

**Steve  
WILLEY**

# Mom always had a way with hedge trimmers

Since the day my then-blond hair fell below my eyes till the day I became a young man, I have been subjected to what I affectionately refer to as "mommy cuts." By that I mean my momma, a woman with no salon training and horrendous eyesight, cut my hair.



Growing up in rural Mississippi, a person didn't have a lot of choices. Mom was about the only person a boy could trust with his hair — especially since the town barber was also the local drunk.

I was lucky in that I was the youngest of three sons and my mom got some valuable practice time in with my siblings. In the eight years before my birth, my mother went from giving haircuts that were sueable to those that merely made people join a convent.

She was never particularly good at it, and the only advantage to mommy cuts was that my family saved a fortune when Halloween rolled around.

A simple mommy cut was enough to petrify the neighbors into giving the Willey kids candy, money, and on three occasions, the deeds to their homes.

On haircut days, (usually after "Captain Kangaroo" episodes aired and my father was so liquored up he happily consented) my mom would make the family draw straws and the loser was forcibly held in a frail, metal dining room chair.

When momma was in a hurry, she'd use the "bowl technique" in which a glass mixing bowl the size of Montana was used to beat the loser into submission, at which point she would begin cutting.

My family never had a lot of money when I was growing up, and we couldn't afford the delicate sheers used by most barbers. We had to make do with everyday household instruments, and while I found the nail-clippers a bit time-consuming, they proved to be far more gentle than my dad's hedge trimmers.

But at the time, it really didn't bother me. Like most young boys at that stage in life, I was more concerned with catching snakes and learning to burp the entire Gettysburg Address than I was with my appearance. Mommy cuts were just a part of life I had to endure.

It wasn't until I began junior high that I was teased severely because of my obvious mommy cuts. I knew that something had to change.

I labored long hours grinding ice for a neighbor who owned a snow-cone truck, saving every penny in the

hopes that I could one day abolish mommy cuts forever.

Then in the mid-1980s, I had saved enough money to get a real haircut, and I would have been damned if it wasn't going to be a knock-out. Oklahoma University football player Brian Bosworth had created a style that was the envy of young people across the nation: "The Boz."

I begged my momma to let me have a real barber give the cut, but she assured me she was familiar with the "Booze" and would have no problem cutting it herself. She even promised to get clippers! I had never been cut with clippers before, so, on her written word that she would use clippers and clippers only, I consented.

I cried the night before, thousands of questions racing through my head: Would my friends approve? Would my blood clot as fast with clipper wounds as they did with hedge trimmer ones? And what the hell is a 'BOOZE'?

When mommy-cut day arrived, the house was awakened by the dull whirl of an electric razor and the muffled whimper of our family dog, Skippy. Mom, to this day, claims that electric clippers "must be broken in" and it was for that reason and not some evil satisfaction that my momma made Skippy the laughing stock of the dog community.

There was no need to draw straws this day, The "Booze" was going

first. The second the clippers cut on, my mom's hands raced feverishly over my head as I gazed at the open jaws of my brothers, and the all-too-common wince from my father. Large clumps of blond hair leapt from my scalp as if they were escaping a flaming building.

Suddenly, as quickly as it began, it stopped. (It also helped that my father eventually slurred out the phrase, "Dammit Susan, at's ENUFF!") I won't get into the specifics of how I looked other than to mention that I looked remarkably similar to Don Rickles' butt.

For months I was told I looked like a diseased squirrel, and my only refuge was playing junior high football where I could wear a helmet without getting strange looks from teachers, priests and funeral home directors.

It would be the last mommy cut I would ever receive.

But despite the pain, both physical and emotional, that mommy cuts inherently induced, there was something blessed about those days. Life was so unhectic and comfortable.

Now with college worries, rent and bills piling up, and seven-year bonds at an all time low, I sort of long for those days again. Days when, as a sandy-haired river boy, mommy-cuts were the only worries I knew.

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