

“Bingo”.

Her voice carried throughout the church hall.

In the 1950’s my mother worked in a bank as a book keeper in order to help care for us five children. Dad was on strike with the Anaconda Copper Company, again. The Union held a strong arm in holding out for the wage needed for the employees to make a good living.

“Bingo”, mom had yelled again. Each week she would meet her friends, also mothers hoping to win money while covering numbers with beans, daubers or the current mode of forming a design. Bingo was the game of choice in the neighborhood on Friday night. Her smile reflected her thoughts on how she would spend her booty. She had won \$100 in the blackout game. The money would go a long way back then.

On Saturday morning we headed out to town. The sun was shining but the day was cold. That day she purchased two Swing coats for daughters in middle school and two snow jackets for sons in elementary school. A fist full of change allowed her a head scarf for herself and the purchase of a baby coat for the little one.

My Swing coat was speckled with white dots. The coat swirled when I swirled as I pranced and danced the five blocks home. Snow crunched underneath my black booted feet. My sister chose the same cut of coat but with blue specks. It could have swirled had she been inclined to pretend she was on a dance stage. She, being two years older than I, stately walked beside mom. Our brothers didn’t come to town with us. Mom knew their size. “It’s easier that way,” she said as we left the brothers home with dad. Our coats fit us just fine. They would last almost through senior high school. They were perfect. They even doubled as an extra blanket during the sub-zero weather. I thought about wearing my elegant “Doris Day “ coat to bed one night but I had thought that it would become wrinkled and no amount of swirling would iron out the creases.

Thanksgiving Day was warmer for us kids that year and those years following the bingo cash flow. Hardships were to soften in following years. The strike was settled. Dad returned to work and the sunshine in Big Sky Country brightened our outlook. Mom met often, though, with her friends on Friday nights.

Our Swing coats, now, only swirl in fond memories; in my memory anyway. Funny how I don’t recall how my coat became a memory. I remember little in how it became no more, even though it meant so much to me. Without realizing it, my Swing coat became my quilt, a security blanket during those difficult times growing up in Montana. Making ends meet was a hardship for all the neighborhood friends no matter what job choice parents made. Fun times were necessary for survival. Bingo was the fun time moms looked forward to and perhaps going home with a win.

Mom’s win during bingo was a bingo for me, too. For that I am thankful.

Lana Russ

