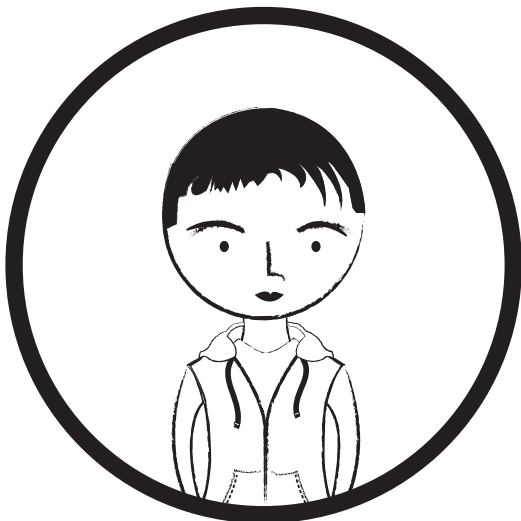


Jeff Gottesfeld





MEET THE



Chris

Age: 13

Proudest Moment: got all As on his last report card

Looking Forward to: a trip to Alaska

Favorite Food: peach cobbler

Best Quality: stands up for others

CHARACTERS



PHIL

Age: 13

Biggest Problem: being bullied by his older stepbrother

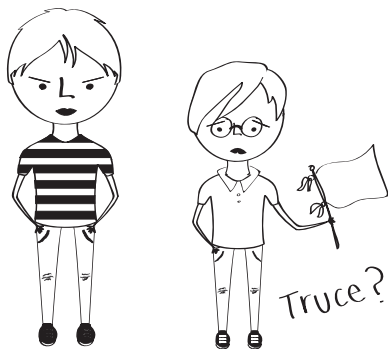
Wants to Become: a race car driver

Favorite Food: beef jerky

Best Quality: knows he could be nicer

I THE CODE

It was a school fight like all the others. A big kid picked on a small kid. The small kid got his butt kicked. Other kids made a ring to watch and cheer.



The big kid was Phil Hartz. Phil was strong. The small kid was Sam Colton. Sam was a wimp. Phil liked to pick on wimps.

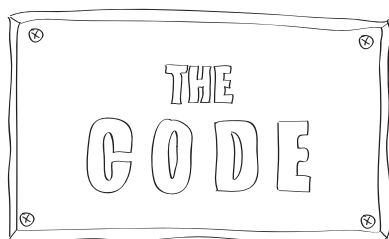


Phil used to pick on Chris Marks. That was why Chris did not try to stop the fight. He just stood there and watched. Just like all the kids in his seventh grade class. There were yells and shouts. It was not a fair fight. Phil did what he wanted. Sam fell to the ground. Phil kicked him in the ribs just for fun.

That was when Mr. Jones ran onto the field. He was the principal. He hated fights. He said all kids could get along. Chris was not so sure. By the time Mr. Jones got there, the fight was over.

“Who started this?” Mr. Jones was mad.

Phil shrugged. “It just happened.”



shh... all kids must follow



That was a lie. Chris knew it. No one said a word. The kids had a Code. No one ever talked. Chris did not like the Code. He did not like it one bit. But he did not want to be picked on by Phil. No one did. It was too bad that Sam got beat up. But Chris did not think it could be stopped.



“Come on, kids. Someone saw. Talk. Please.” Mr. Jones looked from kid to kid. Then he called the names of the best students. “Mary Lopez. Alan Parker. Chris

Marks. Sylvie Pollock. Tai Browne. Come with me!”

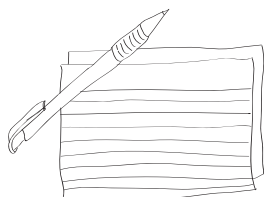
Chris gasped. Mr. Jones wanted to talk to him? He wanted to know how the fight began.

They all went to Mr. Jones’s office. The principal closed the door.

“It’s safe,” he told the kids.

No one said a word. If any of them told, all the kids would know someone broke the Code. This is why Chris did not talk.

“Oh, come on,” Mr. Jones said. “You guys can stop this. All you have to do is say who started the fight. Phil, right? Don’t want to say it? Write it down. I’ll leave the room. Just write the name on a file card.”



I can't write it down. That still breaks

THE
CODE

Mr. Jones found file cards. He put them on his desk. He found pens too. Then he left.

The kids were alone.

Tai shook her head. "I'm out."

"Me too," Alan said. "You know why."

"Me too," Mary agreed.

Chris felt Sylvie's eyes on him. He turned to her. She put one finger to her lips. He knew what she wanted to say. *The Code*. Break it and a kid could get hurt.



When Mr. Jones came back, he looked at the file cards. They were blank. He got mad.