

# Tongue in Cheek: The Favorite Aunt

Every gay man always has a favorite aunt. We seem to be genetically predisposed to it. Even if we don't have one, we'll make one up – an older friend will do just fine. Some of us have both – my boyfriend has an actual aunt who lives in another state and a friend-from-growing-up “aunt,” whom he'll still take on outings. In any case, if you're a gay man, you probably have one. In my family, it's my Aunt Barbara.

When I was growing up, going to her house was always a welcome escape. Compared to my own everything-must-be-in-place home (my mother, I am convinced, was once a member of Housecleaning Youth), my aunt's house was like stepping through the looking glass. No, I never actually saw a talking rabbit – but you



**kevin  
isom**

dog, who was after my uncle's newspaper. There was always a story.

We shared a love of plants. I was a budding horticulturist, and the greatest praise I had from my aunt was an assertion that my thumb, like the goldfish water, was green. I could root anything. She would give me an African vio-

never admit to it herself. She delighted in telling the story of her own aunt – because it could never be, say HER, who actually said such things – who was faced with an obscene caller night after night. Finally, annoyed and determined, the woman responded to the obscene caller with, “Well, dear, I beat my meat, too. I use a good meat tenderizer hammer, and I pound that bleeding, flattened piece of meat until it tears apart with ease after broiling for 45 minutes at 325 degrees.” He never called again, my aunt explained with a wicked smile.

My aunt's husband, my uncle, died recently, rather unexpectedly. And at his funeral, Aunt Barbara was not wailing with grief. At least, not publicly. She was mad. She is a believer in the power of individual choice, and she was angry – at herself, at my uncle, at the doctors – for failing to make better choices to avoid my uncle's fate. I think it was the horticulturist in her. She believed that if he'd had the proper care, she could have tended to him longer.

Only, sometimes, you can't control the way things turn out. It's part of the throwing things in the air approach to life that makes the most sense to me. You hope that they land in the best possible place, but if they don't, then – oh, well, it was just as good a place as any. There is beauty in disarray. That's the only way to accept life – and death.

After the funeral, even without her husband, she still hadn't lost her smile. As I was leaving, she introduced me to a friend and said, “Kevin is a writer. He gets to travel, and he writes articles with tongue in cheek.”

Yes, with tongue in cheek. Just like my favorite aunt. ▼

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could never be quite sure. It was as if everything had been perfectly organized, and then, just for the fun of it, tossed into the air and allowed to land where they might.

Over here you'd find the antique Chinese porcelain fish bowl. “Monstrous, isn't it? Look down inside. Do you see the goldfish swimming in the water? No? Too green to see him? Well, I've been meaning to clean it, but you'll see him poke his head up every now and then.” Over there you'd find a rare species of orchid, only just about to bloom. Or at least, it would have been, if the cat hadn't knocked it over while chasing the

let leaf or two, wrap them in aluminum foil, and I would take them home, carefully coat them with root stimulator, and gently stick them into vermiculite so that they would propagate. I think I liked plants so much because they were one of the few things in life you could reasonably control. If you cared for them, they would usually reward you. They weren't like school and the other kids there, for instance. They – and she – never treated you badly for who you were.

Like all favorite aunts, my aunt has the requisite wicked sense of humor, though she would



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