

## Do You Like Coconut?

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I don't like coconut! There's something about the texture that makes it hard to chew and swallow. Don't get me wrong: I love the smell of coconut. I just don't like to eat it, in or on anything.

Still, coconut reminds me of one of the many fun events that took place in my grade school—the celebration of students' birthdays. A parent, grandparent, or sibling would provide treats, sweet and tasty, along with cartons of white milk or chocolate milk. The class always looked forward to these special occasions.

It's Friday, February 17, 1961, and there are twenty-eight third graders sitting in Mrs. Hiatt's classroom. Even though my best friend's birthday would be on Monday, her mother was bringing treats for our class at the end of our afternoon classes. 3:30 p.m. couldn't get here fast enough.

At 3:30 there was a knock on the classroom door. When the door was opened, Mrs. Slater stood there with a pan of something delicious in her hands. Behind her was a high school student carrying a crate of milk cartons. My classmates and I were so excited we could hardly sit still.

Quickly, all of us cleared our desks of books and papers. Mrs. Hiatt passed out damp paper towels so we could wipe off our desks. We were instructed to keep the paper towel so that when we were finished with our treat, we could wipe our desks clean again.

Jane introduced her mother to the class. We all said, "Hi!" At the back of the room, Jane's mom proceeded to cut the treats into squares. She put each square on a napkin. Then Jane passed out the birthday goodie, while Mrs. Hiatt passed out the milk cartons. Once we sang "Happy Birthday" to Jane, we could eat.

Sitting on my napkin was a beautiful brownie square with chocolate frosting and (wait for it) coconut sprinkled on top. My heart sank. I looked around the room as everyone was eating this birthday treat. Sitting at my desk, I figured I had two options: not to eat the brownie and hurt my friend's feelings or pick off every single piece of coconut. I thought for a moment before I started picking off the coconut.

Jane looked over at me as I quietly picked off the coconut and tried hiding it in my napkin. Eventually, I was able to enjoy the delicious chocolate brownie, minus the coconut. I also enjoyed drinking my chocolate milk.

It was close to the end of the school day. We thanked Mrs. Slater and cleaned our desks.

*Fast forward one year.* It is February 20, 1962, and this year we are sitting in Mrs. Baxter's fourth grade room. Again, there is a knock on the door. Mrs. Slater is standing in the doorway with a pan of goodies so the class could celebrate Jane's birthday. Again, behind her stood a high

school student with a crate of white milk and chocolate milk cartons. We cleaned our desks and prepared for the birthday party. Jane had told us that her mother was bringing chocolate brownies just like last year. I tried to hide my frown.

As Jane delivered the brownies, I saw the white coconut on top of each brownie square. I was the last student to get a brownie. When Jane placed the napkin on my desk, I saw the most delicious chocolate brownie with chocolate frosting and (wait for it) no coconut. I smiled from ear to ear and gave my friend a hug. I also gave her mom a hug. Jane's mom remembered I didn't like coconut and had left a corner of the brownie pan free of coconut.

Celebrating birthdays at school was always fun, but what if a student's birthday fell during June, July, or August? June and July birthdays were celebrated in May, and August birthdays were celebrated in September. My birthday is in June. On a designated day in May, my mom brought in delicious cupcakes frosted with yummy icing decorated with (wait for it) colored sprinkles. No coconut for this kid!