



one true way

ONE

TRUE

WAY

by shannon hitchcock

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Allie Drake- Staff Reporter



August—1977

My life was about to change. I had two goals on my first day at Daniel Boone Middle School: make a friend, and join the newspaper staff. It was the perfect job for me. I was a people watcher, a tad nosy, and an excellent typist.

I studied each of the kids in health class, trying to find one who looked friendly. Instead, Samantha Johnson found me. She swung around in her seat and stuck out her hand like a politician. “Just call

me Sam,” she said. “I know all the kids at DB, so you must be new.”

My reporter’s antenna went up. This girl had confidence. She was just the kind of kid who would introduce me to her friends. “Allison Drake.” My voice came out all scratchy, like I had a frog in my throat.

“Ribbit, ribbit,” Sam said.

“Ribbit, ribbit,” I answered. I was usually shy around people I didn’t know, but something about Sam felt different, right from the start.

“Bet you don’t have anybody to sit with at lunch,” she said.

If not for her big, toothy smile, I would have been embarrassed to admit it.

“You can eat with me,” Sam decided. “Would you rather sit with the jocks, the brains, the theater kids, or the debs? I’m one of the few kids who can sit at any table.”

Sam didn’t say it in a braggy, I’m-full-of-myself way, but like she was stating facts. “Debs?” I asked.

“Yeah, future debutantes. They’re the most popular girls in seventh grade. In a couple of years, they’ll be high school cheerleaders, majorettes, and riding convertibles in the Homecoming Parade.”

I couldn't imagine anybody who'd have less in common with a deb than Sam. She had on a T-shirt that said *Daniel Boone Pioneers* tucked into her bell-bottoms. Her hair was cut into a wedge, like the figure skater Dorothy Hamill, and she was probably the friendliest person I'd ever met.

Sam was also in my English class, which met right before lunch. She didn't have a pencil or a notebook and slouched down in the seat in front of me.

"What's happening, Sam I Am?" asked a boy with an Afro. He wore a silky shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows, and a comb handle protruded from his back pocket.

"Not much, Dwayne. I won a couple trophies riding Penelope over the summer. Have you met Allison?"

Dwayne shook his head. He had a nice, easy smile.

"Here, Sam," said one of the debs and handed her a pencil and a few sheets of notebook paper.

"Thanks, Kelly. This is Allison."

If you asked me, Kelly looked like all the other debs: long silky hair parted down the middle, perfect teeth, and a cute figure. I was a little envious of her, to be honest.

"Welcome to DB," said a girl with thick red hair. It

flowed in feathered layers that reminded me of my brother's Farrah Fawcett poster. She snapped the rings open on her binder and handed Sam some mimeographed sheets. "Thought you might like a copy of my notes from science class."

Sam flashed her a smile. "Phoebe, if it wouldn't be too much trouble, maybe you could copy your notes every day."

Phoebe nodded so hard her bangs bounced.

I learned three things in English class that day:

1. We were going to read *Johnny Tremain*.
2. Sam was skating through middle school without doing much work. And . . .
3. She had a horse named Penelope.

After class, I followed Sam to the lunchroom. "Did you decide which kids you'd like to sit with?" she asked.

No contest. I wanted to sit with the newspaper kids. "You didn't mention the *Pioneer* staff, but I'd

really like to meet them.” I planned to be the best reporter in the history of DB Middle School.

“Okay,” Sam said. “We’ll sit across from Webster. He’s the editor in chief.”

I barely had time to say how Webster was a great name for an editor before Sam had slapped down her brown paper bag. “Hey, Webb. This is my friend Allison. She’s new at DB.”

Webster and I had a lot in common, I could already tell. Both of us had thick blond bangs that we liked to hide behind, wire-rimmed glasses, and, judging from the newspaper spread out in front of him, a love for reading.

“Nice to meet you,” Webster said. “Sam, did your mom bake chocolate chip cookies? I’ll trade you a bag of chips for a cookie.”

Sam reached into her sack and handed him a cookie. “Keep your chips, Webb. I need a favor.”

Webb bit into the cookie. “Ummm,” he said and a look of pure chocolate bliss spread across his face. “What’s the favor?”

I leaned toward him. “The favor is for me. I used to work on our school newspaper in New Jersey, and I want to be a reporter here too.”

“Normally, I request a writing sample.”

I would have shown him a hundred samples, but Sam handed Webb another cookie. “I know you have strict rules, but let’s cut through the red tape on account of Allie’s new. She can interview me about winning a trophy at the Pinto World Championship Horse Show. My mom took great pictures.”

“Done!” Webb said. “If Allie turns in a good interview with pictures, she can join my team.”

I was usually called Allison because Mom hated nicknames, but I didn’t correct them. I liked the sound of it—Allie Drake, Staff Reporter.