The teacher gave me a stern look when she handed me my report of the War of 1812.
I knew it only meant one thing that dreary day years ago at Natchez High School.
“I expected more from you,” Mrs. Minor said. “I can tell you just rushed through this. Take your time next time.”
At the top of my page there was a huge red “F” complete with a circle. Mrs. Minor even put a frowning face at the top.
Going over my report, Mrs. Minor also added a few question marks, corrected names. She even put “where are you going with this” on one paragraph.
Shoving the paper into my book bag, I took a huge sigh. As much as I tried to act like I wasn’t worried about grades, I really did care about them. I usually made all As, but I hid them from my classmates. For some reason, I was almost embarrassed by it.
But a “F”? This was a first, and I didn’t like it at all.
And the fun didn’t stop there. Mrs. Minor insisted that we take our reports home to get them signed by our parents.
“We haven’t done that since elementary school, Mrs. Minor,” Scott yelled from the back of the class.
“I know, but maybe it will motivate some of you to care about your work,” she said, sliding her glasses over her head. “And don’t think about trying anything sneaky. Conferences are next week, and I will be sure to bring it up.”
I have heard that many parents don’t go to teacher conferences today. But 12 years ago at Natchez High, most did go. More importantly, my mother did.
I debated on what I was going to do all day. I just knew Momma would kill me when she saw that bad grade.
I could fake an illness. But then Mrs. Minor would tell her about the poor report at their conference.
I could get my aunt to sign it. But then she would run and tell Momma as soon as I left the room.
I could beg Mrs. Minor to rethink her request. But then she would probably bring up the spit paper war that occurred last Friday after the highly motivational pep rally.
And worst of all, I knew that Momma would ground me for the weekend. I had my heart set on going to Amber’s pool party.
And there was no way around Momma when she grounded you. She took up all car keys and

canceled all her plans to make sure you stayed at home.
I finally came to a decision on the way home from school. I would forge her signature. I have seen it enough to know how she does her name. I had it down to the little loop she does on her "K."
If Mrs. Minor brought it up during the conference, the signature would be so good that maybe Momma would believe it herself. Perhaps it was a paper she forgot about.
It's amazing how smart teenagers think they are when they are really missing a few screws in their great plans. But at the time, I thought I had it under control.
That night in my room, I practiced a few lines on a blank piece of paper. It took a few minutes, but I had it down perfect. With confidence and gusto, I signed that report like I was signing the Declaration of Independence.
I almost skipped down to the dinner table that night. I had everything in order. I even reminded Momma about the conference next week with sheer confidence, almost to the point of arrogance.
I almost came out of my skin with excitement when she told me she changed shifts at the hospital that night and was working the graveyard shift. She wouldn't even be able to attend.
I hopped into bed that night with such relief that I slept like a baby. The next morning, I came down with that same excitement. Everything was working out as I planned, and I would be able to enjoy sheer teenage bliss this weekend at Amber's party.
I even took the time to iron my navy blue school uniform shirt. And I never iron.
Grabbing my book bag, I looked for Momma to tell her goodbye. I was actually going to arrive at school early to hand over my report to Mrs. Minor.
"You got something you want to tell me," Momma asked, looking over her coffee cup.
My heart sank to my feet. My stomach began to toss and turn. I think I even broke out into a sweat. Anytime mothers ask that question they know something.
"No," I whispered. "Why would I have something to tell you?"
"Let me ask you again, Jamie Lynn," she responded. "Is there something you want to tell me."
I was doomed. She asked me for a second time and called me by my first and middle name. That's never good.
Throwing my book bag on the ground, I pulled up a chair at the table. It was like one of those old police dramas that come on the television.
"What do you know," I asked.
Within seconds, Momma grabbed a load of crumpled up papers and placed them on the table. It was all the sheets of paper I spent all afternoon practicing her signature. Apparently, I didn't shove them in the trash far enough, and she found every single one when she took out the trash.
"It's funny how all of a sudden you have taken an interest in my signature," she said.
Yes, I was grounded. No, I didn't go to Amber's party. Yes, Momma saw my failing report. And, yes, she moved her shift around just so she could make the conference.
That day taught me two things: be honest and never think you can pull one over on Momma.
Momma came to visit me last night, and she asked me to fill out a check for her. I grinned at myself when I even signed it for her.
I haven't lost my touch.