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W. Our Wisconsin



Oh, for an Easy-Bake Oven!

It was her Christmas dream during the 1960s.

By Darlene Buechel, Calumet County Field Editor

BACK IN 1968, I was the only 8-year-old girl on the block without an Easy-Bake Oven. In fact, I felt sure I was the only Easy-Bakeless kid in Hilbert and probably America.

While my friends Mary Lynn and Lori created cakes with fudgy chocolate frosting and popped out batches of sugar cookies from their tiny working ovens, the only things I produced were pouting lips and tears.

"An Easy-Bake Oven is a waste of money," Mom lectured. "You can help bake cookies in the big oven."

"It's not the same!" I'd wail, yanking the blond roots on Malibu Barbie's head.

Mom baked the best cinnamon rolls, lemon bars and confetti angel food cake in the neighborhood, and I knew it...but through my green eyes it was clear to see that helping her just wasn't as good as having a small oven of my very own.

Introduced by Kenner in 1963, the original Easy-Bake Oven created heat with two 100-watt light bulbs inside a turquoise metal cabinet that resembled a real oven. It retailed for \$15.95.

Following the trends, a "Premier Model" was

introduced in 1969, available in avocado green or poppy red. A "Mod" version was marketed in 1971.

Today, this toy is still made by Hasbro, but the current unit resembles a microwave. Over the years, some 30 million Easy-Bake Ovens have been sold. *No wonder* I'd felt left out!

As the years went on, my parents held firm. The brightly wrapped packages under our Christmas tree yielded Lite-Brite, Twister and a cool canopy bed for Barbie, but no little oven for me.

Her Interest Cooled

Over time, however, Mom's wisdom proved itself. As I reached age 12, I didn't even realize my oven idea was going up in flames. My friends' Easy-Bake Ovens began collecting dust as boys and Bobby Sherman records took over our lives.

I was soon babysitting on weekends, raking in 50 cents an hour. I could have saved my quarters and bought an oven, but it seemed more important to purchase lip gloss, green apple perfume or the latest records by David Cassidy.

Today, as a grandmother, I realize that Garth Brooks was right when he sang, "Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers."

I now appreciate the carefree, fun and safe childhood I enjoyed in Hilbert. We didn't have a money tree in our backyard, as Dad was so fond of pointing out, but our two-parent middle-class home was full of love and laughter.

I was fortunate to grow up in a slower-paced world. We didn't have a color television set until I was 10, but we saw plenty of color when we went outside to enjoy wonderful Wisconsin in every season of the year.

At Christmastime in 1999, my boss, Dennis, mentioned he was buying an Easy-Bake Oven for his niece.

As I relayed the traumatic saga of my half-baked childhood, Dennis nearly fell on the floor with laughter. But the following August, when I was feeling down about turning 40, Dennis greeted me with a gift box wrapped in purple Snoopy paper.

Finally, Someone Listened!

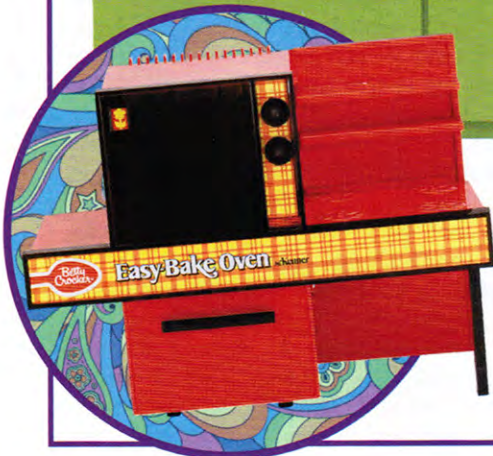
As I opened the package, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. There before my eyes was a box containing my own Easy-Bake Oven!

Dennis' gift truly made my day...someone finally understood. And I well understood how much that gift could mean to a child. After seeking Dennis' blessing, I marched down to the donation box at Toys for Tots the following November and proudly added my nearly new and never-used treasure to the collection.

As I did so, I couldn't help but picture a pigtailed girl in hand-me-down pajamas opening this treasure on Christmas morning.

It warmed my heart to know that some sweet child, who probably didn't have as easy a path in life as my parents had given me, would enjoy her own Easy-Bake Christmas.

The history of the Easy-Bake Oven is traced in the book *Light Bulb Baking* by Todd Coupee. For information, visit lightbulbbaking.com.



BAKED UP HOT SALES.

Avocado green and poppy red were trendy colors of Easy-Bake Ovens sold in the '60s. It became one of the most popular toys ever...and was coveted by Darlene Buechel, age 8 in 1968 snapshot above.