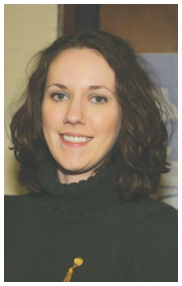

I was in line at the grocery store last week when I saw an all too familiar site ahead of me. There was an older lady, dressed in her Sunday best, with a few items in her basket. A small boy, who I assume was her grandchild, was seated in the basket among a bag of oranges, hot dogs and a few bags of flour.

And there near her purse in the very front of the buggy, I saw it. To the naked eye, it would be hard to spot. But I knew all about it.

Tucked beside her purse, I could see the end of what appeared to be a switch. Upon closer inspection, I discovered that it was in fact a switch.

I couldn't help but start grinning because the little boy in the basket kept glancing up at the switch. He may not have even realized he was doing it, but every few seconds his eyes would cut over to the skinny branch.

I kind of felt sorry for the little boy because I was in his shoes over 20 years ago. I knew the emotions running through his small body. You are excited to be in town, hoping for that candy bar you were promised if you were good. But then there was that small level of fear, as the switch seemed to dance in front of you.

When I was a little girl, a switch was my constant companion. If one wasn't nearby, I almost felt like I was missing something.

I wasn't a bad child who required constant discipline, but I was your normal mischievous kid who needed a little "guidance" from time to time.

When Maw Maw found a good a switch, it was hard to get rid of it. There was one switch I honestly believe she held onto for three years in a row.

I had to go out in the yard and pick it myself, of course. And with tears rolling down my face because I knew what was coming, I handed the branch over to Maw Maw. Like a knight in an English court, she accepted her sword, almost with pleasure.

I think that is the worst punishment ever. To send a child to pick their own switch is like asking them to stick their hands in a bucket with a snake in it. You are almost scared to even touch it. I would start crying before I even made it to a bush to make my selection.

Looking back, I think it was all part of the act to straighten me out.

Maw Maw would carry a good switch anywhere. On trips, it sat on the dashboard for the entire ride. During church, it was placed between the Bible and a bag of peppermint. In the grocery store, it was situated between her purse and the buggy bar. And at home, it just sat on the countertop for easy access.

Even at school, there was the dreaded paddle in case you got out of control. But, to me, a paddle was nothing. A good switch sent fear down my spine.

And the fear didn't end at grandma's house. Momma had one too that she would carry with her from time to time. The only difference is Momma was a little more secretive about the thing. Maw Maw would whip hers out in the middle of a grocery aisle in front of the preacher if she had

to.
I managed to survive all my encounters with the switch during my youth. I am sure the young boy I saw that day in the grocery store will survive as well. He might even grin about it later in life, as I was that very day.
I couldn't help but wipe the grin off my face that day when the older lady turned around and looked at me. Even at 29 years old, I take a lady with a switch seriously.
But I can't help but wonder if I saw a smile appear on her face. She knew she was in control. And because of my upbringing, I knew she was too.