

Home Economics 101 for Boys

By Dennis Knight

Mrs. Jones, one of the home economics teachers at Laramie High persuaded the school administration to let her offer a special course in the subject for boys. She was the young wife of an athletic trainer at the University of Wyoming, and as a couple they also managed a residence hall for the athletes.

I believe it was her empathy for males hopelessly away from home and mother that prompted her to teach the course. She would give lessons and experience in the arts of attaching buttons, ironing garments, cooking on the stove and in the oven, nutrition, planning a household budget, grocery shopping and more. We would even bake a cake, not out of a box, but from scratch.

I saw it as a chance to grab some needed credits and snag an A to buttress my sad grade point average. That it was an extra hour to the school day at seven in the morning was not daunting for me, so I was first in line to register. I figured I would have an easy time of it. Surely I had the genes of my mother who had a college degree in home economics and was a creative homemaker and the mother of seven.

The first unit was on the ironing of shirts, a skill mom had taught me well. I was and still am so good at it I even wrote a recent white paper on the topic. I breezed through the unit and Mrs. Jones held me up as a shining example for the fellows who couldn't tell their placket from a button hole. I was definitely in for an A, maybe an A-plus. I did well through most of the other units too. I had learned to cook at home, and generally understood how to follow sequence, measure, stir, and use a timer. At the cooking stage, we were put in teams and assigned to the available ranges and ovens in the classroom.

All I can say is the other three fellows on my team must have been idiots. How else would you explain what happened on the day we made our yellow cake from a scratch recipe? My sleepy team took too long that morning mixing the ingredients and getting the batter evenly divided into pans, so when the bell signaled us to move to our next class the cake was still rising in the oven. Mrs. Jones shooed us along and said the girls in the eight o'clock hour would take it out.

I went anxiously through my next two periods, ducking out of study hall at ten to check on the outcome. I was greeted on arrival by the laughter of sophomore girls and two large, cookie like objects at my work station. Mrs. Jones was not pleased, and ordered me to round up the boys after school to come back and clean the residue from the bottom of the oven. I don't remember my final grade for Boys Home-Ec but it didn't have a plus in it.

In reporting this story I have done some research on baking chemistry and the effects of baking powder and figure some genius, certainly not I, confused his T-S-P with a T-B-S-P.