

## Recollections about Mom, Joyce (DeMars) Barthel.

The following story is from my recollections.

No doubt there are factual errors.

I know from experience that my recollections can be much different from the recollections of my siblings.

Not just in dates and facts but in emotional memory.

I enjoyed my childhood immensely.

Mom had osteomyelitis as a young girl.

It is my understanding from her, that more than anything else caused to be a tomboy as a youth.

In her days a girl who did athletic or outside things was called a tomboy.

There are numerous definitions of tomboy.

The one that fits her best is, “a girl who acts or dresses in a boyish way, likes rough outdoor activities”.

Mom was an athlete.



*A photo of Mom perched on Pa's first car in 1940.*

This story is about Mom in an informal softball-throwing contest.

This took place in midsummer, maybe around 1954.

I was about eight.

Mom was about 32.

We were at the public park on Howard Lake, in Wright County.

In those days, groups often got together on Sunday afternoons for picnics.

Sunday afternoon because that was the only time dads were not working.

The group might be members of a farm co-op, families from a 4-H club, families whose fathers played on a town ball team, etc.

Each family brought its own food and set up on a picnic table.

Some families combined two or more to a table.

Especially if the families were related.

Food was carried in picnic baskets or pans wrapped in towels to keep the contents hot or cold.

Convenient things like rolling plastic coolers with wheels did not exist.

Plastic containers were expensive and rare.

Mom would bring cool aide in glass canning jars with lids turned tight and wrapped in towels.

Brown beans were common.

Sometimes with hot dogs cut into chunks dropped in the beans.

There would often be a big roaster of chicken.

Most folks raised and butchered their own chickens.

There might be a few cases of beer somewhere, possibly even a keg if it were the right group.

Homemade potato salad in a big crock wrapped in towels.

Foods were homemade.

No store-bought cookies.

Potato chips were a special treat, sometimes.

The choices were Old Dutch Potato Chips in a large can with a lid, or Old Dutch Potato Chips in a small can with a lid.

The cans made good toy drums when empty.

That was if no mom claimed it for a storage container.



There might be some pop around.  
Soft drinks were rare,, however, and you might need to share.  
Gail told me a list of foods that her family ate at picnics, but I do not know much about that.  
They were Lutherans.  
We were Catholic.  
Protestants ate different foods.  
If the weather was good, kids would play in the water, but the adults did not.  
Somebody might have brought a wooden rowboat.  
If the beach was a well-organized one, rowboats might be rented for \$0.25 an hour.  
People brought equipment for games then as now.  
Men and kids played games before and after eating time.  
Moms prepared food and fed us.  
There would be a ball game even if there were only enough men and boys for small teams.  
Otherwise, two or three man “catch” was fun, as were ball games that rotated everyone through a chance to bat.  
Often someone would bring a horseshoe set.  
Frisbee had not been invented, and volleyball was unknown.  
If the group was well organized there might be games with prizes.  
This is where my mom comes in.  
Mom wore dresses, but only on formal occasions like Sunday mass.  
She wore pants, or in summer “pedal pushers”.  
Pedal pushers were calf-length trousers that were popular for women and girls in the 1950s and the early 1960s.  
I recall two occasions when Mom’s pedal pushers were considered improper.  
Our parish priest would try to visit every home in the congregation once a year.  
I spotted his car as he drove slowly down the gravel road from Corbin’s.  
I can still see Mom running toward the house to change.  
Mom often went to weekday mass at 8 a.m.  
If she wasn’t in a dress, she would wear a long coat to conceal that fact.  
Back to the original story.  
When the picnic organizers started lining up woman to do a “soft ball toss for distance” contest.  
I don’t think Mom was even paying attention.  
I watched the contest and saw the other women make their tosses.  
A person who is not trained in throwing a ball has a peculiar way of swinging the arm over the head in an ineffective manner.  
We used to tease guys by saying that they “pitched like a girl”.  
Every boy knew what that looked like.  
Most of the moms made a good effort and threw the softball similar distances.  
Perhaps twenty to thirty yards. Each contestant’s impact spot was measured and marked with a makeshift flag.  
My impression is that somebody realized that Joyce should be in the game, so she was brought over in a rush.  
For no reason, she was wearing a baseball cap.  
I assume some kid or dad had dropped it, and she picked it up and put it on.  
That was unusual because I had never seen a ball cap on her head before or after.  
Just odd timing.  
She walked up to the throwing spot, took the ball, and with a smooth and simple motion she threw it like a man.  
I thought the ball traveled twice the distance of the next longest throw.  
The contest was over.  
The folks around me didn’t know Mom.  
Someone said, “Look at her in that ball cap, she must play ball all the time”.  
I had never before seen Mom throw a ball.  
I didn’t know she could.  
For the next sixty years I continued to learn things, which I did not know she could do.

