



Yes, I Can Too!



Lynn McDaniel

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All the characters in the book have been renamed, except for my family and those who are deceased. Any name that you might recognize is purely coincidental.



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*I lovingly and gratefully
dedicate this book to
Johnnie and Glenda Wood
of Pell City, Alabama.
I thank God that He used you to
direct my life to a path that
I will take to eternity.*







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Thinking Gratefully

After the publication of *Yes, I Can!* I was astonished by the large number of letters, cards, and emails that I received telling me how my story touched their lives. To say that I was overwhelmed is an understatement. I am humbled that my handicap could bless, touch, and help as many lives as it has. I give God the glory for my handicap. It has made me who I am.

Even before *Yes, I Can!* was published, my dear friend, personal and professional mentor, Jane McWhorter, told me over breakfast that we enjoy together occasionally, “You can’t stop at the age of eight! Your readers are going to be left hanging. That’s not fair, Lynn.”

When I swallowed my next bite of scrambled eggs, I also swallowed my plans to go back to writing Bible lessons, which I was very much looking forward to. I plainly understood her reasoning, and also knew all the work that suddenly lay ahead for me. I will be forever grateful to her for sharing her insight in a way that only Jane can do.

I cannot say thank you enough to my two wonderful proofreaders: my professional and personal mentor, Jane McWhorter of Fayette, Alabama; and my dearest friend, Margie Austin, of Montgomery, Alabama. Out of their extremely busy schedules they sacrificed many, many hours to help me with this work. I will be forever grateful. A work like this cannot be done alone.

I would like to thank the many members of the University Church of Christ in Montgomery, Alabama, who kept encourag-



ing me by continually asking me how my book was coming. No one will ever know how much their support meant to me.

I would like to thank my friend, Cindy Warmack Spangler, who answered many, many grammatical questions. I'm sure there were many times that she wanted to run and hide when she saw me coming.

I am indebted to Lydia Naylor of Valdosta, Georgia, for loaning me the items displayed on the cover of this book. Thank you, Lydia. Your life and influence of many years has made me a better person.

I would be completely remiss if I did not extend my deep heartfelt appreciation to Mr. James Andrews, C.E.O. and founder of Publishing Designs, Inc. of Huntsville, Alabama. James is the most gentle gentleman I have ever known. His belief in me, even during an extremely difficult personal time, and his patience while I had to work through it, has left an indelible mark in my heart. What an incredible example he is to me. My life has changed in a very positive way through his association. I am a better Christian, a better person for knowing this fine man.

I'd like to thank my faithful readers for waiting.

Above all, I thank God who gave me the strength to put my life back together enough to make this long-awaited work a reality. God becomes mightier and mightier to me each day that I live.



Introduction

Anyone who has lived on this earth for several decades will know what I mean when I say that life is something! The writing of *Yes, I Can!* was, as with writing any book, long and arduous. But the reaping of the rewards has been sweet and ever so rewarding. Never had I dreamed I could touch so many lives from a keyboard. But the boxes and boxes of cards, letters, and emails that continue to come in over five years later tell me otherwise. I have been ever so humbled to learn how the book, *Yes, I Can!* has touched more hearts than I can count. It really has been something! The English language has no words that can adequately express what each one means to me. Thank you.

It is you, my dear readers, who encouraged me to write this sequel. It is you and your responses that make the long nights worth it and the sleep ever so sweeter. My schedule prevents me from answering and expressing gratitude for each dear response I have received, so this is my response to you. I pray *Yes, I Can Too!* will bless your hearts and make your burdens lighter. Especially, if you are a parent who is raising a handicapped child, may this be an encouragement to you. It wasn't easy for my parents to raise me, but through persistence, they did it. And so can you.

More especially, whatever your age, if you are living with any type of handicap, it is my prayer that this book will encourage you to believe in yourself; that you can do whatever you set your mind to. I have learned that with God's help, I can reach



any goal I want. Please contact me if I can be of any help to you. You will find my contact information in the back of this book.

As I write, I see many walking down the sidewalk past my house. They are an infinitesimal part of the world population, but in my eyes, they represent the whole. Some are smiling as if they don't have a care in the world. Some walk slowly, wearing frowns that might mean trouble at home. Others stare ahead as if their hearts are bearing tremendous burdens. Isn't that true of the earth's population? It's the latter group to whom I would like to hand copies of *Yes, I Can!* and *Yes, I Can Too!* and bless their lives. I just pray that this book will cross their paths somehow.

How happy I am that it crossed yours! I pray it will enhance your life in a very positive way.

Thinking Humbly,
Lynn McDaniel





CHAPTER ONE

Yes, the Bockworm

It felt wonderful to be back to work as a writer. I had been living in my house for about three weeks after moving two states over from my hometown of Charleston, South Carolina. Between unpacking and having three weeks of company, things were finally settling down. I had friends in this town, and also in nearby towns. It was a joy seeing people I hadn't seen in a long time. I had moved out of a neighborhood that was in a rapid rate of decline. After twenty-six years in the same house, I no longer felt safe. After visiting friends in this smaller city for a few years and with as many years of prayers, God finally gave me the courage to pack up, sell, and move. His guidance led me to a most beautiful neighborhood that rarely saw any crime. I felt really blessed.

The late hour on my computer clock surprised me. I realized that just might be the reason for my growling tummy. My opened front door beckoned me to enjoy the late afternoon sun from my small front porch. So, laying my tiny Pomeranian puppy, just weeks old, in her bed, I went outside. I took a deep breath and enjoyed the fresh air. I was still surprised to see the difference in humidity levels and air quality in my new home town. The clouds and the sun were playing the child's game of peek-a-boo. It was finally time for this writer to bring her workday to a close. Changing careers from a word processor to a full-time writer had been a dream of my lifetime. Since there's no time card to punch, my biggest drawback is knowing when to call it a day. I enjoy it just *that* much.



My dear neighbor across the street came out of her house carrying a paper tote bag. She walked across her beautifully manicured lawn, crossed the street, and came up to my front porch. It didn't take long for me to love her dearly, since the day I had met her shortly after I moved in.

"Now, I don't want you to think I sit at my living room window and watch everything that goes on in the neighborhood," she began, "but I wanted to come over and show you some of my handiwork." I could tell Mrs. Ruby was real proud of her work, just as she should have been. "I knew you were back at work today and I didn't want to disturb you, so I was glad to see you out on the porch."

"Mrs. Ruby, you can disturb me anytime! I was just enjoying some fresh air. Come in so we can spread your goodies on the sofa," I said as I held the door for her.

"I saw your yarn basket in your den the other day. That told me you like homemade needlecraft."

"Yes ma'am, I really do," I said as I helped her lay her gorgeous work out on my couch. She had several sizes of doilies, crocheted dish clothes, and dish towels with crocheted tops. "I watched my mama do all sorts of handwork ever since I can remember."

I picked up her large doily and examined it closely. "Is this tatting?"

"Yes, it is," she said proudly.

"You know, I haven't seen tatting since I was a child. I thought it was a long lost art," I sincerely expressed. "My grandmother did tatting long years ago. And I've only known one other person since then who has done any tatting. This is absolutely gorgeous. Do you sell these?" I asked, imagining her prices would be much more than I could ever afford.

"Yes. The one you're holding is eight dollars," she replied.

"Did you say eighty dollars?" I asked.



“Oh my no!” and she laughed, showing her pretty white teeth. “I said eight dollars.”

“Just eight dollars for all this beautiful work?” I asked in utter amazement.

“It doesn’t take me very long to make one,” she explained, “so I feel if I charge any more than that I would be taking advantage of people. I’m not making a living at this. My husband left me well set. But it is nice to have some extra income. Can I see some of your work?”

“Yes, but it’s nothing like your gorgeous work,” I replied.

“Lynn, you shouldn’t compare yourself to me or to anyone else,” she rightfully chastised me.

“Yes ma’am,” I cheerfully replied as she followed me into the den while I walked behind my walker. “I don’t have much to show you. I make and give things for gifts, and with my work and the move, I haven’t had much time to crochet. I crochet when I am too tired to read and too tired to go to sleep.”

As I took from my yarn basket an item and a crochet instructions with a picture of what I was making, I explained, “I’ve been making these jar covers for several years. They cover Mason jars. Even though the picture shows one size, I make them for both size jars.”

“What a neat idea!” my neighbor exclaimed. Then she looked around the room. “Lynn, this house looks great! You’ve only been here three weeks, and it looks like you’re all settled.”

I laughed. “Just don’t go down the hall yet,” I told her. “The first thing I did when we got here was to wash down all the shelves in the kitchen as high as I could reach. I had the kitchen’s necessities unpacked before I went to bed the very first night. And we didn’t get here until after five in the afternoon. I was raised to work hard, especially this time of year. We were never allowed to be lazy.”

“Neither was I.”



My mind wandered back to the typical summers of childhood.

The Clothesline and the Bucket

The summer of 1962 was really good. I had gained much more mobility since learning to walk without assistance. It gave me a wonderful feeling of freedom I had never known. I enjoyed it immensely.

Much to my chagrin, Mama was wise to my new-found freedoms. She didn't want me to think I could use it only toward my own desires. She sought to use my new mobility to teach me new tasks. This gave me the opportunity to learn to do things I hadn't been able to do before. She used the saved tasks to keep me from getting bored, as well as teaching Karen and me how to become good homemakers.

"Well, my little lady," Mama announced one summer morning as a housefly swarmed around my head at the breakfast table, "it's time for you to learn a new chore."

"Oh, Mama! It's too hot to work," I retorted.

"Oh, but not under the beautiful shade trees outside," Mama said cheerfully as she climbed up on the kitchen stool and took down the metal bladed venetian blind that sheltered our kitchen from the glow of the southeast South Carolina hot summer sun. I couldn't imagine how I might be connected with that old blind. Then she proceeded to drag the stool into the den and took down the two blinds which sheltered that room. "Come here, Lynn," she summoned. "Stand right here at the back door."

It was too early in the day, and I just wasn't in the mood to endure the consequence of my disobedience, that is, the backside of a hairbrush against my backside, so I did as I was told. I watched as Mama hung the blinds on the lower section of the clothesline. Daddy had lowered that section the weekend before so I could hang small articles of clothing out to dry while Mama hung the larger pieces. She came back to where I was



standing, took hold of my hand, and assisted me as I walked down the steps. Although I had mastered walking independently, I had yet to master steps independently. “Daddy is going to ask Miss Mable’s husband to put some wrought iron handrails out here. Then you can go in and out all by yourself.”

“Oh, I can’t wait for that! I won’t have to ask for help when I want to go outside to play with Tootsie.” Once I had recovered my balance in my standing position, which is quite typical for a cerebral palsied child, I looked over as Mama filled a scrub bucket with soapy water from the garden hose. It was just at that moment that I realized the task she had in mind for me to do.

“Mama!” I shrieked. “Do you mean for *me* to wash *blinds*?”

“You’re my smart girl!” Mama said with a laugh. “Come on over here. It’s easy.” She picked up the sponge and washed one blade.

“But Mama, I’ll get my braces wet!” I protested as I looked down at my legs that were strapped in leather straps between steel rods that ran the entire length of both legs. Leather knee pads and leather cuffs on the backs of my legs, and leather straps, all of which ran from the top of my thighs to my ankles held my legs in place so they would grow straight. My feet were clad in ankle-high, laced-up shoes. Cerebral palsy caused my muscles to have lots of spasticity; that is, an involuntary tightening of the muscles that causes them to constrict rather than to relax normally. Left unbraced, my leg muscles would have become drawn to the point I would have never been able to straighten them, much less walk. As I grew, all of this expensive paraphernalia had to be replaced every few months.

“A little water won’t hurt your leg braces,” Mama wisely refuted my protest. “They’ll dry. Besides, you’ll be getting a new pair soon.”

“Aw, Mama, it’s summertime,” I argued, trying a new tactic to get out of doing this chore.



“Sorry, sug, your excuses won’t work. Summertime is catch-up-on-chores time. Here’s the sponge. Here’s an old toothbrush you can use to clean hard-to-reach spots.” She then showed me how to wash the areas behind the cords that held the blinds together.

I knew there was absolutely no way out of this one. Mama was a mother of consistency, especially when I didn’t do as I was told. She didn’t allow my disability to stand in the way of my working and doing chores or of my being disciplined. She really believed in discipline, when the situation was warranted. I lost count of how many hair brushes she had broken on my sister and me.

So I washed blinds, and Mama kept bringing more out of the house and hanging them on the line. Then, of all things, she inspected my work. Being the world’s most meticulous person, her keen eyes never missed a thing!

“You missed some, missy. Wash this blade over again.”

“The *whole* blade?” I protested. I was beginning to sweat. My braces were locked at the knees to keep my legs perfectly straight and stretch the hamstring muscles. I bent over from my waist, as Mrs. Walnick, my physical therapist, had taught me. Nevertheless, in spite of the leather braces on my legs and the heat of that summer day, I still had to wash those blinds.

“Yes, the whole blade,” she instructed in a very happy attitude, adding, with her hand firmly on the top of my head, “and no back talk. Besides, why would *anyone* re-wash only a *part* of a blade?”

“Yes ma’am,” I answered. So I washed and I washed; I sweated and I sweated. I could already feel the chaff beginning on the back of my legs as the leather mixed with the sweat. I knew better than to complain because no one ever understood until they saw the red, blistered skin when I took my braces off at the end of the day.



“Good, Lynn!” Mama exclaimed on her subsequent inspections. “You’re a great venetian blind washer!”

I didn’t dare tell her, but I hated it. However, receiving her praises made the effort worth all the sweat. I loved making her happy. That was my ultimate daily goal.

“We’ll go to the pool after lunch, I promise,” Mama said, “*if* you do a good job.”

Then she turned her attention to my sister who had been just watching. “Karen, your job is to rinse the outside of the windows with the water hose as I wash them.”

“Aw Mama, I don’t *want* to!” Karen protested.

“Uh, excuse me! I don’t remember asking if you *wanted* to, Miss Priss,” Mama said sternly. “I don’t always *want* to cook your supper either.”

“But Mama, that’s *your* job,” eleven-year-old Karen said, laughing. I was listening, but I didn’t dare say a word. It might get me into trouble or it might create a new job for me. I wasn’t interested in either.

“Right. And now this is *your* job. Or you can help Lynn wash blinds so she can finish quicker,” Mama offered.

“I’ll help you rinse the windows,” Karen answered gruffly, choosing the lesser of the two evils. Turning on the water, she began spraying the swing set.

“Don’t get water in my sandbox!” I screamed as I looked at the sandbox Daddy built with his own hands and the power saw that he gave to Mama for her birthday last year. “It was left opened last night.”

Mama looked down at the sandbox from her ladder as she washed the kitchen window. “I guess Daddy forgot to put the cover over it again last night. I sure am glad it didn’t rain. That sand cost a lot of money that we just don’t have.”

Mama continued to wash the window. Just as soon as Karen saw that she wasn’t watching us any longer, my big sister turned the hose on me.



“Quit!” I screamed.

When Mama turned around to see why I was screaming, she smiled, and her smile turned into laughter. She liked to see us playing together, making little girl screams—both of play and of torment, even amongst so much sibling rivalry. Mama and Karen began laughing harder as they watched me getting even wetter. I was beginning to look really funny. “Remember, honey, don’t spray her legs.”

“Yes ma’am. I just got her top wet.”

I wanted to run and jerk that hose out of her hand. But I couldn’t. It made me so mad! There she was, having so much fun with that stupid water hose, wetting everything in sight, and I couldn’t do anything but stand there and wash those stupid blinds! It didn’t seem fair.

“Mama! Mama! Make her stop and make her stop now!” I demanded. I was very angry at my sister. She was usually sweet to me, but right at this moment, she was being mean. The more she laughed, the madder I got. She was enjoying my misery a lot more than she should have.

“Lynn, you’re barely even wet,” Mama said. I felt she was taking Karen’s side. “I bet you feel cooler, don’t you? You were really sweating.”

I did feel cooler, but I wasn’t about to give them the satisfaction of knowing. I was angry because Karen had complete control of the fun, or so it seemed to me.

All of a sudden, I remembered that I *could* walk by myself. I had forgotten! I needlessly wasted all that energy being angry. For all of my young life, I had been able to walk only with assistance, either by someone holding onto me or by using a walker. Even though it had been only a few months since I had thrown the crutches down in the front yard for all to see and started walking on my own, I often forgot that I could now walk without any assistance.

My realization caused me to throw my sponge into the bucket



so hard that soap splashed out onto the grass. I clumsily walked over to where the water hose lay on the grass. Trying to keep my balance within the confines of my braced legs, I grabbed hold of the frame of the swing set to help steady myself. Using my poor hand coordination as best I could, I reached for the hose. I had to stretch my arm in order to grab the hose and keep hold of the swing set at the same time. But I did it! I successfully jerked it out of Karen's hands. Getting myself even wetter as I grabbed the hose and struggled to point it away from me, I finally gained control of the hose with my stiff hands and fingers. The stiffness was caused by spasticity that lived in my muscles—another symptom of cerebral palsy. As if I were conquering a bitter army, I turned the water toward Karen. I sprayed and sprayed her as she ran back and forth across the yard, until she was soaked to the bone!

Yes, a Bookworm

Mama employed all her efforts wisely during the summer months to make sure that neither Karen nor I became bored. In spite of that, she still heard the sentence that always made her cringe.

"Mama, I'm bored! There's *nothing* to do." I whined one hot day, after all the blinds had been washed and the curtains had been washed, starched, ironed, and hung back at the windows. As soon as the words were out of my mouth, I thought, *Oh No! She's going to come up with another sweaty chore. Why did I ever say those words?*

"Would you like to take a trip to the library?" Mama asked, much to my surprise.

"Yes, Mama," I replied, greatly relieved. "I've read everything here."

"Karen, do you want to go too?"

"Yes, I'd like to go," Karen answered. All of us, including Daddy, were avid readers.



It was wonderful walking beside Mama and Karen like other girls my age. This was the first time I had walked independently into the library. I felt like a normal kid, except for the braces that clad my legs and the clink-clanky sound I heard with every step. It seemed as though Mama and Karen had grown so accustomed to the sound that they no longer heard it. But I never could accustom myself to the unusual sound. However, I did develop the ability to laugh at it within my own heart. At least I was walking, and that's all that mattered to me; clink-clanky and all.

I went to the bookshelves on my own. We had been there so many times that I knew every nook and cranny of the library. I loved the smell of the musty old books. It seemed like an inviting smell, luring me to investigate. I was a "pro" when it came to finding the books I wanted. As I perused the titles, some I recognized and some I did not. I selected some unfamiliar titles because they sounded good. When my arms could not hold any more, I began making a stack on the floor. I chose eight books, maybe nine. I looked up to see Karen who had just appeared at the end of my aisle. She had three books in her arms.

"What *are* you doing, Lynn? You can't take all these books, stupid!" Karen exclaimed in her sibling rivalry tone. "Mama, tell her she can't read all those books?"

"Yes, I can too, Karen!" I answered loudly in my own sibling insurgency. "I get to keep them for two weeks. Tell her, Mama."

"Shhhh, Lynn! Don't talk so loud in the library," Mama scolded.

"Yeah! They'll kick you out, loud mouth," Karen informed.

"Karen, *I* am the Mama," Mama said firmly. "Besides, Lynn is right. She *can* read that many books. Remember, honey, she stays in the house and reads while you go romping the neighborhood with your friends. She can't romp with her friends," Mama reminded.

Karen rolled her eyes and, under her breath, she said as we



walked to the check-out desk, “Ooohh, this is sooo stupid! She *always* gets her way.”

Mama left my side and quickly walked past Karen. Facing her, Mama asked, “Do you want to spend all of tomorrow in your room *without* a book or a record player or anything? Do you want a day without romping the neighborhood with your friends? I am the Mama and I *do* have the power to make that happen. Do you want that?”

“No, Mama,” Karen said solemnly as she looked down at the floor. Then pointing to my books Mama was holding, she added, “I just don’t think she can read *that* many books in two weeks.”

“But I can too, Karen. You’ll see,” I promised.

The Moron

I started reading as soon as we got into the car. Nothing was more thrilling to me than a new book. And nine of them? Nothing could have made me happier—except if they had been all mine to keep.

Daddy gradually filled our beautiful house with many neat things that he made. I was proud of his abilities. His creativity still abounded as the years wore on. He expertly built book shelves on the wall above my bed earlier in the summer, and, for some unexplainable reason, I loved to watch the shelves fill with books. I saved my allowance and bought a book of my own whenever I could.

I read and I read. I had a lot of fun with the characters I met in each book. They became my companions, along with Tootsie, as she lay contentedly with her head in my lap as I read. My loneliness vanished when I had a book in my hand. Without one, for a reason I just couldn’t explain, not even to myself, I got a feeling of isolation that would not leave me alone.

A little less than two weeks after our library trip, I asked, “Mama, can we please go back to the library?”



“Our books aren’t due for four more days, Lynn,” Karen answered before Mama could.

“*I know!*” I responded. “I’m not dumb, you know.”

“I didn’t say you *were*, dummy!” Karen said as she smiled.

“See, you just did—”

“Girls! Girls! That’s enough. No one is going to call anyone dummy any more,” Mama interrupted. “Besides, *I* am the mom and *I* will decide when we need to go anywhere. Lynn, have you read every single book you got last time?”

“Yes ma’am,” I answered respectfully.

Mama believed me, but she began to wonder if I was really comprehending what I read. Deciding to put me to the test, she picked up the third book in my stack and thumbed through it, quickly reading parts of it. Mama was a very fast reader, so the task was simple for her. “What color was the dog in this story, Lynn?”

“Yellow. He was dingy yellow. That’s how he got his name. That boy—”

“You don’t have to tell me every detail, sug. That’s all I need to know,” Mama said as she raised her hand to stop me. She never liked for anyone to tell every detail of a story, but that seemed only natural to me. Turning back to the story, she asked, “What did the daddy tell his son to do after he got on his horse?”

“He told him to milk the cows and be the head of the house because—”

“What was the boy’s name?” Mama interrupted.

“Travis. His name was Travis and his dog was Old Yeller and—”

“Okay,” she stopped me abruptly. Thumbing through the book, she continued, “What was Travis’ little brother’s name?”

“Little Arlis.”

Mama raised her eyebrows as if she were surprised that I remembered small details. “Did Travis like him?” she continued to quiz me.



“Yes, Mama,” I replied. “Travis liked Arlis but he saw no use for him.”

“Yeah,” Karen’s sheepish grin popped out on her face. “I *know* how he feels!”

“Aww, you know you love your little sister.” Mama was quick with her comment.

Karen’s sheepish grin grew. “Well,” she said with her face pointed to the floor, “I wouldn’t say I *love*—! Lynn, are you *sure* you read every one of those books?”

Mama grabbed another book farther down in the stack. “Karen, if she remembers things in this one like she did the last, then I think it’d be safe to say she not only read them, but she *did* comprehend every one.”

“I remember things I read,” Karen said.

“Well, who wouldn’t? Anybody can remember things in three skinny books,” I chided my sibling and laughed.

Karen took a pillow off the couch and threw it at me. I laughed, and then Mama laughed. “They aren’t skinny, either!” Karen retorted.

“Yes, they are!”

“Well, comparatively speaking, Karen,” Mama interrupted our chiding, “they are.”

“See!” I said, smiling.

“Yeah, Mama always takes *your* stupid side.”

“I am not taking anybody’s side. Let’s be careful how we use the word *stupid*. Let me keep up my quiz, Karen,” Mama said as she thumbed through another book. “Who was Buck, Lynn?”

“Stop acting like I am a moron and don’t remember anything I have read, Mama!” I yelled as I grabbed the book out of Mama’s hands and threw it across the room as hard as I could. “You ask me questions but you can’t stand for me to tell you the entire story. You think I am stupid! What are you doing: suddenly believing all the things those *stupid* doctors told you when I was a baby, that all of a sudden maybe I am a re-TARD?” I was



suddenly furious at all of this questioning. It didn't make any sense in my nine-year-old mind.

Mama lovingly tried to explain. "No, Lynn. I am just amazed that you can read so much so fast and—"

"And comprehend it all? Retards cannot comprehend, can they?" I asked as I took another book and threw it toward the back door. "You have always told me about everything the doctors used to tell you. Are you all of a sudden thinking that maybe, just maybe, they were right after all? You are always telling me that I am not a cripple, but now you are treating me like I am crippled in my mind!"

By this time, I had gotten out of my chair and locked my braces at my knees. I walked down the hall and into my bedroom. "I am sick and tired of it all!" I screamed as I slammed the door as hard as I could. I heard the pictures in the hall shake and bang against the wall. I locked the door and sat down on my bed, feeling totally disgusted.

A few minutes later, Mama was at my door. "Lynn?"

"Go away and leave me alone!"

"Honey, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings," Mama explained. I began unbuckling my braces. "Lynn, unlock the door."

Taking a big risk at talking back, I replied, "No! I told you to leave me alone!" I yelled as I took a brace off one leg and threw it across the room. "I'm sick and tired of the way you are treating me. I'm sick and tired of being treated like I am sooo different. Just go away," I said as I purposefully banged my brace on the floor.

"What was that?" Mama asked when she heard the thud.

"My left brace—not going to wear it no more. Re-tards don't wear braces."

"Lynn, honey, you are *not* a re-tard," Mama said sweetly. I could tell by her increasing voice pitch that she was losing her patience. "Open this door now!"



“No!” I replied, as I flung the other brace across the room. “Leave me alone!”

I heard Mama’s footsteps as she walked down the hall toward the kitchen. I curled up in my bed. The cool sheets against my bare legs felt really good. *Maybe getting angry was worth getting to feel these cool sheets*, I thought. *Now what? I have nothing to read. We never made it to the library.* I could hear Mama’s clanking the pots and pans so I knew she was cooking supper. It was my night to wash dishes. *I am not putting those braces back on today.* I sat there for a while. Then I heard Daddy walk in the front door.

“Where’s Lynn?” I heard him ask. I always hugged him every evening when he came home. I loved doing that. I couldn’t hear exactly what Mama was telling him but I could hear her talking. I assumed she explained the happenings of the late afternoon. I thought sure he’d come to my door immediately.

I began looking around my room for a book I hadn’t yet read. There were none. *If I were rich, I’d buy so many books I would never, never be without a new one to read. And then I wouldn’t have to return them to the stupid library and nobody would ever again question me as to whether I was comprehending them!* I sucked my teeth. *That’s the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard in my life!*

“Come to supper, Lynn,” Daddy instructed me through my locked door.

“Not hungry!” I replied, thinking I was getting into big trouble.

“Your Mama didn’t mean to hurt your feelings.”

“She hasn’t said she was sorry,” I insisted. He said nothing. I heard him walk away.

Then I heard Mama’s steps. “Honey, please come to supper.”

“No! Leave me alone!”

I continued to roam my small room with my eyes. Finally, I



spotted a book across the room that I hadn't read. *Hooray!* I thought.

But then I faced a huge obstacle: I hadn't walked unassisted without my braces yet. *Well*, I thought, *there's always a first time for everything*. I scooted to the foot of my bed and unlocked the door just in case I fell. I was hoping my family was making so much noise passing the dishes they wouldn't hear the door knob rattle. I was not going to give any of them the satisfaction of eating with them, pretending that nothing ever happened.

Cautiously, I stood up by my bed, and slowly I walked across the floor to my small desk on the other side of the room. I picked up my book, turned around, and walked back to my bed. I suddenly realized that I had done it as though I had done it all of my life, like it was a normal thing to do. I was elated! I wanted to shout down the hall, *Hey, I can walk without my braces!* But I still wasn't ready to allow my family to see that I had gotten over my anger so quickly. After all, didn't most people walk across the floor barefoot?

For the first time in my life, I made a major accomplishment without any fanfare.

Trouble!

In the days that followed, we finally did manage to go back to the library. It took some days for my temper to cool. Mama never did say she was sorry, but in her own way, she did other things, though, to try to make up for it.

As I grew more stable in my walking gait, I was able to carry more books for myself. With each library trip, my stack grew. I don't remember ever again being questioned about what I did or did not comprehend. My love for reading continued to escalate, as my stack of books grew. I especially loved rainy summer days, because they intensified my reading.

I took off my braces one rainy day and put my bare legs un-



der the cover. Suddenly, I had to go to the bathroom. I decided to walk totally barelegged.

"Lynn!" Mama screamed as she dropped my neatly folded towels. She was going down the hall to put them in the linen closet when she saw me. "Look at you walking without your shoes and braces!" She took me in her arms and smothered me with kisses, as was her custom at every new accomplishment that I achieved. "When did you start this?"

"Oh, Mama! I've been doing this for days now," I informed her.

"Days?" Mama asked. "When did you start this?"

"The other evening when ya'll were at supper and I was so angry with you for questioning my comprehension that I stayed in my room. I took off my braces. Then I spotted a book on my desk that I wanted, so I got up, walked over, and got the book," I confessed as I happily shrugged my shoulders and threw up my hands.

"You shouldn't have done that the first time without me or your daddy watching you," Mama scolded.

"I know," I admitted. "But at least I did unlock the door first."

"Smarty pants!" Karen, listening from her bedroom, yelled. Coming out into the hall, my twelve-year-old sister continued, "You're going to kill yourself one day just from being so stubborn, stupid!"

"Now Karen, I have told you and told you that we're not going to call one another stupid any more. Have you forgotten already?"

"Karen, if you're not calling me stupid, then Mama is calling me re-tard!" I was getting irritated again. My patience was somehow running thin. "I'm just sick of it all!" I was growing very tired of being "different" and of being treated very "differently." I went back into my bedroom, slammed the door, and grabbed a book. Reading seemed to take all the bad things out of my thought processes.



But before I knew it, Daddy stormed to my bedroom door and yelled, “We’re *not* going to have any more of this door slamming in this house!” he scolded as he tried to turn my locked door knob. “Lynn, open this door this minute!”

I did not obey him. Nor did I say a word. He was “acting strange” again, like he acted the beginning of my second grade year. I just let his anger rage. The very thing that made him act strange caused him to fuss and quarrel at the drop of a hat. I hated it. I began to abhor quarreling about anything. It was useless. What had begun as a sibling spat had now turned into a family fight, minus one—me. My joy of being able to walk barefoot through the house diminished as the roar outside my door intensified. I buried my face in a book and the rage soon became nothing more than a dull roar. Reading was my solace—my way of escape. All was okay, though, in my own little world as I fell asleep under an open book behind a locked door.



CHAPTER TWO

Yes, I Get into Trouble

The beginning of my third grade was a terrific time in my childhood. For the first time, memories were made—memories that would be treasured for a lifetime. The fact that I was a year older than most of my classmates was not a problem. No one made fun of me because I was a year behind.

My teacher was very wise, even though she appeared to be very old. But what teacher in the eyes of a nine-year-old is not very old? However, I liked her very much. Her large appearance, sweet smile, kind eyes, and sunny disposition gave her a good grandmotherly nature.

“I think you and I are going to get along just fine,” Mrs. Maxey told me as she took my hand when Mama and I appeared at the classroom door on the first day of school. Pointing to the second desk in the second row, she instructed, “That will be your desk, Lynn. I see you have come prepared with your cigar box of supplies. I like to see my children come prepared to work on the very first day. Put your box right here underneath this desk.”

“I can’t,” I firmly stated.

“You *can’t*?” she asked sternly as she winked at Mama who still stood in the doorway of the classroom. “Well, I’ll tell you what, I’ll do it for you this first time. But you know what?”

“What?” I asked, seeing how long I could test her.

“Mr. ‘I Can’t’ does not live in Mrs. Maxey’s classroom,” she told me firmly, not even hinting at a smile.

Mama was watching and listening intently. She could see I was starting out the school year by testing Mrs. Maxey, and she