

Published in the *Pasadena Star-News* on May 12, 2002

When Mom lets Loose, it's on the Wings of Justice

She finally made good on her promise; she pulled down my pants and spanked my six-year-old bare bottom. I was a willful child and my mother spanked me many times before. This was different – I had crossed the line.

I grew up in a small town in the Midwest in the 1950's, back when little kids went out to play in the morning and returned at lunchtime, full of stories to tell their mom, while they sipped tomato soup and munched on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

One summer morning I was playing with my friends deep in the excavation of a new home in our housing development. The contractor had just dug the basement, so I was several feet below the ground. I started to clown around, pulled down my cotton shorts and pretended to pee on an imaginary toilet.

Suddenly Mom appeared. She caught me in a shameful act, and she was mad. I felt a strong tug on my arm as she dragged me home. She sat me down a little too hard on a chair and scolded me – wagging a finger in my face. I was scared out of my little kid's mind.

My mother taught my siblings and me by example to control our temper. When Mom got mad, we paid attention. Dad got mad a lot. Even though he usually had a good reason, we just didn't take it as seriously. He was stern and he didn't take any guff.

A product of her generation, my mother called herself a "housewife" while she raised her brood of five children. Her husband and children defined her. Content with that label, she never rebelled.

These days she calls herself a widow, having lost her mate of 56 years late in 2000. Life is difficult and she struggles to find her way alone. She's learned to stand up for herself, even though she resides in the assisted living wing of a posh retirement community.

She lives in a luxurious facility with a caring staff. She is connected to immediate help via a medallion she wears around her neck and has pull-cords all over her little apartment. Staff members are always there to assist her, twenty-four/seven.

Mom eats three meals a day in the lovely dining room with windows that are flooded with Arizona sunshine. The ambience is that of a fine restaurant. To ensure that everyone is accounted for, residents sit in assigned seats. Two of Mom's companions were congenial, like her, but the other was a problem.

Mom would describe comments “Lydia” made about the staff, her tablemates and anyone else she could think of. Mom didn’t like Lydia’s caustic comments, but she didn’t know what to do.

After several months of this nonsense, my mild-mannered mom had had enough. She gave Lydia a talking to. Lydia had crossed the line.

A lifelong bully, Lydia tried to intimidate my mom, but it didn’t work. Mom asked the staff to assign her to another table. She had to get down to the dining room 30 minutes earlier than usual, but she adjusted. She missed her congenial tablemates and they missed her.

Last week Mom called to tell me she’s back with the pleasant companions, far from Lydia. Her fellow lovely ladies stood up and asked to be reunited. I told my mother I was proud of her. She had led that revolt. Her anger was appropriate, her challenge to Lydia was well placed, and the resolution was just.

Though I still follow my dad, who never suffered a fool gladly, I try harder to emulate my mom, who holds her tongue a little too long, but finally lets it fly free on the wings of justice.

Thanks, Mom. Thanks, Dad.