

# THE BLUEBIRD WORD

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## **Busting Out of My Buster Browns**

by Diana Raab

My mother blamed her ugly feet, laden with bunions and hammer toes, on her pointy shoes worn in the 1940s and 1950s. So, the day I took my very first step she began to obsess about the type of shoes I wore. I vividly remember the day in the 1950s, 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, and consisted of taking numerous measurements of different angles of my feet. The shoe salesman, dressed in a suit and tie, 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, mother 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 Eric, 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.

Perhaps because of this childhood trauma, as a young woman, I became obsessed with shoes of every color and style. At twenty-three, I got married and my husband called me Amelda Marcos, who was the First Lady of the Philippines and owned over three thousand pairs of shoes. When we took trips, my suitcase had more shoes than clothes!

Today, we all know that bunions and hammer toes are more related to a family history than to the type of shoes worn, although shoes can exacerbate a preexisting problem. Now in my late sixties, 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; genetics would eventually 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.

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