

The Day of the Great Sea Turtle Feast

By Betty Arzt

One day when my father came from the seashore, he brought home a huge sea turtle. It was so big that he had to borrow a wheelbarrow from a neighbor in order to carry it from his boat. Word soon got around the neighborhood and everyone wanted to see it.

We lived in a mixed neighborhood and everyone knew that my mother was a friendly, openhearted person who welcomed every one regardless of status or color so they all came to see the turtle. My father told them that if someone would help him to butcher it, there would be enough meat for anyone who wanted some. Several of the men volunteered. I do not remember exactly how they did it because I could not stand to watch them kill it, but they soon had it open and were cutting up and dividing the meat.

People were standing around talking and laughing and it seemed like a big party to me. The neighbors were coming and going with their pots and pans. The women were discussing different ways to cook the meat and I remember someone saying that turtle meat was somewhat strange because some of it tasted like fish, some like chicken and some like pork.

The men took the shell and entrails to the bayou, dumped them, and after more visiting the neighbors started drifting home with their portions. Some of the children stayed to play games such as hide and seek, hop scotch and merry go round. For merry go round we all joined hands and danced around in a circle, singing this little ditty,

*'All around the merry go round; the monkey chased the weasel,
see how fast the monkey goes,
plop goes the weasel'*

(On plop we'd all fall down, then on to the next verse)

*'A nickel for a spool of thread, a nickel for a needle,
that's how fast the money goes, plop goes the weasel'.*

A silly game, but we enjoyed it with all of the laughing and giggling. Sometimes I can almost feel that light-hearted again when I think of those times.

My dad told the kids that after supper, he was going to make a bon-fire and tell stories

and if they wanted to, they could join us. Of course, they were delighted and ran home to ask their parents if they could come.

My mother made a delicious stew with our portion of the sea turtle, which to me did taste like chicken, and which we all enjoyed very much. Afterwards we gathered some dead wood and branches from a nearby woods and my dad made a bon-fire. He sprinkled some Bee Brand powder on the fire to keep away the mosquitoes. Then the neighborhood kids and we sat around the fire and my dad told us some wonderful stories about castles, dragons, princes and such. All together, it was a very special day.

After all of these years I still get a warm, wonderful feeling when I remember that exciting, taste good, feel good, day