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What Is Mental Health?

The state of our overall well-being. It includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act and helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.¹

But what I've lived, what I've learned is that mental health isn't just that.

The fog that looms inside you.
The tightness in your chest when nothing even happened. The fear that something will go wrong. The voice in your head sometimes it's on your side, and other days... not so much.

I knew the explanations. But sometimes, words fail to reach. Sometimes the words don't really mean much. Sometimes, words get in the way



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What Is Mental Health?

But how are you?

“I’m good.”

And that can be the end of it.

But sometimes. “I’m good” is...

a mask I wear

You are allowed to, feel,

You are allowed to, question

You are allowed to, heal.

Because mental health isn’t just in
your mind. It lives in your body, your
culture, your brain chemistry, your
society, and it shows up in all kinds of
ways seen and unseen



References

What is Mental Health?

1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (n.d.). Mental health. SAMHSA. from <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health>

The Wall

I don't know who laid the first brick.

Maybe it was fear.

Maybe it was to protect.

But the wall came

like tension in a room no one names,

like voices talking over each other,

And part of me says who cares where it
came from?

Here it is.

It's there in the way my mother talks
through guilt.

There are times when the walls are gone.

Back when Tíos grilled carne,

when Tías laughed in the kitchen,

when banda and cumbias played.

Yo recuerdo a mi padre:

la masa entre la familia,

el glue con cual invitaba.

Yo recuerdo.

Y siento ese amor.

Y por eso recuerdo a mis primos.

Gracias, papá, por lo que hiciste en tu vida.

But the cracks started.

I didn't see them at first.

Maybe I didn't want to.

Maybe they were too **small**.

But then the arguing got **louder**.

The visits **fewer**.

The hurt **deeper**.



And I
I started building too.

A brick for grief.

A brick for guilt.

A brick for trying to fix what wasn't mine.

A brick for pretending I wasn't angry.

A brick to please.

A brick to hold it all together.

A brick for...

**Until I realized, I was standing behind
my own wall, watching the people I
love disappear on the other side of it.**

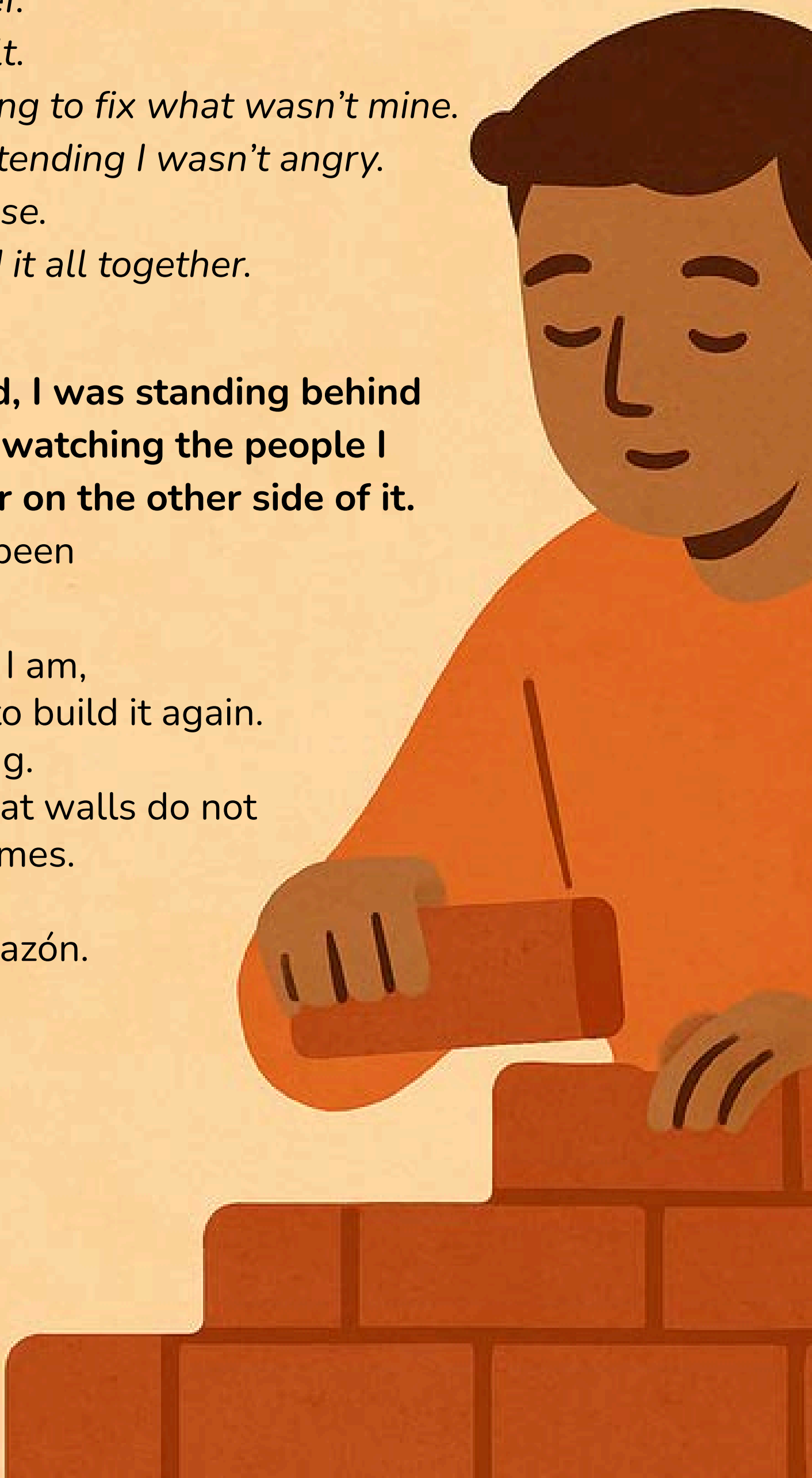
This wall has been
passed down.

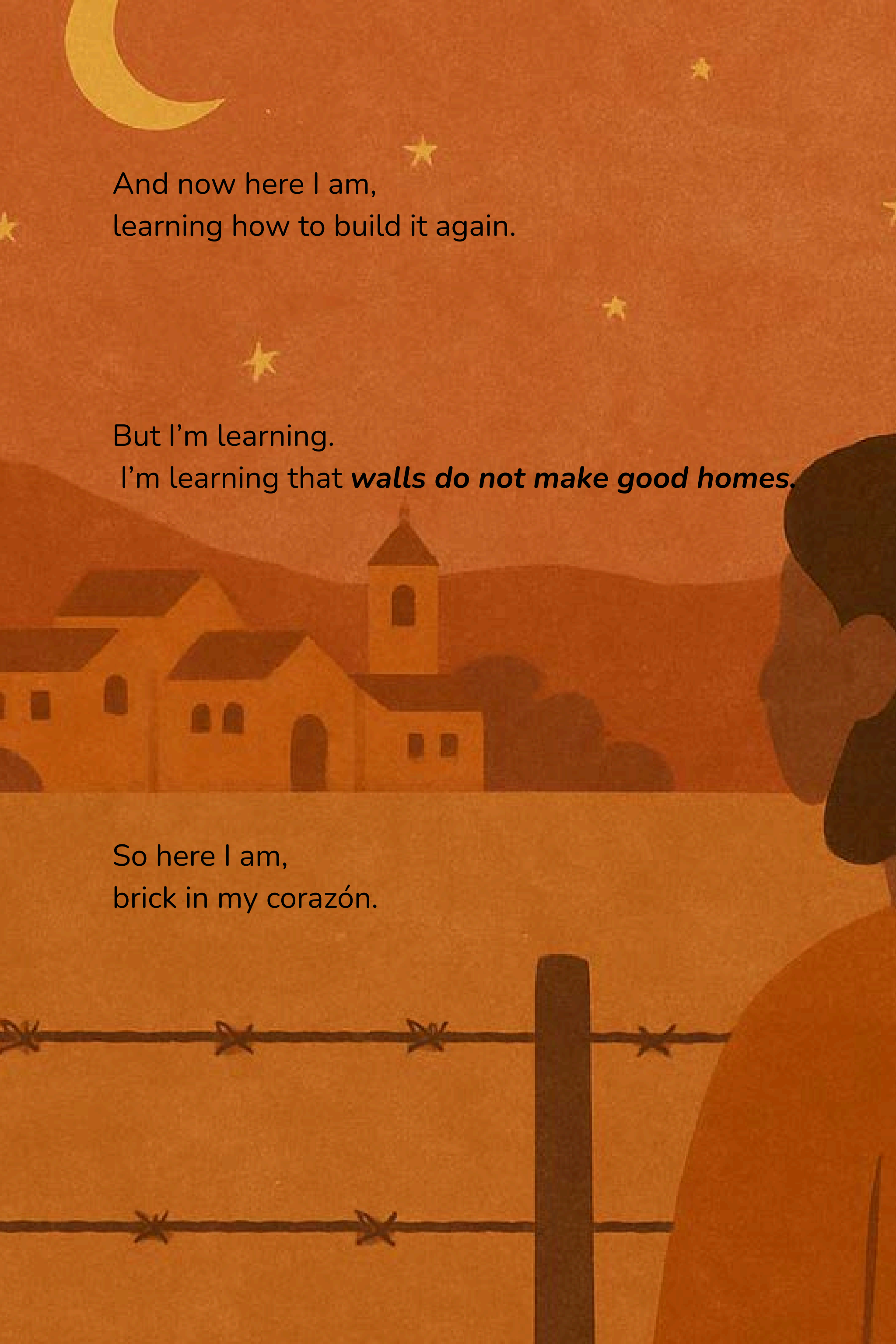
And now here I am,
learning how to build it again.

But I'm learning.

I'm learning that walls do not
make good homes.

So here I am,
brick in my corazón.





And now here I am,
learning how to build it again.

But I'm learning.
I'm learning that **walls do not make good homes.**

So here I am,
brick in my corazón.

This wall is my wall.

And I want to break it down.

But what if it floods?

Shall I offer my tears?

What is it trying to protect me from?

Do I have to forgive

to move through?

I don't know how to tear it all down.

Or whether it's the right thing to do.

But this is where I am.

Forgive me.

For I was not ready to meet you.



It is Here, Aqui

It is here where you **ground yourself**.

Es aquí donde sientes la tierra, y tu
pecho llenar con aire

It is here where you cry for your ancestors,
where their voices whisper back, "**Animo.**"

It is here where your heart calls out for your **hermanos,**
tus hijas, tu familia,

Y aunque no siempre respondan, **aquí siguen contigo.**



It is here where *you are allowed to **feel**, to **breathe**, to **remember**.*

It is here where you can **play, reír, sentir, enamorate.**

It is here where you follow what is true.

It is here where you **see the weight you carry,**

where you notice the shame, the envy, the pain you were never taught to name.

It is here where you have ignored the voice inside you for too long.

Aquí, donde siempre hay algo más importante que hacer.

Aquí, donde el silencio pesa más que las palabras.

But it is also here

Aquí es donde puedes dejarlo ir.

Aquí es donde puedes sanar.

Aquí es donde puedes ser libre.

And aquí if you want it

Aquí es donde puedes empezar de nuevo.



Un Momento PAUSE. BREATHE. NOTICE.

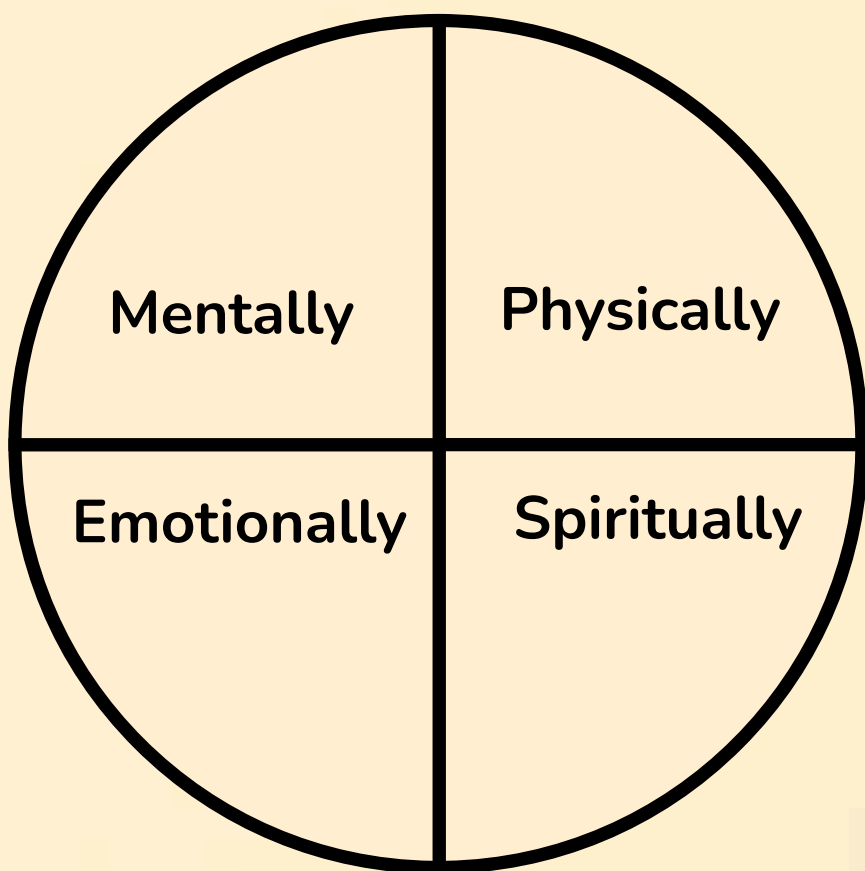
We ask it every day:
“How are you?”

But do we really mean it?

Let's go deeper. It's not a box to check off, but rather with your words and your whole self.

Lets go deeper.
In a journal.
As a voice note.
In prayer.
Or just silently to
yourself with a friend.

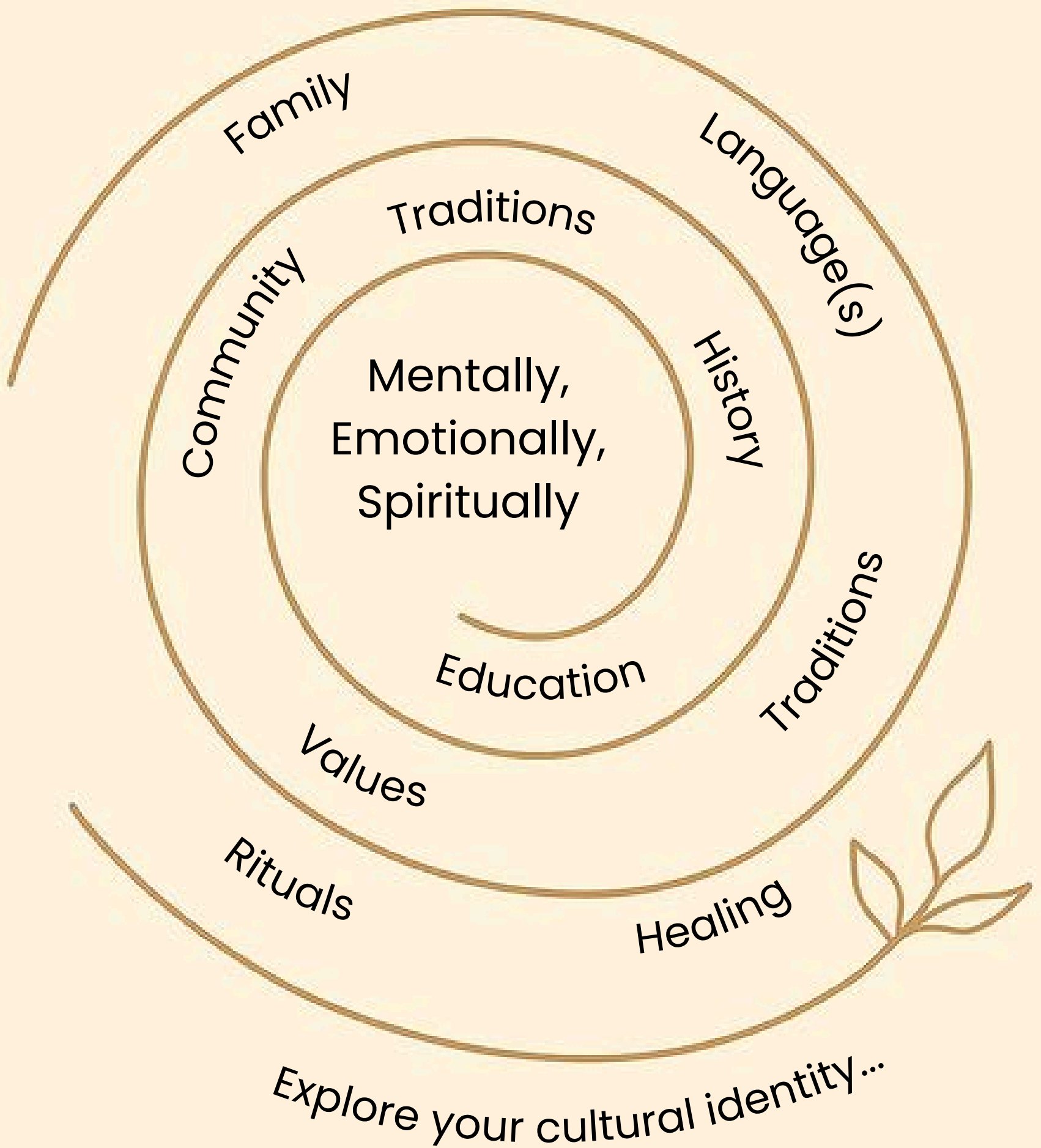
How are you really?



You can say as much or as little as you want. And if you can, bring this into conversation with a friend, a loved one, or a trained professional.



How are you really?

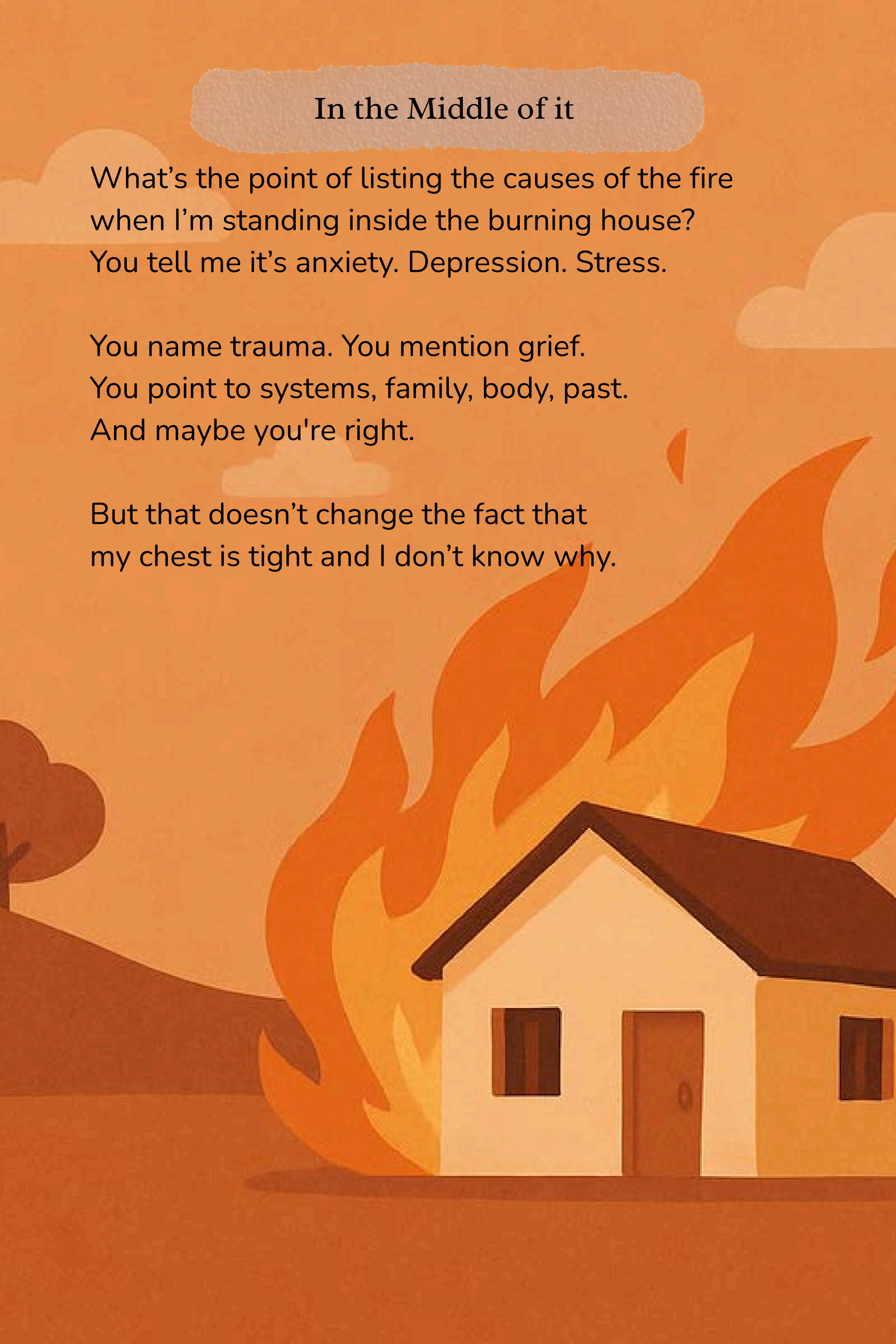


In the Middle of it

What's the point of listing the causes of the fire when I'm standing inside the burning house? You tell me it's anxiety. Depression. Stress.

You name trauma. You mention grief. You point to systems, family, body, past. And maybe you're right.

But that doesn't change the fact that my chest is tight and I don't know why.



I can't slow my thoughts.
I don't feel safe in my own skin.



That's the thing about **mental health**
it's not just something to think about.
It's something you live.
Something you feel.

Even when you can't name it.
Even when you don't understand it.

This is a map in a Forest

We list things because we're trying to see clearly.

Because naming is a kind of power.

It doesn't put the fire out. But it shows us where it started. It helps us understand:

This didn't come from nowhere.

There are patterns.

There are systems.

There are reasons your body responds the way it does.



So yes, we name it :

Brain chemistry.

Childhood trauma.

Loss.

Generational silence.

Poverty.

Pressure.

Loneliness.

Love.

Faith.

And the body that holds it all.

But this is not just a checklist.

This is a map.

And you are in the middle of the journey.

Not broken.

Not behind.

Just here.



So What Now?

You pause.

You breathe.

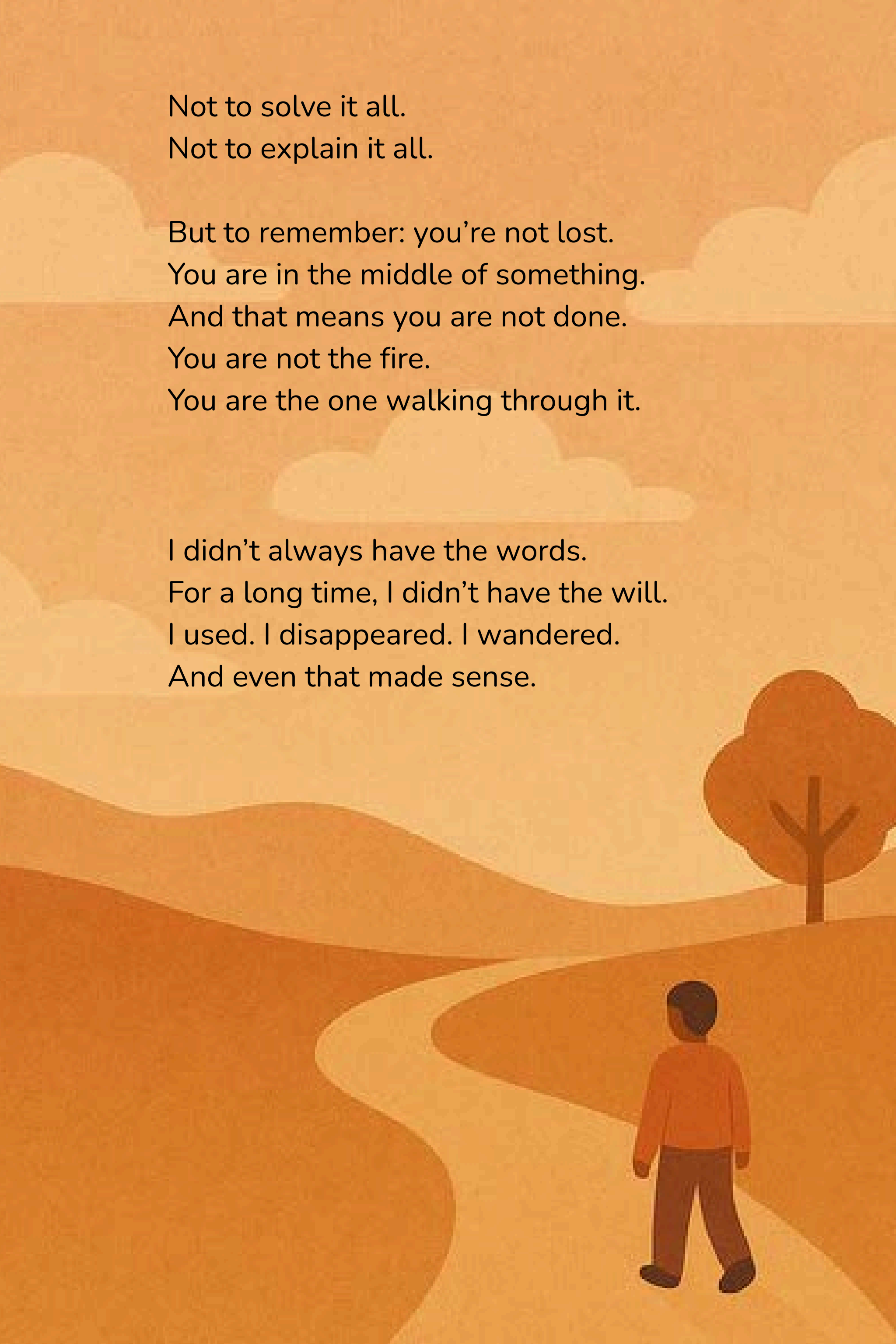
You start where you are.

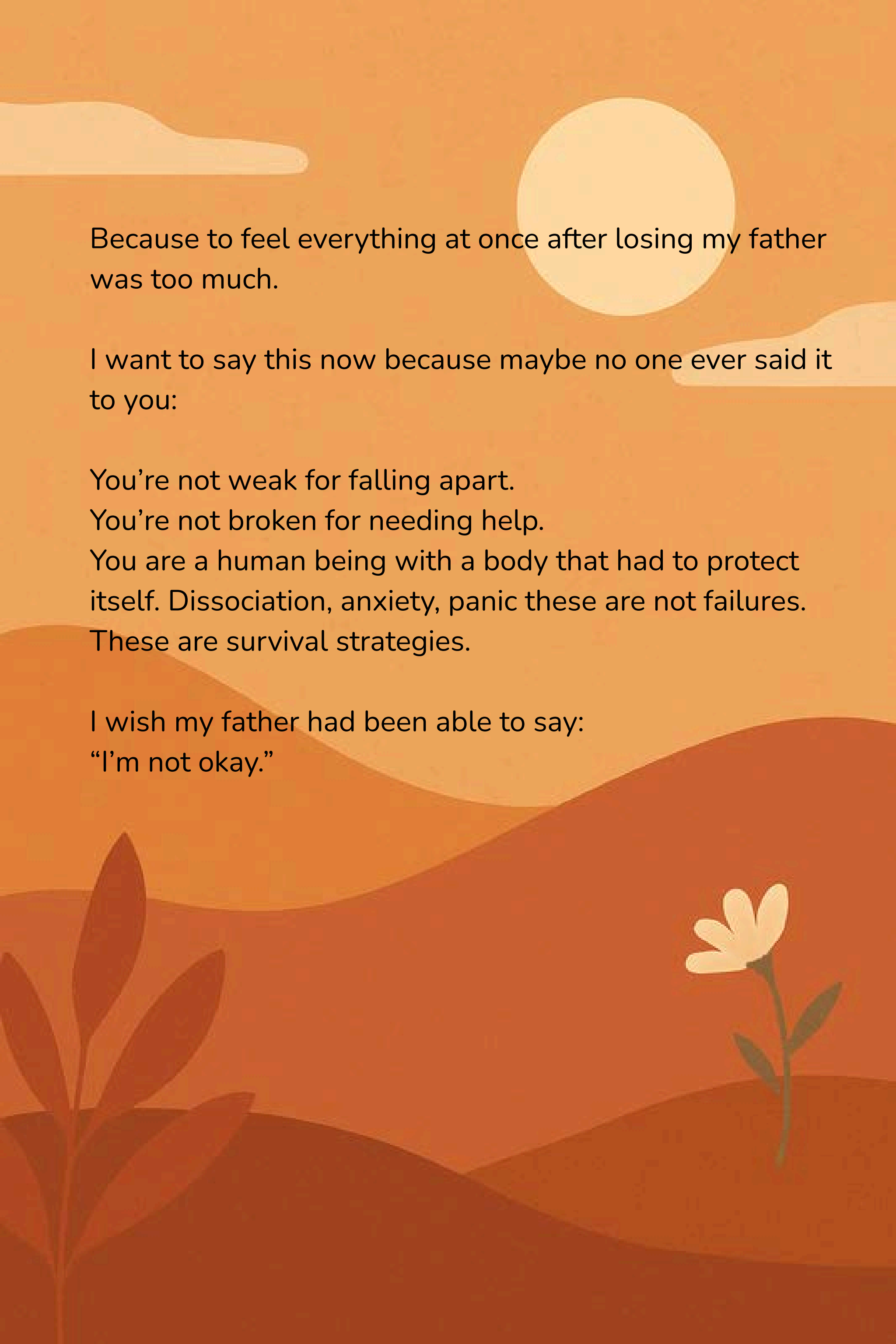


Not to solve it all.
Not to explain it all.

But to remember: you're not lost.
You are in the middle of something.
And that means you are not done.
You are not the fire.
You are the one walking through it.

I didn't always have the words.
For a long time, I didn't have the will.
I used. I disappeared. I wandered.
And even that made sense.





Because to feel everything at once after losing my father was too much.

I want to say this now because maybe no one ever said it to you:

You're not weak for falling apart.

You're not broken for needing help.

You are a human being with a body that had to protect itself. Dissociation, anxiety, panic these are not failures.

These are survival strategies.

I wish my father had been able to say:

“I'm not okay.”

I wish he didn't have to carry it all in silence.
I wish he got to rest.
And I wish I could give him the hug I now know
how to give myself.

That's what this is about.
Mental health isn't fixing yourself.
It's remembering:

I am allowed to feel.
I am allowed to heal.
I am allowed to enjoy this life.



Therapy has helped. Lexapro has helped.

But what helped most
was finally **facing the truth.**

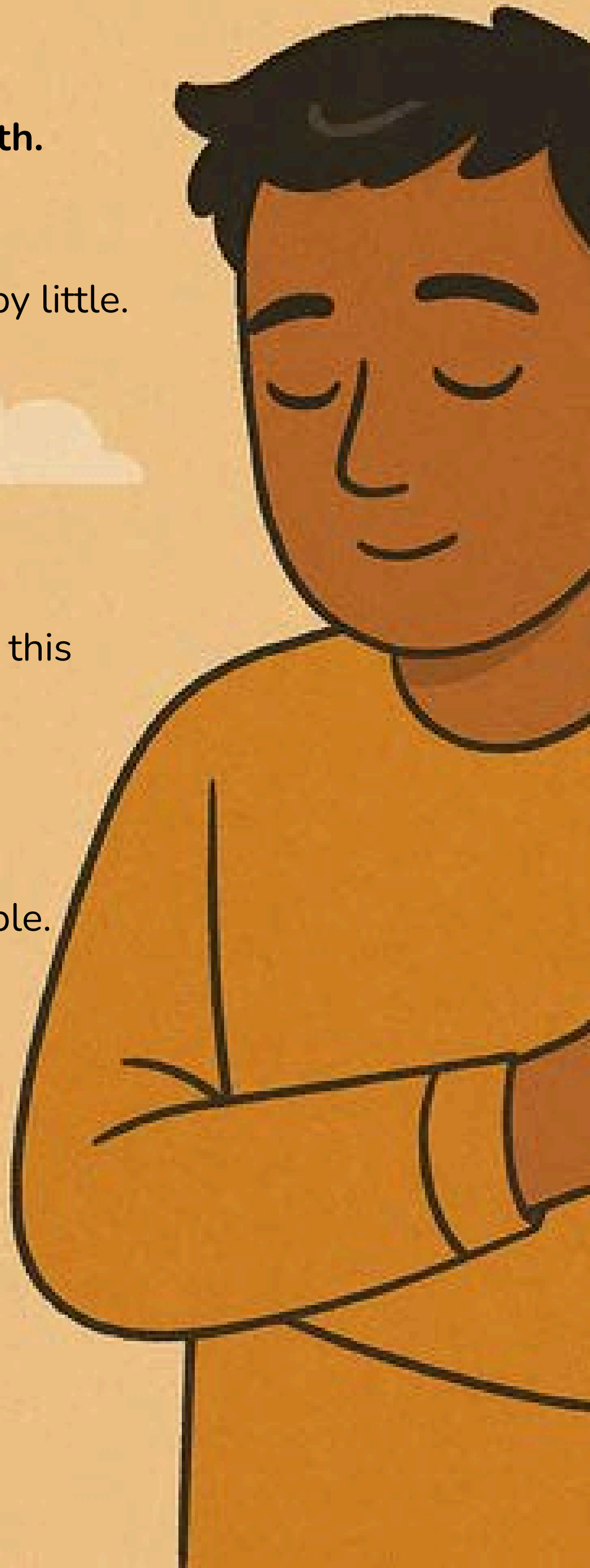
Not all at once. But little by little.

With support.

And if you've never heard this
before, let me say it here:
It gets better.

Not perfect. Not painless.
But intentional and possible.

You matter
You are enough
You can succeed



Silent Suffering

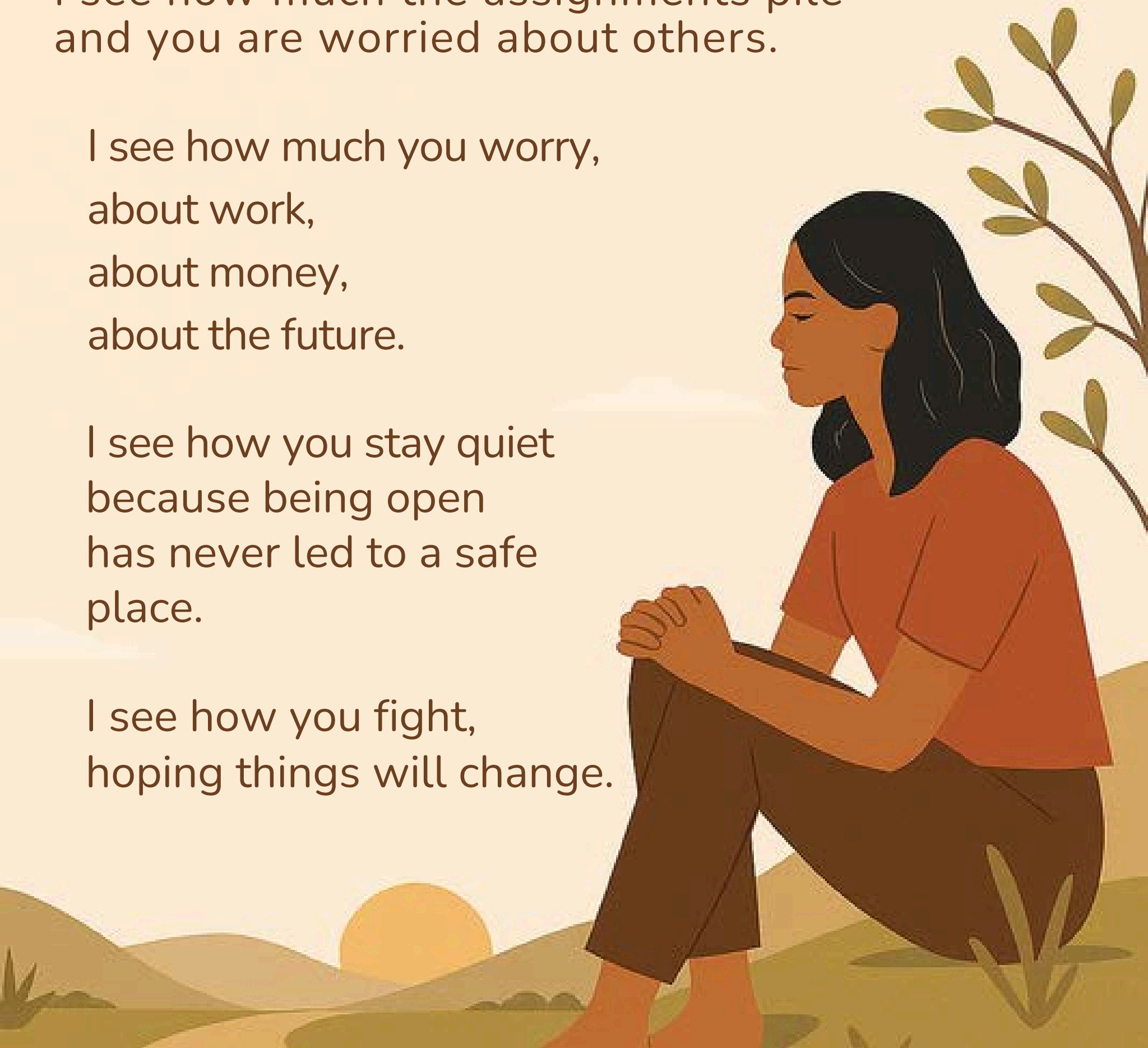
I do not know who you are,
but I know there are things
You cannot say
I see you.

I see the weight you carry
behind your smile.
I see how hard you try to hold
everything together for the kids.
I see how much the assignments pile
and you are worried about others.

I see how much you worry,
about work,
about money,
about the future.

I see how you stay quiet
because being open
has never led to a safe
place.

I see how you fight,
hoping things will change.



I know.....

I know it feels like *there is never enough time.*

I know it feels like *this system was never built for you.*

I know it feels like *your voice does not matter.*

I know you hear the same stories
"When I was your age..."

And you wonder why **no one ever asked how you felt.**

I know a part of you feels like **something is off.**

I know a part of you feels like **you've never really touched the ground.**

Maybe a part of you just wants to hug *your mother, your father, your niños.....* but something holds you back.



I know you've been told:

"Ponte fuerte that's just life."

"We didn't have therapy, and we turned out fine."

"You don't need help, you need to be stronger."

"Tienes techo y comida, ¿de qué te quejas?"



What have you been told?_____?

I know you want to check in on
your kids,
But you were not taught how,

You don't have the time.
You ask if they're okay, but they don't
open up.
And part of you wonders
"Did I do something wrong... "

I know you pray.
Hoping the weight lifts.
That God will hold what you
cannot carry.



Yo se que extrañas el pueblo.

I know sometimes you think about going back,
but you're scared you won't belong there either.

I know the Spanish you speak here isn't the same
Spanish they speak there. I know you fear the day
you could get stopped and sent back.

I know you hope to go to church to spend time
with family.

I know you put so much effort into making sure
everyone is okay.

But I also know...

I know sometimes you drink and **the weight settles in.**
I know sometimes you feel like **you're on the edge of
falling apart.**



I know you tell yourself you
are fine... you are not fine

I know sometimes it's
exhausting just to be you.

I know asking for help feels
like something you were
never taught to do.

Because asking for help
meant being vulnerable.
And being vulnerable meant
being weak.
And being weak was
never an option.



And still you keep going.

Because, really, what other choice is there?

You, who feels **unseen, unheard, unrooted**

I see you.

And even if no one has told you today,
Even if no one has ever told you

You are not alone.
And maybe, just maybe

You don't have to carry this alone.



OFFERINGS

(A Brief Note)

I wrote this to understand myself.
To make sense of what I carry.

When I was a teenager, my father passed away.
That loss left a silence I didn't know
how to speak to. For years, I didn't have
the words.

These are my offerings.

The words I wish I had when silence was
the only sound.

I believe these are the messages he would have
given.

To the one reading this:

It took me years to arrive here.

With love and support,

I thank those who walked with me.

May you find your healing,
whatever it looks like.

-Tino Melchor

