

Sample 1:

Third grade was the worst year of my life. I thought it was going to be a great year, when I found out I was going to have Ms. Jackson, the same 3rd grade teacher my older brother had had five years before. Unfortunately, my luck stopped there.

Early in the school year, when the air was still warm, my PE coach decided that all of the 3rd grade students should learn to play tetherball. It wasn't five minutes into our first lesson when I took the fall. I was going for the ball when I lost my balance. My knee landed on a sharp piece of metal and was sliced wide open. There was blood everywhere and I couldn't stop crying. I couldn't walk either and the coach had to carry me to the nurse.

It was after the tetherball incident that things really started to go wrong. A girl in my class, Alice Miller, started picking on me. She made fun of me all day, every day. Until third grade I had lots of friends, but by October I was lucky if I made it to lunch without Alice making me cry. Other kids saw how she treated me, and they started to pick on me, too.

The year I was in third grade, my brother Mark was in eighth grade, and it wasn't a great year for him, either. I remember he used to argue with my parents all the time, and he started getting really bad grades. I think he was getting picked on in school, too, but I'm not sure because he went to a school on the other side of the highway.

My mom was working at a new job, too. She was teaching at a middle school, just like my brother's, only it was even farther away. The nurse at her school had a daughter, Lauren, who was in my third grade class. Lauren was nice to me at our moms' school, but not so nice to me in our class. She would play with me on the weekends or when we were at work with our moms, but she was one of Alice's friends at school.

Finally, at the end of third grade, I got some great news. My parents decided to build a new house. The new house was just far enough away that I would get to go to fourth grade at a new school! Good riddance, Alice Miller!

Sample 2:

The second I emerged from the water, the whole world turned light pink. I rubbed the water out of my eyes quickly so the chlorine wouldn't sting, and the world began to come back into focus. The muddy rose-colored walls of the indoor pool stood out against the light blue water, but it was my aunt's smile that shone brightest of all.

"Ready to call it a night, kiddo?" she called. I nodded and dog-paddled my way over to her. She helped me out of the pool and wrapped me in a warm, fluffy, white hotel towel. It smelled like clean laundry. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath in to enjoy the flowery perfume.

After I dried off we walked through the lobby and up to our room. We were staying at a very special hotel called the Precious Moments hotel. My aunt and grandmother both collected Precious Moments figurines, so my aunt knew a lot about them. She told me stories about the ones we saw on our way up to the room.

When we arrived at our room, my aunt helped me wash my hair and get into my pink nightgown. The nightgown was almost the exact same color of the walls by the pool, and my aunt joked that I would fit right in with the Precious Moments figurines.

It was already eight o'clock, but my brother and dad were still out seeing a movie, so my aunt said I could stay up with her to watch TV. We watched reruns of "I Love Lucy" and "Green Acres"—her favorite shows from when she was a little girl. As we watched, my aunt dried and brushed my hair. She told me hers had looked just like mine when she was little. I smiled, but on the inside I worried that my hair was going to turn gray like hers.

I don't remember when I fell asleep or when my brother and dad returned from the movie. The next morning, as we walked down to breakfast, my dad asked if I had enjoyed spending time with my aunt. "Uh huh!" I replied. "We had a lot of fun!" As we boarded the elevator, we passed one of the Precious Moments figurines. I told my dad its story that my aunt had told me the night before. As I told my dad the story, I caught a glimpse of my aunt. She was smiling at me, like she was really proud of me. I never figured out why she looked proud, but I always remembered that smile.