

# Creating a Graphic Novel: What I Learned

BY KAMILA J. OSTER

When the different options for the final project were presented for this class, I knew right away that I wanted to draw a graphic novel. As a young child, I spent most of my free time drawing and would create my own books, even though I could not yet read or write. I would first illustrate the pages and then would have my mother fill in the words and read back the stories to me. I even wanted to be a children's book author for a while, so when I heard about this project, I was very excited. Despite my overall enthusiasm, I did at first have trouble deciding what to make my comic about. At first, I wanted to write about my grandparents. My mother's parents immigrated from Puerto Rico, and my dad's parents came to the US from Denmark after World War II. However, after some thought I decided I wanted the story to be about something I had experienced first-hand. Eventually, I decided to focus my project on several social justice issues I faced after moving to Maryland and attending John Nevins Andrews School.

While making this project, I realized just how time consuming it is to make a graphic novel. My talents as an artist have definitely improved from when I was younger; therefore, it took much more time to create a story than when I was five. However, getting to learn about a new art style was a very interesting experience. Although I

still draw to this day, it is usually not in a cartoon-like style, so there was a significant learning curve I had to go through, especially when making sure my characters looked consistent. I also found it interesting just how much a slant or curve of a line can impact how a character looks and what emotion they are portraying. I really enjoyed creating different emotions for my characters and, due to the comic book style, also being able to include a character's thoughts or word bubbles.

In addition to art, I also got to learn more about the story I was writing about. While I knew most of what had happened, there were many specifics I had to fill in by doing my own research on the topic and by talking with my mom. Due to my young age while the events in my story were occurring, I did not fully understand everything that was happening at the time. Thus, it was nice to be able to develop a better understanding of why my experience at JNA was the way it was, now that I am older. In fact, if I were to do this project again, I would want to add more of these experiences and create an overall longer piece that does not include as many time jumps. Despite this, I am glad I chose to do a graphic novel for my project, as it not only taught me about how to create a comic book, but also about myself and how my time at JNA shaped me as a person.


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# THE PICTURES ON THE WALLS

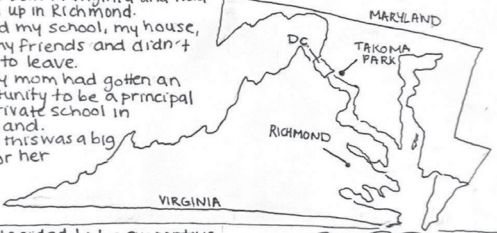
• Kamila J. Oster.

The summer before I started 7<sup>th</sup> grade, my mom told my brother, sister and I that we were moving to Maryland.




We did not have the best reactions

I was born in Virginia and had grown up in Richmond. I liked my school, my house, and my friends and didn't want to leave. But my mom had gotten an opportunity to be a principal at a private school in Maryland. I knew this was a big deal for her



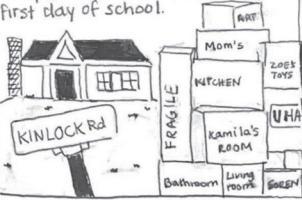
So I decided to be supportive




I asked my mom what school she'd be working at. I was hoping it'd be Spencerville. My cousins went there and had told me how big, new, and cool it was. My excitement was crushed when she responded:

Well, it's not Spencerville. It's a very small school in Takoma Park called **JOHN NEVINS ANDREWS**... It's different, but I'm sure you all will love it.

We moved to our new house a couple days before the first day of school.



The day before the first day of school my cousins came over to help unpack. Eventually the subject of school came up.



Kamila, are you excited for your first day of school tomorrow?

Um, well I—

Yeah 7<sup>th</sup> grade! That's a big deal! You're so grown up. I remember when I was in 7<sup>th</sup>.


Angie, you're only one year older than her! 7<sup>th</sup> grade was last year.

Ang! Stop it! We don't want to scare her before her first day.


Whatever, Joanna. So, are you nervous? I know I would be if I was going to the bully school!

wait... what do you mean? I'm going to the bully school?!

Despite hearing this, I decided to be positive, though I was a little nervous.



Oh, you know, it's just something people say. Like, Spencerville has the rich kids; Olney has the weird kids and John has the bullies. You'll see tomorrow, they're huge! We played them in basketball last year, and I heard one of the girls punched a tree.



Hi, I'm Kamila. Wait, no Hi, I'm Kami. Nice to meet you!

That night I practiced introducing myself and smiling in the mirror.



August 2013

The morning of the first day of school, my brother, sister and I lined up in front of my mom's office for a picture and then headed off to our classrooms.

As I walked to class I noticed that JNA was very old. There were pictures on the walls of kids that had graduated over 100 years ago. JNA also wasn't as nice as my old school and a lot of things were broken and worn out.

As the bell rang, Ruth and I asked Isabelle about our homeroom teacher, Mrs. Howard.

She's really strict, people say she might be... well, you'll see. Just try to stay on her good side. She likes the quiet, smart kids.

When I arrived at my locker, I met two girls who had lockers next to mine. Ruth and Isabelle. Ruth was new, like me, but Isabelle had been at JNA since Pre-K.

As soon as I walked into class, I noticed that the kids looked so old. Some even had mustaches!

I thought I had walked into the wrong classroom, but sure enough Ruth and Isabelle were right behind me, so this had to be 7th grade.

The bell rang and we took our seats. Mrs. Howard began introducing herself and going over the class procedures.

Good Morning 7th grade! My name is Mrs. Howard. Welcome to the first day.

Mrs. Howard then began introducing the new students. Eventually she got to me. And this is Kami Ostor our new Principal, Ms. Rivera's daughter!

After homeroom, we had Bible and History with Mrs. Howard, and then it was time for lunch.

At JNA, we had lunch in the gym which was also the cafeteria and auditorium.

THE GYM CAFETERIA

Lunch table # 1 For [scary] 7th graders

Lunch Table # 2 For [Even scarier] 8th graders

Lunch table # 3 6th graders

me, Isabelle and Ruth

I sat down at the 7th grade table with my new friends and the rest of my classmates. Though I was a bit scared at first, after a while I relaxed and we all began sharing about summer, classes and teachers.

So Kami, what do you think of Mrs. Howard?

Um, well she seems nice.

Well of course you think that because I'm quiet and smart.

Well she's gonna like you. Look around you're the only white kid in the whole school!

What do you mean?

The rest of the students began to laugh and affirm what Zephy had said, some even adding their own thoughts.

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

Are you like adopted or something?

Yeah, you look nothing like Principal Rivera! You don't even have her last name.

The subject soon changed but I spent the rest of the day thinking.

It is true that I am white. My dad is Danish, however, I was raised primarily by my mom and her family and identified more with my Puerto Rican heritage at the time.

In fact, it hadn't ever really occurred to me that I didn't look like my mom or brother and sister. The schools and neighborhoods I had grown up in, in Virginia, were primarily white with some Latinos.

RECIPE

- 2 Puerto Rican Mom
- 1 Danish Dad
- Mix together
- Bake for 9 months
- Yields 3 biracial kids

• straight hair • tall • pale

• curly hair • short • tan

• dark eyes • short • tan

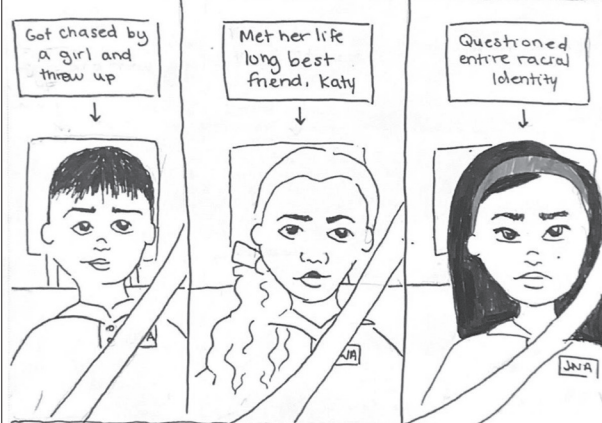
So, I had never really felt different and my comparative whiteness hadn't been pointed out. To be honest, I had never really noticed race, so realizing no one at JNA looked like me was a jarring experience.



That day, as we drove home from school, my mom asked us how our days went and what we thought of JNA.



We each took turns sharing and when it was my turn I decided to ask my mom the question that had been on my mind since lunch.



Hey mom, why aren't there any white kids at JNA?

well, Kami, in 1904 a hub of Seventh-day Adventist institutions were created in Takoma Park. These included the General Conference, a University, the Review and Herald and a hospital.

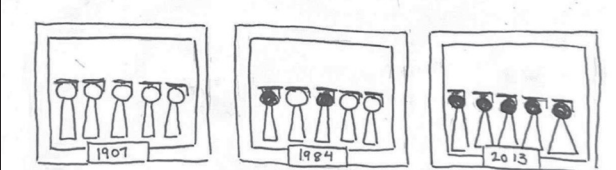


As a result, several families moved to this area to work here and they needed a place to send their kids to school.



They opened a high school, Takoma Academy, and two K-8 academies, Sligo and JNA. Each school had hundreds of white students, in fact some of your dad's sisters went to Takoma Academy.

But as Takoma Park began to diversify, many white families left. They began attending different schools and churches, like Spencerville and Olney. Eventually Takoma Park began to be viewed as unsafe, as more minorities moved in and several white families fled to more rural areas. Then the General Conference and Review and Herald moved. As soon as they finish building the new hospital, it will too.



That's why, if you look at the graduating class pictures in the hallways, you can see the gradual change of which races were represented.

Eventually, we arrived home and continued on with going to school and adjusting to our new lives. Little did we know how much our mom's brief history lesson would later impact us.

At JNA I began to get really involved

- I played the piano.
- Was a member of the National Honors Society.
- played on the soccer team
- joined the steel drum club
- was in the handbell choir.
- And played on the Lady Mustangs basketball team.

The more involved I got, the more friends I made, and my classmates didn't seem so big and scary anymore.

Mrs. Howard, you might wanna move Kami away from the window. She's gonna burn!

Hey Kami, don't stand next to that wall, you'll disappear!

Although, they would still tease me about my skin color from time to time, I usually just brushed it off. This was middle school after all, and every one got teased for something.

Even though I had learned to no longer be threatened by my classmates, I couldn't say the same for everyone. Every year, all of the SPA Academies neatly would play against each other at the Maryland Excel tournament



The Lady Mustangs were undefeated and had been for years, but that didn't stop the negative treatment we received at most games.

Often times the girls on the other teams would push and trip us or, a girl on another team would fake an injury and be given an extra attempt to make her missed free throw.



Even the parents of the opposing team would 'boo' at us when we played. And it seemed like the referees didn't even notice. We always ignored everything and despite the obstacles, we won first place that year.

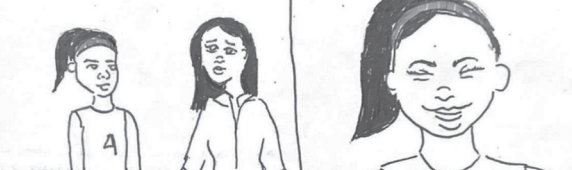
Coordinator of the tournament giving us our trophy. (Also ended up being my step-dad)





My mom eventually got off the phone and told me she had to go back to JNA for an important meeting.

She always had meetings, so I didn't think much of it and continued celebrating with my teammates.



That night my mom came to my room, clearly upset. I asked her if she was okay and she told me what had been bothering her.

They want to shut down JNA...

Is there anything we can do?

The conference wasn't giving JNA any money. They wanted to shut it down and merge it with Sligo. They said we needed more students, since most of the kids attending JNA were on a scholarship, in order to stay open. So we got to work.


But it seemed like no matter how hard we worked and prayed, the conference didn't care.





We hosted fundraisers and went door to door looking for donors and new students.

They even sold the land, our playground was on...

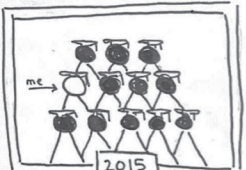
However, more students did end up coming and for a while we thought JNA might get to stay open.



These were very hopeful and exciting times — my mom even got remarried at the start of my eighth-grade year. I ended up getting to graduate from JNA.




curled hair for special occasions



and got my very own class picture on the wall.

For high school, my mom sent me to Spencerville. My step-siblings went to school there and it was right next to our new house.



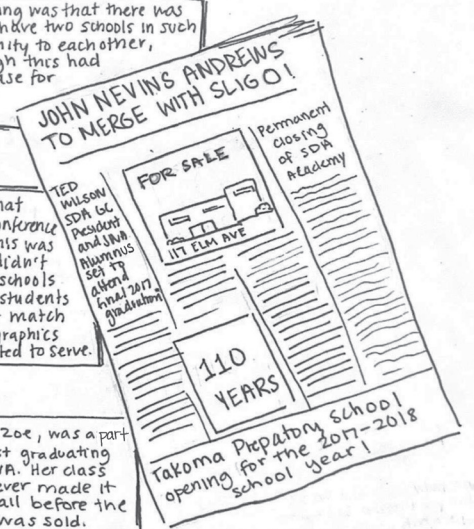
Isabele decided to come to Spencerville with me!

hmm... spencerville isn't as cool as Angie and Janna said.

it was my second year there when the conference announced it

John Nevins Andrews would be shut down the following school year and the building would be sold. The students from JNA would be expected to go to Sligo, which they would rename Takoma Preparatory School. This building was much too small to accommodate such a large influx of students and half of the staff from both schools would be let go.

Their reasoning was that there was no need to have two schools in such close proximity to each other, even though this had been the case for the last century.



Permanent closing of SDH Academy

FOR SALE

171 ELM AVE

110 YEARS

Takoma Preparatory School opening for the 2017-2018 school year!

WE all felt that what the conference meant by this was that they didn't want two schools filled with students that didn't match the demographics they wanted to serve.

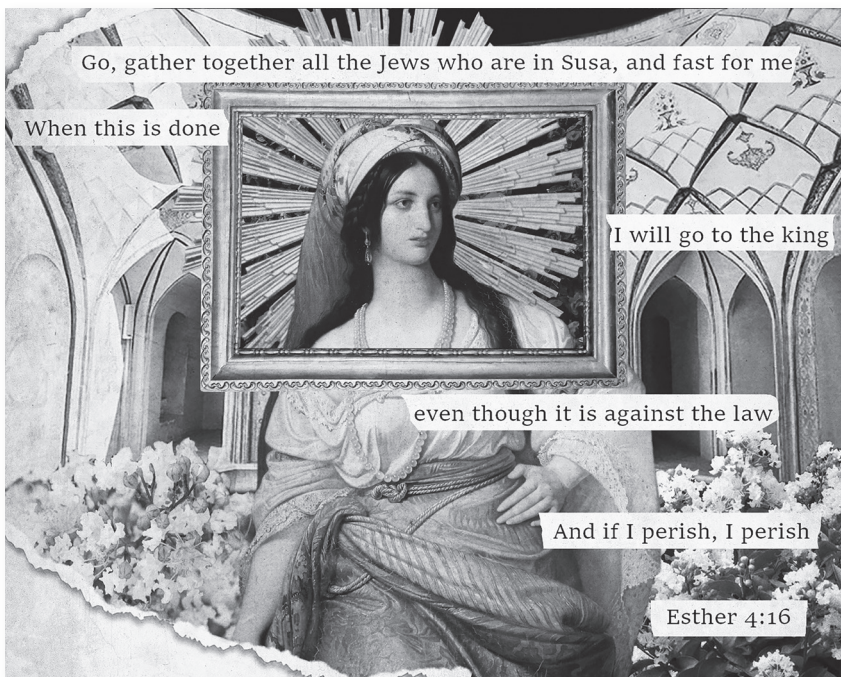
My sister, Zoe, was a part of the last graduating class of JNA. Her class picture never made it on the wall before the building was sold.

The memory of JNA lives on with those of us that were lucky enough to attend this school. I know that I, personally, would not be who I am today had my mom not enrolled us there, and I'm very grateful to have had this unique experience.



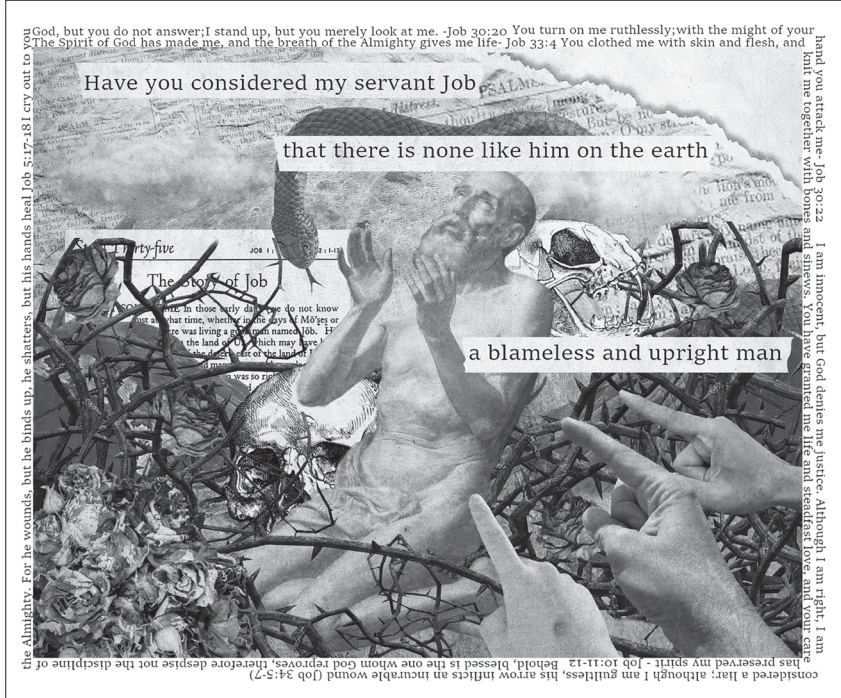
KAMILA J. OSTER, originally from Richmond, Virginia, but raised in Silver Spring, Maryland, is a student at Andrews University. She is currently in her third year and is studying English and pre-medicine, with a writing emphasis. After graduation, she hopes to attend medical school and continue pursuing art and writing.





# Esther

*The Collage of Esther* portrays her image. She is described as beautiful and obedient in the book of Esther. She was put into the mold of an obedient woman but, looking outside of the frame, shows herself as a Jewish woman.



# Job

*The Collage of Job* is the depiction of two views, with Job both praising and struggling with God on the thorny path that he went down. The wilting flowers growing on the thorns show that there is still hope on the painful path, and the collage shows Job's struggle. Around Job is the misfortune of events he went through in the book of Job.



**ALLISON WONG** is a graphic design artist who specializes in illustrations and other graphic works. Based in California, they are currently a student at La Sierra University, where they have had the opportunity to experience different art styles, as well as familiarize themselves with the Adventist institution. Taking inspiration from the stories told in different religious texts, they created art pieces that reflect on them.