

A Lesson in Bread Making by H.T.; June/July 1990 AHE Newsletter

At our house, bread baking is a privilege reserved for the elite few (three to be exact) whose names appear upon the roster of an enterprise called “3R’s Bake-‘n’-Learn.”

Since my name does not begin with R (I’ve been informed that it starts with M – for Mom), and since I have “other sources of income” (Dad’s checkbook), it is considered highly irregular for me to intrude upon the world of dough and oven. If I want bread, I must stand in line behind my more favored neighbors and pay...but not for the same bread. Oh, no! I get to buy the bread that, for one reason or another, is not considered fit for sale. Except, of course, to Mom.

My freezer, fridge, and table are often filled to overflowing with charred and deformed testimonies to the value of experience as a teacher. (“But, Mom! Didn’t you say that everyone’s best lessons are learned from his failures?”)

So, I do not normally bake bread.

But, then, today is not a normal day. Today I need to pound on something. Today I need to clatter around the kitchen slamming cupboard doors and slinging greasy measuring spoons at the sink.

Today I bake.

The wire whip taps a twangy rhythm on the newly dented sides of my shiny, stainless steel mixing bowl. By the time I’ve beat all the lumps from the “sponge,” I’ve worked up a good sweat. It’s satisfying to pause and savor the aroma of warm, growing yeast while gooey brown bubbles vie for a spot atop a mysterious world of growth and change.

And while the yeast is “working” so is my mind – finally.

You see, an unsolicited public opinion poll taken this morning by a member of the board of “3 R’s” has rated my popularity as a mom at about minus 20 on a scale of one to ten.

You know the scenario:

“But, Mom! Everybody’s going.”

“Well, then, I guess my kids are not a subset of ‘everybody’.”

“Ple-e-e-e-ease?”

“No.”

“Why not.” (It’s not a question; it’s a demand.)

“Because I don’t think it’s wise to let that many inexperienced, unsupervised kids...”

“But, Mom! Smiths are letting their kids go!!”

“So, if your last name was Smith you’d be going.”

And so on.

The last word, of course, was not mine. It was, however, sufficiently garbled by a mouthful of cookie and the slam of the screen door that I didn’t understand it. Just as well, I presume.

To the punch-slap rhythm of kneading and loaf shaping I began to pray. “Lord, is this really necessary? Must I always be setting limits? Must I always be holding them back?”

To my amazement, He answered me. He told me to leave a piece of dough on the table. “Don’t coop it up in a pan,” He said. “Let it do its own thing.”

That’s all He said, but it was enough.

The dough in the pans could grow in only one direction. Up. That dough on the table oozed out in all directions, unhampered by restrictions, shaped only by the natural forces of gravity and growth.

By the time I popped three crusty, brown loaves out onto the rack and paused to inhale the warm fragrance, the lesson was complete. An unrestrained, undisciplined child, like the souring, worthless glob on my table, dries and hardens around whatever it gets next to.

Like the bread pan, I must set limits in all directions except one. Bread pans have no lid.

And like the bread pans, I must “take the heat” of life with my loaves, never giving out or giving up till they’re baked through. Then, when it’s time for them to leave my care, they’ll hold their shape and nourish a hungry world.

Thanks, Lord, for the baking lesson!