

"THE TRUE SPY STORY RESEMBLES
REAL LIFE AS WE ACTUALLY KNOW IT—
A PLACE WHERE IT IS RARELY QUITE
CLEAR WHAT IS HAPPENING AND
WHAT ONE OUGHT TO DO."

—STELLA RIMINGTON

A NOTE ON THE ART

Astute readers may notice that sometimes an object described as having a certain color is shown in the pictures to have a different color. For instance, in this book there is an illustration of the Welsh flag that has a purple field and orange dragon. In real life, the flag has a green field and a red dragon. A sturgeon appears purple, although they're actually a disgusting greenish-gray slime color. My mom's boyfriend has an orange mustache, but he really had a *strawberry blond* mustache. That's because we only use three kinds of ink to print the artwork in this book: black, orange, and purple. So everything in this book, no matter what color it is in real life, looks black, orange, or purple. Or white! That's where we didn't use any ink at all. You probably didn't need a note explaining all this. We just didn't want you thinking we think Uranus is purple. We know it's blue. We take this seriously.

—M.B.



To Ms. Knox.

—M.B.

To my incredible parents, Jan and Steve.

—M.L.

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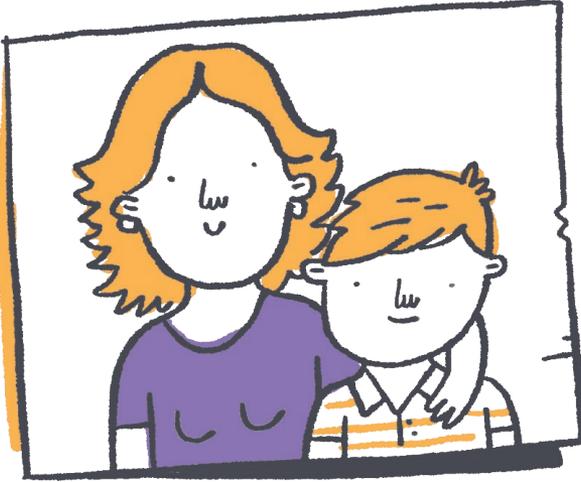
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When I was a kid, I lived in California. (I still do.) California is a state on the very edge of the United States of America. I grew up in a little house with my mom and two rabbits. This is me when I was a kid.



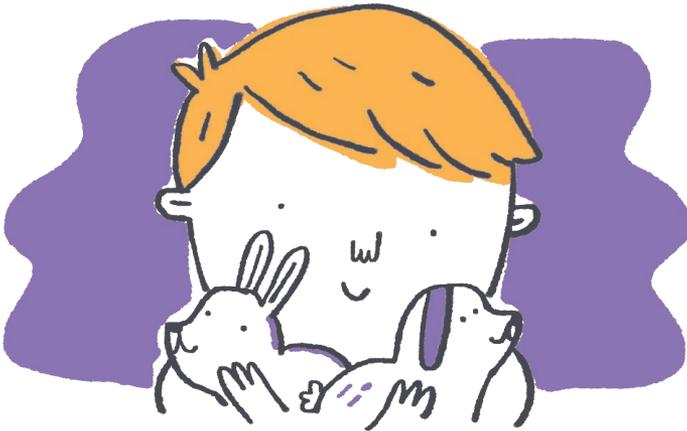
I was the shortest boy in my class, and shorter than most of the girls too. I'm taller now.

This is me and my mom.



Today she is about the same height.

This is me holding my rabbits, Maurice and Taylor.

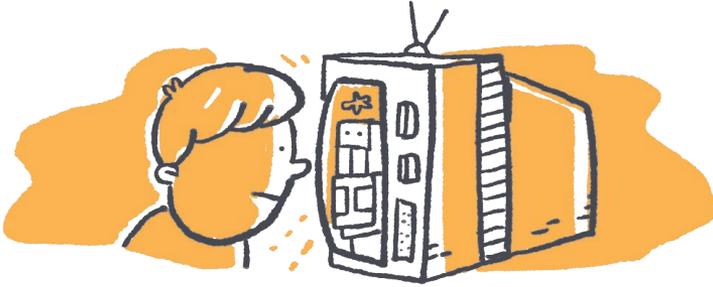


Maurice and Taylor are not any size today, because they are not alive. Pet rabbits live for

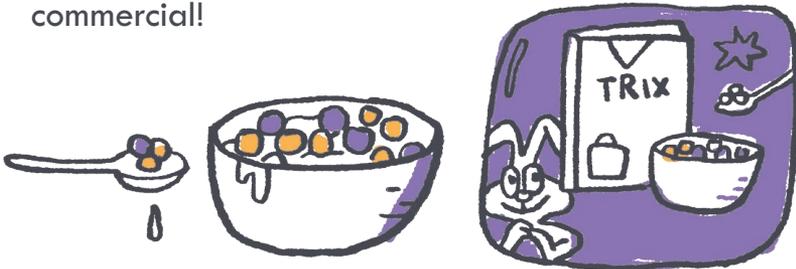
about ten years (that's true—you can look it up), and this story takes place a long time ago, all the way back in the 1980s.

OK:

It was Saturday. I woke up early. Usually on Saturday mornings, my mom's boyfriend, Craig, was camped out in front of the TV, watching WrestleFest. But Craig and my mom were in a fight, so I got to watch cartoons. I watched with the volume turned down low, so it didn't wake up my mom. I had to press my head up pretty close to the TV to hear it.



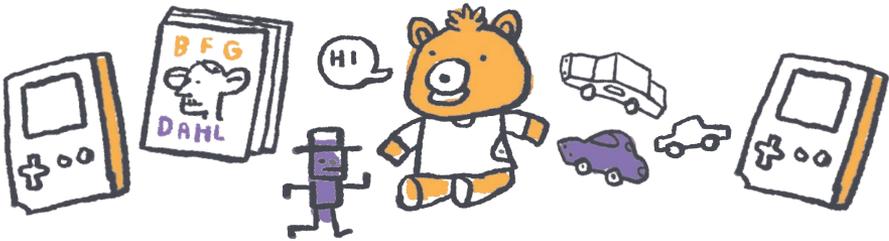
I ate a bowl of Trix—while watching a Trix commercial!



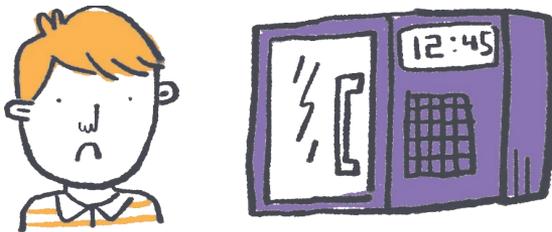
At noon, when the TV stations switched to sports and reruns, I went up to my room.

Then I got bored.

I usually got bored on Saturday afternoons. They seemed to stretch on for way too long. My mom was sitting at the kitchen counter, paying bills and making lists. She got annoyed if I distracted her. So I would stay up in my room and play Game Boy, until I got tired of Game Boy and switched to reading, until I got tired of reading and switched to action figures, then to stuffed animals, then to Matchbox cars, then Micro Machines (which were like tiny Matchbox cars), then back to Game Boy.



When I tiptoed out to check the time on the microwave, only forty-five minutes had passed!



“What are you doing?” my mom asked without looking up from her calculator. “Why are you sneaking around?”

“I’m tiptoeing,” I whispered, “so I don’t distract you.”

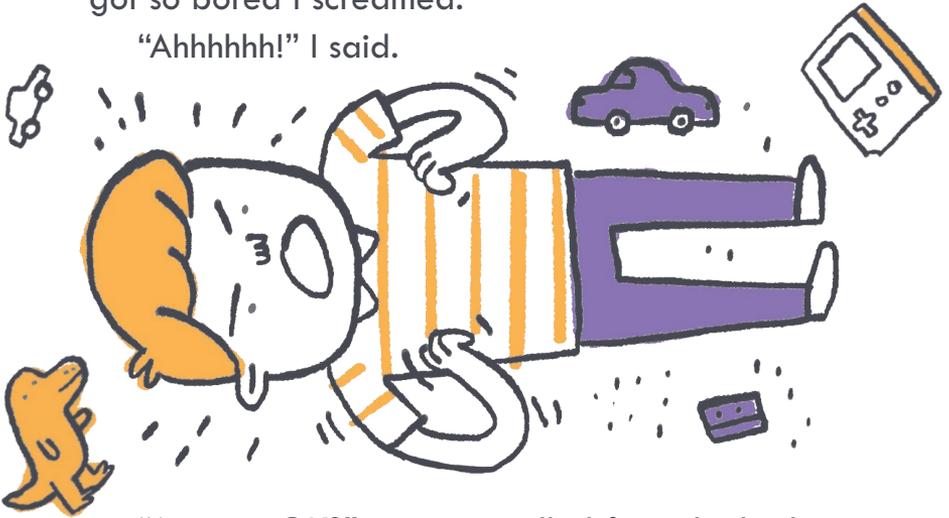
“Why are you whispering?”

“So I don’t distract you.”

“It’s distracting.”

I went back up to my room. I lay on the floor, amid my toys and stuffed animals and books and Game Boy games, and just stared at the ceiling. I got so bored I screamed.

“Ahhhhhh!” I said.



“Are you OK?” my mom called from the kitchen.

“Yeah!” I said.

“You’re being distracting.”

“Ahhhhhh!” I said really quietly, so I didn’t distract my mom.

And then the phone rang.

I jumped up.

Today, when I am writing this book, phones look like this:



If you are reading this book ten years from now, who knows what phones look like. Probably this:



But in the 1980s, they looked like this:



Whenever the phone rang, it was my job to run to the living room and answer it. I ran fast, and I was full of hope. If you've read the other books in this series, you know why: When I was a kid, sometimes the Queen of England would call me, out of the blue, and send me on an adventure. A dangerous adventure. A mysterious adventure. A spy adventure.

I picked up the phone.

"Hello?" I said.

It was not the Queen of England.



NOT

It was Craig.

CRAIG



"Julie? Hey, baby," said Craig.

(Julie was my mom's name. It still is.)

"Um," I said. "It's Mac."

“Oh! Mac! Hi, buddy! I thought you were your mom!”

“Yeah,” I said.

“You kind of sound like her on the phone.”

“OK,” I said.

“Your voice is high, I guess.”

“OK.”

“Cuz you’re just a kid.”

“OK.”

“Well listen, buddy, is your mom around?”

“No,” I said.

My mom was around. She was in the kitchen, with her calculator. But she and Craig were in a fight, and part of my job answering the phone was “screening calls.” Screening calls meant not putting her on the phone when she and Craig were having an argument.

“Your mom is not around.”

“No.”

“She’s not home.”

“Nope.”

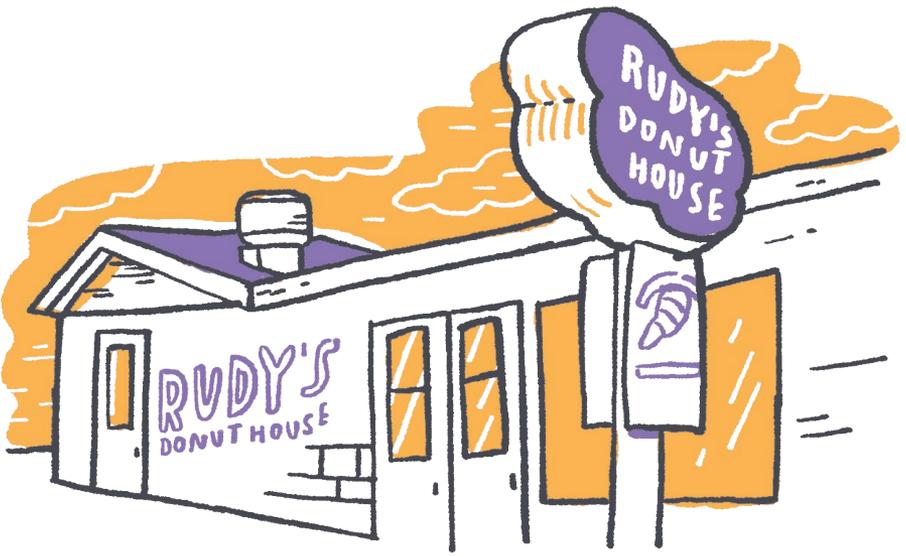
“Where is she?”

I named the first place I could think of.

“The donut shop.”

“The donut shop.”

“Yep. Rudy’s.”



(If you're ever in Castro Valley, California, you should go to Rudy's on Castro Valley Boulevard. Everything there is good, but they have a cinnamon donut that's shaped like a butterfly. It tastes great with milk, which they also sell at Rudy's.)

"Your mom went to Rudy's," Craig said, "and she just left you home alone."

"Yes."

"That doesn't sound like her."

Craig was right. That didn't sound like her.

"It was an emergency," I said.

"A donut emergency."

"Yes."

Craig sighed. "All right, budster. Hey! Listen, while I got you on the phone here, I was thinking we should spend some bonding time together!"

“Hmmm,” I said. I had a feeling my mom was the one thinking Craig and I should spend some bonding time together.

“How about I get us a couple tickets to WrestleFest Live?” Craig said. “It’s coming to town! Joe Brawn is gonna take down The Dictator!”

