

Green Bananas –Part I

Esther pronounces that she had the best parents of all; although she allows an acknowledging smile that perhaps everyone maintains such an opinion. She sits on a wooden chair beside a rectangular kitchen table, the light of the window highlighting a stray hair coming out from her black head covering. The covering I notice is pinned in place with bobby pins and makes a pointed 'V' at the nape of her neck. The table has been pushed up against the wall, a narrow bench tucked in underneath. A spotless counter can be seen on the opposite wall. One bowl is carefully placed in the middle of the table containing its yeasty goodness and rising in the warmth of the room.

Esther is the 6th child in a family of fourteen including her parents. She recalls from childhood a modest house with a large yard, a barn, a tidy outhouse and other outbuildings. She used to wake up every morning at the crack of dawn to help milk the cows and to feed the chickens and pigs. Her brothers were busy feeding the horses and taking care of the heavier chores. The milk was poured into large cans and before the boys lifted them onto the low wagon, Esther's mom skimmed off the cream settling at the top. This made a tasty sauce for the home-made fettuccine noodles drying inside. The milk cans were then taken to the end of the driveway where the milk carrier picked them up and drove them to the village cheese factory. The cat and dog too were given their daily victuals before the family sat down for a breakfast of homemade bread, jam, perhaps a cold sausage and instant coffee. She fondly remembers joking and laughing with her siblings and parents. Her father always worked hard to provide for the family, selling the milk and farming various grains. *Always* there had been time for a laugh and an occasional treat from town.

Today, with her own family chattering in the next room, Esther talks about her first trip to the grocery store in central Ontario after an exhausting flight into Toronto. Every label on the shelf is foreign; the flour only available in small 2 kg packages instead of large sacks. And she had overcooked the potatoes last night. It had taken half the regular time so that she'd had to take them off the element long before the chicken was ready. She supposes that the altitude difference is to blame. And bananas in the store – green as grass!! Stores in her village sold ripened fruit so that the scent of sweet bananas and mangos met you at the door upon entering.

Everything in Ontario is strange and she feels like a child again, asking for assistance at each step. She busies herself inside but wistfully longs for a bigger yard so that she could sometimes work outside. What do people do with themselves in a small apartment, with neighbours 2 feet away, children constantly underfoot and her husband absent for the better part of the day? The whole affair is strange and unsettling. Grateful for the help from family, friends and Mennonite Community Services, she fingers the floral fabric of her skirt saying that she can only do what God helps her to do. Without God's help – she can't finish the sentence. There is nothing else to say except that without her faith in God she couldn't have made it this far. But with God at her side, things will turn out as they should. It is what gives her strength to persevere.