



LALA'S  
JOURNEY



This book belongs to:



Thank you to the resilient Lalas and Jonases of the world  
who inspired us to tell a story of a similar child  
who learned that she had what was needed  
to take the next step.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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[info@EchoIntl.org](mailto:info@EchoIntl.org)

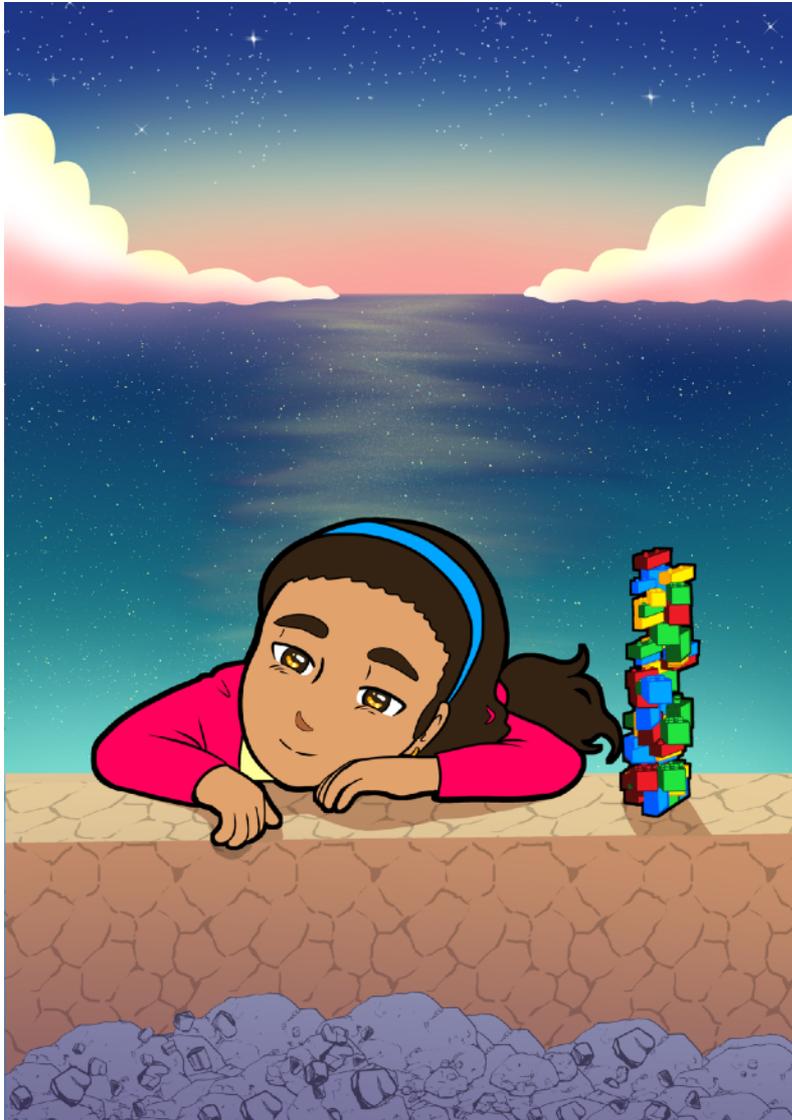
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*Book design by Alexandra Cameron*  
*Illustrations by Bethany Leuthold*  
*Story by Timothy Elverson*  
*Original Story Concept by Amy Knöttner*  
*Edited by Amy Knöttner*

For accompanying activity set and leader training,  
contact: [Home@FirstAidfortheSoul.org](mailto:Home@FirstAidfortheSoul.org)

[www.FirstAidfortheSoul.org](http://www.FirstAidfortheSoul.org)

# Lala's Journey



Lala loved to get up early in the morning to watch the sun rise. Each day she packed her tiny blue suitcase with her three toys and walked down to the harbor near her home. She climbed the steep stone steps and sat on the high wall looking out across the ocean. It was so beautiful. There were always many colors in the sky that reflected on the water. And each day, the colors were different from the day before.

Somewhere, over there, across the water, home. Remembering it made her happy and sad at the same time. She smiled, and she also had tears in her eyes.



# 1: The Skipping Rope

The journey to Lala's new home had been long and difficult. She had visited so many places and heard so many different languages along the way. Some parts of the journey had been frightening. When she left her home, her father had woken her in the middle of the night. They had run and escaped together, but the memories were hard to think about. Even now, she still didn't like to be alone at night.

Lala's uncle was a fisherman. He was a tall, happy man who was always laughing. He had a bushy mustache and the biggest hands she had ever seen. When she last visited, he had shown her how to tie three different knots. They were knots he used on his fishing boat.

Lala opened her suitcase and pulled out her skipping rope. She loved to skip, but today she wanted to practice tying the knots her uncle had taught her.

She started tying the knots. She watched the end of the rope going in and out, up and down, and looping round and round. It reminded her of her own journey, going to one place after another.

Lala wondered if she herself might be a little bit like the skipping rope. Maybe she had some knots in her now because of the journey she had taken. She felt like she had changed in some ways.

Before the journey, Lala was a happy person. But now there were some days when she just felt sad and did not even want to play.

Before the journey, Lala used to love to go to school, but now she found it hard to concentrate.

Using her finger, Lala tried to follow the path the rope took through the knots she had tied. It was confusing because there were so many loops. And it seemed the rope kept returning, over and over, to the same place in the knot. It reminded her of how her mind kept returning to the scariest part of her journey. These were the memories that made it hard to sleep at night.

She looked again at the knots. Maybe people really do become knotted when we go through difficult things, she thought to herself. Maybe knots are just a normal part of the journey.

She decided to untie the three knots. She carefully pulled on the loops. Some parts were easy to untie. And others took a bit more work. Rope tangles easily, but it can also be untied. Maybe it is the same for the knots we have. Maybe some knots will come loose over time like a shoe lace coming un-

done. Maybe others need a little work to untie. And maybe those knots that are really tight will take longer, but eventually they will come undone too.

Untying the knots made Lala think of her uncle again. She remembered how he would help her untie a knot that was too hard for her to untie alone. Lala thought, maybe it's okay to also ask for help with the knots we find in our lives. And, sometimes we can help others with their knots too!

Finally, there was just one tiny knot left. It was near the end of her rope. Instead of untying it, Lala had another idea. She decided to leave it right where it was. She smiled to herself. Some knots come loose and some need to be untied, but there may be some knots we can learn to live with for a while. She stood up holding the ends of the rope. Even though there was still a small knot in the rope, it was not enough to stop her from doing what she wanted to do next.

Swinging the rope around in a large arc, she started skipping!





## 2: The Tea Party

Lala sat on the harbor wall and looked out across the water. It was windy and there were rain clouds in the distance, hiding the sun. She felt sad. She missed her friends, her old house and her toys. The only toys she had with her were the three she had packed in her little blue suitcase. She had to leave the rest behind. She opened her suitcase and took out a large box. She looked inside and there was Sammi, her favorite teddy bear. She pulled him out and gave him a long hug. She used to play with Sammi all the time but not very much since arriving here. Back in her old home, she used to love to have pretend dinner parties with Sammi. She had a small table and would serve delicious looking imaginary meals. It was not as much fun now since she did not have the table with her. She had to leave that behind, along with the plates and cups.

Thinking of the cups, Lala suddenly had an idea. She looked back to the end of the harbor wall where her father was standing outside the little café drinking a cup of coffee. She smiled, and still holding Sammi, ran towards him. Lala didn't stop to say hello. She hurried past her father into the café. Mr. Omar, her father's friend, was inside. She found him and asked if he had four empty paper cups. Mr. Omar looked puzzled, but he gave her the cups anyway. She thanked Mr. Omar, waved to her father, and ran as fast as she could back around the harbor wall. Lala set the four cups upside down on the ground in a square. Then she carefully placed the box that had held Sammi on top. The cups made legs holding up the box. It was a table now!

Lala suddenly realized she now felt better than she had been feeling earlier. Before, she was feeling sad, but now she was feeling happier. Just starting to do something had kept her thinking about how sad she was, and she was very pleased with the table she had made. Lala felt so proud of herself because she had used her mind to solve the problem of Sammi not having a table by using his box and cups from the café.

She looked at the four cups holding the table up. Even though the wind was blowing, the cups kept the table strong and stopped it from tipping over. Earlier this morning she had felt a little bit like a wobbly table. Now she realized there were things that kept her strong too, just like the cups helped the table. She took out her coloring pens and decided to draw on the cups everything she could think of that made her strong and stable.

Lala drew a big smiling face because she was often happy. Then she drew a thought bubble to represent all the good ideas she had. She drew her uncle who was still back home. She had not seen him for a long time but remembering how much he loved her made her feel like she could do anything.

She drew her skipping rope since she usually felt very happy when she was skipping. She drew a fish and a sailing boat to represent the ocean because she loved to come and look out across the water. She drew a cooking pot with a big spoon in it. She loved how important and useful she felt when she helped her aunt cook food, and how happy she was when others enjoyed the food they prepared together.

She looked at all the drawings on the cups. There were so many things that made her feel good and strong.

Lala placed the box back on top of the cups and sat Sammi down next to the table. She started to imagine all of the delicious food that was on the table. Lala smiled. It was going to be their first pretend dinner party since she had arrived in her new home.





### 3: The Stones

It was a cold morning so Lala put on her big, warm, yellow coat. She had been given the coat during her journey when the weather was even colder. Lala and her father had gone on a bus from one country to another, but when they reached the border they were forced to get out of the bus to wait. The cold air had shocked her. Lala's fingers and toes started to feel numb. It even hurt a little to breathe. The trees and fields around them were all white. It was the first time she had seen snow. It was so beautiful but she was too cold to enjoy it. There was a group of kind people helping everyone who was waiting at the border. One woman gave Lala a cup of hot soup. She saw that Lala was shivering so she offered her the yellow coat. Lala was so thankful.

Wearing that coat and carrying her blue suitcase, Lala now walked with her father down to the harbor by where she lived now. The tide was out, so she could collect some shells! Lala left her coat and suitcase with her father in the café and carefully climbed down the steep stone steps so she could walk on the beach.

On the far side of the sand there were some rocks. Lala loved to see what she could find in the pools of water there. There was always something exciting to discover! On the sand near the rocks she found a beautiful shiny black stone. She wanted to take it home, so she picked it up and started to put it in her pocket. But there was already something in there. She tried the other one. There was something in that pocket too! She put down the black stone and reached into both pockets.

In her left pocket, there was a stone that was shaped like a triangle, with jagged edges. It was light grey and had a pink stripe going through it. Lala felt sad as she looked at it. It came from the garden at her old home. She had decided to take it with her when she left to help her remember where she came from. It reminded her of all the things she missed from home. During the journey, she had held the stone tightly in her hands because she did not want to let go or forget. A tear started to form in her eye as she held it tightly in her hand once again.

Lala ran her finger over the stone that she pulled out of her right pocket. It was smooth, round, and white. She had found it just before one of the scariest parts of her journey. The group she was with were all about to get into a tiny boat to cross the sea. Lala felt scared. She could tell her father was frightened too. Just before getting on the boat she picked up the stone from the beach. She told herself that the stone could remind her of the feeling of safety until they landed safe and sound. As she looked at the stone now, she remembered how she had made it safely through those scary moments. She felt very brave, just feeling the stone again.

Both of these stones were important to Lala. She liked the new black one she had found as well. She did not want to throw any of them away, but she could not always keep them all in her pockets. She had an idea. Just above one of the rock pools on the beach, Lala had found a small, hidden cave in the cliff. It was a great place for hiding valuable things. Carrying her three stones, she went to the cave opening.

Near the entrance was a large flat rock. She placed the first stone, jagged and grey, on top of the rock. She thought about all the things she missed from home. This stone represented those things. She then placed the smooth, white stone next to it. She thought about all the hard times and frightening things that happened on her journey. This stone reminded her that she was brave and had made it to a place where she was safe again.

Lala decided to leave the stones on the flat rock in the cave, so no one else could find them. It would be her special place to come and remember. She could visit the cave whenever she wanted to pick up the stones. As she looked at the two stones, she realized that something was still missing. She rubbed the new, shiny, black stone between her thumb and fingers. She thought about all the things she was thankful for. This stone represented those things. She placed the black stone next to the other two and smiled. This was now her special place to remember.

Lala felt happy as she climbed down from the cave entrance to the beach. She now had lots of room in her pockets to collect all sorts of shells.





## 4: The Building Bricks

Lala woke up early and jumped out of bed. She felt excited because she had a plan. Today, she was going to build a house. She knelt down and reached underneath the bed. She pulled out her little blue suitcase and opened it. Inside she found the box containing the plastic building bricks and the instructions for building a house. She hurriedly opened the box. There were only a handful of colored bricks there. Where were the rest of them, she wondered? She took everything else out of the suitcase and checked inside. There were no other bricks there. She suddenly felt very sad. Maybe when she packed her toys before leaving home she did not check that all the plastic bricks were in the box, or maybe some of them had gotten lost during the journey?

Her father shouted her name. “Lala!” It was time to head to the harbor. She quickly repacked her suitcase and went down the stairs. She was quiet as she followed her father to where he had his morning coffee at Mr. Omar’s café. Next door to the café there was a toy shop. Lala stopped and looked in the window. On display were lots of boxes of toy plastic bricks. Some of the boxes were for building houses, some for building castles and some for building all sorts of other things. Lala’s father came and joined her looking in the window. She told him how most of her plastic bricks had been lost, and how excited she was to see all the boxes of bricks in the shop window. She looked at her father hopefully. He put his hand gently on her shoulder and shook his head. He explained that because he was not working yet, they had to be careful about how much money they spent. He could not buy her new toys yet. Lala understood, but she still felt upset. The plastic brick sets looked like so much fun. Her father gave her shoulder a squeeze and went into the café.

Lala slowly walked to the end of the harbor where she climbed up on the wall and sat down. The sun was shining and the ocean was glimmering as if there were thousands of precious jewels floating on the surface of the water. She opened up her blue suitcase and looked inside. The box of plastic bricks was there. She remembered how happy she felt when she first built the house. It was so much fun to follow the instructions to create it. She had been so pleased with herself when she finished. It would not be possible to build the house now because there were not enough bricks left. But maybe one day she would be able to build a new house. She thought again about all the boxes of plastic bricks she had seen in the toy shop. If only she could buy one now. It would be so much fun. She sighed. She could not build her old house and she could not build a new one either.

She opened the box and looked at the bricks inside. They seemed like they were just rubble. The few bricks there were so far from being a house or a

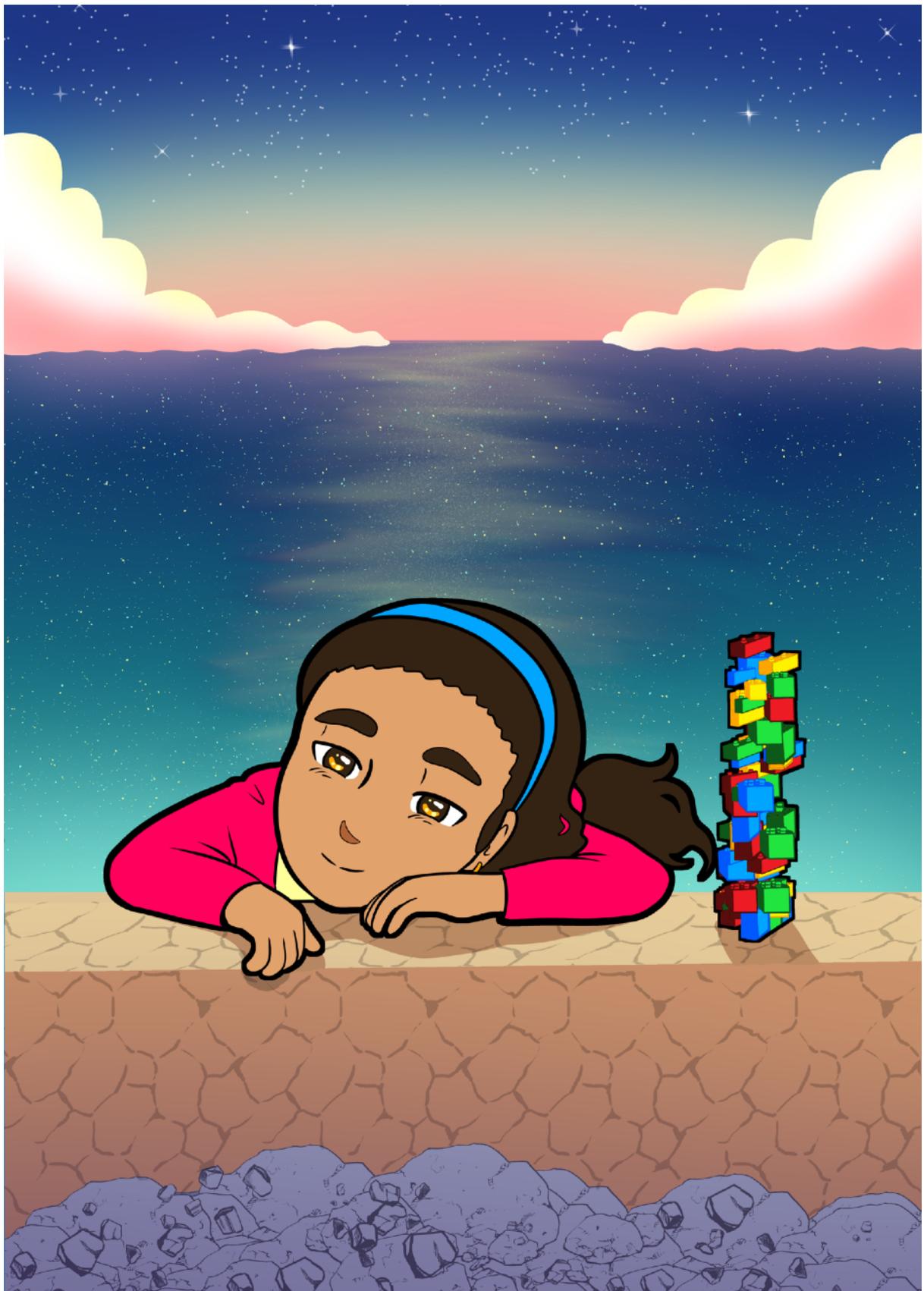
castle. Lala reached out her hand and picked up one of the plastic bricks. She held it up.

Lala reached out her hand and picked up one of the plastic bricks. She held it up. Even though many bricks were missing from the set, this one brick was still whole. It was not broken. It had been part of her house before and maybe it could still be a part of something in the future too. Lala realized that even though she could not rebuild the house she used to have, and she had to wait to build a new house with the bricks from the toy shop, still, she could use this brick in her hands to build something today.

She reached her hand into the box and took out a second plastic brick. She joined them together. Then she added a third and a fourth, and before she knew it, she had a small tower in her hands. She kept building until all the bricks were used. She held up her tower and smiled. She suddenly felt much happier.

Lala wondered if the tower somehow represented her life now. Many things from her past were lost, like her lego pieces. And many things that she hoped for the future were yet to come true, like having a garden again and her dad finding a job. But today she realized she could do something powerful. She could make a choice. She could either think of her life almost like a pile of rubble, or she could start to build something worthwhile with the good things in her life. She decided it was better to build something today even if it was very small.

Lala looked again at her tower. She was surprised how big it actually was! The few bricks she had made something better than she had thought possible. She set her tower down on the harbor wall and looked back out over the glimmering ocean. Today was going to be a good day.





## 5: A New Friend

A big man was standing outside Mr. Omar's café. Lala's father waved at him as they got closer. The two men greeted each other. Her father then turned to Lala with a big smile on his face. "Lala, this is Mr. Senai, and this is his son Yonas."

Two large eyes peered around from behind Mr. Senai. Lala had not noticed the boy there before. Yonas was holding on tightly to his father's leg. Yonas darted back behind Mr. Senai when he saw Lala looking at him. Mr. Senai knelt down, picked up the little boy and placed him in front of her. "This is Lala," he told Yonas.

The boy looked up cautiously. He had been crying and still had tears in his eyes. Lala smiled at him. "You two can play together on the harbor wall while Mr. Senai and I drink some coffee here." Lala's father said.

Yonas seemed nervous so Lala said, "Come on. It will be fun!" She waved for him to join her. They started walking away as Mr. Senai and Lala's father went into the café.

"Do you want to see the ocean?" Lala asked. Yonas nodded shyly. "Let's go!" Lala and Yonas walked to the end of the harbor wall. The tide was out, so they climbed down the stone steps onto the beach. "Let's collect some shells," Lala suggested.

Yonas and Lala gathered shells for a while and then they created a pattern with them on the sand. There were many shells of different colors, shapes, and sizes. Both Lala and Yonas had been smiling while they were collecting the shells, but suddenly Yonas looked sad again.

"What's wrong?" asked Lala.

"I don't know. I just miss my mum," Yonas replied. "I wish I could go back home as if nothing had happened. My father said it would be better here, but I don't really like it. Everything is so different."

Lala knew how it felt to miss home and to struggle to enjoy living in a new place. She reached out and gave Yonas a small hug. Lala wished she could do more to help her new friend.

Later that day Lala had an idea. She would write a letter to Yonas telling him all the things that had been helpful to her when she was missing her old

home. She had learned ways to feel better when she was struggling to adjust to all the changes here. Lala asked her father to help her write the letter.

Dear Yonas,

*I'm glad you told me why you sometimes feel sad here. I understand. I sometimes feel sad too. I think it is normal after leaving home and going on such a long journey. So many things are different here! Sometimes, because of the things I have been through, it feels like there is a big, tangled knot inside me. I learned that some knots are easy to undo, but others are really difficult to untie. Try not to worry about feeling sad or scared or just different. Some things will get better with time, and some things you can just get used to as well. I have a knot in my skipping rope to remind me. But the knot does not stop me using the rope to skip!*

*I have a table with paper cups for legs and wrote all the things that help me to feel strong on the cups. I am sure there are a lot of things you could write about yourself too. It helps to remember the things that help me feel strong. You and I have both been through so many things that really hurt. We know we are strong, because we made it through!*

*I also think you would like the special place I made by the beach where I go to remember. I'll show you sometime. Maybe you can add something there that will help you remember your mother.*

*Collecting shells at the beach with you today was so fun! Sometimes I spend all my time thinking about how life used to be or how I wish life could be in the future. I've noticed that when I try and enjoy what is happening right now, I feel even better. Maybe we can do this together. Let's try to do something fun or helpful together every day!*

*I am so glad you are here! It will be fun to play together more. It is really great to have a new friend.*

Love,  
Lala





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