

The Breakfast Party

by

Mary Jane Manierre Foote

2005

Through the years many have written about the *Party*. In Victorian days I'm sure it was the *Tea Party*, but now, in our advanced stage of sophisticated social development the *Cocktail* or *Dinner Party* are the thing. My yarn is different. Oh rare and treasured attribute, it is about the *Breakfast Party*.

My Mother was a unique and charming woman. At one stage of her social career she had a penchant for giving breakfast parties. This was partly because they were less expensive than dinner parties, and since it was in the depths of the Depression, that quality was key.

Anyway, they were delightful, and Mother always served grapefruit halves, each with a maraschino cherry in its center, along with waffles and sausages.

She operated one waffle iron, while Daddy, at the other end of the table, manned the other. A bewildered maid scurried around the long oval table passing waffles, waffles, waffles.

As everyone was smiling and talking, thinking what a charming idea this was, suddenly a muffled shout floated in from the living room. There was a bay at the far end, and a man's face was unceremoniously gaping through the curtains at the assembled throng, tapping and mumbling loudly. Mother, distracted, said to my nineteen-year old brother, "George, run and see what that rude man wants." A moment later George announced that according to our friend of the window, the house was afire. "Well," said Mother, "that's a bore! Please run upstairs, dear, and see whether he knows what he's talking about."

- A view from the kitchen door toward the front window, photographed a few years earlier.



So off George went, bounding up three flights of stairs. In the meantime, waffles were coming up as usual and Mother's command of the situation kept her guests in line. Finally, George returned, reeking of smoke, with his napkin fairly singed from the flames. In an off-stage whisper Mother ordered him to call the fire department.

My sister Sukey excused herself to look for the engines' arrival. Inside of two minutes two great giants pulled up in front.

The party was perking along nicely, the conversation flitting from poetry to music to art, and almost no one heard the firemen roar in and take over the front staircase. Apparently they diagnosed the problem immediately, and in no time the house was surrounded by neighbors gathering to watch.

- Mary Jane in 1934, fourteen years old.



However, inside, at the very heart of things, The Breakfast Party went on. “Won’t you have another waffle, Carrie dear,” said my mother. “Thank you no, Katharine, I really think I’ve had enough.”

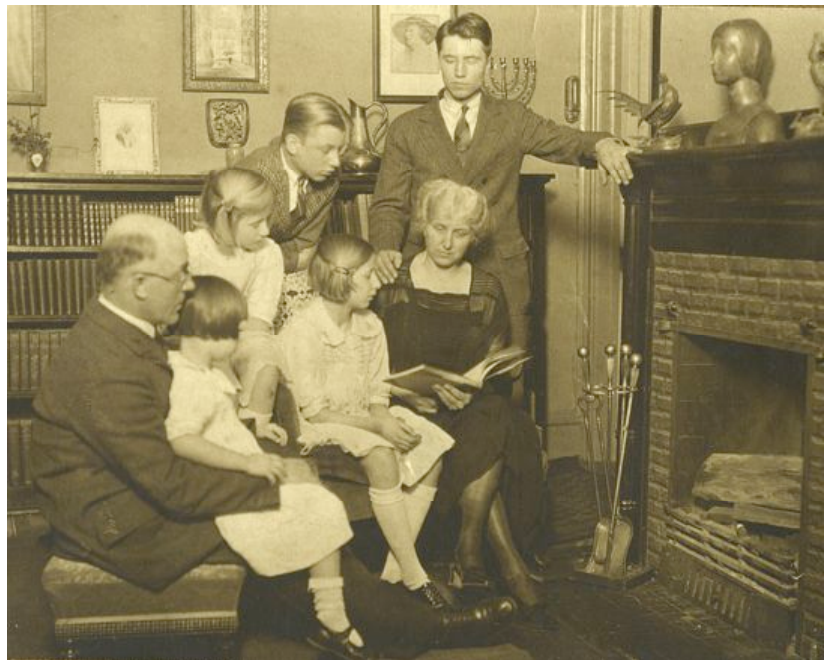
By this time, the firemen were coming down with hoses, tarpaulins and all to protect the lower floors.

My brother George, being an irresponsible soul, had recently been taken in hand by Daddy, and given the job of firing our coal-powered furnace. George’s theory was that if he filled the furnace to its very top with coal, he could be released for a few days from tending to that bothersome chore.

Like many theories, it just didn’t work, for the chimney became overheated, and a fire started in the maid’s upstairs room, spread to the roof, etc., etc. The head fireman finally braved the sanctity of Mother’s dining room and timidly asked if he could please cover the dining room with tarpaulins.

“Well,” in Mother’s vernacular, “What a bother! But no matter,” she added brightly, “Come on, let us move to the kitchen.” So the entourage of family, guests, maid, waffle irons, and the indomitable hostess stumbled into the kitchen. Business as usual, but by this time, friends were beginning to dribble in on their way home from church to offer condolences about the tragedy.

- The Manierre family posed for this portrait a few years earlier in 1925. Mary Jane sits on her father George’s lap. Behind them sit Sukey (Suzanne) and Ginny (Virginia). George IV and Sam stand, as Katharine shows them a book.



“Katharine, dear,” they would say, “please come to our house for dinner – all of you,” and to their hurt surprise, Mother would wave them graciously to a seat and offer a plate of waffles. By this time the original guests had finally realized that this fire was the real McCoy, and were no longer completely absorbed in Mother’s repartee or her waffles.

The party was nearly over around the time the firemen were squirting the downstairs windows, and with some agility, our guests departed from the back porch.

Daddy, who was as gifted in emergencies as Mother, then had a chance to doff his hosting job and ran to get his camera. The operatic qualities of this situation must be on film. So, he rushed across the street to get some corking shots of the firemen’s finale. Trucks, hoses, people on the fence, melting snowmen in the back yard, all in the movies. What fun! Now we could always enjoy our fire.

Actually, it all worked out for the best as the insurance paid for everything including a new window in Mother’s room. We had lots of fun and best of all Mother had a most unique Breakfast Party in town.