

# **Positive Penny**

## **A Kids With Karacter Book**

By SAM and THud

*This Story is Designed for 8-14 Year Olds*

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

A special thanks goes out to Leo L. Levesque, a fellow author (the Thomasina Swift stories) who suggested that Penny should be nicknamed “Shiny.” It all made sense, and so it happened. Thanks, Leo!

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## CHAPTER 1 — A Very Shiny Penny

“You know, Penny my girl,” Mr. Adams told his daughter as she walked into the living room, “that you are practically perfect in every way?” It was one of the parts of her favorite movie, *Mary Poppins*, that she knew by heart, and one that her father said to her whenever he was getting ready to praise her.

“Thank you, Daddy,” she told him, walking over to his big easy chair and giving him a hug.

“And,” he continued, “I am very proud of how wonderful you were yesterday when we visited your grandfather in the hospital. I can’t imagine many children your age having such a sunny smile and carrying on a very positive conversation like you did. Well done!”

“Do you think Grandpa feels better now?” she asked.

“Well. If all of his nurses and doctors are as bright and happy and as sure that he will get better as you do, he can’t fail!”

That made Penny feel very good about herself. Her father and mother had told her, almost as far back as she could possibly remember, that if she had a good and positive outlook about life, all the tiny problems that came along would seem like nothings.

This surprised her at first. Her aunt Dotty, who was her mother’s older sister, was one of the most negative people she knew. When somebody would ask about her latest vacation, she was likely to tell them, “It took too darned long to get there and when I did I had to put up with my best friend’s horrid daughter and son-in-law.” If someone pointed out a rainbow to Penny, she would smile and laugh and enjoy the beauty of it. Aunt Dotty would complain, “Well, that means it’s going to rain. I hate rain!”

And, when it was stormy and dark outside, and the children at Lincoln Elementary School were not allowed to go outside for recess, many of them would groan and grumble about that.

Not Penny. She loved going out to play as much as anyone, but she also loved to read and write stories, so on “bad weather” days she simply smiled and pulled out a book or her special notebook with the paper that had the narrow lines meant for high school

students, and she wrote. To stay inside the lines she wrote extra small, and in a neat and tidy style that anyone could easily read.

Penny put such negative thoughts out of her head and kissed her father on the cheek, and then she skipped down the hall to her room.

She had almost a full hour before her mother would ask her to set the table for dinner, so she opened her backpack and took out the book she had been reading. It was a mystery called *The Loch Carlopa Monster*, and was about two young men who liked to be detectives and solve mysteries.

In this one, they drove to a town in New York and, with the help of a famous inventor, dove very deep into the local lake in search of a monster that many people thought might exist, but nobody had seen.

It was supposed to be just like the Lock Ness monster her father told her about across the Atlantic Ocean in a country called Scotland.

She was about to begin reading chapter two when her father said through her door, “Penny? You have a phone call in my den. Please come out. I think she said her name is Lisa.”

Penny jumped off the bed. Lisa was her very best friend ever. The two girls spent most Saturday afternoons together and even had sleepovers in the summer.

“Hello? Lisa?” she said into the phone.

As she listened, her face went from all smiles to shock and then to sadness. Just before she hung up, she said, “Well. Okay, I guess there’s nothing you can do about it. Bye.”

When Penny came back into the living room both her mother and father could see that she was bothered by something.

“What is it, honey?” her mother asked.

Penny shook her head and told them both, “That was Lisa. Her parents just told her that they have to move to another city. It’s all the way across the country in Idaho.”

After sighing, Penny looked up and smiled, even though it was a little sad. “I guess that is a good reason for us to go that direction

on vacation next summer. And, she will have a whole new group of girls to show off all of her dresses and school clothes. It really won't be that bad. For her I mean. She and I can email all the time. Right?"

When her father nodded, Penny's smile became brighter.

It was exactly that bright smile that had led to Penny receiving her nickname, Shiny.

"I have to tell you that you are about the most shiny Penny I have ever seen," one of her teachers had said the year before. All the other children in class had laughed, but the name had stuck.

Now, everyone, including her teachers and her parents' friends, called her Shiny.

The next day was Saturday, so Penny asked if she might be allowed to go visit Lisa and help her pack for the move.

"Of course, dear. Please tell Lisa's mother that I will be calling tonight. Since you two started being friends, her mother and I have also become friends. I will miss her." Penny's mother now looked a little sad, and Penny could tell that her eyes were starting to build up with tears.

"Don't be sad, Mom," Penny told her. "If you are really friends like Lisa and I are, then you can stay in contact."

When Penny arrived at Lisa's, her mother greeted her. "Hell, hello there, Shiny Penny. I guess that you have heard the news. I'm sorry that Lisa has to leave good friends like you."

Penny gave her a little hug. "Don't worry, Mrs. Wilts. Lisa is just about the nicest girl I know. She'll have no problem meeting other nice girls. And, boys, too."

When Penny walked into Lisa's bedroom, the black-haired girl was looking into her closet with her hands on her hips. Turning at the noise, Lisa said, "Oh! It's you. Hi, Penny. I'm trying to be happy about moving, but I really am not. In fact, I'm angry. Mom and dad promised that we would not be moving until after the school year. But now..." and she stopped with a little sob. Her hands dropped to her sides.

"What happened?"

“Daddy’s company just opened a brand new office in some place called Boise and they want him to be the boss of everything out there. I found it on a map in the big Atlas book in the living room. It’s way in the middle of nowhere.”

Penny smiled at her. “You know,” she said as she stepped forward to help take some of Lisa’s dresses and pants and blouses from the closet and lay them on the bed, “last night I looked on the computer and read some stuff about Idaho and even about Boise. Did you know that it is very close to lots of good snow skiing? You like that. And, it is bigger than this little town so there will be more places to shop. And, you REALLY like that!”

Lisa sniffled and then smiled back at Penny.

“And, I’ll bet that your mom and dad will try to make things as easy on you as possible. Maybe,” she said when a thought hit her, “you can come back here to North Carolina and visit me next summer. Maybe even stay for a month!”

Lisa laughed. “You always see the positive side of everything, don’t you?”

Penny nodded and also laughed. “I do. It isn’t like things might have been a hundred years ago when even moving twenty miles away meant that you would never see each other again. We can email and message and even talk on the phone.”

After they spent a half hour carefully folding up many of Lisa’s pants and shorts, and taking her blouses and dresses and skirts out and hanging them in the special box her mother had placed in her room, the two girls went to the kitchen.

Mrs. Wilts had a plate of cookies and glasses of chocolate milk waiting for them.

“Here’s a little something for the best little helpers I could ever imagine,” she told the girls.

After thanking Lisa’s mother, Penny asked, “When does Lisa leave school? I think many of the other kids would like to have a party for her.”

As she waited to hear the answer, Penny thought to herself, *I really hope that our teacher will say ‘yes’ to a party. I really, really, hope so.*

## CHAPTER 2 — Something Happened

Tuesday morning when Mrs. Adams came down the hall and peeked into Penny's bedroom, she was surprised to find that the bed had not been made and that Penny's shoes and her clothes from the day before were sitting on the unmade bed.

This was very odd and made her wonder if Penny might not be feeling well. She decided to ask her, but her daughter was not in the room.

Back down the hall and in the family room, she found Penny sitting on the floor just staring at the television screen. The set was not turned on, and this was not normal. At this time of morning, Penny should be getting dressed and getting ready for school.

"Is anything the matter?"

Penny turned slowly to look at her mother. She shrugged. "Don't know," she said in a soft voice.

"Well," her mother replied sitting down on the floor next to her, "you were a little quiet last night and your father and I thought it might be because you are sad that Lisa is moving this next weekend. Is that it?"

Penny shrugged. "Maybe. Well, no. No it isn't. That mean old Miss McDade told me we can't have a party to say goodbye to Lisa because it would not be a good use of school time. I hate that old hand-grenade!"

Mrs. Adams had to hold back a little laugh. The rather plump older woman had also been her third grade teacher nearly twenty-five years earlier. Even back then the children had laughed and called her, "Miss McDade the hand grenade," behind her back.

"Honey? Did she say absolutely no, or just not during class time? Because, I can make a phone call to your Principal and ask her if some of the parents might come in and have the party in the lunchroom after school. What do you think of that?"

Penny smiled and threw her arms around her mother's neck, giving her a big squeeze. "Would you? That would be great!"

"I will do that right after you get on the school bus. And," Mrs.



Adams said with a grin, "I will make certain that the old hand-grenade isn't invited!"

Penny raced down the hall and was back in record time, only her hair needing to be brushed so she would be ready for school.

As her mother did the brushing job, she asked Penny, What do you supposed Lisa might like? A cake or a pie? Cupcakes and ice cream?"

As with most people from the South, Lisa Wilts and her entire family were almost addicted to pie. Peach pie. Pecan pie. Apple Pie. But as far as Penny knew, Lisa was particularly a big fan of berry pies. And, her favorite of all time was Boysenberry pie!

Mrs. Adams laughed. "That girl and her Boysenberries," she said with a smile. The previous year she and Mrs. Wilts had gone to a "Pick You Own" berry farm at a farm outside of town. There, the two woman had a choice between strawberries, blackberries, some raspberries and a new crop for that season, Boysenberries. They had looked at each other and broken down laughing.

Their daughters might be a lot alike in many things, but where Lisa did not believe there ought to be any other berry than the Boysenberry, Penny was a strawberry fan.

The two women had spent more than an hour on each one, coming home with more than seven pounds of each one.

Most went into freezer bags and were stored for later use, but the biggest, freshest and juiciest of each went into huge pies made from home-made crusts with a sprinkle of sugar on top that would brown and turn the top crust all sweet as they baked.

Penny tapped her mother on the arm. "Aren't you listening? I said that I think she would want a Boysenberry pie, but it might be easier to make cupcakes with a plump berry in the middle and some more of them whipped up in the frosting."

Shaking her head to clear away the memories, Mrs. Adams grinned at Penny. "That is an excellent idea. I'll check with her mother, Caroline, to see if that is okay. But, only after I talk to the Principal."

The call to the school had been both good and not so good. The Principal did back up Miss McDade in that it was school policy to

not hold parties during class time, but she agreed that a party either during the lunch period or directly after the final class of the day would be fine.

She finished with, “You leave Miss McDade to me, Mrs. Adams. She is a little bit of a spoilsport when it comes to these things, so I will ask her to come have a conference in my office on the day. Do you think we should wait until Lisa’s actual last day, Friday?”

It was agreed that the party would begin at 2:45 on Friday, right after the last bell of the day.

Lisa’s mother, Caroline Wilts, was sniffing with emotion as Mrs. Adams told her about the party. “Oh, Patty. You can’t imagine how happy that will make Lisa. It’s just that—”

“Now, if you are going to go on about you not having any time with all of the packing going on, then I have something to tell you, Caroline Wilts. You are not even going to be allowed to do *anything* other than come, enjoy some fruit punch and a cupcake or perhaps two. I’ve already checked with Deb Abernathy, Ginnie’s mom, and she’s going to take care of drinks and paper plates and plastic forks and cups while I bake three dozen Boysenberry cupcakes!”

When Penny heard that the party was going to happen, she brightened up even though her mother could sense that she was quite sad to be losing her best friend.

Mrs. Adams motioned for Penny to follow her into the living room where they both sat on the sofa.

“I have a couple things to tell you, Penny,” her mother began. “You are starting to grow up, so I believe you need to know these. The first is that having Lisa move away is just one of an entire lifetime of changes you will have to come to grips over and get through. At least this one isn’t as hard as my first lost friend. When I was a year younger than you, my best friend was Sandra Jones. She and I did everything together. Most of the time, that is. One day she and her mother were going to go into a nearby town for some shopping, and they invited me.”

Penny thought a second before interrupting. “Did you?”

Her mother shook her head. “No. And, I would not be here with

you right now if I had. You see, their car was hit by a big truck and they were both killed. “I never had the chance to say goodbye or to talk to her ever again. You have those chances with Lisa. There will come a day when you do have to face the reality of death. Your grandfather isn’t doing as well as we hoped and we could lose him in the next few days or a week.”

Penny was wide-eyed. “We have to go see him. Now!” she exclaimed.

Mrs. Adams patted her on the leg. You and your father and I will go see him tonight during evening visiting hours.”

They talked about other disappointments that would come along in life. Everything from friends that you lose contact with... to people you fall in love with who go away... to the loss of a beloved pet.

“Everything is a life lesson, my dear,” her mother said, “but you have a gift of being able to see the bright side of things. You will survive and get through everything that comes your way.”

They hugged for a full minute before Mrs. Adams excused herself to go back to the kitchen. Although she claimed it was to get dinner going, Penny could tell that she was on the verge of tears. So, she let her mom go to the other room while she headed for her bedroom.

When the phone rang down the hall she ran to answer it.

“Hello?”

“Penny? It’s Lisa. My mom just told me that your mother is going to be having a party for me. Isn’t that great?”

Although what she really wanted to do was lie down and have a good cry, Penny took a deep breath and told her friend how wonderful it was going to be.

“Mom’s even pulling out the last of the Boysenberries and making you cupcakes out of them. She’s putting berries right in the frosting as well.”

They had a good talk for more than fifteen minutes before Mrs. Wilts called Lisa to help set their table for dinner.

“See you at school tomorrow,” Penny promised.

## CHAPTER 3 – Mom and Dad Talk

The party was a huge success. Some of the boys and girls brought her small presents that would be easy to pack while others brought cards telling her how much they would miss her.

Several of her other teachers came for a few minutes to tell her how nice it had been to have her in their classes.

Penny and her mother were the last ones there along with Mrs. Wilts and Lisa. They all hugged and cried a little and promised they would always be in touch.

“Just a phone call away!”

Three weeks went past and both Mr. and Mrs. Adams were worrying about Penny’s change in attitude.

The girl who had once been practically famous for being positive and cheerful was now quiet and even a little withdrawn from things.

The only positive thing that happened was that Penny’s grandfather was getting better with each passing day and would be out of the hospital within a week. That made the girl happy, but only briefly.

But, nothing they could think to say to her made an overall difference. Even her teachers, including Miss McDade, tried to help her but all Penny would do was shrug, agree with whatever they told her and then go off and be quiet.

Usually full of stories and interesting facts about others at school or something she had learned, Penny barely said a word at dinner most nights. She was becoming so withdrawn that her mother and father had a talk one evening after she had been excused and went to her bedroom.

“I hate seeing her like this,” her mother stated.

With a sigh, her father agreed. “But, as much as it hurts us to watch her go through this, it is a natural thing that only she can get over. We need to be strong and ready when she asks for help,

and just be strong and right there for her without seeming to hover over her.”

“I know, but she’s so sad right now.”

They agreed to give her another week, making it about a month since Lisa’s family moved to Idaho, before they became proactive about seeking some help.

But, a full eight days went past and it was now spring break... and Penny was finding it difficult to get out of bed. With sunshine and the freshness that the change of seasons brings, her mother was becoming more alarmed.

She made a phone call and arranged to bring Penny in to see a nice man who she told Penny was a Psychologist. He could see her on Thursday so she only needed to wait three days.

“Hello, Penny,” he greeted her and held out his hand. She shook it with nearly no energy.

“Hi.” She looked around the room. There was a desk over in one corner and a pair of nice, leather seats in the middle. On a small table between them was a box of tissues.

“Has your mother told you about me?” he inquired, leading her over and offering her one of the chairs.

Penny shrugged. “Some sort of person who looks at what’s going on in my head, I guess.”

He laughed at that. It was a warm and genuine laugh and it made her feel trust in this stranger. His eyes even twinkled as he chuckled and finally stopped, looking at her.

“That is very good. It is much better than being called a ‘shrink’ or a ‘head mechanic.’ And, yes, I hope to have a few chats with you to see if I can shed a little light on why you are feeling what we call ‘depressed.’ Do you understand that term?”

She shook her head.

“Well, then, it basically means that you have a kind of sadness that goes deeper than, oh, perhaps being sad after you are told you cannot stay up to watch a television show. Or the sadness you get when you lose something. If you don’t mind a quick analysis, I’d say you did lose something, but more important to you than a ring

or a book.”

They talked for ten minutes with her mother in the room and then another twenty minutes with just the two of them.

It took most of that time for Penny to open up and tell him how hurt she was about Lisa moving away.

“It isn’t fair,” she told him. “Her parents even told her they weren’t moving!”

He looked at his notes. “Hmmm? Is that actually what they told her, Penny?”

Penny thought a minute before answering. “Oh. Maybe not. I guess they told her they weren’t moving until after the end of the school year.”

“Okay. So can you tell me how you felt about the future possibility of an end of the school year move compared to this sudden news and departure?”

Now, Penny had to think very hard. “After the end of the school year,” had seemed almost an impossibly long way off, so it hadn’t bothered her now that she was asked to consider it.

“I don’t know. I didn’t think it would ever come around, so it wasn’t that important to me. Why?”

“Why wasn’t it important, or why did I ask?”

“Both, I think.”

He nodded and gave her a little chuckle. She knew he wasn’t laughing at her or the questions, just that the situation was mildly humorous and possible one he faced every day.

“Penny, I believe that the younger we are, a specific date that is months away might just as well be a half a lifetime. None of us, no matter how clever we are, has a good grasp on ‘way out there’ until we get into our teenage years. For some people, even later than that. So I find it perfectly normal that you were not particularly bothered by your friend Lisa and the possibility of her moving many months in your future. But, I also think that most of us feel sadness when we discover an event just like this one is about to hit right in front of us. So, would you like to know what the solution is?”

She nodded. Inside her heart she felt that it was probably the most important thing in the world at that moment.

“It does us no good to wonder about how hurt we will be when that hurt or sadness isn’t going to happen for a long time. It would be like waking up one morning when you are six and wondering how badly you will feel when you get to be eighty years old and have a husband who has just died.”

Penny laughed. “That would be impossible,” she declared.

“And, you are right about that. Absolutely right. But it will possible happen to you. Until then your mind prefers to not think about it how you might feel. That is natural and healthy. It is what we call a self-defense mechanism. That means a way to keep things from worrying or bothering us.”

“Oh. So why does it hurt so much now?”

He nodded. “Another very good question. I think I can describe it like this. What hurts more? Getting your thumb hit with, oh, let’s say a hammer in one fast thump, or having the hammer gently placed, slowly, on the thumb?”

Penny smiled. “Wham, thump, *ouch!*”

“Uh-huh. So how does that match what has happened here with you and Lisa?”

It suddenly occurred to her what he was trying to say. “It hurts so much because it was sort of a wham, thump, ouch thing. Right?”

He nodded and gave her a look to encourage her to continue.

“Uhhh, so it didn’t bother me when she told me it might happen in eight months as much as it did when it was going to happen in seven days.” She stopped and looked at him. She knew he wanted her to say more, to figure it out for herself. “I have a question.”

“Go right ahead.”

“Well, would I have felt this bad if it didn’t happen until summer?”

The man scratched his shin in thought. “There are as many answers to that question as there are girls such as yourself. But in

an overall way I believe that if you had more time to consider her move, on the day it happened it would not have been such a shock. At least,” he winked at her, “you had a full week and even a lovely party or so I hear. Perhaps you should concentrate on remembering all the good times you two had together and with your friends and even call her up and make some sort of plan to keep in contact.”

For weeks she had wanted to do just that, but each time she thought about Lisa being many, many miles away she had become more and more sad.

That evening Penny told her father about the visit to the doctor. “He is what mom called a piechiatriss.”

Mr. Adams laughed and give her a hug. “It is spelled funny but it is pronounced like sigh-ki-a-trist.” He spelled it for her. “P-s-y-c-h-i-a-t-r-i-s-t.”

“He said losing her is like hitting your thumb with a hammer. If it happens all of a sudden it hurts a lot, but do in slowly and gently and it hardly hurts at all. He told me I’ve been so sad because it happened all of a sudden.”

Mr. Adams looked at his wife. “Wise words I believe. Don’t you think so, dear?”

“I do. So, Penny, you were so full of thoughts on the way home I didn’t want to disturb you, but did he say anything else that might help you?”

“Yes, he did. He says I should call her as soon as possible so I can tell her how much I miss her and how much I hope we can see each other some time not too far from now. But, he also told me that sometimes people who are very close never get a chance to get back together and I ought to just keep the good thoughts. He said to write them all down in a journal and every time I remember another good thing about Lisa, I’ll add that to the list. Then, every time I am sad about her moving away, I should look at the list and remember exactly why each good thing on the list is there.”

She excused herself, saying she was going to get out a brand new spiral notebook and start her list. She turned around at the entry to the hall.



“Is to too late to call her? I know about time zones so she is hours different, Right?”

“Yes, Penny,” her father explained, “but we are on Eastern Time and she is on Mountain Time, so she is two full hours earlier than we are. The world turns to the east and we are east of her so our noon is her ten in the morning. Let me see,” he said looking at his watch, “it is just going on six-thirty now, so what time is it in Idaho?”

Penny was good at math. “Four-thirty.”

“So, if you wait until after dinner until about, oh, seven-thirty it will still be before her dinner. You go make your list and then your mother or I will help you dial that long distance phone call.”

## CHAPTER 4 — An Important Discussion

“We have come to speak with you about our daughter, Penny Adams,” Mr. Adams said to the woman sitting across the desk. She was Penny’s Principal at the grade school

“Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Adams,” she said to them, standing up and shaking both of their hands. “It is a pleasure. And, Mrs. Adams and I have spoken in the past when you were so graciously planning the going away party for Lisa Wilts. We even nodded to each other when I stepped in the room for a moment.”

Mrs. Adams smiled but decided not to thank her for keeping Miss McDade away from the party.

“I must tell you that it is not a surprise to me that you want to talk about Penny. In fact I was going to phone you in the next few days to ask you to come see me.”

Penny’s parents exchanged a surprised look.

“I believe the reason you came here today is about Penny having changed in some way. Is that correct?”

Both of Penny’s parents nodded, but said nothing.

“It has been noticed by her teachers and most of the other students. While we can allow for quite a bit of attitude change—heavens knows how much of *that* happens at the junior high level—the one thing I have to worry about is what it does to a student’s grades. And, Penny’s grades are about to become a problem.”

Mr. and Mrs. Adams told the woman about Penny’s visit to the Psychiatrist and how it helped her put many things into perspective, and that over the five days since that they both noticed a marked change.

“Well, now that everyone is back from spring break I hope that we can all get Penny back on track, but we have limited time before the end of the school year. And, she is effectively a whole month behind.” Seeing the looks on the couple across her desk, she gave them a soft smile.

“I think I might have a plan to help, but it is going to take all of Penny’s time and effort to make it happen. Now, I could describe it

to you alone but I would like to call her into this discussion. She will have just gone into her homeroom period where all students do is homework and reading. She can miss that. May I have your permission to have her paged?”

“Absolutely!” Mr. Adams told her.

Four minutes later a small knock came on the office door and it opened. “Did you want to— Oh! Mom. Dad!” Penny was both startled and now nervous at seeing both of her parents with her Principal.

“Come in, Penny. Your mother and father and I were just talking about the matter of your missing out on a month of learning.”

“But, I was here all last month, ma’am!” Penny protested. “I’d never skipped school no matter how bad I felt!”

The Principal laughed. “No, Penny. You did not skip any classed but you weren’t exactly at school, were you? Your mind was about eighteen hundred miles away in I believe, Idaho?”

Penny’s eyes went down to look at the floor. “Oh. That. Yes, ma’am.”

Her father got up and led Penny back to his chair. “Go ahead and sit down, Penny. Your Principal says she has a way to help you finish this grade on time.”

The girl’s eyes came up and she looked at the Principal who was nodding, then it swiveled to face her mother and then up to look into her father’s encouraging face then finally back to the Principal.

“Really?” she asked in wonder. “Everyone has been telling me I’ll have to repeat this year.”

Now, the head of the school looked bothered. “Penny? Who has been saying that? If it is students, then they are ill informed. But, if it is any of our teachers...” and she did not finish that thought.

Penny was quiet for many seconds. “Go ahead and tell her who has been saying that terrible thing,” her mother urged.

Penny tried to form words but they got stuck in her throat until she felt her father’s hand gently squeeze her shoulder.

“Miss McDade,” she said in almost a whisper. “Please don’t get mad at her. She was frustrated with me for not finishing my homework and it sort of slipped out. I don’t want her to get into trouble.”

The Principal had been working up a good anger and this statement deflated her.

“Huh? Why is that?”

Penny gulped, her mouth suddenly very dry. “Because she’s the best teacher I have,” she finally got out.

The Principal sat back and sighed. She took off her glasses and pinched the bridge of her nose for a moment. “Yes. I know.” She looked at the two other adults. “You see, Miss McDade has been and can be a wonderful teacher, it is just that she rubs a lot of people, student and parents, the wrong way. In fact, and you must keep this an absolute secret, Penny, she is being asked by the School Board to take early retirement. This is just about the last straw.”

“No, please,” Penny nearly pleaded. “Everyone say they hate her, but we all learn so much. It’s just that she is awfully old fashioned about things and the way she thinks.”

“Well, if you are to finish this year on time and not have to take summer school or be put back one year from the rest of your friends, then you need to work with her and the three other teachers you have to bring up your Math, Social Studies, English, and General Science grades. You can let the PE and Music Appreciation classes go. I’ve spoken with those teachers and they will give you a D if you can’t catch up. It isn’t failing but it isn’t very good.”

Penny promised to do everything she could to catch up.

So, before she went back to class she and her parents signed an agreement form. She would be given all of the materials covered that past month before spring break and could retake any quizzes or tests in three weeks. But, she also had to knuckle down and keep up with her current work.

“I’ll work every night and on weekends,” Penny said. “I can do this.”

She smiled and went back to class.

“You know something, Mr. And Mrs. Adams. I believe that girl of yours can do exactly that!”

## CHAPTER 5 – Shining Up the Penny

The big day arrived. April 29th. It was Penny's tenth birthday and a big party had been carefully planned by her mother. It was to be the only day Penny had where she could take a break from her studying.

She managed to pass all her missing classes with low B-level grades and was keeping up with her new studies, even scoring a few A's on quizzes in Math (multiplying fractions) and General Science (how the solar system was formed).

Fifteen of her school friends, and her cousin from a town just ten miles away, all were to arrive at the Adams' home two o'clock.

At noon, Mrs. Adams walked down the hall and gently knocked on Penny's door. "May I come in?" she asked.

When she opened the door it was to find Penny sitting there concentrating on a textbook. It was propped up against a pile of other books and there were two notebooks open as well. Penny was writing quickly in one of them. She stopped, evidently sensing someone behind her.

"Oh! It's you, Mom. I didn't hear you. Uhh, I'm working on more of old hand grenade's math stuff. Now that we are supposed to have mastered multiplying fractions, she has us dividing them. I mean, why? Nobody is ever going go into a store and say, 'now if I want one third of a tenth of a ton of beans, how much do I want?' Are they?"

In spite of her daughter's serious face, she smiled and laughed. "More often than you think, dear. But it is very easy to do." And so saying she proceeded to remind Penny how to find common denominators and then to do simple equations.

"But, that's too easy," Penny said before a voice behind them exclaimed:

"It is, but it is something you have to figure out."

The blood froze in Penny's veins. "Miss McDade?"

"The very same." Penny stood up and turned around.

"Mrs. Adams, I hope I did not over step any boundaries by

coming in your pen front door. I'm certain you left it open for ventilation on this warm April day and not for meddling old hand grenades to waddle through. Oh, don't looked so shocked. I was called that the very first year I started teaching. Even from you, if I recall..." and she raised an eyebrow at Mrs. Adams, "Patty Parker. Yes, I remember each and every one of my better students and I remember you even after all these years. And I intend to remember Penny here as well."

"Uhh, let me get you a chair—"

"Nonsense. I stand all day and even if I am what might be described as plump, I can still stand. I'll say what I came to say and then leave you alone. I want you to get through this little problem, Penny. So much so that I am willing to spend an extra hour after school each Monday through Thursday until we get out on June 8th. Together, we can get you back at the top of the class where you belong, and I can go out feeling like I accomplished something meaningful."

She explained that she was being asked to retire and would not be back the next September.

"I might do some tutoring for exceptional students," she said. "You, for instance."

"I don't think you should retire," Penny stated.

Now, Miss McDade stood looking puzzled. "Why, Penny. Nobody is particularly pleased to see me or find that they have been assigned me as their teacher for the following year. My reputation precedes me."

"But, you are a good teacher. All you need to do is—"

Penny's right hand slapped over her mouth and her eyes went wide as saucers. She took the hand away just enough to utter one word, "Sorry!" before it clamped back down.

"What, girl? I should lighten up? Dye my hair? Be nice? Go easy on you students?"

Penny took her hand down. "No, ma'am. I was going to say smile. If you just smiled instead of frowning some times kids wouldn't be afraid of you. You always look like you are about to yell at us, that's all."

Her mother turned on her and said, “Yes. That is just about all of that sort of talk to our guest. Now you apologize, Penny.”

“No. Patty. She is correct. Can you ever remember me smiling when you were one of mine?” She waited a few seconds. “I didn’t imagine so. Penny is right. Both my sister and I were brought up by strict parents who did not want us to smile. Father said it made people look like lunatics!”

The three of them went into the living room where Miss McDade accepted a cup of tea and a cookie that had been baked for the party. When she noticed the decorations she asked what the occasion was and when she heard it was Penny’s birthday she got up explaining, “I need to get out of your hair, then. You probably have a lot to do.”

“You could stay,” Penny suggested.

“Oh, no. Nothing would ruin your party guests’ good mood quicker than seeing me here.”

Penny shook her head. “It isn’t like you have to be in here all the time. Heck. Mom isn’t going to be very much. But it might be a good chance to try smiling. I think you might find that the kids will smile back.”

Miss McDade looked at Penny. “You can’t be very sure of that, Penny.

“Sure I can! I’m practically positive about it!

\* \* \* \* \*

The final full month of the school year went by very fast. Penny only had two non-study days in all thirty days. Those had been spent talking to Lisa on the phone and hearing funny stories about some of what she called “the goat ropers and hicks” many of the country-raised young boys were.

Miss McDade had been good to her word and soon had Penny not only caught up but finishing the entire math textbook a week early. And, when the final test came Penny passed it with a 99%, the highest grade in the entire class.

On the very last school day Penny and all the other boys and girls were shocked when the school’s most feared teacher, Eloise



McDade, asked the school to have an assembly right after lunch. When all the children—nearly 400 of them grades one through six—were seated, the big doors at one side of the auditorium opened and six women came in pushing carts filled with cupcakes.

“First of all I wanted to say thank you to those students I have had the pleasure of teaching. Then, I want to show the rest of you that old Hand Grenade McDade isn’t as mean and nasty as you might have heard. In fact, I may not show it but I have been very fond of being part of your education, and that is something I will not be doing as of next year.”

Without going into details she told them she was leaving teaching. Some of the children secretly were thankful and some were sad, but most were curious. They had never had her as a teacher. But, they had heard the rumors...

At the end, and as the pupils were walking out, some stopping to shake her hand and tell her good-bye, one little girl stood out.

She had a smile on her face and a certain look in her eyes. When the last student had gone, Penny stepped forward.

“You aren’t going to retire, Miss McDade. You are too good a teacher.”

“Penny, Penny, Penny,” the teacher said with a little shake of her head. “How can you even think that? I may not have told you but I am not going because I want to. I am going because I have been told it is time for me to leave.”

“Then someone is going to have to reset their clock.”

“How can one young girl be so sure of herself, girl? How?”

“I don’t know, Miss McDade, but you’ll be back. I’m positive!”

## SOME SPECIAL WORDS

There may be a few words used in this story that are new to you. Like these:

**Boysenberry:** a large sweet berry that is a cross between a special type of raspberry and a blackberry. They are often as large as a man's thumb and are very juicy.

**proactive:** try to be the first one to do something; "He wanted to see the band so he was proactive about checking for tickets.

**Psychologist:** a doctor who helps people having difficulty with emotional issues; they use conversation and suggestions rather than drugs to help their patients.

**perspective:** a way of looking at things; people can have a positive perspective or a negative one.

**gracious:** to be pleased and helpful in a situation

**retirement:** to stop working at your job; this usually happens when someone turns 65 or after a certain number of years in a position.

If you find other words that you do not understand, you might also ask a teacher for help, ask one of your parents, or even look in a dictionary.