

Party Shoes and Longboards

By Stephen Rusiniak

From the book: **Not Your Mother's Book...On Being a Parent**

Maybe it's a *girl thing*, but I could be wrong. Whatever it is, my daughter has always had an affinity for clothes and their accessories. It was an early interest in one particular accessory that unleashed what's known around our house as her adventures in personal storage. It all started with a pair of shoes.



"best friends"

For her second birthday, Tracy received a brand new big girl dress and a matching pair of black patent-leather party shoes. She adored the dress but she became *best friends* with the shoes. Wherever she went, her shoe-friends went, too, and not necessarily on her feet. Sometimes they happened to be the passengers in her baby-doll stroller, while other times they sat quietly beside her watching the gang from *Sesame Street* on television. One night, they had a sleepover—the first of many. Not long after we'd tucked Tracy in for the night, I peeked in and saw her peacefully asleep and sharing her pillow with her party shoes.

It simply became a matter of routine for her to take her shoes to bed with her. One night, after a bad dream, my wife and I awoke to find Tracy standing next to our bed looking like the cartoon character Cindy Lou Who from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Her blonde hair stuck out in all directions in static electric splendor as her tears flowed down her cheeks and past her quivering lip. And just below her almost-floor-length Winnie the Pooh nightshirt, strapped to the wrong feet, were her two patent-leather best friends.

Eventually though, it was more than just her shoes that began spending nights in her bed. Over the next few years, the area beneath her pillows and eventually her blankets and sheets became a depository for anything and everything that happened to be the interest *du jour*. On any given day, the plethora of cherished possessions found just below the surface of her bedding might include a variety of books and toys, puzzles or rocks—yes, she had a rock collection for a while. A favorite coat or photo might be there with a few of her stuffed animals. And one night, as we tucked her in, we even found her real-life lovebird, Peaches, enjoying some private time with her under a canopy of tented sheets.

Making her bed every morning began to take on the appearance of a scavenger hunt gone wild. As she grew older, though, she learned to make her own bed and eventually the days of finding her hidden treasures passed. As time went by, I eventually stopped wondering if any more of her most cherished possessions were still being sequestered beneath her pillows, blankets and sheets.

Today, she's a teenager and it's no surprise to me that her love of all things having to do with clothes and shopping hasn't diminished. She has, however, developed a few other interests—including surfing. When the time or season prevents her from riding the real waves, she becomes a sidewalk surfer who *hangs ten* around our neighborhood on a longboard—an extended version of the old-time skateboards. It is currently her most-cherished possession.



Tracy with her longboard

Last night, we walked into her room and as seems to be the norm, she'd simply thrown her bedspread over the pillows and sheets, implying that her bed was made. Absently, I asked what she'd hidden under her pillow these days. She replied, "Nothing. My longboard is just too big." Looking at this crumpled and bumpy mess of her bed reminded me of a time when almost anything might be found just beneath its wrinkled surface, and a time when a pair of black patent-leather party shoes slept there.

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(Note: Photos not published in book)

the backstory:

I don't remember why but one summer morning I awoke earlier than usual. Taking my laptop and coffee out onto our porch, I'd decided to write a piece about the days when my daughter, Tracy stored her favorite interests *du jour* under her covers—this being the result of a recent conversation we had about where she kept her newly purchased *longboard*.

Not content to simply compose this piece as I would any other I decided to attempt writing more like the way a friend of mine, Wayne would write (Wayne and I have previously written together. Click on *But you were just a cop* on my "in books" for more info). His style is flowing and descriptive, and to this end I began writing—except what I was writing ended up having little to do with longboards. It did, however, eventually become a piece entitled *Out there on the beam* (to read please visit my "other pieces" page and click on the title).

I returned to the original topic and the words (this time back in my own style) flowed, and as they did they brought me back to a time when my little girl was—still a little girl. It was a fun piece to write!

Party Shoes and Longboards first appeared in a local parenting magazine and later in the book anthology **Not Your Mother's Book...On being a Parent.**



*Photos of my sidewalk
(and ocean)
surfer girl
from back around the time the
piece was written*

