



Through Thick & Thin

 Sandra Byrd



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Published in association with the literary agency of Browne & Miller Literary Associates, LLC, 410 Michigan Avenue, Suite 460, Chicago, IL 60605.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Byrd, Sandra.

Through thick & thin / Sandra Byrd.
p. cm. — (London confidential ; l#21)

Summary: Fifteen-year-old Savvy Smith, an American living near London, sees her chance to write a full column for her school newspaper, and must rely on her Christian faith when she is forced to choose between friends, family, and fame.

ISBN 978-1-4143-2598-9 (sc)

1. Schools—Fiction. 2. Advice columns—Fiction. 3. Americans—England—London—Fiction. 4. Fashion—Fiction. 5. Christian life—Fiction. 6. London (England)—Fiction. 7. England—Fiction.] I. Title. II. Title: Through thick and thin.

PZ7.B9898Thr 2010
I Fic—dc22

2009046892

Printed in the United States of America.

16 15 14 13 12 11 10
7 6 5 4 3 2 1



FOR DEBBIE AUSTIN:

friends through thick and thin for nearly twenty years



Chapter 1



It was ten minutes before I had to leave the house to get to my school, Wexburg Academy, the first day back after Christmas vacation. And my hair was a mess. I mean the kind of mess that you can't possibly show up to school with, not if you're fifteen and your hair is third in importance in your life. Right after God and family. Some days, right after God. Kidding!

I ditched the downstairs bathroom and slid into the kitchen. "I'm sick. I have to stay home," I told my mother as she wiped down the counter and put the toaster away. "I think it's the flu." I coughed three times for effect.

"You look fine to me," she said. My dad chugged down his normal breakfast of tomato

juice with a shot of hot pepper sauce, snorted, and glanced up.

"You look fine to me, too," he said. "New hairdo?"

"Yes. I call it 'running in a wind tunnel.' Or maybe 'standing too close to firecrackers.' Or 'I'd like to lose the tiny social standing I've gained in the six months we've lived here.'"

Here's a new rule for my fashion notebook: I will never, ever, ever attempt to scrunch my hair without washing it the day after I've flat-ironed it. Never.

And here's a second rule, one I should have known by now: don't ever try new hair products on a school day.

"You like different fashions, Savvy," my little sister, Louanne, said. "You're just setting a new style." Her dog, Giggle, who should have been named Growl, stared at me. I knew he was mocking me. I gave him the stink eye and promised myself to chase him with a running vacuum cleaner after school.

"I can't go, Mom. I really can't."

"You really can," she said as she looked at her watch. "In fact, you must. Better get a jacket on and head out."

“Why is *your* hair done so early, Mom?” Louanne asked. I pulled myself out of my panic-attack nosedive long enough to look at my mother. It was true. Her hair was done. And her makeup. And she had actual clothes on—not sweats.

“Vivienne asked me to come with her to check out some fund-raising ideas for the book club.” She seemed pleased that she’d made a friend. Louanne had made some friends too. Even my dad had made a friend at work.

And *moi*? Not yet. Most of my friends back home had quietly slipped away as they became involved with their own activities. I’d had a couple of potential friends here at the end of the term, but one look at this do and it would be all over. With any luck, I wouldn’t run into any of the populars—the Aristocats, as I called them—today.

I pulled a smart, stylish jacket over my school uniform. Too bad hats were only in for the tea-with-the-Queen set. I glanced at my hair in the hallway mirror. Worse than I’d remembered.

The walk to school was about ten minutes, and I pulled out my new schedule to review on the way there. This was term change, so it was mostly old classes and a few new ones. For one,

second period was changing from health to PE. Everyone's hair would look bad after PE. Right?

First period was maths, as they say here in Britain. My archenemy on the newspaper staff, Hazelle, was in that class. So was Brian, a boy who had started out not liking me, but we'd bonded over a stick of gum. When I got to school, I slid into the seat next to him.

"How was Christmas?" he asked politely, never taking his eyes off my hair.

"I know; it's a disaster," I said. "Christmas was fine. Yours?"

"Fine," he said, not bothering to contradict me about the disastrous hair.

Hazelle walked in. "Hullo, Savvy," she said, setting down her book bag a few chairs away from mine. "New hairdo?" she asked with a snarky edge to her voice.

I bit back a few words about how her hairstyle could use any kind of shaping at all, and smiled. "Welcome back to school, Hazelle," I said sweetly. Even Mr. Thompson gave me a startled glance when he entered the room, but like any good Brit, he recovered his poker face rather quickly. I toughed it out through the class, knowing that PE was next and with it, hopefully some relief.

Afterward, people would probably just assume that my hair was the result of a really dedicated, energetic workout.

I picked up my book bag and headed for the gym. I walked into the changing room. And then I saw them, all propped up against the mirrored, stainless-steel countertops like a complete set of high-society British Barbies. They'd taken up every available plug for their hair gear. Oh, great.

The Aristocats.

