

The Infamous Ugly Teapots

I thought the first grade was going to be the start of an amazing new life, but it's funny how things change in just one afternoon. The summer before first grade, my family purchased a new home in the little town of Battleground. Battleground was on the complete opposite side of the city from my old house. The brown two-story house with an enormous fenced-in backyard looked like a mansion compared to the ranch house we previously lived in. It was so big that I had a bedroom *and* a separate playroom.

It was summer time, and to me summer was all about playing: with Legos, with my life-sized Barbie, and with friends. Since I had gone to Klondike Elementary School for kindergarten, I didn't have any friends in Battleground. The little subdivision on Lookout Drive had about seven kids around my age. Not long after moving day, I befriended the neighborhood gang. Lookout Drive was the canvas for our imagination. The street split into two wide cul-de-sacs which provided two perfect venues to play. We would ride our bikes in continuous circles pretending to be pirates sailing the seas or played very competitive games of kickball that would only end when dinner was ready.

That summer zoomed past quickly, and anxiety about the first day of first grade started to set in. No more half days of school, no more naptime, no more snacks--this was **real** school with gym, art, music, recess, and homework. Even more importantly, it was my first day at Battleground Elementary School.

The last week of summer, Mother surprised me with a trip to Wal-Mart so I could pick out a brand new outfit for the first day of first grade. I had landed on the moon! Mother never

let me pick out anything on my own. Now I wielded the power to choose a dream outfit that would awe my new classmates when I walked into Mrs. Branson's classroom.

I felt like those kids in Willie Wonka when they wandered through the room of pure candy. Running in between the circular racks, I searched for The One. I wasn't exactly sure what I was looking for, but I would know when I saw it. And I did. In the center of the maze of clothes was a display table. On that table was the most amazing thing my eyes ever saw inside Wal-Mart. It was a two-piece set that included a white rhinestone tank top with a gorgeous purple butterfly embellished on the chest and khaki shorts with a matching butterfly on one pant leg. Mother said it was cute. I thought it was perfect. She bought it.

The minute we pulled up in my driveway, I raced out of the blue Saturn, threw open the front door, barged into my room, and delicately hung the perfect outfit up. I stood there in awe. The butterfly outfit was the pinnacle to my back-to-school shrine. I had put my new Lisa Frank backpack, my never-been-touched crayons and colored pencils, and my new light-up sneakers in the corner of my room, but the newest addition gleamed in my eyes more than anything else.

The vision of the first day was clear. On the playground, kids would swarm all around me. "Wow, that is the prettiest outfit I have ever seen." "I wish I was wearing that instead of this ugly pink frilly dress." "Kate, will you be my friend?" "No she's gonna be mine!" "Not uh!" Mother opened the door and ruined my dream as she took the outfit off the hanger, declaring that it had to go through the wash first.

The rest of that week felt endless. The continuous downpour of rain made my anxiety worse. I was forced to waste time by playing with my life-sized Barbie in my Pocahontas tent

and watch Disney movies that I had seen hundreds of times before. Luckily, Sunday, the day before school started, the rain stopped, and it was the ideal day: sunny and warm. All the neighborhood kids ran out simultaneously in the middle of the street. When the exchange of boring stories about being cooped up in our homes was done, we all agreed that since it was the last day of summer, we had to go out with a bang. After a short powwow, we decided to play one of the most classic children games of all time: tag. The practically limitless boundaries included every single house and yard on Lookout Drive. We chanted "Bubblegum, bubblegum in a dish, how many pieces do you wish?" until all but one foot was left. Amy Nelson was "it." The game started. I, being one of the faster kids in the neighborhood, rarely got tagged. That was until Eric Reid became "it." I reckon that kid had a crush on me because whenever he was "it" in any game, he always darted toward me first. His eyes glanced in my direction. I looked up, and the challenge was on. I ran as fast as I could, zigzagging among cars, mailboxes, and anything else that would slow Eric down. Despite all my adrenaline, he was gaining ground on me. I started looking for a last resort. The first thing that caught my attention was the bushes up against Ms. Burnett's house. Maybe if I ran around the house and hid in them, Eric wouldn't notice and would run right past me.

I had nothing to lose. Using my last bit of energy, I ran around the corner of the red brick house and into the bushes. The moment I felt sharp sensations on my legs, I realized I forgotten a key detail about Ms. Burnett's bushes. They were rose bushes. I ran out of the bushes, and I looked down at me legs. Blood was streaming down from dozens of minor cuts. To make things worse, I got tagged.

The game ended on account of my looking like I had waded through a pool of tomato juice. It didn't really hurt much, but I was just imagining the curses that would come out of Mother's mouth. I opened the screen door and hollered for her. I learned from past experiences that I would get yelled at if I got blood on the carpet, so I waited outside. Mother's mouth dropped as she opened the door. After a minute or so, she took a deep breath and walked away. She came back with an old towel, antibacterial spray, and the box of Rugsrats Band Aids. It was very clear that Mother was frustrated with me because during the entire cleanup she didn't say a word. When the last Rugsrats Band Aid was stuck onto my legs, Mother sighed deeply again and looked at me.

"Mother, I'm sorry. We were playing a game of tag and Eric..."

"I don't even want to imagine what you did this time." There was another long awkward pause. I wasn't exactly sure if I was free to go, or if Mother was going to punish me. I decided it would be wise if I just continued to sit on the porch. "You are not going to school like this." My heart slowed down. I did not like the sound of this. "There is no way you are wearing shorts to school tomorrow. I do not want your new teachers getting the wrong idea about your family life."

My heart stopped. No. This was not happening. Without saying anything else, Mother collected the first-aid supplies and walked through the front door. Panicking, I followed behind her. She headed up the stairs. No, she isn't going to do what I think. Her fingers wrapped around the doorknob to my bedroom. She better be confused and think that door leads to the bathroom. She stepped inside and opened my closet. Her hand pushed aside the hangers digging deeper toward the back.

All of a sudden it clicked. No anything but **that**. She picked **IT**, the hideous torture device. Mother was changing my fate. I *was* going to be the cool kid in school. Now I'm going to be the social outcast. The last kid picked for kickball. The one no one wants to trade food with at lunch. The only kid in the entire class not invited to birthday parties. Tears streamed down my face as these images crossed my mind.

Mother reached for the beautiful butterfly tank top and shorts, and hung them back inside my closet. By doing so, she shut the door on my perfect future. Now instead of a magnificent masterpiece, a piece of horror ruined my back-to-school shrine: the Infamous Ugly Teapots Outfit. The royal blue long-sleeved shirt was topped with a black-and-white striped collar that matched the black-and-white leggings with the elastic heel straps. On the bottom of the shirt was extra fabric puffing out like a dress with large mustard yellow, spinach green, and rusty orange teapots printed on. And to top it all off, three large plastic teapot buttons were placed in the center just like pieces of charcoal on a snowman. The person who created that *thing* must have hated children because no one, NO ONE, would ever want to wear that.

The rest of the day I continuously argued, pleaded, and even threw in a few temper tantrums and door slams, but nothing worked on Mother. Now I dreaded the first day of first grade. I barely ate any of the chicken patty that was on my plate. I didn't even watch Nickelodeon after supper. I just went up to my room and sulked.

That night I barely slept, and when Mother came in my room to wake me up the following morning, I refused to leave the security of my blankets. She dragged me out and forced the teapot nightmare on my innocent body. I went downstairs and waited on the

bottom step of my staircase hoping for a miracle. Maybe today would be the first ever August snowstorm, and the school would declare it a snow day.

Mother came with her camera and hurried me outside for first-day-of-school photos. When I stood in front of the huge oak tree that shaded the majority of the front lawn, I refused to smile. After the flash blinded my eyes, I threw on my backpack, and slowly trudged to the bus stop where all the neighborhood kids were waiting. I sat on the side of the road, away from them all and stared down avoiding any contact. Finally the bus came, and I took a seat in the front. The whole ride I just blankly stared out the window, trying to ignore the loud excitement from all the lucky kids who weren't wearing hideous teapots.

The yellow school bus pulled up to its stop in the parking lot, and the driver repeated the bus number so we were able to find it again at 3 o'clock. I couldn't wait until then. Quickly I got off and headed to my classroom that I found during the open house. Mrs. Branson's room was brightly decorated with animal posters, glittery borders, and bright bulletin boards. The other kids gazed with amazement at the décor; I just looked for the desk with my nametag. Once I found it, I sat down and tried to be invisible. Everyone else seemed to know each other quite well, hugging, telling jokes, or showing off their new clothes. I could have been one of them. None of this would have happened if I hadn't played tag; if I hadn't made friends with the neighborhood kids; if I hadn't moved here.

Mrs. Branson quieted the class down. She had prepared a funny introduction, but I wasn't in the mood to giggle with everyone else. Then came the announcement that we were supposed to go down to the gym and get our yearbook photos taken. Wonderful. I stood at the back of the single-file line. In the gym, there were two stools with a grey backdrop behind each

and umbrella lights scattered around. When it was my turn to go, the man tried to get me to smile with a stupid monkey puppet, as if that puppet would magically make my whole day better. He gave up on me, and another flash blinded my eyes.

When we all found our seats, Mrs. Branson announced our first project. We had to draw a replica of ourselves on the first day of school and write down our favorite color, food, movie, and so on. Then when we were all done, she would hang them up around her carefully decorated room. Normally I loved arts and crafts projects, but this one was horrible. Not only would my family and the yearbook have evidence of this outfit, but I would constantly be reminded of this nightmare every time I walked into this classroom. I decided that it would be best if I drew the butterfly outfit I was supposed to be wearing. Drawing the purple butterfly instead of teapots slightly lifted my crushed dreams. When Mrs. Branson saw my project, she said, "Honey, you were supposed to be drawin' what you're wearin' right here." But I was finished, and she said I didn't have time to redo it, so the drawing of my dream outfit was hung along the chalkboard instead of ugly teapots.

At lunch, a girl with brown hair and brown eyes sat next to me. She was wearing a light pink frilly dress with lace and bows placed everywhere.

"You're lucky," I said to her. She looked up from her paper bag lunch.

"Why am I lucky? "

"I would much rather be wearing your dress than these ugly teapots." She examined me from head to toe.

"Nah. I'd much rather be wearin' those teapots than this dress. My mom said I had to look pretty on the first day of school, but it's so gosh darn itchy. I wish I was wearing my jean

shorts." Her name was Angela, and she was new to Battleground, too. I told her what happened during tag and showed her my cool Rugrats Band Aids. Angela shared stories about Georgia. She asked me if I would trade my Gushers for her Oreos. And I did.