

Fold All the Proteins

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Monday

The Fifth Time's the Charm

Last night my fifth experiment in baking — after two attempts at yeasted bread loaves using gluten-free flour, one attempt at sourdough biscuits using a different gluten-free flour, and one more attempt at sourdough biscuits using wheat flour — finally came out close to the way I hoped. I used a basic bread recipe from *James Beard's Theory and Practice of Good Cooking* — not the “batter bread” I first tried. The dough behaved like I remember bread dough behaving as I pummeled and pounded it. It rose quite nicely, I beat it up some more, and it rose some more. The finished loaves had a nice brown crust and a soft interior. The kids wiped out both loaves for breakfast with butter, marmalade, pumpkin butter, and peanut butter.

I wrote that they came out “close to the way I hoped.” They weren't quite as tall as I hoped. I allowed the bread to rise in the oven, set on warm, and covered the bowl with a damp towel. The dough rose up and the towel dried out, and the dough adhered to the towel. When I peeled it off, it took some of the dough with it. The same thing happened with the towel I put over the dough in the bread pans for the second rise. The loaves were torn open a bit on top and partly “deflated.” I could have let them rise a bit longer to gain some more altitude, but it was getting late and I was in a hurry, so I just baked them as they were. As a result the loaves weren't as tall as they should have been. So next time, I need to figure out a different way to keep the rising dough moist. Maybe I'll do the first rise inside the Instant Pot, and then put greased saran wrap over the loaf pans. Or maybe I should grease the dough before I put it into the loaf pans. I'll figure out something.

The real goal is to be able to have the kids make the bread!

Flour is a little scarce in stores these days. Grace is looking into whether we can get some flour mail-ordered directly from King Arthur.

Thursday

We received our SNAP and WIC benefits, and so yesterday Grace and I made an outing to Costco, just over 3 weeks after our last Costco trip, to stock up. We didn't find any ground bison or toilet paper, and they didn't have the less-expensive Kirkland brand diapers, but we were able to get most of the rest of the things on our list. We also picked up a few treats. I got several boxes of crackers, several kinds of cheese including a soft-ripened goat cheese that I really like, and which the kids will never, ever eat, so I don't have to worry about them eating it all! It was on sale because it was a day or two away from its sell-by date, but that just means it is extra-pungent!

Oh, I almost forgot — we also were able to get a 25-pound bag of wheat flour!

WIC and Costco are not all that compatible. WIC is difficult to use in many stores, but some such as Kroger will at least clearly mark WIC-covered items on the shelves so that shoppers don't have to guess. Costco apparently carries some items that WIC will cover, but they aren't clearly marked on the shelf, and they don't seem to be able to provide any sort of list. So Grace attempted to install the WIC app which would allow her to scan barcodes and determine if the items are covered, but wasn't able to get it working before we pulled into the parking lot. WIC has become even more complicated than usual for some customers. So — we bought no WIC items on this shopping trip. But the SNAP card worked fine. We were able to pay for all the food items that SNAP covers with the SNAP card, and then pay for the rest (the diapers, wipes, vitamins, Flonase, etc.) with our regular debit card.

Costco has enhanced their COVID-19 safety even more. They have extended the plexiglass shields between the checkout workers the full length of the belt and bagging area, and rearranged things so the receipt prints way down at the end and you can take it directly from the machine. So we continued to feel that Costco is one of the safest places to shop. When we got home we sanitized every package as per usual with a bleach solution and got everything put away.

We were even able to take home two hot pizzas. We wiped down the boxes, but the pizzas themselves and the interior of the boxes get hot enough that we have no concern that the virus in question could remain viable in that environment. The plan had been to eat the pizzas first while they were hot, and then bring in groceries. But the kids had not done their chores adequately at all in the several hours that we were out. So we made them finish cleaning the kitchen up completely while we waited. The pizza was only lukewarm, but it had been two months since I had eaten pizza, and I have missed it!

The weather has been atrocious; yesterday it was snowing a bit, on and off, and raining a bit, on and off. It wasn't fun to be outside at all. Sam and I only did a little bit of garden work. He raked some leaves, and I dug a trench. At one point trying to jam the shovel through some roots, I took a spill and landed hard on my lower back. I don't think I did any serious damage but my back and my

abdominal muscles have been sore. So I've been using a little bit of Aleve and a little bit of arnica because I'm eclectic that way when it comes to medicine.

With the poor weather, the kids are frustrated being stuck indoors and there is a lot of bickering and fighting going on. Yesterday as a treat I ordered some candy from Public Displays of Confection in Tallahassee, Florida. The kids have watched many of their videos on YouTube and they are excited to try some of their candies made by hand on some amazing vintage rolling and cutting equipment. I highly recommend the videos for anyone who is, like me, mesmerized by watching people make things.

I've been looking for movies and TV shows we can share with the kids. I have season 1 of the original *Mission: Impossible*. We watched the pilot with them a year or two ago and one of the kids — I forget who — found it too scary. Not because it was violent — it isn't really very violent — but because of the *masks*. They just freaked one of the kids right out. It has been a while, though, so I pulled out the set again, and I think tonight we're going to try to watch another episode of *Mission: Impossible*.

I also found that a bookseller on Alibris — Thrift Books Motor City (apparently in Georgia, not Detroit) — had used copies of five of the hardcover volumes of *The Complete Stories of Robert Silverberg* marked down pretty dramatically (four of them were about 80% off the cover price). The store must be hurting. Did I take undue advantage of them, or did I support a bookstore in need? I'm not really sure. We'll see what shows up. Even if the copies are actually the paperback editions instead of the hardcover editions, and even if they quite beat up, I will still consider it bargain.

A book I ordered way back in January has still not arrived. I bought it from a seller in England. The package was supposed to be delivered to our house, but it was marked as “undeliverable” and bounced because the driver apparently didn't want to drive down our driveway that day (they have delivered packages to our house plenty of times). The seller was kind enough to ship another copy, to my workplace, expecting that the original would eventually make it back to him. But then all... *this* happened. I was furloughed from my job, and the United States became the epicenter for the global COVID-19 pandemic. And the package has been stuck somewhere in some sort of delivery limbo, “in transit to next facility,” for several weeks. I have asked the seller to see if he can find out anything further. Apparently he still hasn't received the original package back. I've asked my boss whether the second package was, by chance, delivered to my office. It might just be a lost cause at this point, which is too bad, because it is a scarce book — a signed and numbered copy of the U. K. edition of William Gibson's new novel *Agency*.

It would be nice if the seller could get reimbursed for the lost package and I could get reimbursed too, but mostly I wanted that book!

I spent about 45 minutes on the treadmill today because we hadn't been able to enjoy a walk outside. It felt pretty good. My heart rate is behaving the way I

expect it to. I think not watching Trump's press conferences at all, and only occasionally checking the news, has helped with that a lot.

Time for black bean burgers! And, maybe, an episode of *Mission: Impossible*.

Friday

We have a wheat flour from Costco, But we are still experimenting with gluten-free flour, in part because we've come to like the flavor of the Bob's Red Mill rice-based flour. Grace and Veronica tried to make a sourdough with it, using a long rise time. It was only partly successful. It did have a wonderful sourdough flavor, and it did rise some, but it was still too dense. Also, there was some sort of mistake in the baking, where one of the kids turned the oven off much too early, leaving it only partially baked, and then Grace had to get the oven heated back up and take a guess at how much longer it needed to bake. So it was a bit raw inside but actually burned on the bottom. They will try again with a longer rise because the sourdough flavor was quite promising.

We watched two episodes of *Mission: Impossible* last night and the kids did not protest this time. In fact, they were quite engaged. And I was reminded again that despite some cheesiness and sexist tropes, this show was great! The pilot in particular was shot more like a feature film than a TV show, with a lot of great camera work and fantastic edits. The restored color footage looks terrific and I really love the use of music in this show. It's also just a *smarter* screenplay than most screenplays one sees these days, with a lot of subtle information conveyed to the audience quickly to set up things that happen later in each show.

I heard from my boss that in fact the package I mentioned was delivered to my office, and they did not bounce it but held it for me. No one bothered to tell me and the tracking information was never updated. So that's a relief. I'll arrange to get it sometime.

There was some chaos this morning because Joy was out running an errand and had trouble with her van — she got it used, and it has delivered such a constant string of problems that the word "lemon" would not be inappropriate, unfortunately. So she was calling for assistance early, about 8:00 a.m. Grace and I were not up and in general we don't answer calls that early because Grace often gets calls early from family members who assume (apparently) that she is up as early as 6:00 a.m., so we figured it was one of them. But Joy called back a little later on the wired phone and it announces who the caller is, so we answered it and Grace went out to assist her.

While I was in the bathroom, Malachi woke up and decided that he was extremely upset that his mom wasn't there, so I started trying to roust some kids to help keep him occupied while I finished up in the bathroom. Sam is usually up early but for some reason he wasn't, so there was a lot of yelling involved trying to wake someone up. I made coffee and a pot of oatmeal. The bickering over chores

and computer use started early and has not stopped. Joy and Grace eventually made it back and I just came downstairs. It hasn't been a great day so far. I need to think of a way to improve it. Maybe I could take some kids out for a walk.

Joy brought home some wheat gluten, so we might try using the gluten-free flour again with wheat gluten added. That actually makes sense given our particular allergies; it doesn't seem to be that we actually have anyone with celiac disease or who is allergic to *gluten* per se, but a couple of us seem to be mildly allergic to wheat itself. So a flour that has just a small portion of wheat in it might be just the thing. For the kids who don't seem to have the wheat allergy, they can eat bread made with wheat flour.

Sunday

Time is breaking down a bit for me. The battery in the clock in the kitchen died and I have not bothered to replace it. Because I'm not going to work, I have had a tendency to forget what day it was. Since I've become more active on Facebook recently, after a couple of years of barely using it, I've also recently been forgetting whether I've written some things in my newsletter, or on Facebook. So I think I forgot to mention in the newsletter that on Tuesday, the kids used the rest of the flour from Busch's to make a basic white bread recipe suggested by my sister-in-law.

This is the recipe. It's called "Diane's No-Fail French Bread." It doesn't take very long to make! It doesn't require a long rise and then a punch-down and then another long rise.

They made another batch today and it also turned out really well. So the kids can make their own bread. The only difficulty is getting them not to eat both loaves immediately.

Also, I'm a bit jealous because their bread is coming out better than the bread Grace and I have been making.

Feldman, Barfing Babies, Marco Polo, Target, WIC, and Habañero Cheese

I've been a bit sleep-deprived for the last couple of nights. On Friday night, David Feldman of the David Feldman Show podcast hosted a Zoom call with supporters and some of his regular guests. There were over 120 people in the call and it went for over three hours. I went downstairs to join the call. I've been listening to his podcast and supporting him for, I think, over ten years. He's sent me an occasional thank-you note, and we've exchanged a few e-mails and brief notes via Twitter. The invitations to the first two Zoom calls wound up in my spam folder, so I didn't find out about them in time, but I really wanted to attend this one. After the main guests were done he invited listeners to chime

in briefly so I got to speak to him and his listeners, albeit briefly because there were still about 70 people in the room.

Feldman is a screenwriter and stand-up comic who is also very well-versed in history and politics. Feldman is more a liberal than a leftist, but in recent years he's become radicalized a bit, bringing on professors of Marxist theory, and declaring himself a die-hard Bernie Sanders supporter. We don't agree on everything, including comedy, but he has great guests on the show including Corey Brettschneider, Professor of Political Science and Public Policy at Brown University. It's always fascinating to hear Corey and David do a deep dive into current events and the relevant Constitutional Law. And then the show might immediately switch to a completely tasteless but hilariously funny comic such as Aaron Berg.

I would love to have Feldman on the podcast I do with Grace sometime, and so might try inviting him, although it is very hard for Grace and I to ever *schedule* anything that requires the children to be quiet or otherwise occupied; the younger ones always seem to enforce their veto power when we try to do something together.

Anyway, the net result was that I left Grace to deal with kids and went downstairs to join the Zoom call. When I finally signed off, it was well past midnight, and I expected the kids to be in bed. Three of them were still huddled around the computer playing games. Grace was asleep. I told the kids to shut it down and go to bed and then I got into bed and turned off the light. Shortly after I had fallen asleep I heard Benjamin come racing to the bathroom — for some reason he holds it as long as he can. Then I fell asleep again. Shortly after that I was again woken up by the boys fighting in their bedroom. It just got louder and louder and more extreme until I had to intervene. Benjamin was screaming at Joshua. I never did figure out why. But I make him bring his blanket and pillow into our bedroom and sleep on the floor. Then as soon as it was light, I was woken up again by the demented robin that often likes to peck on the windows to wake us up.

So — a terrible night's sleep, and a long day on Saturday.

On Saturday night we had a potato dish that Veronica had partly prepared. The kids loved it. Elanor ate, I think, eight servings. then as we were clearing the table she blew those eight servings all over like a fire hose. So I had to clean that up, wondering if it was going to trigger a chain reaction in me, and wondering why she had gotten sick. Our best guess is that Veronica did not pick through the potatoes well enough and one of them was green or otherwise not right. Elanor fell asleep after that and so we all got ready for bed, but she vomited once more — more potato. We got her cleaned up — Veronica gave her a bath — and all went to bed, and then she woke us up with a third round.

So — again, not a great night's sleep. and then this morning the kids were up early rampaging through the kitchen. Elanor seemed fine so we think our food poisoning theory is probably correct.

I've been doing a thing to try to force myself to practice guitar and actually learn some more songs. I've been sending folks short videos on Marco Polo, the video-sharing app, of me playing a song on guitar and singing. I promised folks "a bad recording of pretty good guitar playing and pretty bad singing." And that's what folks are getting.

If you'd like to get these, and you have the Marco Polo app installed, send me your cell phone number, and when I learn a new song I'll send you a recording. I've been doing a separate performance for each person (thus forcing myself to practice). If I have to send out a lot of them, I'll probably create a group and send one performance to the group.

I made bulletproof coffees with MCT oil to help us wake up, and that helped, but I really needed a mental health break today. I don't like it when I find myself yelling at the kids for trivial reasons, but between the sleep deprivation and having the kids inside most of the time for a couple of days due to bad weather, and thus not burning off their excess kid energy outside, I was snapping at everyone.

So, Grace and I decided to go to Meijer to try to get our WIC food.

The Meijer parking lot was not full, but I asked her if we could drive a little bit further down the parking lot to check out Target instead. My rationale was that Target usually has a better selection of DVD and Blu-ray discs, and I wanted to see what new releases were available. Looking at new books and video releases is just a thing that I am accustomed to doing, or at least was accustomed to doing, although on most trips I don't actually buy anything; sometimes I'll take a cell phone picture of a book or video and look up reviews later to see if I might be interested, and sometimes I'll buy it on a later trip — or sometimes not.

Target's parking lot had even fewer cars in it, so we thought that might be a safer place to shop. We called the Target store's customer service desk from the parking lot to verify that they took WIC, and then suited up and went in.

Target was sanitizing shopping carts, and there was a lot of room between the few shoppers that were in the store, so we felt pretty good about shopping there. They had a number of things we hadn't been able to find at Costco, including canned diced tomatoes, canned ground tomatoes, refried beans, and other basics, canned beets for Joy, as well as some not-so-basic items like barista-style oat milk and a treat we were very excited about — Better Made Rainbow Chips. These chips are kind of hard to find, and their flavor is kind of hard to describe — they are, sort of, to regular chips what nearly-burnt, dark, caramelized onions are to regular cooked onions. In my opinion, delicious!

Grace managed to get the WIC app working on her phone and so was able to scan the shelves to determine which items could be paid for with WIC (it's not obvious because there is nothing on the shelf labels). She found a few things, but the only brand of peanut butter they had that WIC would pay for was Jif, and we don't like to get peanut butter with added sugar. There were a few

other things that WIC would supposedly pay for, but Target didn't seem to carry a version that was covered. This is a constant problem with WIC — it's complicated to use! But we got what we could and attempted to check out.

I didn't find anything that interested me in the video section, but it was still nice to do something that I normally do.

We checked out with all the non-WIC food just fine, and tried to buy the WIC items as a separate order. Everything seemed to go fine, but after Grace swiped her WIC card and punched in her PIN, the system kept saying "invalid card number." So we had the checkout clerk suspend the order, and take all those bagged-up items to the customer service desk. Grace and I then went outside and I paced around with my mask and gloves still on while she tried to get in touch with WIC and figure out what was wrong. She finally determined that even though she had spent hours earlier in the week trying to fix this problem, and had been told it was fixed, our WIC account was somehow still set up with our old address in Saginaw. And so the transaction was failing, apparently, because we were in the wrong ZIP code. The "invalid card number" wasn't really an invalid card number.

There was nothing more we could do this evening so Grace went back in and told them to put all those groceries back on the shelves. Then we loaded up the car, stripped off our gloves, sanitized the car door handles with bleach wipes, and drove home, eating the sanitized bag of rainbow chips.

For dinner, I wanted to make soft tacos. So I prepped a heap of grated cheddar cheese and a heap of grated habañero cheese. We heated up two cans of refried beans. I chopped up an onion and Grace cooked up a pound of ground bison with a little bacon and lard and onion to make taco meat, flavoring it with chorizo spice mix, cumin, and a little salt. Then we set out guacamole, sour cream, and salsa. Everyone got to decide what they wanted in their tacos and I made them to order.

The habañero cheese wasn't a big hit with the kids — although Sam bravely ate some — so there was a lot of it left over. I wound up eating two extra tacos that were really quesadillas made with the habañero cheese. I'm embarrassed to describe how fast I wolfed them down. I was hungry, certainly, but I've also really missed spicy food, since we haven't been cooking very much.

I'm sitting up late finishing this newsletter after the kids went on to bed, although the boys are still bickering softly in their bedroom. I need to take some Tums. The heartburn is getting a bit painful after all that spicy cheese.

I have no regrets.

Folding at Home

Oh, there's one more thing I wanted to mention. I mentioned gluten, a protein that you can fold when making bread. But there's another protein-folding project you can contribute to: the Folding at Home project. This has been running for decades, and years ago I used to set up my computers to work on protein-folding research while I wasn't using them. Now there are some research projects into proteins that are specific to the COVID-19 virus. So I've been running it on my Mac Pro and ThinkPad laptop when I'm not using those computers for other things that require computing time. Writing this newsletter and surfing the web require very little computing time so it can run even while I'm writing.

It will heat up your computer a bit, use a small amount of network bandwidth, and increase your electric bill a bit, so it's up to you if you want to make that trade-off. I can't contribute a *lot* of computing time with just these two computers, but it's something.

I hope you are all staying healthy!

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