

Grandma's Table

From "The Amazing Adventures of a Midwestern Girl"

By Barbara J Barton

One of the most treasured members of my family was Grandma's dining room Table. Its top was a dark wood laminate and it was surrounded by wooden chairs with soft cloth cushions. Grandma took great care of that Table, polishing it every week when she dusted the rest of the furniture in her home on the hill.

After Grandpa passed away, I took over the duties of Table maintenance. Screwdriver in hand, I would get on my knees and make my way around the Table, tightening screws and making sure Grandma's Table was secure because a secure Table makes a secure family.

We never used plain table service on Grandma's dining room Table. It was a place to honor family. Grandma honored her family with china and silver. I remember gently taking the dinner plates out of the cabinet, their yellow forsythia flowers and gold rims greeting me every holiday season. We would set the Table, making sure every flower pattern was just so, the salad plates in their proper position. The silver would be polished up and placed around the beautiful china, with the forks elegantly resting on paper napkins folded into triangles. The china coffee cups and dessert plates were stacked on the counter that once held a big aquarium full of black guppies. Candles were lit and the Table was ready to receive Grandma's honored guests.

We were sitting around that Table when news came one snowy Christmas night that one of my grandparents' friends, a truck driver, missed a curve over by the motel and crashed. He didn't make it, someone said. People gripped the Table for support. Some leaned on it. The adults sat around the

Table for a long time that night, seeking comfort from the Table and each other.

The Table witnessed many things in our family, including the rituals people do as they get older. As Grandma entered her eighties she began to sort. She sat at the Table, going through her old black book and pulling out all the recipes she had collected over the years, re-gluing and re-organizing them by section. Grandma took great care to be sure that the surface of her Table did not get scratched while working on her recipe book by putting a nice white linen tablecloth down to keep it safe.

Once the recipe book project was done, it was time to sort out family photos. Grandma brought out several stacks of photo albums and set them on the Table. You could almost see the Table smile, glad to see the familiar faces Great Grandpa Zimmerman and Uncle Cully and Aunt Dorothy once again. A great sadness was beginning to settle into the Table's heart, as every year the family dinners grew smaller and smaller.

It was at this Table that my Grandmother sat weeping in my arms, somehow realizing yet not quite believing her life was coming to an end. After I put her to bed, I lay my head down on that Table and cried. In the little pool of tears I saw a reflection, first of me, then of my Grandma.

When Grandma left us, we stacked boxes on the Table and sorted for weeks. I took home everything I could fit in my house so I could have Grandma with me every day. Her rolling pin, cast iron frying pan, the player piano, her cookie cutters. But I couldn't take the Table, I had no room. The Table along with the rest of Grandma's life things was soon gone, sent off to be sold at a tag sale.

Around that Table had sat my Grandpa and Great

Grandparents, Great Aunts and Uncles, old family friends, all now gone. And when Grandma and her Table left us, our family gathered no more.

A couple years later, I wandered into an antique store in the town my Grandma had lived most of her life, the town in which I was born. As I made my way around the basement I came to a door that opened into a small, dusty, unlit room. And there, with its chairs stacked neatly beside it, was my Grandma's Table.

I took out my bandana and slowly wiped away the dust, shining it up the way Grandma would have done. And I very carefully checked every screw.