

Darcie Dines Out

When Darcie's baby brother was born, her mother had to stay in the hospital for three days. Darcie thought that she and Dad would probably eat out on those days. She was looking forward to it.



"Oh, boy," she said, "hot dogs and hamburgers every night!"

"Well, not tonight," her father said. "The Spencers invited us for dinner."

Darcie put on a clean shirt, washed her face and hands, and combed her hair.

"Remember," Dad said as they walked across the street, "use your best manners."

"I know," Darcie said. "Say please and thank you."

"Right, and eat everything on your plate," Dad reminded her.

Inside the Spencer house Darcie sat at the table and sniffed quietly. It didn't smell like meat loaf. It didn't smell like lamb chops. It didn't smell like fried chicken. What if it was something she absolutely hated?

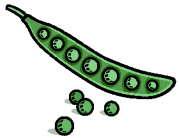


"I'm so happy to hear about your baby brother," Mrs. Spencer said as she put a plate down in front of Darcie.

"Darcie looked at the plate. Peas. That was ok. Buttered noodles.

That was good. Some kind of gravy with chunks of meat and mushrooms in it.

Darcie took her fork and carefully pushed the gravy away from the noodles and peas. Then she looked at her father, but Dad was already eating and didn't notice her. Darcie remembered what Dad has said about good manners. She took a tiny bite of meat. It tasted good! Soon Darcie cleaned her plate.



"I'm so glad you liked by beef stroganoff," Mrs. Spencer said.

"I've never had it before, but it was very good," Darcie answered.

The next night Darcie's father said, "The Fords have invited us over for dinner tonight." Darcie sighed. No hamburgers or hot dogs again. She washed up and walked next door with Dad.

As soon as Mr. Ford opened the door, Darcie could smell chicken. She loved chicken. Mr. Ford served her two drumsticks—"In honor of being a big sister," he said, winking at Darcie.





Darcie looked at her plate. Green beans. That was ok. Some funny-looking rice. It was brown and had red and green flecks in it with black blobs that looked like raisins. Darcie wondered why anyone would ever think of mixing raisins with rice.



Darcie ate both drumsticks very quickly. Then she polished off the green beans. She looked at the rice. Then she looked at her father. Dad was explaining something about his work to the Fords and didn't notice her. Darcie thought about good manners. She slid a few grains of rice onto her fork. It wasn't too bad. Next she stabbed a raisin and some more rice. It was really pretty good. Darcie ate everything on her plate.

The third night Darcie's mouth was watering for a juicy hamburger. Just as they were getting ready to go to the Burger Pit, Mrs. Zappettini called and insisted that they come over to share 'potluck'.

"What's 'potluck'?" Darcie asked.

"It means taking your chances on what's being served," Dad explained.

"Knowing Mrs. Zappettini, I think we have nothing to worry about."

"But I just wanted a hamburger," Darcie complained.

First Mrs. Zappettini brought out a large tray of something she called "Antipasto." Darcie was relieved to discover that it was really carrot sticks, celery, green onions, black and green olives, and pieces of salami. They all got to choose just what they wanted, so Darcie took several carrot sticks and some black olives.

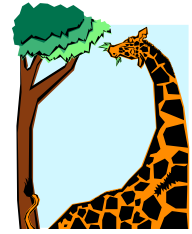


At the dinner table Mr. Zappettini expertly twisted slippery strands of spaghetti into artistic coils on each plate and nestled big meatballs on the side. Then Mrs. Zappettini passed hot, crusty bread. Darcie loved spaghetti. She thought the meatballs were almost as good as a hamburger, and the bread was better than a bun.



But then, oh dear! Mrs. Zappettini was bringing everyone another plate with a strange, dark green thing in the middle. It was the size of a man's fist with tightly closed leaves all around. Darcie touched in gently with her finger. It was tough and leathery, and the pointed ends scratched. Darcie thought about good manners. This was a special exception, she felt sure.

“It’s an artichoke, Darcie,” Mr. Zappettini said, pulling off a leaf. “Ummmm, good.” He stuffed it into his mouth like a giraffe chewing leaves from a tree.



Very softly Darcie said, “I don’t believe I care for artichokes.”

“Try it,” Mrs. Zappettini urged. “See. Pick off a leaf, dip it in the sauce, and then chew off the end. That’s the tender part. Leave the rest of the leaf on the plate. Try it, Darcie, it’s fun.”



Reluctantly, Darcie picked a leaf. She took a cautious bite. It wasn’t bad. She tried a second leaf. Well, maybe it was pretty good. Soon she had a large mound of artichoke leaves at the side of her plate and a small cone of pale green leaves left.

“Here’s the best part,” Mr. Zappettini said. “Let me show you how to get to the heart.” Carefully, he pulled off the rest of the leaves all at once and handed them to Darcie just like an empty ice cream cone. Then he scooped out the center of the flat piece that was left on the plate, the heart. He cut it into several pieces.

“Now you can fix mine,” Mr. Zappettini offered. So Darcie did. She was beginning to like artichokes a lot.

“You’re a good sport, Darcie,” Mrs. Zappettini said as they thanked her at the door. Darcie smiled.

Walking home, Dad said, “I think we should have a special welcome home dinner for mom and baby tomorrow night, don’t you? I could go down to the Burger Pit and get those hamburgers you’ve been craving.”

“Oh, no, Dad,” Darcie interrupted, “let’s really surprise Mom. How about fixing beef stroganoff, brown rice with raisins, and artichokes for a change?”

Dad laughed. “She’ll be surprised, all right.”

“We’ll just tell mom it’s ‘potluck’,” Darcie explained, “and see if she remembers her best manners.”

This story is adapted from *Darcie Dines Out* by Angela B. Haight, Highlights for Children, May 1985.



University of Washington PKU Clinic
CHDD - Box 357920, Seattle, WA 98195

(206) 685-3015, Toll Free in Washington State 877-685-3015
<http://depts.washington.edu/pku>