

# I DON'T LIKE HAM

By Jerry Rabushka

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**CAST: 1F, a high school student named Jenny**

I don't like ham.

There, I said it.

I don't like ham.

*(proudly)* I said it again.

I even told my mother. "Mom, I don't like ham."

She was not impressed. *(reacting slowly with increasing anger, as her disappointed MOTHER)* "You realize, young lady, that if you refuse to eat ham you'll grow up to be a lonely, dried up passed-over prune. You'll never get a date, a job or a place to live outside of your filthy bedroom. Now, go wash the dishes."

I don't like washing dishes either.

My family celebrated several holidays with ham, which, if you've been paying any attention at all, you'll remember that I don't like. Christmas, Thanksgiving, Labor Day, Memorial Day, *(scandalized!)* my birthday... it always turned into a festival of relatives trying to shove ham down my throat.

See, here's how a conversation *should* go:

*(as someone offering her ham)* Jenny, would you like some ham?

*(as herself)* No thanks.

*(as FIRST SPEAKER, sweetly)* Okay.

That's in my dreams.

Here's what happens:

*(as someone trying to force her to eat ham)* Eat some ham, Jenny.

*(as herself)* No thanks.

*(as FIRST SPEAKER, offended)* What's wrong? You're so special that you can't have a little ham? We spend all day cooking ham and you're too good for it?

When one shark draws blood, the others follow.

**(SHE imitates various RELATIVES [author's note: use the suggestions below for your delivery, or feel free to come up with your own].)**

(as an angry OLDER WOMAN) She's anorexic, that's what it is. She needs to eat some *meat*.

(as a very peaceful "in your face" type who acts nice but really isn't) It's much better if you cooperate. (*happy, but eerie*) Much less difficult for all of us.

(as the RELATIVE who is always "right") Are you one of those (*disgusted!!*) vegans? You'll stunt your growth. You're just making a political statement that has nothing to do with ham. And you're insulting your mother who spent all day cooking it!

I tried other ways to keep it off the table.

(as "UNCLE SAMMY," her great uncle) Jenny's hiding the ham again!

(as herself) Well, Uncle Sammy, we all wish you felt the same way about Jack and Coke.

(explaining to the audience) So you see, it's not so simple.

(the next section is spoken as her older old-fashioned AUNT, addressing the audience) No, it's not so simple. I'm Jenny's Aunt Tillie. Her great aunt. Her grandmother's sister on her father's side, married to her Uncle Sammy... the drunk. I've been cooking ham since I was seven.

If she'd say "no thank you," it would be one thing. It's more like *this*:

(sweetly) Jenny, would you like some ham?

(still as AUNT TILLIE, who is now imitating JENNY and making her sound as mean as possible) Aunt Tillie, what is wrong with you? You know I don't eat ham. And you shouldn't either. Do you know how pigs are raised? Do you know what they put in it? Do you know anything about what you're eating or where it comes from? You should be ashamed of yourself. Mom, can we get away from wretched Aunt Tillie?

(acting hurt, to get sympathy.) That was my reward when I offered her some ham. (*turning on the tears*) "Can we get way from wretched Aunt Tillie."

(now as JENNY, who starts the character transition by reacting in disbelief to what "Aunt Tillie" just said) That's so not true.

(as AUNT TILLIE) Yes it is. You're disrespectful and ungrateful.

(as JENNY) What's not true is the part about her asking nicely. It was more like. "Put some ham on your plate. Like the pig cares. Your Uncle Sammy's a pig and *he* eats ham. You're a tainted and tarnished child who doesn't appreciate what we go through to make you happy."

(as herself, again addressing the audience) There was no "would you like some ham" in there anywhere. And I still don't like ham. However you slice it. Aunt Tillie forgets to mention how many houses she set on fire perfecting her recipe. (short pause, counts on fingers, then says triumphantly) Three.

(as AUNT.) That's not true. (smugly) One was an apartment.

(as JENNY) People tried to trick me. They'd boil collard greens with ham so I'd get a taste of it. But I don't like collard greens either. Then they tried cabbage. Look, combining food I don't like with a vegetable that gives you gas is not going to change my impression of either ingredient!

For awhile, my relationship with my mom became little more than a discussion about ham.

(as MOM) "You don't really taste it!"

(responding) If you don't taste it, then why are you putting it in everything we eat?

"It flavors everything else."

(not sure of the logic of this) So essentially, something I don't like the flavor of that no one else can taste was flavoring everything we ate.

(short pause as SHE processes what SHE just said, plus this is a new section of the story)

There was this cook off at the community center. You can guess what the theme was.

It wasn't "Assorted vegan delights!"

It wasn't "Chocolate, something everyone likes."

It wasn't even "How to make a sauerkraut and watercress sandwich." Which is too bad, because there's a market for it that most people overlook.

The theme off the cook off? (with fake enthusiasm) "Win Your Man With Ham!"

So I'm like "Mom, *you* have a husband, and Aunt Tillie, *you* have a husband, and well... Cousin Rosie, you've had *four* husbands, so obviously you're much more experienced at winning a man than me, my mother, and Aunt Tillie combined. Maybe *you* should enter."

Mom said, "Your father and I are renewing our vows. With ham."

Aunt Tillie said, "I've always cooked ham for your Uncle Sammy. That's why I'm married and your not."

*(responding, a bit confused again)* I think the fact that I'm not even 18 is why I'm not married, but have it your way.

Cousin Rosie was like: "My ham is spectacular, but the last thing I need is another husband."

Mom decided that I needed a ham-eating boyfriend and signed me up to the contest. She gave me a secret family recipe and told me to go at it.

Now how am I supposed to know if it's good or not, considering that I DON'T LIKE HAM?

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