

# Hot Dish

by Jack Swenson

My wife talked to the church ladies. Sandwiches would be fine, they said, but a hot dish was expected, especially at that time of year.

After the funeral, we all trooped down to the church basement. I table hopped and talked to old family friends and relatives I hadn't seen in years. I thanked them all for coming. Really, they were brave to get on the roads. Lordy, it was cold! I confessed that I had grown soft from all those years of living in California. They laughed and said they didn't like snow and ice either.

My cousin from Fargo was there. She had gotten fat. I don't think I had met her husband before. He looked like he would have been more comfortable in bib overalls.

I said hello to Gladys, Walter's widow. Walter was my dad's best friend. They grew up together. My dad had died of a sudden heart attack some years before. Walter had recently died of a stroke.

My mother had died of a stroke, too, only she had lived for three years after the catastrophe took away her ability to walk, talk, and feed herself.

Her death was a blessing, I was told.

After lunch, as the ladies were cleaning up, I sat and talked with a relative that I had heard about but never met. He was a lively fellow. My wife and I sat talking to Bobby and his dour wife for some time. Millie was a good woman, Bobby said. A good Christian woman. Well, I said, you can't hold that against her. Bobby's wife looked like she had swallowed kerosene.

Afterwards, my wife scolded me for being rude. I said I didn't think I had anything to apologize for.

Before we left, I sat down and wrote out a check in my mother's name for a thousand dollars each to the nursing home and the church. I knew the home would appreciate it, and the church folks would think it should be more. I was right, too. I got a nice letter from the manager of the nursing home. I didn't hear from the church.

