

Sonny's Adventures

In the early years of their marriage, Mom and Dad lived in Harbor Beach where Dad was stationed in the Coast Guard. They lived in a second floor apartment on an old neighborhood street that was the back side of the block that formed the main shopping street in town. The street sloped down a hill at the bottom of which was a gas station on the corner. Mom was only 19 years old and had a not-quite-two very busy toddler, Sonny, and six-month-old Kathryn. Part of Daddy's Coast Guard duty was to patrol the beach looking for "rum runners" bringing in liquor from Canada. He'd hurry his walk so that he could sneak home for a few minutes and help Mom with the children.

One of the hardest times of the day for Mom was right after she had given Sonny his breakfast and was bathing Kathryn. Though he wasn't talking at all, Sonny was very gregarious and knew how to make people understand him. And he had his morning ritual. As soon as he got up, he got out a little wrench and took the tongue off his wagon. Then he got dressed and ate his breakfast. Then, as soon as Mom got Kathryn in the baby tub so she couldn't leave her even for a minute, he let himself out of the apartment and went on his adventures.

No matter what Mom did to try to secure the door, he'd find a way to get it open and she'd hear the door click shut behind him minutes after she got Kathryn in the tub.

Sonny would get his tricycle, which he already could ride, off the porch and down the hill he would go to the gas station, braking at the bottom with his feet. He went through a lot of shoe soles that summer. Then he would hang out with the men at the gas station, shaking the gum machine when he wanted some gum and generally being friendly. The guys told Mom they thought he should be named "Sunny." When they thought he'd been there long enough, they got a couple of suckers out of the box they had purchased especially for that purpose and gave Sonny two, one for him and one to take home to his sister. Eventually, Sonny would reappear at home to shove a somewhat sticky sucker in Kathryn's crib.

One day, Mom was out with Kathryn in the buggy and Sonny tagging along and she decided to pick up a few things at the A&P store that was around the block on the main shopping street. When they went into the store, Sonny went right straight to the back, took a banana off the counter, peeled it, and ate it. Mom was embarrassed and when she got to the check-out, she told the clerk that she would pay for the banana her son had just eaten. The clerk said, "Oh, that's OK, Ma'am. He gets one here every day."

On closer investigation, Mom discovered that Sonny's morning trip out really started at the next-door neighbors where he helped them eat their breakfast; then he went to the gas station; then he went around the corner to the A&P store for his banana; and then he finished up his journey by proceeding around the block to visit an elderly lady where he ate a cookie before heading home.