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FINDING COMFORT AT LAST

I suppose my arches have held up all these years because high top shoes supported my feet at an early age. My mother insisted the laces should cross over and up to the top of the ankle. Sturdy feet assisted good posture and served well for a lifetime.

When I began school, my feet and my behavior were expected to follow a strict code. The appropriate shoes for a Catholic schoolgirl were blue-and-white saddle shoes. Conformity in dress promoted conformity to rules: No running allowed in the school building. Shine in your school shoes. Every September began with shopping for the required uniform.

But, ah, Keds, red, blue, or white. These thrust me into a new season and a whole new world. Keds meant running, not walking. Freedom. Summer surged through my feet. Skip. Jump. Explore. I kept my Keds until they wore out.

Junior high brought a new addition to my wardrobe, a pair of basic black, pointed-toed pumps. I felt as awkward in these shoes as I did dancing with boys who were two to four inches shorter than I. These shoes pinched my feet, and thinking about them reminds me of the discomfort I felt during this time in my life.

I had a brief flirtation and affair with white bucks, but it didn't last. The rough, suede-like Spaldings seduced me with their handsome exterior. I soon tired of the upkeep with the bunny bag that exuded a white powder to camouflage the spots. Good for a fling, but high maintenance.

At nineteen I graduated to Red Cross shoes, old-maidish, but durable with their rigid sole and heel. These sensible, plain black shoes elevated me a couple of inches and brought new responsibilities. A far cry from fashion, they complemented the rest of my outfit. I had entered the convent, acquiring a new habit and focusing on a career in teaching. These shoes served me well for a time.

After seven years, I traded in Red Cross lace-ups for a new life that included boots, strappy heels, and dancing shoes. Dating and working in the corporate world, I teetered on uncomfortable, ill-fitting, four-inch heels, because these were sexy, not sensible; playful, not serious. I followed the trends.

Marriage and children moved those heels into the back of the closet. Up front:: penny loafers, *Just Do It* Nikes, multi-colored flats and a pair of low-heeled, sling-back pumps. Shoes that could chase toddlers, go to swim meets, and attend mother-daughter teas kept me going for a number of years.

The Red Cross shoes and lusty four-inch heels were donated to Goodwill long ago. In the last few years I've found the contentment my feet have so long desired, though often I prefer to go barefoot. I'm comfortable in all my unfussy shoes these days. They correspond to my needs. Sandals accommodate my casual lifestyle. They fit the bill for almost every occasion. Add socks in winter. Walking requires tennis shoes. Well-worn, cozy slippers comfort me around the house. Black, velvety, fleece-lined Uggs allow ease of movement and soothe my soul.