

Finding My Voice

Graphic Memoir



Written by Willow Dawson

Willow Dawson is the creator of *Lila and Ecco's Do-It-Yourself Comics Club* and illustrator of award-winning graphic novels *No Girls Allowed* with Susan Hughes and *Violet Miranda: Girl Pirate* with Emily Pohl-Weary. She is currently working on two upcoming graphic novels, *Hyena in Petticoats: The Story of Suffragette Nellie McClung* and *100 Mile House*. She also teaches comic book classes and workshops for various organizations.

Before

Have you ever felt unable to express yourself to someone important to you? How did you deal with the situation?

During

A graphic memoir uses text and illustrations to tell a snippet of the author's life. To read this selection, follow the panels in a "Z" pattern. Note that the setting of the scene is given in a "narrative box" at the top of some panels.

Tips

panel: a framed section of a graphic memoir

narrative box: a box in a panel that the author uses to give the setting or explain an event

speech bubble: a shape drawn around dialogue with a pointer toward the speaker. The author of this memoir uses different shapes for speech bubbles to express emotion in addition to the dialogue.

Why I Wrote This Selection

“ This story is a slightly fictionalized version of a few memories from high school. The writing process involved condensing time, and combining characters and events. Knowing me now, it's hard for people to believe I was painfully shy, or that I was a poor student. As my asthma worsened and my relationship with my mother became more difficult, I felt more and more stifled. I believed I was a failure. Writing class was a huge turning point. I quickly found that writing about difficult things helped me feel more powerful and, as I became more comfortable with words, I learned how to stand up for myself. ”

Vancouver, BC. Winter 1991.

Your teachers just told me you're failing nearly every class, Ella. Consider this the first night under your new curfew!

But it's Friday!

You'll thank me for this one day!



What is this place?

The Witches' Circle.

It's beautiful.

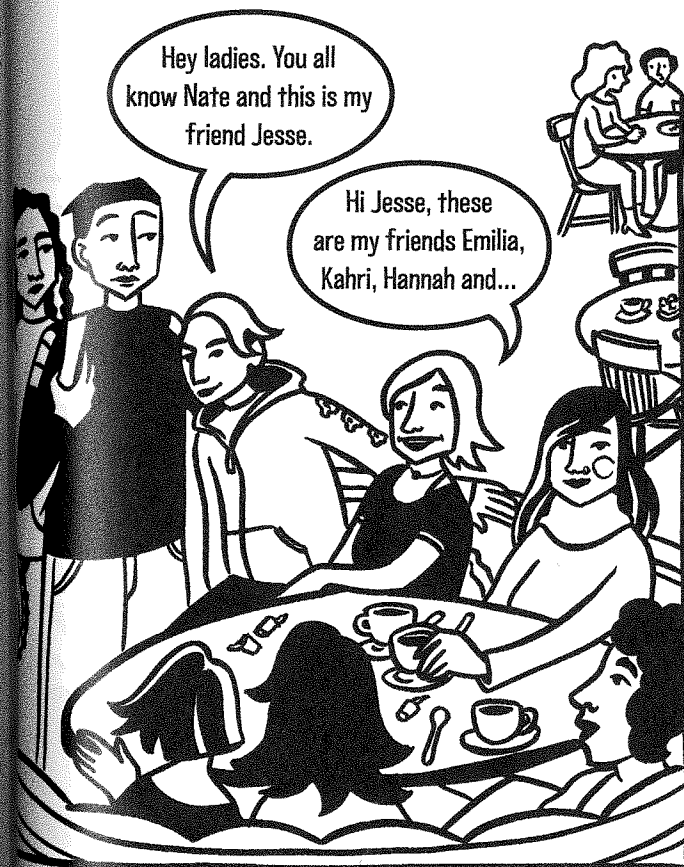
Oh man, I gotta get outta here.

Cough
Cough

ELLA!!! DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW WORRIED I WAS? YOU COULD HAVE HAD AN ASTHMA ATTACK! OR BEEN ASSAULTED AND LEFT TO DIE IN AN ALLEY! I BET YOUR FRIENDS WOULD JUST LEAVE YOU THERE IN THE STREET WITHOUT EVEN CALLING AN AMBULANCE! I WAS ABOUT TO CALL THE POLICE AND REPORT YOU AS A MISSING PERSON. AND DO YOU KNOW WHAT THEY'D DO? THEY'D THINK WE WERE NEGLECTING YOU AND CALL CHILD SERVICES, WHO'D TAKE YOU AND YOUR SISTER AWAY AND PUT YOU IN SEPARATE FOSTER HOMES. IS THAT REALLY WHAT YOU WANT???

DO NOT TALK BACK TO ME! Six minutes is like six hours to a worried parent. Go to your room and think about how your actions affect other people. Don't come out till you're ready to apologize.

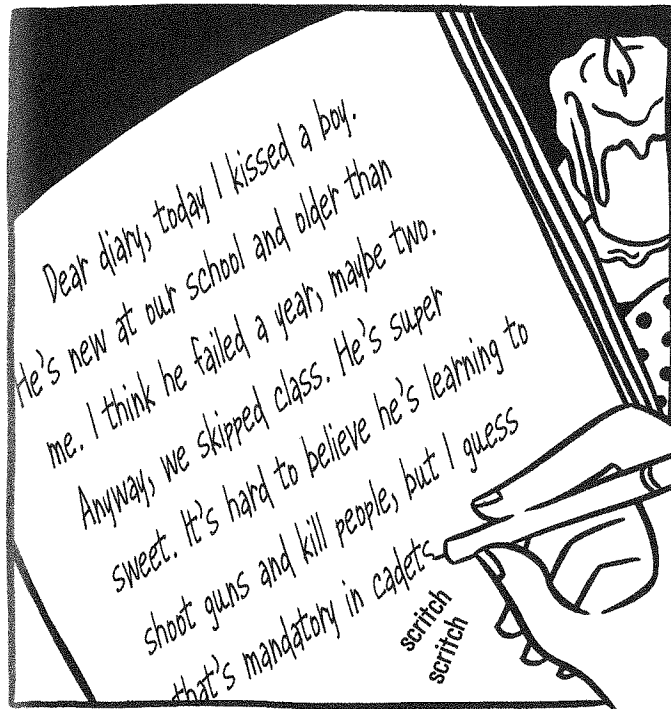




CLICK

Hello, this is the Principal's Office calling to let you know your child did not attend one or more classes today. Please send a signed and dated note explaining their absence when they return. BEEEEEEEP.





WHAT'S ALL THE RACKET?



YOU'RE KEEPING ME AWAKE! WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE, I HAD TO FEND OFF MASS MURDERERS AND TILL THE FARM BEFORE 7AM! THEN I'D WALK SIX MILES TO SCHOOL WITH NO SHOES! I LEFT HOME AT SIXTEEN! AND YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE THE DECENCY TO KEEP IT DOWN SO WE CAN SLEEP?



I—I just want you to calm down for once and stop yelling at me all the time.

I don't yell at you, I raise my voice. NOW GO TO SLEEP!

SLAM
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP





Where were you this morning?

I slept in. What'd I miss?

A math test.

Oh crap. I completely forgot.

Well, there's a party tonight. You coming?

Yeah, she's coming.



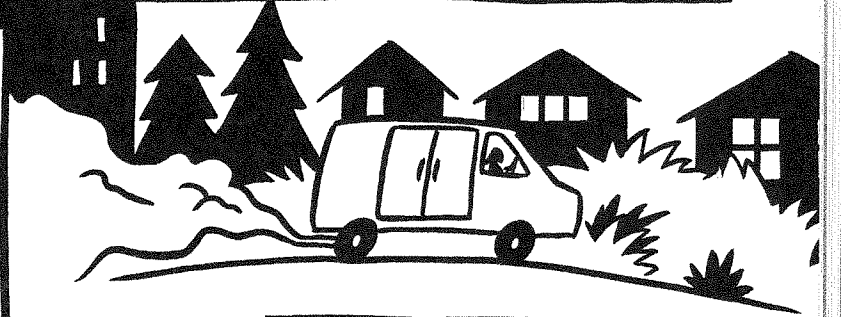
That evening...

So I'm gonna stay at Ella's house tonight, K? Okay...
Uh-huh... Love you too, Mom. Bye.

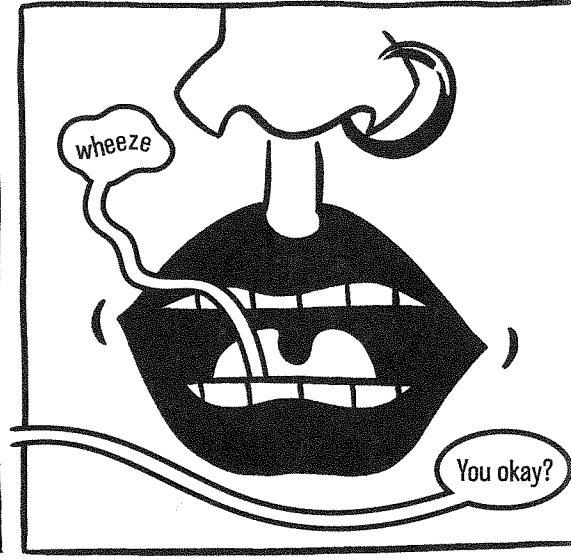


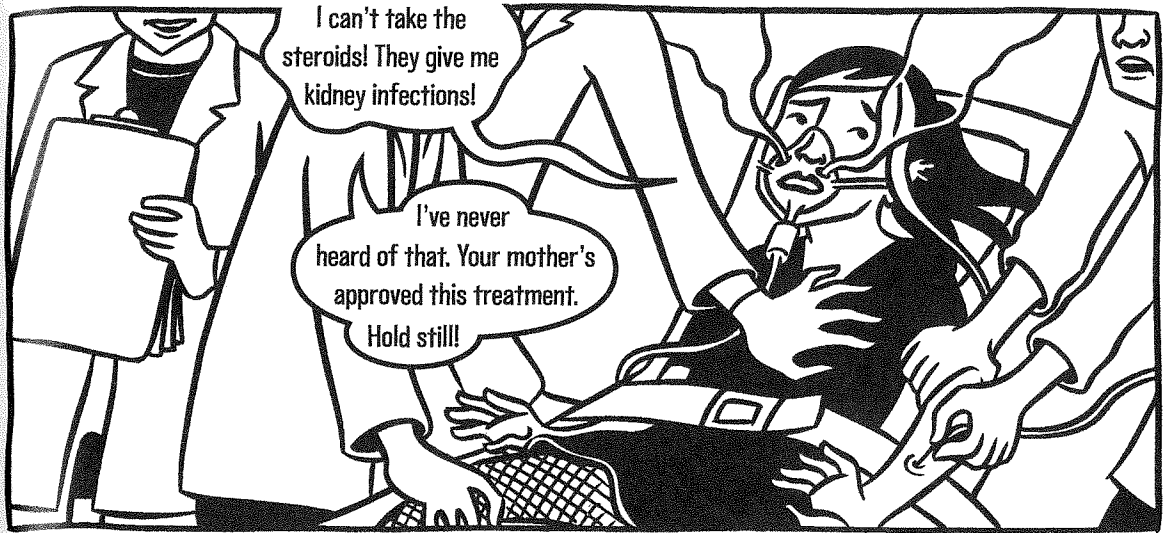
No, mom, we really have to study together. I'll sleep at Erin's because I need her help on this test.

Okay. See you tomorrow.



A few days later...





I can't take the steroids! They give me kidney infections!

I've never heard of that. Your mother's approved this treatment. Hold still!

The next day...

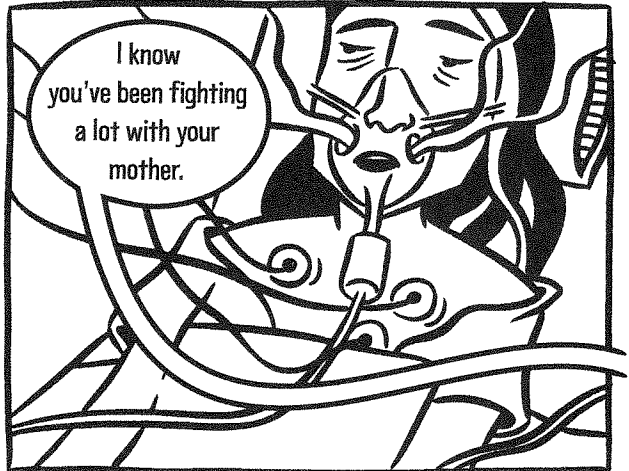
I just saw the test results. Your asthma is out of control. I told the specialist I'm your family doctor and you're sensitive to steroids, so we're looking into alternatives. For now you also need to avoid the things you're allergic to: animal dander, bees, pollen...

I know all this.

You can't smoke anymore.

Yeah.

And you have to avoid stress.



I know you've been fighting a lot with your mother.



Thanks, Dr. Gerard.

This book helped me understand some things about my family. It might help you, too.



Days later...

Promise me you'll get yourself into a creative writing class when you finish school?

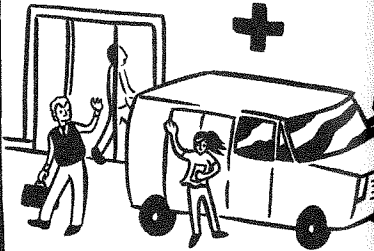


You have serious talent.

Thank you, Mr. Woolton!

Ella, I think you've found your voice.

Ella? Are you ready to go home?



Mom?

Yes, sweetie?

We need to talk.

