

Pink Hats for Wendy



By Her Mother
Bluebird

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This book is dedicated to Wendy's Children and
to all children who lose a mother at a young age.

Foreword

There are two things that belong to a mother; the birth and the death of her children.

Being with Wendy during her final days was a special time for both of us. Sometimes I feel sad that we didn't re-view more of our lives, tell truths and fewer lies; confide, confess, rejoice. Wendy had her own way; we shared few words, many times just watching the children play, folding clothes, looking out the window or at each other, but not to cry. This was how Wendy chose to spend her last days and months. I am proud to have been there with her. Those of us who were close to Wendy thought that she always belonged to God; her spirit soared with the angels. Wendy never had an unkind word.

These poems are to honor her and to help others celebrate last days and record them; to honor mothers who were not always there for their daughters, but had reasons. We all gave whatever love we had to give.

Pink Hat Christmas

This Christmas my daughter
Will be wearing a pink
Hat instead
Of red—

Pink is her color anyway,
Pale, but not like her cheeks,
Always rosy, her eyes almost
Always have a glow
To them—

Pink, because celebration is
Muted,
Has a different meaning,
No less significant—

Has more to do with memory,
Slightly faded pictures in
Albums
Pored through,
Children all over the bed—

She does not have her usual
Set of long locks,
Hair she was always
Proud of—

Having to choose colors and
Threads that allow her
Head to breathe,
It was natural that she
Would choose pink,

Which happens to be the
Breast cancer color,
Which— happens to be
Not an end statement

But a new beginning,
An unknown—Where she
Will go—Her pink hat
Making for her a trail—

This Christmas will be
A different celebration;
No less significant,
No less happy,
But is more about memory,

More about dusty
Trails rather than
Roads, more flowers,
More smiles,
More curved edges
To laughter,
Something about Pink—

The beginning and end
Of a rose.

Beginning of Losses

She didn't think
It would happen—
 After three chemo-
 Therapies
Nothing Happened.
Then one
Day her seven-year
Old daughter brought
Out a fistful of hair
To her Daddy working
 In the garden;
It was the beginning
Of a set of losses—
 That fistful
 Fell into the garden
Where it immediately
Got nourished
By a shower.

Silver Combs and Brushes

I don't remember
Ever
Combing my
Daughter's hair;
Part of the time
I wasn't there.
But who, I
Wonder, braided
Her hair in those pretty
Braids—and did
She have a silver
Comb and brush and
Mirror set?
Whatever happened then,
We don't talk about;
I have to imagine
It was she alone
Who combed
It, braided
It and never cut
It—choosing always
To let it
Grow.

He Doesn't Know

I was out of
Town with a
Purpose when
More strands
Fell out—her husband
Put many of them
In a special box,
In between
Photographs in
An album.
When
I came back
From traveling
I saw some of them
On the floor where
The baby often
Bangs his head
In protest over some
Other child taking
His toy—He
Doesn't know yet that
Those strands will
Not always be there,
Swept away
Clean with a
Sweeper.

Still Time

There is time,
I think to myself,

There is time,
She must think
To herself;

There is still a
Lot of time for
Us to go slow

On our path
Together—

Some days we
Laugh
Over some silly
Thing a child

Said—On some days, it
Is to say—“There is a
Need for more
Tea spoons
To set on the table;”

Some days I bring
A broccoli
And rice dish;
And one day I
Went through
All of my
Crocheted hats

Hanging in a flowered
Bag on my closet
Door and brought her
Ones to wear
As head coverings.

She chose the
Purple hat
With rainbow
Colors and
We smile.

Each hat
With a history saying
More to each other
Than words.

Trying on Wigs

At the wig
Store there
Were rows of
Wigs on the wall—
“They are mostly for
Black people,” she
Said, as we
Moved toward the few
With blond and brown
Hair—
After trying a few,
We would have laughed
A lot more,
But the baby was climbing
Over and under
In and out of the tables—
And the older child
Had a ball
He was throwing across
The floor—almost knocking
Over displays—
The man at the
Cash register
Didn’t have to say
Anything; we
Bought two turbans
Quickly, one pink,
The other purple—
And rushed out of the store.
Her seven-year-old daughter,
Liked best the pink one.

Last Piece of Frizz

"Now it is almost
Gone," her husband said,
"I wish she
Would cut off that
Last piece of frizz
That clings to the back
Of her head.
It is
Just so weird."

But I think to
Myself—No one
Has to see it—It is
Hers,
What she has to
Cling to.
But—
That was two weeks
Ago—and I haven't asked
Or heard about
Whether it is still there
Yet
or not.

My Daughter's Hair

Now, at a
Conference,
I am reminded
Of my daughter's
Hair everywhere;

Someone sits in front
Of me and light
Plays sunbeams
On it—

I think
Of my daughter's
Hair—

Another has a barrette
Placed just right,

And I think
Of my daughter's
Hair—

Another has a
Bun in the
Back, with a
Knot,

And I think
Of my daughter's
Hair—

I think
Of my daughter's hair—

The beautiful knot
She twirled around
In the back and set
Just to the right of
Her face;

Everyone always saw her
Beauty,
Everyone always remarked,

“How beautiful”

My daughter’s hair.

Gains and Losses

Wendy has regained
Some hair; just a baby-
Like fuzz—I notice now
How her head is such a
Nice shape, almost still
Like it was
 When she was a baby.

I remarked how wonderful
It was,
 But then remembered
That she is undergoing
Radiation
And would lose it
 Again—

“But, (the next day)
I can walk again,” she said,
On the phone,
 On the morning of the
20th
 Of January,
 “I can walk again.”

What is lost is regained
Somewhere else—we called
Hospice to cancel the morning
Nurse—we are canceling,
For now, the nursery school
And day care—

For now.

OM

We celebrate
With everyone gathered
At the dinner table;
Right after,
We held hands and chanted a
Wonderful
OM.

Promises

Her oldest son called
from Atlanta—

It was he who told his
Mom—"If you do
Radiation, I will be
A vegetarian."

She did and I
Imagine he will

Be a vegetarian,
Perhaps with a
Few exceptions,

Like when we go again
For Sushi—

Maybe we will
Celebrate over his
Favorite California
Roll with eel.

We'll have to wait
And see.

Insensitivity

I gave my
 Daughter
Another pink
Hat I found
At a yard sale.

I admit,
 Insensitively,
I asked her if she
Still had the knot in
Back of her head—

Immediately, she
 Bristled— and
Declared she didn't
Want to show off
Her head,
And didn't want me
Writing
 About her hair.

How could I
 Tell her
The poems are
Not about
Her hair at all,
But more about
The story of
 A Mother
 And her daughter.

Not About Tomatoes

Her voice gets
Steroid sharp;
Every day
 She secretly
Takes a hunk of
Doughnut
 Filled with sugar,
 Two months ago,
She never would have
Eaten.

The man with the
 Box of tomatoes
Keeps repeating
Himself—saying
 "There is no
Salmonella in them,
 There is no
Salmonella in the
Tomatoes."

But the man of
The house
Said,
 "There could be.
 There could be."

I repeated myself—
 "Are you going to be okay?
 Are you going to be okay?"
While packing up the
Tomatoes to
Take home.

"What do you mean?"
She asked,
"I'm fine.
You already
Asked me that."

Okay—everybody
Repeating
Themselves;
Tomatoes not
Rotten—No
Salmonella
Please.

In the Center of Her Children

Everything started
To be the same,
She wore the same
Pink hat,
Sat in the
Same chair in
The center of her
Children.
Nevertheless,
I went on
Line, found
Pretty print
Scarves—tie
Bucks for behind her
Head—flowers
And leaves in
Many different
Shades and colors.
It is not her
Style to want
Or to ask;
I still found
It was something,
Though really nothing
To pass the time to
Do—
Realizing,
We want
Such different
Things, but
She is the one
Dying,
Defining,
While I die a little too.

Emergency

This time,
 (Unexpectedly)
She had on a broad
Brimmed straw
 Hat with pink broad-
Cloth,
Almost hiding her face,
Covering her head—

She said she got
It at Walmart
The day before,
But she couldn't
Tell me this
Until hours after
The seizure,
After the ambulance,
After the ER,
And now in the ICU.

After I arrived,
 (And as unexpectedly
 her husband
 had called to tell me),

It was almost
All you saw:—
 A broad brimmed straw
Hat—not her eyes.

She briefly
Began to speak again,
(Machine buzzing,
Blinking, drawing lines).

She opened
Her eyes
And started talking;
What she remem-
bered,
She said, was going to
Walmart, buying the
hat,

But
Nothing more.

Getting Ready For The Garden

When ready for
Discharge, the nurse
 Remarked,
 "Your hat is so pretty,
 And you have such
 Beautiful eyes."

She thought
I was her sister—
 "No need to
 Apologize,"
I said, a bit
 Flattered—I admit.

We waited, it seemed,
Forever, for the escort
To come—Her
Eyes drifting off
 Peacefully
 To sleep.

I was bracing myself
For home
(Her husband
and I not speaking).

When the wheelchair
Finally came,
She said to the aide,
"I bought this hat
To work in the garden."

But then her leg
Collapsed, at the
Door to the
Car—
Her straw hat still
In place.

I could not help but wonder
If she would ever do gardening
Again.

Making Amends

At every turn
Now—of her
Pink clad head,
There is
The question
Of how many
More turns—

Or when she
Says something,
The sentences
Not making
Sense,
Will she say
Something,
Ever—again?

Will her eyes
Open and Close
And
Open
Again?

Will
I have time
To be
With her another
Day?

Yesterday,
I tried to make amends,
"I would like to say
I'm sorry
For so many
Things," I said.

"No," she said,
"I do not
Want that."—

Emphatically!

Her mind,
Perhaps, on more
Peaceful things;
I tried.

Pink Hat Smile

She loved to
Have her
Picture taken,
Even up to the
End;

Smile
Snap—

She said someone
Had taught her how
To smile
And she practiced
Smiling until
She got it just
Right—I tried

To imagine if
Some of her
Last smiles
Were forced,
When she didn't like
How her face
Got puffy and
Swollen, but,
I think—

No—
She had decided
That smiling
Makes everyone
Happy—

So she
Smiled
To make others
Happy,

So they
Would
Smile
With her
As
Well.

Multi-colored Hats

On her bedroom wall
Are many
Assorted
Hats, of all different types;
Some large
That she crocheted in
Rainbow colors for

Her husband, two tiny
Hats she crocheted
For her babies,
Several purple ones;
Others, in different colors
And shapes for
Differently sized
Heads—

The first pink
Hat I got her
Is faded
And torn,
But is
Still there
On a nail,
Turning rusty
Brown.

Jamaican "Tams"

This may be the
Final pink hat
I buy.
She said she liked the original
Hat,
 Pink—crocheted
 With cotton thread;

Turns out,
 It's called a Jamaican
 "Tam."
 I tried to find it,
First, back to the Jamaican Shop,
Where the man said
He had not yet ordered it,
Though he had promised;
Then multiple
 Rastafarian
 Hippie sites
On the internet,
Turned up a
 Purple "Tam"
 Not pink.

I went to Amazon
But couldn't
 Complete the
 Order form,
Correctly, for
A beautifully elegant
Pale pink hat that I liked,
But not what I was looking for,
 For her—

I screamed
At the helpful
Service clerk,
 Who didn't do
 Anything but
Try to help;

Finally, at the Publix,
Buying a pie crust
For a blueberry pie,
 I saw a man
 Wearing just
 The right
Crocheted "Tam"
(In white—not pink).

"Down at the wig
Shop," he said,
"They have them
In every different color;
 They stay
 Open until 8."

Walking fast,
Down the strip
Mall, right before
They closed,
I found
Just what I wanted;
 A Pink Crocheted
 Hat
 For \$1.99.

Dissatisfaction

She wore
 One of the last pink
Hats I bought her,
Though now a bit
Snug—her face
Puffy—
She is mostly
In bed
 Lying on her
 Back, staring
Into space, not
Saying
Anything,
Or barely.

“I should be
 Satisfied,”
She said.
 I,
Waiting, asked,

“Are you?”

“No,” she said,
“I’m not.”

 That was
All she said.

The Final Pink Hat Poem

Smoothing
The wisps
Of hair that
Peak out from
Under her
Pink hat—I straighten
The hat;
It keeps
Coming up over
Her ears. . .

She is now
In her last
Stage—saying
One word
At a time;
“Help” or
“Okay”—
She hears me.
(A son, her husband,
A daughter, are also there.) . . .

I am by her
Side cradling
Her head,
Thinking about
What this must
Be like
For her—It
Is not the
Way the book
Says, more like
The yellow sheet
From Hospice
Describes

The symptoms
Of dying. . .

I knew when
On Sunday or
Was it the day
Before, when
Wendy called,
 Wanting then to
 Listen, finally
Acknowledging
She was dying;

“Listen,” I
Said, “This is what
May happen—
 Your breathing
 Will change
As it did during
Labor, giving
Birth.”—
 (She had borne
Ten
 Children:
She knew about
 Breath, dilation,
 Labor that to her
Was not painful.)

“It
Will not be
Painful, but
Will be a
 Labor—
 Your body
Will give

Over to
God, to
What we might
 Call Heaven,
A peaceful
Ending"—

"A tunnel
 Of light
Described by
Near death survivors;
 They all say
 Almost the same
Thing," I said,
 "You do not
 Need to be
Afraid." . . .

"Do you want
 to listen to this?
Are you listening?"
I asked,

"Yes," she said.

Describing the transition,
"You will go on a journey,"
I said,
"Like climbing a cliff,
Hanging on, but
Not seeing beyond,

But now—

Now. . .

I am smoothing
Over her face,
With my hands
Looking at
 Her hands,
Wishing we had
Scrubbed her
 Dirty nails,
 Cut them—

Massaging her
Arms, "Yes,"
She says,
 When I tell
 Her we are
With her—
When she asks
Us to do something—

"We are here,
We will be here,
We love you." . . .

"Okay," she says.

Over and over
We do this.
 Simple reassurance,
 Simple words, . . .

"Yes," she says,

When we tell
Her we are
 Here—
There are
 No more

Moments to
Speak, tell
Secrets, ask
Questions, read
 Even the
 Bible
Though her husband
Recites the 23rd
Psalm, those of
Us, who could,
 Repeating. . . .

I thought of
 Infancy and
Toddler stages,
Boots that
Were hard to
Get on,
A crib that had
 Screened in
 Sides—she
Was penned in—
 Cotton warm tights
She wore in the winter
Under a red and white
 Pinafore,
Leggings, coats she
 Wore sledding, apples
Picked
In fall,
Things she said,

Peas she picked
Up and ate
In her high
Chair
And threw over
On the floor. . . .

And as she
 Grew into a
Young lady,
The ballerina
 Costume she
Wore with perfecting
Arms and legs;

She could have
Been a prima ballerina,
 But she chose
Raising children instead,
Loving them,
 Saying "yes"
 And never "no."

I thought about
What she was thinking
Now—as
Her breathing
Changed—

I wondered
Whether
She was
 Thinking
At all. . .

Or whether
God was talking
To her, taking her
To where
Thought is unnecessary—

She seemed to
Know—even
In the last hour—
“Ouch,” or
“Okay,” or
“Yes,” she’d say
In response
To our asking
If she knew
 We were there. . .

As
Her breathing changed,
Our breathing
 Remained the
 Same, within
 Normal limits,
Our hearts beating
More rapidly,
Or was it our thoughts
Racing to
 Try to keep
 Up with hers, to

Try to keep her
Here—

Try to keep her
Here . . .

Smooth
Out the edges,
Warm the cold
Arms and limbs,
Straighten the
 Pink hat,
One last time. . .

Later,
Her pink hat,
They said,
Dropped
Off when the
Funeral home
Came to pick her
Up.

I am not sure
Where it went, but—
I bought one last
Pink hat
To be placed on
Her head forever.

With whatever
 Love I ever
 Gave her,
With whatever love
 I had to
 Give,

I gave.

About the Author
Gayle Bluebird

Bluebird was born and raised in Quakertown, Pennsylvania and is the mother of three and the grandmother of fifteen children. She has been writing poetry most of her life and has been published in several anthologies. She works as a national mental health consultant and is known for her work on reducing the use of seclusion and restraint in psychiatric facilities. She is also recognized for promoting artistic expression for persons who have received mental health services and is the founder of Altered States of the Arts, a national network of artists, writers and performers. She lives in Gainesville, Florida, and intends to travel across the country in the next year as a "traveling technical assistant" writing stories and poems along the way.

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In Loving Memory Of My Daughter
Wendy
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