

BEFORE AND AFTER

The subtitle for my version of this is:

ONCE UPON A TIME

Last May, my daughter-in-law, Sandra, emailed me a photograph of a glass jar capped with a white enameled lid; the lid had been carefully lettered identifying the contents of the jar: "BACON GREASE"

Show Photo of "Bacon Grease".

Once upon a time, when I was a child, before the Second World War, we did save the bacon fat in a can, not a jar, on the counter next to the kitchen stove. As I remember, bacon fat was used when frying eggs.

So a photo of a jar full of bacon grease was not a surprise to me.

Didn't everyone who was still allowed to eat fat reuse bacon fat?

This is the "Before" part of the diagnosis of my high cholesterol level; the time when I still deep-fat-fried chicken in the fat from Neuske's bacon. The "After" part is that for past 20 or 30 years, my bacon allowance has been one piece of "turkey bacon" each week.

In any case, I found this photo quite amusing and sent an email back to Sandra, which was not really accurate as we probably didn't get bacon during the World War because bacon was rationed and my father was in Washington. But we did place all rendered meat fats into a can on the counter beside the stove, to be used as needed.

This is what I wrote back:

"Back during World War II we did save bacon grease. When we got a can full that we were not going to use for our home cooking, we turned it back to the butcher and received "red stamps" that could be used to purchase rationed meat, and maybe butter, which was also rationed. Instead of butter, we used unrationed oleo margarine. Oleo came in its original white color, but with a capsule of orangeish food coloring that the buyer could mix into the oleo to make it "butter yellow". One of my jobs was to color the oleo, squishing the coloring agent into the white fat with my bare hands. I thought this was fun, but my mother disliked the whole operation. She especially disliked watching me put the white oleo on white soda crackers for a snack."

In those days oleomargarine was called "oleo" rather than "margarine".

Because the color of real butter varies with the food cows eat in the different seasons, butter producers color their butter so that it is the same yellow all year long. The dairy industry would not permit oleomargarine to be sold “artificially” colored. This was a really big deal in dairy states like Wisconsin, New York, and California.

Sandra replied to this information:

“That’s so cool! Have you ever thought of writing down some of these anecdotes?”

So, that is what you are getting for the next few minutes.

Lots of things were rationed during World War II.

When I went to camp in Colorado and then away to boarding school, I had to take my food ration books with me. The red stamps were for meat and meat products such as butter, and the blue stamps were for items in cans.

I think sugar was also rationed. We got an extra allowance to make jellies and jams from our homegrown produce: strawberry, raspberry, grape, currant, and mint are what I remember.

We had ration coupons for shoes: we were allowed two pairs of shoes per year, but sneakers were not rationed because they were not made of leather. This was a little difficult with growing children. Shoes were passed from one child to another as we grew in or out of them. I remember being jealous of one of my friend’s leather “high top boots” that her brother had outgrown. I wanted high boots too.

Gasoline was rationed. The family car had an “A” sticker on the windshield and ration papers that permitted about 4 gallons of gasoline per week to be purchased. This was enough gas for three trips to the village of Barrington per week. As our grocery order was usually phoned in and then delivered, this was enough to cover weekly trips for Sunday School and Church, and my mother’s Friday trip, by train, into Chicago to see her mother and attend the Chicago Symphony. Our Ford pickup truck also had an “A” sticker. When my father returned from working in Washington in 1945, he managed to get a “B” sticker and ration book for his car, allowing a more generous amount of gas per week, so he could drive each work day to the Barrington railroad station to go to his office. As the war in Europe had ended by that time, the weekly allowance had been increased beyond the original 8 gallons per week for his car.

Heating oil was rationed. Every winter I was cold. Our house had hot air heating, but when it got cold I found a hot air vent that I could sit beside, wrapped in a blanket, to quietly read. After the war rationing had ended it was determined that the heating oil

allowance for our house was underestimated by a sizable amount. We were not surprised.

But back to a kitchen adventure.

Angel Food Cake

In the early 1930s, my mother considered Angel Food Cake to be a good desert when they had guests to dinner; the cake would be served with a fruit or chocolate sauce. The cake took a considerable amount of effort to make because you had to get a dozen eggs and separate the whites from the yolks; then the whites had to be whipped or beaten until stiff enough to form peaks. Before the electric mixer this took considerable time and effort. My mother insisted that the egg whites for this cake must be placed your “best china platter” and then whisked, with a flat whisk, until they had reached to proper consistency to be folded into the flour and sugar mixture. I still remember her whisking away. I now have her “best china platter”; it is chipped here and there along the edges and I sometimes wonder of the chips came from the whisking.

And then, sometime in the later mid-1930s, an electric Mixmaster entered our kitchen. It not only mixed anything that needed to be mixed, we also had the juice extractor and the meat grinder attachments. Freshly squeezed orange juice for 6 people was much easier. Cookie batter was a breeze. And any kind of cake, including Angel Food, was much easier. Cup cakes, baked in muffin tins and, in our family, called “Jum Jills” after the treat created in Wanda Gag’s book, *The Funny Thing*, were particularly favored.

And we had more Angel Food Cakes. I should mention that the 12 egg yolks usually became baked custard. The children got the custard, the Grown-ups got the cake.

In case you are interested, or even if you’re not, the Mixmaster was introduced in 1930. It was the first “mechanical” mixer with detachable interlocked blades. However, 1930 was just the start of the Great Depression and I suspect that most people didn’t spend what money was left on mechanical mixers.

An additional cake “After”:

When I was at Cornell University I discovered that the Agriculture College had a store that sold milk, eggs, wonderful ice cream, and, in a separate freezer case, plastic bags containing the whites of 13 eggs. Wow! I bought a held electric mixer and an Angel Food Cake tin and I was known to bake Angel Food cakes to share with whatever design team I was on. I also baked cakes to share with the other four women who also had very small apartments in our attic in a building near the Cornell campus.

From time to time, I still do make an Angel Food cake, but for the past 50 years or so, I have been buying a box of a mix at the supermarket to which I add some additional flavorings, and the beating is done by a stand Kitchen Aid mixer, but I still use the same old Angel Food Cake tin.