

Jell-O is Not a Food....And Other Culinary Observations

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The grandchildren, incorporating the delicate dance of COVID distancing, have come to visit, bringing with them Marshmallow Fluff, hydrogenated peanut butter, Lucky Charms cereal, Mountain Dew, Ramen Noodles and Jell-O. I counter with homemade whole wheat oatmeal chocolate chip cookies (delicious!), orange juice, a huge watermelon, and local strawberries.

As these are acquired grandchildren—not mine, but my partner’s—I do not remark on their food choices but simply hope they will survive a childhood of Wonder-like bread, American cheese, coke and Cheetos. Two of these grandchildren—there are ten in all—also eat copious amounts of salad, a proclivity which I indulge feverishly.

Their grandfather, a loving patriarch whom I rescued from just such a diet a mere eighteen months ago, relapses entirely and partakes of huge amounts of pizza and hero sandwiches made with Italian sausages and ham. But what can you expect from a man whose kitchen sports a large wooden sign reading: “Eat ICE CREAM for daily happiness”.

Don’t get me wrong. I am not a food purist and can personally down a family size bag of salt and vinegar potato chips at one sitting. And I feel that a container of ice cream, any size, is one portion. And corn dogs and cheap champagne is my idea of culinary heaven. But I try, I really do, to curb these indulgences.

In fact, sometimes I swing too far in the other direction. After purchasing an outsize bag of chia seeds, I began sprinkling them on everything. The first time my partner encountered them, he squinted suspiciously at his salad and complained: “I think there’s some sand in my food.” After a short dissertation by

me on the life giving properties of chia, he reluctantly consumed them. Now, having bought so many, I try to hide them in almost anything, with moderate success.

I've also tried to eke down the copious amount of steel cut oats I found hiding in a high cupboard, but all of my attempts have not been irresistible. Chocolate chip cookies (see above) are very forgiving, but my last attempt at a loaf of yeasted bread, liberally engorged with soaked steel cut oats, elicited this dry remark: "Well, if we can't eat it, we can use it as a weapon of mass destruction."

Well, maybe I make too much of all of this. But the grandchildren have a tendency to climb out of an upstairs bedroom window and sit on the roof, like the proverbial fiddler. And sometimes the older ones ride the little one's tricycles around and around the outside of the house, ending their trips with death defying plunges down the steep embankment at the back. I look sideways at my partner but he just opens up another bag of Doritos for them.

"You are what you eat," I say sententiously, implying they would be calmer if he only fed them celery.

He smiles benignly and reminds me that I can down an entire Baby Watson Cheesecake at one sitting. So what does that make me?