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## CHUCK TAYLOR BLUES

by

Mel Henderson

1. When I was thirteen, the pink-cheeked counter girl at a frozen yogurt shop gasped and called over a co-worker to show him that our eyes—mine and my mother's—were exactly the same: the same blue, same bones, same eyelashes. As if we were the same girl, now and later. My mother quietly rolled her eyes.

2. My mom called me a “difficult shopper,” especially for school clothes, because she always had to ask. Did I prefer the navy skirt over than the tartan? The herringbone or the plain pea coat? Did I prefer the cordovan penny loafers or the chestnut ones? Sure, I said, and I picked one, trying not to roll my eyes.

3. Once, when I was six or seven, I bit her on the arm through the grey wool of her tailored suit. I don't know why I did it; I was never a biter. I remember the taste of the wool. I remember her scream and how she sent me away. I don't remember being punished.

4. I wore them all at least once—the khaki skirt, the cordovan loafers, the plain pea coat—so that they wouldn't go to waste. Most of the time, I wore jeans and yellow Chuck Taylors.

5. When I drove her especially crazy she would declare, like issuing a curse, that one day I will have a daughter just like me, and then—*then* I will know what I have put her through.

6. I am the mother of three boys. Now I will never know what I put her through.

7. She said females are mean; they can't be trusted. She didn't say "girls." She said "females." Men make better friends, she said, so she had hoped to have only boys. But of course once she had three wonderful females, she said she wouldn't change a thing. Not even cursing me with a wonderful female of my own.

8. Between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, I went through three pairs of yellow Chuck Taylors and one pair of cordovan penny loafers.

9. An immigrant businessman friend said I get my looks from my mother. He said, "This is good for you." I think my mother is pretty so I was flattered. He said I get my personality from my father. He said, "This is lucky for you."

10. I've been told two different stories about the moments just after my birth: (1) Because breastfeeding should commence at once, she suckled me immediately. (2) Because the delivery had been unspeakably painful, she asked the doctor to knock her out immediately. I have never asked her which really came first.

11. Why would a mother ask to be knocked out—to vanish into the unconscious dark—just when the worst part is over and the reward has arrived?

12. What do the mothers of mothers know that I, a mother of fathers, may never know?

13. When she was teaching me how to use mascara, she declared that women with rounder, cat-like faces are universally considered more beautiful. She lamented that her face is not cat-like. She denounced the shape of her elegant nose, the curve of her modest lips. But my face, my shapes—God gave me better things. God always gave me better things. She slammed a door to go think about that.

14. I do not know if Chuck Taylors come in cordovan or chestnut.

15. If I'd had a daughter, I know I would have dressed her in tiny little yellow Chuck Taylors while she was still too small to bite me.

16. We recently walked into an ice cream shop, my three boys and I. The girl behind the counter smiled when she noticed my sons all have brilliant blue eyes—and that each has his own distinct shade of blue.