

Kitchens

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I cook. Any kitchen anywhere I live is the center of my day.

As a child, the kitchen jobs were shared between my mother and grandfather with him definitely taking the lead on the actual work although I think the planning was definitely a shared endeavor. She did the grocery shopping, so they would confer and decided on the meals for the week. Planning centered around Sunday dinner which Grandpa prepared while my mother and I were at church. Then the leftovers would be the basis for the rest of the week's suppers. He was first home from work and so prepared all of those meals also, even though his supper consisted of two coddled eggs and milk toast. He had a stomach ulcer, so he always ate his main meal at noon at restaurants downtown near his work. He was very creative with those weeknight meals, so I don't ever remember being bored with the same old thing.

The kitchen was an old-fashioned design. The gas stove was up on legs rather than sitting on the floor. There were black and cream linoleum squares on the floor until they finally needed to be replaced with a more "modern" surface. A tall narrow cupboard conveniently held the ironing board which lowered into position on a hinge. There were two doors into the kitchen. One was a swinging door to the dining room which was never closed except if there was company. The other door led to the back hall. The icebox and later the frig was located just outside the kitchen door in the hallway where there were stairs leading both down to the back door and then to the basement or up to the second and third floors. Although the refrigerator is generally right in

the kitchen in a more modern arrangement, I suppose using the back hall made sense as the iceman could come in the back door and up the stairs without needing to go into the living space. He could even deliver ice if no one was home as long as the back door was unlocked. (The door into the kitchen could be locked.)

There was a kitchen table, the kind where part of the table folds down, and we always ate breakfast there and lunch if we were home. (Dinner was always in the dining room.) My mother was up first because she had to leave for work early. I got up and had breakfast with her so that we had some time together. My grandfather got up about an hour later. That quiet time of the morning was a special time to play, read, or later, do homework. Once he was up, I would take my brush into my grandfather's room so that he could brush my hair as it was way too curly for me to manage by myself until I was older, probably late in grade school. We would leave the house together, he waiting at the bus stop which was right in front of the house while I went off to school.

Sitting on the counter in a place of pride was a commercial Kitchen aide mixer. We had all of the attachments including a meat grinder and ice cream maker. My grandfather employed that grinder to turn leftover roasts into meat patties with an interesting sauce if that was required during one of those weekday leftover meals.

No one that I knew owned one of these amazing machines. I'm sure it was purchased when my grandparents started a candy business during the depression. My grandmother Bertha (know as Bird) went down to NYC to study candy making. I'm assuming that she was able to stay in

Brooklyn with her mother-in-law, Cornelia Smith. Aunt Josie was also living there. After Bird finished her studies the couple started the business with my grandfather doing the book keeping and probably the advertising and other chores. They were only able to do that for one Christmas, the big candy season, before she was diagnosed with breast cancer and died a few months later. I remember playing with the cool candy molds as a kid, not really knowing what they were.

My most challenging 'kitchen' was in a small efficiency on N. Lawn Ave. where three-year-old Casey and I moved when we first came to Madison. There was no kitchen as such. No hot plates allowed. This was years before microwaves. There was a small table in the one room living area and a bed for me in the next room. Casey slept on the day bed in the "main" room. There was a small frig in the closet. Clothes were hung in a closed-off stairway off of the common hall.

I still cooked, in spite of the challenging arrangement. I had an electric frying pan which can be quite versatile. Frozen vegetable were perked in the basket of the electric coffee pot. Needless to say, this arrangement presented a meal planning challenge, but we ate as well balanced meals as I could manage. Dishes were washed in the bath tub.

Now I finally have a kitchen that I designed for me. When we were doing the planning, I learned from some of the designers that they generally work with "cookie-cutter" kitchens which are often hardly ever actually used. I kept emphasizing that I cook, so my kitchen is tailor made for me. Nothing is out of reach except for large items kept in a cupboard over the stove. I like things handy, so pans are hung under a shelf next to the stove. The counters vary in both height and surface, depending on the function. There is a butcher block surface for general preparation, a lower granite counter for mixing and rolling out dough, and a higher soapstone one at Bob's height. This doubles as a serving area

and has worked well for drinks and appetizers during parties. There is also a soapstone surface which is positioned level with the stove top so that hot things like canners or stew pots can be safely slid off of the stove. I've had the redone kitchen for at least 15 years now and, every once in a while, I still stop and say to myself, "I love this kitchen."

I've come a long way from perking the vegetables in the coffee pot.