



hula-hoop girl

My talent was just too weird.
Did I dare let others see it? **BY LACEY ISCHE**

It was the first day of band camp, and I was a nervous wreck.

I guess it was because of the rumors I'd heard about what upperclassmen did to freshmen. You know, kids getting duct-taped to the wall, or dumped in garbage cans, or stuffed in lockers. My only hope was that a week of marching band rehearsals before classes started would give me a head start on making friends.

I had just put my clarinet together when the band director made a special announcement. "Don't forget, Friday is the annual Band Camp Talent Show!" It was supposed to be an icebreaker, she explained. A way for freshmen to get to know everyone. "Your job is to get up there and have fun," she said. "And be sure to express your individuality."

My individuality. I wasn't sure I wanted to go there just yet.

At break time, all the freshmen were buzzing about what they'd do for the show. Group dances, lip-syncs, skits... everyone seemed to feel there would be safety in numbers. I huddled with a few of my close friends from middle school. "You're going to hula-hoop, right, Lacey?" they all asked me. "You have to!"

Yes, I am a hula-hooper. I started hooping around the same time I started playing the clarinet, in fourth grade. And I got into it because of my teacher, Mrs. O'Roarty.

Mrs. O'Roarty was the coolest person ever. With her long hair and the funky way she wore dresses over pants, she didn't look like a teacher. And she didn't always act like a teacher, either.

One day she gave us an assignment to write an essay about ourselves. "Tell me what you're really interested in," she said. "Don't worry about what other people think. Be yourself!" Then Mrs. O'Roarty told us about her own unusual interest. "You know what I like to do? I like to hula-hoop!"

"Will you bring one in and show us?" I asked.

The next day, we were off to the playground for a demonstration.

Mrs. O'Roarty was awesome! She could even move the hula-hoop from her waist to her neck. We all gave it a shot. Everyone in the class liked hula-hooping, but no one was as crazy about it as I was. I practiced every day during recess, and by the end of the year, I'd mastered some easy tricks, like turning around while hooping. Mrs. O'Roarty noticed.

"You need your own hula-hoop, Lacey," she told me.

About a week later, while I was at band practice, Mrs. O'Roarty stopped by my house and left a rockin' hula-hoop for me. It was about 5 feet in diameter, and she had taped it all around with different colors. I couldn't believe she had gone to that much trouble for me.

By eighth grade, I could move the hoop from my waist to my neck, just like Mrs. O'Roarty. I could also move it from my neck to my hand or hoop with my neck and arm at the same time. I could turn; I could sit down and hoop around my neck; I could hoop

blindfolded, jumping, or lying down. Whenever I wasn't studying or playing clarinet, I was hula-hooping.

I wanted to hula-hoop for the talent show. But I didn't want to look like a dork. Maybe I should just join in one of the skits, I thought. But I knew what Mrs. O'Roarty would think of that idea. I could almost hear her saying, "Be yourself, Lacey. It doesn't matter what other people think!"

So I signed up to do my own act.

The day of the talent show, 30 students prepared to take the stage. I was third from last, and one of only three solo performers. There were group dances and funny skits that got lots of applause. Meanwhile, I was about to go onstage alone and risk complete humiliation.

As I waited my turn, I started shaking and sweating. *What was I thinking?* At the last minute, I decided to do something funny when I went onstage. I thought I might get a laugh by tripping over my hula-hoop.

I was wrong. No one laughed — there was just dead silence.

"Is that supposed to be funny?" an upperclassman shouted from the audience.

But then my music started. I had chosen "Move It Like This" by The Baha Men, and it seemed to pump up the crowd.

I started out with a few easy tricks, but in the middle of the song, I put on a blindfold. The crowd went nuts! I did some of my most difficult tricks blindfolded, then threw my blindfold into the audience. Everyone cheered even more! People clapped and jumped and moved around. Whenever I did a trick, they went wild. After I finished, I got the loudest applause of anyone.

When I walked offstage, upperclassmen hugged and high-fived me. The senior drum majors said, "That was amazing! I've never seen anything like that in my life!"

From then on, everyone started calling me "Hula-Hoop Girl," a nickname I love. My freshman year was a total blast — I was even elected to student council as freshman representative. My friends told people, "Vote for Lacey. She's one of a kind!"

I'm grateful to Mrs. O'Roarty for introducing me to hula-hooping, but I'm even more grateful that she gave me the courage to be myself.

It's definitely the coolest trick I've ever learned! 🌸

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On August 1, 2006, we'll select one name (at random) to win the hula hoop and DVD. Winner will be notified by August 15. Entries cannot be acknowledged or returned.



win it!

pssst! Lacey's hoops are all handmade by her dad.