St. Patty's Day With Emmy

Emmy was smart, but Grandma was smarter.

By Audrey Corn

If I close my eyes and listen hard, I can still hear the dinner conversation at Grandma's house on St. Patrick's Day.

"Everybody's Irish today!" Grandma used to say, and from Grandpa on down to my littlest cousin, we all agreed.

I grew up in Brooklyn, N.Y., in the 1940s. Most of my relatives lived nearby, and on St. Paddy's Day, we always gathered at Grandma's house to eat corned beef and boiled cabbage. But our mothers had a rule: If we didn't eat our vegetables, we didn't get our dessert!

I was a good girl, of course, and always ate my cabbage. Cousin Emmy cheated and never ate hers. But Emmy always got her dessert, same as me.

Emmy knew a million tricks to escape eating cabbage. One year, she helped clear the dirty dishes from the table *without being asked*. The first plate Emmy grabbed was her own. She scraped her entire helping of boiled cabbage into Grandma's garbage. The grownups didn't see, and we kids didn't tell. Emmy got her dessert.

The following St. Paddy's Day, Emmy sat down next to *me* at the table. When Grandma served us cabbage, I asked for a very small helping. Emmy did likewise.

Grandma's idea of small was still too big for me. Emmy pushed her cabbage to one side of her plate. Then she ate her corned beef. Emmy liked corned beef. So did I.

But there are two kinds of people in this world. There are the people like Emmy, who start with the good stuff, and there are people like me, who get the bad stuff out of the way first. Four horrible mouthfuls later, my cabbage was gone.

"I guess you really like cabbage!" Emmy teased.

"Shut up!" I hissed. "Remember, you won't get dessert until you finish your cabbage."

"We'll see about that!" Emmy stuck her tongue out at me. I stuck my tongue back out at Emmy. Then I ate my corned beef. When I finished, Emmy's cabbage was still untouched.

Emmy slid her chair closer to mine. I knew she was up to no good, but I wasn't prepared for what happened next.

Plop! Emmy's cabbage landed on *my* plate.

"I'm ready for dessert," Emmy announced shamelessly.

Grandma gave Emmy a big slice of chocolate cake with green frosting. Then Grandma said to me, "Finish your cabbage, dear. I'll save your dessert."

I looked at Emmy's cabbage. The sight of it made me sick.

"I don't want dessert. Please, may I be excused from the table, Grandma?" Grandma nodded and whisked away my plate before Mama could see the cabbage. *Grandma knew*.

Easter was the next holiday dinner at Grandma's house. I hoped that Emmy wouldn't sit next to me at the Children's Table. Grandpa always served creamed spinach with the Easter ham. Emmy and I hated creamed spinach.

I ate my creamed spinach first, to get rid of it. I don't know what Emmy did with *her* creamed spinach. Just before we sat down to dinner, Grandma said spring was the time for new beginnings. Then she "graduated" Emmy from the Children's Table to the Big People's Table.

Grandma was one smart lady back in the Good Old Days. ❖

From Good Old Days Magazine, March 2008, Vol. 45, No. 3, Copyright © 2008 Good Old Days Magazine