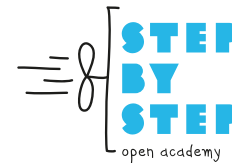


What is troubling
Rory?





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About included communities

With this picture book created as part of the “Included Communities” project, we tried to raise the awareness of parents and children regarding difficulties and emotions that children of (former) prisoners may experience, such as shame, sadness, or loneliness. The purpose of the picture book is to serve as an additional tool to parents (educators, guardians, foster parents) in developing the compassion and empathy of their children towards children whose parents are (were) imprisoned.

The project was implemented during 2019 and 2020 with the general goal of creating conditions in social communities for the re-socialization of perpetrators of criminal offenses through increased capacities of civil society organizations.

It is estimated that in the Republic of Croatia there are approximately 12,500 children whose parents are in prison. This especially vulnerable group many call “invisible children” and “orphans of justice”, because they are often not recognized as children who need support and assistance.

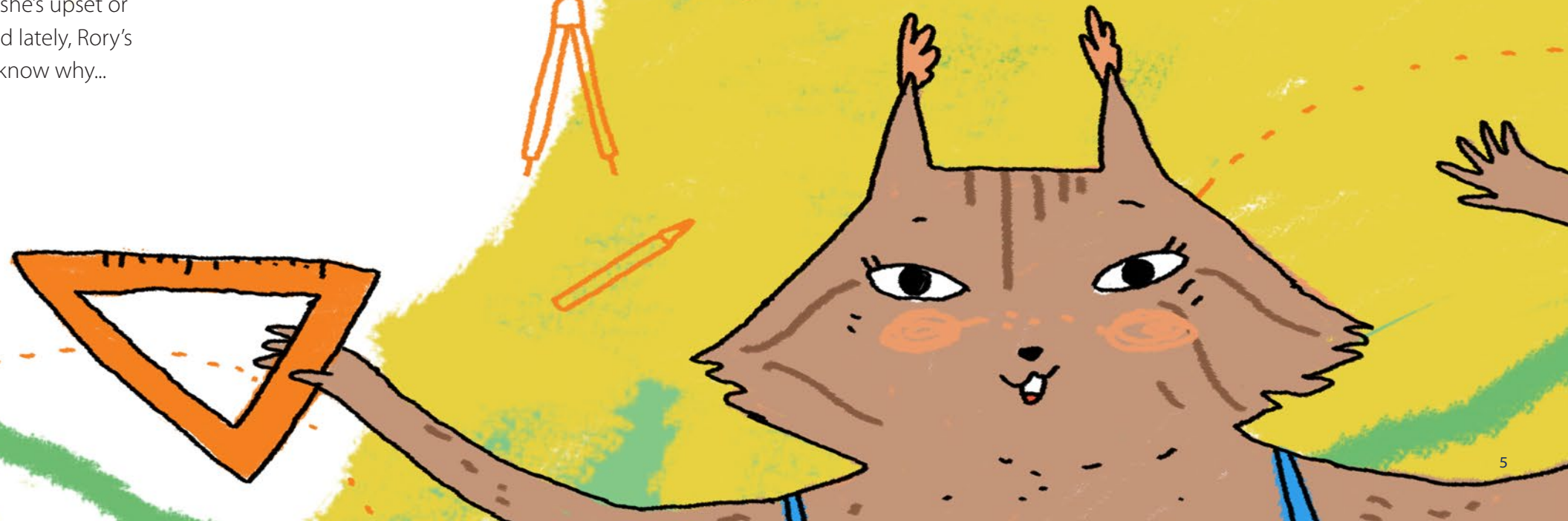
Children whose parents are in prison are confronted with very strong emotions, such as sadness, guilt, shame, fear, and anger. They worry about the way people around them will react to the fact that their parent is in prison, they could be scared for their parent’s safety, overwhelmed with grief because they are separated from their parent, feel guilty because their parent is in prison or be mad at their parent, the police, the court, etc. School-age children, like our character Rory, are often overwhelmed with different emotions, of which they are even not aware of, and which can significantly affect their behaviour. In these situations, it is important that people around them react and provide the child with support and understanding. You can use the adult characters and their conversations as examples for doing this. It is important to send a message to the child that it is accepted and that it has the space to express its emotions.

Meet Rory, she is a young lynx from the Lis family. Rory started second grade this year, together with the bear Mary, deer Antler and his older sister Fawn, and other forest creatures. Although unusual, this class fellowship soon got close and its members like to spend time playing after school.

Rory is a cheerful and curious lynx, always ready to play and spend time with family and friends. At school, you can rarely see her separated from her best friend - bear Mary, who passionately loves sweets. Rory became friends with Mary already during the first week of school when they realized that they both enjoy spending time at the nearby forest creek - Rory dancing, and Mary hunting fish with her family. Besides dancing, Rory enjoys competing with deer Antler jumping or running.

Their teacher Rea is also in the class, a warm and caring she-wolf, who keeps a waking eye on her students, and calls upon them with a beautiful voice to sing at the end of each day. Rory adores her because she can see that the teacher is righteous and takes care of everyone in the class.

There is one other thing you should know about Rory! When she's upset or troubled, she grabs her tummy because it starts to cramp. And lately, Rory's tummy had a lot of cramps, even though she did not always know why...





Last Friday the class, as usual, waited a bit sleepy to sing goodbye to their teacher Rea and friends at the end of the day. Just as they were about to sing, the teacher stopped and smilingly continued: "Eekhrm! Dear kids, I have one more exciting news for you, before we say goodbye. Next week we're going to celebrate Father's Day! We're going to celebrate it by having a workshop on the school playground, and you will invite your dads to this important event."

Rory suddenly felt drumming in her head, her heart pounded faster and faster, and then she realized that she's already holding her tummy, in which she hasn't felt this kind of cramp since the day when... She could barely understand what the teacher was saying, and she couldn't calm herself nor hear clearly what's going on. The pressure in her head became stronger and stronger...



It seemed to her that this lasted awfully long, and then she felt a warm touch on her shoulder; after raising her head, she saw Mary, who was saying something to her.

"Rory! Rory... Can you hear me? Are you ok? Are you in pain?" Mary spoke quietly, watching Rory's paws, with which she still firmly held her tummy.

Mary was worried about Rory. She noticed that Rory was lately a bit angry, then a bit sad, in certain moments even unkind. Rory just answered Mary's question nodding her head confusedly and stopped her look on a group of friends who excitedly shouted over each other on the news they just heard.

"My dad can teach us how to start a campfire!"; "My dad's gonna...";
"And my dad knows how to make the best..."

Rory listened to them downhearted, and her eyes were filled with tears... She wanted to go home as soon as possible and started to pack her things in a hurry.





When she raised her head, it seemed to her that everyone intentionally looked away from her. She put her bag on her shoulder and went for the door when she heard: "Who do you think Rory's gonna bring to the workshop? Her dad no longer lives with her."

She felt a strong pressure and heat in her head again. Unfortunately, at the same time Fawn and Antler laughed at one of their own jokes. Thinking that they were making fun of her, Rory felt rage which she didn't know how to control. She threw a book from the desk on the floor really hard, and stormed out of the classroom, crying.

After seeing what happened, teacher Rea called Rory to her teacher's room, where she first waited patiently that Rory calms herself with a cup of tea. "Rory, I can see that you are terribly angry and sad right now. I also noticed that you weren't happy with the idea to invite fathers to the celebration. Are you worried about something regarding that?"

Rory felt relieved because the teacher showed her that she's not angry and that she cares for her. "Hmm... well, you know... My dad... Fawn and Antler..." She felt new tears about to roll down her face and sticks in her throat wouldn't let her speak. What should she tell her teacher? What to tell her friends, why is her dad not at home? „If only this mess in my head would calm for a moment," wished Rory. She could not believe the amount of emotions she can think and feel at the same time. She was afraid that now no one will want to spend time with her, and at the same time she was overwhelmed with sadness. She missed her dad and she wished so much that he can be with her next week at the workshop. Then they could dance their dance together, and dad would show tricks to the other kids because he is the best magician eever.

"I don't want to talk about it! I want to go home!" Rory shouted through tears and ran home.



As she was worried about Rory, the teacher called her mum and told her what had happened.

"You know, this is truly an unusual reaction for Rory, and it seems that her friends are also not sure what affected her so much... I also noticed that for some time now she has often been pensive and downhearted, and sometimes she overreacts to small things. I would like to help her, but I don't know how. Do you have any idea on what's bothering Rory?" teacher patiently explained to Rory's mother. There was a long pause, and then Rory's mum found the courage and shared with the teacher that Rory's dad had been in prison for several weeks now.

Mum lynx thought that the best way to protect Rory is not to tell anyone at school where her dad is. When the teacher called her, she understood that Rory needs help, and that silence creates even bigger difficulties for her. It would be better for Rory if the teacher knew what's going on. She's warm and open, she'll understand Rory, give her comfort, or help her to feel less lonely.



When she came home, Rory muttered a greeting to mum, grandpa, and her younger brother Gor, who just shook the sand off his fur after playing in the sandpit. She passed them by and went to her room.

Mum came to her and kissed her. "Your teacher told me that you had a rough day at school, I'm really sorry. Would you like to tell me what happened?" kindly asked mum lynx. "M-m" mumbled Rory, shrugging her shoulders. She didn't know how to answer. She turned away from her mum, sat quietly on the floor, with her back against the bed and looked outside the window, fidgeting a pinecone with her hands, which was the main character in one of dad's magic acts.

Mum approached her silently and kissed her on the top of her head. "Ok, I'll be back a bit later, but if you want to talk, I'll be in the kitchen. You know, you're not in any kind of trouble."



Rory spent the whole day in her room. She didn't want to talk to her mum, nor her grandpa. Gor called her several times to build sandcastles. Antler wanted to compete with her in jumping over the creek, and Mary brought fresh honey and strawberries to bake a cake together. Nothing, and I mean nothing worked. Rory just wasn't into having fun nor company.

She kept thinking about how actually nobody understood her. She looked at Gor, playing carefree in the sandpit. "How can he be so relaxed, and our dad's in prison? Who knows what can happen to him in there?"

She also thought of Antler and Mary. "What do they know about what's it like when you don't have anyone to go to the father's workshop with?" The more she kept thinking about it, the more her tummy ached.



In the evening Rory heard a knock. She saw her grandpa on the door, who smiled at her mildly and sat on the bed next to her. "I know you miss him," he said, looking at the pinecone, which was again in her hands, and then at her. Rory hesitated for a minute and finally said, "Yes, I really miss him a lot. I know we've already talked about it, but I just wish he could be here."

"I know, honey... A lot has changed lately. Your dad had to leave suddenly and for now, we don't know how long he's going to be away. It's not easy to be sad, but that's ok. When we miss someone we love and we can't be next to them, everything else may seem irrelevant."

Rory thought about how it seemed to her today in class that she's alone and that the most important thing is that she can't come with her dad to the Father's Day workshop.

"But it's not always so," continued grandpa calmly. "You see, your dad loves you and he knows that you love him. He can't wait for the moment when all of us will be able to be together again. Mum, Gor, and I also love you. And your teacher Rea, and your friends Mary and Antler! We're all there for you, and the fact that you're sad or angry changes nothing."

Rory felt her cramp relaxing, and some kind of nice warmth taking over her. She suddenly got out of bed and hugged her grandpa as hard as she could. When she put her head on the pillow again, she was so tired she went right to sleep. "But I still can't go to the workshop because I don't have anybody to go with..." was the last thought that remained in her head.



The following morning Rory felt better but decided not to go to school. She thought, if she can't bring her dad with her, there's no reason to go to the workshop. She decidedly announced it during breakfast, and before mum and grandpa had a chance to say anything, she ran to Mara, who was waiting for her by the creek.

"Are you sure you're not coming?" asked Mara, while they were eating blueberries she picked from her garden that morning.

"Totally," responded Rory with confidence. "My dad can't come, so I don't need to either."

"Hmmm... You know, Father's Day is the day when you're with everyone you love. We would all like you to come and have fun with us. Martha's uncle... oh my... achoo," Mara pretended to sneeze and continued, "Allergy season. As I was saying, teacher Rea will surely sing, we'll play basketball, dance... All the things you love, too!" "Please, please come!"

Rory thought about it and remembered her grandpa's words from last night. Those are her friends who love her. Maybe it really isn't so bad her dad can't make it... And then she got it. "I'll think about it, I have to check something..." she said, already running towards her house, wondering how she didn't think of it before!



Rory couldn't wait until next morning. The previous night she asked her grandpa to come with her to school on Father's Day. Grandpa has an excellent eye for photography and can show the rest of the class how to make good photos. Maybe even record a video!

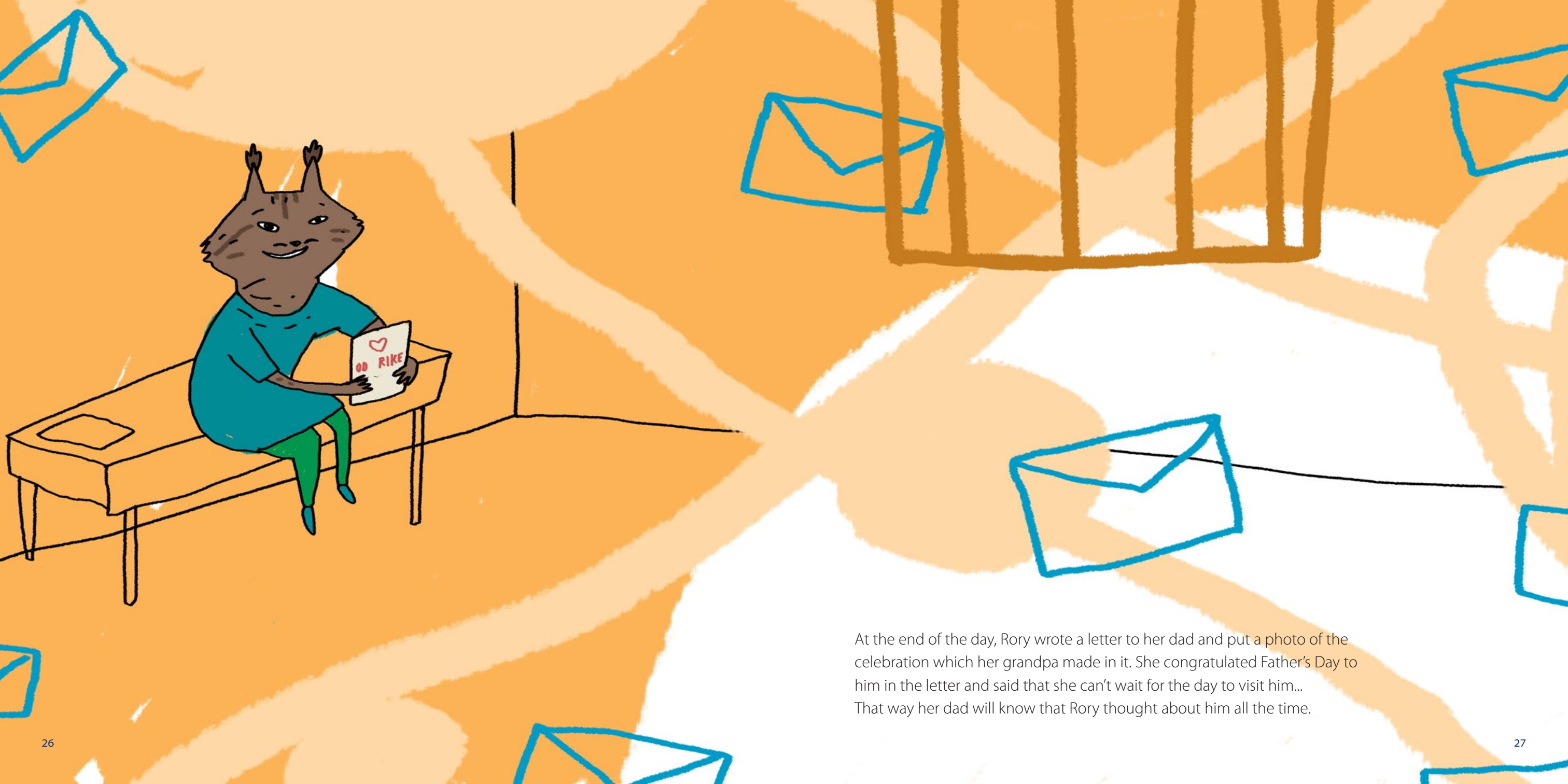
After breakfast, they said goodbye to mum lynx and Gor and walked to school, grandpa with a professional camera around his neck.

When they arrived at the yard, Rory was baffled. Antler and Fawn came with their uncle, who was showing everyone how to play basketball, Mary's older brother brought cakes, lizard Blizzard helped her uncle to set the equipment for making light effects, raven Painter was helping her older cousin to stretch the painting canvas, and marten Martha's uncle had a saxophone prepared to play. The teacher will join him on the guitar and sing.

"What's going on? Why are your dads not here?" shouted Rory surprised to her friends. "We knew your dad can't come and that you surely miss him. We wanted to show you that you're not alone, so we made a change of plan with teacher Rea." said Mary satisfied, who almost gave away the surprise to Rory yesterday. "Come on, let's play and dance!"

The teacher and grandpa smiled at each other passing by, and then grandpa took the cover from his camera lens and got prepared to capture the happy moments.





At the end of the day, Rory wrote a letter to her dad and put a photo of the celebration which her grandpa made in it. She congratulated Father's Day to him in the letter and said that she can't wait for the day to visit him... That way her dad will know that Rory thought about him all the time.

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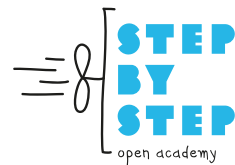
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