as if there was a shield around them. Bernard closed his eyes like Jazz did, and put one hand on the table to steady himself. He whispered to himself, “It is going to be okay, it is going to be okay, it is going to be okay.”

The shaking stopped, and he opened his eyes to a stunning white light again. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and opened them again—slowly this time. His eyes adjusted and he found himself looking up at the now-familiar, tall, red brick walls.

Of course they were still at that school. But where in time were they now? They had seen the past and the future. He was sick of time travel, of being confused and not knowing where they were. Just then he noticed the brick... it was chipped again, and he turned around to see the weathered gray picnic tables from that morning, and the new addition of the blue steel ramp. Could it be—were they finally back? He looked back at Jazz hopefully, who was smiling and looking around. “Are we back?” he asked, just to be sure. She nodded vigorously. “Yes, I think we are! Wow, that was bizarre.

Bernard looked back at the sign, which again read “Orillia Middle School,” and the sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach disappeared. He looked around, and noticed that the school was once again surrounded by children. They

were standing in the same places as earlier that morning, and he wondered if any time had passed at all.

Just then, the bell rang, its shrill sound startling Bernard and making him jump. They made their way over to the ramp. Jazz started to talk loudly and cheerily about their classes again, and Bernard listened silently and intently, just the same as that morning. Then he got distracted by thoughts of Madeline and Sterling, and all the things that they had seen when they time traveled. He could still hear Jasmine talking while he was thinking about this, and it seemed as if he was hearing two voices at once. He tried to stop thinking about everything they had just seen, but he couldn't. Thoughts and voices of the past, the present and the future swirled in his mind and in the air and made him feel overwhelmed. He looked straight ahead as Jazz wheeled him up the ramp, and he tried to mentally block out her loud voice and the conversations of everyone around them.

When they entered the school, Jazz stopped talking and Bernard felt his muscles relax and his mind clear. He still couldn't stop thinking about the Hospital School, and he imagined what it would have been like when Sterling and Madeline went there. He pictured the children around them in ill-fitting uniforms, and remembered the awful smell and the overcrowded rooms. It felt strange to look around the school after having been there when it was an institution, and he couldn't even imagine what it would be like for Madeline and Sterling to come back after all

they had been through. He understood why they wanted it to be torn down, and how important it was to them that what happened there never happened again.

He looked around the hallway and saw a sign for the school office, with a suggestion box attached to the wall next to it. He thought of all the changes he had seen when he went forward in time. The concrete picnic area that was so easy to use, and the gentler, more gradual ramp that would replace the steel blue one. He thought of the beautiful memorial honouring those who never left that horrible institution, and all of the different sorts of people gathered together.

Jazz must have been thinking the same thing, for she skipped up to the suggestion box, picked up the pen next to it and started writing something on one of the blank cards. Bernard rolled up beside her and opened his backpack. He took out a second pen, grabbed one of the cards and began writing out suggestions.



## About the Authors


Marie Slark loves to knit, crochet and spend time with her cats and dog. She was a plaintiff in the Huronia Class Action lawsuit against the provincial government, which was certified in 2010 on behalf of survivors. Marie wants to ensure that survivor stories are heard.

Pat Seth is a strong advocate for survivors of institutionalization. She was a plaintiff in the Huronia Class Action lawsuit against the provincial government, which was certified in 2010 on behalf of survivors. Pat enjoys going out for coffee with friends and shopping for healthy food.

Kimberlee Collins has been a member of Pat's union since 2014. She is a doctoral candidate at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto.

## Learn More

For more information on the Huronia Regional Centre, multiple formats of this book, including audio, ebook and American Sign Language vlog, as well as a clear language pedagogical guide to engage with the history of institutionalization of people labelled with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Ontario, visit **[timetravelwheels.ca](http://timetravelwheels.ca)**.



“All people need to know this history so that it will not happen again. If you let things fester and don’t talk about tough issues, things won’t change. Because of [survivor] storytellers, I can live with who I want, where I want and I get to do lots of projects I want, like writing plays and musicals. People think that discrimination is over but it’s not.”

— **Andreas Prince**, *Actor and Playwright with an intellectual disability*

“Readers will find themselves endeared to Bernard and Jasmine whose young lives unfold under institution-ization’s shadow, yet together with disabled survivors and elders they embody the crip community wisdom to create a more just future. *Time Travel Wheels* imaginatively and compassionately challenging readers to consider how we will honour the past and, at the same time, mobilize an anti-eugenic future.”

— **Chelsea Temple Jones**, *Assistant Professor in the Department of Child and Youth Studies, Brock University*