

The Curator Says... In “The Blue-Trimmed-in-White Cream Pitcher,” Virginia Edwards reveals the depth of emotion sometimes attached to small objects. Following her mother’s death, the author returns home, touching the familiar objects she has known since childhood. The memories come flooding back; each piece tells its own story.

The Blue-Trimmed-in-White Cream Pitcher

Virginia Mitchell Edwards

The day after the funeral, my sister-in-law Alice and I went to Mother’s house to look over her things. “Now, Virginia,” she said, “you take whatever you want. You are the only daughter and your mother would want her things to go to you.”

“But Alice,” I moaned, “I live in Ohio; I’m flying back home. I can’t take Mama’s things. Besides, I don’t need anything!” We walked through the quiet house. Such stillness. So foreign to my memories. I never knew the house to be so quiet, so empty, so without Mama! I remembered getting off the yellow school bus that Mr. Campbell would bring up the long drive, almost to the front door, and my call as I came in the door: “Mama?” She was always there.

I couldn’t touch a thing. It was all Mama’s—her things—just as she had left them by her sudden, unexpected departure. We walked down the wide, almost empty hall which once had housed living and dining rooms separated by large, white columns, but that was eons ago when we first moved into the house and Grandmother Neal and Calvin’s family lived with us. Almost every room opened off that hall, and even though Daddy had had the house leveled and new underpinnings constructed, the hall floor still popped and creaked when my nephews ran and played inside or Daddy, with his long, heavy strides, came in the front door like the proverbial tornado. As he rushed in, he was usually calling in his hurried, breathless way, “Nig! Nig!” (I still wonder where that nickname came from) or “Lena Mae! Lena Mae! I need you!” I remembered that Calvin claimed he had heard Daddy’s heavy footsteps passing through the hall several weeks after he had been buried in the Greenwood Cemetery some seven years earlier. All that was lacking was his voice calling his Nig.

Alice and I went into each room in the house, pausing and looking and oftentimes, picking things up and putting them back down. We saved the kitchen and dining rooms for last. More than any place in or out of the house, the kitchen was Mama’s place. But now the large, light-filled kitchen seemed unusually bare. The table was covered in the usual oilcloth, probably a new one since I had visited last, with salt and pepper shakers the only centerpiece. I opened each cabinet. They were neatly filled with mixed sets of dishes and glasses. I started to ask Alice about the butter presses and biscuit bowl but remembered that Mama had told me about the boarder to whom she had rented a room, and how he had persuaded her to sell him some old stuff, “things he called antiques,” to take back to Texas with him to sell in his junk shop. He probably paid her pittance for the antiques. In the

bottom drawer of the stove were her black iron skillet and cookie sheets. Did I get the iron stick cornbread pan then or had she already given it to me?

The last room was filled with the used dining room suite Mama and Daddy had bought when they were finally able to buy a home of their own...this house, the big house, we called it. I was starting ninth grade and finally had a room of my own, and we had a dining room to use for special occasions. When my husband and I started dating, he would come home from church with me for Sunday dinner—usually fried chicken, mashed potatoes, peas or butterbeans, and her wonderful banana pudding or chocolate pie.

I stopped in front of the china cabinet that was filled with a partial set of glasses – those with the gold rim—that Mother used for those Sunday dinners. There were the glass pickle dishes from Woolworth's that I had bought her for a quarter apiece for Christmas presents. "Take it!" Alice would say every time I picked up an item.

I opened the bottom of the cabinet, and said, "Oh, she still has the blue dishes I bought her." "Take them," Alice said emphatically.

Mother never had a set of China. We always used the ordinary mismatched dishes, but when I was in high school and got my first job working in a ladies' dress shop on Saturdays, I had bought Mother a set of dishes for Christmas. They were a pretty sky blue—always my favorite color—trimmed in white. On a Saturday, I had seen them in the window of Kellogg's Hardware Store on my way to grab a hamburger for lunch. I thought about them all afternoon while helping ladies try on dresses and shoes, and had gone back to Kellogg's on my supper break and put them on layaway. I don't remember how much they were or how much I paid down, but they couldn't have cost very much because I paid a dollar a week and finished paying for them by Christmas.

"I bought them twenty years ago," I told Alice. Some of the pieces had gotten broken, but she still kept them as her best dishes. "I'll take this," I told Alice as I picked up the shiny blue-trimmed-in-white cream pitcher. "It still looks brand new."

I got a few other things from Mama's house—some delicate lacy crochet pieces made by Mama and Grandmother, the few pieces of jewelry she had including the pearl pin my husband had brought her from his Southeast Asia tour, and the hand-painted pin I had just sent her for Mother's Day two weeks earlier. One day I'll pass the Woolworth pickle dishes and those pins on to my daughters and granddaughters. My son likes cornbread so perhaps he'll like the iron cornbread stick pan. But who will want the small, sky-blue-trimmed-in-white creamer? It has no value except the memories of a sixteen-year-old girl buying her mama a set of dishes by paying a dollar down and a dollar a week from her five-dollar-a-Saturday paycheck made working in a dress shop.

Virginia Edwards says... Born and raised in West Point, Mississippi, Virginia Mitchell Edwards moved to Auburn when her husband, Ollie, retired from the Air Force in 1977. She had received her degree in English Education from Wright State University while they were living in

Dayton, Ohio. She was a stay-at-home Air Force wife and mom until they moved to Alabama, where she then taught junior high and high school English for twenty years. She received her M.Ed. while teaching, especially enjoying a Sun Belt Writing institute, where she found encouragement in her lifelong hobby of writing. In retirement, she enjoys a full life with her family—especially her grandchildren, her Bible study classes, genealogy, gardening, AU sports, traveling when she can pry Ollie away from home, and writing her life.