

Lunch With Ethyl

Today I had lunch with my good friend Ethyl Soddelmeyer at a little sandwich shop that just opened down the street from me. That might not sound like much, but Ethyl is a tricky one. We plan lunch all the time, but she forgets. And not just our lunch dates.

Ethyl forgets everything—her keys, where she left her car, what day it is. Names are particularly troublesome for her—her own, her street, the state where she lives. Personally, I think it's early onset Alzheimers, but I wouldn't dare say that to her face. You just don't say the "A" word around a 70-year-old woman unless you have back-up. She packs a mean umbrella, and her handbag has to weigh close to 20 pounds, what with all the medications, snacks, and kitchen implements she carries in there.

Needless to say, it takes some doing to make and keep a lunch date with Ethyl (we've had six in the thirty years I've known her), so this was something of a special occasion for me. Since I was meeting her at the restaurant, she promised to wear something I'd be able to spot easily across a crowded sandwich shop. Take it from me, a green hat with clay parakeets on it is definitely one of a kind.

So anyway, we got our orders and sat down to catch up, and right away she launches into me with a vengeance I didn't know she possessed.

"What's all this talk I hear about you cleaning up the internets?"

"Well, not all of them, dear," I assured her. "Rest assured, Gigilo Porn is way below my radar."

"Hmph," she snorted, mollified. "You know, at our age, you'd think you'd find something better to do. I got a neighborhood full of boys just graduated from high school. You interested?"

"In what?" Tutoring? Starting a cult? Human trafficking?

"They're *young*," she spat, as if that was explanation enough. "Minds are weak, you know." She illustrated by twirling her fork by her ear, which slung a wad of coleslaw across the room to land on a businessman's laptop two tables over. I pretended not to notice until the man stood and stomped over to our table.

"What's the deal, lady?"

I should mention here that once-upon-a-time Ethyl was a schoolteacher. And as everyone knows, once a schoolteacher, always a schoolteacher. She wheeled on the poor unsuspecting businessman, whipping a ruler from her ample handbag faster than Zorro could draw a sword.

"Did I give you permission to speak, young man?" she demanded, smacking him across the knuckles with a force that sounded like a gunshot.

You know, I never did ask *where* she taught school.

"You crazy old bag!" he yelled, jumping back.

By now we had the attention of everyone at the surrounding tables, several of whom were pointing cell phones at us and giggling, which made me wonder if I was going to be reporting on myself in tomorrow's column.

"Go sit down and eat your coleslaw, you ungrateful little twerp," Ethyl snapped.

The man was either Catholic or so shocked he couldn't think, because he turned without a word and shuffled meekly back to his table. Within minutes it was business-as-usual around us. Ethyl turned back to me and smiled sweetly.

"Young people today. It starts in the home, you know."