**What was your Mom like when you were a child?**

My childhood memories of my mom are almost always in the kitchen. In our house, the kitchen was the largest room, and my mom spent most of her waking hours there. Microwave ovens and frozen food were unknown to us. Our refrigerator had a very tiny freezer, and that stored mostly ice and ice cream. That meant everything was prepared fresh every day. Everything was cooked on the stovetop or in the oven. This involved making everything from tomato sauce to ravioli to apple pies from scratch. When we were home, something was always cooking in the kitchen. I can still recall the many kitchen smells and smile.

To accomplish this, my mother went food shopping every day. Since my father took the car to work, my mother had to walk about a mile downtown to the grocery store, the butcher, the fish store, the bakery, and the bank where she paid the gas and electric bill every month and also made her Christmas Club payment. (Christmas Clubs were a popular way back then for working class people to save for the expenses of Christmas shopping. You put money in the bank every week when you got paid, and in December you got a check for your deposit total plus interest.) Since there was no such thing as Pre-K, I accompanied my mother until I was five on all her errands, at first alone and later with my brother in the stroller. I felt I was an indispensable assistant.

My mother always described herself as a tomboy. She loved physical activity. She always said she preferred playing with a ball to playing with dolls. Unfortunately, in her day, girls were not allowed to play anything too strenuous. She wasn’t even allowed to have a bike as a child because her father told her that “bicycles are for boys.” She rebelled against that and borrowed bikes whenever she could. Mom was a feminist before her time.

She was a great mother for boys. She played wiffleball with us in the backyard and step ball in the front. Later, she took us to the driving range to hit out golf balls and she took us bowling. She enjoyed sports. She rebelled against things that she considered too “girly.” I often wondered what kind of mother she would have been to a girl. But she was ideal for me and my brother.

One “thing that mom enjoyed was music. She always had music playing in the house, first on the radio, and later on her Harmon Kardon stereo. She loved listening to Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Jerry Vale and Mantovani records. She played her harmonica for us and encouraged me to learn to play the guitar to accompany her.

Her other enjoyment was hot dogs. It was her favorite food in the world. I always found it ironic that this person who was a fabulous cook and appreciated food would rather go to Rutt’s Hut for a hot dog than to some fancy restaurant. But that was mom. Take her to any hot dog stand and she was in heaven.

When my brother was finally in school, mom went back to her job as a comptometer operator for U.S. Rubber Co. (later Uniroyal) in Passaic. The building is still there, although the company left a half century ago. Mom was a master of the comptometer, which was a mechanical adding machine that could do all sorts of mathematical calculations. She was fast and she was accurate. That made her much in demand at the accounting departments of U.S. Rubber and later at ADP and Mack Drugs. Unfortunately, the comptometer was made obsolete by the electronic calculator in the late 1960s, although some offices still employed comptometer operators into the 1970s.

When mom was working, my brother and I were latchkey kids. But since my grandparents lived upstairs from us, there was always someone around if we needed them. Since my father had the car, my mother took the bus to work. My brother and I would often walk down to the bus stop in the late afternoon to meet her when she got off the bus. I think that often made her day. Her smile was a sight to see. Later, when my father started working as a mailman, he would be done with work at 3:00 and my brother and I would get in the car at 4:45 and drive to Passaic to pick up my mother at work.

My mother became a widow at the age of 39. I know it was tough for her after that to try to support two young boys on an office worker’s salary. But she never let on to us how tight things were. She was determined to send both of her boys to private schools and saw them both become professionals.