

The Ice Cream Wars

by Joan Black

It was HOT. It was HUMID. It was Louisiana in July!. The one and only solution to beat the heat and keep everyone, adults, children and puppies happy, was to make ice cream! So we rummaged in the garage until we finally found The Old Wooden Bucket. Well, not THE old wooden bucket, but a good facsimile thereof. An antique in this day and age of everything electric (or even solar powered), the wooden pail with the Rube Goldberg mechanism on the top, was rescued from the clutter, brought outside, hosed off and filled with water to get the dried out wooden slats to swell. Next came a quick run to the stores to buy more milk, eggs, sugar, vanilla essence, rock salt and crushed ice. A circle of kids sat and watched with rapt attention as we worked 'magic'. Milk, sugar and vanilla were measured into a saucepan and placed on the stove to heat. The children took turns to gently stir the custard. Meanwhile other recruits were persuaded to break eggs into a bowl and whisk, whisk, whisk until light and fluffy. By that time the custard was ready to pour into the inner container and placed in the refrigerator to cool. Layers of rock salt and ice went into the now watertight bucket. The cooled custard container removed from the 'fridge and sunk down into the ice and salt. The paddles were placed in the container, the metal hand crank affixed to the top and VOILA! time for the fun of cranking! Smallest children went first while the handle was still easy to turn, while others stood in line anxiously waiting to try their hand at making ice cream. Encouragement was offered as the handle became harder and harder to crank until at last Dad pronounced it "Ready". The paddles were withdrawn and everyone had the chance to lick a paddle clean – germs be damned!. The bucket was then wrapped in an old blanket for insulation and placed in the shade of the tree out on the lawn while the ice cream hardened.

We lost count of the number of times the question was asked "Is it ready yet?" Until finally, YES, it was ready! Oh the bliss of sitting on the cool grass in the shade of that big ol' tree slurping on a home made ice cream! Neighboring parents came by to enquire if everything was OK? They'd noticed that the children were all SO QUIET – no squabbling, tantrums or yelling – how come? They too stayed for ice cream – and that's when the wars started. Soon everyone was cranking out home made ice cream. The Browns added strawberries, the Smiths added fresh peaches, the Jones' added M and Ms. This was one-up-manship at its most devastating. However, we felt smug – THEIR buckets were electric, OURS was good old fashioned, honest-to-gosh hand churned.

Maybe time has smoothed out the edges of that long, hot, humid summer – but I still recall fondly the taste of that homemade ice cream.