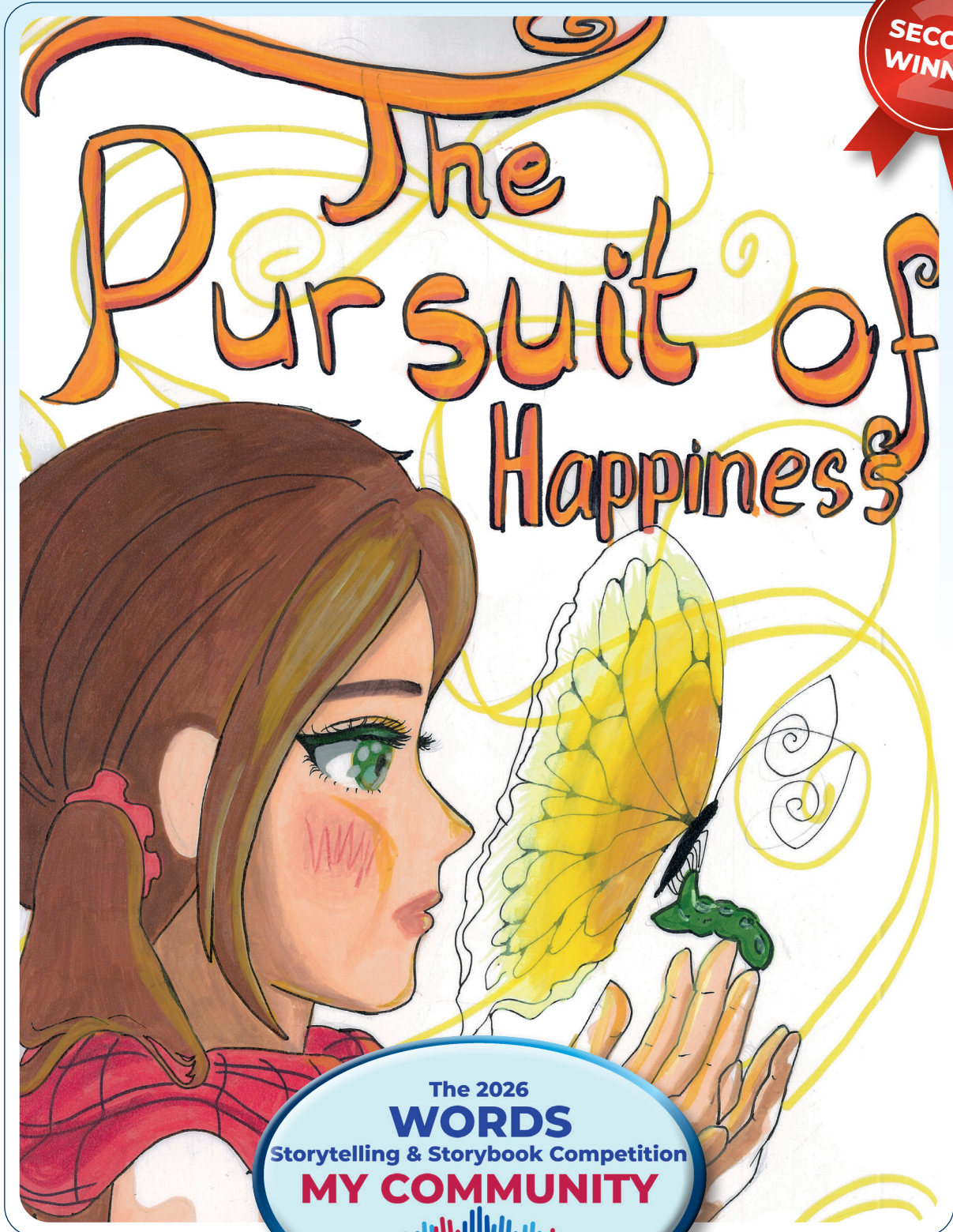




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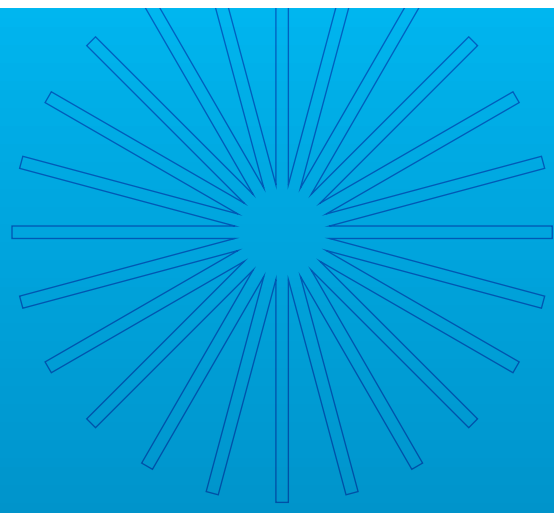


- THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS -



The 2026
WORDS
Storytelling & Storybook Competition
MY COMMUNITY





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American Indonesian Exchange Foundation (AMINEF)
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These storybooks have been lightly edited for clarity.

Table of Contents

4	Foreword
5	About the WORDS Competition
7	The Pursuit of Happiness
17	About the Author
18	About AMINEF
19	About the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Program and ETA in Indonesia

Foreword

The seventeen stories presented in this book came from a collaborative process between students and their teachers— both their home institution teacher (co-teacher) and the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) serving in their schools. At the heart of the collaborative process is the desire to foster understanding and to bridge differences. The schools where they taught were selected through a collaborative process between AMINEF, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs to host the ETAs. Indeed, everything about this program underlines cooperation between all parties involved.

After a long selection and preparation process, the ETAs served in Indonesia for eight months. They came from various states in the US, from New York to California, Vermont to Louisiana - some from urban areas, others more rural. Together, they represent the rich landscape of places and cultures in America. Likewise, in Indonesia, the ETAs were exposed to and experienced life in various places and cultures. They co-taught English in various areas, spreading from Padang, Jambi, Lampung, Kulon Progo, Kudus, Sidoarjo, Praya, Palangkaraya, Makassar, and Kendari.

Over the eight months the ETAs, co-teachers, and students, in essence, serve as cultural ambassadors to one another. They forged friendships beyond the classroom walls and invested their time and energy in the communities. And this year's theme for the WORDS Storybook competition is indeed "My Community".

The stories you are about to read here were written by the stars of each school. The authors won a local competition organized by the ETAs and the co-teachers. They then worked intensively on their books and on how to best narrate the stories. In April, the students, co-teachers, and ETAs were invited to Jakarta to celebrate their journey – from beginning to learn English to becoming authors and, subsequently, storytellers.

The students performed confidently in front of a panel of four prominent judges who are all Fulbrighters from Indonesia and the US: Ahmad Fuadi, an author of best-selling novels including "Negeri 5 Menara" and a prominent public speaker; Anna Grundström, a performing artist and independent researcher based in Brooklyn, New York; Azalia Muchransyah, filmmaker, scholar, and lecturer at BINUS University; and Douglas Ramage, AMINEF Board Member and founding Managing Director of Bower-GroupAsia Indonesia.

The third place went to Clarintha Glory Amungin Allokendek from SMK Raden Umar Said Kudus with "Hannah The One-Man Team" whose story reminded us of the importance of collaboration with others. Putri Permata Sari from SMK 9 Padang's story "The Pursuit of Happiness", won second place. It is a beautiful story about self-acceptance and creating a community of your own.

In first place was Florencia Kirana Wilman from SMK 6 Padang, with her story "The Day Coffee Called Us Home." Ms. Wilman presented a powerful reminder that, amid disasters and challenges, communities can work together and find solutions. Her story showed that sometimes what the community needs is one person to plow the way, helping each other, and others will follow.

The WORDS Competition is a celebration for all: the students, the ETAs, and the co-teachers. It is a celebration of a new, and hopefully lasting, connection among people. And AMINEF is proud to have been part of these connections.

Dr. Sandra Hamid

Executive Director, AMINEF

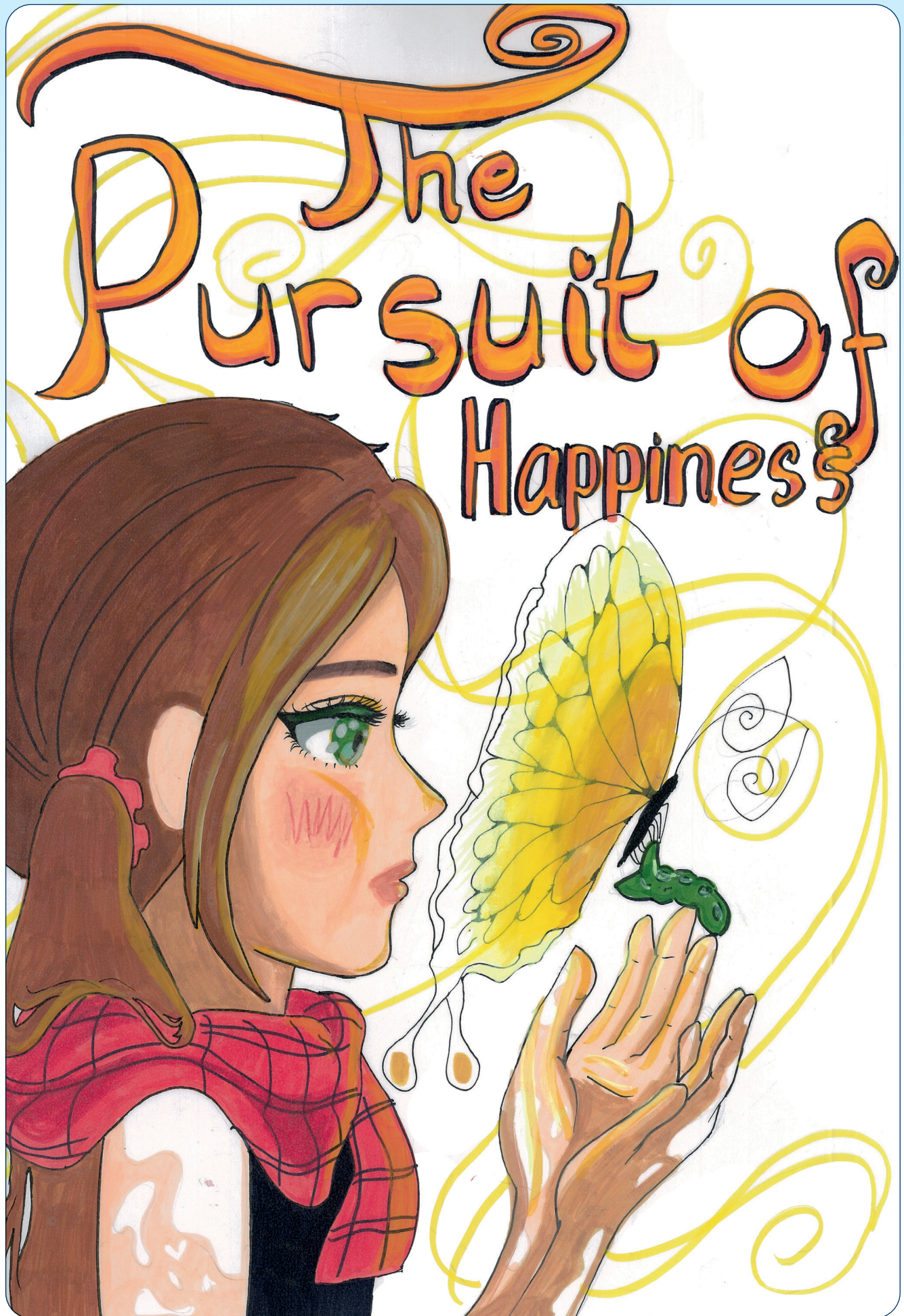
About the WORDS Competition

WORDS is a national English-language competition that brings together one student from each Fulbright ETA host school. Launched as a speech and talent contest in 2007, it evolved into a storytelling and storybook competition in 2018.

Finalists first win their school-level competition, which Fulbright ETAs organize in collaboration with the co-teachers. ETAs support students through brainstorming sessions, workshops, and performance feedback.


A highlight of the AMINEF year, the WORDS Competition allows 10th and 11th graders to showcase their storytelling skills, English proficiency, and cultural insights. In 2026, seventeen finalists will bring the theme **“My Community”** to life through their original stories.





Today,
Karenina IS
LOVED 
by Many.



But...
Was she
ALWAYS
LOVED 
this way ?

Back then... Nina was alienated by her peers.
Words were thrown at her like stones.

Don't sit near her!

Eww disgusting

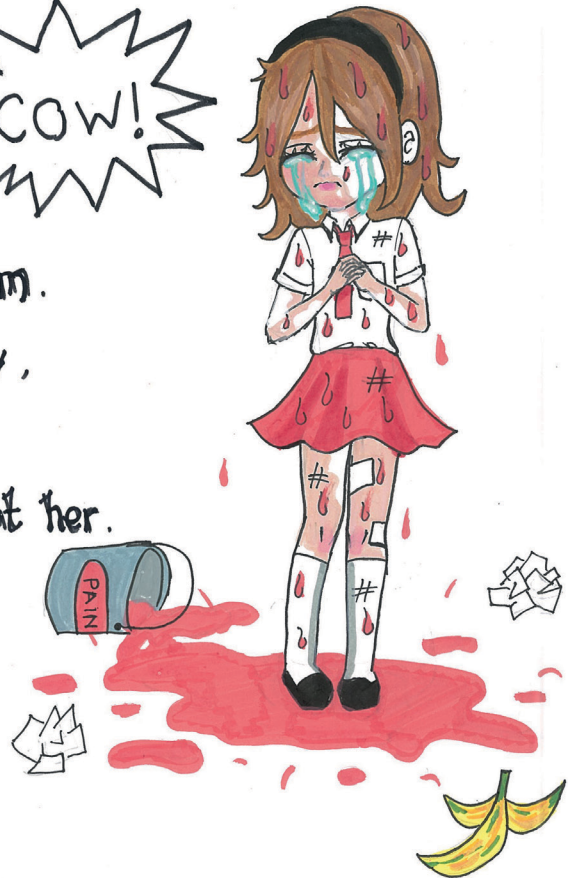
COW!

But Nina tried to ignore them.

Pushes in the hallway,
Kicks under the desk,

things thrown at her.

Though the teachers saw her -
their eyes always looked away



Scared that it would only make things worse,
She preferred to keep it to herself.



By junior high, hope had learned how to shut itself deep inside her, leading Nina to isolation. All just because of a skin condition, Vitiligo. Nina preferred solitary activities, like...

Match starting in 3.. 2.. 1!

Online Games.

For hours, Nina played with online friends who made her... feel accepted, something she never felt in real life.



MayAyam Enak



Dictator Sparta



One night, her phone notification rang.

GUYS! FACE REVEAL ON VOICE CAM?

Can we.. not? i usually keep my camera off.

it's okay, don't be scared

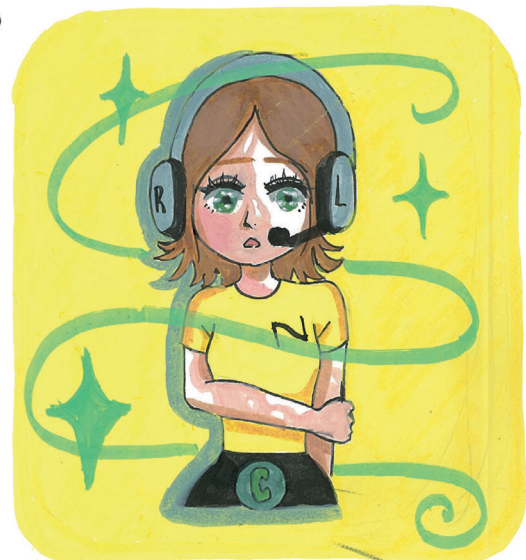
We won't judge^^

Eww why didn't you warn us! Oh, i'm gonna throw up!

Nina hesitated yet she had no choice but to press that button.



Silent Nina

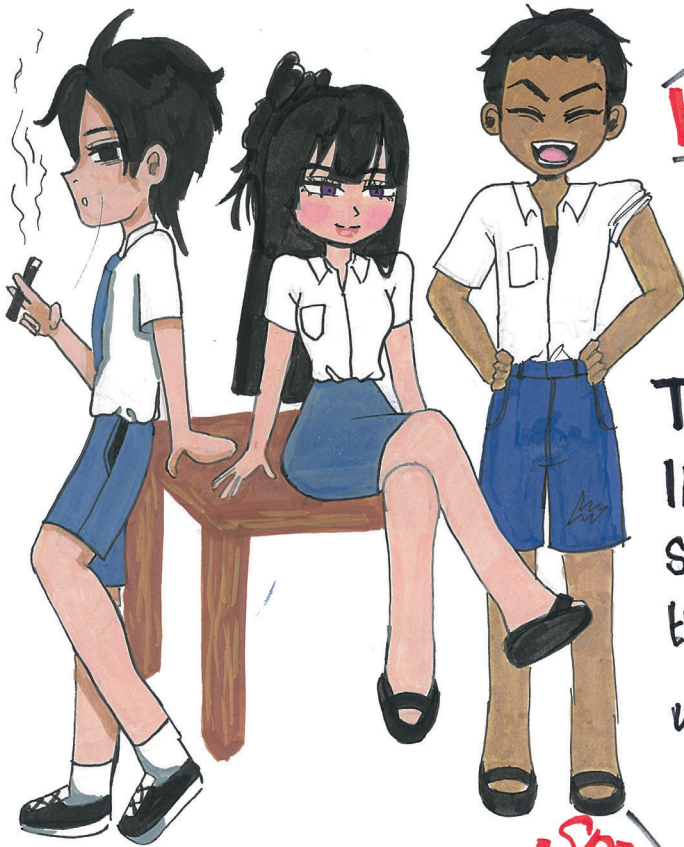


But no..... That didn't happen

is that vitiligo? That's so COOL

Honestly... You're Beautiful.

And in that small moment, Nina's heart felt lighter than it had in years.

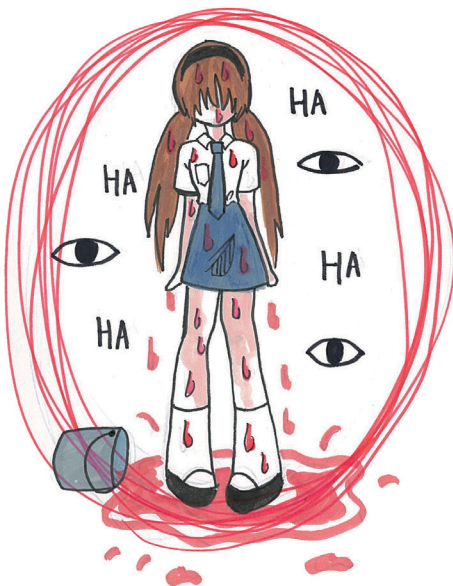


HAHA After that night,
Nina finally believed

she was just like everyone
else even with her vitiligo.

The holidays passed,
It's her first day of high school.
Stares followed as usual, but
this time, Nina walked in
with confidence.

But as soon as she
opened her class door –
"Eat that, cow!!"
Red water dripped down her body.
It's her old bullies!!



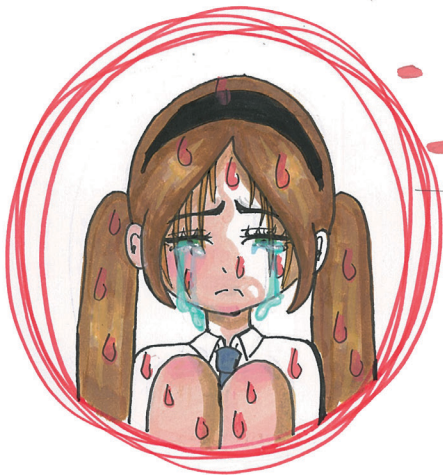
Shame burned, so she ran.

And as she ran,
one thought echoed in her head.

“Online friends are liars!”

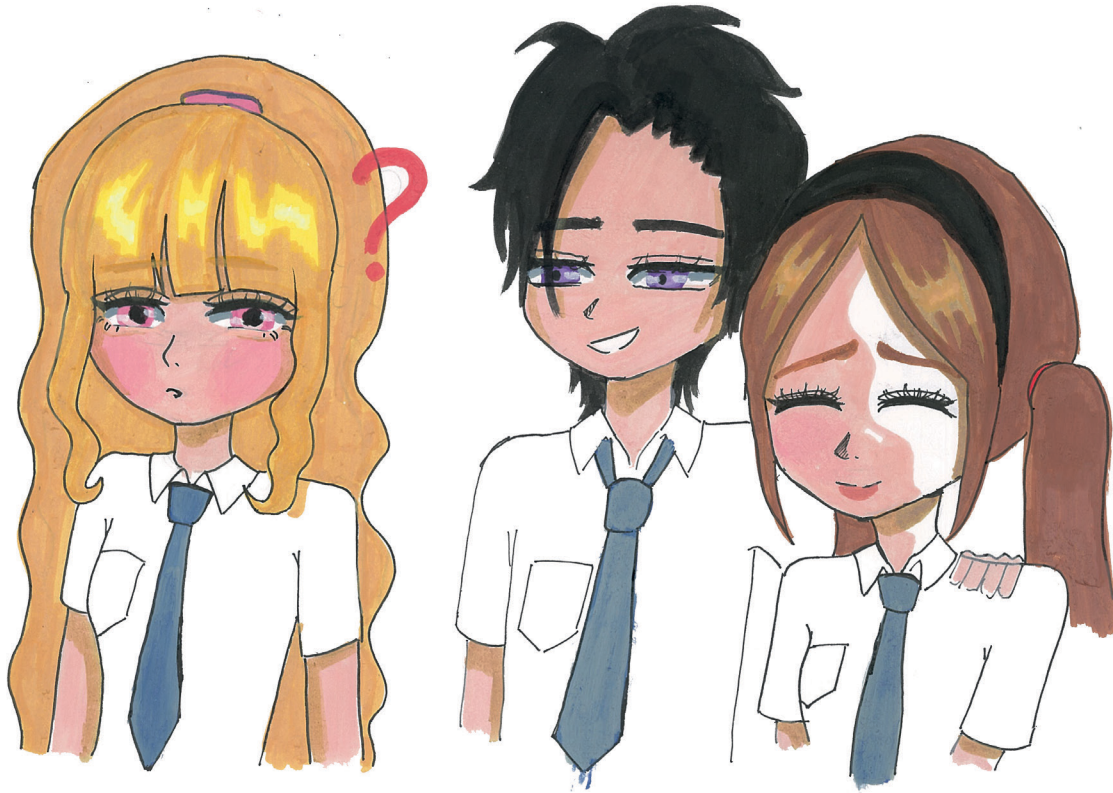
“Maybe I’ll never be accepted...”

Nina cried alone.



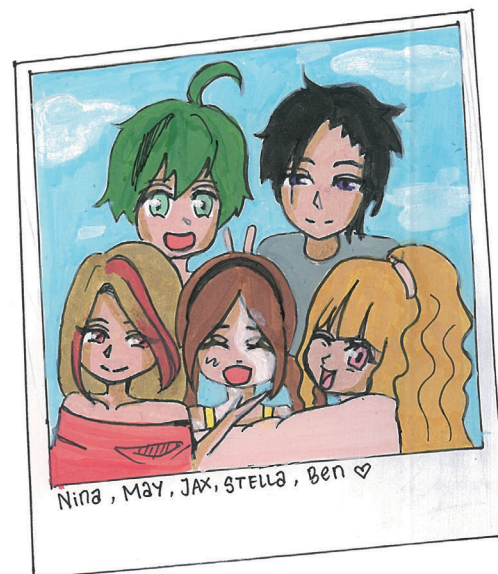
Hey, Nina right?
It's me, Jax! I mean -
Dictator sparta.

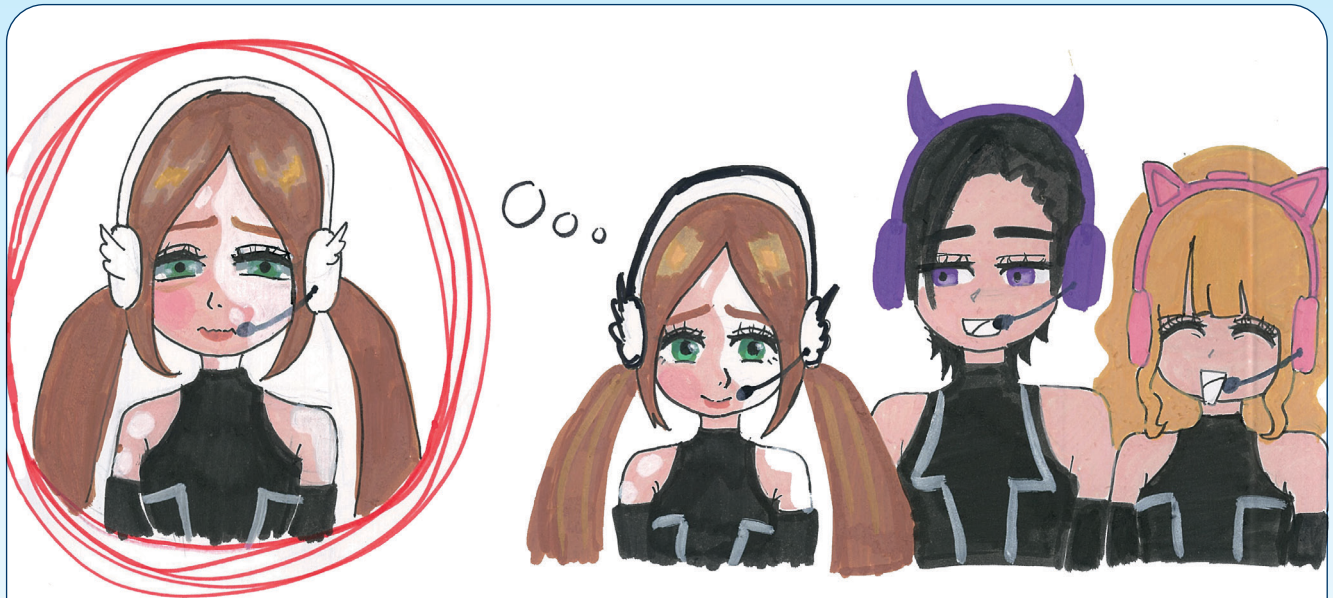
Nina looked up,
Surprised, he recognized
her from the many matches
they played together.



He showed her May, one of their online best friends too. And together, they introduced Nina to their friends. They played games, laughed, and for the first time, Nina felt wanted and accepted, in real life.

Jax, May, Stella, and Ben stayed with her after that. They taught her how to stand her ground instead of running away.

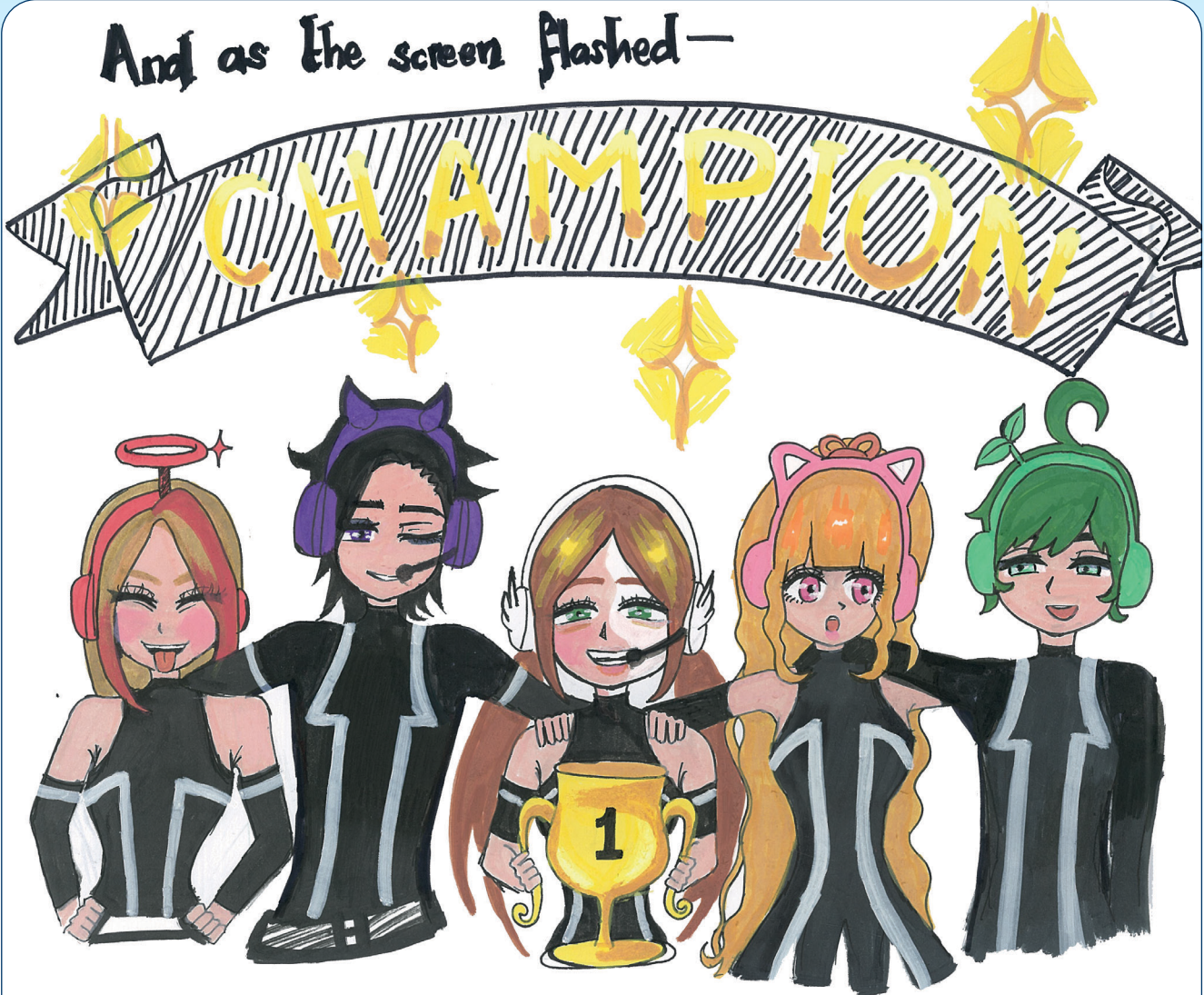





They joined the Esport club. Now they were at a big competition, just seconds before the match began...
 "We got this Nina". Having someone to notice her anxiety was new to her. Her friends stood beside her, not as a team... but as a "Family". Nina looked at her friends beside her. And for the first time, she understood something, she wasn't hard to love... She was just waiting for the right people. And maybe acceptance wasn't about online or real life — Maybe it was about who chose to stay.



And as the screen flashed—



“There was a time I felt like I didn’t belong
But I never changed who I was — I just kept going.
And today, I’m standing here.... With my friends.”

Nina smiled, not because she won the game,
but because she had finally won
her place in life 

About the Author

Putri Permata Sari SMKN 9 Padang



I am Putri Permata Sari, or most people call me Kimmy. I am an eleventh-grade student from SMK Negeri 9 Padang, majoring Hotelier Hospitality. I am always curious and enjoy experimenting with new and untested approaches, especially when it comes to art and human sentiment.

In my free time, I like to draw and hanging out with my friends. I enjoy imagining feelings around me before transforming it into art (any kind).

I always crave change, growth, and improvement to gain new skills in life. Opportunities like competitions are important and precious for me!



About AMINEF

The American Indonesian Exchange Foundation (AMINEF) is the binational Fulbright Commission for Indonesia. AMINEF's many educational exchange programs have increased mutual understanding between the United States and Indonesia and strengthened the ties that unite our two countries.

Since 1952, more than 3,500 Indonesians and 1,400 Americans have participated in exchanges. Annually, 80-100 Indonesians travel to the US through Fulbright grants for degree study, teaching, research, or non-degree professional fellowships. Similarly, up to 60 Americans receive Fulbright support to contribute their expertise in teaching, research, or as Specialists, offering insights to Indonesian institutions.

For detailed information on degree scholarships and non-degree fellowships available to Indonesians and Americans, visit the AMINEF website at www.aminef.or.id.

About the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Program and ETA in Indonesia

The Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) Program, one of the US State Department-funded Fulbright programs in many countries worldwide, places recent college graduates and young professionals as English teaching assistants in primary and secondary schools or universities overseas.

The program helps improve international students' English-language abilities and knowledge of the US while increasing the US student's language skills and knowledge of the many host countries worldwide.

In Indonesia, the Fulbright ETAs are placed in high schools (SMA, SMK, and Madrasah) that assist local English teachers. The program has been running for over two decades, since 2004, affecting thousands of Indonesian students and their communities across the archipelago. AMINEF works closely with the Indonesian Ministries of Primary and Secondary Education and Religious Affairs to administer the Fulbright ETA program in Indonesia.



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AMINEF

Intiland Tower, 11th Floor
Jl. Jend. Sudirman Kav. 32
Jakarta 10220

T. +62 21 5793 9085/86
F. +62 21 5793 9089

www.aminef.or.id




AMINEF/Fulbright Indonesia




fulbrightindonesia




@FulbrightID



AMINEFFulbrightIndonesia



aminef_fulbrightindonesia



infofulbright_ind@aminef.or.id

