

Simon Says Mask On Mask Off

Be Kind. Be Brave.

SCHOOL



Written By:
Patricia Ann Simon R.N.
& Abigail Grady

Illustrated By:
Valerie McCord

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PATTY AND ABIGAIL

How It All Began

Back in 2019, I received a Facebook message on my Smile with Simon page. A mom reached out to me and told me her 7-year-old daughter, Abigail, was born with a bilateral cleft lip. They live in a little town in Maine. I asked if I could reach out to her daughter to let her know that I was born with a cleft lip and palate.

Over the past two years, Abigail and I have talked frequently via FaceTime. We tell each other jokes, do tongue twisters (Sally sold seashells by the seashore), create fun FaceTime emojis, and we laugh.

For two years we developed a virtual friendship. I love Abigail to pieces. She is the sweetest, funniest, and smartest little girl. And, she has a great sense of humor. Wicked good!

When I was telling Abigail that I was writing, Simon and Patty Go To Camp, I asked her if I could add her as a character in my book. I wanted to add Abigail as Patty's friend. When I asked Abigail, there was a long pause on the phone. Then, in a soft voice, Abigail asked if she could be my sister. I almost cried. I was so overcome with emotion. This little girl who I became friends with through Facebook asked if she could be my sister in my next book. I had to hold back my tears.

My voice was quivering as I told Abigail that I would love to have her be Patty's sister in the book.

I can't express what that moment was like. I kept saying to myself, "she likes me, she likes me"!

We had planned to meet in person at the Children's Craniofacial Association retreat in 2020, but that got canceled due to COVID-19. 2021 in-person CCA retreat was canceled due to COVID-19. However, in 2020 and 2021, the Children's Craniofacial Association was able to hold a virtual retreat. Even though they were virtual they were awesome!

After I got my two COVID vaccines, I called Abigail's mom and asked if I could come out to Maine to meet Abigail in person. When I told Abigail that I was going to finally meet her in person she cried and jumped up and down. She immediately grabbed a pencil and started writing down a list of things she wanted to do with me.

The day finally came. We met at a seafood restaurant. I was on one end of the restaurant and Abigail was across the room. She saw me and ran with outstretched arms yelling, “Patty”. It was like something you would see in the movies. Wow. What an amazing moment.

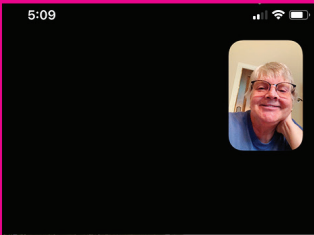
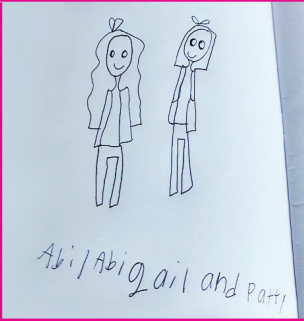
While in Maine we went to the beach, saw two lighthouses, painted, flew a kite, picked up seashells, and ate lobster. We just hung out and had a blast.

Abigail and I decided to write a children’s book together. We talked about what it was like wearing a mask for so long due to COVID. We went over the illustrations and the storyline. And, this is the finished product. We hope you like it.

Even though there is such a huge age difference between us, there is this bond. A bond that took time to grow. I love Abigail and consider her my younger sister. Abigail has taught me to be a kid again.

Thank you for the gift of your friendship, Abigail. You have no idea how much I treasure it.





This book is dedicated to the craniofacial community.

The craniofacial community has created a safe haven so you can be your true self. You will be given the tools and support to remove your inner mask, learn to be confident and to love every piece of your beautiful self.

Share your story, your struggles and your achievements. You will be surrounded by unconditional love.

You will meet the most amazing people. They will inspire you. They will lift you up when you fall. The friendships you develop will last a lifetime.

Thank you for helping me learn to love my inner self. I am a better person because of you.

Patricia Simon



Abigail Grady

I would like to dedicate this book to my mom and dad. They have been my #1 support and were there for all of my doctor's appointments and surgeries. They also taught me to love how I look and to show kindness to others.

My advice I would want kids and adults to get out of this book is to love yourself and show kindness to others.

Not everyone is born the same, but it is okay to be different and love yourself no matter what others think. You are beautiful just the way you are.

Keep on smiling,
Abigail

FOREWORD

2020 was quite the year filled with gobs of anxiety and uncertainty as we reckoned with the scourge of the COVID-19 coronavirus. Once we learned the science behind how the mostly airborne virus spread, we began to wear masks to reduce its impact on our communities. This move was not universally accepted by all. However, people with facial differences embraced the opportunity to blend in and hide their faces with fun, brightly colored masks.

Growing up, I spent much of my life trying to blend in. Everywhere I went I thought, “Don’t say anything; keep your head down, and just blend in.” Invisible masks were my world, allowing me to shapeshift into different versions of myself. Humor and taking on other people’s mannerisms and ways of being in the world worked wonders for me. It wasn’t until I found CCA, and friends like Pat, that I found the strength to live a mantra they shared with me “Why fit in when you were born to stand out.” Huh, I thought, they might be onto something.

Yes, some days the concept rubs me the wrong way. Thankfully, like Patty and Abigail’s mom, my friends remind me that I can put aside all my masks — visible and invisible — and just be me.

I sincerely hope you enjoy this book by my dear friend, Patricia. As a nurse, and now as a writer, she continues to help heal and transform us into better humans.

Kara Jackman
Marketing and Communications Coordinator
Children’s Craniofacial Association

Children’s Craniofacial Association is a national, 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, headquartered in Dallas, Texas. Nationally and internationally, CCA addresses the medical, financial, psychosocial, emotional, and educational concerns relating to craniofacial conditions.

INTRODUCTION

I always say there is power in the shared story, in knowing you are not alone.

I was born with a cleft lip, a hearing loss and no vision in my left eye but it has never stopped me from doing anything I've wanted to do in my life. I had 6 surgeries, years of orthodontics and speech therapy growing up. I was teased in school, kids would say mean things and I would sit alone sometimes on the school bus and in the lunchroom.

We all wear smiles that will light up a room. Songs of joy and gratitude move our feet and our soul. But beneath this veil of good fortune and blessings is a mask that hides our cries and sighs. Behind the glory of triumph and victory is the masking of untold stories of struggles and tribulations.

We wear masks that let the world in but prevent us from engaging with the harsh realities of how we may feel in the world. We wear masks that let the masses think otherwise.

For some of us wearing masks during the pandemic has been an unexpected blessing while for others of us this time offered unique challenges. I know for me, as someone who was born with a hearing loss and reads lips, when everyone is wearing masks, I have a hard time understanding people and that is difficult and frustrating for me.

I feel that I have always hidden some part of myself behind a mask. I think in some ways we all do that.

Hiding isn't the only choice though. Just by choosing to listen to the sounds of love, respect, and self-worth, we can empower ourselves to remove the masks and show our vulnerability.

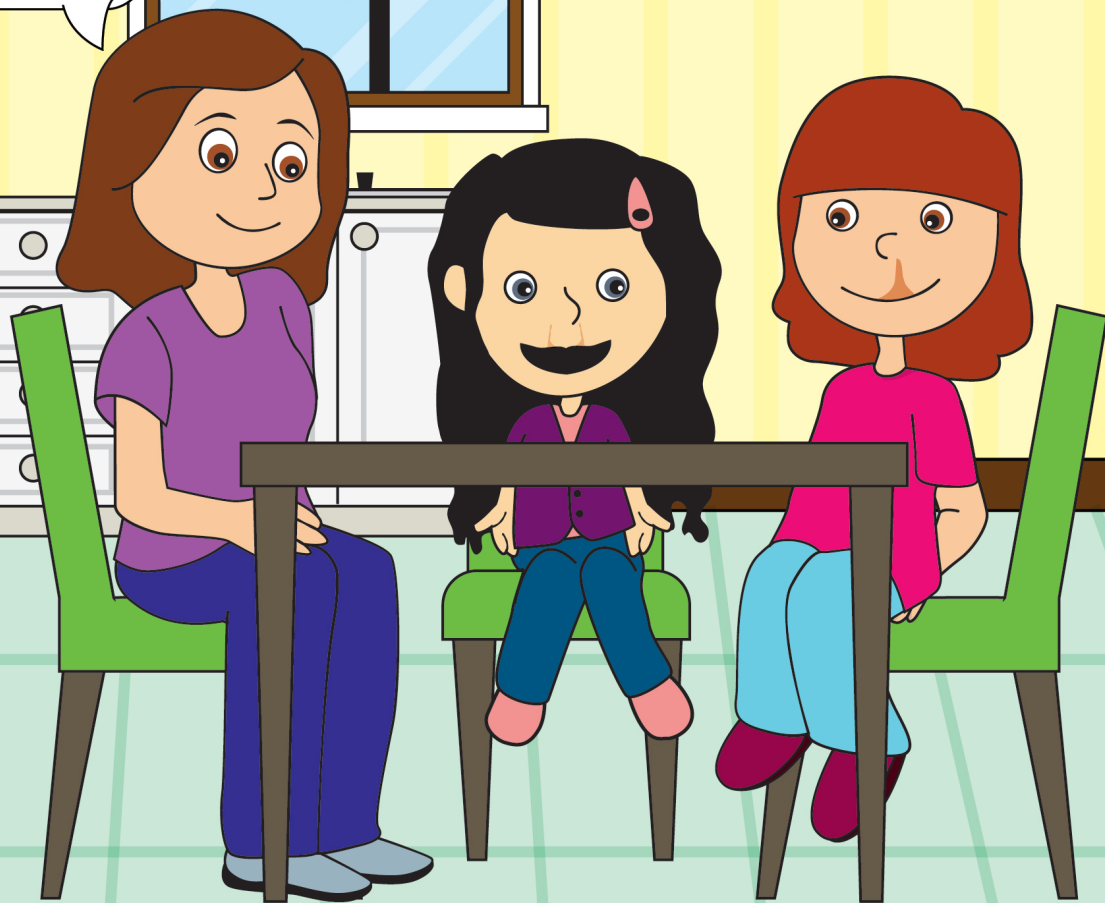
Thank you Patricia and Abigail for sharing this beautiful story and for giving voice to what many of us in the craniofacial community are feeling as we move forward in the world.

I hope when you read this story, you will think about the person and the heart behind the mask. When the mask is removed, always show kindness! And here's a little secret, when you do kind acts, not only do you make the other person feel good, but you feel really good too.

**Dina Zuckerberg
Director of Family Programs,
myFace.org**

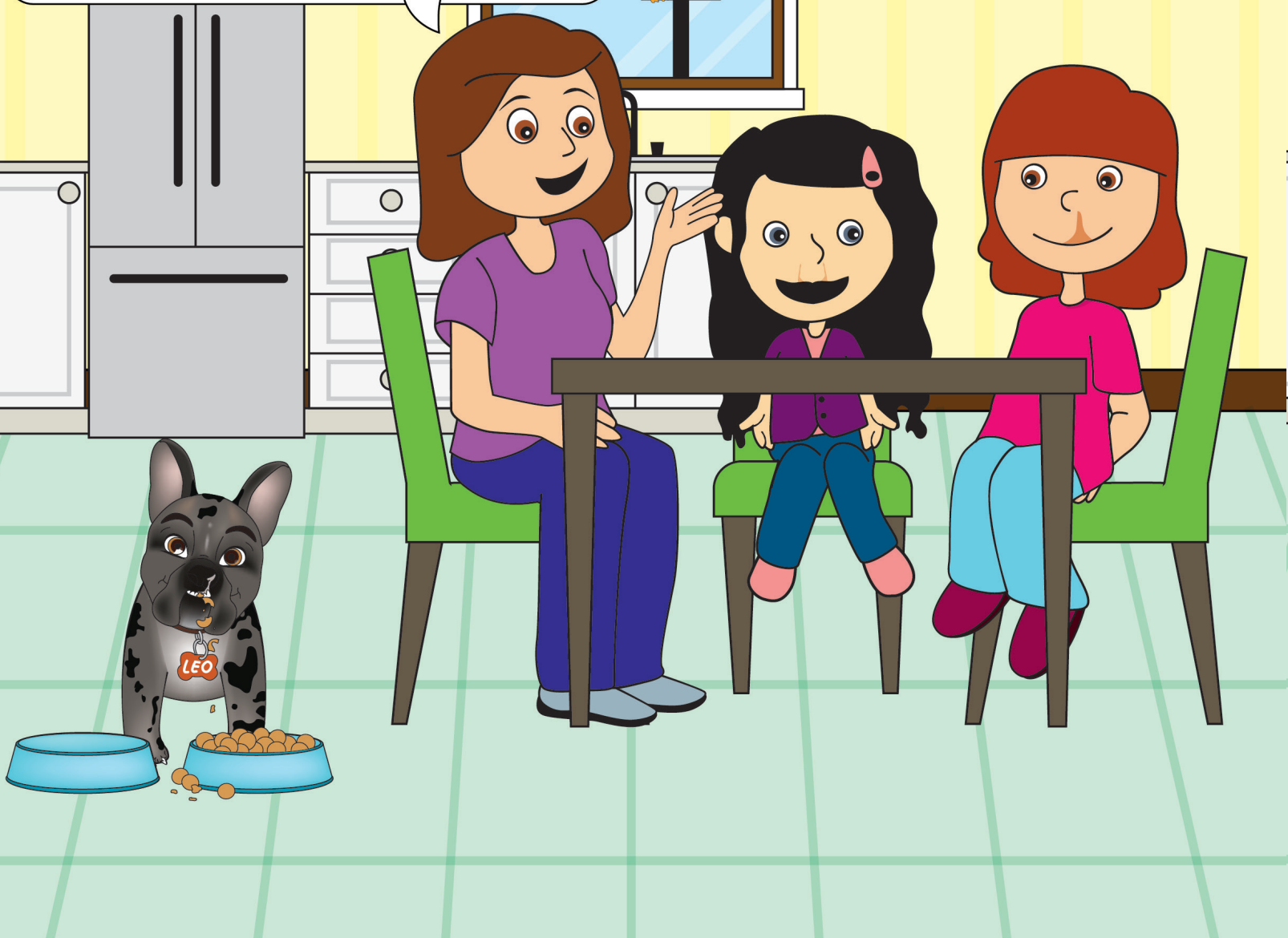


Abigail and Patty, I have some exciting news!



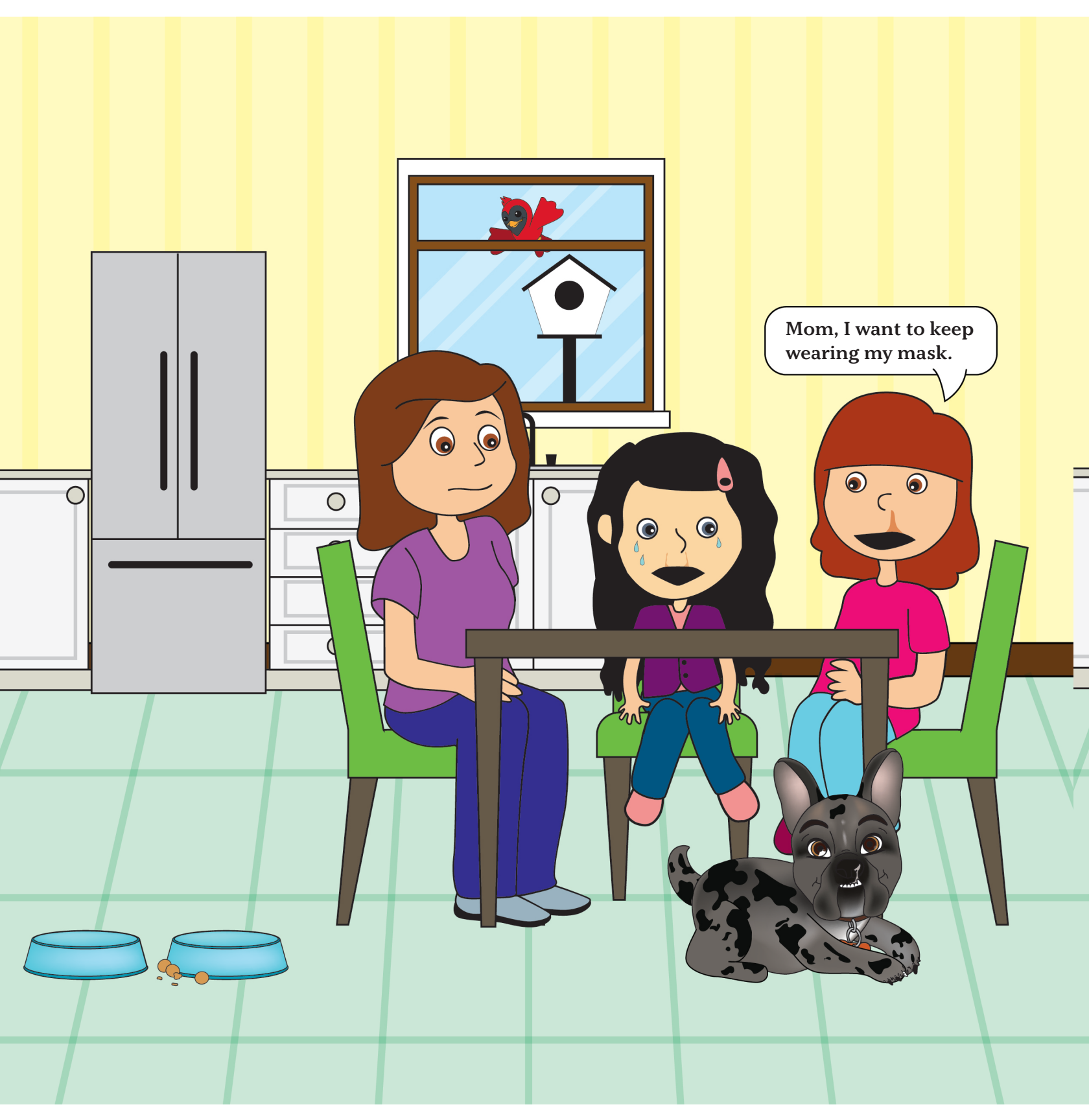
The scientists developed a vaccine to stop the spread of the virus. This means you will be able to go back to school.

Your school has done months of planning to make sure students are kept safe.

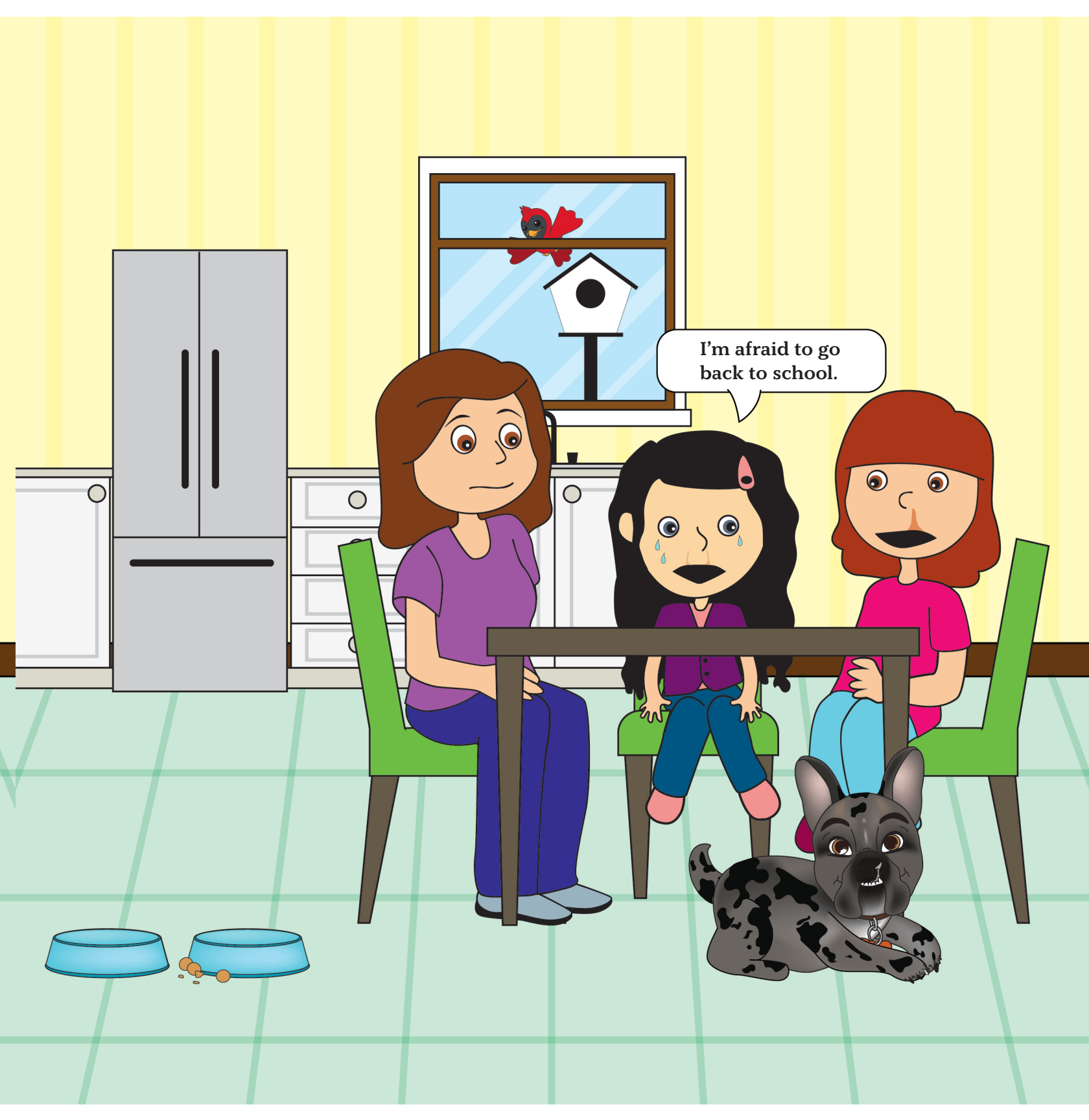


You will be able to see your friends. Isn't that wonderful?

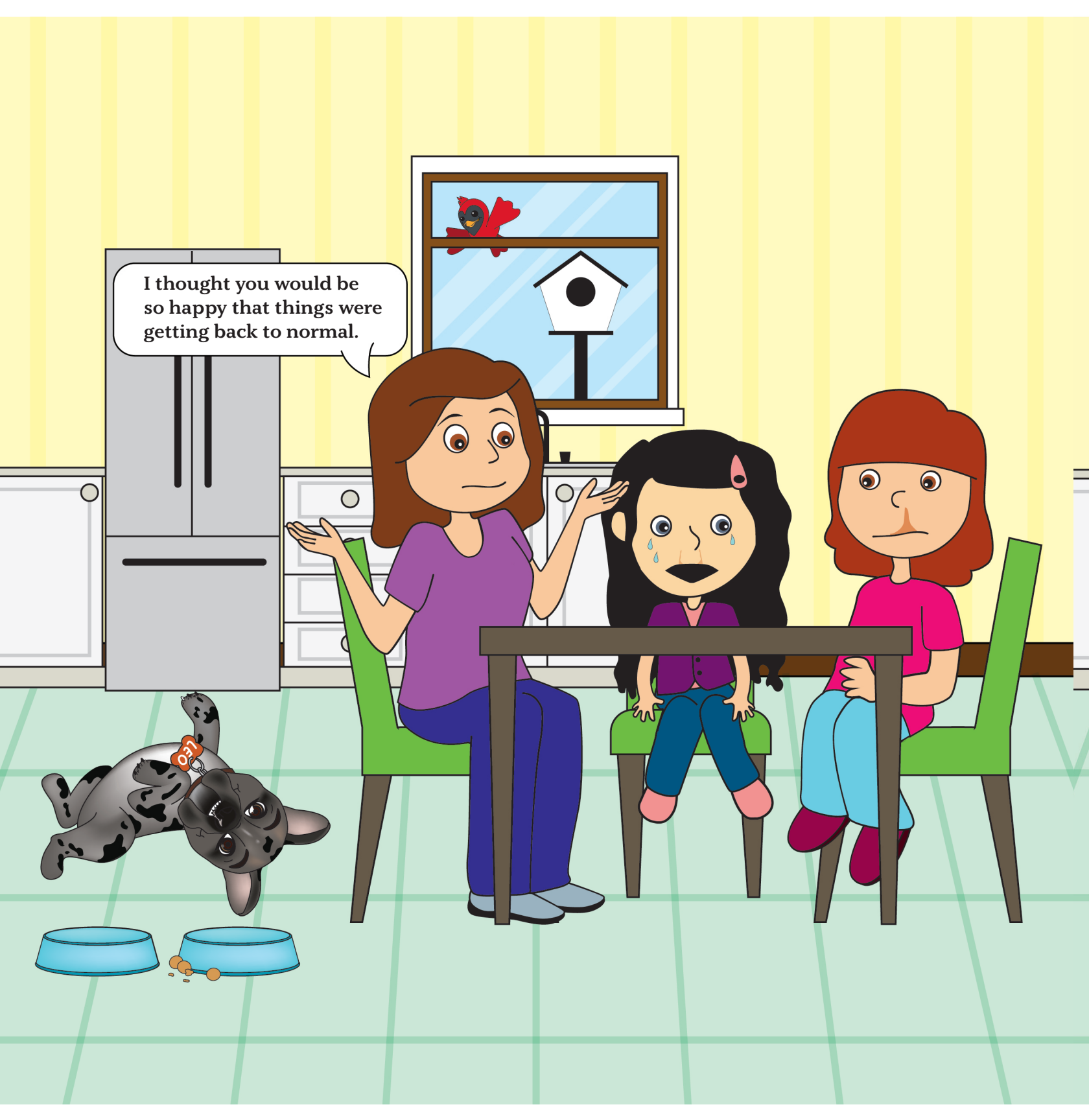




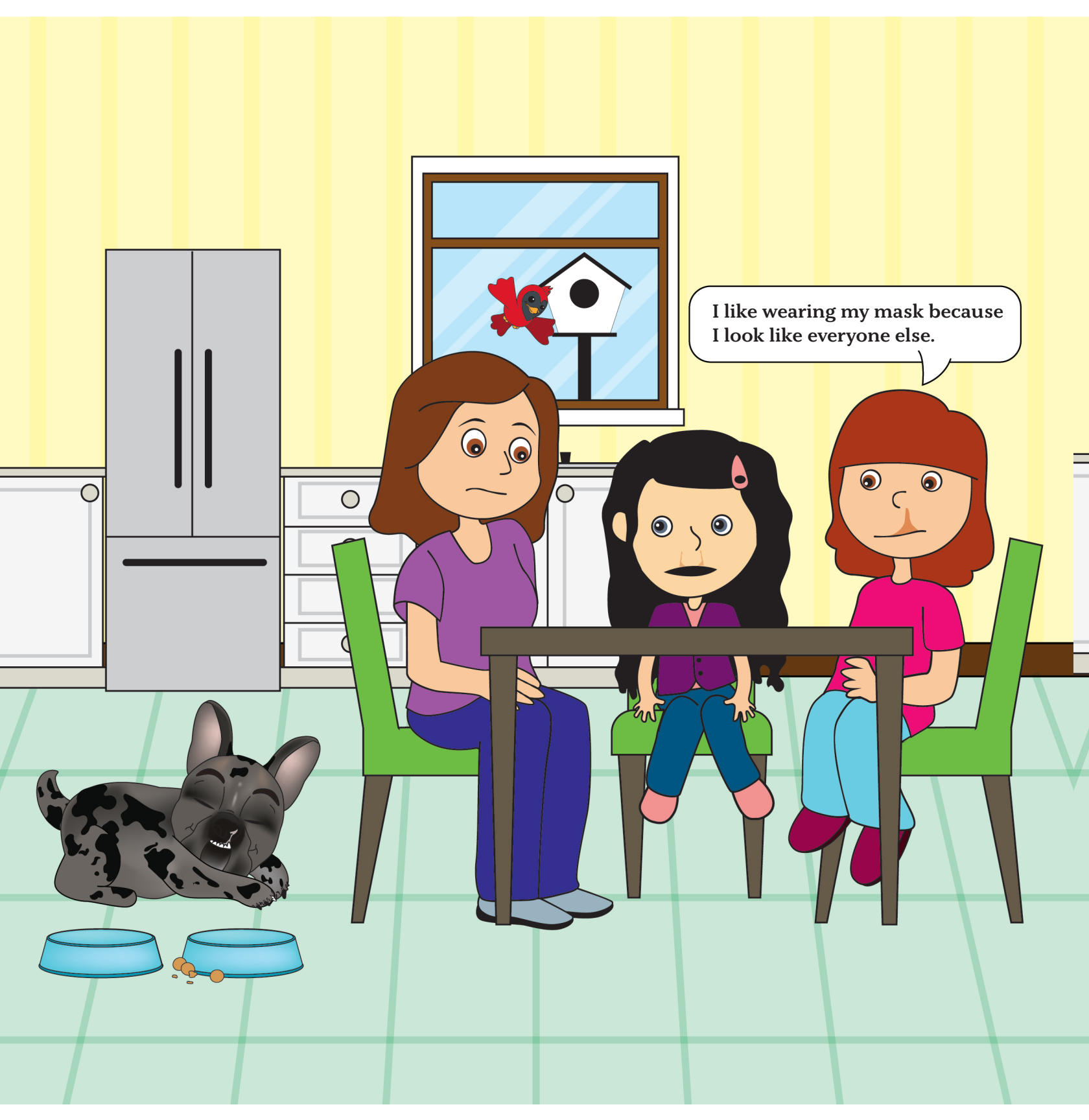
Mom, I want to keep wearing my mask.




I'm afraid to go
back to school.







I like wearing my mask because I look like everyone else.



Don't you want to look different than everyone else?

No!

I know this is a hard time.
We had to wear masks for such a long
time. All you could see was people's eyes.

When it comes time to take our masks
off, it can be scary.





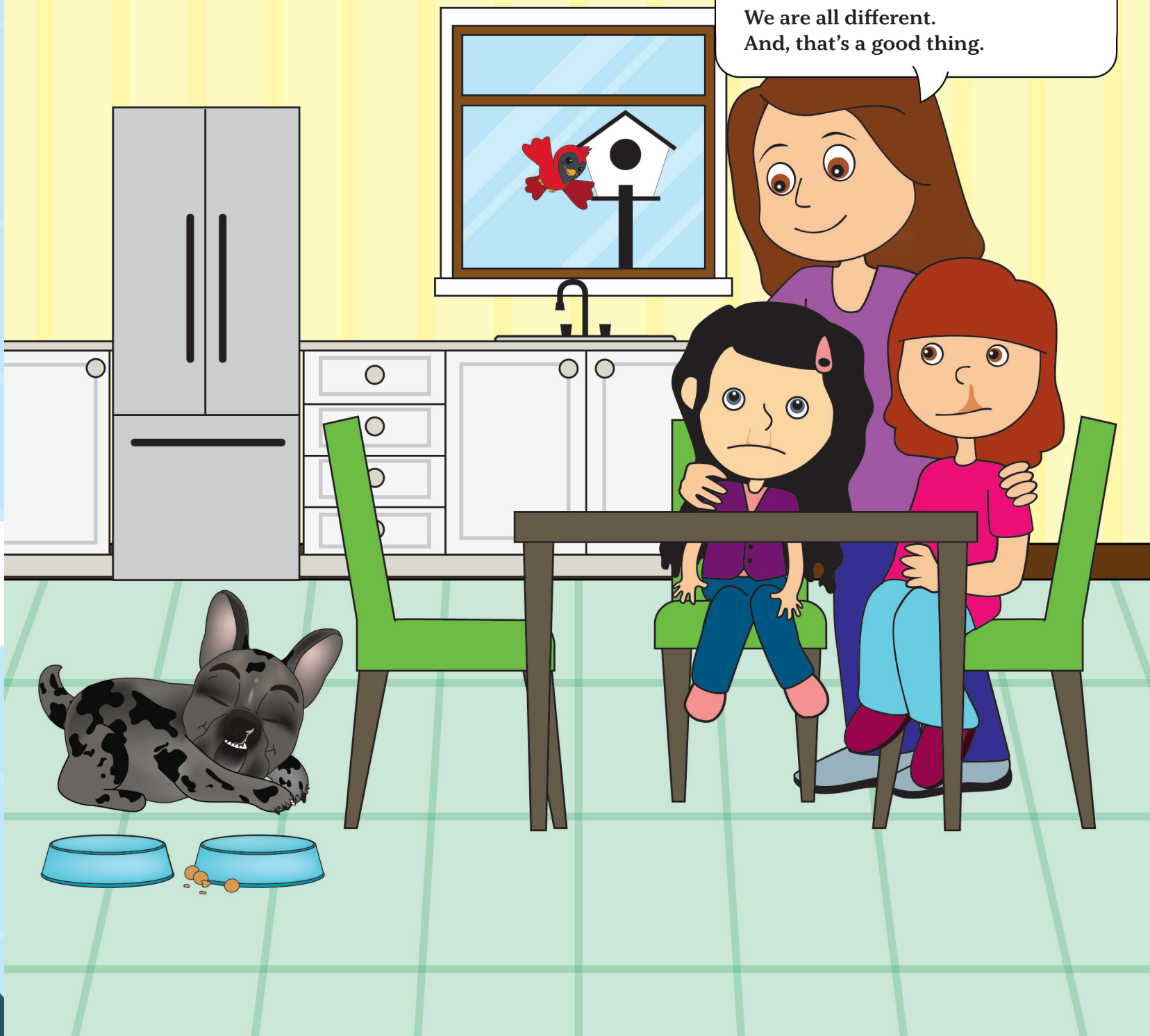
I just want to continue going to school online. I don't want to go back to school.

When I wear my mask, I feel like a superhero!
If I take it off, then everyone will see the real me.



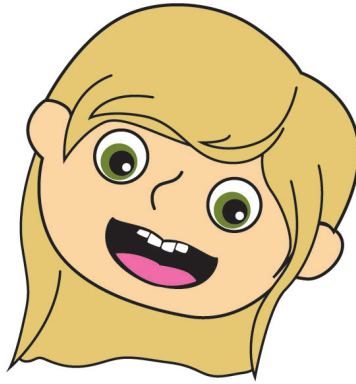
Girls, I know how brave you are.
Your scar is your badge of courage.

We are all different.
And, that's a good thing.

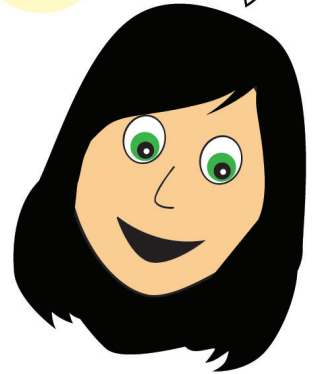


**Everyone wears a mask in some way
so they can protect themselves from being hurt.**

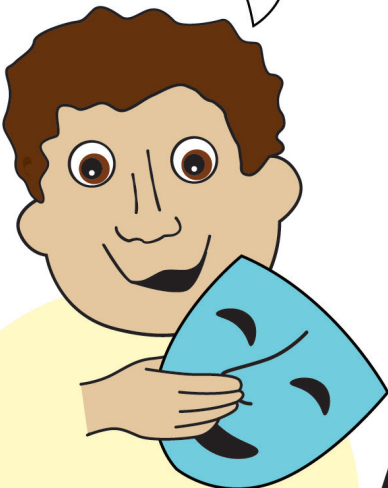
I'm great!



I'm good!



I'm okay!



I wear a mask. Not a facial mask
but an internal mask. I wear a Mom
mask when I need to.





What's a
Mom mask?

Abigail and Patty, I want to always be strong for you so that I can protect you and keep you safe.



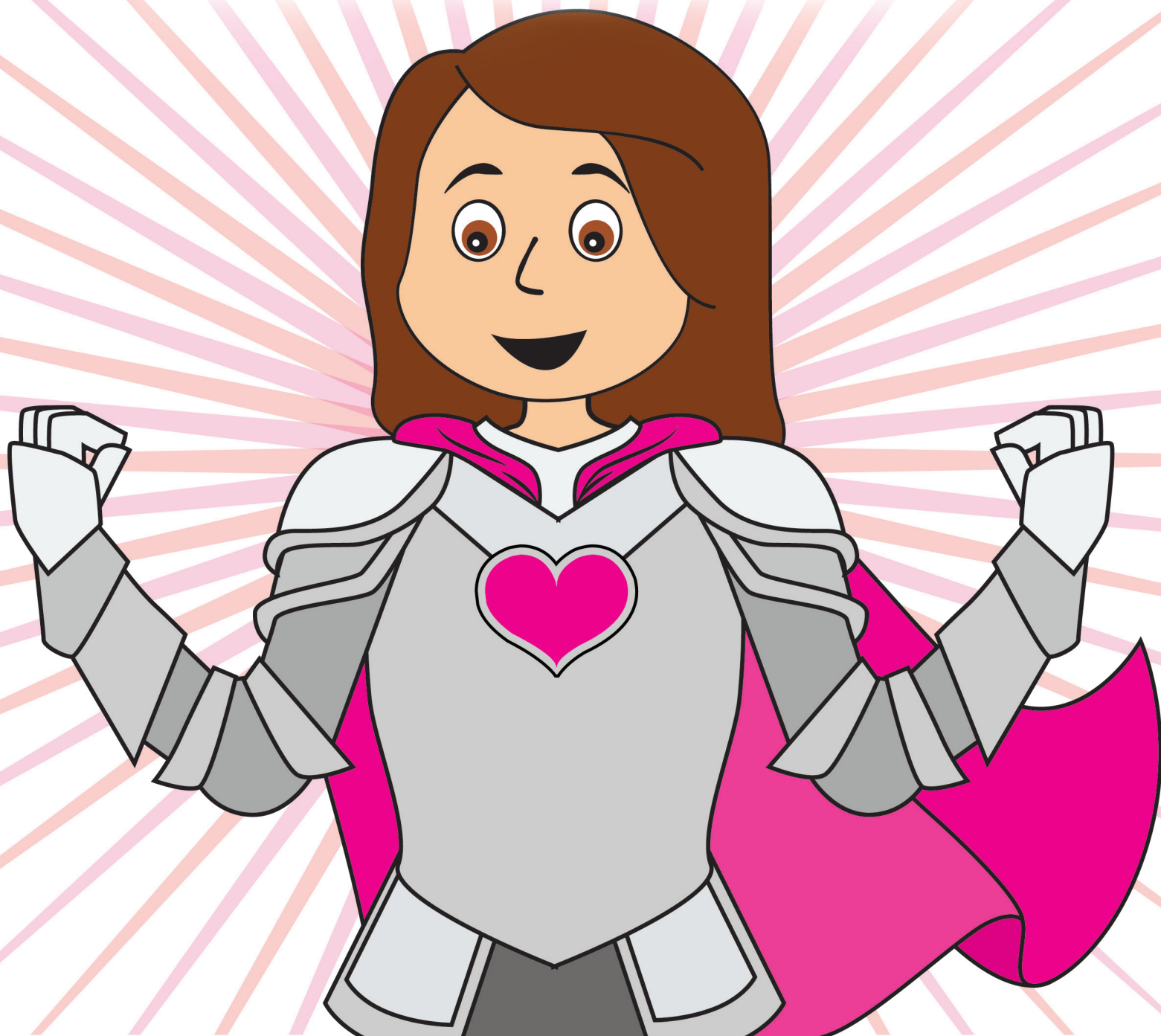
But, some days, I just can't protect
you from unkind words, stares,
and not so nice people.





So, Mom you wear a mask too?
You have to be brave even when
you are afraid?

Yes, honey. A mask is like a shield trying to protect you from getting hurt.
It's kind of like body armor. It's like being a superhero.



Girls, behind every mask is a face and a heart. I wish I could protect you from every pain or insecurity. But, I can't.

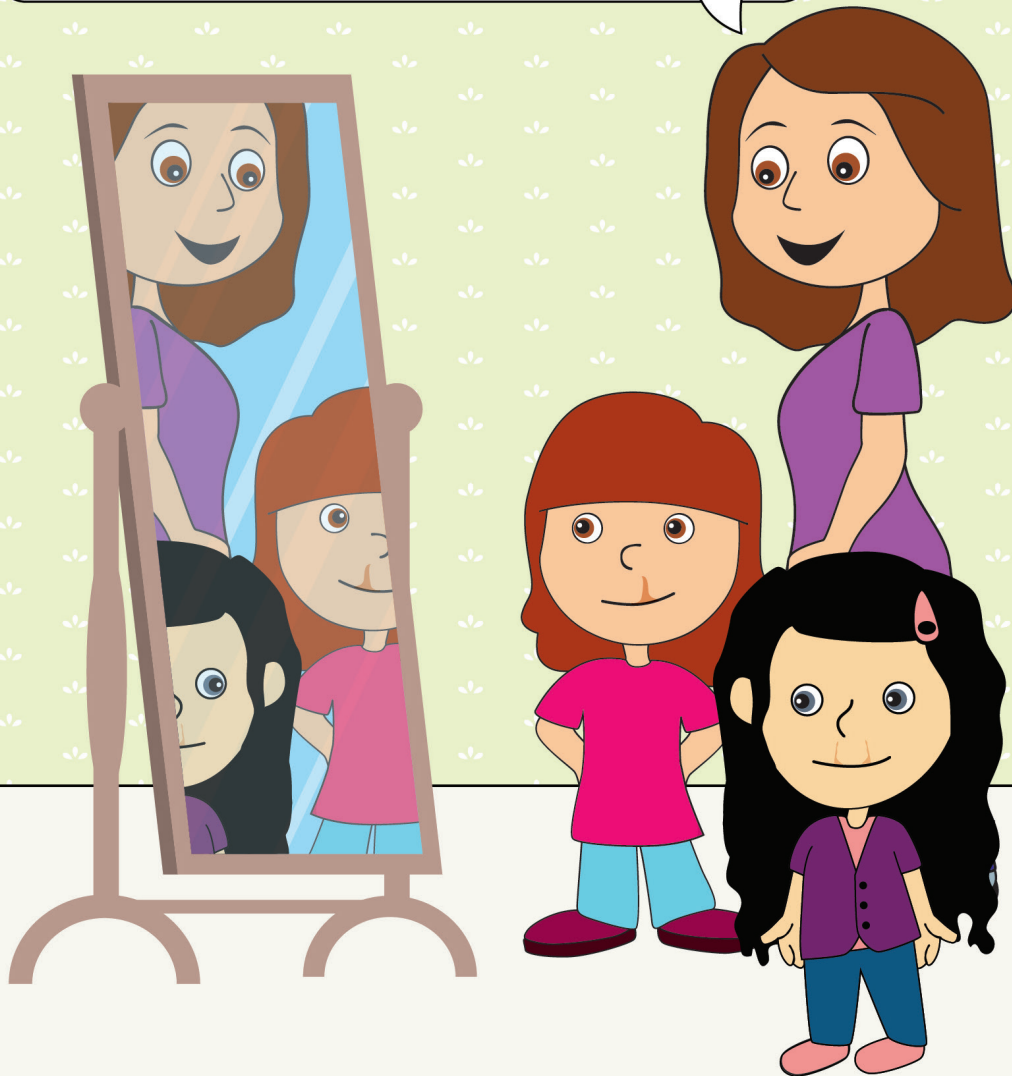


All I can do is love you and hug you.
And, help you through life's challenges.



Patty and Abigail, let's look in the mirror.

When you see yourself, I want you to see and feel how beautiful you are. Beauty comes from within.



Like a superhero, I want you to be strong. I want you to stand up for yourself and to feel good about yourself.

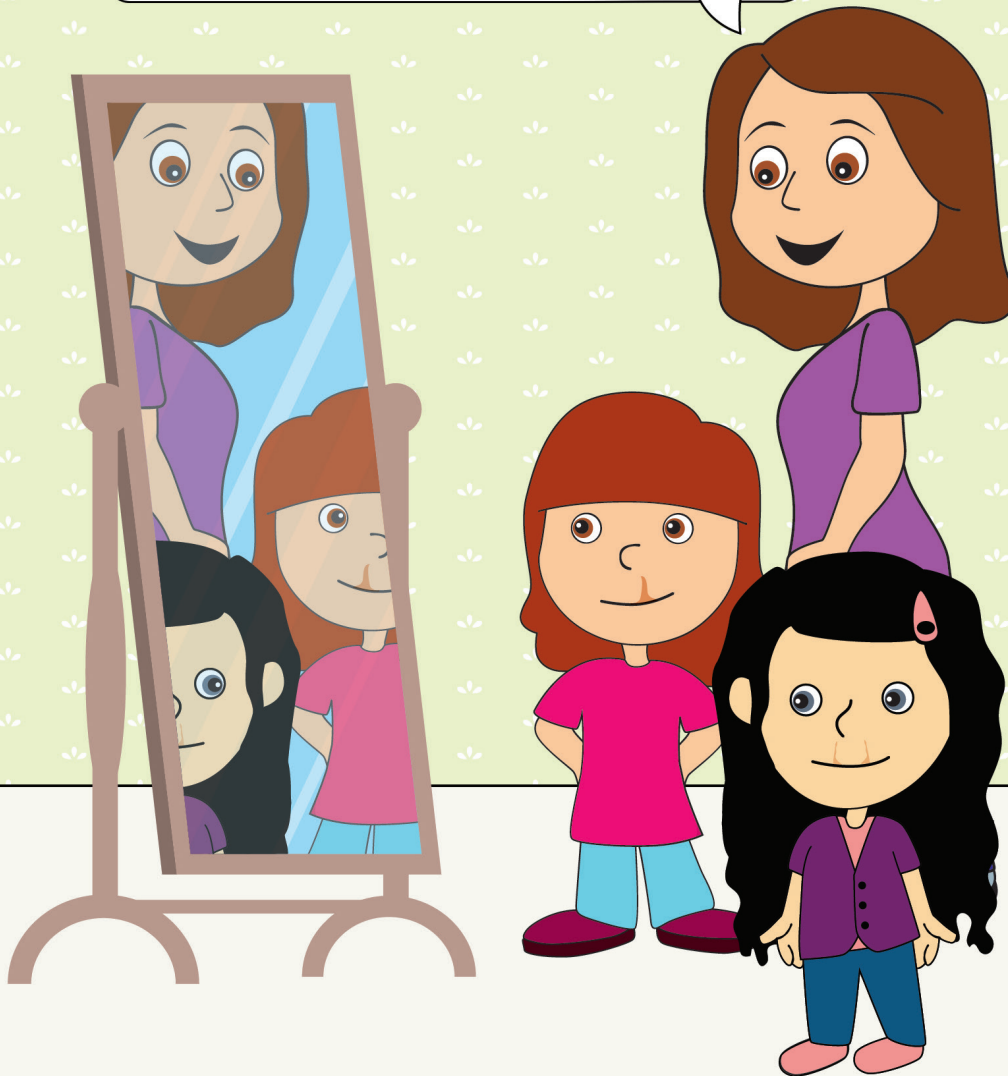
Most importantly, I want you to show kindness and acceptance to others.





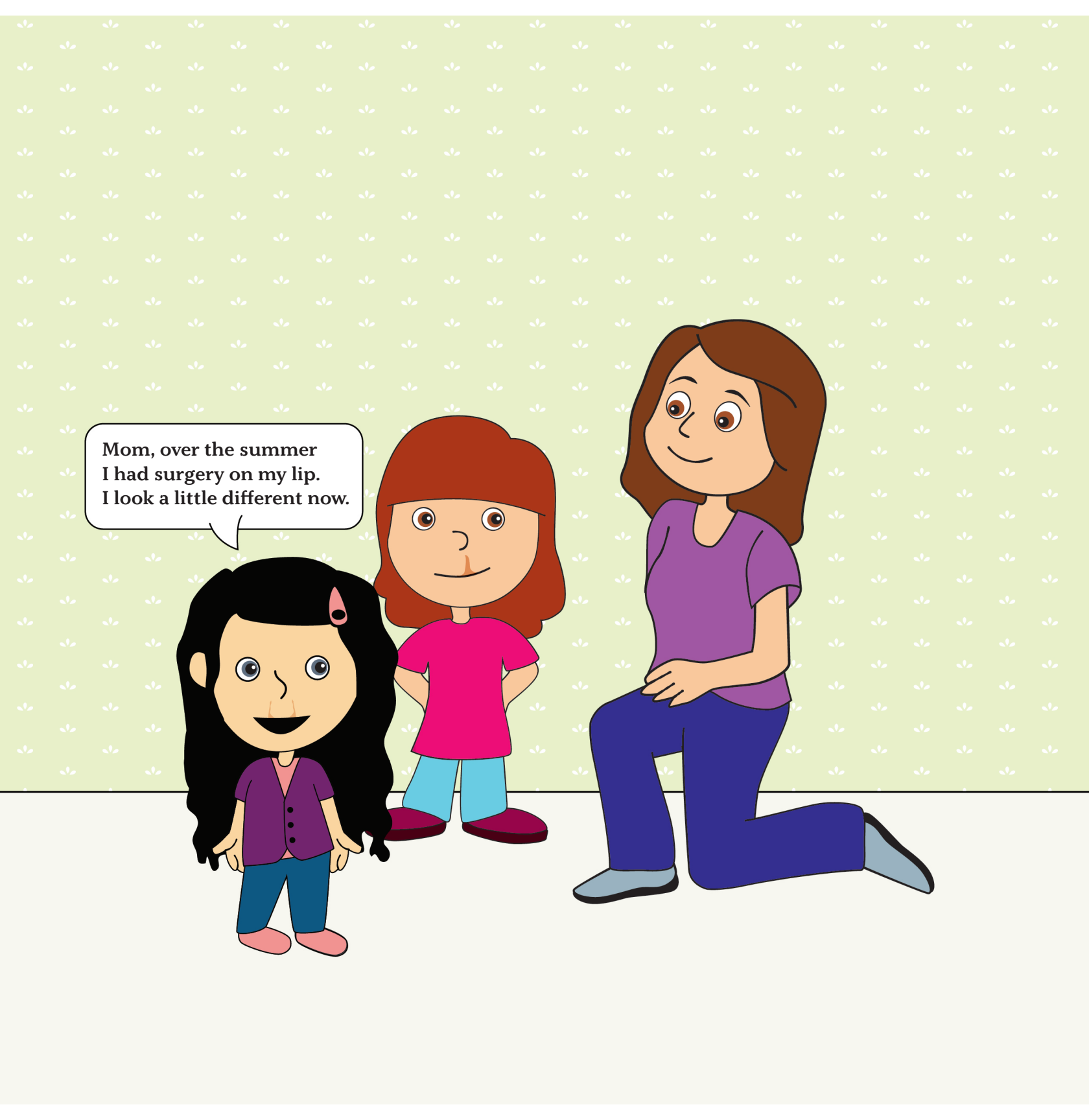
Say "hello" and smile. If they keep staring,
ask them if they have any questions.

You can tell them you were born this way.



Hold your head up high.
Be proud of who you are.





Mom, over the summer
I had surgery on my lip.
I look a little different now.

I'm afraid to take my mask off.

Kids will see that I had surgery. I'm scared they might make fun of me.

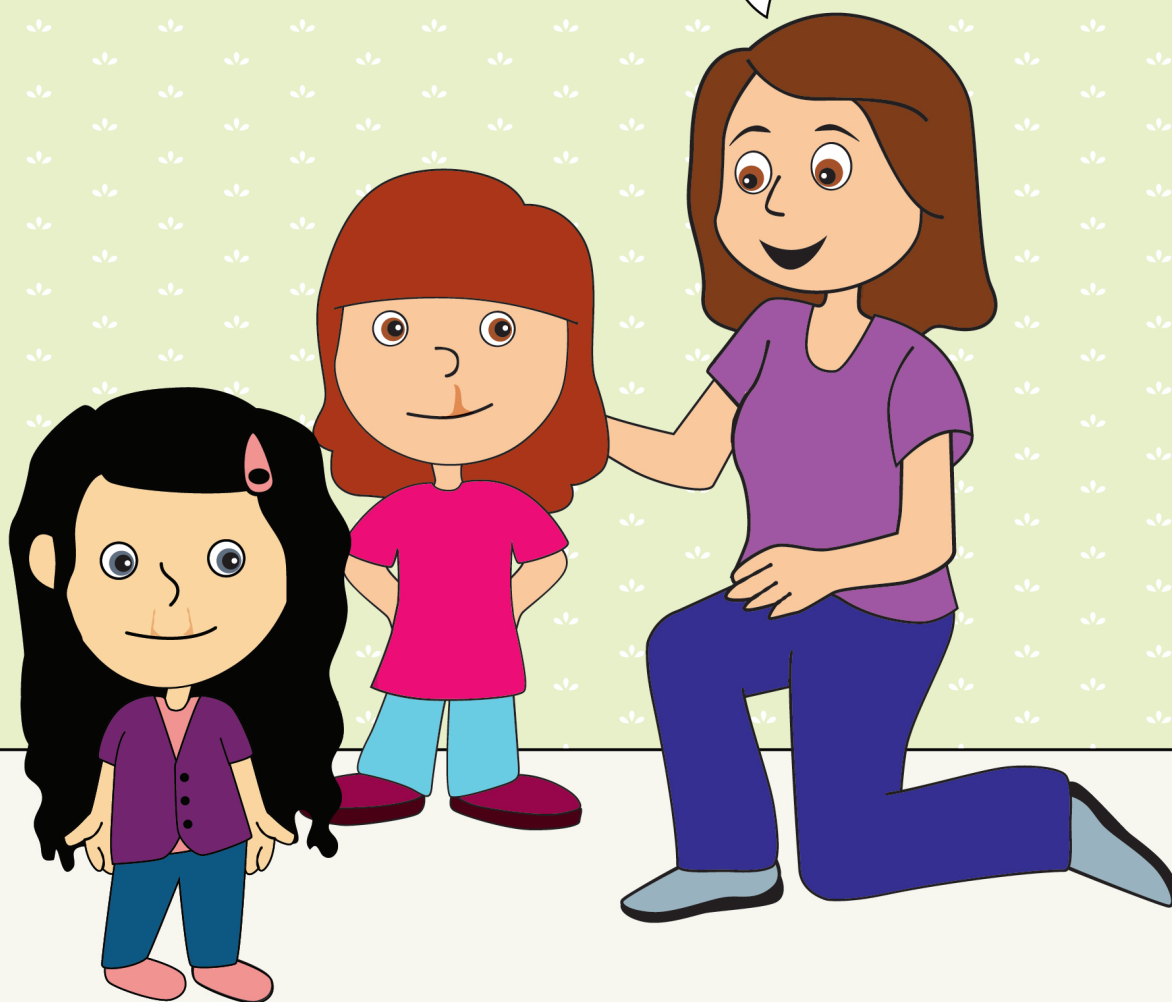


I understand if you feel more comfortable wearing a mask. And, that's ok.



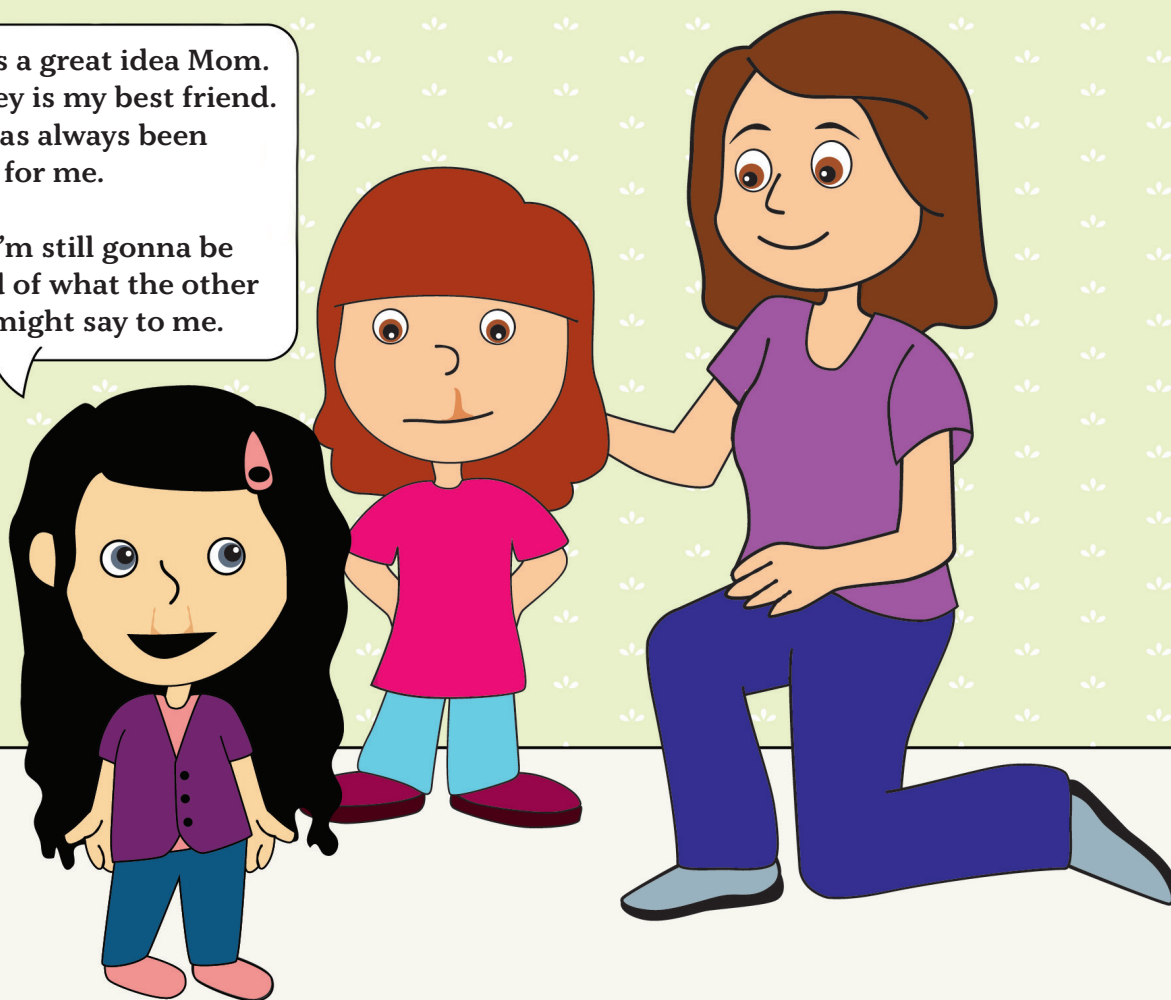
Why don't you show your friend, Aubrey, your lip.
You can tell her what it was like being in the hospital.

I can be nearby, in case you need me.

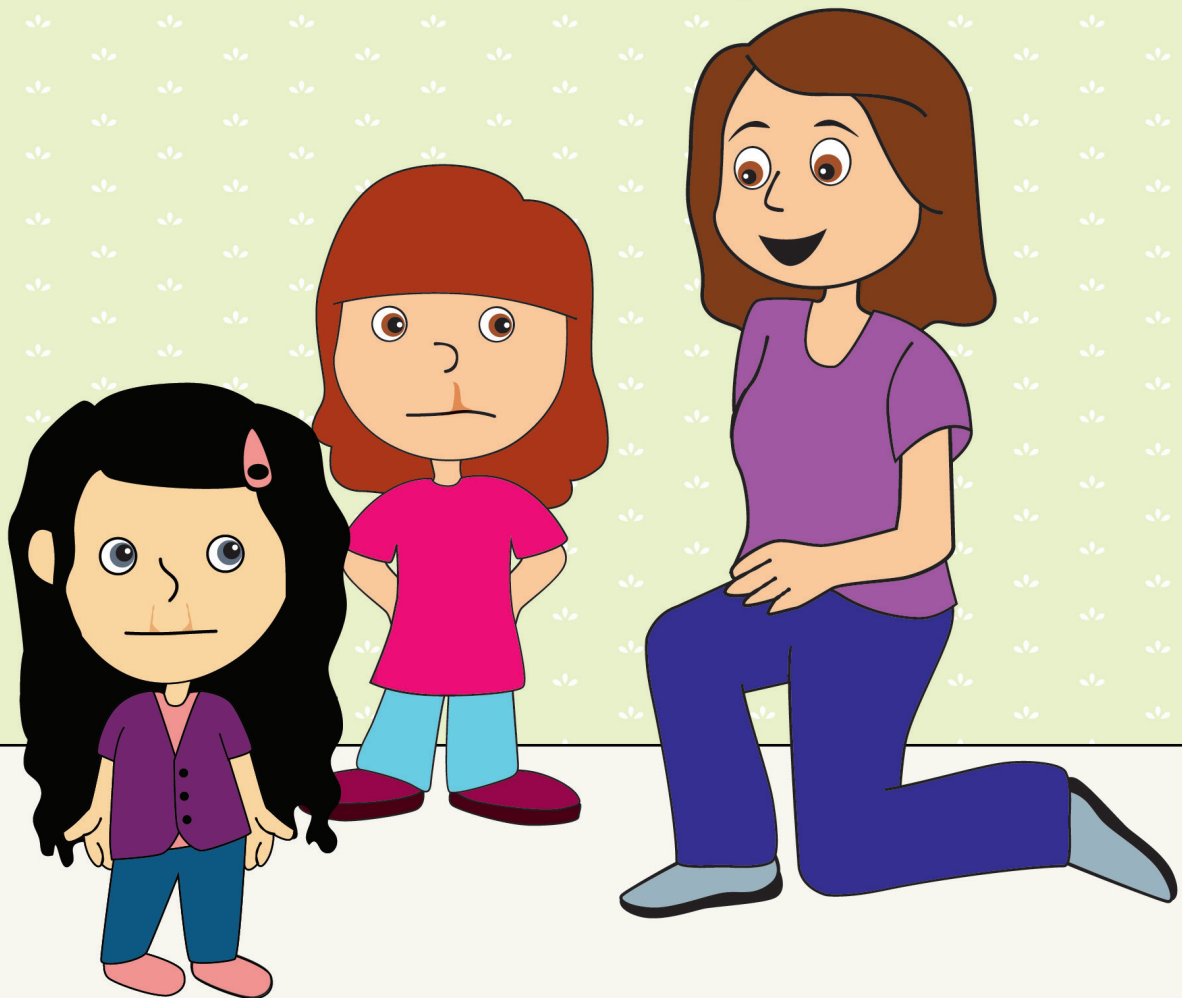


That's a great idea Mom.
Aubrey is my best friend.
She has always been
there for me.

But, I'm still gonna be
afraid of what the other
kids might say to me.



I know, honey. Our family will help you through this. It won't be easy. But, I know you can do this.
Don't let fear get in your way.





Girls, do you want to go for ice cream?
Would that be ok?

Count me in!

Sure Mom.
That would be great!

I'm going to see if Aubrey
can come with us.



You know I love
vanilla ice cream!

I want a scoop of blueberry
ice cream on a sugar cone



OTHER BOOKS BY PATRICIA SIMON

Smile with Simon

Simon and the Buddy Branch

Simon and Patty Go To Camp

Simon and the Bully

Little Leo - Underdog to Superdog

www.smilewithsimon.org