

I'MPOSSIBLE

ChessLife Strategies™ For Children & Young Adults

Kyseme Ali Ellington & Bobby Crawford

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What people are saying about I'mpossible



In ChessLife Strategies™ Kyseme Ali Ellington and Bobby Crawford offer a vehicle of authentic empowerment that speaks directly to youth in language they can relate and respond to. It's obvious that the authors not only live what they have written, but that they have also witnessed the life-changes in the youth to whom they have taught ChessLife Strategies™. I've given copies to all of my grandchildren and placed it in the children's library and the bookstore of my spiritual community.

Michael Bernard Beckwith

Founder, Agape International Spiritual Center
Author of *Spiritual Liberation—Fulfilling Your Soul's Potential*

I'mPossible: Enjoyable, refreshing and memorable. It's a lot like Disneyland for children, but adults can have a wonderful time too. For all ages—proper preparation does lead to successful operation and execution.

Jim Clemons

Assistant Coach
Los Angeles Lakers

Chess is a great game and challenges the mind. As a special educator, I believe it provides children, particularly those with special needs, an opportunity to utilize critical thinking skills, sustained joint attention, problem solving and perspective taking while having fun. I'mpossible sends an uplifting message to our youth.

Pamela Wiley-Wells, Ph.D.

President
Los Angeles Speech & Language Therapy Center, Inc.



This book speaks to real strength of character and determination. Kudos for little Ali and his remarkable life lessons of Courage, Humility, Enlightenment, Savvy, and Strength! I'm Possible proves that your mind is the strongest weapon you can cultivate. I hope this is just the first of a great series.

Jean Pennicooke

Principal

Kentwood Elementary School, LAUSD

This book speaks to the universal themes of friendship, learning, changing, adapting, planning and problem solving. It appeals to chess players as well as non-players. Ali's chess playing ability helped him see the possibilities and make the right choices to create a positive outcome.

Dewain Barber, MA

National Scholastic Tournament Chess Organizer

Owner of American Chess Equipment, LLC

After my son and I read your book it was like a tremendous weight was lifted from our shoulders. He said it helped to know someone else had gone through what he is going through. I thought it so inspiring to see your real life solutions to many of the challenges he's facing. I hope he too is able to gain confidence in his abilities, and to not be crushed when boys call him a nerd or tease him for reading. Thanks!

Helen

Elementary School Parent

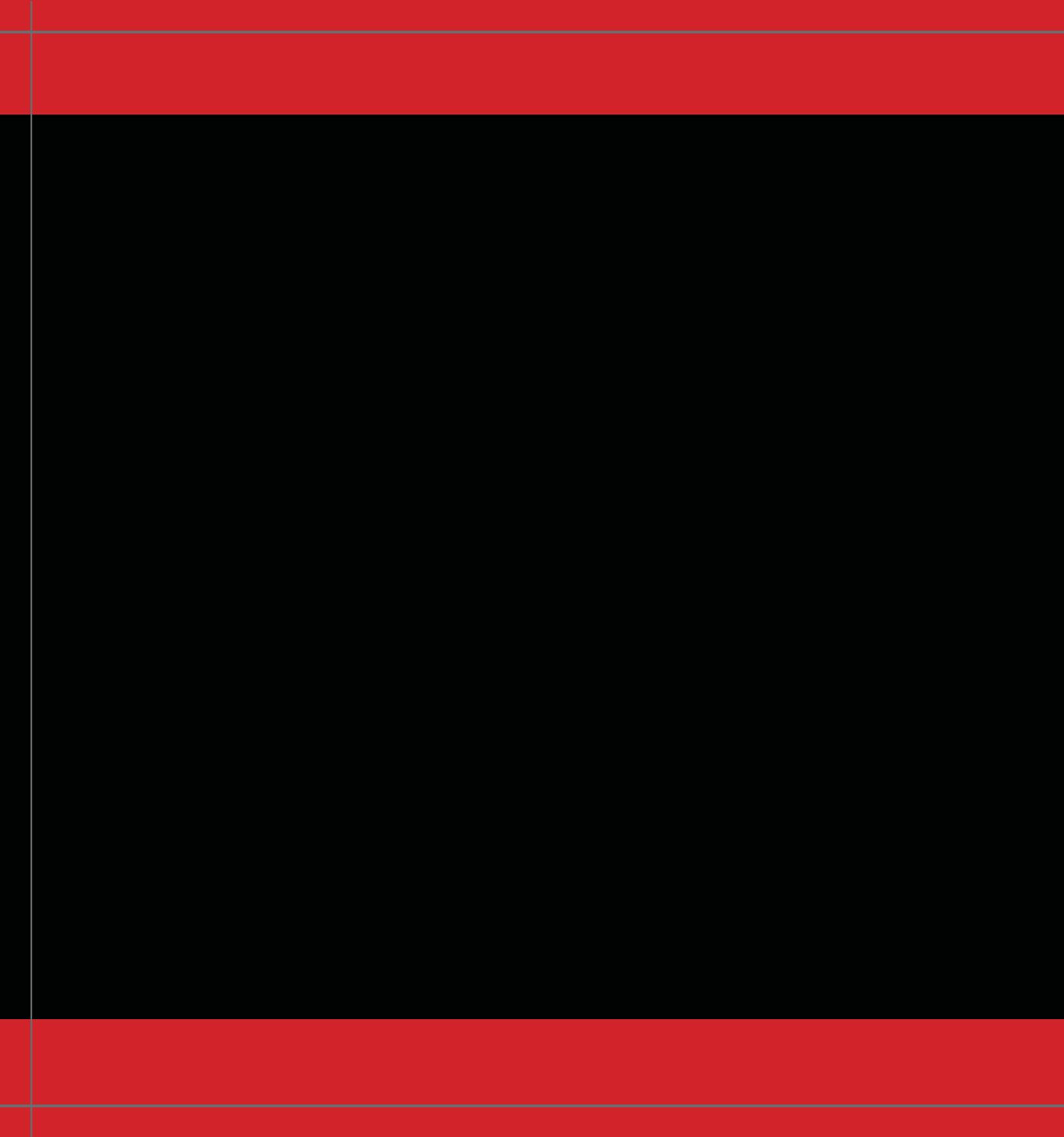
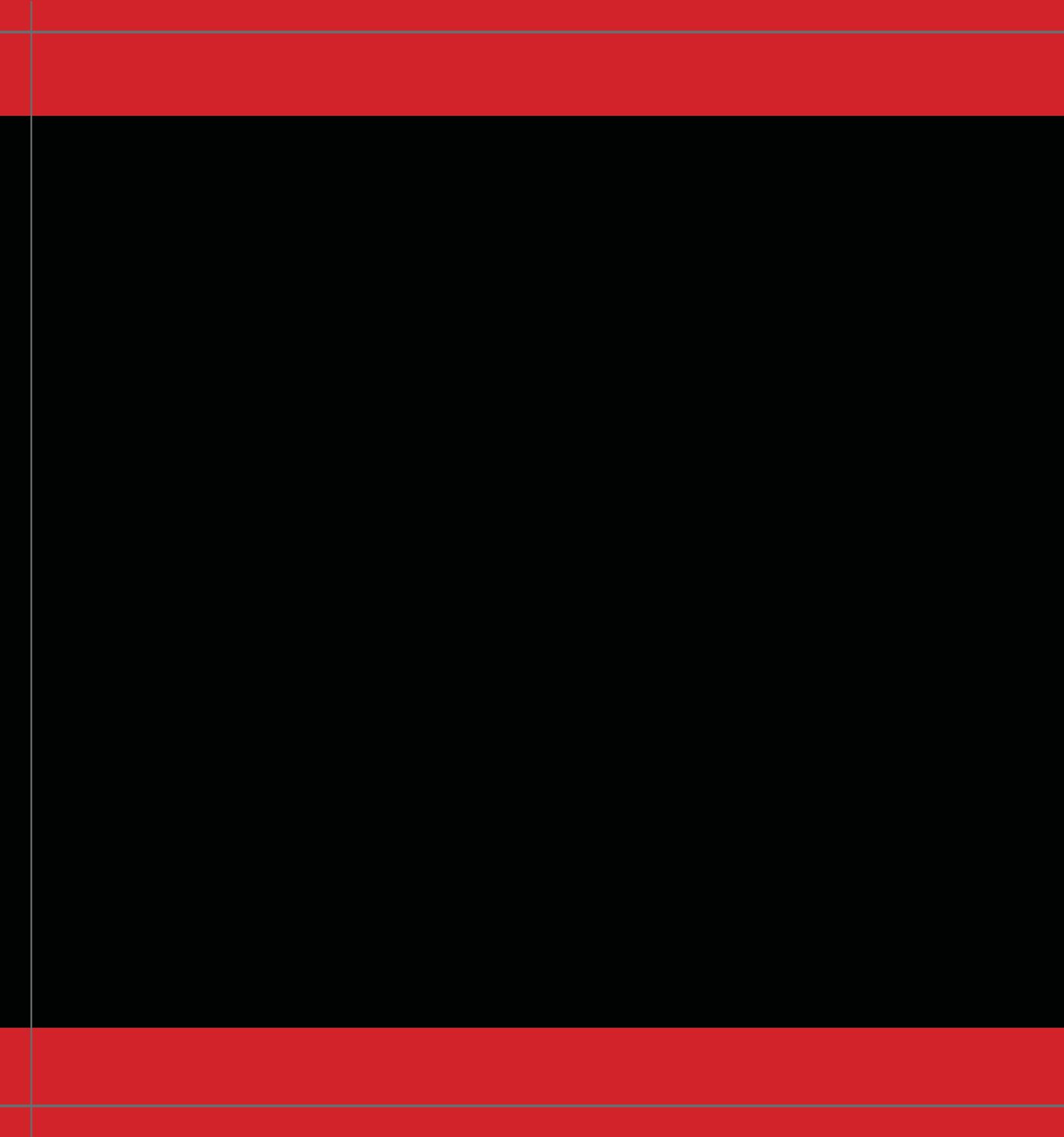


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"The movement of the pieces is symbolic of your possibilities. Just as you have choice of movement on the chess board, you have free will in the real world. And it is your choices that make your destiny..."

Bobby Crawford from *Crashin' the Boards*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We dedicate this book to the brilliance in all children
wrangling to reveal itself.

Ellington & Crawford

We wish to acknowledge our parents, **Rue & Vickie Ellington, Bob & Mary Crawford** who shared the wisdom of their years, ultimately culminating in **ChessLife Strategies™**.

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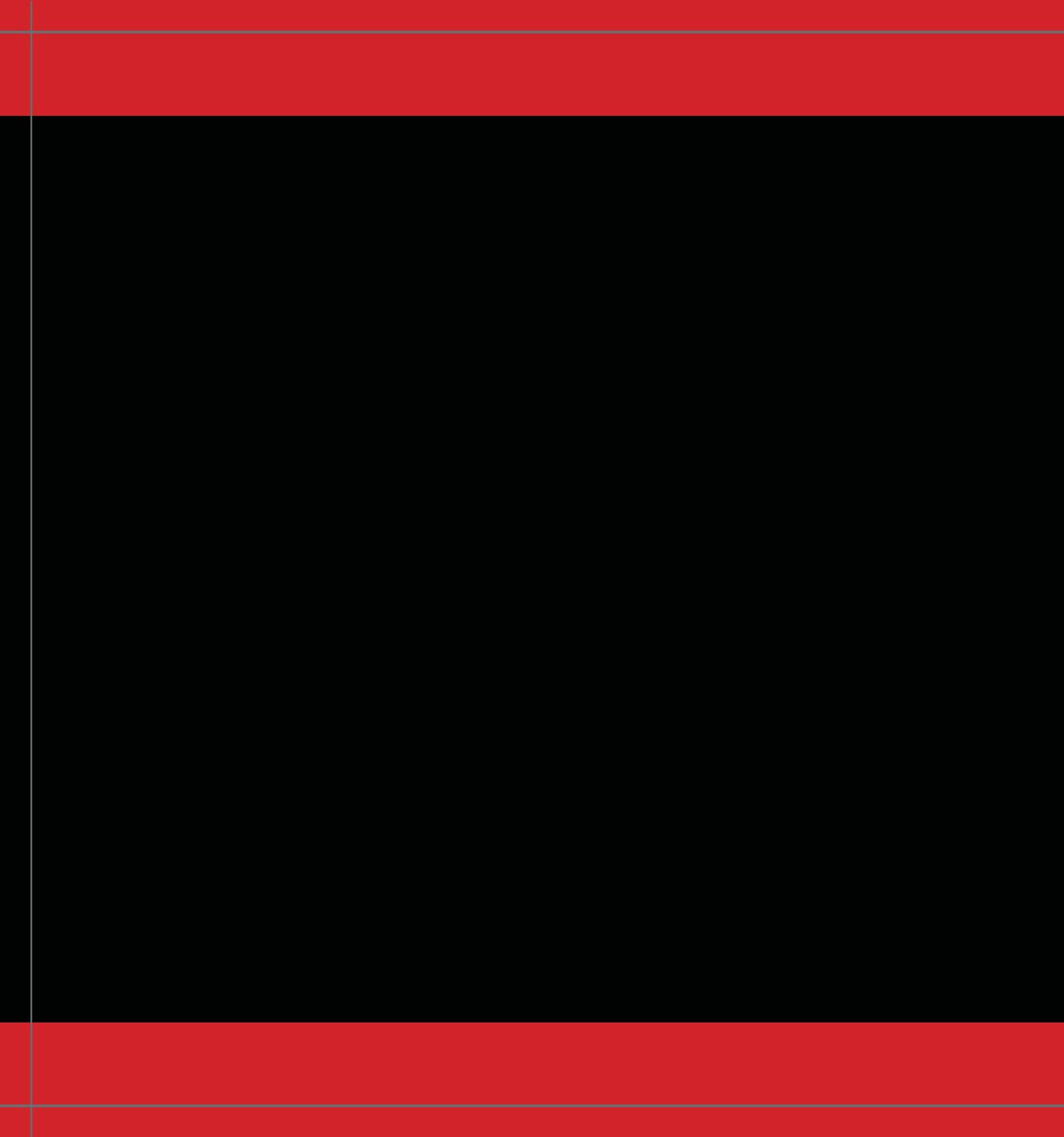
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To my wife and best friend Neisha Ellington whose support and love serves as my greatest ally on earth & to my children Noah Ali and Hannah'Noel Ali, *remember where your strength resides and to always climb as high as you dream.*

Kyseme Ali Ellington, Duke of Chess



And to all of the family, friends, librarians and educators who encouraged us along the way.



Chapter 1

BOYS IN THE HOOD

Growing up the youngest boy in the neighborhood was a daily challenge, and having the name “Ali” made it even worse. That’s because boxing was the neighborhood’s all-consuming pastime, and being named after the greatest boxer in history, Muhammad Ali, brought me lots of unwanted attention.

Dad says my mother was in labor for over 22 hours before my tiny body finally came out—punching like a boxer. That’s what inspired him to give me “Ali” as a middle name. Although this would be a constant source of pride for him, I don’t think he knew the grief that name would cause me.

My neighborhood was just like the “Wild Wild West,” except the boys were trying to prove themselves as boxers instead of cowboys. Picking a fight with Muhammad Ali’s namesake was a quick way to get noticed—and every boy in my neighborhood wanted to be noticed.

I was a skinny kid of twelve, the youngest and smallest boy around. The older boys all seemed like giants to me. Sometimes, as I made my way through the neighborhood to the market, playground or library, the older boys would shout, “So, you think you’re really *somethin’*, huh, Ali?” hoping I’d give them an excuse to battle.

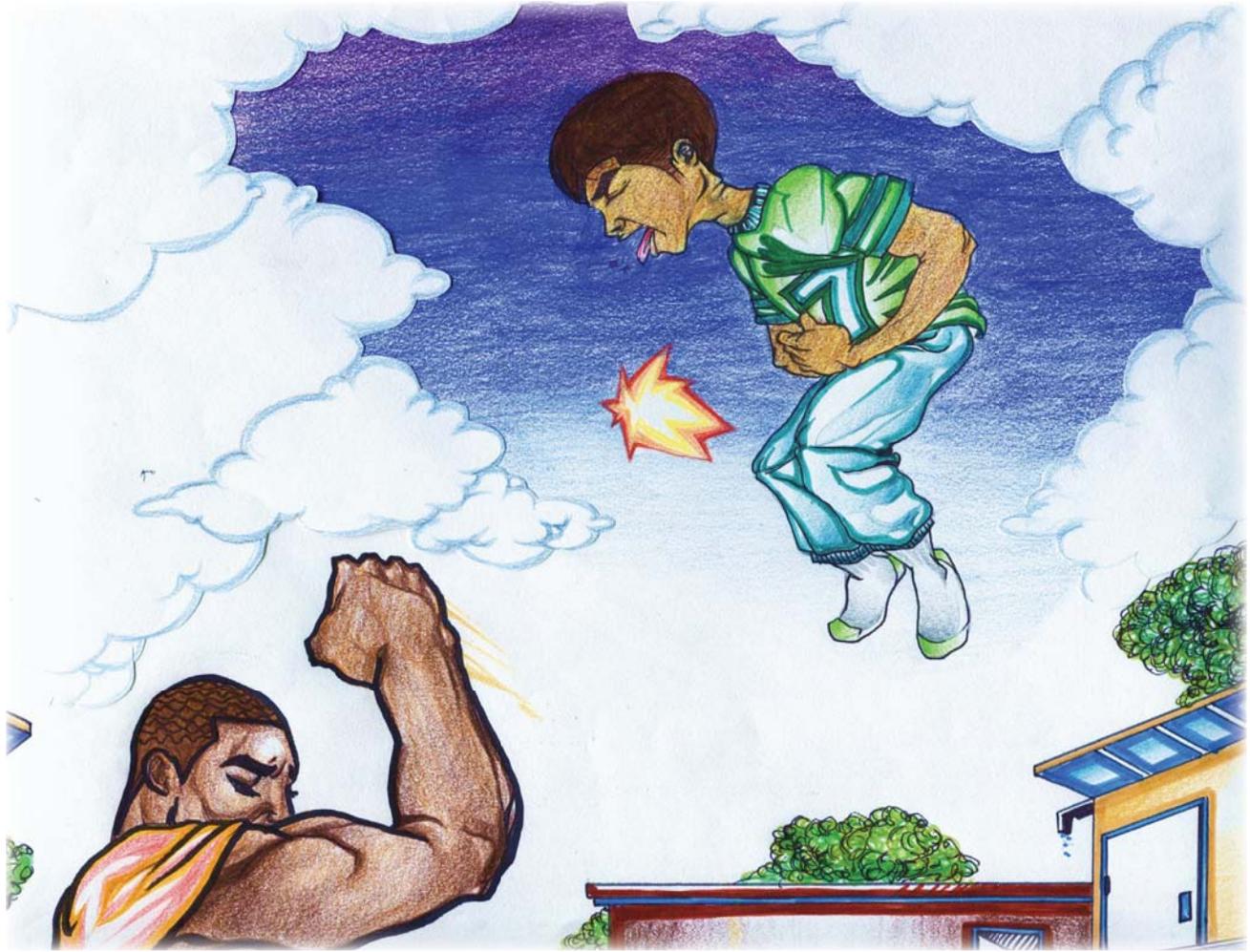


Leaving the library was especially tricky. There was this big, scary eighth grader named Brick that every kid in the neighborhood was afraid of. I didn't know his real name, but let me tell you why they called him Brick.

Slap-battles were the rule of boxing in the neighborhood--half closed fists thrown with speed, but with a kind of slap upon impact. We weren't really trying to hit hard, just score as many times as we could to the stomach, chest and ribs. And there was absolutely no punching to the head.

This was the point system and it kept these neighborhood bouts fairly civilized, even polite. Wading through your opponent's defenses to land a soft jab to his chest could cause an uproar of "ooohs!" and "ahhhhs!" from everyone watching. Slipping past one of his jabs to land a soft jab of your own to his stomach was almost the equivalent of a knockout in a heavy weight title fight. And although we usually went home sore, nobody really tried to hurt anybody.

That is, except for Brick. His punches landed with a thud that could be heard in the next county. He wasn't just big, he was *solid*, like a building or something! High school kids would cross to the other side of the street when they saw Brick coming their way. Rumor has it that he put a kid in the hospital just for accidentally stepping on his shoe.



Brick never smiled and he certainly never laughed. In fact, we wondered if he had *teeth*. But we knew he had fists—fists that hit like a brick!

It was my misfortune that Brick lived right down the street from the neighborhood library—the one I liked to walk to every Saturday morning. I dreaded running into him, but sometimes it was simply unavoidable. The trip was al-

ready a long, five-block walk for me. To avoid going past Brick's house, I'd have to walk another four blocks out of my way. And that still didn't guarantee I wouldn't run into him.

The fact is, I envied Brick for living so close to the library, even though he never bothered to go in. I had no idea why he wouldn't go. I just figured he had something against books.

Whenever Brick saw me going home with books under my arm he'd shout things like, "You ain't no Muhammad Ali! You ain't no fighter!" or "You're soft! You're a brainiac! You're just a nerd!"

Now, my mom always told me that liking books was nothing to ever be ashamed of, but somehow Brick made me feel like there was. One day I made the big mistake of yelling back, "I ain't no nerd!" *Why on earth did I say that?*

"Oh, so if you're not a nerd then you must be a *fighter!*" he said with that satisfied look he only had when he was going to beat somebody up. I had fallen into his trap. "Let's box!"



Brick chased me all the way home that day. In fact, he chased me home every Saturday morning. That's what finally made me ask my dad to teach me how to box. I was tired of being afraid. To my surprise, Dad needed convincing.

“Dad, boxing is the only way I can prove I'm not soft, whatever that means. And maybe I shouldn't let the neighborhood kids see me reading or coming home from the library or playing chess, either.”

Dad was frowning. He had grown up hard on the tough streets of Newark, New Jersey. He was raised to believe that a man needed to be like a turtle, hard on the outside, but soft on the inside. “But remember,” he would add, “A turtle is not afraid to stick his neck out.”

Dad often offered little proverbs like that. Some of them I could understand right away, but others might take me days to figure out. He liked to toss out clever little riddles now and then, too. Some of those could take me weeks to figure out.

In my mind, I already had one part of the turtle thing all figured out. I was already “soft on the inside,” I guess because I really cared about people, I practiced being fair and honest and I loved to read and stuff. But, now I wanted to get the *tough on the outside* part taken care of, too. Surely boxing would do that. That’s why I was surprised when my dad said—

“So, you’re bothered by them calling you *soft*? Boy, you’re getting off *easy*. Soft? Fredrick Douglas was called *slave*, because he was born a slave. But he did not allow that label to tell him who he was. He won his freedom, educated himself and became one of the greatest men in our history. Albert Einstein was called *retarded*. Can you imagine? One of the most brilliant men ever born and they called him *retarded*!”

“The only difference between you and those two great men who changed the world is that they did not allow their critics to determine their value as human beings. They kept right on doing what they were doing.”

“But, Dad, I have to hear kids call me *soft everyday*.”

“Son, people don’t see things as they are, people see things from *where* they are. You can’t control what people think or what they say, no more than you can control your opponent’s moves on the chess board. But you *can* control how you *respond* to their moves. Analyze the situation like a chess player. Turn your opponent’s moves to your advantage. Instead of feeling bad about what they say, realize that you have qualities they simply don’t understand. Perhaps they call you names because they secretly admire your character and values. Perhaps they wish they had the courage to emulate your qualities.’

‘So take *pride* in them, Son. Say to yourself, ‘Hey, they’re just talking about the things that make me *special*—that I’m smart, respectful, hard working and dependable—hey, what’s not to like about that?’ Am I making sense to you, Son?’”

“Sure thing, Dad—but if it’s okay with you, right now I need to learn how to *box*.”

He took a deep breath and sighed. He seemed disappointed, like maybe I wasn’t listening. The truth is, I just really didn’t understand all of what he was saying. I just wanted to walk to the library and not have to fight or run from somebody on the way home. But I couldn’t bring myself to tell Dad that. I guess I didn’t want him to see how afraid I was of the older boys in the neighborhood.

“Okay, get in your fighting stance!”

I was startled by the suddenness of his order. “Excuse me, Dad?”

“I said, get in your fighting stance!”

Whoa! I was eager to learn boxing, but I didn't know he'd want to start *right away!* Nonetheless, I spread my legs and raised my fists.

Dad circled around me, examining my stance.

“Hold your fists higher.”

I immediately raised my fists.

“Keep your elbows tucked in to guard your ribs and gut.”

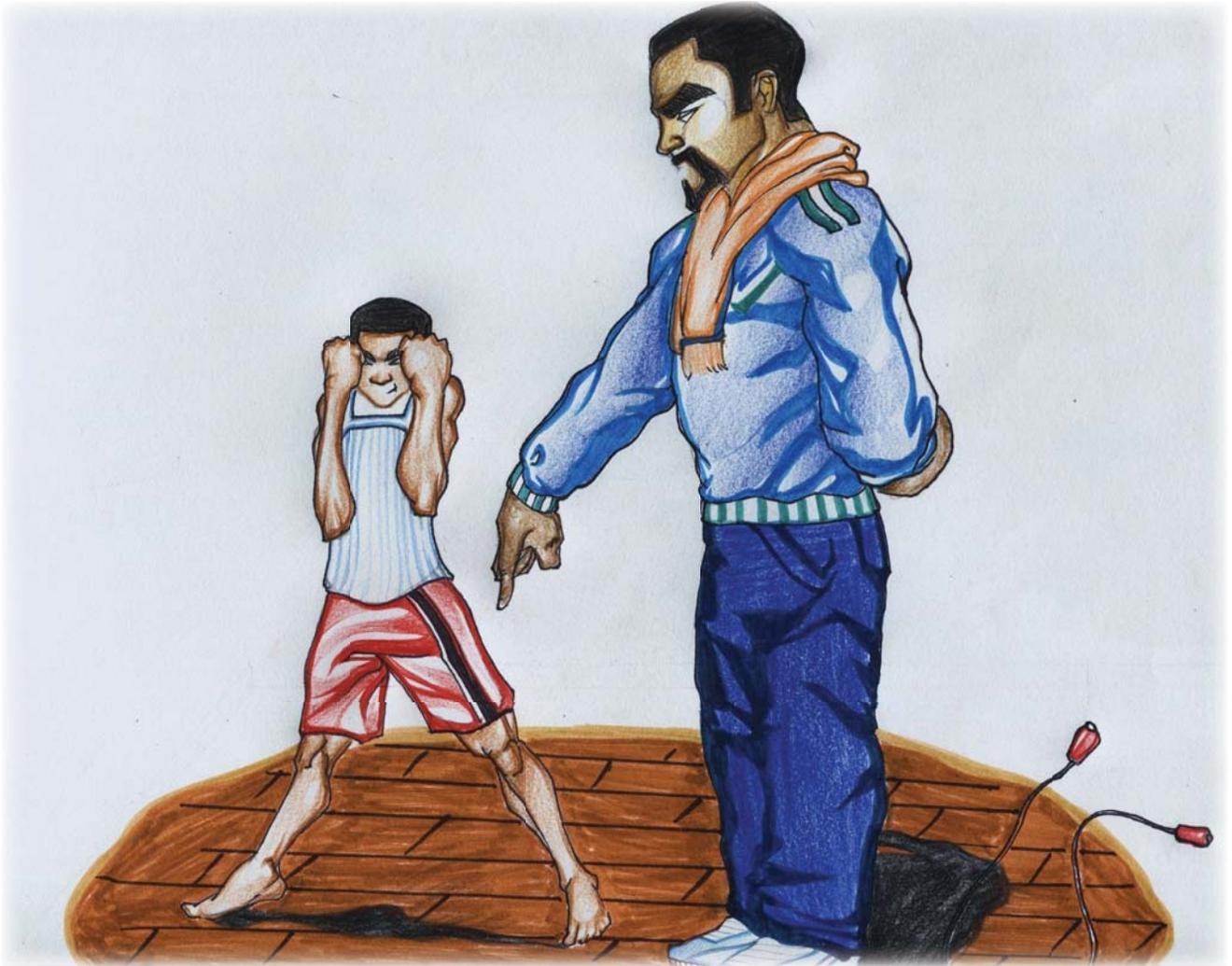
Oh! So that's why the other boys were able to score on me so much in slap boxing.

“And your feet are spread *waaay* too far apart.”

I quickly closed my stance.

“Now, move around”

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I moved around—awkwardly, stiffly—but I was moving.

“You’ve got too much weight on your heels. Transfer some of that weight to the balls of your feet.”

I did it and found myself moving around a little easier.

“Now, up on your toes and dance like Muhammad Ali!”

I was up on my toes and moving more fluidly.

“Jab!”

I jabbed.

“Keep those elbows in and those fists up by your chin!”

I’m obeying Dad’s every command and loving it!

“Don’t spread your feet too far apart, even while you’re dancing!”

“Okay, Dad!” I shouted as I happily danced around the room pretending I was Muhammad Ali. It suddenly occurred to me, *maybe I could be a fighter after all.*

Chapter 2

NANA KOROBİ YAOKI

That night, I watched a television show about Japanese Sumo Wrestling. It was fascinating. There were these huge 400 pound wrestlers wearing only these thick tight belts called a *mawashi* which wrapped around their waists and went between their legs. The wrestlers fought in a circular ring called a *dohyo* made of clay with salt sprinkled on it for a kind of ritual purification dating back many centuries in the Shinto religion.

There was an elaborate ceremony where the wrestlers would lift their legs and stomp their feet. Then they would spread their legs at their starting lines, crouch and stare each other down. Finally, after a moment of sizing each other up, the wrestlers would suddenly charge each other and crash like two big bulls. This is called *tachi-ai*.

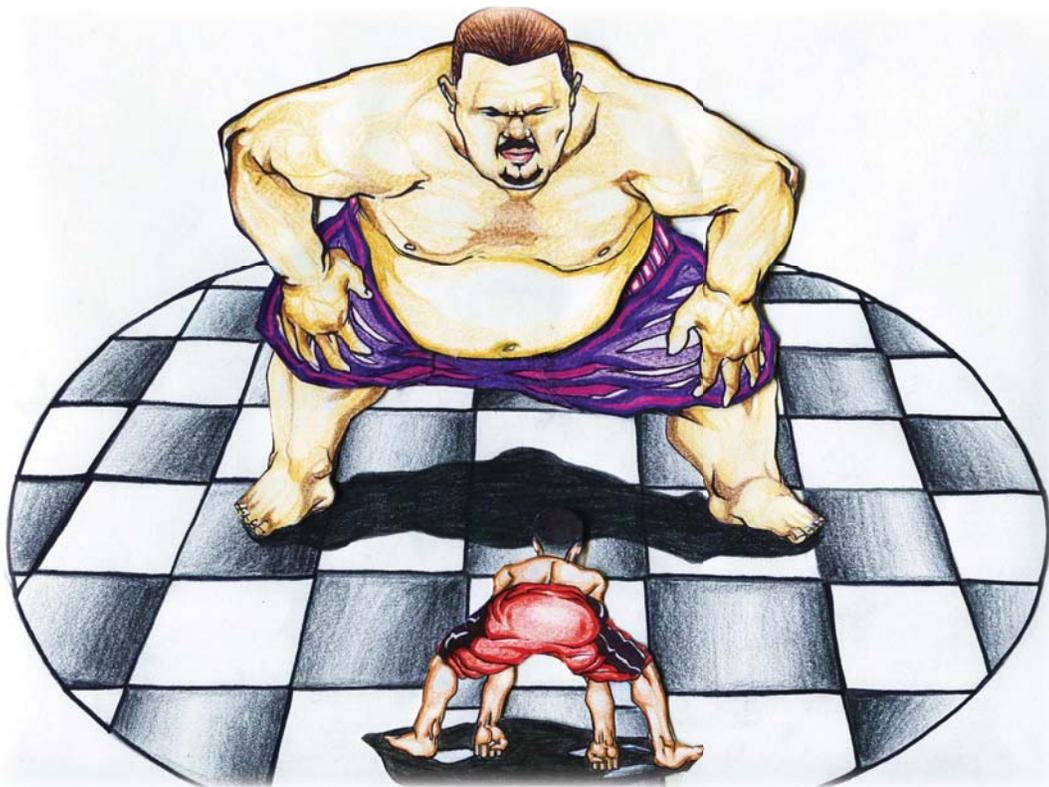
They would push and tussle and grapple with each other until finally one of them was able to push the other one out of the circle—thereby winning the match.

At first I thought it was just a fun thing to watch. However, it turned out to have made a huge impression on me.

That night I had a dream that I was standing in the center of the ring with thousands of spectators watching. Interestingly, the clay floor of the dohyo was painted in black and white squares—just like a chessboard.

I was waiting for my opponent when suddenly the world famous Hawaiian sumo wrestler Akebono stepped into the ring to wrestle me. He was a giant, even among sumo wrestlers. He was bigger and stronger than anyone in the sport. And here I was, this little puny kid, about to take him on.

We both performed the ritual, raising our legs one at a time and stomping the floor. We both spread our legs at the starting lines and crouched down, preparing to charge.



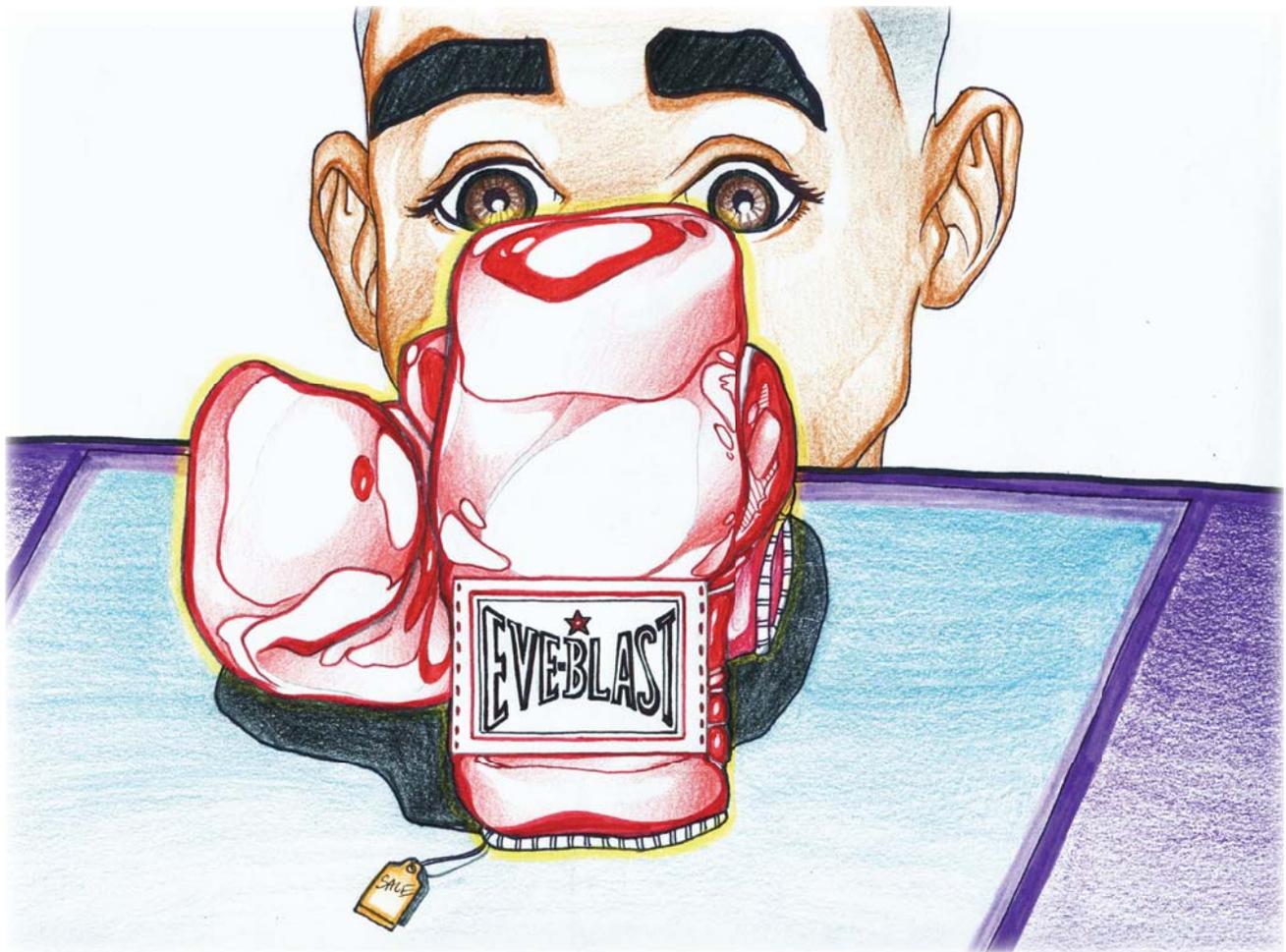
Compared to Akebono I was a gnat, but I was determined not to be pushed out of the circle or allow him to mop the floor with me like a tattered rag doll. In fact, I wasn't going to be pushed around by anybody, anywhere, anymore.

Akebono frowned at me and I gritted my teeth. Then finally and suddenly we charged each other. Even though we were only a few feet away from each other the charge seemed to be happening in slow motion. I felt myself push off as I raised up from my crouched position. I could see Akebono's face tighten as he raised up from his!

I lifted my arms and braced for the impact of the coming crash. I saw him brace for impact, too. As we neared each other, the shadow of his gigantic body covered me in the darkness of my impending doom. At the very instant that this skyscraper was about to fall on me, finally—*thankfully*—I woke up!

“*Whew!*” My pillow was drenched in sweat and I was shaking uncontrollably. I didn't know what to make of the dream but I felt dread for the rest of the night.

The next morning Dad took me to the sporting goods store to buy boxing gloves and head gear. Walking around the store helped me forget about the dream. But it wasn't until I finally got to see and smell those beautiful red leather “Everblast High Performance Lace up Training Gloves” that I was truly okay again. Dad let me try on the head gear and *everything!* Man, I looked really cool!



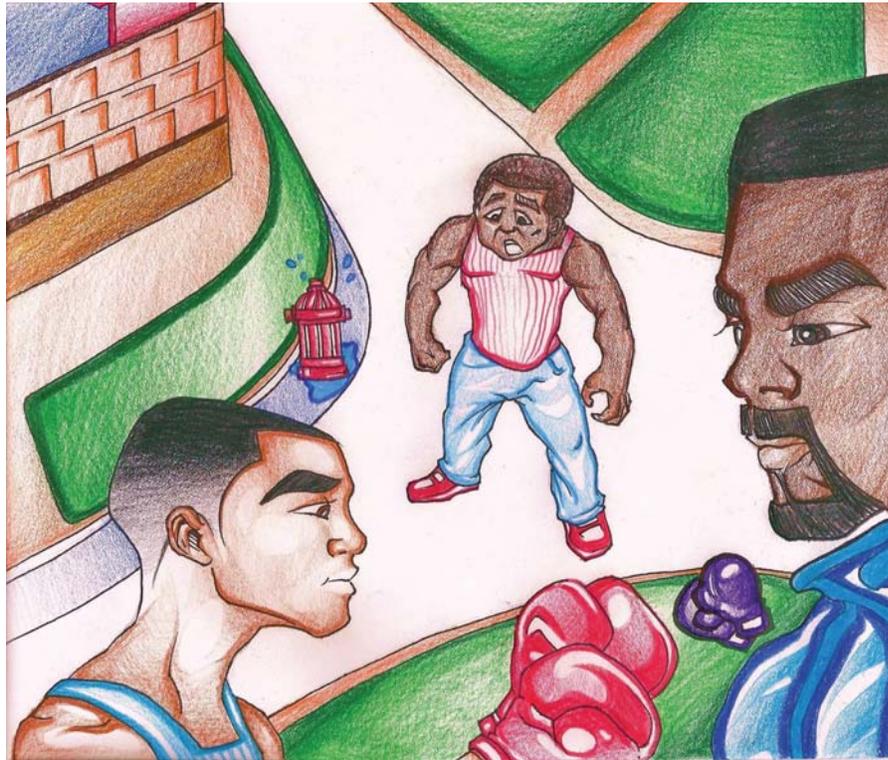
Dad bought two sets of gloves and head gear. It felt like Christmas morning. I wore the head gear all the way home. I couldn't wait for Dad to teach me more about boxing.

However, as soon as we got home Dad took me out on the front lawn and started lacing up my gloves. *On the front lawn? Where everybody might see?!* But I didn't dare complain about that to my dad. Once again, I feared he might see just how scared I was.

As excited as I was about the gloves and everything, I still didn't really want to fight anybody. I was simply tired of feeling afraid. I wanted to feel more confident. I thought that private lessons with my dad would be the perfect way to achieve that. I guess Dad had other ideas.

Just like I feared, right away we started attracting attention. Anthony "Showboat" Loowey, spying us from waaay down the block, was now heading our way.

"If the local boys had some kind of organized boxing forum," said Dad, "they might stop all of those senseless neighborhood scuffles. For now, I'll let our front lawn be that forum. Besides, this will allow me to keep an eye on things."



I guess Dad was right because Anthony was almost upon us. Before he could get any closer I put my guard down and whispered to my dad, "I'm ready to go in the house now. Please unlace me."

Dad could see the fear in my eyes. At that moment I realized that he had probably seen the fear in me all along. Now I was ashamed. Dad put a comforting hand on my shoulder.

"Son, fears are simply **F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal. Once you face them, you'll find that most of them aren't real. And you will see with brand new eyes. Got it?"

I nodded like I'd gotten it, but I really hadn't. He smiled and nodded, but I could tell he knew I hadn't gotten it. Perhaps he had faith that one day I actually would get it, but he knew it wouldn't be today. He started to unlace me.

Even though I didn't have any faith in myself, I decided to step out on the faith that *Dad* had in me. "Okay, Dad, you can leave my gloves on."

Dad smiled.

"Wow! Those gloves are really cool!" said Anthony, who had finally reached us. "Can I box with you guys?"

Anthony was two years older than me, but he was buff and the scars on his face and the stitches on his lip made him seem even older and scarier. He wouldn't have been my first choice to box on the lawn, but he was the first one to show up, so I had to go with it. Besides, it really didn't matter who showed up first since every boy in neighborhood was bigger than me.

The bout lasted only five minutes, but it was the longest five minutes of my life. I was grateful to both God and Dad for those gloves and head gear! However while the gloves cushioned Anthony's powerful blows to my body, the head gear now made it okay for him to swing at my head.

And swing he did. I quickly discovered how in boxing, unlike chess, size *does* matter. And boy, was I feeling the difference!



The bout didn't go so well for me. While I held my own in the first three minutes and even landed a few solid punches, Anthony's massive size eventually wore me down. My dad, being fair, declared Anthony the winner.

Spooky, a fearless tall and skinny kid three years my senior, had spied the match from down the street. He and Matthew, a lean and muscular curly-haired boy, had drawn near only in time to see Anthony's dominating final minutes. They had totally missed the first two minutes when I was *dazzling*—or so I wanted to believe.

But now I had a headache and my whole body was sore, not to mention my ego. Losing that bout made me feel like I was going backwards. And even though Anthony was much bigger and stronger than I was, it didn't make the losing any easier. I looked towards the house and saw Mom watching through the closed window. Now I was truly embarrassed.



Mom looked at me and nodded as if to say, “Remember what I taught you.” But try as I might, I was just too overwhelmed to read her mind. Then she quietly mouthed something to me through the glass. I struggled to read her lips but I just couldn’t make out what she was saying. She repeated it twice before I was able to catch something like “neh neh” or “nah nah,” but neither of those made any sense. But by the third time she mouthed it to me, it hit me like a lightning bolt.

I remembered how years before, when I was only five, I begged my dad to take the training wheels off of my bicycle. He and Mom didn't think that was a good idea, but I insisted that I was ready. So, off went the training wheels.

Dad held the bike up as I tried to balance myself. I started pedaling and he ran next to me to hold me aloft. Before long I felt like I was good to go. I didn't think I needed any more training wheels and I certainly didn't need Dad to hold me up.

"Let go, Dad! I don't need your help!" I didn't realize it at the time, but I think I hurt his feelings. After all, I was acting pretty cocky, especially for a five year old.

"Are you sure, Son?" he asked, running beside me, half out of breath.

"I'm sure!"

"Okay, Ali." Dad let me go.

I think I went another ten or twelve feet before the bicycle and I collided with the ground. Fortunately, I wasn't hurt.

"You okay?" asked my exhausted but concerned dad.

"Yeah Dad, I'm okay," I said, hiding my complete embarrassment.

"Well," he said as he turned and headed for the house, "When you're ready for me to put those training wheels back on your bike I'll be in the garage."

I sat there at the curb, sulking. I saw Mom looking at me through the window just like she's doing now. But that time she decided to come outside. She came over to me and sat down beside me at the curb.

For more than ten minutes we sat there, saying not a word to one another. Finally, I asked Mom, "How long are you going to sit here?"

"I don't know," she said. "How long are *you* going to sit here?"

"I'm gonna' sit here *forever!*"

"Hmmm," she mused, "Forever is a very long time."

"I don't care!" I said, brooding like the stubborn five year old I could sometimes be. "And I'm never gonna' ride that bike again either, with or *without* those training wheels!"

"I see," said Mom, very calmly. We sat there a whole five or ten minutes more without saying another word. Then finally she says, "You know, Ali, the Japanese have a really cool saying that kind of speaks to what you're going through right now. Would you like to hear it?"

"Well, I suppose so," I said, dryly.

"Repeat after me," she said. "Nana (Nah-nah)."

"Nana."

"Korobi (Ko-RO-bee).

“Korobi.”

“Yaoki (Yah-O-kee).”

“Yaoki”

“Altogether now,” she said, “Nana Korobi Yaoki (Nah-nah ko-RO-bee yah-O-kee)”

“Nana Korobi Yaoki (Nah-nah, ko-RO-bee, yah-O-kee),” I repeated. “What does it mean, Mom?”

“It means, ‘Seven times you fall, eight times you rise.’”

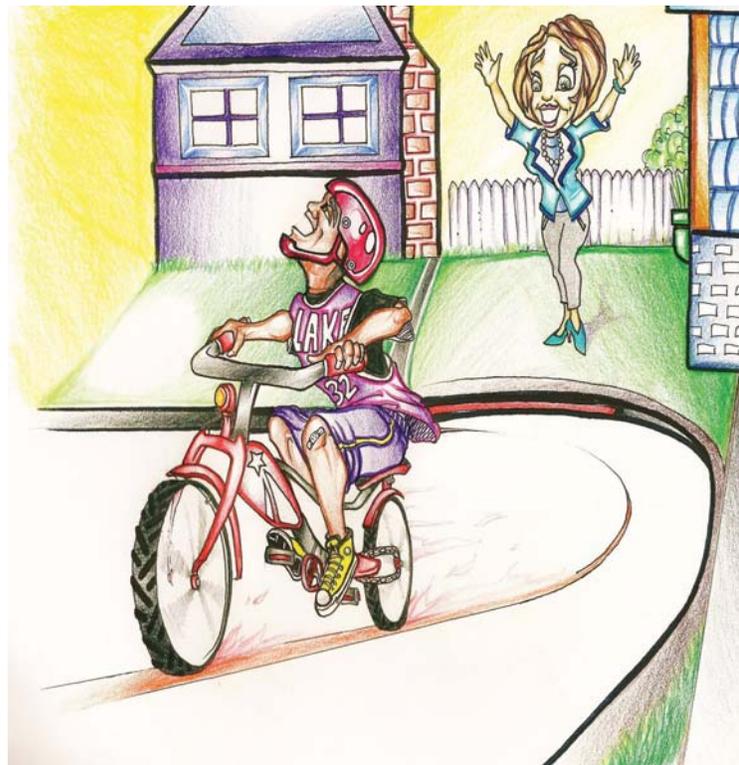
She sat there with me for another five or ten minutes while I quietly tried to figure out what it meant. *Let me see, if you fall seven times, but you get up eight times, then that means that you’ll always be getting up more times than you fall down. So, three times you fall, four times you rise. Five times you fall, six times you rise—and so on, and so on...*

It was beginning to make a lot of sense. So I got up from the ground, got back on my bike and started pedaling. As I tried to balance myself, the handle bars started veering left, then right, and finally out of my control. After about fifteen feet I fell to the ground again. This fall hurt a little more than the first one.

I quietly said to myself, “Nana korobi yaoki,” and I got up. I mounted my bicycle and rode a little smoother and got up a little more speed before finally falling to the ground again.

This fall hurt more than the first two falls put together. I looked at my mom. She was trying not to look worried, but despite the fact that I was wearing a helmet, I knew she couldn't take seeing me fall anymore. As much as she wanted me to succeed, I knew if I fell one more time she would *insist* that Dad put those training wheels back on. Even though I was ready to give up I decided to give it one more try.

I whispered to myself, "Nana korobi yaoki." I got up. "Nana korobi yaoki." I got on my bicycle. "Nana korobi yaoki!" I'm now saying it out loud as I begin to pedal. "Nana korobi yaoki," I shout as my bike begins to pick up speed. "NANA KOROBITYAOKI!!!" I'm now shouting as I fly down the street and laughing as I go!



When I get to the end of the block, I wheel around and look back to my mom at the far end of the block. She is standing there clapping for me. Her smile brightens the entire street. She waves proudly and heads back into the house.

...So, here we are seven years later. Once again I was feeling like a loser until her look reminded me that no matter how many times I fall, I can always get up and try again. Knowing I've got it, she smiles and walks away from the window.

However, any getting up I was going to do would have to happen on some other day, because by now I was beginning to imagine a thousand other things I would rather be doing than boxing—like reading or playing chess.

“I think I can take you, Anthony,” cried Spooky Slim.

“Put on the gloves then, chump!” replied Anthony.

This was perfect! My loss to Anthony had spared me from having to fight again. Now I could sit back and study Spooky and Anthony's technique, just like I studied my chess opponents.

I would look for their tendencies. What weapons in their arsenal did they favor? Did they start slow, feel each other out and cautiously develop their strategy, or did they try to win it all right away? I would look for weaknesses in both their offenses as well as their defenses.

By studying them *this* week I'd be better prepared to box them *next* week, or so I figured. However, there was just one problem—

“After they finish I’ll box *you*, Ali!” said the curly-haired Matthew, totally ruining my plan. I was crestfallen but I couldn’t let it show.

“Sure thing Matthew” I said. Suddenly without warning, the chess player in me spoke up—“You might as well box me, because there’s no way you’re gonna’ be able to beat *Anthony*.”



I was shocked at what I had just said. I glanced at my dad. He sighed, perhaps a little disappointed in me. Heaven forbid he thought I was a coward. Dad was a chess player too, so he instantly saw through my calculated attempt to get out of fighting again. Surely the others saw through it, too. Surely they were going to call me on it. But just as I was about to bow my head in shame, Matthew spoke up—

“I’m not afraid of Anthony! In fact, I’ll fight whichever one wins between him and Spooky Slim!”

“Well,” I said, “if that’s what you really want to do I won’t stand in your way.”

“Hey, let’s get it on!” cried Spooky and Anthony.

I couldn’t believe it! I had just used a chess tactic called “deflection” and it had worked! Deflection occurs when you successfully direct your opponent’s attention away from an important piece or square that you’re trying to protect. In this case, the piece I was protecting was *me*.

I bit my lip to hide my glee but I didn’t dare look my dad in the eye. As relieved as I was, I still felt ashamed in front of him. But look at him I did, and to my surprise he was smiling. Whatever disappointment he might have felt as my boxing coach was apparently outweighed by his pride as my chess teacher. I had cleverly bought time to prepare myself for boxing battles to come, and my dad seemed to thoroughly appreciate that.

No sooner had Dad laced their gloves when Anthony and Spooky went at it. True to his nickname, Anthony started showboating by circling his arms like a windmill. He did this over and over just before he’d take a swing at Spooky.

To be fair, it didn’t seem like either one of them had any real strategy. They were just two big kids swinging wildly at each other.

As I watched Anthony and Spooky butt heads, it reminded me of some of those Saturday morning nature shows I liked to watch on television. Young bucks with their heads down brandishing their underdeveloped horns. The bucks

would charge each other again and again, practicing for the day they would establish their dominance over all of the other bucks.



As I continued to watch Anthony and Spooky box, I imagined that our cave dwelling ancestors must have had a similar ritual between the men. They probably fought to determine who would rule the clan. In those harsh and brutal times, you needed excellent hunting and fighting skills to survive. In

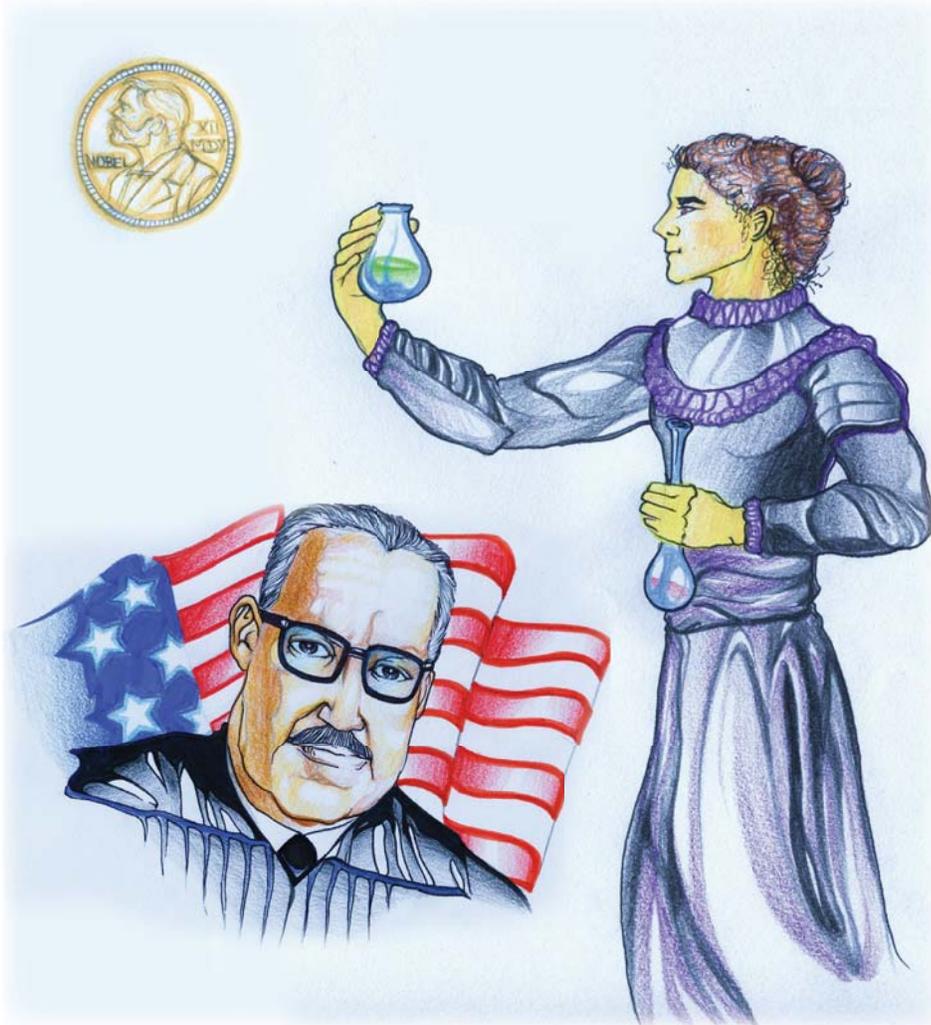
those days, winning the leadership of a clan required more brawn than brains and was often decided in mortal combat.



As time passed, the clans that developed their intelligence as well as their fighting skills eventually conquered the less intelligent clans. They formed cities and societies with rules and laws. They made music, painted great art

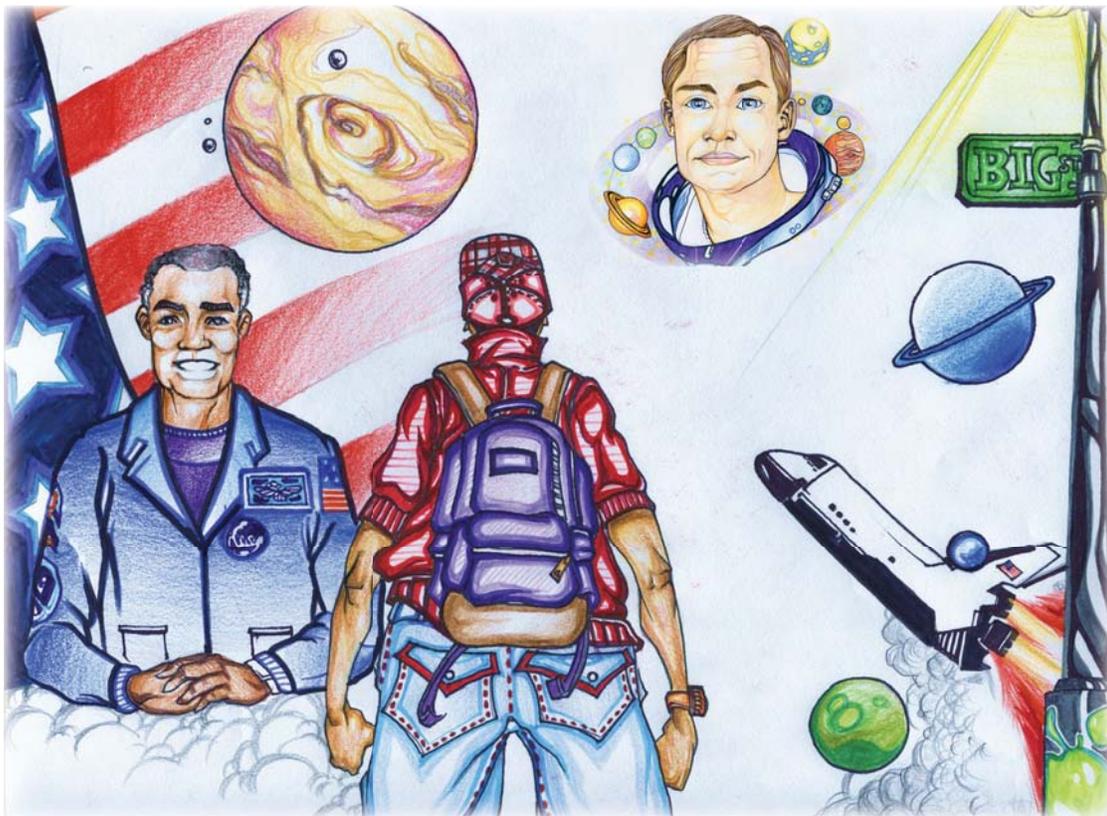
and carved great sculptures. They built temples for worshipping and libraries for storing their knowledge.

Ahhhh...libraries. I wished I was in one right then. I'd be reading about Thurgood Marshall, the first Black Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, or Madame Marie Currie, the first woman to win the Nobel prize in physics.



And while I was currently fascinated with Neil Armstrong, the first person to walk on the moon, my latest enthusiasm was reading about Colonel Frederick D. Gregory, the first Black astronaut to command the Space Shuttle. Since I was a big fan of the movie *Star Wars*, I was really interested in reading about those two.

These were the kinds of people that inspired me. These were people who had overcome great odds by using their minds instead of their fists. They studied. They learned. They mastered the knowledge that took them to the top of their chosen professions. That knowledge had even taken one of them to the *moon!*



The thump of the glove hitting Anthony in the head abruptly snapped me out of my musings. Instead of preparing to fly to the moon, here we were fighting outside of the cave to prove we could go out and hunt a Sabre-toothed Tiger or a Giant Woolly Mammoth—those giant prehistoric elephants with the frighteningly huge tusks.

I found myself wondering, “What was the chance of my running into a Sabre-toothed Tiger in Carson, California?”



This boxing thing was already beginning to seem a little silly. What was the point of all of this, anyway? The truth be told, I just wanted to be able to go to the store, the playground or the library and not have to box or run from somebody on the way home.

Anthony won his bout with Spooky and Matthew went on to beat Anthony. So, by the end of the day, Matthew was the champ. Everyone seemed okay with that including me... We made plans to do it again the next Saturday.

Chapter 3

BATTLE IN THE MIND

All week, whether I was listening to my teacher, reading a book, doing my chores or playing chess with my dad, I couldn't stop thinking about the upcoming weekend boxing matches. They were distracting me from all of the things I really liked to do. Being the smallest of the four guys, I knew I really needed a strategy. So, I went to my dad for help.

I interrupted him repairing his old classic Mustang in the garage. He put his wrench down and turned to me.

"Well Son," he said in that calm street savvy manner of his, "You've only got four days to prepare, so you'll have to make a choice. I could prepare you a little bit for all three of the guys, or a whole lot for just one of the guys. Which approach do you want to take?"

What a time for riddles! I knew he was testing me, but who's got time to figure out the test?!

He picked up his wrench and turned back to the engine. He knew it would be harder for me to figure it out if he was staring at me.

And he was right, for no sooner had he turned away when it hit me. I remembered how, in the early days of Dad teaching me chess, I was eager to learn

every chess opening there was. I would learn one and then try it on my dad. He would very quickly demolish me. The next day I'd come at him with another chess opening. Again he would demolish me.

"Son!" he finally complained, "You're in such a hurry to learn *all* of the major chess openings that you'll end up mastering *none* of them!"

I had always been too eager to move on to the next thing in everything I did. However such a habit can be costly in chess. So I guess that was one of the reasons I had been losing to Dad.

"Son, each opening has its own strengths and weaknesses. Pick one and use it over and over until you've learned just about everything there is to know about it. Then, move on to the next one. In time you'll become master of them all."

So I knew Dad would be pleased when I said, "I think the smart thing for me to do is to prepare for Matthew. He's the one that I deflected when he challenged me last Saturday. He's not going to let me get out of boxing him two weeks in a row."

Dad laughed, "Good choice!" I guess I had demonstrated that I could apply something he had taught me to a whole new situation.



Dad made me analyze Matthew's boxing style. I had already noticed how Matthew hardly ever used his jab. I also thought he held his guard too low.

"Great observation, Son! So, what does that tell you about Matthew?"

"I'm not sure, Dad."

“It says he’s a lazy fighter! He’s counting on his weight and size to push his opponents backwards around the ring. His size also makes him overconfident. But you can use all of that to your advantage.”

“How do I do that?”

“Keep your guard up and your gloves in his face! You must jab, non-stop. Every time he comes within your arms length, shoot that jab out and make him pay for it. In fact, I want you to jab so much that *he’ll* be backing up instead of *you*.”

I was doubtful. “He’s a big guy, Dad. Do you really think I can back him up?”

“Absolutely! But it doesn’t matter what *I* think. It only matters what *you* think. Every battle is won or lost first in the *mind*. If you can first conceive it, then you can surely achieve it.”

I was still doubtful, and Dad could see it.

“Look, Ali, I want you to box him like I’ve taught you to play chess—not simply move by move or blow by blow—but I want you thinking several moves and several blows *ahead*. When you learn how to see all of the possibilities seven, eight or nine moves down the line, then you’ll be able to plan and prepare yourself for victory in everything you do.”

Dad continued, “Now, he’s not expecting that flurry of jabs you’re going to give him. He’ll be forced to hold his gloves higher to protect himself. That’s when you’ll start throwing those fast right hooks of yours to his body. He’ll get confused and not know which part of his body to protect—his head or his gut.”

Dad was starting to make a lot of sense.

“His arms will start to get heavy from being held so high and his stomach will be sore from taking all of your right hooks. Sooner or later he’ll lower those heavy arms. I think you know what to do from there, right?”

I did. It was a good plan, but frankly, I was still a little scared.

Chapter 4

KNOWING WHEN TO DUCK

For the rest of the week, whenever I had a spare second, I was in front of the mirror, jabbing. In the middle of sweeping the kitchen floor, I was jabbing. Sitting on the toilet, I was jabbing. Mom even said she happened by my room and saw me jabbing in my sleep. I jabbed until my arms nearly fell off.

That Friday, the night before the big day, I had the Akebono dream again. Just like in the first dream we went through the whole ritual. We raised our legs one at a time and stomped the floor. We spread our legs at the starting lines and crouched down, prepared to charge.

Akebono frowned at me and I gritted my teeth. Then, in slow motion, we would suddenly charge each other. Again, I could feel myself push off as I raised up from my crouched position. Again I could see Akebono's face slowly begin to tighten up!

I lifted my arms and braced for the impact of the coming crash. Again, as we neared each other, the shadow of his gigantic body covered me in the darkness of my impending doom. At the very instant that this skyscraper was about to fall on me, finally—*thankfully*—I woke up! I was sweating and trembling, just like before. It took a half hour for me to calm down enough to get back to sleep.

I was still on edge the next morning and had a hard time concentrating in the library. Afterwards, caveman Brick chased me home, which certainly didn't make me feel any better. But I made sure to get home before the guys arrived so that they wouldn't see me with my library books and know that I had been there.

We were all set to watch the Boston Celtics play Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls. Even though we lived in Los Angeles, we were all big Michael Jordan fans. The plan was to watch the game before going outside to box.

The game was fantastic with Jordan putting up 48 points! Everyone was blown away, even my dad, and he's not easily impressed.

As we headed for the front lawn, Matthew yelled out, "You're not gonna' try to get out of boxing me again, are ya' Ali?"

Dad could see I was biting my lip so that I wouldn't smile. So, he didn't smile either, though we both really wanted to.

"Okay, Matthew," I replied. "I won't duck you again."

"Heh, heh, heh," Matthew chuckled. "Let's mix it up!"

We started putting on the gloves. As Anthony laced Matthew's gloves and my dad laced up mine, I could see Matthew's confidence building. He was really looking forward to demolishing me in front of everybody.

Dad saw I was beginning to worry. He squeezed my hands through my gloves and whispered, "Stay focused on your strategy and everything will work out."

While his words restored some of my confidence, I was still pretty scared. But I couldn't let my dad or anybody know it. So I gritted my teeth and glared at Matthew like a tiger to a doe. I think I fooled even *Dad*!



Dad again explained the rules to everyone. Then he put the headgear on our heads and turned me and Matthew loose on one another.

Just like he had done the week before with Spooky, Matthew charged in wildly with his hands too low and with no jab to speak of. His wild swings at my head allowed a quick little guy like me to easily duck and slip away, especially now that I knew how to dance.

Dad had said, "It's a scientific fact that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. So, in the time it takes for one of Matthew's wild swings to arc all the way around to your head, you should be able to land a quick straight jab to his head and still have time to duck."

Wow, was Dad ever right! With every wild swing Matthew threw I clocked him with my jab and ducked his swing. In fact, after a while, I was sometimes able to hit him with *two* jabs before ducking his wild swing.



Anthony and Spooky couldn't believe it. I started tagging Matthew with such regularity that the guys started laughing. In frustration, Matthew started holding his hands higher to deflect my jabs. So, just like Dad had instructed me, I started faking jabs to Matthew's head and throwing sharp right hooks to his midsection.

"Whoaaaaaaaaa!!!" cried Anthony and Spooky.

Matthew did manage to graze me with one or two of his shorter swings, but the headgear kept those blows from really hurting me.

Eventually, a few more of my fake jabs to Matthew's head followed by a sharp right hook to Matthew's gut was almost causing him to double over. And just like Dad had predicted, at this point I knew what to do. I threw a left hook to his head, then a right hook to his head, then a straight left jab to his gut before firing another right hook to his head. Matthew fell back onto the grass, *exhausted*.

Anthony and Spooky screamed! They couldn't believe it! Last week's champion had just been knocked down by the smallest kid on the block. They lifted me up on their shoulders and started parading me around the lawn.

Since Dad was the referee, he felt obliged to keep a straight face, but I could see the total pride of a father beneath his blank expression. ...Then I noticed Mom peering through the living room window. She smiled and nodded as if to say, "Well done," before disappearing from the window. I had never felt so proud.

But then, Matthew sat up, clearly embarrassed. Suddenly I felt bad. Sure, the headgear had kept me from really hurting him, but I still didn't see why I had to

succeed so brutally at his expense. I liked Matthew. I wasn't going to get any pleasure out of beating him up every week—or getting beat up by *him*. But what was I to do? This was boxing. This was the neighborhood. And boxing skills were what he and the other boys most valued.

Matthew got up and congratulated me. He was, after all, a good sport. I was glad that he wasn't angry with me.

Anthony and Spooky went on to box, but this time the lean Spooky managed to out-box the big buff Anthony. Spooky said my victory had inspired him. *Wow!* That was the first time I had ever done anything that inspired somebody else. I didn't even know I could have that kind of influence on anybody—especially the older boys in the neighborhood. Who knows, maybe I could inspire them in other ways too. Hey, maybe I could even get them to take up chess or to go to the library with me. ...*Wait a minute?! Who am I fooling? That's not only crazy, that's impossible!*

Chapter 5
IMPOSSIBLE



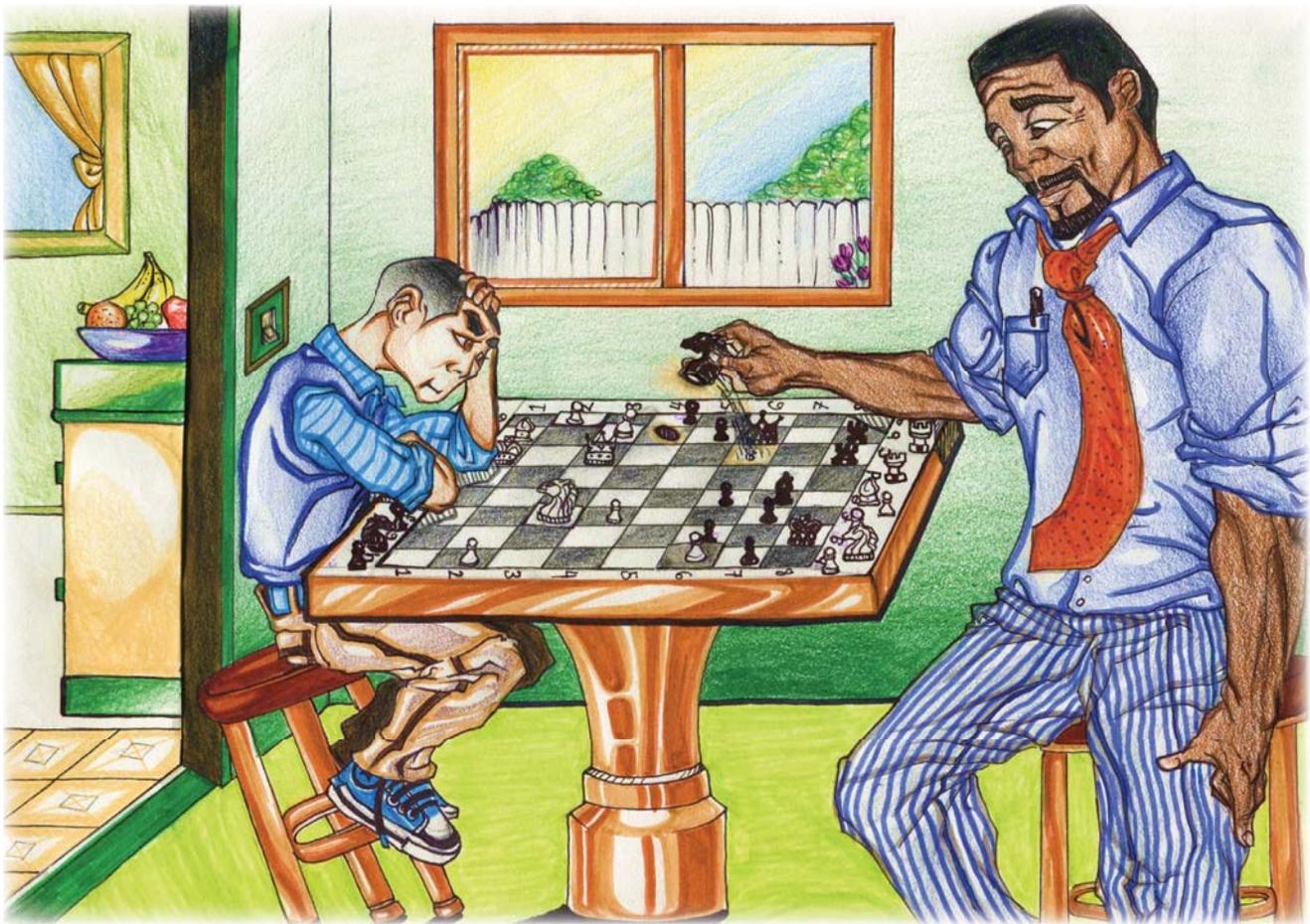
So that's how our Saturday routine was born. I would sneak pass Caveman Brick's house to get to the library in the morning. After I left the library, Brick would chase me home. Then Anthony, Matthew, Spooky and I would watch the NBA basketball game before ending up on the front lawn boxing.

As time went on everyone's boxing skills improved. Just about every Saturday a different one of us would be crowned champion. Other neighborhood kids sometimes came and went, but the four of us remained the core faithful to the Saturday routine. And the weirdest thing of all? No matter how much my boxing skills improved, every Friday night I'd have the exact same Akebono nightmare with all of the accompanying trembling and sweating.

Don't get me wrong, I did sometimes have fun boxing, but having to prove myself—in this way—every weekend was beginning to feel silly. And frankly, after five months I was just plain bored with it. Like I said, I just wanted to be able to walk to the store, playground and library and not have to run from somebody on the way home. Was that really too much to ask of the world?

I was desperate. Something had to be done, but what could I do? I wanted to share my thoughts with Dad, but I was afraid he would think I was just being afraid again.

Dad and I were playing chess one day when an interesting thing unfolded on the chess board. It was one of those rare times when I thought I had him beat. However—perhaps because I was distracted by my boxing dilemma—I allowed Dad to move his knight (*to d4*) and totally immobilize my queen. I had carefully orchestrated my pieces to within one move of checkmating Dad with my queen. But now Dad has her pinned down protecting my king.



Dad chuckled, “It’s a little like your boxing situation isn’t it?”

“Pardon?” I asked, totally baffled.

“You’ve allowed yourself to be *restrained*, Son. It’s a chess tactic whereby one exerts control over an enemy’s piece in order to keep it from being active. You were all set to lower the boom on me with your queen, but I’ve got her pinned down protecting your king. Instead of playing *your* game, I’ve forced you to play *mine*.”

“Okay, but how does that relate to my boxing?”

“Well, you seem bored with boxing.”

“Bored with boxing—*ME?! Naaaaah*,” I said with all the conviction I could muster. *Using my queen, I captured his rook (on b8).*

Unconvinced, Dad cocked his head to the side and studied me. He sighed, “Your enthusiasm for boxing seems to lessen with every passing Saturday.” *Dad captures my queen with his rook, putting me in check.*

“Oh no, Dad, not me. Why I just, I just *love* boxing!” *I moved my bishop in front of my king (to c2) to block the check.*

“Be that as it may—while boxing is something your friends really value, it seems to be something that you just *tolerate*. You just simply *go along with it*. Unfortunately, what you’ve really done is allowed your *friends’* values to dictate *your* values. So, in a way, *their* values have restrained you.” *Using his rook, Dad aggressively captures my bishop, placing me back in check.*

“But boxing is a great sport, Dad.” *I wanted to capture his rook with my king but his knight was now guarding it. So I had to move my king out of harms way (to d1).*

“It’s a *wonderful* sport and you’ve certainly proven you’re good at it. But you’re good at other things, too—*intellectual* things, *academic* things—and there’s no reason for you to be embarrassed about that.” *Dad moves his queen (to d6) placing me in check, again.*

“I’m not ashamed of any of that stuff.” *I move my king out of check (to e1).*

“Oh, no? Suddenly your grades are slipping, you’re disruptive in class and you’re no longer enthusiastic about learning.”

Oh- oh! Apparently Mom & Dad have been talking to my teacher. “Don’t worry, Dad, I’m probably just going through some kind of phase or something.”

Dad was shocked at this. “Some kind of *phase*?! We don’t allow *phases* in this house! And we don’t hide trips to the library from our friends or turn the TV from the history or science channel to the sports channel whenever the doorbell rings. And don’t think I haven’t noticed that you never set up the chess board in the living room, anymore. You’re afraid your friends might see you playing chess through the front window!” *Dad moves his bishop (to h4). “Check.”*

His words hit me like a brick. I instantly realized that Dad was right. I had been acting ashamed of my own smarts. Now I was ashamed that I had been ashamed. *I know I’m in big trouble, but I’m forced to capture his bishop with my knight.*

“I just hope that one day, Son, *one day soon*, you’ll stand up for yourself and stop being embarrassed by who and what you are.” *He brings his queen all the way across the board (to d2). “Check.”*

“But Dad, I don’t know where to begin.” *I move my king again (to f1).*

“In chess, when your opponent has your pieces restrained, the remedy is to redeploy.”

“Redeploy?”

“Yes. Maneuver your pieces to more effective squares. In essence, you want to change the dynamics of the playing field so that it works in your favor.”

I wasn't exactly sure what all of that meant, but just as I was about to ask, *Dad brings his rook down (to c1)* with aggressive authority and declares “CHECKMATE! ...If you insist on playing the game of life on other people's terms, then your own hopes and dreams will get checkmated, *every time!*”

Dad abruptly got up and walked away. He didn't use dramatic exits like that very often—only when he wanted to make a really big point. This was also his way of forcing me to come up with my own solution. But frankly, I still needed help.

I went to Mom and told her everything. I admitted being bored with boxing, about being ashamed of my smarts and about wanting to be a turtle, just like Dad, “tough on the outside but soft on the inside.”

“Ali, you've got your dad's turtle metaphor all mixed up. You see, he and I grew up on the tough streets of Newark, New Jersey. In our day, boxing wasn't just a hobby for boys, it was *survival*. But you're facing the 21st Century. People are going to have to depend more on their brains than their brawn to succeed in life. *Mental toughness* is what your dad and I want you to develop.”

Mental toughness? What exactly is that and how do I achieve it, especially in this neighborhood where all the boys can think about is boxing?

“Now,” continued Mom, “if some clever little boy could figure out how to get the kids around here to battle with their minds instead of with their fists, well, that would be a tremendous accomplishment. Don't you think?”

Right away I knew she was alluding to *chess*. “But Mom, that’s *impossible*. These guys live and breathe nothing but *boxing*.”

“Did you say it’s *impossible*?”

“Well, Mom, it *is* impossible.”

Mom was now slicing cucumbers for the salad. She put the knife down, turned and pointed to the blackboard behind her and said, “Write the word on the board.”

I took a deep breath and sighed. I really didn’t want to bother with the blackboard—especially for a word I already knew how to spell. “Awe, Mom—”

“Go on,” she insisted as she dumped the cucumber slices in the salad bowl.

I ambled over to the black board and briefly debated with myself about which color chalk I would use—anything to add excitement to an otherwise boring assignment. Can you believe it?—After a quick round of “Eeny, meeny, miny, moe” I ended up with white *anyway*. Calculating the outcome of that children’s counting rhyme is normally a three year olds’ first encounter with chess mindedness—*thinking ahead*—and I just blew it!

Nevertheless, I proceeded to write an uppercase ‘I’ and then lowercase ‘m-p-o-s-s-i-b-l-e.’ So there it was, ‘Impossible.’ “Okay, Mom, I’m done.”

“No you’re not,” she says as she batters the filleted fish for frying. “Can you see your potential in that word?”

Can I see my potential...in a WORD?! Now I'm totally lost, so I have to answer her honestly. "No, Mom, I'm afraid I can't."

Mom put the fish down and turns to me with those flour battered hands, "You'd be able to see it if only you had faith the size of an apostrophe..." She returned to battering the fish.

*'If only I had faith the size of an **apostrophe**...'* *WHAT?!* She's beginning to sound as mysterious as Dad. She's even got that *'I'm not going to say any more'* look that Dad is so good at. So I know right away, I'm on my own.

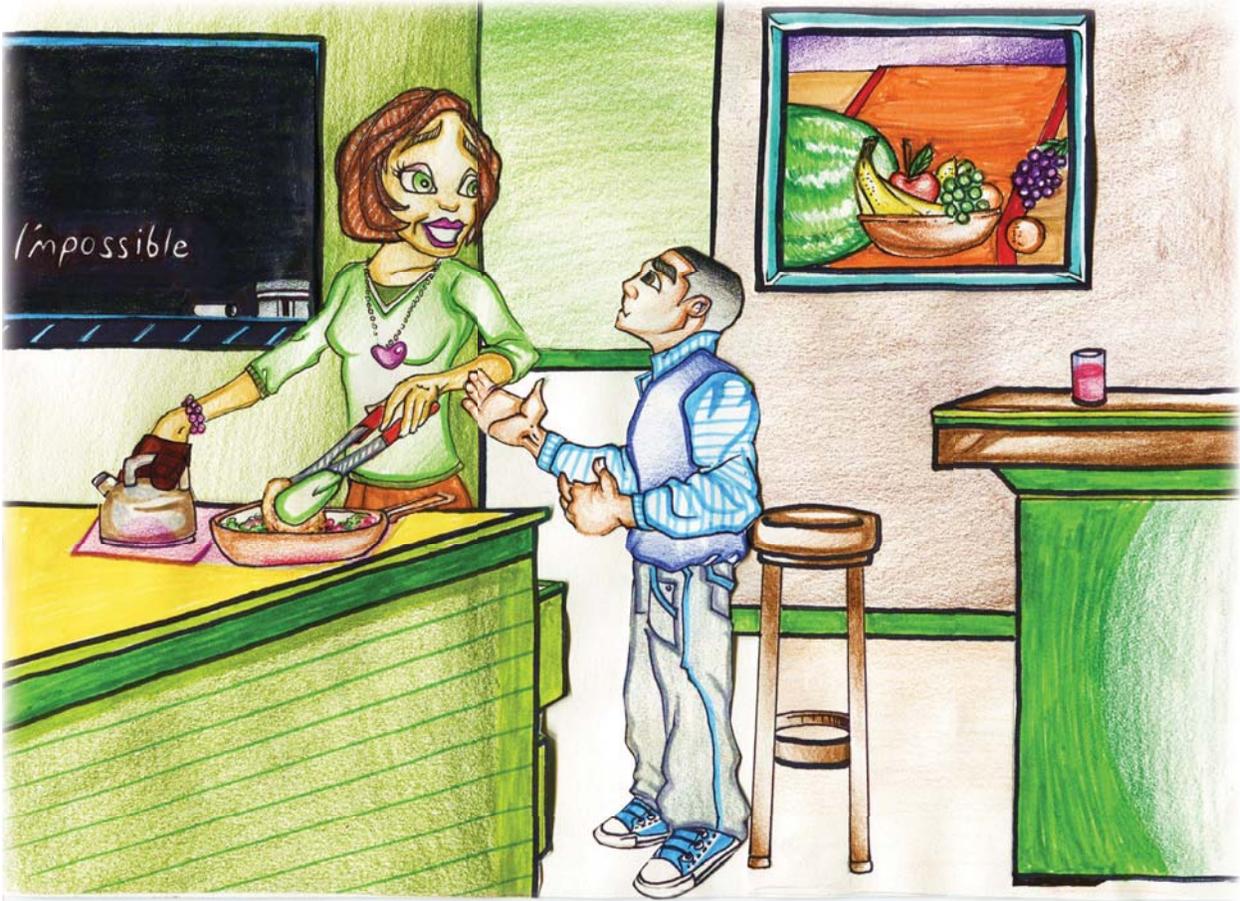
I study the blackboard long and hard. *An apostrophe? Where?!* I'm regretting I didn't pay more attention to Miss Davis in last year's grammar. In the language of chess, you might say that last year was several chess moves ago. Back then if I had looked ahead—seven, eight or nine moves—to today, I would have paid more attention to her lessons on apostrophes and I would have set myself up for victory in this moment.

My grandma used to make me say over and over again, "Proper preparation promotes peak performance. Proper preparation promotes peak performance." As much as she drilled that into me, I'm only now realizing what it actually meant, for at this very moment I cannot perform at my peak because I didn't properly prepare myself when I had the chance.

So I'm forced to admit to Mom, "I could really use a hint here."

Mom had just laid the third of three battered fish in the frying pan. The smell of her exotic seasonings is intoxicating and my mind is drifting from the frustration of the word puzzle to thoughts of catfish, greens, creamed corn and cornbread. Suddenly Mom walks over to the blackboard and—with flour battered fingers—

squeezes an apostrophe of flour between the *I* and the *m*—virtually over the *m*—so that it reads *I'mpossible*. Then she goes back to her frying.



*I'mpossible...I'm possible...**I'm** possible!!! Wow! I get it! **I'M POSSIBLE!!!***

Mom had always told me that I could accomplish anything I set my mind to, if I was truly willing to work for it. And while I knew she meant well whenever she said it, I had heard it so many times that quite frankly the statement had lost the power to move anymore. But what do you know, Mom came up with a

potent way to drive home the same old message in a fresh and exciting new way. And I LOVE IT!!!

She has just reminded me that everything I want to *do* is *possible*! Everything I want to *be* is possible! Everything I can imagine is possible, if I am willing to do the work! All I needed was a little faith—faith no larger than an apostrophe, to realize my own power.

“Thanks, Mom!” I shouted as I ran out of the kitchen. Mom helped me see that chess was the answer all along. Even though I had once considered introducing the guys to chess, I didn’t have enough faith in the tactic or myself to actually go through with it. But I think I have it now.

Chapter 6

FIVE MONKEYS

I now realized what I had been up against all along—false *notions*.

As Dad once explained it, notions are simply ideas people hold on to that may or may not be good for them and that may or may not make sense. For many of us our thoughts, concepts, accepted wisdom and sometimes our entire philosophy of life might be no more than one big mixed up mishmash of false notions.

The trouble is, once people get a false notion in their heads, it's very hard to get it out. I once read about a very cruel experiment performed on monkeys.

Since monkeys have more in common with humans than any other animal, “behavioral scientists” often study monkeys to get a better understanding of some of our own basic human behaviors. In one particular experiment they put five monkeys in a large cage and hung a bunch of bananas from the ceiling by a string. Conveniently for the monkeys, the scientists had placed a ladder right under the hanging fruit. As you would expect, one of the monkeys goes to the ladder and starts to climb up to the bananas. However the instant he touches the ladder, he and all of the other monkeys are suddenly doused with a steady gush of ice cold water.



A little while later, another monkey tries to climb up to the bananas and, once again, all of the monkeys are bombarded with ice cold water. Before you know it, all of the monkeys are afraid to go anywhere near the ladder for fear of being doused.

Then the behavioral scientists do something very interesting. They take one of the monkeys out of the cage and replace him with a new monkey. The newcomer

sees the bananas hanging from the ceiling with the ladder leading up to them and starts for the ladder. To his surprise and horror, the four original monkeys attack him and beat him up. Later on the newcomer again tries to climb the ladder and again the other monkeys beat him up. He wasn't there when the other monkeys got doused with ice cold water, so he doesn't know why they keep beating him up. But one thing he does now know for sure—*Not to go near that ladder!*



Then the scientists remove another monkey and replace him with a new monkey. As expected the newcomer sees the bananas and moves for the ladder. All three of the original monkeys—*along with the first new monkey*—attack the newest monkey and beat him up. Later on the new monkey tries it again and again the other monkeys attack him. Just like the first new monkey, the newest monkey had neither personally experienced or seen anyone getting doused with ice cold water. So he doesn't know why they are attacking him. But he certainly knows not to go near that ladder again.



Before long, the scientists remove another original monkey and replace him with a new one. The newest monkey sees the bananas and moves for the ladder. The first two new monkeys, along with the two remaining original monkeys, attack the newest monkey. Like the first two new monkeys, the newest monkey had never seen anyone getting doused with ice cold water, so he has no idea why he's being attacked. However he has learned not to go near the ladder.

The behavioral scientists continue replacing the monkeys until there are no *original* monkeys left in the cage—only five *new* monkeys who have never even seen a monkey getting doused with ice cold water. None of the remaining monkeys have any idea why they were never allowed to climb the ladder. Yet they never approach the ladder again. Why?



Because as far as they know, “that’s the way it has always been done around here.”

Well in my neighborhood, boxing is something you have to do. Boxing is what gives you status amongst your peers. All disputes and arguments are settled through boxing. Boxing is what determines whether you are considered tough or cool. No one knows why. No one remembers how it all got started. All they know is, *“That’s the way it has always been done around here.”*

How about if I could get them to see that chess was even cooler? What if I could show them that chess could toughen them more than boxing—MENTALLY toughen them?

What if I could help them see how chess could make them smarter, more disciplined and better able to make complex decisions? Such a thing would finally drag us out of the caves and put us on a pathway to the moon, or to the Supreme Court or maybe some day to the Presidency of the United States.

This would call for the best plan I had ever come up with, on or off the chess board. How do I get these caveman-minded teenagers to become “chess-minded” young adults? How do I get them to see value in this quiet thinking person’s game? Not only would I have to get them to see it in action, it would have to look like a whole lot of fun.

Chapter 7

PLAN OF ATTACK

Mom had helped me find the faith, now maybe Dad could help me find the courage to challenge the false notions that the guys in the neighborhood swore by.

Dad was happy to hear that I was finally ready to stand up for the things I really valued. “Okay, Son, how can I help?”

I told him my plan. I insisted that it had to be executed on the upcoming Saturday because Magic Johnson and the L.A. Lakers would be playing Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls.

“I don’t understand,” said Dad. That game is the most anticipated matchup of the season and you guys have been looking forward to it for months.”

“I know Dad, and that’s why it has to be *that* day. It’s the best way for them to see just how important the game of chess can be.”

Dad suddenly laughed and said, “Ah hah...”

For the first time, it was Dad who had to get *my* meaning. We sat down to design our plan of attack.

Chapter 8

AWE OF THE GAME

That Saturday couldn't have gotten off to a better start. I had a great morning at the library. I didn't run into Brick on the way there or even on the way home, which allowed me to keep my mind on everything else I had to do.

I deliberately came home late. In fact, it was just ten minutes before game time and the guys were all waiting in front of my house. Spooky noticed the books under my arm.

"Where you been all morning?" he asked almost as a reprimand.

"I spent the morning in the library."

"The LIBRARY?!" screamed Spooky and Matthew, laughing out loud. But Anthony just studied me, curiously.

I made a point of not reacting ashamed, embarrassed or even offended. I just calmly smiled and said, "Yeah, and I had a good time, too."

Anthony smiled with what seemed like admiration, but Matthew and Spooky were *stunned*. They immediately stopped laughing and seemed at a loss for words. I guess since I hadn't responded like they expected—you know,

embarrassed about going to the library—I hadn't left them anything to make fun of. They were left looking embarrassed and maybe feeling a little silly. I was so surprised by all of this that I was actually starting to feel sorry for them. But I let them linger in that awkward silence for a few seconds more before rescuing them.



“So guys, what did you bring for the festivities?”

“I brought some Gatorade!” said Matthew, relieved that I had changed the subject.

Anthony had brought a big bag of potato chips and Spooky had brought nachos and what turned out to be some very nasty cheese dip. Everyone was all smiles and eager to get on with the day's exciting agenda.

As we spilled into the house and made our way towards the living room, Anthony suddenly noticed something--

“Wow, what’s that?!” he yelled.

All eyes turned to the dining room.

“Oh, that’s my dad’s new hand carved chess set,” I answered, nonchalantly. “It was made in India.”

“Wow!” said Spooky. “That’s awesome!”

Dad had just installed some ceiling track lights. He had cleverly aimed the spot lights at the set so that the green and grey marble chess board seemed to float above our glass dining room table.

Somehow, the whole dining room seemed dark except for an almost magical, heavenly light on the chess board.



“Are those supposed to be the chess pieces?” asked Matthew.

“Yeah,” I answered.

Anthony was awed. “I’ve never seen chess pieces like *that* before!”

I explained, “Since the game of chess originated in ancient India, my dad wanted a replica of the original ancient chess set and pieces from 1500 years ago. Back then, the pieces were modeled after actual elements of the ancient Indian army.”

“Wowwwww!” they all whispered in unison.

I have to admit, the style of those 6 inch tall chess pieces was a wonder to behold. The pieces were all hand carved jade green or jasper red. The two rajahs or kings were hand carved regal figures dressed in long robes, as were the two grand viziers, pieces we know today as the queens.

The pawns were carved foot soldiers with spears. The rooks were chariots complete with horses, and the knights were actual cavalymen on horses. But the bishops were the most fascinating of them all. They were actual battle elephants complete with archers and spear throwers riding in cabins atop those huge pachyderms.

I explained that by the time the game of chess traveled from India to Persia and then later to Europe, the names and style of the pieces had changed to what we know them to be today—rooks, knights, bishops, queens, kings and pawns.

By now, Anthony, Spooky and Matthew were all mesmerized by the sight of those elegantly carved chess pieces which seemed to hover in the light.

“Can I...can I touch one of the pieces?” whispered Spooky, stuttering nervously. This was so unlike him. Normally he wasn’t afraid of anyone or anything.

With as much gravity as I could muster I whispered back, “Well, you can touch one, but be very, very *careful*.”

Spooky slowly reached out and gently picked up a knight. I kinda' knew he would be drawn to the knight. He examined the jasper red knight like a jeweler examining the Hope Diamond. He was so awed that he forgot to breathe. He finally had to take a deep breath to keep from passing out.

"Can I touch one?" whispered Matthew.

"Me too?!" whispered Anthony.

I whispered back, "Okay guys, but be very, very careful. They really mean a lot to my dad."

"Wow, this is really something," said Matthew. "My uncle tried to teach me chess once but he lives too far away to keep it up."

"My mom once showed me how the pieces move," said Anthony.

"I don't know nothin' about it, but I could learn," said Spooky with complete humility—something rare for him.

"That's good guys, that's good," I said, trying to be encouraging without sounding patronizing.

"Man, these are so *cool!*" says Anthony, almost bursting with enthusiasm.

Did he just say COOL?! Did I have them hooked, ALREADY?!

Suddenly, "Hey, we're gonna' miss the game!" yelled Spooky.

Now equally alarmed, they all gently put the chess pieces back in place and slowly backed away from the table before finally and suddenly *dashing* into the living room. I was a little disappointed but I knew enough not to worry.

It's just like in chess when—early in a game—you think you've got your opponent cornered. Just as you're about to close the trap, he suddenly slips right out of it. That's a very discouraging moment, but you need to remember that there's still a lot of game to play. That's the time to take a deep breath and face the fact that you simply have more work to do. So I didn't allow myself to worry. At least I had helped the game make a very good first impression.

The first half of the basketball game was proving to be the most exciting we had ever seen. Jordan and Magic were going toe to toe. Though Jordan had more individual points, Magic Johnson had the Lakers up by four. By the time the first half ended we were on the edges of our seats.

“Woooooeeee!” screamed Anthony. “We got a *goody!*”

“Yesireeee!” yelled Matthew.

My mom brought in hot dogs and French fries which we eagerly devoured like the gluttons young boys can be. It was as if we were afraid the food would get in the way of the game once half time was over.

Just as half time was ending Dad, *as planned*, stepped through the front door. “Hello boys,” he said, cheerfully.

There was a chorus of “Hiya doin’, Mr. Ellington!” from the guys.

“We got a real game on our hands today, Mr. Ellington!” said Matthew.

“We sure do Matthew! But I don’t know if Ali is really up to it!” said Dad, challenging me for all to hear.

“Are you kiddin’?” I shot back. “I’ve been waiting to take you down all week!”

“Well, Son, let’s get to it!”

The guys were all quietly baffled, trying to figure out what Dad and I were talking about.

“Are you sure you don’t want to sit for a minute?” I asked Dad, teasingly. “Maybe you want to get a drink of water and relax before I totally demolish you.”

“What?! Boy, I’m ready for whatever you got. Bring it on!”

Dad and I headed into the dining room as Anthony, Matthew and Spooky sat in total befuddlement. Out of the corner of my eye I spied them quietly looking to each other for answers.

Dad and I stood over the chess board and glared into each other’s eyes like heavyweight boxers about to contend for the championship of the world.

As the guys slowly drifted into the dining room we pretended not to notice them.

“Dad, I want you to know that no matter how bad I beat you, I do still really love you.”

“Boy, don’t try your psychology on me! I’m about to bring you the PAIN!”

Playful trash talking was something my dad and I liked to do together. We talked trash to each other whenever we competed—be it basketball, ping pong or bowling. Whatever the activity, it didn't matter. And we were really good at it. But we took care never to say anything vicious or profane.

In fact, Dad would say, "Words are 'things.' Your words have the power to hurt and the power to heal, so be very careful how you use them."

Of course my mom was more direct, "If you can't be funny without being mean, then maybe you really aren't that funny!"

We sat down and immediately went at each other. But all of our trash talking stopped. Suddenly it was our silence that seemed to hold the attention of the guys. You see, as much as we liked to joke with each other, Dad insisted opponents not talk during a chess match. To him, good sportsmanship demanded that you not talk or in any way distract your opponent while he's thinking.

The guys stood in the doorway, quietly awed and silently baffled. Suddenly the horn sounded from the television, signaling the beginning of the second half.

The guys, still standing in the doorway, looked towards the television in the living room then looked back at us. Back and forth went their heads while their bodies remained frozen in the doorway. It was so funny that I almost laughed, but I had to keep pretending not to notice them.

Finally, the screams of the crowd following some dazzling Michael Jordan dunk was just enough to draw Matthew and Spooky away to the TV. Anthony, however, not only remained, he drew much closer to our game.



As our chess game wore on, Anthony was beginning to remember some of the things his mom had taught him. He even offered an occasional suggestion or two, but mostly he just asked questions. A couple of times Anthony hurried into the living room, I presumed to see how the basketball game was going.

However, it turned out that he was actually keeping Spooky and Matthew apprised of me and Dad's chess game.

Eventually Matthew and Spooky abandoned the basketball game and came in to see what it was that had us all so engaged. They had never seen anyone sit so quietly for so long with such focus and passion. Before Dad and I knew it, they were all studying our game intently and whispering to one another about what was going on.

Dad eventually won that first game, but I went on to win the second. By the time Dad was declaring "checkmate" for our third and decisive game, Mom was coming into the dining room with a tray full of delectable hamburgers.

Since I was such a proud little kid, losing was never easy for me—not even to my dad. But just like he had taught me, I reached out, shook his hand and said, "Good game!"

"Well, Son, if you ever feel ready to challenge the champ again, make an appointment with my secretary here." Dad kissed Mom and strutted out of the room.

"Don't worry Son," said Mom, "You'll get the best of him next time."

"Ali, teach me how to play this game!" begged a now excited Spooky.

"Don't leave me out!" says Matthew.

Anthony smiled, for he knew that I knew that he was already solidly hooked.

“Sure guys,” I said, “But, let me ask my dad.” I yelled to him in the other room. “Dad, is it okay to teach the guys on your new jade and jasper chess set?”

There was a long pause. To my amazement, the guys were holding their breaths like children who had just asked if they could go to Disneyland.

Finally, “...Okay,” came the welcome voice from the other room. “But don’t drop those heavy pieces on that glass dining room table!”

“Wooooh...” sighed my very relieved and happy group of guys.

“...Well guys,” I said, “first let’s learn how to properly set up the board.”

I pulled out my portable cassette player. I had written a few rhymes about chess piece movement and set up that I thought would be good to share with the guys.

“Rook, Knight, Bishop, makes me want to hiccup! (Hiccup) Queen on her color, King on the other (Clap). Pawns front line, all of the time. (Clap)”

“That’s so goofy!” laughed Spooky. “But I have to admit, I now know how to set up a chess board.”

The guys laughed.

As my mom headed out of the room she paused to look back and see the four of us huddled over this beautiful, elegant chess set. She smiled at me. Secretly, neither one of us could hardly believe what was happening. Somehow, miraculously, the guys had completely forgotten about the biggest basketball game of the season—with our two most favorite players, Jordan and Magic—playing on the TV in the very next room.

Chapter 9

CHESS IN THE HOOD

Soon the guys were coming over three and four times a week to learn and play chess. Other boys began to come over, too. A few neighborhood girls even showed up to learn how to play.

Pretty soon I was hearing little boys and girls reciting my chess rhymes on their way to school in the morning.

The guys and I talked less and less about boxing and more and more about chess. Eventually the subject of boxing never came up at all.

Spooky's mom stopped me on the street one day to thank me for teaching him chess. She said his concentration was better and that his grades had dramatically improved.

Anthony's mom said that once he started reading books on chess strategy, he began to read books on other things, too. Anthony discovered that he actually liked reading.

But it was Matthew who became my "Ambassador of Chess" to the neighborhood. He was like having my own personal publicist, spreading the word about my chess teaching skills.

Soon people stopped comparing me to the boxer Muhammad Ali. Now people were focusing on my *last* name, “*Ellington*.” They wondered if I was in any way related to Duke Ellington, the preeminent Black composer and band leader of the 20th Century.



Spooky’s mom even said, “Ali plays chess like Duke Ellington plays music!” Since I hadn’t yet come to appreciate the brilliance of that musical genius, I didn’t know what to make of her compliment. But suddenly every kid in the

neighborhood was calling me the “Duke of Chess.” I wasn’t sure what to make of that either, but I had to admit, it sure did sound good.

Soon, we had almost every kid in the neighborhood playing chess. We even sponsored a small tournament at the playground, one Saturday. My mom, dad and I refereed.

And a really remarkable thing happened. The kids in the neighborhood stopped calling me *soft*. I believe they did this not just because *I* had changed, but because *they* had changed, too. It made me understand what Dad meant when he said, ‘People don’t see things as they are, people see things from *where* they are.’

The kids were now—one might say—‘In a different *place*.’ Through chess they were learning to appreciate hard work, mental discipline, problem solving and critical thinking. These things that they once thought soft about me were now qualities they wanted for themselves.

I felt like I had finally come into my own. No longer ashamed of my own smarts, I felt free to be my authentic self! Naturally my grades in school began to improve because I was excited about learning again—and my friends were excited about learning *with* me!

Finally, the neighborhood had truly become not only a haven, but a veritable chess *heaven*. I was truly happy and my life was almost perfect.

Now, if I could just stop having those Akebono nightmares, every Friday night...



Chapter 10

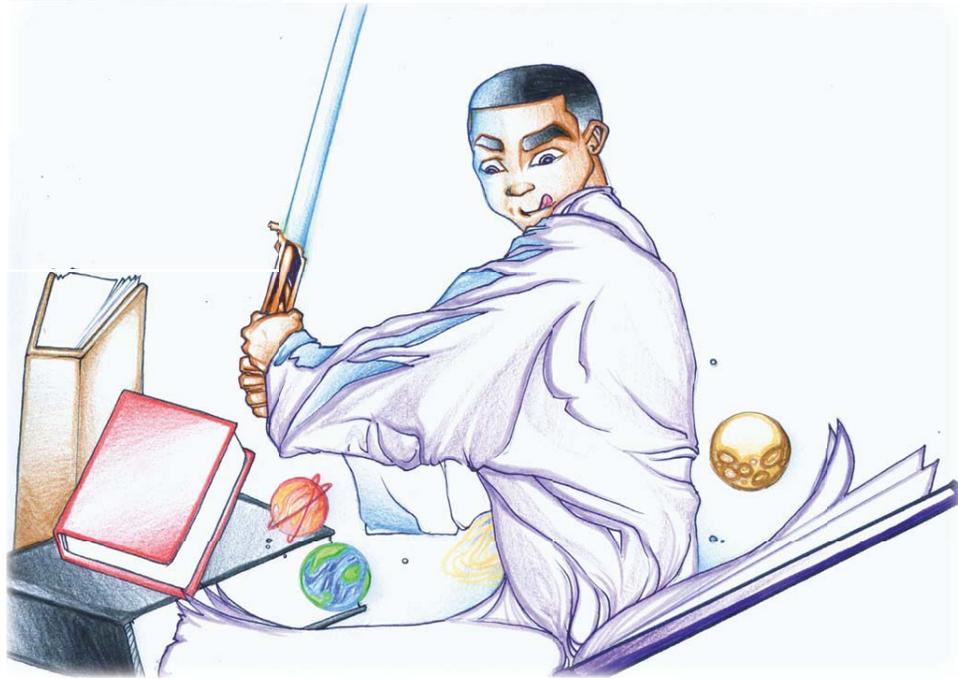
SEEING EYE TO EYE

It had been a long time since I'd gone to the neighborhood library. I had been so busy teaching and playing chess on Saturdays that I just hadn't had time to get there. Most of the books I was reading now were from the library at school, but I really missed the huge selection at the neighborhood library.

I made up my mind that on this Saturday I was going to catch up on all of the books I was dying to read.

I spent that whole day in the library reading about space exploration. It felt so good to imagine myself as Captain Kirk from Star Trek or Luke Skywalker from Star Wars. I felt that it was my generation that would one day get to explore outer space and get to do some of the fantastic things we saw in those movies and TV shows.

And yet, for the first time I couldn't help but wonder if all that I read in the books and watched on television about outer space was fiction. I began to ask myself questions like, is the earth really a globe, did they really figure out a way to fly through the Van Allen Belt into outer space, did man really walk on the moon? As I sat quietly to myself I realized that I have never taken the time to question, research or investigate why those who do not believe in these things, do not believe. My father used to say, "first to present his case seems right, until another comes forward to question him."



In chess we refer to this type of behavior as "pushing pieces." It's when a player doesn't consider or give much thought to both sides of the board, prior to making a move. I was no longer willing to be that type of chess player nor was I willing to be that type of person in any area of my life. The best chess players play every game the exact same way. They examine the board from both their own and their opponents point of view prior to making a move. Such careful consideration is called critical thinking.

Just as I said to myself, "oh no, I'm starting to think like my dad!" I heard, "attention patrons," announced the sweet elderly woman over the PA. system, "The library will be closing in ten minutes."

WOW! I had been so engrossed in my reading and deep thought that I totally lost track of the time. That's when I truly realized just how much I had missed coming to the library.

As I stepped out onto those wide marble library steps, it was just in time to see the top of the setting sun as it descended out of view. Though there was

still a dash of daylight, the moon was already visible high in the sky. A sweet early evening breeze gently brushed up against my face. I stood there on the steps of the library with my eyes closed and my head tilted back. I took a deep breath and sighed with pure joy as I took it all in.

I was proud that I had helped change the neighborhood. No longer did we have to box somebody just to have a friend. For the first time in a very long time I was really truly happy. In fact, I was so happy that I didn't have a care in the world.

But gradually a sense of dread began to come over me. I began to remember who I was. I began to remember where I was. And most importantly, I began to remember who lived right by the library. It was time to recognize that not all of my battles were behind me.

I had totally forgotten about Brick! But I was sure that Brick hadn't forgotten about *me*. I hadn't seen him in well over two months and I certainly didn't want to see him *today*. I needed to hightail it out of there!

I held my breath as I slowly and quietly made my way down the block, past Brick's house and around the corner. In the clear, I paused to catch my breath. *Whew! Thank God I hadn't run into—*

“Hiya doin’ Muhammad Ali!”

There I was, face to face with the caveman himself. I had always managed to keep my distance from Brick. Now, here he was so close that I could smell the ham and cheese sandwich he had for lunch.

While I now had more confidence in my boxing skills than I did the last time Brick and I met, I still didn't want to box him. The truth be told, I didn't want to box *anybody* anymore.

Instead of strategically evaluating the situation, I always ran from Brick. I now realize that in so doing, I had unwittingly given him tacit or unspoken approval to chase me, every Saturday. But today I can't run. Today I *refuse* to run.

Staring up at this massive creature, I—for the very first time—looked directly into his eyes. Before, whenever he looked at me, I always looked away hoping he wouldn't even notice me. But now, somehow—and I don't know why—I wasn't afraid. It was as if everything I had gone through those last many months had prepared me for just this moment.

Maybe this is what Dad meant when he said, “Fear is simply **F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal. Once you face it, you'll discover that most of it is false. And you will see it with brand new eyes.” So, even though Brick was a foot and a half taller than me, it felt like we were eye to eye. I think Brick felt it too.



He seemed taken aback. In fact, he even took a step back. It kind of reminded me of Matthew backing up from my jab the first time he and I boxed on the front lawn. Except this time I wasn't jabbing. This time it was just my calm steady gaze that seemed to unsettle my opponent. Maybe nobody had dared look Brick in the eye before. Or maybe he saw something different in me. I wasn't sure.

Clearly he had some silly notion about life that made him chase me every Saturday. I needed to find out what it was so that I could challenge it. No more diversions, no more deflections. Now was the time for me to be truly “chess minded.” I needed a really *sound* move, which is a smart move made after you’ve formed a solid plan.

“Let me ask you something Brick,” I said, catching him totally off guard. “What do you like to do?”

“Whatdya’ mean, what do I like to do?” he said, irritated by my question.

“When you’re not chasing little guys like me around the neighborhood, what do you like to do?”

Brick paused for a long moment, thinking about what I had asked. I guess nobody had ever asked him something like that before.

“What’s it to you, you little runt?!”

“Hey, Brick, I don’t mean any harm. I was just wondering if chasing me was the most exciting thing you get to do on Saturdays.”

“I got plenty of exciting things to do on Saturdays, chump! Waaaaay more exciting things!”

“That’s good Brick, that’s good. Some of my friends and I have some pretty exciting things we like to do on Saturdays, too.”

“I been hearin’ about y’all boxing and everything. But I guess y’all were too scared to invite me over, huh?” Brick says with a gleeful, menacing grin.

“To be honest with you Brick, we aren’t really into the boxing thing anymore.”

Brick seemed genuinely surprised. “You’re not?”

“Nope. We like to spend our Saturdays playing chess.”

“Yeah, well I heard about y’all doin’ that, too. But I didn’t think you guys would ever give up boxing *totally*.”

“I can see why you would think that because we did have a lot of fun. But the truth is, we found we have a lot *more* fun playing chess.”

Brick studied me suspiciously. “You trying to trick me out of chasing you or something?”

Whoaaaa! Brick was a lot sharper than I expected! I needed to reassess this situation quick, fast and in a hurry. “It’s not a trick Brick, but I *am* using a strategy on you. The fact that you can see that I’m using a strategy shows that you are *chess minded*. What I mean is that you see and think like a natural born chess player. The only thing for you to do now is to learn how to play the game.”

Brick glared at me, mistrustful. His face contorted into various expressions as he thought about what I had said. First he frowned. Then he started biting his upper lip as he looked to the sky, bewildered. Then he bowed his head and cradled it in his hands as if he were trying to squeeze some sense out everything that was happening. Then he raised his head and looked me squarely in the eye.

“Ali, all of those times that I chased you home, you know that I could have caught you if I really wanted to, right?”

I was really tempted to debate this, especially since I was known to be the fastest little kid in the neighborhood. But what sense would it make for me to win that battle and lose this war? At this moment of truth, Brick and I could be on the verge of something really good. However, I knew that the next words out of my mouth would determine whether we would be friends for life or enemies to the grave. "...Yeah, Brick, I'm pretty sure that you could have caught me if you really wanted to."

Brick studied me, carefully. I guess he was making sure that not only was I sincere, but that I wasn't making fun of him either. He finally nodded, satisfied that I had given him his props.

"You know, Brick, I bet if you came and hung out with me and the guys you might find chess is something you could really like, too."

"Chess, huh?" he said, dryly.

"Yeah, *chess!*" I said with an enthusiasm that seemed to surprise him. "My mom is gonna throw a few burgers on the barbecue and my dad will make sure there's plenty of Gatorade. We'll play a little basketball out by the garage, and then it's a 'battle of the minds' on the chess board for the rest of the evening."

I saw slight creases start to form at the corners of his mouth, like he was about to smile. He saw that I saw it and tried to stop it, but it was too late. A hardened bully like Brick wouldn't be caught dead getting cheerful over something like chess. But there it was, a full fledged smile was breaking out all over his face and he couldn't stop it. And wouldn't you know—Brick actually did have teeth.

"You're a goofy little nerd," he said with a laugh.

“I understand why you feel that way and I’m okay with it.”

He looked at me curiously, then smiled and nodded, “You know, you *alright*, Ali!”

“So look, Brick, are you coming over or what?!” I asked, forcefully.

He laughed. “Sure, I’ll give it a try.”

“Okay, Brick. Let’s go.”

Together, we started down the street. It’s funny how, now that we were friendly, he didn’t seem that much bigger than me anymore. I suppose I was truly seeing with new eyes.

However, I was so used to running from Brick that walking beside him still felt a little weird. We took the first several steps into our journey without saying another word. I don’t know why Brick wasn’t talking, but I certainly knew why I wasn’t. I was afraid that I might say something that was truly corny and spoil the moment. Suddenly, rather matter-of-factly Brick says--

“You can call me Arnold if you want.”

Arnold?! I never would have imagined he had a real name like that. But I know better than to make fun of it, at least not right now.

“So,” he continues, “You guys really don’t box anymore?”

“No, Arnold, *not at all.*”

“That’s cool with me,” he said dryly. “I never really liked boxing too much anyway.”

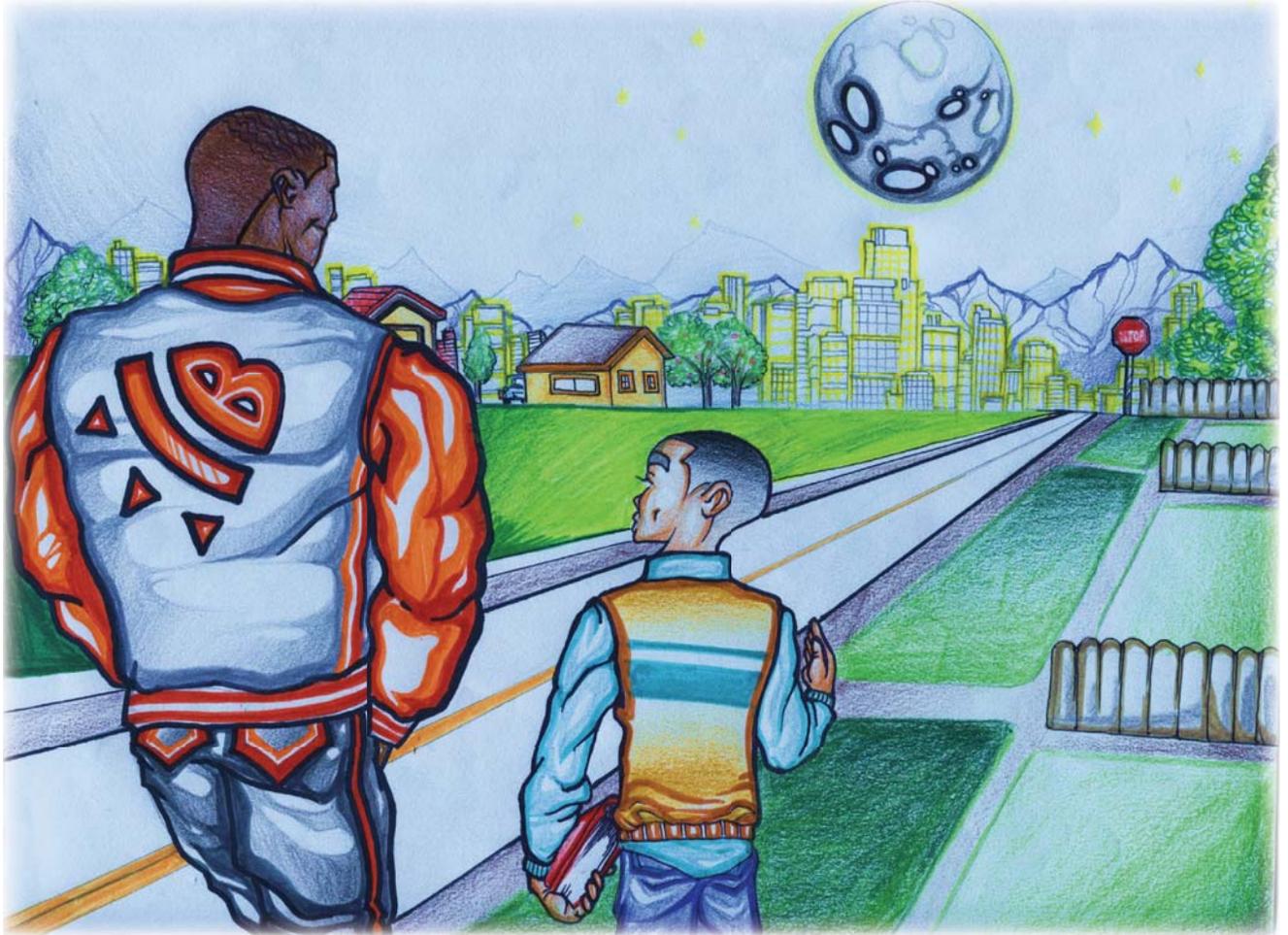
Now, this was UNBELIEVABLE! “For real?!”

“Yeah... I only boxed because everybody else was doing it. Besides, I didn’t want to be the one that got chased home.”

Stunned, I stopped in my tracks. *Is Brick trying to tell me that all of this time he had been just as afraid as I was?!*

Brick seemed to read my mind. He sheepishly shrugged his shoulders as if to say, *Hey, man, I’m still just a kid too, you know.*

I started laughing. I didn’t want to, but I couldn’t help it. Brick took offense and glared at me in his old threatening manner and for a moment I thought that all bets were off. But in a flash, right before my eyes, Brick *chose* to laugh instead. Then I laughed even harder. So did he.



Somehow I had just made peace with the last and most formidable of all of my fears—and I would never have another Akebono nightmare.

So down the street we went, two young kings, created in the image of God, joking, talking intelligently and walking tall with smiles on our faces...on a surefire pathway toward the moon...heaven bound!

The End

Survivor: The History of the Library

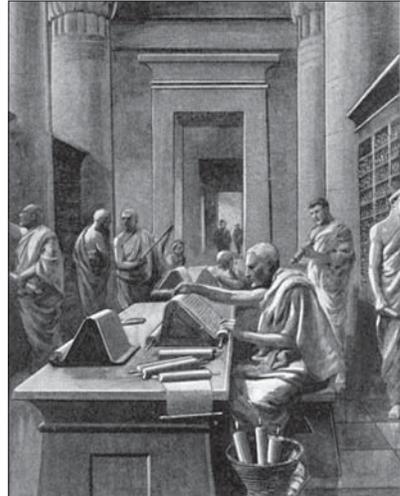
Barbara Krasner-Khait checks out the story of the library.

THE COLLECTION OF written knowledge in some sort of repository is a practice as old as civilization itself. About 30,000 clay tablets found in ancient Mesopotamia date back more than 5,000 years. Archaeologists have uncovered papyrus scrolls from 1300-1200BC in the ancient Egyptian cities of Amarna and Thebes and thousands of clay tablets in the palace of King Sennacherib, Assyrian ruler from 704-681BC, at Nineveh, his capital city. More evidence turned up with the discovery of the personal collection of Sennacherib's grandson, King Ashurbanipal.

The name for the repository eventually became the library. Whether private or public, the library has been founded, built, destroyed and rebuilt. The library, often championed, has been a survivor throughout its long history and serves as a testament to the thirst for knowledge.

Literacy Builds Libraries

Early collections may have surfaced from the Near East, but the ancient



Founded circa 300BC, the Great Library of Alexandria was the most famed literary repository of the ancient world.

Greeks propelled the idea through their heightened interest in literacy and intellectual life. Public and private libraries flourished through a well-established process: authors wrote on a variety of subjects, scribes or copy shops produced the

books, and book dealers sold them. Copying books was an exacting business and one in high demand, because a book's "trustworthiness" translated into quality. An Athenian decree called for a repository of "trustworthy" copies. Though the public library first appeared by the fourth century BC, the private library was more prevalent. Aristotle, for instance, amassed a large private collection. Ancient geographer Strabo said Aristotle "was the first to have put together a collection of books and to have taught the kings in Egypt how to arrange a library."

The Great Library

That library, of course, was the Great Library of Alexandria, a public library open to those with the proper scholarly and literary qualifications, founded about 300BC. When Egypt's King Ptolemy I (305-282BC) asked, "How many scrolls do we have?", Aristotle's disciple Demetrius of Phalerum was on hand to answer with the latest count. After all, it was

Form Dictates Function

Throughout most of the library's history, the term "book" referred to works written on papyrus and some parchment rolls. Beginning in the second century, stacked and bound wooden boards recorded literature, science, and technical information. These tablets, called codex, derived from a centuries-old practice of using wooden writing tablets for notetaking. These new, durable codices gradually replaced the fragile rolls. However, rolls continued to be used for archival-type documents. Parchment eventually replaced the wooden boards.

The new codex form impacted book storage. Codices were stored flat on the shelf and covers protected their leaves. The libraries had to find ways to house both rolls and codices. New libraries emerging in the Middle Ages in churches, schools, and monasteries concerned themselves only with the codex form.

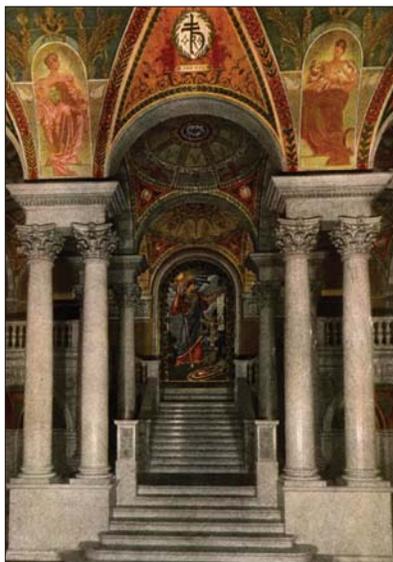
Demetrius who suggested setting up a universal library to hold copies of all the books in the world. Ptolemy and his successors wanted to understand the people under their rule and house Latin, Buddhist, Persian, Hebrew, and Egyptian works — translated into Greek.

The library's lofty goal was to collect a half-million scrolls and the Ptolemies took serious steps to accomplish it. Ptolemy I, for example, composed a letter to all the sovereigns and governors he knew, imploring them "not to hesitate to send him" works by authors of every kind.

The Ptolemies engaged in some unorthodox acquisition methods. Some stories relate that they confiscated any book not already in the library from passengers arriving in Alexandria. Another story tells how Ptolemy III (246-222BC) deceived Athenian authorities when they let him borrow original manuscripts of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, using silver as collateral. Ptolemy kept the originals and sent the copies back, letting the authorities keep the silver. More traditional means included book purchases from the markets of Athens, Rhodes and other Mediterranean cities. Older copies were the favored acquisitions; the older the better, since they would be considered more trustworthy. At its height, the library held nearly 750,000 scrolls. There must have been duplicates since there weren't that many works.

Much of what is now considered to be literary scholarship began in the

Alexandria Library. Funds from the royal treasury paid the chief librarian and his scholarly staff. Physically, books were not what we think of today, but rather scrolls, mostly made of papyrus, but sometimes of leather. They were kept in pigeonholes with titles written on wooden tags hung from their outer ends.



While most modern libraries spend more time and money on collections than ornamentation, some institutions, such as the Library of Congress, still aspire to ancient standards of architectural splendor.

Fires and depredations during the Roman period gradually destroyed the Library. When Julius Caesar occupied Alexandria in 48BC, Cleopatra urged him to help himself to the books. Obliging, he shipped tens of thousands to Rome. Marc Antony was rumored to have given

Cleopatra the 200,000-scroll collection of rival library Pergamum to replace Alexandria's losses.

Thanks to the Great Library, Alexandria assumed its position as the intellectual capital of the world and provided a model for other libraries to follow.

When In Rome...

By the middle of the second century BC, Rome also boasted rich library resources. Initially comprised of some scattered private collections, holdings eventually expanded through the spoils of war. Even Aristotle's famed collection was among the bounty.

Julius Caesar dreamed of establishing a public library in Rome, but his vision was cut short by his assassination. After Caesar's death, Asinius Pollio acquired the requisite funds to make the dream a reality. The library was divided into two sections — one for Greek and one for Latin, serving as a model for subsequent Roman libraries. Great statues adorned the walls. Books, typically acquired through donations by authors and others, as well as through copying, were placed along the walls and readers consulted them in the middle of the room. This marked a distinct departure from the Greek model, where readers could only consult their books in an atrium away from the rest of the collection.

To serve as director of a library was a great honor. The role became a stepping stone for the ambitious government servant. Staffs consisted of slaves and freedmen, who were

assigned to either the Greek or the Latin section. Pages fetched rolls from the systematically arranged and tagged bookcases and returned them. They usually transported the rolls in leather or wood buckets. Scribes made copies to be added to the collection and recopied damaged rolls, while keeping the catalog up to date. Libraries were typically open during standard business hours — sunrise to midday.

Rome had only three public libraries at the time of Augustus's death in 14AD: Pollio's, one in the Porticus of Octavia, and Augustus's on the Palatine Hill. When Trajan (98-117AD) dedicated his monumental column in 112-113, a library (sectioned into the traditional Greek and Latin chambers) was part of it. Much of the interior still exists today. The collection there grew to include some 20,000 volumes. Still, libraries remained the domain of the learned: teachers, scientists, scholars. Where were the masses to go? To the imperial baths, of course! At the baths, men and women, rich and poor could take a bath, meet with friends, play ball — and read a book. Libraries were added to the baths until the third century. A catalog of Rome's buildings from about 350AD enumerated 29 libraries in the city. But in 378, the historian Ammianus Marcellinus commented, "The libraries are closing forever, like tombs." As the Roman Empire fell, libraries seemed doomed to extinction.

Monasticism Transforms the Library
In the early 500s in Egypt, a man

named Pachomius established a monastery and insisted on literacy among his monks. This was to have a long-lasting effect even after the Roman Empire split in two about 100 years later. Throughout the rest of the eastern empire, monastic communities emerged with small and mostly theological libraries.



Rome's Vatican Library is one of the richest manuscript depositories in the world, with more than 65,000 manuscripts and more than 900,000 printed volumes.

Sparked by the spread of Christianity, the eastern half of the empire did much to foster the use of libraries. The capital city of Constantinople had three major libraries: the university library, the library for the royal family and civil service and a theological collection.

Even though libraries disappeared in the western empire due to invasion, lack of funds, and lack of interest, monasticism gave rise to an explosion of learning. In 529AD, Benedict established a monastery in Monte Cassino and established a rule by which the monks would live. Chapter 48 of this rule mandated: "Between Easter and the calends of

October let them apply themselves to reading from the fourth hour until the sixth hour . . . From the calends of October to the beginning of Lent, let them apply themselves to reading until the second hour. During Lent, let them apply themselves to reading from morning until the end of the third hour, and in these days of Lent, let them receive a book apiece from the library and read it straight through. These books are to be given out at the beginning of Lent."

The Benedictines created libraries and the scriptorium became sacred. It soon became customary for monasteries to lend to other monasteries, giving birth to the inter-library loan. Charlemagne, who owned a robust library in Aachen in the eighth century, ordered every school to have a scriptorium. The road was well paved to invite the Renaissance and a new age for libraries.

Renaissance of Learning

As Europe emerged from the depths of darkness into the light of learning, its people began to look to the Greek and Roman artistic and literary classics for inspiration. Many aristocrats of the period were dedicated to developing their private libraries. Cosimo de Medici of the famous Florentine family established his own collection, which formed the basis of the Laurentian Library. Also in Italy, the Vatican Library opened in the 1400s. Accompanying the growth of universities was the development of university libraries, which, in some cases, were founded on the basis of a personal donation. For example,

Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, donated his large collection to Oxford University in the early 1400s.

Gutenberg's movable type innovation in the 1400s revolutionized bookmaking. Printed books replaced handwritten manuscripts and were placed on open shelves.

The Golden Age

Throughout the 1600s and 1700s, libraries surged in popularity. They grew as universities developed and as national, state-supported collections began to appear. Many of these became national libraries.

In Britain, Sir Thomas Bodley rebuilt Humphrey's library at Oxford in the late 1500s. It was renamed the Bodleian Library and today ranks as the second largest in the country. The largest, of course, is the British Library, founded in 1759 as part of the British Museum. The earliest public library in the UK was associated with London's Guild Hall in 1425. A second opened in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1580. Neither of these still exists, but one established in 1653 in Manchester, England does. Once Parliament passed the Public Library Act in 1850, libraries began to spread throughout the nation.

In France, the national library in Paris known as *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* began in 1367 as the Royal Library of Charles V. Another significant library, famous for its influence on library management, is the Mazarine Library, also in Paris. Cardinal Jules Mazarin, chief minister of France during Louis XIV's minority, founded it in 1643.

Building on its Roman heritage, Italy boasted several renowned libraries, including Laurentian Library in Florence, Vatican Library in Vatican City, Ambrosian Library in Milan and National Central Library in Florence, based on the collection of Antonio Magliabechi, a scholar of the 1600s and 1700s.

On the Iberian peninsula, King Philip V established the National Library of Spain, Madrid in 1711. Portugal's National Library in Lisbon appeared in 1796.

Three libraries form the national repository for Germany. The first, the German State Library in Berlin, was founded in 1661 by Friedrich Wilhelm. The second and third followed much later: the German Library in Leipzig, founded in 1912 and the German Library in Frankfurt, founded in 1946.

Catherine the Great founded the M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library in St. Petersburg in the late 1700s. Russia's largest library, the Russian State Library in Moscow (formerly the Lenin State Library), was founded in 1862.

The oldest library in America began with a 400-book donation by a Massachusetts clergyman, John Harvard, to a new university that eventually honored him by adopting his name. Another clergyman, Thomas Bray from England, established the first free lending libraries in the American Colonies in the late 1600s. Subscription libraries — where member dues paid for book purchases and borrowing privileges were free — debuted in the 1700s. In

1731, Ben Franklin and others founded the first such library, the Library Company of Philadelphia. The initial collection of the Library of Congress was in ashes after the British burned it during the War of 1812. The library bought Thomas Jefferson's vast collection in 1815 and used that as a foundation to rebuild.

It wasn't until waves of immigration and the philosophy of free public education for children that public libraries spread in the US. The first public library in the country opened in Peterborough, New Hampshire, in



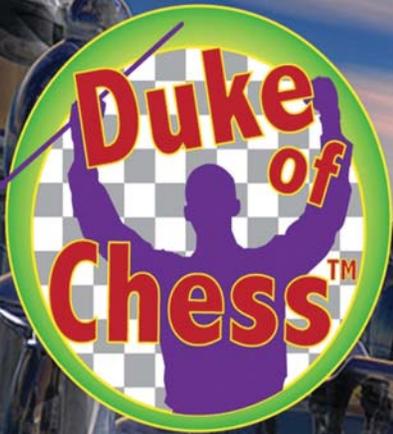
Beginning with John Harvard's 1638 donation of 260 volumes, the Harvard Library has grown to become the largest university library in the US, with more than 10,000,000 volumes.

1833. Philanthropist Andrew Carnegie helped build more than 1,700 public libraries in the US between 1881 and 1919.

Libraries may have changed over the years — no longer do pages carry scrolls in wooden buckets — but the need for a repository of knowledge remains.

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All songs written by Sista Neish & Duke of Chess

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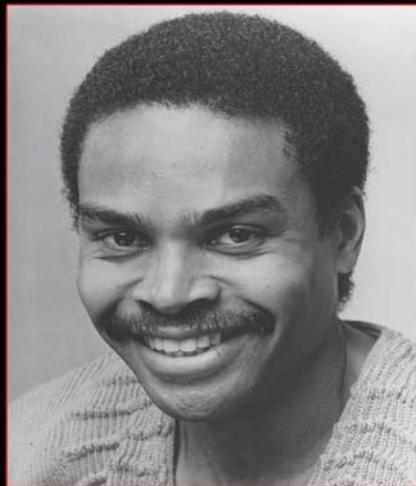


Kyseme Ali Ellington, the “Duke of Chess,” has been igniting the fun in learning since 1996, having taught over 60,000 students and adults to live their best lives out-loud. He is the Architect and Co-Founder of **Chess Tutors**, a program more concerned with developing *life* masters than *chess* masters. Acknowledged Business Partner of the Year by the California State Senate, the State of California, the County of Los Angeles and Miller Toyota, Chess Tutors proves everyday what a wonderful learning tool chess can be.

Kyseme is also the Co-Founder of **Educators Plus**, a California certified supplemental educational service provider which provides English and math tutoring for at-risk youth within the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Happily married for 15 years, Kyseme and his lovely wife Neisha have two children, Hannah'Noel, 7, and Noah, 10. As Los Angeles County Sheriff Department Clergy they live and provide their services through-out the L.A. metropolitan area.
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Bobby Crawford



Director of Communications for **Chess Tutors**, is a playwright, screenwriter, lyricist and director of both stage and film. At age 22 Bobby's play the **Brass Medallion** became the first original African American play and Bobby the youngest writer ever produced in the Eisenhower Theater of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, in Washington, D.C. He has won numerous awards for writing including the Amoco Oil Bronze Medallion, Owen Weenie Dodson Award, American College Theater Festival Award, Samuel Goldwyn Award Finalist as well as two Gilbert Hartke Awards for Best Direction & Best Production.

Bobby has written extensively for television including *My Brother & Me* (Nickelodeon), *The New Odd Couple* (ABC) and was story editor on *227* (NBC) where he wrote the premier episode. Bobby wrote the hit film *A Rage In Harlem* starring Danny Glover, Forest Whitaker, Robin Givens and Gregory Hines. Bobby and his partner, noted composer **Howlett Smith**, are currently completing their third musical for the stage.

