

Peoples' Weird Shit Namely Mine by Susan Connell

Contributed by Susan Connell

Â Â PEOPLES' WEIRD SHIT NAMELY MINE Â by Susan Connell Â Polyestra Â Â My father often pointed out that, among other things, I looked like a retard when I ate.Â "You eat like a retard," he would interject while I tried to place a bite of food in my mouth.Â To this day I'm not sure what he was talking about.Â He never once said this to my sister.Â Because I am left handed, writing with a pen, as well as cutting food, often appears a little awkward. I assumed he was referring to my left-handedness.Â And so did my mother since herÂ nervous reaction to his insult was jumping across the table, yanking the utensils out of my hands and cutting my food for me.Â Â As a young adult, I would do anything to avoid eating in the presence of other people.Â I would meet new people and inevitably be asked to go eat with them.Â I somehow hadn't foreseen this horrifying social obstacle.Â I would panic.Â I would often go with them and eat nothing or close to nothing.Â I would order toast or french fries.Â I would have supreme difficulty getting each individual french fry into my mouth.Â I would lean my face a few inches from my plate and quickly and strategically insert a french fry into my mouth.Â If I caught anyone looking at me I would have a thousand heart attacks.Â Â I would freeze and sometimes put my head under the table or turn my back on people. Â Salads were guaranteed death.Â If I went on a date and some sadist brought me a complimentary salad I wouldn't touch it.Â If I actually tried to eat a salad in the company of peers, I could never once get the leaves entirely into my mouth with a fork.Â I would spastically stuff the lettuce into my mouth with my fingers or cover my mouth with both hands while I reeled it in with my teeth or I would cover my whole face with a napkin or drop violently to the table in an epileptic-like fit.Â I would look around the restaurant, large leaf hanging out of my mouth, eyes wide, visualizing my escape through the illuminated emergency exits.Â I would sneak the next leaf when I thought no one was looking, miss my mouth entirely and smear dressing across my cheek, then groan like a car-struck mongrel and go swig whiskey in the ladies' room.Â Â On possibly the worst occasion, I unfortunately found myself forced to eat dinner with a group ofÂ popular, uppity musicians in some trendy yuppie club.Â Within a fraction of a second, a lettuce leaf from a neighboring plate entered my mouth and lodged itself perfectly flat across my front teeth.Â AfterÂ failed attempts at freeing it with my tongue, a swish of water, leaning under the table and trying to scrape it off with a fingernail, I tried to converse with the others while completely concealing my upperÂ teeth with my lip.Â When certain sounds revealed themselves in maimed and alarming ways because of the position of the upper lip, I simply stopped eating and sat there for close to an hour, not responding to anyone, not finishing my food, unable to smile, catatonic.Â Â The reason why it took so long to understand my father's phrase "You look like a retard when you eat," is because it wasn't a criticism, but an ironclad guarantee for the future.Â Â I could have embraced eating like a retard. I could have developed into a cold-hearted,Â belligerent eater and really gotten off on it.Â I could have become terribly ruthless about the whole deal, slurping and hurling and fisting and growling, eating my public dinner off my own cheeks and thighs with my fingers, the fingers of others, the still-beating heart of my father encased in lettuce.Â But my parents raised me to have good manners.