

A Lobster Tale *by Dave Wilenta*

As I approached the back entrance of 756 Minnie Place, I felt an uncanny urge to turn back and head in the opposite direction. Perhaps, if I had obeyed my instinctive urge over 30 years ago, my eating habits would be dramatically different today. As I made my way up the stairs a pungent smell made its way through my nostrils. I couldn't quite pinpoint the scent but soon realized it was not in the least bit pleasant. As I walked in and tracked my nine year old feet over the heavily worn floral pattern linoleum floor, my Grandfather barked "You hungry kiddo." "Ah, no Pop-Pop I just ate, just came by to see how you're doing", I muttered. The big, burly man sporting his usual white V-neck T-shirt and dark slacks motioned for me to have a seat. "What did you eat", he said. I knew there was no right answer, so I simply told him the truth. "I had two hot dogs at the ball-field". "Acchhh, sit down and have some real food, learn to eat like a man", he snarled! I knew there was no way to refuse his command. Whenever Pop-Pop had something cooking, anyone and everyone was obligated to stay for some.

So, I sat down like a good little boy, and waited anxiously to see what it was that smelled so terribly bad. The smell reminded me of my uncle's modest fishing boat for some reason. Could it be seafood???? Oh, no!!! The only sort of seafood I had ever tried was tuna fish with loads of mayo, trapped between two slices of thick bread. As my mind wandered, Buster had made his way up from the basement, and came charging at me, ears pointed, tail wagging. My grandpa's dog was happy to see me, and I was delighted to see him. As he lay at my feet, while I calmly stroked his ears and neck, I felt a reassurance with Buster at my side. At the time I didn't know what made me feel that way, but would soon figure it out. I keenly watched my grandpa reach into his old, faded brown stove to check on his preparation and asked "What are we eating?" He replied, "Don't worry kiddo, you'll love it."

As I nervously waited for my food, I glanced around the kitchen. The dark, dreary wood paneling seemed outdated, even from a nine year olds perspective. The lighting in the kitchen was quite scarce. Either the forty-watt light bulbs were on their way out, fading slowly away, or the massive floral-patterned discolored sconce that was shielding them was doing its job all too well. The dark paneling, scant lighting, worn floor, and the somewhat familiar stench of my uncles fishing boat made me very uneasy. As I leaned back in the old wooden chair, it creaked

and along with its creak came my meal. “Lobster tails son, I already took them out for you, here is some butter if you want to dip them”, Pop-Pop grunted. “Eat, go ahead try it”, he said.

I knew I was not going to enjoy my meal. As my grandfather peered curiously out of the corner of his eye, I gradually raised a piece of lobster to my mouth, plopped it in and began chewing. “Oh Lord Jesus”, I thought and almost blurted it out audibly. It was worse than I could ever have imagined! It was if I had taken a dive to the bottom of the sea and chomped on an immense mouthful of the ocean bottom. That’s exactly how lobster tasted to me. I didn’t bother chewing much of it. I pretty much swallowed it whole, figuring it would be easier that way. As I looked up with a poker face, I noticed Pop-Pop coyly grinning at me. “Good, ha Davey,” he chirped. I replied with a disingenuous nod of approval. He said “Try it with some butter”. As ordered, I dipped another piece of ocean bottom into the butter and quickly shoveled it into my mouth. This time it was different. It now tasted like a greasy, rubbery, slithery piece of the ocean bottom. I absolutely couldn’t stand it! Lobster was dreadful!!!

As I forced back the lobster that was trying to come out the way it had gone in, I knew I would have to finish my plate, or else I was at risk of offending my grandfather. No one offended Pop-Pop and lived to tell about it as far as I could remember! I was out of options. I had nowhere to turn, nowhere to hide, my time was up.... As I desperately gazed around the kitchen, while a bead of sweat formed on my brow, my eyes caught sight of the familiar old, tattered dark wood crucifix hanging above the stove. I remember thinking, if anyone can get me out of this jam, it’s Jesus! I was hesitant to ask him for help because I hadn’t been praying all that much recently, or ever for that matter. I knew I had nothing to lose and everything to gain, so I gave it a shot! “Oh Jesus, please....if there is a way to get me outta this, please show me. I’m sorry to say, but I think lobster is the most awful tasting thing you’ve ever created and I can’t possibly eat another bite....I promise to go to church next Sunday, if you help me out”!

As the last of my prayer was silently uttered, I noticed Buster had made his way to the outskirts of the kitchen, on the edge of the imitation oriental floor rug in the living room. And then it dawned on me! An answered prayer! Wow that was quick...Thank you Jesus! If I could somehow get the rest of my lobster across the kitchen to Buster, I would be saved. Dogs eat anything, don’t they?... I reflected. The timing had to be precise, so I eagerly waited for Pop-Pop to turn his back. Finally the moment had come as he went to check on his Kielbasa, which had been boiling for quite some time. As he shifted his broad shoulders toward the stove and

away from me, I picked up the remaining pieces of sea bottom in my right hand and hurled them towards Buster, my furry angel sent from above. I strategically coughed in order to muffle the sound of the food splattering on the floor. Buster gulped it up in no time and my grandfather didn't hear a thing. My plan...I mean God's plan had worked! I remained seated and a few minutes later after he was satisfied with his polish sausage, he turned towards me. "Now that's good food, eh kid?!" "Want some more, I have plenty?" "Ah no thanks Pop-Pop", I replied. "I'm pretty stuffed and wanna watch some T.V." "OK, maybe later you can have some Kielbasa" he mumbled. "Gee, anything but lobster" I thought to myself. As I stepped over Buster to make my way into the living room, I turned back, leaned down, and gave Buster a loving embrace. "A boy's best friend" I thought, as I continued to affectionately cuddle my new favorite furry angel.