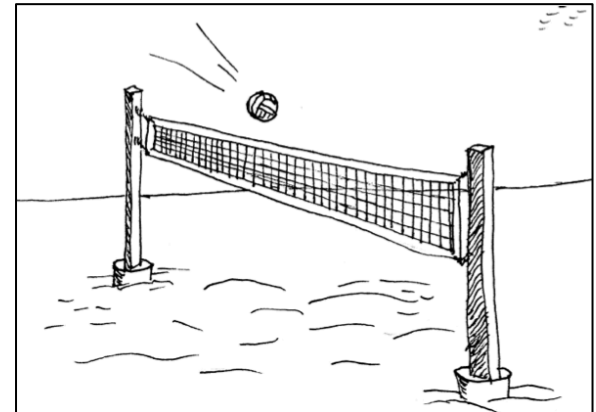
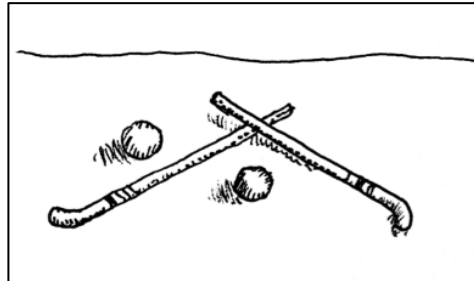
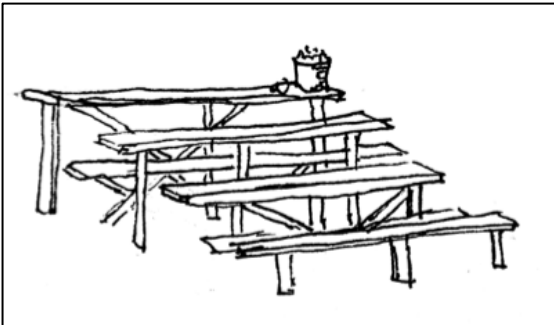


The Girl who was Born with only Two Arms and Two Legs



By Stuart Baum
Illustrated by Zoë Baum

Once upon a time, actually not *that* many years ago, there was a girl who was born with only two arms and two legs. Can you imagine that? Count how many you have. Eight! That's right. *Four* arms and *four* legs.

Now, there have been a few children born with only four arms and *three* legs. Or four legs and three *arms*. And there was one child born with only three of each, for a total of six, but what would it be like having only *two* arms and *two* legs! That's hard to imagine.

If you fold two legs underneath yourself and hide two arms behind your back, you can feel what it might be like. Very odd. And how would you do all the things you need to do with only two arms and two legs. It'd be hard to even walk!

When the baby was born, the doctor told the parents the bad news. That their new baby daughter only had two arms and two legs. Though they were sad, they decided to love their new daughter anyway. And they named her Quarta, meaning 'four.'

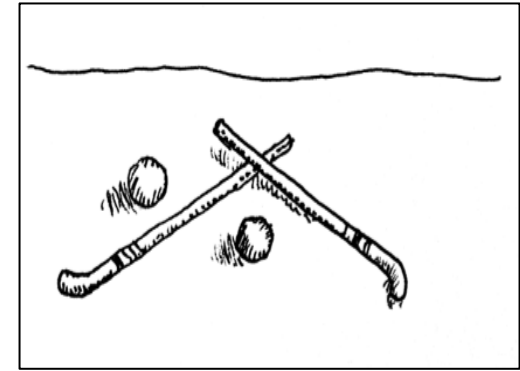


Growing up, Quarta had very few friends. This was possibly since her parents were afraid she'd get hurt or struggle too much to keep up, because she had only half as many arms and legs as the other children.

When she was five, Quarta went to school like the other children. She did well in classes, better than most of the other children, but she struggled to fit in socially, that is, she had almost no friends. And, as far as sports went, this was the biggest problem.

Other children could easily catch the two balls and two sticks when they played “Balls and Sticks,” but since Quarta had only two arms, she could only, at best, catch one stick and one ball. For this reason, no one wanted her on their team.

Lunch was even more difficult, since the children had to catch their own food and Quarta had to learn how to do this with only two arms. Can you imagine catching food with only two arms? That’d be *really* hard!



She did not starve, of course, but there were some lunches where her teachers had to give her food, like a baby, and this was embarrassing.

The other children teased her, as you might expect, which made her sad, but what could she do?

It became worse as she got older. When she was thirteen and the students were going on dates, she was often left home alone. Every now and then, her friends would all go out together and they would invite her. But, she knew, she was too different to be considered a girlfriend by any of the boys. They would be nice to her, but it was more like how you would treat a pet than a person. This made Quarta very sad.



One day, the students visited the seashore during a school field trip.

Quarta had to get special permission to go, since the teachers were worried she'd struggle to keep up and, if there were any danger, she'd cause problems for the other students. But she was allowed to go, mainly since everyone knew that Kako, a boy who had all four arms and legs, was the *real* problem. He kept wandering off to look at creatures on the seashore, getting lost, or worse, getting trapped in a tidal pool and having to be rescued.

As expected, it was only minutes after they reached the seashore that one of the other students noticed that Kako was gone.



Quarta knew where he was. She saw him sneak off to watch some of the animals on the sand.

“He stopped by the big beach,” Quarta told the teacher. “I’ll go back and find him.” She hurried off to collect him.

The teacher asked two other students to follow her, to make sure she didn’t also get lost or in trouble.

As expected, Kako was trapped in a tidal pool.

Quarta saw this and, wanting to be helpful, climbed up the edge of the rock (using just two legs and two arms! Can you *imagine*?) and reached down to grab Kako. If you are expecting that she was also pulled into the tidal pool, you can relax. She was able to save Kako and he climbed back over the rocks to safety.

Quarta was happy, since she rescued another student! She, the girl with only two arms and two legs, had rescued someone with all four arms and legs!

She thought this would make her a hero and that Kako, though a somewhat troubled student, would be her friend.

It did not turn out that way.

A couple of the other students teased Kako.

“Kako was rescued by a frea-eak,” they chanted. “Kako was rescued by a frea-eak.” This embarrassed Kako. Because he was embarrassed, he became angry at Quarta.

Quarta had tried to be brave and helpful. And she had been. She had *rescued* another student! But it was turned against her. Instead of being called a hero, they teased her as a freak. She was miserable for the whole field trip.

Until, that is, she saw something amazing.

On the last beach they visited, there were other two armed and two legged creatures. Lots of them!

While they looked nothing like her (they were pink and brown and had colorful pieces of cloth wrapped around parts of their bodies) they were happy! They were playing and laughing and splashing in the water. Even though they all had only two legs and two arms! Quarta had never seen such a sight

She counted their limbs to make sure: One, two arms. One, two legs. And, incredibly, everyone one the beach seemed to have this exact same number.

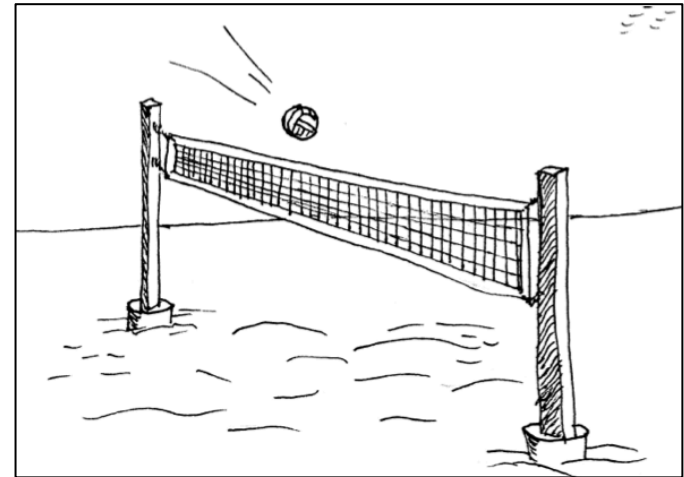
This gave Quarta hope that she, too, could be happy even though she, too, only had two arms and two legs.

She watched them more carefully. There was a small group of them playing a game near a net. Four of them were on one side and four were on another. They were hitting a large ball over the net back and forth. Incredibly to Quarta, they were hitting the ball with just *one* arm! They were jumping, some were jumping pretty high, with only two legs!

Quarta stared and stared and stared at this game, trying to learn the rules. These creatures looked so happy and they were having so much fun! And all with only two legs and two arms!

And, since there was only one ball, it didn't matter that they only had two arms.

She decided that she would bring this game to her school.



Her excitement was broken by one of the nastier students yelling, "Hurry up, freak, it's time to go home." Normally this would make Quarta sad, but now that she had a game and saw how happy it made these other two-armed and two-legged creatures, she believed she had a chance to be happy, too.



When she got back to school, she started work on her new game.

She called it “One Ball” since it was played with only one ball. She set up a net and marked off the area, by drawing lines on the ground. The rules were simple: Hit the one ball back and forth over the net. If the one ball touched the ground or went over the lines, the other team got a point.

She then found three of her friends who were also bad at sports (One of them was very small, one was somewhat heavier, and one was simply not good at sports) and they started to play “One Ball.”

They had trouble at first, but soon they started to make it work, hitting the ball back and forth over the net without letting the ball hit the ground. Even though the game was harder than she thought it would be, and the others had trouble learning the rules, they were all enjoying themselves. She was concerned, at first, since everyone was struggling, but even when they missed the ball or hit it out of bounds, they were laughing and having fun.

Even better, Quarta was able to play just as well as the others. The extra two arms *did* help when playing One Ball, but not as much as in the “Sticks and Balls” game, where you *needed* all four arms.

The next day, there were eight students, all of whom were normally bad at sports. They made two teams, each with four players (just like the two-armed and two-legged creatures on the beach!)

Quarta decided that the first team to sixteen points would win.

They played three games and everyone had so much fun, no one could remember who won any of the games.

The third day, even more of the students showed up to play “One Ball.” Again, these were the students who were rarely asked to play sports with the others. Generally, the only time they were asked to join the games

was when the better players needed to make the teams even. And they were often asked to “just stand there and try not to get in the way.” With One Ball, though, no one could simply stand there and watch. Everyone got to play as much as everyone else on the team. And everyone was laughing and having a great time!

Suddenly Shay walked into the gym.

Shay had all four arms, but two of his arms were deformed. These two arms had large round growths on them. Shay had a condition called “club arm” and for this reason, he was allowed to skip gym class.

Quarta welcomed Shay and found him a team with only three players. He would be their fourth, which they needed. The other players welcomed him. Quarta did not even need to say anything about him having two *good* arms, which was the same number of arms she had.

Shay was, at first, nervous about joining a One Ball team, but by the end of the first game, Shay was tired and happy.

“Thank you, Quarta,” he said. “This is a good game, since anyone can play. Even me.”



Within weeks, they had formed a One Ball league with six full teams. Quarta was captain of her team and also ran the league. Shay was captain of another team.

One day, when they showed up to start their games, there were eight other students standing in their way. These were the eight best sport players in the school.

Jenna, captain of one of the “Balls and Sticks” teams and probably the best sports player in the school, stepped forward and spoke directly to Quarta. “You are being unfair and mean.”

Quarta could not believe what she was hearing. She, of all the students, the one who had been teased her entire life, was being accused of being unfair and mean?

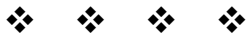
“Please explain,” she asked.

Jenna said, angrily, “You start a sports league, with a brand new game, and only invite *some* of the students in the school? That’s unfair.”

One of Jenna’s friends added, “Yes, just because you are bad at sports, and a freak, doesn’t mean you can keep this game to yourself and the other weak players.”

Instead of being mad or frightened, Quarta started laughing. She said, through her laughter, “This league is open to *all* players. It just never occurred to me that you’d want to play a game with only a single ball. Or with us.”

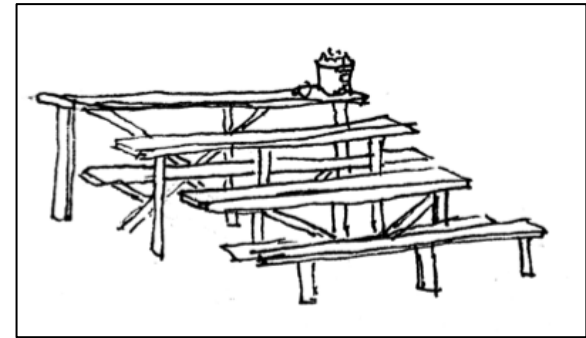
The new players joined and, happily for everyone, they were not much better than the other players. A little better, of course, but not enough better that they always won.



Soon, One Ball became the most popular game in the school. And while Quarta was never one of the better players, she played well (especially since she practiced a lot!), she always had fun, and she continued to run the league.

At the end of the school year, there was a big One Ball tournament, where the parents of all the students were invited to sit in the stands and watch. And cheer.

Quarta's parents were watching from the stands. They saw how well Quarta ran the league. They also saw how well she treated the other students, even the ones who used to tease her and call her a freak for having only two arms and two legs.



They were very proud. They cheered loudly for all the teams, but especially loudly for Quarta's team, even though her team lost early in the competition. It was during this very moment they realized they did not love her *anyway*; they simply *loved* her.

❖ **The End.** ❖

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