I grew up in the 50’s and 60’s where there wasn’t a lot of non gender specific expression accepted. Girls never wore boys clothes – if you had pants, there wasn’t a fly, they either zipped on side or back or just pulled on. Boys played sports, girls played hopscotch or four-square. And school dress codes were very specific and gender based.

I never felt in sync with what girls were supposed to do, like, be, or dress. I was fortunate in that the adults in my family pretty much let me pursue my interests even though they didn’t fit the cultural expectations of my gender. But, even then, they were not totally devoid of gender expectations of me.

There were toys I wanted and didn’t get because they were “for boys”, clothes I wanted to wear but couldn’t because of school dress code or they were considered too expensive for play clothes for a girl. I’d get toys I never played with (dolls – I always gave them to my younger sister) – clothes I’d only wear if I had too, for school or special occasions. I also can remember it was OK for boys to run around the house in their underwear, but not the girls.

Two big things stand out in my pre-teen life where gender “surprised” me and made me sad. First was I wanted to be a cowboy – I wanted to be just like the Lone Ranger or Roy Rogers. I wanted chaps and boots and cowboy hat and six shooters. The adults gave me cowgirl clothes – skirt and blouse and cowgirl hat and told me I couldn’t grow up to be a cowboy, I was a girl.

The other thing... from the time I started playing with other kids, I always played with the neighborhood boys. They did all the fun things I liked, climbing trees to get bird nests or wasp nest or make a tree house, collect bugs, play baseball in the intersection, ride bikes to the empty field and explore, play soldiers, or cowboys and Indians... you get the idea. I had a great time, they were my best friends. Then, one day – and it was like flipping a light switch – they no longer wanted to play with me, I was a girl. I was no different than the month before – but now my being a girl made a difference – and we were only 3rd graders.