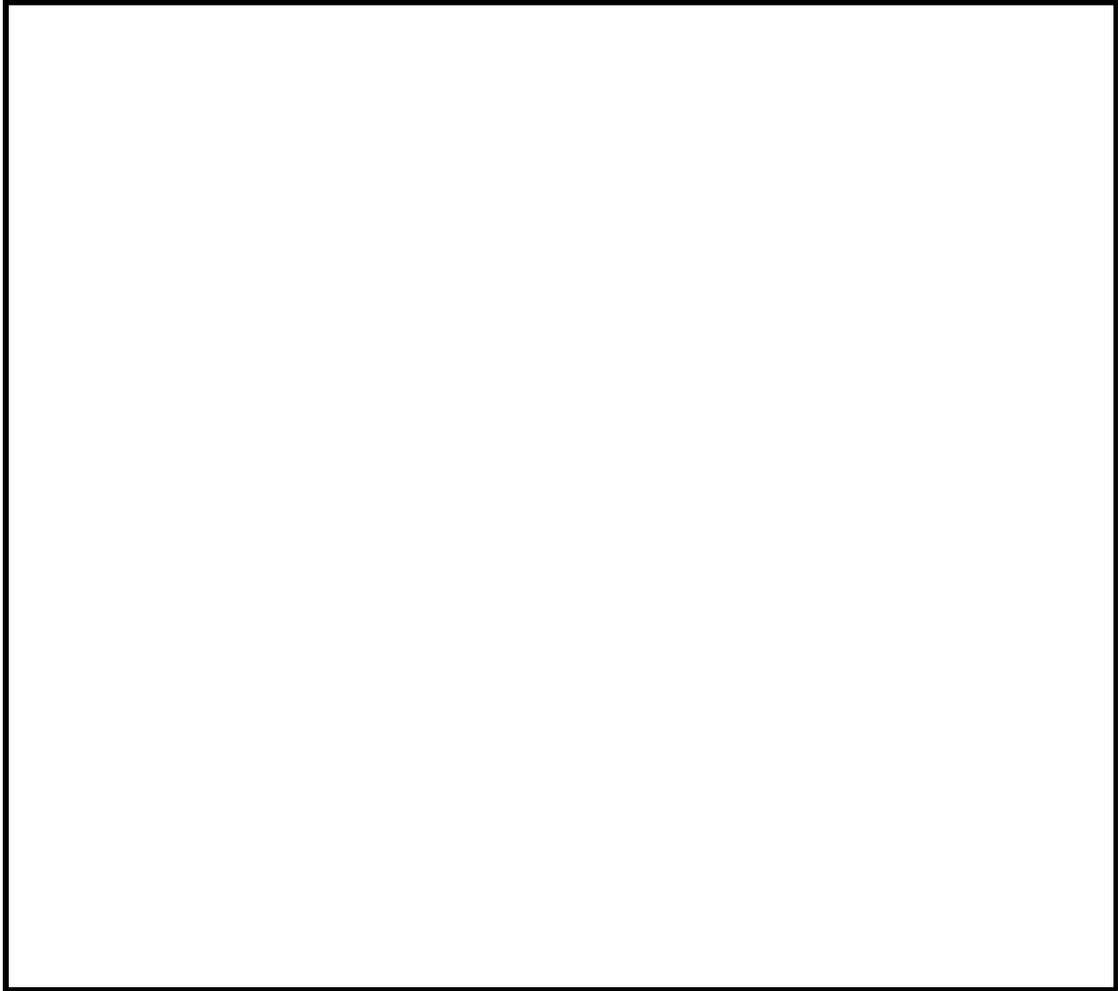


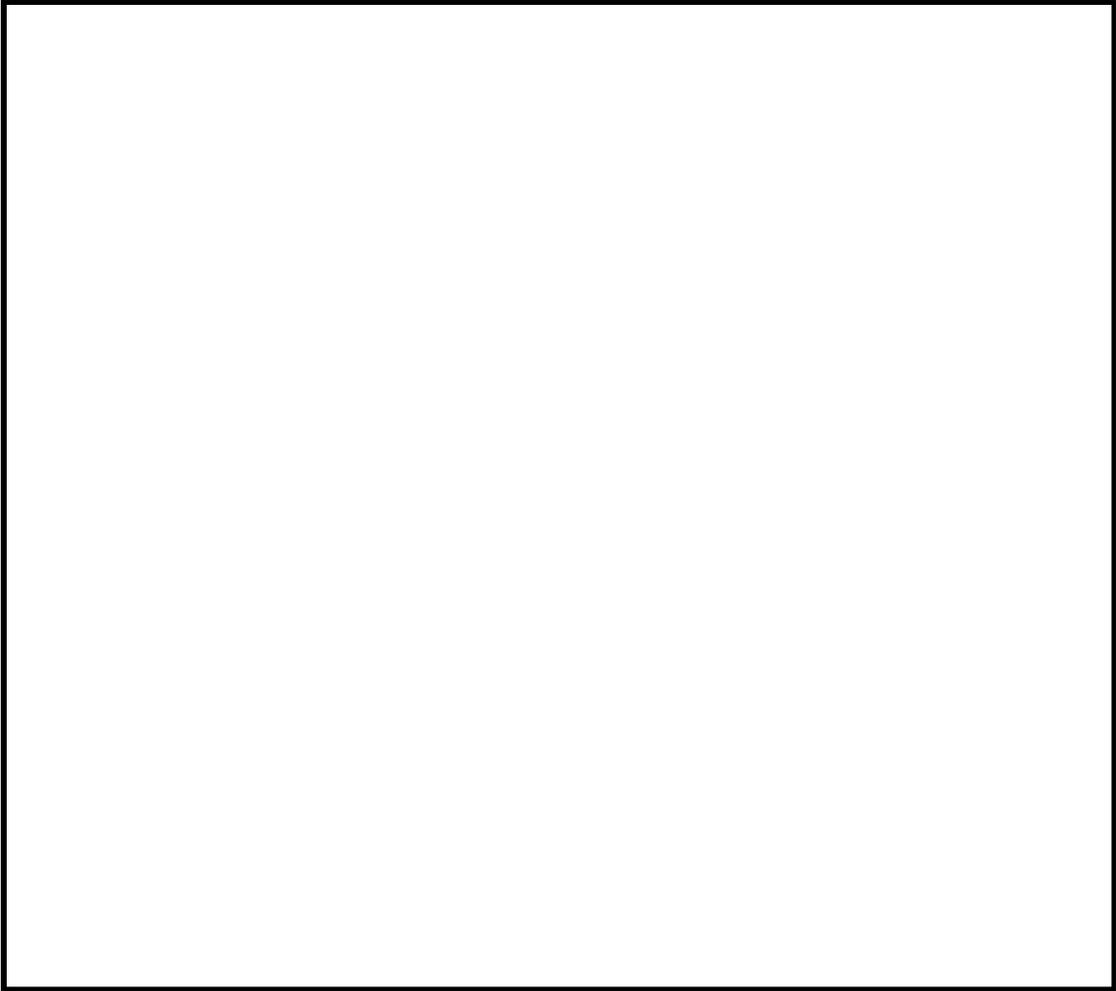
The Day the Germ Threw a Party

By: Elle M. Erickson
A Fellow Human in Quarantine and Sheltering



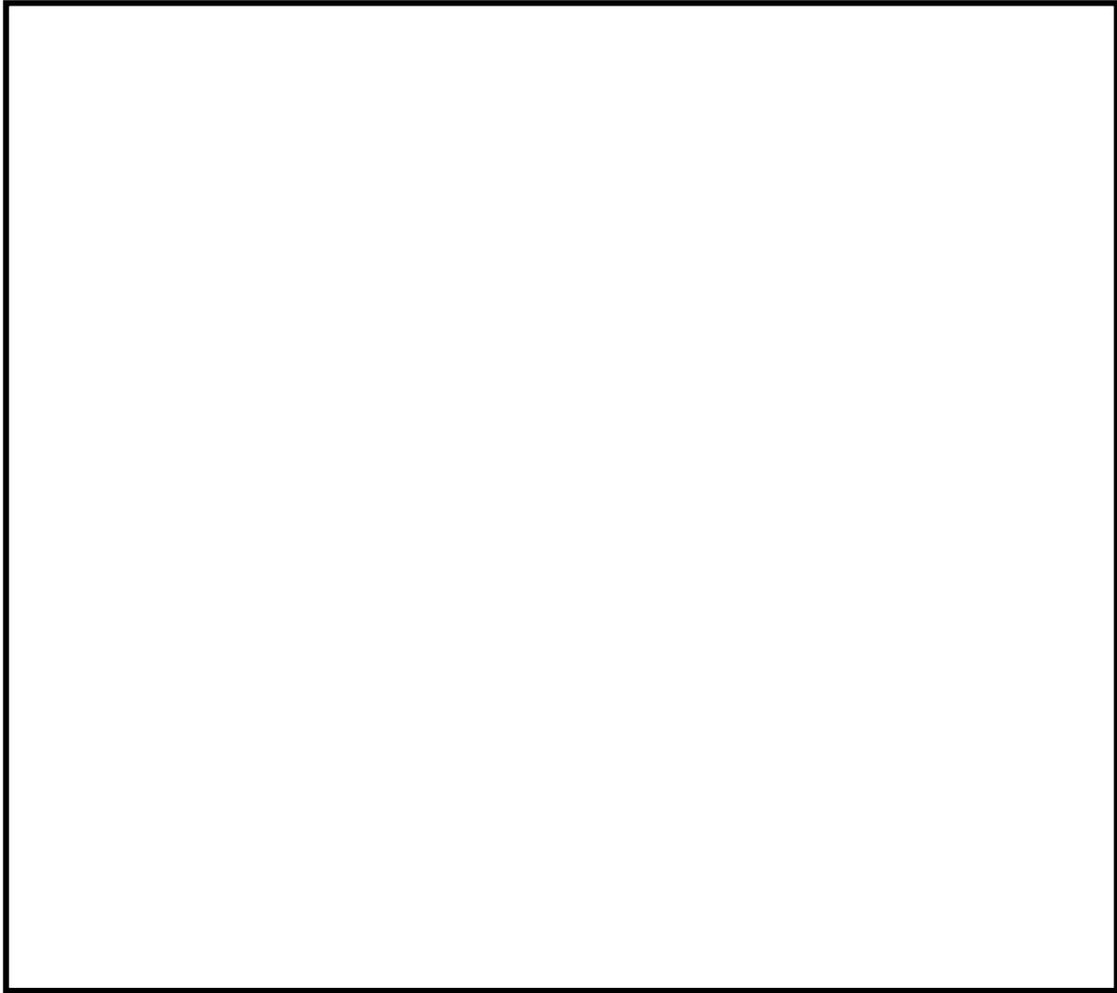
Pudgkin was what one would call a loner — and Pudgkin didn't like being alone. Now, some germs enjoy being alone. They like finding a special place to hangout — perhaps with a good book, usually on a human or animal, and they enjoy the solitude. They like humans. They like hopping along and seeing the world.

This was not Pudgkin. He was a little different. He wanted friends. He wanted to be surrounded by other germs, for he was lonely. He daydreamed about confetti, balloons, cake, and dancing. He wanted a party. A big one. A big party with lots and lots of germs.



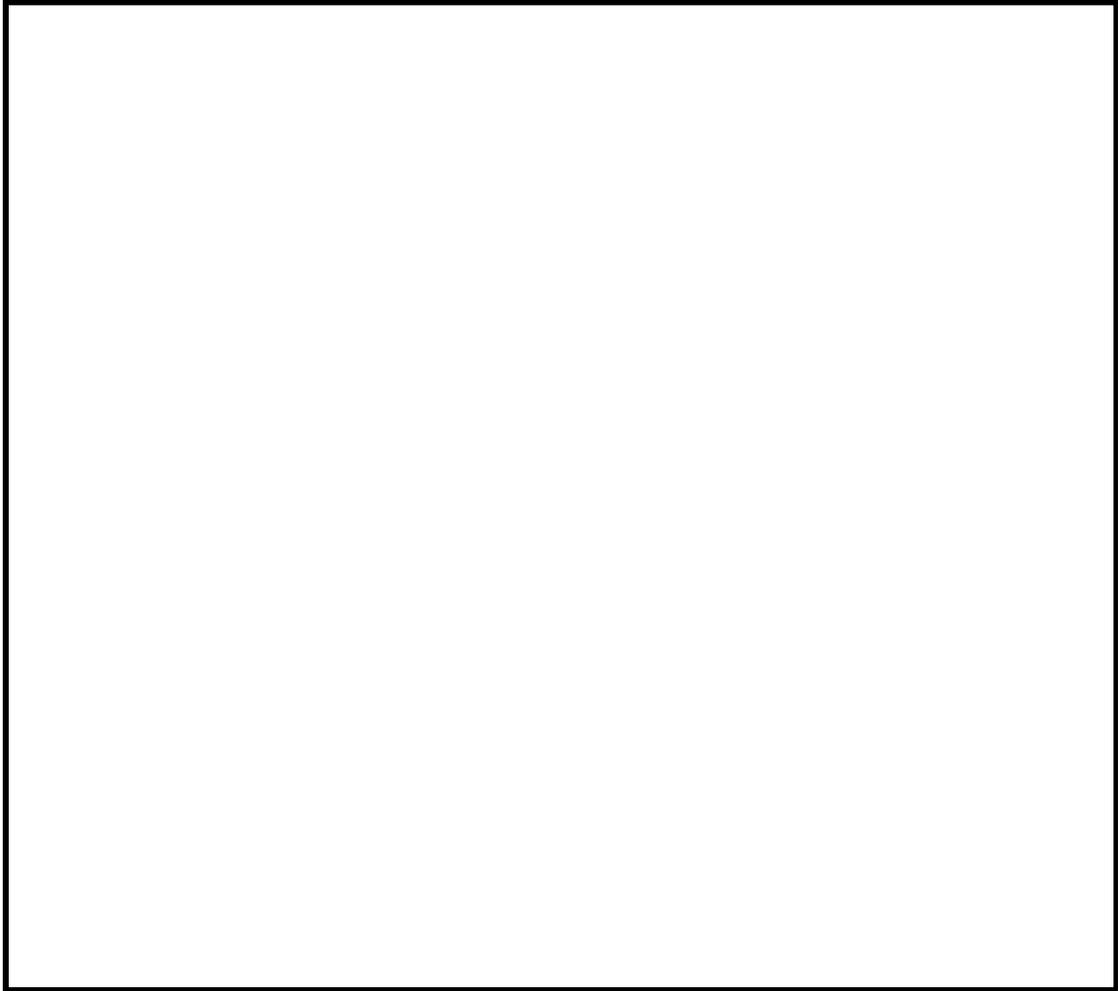
He spent day in and day out trying to figure out how to solve this problem of being a bit lonely. He ran all of his ideas by his mom, but she thought it was nonsense that a germ needed to have so many friends. She told him to use his imagination, to find happiness by himself.

But that night, Pudgkin went to his room, ate some red apples, turned on his lamp, and opened his favorite magazine, "Super Extreme Ideas That Are Actually Bad Ideas." His little mind began to fire up. He began to think to himself and he thought, "What if I made copies of myself? I'd never be alone and my gosh, I would have the *best* party ever. So many germs would be everywhere!"



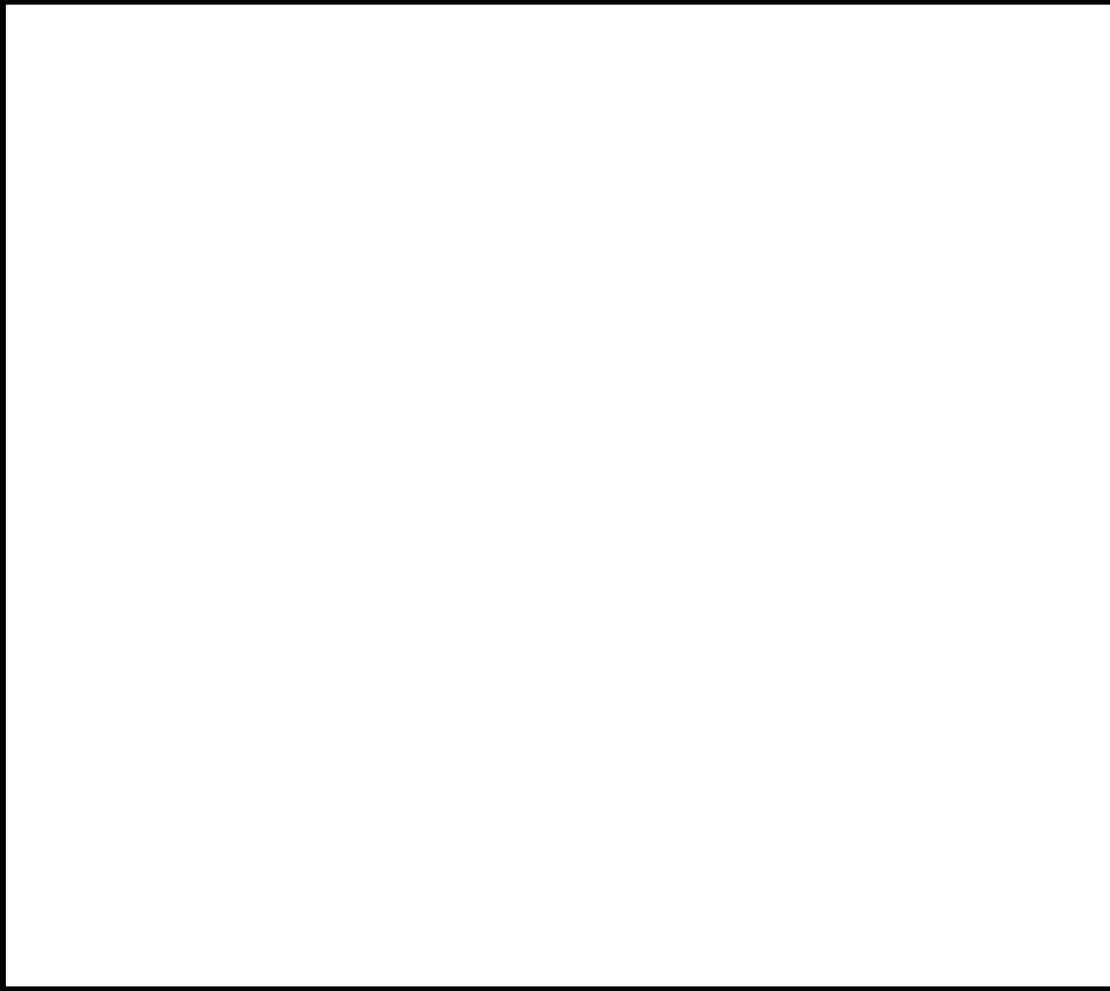
That night, in the light of the moon, he invented a machine that would whirl, twirl, shimmy, and shake — then would spit out a perfect copy of Pudgkin. He knew that this would solve his problems.

The next day came. Pudgkin hit the massive red start button and the machine came to life. After about an hour, Pudgkin had 35 friends ready to party — and boy did they party. There were purple balloons, red, yellow, and green. They danced on a table to techno beats and had a blast.

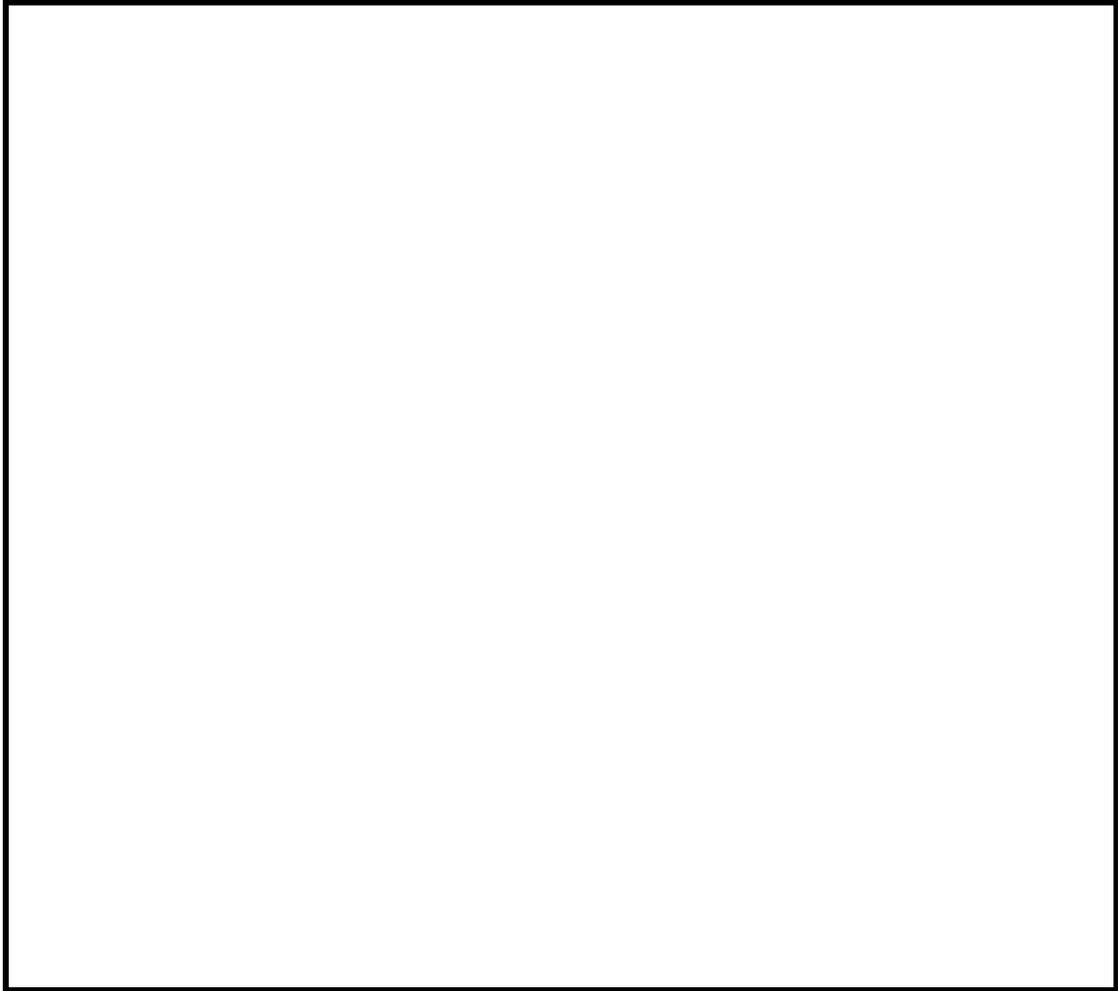


Then. There was a problem. Pudgkin's machine got knocked by Pudgkin #26 and began making more and more copies of Pudgkins. Before anyone could notice, there were:

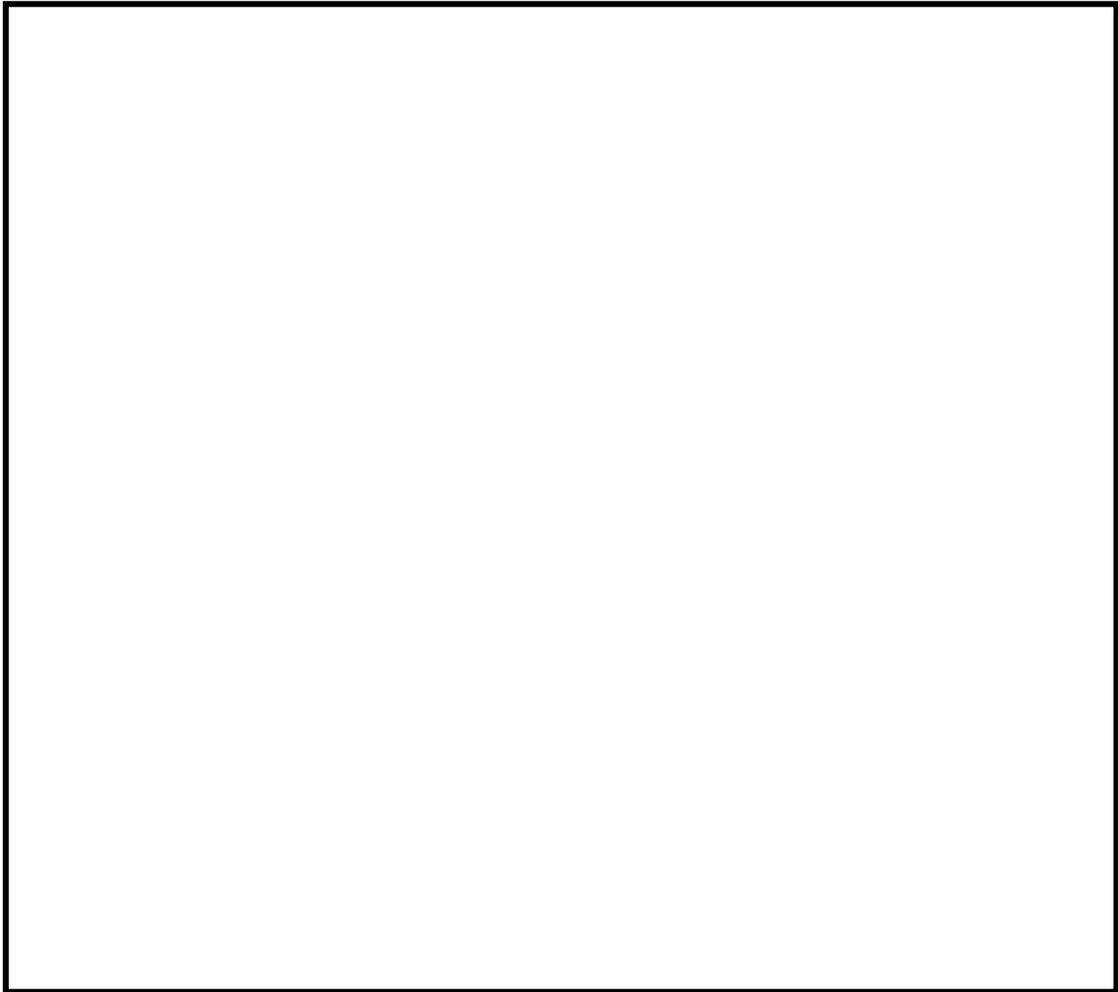
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74923749274927492873492749237497298472987492873429847
2937494935703457234095 Pudgkins.



They were here. They were there. They really were everywhere. Now, these Pudgkins were great to party with on their own, but when they partied on humans, some humans got sick – And that was another problem, a big one.

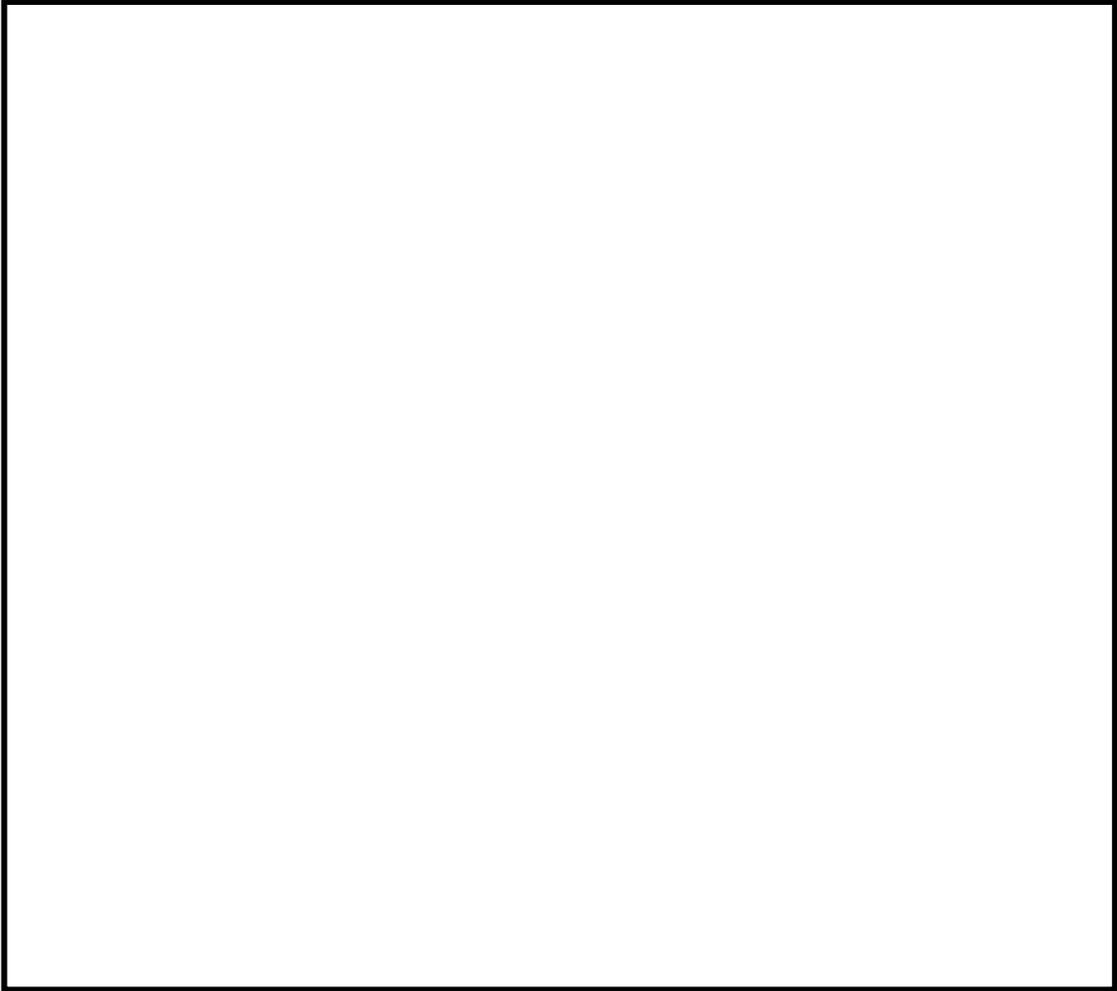


The Pudgkins covered doorknobs in all countries. They were on tabletops. They were on playgrounds. They were at bounce houses. They were at restaurants – on forks, knives, and spoons. They were on basketballs, baseballs, and chairs. They were at schools — on the pencil sharpeners, the computer keys, the chairs, the backpacks, the teacher’s desk. Humans carried them around and they didn’t even know it. The Pudgkins hit the human world hard.

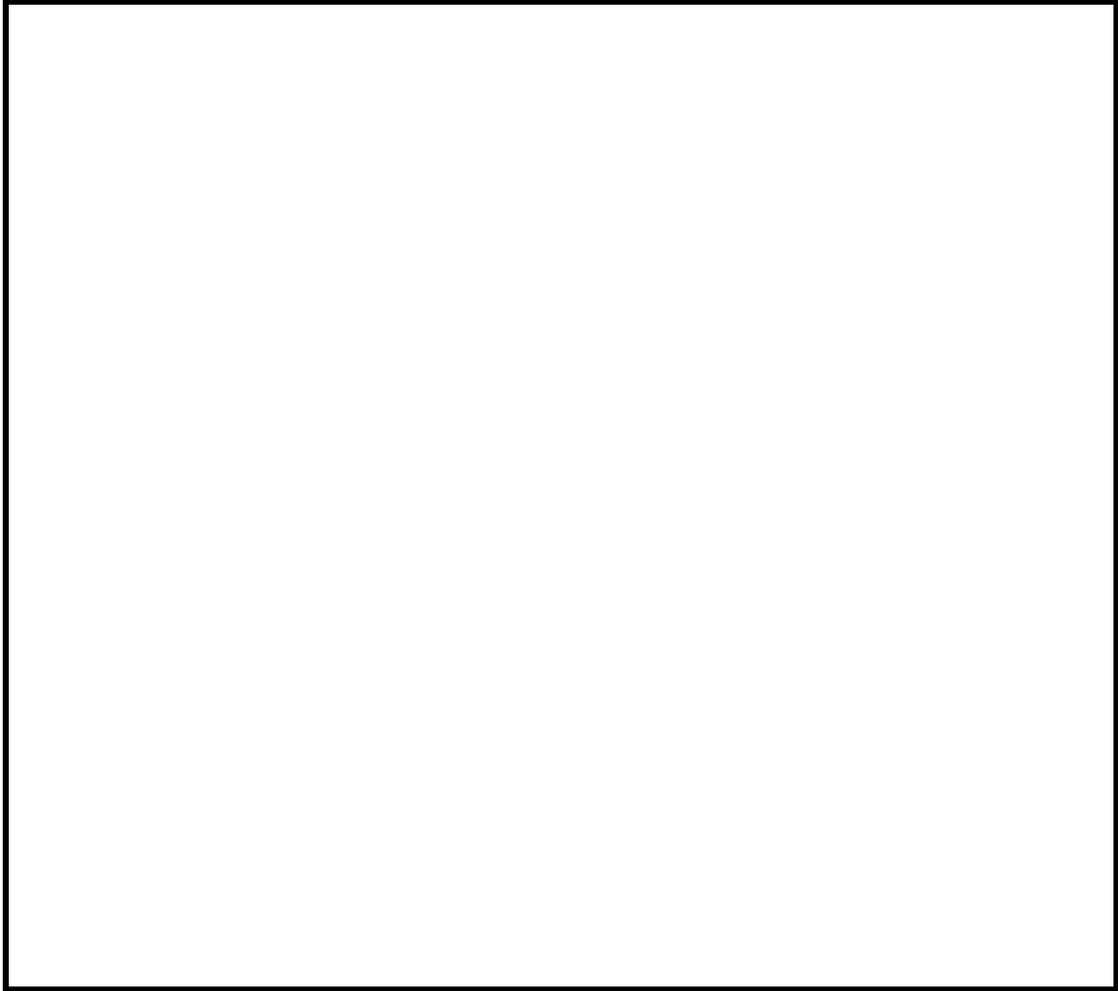


Because the Pudgkins were making humans sick, many things on earth that normally happened stopped. Parents stopped going to work. Kids stopped playing with each other in person. Friends couldn't have dinner together in restaurants face to face. Girls and boys couldn't fly on airplanes. Brides couldn't get married. Grooms couldn't get married. Proms were cancelled. Playdates were cancelled. Birthday parties stopped. It all stopped.

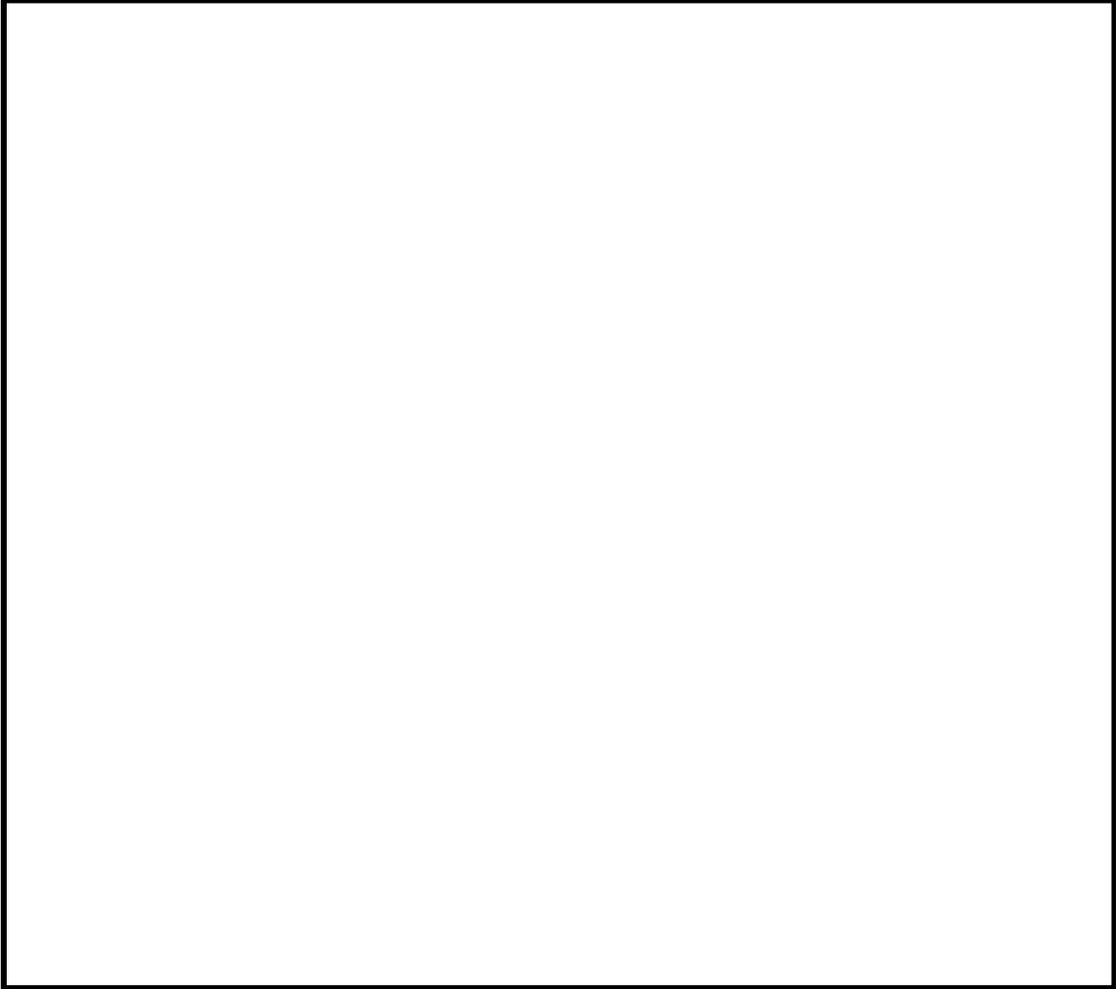
Kids cried. Moms cried. Dads cried. Grandmas cried. Grandpas cried. Everyone cried.



But then, they stopped crying. The humans stood up and realized they could help. They began to take action. They washed their hands for 20 seconds – singing the ABC's or humming "Happy Birthday." They stayed home to protect their loved ones – doing that thing called social distancing. They washed their hands some more.

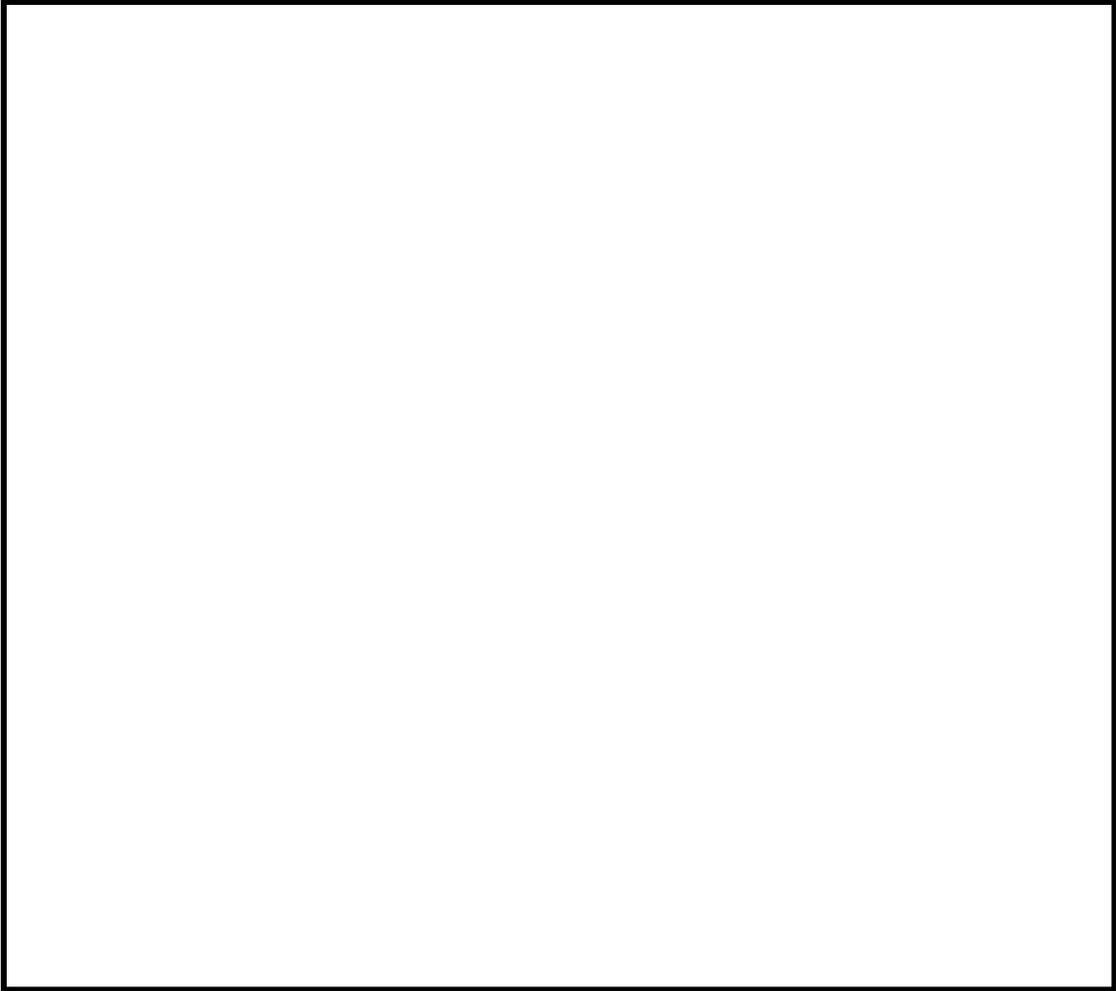


Yes, parents stopped going to work, but they began to notice things about their kids that they had never noticed before — or perhaps forgotten. Kids stopped playing with each other in person, but they discovered new parts of their homes and began to play with toys lost in dark corners or under beds. Friends couldn't have dinners together, but they turned to technology and takeout Chinese food, pizza delivery, and homemade goodies to get them through.



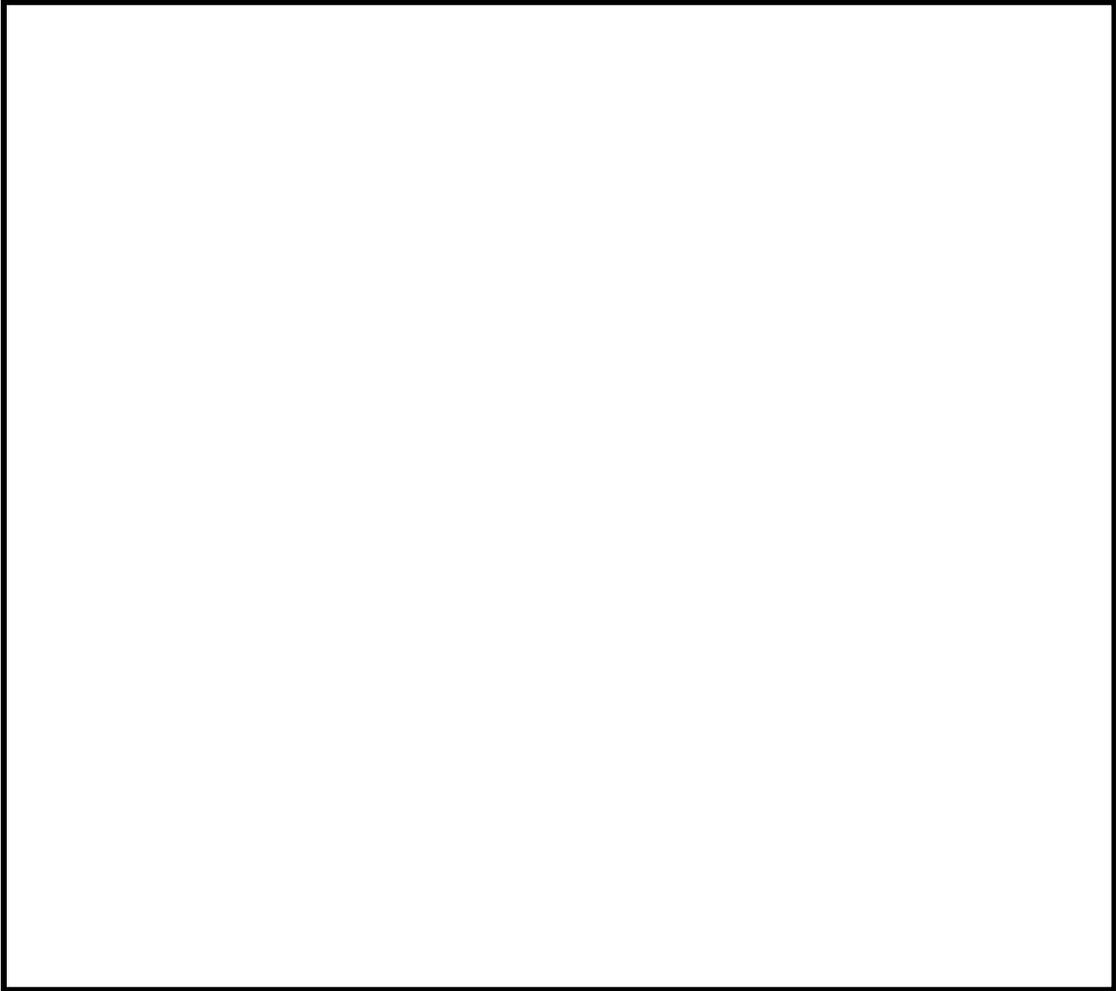
The minutes turned to hours. The hours turned to days – the days to weeks and weeks to months, but as each day passed, there were changes. There were good days. There were bad days. There was sun. There was rain. But the kids, the moms, the dads, the teenagers, became a little bit closer during this hard time.

And then. Things got even better. The germs went away.



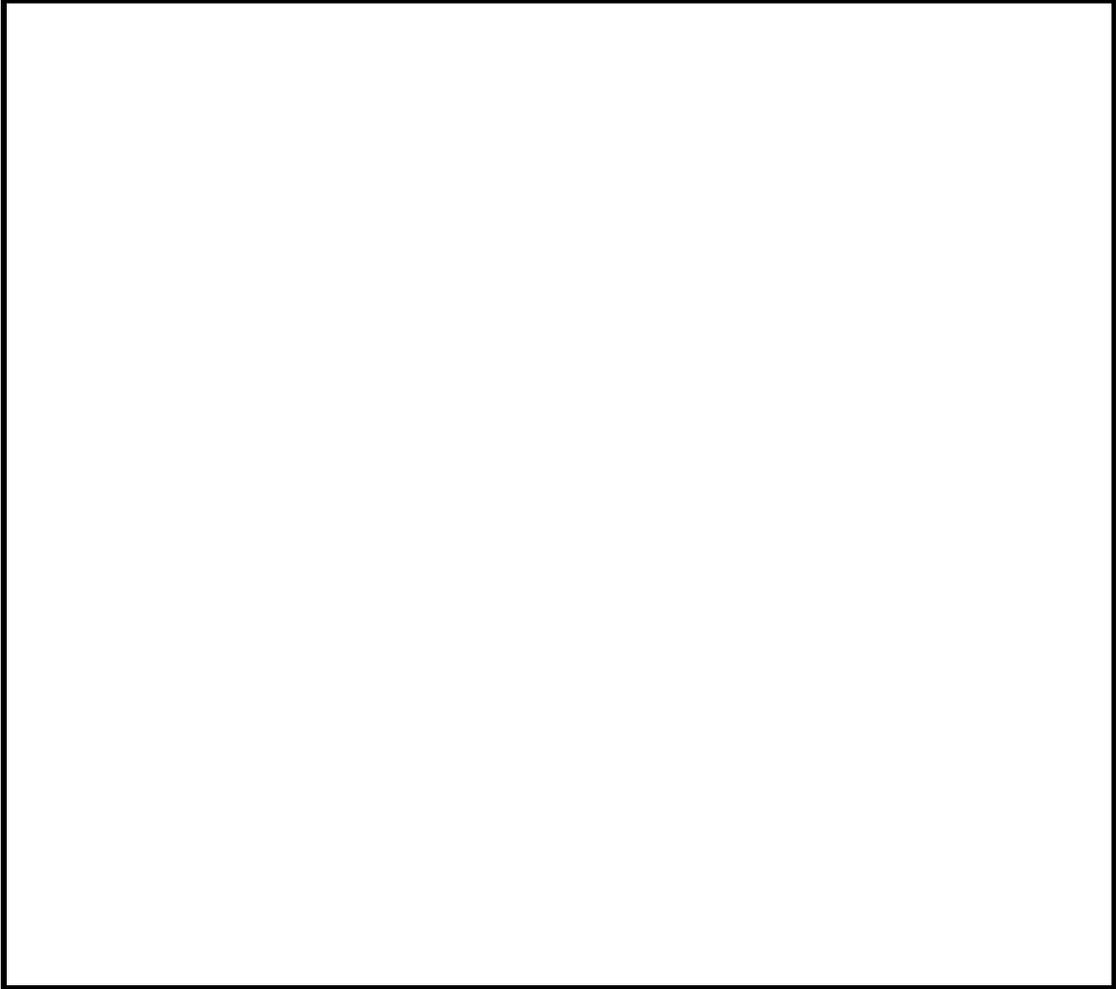
You see, germs can only last so long before they get tired. Yes, just like sadness, they come and go. Some are here in the winter, some in the spring. Some germs (like Pudgkin) show themselves in the most random times and take the world by surprise.

Whatever happened to Pudgkin #1 you're wondering? Where was he in all of this as the humans endured? Whelp, he partied hard. He ate all the cake. Drank all the soda. His friends threw all the confetti. But all parties must come to an end and Pudgkin's party finally did. After one too many cupcakes, Pudgkin and his friends went home.



And when Pudgkin went home, his mom locked him in his room, took away his magazines, and grounded him. When she shut his door, another door opened though.

Yours. 😊



So let us keep things clean. Be smart. Wash your hands often. Wash them well. No one wants germs like Pudgkin partying on them anyway. They leave quite the mess.

Someday, I promise the doors will open again and you will be able to play outside, play tag, go to school, and be free. We just have to wait for this round of Pudgkins to call it a night – and spending time inside, while practicing good hygiene will help their party end quicker. I mean, humans *are* bigger than germs after all, in more ways than one.

Facts About Germs and Hygiene

Germs are tiny – the only way humans can see germs is through a special tool called a microscope. Germs are small organisms that can invade our bodies and make us sick.

There are 4 types of germs in the world – viruses, bacteria, fungi, and protozoa.

Viruses need a human (host) to live in, though they can live on some surfaces for more than 7 days. Pudgekin was a virus.

Viruses don't really replicate through a machine that whizzes and shakes. They multiply inside a human and then spread in different ways.

Germs are usually spread through sneezing, coughing, or even breathing. Sometimes, germs are spread person to person by touching an object that already has another person's germs on it, like a doorknob or light switch.

When you cough or sneeze, try to catch it inside your arm, right near your elbow. That way, other people won't get your germs!

Because germs can live on tables, doorknobs, and other objects, the best thing to do is wash your hands after going to the bathroom, before eating, and when coming home from school or any place outside your home.

Wash your hands with warm soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Try singing Happy Birthday to yourself while washing.

If you're feeling sick, stay home.

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