

Stone Soup

~ retold by Dawn Daniels

Once upon a time, faraway yet very near, a weary traveler came to a quiet village. He went door to door begging for food to silence the hunger in his belly. The fearful villagers each in turn told the stranger that food was scarce - there was nothing to share - and closed their doors to him.

Oh, they are in great need indeed! thought the hungry man.

So from the center of the village square the traveler called out, "All of you take heart. I will make enough stone soup to feed us all!"

Stone Soup? How ridiculous! thought the villagers. *You can't make soup from a stone. . .*

The traveler pulled from his knapsack a banged-up old tin can and filled it with water from the town well. He then built a small fire and set the can over the flame. The village children had wandered over out of curiosity and were watching the man from the safety of some nearby trees. They were amazed to see the man take from his pocket a common earth-toned stone and toss it with a loud *kerplunk* into the can of water.

As he crouched down, stirring the water with a stick, the weary traveler spoke aloud to himself. "Oh, this will be a fine stone soup, more than enough for everyone to share."

"My parents think you're a fool!" one of the boys called out from behind an oak tree.

The traveler kept stirring.

One of the children, a very small girl, ran from the shelter of the trees and approached the man. She watched him as he stirred, humming quietly to himself. "Mister, that can won't hold enough soup for all of us," she blurted out, "my mother has a much bigger soup pot." After a pause she added, "Would you like us to go get it for you?"

"Why, thank you, sweet girl," replied the stranger, "you are most kind."

So the little girl ran with several of the other children to fetch the bigger soup pot. As the children worked together with the traveler to fill the new pot with water, they asked him what stone soup tasted like. "Oh, it's quite delicious," said the traveler, "and the best thing is that it's always different every time and every place I make it."

"Why?" asked the children.

"Every time I make this wondrous soup, something quite magical happens," replied the traveler.

"What?" they asked.

"Well, it usually starts with someone going to fetch a little of what they think will make the soup taste better," said the man, "like a bit of carrot or a bit of onion. Most people seem to think that the stone needs a little help. I could be wrong - maybe it's different here in your village - but so far on this journey I have found that people have much more to share than they think they do."

The children were quiet for a time, and then they gathered closer round, gazing into the soup pot. Could it be true? After a few moments they all ran off toward their homes, calling over their shoulders as they went, "We'll be back soon - keep stirring!"

It wasn't long before the villagers - young and old alike - began arriving in the town square. The little girl, who had first offered the bigger soup pot, stepped forward with her mother by the hand. "We would like to add some carrot to the soup," the mother said. The little girl tossed a handful of chopped carrot into the pot.

"Mmmm," grinned the traveler, "the soup smells better already. Thank you."

Soon all of the villagers were adding a little of this, a little of that to the steaming pot - onion, celery, more carrot, potato, turnips, rutabaga, green beans, barley, herbs, salt, even a little meat found its way into the soup. The traveler said a "thank-you" for each contribution.

It wasn't long before the village square was filled with the smell of the glorious soup and the sounds of the villagers talking and laughing together. Tables were brought out and soon covered with colorful cloths and plenty of bowls and spoons for everyone. Loaves of crusty bread appeared and even some cheese.

When the soup was done, all of the villagers gathered around the pot with bowls in hand to share in the bounty before them. The traveler served each person in turn then sat down to join in the feast. Everyone ate until their bellies were full.

When it was time to continue on his way, the traveler bent down to pack the old tin can into his knapsack. The villagers all gathered around him and he felt a small hand on his shoulder. "Here's your stone, Mister," said the little girl, "I found it at the bottom of the pot."

"I think you should keep it," the traveler said, looking around at them all. "You can use it to make stone soup whenever you need to remember that you have enough - and that when you share together - there is always enough."

And as the traveler left the village, he stooped down to pick up another common earth-toned stone, slipped it into his pocket and continued on his way.

2/22/08