

Summer 1961

Mary Hawkins

A wonderful excitement fluttered through my stomach. Like butterflies hovering over the roses, flutters moved from right to left through me. I was going to be the honored guest at my first big birthday party. Wow! A party to honor me on my birthday.

Mommy invited my grade school friends and the kids from our holler to the party. Very few kids up here ever have a party with friends invited. Mommy baked a huge cake. Chocolate! Yummy; that's my favorite. Two thick layers. I caught a glimpse of her leaving the kitchen with it. Tiny peaks of fluffy, egg white icing browned lightly to highlight the peaks and valleys. On top were nine pink candles resting inside crunchy little candy bases.

Unnoticed, I slipped from the kitchen and wandered through the house, out the front door, and watched as orders were barked to my siblings. From behind the banisters where I crouched on my knees, I watched them hustle from one place to another getting everything ready for the festivities.

"Floyd, pull that saw horse back toward the hill. Straighten it up. It's not in line with Ike's."

"Why don't you ever yell at Ike and make him line his up with mine?" Floyd grumbled. "It's always me; why can't it be someone else who needs to fix something?"

"The best thing you can do, Little Boy, is keep your mouth shut and do as you're told. Now, boys, go to Daddy's garage and get that plywood that he had left over from the pantry."

The boys disappeared and sauntered around the side of the house toward Daddy's workshop. I could hear Floyd grumble and complain because Mommy had yelled at him.

The party table was being assembled in the front yard from two well-worn, rough, wooden saw horses with scars and cuts across the tops of each that testified of all the home fix it jobs that Daddy had undertaken in years past. The boys returned with the 4 x 8 sheet of plywood and placed it on top of the saw horses to complete the table. Mommy was ready to work her magic.

"Ike, go to the lower end of the table and catch the end of this sheet when I flip it." Mommy commanded. "This yellow sheet will make a nice table cloth."

One quick flip, the sheet snapped, and flew into Ike's waiting hands. Once the tablecloth was positioned just right, Mommy repeated the procedure again with white lace as an overlay. No one would ever know that it wasn't a real table. Mommy could make anything look good. She constantly amazed me. Balloons in yellow, pink, white, and blue became table decorations. As I watched Mommy and the boys working away in the yard, a slight breeze escaped and rushed down the hill leaving the ridge far behind it. It swam around the back of the house, lightly kissed my left cheek, and left a mild lilac perfume in its place.

Excitement and pride blossomed and bloomed inside me. The expectation was almost too much to bear. I eased from my crouched position and slipped down to the third step from the bottom to get a closer view of the action in the front yard. I carefully smoothed my dress so no wrinkles would show on my skirt tail. Mommy had traded feed sacks with Mr. Sauders to get enough material to make my party dress. The blue and

yellow background flowers seemed to correspond with everything else on my special day.

As I fixed my skirt around my legs, I intertwined my slender fingers and looped them in front of my drawn up knobby knees. I must remember, “It isn’t lady-like for a girl to show her knees.” Mommy and Granny Kennedy were always firm and strict about stuff like that. After all, it was the biggest day of my young life. Once again I smoothed my skirt with hot, sweaty, June hands and laced my fingers together. “I can’t believe this is happening.”

Mommy placed a huge vase filled with multiple shades of flowers from her prized flower garden near the back of the table. She included huge yellowish colored mums, large white flowering snowballs from Daddy’s favorite bush plus other kinds that I didn’t know much about.

From out of nowhere, presents mysteriously appeared. Kids from up in the head of our holler and from down the dirt road began to appear. Each one carried a package or a birthday card. My friends were actually at my house, and we were having a party.

The summer of 1961 was the best. I was usually glad to be out of school so I could go barefoot. I rarely wore shoes, but I received five pairs of flip-flops. I was so proud of all those shoes. I enjoyed running and walking up and down the dusty hollow in them. As summer wore on and I was out and about, the sun bore down tanning the upper exposed portion of my feet a smooth dark tan. Where the straps covered my feet, a stark white image of the flip flops remained.

You, know, sometimes it’s the smallest things that leave the greatest impact upon on us when you’re young.