1949

I Had a Career on the Companion

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Iowa State College

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I Had a Career on the Companion

by Mary Dodds Schlick

IT WAS a stifling summer day in New York when I set out to make a good impression on the Crowell-Collier Publishing Company. A strange city far from home, seasonal but uncomfortable weather and the strain of my first interview made me wish my proper summer suit were taking me sightseeing instead of in the door of the Postum Building on Park Avenue, up the elevator to the sixth floor and down the hall to a large forbidding door with a shiny brass plaque inscribed “Woman’s Home Companion Home Service Center.”

My interview was with home equipment editor, Elizabeth Beveridge. I now wonder what spectres I had imagined dwelled in New York. The people were like those I had always known. Their test kitchen had equipment and testing instruments similar to those we use at Iowa State. The work, as outlined by Miss Beveridge, was something I knew about—not the intangible dream world my imagination had woven around a large magazine’s production.

I began in October after a 2 month’s trip to Europe. Equipment technician was my title, and my work consisted mainly of testing large and small household equipment from the consumer’s standpoint. I was under the direction of Arlean Pattison. With her patient help and that from the complete files of previous reports, correspondence and manufacturers’ publicity material, my first testing experience began.

Range Testing

In the course of a year, every type of equipment imaginable went through our hands, from tiny plastic egg crackers to the largest home freezers. One of my problems was to give a new gas range the regular gamut of tests. To judge the evenness of heat distribution in the oven I baked two consecutive loads of biscuits, rolled to a uniform thickness and cut in 2-inch squares. To achieve a similar dough each time we used a commercial biscuit mix, adding weighed amounts of milk, stirring and kneading an exact number of times. This I did—but after stirring that exact number of times, the mixture was too thin to knead.

With an eye on the kitchen door I added a bit more biscuit mix, stirred again. Not thick enough. Just a bit more—still too thin. At last I was able to form some semblance of biscuit shape and popped them into the test oven. After 12 minutes, as it said on my direction sheet, I looked at my products. They were pale as marshmallows. After five additional minutes, I pulled them out just as Miss Pattison appeared to see if I had any question about the procedure. There on the table were 20 sodden lumps. No range should brown that poorly. Surprised, she asked to see the box of biscuit mix which I had used. And I pulled from the shelf the box. There in large red letters it said CAKE FLOUR.

Deadlines

But with every experience I learned a little more. This mistake taught me to be more observing, to proceed carefully in test work. It was only one of a thousand learning experiences, not all such blatant mistakes, but each one valuable in a different way.

A magazine staff is always working ahead, toward the Christmas issue in August and September; toward spring cleaning ‘mid winter snows. As each issue goes to press it is forgotten, except for the readers’ letters which follow. There is never any looking back or thinking back, for that matter, because there isn’t time. Somehow the months come faster when there is a deadline to meet. This is the way the testing proceeded, also. Before I realized it, 100 detailed reports to manufacturers had been written. Some were brief, many long, but each represented hours of actual work with a piece of equipment.

Periodically I would compile ideas for equipment articles that occurred to me during work with the various appliances. At last one of them was accepted, and I began work developing waffle recipe ideas and variations. Miss Pattison again directed this and led me through the maze of channels a story must follow before publication. First, the idea was sent to the

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COURTESY AT A VICIOUS SERVICE

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206 Welch Avenue Phone 2774

Parties by Reservation

PACKER'S TEA ROOM

FOR DELIGHTFUL FOOD IN A HOMEY ATMOSPHERE

Dinner and Luncheon

Career on the Companion

(Continued from page 3)

art department for a layout. Armed with the layout, I attempted to put information about the waffle baker, recipes and cleverness into their meager copy allowance. This was my first actual fight with terseness.

When I felt satisfied, I submitted the copy to Miss Beveridge. From her desk, it went to the executive editor, to return to me an entirely different personality from that which I had sent.

But the work was not over. A photograph must be taken to illustrate the ideas. After the photographers moved their equipment into our test kitchen there wasn't much room to prepare the waffles. To bake a perfect waffle seemed simple to me, but for the camera it must be perfect. The waffle grid must be spotless as if it had not been used in days. The waffle itself must look freshly baked. It was an interesting problem, solved only with the aid of Rose, our Austrian maid, who dashed around the kitchen with dish cloth and towel. Rose found another waffle baker with grids just the size of those on the waffle to be pictured. The waffle was baked and transferred; the picture taken; our nerves saved.

Equipment Photographs

After about 6 months at the Companion, I began working with all of the equipment photographs—either as errand girl only or in charge of the article. This took us out of New York from time to time. Then we would pack all of the equipment and

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DES MOINES BUILDING-LOAN AND SAVINGS ASSOCIATION

THIRTY-FOURTH ANNUAL STATEMENT

DECEMBER 31, 1949

ASSETS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIABILITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member's Shares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money paid in on shares of Association Stock by investing members plus dividends credited to their account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advances From Federal Home Loan Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplated Loans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amounts due borrowers on new building operations to be paid out as construction progresses or when finished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserve for Office Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unearned Profit on R. E. Sold on Cont.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profits made but not claimed till paid in full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.H.A. Trust Account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserve for Uncollected Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingent Reserve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reserve built up to protect members against all possible or contingent losses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate Reserve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rents paid in to protect members against all possible or contingent losses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unallocated Reserve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surplus or balance on hand after paying all dividends and expenses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL | $14,069,994.88 |
TOTAL | $14,069,994.88 |

SAFETY — COURTESY — SERVICE — AVAILABILITY — ATTRACTIVE EARNINGS
WE HAVE NO PREFERRED STOCKHOLDERS

Dividends—December 31, 1949.............$201,070.50
Dividends—Since Organization................$3,339,059.97

SERVICE FOR HOME LOANS—A RECORD OF PROGRESS IN SAVINGS

12 THE IOWA HOMEMAKER