

SHOPPING BEFORE SUPERMARKETS AND MALL

Did you get excited when your mother or dad told you were going shopping?

This is a story of history, adventure, and endurance.

At six or seven, home alone when parents were not at home was not an option. So, this six or seven-year-old was a hostage to all the shopping trips.

KEY FOODS

The man behind the counter looked down at the little girl in the blue dress, bows at the end of her braids and white sandals, newly polished. He smiled at her and offered her a slice of baloney. She reached up and took it, the rosy glow of her shyness showing on her face. She was hungry and ate it quickly, licking her fingers, not wiping them on her blue dress, maybe her favorite.

It was a hot day, and it was good to get into the grocery store where a large fan on a tall stand blew the hot air around. Being in the store was better than the noisy, dusty street where the trollies and trucks and cars gave off heat, just like the sun. There were also bad smells in the street when it was hot like today. Sometimes she tried to hold her breath.

Everything in the store was clean, the white aprons on the two shopkeepers, the counter where bread, and meats, and cheeses were stacked, even the sawdust on the floor. The bright sunlight came through the sparkling window, showing not a speck of dirt anywhere.

The girl's mother laughed at what the two men, who looked very much alike, were saying as they placed the items from her list on the counter.

Restless to get going, she wandered the aisles in the store and sniffed at the smells that changed with the different merchandise in each aisle. Soap in the first aisle, straw brooms in another, and everywhere the smell of the sawdust on the floor.

"Linda. Where are you. I'm finished. Help me carry these packages to the car."

Linda clutched the paper bag by the handle with one hand and held onto her mother's with the other. Crossing the street was not her favorite thing. She needed to take care that her small shoes didn't get caught in the trolley tracks, or that she didn't turn her ankle on the cobble stones.

The family had a car, and her mom knew how to drive. She was very glad she could sit by the open window in the front seat, feeling the breeze as they chugged along 69th Street. It was a very hot day to be walking the mile and a half home.

SOME FACTS ABOUT SHOPPING IN 1947 TO 1950

It all started out with getting dressed up.

"Whaaat?" you say.

Well imagine six-year-old me getting all "dolled-up" for what seemed an experience akin to Marco Polo's trek from Italy to China. You'll see what I'm talking about.

First, the hair needed to be braided. There was no such thing as the natural look. Hair needed to be tamed. Next, the dress and a hat, gloves, ankle socks and shoes. Everyone was dressed up in the 1940's and 50's. Even criminals wore a suit, hat, and tie for their mug shots. Just visit any police museum files.

The most epic shopping trips were to the Lower East Side of Manhattan. More to Come