

**WE OAK  
ARE LAND**

**INTER**

**NATIONAL**

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Introduction to *We Are Oakland International* © copyright 2012 by Thi Bui

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# INTRODUCTION

Imagine you are 14 years old. Hormonal changes, pimples, self consciousness -- the works. Now imagine that all that is the **easy** part of being you. For you are an immigrant; you have left your home and friends, you don't know anybody at school, your family is split between two countries, you don't know your way around your new city, and you don't speak English.

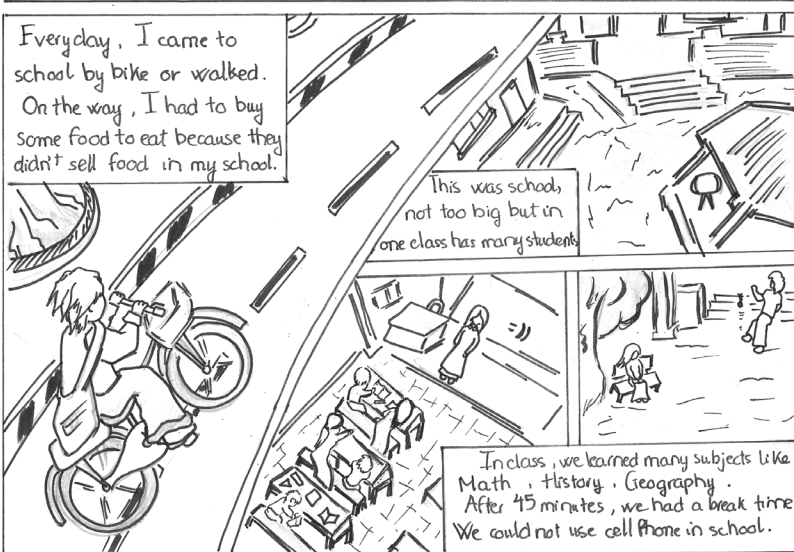
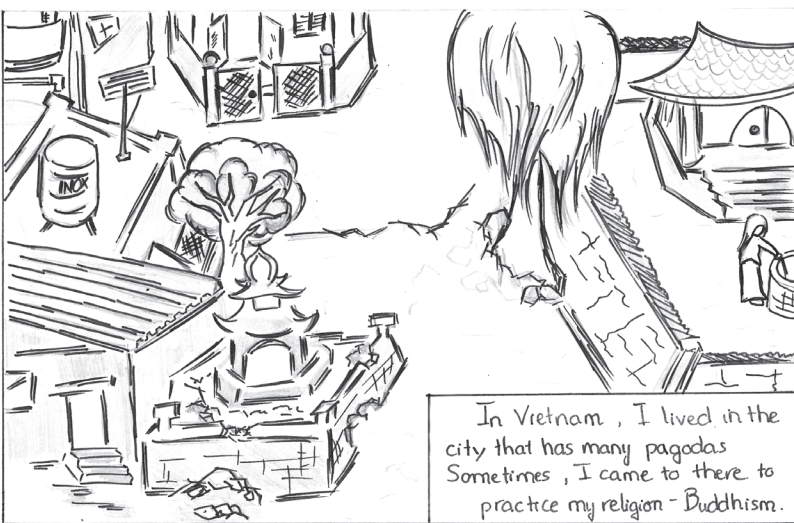
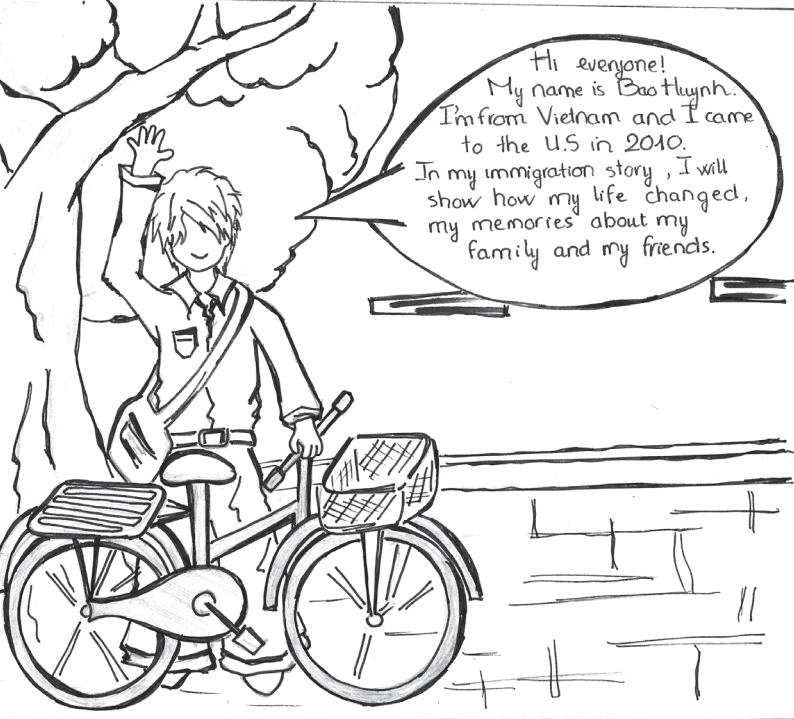
When I began teaching at Oakland International High School, I had lofty ideas about the world events and issues I would be able to discuss with such an international mix of students. I too am an immigrant; I left Vietnam as a refugee when I was a child. But what I quickly realized stood between us was a language gap wider than any ocean. My pseudo-command of three other languages didn't even begin to cover the multitude of languages that my students spoke.

The comics project began as a way for me to better understand my students. I found that if I taught everyone a new language, governed by a few simple conventions like panels and speech balloons, then we would have a common way of communicating that allowed students to surprise me. Over the years, as I learned to ask them better questions, my students have surprised, informed, inspired, and moved me to tears with their stories.

And these stories are just the tip of the iceberg. This year, an 11th grader named Bao rewrote the immigration story he did for me as a 10th grader. The original story, shown on these two pages, is undoubtedly beautiful but maybe just a little generic. Bao told me that the first time around, he was shy about sharing with other people the personal details of who he was. The second time, he said, he opened his mind a little more. He had more experience, and he reflected more deeply about his characterization. Bao's second version is on the pages that follow. It's a fantastic story about childhood, adolescence, and nostalgia that reminds me of Rob Reiner's film *Stand By Me* or François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows*. Here is a young man who is becoming a storyteller; he is learning by figuring out what his own story really is.

So when you read these stories, remember that they are the first attempt by a person still forming his or her identity in an environment and language that is not native. Look deeper to imagine what more surely lies beneath. Look forward to picture the future of these teenagers who have already experienced so much. Recognize in them their great potential.

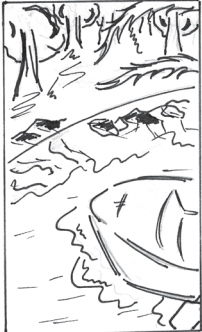
**Thi Bui**  
Art Teacher, OIHS



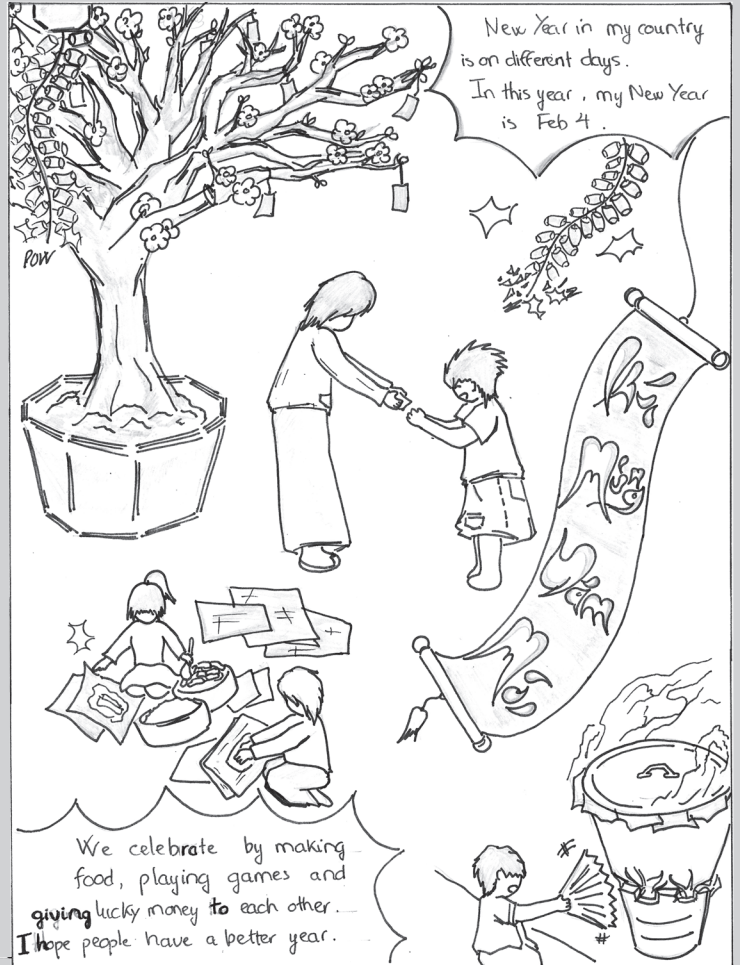


On Sunday, children in my village went outside and played many games. We caught fish in the river. It was fun but I didn't get any fish sometimes.

If the day was very windy, we made a kite or bought it in the store. And then we would fly our kite to the sky.



Also, we played a game called hide and seek. One person had to find another one to win the game.



New Year in my country is on different days. In this year, my New Year is Feb 4.

We celebrate by making food, playing games and giving lucky money to each other. I hope people have a better year.



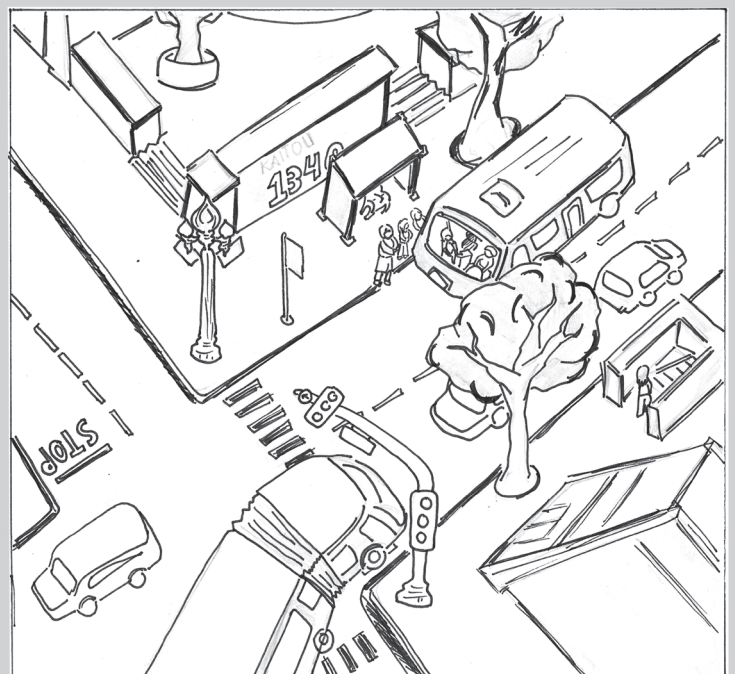
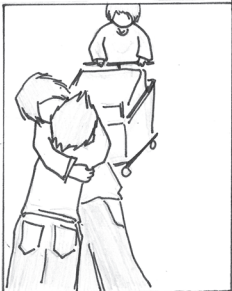
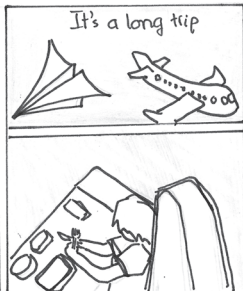
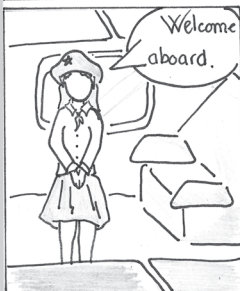
After many years living in Vietnam, My family moved to the U.S to live with my grandfather, grandmother and my uncles.



We went to the airport in the early morning when people were sleeping. I looked at my grandmother's face and "I just knew that she was crying, I couldn't see it clearly."

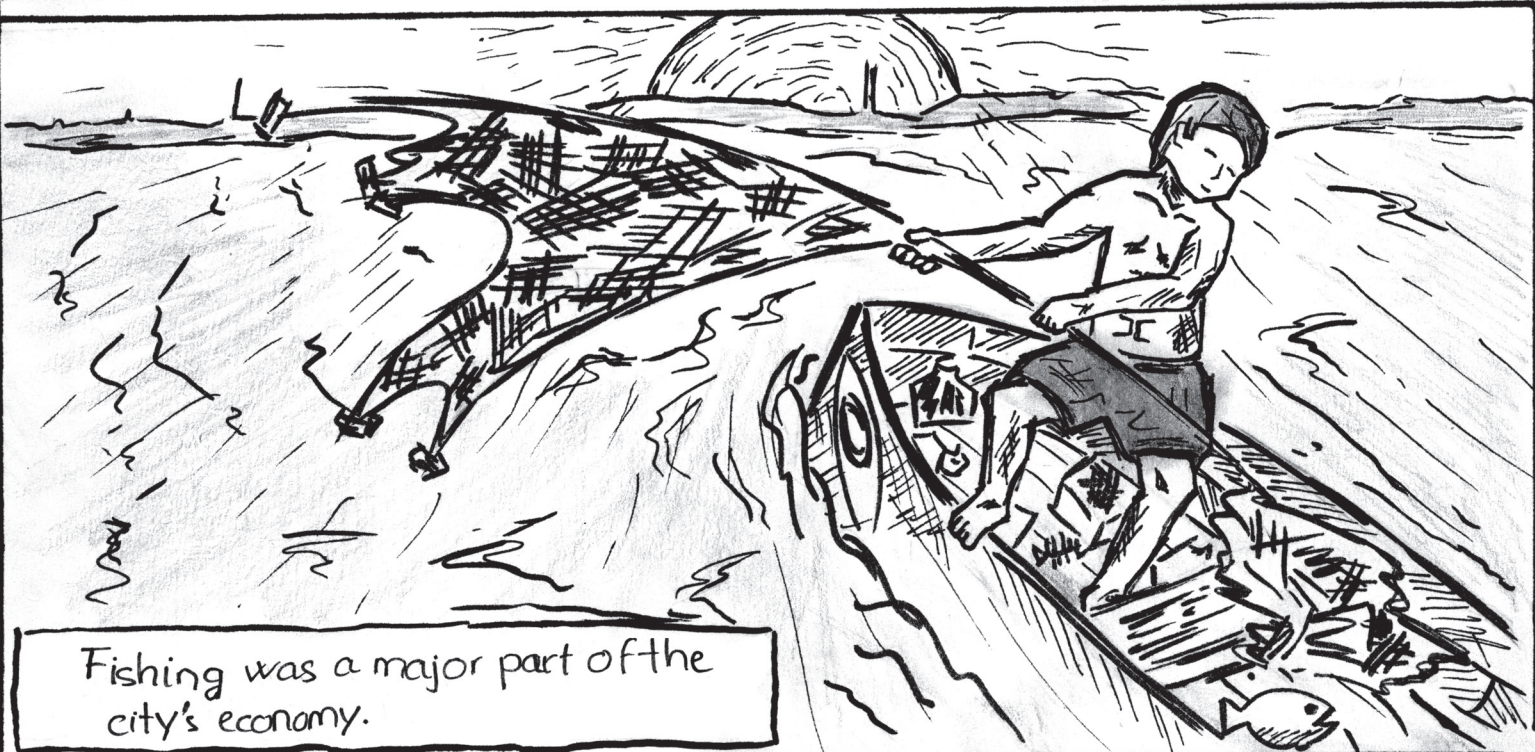
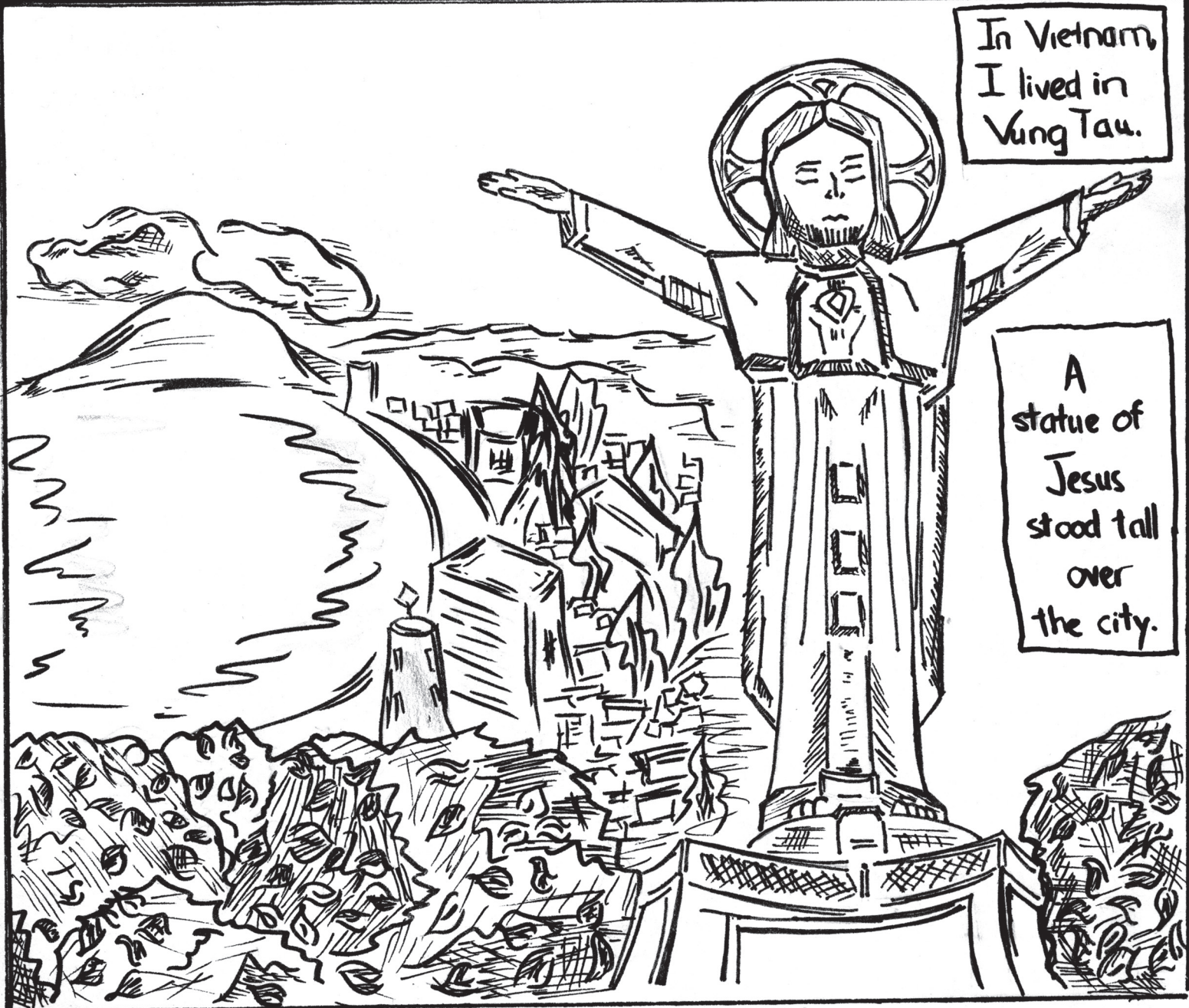


Everyone felt worried because this was the first time we went by airplane. Many emotions in their faces.



In Vietnam,  
I lived in  
Vung Tau.

A  
statue of  
Jesus  
stood tall  
over  
the city.



Fishing was a major part of the  
city's economy.

I spent my days

playing King of Fighters with my friend.

Haha It's very fun, bro Play some more

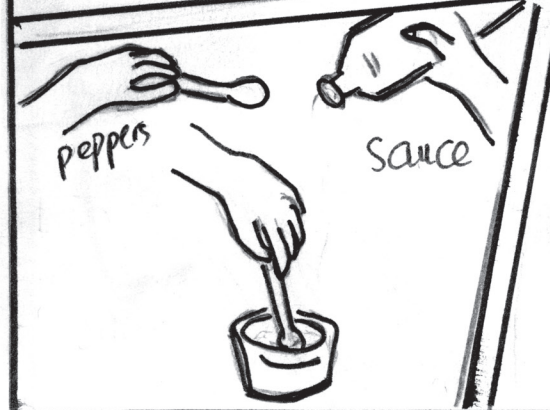
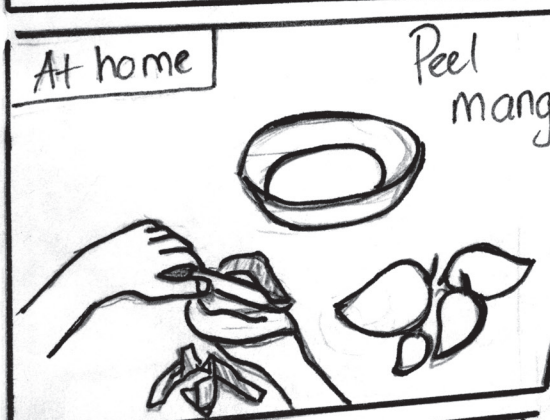
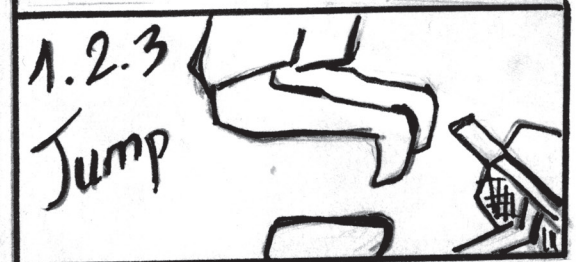
It Was fun at the beginning

...and sad at the end, always.

Oh lord It's too late.

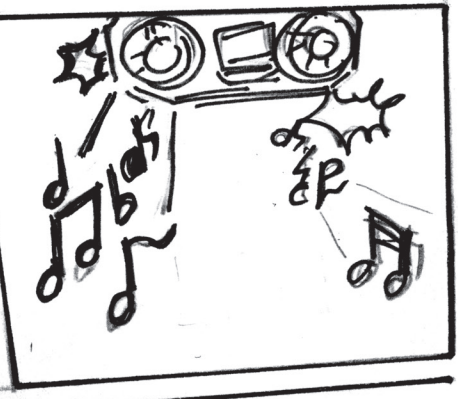
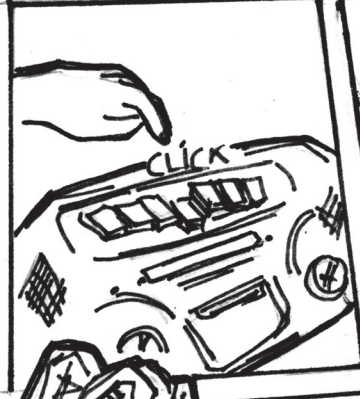
Looked at



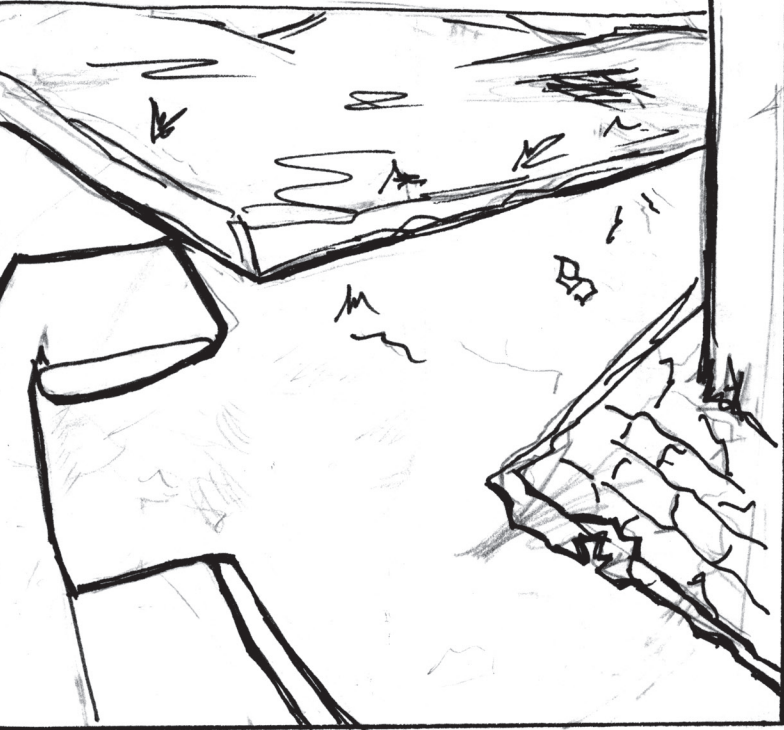


...was fun and more important it was free. !!





Afterwards, we went to the Soccer field when the lights were on.



We sat there for a long time:



Lights off  
Let's go home dude

One time my buddies and I hiked up a mountain and cut down some trees. For what? We'll find out!

Dammit! It's too hot, man!

Sweet  
Which one?

Lightbulb icon, tree icon, dollar sign icon

Haha  
Got it

Grrr...  
C'mon bab  
Help me out  
You guys

I'm bring this baby  
Y'all should watch out for me HA HA HA

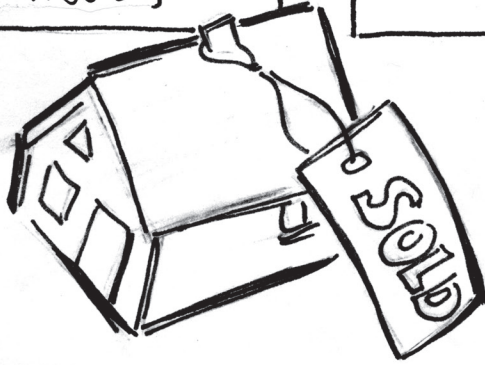
We carried those trees the whole way back.  
Don't need a rest, do ya?  
Was it crazy?  
There were up to ten of us crossing the streets with trees on our shoulders.

Those trees were very valuable.  
First

Happy New Year 2007

We stole them anyway!!  
Later

When we got our visas,



we sold our house and rented a small one to live in.



Using that money, we booked our flights



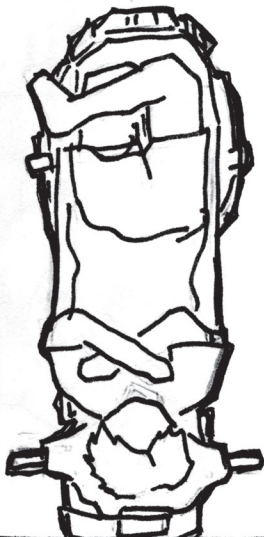
I still went to school. Still boring as usual.

Lying on my hammock,



I looked at the moon, wondering...

How is my life going to be in the U.S.?



Maybe



Hamburgers

Pizza

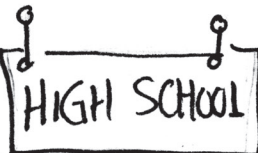


New clothes

Or



Teacher



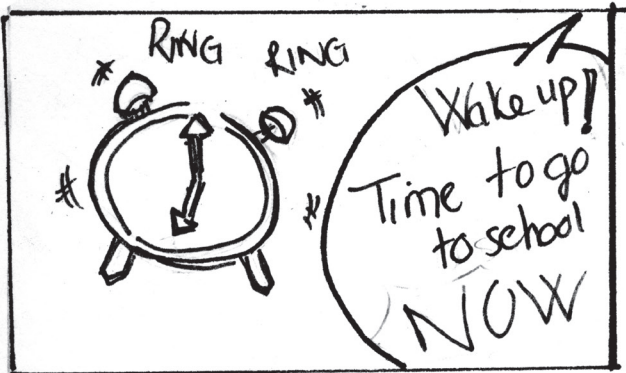
speaking English!!

30°F Cold

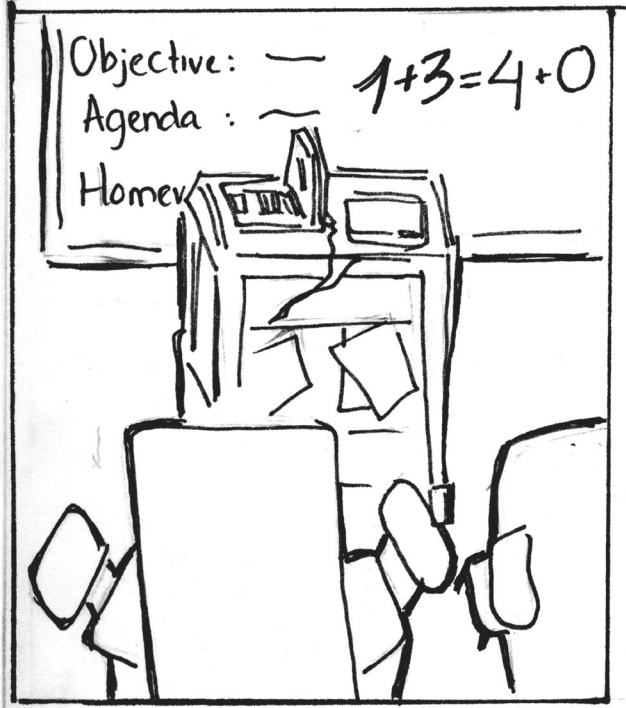
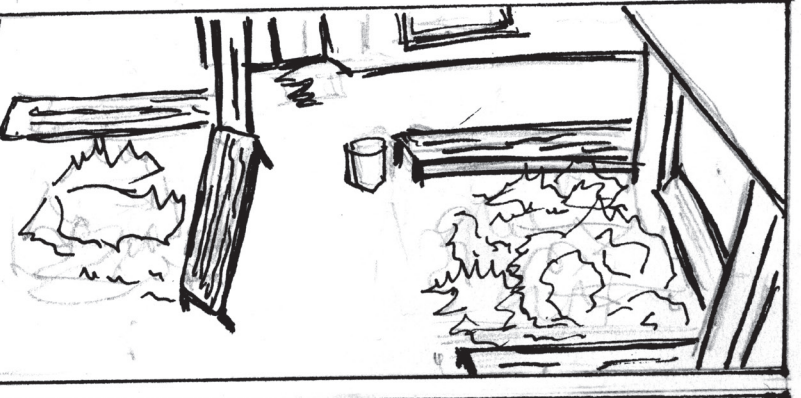
I went to sleep and tried not to think about tomorrow.



Slowly, slowly I closed my eyes and fell into darkness.



Almost two years have passed but I still feel like the first time I came to the US.



Life goes on and so do I. I'm happy to be here, I wish for all of us to be healthy and successful in life.

