

Laura's New Life

Larry Adams has just graduated from a large high school in the city, but due to having given up on academics since middle school, he has graduated with few information age skills. His parents, Jack and Emily, are now talking at the breakfast about Larry and the need to find some worthwhile employment for him. Oh Jack, said Emily, I am so afraid for Larry. You know Larry has a wonderful personality and is so patient and kind to everyone. However, he just began to give up on his studies just after middle school. I know, said Jack. Now I am afraid the only jobs in this city with his skills will be working in minimum wage jobs with little or no raises. They will just use him until he burns out and then hire someone else for the same minimum wage. Worse, he could be forced to work very hard in some physically demanding job just to make a living wage. Oh, said Emily, you know Larry could never hold up to such work. At 5 feet 5 inches and only about 141 pounds, that kind of work would wear him down in a few years. Yes, I know, said Jack. Larry is a wonderful kid and has a wonderful mind, but lacking any real skills, he is going have trouble making a decent living here. I know, said Emily. We need to help him, but I just don't know how.

As the two of them continued to finish their breakfast, Emily began to think of her sister in Grove Point, the little town she grew up in. You know Sam, I remember my little home town at Grove Point. It was so peaceful living there: far different from this big city and all of its pressures. Yes, said Jack, but there aren't any jobs there. You know, said Emily, - Angela said she needed someone to help her with her house and yard after our parents died. She did mention having to walk a few miles each day delivering coats and gloves she made for the local town's people there. You know', said Jack, that would at least provide Larry with a way have a more stable life right now. Yes, said Emily, I just know the peacefulness of Grove Point will fit right in with Larry's more mild and patient personality. I am going to call her right now and see what she thinks about this idea.

(Emily calls Angela) – Angela, said Emily, we are trying to find a way help Larry find a nice place to better prepare him to be more independent. The city has become a very harsh place for kids without good skills. What would you say to having Larry visit you for a while to see if he might have a more peaceful life.

That sounds like a wonderful idea, said Angela. The city is a horrible place to live, and I need help taking care of our house after mom and dad died. I have more than sufficient income from Dad's savings, and I am also making a little profit from selling gloves and coats I make for the town folks. The yards are overgrown and I can only do so much to keep up our house by myself. Oh Angela, said Emily, I just hope Larry will like it there. I know when we visit, he is always very kind and patient with everyone. He loves walking down those old country roads. Oh yes, said Angela, I think Larry would fit in good here.

That Friday, Jack, Emily, and Larry packed up Larry's things into their SUV and drove to Grove Point. As they got to the town limits, they could see older houses sprinkled in among the woods. As they got into town, Emily could see the old courthouse in town and the nearby diner. Just out of town they passed Lucy's Salon. As they drove a half a mile out of town, they came to Angela's house. Angela was waiting with a nice meal. Oh Angela, said Emily, this place hasn't changed at all. I know said Angela. Then Jack and Larry began unloading Larry's things into Angela's house and putting them into one of Angela's more spacious rooms in the house.

The next morning while Angela, Jack, and Emily were talking over coffee after breakfast, Larry went outside to see the yard and the woods around him. As he got to the front of the house, near the street, Larry saw an older man slowly walking down the road. As the older man passed, he said, hey Miss, do you know Angela? Oh, said Larry, Angela is my aunt. I will be staying with her for a while. What is your name, said the older man. My name is Larry, I said. Okay, said the older man, tell Angela, Tom said howdy. I will do it, said Larry. Larry knew his long hair, extending almost to his shoulders probably gave the older man the impression he was a girl. However, Larry was always very patient and kept the conversation light and positive. When Larry got back into the house, his family was still having their coffee time after breakfast. Oh, said Larry, Tom told me to tell you hi. Oh, said Angela, thanks. Is Tom is still living here?, asked Emily. Oh yes, said Angela. I don't think Tom has ever left Grove Point.

The next day when Jack and Emily, got ready to go, Angela gave Emily a big hug and said goodbye to Jack. As they drove off, Angela and Larry went back in the house. Larry was Setting up his computer and finding places for everything. Angela was making final touches to some gloves and a coat she was preparing

to deliver the next day. The next morning, Larry and Angela had breakfast. Then Angela packed up the packages of gloves and a coat to be delivered. Here, said Angela, I have three places for deliveries today. You may have to travel a few miles to deliver them. I made you a map for all three stops and the names for each stop. Good, said Larry, I will enjoy the walk.

When Larry got to the first stop, he came to an older house just off the road. They were gloves going to Mrs. Phillips. When Larry got inside the gate, he could see Mrs. Phillips working in her garden. Mrs. Phillips, said Larry, yes honey, what is it? My aunt Angela wanted me to deliver your gloves to you. Oh, thanks, said Mrs. Phillips and what is your name sweetheart. My name is Larry. Oh, okay, said Mrs. Phillips. Tell Angela thanks so much for the gloves. I will, said Larry.

Then Larry began to make his way to his next stop. It was to Lucy's Salon. Larry went inside to deliver her a coat Angela had made for her. Oh honey, are you here for a cut? said Lucy. Oh, no, said Larry. My aunt Angela wanted me to deliver your new coat. She said if the sleeves are a little too long, she will be happy to take them up a bit. Oh, sweetie thanks so much and what is your name? My name is Larry, Oh, she smiled, okay. Well, if you want a cut, just come on in. I will do it, said Larry.

Then Larry went on to his next stop down the road. It was to Mrs. Cook. She was living just outside town in an older white, two story house off from the road. Larry had to walk down the driveway a bit to get to her house. Larry knocked on the door and waited for Mrs. Cook to answer. She was an older lady with glasses. Oh Miss, may I help you, she asked? Larry just took it in stride and said, My aunt Angela wanted me to deliver your new gloves to you. She says, she couldn't find the exact color blue you wanted, but if you can find that color somewhere to just let her know, and she will make some more with that color. Oh, sweetie, tell Angela I will be happy with these. Oh, they are so cute. I love the way she ruffled the cuffs on them. I will tell her you liked them, said Larry. Oh honey, what is your name. My name is Larry. Okay Laura, thanks so much for the gloves. You're so welcome, said Larry.

That afternoon, Larry lazily walked back home to Angela's house. He told Angela what everyone had said and how they all seemed very satisfied with the

gloves and coat. Then Larry took out the old riding mower and cut all of the grass he could cut with that mower. Then he finally got the hand mower cranked up and began cutting around all of the trees and bushes in Angela's yard. When he had finished, her yard looked much better. Tom saw Larry finishing up. Oh, said Tom, Lauri, you are a hard worker. The yard looks so good now. Thanks, said Larry. Now, I just have to trim these bushes a little. Oh girl, don't over do it. Take a rest. Okay, said Larry.

Angela was listening and smiling as Tom continued walking down the road. She came out as Larry took a break from his mowing. Oh, said Angela he thought you were a girl. Oh, I know, said Larry. I told him my name yesterday, but I guess he just didn't hear it correctly. Oh, Angela smiled, I imagine even if he did, your long hair clouded his perception so much, he still became confused. I think your long hair is cute. Don't change it. Oh I won't, said Larry, smiling.

The next day, Larry finished trimming the bushes around Angela's house. Angela was so grateful. Now she said, I have a nice yard and all of the bushes look so nice. Someone will think I hired professional to do this. Tell you what, you get cleaned up, and I will treat you to a wonderful meal at Mary's diner.

When Larry was cleaned up and dressed, Angela and Larry drove to the local diner and parked in the parking lot by the courthouse. When they went inside, there were a few, older town's people having dinner. You could hear them talking, Oh, hey Miss Emma, how are you doing; and Miss Emma saying, I am doing good Jake, said Miss Emma. This arthritis is making me a little slow today. Well you take it easy Emma, said Jake. Okay Jake, said Emma. Then Mary, the owner came over to their table and said, what will you ladies be having today? Angela and Larry just smiled with Angela saying, oh Mary, this is my nephew, Larry, he will be staying with me during the summer. Oh my, said Mary smiling, I am so sorry, still smiling. Then she said, you must be Emily's son. Yes, said Larry, still smiling himself. Oh, how is Emily, I haven't seen her in so long. We went to school together. She is doing good, said Larry. I will tell Mom you are thinking of her. Oh sweetheart, you two just order whatever you like. Dinner is on me. Angela smiled and said, Mary we won't make a habit of this, but thank you so much. You two are so welcome, said Mary.

That night after Larry had gone to bed, Emily and Angela were talking on the phone. Oh, said Emily how was Larry's first day in Grove Point? Oh, it was nice, but very different also. You know having long hair in the city is more normal there, but here, Angela said smiling, the people only see girls with long hair. Even when Larry told Tom his name, Tom still mispronounced his name as Lauri. Oh, that must have been a little embarrassing for Larry. No, it wasn't, said Angela. The ladies he met while delivering my packages of coats and gloves also thought he was a girl. Larry just smiled, saying the ladies were so nice, but even hearing him say his name, seeing his long hair, they would continually use names like honey, dear, and sweetheart. Oh, that is so cute, said Emily. Thank goodness Larry was so kind and patient with everyone. Oh, he is soo patient. When we went to Mary's diner this afternoon, Mary asked, What will you two ladies be having for dinner. Larry and I just smiled, and I finally told Mary he was my nephew, and his name was Larry. Then Mary was so apologetic. Larry was still smiling. Oh-, Mary asked how you were doing. Oh Mary, said Emily, I haven't seen her in so long. We used to walk home from school every day together. Tell her I still miss her. I will, said Angela.

A few days later, they went into town to pick up some groceries and get some material for more gloves and coats. Angela first went into the general store to get some fabric. As they were searching the various selections, Mrs. Taylor came over to help. Oh, Angela we have some new material now, and who is this young lady you have with you? Oh said Angela as both her and Larry smiled, This is my nephew, Larry. Oh, said Mrs. Taylor as she put her hand over her mouth, I am so sorry. Larry just smiled and said, I will be staying with Angela over the summer. I love these older houses and the town area. It is so much more peaceful here than in the city. Oh, honey, I am sure you will like it here. I couldn't live in the city. It is just too fast for me. When Angela and Larry left the general store, a lady asked Mrs. Taylor who was that young girl with Angela. Oh, said Mrs. Taylor smiling, that's her nephew. He looks too cute, said the lady, smiling. Yes he does, said Mrs. Taylor, still smiling.

When they went into the grocery store to shop, Larry could see the old, linoleum floors had probably been there for many years. The register counter was made of a hard oak and probably had been there since the store was built many many years ago. A teenage girl was putting groceries on the shelves as they passed

by. Oh, hey Susan said Angela, how are you doing? I am doing fine, said Susan. Then she looked at Larry. Oh, I haven't see you before, said Susan. You don't go to my school do you? Larry smiled, no I don't I am staying with Angela over the summer. She is my aunt. Oh how nice, said Susan. I hope you will stay here. My name is Larry, I said. Oh, I thought you were ah well. Okay Larry; I love your hair. Thank you, said Larry. What grade are you in, asked Larry. I am just going into high school next year. Okay, said Larry smiling. Take it easy. Okay, said Susan. As they left the store, Susan's mom, Mrs. White, was talking to Susan. I saw that young girl with Angela you were talking to. You know she would look nice if she would fix her hair a little. Susan tried to contain her giggle. Oh yes mom, she would look better, still giggling a little. Does she go to your school? No, mom, said Susan, she doesn't, still smiling.

When they got home, Angela and Larry began putting everything away. Oh Larry, I love the way you handled all of those well meaning ladies in town. Thanks, Angela, said Larry smiling. All of them are so well meaning and so kind to me. Sometimes I feel like I am embarrassing them more when I do tell them my name. I know, said Angela. I think it's kind of cute when they get it wrong. they are so much nicer, said Larry smiling. Angela said smiling, yes, they are.

The next morning as Larry was walking along a path going through the woods, he came to a lake. Angela told him there was a lake out there, but he never really went there. When he got to the clearing by the lake, he could see a family fishing off a dock. It was a father, mother and two daughters. The father had his rod and reel cast out and waiting for a bite. While he waited, he would help his wife and two daughters change the baits on their cane poles and set the corks to a better level. When they saw Larry, they waved to him in a friendly way. Larry came up to the dock to see if they if they had caught anything. Have you caught anything? asked Larry. No honey, said the wife. We just started fishing. Hey Luke, said the wife, we have another cane pole in the back of the car. Yes Ann, but we need to put another cork on it. Then the wife looked at Larry and said, sweetheart, would you like to fish. Sure I said. Then the wife got the extra cane pole out and unfurled the fishing line. Here you go honey, you take this pole and I will find you a cork you can put on your line. Thanks I said. Then Ann found a cork and put it on my line at about the same place she put the corks for

and her daughters' lines. Then she asked, sweetheart are you afraid of worms, she asked smiling. No I'm not, I said smiling. Okay, take a worm try to put it on your hook so it won't come off. I managed to do it. Then Ann looked at it, and said, good dear. That should work fine. As we sat there fishing, the wind began to pick up. The girls began to continually brush their hair out of their eyes so they could see what they were doing. I was having the same problem myself. Then Ann saw our difficulties and reached into her bag and pulled out some colored hair bands. She went to one of her girls and after gathering her hair, she put a hair band on her hair and twisting it a couple of times until it was snug. Then she went to the other daughter and put another hair band in her hair and twisted it also until it was snug. Then she came over to me and said, here honey, let me put this in your hair. It will keep your hair out of your face. Thank you, I said. She just smiled and began gathering my hair up and twisting the band a couple of times until it was snug. There you go sweetheart. Thanks I said, you're welcome sweetie, she said.

After about fifteen minutes, we began to get bites. Then Luke caught a fish on his rod and reel. Afterwards one of the girls caught a fish also. Ann took it off of her line and put the fish in a bucket of water. Then the other daughter caught a fish also. She was so happy and said, mommy I caught one. Then a little later, Ann caught a nice catfish. She was happy she finally caught something. The girls and Ann looked at me and said, you will catch something just wait. I smiled and was just enjoying the peace of the area. Then all of the sudden, my cork just vanished, I pulled on the pole and felt a huge tug on the line. Wow, I said, I have a fish; I have a fish. The girls all got tickled and said, mommy, she has a fish. It's a big one. Come on sweetheart, Ann said, hang on to it. I am, I am, I said. Then the fish slowly got tired and came to the surface. It was a large catfish. Luke said, that is a nice fish. Thank you, I said. Here, said Ann, let me help you take it off of your line. Thank You, I said. Then she took the catfish and with a couple of good tugs, pulled the hook from its mouth. There, the hook is out. Here honey, I will put your fish in the bucket until you leave. Then I will wrap it in some ice for you. Thank you I said.

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That afternoon the family finished their fishing and packed up to go home. Ann took some ice and some newspaper and wrapped up my fish. Oh sweetheart you did wonderful. The girls and Ann smiled at me as they waved goodbye. When I got home, Angela was in the living room. Oh, she said, you are back.

Oh yes I said. I went walking to the lake and saw a family fishing off the dock. The family let me use one of their cane poles to fish also. I actually caught a fish. Here it is. Oh, said Angela that is a nice catfish. We will have to clean it. Oh, she said, you have a ponytail. It looks so cute. Oh, I smiled, the wind picked up and their two girls were having their hair blowing up in their faces. So Ann put hair bands in their hair to keep their hair out of their eyes. Then she saw my hair blowing up in my face and put a hair band in my hair. Oh, she smiled, that was so sweet of her. They were so kind I said. They all waved goodbye when they left. That must have been fun, she said. It was, I said. I had never caught a fish before. You did good', she said. Now, let's go out back, and I will show you how to clean a catfish.

She took the tools she usually used and set them up on a little table. Then she said, We first need to get the skin off of the catfish. Then she took a sharp knife to make little slices in the skin around its head so the skin was just slightly peeled. Then she used a pair of pliers, and after tightly gripping its head, used the pliers to pull the skin off of the catfish. When she needed to, she would make some more little cuts and pull some more until all the skin was off the catfish. Then she took a heavy, sharp knife and cut off its head. Afterwards she made a cut on its underside toward the back, just past the little hole and made a large cut back up to the front where the catfish was completely open inside. Then she was able to begin cleaning the insides from the catfish. She then took a hose and began washing out the insides until the insides were just, very clean, white meat. To be safe, she then cut off the spines on the sides of the catfish. That night Angela cooked my catfish with one half for her and one half for me. She also made some coleslaw, french fries, and baked beans to go with them. She watched me and said, catfish is good, but – you need to very delicately use your fork to very gently take the meat off of the fish without taking any bones. I was then very careful about separating the meat from the bones. After a while I felt more confident. That night I took the hairband out of my hair and laid it on the sink as I washed up for bed.

A few days later, Angela and I went to the library to get some books. Although I am not an avid reader, I do like books that may have value for me. While Angela was looking for her favorite authors, I was looking for anything I thought would be interesting. The librarian saw me looking at the various books and smiled saying, honey let me know if you have any problem finding something. Thank you, I said in a grateful way. When Angela had gotten her books, she asked me. Larry, did you find anything you liked? Oh, not really, I said. Then we went to the counter to check out her library books. Oh, Angela said Becky Thomas, the librarian, does she want a library card? Oh said Angela, this is Larry my nephew, he will be living with me over the summer. Oh, my, she said so embarrassed. That's okay, said Larry smiling. You were being so kind to help me. Larry, do you want a library card, asked Angela? Sure I said. Then I filled out the form for the card. After giving the form to Becky, I said, I will try to find a nice book next time, I promise. Okay, said Becky, still smiling. Oh Larry, said Angela, it seems everyone in town thinks you are a young girl. Oh, I know, said Larry, but they are all so kind. Yes, said Angela. I feel guilty even telling them you are my nephew. I know, said Larry.

Larry managed to get the tire on Angela's bicycle fixed and after filling it full of air and oiling the chain and wheels, he had it working smoothly. Then he began riding down the road toward town. When he got to town, he saw two girls also riding their bicycles. They looked like they were in middle school. They waved at him. He waved back. As they got closer, one of the girls said, we haven't seen you before. Are you new in town? Oh yes, I said, I am living with my aunt Angela over the summer. Oh she is so nice, said one girl. Angela made gloves for my mom and myself. Then the other girl said, Oh, Angela made a coat for my Mom. She just loves it. I am making some of Angela's deliveries now, I said. This bicycle will come in handy. My name is Amy the blond girl said. The other girl said, my name is Sharon. I am Larry, I said. The girls put their hands over their mouths, saying, we thought you were a girl. That's okay, Larry said smiling. Are you going our school next year? asked Amy. Oh no, I said. That's too bad, said Amy. Yes, said Sharon. You would like it here. Okay girls, see you later, I said. They said bye--. Oh, he is so cute said Amy, I know, said Sharon.

That night Angela was talking to Emily on the phone. Oh Emily, I think Larry's long hair is the talk of the town. Larry walked to Aaron's Lake and saw a couple fishing, and they thought he was a girl. They even gave Larry a cane pole to fish with. The mother put hair bands in her daughters hair as the wind picked up and saw the wind blowing Larry's hair also. She then put a yellow hair band in his hair. He looked so cute when he came in, still wearing the hair band. He even caught a catfish. The young girl at the library thought he was a girl and asked if "she" wanted a library card. Oh, that must have been something. I told Larry I was beginning to feel more embarrassed for them, finally telling them his name was Larry, my nephew. Larry kind of agreed. He said they were all being so kind to him. Oh my, said Emily, I don't know, said Angela, maybe I should put the yellow hairband back in his hair. That would be too cute, said Emily. How about just overlooking it when they do use words such as her and she. Oh said, Angela, I don't know where that might lead. Still Giggling, Emily said, just let them be wrong and not feel so embarrassed. I will try, said Angela.

A few days later, Angela and Larry were tending to her garden with all of her tomatoes, squash and beans. The sun was quite bright and she knew Her and Larry's skin couldn't take the sun very well. She then got a couple of hats for the two of them. They were both, ladies', wide brimmed hats. She just didn't have anything else to give him. When Larry put on his hat, the cuteness of the hat and his long hair definitely made him look like a young girl.

As the two of them continued to weed around and pick the ripe vegetables, the two girls, Amy and Sharon showed up on their bicycles. Oh, said Amy as they looked to the side of the yard is that really Larry and Angela. Larry looks so much like a young girl with that wide brimmed ladies' hat. Yes, he does, giggled Sharon. He looks so cute. As the girls rode up on their bicycles, Angela and Larry looked up to see them approach. Oh, hi girls, said Angela. Oh, said Amy and Sharon, we met Larry yesterday. He said he would be staying with you over the summer. Yes, I sure need the help. Larry, said Amy, you look so cute in that wide brimmed hat. Oh, said Larry smiling, Angela couldn't find any other hats to keep the sun off my face. Oh, I understand, said Sharon smiling. With your long hair it just looks so pretty. Then Angela said smiling, you know, it does.

Later that week, Larry was making three more deliveries. This time he was using Angela's bicycle and storing the packages in its large, front basket. With

his long hair and red, girl's bicycle, he looked like any other young girl riding a bicycle. His first stop was to Mrs. Adam's house. She saw Larry ride up and take the bag of gloves out from the larger package and begin walking toward her front door. When she opened the front door, she said very kindly, young lady you have something for me'. Oh, said Larry, Angela wanted me to bring over your new gloves. Oh, thank you sweetheart. Oh, they are so pretty. Has Angela made you any gloves yet? No, not yet, said Larry; she is my aunt. I will be staying with her over the summer. That is so nice. Tell her she has the sweetest niece. Okay, said Larry.

Then Larry rode on to his next stop, Mr. Harrison. After knocking on his door and waiting, Mr. Harrison opened the door and said, Well, what can I do for you young lady? Oh, said Larry, Angela sent me to bring you you're new coat. She hopes the fabric will be soft enough. As Mr. Harrison, felt the fabric, he said, honey it is. Tell her it is just perfect. I will, said Larry.

Then Larry went on to his last stop. Mrs. Dunning. While he was riding, a storm blew up and poured down. When she answered the door, she could see Larry was soaked from the rain. Oh baby, said, Mrs. Dunning, what are you doing out here in this rain? Oh, said Larry, Angela sent me to bring you your new gloves. She hopes the fingers will more comfortable for you. Oh, said Mrs. Dunning, never mind about that honey, let's get you dry and into something more comfortable. Come on in. Then Mrs. Dunning led Larry to the bathroom and said sweetie, I want you to take off those wet clothes and get dry. I will find something dry for you to wear home. Larry found a towel and after removing his clothes, he dried off. Then Mrs. Dunning handed him some clothes to wear. She said, they belonged to my daughter; she was about your size when she was your age. I hope they fit. Thank you, said Larry. Then Larry began putting on the pants and shirt she had given him. When he saw himself in the mirror, he was little embarrassed, the jeans were a kind of faded yellow and the blouse was white of a delicate sleeveless, fabric that had girl's buttons. She also gave him a pair of white socks to wear. When Larry came out of the room, Mrs. Dunning said, oh honey, I am so glad they fit. Now you will have something dry to wear home.

Now sweetheart, I have your shoes drying at the stove. Now sit here and let me dry your hair. Then Mrs. Dunning began to blow dry my hair and comb it out.

When she was satisfied, she then said, now honey, let me try on these gloves. Then Mrs. Dunning tried them on. Oh, sweetie she said, they fit perfect. Tell Angela, thanks so much. I didn't know Angela had a daughter. I began to giggle, oh I said, Angela is my Aunt. Then you must be Emily's daughter. Oh sweetie, you tell Emily, Emma still remembers her from school. I will, said Larry.

When Larry got back to Angela's house, Angela looked at Larry. Oh, Larry what are you wearing? You look like a girl in those clothes. Well, said Larry, when I was going to Mrs. Dunning's house, it began to pour down rain. When she opened the door for me, she could see I was soaked. So she sent me to her washroom to take off my wet clothes and dry off. Then she gave me some other clothes she said belonged to her daughter. When I came out, she blew my hair dry and dried my shoes over the stove. Oh my, sweetheart, you were so kind to allow her to help you. Then Angela began to giggle. Oh baby, you look like a cute, teen age girl in those clothes. I know, I said. I looked in the mirror after getting dressed. Then Angela said I am just so glad to hear everyone was happy with the gloves and coats I made for them. Oh I said, Emma said to tell Emily she still remembers her from school. Oh that's right, said Angela, Emma used to play with her many years ago. Okay honey, let me make you a nice supper. Okay, I said. Larry was still wearing the yellow Jeans and white blouse at dinner.

The next day, Tom was passing by Angela's as she was checking her mail. Oh tell Lauri she looked very nice in her outfit yesterday as she was riding her bicycle. Oh, okay, said Angela giggling, I will tell her. Oh my, she giggled, he must have seen Larry coming home in those yellow jeans and white blouse.

The next day, Angela went to have her hair fixed. Larry, said Angela, while I am there, why don't you have your hair just trimmed to make it more even. We both knew my hair was now past my shoulders. Okay, I said. Then as they arrived at Lucy's Salon, Lucy saw her and said, Angela do you want the same cut? Yes, and Larry just wants you to just trim his hair even on the ends. Okay, said Lucy. Then while Lucy was trimming Angela's hair, a young lady was waiting for Lucy to cut her hair also. Oh honey, you have such beautiful hair. I hope you don't cut any off. It looks so pretty. Thank you, I said. Then Lucy and Angela began to giggle.

When Lucy was done with Angela's hair, I went and sat at Lucy's chair also, so she could trim my hair. Lucy said, okay sweetie, I am just going to trim the ends even, so it will look more neat. Okay, I said. At first she dampened it a little and sprayed something on it. Then, Lucy began to comb out my hair to make it very smooth. Then she began to measure and cut, measure and cut until she was sure all of the ends were even. Then she said, there now, all done. What do you think? When I looked in the mirror, I didn't see Larry as much. I mean, my hair was always long but so ragged, more like a boy, but now, with my hair so smooth and the ends all even I looked more like a young, teen age girl. Oh, I said, I look so different now. Oh sweetheart you look so nice now. Thank you, I said. Then Angela looked at it and smiled, saying, oh, honey it looks so nice. Angela was still smiling as we left the salon.

When we left the salon, Angela took me to Mary's Diner. Mary was all smiles when she saw us. Oh, Angela you must have just gotten your hair trimmed. You both look so cute. Thank you, said Angela. Then Mary said. Oh honey, your hair looks so much better. You look so different. I love it. Thank you, I said. As we left the diner, Mary was still smiling.

The next day when we went to the library, Becky was there again and an older lady was there beside her. They both smiled when they saw me. Oh, my you look, so nice today she said. Thank you Becky. Oh, said Becky, we have your library card also. Thanks I said. She handed it to me, and I went on try to find nice book to read. Oh, said the older lady, I didn't know Angela had a daughter. Becky just started giggling. Before we left the library, I managed to find a book. Then as we checked it out and left the library, the older lady said, have a nice day ladies. Becky began to laugh.

That night, Angela called Emily. Oh Emily, Larry was making some deliveries for me on my old bicycle. Well just before he got to Jessie Dunning's house, it began to storm. When Larry finally got there, he was soaked from the rain. Our old school mate Jessie saw the girl's bicycle and his long hair and thought he was a young girl, like her daughter. She had him take off his wet clothes and dry off. Then she handed him some of her daughter's older clothes which fit him just right. When Larry came back he was wearing light yellow jeans and a white sleeveless, blouse. He looked so cute. Oh, said Emily, laughing, I can only imagine. Then said Angela, I wanted to just get Larry's hair trimmed at Lucy's.

however, Lucy also conditioned his hair and then smoothed and combed it out, so when she trimmed the ends, he looked like a cute teenage girl. Oh my, said Emily, I would like to see that. Here is a picture of him with his new hair cut. Then Angela sent the picture. Oh dear, Emily said, still giggling, she I mean he looks so cute. Yes, said Angela. When we went to Mary's for dinner, Mary couldn't stop smiling at Larry's hair cut. When we left the library, Jan, the older librarian, said, "have a nice day ladies." Oh, my baby, said Emily. I think his hair is so cute now. So do I, said, Angela. Oh, Tom saw Larry coming back from Jessie's in his yellow jeans and top and said Laurie looked nice in her outfit. Oh, said Emily, he must really think Larry is a young teenage girl.

That Saturday, Angela had to pick up some groceries from the store. Larry went along to help her pick up everything. When they went inside, Susan saw Larry's hair and just smiled, saying Larry you trimmed your hair. It looks so cute now. Thank you, said Larry. My aunt thought I should have it trimmed. When I did, guess she made it a little too nice. Oh Larry, I think it is so cute. Then as Larry and Angela continued to shop, Mrs. White said to her daughter, see how cute she looks now. All she had to do was to fix up her hair a little. Susan began to giggle. Yes, mom, you're right. She is so cute now. The bags of groceries were a little heavy. Mrs. White saw Larry and thought he was just a frail, young girl. Then she said, here sweetheart, let me carry that bag for you. Angela just smiled, saying thank you Mrs. White. That was very sweet of you. Susan just giggled saying, that was so sweet of you, Mom. When Larry and Angela drove off, Larry just shook his head, saying, you know what she thought. Yes, sweetheart, Angela said while giggling, I know.

Laura's New Life Chapter 3

The next day, as Angela and Larry were out in the garden, the two girls, Sharon and Amy rode up on their bikes. They could see Larry with his wide brimmed

hat on again and also where his hair appeared to be much more smooth and even. As they came up to Angela and Larry, Amy said, Larry your hair looks so pretty, she said, still smiling. Then Sharon, said, it looks so cute. Did you have it trimmed? Yes, said Larry. Angela began to smile, I think it looks so nice now. Yes, said Amy and Sharon giggling.

Then Amy and Sharon actually began helping Angela and Larry weed the garden and loosen the soil around the plants. After about an hour, it began to rain and they all went inside the house. Angela was so grateful, she made lunch for the girls and Larry. Oh, Amy and Sharon, did you girls know your mothers, Tish and Edith, went to school with me and Emily, Larry's mother. Oh, that is so neat, said, Amy. So Larry's mother grew up here. That's right, said Angela. Larry is now learning about what it is like to live in a small town.

Oh, Larry, said Amy, I hope you like it here. Yes, said Sharon, I am going ask my Mom about your mother, Larry. This will be so neat. Yes, said Larry I bet both of them will have some stories to tell. After they had lunch, the rain began to slack off, and the girls went home.

That night Larry was watching television with Angela. Angela said, I remember watching television with Emily right here in this house many years ago. I would brush her hair, and she would brush mine. We had so much fun. Here, said Angela as she took out a comb, turn your back just a little to me. When Larry did, Angela said, I just want to smooth out your hair. Okay, said Larry. Then Angela began to comb Larry's hair from the top of his head to the bottom of his hair now an inch below his shoulders. She kept combing it until it was very smooth all around. There now, see how it looks. When Larry looked into the hand mirror, he could see a young girls face with nice, long straight hair. Oh, said Larry, I look so different. You look so nice that way, said Angela. I love it. Thank you, said Larry. Your so welcome Sweetheart.

The next day as Larry was making deliveries, he delivered a coat at Mrs. Dunning's house. Mrs. Dunning was so grateful for the new coat. Oh, honey it is so nice. I just love the soft brushed fabric your aunt made it with. Now sweetheart, she said, I could see your hair blowing in the wind. Honey, let me fix it for you, so it will stay out of your eyes. Larry was still trying to be accommodating for Mrs. Dunning. Now sit here at the table and me fix it for

you. Then as Larry sat at the table, Mrs. Dunning pulled up a chair behind him and began to comb his hair out until it was very smooth. Then she gathered his hair into a nice ponytail and put a red hairband on it. Now, sweetheart, said Mrs. Dunning, your hair won't look so messy when riding your bicycle. Thank you, said Larry. You are so welcome baby. Now tell Angela I just loved the new coat she made for me. I will, said Larry. Then Larry rode back home on his bicycle. As he was riding home, Amy and Sharon spotted him and started giggling as they stopped in front of him. Larry you have your hair in pony-tail. I know, said Larry. I made a delivery to Mrs. Dunning's house. She said, let me fix your hair, so it won't get messed up in the wind. Then she gathered it up and put it in a ponytail and put a hair band on it. Oh, baby, said Sharon, you look so cute. Thank you, I said. Yes, said Amy, Mrs. Dunning lost her daughter years ago. She was about your age. Oh, said Larry, that is why she tried to help me with my hair. Oh my, said Larry. That was so nice of her, said Amy. Oh, yes it was, said Larry. Then the girls said goodbye and Larry rode on back home to Angela's house.

When Larry came in, Angela began to smile, Oh honey, she said, who fixed your hair. It was Mrs. Dunning, said Larry. She saw my hair blowing in the wind, and after I gave her the coat, she said she wanted to fix my hair. I later heard from Amy and Sharon that Mrs. Dunning had lost her daughter when she was about my age or younger. She really thinks I am a girl, due my long hair, and because she lost her daughter, she has gone out of her way to try to help me. Oh honey, that was so sweet of you. Oh sweetie, it looks so cute on you. Thank you, said Larry. I wanted to take it out, but Angela insisted I leave it in. Then Angela insisted I put on the yellow jeans and white blouse Mrs. Dunning gave me. Then Angela took a picture of me with the yellow jeans and the sleeveless white blouse. When she showed me the pictures. I looked like a cute, young teenage girl. Oh baby, she said, you look so sweet. Then she had me ride with her to the library to pick up a book. Becky was there. Oh, she said you look like a cute girl. You look so pretty. Thank you, I said. Then the older lady, Jan came around the corner. Oh, sweetheart, you look so nice today. Thank you, I said. What is your name honey. I couldn't think of anything to say and finally Becky saw I was stuck and said, her name is Laura. Oh, said Jan that is a pretty

name. I just took a deep breath, and Becky smiled knowing she helped me get out of a jam. When Jan left, I told Becky what happened,

Becky, I was delivering some gloves to Mrs. Dunning one day when it started raining very hard. I was soaked when I got to her door. When she let me in, she was so concerned about me, she had me take off my wet clothes and dry off in her washroom. She really thought I was a young girl and wanted to help me. She then handed me these yellow jeans and blouse so I would have something dry to wear home. I didn't know she had lost her daughter many years ago and was now trying to do for me what she couldn't do for her daughter. She said this outfit belonged to her daughter. Yesterday, she saw me riding up to her house to deliver a coat Angela had made for her, and the wind was blowing my hair everywhere. When I gave her the coat, she was very appreciative and wanted to help me in some way. She said she wanted to fix my hair, so it wouldn't blow in the wind. I let her fix my hair. She then put a hair band in my hair. Angela not only left it in, she also had me put on the yellow jeans and this white blouse. I am guessing she really likes the way I look in these clothes. Oh, that is so sad about Mrs. Dunning's daughter. Oh, and you have been so patient with Mrs. Dunning and Angela. I have to say, you do make a very pretty girl, she giggled. I love it so much. Now I know why Angela loves it also. You look so cute in that outfit. Oh, said Becky, while you are in this outfit you really need to say, my name is Laura. Now what is your name, ah, ah, Laura, I said. Good girl. Remember from now on you need to say, My name is Laura. Believe me you don't want to say, Larry in that outfit. Okay, I said. Oh, sweetie, Becky said, be careful from now on. I will, I said. As I left the library with Angela, Jan, the older lady said, Bye ladies. Angela and Becky just smiled as we walked out the door.

The next day, Angela took me to the store where she buys her fabrics. Today however, I managed to go without the ponytail, but my hair still looked very smooth and wavy. Mrs. Taylor came over again to help locate some fabrics. Oh honey, Mrs. Taylor said to me, your hair looks so smooth and even. I love it. Thank you, I said. Oh, Angela, I love what you did with her hair. It looks so pretty. Thank you, said Angela. Then Angela got the fabrics she needed, and as we walked out, Mrs. Taylor smiled and said, have a nice day ladies. Angela was smiling all the way back home.

A couple of days later, Amy and Sharon came by as Angela and I worked the garden. I was dressed in my usual clothes, however my hair, thanks to Angela's devotion to combing it, was very smooth and wavy like that of a teenage girl. Amy and Sharon helped for over an hour, which made our work so much easier. Again, Angela invited us in for lunch. This time, she ordered pizza from the town's only pizza parlor. As we waited, Sharon said, I sure miss that ponytail. It looked so cute on you. Angela just smiled. Then Amy had me sit in a chair, while Sharon put my hair in a ponytail. When she was finished, she placed a hair band on it. There now, you look so cute. Thank you I said. Amy and Sharon giggled while Angela just kept smiling. When the pizza came, the delivery person was very nice. Ladies I have your pizza nice and hot. Then we all sat around the table and had pizza. It was so good. When the girls left I still had my hair in a pony-tail.

That night, Angela was talking to Emily. Oh Emily, we have had a crazy time After I had his hair trimmed, his hair looks so smooth and even, everyone we meet thinks Larry is a girl. A few days ago, Larry was taking a coat to Mrs. Dunning's house. When Larry pulled up on my bicycle, after she was satisfied the coat was fine, she then had Larry sit by her table, so she could fix his hair. When she was finished, she put it in a pony-tail. When Larry got home, he looked so cute, just like a young teenage girl. Oh my, said Emily, he must have looked so silly. Oh, said Angela he looked very cute. The next day, I had him put on the Yellow jeans and white blouse again. He looked so cute in his outfit and ponytail. Then I took him to the library to get some books. Becky, Jan's daughter, even helped out Larry by using the name Laura when Jan asked him his name. Oh, said Emily that is a pretty name. Here, I am sending some pictures, said Angela. When the pictures arrived, Emily said, oh my, She I mean he, my Larry looks like a teenage girl. He looks so cute. Oh I love the way he looks, said Emily. You know I bet Larry would actually fit in better as a teenage girl. Angela laughed, saying I will try to do my part. Okay, said Emily. Then Angela hung up the phone.

The next morning, I was still wearing my pony-tail. I began to take it out, then Angela said, please sweetheart, leave it in. It looks so cute on you. Okay I said. Then Angela took me to a clothing store. She began picking out some jeans for working in the garden only they were ladies jeans. Then she picked out some T-

shirts and dress shirts she felt would be loose and not so hot. The dress shirts seemed to be normal, but when we got home and I looked more closely, I could see they were in light shades of yellow, red, and blue. There were little pleats in them and even some little imprints of flowers on the cloth. Oh, they looked too nice. She also got two pairs of tennis shoes, a tan pair for the garden and some light purple ones for everyday wear. She also picked out a pair of dress shoes for going off. They were Debbie med wedge shoes. She even got some socks in different colors. Now, said Angela you will have something for the garden and for just everyday.

The next day, we went to the grocery store to get a few things only this time I was still wearing the pony-tail. Angela also had picked out some tan jeans and a light yellow shirt from the set she picked out the day before. I could see the flower print in the cloth. She even laid out some yellow socks and the new light purple tennis shoes. When we got to the store and walked in, Susan looked at me first and put her hand over her mouth, saying you look so pretty, I didn't recognize you. Who fixed your hair? Oh, when I was making deliveries, Mrs. Dunning thought I was a girl when she saw my hair all in my face in the wind. She said she wanted to fix it for me so it wouldn't blow. She then put it in a pony-tail. Then after taking it out, Amy saw me without the pony-tail and put it back in. Angela liked it so much, she wanted me to keep it in a pony-tail. Angela has now picked out some clothes for me she thinks are nice only they are more lady like clothes she thinks will go with my hair. Oh, said Susan, they are so cute. I love the yellow blouse. I can even see the flower imprint in the cloth. You look so sweet in those clothes. Oh, I guess I should say thank you. Oh baby, you look so nice. I know my mom will be tickled, said Susan.

That night, Angela took out my pony-tail so I could clean up for the night. But then later that night while watching television, she combed out my hair, dried it and put the pony-tail back in. There now, said Angela all finished.

A couple of days later, I was making deliveries again. Angela had me wearing the light blue jeans and white blouse and white socks and tennis shoes. I was still wearing the pony-tail. This time when I knocked on the door, Amy answered it. Oh, my, said Amy, you look so cute. You look like a young girl. My aunt liked the pony-tail so much she kept putting it back in. Then she got some clothes she felt would go with the pony-tail. Oh, sweetie, said Amy you look so pretty. I

love that blouse. Oh, I can see the flower imprints in it. It looks so cute on you. Becky at the library told me to be sure and not use the word Larry dressed like this. She helped me reply to Jan, the older lady when she asked me my name, Becky saw I was stuck and said, her name is Laura. Oh, that's a pretty name, said Amy. If anyone asks me from now on, I will say your name is Laura as she giggled. Thank you, I said. Oh baby, you have been so sweet and patient. You look so cute. Then her mother Mrs. Adams came to the door. Oh sweetie, may I help you. I just smiled saying, my aunt wanted me to deliver your coat to you. Oh, said Mrs. Adams you must be Emily's daughter. Ah - yes, I said. Oh honey, that was so sweet of you to bring it. Thank you so much. As Mrs. Adams left the door, Amy said giggling, I can't wait to tell Sharon we need to call you Laura from now on. Okay, I said. Then I continued making my deliveries.

That night, Emily and Angela talked. You know, said Emily I have this crazy idea. What if we could find a way to help our ah - Laura slowly fit in to the role of a nice teenage girl. I would love to see him/her go back to high school and to try to regain the skills he missed when he was going to high school. Oh Emily that is one crazy idea, said Angela. If you want me to begin, I would love to have a young teenage girl in the house, and oh, I think Larry, I mean Laura desperately needs that opportunity.

The next day, Larry was out running errands when Amy and Sharon arrived at Angela's house on their bicycles. Angela saw them coming up and was waiting out front. Hey Mrs. Foster, said Amy and Sharon; we just came to see if Larry wanted to ride with us. Oh, girls I am so glad you are here. Please come inside. When the girls came inside, Angela led them in to the dining room and gave them both a glass of iced tea. You two along with Susan and Becky will be going into the 10th grade next year. Well, Larry just graduated this year. When Larry entered the 10th grade, he more or less gave up on school. Now after graduating, Larry has found himself with little or no academic skills to get a nice job and earn a decent living. Larry is such a wonderful kid. You girls know that. Oh, yes, said Amy, smiling. He is so good with everyone, especially the older people here. Oh, said Sharon, and he has worked so hard to help you with your garden and is so patient with everyone. I know that, said Angela smiling. Also, which may be a very good thing for the plans his mom and I have for Larry is, Larry is only about 5 feet 5 inches tall and only weighs about 141 pounds. That

makes Larry about the same size and weight as girls just going into high school. Then Amy said, the first day we saw Larry, we thought he was a young teenage girl with his long hair and about our size. Yes, said Sharon, we thought Larry was just another new girl in town. I know, said Angela smiling, but Larry has just been trying to get along with everyone. He has never thought of actually being a young teenage girl. Now his mom and I are so afraid Larry will not have a future without a good education. His mom has asked me to try to allow Larry, through various supports and conditioning to slowly adapt Larry to actually becoming a nice, mild, teenage girl who will go into the 10 grade as Laura. We so want her to slowly recover all of the academic skills she has lost while going to high school these last three years. Oh, said Amy, that is why you have been slowly trying to get him/her to accept the girl's things and even the ponytail. Yes, said Angela giggling and yes, I also think those clothes and ponytail look so cute on him now. I know, said Sharon, Larry, I mean Laura is so mild and kind and so patient with everyone, he or she would make a wonderful 15 year old girl. Then Amy and Sharon left Angela's house to slowly develop a plan to do their part to help Angela and Larry's mother succeed with their plans to make Larry able to enter high school as a 15 year old girl. That night, Amy and Sharon talked to Becky from the Library and Susan from the grocery store who were all planning to go to the high school next year. They told them about Angela's and Emily's plans for Larry. They all made a vow not to talk about the purpose but to do all they could to support, condition and help Larry/Laura become a very cute and still very kind and patient, 15 year old girl who hopefully would be able to enter the 10 grade with them next year.

That night after Larry got cleaned up, Larry and Angela had popcorn and watched a movie. Angela began combing out Larry's hair and after it was dry and smooth, she began putting it in a pony-tail all over again. By now Larry had become used to it and kind of just learned to accept it. He didn't say anything. Afterwards, Angela smiled, knowing Larry/Laura looked so cute. She even began talking somewhat silly to him as they watched the movie, saying, the girl is so scared. Do you think he is waiting for her? Larry just smiled saying, maybe he's behind her. That would be scary. When he went to bed, Angela, began thinking of ways to make his room and the house more accommodating for a 15 year old girl. She knew it would require a lot of subtle changes over time for Larry/Laura to make such a change.

The next morning, Angela laid out some of the new clothes. There were some nice gray jeans, a very light red shirt/blouse and his new white tennis shoes. When they went to the fabric store, Mrs. Taylor made all over Larry/Laura. Oh honey, she said, you look so nice. That pony-tail looks so cute on you. Oh Angela, she looks so pretty today. Thank you, said Angela. As Larry/Laura was looking at the leather goods, Mrs. Taylor began to talk to Angela. Angela, said Mrs. Taylor, if I didn't know better, I would really believe I was looking at very cute, young girl. Well, Emily is hoping he/she will more accepted as a cute young girl. Larry is so kind and patient but also so small and frail, his mother is afraid for him. She is hoping to protect him by helping him become a young teen age girl. Oh I see, said Mrs. Taylor. He or she is so kind and patient, this world would surely run him over at every turn. I know, said Angela, but hopefully this way, he will be more safe and perhaps have much more support. Oh, said Mrs. Taylor smiling, he/she is so cute already. Oh, said Angela, some of the girls are already calling her Laura. Oh that is a pretty name, said Mrs. Taylor, I will use that name from now on. Yes, said Angela, smiling.

When they were finished, Angela took Larry/Laura to Mary's Diner. Mary saw Angela and Larry enter the diner. She put her hand over her mouth, trying not to show her open mouthed surprise. Then Mary said, Oh, you two look so nice today, she said, as she was talking to Larry/Laura. I love the pony-tail, it looks so cute on you. Thank you, said Larry. Mary also noticed the very pretty, light red blouse and gray jeans she knew were made for girl's his size. Mary just smiled. Then Angela, deliberately parking her car a little ways from Mary's Diner

and also deliberately leaving her glasses in the front seat, asked Larry/Laura if he would retrieve them for her. Larry being the always helpful and considerate person he is, was more than happy to get them for Angela. While he was gone, Angela said to Mary, Larry's mother sees Larry as a very kind and very patient boy, but-- she is so afraid, given his small stature he will be run over in this today's world. She is hoping to protect Larry by slowly getting him to accept himself more and more as a young girl and still remain the very kind, caring, and very sensitive, considerate person he is. Becky, at the library is already calling Larry, Laura to help protect him. Okay, said Mary smiling; I like that name. I think that is a cute name. When Larry/Laura returned, Mary was so kind to him. Oh, honey, I have seen you running so many errands for Angela and doing so much for everyone, this meal is on me this time, she said smiling. Thank you, said Larry in his usual, but now, growing more passive voice.

The next day, Amy and Sharon came over. They saw Larry/Laura in his ponytail, light blue jeans and a cute, orange T-shirt top with a unicorn on the front. Amy said, Laura, you look so cute in your outfit. We are going bike riding all through town. We want you to go with us. That sounds fun, I said. As we rode to town, we would see different towns people in their yards who would wave at us. One lady said, be careful girls, those cars go really fast. A lady passing by in her car said, girls you look so cute today. We all said thank you. Then later, we began to ride through town. Amy and Sharon showed me where we could put our bicycles and begin walking through town. While I had gone to town and in different places with Angela, now I was with Amy and Sharon just walking and seeing all of the stores and shops. We went into an antique store and looked around. It was funny; Amy and Sharon kept calling me Laura. Laura, look' at this vase'. It is so" pretty". Yes, I said. I love' the designs' on it. Then Sharon said, oh", look' at this lady' in the picture'. She so" pretty". Oh, yes', I said, she is pretty'. Then Amy while smiling, glanced at Sharon, and Sharon smiled back. Oh Laura, look at this old' sewing machine. It is so" cute". My grandmother had one of these. I looked at the needle and thread. I then asked the lady if it still worked. Oh, yes dear' it does. That is so' cute', I said. Then Sharon smiled at Amy. Then the lady smiled and said, here sweetheart', sit down at the chair, and I will show you how it works. I sat down at the chair, and she flipped a little lever and said, now honey' it is all ready to begin sewing. All you have to do is

begin pushing that pedal on the floor with your foot, back and forth. When I did, the sewing machine began to sew the fabric. It is so' neat'. Thank you I said. Your welcome sweetheart', she said.

Then we went over to the book store. There were so many books on many topics. We just looked mostly at the pictures. Oh", said Amy, they have the Book' Frozen'. I think Elsa is so" pretty", said Amy. Then Sharon said, I think Anna' is prettier". Then Amy said, Laura, which one do you think is prettier, Anna' or Elsa'. I think they are both' pretty', I said. Then they looked at the books with the unicorns. Then Sharon said I love Uni' the Unicorn' she is so" cute". Then Amy said, I love the Unicorn' Princess'. I think she is so" cute". Laura, said Sharon which one do you think is cutest', the Princess or Uni the Unicorn. They are both so' cute", I said. Then Amy and Sharon just smiled.

Then we went to the children's shop to see the children's dresses and toys. Oh' Laura', said Amy, look at these little dresses' for a five' year' old'. I just love the petticoat' and lacy' dress'. It is so" precious". I came over and looked at it and said, oh', it is so" precious". Amy and Sharon began smiling. Then Sharon looked over at the dolls on display. Then Sharon said oh, these dolls are so" cute". I want to take them all' home' with me. Then Sharon said, Laura, which of these dolls do you think is prettiest'. Oh, I don't know, I said. They are all so' pretty". When we left the children's shop, I said, they had so' many' pretty' things' in that store. Amy and Sharon had big smiles on their faces.

Then Amy and Sharon went into the makeup shop. They even had a makeup artist showing the ladies the different kinds of makeup. As the artist worked, she would show the patrons the products on display and how to apply them. When she got to Amy, the artist put a little light blush on her cheeks, a little, light eye shadow on her eyelids, and some light lip gloss on her lips. Oh Amy, I said, you look so' pretty'. Then Sharon had her face made up. When she was finished she too had the light blush, light eye shadow, and some light lip gloss. Then both Amy and Sharon called me to the artist. Laura', now it is your' turn'. I went up there a little scared. The artist was very kind. She said, Okay sweetheart, just sit here, and I will make you so pretty. Okay, I said. As the artist worked, Amy and Sharon looked on and smiled. When she was finished, she let me see myself in the mirror. Oh, I can't believe it, I said. Then Amy said, oh, Laura, you look so" cute". Then Sharon said, oh, Laura you look so" pretty". Thank you, I

said. I was soo" scared". Oh baby' said Amy, you were wonderful'. Yes, said Sharon, you did so' good' in there. They just smiled as they took my hands and led me out the door.

At supper that night, I told Angela about how Amy and Sharon took me into the various shops. Angela began smiling at me the whole time. I said, Amy' and Sharon' took me into the various shops' in town'. We went into the antique' shop' and saw so many pretty' vases' and pictures'. Then we went into the children's store and saw the cute' children's dresses'. Amy thought the little girl with the little' white' dress' and petticoat' was so" cute". Sharon, was looking at all of the dolls, saying she wanted to take them all' home' with her. They were all so" precious". She asked me which doll was the cutest'. I said, They are all soo" cute". The whole time, Angela was smiling at me. I didn't know why.

Then we went into the book store. Amy and Sharon began looking at the Unicorn books. They mentioned I had a unicorn' on my T-shirt. Then as they began comparing the different ones Amy called me over saying, Laura, The Unicorn Princess' is soo' cute'. Then Amy called me over saying, Laura, come here, the Uni the Unicorn book is soo' cute'. Then they asked me which one was the cutest'. I said, they are both, soo" cute". Then they began looking at the book Frozen, with Sharon saying she thought Anna was cutest'. Then Amy, said no, Elsa was cutest'. Then they asked me. Laura, which one do you think is the cutest', Elsa or Ana. I said, they are both, really" cute".

Then I said we went into the makeup' shop'. The makeup artist made up Amy's face first'. She did Sharon's face next. When the makeup artist was finished, she looked soo' cute". Then Amy and Sharon called me up there, saying Laura, you're next. The lady was very kind, saying I am going to make you soo' pretty'. I was soo" scared". When the artist was finished, Amy and Sharon said I did so' good'. Then we got a milkshake and came back.

Oh sweetheart you must have been so' scared' having your face made up. Oh yes, but we had so much fun. Oh baby', you are so' precious'. Here, let me wash that cute makeup off of your face. Okay I said. Then Angela led me into the washroom where she began using some kind of cream she said would take off my makeup. She very carefully took a damp napkin and slowly began to take off the eye shadow. Then she slowly and gently began removing the light blush.

Then she smiled as she began removing the light lip gloss. Oh, sweetheart', you looked so' pretty' when you came in. Thank you, I said. Then that night when I got ready for bed, Angela came in and pulled the covers down for me. Then she tucked me in. Goodnight sweetheart, she said.

The next morning when I got up and came into the kitchen, Angela was waiting with breakfast. I was still wearing my pajamas. After breakfast, I went into the washroom to shave the peach fuzz off of my face. When I came out, Angela looked at my face, and said. Um, let's try something. Let's go back and look in the mirror. When I got back to the mirror, Angela said, I wonder if this would look better, she said, as She took my razor and said let me shave off some of that side hair. Then Angela wet my face with some cream and warm water. Then she began to shave off some of the hair around my face in a kind of oval fashion and some more she called baby hair. When she was finished with both sides, she washed it off. Now, said Angela, how does that look? I looked at my face and could only see my hair growing out but no shorter side hair. It looked like I had more more of a round face; it looked so neat. Oh, I think it looks cute' like Sharon's and Amy's. Angela smiled saying, Now I want you to keep shaving your hair this way. Also, I want you to be sure and try to keep your hands, arms, chest and neck area clean of any hair. I think it looks cute this way. Okay, I said.

Then I when I went to my room, I saw where Angela had laid out my darker blue jeans and light blue shirt, light blue socks and white tennis shoes. When I came out, Angela said I looked so' nice'. Now she said, let me fix your hair. Then she began to comb it out until it was very smooth and then put in a blue hair band. There now, all done. When I looked in the mirror, I noticed my face looked so clean without the side hair and so smooth, more like Amy and Sharon now.

That day, we went back to the library, so Angela could exchange some books. I even wanted a book myself. Becky saw us come in and smiled. Oh hi, Laura, Mrs. Foster. As I stopped by the checkout desk, Becky was smiling and said, Laura, you look soo cute today. You changed your face in some way. You look like any other young girl our age. Thank you I said. I think it was Angela who did it. She took a razor and removed some extra hair from the sides of my face. It looks so much smoother now. Oh sweetie, it does, she said smiling. Then I went try to find a book. I just wanted to see what a unicorn book was like, so I

got one. I finally chose Uni the Unicorn. When Angela and I went to check out our books, Angela smiled when she saw the cute unicorn on the cover with the cute face and hair. Oh, said Angela that looks like a wonderful book. I will have to read that one myself. When we got to the checkout counter. Becky started laughing. Oh, she said, that book is so cute. The little girl is so precious and the Unicorn acts so cute in the story. You're going to just love it. Thanks, I said. I can't wait to read it. Then Angela did all she could to contain her giggle. Oh, Mrs. Foster, Laura is so cute; I just love the book she checked out. Oh honey, said Angela, I will be sure and read it myself. Then Angela and I left the library.

While we were in town, Angela picked up some things from the store. Susan saw us as we entered. Oh Laura, she said, you look so cute today. Thank you, I said. Your face it looks so different. Oh Angela had me shave off some side hair. Oh baby, you look so nice. I love it. Thank you, I said. As Angela continued to shop, Mrs. White came by and said, oh Angela, Laura looks so pretty today. I love her hair. Thank you, said Angela. Oh, will Laura be going to the high school this year. Angela just giggled and said, we certainly hope so, Betty. That would be nice. Susan says she hopes Laura will be with her when she enters high school this year. That would be so nice, said Angela.

That afternoon, I helped Angela fix supper. Here honey, Angela said, as she gave me a small pot and showed me how to make rice. Then she said, Now put about this much rice in the pot for the two of us. Then put in about a cup and a half of water. I did as she asked, putting in the rice and water. Then she said, now put the rice on to boil but try to watch it. When it begins to boil, turn it down less than half, about right there. Then we'll cover it and let it simmer. Okay, I said. As I was doing that, Angela was heating up some roost beef. I watched as Angela told me what she was doing. Now, I just put a little oil in the frying pan and turn it to about medium. Then I cut up about a half of an onion, see. Do you want to cut it up, she said. Angela got out a cutting board, and I slowly cut up the onion. When it was in small pieces she said, okay honey, now slid the onion into the frying pan. When I did, she said, very good. Now we'll just fry up the onions until they are nice and done.

About the time the onions were done, the rice began to boil. Then Angela had me turn the burner for the rice down to about a third of its heat and cover it. Good sweetheart, said Angela; now put this can of roost beef in with the onions

and cook them together. The roost beef is already cooked, so all I have to do is heat the roost beef and just mix the onions in with it. While the rice was simmering, I began stirring the onions and roost beef together. Then we turned down the heat on the onions and roost beef and allowed the rice to cook a little more. Then Angela checked the rice by putting in a small spoon and taking out a little rice. She blew on it for a second and then tasted the rice. Um, she said. It tastes done. Now honey, Angela said, you do it and see how it tastes. I put a spoon in and took out a little rice and after blowing on it, I tasted. Okay sweetie, she said, does it taste nice and soft? Yes, it does, I said.

Now you know the rice is done. We'll just leave it on a little longer while we make the muffins. Then Angela said, now set the oven on bake to about 350. Then put a little butter and the rolls in this small pan. Then when the oven beeps, put it in. Set the timer for about 5 minutes, and then we can check them. When I had put the rolls in the oven and set the timer, Angela then had me look at the rice. Okay dear, there is just a little too much water in the pot of rice, so what we will do is use a strainer to get some of that water out. Then Angela had me put a strainer over the sink and pour the rice into the strainer. When the rice and water had gone into the strainer, she had me put the rice into the frying pan with the roost beef and onion. Then I cleaned off any remaining rice and put that in the frying pan. Then the oven beeped and the rolls were nice and brown.

Angela gave me a large oven glove to take out the pan. I laid the muffins on the stove and then continued to mix the rice with the onions and roost beef until Angela felt they were all mixed together. Then Angela said, okay honey, now we can turn off all of the heat and just let it all sit while we fix the table. I then helped Angela set the table with plates, silverware and glasses. Then Angela took a large spoon and dipped up a serving of rice and roost beef for my plate and hers. Then she put the rolls on a plate with some butter beside it. Then she opened the pitcher of tea and filled our glasses. Oh my, I said, I just learned how to make a meal. Thank you, I said. Oh sweetie you did wonderful. After we ate, I helped Angela put away the leftovers and then wash and put away the dishes. That was so good Angela. Now said Angela, you will know how to make rice and roost beef yourself. Yes, I said.

Laura's New Life Chapter 5

That night as we watched television, Angela began combing my hair again. She just kept combing it even after I thought it was nice and smooth. Later that night, Angela pulled covers back and then tucked me in.

The next day, Amy and Sharon came by on their bicycles while we were working in the garden. They were both carrying bags in their front baskets. They laid their bags on the front porch and came back around to help us. Amy and Sharon smiled when they saw my faded jeans and red striped top. Oh Laura, you look so cute today, said Amy. Thank you I said. Then the two of them put on their work gloves they had brought with them and began helping us weed the garden and pick some beans, tomatoes and squash. Later we all went inside. Amy and Sharon also brought in the bags they had left out on the porch. When we got cleaned up, Angela warmed up a pie she had and put ice cream over it. We all enjoyed it. Afterwards, Sharon gave Angela a package and said, I hope you will put this package away until tonight. You will understand. Okay, said Angela. Then Amy and Sharon smiled saying, Laura, we brought you something and we want to see how if they will fit. I said okay, then Amy gave Angela the other package and said,- Angela, I think Laura may need your help in putting these on. Okay, said Angela smiling, I can't wait to see what they are. Then Angela said, Laura sweetie, what do you say we go to your bedroom and try on these things. Okay I said. When we got into the bedroom, I watched as Angela opened the package. Oh my, said Angela, smiling, they are two skirts and panties. They look so pretty. Angela saw something else in the package and started to giggle but just put it down temporarily and opened up the skirts. These are so pretty, said Angela. The first one was a green, flared, skater skirt. The second skirt was a light blue pleated, skater skirt. I looked at them. Oh my I said. I have never worn a skirt before. That's okay honey, let's see if they fit. Then Angela turned around and had me take off my jeans and put on the white panties and green skirt. When I put them on, Angela then turned back around then took out the little package that was still in the bag she was smiling at before. When she opened it up for me, she showed me what it was. Oh, I said smiling, it's a bra. Amy and Sharon were outside listening and giggling. Come on, said Angela smiling, let's see if it fits. Then I took off my shirt. There now, said Angela, hold out your arms for me. When I did, Angela said-, just relax and

see how it fits sweetheart. Amy and Sharon were still listening. Then Angela slowly pulled the new bra up to my shoulders and then had me turn around. Then she gently pulled the ends together to find a notch in the bra that would be comfortable. Then Angela latched the ends. There now, said Angela, turn around so I can see it. When I did, Angela had a big smile on her face. Oh honey, with you hair fixed and your smooth clean face, you look so cute. Thank you Angela, I said. Oh sweetheart and the cups are just slightly padded for a 15 year old. They look so nice, just the right size. Then Angela had me put on the light yellow blouse to go over it. Then she actually buttoned it for me. Oh, baby, she said, you look so pretty. Then Angela gently led me out the door to show Amy and Sharon how I looked.

When we got out into the living room, Amy and Sharon had their hands over mouths at first. Oh Laura, said Amy, you look so pretty. I so love that outfit. Oh, and you are wearing the bra. It makes you look just like a normal fifteen year old girl. Oh said Sharon, you so cute in that outfit. Then Angela said,- now we need to try on the light blue skirt.

Angela led me back to my bedroom to try it on. She had me take off the green skirt and then put on the light blue pleated skirt. I could see the zipper and buttons on it and didn't know what to do. Angela just smiled, saying, that's okay sweetheart, I know what to do. Then she turned the skirt so the zipper and button were on the front and then had me pull the skirt up my legs while her back was turned. Now sweetie, she said, you can zip and button the skirt in the front and then turn it so it is in the back. When I was finished, she said, Oh baby, is it too tight. I said no, it feels like the other one. That's wonderful, she said. Now straighten your blouse, so I can see how it looks on you. When my blouse was straight and neat, Angela led me to the living room. Oh Laura, said Sharon, you look like any other, very cute girl. Oh, said Amy, you look so cute. Thank you, I said. Then Angela had me wear the skirt and top the rest of the day. Angela did have to teach me how to smooth my skirt, so it would feel more comfortable when I sat down.

That night when I began to clean up for bed, I tried to reach for the button and zipper. Angela laughed, saying that's okay honey, just turn your skirt until your button and zipper are on the front. Then you can undo the button and zipper

much more easily. I then turned the skirt around until the zipper and button were in front of me. Thank you Angela, I said. Oh baby, she said smiling.

When I came into my bedroom, after taking a shower, I saw a package and a little note beside it. It read. From Sharon, I hope this gown will fit you. I felt you needed something cute to wear to bed. There was some more writing below it saying, please come to the living room when you put it on. I want to see how it looks. When I opened it up, I saw a very cute, girl's gown. It was white with pink ruffles and lace on the collar and cuffs. It had pink ruffles and lace across the chest and also had ruffles and lace on the hem. When I put it on, it came down past my knees. When I looked in the mirror, I gaped at myself. I looked like a very cute, little girl with long, wavy hair.

When I went into the living room, Angela had her hand over her mouth, saying oh sweetie, that gown looks so pretty on you. You look soo cute. Thank you, I said. Oh, baby she said. Sit here at the couch, and I will make us some popcorn. When she came back with the two large bowls, she was still smiling and admiring my gown. Oh sweetie, you look like a doll in your new gown. You look so sweet. Oh, I said, I have to admit this gown feels so soft and comfortable. Angela smiled saying, honey it's supposed to be very soft and very comfortable. Later that night, while watching the movie, Angela could see I was getting tired. Then Angela led me to my bedroom and pulled the covers down. Then she laid me on my bed, tucked me in, and then kissed me on the cheek.

Later that night, Angela called Emily on the phone. Oh, Emily, Laura was so cute last night. Yesterday, Amy and Sharon took Laura bike riding through town. The girls stopped at different shops and kept calling her Laura. Then they kept looking at the different things they saw, continually using such words as soo cute, pretty, adorable, and even precious. The last shop the girls visited was the beauty shop with a makeup artist. The makeup artist did everyone's face including our little Laura's. When she came home, Laura began using all of those words she learned from Amy and Sharon. She had completely forgotten she was wearing pretty makeup as she was telling me about where the girls went. Still laughing, Angela said, she was even accenting those cute words. She was so cute. Angela then sent pictures of Laura in her makeup, skirts, bra, and gown to Amy, Sharon and to Emily. Oh Emily, I sent you some pictures of Laura in her new skirts and nightgown. She looks so cute now. Amy and

Sharon got them for her. Then Laura put on both skirts to see if they would fit. Laura also got a new padded bra which fit perfect and would be just right for a young, 15 year old girl. Oh I see, said Emily. My little Laura looks so cute in her skirt. Oh and that new gown of hers is so pretty. I can't stop giggling, said Emily. She is so cute now. Still giggling, Emily said, oh my little girl had cute makeup on also. Yes, said Angela, smiling; I will let you know more later.

The next morning I was still wearing the gown. I felt a little silly wearing it, but as Angela said, it was soft and comfortable. Then Angela called me to the kitchen. Laura, she said, breakfast is ready, just come on out in your gown. When I did, Angela just began smiling all over again. Oh Sweetheart, just have a seat, she said, you look so pretty in your new gown. Thank you, I said. Then she made me egg, grits, toast, and coffee.

That day, I made deliveries in my gray jeans, unicorn shirt, and yes, the new bra Amy got for me. Angela also put my hair up in a pony-tail with a purple hair band to go with my purple tennis shoes. I went to Mrs. Jacobs house to deliver her gloves. She made all over me saying, please tell Angela she has the prettiest niece. I will, I said. Then later I went to Mr. Freeman' house to deliver his coat. He was so nice and said, Oh honey, you rode all the way out here to deliver my coat. Thank you so much. Then later, I came to Mrs. Aaron's house and knocked on her door. It was Sharon's house. When she answered it, she said, oh Laura, you look so cute as she put her hand over her mouth, and you are wearing your new bra. You look so pretty. Thank youu, I was beginning to say it in a more child like way. Oh baby, you are so cute now. I love it. Then Mrs. Aaron came to the door. Oh mom, said Sharon, this is the girl I have been telling you about. Oh, said Mrs. Aaron, Laura, you look so cute. Tell your Aunt, I love the gloves, and finally got to meet her pretty niece. Sharon just giggled and said, okay mom, you're right, she said, still giggling.

The next day we went to the department store where Angela bought more panties in different colors and some more bras in the same size Amy had bought. Angela was so happy as we left the store. Next, we went to get some more fabric for Angela. Mrs. Taylor was waiting. This time I was wearing the blue jeans; the light blue blouse; my light purple tennis shoes; and yes my new bra. Oh Laura, you look so pretty today. Thank youu, I said in my more mild voice. When Angela and Mrs. Taylor were alone for second, Mrs. Taylor said, oh

Laura looks so cute in her new bra. I know, said Angela. Now, she looks just like any other 15 year old girl. They both smiled, and Angela paid for her material.

That afternoon, Amy called and said they were going to a movie. Amy said, they were going in skirts. Then Angela smiled saying you can wear your green skirt and light yellow blouse. You can all wear some nice white socks and your new pumps. I was a little embarrassed at first. Then I said okay. Angela helped me get ready. Then when Amy's mother pulled up, I went to the car. Oh, Laura, you look so cute. Thank you, I said. Sharon was in the back and could see I was a little scared. She just smiled and took my hand. Oh baby you look so cute. Just enjoy the movie. Amy and I will sit on both sides of you. Thanks Sharon, I so appreciate that. Then Sharon made all over me, occasionally brushing a stray hair back for me. When we got inside, Amy sat on one side and Sharon sat on the other. During the movie, I had to use the restroom. Amy just smiled and said, let's go together. Then Amy looked into the restroom and made sure the room was clear. Then she motioned me in. When I was finished, Amy just smiled and said, You were wonderful. Still smiling, she said, now let's go watch the rest of the movie. It was soo' good'. We all had a good time. As we left the movie theater, we all had to wait for Amy's mother. I had forgotten about wearing the skirt until I found myself outside the theater with all of the other patrons. Oh, I am so scared now, I said. Amy and Sharon, just smiled, took my hands, and said, oh baby, you look so pretty. Just know that and relax. I did and then I said. Thank you. I feel better now. Then a little later, Amy's mother picked us up and carried us home.

That Saturday, Amy and Sharon came by the house to help me with my reading. They brought a book for me. Then they would read some lines and then have me read the same lines. I noticed Amy really accenting some of the words and acting silly herself as she read the words. She also made little accent marks as she would read using the silliest voice I have ever seen her use. The book was entitled, Sally' the Silly" Girl" Sally was the most' silly' girl' in the school". She would giggle' even when there was nothing" to giggle' about. When the other kids were singing normal, she' would sing in very' high' notes'. Then Amy would have me read the same passage and tried get me to imitate those same words. I would read the words and try to emphasize the words right where Amy put her

accent points. I was starting to get better. Angela heard me reading and began to smile as she heard me raising my voice on the accent points.

Then Sharon gave me book to read. It was entitled, My Oh" So' Cute" Bedroom'. She began to read in the silliest voice I ever heard her use. I have the cutest" bedroom'. It has an Ice" Princess" on the spread' with cute' little' animals' on the pillows". It has a beautiful" pink' rug' with little' girls', little' flowers', and little' cats' and dogs' all" over it. The walls' in my bedroom have little' pink' and yellow' flowers' all" over it. Then Sharon had me read it and tried to help me use the accent points and try to read in just as silly a way. I was getting good at it. Angela was listening as I began to read the lines with the same cuteness Sharon used. Angela began to giggle as I got better and better at it.

Then Amy read some lines from her book and would act very silly as she read the lines. Then she would have me read from her book using that same silliness. Sally the Silly Girl. Sally' would dance' across' the room' pretending' she was a ballerina". She would make funny" faces" at the teacher' when she turned her back to her. When she pretended' to be upset', she would pretend to pout by holding" her bottom" lip" out". She was so" silly". Angela began to giggle again, as I tried imitate Amy's silliness.

Then Sharon would read from her book in a very silly way and then have me read some lines from her book with the same silliness. I have the cutest" dolls' on my' bed'. They have little' pink' dresses' with sashes' and white" petticoats". They have little' white' shoes' with little' straps' and a little' bow' in their hair. They look soo" cute".

I was getting so good' at it. Every time I read a line, Angela would start to giggle". After an hour, we all took a break. Angela made everyone peach cobbler and ice cream. Angela", I said, those' stories' were so" funny'. I thought the silly' girl' was so" cute". The Cute' Bedroom' was so" silly" also'. Can you imagine' having all" of those cute' dolls' on her bed' and on her' dresser". Angela, Amy, and Sharon were all giggling. I didn't know why. Why are you giggling" so' much', I said. They were just' cute', silly' stories'. Then after our break, we read for another hour. Then Amy and Sharon gave me a big hug and they went home. They were giggling as they left the house.

That night at supper, I was talking to Angela. Oh, Amy' and Sharon' were so" silly" today' as they read' those stories'. I don't think I could ever" act that' silly'. Angela began to giggle all over again. I didn't know why.

Then as we watched television I commented on the girl's dress. That dress is so" silly", just like those cute" dolls" we saw at the children's shop. Angela just continued to smile as she combed my hair. Later she took down the covers for my bed and tucked me in. Then she kissed me on the cheek.

The next day we went to the library. Angela had me wear the cute light, blue pleated skirt, white blouse and white socks and my wedges. When I turned in the book, Becky had a big smile on her face. Oh Laura, she said, you are wearing a pretty skirt and blouse, and oh my, and a bra. You look so pretty. Thank' youu, I said in now a much more timid way. I love those wedges, they look so cute. Amy' and Sharon' gave me some cute' skirts', and even a gown'. Oh my, she said giggling, that was so sweet of them. It was", I said.

They were acting so" silly" yesterday as they were trying improve' my reading'. We must have read' for over' two" hours'. They would emphasize' different' words and then have me read those same' lines' with the same" silliness". I didn't know why but even after we finished reading, Angela, Amy, and Sharon continued to giggle. They were being so" silly". Oh I just' loved" the book, Uni the Unicorn. Uni" said there were' little girls' and her parents' said it was just' her imagination'. And then the little' girl' who said there were unicorns", and her parents said it was just" her' imagination'. It was so" cute" when they met'. I just' loved" it. Then Becky began to giggle. Oh baby, you sound so cute, said Becky. Now I know why Amy and Sharon helped you with your reading, she said, still giggling.

Then Angela said, she had to run an errand and asked Laura to stay and find a book to read. Finally, I picked out the book, Ann of Green Gables and began to read at a table in the library. Somehow, I was much more at ease as I read. Becky smiled looking at Laura, for she now saw a cute young girl in a nice skirt and blouse, so at ease, so sweet, and was actually enjoying her reading.

Then Becky went over to Laura and asked her if she liked the book. Oh", said Laura, she is wearing that silly" dress" and is talking so" cute". I just love' the

way she talks. Oh, Laura, said Becky giggling, I just love the way you talk. You are so cute, she said, still smiling.

When Angela came to get Laura, Laura was still reading her book. Then Angela asked Becky if Laura has been reading the whole time. Becky said, yes, she has been a perfect angel and appears to be engrossed in her book, Anne of Green Gables. At that Angela began to giggle. Oh my baby, she said. Then she and Becky both began to giggle.

That Friday, Emily came up for a visit. When she saw Laura in her yellow skirt, white light blue blouse, pony-tail, and knee socks, she got so tickled. Oh, baby, said Emily, you look so pretty in your new outfit, said Emily. Mom', I said, I have been learning how to read from Amy' and Sharon', and Angela'. They showed me how to dress' and talk' and walk' and speak' so" well'. They are so" sweet'. They even want me to go back to school as Laura. Oh sweetheart, said Emily. I think that would be wonderful. You do'? I said. Oh, yes honey, said Emily. Then Mom gave me a big hug. Angela was so happy for both of us.

That night after supper, Angela watched as Emily combed Laura's hair nice and smooth as Laura sat on the sofa in her pretty gown. Then when Laura got tired, Emily led her daughter to her bedroom and tucked her in. When Emily came out, she was so surprised. Oh Laura appears like she is no more than a fifteen year old girl. She is so cute and talks so silly now, just like a young girl from middle school. I know said Angela, giggling.

Laura's New Life Chapter 6

The next day, Emily went to town with Angela. When Emily went into Mary's Diner she began to cry. Oh, Mary, I haven't seen you in ages. They hugged. And then Emily saw Karen Dunning. Oh Karen, I am so sorry about your daughter. Then they hugged for the longest time. Then Emily turned around and there was Tish. Oh Tish, I sure missed you, said Emily. Then Emily turned and there was Edith. Oh Edith, you, me and Tish played together in elementary school. Then they hugged. Oh Marge (Mrs. Taylor) oh, we fought over the same boy. They were both crying, yes we did, as they both hugged. Then Mary brought out the school pictures of all the ladies when they went to school together. She had copies for all of the ladies.

That afternoon, Amy, Susan, Sharon, and Becky knew Emily would be giving Laura a new dress the next day. Angela and Emily had picked it out and wanted Amy and Sharon to bring it over the next day. However, the girls knew that for Laura, this would be a whole new experience for her. So they wanted to do all they could to prepare Laura for that next day. While the ladies at the restaurant were having their get-together, Amy called Laura over to her house. When she got there, Amy, Sharon, Susan and Becky were all waiting. While Laura was wearing her nice gray jeans and light blue top, the girls knew that wearing a pretty dress would be a totally new experience for her.

Oh', I said, why' is everyone here? Well, said Amy, your mother and Mrs. Foster wanted to surprise you tomorrow with a new dress, but we all know you have never worn a dress before. So we all wanted to support you and get you more prepared for wearing the dress they picked out for you. Oh', my'', my mom and Angela have bought me a dress. I will be so' embarrassed''. Then Amy said, oh baby, you will do fine. Then Sharon said, honey, you are so pretty already. Then Susan said, oh sweetheart, we all love you.

Then Becky said, okay girls, let's show Laura her new dress and help her get ready for tomorrow. Then Amy took Laura's new dress out of its bag. The dress was very pretty. It was a light rose colored, two layer, chiffon dress with fluffy sleeves and a nice bow in the back. The dress was knee length and so pretty. Okay, Laura go to my bedroom and just change out of your clothes. You will need to put on these rose knee socks that go with them. Okay, I said.

Then about five minutes later, I opened the door. I still had my mouth open in a kind of little girl surprise. Oh, I said, I saw myself in the mirror. I look like one of the dolls in the children's department. Amy just smiled. Oh sweetheart, she said, you look just wonderful. Now turn around, and I will bring your zipper up. I turned around and Amy slowly raised the zipper until my dress was closed. Then she gently tied the sash on my dress. All finished, said Amy. Now just turn around. When I did all of the girls, just smiled. Oh, said Sharon, you look so pretty. Thank you, I said. Oh, said Becky, baby you sounded like a little girl when you said thank you. You look wonderful. Then Susan said, oh honey, you are the prettiest girl. Then I said, oh thank' you so' much' for being here. You made it soo' much' better'. I, I don't feel embarrassed' now. Then all of the girls smiled and gave me a hug. Oh, I feel like oh no - Then Amy saw a tear fall, ah happy now. We just sat in the living room for the next hour, talking about the new school year coming up and how I may be re-entering the tenth grade as a 15 year old girl. Amy and Sharon dried my eyes with tissues. Oh, said Becky, I hope you are in my classes, she giggled. Then Susan said, baby you will do wonderful. Then when the girls left, Amy untied my sash and unzipped the zipper to my dress. Then I went back and changed into my other, ah less cute clothes. Then Amy and Sharon put the pretty dress back in its bag for tomorrow. That night, Emily combed Laura's hair until it was very smooth. Then as Laura became tired, Emily led Laura to her bed where she tucked Laura in and kissed her on the cheek.

The next morning, Emily and Angela were up early talking and reminiscing about all the girls, now ladies Emily reunited with the day before. Oh, said Emily, Mrs Dunning was so cute when she said, your baby was out in the rain, and was so afraid she would catch a cold. Oh and Mary, said, you have the cutest daughter now. Yes, said Angela, the whole town has helped with your plans by simply seeing Larry more as Laura from the beginning. Oh, yes, said Emily, thank goodness for small town values and experience.

I heard talking in the house and got up to see what was happening. I was still in my gown when I got to the front room. Mom and Angela had prepared breakfast and were already setting the table. Oh sweetheart, said Emily, go wash your face and comb that hair out of your eyes. Okay Mom', I said. When I came back, they had already fixed my plate. Oh Laura, said Angela, we are having a

little party today for you, as Emily will be going back home this afternoon. I smiled, saying, I am sure I will have a good time. Then Angela smiled at Emily, and Emily smiled back, Yes, said Emily smiling, I know you will honey.

Later that afternoon, Mrs. Dunning, Mary White, Mrs. Taylor (Marge), Mrs. Adams (Amy's mother), and Mrs. Aaron (Sharon's mother) began to show up. Mary brought Cake and ice cream; Mrs. Dunning brought fresh chocolate chip cookies. Mrs. Taylor brought some potato Salad. Mrs. Adams brought deviled eggs. Mrs Aaron brought over baked beans. Meanwhile Emily and Angela had cooked up a lot of fried chicken and hush puppies.

When they were all together, Amy, Sharon, Becky, and Susan showed up with the packages Emily and Angela had prepared for Laura. Emily and Angela then directed Amy who was carrying the packages, to Laura's bedroom. Then all of the girls went over to Laura who was now wearing her dark blue jeans, light red blouse, a nice pony-tail, and her wedges. Oh, said Amy, you look so pretty. Thank you, I said. Then Becky said smiling, honey just act silly like you do. Then Susan said, baby, you will do wonderful. Then Sharon smiling, said, just don't cry. We forgot to bring tissue. Okay', I said giggling.

Then as everyone arrived, Emily said, I am so glad you guys are here. I wanted to have a party for all of you who have helped to make this happen for Laura and us. Angela and I also wanted to let you be a part of another step in Laura's life. Then Mom led me to my room. Oh, sweetheart, she said, I have surprise for you. Then Mom took the bag off of its hanger. It was the rose colored chiffon dress I wore the night before. I smiled, saying, Mom that dress is so pretty. Mom was tickled I liked it. Then Mom had me change my clothes as she helped me put on the new dress. Then she had me turn around, so she could raise the zipper and tie my sash. When she turned me around, she said, oh honey you look so pretty. Thank you Mom. Then she gave me a big hug. Now sweetheart she said. Put these knee socks on that go with your pretty dress and then put on your wedges. When I put them on, Mom began to fuss with my hair until it looked just right. Then she took some rose colored hair pins and placed them on my hair to hold it back. There now; all done. Then she said, are you ready to see everyone? I hesitated for a second. Then I remembered my wonderful friends who helped me last night and were now waiting for me outside. Then I smiled, yes Mom, I am ready. Then she opened

my door, and I walked out into the room. Everyone was oohing and aahing and making all over my new dress. Oh sweetheart, said Mrs. Dunning, you look so pretty. Then she gave me a big hug. Then Mrs. Taylor came up and said, sweetie, that dress looks so pretty on you. Then she gave me a big hug. Then Mary White came up and said, my you look so pretty in your new dress. Then she gave me a big hug. Then Mrs. Adams came up and said, oh baby, you look so precious in your new dress. Then she gave me a big hug. Then Mrs. Aaron came up and said, oh honey, you look so pretty today. Then she also gave me a big hug. Then everyone began getting out all of the food and began setting up the table for everyone to eat. The girls were all smiling and being silly. Oh Laura you did wonderful. Sharon was still giggling, and said, I didn't see one tear. I know, I said, you guys made' it happen' Then they all gave me hug. Oh, said Becky laughing, I just love the pins in your hair. They make you look like a princess, unicorn, that is. I know", I said, It looks so" silly" doesn't' it. Then all of the girls began to giggle.

While Emily, Angela and her friends sat at the large table the girls and I sat in the living room on the sofa and chairs. Oh, I said, this dress feels so comfortable, and for some reason, I feel so much more delicate wearing it. They all smiled. Then Amy said while giggling, that's because you really do feel pretty now. Wearing a pretty dress just makes you feel and act more delicate. Oh I see', I replied. You know, I could get used to this. Then all of the girls began to giggle. Oh, baby, said Becky, you are already acting so cute and delicate in your pretty dress. I know, said Sharon, I could see Laura taking smaller, more delicate steps as she began walking around. Laura, you looked so cute, she giggled. Then Susan said, your mom really fixed your hair up nice. You look like a very pretty, delicate, young girl with your hair fixed and those cute, rose-colored pins. Then I just looked at them all and said, oohh', ahh', thank' youu. Oh baby, said Sharon giggling, someone get some tissue. Then they all started smiling and giggling.

Emily and Angela kept me in the dress for the rest of the day until Emily went to go home that Sunday. Then Emily gave me a hug and said, baby, you look so pretty. Thank you Mom, I said. Then Emily gave Angela a big hug, and we all waved goodbye for a time.

That night I went to clean up. Angela helped me take off my dress and left a gown on my bed when I came out of the shower. I hung my dress in my closet and went to Join Angela who was waiting with some popcorn. Oh sweetie she said, you looked so pretty today. Thank you Angela, I said. Just think, said Angela, in less than a month, school will be starting. I know, I said. I just want to do well. You will sweetheart, said Angela. Just relax and enjoy learning. Okay, I said. Later that night, Angela led me to bed and tucked me in for the night.

That night Angela went about finding a way to get Laura entered into the high school that year and smiled to herself. Oh, she thought, this may work.

The next day, I rode off to make more deliveries. Angela had laid out some blue jeans, my yellow blouse, and my purple tennis shoes. Then she had me fix my hair and put in a yellow hair band to go with my light yellow blouse.

While I was gone, Angela went to work, getting me ready to enter school as Laura Foster, a 15 year old girl from Grove Point Middle School to enter Grove Point High School. Angela and Emily had a friend in the county who created a birth certificate for a Laura Foster. They even had the school pictures to appear Laura had classes in the different grades and was now entering the 10 grade at the high school.

That afternoon when I returned, Becky and Susan were picking up supplies for school and wanted me to go with them. When I told Angela what they were doing, she smiled and said, that is a wonderful idea. I hope they can help you pick out some cute things for school. Then Angela gave me 50.00 for school supplies. I met them in front of the department store. They were all smiles. Oh Laura you look nice today. Thank' youu, I said. I just don't know where to begin finding everything I will need for school. Becky and Susan just smiled saying, we kind of figured that out, they said giggling. Let's go in and see what they have.

The first place they went to was to the book bag areas. Oh, said Susan, here are some cute ones. They had the light blue ones with the little red roses with green leaves all over it. Then Becky saw another book bag that was similar. It was a light pink with little white flowers and little dark leaves. Finally they picked one out for me. Oh, they said this one is so cute. It was white with little red

buds and little yellow pedals with green leaves all over it. Oh, I said, Angela will have a fit over this one. Susan and Becky giggled. I hope I can adapt; It is so' pretty'. You will Laura, said Susan. Just see it as just another cute part of your clothing. Oh, it is so' cute', I said. They just smiled. Then we got our paper and pens. Susan and Becky picked out some cute pens with bright polka-dots and others with little flowers on them. Then they picked out some for me. I said, these are too' cute'. They just smiled and said, and "we" are worth it. Then we picked up some paper. Then Susan and Becky picked out some spiral notebooks and bought one for me. They were white with many different kinds of pink, blue, yellow, and red blooms all over them.

Oh, these are so" cute', I said. Yes, said Susan, these are very pretty, but they are also important. When something happens, you need to find a time afterwards and write down what happened, so you not only have memories, but also be able to think about how to change and do something better next time. You will have so many experiences, and after you have filled this notebook with things, you can date it and then begin with another notebook and keep writing about all of your experiences. Don't trust your computer, because computers can go down and take all of your information with it. Oh, said Becky, and you will have so many new experiences at school, many you will experience for the first time and may not know how to handle. Then we can help you from our experience and learning how to do things better next time. But it will be fun, for we can laugh about them and make the less good ones better next time. Then when they were satisfied we had gotten everything we needed, Susan's mother picked us up and brought me back home.

Angela giggled when she saw my book-bag. Oh honey, she said, your book-bag is so cute. Thank youu, I said. Angela I am so scared. I will be doing so' many new' things' each day and never knowing what will happen. I am sure glad I have Susan, Sharon, Amy, and Becky to help me. Oh yes sweetie, she said. They are wonderful friends and love you so much. I know that, I said. They have always been there for me.

Then that night at supper, we just talked about what I would wear. Angela laughed and said when we were going to school, we always had to wear dresses and skirts, but I know today the girls are all wearing Jeans and cute tops. Oh, that's good. Could you imagine me wearing that dress to school.

Then we both giggled and then cleaned all of the dishes and put everything away.

The next day was Friday morning. School was to begin the very next Monday. Angela took me to the high school to get my class schedule for Monday and also to help me locate my classes. I wore my nice light blue jeans and red blouse with the purple tennis shoes. When we got to the counter for the "F" students, the lady said honey what is your name? I said Laura Foster. She looked down the list and didn't see my name. Angela and I both looked at each other. She kept looking and kept looking, and then said, oh here it is, Laura Foster 10th grade. Here is your schedule sweetie. Oh, I said, that was so "scary". Then we both laughed. Being around all of those students I felt very scared at first, but then after seeing Amy and Sharon, I was so relieved to see someone I knew. Amy and Sharon could see the relief on my face and they gave me a big hug. Oh, I said, I so glad you guys are here. They just smiled, and said, you look wonderful. You will do fine. Angela, then giggled and said to the girls, please take care of my baby. The girls laughed and said, we will Mrs. Foster.

Oh", I said, they have me scheduled' for P."E". I could never do' that. I would be so" embarrassed". The girls began giggling. Then Amy said, oh in this county and other rural counties, girls and boys can take wilderness training instead of P.E. We get enough physical exercise at home, said Sharon giggling. What is wilderness' training'? I asked. That sounds' good', and ah, much' less' embarrassing'. Oh, we are taught many things about the different plants, animals, trees, the land, along with how to survive on the good things and avoid the bad things. Oh", that would be so" much' better", I said. Okay Laura, all we have to do is when we go to sign up for P.E. there will also be the Wilderness and Nature class you can sign up for instead. Then Amy led me over to the booth where we could make our choice. We got in line and when the lady called us up, Amy and Sharon signed up for the Wilderness and Nature training classes. Then the lady called me up saying, okay honey, what is your name? I said ah, Laura Foster. Then she looked up my name on her computer. Okay, I found you. Now which do you want to take, P.E. or Nature and Wilderness training. Oh, I said, Yes", Nature' and Wilderness' Training'. Then she said, okay sweetie it's done. Oh", thank' youu, I said. Amy and Sharon were still

giggling. I definitely didn't mind the geometry, English, History, and Science classes. At least I wouldn't be changing clothes in those classes.

We also picked up our books for school at the various booths. We picked up our Nature and wildlife books and went on to pick up our other books for the subjects we were taking. That afternoon, the girls went home, and I began to write about my first day at the high school in my personal notebook.

That night after Laura went to bed, Angela smiled and even giggled as she began to read the Journal, Laura was writing.

Oh', my first day at the high school was so" different". There were so' many' boys', girls', and school personnel there. I felt so" embarrassed" and so scared" at first. Angela was a big' help'. Then after she left, Amy' and Sharon' made me feel so" much" more' at ease. Giggling', they practically' led' me by the hand' as we went through the hallways to reach the various booths in the school. The ladies in the booths were very' kind'. They always smiled' and would speak in such nice' ways' as they located and printed up my class subjects and room numbers. Amy and Sharon began' to giggle" as I followed their advice and took the Nature and Wilderness class. Amy and Sharon could tell I was so" relieved" when the lady said she had signed me up for that' class' instead of P.E.

Laura's New Life Chapter 7

The next morning when I got up, Angela called me; come to breakfast sweetheart. When I finally came to the table, I told Angela about going to the school to sign up for my classes. Angela was smiling and said, Oh, honey, that must have been a scary experience for you dressed as a young girl and seeing all of those people there. Oh I was so" scared", I said. Then Amy and Sharon made everything better. Oh baby, she smiled, I am so glad they helped you.

That afternoon, I met Susan and Becky at the library. They were also getting ready for school. Oh, said Becky you are in my Geometry and English class. Then Susan said, Laura you are in my Science and History class. Oh", thank' goodness", I said. I just don't want to be alone' when I go to my classes'. We'll be there, said Susan. And then Becky laughed, we'll try to keep the boys off you. Funny, I said. Then we all giggled.

That night we went to the movies. The girls were all wearing skirts. Angela picked out something for me to wear. It was the yellow skirt with white blouse with some animal socks. Then Angela put some yellow barrettes in my hair. I looked like a young teenage girl. When Becky's mom picked us up, she said, oh honey, you look so cute. Thank youu, I said. Then Susan, said, she always says thank you that way when she is feeling a little insecure. Oh sweetheart said Jan, you are so cute. Just relax and have fun. I will, I said. When we got into the theater, we all took our seats and waited for the movie to begin. When they got to the scene where the killer was waiting to pounce on the girl, I couldn't help it. I said, oh" no". Then Becky and Susan began to giggle. The movie had an intermission, and we all got up to get some popcorn and a drink. The man behind the counter was so nice. We told him we wanted popcorn for each of us and three cokes. He said, sure ladies. Here let me put some lids on them for you. Then after giving us three boxes of popcorn, he said here are some napkins, I wouldn't want you ladies to get butter on your pretty skirts. We thanked him and went back to our seats. Later, I had to use the restroom, Susan went first to make sure it was clear. Then I went in. A lady came in after me and sat down in the next booth. When I finished, I just got up and left. Oh", I said, that was my first' time having a lady' in the restroom with me. At' least' I will be better' prepared' next time. Susan could see my fear, and said, you did fine sweetie. Thank youu, I said. Susan just giggled.

When I got back from the movie, Angela was waiting with some pie and coffee. Oh", Angela I said, we saw the movie', The Killer' Strikes' at Night'. It was so" good". They didn't show his face until the end of the movie. They always showed the victim in a dark area. Then the music would change, and we just knew" something bad' was going to happen'. When the killer' pulled' the girl' around the corner', we all' screamed" at once'. Everybody looked at us and laughed. I was so" embarrassed". Susan thought it was the big' man with the tattoo' who was the killer. Becky thought it was the Tall' thin' man with the mustache'. I thought it was the big' lady' at the cigarette' store'. It turned' out to be the midget' who always so" nice" to everyone'. I didn't know why but Angela was giggling the whole time.

The next day was Sunday, the day before we went back to school. I told Angela I was so scared. I will going to school as a young girl in the 10th grade. I will be talking to teachers and interacting with hundred of students, both boys and girls. Angela just smiled saying, Laura, you have been doing this for the last three months now. Have there been any problems so far? No Angela, I said. Everyone has been so kind to me, and the girls are always there for me. You know Angela, I have to say, it has been so much fun, being talked to so kindly by everyone. You know, Angela, knowing I have you, Mom and those wonderful friends, I think I will have fun going to school and relearning all of the things I didn't learn earlier. Yes, said Angela as she gave me a big hug, and you, sweetie are so cute too. Oh', thank' youu, I said.

The next morning, Angela helped me get up early, have a nice breakfast, and find something nice to wear for school. I wore my light gray jeans, Navy blue blouse, and nice shoes. Amy's mother dropped us all off at the school. They all gave me a hug and encouraged me, saying just relax and have fun. I said, you guys are the greatest. And I did just that; having learned from my previous years, I listened to all of my teachers and all of those around me, I took notes, and I actually wanted to begin reading and learning the various material in all of the books. I realized as I listened more intently the information was not that difficult. I was able to understand immediately much of the information and marked the places where I wasn't sure. As I went to each class, I was able to relax much more and just listen and draw pictures in my mind of everything my teachers talked about. Perhaps it was the previous months of very kind, stable

treatment that put me so much more at ease and made me feel so much more comfortable with interaction and communicating with everyone in a much better, more positive way.

At the end of the day, Amy, Susan, Sharon, and Becky were all waiting for me outside. We all walked home together that day and talked about all of the funny things that happened to us. I loved it, said Becky when Mr. Burton said Laura, do you understand the formula to find the hypotenuse of a right triangle?, and you said, yes sir. The length of the hypotenuse squared equals the square root of the sum of each of the shorter sides when they are squared. Um, that is correct young lady, he said. Thank you, you said. You were so good in answering the question and still said thank you like a little girl. You were so cute. I was still giggling and said, if he had asked me about the area of a triangle, I wouldn't have had a clue. Oh, girl said Amy, you did so good. Thank you, I said. Then they all giggled again.

That afternoon at dinner, I told Angela about my day. Oh, in Wildlife, we got to see a mother bear in their sanctuary. They are so large when they stand, and they are so fast. Then Angela said, I bet you were glad to be behind the fence. Oh yes, I said, but then we also got to see her cubs, they look so small compared with the mother and they are so cute. Angela smiled and said, I know honey; babies are so cute. That night before bed, I wrote in my journal.

At first I was so scared about being among all of those boys and girls as a female student, but then I began receiving the same kindnesses from students and teachers I had received in my neighborhood. As the day went by, I began to feel more comfortable with everyone around me. I was still glad when school ended today. I guess I needed the free time to process my experience.

After a few days, Angela laid out the beige pleated skirt that came to my knees, a white blouse and beige socks. I was a little scared. I had never worn a skirt among so many people before. When the girls came to walk with me they must have seen I was a little uncertain and made all over me. Oh Laura, said Amy, you look so cute in that skirt. Thank you, I said. Then one by one, Amy,

Sharon, Becky, and Susan all gave me a hug. Hey, I needed' that', I said. Then they all giggled, and we continued to the school.

I had to admit, I felt so much more comfortable wearing the skirt. It was still September, and the weather was still quite warm. My teachers, especially the older ones would make comments such as, Laura, you look so nice today. Then I would say, thank you. Then another teacher would say, Laura, your mother must have taught you how to dress appropriately. I would just smile and say, thank you.

That afternoon, I was helping Angela, still wearing my school clothes, as I helped her prepare the dinner. Oh Angela, the students loved my skirt. Oh honey, said Angela, you look so nice in it.

Later that night after Laura went to bed. Angela read Laura's Journal, smiling as she read the latest entry.

I wore a skirt' for the first" time' to school. I had never walked soo" much" in a skirt' before. As I walked, I could feel how my skirt moved and tried to adjust to its movements so as to keep the skirt from moving' so'. Amy and the others could tell I was adjusting my walk and giggled, saying, girl, you don't have to be fashion conscious right now hon, we need to walk faster. I just giggled and hastened my pace, even' if my skirt felt' as if it were' dancing". When we finally got to the school, I did adjust my pace. It seemed wearing and walking in my skirt the whole day and trying to keep it from twitching' so', caused my whole' body' language' to change to one that became more graceful and delicate. Laughing; after school, the girls could see how my skirt affected my walk and giggled. Oh honey', they said, you are walking so" prim' and proper' in your skirt. You look so" cute'. Then we all giggled.

By Friday afternoon, I was ready for two days off. There was such little time for real study during the week, I really needed the weekend to read, study, reflect, and prepare for my lessons. Realizing how so much more important learning really was, and – I think also perhaps having a much more stable base of

support from so many wonderful people and yes, perhaps, Laughing, all of the cute silliness we shared, allowed me to be so much more at ease, so I could read, study and learn more easily. That Friday afternoon, Amy, Sharon, Becky, and Susan walked home with me and also wanted to come into my bedroom. I said, okay, come on in. The four of them just looked very closely at the room and were smiling at Angela, who also was smiling for some reason. Then Angela said, are you girls thinking about what I think you're thinking about? Then they began nodding their heads in agreement. Angela then sent me off to deliver a pair of gloves she had made. When I got back, all the girls and Angela were talking and giggling as they the came out of the front door. Oh, Laura, Said Susan, you have the sweetest Aunt, and she has such wonderful taste. Yes, said Becky giggling, Angela helped us so much. I never really figured out what they were all talking about, but I know the girls and Angela had a nice time together.

Later that afternoon, the girls wanted me to meet them at the children's area inside the department store. The girls were all giggling as we went in as if they were passing some secret information. As we walked through the children's area, the girls began to look at all of the children's rugs on display. Oh, said Amy, Laura, this rug is so cute. It has little red, pink and violet butterflies all over it. I just' love" it, she said. Then Susan said, Laura come look at this rug. It has large pink', white', blue', and red' flowers' and blooms' all" over it. I think it is so" cute". Then Sharon found another rug. Oh Laura, she said, come over here. This rug is so pretty. I looked at it also. It was so pretty, It had a girl's pink bicycle with its front baskets overflowing with pink flowers; It had the Eiffel Tower in France covered in pink flowers; A large pink Banner that said Paris; it had a picture of the Louvre in Paris; and the city streetlights. Oh, Said Sharon which one do you think is the prettiest. Oh', they are all so' cute", I said. I think the Paris one is the cutest'. All of the girls smiled at each other.

Then they all went to the children's bedspreads. Becky found a bedspread and said, hey Laura, come see this' Bedspread'. Isn't it cute"? Oh, Becky, I laughed, that is too' cute'. I love the little pink, green, red, and violet butterflies on it. It is very pretty. Then Amy picked out one. Laura, come look at this one. Oh Amy, I said, that is very' cute'. I love those very colorful' leaves' flowers' blooms' and polka'-dot' hearts'. Yes it is so' cute', I said. Then Susan, said

Laura, come look at this one. I looked at it. Oh, Susan, that one is cute' also, I said, I love the background light green and blues and the foreground of stems sprouting white and pink flowers with little green leaves everywhere. Well Laura, which one is the prettiest? Oh, I said, they are all very pretty. Then I said, Um, I guess I like this one with the two tones and very vivid long stems with large white and pink roses everywhere. The girls then looked at each other and smiled.

When I got home, Angela was smiling, saying dinner is ready sweetie. Oh Angela, I said, I'm sorry didn't help you get dinner ready. After dinner, I worked extra to help clean everything up and put everything away. Angela just giggled saying honey it's okay. That night when I came to my room after cleaning up, Angela came in right behind me. I looked on my dresser and table. Oh", my" I said, Angela you added cloth' covers' for my dresser" and table'. Oh, I said, I love' the ruffles and lace on the ends. They are so' cute'. Angela just smiled saying, Now you have a pretty bedroom. Thank youu, I said.

The next day, the girls came over while I was running an errand. When I returned they had just left. When I came in that afternoon, I figured they just wanted to talk to Angela. Then when I went into my bedroom, I was astonished to see the same Paris rug I saw the night before, lying on my bedroom floor. Angela came in and saw my open mouthed, surprised look. Oh' my', I said. The girls gave me that rug. Oh Angela', it is so" pretty". Oh, I know, said Angela, the girls told me how they showed you the different rugs while they made all over each of them. Then they said you thought that rug was the cutest. I did', I said. Now my girl has a pretty rug, she said.

The next morning when I joined the girls, I gave them all a big hug. Oh guys, that was the cutest"" surprise'. I loved"" it. Thank' youu'. Then Becky asked, did you think it was too girly? I laughed and said, after wearing that cute' skirt' to school last week, nothing's' too girly. Then we all giggled and continued to school.

That night as Laura slept, Angela read the last entry in Laura's journal. As she read it, she begin to giggle.

Oh", I didn't tell Angela how cute I really thought those pretty' white' dresser and table clothes were. She might think I was being too' girly'. Oh the girls were so" sweet" getting that oh' so' cute' rug for me. It was so" pretty'. It had so many cute flowers' and pink' things. I just loved' it. I really loved the little doll on display in the children's department. It had a little girl with a long' silk, pink' dress and puffed' shoulders with a large lace and ruffled collar. She was also holding a little teddy bear in her arms. She looked so' pretty'. Becky and Amy have a doll on their dresser in cute dresses. Angela would probably think it would be too girly for me.

Laura's New Life Chapter 8

A few days later, Becky and I were in English class together. A boy named Billy in older clothes had not prepared his homework properly. You could tell by the way he was dressed and the way he talked he was from the rural part of town. Then Mrs. Stevens chastised him for over a minute, telling him he needed to begin bringing in his homework in a proper manner. Then she said, I am giving you an F for that homework. Next time, do it right. Billy always looked more low keyed and mild. Now I could see why he also often looked so cowed. Billy had become used to such treatment.

After class, I went over and spoke to him. Billy, I am so' sorry' she spoke to you that way. I know' you have much less experience listening to those fancy' words' Mrs. Steven's uses. Just understand it is not' you'. It is just your lack of experience with her words and even the words in the books. You are a wonderful' person', and just know that with a little more experience, listening to those fancy words, just reading more' slowly', and listening' more to those words, in time', you will get a little better each day. Just be patient and know this. You are just as capable as anyone. Thank you Laura, said Billy. Oh" I said smiling, I couldn't plow a field like you do if my life' depended' on it'. You are so' good' with that tractor. Just know that in time, you can also learn all' of Mrs. Steven's fancy' words' and maybe even give Mrs. Stevens a lesson in speaking properly.

Becky heard my little speech to Billy and said. Oh Laura, that was so' sweet' of you supporting Billy' the way you did. Oh", I said, I have seen teachers pick out students, especially boys they felt they could intimidate' and hurt' using both their position and the all' too' free', freedom of expression' some women will use toward boys who are more vulnerable. I have seen it way' too' often', and now it hurts much' more' knowing I' am' protected" from such abuse simply" because I am a girl" now. Oh baby', Becky said smiling, I can see you are definitely' a girl'. I see a tear coming down. Then I smiled back, and we went on to our next class.

A few days later, we were coming home from school. The girls made a point of walking with me to my house. They were smiling the whole time. Okay, guys, what's up? I asked. Oh, Amy smiled, we just wanted to see how your new rug

looked in your room. Okay, I said, so the girls came in, and I showed them all to my room. When we went inside, I couldn't believe it. Angela had replaced my bedspread and pillow cases with the very bedspread and pillow cases I had picked out in the children's department as being the prettiest. It had the large, pink, white, and red roses with the little stems and leaves all over it. It even had background pictures of other flowers and leaves. It was so pretty. Oh, Angela, that bedspread is so cute. I love it, and it's just the one I picked out at the department store. Then I gave Angela a big hug, and the girls began giggling. Then Becky said, still giggling, Mrs. Foster, I told you Laura could handle it. Angela was so relieved, she opened up ice cream and cake for everyone. Then Amy said giggling, we'll just wait on the makeup and dressing table for now.

That night, when I washed up, I put on a gown and joined Angela in the living room. Oh Angela, that bedspread is so 'pretty'. It kind of makes you feel more delicate just being around it. I know sweetie, she said. That is why girls like pretty things. It makes us feel more cute. Then Angela made some coffee and we watched a movie together.

It was now Friday afternoon, and I really enjoyed the weekend for study. I didn't feel nearly as rushed as I did coming from school; taking care of any chores or needs which had to be taken care of; preparing a dinner; and then getting ready for the next day. Doing homework during the week just didn't leave sufficient time to study, reflect, and enjoy the process, much less to prepare for exams. So on the weekends, when I wasn't helping Angela, I could sit back and enjoy just reading, reflecting and taking in much more understanding of the material I was reading. I had to admit again, the peace I felt from the much kind treatment I received from everyone, created so much more ease of learning which made the learning process so much more enjoyable.

That Saturday, I went off with the girls to a movie again. We went in slacks this time, as we didn't want to have to wash and dry our more nice clothes from any coke and popcorn spills in the theater. Before we left the Theater, Sharon called her mom and made another call afterwards. She was smiling when she finished with her second call. A little later, Sharon's mother picked us up and brought us home.

That night when I came into my room to get ready for bed, Angela followed me. I was so surprised to find the very doll I thought was so cute at the department store, was on my bedroom dresser. Oh, she seemed even more beautiful than she did in the store. Oh' Angela" the very' doll' I picked' out' at the department store as the cutest' doll', it's here" on my dresser". She is so" cute". Angela smiled, saying the girls knew you picked out that doll as the cutest one. When Amy and Sharon told me how when you were at their house, you would feel the hair and clothes of their dolls on their dressers, I felt you would like to have a doll of your own. Oh", I said, she is soo' pretty" and soo' cute". I love' her'. Angela could see I was exhibiting some emotion and said. She is so' cute', baby'. Oh', I know", I said.

The next day we were in English class. This time Billy had prepared his homework well. When he turned it in, Mrs. Stevens tried to make it appear as if her scolding him from the week before had caused Billy to improve. She said, there now Billy, your homework is in order. I knew Billy was now trying to make it a point to do better in her class, in spite of Mrs. Stevens. After class, I told Billy, I know you are trying to do better. Just keep on learning to find ways to slowly, but continually improve. Try to examine the little things you can do just like working on your tractor to keep it running good. I want you to do so well in her class. I hope you will make Mrs. Steven's class a special project to hopefully, through your mild, still kind, and your very sharp wit, show her that country people are just as capable. Thanks Laura, said Billy. I will try to be very kind and still do my best.

Then Becky came over to me and said, um, do you have a new boyfriend? Not in this present life, I giggled. I just so want for Billy to do well in this class just to show Mrs. Stevens that country boys are just as capable as anyone else. Yes, said Becky, too many city people think country people are not as good. Then I said, I know we as girls hear so much more information from our daily interactions with our parents and friends. Billy and other boys don't get this wonderful support each day, especially country boys. I just hope Billy will be able to find a way to enjoy and learn enough from his listening and reading to begin to better understand the many fancy words Mrs. Stevens uses each day. Then Becky and I went on to our next class.

That night as Laura slept, Angela began to giggle as she read the latest entry in Laura's Journal.

This afternoon, I wanted to relax and study more. Angela was visiting friends, and while she was gone, I sat at my little table and just began going over my math, History, and Science lessons. I had to admit, all of the additions Angela and the girls created for my room, made me feel so much more at ease and at peace. Somehow, I could read, reflect more, and even for the more difficult areas of science and math, I could slowly, but more easily put the pieces of the information I was reading, together with better understanding. When I wrote anything, my writing exhibited a more delicate, ease of writing. I felt my writing had become much more smooth and controlled. I felt I could also write longer and with much less fatigue. I was also able to visualize more easily what I wanted to write in more complex ways. Most of all, I think – I enjoyed so much the peace and ease the cute atmosphere in my room created for me. Then I started laughing to myself. I was becoming jealous of my doll. She had a teddy-bear, and I didn't.

That Friday afternoon, Mom came up for a visit. She arrived at about five. When she saw me, I was still in my school clothes: dark, blue jeans, a yellow blouse, and my wedges. Oh, baby, she said, you look so cute. Then she gave me a big hug. Then she gave Angela a big hug. That afternoon, there wasn't much room to help out aside from setting the table. Angela and Mom were talking their past and present gossip as they made dinner. Oh, said Mom, did Melanie ever get married? Oh yes she did, said Angela, but she waited until she was 30. Oh, said Mom. I am so glad. I hope she is happier now. Oh, said Angela, Tom is still asking about you. Oh, said Mom laughing, Tom was in high school, while I was in middle school. He had the biggest crush on me. We rode our horses then. I think he liked my horse, Betsy as much as he liked me. Oh, yes, said Angela, you could really ride then. I was so small, I was like a feather to Betsy.

That night, after supper, Mom was combing my hair as we watched a movie. Then she said, you know sweetheart, when I was your age I wore braids all the time. Here let me show you how it looks. Then Mom began separating my hair in different places and then began to twist my hair together in different ways. Angela began to smile as she looked on as Mom began to braid my hair. When Mom was finished with one side, she put a hair band on it and then began separating and braiding the other side. When she was finished, she put a band on that braid also and held up a mirror for me to see how I looked. I looked like a cute little girl. Oh Mom, I look like 12 year old. I look so cute. Angela and Mom began to giggle. Yes, said Angela, you look so cute now. Mom said, I hope you can learn to braid your own hair for those days when you really want to look cute.

When I woke up the next morning, I was still wearing the braids. Angela and Mom were already up; talking more gossip; and making breakfast. I put on some jeans and a light blouse. When I came to the table, Mom smiled, and said hey sweetie, you still have your braids in. They are so cute. Thanks Mom, I said. Then Mom and Angela made plans to go into town. They wanted me to go with them. Mom had me put on something more warm, because the weather was beginning to change now. I managed to find an old sweater I had, but of course it certainly didn't go well with the clothes I was wearing now.

When we went to the department store, Angela and Mom went to the children's department to find some clothes they felt would be better suited for the fall and winter, especially for school. I had become so used to being in the children's department with Angela and the girls, I didn't think much of it anymore. I loved the cute clothes, but still I knew that winter clothes for girls would be much different than any winter clothes I had ever worn before.

Mom and Angela continued to look at the various winter clothes for teens. The first things Mom and Angela sought out were sweaters and things I would need. They would smile; feel the fabrics; and even hold some of the clothes against me just to see how they might look on me. I had absolutely no idea what to choose or what to expect them to choose. This was a whole new area for me. Then Angela showed Mom a sweater, she thought might work. Angela, said this will look so pretty with her other clothes. It was a tie-dye, over-sized fleece hoodie with pockets, and a half zipper. It was in all light yellows, blues, and

pinks. It was too cute. I had never worn anything like that. Then they put the hoodie up against my chest and debated for a second. Then they both smiled and Mom said, honey try this on and see how it fits. When I came out, I saw myself in the mirror. With my braids, I looked like a very cute young girl with a very delicately colored sweater. It was definitely made for a teenage girl. Mom and Angela had a fit over it. They asked the saleslady if I could keep it on and pay for it when we left. The Saleslady agreed and smiled, saying, sweetie you look so cute in that sweater. Thank you, I said.

Then Mom and Angela went on to try to find some longer-sleeved shirts they felt I would need. They loved the french toast, light blue and light yellow, long-sleeved blouses with the peter pan collar. They had me try them on. Oh, she looks so cute, Angela said to Mom, as if I were just a child; which I guess to them I was, now. Then Mom had me keep the light blue, long sleeve blouse on and put my new hoodie over it. The saleslady kept the tags for them until we were ready to go. Then Mom and Angela bought some other long-sleeve blouses for me.

Then Mom and Angela smiled as they went over to the winter skirts and dresses. They first went to the skirts. Mom and Angela found a long, pleated, plaid wool skirt but debated on the colors. Angela wanted the light and dark pink crisscrossed skirt, while Mom wanted the more subdued red one. After trying on the red one, I came out and looked in the mirror. The skirt came to just about the middle of my calve. Again, Mom had the saleslady hold the tag for her, so I could keep the skirt on. Then Angela and Mom smiled and got both skirts.

Oh, said Mom, Laura will need a winter dress for some special occasion. Angela smiled, saying yes, she will. Then they went looking in the dress department. They finally picked out a floral midi dress with three-quarter sleeves. It was green with little pink flowers and green leaves. They had me try it on. When they were satisfied, they got another dress like it in a different pattern. Then Angela and Mom sent me to pick out a belt for myself. While I was gone, they began to shop more in the children's department.

I looked around for a belt, I felt might go with my jeans and other slacks. I found a good deal on set of narrow belts, in red, white, and brown that were three for \$10.00. I couldn't pass it up. I couldn't find Mom and Angela at first. Then I

saw them waving at me from the cashier's desk. I then waved back and brought my belts over to them. Oh, honey, said Mom, you got some pretty belts. Thank youu Mom, I said. When we finished paying for everything, I couldn't show enough appreciation for all they were trying to do for me. Oh Mom, Angela, I will have to run a lot of errands to make up for all of this. Thank you both, soo much. Then I gave both of them a big hug.

The next day, the girls came over, while Mom and Angela went to visit their old friends before Mom headed home. They laughed and giggled as I tried on all of the new clothes Mom and Angela had bought for me. Oh, Laura, said Amy, you look fabulous in your new clothes. Sharon, said, I can still see you are a little nervous wearing your new dresses. I am, I said. They are so pretty, and I, I just don't know if I qualify to look that pretty in them. Oh, said Becky and Susan, yes baby you do. Then they all gave me a hug. Um, I said smiling, with a little emotion, even if I don't right now, I know with your support, and ah, giggles, I will, eventually. Then, while still wearing one of my new dresses, we went out to the kitchen and had pie and ice cream.

That afternoon, the girls finally left. I changed back into jeans and a sweatshirt. Mom and Angela finally came home and while still talking the gossip, Mom finally said goodbye to me and Angela and went home to I guess, make more plans for me. That night as I got cleaned up, and went to my room, I could see beyond the covers of my bed, the head of a teddy-bear. I just went over to it and picked it up. Angela came in about that time and smiled, saying, your Mom and I thought you might want one. Angela could see me holding the teddy-bear to my chest, as I said, oh, thank youu, both.

The mornings were getting cooler now. I really began to appreciate that warm, cozy, sweatshirt with the hoodie. Sharon giggled as we were walking to school, saying, Laura, I am so jealous of your pretty sweatshirt. It looks so cute on you. Oh, I said, thank youu. Then all of the girls began feel the fabric on it. Susan, laughed and said, now we will all have to get one.

Later that day, in English, Billy had his homework prepared again. As the class continued with our assignments, Mrs. Stevens looked at Billy's homework more closely than she did with the other students. Then she put it down on the stack with the other papers. I just smiled knowing Billy had done his homework well.

After class, as Becky and I left the room, I just said, Billy, keep doing good. He just smiled and said, We'll do.

Angela was so appreciative of how much the girls had done for her, my mom, and myself, she made everyone gloves for the winter. She had me pass them out to everyone the next morning. They were wool knit and lined in fleece. She had so many different colors. The girls had already chosen their colors, but made me believe they were just choosing what was available. Sharon got the orange gloves; Amy got the light blue gloves; Susan got the red gloves; while Becky had chosen the yellow gloves. That left me with the light pink gloves. Oh, said Amy, they go so well with your sweatshirt. I began to giggle, saying, yes, they do.

That afternoon while I was helping Angela get dinner ready, told her how appreciative the girls were and myself. Oh', Angela', I said, Sharon loved' the gloves you gave her. She said they go with her orange' socks'. Amy said she loved the light' blue' gloves. She said they go' with her eyes'. Susan said, she has always' loved' red', and those red gloves are so' pretty'. Becky loved the Yellow gloves. She said, they go well with her more pale' skin' and blond' hair. Oh, Angela, and I loved' the light' pink', because they go so well with my new' sweatshirt'. Thank you so' so' much', I said, for all' you did for the girls. Oh, honey, Angela said smiling, they are so welcome.

That night as Laura slept, Angela smiled as she read Laura's latest entry in her journal.

That night I was in my room, reading my history and science pages. Again, it seems the cuteness of my room, continued to create for me, a sense of peace and security. It seemed I could sit back in my chair and truly read, pause, reflect, and slowly see the connections to the material I was studying. The peace I felt truly made my reading and learning so much easier. I felt I could actually feel the intent of the writers as they had written the information in the books. Oh, I thought, I wish had felt this same peace and contentment years ago.

Laura's New Life Chapter 9

I felt good the next morning. I was actually smiling as I combed out my hair. I even put a couple of pins in my hair to help keep my hair in place. I helped Angela fix our breakfast and even twitched my head the way, I had seen Susan and Becky do it. Angela just smiled and said, you're feeling good this morning. Oh, I said, I am feeling, so" good" this morning.

When Laura joined her friends on their walk to school, Angela waited until she knew Emily would be up and called her on the phone. Oh, Emily, said Angela, our little girl is growing up. What do you mean, said Emily. Well, said Angela, when Laura came to breakfast this morning, she was wearing some colored pins that matched her blouse, and her hair was fixed just so. She looked so nice and was even acting a little silly. I think she has just realized she is worthy of looking pretty. Oh my baby, said Emily; that is so wonderful. I am so happy for her.

That afternoon, as we were coming home from school, some young girls were jumping rope. I put my hair in a pony-tail and went over to where they were. Amy, Sharon, Becky, and Susan began to giggle as I went over to the young girls jumping rope. May I try it, I said. Sure, said the little girl with freckles. Then the girl on the other side of the rope laughed and said, Sherrie, we need to swing the rope real high for her. The girls stood back, some giggling and some smiling, saying, go Laura. Then the little girls got ready and began turning the rope over my head. I began to jump the rope to the girls' rhyme

Cinderella dressed in yella,

Went downstairs to kiss a fella,

Made a mistake and kissed a snake.

How many doctors did it take

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, (oh, She's good, they said 9, 10,

Then I messed up. Then Amy, Sharon, Becky, and Susan began to clap for me. Then I said to the little girls, thank you girls so much for letting me jump. You're welcome said the little girls. You girls are so cute, I said.

Then I said to my friends, That was so much fun. Oh, said Susan still giggling, we could see that. You looked so cute jumping the rope to their rhyme, said

Amy. Then Becky said, oh baby, you probably never got to jump rope before. Then Sharon said, Oh, honey you were so good, I took a picture with my cellphone.

That Friday afternoon, we went to the homecoming pep rally before our homecoming game. Since we had the smallest school in several counties, we knew we were going to lose, we were just hoping it would be a good game, so everyone went to the rally just to have fun. The cheerleaders looked cute in their short skirts. As the kids they were, they were acting silly and putting on the big cheers for their school. The girls and I got a kick out of them and cheered along with them. The air was getting cooler now, and we all dressed warm for the occasion. The players on our team were just country boys who could run and play as well as anyone. However, since our team was so small in numbers, many of the players had to play both offense and defense, while the larger schools had more players and could allow their entire defense to rest while their offense was on the field. Our players may have been just as good, but after halftime, they were so tired from playing both positions they were too exhausted to keep up with those larger teams and would begin to slow down, thus allowing those larger teams to win in the second half.

I felt sorry for many of those players. They were just kids seeking out very temporary feelings of love and honor from their schoolmates and others. I felt for many of those players, for the love and honor they received would be very fleeting. For after high school they would be returning to the real world of minimum wage and hard work which would eventually wear them down as the system had worn down their dads before them. No wonder there were so many widows in those small towns. Now, as we cheered for our school, I began to realize we were just seeing the same, temporary striving for love and honor by those country boys. I could already see the more tired body language and the slower gait of their fathers I would see in town and in the fields who, like their sons today, had also participated in the same futile ritual of very temporary feelings of love and honor through various sports. We all had so much fun at the pep rally, and at the game, we continued to cheer our team, right up until the end where we finally lost the game 35 to 7.

That night as Laura slept, Angela smiled as she continued to read the latest writing from her Journal.

I can now see so clearly, the very different, much more protected position I now enjoy and the much more wonderful atmosphere of support and yes, love/honor I receive just for being a girl. I feel quite certain this has enabled me to have a far greater ease of thought, which in turn has allowed me to have much more ease of reading, thinking, learning, reflecting, and even planning in a much more long-term way. Oh, and yes, the much more continuous, positive, social interactions I enjoy with the girls, Angela, and all of those wonderful people in town, have given me so much more effective communication skills in a week than those country boys will receive in a year.

The next day was a Saturday. Amy and Susan asked me to go bike riding with them. As we rode out of town, we began to see some very old houses, some were ready to just fall in. Oh, said Susan, that old house belonged to my great grandfather. Then Amy would say something like I think my relatives lived in that old house over there many years ago. Then we came to the town cemetery.

We put down our bikes outside the fence and walked through the old gate to see the names on the various gravestones. We could immediately spot some names as our own and other names from people who grew up in the town. I saw the name Foster and knew that was my mother's and Angela's maiden name. We even found some Adams' from Amy's family and some Whites' from Susan's family. As we began to look at some of the older grave stones, I was puzzled at first with one set of Gravestones from the early 1800's. It seems a Martha Adams had married a Jacob Foster and died in 1805. I then called Amy over to look at the two gravestones. Oh Amy, could this mean that somewhere long ago, your family married into my family? Amy smiled, saying yep, it's true. Your great great great grandmother was my great great great aunt. Oh my said, that means we are related. That is so cool, I said. Just, think, I said, that makes us distant cousins. Then Amy laughed, saying, now you know where you got your good looks from. Then we both hugged. Then Susan called us over to some other gravestones, saying hey Laura, Amy, look over here. There she showed us where a Gina Foster married a Kevin White many years ago and had died in the 1860's. Oh, I said, we are related also. My great great aunt was

your great great grandmother. Oh my, I said, this is so cool. We are also distant cousins. Oh Susan, that is so crazy and wonderful. Then we hugged. Then Amy and Susan laughed, saying, Laura, we already knew we were distantly related. We just wanted to surprise you. Oh, I said, with a little emotion, you did just that. That was a very wonderful surprise. Does Angela know this? Then Amy and Susan laughed, saying, she was the one who told us.

Oh, I said, these are all my people and your people. Oh, now I really know where my folks came from.

That afternoon at supper, I told Angela how Amy and Susan showed me our family connections. Oh, Angela, I said, our family has so much history here. Yes, said Angela, smiling, that is why everyone here is so good to each other. We never know who we may be distantly related to. That night, Angela combed my hair out as we watched a movie. When I got tired, she led me to my bed and tucked me in. She saw me smile as she picked up my teddy-bear and handed it to me. I guess after that day, I really knew I was home.

The next morning, although we didn't attend church, we did get ready to attend the Sunday gathering with all of the folks who did attend the local church. Angela said, many years ago, they would call it, Dinner on the Grounds. Today, we just call it, having a town Dinner. Different families would prepare different meals: fried chicken, bar-be-Que, potatoes, rice, gravy, peas, squash, beef, beans, biscuits, cake, pies, etc. along with large pitchers of Iced tea.

Angela smiled, saying today, we get to dress up. She combed out my hair, and braided it. Then she put in two small ribbons. Then she picked out one of the winter dresses she and Mom had bought for me. She also surprised me with a new white button up sweater to wear over it. She also gave me some knee-socks to match my dress. When she was finished helping me get ready, she had me look in the mirror. I looked like a young girl all dressed up for something fancy. I had never dressed so nice before. Oh, Angela, I look so pretty, I said. Oh sweetie, you look wonderful. Then Angela finished getting ready herself. Then Angela said, okay Laura, you take the beans and fried squash, and I will bring this large pitcher of tea. When we had put those items in the car, Angela then put a chest of ice in the trunk area. Then we headed off to the church grounds.

When we arrived at the church, the ladies were already putting their food and other items onto two long picnic tables. Mr. Thompson saw us taking the food out from our car and said, do you ladies need any help? Then Angela said, oh thank you Sam. We do have an ice chest in the trunk, and it is heavy. Then Sam picked up the heavy ice chest as if it were nothing to him and carried it to the area where everyone had placed their ice. Oh, said Sam, Laura, you look so pretty today. Thank you, I said. He could see I was sincerely grateful and returned a very appreciative smile in return.

Amy, Susan, Becky, and Sharon were also there. Oh, I had never seen them so dressed up. They were also wearing nice dresses and sweaters. Oh I said, you guys look so dressed up today. Then Sharon laughed, saying, and I have never seen you look so beautiful. Oh, I said, when I when looked in the mirror this morning after Angela helped me get ready, I saw a young girl I had never seen before, looking back at me. I felt so, so, ah – Then Becky finished my sentence, saying yes Laura, like a very beautiful, young lady. Ohhhh, I said. Then Becky gave me a hug, and smiled, saying I just love your cute braids. Thank you, I said.

Most of the food and things were now put on the tables and the people were just talking to one another. Then the preacher, Reverend Wilson, had everyone pause, so he could bless the gathering. Then everyone stopped what they were doing and listened to Mr. Wilson. Bruthas and sistas, he said, is time to give thanks for this wonerful blesen. Then everyone bowed their heads. Lowrd, he said, we ar gadered here today, to-thank-you for this time-we-have-to-shar weth da rich bounti you haf bestowed upon yourr sheep. I kno some of da bruthas and sistas haf been away fom the floc for a lonn--time. Pleese lowrd, kinly show dem da way bak to da floc. Now as-we-begin this fine mil, I praa lowrd, you will watch us all, so we will all saa wat is riiches an bena-ficial fa all. I ass all dis in your son's name, A'-men. - Then you could hear the whole gathering say, Amen.

I couldn't help smiling throughout the prayer, while Amy and Susan could barely keep their mouths closed. Then we all began to stand in line to choose from the many, very different and delicious foods and deserts all of those good people had brought for that very large picnic or as the folks called it, Dinner on the Grounds. I looked around and could see the older folks, some not having seen

their friends for months at a time. They were so glad to see each other and with much emotion. Oh, Miss Bessi said Mr. Rollins, you just look just as beautiful as ever. Oh Bob, you always say that. But you know I mean it, said Mr. Rollins.

That night after Angela helped Laura remove her dress, Angela waited for Laura to go to sleep before reading Laura's latest writings on the events for that day.

I had to admit, while I do love all the folks, I really didn't think I could sit and listen to one of Reverend Wilson's sermons without giggling once, twice, maybe three or four times. I am sure they would have me removed in short order. But oh, I so enjoyed dressing up and going to that picnic or Dinner on the Grounds as they call it. I felt so self-conscious in my pretty dress, sweater, and things. The dress itself caused my walk to become much more delicate. That in turn caused me to also use my arms and hands in a more delicate way. I think Sharon and Becky noticed it also. They were continually smiling at me, clearly seeing how much more delicate my body language had changed while in my dress and other accessories. Oh, it wasn't just me: all of the girls who were now wearing their dressy dresses, were also acting more delicate in different ways. Laughing; I think as we sat there having that wonderful meal, our much more cute and delicate body languages began to feed on each other. By the time we had finished, we were all behaving in the most delicate and proper way. You know, I actually loved it. I even began to look forward to other occasions.

That Monday morning, all of the girls were back to wearing jeans, tops, and sweaters. Oh, I said, that dinner yesterday was so nice. I felt so, ah, pretty. Sharon and Becky giggled, saying, we all did. Yes, said Amy, but we have dressed up many times. You must have really felt different. Oh yes, I said. I felt so much more delicate all dressed up. Also, I had never had so many nice compliments from so many people, and they were all so kind. I just hope I never get too used to it. Then all the girls smiled, nodded their heads, and we continued to school.

That afternoon in English, we all had to turn in a report on some activity we do at home. Billy turned in his paper. Mrs. Stevens briefly looked at his paper. I think Billy was working on his handwriting, for the letters appeared to be in a much smoother form. After class, I said to Billy, keep doing good Billy. He smiled, and said, I think I am getting better. Oh, I thought, I feel much better about Billy now. Then Becky and I went to our next class.

That night as Mrs. Stevens was going over the student reports, she finally came to Billy's. It was entitled, "**My Daily Chores**". Then Mrs. Stevens finally got to meet the real Billy, at least in print. She began to read -

My Chores each day are composed of taking the cows out to graze at 6:00 in the morning. Then while I am walking back to the house, I feed the chickens and hogs. Hopefully I will be finished in time to not only clean up but also to maybe have some breakfast before going to school. In the afternoon when I get home, I need to cut down the bushes and other growth which come up after we have harvested our crops during the summer. This requires about two hours each day. I must also check the engine for lubrication and mowers for any severe wear before I begin. Then afterwards, I must clean the tractor and mowers, checking for any build up which may damage the tractor or the mowers. Afterwards, I bring the cows back into our main yard. When I am finished, I am tired, but our family has been doing this work for many years now. It is our major source of income. While I feel obligated to help keep up our farm, I am also well aware of the debilitating effects this work has had on my grandfather and father. My father is only 35, but he already looks as though he is much older due to so much hard work over time. I hope to slowly learn many things, my family wasn't able to teach me about academics and learning, especially skills I might be able to use without having to work so hard on the farm.

When Mrs. Stevens finished reading Billy's report, she realized the student she had thought was just not working or trying, was already working harder at home than she ever had to work in her life. She thought about how Billy would sometimes show up in his old clothes and maybe not smell as clean as the other students. While Mrs. Stevens had never done such farm work, she realized, Billy was trying to work two jobs: the job of learning at school with little or no

support from home and also working at home which also took up so much time. She then gave Billy an A+ for his report.

The next day in English, Mrs. Stevens handed the graded reports to the students. Mrs. Stevens went around to each desk as she gave back the graded reports the students turned in the day before. When she came around to Billy's desk, she looked at his paper for a good 5 seconds. Then she very gently laid his graded paper on his desk. Then Mrs. Stevens said, Billy, that was a wonderful report. Then she hesitated for a second, and then went on to hand back the rest of the graded reports to the students.

While Becky was looking at Mrs. Stevens handing back Billy's paper, she was also pulling for me, hoping I would not be disappointed by some off hand remark by Mrs. Stevens. When Becky saw how wonderfully gracious Mrs. Stevens was to Billy, she smiled and looked at me. She could see how happy I was also.

I was still beaming as the girls and I walked home that afternoon. Amy and Sharon said, Laura, why are you so happy? Becky giggled and said, well it's not a boy thing exactly but – she is so happy because Billy is doing better in English. She has been encouraging him for weeks, and today, Mrs. Stevens gave Billy an A+ on his English Report. Just hearing Becky say that made me smile even more.

That Saturday, I was again, delivering gloves and coats to different people. I had to admit with my cute sweatshirt, light blue jeans, and braids, I was now seen more readily as just another cute young girl. Mrs. Evans was very thankful for the gloves Angela had made for her, saying, honey, your aunt, she has the sweetest niece. Thank you, I said. Then I went on to Miss Emory's house to deliver her new coat. She invited me in for hot chocolate. She was funny: when she saw I had some chocolate on my face, she took a napkin and wiped it for me. My last stop went to Mr. Bryan's house to deliver him his gloves. He was so thankful, he gathered up a large sack of pecans and stapled them together. Here honey, he said, I have been meaning to send some to Angela.

Laura's New Life Chapter 10

That night as Laura slept, Angela read the latest entry in Laura's Journal

I loved riding Angela's bicycle, whether it be delivering things or just riding along those old roads or into town. I actually felt more safe being seen as a girl riding a bicycle on the road or in town. The people were so kind to slow down or even go way around me, just to make sure I was safe. This afternoon, after taking the pecans to Angela, I got back on my bike and rode into town. When going into town by myself, I wasn't distracted by having to pay attention to Angela or the girls when I was with them. I could focus much more on the individual houses, buildings, and take a closer, more reflective look at the men, women, and children I saw. They were so settled in their ways. Each person appeared to walk in a much more relaxed way. Oh, it was so much more peaceful than living in the city where everyone was very tense and active as if they were continually late in getting somewhere. Comparing the two, well, there was no comparison. Although many of those people had no more than a make believe, high school education, they had a sense of peace about them, which I felt those in the city were continually trying to reach but never really able to arrive.

That Sunday, the girls and I went to the movies again. When I got back home, I told Angela during supper all we did. Angela I said, we had a good 'time' at the movies. This time we made 'a promise' not to scream 'even' during the most scary' moments'. Of course', that's difficult' for some' of the girls'. When the part of the movie got to where the lights' went' out' in the girl's house, Amy' and Susan' began to hold their mouths' open' just' waiting' for the killer to strike. Fortunately' for them, just' at that time', the theater had its intermission' and the lights' came on. They were so' relieved'. Then we all got up to get a coke and some popcorn. After the intermission', we went to our seats' and waited' for the movie' to begin'. Then the lights went out and the movie backed up a little showing again, the lights in the girl's house going out. This time, Amy' and

Susan were more prepared and just had their mouths open in anticipation. It was funny, Sharon, Becky and I mouthed to them, don't scream. Then a hand reached over the girl's shoulder, and we all screamed. We were so embarrassed. I didn't know why but Angela was smiling at me the whole time.

The Thanksgiving holidays were approaching. While I loved being able to go back to school and learning more, I also felt I needed the holidays to take a break and enjoy having more days off. It was getting colder also, so Angela and the girls' moms began taking us to school and back. The girls and I agreed, being able to sit in a nice, warm car during those cold mornings and afternoons was much better than walking a mile in the cold. When Angela or Becky, Amy, Susan, or Sharon's mom took us to school, we felt so much more fresh and ready for our morning classes.

Oh, Susan, said Becky, have you see that cute boy with the blond hair and John Deere Tractor shirt at school? Oh, yes, said Susan. Isn't he in one of your classes Amy? Yes, said Amy, he is my history class. Oh, I know him, said Sharon. His name is Jimmy. His mom moved back to his family's farm after her Father died. Now he is having to care for his Mom and his grandmother on the farm. Oh, that is tough, I said. I hope they can make it.

Oh, speaking of boys, said Amy, Laura do you have any boys in mind?, giggling. Oh, I said, smiling, I am seeing the world of relationships very differently now. Having seen both sides, I see the average boys so conditioned to be tough by the world they live in, they are not prepared to earn a decent living today unless they come from parents with connections or their parents provide them with sufficient support. I am afraid the vast majority of boys are so overwhelmed by the aggressive treatment from their parents, teachers, peers, and others, they are not able to learn nearly as well. Then when they grow up, people will use society's allowed aggressive treatment upon boys to use them to perform much of the manual labor and also use that same allowance to talk to those boys, later men in more harsh ways. They are usually also almost never given any kind, caring verbal interaction for fear of coddling. This is why those boys you see who appear to be so manly are really not that prepared for life. The much aggressive treatment they receive and much less support from everyone, leaves them very insecure. So they attempt to put on an image of strength, power, status in different ways to help protect them from any more aggressive treatment

by society. They may talk firm, strong, and carry themselves in very strong ways but sadly they will not be able to support themselves or others without continually struggling in manual labor just to earn a living. I hate to say this girls, but those geeks you see will be able to earn a much better living for themselves and for their wives.

Remember though, it was never about genetics and effort for any boys, whether they be good ole boys or geeks. It is all about the treatment and support their parents, their teachers, and their peers provide or don't provide which determine which direction they will go. You know the teachers and many students really believe girls are simply smarter and/or working harder than the boys. They think that is the reason girls are doing so much better in school.

The truth is, as a girl, I am receiving much wonderful, kind, verbal interaction, conversation, and much wonderful support from my family, teachers, and you guys each day than those boys will receive in months. For me, this is creating much lower average stress; a much higher social vocabulary; better communication skills; lower muscle tension for much better handwriting; and much more wonderful freedom of expression which is accepted and respected by everyone, simply because I am a girl.

You guys have no idea how much you helped me by simply helping Angela decorate my room in such a beautiful way. The beautiful rug; bedspread/pillow cases; the ruffled and lace covers for my desk and drawers; and the beautiful doll you girls picked out, make my room so beautiful. When I walk inside my room, I feel so secure and at peace. In addition, the wonderful kind and supportive words I receive each day from Angela, you guys, my teachers, and all of those wonderful people in town provide me with so much ease, stability, peace, and a wonderful feelings of security. Going to school as a girl has provided me with so much more of an advantage in ease of learning than I ever would have received as Larry. I would have simply failed all over again. So, Laughing; as for guys, I do feel for all of those boys. I know society will never provide them with anything even similar to the wonderful treatment we will receive each day, simply for being girls.

I hope you guys will remember, that when any boy today is looking for a girl friend or a girl is looking for a boy friend, we need to keep in mind that boys

are usually feeling much more insecure and so will put on a very, usually fake, nice/kind, image, or other displays so as to impress. They have to do this to cover their more truthful, very fearful, insecure, and much less logical and less skilled lives which we are given each day. So try to find a boy who shows both his weaknesses and his strengths, not just his strengths. Then you will have an honest boy. Also, understand we are all very human and capable of change with better support, so don't buy into the myth of genetics for anyone around you and especially for ourselves. Remember we can all continually change and improve our lives over time by having more ease of thought; ease of pace; and trying to keep our minds more at ease all the time. Sadly the average boys and men will not be given this needed support, so many will fail either in school or later in society, because they will lack many of the necessary information and communication skills to relate effectively with those jobs and persons who are able to earn a living income. So be careful and try not to depend on those boys who may appear so impressive today who may not have those skills.

Becky laughed, saying, that was a mouthful. Yes, said Sharon. You should teach our teachers. Susan said, oh, I need to take notes on selecting better boys. Then Amy said Laughing; So I guess you are very content with being a girl. Oh, I said, Laughing, I love it. Then we all giggled and went to our classes.

That afternoon, I rode home with the girls in Amy's mother's car. Oh, I so appreciate everyone giving us all rides. It's getting so cold out now. Your welcome sweetheart, said Mrs. Adams. I have noticed the traffic also getting much heavier now, so we don't worry as much by giving you girls rides.

When I got home, Angela took me to Mary's Diner for dinner. Oh, I said, I love going to Mary's. She and the town folks are always so down to earth. When we went inside, Mary was happy to see us, saying, Oh Angela, Laura, you both look so nice today. Thank you Mary, said, Angela. Then I said, thank youu. When I went clean up before the meal, Mary was talking to Angela. Oh, she said smiling, when I looked at Laura I saw very cute young girl. She has become so pretty now. I still love her thank youu's. Oh, said Angela, she even hinted in her journal one time, she wished she had a teddy-bear. She was so happy when she saw one in her room. Just like any young girl; she hugged it and even took it to bed with her. Oh, said Mary, that is so cute.

When I got back to the table, Mary said, Laura, we were talking about you. I smiled, saying, I thought so. Then I said, Oh, Mary you must see so many of the town's people so very often. Oh, said Mary, I have learned to love them all through all of the good times and the bad times.

That Friday afternoon, Angela went to the library to get some new books. Becky's mother was there. Oh honey, said Mrs. Robins, you look so nice today. I love your blouse. Thank you, I said. Then as I went to find a book, Mrs. Robins began talking to Angela. Oh my, said Jan, Laura looks so cute, and she looks so happy also. I know, said Angela. She is doing good in school and attributes it to the very kind treatment she is receiving. She even sees her cute girly room as a kind of sanctuary of peace. Oh, I am so happy to hear that, said Jan. My Becky is like that also. She has a little cat animal she keeps on her desk. She says, he keeps her company.

That Saturday, Angela went to the department store to get some fabric for gloves and coats. Angela, Laura, you ladies look so nice today. Thank you, I said. Oh, Angela you came in for some fabric. I bet your orders have increased since it has been getting so cold. Oh yes, said Angela, I am behind now. I will need to teach Laura some of the sewing techniques I use to cut up and sew the material together. Oh, I said, I would love to do that. Angela smiled, saying, Laura, you can begin by looking up these fabrics for me. Oh yes, I said, and then I began searching for the names of the fabrics Angela had on her list.

Oh, said Marge, Laura looks so pretty. Oh, said Angela, she has been learning from Susan, Amy, Sharon, and Becky. Oh, Angela, said Marge, she makes a wonderful fifteen year old girl. I know, said Angela. She is always helping make breakfast and dinner. She enjoys sitting up with me at night in her nightgown watching movies and eating popcorn. We even act silly together during the scary movies. Oh, that is so sweet, said Mrs. Taylor. Oh, it is, said Angela. Laura is taking in some much life from the girls and school and bringing all of that cuteness home with her. She sometimes makes me feel like a high school kid again.

When I finally came back with the material, Mrs. Taylor began measuring and cutting off the amount of fabric Angela requested for each item. Mrs. Taylor said, Laura you are going to learn so much about sewing from Angela. I know, I

said. She makes makes those wonderful coats and gloves in different ways for all of those people: some with ruffles; some with longer sleeves; all in different sizes. I have so much to learn. You will do fine, Laura, said Mrs. Taylor. Just take your time and enjoy learning. I will, I said.

Later, Angela and I went to the store to pick up some groceries. Susan's mother, Mrs. White saw us come in. Oh Angela, Laura, good to see you two. Laura, said Mrs. White, you look so cute today. Thank youu, I said. Then Angela had me pick up some groceries on the other side of the store. Oh, said Betty, Laura looks so pretty today. I love her hair. Oh yes, said Angela, she loves the way Susan and the girls keep their hair more straight and smooth. I love putting in the colored hair pins now and then. I think it helps to make her look like a normal fifteen year old girl. They look so pretty on her, said Betty. Oh, I love having her with me, said Angela. I can tell right off when Laura has come in from an outing with Susan and the other girls, she talks with more girly emphasis, like young girls do. I can't help but smile when she is talking to me that way. I can imagine, said Betty. My Susan talks the same way when she is excited about something. Susan, saw us coming to the register, and said, Angela you look so nice and Laura, I always love that blouse on you. You always say that, I said. But it's so cute. Thank youu, I said. That's what I was really waiting for, said Susan, giggling, one her cute, thank you's.

Angela and I spent the last two days of my Thanksgiving vacation with Angela working on and teaching me how to cut and sew material for the gloves and coats she was making for everyone. She had patterns she would use for the inside and outside material for the gloves and coats. Then she taught me how to use those patterns as a base and then use the individual sizes given her by the people to alter the patterns for each size. I felt so good being able to finally help Angela with her work. I could now help prepare the material, while she concentrated on sewing the different materials together. As a result, she could do more in less time. I also felt my hands and fingers were somehow now better coordinated for the more fine work required. I feel the lower muscle tension created from my now, more eased environment allowed me to visualize everything more easily and also allowed my fingers to have much better control to set up and then cut the material in a more delicate and exact way.

That night as Laura slept, Angela smiled as she read the latest entry in Laura's journal.

Last night after Angela and I cleaned up the dinner table, Angela and I continued our ritual of watching a movie at the sofa and eating popcorn. I think she also enjoys having a little girl in the house, as she would be brushing my hair; playing with it; or putting it up in some way. She is usually finished with her hair dressing during the first 20 minutes. Then we would get back to more seriously watching the movie. I usually fell asleep before she did, and I usually found myself just coming awake again, as she was leading me to my bed. She would tuck me in; give me my teddy-bear; and then kiss me on the cheek just like she would a little girl.

The next day, Mrs. Aaron took us all to school. She was very nice and made sure we were all ready when we got to school. Laura, she said, I like your hair. Thank you, I said. Angela helped me put it up. I am learning though.

Billy continued to do well in Mrs. Steven's class. I was so relieved to see her actually talking more kindly to Billy when they did talk. I know it helped Billy's feelings, and I am sure it also helped to motivate him to keep doing better in her class.

Amy, Sharon, and I were in nature class that afternoon. While it was still a bit cold, we all loved being outside in the woods. Some of the kids who had this class before, brought cardboard with them. Amy and Sharon brought theirs also. I didn't know what they were for until the class for the day was half over, and Mr. Watkins said, okay everyone we have an extra twenty five minutes to go down the hill. I didn't know what he meant until Amy, Sharon and the others took me over to where an open field dropped off with much grass and leaves. Then the students began taking their cardboard and began sliding down the hill. Then Amy said, Laura it's perfectly safe, we have long since cleaned out all of the sticks and rocks. Then they slid down the hill on their cardboard. They were going pretty fast. Then after Amy and Sharon reached bottom, they came back up and said, okay Laura, your turn. Oh, I said, I hope I don't hit anything.

Sharon smiled and said, one girl landed up against a tree last year. Just kidding. Then Amy gave me her cardboard, and Sharon sat down on hers about five feet from me. Sharon knew how to push herself off, but I wasn't sure. Then Amy got behind me and when Sharon pushed off, Amy pushed me off. All of the sudden, we were sliding down that steep hill. We were going fast. As we were going down, Sharon said, hold on to the cardboard. We kept getting faster until finally we reached the bottom of the hill. Oh, that so much fun, I said. You did good, said Sharon. The first time I went down the hill I didn't hold on and wound up rolling halfway down. Oh my, I said. We did have to fix our hair afterwards, but it was worth it.

That afternoon, I helped Angela cut out fabric according to pattern and the sizes for her customers. She would then be sewing the fabric; filling them with insulation; and sewing the different parts together. She had it down. Later I went back to my room to study. I don't know if it was because I had some of this material before or the wonderful stability I felt now, but I felt so much better about actually learning what was in the books. I know my handwriting improved, or maybe it was just my teddy bear I kept on the end of my desk.

A week later, when Amy's mother dropped me off at home, Angela looked very upset as she came out to meet me. Oh honey, I have some sad news for you. Mrs. Dunning had a heart attack and died today. They will have the funeral this Saturday. Oh my, I said, "Mrs. Dunning was so kind to me." I don't know why: maybe it was all of the free expressions and emotions I had learned and shared with all of the girls and everyone, but all of the sudden I began to tear up. Angela saw I was beginning to lose it emotionally and gave me a hug. Then I just fell out with emotion. I just couldn't help it. We must have cried and hugged for some minutes before going into the house together.

Laura's New Life Chapter 11

That Saturday morning, Angela helped me get ready for the funeral. It seems in the country, everyone going to a funeral wears dark clothing. Angela picked out a gray dress for me to wear with a white sweater. Then she braided and fixed my hair real nice. When we got to the church, Amy, Sharon, Becky, and Susan were already there. They too were wearing darker colored dresses and warm sweaters. We all hugged and yes, we all cried all over again.

When it came time for the funeral to begin, we all took our seats and waited for the Eulogy. This time, Reverend Wilson must have practiced his lines and spoke with the very best of intent. Brothers and Sisters, he said. We are here today to pay our warm respects to our most beloved Sister, Jessie Dunning, who has passed away. Jessie Dunning was the most kind and considerate person to everyone, always going out of her way to help others in need. Our town has lost someone who was very special to all of us. The Bible has many good things to say about those loved ones we have lost. Then Reverend Wilson opened his Bible and said, "Here in Ecclesiastes 9:5 it says" "For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing at all." That means Brothers and Sisters, Our beloved Jessie is not feeling anything. The Bible even says she is asleep. Here in John 11:11-14 it says - ¹¹ After he said these things, he added: "Laz'a·rus our friend has fallen asleep, but I am traveling there to awaken him." ¹² The disciples then said to him: "Lord, if he is sleeping, he will get well." ¹³ Jesus, however, had spoken about his death. But they imagined he was speaking about taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus said to them plainly: "Laz'a·rus has died. Now, said Reverend Wilson, "we now know our loved one, Jessie Dunning is asleep. But it is even better, for now let's read what Jesus does for Laz'a rus. Here in John 11:17 it reads", "When Jesus arrived, he found that Laz'a·rus had already been in the tomb for four days." Here again, said Reverend Wilson, Jesus had wonderful words for those watching. I will read verses 21-24 Martha then said to Jesus: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² Yet even now I know that whatever you ask God for, God will give you." ²³ Jesus said to her: "Your brother will rise." ²⁴ Martha said to him: "**I know he will rise in the resurrection on the last day.**" "Yes, Brothers and Sisters, said Reverend Wilson, "Jesus spoke of the dead rising in the resurrection on the last day of this old system. Here in Verses 39- 44 it reads -

³⁹ Jesus said: "Take the stone away." Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to him: "Lord, by now he must smell, for it has been four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her: "Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"

⁴¹ So they took the stone away. Then Jesus raised his eyes heavenward and said: "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² True, I know that you always hear me; but I spoke on account of the crowd standing around, so that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice: "Laz'a·rus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The man who had been dead came out with his feet and hands bound with wrappings, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them: "Free him and let him go." Then Reverend Wilson said, "So you see Brothers and Sisters, Jesus called on his Father to help him perform that wonderful miracle as an example of bringing all of our loved ones back on the last day of this old system and to bring them back to us in the new system. Now we all have this wonderful hope of seeing our loved ones again."

After Reverend Wilson's Eulogy and service, the town's people were somewhat comforted by his words of hope. While some of the folks were still crying, others I think actually had more hope after the service than before. Then everyone lined up at Mary's restaurant for her fried chicken, potato salad, banana pudding, and other wonderful vegetables. Everyone went on for hours talking about all the things they said and did with their wonderful friend, Jessie Dunning.

After we said our goodbyes to all of our friends, Angela and I went back home and dressed in our normal attire. That Monday everyone was back at school with little mention of Jessie Dunning. I guess it takes a while for everyone to sort through their losses in their own way. I was okay. I knew Mrs. Dunning had been feeling sickly for awhile. Still, I would miss her.

Christmas was approaching, Mr Weber was hanging ornaments on the town's light poles. The kids in school were cutting up more, knowing they would all be off for two weeks, and the teachers kind of put on more happy faces, showing more movies and having more little parties. We were all glad to have a break from all of the school work. Angela was making more gloves and coats for everyone, and I learned more about putting the different material together to make the different items. Angela even had me make some passes with the sewing machine albeit in places where if I did make an error, it wouldn't show. I

got better though, but I still waited for Angela to give the okay before making a sewing pass on the exterior of something.

When the last day of school for the holidays ended, Becky, Sharon, Susan, Amy, and I walked home that day. We could feel the cool air, but it felt good that afternoon. Amy was talking about giving her mom a gift certificate for a nail treatment at the new nail shop that opened up. Then Becky, Sharon, and Susan began to think of doing the same for their mothers. I began to giggle and said, do yal really think our moms/aunts would go along with that? After all, you know how practical they are with money. They would probably think it was a bunch of foolishness. Then Becky chimed in, yes but it would so much fun to watch them being pampered. Then we all laughed. By the time we got home from school we had already made plans for the occasion. Sharon said she knew the lady and would try to get a group discount.

As the days went by, the girls continued to make their plans, while I continued helping Angela make gloves and coats. My number of deliveries began to go up. Angela had me wear the white knit stocking cap with the pom pom to help keep me warm. The town's people were so happy to get the gloves and coats. I think more than that, many of the folks who lived outside of town didn't see too many people where they lived. I think I spent more time talking with the folks than I did delivering coats and gloves. Many of them appeared to be so cut off from everyone. Oh, said Mrs. Emory, I love your hat; it is so cute. Thank youu, I said. It belongs to Angela, but she insisted I wear it today. Mrs. Emory had me come inside and sit, while she made some hot chocolate. Then she talked about her husband Hank who worked at the local mill. Hank was such a good hearted man, she said. He worked so hard to help keep everything going. This is his picture. I could see a strong, firm man in his best clothes, portraying just the image for a person dressed up, probably very different from the working person he normally was. Here you go honey, she said, as she poured the water into my cup of hot chocolate. We must have talked for about a half hour at least. Afterwards she gave me a hug, and we said goodbye. There were so many folks like her, some older ones still raking leaves from their yards in the cool air even though perhaps no one would ever see them. Oh, I thought, how the yester years were so different. I guess I was torn between the delicacy and peace of mind they enjoyed and the pull for learning other things also. I would

just try to keep putting the pieces together to find some nice point in between the two.

Christmas was approaching. Of course Mom would be coming. Angela and I prepared all of the fixings for the big dinner we usually had each year. I actually learned over the months how to make potato salad, deviled eggs, turkey, dressing, and corn bread that didn't stick to the pan. I loved the time with Angela cooking and sewing. I think I kind of picked up some spontaneity from Amy, Sharon, Susan, and Becky.

Oh, Angela how is the turkey doing? It's still got some time on it, said Angela. You can begin putting on the dressing and getting it ready. I prepared the dressing and waited for the turkey to get done. Your mom is going to see a whole new person when she comes. She will see a cute, young lady. Oh, that's right. I have changed so much. My hair is longer now with more curls. I don't even think about wearing cute slacks and blouses any more. Oh, and my talking; I know I must sound a lot like the girls now. They have so much life; I guess that life has become a part of me. I love it. Your Mom will love it, said Angela. You actually favor her more now. Oh', that would be a sight, I said.

The next morning when Mom drove up, everything was ready. Mom came in with a bunch of presents and things. Oh, she said when she saw me, Oh baby, I didn't recognize you; you look so cute. She gave me a big hug, and then just looked at me. Mom, I had so much help from Angela and the girls. They helped me in so many ways. I know I couldn't have done it without them. I have learned so much. Mom was still smiling at me as I helped her bring in some of the packages.

I could hear Mom talking to Angela as I went inside with the packages. Oh Angela I truly have a young daughter now. I can't believe it. She is so pretty. I know, said Angela. She even talks like her friends now. She even uses the same silly expressions they use. I love it.

That afternoon, Angela and Mom talked while I delivered some more gloves and coats using Angela's bicycle. Oh, said Emily, You should have waited and let me help you with the supper. Oh, said Angela I knew you would be tired, and Laura was so helpful with everything. She made the dressing and potato salad.

Oh, said Emily as she put her hand to her mouth. My little girl can cook. That is so wonderful. I can't wait to taste it.

That afternoon when I came in, supper was on the table. Mom and Angela purposely waited for me to finish delivering everything and get back before beginning the meal. When we finished with all but the dessert, they were still talking about people and things I knew nothing about. I just began moving the dishes to the sink and putting the leftovers in the frig.

The next day, the girls told me they were ready to treat their mothers to a manicure. They wanted me to join them. I just knew their mothers would not like wasting their hard earned money on having a manicure, but they asked me to go along. When I got to the nail salon, all I saw as Sharon, Amy, Susan, and Becky. Hey, I said, where are the mothers? Are they on their way? They just started smiling. Well, said Amy, we and Angela decided to put some money together to allow you to get a full manicure. I was so surprised. While I had seen the girls with pretty nails, I had never thought about having my nails done. Oh, I said, that is so nice of you guys and Angela. I don't know what to say. Oh, what will Mom say? She will just see a pretty girl with pretty nails, said Becky. Just then the lady, Mrs. Jordan came up to us and smiled, saying, and you must be the lucky young lady getting the gift manicure. Oh, ah - yes I said. As Mrs. Jordan, led me back to her table, the girls sat smiling and watching the whole event. I was still wondering what was going to happen. Oh sweetheart, said Mrs. Jordan, I am going to fix your nails up so pretty, just relax and enjoy. I just smiled and said, okay, thank youu. Then Mrs. Jordan began cleaning and trimming my nails. When she was finished, she said, okay honey I am going to put on a base coat, so your new polish will stay on longer. Then she slowly began applying the base coat to each of my nails. When she was sure they were dry, she then said okay, now I am going to apply some nice polish. The girls said you loved light pink and picked out this color. I just looked at the polish and then at the girls. They were all smiling. I just shook my head and smiled saying, okay - that color will be wonderful; thank youu. Then she began to apply the polish. When she was finished, she waited a couple of minutes and applied another coat of light pink. She was so delicate and careful with each nail. when she was finished I thought we were done. Oh I said, they look so pretty. Thank youu. Then she smiled saying, oh sweetie we're not finished yet. Now we have

to put on two top coats to help seal in the polish. I couldn't help smiling with a wide grin. I looked back at the girls and shook my head. They just smiled knowing I was getting the full treatment. Then when my nails were dry, she began applying the first of two top coats. She was just as delicate with the first and then the second coat as she was with all of the others. After a couple minutes, she had me look at my nails to see if I liked them. Oh, I could not believe I had my nails painted by a professional, and they looked so pretty. I just opened my mouth in complete awe over the sight of my polished nails. Oh, thank you, I said. They look so, so pretty. I am sure Mrs. Jordan had received many thank-you's before, but I think she could tell my thank-you was somewhere around the top of her list. She could tell I was very impressed, and said, oh sweetheart, you are so welcome. As I went up to the front of the salon, the girls were waiting and smiling, even giggling. They began to make all over my nails and making all of the oohs and ahhs as they examined each nail. Oh Laura, said Susan, you were acting so cute as she did your nails, like a little girl having her nails done for the first time. Oh, that's right said Sharon, this is your first time getting a full manicure; you did wonderful, and they look so pretty. Oh my, I said. Thank you all" so much. Then they all gave me a hug.

That afternoon when I came home, Mom and Angela were waiting. They were smiling, knowing the girls had treated me to a full manicure. Oh, said Mom, let me see your pretty nails. I showed her my nails; like the girls, she and Angela examined each nail to see how they looked. Oh, honey, Mom said, they look gorgeous, and I love the light pink. It looks so cute on you. Then Angela made silly, acting as if she were talking to young girl, saying in a very silly way, Oh" Laura' has the prettiest" nails". I am so' jealous". Oh Angela, I heard you were in on it. She started laughing, saying it was your Mom's idea. Oh, my, I said. Thank you. Then I gave her a hug saying, that was so nice of you.

That night, we sat up for a while and talked. When I went to my room to write in my journal, Mom and Angela were still talking. I wrote a little about the last few days and then went to bed.

Emily and Angela waited for Laura to go to sleep. Then Angela sneaked into her room and recovered her journal. Then Angela and Emily smiled as they began to read Laura's latest writing.

While I knew it would have been cold day in July for those country mothers of the girls to have their daughters or anyone else pay hard earned money just to have a fancy manicure, I had no idea their present was for me. Oh, I was so surprised and nervous at first, but knowing those girls were doing this for me I felt obligated to go along. Laughing; Mrs. Jordan put me so at ease with her kind words and ways. I could not believe all the work Mrs. Jordan put into my nail manicure. She was being so careful and so delicate with each step. Susan was right I must have felt and acted just like little girl having my nails done for the first time. I know Angela would have a fit if I were to make a habit of it, but - I loved all of that attention and pampering.

The next day, Mom and Angela insisted I put on some nice slacks and blouse. They even fixed my hair in a french braid. Then we all went to town. Part of it was for Mom to meet all of her friends and to see her old town again; Laughing; I think the other part was to show me off to everyone, nails and all. A few days later, Mom gave me and Angela a big hug before saying goodbye.

Later that week, Angela and I prepared more coats and gloves. I don't know why but somehow the ease of pace and perhaps the delicacy of Angela and the girls provided me more ease of fine motor coordination. While I know my handwriting improved a lot, it seemed also my finger coordination for manipulating the fabric and even working the sewing machine and handling the thread became easier for me. I could feel myself more easily using the large needle for doing fine adjustments to the coats and gloves. Angela noticed it also.

Oh honey you are getting much better, said Angela. I know, I said. I feel so much more at ease and can focus so much easier now. I can even thread the needle now in less than three tries. That's good for me. I know, laughed Angela; You are as good as me now. We worked on her projects for another hour or so before stopping for the night.

In February the girls and I went to Aaron's Lake. We weren't getting any bites for the first hour. Susan got bored and began kicking her feet in the water. I

was sitting beside her and got splashed. I put my feet in the water and began splashing her back. Then Amy said, hey girls we're trying to fish here. Then we stopped and put our minds back on trying to catch some fish.

Just a little while later, Becky got a bite. We all became excited and waited. Her cork went under, and she pulled up a large brim. We all congratulated her, as she put it in the fish bucket. Then Sharon got a bite that almost snatched her pole from her hand. She was so surprised at first but kept holding onto her pole as the fish kept pulling her line. Finally it got tired, and she was able to pull it to the dock. It was a channel catfish. Angela said they were the best eating catfish. She had a hard time dislodging the hook at first; then I tried to help. The hook wouldn't come out. It was stuck deep inside. Then Amy came over and tried her method. She grabbed the head of the catfish and reaching into its mouth, worked hook out of the fish and put it in the basket. We were so relieved. Then we all re-baited our hooks and threw our lines back in.

A little later Susan caught a catfish that was even larger than Sharon's. This time the hook was just in the lip. She had no problem removing the hook and putting it in the basket. Well Laura, said Amy, it looks like we need to catch a fish. Then about fifteen minutes later, Amy's line began going out. She was experienced. She waited until the line began moving fast; then she gave a quick pull on her pole. She got a big tug on it. Oh, said Amy, I have a good one. We all waited as she worked the line and slowly brought the fish to the dock. It was as large as Susan's fish. We stayed out there about another hour fishing, I was feeling a little left out. I didn't even have a bite.

The girls were looking with a little concern, but they were also smiling somewhat. I didn't know why. After a while, I was so frustrated I just laid my pole beside me and waited, thinking it wasn't my day. Then all of the sudden, my line began going out. I didn't even know it until Susan shouted, Laura, you have a bite. I was so excited looking at the line, I forgot where my pole was. I managed to catch my pole just before the fish pulled it off the dock. I was so excited, I just sat there and held on to my pole. Then Sharon shouted encouragement, just hang on til it gets tired. I kept waiting and holding onto my pole. I was worried it would get away. Then after what seemed like minutes, it finally got tired, and I slowly pulled it in. I was so excited and also so relieved, I couldn't even think to pull the hook out of its mouth. Then finally Becky came

over and took the fish from me. Here Laura, she said giggling, I will help. Oh, my, said Susan that is the biggest one. Then I just stood there in awe as Becky took the big fish and put it in the bucket. Then we all looked at each other and smiled, knowing we all caught a fish.

That afternoon, we all went to Angela's house. She was waiting with tools and her fish table. Then we all cleaned our fish and had a fish fry. It was so much fun. I couldn't wait to do it again. They were all giggles and talking about how excited I was when I caught my fish. Angela couldn't help giggling a little herself. When they left, I gave them all a hug and went back inside.

Oh, said Amy, Laura was acting so silly today. I know, said Susan. I began splashing Laura just to see what she would do. She acted so silly, saying, you "splashed" me'. Then she began kicking her legs back and said, take' that". I know, said Susan. She was having a good' time'. Then Sharon said, Oh, Laura looked so cute when we had caught our fish, and she had not caught one. She began to have this scrunched up face and lip like a little girl who has been left out. She was so cute. Amy giggled and said, I saw her also. She was so upset. Then when she couldn't get the hook out of Sharon's fish, she said, What' are we going' to do"? She was so funny. Then Becky giggled and said, oh, when she finally pulled her fish out of the water, she was so excited her mouth was wide open and was just staring at her fish. I know, said Susan; as you took the fish off the hook she must had her mouth open forever. She was so excited, she twirled around and danced, just like a little girl.

Laura's New Life Chapter 12

That night as I got ready for bed, I took off the bra Angela and Mom had bought for me. My breasts felt somewhat puffy and sore. I showed Angela. She began to smile and said, Um, your bra may not be the right size now. I will get you some more tomorrow. I think they will fit much better. That night Angela and I had our usual popcorn and movie time. As we watched what had become a custom, to watch scary movies, Angela brushed my hair as I watched. Oh", I said, he's waiting" for her, and she' doesn't' even' know" it'. - Angela knew Laura was really into the movie and excited. She just played along with it. - Yes", said Angela, he's' going' to get" her'. No", I said, what" is she going' to do". Angela was smiling the whole time. Then I realized she was just putting me on. Oh" Angela", I said, this' movie' is so" good". Then Angela giggled and gave me a hug. Oh baby, it's just a movie. later I got tired and Angela led me to bed and tucked me in. Then she took my teddy bear and tucked it in beside me.

The next day after school the girls could see I was having to continually adjust my bra. I didn't tell them my breasts felt sore and irritated. They just smiled and acted as if nothing was wrong. Angela was waiting when I got home. I couldn't wait to change out of my old one and try out the new ones Angela had bought. They were soft and didn't fit so tight. They seemed to have less padding. When I tried one on, I was so relieved. Oh Angela' I said, this fits' wonderful"; I love' it'. I feels so' much' better' now. She just smiled and said, good, now you won't have keep adjusting it.

A month later, Laura was fast asleep. Angela sneaked in and smiled as she read what Laura had written in her diary.

Over the next month or so, things at school seemed to go like clockwork. I would talk along with the girls about different subjects, but when it came to boys, I would just smile and let them talk. They would go on about Tommy Phillips, the basketball star and other popular boys in school. I thought it was so cute the way they acted; I knew when they were cutting up or putting on the drama queen. They are such wonderful friends. I know they will be there for me.

I am so grateful Angela bought me some new bras. My breasts still feel puffy, but now I can adjust my bra out more to compensate.

I did find myself cutting up more with the girls at school and even in class, I found myself answering questions in more silly ways. In Science, the teacher asked us how do you think the human race began? I raised my hand. I couldn't help myself. I said, I imagine with a 25% discount. Susan just shook her head and laughed saying where did you come up with that? The teacher just smiled and said, I guess that's a new answer.

The next morning, I began to look at my breasts more. They did seem to be larger. I wondered if it was due to wearing the old bras. I didn't know. Still, the soreness had gone away which was a relief. I was thinking it was perhaps also the bra making them feel more full. Angela was all smiles at breakfast. She was interested in how the new bras were working for me. Oh Laura, she smiled, you look so nice in your new bra. - I did notice the fullness in my breast, and said,- Angela, this one feels much more comfortable. I am not sure if it was the old bras, but my breasts do feel somewhat more full now. She just smiled and said. That's okay honey, you'll get used to it.

The students at school were also looking at me with more pleasant curiosity. Oh, Laura said Karen, that top looks so nice on you. Thank youu, I said. She just smiled. That afternoon coming home from school, the girls were more upfront and kind. Oh, Laura, said Becky, your top looks a little different, she said smiling. Have you changed something. Yes, I said, Angela got me some new bras. It seems my old bras were becoming uncomfortable. My breasts began to feel puffy and sore. They even feel more full. I don't know why. The girls all smiled. Then Susan said, you will be fine. Oh thanks I said; I was worried at first.

The next few weeks the girls seemed to treat me with, I guess, even more care and even more delicacy. As we walked home, they seemed talk more soft and more silly. I loved it. They would act silly also. Amy would start playing with my

hair. Becky and Susan would look at me and act silly. Sharon would, more often, ask how I was feeling. They were all being so kind. I didn't know why.

That night Angela and I made a nice supper. She was smiling at me the whole time. Here honey, she said, you can use this towel to take the biscuits out. I will set the table and pour the glasses. She was so silly the whole night.

The next afternoon, I was using Angela's bicycle to deliver some coats and gloves we had made for some folks. when I went to Mrs. Simon's house, she was outside raking leaves. She smiled when she saw me ride up. Oh, hey sweetie, she said. Oh, you have something for me. Yes, I said, Angela finally got your new gloves fixed. She wanted you to be sure and try them on to see if they fit okay. Sure honey, let me see them. I gave her the package. She tried them on. Oh, she said, I love the soft cotton inside. They feel wonderful. I don't know why, but I began acting more silly, saying I wanted to put fake finger nails on them, but Angela wouldn't let me. Oh, said Mrs. Simmons, that would have been so cute. I know, I said.

Then I rode through town to Mr. Elliot's house. I rode slow as many persons so concerned with their daily lives were usually not paying attention to someone on a bicycle. If I saw anything or anyone potentially turning in my direction, I would simply stop and wait. Mrs. Parker was waiting at the light. We waited together. Oh, Mrs Parker you are wearing that new coat. Yes, she said, it keeps me so warm. I just love it. Oh, said Mrs. Parker, and That wool sweater looks so nice on you. Thank youu, I said. After we crossed the street and I went on my way, I realized everyone was talking more about my tops and sweaters. Um, I was thinking it was the new bra. That night Angela smiled as she read Laura's Diary.

I feel I am beginning to sense more the little things around me. When talking with Angela I began to take more notice of how Angela did her hair and acted from time to time. I could sense more when she was in a silly mood or a more serious mood. It was kind of neat; I felt I could play along better knowing the mood she was in and respond in a better way. While studying I was beginning to reflect more on the writers in the texts, seeing or feeling more how they were presenting the material. I

felt I could sense the different delicacy, articulation, emphasis in the different areas of a chapter.

I felt somehow I had developed a sensitivity I had not felt before. I loved it as it felt more like an added dimension of insight or sensitivity I may have just taken for granted before. I looked at my beautiful rug and bed spread the girls had bought for me months ago. They looked different to me now. I felt I could see the delicate threading of the rose pedals and the beautiful blooms on the rug and bedspread. I could see how the ruffles and lace of the spread were so rich in color and brightness. It was like I was really seeing them for the first time. Oh, I said to myself, they are so much more beautiful now.

The next morning before school, Angela was all smiles. I didn't know why. Oh, honey I love that outfit, those colors look so nice on you. Thank you, I said. Laura, said Angela, I saw you wearing that pretty' yellow' blouse' the other day. I thought the little flowers' were so' cute". I think the girls will love' it'.

That afternoon, while coming home from school, Becky wanted me to give her the paper I turned in, about our trip to the woods last week. Then she began to read it out aloud to the other girls as we were walking home. Oh, I said, please' don't read' it, I will be so" embarrassed". What will the girls' say'? Oh baby, said Becky they will love it, just trust me. Okay, I said but if they laugh', stop reading' okay'. I will, I promise, said Becky, smiling. Then she began to read the paper.

Our trip in the woods by Laura Adams

My wonderful friends, Susan, Sharon, Amy, and Becky and I went into the woods last week. It was so' quiet' at first, as the light snow was just' beginning to melt. Everything was brown' from the winter cold, but it was also so' peaceful'. You could hear the stream in the distance running over the little' bank' like a little' waterfall'. Some of the birds were now venturing out and singing. As we approached the stream, we could see the little flat rocks persons had placed in different parts, so they could cross the stream without getting wet. We were all scared' at first as the water although not deep, was very cold. Amy

went first; she had done this before. She was kind of encouraging us also by acting silly but still telling us how to go across safely. She stepped across the first two flat stones. Then she took a little jump to a large flat rock in the middle. Then she acted silly making us think she was scared'. We knew her better than that. Then after smiling at us, she turned and took a jump to the next big rock. Then all she had to do was take a long step to the other side.

Then Sharon went across and jumped just like Amy. Then seeing how Amy and Sharon did it, Susan more confidently went across. Becky and I had to jump a little more, because we were shorter. Becky jumped from the little stones and then took a breath and jumped to the first big stone. Then she looked at me, smiled, and just jumped again to the next stone and over to the other side. Then they waited for me.

I was so' scared', and that water was so' cold'. Then I carefully made large steps over the first two stones. Then I just stopped and froze', saying, I am going to have to jump'. The girls were all smiling at me, saying you can do it; just take your time and get a go-od jump. I looked at the first' big stone and looked at them' and then back at the large stone. Then I jumped -; I made' it. I was so' happy'. Then I looked at the next stone. It was a little farther away. I looked at the girls and smiled, saying okay', here' goes'. Then they all said, You can do it. I got ready, took a deep" breath" and leaped' high'. I made" it'. Then Becky laughed saying, you can close your mouth now. I was so" relieved". I then stepped easily over the next stones to the girls. They all gave me hug. That was so' neat", I said, and I was so" scared".

Oh my, said Sharon laughing you actually remembered all of that. That was so cute'. I loved' it. Oh yes, said Susan, I remember you were so relieved you made it across. That was so funny. Oh, laughed Amy, I just know you are going to be in the drama club.

School seemed to have more life now. I began to wear more cute colors and floral designs. I even started wearing my funny printed socks to school. The girls got a kick out of it. Laura, you are looking so cute these days. Oh, thank' youu", I said. I don't know what" it is. I guess I started seeing everything around me in a different way, "giggling", I guess', in a more' silly' way' also. I

love" it'. I am not' going wear that lace' peasant' top' mom got for me. That is just' too" silly'. The girls were all giggling. I didn't know why.

It was April now and the weather was beginning to warm up. I didn't know why but I even had to adjust the straps on my new bras. One afternoon I looked in the mirror, and I could see my breasts had gotten larger. They were more full. Maybe it was the new bras making them look larger. I didn't know. My tops definitely showed more form now. I kind of got a kick out of it. Angela was smiling all the time and acting silly even about the little things. Oh, she said, I love those animal socks. I am going to steal them, she said. No', I said, I love my kitty' cat' socks'. You can have my bunny' socks'. She just laughed.

I loved sitting in my room at night listening to the radio when not stuck on some part of my homework. When I did feel comfortable with the material, I would play it softly and just reread some pages for better understanding. I would put my teddy bear up on the desk to keep me company. I would do my best studying after cleaning up and in my gown. It felt so much more comfortable. Angela would have to come in and remind me when I stayed up too late. Oh, sweetie it's getting late, you know how difficult it is to get up when you stay up late. Oh', I know", I said. I turned off the music and got my things together for the next day.

We were walking home from school that day and saw the little girls coming out of the elementary school with their new dresses and Easter baskets. Becky said oh, those little girls look so cute. Oh, Amy, said Sharon, are you going to get a new Easter dress and an Easter basket? Amy laughed and said, yes, I am going disguise myself as a 10 year old and get all of their Easter eggs, and then sell them to the highest bidder. Susan giggled and said, and I would be taking pictures of you in your cute dress and basket and blackmail you for all of those eggs. Oh, I said, giggling, I guess I missed that stage. Amy began to giggle, saying, yes, but you are really making up for it now. Then everyone laughed.

That night after Laura had gone to sleep, Angela read from Laura's dairy.

Oh, I feel sorry for Billy and the other boys. While we were cutting up and laughing, Billy, the other boys, and some of the country girls were needed to help get their land ready for crops. They would be going to

school and then having to come home and work their fields both getting them ready and planting their crops. It was so much work. I know many of them would not have time to work their farms and keep their minds on school also.

Oh, and in today's world, it is so much more important to have some good academic and communication skills. Those wonderful country folks have three strikes against them. They grow up with much less academic support from their parents who sadly also had to give up much education; also they have much less accumulated vocabulary and communication skills which the nice, middle class books today are filled with; and yes, the much time, energy, and attention needed to work their farms so diffuses their focus and energy, I don't see how they even pass their classes, much less prepare for higher learning.

I guess in many ways I was very fortunate to have another way out. While I was cared for and supported, those country boys and some country girls had to grow up early without the support I received. While I had nice clothes and a warm place to stay, those country boys and girls had to bring in firewood with many depending on the food they had grown the previous summer and making do with older clothes. Their lives are so different than for the girls and I. That's why I appreciate so much more, the kindness, care, and support I receive each day.

That Saturday, Angela and I dressed up to go into town for things. I wore a nice skirt and top while Angela wore some nice slacks and blouse. When we arrived at the general store, Mrs. Taylor was all smiles. Hey Angela, she said, and oh my, Laura, you look so cute today. Thank' youu', I said. Oh'', I couldn't' decide' what' to wear'' to town. They all seemed so, ah, fancy'. Finally Angela helped me pick' out something'. I didn't know whether to put my hair up'' in a bun' or leave it down''; finally Angela just made a nice pony tail. Oh, honey, said Mrs. Taylor, I think you look wonderful.

Then I went to look at the new tops. Angela continued to talk with Mrs. Taylor at a distance. I couldn't hear what they were saying. Mrs. Taylor smiled and whispered to Angela. You know Angela, if I didn't know better I would think Laura is going through that stage. Oh, and she even appears to be growing a figure. Angela smiled and whispered back. Oh yes, Laura has been acting more silly lately and during some scary movies she is becoming more emotional. Does she know?, whispered Mrs. Taylor still smiling. Angela smiled back and whispered, No she doesn't. When I picked up those new bras for her, she just thought her old bras had somehow irritated her breasts. Oh my, said Mrs. Taylor, giggling, were we that silly when we were that age? Angela giggled back saying, probably.

We had a good time shopping. Angela got some more supplies, and I got a new top. Then we went to the library, so Angela could get some new books. When we got inside, Angela went to the fiction shelf. I was so consumed with my school work, I just took a seat and waited for Angela. Then Mrs. Thomas came over to where I was seated, and said, oh, Laura you look so pretty today. Oh, thank' youu', I said. Then she said, honey, do you need to find a book? oh, no', I said. I am so'' overwhelmed' with school' work I am putting free reading on hold' for right now. I am just waiting' for Angela to find something she' likes'. Oh'', we are studying Romeo'' and Juliet'' in English. That was so'' terrible'' about Romeo taking his own' life' thinking Juliet' had died'. Then Juliet was so'' heartbroken'', she killed' herself'. Why' didn't they just make make the ending different''. I mean, He just gets' ready'' to kill himself; and then at the last'' second', she wakes' up'; then they hug'' and run'' off'' to live happily'' ever' after'?? Oh'' my'' sweetie, said Mrs. Thomas smiling, that would have been a much'' better'' ending'. I like' your ending' much'' better'. Yes'', I said, I am going to rewrite'' that story' with the happy'' ending'. Then they will sell so'' many' books'', they will be forced'' to take that old' horrible'' story' off the shelf and replace'' it' with my' much' better'' ending'. Mrs. Thomas began to laugh out loud saying, Oh, honey'', I think that is a wonderful'' idea'.

When Angela picked up her books we headed to the checkout counter, Mrs. Thomas was all smiles saying, Angela, did you find everything okay? Oh yes, said Angela.

When we finished, we went to the grocery store to get some supplies. When Angela came through with her buggy, Mrs. White saw her coming in. Oh hey Angela, said Mrs. White, you two ladies look so pretty today. Oh, thank you Betty, said Angela and how is Susan doing? Oh, she's still helping out on the weekends. I don't know what I would do without her. Oh Laura, said Mrs. White, how is school? Oh', it is wonderful', I said. Many of the teachers have grown' up' here' and are so'' much' more patient' with the students who need' more' help. They talk' more down' to earth', like folks'. Oh, that's good, said Mrs. White. Then I went off with the list Angela had given me earlier.

Oh, said Betty, smiling and whispering to Angela, Laura actually looks like she is maturing in the top. Ah, she is, said Angela. I had to get her some new bras, because her older bras were becoming an irritation. She still thinks it was the bras causing the irritation. Oh my, said Betty smiling, she doesn't know? No, she doesn't, said Angela. Emily told me not to tell her. She knows her breasts are larger, but she still thinks its the old bras. She seems to be a very happy, said Betty. Oh yes, she is and is even going through the silly emotions girls go through. Oh, she sounded so cute just a second ago. I know, said Angela smiling, she is so full of life now.

Laura's New Life Chapter 13

That afternoon, Angela and I put away all of the things we had bought. We were so tired. I couldn't wait to take off my clothes and find something more comfortable. I put on some slacks and nice soft top. When I went to wash up, I looked in the mirror. My round breasts showed up plainly under my top. I was surprised. I wondered what Angela would say when I went into the kitchen to help her prepare for supper. I was pleasantly surprised when she just smiled and said, oh, sweetie, you must feel much better now getting into something more comfortable. I know we had a long day, and you were so patient and helpful. Oh Angela, I said, I was so nervous today, thinking about how everyone would look at me, not knowing what they were going say. They were all so sweet and kind. I felt so much better afterwards. You looked wonderful, said Angela, and everyone saw you as a beautiful young lady. Oh, I feel so much better now, I said. Angela just smiled and said, now what do you want for supper?

As the days and weeks went by, I began to feel more comfortable with my breasts. I suppose me and everyone else had gotten used to them. I stopped looking at them and just accepted them as normal. Everyone was so kind to me; I loved it. After a while I felt as though those round breasts were a blessing.

We were entering our last week of school. I had to say it was a real change for me, entering school as a girl and actually retaking high school classes all over again. The support from the folks in Grove Point, Angela, the girls, the students, and the teachers was so wonderful. I think the stability created from all of that support enabled me to be so much more at ease with both adapting as a girl and also being able to relax, enjoy, and actually learn so much in school. I was beginning to feel more confident in all of my subjects. Still I think everyone was glad the school year was finally ending. I know I was beginning to feel fatigued. We all needed to stop and rest for a few months. Now with school letting out, those country boys and girls would have much more time and energy to devote to their family farms and the many chores they had to do to keep everything going, so being out of school would come as a big relief for them.

That week, the teachers slacked up on all of the assignments. All of the final tests had been given and grades assigned. All that remained was for the teachers and students to just spend time reflecting on our school year; the friends we made; all of the trials, tribulations, good times, bad times, and even the funny times we all shared together. It was ah - really neat.

The last day of school, we all walked home together, talking about all of the teachers, the students, and the friends we made. Oh, said Sharon, Laura, you were so nervous in the beginning; I didn't think you would make it. I know", I said. Imagine' me" going to school as a girl and actually' reliving" my high' school' days'. That was some" experience'. Oh, said Becky, you looked so cute in the library in your new outfits. My mom never knew you were a boy. Oh, and the time we were in math class, and we were asked about the length of a hypotenuse. You raised your hand and said the length of hypotenuse equals the square root of the sum of the shorter sides when they are squared. All the kids thought you were a genius. We all laughed. Oh, said Susan, you were so concerned about Billy being hounded by Mrs. Stevens. You encouraged him, and he actually passed with a good grade. Oh', I said, I was so" thankful' for that. He earned' every' bit" of that good' grade'.

Then Amy laughed, saying I remember when you wore a skirt for the first time to school. You were so concerned about your skirt flying up, you were walking so slow and couldn't keep up with us. We had to tell you to speed up. That was so funny, she said. Then we all laughed. Then we got close to Angela's house and all of the sudden I just stopped. Whoa", I said. What's wrong said Amy. Then I just started crying out of the blue. Oh baby, said Sharon. It all finally hit you didn't it. I just nodded my head. Then they all gathered around me and gave me a big hug. We must have looked silly standing there for about five minutes just hugging and crying. Then as we all gathered ourselves, I said, oh, why am I acting so silly? Becky just laughed and said, oh honey, that is just a part of being a girl. We do that. Then they all laughed. I managed to fix myself up before entering the house while the girls continued on their walk home. I could still hear talking as they walked away.

Oh, said Sharon, she doesn't know, does she. No one has told her yet? I haven't, said Becky. I haven't said anything, said Amy. I haven't said Susan smiling. I am just waiting for her breasts to reach a point where there will be no

denying it. I know, said Becky. She still thinks it's the bras she wearing. Yes, said Amy, she doesn't realize the treatments her mom is giving her are really playing with her hormones and emotions. Oh, said Sharon laughing, now she is acting like we do all the time. Then they all laughed and continued their walk home.

The next morning Angela and I were tending to our new garden. We planted the seeds and sprouts weeks ago, but now they were really coming up. We had beans, squash, tomatoes, cabbage, and even some popcorn. I loved the ground. It was so rich. Angela and I also made sure to rake our leaves out over the area during the winter to help ensure the soil would be fertile for planting. We would go out in the morning to weed and clean out around the plants. Then we would water the garden before the sun got high. We always welcomed the showers we got. The rain seemed to do the most good. Then we would go back inside to avoid the heat of the day. Oh, I said, Angela I have a good' feeling' about this garden'. We have been getting so" much rain' this year. I just' know' that ground will make everything' grow'. Angela smiled, saying yes, I think we' will have a wonderful" garden' this year.

The next day the girls and I rode our bicycles into town and parked them by the general store. In this town, bicycles are a necessity for many, especially teenagers, so there are bicycle racks everywhere. As usually the case in small towns we didn't bother to lock our bicycles up, for everyone there is usually very honest and they really don't need bicycles anyway. The first thing the girls did was check out the general store for the new spring fashions.

Oh" Amy", said Sharon, I just' love" this' top'. Oh', yes' I love' the puff sleeves and hearts, said Amy, but your mom would have a fit' with the square neck look. We all laughed knowing how old fashion Sharon's mom was. Then Susan found another top. She said, hey guys, look' at this' one. I love' it', said Susan. One was a green and white floral, short-sleeved, cotton, tunic with a round neck. The other ones were in red, blue, violet, and yellow. Oh", I said, they are' so" pretty'. They will go great' with our jeans'. I know', said Becky. Oh', and they are so" cute'. We all got one. Amy got the green' one; Susan got the red' one; Sharon picked out the blue' one; Becky picked the yellow' one; and I got the violet' one. We all held them up and saw they were all very pretty. Oh, Angela will just'

love" this. I better' hide' it from her, or I will never' see" it again. We all laughed and paid for our items.

Then we went to the local beauty shop. We began to look at the different makeup. Oh, said Amy, I just love this nail polish. Laura, it's similar to the light pink you got during your manicure. Oh, I see. It was so pretty when Mrs. Jordan did my nails in that color. I kind of miss it. Tell you, what, I said, we'll both get a bottle. Good; hey, maybe they will think we're sisters. We both laughed. At that time, Susan, Sharon, and Becky were browsing through the makeup department. They were all trying out different skin tones and combinations. They even put some combinations on my face. When I looked in the mirror, I was kind of surprised. Oh' I said, my face looks so' different' in this light. It looks so' smooth" and soft". Oh, it's just your imagination, said Becky. You have always had a pretty face. Oh' my", I said, I love the way the tones make my face look so' pretty". Becky just laughed. Oh sweetie you don't need make up right now. You have a pretty face without it. Then all the girls began trying out the sample lip gloss. They were so many pretty shades. They had yellows', pinks', reds', even oranges'. I think we all favored the light pink. It was soo" cute".

When we left the store, we got our bikes and headed home. When we got to the road going to my house, the girls continued on to their houses. Oh, said Sharon, Laura knew her face was looking more soft and smooth now. Yes, said Amy, but she has no idea it is the hormones. Then they all giggled, as they rode away.

That night, Angela got a kick out of applying the pink nail polish to my nails. When she was finished, She said, Oh my, honey your nails look so pretty. Thank you, I said.

That night, Angela and I had popcorn and watched another wonderful movie from the old days. Oh, I said, the girls seemed more cute then. When they spoke, they used more light expressions and feelings. Oh, yes, said Angela, it was a different time then. The girls were not trying to keep up with the guys. The girls back then enjoyed a much more protected world designed for them to be housewives while the men worked the hard jobs and even went to war, many times. In many cases their husbands were killed. There were hard times then,

but girls and women were cared for by their families which gave women more ease, stability, and yes, cuteness. Women were allowed to act out in more silly and cute ways back then. Today girls and women cannot count on men to make a living for them.

Many girls and women are being conditioned today to act like men or putting on more of an image of strength, so many girls and women today are shying away from the more cute and silly ways of the past and putting on more hard, firm attitudes. Many women don't realize it is the very softness and delicacy of the past which has enabled them to have the stability, care, and support to do so well in school and now, earn a living, in many cases much more than their male peers in society. I am thinking you feel much better prepared today to think and act with more insight as a girl than you ever would have been able to think and deal with life as a boy. Yes, I said, if I were still treated as a boy, without the wonderful care I have received over the last year, that has given me so much more ease, stability, and support, I know I could never have done as well in school. I feel so much better as Laura now. Angela just smiled and continued brushing my hair. Then Angela said, and you wouldn't be nearly as cute as you are today. We just laughed and then continued to watch the silly movie.

The next morning when I rose, I looked across my room at the cute rug; the cute dresser; the cute bed and spread; and my - oh so cute doll. I was so happy to have those cute things in my life and all of the wonderful support I had experienced simply for being Laura. I truly felt blessed.

A few weeks later, Mom came to visit. She was so excited to see me and gave me big hug. Oh, Laura, she said, you look so pretty. Thank you, I said. Oh Mom, I have been learning so much over the last year from everyone. I know I must look very different now. I love the way your clothes fit, said Mom. You look so much more mature. Oh, and your face, it looks so soft and cute. I know, I said smiling. Then Angela and I helped Mom bring in her bags. Then we had a nice lunch and talked.

Laura, said Mom, I know you have changed so much over the last year. How do you feel about being Laura. Oh Mom, I have never been so happy. I receive so much more care and support from everyone. In school I can think, learn, and enjoy learning. I can do my homework with much more ease and reflection. I

have gained so much more insight into what it really means to be at peace and actually feel good about myself. Oh, and my friends: Becky, Sharon, Susan, and Amy have been so supportive and caring. I know I would never have had that support as Larry. I never want to go back to being Larry. I would have to give up all of that wonderful support and care. I would have to find a way to cope with the much more aggressive, uncaring world which caters only to those boys with more support and influence while leaving many other boys who are less supported to fend for themselves.

I began to giggle, saying, Mom I love being Laura. Then Mom and Angela began to giggle. Oh baby, said Mom, I am so happy for you. Then while Mom and Angela talked, I went out to set the water sprinklers from the well out to the garden. Oh, Emily, said Angela, Laura has been acting so silly lately and so much more emotional at times. She doesn't know I have been giving her a good dose of hormones for the last 12 months. She complained her old bras were beginning to irritate her but she doesn't know the reason. You saw her face, you could see she has a much smoother and softer her face is now. Oh, I know, said Emily, I could also see her breasts are beginning to fill out. She is beginning to look so pretty now. Yes, said Angela and so emotional also. I just love hearing her silliness and cute emotions. She makes everything so much brighter.

That is so good, said Emily, I don't know when to tell her or if I should. Oh, said Angela, let's just take it one day at a time and see what happens. I know Laura is so happy now. I bet she would take any new changes in stride and still keep being the most wonderful girl she is today. Oh, said Emily, I feel so much better now. I had my doubts at first, but hearing you and Laura talk that way, makes me feel so happy for her. Knowing she is so happy and so well adjusted makes me feel wonderful. Then Angela and Emily began to cut up like the sisters they were as they cleaned up the table and unpacked Emily's suitcases.

Over the next week, Mom was continually doting over me, helping me fix my hair and setting out outfits she thought would be cute. One morning, I said, Mom, smiling, I am going to work in the garden this morning with Angela. Do you still want me to wear the cute yellow skirt and white peasant blouse. Then she started laughing, saying okay, wear your jeans and old top. But after you

clean up, I want to see how you look in your cute outfit. I laughed and said, okay.

Emily even got on some of her old clothes and began raking leaves and cutting off dead ends. We all worked the garden. When the sun got higher, we all came in and cleaned up. Mom waited for me to get ready, and then she fixed my hair as if I were a ten year old. She was so cute and acted so silly. Then she braided my hair and put in two yellow hair bands. There now, she said, that looks much better. I began to cut up also saying, yes Mommy. We both started laughing. When everyone was ready we all went to Mary's Diner for lunch. Mary was so happy to see Emily again and gave her a big hug. Then Mary turned toward me and said, oh my, Laura, you have become a beautiful young lady, and you look so pretty in that outfit. Who fixed your hair? It looks so cute. I pointed to Mom laughing, saying, she did it. Oh I see, said Mary, that's why you look so cute. Emily began to smile, saying yes, I'm the guilty party. Then we all started laughing and had a nice lunch.

Then Mom and Angela went to visit all of their friends while I stayed in the library and browsed over the books. Then Becky came over and smiled, saying I thought you didn't want to wear that silly yellow skirt and white peasant blouse. I had no choice, Mom came to visit and hunted it down, deep in my closet. She must have braided your hair also. It looks so cute. That's okay, she giggled, Moms are supposed to be mother hens. I know, I said smiling. I think she likes me much more as Laura. Oh I see, she said giggling. You do make a better Laura.

That week, Mom and Angela had the grandest time reliving old memories and meeting old friends. I had never seen Mom move so fast as when she and Angela practically ran to the old mill to see the writing they had written on the old wall many years ago. When I finally saw them walking back, they were still talking. Oh Angela, I can't believe our names are still there. That was so neat, and to think we were only about 13 and 14 when we wrote our names. Yes, Emily, we had such happy times then. Laura would probably have a fit if she had to wear what we wore back then: all of those full skirts and dressy dresses. I imagine so, said Emily. Still I think she would have fit right in. I think so too, said Angela. She has a lot of the good nature of the older ones. That is what makes her so sweet and kind to everyone. I know, said Emily. You know she

got it from us. Mom was so happy to know I was doing fine and happy being Laura. When she left to go home, she gave us both a big hug.

Laura's New Life Chapter 14

The next day it was going to rain all day. We were grateful we wouldn't have to water the garden for the next three days. After breakfast Angela went up into the attic and began searching through some old trunks. Some of them had not been opened in years. I came up to see what she was looking for. Oh, said Angela, I was going to surprise you. I am looking for some old dresses Emily and I wore many years ago when we were your age. I just hope they are still in one piece.

Angela opened one chest and looked inside. They were mostly old linens and fabric. Then she opened another old chest, and we looked inside. We could see what looked like old skirts and dresses from many years ago. Then she found one she thought was cute and carefully separated it from the rest. When she opened it up, I saw the dress. Oh Angela, I said, it is so 'pretty'. The kids might make fun' of it', but I think it's just' gorgeous". Then Angela smiled and held it up against my profile. Then I held the dress as she spread out the waist of the dress. Oh my, she said, it might just fit.

We eased the dress and slip down the stairs and turned on a bright light to get a closer look. It was a light pink dress with little green flowers and roses that came down to the knees. It had a full skirt. It had full gathered sleeves made of flouncing. It also had a full slip petticoat to go with it. It was so pretty. I can't wait to try it on, I said. Then Angela smiled and carefully opened the slip/petticoat and had me put my arms through the sleeves. Then she carefully and slowly pulled the slip over my arms and down my waist. When she was finished, she began to smile. Oh, she said, the slip fits nicely. Now to see if the dress will fit. Then she opened the dress up and slowly brought it over my arms and down my waist. Then she carefully opened it and straightened it over the full slip. Oh my, I said, it fits. Yes, said Angela smiling. It looks so pretty on you. Now, let's see if the zipper will still work. I turned and allowed Angela to take some silicone lubricant and dab a little on a small cloth. Then she carefully applied it to both sides of the zipper. Then she slowly and carefully began moving the zipper back and forth until it began to move up the dress. I think it's working she said as the zipper began to go higher and higher until finally it reached the top. Then she tied the little sash in the back. Oh, said Angela, now turn around and let me see it. When I turned around, she took a deep breath

and smiled, saying, oh honey, that dress looks so pretty on you. Oh, I said. I have never worn a dress where the skirt stood out so far. It looks so cute. I know, said Angela.

Then Angela brushed my hair and fixed it so it was neat again. Then she opened up the earrings that went with the dress and clamped them onto my ears. There now, she said, we wore knee-socks back then. Do you have any light pink knee-socks?, asked Angela. If you do, find them and put on those nice black wedges. I managed to find some light pink knee-socks and put on my nice shoes. Then I returned to the front room. Oh, you look so much more delicate when walking in that dress. I know, I said. The dress forces me to hold my hands a little higher and the slip and skirt also cause me to walk more gracefully. I feel like a little girl in a party dress. Oh, said Angela giggling, I think it was Emily's party dress. I want to call her now to show her how cute you look in her old dress. I just know she will get a kick out of it.

We had a seat at the table while Angela called Emily. The phone rang, but after going through the limit of rings, Emily's voice mail came on. Angela left the message, and then we waited for her to call back. Meanwhile Angela and I enjoyed a glass of tea at the table. It soon became apparent, I was becoming uncomfortable in my seat. Angela noticed it and smiled, saying, oh sweetheart I forgot to tell you how to sit wearing full skirt and petticoat. Now stand up beside your seat. I did as Angela said. Now honey, stand at a right angle or with your hip next to the seat. I did as she said. Now take your hand and sweep the skirt and petticoat smooth and keep it smooth and tight while you are seated. If you do it right, your dress and petticoat will be smooth when you sit. Then it will be much more comfortable for you. I did as Angela instructed me. After a few times I had it down. Oh yes, I said. That is so cute and so much more dainty and delicate than girls do it today. I know said Angela giggling, and you look so much more delicate and dainty when you do it. We used to called it, sweeping our seats.

We must have waited for over an hour. Then we got a call from Emily. Hey Angela, what's up she said. Oh, said Angela, we have a surprise for you. Turn on your video receiver. When Mom did, Angela directed her cell video to where I was. I stood up where she could see me wearing her old party dress. Oh my, said Emily, that is my old party dress. Oh Laura baby, you look so cute. Now

turn around so I can see the other side. When I turned around, she looked the dress over and said, oh my Angela, that dress fits her perfectly. I just love it. Oh, baby, she said, how does it feel wearing such a pretty dress? Oh Mom, I said, it makes me feel so delicate and dainty. I just love it. Okay, said Emily, I am giving you my dress. It looks so pretty on you. Thank youu, I said. Then Mom had me walk up and down the floor about four times just to see how I moved delicately and gracefully wearing the dress. Oh honey, you are walking so gracefully in that dress. I am impressed. Oh sweetheart, that dress looks so gorgeous on you. Then Emily joked, saying now you will have to locate the others for her to wear also. Yes, said Angela she would look so cute in them. Then they said goodbye. That would be wonderful I said. I must have worn the dress for another couple of hours. Then Angela carefully unzipped the dress for me, and we carefully put it into a large bag to see if perhaps it could be dry cleaned.

That summer, we began to pick our vegetables and even had a bunch to put up for the winter. We must have put up 25 jars of tomatoes and 25 more jars of beans. After all of that work: I don't want to jar anything else until next summer.

That August, the girls and I began to get ready for the new school year coming up. I loved the clothes Mom and Angela had gotten for me last year. Since I stopped growing, I knew my clothes would still be good for the fall. However, some of my tops did begin to feel somewhat tight and uncomfortable. As the girls and I began to shop at the general store, I went to see if they had any larger tops to take the place of the less comfortable ones. They saw me checking out the new tops. Oh Laura, said Susan, I thought you would be looking for some new tops. Oh yes, I said; I love my old tops but I feel so" constricted' with some of them. I hate' It'. Some of them are so" pretty'. Sharon heard what I said and just giggled, saying you will find some more.

Then Susan and Sharon just smiled and shook their heads. As I looked, I could see they were right. The new selection was pretty also. I found some nice, more loose tops I knew would be more comfortable. Oh, I said I love these V-neck T-shirt tops with the extended hem. Amy saw what I was looking for and smiled, saying oh yes, those should fit nice. I then picked out an aqua color I thought was pretty. Then Sharon and Susan went to check out the new colored jeans. I continued to shop for a few more tops and blouses. Then I found some

more tops. These are crew neck blouses with lace crochet chiffon pom pom with a flowy short sleeve. Oh, I said, these are so pretty. Amy smiled saying, oh yes they are. I finally picked out a purple one and held it to my chest. How does this color look? Amy got so tickled saying oh yes baby, it will look so pretty on you. I was so happy, and continued to look for a couple more tops. Susan and Sharon were looking at me and smiling from the jeans department. I couldn't hear what they were saying. Oh, poor baby, said Susan, she is so self-conscious about her breasts, she is going out of her way pick out loose tops and blouses. I know, said Sharon, I just saw her pick out some cute tops I know she will like.

I continued to try to find a couple more I thought would be nice. I found something more simple for the warmer fall weather. It was a summer color block striped T-Shirt short sleeve loose tunic blouse in light green. I knew it would be more comfortable. Just then Becky came over and said, are you finding anything you like? Oh, yes I said, they have cute tops I feel will look much better on me. She looked at my last choice and smiled, saying, oh yes Laura I think you will love that one. Thank' you', I said. She just giggled. I almost gave up finding one more; then I saw some others. They were 3/4 bell sleeve blouse summer crew neck lace top floral textured baby doll shirts. I loved the beige color and picked it out. I was so happy I found everything I needed and just kept them with me. Then I waited and tried to help the girls decide on what they wanted to buy.

They were looking at the many different colors of jeans. Oh, these are so' nice'', I said. Laura, said Amy, do you need any jeans? Oh I said, maybe it's Angela's cooking; I have been gaining some weight lately. I do need to find some larger jeans. The ones I have are beginning to feel tight on me. Becky smiled saying, yep, that's probably it; she is really a good cook. I know, said Susan; she makes great fried chicken. Then they all began to smile. I didn't know why. Then we all continued to look for some more jeans, slacks, and tops. Finally we were both satisfied and if possible for teenage girls, tired of shopping for the day. We were cutting up and joking about our purchases. Oh, I said, Amy I didn't think you were into pink jeans. They all laughed saying, she only wears those on dates. I giggled saying, I guess for dates you have to dress up a little. We were so happy we had found what we needed for school.

That afternoon, I showed Angela what I had bought. Oh, they are so pretty, she said, and I see you also made sure they wouldn't be so tight fitting. Yes, I said. I wanted to make sure they would be comfortable. Then she had me try them all on to see how they looked. Oh, sweetie she said, you will look so nice when you go back to school. Oh, yes, I said. Thank you so much for helping me get these. Oh, said Angela, your mom did most of that. I will have to thank her, I said. Later that night Angela sneaked into Laura's room and smiled as she read the latest entry in Laura's diary.

This morning when I was cleaning up, I looked at my breasts. They appeared to be larger, and even the nipples appeared to be larger and darker. For some reason, they didn't feel sore anymore. In fact they actually felt much more pleasant for some reason. Maybe the new bras were making them feel more comfortable. I did have to adjust my bra strap again, so it wouldn't be so tight. Still, I felt so much better now. I kind of liked it more as a way of identifying more with the girls. I actually felt my breasts were more feminine now and more in line with my new life. Oh, and they felt so wonderful. I loved it.

It was now almost September. The girls and I went to the school to sign up for our new upcoming school year and receive our new books. I felt so much more at ease and confident this time. I even wore one of my new blouses and red jeans to sign up. I was actually excited. Oh, I said, I get to do this all" over" again'. At least I now my selection for nature class will carry over until I make a change, but that" will be never". The girls just giggled. Then Sharon said, at least we don't have to take her by the hand this time. Then I giggled, saying, yes, I was so" scared" and worried' then. I must have acted so" silly". Then we all laughed.

When we had all signed up, we checked each other's schedule. Sharon and Susan would be in my English and math classes. Becky and Amy would be in my science and history classes. Oh, I said, I am so' glad' you guys are in my classes. This will make it much' better'.

After signing up for our classes, we began walking home. When we got to my house, I said goodbye to the girls and went inside to show Angela my schedule. The girls continued to talk as they walked home. Oh, said Becky, I didn't say anything, but Laura looked so cute in her new blouse. Yes, said Amy, she is beginning to look so pretty now. I know said Susan, giggling. She still thinks it's her new bra. Yes, said Sharon, giggling. She was acting silly too. She was jumping up and down, knowing we would be in her classes. They all laughed and continued their walk home.

I was glad the registration was on a Friday. Now we would have two days off to get our heads together and prepare for our classes on Monday. I could also scan through the books to see more about how they were written. Then I felt more comfortable about what to expect. That night at supper I was still wearing the outfit I wore earlier to school. Angela was looking at me across the table and smiling, saying, oh, sweetie, you look so 'nice' in that outfit. Oh' thanks', I said. The girls' liked' it also'. They even joked, saying I was growing' up'. We both giggled. Then Angela said, I am so glad you actually chose those cute tops. I just love those flare sleeves and chiffon. You look so pretty in it. Oh, thanks', I said. I think I was trying so' hard' to find some loose' tops', I didn't think about how cute they were at first, but then I saw how pretty' it was and just' had" to have it. Oh baby that was a wonderful choice, said Angela.

Saturday, the girls and I went to town to replenish school supplies. We got some more cute pencils and pens along with some paper. Then the girls began shopping for book bags. Their school bags had seen better days and really needed to be replaced. Sharon found one she liked. It was gray with stripes tied in a bow with pom poms on the zipper. Oh, said Amy, that is so' pretty. I am just not in to poms poms. Then Susan found hers. I was all yellow. Oh, said Sharon, It says imitation, waterproof leather. That will be good. Then Becky found hers. It was a cute purple one with extra large clasps for the zipper. Oh, said Amy, this looks nice. It was green with black zippers. Like all the bags it had a USB charging port. That is so' nice', I said. Now you can charge your phone from inside your bag. Oh, said Amy smiling, I was going to get that one, but I so knew you love purple. Yea, right, giggled Becky. I know you hate purple. Then the girls looked at me and Susan said, well Laura, have you found one you like? Oh', I said kind of shaking my head, I haven't thought' about a

book' bag'. I guess I feel attached to the one I have. Oh, I do need more diaries though. I am on my last few pages. They just smiled, and we finished our shopping.

That Monday, I wore the same outfit to school I wore on Friday for registration. I thought it was so pretty. We all found our classes and went through the day, taking notes from our teachers; hearing their teaching methods; and listening to the requirements they had for us. I think we were all ready and excited to begin the new school year. I think we loved dressing up as much as we loved school.

As we walked home, the girls were talking about the boys in their classes. Oh, Susan, said Sharon. Did you see that cute boy named Jerry? I thought he was so' cute'. Oh yes, said Susan giggling, I loved the way he held his pencil. It was if he actually knew how to use it. We all laughed. Oh, said Becky, Amy did you see the tall boy who spoke with that slow draw. Oh, yes, said Amy, he seemed so mature. You better get him before I do, said Amy smiling. Oh, Laura, said Susan, that boy named Ben in math class was looking you over. Oh, I noticed that, I said, smiling.

Oh, said Becky and in Science class, Chip was also looking you over. Oh', no'', I said, I didn't notice that. Then all the girls began to giggle. What are you going to do?, asked Amy. Oh' my', I said smiling. I know you guys have desires to be with boys and maybe even choose one of them for life. But for me, I am so thankful just to have the wonderful peace, stability, and care I receive from everyone each day just for being Laura. I don't know about the future, but for me I already feel satisfied. Oh, said Sharon, you are so lucky, she giggled. Yes, said Becky laughing, we are going stir crazy, and you are already fulfilled. Oh, said Susan, I have been listening to Laura so much. Knowing how many boys today are really very insecure and putting on a front of strength just to impress girls, all the while failing in school and unable able to support themselves later, I am a lot more cautious now. Of course, she said, laughing, that doesn't mean I can't enjoy their company. Then we all laughed and continued to walk home.

Laura's New Life Chapter 15

That night when Laura went to sleep, Angela smiled as she read the last pages of Laura's Diary.

Oh, at school today, the girls said a couple of boys were sizing me up. They asked me what I was going to do. I just smiled and told them I don't know how I will respond in the future, but right now, I feel so wonderful with the support I have now, I just don't have any interest in boys. I really feel sorry for boys today. The belief boys should be strong is leaving many boys failing in school and so insecure these days. I feel sorry for those girls who may buy into the insecure fronts those boys may portray and then become painfully disappointed in the future. Oh, I thought smiling, I do have my teddy bear. He is all the company I need right now.

The next morning before school, Angela was all smiles. She had my breakfast waiting and even took out her comb to make sure my hair was in place. She even put a cute braid in it. Oh, said Angela, I just wanted you to look pretty today. Thank you, I said smiling.

That morning, the girls and I walked to school. Oh, said Amy, you look so pretty. I love that new blouse. Thank' youu', I said. Oh, said Becky giggling, you braided your hair also. Have you changed your mind about those boys? Then all of girls laughed. Oh', no" I said, smiling. Apparently' Angela' was in a happy mood and decided to braid' my hair'. I think it looks so pretty that way, said Susan. I know, I said. I just never think' about it, unless I am going somewhere' special'. Sharon was wearing a couple of small braids on in front of her hair. Oh, Sharon, I said, I always' love" those little' braids' in your hair'. From now' on, when I know" you are not' going to have those little braids on a certain day, I will do' mine' that way, I giggled. We all laughed and continued to school.

A few weeks later, our English teacher, Mrs. Frasier gave us a subject to write on what we thought should be changed in education today. After class, Sharon and Susan were looking at me and smiled. Then Susan said, oh, Mrs. Frasier doesn't know that is your passion. Yes, said Sharon, I know you will give her a

mouthful. Oh' my", I said. I will have so" much' to say'. I won't' know where' to begin'. Then we all giggled and went to our next class.

As soon as I got home I began to write on that subject. I didn't know what to place first, second, or third; they all seemed to be very important. Angela came into my room off and on to check on me and saw I was so busy putting my paper together for Mrs. Frasier. Oh, said Angela, that is a lot of writing for just one paper. I know' I said, but for' me' it is so" important'. I have so' much' to say', and I am so' afraid' I may say certain parts wrong and perhaps mess' up the meanings' in some way. That's okay, said Angela, I will read over your paper with you when you are finished. Then after we agree the meanings are clear enough, and she still has a problem, we'll both take the blame, she said, laughing. Then she left the room. When I finished the paper, we read it over together and made some corrections. Then she smiled and said, my little girl is going to be the best teacher ever.

Three days later I handed in my paper. As we left the room, Susan and Sharon could see I was so nervous. You will do fine, said Susan. You write so well, and you have so much passion. Yes, said Sharon, you make so much sense. I just know she will like it. Oh, I said, I so' hope' so. Then we just smiled and went to our next class.

The next Monday I was so worried about what Mrs. Frasier would say. She was smiling at me off and on as she handed back our papers. Then when she got to my desk, she had the biggest smile on her face. Oh, Laura, she said smiling, you had so much to say. I just know you are going to be a wonderful teacher some day. Oh, thank you, I said. Susan and Sharon just smiled. Then Sharon whispered to Susan, I just love her thank you's, and they giggled.

That afternoon, coming home, Susan read to the girls the paper I had written.

How I Would Change Schools

I think in small towns, the boredom could really become a problem. For those few students from small towns who are not as supported as the girls and I, school provides a wonderful outlet for change. I think even for those boys and girls with less support, it also provides for a place to

have more care and even access to much more academic areas of knowledge than they would have received at home, although I feel for many of them, their less supported and more labored world, I am sure, has removed much energy and focus from their academics in the past and even now. I can see why many of them begin to stagnate in the earlier grades as they began to fall further behind in school. I can only imagine for some students who have fallen behind, school has become a place of much more fear, failure, discipline, and even more hopelessness as they are slowly separated more by class separations according to achievement.

The myth of genetics in ability hurts everyone but for them, it must hurt so much more. I know the myth which said we simply evolved with different abilities people see as more or less fixed, have become accepted as dogma today. The foolish men who created it, could not see how much more complex our minds really are and how we can continually change and improve over time. I know I will do all I can to remove that awful myth of permanence from their lives by providing wonderful tools for everyone -to approach their lives more delicately to continually change and improve. We need to see true average stress as many maintained layers of mental conflicts in both our conscious and many more within our subconscious minds which take up much mental energy: many past, present, future - experiences, fears, anxieties, needs, circumstances which take up much mental energy leaving us with much less mental energy for new mental work. I also see how many unhelpful values of force, power, anger, defense ingrained into many students from a young age must also take up much wasted energy by hurtfully, intensifying those layers of mental mental conflicts making those layers much higher. I see an upright rectangle showing our full mental energy. Then I see those many "maintained layers" as lines from the bottom going up. The space left shows our leftover mental energy for new mental work. Then any new

events- or situations would go on top, hurting their learning more so. Some of those kids from much less supported environments are having to work three or four times as hard to learn as I am.

Also I am sure, from much less support and knowledge from their families, many were having to learn "new", basic vocabulary and longer sentence structure in the early grades forcing them to work even harder to learn that extra, newer mental work. Oh, in addition, the higher layers tend to feed into improper pace and intensity than needed when approaching newer mental work. That extra bleeding through of mental energy intensifies their already higher layers forcing them to work even harder for the same mental reward as other students with lower average layers. That hurts their learning and motivation even more by raising their layers even higher.

Oh, how to fix that? I will help provide students with ways to slowly begin approaching their lives more delicately to slowly understand how their true average stress is much more complex and maintains so many more layers of needless, mental conflicts within both their conscious and subconscious minds which hurt their learning and motivation. Then I would help them slowly understand, resolve, and tweak, - change "according to their own ideas" of what they may see as more wasteful or hurtful values of anger, force, power, improper pace to slowly and permanently understand, resolve, and more permanently lower their many needless layers of mental conflicts as those conflicts come up into their conscious minds. Hopefully they can then continually change and improve their lives over time. Then they can slowly approximate the lower layers experienced by students from more stable, supported environments.

Oh, Also I would teach them how to understand how their higher layers feed into improper pace which also raises their layers even more. I would

show them how students in more secure environments have lower layers and so more naturally approach new mental work more slowly, saving them much wasted energy. Also for country boys and girls, the old admonition to work hard only hurts their motivation even more, causing them to try even harder and raising their layers even higher. I would begin teaching them how to see approaching any new mental work or academic problem as like approaching a new problem on a tractor. We slow down even to the point of just stopping and reflecting on a problem. Then as we gain more knowledge and experience or mental frame in that area, our pace will increase naturally' with greater intrinsic reward which will allow increase in pace intensity as their understanding and ease of connecting to other new knowledge grows. This would eliminate the over pace, hurting so many students with higher layers today.

Oh, and how to recover from past deficits of knowledge and skills? I would teach them how to understand we are all so very equal, but are so greatly affected differently by our individual environments over time causing some students to work much harder and with much less knowledge. It is no one's fault; it's just the way many sincere persons and families have gone about their lives for many years. For this I would tell all students, to just understand, we may be "presently lacking in some or many skills today", but – we can all slowly change and improve over time to slowly understand and learn anything we may have thought was too difficult in the past simply because we were trying to learn the wrong way and with the wrong tools. Now with the right tools we can all slowly regain knowledge and skills over time to slowly catch up with our peers if we desire or at least take comfort in knowing it was never us but many environmental variables at work which we can all continually change in time.

Wow, said Amy, that must have rocked her socks. Yes, said Becky laughing. I bet the teacher was a little shaken up also. Oh, said Sharon, Laura was so afraid of what the teacher was going to say. Yes, said Susan, and Laura was so relieved when Mrs. Frasier had a big smile on her face as she complimented her while handing her paper back to her. Laura even used one of her cute, thank you's. Then we all laughed and continued walking home.

It was beginning to cool off at night. I loved it. And in the mornings, I could wear a sweater. We even had coffee on those cool mornings. I guess Fall is definitely my time of the year. Angela and I were having breakfast that morning. Oh Laura, she said. I am so' glad' Mrs. Frasier liked your paper. Oh', so' am' I', I said. Could you' imagine' having to go through the whole' school'' year' with her holding some' grudge' if it appeared too forward'. You mean, intimidating, said Angela. Yes', I said, I guess that could have easily' happened'. I am so' relieved' now. Angela just smiled and said, oh baby, you will do fine.

That Sunday, I rode my bicycle to the old Baker house down the road. We call it the old Baker house, because many years ago, the Baker's lived there. Over time, the house became too old to keep up. Like many houses in the country areas, they are allowed to just keep existing until they just begin to fall in on their own. I guess the heritage of our old houses are such, we feel obligated to allow them to stand as long as possible. I feel sure the family who lived there had a wonderful history with all their neighbors in Grove Point, probably even related to some of the families. The paint by now had long lost its gloss. The columns holding up the spacious front porch were still in place and many of the windows appeared to be just as sound as in years past. However, you could see what the years of vacancy had done to the house. The roof was beginning to fall in. The Planks of the walls were beginning to warp and become loose. Still, those old houses seem to keep going and going. The builders long ago must have designed them to last forever.

Then Amy rode up on her bicycle. Oh Laura, she said, I guess you are admiring the Baker house. Oh Amy, I said, this old house is so neat. I bet it has so much history. I know it's falling in now, but I love it. I guess my imagination gets away with me, appreciating the spirit and life of the people who lived there. Yes, said Amy, my great-grandparents were Bakers. They lived there many years ago. Oh, I said, so this is like family to you. Yes, said Amy, my grandmother was born

in that house. I know it's old, said Amy, but for me it's a part of my family history. My grandmother told me all of the stories about how they had to work the fields for many hours just to keep their farm going. They had to bring water from the spring for a long time until they had enough money to pipe the water to the house. Then Amy laughed saying, when they finally got electricity, Granny said they felt like they were in hog heaven. Oh, she said, all of those weeds and such have grown so high, but I remember when years ago you could actually go inside. Granny told me so many wonderful stories about their life there. It's a shame things have to change so. It was then I saw some tears coming from Amy. I know she is a strong person, but I also know how much feeling country people have for their history and their families. Oh Amy, I said, and we hugged. Oh, said Amy, laughing, now I know why I don't come here often. This happens. When Laura went to bed, Angela smiled as she read her diary.

That night as I wrote out my homework in my bedroom, I felt my handwriting was becoming much more neat. I could write with a more delicate hand. I kind of enjoyed it. I felt I could write with more flare and control. My science and math was becoming easier for me. I think my much more cute, stable, environment seemed to provide me with much more ease and focus the year before, allowing me to create a much better base of information. I now feel much better able to combine that information with the material I am studying now. I so loved being able to visualize in a slower, more reflective way on the information to see just how all of the parts of the material come together.

I now feel truly grateful to be able to study with so much more delicate ease of thinking to comprehend material I am sure would have been much more difficult for someone with more fears, anxieties, much less social vocabulary, and lack of experience with communication when compared with the much more wonderful array of communication I experience each day, simply for being Laura.

I am beginning to experience life differently. It is as if I am a new person with new characteristics of softness, delicacy, and ease. I feel much more self-conscious of that softness, delicacy and ease as I walk, talk, interact, and able to react to others around me with more thoughtfulness. I feel so much more sensitivity to the body language, words, tones, inflections, and feelings of everyone around me. Oh, it is as if I have been given new emotional eyes and ears to see and hear those around me much more clearly and to reply in more delicate and pleasant ways, making use of all the new information I was feeling.

The next morning at breakfast, I was all smiles. Angela', I asked, have you ever felt' so" delicate' and at ease', it just made you feel so" wonderful"? Oh baby' yes', she said. I guess for me it comes more natural. I guess I have experienced that delicacy and ease for so long, I kind of take it for granted. However, you have only just begun' to feel all of that wonderful' ease' and delicacy. Oh baby, for you it must be a new experience. Oh' yes', I said, I have these moments when I feel so" light' I can just' float" everywhere' I go'. I just love" it.

As the girls and I walked to and from school each day, the girls began to look at me more. One day coming home from school, Sharon said, Laura you seem to have a more cute expression on your face lately. Yes, said Becky, you have this kind of smiling silly look on your face sometimes. I think it's so cute. I am not sure what it is, I said. I think over time I have begun to feel so' much at ease' and at peace', it's like sometimes, I am walking' on clouds'. Oh, said Amy, you are beginning to actually feel like a young lady. Yes, said Susan laughing; when we are not crashing down in emotions, we spend the rest of our time walking on clouds. Then all the girls and I began to laugh and continued our walk home.

Laura's New Life Chapter 16

About a month later my book bag began to show its wear and tear. I tried to patch it. It had been with me the last two years. Also the various stains which began to accumulate over time had finally made my once, very nice book bag look quite dingy not nearly as nice as it was before.

When I got home that day, I took everything out of my old book bag. Then I put it up in my closet. I still didn't want to part with it. Angela also had some shopping to do, so we went together: her to find what she needed and me, to find a new book bag. While Angela went to search for her things, I went over toward the book bag area. I looked over all of the bags, and wanted to try to not get one that matched any the girls had already bought. I finally found one I thought would be nice.

It was waterproof leather in a stone, white, light pink, and light blue finish. It also had a cellphone charger connector. I knew I would need that. I looked inside and saw it would have plenty of room for my books and things. I showed it to Angela, and she was impressed. Oh honey, she said, that bag is so "pretty". I think you are going to love it". I just smiled and helped her with some of the things she needed. As we were leaving the store, Angela said, oh, honey I forgot something. I'll be right back. About fifteen minutes later, Angela came out with a small bag and placed it with the rest of her items.

The next day, the girls and I were waiting for classes to begin that morning. They were all admiring my new book bag. I opened it up and began showing them all of the little compartments it had. As I began taking things out, I was surprised; there in the bottom was a purse with a strap that matched my book bag perfectly. When I took it out, Becky said, you have a matching" purse", and it so "cute". Oh, I said, I didn't" purchase" one. I know" it wasn't in there last" night". Then Susan laughed saying, I bet'en ten to one", Angela had something to do with that. Oh, said Sharon, it looks so" pretty"; I just" love" it. Thank" youu, I said. Oh, I said it isn't empty either. Then I opened the main zipper, I just shook my head smiling. Inside was a cute comb, nail file, hair pins, hair bands, a mirror, light pink lip gloss, and some light pink nail polish, even my school ID.

Oh how sweet" of Angela", said Amy. Yes, I said, I know I will have to carry it as there won't be enough room to keep it and my books in my book bag. Oh, said

Becky, now you have a purse for all of your personals. Then Amy took the light pink lip gloss out of its case, and said, here Laura let me put a little on your lips. Just be still. I just smiled and let her spread some over my lips. Now, she said, roll your lips for me. When I did, Amy said just one more place; there, she said. Now, look in your mirror. When I did, saw a cute girl with light pink lips. Oh, they look so' nice'; Thank youu, I said. Then Susan laughed saying, she gave you everything except a pad. Then we all broke out laughing. Then I said, you know I think it is just' too' cute' to keep in my book bag. I put it over my shoulder and adjusted the straps on it. Oh, said Sharon, it looks so' cute'. Oh, I said smiling, it does' doesn't' it; I love' it. Then we all went to our classes.

That afternoon, the girls and I talked as we walked home. Oh', I said, I know' I can't keep carrying this purse' to school with me. It's too' much', but I will keep my compact, lip gloss, polish, pins, bands, and ID in my bag just in case. At least now I will have a cute' purse' for when I do go off'. I know, said Sharon; it makes it kind of awkward trying to carry a purse and book bag together. We stopped carrying our purses years ago. Yes, said Amy, but you never had a purse before. Now you have a beautiful' purse'. Yes, said Susan smiling, a girl isn't complete' without a purse'. Then Becky said, yes, and you never know when you may need to visit the little' girl's' room. Then we all laughed.

When November arrived, the weather in the south had become cooler and much more pleasant. We would wear our sweaters on most mornings, but still had to remove them in the afternoon. We could ride our bicycles for miles before becoming overheated. With our hair tightly in buns or ponytails and covered, they were never a problem for us. We would ride through town; and then after short breaks, head out to more distant country areas. The air felt so nice, and the woods and fields always had something new to offer.

Oh, said Susan, we haven't been out here in a long time. I know, said Becky. Maybe we are developing more endurance and strength. Oh, I said, I just' love' the peace' out here. It feels so' wonderful'. Then Sharon hollered out, my great grandparents lived in that old house out on that hill many years ago. We looked out over the field and saw her folks' old house, though quite old, it was still standing in the distance. We passed over a little creek just up the road and stopped to check out the stream below.

Oh, said Amy, the water is still flowing. Yes, said Susan, I even see some brim hitting the surface. I hear the water flows into Aaron's Lake way off in the distance, said Becky. We looked around and saw the pecan trees were full of pecans, but still had not dropped their pecans yet. Amy said, they won't really start dropping their pecans until the first frost. In the south we knew that probably wouldn't occur until the middle or late November. My', I said, with so many trees', no' one will be without pecans'. Yep, said Sharon and to think the folks used to have so many, they would use them to fill in the holes in their yards.

That Saturday night, Angela and I had our popcorn and movie adventure. We we would clean up and afterwards we would put on our gowns and allow our hair to dry while having popcorn and a movie. As my hair dried, Angela would sit behind me and comb out my hair. Oh' Angela', I said, we rode our bicycles way' out' of town' today, all' the way' to Shaffer's Creek. It was so' peaceful' out there, and the trees were full' of pecans'. My', said Angela that was a long' way' for you girls to ride'. I think the cool' air helped us a lot', I said, and we are older' now'. Oh, that's right, said Angela we have a couple of trees, but one doesn't put out so well. I know that old field you are talking about. Mr. Morgan used to own that land. He passed away some time ago. Now when the pecans drop, a lot of folks who don't have any trees or have just a few, are allowed to go pick those pecans. I think in a week or two we could be seeing our first frost. Then we can get over there to pick some pecans. Then we went back to our popcorn and movie.

When the Thanksgiving holiday arrived, we were ready. The girls and I needed a break from school. In the South, when we have Thanksgiving, we don't just have Turkey and dressing, we have ham, cabbage, fried squash, biscuits, cornbread, Baked beans, collards, deviled eggs, banana pudding, and cake. Angela and I would never make all of those items for ourselves alone. So we get together and have group gatherings where different folks bring individual items to the gathering. This time it was Amy's mother who held the event. Angela and I made the deviled eggs and fried squash. While it was a kind of gathering, in the south it's rarely formal, so we just wore some jeans and a nice blouse. Angela did braid the two front strands of my hair in braids. I always thought they looked cute.

Amy and the girls were already there when we arrived. Oh said Sharon, you have those cute braids. I just love em. Mrs. Adams saw me, and smiled, saying, oh Laura, you look so cute today; I just love your blouse. Then she gave me a big hug. Thank' youu', I said. The girls were all smiling at me knowing what she was thinking. I just smiled, knowing what everyone was thinking. As when going to any southern gathering, we all ate too much. When it was over, we all hugged and said goodbye. My, said Angela, Mrs. Adams loved your outfit. I know, I said. I am sure' she was also' surprised' to see my developed' breasts'. Oh, yes, said Angela, you have changed a lot since last year. Then we both giggled.

That night Angela waited for Laura to go to sleep and smiled as she read the latest entry in Laura's diary.

Oh, I know my breasts are getting larger and more full now. I had to adjust my bra again. They feel so soft and even more sensitive now, but also very comfortable with my new bras. It's like I am beginning to actually feel like one of the girls. I feel it even changes my body movements. I think having the larger breasts makes me more conscious of my movements and posture. I think it is causing me to move with more delicacy and ease. I kind of like it.

That morning going to school, The girls and I were talking about yes, boys. Oh, said Susan, that boy, Jimmy was asking if you were available. I didn't know what to say. I told jimmy, probably not. Then Becky said giggling, you should have said she was, just to see how Laura would react. We all started laughing and continued on to school.

That afternoon in the hallway, Jimmy came up and complimented me on my new blouse. Oh, Laura, he said you have a wonderful personality in class. I love your comments. Do you, ah, do you, have a boyfriend? Oh', I said, Jimmy', you are so' wonderful' and have the most' pleasant' disposition' and character'. Any' girl' would love' to have you, but - right now, I am so' concerned' with just getting through school. I am so' afraid' to have any distractions'. Life is so' crazy' today, and I feel learning these academic' skills will be so' important' later. Hey, I said, Jimmy' if, and that is if', I ever' wish to have a boyfriend', you' will be my

first' choice; deal? Jimmy then had a big smile on his face, saying that's a deal. Amy and Sharon heard the conversation and were smiling the whole time.

Oh', baby", said Sharon giggling, you just blew' off the cutest' boy' in school'. Yes', said Amy, he is soo" cute', and I am' soo" jealous', she said giggling. Oh, guys, I said, smiling, I am so' sorry', and we could have had so" much' more to gossip' about. Then we all started laughing and continued on to our classes.

That afternoon, the girls were cutting up as walked home. Oh", said Sharon, when Jimmy asked Laura if she had a boyfriend, Laura said, if I ever' wanted' to have a boyfriend' you' will be my first'. Oh, that was so" sweet', said Susan. Yes", said Becky, and I was so" afraid' you wouldn't know what to say. That was so" beautiful' Laura. Then Amy, said giggling, and I am still soo" jealous', and to think he' passed' me" up. Then we all started laughing and continued walking home.

That Christmas, Mom came to visit. By this time, many of the leaves had fallen, and over the last year, I certainly changed. When she drove up she just came up to me and just held me out in front of her, saying, oh' Laura", let me look at you. Oh' my", you are a such' a beautiful' young' lady' now; you look so" pretty'. Oh' baby', then she gave me a big hug. Thank' youu', I said. That week Mom enjoyed having her, ah daughter with her. We would go shopping, with her continually getting me to try on all of the pretty clothes she thought I would look nice in. Then she would end up choosing a few and having me show case them for Angela. Angela was all smiles. Oh Laura, she said smiling, and I thought I was the one who was doting. We just giggled and enjoyed having Mom that week.

In January, we started back to school. The girls and I all had some new clothes given to us during the holidays. Amy had her new white gloves; Susan had her new colorful Stocking cap; Sharon had her new tan coat; Becky had her new furry shoes; and I had my new royal blue wrap around scarf. Needless to say, we were all prepared for the winter.

By now the boys in our classes kind of figured, I was wasn't interested, so they stopped asking. I was relieved. I was thankful for the men/women bathrooms. When needed I would use them instead of the main restrooms. When asked, I would just say, I really enjoyed the privacy they provided. Still I was beginning

to feel uncomfortable using them, as I was certain it would eventually create some conflict.

While walking home with the girls, Amy said, Laura, are you ever thinking of perhaps, ah, becoming a girl, ah, full time. Oh, said Becky giggling, she already is; ooohh", you mean' -. Yes', said Amy, you are bound to have some problems in the future with various conflicts, maybe even in school. Oh, said Sharon, that is a bigg' step'. I know', I said. Up' until now', I have been so" satisfied' with just' being Laura', without having to make any such changes in my life in that area. I would love' to just continue' on' this way without' doing' that. Oh, said Susan, I just hope you will think it out. I love you just the way you are, she said giggling. Then we all started giggling and continued walking home.

That night Angela smiled as she read Laura's diary.

This afternoon as I sat doing my homework, I took comfort with the wonderful atmosphere my delicate and pretty room provided me. I remembered what Amy said about the question, if I had perhaps decided to have my gender truly changed in view of possible, real conflicts down the road. Everyone was interested, saying that would be a be big step, even Susan saying, I love you just the way you are. I smiled and looked at my doll, holding her teddy bear, saying you have it made. You can just sit there and look pretty. I have to mix with all of those ah, humans. I will just have to think more on what I need to do. Hey, I have been doing good all this time. Right now, I feel good, just being Laura. I just smiled and went back to my homework.

The next morning at Breakfast, I said, Angela, yesterday Amy asked me if I ever thought about having my gender truly changed. She pointed out how there could be some major conflicts down the road. Oh, I know sweetie, said Angela, your Mom even discussed it, but she wanted to let you come to that conclusion. She wants you to be happy. Then she said smiling, she knows you are already happy being Laura. That is a lot to think about. I think in time, you will come to the right decision. I just smiled and said, okay, I will just allow more time, to hopefully be able to make the best decision.

That day at school I watched as the girls went to their girl's restrooms while I, when needed, went to one of the few, either or, restrooms. I was beginning to feel more self-conscious about it. Still I felt so comfortable knowing I had so much more privacy. I met Becky and Amy on our way to Science. Oh, said Amy, you have a nice smile on your face. I know I must have really put you on guard yesterday. Oh, no I giggled. I learned my Mom has even discussed it with Angela. Although she hasn't said anything to me, I kind of got the idea, I was doing the right thing by just allowing time and thought to direct me until I was finally able to make the best decision. Becky said, laughing, then I will have an extra ear when I go to the restroom. Then we all giggled and went on to science.

One afternoon, Angela dropped me off by the old pecan orchard on Mr. Morgan's now vacant property. Okay, said Angela, I will pick you up in a couple of hours. Maybe by that time you will have a whole bucket of pecans. I came prepared with a bucket and two large trash bags. I also had a couple of soft drinks, some chips, and a candy bar. Oh, I said to myself as I gazed over the open field of pecan trees. The area appeared to be deserted. I guess the young people didn't pick pecans any more, and the older folks probably didn't want to risk being out there by themselves on such a cool day. Among the distant pecan trees also stood an old white house. I was feeling good. The air although quite cool, felt wonderful as I started off looking around each pecan tree for pecans. It seemed some of the trees would be of a different sort and not producing pecans that year, while other trees had plenty of pecans. As I would stop and pick them up, I would find both large pecans and also the paper shells or smaller pecans. I know why the older folks didn't didn't pick as many. You have to bend down to the ground to pick up the nuts. Also when the nuts fell, you usually remained in one spot as those pecans would hit and roll toward lower and more confined areas, forcing the person to remain in generally the same area picking up multiple pecans. I didn't mind at all, as I was full of energy and in good health.

As I neared the end of two rows of trees, I came upon that old, white house. I had already emptied my bucket a couple of times into a large trash bag and had almost filled my bucket again. By that time I was ready for a break. I opened a drink and sat down beside the old wooden house. I looked around and saw a

young lady picking up a few pecans. I guess she must have been working the trees on the other side of the house the whole time, and I just didn't see her.

Hey, I said, how you doing with the pecans? She just smiled and said, I am doing good dear. I only need a few. Oh honey, she said, you are doing good. It looks like you are finding some nice pecans. I could tell she must have been one of the local country ladies from the area. She was wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat with a white ribbon around it. She even had on a long, old fashioned skirt and cute yellow blouse. She had this big smile on her face. Oh honey, she said, I am so glad for the company. I just love your blouse and hat. They look so cute on you. Thank' youu', I said. Oh', I was going' to take a break' here' anyway', I said. I have two' soft' drinks, chips, and a candy bar. Here, I said, I have more' than I need'. So we sat down on that old front porch and relaxed while enjoying our drinks.

Oh honey, she said, my name is Cindy Williams. What is your name. Oh, I said, my name is Laura Adams. Oh, Laura, she said, I have been living in this area for a long time. I know things have changed for many folks, but I really love the more simple life. I know' I said. I guess things have changed a lot' with everyone' now having to earn income outside' the farm'. Yes, said Mrs. Williams, I see those cars coming down the road every so often. My, they seem very different now. I love' your long' skirt', I said. Those bright' colors' look' so" pretty'. Thank you, she said. Then she smiled, saying I love this skirt, because I can wear it with any of my blouses. She had long braided hair that seemed to go all the way to her waist. I love' your braids', I said. I have never' seen braids' that' long' before.

Oh sweetie, years ago, everyone wore long braids. It helped to keep our hair from becoming entangled in everything. I like' that', I said. I will have to remember' that. We finished our drinks and relaxed some more. Then I said, oh' my'; Angela will be back to pick me up in a half hour. She is going to think I was loafing'. Here Mrs. Williams I said, do' you want some of my pecans'? I have more' than I need now. Oh she laughed, saying that's okay honey. I assure you; I have all the pecans I need.

Okay I said. Well I am going to try to pick a few more before Angela gets back. Maybe I will see you again next time, I said smiling. I gave her a hug, and said,

I will tell Angela I saw you. Okay, said Mrs. Williams. I turned toward the next set of trees and bent down to pick up a few more nuts. Just then I heard the door on the old house shut. Um, I thought, maybe Mrs. Williams is making her home there. I continued to pick around some more trees, until I heard Angela's horn in the distance. I waved to Angela, then smiled and headed back toward the car. As I passed by the old house, I saw the door of the old house was half open. I looked inside to see if Mrs. Williams was still there. All I saw was some old furniture and an old rug that had not been lived in for years. There on the floor was the drink bottle Mrs. Williams had carried off with her. Mrs. Williams wasn't there. I know she wouldn't have had time to walk away without me seeing her. I was so puzzled.

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That afternoon at dinner, I told Angela about meeting Cindy Williams, and how she wore the long skirt and blouse, and had the long braids in her hair. Oh, said Angela, there are very few people living in that area. I know them all. I don't know of anyone named Cindy Williams. Angela I said, it was kind of weird. I had just gotten up to go pick some more pecans and heard the door on the old house close. When you came to pick me up I passed by and saw the door half open. When I looked inside, she wasn't there. Oh, said Angela, the country will play tricks on you. There is so much history here. Maybe next time, you will see her again. I sure' hope' so, I said.

The next few days I was beginning to take more notice in things around me. I kept thinking back to that afternoon when I met Mrs. Williams. I admired her delicacy and ease. It seemed so removed from the more rushed day to day life I see many girls and women living today. It was as if she lived in a completely different time. I began to look at my room in a more delicate way, thinking how would Cindy, Mrs. Williams have looked at things or changed things. I thought about how she talked, in a more southern, delicate way. I loved the way she picked up her skirt so delicately as she sat on the porch. I loved the way she would hesitate for a second, and then say her words in a most kind caring manner. Oh, to be so much at ease and to exhibit such delicacy of spirit and voice. I felt her character and voice offered so much more beauty than any of physical things around me.

That afternoon as I helped Angela prepare dinner, Angela looked at me a little funny. Laura, she said, you sound a little different. Have you been picking up on some older, southern ways? Oh, I may have, I said. I have been thinking back to that time I spent with Cindy or Mrs. Williams that day. I guess I may have picked up some things from her. She was so' different and so' cute' and delicate' by today's standards. I love it, said Angela giggling, I may have to spend some time with her to brush up on my southern rapport.

That night as I put on my gown, I began to imagine how Cindy would have walked in her gown at night or sitting as I was, at my desk. I would consider how she might have held her pen and even how she might have written her letters with a more delicate finesse. As I looked about my room, I thought about

how lavishly my room had been decorated compared with the living room I saw in the old white house, yet the person I saw, Mrs. Williams, made everything wonderful and sweet, just by her presence.

The next day when I got dressed, I took a little more time with my hair. I combed it a little more. I even put in two small braids in front. I chose a brighter colored blouse. I thought more about Cindy, Mrs. Williams. When I joined the girls, Becky seemed to pick up on something first. Oh Laura, she said, you seem different this morning. Your walk seems ah, more delicate. I think it's cute. Thank' youu', I said. Yes, said Sharon, I can tell by the way you are moving your arms you appear to be more at ease. I see it too, said Susan, you appear to have a kind of cute, more delicate smile.

I know, said Amy, smiling, Laura has a boyfriend. Then we all laughed. No, I said, I met a lady while I was picking pecans by the old white house house in Mr. Morgan's pecan orchard. She was so kind and nice, and she had this wonderful personality. Wow, said Amy, she must have been something. Yes she was, I said. She had this cute', straw' hat' with a white' ribbon' tied around it. She also had this long, bright', multi-colored skirt' she said she could wear it with any blouse. She was so different. She said her name was Cindy Williams. Then we continued on to school.

All through the day, I thought of Mrs. Williams and wondered how she would respond to persons around her such as other students and teachers. I would wonder how she would respond to doing what I have been doing everyday such as walking the hallway; sitting at my seat; and talking to other students. I even imagined how she would approach the academics. I felt surely there would be a measure of light, but focused, delicacy, and mildness in everything she did.

When Becky, Amy, and I left history, Becky said, oh Laura your voice seemed more soft when responding to Mrs. Edward's question. Amy said, I loved the way you said, "On page 323, it says, 'The men led the way through the woods to protect their wives and children.'" You said the words so delicately, I know Mrs. Edwards was impressed. Oh, I said, I guess my time with Mrs. Williams helped me to see things in a softer way. I loved her soft voice, movements, and cute expressions. She seemed so full of life. I guess I want to develop some of that

myself. Becky laughed saying, well it's working. You actually sound more like a mature young lady now. Then, we all giggled and went to our next class.

That night, Angela waited for Laura to go to sleep before reading her diary.

Over the next few weeks, I became more conscious of my words, my gait, my posture, and even my gestures. I guess at times when I thought of Mrs. Williams, I would find myself walking and talking more like her or at least trying to sense her character. Laughing; then at other times, the pull of the girls and Angela would bring me back into the real world, and I could be just as spontaneous and silly as they were. I kind of liked it that way. I knew then I could be a normal teenage girl and – if there ever came a time if needed to present myself in some more, prepared and knowledgeable manner, I could do that also. Then I took my teddy bear and went to bed.

The next morning, when I got dressed I just put on some nice jeans and a cute top. I put my hair up in a ponytail and came to breakfast. Oh, said Angela smiling, have you stopped modeling yourself on Mrs. Williams. I giggled, saying I guess for now, but I can still bring her to mind when needed. That's good, said Angela smiling. I would never want you to grow up too quickly. Oh I said smiling, and miss all of the fun with the girls, never.

Weeks later, Angela and I went to Mary's restaurant for an afternoon dinner. I was acting as any normal, teenage girl, cutting up with Angela and the folks in the diner. Oh, Laura, said Mr. Bland, you look so cute today. Thank youu, I said. You look so good since you retired from the hardware store. I know you put in a lot of hours there. Oh honey, said Mr. Bland, I did, but since I was the only one who knew where everything was and how everyone depended on me, it made it hard to rest. Yes, I said, I am glad your son came home to help out. He must be a big help. Oh yes, sweetie, he knows everything I know and is so helpful. Laughing, he said, I guess he finally realized the big city didn't have everything to offer. Oh, I know, I said. I don't think I could have ever made it in a big city.

Then Mary showed up to take our order. Oh, Laura honey, I just love your new blouse. It looks so cute on you. Thank you, I said smiling. I then went to the restroom to clean up. Oh Angela, she continued, Laura is looking like Emily a little more each day. I know, said Angela. She also met a new friend while picking pecans near the old white house in Mr. Morgan's orchard. She did?, said Mary. What's his name?, she asked, and they both giggled. Well, Angela said smiling, well it wasn't a boy; it was a lady. She said her name was Cindy Williams.

Oh my, said Mary; many years ago, there was a teacher who lived in that old white house. Her name was Cindy Williams. The older ones, many years ago, talked about Cindy Williams who taught them in school. They say there was a harsh winter one year; she took pneumonia and died. But that would have been almost a hundred years ago. Oh, said Angela, then Laura met a person, but not in the sense we meet people. Yes, said Mary; was Laura afraid? No, not at all, said Angela. Laura said Mrs. Williams, Cindy, was very kind and gentle. Laura said she even shared her drinks with her. Laura was so impressed with her very delicate ways: her soft voice; her smile; everything. Then for weeks Laura tried to imitate Cindy's delicacy and character. I must say she looked so cute and delicate at times, and her voice appeared to imitate the older, southern talk we heard as children many years ago. Oh, said Mary, Laura must have sounded so sweet. Oh yes she did, Angela said smiling. Now Laura says she knows she can call up Mrs. Williams character any time, if needed.

I returned to our table just as Angela and Mary looked back at me. Then Mary said, oh Laura, we were just talking about you. Yes, said Angela, but it was all good. I am glad to hear it, I giggled.

It was late February, it was still very cold, and the parents or in my case, Angela would take turns giving us rides to school. We really needed it as the morning temperatures would still be in the 30's. We all dressed warm, knowing even in the afternoon, it would still be quite cool and windy. This time Susan's mother, Mrs. White took us to school. Oh Laura, said Mrs. White, I heard you met a nice lady in the pecan orchard by the old white house. Oh yes, I said. Well, said Mrs. White, if you see her again, tell her, Mrs. White said hi. I will, I said.

As I headed off to class, the girls were still talking. Oh Susan, said Becky, It seems your Mom knows Mrs. Williams. Oh, said Susan, she does but only as a distant family member. Mom told me Cindy Williams was my great great aunt. Oh my said Amy. You mean Laura saw a ghost. Yes, said Susan. She died many years ago. Oh, said Sharon, I hope no one tells Laura. She would be so upset. I know, said Susan. You know, I am glad she met her. In a way, Laura has developed some of that wonderful cuteness, Cindy had. Then they all headed to class.

I loved the added dimension of beauty and cuteness Cindy, Mrs. Williams provided me. It gave me a much better, more stable view of how girls and women lived in a more stable time. Even acting silly with the girls and Angela, I still appreciated the more delicate and more relaxed movements and disposition Cindy, Mrs. Williams had. I felt teachers and students were noticing it even when not saying anything. Oh, said Mrs. Howell, you seem to be feeling wonderful lately. You seem to be so carefree and at ease. You appear to have a wonderful sweetness I haven't seen in a long time. Thank' youu', I said. I think I learned some wonderful' things' from someone who had the most' wonderful' personality'. I hope' I never' lose' it. Oh, sweetie, said Mrs. Howell, I hope you don't either; it is so refreshing.

Over the next few months, the girls and Mrs. White never mentioned Cindy, Mrs. Williams again, but I always kept her in mind. I think her character helped me to take even the most trying times in stride. I think her wonderful characteristics may have even bled into the girls and Angela. I think in a way, we all learned from Cindy how to be more at ease and at peace.

That night Angela smiled as she read Laura's diary.

As the school year drew to a close, I felt so much more comfortable about being Laura. I loved the peace and stability being Laura provided for me. I had learned to appreciate the wonderful delicacy, character, and spirit of the many girls and women around me. As I slowly developed those characteristics, I was able to feel so much better about myself. From my many experiences I felt I could see, feel, sense, and relate to

everyone with so much more ease, mildness, and confidence and could create much more comfort, care and support for those around me.

It's been months now since Amy asked me about making a decision on a definite change. I was beginning to think more about what Amy had said, that something might come up where I might run into difficulties later in school or in life living as Laura without going all the way. I am feeling so wonderful with all of the support and care I am receiving. I would be satisfied just to remain as me, the present Laura. Still, I feel I have to plan for the possibility of some unforeseen event which may cause more harm than good by not changing. I will just try to think ahead and plan my steps more carefully in the future.

That Summer, the girls and I enjoyed swimming and fishing at the lake. In the south, someone would always have a barbecue somewhere. We were no exception. We would enjoy swimming and enjoying the cool lake, while our Moms and Angela would be setting up a picnic area near the lake. Still on such occasions, although I felt comfortable with my one piece, I was still timid knowing perhaps something might occur with others in the area. While we were swimming, another group of folks also set up their table nearby. Their kids were there also. Those kids quickly jumped in the lake where we were. About an hour later, our Moms and Angela called us to say they were ready.

As we got out of the water, Amy, said, Oh Laura, that suit looks good on you. All I see is a cute young girl. Thank youu, I said. I was so worried I might appear different in some way. Then she smiled and gave me a hug. Then Sharon came up and said, what's with the hugging? Amy just giggled and said, we were just talking girl stuff. Oh, said Sharon who began to giggle also, oh yes, Laura you do look very pretty in that suit. Oh, thank youu, I said. Then we continued our walk to the picnic table.

When we went back into the water, Mrs. Robins, Becky's mother, said to Angela, Laura looks so pretty in her suit. Yes, she does, said Angela smiling. Laura was unsure about what kind of suit to get, so we picked it out together. Yes, I know many girls are wearing the two piece suits, but Laura looks more mature in her

suit. Yes, said Angela, and I am so happy she is having so much fun with everyone. Oh, said Mrs. Aaron, Sharon's mother, giggling, Laura is acting just as silly as the other girls as they splash each other. Yes, said Mrs. Robins, Laura has sure come out of her shell since she moved here. Yes, said Angela and the other mothers, giggling. The other mothers knew by now Mrs. Robins never realized Laura was not who Mrs. Robins thought she was.

As we were playing, Becky giggled saying, Mom said she saw a boy trying to make friends with you. Oh, how sweet, said Susan, giggling. I started laughing, saying, believe' me', he was much" too' young' for me. Then we all started laughing and went back to playing with the beach ball.

That night as I got ready for bed, Angela was popping popcorn and making a fresh pitcher of tea. When we sat down at the sofa, Angela smiled saying, I heard a boy was talking to you today. Yes', I giggled, he was so" nice' and seemed so' sincere'. Then I smiled, saying, I learned from Amy and Sharon to build them up at the same time I let them down. I said, you are so' cute' and so' kind'. Any' girl would love' to have' you. I just told him, I was so' focused' just trying to learn enough skills' in school, I didn't have time' for anything else. Then Angela said smiling, everyone loved your suit today. Oh, I know I said smiling. I guess everyone was so surprised I could look good in a one piece. You helped me pick out just the right suit. I feel so much better now about being me. Then we giggled and went back to having our popcorn and watching our movie.

The next day, Angela told me she got a call from Emily saying their cousin Jacob had died. Oh my I said, I remember Jacob. He always had so much life. Yes, said Angela, he was a wonderful person. Kate told Emily, he died of a heart attack just yesterday. They will be having the funeral in Atlanta this Friday. Oh I said, that will be in two days. Yes, said Angela, the family will be spending the night at Kate's house tomorrow night and then go to the funeral the next day. Oh, I said, I will have to make a decision. I know my father and Kate knew me as Larry, but now I have been living as Laura for the last two years. I am not sure what to do.

Oh, said Angela, I have a wonderful idea. What do you say, we rent a room in Atlanta for tomorrow night. You can go as Laura. Then when we go to the

funeral, you can sit with me toward the back, so we don't have to create any needless attention. Then when they have the dinner afterwards, Angela smiled, you and I will be just as cute and graceful and still be there to comfort Kate and the family. Oh, I said, smiling, believe me, for the last two years, I have learned so much more about being Laura than I ever knew about being Larry. Then Angela gave me a big hug saying, you and I will do fine; just wait.

The next day, while all of the other relatives were staying with Kate and the family, Angela reserved a room at the Country Inn, and we drove to Atlanta that morning. Although we were already prepared for the funeral, clothing wise, it was still early, so Angela treated me to some city shopping. Oh, there were so many people there much like where I lived before. I think I had gotten so used to Grove Point, I still had to adjust. Everything seemed so fast paced. Still when Angela took me into some ladies shops for clothes, we both felt at home. Oh, Angela, I smiled, we don't have to get torn jeans. We already have em. You're right said Angela. We found some nice skirts and tops for the summer. Some of the ladies could tell we were more country and lightened up their conversations with us.

Hey ladies, said the sales person, yal finding some nice things? Oh, yes, said Angela. We are here for a day and wanted to find something different. Oh yes, said the sales lady. My name is Missy. If yal need anything, let me know. Oh thank youu, I said. You have so many cute clothes. She just smiled and said, you're so welcome. Angela got carried away. She got me a couple of new blouses, two summer gowns, and a dress. Oh, Angela, I hope Mom is paying for this. Oh, she is, said Angela. She even told me where to shop. When we got back into the car, I said, oh, Angela, I had so much fun shopping and browsing, I had completely forgotten this was my first trip out of Grove Point as Laura. I had so much fun and saw so many pretty things. Good, said Angela.

Laura's New Life Chapter 18

That night we checked into our room. The lady was very kind, saying, I have your reservations: Angela Foster and Laura Adams. Yes, said Angela. By that time we were tired and ready for bed. Angela took out one of the new gowns for me to wear to bed, and began rolling my hair for the next day. When she was finished, we made some coffee and watched a movie.

I must have fallen asleep during the movie and woke up in the morning in my bed. Angela had already gotten ready and then waited for me to take a shower before removing the hair cover and rollers. Then she combed out the curls until my hair was in nice waves. Oh, thank youu, I said. I guess this will be a pretty special occasion for me, and also with family here. Yes, said Angela, for some it will be first time they will have seen you as Laura and not Larry.

I thought I was going to wear my black dress from the last funeral, but Angela had other plans. She uncovered a new dress she said Emily had ordered from that store and didn't tell me. It was a lavender, a line dress with short sleeves covered in floral lace. There was a delicate ribbon that tied into a bow in the front. It was so pretty and yet so mild. Oh, Angela, I said, that dress is so pretty. Is it right for a funeral? Oh yes, said Angela, it has a very nice color for a funeral. Also Emily said she wants you to really look nice when you go. Oh my, I said, now I know why. I need to make a strong case for me as Laura. Yes, said Angela. That is why Emily chose this dress and had me fix your hair just so. When I looked in the mirror, there was no trace of Larry, just a very pretty young girl in a nice lavender dress. Oh, Angela, I haven't dressed up this way in so long. I love it. Thank youu and Mom. Angela just smiled and put her hands on my shoulder, saying, you will do wonderful. Then we packed our bags and left for the funeral.

As we drove up to the church, there were cars already parked in the parking lot. When we came inside, Emily was already there and came up to me, saying, oh my, Laura, you look so pretty, and she gave me a big hug. Then she whispered, I just love that dress. Thank youu Mom, I said. Then when she stood back and looked at my hair, she said, Oh Angela, she whispered again saying, she looks so pretty. Then one of the attendants directed us to the family area. Mom and Dad sat on the front near Kate, while we sat one aisle back on the other side.

Kate was looking at me and then whispering something to Mom I couldn't hear. Emily, she whispered, Who is that young girl sitting beside Angela? Oh, said Mom whispering back saying, that is Laura. Oh, she is beautiful, said Kate whispered back. I just love that dress, and her hair looks so pretty.

Somehow I guess my presentation as Laura sealed the deal. After the sermon, Kate just looked at me and gave me a big hug, saying, Laura I love your outfit. It is so pretty. Thank youu, I said. Kate, I know you miss Jacob, but he is coming back. Oh she said, winking at me. I know he is asleep and will come back to us on the last day. Oh Laura, I am so glad you have that hope also. I just smiled saying, yes Kate with that hope we have so much more to live for. Oh yes, she said. Then we all got into our vehicles and went to the grave site for the burial.

Afterwards, Dad, Mom, Angela and other members of our family went to the Country Buffet for dinner. Some of my cousins surely didn't recognize me, and that was good. However, they were all so sweet and kind. One boy, Shawn, who was younger than me, heard my name was Laura. He said I hear you are one of my cousins. Yes, I said. I am Emily's daughter. Oh, he said, I didn't know Aunt Emily had a daughter. Then just afterwards he said, You look so pretty. Maybe we can visit one day. That sounds wonderful, I said. I love the way you helped find places for everyone. You look so handsome in your suit. Thank you, he said.

While Dad didn't say anything, I could tell he was still impressed at how cute I had become over time. When we first met, he just stared at me, but after a while, I think all of the time and influence Angela, Mom, and the girls had on me over the past two years finally honed my appearance so much as Laura, that toward the end, even he began to smile and see me more as Laura and not as Larry. I just smiled back and mouthed, thank youu.

Then I had to make a decision, not a big decision, but a decision nevertheless. I needed to use the restroom. At Grove Point the school had men & women restrooms and in town, the rooms were so infrequently used they would only have one stall which could be locked. However, here, it was different. The restrooms contained multiple stalls with ladies coming and going. While I knew I could manage my privacy, I didn't want to, in any way, infringe on the privacy of others. I then whispered to Angela, saying I need to go to the restroom. I hope I

can do so without interfering with others. Angela smiled and whispered back, saying, we can do this. Then she and I went toward the ladies room. Angela looked inside and allowed the one lady using a stall to finish and leave. Then she and I went inside where I closed the door on a stall. Then Angela patiently waited until the restroom had cleared again. Then we left as calmly as any two ladies could.

That night when Laura went to sleep, Angela read Laura's diary.

That afternoon when we arrived home, we were both very tired. Angela helped me out of my dress, and I took a well deserved shower. After my time in the restaurant, I began to think about more situations I might fall into, even at school next year. I was thinking I might even do fine if I stayed in Grove Point, but life could change, and I might be thrust into a whole new world. What if I had an accident of some kind and then had to be examined? What would happen then, especially with me being a student at the school? This could create problems for everyone. I was beginning to feel uncomfortable about not feeling as complete now. I felt any connection with Larry would only allow for more harsh treatment and cause me to lose all of the wonderful care and support I have enjoyed for so long here at Grove Point.

The next day, Mom called Angela. They must have talked for about an hour or two. When Angela hung up the phone, she had a smile on her face. She said, Laura, Emily thought you looked so nice at the funeral, she says she wants you, me, and her to get away for a few weeks. That sounds wonderful, I said. Where are we going? Well, said Angela we are going to spend a week in Atlanta and then three weeks with Kate in North Carolina. Then Angela said, Emily has a surprise for you. She is coming down in a couple of days, then we will all go to Atlanta. Okay I said. Then I helped Angela in the garden until it got too warm outside.

A couple of days later, Mom drove down and met us in the front yard. We were all packed and ready. After a nice lunch, we all climbed into her large car and

went to Atlanta. We stayed there about a week, and then when Emily and Angela were ready, we traveled on to Kate's house in North Carolina.

It was so nice; it was on the beach. Mom, Angela, and I sat out on the beach in our suits in the early morning and came back in when it got warm. Then at night, Kate would either have fish and shrimp or take us out to some restaurant she loved. I was able to try on some of the new cute blouses and skirts Emily and Angela had bought for me. I was surprised when Emily and Angela went shopping without me. Then I was more surprised when they brought in a couple of modest, but new, two piece swim suits for me to try on. Oh, I said, they are so cute. I couldn't wait to try them on. I wound up modeling the two suits for Emily, Angela, and Kate. Oh, baby, said Mom, those suits look so pretty on you. Then Angela said, oh yes, you look so nice. Then Kate said, oh honey, you will have to beat the boys off you. Then we all giggled.

That night, Emily, Angela, and Kate smiled as they read Laura's dairy.

Oh, these past two weeks in Carolina have been so wonderful. I loved sitting out on the beach in the morning or late in the afternoon. I loved the ocean breeze and the cooler air late in afternoon, night, and in the morning. When going to sleep, I could hear the roar of the waves coming in and crashing on the beach. I will have to have those sounds piped in when we go back to Grove Point. I feel so spoiled; Mom, Angela, and Kate almost take turns looking after my every need. I know with Kate's, Mom's, and Angela's southern cooking I will probably gain about 10 pounds while I am here. And I so love the wonderful fish and shrimp. I think I will have to have it shipped in when we go back to Grove Point.

That last week in North Carolina, I began to move around more. We all walked on the beach and picked up shells. We stopped at some local stores and bought some souvenirs. Many of the girls and ladies there wore cute floral, skirts and dresses. It was as if they were advertising the beauty of the area. Oh, I said, you don't see many girls wearing flowers in their hair at Grove Point. I think they look so "cute". The last day before we went back to Grove Point, we

sat in an open air restaurant on the beach that night; the air was beginning to cool. The servers were all very friendly and made all over me. I loved it.

The next day everyone hugged Kate and thanked her for sharing her wonderful place with us. I was feeling much better. We had such a wonderful time. When we finally arrived back home late that night, we were all very tired. Mom and Angela kind of led me to my room and allowed me to go to sleep, while they unpacked everything. Then they all went to bed.

The next day, I woke up and realized I was back in my room with all of my things just as they were. I loved being in Carolina. I had to say I had the time of my life, but finally coming back home also felt good. That morning, we were all so full from that feast on the beach, we just enjoyed some Iced tea and cinnamon toast. Oh, I said, that trip was something. Yes, said Emily, and you did wonderful. Thank you, I said. Yes, said Angela, you did so well. Oh, I giggled, I feel so wonderful also. That afternoon Mom went back home. Then Angela and I went about just taking it easy, just doing little things.

About a week later, it was August, and the girls came to visit. Oh, said Amy, when you told us yal were going on a nice vacation for about 4 weeks, I couldn't believe it. Oh, yes, I said, we had a wonderful time on the coast in North Carolina. Oh, said Becky, you appear to walking a little slow. Well, I said, we rented bicycles at the beach, and while avoiding a car that ran a stop sign, I ran into a ditch. I am getting better. I just have some bruising to heal. Oh, said Sharon, you didn't break anything did you? Oh, no, I said. We had a doctor check me over really well, nothing broken. Then Susan said, um, I am just, so glad you are okay. Oh Susan, I said, smiling, I am doing wonderful now. Then I saw a what appeared to be a very relieved smile on her face. Then Angela treated the girls and I to Mary's restaurant for lunch.

It was almost August now. I was feeling much better. I was able to do more work, helping Angela in the garden. We still worked wisely and would stop when the sun got high. We almost picked everything we needed, and there were only a few vegetables left to pick. I had managed to find a straw hat like the one I saw Cindy wearing, and I placed a white ribbon around it with a bow to match the one she was wearing. Angela just smiled, saying, so that is what her hat looked like. Yes, I said, it's just like the hat she wore. I love it.

The girls and I went to the theater that night to watch a movie. It was entitled, Rose Thorns. I wore one of floral skirts and top. The girls loved it. Amy said, let me know where you got that skirt. It is so 'cute'. Yes, said Sharon giggling, it looks too sophisticated for Grove Point. I know, I said. It just reminds me of sitting in the beach restaurant and hearing all the waves crashing on shore. Oh, and the servers were so kind. This one server kept coming back to our table and asking if we needed anything. Angela finally began to giggle, saying he is coming back because of you. I think he has a crush. Oh no, I giggled in jest, and to think we were leaving the next day. Oh, said Becky, you should have stayed a few more days. Then we all giggled.

During the movie, I could see the girl was so in love with the boy she was dating. Then just before they got married, her fiance was called away to war. She kept writing letters to him, telling him of all the things going on at home and the plans she had for him when he returned. He would write back, saying he was staying low, for her not to worry. At the end, she learned her fiance had died in combat and would not return. At the end, all the girls had some tears in our eyes. Oh, said Susan, that was so good until the end. Yes, said Becky, still shedding a tear. That was so 'sad'. I know, I said. Oh', and to think they had their 'whole' life' ahead of them.

That night Angela smiled as she read from Laura's diary.

It is late in August now. I am more than ready for school. Angela, Mom, and Kate have spoiled me rotten. I didn't need a thing. I was also feeling sooo much better about being me. I felt so relieved and so free to be able to go anywhere and any place and know, I will be seen as Laura. I haven't told anyone and don't plan to, as that may in some way give away the very need I have to be seen as Laura. Still I feel so much better now.

When we went to school that first day, I think I wanted to, even more to be like Cindy. I felt so much more confident now and oh so much more free. Oh, said Amy, you have that Cindy look. Yes, said Sharon, smiling, I can see the extra delicacy in your walk. Susan was still worried about me for some reason, saying, I am so happy you are feeling so good, she said. Becky answered her,

giggling, saying, why shouldn't she?; She got to sit on the beach with all of those cute boys and browse all of those beautiful clothes. Yes, Becky, I said, that's why. Then I smiled and winked at Susan. Then Susan's mouth dropped open, then she smiled saying, oh', yes, that's what it is. It was all those boys and all that shopping.

All through the day, it was like a light came on saying, I am Laura with all of the cuteness and personality of all those wonderful people I have come to know. I would go through my classes as if all the students and teachers were there, but I was a completely separate, independent being, interacting as freely as anyone and with so much more freedom and confidence. I saw it as a need to model the same wonderful kindness, ease, stability, peace, and care I had been receiving.

That afternoon coming home, the girls seemed more open about my more delicate appearance. Oh, said Amy, in math, you were so' calm' and relaxed. You had the same delicacy you had when you went through that Cindy', stage'. Yes, said Becky smiling, you seem to have that ease you had before. I noticed it also, said Sharon, You seemed to be smiling' the whole' time'. Then Susan, said smiling, I am pretty' sure' it's not a boy. Then we all giggled and continued walking home.

When I got in, Angela had made a nice salad and some tea. As we sat and ate, Angela smiled, saying, Laura, I am seeing a more delicate Laura now. You must be bringing out Cindy more often. Yes, I said. I feel so much more free now, if only just to remove much of today's over compensation of strength and power many girls and women feel they must have today to be accepted and compete. They don't know they already have that wonderful beauty within them through the 'present inner-security' society is providing for them by giving them so much kind, caring, verbal interaction, and support. It would be so wonderful if all girls could meet Cindy Williams and know the true inner-beauty all girls and women can develop in time.

Now when I rode my bicycle to the various houses in town to deliver coats and gloves, I felt more free to be as I could imagine Cindy to be with all of her soft, delicate ways. At Mr Benning's house, I felt I could communicate in a more open, well, feminine ways. I felt more comfortable with more movement and

grace. Oh, Mr. Benning, Angela had me deliver your new coat to you. She's says if the sleeves are too long she will take them up. Oh, said Mr. Benning, you are that pretty girl I see riding through town at times. Tell Angela, she has a pretty niece. I will Mr. Benning, I said. When I went to Mrs. Payton's house, she was still hanging her laundry on the line. When I rode up, she looked at me and smiled, saying oh honey, did you come to help me hang my clothes on the line? Well, not really I said. I did come to bring you your new gloves. Oh, she said, sweetie, these are so beautiful; Angela was even able to find the purple lace trim. I love them. Then I helped her hang up the rest of her clothes on the line. Oh, said Mrs. Payton, you have a certain character I haven't seen in a long time. I remember as a little girl, watching the older women carry themselves in much the same manner and voice as you. You remind me so much of that very stable time long ago. Oh, thank youu, I said.

Angela waited until Laura went to bed before reading her diary.

Oh, I think the more I became more comfortable with being Laura, I also slowly began to feel, more sensitive to the cute things in my room. I became more sensitive to my words, tones, and the more delicate way my tones moved up and down the scale. I became much more sensitive to the colors and fabrics of my clothing. Oh, I felt with each day, I would begin to sense something new, even more subtle, which I could use to enhance my ease, stability, and my inner-security, making me less dependent on the more physical things around me.

Laura's New Life Chapter 19

As we were walking to school, Amy and Sharon were talking about how the boys in our classes were all the time, trying to answer the questions from the teacher, sometimes without raising their hands. I just smiled saying, I know as girls we are given so much love, care, and support simply for being girls. A lot of that support has enabled us to be in higher classes today. But those few boys, even in our classes, while doing good, are not given love and honor just for being boys. For many boys, they have to keep generating achievement to keep receiving love and honor from others. If they were to fail in some way, they will be given more harsh treatment by their parents, teachers, and others.

So boys may feel the need to seek out ounces of achievement by answering questions even out of turn. Oh, and those are the higher achieving boys. Many of the other boys due to much less support have already given up on school years ago and are now just coasting along in lower classes and putting up with more simple, busy work and more patronization from uncaring teachers. I feel so fortunate to be receiving so much more wonderful care, support and yes, love simply for being Laura. That is why we as girls do not feel the need to answer out of turn, for we are much more content, secure, and more satisfied with our lives. Oh, said Susan, I don't think I would ever want to be a boy. Yes, said Becky, giggling, I would have to give up all of my cute clothes. Then we all laughed and continued on to school.

Around November, the school administration took it upon themselves to close off some the men/women bathrooms. When Becky and I approached the one I usually use at that time, we saw the note saying, "**For Teachers and Administration only**". Okay, said Becky, this is no problem. The girls restroom is just down the hall. I said, okay, Becky, if you will check to see to see if it clear, I will use one of those stalls. Becky smiled and said, good. When it was clear, I went in and closed the stall. When I was finished, I waited until Becky gave me the okay. Then we left the restroom.

This worked fine for many days. However, one day, I was in the hallway by myself and needed a restroom. I peeked inside and found it empty. Then I waited until the girls who came in while I was there, left. Then I left. Next time I made sure one of the girls was with me when I needed to go.

I was beginning to feel more confident now about using the girls restrooms. When I would find myself alone, I learned to wait until it was almost class time before going in and then quickly using a stall; then going to class.

That night at dinner, I told Angela about the school closing down the teacher restrooms to students. Angela just smiled, saying, oh baby, you will get used to it. I know you have no ill-intent for the other girls using the restrooms, and you so value their privacy. But know this, you are just as much a girl to me and Emily as you need to be. Honey, you have just as much right to be there as any girl. Just see it as a new learning experience. I took a deep breath and said, okay, I said, I will get used to it. Good girl, said Angela, smiling. It was so comforting having Angela give me the support I needed to do what I really had to do.

The girls so supported me during my time of learning how to use the ladies public restrooms. As we were walking to school, Amy said, I saw Laura actually going into the ladies restroom by herself. Way to go, said Sharon, giggling; those girls are not going to bite you. Then Becky giggled, saying, I know some girls who will. Then we all started laughing and went to class. Susan was walking with me to our first class saying, I hope you gain more confidence. Oh, I said smiling, I will. Then we entered our class.

That night Angela waited until Laura went to sleep to read her diary.

Over the next few weeks, I began to feel more comfortable about using the ladies restrooms. I learned to feel just as confident as any girl should. I also learned a lot more about the ah, the activities of many of the girls, and ah, also the boys in the school. Oh, if I had an evil heart for blackmail and a good recorder, I could retire before leaving high school.

The girls and I had ridden into town to check out all the new things in the shops. We searched the clothing stop first; then the second hand/antique shops; finally we came to the jewelry store. We were looking at all of the wonderful jewelry on display. Oh my, I said, I bet the older country folks would, as some might say, 'raise a hissy' to pay all of that money for jewelry. I know, said Amy; we have to purchase costume jewelry. Yes, said Susan, smiling, but it passes, because no

one here can tell the difference anyway. Then in the back, we saw the ear piercing chair. All of the girls had their ears pierced but me.

We were all looking at the various studs, hoops, dangles, and drops. Oh', these are so' pretty', I said. Well, said Becky, are you ready to get your ears pierced? Oh, I said, I never' thought' about that, but you' guys' look so' cute' when you wear yours'. Just then a lady from the back came up to us smiling, saying, girls did you find something you like. Then Becky began nudging me toward the sales lady. The sales lady smiled, saying my name is Elizabeth. I am thinking this is the young lady who may want to have her ears pierced. Then all the girls began nodding their heads in approval. Oh sweetie, what is your name, said Elizabeth. My name is Laura. Okay Laura, why don't you look around at the various ear rings, and let me know when you find something you like.

When we went back to the display, I said, oh my, what do I choose?; there are so many. The girls then began picking up various ear-rings and putting them up to my ears and then debating on which ones. Guys, since these will be her first ear-rings, what do you say we go modest for right now. Oh, I said, they all' look so' pretty'. Then Susan picked up some rose colored studs. Yes, said Sharon, those will be pretty and not stand out. Then Amy picked out some nice little heart-shaped ear-rings. These will also look pretty. Then Becky said, I think they will go nicely with her face. Then the girls had me look at the two ear-rings. Oh, they are so cute, I said. Yes, I think they will be fine. Then we all turned and went back to where Elizabeth was waiting. She smiled when she saw my choice, saying, oh honey, those rose studs will look nice on you.

I sat in the chair, and Elizabeth smiled saying, okay sweetie, let me clean your ears really good. She gently brushed my hair back behind me. Then she took some antibiotics and cleaned both ears really well. There now, she said, now be perfectly still while I mark your ears. She marked them at the lower ends just as I chose. Then working from the side where I couldn't see, she said, okay this will sting just a little. Then I felt a some pressure and a prick. Then a second later, she said, finished with that ear. Then a second later, I began feeling some pain. Oh, I said, now it hurts. All the girls smiled; then Becky said, you did good, baby. Now sweetie, said Elizabeth, you did good; now for the other ear. I then felt quick prick with a little sting.

There, all done, she said. Then I could feel the pain in both ears. Ooeee', I said. It hurts. The girls all giggled. Oh baby, said Amy, you did wonderful. Then Elizabeth held the mirror up for me to see my newly pierced, ear-rings. Ooeee', I said again, but oh', they look so' pretty". Then Elizabeth gave me instructions on how to keep them clean and how not to irritate them until they were well. Then I remembered saying, oh, how am I going to pay for this. Then Sharon giggled, saying, Angela gave us the money. We already paid for everything. I just shook my head and smiled, saying oh Angela. On the way out, the girls made all over my new ear-rings. Oh, I said, how long will they hurt? Becky smiled saying, it will hurt less and less until finally you won't feel anything. Ooeee', I said.

When I came home, Angela said, Oh, Laura, let me see your new ear-rings. She faced me and then pushed my hair behind my ears and looked. Oh, baby, she said, they look so pretty. Thank' youu', I said. I know there was some pain involved, she said, but you will love them. Now when you dress up, you will have pretty ear-rings to wear. I know, I said. I know how the girls look with their pretty ear-rings.

Although they still felt sore, that night I couldn't help, repeatedly taking peaks at my new ear-rings in the mirror. They looked so pretty and feminine. While Angela and I were watching the movie, Angela would be looking over and smiling at how cute they looked. I would just smile and shake my head. We both loved them.

Over the next week, they hurt less, and I could enjoy them more. I was beginning to feel just like the other girls, yes, even going to the ladies rooms. I felt so much more free to be as soft and as feminine as anyone.

At Christmas, Mom came up as usual to visit. She loved my pierced ear-rings. She even bought me some more pretty ear-rings before she left. She was so thrilled to have a young daughter she and Angela could dote over. And I was so lucky to have such doting persons in my life.

Later that year they were having the prom. Amy had a date of course and so did Sharon. I was certain I wasn't going to have a date, but also Susan and Becky chose not to have a date. Still, we loved dressing up for the prom and having a wonderful time. We were all decked out in our fanciest dresses, and our hair

fixed just so. Oh, all the girls looked like princesses. Each of us made all over the other girls pretty outfits and hair. It was so cute. For many girls it was perhaps their only chance to really dress up and go out. Even for those without dates, it was a wonderful experience. When they crowned the queen, we all applauded and made over the queen. She was very pretty and very sweet. I think they made the best choice. Then Becky giggled, saying, are you jealous you weren't chosen? Not at all, I replied, giggling; that crown would mess up my hair.

The next week, we were leaving school together. I was trying to catch up to the girls who were already across the street waiting for me. As I crossed intersection, a driver pulling out of the parking lot, didn't see me and hit me just enough to knock me over. The driver stopped immediately and came over me to see if I was okay. It all happened so fast, I didn't know what to think. Then the girls all came over to me to see if I was okay. Oh, said Amy, don't move; we need to have someone check you over. Yes, said Susan, you may be hurt some where and not know it right now. Oh, said Becky, let me take your bag for you. About that time, Susan flagged down a teacher who came over and helped me onto a school golf cart. Then they carried me off to the nurse's office.

The girls all waited outside wondering what would happen now. They were whispering, saying oh, what are they going to say when the nurse finds out about Laura? I don't know, said Sharon. Maybe they won't check there. Oh, said Becky with a worried look, believe me; she will check everywhere. Oh, I feel so bad for Laura. They must have waited for over an hour as the nurse checked Laura out completely. By that time Angela had been called and was waiting with the girls. Oh, said Angela, how bad is it? Well said Amy, it wasn't so bad, but we are worried about Laura being discovered. Oh, that would be bad, said Angela. Then Angela smiled and winked, saying, you know girls, I think Laura will do just fine, trust me. Then all the girls, with the exception of Susan, looked at Angela with a puzzled and still worried look.

Finally the nurse came out and said, Laura is doing just fine. I checked her out thoroughly. She has a bruise on her hip where the car hit her. Other than that, she is perfectly fine. The girls were all, very happy, but also very surprised. Oh, I can't believe it, said Amy out loud. That is so good, said Sharon.

Then, Angela and the girls helped me to the door and to Angela's car parked outside. Then she drove us all home. Oh, said Becky how did the nurse miss the, ah, you know? Then Susan said smiling, I think I know, I but didn't want to say. Then Angela said, smiling, yes Susan, our little vacation to North Carolina also involved a stopover in Atlanta. Oh, said Sharon, you mean?, yes, I said. Oh my, said Amy. You never told us. I know, said Angela, but I could never be sure if disclosing it might get out somehow. Oh, said Amy, you probably knew something might come up in the future, you would not have to be prepared for. Oh, said Susan, I am just so glad you are still healthy. Yes, I said, being Laura is wonderful, but may still come at the risk of being seen differently.

The last day of school, we all hugged and cried. I thought of all of the wonderful people who helped me to become Laura. I was so grateful for all the support they provided me. I felt I was now ready for anything that might arise. After school, I stayed in Grove Point, but made sure to take at least a week for a vacation with Kate in North Carolina. The girls and I would continue to take a few classes during the fall and winter at the local community college just to keep our minds active and to also develop more skills necessary to earn some income in this new information age. I will always remember those very good people who I came to know and appreciated for the wonderful character and spirit they provided me.

The girls came by the house today. Angela, said Amy, we need to get Laura ready for college. I Know, said Angela giggling, but I will need her help for the garden. I don't mind I smiled; I know the value of real vegetables. I'll do both. Yes, said Sharon, I know even though Laura is old enough to drive, I saw her putting new tires on her bicycle. Hey, I still love my bicycle, I said. No telling when we will need it to ride to Morgan's orchard. Oh, said Susan, you have become so cute, you will have to find a boy in college. Oh, I am still just happy just being Laura, but- Laughing, I will take note of all of the nice boys and send them to you. How about me, said Becky? Oh I said, I will send all of the Geeks and the bad boys to you. Thanks, said Becky. Then we all laughed as Angela served us pie and ice cream.