

‘Woolly Bear’ Wished Only to Shed Her Coat

Girl’s hand-me-down fur was a target for teasing.

Because I grew up in the Depression, few material possessions were ever my own, and clothes were invariably hand-me-downs.

Mama was adept at altering everything to my size; I still remember hearing the whir of the old Singer sewing machine from our bedroom at night. And, at 11 years of age, I wasn’t too clothes-conscious yet.

However, I do recall my utter embarrassment at receiving a neighbor’s old fur coat in 1937. Even though the real fur was soft, cuddly and warm, I was ashamed to wear it in front of my Cold Spring, Minnesota friends and classmates.

All of my complaining and crying didn’t sway my mother, who said sternly, “Young lady, if you don’t intend to freeze this winter, you’ll wear it and like it!”

I only wanted a cloth coat like the other girls had. Fortunately, the weather remained unusually warm and I continued to wear my fall coat to school.

The day after Thanksgiving vacation ended, it happened. The temperature fell drastically and the north wind howled loudly as it swirled snow into huge drifts during the worst blizzard in our history. I sadly realized winter was here.

What I expected of my classmates came true. The girls snickered and giggled at my fur coat, and the boys called me “Woolly Bear.” I cried all the way home.

Naturally, I was happy when Christmas vacation began and I

wouldn't have to face my classmates. Mama kept us busy. We baked dozens of cookies, fruitcakes and date bars to have on hand for holiday guests.

On Christmas Eve, we trimmed the tree and sang carols. When all was in order, we dashed upstairs and jumped into bed, eager to see what gifts St. Nick would bring.

The next morning, while it was still dark, we tiptoed downstairs and turned on the tree lights. There, we found clothes, school supplies and candy.

Mama and Daddy were awakened by all our noise and stood watching us, pleased with our excitement. Then Mama went to her sewing room and returned with four white, oblong boxes, handing one to each of us.

As my sisters held up pretty dresses Mama had made, I wondered what she'd made for me. When I opened the box, I almost fainted from sheer joy. Nestled in the tissue paper was a homemade coat of herringbone tweed that had big, shiny buttons and a tiny collar of black velvet. I strolled through the room modeling my coat, proud as a peacock.

Now, I was eager for school to resume. I could hardly wait to show off my new coat—the best Christmas gift I ever received and the one personal possession that I wasn't obligated to share with anyone.

—Angie M., Cold Spring, Minnesota