

Finn's Famous Flapjacks

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No one made pancakes like my dad. No one else knew how. And they were famous (he told us so) because of his secret ingredient. When I bragged to my friends about my dad's pancakes, they were awed. They had never heard of red, green, yellow, or (my favorite) blue pancakes.

The fun began on Pancake Eve: the night before pancakes were to be served. It didn't have to be a holiday or any particular day at all; any day that my dad got a hankering for hotcakes would work just fine. Generally the excitement began at dinner on Pancake Eve.

Daddy would innocently ask, "Who wants pancakes for breakfast?"

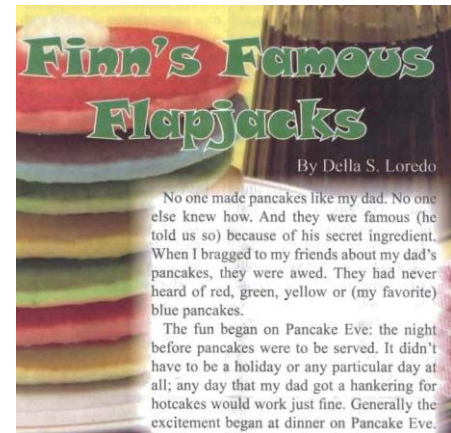
A clamor of "Yeah! Hurray!" would erupt. Of course everyone wanted pancakes – they were, after all, famous (he told us so).

As soon as the dinner dishes were cleaned up, Daddy began preparing for the big day. First, he would methodically set out the pancake mix, aluminum mixing bowl, and wire whisk – moving each an inch this way or a half-inch that way until the set-up was perfectly aligned. Next he would ready the necessary accompaniments: freshly ground peanut butter, Mother's homemade pancake syrup, and her special applesauce made from homegrown apples. Lastly, he would set the table for breakfast, making sure that each brown Melmac plate, blue plastic cup, and well-worn stainless-steel utensil was properly situated. Everything had to be just right for pancakes.

He would not bring out the secret ingredient, however, until the next morning when everyone else was still asleep.

Throughout Pancake Eve, Daddy fanned the flames of excitement by taking an on-going poll as to the preferred flavor for the next day's pancakes. Each flavor was famous in its own right, and each offered its own special appeal. Red pancakes were robust, with full-bodied flavor; yellow were sunny and subtle; green pancakes promoted growth and had a hint of mint; blue were calming and best with peanut butter. As he tucked each of us into bed that night, his final words to us would be "Um-m-m, those pancakes will sure be good in the morning." Then he would close the door as we drifted into sweet dreams of pancakes and exotic toppings.

On Pancake Day we awoke to the aroma of cooking pancakes. Being the head chef, Daddy had himself already mixed up the batter, of course, but he sometimes allowed Mother to actually cook them. This made for even better pancakes because Mother had hidden artistic talents that surfaced in her cooking. One never knew if one might get a dog or a dolphin, a giraffe or a genie, a cat or a camel. But our



favorite shape was always her renowned silver dollar – a miniature pancake that disappeared in one bite.

Once seated at the table for a breakfast of Finn's Famous Flapjacks, the real fun began with Daddy saying, "Yeah, when I was in Saskatoon and made flapjacks for Paul Bunyan..."

That's the reason Daddy's pancakes were famous, of course: because Paul Bunyan had only gotten so big and strong after eating them. Daddy and Paul had been the best of friends, and ole' Paul wouldn't think of heading out for a hard day of logging without first downing a hearty breakfast of Finn's Famous Red Flapjacks. The lumberjacks also demanded them on cold nights when Daddy made pancakes so big that they could be used for blankets. (This, of course, cut down on mealtime the next morning since they just ate their blankets when they awoke.)

The stories got better every time Daddy retold them.

I don't remember how old I was before I realized that Daddy had never been a lumberjack in Saskatoon (or anywhere else), or that he had never known Paul Bunyan. I don't remember when I realized that Daddy hardly ever even mixed up the pancake batter, let alone cooked them (it was, of course, my unpretentious mother who was the real chef). But I do remember the day that my mom revealed to me the secret ingredient for Finn's Famous Flapjacks: food coloring.

And I do remember the fun we had because of my dad's creative use of something as mundane as food coloring. My dad's "secret ingredient" – while not very glamorous itself – transformed regular pancakes into Finn's Famous Flapjacks, regular people into creative chefs, and regular days into celebrations. And although I didn't grow up in a wealthy home, I always felt luckier than any rich kid. After all, other kids only had plain ole' pancakes for breakfast.

What's more, I also learned several important life lessons from my dad's fun. Perhaps the most important of these was that the right "secret ingredient" can transform anything ordinary – including life itself – into something truly extraordinary.

The Apostle Paul had just such a "secret ingredient" that transformed his view of life. It allowed him to be content in jail (Phil. 4:12), unworried when hungry (v.12), joyful in suffering (v. 4) and peaceful, even while awaiting trial for his life (v. 6). But Paul didn't keep his secret ingredient a secret; rather, he recorded it for all of us to use as well:

"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation...I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Phil. 4:12-13, NIV)