

# Albinism Since 1930

By Wanda Warren



The two most positive impacts albinism has had on my life are adaptability and tenaciousness. Albinism in my early years brought much physical pain (from sunburns) and a search for “normal” health. The search for “normal” physical and emotional wellbeing continues, resulting in my continually acquiring new skills.

My memories start in 1930 in Laurelville, Ohio, a still small town (population 500) near the confluence of Salt Creek and Laurel Creek in the Hocking Hills. In late September 1930, Joe and Mae were delighted and then shocked

to see that their beautiful new baby girl was born with white hair, pale skin, and pink eyes. Hours of travels and medical consultations led to the diagnosis of “albino.”

Vinegar, butter, and many other suggestions failed to give me relief from sunburns.

Over time, skin treatments improved and the best solution of wearing a long-sleeve shirt, a hat, and full sunglasses turned out to be current-day recommendations. The remedies for my low vision left me feeling excluded—I sat at the front in order to see the blackboard

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and did not try to play ball games. No one actually considered changing my hair color—wouldn’t that have been something—but instead called me names like “Blondie,” “Towhead,” and “Whitie,” names that I was sensitive to.

These things on the surface made it hard to make friends. I got to like characters in radio soap operas, like Ma Perkins. I had ideas that I would never meet a man to marry.

There are two sides to every coin, though: I was a successful student, had a terrific older sister, and was called on by neighbors to run errands for them in my teen years. Bank errands showed a level of trust. It’s possible that a lack of understanding of albinism meant that I was expected to do as well as any other child. I graduated on a scholarship from Ohio University, where my father—the first in his family to attend college—had studied. I established friendships in my sorority, some that lasted for decades, and got my Master’s Degree at Ohio State. I became a Registered Dietitian.

One of my supervisors at my first job encouraged me to join the young adult group at King Avenue United Methodist Church in Columbus. Life changed! I met a dashing young man from Kansas, Fred, and have been married to him for over 63 years. We have three children and several grand- and great-grand-children. Cats, and occasionally fish and turtles, have added life to our home. We moved to the Washington DC area in the early 1960s and have enjoyed living here, serving actively in the United Methodist church in many ways—food and furniture banks, church choir, women’s circles, potluck suppers.

Many wonderful memories come from travel and music—I was introduced to travel by my step-father, who was a conductor for the railroad. In my early twenties, I took the train and boat to visit my sister at Keisen school in Japan where she taught. Fred, coincidentally, was stationed in Japan during his Air Force years. My family, concerned that I would be alone in life, insisted that I learn things of value, so I began singing. My choir expertise led me to become certified in teaching music to young children, performing at local venues, and being President of our local music teachers club. With help from my family I am learning to sing in a virtual choir.

I still feel excluded at times and challenged by the cavalcade of icons on iPhones and iPads, but I am incredibly grateful for all God has blessed me with and I keep good humor. In my present living arrangement in a senior community, I encounter many older people who’ve recently lost their vision and ask me how to cope.

A close friend of 30 years describes me as “feisty when she needs to get her point across, loving when she realizes it doesn’t matter, and indomitable when she knows it will make a difference.”

