

My Name is Bertha

My Name is **Bertha**



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to all those children who have ever had trouble losing weight. I dedicate these stories to you from Bertha. I want to also dedicate this book to my Aunt Tova who at four years old told me I was born to be a teacher. I followed in her footsteps every step of the way. I want to dedicate these stories to her for encouraging me to never give up on myself. I also want to thank my sister, Marcia, my bestfriend, for being a good sport.

*Love,
Fran and Bertha*

Author's Note

Encouraging young children to read has always been a passion and a goal for me. Creating material that is both interesting and exciting for young readers is what I hoped to accomplish by writing “*My Name is Bertha*”.

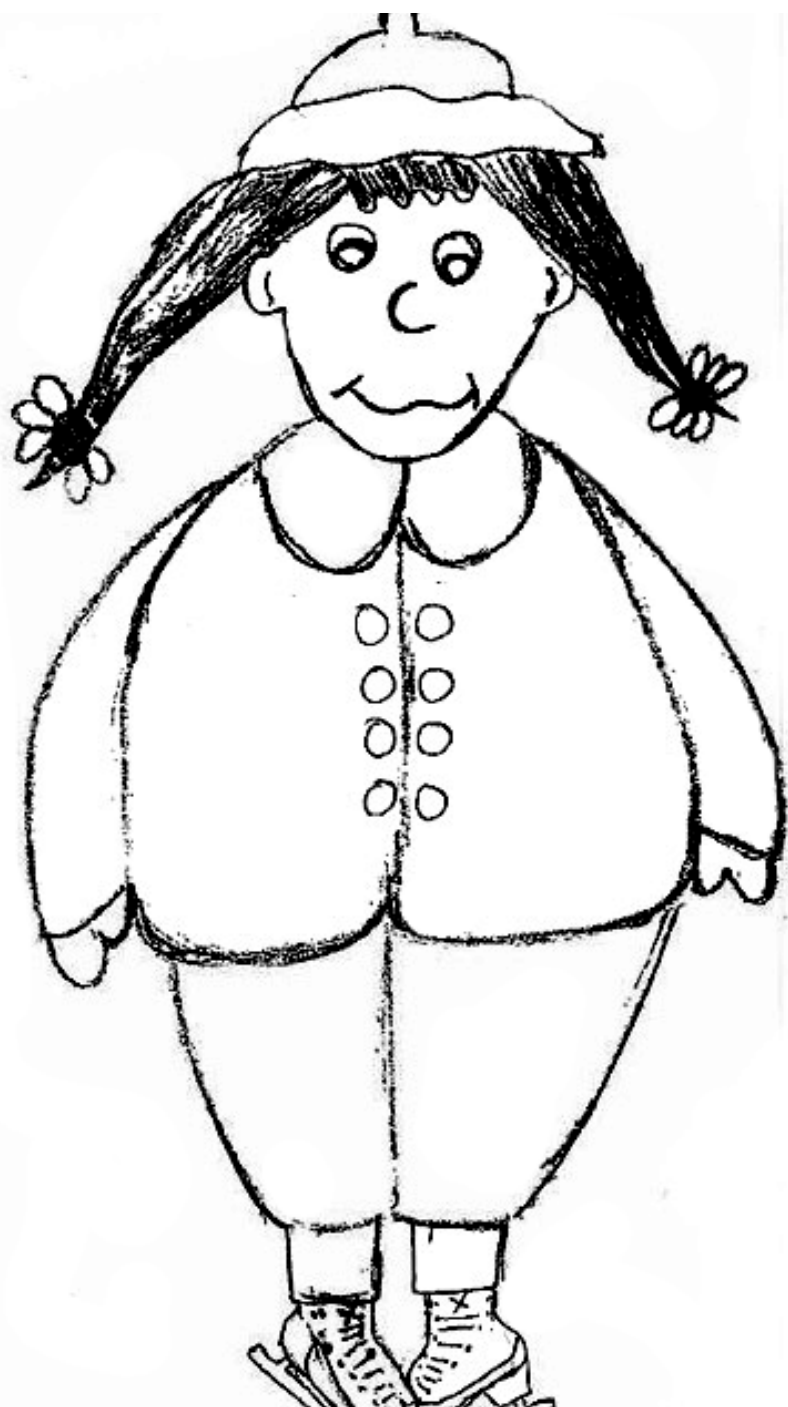
Before writing this book, I taught in the New York Public Schools for over 30 years. I spent all those years in one school and loved every minute of working with my students and encouraging them to be the best they could be and never giving up on themselves. Children today have to know that they can achieve anything that they want and no one should try to stop you from reaching your goals and dreams. As the Reading and Writing Staff Developer in my school, I had the opportunity to help young readers enjoy and understand good literature and helped them to have a love of reading.

When I started this project I realized that I needed someone to illustrate the pictures of the characters and my stories. Since my niece is the closest to a daughter I will ever have and enjoys drawing, I asked her to be the illustrator on all of my books.

Not everyone is born athletic, beautiful, thin or a genius. But, everyone is born good in something whether it is running track, playing board games, or drawing. Who you are is what makes you special. I hope that you enjoy reading about Bertha and Tillie and learn that there is a little bit of both them in everyone.

Love,
Bertha

My Name is Bertha



Bertha Goes Ice Skating

It's Saturday, and I refuse to get out of bed. I am not going to dancing school and that is all there is to it. I, Bertha, refuse to go through the torment and torture of tap and ballet ever again.

My mom, Rosie, feels that these lessons are great for me and that I will become a graceful ballerina dancing on toe shoes some day. Some day never, is what I know and think.

Hiding under the covers and pretending to be fast asleep I heard voices outside my bedroom door. My sister, Tillie, is up and dressed to go to dancing school and is about to try and wake me up. All of a sudden someone comes into the room but it is not Tillie, it's my Dad, Doc. He gently taps me on the shoulder and tells me he knows that I am really faking it. He has a surprise for me and my sister. He tells me that because I got an A on my math test this week and another one on my spelling test, I could miss dancing school this week. I look up at him in total awe and ask if he was joking. He said he was taking the entire family to Rockefeller Center and then to a show at Radio City. I was so excited that I jumped up out of bed and was ready to go in record time. That is, record time for me.

We all piled into his car and drove down to the city. We parked on the street not too far from Rockefeller Center. That is when my Dad hit me with the big surprise of the day. I don't know what I ever did to deserve so much torture and pain for one so young, but if dancing lessons were not awful enough, just wait till you hear about my first and last ice skating lesson. Yes, I now had to be humiliated once again by taking ice skating lessons.

My sister of course was totally thrilled because this was something else that she could do and I couldn't. I was born with 2 flat feet and wore these ugly saddle shoes with arches in them. I could never wear sneakers or regular shoes because the doctor's wanted me to wear these ugly shoes for my own good. How could wearing shoes that

were wider than my foot and made me look like a walking hippo be good for me?

The first thing we had to do was rent the ice skates. Now, that should not be hard, except it was for me. My foot was wide and I wore a size 5 at age ten which was bigger than most kids at 11 years old. I was five feet tall and was very over weight. Not only did they have trouble finding skates for me, but when I tried to stand on them they needed three people to hold me just to keep me from toppling over on my face.

Next, we had to meet our instructors. They looked like nice people, but the poor man that got me as a student; I don't think he was ever the same again. Of course my sister got the young and cute guy. I got a man that was much older and who took one look at me hobbling and wobbling on my skates, which by the way was double bladed for clumsy people who could not balance themselves on one blade or even ten blades at once, and shook his head in despair.

My sister, Tillie, went off with her instructor and was able to skate around the rink without falling or tripping the teacher. My instructor, Mr. Mills, took both of my hands and stood facing me on the ice. Big mistake on his part. He wanted to try and have me take small steps towards him. Well, that was not a great idea. No sooner did I pick up my left foot instead of gliding it on the ice, then my right foot slipped out from under me and I fell on my rear end and so did my instructor. If it wasn't so sad it would have been really funny. I told my Dad that this was a bad idea. I could feel it in my bones. If I can't stand on toe shoes and I slip on the floor in my tap shoes, how did they expect me to ice skate?

Mr. Mills did not want me to be discouraged or to give up. After my Dad paid 20 dollars for the hour, he wanted me to have a good lesson and maybe come back for more. (I don't think so—not ever—even

if I have to take extra dancing lessons). So, we tried again, this time he took my left arm and I held on to the railing for balance. I put my right foot on the ice in front of me and then I tried my left. I did not realize that this was probably the wrong way to do things. Mr. Mills showed me how I was supposed to skate but no matter how hard I tried we both wound up on our rear ends.

After one half hour of humiliation and torture and not to forget pain from falling, I begged my Dad to let me stop the lessons. I looked at my instructor who also looked at my Dad and prayed he would stop the misery for both of us. NO SUCH LUCK. I asked my Dad why I had to continue if this was supposed to be a reward for me for getting good grades. I would hate to see what would happen and what punishment they would inflict on me if I had failed the two tests.

After 10 more minutes and ten more falls the instructor went over to my Dad and told him he could not go on any more. He handed him back the entire 20 dollars and told him to never let me on the ice again. He said that I was the most uncoordinated disaster he had ever seen. You see, not only can kids be mean, but grown ups too. I turned beet red and sat down on the floor and took off the skates and threw them. I was too mad and so embarrassed. I knew that I could not skate, I tried my best and still I could not do it. Why did this man, who is paid to help kids learn to skate, insult an 11 year old girl just because she could not skate? But, I bet I could spell and do math better than he could. He even told my Dad that all the money in the world could not make him want to teach me one more minute or make me a skater.

At that moment I could not have felt worse. If it is not bad enough that I weigh over 160 pounds and am totally uncoordinated, I did not need my sister Tillie coming over and gloating and bragging

about how great she did at ice skating. I walked away from everyone and sat down on a bench and cried. I was never going to go with my family again and I did not want to go to Radio City to see the holiday show. I just wanted to go home and hide or eat my way into oblivion to make myself feel better.

But, since my sister did such a great job at skating I had to sit through the holiday show anyway. But, I did not have to like it. After the show we went out for lunch and I decided to order something that would make me feel better, even if I did not need it. I ordered a hamburger and a double order of fries and onion rings to sooth my nerves and a double hot fudge sundae for dessert. Of course this is not the answer to my problems but being a kid and only 11, what did I know. No one seemed to notice that I was upset. They were annoyed that I threw the skates and refused to give them back to the rental office. My Dad told me I could never go skating again if that was how I was going to show my appreciation for a reward for doing well in school. That would be my reward. No more skating lessons that was the best news yet. Of course, now I had to figure out a way to get out of the dancing lessons too. But, that would come in time.

We went home and I was sent to my room and grounded for throwing the skates. My grandmother came into my room and asked me why I did it. My grandmother was the smartest person in the whole world and she knew that I would never do something like that without a good reason. She also knew that I did not have a real temper and that something had to really upset me. I told her about my day and she said I should have told my Dad that I threw the skates because I was embarrassed and hurt by what the man said. She told him he owed me an apology. Thank you grandma.

What would you have done if you were Bertha and someone said that to you?

Why do you think her parents never told the instructor what he said was mean and rude?

What would you do if your parents gave you a reward that you did not want?

Why is telling people how you feel better than throwing a temper tantrum?

What should the instructor have done differently and how?

Not everyone can skate—not everyone can dance—not everyone can spell or do math as well as I can. Everyone is good at something just remember that.

Love,

Bertha



Bertha Saves the Day

It all started with a simple punch ball game that got out of hand. We were in the country on summer vacation and all of the kids enjoyed playing punch ball at night after camp. There were 21 of us. We chose sides, ten on each side. One person could not play, that was the rule. Only ten on a team and the odd man was the official scorekeeper. Unfortunately, that was always me. Yes, here I am again, Bertha, and once again, I am the odd girl out. Every night we'd gather around the large tree next to my bungalow and we'd play punch ball. The only problem is that no one wanted me on their team. No matter who the captains were of the teams, no one wanted uncoordinated Bertha.

Everyone gathered together with their team captains to decide on their lineup. My sister, Tillie was the captain the Red Team and her friend Harvey was the captain of the Blue Team.

After deciding on their starting lineup the game began. I was the official scorekeeper and got to stand on the sidelines. Big Richie, Harvey's brother was the official referee.

The game began and the teams seemed evenly matched. The Red Team led by my sister, Tillie was behind 4 to 3 at the end of the seventh inning. We played our games the same way you play baseball. Having a really hard job of keeping score, I became really bored with the game. I started to daydream and my attention to the game drifted away. I must have been daydreaming for a long time because I heard loud screams, yelling and saw everyone running in different directions. I saw several of the members of the Red Team running and yelling that someone was hurt. I heard some of the members of the Blue team laughing. Whatever happened was caused by one of the members of their team and they thought it was funny.

No one seemed to pay attention to me or what I was doing. No one even noticed that I was there. But, no one ever notices Bertha.

I am ten years old, overweight, not very pretty and not sports oriented. But, I have a great memory and I am pretty levelheaded in emergencies.

I looked around to find out what had happened. I observed what was happening around me. I was hiding behind the big tree that was home base. Standing behind the tree I saw someone trying to cover a huge hole in the ground with dirt. It seems that the Blue Team had a member from another Bungalow Colony that they invited to play that night and he thought it would be funny to dig a hole in the middle of the field and see what would happen. The other members of the team were afraid of him because of his size and his reputation that they went along with his prank. This was a prank that cost a member of the Red Team dearly. The boy from the other colony was tall and had long blonde hair that he wore in a ponytail. Some of the other kids from his colony came along to watch the game and see what would happen. As I stood behind the tree I heard that no one knew two kids fell in the hole and one was thought to be seriously injured. No one seemed to know what to do.

The Red Team just stood there in shock. My sister and my cousins started to scream and cry. That was not going to help Phillip and Susan who had fallen into the hole. Everyone was afraid because these other kids surrounded the hole and would not let anyone try to help them or get help for them. This was the one time that being invisible might work to my advantage. Not being very agile and not able to make a run for it, I had to figure out a way to go for help and not be seen or heard. The tree was huge and no one could see me behind it. No one even remembered that I was there. All of the kids looked scared and no matter how they tried to plead with these kids, they just stood there and laughed. Someone had even knocked out Richie so he could not help to defend the younger kids.

I quietly took off my shoes and walked backwards towards the owner's bungalow hoping to encounter anyone that could help me. I saw no one and that was not good. What happened next was even worse. I heard deafening screams coming from the two kids in the hole and heard the other kids yelling. Loud cackles and laughter came from the boys on the other team who were throwing rocks and dirt at the two children in the hole. They dared anyone to try and stop them or they would be next.

This was supposed to be a simple game of punch ball among friends and it turned dangerous and ugly real fast. I don't know if it would have turned out differently if I had not daydreamed and lost sight of what was going on but I knew I was the only hope to save those kids and to stop what was happening.

I carefully turned and started to walk away from the action and what was going on when someone saw me. I am a big girl and as I said I cannot run fast and have two flat feet. I was not going to let them stop me and I was not going to show them that I was afraid. Bullies are something that I will not tolerate and I am a big girl and weigh 170 pounds; I guess I gained ten pounds since going ice skating, and I was going to use that to my advantage.

As one of the boys on the other team started to chase me I realized that I would not be able to outrun him but I could out shout anyone. Yes, I can yell louder than a loud whistle or an oncoming train. I was scared but I was not going to give up. I started to shout for help and yelled and screamed as he gained on me. But, that did not stop me from running as fast as I could and from yelling at the top of my lungs. Then, I saw it, right in my hand, the extra punch balls that the scorekeeper always had in case a ball got lost during the game. I might not be a fast runner but I practiced punching the ball when no one was around and I could punch a ball and hit the

mark better than anyone on either team. I stopped in my tracks and saw the anger on the face of the kid that was trying to stop me from getting help, when I wound up my right arm took the ball held it in position and punched it right into his face. I did the same thing with the other ball except it hit him in the leg and stopped him cold. I ran and ran as fast as my thick oversized legs could go and got to the owner's bungalow and yelled for help.

The owner came out and got the parents of the kids who were playing and called the police and the fire department to get the kids out of the hole. Unfortunately, this prank cost one of the kids his right arm because it was badly damaged and could not be saved. The other child, Susan, lost her right leg. This was no simple prank, but they said if not for me it could have been much worse.

The boys involved were arrested and the other kids were made to leave the colony and could no longer return. Now, I was no longer the official scorekeeper, I was now a player. You see, I, was the first person picked to be on any team from that day on not only because of how I saved the day and the lives of kids in the hole and anyone else from getting hurt, but I was the best puncher on both teams and always got a home run. I really did not have to run the bases; I just walked them. Sometimes being invisible is not so bad. But, thankfully, I am not invisible anymore. It should not matter what a person looks like when playing a game or judging them.

Remember, practical jokes can be dangerous not only to you but to those you play the joke on. Games are played to have fun, winning or losing does not matter, its team spirit and having fun.

Bertha : that's me!



Bertha



Bertha's Birthday Surprise

I guess not everyone can get what they for their birthday. I am going to be 11 this year and would like my own cell phone and I Pod for my birthday. Most kids have one but, me, Bertha all I have is an alarm clock to wake me for school, an old tape recorder from 18th century and a dial phone, not digital in my room to share with my sister, Tillie. How far back in the dark ages can my family be? I must be the only kid in my class without my own IPOD and cell phone. What would happen if walking home someone tried to take me, Bertha? What would happen if I could not call for help if I needed to or someone was in trouble?

When my parents asked me what I wanted for this special birthday, I told them. They just looked at me and stared in disbelief. What do you need with a cell phone when you have a phone in your room? What do you need with an IPOD when you are supposed to go to school to learn and not listen to music? That is why so many kids are not learning and so many get in trouble. I just stood there in disbelief.

I, Bertha, who gets good grades in school and has never given them one minute of grief, will now have to figure out a way to bring my parents into the 21st century and make them realize that I deserve something special for my birthday too.

First, I will have to create a situation that would endanger me to make them realize that I needed the phone for my own protection. I will have to make sure that they know that walking home from school or even in the halls can be dangerous and cause the need for me to have my own phone. Second, of course, is I share my phone with my sister and she is always on it gabbing away with her friends while I'm doing homework, studying for tests or taking piano or violin lessons. By the time I get done with my work my mother says

it is too late to call anyone and I have to go and read a book. What did I ever do to deserve this?

Walking home from school I came up with my plan. I would have to be creative and clever to get my point across. I decided to tell them that while walking home I saw some tough kids following me and became afraid. I started walking faster and they did too. They tried chasing me, but I was running too. Except, I weigh over 160 pounds and can barely run or walk one block without huffing and puffing. I would tell them that I was lucky that someone came along and stopped them from hurting me. I was concentrating on my plan so much that I did not see the huge pothole in front of me and I fell down into the sewer. I screamed for help and tried my best to get up but I could not. I just stayed there for what seemed like hours in pain. No one came to help me and I had no way of calling anyone for help. My point exactly for why I needed phone. Well, that will show them if I live to get out of this hole. No matter how loud I screamed or tried to get out I kept falling back down.

I searched around the sewer for anything that might help me catch someone's attention. I was hoping that someone had thrown a rock down there or the workers had left a tool. I hoped that someone in my family would notice that I was missing, but I guess they thought that I was neatly tucked away in my room somewhere doing my homework and they did not notice that I never came home from school. At least if I had an IPOD I could pass the time listening to music and possibly get someone's attention.

Just when I thought I was going to make the sewer my permanent address someone came by and saw the sewer cover in the street and placed it on top of the open hole. I yelled and screamed to get the person's attention but they just ignored me. They thought the yelling

was coming from a group of loud boys walking down the street making stupid sounds and noises.

I can't believe that no one noticed that I was missing. It was almost dinner time. I do own my own watch, of course it's a wind up and not a battery operated one. You see what I mean? My parents really need to enter this century. I guess a windup watch will never go dead since it doesn't have a battery.

I started to daydream and dozed off when I heard noises coming from the top of the sewer. Someone took the cover off of the top and was climbing down. I stood still. I moved off to the side to see who was coming down. It was really dark and wet down there and I hoped that whoever was coming would help me get out. The person had a huge flashlight and had put a ladder next to the top of the hole and was climbing down. I called out to the man and he was startled. He had no idea that I was down there and was surprised to see me. Well, how many kids will you find in a sewer who now smells like a pile of dirty garbage and who might have a broken leg and is wasting away from not eating dinner last night. I guess I must have been there all night and no one bothered to come and look for me. You would think that someone would have backtracked my path coming home from school or sent for the police and had helicopters flying over the entire Bronx looking for me. That's only in the movies.

Fortunately, the man saw that I was just a kid who had an accident and he tried to help me up but he couldn't. I guess being my size he would need a forklift to get me out. Lucky for me he did have a real life 21st century phone which did not get a signal in the sewer but he did have a walkie-talkie to communicate with his other workers and someone heard him. Someone called an ambulance and someone came down to help him get me up, but my leg was swollen and I

could not climb up the ladder. I don't think I could have even if I had not hurt myself falling in the hole.

When the ambulance came they asked me for my phone number and they called my parents. I guess now they might realize that their precious perfect child was missing. The rest was all a blur to me. Someone lifted me out of the hole using a large rope and a harness of some kind. Three people had to put me on the stretcher and the last thing I heard was someone crying and saying I'm so glad that she is okay. I guess that was my mother, but I really don't remember. I fell asleep in the ambulance and woke up in a room with my left leg in a cast. Well, that will show them that I needed my own phone and that I deserved my own IPOD. You would think that my sister, Tillie would be glad to see me, but she wasn't even there. They sent her to school.

When I finally saw my family in the hospital they told me that they thought that I was sleeping over a friend's house and that I just forgotten to call. I asked why they didn't call any of my friends to see if I was there and they just stared at me. My mother said that she and my dad were busy and never realized that I had not called until they felt it was too late to call anyone. I just stared at them in disbelief. I reminded them that I never forget to call from a friend's house or I would find a pay phone to call if I was going to be late.

I think it might have finally sunk in. We need to get her a phone for emergencies and we need to pay closer attention to Bertha.

My birthday is not for another 8 months and I realize that I had to really rub it in and let everyone know how afraid I was being down in the sewer by myself with a broken leg. I also wrote and told the Mayor that leaving potholes unfixed could really cause a serious accident just like mine.

Well, folks, to make a long story just a little longer, my birthday came and I got up and went into the kitchen for breakfast with my family. Only, my parents were not there. My grandmother was there and she told me that they had a special surprise for me for my birthday.

She took me to Lebanon Hospital in the Bronx and low and behold there was my present, born on my birthday, not a cell phone, not an IPOD, but a new baby brother. I guess I will have to wait until next year for the IPOD. As for the phone, I got that a week later.

Remember: Watch where you are going when you are walking by yourself. Always tell someone where you are going and call when you get there or if you are going to be late. Don't daydream while you are walking or you might fall in a hole too. Most of all walk in pairs or in groups when you are walking home from school

Stay safe.

Love,

Bertha

my name
is Butta....



Bertha Has Her First Crush

Bertha, that's me is going to her first dance this week. I really hope that someone asks me to go, but I won't count on it. Who is going to ask an over weight girl whose mother dresses her in polka dots and stripes to a dance? The poor guy would think his date was a zebra in colored stripes or even worse. Added to that I am not exactly a raving beauty. I realized that in order to get invited to this sixth grade dance I would have to get moving on making some improvements on myself.

First, I would have to restyle my hair and pray that my mom would let me get into the present age instead of the Victorian Age. I would need to enlist the help of several people in order to make this transformation into the to Wear Mode not the to Avoid Wearing Anywhere Mode. Fashion is something that is individual to the person and their body type. But, my fashion sense did not match my mother's and I always seem to look like a clone of Kate Smith, a very famous singer, who was really heavy she told me way back in the 50's before I was born. I am trying to look more like Pink, Mandy Moore, or Amanda Bynes than the stepsisters from Cinderella. I really think that the one with the dark hair looks just like me, poor thing. No wonder the Prince cringed when he saw her.

I decided to talk to my Dad who I hoped would give me the money to buy something really cool to wear to this dance. I also hoped that I could get my mother's hairdresser to let someone else restyle my hair for the dance. But, first, I had to get an escort and the teachers said that we were allowed to ask a boy to the dance if we wanted too. Well, since I did not think the boys even noticed me nor did they ever talk to me on class line or in gym or anywhere else, I had to think of which one might take a chance and go with me to the dance. The teacher's said it had to be someone from the school. They did not want any students bringing anyone from any other school because they did not need trouble.

The next day at lunch I had on my orange pants with my white shirt and my black saddle shoes and really thought that I looked okay. But, someone said that I reminded them of a Halloween Jack-o-Lantern dressed in orange and white and black. That made me feel really mad. I never say anything to anyone or hurt anyone's feelings. I went over to the boys who said that and told them to go look in the mirror at themselves because from where I stood, they looked pretty awful. I also told them being mean was probably the only thing that they were really good at since most of them could barely spell or pass a math test.

I realize that it is not nice to be mean, but sometimes you have to stick up for yourself and now is as good a time as any—so I thought. They just looked at me and stared and started to laugh. One of them said that a Goodyear Blimp had less air in its tire than I did. How rude. I just walked away with my head down. After all, I had just started to lose weight, or was trying to and no one even noticed. So, I did another dumb thing and went out and had a double hot fudge sundae to make myself feel better. Don't do that either, it only makes you gain weight.

I got to class and started to check out the boys in my class. One of the boys, who was really cute and looked like a movie star with his black hair, black eyes and really great body, would sometimes say hello to me. One of the other boys, who was tall, red hair and was cute, also said hi to me sometimes. I realize that does not mean they like me, but at least I'm not invisible to them.

I looked around at the rest of the boys who were in the class and saw no prospects. After school I checked out the boys in the other classes who were walking home my way and tried to start a conversation with one or two of them. But, they just stared at me, laughed at my outfit, my big body and walked away.

The next day a new boy, Frank, was added to our class. He was tall with dark hair, freckles and wore black rimmed glasses. The other girls in the class said he looked like a nerd just like me. He was wearing a plaid shirt with brown pants and looked like he could use a makeover too.

The teacher put his desk next to mine and asked me to introduce him to the other kids at our table. She told him that I was really very smart and could show him how to organize his binder and his desk the way she wanted. Frank seemed like a nice kid because he did not laugh when he saw me. He just thanked me for my help and started to talk to Pamela who was sitting on the other side of him. I really hoped that she would ask Melvin to the dance or Stephen and not Frank.

I walked home by myself with my makeover plan in my head and my first stop was the hairdressers. I asked if Tony could do my hair and make me look more updated like the other girls in the school. We went through some hairdo magazines before he chose the one that he thought would fit my wide face, wide nose and the rest of me too. That being done, I thought I looked great when I saw myself in the mirror. I, Bertha had been transformed from a huge nerd to only half a nerd. Now, I had to do the rest. You see, I really like Frank and he was always nice to me in class and tried to stop the other kids from making fun of some of my weird outfits.

Yes, next I dragged my mom to morning class line with me so she could see what real kids my age wore to school. She stood there and shook her head and said you are too big to wear mini skirts and tank tops like the other kids. You cannot wear jeans in school so you will have to wear the wide leg pants, the wide shirts or the wide dresses that you have in your closet. At that minute I told her for the first time in my life that if she cared about me at all she would let me,

Bertha, at 11 years of age pick out my own clothes just like every free citizen in America does every day.

I have to admit I was really proud of myself for standing up to her and letting her know that because of the way I looked and what I wore the other kids were constantly making fun of me. If it wasn't bad enough that I weighed more than a baby elephant, I did not need my clothes to make me look worse. It took a while but she finally agreed to at least let me pick out the dress I would wear to the dance, that's if I had an escort. I went to my favorite store on Tremont and Southern Boulevard, called the Colony Shop and tried on every dress in size 16, which was my size. I decided even though I was only 11 years old I would pick a dark color for the bottom and maybe a small print on the top. A totally solid colored dress in dark blue or black with silver shoes and a silver necklace would make me look thinner and prettier.

The final step was to get my mom to let me wear some lipstick and blush. I finally convinced her to let me wear some light pink lip gloss, light beige eye shadow and some bronze blush.

The hard part was how to get Frank to want to take me to the dance and try and eliminate the competition. Even though he was not the cutest boy in the class, he was by far the only one who spoke to me and we were doing a report on Zeppelins together so I thought since he was getting to know me, maybe I had a chance.

I saw him the next morning on class line and we started talking about the project on zeppelins that we were doing together. He even told me that he thought my hair looked great in the new style that Tony had created for me. I asked him if he was going to the dance and that if no one had asked him already, would he take me. He said he would let me know. I guess he was keeping his options open and waiting to see if anyone else asked him or if there was someone he wanted to ask to the dance.

But, it was already Wednesday and the dance was Friday and I still had no one to ask from my school. I decided to tell my teacher my problem and if she did not agree with what I wanted to do, I was not going to attend the dance. I did not want to be the only one coming alone since the rest of the girls in my class, who looked more like my sister Tillie, than me, and had dates. She also said she would think about what I had asked her. I have a cousin Ira who is really cute and really nice and who is my very best friend and said he would be proud to take me to the dance. Well, folks, Friday came around and Frank said that he could not take me to the dance that he had to go somewhere with his family. Of course I did not believe him and just about told him so. I told him that if he didn't want to take me to just say so but he insisted that I was wrong. He said he thought I was a really nice girl with a sweet personality. You know what that means; you're nice but not pretty and forget it. You see, it is not how smart or nice you are that attracts boys it's how you look.

My teacher, Mrs. Mencher, told me that it would be okay for me to bring my cousin Ira to the dance since I brought him to school with me and introduced him to her. I would be the envy of all of the girls. I made her promise that she would not tell anyone he was my cousin.

The night of the dance came and I put on my beautiful black and white dress with my silver small heels, and had Tony do my hair in my new layered look and his girlfriend, Rose, did my makeup. I looked really great, so I thought. My mom and Dad were impressed with how I looked and she agreed to let me pick out my own clothes from now on or at least sometimes. I looked really pretty. Only one problem, my cousin Ira got the measles and I had no one to go with. All dressed up and no where to go, that's me Bertha. My mom felt so bad she wanted me to take my little 8 year old brother to the dance.

Now, she was pushing it. I was just about to forget the whole thing when my phone rang. I could not believe it. It was Frank.

When he came to the door to take me to the dance his face lit up and he said I was the prettiest sight he had ever seen. I, Bertha, who no one notices or even thinks is cute no less pretty had her first date, yes with Frank. He really wanted to take me to the dance and asked his parents if they could put off their family event for just one more day and let him go to the school dance with his new friend Bertha, oh yeah, that's me.

I guess maybe there are nice boys in the world. When we walked into the dance, the other girls just looked at us and stared. Who cares! I had the cutest and nicest boy in the whole world take to my first dance. Never give up and always try and look your best. Whatever your shape just makes sure your clothes fit your size and your hair and makeup is classy—just like me!

Love,
Bertha





Bertha-

Why Me?

at 1

Saturday! Oh No! Dancing Lessons

Oh no! It can't be Saturday already or can it? Don't I have to go to school or study for a test or do homework I could pretend to be sick, but that didn't work last week or the week before. I could say my left leg hurts and that my right one is sprained, but I'd have to be a really good actress to pull that off. It is the worst day of the week and always the worst day of my life—yes—where most kids would look forward to the weekend and having fun-I Bertha—do not. Why?

It all began one day when my mom decided that what my sister and I needed was dancing lessons. I personally had enough lessons during the week. I had piano, violin and language lessons three times a week. I did homework for hours on end every night. I got good grades in school. So, why was I being punished, tortured and made to go to dancing school? My mom thought it would be good for me and help me to lose weight. She also thought that it was a good way to make some friends.

My mom, Rosie, decided that since my sister wanted lessons and she did not want to leave me home, I would have the fun of getting them too. But, that was not the real reason. I was overweight and needed to lose weight. Well, not some, a lot of weight. You see, at the age of 10, I weighed over 160 pounds and looked like a huge beach ball walking down the street. You could see my back end blocks away before I even arrived. So, my mom thought that dancing school and stuffing me into a tight leotard, would help me develop grace and poise. I think not!

My sister, Tillie, has always been tall and thin. She has blonde hair that frizzes when it gets warm but a cute pug nose and everyone says that she is so pretty. I, Bertha, on the other hand, have a big nose, big bottom and at ten I am five feet tall and the tallest girl in my class in school and the most likely to fail in dancing school.

So, I am still in bed hiding under the covers when my perky and happy sister Tillie throws cold water on my face and tries to get me out of bed before my mom comes in and yells. I just glare at her and think some day you will weigh 200 pounds and I will have the last laugh.

I got up, got cleaned up real fast and stuffed my wide frame into my leotard because we were late and did not have time to change at the dancing school.

Our school was on Hunts Point in the Bronx on the top floor. After walking up 6 flights of stairs how can you expect me to dance no less stand up. I could barely breathe.

When we entered the room everyone was warming up on the bars and doing stretches. I was trying not to look conspicuous in my black leotard and just stood off to the side watching all of the other students limber up. Not to look too disinterested, I pretended to do some type of stretches too. I put out one leg then the other and started counting and attempting to do some deep knee bends. The only problem was that my bottom half and my top could not seem to bend together making me look like a stuffed bear.

Making matters worse was that my three cousins, also thin and who enjoyed laughing at me in my tights, were taking lessons too. They began whispering to each other with some of the other students when we all lined up in front of the dancing teachers. Some of the students were doing tap this week, some ballet and of course my graceful sister and my three cousins were doing toe. Big Bertha, as they called me behind and in front of my back, was trying to just walk in tap shoes without falling down. No matter how hard I tried to walk or attempt a step I could not do it without falling or slipping. On top of that my leotard was so tight that my bottom looked squashed

together and my legs looked like Ms. Piggy wearing a ballet costume on Halloween.

The lessons lasted for one hour. My sister and my cousins were having fun doing toe and dancing to some really beautiful music. I was dancing to tap, tap, tap and tap just to attempt to look interested in the lessons. However, things got only worse. The teachers decided that they wanted everyone to practice their routines for the upcoming dance recital. Except, that since I was part of no dance group and had not routine all I could do in the recital was tap, tap and tap. No one tried to make me feel comfortable dancing and each week it got worse. Instead of encouraging me to dance and attempt to lose weight, everyone, including the adults, just laughed at me and shook their heads in disbelief. So, instead of trying to lose weight, I ate myself into oblivion at lunch after the lessons to make myself feel better. I could not even tell my mom how I felt because she did not want to hear it. Once she decided something was good for you, you just had to do it.

My mom chose my clothes and always had me wearing polka dots or stripes which made me look like a round beach ball. Imagine wearing a red and pink polka dot dress to school with black saddle shoes and white socks. No one wants to be caught wearing such an awful outfit. But, my mom thought I was cute. It was in this outfit that I went to school on my first day of sixth grade. Can you imagine what all of the other kids thought about how I looked? Not only did I look like a beached whale in polka dots but I looked that the poster child for what not to wear in any year.

I knew that I had to do something and fast. I could not stand dancing school or dancing lessons. I had to let someone know what I was feeling but I did not know who would listen. I loved my piano and my violin lessons. I practiced for one hour each day on both

instruments and my French lessons were fun. So, why was I being punished? Why did I need dancing lessons? Oh yeah! To help me lose weight!

What I needed was a plan. I needed to find a way out of the lessons and a plan to help me lose weight. I knew that being over weight was not good, but being ten years old and not knowing how to diet, what could I do? My sister, Tillie could eat anything she wanted, and she did, and not gain an ounce. I hate her. My cousins ate until they couldn't eat anymore and were also thin. I just know some day it will all catch up to them and I will be the thin one and they will be fat.

I decided to go try and find a way to lose weight and use the dancing lessons to possibly help me without saying anything to anyone in my family. The next week I went to dancing school, squeezed into my leotard went through the torturous lessons and hoped to speak to Rose, the teacher who played the piano, about how I could learn to dance and maybe not be so embarrassed while doing it. I told her that I felt awkward in front of the students because of my weight and my clumsiness. She said she understood. She also realized that I needed someone to encourage me to try and not give up. Rose was the right person. I asked her if I could help turn pages for her on the piano or even play for the other students during part of the lessons. I asked if when they went into the other room to rehearse for the recital if she could help me learn some steps so I could be in the recital too. She thought about it for a while, listened to me play, and said that I was good enough to accompany the dancers, and that she would go along with part one of my plan.

My usual lunch after dancing school, because I was so frustrated, was 4 slices of pizza and maybe some fries and some ice cream. My usual snack on Saturdays and Sundays was an ice cream sundae or chocolate moose cake. How yummy is that! I felt that was the least I

was entitled to for being tortured, embarrassed and made to go to dancing school. But, this had to end and it did. I wanted to have one last food fest before I got down to some serious dieting.

Next, I needed help to really lose weight. I did not want anyone in my family to know what I was going to do. I did not want them making fun of me and laughing because they thought I was fat and could not even lose one pound even if I tried. I decided to speak to the only person I could trust with this secret, my Grandmother. I waited until my mother went out shopping with my sister for her recital stuff, and told my Grandmother what I wanted to do. She agreed to help me only if we spoke to my doctor first. It was because I went to the doctor that I found out I had a thyroid problem which was why I could not lose any real amount of weight. My thyroid was slow or under active which was causing my weight gain among other things. My doctor had done tests to find this out and gave me medication to help with this problem. But, this was just the start. I had to diet, exercise and really watch what I ate, or nothing would help.

With the help of my grandmother, I convinced my mom to let me walk to my language lessons instead of riding the bus. I told her at ten I was old enough to walk. I convinced her to let me walk to the violin teacher's house, with her, instead of her driving there. I convinced her to let me walk to and from school instead of driving us there. Oh, yeah, sometimes revenge comes when you least expect it. Since my sister is a year younger than me, she could not go to school alone on the bus and my mom did not want me walking the 16 blocks alone. Poor, Tillie and my 3 cousins had to walk too.

At the end of 2 months with the help of my grandmother, my mom, who did not know she was helping, and the doctor I lost 10 pounds. Yes, I now weighed 150 pounds and I'm on my way to looking better. However, just because I lost 10 pounds did not mean that I

could stop, nor did it stop everyone from laughing at me in my tights in dancing school or my dancing. But, I did not care. I was on the road to losing weight and I was going to be unstoppable.

My next step was learning how to do at least one of the dance routines in order to be in the recital. My sister and cousins were going in the Swan Lake part of the show. I knew that I could not do toe and I learned one of the routines for the tap part of the show. I tried my best and would not give up until I succeeded. I did. I really did my best and was in the recital. Maybe, I was not the most graceful dancer or the best one, but I did succeed in losing 15 pounds before the show and in dancing without slipping or making one mistake. Guess what? Rose even let me play the piano for one of the dance routines.

This goes to show everyone that if you try hard and do not give up you can succeed and do it do.

Love,
Bertha



Bertha Goes Bowling

Poor Bertha knows what day it is. It is the dreaded weekend and it is Saturday which means she has to go to dancing school. She hates these lessons because she cannot dance gracefully like the other students. Her sister, Tillie, laughs at her uncontrollably when she sees her in her leotard. Bertha is not only uncoordinated but weighs close to or over 160 pounds and cannot even fit into her leotard without her legs sticking out and her bottom looking squeeze together.

Bertha has been trying so hard to convince her mom to let her stop this torture and embarrassment but she won't. Her mom, Rosie feels that these lessons will teach her grace, poise and help her lose weight. Think again! All these lessons do is provide the other students with the Saturday morning laugh and poor Bertha with an unhappy day.

Bertha can hear her sister Tillie talking to her 3 cousins who also attend this class and love to crack up laughing and making silly wisecracks with the other kids about how Bertha looks like a fat hippo in a black leotard with huge elephant legs that stick out in wide chunks. But, just as she was about to go back under the covers and pretend to be sick and cough her head off, her Dad comes in and says that for the next 2 weeks it would be family Saturday and she did not have to go to dancing school. Bertha should have been happy, but she remembered that last week her father's idea of family day was to take her ice skating and poor Bertha was a disaster on the ice. She kept falling on top of her instructor and he finally returned her father's money for the lesson while holding his head in his hands and an ice pack on his bruised bottom from falling.

Today's fun day would be spent he said learning how to do something else. He was going to take the family to Southern Boulevard Lanes to teach them how to bowl. Bertha just looked at him with her eyes wide opened and said, "WHY? I thought that family days are supposed to be fun and everyone is supposed to get a turn choosing

what they wanted to do. How come I never get a choice? Why is it that every family day is spent trying to make me do something physical and trying to make me lose weight. Losing weight is a hopeless case for me just except that you have one child who is talented in dancing and singing and is pretty and one who is just me—Bertha.”

We went into the bowling alley and already I knew that I was doomed and in trouble. Just watching all of the people bowling gracefully up and down the lanes without falling over or looking silly let me know this was going to be even worse than dancing school or ice skating. My Dad went up to the shoe rental counter and got everyone a pair of bowling shoes. That was the easy part. Now, for the fun part. We went over to lane 12 and sat down on the tiny bench made for four people to sit on, but with me there was only room for 2. My Dad, Doc, was not thin either, but no one seemed to notice that. Next, we put our names on the bowling sheet and it was time to begin.

My sister Tillie was up first and she chose a pink 10 pound ball to show off her bowling skills. Tillie and my Dad had been practicing while I was taking my piano and violin lessons. She had the right form and went up to the lane and threw the ball and got 7 pins down. On her second shot she got 2 more making for a total of nine in frame one. Next, my Dad went and got a strike and my mom followed with an 8 count. Now, it was my turn. I tried to follow the proper form that they had and I even waited to give courtesy to the person on my right who might be trying to bowl too. I did not want to distract anyone. But, what could I do when I had no idea of what I was doing and no one thought to show me.

I knew I could not walk up to the lane and do the proper slide, so I walked straight up to the end of the lane and stopped cold before throwing the ball down the alley. I had an 8 pound ball in my right hand and tried to hold it properly with my right hand and my left

underneath it. As I started to wind up, I guess I thought I could throw it harder if I used my punch ball skills to get some momentum on the ball, I bent over and heard a ripping noise. My pants split down the middle because they were too tight and I bent over too far. At that moment all I wanted to do was run away and hide. But, my mom said that bowling would help me to lose weight. I don't see how it would help me, but when my mother said something, that was the word. So, she tied her sweater across my bottom to hide the rip and I took my shirt out of my pants, and she said I was good to go. Not quite good, but go I did. I walked back up to the edge of the lane and wound up my right arm and threw the ball straight across my body three lanes to the left and got a strike for the man on that lane. He just looked at me in horror, while everyone else just stared at me and laughed. I guess I had to laugh too because it really was funny just thinking about how ridiculous I looked standing there bent over, a sweater hiding a rip and swinging my arm as if it were a pendulum and then throwing it anywhere but where it was supposed to go.

My Dad just said to sit down and everyone else completed their games and I was told to sit out for a while. When he finally cooled off from being embarrassed by what I did, and apologizing for it, he said I should try again. This time he came up with me and told me to hold the ball in my right hand at my side and swing it back and forth and then back further and throw it straight ahead of me onto the lane. I tried and tried and no matter what I did I still threw it crooked, but at least it landed on my lane. Well, not in the lane, but in the gutter. Yes, you guessed it my grand score for game one was a big fat round egg or zero. My sister scored 100 and everyone else did even better.

They continued to bowl and to add to my humiliation my father asked the manager to put up bumpers on the lane next to theirs so I could practice and not get anymore gutter balls or accidentally throw

the ball in the wrong lane, like theirs. My face turned beet red and I was fuming. Bumpers are used for little kids who are first learning to bowl, not for 10 year olds who really wanted or did want to learn how to bowl the right way.

At the end of 3 games my Dad said we were leaving and I was so excited. I wanted to go home and change my clothes because I looked ridiculous. To add insult to injury, as we walked home I met 3 friends from my class sixth grade who started to laugh when they heard, from Tillie, what had happened. I heard them cackle and laugh all the way down the street. Poor Bertha, she is so fat that she can't even bend down without ripping her pants. Poor Bertha must have been a really big sight to see on those lanes. I bet no one else could bowl until she sat down because she is so fat.

I walked home not talking to anyone. No one realized how hurt I was and how embarrassed I felt seeing three kids from my class and no less looking awful in what I was wearing.

I stormed into our apartment on Southern Boulevard and Tremont Avenue and shut the door to my room and locked Tillie out until I changed and cooled off two hours later. No one bothered to ask me why I was so mad; instead they went out for Chinese Food, to Fu Man Chu the restaurant down the block from our house and had a great meal. Me, I was left to stew and brood and pout.

When everyone finally came home and they insisted that I let Tillie in the room, I stormed out and went next door to my Cousin Annie's house to talk to my Aunt and tell her what had happened. She did not laugh at me and she told me next time I would do better. There would be no next time. Why do I have to do any sports at all if I am so spastic that I only look like an oversized artichoke or worse each time I attempt another one? I think that for family day I will join another family who likes to go to museums and art galleries to

learn something about history or art rather than do sports. Now, all I have to do is find one that would like to take me, Bertha along.

I never told my parents how I felt about bowling and I never went with them again. I knew that the only way I would go would be if I lost some weight and could fit into something that would not tear or rip when I bent over. Every time they mentioned bowling I told them I had a report to do for school or a test that I had to study for and did not have to go.

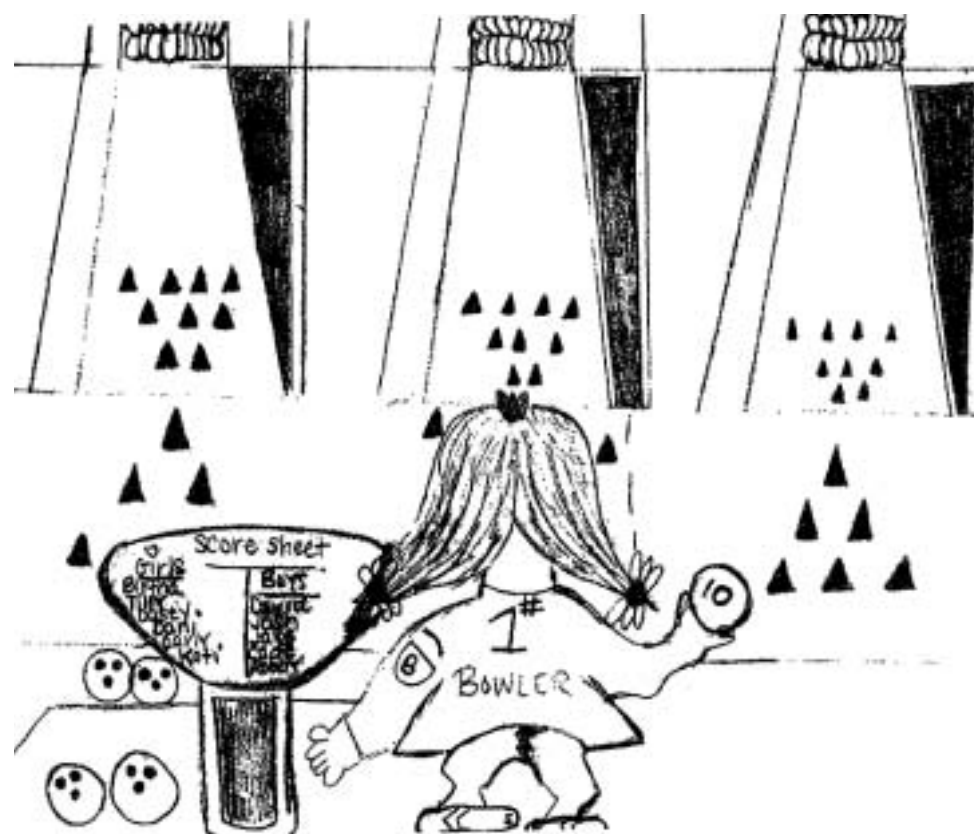
Just to let you know that while they were at dinner after bowling that night, I ate myself into oblivion on grandma's chocolate pudding and noodles. Not too smart to do that, but it made me feel better and at ten years old and loving food the way I do, that was the only solution to my problem.

For anyone who has ever had that happen to them:

1. Tell your parents how you feel before you go and do something that will make up feel uncomfortable
2. Tell them when someone is rude and says something to you that is hurtful
3. Tell the person or persons that they hurt your feelings and let them know that they would not feel any better if someone insulted them
4. Don't pig out on food and make matters worse. That won't hurt anyone but you.

Stay strong and think positive about yourself. I am learning to do that and so can you.

Love,
Bertha



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