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COOKING



I learned how to cook because I like to stir oatmeal more than I like to pick up dog poop. Maybe I should explain.

Because there were so many of us, every couple of months my mom or dad would try some new plan to organize us six boys.

Like one spring my mom got tired of us always mixing up our sweatshirts and losing them. She bought six identical blue hooded sweatshirts, and she ironed giant white numbers on the back: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

We didn't mix up our sweatshirts after that. But we did manage to lose them.

For a while to make it easier to keep our clothes straight, my mom also tried color coding us. Jim was blue. Blue shirts, blue pants, blue socks. I was brown.

I really grew to hate brown. Even today, forty years later, I still avoid brown clothes.

But the biggest plan was the Family Job Chart.

You might imagine that a pack of boys wouldn't be too keen on washing, cleaning, or cooking. And you would be right. We tried our best to avoid anything we thought was work. Our mission was always to get out of work and get away to play. Which is why my dad came up with the job chart.

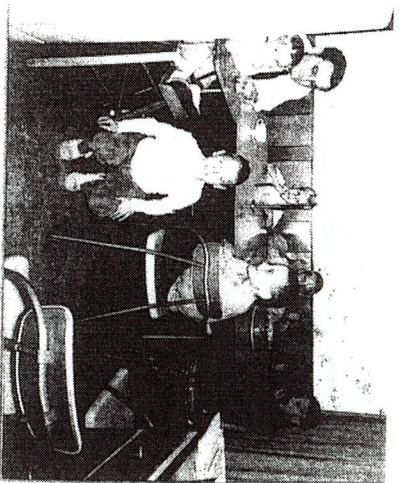
The chart listed all the different chores around the house (vacuuming, table setting, cooking, dishwashing, dog feeding, yard pickup) and all our names (Jim, Jon, Tom, Gregg, Brian, Jeff). The idea was that every week each guy would have a different job.

But I hated feeding the dog. The look and sound and smell of that gloppy wet stuff plopping out of the can gave me the willies. The only thing worse than that was the look and feel and smell of what the dog turned the food into . . . and then plopped out in piles all over the backyard.

So to avoid any of the nasty dog work, I would trade jobs with Brian and Jeff whenever they had cooking. Because they were the youngest, they usually didn't get exactly what was going on. I would just

tell them, "Brian, you get to feed the dog again this week. Jeff, you get the best outside job this week." I think it helped them become better people.

It also kept me in the kitchen. And the kitchen was the best place to be. Helping



my mom cook, I would stir oatmeal, flip bacon, butter toast, peel potatoes, mix cakes . . .

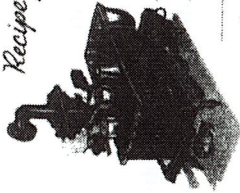
All much better smelling jobs than the dog chores.

And the best added bonus of the cooking job was that you got to eat more. A taste of scrambled eggs here, a bit of toast there. I still love eating raw potatoes with a little salt when I cook.

And the oatmeal. Ahhh. The oatmeal. No place better to be on a cold morning than standing over a huge warm pot of bubbling oatmeal.

From my weeks, months, and years of experience I can now reveal to you the secret of great oatmeal:

Here's what's cookin' JON'S OATMEAL RECIPE Serves 8
Recipe from the kitchen of



1. MAKE A BIG POT OF IT. AT LEAST ENOUGH FOR SIX GUYS PLUS TWO PARENTS.

2. USE THE WHOLE-GRAIN OATS. MIX WITH MILK. NOT WATER.

3. ADD BUTTER AND SALT WHILE IT'S COOKING.

4. STIR IN CIRCLES. STIR IN FIGURE EIGHTS. STIR IN BACKWARDS CIRCLES.

5. REPEAT STEP 4 OVER AND OVER UNTIL THE OATMEAL / MILK MIXTURE THICKENS AND STARTS BLOPPING LIKE MINI VOLCANOS.

6. WARM YOURSELF OVER THE STOVE. TAKE A TASTE OR TWO OR THREE. AND BE VERY HAPPY THAT YOU ARE NOT OUTSIDE PICKING UP DOG POOP.