

Fun food:

Strawberry ice cream sandwiches



Greta McKay, 2, enjoys a homemade ice cream sandwich filled with no-churn strawberry ice cream.

Gretchen McKay/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette-TNS

By GRETCHEN MCKAY • Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

One of the best things about summer, especially if you've got kids or grandkids, is all the ice cream you get to eat to cool off, no excuses necessary. And it's relatively easy to make, even if you don't have an ice cream maker, if you go with a no-churn recipe in which whipped cream is gently folded into a sweetened condensed milk enriched with vanilla and other flavorings, like fresh fruit or spices.

My 2-year-old granddaughter Greta's current favorite is "pink" ice cream, both colored by and studded with chunks of strawberry. She also recently discovered ice cream sandwiches, and is such a fan that, on a recent visit, I watched her try to eat the paper wrapping on one after polishing off the cookie in an attempt to get every single drop of flavor possible into her mouth.

It made me decide we should try our hands at making them at home, stirring the chocolate cookie batter together in a big bowl on the kitchen counter after mixing the ingredients for the ice cream and pouring it into a loaf pan to freeze overnight.

It was a fun way to spend some one-on-one time together, and the sheer joy she expressed when we unwrapped "her" finished sandwiches the next day at

her baby brother Sean's baptism party was priceless. My adult children loved them, too, as a late-night munchie.

This recipe, adapted from Smitten Kitchen, is both super easy and super satisfying. I went slightly off script by cutting the sheet pan-sized cookie into individual squares to make the individual sandwiches, which meant some of my cookies crumbled before being stuffed. (I didn't have an offset spatula to smooth the batter.) As a result, the sandwiches weren't picture perfect. (I saved the broken bits to crumble on top of ice cream as a sundae.) But they were still pretty tasty, a great introduction to baking for a toddler — and a sweet start to everyone's summer vacation.

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DOROTHY FLESHMAN
DORY'S DIARY

Meeker's stone was empty, but La Grande is full of history

The stone was there 20 years before I was born, but I was taught to honor it from the time I was a small child.

In 1906, Trail marker Ezra Meeker, on one of his trips through Oregon, was making sure that the Oregon Trail, which had brought so many people west in covered wagons drawn by oxen or horses, afoot, or by horseback, would not be forgotten, by placing the stone at the head of B Avenue in La Grande.

On this day we were to see whether or not there were historic items within the stone, preparing ourselves for disappointment in the event the stone was empty, whether by never having been put there in the first place or that the stone had been tampered with over the many years it had been there. It well could end in disappointment for onlookers.

Yes, to some, the hollow interior of the Meeker stone was a disappointment because there was nothing inside the stone where Meeker had said he had put items of interest to folks from the early 1900s. On June 23, 2022, the stone was pulled off its base and held up for all to see. It was empty.

If there had ever been anything there when he said he put it there, then it had long ago disappeared.

With this new knowledge, the people were turned away greatly disappointed and tempted to drift away as though nothing important had happened this beautiful sunny day.

I wasn't. Well, maybe just a wee bit disappointed because the possibility of what it contained could have been historically valuable. But I'm afraid it was what I expected.

The years had taken a great toll on the looks of the area, and I was never really sure that the stone itself could survive when folks decided that they wanted to build their houses on that ledge, let alone be in the same place after the road work had been done in that area, great changes taking place there over the years.

You see, I remember B Avenue when it was a dirt road, narrow and muddy in times of rain, dusty in the summer. It went up the B Avenue slope of the hill and turned in a curve onto the county road before it became Walnut Street. It was just the road that led to Morgan Lake, hills in which to hunt or chop winter wood, or have a little cabin up in there someplace for solitude or hunting. We children ran those hills like a backyard. Cross-street Oak Street wasn't yet cut through when I was eight years old and neither did C Avenue go up the hill beyond that point but turned right onto Alder Street (Sunset Drive) and down the graveled road where we lived years later. The land above was just a hillside for grazing.

My aunt and uncle, the Lovans, lived at the foot of the hill facing B Avenue above the Cedar Street intersection, and our family had moved on up the road and around the hill into the retired Hofmann Swiss dairy chalet a quarter of a mile from the city limits, so we drove or rode that road every time the parents were to take us someplace important like fishing in Wallowa County or swimming in warm water at Cove or huckleberrying on Mount Emily.

The rest of the time, we children at our chalet home came down what was then called the Mill Canyon Creek/Road beside the power plant and cut across country open field and down between Crandall's big farm and dairy and the remains of the old flour mill, then into the backdoor of our relatives via the cow barn and chicken pen. Thusly, we made our way to school or town to see the Saturday cowboy movie at the Granada Theatre, bypassing the length of the road to B Avenue where one of the cattle or sheep drives might be coming up our way.

And, so, we just knew that the road began at the curve when it left B Avenue and went by a miniature chalet likened to the one we lived in on up the hill. The Hofmanns and Hildebrandts had lived there much earlier, the Hildebrandts downstairs, the Hofmanns upstairs, a system that worked for all since the 1911 arrival of the families across the states from New York where their ship had docked separately from Europe.

But that probably has little to do with the Meeker stone except to show how things have changed over the years, the stone and the chalet gracing the hill by themselves. The little chalet was the only building on the uphill side of the road. There were no buildings at all across the town side of the hill. In fact, the Lovans' place beyond their house went up the slope to the county road and grew grain or grass that turned brown in the fall, a good place for kids to play, especially when they found the uncle's old and rusted car with isinglass windows. But, then, that's not about the Meeker stone, either, is it. It is about local history.

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