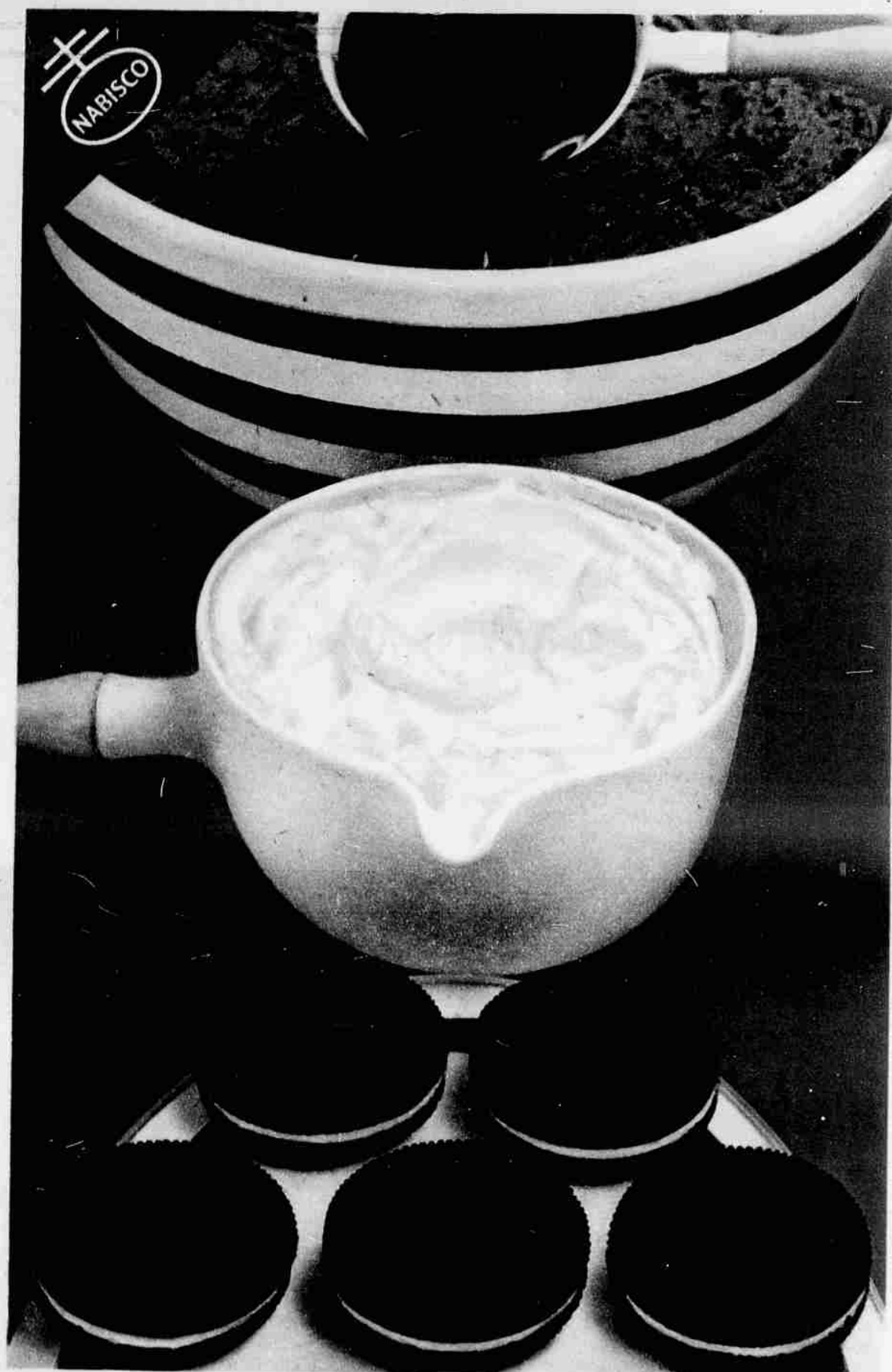




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"WELL, I DON'T CARE what anybody says, I'm not letting my eighth grader go out on dates," said the Positive Mother. "She can just wait until she's in high school. That's plenty of time."

The Mild Mother across the table looked conscience-stricken.

"Goodness, I let mine go. Maybe it was the wrong thing to do, but I've always had such faith in her good judgment. She seemed to know right from wrong kind of instinctively."

The Positive Mother frowned. The Peacemaker Mother poured another round of coffee.

"Oh, I think a lot depends on the individual," she said comfortingly. "Some are old enough at 13 or so and some aren't."

She paused, her coffee pot suspended in mid-air.

"Of course, I always think about the little Bronson girl. Have any of you girls seen her lately? My heavens she's so mature! She's in my Sandra's class, but she looks 18 or 19. Her parents haven't let her start dating yet. She can't be 14 yet, I'm sure."

The Positive Mother smiled triumphantly.

"Oh, no, she's not dating exactly. But have you been in the drugstore recently after school's out? Well, I have. And she's always there, hanging around. She makes up to every boy in the place, older ones, too. Gets them to give her a ride home. She's too pretty for her own good. I predict..."

The Mild Mother intervened.

"Now isn't that the way rumors start?" she asked.

"I can't see anything wrong with a ride home after school. Just because a girl's pretty doesn't have to mean anything bad. I really feel sorry for teen-agers. Nobody ever reads anything good about the good ones, the ones in little towns like this one all over the country. I think they're smarter and nicer and better than they ever were in my day. Nobody really gives them credit."

The Positive Mother toyed with a spoon.

The Mild Mother smiled at her.

"Just the other day I was so downhearted. I told my teen-ager how hard it is sometimes to be a parent and to worry about making mistakes bringing up the kids. And in these times, it's always the parent's fault."

"But my Betsy put her arms around me and do you know what she said? She said, 'Never mind, Mom. Give yourself a break.'"

"Even parents have a right to be wrong once in a while."

Patty Johnson