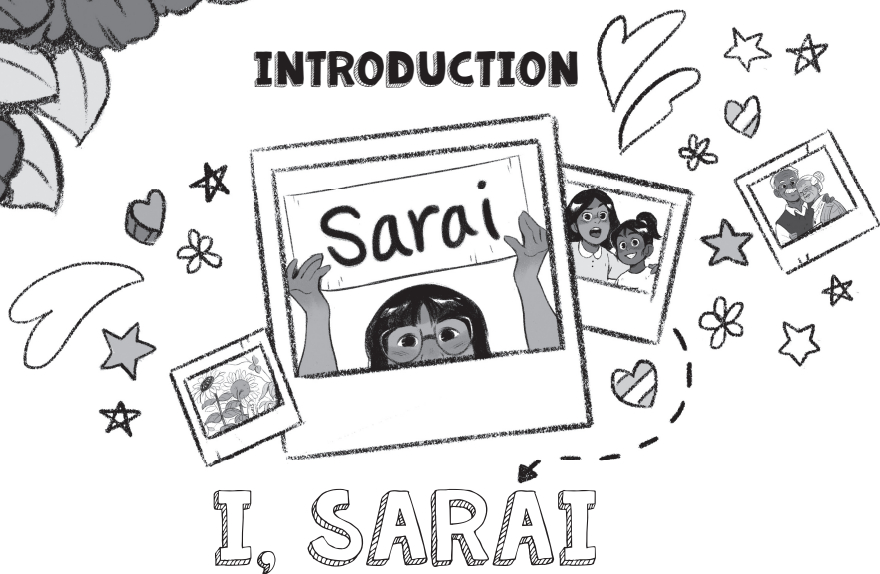


INTRODUCTION



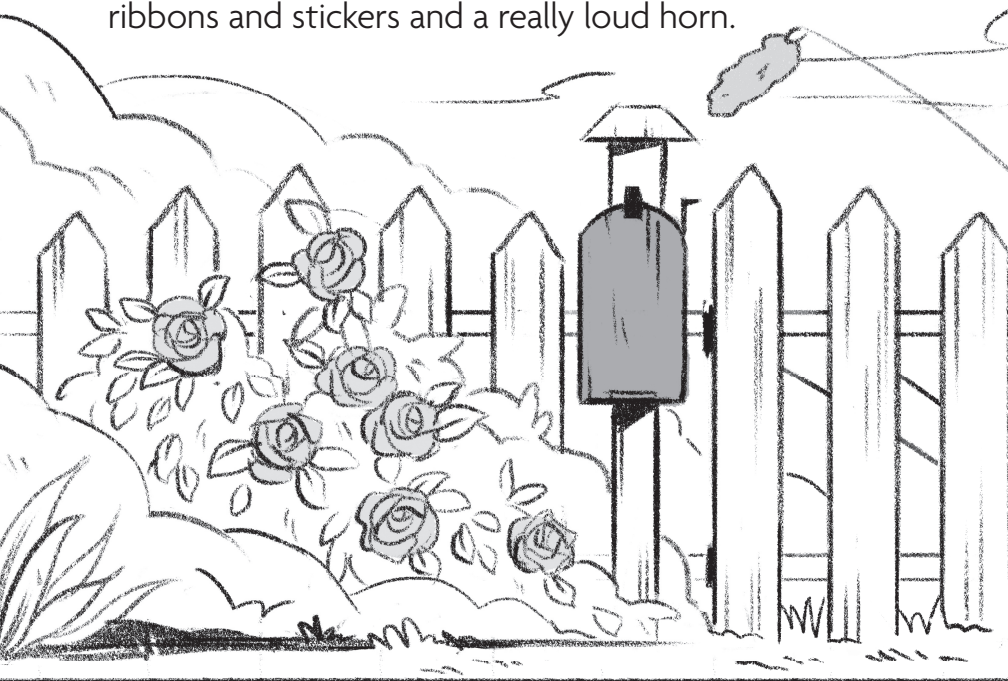
I, SARAI

I wake up in the morning, open my eyes, and stare at the painted sign hanging above my bed. It says “YOU ARE AWESOME.” I made it to remind myself that no matter what else is going on, I’ll be okay. Because I, Sarai Gonzalez, am awesome. Or, at least I try to be. My sister Lucía once asked me what awesome means, and it was a little hard to explain. Awesome means, well, awesome! It also means great, super, amazing, and love, family, and fun. It’s how I want to be and what I hope I already am.



One day, I want to be a singer, a dancer, an actor, a baker, a talk show host, and a chef. I already AM a businesswoman, or business girl, I guess, since I'm only ten. I have a cupcake business, and my pink-and-yellow room is the same color as the strawberry-lemon cupcakes I made last week for my mom's friend. I used boxed mixes for the cake part, but I made homemade frosting and decorated them with sprinkles and a cherry on top. I take cupcake making seriously, because it's a business. I even have cards that say "Sarai's Sweets" with my dad's number on them. I only

sell to people I know. I'm always trying to earn money because it seems like someone in the family always needs it, and I want to be able to help. For a long time we needed help with our bills and we moved from place to place. We are doing great now, but I remember how much our family helped us when we needed it, so I have two coffee cans where I save my money. One says "Family" and the other says "Bike" because I'm also saving up to buy a bike. I want my bike to be hot pink, my favorite color, and have ribbons and stickers and a really loud horn.



When I ride my super awesome bike down the street,
I want the neighbors to say, “Here comes Sarai
Gonzalez!” as I fly by in a pink blur.



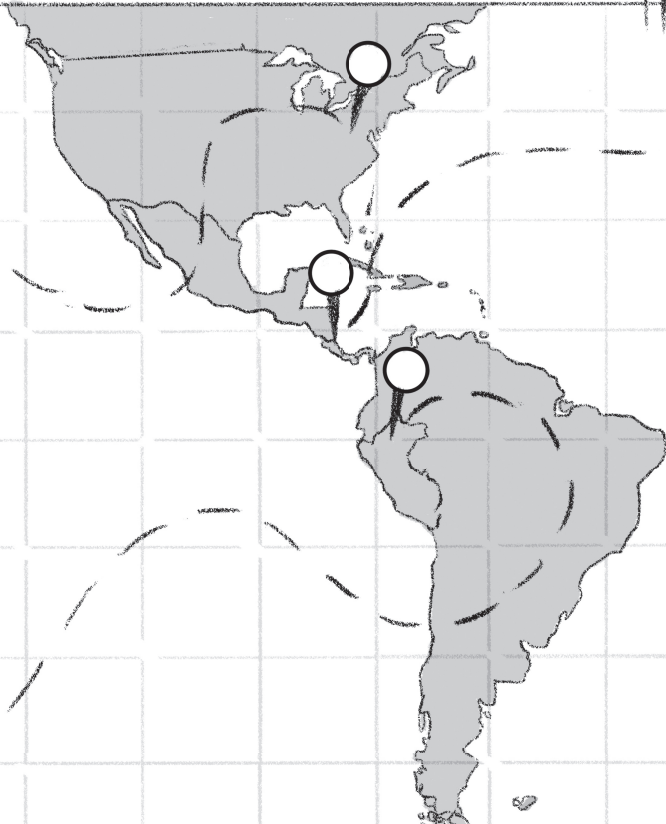
Being a member of the Gonzalez family means a lot. The Gonzalez family five is my mom, my dad, my little sister Josie, and my little sister Lucía. Josie is seven, and Lucía is five. And me, of course. My mom still calls me her “little peanut,” but I’m not so little anymore. I’m in the fourth grade! We stick together, no matter what. When we go to a party or church or anywhere, people make room.

“Here comes the Gonzalez family!” they say. “Look out!” At first, I didn’t know what that meant, but Dad says it means that we are *very* fun and loud.

My mom, Diana, was born in Peru, all the way in South America. She moved here when she was a little girl with her mother and sister and she worked in the farm fields when she was only fourteen. My mom is hardworking, and I want to be just like her. Even though her family didn’t have a lot of money, she went to college and now she works with computers.

My mom says we can be anything we want when we grow up, and I believe her.

My dad, Juan Carlos, is an immigrant too. He came to the United States when he was little, and just like my mom, he was the first in his family to go to college. Dad is from Costa Rica, in Central America, but our whole family lives in New Jersey now. So we are really, truly Americans—North, South, and Central!



A few years ago, my parents bought us our very first house. It's small and white and has three bedrooms. Before we bought the house, we lived in apartments or with other people—grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles. That was fun, but it's pretty cool to have my very own room for the first time. I've got purple flowers painted on the door, and I'm growing flowers and vegetables on my windowsill—sunflowers and cabbage and peas and broccoli. When they get bigger, Dad will help me plant them outside. Dad and I love doing projects together. My dad is an at-home dad, which is kind of a silly thing to say, because my mom is at home a lot too, just not during weekdays.



During the weekdays, the Gonzalez family five have to spend some time apart. Lucía and I go to school together, Mom goes to work, and Dad drives Josie very far away to a different school. Josie is hearing impaired and goes to a school with other deaf and hearing-impaired children. She just got implants in her ears that help her hear sounds—it's pretty awesome! She's also learning sign language, and we're trying too. Josie has already learned lots of words, like “pool,” “ice cream,” and the name of her favorite hamburger place, for starters. She can sign my name too.

