

*a novel*

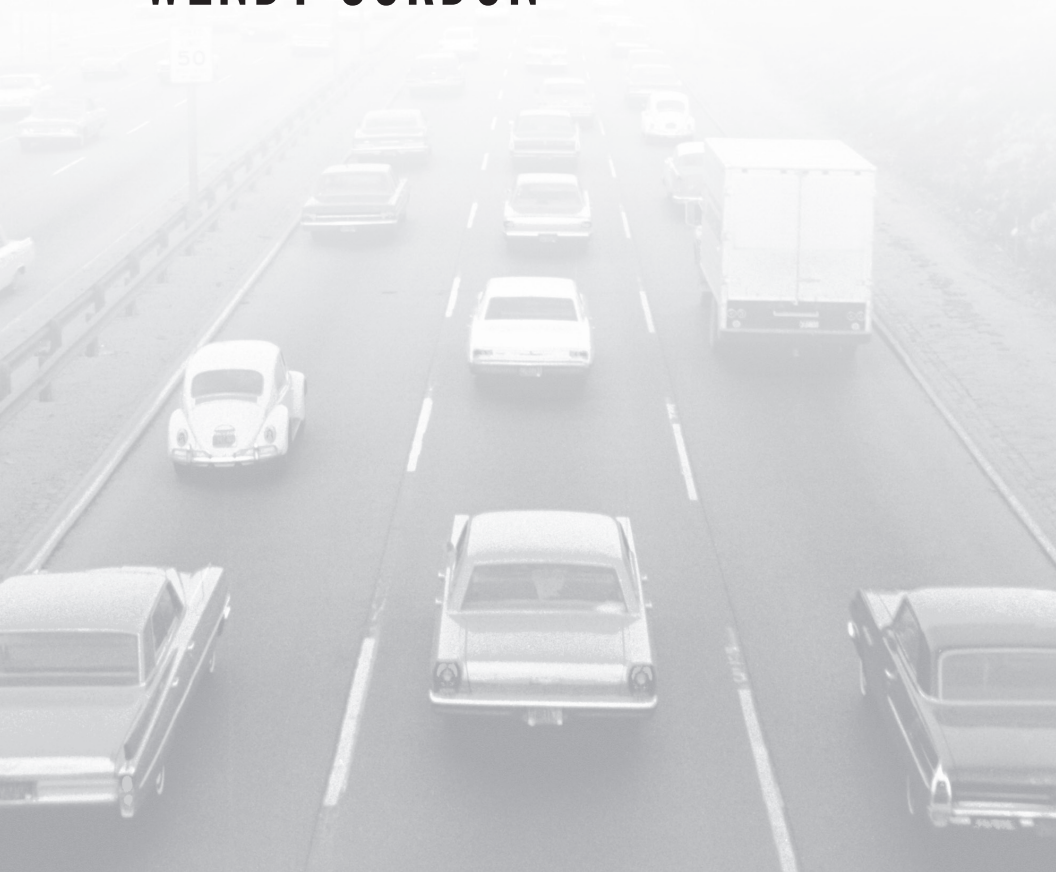
# **WRONG HIGHWAY**

## **WENDY GORDON**

**WRONG HIGHWAY**

SHEPHERDESS BOOKS PORTLAND

# WENDY GORDON



**WRONG HIGHWAY**

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2016 Wendy Gordon

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, contact the publisher at the address below.



**shepherdess books**

shepherdessbooks@gmail.com

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing, 2016

ISBN 978-0-9970780-0-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015919710

Frontispiece photograph © Superstock

Credits are found on page 376.

Copyediting by Kristin Thiel

Book design by K. M. Weber, [www.ilibrilbookdesign.com](http://www.ilibrilbookdesign.com)

*To my husband Zak and my children  
Rhianna, Jessica, Alex, and Lukas  
You are the center of my life.*

# CHAPTER ONE

## MARCH 1986

Erica needed to buy milk and cheese sticks at the supermarket, though she couldn't recall whether she'd remembered the coupon for the cheese sticks. She fumbled through her purse at a red light, finding the coupon safely wedged behind a wad of Kleenex. The red light was a long one, and Vince Volvo started shaking. A vibration came out of the gearshift. Erica held her breath until the light turned green. She accelerated, and Vince slid forward like he was supposed to.

After picking up Jesse and Jake's friend Michael in West Meadow Estates, she plunged into the surge of early-afternoon rush hour traffic. She'd been running all day in this disgusting pelting rain, starting with her hour at aerobics working off the fat from her pregnancy with Sophia, then dropping off some forms at West Meadow Elementary, buying diapers, returning books to the library, and driving all the way to Manhasset to the toy store, choosing a wooden beading set for Stacey. She'd left it, wrapped and with a card, on the hallway table when she'd finally gotten home, just in time for the twins' return from preschool, but then the phone started ringing and didn't stop. Nassau Auto Glass phoned, asking if she had any broken windows needing repair, as if you'd drive around with a shattered windshield waiting for someone to call. Her husband, Ethan, who spoke a numerical language that was as incomprehensible to her as ancient Phoenician, called and gave some excuse why he'd be working late. Something about linear output or *n*'s or *m*'s or *x*'s or *p*'s. Then, when she'd finally strapped all four kids into Vince Volvo, her mother called and she had to run into the kitchen, leaving the kids in the car. Her mother bumbled



excitedly about some crisis besetting her friend Arlene before announcing that she couldn't talk long because she was late for a real estate meeting.

Erica was certain she'd been holding Stacey's gift while talking to her mother, but she reached over to the passenger seat to reassure herself she hadn't left it on the hallway table. She ran her hand along the shiny wrapping paper, the curlicues of ribbon.

Vince's engine made a weird swishy sound. Maybe the Pakistani guy who worked at the gas station by aerobics had misunderstood her and put in regular instead of premium. The rain drummed down harder. She was always so tired, an exhaustion that coffee only glossed over. Whenever she lay down at the end of aerobics for a minute of yoga-inspired full relaxation, her head sunk into the mat. Her eyes closed, and she almost drifted off to sleep before her instructor, sexy Ari, rang the bell. She rolled to her side, wiggled her fingers and toes, and reentered the world where she always had to stay awake.

In the shimmering halo of the oncoming headlights, she short-circuited. She forgot where she was. Too many details leaped about her brain like uncontrolled electrical signals. She didn't recall whether she was driving on the Northern State or the LIE or the Meadowbrook, or whether she was driving Dylan to soccer, or Jake to T-ball, or Sophia to the doctor for her shots. She didn't remember whether it was 1976 or 1986. Everything was darkness and light, black and white, random dots. She could make out the difference between the white lines and the black road and recognize the circles of light that represented cars in front of her, and she navigated her heavy metal vehicle laden with children by instinct.

"Mommy, can you play the Talking Heads?" Jesse piped up from the backseat. With the sound of her son's voice, a fuse reset in Erica's brain, and all the dots coalesced. She remembered, yes, it was March 26, 1986 and she was driving Jesse and Jake and their friend Michael to Stacey Lincer's ice skating party in Mineola. She slipped the Talking Heads into her tape deck. David Byrne spoke to her personally.

“You may find yourself behind the wheel of a large automobile. . .”

Yes, she thought. Her Volvo station wagon, with its two extra seats in the back, qualified.

“And you may ask yourself. . . how did I get here?”

“I took Glenvere Road to Hillside Avenue,” she answered David. “Beyond that, I can’t say.”

Jake sang along in the backseat, in his clear, perfect-pitch voice. The Talking Heads was his favorite band, but as usual, he made up his own words.

“Wrong highway, Mommy. Wrong highway. Wrong highway.”

“Is this the wrong highway?” Erica asked David. “Give me direction.”

“And you may ask yourself. My God, what have I done?” David said in response.

“Wrong highway. Wrong highway,” sang Jake.

“Jake, will you shut up, you stupid dork,” Jesse said.

## WRONG HIGHWAY

BY WENDY GORDON

*396 pages*

*\$16.95 paperback*

*ISBN 978-0-9970780-0-8*

*Published by Shepherdess Books | Portland*

*Available where all fine books are sold.*