

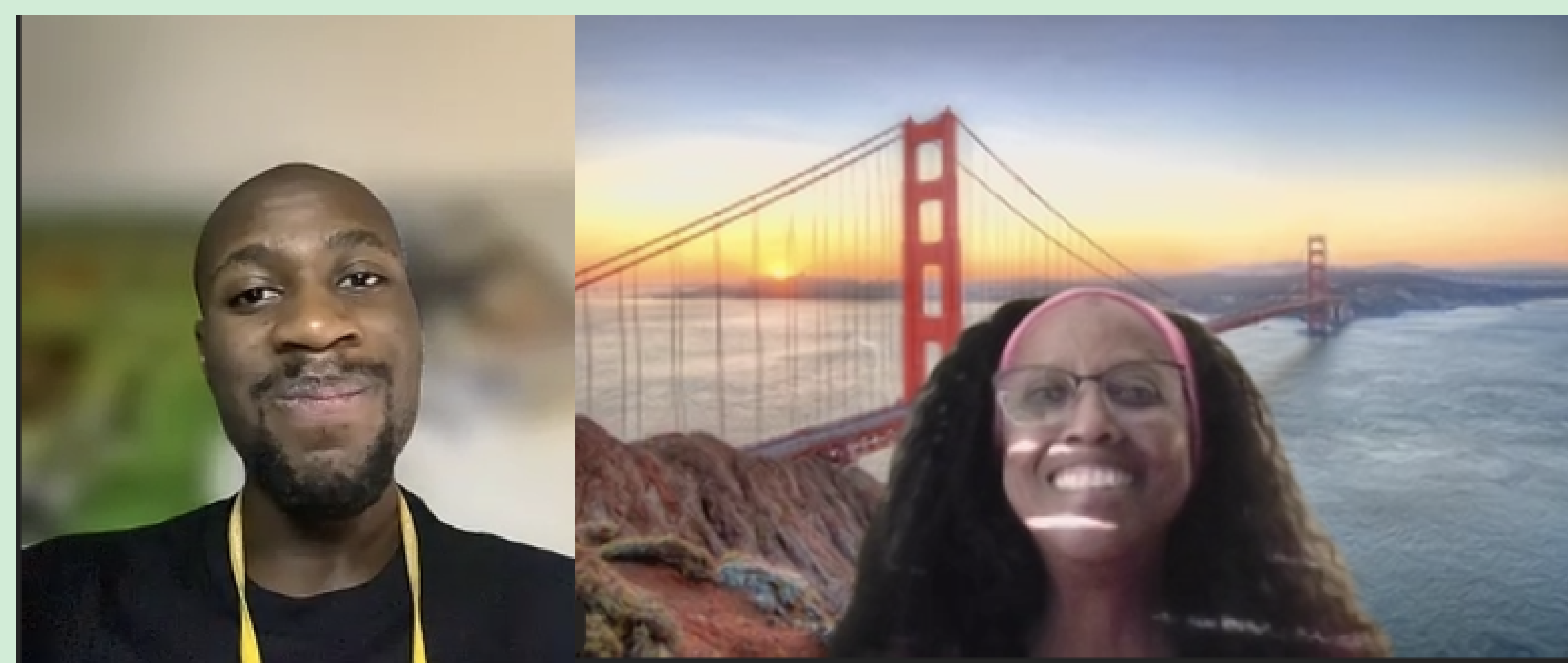
THREE SIGNINGS, THREE STORIES, ONE MESSAGE: THE IMPORTANCE OF GIVING AND HONORING VOICE

As we approach the end of SDMNY's journey, we are also celebrating a number of SDMA signings – here, those of Willie, Ian, and Jeff – that both represent some of the differences among our Decision-Makers – age, geography (upstate/downstate, urban and rural), interests, and aspirations – and some major commonalities, including birds!

Willie, the youngest, just 21, is a NYC guy from Cambria Heights, Queens. He is entering his second year at the College of Saint Vincent's Bridge Program, where he lives in the dorms, practicing his independence and is loved by all, earning him the nickname of "the Mayor." Willie aspires to be an actor and/or to do voiceovers, especially for cartoons; he relates how, as a child, he fell in love with the character of Tom Hanks in *Toy Story* and decided that was what he wanted to do when he grew up! He loves music and comedy, including, among his favorite comics, Jerry Seinfeld, Ben Stiller, Eddie Murphy, and Chris Rock.

Willie's mom, Raquel, has been working in the I/DD field for more than 30 years (she's currently Director of Residential Placement at Constructive Partnerships of New York) and is passionate about the need to recognize the voices of people with I/DD, rather than just "talking around" them. Willie's other supporters

are his dad, Mitchell, his sister, Nia, and older brother, Mitchell G. Together they make up a loving and supportive family that really "talks things out" and that is committed to Willie's continuing growth and ability to "navigate the world."



Willie and his mom Raquel

Ian, between Willie and Jeff in age, is 29, and lives with his brother and sister in Batavia, in rural Genesee County, which, at its founding in the early 19th century, was known as “the birthplace of Western New York.” Ian enjoys walking, Twitter, watching movies, YouTube, drawing, and hanging out with his family, and is known for his great memory. His favorite sports team is the Miami Dolphins. (We wonder if that’s because Batavia’s semi-pro baseball team, the Muckdogs, was formerly an affiliate of the Miami Marlins?) He has a girlfriend of 10 years, and his personal goal is to find a job.



Amber, Kenneth, Mitchell, Isobella, and Ian and the bird Gojo

Like Willie and Jeff, Ian has a very supportive family: currently he also has the most supporters – his mom Amber, mom's boyfriend Kenneth, a family friend (considered family) Diana, and brother Mitchell and sister Isobella. With the exception of the family friend, they all gathered to celebrate Ian's SDMA signing

with themed decorations and a delicious ice cream cake! Also in attendance were Amber and Kenneth's dog Enola and, foretelling Jeff's signing, Mitchell's bird Gojo. Everyone had wonderful things to say about Ian, how proud they are of him and how honored to be chosen as supporters. And Ian's sister echoed the sentiment expressed by Willie's mom when she said: "Today is a big day for you. The day your voice is recognized!"

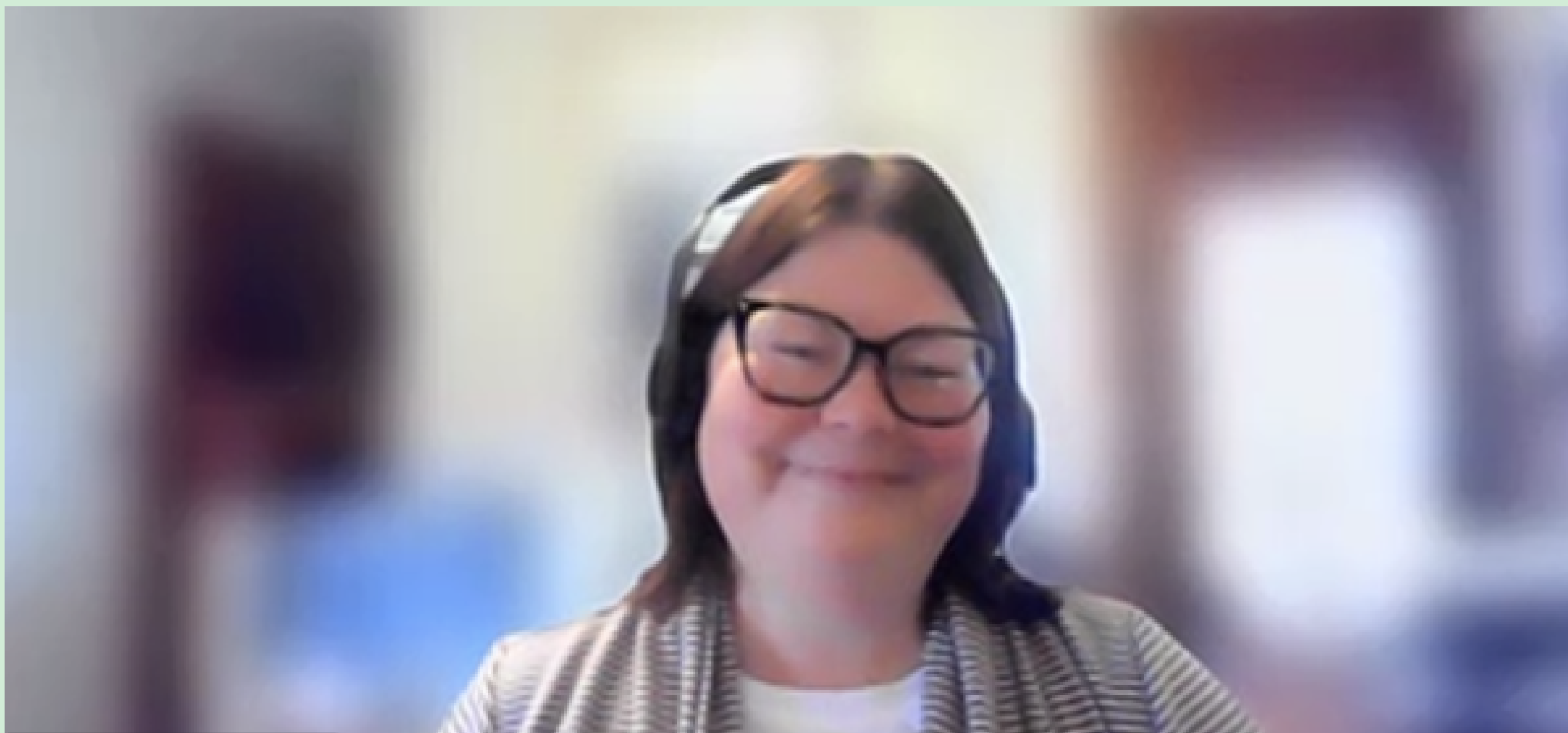
Jeff, the oldest of the three, is 37 and hails from Buffalo (about as far as you can get from NYC), where his parents Joan and Jon still reside; currently, he lives in his own apartment in Williamsville, a village that is part of the town of Amherst, halfway between Buffalo and Batavia (see above). He is, however, a world traveler, having visited France, Germany, Belize, Chile, and even Africa with his parents; he's looking forward to an upcoming 3-week trip to Japan. Jeff has a 4-year degree from Marist College, works at his local Wegman's, keeps in great shape by going to the gym 3 times a week, and loves babysitting for his 3- and 6-year-old nephews who live nearby. Jeff starred in a documentary, *The Asperger Difference*, which has been shown worldwide, but is most proud of taking care of his 29-year-old cockatiel Brandy, and keeping him alive for twice the species' normal lifespan, a record he attributes to “love, fruit and veggies every day, multi-grain bread, and keeping his cage clean!”

Although currently Joan and Jon are Jeff’s only two supporters, they see the SDMA as a beginning for getting more supports for him as they grow older. Facilitator Craig attended Jeff’s Life Plan meeting, opening up possibilities for more consistent relationships with support staff and the potential for Jeff to invite them to become additional supporters.



Jeff with his bird Brandy and Jeff’s parents Jon and Joan

One major commonality among these signings was the quality of the facilitators and the appreciation the Decision-Makers and their supporters had for them. For example, Jeff’s dad commended facilitator Craig for “giving him a process for making decisions by planning, step by step, what goes into making a decision.” But, like the Decision-Makers, the facilitators also represented some of the diversity that has enriched our process and enabled every facilitation to belong uniquely to its Decision-Maker.



Facilitator Shailene

For Willie’s facilitator, Shailene, Liason in the Member Relations Department at a CCO in Broome County, this was her very first facilitation, and she found Willie to be “a joy to work with.” Shailene is the mom of an adult child with I/DD who is an SDMNY Decision-Maker. (Good News 11/22/24)

Ian’s facilitator Karen is a seasoned and highly respected professional in the I/DD field who was one of our very first volunteers almost 7 years ago; she has continued both as a superb facilitator and a thoughtful and inspiring mentor. (Good News 1/3/25) Karen’s mentor, SDMNY’s own Simge



Facilitator Karen

(Good News 2/28/25) (from whom you receive Good News), had, like all mentors, been a successful (if intermittent) facilitator, but this was only her first stint as a mentor; given Karen's more extensive experience, the pairing might have been intimidating, but together, she and Karen worked collaboratively to maximize the effectiveness of the process for Ian and his supporters.



Facilitator Craig

Jeff's facilitator Craig, a Member Relations Manager for Person Centered Services in Buffalo, NY, used his experience and knowledge of the I/DD funding system to connect with Jeff's support team, to educate them about SDM and Jeff's SDMA, and to encourage them to take part in supporting Jeff's "voice" and his right to make his own decisions. He

innovatively "facilitated" Jeff and his supporters in making a "memorandum," separate from the SDMA, that expressed in far greater, and more nuanced detail how Jeff wanted to receive the support set out in the SDMA, and how his supporters would give it.

Shailene, Karen, and Craig are as different from each other as are Willie, Ian, and Jeff, but they are alike in the way they use their unique skills to enable Decision-Makers and their supporters to reach thoughtful, meaningful, long-lasting SDMA's that have integrity and accountability. All three deeply believe in and are committed to the human right of legal capacity.

Willie, Ian, and Jeff share loving families who believe in their abilities and are committed to lifting up their voices, even as these three young men have worked hard, through the SDMNY facilitation process, to become more self-determined and autonomous, to learn how to make their own decisions, how and when to use the support of trusted people in their lives, to live more inclusive lives, and to exercise and embody the human right of legal capacity.

CONGRATULATIONS TO WILLIE, IAN, AND JEFF AND YOUR SUPPORTERS, AND THANKS TO FACILITATORS SHAILENE, KAREN, AND CRAIG (and to Brandy and Gojo for adding color and wings!)