

Grape Jelly

Written by Vivian Bikulege



I made myself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich today. I am going to a book club and members are invited to bring a sack lunch to eat over conversation. I love peanut butter. I love jelly too, but not grape jelly. That is what is in the refrigerator. It was my Mom's jelly.

Welch's Concord Grape Jelly, America's #1 Grape Jelly - 100% North American grown. The jar is about one-quarter full and it looks like there is a small particle of margarine floating around in it. No doubt it is Country Crock, another favorite brand of Mom's. I don't like margarine. I don't sense any "country fresh taste" and I don't like seeing it lodged in the jelly. I'll take a hot piece of toast with real melting butter and warmed blackberry preserves all day long.

A few months before I lost my Mom, we got into a tiff over jelly. I bought Smucker's grape jelly. It was cheaper. (Sometimes cheap is one of my hallmarks.) Irene wouldn't eat it. For me, grape jelly is grape jelly. All of it is yucky. I was irritated with the Smucker's boycott going on at our kitchen table. Out of frustration, I threw the entire jelly jar into the garbage can as my response to Irene's abstention. Tossing out a brand new jar of jam went against every grain of my nature. I hate to waste food, even when products have exceeded their shelf life. (Ask my family about the breakfast I made with expired pancake mix. Then again, don't. Maple syrup and early morning retching is not a recipe on the back of a box of Aunt Jemima Original Pancake & Waffle Mix.)

According to Welch's, "Every jar starts with three bunches of grapes." There are 13 grams of sugar in every tablespoon. There are 15 grams of sodium. No protein. No fat. And there are 26 servings in a jar. I think I'm down to about 6. What's funny (not really) is that the Welch's in my refrigerator is another remnant of my mom lingering in the house. Her presence. I know her hand held that jelly jar. Suddenly, three bunches of mashed up grapes have a whole new meaning and even if I disdain grape jelly, you can bet I won't easily toss that jar into the recycle bin. I'll savor this jelly. It has more value than any Bordeaux. And that orbiting piece of alien margarine space trash suspended in a thick purple galaxy? Who

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cares?!?! It's just margarine for God's sake. It goes on toast too. It used to go on *her* toast!

I tried to remember if the jelly standoff was the last argument I had with my Mom. It wasn't but the other altercations were tied to sickness. Stay in bed. Let me help you. Please put on your Carnegie Mellon football tee shirt for a picture to share with your grandson Luke on his signing day. She was too sick for iPhone pictures and did not want her grandson to see her like that. I should have known better, had better sense. It goes back to Welch's grape jelly. When someone is used to the same thing all of their lives and likes it, maybe even loves it, why should she change when so many other things, big things, in her life have changed, are changing? And why can't a daughter understand that? Fifty cents more for her brand of happiness? Was it worth the petty dispute? Now, looking at the diminishing jar of jelly, I know the answer. You do too.

Grape jelly. I don't like it but I never thought I'd cry over it. Never thought I'd write about it. Grape jelly doesn't matter much in the greater scheme of world politics, environment, race relations, and poverty. But today, in this house, as I draw a glob of sugary purple from an 18 ounce glass jar and spread it on top of peanut butter to finish making my sandwich, grape jelly is important. It is significant because it puts the lessons right in front of me. Serve people the best that I have. Don't hold back especially when it comes to nickels or dimes or quarters. Remember what is important especially as time becomes even more precious, when you are given the gift of that time. Feed one another with generosity, quality and care. Accept imperfection in yourself, in others and in a jelly jar with margarine or peanut butter floaters. It's okay. It happens. It's just jelly and margarine for God's sake.

I have another story about the time I bought store brand peanut butter instead of Jif creamy peanut butter but I'll save that one. My heart can only take so much.