

Knee-Hi to a Grasshopper

By Kathi Gunio

When I was knee-hi to a grasshopper, I bit my oldest sister's hand. It was the price she paid one Easter morning for trying to separate me from my Easter basket, filled to its wicker rim with jellybeans and marshmallow PEEPS. Her intent was to gather up the gang for a holiday family snapshot, but tradition or not, I was not interested in capturing a Kodak moment with my three siblings dressed in our Easter Best. My *eyes were bigger than my stomach*, and eating the ears off a hollowed chocolate bunny was my first priority. However, my sister Diane always took her firstborn role in our family seriously, and it was family picture time.

As she dragged me by my skinny arm across the green thick-piled carpet of the living room, through the kitchen, and out the breezeway door, I screamed in protest every inch of the way. *I was as light as a feather*, and my small frame was no match for my older sister. Therefore, I resorted to the only defense I had: I bit my oldest sister's hand.

I'm not sure exactly how old I was at the time, but according to my mother, I was *knee-hi to a grasshopper*. Whatever that amounts to be in inches or feet, I have to admit to this day that I still don't know. I only understand it to mean that I was very small.

So why, then, wouldn't my mother just say that? It's simple. It's just not her way of communicating. My mother's way of communicating includes an assortment of expressions, idioms, and sayings to explain her opinions and observations regarding particular situations. Like how the cashier at the grocery store is bagging groceries *slower than molasses*, or how *it's raining cats and dogs outside*. In one single sentence, my mother would tell my siblings and me that we were *bouncing off the wall* and needed to *stop running around like a chicken with its*

head cut off or she was *sending us outside to blow the stink off us*. Other times, she'd remind us that money doesn't grow on trees and we should thank our lucky stars, because there were many others who *didn't have a pot to piss in*.

Although my mother's sayings are not uniquely her own, I refer to them as such because still to this day, I've never met anyone who incorporates them into everyday language as much as she does. In fact, *if I had a nickel for every time* she used one, my bank account would far exceed six digits. But because of my mother's unique communication style, these sayings played a pivotal role in the guiding and disciplining of my three siblings and me, often making her sound like the prudent pillar of wisdom and knowledge. She *definitely fit the bill*, especially since she became a widow at the age of 31, left to raise us four kids by herself. At that time, I'm sure it seemed like her world *went to hell in a hand basket*.