

# Short Memories

## Two Ocean Rescues

WHILE VACATIONING in Hollywood, Florida, in 1952, my grandma was content to sun herself in a beach chair until we finally convinced her to wade in the ocean.

Grandma walked into the warm, blue water up to her waist. Unfortunately, we forgot to tell her about the numerous little fish swimming around our feet. When she noticed, she let out a scream and leaned forward.

Now, I don't know if it was the fact that her mouth was wide open or if it was the salt water releasing the adhesive, but the upper plate of Grandma's false teeth fell out. As she started to reach forward in an attempt to retrieve her false teeth, a wave hit her from behind—and she went under.

Dad and I rushed to help her, and it took both of us to get Grandma to her feet. She was all right, and her first words were, "I got them!"

While the situation was not amusing at the time, it proved to be the most exciting part of our trip, and I always recall it with a smile.

—Charles Warner, Douglas, Wyoming

## In the End, Young Boy Really Did "Take the Cake"

MY DAD was a Baptist preacher in southern Arkansas for about 50 years. I came along near the end of the Great Depression.

In the 1940s and '50s, it was common for us to be invited to someone's home for lunch following morning services. One day, when I was 4 years old, we were visiting a family for lunch and the lady of the house had prepared a very good meal.

There was one hitch. She had baked a coconut cake for us, and

I have never liked coconut. The woman tried several times to give me a piece of cake, and my final response was that I didn't like cake with hair on it. My mother was mortified and spent some effort apologizing for that remark.

Dad thought it was hilarious and told this story for years. Mother did not agree and mentioned it for years, too, but only when she was upset with me.

As a retired minister, I've reached the ripe old age of 68 and still don't like coconut, but neither of my own preacher's kids has ever refused "cake with hair on it."

—Fred Stevenson, Littleton, Colorado

### Powdering Their Noses

DURING THE 1940s, when my sister and I were teenagers, our father rigged up a badminton net in our front yard because we enjoyed playing.

The unpredictable wind very often would lift the shuttlecock onto the roof, just in front of my bedroom's dormer window. We'd have to run upstairs to get the shuttlecock or get one of our younger siblings to sit up there in the window and toss it down.

One day, my sister's boyfriend brought us a bag of powdered skim milk to line the court. The lines were nice and white and looked very official.

Then, it rained. It took us a while to figure out where that awful odor was coming from; we never thought about the powdered milk rotting.

The stench was terrible, but the grass loved it, growing taller and healthier along the milk lines. We missed our white-lined court, but we never tried that again.

—Lois Brown, Snohomish, Washington

## Haircut Derailed

MY BROTHERS, John and Bill, ages 8-1/2 and 6, had just returned from the barbershop in our town of Kingston, West Virginia when they asked me if I'd like a haircut. Being a curious 4-year-old, I said, "Okay."

They piled catalogs on a kitchen chair for me to sit on and draped Mom's tablecloth around my shoulders.

Next, Bill took his windup Lionel train engine and, with the wheels spinning, went up the side of my head. My hair wound around all eight wheels so tightly that the locomotive was stuck there—with the whistle blowing! My ears rang for a week.

Mom came running, and it seemed like it took hours to get the train wheels cut away from my head. All of my long hair went with it. My mom used a hair bow to cover my bald spot.

—Betty Stephenson, Dover, Delaware

## Crime and Punishment

MY FRIENDS and I didn't really regard the stealing of watermelons as thievery. It was our rite of passage in the mid-1930s.

Our plan was to sneak through the barbed-wire fence and snatch a bunch of ripe watermelons in the large melon fields on the outskirts of a nearby South Dakota city. We never cut fences; that would have been unsporting.

Jean was the best "thumper" to determine melon ripeness, and she passed the melons to Tim, the "hoister." Tim handed them over the fence to Fred, Ernie and me. We three packed them into Fred's old jalopy.

Concentrating on our roles, we failed to notice two dark shapes approaching from each end of the country road. Just as we prepared to leave, spotlights, blinking lights and the unholy din of

sirens surrounded us.

It could have been worse, I suppose, but we were forced to sit on the curb outside the police station and eat every last bit of stolen melon, with a policeman seeing to it that we ate clear into the rind. He even refused to let us go to the restroom.

Mother heard about it somehow, and I'm sure she knew I was involved. All she said when she mentioned the matter was that she always felt any punishment should fit the crime.

—Dorothea Weybright, Tequesta, Florida

### A Girl Named Virgil

YOU'VE HEARD the Johnny Cash song A Boy Named Sue? Well, when my mother was born, she was named Virgil to honor Sister Mary Virgil, a nun whom my grandmother admired. Mom went through the early part of her life proving her femininity and putting up with more than a few jokes.

As a young woman, in the 1930s, my mom became a registered nurse in obstetrics. She gave up her career to raise seven children before returning to nursing, when her youngest child was 13.

One day, while reviewing new admissions, Mom saw that one expectant mother's first name was Virgil. She went into the room and asked the young mother how she happened to receive such an unusual name.

The woman replied that when she was born, in the late 1930s, her mother had a wonderful young nurse named Virgil. She liked the nurse so well that she named her little baby girl after the nurse.

Life is full of coincidences. Yes, that young nurse was my mother. Mom worked until the age of 74 and is still going strong at 93.

—Sharon Zivko, Pewaukee, Wisconsin