

# Pink Hats for Wendy



By Her Mother  
Bluebird

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

Being with Wendy during her final days was a special time for both of us. Sometimes I feel sad that we didn't review more of our lives; tell truths and less lies; confide, confess, rejoice. Wendy had her own way; 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. Some of us who knew Wendy well thought she always belonged to God; her spirit soared with the angels, she never had an unkind word.

These poems are to honor here; 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 give whatever love we had to give and gave

## 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 mem-  
ory,  
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 another 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  
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  
That 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 many 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 re-  
marked,  
"How beautiful"—  
My daughter's hair

## Gains and Losses

Wendy has regained  
Some hair, it is just a baby  
Type 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 20<sup>th</sup>  
    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

James called--

It was he that 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 again  
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,  
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 said,  
    “I’m fine,  
    You already  
Asked me that.”

Okay, everybody  
    Repeating  
    Themselves.  
Tomatoes not  
Rotten—no  
Salmonella  
    Please.  
Take home—

## 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  
Backs 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 talk again,  
(Machine buzzing,  
Blinking, drawing lines)  
    She opened  
Her eyes  
And started talking;  
    What she remembered,  
    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,"  
She said to the aide,

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 will 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.

### Multi-colored Hats

On her bedroom wall  
Are many  
Different  
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  
Different 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 he said  
He hadn't 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 the  
One of the last pink  
Hats I bought her,  
Though now a bit  
Snug—her face  
Puffy—  
She is mostly  
In bed now,  
Lying on her  
Back, staring  
Into space, not  
Saying  
Anything,  
Or barely;  
“I should be  
Satisfied,”  
She said—l--  
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—straightening  
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,  
(Her son, her husband,  
Her 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, though  
A yellow sheet  
From Hospice  
Described all the symp-  
toms  
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, dilatation,  
Labor that to her  
Was not painful)—

“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 said  
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.

Going on to  
Describe the transition,  
"You will be on a journey,"  
I said,  
"Like climbing a cliff,  
Hanging on, but  
Not seeing beyond,"

--But 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 said,  
When I told  
Her we were  
With her—  
When she wanted  
Us to do something—

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

"Okay," she said.

Over and over  
We did this,  
Simple reassurance,  
Simple words,

"Yes," she said.

When we told  
Her we were  
There-  
There were  
No more  
Moments to  
Speak, tell  
Secrets, ask  
Questions, read  
Even the  
Bible,  
Though her husband  
Recited the 23<sup>rd</sup>  
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,

“Yup, I do,”  
  At age two--

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

And as she  
  Grew into a  
  Young lady,  
  Her 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  
  In the last hour—  
  “Ouch,” or  
  “Okay,” or  
  “Yes,” she’d say,  
  In response  
  To our asking  
  Her 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.

In Loving Memory Of My Daughter  
Wendy  
June 3, 1965 — July 14, 2008