

An Easter Reflection...

By Kimberly Anastas

My brother and I just stood there, our mouths open, looking very confused. How could this have possibly happened? How did our Easter baskets, filled with chocolate eggs, marshmallow peeps and jelly beans appear in our living room?

I was ten years old. My brother John was eight years old. Neither of us believed in Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny. We knew that Mom and Dad were responsible for the chocolate bunnies in our Easter baskets and the colognes and toys in our Christmas stockings. Our sister, however, still believed in all that was magical--as any six-year-old should.

I was devastated when I learned (at age six) of the secrets adults keep to make children happy. John was embarrassed when he found out; he was seven. We both vowed, however, that Michelle, our little sister, would believe in the fantasies of Santa, Peter Cottontail and the Tooth Fairy for as long as possible.

This particular Easter weekend, when I was 10 years old, was a very warm one. Holy Saturday was very sunny and we were very excited to have a five-day vacation from school. John and I had been enjoying the unusually warm weather by playing baseball and kickball and snatching samples of Mom's nut rolls all day.

We started to get on each others' nerves. (Don't all brothers and sisters?). We began to fight. We argued; we name-called. We even got in a few good smacks at each other. The arguing went on all day. Mom kept her patience quite well; she continued cooking and baking.

That evening when it was time for Mom to unwind, she really let us have it. She yelled and told us that she'd had enough of our "petty fighting." She warned us to behave or else we'd be sorry. Being the little brats we could so often be, John and I giggled it off and ran outside to continue our shouting matches because my mom's bark was often bigger than her bite.

The next morning Michelle excitedly nudged my shoulder until I woke up. "Kimmy, let's go see what the Easter Bunny brought us!", she squealed, beaming with so much excitement that I thought she would cry. It was barely light outside. I was so tired that I almost screamed at her for waking me so early. But when I saw the glittering smile on that little girl's adorable face, I had to be excited for her.

I slowly dragged myself out of bed. Michelle grabbed my hand and skipped to the door. I staggered behind. Before entering the hall to go downstairs, Michelle said, her big brown eyes sincerely staring at me, "you can have all my peanut butter eggs." I would do almost anything for peanut butter eggs and suddenly I shared in my sister's excitement to hurry down the stairs.

But when we entered the living room, there were no baskets to be found. Michelle's eyes looked like two muddy pools. Tears streaked her cheeks like raindrops sliding down bedroom windows.

"Don't cry. Maybe they're in the playroom," I desperately told my sister. We ran through the dining room, through the kitchen, to the place most people call a gameroom. No baskets.

Michelle sobbed. I felt helpless. I immediately knew what had happened. I told my sister to continue searching for the baskets and I zoomed through the house and up the stairs, only touching every other one, to John's bedroom.

"Wake up!" I shouted. "Wake up!"

He rolled over, looked at me like a had three eyes, and wined, "What? I'm sleeping."

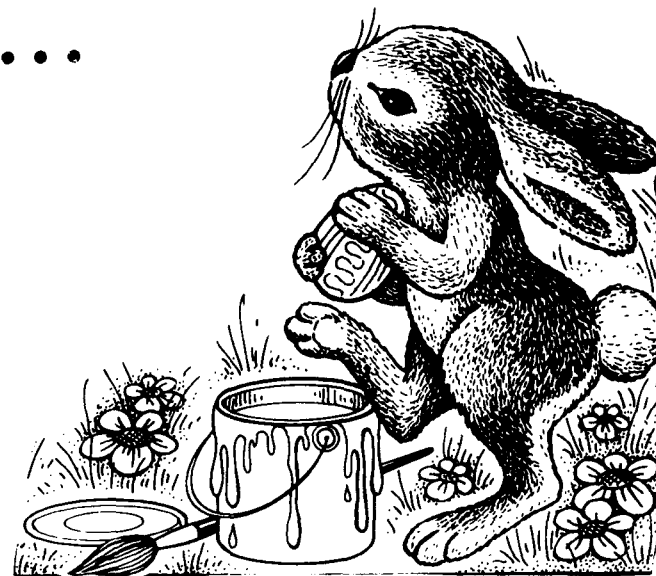
"Not any more," I grumbled. "Mom didn't put out any Easter baskets and Michelle is downstairs crying very hard. It's your fault," I accused.

"Why is it my fault?" he asked, rubbing his eyes and yawning.

"Because you were bad yesterday and Mom warned you that you would be sorry if you didn't behave," I exclaimed.

"You were bad, not me," John insisted.

Our whispered accusations turned into another shouting match. Dad



came into John's room to see what was going on. When we saw our father standing in the doorway, we immediately shut up and stared at his very stern-looking face. (Dad has very thin lips and sparkling brown eyes just like Michelle's--his face even looked like it was smiling when he was sleeping, so when he looked mad, we didn't know how to react.)

"Your mother is downstairs with Michelle. I hope you two are proud of yourselves," he said quietly. "Thanks to your fighting and carrying on, your sister gets punished too," he said a little louder.

I looked at my brother. His pouting lips and teary eyes were a pathetic sight. "But why did Michelle get punished? She didn't do anything," I nervously said.

"Maybe you'll learn that life's no picnic and your misbehavior affects everyone. . . .blah blah blah. . . .yak yak yak. . . ."

My dad was (and still is) great for getting on a soapbox and philosophizing. As he rambled, I thought of my sister's quivering bottom lip and her shaking shoulders. I thought we broke her heart. I wiped my cheeks with the back of my hand. John was crying now too. I lifted my head. My dad was silent. (I didn't know when he ended his speech.)

"What do you have to say for yourselves?" His words echoed in my ears for what seemed like forever. But seconds later, I answered, "I'm sorry." John repeated it: "I'm sorry."

"What good does being sorry do?" my father yelled. He continued, "Does sorry make your sister feel better?"

"We'll make it up to her," I said. "Yea. We'll say sorry to her and tell her it's our fault," John added.

Dad just walked away, not saying a word.

It was a very long, silent morning. Finally 10:45 arrived--time to pile into the car to go to 11:00 a.m. mass. John and I didn't even argue about who sat in the middle on the hump. I did so I could sit next to my sister.

Michelle's tears were silent now. They just trickled down her cheeks. Every once in a while she sniffled.

"Don't cry, Michelle," John said.

"Shut up, she can cry if she wants to. She's hurting." I couldn't keep my big mouth shut. The arguing began.

As my brother and I tossed around the blame, my mother went into the house for her church envelopes. Seconds later, my father warned us to be quiet. His face was the shade of an apple. We clammed up quickly. Mom got in the car. We didn't realize she had ever been gone.

In church the choir ladies oooed and awwed at our new outfits and pinched our cheeks. Not one of us felt like dealing with this fussiness. We just wanted to go home and mope. We stayed after church a long time while Mom and Dad chatted with the songbirds. I knew we couldn't avoid it:

"Oh, honey, what did the Easter Bunny bring you?" asked Mrs. Newmeyer.

I saw a gush of fluid protrude from my sister's eyes. Mom hugged her and they left.

"Nothing," I replied.

John and I walked out of the church and joined Mom and Michelle in the green Plymouth. After explaining his children's bad behavior to the nosy choir members, my dad joined us in the car.

Mom and Dad were awfully happy for some reason. I knew it was because they were mean and were so glad to punish us.

After parking in front of our home, Michelle announced that she had a belly ache and was going to sleep. John and I dragged our feet and were the last ones in the door.

"Aaaaah! Kimmy! John! Come here--look!" Michelle's piercing voice screamed.

John and I just stood there not knowing what to do or say. Michelle hugged my mom and my dad then she said, "See, you guys, the Easter Bunny forgives you. He loves everyone." She then walked to her basket, picked up the peanut butter eggs and handed them to me.

