

Just like Mama made ...



True stories of the first real meal you tried to make

Fried chicken. There's a good chance that the first meal you ever prepared included your own version of Mama's fried chicken. Your side dishes likely included at least one of the following: cornbread, greens, beans, mashed potatoes or fried fatback. A first meal is no place to count calories.

Those satisfying and simple first meals stand out because you shared them with someone you loved, even if they did go awry. These are the ones that end with the diplomatic friend, fiancé, husband or family member choking down a bad meal, usually without complaint or commentary. Usually.

Your first meal was one to remember—whether it was edible or not.

—Kim Whorton Tripp, contributing editor



Thanks to everyone who sent in stories. Next month we'll publish your reports on lessons you learned from your children. [Deadline was June 15.] See the remaining themes and rules of our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series on page 15.

A home ec lesson for a football player

Three years of home economics in high school does not prepare everyone for the real world. I am that example.

My husband, who was my boyfriend at the time, was my guinea pig. I prepared a complete meal for him—the one we had previously cooked in the home ec class. It was simple: browned ground beef with onions and green peppers and biscuits. And my first attempt alone. Oh yes, it was full of green peppers (which he does not eat) and biscuits the size of a half-dollar with the consistency of a rubber ball with a hard outside shell. But he ate everything I fixed. He didn't, however, retain any of it. He had a football game that night. But the meal I had prepared came back up to greet him, and he had to be taken out of the game.

My cooking skills did not improve. We have been married over 30 years. We do not have a stove. You cannot imagine the looks I get when I comment on something wonderful that someone has cooked and when they offer the recipe, I reply that I would not be able to recreate their scrumptious delicacy because I am without a stove. My husband and my son do not have a problem with this. As a matter of fact, they are grateful and have let me know this through the years.

Annette Williams Clontz
Morganton, Rutherford EMC

Fried fatback and Pet milk gravy

My husband and I spent our first 15 months of married life with my parents. We eventually bought enough furniture (which we stored in a tobacco pack house) to move into our apartment in Pilot Mountain. Fortunately the refrigerator and stove were furnished with the apartment. The day we moved, we purchased a wringer washer at Boles Hardware in Pinnacle. Along with the washer and our other "treasures" we finally were settled in.

My first meal consisted of fried fatback, gravy, scrambled eggs and toast. It was topped off with a jar of my mom's homemade blackberry jelly. I used canned evaporated Pet milk to make the gravy, which turned out to be tasteful. We continued to use lots of Pet milk, saved the coupons on the can, and redeemed them for dishes.

We put in a day of hard work with getting settled in the apartment and the first meal I prepared we especially enjoyed.

When I think back on it all, we were almost like kids in a playhouse. If things could have remained that simple, what a wonderful life it would have been.

I continue to learn meal preparation and really enjoy cooking. To this day, it is one of my favorite hobbies, but our first meal in our new surroundings was probably our most memorable and enjoyable meal. Until their death, I always looked forward to going back to visit my parents and sharing a meal with them. What a joy it would be if I could do that today.

Ruth Watson
Mt. Airy, Surry-Yadkin EMC

Fresh chicken dinner

In 1932, I was 13 years old. I had never cooked by myself before, so I was all upset one day when Mom said, "You have dinner ready at noon." She instructed me to fix chicken, gravy, potatoes and green beans. She and Dad then went to the field on our Indiana farm to shuck corn. I didn't think that sounded too bad, but I knew the chicken I was to fix was still walking around in the chicken house! I had to catch it, behead it, fix hot water to dip it into to pluck the feathers, scrape the skin clean off all that was left, and then cut it into pieces to fry. The potatoes had to be peeled before they were cooked, but the green beans didn't require much work. They were home-canned and easy to fix. I got everything ready on time, and Mom and Dad really enjoyed it. Mom said, "I knew you could do it."

I have cleaned many chickens since that day, but I'll never forget the one I cleaned the day I fixed my first meal all by myself.

*Beulah Montel
Snow Camp, Randolph EMC*

Meat and potatoes casserole dish

When I first met my husband 13 year ago, I couldn't cook to save my life. Most of our meals consisted of hamburgers, hot dogs, frozen pizza and fast food. One day I thought I would surprise my hubby with an actual meat and potatoes meal. I bought a canned ham, scalloped potatoes, corn and rolls. After a long-distance phone call to my grandma, I got the ham into the oven with a brown sugar glaze. I followed the recipe on the box of scalloped potatoes. Got everything into the oven—so far so good. Everything smelled great.

When my husband got home, I was so excited when I told him what I was making. Suddenly there was a very loud bang from inside the oven. When I opened the oven door, I found that the casserole dish that had once held my scalloped potatoes had exploded. There was glass and potatoes all over my ham, not to mention my once clean oven.

Dinner that night wound up in the garbage. I was feeling so bad that my wonderful husband took me out for dinner. He even cleaned my oven for me.

*Kimberly Banks
Rutherfordton, Rutherford EMC*

Cressy greens and fried meat

It was on March 18, 1955. My husband Wiley and I moved into a small house. That day I cut a mess of cressy greens, and on my old wood cook stove I started fixing our supper.

We sat down to a meal of cressy greens, fried streaked meat, cornbread and cold buttermilk. I can see us sitting there at our homemade table with flat rocks under two of the legs because the floor was slanted. We didn't have any chairs, so we turned over bean hampers and sat on them.

I remember warmth from the cook stove and the oil lamp casting soft shadows. I can hear Wiley saying, "This is the best supper I've ever eaten." It was delicious, and nothing could have been finer.

*Rosetta E. Brewer
Warrensville, Blue Ridge Electric*

The Star Wars Dinner Party

The first meal I remember cooking was my Star Wars Dinner Party, in honor of the release of "Star Wars Episode 2." I had helped bake cakes and other stuff ever since I could stand on a chair, but I had never made a meal. I thought this was a good chance. I went on the Star Wars Web site and found some recipes.



It all started with the Star Wars Dinner Party. Now Jeremy wants to be a chef.

I made a banner that said, "Welcome to the Star Wars Dinner Party" and hung it on the wall. Then I started the cooking. I

made Pit Droid Pizza for a main dish. Pretzels in the shape of Star Wars letters. For dessert I made green Jell-O and put Star Wars action figures in it, and homemade Hoth Ice Cream.

I put the food on the table and decorated with Star Wars-themed cereal boxes, plates, chip bags, and Star Wars Lego's. The family loved it! Now three years later, I want to be a chef.

*Jeremy Lucas
Taylorsville, EnergyUnited*

continued on p. 16

Send us your best Earn \$50

Here are the themes in our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series. Send us your stories and pictures about these themes. If yours is chosen for publication, we'll send you \$50. You don't have to be the best writer. Just tell it from your heart.

September 2005 Celebrity Look-alikes

Photos of people who are dead-ringers for someone famous. Digital ones must be 300 dpi and at least 4 by 6 inches.

Deadline: July 15

October 2005 My Favorite Photo

North Carolina people, places, things. Digital ones must be 300 dpi and at least 4 by 6 inches.

Deadline: August 15

November 2005 It's the Thought That Counts

The dumbest gift you ever received.

Deadline: Sept. 15

December 2005 Holiday Mishaps

Those holiday plans that just didn't work out as you hoped they would.

Deadline: Oct. 15

The Rules

1. Approximately 200 words or less.
2. Only one entry per household per month.
3. Photos are welcome. Digital photos must be 300 dpi and actual size.
4. E-mailed or typed, if possible. Otherwise, make it legible.
5. Include your name, electric co-op, mailing address and phone number.
6. If you want your entry returned, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. (We will not return others.)
7. We pay \$50 for each submission published. We retain reprint rights.
8. We will post on our Web site more entries than we publish, but can't pay for those submissions. (Let us know if you don't agree to this.)
9. Send to: Nothing Finer, Carolina Country, 3400 Sumner Blvd., Raleigh, NC 27616
Or by e-mail: carolina.country@ncemcs.com
Or through the Web: www.carolinacountry.com

Home-grown fried sweet potatoes

When I was a 5-year-old youngster, my mother was working in Highlands. I decided to cook dinner when my mom came home from work. She was so proud and surprised when she entered the kitchen and found me on a stool cooking.

"Oh my gosh, what are you cooking?" she said.

"Cornbread, beans and my favorite fried sweet potatoes," I said.

"We don't have any sweet potatoes," Mom said.

I very proudly replied in a loud voice, "We do so! We have a box full of them!"

"Young lady, you show me those sweet potatoes," she said.

I eagerly took her to the box of sweet potatoes in the cellar. She screamed, "My God! You fried my prize dahlia bulbs!"

Believe me, to this day I do know the difference between dahlias and sweet potatoes. You can imagine how we enjoyed Mom's surprise dinner.

Linda Rogers Williams

Scaley Mountain, Haywood EMC

Just like Elmer's

As a newlywed, I was convinced that I could make my new husband, Jayson, love liver with gravy and fried okra all in one meal. All I had to do was cook it just like my mother always did. That would be easy—or so I thought. Mom just made it look easy.

I was excited as I gathered the ingredients and began "the famous meal." As I progressed, I slowly realized that this meal was not going to look or taste like Mom's. Both the liver and gravy and the fried okra looked like Elmer's Glue. My husband tried to eat it, and I felt like crying. Never fear though, I'd fixed Jell-O for dessert. Who could mess up Jell-O? Only me, the newlywed wanting to make a huge impression on her loving husband, could fix Jell-O that didn't gel and had to be eaten through a straw.

My husband remembered "the meal," because when he saw this theme in Carolina Country he said, "You need to write about our first meal."

Gail Duncan

Pine Hall, EnergyUnited

Mother-in-law's Victory Pie

My mother is a wonderful cook who solely ran her kitchen. Due to this I had little experience cooking until I got married. Wanting to be a good wife, I planned to cook a special meal for my new husband. This was the first meal I ever made using his mother's recipes from her church cookbook. I knew he loved her food so I decided to cook her Victory Pie. It sounded good but I had never seen it so I just followed the directions carefully.

With eager anticipation I awaited my husband's kind remarks on my efforts. Then it happened. When dessert was brought out he asked me what it was. I said, "Your mother's Victory Pie." He shook his head and said, "It looks like a defeat to me."

Twenty-eight years later we are still married, but I learned a good lesson: Never cook your mother-in-law's recipes.

Cathy Crumpler

Mt. Olive, Tri-County EMC

Got Land?

- WE build on YOUR lot, or on property you'd like to purchase.
- WE pay construction loan interest!
- WE pay points & closing cost!
- NO DOWN PAYMENT!
- Land & Home financing available.
- 2 Locations: Charlotte & Columbia

FREE BROCHURE

Just mail this coupon or call today

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Where do you intend to build: _____

Mail to: **Madison Homebuilders**
1721 East Blvd.
Charlotte, NC 28203



FOR FLOOR PLANS & A FREE BROCHURE
CALL TOLL FREE:

1-800-957-9304



Madison Homebuilders
www.madisonhomebuilders.net