

Betty and Me

by Jean Dickson

I'm always amazed at how we think we have to learn about life from people who are experts, from the PhDs in the crowd. And then along comes Forrest Gump and we learn that sometimes the simplest things in life can teach us the most.

I learned that just the other day. I was rushing, trying to get ready for a church function and the dessert I made got burned in the oven when I forgot to set the timer. My apple crisp had turned into crisp apple. But fortunately, I had Betty Crocker. When I picked up that cake mix and read the back panel, all of a sudden I had a profound Forrest Gump moment. Because I realized that Betty was talking to me about more than making a cake - Betty was talking to me about how to live my life.

Even before the baking directions, Betty Crocker tells me what ingredients I need. I learn not to mix together the oil, water and cake mix if I don't also have three eggs. But Betty's also whispering in my ear that I need to be prepared, to have the ingredients I need to bake up Jean's life just right. I need to assess what skills and abilities I have and see if they match my goals. And if they don't, I need to find out where to get some EGG-sperience!

Step #1 says to preheat your oven – and grease and flour your pan. From this, I learn that you can't bake your cake if you haven't turned the oven on! You've got to think ahead. My life isn't going to get anywhere if I constantly think in the short term. If I live only reacting to the moment and don't think strategically, then my life is going to be one soggy, unappetizing mess.

Betty Crocker, in step #2 tells me to beat together the cake mix, water, oil, and eggs. You can't make a cake taste tantalisingly terrific by mixing water with water! Or oil with oil. You need more than just one ingredient to make things interesting. In life, as in cooking, you need variety. I need people with different opinions, backgrounds, values, and thinking styles to add flavour to each day. I want my mind to sizzle with excitement and if I only associate with people who think the same way I do, it won't happen.

But Betty's not through yet. Step #3, tells me that I need to bake the cake for 30 minutes in a 350 degree oven. Think of heat as trials and tribulations. I'm telling you that in order to succeed in life, you need to have some difficulties.

A cake placed into a lukewarm oven isn't going to rise, to become tender. The baking powder needs heat to work. In the same way, without trials and tribulations in our lives, we won't become tender of heart, compassionate.

Before I faced the heat of unemployment, I seldom thought about the poor. And when I did, it was to think myself superior to them. But after two years without a job, without proper food to eat, without adequate heat, I gained an appreciation towards the needs of the poor. Yes, trials and tribulations tenderize our hearts. But we can't be left too long in the oven of adversity, otherwise we become dried out, hard, bitter in the same way a cake left too long in a hot oven turns into a hard, dry, unpalatable mass.

The final thing Betty Crocker teaches me about life is that you've got to frost the cake. Some people may argue that this step is unnecessary. But we all know that frosting completes the cake. So I need to find out what completes my soul, what makes me whole.

I've learned a lot from this simple box of cake mix. When I read the back I've discovered all I need to know about living a successful life. And all I had to do was open my mind, as well as my eyes, to one of the simplest things in life.