

Down By The Berry Patch

"Sibling Love"

Rita Luks

19 August 2014

Everything was funny that afternoon. My brothers laughed so hard telling about [Andy](#) helping [Bruce](#) put on his nylons that tears squirted from their eyes. They claimed that the hardest part was getting the seams straight.

Those nylons were long white elasticized stockings he needed to wear because he'd just had a quadruple by-pass. The fact that he was recovering so quickly after the surgery was enough to make us all a bit giddy. His physical condition was such a contrast to the old man on the other side of the room, who struggled to breath. It made us all feel a bit guilty about basking in our good fortune, but we couldn't contain our relief and thankfulness that our baby brother was going to be ok.



When Bruce's doctor set a date for surgery and told him to go home and put his affairs in order it had been a nightmare. He had backed down my driveway to head home when he put the car in drive and came back up the hill to ask me if I thought he was doing the right thing. There was no doubt in my mind that he was. I told him when [Daddy](#) died this kind of surgery wasn't even an option. He had a chance for a good life and why would he even question it. Just go for it! We talked about people we knew of who had heart surgery and gone on with their lives. Not one of them was only 40. They were all old with more risk factors than Bruce and had done just fine. I said it more bravely than I felt it.

His surgery was a great success. Not like the old man who was a sad reminder of what could have been. [Judy](#) had come down from Rose City. She mowed acres of grass to occupy her mind while the rest of us were at the hospital on surgery day but she couldn't stand not being there any longer. She had come to see for herself.

Andy stopped on his way from Flint to have a trophy engraved for Bruce who had been in a canoe race with one of his boys while he was home that couple of days. He couldn't begin to paddle so their boat came in last, but Andy considered him a winner and wanted him to know it. I had been watching [Chad](#) while his Dad was in the hospital in Lansing so [Sherry](#) could be at the hospital but [Beth](#) was keeping him for the afternoon.

So there we were, the four of us feeling like little kids. Acting like kids. It was a perfect day together in spite of the circumstances, or perhaps, because of the circumstances. The bond between of the four of us had never been stronger. We pushed the afternoon long past visiting hours, wanting it to go on forever. It was the kind of day that made us realize how lucky we were to have each other.

Reprinted from *Down by the Berry Patch*

<http://berrypatch.info/rita/017.html>

Last updated on 19 August 2014

Photo Caption: Bruce, Judy, Andy, and Rita

We joked about [Mother's](#) cooking. One thing we all agree on was the dish Mother called Eggs-al-ona Mexicana — that looked and tasted like vomit — was the worst and rice was a close second. We laughed about the time Mother baked a canned ham in the plastic it was wrapped in because the directions didn't say to take it off and how we learned — after we left home — that salad wasn't always a head of lettuce on a plate that was passed around the table with a big knife for everyone to slice off a slab. We all grew up thinking home made cookies were graham crackers with frosting in between and that, when we visited Mother now, nothing kept in the refrigerator looks safe to eat.

Food stories always began or ended with the rice fiasco. We all hated rice. It had to have happened in August because it was the night the whole family was going to the county fair. Mother served rice for supper. We refused to eat it and Mother and Daddy said we had a choice. We could eat our rice or forget the fair and go upstairs to bed. All four of us got up from the table and marched upstairs to bed.

We laughed at Bruce about hiding his black olive pits when he was little. He'd line them up behind him along the back of his high stool so no one could count how many he ate. It was only his secret until he got down from the table. Every time the story was told the line of pits left behind got longer.

We laughed at how high Bruce and [Cousin Jay](#) climbed trees. Bruce would stand firmly on the ground and yell, "Go higher! Higher, Jay!" Then he'd brag that, "We really climbed high today!" When he and Sherry remodeled their house he stood at the bottom of the ladder and shouted up directions. He reported, "We got the siding almost finished today." The same way you climbed trees, Bruce?

We laughed about the time Daddy said Bruce was too young to go pheasant hunting so he only took Andy. Left behind, Bruce went in the house, got his BB gun and hunted in the yard. He was sneaking around the big maple by the porch when a wounded pheasant seemed to come out of nowhere and landed on a low branch. BANG! That was the only pheasant bagged by a Liberacki that day.

We laughed until we pushed way past the time to leave. The four of us born into that exclusive club finally conceded it was time for the meeting to be adjourned.

[John](#) had been hesitant to visit Bruce, but Sherry and I convinced him to go back with us later in the evening. Sherry had gone ahead and when we got there she met us in the hall to say we couldn't go into the room right now. I knew we should have shown more respect for the old man in the room that afternoon. Did we cause this to happen? When a nurse came to say there was a conference room the family could wait in, I realized it was for our family.

The last meeting of the four of us was at Achenbach's funeral home where we all grew up in Unionville. Bruce lay at the front of the room, the corner of a note from his eight year old son, Chad, peeking from his pocket. Close by, Judy, Andy, and I put our heads together and our arms around each other, hanging on with all our might, afraid to let go. Glad we took time to share the stories only the four of us truly understood.

Reprinted from *Down by the Berry Patch*

<http://berrypatch.info/rita/017.html>

Last updated on 19 August 2014

Photo Caption: Bruce, Judy, Andy, and Rita