

GIFTS WHILE GROWING UP

By Fred Hobbs

A commonly used term to refer to an adult is a “grown up.” Specific laws are on the books to delineate benefits allowed and responsibilities expected of adults. But a child can exhibit grown up behavior merely by ceasing to require the use of diapers. As development advances beyond potty training, the process of growing up accelerates rapidly both mentally and physically.

At what age is a person truly a grown up? Surely, some of my octogenarian contemporaries are capable of exhibiting behavior that is decidedly *not* grown up. That’s a subject for another time.

In considering my own experience of growing up, I first must give credit to my courageous and resolute mother. At age 32 she became a widow, left to care for and support a baby and four older children. My father died of tuberculosis contracted in the trenches of France in World War I. I was the baby.

This was in the midst of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Mother somehow found a series of part-time jobs that generated small amounts of income. That money, combined with a modest government pension from my Dad’s military service and occasional “relief” benefits (called welfare these days), she kept the family intact.

Through necessity, my siblings and I experienced growing up in a different and more challenging way than most children. My sister, who was ten years older than I, became a valuable helper to my mother and the whole family.

This included a heavy schedule of baby-sitting as well as kitchen and housekeeping chores. Her care helped to form a special bond between my sister and me that has lasted all our lives. By the age of three or four, I began to enjoy the attention of my three older brothers who, I am told, hauled me around in a little red wagon and otherwise entertained me.

Mother instilled in all of us a sense of duty to each other and a measure of trust and independence that was not only a key to our family stability, but a major factor for success in later life. At appropriate stages of growing up in these uncertain economic times, we each found work to supplement the family income and cover some individual expenses. My sister worked at a summer mountain resort and assisted a woman who prepared specialty foods for the former Daniels and Fisher department store in Denver. My brothers caddied at local golf courses.

In the 1940s, the Depression was over, my sister had married, my older brothers were in the service and my mother was now working in a wartime defense plant. I was still in the process of growing up. At age eleven, I was selling some 375 Collier’s magazines weekly to soldiers at Lowry and Buckley Fields. At two and a half cents per magazine, I was making enough money to buy some of my clothes, see a movie once a month, enjoy an ice cream cone or a cherry coke whenever I wished... and even purchase a set of dishes for my mother.

Her firm guidance during my formative years later helped me to earn my own way through college and deal with the challenges posed in the world’s work force. How proud and grateful I am, that as I was growing up, my mother gave me those two priceless gifts...independence and trust.