

Tie a Nice Bow

By Nancy Mann

In the married student housing near the University of South Carolina the floors were made of concrete. Newlyweds often bought linoleum pieces to set down on top of it, also to cover up the grey color. Many apartments nearby were painted grey, as Charleston, a proximate city, had become a storage depot for the tons of the nation's battleship paint, post-World War II.

In the early Seventies, a young mother decorated one room in her student apartment as a nursery, laying down colorful linoleum, hanging bright curtains on the window, and placing a wooden rocking chair in the room. She also placed a dresser drawer set in it-it had deep drawers for a toddler to sleep in-a la the character in the comics, "Moon Mullins."

Two weeks after the birth of her baby girl, she nursed her dark-haired Indian "princess," in the pre-dawn, and also fed her sterilized water per the pediatrician's orders. Her baby was so cute, always bathed and powdered, and dressed in beautiful, pastel, night-sacks by Carters-gowns that gathered and tied in a bow at the bottom of the garment – as Sweet Pea, Popeye's darling crawled around in-in the cartoons.

This night, the mother was especially tired, and could barely lift and nestle her baby under her elbow in the rocking chair. "Oh, God!" she cried, "let me close my eyes for just one minute!"

Meanwhile, millions of years' of evolution had resulted in human arms that could carry weights up to forty pounds, arms that could aid in tree-climbing, and arms and hands that could grope for clams under water. Human hands developed to grasp and cradle handfuls of nuts, and they developed as strong instruments to do many things beyond peel citrus rinds...

The mother jerked awake-her head snapped like a chicken. Her dry mouth hung open. And, with her damp nightgown twisted around her, her body was moving back and forth in the rocking chair. The chair had traveled many feet across the room from the momentum. Her left arm hung at her side, over and above the arm of the rocker...how long had she been asleep?

At the end of her trembling arm, her pinkie finger had caught one loop of the bow-tie of her infant's nightgown. Her baby was head down, lumpy as a small sack of potatoes, and the patented snap of the Carter's nightgown had not popped open at her tiny, tiny throat.

And, neither did the bow unravel-the bow at the gathered hem-the newborn was swinging violently-a pendulum possibly to wildly crash on an unforgiving, cold, cement floor.

Those were the days when babies were born with soft spots on their skulls-and those were the days when children's clothing was quality-really well-made.