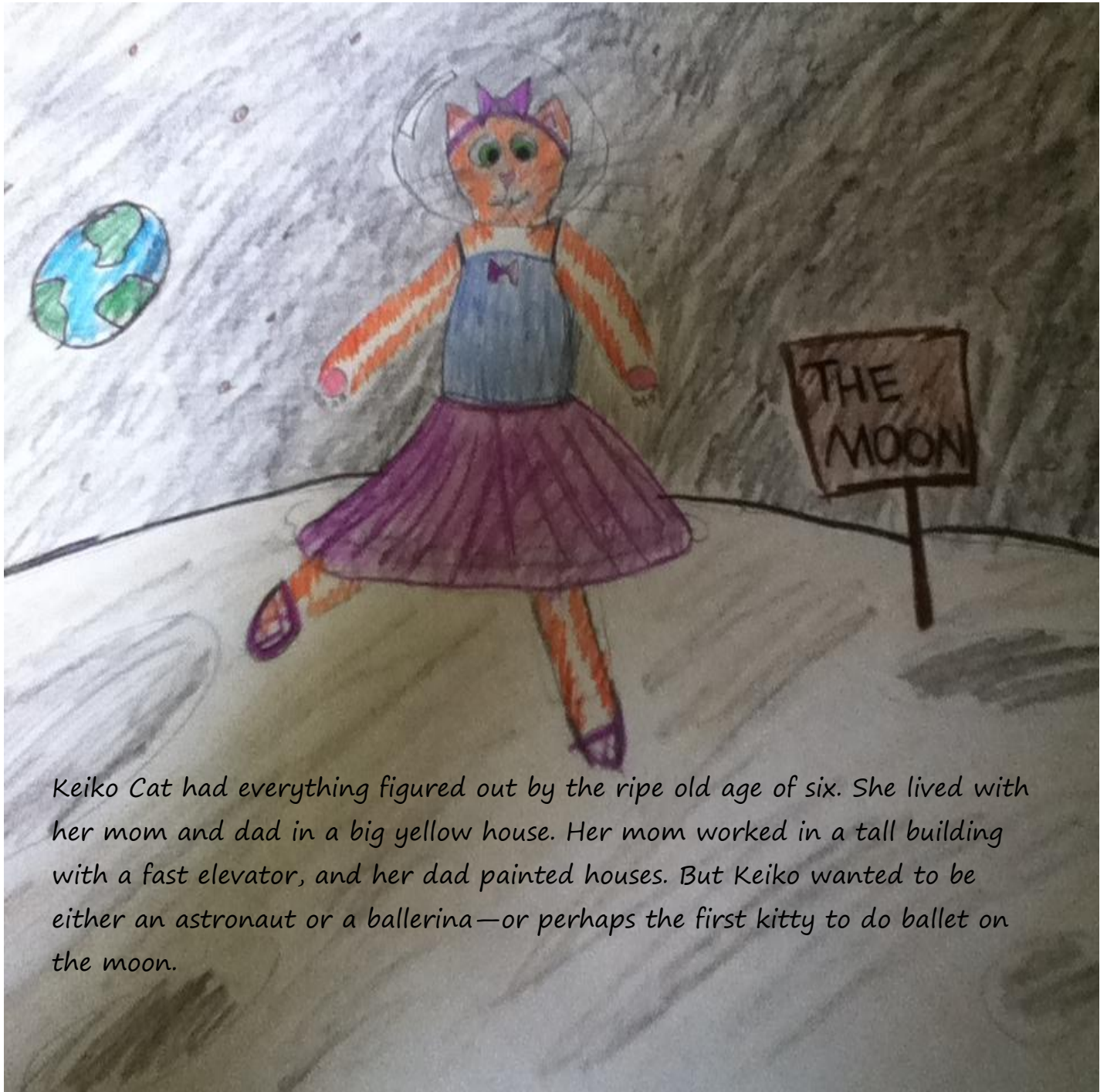


The Astronaut Ballerina and the Don't Forget List: A Children's Story about TBI

By Gracie Beaver



*Keiko Cat had everything figured out by the ripe old age of six. She lived with her mom and dad in a big yellow house. Her mom worked in a tall building with a fast elevator, and her dad painted houses. But Keiko wanted to be either an astronaut or a ballerina—or perhaps the first kitty to do ballet on the moon.*

One day, over summer vacation, Keiko was sitting at home playing with her dolls when her mom came into her room. She was crying. "Keiko, we need to go to the hospital," she said, "Daddy had an accident." As the two of them drove to the hospital, her mom explained that Dad fell off of a ladder at work and had hit his head.



When they got to the hospital, the doctor explained that Dad might act a little differently, and that his brain would take time to heal. Keiko was confused. Her dad didn't look any different, aside from the hospital. The doctor explained that hurting your brain was different than breaking a bone. "Remember when you broke your paw last year, Keiko? We could see where it was broken. But we can't put a cast on a brain, and we don't know exactly how your dad's brain is affected."



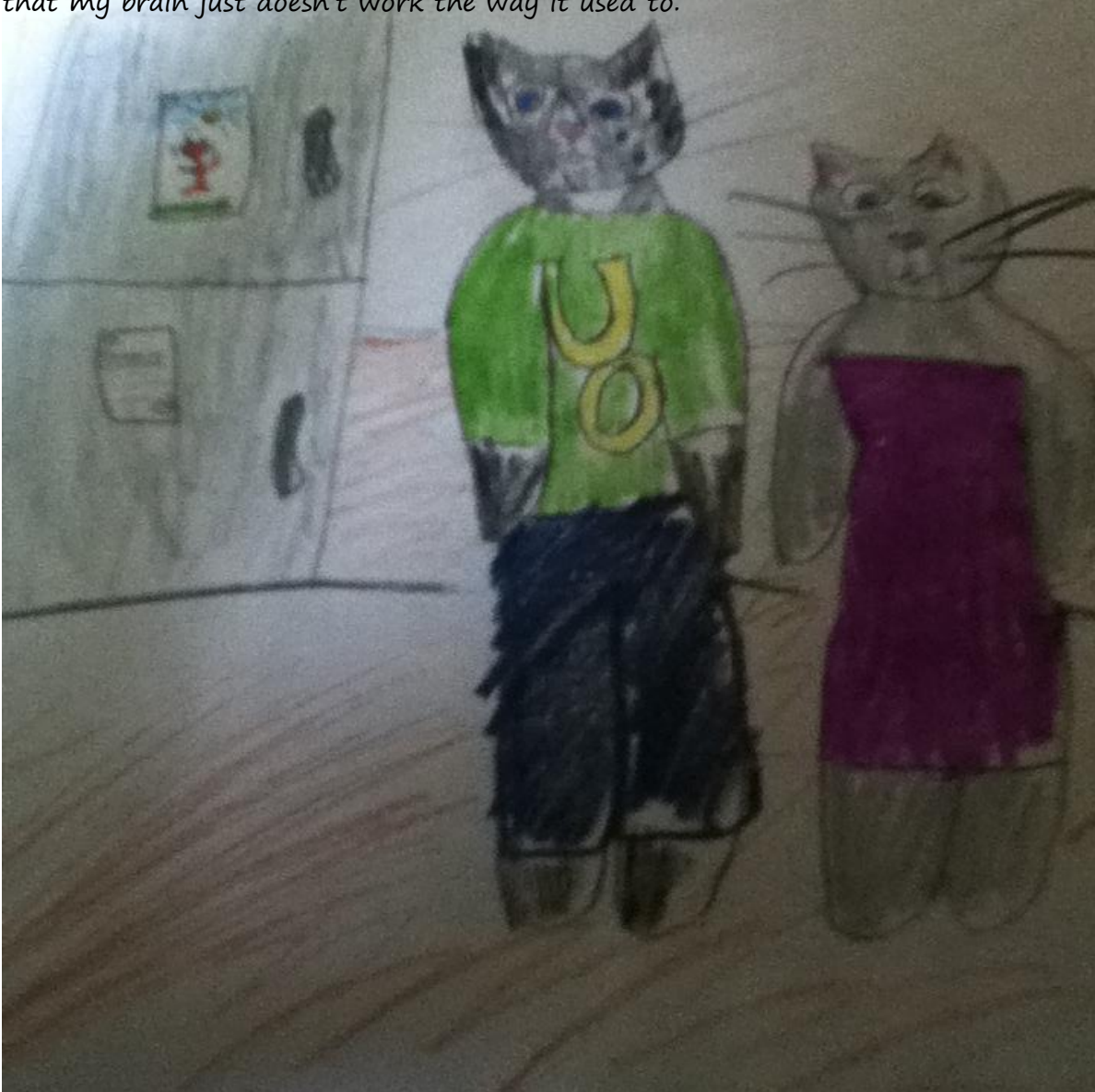
After a few days, Keiko's dad came home from the hospital. "Dad, can we go play catch?" Keiko asked. "I'd love to, sweetie, but I need to rest," he said. Then Keiko's mom told her that she needed to leave Dad alone because his brain needed a time out.

Keiko also noticed that Dad was forgetting things. He couldn't remember words, and he kept losing things. He burned his toast and forgot to make her lunch. He didn't water the rubber tree, and it turned brown. He even forgot about Mom's birthday—but he did that before, too.



*But the worst of all was when it was time for Keiko's recital. Dad had something called "occupational therapy," which Mom had explained a dozen times, but Keiko still didn't understand. After it was over, he was supposed to come straight to the dance studio to watch Keiko's big debut. But when the curtain drew back, Keiko could only see her mom sitting in the audience next to an empty seat. She began to cry, and refused to go on stage, no matter how many times her dance teacher begged her. When Keiko and her mom got home, her Dad was sitting on the couch, watching TV. "I can't believe you forgot my recital," Keiko yelled, tears blurring her eyes. "You don't care about me at all!" She ran upstairs to her room and slammed the door before her dad could say anything.*

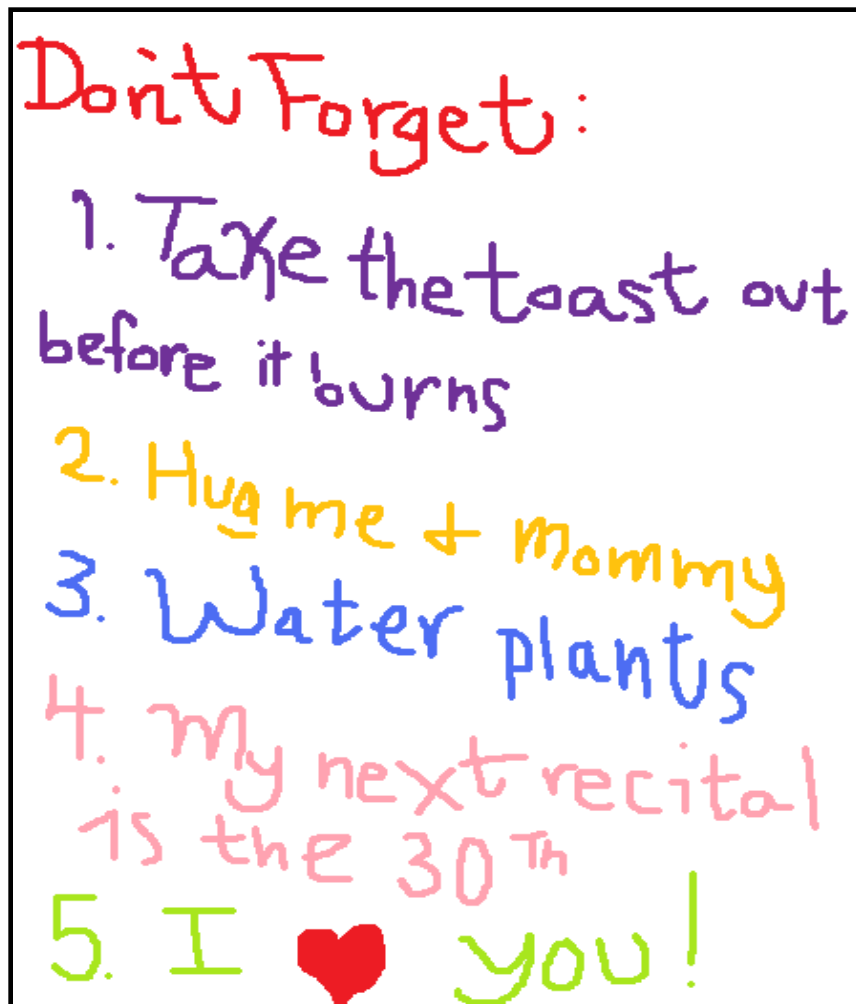
After a few minutes, Keiko stopped sobbing and listened to the voices downstairs. She crept out of her room and eavesdropped. Her dad was crying. "I feel so awful...I can't remember anything," he said. "I don't know how to explain to her that my brain just doesn't work the way it used to."



Suddenly, Keiko felt really, really bad. It wasn't her dad's fault that he had missed her recital—it was because of his brain injury. But then she had an idea. She got out her colored pencils, pens, and stickers and got to work.



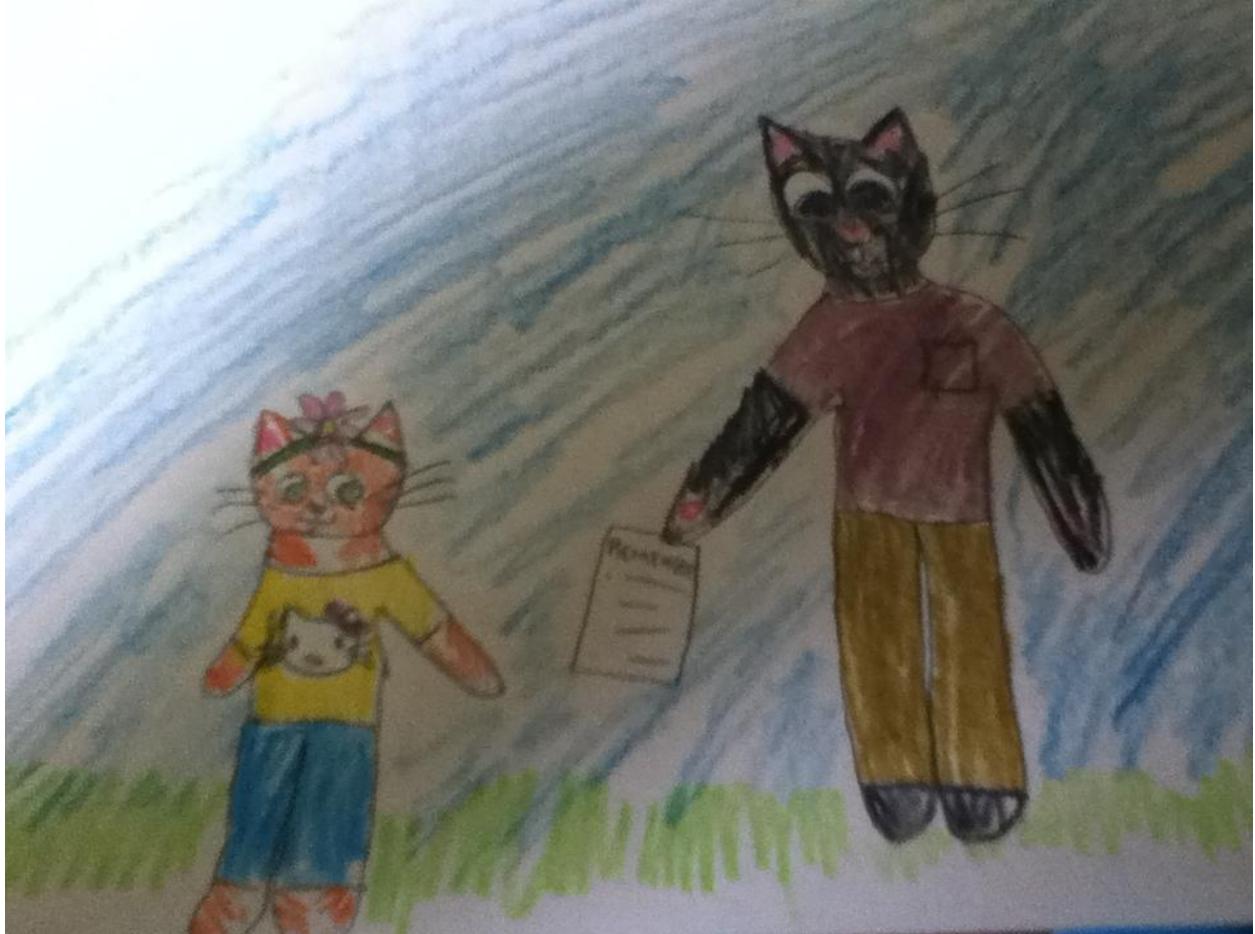
After another hour, she tiptoed downstairs to where her parents were still talking in hushed voices. "I'm so sorry, Keiko," her dad said. "It's okay, Daddy. Your brain just needs some help," she said. "I made you something." Keiko's dad smiled. It was a Don't Forget list:



Keiko's dad gave her a big hug. "I love you so much," he said.



*“Keiko, I have a great idea,” her mom said. “You’re still in your recital clothes...why don’t you do a private recital right here?” So Keiko danced and spun around the living room like she was on the moon. She even pretended to plant a flag in the coffee table. She imagined her name in bright fluorescent lights.*



The next morning, as Keiko was getting ready to go to a friend's house, her dad stopped her. "Good morning, astronaut ballerina," he said. "I have something for you," he said, giving Keiko a piece of paper. It was a Remember list:

Remember that you are special. Remember that mommies and daddies aren't perfect. Remember that we will get through my brain injury as a family. Remember that I love you.