

Ride the Wave

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Dedication

Ride the Wave is a story about friendship and change. With her friends' support, Shelly is better able to handle any situation that comes her way. I, too, have an amazing set of friends. Please know that each of you, in your own special way, has helped me ride the waves. So to you, my dear friends, I dedicate this book.

Freddie

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Part One

New York

“The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance.”

Alan Watts

(1915-1973)

British philosopher, writer

Chapter One

Nothing Ever Stays the Same

“Shelly, whatcha thinking about?” asked Amy pulling me out of my trance.

I turned my head from the window. “Nothing much, just wondering how it must feel to be a pumpkin. You know, one day everyone is excited about you. They carve a funny face and place you in a special spot in the window so you’re admired by the world. Then a couple weeks later you’re tossed outside, ignored, and ready for the compost pile.”

“You can be so weird,” Amy laughed. “How do you come up with this stuff?”

“It’s a gift I have,” I laughed as I pointed out the window. “See that decayed pumpkin abandoned over there amongst the pile of leaves?”

“What about it?”

“It reflects my mood. Amy, don’t you hate riding this bus?”

“No kidding, but what’s the alternative?”

“Absolutely none. Won’t turn sixteen until June and riding with other kids is out.”

“Yeah, parents can be weird about those kinds of things. Anyway, next year this time we’ll have wheels.”

I looked over at her and smiled.

“What?” Amy asked.

“You know, I’ve known you since first grade and not much has changed.”

Amy scrunched her eyebrows and looked directly into my eyes. “Is that good or bad?”

“Definitely good—you have this way of finding something positive out of any bad situation. Doesn’t anything rattle you?”

“I try to look at the bright side of things. Don’t be such a worry wart.”

“So that’s what you think I am, a worry wart?”

“Well, sort of...okay, big time!” Amy laughed. “Hey, not to change the subject, but what about the school play? Going out for it?”

“Yeah, auditions start after school on Monday,” I answered as I continued to stare out the bus window.

“Which role are you going for?” asked Amy.

“Hermia—she’s the daughter of Egeus who’s upset because she won’t marry the guy her father picked out. Instead she wants to marry Lysander.”

“Wicked,” Amy replied.

“Yeah, I hope I get a speaking part instead of queen of costumes and props like last year in *The Tempest*.”

“Ahh, remember...think positive. Besides, with this your second year at Jackson High, you should have a better chance. What’s the play?” Amy asked placing her backpack on the floor.

“*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,” I replied feeling quite amused over this conversation. “You know Amy, there’s nothing more exciting than performing under those bright lights. I can’t see the audience but occasionally a cough or laugh can be heard. The applause tops everything. It makes all those rehearsals worth it.”

“I know. I’ve never been in a play, but I experienced that on the soccer field. I love the electricity that fills the air when a ball finds its way into the goal from the side of my foot. Magic! Anyway, most likely I won’t see much of you once rehearsals start.”

“Look at all the times you stayed after school for practices and games,” I quickly threw back at her.

“All right, all right! So tell me, do you have any plans for Saturday? Want to go to the mall and later take in a movie? My mom said she’d drive.”

“I can’t,” I said. “Tomorrow is Mei’s Gottcha Day. We’re doing some kind of family thing with her. It’s been five years since we brought her home.”

“Five years? I remember the day you heard about your parents’ plan to adopt Mei.”

“Yeah, I guess I was pretty strung out about it.”

“Strung out? You had one major spas attack, girl!”

“Come on Amy, give me some slack. I was only ten at the time. The thought of having a sister didn’t fit into my plan.”

“So what changed your mind?”

“I don’t know. I guess a lot of different things. Seeing you excited about it kind of rubbed off. Then my mom explained how Chinese orphanages were overflowing with little girls. That got to me. Eventually I realized my selfishness.”

“Your family waited forever to get Mei,” said Amy.

“Actually, the wait lasted a little over a year, but Mrs. Presley told my mom that things have really changed.”

“How come?” asked Amy.

“China tightened its adoption policies. I think the country realized there was a shortage of girls; so in some parts of China, couples were allowed two kids. Oh look, my stop.” I picked up my bag and worked my way out of my seat. “Give me a call tonight.”

I walked the short distance to my house before I spotted Mei playing with her friend, Jennifer.

“Shelly,” Mei yelled when she saw me walking up the driveway. “You’re home!” I smiled as she ran toward me and grabbed my hand. “Hi Mei, how was kindergarten today?”

“Good, guess what? We made these turkeys and then wrote down something we’re thankful for.”

“We did that, too!” Jennifer chimed in.

“Yeah, I think lots of kids do that around Thanksgiving. What did you write?”

“I said my mommy, daddy and sister,” Mei announced with a toothless grin.

“Thanks, Mei. You know, I’m glad I have you for a sister, too.” I gave her hand a little squeeze. Mei looked up at me and sported the shy smile she often gave when she didn’t know what to say. She giggled, took off, and raced Jennifer to the backyard. Mei’s birth took place in China but she unquestionably was American. No matter, my parents continuously exposed her to the culture of her birth country.

“Mom, I’m home,” I yelled as I entered the house.

“I’m upstairs,” Mom yelled back.

I took off my jacket and allowed my nose to follow the trail to the baked brownies cooling on the kitchen counter.

After cutting a generous portion, I pulled the freshly printed script out of my bag.

“Hi, Shelly, how did your day go?” Mom asked as she walked into the kitchen and spotted me eating my brownie. “Just have one of those, please. I have a chicken in the oven. Dad doesn’t have an afternoon class today so we’re having an early dinner.”

“How come?” I asked.

“He’s taking his students to the town meeting on Monday instead.”

“Is that the group pushing to save the bog on Cranberry Hill Road?” I asked.

“The same—Dad’s objective is to involve his students with environmental issues right from the start instead of just reading about them.”

“Ah huh, he’s been working on that project for awhile.”

“You know, Shelly, why don’t you consider going with them.”

“What would I do there? They’re all graduate students.”

“It might be interesting to see a citizens’ action group at work.”

“Yeah, I know but I have a lot of stuff going on right now,” I said looking down at my lines.

“Okay, but you’ll be missing a great opportunity. Did you see Mei when you got off the bus?”

“She’s outside with Jennifer.”

“What’s that you’re looking at—your script?”

“Ah huh. I’m learning these lines for my audition on Monday.”

“Let me know if you need help,” Mom offered as she opened the oven door to check on the chicken.

“Thanks, but right now I need to memorize this

Shakespearean English. It's a little hard—words like *art thou* and *thy*—stuff like that.” I looked up from my script and found Mom smiling at me. “What’s so funny?” I asked.

“Oh, just thought back to the time when you gave this report. I think you were in fifth grade. Remember how nervous you were?”

“How could I forget that?” I said as I took the last bite of my brownie.

“You called it your day of terror,” Mom reminded me. “Now look, here you are auditioning for the lead part in a play. You’ve come a long way, Shelly.”

“I guess so.” I pushed the chair back and stood up. “One thing I’ve discovered, Mom, is nothing ever stays the same.”