





# Family Secrets

by Daniel J. Siegel

Every family has them, those stories that only the select few know. It could be about an ostracized relative, or one who spent or is spending time behind bars, or something worse. On the other hand, we all probably have other secrets that aren't really secrets, they're more aptly described as untold stories we had hoped more people knew.

Certainly, my family is no exception.

My sister Marsha had one of those stories. She had a beautiful face that glowed, and an incredibly sweet personality that matched her smile. Everyone adored Marsha. And while she may not be well known, she is part of one of

the most famous pieces of advertising art – the Coppertone girl. You know the picture, the one that appears on every bottle of suntan lotion, with the adorable pigtailed girl whose bikini is being tugged away by a little dog.

Few people know the true story about that image. Here it is.

I was a little boy at the time, just a few years old. We lived in Mount Airy on Sharpnack Street, near St. Therese, the parochial elementary school at the end of our block. Among our neighbors were the Simpsons, a family who had become close family friends. The parents were Esther and Harvey, and they had two daughters, including one also named Marcia.

Harvey was a commercial artist, whose major client was Atlantic Richfield, the petroleum company that dominated the gasoline market in the area for many years. Harvey drew many of the signs and promotional displays that were used to sell gasoline, highlight promotions (such as when you received a free drinking glass with a fill-up), and inform customers about other services, like car repairs, that were available at what used to be called “service stations.”

Harvey also did freelance work. One of those jobs came in the early 1950s (before I was born) when he was hired to recreate a drawing for a suntan lotion called Coppertone. To complete the project, Harvey had an idea – and that's where my sister came into the picture.

So, Harvey asked his daughter Marcia and my sister Marsha to pose for the drawing, which would be a composite of them. But he also needed someone else. He wanted a little girl



with freckles to help complete the picture.

Harvey knew just what to do. He asked one of the little girls from the Catholic school if she would be interested in posing for him. (Imagine what would happen today if a man walked up to a little girl and asked her if she wanted to model for him. He'd be in jail in seconds.) The girl agreed (no one later would recall her name), and Harvey's idea was ready.

The three girls all posed in Harvey's home, and the result is the picture that has today become known merely as the "Coppertone girl." We used to joke that my sister Marsha would forever have the most famous tush in advertising history.

Of course, the picture has been used far more than one time, and has become the company's copyrighted trademark. I learned about the picture from Harvey (who regularly played bridge with my parents), from my parents and of course from Marsha, who always took offense when stories would surface and others would claim to be the model in the picture.

The Simpsons and my family remained close for many years, even moving within one block of each other in the suburbs. Harvey continued to create his commercial artwork, and also drew various covers for *Time* magazine. But his pride and joy was always the Coppertone girl.

Harvey died in 1973 of acute leukemia. I still remember Harvey and Esther playing cards one weekend, and my parents and I commenting that he didn't look good. A couple of days later, we learned his diagnosis, and a few days after that, Harvey was gone. Esther moved back to her native New York, and we never saw her again. But my parents saved the autographed magazines, one of Leonid Brezhnev and the other of investigative reporter Jack Anderson.

Marsha died in 2002 after a long battle with multiple sclerosis. When she passed, I began to search for some confirmation about the Coppertone girl's history. What I found instead was controversy. Others have also claimed to

be the artist, and the company will not confirm who the artist was. Instead, when I went to the company website, there was a page about the drawing that simply said that the name of the artist was unknown, although the model was believed to be the artist's daughter.

More recently, stories have surfaced on the Internet and elsewhere in which other artists have claimed to have drawn the picture. According to Wikipedia, "In 1953 Tally Embry Advertising in Florida was hired, and their ad men created the concept of the little girl and the pup. An artist named Joyce Ballantyne Brand re-drew the little girl in 1959 when the original artwork was destroyed in a fire."

Thus, I have a couple of theories. First, my sister was born in 1950, which is consistent with the fact that many sources report that the original drawing was lost in a fire and had to be re-drawn. It is also possible that multiple artists were hired (unbeknownst to the others), and that a composite of their work was the genesis for the drawing that ultimately became the company's trademark. Finally, the fact that an artist claimed to have "redrawn" the picture in 1959 would also make sense, because by then my sister would have been almost nine years old, and the girl in the drawing is much younger.

It is also possible that there were multiple revisions over time, and that various artists drew them. After all, the design itself has changed over time. Recently, the drawing

was modified to cover more of the girl's bottom to make the photo "less revealing."

But the Siegels, the Simpsons, and the family of the unknown freckle-faced girl will always know the truth. We also know that Harvey was only paid a one-time fee of \$500 for his drawing.

The Coppertone girl remains very special to me. Every time I go to the beach and apply some suntan lotion, I do so with the comfort of knowing that, regardless whether anyone else knows our family secret, I know that my sister is always there to protect her little brother. ■

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# Young Lawyers Division

## 2011 Law Week Poster Contest



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Gabriella Smith, a sixth-grade student at St. Nicholas of Tolentine School, won first place for her “Freedom of Expression” poster in the Young Lawyers Division’s annual Poster Contest in celebration of Law Week, May 2-6, 2011. She received a \$300 savings bond courtesy of the YLD.

Second-place was awarded to De’Aja Gordon, a sixth-grade student at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament School, for her “Freedom” poster. She received a \$200 savings bond.

Third-place was awarded to Grace Gervino, a sixth-grade student from St. Christopher Elementary School, for her poster depicting a bird released from its cage. She received a \$100 savings bond.

The Law Week Poster Contest was open to 5th, 6th and 7th grade students from Philadelphia public, private, charter and parochial schools. Students were asked to draw a picture showing what freedom meant to them. More than 130 posters were submitted.



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