

Grandmother's Sabbath Candlesticks

Grandmother's Sabbath candlesticks are tall, about ten inches high, well worn with much of the fancy engraving wiped out by her weekly polishing and use. I wish they were mine.

She must have made them shine lovingly as her offering to God week after week, and placed them carefully in front of her place at the immaculately set dinner table for the start of the Sabbath on Friday evenings. I never saw them even slightly tarnished, until long after she was gone.

The pristine cloth was lovingly embroidered, with carefully cut-out sections weaving in and out. I could just imagine her sitting patiently with her needle flying, knowing that this work would be one of the central pieces of her weekly life with the man she loved and was about to marry. I used to run my hands over it often, feel the even stitches around the cut-outs, the patterns of flowers and stems all in pure white, ready for the Sabbath bride. She must have made it for her trousseau. The candlesticks would also have been in her special pre-nuptial trunk. Where is that lovely cloth now?

Gleaming silver cutlery and white dishes with very fine gold borders and crystal glasses were set at each place on the snowy cloth. In front of Grandmother's place, at one end of the table, white candles waited in the candlesticks. At the other end, in front of Grandfather's seat, was a plate covered with a smaller, similarly embroidered cloth. Under this lay two "barches", or Sabbath loaves.¹ Grandmother always baked these egg breads herself and braided at least five or six long strands of dough into a loaf that rose in the middle, and was baked to a shiny, rich, crusty perfection. At the end of the baking, she checked for a hollow sound when she knocked on the

¹ In Canada it is called "challah". Two loaves were always baked in order to save one for Saturday, when work is forbidden. This bread symbolizes mana at the time of exodus.

bottoms, at which time she declared them done and removed them from the oven.

When the cloth was lifted, the aroma of fresh-baked bread drifted around the table, to the satisfied "Ah's" of all present. Grandfather also had the Kiddush cup filled with red wine at his place. Kiddush means blessing in Hebrew.

The family was seated around the sides of the table. When we were all together, there were nine of us. I was the only grandchild. I always sat next to Grandmother. (Now when my family gathers at table, at least one, sometimes two grandchildren, sit at my side).

The smells coming from the kitchen were tantalizing, promising great pleasures for all the senses. The soup tureen was brought in, so that the meal could begin right after the ritual blessings were finished.

But, first things had to be done in their proper order. Grandmother placed a light, ecru, lace shawl over her head, as custom required, looked around the table at her brood for silence and attention. Then she lit the candles, drew the light toward herself two or three times with her hands, covered her eyes and recited the Kiddush. "*Baruh ato adonoi... vetsivanu l'hadlich ner shel Shabbat*" bless the Sabbath lights.

Only after she, the woman of the house, had performed this ritual, was my Grandfather given his turn to bless the bread, break pieces off and pass one to each person around the table. Then he blessed the wine, raised and drank from his special Kidush cup. (The cup now belongs to my daughter, Sonia). After all the amens were said, talk and eating began in earnest.

We always started with golden chicken soup ladled into wide, old-fashioned bowls. In the soup either noodles, rice or matzo-balls floated. I hated these little dumplings (and all dumplings), and still pass them up now.

The conversation around the table was always loud and boisterous as the three siblings, my mother, Aunt Herta and Uncle Konrad, and often, their mother tried to out-shout and interrupt each other, to tell their tales their own way. "*Die Angheiratetn*" (those married in), my father, Uncle Ernst, and Aunt

Hanna joined in sometimes, usually as back-ups for their spouses. My role was somewhat ambiguous, though I was often the centre of attention and conversation. I enjoyed it all thoroughly, giggled and postured or did whatever the moment seemed to require.

The meal continued with the inevitable roast poultry, chicken, duck or goose, which my Grandfather raised and slaughtered in the back yard. It was served steaming and crisply brown, with smooth white mashed potatoes and green and orange vegetables. My favourite pieces, the wings were always saved and served to me first.

"Don't eat with your fingers", my mother would admonish, and

"Oh, leave the child alone, she's fine" my grandmother would retort. She allowed me everything.

I forgot to mention the pickles. Home made by grandmother in large wooden barrels, they were irresistible mouth-watering and juicy, and had to be eaten with the fingers, or they lost their personality, even for my mother.

Meantime the noise never diminished. Laughter was constant, interspersed with loud voices disputing, agreeing, talking continuously. The grandparents beamed from each end of the table, and occasionally winked at each other or at me. They loved it all. Noise, which would have sounded disharmonious to a stranger, was, in reality, a carefully orchestrated piece of music. It was friendly banter among friendly and loving faces. Faces that were highly expressive and elastic, and gestures that told more of their stories than any words ever could.

Throughout the meal the candles burned brightly in front of my grandmother. They lit up her face and shiny white hair, and especially her sparkling blue eyes, which expressed so much love for all of us. It was forbidden to blow out the candles. Often they didn't flutter and sputter out till after the family had left the table. I loved to watch their final moments as the flames came closer and closer to the Shabbat candle sticks and were reflected in the glittering silver. The memory of those lights rekindles the laughter and warmth that was soon to be extinguished for ever. The memory lives on in me.

Of the people mentioned in this story, the following died during the holocaust:

my grandparents:

Josef Nürnberger, Cantor in the synagogue of Zatec (or Saaz in German)

Berta Rosenzweig Nürnberger

my aunt: Hanna Schwartz Nürnberger

many other members of my mother's side of the family were also lost, but I did not know them, and am unable to trace them now.



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