

The Green Pea Scholarship

“Why I Like Green Peas”

By

Gwendolyn S. Norman

It always seems to surprise people when I say I like green peas, but the cute little legumes have been a favorite all of my life. The reason for my romance with the tiny spheres goes back to my early childhood, and this is a story I am happy to tell.

Green peas have three major endearing qualities, and the first is their association with my fantasy life. My parents were pretty strict about which television shows my sister and I could watch as children, but they could not control the commercials that accompanied their program selections. As one might expect, though, commercials for programs that positively stimulated the minds of tots were often positive and appealed to youth. A special series of commercials that caught my attention, and captured my imagination, were the ones that featured the Jolly Green Giant. He was a tall, imposing figure, but he was so kind to the little character called “Sprout,” that I knew he must be a really good guy. His “ho, ho, ho” did not scare me, but actually reminded me of another big fellow I REALLY liked, Santa Claus! Surely, if all I had to do to make this gentle giant happy was to eat his peas, then that was the least I could do. I knew how Jack, of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, had a terrible run-in with a not-so-friendly giant, but I wanted to have relationship with a kindly one. The Jolly Green Giant fit that bill.

Second, not only was I having an imaginary relationship with animated flora, but peas performed several different roles at the dinner table. They interested me because they started off as hard little uncooked balls, inside a shell, but when cooked, became soft and spry little characters. To me, they were green and vegetable-like on the outside, but had the texture of mashed potatoes on the inside. They would roll around on my plate, often playfully evading my fork, but had the uncanny ability to hide under other foods, giving the impression, particularly to my mother, that I had eaten all my peas. Now, “eating all of your peas,” was an important rite of passage in my home, allowing the children at the table to cross over into the world of desserts. Thus peas offered dinner time entertainment, an interesting taste sensation, and were my ticket to home baked pies, cakes and cookies!

Third, I have always been a champion of the underdog, and green peas just never seem to get any respect. Folk try to dress them up in cream sauces, mush them up into soups, throw them into salads, and such, but one rarely hears someone say, “I can’t wait to get home, we’re having green peas for dinner!” While they often symbolize the plain, the ordinary, the uninspired vegetable selection of the day, I think they deserve the recognition of culinary artists throughout the world. They are small, colorful, versatile, nutritious, flavorful (if not overcooked) and economical. What more could a master chef want?

So my love of green peas began early, spurred on by my affection for a giant, then enhanced by the important role they played at dinnertime in my home, and finally entrenched when I realized they needed someone like me to champion their cause. If green peas could talk, as I have sometimes fancied they could, I believe they would thank me for recognizing how special they really are!