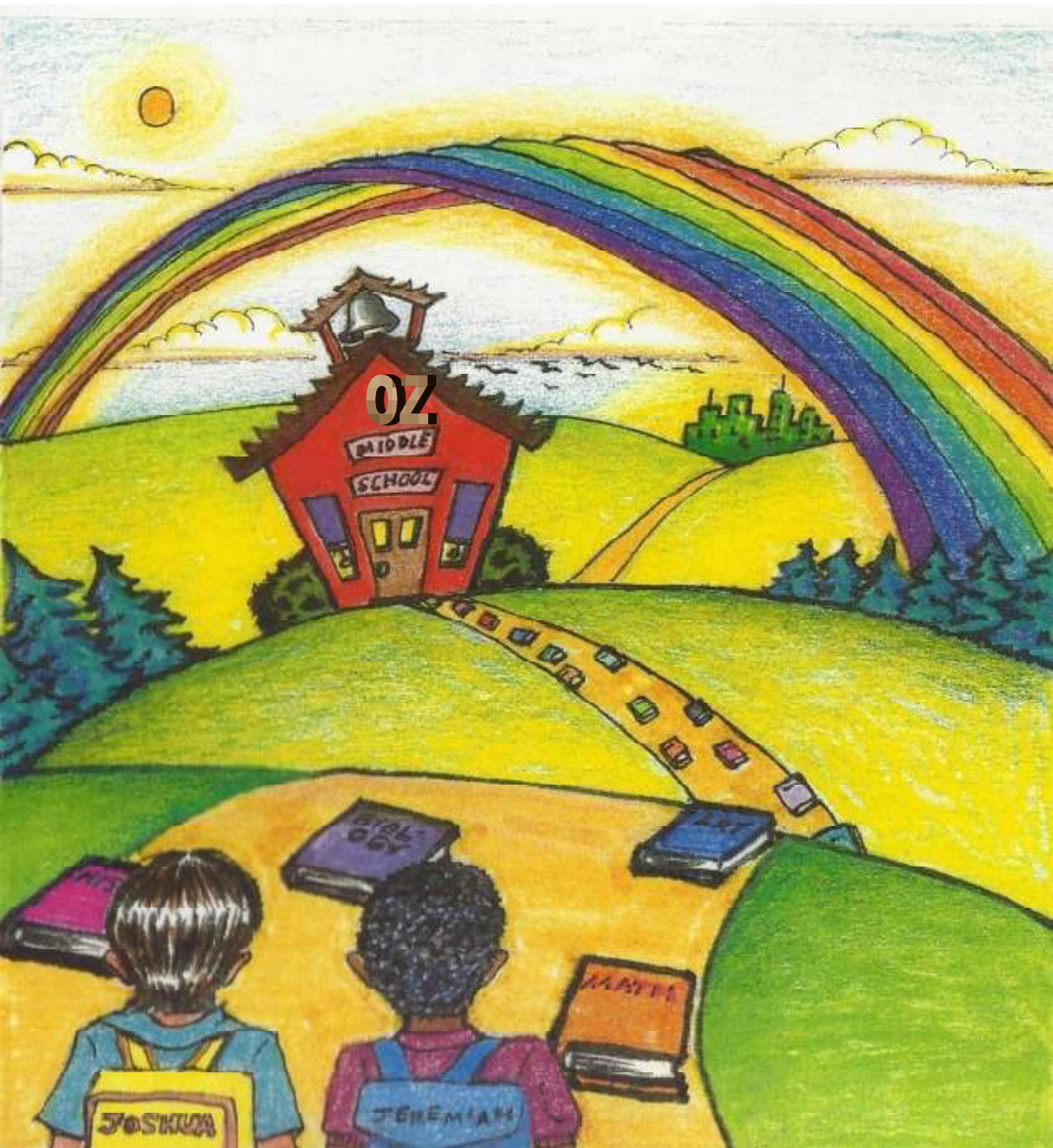


If it's to Be, It's up to Me



“Real education should consist of drawing the goodness and best out of our own students. What better book can there be than the book of humanity.”

Cesar Chavez

Civil Rights Leader



1927-1993

Dedications and Acknowledgements

I dedicate this book to the teachers whose influences and inspirations prepared me for this moment. I must also include the powerful women in my life: my grandmother, my mother, my sister, and my wife whose true guidance comes in many forms but is always accompanied with care and consideration. This book is dedicated to our “lost generation who could be our stars of tomorrow” and to their families who will reap the benefits of this writing, as well as to the individuals who will make those benefits possible. I thank the Holy Spirit for anointing me to write this book, and also thank my spiritual mentor, Bishop Chatham, whose teaching encouraged me to leave this legacy for our struggling generation who has turned their back on Education.

**“Easy money is the main culprit of the Lost Generation
who have turned their back on Education”**

Joshua (2011)



Foreword

Although this story is fiction, and not based on an actual life, it finds its basis in the facts of life itself which challenge our “at-risk” students and single parents who serve both as parent and provider while trying to have a life of their own. What happens to these adolescents, and how they adjust to the situations in which they find themselves, will eventually have a domino effect on our society, whether we help them achieve success or support them in our penal system. The two young men in this story represent the people, of color, in this country who are constantly looking for a way out of the circumstances in which they were born. The implications of the previous statement might read as the stereotyping of a particular group of people, but truly, the author did not intend this at all. In today’s ever-changing demographic surveys, the statistical facts speak volumes: our nation’s dropout rate, against ethnic breakdowns, show a generation lost to education—and particular groupings of color which now fill the penal system. This book is written in the attempt to “think-outside-the-box” and encourages, as well as revitalizes, the approaches as to how we, as parents and educators, create a dialogue with all students. We must be part of the process to guide students, with their cooperation and communication, to think about what lies ahead. This book is unique in that it uses the Five E’s of

Education, which incorporates the reader, and the teacher, as well as the parent(s), to engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate each situation that these two young men encounter. The best plan for this book would be to use it before summer break, and after exams, to stimulate what is known as “food” for thought: to create thinking habits, and understanding, before they act.

“You must be your brother’s keeper, or he’ll drag you down in his ruins.”



W.E.B. DuBois (1907)

Introduction

“If it’s to be, it’s up to me” is based on the lives’ of two young minority students who develop a strong relationship that is challenged by the desires of today and because tomorrow isn’t promised to them. The story tells of the perils and environments of Joshua’s and Jeremiah’s experiences as they encounter the daily stresses, strains, and struggles of the growing pains that many at-risk students face in today’s society and that influences all of our stars of tomorrow. It’s about the most precious gift we have as human beings, which is the gift of choice and how important it can be if chosen wisely. It orchestrates and questions one’s values, beliefs, and morals which occur during those wonder years of puberty which challenge the upbringing that affects us all during that stage of life. The dilemma of “to be or not to be” is the question that must be answered as our two young men try to survive while attending Oz middle school.

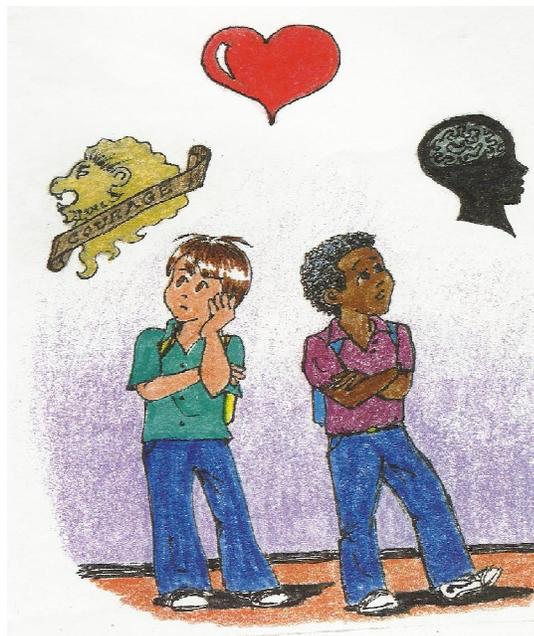


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Chapter 1 Dreams and Visions



Hello, my name is Jeremiah, and as you can see, I'm lying here in a coma. I can't believe that I'm unconscious! Or that I'm in a hospital! The reason I'm here in the hospital is that I had an accident a week ago. I can see my Grandma and Joshua, but that's all I can do; I can't move. I guess you are wondering how I got here.

Well, it began six months ago when my Grandma had me transferred to a gifted and talented school called Oz. I did something extremely foolish to get sent there, but I thought I was protecting myself from three bullies who tried to beat me up.

Things started when I took the little knife. This knife was given to me as a souvenir

by my grandmother when she went to Florida on the only vacation she has ever had. It was a pretty little knife that had pictures of her favorite birds on it: flamingos. I remember taking the knife to school for protection and flashing it to scare the bullies away.

I My Grandma took me out of that school and had me transferred to Oz, which was known for Academic Excellence, and its programs that prepare you for college. This move pleases my Grandma because she didn't want me to be labeled as a "bad kid who carried a knife," and Oz's programs would help me to become a better student.

I remember my first day at Oz because the Principal took the time to give me a guided tour of the school. This really got my attention and made me wonder. Why would this man take the time to show me around and get to know me? I mean, I was in trouble, and it seemed many people had passed judgment on me already, so I was shocked! I guess it had to do with the statue that was inside of the school. It was a bust of a Greek philosopher with these words engraved under it, "Education without educating the heart is no education at all; therefore, we must include developing character as well as the mind."

Do you know the name of this Greek philosopher? If you do write his name here:

***** (The answer will be in back of this chapter)**

I hope this will help you think like I do and eventually give you a clue, or idea, as you read and discuss this book. The book tells about my best friend Joshua, and me, and about how important it is to develop the right character traits to be successful in life, or at least what I think is successful.

Well, let's learn a little more about Oz before I tell you how I ended up in my current situation. This school was truly amazing, and I began understand how it got the reputation of being a great school to attend. I felt extremely blessed because the teachers follow the principal's leads: they consistently show how much they cared and how glad they are that you are here. Something else that really captured my attention as the principal and I walked the halls; I noticed a mural, or painting, covering the walls. There was a picture of Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz near the cafeteria with these words next to her, **"Somewhere over the rainbow, I will find my purpose in life which will help me to achieve my goals; for what I learn here will help me choose my destiny."** Next to her was a large painting of a rainbow, with two pictures underneath it: one picture was a door, and the other was a window. I remembered asking the principal what they

represented. He replied, "One represents how your mind reacts to knowledge that is offered to you, whether you willingly accept it or not, while the other represents all the opportunities that exist, and are waiting for you, if you make positive decisions in life."

The door represents your mind, and the window represents your opportunity.

The principal explained to me, "That the door symbolizes how you distinguish the information that is given to you daily, and you cannot hear or learn what you need to in order to be successful when the door is closed. However, when the door is open, goals in life are attainable by positioning yourself to make positive things happen; also, you must prepare yourself in order to achieve positives in your life. The window of opportunity helps you see clearly the visions, and goals, you foresee in your future when exploring the possibilities for the best scenarios to attain those dreams or goals and not the fantasies that are unrealistic or unattainable. The window shows you how to find purpose in your life.

With a puzzled look, I stared at him; then, he said, "The window represents your dreams and desires."



Dreams vs. Fantasies

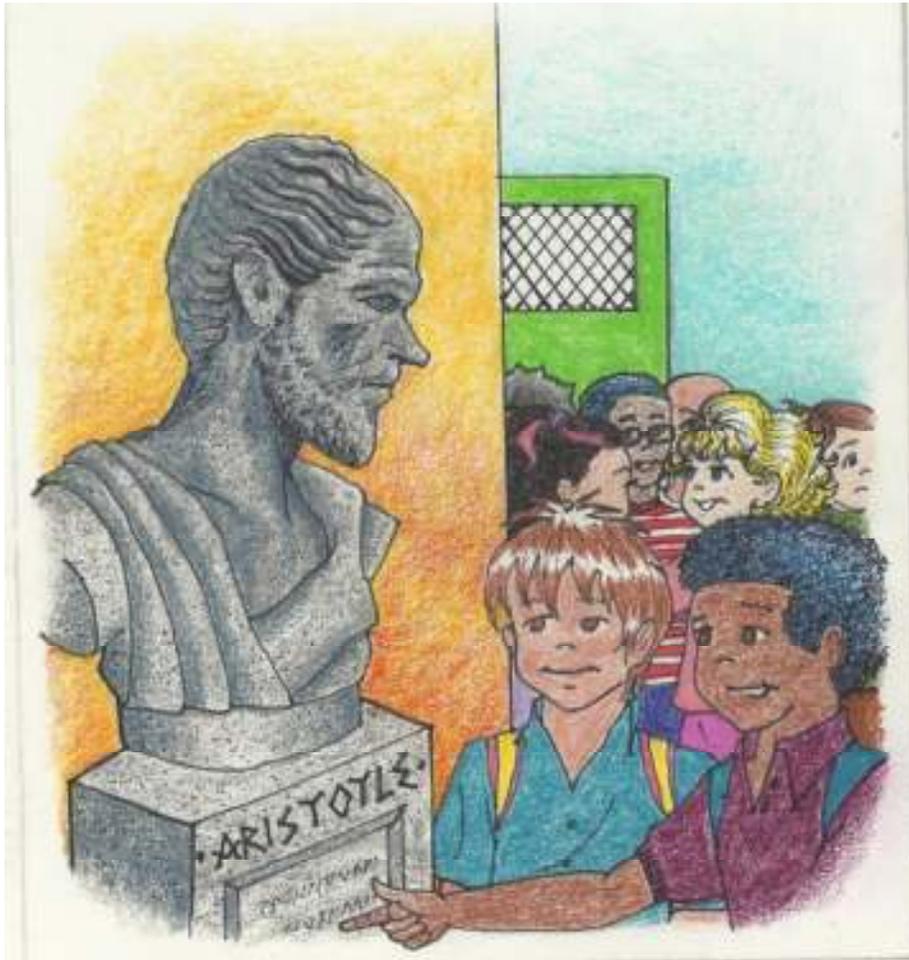
Explore: Have you ever wondered what your purpose in life is?*

Clearly think about something you do well and that is attainable. Do not think about what your friends or parents want, but what you actually want to set as a goal. If you have a Bridge's Program at your school, you have a means to explore what gifts you have to help you to succeed in your dreams. Oh-oh, think and put it on paper. What are your dreams, and are they attainable?

As we continued our tour down the hall, I notice the other three pictures on the wall of the Wizard of Oz characters: the Scarecrow, the Tin-Man, and finally the Lion. The explanations of these paintings will be discussed and revealed later.



*** (Greek philosopher)



Chapter 2 From Situation to Revelations

After the principal and I finished our tour of the school, we headed to his office in order to find a student with the same schedule as myself. This is how I met Joshua! He saw me, and I immediately saw a look of despair. I guess he wasn't thrilled about guiding the "new guy" around. He asked my name and sarcastically replied, "Glad to meet you."

I knew he would have rather shown a girl around instead of me, and I understood how he felt`.

We went to all the morning classes, and when lunchtime came, he told me he'd see me after lunch. This made me somewhat angry and upset because I didn't relish the idea of eating lunch solo—especially on my first day.



Explain and Explore: Why did Jeremiah feel the way he did? Discuss and write*

As I was eating lunch, some guys, who were sitting nearby, came over and asked my name, where I was from, and why I was at Oz. I knew better than to tell them where I was from, but I did tell them my name, and nonchalantly told them I had made a bad decision to land here.

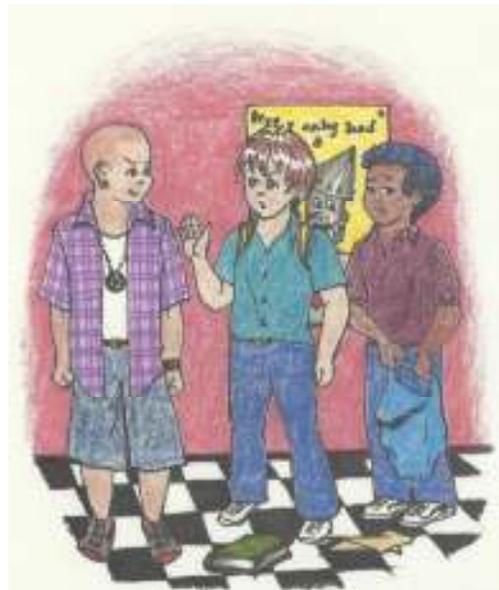
They gave me a peculiar look; then, they left. As soon as I finished my meal, I decided to make a restroom run before classes started again. I looked for Josh and didn't see him, so I walked up to the guys who had been curious about me; they told me to follow them. I trailed them down the hall, and when we got to their "place," they told me that it would cost me fifty cents to enter. I told them that I didn't have any money, and that I could bring it tomorrow...Well, I didn't want to get into trouble, especially on my first day of school, so I was at an impasse as to what to do.



Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate: What would you have done in this situation?*

I knew that if I went the route of snitch and told what they had done, I would be labeled, and no one would trust me. I hope that no one ever has to experience testing someone's pride—and courage. If you do, seek someone who is positive and encouraging in order to guide you down the right path and into making the right choice.

What made this ironic, and somewhat laughable, was that it was happening near the wall with the Tin man. Everyday life will challenge and test your courage to see if you have the heart to make the right choices. I knew this was my moment, so I changed the subject and told them that I would show them the latest dance moves. They looked at me with a strange, funny look and told me to give it my best shot. Well, I am literally the worst dancer in America! Also, needing to take care of my business didn't help. If you looked up the word uncoordinated in the dictionary, you would see my picture right next to the definition. Fortunately, the guys began to laugh uncontrollably which got Joshua's attention. He came over to investigate the situation for himself.



I guess that Joshua had a tough reputation because upon his arrival, the other guys' attitudes changed immediately; they informed him that I was doing a new dance and teaching it to them; he told them if they needed lessons, he would gladly give them a few pointers on the matter. Instantly, they replied, "It's cool!" And they headed back to the cafeteria. I thanked Josh for his assistance and quickly took care of my business.



Explore and Elaborate: What does it mean to have a “reputation” given to you by your peers? Discuss and write*

The remainder of the day went fine, and I was really impressed by the teachers who showed patience with me on my first day. As the day ended, I was walking out the front door, and Joshua came up to me and asked if I needed him to walk me home. I guess he felt bad for what happened at lunch, and that he was somewhat to blame, and wanted to make up for it. I told him that I didn't need protection, but I would enjoy his company on the way home. This invitation opened up a dialogue between us about why I didn't defend myself when the guys at lunch were giving me a hard time. I told him the reason I was there was for defending myself the wrong way. I told him a knife was involved, and

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