

AUGUST 14, 1980

Cooking for the boys while Child Who Sits in the Sun has been in college has been like doing the short order work in a diner on the Rock Island Railroad. I never know who is going to make a meal or who is going to have a guest. The knives and the forks ate in a coffee can on the table. I try not to be friendly with strangers.

My mother supplements the menu with homemade bread and fresh baked cookies. The cookies serve a dual purpose. I've learned that if I'll clinch a right crisp brownie in between my teeth while the oven is warming, the cookie gives the same stabilizing effect that a bullet does a line infantryman, plus the sugar gradually dissolving bolsters my energy level.

Cooks need extra emotional support. Exploding skillet grease and dark oven smoke wreck the nerves and dark oven smoke wreck the nerves and destroy a persons outlook on life. I've watched many an old ranch cook punt a garbage can farther than the leading kicker in a pro-league. Fallen hot rolls and sticking frijoles have caused many an old gal to stomp a cup towel until the tomcat moved to the barn. Cooks and gallery help are a temperamental breed and for this day they sure and for this day they sure have my deepest understanding and sympathy.

My biggest culinary accomplishment so far has been to create a canned chili casserole that's so fast and easy that I'm considering auditioning for one of those TV cooking schools.

I'll just share it with you. The secret is to start serving Frito and cheese snacks a day ahead of time. Enough cheese and Frito will be crumbled and crushed on the drain board and underneath the cabinet to sprinkle rich layers that fall into a delicious chili pie.

You don't have to be limited to cheese or Fritos. Yesterday, for example, I brushed in a cup or so of a pancake mix that'd spilled in behind the coffee canister and collected there.

The result was a bubbling pot of chili with rich cheese dumplings floating in the broth. We had enough left over for an omelet and the starter for a pot of soup. Every bite had that tantalizing surprise flavor that cooks strive to produce. (See how close I am to being a television star?) I may call old Betty Crocker in the morning and see if she would like to have the recipe for her cook book.

Child Who Sits in the Sun is graduating next week. Will I be glad to have her home. Evenings have been long and dull. I sit at the kitchen table, or wander about the house raking leaves in piles from the dying pot plants, or sweeping up the falling dog hair and the molting parakeet feathers.

I had no idea that house birds and town dogs were so much trouble. Her old dog howls half the night, and I'll take a paralyzed oath that those caged songsters don't sleep as much as a Rhode Island Red rooster does.

My pool playing has been neglected to a point of no return to the tournaments. Last week a neighbor lady brought over a Pyrex dish of jelled fruit salad. The cherries and the grapes were arranged in triangles exactly like a half-rack of nine ball. I was so lonely for a game that I didn't know whether I was hallucinating or coming down with kitchen fever. The next time my wife goes off to college I am going to look up a judge merciful enough to give me a 30 days at the public farm.