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**My Mother,
the Frugal Finn**
By Sharon Love Cook

Photo of Mary E. Love

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My Mother, the Frugal Finn

"I'm a frugal Finn," my mother often announced by way of explaining her thriftiness. Frugality was in her Finnish genes, she claimed. Nonetheless, she sometimes carried it too far.

For instance, she'd drive all over downtown Gloucester searching for a parking meter with a little time left on it. In the passenger seat, I was instructed to scan the meters on my side of the road. Those with a tiny flag jutting from the top (indicating expiration) were ignored. What a feeling of satisfaction when she discovered a meter with unused minutes. Yet, as I said, my mother sometimes carried frugality too far.

As a preschooler, I discovered a wooden potty chair (minus the pot) in the attic and impulsively put it over my head. While it went on easily enough, I couldn't get it off. The thing was stuck. I went downstairs, the chair balanced on my shoulders, its legs in the air. My father was at work so we sought help from a neighbor. He tried slipping it over my head with no luck. Finally, he suggested we go to the fire station where they'd cut it off. Although the idea was scary, I was tired of wearing a potty chair.

The fire station was located in a busy part of town. I lay awkwardly on the back seat while my mother drove, the car intermittently lurching forward. I soon realized she was checking the meters. While I considered my predicament a *family emergency*, my mother wasn't going to pass up an opportunity for free parking minutes.

Walking the two blocks to the fire station, my head encased in a potty chair, I was too young to feel embarrassed. Instead, I was pleased with the attention I created among the passing shoppers.

Growing up Catholic, my siblings and I celebrated our First Holy Communion in the second grade. Instructed by the nuns, we spent a whole year in preparation. We knew it was a big deal when a Bishop from Boston showed up to perform the Mass.

I showed up at St. Peter's Church wearing the regulation white dress (my older sister's hand-me-down), white lace veil, and bright red shoes. They were my school shoes; my mother refused to buy new white shoes "you'll only wear once." When I protested, she announced, "No one will look at your feet."

She was wrong. The nuns stared in astonishment at my red shoes, "Does your mother know it's your First Holy Communion?" Sister Florine asked.



My mother Mary Love, with my daughter Jessica Love Cook and her father/my husband Oliver Cook, at Long Beach, Rockport, where our family had a cottage for 50 years.

"She's a Lutheran," I said. That response usually put an end to their questions.

The problem was solved by placing me in the center of a gaggle of nuns whose long black habits concealed the offending shoes. While the other kids marched into the church two by two, I shuffled in like a fugitive, surrounded by nuns.

Another frugal family legend concerned my mother and her sister, our Aunt Winona. The minister at their church suggested they visit a parishioner in the hospital. Not only that, could they take with them a box of candy? Thus prior to their visit, the pair stopped at Sterling's drug store. "We bought a whole pound," my mother complained. "They didn't sell half-pounds."

At the Addison Gilbert Hospital, they found the parishioner asleep in her room. Placing the candy on a table, they sat by her bed until a nurse appeared. She announced that the patient hadn't regained consciousness and wasn't expected to. Startled by this news, my mother and

Winona wandered from the room, heading for the elevator. Outside, standing on the hospital's granite steps, they contemplated the situation: *The patient would not recover. What would happen to the chocolates?*

"The housekeeper will take them," Winona suggested. With that, the pair marched back inside. The ward was busy; no one noticed the two arriving and promptly leaving, a box of candy secured under an arm.

Hearing this story, my siblings and I were unanimous in our criticism. However, as I get older, I can see the practical side of the situation. Could it be I've become that frugal Finn? After all, it was a *whole pound* of chocolates!

By Sharon Love Cook

This story appeared in the Gloucester Daily Times and Salem News in May, '21.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharon Love Cook, a Gloucester native living in Beverly Farms, is the author of the *Granite Cove Mysteries* (whose setting is Cape Ann), a syndicated columnist, cartoonist and VP of Friends of Beverly Animals.



Sharon Love Cook, Author
Photo by Cape Ann Photography