

Keep Your Fork

A young woman was diagnosed with a terminal illness and was given three months to live. As she was getting her things in order, she contacted her pastor and asked him to come to her house to discuss certain aspects of her final wishes.

During his visit, she told him which songs she wanted sung at the funeral service, what scriptures she would like read and what outfit she wanted to be buried in. Everything was in order, and the pastor was preparing to leave when the young woman suddenly remembered something very important to her.

“There’s one more thing,” she said excitedly.

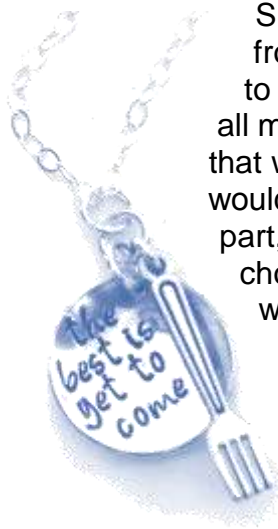
“What’s that?” asked the pastor.

“This is very important,” she continued. “I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand.”

The pastor looked at the woman, not knowing quite what to say.

“That surprises you, doesn’t it?” the woman asked.

“Well, to be honest, I’m puzzled by the request,” the pastor said.



She explained: “My grandmother once told me this story, and from that time on, I have always tried to pass along its message to those I love and to those who are in need of encouragement. In all my years of attending socials and dinners, I always remember that when the dishes of the main course were being cleared, someone would inevitably lean over and say, ‘Keep your fork.’ It was my favorite part, because I knew that something better was coming, like velvety chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie. Something wonderful, and with substance!”

Then she added: “I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand, and I want them to wonder, ‘What’s with the fork?’ Then I want you to tell them, ‘Keep your fork – the best is yet to come.’”

The pastor’s eyes welled up with tears of joy as he hugged the young woman and told her goodbye. He knew this would be one of the last times he would see her before her death. But he also knew that the young woman had a better grasp of heaven than he did. She had a better grasp of what heaven would be like than many people twice her age, with twice as much experience and knowledge. She *knew* that something better was coming.

(more)

At the funeral, people were walking by the young woman's casket, and they saw the dress she was wearing and the fork placed in her right hand. Over and over, the pastor heard the question, "What's with the fork?" And over and over, he smiled.

During his message, the pastor told the people of the conversation he had with the young woman shortly before she died. He also told them about the fork and about what it symbolized to her. He shared with them about how he could not stop thinking about the fork and that they probably would not be able to stop thinking about it either.

He was right.

So, the next time you reach down for your fork, let it remind you, ever so gently, that the best is yet to come.

(This story is adapted from the 1994 Roger William Thomas short story Keep Your Fork, which appeared in the 1996 best-seller A 3rd Serving of Chicken Soup for the Soul.)

– Beecher Hunter

