

STRAWBERRY ICE CREAM

I wrote this story while flying back from LA to Nashville. Like all make-believe stories, this one is partly based on fact. One fact is that strawberry is my favorite flavor of ice cream. The other is that my grandchildren have a mischievous black cat named Thunder who is strangely attracted to drinking straws. Don't ask me why. That's just the way he is. If you're not looking, he will steal the straw from your drink and run away to chew and play with it. This story is built around these two unrelated facts.

Love, Grampa Bob

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A New Ice Cream Shop

"This is the BEST strawberry ice cream ever!" exclaimed Poppa. *"And you made it yourself, eh?"*

"Thank you," replied mother. *"Yes, I made it myself using a special recipe from my grandmother. A SECRET recipe!"*

"You know," said Poppa thoughtfully, *"people would pay good money for such delicious ice cream. Why, you could even open an ice cream parlor and get rich making and selling this stuff. Plus, it would be a fun job. A lot more fun than my boring factory job."*

"Are you serious?" asked Momma.

"Absolutely!" replied Poppa. *"Besides, our little town needs an ice cream parlor. And you children can help run it. Right children?"*

"Yes!" replied the Oberwurst children – all five of them. *"Then we could have ice cream any time we want. And all of our friends could come to our store after school, for ice cream!"*

"But are we going to have only strawberry ice cream?" asked Katie, the youngest child. *"Because my favorite is mint chocolate chip."*

"Of course we can have other flavors," replied Poppa. *"But strawberry ice cream will be our banner product, our specialty, our trade secret, our claim to fame!"*

That's how the Oberwurst family got into the ice cream business. They bought equipment to make big batches of ice cream, a large walk-in freezer to hold the ice cream, and tables and chairs for the customers. They rented an empty store on Main Street, just two blocks from the school – a really good location. Poppa put sign in the store window.

Coming Soon! Oberwurst Ice Cream Parlor

Specializing in Strawberry Ice Cream!

“The key to our success is Mamma’s secret recipe,” said Poppa. “We need to keep it in a safe place.”

“I will keep it in my jewelry box,” offered Mamma.

“But what if it comes a flood, like Noah and the Ark?” asked Katie, the youngest child. “Then the paper with the secret recipe will get wet and ruined by the water.”

“There are always plenty of soda straws in an ice cream parlor. Each night I will roll up our secret recipe paper and slide it inside a straw before I put it in my jewelry box,” laughed Mamma. “Then it will be safe even if we have a flood, Katie.”

Off To a Good Start

The people of the town were eager to try out the new ice cream parlor. They LOVED the strawberry ice cream! They told their friends. Their friends came and liked it too. Soon the Oberwurst ice cream parlor was a prosperous business with steady customers. The Oberwurst family was making good money.

Of course, Momma was very careful to protect the secret recipe. After all, it was the secret of their success. Early each morning she would take the straw out of her jewelry box, poke the recipe paper out onto the counter top, and begin to mix up fresh strawberry ice cream. Each evening at closing time she would roll up the recipe paper, slip it back inside the soda straw, and place it back in her jewelry box. Nobody outside the family knew where the secret recipe was hidden. Nobody, that is, except Thunder the Oberwurst’s black cat.

Thunder didn’t care about ice cream. But he loved soda straws. He liked to chew them. He liked the rustling sound they made when and they skittered along the floor. In fact, Thunder had his own secret collection of soda straws hidden in the basement of the store. But there was one particular straw that he wanted more than any other. Each night Thunder watched Mamma place a special straw in her jewelry box. *“Hmmm,”* thought Thunder, *“This must be a very special straw. Why else would Mamma so carefully hide it away each evening? But all the soda straws belong to me. I want this one too.”*

The Cat Burglar

So Thunder made a plan to steal Mamma’s straw. He waited until late at night when everyone was fast asleep. Just to make sure, he meowed kinda loud to see if anyone was still awake to say *“Shhhhh!”* or *“Shut up!”* But no one responded to his meow. Satisfied that everyone was fast asleep, Thunder jumped up onto the counter. He lifted the latch of the jewelry box with his paw, snatched Mamma’s straw with his teeth, and carried it away to his collection of stolen straws in the basement. Then, pleased with the success of his plan, he curled around his straws and fell into a deep sleep.

Next Morning

"Poppa!" shrieked Mamma. "Come quickly!"

"What is the matter!" asked Poppa, coming on the run.

"Look! Look in my jewelry box!" said Momma. "I was getting ready to make a big batch of strawberry ice cream for all our customers today. The strawberries are already cut up into little pieces. But look in my jewelry box! The secret recipe is gone! Someone has stolen it! What will we do?"

"There's only one thing to do," said Poppa. "We will look until we find it. Maybe it rolled into a crack in the floor or some other hard-to-find place. Children, come quickly! Everyone help. Move all the tables and chairs in the shop. We've GOT to find our secret recipe!"

Thunder woke up in his basement hideout. All the noise in the ice cream parlor made it impossible to sleep any longer. Chairs and tables dragged across the floor. Cabinet doors opened and then slammed shut. *"Humans can be so annoying at times!"* thought Thunder. Then he looked down at his straw collection. He picked up one mangled straw and chewed on it for a while. Then he eyed Momma's special straw. *"Now or later?"* thought Thunder. He decided on later because right now he was hungry. He wanted food more than a straw.

Meanwhile the Oberwurst family continued to look in every nook and cranny of the shop. Thunder listened to their conversation. *"Oh,"* thought Thunder, *"They're looking for MY straw. Well, that's just too bad. Because now it belongs to me."* I know this sounds selfish, especially since the straw in question actually belonged to Momma and held her secret recipe inside. But Thunder was in an ornery mood that morning. And of course, after searching through the entire ice cream shop, the Oberwurst family did NOT find the missing straw with the recipe inside.

"What will we do today?" asked Momma. *"All our customers will want strawberry ice cream."*

"We'll just have to put up a sign," replied Poppa. And so he placed a sign in the front window of the shop.

SORRY. TEMPORARILY OUT OF STRAWBERRY ICE CREAM.

PLEASE TRY OUR OTHER DELICIOUS FLAVORS.

Then they waited to see what would happen. And they waited. And they waited some more. Finally Momma said, *"Alas Poppa! It's lunch time, and not a single customer has come into our shop. Not even one!"*

"Don't worry," replied Poppa. *"Here come two customers right now."* Poppa turned to them and asked, *"Would you like to try some of our delicious chocolate latte ice cream?"*

"Not really." They replied. *"We prefer strawberry. We only came into your shop to ask, 'How long will it be before you have strawberry ice cream again?'"*

Poppa rolled his eyes and thought for a moment. *"Come back tomorrow,"* he told them. *"I promise you that we will have it by tomorrow."*

"We will come back tomorrow then," replied the customers. *"And we will bring all our friends with us. Everyone in town wants your special strawberry ice cream."* Then they left.

A Bad Idea

"Poppa!" exclaimed Momma. *"How can you promise them that we will have strawberry ice cream tomorrow? Our secret recipe is gone. And we have been unable to find it."*

"In that case we will have to use a new recipe for strawberry ice cream," answered Poppa. *"Here, try this one."*

"Where did you get this new recipe?" asked Momma.

"From the internet," replied Poppa. *"It sounded really good. It's called Strawberry Delight."*

"Are you sure?" asked Momma. *"Nothing will taste as good as our secret recipe."*

The Oberwurst family got up early the next morning to get ready for their customers. After all, Poppa had promised that they would have strawberry ice cream tomorrow. And today was that tomorrow.

"The children will be coming here as soon as school lets out," said Poppa. *"We'd better start making ice cream now."*

"But it won't be our special recipe!" protested Momma.

"I know," replied Poppa. *"But we need to sell ice cream. You get to work and I'll put up new sign in the store window."*

FRESH STRAWBERRY ICE CREAM TODAY! READY AT 3 PM

At 3 o'clock sharp the store was full of hungry customers. All of them wanted (you guessed it right) strawberry ice cream. They all cheered when Momma and the children brought out huge bowls full of ice cream made using the new recipe (Strawberry Delight, from the internet).

The baby spit her ice cream out of her mouth and onto the floor. *"Bad! Bad! Bad!"* she said.

"Yuck! This doesn't taste right!" said a small boy. "

"It's not like it used to be," complained an elderly lady.

"Something's just not right," said a lawyer. And he walked out of the shop, leaving his bowl of Strawberry Delight on the table. One by one, everyone else walked out of the store too. Nobody liked the new recipe. Nobody!

After the last customer walked out, Momma sadly said, *“Without the secret recipe for strawberry ice cream, no one will come to our store. And if no one comes to our store, we won’t earn any money. And if we don’t earn any money, we’ll go out of business!”*

“If we go out of business,” said Poppa. *“I will have to go back to my boring factory job!”*

Out of Business

Poppa sighed deeply as he placed a new sign in the store window.

SORRY. NO MORE STRAWBERRY ICE CREAM. OUT OF BUSINESS

When Katie, the youngest child, read the sign, she started crying. Then Momma starting crying. Soon everyone was crying. Boo hoo! Boo hoo! Boo hoo hooo hooooo!

Did Thunder care about all this? Nope! Not one little bit. He just snuggled up to his straw collection and settled down for a nap. But while he slept he had a strange dream. A SCARY BAD dream! He dreamed that he had Momma’s straw in his mouth, and he was running for his life from a ferocious bulldog. The face on the bulldog looked like Momma Oberwurst! The bulldog was gaining on him! Closer and closer! Just as he was about to be caught, Thunder woke up. *“Whew! What a scary dream! I really thought I was a goner!”* thought Thunder. Then he had a new thought.

“Maybe this dream means that I shouldn’t have stolen Momma’s straw. Besides, it really doesn’t sound like a special straw to me. When I bat it along the floor, it doesn’t make that nice skittering noise. That’s probably because of that dumb piece of paper stuck inside of it. Yeah. That’s what messes up this dumb straw. I don’t think I want it any more. Should I bring it back? Or should I just throw it away?”

A Happy Ending

Next morning Momma went into the kitchen.

“Poppa!” shrieked Momma *“Come quickly! Look! Look in my jewelry box!”*

“I can hardly believe my eyes!” exclaimed Poppa. *“It’s the missing straw! Is the secret recipe still inside?”*

“Yes it is!” replied Momma.

“Yay!” said Poppa. *“We’re back in business again!”*

“Well yes and no,” said Momma. *“Yes, we now have our secret recipe back. But we have lost all our customers. That yucky ‘Strawberry Delight’ ruined our reputation.”*

“Don’t worry,” replied Poppa. “You make more of that great-tasting strawberry ice cream using the secret recipe. I will think of some way to get our customers back.”

Poppa went to the back of the shop and made a new sign for the front window of the store.

SPECIAL TODAY ONLY. FREE STRAWBERRY ICE CREAM! STARTING AT 3 PM

Katie’s eyes grew big when she read the sign. *“Poppa, do you think it will really work?”*

“We will find out soon enough,” replied Poppa. The whole Oberwurst family anxiously waited for school to let out. At 3 PM two children walked by the store.

“Look at that sign!” exclaimed one child. *“Free strawberry ice cream! Let’s go inside.”*

“Not me,” said the other child. *“I tried their strawberry ice cream yesterday. It was yucky. Everyone walked out of the store.”*

“But it’s FREE,” replied the first child. *“Let’s just try it. If it’s really yucky, we can just walk out.”*

Meanwhile, other children from school had gathered outside the ice cream shop.

They said to the other two, *“Go into the shop and try out the strawberry ice cream for us. If it’s good this time, like it used to be, then we’ll come in and have some too.”*

Momma Oberwurst served each child a heaping bowl of strawberry ice cream.

“This is my own special recipe,” smiled Momma. *“You will like it very much.”*

The children outside the shop watched as the children inside the shop tasted the first spoonful of strawberry ice cream.

“YES!” they shouted to the other children who were waiting outside the shop. *“It’s really GOOD. Like it used to be!”*

All the children outside the store quickly ran into the store to get their free ice cream. When they finished eating they ran off to tell their other friends about the free strawberry ice cream. These other friends came to the shop. Grownups came to the shop. Even the elderly lady and the lawyer came back. Everyone agreed that the famous Oberwurst strawberry ice cream was back to its original incredibly good flavor!

When closing time came, Momma and Poppa turned to their children. *“We have regained our good reputation with our customers. The Oberwurst Ice Cream Shop is now safe and secure. Good work all of you. Thank you very much!”*

Did Thunder the black cat care about all this? Nope! Not one little a bit. Because he was sound asleep in the basement, snuggled up to his straw collection. And this time he had no bad scary dreams.“