

American Birthdays

by Elizabeth Kate Switaj

Cherry was America's least favorite pie. Her mother made it every year for her father's birthday because "daddy doesn't like cake." America had to wash the bowls, the wooden spoon, the plates and finally the Pyrex dish. Her brother got to "contribute" by climbing the tree in the yard and picking the cherries.

One year, America complained that it wasn't fair. Her mother said, "Just be grateful we have a sink you can reach from your chair."

Another year, America asked for apple pie for her own birthday. Her mother said, "Just be grateful you have friends here" and served chocolate cake with buttercream roses.

Yet another year, America asked why her family had moved to a country that made war on theirs. Her mother said, "Just be grateful you were born here."

The year before she left for college, America asked if it could have been American weapons that made her be born without legs. Her mother said, "Just be grateful. If we got the visas three months later, you might not have had arms. Six months later, you might not have been born."

For her first birthday away from home, America tried to make an apple pie, but it burned. She bought red velvet cake instead and told herself she was lucky that she didn't miss the last accessible bus back from the store.

