



*It's amazing how a single event in a person's life can change everything. At this moment I'm sitting in the courtyard at Piedmont Middle School, North Carolina, in the United States of America. I bought a blank book yesterday and am writing in it now, wondering how to begin to explain how I got here.*

*This is a story about the most interesting thing that has happened in my great big entire thirteen-year-old life. I'm not sure where to start, and I have no idea how this story will end. But I guess I should begin my story in Canada -- the first land I ever called home.*

At Victory Baptist Church in Newmarket, Ontario, my Sunday school class performed an exercise to introduce ourselves to our classmates and the teacher. For the first part of this exercise, we passed around a thick book which told us the meanings of our names. I looked up my name, "Wendy," and found the definition was "wanderer." I remember feeling disappointed that I didn't find "certified genius" or "destined for happiness" next to my name. Gradually, however, I became intrigued to think I might be destined for some cool journey.

I would lie awake at night for what seemed like hours -- thinking, imagining. First I'd entertain myself with a little puppet show using my bare hands. I only knew a few contortions: duck, bunny, rooster, alligator. After the show was over, I'd stare out the window over the foot of my bed and wonder.

Will I ever move out of this boring town? Nothing ever happens here. I would look around my dark room at the shapes and shadows and my imagination would travel further. Do my toys come alive at night while I sleep? Will I ever see a UFO? What do aliens look like? Did I just hear something breathing under my bed?

From age eight to ten, the puppet shows gave way to more of the fantasies. I'd close my eyes at night and imagine myself on The Tonight Show, which I could hear faintly from down the hall where my parents stayed up to watch.

"So," Johnny would say, "You've published your first book at the young age of eleven. Quite an accomplishment. How does it feel?"

I would fantasize about my remarks. If I'm ever famous, I thought, I want to be modest. "Well, Johnny," I'd begin -- *No. Don't call him by his first name. You're being arrogant.* "Mr. Carson, I just love to write. If it wasn't for my parents who encouraged me all these years, I couldn't have done it." *Yeah. That's good. My parents would watch me on TV and get all teary-eyed. My teachers would be proud, and my classmates would be jealous. Oh, how wonderful it would be.*

Deep down I knew I'd never have a chance to do anything important until I got older. Perhaps that's why I always "wished my life away" (as my mother described it).

At Meadowbrook Public School I associated advancement and achievement with floor levels. The lowest grades were on the first floor, the highest grades on the third. I remember feeling overjoyed when I finally made it to the second floor, but soon realized higher floors meant more steps to climb. Consequently, this also meant less time outside for recess, since it took longer to scramble out of the building and get back to class when the bell rang again. Still I found myself fantasizing about the third floor (again, "wishing my life away").

Newmarket High School was only on the other side of town, but to me it might as well have been on the other side of the world. As it was a Canadian school, the grades stretched from nine to thirteen. I rode past the school many times in my mother's car or my dad's pickup on the way to Marc's Dairy Mart or Mr. Submarine. My nose pressed against the window, thinking how many years it would take to get there. Will I ever be that old? I thought. I watched the high school students carrying their books on Algebra, Chemistry, Biology. How confident they looked. Older kids always looked confident to me. I wanted so much to be like that.

For some reason there were a couple boys in my class and some older kids who loved to tease me. I never understood what made me a target. Was it because I was too skinny? Was it because I liked school? Was it because I wore the same baggy sweatpants every day, when all the other kids wore jeans?

I recall one day a group of older boys stopped me and my younger sister, Laura, on our walk home one day and called me a weirdo. I came home sulking and cried to my father that “a mean kid called me weird today.”

“Yeah. So?” Daddy responded.

I was taken aback. “But... I’m not really weird, am I?”

Daddy leaned back proudly. “Darn right you’re weird, kiddo,” he said. “You’re a Carrick, don’t forget. You don’t want to be like everyone else, do you?”

I shook my head no, figuring that was the correct response.

“All right, then. Be proud of who you are. You’re better -- and smarter -- than any of those kids, okay? They’re just trying to bring you down. Don’t let them. The next time those boys call you weird, just say: Darn right I am, and proud of it!”

I smiled, imagining how great it would be to make a joke of the whole thing. This did seem like a great idea, and an interesting experiment to try.

I took my father’s advice the next day. I was carrying my tall stack of books as usual, unaware that I stood out as different. Most other kids used book bags. The same group of boys stopped me in almost the same place as the day before. “What a nerd!” Said one boy.

I leaned my head back as planned and mimicked my father’s attitude. “Sure am,” I said, smiling, “and proud of it!”

The boy eyed me strangely, taken off-guard by my cheerful response. Unable to find a good comeback, he replied, “Whatever,” and headed off with his friends. A few of them looked over their shoulders at me as we continued on our separate paths.

My little sister shook her head. “Jeez, Wendy, you embarrass me to death.”

“How about if I do this?” I said, putting on a cheesy grin and beginning to skip jauntily with every step as we crossed the road to reach our street, Botany Hill Crescent. Laura quickened her pace to get ahead of me so onlookers would hopefully forget we were sisters.

“You *are* a nerd.” Laura groaned.

“Or how about if I do *the-e-e-s*?” I said, trying my hunchback impersonation, disguising my voice, leaning forward and dragging my left leg.

Laura folded her forefinger, stuck the knuckle up her nostril and changed her voice, too. “How about if I do this, Wendy?” She crossed her eyes and faked a hideous overbite.

“Oh, that’s awful!” I laughed.

Laura and I walked the same path every day to school. We lived so close, we had no need for the school bus. We had a few more years to go before we’d have to say goodbye to our shortcut and then we’d have to take the bus to the high school... but Laura and I never got to see the inside of Newmarket High.

As we went about our daily lives, events were taking place so we would never experience grade thirteen -- and so my mysterious journey would soon begin.

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You’ve just read Chapter One of “Wearing My Weird – in the Great White North.”

If you’d like to order the full book,

Please visit the book website: <http://wearyourweird.weebly.com/>

Thank you for reading!

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