

ICE CREAM: A RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

By Fred Hobbs

All three of the children my late wife and I reared chose diverse pathways in their careers. During their college and early employment periods each gained experience working in various capacities, mostly chosen by availability and suitable, if not fantastic, wages.

Our youngest, Fred, Jr., had, for a couple of years, the most popular job around. He was the manager of an ice cream store. Modeled after the now-famous nationwide chain Ben and Jerry's, which started on the east coast, the western version, called Josh and John's, hired Fred while he was still in college majoring in comparative religious studies, a commendable, but not necessarily focused path to a career.

Started in Colorado Springs, the two entrepreneurs Josh and John rapidly expanded their business to stores in Boulder and Denver. Fred ran both of them. Alas, Ben and Jerry eventually pushed Josh and John out of the highly competitive Denver metro markets, but remain today in business in Colorado Springs.

Naturally Home-made Vanilla was and is still on Josh and John's menu. In fact, Vanilla remains the favor of choice for the majority of American ice cream lovers. That has been so since Thomas Jefferson's time. Jefferson is credited with the idea of making the frozen treat from a recipe of fresh cream, sugar and flavoring. The first ice cream parlor opened in New York City in 1776. There is no record that it was in honor of the Declaration of Independence, but it must have been a place where some people came to help celebrate the historic event with a cone or a dish!

Today, like most ice cream emporiums, Josh and John's offers a large menu of ice cream flavors. In addition to Vanilla, Chocolate and Strawberry, there are such creative flavors as Mocha Java Josh, Almond Joy (using pieces of that tasty candy bar), Pikes Peak Coffee and a creation called Malted Mazel Toff(ee.)

Fred had a hand in developing those and other flavors during his tenure at Josh and John's while at the same time pursuing his college courses. He also displayed his talents in marketing which later became his chosen career field. When the pending arrival of Ben and Jerry's became a major threat at the time, Fred and his two bosses tried several gambits to stay atop the ice cream band wagon. Ice cream samples were delivered to always-hungry local disc jockeys and pop-culture oriented newspaper columnists. The frozen treats were tied to holidays, Denver-area sports team victories, and the creation of ever-new Josh and John flavors.

This effort led to a feature interview for the Denver Post's business section. As the marketing guy, Fred was recruited to answer the reporter's questions.

Yes, Josh and John are real people. No, they didn't exactly set out to copy Ben and Jerry, but do admit that their approach to the ice cream business is similar.

They are confident that the local community will continue to support their venture and yes, they have many more ideas for blends and flavors of ice cream to delight young and not-so-young alike.

Despite the good publicity and creative marketing effort, the business clout of the boys from the east won out. And, Josh and John were unable to compete successfully in the Denver metro market.

Eventually, young Fred turned to other pursuits, but nonetheless, left a lasting impression in the history of ice cream merchandising recorded for posterity in the Denver Post. When asked by the newspaper reporter: "What do your college studies have to do with ice cream?" the reply from my quick-witted entrepreneurial son was "Why, don't you know? Enjoying ice cream is truly a religious experience."