

A Mother's Day Story

"Love Baked In"

Sasha lived with her mother and brother in a low income housing development. Her father had deserted the family when the children were very young leaving the young woman to raise the children by herself with the help of welfare money.

Sasha loved her mother's cooking; she thought it was magic to watch her mother mix ingredients together and place them in the oven for a period of time and then have a delicious meal together around the table. Sasha wasn't ashamed of the welfare budget because her mother was able to do sewing to earn extra money and she made sure that the children had healthy, delicious meals even it was on a shoestring budget.

Mom loved cooking and Sasha was intrigued with the wonderful aroma of homemade bread baking in the oven. As soon as she was old enough to read, her mother started teaching her how to mix the flour mixture together to make bread.

Life changed for the family when Sasha was 10 years old. Her brother got angry at his mother, ran out into the winter night air wearing only his pajamas and no shoes. Mother didn't chase after him; she said he would come back when he got cold enough. It seemed that she was overwhelmed with caring for two children, having to make do with scarce resources and she didn't have the energy to set proper boundaries.

Unfortunately a social worker passed the boy and stopped and picked him up and the result was that the two children were placed with social services and removed from their mother's care.

The family suffered with this turn of events and finally Sasha's mother made arrangements for her to live with some friends of the family who was planning on moving to Europe and that was where Sasha spent her teenage years. Sasha didn't understand why her mother never wrote to her, but Sasha spent time walking the streets of France looking in the bakeries and the aroma of the freshly baked bread filled her thoughts with images of the mother who gave her up. She longed to be with her mother and she never gave up on the hope that one day she would find her. She came home to the states as a young adult, attended college and graduated from a Culinary Arts School. She then began her search for her mother and she finally was successful. She walked to the front door of a convent and asked to speak with her mother. It was a difficult moment as the two women faced each other. Could a relationship be restored after all this time? Her mother invited her to follow her to the industrial kitchen where she did the cooking. She said, "We're going to make some bread." The wonderful memories of those early years of making bread with her mom filled Sasha's heart and she was put at ease. Soon her mother was giving directions and instructions as well as discussing the desired results as an end product. Sasha allowed her mother to teach her and refrained from mentioning that she had done a thesis in college on artisan baking and had studied at a culinary arts college. She was just thankful to hear her mother's voice and to bask in her presence.

A few hours later, Mother and daughter pulled the golden brown loaves of bread from the oven, smothered them with butter and shared some slices together as they sat facing each other at the table. They ate in silence, yet the bonding of love flowed between them. Sasha accepts her mother's imperfections and limitations. But she believes that her mother believed that another family could give her a good life that was not going to happen if she stayed with her. She wanted to spare Sasha a life of poverty and hardships and she made the decision to give her to her friends.

Sasha ponders about the meaning of love. She thinks about the uncomplicated friendship that she and her mother enjoy in the present. Just the simple act of slicing warm bread, smothering it with butter and sharing it with each other as they face each other across the table speaks of love. The Bible says that "Love covers a multitude of sins." No one is perfect; we all need forgiveness; and we all need love. Sasha has chosen to reach out and enjoy the happy memories that she has of childhood and to move forward appreciating the time that she and her mother have now making bread and sharing the wonderful Italian recipes that have sustained her family from generations past.

(I read this story in Good Housekeeping Magazine May 2015)