



QUEEN OF THE HILL

This was the year of many “firsts and onlys” for me. First and only time walking on a frozen lake, first and only time moving to another country, and the first and only time winning a fist fight at school.

Yep. Scrawny little ole me – won a fist fight against a boy at school. The most challenging year of my childhood began with this small victory. I really should have chosen to enjoy this victory, because there were many challenges I would face in this year ahead.

Winter came extra early that year in Newmarket. A thick blanket of snow developed, concealing the green grass and autumn leaves.

It was finally time for the most popular winter recess activity at Meadowbrook Public School: snow sledding. Our recesses were spent waiting in line with a Loblaws grocery bag to slide down the hill behind the school. After several minutes, I squirmed with frustrated anxiety. By the time it was my turn, and I made it halfway down my own sliding path, the second bell beckoned us all to return to our classrooms.

I lingered outside a bit longer and waited for the mob of children trampling over each other to get back inside.

Stampede nearly over, I followed my friends into the building. We stopped in the hallway outside 'House Six,' the classroom for sixth graders. After we struggled out of our snowsuits and scarves, and tugged the touques off our heads, we were prepared to face the substitute teacher, Mrs. Christian.

The sub had her back to the class as she wrote a list of quiz questions on the blackboard. Red-haired Stephen took this opportunity to leap out of his assigned chair. He blew his freckled cheeks out, bugged his eyes, and stuck his fingers in his ears. I marveled at his bravery.

Mrs. Christian spun around as Stephen jumped back in his chair, hands in his lap and legs under the desk. The teacher had apparently been warned about "Little Demon Stephen." She looked straight into his little green eyes, pointed to the door and uttered the words which strike fear into any kid's heart.

"Principal's office -- now!"

Stephen was led to the door, pouting.

The remainder of the day was normal.

After school, we bundled up again to go home. Some kids waited for the school buses while the rest ran through their own shortcut paths. I was one of those path-takers. I exited the rear of the school and took a wide detour around the hill to cross the soccer field on top. The hill was quite difficult to climb after so many bottoms had slid down, flattening and slickening the surface. When I finally arrived at the white field on top, I noticed a crowd of people gathered at the opposite end. I heard cheering and shouting. It was obviously a fight.

Idiots, I thought. Why do boys fight each other so often? I remembered Stephen's episode today and wondered if he was the one making trouble.

I pulled my gaze from the crowd and looked at the field of snow before me. It was crusty on top, like toasted marshmallows. I tried to keep my feet from falling through, stepping delicately on the surface. Then I looked behind to observe the path of boot prints. Embossed on the rubber soles of my boots was the image of a little Eskimo. I tried to make that Eskimo reveal itself in every boot print thereafter.

My eyes returned to the crowd, but the wall of observers was too thick for me to see the fight. My feet continued through the snow. I began to notice a peculiarity about the crowd, and an odd sensation came over me.

My right foot was in the air when suddenly I heard my name being called from a distance behind. All balance lost, my foot fell through the white crust of snow, shortly followed by my padded behind. The snow was so comfortable, I allowed my head and back to fall, arms stretched out. I stared up at the bright sky and soft, cotton clouds. *Abh*, I sighed, and closed my eyes; content and comfortable in that deep mattress of snow.

When I opened my eyes to look at the clouds again, my view was obstructed by my neighbor-

friend, Deborah. "Wendy, get up!" She demanded.

I sighed again. "I can't. I'm too comfy. Wake me up on your way to school tomorrow, okay?" I closed my eyes and pretended to snore.

Deborah was impatient and very excited. "No, Wendy! Get up now! There's a fight over there!" *Since when was Deborah interested in fights?* "Who cares?" I moaned.

"But Laura's over there!" Deborah shrieked.

I shook my head slowly. Why would my little sister, Laura, be interested in such things? "Don't tell me she's actually watching those bozos fighting."

"No, Wendy --" Deborah was flapping her hands around violently, like a confused bird. " -- Laura *is fighting* a bozo over there!"

"*What?*" I stumbled to my feet and looked again at the crowd on the opposite end of the field. Deborah and I ran to the mass of people. I then realized why I'd felt a strangeness about the scene. The crowd of onlookers were mostly girls. I wedged myself into the crowd to find Laura sitting on the back of a yellow-haired boy who hollered as she pounded his face into the snow.

I listened intensely, and tried to siphon out the surrounding cheers. I could just barely decipher the words coming from my little sister's snarling lips.

"Say it!" She yelled into the boy's ear. "Say it, you jerk! You dirt bag! You smelly fart burger!" I never saw Laura bully anyone like this before. Nobody besides me, anyway. "You apologize to her or I'll knock your brains out!" I heard her say.

Wait a minute, I thought. Who was Laura fighting over? Deborah grabbed my arm.

"I tried to tell her it's okay," she said, "but she won't listen to me. She just went nuts!"

"What's okay?" I asked.

"Doug was saying mean stuff about me."

"Doug?"

Deborah pointed to the boy under Laura. In her pink snowsuit, she appeared to be almost twice her size. She was punching him in the back, now. The fuzzy pompom on her touque bounced around her head violently. I watched and felt a sense of pride come over me. *My little sister is defending her best friend*, I realized. *Way to go, Laura!*

Suddenly the boy turned himself over, pushed Laura off and gave her a single, strong punch to the chest.

A charge jolted through me. The noise from the crowd faded as I bolted into the group. I grabbed Doug by the back of his coat and threw him off my sister. Kneeling down over Laura, I reached a hand to where she'd been hit.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm all right." She groaned and stumbled to her feet. "He didn't hit me that hard."

I turned to look at Doug. He stood surrounded by his friends, all smiling and laughing. My anger swelled as I stepped toward them.

"Proud of yourself?"

The fact that I was one grade older didn't phase them. The group snickered at me and turned away.

My cheeks flushed with rage. "Look, you jerk, you hit my little sister!" I moved in closer until we were face to face.

Doug was surrounded by his friends who urged him to fight me. He crossed his arms.

I continued. "You could have hurt her very badly. How would you have felt then?" I winced, realizing I sounded like a scolding parent.

The boy stood firmly and flapped his chapped lips. "Screw you!"

His foul language left me speechless. How was I to respond after a remark of that sort? My eyes narrowed as I attempted an intelligent response. "Oh, yeah?"

The boy seemed familiar with my counterattack. "Yeah!"

I leaned in closer. We were nearly nose to nose now. Boy, his breath smelled terrible. "You'd better not say that again." I warned.

Doug whined. "Oh, *yeah?*"

"And if you ever touch my sister again -- " I was ready to explode. " -- you're gonna *get* it!"

The boy's friends laughed behind him. His final retort struck me in the heart.

"I don't give a fart about your STUPID sister!"

What happened next seemed to be almost by reflex. My fist flew up and slugged him hard under the chin. He stumbled backward, eyes wide as he reached up to cradle his jaw.

I was in a daze, my eyes wide -- but not as wide as the boy's friends who stood dumbfounded, their mouths agape.

Laura and Deborah grabbed my arms and pulled me away. When we reached the opposite edge of the field, Laura finally spoke.

"All right! That was great!"

Deborah joined in. "I can't believe you did that!"

I hung my head. "I didn't mean to."

"Good thing you did, though," Laura said. "He was asking for it."

"Yeah. Way to go, Wendy! You won the fight!" Deborah cheered.

Why did I feel so bad, I wondered. A voice inside began to preach. *Because you didn't win. You lost. It was the boy who got what he was asking for.*

The wind pushed us forward and the sounds of commotion behind us slowly faded as we all made our escape.