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500 words

CHOCOLATE PUDDING

by

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I heard the back screen door slam. Then I saw Johnny, my older brother, running, barely able to keep his balance on the newly polished linoleum, yelling, "I've got the trots." He headed straight for the one bathroom. Not far behind came Freddy, my cousin, with the same complaint.

During the 1950's of my high school years, the six of us lived with Uncle Fritz and Aunt Mary along with their five children. The oldest girls of each family, Mity and I, had multiple responsibilities. During the summer months we made lunch for the thirteen of us. The simple meal included Weber's white bread, deli meat like baloney, tangy Miracle Whip, sliced tomatoes and lettuce for sandwiches. Ice tea, the only drink besides water, quenched thirst from the stifling weather. Fresh fruit finished the meal most days.

Freddy and Johnny took lunch breaks from mowing and raking alfalfa. Only a tractor umbrella or tarp provided protection from the blistering sun and still heat of the Imperial Valley. They came in cranky, sweaty, and dirty. Mity and I gave them heck for dragging dirt into the house. The arguing went back and forth with the boys saying, "You get to stay in the nice cool house, listen to radio soap operas, and sit." We reminded them of who ironed, folded their clothes, kept the house clean, and cooked. At lunch complaints continued: "This is the same old boring stuff." Mity and I had heard enough of their whiny nature. What to do for sweet revenge?

Tomorrow's dessert would be chocolate pudding. Following a recipe using the Revere Ware double boiler, we made a smooth pudding with a tempting aroma. We divided a portion of the hot mixture and added Ex-lax. Mity and I had no knowledge of laxative melting levels. We broke the Ex-lax into small pieces, believing it would melt without difficulty; after all it was also chocolate. We stirred and whipped, removing most of the lumps. We had little concern about dosage, just that it be effective.

The following day's lunch included chocolate pudding with two special bowls for Johnny and Freddy. They thought the pudding a treat, but lumpy. And out to work they went while Mity and I waited for results.

After work, Uncle Fritz, Freddy and my brothers, Johnny and Fritz, drove the ten miles to Mexicali, Mexico, for a thirty-five cent haircut with directions to the barber to cut U.S.-style side burns. While across the line, they had the usual treat of shredded, boiled beef tightly wrapped in handmade, warm corn tortillas. These tacos ordered by the dozens with hot sauce they gobbled up one after another.

After Johnny and Freddy recovered from the trots they agreed, "It was that Mexicali meat." Mity and I listened. We never told them about the special pudding, as we knew the trot would hit the fan.

Next November both John and I will be in our seventies. Maybe I'll give him this memoir. It is time to spill the beans.