

Every Dirty Dish is a Blessing

A grandmother's timeless wisdom brings comfort in today's tough financial times.

by Virginia Foley

My grandmother lived through two World Wars and the Great Depression. As a young bride she watched her husband go off to fight. And when war came around for a second time, two of her six sons followed suit. Grandma suffered her share of heartache during the ninety-one years she lived yet she possessed a *joie de vivre* which was contagious to those around her.

When I was a child, I'd stay many weekends at her house listening rapturously to her stories, and she had many of them. A real gadabout, Grandma would take me with her to visit her 'old' friends, those sick in the hospital or lying in funeral homes. A shy child, I was fascinated by her gregariousness and how Grandma turned every outing into a social event.

She lived in a big old house and her kitchen was a hive of activity. I distinctly recall the strong smells of cabbage and cauliflower cooking, the sight of cats and kittens curled up in blanket-padded cardboard boxes in one corner, an ironing board set up in another, a pantry filled with store-bought cookies and every flavor of jello, and an uncle or cousin or one of Grandma's boarders sitting at the kitchen table.

She never considered herself a cook but she did keep us well-fed. On Saturday mornings she and I would walk to the local grocery store, stopping to chat with people we'd meet, before purchasing a few wieners from behind the glass display case. The butcher would wrap the hotdogs up in brown paper and on returning home Grandma would plop them into a pot of water on the stove. Often she'd be talking so much that she'd lose track of time. The

boiling water would spit and the wieners would split until they almost exploded, but the mustard and ketchup filled their crevices just perfectly. A hotdog has never tasted as good!

There was a deep porcelain sink in her kitchen and when Grandma washed the dishes she'd haphazardly pile them up on the draining board to dry. I'd keep an eye on them, watching them teeter, bracing myself for their crash landing, yet somehow they stayed put. My own mother, her only daughter, always dried her dishes and placed them neatly back into the cupboard. Grandma's precarious stack was much more interesting.

While she washed the dishes, Grandma would lyrically repeat, "Every dirty dish is a blessing." She told me I should always remember this. As a child, I didn't realize the depth of meaning that came with those few words and actually thought it silly to think something covered in the remnants of caked-on food could be a blessing. But Grandma's adage has always remained with me.

In today's precarious economic climate, with uncertainty about continuous income, medical benefits or a roof over our heads, Grandma's words are truer than they've ever been.

Many years have passed since those languid days spent with Grandma, but so many times as I take my dishes to the sink after a meal, I remind myself:

"Every dirty dish is a blessing."

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