

## Ice Cream

Ice-cream consumption was a problem in our household. Whenever my mother bought a carton of ice cream, I would eat most of it right away. This wasn't fair to the other members of the family. My mother didn't want to increase the quantity of ice cream that I ate, but she wanted everyone to be able to have some. She decided that she would buy three half-gallon cartons at a time. One for me, one for my brother, and one for the parents. She would make this purchase once every three weeks, so I could make my half-gallon last for three weeks, or I could eat it all right away, but that was my ration.

I always got mint chip, and, never one to waste time, I ate my half-gallon in the first two days. My brother made his last, eating a scoop or two every three days. This drove me mad. One afternoon, long after my supply had dried up, I opened his carton. He hadn't eaten any yet. I figured that if I just ate around the edge, he wouldn't notice. I traced a light canal around the perimeter of the carton with my spoon. Rocky Road. After three or four laps around the carton I determined that my invasion was still undetectable. I sealed it back up and scurried upstairs.

The next afternoon, I returned to the scene of the crime. Again, I furrowed delicately around the edge of the carton. The ice cream still reached the top; it just had a neat moat around it that was certainly no cause for alarm. But that night my brother opened his ice cream.

"Mom, doesn't this ice cream look weird?" She agreed that there was something wrong with it. They stood over the carton, trying to figure out what might have happened.

"Maybe it melted in the store?" Eric suggested.

"Maybe," she said. "I'll take it back. I don't think you should eat it. Something is wrong with it."

Taking it back to the store? I panicked. If they took it back to the store, I would surely be discovered and possibly arrested. When I confessed to my crime, I was cut out of the next few rounds of ice-cream purchasing.

Some months later I came up with a new approach. Again, my mint chip was long gone, leaving me to gaze longingly at my brother's half-gallon of Oreo, which sat nearly full in the freezer. It was in a rectangular box, which opened at the small top instead of the wide side. My brother had taken a few nibbles, but the rest was intact. I spooned out a bit from the top, but knew I couldn't go much further without detection. Then I had an idea. I opened the bottom of the box and began a rear-entry sneak attack. It was subtle at first, but as the week passed, I grew bolder until I had eaten about a third of the carton, from the bottom.

Then my poor brother, in the ordinary course of scooping his ice cream, broke through to the gaping vortex that should have been the remainder of his supply. This time there were no mysteries. My gall astounded my mother. My brother was genuinely curious.

"Did you truly believe that I wouldn't figure it out?"

I kind of did. Actually, I had hoped that the ice cream might slide down to fill the void as he served himself, the way it creeps further into an ice-cream cone as you eat it. But that was the end of ice cream in our household. From then on, when we wanted ice cream, we went out to the parlor. One scoop each, no thievery, no plotting, no fun.

The ice cream in my adult life comes in pint-size cartons and is oozing with various forms of caramel, fudge, and peanut butter. (Whether it is labeled low-fat or frozen yogurt — I have spent whole years limiting myself to one or the other — makes no difference in my weight.) At first the pint seemed like a curse — it had to be polished off regardless of whether there was help from a lover's spoon. But remembering the struggles I had had with the half-gallons of my youth, I became grateful for the pint. The size is right. To my delight, finishing a pint by myself is a bit too difficult. I can do it on occasion, but it takes hunger, time, and determination. Leftover ice cream always makes me proud. But the pint is also just enough to share without sparking competitive consumption. It feels like one-and-a-half servings each. The only challenge is the rush for whatever buried candy nuggets must be unearthed. This is a real test of character: What better way to display true love than to mine a luscious peanut butter cup, only to offer it to your mate? Believe me, it took me a long time to get there.