

Your brother's keeper

by Amos Arthur Holmes

When you are 55 years old your mind finds it more and more pleasant to look backward. Nothing in the future could possibly be as enchanting as those experiences already lived.

I remember my first Sunday School recitation and what a disaster it had been. I simply froze and not one single word escaped from my mouth. The whole thing was a terrible flop. I remember as I was leaving church my father said, "Son, the Lord was certainly proud of you today." But he was clenching his teeth and pounding his fist into the wall when he said it...so I wasn't too sure about his sincerity.

I can remember so many things...my first kiss...my first punch in the nose...my first swig of castor oil. But most of my remembrances involve my home, my family, and those experiences of early youth. And to this day...this very day...I remember an occurrence that transpired when I was nine years old.

My mother set a lovely table. The linen tablecloth was covered with beautiful china and sparkling crystal. And I remember the vicious, inhumane garbage she placed before us, and sternly (with psychotic exuberance) made us eat. Things like spinach...and asparagus...and good LORD ALMIGHTY...BROCCOLI.

Even these disasters could have been tolerated if our home had thrived in an atmosphere of freedom, or if there had been even the smallest vestige of liberty. If I could have said, "Thank you, mother, awfully kind, but I do believe I shall by-pass the broccoli."

But freedom was unheard of in my home. My great-grandfather fell at Saratoga for absolutely nothing. My grandfather gave up the ghost at Gettysburg... and in vain. Their sacrifice, for the essential freedom...freedom of choice...was somehow never transmitted to my mother. She not only insisted on serving those hideous droppings but also insisted that we eat every morsel heaped upon our plates.

It is most difficult for a nine-year-old child to defy authority. You cannot conspire with your brothers and sisters for the purpose of instigating violent uprisings because your brothers and sisters are weak and immature. And in my case it was terribly hard, impossible really, because my brothers and sisters were extremely fond of spinach, asparagus, and broccoli.

And so, in a situation like this, you depend on whatever cunning you can drum up. A spectacular trick, a

sleight of hand, or a miraculous happening.

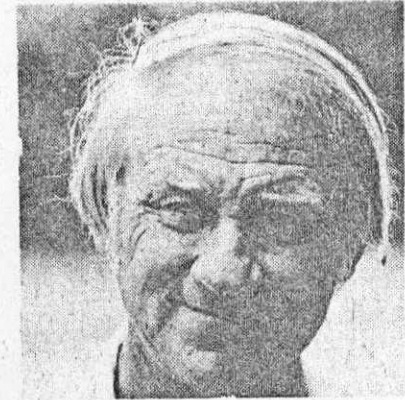
I look back, after all these years, and am amazed at the ingenuity and creativeness I employed to defeat my mother's satanic compulsion to serve balanced meals.

My mother would, with malice, ladle pounds of broccoli upon my plate. As she passed to my sister, I would say, "Please, Mama, could I have just a trifle more broccoli?"

Brilliant! Mother was now off guard. If I loved broccoli then it stood to reason that I would not destroy that which I loved. And so, as my mother was slapping my sister for spilling her milk, I would grab the broccoli in my hand and throw it under the table.

I did this at every meal. Often I threw peas, sometimes lima beans, and always spinach. But the inedible swill placed upon my plate was always banished to the floor beneath the dining room table.

My 11-year-old sister was in charge of cleaning the dining room...and being overly lazy...she found it expedient to leave the dining room chairs as they were. If she moved the chairs she must sweep under the table. And this was unthinkable. So that huge cache of food...that I was



discarding every day...went unnoticed.

Of course there is no such thing as the perfect crime.

After about two weeks there would be an awful odor arising from under that table. My mother, following her nose, would discover the huge heap of decomposed vittles. She would look back at all of us, and with trembling voice, scream, "WHO IS THE VILE SWINE RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS?"

Everyone looked blank. Completely puzzled. Except myself. I said, "Mama, this surely goes against the grain. The act of informing on one's own brother is distasteful...but I saw...with my very own eyes...CHARLES throwing food under the table. Especially the broccoli."

My mother then picked Charles up by the ear...took him howling up the stairs...and beat the living hell out of him.

I've always felt bad about that.