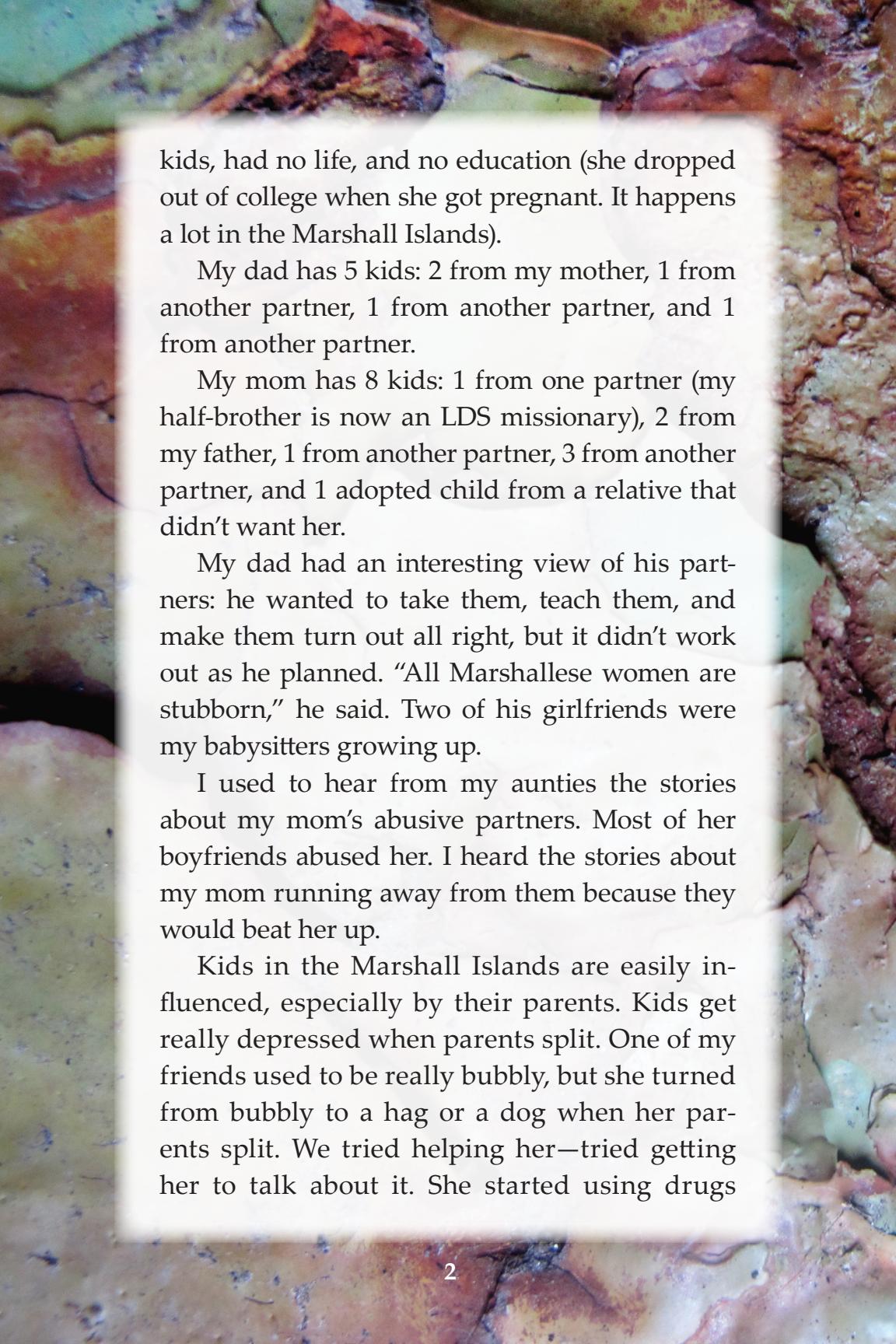


A Bit of Everyone and Everything: An Interview with a Young Woman in the Marshall Islands

_____ had soft eyes, a strong, brown body, multiple scars on her legs from scrapes and bug bites, a white t-shirt and some black shorts, and an easy smile. I met her at the LDS girls' camp this year out in Ajeltake. She was animatedly telling a story, in Marshallese, to some other girls sitting around her. She told a story about a boy who was named "Niñniñ" ("Baby"). She laughed as she recounted that she hadn't seen Niñniñ in many years and it was strange to see him grown up and still call him by his name. I asked her if she would tell me about her life. This is her story.

I am _____. I am 16 years old, and I am half Marshallese and half _____. My parents met at the local college on Majuro Atoll—he the teacher, she the student. My dad was also a gambler, and he and my mother split when I was 2 years old.

I lived with my dad for most of my life in another Pacific country. My dad was like my best friend. He was sad when I said I wanted to live with my mom in the Marshall Islands, but he was going back to school and would be busy, so he let me go. My dad didn't want me to live with my mom since he said she was struggling with 8



kids, had no life, and no education (she dropped out of college when she got pregnant. It happens a lot in the Marshall Islands).

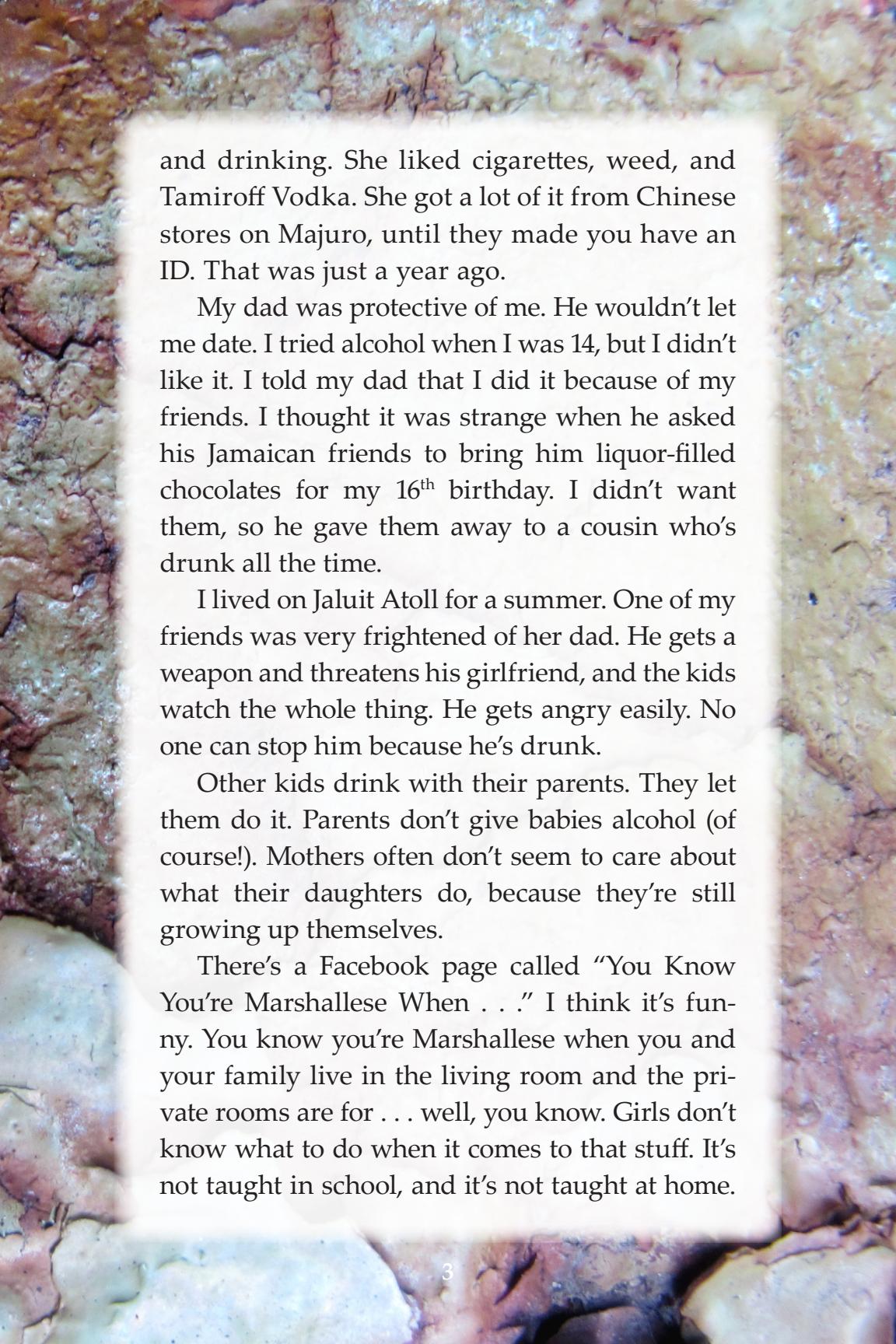
My dad has 5 kids: 2 from my mother, 1 from another partner, 1 from another partner, and 1 from another partner.

My mom has 8 kids: 1 from one partner (my half-brother is now an LDS missionary), 2 from my father, 1 from another partner, 3 from another partner, and 1 adopted child from a relative that didn't want her.

My dad had an interesting view of his partners: he wanted to take them, teach them, and make them turn out all right, but it didn't work out as he planned. "All Marshallese women are stubborn," he said. Two of his girlfriends were my babysitters growing up.

I used to hear from my aunties the stories about my mom's abusive partners. Most of her boyfriends abused her. I heard the stories about my mom running away from them because they would beat her up.

Kids in the Marshall Islands are easily influenced, especially by their parents. Kids get really depressed when parents split. One of my friends used to be really bubbly, but she turned from bubbly to a hag or a dog when her parents split. We tried helping her—tried getting her to talk about it. She started using drugs



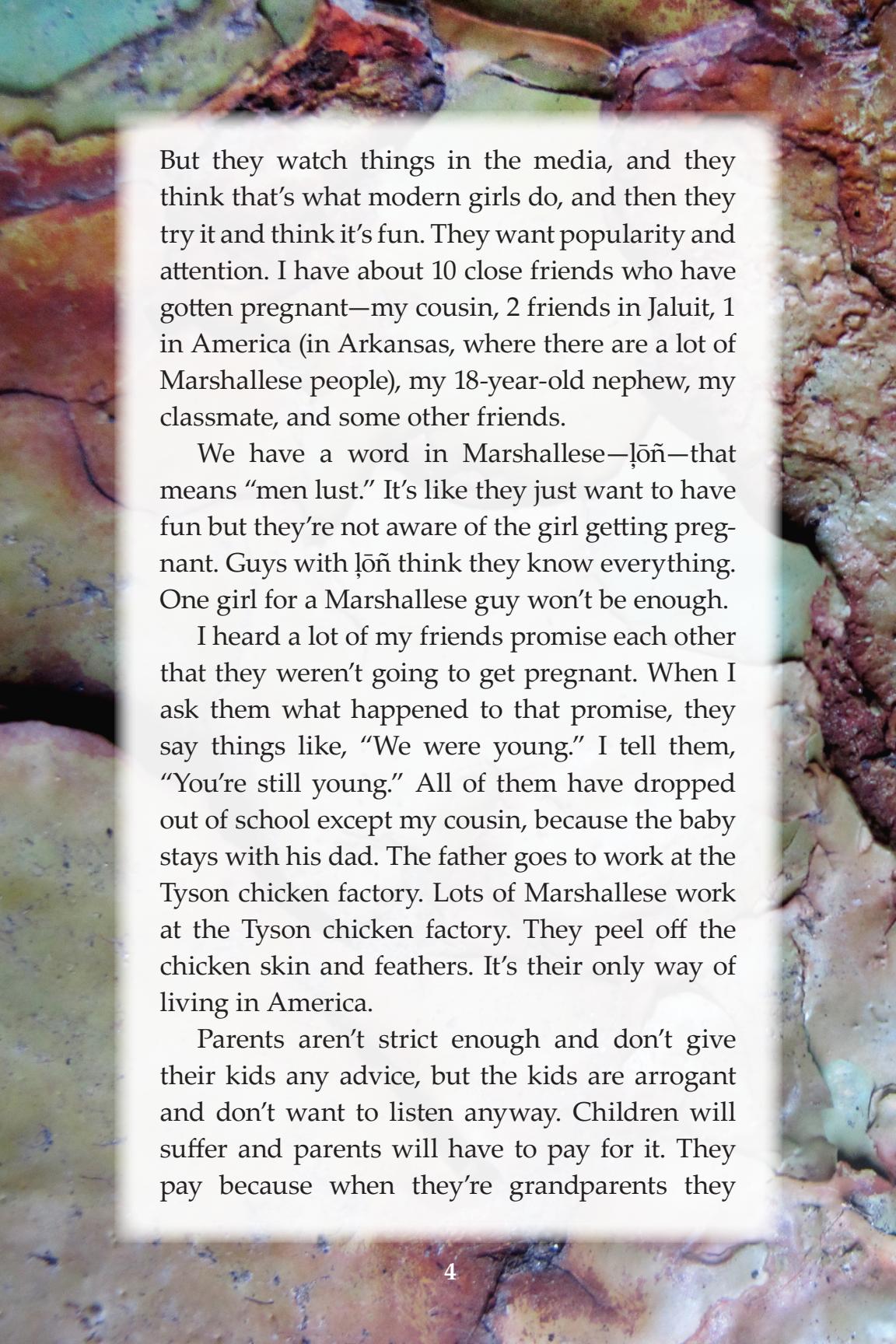
and drinking. She liked cigarettes, weed, and Tamiroff Vodka. She got a lot of it from Chinese stores on Majuro, until they made you have an ID. That was just a year ago.

My dad was protective of me. He wouldn't let me date. I tried alcohol when I was 14, but I didn't like it. I told my dad that I did it because of my friends. I thought it was strange when he asked his Jamaican friends to bring him liquor-filled chocolates for my 16th birthday. I didn't want them, so he gave them away to a cousin who's drunk all the time.

I lived on Jaluit Atoll for a summer. One of my friends was very frightened of her dad. He gets a weapon and threatens his girlfriend, and the kids watch the whole thing. He gets angry easily. No one can stop him because he's drunk.

Other kids drink with their parents. They let them do it. Parents don't give babies alcohol (of course!). Mothers often don't seem to care about what their daughters do, because they're still growing up themselves.

There's a Facebook page called "You Know You're Marshallese When . . ." I think it's funny. You know you're Marshallese when you and your family live in the living room and the private rooms are for . . . well, you know. Girls don't know what to do when it comes to that stuff. It's not taught in school, and it's not taught at home.

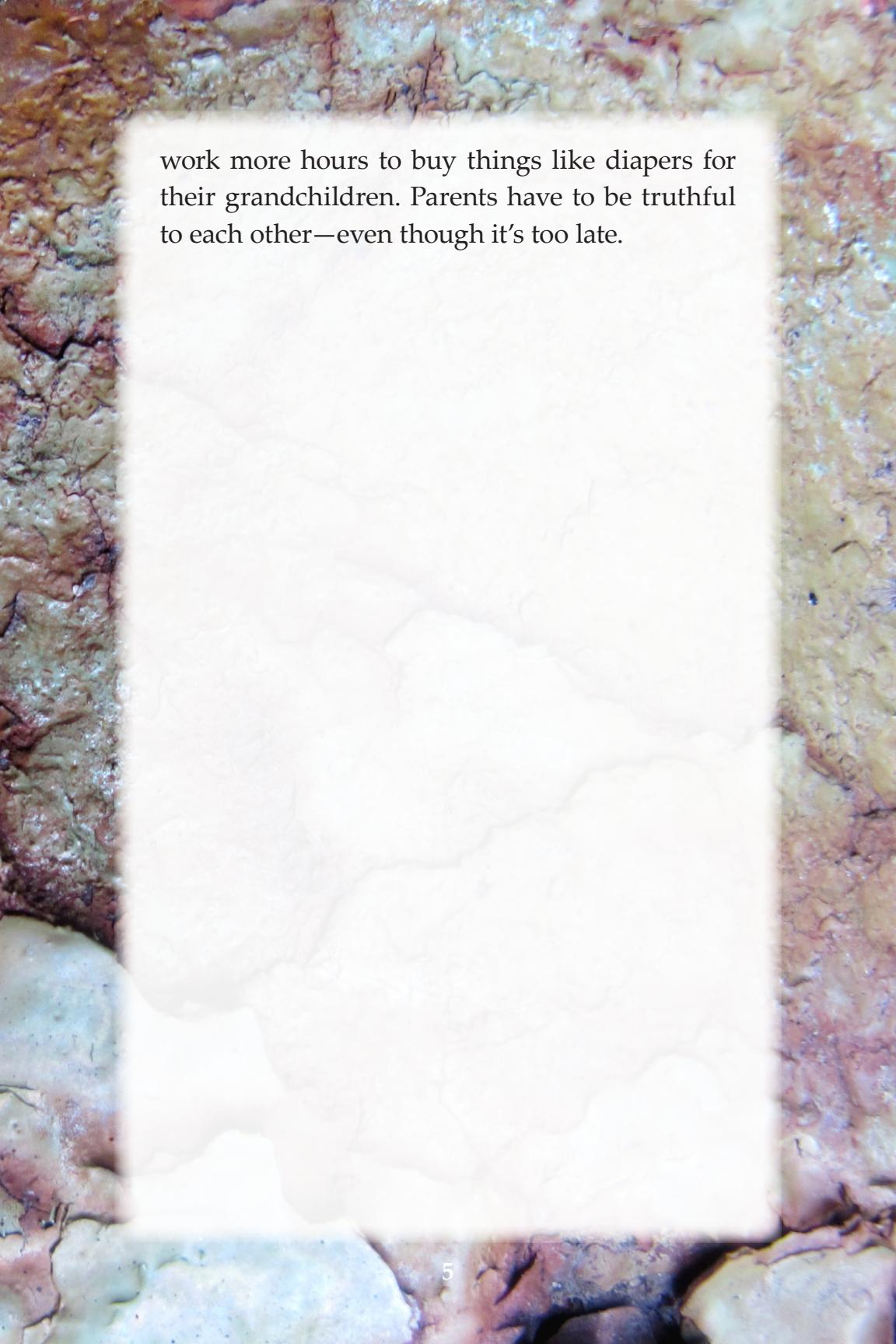


But they watch things in the media, and they think that's what modern girls do, and then they try it and think it's fun. They want popularity and attention. I have about 10 close friends who have gotten pregnant—my cousin, 2 friends in Jaluit, 1 in America (in Arkansas, where there are a lot of Marshallese people), my 18-year-old nephew, my classmate, and some other friends.

We have a word in Marshallese—*lōñ*—that means “men lust.” It’s like they just want to have fun but they’re not aware of the girl getting pregnant. Guys with *lōñ* think they know everything. One girl for a Marshallese guy won’t be enough.

I heard a lot of my friends promise each other that they weren’t going to get pregnant. When I ask them what happened to that promise, they say things like, “We were young.” I tell them, “You’re still young.” All of them have dropped out of school except my cousin, because the baby stays with his dad. The father goes to work at the Tyson chicken factory. Lots of Marshallese work at the Tyson chicken factory. They peel off the chicken skin and feathers. It’s their only way of living in America.

Parents aren’t strict enough and don’t give their kids any advice, but the kids are arrogant and don’t want to listen anyway. Children will suffer and parents will have to pay for it. They pay because when they’re grandparents they



work more hours to buy things like diapers for their grandchildren. Parents have to be truthful to each other—even though it's too late.