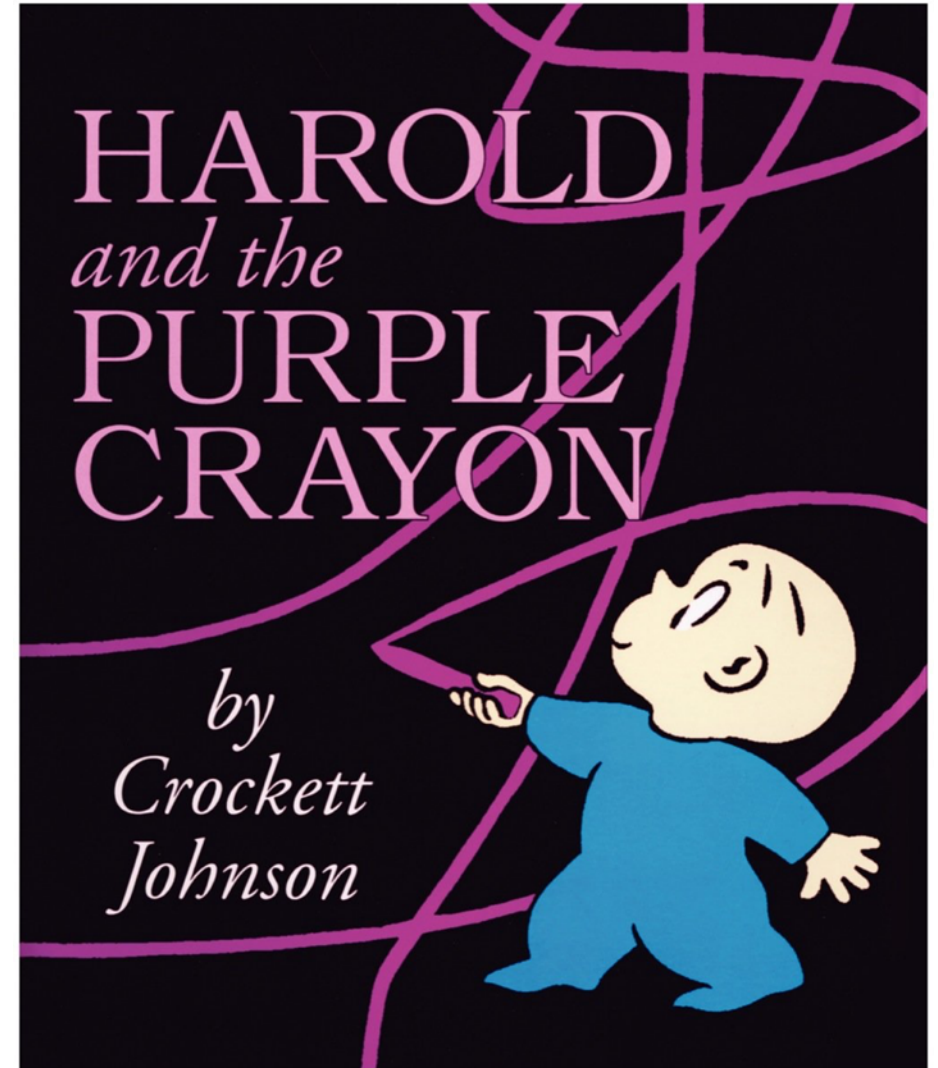


# Storylines Activity

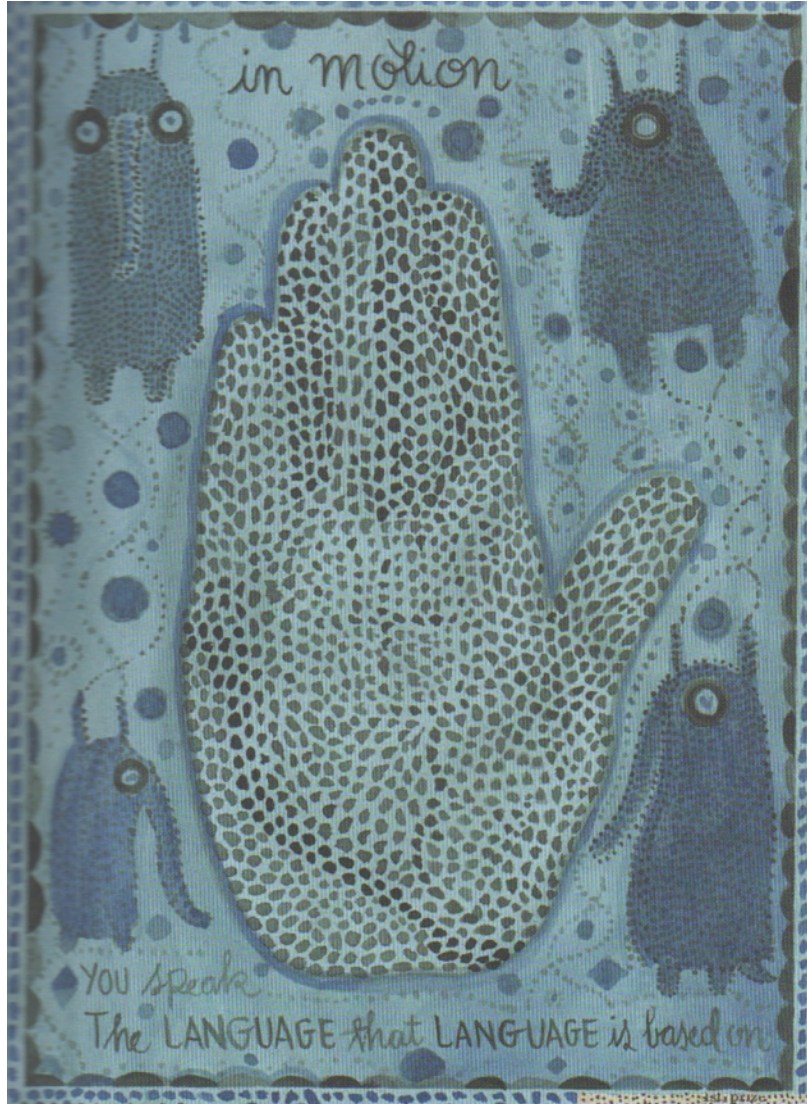
This activity builds off of various line drawings exercises I do in class, including Grids & Gestures, along with the use of lines from Tristram Shandy & Vonnegut's Shape of Stories (see the video of Vonnegut online). For your "story line", think of an arc of your life – either recent months or your whole life, and make a line that represents your experiences. Interpret as you wish.

# Living in Line

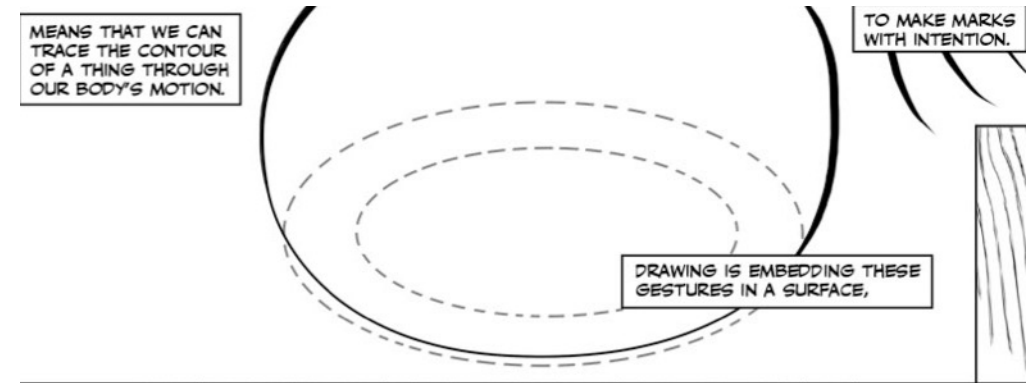
“you just think something and then run a line around your think” - anonymous 4 year old



Lynda Barry: “In motion, you speak the Language that Language is based on.”



Drawing is a permanent trace of gesture.



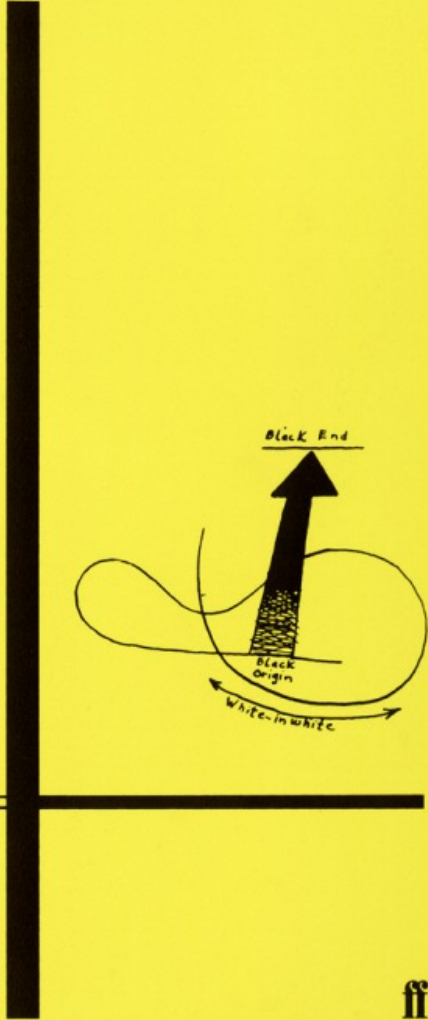
**Maxine Sheets-Johnstone** “Movement is our original mode of thinking” – “thinking begins in movement”

# Paul Klee – a line is a dot that went for a walk...

PAUL KLEE

PEDAGOGICAL  
SKETCHBOOK

Introduction and Translation  
by  
Sibyl Moholy-Nagy



An active line on a walk, moving freely, without goal. A walk for a walk's sake. The mobility agent, is a point, shifting its position forward (Fig. 1):



Fig. 1

The same line, accompanied by complementary forms (Figs. 2 and 3):



Fig. 2

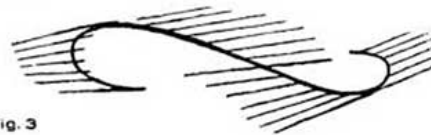


Fig. 3



The same line, circumscribing itself (Fig. 4):

Fig. 4



Two secondary lines, moving around an imaginary main line (Fig. 5):

Fig. 5





Tim Ingold: One could perhaps compare wandering to drawing: as the draughtsman traces a line with his pencil, so the wanderer – walking along – paces a line with his feet.

Richard Long  
A Line Made by Walking

Robert MacFarlane writes: “Long’s legs are his stylus, his feet the nib with which he inscribes his traces on the world. Walking becomes an act of inscription, and his work is a reminder that our verb “to write” originally referred to a kind of incisive track-making. The Old English “writan” carried the specific meaning “to incise runic letters in stone”: thus one would “write” a line by drawing a sharp point over the surface - by furrowing a track.”

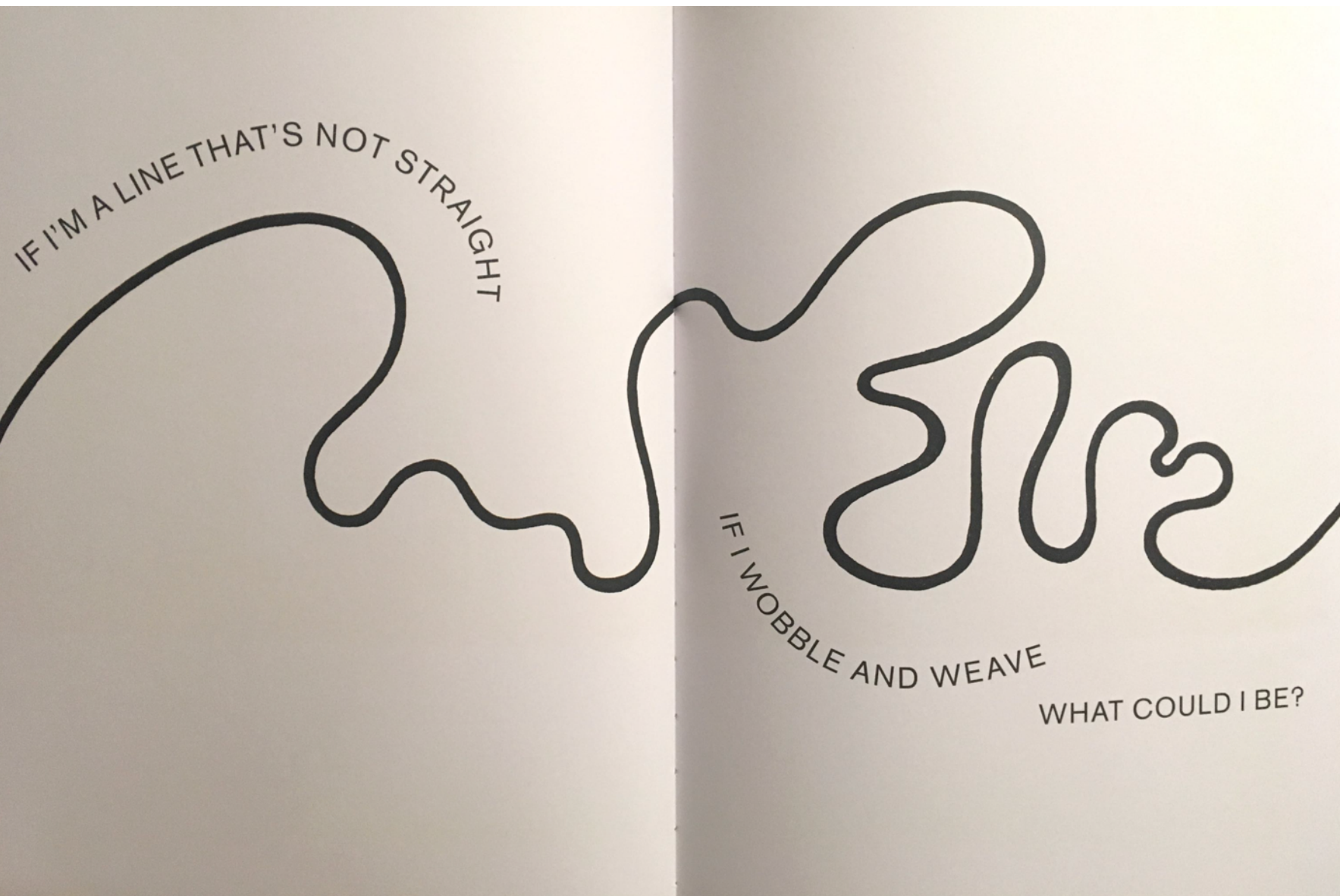
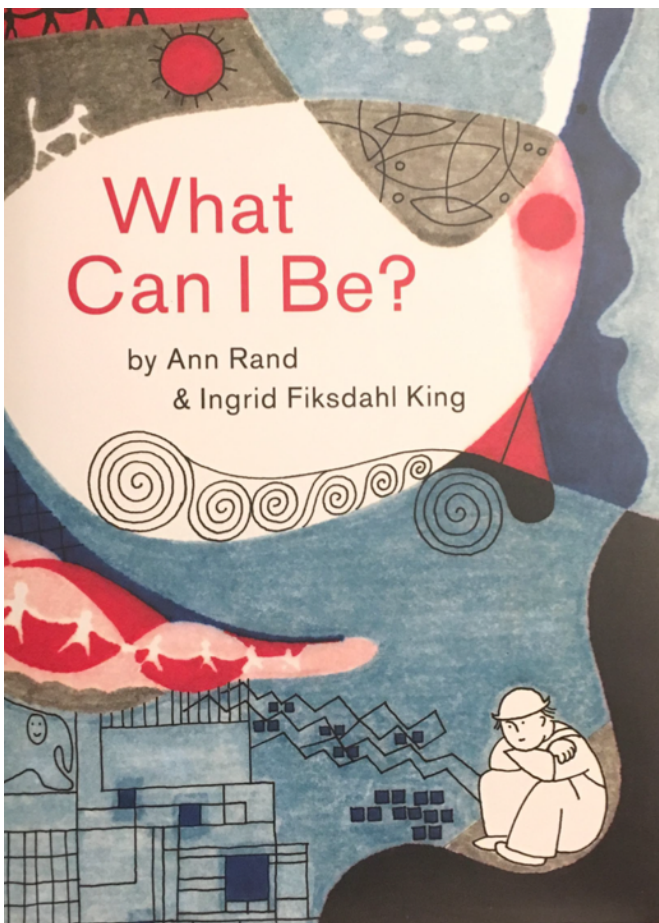


A LINE MADE BY WALKING

ENGLAND 1967

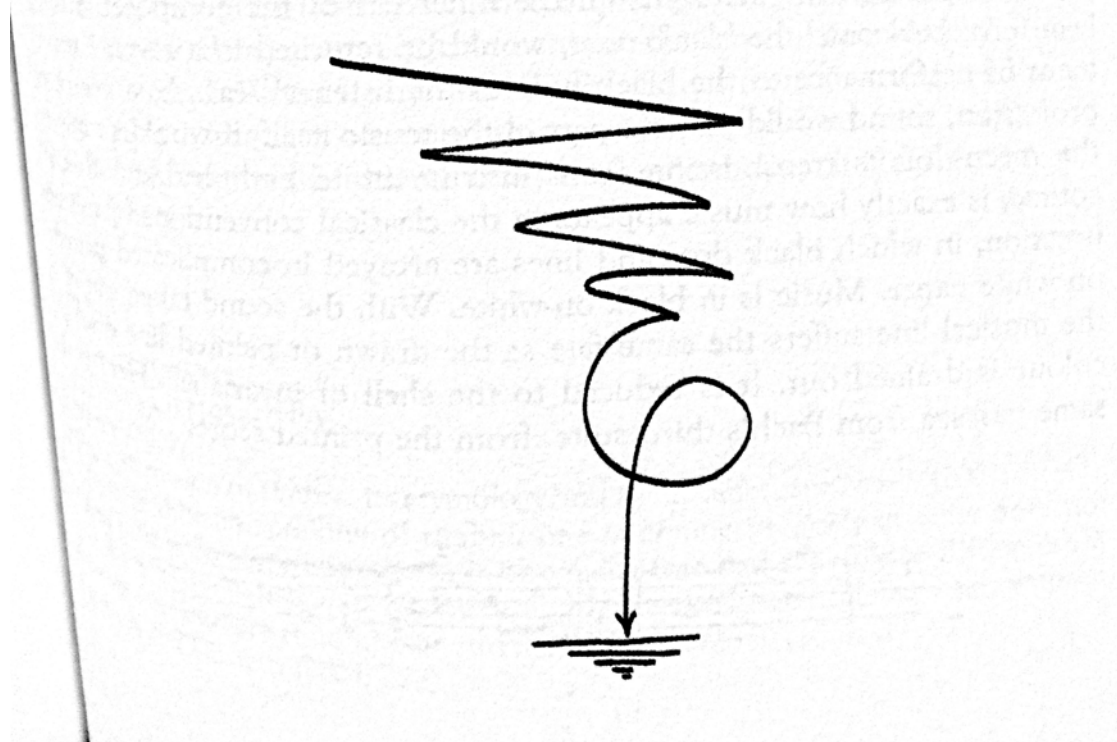
# What Can I Be?

by Ann Rand  
& Ingrid Fiksdahl King





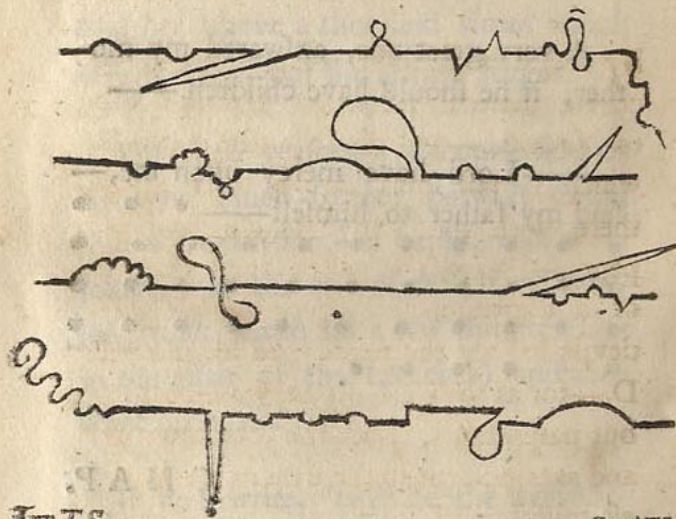
and the line of pitch? Consider, for example, the opening of the unaccompanied cello suite by Johann Sebastian Bach. I could draw it like this.



Tim Ingold – drawing Bach

## C H A P. XL.

**I** Am now beginning to get fairly into my work; and by the help of a vegetable diet, with a few of the cold feeds, I make no doubt but I shall be able to go on with my uncle *Toby's* story, and my own, in a tolerable straight line. Now,

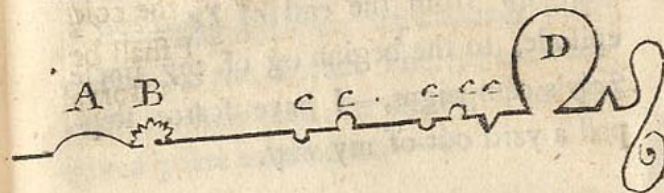


Inv. TS

Scul TS

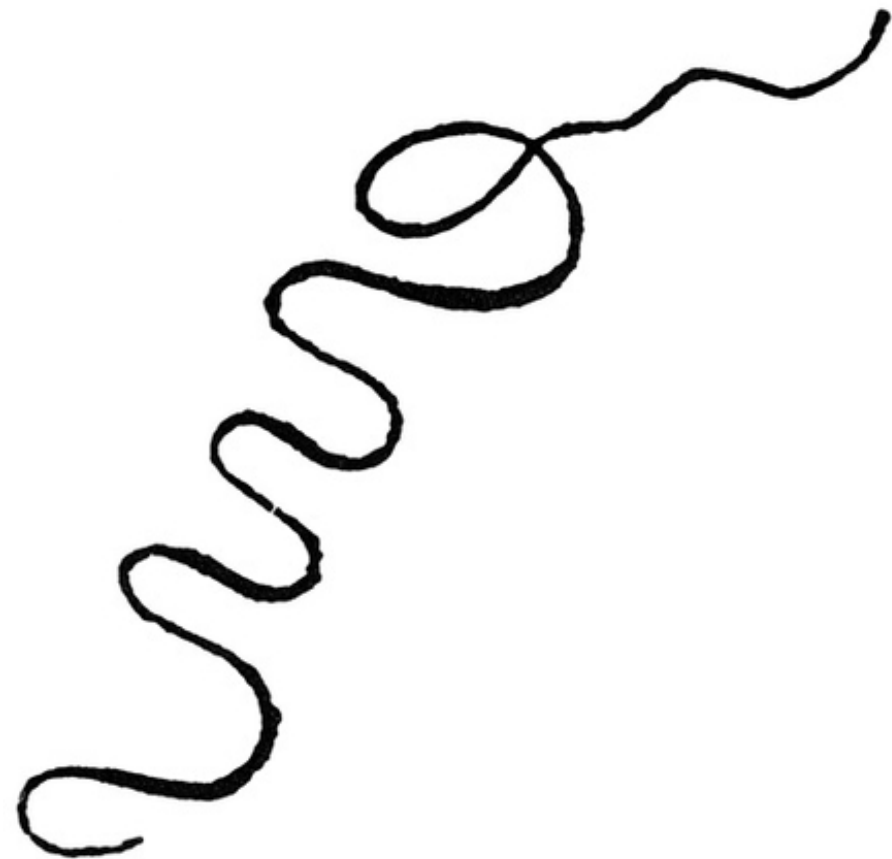
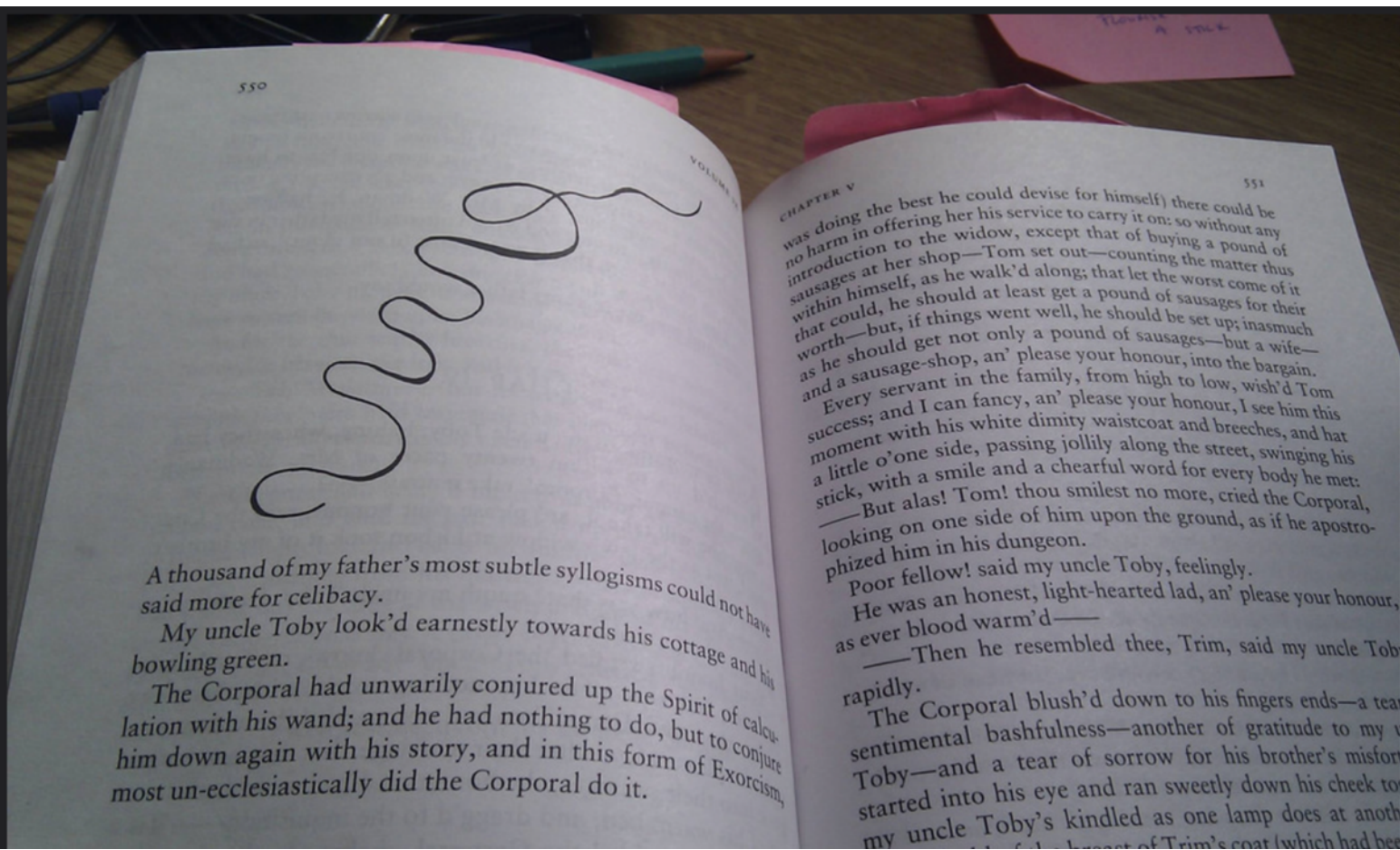
These

These were the four lines I moved in through my first, second, third, and fourth volumes.—In the fifth volume I have been very good,—the precise line I have described in it being this :



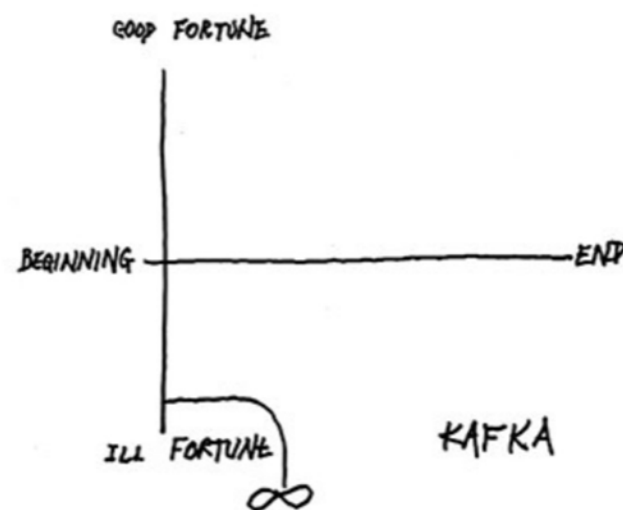
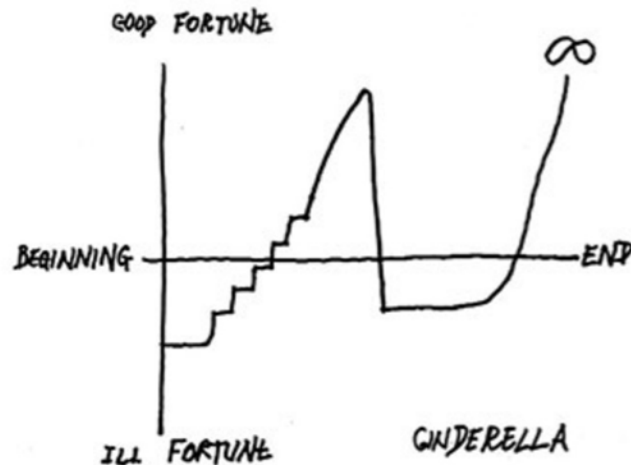
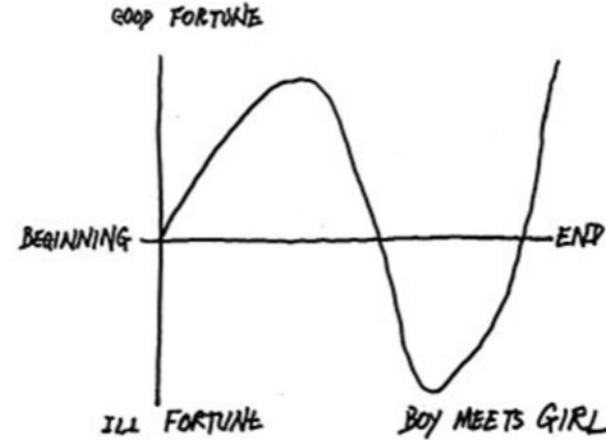
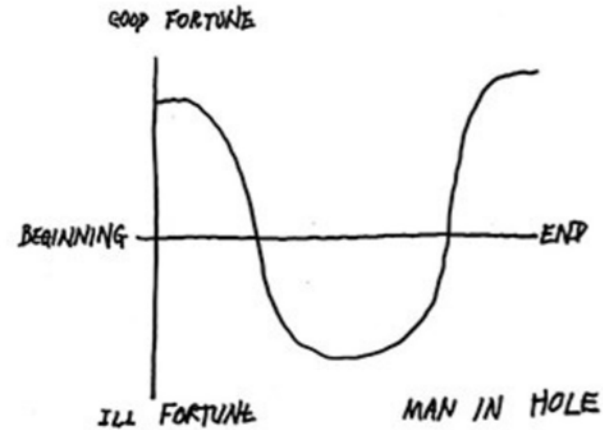
By which it appears, that except at the curve, marked A. where I took a trip to *Navarre*,—and the indented curve B. which is the short airing when I was there with the Lady *Bauffiere* and her page,—I have not taken the least frisk of a digression, till *John de la Casse's* devils led me the round you see marked D.—for as for c c c c c they are nothing but parentheses, and the common *ins* and *outs* incident to the lives of the greatest ministers of state; and when compared





From *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne

See Vonnegut's delightfully clever "Shape of Stories" video online



# The Shapes of Stories by Kurt Vonnegut

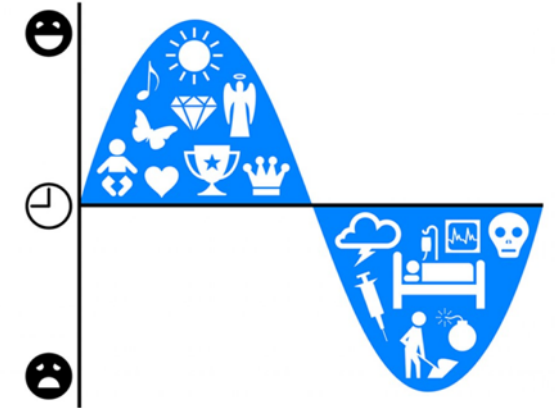
Kurt Vonnegut gained worldwide fame and adoration through the publication of his novels, including *Slaughterhouse-Five*, *Cat's Cradle*, *Breakfast of Champions*, and more.

But it was his rejected master's thesis in anthropology that he called his prettiest contribution to his culture.

The basic idea of his thesis was that a story's main character has ups and downs that can be graphed to reveal the story's shape.

The shape of a society's stories, he said, is at least as interesting as the shape of its pots or spearheads. Let's have a look.

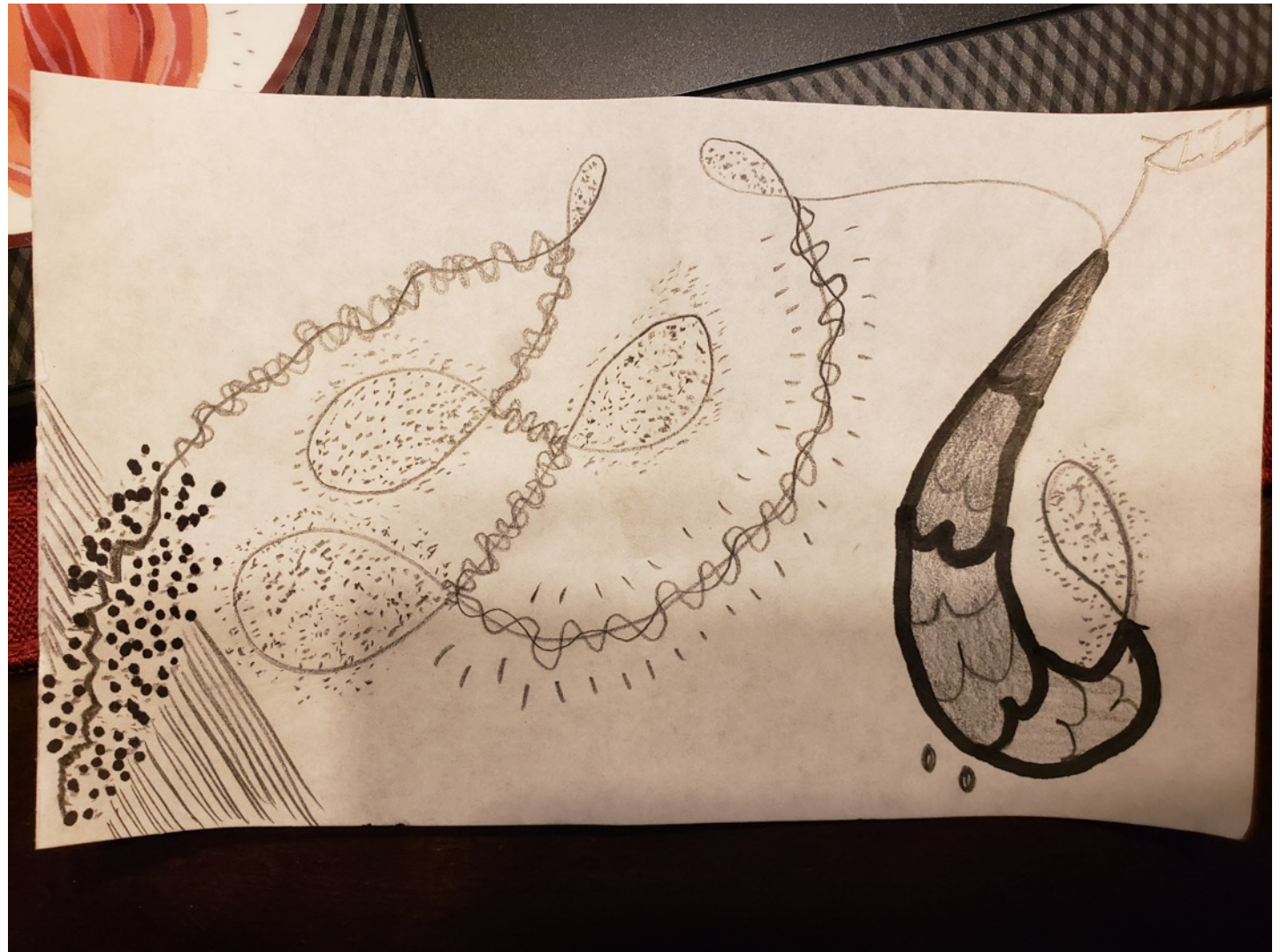
Designer: Maya Eilam, [www.mayaailam.com](http://www.mayaailam.com)  
Sources: *A Man without a Country* and *Palm Sunday* by Kurt Vonnegut



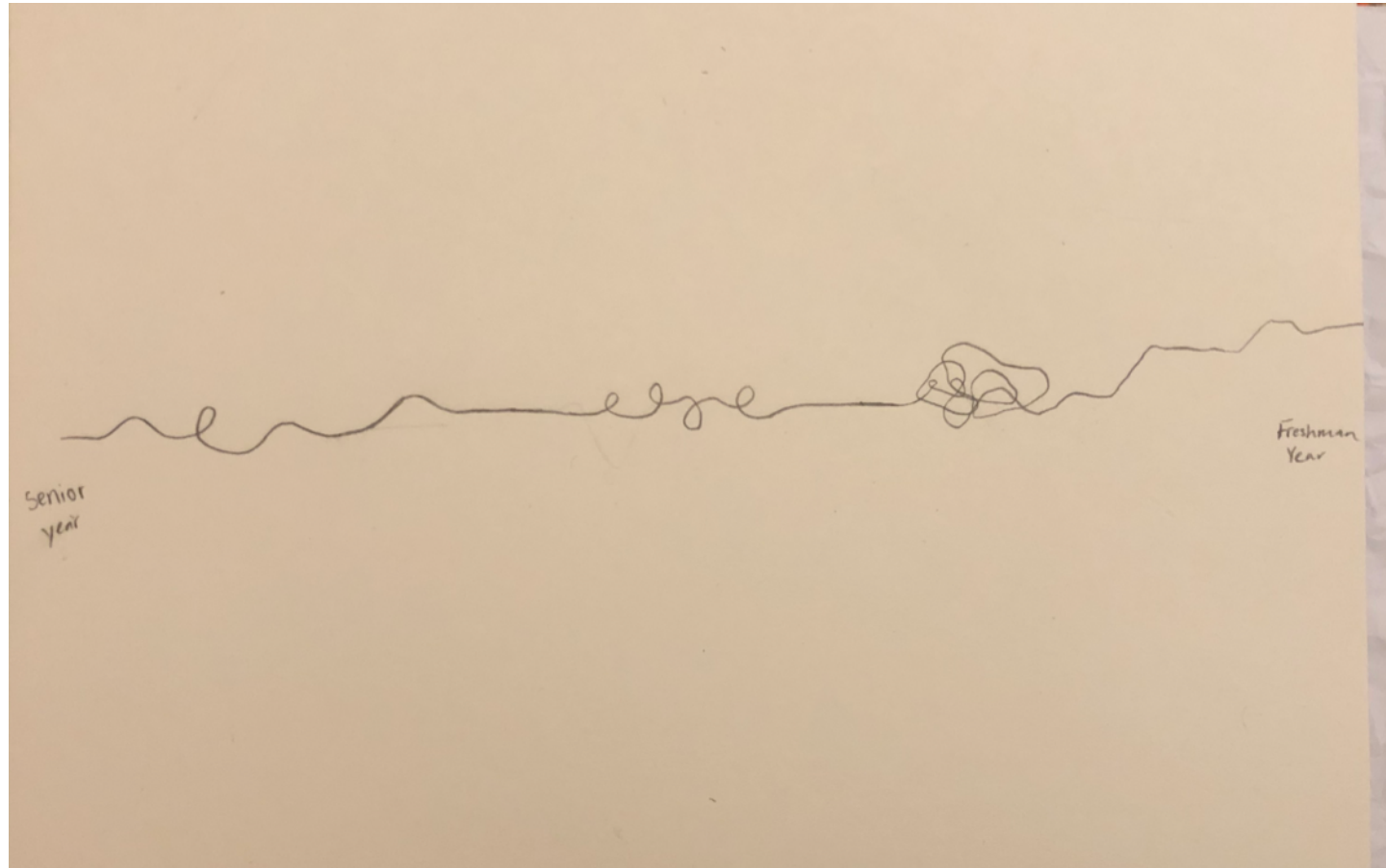
Man in Hole	Boy Meets Girl	From Bad to Worse	Which Way Is Up?
The main character gets into trouble then gets out of it again and ends up better off for the experience.	The main character comes across something wonderful, gets it, loses it, then gets it back forever.	The main character starts off poorly then gets continually worse with no hope for improvement.	The story has a lifelike ambiguity that keeps us from knowing if new developments are good or bad.
Arsenic and Old Lace Harold & Kumar Go To White Castle	Jane Eyre Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind	The Metamorphosis The Twilight Zone	Hamlet The Sopranos
Creation Story	Old Testament	New Testament	Cinderella
In many cultures' creation stories, humankind receives incremental gifts from a deity. First major staples like the earth and sky, then smaller things like sparrows and cell phones. Not a common shape for Western stories, however.	Humankind receives incremental gifts from a deity, but is suddenly ousted from good standing in a fall of enormous proportions.	Humankind receives incremental gifts from a deity, is suddenly ousted from good standing, but then receives off-the-charts bliss.	It was the similarity between the shapes of Cinderella and the New Testament that thrilled Vonnegut for the first time in 1947 and then over the course of his life as he continued to write essays and give lectures on the shapes of stories.
Great Expectations	Great Expectations with Dickens' alternate ending		



## Student “storyline” examples

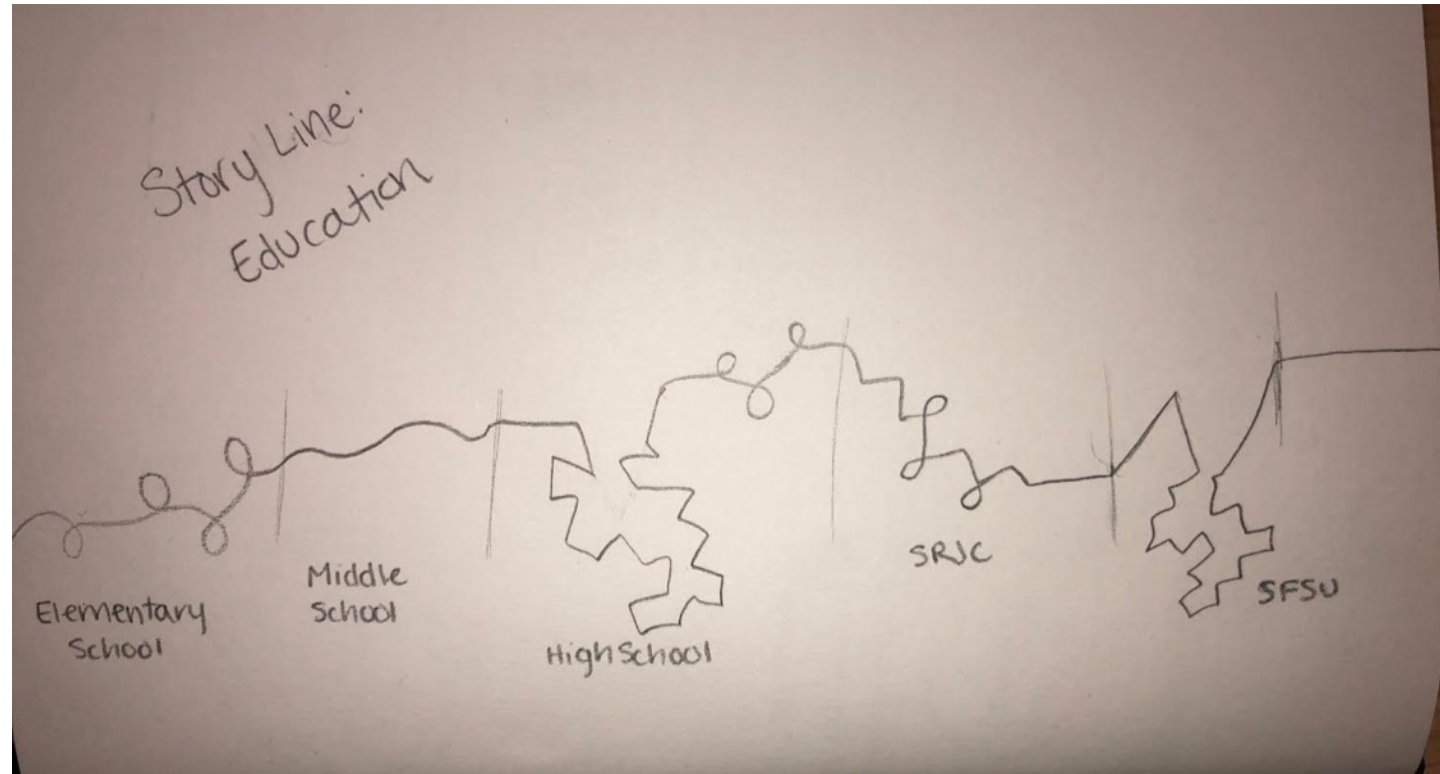


C: I decided to do try and draw the last 6 months of my life through lines. And this is what came up. A lot of it had to do with acknowledging that I am maorocoti which people mostly know it as transgender non binary and what it felt like to not be able to sit in that discomfort of pretending to be one thing knowing I was something else and how the coming out as such was a process and the squiggly lines where the ups and downs of my emotions, the big loops with the dots were moments i remember having such horrible anxiety and how eventually through support the anxiety lessened until I started to embrace it openly.

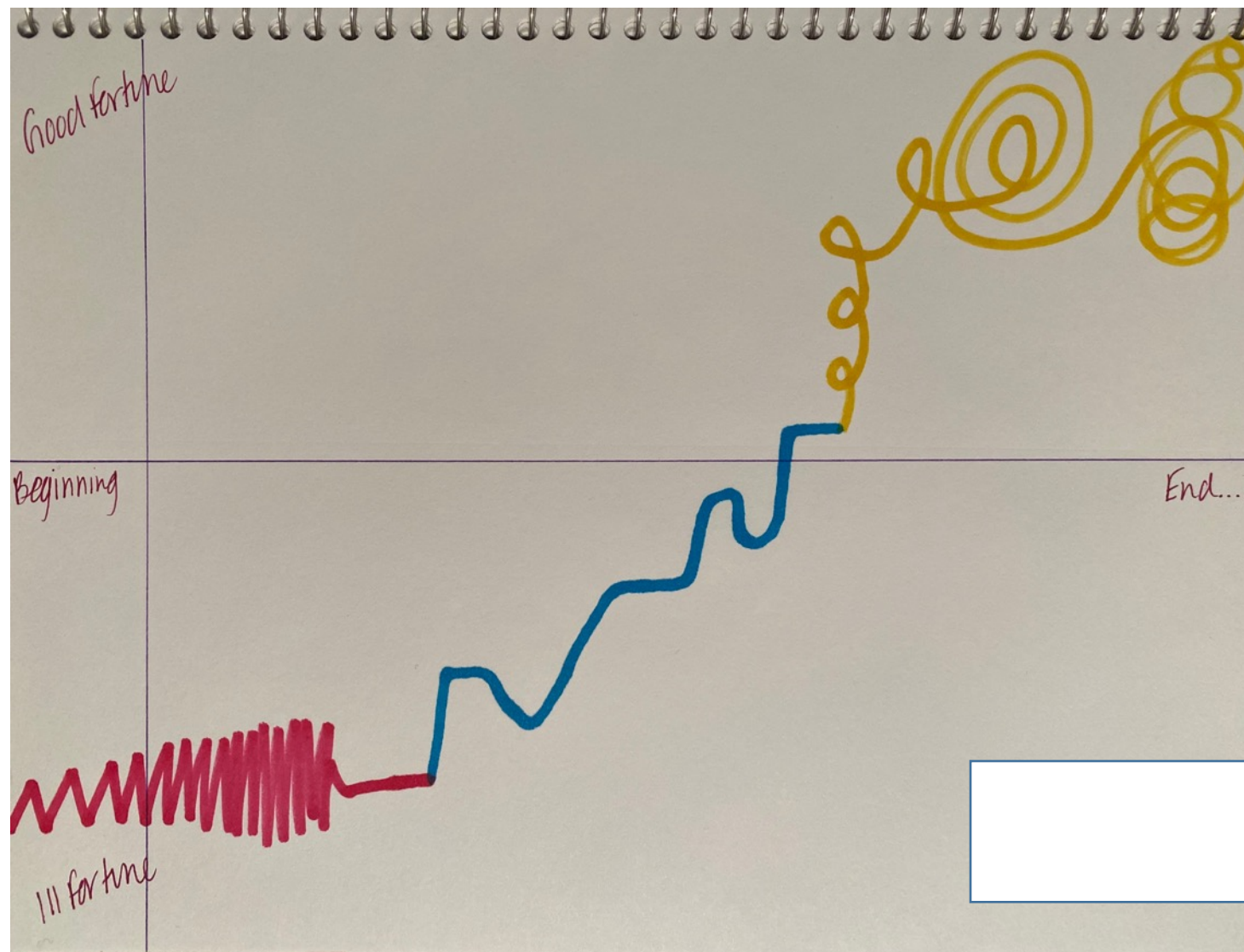


M: This goes from my senior year to my freshman year of college. I used the loops to symbolize the decision process when I was looking into different schools and showed that even though I had tough times I'm happy with where I am now.

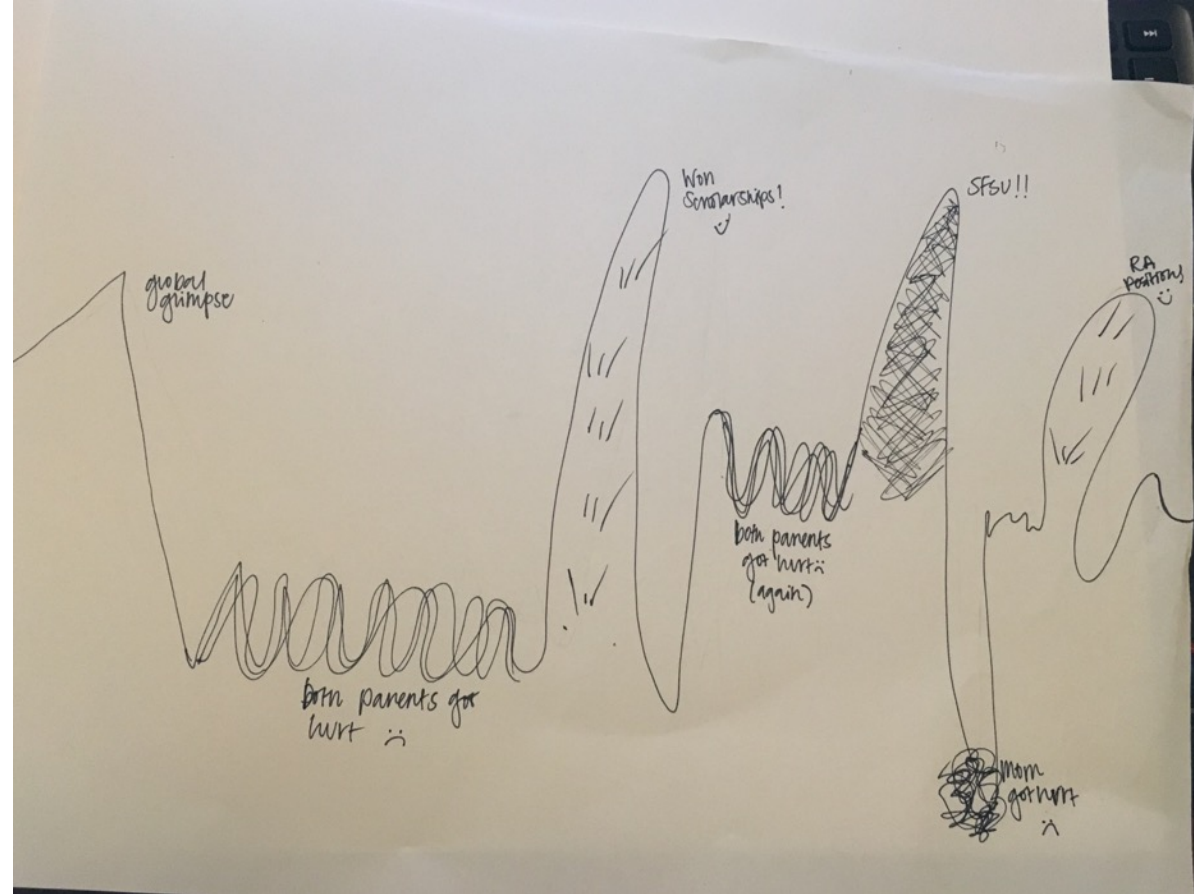




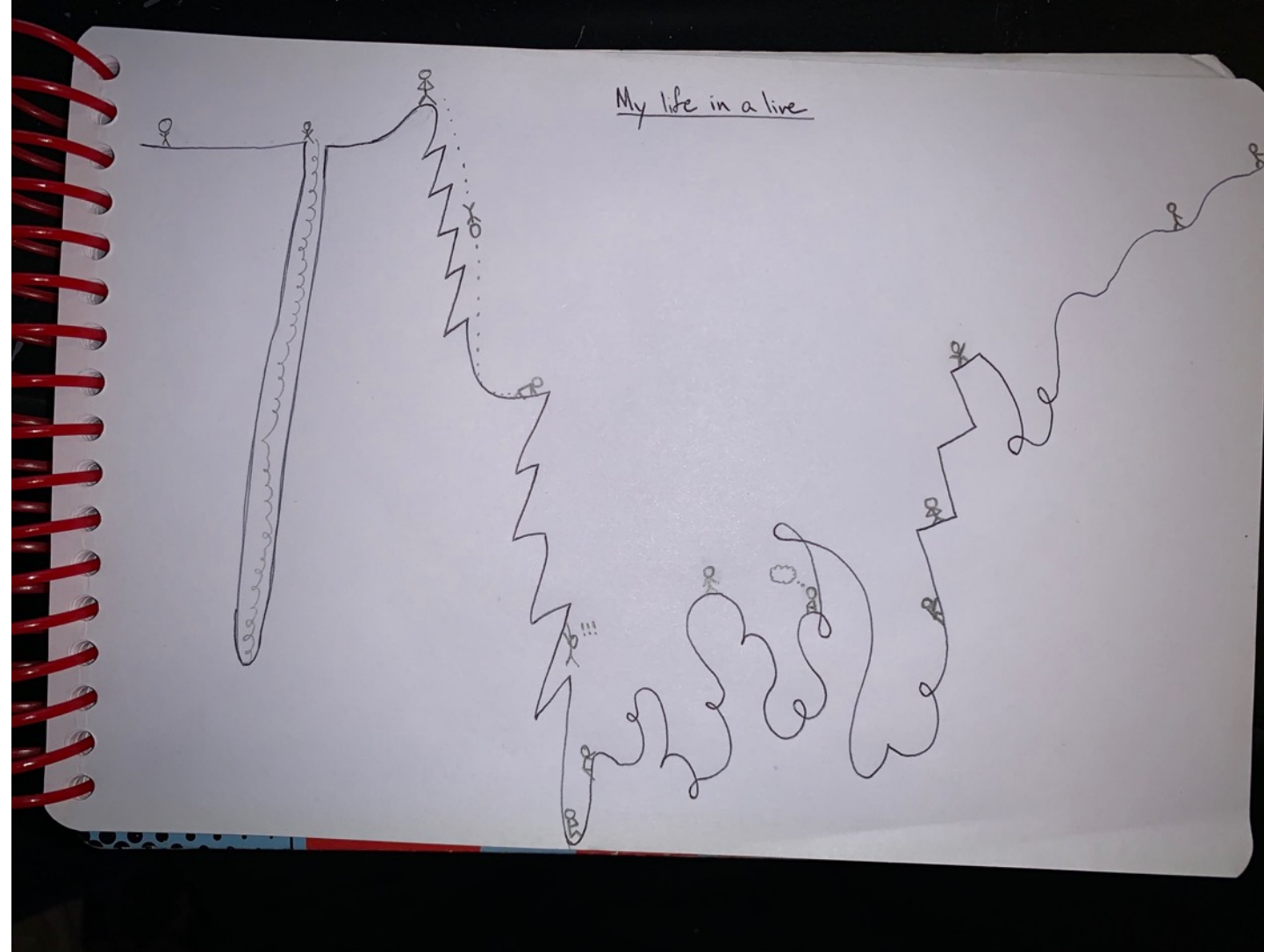
T: For my story line, I decided to path my experience through school. I felt as if elementary school and middle school were pretty predictable times for me. The only expectation I had was to be a kid and do well in school. In high school and beyond (when reality and responsibility kick in), my education experience has become a bit more hectic with lots of outside factors determining how my time goes.



A: This storyline represents the years of my life from filing for divorce in 2018 to current. I chose a very choppy, and stressed line to represent the beginning of the end, adding red for angry symbolism. That began my slow rise of healing, and growing involving many ups and downs, and anxiety. I used the color blue to represent this sad, but optimistic time of growth in my life. I used loopy lines to present my new found purpose and goals.. my individualism and brave endeavors. This line is yellow, for happiness.

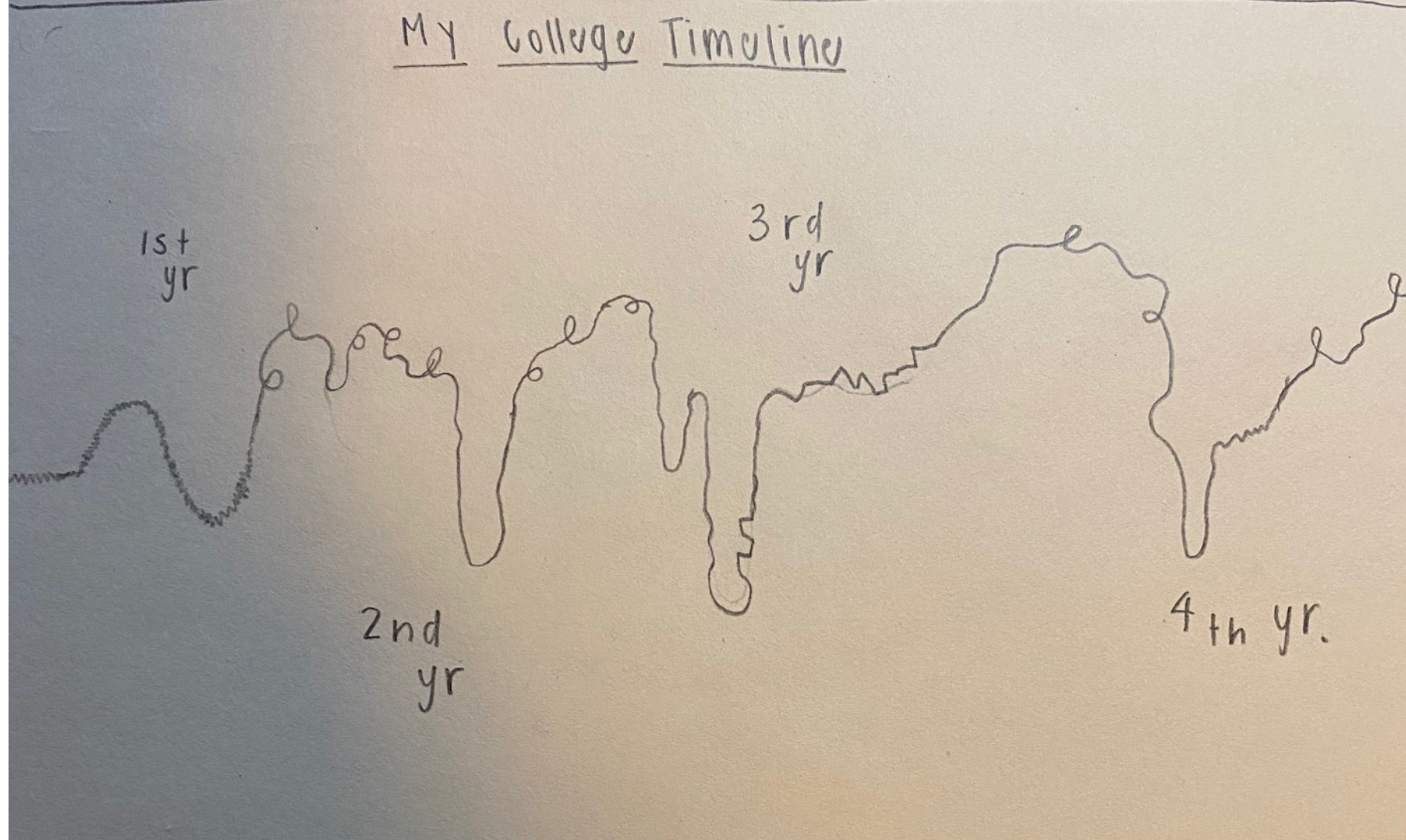


M: So this is my life map and currently spans from 2017-present and how I made it here to SFSU. In 2017 I took a study abroad trip to Constanza, Dominican Republic and worked with the local families in the area. During my time there, I worked with the children and did English tutoring and teaching and that's where I learned that I had a niche for teaching. Fast forward to the end of my senior year in 2018, and both of my parents ended up in the hospital due to health complications. It was a really tough time for me because I pretty much ended up not going to school for the last semester of my senior year in order to take care of both of my parents, it felt as if I was completely unprepared for the next steps. But, the light at the end of that tunnel was winning scholarships and I ended up not paying for anything my first year here, so that's also pretty cool. And again comes the caveat, my parents got hurt again before I started here at SFSU so that made me really question whether or not I wanted to attend. After they got hurt, I started attending SFSU and shortly thereafter, my mom got hurt. I was really frustrated and confused because I couldn't figure out why all of these things were happening at once, but I had to just take the brunt and move on because that's life. The last happy squiggle is me getting an RA position at the beginning of this semester and finally being able to understand the concept of timing. As my mom always says, "Man plans and God laughs" so I think I took a lot from that quote throughout my time here.

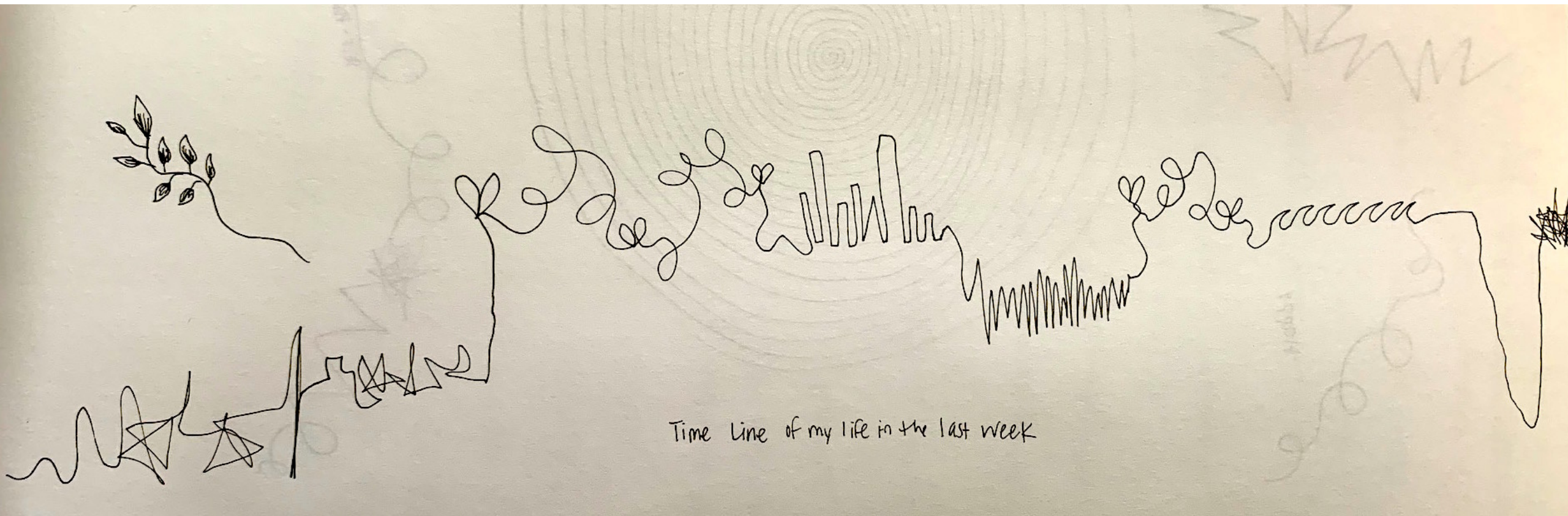


D: I did my lifetime so far. I had a really good childhood so I started off high, with a dramatic dip for when I get diagnosed with diabetes but quickly go back up cause kids can handle anything. My peak at the beginning is the start of college, and the downfall that ensues is the struggles I had there that lead to me dropping out. And from there it's the path back to physical and mental health, which is never a straight line or as easy as just taking steps. At the end it's a wobbly line to show continuous change and growth. The little stick figures I just thought was cute.



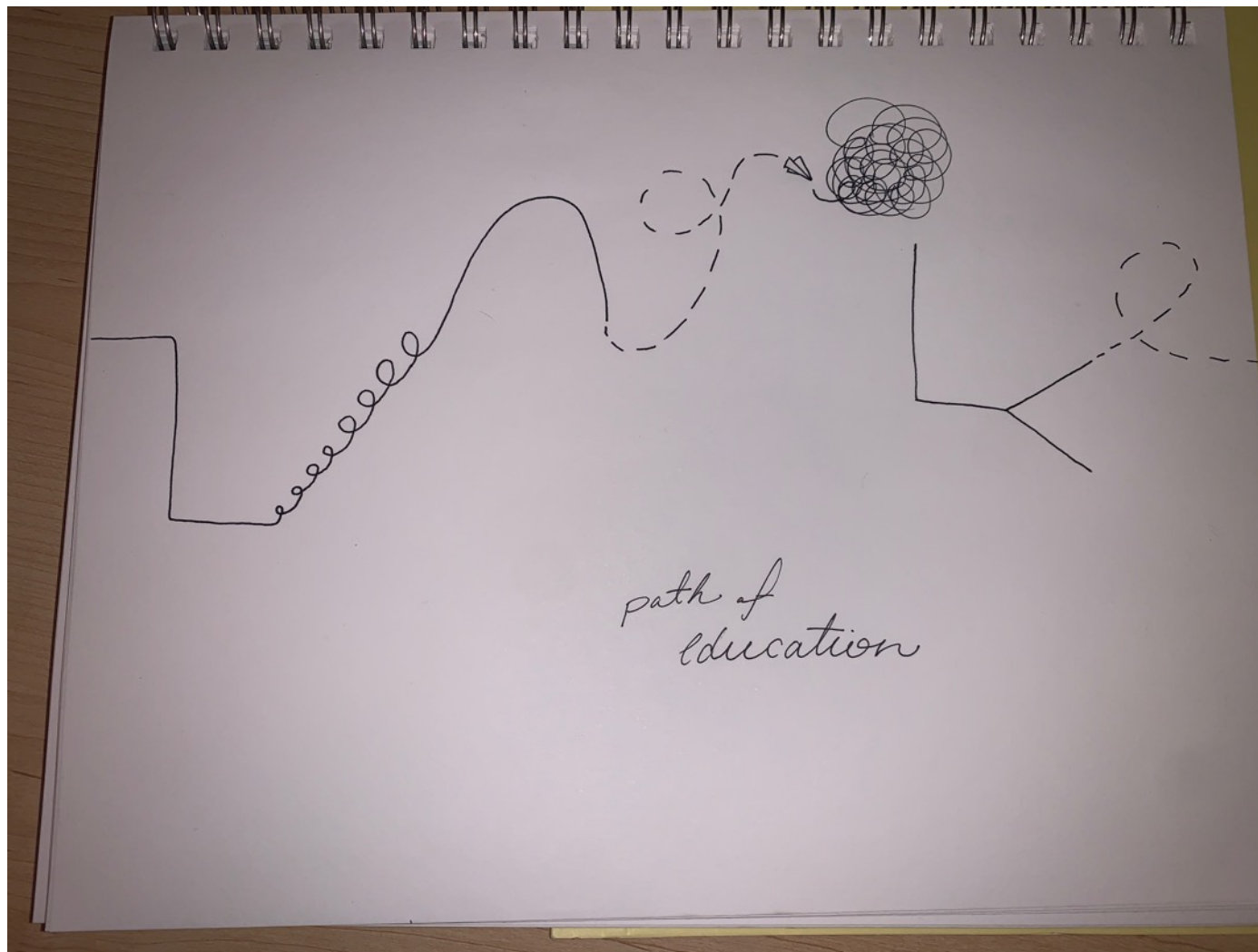


A: I feel like my life is a rollercoaster. This is a timeline of my college years. As I was going into college, I was very timid and unsure, but it got better when I met some fantastic people. Looking at this there are a lot of downfalls. I experienced a few deaths during my time in college, my dad was diagnosed with cancer, and I just had a lot of depressing moments. Things always started to get better with the support I had, but there was something that came to ruin it. As I'm about to graduate this semester I, hope for nothing but good things, but it's to be expected that unfortunate events are going to happen. I'm hopeful, though!

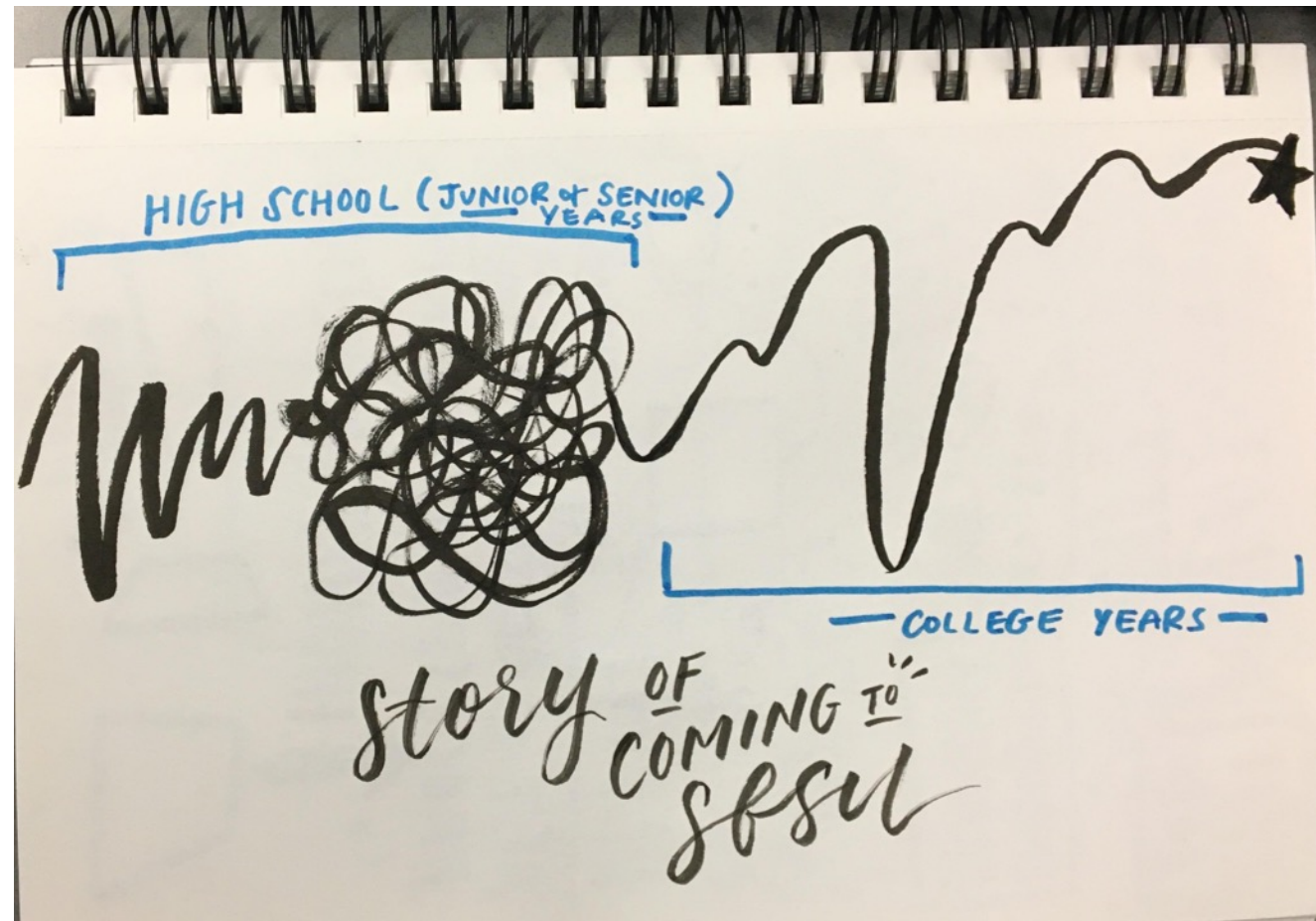


M: I did a time line of last week. It started a bit busy with work and school. Then I was stressed out trying to clean my apartment and do groceries because my mom visited from southern California and my sister visited from Portland with my niece and nephew. I was happy when they were here because I had not seen them since August. We explored the city, went to the park, and to the beach house where we just enjoyed our time together. I managed to get in a long good run on the beach in between, then my mood dipped when I had to say goodbye to them. Then it was back to the grind of work and school.



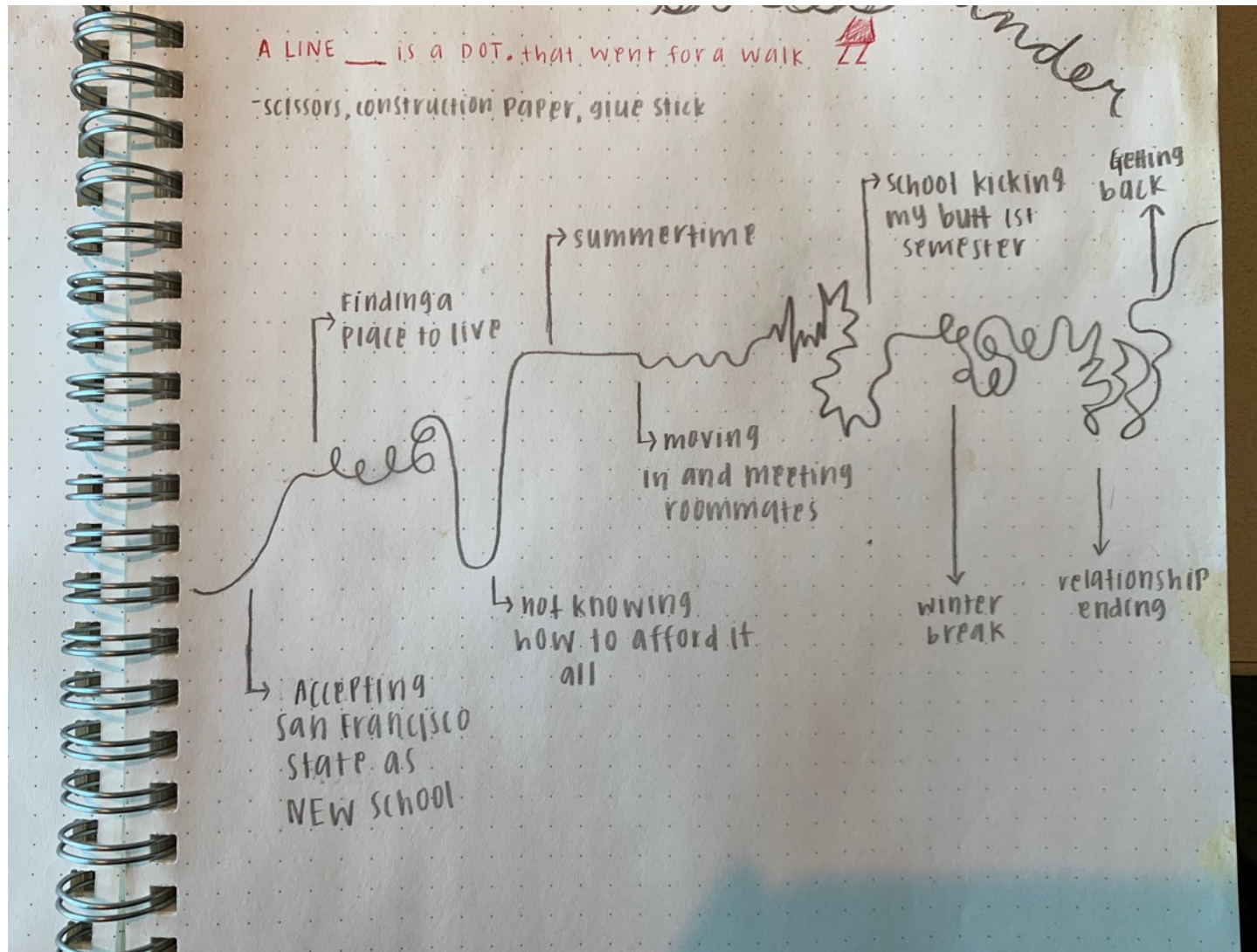


C: My path to university life has been different yet very similar to others. I just transferred as of this spring and have had my ups and downs of figuring out what path I want to go down educationally and where I hope to go after college. My line shows many changes because my life is constantly moving and changing as I grow and decide what's next.



C: High school was pretty tough because I am the first to go to college within my family so there was a lot of familial pressure in choosing a major and university. It was also when my dad was diagnosed with Parkinson's which still saddens me to this day. College has its ups and downs like an upgoing journey to the mountains.





S: Watching the video of Kurt Vonnegut really helped me understand this exercise. I chose to draw my storyline about when I first accepted my admissions to SFSU up until now. I really had fun thinking about how a line could express the way I was feeling during these months.