

Sweet and Sour

By Zi Graves



Memories

Last week I left you in the midst of sorting through and probing deep into the recesses of memory that holds the secret of our past and all kinds of things popped out, some good and some not so good. It takes both to make up one life. The good we like to hold onto, the bad we try to bury deep within our subconscious and only accept it as a fact of our life when we go probing into the past. And that part is for the interest of "family only."

Last week I told of the geographical location and interesting combination of transportation and industry so close to our home. Now we will see how that affected our life.

The frequency of the street cars passing by with their jangling bells announcing their next stop was more interesting than anything for that meant someone would be getting off at the stop close by and it could be mom or dad coming home from work, or marketing, or it may be a neighbor with a cheery "good morning, or evening" greeting us as we played games on the sidewalk. But whenever it was, it was fun to see them get off and listen for the bell to ring for the next stop. These cars were operated by electricity from a cable run overhead. I wish I could remember how it was connected to the car and whether it was one or two tracks in row, but such things were somehow

not stored for future use. And anyway, who would have ever dreamed twenty-five years ago that I would be trying to describe in the year 2000 how streetcars were operated and their importance to the growth of a developing nation. I do remember how the sparks would fly from the cable when the car was stopped or started, and the conductor would get out and adjust something or other and the sizzling and popping would stop and the trip continued. Streetcars were the only way of transportation for the inhabitants of the towns along the upper Ohio valley to get to their destinations, whether it be the next town or their place of employment, that I knew about. Automobiles were just beginning to make their appearance as a popular mode of travel and public transportation was the accepted way to get where one wanted to go.

One of my happy memories of those days: On May 28, the last day of school for that year, every child was given a packet of tickets, courtesy of School Administration and American Steel Mill, that included a round trip streetcar pass, a strip of ten tickets for the rides of our choice, and an entrance pass to Rocksparks Park. This park was the forerunner of places like Coon Island Park. And for many of us it was our first experience, but not last, of the excitement of the last day of school and the packet of courtesy tickets to Rocksparks Park. What a wonderful way to end the school year.

The steel mill, I think it was, The American Steel and Tin Plate Company, did many more things for the community that could, and should, be a model for today's industry, and civic institutions to follow. This was the large steel mill directly behind our house on Wellsville Ave. in Wellsville, Ohio.

This was the small thriving town with the excellent school system I have spoken about before. I had other assets as well, that of the steel and

pottery industries. The steel mill covered two blocks, beginning at the banks of Beaver Creek and ending in back of our house, on the banks of Wells Creek. It was a noisy industry with bells clanging and overhead machinery going day and night past the windows of our house, but the noise had meaning. It meant they were busy and their employees, as well as the industry, was making money. So the residents of this area reaped the benefits from the programs it spawned.

The entrance to the office of the mill was a half block from our house and on the corner to the entrance was a big brick building with a porch across the front and sidewalk leading to the street. It was an impressive building and it took awhile before I had the courage to knock on the door and ask to see Ms. Perry. I had been told she was a nurse and would fix up my blistered heels: I was welcomed by a tall homely woman who immediately got out a roll of wide white tape and showed me how to put plain tape, not band aids, on a raw blister on one heel, caused by improperly fitted shoes. On the spot I fell in love with her. It was then I learned about other duties she performed. She was not only a nurse, she was the administrator of more programs of interest to the whole neighborhood. This building was part of the Steel Mill's holdings and Ms. Perry was the overseer of them and all activity taking place in it. It was a glorified community center for kids from all walks of life. Ms. Perry held after school classes for girls three days a week and boys two days. She had classes for the girls on sewing, mending or allowed them to choose their hobby. Much of it was simply socializing while pretending to sew. The boys had a separate area to meet and do whatever boys do when they are supposed to be learning new skills. Their teacher was a male friend of Ms. Perry, whom we all tutored about

as being "her boyfriend." Maybe he was, for she was an attractive unmarried woman, and if he was the handsome middle aged man some of us saw leaving the office with her, they were well matched, and I hope they got married and lived happily ever after.

Ms. Perry also took the young people on outings. Boys one week, girls the next week. Maybe she didn't understand the need for both sexes to share the same outings, or just maybe she understood too well. At least there were never any improper conceptions taking place when she was in charge. On one of these outings with the boys, she told later of an embarrassing moment to one of their senior boys who was trying to show off during the tree climbing competi-

tion. He was a very handsome young man, well dressed and somewhat cocky with his skills. As Ms. Perry tells it, she had warned them of climbing too high or too close to the edge of the steep hillside, but this teenager, as most of them are guilty of doing, took no heed and climbed to the very top of a young tree and bent it forward so he could swing to the ground. This is really an exciting thing to do for I have done the same thing. But Bob hadn't counted on his belt coming unlatched at the same time his body slithered down as his feet reached for the ground, so he not only lost the contest, he lost his dignity along with his pants and belt as both slipped over his feet and had to be rescued by Ms. Perry.



Points East

By: Ike Adams

I was making cornbread the other day in front of somebody who would rather not have her name in the paper and heaven knows that I would never try to insult or make anybody mad in this space.

This person has to have a recipe book or card handy if she boils water and she says that half the time it just doesn't come out right. She was in awe of my approach to cooking because I have no use whatsoever for measuring cups or spoons.

My approach to cornbread commences with a big mixing bowl into which I pour as much self-rising cornmeal mixture as I think I'll need. Into that I put an egg, a big pinch of Clabber Girl baking powder and a

splash of cooking oil. If I don't have an egg I put in a big dollop of mayonnaise. Then I pour in about a cup of buttermilk as I think I'll need and start stirring. If it's too thick I add a little more buttermilk and if it's too thin I add a little more meal. I want the mixture thick enough to pour easily but not soupy. When it's stirred up real good I pour it into a cast iron skillet that I've sprayed with butter flavored Pam and I bake it at 450 til it gets good and brown. Nobody complains about my cornbread and very seldom does any of it get thrown out to the dogs.

My friend's approach to the cornbread is a recipe which she follows

step by step. She levels off the top of the cup with a spoon handle because she fears the worst if she has a teaspoon too much meal. She would never consider substituting mayo for eggs and she measures her cooking oil in a tablespoon thimble again with a short handle. She sets a timer on the oven for however long the recipe says the bread should bake.

I do not have the patience to watch her make a meat loaf because I can't imagine measuring half a cup of chopped onions and mashed up crackers and what not.

I use the same mixing bowl that I use for cornbread to create my meat loaf. I lay out a pack of hamburger, a stick or two of celery, a big onion, a bell pepper, some crackers, a bunch of catsup and a couple of eggs and I go to mixing stuff together until it looks and smells about right. I make a trip to the spice rack and grab some basil, oregano and anything else that hits my fancy and I do liberal dashes

of that into the mixture along with some salt and pepper. When it gets to the point that it looks like I have enough to fill, you guessed it, a big cast iron skillet, I dump it in and sort of round it off. I smear some molasses on top and pop it into the oven at 350. After it bakes long enough to get the kitchen smelling good, I smear on another coat of molasses and let it bake a while longer—probably about 35 minutes from start to finish.

I asked my friend if she ever used molasses on her meat loaf and this is a direct quote, she says, "can't find a meat loaf recipe that calls for molasses."

"Just add molasses to the one you use regularly," I suggested.

"Oh Lord, no," she said. "It might not turn out right."

The only recipe that I pull out and follow to the is one that Dover Corbett gave me for venison and it is too long and complicated to put in this column. Dover insists that after six decades of practice he has gotten this recipe to the point that it can't be improved and that every step has to be followed to the letter. I'm convinced that he is right.

Other than that, I figure that cooking is pretty much common sense. I do pull out a cookbook once in a while to get inspiration but that's about it. Just mix stuff together until it tastes good and looks like it will fit in the cooker or the baking pan and go

for it. And if somebody tells you that "your doing that wrong" which happened to me when I made candy last night, just tell them that they don't have to feel obligated to eat it.

It's about supper time here on the Branch and writing this column has made me hungry. That means I'm sounding better all the time so I think I'll rustle one up.

Happy cooking and in the meantime please let me know if you have an answer for this troublesome question that has been bothering me all weekend: What happens if you get scared half to death twice?

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