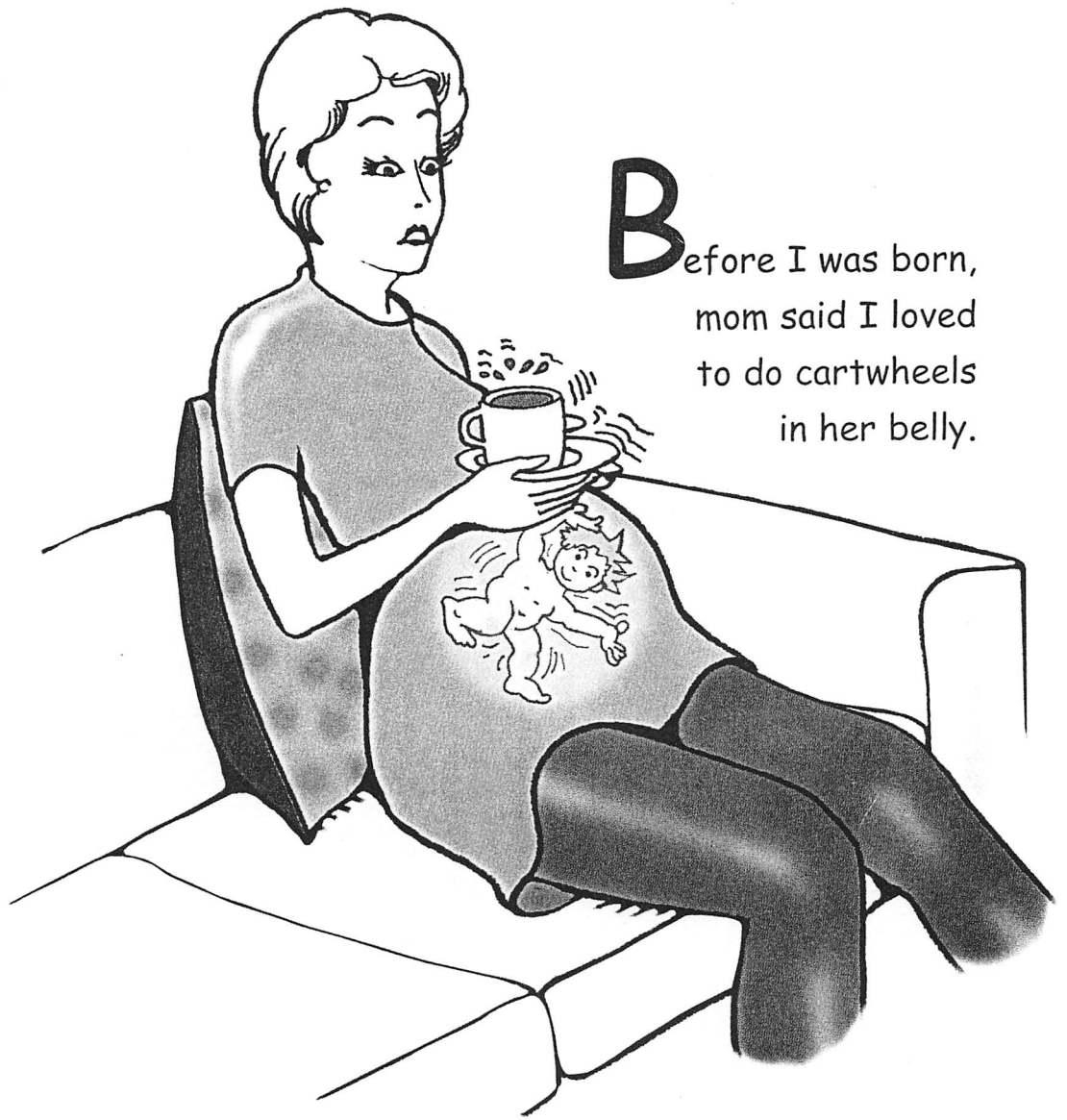


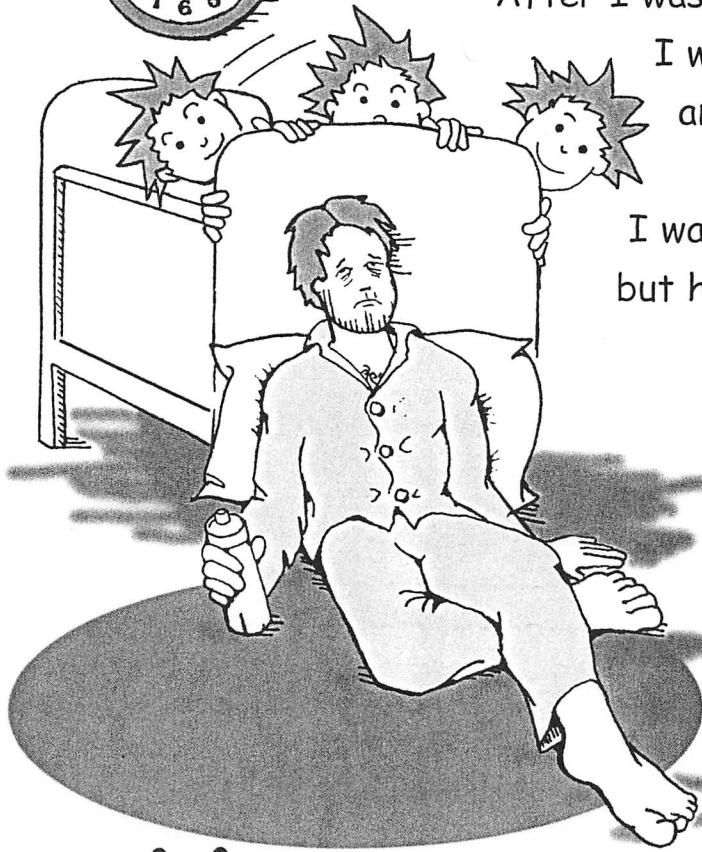
# Why Can't I Pay Attention



Hi, I'm Nicholas.  
I am 10 years old.  
I'm going to tell you  
my story from the  
very beginning.

By David H. Shawn MD, FRCP(C)  
The Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto

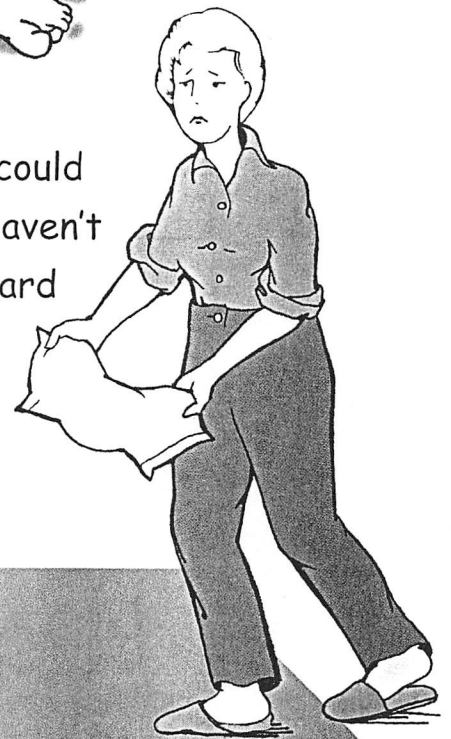




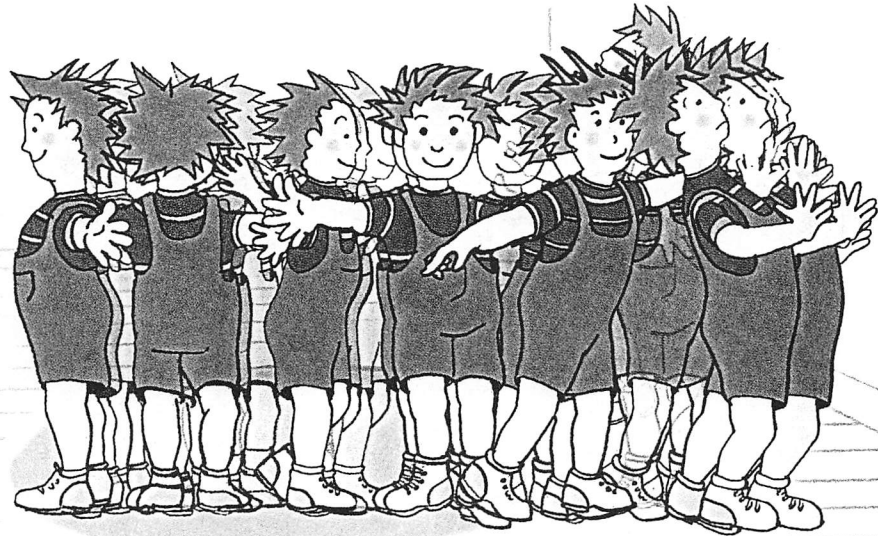
After I was born, Dad said  
I was always up at night  
and wanted to play.

I wasn't tired,  
but he sure was!

**M**om said as soon as I could  
walk, I started to run, and I haven't  
stopped since. She had a hard  
time catching up to me.



Dad said sometimes I had so much energy that I'd spin like a top, and bounce off the walls.



**M**om said  
I got into everything.



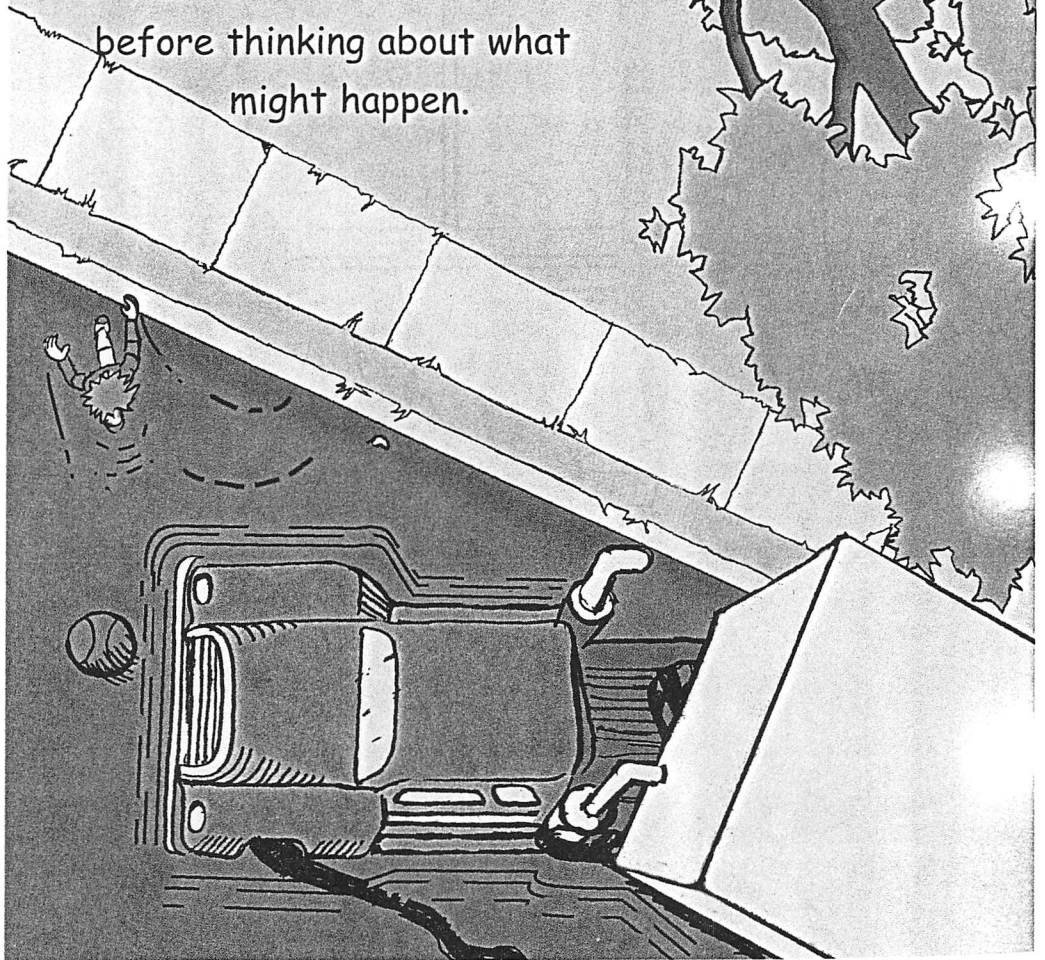
**A**t the Daycare they said I was friendly and lovable. But they asked my mom why I couldn't settle down and listen.



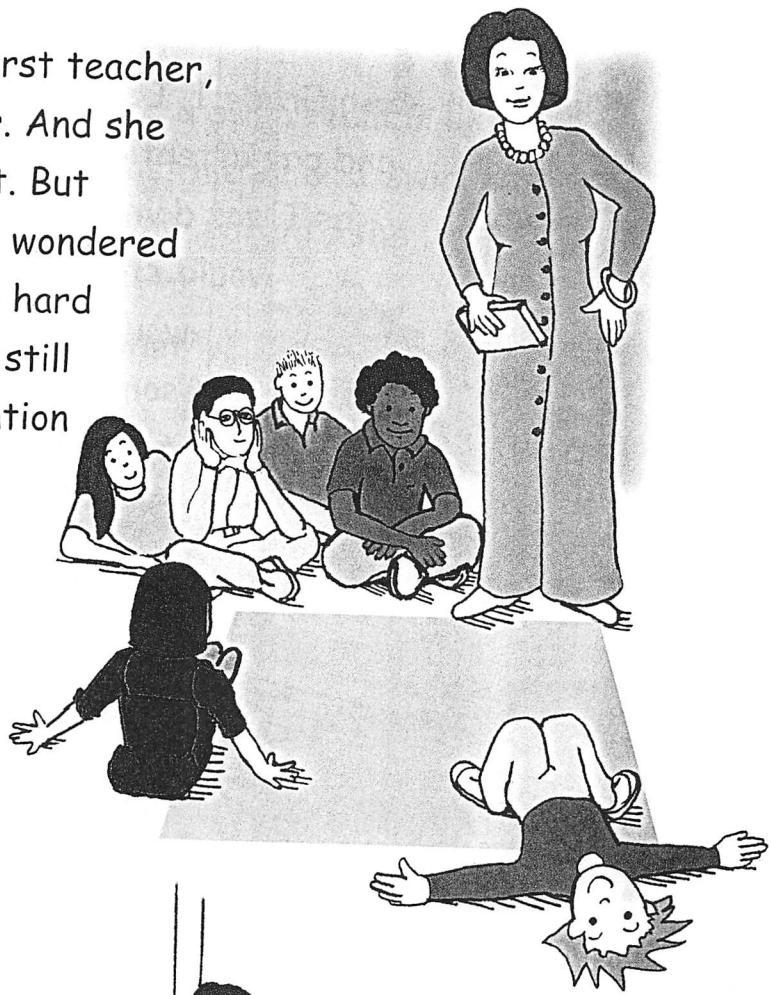
**D**ad said he  
always had to keep his  
eyes on me. Sometimes  
I'd climb too high.



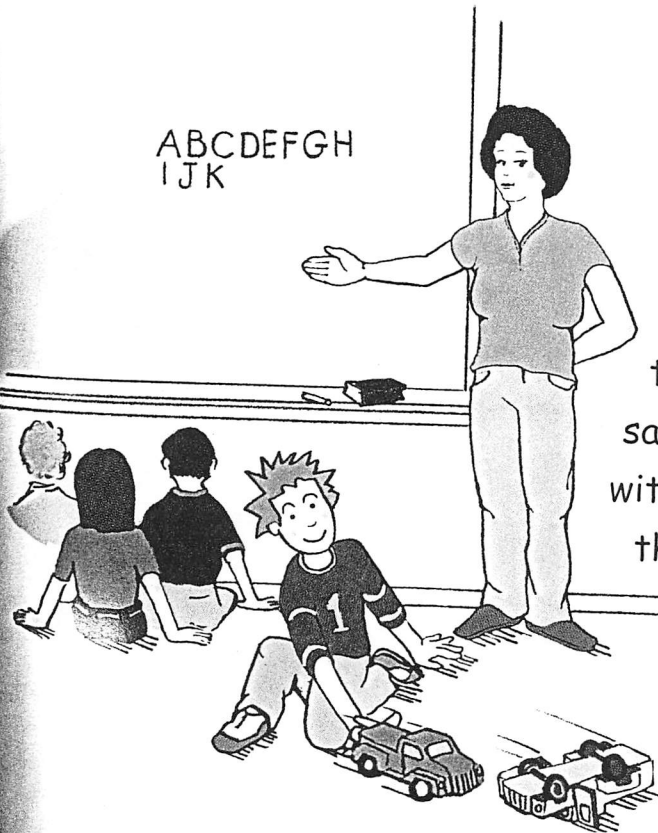
Or run onto the street  
before thinking about what  
might happen.



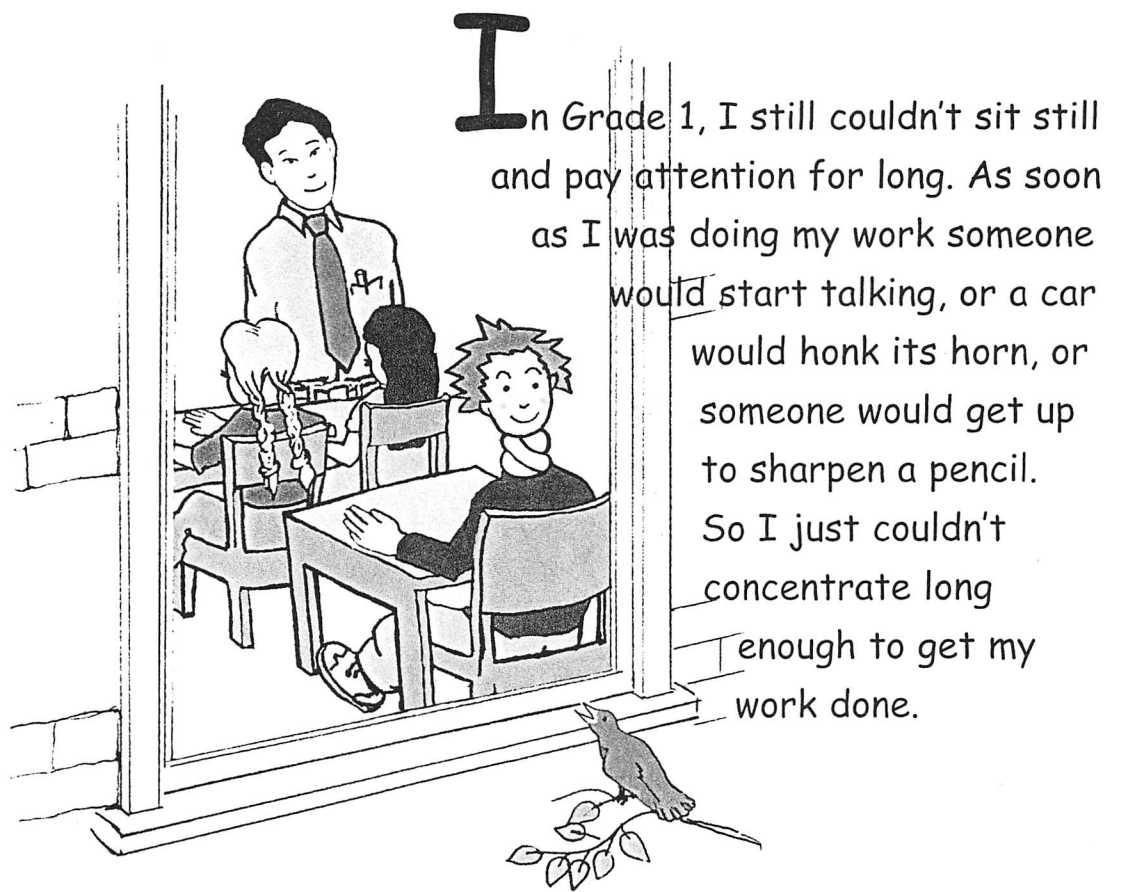
I loved my first teacher,  
Mrs. Chester. And she  
liked me a lot. But  
Mrs. Chester wondered  
why it was so hard  
for me to sit still  
and pay attention  
in circle time.



ABCDEFGHIH  
IJK



**I**n senior  
Kindergarten, my  
teacher Miss Nadeau  
said I wanted to play  
with the trucks and  
the sand toys instead  
of learning my  
letters.

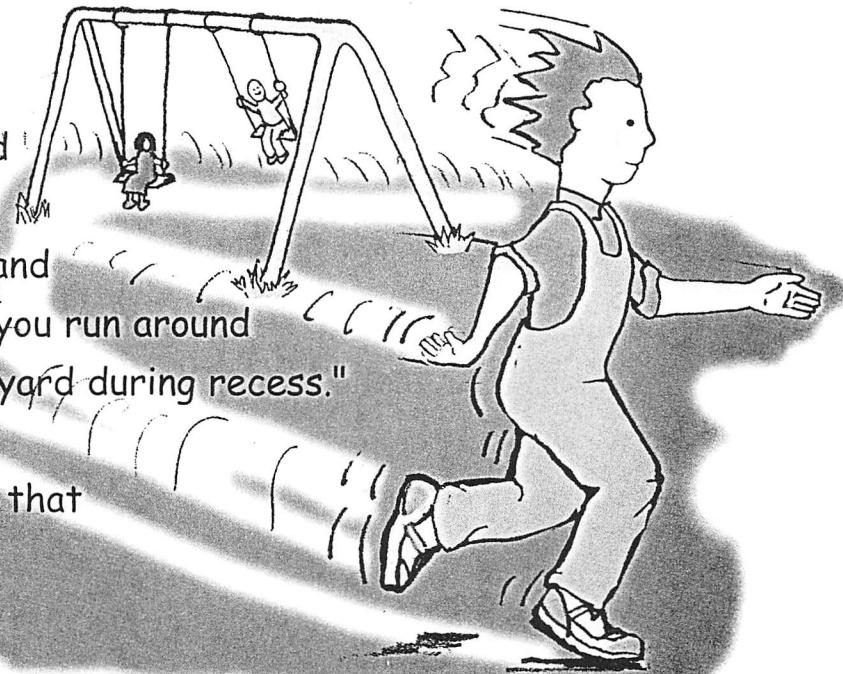


**I**n Grade 1, I still couldn't sit still and pay attention for long. As soon as I was doing my work someone would start talking, or a car would honk its horn, or someone would get up to sharpen a pencil. So I just couldn't concentrate long enough to get my work done.

When I had too much energy to settle down, my teacher Mr. Wong would say: "Nicholas you have ants in your pants.

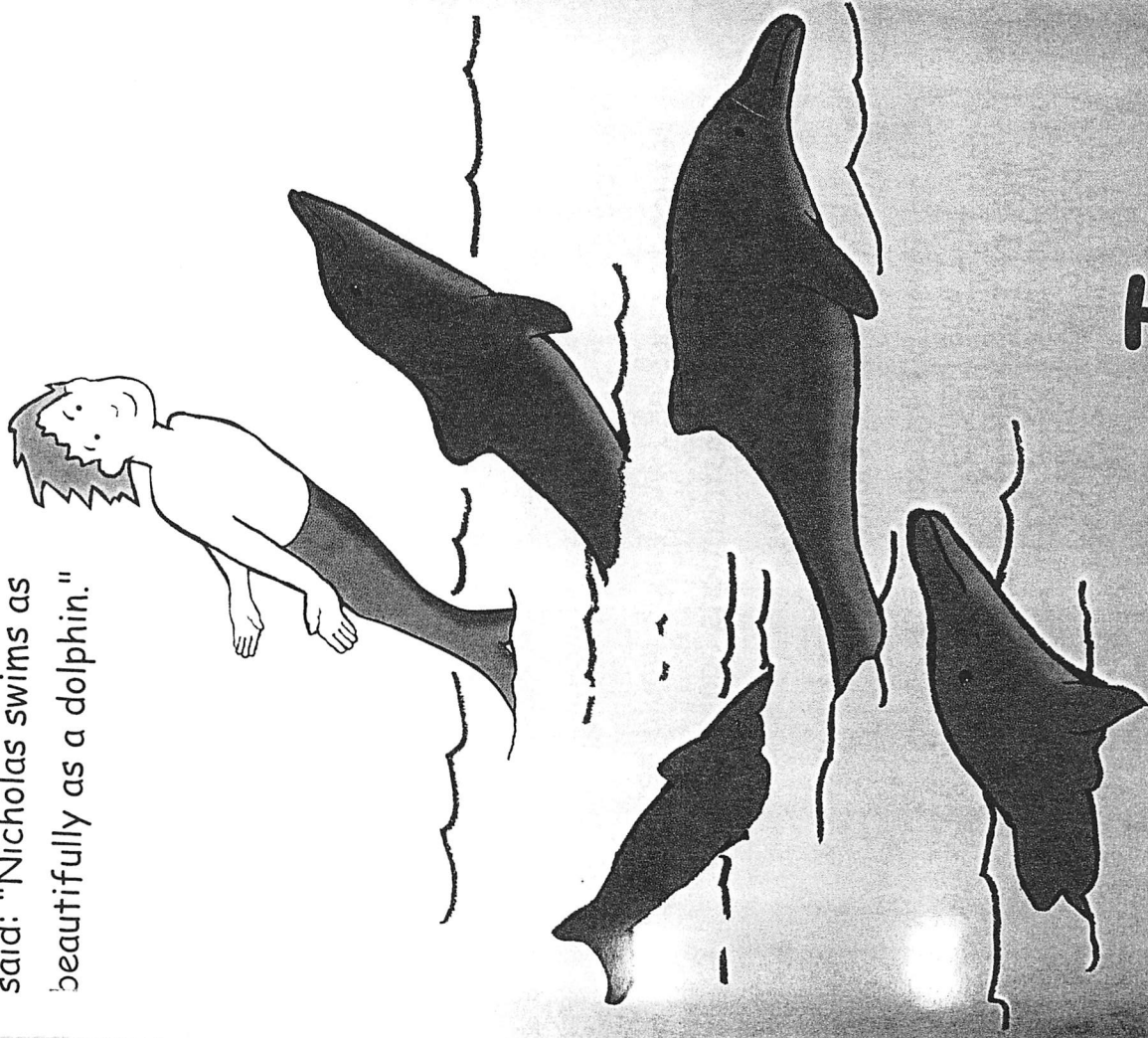
You better walk around the class a few times and make sure you run around the school yard during recess."

Sometimes that would help.

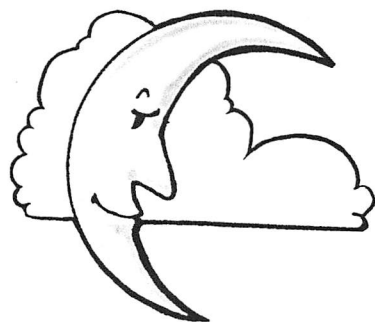




That summer I joined a swim team. I like to feel  
the water rushing past me when I swim fast.  
When my coach met my parents she  
said: "Nicholas swims as  
beautifully as a dolphin."

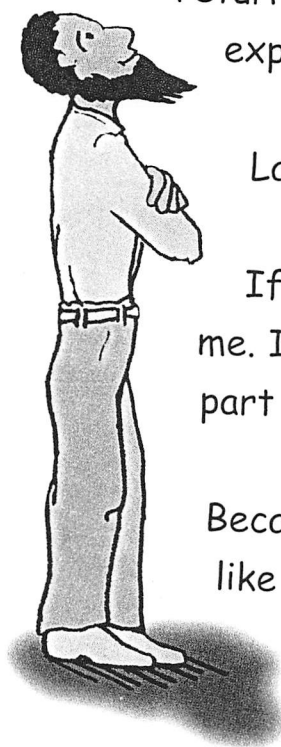


**I** felt proud.



In Grade 2 my teacher was Mr. Singh. Sometimes I missed his instructions because my attention wandered away.

When the rest of the class was working, Mr. Singh would come to my desk and quietly whisper: "Earth to Nicholas. Earth to Nicholas." My attention would return to class and Mr. Singh would help me by explaining the instructions again.

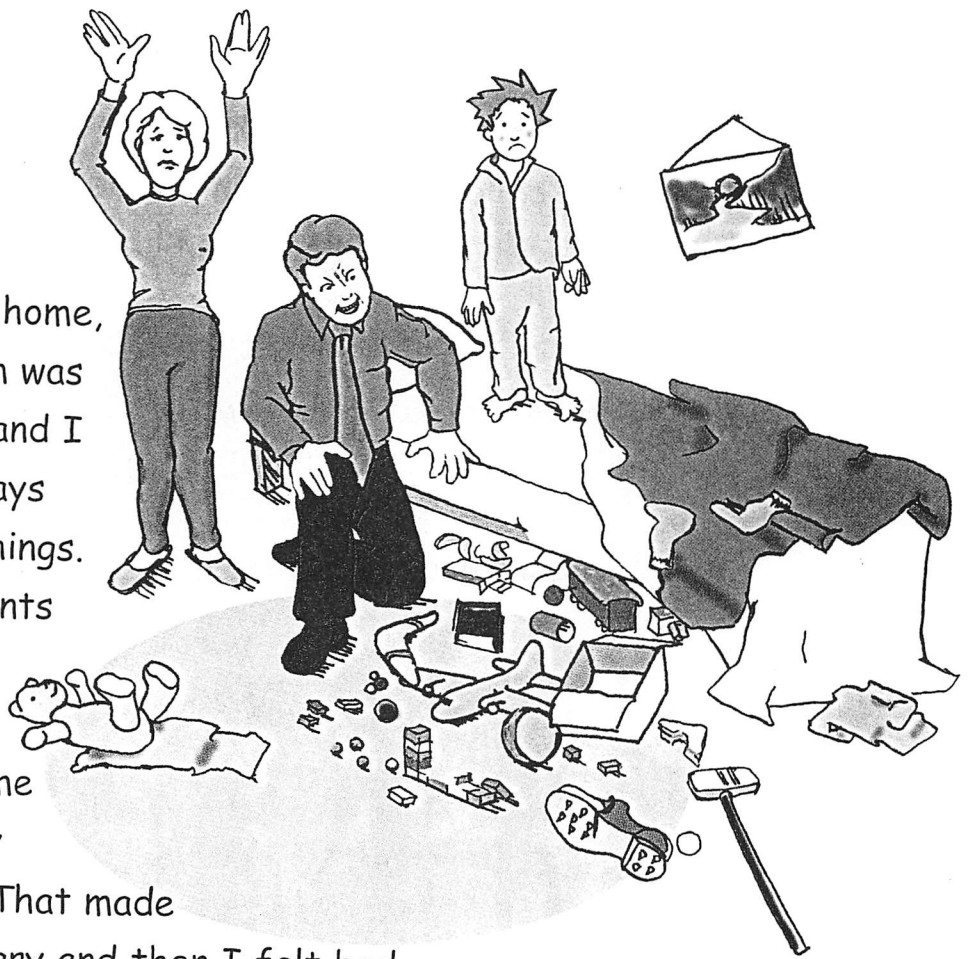


Later he would check to see how I was doing.

If I was having trouble, Mr. Singh would help me. If I was disorganized, he would tell me which part to work on next.

Because I still couldn't sit still and pay attention like the other kids, my reading and math weren't very good. A special teacher started to help me in class.

**A**t home, my room was a mess and I was always losing things. My parents always had to remind me to do my chores. That made them angry and then I felt bad.

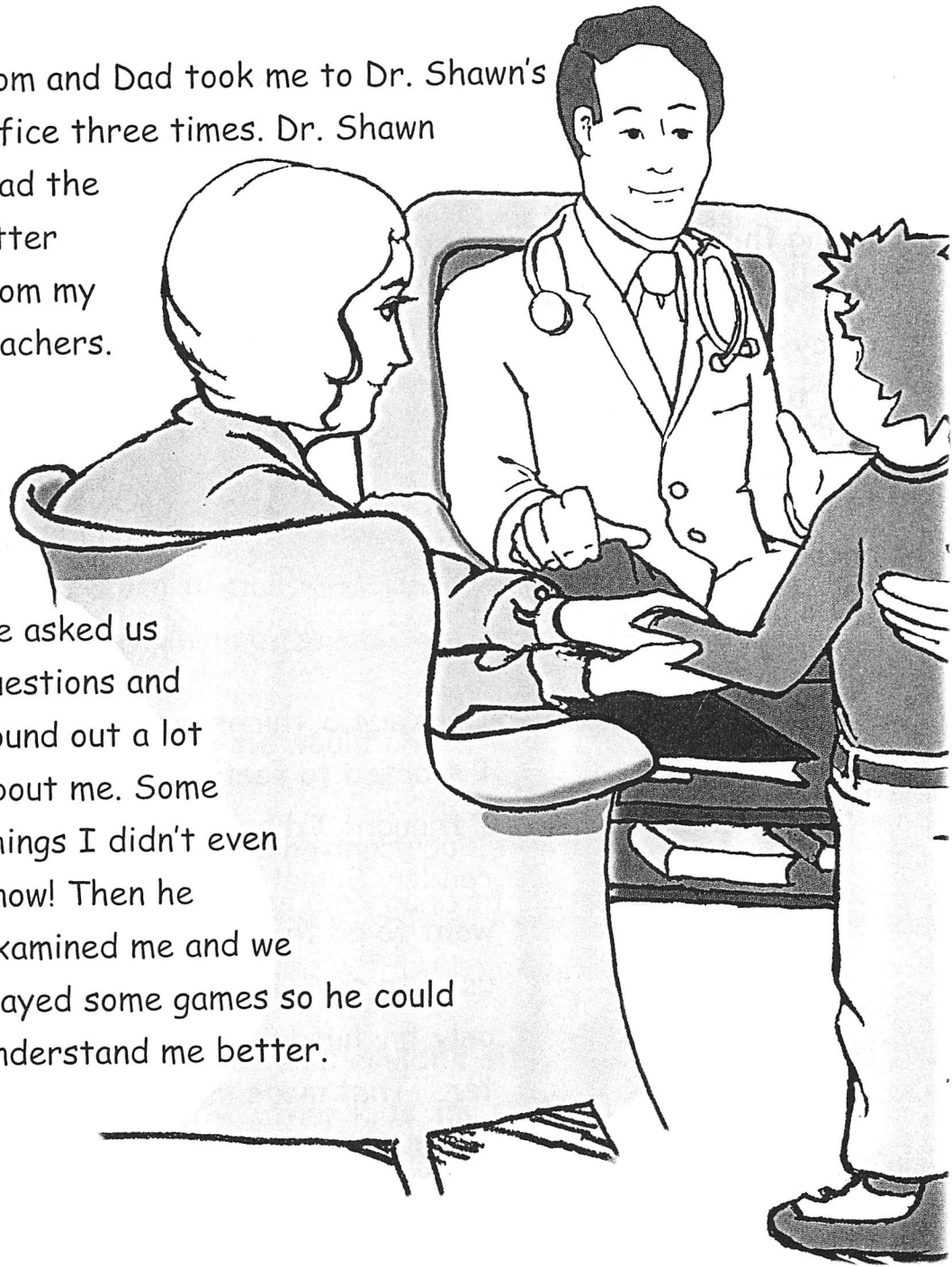


In Grade 3, things got worse. I started to feel really dumb and I thought I'd never be a good reader. Sometimes I didn't even want to go to school. My parents used to say: "Nicholas, if you would only try harder, you could do better." That made me sad. They didn't understand that I couldn't concentrate and get my work done like the other kids.

**M**y principal, Mrs. Barten, spoke to my mom. Mrs. Barten said a children's doctor might be able to help me to settle down and do my work.

Mom and Dad took me to Dr. Shawn's office three times. Dr. Shawn read the letter from my teachers.

He asked us questions and found out a lot about me. Some things I didn't even know! Then he examined me and we played some games so he could understand me better.

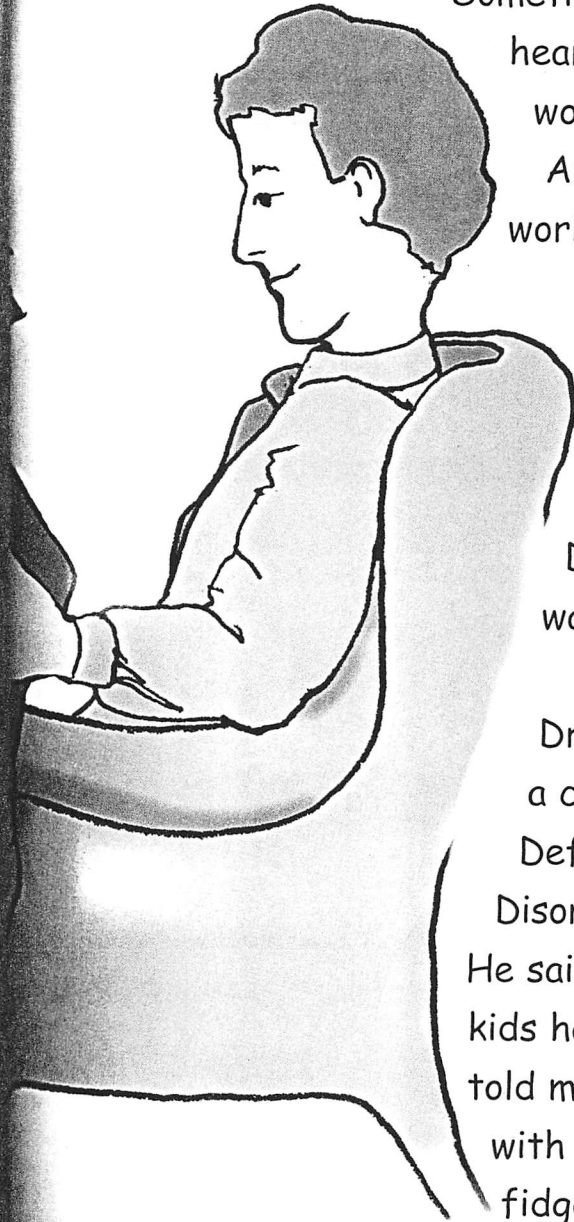


Dr. Shawn said that there are many different reasons why kids can't sit still and pay attention.

Sometimes it's because their parents are worried and upset.

Sometimes it's because they can't hear well or understand the words the teacher is saying.

And sometimes the school work is just too hard for them.



**T**here were other reasons but I can't remember them all.

Dr. Shawn said my reason was different.

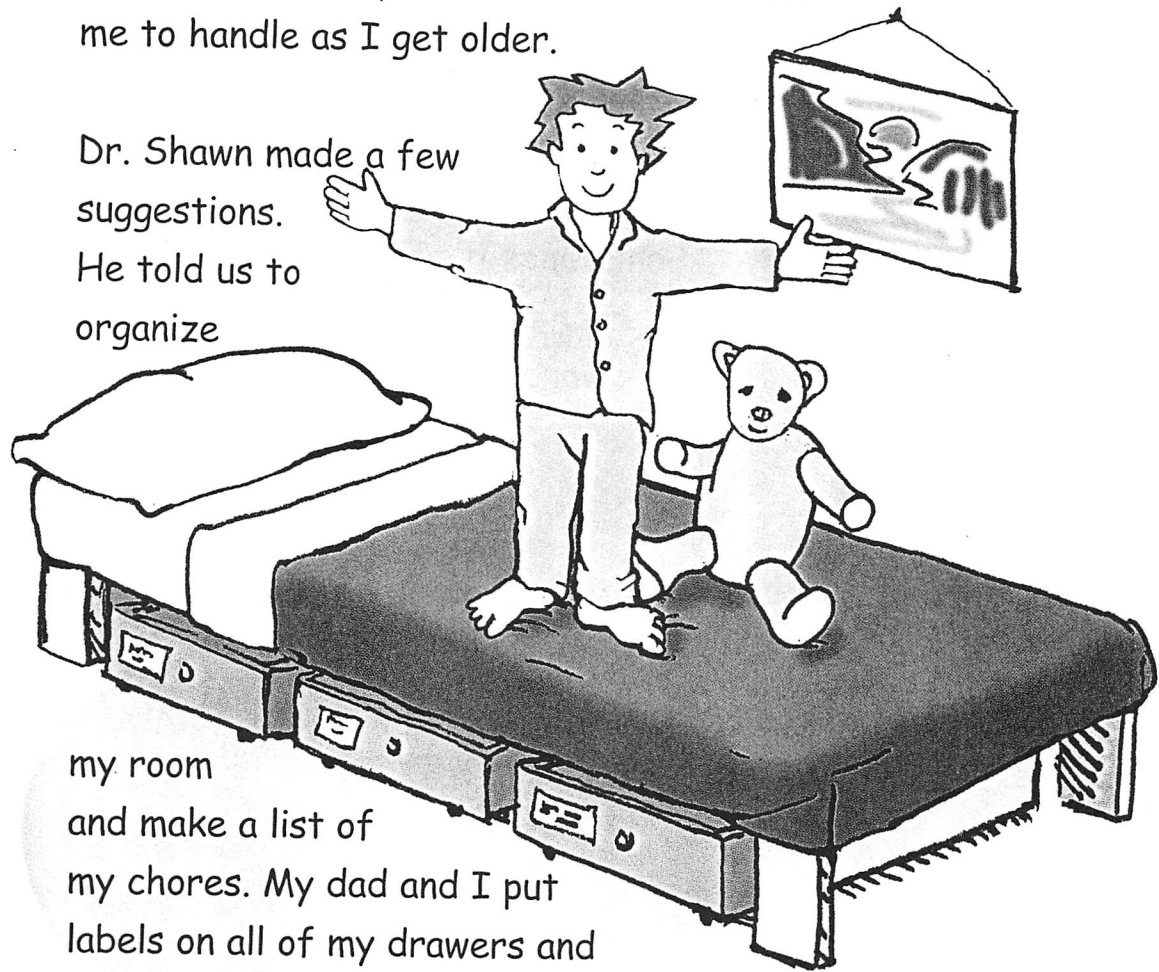
Dr. Shawn said that I have a condition called 'Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder' (ADHD for short).

He said that lots of other kids have it too. Dr. Shawn told me that some children with ADHD are jumpy and fidgety like me and others

aren't jumpy or fidgety at all. But every boy and girl with ADHD has some trouble paying attention in school.

Dr. Shawn said my ADHD will be easier for me to handle as I get older.

Dr. Shawn made a few suggestions. He told us to organize

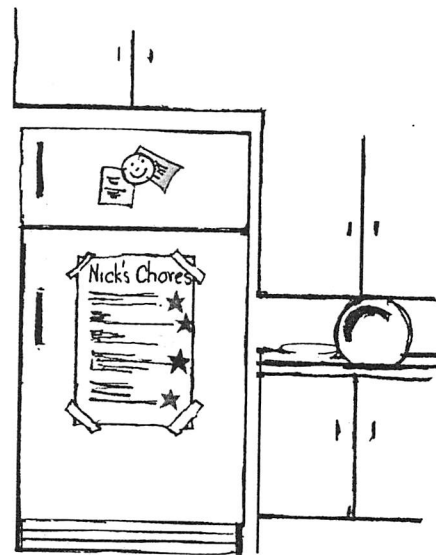


my room and make a list of my chores. My dad and I put labels on all of my drawers and arranged my things on shelves. Mom and I put a list of my chores on the refrigerator.

I got a star every time I did a chore. When I earned 10 stars I got an extra half-hour of T.V. That helped me to get my chores done!

Dr. Shawn said my teachers did all the right things. He spoke to the school and I got started on 'points'. That meant when I finished my work in class I earned points that got me extra time on the computer.

**D**r. Shawn and a counsellor helped my family and me to talk about our feelings. My parents didn't know how frustrated and sad I felt because I wasn't doing well in school and was always losing things.



I didn't know that Mom and Dad cared about me so much. I thought they were angry with me, but they were just worried. It felt so good to hear them say "I love you" and to get a big hug. Some boys and girls with ADHD do much better in school and at home with the kinds of help I got. But I was still having trouble concentrating and getting my work done.



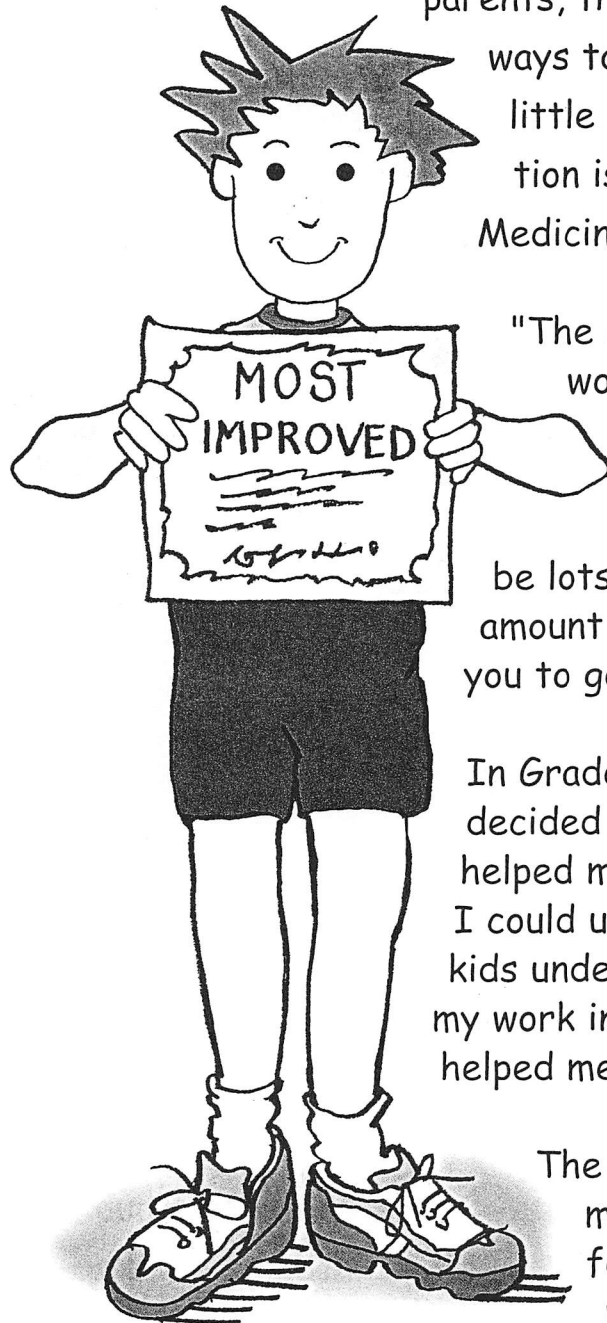
Dr. Shawn explained: "Nicholas, I want you to understand that ADHD is a condition just like asthma is a condition. Children with asthma have trouble breathing and some-

times medicine can help them."

"I

t's the same with ADHD. Boys and girls with ADHD have trouble paying attention. You and your parents, the school, and I have found

ways to help you concentrate a little better. But paying attention is still hard for you. Medicine may help".



"The right amount of medicine won't change the kind of person you are. You will still have a great sense of humour and you'll still be lots of fun. But the right amount of medicine might help you to get your work done."

In Grade 4, my parents and I decided to try the medicine. It helped me to concentrate in class. I could understand what the other kids understood. I finished a lot of my work in school and my parents helped me at home.

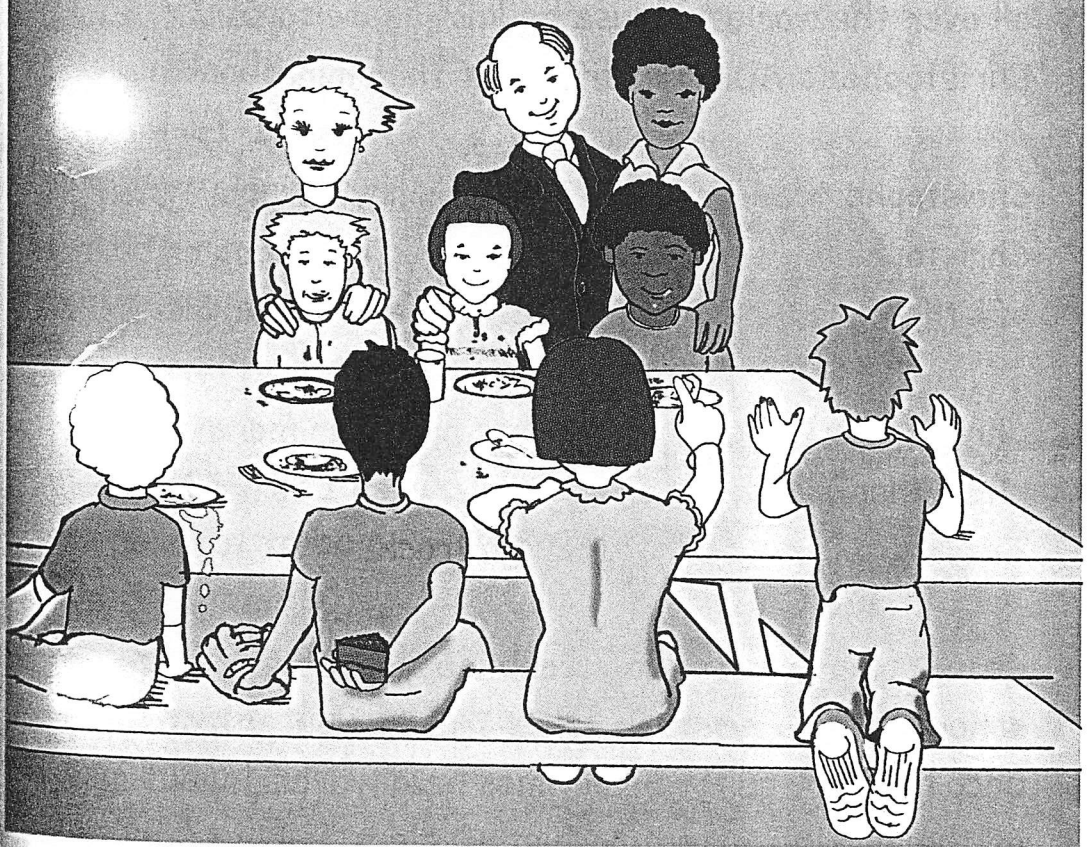
The special teacher still gave me extra help but I didn't feel dumb anymore. I worked hard and caught up to the other kids in class.



**T**his summer the best thing happened! Dr. Shawn's office arranged a picnic for the kids with ADHD and their families. And I made three new friends -

Christopher, Melanie, and Ali.

It was nice to meet other kids with ADHD and know that I wasn't alone. I like all my friends but Christopher, Melanie, and Ali understand me the best.





**C**hristopher is a computer whiz. He talks to people all over the world because he knows how to surf the net. Christopher's ADHD is different than mine.

Christopher is never restless and jumpy like me. When Christopher was a baby, he didn't spin like a top or bounce off the walls. And he didn't get into everything like I did.

Christopher has great ideas, but he's even more disorganized than I am. My parents smile when I complain that I've had to keep Christopher 'on track'.

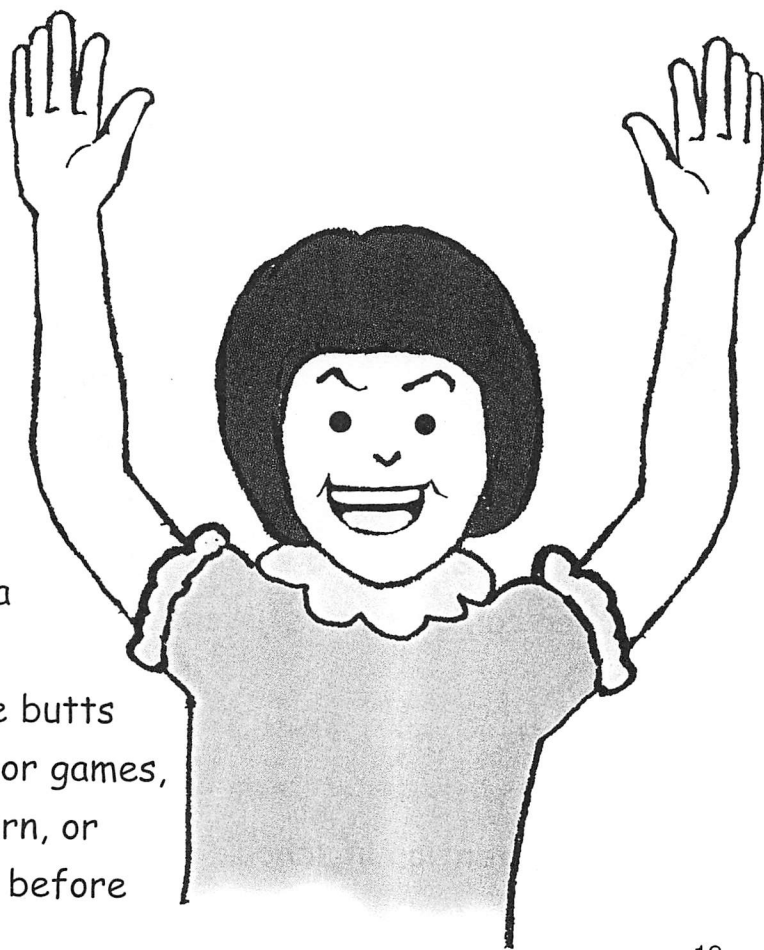
Christopher has a lot of trouble paying attention in school. When Christopher has trouble concentrating, he becomes very quiet. Sometimes he daydreams. But most of the time his attention just wanders away and he

doesn't even know it. It's hard for anyone to notice when Christopher isn't paying attention because he never gets restless or jumpy like me.

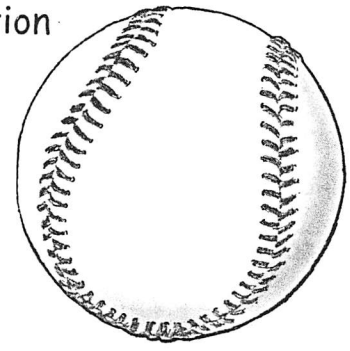
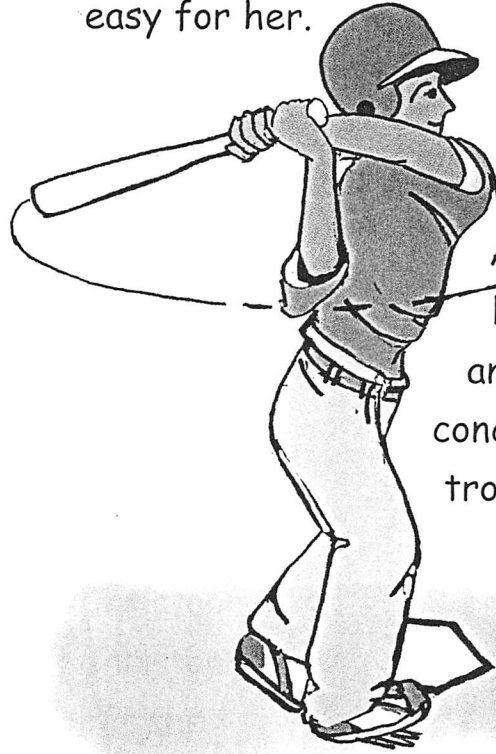
In Grade 4, Christopher wasn't doing very well. His parents and teachers thought it would be a good idea to see Dr. Shawn. Dr. Shawn said that there are three kinds of ADHD. He said Christopher has the kind of ADHD that is the hardest for everyone to recognize.

**M**elanie has a great imagination and she's really lively.

Her mother says she's like a little tornado sometimes. In school, Melanie is a chatterbox. When she talks too much in class, the teacher quietly reminds Melanie not to be a 'social butterfly'. Sometimes Melanie butts into conversations or games, doesn't wait her turn, or blurts out answers before



the question is even finished. She can't seem to help herself. Melanie is learning to 'stop, look, listen and think' before doing things that make her friends angry. Melanie doesn't have as much trouble paying attention in class as Christopher and I do. She is very smart and school is easy for her.



Ali is terrific in sports. He also has ADHD. His family, the school, and Dr. Shawn have helped Ali to concentrate in class. But Ali still has trouble learning.

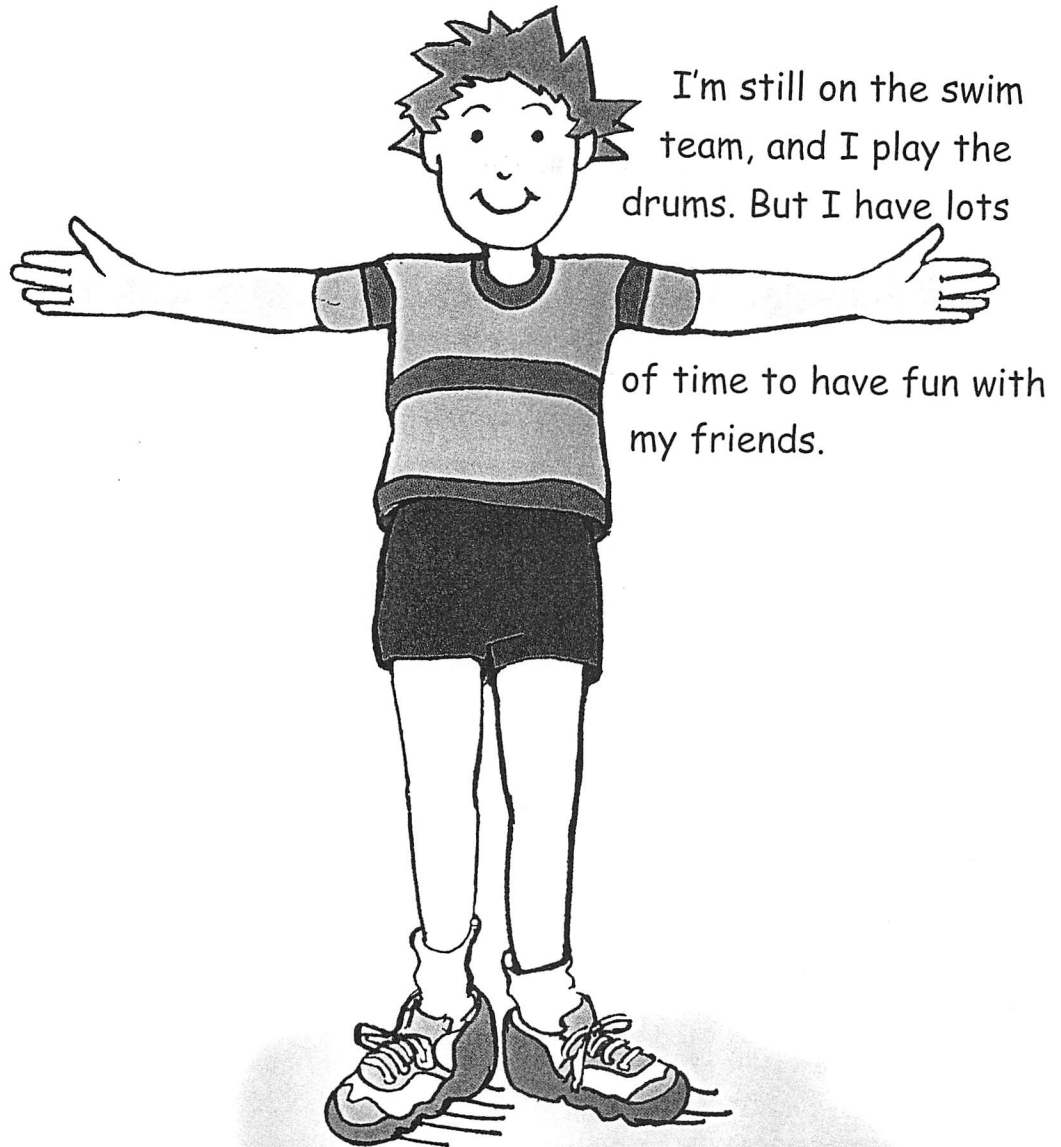
**D**r. Shawn asked a psychologist to see Ali.

Ali has another condition called a 'learning disorder'. His learning disorder makes it hard for him to read. Ali learns better in a small class at school where the teacher can give the students special help.

After the picnic I realized that there are lots of girls and boys with ADHD and all of us have some trouble paying attention in school. Some children with ADHD are

restless and jumpy like me, and some aren't restless at all. My family, the school, and Dr. Shawn help me a lot.

But most of all, I help myself. I use all of my energy to concentrate in class. And if I don't finish all of my work in class, I make sure I do the rest at home.



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

A few years ago I searched for an educational storybook about attention problems and ADHD in children. When I couldn't find a book that precisely met the needs of my patients and their families, I decided to create one myself. The narrative of "Why Can't I Pay Attention?" has been printed exactly as my patients and their families read it in my practice. I hope you and your children find this book a colourful and engaging educational tool.

"Why Can't I Pay Attention?" presents ten important points:

1. At times, all children display one or all of the symptoms of *inattention*, *restlessness*, and *impulsivity*.
2. The symptoms of *inattention*, *restlessness*, and *impulsivity* become a concern when a child does poorly in school or has trouble making and keeping friends.
3. ADHD, as well as *Other Conditions\**, must be considered as possible causes of *inattention*, *restlessness*, and *impulsivity* in a child who does poorly in school or has trouble making and keeping friends.
4. Your child's assessment should include: a thorough history with information about your child's behaviour and functioning in the home, community, and school environments as well as a developmental history; a complete physical examination; a review of previous report cards from Junior Kindergarten onwards; a current teacher's note; a screen of academic achievement; and a family interview. Sometimes further investigation is required to reach a correct diagnosis.
5. Nicholas relates his experience with ADHD. Together with Melanie and Christopher, the three children demonstrate the subtypes of ADHD. These include ADHD: Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type (Melanie), ADHD: Predominantly

Inattentive Type (Christopher), and ADHD: Hyperactive-Impulsive/Inattentive (Combined) Type (Nicholas).

6. Children with ADHD have a greater than average chance of additional childhood conditions such as: Conduct Disorder/ Oppositional Defiant Disorder; Anxiety Disorders; Mood Disorders; and Learning Disorders. (Ali's character illustrates a child who has ADHD as well as a Learning Disorder).
7. At the present time, one specific laboratory test for ADHD does not exist. There is however, considerable evidence that ADHD is a biological disorder with symptoms that at times may persist into adolescence and adulthood.
8. Successful treatment requires a team approach including the child, the family, the community, educators, and health care professionals.
9. As in Nicholas's story, non-pharmacologic interventions should be implemented before medication is considered. In the classroom, this should include frequent feedback and a token-reward system to help keep the child on task. Sometimes the special education department of the school needs to be involved. At home, expectations regarding behaviour and completion of chores and homework should be clear. The development of organizational skills should be encouraged.
10. When medication is used, it is only one part of a total treatment plan.

Early diagnosis and treatment increase the child's ability to lead a happy and meaningful life.

\* Physical Disorders (e.g. Hearing Loss, Hyperthyroidism); other Mental and Emotional Disorders such as Mood Disorders (e.g. Childhood Depression), Anxiety Disorders, Conduct Disorder/ Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Autistic Disorder, Personality Disorders, Personality Change due to a General Medical Condition or a Substance-Related Disorder; Child Neglect/Abuse; Tic Disorders; Medication-Induced Symptoms; the Bored Child with very superior intelligence; the Normal Child with Age-Appropriate Overactivity

Dr. David Shawn is a Pediatrician at The Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto and an Assistant Professor, Department of Pediatrics, University of Toronto.



## Author's Acknowledgements

"Why Can't I Pay Attention?" reflects some of my clinical experience with children who have attention problems.

My wife Debbie and daughters, Sari, Naomi, Ilana, and Rayna sat patiently through countless revisions of this manuscript, always suggesting better ways of telling Nicholas' story. In truth, I share authorship with them.

Fortune has it that I was encouraged in this endeavour by three fine individuals who happen to be outstanding clinicians and academic psychiatrists. I wish to thank Dr. Paul Steinhauer, Dr. Mary Seeman, and Dr. Stanley Freeman.

As I continue through life as a parent and practising Pediatrician, I am constantly reminded that parents must be positive role models for their children. For this, I thank my parents, Herman and Beatrice.

I would like to thank Novartis for generously providing this book as a public service.

Finally, it is my hope that you will enjoy Nicholas' story and learn from it. If you do, then I will have accomplished my task.

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