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**BODY:**

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I was still lingering over my son's cauldron of Halloween candies when I smashed headlong into the holiday season. I had contentedly continued to concentrate on my quota of candy corn when I was confronted with even sweeter distractions.

No sooner had my favorite coffee bar begun pushing gingerbread in the form of a latte than I discovered I could top off my own coffee with some whipped cream and pumpkin pie spice. Seemingly just minutes after I packed up my "scary Alice" costume, I found myself planning my next big event while maintaining my sugar high.

I don't have a traditional outfit for Thanksgiving like I do for Halloween. Every Oct. 31, I'm Alice-in-Wonderland's doppelganger - having purchased the smoke-stained blue dress which I believe she was wearing when she fell down the rabbit hole at the Elephant's Trunk fire sale a few years back. On Easter, I always wear a pink sweater with bunnies. For New Year's, I toast in a change wearing a sparkly gold sweater set.

Although my ensemble for today seems to switch every year, I know there is one thing that will never change. Sure, we sometimes tinker with our Thanksgiving menu, altering the stuffing recipe or concocting new potions with which to baste the bird, but the one thing that absolutely, positively, always remains the same is that I will burn the biscuits.

When my son was still quite young, the experts always said that it's important to establish traditions. Having been born to somewhat unconventional parents not exactly clinging to the "let's live in a colonial and buy a big gas-guzzling SUV" mind-set, he in some measure has had to find his own way. It's fine with me if he and his pals call me by my first name. I don't mind if he has pizza for breakfast and eggs for dinner, and when he said he wanted to get his hair spiked with tips in shades of red or blue, I offered to pay for his visit to the stylist.

When we cling to convention at this time of year, it's in our own singular way. For as surely as Santa perennially caps off the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade, I will burn the biscuits.

My salt-and-pepper haired great-grandmother inaugurated this inescapable convention. At 70-plus, she could make a dozen homemade pies in six different flavors with not a single soggy crust; she could roast a really hefty bird in her ancient oven without it emitting even a little smoke;

she could handle the appearance of four or six or so more people for the full sit-down, dress-up dinner on the day of just because their aunt's cousin broke her ankle the night before and their Thanksgiving plans at the last minute fell through.

As long as I knew her, she could accommodate whatever befell her, but the one thing she could never do was serve a Thanksgiving meal without burned biscuits.

I manage to recall that black-bottomed reminder of her every year. No matter how many different measures I take, lining the cookie sheet, using some spray, trying a glass pan or the dough from a can, I always burn the biscuits. The oven will be set too high, or the timer won't blow. The turkey will take up all the space, the rack will be too low. However hard I plan, that I will burn the biscuits is a fail-safe bet.

So every year the entire family finds itself giggling as everyone pulls the warm tops off the charred bottoms. It's always a lighthearted and anticipated moment in what sometimes can be a stress-filled day. Everyone in my bloodline always knows to wonder, will she burn the biscuits?

I knew the tradition would irredeemably live on when, a few years back, we invited a young cousin to join us. Our Thanksgiving dinners being something of a group effort, Cousin Bubba was asked to manage a single task: oversee the biscuits.

No matter that he was then attending the Culinary Institute in Hyde Park or that he was already fairly experienced in the kitchen. No matter that he didn't hesitate to expound on the chemistry of our cooking. Sure, he fretted over my affinity for Crisco and disagreed with my findings of its aptness in pies and cupcake icing. Absolutely, he taught us all sorts of tricks showing that he was putting his education to good use. But, true to form, despite our constant reminders and his frequent checking, no matter how fast his vegetable slicing skills or impressive his sauces, despite a semester of pastry class, Cousin Bubba burned the biscuits.

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