

THE DESK

The year was 1960 and the world as my family knew it was about to be turned upside down. The Vietnam War smoldered a world away, the Civil Rights Movement gained traction and support across the country, and a handsome young man with a New England accent showed strength in the polls for the presidency. In spite of the changes in the wind, my rock-solid dad, with conservative values, continued to drive his reliable American-made Chevrolet each and every day. My world continued to thrive on a steady diet of peace and predictability.

By the start of third grade in September of 1960, there appeared a new blond maple wood mid-century modern child's desk in my tiny bedroom. It was sleek and simple. The desk's purpose was to provide me with a much-needed quiet spot for homework, for thinking, and for dreaming. The desk was all that, and more.

In third grade, with little or no homework, I used the desktop to "iron" my stack of cotton handkerchiefs just as I perceived my mom doing at her ironing board in the basement each week. A small cup of water from the bathroom plus a comb became the tools of my trade that year. In the late afternoon, the hour just before dinner, I proceeded to pretend to iron the hankies with water and a smooth surface provided by the back of the comb. It was engaging work as I folded and stacked the neat pile of cotton cloth, a job that kept me occupied in a way that seemed to be of help, in general, to the household, and reflected my mom's weekly chores.

By seventh grade, I felt challenged by the homework, especially in science, a subject I never could grasp. I sat for hours at my desk and read the pages of my textbook aloud in my tiny room, hoping to absorb the content if I saw it AND heard the words. I struggled to learn science that year, but managed to pull out a B for the course.

Eighth grade provided a new use for the desk. By the time I reached the age of thirteen in 1965, sewing ignited my imagination. My mother spent her reserves of cash one month to buy me a used sewing machine and I went to town. First, I made skirts, then jumpers, and finally accomplished more advanced work on dresses. My little desk, with its scattered pins and tissue-paper pattern pieces, served as the space I needed to sew on a machine, and create clothing for school.

In late summer of 1966, I graduated to my older sister's bedroom with the twin beds and private bathroom. Clearly, I was grown up and not in need of the room everyone continued referring to as "the baby room". No more tiny room for me. No more tiny furniture. No more working at my favorite space.

My simple blond wood desk and matching adjustable chair were relocated to the basement of our home in Pennsylvania. For the next five decades, the desk and chair languished in the basement or garage of residences in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Texas, Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin.

Happily, the desk and chair have been refurbished and are flourishing in the bedroom of my young granddaughter, Grace. This kind, smart, and serious student received my cherished desk--the one on which I learned seventh grade science by reading the text aloud--on the occasion of her sixth birthday in 2015. Grace uses her desk almost everyday for thinking, writing, and dreaming. This is her spot now and it makes a quiet comfortable place for Grace to imagine her future. My heart is filled with joy as this solid symbol of studying and creating enjoys a new life back in the state of Ohio once again.