

# I, Too, Am Here



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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

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Edited by Kathryn Cole

*Second Story Press gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts for our publishing program. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund.*



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Funded by the Government of Canada  
Financé par le gouvernement du Canada



Published by  
Second Story Press  
20 Maud Street, Suite 401  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
M5V 2M5  
[www.secondstorypress.ca](http://www.secondstorypress.ca)

# I, Too, Am Here

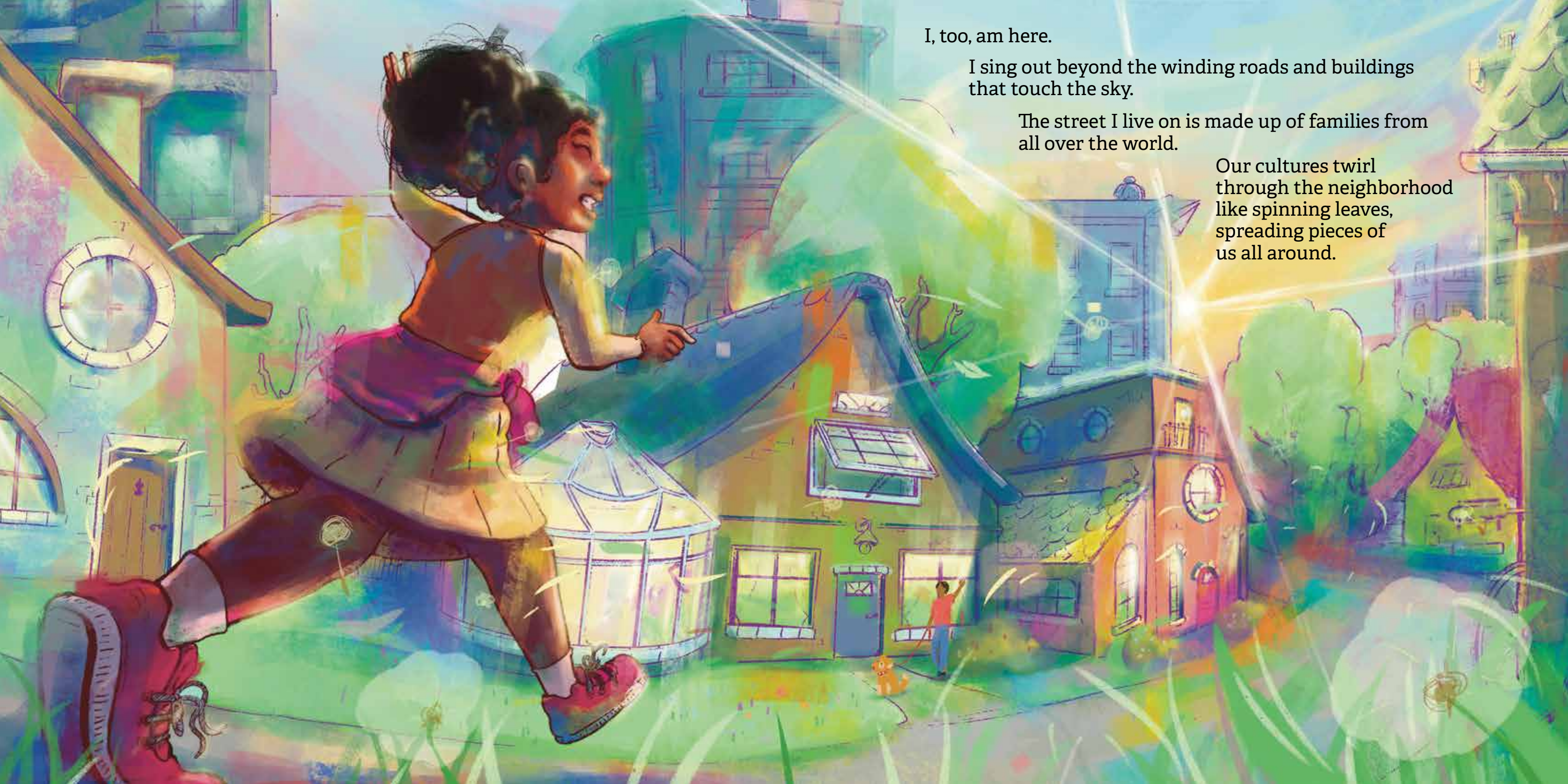
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I, too, am here.

I sing out beyond the winding roads and buildings  
that touch the sky.

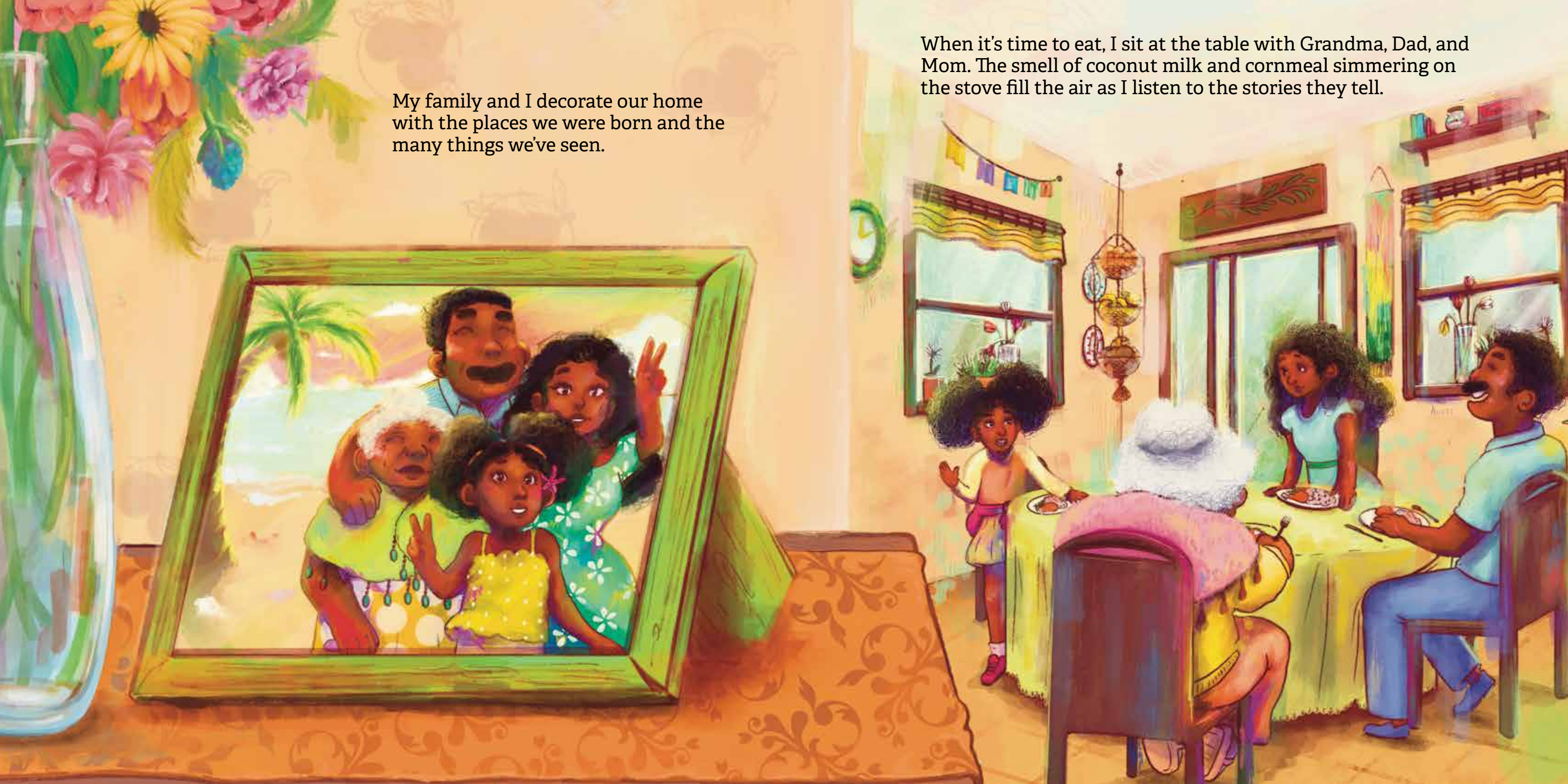
The street I live on is made up of families from  
all over the world.

Our cultures twirl  
through the neighborhood  
like spinning leaves,  
spreading pieces of  
us all around.



My family and I decorate our home with the places we were born and the many things we've seen.

When it's time to eat, I sit at the table with Grandma, Dad, and Mom. The smell of coconut milk and cornmeal simmering on the stove fill the air as I listen to the stories they tell.








Grandma tells of when she first left the island and its warm breeze. How the moon's glow reflected differently off the rain in the new country. How she worked three jobs and saved enough money to send for my dad.

She tells me about the night the police came knocking on her door, because her neighbors had reported a crime.

In bright red paint, someone had written *GO HOME* in big letters around her fence.





So she bought two heavy cans of deep brown paint and covered the bright red words with long strokes of her brush.

"You're so strong, Grandma," I say, "to carry such heavy cans."

She smiles at me.

But I don't understand her story. How someone could tell her to go home, when she already was?



Then Dad tells his story of the first time he saw snow. How he couldn't tell if it was floating or falling. How the soft flakes seemed to dance around him.

He tells me about how some boys from his class turned the soft flakes into hard snowballs and threw them at him.

The boys yelled, "Go back where you belong!"

And they kept throwing snow until it was all he could taste. Sharp and cold.

So he cleaned his face and wiped away the melted snow.



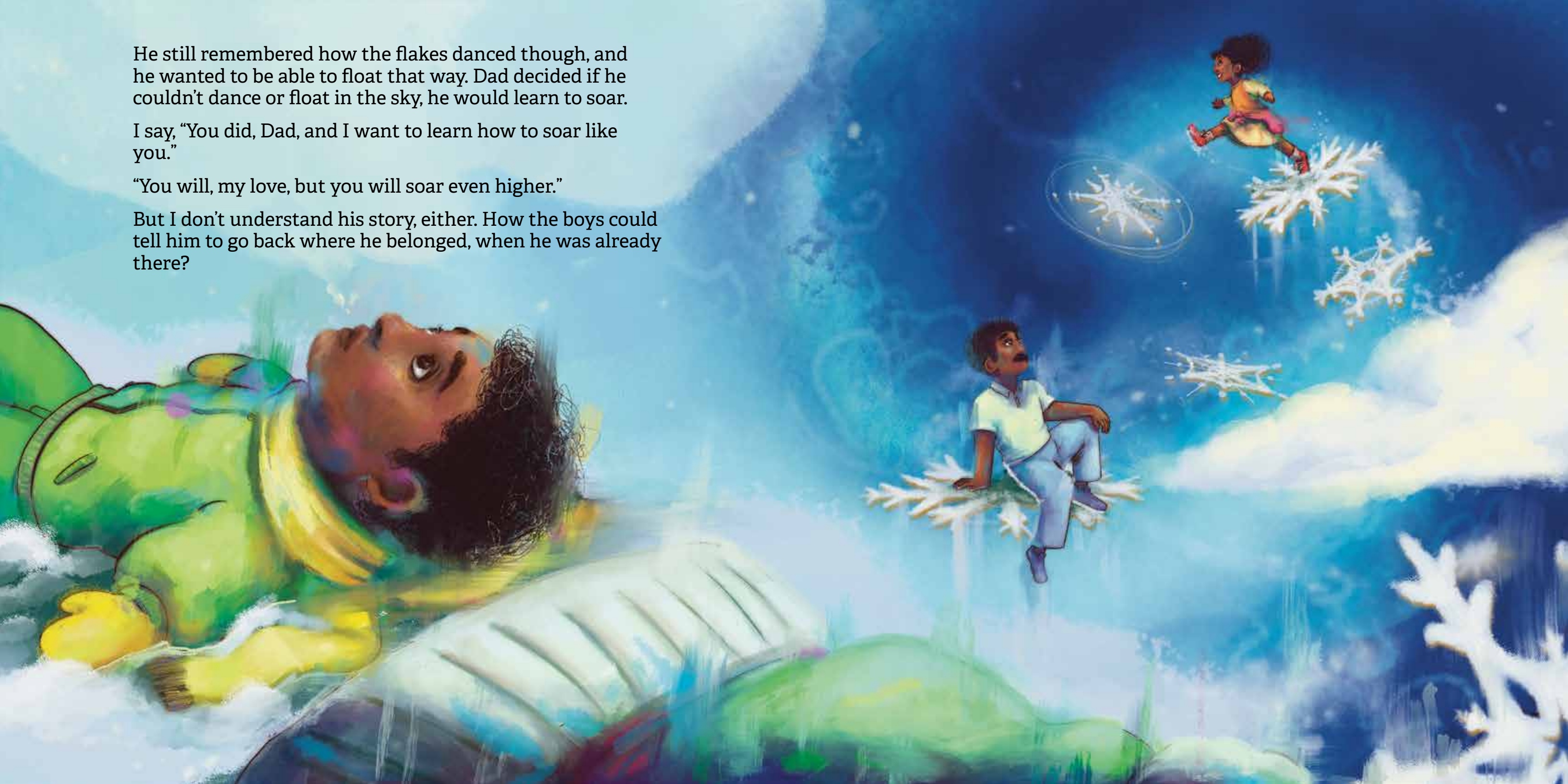


He still remembered how the flakes danced though, and he wanted to be able to float that way. Dad decided if he couldn't dance or float in the sky, he would learn to soar.

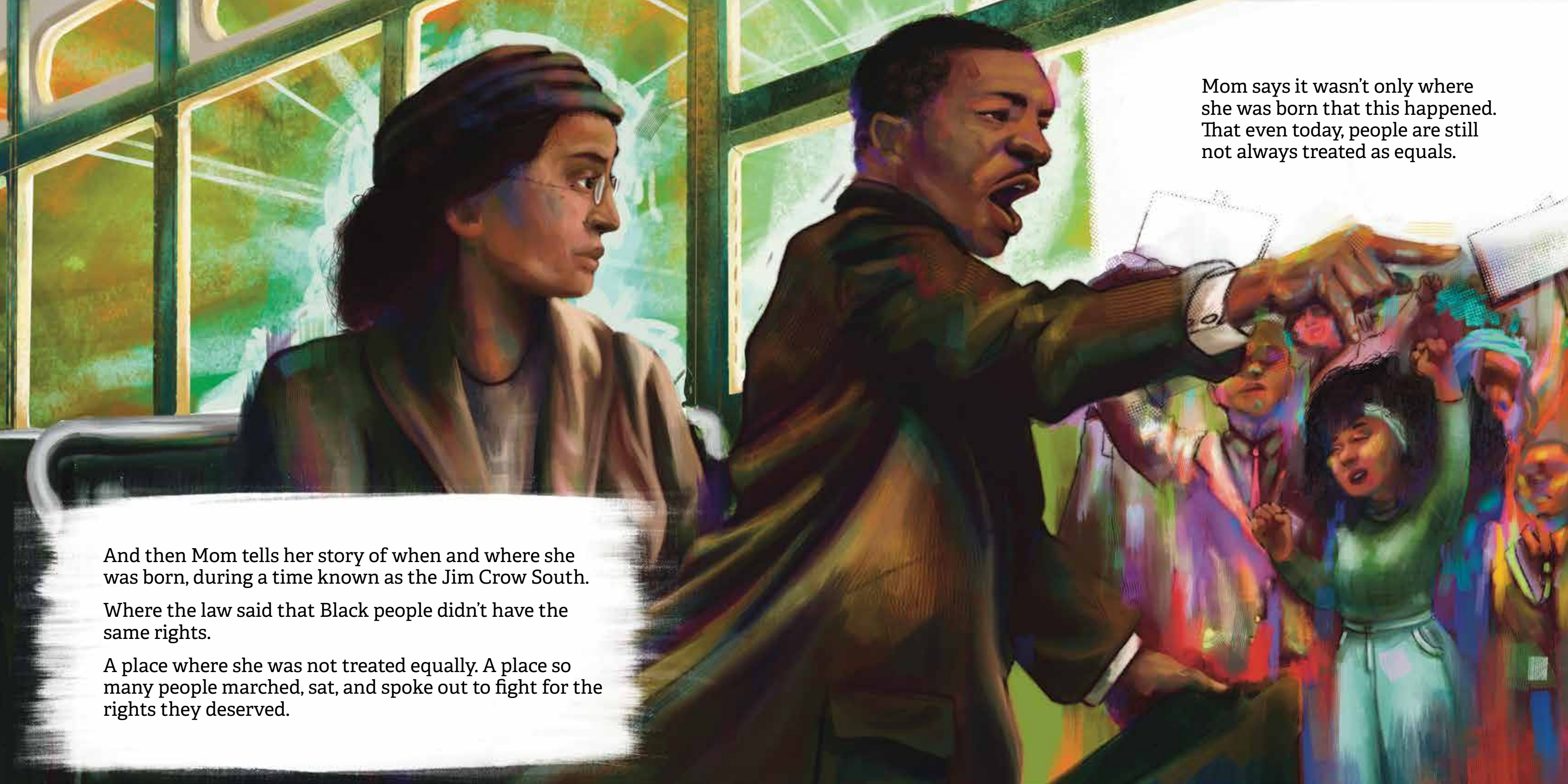
I say, "You did, Dad, and I want to learn how to soar like you."

"You will, my love, but you will soar even higher."

But I don't understand his story, either. How the boys could tell him to go back where he belonged, when he was already there?







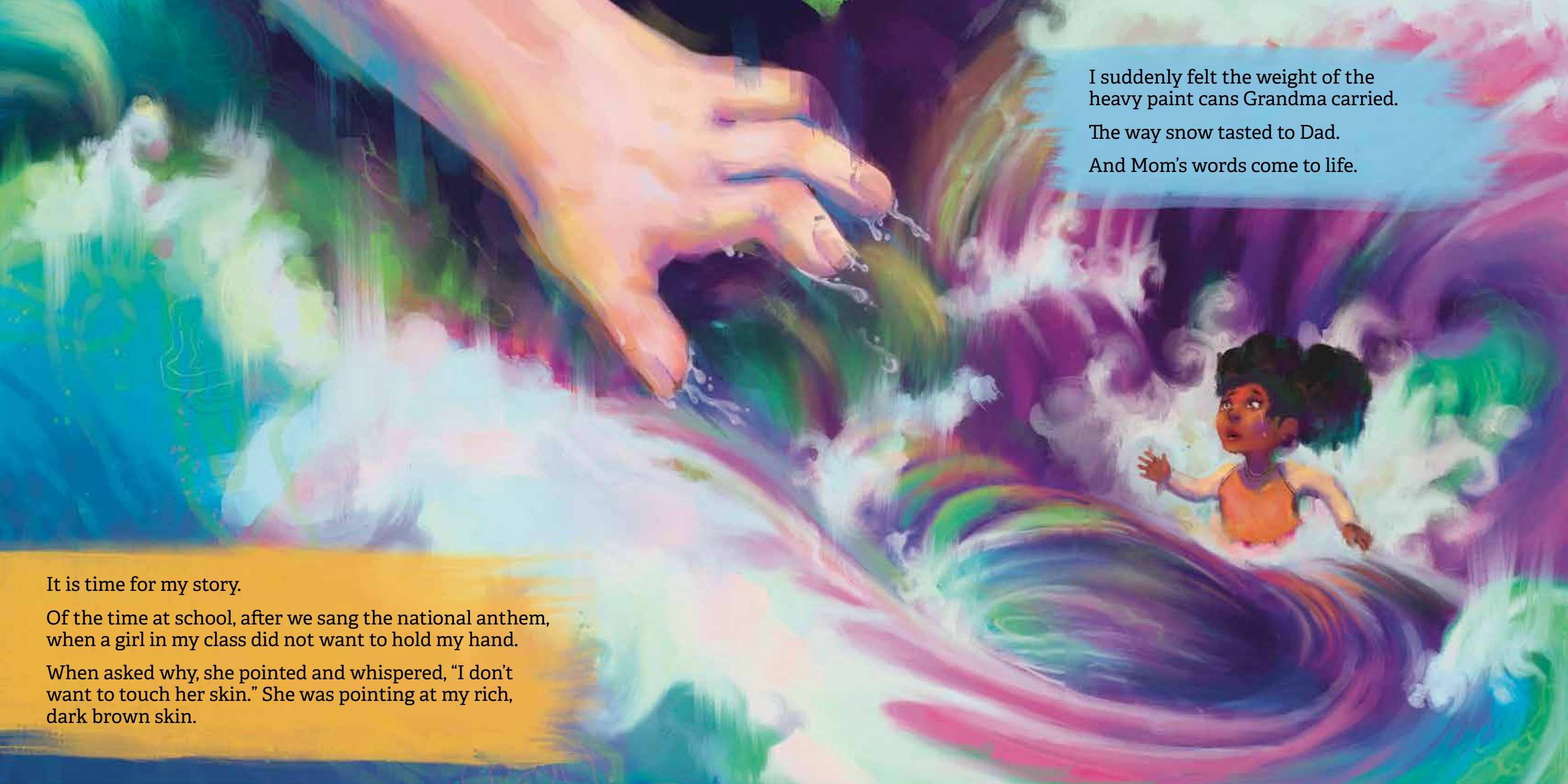
Mom says it wasn't only where she was born that this happened. That even today, people are still not always treated as equals.

And then Mom tells her story of when and where she was born, during a time known as the Jim Crow South.

Where the law said that Black people didn't have the same rights.

A place where she was not treated equally. A place so many people marched, sat, and spoke out to fight for the rights they deserved.





I suddenly felt the weight of the  
heavy paint cans Grandma carried.

The way snow tasted to Dad.

And Mom's words come to life.

It is time for my story.

Of the time at school, after we sang the national anthem,  
when a girl in my class did not want to hold my hand.

When asked why, she pointed and whispered, "I don't  
want to touch her skin." She was pointing at my rich,  
dark brown skin.





When I got home I cried long  
tears and told Mom.

Then she read me a poem  
called, "I, Too," by a man named  
Langston Hughes. "I know how  
he felt," I told her. "I don't feel so  
beautiful right now."

"Sometimes," Mom said, "people will try to make you feel like you  
don't belong. Sometimes their words will be loud, and sometimes,  
they'll be whispered. And sometimes, they won't use words at all.  
It may be a look, or even a gesture. But you are here. Your voice  
spreads like the morning sky and shines like the stars twinkling  
at night. You, too, are here."

Mom hugged me then,  
and I felt beautiful again.

Because I am.  
We all are.





Some of us were born  
here, like me.

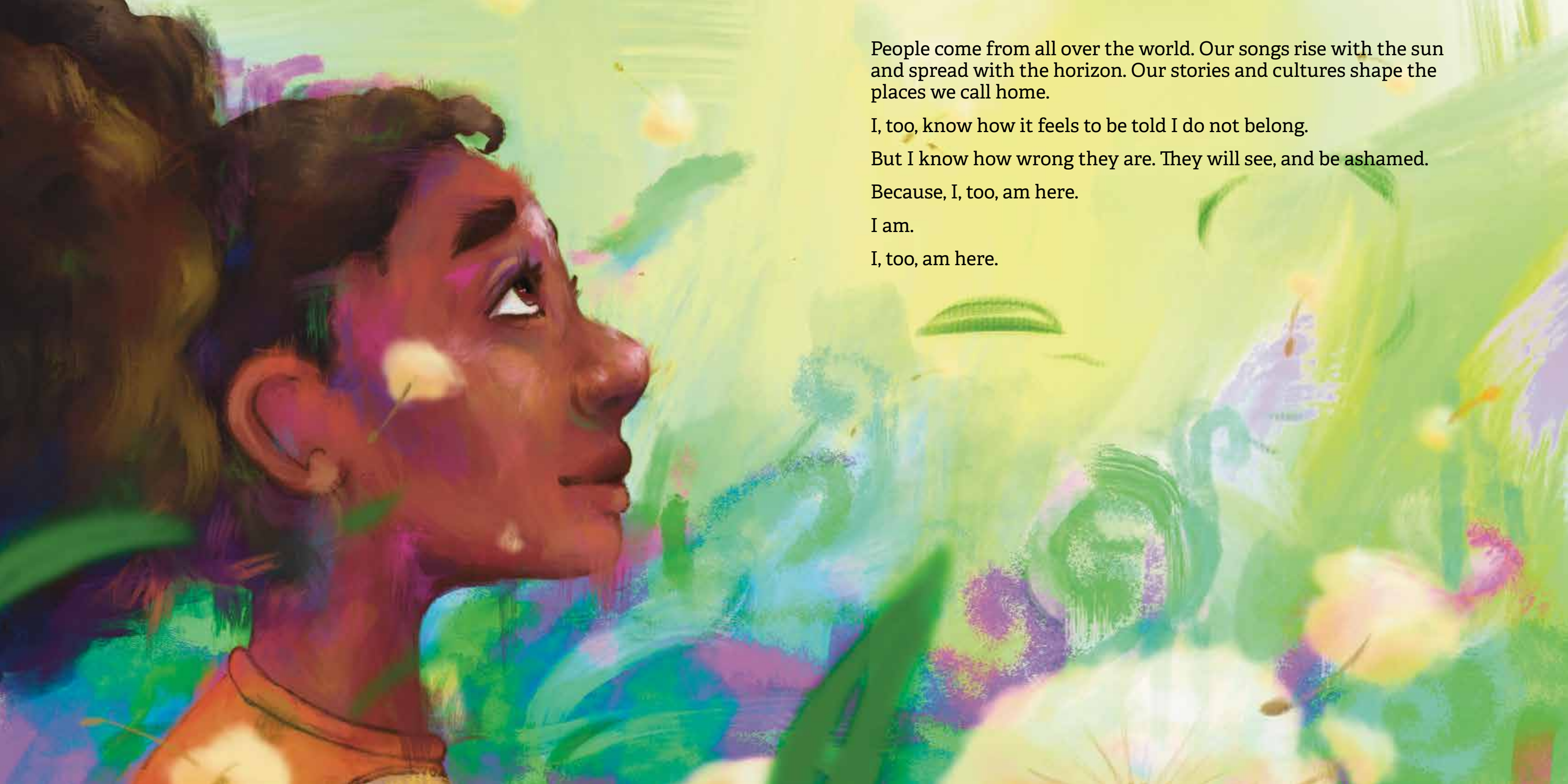
And some of us were not.

Like Grandma, who  
taught me to be  
strong.

Like Dad, who  
taught me to soar.

Like Mom, who  
taught me to love.





People come from all over the world. Our songs rise with the sun  
and spread with the horizon. Our stories and cultures shape the  
places we call home.

I, too, know how it feels to be told I do not belong.

But I know how wrong they are. They will see, and be ashamed.

Because, I, too, am here.

I am.

I, too, am here.



### Author's Note

My mom read Langston Hughes's poem, "I, Too," to me when I was a kid. The poem, first published in 1926, paints a picture of the inequality many Black Americans, and Black people of other nationalities, faced and continue to face. It was a call for us to be "at the table," as he puts it, and not made to feel lesser than or excluded. I was lucky to grow up around a mixture of people from different places. We respected each other. But I, and my family, were also around people who didn't share that respect. People who found ways to show us, and tell us, that we weren't welcome because of the color of our skin, or because some of us were born in different places. So, when I first heard the poem, it almost sang:

*They'll see how beautiful I am*

*And be ashamed—*

I understood those words and felt that they understood me. I wanted to write this story and share Langston Hughes's words to remind everyone who's been told or made to feel otherwise how beautiful they are. How much joy and wonder they bring to the people and places around them. That we are here, and that anyone who tries to make us feel differently should be ashamed. In reading this story, I hope we can learn to see the ways our words and actions can hurt others and how wrong they are. I hope, in reading this story, we are reminded how beautiful we are and always will be.

*For my mother, father, grandmother,  
and all of us that, too, are here.*

—MC

**Morgan Christie** is the author of multiple books and has won the Arc Poetry Poem of the Year Contest, the Prairie Fire Fiction Prize, and the Howling Bird Press Nonfiction Book Award. Morgan wasn't sure what she wanted to be when she grew up, but she knew that she wanted to make a difference in the world. She hopes that through the stories she tells she is doing just that. Morgan writes out of Toronto.

**Marley Berot** is an illustrator with over ten years of combined personal and professional experience. Her portfolio includes cover art for *Neuron*, graphic design work for the Toronto International Film Festival, logo design, and book illustration. She runs her own online store called [MarleysApothecary.com](http://MarleysApothecary.com). Marley is very passionate about her work as an artist, and this can be seen in every piece she creates. She lives in the Toronto area.



# *Our stories and cultures shape the places we call home.*

The street she lives on is made up of families from all over the world. Her family shares with her their stories of journey and struggle. Her own story begins here in this country, but she is sometimes made to feel she does not belong.

She listens to her family's voices. They tell her she will soar, they tell her she is beautiful. She listens and she says "I, too, am here. I belong."

Inspired by Langston Hughes's poem, "I, Too."

**September 2024 for ages 6–8**

Publicity contact: [emma@secondstorypress.ca](mailto:emma@secondstorypress.ca)

For Canadian orders: UTP 1-800-565-9523

For US orders: Orca Book Publishers 1-800-210-5277

ISBN: 978-1-77260-387-3

**\$21.95**

Marketing Campaign:

- Extensive ARC Distribution
- Digital galley promotion on Edelweiss, CataList, PW
- Outreach to Children's BookTok
- Promotion at Bookseller, Library, Educator Conferences: ABA, ALA, TLA, NCTE
- Author appearances, speaking engagements

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