Way Back When

Now it is the time for all good homemakers to clean the corners, cudgel the butcher and teach the kids manners. Passover is here.

Remember when the pesa-dicky dishes had to be brought up from the basement along with the nickel percolator pots? The basement harbored not only three dusty barrels, but revealed several other items to be delegated you to remember to remind her to bring up after the Seder.

The scientists of today may have been the ones who helped Ma get ready for the holiday by helping to change the kitchen. All those who have put up under-water activity. Remember when the pesa-dicky dishes were set to soak in the bathtub? You tried to hold the sugar bowl under water until it started to push its way to the surface, and you added that tint of color to the bath. After a few minutes, the tub and its contents were flung to the starboard, then to settle in various sections of the tub slightly clinging as they fell on other pieces of china. It was even fun to try to set the glasses with the openings out of water and watch the water turn and sink to the bottom. And when the dishes were soaking, where did Maetel have to take a bath ("...because he's working and he can't take a sponge?") by the upstairs, of course.

Like Fresh Paint

And remember the new oilcloth for the kitchen table that smelted like a freshly painted room. And as the family members... the girls... become older, the cloth became fancier. It wasn't just cut at the dime store; fancy edgings were made with the rim of the saucer or with the pinking shears. It took about 3 days to change the pantry and the kitchen.

For the Kids, Pesach meant staying up late, marmalade fruit slices, fried matzahs for breakfast, stomach aches, oversized Mason jars filled with smschutz; said smschutz to be sliced thinly on a piece of matzah with onion and salt. Pesach also meant matzah crumbled above all, the sound of Maetel klipping with the big wooden bowl in her lap making gefilte fish.

And Brotherhood, Pesach also meant chocolate, rabbits, egg shaped chocolates and mounds of colored jelly beans to be scattered on top of your shelf until after the Holiday. Why? Because when you bought some fried matzah, gefilte fish and pesa-dicky kugel for the neighbors who lived next door, they were rewarded with a guy carrying basket and lots! your name spelled out in white icing on one of the treats. And how about all you "kids" who went through the dime store after Hebrew School to beg for the concession setting chocolate eggs and standing there and "smelling" and wondering if this very act itself was "treif"? Because, after all, it was a chometzig smell. And later, you would broach the subject, "Ma, what would happen if Mattel (he was always the third person in absentia in such discussions) accidentally ate some chocolate during Pesach?"

And during the Passover holiday who ate lunch out? Remember when Ma made lunch... Whether for Pa to take to the store or for the kids who went to high school, Ma always made the lunches. Calories Anonymous would find if they saw what was consumed. Usually a couple of hard-boiled eggs with the waxed paper cone of salt, thick matzah softened in warm water for sandwiches into which Ma shaped thin slices of meat (enough to feed six teen-agers today); also a whole tomato, a couple of matzah meal kugels... and dessert... a banana, a pear and for later... some nuts.

By the way, if you're thinking of eating why not wait until after the Holidays this year... or don't you like the beet and almond preserves and matza meal pancakes?