

From Aunt Olivia's kitchen

Adolescent experiments

by Lydia Lovell

When I look back to the years I was a teenager, it seems as though I spent most of the year daydreaming about the good times enjoyed the preceding summer or anticipating the good times that would begin immediately after the last day in June that school was in session. At the same time, I recall school days as reasonably contented ones, and am puzzled about the apparent contradiction.

A better-than-average student, I got along well with my teachers. A willing participant in extra-curricular activities, I was accepted in my peer-group. Although I played no musical instrument, I belonged to the Glee Club. Although disinterested in organized competitive sports, I participated in those where winning was unimportant like swimming, hiking, cycling, and climbing trees. These were, for me, solitary pursuits practiced in summer months. In winter when other youngsters went skating or coasting, I preferred the fireside and a good book. Probably my mother worried about me, and probably she discussed her concerns with Aunt Olivia who "took steps."

Was it my own idea? Or was the suggestion planted and allowed to grow, that the four or five girls and four or five boys, all in their teens but still too young to drive cars, gather at one another's houses on Saturday evenings to practice the graces of adult behavior at parties? I'll never know for certain (and I never suspected at the time), but today I think it likely Aunt Olivia had a hand in nurturing those little soirees. Certainly, it was a fine idea, for we had all known each other since kindergarten, felt more like brothers and sisters than boy-and-girlfriends, but needed experience to make the transition to other ways to gain attention than tripping, punching, and pig-tail tweaking.

An important aspect of those Saturday evenings was food. We had eaten heartily at home prior to the 7 p.m. meeting hour, yet we were of the age where our appetites were never satisfied. As soon as we assembled, bowls appeared filled with popcorn and peanuts, and plates of Ritz crackers and cheese were strategically distributed. Eating gave us something to do until our self-consciousness wore off, and we could relax. Parental supervision casts its shadow over us, too, for at whichever house we met, family members hovered just beyond the living room door, listening and occasionally observing.

In addition to food, there were games. We played 'kissing games' like spin-the-bottle, of course, and when a blushing couple left the room for privacy of a hallway or front entry, chances were good the young man balled his fists in his pockets, glared at the young lady fiercely, and mutely DARED her to come near enough to be kissed. Or the girl turned her back, covered her face, and looked at the boy through spread fingers, silently shaking her head. Then, un-kissed, the pair returned to the group and easily appeared both smug and satisfied. Little wonder that parents permitted kissing games. Maybe their own memories were excellent!

Time flew or dragged, depending upon whether you were guest or hostess. Being hostess involved enormous responsibilities . . . guests had all the fun! Shortly before nine



o'clock the company moved to the dining room where more refreshments were served. Cola or ginger ale and cookies and cake were standard fare, but there were attempts to vary the menu on the part of some parents (and of Aunt Olivia). It was she who prepared snacks when it was my turn to entertain. Cheese Fondue became a perennial choice.

2 12-oz. cans of beer
2 lb. Swiss cheese, grated
4 T. flour
1 t. salt
Dash of nutmeg
½ t. Tabasco

French bread cut into cubes

Leave opened cans of beer at room temperature for half-an-hour. Pour beer into top of double boiler and boil a few minutes to drive off the alcohol. Place over hot water and gradually add grated cheese, stirring constantly after each addition until cheese melts and mixture is smooth. When all cheese is added, blend flour, salt, nutmeg, and Tabasco with ½ C. cool water and stir into cheese. Serve immediately to 10 or 12. At an adult party, a dry white wine is an appropriate beverage to serve with fondue, but we settled for pale dry ginger ale.

At our house, Aunt Olivia's chafing dish was used as the fondue bowl, and we gained a degree of sophistication, even poise, handling chunks of bread on long-handled forks, dunking them into the cheese without losing them, and getting the delicious bits to our mouths without dribbling cheese all over ourselves. Until we got the hang of it, a certain amount of spillage was inevitable and enormous double damask napkins protected our party clothes. My mother proposed draping us all in bibs, but Aunt Olivia echoed my protestations and she and I outvoted Mother's practical suggestion. We did master the technique, in time.

Uncomplicated, but fancier than ginger snaps, were Orange-Raisin Cookies. Aunt Olivia frequently supplied a big batch when I was hostess. This recipe makes 24.

½ C. softened butter
1 egg
1½ t. grated orange rind
½ C. orange juice
2 C. flour
2 t. baking powder
½ t. cinnamon
½ t. salt
½ C. seedless raisins
¾ C. chopped walnuts

Preheat oven to 375°. In a large bowl, cream softened butter until light; beat in egg. Add orange rind and juice; set aside. Sift flour, baking powder, cinnamon, and salt onto wax paper; stir into egg mixture. Beat by hand until well-blended. Stir in coarsely chopped raisins and chopped nuts. Drop cookies from teaspoon onto baking sheet, allowing space to spread. Bake 20 minutes until light brown.

All of us were still young enough to savor anything tasting of peanuts. Peanut Butter Nuggets called for no sugar and

required no baking. At the age of ten I learned to prepare them with a minimum of supervision.

⅓ C. peanut butter (creamy or crunchy)
2 t. vanilla extract
1½ C. shredded coconut
1½ C. chopped walnuts
1 T. grated lemon rind
1 C. chopped raisins
Extra coconut for dredging
Yield: 30 nuggets

In a medium bowl, combine all ingredients. Form into balls the size of a small walnut. Roll in shredded coconut. Chill until firm.

Twice, during the two winters our Saturday night parties were a bi-weekly occurrence, Uncle Henry volunteered to be chef and serve us his pancake specials. Not only did he produce the usual pancakes with maple syrup and butter, but he made two more separate batters giving us variety. Orange Pancakes are delicately flavored.

2 egg yolks
½ t. salt
½ t. baking powder
2 T. honey
butter and oil for frying
2 C. orange sections, chopped fine
1 C. flour
2 egg whites, beaten stiff

In a medium bowl, beat egg yolks, salt, and honey together; stir in orange sections and juice. Stir in flour. Fold in beaten egg whites. Combine equal amounts of butter and oil, heat enough to cover bottom of large skillet. Drop batter by tablespoonful for small pancakes. Turn to brown both sides. Serve hot. Makes two dozen.

No sooner had Uncle Henry finished mixing up one bowl of plain batter and another of orange batter than he set to work mixing a third batch which he called Jamaica Pancakes.

2 eggs
2 T. sugar
⅓ C. flour
1 t. baking powder
½ t. nutmeg (optional)
6 very ripe bananas, mashed
In a medium bowl, beat eggs until lemon-colored, add sugar and beat briefly, and add rest of ingredients except bananas. Stir, but do not overmix. Stir in mashed bananas. Heat griddle or skillet using same butter and oil combination as for Orange Pancakes. Drop batter by tablespoonfuls, turn when bubbles appear on edges and cakes are golden. Cook on second side and serve. Yields three dozen.

Over plain pancakes we poured maple syrup. With Orange and Jamaica Pancakes we used orange marmalade. Uncle Henry urged us to try sour cream with Orange Pancakes, but none of us was adventurous enough to experiment. Since then, I've learned to appreciate the subtle flavor combination.

The beverage of choice with pancakes was hot cocoa . . . prepared 'from scratch' in a huge double boiler. As each cup was ladled out, a fat marshmallow was carefully floated on top. Nectar of the Gods.

So short, those years, those school days, those winters we were in our early teens . . . too old to be children, too young to be grown-ups. The awkward stage of adolescence . . .