



*Reluctant Press presents:*

# The Rainbow School For Girls



E. B. Stevenson

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A 'NEW WOMAN' E-BOOK

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Persons seeking gender reassignment surgery, hormone therapy or any other medical and/or body-altering process should seek the counsel of a qualified therapist who follows the Benjamin Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorder.

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# **“THE RAINBOW SCHOOL FOR GIRLS”**

**by E. B. Stevenson**

## **One**

The middle part of June came around once again, and it was time to make plans for the next academic year, which would begin in late August. This was a routine I grew into during twenty years teaching in the New York Public Schools. For the past five years, I had been teaching Social Studies to a group of remedial education students at Buchanan High School. Before that, I spent eight years teaching regular middle school Social Studies in the Bronx. I taught in upper Manhattan for one year, two years each teaching high school Social Studies in Queens and lower Manhattan. I started

twenty years ago teaching middle school Social Studies in Brooklyn.

I had been living in a two-bedroom apartment in Greenwich Village since I came to New York. I have had six roommates in the twenty years I was in my apartment: four male and two female. The female roommates I had were two of my three sisters. My oldest sister, Ann, lived with me while she was studying pre-med at Columbia. My youngest sister, Rosemary, lived with me while she was in art school. Christopher Carson was my latest roommate; he had come to New York three years ago from Michigan, where he grew up and went to college.

It was a week before the end of the school year. I had just finished my last class for the day, and was preparing to leave for my apartment to grade papers and prepare the final exams for my classes. I heard a knock on my door just as I finished packing my briefcase and backpack. Robyn Carter, the assistant principal, was at the door. "May I come in, Eric?" she asked me.

"You certainly may," I replied before asking her what's on her mind.

"I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but you've heard that the New York Public Schools are cutting back on teachers. Since you've been with us for twenty years, you're eligible for early retirement. There is one condition attached to your early retirement, though: you cannot accept another teaching position in the New York metropolitan area for the next four years. I'm sorry that we cannot extend another contract to you, but you've done a great job for us. I can give you an excellent reference when you apply for your next teaching job," she informed me.

The subway ride back to Greenwich Village was the longest I had been on. I had to let it sink in. I was finished as a secondary school teacher in New York. When I returned to the apartment, I found Chris sitting in a chair in the kitchen. He was grading his students' papers. When I walked in, Chris asked me: "What's with the long face, Eric?"

"I've been offered early retirement. I only have one more week as a teacher in New York," I replied.

"I got my layoff notice today. After next week, I will no longer be a teacher in the New York Public Schools," he added.

"That comes at a good time; the lease to our apartment is up on June 30."

"Where do you plan to go?" he asked me.

"I'm hoping to teach somewhere in the Midwest or in the Rockies," I replied.

"My girlfriend works at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul. She's pointed me to an English teaching opportunity in Pusan," he added.

"Yeah, you've been with that same girl since you two were in grade school back in Traverse City."

When my proctored my last exam, I began to pack my items from my classroom into four huge boxes. I decided to drive my minivan to work for my last day instead of taking the subway. As I was packing my last box, Robyn knocked on the door. "Eric, you have a visitor," she informed me.

The visitor turned out to be Ginger Davis, a former colleague from my days teaching in lower Manhattan. She was in a white summer dress and a matching pair of flats. "What brings you here, Ginger?" I asked her.

“Eric, I now teach at the Rainbow School for Girls on Long Island, and Robyn made me aware of your situation. I had the feeling you were looking for a job and looking to get out of New York, so I came here to tell you that we have an opening for a History teacher at our campus in Casper, Wyoming,” she informed me.

“I would be interested in interviewing for the job,” I told her.

“Jacqueline Avildsen, who heads up Human Resources for all of our campuses, is in town conducting interviews for vacant positions at all our campuses. She would like to meet with you Monday at two,” she informed me before asking me if I could make it.

“I’ll be there Monday afternoon at two,” I replied.

When I came back to the apartment, Chris had hauled the last of his boxes in. “Did you get any visitors on your last day?” he asked me.

“I got a visit from Ginger Davis. I worked with her when we were teaching together in lower Manhattan. She’s now at the Rainbow School for Girls on Long Island, and informed me that there’s an opening at their campus in Wyoming. I’m being interviewed on Monday at two o’clock for that position,” I replied.

“I also have an interview on Monday. A representative from the school my girlfriend suggested will be interviewing me at one o’clock at the South Korean mission to the United Nations,” he added.

“I’m sure South Korea is going to be an adventure, as far as teaching is concerned. One of my friends, who student taught under me at Buchanan, is teaching in Daegu now. He’s been able to find a church that has services in English; most of the people that attend

church with him are Filipino immigrants. I'm sure you can find a church with services in English in Pusan."

"There's so much to do in Wyoming. I hope you can ski."

"I prefer hiking and camping, myself. The last time I went hiking was in the Catskills; I last went camping in the Poconos in Pennsylvania."

"I must admit, camping is something I haven't done since Boy Scouts. I haven't been on a hike since I went with my girlfriend to Vermont last spring."

"If I get this job, I'm looking forward to the fresh Rocky Mountain air. I hope I can find a decent girl in Casper; I haven't been able to do so since I left Carbon-dale."

"I hope I can get this job in South Korea. At least I'll be closer to my girl and get used to a new culture."

## Two

It was a beautiful day as I made the trip from Greenwich Village to the Rainbow School for Girls' campus on Long Island. I left around twelve-thirty, after I had lunch. The campus was located on the shore of Long Island Sound about forty minutes from Greenwich Village. It was one-thirty when I arrived at the gates to the campus. I pulled out my driver's license, and showed it to a white-haired security guard.

"My name is Eric Bronson. I have a two o'clock appointment with Jacqueline Avildsen," I informed him. After he looked over the security list, he opened the gate. I drove through the gate, and drove along a mile and a half of winding roads before coming to the main campus. The main classroom and administration build-

ing was surrounded by a multi-purpose building on the west side, dormitories to the north, and visitors' quarters to the east. The administration building is the only one on campus without a view of Long Island Sound. I pulled my minivan into a visitor space in the parking lot, grabbed my briefcase, and walked into the





building. I took the elevator to the third floor, where the administration offices were.

I found the room I was asked to go to, number 311. It was the office of Janna Hawkins, the school's headmistress. I walked in, and informed the assistant on duty, a student named Denise Stone, that I had arrived.

"May I help you?" she asked me.

"I'm Eric Bronson; I'm here to see Miss Avildsen," I replied.

"She will be with you in a moment," she added, before asking me: "Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you," I replied before I sat in a chair directly across from the reception desk. I opened my briefcase, and began reading that day's New York Times. As the clock struck two, a blonde-haired woman came out of the conference room next to the headmistress' office. She was five-ten, average build, wearing a blue dress, matching jacket, a pair of white stockings and a pair of blue and white flats. She looked directly at me. "Mr. Bronson?" she asked.

I immediately put my newspaper back in my briefcase, got up and walked toward her. "I'm Eric Bronson," I informed her.

"I'm very pleased to meet you. I'm Jackie Avildsen, Director of Human Resources for the Rainbow School for Girls," she said before she showed me into the conference room.

I sat down at a chair on the left side of the table, while Jackie sat in the chair at the end of the table, with her back to the video screen. I opened my briefcase, took out a copy of my resume and references, and handed them to her. Just as she was beginning to look

at my resume, she said: "Ginger Davis has told me a lot about you."

"She and I go way back; we spent two years teaching together about fifteen years ago in lower Manhattan. I taught Social Studies, she taught English," I informed her.

She looked over my resume, before asking a few questions about my background. "I understand that you have Bachelor's degrees in education and historical studies from Southern Illinois University Carbondale, and you got your Master's in historical studies and social work from Seton Hall. What did you do for your Master's theses?"

"I did my history thesis on the War Bond drives during World War II. I discussed how these drives were promoted in the community and the media. Part of my research included listening to many hours of radio shows from the period, and see how the writers of these shows wove promotional announcements for these drives into the shows' storylines. I also discussed, at length, efforts in eight different cities. The cities I selected were St. Louis, New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, Atlanta and Denver. The entire thesis ran over seventy pages. For my social work thesis, I wrote on the emergence of transgender students in the general student population. For that one, I interviewed a group of transgender middle and high school students, and got a wide range of opinions on the subject. I also read several case studies of transgender students transitioning while in school," I explained.

"You did extensive studies on U.S. and world history when you were at Carbondale."

"I took a lot of world history classes in addition to U.S. history classes."

"You've been teaching in the New York Public Schools throughout your career, most recently teaching Social Studies to a group of remedial education students at Buchanan High."

"The students I had were what the administration called 'the unteachables.' My students didn't fare very well in a traditional classroom setting. Some of these students were even bullied in a traditional environment. I had only eight to ten students in my classes at any given time. The students I had came not only from New York, but also from all over the world. Each group of ragtag high school students I had got a complete course of study in history, civics and current events. Their favorite activities were their annual field trips to City Hall and the United Nations, and the stream of guest speakers that came into my classroom."

"You've taught at middle schools in the Bronx, upper Manhattan and Brooklyn, and at high schools in Queens and Lower Manhattan. This is the kind of experience we're looking for at Rainbow."

"It's too bad I wasn't able to teach on Staten Island. After twenty years in the Big Apple, I think it's time for a new challenge in a new city."

"You're going to love it where this job is. Casper, Wyoming is a nice town with a view of the Rockies. It is three hours' driving time from Cheyenne, and five and a half hours from Denver. There are a lot of places to go camping and hiking in and around Casper, along with plenty of historical sites. Within a day's drive are cities like Billings, Salt Lake City, Colorado Springs, North Platte, Rapid City, and resort towns like Vail, West Yellowstone and even Jackson."

“I already have lodging arranged there. My Uncle William passed away three months ago. He lived in Casper most of his life, where he owned a travel agency. He was ninety-three years old when he passed; he left me his house at the lake outside of Casper.”

“Do you have any questions?” she asked me.

“I know that this is a girls’ school. What kind of girls are among the student body at Rainbow?” I then asked her.

“The Rainbow School for Girls originally started as a school for troubled girls in grades seven through twelve. Many of the girls who fit into this category are wards of the court. They’ve been removed from their homes by court order for various reasons. Many have been removed due to one or both parents having a history of abuse, whether it would be abusing drugs or alcohol, or they have endured physical and/or emotional abuse at the hands of one or both parents. A few of the girls at this particular campus have also been dealing with serious emotional problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder. Other girls have been referred to us by psychologists or psychiatrists for behaviors that society considers to be unfeminine. We have also earned a stellar reputation for the education of transgender girls. This group is usually referred to us by a psychologist or psychiatrist following a diagnosis of gender identity disorder. These girls started life as boys, but realize that at some point in their lives that they are really girls, unfairly trapped in the bodies of boys. This school is a safe alternative to their local public school. Many of the girls in this group go through surgical reassignment prior to starting their freshman year of high school. Students from both groups have

gone on to become successful in adulthood; a few come back to teach at the school.”

“Where do you draw your students from?”

“We draw our students pretty much from all over the United States. The students you will be teaching come from the Rocky Mountain states; the Casper campus takes in the majority of its students from Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Montana, North and South Dakota, along with portions of Arizona, Idaho, Texas, Utah, Kansas, Nebraska and the Oklahoma panhandle. Occasionally, we’ll get a few students from the Canadian provinces of Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan on student visas. The Long Island school takes its students mainly from New England, as well as northern New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania, along with the occasional student from Canada’s Maritime Provinces, as well as Ontario and Quebec. We’ve even had a few students come here from Europe.”

“Besides Casper and here on Long Island, where do you have campuses?”

“The Rainbow School for Girls has its home campus in San Francisco, with a view of the Pacific Ocean. Our branch campuses are in Los Angeles, Chicago, our Tampa Bay campus in Clearwater, Florida, our Missouri campus in northern Jefferson County, about forty-five minutes from St. Louis, our mid-Atlantic campus in suburban Baltimore, with a view of Chesapeake Bay, and our Seattle campus, which has a view of Puget Sound. We opened a new campus last August in the mountains of northern Georgia, about an hour north of Atlanta.”

“Who provides the funding for capital improvements, programs and social events?”

“We have a large endowment fund for all of our campuses, plus smaller funds for each individual campus. We have fund-raisers throughout the year in most cities with significant transgender populations; these fund-raisers help fund the operation of our campuses. We also receive corporate donations, mostly from companies with transgender-friendly policies, as well as from charitable foundations and individual donors. These gifts can be as small as ten dollars, as we get from some of our alumni, while other individual donations are larger. Last month, a San Leandro businessman donated four million dollars to our school.”

“What social events are planned during the year?”

“We start the social calendar with what we call the Kick-Off Dance for all grades. This is held during the month of September, the date depends on the campus. The Casper campus holds theirs the third weekend of September. Here at the Long Island campus, it’s the weekend after Labor Day. In late October or early November, again depending on the campus, we have our Homecoming Dance for the high school girls. Casper holds theirs the weekend before Halloween; Long Island usually schedules this one the weekend after Election Day. During November, the seventh and eighth grade girls hold a Pink Ribbon Dance to raise money for breast cancer research.

“This is the only dance, other than the Prom, that the Casper campus holds the same weekend as the Long Island campus; it’s the weekend before Thanksgiving. We have a Holiday Dance for all grade levels in December. Casper holds this the weekend before Christmas, while Long Island holds theirs the first weekend of December. During the second half of the year, we have a Heart Dance for the seventh and eighth

grade girls in late January or early February; this is where they raise money for heart research. The Casper campus holds theirs the last weekend of January; it's held the weekend closest to Valentine's Day on the Long Island campus.

"The high school girls hold their Valentine's Dance either on the weekend before or after Valentine's Day; it's the weekend before in Casper and the weekend after on Long Island. In the spring, the seventh and eighth grade girls hold Dance for the Cause when they return from their Easter/Passover vacation. Each campus selects a different cause to raise money for. The Casper campus raised money for autism research this past year; the younger brother of one of the transgender girls is autistic. Here on Long Island, the cause was domestic abuse; two of the graduating seniors were abused by a parent before the courts sent them here. The freshman and sophomore high school classes hold their Spring Dance the weekend after the seventh and eighth graders hold their Dance for the Cause. The final dance of the year is for the high school juniors and seniors, the Prom. All campuses have their Prom the second week of May. We also have fashion shows throughout the year, displaying the talents of the students in our Fashion Design program. We have three fashion shows a year; the biggest is the spring show, which takes place around the end of April or the beginning of May. Our bridal and formal fashion show is in February, around Valentine's Day, and our first fashion show is the winter fashion show, which takes place in mid-October."

"How long is the school year?"

"The school year for all campuses starts the last full week of August. It is divided into semesters; the fall se-

mester goes from the last full week of August until the week before Christmas. We're usually off from the Friday before Christmas until the second day of January. The only exceptions are when January 1 falls on a Friday or a Saturday; then we start either January 3 or 4. The spring semester starts on the first school day in January, and goes through until the Friday before Memorial Day."

"Do the girls usually go home, or do they stay with host families?"

"Some of the girls, mainly the transgender ones, go back to their hometowns for the December holidays. The girls who are wards of the court get to stay with a host family in the towns where our campuses are. These host families are usually in the Foster Parent program, and have had experience with handling troubled youth. During the Easter/Passover break, some again go back home, others stay with a host family, while others travel to other parts of the country to visit historic sites that are part of their studies. During the summer, a number of our transsexual students spend the time undergoing and recovering from gender reassignment surgery, or what the layman would call a sex-change operation. Many of these students go through the surgery after finishing the eighth grade with a 'B' or better in feminine deportment. Those who score lower than a 'B' in feminine deportment has their operations delayed; most by a semester or two. Other girls take part in the programs we offer at the school."

"And what are those programs?"

"For our girls over sixteen years old, we have a jobs program. This is where a student takes a summer job in their hometown or in the community around the campus. The jobs they do are also varied; some are candy



stripers at the local hospital, others work as clerks at department or specialty stores, some even work as receptionists for local doctors' and lawyers' offices. Some have even worked summers as fashion models, mainly in New York. Our younger girls go to our school-sponsored camps, where they learn about nature, horsemanship, hiking, orienteering, boating and other outdoor activities. Support groups are a big part of our summer programs; the younger girls have a daily support group, while the girls over sixteen years old meet every other week for support groups on campus. We feel that a well-rounded education is the best therapy for troubled and transgender girls."

"How long is the typical school day, and how many classes will I be teaching per day?"

"The school day usually begins at eight o'clock in the morning with breakfast. First hour starts at eight-thirty; each class period is fifty minutes in length. Second hour starts at nine-thirty, third hour at ten-thirty, followed by fourth hour at eleven-thirty. Two grade levels have a lunch period of thirty minutes, starting with the seventh and eighth graders. The high school freshmen and sophomores eat lunch at noon, while the seniors have their lunch at twelve-thirty. Fifth hour begins at one o'clock; each afternoon class is also fifty minutes in length. Sixth hour begins at two o'clock, and seventh hour, the last hour of the day, begins at three o'clock. The school day ends at three-fifty in the afternoon. You will be teaching five classes a day, along with co-facilitating a one-hour support group and an hour for lesson planning and coordination."

"This sounds like the kind of challenge I've been looking for."

“We’ll inform you of our decision in seven to ten days.”

Jackie and I both got up, and shook hands. “Thank you for the interview,” I said to her.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Bronson,” she added.

When I got back to the apartment, Chris was starting to pack his personal effects. “Are you going to ship all of this to Korea?” I asked him.

“Some of it will go to Korea; the other stuff will be sent back home to Traverse City,” he replied.

“How did it go at Rainbow?”

“The interview went very well, I thought. Jackie, the lady who interviewed me, was very straightforward with her questions and answers. The girls who are students there get a very well-rounded education; even more so than the students I’ve taught in New York.”

“What will you take from this experience in New York?”

“It’ll be the students that I’ve influenced over the years. Most have gone on to be successful in various fields; even a few returned to teach in the school system. I’ll be taking this experience wherever I go.”

“That’s the same thing I’ll take with me to Korea.”

“The program I’ve been teaching in has had its share of successes. One student who was in one such class over thirty years ago now owns a fixed base operation at JFK. One of his classmates from that period works for him as an airframe and power plant mechanic, while another is in charge of getting provisions for their customers. In other words, he orders the food

and drinks the customer requests, and makes sure they're put aboard the aircraft. Their former teacher visits them occasionally; he's been retired for ten years, and has become a champion poker player."

"Many of my former students kept in touch with me after they were in my classes."

"By the way, how many of the laid off teachers have work lined up for next year?"

"Unlike the group that took early retirement, we can work for a school district in the New York area. Two teachers I know have already signed on in Westchester County. Another one is headed to Jersey City to teach. Three others are headed to Connecticut. One other is headed to Long Island. Most of us are headed out of New York, though. A young lady who taught in my department and was my closest collaborator is headed to England. Another friend of mine is going to Australia. Yet another one will be teaching English in Austria. One of my colleagues from my first year in New York has joined the Peace Corps, and will be headed to Liberia to teach school for two years."

"Of those I know who took early retirement, another remedial education teacher is moving with her husband, who just retired from the N.Y.P.D., to the Ozarks. He helped with the formulation of the idea for the all-female Lavender Team. They just had their new home built on the northern shore of Bull Shoals Lake, on the Missouri side of the state line with Arkansas. One of my colleagues who taught regular classes at Buchanan is retiring with his wife to Flagstaff, Arizona. His wife retired from the nursing profession three years ago. The former chair of the Math department at Buchanan also took early retirement; they're retiring to Seaside, Oregon. Her husband just retired from the Fire

Department of New York; he was assigned to a station on Staten Island. I'm not the only one who was interviewed by the Rainbow School for Girls who was let go by the New York Public Schools."

"That's right. I worked with Pamela George when I started teaching in New York three years ago. She interviewed for an open English teaching position at their school in Atlanta. That's home for her; she's originally from Roswell."

"I should know whether or not I get the position in the next seven to ten days."

It was a week after the interview that I got a call from Jackie, who was back at her office in San Francisco. I had a feeling deep inside that something positive will come out of it. After talking with her for ten minutes, I was excited at the new opportunity that awaited me. When Chris returned from a visit to the South Korean mission to the United Nations, he also had some news for me.

"What's the word?" I asked him.

"My living arrangements have been taken care of in Pusan," he replied.

"I got the job in Wyoming. I start July 15; I'll be traveling for a couple of weeks before I start the new job," I added.

"Where do you plan to go?"

"I'll be visiting a former college classmate in Millcreek, Pennsylvania, before spending the Fourth in Chicago. I also plan to visit relatives in St. Louis and Omaha before I plan to arrive in Casper on July 10 to settle into the house I inherited from my uncle. I won't have to rent a trailer; my minivan has stow-and-go seating."

"I'll be going straight to Korea; I'll be leaving June 15 on a flight from JFK to Incheon. I'll be spending a few days with my girlfriend in Seoul before I move into my apartment in Pusan. My most important personal effects will be going with me to Seoul, like my books, video game system, television set and stereo system. The rest of my personal effects will be stored at my brother's house in Traverse City."

I drove Chris to JFK on the morning of June 15; he gave his car to his eighteen-year-old nephew, who was headed to college in East Lansing the following fall. I spent the last two weeks in the Greenwich Village apartment packing my personal effects for the move to Wyoming. Twenty years is a long time to spend in one apartment, not to mention one city. I felt that it was time for me to go to a new city and a new life. On June 29, I moved the last of my personal effects out of the apartment I had occupied since I took my first assignment after graduating from college. With my minivan packed, I left New York in the wee hours of June 30, headed for a new life and a new phase of my career in Casper.

### **Three**

Heading out on Interstate 95 to catch up with Interstate 80 in New Jersey, I spent a lot of time on the drive to my first stop in northwest Pennsylvania thinking about the challenges that lie ahead. I spent two days with a close friend of mine in Millcreek; she was working as a home care nurse and raising a six-year-old daughter alone after her husband was killed in Afghanistan. On July 3, I left Millcreek and drove more than half the day into Chicago, where I spent the Fourth with friends. The next day, I left for St. Louis to visit

with family and friends before leaving on July 7 for Omaha. As I was stopping for lunch at a truck stop outside Kansas City, I got a call on my cell phone from Jackie, who was in Omaha to attend a fund-raiser for the school the next day.

“Eric, I’m so glad I caught you. I’ve been trying to get you all day,” she told me.

“I’ve been driving since seven o’clock this morning; I’ll be in Omaha later this afternoon,” I informed her.

“Where are you right now?” she asked.

“I’m having lunch at a truck stop on Interstate 70 outside Kansas City,” I replied.

“When will you be in Omaha?”

“I’ll be in Omaha around two o’clock.”

“Great! How would you like to have dinner with me tonight?”

“I would love it. What time should we meet?”

“Would six-thirty be too early?”

“Six-thirty would be fine.”

I arrived in Omaha at two-fifteen in the afternoon, and checked into my hotel near the airport. I brought in my suitcase, and took a nap before I showered, shaved and changed into a maroon suit and a navy blue tie with navy blue socks and maroon dress shoes. I left my hotel room around six-fifteen, and walked down to a nearby restaurant. Jackie arrived eight minutes later, wearing a floral print dress and a pair of white sandal pumps.

“I’m so glad you could make it, Eric,” Jackie said with a smile.

"I'm very pleased to see you again," I said before she took my arm.

We walked inside, where we were shown to a table near the window with a view of downtown Omaha. She ordered a Caesar salad, while I ordered grilled salmon and rice. "What brings you to Omaha?" I asked her.

"The school is having a fund-raiser at a downtown hotel conference room. This is one of many fund-raisers we hold throughout the country. I wanted to ask you if you, as a new faculty member would come to speak to the group," she replied.

"What would you like for me to talk about?"

"Your experience as a teacher in New York, and what you're looking forward to at your new job in Casper."

"That will be easy to do."

I then asked her about her background. "I come from a family of educators. I grew up in Omaha. My father taught social studies for thirty-five years at Boys Town; my mother taught science at a public high school in Omaha for thirty-two years. I started my teaching career in Omaha twelve years ago, after I graduated from Iowa State. My first job was as an English teacher at a public middle school. After just two years, I was recruited by the Rainbow School for Girls to take a job as a middle and high school English teacher at their campus in Chicago. I received a Master's degree in education administration from Northwestern while working in Chicago; I spent six years in Chicago before being promoted to associate headmistress in San Francisco; I assumed my present position last summer. Both of my brothers teach physical educa-

tion; one is a football coach at a Catholic high school in Milwaukee, the other is a soccer coach at a public high school in Ainsworth. My sister is a social studies teacher at a public middle school in Falls City. Both of my brothers are married to elementary school teachers; my sister is engaged to marry a history professor who teaches at Creighton. I'm still single, although I have a son from one previous relationship, and a daughter from another."

"My education background isn't as strong as your family's. My uncle was a high school math teacher and elementary school principal for forty-two years in suburban St. Louis. One cousin teaches kindergarten at a Lutheran school in south St. Louis, another cousin teaches high school physical education in Spartanburg, South Carolina. I got my Bachelor's degrees in secondary education and history from Southern Illinois University Carbondale, and my Master's degrees in history and social work from Seton Hall. It was my M.S.W. that allowed me to work with the 'unteachable' students at Buchanan."

"At least it prepared you for your new assignment."

"By the way, who's the headmistress at the Casper campus?"

"Her name is Lorianne Lyons. She's been headmistress at Casper for the past four years. Before that, she was associate headmistress at our Los Angeles campus for three years, taught feminine department and English at our San Francisco campus for three years prior, and taught for nine years in the public school system in Kansas City."

"The last name sounds familiar. I remember a Larry Lyons, though. We grew up together in Creve Coeur, Missouri. We were top-notch athletes when we were in



high school. Larry ran cross country, and gave our high school a second place finish in the state cross country meet at Fort Leonard Wood during our senior year of high school. He also lettered in track and field and soccer. I lettered in just two sports; ice hockey and baseball. During my freshman year, I was the team's leading scorer, with twenty-one goals and thirty-nine assists. I was among the top scorers in my sophomore year before becoming a reserve defenseman in my junior and senior years. On the diamond, I caught and played first base, but I was mainly a designated hitter. During my senior year, I set the conference record by hitting forty-six home runs and driving in 102 runs. Larry and I were very good friends while we were in high school; we went off to separate colleges when we graduated. Larry accepted a track and field scholarship at the University of Missouri, while I went to SIU Carbondale on an academic scholarship."

"Lorianne is looking forward to meeting you when you start your new job."

I returned to my hotel room after having dinner with Jackie. The fund-raiser, which had a fashion show after the speeches, began at noon. I figured I had to dress up for this one, so I decided on my navy blue suit, burgundy tie and the same pair of dress shoes I wore the previous day. When I arrived at the hotel downtown, Jackie met me at the front door to the ballroom, along with a brunette woman, five-seven with long hair, wearing a bright yellow sleeveless dress and a pair of antique white high heels, and a bearded red-haired man, five-eleven, wearing a pair of khaki slacks, a short-sleeve button-down shirt, a navy blue tie and a pair of brown loafers.

“Eric Bronson, I’d like to introduce you to two of your new colleagues. The first is Amanda Kenton; she teaches in the social studies department. The young man is Matthew Runyon; he teaches English literature, with emphasis on Shakespeare,” Jackie said in an introductory fashion.

“I’m pleased to meet you,” Amanda said as we shook hands.

“Welcome to the team,” Matthew added as he shook hands with me.

The four of us walked into the ballroom, where a waiter showed us to a table. When we sat down, we discovered there were two other seats that were empty. “Who will be joining us?” I asked.

“Heather Johnson directs the Fashion Design program at our Casper campus. She apprenticed with a top Paris designer, and has worked for fashion designers in Milan, New York and Los Angeles before coming to Casper to teach her craft four years ago. Kevin Leeds is another new teacher at our Casper campus; he teaches foreign languages. He taught French, Spanish, German and Portuguese in the public school system in Washington before that school system laid him off at the end of this past academic year. Kevin’s wife, Josie, is a Casper native,” Jackie explained.

“Where do you come from?” asked Matthew.

“I was born and raised in Creve Coeur, Missouri. It’s about fifteen miles west of St. Louis. I got my Bachelor’s from Southern Illinois, and my Master’s at Seton Hall. I taught social studies in the New York Public Schools for twenty years before I was offered early retirement last month,” I replied.

"I don't know if you've heard of Buffalo, Wyoming," Amanda added.

"In fact, I've heard of the town, although the only Buffalo I've been to is the one in New York," I told her.

"It's about an hour and a half north of Casper, near where Interstates 25 and 90 meet. I visited there when I was in college," Matthew added.

"You grew up not far from our new colleague," added Jackie.

"I grew up in Clinton, Illinois. It's a small town north of Decatur, and south of Bloomington. I was an honor student the entire time I was in school; I went to Illinois State in Normal on an academic scholarship. I started my career in South Korea, teaching English to gifted students in Seoul. That gave me a chance to travel throughout Asia; I visited Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, and even spent a few weeks one summer volunteering at an orphanage in Kolkata, India; I'm still used to saying Calcutta. After three years in South Korea, I taught English literature in Lincoln, Illinois for two years. I joined the faculty of The Rainbow School for Girls in Chicago seven years ago; I took a transfer to Casper four years ago. While I was in Chicago, I got my Master's in social work from Loyola," Matthew explained.

"Where did you go to school, Amanda?" I asked her.

"I lettered in track and field in high school. I went to Minnesota on a track and field scholarship. I received Bachelor's degrees in education, history and social work. I came to Rainbow right out of college; I wanted to work close to home. I've been at Rainbow for the last three years; I just finished my Master's in

social work from the University of Colorado," she replied.

After the four of us ordered lunch, Heather and Kevin arrived. Kevin was in a short red button-down shirt, a pair of khaki slacks and a pair of burgundy dress shoes, while Heather was in a white blouse, pink slacks and a pair of pink and white flats. Both of them hovered around six feet tall. "You must be the other new teacher in town," Kevin said, trying to guess which one was new.

"I'm the other new teacher here. Eric Bronson, formerly of the New York Public Schools," I told him.

"I'm Kevin Leeds, formerly of the school system in the District of Columbia," he added.

"It's great to have both of you aboard. Mr. Bronson, I'm Heather Johnson, director of the Fashion Design program," she added.

"Kevin, Heather, Eric Bronson is originally from the St. Louis area. He'll be starting at Rainbow in Casper this month," Jackie informed them.

"I grew up not far from you, either," Heather added.

"Where did you grow up, Heather?" I asked her.

"I grew up in Hannibal, Missouri. I knew I had a knack for designing fashions from the time I was a teenager. I designed and made my own prom dress. When I graduated from high school, I went to fashion design school in Paris. After I graduated, I apprenticed with a top fashion designer. I spent eight years in Paris before heading off to Milan for two years. I worked for a costume designer in Los Angeles for three years, followed by four years working for a bridal and formal

gown designer in New York. I came to Rainbow in Casper five years ago to start the program," she explained.

"I grew up in San Bernardino, California. I was an honor student throughout; I went to Stanford on an academic scholarship. When I graduated with a Bachelor's in linguistics, I accepted the job in Washington. While I taught in the District of Columbia, I rented an apartment in Virginia. I taught in D.C. for eleven years before I was laid off. My wife, Josie, is from Casper. She's going to be teaching fourth grade in the public school system there this fall," added Kevin.

After lunch, we heard a series of speakers on how their experiences at the school shaped their lives. Some were students, others were faculty members. Jackie was the second to last speaker, talking about how her experience has enriched her life. After she finished her speech, she began her introduction.

"One of the newest members of our faculty this coming academic year is Eric Bronson. Mr. Bronson is a graduate of Southern Illinois University Carbondale, with Bachelor's degrees in historical studies and education. He also holds Master's degrees in historical studies and social work from Seton Hall University. For the past twenty years, he has taught social studies in the New York Public Schools; his most recent assignment was teaching a remedial social studies class at Buchanan High School. He will be teaching history at our Casper campus. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Mr. Eric Bronson."

I got up from my seat, and walked toward the podium. Jackie and I embraced before I stood in front of the podium, and faced the audience. "You may not know this, but public speaking is my strong suit," I said before they applauded.

I then started with my speech. “Just two months ago, I was teaching social studies to a group of students assigned to a remedial program in the nation’s largest public school system. These students couldn’t make it in a traditional setting. We were taught to give these students special attention, and they responded. I saw a vast improvement in their grade point averages. When they started in the remedial studies program, many students were getting either a ‘D’ average or a failing grade. The students I taught mainly came from broken homes; most lived in single-parent households. I had a pair of students who were being raised by an older sibling, and several who were in foster homes. Their stories were sad enough to make me shed a tear. Within one semester, they raised their averages by two or three letter grades. I really cared about these students; I wanted to bring out the best in students who the system considered to be ‘unteachable.’ Many of the students I taught went on to college or trade school. I’ve been proud to have a part in their academic turnaround.”

I got a round of applause before I continued. “My experience in the remedial education program in New York prepared me for the next phase of my career; I’m glad that the next phase will be in the mountain air of Wyoming. For the past twenty years, I’ve worked in a co-ed environment. This is the first time I’ll be working at a single-gender school; in this case, a girls’ school. I’ve worked with a number of troubled girls during my years teaching in the Big Apple. Last year, I even had one student who dealt with gender identity issues. It was the first time I had a transgender student in any of my classes, and it brought me a unique perspective. This student told me his heartbreaking story of being a girl, trapped in a boy’s body; I had not shed as many

tears for a student as I did for this one. I've been told that he's now started a new life as a girl, and has enrolled at our Long Island campus."

Another round of applause rang out before I continued. "It is the experience I've gained teaching in a big city school system that I bring to The Rainbow School for Girls. I'm very pleased to join the family at Rainbow, and I will never let you down." I got a standing ovation when I stepped down from the podium.

"You're really going to like it in Casper," Matthew told me.

"I'm sure of it," I added.

## **Four**

After spending the night of July 8 with friends, I left for Casper at eight o'clock the next morning. I drove for several hours along Interstate 80 through Nebraska, stopping for lunch in Lexington. It was just before five o'clock that I finally crossed into Wyoming. The only times I was held up in traffic was coming out of Omaha, and getting onto northbound Interstate 25 from westbound Interstate 80 in Cheyenne. It was just after eight o'clock that I made it into Casper, checking into a hotel for the night.

On the morning of July 9, I walked down the street to my young cousin Stephanie Felton's real estate office near downtown Casper. She was a real estate agent for my cousin John during her free time and in the summertime, when school was out. She also taught sixth grade at a local Catholic school. When I arrived, a high school girl named Emily greeted me. "Good morning," she said with a wide smile, before I was asked whom I had arrived to see.

“Stephanie Felton,” I replied.

“We’ve been expecting you. I’m Emily Green, the receptionist for John Felton and Associates,” she added.

Stephanie had slightly longer hair than I remembered her when I visited her at Carbondale during her junior year. She still looked like a college girl, even though she was already twenty-six years old. She was five-seven with an average build, wearing a white blouse, a pair of off-white slacks with white flats. “Eric, it’s great to see you again,” she said excitedly before we embraced.

“It’s great to see you again, Stephanie. It’s been four years since I spoke to your class at SIU Carbondale,” I added.

“Has it been that long?” she asked me.

“Yes, it’s been that long. I’m taking a job as a teacher at the Rainbow School for Girls.”

“I heard Uncle Will left his lake house to you when he passed away a few months ago.”

“I’ve wanted to get out of New York for several years; I was offered early retirement last month. I got offered a job teaching history at The Rainbow School for Girls here in Casper; I start in five days.”

Stephanie grabbed the keys to the house out of her office, and walked out to the minivan with me. While I was driving, Stephanie told me about the receptionist who greeted me. “Emily will be a senior at Rainbow starting late next month. She has worked for us the past two summers, and also fills in on the weekends.”

“How long has she attended Rainbow?”