

Something to Cry About

By Holly Kritsch

I'm sure I would have done it myself if she had waited a few more days; maybe on the weekend when I wouldn't have to go to school. It would give me time to adjust. But my mother decided that today was going to be the day. Today the minute I walked in the door expecting lunch. Today was the day that I would start wearing a bra. I knew it was inevitable, but I was still reluctant. It had something to do with all those straps you had to worry about; not to mention how they encouraged nasty boys to pull on the back closing and snap it back whenever they sat behind you. This was 1959, long before the slogan, "no means no".

I thought that by wearing loose blouses no one would notice that I was beginning to show signs of "blossoming," as my grandmother was fond of saying. However, my mother declared that I was "too old to go flopping about". And so, it was. Despite my best efforts of eluding her, I was wrestled into my first bra. Not my own first bra, but one of my mother's pointy padded uplifts. When I looked in the mirror I was horrified. In one stroke of maternal wisdom and a little physical force my mother had transformed me from a mushy breasted 13-year-old into a calendar girl – at least in the chest area. The snotty nose and blotchy face ruined the rest of the picture. When my friends started wearing bras, I hadn't noticed such a dramatic change. Maybe because their mothers were large bosomed women, they couldn't pass their undergarments down to their daughters. My mother, on the other hand, was a petite forty-year-old who had mastered

many adult disguises; spike heels, nylons with a perfect straight seam, and of course these padded things now locked around my chest. On her these pointers looked just fine. I stared in fear at those perfect 34's. I was going to have to take those babies to school this afternoon. They pointed straight out like I had pushed birthday hats under my sweater. Yes sir, straight out and straight ahead those things were saying, and no nonsense about it. They looked like they needed red flashing lights to warn off approaching objects. Somewhere deep inside those vast near empty cones my tiny nipples shrivelled at the thought of afternoon classes.

Now that she had achieved her goal, my mother turned conciliatory. "How pretty you look," she told me. "Your sweater drapes so much better." Conciliatory, until I snivelled a few minutes too long and she threw her hands in the air and snapped, "For goodness sakes stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about."

When I walked into the classroom after lunch, the attention of the whole class riveted on my chest, which had swelled to miraculous proportions since morning. Nobody said a word. They sat there awestruck. For the rest of the week, they watched me carefully. I think they were expecting another eruption and this one they didn't want to miss. After a few days I learned to handle that bra with a measure of finesse, but the straps were still problematic. They were prone to breaking and I was forever finding them dangling around my knees after climbing trees.

Friday night was the school dance night. I had been to two school dances already and they were mostly dull, with the girls on one side of the gym and the boys on the other. The girls shuffled about in the corners jiving together to Elvis Presley music. However, there was little else to do in a village of six hundred people and if you didn't go you

might miss something crucial. That Friday, to my amazement, I was actually asked to dance, by boys. As they twirled me around yanking my arm over my head, I sent up fervent prayers that those bra straps would hold throughout these assaults on my mother's mending skills. Then it happened. The cutest boy in the school, the best dancer hands down, executed a particularly flamboyant twirl and rammed his elbow into one of those empty cones, denting it in, where it stayed. We danced on pretending nothing had happened. On and on, the music blasted out of the speakers. A stolen glance at my chest revealed one perfect pointed peak and one that looked like the blunted end of a volcano. I poured myself more vigorously into the music, hoping it would cause my dented side to pop back into position. But it didn't. The music stopped. We stood there. The boy peered off into the distance, trying to pretend he didn't notice how he had defaced this poor grade eight girl's bosom so horribly. In the few seconds of quiet before the next song that cup chose to right itself with one resounding pop. I rushed off to the girl's bathroom in disgrace.

On the way home, my best friend tried to console me. She actually wore a thing called a training bra that her aunt had picked up in Halifax. It fit her tiny chest perfectly with no empty spaces. Why had my mother not ordered me a training bra? My breasts definitely needed training. Didn't my mother know that these things were dangerous objects like cars and motorbikes? They should never be entrusted to a 13-year-old.