

Loved *by Theresa Pinel*



My favourite relative was Auntie Julia. First of all, she lived just down the hill from our house, having a small simple house built on a land that was once our property. I was five-and-a-half when the Loehndorf family moved to Keremeos from Saskatoon. Cousin Gail had just turned six. Instantly, we were play mates.

Auntie's house in British Columbia was primitive. Without plumbing, the outdoor toilet was behind the chicken coop. The house had three small bedrooms, a porch that served as a laundry room on washdays and a small living room that had a radio in a wooden cabinet that was as tall as I was. Being on Boundary Road, the house had electricity.

The kitchen had only a cupboard or two, so Auntie did most of the meal preparation on the kitchen table. Then she'd feed the wood-burning stove with apple wood from the neatly piled stack leaning against the hen house, to cook her meals and bake delicious desserts.

Her source of water was from a hand pump with pipes leading from the well dug below the hard-packed, sandy cellar floor, to just above the kitchen floor. For years, Auntie had to bend over to pump the handle for every bucket of water that the family used for drinking, cooking and washing. A trap door from the kitchen floor hid the wooden stairs to the damp cool cellar, which served as her refrigerator.

Often on Saturdays, Auntie baked a jelly roll. When the oven yielded a thin yellow cake, her fingers would fly to cut around the edges of the large pan, dump the cake onto a damp dish towel, spread the top side of the cake with homemade apricot or raspberry jam, and roll it up using the towel so she wouldn't burn her hands. If the cake cooled before she could roll it up, it would crack spewing out jam. Then Auntie Julia would express her disappointment out loud. We assured her that it would still taste yummy.

If we interrupted her, she'd just say, "Quick, quick, I have to be quick," ignoring our questions and comments. We weren't allowed to eat the jelly roll until Sunday. When Uncle Albert left Keremeos, Auntie continued to take foster children. I could see by the way she cared for the little ones, that she loved the, and that I, too, was special to her. To seal the supposition, Auntie Julia would pick us up, give us a warm bear hug, and declare, "I love you so much I could just eat you up." Then she would proceed to make loud chewing noises, which put whoever she was "eating" into a fit of giggles.

Besides “eating” us, she had a cookie jar that was always more than half full. I can still see the clear square glass coffee jar full of sugar cookies on the middle shelf of her pantry. I loved to run my fingers on the jar to spell out N-A-B-O-B. Auntie never scolded us for sneaking cookies. I think now, that because of her generosity, she simply pretended to not notice when we escaped from her walk-in pantry with handfuls of cookies.

Auntie Julia grew a vegetable garden that included several rows of orange carrots, juicy green peas, and larger light green edible pod sugar peas. To this day, I cannot find seeds of the large edible pod sugar peas. I’m sure that sometimes Auntie must have planned to cook peas for supper, only to be disappointed that the plants had already been harvested. Busy as she was, Auntie Julia always seemed to have time to sing a little tune, listen to us or share her scrumptious baking.