



Ned
Hickson

Dignity is a little easier to swallow with hot sauce

Within our lives there are certain moments that inspire a deeper understanding of ourselves. I experienced such an epiphany yesterday morning during a quiet moment of introspection; crouched in the backyard; sprinkling dog poop with hot sauce.

To clarify, I was not attempting to create the world's most disgusting Cajun appetizer. According to a book on canine behavior, this would train our dog to avoid eating his "leftovers." It was in that moment, while

clutching a bottle of Tabasco and trying not to be seen by my neighbors, I came to realize that somewhere along the way providing our dog with decent manners had become more important than maintaining my personal dignity.

How did this happen?

I'm a 49-year-old man who survived the diaper phases of two children — both of whom were heavy eaters. I've had my share of high profile, low-dignity diaper changes, one of which required quick thinking, commando-like precision, and a paper plate. I've sat across from my four-year-old son at a busy restaurant in downtown San Francisco, handed him a cheese stick

appetizer, and watched him yak up what appeared to be everything he'd consumed since graduating to solid foods. I tried to salvage the situation by waiting for a lull in gastrol activity and then racing him into the men's room. And let me just say had the rest rooms been clearly marked, we probably would've made it.

What got me through those times, of course, was knowing, as a parent, I could look forward to eventually becoming an embarrassment to my children once they entered middle school.

However, as I crouched over Stanley's latest pile with my Tabasco bottle at the

ready, one thought kept running through my mind:

You can't embarrass a dog. Particularly one with questionable intelligence.

This meant I had either (a) matured to the point of not caring what others thought of me based on their own one-dimensional perception, or (b) succumbed to the realization that the last of my dignity had been wrung out into a mop bucket in San Francisco.

In either case, it meant I had moved on to a new phase in my life. A time that will eventually prepare me for my

later years, when I'm secure enough in myself that the opinions of others — or even the basic rules of traffic — no longer matter. However, reaching that level of self assuredness is still years away, which is why, after noticing I'd been crouched over the same pile for several minutes, I quickly sprinkled it and moved on.

As far as I can tell, Stanley is no longer interested in his "leftovers." I know this because he has stopped coming in from outside and standing with his tongue in the

water bowl.

At the same time, it's proven to be a trade-off since I can't put Tabasco on my eggs without getting queasy.

The important thing is that the experience has allowed me to achieve some personal growth thanks to a few moments of introspection about fodderhood.

Ned is a syndicated columnist with News Media Corporation. His book, "Humor at the Speed of Life," is available online at Port Hole Publications, Amazon Books and Barnes & Noble. Write to him at nedhickson@icloud.com

SWC to offer free native plants

MAPLETON — The Siuslaw Watershed Council's (SWC) 17th annual native plant distribution is coming soon.

Distribution day will be Feb. 13. River, creek, and lakeside landowners may be eligible to receive free native plants.

Trees planted along streams help reduce erosion, filter nutrients and keep the water cool for salmon and trout.

The SWC will once again provide free native plants for

waterside (riparian) planting in the Siuslaw Basin and Coastal Lakes Area.

Call the SWC office for more information on each available plant or visit www.siuslaw.org/native-plant-distribution for updates on current availability, then determine which plants will work best for your site conditions and let us know which of these plants are on your wish list.

Maximum request per landowner is 300 plants. SWC

staff can also help advise you on plant selection and placement. Send requests ASAP because supplies are limited.

Orders will be taken through Feb. 6.

For more information, contact Kate Harnedy at 541-268-3044, or email nativeplants@siuslaw.org.

This project is made possible through a grant from the Coast Range Stewardship Fund (USFS) and private individual donations.

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FOOD & DINING

Get ready for game day with Texas chili

January marks the dawn of a new year, but for football fans, the first month of the calendar year also means the playoffs are about to begin. Football gatherings can be fun for ardent and novice fans alike. One of the reasons such get-togethers appeal to so many people is food, which typically plays a big role on game days. Hosts who want to wow their guests with homemade chili can try their hands at the following recipe for "Texas Chili With Chipotle Cream" from Neal Corman's "Virgil's Barbecue Road Trip Cookbook" (St. Martin's Press).

TEXAS CHILI WITH CHIPOTLE CREAM

Serves 4 to 6

Chipotle Cream

- 10 1/2 ounces goat cheese
- 2 tablespoons pureed chipotle in adobo sauce
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons heavy whipping cream
- Juice of 1/2 lemon
- Juice of 2 limes
- Zest of 1/2 lime
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

Chili

- 2 tablespoons Texas Chili Spice Mix (see below)
- 1/4 cup canola oil
- 2 pounds skirt steak
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1/3 pound sliced bacon, diced
- 4 cups finely diced yellow onions
- 2 cups finely diced green peppers
- 1/2 cup chopped garlic
- 1 28-ounce can crushed tomatoes, drained
- 2 tablespoons dark brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons dried Mexican oregano
- 2 tablespoons Texas-style chili powder (use 3 to 4 tablespoons for a thicker chili)
- 3 tomatillos, rinsed and diced
- 3 tablespoons corn masa flour (recommended: Masaca)
- 2 tablespoons pureed chipotle in adobo sauce
- 5 cups beef broth
- 2 16-ounce cans black beans
- 1/2 bunch cilantro, coarsely chopped, divided
- 1 13-ounce bag tortilla chips, crushed

1. Combine all the ingredients for the chipotle cream — except for the zest — in a food processor. Process until evenly incorporated.
2. Remove to a medium bowl and fold in the zest. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours before serving.
3. Mix the Texas Chili Spice Mix with the oil to make a paste. Dust the skirt steak with salt, then baste with the paste.
4. Marinate for 1 hour and then grill over high heat to medium rare. Set aside and allow to rest.
5. In a large, heavy-bottom pot, render the diced bacon until it is crispy. Add the onions, green peppers and garlic, and sauté until slightly brown.
6. Add the tomatoes, brown sugar, oregano, chili powder, tomatillos, flour, and chipotle. Heat for 3 minutes, or until the mixture begins to thicken.

7. Add the beef broth, bring to a boil, and reduce to a simmer. Simmer uncovered for 1 hour.

8. Cut the steak against the grain into small cubes. Add the steak and beans to the chili, and simmer for an additional 20 minutes.

9. Add most of the chopped cilantro and serve over crushed tortilla chips with a dollop of chipotle cream and a sprinkling of fresh cilantro on top.

Texas Chili Spice Mix

Makes 1 cup

- 2 tablespoons guajillo chili powder
- 2 tablespoons chipotle powder
- 6 tablespoons ground cumin
- 4 tablespoons dry Mexican oregano
- 4 tablespoons sweet paprika

Combine all the ingredients in a medium mixing bowl. Transfer to a covered container and store in a cool, dry place.



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