

Carnal Knowledge

By Dianne Hardy, Utah

My knowledge of sex began as a childhood memory in 1947, when I was four. A couple with two girls moved into our old house after we moved from Myton to Roosevelt. I came to know the girls, Marilyn and Carol, when I stayed at Grandpa and Grandma's house on weekends. Mama said I could play with the girls, but only at Grandma's house. I couldn't go to their house—because of their parents.

I overheard Daddy and Mama talking about their family and more than what was said, I remember low voices judging the parents who lived together without benefit of marriage. I felt the shame of it without understanding why. I thought that people who lived together were, of course, married. How could it be otherwise?

This was my first acquaintance and although the association was weak, I knew something was amiss. Naturally, I never said anything to the girls—it was too secretive and shameful, but I could tell by the way Grandpa and Grandma acted, they knew about those parents too.

The mystery came to an end the summer I was seven and my sister, Mary, was nine. Mary's friend Jeannie reported that her mother gave birth to a baby boy. That afternoon Mary and I were playing on a blanket in the back yard. We each had our Baby Coo dolls we'd received for Christmas. Mary laid her doll's clothes in neat rows and then dressed it in one outfit after another. With a wet finger I wiped my naked doll's dirty face and tried to borrow clothing from Mary because I had lost mine. Mama sat with us reading a book.