



THE WORST CAKE EVER

Baking one very bad cake with Dad made a big impression.

By Marie Elwood-Hendricks

It was family home evening, and Dad was teaching the lesson. I slouched into a comfortable chair and glanced around the room at my sisters and brothers. We were there, prepared to listen—halfway—before rushing back to the really important things in our lives.

Suddenly Dad disappeared into the kitchen. I raised my eyebrows at Anna, my sister. She shrugged, silently communicating, “How do *I* know what he’s doing?”

He came bouncing out of the kitchen with an apron on, a large mixing bowl and an old cookbook in his hands. “Today for our lesson, we are going to make a cake. Then, for a treat, we will eat it.”

That sounded good to me. I could always handle a few extra snacks between meals.

“But,” Dad said, “we’re not going to use this cookbook.”

“Why not?” asked my sister Katie.

“Well, this book was written a long time ago,” he said as he checked the copyright date in the front. “1979. I’m sure they knew how to make a 1979 cake, but I really doubt the authors know anything about making a cake right now, in this century. The pressures that we’re under, the technology, it’s all really different.”

“But cake making doesn’t really change,” protested Anna.

“No book,” said Dad. He threw the cookbook squarely onto the kitchen table. “This is our cake, and we’re going to make it our way. We don’t need anyone to tell us how to make it. Let’s go around and each person can pick an ingredient to put in the cake.”

He started with me. “Um, OK, flour?”

“How much?”

“Two cups?” I hazarded a guess. “Really, Dad, I think it would be better if . . .”

He held up his hand to silence my protest as Mom rushed to get the flour and add it to the mixing bowl.

Joe was next. “Butter? One stick?”

We went around the circle. We added salt, sugar, milk, and eggs. I breathed a sigh of relief when Katie added baking powder. She bakes more than I do, and I had known it needed some kind of leaven, but I was unsure what.

It was Anna’s turn. “Cocoa powder,” she declared. I smiled. Chocolate cake is my favorite. This cake was turning out to be OK after all.

When we were all finished, it looked like cake batter and smelled good, too.

“Let’s grease and flour the pan,” suggested Katie.

“One moment,” said Dad. “I just thought of something that would be really good to add.” He handed the bowl to Mom and came back with some . . . was that Worcestershire sauce?

Amidst howls of protest, Dad added two large tablespoonfuls of the black sauce to our batter. We all looked on in shock and dismay.

Dad smiled benignly. “Were you going to grease and flour that pan?” he asked Katie.

“I guess so,” she replied uncertainly.

Dad looked at our crestfallen faces. He said, “I know most successful cakes don’t have Worcestershire sauce in them. In fact, if we looked in the instructions, there might be some kind of warnings against adding things like Worcestershire sauce. But,” he said with a sneer, “that cookbook is old-fashioned and ancient. We don’t need anyone telling us what to do. It’s our cake. We can do what we want with it. Also, I hear that everyone who is anyone is

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putting Worcestershire sauce into their cakes these days.”

Dad popped the cake into the oven and removed his apron. In stunned silence, we returned to our seats. Dad sat down, too. When he began to speak, the sneer was gone. He held up a set of scriptures, and his tone was reverent.

“When you pictured the cake we were going to make, you probably pictured something wonderful, maybe a chocolate cake with white frosting. You did not picture something disgusting.

“Right now I want you to picture the life you have ahead of you. Picture the ingredients you know you need to return to your Father in Heaven. Picture serving a mission. Picture marriage in the temple. Picture the career of your choice. Picture yourself making good choices and being a force for good in the world. These are the positive ingredients you put into life.

“But there are certain things that do not belong in a successful life, just as Worcestershire sauce never belongs in a cake, like drug use, sexual immorality, or dishonesty. No matter how Satan tries to disguise them, they are guaranteed roads to failure.

“Of course, our cake would have turned out better if we had read and followed the

instructions.”

He held up his scriptures. “Your life will turn out better if you follow the teachings in here. It’s true that the scriptures were written a long time ago. It’s true that some of the values may seem old-fashioned to some of your friends. But, like Anna said, cake making doesn’t really change much over time, and neither do the rules for living a happy and successful life. Also, we have living prophets and apostles. They are the experts, just like the authors of the cookbook are experts. We all would do well to follow their teachings.

“If you keep sight of your eternal goals, you won’t let people talk you into putting destructive ingredients into your life. But if you just drift along, adding whatever yucky things are ‘in’ at the moment, you won’t make the cake—or the life—that you picture for yourself.”

We were quiet for a moment. Then Mom said, “Of course, we do have repentance.”

“That’s true,” said Dad. “Unlike cakes, lives get second chances.” The timer buzzed. Reluctantly, Katie went to the kitchen and removed the cake from the oven. It smelled terrible. Were they really going to make us eat that?

“Let’s go have a treat,” said Mom. As we got up to leave, my brother Joe put his hand on my dad’s shoulder.

“Good lesson, Dad,” he said.

We were pleasantly surprised to find another cake, which Mom had made using the cookbook. We all had a small bite of the nasty cake, however, just to see what it tasted like. It was as disgusting as it smelled.

For the price of a few wasted ingredients, Dad made a huge impact. For years now, I have remembered his lesson, and I have always been blessed when I have tried to avoid the undesirable ingredients of life. **NE**

