

**The Silver Pitcher**  
**Or how we talk about SEX, generation to generation**

Sally Franz

My grandmother, God Bless her, was as forward a thinker as she could be, given the changes she faced over her 98 years. Born in the 1800's, She and her two sisters went to college when there were very few women even considered for entrance. The Haigh sisters were proud to have voted in the first election open to women and they all had their licenses and owned their own cars as young women.

Yes, Gramma kept up with the times as best she could, but some things came easier than others. She kept up with the arts, current literature and loved exotic travel. And of course entertaining was held up as an art form: serving rich foods on expensive place settings cooked with all the latest kitchen equipment. However, when it came to the subject of sex, she just couldn't jump on the bra-burning-pill-taking-free-love-express-train that hauled so many passengers in the late sixties.

Grams believed women had the right to control of the number of births they wanted. She always sent money to Planned Parenthood to promote birth control education. But for all her free thinking, she just couldn't bring herself to talk outloud about certain anatomy parts or the act of "you-know-what" "with "you-know-who" and "you-know-where" in anything but euphemisms.

Her generation talked about the Birds and the Bees as if the birds and bees were going steady together. Phrases such as "being in the family way" or "straying husbands" filled whispered conversations when the elderly sisters gathered in the parlor. But these conclaves were grouped together under the umbrella of "not for young ears," even when my ears were twenty years old. "Run along and find something useful to do or I'll set you down with the silver polish and you can clean my serving trays." I made myself scarce.

So needless to say on the day before my wedding I was taken aback when my Grandmother caught me by the elbow and said, "There is something I have to tell you before you get married. Follow me into the dinning room."

There, behind closed doors, she unveiled a lovely antique silver pitcher. "It's a gift from your groom's family." She beamed as she placed it in the middle of the table.

"Now," she said, "to protect all your valuables you must remember how to use a velvet case. Always roll it down and place the silver piece inside, then gently place your hand inside between the metal zipper and the sterling, then carefully zip it closed. If you just grab hold of the zipper-latch and yank it straight up you will scratch the silver."

“I want you to practice, so that I can be sure that you do it correctly.” I had the case off and on several times with my fingers guarding the precious treasure within. At last my grandmother was satisfied that I had the technique down.

“You’ll be glad I taught you this,” she smiled knowingly. But knowing what? That was it, the whole sum of marital advice from my grandmother.

I often wondered if her talk was some Victorian code for explaining the use of birth control, or perhaps she wanted to reinforce the idea that the better the silver, the better the hostess. Whatever the message, it was totally lost on my hippie-dippy-flowers-in-my-hair- brain.

I had my first child within a year because in the passion of young love we had sex all the time and rarely remembered protection. Many years later, when that marriage failed, I gave a very tarnished silver pitcher back to his side of the family having never used it. Well, at least it wasn’t scratched!

Now that I am a grandmother, what advice do I plan to give my granddaughters?

Don’t buy anything that needs polishing, ironing or scrubbing. Housewives are married to their houses which is why they often end up with the house, but not the husband. Be a Lifewife! Be married to laughter, playfulness and even if all you can afford is paper plates, serve others heaping portions of forgiveness and your home will be filled with love.

Oh, and never mind waiting too long to have your children, it’s a lot more fun to grow up with them.