

Suzie Too's Kitchen

I'm so mad I could explode. I bet if I wrapped my hands around that big soup pot in back, it would start to boil. Those two from the *Bourneville Weekly Express* sure made things worse for me. They must have something against vegetables, probably were made to eat broccoli when they were kids and now they're taking it out on me. I'm just glad you people from the *Cedar Rapids Review* are going to give me another chance.

What did they expect? **Suzie Too's** is just a small diner off the town square. I got six little tables, seven if you count the one in the window. There it's like being in a fishbowl. Sheriff Harris is the only one who's willing to sit there. I'm guessing that's so anyone passing by can see he's upholding the law and not eating some donut. Yeh, there're eight seats at the counter but who would want to sit there on a date.

Those people from the *Weekly* weren't nice. And to think I kept pouring free coffee for them. The reporter seemed to be scribbling down almost everything I said. I don't know how he mixed things all up later. The article was just like scrambled eggs, if you ask me. That lady photographer wasn't much better. What was she thinking taking pictures of empty tables with dirty dishes on them from lunch? Really, if I was talking with them, I certainly couldn't be bussing the tables. And here I let them each choose their own sweet roll! What was I thinking?

I even let her take that artsy photo of me in front of the mirror up front. So she got both my profiles and wrinkles double. She could have let me go back and at least brush out my hair or put on some lip stuff. She sent me that photo. Thank heaven they didn't print it. I look like such an old woman and I'm not even 45. So what if I have a few stylish grey streaks. Everyone thinks they're not natural. Maybe it's some sort of blackmail to get free coffee and sweat rolls for the next twenty years. You know, "Coffee and rolls; put it on our tab or we'll print that picture of you. You know the one." Jeez!

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I thought it would be good for business to have a little write-up in the *Weekly*. The whole town gets it. You can pick it up at any of a dozen places and if you pay, they'll even deliver to you locally. I thought maybe that there could be a couple newcomers to town that didn't know about us especially now that we're *vegetarians*. For a while, we went co-op and I thought that maybe confused people. I was hoping that the article would get the word out.

I started giving the whole thing over to my daughter, Suzie Too. She's really quite a cook, you know. That's why we renamed the diner and called it "Suzie Too's." It was meant to be funny -- people could say, "They had lunch at Suzie Too's," and you wouldn't know if they meant they had two lunches or if everybody was now eating here. I thought about sending out coupons for a free coffee with lunch saying something like "Too's for Lunch, Three's a Crowd." In case you're wondering, Ms. Marylin didn't think it was so funny either.

We were still playing with the name when Suzie, my daughter, almost spoiled it when she organized the rest of the staff to try to make us into a co-op. They wanted to change the name of the diner to Co-op Kitchen. Thank heaven that's behind us now.

And on top of everything, I'm a single parent. Suzie Too's my daughter. It may have been that post-part blues or jazz or whatever they call it. By the time I was ready to leave the hospital with my baby girl, I was tired of all those puffy doctors with those numbers after their name- -II, III ... boy, talk about inbreeding. Those kids must have been born with that cold instrument wrapped around their necks, so they could take their own pulse. I thought I'd have some fun and named Suzie after me. I couldn't use "Junior," so I took "Too." I never was good at spelling and besides I thought having a Chinese middle name would make my daughter smart. Then seventeen years later, she comes to work for me, go figure.

My good friend, Ms. Marylin, used to come in three times a week, maybe more when Judge Livermore was alive. It was Lawrence Livermore, Junior before they got married. When he ran for judge he became

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"Il" instead of "Junior" -- see, just as I told you before with all those doctors. Same person though. He wasn't all that bad. Sometimes when he had half days off, he'd meet Ms. Marylin here. That would be back in the late 50s, I think.

I just started here as a waitress and now my daughter is just a little older than I was back then and already the main cook, or should I say "cheffish" as she insists. She's joking of course.

Truth be told, when Ms. Marylin first came to Bourneville she was a teacher and stayed with me in my parents' house on Spruce. Just think -- we shared the same bathroom. I think my parents were hoping she'd be an example for me; maybe I would become a teacher like her. I guess they didn't consider you have to have brains first for something like that. Not that I'm dumb.

I just didn't care that much for books. But I did like magazines, especially those with recipes, like *Women's Day*. You know, I remember my mother picking it up free at the local A & P when I was a kid. At least I think it was free. Sometimes we'd read the recipes together and decide what menus to cook for Father. It was a lot of fun. I guess that's how I learned to read and cook. I did the same thing with my daughter too.

That's funny; I only have the one child. I never called her "Too"; it's always been Sue or Suzie. Anyhow, I looked up to Ms. Marylin. Even after she moved out of our house, we would meet maybe once a month on a Sunday for milk and cookies.

Then Ms. Marylin started to work with all those well-dressed and neat looking people; professionals, I think they're called. They usually have all sorts of degrees and offices downtown. They never smell from anything but perfume, but don't get me wrong. Ms. Marylin really is smart and nice. I think I was going to be a senior when she met and married Mr. Livermore. By then she wasn't a teacher anymore and didn't have to chaperone our senior prom. Too bad. I had this really super date I wanted to show off; he was the pitcher for our high school baseball team and a track star too.

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I did graduate, well barely. I know that Father was disappointed. He had high hopes for "his girl." I guess he thought he could *will* brains and ambition into me. He tried. I can see now that he accepted his disappointment after a while. I did get a job right out of high school, before the end of the summer. I tried a couple of different ones before coming to the diner. Strange how things work out.

There was an old couple that ran this place, Mr. and Mrs. Karl Schmidt. They made it through the War, too. They were old and tired already when I started. That's why they hired me. First, they had me doing almost all of the hard work. I was waitressing and bussing and when things slowed, even doing the cleanup and dishes. I didn't mind. But after a couple of months, I started making some suggestions that I thought would cheer up their menu. Said I always helped my mother cook at home, still did – I must have said, "do" since I was still living at home then. They said it would be OK to try one or two *entries*, main dishes, but I'd have to come in early. Mr. Schmidt warned me that in case they didn't sell I wouldn't get paid for any time I put in preparing them.

I had them put out a sample plate under the glass. It seemed to do the trick. I wasn't counting, but they were. At the end of the month, they proudly told me that on the average they must now be getting three to six new diners a day... and almost all of them asking for the dishes I made. So, they said they'd put those up on a board and call it "Suzie's Specials." That was when we put up that blackboard on the wall facing the counter.

Next week I told Mom she had to come in for lunch. It would be free; the Schmidts told me to invite her. Mother was so proud when she saw the sign. I never said nothing to her in advance; I didn't want to spoil the surprise.

Mother went home and told Father. When I came home after we cleaned and closed up the diner, there was Father beaming from side to side. He gave me an especially big hug. "That's my girl!" were his very

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words. I heard him telling Mother that night that things were turning out nicely after all and that we all can't be teachers.

So anyhow, the Schmidts had me doing more of the cooking. They hired another young girl to do the waitressing. They were getting even older. They said they came with their families to America before the turn of the century as little kids. They actually met in high school in Des Moines. Eventually they found their way here to Bourneville and started this diner, *kerplunk*, the year I was born, 1932. Talk about bad luck. The Depression. Who had the money to eat out? However, they were good people. Talked some of the local farmers into helping with supplies and ran this with the help of some of the local churches mostly as a soup kitchen. There were lots of people hungry then. Earned themselves goodwill from that.

Then when things picked up a little, they were able to make the diner into a going business. Well, just barely. They had to keep open from early breakfast to dinner. Lots of hours and hard work. Now after the War was over, and no one here picked on them for being of German, they were able to just do lunch and supper, 11 – 7. By the time I started to waitress, they had already cut back to just long lunch hours most days.

They were doing well enough. Then Mr. Schmidt had something go wrong with his heart, same like Mr. Livermore, II. He was told his working days were over. I think it was in 1962, by then we were almost like family. I even cooked them supper meals after we were closed for the day. So they said since I was such a good cook, maybe I'd like to take over the diner. They'd just like a fair price for all the furnishings and stuff. They somehow figured it all out and it wasn't very much. They said the money would help them move to Florida where they had some cousins. Also said the winters weren't so harsh down there on the Gulf. I said I'd have to think about it.

Well, I talked it over with my parents. Since I was living home, I was able to save and almost had enough to buy them out myself. OK, Mother and Father offered to help too. However, it was only a little bit. I

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thought about it, and thought about it and then called Ms. Marilyn and asked if we could meet that Sunday and discuss an important matter. She agreed. When I told her all about the deal with the diner, she was so excited for me. See, she already had been running "Marylin's Manor" after Judge Livermore died and really believed that women should be able to earn their own way.

She said she would like to look over the books and make sure the price was fair. She'd review them with her accountant who knew all about these things. So I told the Schmidts I'd need a little more time to think it over and if I could see their books that would be helpful. They weren't surprised. Said they liked me and wanted me to be successful, so yes, that would indeed be a good idea. Then I would be more comfortable when I bought their restaurant.

That's what we did. Examined the books, at least Ms. Marilyn and her accountant did. Then Ms. Marilyn made a special dinner that next Sunday and invited my folks and me. Over dessert, she told us what her accountant said -- it was good. She said if I did buy it, she'd be sure to send all her lodgers over to me for lunch since lunch wasn't part of *her* deal.

On Monday, I told the Schmidts that we probably had a deal. Ms. Marilyn had another lawyer friend that would review everything and then write up a fairly priced offer, all legal.

That's what happened. I bought the diner and had a new sign proclaiming that this was now Suzie's Kitchen. Of course then I told my parents it was about time for me to be living on my own seeing how I was a business owner. I guess that was the old "good news, bad news" because if I were still living at home I probably wouldn't have had some of my old boyfriends come calling around. But then again I wouldn't have had Suzie Too so I don't know.

In any case, I'm glad at least the people in Cedar Rapids will get the right story. You can tell them if they come down, I'll give them a free cup of coffee with lunch. Yeh, but remember to tell them we're now called "Suzie Too's."