

The Music Shoe



by Christine Taylor

This book is dedicated to all the children who keep going when times get rough, who believe in themselves when the impossible is near. Remember- we all have music in our souls.

"In life, you don't let anything stop you. If you wanna do it bad enough, you get knocked down, pushed around, you fall down, you get up and say, "I wanna do this, and my God I'm gonna do this..."

And by golly, eventually you will, and that's is always been my determination."

~ Peg Leg Bates

We were the perfect pair. Some shoes are stuck with humdrum partners. Not me, I was a Lucky right with a Besty left. Shoes are usually together for life. Well, sometimes.



Besty heard him first...tap step, tap step, tap step.

Clayton tried me on, and paid for me.

"Thanks Mr. Bates, come again."

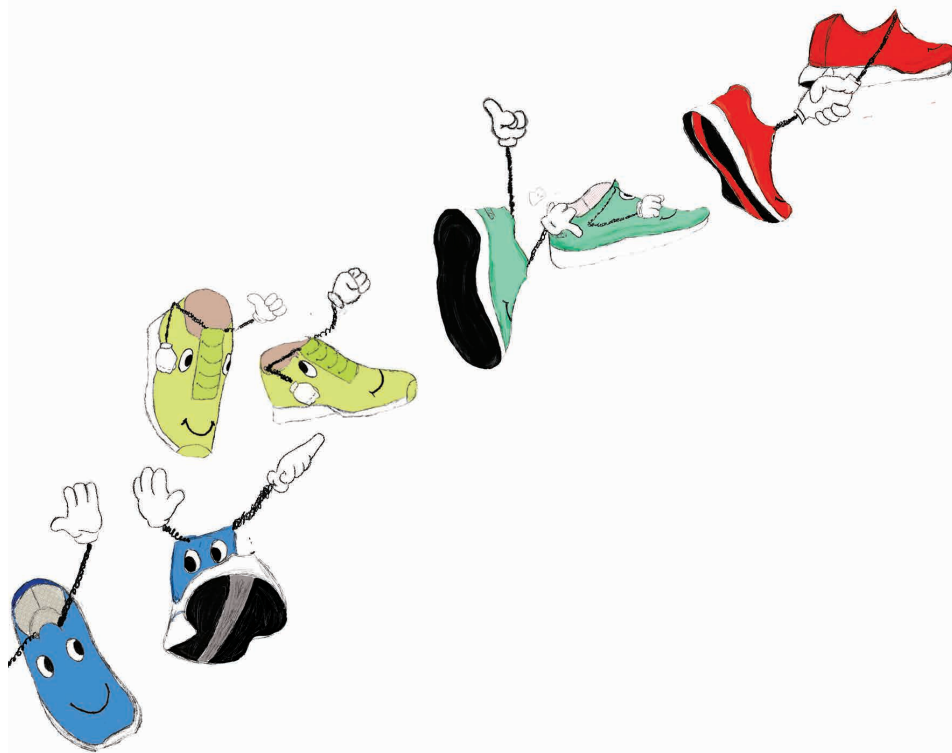


My new owner had one leg and
a wooden peg. That's when it hit me—

I'm going to be alone!

I saw other shoes, always in twos...

running,



jumping,



dancing,



and sleeping under the bed together.



What will I do all by myself?

When Clayton was little, his parents got divorced. His mom worked long hours in the cotton fields as a sharecropper. The White man who owned the land paid her, but not always the right amount.



And when Mama wasn't looking...



Clayton would go into town and dance. Everywhere he went people cheered, they clapped, and tossed coins into his little cap.

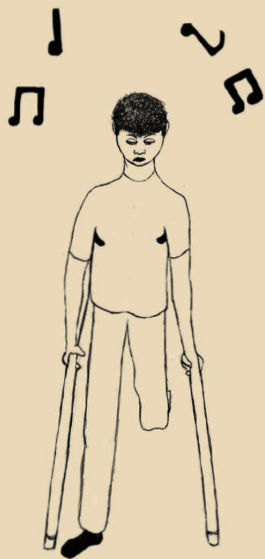
Years later, Clayton saw a sign, "Help Wanted"
"Please Mama," he begged, "I can make money. I can help us."



On his third day at the cottonseed mill, the siren screeched ne-nah, ne-nah, ne-nah. 12 year old Clayton lost part of his leg when it got caught in a piece of machinery.

Because Clayton was a poor Black child, the closest hospital wouldn't help. That happened a lot in the 1900's. They called the doctor, and he operated on the family's kitchen table. Months later, Clayton tried to dance using his crutches, but it didn't work.

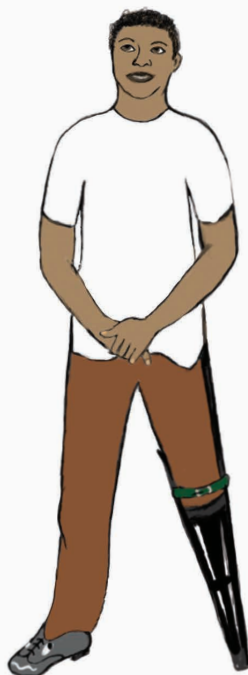
Then his uncle made him a wooden peg leg. Clayton did a jig, a leap, a hop. He practiced all the time.



One day when we were dancing.



Clayton froze.



Then something scary happened.

Clayton found a hammer, some nails, and a few pieces of metal.
He pounded that metal right into my sole. Oh, it didn't hurt,
but it changed the way we danced.

If only Besty could see me now!

With metal on my heel and toe, we made MUSIC! Music with amazing sounds like jingle, jingle, tap, tap, tap. Clickity, click, forward and back.

The next day we went to Michael's Dance Studio. I don't think that old wooden floor was ready for us. Everyone was tapping. I heard Clayton yell "What makes you jingle and jangle?" His buddy shouted, "Bottle caps."

Everyone told a different story...

"I've got pennies on my shoes."

"I've got nails."

"Hey Peg Leg Bates, you have the best sounds. What did you do?"

"I nailed a piece of metal to my shoe." And that's the day I learned that Clayton Bates had another name...

Peg Leg Bates

I wasn't his only tap shoe. When Peg Leg Bates wore white pants he had a white peg leg, and a white tap shoe. The same for his black pants, grey pants and blue pants. Clayton always looked his very best.

The next thing I knew, Peg Leg Bates was packing us up and hopping on a train. We were heading to a carnival. Oh boy, our dancing career had just begun! Next was vaudeville...

then on to the Cotton Club in New York City. Before I could say suffle back flap, we were dancing in a Broadway show.

And that wasn't the end of our days on the road. No sir. We went to England and danced for the King and Queen.

When we got back to America, Mr. Ed Sullivan asked Peg Leg Bates to be on his TV show. Not just once, but 21 times! That's a lot of tap steps!

Everywhere we went, people knew Peg Leg Bates. They talked about the dancer who tapped out new and amazing rhythms. The dancer with just one leg.

It's been a long time since those days. Peg Leg Bates and his wife Alice, opened a resort. A place where Black people could enjoy vacations just like White people. Today, because of the Civil Rights Movement, everyone has the right to go wherever they want.

Today, I'm at the Fountain Inn Museum in South Carolina. I smile when I see that old wooden peg leg on display and pictures of Clayton and me.

Tap shoes have sure changed over the years. They come in all different sizes and colors.

Some have flat heels.

Some have high heels.

Some have wild colors.

Some are plain.

I will always miss my Besty, but I'm happy to say that once Peg Leg Bates put metal on my sole and made me shine. I wasn't lonely anymore...

My taps and I were a pair.

CLAYTON "PEG LEG" BATES

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DON'T LOOK AT ME IN SYMPATHY. I'M GLAD I'M THIS WAY
FOR I FEEL GOOD AND I'M KNOCKING ON WOOD,
AS LONG AS I CAN SAY

YOU JUST WATCH ME PEG IT. YOU CAN TELL BY THE WAY I LEG IT
THAT I'M PEG LEG BATES. THE ONE LEGGED DANCING MAN.
I MIX LIKE FANTASTIC, BUT WITH HOT GYMNASTICS
I'M PEG LEG BATES. THE ONE LEGGED DANCING MAN.

"LIFE MEANS. DO THE BEST THAT YOU CAN
WITH WHAT YOU HAVE, WITH ALL YOUR MIND AND HEART.
ONE CAN DO ANYTHING IN THIS WORLD IF ONE WANTS TO DO IT
BADLY ENOUGH." CLAYTON "PEG LEG" BATES

