

What Goes in Early Goes in Deep

In "What Goes in Early Goes in Deep," the author, at thirty years old, makes an impulsive decision to leave a stable job in Washington to buy a food store, sparking a mix of excitement and anxiety. Her parents are horrified and perceive her shift from a promising government career to that of a shopkeeper as a downgrade, reflecting a long-standing disconnect between her aspirations and their expectations. Growing up, she felt alienated from their ideals, which revolved around social appearances and conformity.

Her childhood memories are colored by a contrast between her maternal grandparents, Morris and Bessie Rosenberg, and her paternal grandparents, whom she describes with less affection. The Rosenbergs, immigrants who built a life through hard work, created a welcoming environment filled with love and traditional foods. Conversely, her mother's side of the family, particularly her grandmother Annette, was colder and more critical, fostering an atmosphere devoid of warmth.

The narrative details her upbringing in Stamford, Connecticut, marked by a seemingly ideal suburban facade that hid the emotional distance in her family. Her father, a charismatic surgeon, commanded attention with his humor and style, yet his emotional volatility created a tense household. Her mother, though elegant, struggled to connect with her children, focusing on control and appearance over nurturing.

Despite achieving academically, the author recalls feelings of inadequacy fostered by her father's unyielding expectations and his explosive anger. Their parenting style prioritized achievement over emotional support, leading to a volatile atmosphere where nothing felt satisfactory. She and her brother became adept at hiding their struggles, feeling like children without a roadmap to navigate approval.

School provided an escape for the author, where friendships flourished, and she found enjoyment in pursuits like science. Her investigative nature came to life in projects that earned her accolades, yet she remained starved for parental approval, which was often absent.

Amid societal pressures, the author grappled with the expectations of womanhood in the 1960s, feeling her choices stifled by her mother's controlling nature. The chapter concludes with a poignant reflection on the long-lasting impact of her upbringing, focusing on the internal dialogue of self-doubt and the desire for independence, as she navigated her adolescent years under the shadow of her parents' rigid worldview.