



Reflections on “The Help”

Last week, I was relaxing with some friends at a pool party get-together. Of course, the topic was the weather, what the temperature was, and what the heat index was – you know the things we talk about on a daily basis in the South. All I know is that it was HOT!

I started to think back to an equally hot summer 8 years ago, when I served as the food stylist for the Dreamworks production of the movie “The Help.” When they hired me, I didn’t actually know what being a food stylist entailed, but I knew I wanted to do it. As time moved on, I discovered that any food that was shot in the scenes was my responsibility to prepare, deliver, and set up for shooting the scenes. You also had to prepare twice as much as you thought you needed in case scenes had to

be shot more than once.

If you are familiar with the book and movie, you know that the main “food” character is Minny’s Chocolate Pie. I don’t know too many people who are not aware of the significance of the pie, but let’s just say it was tampered with by its baker. Now if you don’t know the story, and I have peaked your curiosity, you can Google it if you need to.

To say that a pie can change your life would be putting it mildly. In the years that have followed the release of the movie, I have become not only a food writer, but also a public speaker. I enjoy telling my experiences about life and working in the movie industry for a short time. Whether I am speaking to a small gathering or a keynote speaker for a large group, I equally enjoy the experi-

ence and have met so many wonderful people across the great state of Mississippi.

After the release of the movie, the DVD was put on the market around Christmas season. I was contacted and hired by Disney studios to travel for a few days and do morning shows to promote the sale of the movie’s DVD release. Being met by limousines and having hair and make-up people traveling around with you was something I could have easily gotten accustomed to.

It is funny to me how one phone call and one decision to do something a little bit out of my comfort zone changed my life. I began working that summer on June 1st and my last day was October 31st. For 5 months, I shopped, cooked, and served food to be shot on whatever location was being filmed that day. I lost 50 pounds while working outside in a food tent. We never worked on Saturday or Sunday, but every other day was early in the morning until late at night. It was the hardest work I have ever done in my life.

In recent years, I’ve been contacted by *Food and Wine*, *Southern Living*, *Eat Drink Mississippi*, *Southern Lady*,

do not. Thankfully, no one with capital letters after his or her name has ever claimed that improper spoon training will begin a child’s descent into psychological pandemonium, even criminality. Perhaps it’s only a matter of time. There must be a market there, somewhere.

After all, there are several similarities between spoon training and toilet training. First, they both involve the digestive system. Second, they both involve messes. Third, said messes must be taken care of by parents (or nannies, as the case may be). Surely someone smarter than myself can make a case for waiting to teach children to feed themselves until they are at least five, lest an emotional apocalypse ensue. Said someone – a Ph.D. psychologist, of course – could come up with spoon-training readiness signs, as in, “child shows no significant anxiety at being handed a small spoon covered in soft rubber.”

Then the recommendation that “child be allowed to handle and chew on rubber-coated spoon for at least a week before training in self-feeding actually begins.”

Within five years, we will have therapy and medication for “self-feeding anxiety disorder.”

I’m being a tad, but only a tad, facetious. Nonetheless, history strongly suggests that if a child-rearing problem doesn’t yet exist, the professional community can be counted upon to remedy the situation.

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Glamour, and *Entertainment Weekly* magazines for interviews and recipes. My food writing has increased to three magazines and four newspapers. In addition to teaching middle school, there is never a dull moment in my life. I wouldn’t have it any other way.

I hope you will give today’s recipes a try. Thanks for reading.

MINNY’S CHOCOLATE PIE

1 ½ cups sugar
3 Tbsp. cocoa
2 eggs
¼ cup butter, melted
1 tsp. vanilla
¼ tsp. salt
1 small can Pet milk (5 oz.)
1 unbaked 9-inch pie shell
Mix all ingredients and pour into unbaked pie crust that has been pricked with a fork. Bake at 350 degrees for 40-45 minutes. Cool and serve with whipped cream.

*This can easily be doubled to prepare 2 pies at one time. Baking time will increase by about 10 minutes.

BALSAMIC VINAIGRETTE
¾ cup balsamic vinegar
2 oz. water
¾ Tbsp. minced garlic
1 Tbsp. Zatarain’s Creole mustard
3 oz. sugar
2 tsp. dry Italian seasoning
1 tsp. black pepper
½ tsp. salt
2 cups olive oil
Place all ingredients, except olive oil, in a blender or food processor. Slowly add olive oil until thickens and becomes emulsified. Pour into a Mason jar and refrigerate. Makes 3 cups.

LEMON POUND CAKE
3 sticks salted butter, softened
3 cups sugar
5 large eggs
¼ tsp. salt
3 cups flour
1 cup lemon-lime soda
3 Tbsp. grated lemon zest (from 3 lemons)
Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Thoroughly coat a 10 cup Bundt pan with baking spray. Cream the butter and

sugar with a mixer about 5 minutes; add eggs one at a time. Add the salt, flour 1 cup at a time, and then the lemon-lime soda. Mix in lemon zest and baking soda; evenly place the batter in baking pan. Bake for 70-75 minutes until cake is done. Let cool on rack for 15 minutes, then turn out to cool completely.

Glaze:

2 Tbsp. grated lemon zest (from 2 lemons)
2 cups powdered sugar
2 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice
¼ tsp. salt
1 Tbsp. water
Combine all glaze ingredients and whisk until thick, but pourable. You may need to add more lemon juice if too thick. Put the cake on a stand and use a large spoon to drizzle glaze all over the cake. Let set about 30 minutes before serving.

Lee Ann Fleming is a Holmes County native, food columnist and has garnered fame for her recipes featured in the film, **The Help. Fleming can be reached at lafkitchen@hughes.net.*



Living With Children

By John Rosemond

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Strolling through my go-to grocery store the other day, I happened down the Baby Products aisle where I spied packages of toilet-training pants featuring pictures of happy children who looked at least three, some as old as five. The first question that came to mind: Why would a five-year-old who is continuing to eliminate on himself be happy? Perhaps a spokesperson for the unnamed manufacturer of said diabolical apparel will answer that question for me.

In the mid-1950s, a study done by researchers from Harvard, Stanford, Yale and Princeton determined that close to 90 percent of 24-month-old American children were accident-free and had been for at least one month. That means 9 out of 10 children were completely toilet trained by no later than 23 months. And then, in the 1960s, along came the Mr. Rogers of pediatrics, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, who claimed, without a shred of scientifically-obtained evidence, that the attempt to toilet train a child under age 24 months requires “force” and is therefore psychologically damaging.

In addition, Brazelton fabricated a wholly fictitious set of ten or so behavioral “readiness signs” that he insisted be present before toilet training is attempted. Mind you, the only readiness sign to which mothers in the pre-psychological parenting era

(pre-1960s) paid attention was their own readiness to stop changing and washing diapers. Almost instantly, Brazelton’s “child-centered” approach to toilet training became the gold standard in the pediatric community. As pediatricians began advising mothers to hold off training until 30 to 36 months lest they wreak psychological havoc on their kids, a process that had taken 3 days to a week, on average, began taking months, even years. Likewise, mothers went from being fairly nonchalant about the entire affair to being toilet-training basket cases.

The problem rapidly expanded to the point where some psychologists began specializing in toilet training. In Charlotte, North Carolina, in the 1970s, a psychologist advertised an in-home toilet training service. Yes, he would come to someone’s home and either toilet train the child in question or walk the parents through the process. Books on how to toilet train began to proliferate. (I even wrote one in which I simply described how it was done before Brazelton threw his monkey wrench into the matter.) After all, where children are concerned, there is nothing new under the sun (despite propaganda to the contrary).

Do parents need specialized professional training to properly teach children to feed themselves? No, they

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