

(A story about self control and gratitude)

Fish and Rice

I come from that great country in a large corner of the world called China. I remember sitting at my grandmother's feet when I was a young girl. She would tell me stories about her life when she was a girl. Her parents worked in the fields. Life was very hard for them, but although they were poor, they were happy.

Everyone was the same. They all worked hard in the fields and ate only fish and rice every day. If someone managed to catch a bird, it was a day of celebration. Another family would be invited to join in with the meal. They ate snakes too, when they found them.

Grandmother had few toys, Her mother made her a rag doll and her father made a little wooden bed for it to sleep in. Any other toys were just pieces of broken crockery, or kitchen tools or containers which had to be given back to be used to prepare the fish and rice.

Grandma had a friend who lived nearby. Her name was Lin. The two girls made up stories about adventures on their horses. Pieces of rope were tied to their imaginary horses and off they would gallop to far away places, where they could find beautiful jewels in caves to bring home to make their parents rich. They thought that if they were rich they would be able to eat the kinds of things that kings and princes ate, which certainly wouldn't be fish and rice.

One winter the snow came early and stayed for a very long time. Everyone had their stores of rice in sacks, kept safely away from rats and mice. Their dried and salted fish was hung high, near the ceiling. Grandma's mother was worried that there would not be enough food to last the winter. The rice was lasting out well, but the fish was nearly used up. Soon most of the meals were made from rice alone. The fish was all but finished and then it was gone. Grandma began to realise that she actually loved to eat fish. The rice was so plain without it. She complained to her mother. She said that she did not like to eat rice without fish. Her mother came and sat beside her.

"Rice is very good for us. It keeps us alive. We must be grateful that we have rice to eat. Some people have no fish and no rice at all. How do you think they feel? They must be very hungry. We must be happy because we are not hungry."

"But I am tired of rice." Grandma had said.

"You must learn to control yourself and not complain about things that cannot be changed. You will just feel bad and make other people unhappy too. You do not want to make you father unhappy, do you? If he sees you smiling and eating your rice, he will not be upset because you are moaning. He is grateful that we still have rice. He can smile about that and so can I. You must learn to smile about your plain rice too.

I asked my grandma if she ever did learn to smile about plain rice. She nodded her head. "My friend, Lin's family had no fish and no rice. They came to share our rice until winter was over. That made me very happy – to be able to give them rice, so that they would not starve. I never complained again. I was very grateful to have enough to eat – and I was happy to share it.

QUESTIONS:

1. How did you feel when you heard the story?
2. Did it remind you of anything in your own life?
3. What toys did Grandma play with as a child in China?
4. What food did they have to eat?
5. What food did they have in the winter?
6. What important thing did Grandma learn from her experience as a child?