Rebound, by Kwame Alexander

Our story starts in 1988, and twelve-year-old Charlie Bell is spending his days reading comic books, hanging out with his best friends, CJ and Skinny, and WISHING he was good at basketball. Charlie used to spend time playing basketball with his dad, but that’s changed now that his dad is gone—he passed away three months before our story begins. Charlie doesn’t like to talk about it, but he’s struggling without his father. Without his father, there’s no one to play basketball with, travel to state capitals with, or willing to buy him new sneakers. And to make it even worse, it seems Charlie and his mom can’t stop fighting. But at least it’s almost summer vacation, and Charlie will be able to stay home and read his comics and not worry about school…

Unfortunately for Charlie, after some peer-pressure from a friend, Charlie is caught stealing from a neighbor. This, combined with all of their fighting, is the last straw for Charlie’s mother. She gives him two punishments: one, he must walk the neighbor’s dog every day for the rest of the school year. Two, he will spend the summer with his paternal grandparents, who live hours away, near Washington D.C.. Charlie doesn’t want to go to his grandparents’ house, and at first, being left there makes him feel even more hurt, angry and abandoned. His father is gone and it seems like his mother doesn’t want him, his grandfather keeps asking him to do chores and making him listen to jazz, and his cousin only ever wants to play basketball at the YMCA.

But, slowly, things start to get better. Charlie’s cousin convinces him to play basketball, and he realizes that he really *does* enjoy playing, even if he can’t play with his father. He begins to enjoy spending time with his grandparents, even though he still doesn’t like his chores. He learns more about his father, and the other men in his family he’d never met before. He gets better and better at basketball and even gets to go to a professional game! But all along, he remembers a certain friend is planning on visiting D.C. during the summer…

Everything was going so well, but on the day of the big family 4th of July party, Charlie decides to sneak away, get on the train to Washington D.C., and meet up with friends to go skating. Unfortunately, one of his friends gets into a fight, which results in a near-shooting. The police arrive and arrest them, which is how Charlie learns that one of the other boys had drugs in his bag, and that they’re now all being arrested for possession or marijuana.

Charlie spends what feels like an eternity in his jail cell, thinking of all of the things in his life he’ll improve if he manages to get out. He imagines the Black Panther coming to save him, but it’s his grandfather who does. His grandfather is angry, but he knows that Charlie didn’t know about the drugs, and soon reminds Charlie that he isn’t alone, and that he has an entire family that cares about him. He brings Charlie back to the house, where Charlie’s mother tells him he’s going home with her in the morning.

Charlie says his goodbyes with the people around him: he and his cousin play one more game of one-on-one basketball, his grandparents give him all of his father’s old comic books, and his grandfather gives him his late father’s favorite jazz record. Charlie is still sad about the loss of his father, but now has better ways of dealing with his loss, and a healthier look on life.