

Waiting by the Oven Door – Marylin Nease – Texas

Hey, Mom,

Been thinking about you. Missed you at Thanksgiving—we all missed you.

We met at your place for dinner. You should've seen us getting everything ready. We were all in the kitchen fighting over...uh, taking turns using the oven and stovetop. Mahlon brought turkey; David, ham. Frances cooked a sweet potato casserole; Lisa, a green bean one; and Shawna/Brandon, a corn one. Aunt Frances and I made your rolls. Desserts? Aunt Frances made pecan pies; Luna, pumpkin; Rex, blueberry-banana cream. Mahlon had organized ahead of time who brought what.

Now back to you and why you've been on my mind more than usual. It's about your rolls, Mom. You set the bar high for anyone following you as maker of the rolls.

Somehow, that assignment has been mine since you died.

Remember last Christmas when you made our last batch of authentic “Mother’s rolls”?

I remember.

You made them, and I was your assistant.

You died two weeks later, so that final roll-making we did together is a powerful memory. You stood at your kitchen sink with the bread bowl in the sink, and I brought you ingredients as you asked: hot water, yeast, sugar, salt, oil, eggs, flour. You mixed; I watched. When you told me the dough was ready, I covered the bowl and placed the dough in the refrigerator to rise. The next morning, at your direction, I removed the bowl from the refrigerator.

I'm not sure what happened next. Did you put the dough into muffin pans? Did we do that together? I don't recall the rising, baking, and serving of the rolls—just the making of the dough, when only you and I were involved, before the rest of the family arrived.

Mom, you should have seen the crowd gathered in front of your oven last Thursday after I suggested it might be time to check the rolls! Frances opened the oven door, and Luna proclaimed, “Those aren't Memaw's rolls!” Someone else in the crowd agreed, “No, they're not.”

Well, Mom, at that point I understood the pressure of living up to expectations. I had failed. My rolls didn't measure up to yours.

I'll admit, Mom, I used white whole-wheat flour instead of the flour you used. Still, I'm guessing if you'd been present, you'd have laughed and said, “They look fine. They'll taste fine. Let's put them on the table and sit down to eat.”

So, what to do? Say “I pass” on making rolls from now on? Let someone else have that assignment? Or, develop a tougher skin, armor-thick and Crisco-slick, to let the bread critics' remarks slide off my wounded psyche's back?

No, Mom, the spokespersons were right: those weren't your rolls—and never will be again. That's why we stand before your oven door each year on Thanksgiving, hoping one more time to see “Mother's rolls” emerge. What we really want isn't bread; it's you.

We missed you again this year.

Love you,
Marylin