

Peas and Carrots

by

Kim Pearson

Peas and carrots! To this day, the thought of peas and carrots served together makes my gorge rise and my blood pressure soar. Peas and carrots were an early battleground in the long war between my mother's taste and my own.

To my mother, raised poor during the Depression, being able to buy already canned vegetables was a mark of luxury. She could open a can, pour the contents into a pan and just heat it on the stove. What a miracle! No picking, washing, shelling, peeling, chopping, boiling, bottling or capping. No sweating in a hot kitchen on a summer afternoon. Just poof and abracadabra, your children are served a nourishing vegetable in a mere five minutes.

In 1959 no one cared about any sodium or preservatives packed into those cans. No one cared, either, how awful they tasted. At least my mother didn't seem to care, because no matter how much my brother and I complained, canned vegetables appeared on the dinner table every night. Canned green beans that tasted like soft tin, canned creamed corn that tasted like gritty mush, canned beets that stained your teeth, canned spinach with a dark metallic taste and the texture of slug slime, and my least favorite of all, the dreaded canned peas and carrots medley.

The mushy, pillowy peas were bad enough, but the carrots – no words can describe their awful texture and worse taste. Even their shape was nauseating – tiny uniform cubes that could never have come from a real carrot.

I hid peas and carrots underneath my mashed potatoes; I swept them surreptitiously into my napkin; I fed them to the dog (which never worked because as soon as they hit his mouth he spit them out on the floor – he was no dummy); I transferred them to my brother's plate and threatened him with evil looks that promised torture if he complained; and finally, when she just would not stop serving those cubes and pillows of hell, I graduated to outright rebellion. I simply refused to eat them, no matter what. I made a principle out of canned peas and carrots, a principle I defended with 10 year old fervor.

I even wrote a story about a girl who died rather than betray her right to her own individual taste. It was an affecting story, heavy on funeral details. The poor child lay nestled in a small pink coffin, surrounded by pink rosebuds. Beside the coffin sat her mother, weeping over her dead child, so sorry now that she had ruined her daughter's short life by making her eat canned peas and carrots.

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