

Spic and Span House Cleaning

by Harry Zirkelbach

So Geoff, you're bored. Your mother leaves us for her work. We have a few hours to visit, little interesting on television. How about I make us a hamburger; tell me what you want on it. Then I'll tell you a story, O.K.?

Let's collect the pieces of that sandwich.

The story is about "Spic and Span". What, you don't understand the phrase?

Join the community. "Spic" goes back to medieval times, when chips of wood were used to clean anything. The term developed, "Spic and New". Then Samuel Pepys in his writing about the cleanup after the Great London fire in 1666, spoke of areas that had been made "Spic and Span". Span, indicating the size of a hand.

Spic and Span's meaning can change with time. My mother's friends understood one extent as girls; that changed during the Great Depression when they and their families were ground into poverty. How do you scrub a dirt floor?

Now, the story I have in mind is about your Uncle Lit. His name was Litmer. Classmates saw it short for Lightning, for he was the slowest of them all.

After Regis High School, he was drafted into the Army where he had unremarkable career. He served a time in Korea after the fighting as Cook.

He left the Army when his commitment ended, returned to Denver. "Sandwich not bad, 'eh, Geoff?"

While dabbling in Regis College, he and a friend decided they should go into business. There's was a special friendship. In high school they had been with a third classmate when their car was stuck at 7th and Ogden, in Denver, crushed, their friend killed. After such moments, they would share forever in their inner mind quietude, "Why Bobby, not me?"

Suddenly, without explanation, they decided to found a home cleaning business. The investment, small, they were young, willing. No training needed. Scrub away.

Confident, bought the supplies, had flyers made, chose the business name "Spic and Span House Cleaning", set their entrepreneurial flag.

Alas, few calls, for even a quote. Also, repeat business they expected, was not there. Something wrong? Hmm.

"Pick up the crumbs, Geoff."

Then that call from a woman in a wealthy part of town; respond, pass the visual and cost test. This dowager had a large house. She walked them through the many rooms, explaining what she expected. Fortunately, they missed all her signals. She said each room was filthy, describing

dirt spots they never saw. That complete, she promised to return in six hours.

They worked like never before, careful not to break any antique, reorient furniture. They work through lunch. Had finished just as their employer returned.

No smile greeted them.

Instead, their hostess was furious. They had smeared everything they touched. Her displeasure increased as she led them through paradise despoiled.

She order them out, threatening everything.

Definitely broke, they headed to their comfort bar, ordered the first beers.

About the time the second beer spoke to them, they snickered. Why had they thought they could please women in cleanliness? Indeed!

By the end of the third beer they were calm, laughing. They agreed to disband "Spic and Span", toss the junk, return to something they knew, enjoy life, that day two men with no obligations except to themselves.

Like you and me now, Geoff.