

The Great Refrigerator Massacre

“Order, order” cried the bottle of Ranch Dressing. “This emergency meeting of the Condiment Committee must come to order!” With this began one of the most notorious incidents in the life of the refrigerator. The Ranch Dressing as the oldest expired item was Chairperson. The Committee, comprised of the older, wiser and mostly expired products ran the show and maintained order amongst the groceries. Now a situation unlike anything she had faced before required her utmost tact and skill. In the three years since her expiry date in June 2009, it had been relatively quiet. Life had seemed good tucked away out of sight in the bottom bin of the refrigerator door behind a half bottle of teriyaki sauce. This looming crisis threatened to ruin her placid existence.

That afternoon a visitor had opened the door and removed a month old partially used half gallon of milk. To the milks disgust the stranger opened its top and sniffed the contents. “Can you imagine” the milk said to a half eaten package of turkey breast, “he sniffed me and grimaced. These people can be so vulgar”. It was what the visitor did next that really caught the milks attention. He called out to a person named Harriett and announced that the milk had gone bad and he would pop out and get some more. Then the milk, without being in the freezer, froze with what he heard next. The stranger asked Harriet that if she didn’t mind he would clean out the refrigerator in the morning. When the milk passed this on to a recently expired carton of eggs, the word was out. There is no shutting up a dozen frightened eggs when they start to babble. To quell the growing unease the Condiment Committee decided it had to do something. They needed a plan of action.

The sole half- eaten survivor of a bottle of dill pickles led off. “I am not worried; we pickles never expire, but what about the others who are past their prime”? “That’s right” chimed in the oldest of the two mayonnaise bottles “what is going to happen to us”? A murmur of agreement rose from amongst the

occupants of the shelves and door bins. With some difficulty, the Chairperson got the meeting under control and attempted to allay everyone's fears.

She reminded the committee that over the years many people had looked in the refrigerator and not taken action. Some had even said they were going to clean it out but nothing happened. Look at her, still here after three years. A bottle of stale Tonic Water piped up, "that is OK for you to say, you are on the door. No one ever looks on the door. It's us, on the shelves that have the most to lose, we are the first things someone sees when they open the door." With this comment, the noise level started to rise again. Realizing she needed a clincher the Chairperson decided to invoke the real elders, the inhabitants of the freezer. "Friends, think of the freezer, some occupants have been there since before anyone can remember. Many of them predate me. Their coating of ice and frost makes it almost impossible to know what they are and how long they have been there. Please be calm, everything will be fine." This seemed to do the trick, the groceries settled down, calm returned and everyone went about their business. The immediate crisis appeared to have passed.

Nonetheless, it was a night of unease for many of the inhabitants. Everyone considered their expiry date and how old they would have to be to survive if the axe fell. The recently expired dozen eggs felt they were still fine. A plastic container of half-eaten spinach salad was only two weeks old and still mostly green. Picking out the wilted pieces might allow the remainder to hang on a little longer. A couple of Styrofoam containers with take-out food in them were in a cocky mood. They recalled many stories of food being microwaved back into edibility and felt they had a few days left in them. The Ranch Dressing however was not so confident. For the first time she was genuinely worried. She was the oldest inhabitant in the refrigerator and if the stranger was as serious as he sounded, she might not survive.

In the morning, tension was high and everyone on edge. When the door opened a palpable sense of dread overtook the inhabitants. After the visitor took out the new milk and replaced it there was a

collective sigh of relief. The Chairperson let out her breath. Had she been awake all night worrying about nothing? The calm was not to last.

At mid-morning, the door opened again. The visitor was back and this time it was clear a snack was not what he had in mind. Beside him on the floor, armed with a fresh liner bag sat the kitchen garbage can. He immediately started poking around the shelves examining everything, reading labels, looking for expiry information. First out and down the sink went the half gallon of expired milk. Next, with no attempt at salvage, the container of spinach salad went into the can. A gasp rose from the inhabitants. What a waste, surely another meal or two remained in the container. At the back of the lower shelf, two eggs found hiding in a small container with an unreadable expiry date joined the spinach. Then in rapid succession, the now not so cocky Styrofoam containers, the half- eaten turkey breast and the two mayonnaise bottles landed in the can with a loud clink. Right behind them, a package of hot dogs bought for the first of July and past their best by date. Some food items without expiry dates also got the toss. Apparently, just the appearance of hanging out in the refrigerator with little chance of use seemed to invite removal.

Slowly the shelves emptied. The re-arranged contents for the first time in many months were fully visible. Although Harriett told the visitor she was out of beer he happily discovered six bottles of various brands hidden amongst the lower shelves. The carnage was dreadful and the cries coming from the garbage can were upsetting. With a shudder, the containers in the door bins realized they were next. Panic seized the door inhabitants as the visitor grabbed the Chairperson. The visitor called out, "Harriett, here is a bottle of salad dressing over three years old. I think it takes the prize as the oldest." With that, he unceremoniously tossed the Ranch Dressing into the can. Her worst fears realized she joined the rest of her comrades destined for the dump.

As predicted, the dozen eggs survived because they had only just expired. Not so fortunate, several packets of soy sauce, a number of bottles of dressings and other sauces joined the Ranch Dressing. An old friend, a bottle of homemade jam in a Mason jar having long lost any resemblance to what type of jam it was, landed beside her. Looking around she realized that most of the Condiment Committee had met her fate. There was nothing left to do but say hurried farewells. Slowly the can filled. The can liner was so heavy lifting it meant it was in danger of splitting and spilling the contents.

Then it was over. With the door closed, the survivors sighed with relief. The contents of the refrigerator were decimated. For the first time in years, the interior was neat, full of open space and light. Truth be known, some of the contents secretly liked the change; they could finally see their fellow inhabitants. A few faint moans and cries heard emanating from the garbage reminded the survivors just how narrow their escape had been.

Then the unthinkable occurred; the visitor opened the freezer door. This was too much. The freezer inhabitants were the elders, the holders of tradition and knowledge. If they were lost then it would truly be the end of an era. Suddenly a reprieve, the person called Harriett decided to spare the freezer for now. It would have to wait for another day. Everything was frozen she said, nothing would go bad and it was too much work to try to figure out what everything was.

With that came the final act. The stranger picked up the very full garbage can and headed for the garage. The survivors heard the crash as he dumped the can into the curbside bin. The heart wrenching sounds of the recent inhabitants heading for their final moments was too much to bear. The half bottle of no expiry teriyaki sauce called for a minute of silence in memory of their dear, recently departed friends. Life goes on though even in a refrigerator. The survivors chose a new Condiment Committee with the half-eaten dill pickle unanimously selected as the new Chairperson.