

The Green Glazed Elephant

by Sheila Luecht

When I was a very little girl, about four I think, I used to see my grandmother once in a while. I lived in Indiana at the time and so did she. She was a matriarch in the conventional sense of the word, an imposing and powerful woman in our family. Her name was Rose. She was Hungarian.

My visits to my grandmother were not frequent. We often went to her home on Plummer Street for a family dinner, over which she presided. Her cooking was outstanding and her nut rolls and poppy seed rolls to die for.

She had two other sons, younger than my father. Her life was raising and caring for her sons. Her husband, my grandfather, was an alcoholic and she had divorced him at one point. He still lived there at times and was included as possible.

I remember her taking me to the deli at Goldblatt's department store, in the basement, and being impressed with all the cold cuts and lunch meat types that we did not eat that at our home. She would stock up and feed my father lunch as he worked nearby for many years after he was married. I ate my first sandwich at her home and preferred bread with mustard on it and pickles and she warned my father I might get sick from it. Which he in turn laughed at and I never did.

Once I stayed at her home and I asked her to fix my hair, she told me she was having fun because she had no little girls. She said she didn't know much about it but would try. I did feel pretty special.

I still remember her bedroom, how it looked and smelled, her picture on the dresser, the cozy feeling in the room. I also remember climbing in and out of the claw foot tub in the old bathroom.

I also remember the back bedroom where my grandfather would sleep at times. Once I had come with my father to visit and his father lay on the bed seeing things. He had the DT's and my grandmother did not want me to see him flaying about and screaming about the spiders, but my father said, no, she should see what alcohol does. I realized it was serious business and after a moment or two my grandmother took me from the room. I remember feeling compassion not fear because my grandfather was suffering.

My father was the eldest. The most responsible and the one who my grandmother did rely on for many years. She did not like my mother. It was only in later years that they seemed to understand each other and got along. She also was very kind to my mother when my father died. She took money my father had given her for her old age and gave it to my mother. It was an enormous gesture of reconciliation that was not lost on any of us.

I remember once I was at my grandmother's house and there was a rather large sized green glazed elephant sitting amongst her knick knacks. I could hold it in my hands but it was big, of course I was small. I loved it, and I had a fondness for green, which remains with me today.

The elephant was breakable and I know that my grandmother held her breath every time I went near it, and I was repeatedly cautioned that it was not to be played with only admired. She taught me in her own way, respect for it. She may have commented on the green with a bit of black in it that it reminded her of my hazel eyes. One day, she gave it to me. I hardly remember it, except that it was a nice thing to have and I was surprised.

I did not have it very long. No, I did not break it. I was playing in the neighborhood and brought it to show someone and for some reason I ended up giving it to them. I don't remember if they asked me for it, or if I wanted them to have it, but in that moment it was no longer mine and gone.

When my parents found out they were a stunned. "Why did you give that away? Your grandmother gave that to you!" I realized that I should not have done it and I can remember expressing some remorse, but I was mostly confused. I had somehow gotten the message that if someone likes something you have very much, it is a nice thing to give it to them. My grandmother had given it to me, and so I gave it to someone else who liked it. I was then around five and getting an understanding of things. I most importantly never broke the elephant and my memory of it is intact and beautiful.

What did it the whole thing teach me? I think it showed that if someone is kind and giving to you, you can pass that on. I think it made sense that I respected the idea of giving and certainly entertained a fear of breaking something so beautiful. It also taught me that if someone asks you for something or you want to give someone something, you should take some time to think about it, what it is and if you should do that. That is the funny part. I only realized that it was not probably a good thing when my parents questioned it and to impress upon me not to be so generous again, told me that my grandmother might never give me anything else, because I might give it away.

That turned out not to be true. My father had given my grandmother several pieces of jewelry while he was in South America during WWII. I received all of that, as a young girl. I also was given many things that mattered to my father and connected me to him, long after his death. So I like to think of the glazed green elephant and it's gifting by me, as a pivotal moment in my then young life. I have

always been generous, but I try to stop and think now and again about what I am giving away. Some things don't matter as much as others might believe but some things do if we stop and consider their origins. It is better to be generous than not, and that is a good thing too.

