



The Great Valentine's Day Lapazoo

by Saralee Perel



I was always Mom's valentine. And she was mine.

I'm hoping maybe others can experience the joy I did, with their mother, daughter or anyone at all.

Dad gave Mom roses. She loved that. Then one year he didn't and never did again. He was a despondent man. Their marriage was not a good one. Mom voiced her rage. Dad kept his in. But it had to manifest somehow. So he no longer did nice things for her and became very withdrawn.

I couldn't stand seeing my mother cry on Valentine's Day, so I made her my valentine. I gave her lace-trimmed cards and candy. These easy gestures meant the world to her, as they symbolized that I loved her. You can probably guess she needed that.

She'd get me Valentine's gifts. But the showstopper was when she put together a "come as a flapper" Valentine's Day party when I was a little girl.

Fifteen girlfriends came, all in hyper-maniac Roaring '20s flapper and gangster mode. Mom decorated our dining room with cardboard cherubs, feather boas and heart-covered place settings. I nicknamed our rooms according to the color of the walls. This one had panels of walnut.



We were Jewish so the food was kosher – but flapper style. Using red food coloring, Mom made thin bagels topped with candy sequins and served them as Yiddish garters.

Her mini-Reuben sandwiches were called Bugsy Siegel sandwiches. She approved only of Jewish gangster names. My brother said he was Al Capone. She said, "You're Meyer Lansky." The food was under a banner that read, "Shoot first. Ask questions later." Mom had a thing for gunmen. The party favors were chocolate cigars and, fitting with Mom's fetish, miniature toy Tommy guns.

We shimmied and we boogied all night long. Man, we must have danced until 9! I relived those moments-in-time recently as I sang the very same song that we could not stop dancing to, at full volume on the record player that wondrous night.

*Charleston! Charleston!
Made in Caro-lin-a,
Ev'ry step you do,
Leads to something new
Man, I'm telling you,
It's a lapazoo!*

Mom could surely kick up her heels when she was happy. Everyone loved my mother...except my dad. She didn't love him either. But I deeply loved them both. Ever the self-nominated family problem-solver, I left my party to find my father. As usual, he was alone in his den, smoking his pipe.

"Won't you come dance the Charleston with me?" I asked. Holding hands, we walked to the party room. Dad could be wonderfully goofy. He put a red feather boa around his neck and danced with me. He had one hand on his hip and the other pointing way up, making silly circles with his forefinger to the rhythm of the music.

All the girls were dancing, not missing a beat other than to pull up their mothers' black fishnet stockings that kept dropping to their ankles. Bangle bracelets clinked. Elbow-length gloves were tossed high in the air.

Neither of my parents noticed, as I slowly danced with Dad toward Mom. She was showing fancy Charleston moves that the girls were trying to imitate. She didn't see how close Dad and I were to her. If I wasn't in the picture, it would have appeared they were dancing together.

So I slowly backed away.

Then I stopped and stood motionless as I watched for as long as the song lasted, my parents dancing together for the first time in my life.

And that was the very best part of the great "come as a flapper" Valentine's Day party, held in 1960, in the Walnut Room, when I was only nine.

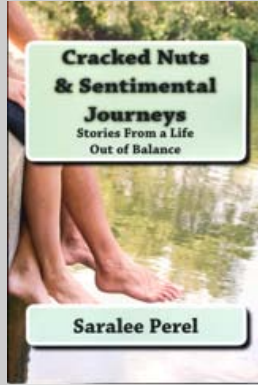
Photographs courtesy of Saralee Perel



Saralee Perel is an award-winning nationally syndicated columnist. Her new book, *Cracked Nuts & Sentimental Journeys: Stories From a Life Out of Balance*, is available in local bookstores.

It can also be ordered through Amazon, or directly from the publisher, as well as from Saralee for a personalized signed copy.

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Her novel, [Raw Nerves](#), is also available as a paperback and an e-book on Amazon.

