

MOTHER'S DAY BOOT CAMP

by Jack Weyland

My first mistake was complimenting my wife Emma, “Hon, for Mother’s Day, are you going to make that candied ham like you did last year? That was so tasty! Oh, and the scalloped potatoes were out of this world! Even the kids liked ‘em.”

She glared at me and, without another word, went out to her garden. I figured she just needed to commune with nature. I’m a lot like that too. That’s why I’d gone golfing with my buddies that morning.

While she was in the garden, I made me some nachos, went to the living room, and turned on a baseball game. I’d had a hard week and needed a break. Every day that week, I’d gone in at seven in the morning and sometimes didn’t get back until seven or eight at night. But we’d made our deadline so I figured I deserved a little down-time, like watching the game.

Our three older kids were somewhere in the neighborhood so that was good. About five minutes into the game, two-year old Jimmy wandered into the living room and sat down next to me. I don’t know what he’d been eating but his messy diaper smelled gross.

“Go see your mom,” I said. “She’ll fix you up.”

He looked up and smiled at me and then sat on my lap. The smell was more than I could stand so I picked him up, went to the kitchen, opened our sliding door, and called out, “Hon, here’s Jimmy. He’s got a messy diaper. I’ll just set him outside. I know you don’t want it smelling up the house.”

She glared at me. I set Jimmy outside, slid the door shut and returned to my game.

In a few minutes, Emma came inside, took Jimmy into the bathroom and changed his

diaper. On her way back outside, I asked her to get me a root beer but she must not have heard me. But that was okay. I wasn't that thirsty. I could wait until she came back inside.

About half an hour later, it was the bottom of the ninth with two out, the bases loaded, the score tied, and up comes Derek Jeter to bat. Five pitches later, the count is three balls and two strikes. The home crowd is on their feet.

Just then Emma entered the living room with Jimmy in her arms. She grabbed the remote and stood in front of the TV, totally blocking my view.

"This next pitch will decide the game," the announcer said. "And here comes the pitch."

She hit mute on the remote. Also, she was looking kind of wild-eyed. "Would you care to know what Mother's Day was like for me last year?"

"Sure, Hon, but could we do that after the game?"

She turned the TV off so my guess was her answer was no. "Last Mother's Day I planned the menu! I bought the food! I cooked the food! I set the table! I called everyone to dinner! After we ate, you and the kids gave me a few presents, and some cards. After that, I cleaned up the kitchen! I put the dishes in the dishwasher! I cleaned up the wrapping paper in the living room! That's what happened last year!"

"You did a good job too, Hon. Thanks a lot. I know the kids really appreciated it."

She pointed the remote at me like it was a weapon. "Do you want to know what Mother's Day is going to be like this year?"

I got to admit she was a little scary. "Yes, Ma'am."

She jabbed the remote in my direction with each statement. "You will plan the dinner! You will buy the food! You will cook the food! You and the kids will set the table! We will eat

and then you and the kids will give me presents! And then you and the kids will clean up the kitchen and put the food away, then pick up the wrapping paper from the presents. You got it?”

“You know what? You’re absolutely right. You need a rest. Hey, I’ve got an idea! How about if we eat out instead?”

She threw up her hands. “That is so much like a man!”

“Well, you know, actually, I am a man.”

“You want us to go to a restaurant on a Sunday just so you can get out of work? How convenient for you, right? Well, let me tell you something! We will not go to a restaurant on Mother’s Day!! And, also, you will not order in the night before! You...will...cook...the...food!”

“Okay, sure, Hon, no problem. What would you like? Maybe a frozen pizza. I know you like pineapple on yours so I could put some on before I put it in the oven.”

“We’re not having frozen pizza for Mother’s Day! I want you to cook.”

“You know I can’t cook. What would I cook?”

“That’s up to you! You are in charge of planning the meal.”

“I see.”

“Good, I’m glad. That’s all I have to say on the subject.”

“Okay, well, great. Could you step away from the TV. I’d kind of like to see how the game I was watching turned out.”

“Do you really think you’ve got time for that? Mother’s Day is only two weeks away.”

Well, or course the answer was yes, I did think I should find out who won the game, but it didn’t seem like a good time to tell her that.

I sat down at our table with some paper and a pencil and pretended to plan the menu: The

best I could come up with was to buy fast food late at night, hide the boxes, put the food in a pot, and then put the pot in the refrigerator and, on Sunday, pretend I'd cooked it. But I was sure that somehow she'd find out what I was up to.

It soon became clear I needed help so I walked down the street half a block to my cousin Cody's house. Not because I thought Cody would have any ideas about what to have for Mother's Day. But his wife Amanda is a good cook.

I found them cleaning out their garage. I told them about Emma freaking out.

"So what do you want from us?" Cody asked.

"Well, the thing is, I don't know to cook, so, uh, actually, Amanda, I was wondering if maybe, when you're fixing dinner for Mother's Day, if you could do it the night before, and maybe cook enough for both our families, and then I'd come over when Emma was out and sneak the food into our house. I could even mess up some pots and pans so when she came in the kitchen, she'd think I'd done it all."

Amanda's eyes got real big. "You want me to cook dinner for your family for Mother's Day?"

"Yeah, if it wouldn't be too much trouble. Of course I'd kick in money for the food...and maybe even a little to you for cooking for us."

From the way Amanda was glaring at me and Cody, I figured the answer was going to be no. But I wasn't prepared for what she said next. "Cody, I think Emma is on the right track. So let me tell you now that I'm not cooking on Mother's Day either. So it's all up to you two. What do you think you'll cook?"

Cody glared at me. "How about some nice fried chicken from that place down the road?"

“I thought about that too,” I said to Cody, “but Emma says it’s Sunday and she doesn’t want me buying anything on Sunday.”

“I could get it on Saturday,” Cody said.

“Well, you could,” I said, “and I thought of that too, but Emma says that would be too easy. She wants me to cook it.”

Amanda nodded. “That’s what I want too, Cody. You’re in charge of breakfast, lunch and dinner for Mother’s Day.”

Cody glared at me. “Could we step out in the front yard for a minute?” he asked me.

We went in the front yard. “Thanks for ruining my life!” he said bitterly.

“How could I know Amanda was going to freak out too?” I asked.

“What are we going to do?” he asked.

“I have no idea.”

“I didn’t sign up for this when I got married,” he said.

“Me neither. I don’t go around telling Emma she has to clean the garage for Father’s Day! So where does she get off telling me I have to cook on Mother’s Day?”

“That’s right! She’s totally off track on this one.”

After a long pause, I sighed. “You know we’re going to have to do this, don’t you?”

“Yeah, I know. Like they say, ‘If Momma ain’t happy, there ain’t nobody happy.’ So what do we do?”

“Well, for one thing, We don’t ask any other wives to bail us out. If this ever snowballed, I’d be universally hated by all the men in our ward.”

“We got to get someone to teach us how to cook something,” Cody said.

“Who?” I asked.

“Let me think,” he said.

“Yeah, sure.”

“While you’re thinking, how about if we go to the driving range?” I asked.

“Sounds good.”

On our third bucket of balls, Cody came up with a possible solution. “Okay, I’ve got it. There’s a guy at work and his aunt cooks at the county jail. Let me ask him if she’d be willing to teach us how to cook something for dinner on Mother’s Day.”

“Sounds good.” A few minutes later I dropped Cody off at his house.

An hour later he called me and said he’d set it up. We’d each pay this woman twenty dollars to give us a cooking lesson, and she’d do it in the kitchen in the county jail starting at ten o’clock next Saturday, which would still give us a week to get ready for Mother’s Day.

I figured this was a good idea as long as we kept this quiet. There was no reason for anyone else to know what we were going to do.

But I was wrong.

Cody was the executive secretary in our ward, and apparently the next day in PEC he told the bishopric what we were doing.

So, that Sunday, Brother Samuelson, a counselor in the bishopric, when he was giving the announcements in sacrament meeting, got a big grin on his face. “Also, I understand the elders quorum is having a...” He started laughing. “...a homemaking meeting next Saturday morning.”

He couldn’t stop laughing. “A homemaking meeting...where they’ll learn to cook for

Mother's Day. Sam, I understand you're in charge of this first ever elders quorum homemaking meeting. So if any of the brethren are interested, talk to Sam, who I guess is our new Elders Quorum Homemaking Director...So, Sam, what's on the docket for next month...scrap-booking?" And then he and most of the ward laughed.

The next thing to be announced was a funeral. I'm not proud of saying this, but, the truth was, I was glad someone had died because it meant people quit laughing at me.

Apparently they talked about this in Relief Society because after church I got four phone calls from brethren in the ward saying through clenched teeth that they also had been told by their wives that the husbands would be cooking dinner for Mother's Day. They wanted to know more about where we would be having our training, and what they should bring and how much it was going to cost.

Saturday morning us six guys from the ward gathered at the county jail. After waiting for ten minutes, the jail cook came out to greet us. She was six foot four, stronger than any of us, with a voice louder and more gruff than any I'd ever heard.

"I am Officer Jones! I am the Chief Dietician for the Wilmington County Jail! You may address me as Chief Jones! I will now collect your fees! Place them in the palm of your right hand as I come by to pick them up! Do you understand me?"

We all nodded. She was so scary that I think we all privately vowed to always live a law-abiding life.

The first five, including me, put the required twenty dollars in bills in our right hand as she passed by us. But the sixth member of our ward did not have cash. He took a deep breath.

"Can I write you a check?"

“A check? You want to write me a check? What is the matter with you? You think the Wilmington County Jail is a place where we accept checks? Get out of my sight before I have you arrested!”

He was on his way out when I caught up with him and told him he could write me a check because I had more than enough cash.

When he approached Chief Jones and gave her a twenty dollar bill, she did the *I'm looking out for you to mess up* sign with her two fingers pointed at her eyes, and took his money.

She led us into the kitchen area. In the middle of the room there was a long stainless steel table with six stools set up around it.

“Today I will be teaching you how to prepare “Chicken a la Mayo,” she shouted. “Do any of you know the significance of that name?”

I looked at each of my quorum brethren and saw fear in their eyes. So I thought that maybe I should be the guinea pig. “Uh, is it somehow related to Cinco de Mayo, the Mexican holiday?”

“No, it does not!” she shouted. “Anyone else?”

We all stared straight ahead.

“It is a chicken dish that uses mayonnaise!”

We all nodded.

She went to the refrigerator. “I will now issue to each of you a chicken breast. I want you to pound it until it is one-fourth of an inch thick. You may commence pounding as soon as you receive your chicken.”

I didn't really know how she wanted us to pound the chicken. Nobody else did either, so

we all just stared at the piece of chicken.

“I do not see pounding going on!” she yelled.

I was more than a little panicked so I took off one of my shoes and began pounding on the chicken with the bottom of my shoe.

Two whacks and she was all over me. “What do you think you’re doing?” she yelled.

“Uh, pounding the chicken.”

“You are not respecting the chicken! Give me twenty-five pushups!”

I couldn’t believe what I’d just heard. “What?”

She got in my face. “I want you to give me twenty five pushups! If you do not, I’ll make it so you’ll never get out of here! One word to the judge and that’s all it will take! Is that what you want?”

Clearly Chief Dietician Jones was certifiably crazy. But what can you do? I got down and began doing pushups. The first ten went okay but after that I slowed down and finally stopped to catch my breath.

“You are a disgrace!” she yelled at me.

I nodded and kept on doing pushups until I’d finished twenty five.

When I sat down again, Cody leaned over and with a stupid grin on his face whispered, “So, Johnson, what are you in here for?”

I was in no mood for humor. “Beating up my cousin,” I grumbled.

He smiled. “I’m not worried. You know why? Because I can actually do twenty five pushups.”

“Not another word from you two!” Chief Dietician Jones yelled.

Things went better after that. She started to demonstrate what she wanted us to do and we just copied what she'd done.

While our chicken breasts were cooking, she taught us how to make a Waldorf salad, for which we had to chop celery, apples and walnuts into tiny pieces.

It was a never-ending job. "Good grief," I complained, "Can't these people chew anything?"

"Hey! Quiet over there!" Chief Dietician Jones yelled.

Next she taught us how to bake a potato, what frozen vegetables would be good to serve with the chicken, and the basics of setting the table.

By this time, she'd quit treating us like low-life criminals. "How many of you clowns have ever made pancakes?" she asked.

We all raised our hands.

"I'm going to teach you how to make crepes. A crepe is like a pancake except thinner. You're going to put cut-up fresh fruit and ice cream on top of each crepe."

She taught us every step along the way.

When our chicken had finished cooking, she cut up one of the pieces and let us have a taste. It tasted great.

She announced that, with our permission, since we'd used county equipment, she'd like to give our chicken pieces to her co-workers at the jail. We all agreed to let her do that.

By the time we left we felt good enough about the experience to shake her hand. She had an amazingly strong hand shake.

For Mother's Day, a week later, I repeated everything I'd been taught by Chief Dietician

Jones. I couldn't believe how much Emma appreciated everything.

I had chosen frozen peas for my vegetable mainly because it gave such a nice color contrast to the chicken, Waldorf salad, and baked potatoes.

After the kids and I had cleaned up the kitchen and given her our presents, I went into the back yard. I needed a little time to myself.

After a few minutes Emma came out. "Is anything wrong?" she asked.

I sighed and lowered my head. "The crepes," I said dejectedly.

"The crepes? What about 'em?"

I sighed. "I don't know...I just think they could've been better. Maybe if I'd had a crepe pan...then..." I couldn't even finish my sentence.

"The crepes were wonderful!! Even the kids loved 'em."

"That's just because of the ice cream. And Ben didn't even eat his."

"You know Ben. He doesn't eat half of what I fix for him."

"I know, but still," I said sadly.

She threw her arms around me. "Do you have any idea what a hero you are in my eyes for everything you did for me for Mother's Day? I will never forget this. I love you so much."

"I love you too. I always have, but even more now that I realize how much work it is to cook for us. And not just the cooking. Everything else you do for us."

So, all in all, it was a good thing. We've been getting along real good. I mean amazingly good!

Oh, one other thing. For my birthday, Emma got me a crepe pan!

I can hardly wait for next Mother's Day!