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Taking Out The Trash: Garbage In...Garbage Out!

by Antonia Ragozzino

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Preface

It is a typical school morning at the end of the third grade. I rise earlier than usual stretching and groaning. My sisters are always up earlier than me, so no one is in the bathroom. I scurry down the hall, quickly to get into the bathroom. This is a quest every morning with two older sisters! I splash water on my face and brush my teeth with my favorite Little Twin Stars toothbrush. My two sisters were already in the kitchen eating their toast and tea. As I get ready for school, my grandmother, Ella, who I am named after, would usually sneak into my room and make my bed. This is the shape of things to come as my grandmother continued this bed making ritual through my late teens. I am now horrible at making my bed because that talent, along with ironing, cooking, cleaning and taking out the trash was always done for me.

We lived in a small neighborhood in New Haven, Connecticut. My grandparents lived next door to us so it was completely normal for her to be over at any time of the day or night. My Italian world was ever so ordinary to me and my friends at our Catholic elementary school. We lived in a great big Italian community where most of my friends either lived with their grandparents or their grandparents lived next door. It was not uncommon to have an Aunt or Uncle down the street. Families congregated together for every meal or after every meal for *coffee an'*. I could never figure out what *coffee an'* was. As I got older I realized it meant coffee and pastry, cookies or any other kind of dessert. The *coffee 'an* my family referred to every night was just a simple, non-committal phrase for "let's get together again for the fifth time this week to talk more about nothing and eat again." The *'an* was the way out of committing to what exactly we were eating for dessert, but we knew it was something! My grandparents

always hosted *coffee 'an* right after dinner. My Aunts and Uncles would walk or drive on over. I would get to play in the family room while the adults were talking. As soon as the lottery went on at 7:50pm, I had to go inside and get ready for bed.

Morning would come upon us again and my grandmother would come in at seven o'clock to help us all get ready for school. Every day I stepped out of the shower to find my Catholic school uniform pressed and ready to slip on for another boring day of school.

As I pulled up a chair to the kitchen table every day, my breakfast was being cooked by my mother and my brown bag lunch was prepared. Morning was not so bad. See, if I didn't feel like moving at a faster pace, my mother would let me miss the school bus and she would drive me to school. As I sat and ate my breakfast, my father would usually collect all of the trash from our bedrooms and bathrooms and tie it all up in the kitchen. My parents would exchange nonsense such as what is being served for dinner or which one was stopping at the bank. Then my father kissed my mother goodbye and left for work. These mornings were typical for our house. Everyone had their tasks and like a well-oiled machine, my mother and grandmother got me and my sisters off to school.

We attended our neighborhood elementary school, St. Bernadette's in New Haven, Connecticut. St. Bernadette's School holds eight classrooms of children, grade one through eight. I went through my Catholic schooling with the same students for eight years. My mother ran the hot lunch program. The program rotated each week from ziti, meatball subs to fried dough pizza. It was a very close-knit school and community. When the bell rang at three o'clock, we got on the bus to head home. Snacks were waiting when we got off the bus and my grandmother was waiting to collect our uniforms for a wash and iron. On this afternoon, my mother was frying

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chicken cutlets and my sisters, and I were doing our homework in front of the television.

I hear my father's car pull up in the driveway. I know dinner is close. My father always worked more than one job, but he always came home for dinner. We ate as a family, and then he cleaned the dishes, took out the trash and went back to work.

"Girls, dinner!!!" my mother shouts from the depths of her lungs. My sisters and I scrambled to the kitchen where dinner was served. Thank goodness it is Thursday because we always have chicken cutlets, mashed potatoes and salad. Chicken cutlets are my favorite meal. I sat right next to my father every night. I never talked much during dinner; my parents usually monopolized the conversation. My sisters and I just ate and listened to them.

I was the baby of the family. No one in my family ever had anything to talk to me about. I was hoping someone would have asked me about my first communion coming up. But I was usually not the source of the deepest conversation at the dinner table.

I learned later in life that I was always the last excused from the dinner table because my older sisters would sneak their food onto my plate, so it would appear as they finished their plates first. I was always stuck at the table last and then ordered to help clean up the dishes. Now I see how oblivious I was from way back then. I didn't even realize piles of extra food were snuck on my plate by my two older sisters.

My dad always stood and collected anything that needed to go out with the trash. He always took the trash to the basement and rolled out the trash cans faithfully on a Thursday night. I always knew taking out the trash was the man's job. My father, grandfather, uncles, and husband always took the trash out. It was automatic.

Somewhere along the path of my fun little childhood with my Italian family and respectful male role models, my life gradually changed significantly. Who would have thought one ex-husband and two big blue trash barrels would have such a significant impact on my life? Divorce crashed, burned and busted my bubble! The first day I had to roll my trash cans down the driveway after my husband left was the worst day I could remember back then. I just could not do it.

It was like a funeral procession but not because he was gone, just because I threw a fit that I had to take out the trash. Every trip reminded me that I was alone with no husband to take care of me and I was always being taken care of my whole life!

All these “man” things to be done around the house were not my job. After much time of soul searching and second husband searching, I realized not everything was ever going to be perfect, like my upbringing. I also was slapped with reality when I realized not all men were like the dads and husbands of when I was growing up.

We are in the twenty first century now and so much has changed. I am not a man hater. Actually, I am the biggest fan of love, I just have finally learned how to take out my own trash. I even brace myself every time when the man in front of me no longer holds the door. As soon as I became independent, I started to self -reflect, take my mental trash out and learn that I did not need to define myself by whether or not I had a man. I knew this revelation would have me embarking on a whole new journey in my thirties. I was smart, stable and full of good choices! Or so I thought?

Now decades later, my bags are packed for Killington, Vermont. I am all ready for my first winter on the slopes. So much has happened to me over the past few years. I am so young, and I just want to put my heartbreak behind me and start a new journey. I know my journey will never end with

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the same wonderful marriages I observed growing up, so I had to be happy with the hand I was dealt. My divorce, the endless search for a new man and my empty bank account just exhausted me. I was so ready to embrace life as a single adult, make new friends and shake men loose for the winter.

My friends and I are not your typical Killington, Vermont ski house renters. Renting a ski house seemed like a new exciting thing to do. We were tired of all the same, single things to do in New Haven, except for always enjoying the pizza. We wanted to get out of New Haven on the weekends. All of our friends were married and starting to get pregnant. As thirty something singles, there was nothing to do but interrupt our friend's happy homes on Friday or Saturday or go down to the city to strike up some fun. New Haven just kept serving up the same local bar events every weekend. If you are not a college student, there is not much to do for entertainment on the streets of Yale University. There was certainly no selection of men. The same men were out in the bars that were there before I was married! There was an occasional spotting of a guy who was newly divorced and back in the scene. Other than that, every weekend was basically a bad Groundhog Day. *Well enough*, I thought! My girls and I decided to learn how to snowboard, rented a ski house and rid ourselves of our New Haven trash. On that note, brace yourself for this series of "trash" tales as I chronicle more dates, men, mishaps and trips to the curb! If I keep taking the garbage in, it eventually must go out!



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