

I, Betty Crocker

by Paul Steven Stone

I was born at the age of 42.

Some of you might regard that as a handicap, but at the time I assumed everyone was born fully grown in a corporate test kitchen. In fact, I still think of it as an advantage; like being born with a silver spoon in my hand.

My parents were industrious and successful advertising icons themselves. Mom was the housewife on the Crispy Cornpads cereal boxes, Dad the cartoon character in the Gillette Safety Razor commercials who always stroked his chin and declared, "Feels smoother, too!"

My parents were proud of me from the start and encouraged me to think of myself as more than a mere advertising symbol. Knowing from their own experience how difficult life could be for someone who never had a childhood, adolescence or early adulthood, they arranged for me to play with other celebrities like myself. Thus, I led a very active social life, and still fondly recall those days when the Gerber Baby, the Morton Salt Girl (what a klutz!), the Ivory Snow Mother and myself would stay up till all hours of the night exchanging recipes and baby care advice.

It's easy to judge one's parents by today's standards, but in truth it was a far different world back then. So, it's not surprising that my parents wouldn't allow me to play with Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben, or that my father threatened to lock me up in the kitchen if I so much as glanced in the Marlboro Man's direction.

Ah, the Marlboro Man! There was a fellow who could turn the head of any woman who spent most of her days on cake mix boxes. But like most things in life, the dream was far more interesting than the reality. Later on, when I had the chance to date Mr. Marlboro, I found him to be dull, insipid and totally lost without his horse. Not only that, there was an aura of stale smoke always hovering around him and fouling his breath. It was all you could do to let your nostrils open for even the smallest intake of smelly, cigarette-reeking air.

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I laugh now to think of my father's Victorian attitudes, but having worked in men's magazines his entire career, he had seen too many unsuspecting females whose advertising careers were ruined by associating with the wrong type of commercial characters. So, except for a brief relationship with that boy who kept getting sand kicked in his face in Charles Atlas ads, I was never allowed to go out on dates until the start of the Second World War.

The war years, with their food shortages and rationing, were lonely years for me, and I recall staring down long empty supermarket aisles waiting for a chance to wave at the Gorton's Fisherman or Tony the Tiger as they went by. By then, I had developed a line of hot breakfast cereals that put me on the shelf next to the one real love of my life.

Modesty forbids me to reveal the intimate details of my relationship with the Quaker Oats Quaker -- or 'Quaky' as we used to call him -- but you'll most likely remember from the fan magazines that we were seen at all the "in" places, dancing till dawn, burying ourselves in confetti, drinking champagne from Buster Brown slippers.

Sad to say, it was an affair fated for an unhappy ending. Inevitably, gossip about our relationship reached into the corporate headquarters of both our companies, and rulings came down from both mountaintops forbidding fraternization between competing brands. Quaky went into brief seclusion while I was given the first of my "new looks" by my personal illustrator, a total revamp that not only changed my look but my entire personality as well.

To be honest, with my new personality I suddenly discovered new appetites rising up within me, so that stuffy old icons like Quaky began to have about as much appeal as cold oatmeal. Shocking to say, I began seriously looking around for the kind of relationships my father had always worried about.

And so, girls, I began to experiment with more exotic spices.

NEXT: "No Kitchen Could Hold Me," Betty's honest look back at her "lost years" and her torrid, love-hate relationship with the Pillsbury Doughboy.

