

# **Social Impacts of ‘Once-a-Day’ Milking in New Zealand**

**Rupert Tipples and Nona Verwoerd**

**Agriculture Group,  
Agriculture and Life Sciences Division,  
Lincoln University,  
Canterbury.**

## **Agriculture in New Zealand**

- **Dairy exports = \$5.71 billion ( 21% of total merchandise exports)  
(SONZAF, 2005)**
- **3.6 million cows in 12,751 herds**
- **26,331 in Major Occupation Dairy Farming (1.5% of those occupied, Census 2001)**

# Dairy Industry Structural Change

- **Sole self employment is being replaced by more employment and employees**
- **Contracting labour force and less larger herds**
- **More management skills and staff are needed per herd**
- **Ageing of dairy farm population**
- **Hours worked increasing since 1991**  
**Now 32% work more than 70 hours per week**

# ***Strategic Framework for Dairy Farming's Future, 2005***

- **NZ Vision: 'World's best in dairying'**
- **Purpose: 'To enhance the sustainable competitive advantage of New Zealand dairy farming'**
- **Social sustainability only by implication: 'Be an attractive career prospect for current and potential farmers'**
- **Family succession rates in dairy farming perhaps as low as 6 percent?  
Sustainable?**

# The dairy farm labour crisis

- **Reputation: Low pay and bad employment relations**
- **Staff shortages since the late 1990s**
- **Response: Promotion of the career and lifestyle of dairy farming: *Windows to Dairying* and *Let's talk Dairying***
- **Failure of industry to recognise problems from employees' perspective (e.g. Fairweather, 1994)**
- **Key problem areas: 'Time' and 'Work' environments (Tipple, Hoogeveen and Gould, 2000)**

## **A shift in employer/employee power**

- **Good employers (e.g. fair, concerned, involved, and even tempered) have little trouble getting staff**
- **Bad employers (e.g. bad tempered, unfair, exploitative, or unconcerned) have more and more difficulty getting staff. They have to take what they can get!**

# **Growth of OAD milking all season**

- **Any initiative making employment more attractive is of interest**
- **2002 Fewer than 10 farmers milking OAD (Bayley, 2002)**
- **2003 Less than 30 milking OAD (Searle, 2004)**
- **2004 130 farms milking OAD (Bewsell, 2005)**
- **2005 351 farms milking OAD (Bewsell, 2005)**

**With less than 5% of herds milking OAD, the social impact is unclear => Our investigation.**

## **Research model used**

- **Initial investigation**
- **Main study 2006-2007, if funded**
- **To develop hypotheses and a more structured research programme**
- **Formal and informal interviews with 6 farmers (2 OAD, 2 thinking of changing to OAD, and 2 with no intention of changing); plus 8 workers and several of their wives and partners**
- **Interviews: September/October 2005**

# Why drawing as a research technique?

- **Dairy industry over researched**
- **Rehearsed answers / to please interviewers**
- **Seeking experientially ‘true’ information**
- **Therefore: Creative Visualisation for subjective information**
- **Gives access to “creative, holistic, contextualised experience of the respondent”**
- **Rather than: Eliciting learnt, analytical or externally validated verbalised responses**
- **Drawing guided by Vaunda Maynard, an experienced interactive drawing therapist**

# THE DATA

# Dairy farmer reactions to OAD milking

- **Unclear whether OAD can lead to lower staffing levels – complex equation with a reduced length of working day, but more cows to milk etc**
- **Those not going for OAD claimed no saving of staff time – it was not really so long a day, just a shift in work patterns**
- **For many farmers OAD requires a higher level of staff competence, with only half as much time to observe stock**
- **The undecided reckoned employment was only one of many variables to consider**

## **Continued: OAD adopters**

- **One larger employer was pressed by staff to adopt: working day shorter, wages and staffing unchanged**
- **Profitability down 7% first year, but extra maiden cows from higher stocking rate**
- **Staff turnover fell to zero**
- **Absenteeism, sick leave, accidents dropped dramatically**
- **Employer reported: staff were wide awake because they had a good night's sleep and that made a dramatic and money saving impact**

## **Further adopter comment**

- **Morale was high → a ‘work smart’ attitude: staff worked faster, took more responsibility and combined jobs in effective ways**
- **With shorter working days, good intentions to train had converted into real training time**
- **There may be other ‘hidden’ benefits around staffing levels and staff management**

# Dairy workers reactions to OAD milking

- **Former ‘bad’ image of dairy farming – dirty, sleep-depriving, thankless, and deadend (Kuriger, 2001)**
- **OAD is a ‘hot’ topic. Most wanted shorter working hours even if it meant a fall in income. Friends had left dairy farming for just that**
- **With OAD: shorter, more acceptable working hours, enhancement of family life, the prospect of a more balanced lifestyle, may all offset a possible fall in income**
- **One such farm worker believed she ‘...could get a life’!....**

## Other OAD benefits

- **New sources of labour: one employer had divided his staff in two groups:**
  - (a) **Women: used as specialist milkers, very good milkers, took their time, gentle with the cows, gave slow milkers time to empty, cleaned up as they went, sang to the cows**
  - (b) **Both men and women: did the other farm jobs**
- **OAD opened up the untapped pool of women with children, who could milk between 9.00 a.m. and 3.00 p.m., while their children were at school**
- **OAD permitted farmers thinking about retirement to withdraw by degrees and reduce their work gradually, while increasing their amount of leisure. Thus, their dairy experience might be preserved for the industry**

Twice A Day Milking

vs.

Once A Day Milking

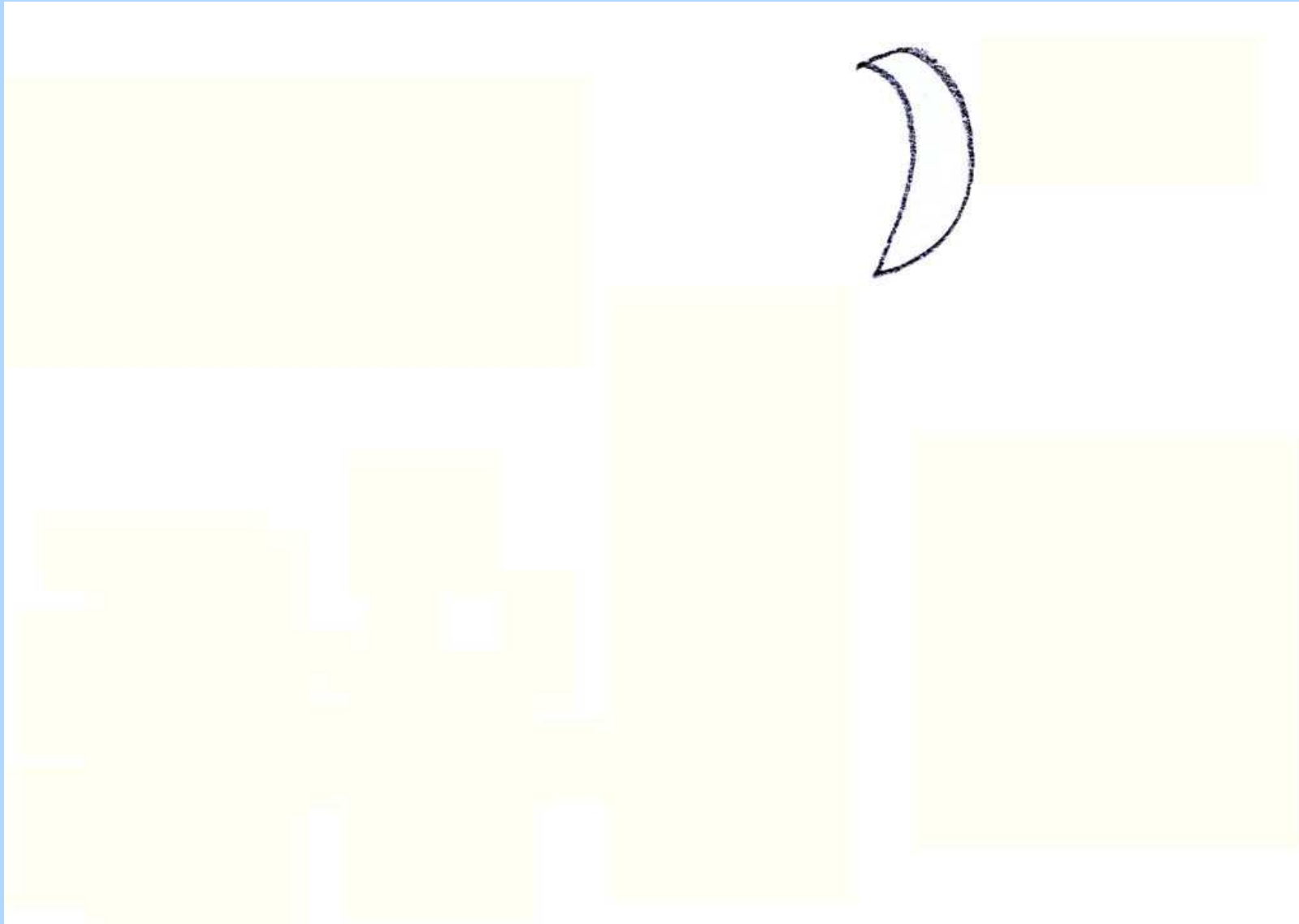
*- Two Drawings by a Dairy Milker*

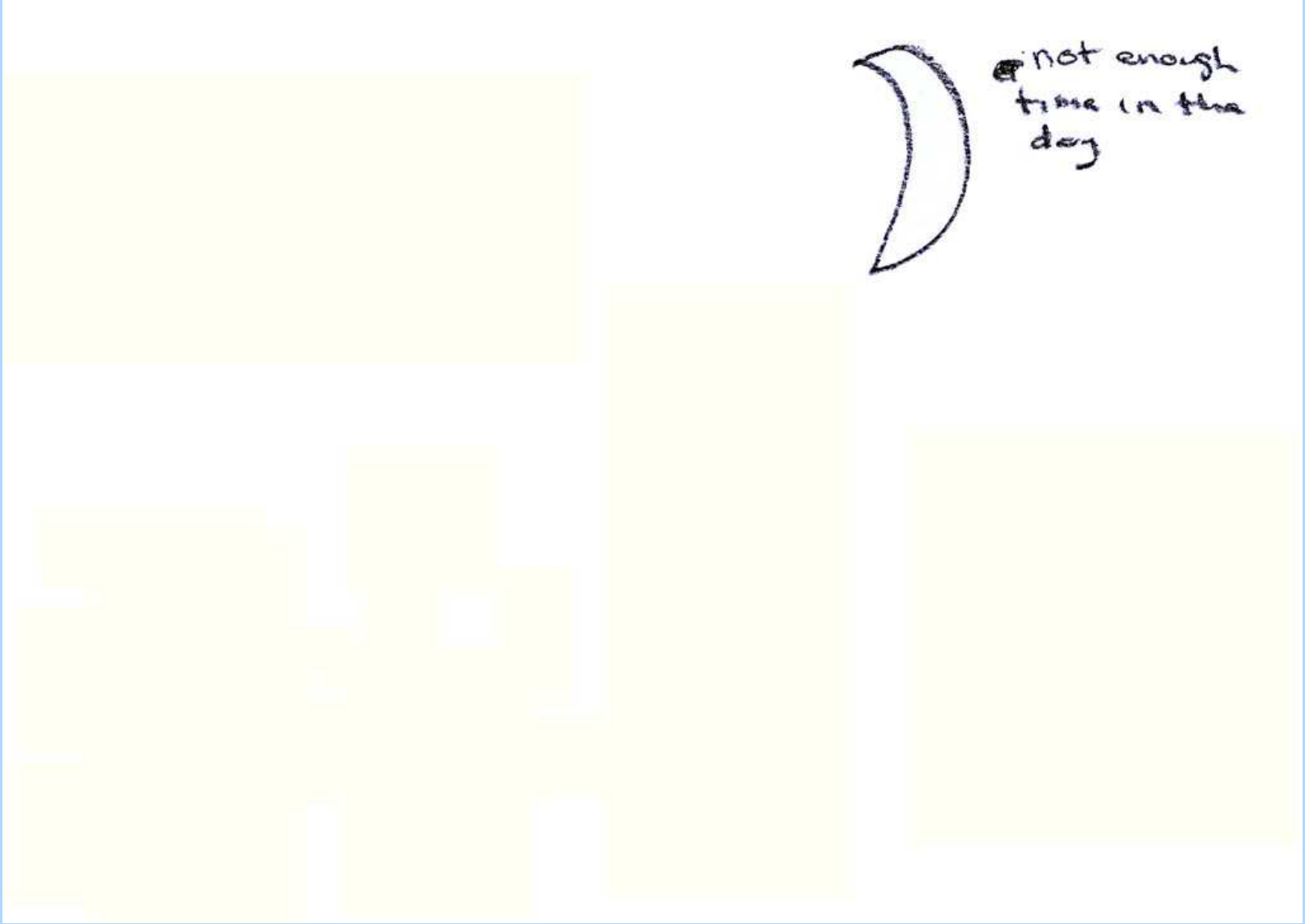
**Drawing guided by Vaunda  
Maynard**

# **Drawing 1**

**- Twice A Day Milking**

**Instruction:** *Hayley, I'd like you to think about working on a dairy farm, and draw anything that comes to mind.*





**Instruction:** *What are the feelings that go with this?*

**Answer:** *Loneliness, isolation.*

To many Jobs expected  
to be done each day  
not enough time to do  
it all.



not enough  
time in the  
day

**Instruction:** *Put yourself on the page.*

To many Jobs expected  
to be done each day  
not enough time to do  
it all.



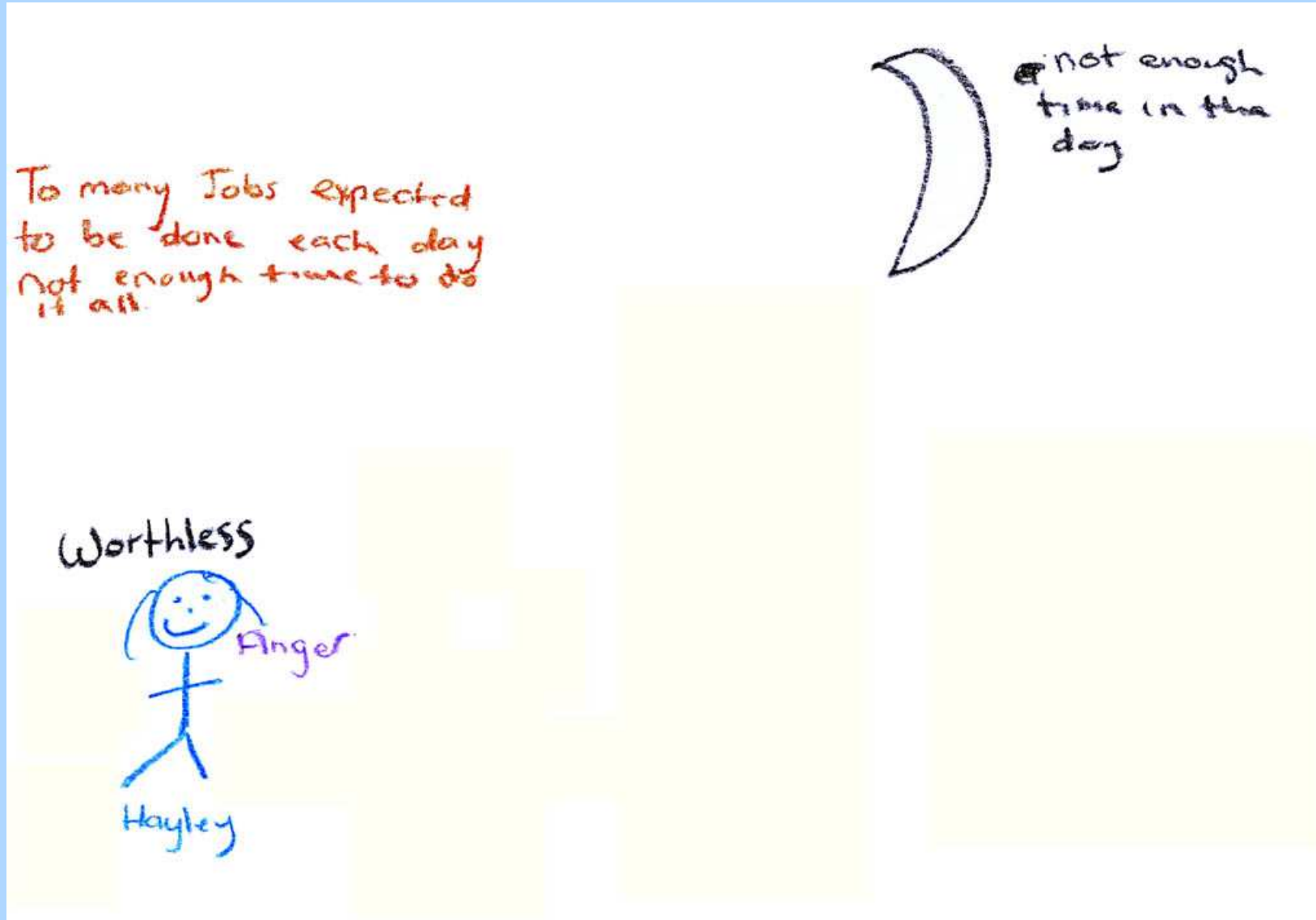
not enough  
time in the  
day



Hayley

**Instruction:** *How do you feel?*

**Answer:** *Worthless, angry, helpless, useless. Tired!*



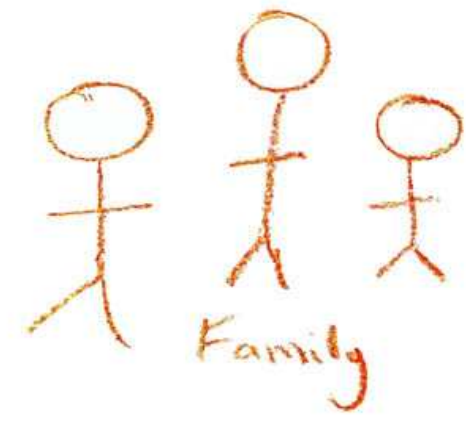
**Instruction:** *Who else needs to go on the page?*

To many Jobs expected  
to be done each day  
not enough time to do  
it all.



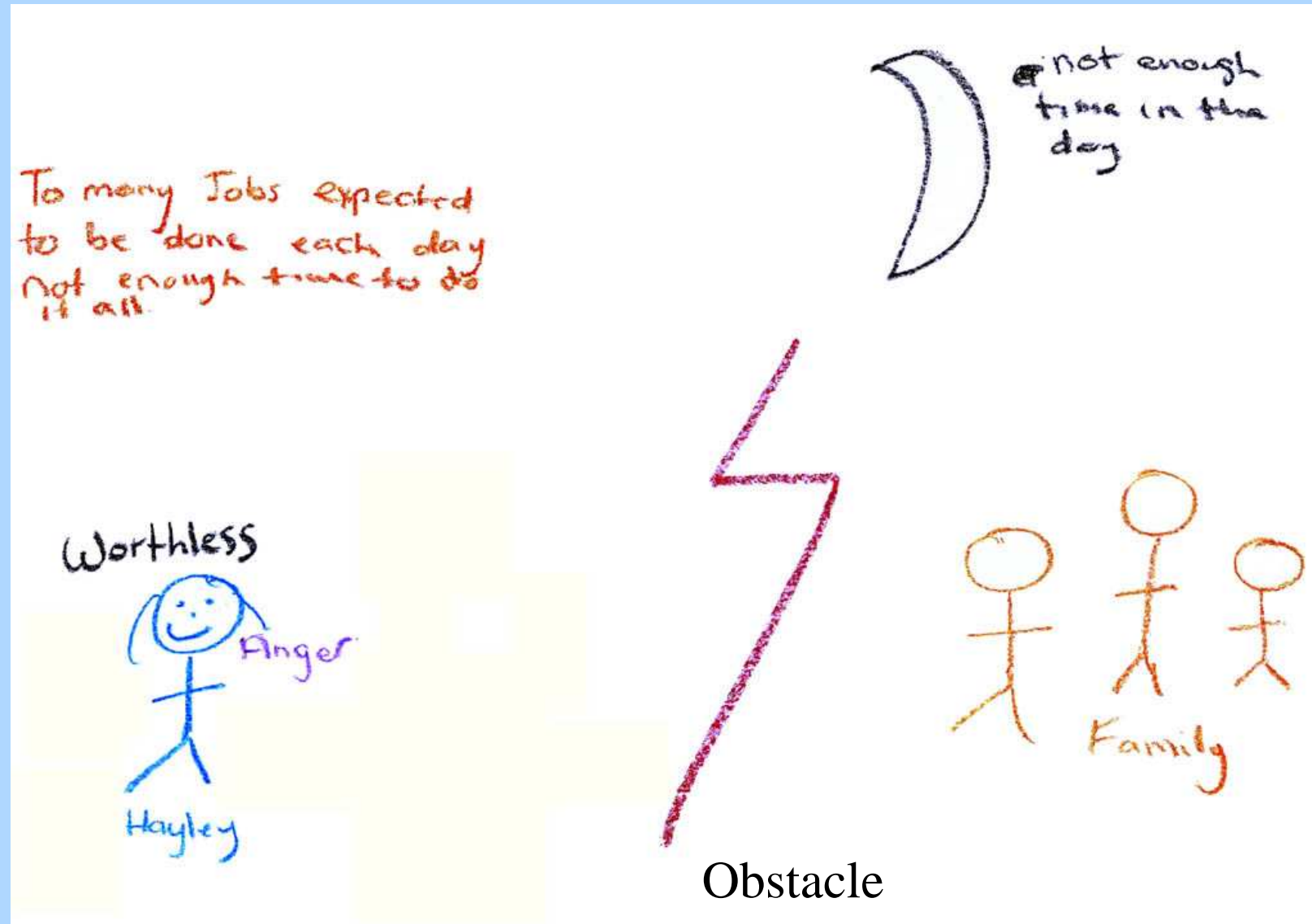
not enough  
time in the  
day

Worthless



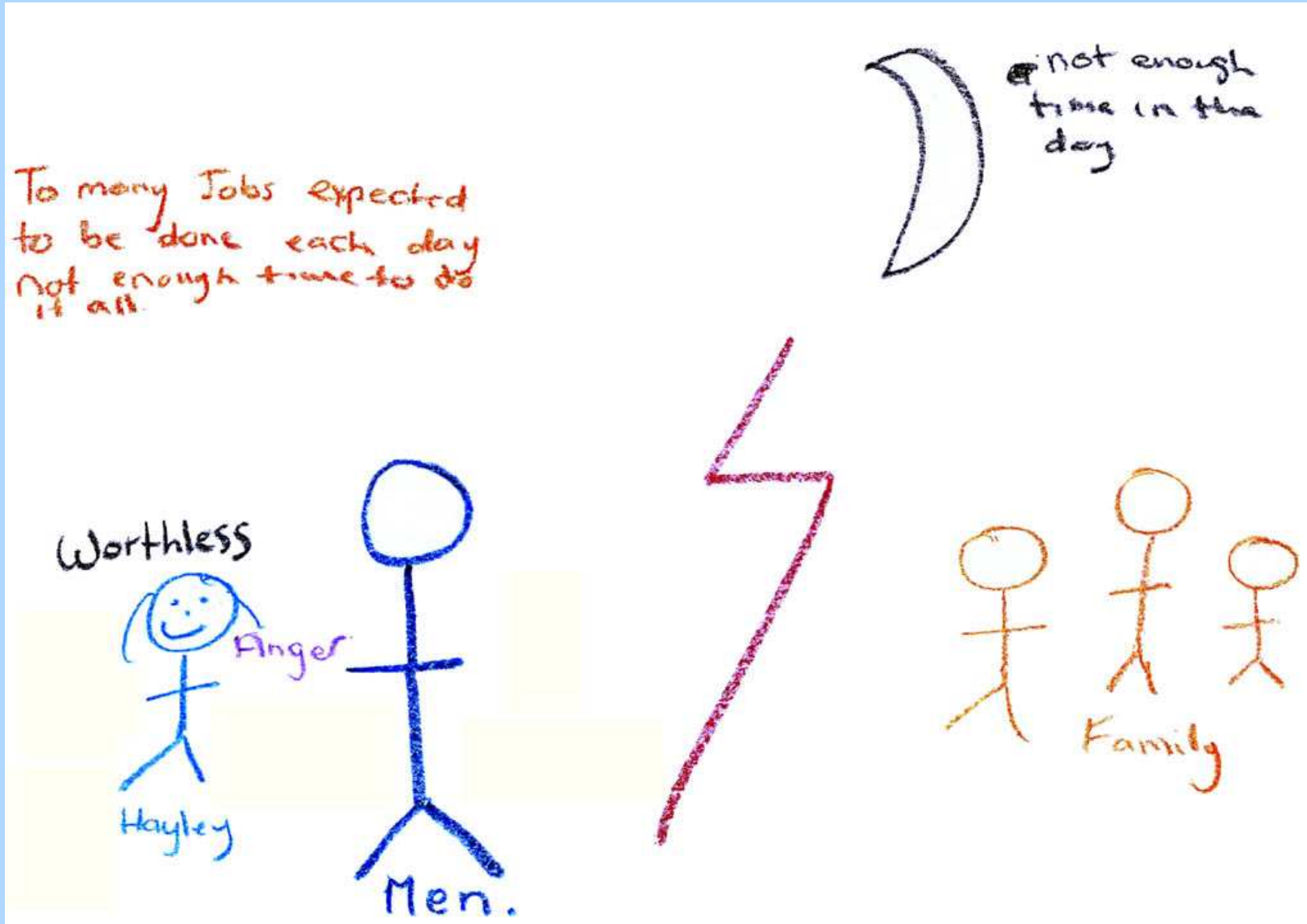
**Instruction:** Are there any obstacles?

**Answer:** No time to spend with family and friends.



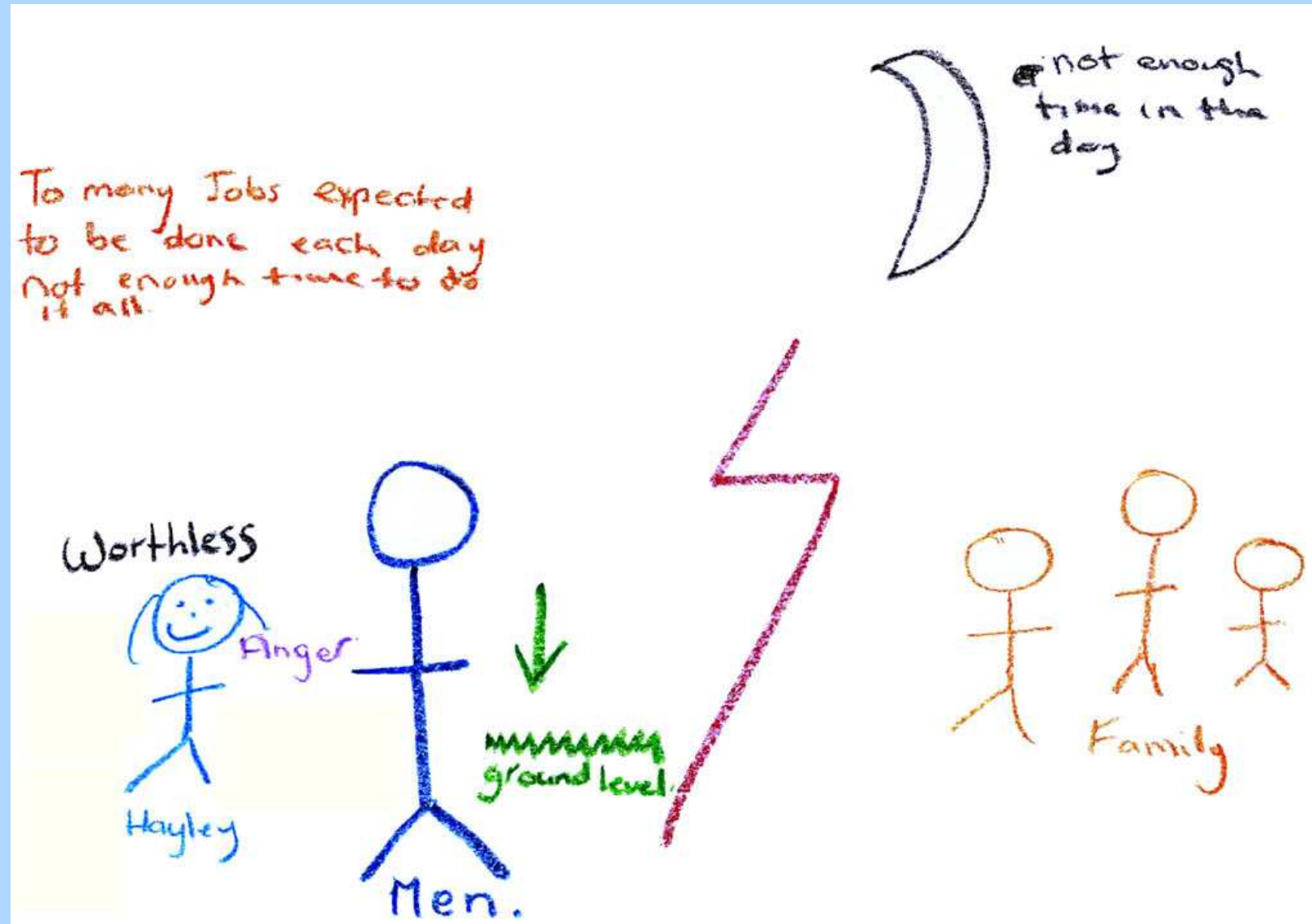
**Instruction:** Are there any other obstacles?

**Answer:** Men! They think they know everything. They try to impress us.

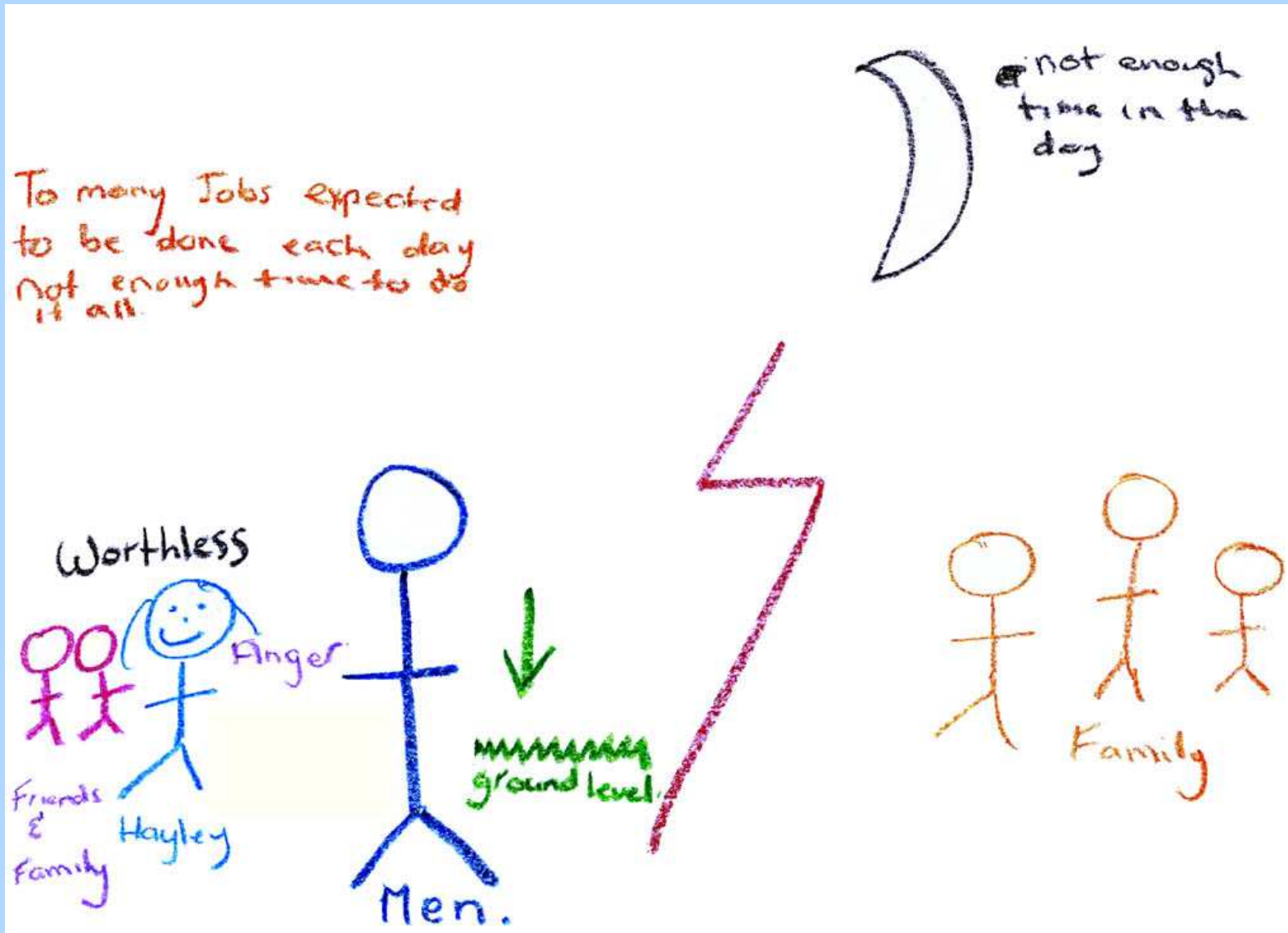


**Instruction:** *What do you want to say to them?*

**Answer:** *Get real! Get down to ground level!*

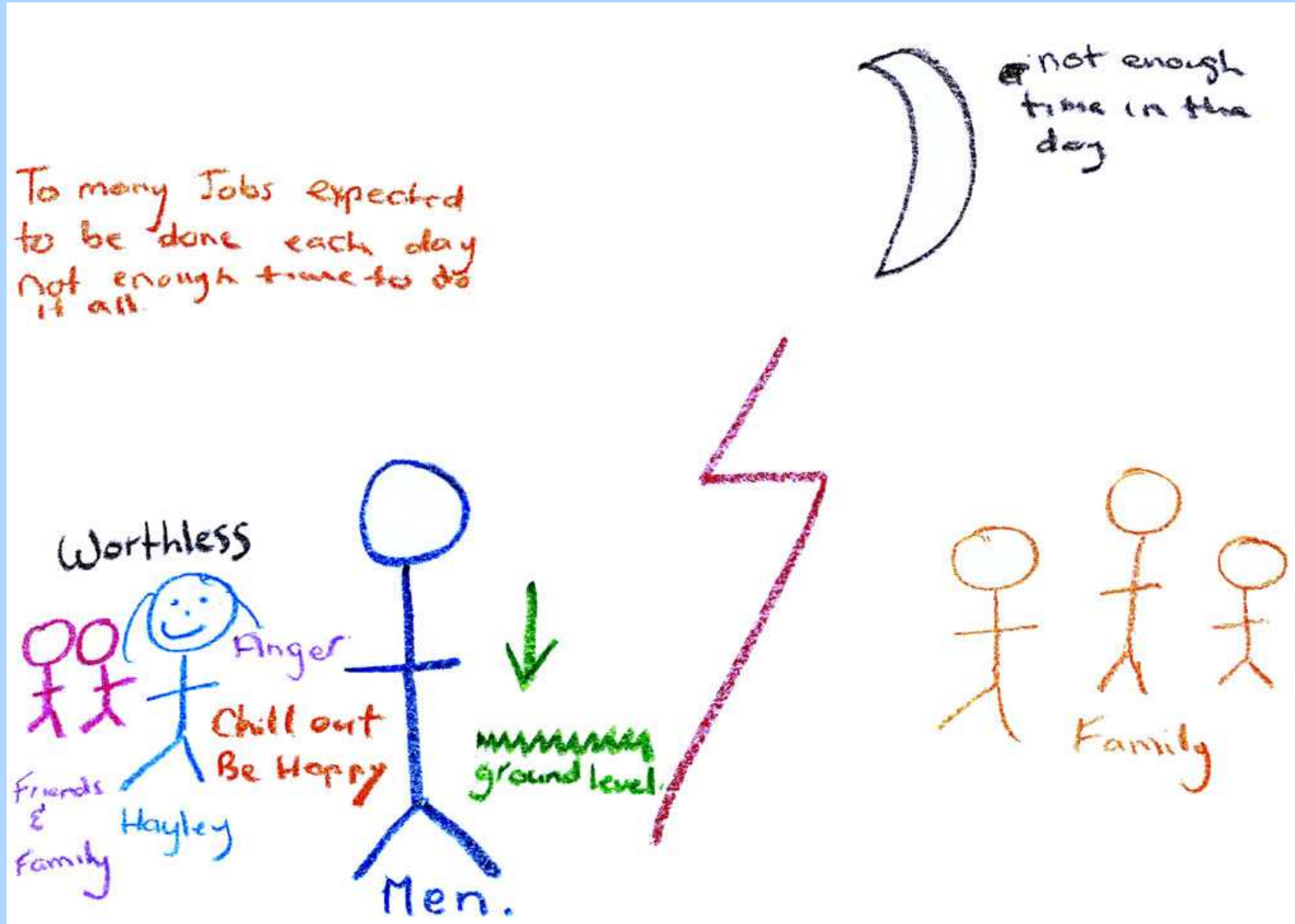


**Instruction:** Give yourself some support.



**Instruction:** Give yourself some wise advice.

**Answer:** Chill out. Be happy.

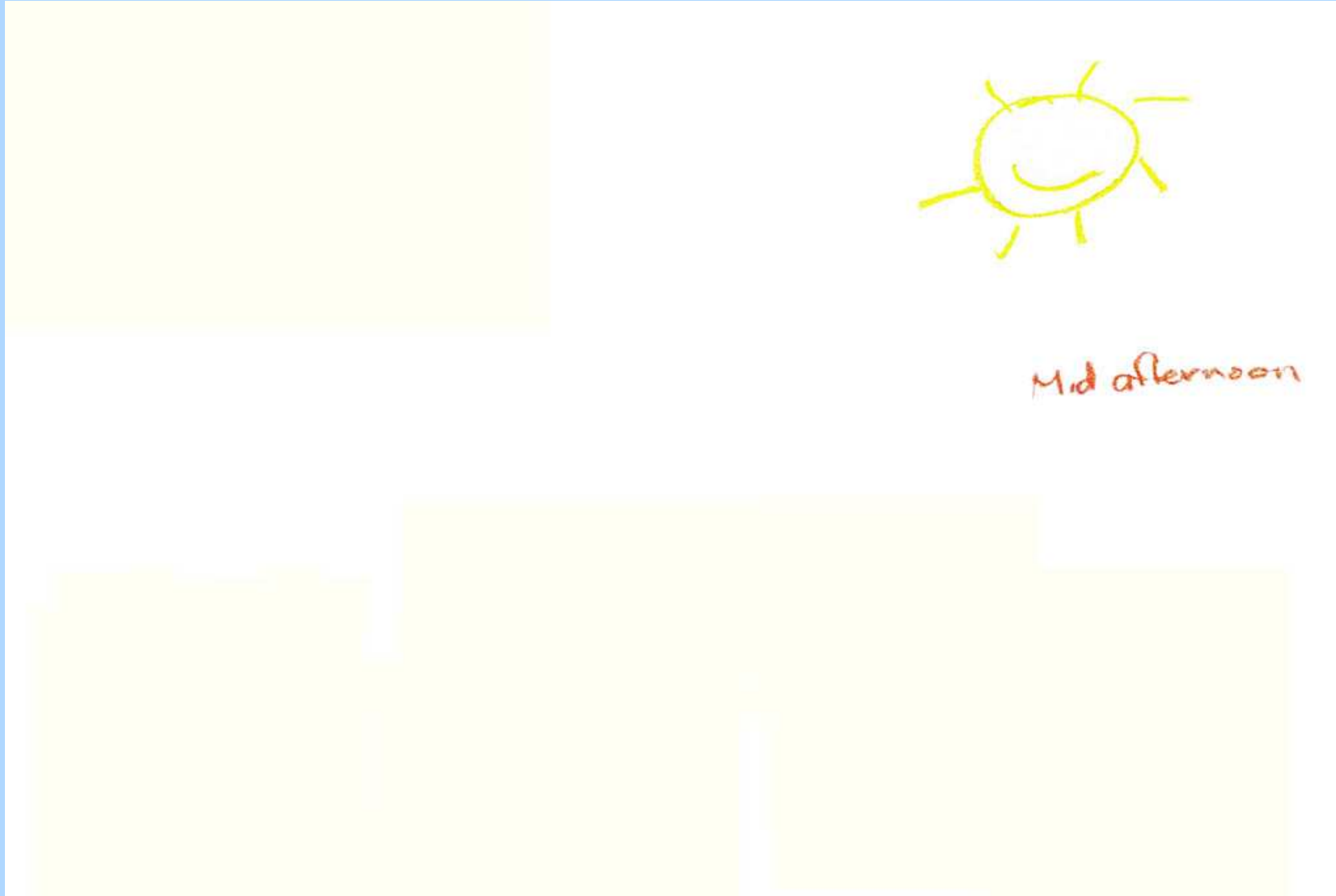


# **Drawing 2**

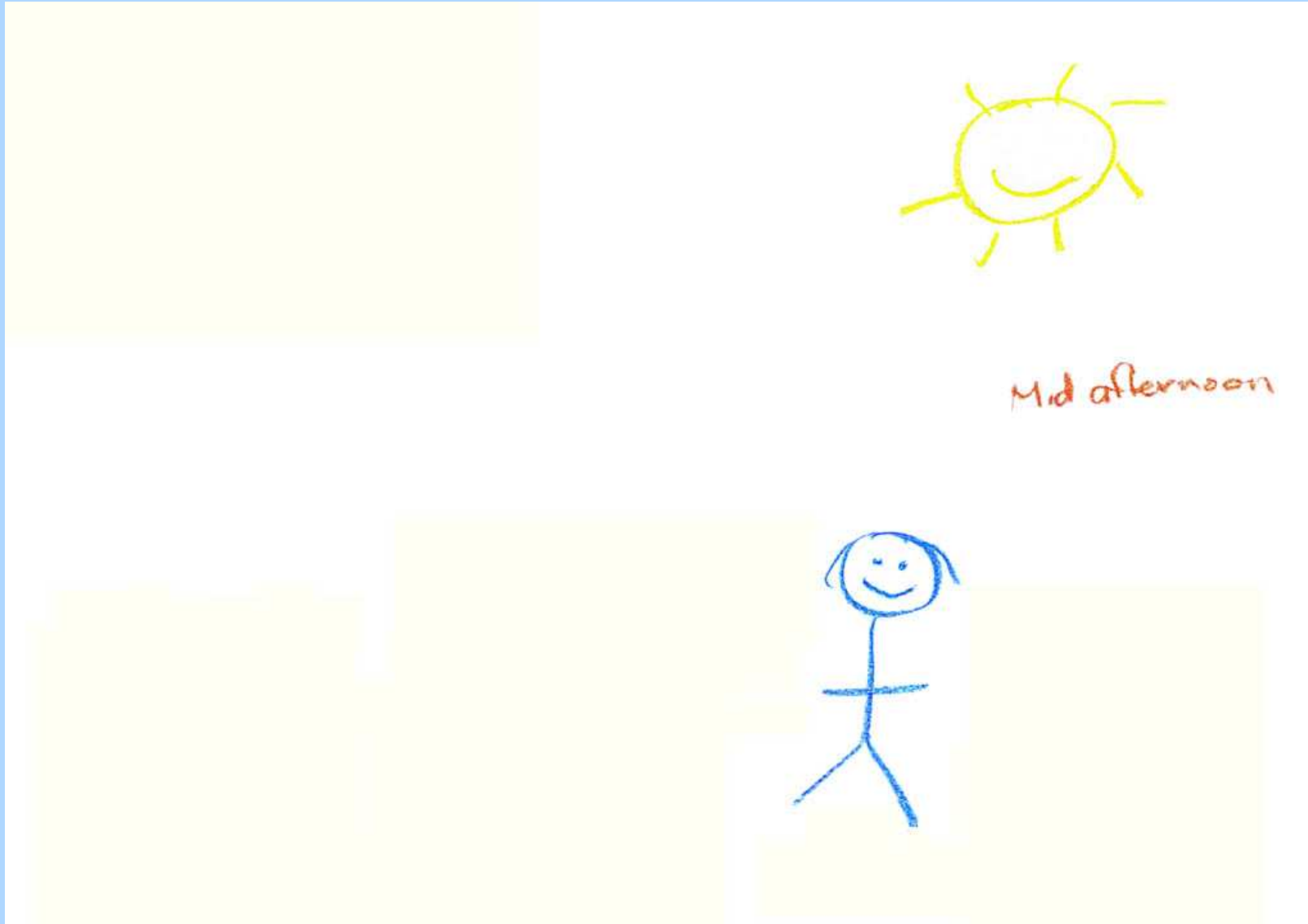
## **- Once A Day Milking**

**Instruction:** *Hayley, what would it feel like to work on a dairy farm doing once a day milking?*

**Answer:** *Relief, elation, joy.*

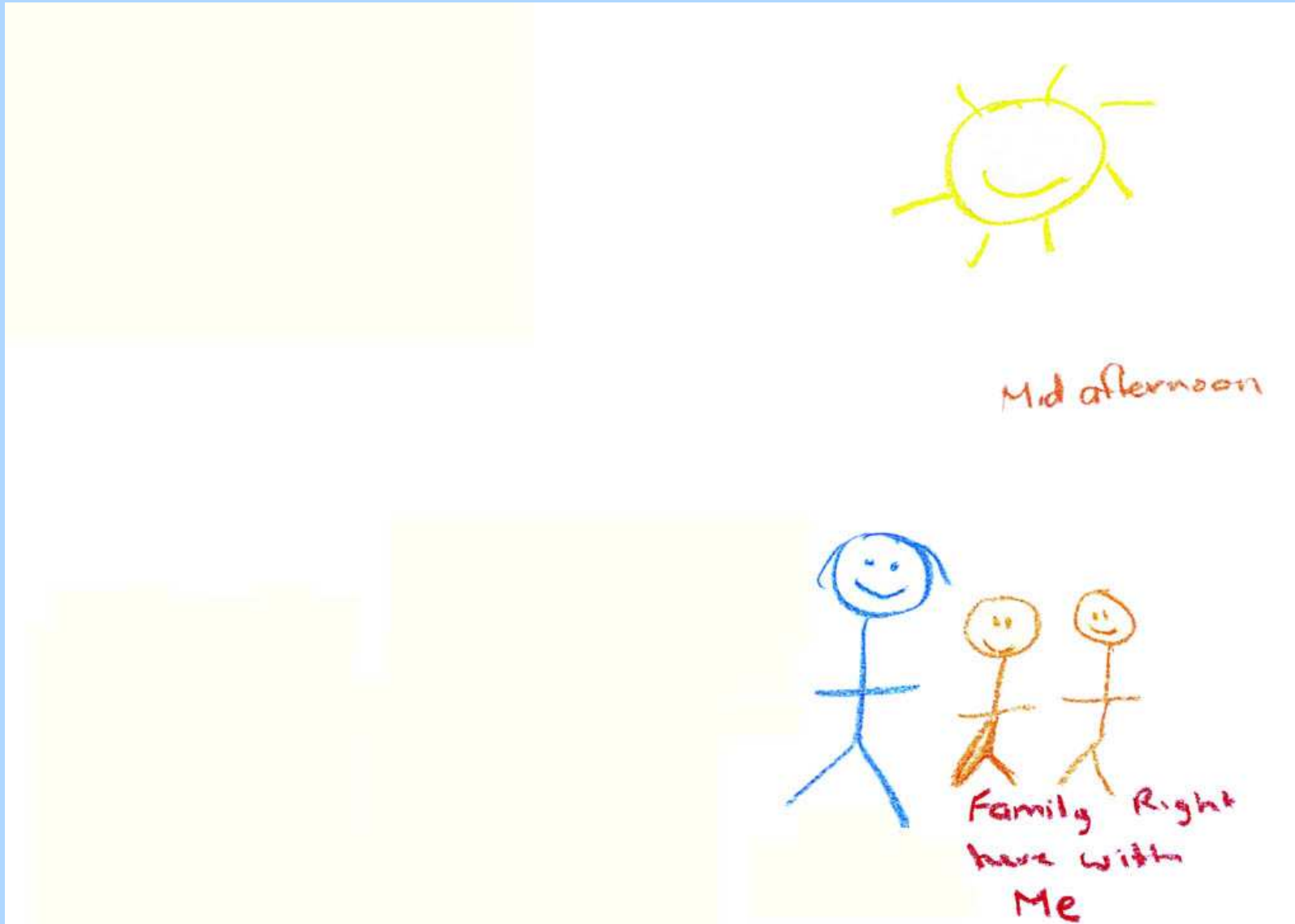


**Instruction:** *Put yourself on the picture.*



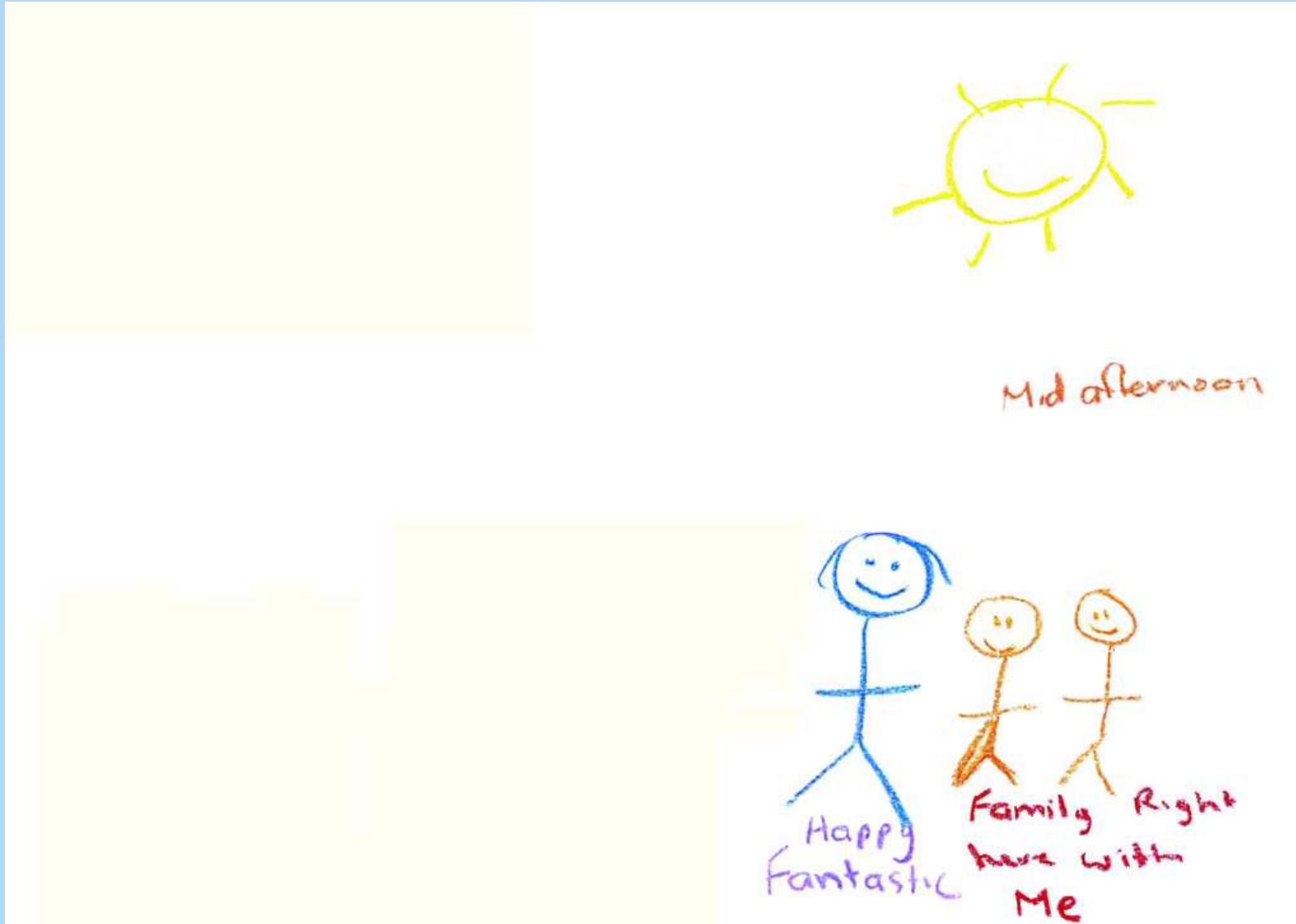
**Instruction:** *Who else needs to be on the picture?*

**Answer:** *My family right here with me.*



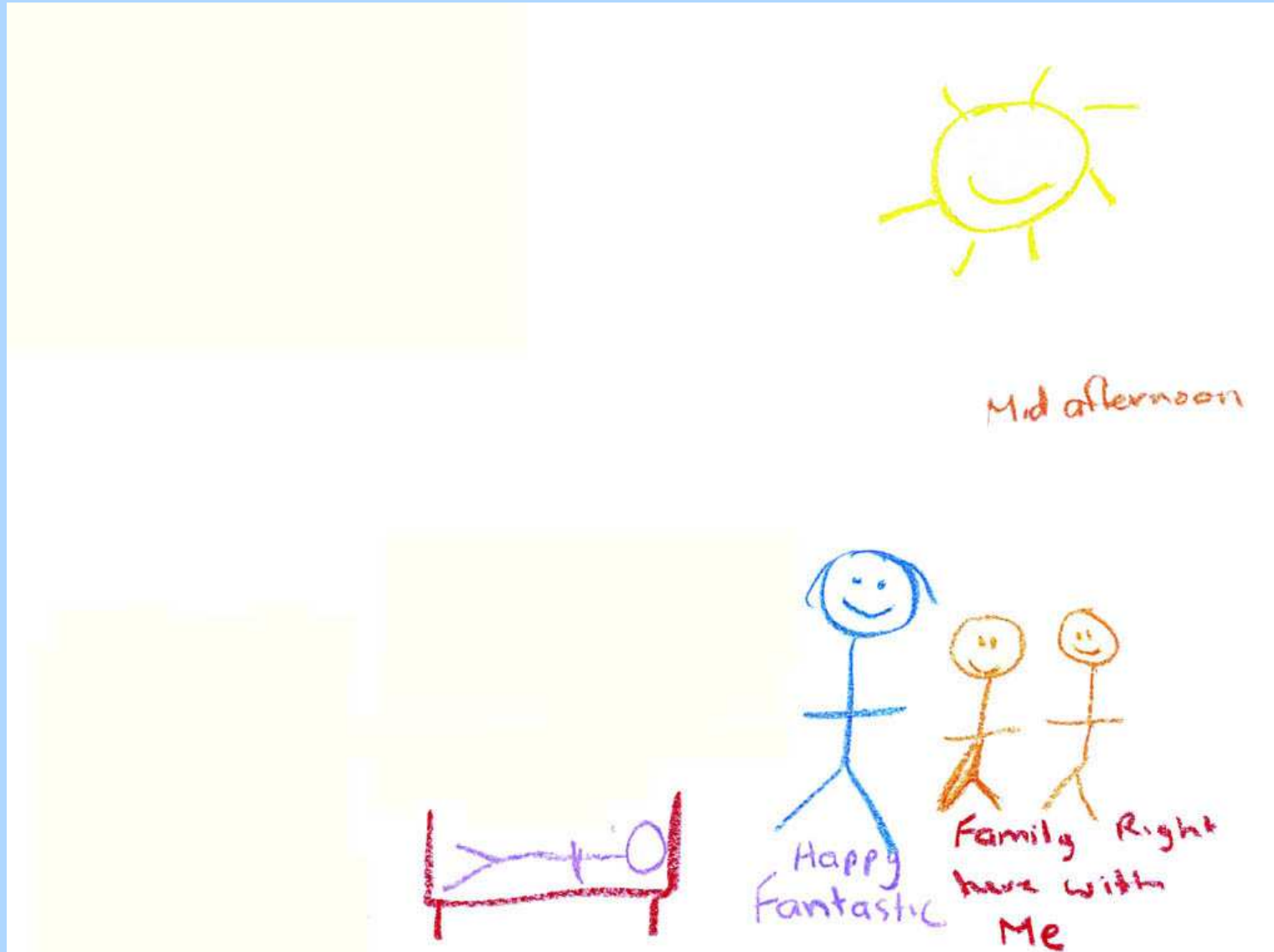
**Instruction:** *How does it feel?*

**Answer:** *Happy. Fantastic!*



**Instruction:** *Are there any obstacles?*

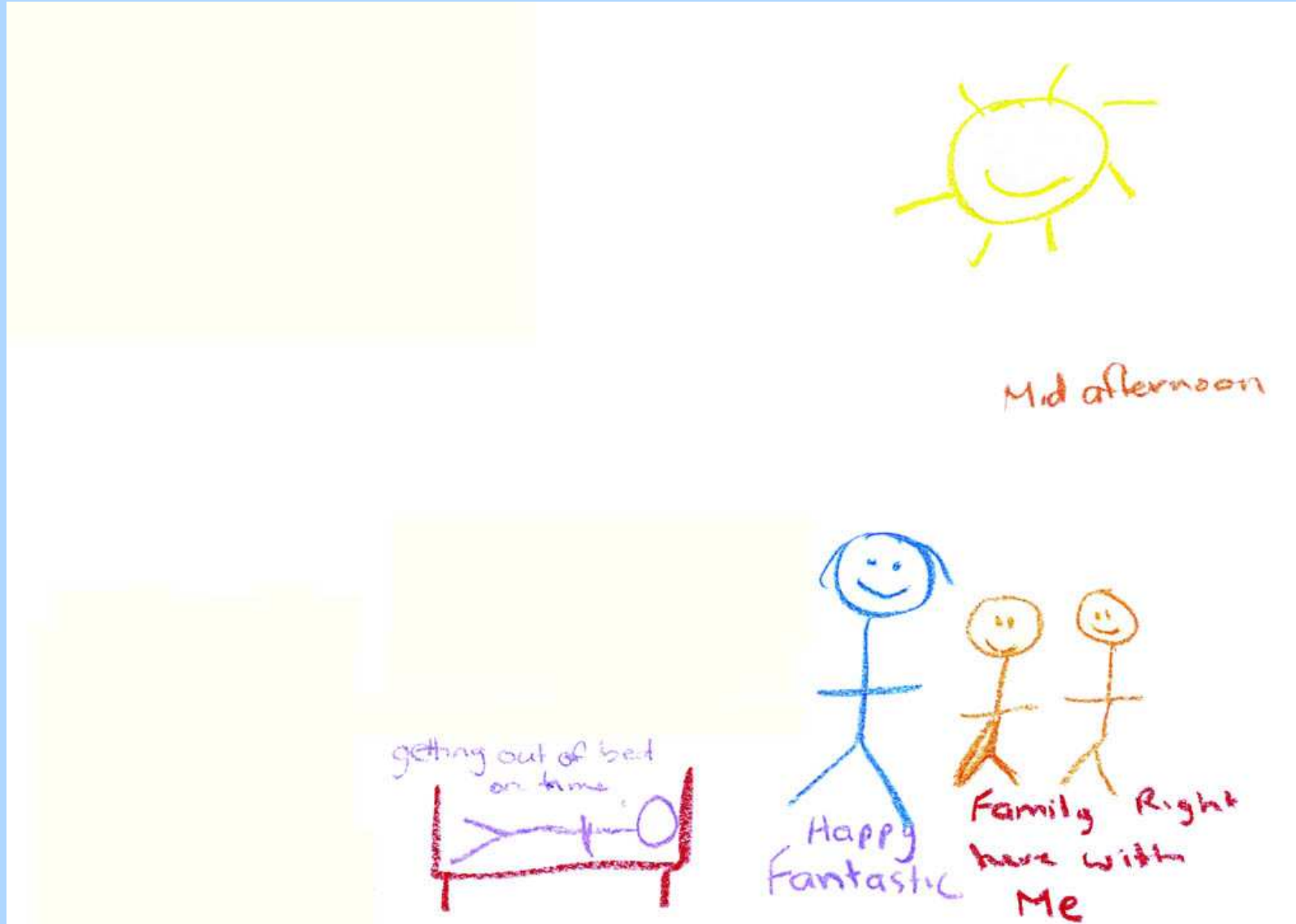
**Answer:** *Loneliness, isolation.*



Obstacle

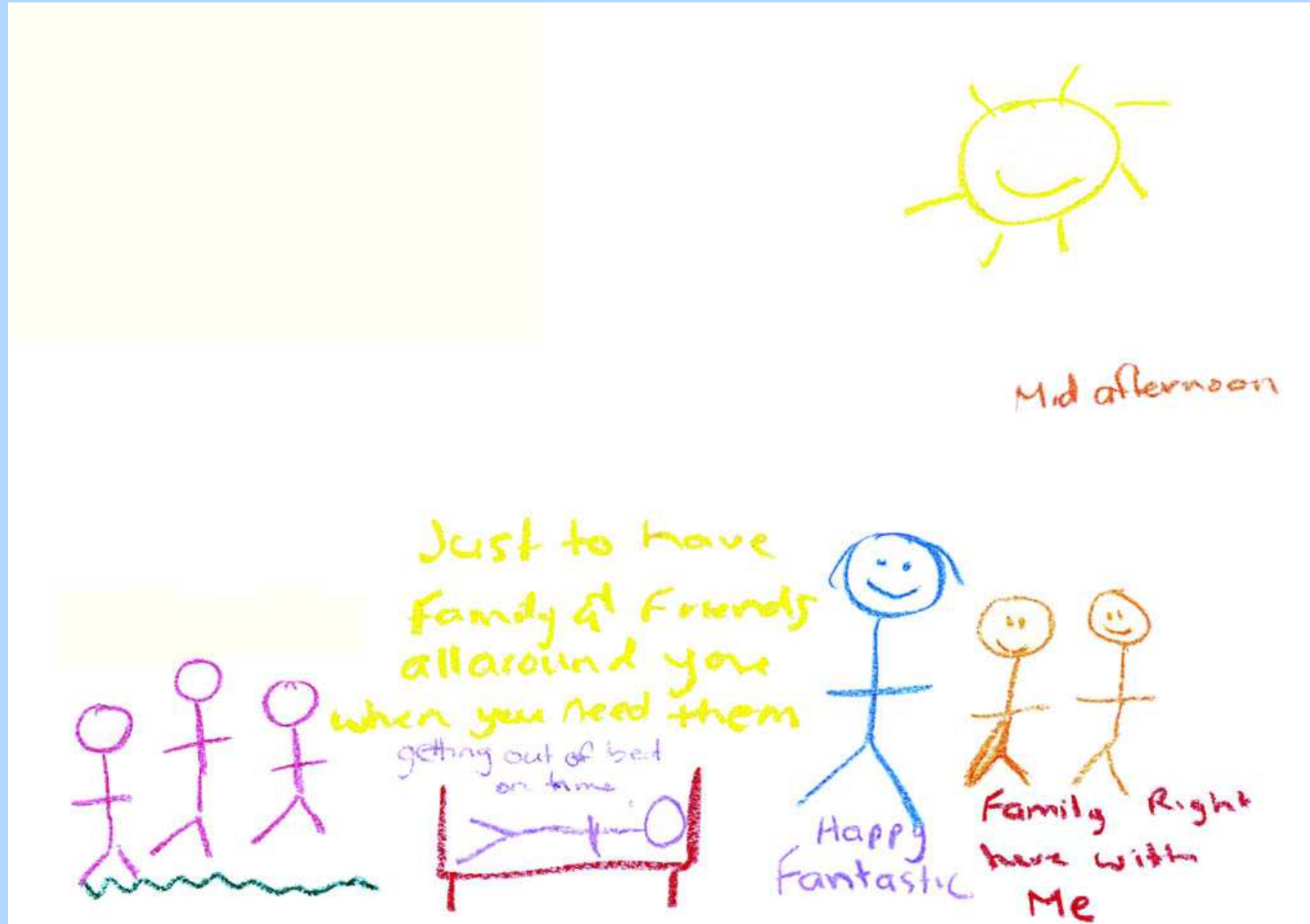
**Instruction:** Please explain that.

**Answer:** *May be I will be inclined to sleep too long and not get out of bed!*



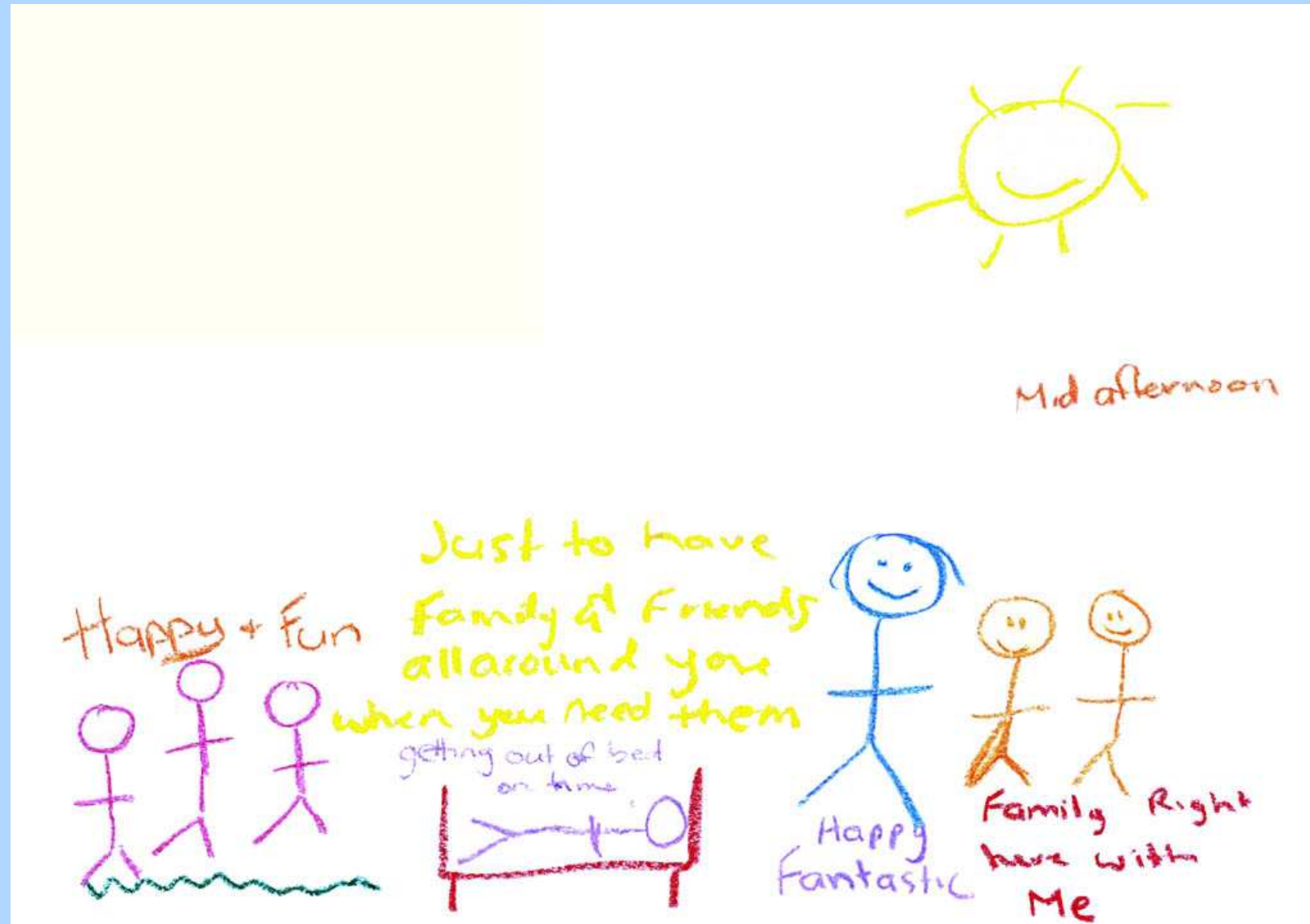
**Instruction:** Give yourself some support.

**Answer:** Just to have family and friends around me.



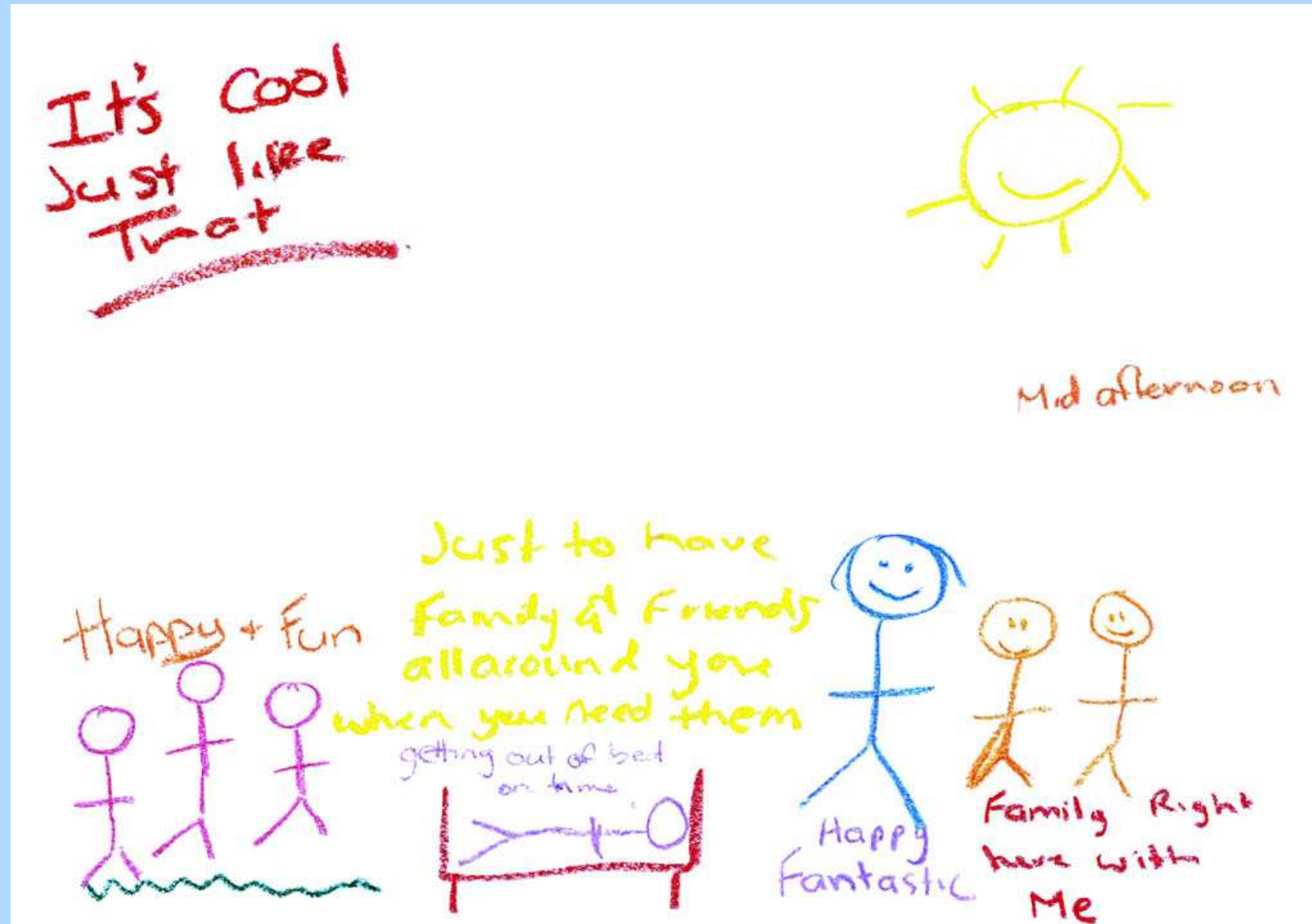
**Instruction:** *How does it feel?*

**Answer:** *Happiness and fun. Enough time.*



**Instruction:** Give yourself some wise advice.

**Answer:** It would be cool just like that.



# **A more balanced lifestyle?**

## **Formerly:**

- **Starting at 4.00 a.m., working to 7.00 p.m.**
- **General lack of sleep**
- **Only see family during daylight at weekends off – every second week or so**
- **Loss of concentration**
- **Exposure to accidents**
- **Relationship and family problems**
- **Drug use by young to cope with demands**
- **Problems with depression in the industry**

# Huge improvements!

**Workers, their wives and partners report a HUGE improvement in their lives:**

- **Participating in sports**
- **Reading the newspaper**
- **Time to socialise**
- **Improved family relationships**
- **Children respond well to two available parents**
- **Appreciation of ageing parents seeing son much more often**
  
- **Surely that is what the Kiwi lifestyle is about?**

## **Future research**

- **Employees are strongly in favour of a move to OAD milking**
- **Employers, carrying the business/livelihood risks, are much more cautious**
- **Data are quite anecdotal but triangulation of methods and sources of data suggest they are robust**
- **Initial results look very positive and should encourage the investment of more research funds in 2006-7**

**THE END**

LINCOLN UNIVERSITY