

## **Busting Out of My Buster Browns by Diana Raab, Ph.D.**

My mother blamed her ugly feet, laden with bunions and hammer toes, on the pointy shoes worn in the 1940's and 1950's. So, the day I took my very first step she began to obsess about the type of shoes I wore. I vividly remember the afternoon when she sat me in the back seat of her white Valiant and drove me to the local Buster Brown store in Fresh Meadows, New York. In my little frilly dress, she lifted me onto the platform, six stairs up, to have my feet measured. I remember the measurements to be quite time-consuming and scientific, consisting of taking numerous measurements of different angles of my feet. The shoe salesman, dressed in a suit and tie, then fitted my laced shoes and then ran a mobile x-ray machine over them to make sure my toes lay flat. Looking back, I realize the seriousness and professionalism of his job.

From that day onwards and whenever I needed a new pair of shoes, particularly the week before the beginning of school, she drove me back to the Buster Brown shoe store for a fitting. At school, I was the only girl not permitted to wear slip-on shoes. The week before my sixth grade prom, which I was to attend with the cutest blonde boy in the grade, I told my mother I wanted my first pair of slip-ons. Against what she called her better judgment, she agreed, but I was permitted to only wear them on that day. Even though I appreciate my mother's gallant efforts, from that day on, I decided never again to wear laced shoes, except for sports, and became obsessed with slip-ons.

Today, we all know that bunions and hammer toes are more related to a family history than to the type of shoes worn. Now in my late fifties, I have to thank my mother's side of the family for my deformed toes and the bones growing in all different directions. I made the decision a long time ago not to become obsessed with wearing the right shoes. I wanted only beautiful shoes, because it did not matter; heredity would doom me. A few years ago, when we moved into a new house, we had to build extra shelves in my closet, to accommodate every style and color shoe. Thanks, Mom, for turning your obsession into my deep passion for shoes.