

Easter hugs to my five kids and their families.

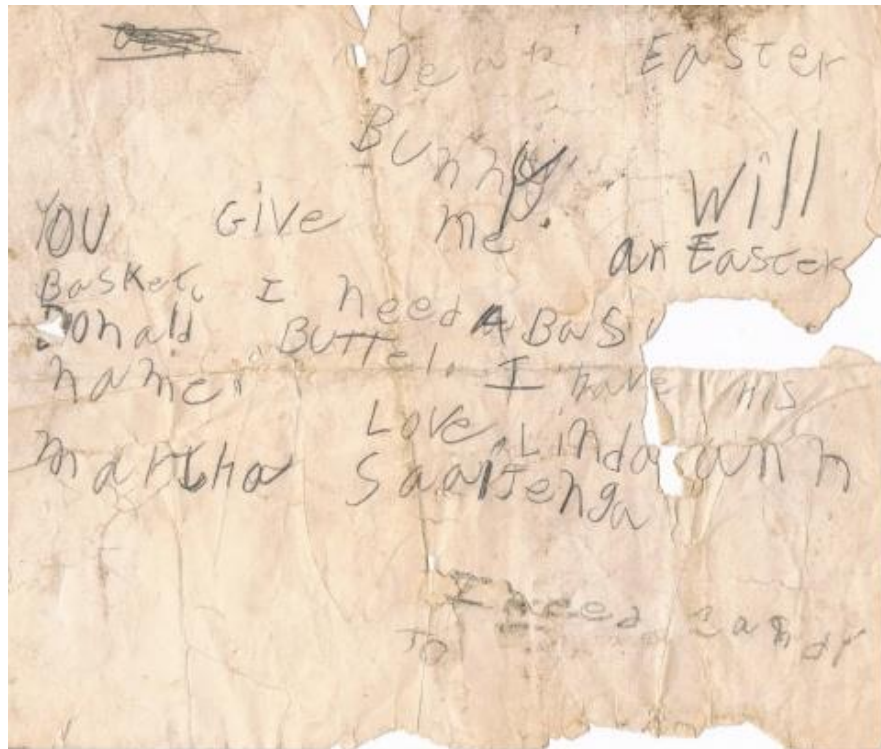
Happy Easter!

Today is my 64th Easter Sunday. Despite clouds and rain, the world is aglow with color and brightness. Azaleas, lilacs, tulips, dogwoods, redbuds, and a plethora of other flowers are in full bloom, a normal Virginia spring day. As I write this, I am sitting in Riverwalk Park in Lynchburg's Lower Basin alongside the sparkling James River. Jim is out patrolling the railroad tracks with his camera but my mind is in its frequent "free-wheeling mode".

Easter was such fun when I was a little kid. OF COURSE! the bunny came every year with a pretty basket of "loot". I hoarded all of my baskets from other years and placed them out on the old dilapidated porch on the east side of the house, in hopes that the bunny would bring even more goodies if he saw a bunch of empty nests. What he did was spread out the loot into each basket. Dad did not appreciate hard boiled eggs so that rabbit always brought raw eggs in a variety of bright colors.....and you best not drop one of them or risk egg yolks all over your clothes and toys! Mom was able to recycle those pretty eggs into cookies, cakes, and fried eggs the next week.

My baskets didn't contain very much candy. Mostly, the loot consisted of a few barrettes, a new box of Crayons, a couple of pairs of anklets, and maybe a couple of new dresses for my dolls. Most years there were pictures taken of me, in my new dress, and all those baskets. Oh, yes, I had a new dress every spring. My parents worked hard for their money but Mom always found fabric to sew something new and pretty for me.

One summer, long after Easter, Mom found a water-soaked note among the flowers. It was a letter I had written to the bunny that past spring. When I disassembled my childhood home, many years later after my parents were both gone, I found it saved in a box of Mom's "treasures". The gist of the note was that we had drawn names in school and I was drumming up a nice basket of goodies for the name I had drawn, neighbor Donald Buttell. You will note, at the bottom of the letter, I was angling for candy for myself too. *I still have that note pictured below:*



After the bunny hopped off into the sunset of my imagination, I was allowed to color those raw eggs each year. It was such fun and I used to badger Mom into letting me color WAY more eggs than she could use for baking in the near future. She soon discovered that she could poke holes in both ends of a raw egg and remove the contents, then freeze it for future use. I was a happy camper! The trick was keeping the dye from filling up the empty eggs. Once those eggs were colored, I still had all those marvelous cups full of bright colored dyes. Then the fun began in earnest. I found a paint brush and painted the sidewalks, the dog, any unsuspecting cat who came near, the grass, and JUST ONCE the side of Dad's garage.



After a day or two of artistic abandon, my stash of dye mysteriously disappeared. By the way, note the holes in the knees of those hated long brown cotton stockings in the picture above.

As mentioned before, I always got a pretty new dress. The prettiest one I remember came when I was about 12 or 13. I woke one beautiful Easter morning to see a gauzy white and lavender creation hanging in my bedroom window. The glorious Illinois sunrise was spotlighting that dress, the white lace curtains, and the big pot of lush green shamrocks. I can still picture it in my mind today! That's my pretty dress and my dog Mikela Jane below:



Time went into fast-forward and soon I became a mom myself. You kids were only too happy to cooperate with the “bunny myth”.



Now there were 5 baskets to fill. The rabbit's financial condition had improved a bit by then so he could afford more candy and trinkets for you. Well I remember all the baskets lined up on the enclosed south porch on Florence Road. Grampa and Gramma Faist used to contribute money to the cause, so, in addition to the usual candy and toys, each nest contained a pair of bright tennis shoes for summer. Since you all wore almost the same size shoe, each pair was distinctive so we could tell which pair belonged to which kid. And that bunny always left more loot at Grampa and Gramma Saajenga's house so you were in great shape. At their house the bunny brought new clothes, hand-crocheted toys, and non-edible eggs decorated with quilling and decoupage. Some of those eggs still survive. *The picture below shows Granddaughter Abby with some of the eggs.*



Baileyville, German Valley, and Forreton school districts did not schedule their Easter Vacations with parents in mind. You were usually home from school the week BEFORE Easter, which made the job of coloring eggs on the sly more difficult. One thing the bunny did, though, was bring a few pieces of candy for each of you every morning that week you were home. The reason for this was to put teeth into the threat, "You kids better behave. The bunny might be watching." You were model children until Easter Sunday. (Sometimes the bunny also left a nest of colored eggs at various times of the year. This ruse made 5 little kids more inclined to eat more eggs ---- and it didn't exactly hurt a mom's desire for better-behaved kids.)

Then you kids got older and the bunny's influence evaporated. I've written earlier about Larry and Randy's new-found skills of writing messages on uncolored eggs with white Crayons. The grandparents' embarrassed looks when the basket of eggs

was passed at Easter dinner made it clear that those two boys would forever have their Crayons confiscated. It was NOT a “Kodak Moment.”

When Sandi attended Highland College (in 1985) in Freeport, she was the Easter Bunny for an egg hunt for the kids in the community. Here she is in costume:



But today is April 16, 2006, and it is time to store this mom’s memories for another season. Cindy is baking ham today and the little ones in that household will be up to their ears in toys and chocolate bunnies. We need to “go see”. Jim’s and my Easter officially began last weekend in Atlanta at the Passion Play. This morning’s church service was inspirational with soul-lifting music so we are coasting along with happy and thankful hearts. We hope each of you has found the same peace. Happy Easter.