

*A toddler's life is changed by physical and emotional scars after an accident. Gayle shares the obstacles she faced and overcame and hopes others learn from and are comforted by her extraordinary path to personal and professional success.*

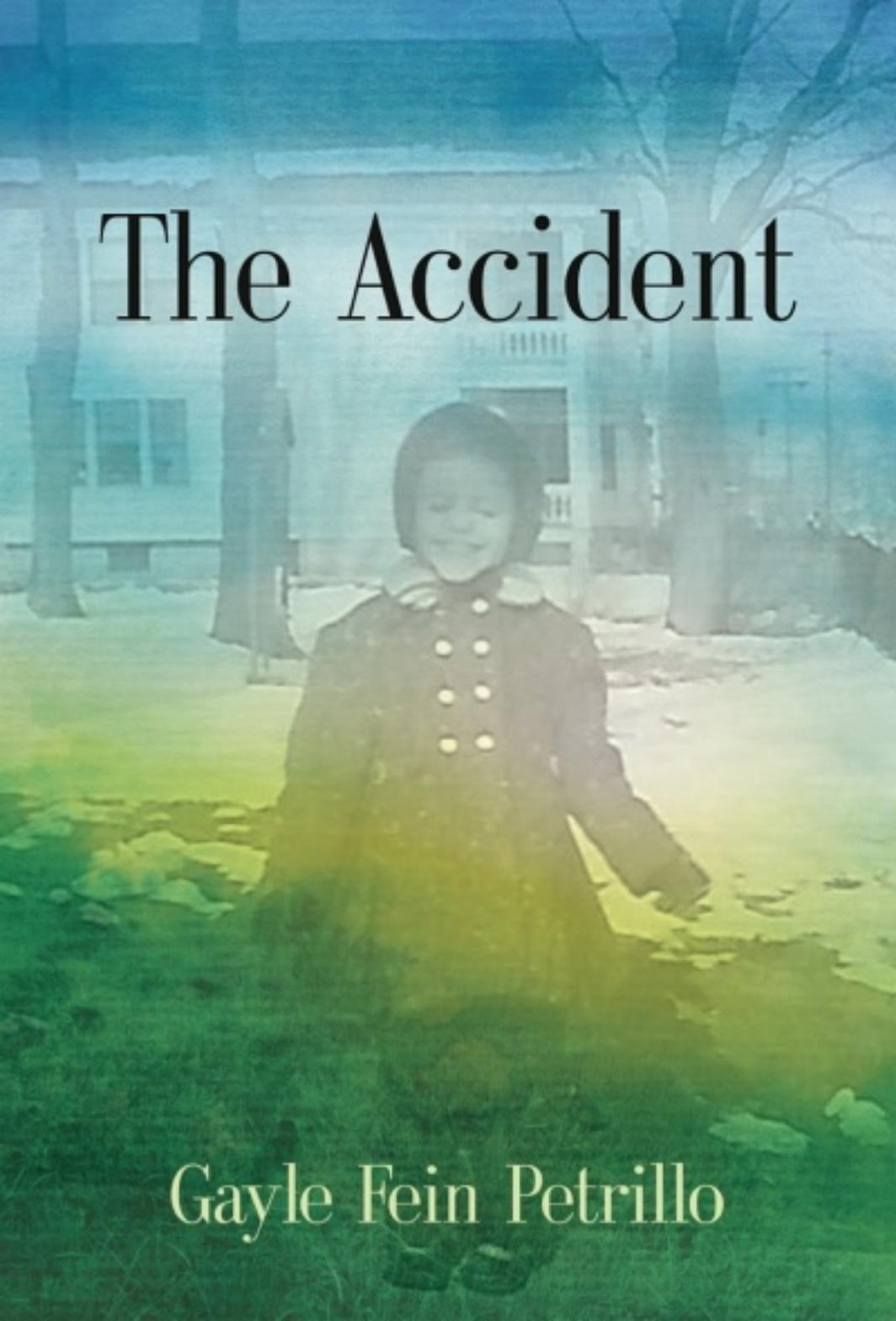
## **The Accident**

By Gayle Fein Petrillo

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A young girl with dark hair, wearing a dark, double-breasted winter coat with a white fur collar and several buttons, stands in a snowy yard. She is smiling slightly. In the background, there is a house with a porch and several bare trees. The overall scene is in winter.

# The Accident

Gayle Fein Petrillo

*“The Accident by Gayle Fein Petrillo is an important story to tell, and intriguing from the start as told in a flashback. It’s a compelling story with subject matter perfect for older kids; i.e. embarrassment, lack of trust, etc. And its imagery... I could smell the warm cookies!”*

— Marge Pellegrino, Author, Neon Words.

*“It is the kind of message that kids of all ages need to hear, as readers at any age love a personal connection to their lives. This type of book could be one that might be used in therapy sessions, school settings by nurses, social workers, and teachers. In particular, it could be used to build materials for a theme-based unit, as a ‘Touchstone Book.’”*

— Betsy Reutemann, Teacher

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## INTRODUCTION

Accidents just happen. There isn't anyone to blame. It's nobody's fault.

Have you ever had an accident? Have you ever fallen off of your bike or out of a tree?

Have you tumbled down stairs? Have you ever touched something really hot or tasted something that burned your tongue?

Some accidents are more serious than others.

Sometimes you can make it better with a few bandages and antibiotic cream. Other times you have to go to the doctor or even the hospital.

My accident was pretty serious.

It left me with physical and emotional scars. I had to learn how to deal with both, but especially the emotional ones. In my case, I became afraid. Everyone is afraid of something. But when fear becomes so big that it interferes with life, then it's a problem. My fears were that big and I had to learn to overcome them.

*Gayle Fein Petrillo*

This is my story of how I learned to do that. I hope it helps you and gives you some ideas of how you can conquer your own fears. Because it can be done!

## CHAPTER ONE REMEMBERING

I loved to hold up three fingers when anyone asked how old I was. But the truth was, I was not quite three years old yet on that beautiful, sunny October day.

I was so excited. I was going with my mom to our neighbor's house for a grown-up tea party. I pranced out to the kitchen wearing my favorite pink dress and black, patent leather Mary Jane shoes.

"Mommy, how pretty do I look?" I twirled in front of my mother, my smile almost as big as her beautiful white necklace—the one she would let me wear when we played dress up.

She told me I looked beautiful! Then she told me I had to change. We would be playing outside before the tea party, so I had to dress warmly.

I was sad that I couldn't wear my perfect princess dress, but I found a pair of colorful corduroy pants with a matching top and flannel jacket. Soon I felt so cozy that I forgot about my disappointment. It was time for the tea party!

The leaves were piled high in my neighbor's yard. I couldn't wait to jump into them with my new friends.

We lived in Upstate New York and had just moved from my very first home—a small farm in the country. What I missed most was when Daddy put me on his shoulders and took me out in the field to see the horses. He'd set me on the ground and let me feed an apple to Tiny, the biggest of six huge workhorses. Tiny's giant mouth would take the apple out of my hand so gently. His soft nose always tickled and made me laugh.

Playing outside in the leaves was so much fun, but oh the smell of those warm cookies escaping out the back door! I kept my jacket on as we ran inside, but pulled off my hat. I felt the top of my head to be sure my hair ribbon was still tied around my barely-there ponytail. I had a private giggle remembering that I was hiding my new lacy undershirt beneath all of my layers.

My mom and her friend had just put a coffee pot and cookies on the table. Hot chocolate was on its way. There were even tiny teacups. I tried to climb onto the wooden bench that ran alongside of the table. But

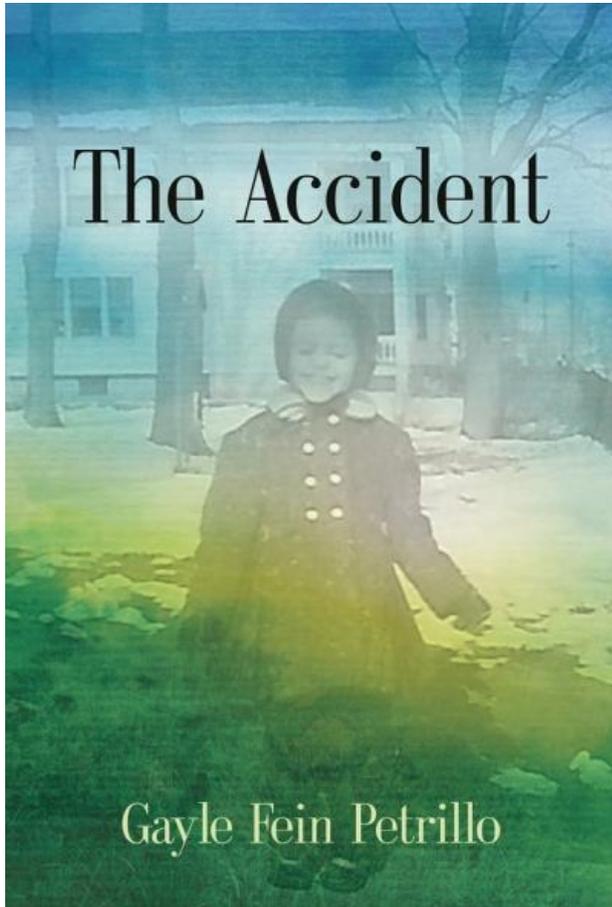
*The Accident*

it was too high. I put my hands on the table to boost myself up. That's when the accident happened.

I saw small candy bars scattered across the white tablecloth. What fun! I reached for a piece of candy . . . and tipped over the coffee pot. The boiling hot coffee spilled onto my jacket and all over me. The heat was so intense that it made all three layers of clothes stick to me. Then it burned through several layers of skin on my chest and belly.

It happened so fast. I don't remember screaming or anyone calling 911. But I'm sure I cried loud enough for the entire block to hear, and someone did call an ambulance.





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