



Things I Wrote About When I Was Eight

Hi, it's Stella Batts again!

I've written nine books since I turned eight years old. That's because a lot of things happened to me that I wanted to write about, such as:

1. Joshua in my class started calling me Smella, so I changed my name. But then I changed it back again.
2. I taste-tested magic gum, which was fun.

But then I got it stuck in my hair, which was NOT fun at all. Plus, my best friend Willa moved away, which was the most not-fun thing ever.

3. But I got a new best friend, named Evie, who moved here from London. She has a cool accent.
4. My baby brother, Marco, was born.
5. I got to babysit Evie's dog, and I lost it! Luckily, my sister, Penny, helped find it.
6. Penny and I were flower girls, we got a new uncle and a new cousin, and we all went swimming in our flower-girl dresses!
7. My friend Lucy and I made a secret newspaper. I wrote about the secret new Candy Carnival at our store, Batts Confections. (It's not a secret anymore.)
8. I got to be on my favorite show in the whole entire world, called *Superstar Sam*.

9. I slept over in my school library.

In this book I'm going to write about the amazing trip my family and I are about to take. And guess what? By the time I finish this book, the other thing that will have happened is I will have turned NINE YEARS OLD!

Remember when?



Closer to Nine

“Stella, there’s a phone call for you,” Mom said.

I love getting phone calls!

“Hello, this is Stella Batts,” I said, pressing the phone against my ear. “Who is this?”

Next to me, my sister, Penny, whined in my other ear. “How come I didn’t get a phone call?”

“Shhh, Penny, I can’t hear,” I said. “Who is this?” I asked again.

“Guess,” said a voice on the other end of

the phone.

“Willa!” I nearly screamed. “Of course I know who it is! You’re my best friend! I can’t wait to see you in person! It will be my best birthday EVER!”

“Me tooooooo!!!!” Penny cried, leaning toward the phone.

“It’s not going to be your birthday,” I told her.

“I mean I can’t wait to see Willa, too!” she said. “WILLA!!!!”

“Inside voices, girls,” Mom said. “Please.”

“Let me talk to Willa,” Penny said, in a soft inside voice.

“No,” I told her, in my soft inside voice.

“I don’t mind if Penny wants to talk to me,” Willa said.

Willa is very nice. As a matter of fact, she’s the nicest person I’ve ever met in my

whole entire life! But I knew she’d called to talk to me, not Penny.

“It’s not fair,” Penny told Mom.

“Hold on,” I said into the phone. I walked out of the kitchen, down the hall, and into my room.

“You know what’s weird?” I asked Willa. “You know exactly what my house looks like. But when you walk in yours, I have no idea what it looks like.”

“You’ll know in two more days,” Willa said.

“I know!” I said. “I’m so excited!”

If you haven’t guessed already, that was the amazing trip I mentioned in Chapter One—a trip to Willa’s house in Pennsylvania. From Saturday morning until Tuesday night—four days and three nights!

“I’m more excited,” Willa said.



“And I’m the MOST excited,” I told her. “I’m so excited I feel like . . . I feel like I could hug the whole entire world. That’s how excited I am. And the best part is, it’ll be my birthday when I’m there.”

“A sleepover birthday,” she said. “My mom and I planned it all out. You and Penny will sleep in my room, and your parents and Marco will sleep in Jackson’s room.”

“With Jackson?” I asked. Jackson is Willa’s younger brother.

“Jackson is going to sleep in Spencer’s room,” Willa said. Spencer is her older brother. “My mom said it’s like musical beds.”

“That’s funny,” I told her.

“So, what are you doing between now and when you get here?” Willa asked.

“Right now we’re making cupcakes for my party at school tomorrow,” I told her. “We can’t frost them yet, because we’re waiting for my dad to come home from the store with all the toppings. There’s going to be rainbow sprinkles, chocolate sprinkles, chocolate chips, cubes of fudge, and probably a million more things.”

“A million? Really?”

“No, not a million. But a lot. As soon as he gets here, we’ll decorate the cupcakes. Then I’ll go to sleep, and wake up and go to school, and have my party. Then after that, Mom will

pick me and Penny up. We'll go to sleep one more time and when we wake up it'll be time to go visit you."

"Do you know what I'm doing?" Willa asked.

"No, what?"

"I'm making you a friendship bracelet."

"Is that my present?" I asked.

Some people like their presents to be surprises, but I like to know because then I can be happy about whatever is going to happen for even longer.

"You'll see," Willa said in a teasing voice.

"But I—" I started.

Just then Willa's mom said something to her in the background, and Willa said, "Stella, my mom says I have to hang up now because it's almost my bedtime."

"What?" I said. "It's not even six o'clock."

"It's three hours later in Pennsylvania," she reminded me.

"Oh yeah."

"Got to go," she said. "I'll see you in two days. Tell Penny I'm sorry I didn't talk to her, but I'll see her, too!"

"Bye, Willa," I said.

After we hung up, Dad still wasn't home, so I decided to pack for the trip. I've had a lot of experience packing, because I'd helped Mom pack my bag for Aunt Laura's wedding, and I'd practically packed by myself to go on my school library sleepover.

This was a bigger trip, so packing was even more important. I pulled things from my closet, my dresser, and my desk, and made a big pile of stuff on the floor.

Someone knocked on my door. I have a sign posted that says *This is Stella's Room. If*

You Are Not Stella Then Please Knock. Penny never reads the sign. Marco doesn't know how to read. So the person knocking had to be Mom.

"Come in," I told her.

She did, along with Penny and Marco. Mom and Penny walked, of course. Marco crawled. It's his new trick. He's getting pretty good at it. Mom and Dad made a rule that Penny and I had to keep things clean from now on. It was always the rule, but now they are SUPER strict about it, because whatever gets left on the floor, Marco pops into his mouth to eat. Books, pens, pen caps, socks, my Glinda the Good Witch Wand, Penny's favorite stuffed animal Belinda. You name it, Marco will try to eat it.

Mom scooped Marco up quick as a wink when she saw everything piled on my floor.

"Stella, what on earth is happening in here?"

"It's okay," I told her. "I'm not breaking any rules. I'm just packing."

"It looks like you're packing to go away for a month," she said. "I don't think you need a dozen shirts for a long weekend in Pennsylvania."

"Only eleven," I told her.

"And your flower-girl dress from Aunt Laura's wedding?" she asked.

"I thought I might need something fancy for my birthday," I explained. "That dress is the fanciest thing I've got."

"I'll get my dress, too!" Penny said, and she moved toward the door.

"Not so fast," Mom told her.

"That's right," I said. "It's my birthday, so I should wear the fanciest thing."

"It's not fair," Penny said again, pouting.

“Stella Rae,” Mom said, shaking her head. She sat down on my bed with Marco in her arms. “We really need to pare down this pile.”

“I know what *pair* means,” I told her. “And I know what *down* means. But what does *pair down* mean?”

“It’s P-A-R-E down,” she said.

“Ooh, goody,” I said. “A new word!”

I love new words. I like to put at least one new word in every book I write, and sometimes even more than that.

“What do you think it means?” Mom asked me.

“It means you want me to bring less.”

“Exactly. Now, put everything away, and I’ll pack for you later.”

“I’m old enough to pack myself,” I told her. “After all, I’m nine.”

“You’re *eight*,” Penny said.

“I’m afraid she’s right, for a few more days at least, my sweets,” Mom said.

“I’m closer to nine than I am to eight. I’m only three days away from nine, but my eighth birthday was . . . three hundred and sixty-two days ago.”

“One day you won’t want to be any older,” Mom said.

“Sure I will.”

“No, you won’t. Trust me.”

Grown-ups always think they’ll know what kids will want when they’re older. But I had a feeling Mom was wrong about me. I loved getting older—especially since it meant I got to have a birthday.

“I don’t want to be any older,” Penny said. She dropped to the floor and rolled around a bit. “Goo goo gaga. I’m a baby. I can’t even crawl. I’m younger than Marco now!”

“Penny, get up,” Mom said. “You’re a big kindergarten girl—and that’s way more exciting than being a baby. Think about all the things you can do!”

“You just said getting older was a bad thing,” I reminded Mom.

“I said there was no reason to rush it along,” Mom said.

“Goo goo gaga,” Penny said, rolling around again. “Goo goo ga ga ga. Ooh, I can feel the garage opening!”

“How’d you feel that?” I asked.

“The floor vibrated,” she said, as she sprang to her feet. “Daddy’s home! The toppings are home!”

“Yay!” I said.

Marco clapped his hands.

“What took him so long?” Penny asked.

“He had to work,” Mom said. “You know

that. Stuart hasn’t been around as much.”

Stuart is my favorite person who works at Batts Confections.

“Why not?” I asked.

“Because he’s graduating college in a few weeks,” Mom said. “And he’s getting ready to move to New York.”

“He’s leaving us?” I asked.

“I’m afraid so,” Mom said.

“I hate when people move away,” I told her.

“I know,” she said. “But now we’ll have another person to visit on the East Coast.” She looked down at my pile of clothes on the floor. “Tell you what, my nearly nine-year-old girl. I’ll give you an early birthday present right now. You can wait on cleaning up, as long as you promise to do it after cupcakes.”

“I promise,” I said. “Thanks, Mom.”