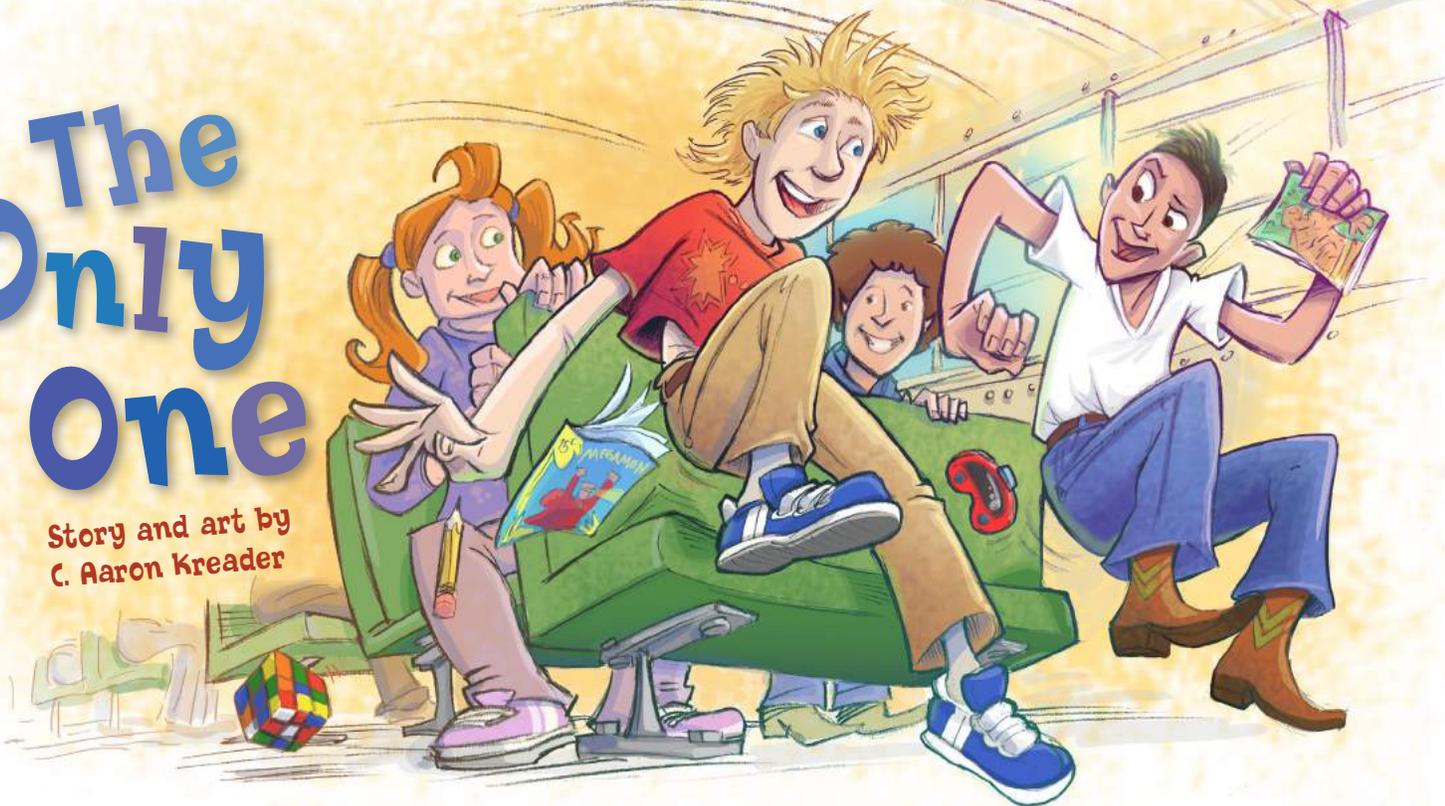


The Only One

Story and art by
C. Aaron Kreader



Today was going to be different. I could feel it. Different could be good or bad, but in a small town, it's usually bad. Since I'm the only Bahá'í kid in a town where heavy rain is considered exciting, I try not to alarm people. But that's hard when the local pastime is digging into people's private lives. It's like living in a town full of detectives.

Teachers and friends ask questions after I miss school for a Bahá'í holy day. And after Christmas, "What did you get from Santa?" is always hard to face. But I'm a ninja at blending in.

I save a few of my birthday gifts from November until after the holidays. Or I change the subject by giving compliments to my inquisitors about their haircuts or shoes. This doesn't always work, so there are some awkward moments where I try my best to explain the faith I love.

"Hi, Saul!" Andy pounced into the bus seat next to me, which popped me into the air.

"Hey, Andy." I returned the favor, rising up and then landing on the bench to catapult Andy into the air.

We both burst into laughter.

Andy, Eddie, and Katy were all on my bus route, because our farms were close together. Eddie and Katy joined us, and that uneasy feeling about today vanished in giggles and games.

But as the school day rolled on, the feeling crept back. I became lost in thought, moving like a zombie through class, the lunch line, and eating—almost without blinking.

"You gonna eat those?" Eddie's finger hovered over my fries.

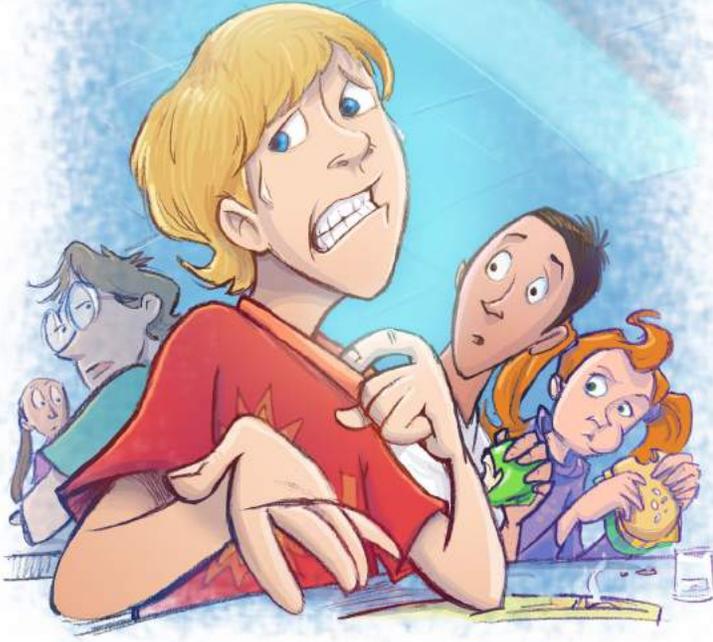
"Huh? Oh, go ahead." I was hungry, but I couldn't eat.

"You ready for class today, Saul?" Katy asked.

Time stopped. I stared at Katy. We were studying world religions in social studies, so Ms. Hanover wanted us to talk about our churches in class today. *That* must be why I felt weird all day. I became lost in the universe of my own thoughts. Andy, Katy, and Eddie—as well as Jeff and Laura—all looked at me from around the table.

"You're Jewish, right, Saul?" Detective Laura was hard at work.





I scanned Laura, looking for something to compliment—no new haircut. And I couldn't see her shoes. PANIC! I was about to freeze and make a fool of myself. I took a breath, finished chewing, and took a swig of milk to buy time. This was it. I would *wow* them. Yes! Tell them all about my faith, just like I had practiced in my mind. Gathering courage, I opened my mouth.

"Bahá'í," I smiled.

"Where are you going?" asked Laura. At first, I was just as confused as they were. Then I realized that she thought I said "Bye."

"Uh, no, I'm a *Bahá'í*." My courage was slipping—I had to move fast.

"What's that?" Jeff asked. The table was all ears, and I wondered if the whole lunchroom got quieter.

My face was hot. I blurted, "It's unity, and all people, with the equal races, WE ARE ONE!"

The silence around me confirmed my epic *fail*. I lurched up and ran, leaving my lunch tray behind. The class bell sounded as I dashed out of the lunchroom.

After school, I went to the river where trees were stacked along a steep bank. Whether they fell in a storm or from the work of beavers, I never knew. Andy and I imagined it was a huge fort. We forgot about our day and became heroes of our own world. As the shadows grew long, we lay in the fort, watching the sunset.

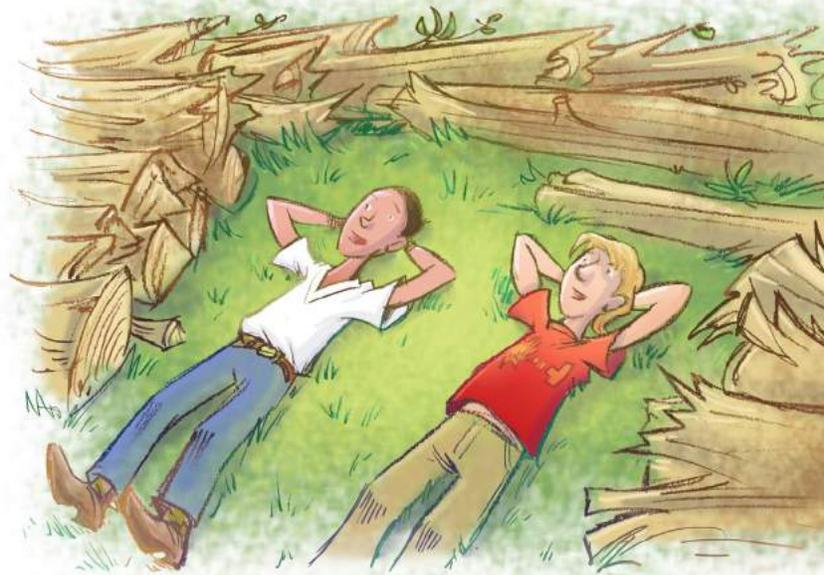
"What is a Bahá'í?" Andy asked, gazing at the golden sky.

Relaxed, I didn't think—I just spoke from my heart. "A Bahá'í believes there is one God and all the religions should be friends."

We sat in silence until Andy turned to me and said, "I want to be a friend of the Bahá'ís."

I stared out of our fortress and took a deep breath.

I might still be the only one, but at least I wasn't alone.



Are you the only Bahá'í at your school, or do you feel like "the only one" in other ways? What's it like for you? What do you do when friends ask about you or your religion, whether you're a Bahá'í, Buddhist, Muslim, or another faith? Share your story with **Brilliant Star**. Your thoughts and experiences can help other kids! Write to us at brilliant@usbnc.org.