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Creating Balance for Busy Moms

Just Get 'em Fed

*Simple Whole Food Meals
for your Family*

by Kelly Morris



Chapter 1

How I Got Here and Where I'm Going

My philosophy about how I feed my family has evolved over the years.

When my husband and I first married, I hadn't a clue in the world how to cook. I had always been a career woman and ate out much of the time. Learning to cook, or learning to do anything domestic for that matter, just didn't happen for me growing up. I could no more make a batch of cookies than I could understand why it was necessary to separate different colors of laundry. I was a domestic nightmare.

Having been a bachelor for quite some time, my husband knew quite a bit more about how to 'keep house' than I did. Therefore, it seemed like the best decision at the time for him to do the shopping and cooking. He enjoyed it and Lord knows we probably wouldn't get past peanut butter sandwiches and cereal if left up to me. Our little family of three could easily survive on Stouffer's frozen foods and we were perfectly content with that.

By the time we had our second child, the Lord began to impress on us that I should 'retire' and come home to raise our children. Not only did I leave a sizable income behind, but I had absolutely no idea what to do at home.

A period of depression followed for me once I came home to be a "domestic-goddess". I felt like a fish out of water. Everything I had ever been good at didn't apply here at home. I knew how to make money, handle clients, discuss things financial and motivate others. How could any of this knowledge get dinner on the table? I had never felt like more of a loser.

God was gracious and sent me a number of mentor moms to help me get on track. I was hungry for knowledge about how to do this 'homemaker' thing, but there didn't seem to be any manuals on the subject. Martha Stewart hadn't yet appeared on my radar screen, and I'm not sure that she was what I needed at the time anyway. My heart needed help turning from the work world to my home and family.

Time passed and I slowly, I mean *slowly* learned how to be a decent homemaker. One of my favorite Bible verses at that time was Hebrews 12:11 which says....

"All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

This verse gave me such encouragement! Although I was ignorant about homemaking at this stage, I could be 'trained'. Education was mine to be had and I made every effort to glean from other women as well as read everything I could get my hands on..

"**The Tightwad Gazette**" newsletter, by Amy Dacyczyn, was introduced to me and what a blessing it was. I stalked the mailman every month looking for that newsletter. I read it over and over again, marking it up and studying the points she had made. Like-minded women came together with me to learn more about how to take care of our families on a shoe-string budget.

I treated my quest to live within our meager means at the time with the same enthusiasm and professionalism I had given to my previous career. Research accompanied charts and notebooks that I kept, thoroughly scrutinizing each and every expense and product.

Garage saling, couponing and rebating became my obsession. Come Wednesday evening, I was armed with my marked-up issue of the garage sale section of the newspaper. By the crack of dawn Thursday morning, I had my littles up and ready to hit the road with a sippy-cup full of milk in one hand and a baggie full of cereal in the other. The best deals were gone first and I was going to make sure I got them.

****I cringe at this now. This isn't balance, it's obsession. I'm just telling the story as it happened, not as though I recommend it. :)*

Running to several stores a week to get the best sales, I did everything I could to keep the budget balanced. **Our food bill was only \$100 a month for 5 of us**, including diapers. Aldi was my very best friend, but I still looked for ways to find better deals. Even though I was running to several stores each week, they were within blocks of each other, so I stayed within my fuel allowance budget as well.

New Year's Eve 1996, after 3 1/2 years of struggling, my husband and I wrote our last 'debt' check and we were debt-free!

While the budget eased up, we were still a one-income family and had to watch our pennies. Yet, I had a desire to feed my family a more natural diet. By child #4, I was experiencing some pretty severe digestive issues and began to research natural remedies and other diet options.

I stumbled across vegetarianism as a lifestyle/diet choice. Most vegetarians that I knew of didn't really understand what they were doing, creating serious vitamin/mineral deficiencies for themselves and consequently found themselves sicker than before. If I was going to become vegetarian, I wanted to make sure I was a smart one. Vitamin B12 and complete protein sources are the biggest hurdles I had to overcome. Vitamin B12 is only available in animal products and complete proteins are difficult to duplicate with plant foods.

Nonetheless, I became a vegetarian for 6 years, right along with my family. With certainty that I could do a better job than most to insure the proper nutrients for my family, I also began to juice carrots and ate a lot of raw foods. I spent hours each day, getting up early so that the children would have fresh carrot juice, cutting up fruits and vegetables all day long for meals and slaving over nutritionally sound meals.

Yet, after 6 years of being vegetarian, I truly felt worse than I ever had! Not to disgrace vegetarianism, it just didn't work for me. The money that I spent each week for food just wasn't paying off.

Spiritually, this special focus on personal health was beginning to be unsettling. God was showing me that there were other people in the world that could benefit from the dollars I spent each week on food, by just giving them *anything to eat*, much less organic or vegetarian.

After 6 years of vegetarianism and two more children, I went back to meat and whole food for my family.

"**Nourishing Traditions**" was introduced to me by a former vegetarian and organic dairy farmer. While I don't adhere to everything that is in that book, it made *much*

more sense to me than vegetarianism in terms of nourishing my body with the food it needed.

Organic foods became my new standard, yet **by the time we adopted and our brood increased to 9 kids to feed**, it wasn't feasible to maintain this.

Today, my philosophy could be called "**Just Get 'em Fed**" with as much whole food as possible. I prefer whole foods for my family when available and cook from scratch as much as time will allow.

Fortunately, eating a wholesome and natural diet isn't nearly as complicated as it was just 10 years ago. Walmart carries whole wheat pasta, rice/soy milk and hormone-free meat, if you choose. Now, it's just a matter of how much you can afford to spend to feed your family, in a healthy way.

Chapter 2

Feeding the Tribe with Whole Food

Feeding 9 kids and a husband is a full-time job in and of itself!

But the "feeding" is the final step of the process. **First**, there must be budgeting, list making, couponing, and meal planning, *thenshopping*, loading, unloading and storage! What about all of that?

One cannot discount the importance of the other steps of **bringing food to the table**, yet I read very little about this. What I read even less about is the **time and energy** all of this preparation takes. We are now a 2-3 cart family, in other words, we can fill at least 2 carts at the grocery, sometimes three carts are necessary to meet our needs. This takes a lot of energy out of *any* mom!

By the time I get home from shopping with *at least three* children, after pushing carts throughout the store, loading the conveyor belt, loading the bags in the cart, loading the van, driving home to unload the van and then put everything away, I'm exhausted. The last thing I feel like doing most days is being creative in the kitchen, I just want to **"Get 'em Fed"**!

I knew that I had to come up with a more concise way to get wholesome food on the table. It is out of that need that I began to cook "**thematically**".

While I enjoy cooking and trying new recipes, the size of my family and their preferences in food keep me focused on *the basics*. The Morrishome prefers to see their favorites on a regular basis. As Mom, I want to make sure my family is eating as much "whole food" as possible.

"Whole foods" are natural foods, that are closest to their natural state when they are consumed.

My **"Whole Food/ Get 'em Fed"** approach is *the best of what I've learned over the years about nutrition, food's role in our lives and being frugal.*

Before I go further, let me say that I am not a 'raw food' advocate. Today, I feel that foods are better digested by most people when cooked, even just steamed. By "natural state", I mean that you consume "real food", food that grew from the ground or an animal product of some kind.

By this, am I saying that we never eat processed food? Nope. We eat it. I think everyone does from time to time. Frankly, I don't feel too bad about it when we do...why?

First of all, we are not characterized by eating processed foods. Your health is determined by what you do everyday, not what you do once in a while.

Second, we eat enough fiber to 'flush' out a dietary mishap here and there. Life's too short to agonize over every bite.

The kinds of food that I purchase and cook with are good, solid foods like...

** Dairy products like milk, cheeses, fermented products like kefir or cottage cheese and eggs.*

** High-quality/ low-fat meats.*

** Whole wheat bread, pasta and cereals.*

** Fruits and vegetables: Fresh from the garden, in season at the store, frozen and canned.*

** Brown rice, oats and beans*

** Good oils like olive, coconut and canola.*

** Quality herbs and spices, from the garden if possible.*

From this list, I can make most of what we eat each week, with the exception of sugar, coffee, flour and leavening.

Where do I shop?

For the most part, I shop at Walmart, Aldi and Meijer, whoever is having the best sales that week. "Cherry picking", when you just buy the best of what's on sale, is my past-time. I feel absolutely no loyalty to any grocery store, my mission is to feed my family and be the best steward I can be.

I prefer to get my meat from Kroger or Sams Club. Occasionally, I stop by the health food store for a few herbs or supplements, but the prices have gone up so much lately. I prefer to get my vitamins and minerals from food.

Chapter 3

Alternative Sources of Food

In a tight economy, realizing other sources of food can only be to your benefit. Be mindful of your community, church, neighbors and family who might have access to sources of fresh food for your family.

Game - Depending on what part of the country you live in, those who **hunt deer, elk** and the like are frequently looking for those who will take (or buy inexpensively) their "prizes". You may even be someone, or married to someone who likes to hunt or fish. Take advantage of this fresh food source! Learn to cook with it and acquire a taste for it.

There are times when fresh venison can be had for just the processing fee. Call around to the different meat processing plants in your area and ask about it. You'll have to time it around hunting season in your state. Many times, hunters aren't interested in the deer meat as much as they are the head for mounting. Our family was able to get about #100 of venison for just the processing fee of \$80. That's less than \$1 a pound for fresh, organic meat! You can't beat that.

Foraging - I am continually amazed at how people, who may have inherited fruit trees, just let the fruit rot and fall to the ground. Put the word out to friends/family/neighbors with unattended fruit or nut trees that you would be willing to come over and collect them.

While not the wisest thing to do alone (bring your husband), I have pulled over to ask people (with unloved, fruit-bearing trees) if they want the fruit. Sometimes, they would be glad to have someone come and clean them all up. Other times, the answer may be "no", but you'll never know unless you ask.

I discovered over 10 mulberry trees on our property this year, talk about exciting!! We picked for weeks, making jam and freezing the berries.

Also, make it known among friends and family that you would be willing to "forage" any garden surplus. Believe me, by September, many gardeners are wishing that the tomatoes, green beans and zucchini would just go away! Grab up whatever you can, eat it and preserve the rest.

Gardening - Don't tell me that you don't have a big enough yard, because you can 'container garden' yourself right into a fresh veggie oblivian! I did it for many years. For those of you who are blessed enough to have a nice, sunny corner of the yard, plant a few tomato and pepper plants...it's not rocket science, believe me, *if I can grow* something to eat, you can too!

U-Pick places - I totally love U-pick places! However, many of them around my part of the country have closed down. They are just not easy to find anymore around here. When you can find them, get familiar with their prices. They will almost always be higher than what is at the grocery, they aren't mega-growers, they're just local farmers. There's something to be said for supporting these folks, I try to do that when I can.

In terms of getting the best price at a U-pick farm, ask about bruised fruit and/or 'drops', which is fruit that has fallen off the tree and is on the ground. Most of the time, this fruit is perfectly fine to eat although you may need to cut out a bad spot or two. I used to buy bushels of 'drops' apples and come home to make applesauce and apple butter for my family.

Day-Old Bread Stores - I love day-old bread stores! The one in town that I really love is a Hostess store. Once a month, I go to get about 25 loaves of bread, hamburger/hotdog buns, muffins and whatever else I could find that was a good deal. The ladies there began to look for me and would show me the best deals for the day. There is tremendous benefit to getting to know the people at places you frequent! Talk to the employees and let them know what your needs are.

Discount stores - Big Lots and other discount stores are great places to shop, *if you know your prices*. I like to shop quarterly at Big Lots, when they have their 20% coupon out. I can get toothpaste for 80 cents and shampoo for 75 cents. Why fool with coupons with these kind of prices? I just stock up enough for a few months. This also allows me to 'share' with my daughter when she comes into town. I don't want her to pay retail and as a college student, she doesn't have time to look for good deals.

Bargaining - Whenever I go meat shopping, I look for the butcher. Meat has an expiration date and Mr. Butcher has to sell or pitch it, so I always ask what he needs to sell *today*. It's amazing, I **almost always** get a great deal on a big package of meat. It never hurts to ask, or look for the 'manager's specials' in the meat department.

Get "Starters" from friends - I have used starters of plants, kefir and bread that have lasted a very long time. What a joy (and a cheap one at that) to have a [fresh sourdough loaf](#) of bread to eat that day, sprouts to munch on or fresh kefir to drink. You may not be familiar with these types of foods, but they are magnificent for you and pretty darned cheap. Check them out.

Chapter 4

From List to Store and Back Home Again

Going to the store each week or two can be **overwhelming**, when you think about all that must be accomplished!

Systems help me to stay sane...and organized, so that I accomplish as much as I can with my limited amount of time, energy, money and brain-cells!

Simple steps to make sure you're prepared for the store

Assemble your list - List preparation takes place ALL week. The greatest obstacle to a well-shopped grocery trip is a poor list. I cannot remember 6 days of requests from the kids, I can barely remember what I had for breakfast!

I keep a **grocery list on my planner** and all the older *kids know to write items on there as they notice the need*. This alone helps me so much! If the child is old enough to write legibly, then they are allowed to write on the list. This also includes items that they may need for school, they don't need to say anything to me (because it won't do any good anyway, I usually don't remember!), just put it on the list.

Scanning the sale flyers in Sunday's paper is also part of my list process! If I see an item that *I use regularly* that is at rock-bottom price, I will make sure I get to that particular store. **Adding this note to my list** helps me to remember from Sunday to grocery day. Sometimes, if there are quite a few items at one store that I want to stock up on, I'll tuck the (marked up) sale's flyer into my planner, right next to my list.

To make the best use of coupons, **assembling the ones you plan to use at home** will make all the difference once you're in the store. Pin them along with your list. I like to write a big letter C next to the items that I have a coupon for.

A quick word about **coupons**...it's no secret that coupons are mostly targeted at new items and/or processed foods. Having said that, I do find **coupons to be a useful tool at times**. Coupons are great for toiletry and personal care items.

Limiting the number of coupons that I clip to those products I actually use keeps me from the "coupon crazies", a condition known to those who clip every coupon they find.

"Coupon Crazies" are characterized by symptoms like buying elaborate coupon organizers and checking coupons.com hourly for newly released coupons. The *balance* I crave is in just clipping what I use.

At the end of the week, I glance through what the kids have written and make my final list. As I transpose the list to my stenopad, I walk around the house to **take one final inventory**.

A final word to the wise: Feed yourself and everyone who's coming with you *before* you head to the store. Also, bring snacks and water for yourself and everyone who's coming with you. Why?

A few calories will keep you from getting too hungry and over-buying. A light snack also keeps you from being tempted to eat out.

Once at the Store

* Talk to your children **on the way** to the store. Reinforce the standards of behavior that are expected at the store. Maybe sing a song about it, but get some "buy in", getting *them to say it* with you. I have written about this extensively [here](#).

One method I use in the store, now that my children are able to read, is to give the children a coupon or two, once we are in the appropriate aisle. They really enjoy looking for the couponed item. I do this when the store isn't busy.

* Try your best to **get down to business**. Avoid special seasonal displays and all the fun stuff designed to get you to over-buy. Stick to your well-organized list, get your food and get out of there!

* Try **generic** brands! You can save a lot of money this way. I really love Walmart's "Great Value" brands.

* **Aldi** is another great, no frills place to shop and save money.

* **Know your prices!** Don't be misled by displays that look like a good deal but really aren't. [Making a price book](#) is very helpful.

* Establish price guidelines, for example, I have limits as to how much I'll pay for certain items...

- No more than \$2 a pound for meat
- No more than \$1 a pound for fruit
- Box of cereal, under \$1.50
- Shampoo/conditioner, under \$1

* Try to finish your actual shopping in the store **within 30 minutes**. Advantages to this are that you and your 'helpers' won't get too tired or hungry before you have a chance to get home. Also, studies show that the longer you are in a store, the more you'll spend.

Back in the car, loaded with your groceries

* Take a big swig of your drink and eat a little something...I love to eat 1/2 protein bar, just to get me through to the next meal and to keep my nerves calm.

* Praise your children for doing a great job in the store!

Food Storage

Once home, a different dimension of 'food management' unfolds. It's called 'food storage'. I've written about [How to Organize Your Pantry](#), but let me chat a little about it here.

Where you store your primary food and your surplus will be **individual to you and your home**. Let me say this, though, regardless of how **small your home may be**, there is *somewhere* that you can stockpile your great finds.

Creating a place to store extra food will help you tremendously:

* First, having some extra food to fall back on in case of a **weather emergency** will keep you fed until the roads clear.

* Extra food can help with a sudden **unemployment** situation.

* Keeping extra food can help you to **minister to someone in need** by just loading up a bag for them.

Once you create a place (or two) to store your food, organize and label it so that anyone can see where the food goes. I finally broke down and bought a labeling machine. I labeled all of the pantry shelves, so that when groceries come in the door, it's clear to see where everything goes.

Just today, I made a monthly Aldi run and filled up the van with food. Before I could go to Sam's, I needed to run home and unload. By the time I finished at Sam's, the teenagers were home from school. I asked them to start putting the food in the garage away, because I was on my way home with more. How glad I was to know that every shelf was labeled! What a blessing.

Food rotation: Be sure to rotate your extra food, FIFO, first in, first out is a good way to teach your kids about rotation. Without proper rotation, your food will expire and nullify your great deals.

Chapter 5

Theme Days and Recipes

As I have mentioned before, I cook "thematically". This means that rather than tie myself down to a specific recipe, I cook by a theme for that night.

You'll notice that some themes overlap with other, for example, there may be some beef in one of the pasta meals or some chicken in a casserole dish. That's ok. This system works well for me and the way I think. Keep in mind that my hope is that you'll take this and run with it, making it your own!

This is what my weekly plan looks like:

Monday - For many years now, my husband has worked a bit late on Monday evenings and therefore isn't home for dinner. After a full day of homeschooling, keeping the house and doing homework with the 'regular school' kids, I'm exhausted. Monday night's meal needs to be simple, yet filling for the Tribe.

The meal for Monday is either leftovers (if I have enough for everyone who is home), a frozen casserole (made previously) or breakfast (eggs, fruit, toast). Dinner has to be something that I can heat up and get on the table, but also clean up quickly as well.

Tuesday - Beef night is a favorite around here and it takes several forms, which I'll cover more in the "Recipe" section. Beef can be replaced with venison, if you choose.

Wednesday - Pasta night! Plus, it also happens to be "**Family Movie & Ice Cream Night**". We eat pasta, clean-up dinner, then eat big ice cream sundaes. Then we all sit together and watch a movie. The kids really look forward to this.

Thursday - I love "Slow-Cooker night"! Dinner is checked off the list early and my kitchen doesn't get hot. For many years, I neglected my slow-cooker, allowing it to gather dust in the pantry. What was I waiting for?

Friday - Chicken night! My big boys especially love chicken night, especially fried chicken and mashed potatoes. I try to make enough to have leftovers for the weekend.

Saturday - Flex night, anything is possible! Sometimes we'll eat leftovers, other times we'll eat out. Saturday night's meal depends greatly on what's going on. During football season, we would likely be eating out after a game. Other times, we might just make soup and sandwiches. That's why it's called "Flex night".

Sunday - Soup night, my personal favorite. I could eat homemade soup every night for dinner, if it were up to me. I love to make soup for many reasons. Of course, it's delicious and warming. Soup also allows me to clean out the frig, using up leftover vegetables and meat.

What you don't see here is any fish or pork. My family just doesn't enjoy these cuts of meat and so we don't eat them at home. But remember that the intention of this book is to motivate you to **personal your own themes** to fit your needs.

Chapter 6

Monday is Casserole Night!

As I stated before, Mondays I'm on my own for dinner. It's usually a busy day, so I make our meal simple by pre-making some of our favorite casserole recipes to keep in the freezer.

I love recipes for casseroles that are more like 'formulas', allowing me to use up what I have on hand.

Leftovers are the first priority to be eaten, if there are any. If not, then we pull out a frozen casserole for our meal.

With a simple "White Sauce" recipe, you can make just about any casserole you want very simply. After you make it a few times, you'll begin to see it's versatility. **However**, that being said, **get over any guilt** you may feel about cracking open a can of "Cream of Something", because sometimes that's all you can get done....it's ok. *Just get 'em fed!*

White Sauce

1/3 cup butter
1/3 cup flour
1/3 cup onion
1/2 tsp. salt and pepper

1 3/4 cup of broth

2/3 cup milk

Sautee butter, flour, onion, salt and pepper in a pot until onions are translucent and mixture is lumpy.

Then add broth and milk, bringing entire mixture to a boil, stirring constantly. Remove from heat when thick.

Three-Cheese Casserole

My kids would eat this every day if I made it! I always double this and freeze one for another time. Leftovers don't last long!

Make white sauce and add 2 cups of cheddar cheese to mixture.

Then you'll need:

6 cups (at least) of cooked whole-wheat pasta, drained
1 1/2 tsp. dried basil
2 cups cottage cheese
1/2 c. parmesan cheese
Salt and pepper to taste

Add white sauce/cheesy mixture to pasta and stir well. Then add basil, cottage cheese and parmesan cheese.

Stir well and bake in 13x9 greased casserole dish. Bake at 375° for 35 minutes.

This recipe freezes great! I just put it in a zip-lock bag once it's cool, lay it on a cookie sheet in the freezer until set and freeze.

Chicken Pot Pie

This should really be called "Leftover Pie" because it's really just made with leftovers. I try to keep an empty butter tub in the freezer, tossing any leftover veggies in there. When it's full, it's either time for Chicken Pot Pie or soup. It costs virtually nothing to make and you're being an outstanding steward of each morsel.

Make the white sauce.

Then add at least 4 cups of frozen vegetables, leftover veggies and/or cooked chicken in your sauce.

Heat until vegetables are well distributed, then pour in a 9x13 casserole dish. Cover with pre-made pie crust and bake according to directions on pie crust.

You could double and freeze the second half of the filling without the crust in a zip-lock bag. When ready, just thaw out the filling, pour in a casserole dish, cover with crust and bake. How easy is that?

***OK, I'll admit it, I make a lousy pie crust. I'll admit another thing too...if I have to make a pie crust by hand, it completely de-motivates me to make this recipe, and that's a shame. It's too good and thrifty of a meal not to make. I use coupons and just buy the crust, but if you're into it, save even more by making your own (whole grain!) pie crust.

Breakfast Casserole

8 slices of bread (Use what you have on hand! I've used french bread, whole wheat, leftover cornbread, whatever!)

#1 bacon or sausage, cooked and chopped small

2 cups shredded cheese (cheddar, american, colby, again, use what you have!)

6 eggs, beaten

Grease the bottom of a 13x9 pan. Tear up bread and place in the bottom of pan. Sprinkle meat and cheeses over bread. Mix eggs and milk together and pour over. Salt and pepper to taste.

Bake at 350° for 35-40 minutes or until eggs are cooked. Great to serve with fried potatoes and /or fried apples.

***I must admit that sometimes we just switch things up a bit and fry up some bacon, scramble a couple dozen eggs and toast about a loaf of bread for dinner. It's all the same ingredients really, but just in a different form and order. We love to have breakfast for dinner at least twice a month.

Chicken Tetrazinni

2 cups whole-wheat spaghetti, cooked and drained
1 can of cream of chicken or mushroom
1/4 cup green pepper, chopped
1 1/2 cup cheddar cheese
2 cups chicken, cooked and diced
1/2 cup onion
1 cup chicken broth

Sautee onions and peppers in a little oil until onions are translucent. Mix in the rest of the ingredients. After mixing well, pour in a greased 13x9 casserole dish. Top with extra cheese, salt and pepper. Bake at 350° for about 35 minutes, until bubbly.

Macaroni and Cheese

1/2 cup butter
1/2 cup flour
4 cups milk

Melt butter in skillet, then add flour and stir until lumpy. Then add 4 cups of milk, turning heat to high, stirring constantly. When mixture thickens, remove from heat. Then add...

4 cups of cheddar cheese

Stir well, then add...

4 cups of cooked whole-wheat pasta

Stir well, then pour in 9x13 casserole dish and bake at 375° for 25-35 minutes.
Yum!

Chapter 7

Tuesday is Beef Night!

We don't eat a lot of beef, but we do enjoy it once or twice a week.

Many times for Tuesday dinner, I just fry up a few pounds of ground beef, add a package of taco seasoning, lay out some taco shells or tortillas and have a Mexican night. It's so easy! With just a few toppings like sour cream, salsa and any veggies I have on hand, everyone is well fed.

Sloppy Joes

A Morrishibe favorite!

1 ½ lbs. of ground meat
1 onion chopped

Fry meat with onion until meat is no longer pink and onions translucent, then add:

½ cup ketchup
1 tbsp. brown sugar
½ tsp. yellow mustard
½ tsp. chili powder
½ tsp. vinegar
½ tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
½ cup water
Dash of salt

Cook slowly, I use a slowcooker, for 1-2 hours, freezes well. Serves about 8.

Recipe from Mary at www.owlhaven.com

Kelly's note: I like to fry up 6-7 pounds of meat at a time and make this. We'll have some for dinner and put the rest in the freezer.

Meatloaf

1 egg

3/4 c. milk

1 cup shredded cheese

1/2 cups oats

1/2 c. onion

1 tsp. salt

#1 beef

Mix meat mixture, then top with:

2/3 c. ketchup

1/2 c. brown sugar

1 1/2 tsp. yellow mustard

Bake at 350° for 50 minutes or until meat is no longer pink inside.

Quick Fix Beef Burrito Skillet

#1 ground chuck

1 packet taco seasoning

1 can kidney beans

1 cup salsa

1 cup water

4 tortillas

1 cup shredded cheese

1 can corn

Fry beef until no longer pink and drain. Add taco seasoning, beans, salsa and water. Bring to boil, reduce heat and let simmer for 5-10 minutes.

Stir in tortillas, top with cheese.

Cover and let sit for 5 minutes. Garnish with sour cream, tomato and lettuce!

Recipe from www.5dollarinnings.com

Kelly's note: If planning to freeze, reserve the tortillas until you are planning to serve.

Mexican Potato Casserole

My kids love this one!

4 medium potatoes

2 tbsp. butter

2 ½ tbsp. taco seasoning

#1/2 ground beef

¼ cup chopped onion

1 cup salsa

½ chopped peppers

1 cup grated monteray jack cheese

Cut potatoes into bite size pieces and place into greased casserole dish. Melt butter, stir in taco seasoning. Pour over potatoes and stir to coat well. Bake uncovered at 425 for 40 minutes. Stir, bake 10 minutes longer. Brown and crumble beef; add onion and cook until soft, then drain.

Stir in salsa and chopped peppers. Pour over potatoes, top with grated cheese. Bake uncovered for 10 minutes. Serve with sour cream.

Easy Shredded Beef Taco Meat in the Crockpot

This is one of those recipes that can cross over from Beef to Crockpot night, depending on what you have on hand!

1lb. beef stew meat

3-4 cloves of garlic

3-4 Tbls Worcheshire Sauce

3 capfulls hot sauce

Salt & Pepper to taste

Mix all and cover with water in the crockpot. (water should come to just above the mixture)

Cook 5-6 hours on low, until tender and can be shredded. Drain.

Serve on tacos, with your choice of taco toppings.

Is also great on nachos!

Recipe from www.newnostalgia.com

Fork-Tender Roast

I have only figured out how to make a good roast this year, as it's all in the cut. Chuck roast is what you want. English roast is lower in fat but dry. Round roast isn't tender. Buy chuck roast when it goes on sale under \$2.75.

The other trick is to let it cook long enough. If you check it and it's still tough, it's just not done. Close the lid and leave it alone for a couple of more hours. It's remarkable how it changes at the end of the cooking cycle.

Use the leftover meat to make taco beef for another meal.

Chuck roast, #2-3

1 onion, quartered

2 cups beef broth or water

Put ingredients in the crock pot and cook on low for 5-6 hours.

One variation is that you can add all of your vegetables on top of the roast to cook along with it. I prefer this method, but don't always have the time. Potatoes, carrots and celery taste great with roast. Just pile them on top of the roast and let them cook right along.

Chapter 8

Wednesday is Italian Pasta Night!

Ah, pasta, the ultimate comfort food! We love pasta and enjoy it frequently. It's inexpensive and terribly versatile.

It only costs a few more cents to purchase whole wheat pasta, thus adding a significant amount of fiber to the meal.

The key to keeping your pasta meals creative is learning to make white sauce. White sauce is the base for many different kinds of simple sauces that cost just pennies to make! Why spend your grocery dollars on canned sauce when white sauce is so simple and easy to make?

When trying to feed my big boys, I count on pasta to get them filled up! My family doesn't like too many flavors mixed together, but these recipes are so versatile that you can tailor them to meet your family's preferences.

Serve these entrees up with a big, warm loaf of french or garlic bread and dinner's on!

Easy Alfredo Sauce

1/2 cup butter
1 8 oz. package cream cheese
2 tsp. garlic powder
2 cups milk
6 oz. grated Parmesan cheese
1/8 tsp. ground pepper

Melt butter in a saucepan over medium heat. Add garlic powder and cream cheese, stirring with a whisk until smooth. Slowly add milk, continuing to stir with whisk and work out any lumps. Then add Parmesan cheese and pepper, turning down heat and stir until desired consistency.

Fettuccini Alfredo

Once again, you are going to hear me talk about versatility here. With the Alfredo sauce recipe above, all you need to add is some cooked pasta and you have a meal! You can add toppings that you have on hand or that are in season very inexpensively.

* Chicken/turkey
*Broccoli, asparagus, green beans

Three-Cheese Baked Pasta

A great use for leftover Alfredo!

1 16 oz package of ziti or pasta of choice
20 oz. or so of Alfredo sauce
**** Start from here with leftover Alfredo....

1 8 oz. container sour cream
1 15 oz. ricotta cheese
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
1 1/2 cups mozzarella cheese

Cook ziti according to package, drain and return to pot.

Stir together Alfredo sauce and sour cream; toss with ziti until evenly coated. Spoon half of ziti mixture into a lightly greased 13x9 baking dish.

Stir together ricotta (or cottage) cheese and next three ingredients; spread evenly of pasta mixture. Spoon remaining pasta mixture evenly over ricotta cheese layer, sprinkle with mozzarella cheese.

Bake at 350° for 30 minutes or until bubbly.

Recipe from www.southernliving.com

Homemade Marinara Sauce

1 tbsp. olive oil
1 medium onion, chopped (about 1/2 cup)
1/4 cup finely chopped carrots
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 can (28 oz.) crushed tomatoes with basil, undrained
1 tbsp. chopped fresh Italian parsley (easily grown in your kitchen window)
1/2 tsp. chopped fresh oregano leaves or 1/4 tsp. dried
1/4 tsp. coarse salt
1/4 tsp. pepper

In a 3 quart saucepan, heat oil over medium heat. Add onion, carrot and garlic, cook about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally until tender. Stir in remaining ingredients.

Heat to boiling. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 15 minutes.

Serve over cooked pasta.

Recipe from Muir Glen/Small Planet foods

Spaghetti

#1-2 spaghetti, boiled and drained
1-2 jars of marinara sauce or homemade sauce

When time and energy are in short supply, this is **good enough**. Add some Parmesan cheese on top and eat.

However, when you find more time to be creative, by all means, do so! My spaghetti looks different every time I make it, depending upon what I have that needs to be used up. Here a just a few variations...

* Ground beef, turkey or venison with a little onion and then added to the sauce. Keeping some precooked meat in the freezer can help get dinner on the table that much faster.

* Various cheeses that can add to the taste as well as the texture, like mozzarella, Parmesan, ricotta or cottage cheese.

I always make more pasta than I expect to eat that night and make a quick casserole for another night. Here's one idea...

Pizza Spaghetti Casserole

12 oz. uncooked spaghetti
1/2 tsp salt
#1 pkg. mild ground pork sausage
2 oz. turkey or regular pepperoni
1 jar (26 oz) of tomato basil pasta sauce
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1 (8 oz.) pkg. shredded Italian three cheese blend

Cook spaghetti with salt according to package directions. Drain well and place in a lightly greased 13x9 casserole dish.

Brown sausage in a large skillet over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, 5 minutes or until meat crumbles and is no longer pink. Drain and set aside. Wipe skillet clean. Add pepperoni and cook over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, 4 minutes or until slightly crisp.

Top spaghetti in baking dish with sausage, pour pasta sauce over sausage. Arrange half of pepperoni slices evenly over pasta sauce. Sprinkle evenly with cheeses.

Arrange remaining half of pepperoni slices evenly over cheese. Cover with non-stick or slightly greased foil.

Bake at 350° for 30 minutes; remove foil and bake 10 more minutes or until cheese is melted and just begins to brown.

Recipe from www.southernliving.com

Chapter 9

Thursday is Slow-Cooker Night!

The versatility of the slow-cooker can no longer be denied! As I learned from "Make it Fast, Cook it Slow" by Stephanie O'Dea, the only thing holding us back is our imagination!

Another stereotype that I had in my mind about slow-cookers was that they were only useful in **cold weather**, for soups and casseroles. Little did I realize that using a slow-cooker for meals in the **summer time** was a fabulous way to keep the heat down in my house.

If you don't have a slow-cooker, look for a nice one on sale and try it out. If you do have one, stuffed way back in your pantry, pull it out, dust it off and find out how simple, fast and easy it can be to "**Get 'em Fed**"!

Slow-Cooker Lasagna



Slow-cooker lasagna is so easy to whip together, I did it in less than 5 minutes! First, I just put about 1/3 of the jar of sauce in the bottom of the crock. Then I broke up a few lasagna noodles and laid them like this. *It is not necessary to boil the noodles for this recipe, they will cook in the sauce! Cool! Don't buy those goofy "no-boil" noodles...



Then I dump about 1/2 of a container of cottage cheese over the noodles.



Then I put another 1/3 jar of sauce or so....



Then another layer of noodles...



Then I sprinkle a few handfuls of mozzarella cheese and about a cup of Parmesan cheese.

See how fast this goes?



This would be the layer to add any herbs or spices you want to add...

I grabbed a few leaves of basil and tore them up, adding them to my lasagna.

You could use oregano, garlic, parsley, etc.



Another layer of noodles....



More sauce, then another handful of mozzarella cheese and you're done!



Slap the lid on that puppy and you can pretty much forget about dinner until it's time to eat your Crockpot Lasagna!

I always try to keep these ingredients around so that I can get something in the slow-cooker when I need to.



Taco Chicken

This is by far one of my very favorite slow-cooker recipes ever! It's versatile, easy and delish! I love to walk in the house and savor the aroma of this cooking in the crockpot, especially when I've been out doing errands all day. I know that dinner's done and everyone will love it.

When I think of my slow-cooker, I usually am reminded of cooler temperatures, but don't let your slow-cooker stay in the pantry all summer! Use that puppy to keep the overall heat in your house down, rather than heat up the stove for dinner. I can really tell a difference!

Sometimes we serve it with taco shells, other times we make burritos out of it and yet other times, I'll eat it right out of a bowl with a little cheese on top!



4 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves

1-15 oz. can tomatoes with chiles(Rotel) and their juices

1 cup frozen corn

1/3 cup water

1-15 oz. can black beans, drained and rinsed

corn taco shells

favorite toppings: shredded cheese, sour cream, lettuce, tomatoes, avocado, ripe black olives.

Using a 4-quart slow cooker, put the chicken into the stoneware and top with the entire can of tomatoes, corn, water and beans. cover and cook on low for 7-8 hours or on high for 4-5 hours.

Shred the chicken with two large forks and fill the taco shells. Add your favorite toppings and enjoy!

Recipe by "Make it Fast, Cook it Slow" by [Stephanie O'Dea](#)

Crock-Pot French Toast

1 whole loaf of bread (I made a gluten-free raisin bread)
1 dozen eggs
2 t vanilla
4 cups of milk (1 used 3 cups of soy, and 1 cup of heavy cream)
1/4 t salt
2 t cinnamon
1/4 cup brown sugar
1/4 cup walnuts, or other desired nuts (optional. I did not use nuts this time.)

I used a 6 qt Smart-Pot Crock-Pot for this. I'd recommend a 5 or 6qt for this dish. If you have a smaller crockpot, scale back a bit. Maybe only use 1/2 a loaf of bread.

Grease the inside of your crockpot very well with butter, shortening, or cooking spray. Slice your bread into large slices (if it's already sliced, just dump it in) and place the bread into the crockpot.

In a large bowl, whisk the eggs, milk, brown sugar, salt, cinnamon, and vanilla together. Pour on top of the bread.

Cover and cook on low for 6-8 hours. This is done when the bread has soaked up all of the liquid and the egg has cooked (you can tell because you'll see bits of cooked egg stuck to the bread). The bread will expand---it's like one of those spongy foam things that come in the capsules and turn into a dinosaur. Very cool.

After 8 hours, I had a bit of liquid left in the crockpot, but the bread on top was browned nicely and the egg was done. I took the lid off and went hunting for the camera, and then checked email, and then watered the garden. 30 minutes had passed before I remembered that I had left the lid off of the crockpot, and that it was still plugged in. BUT! all the moisture was gone and the french toast was perfect.

From "Make it Fast, Cook it Slow" by [Stephanie O'Dea](#)

Shredded Chicken Sandwiches

3-4 pounds of chicken breasts
1 large bottle of BBQ sauce
A few squirts of honey

Put everything in the slow-cooker on low for 5-6 hours, until chicken is no longer pink inside. It helps to turn the chicken at some point.

When chicken is finished cooking, remove from slow-cooker and let cool somewhat. With a couple of forks, shred chicken.

Serve on whole-wheat rolls. How easy is that?

French Fry Hotdish

A new recipe to our favorites book, tastes like Shepherd's Pie

#2 ground beef or venison, browned
1 pkg. onion soup mix
2 small cans corn, drained
2 small cans peas or green beans, drained
1 can (family size) Cream of Chicken ~or~ Cream of Mushroom
2 cups of frozen french fries ~or~ freshly peeled potatoes, chopped

Brown meat in a pan and drain off fat. Add onion soup mix and cook until tender. Mix beef with vegetables and soup.

Layer meat in the bottom of greased slow-cooker. Add french fries and repeat until mixture is gone.

Cook on low for 8 hours or high for 5 hours.

Taken with permission from "Love in the Kitchen", a cookbook by a mother to 16 Wendy Jeub of Colorado. See www.jeubfamily.com

Applesauce Chicken in the Slow-Cooker

4 large chicken breasts
2 tsp. garlic powder
2 tsp. cinnamon
3 cups applesauce
2 tbsp. apple cider vinegar

Spray slow-cooker with oil spray, put chicken on bottom. Combine all other ingredients and pour over chicken. Cook on high for 5-6 hours, low for 8. Serve over rice, yum!

Chapter 10

Friday is Chicken night!

Garlic Parmesan Chicken

6 boneless chicken breasts
1 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
1 envelope Italian salad dressing mix
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/2 cup olive oil

Mix together cheese, garlic and dressing mix. Dip chicken breasts in olive oil, then coat with cheese mixture.

Lay chicken in a greased baking dish. Bake at 400° for 45-60 minutes or until chicken is tender and no longer pink.

Paprika Chicken

6 boneless chicken breasts
1 tsp. poultry seasoning
2 tsp. paprika
pepper to taste
A pinch of garlic powder

Lay chicken in greased baking dish. Mix seasonings together, then sprinkle mixture over chicken evenly.

Bake in preheated oven at 375° for 50-60 minutes or until chicken is no longer pink inside.

Recipe from www.allrecipes.com

Creamy Chicken

This is very good over brown rice, my peeps love it!

3 boneless chicken breasts
8 oz. sour cream
1 can of Cream of Chicken
1 sleeve of Ritz crackers
1/4 cup butter

Place chicken in greased baking dish. Mix sour cream and soup together and pour over chicken. Salt and pepper to taste.

Melt butter and mix with crushed crackers and top chicken. Bake at 375° for 50-60 minutes or until chicken is no longer pink inside.

Crispy Fried Chicken

My family loves this dinner, especially when I make mashed potatoes with it!

#4 chicken pieces
1 cup buttermilk
2 cups of flour
1 tsp. paprika
Salt and pepper to taste
Oil for frying, about 1/3 full in a skillet

Then mix flour and paprika together in a shallow bowl. Working with one piece at a time, dip chicken pieces into buttermilk, then roll in flour mixture, coating well.

Place coated chicken into **hot** oil, then salt and pepper to taste. Fry chicken until browned on both sides, then reduce heat and cover skillet. Cook for about 20-30 minutes, checking on chicken frequently. Cook until chicken is no longer pink inside.

Chapter 11

Saturday night is Flex night!

When Saturday night comes, it's hard to say what we've been up to all day long.

Depending upon the season, we might have been working in the yard all day, running kids around to games or cleaning the house.

It seems that we are pretty tired by the time dinner rolls around, so we just keep it super easy. Leftovers are our first priority, as usual. Our second choice for dinner might just be soup and sandwiches. Other times, we just order a pizza.

When I have the energy, homemade pizza is a family favorite around here. This is by far the best crust I've **ever** made!

We just add pizza sauce, cheese and whatever is on hand. Use your own recipes on this fabulous crust!

Jay's Signature Pizza Crust

2 1/4 tsp. active dry yeast

1/2 tsp. brown sugar

1 1/2 cups warm water (110° F)

1 tsp. salt

2 tbsp. olive oil

3 1/3 cups all-purpose flour

In a large bowl, dissolve the yeast and brown sugar in the water, let sit for 10 minutes.

Stir the salt and oil into the yeast solution. Mix in 2 1/2 cups of the flour.

Turn dough out onto a clean, well floured surface and knead in more flour until the dough is no longer sticky. Place the dough into a well oiled bowl and cover with a cloth. Let the dough rise until double, this should take about an hour. Punch down the dough, and form a tight ball. Allow the dough to relax for a minute before rolling out.

Preheat oven to 425°. If you are baking the dough on a pizza stone, you may place your toppings on the dough, and bake immediately. If you are baking your pizza in a

pan, lightly oil the pan and let the dough rise for 15-20 minutes before topping and baking it.

Bake pizza in preheated oven, until the cheese and crust are golden brown, about 15-20 minutes.

Yummo! Recipe from www.allrecipes.com

Chapter 12

Sunday is Soup night!

Minestrone Soup

One onion, finely chopped
3 tbsp. olive oil
2 cloves minced garlic

Saute in a pot until onion is translucent, about 5 minutes.

Then add:

8 cups of vegetable stock (or meat stock if you prefer)
1 can of kidney beans
6 cups of chopped vegetables, use what you have on hand! Potatoes, carrots, celery and spinach work best.
However, I like to use up those little 1/2 filled bags in the freezer if I can. Be creative and flexible!
1 1/2 tsp. basil
1/2 tsp. oregano
1/2 tsp. rosemary
Salt to taste

Let this simmer for a few hours on the stove or transferred into a slow-cooker. Then add...

1/4 cup tomato paste
1/2 cup macaroni
2 cups cabbage, chopped finely

Simmer another 30 minutes and then enjoy! Wonderful with good bread and better the second day. Freezes very well.

Pantry Chili

This is pathetically simple, but an essential for busy moms! Keep the ingredients handy in your pantry.

In a large crockpot, dump in...

2 -28 oz. can of tomatoes
1-15 oz. can of kidney beans, rinsed and drained
1-15 oz. can of black beans, rinsed and drained
1-15 oz. can of corn, drained
1-15 oz. can of chili beans
1 tbsp. chili powder

Cook in crockpot on low for 7-8 hours. Sometimes I serve it just like this, with some corn muffins. Other times, if I have some pre-cooked beef in the freezer, I'll throw in a handful or two. Leftover rice is another good addition to this recipe and adds more fiber.

Serve with cheddar cheese and sour cream!

Creamy Corn and Potato Chowder



Rich, creamy chowder is a favorite comfort food -- reassuring, full-bodied, and very delicious. And it's easier to make than a lot of cream soups because you don't have to puree anything.

Ingredients

2 tablespoons butter
1 large onion, finely chopped
1 rib celery, finely chopped
5 1/2 cups chicken stock
1 1/2 cups frozen corn kernels
1 large all-purpose potato, peeled and diced
1/2 to 3/4 teaspoon salt, to taste
1 cup heavy cream
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
Black pepper, to taste
Fresh dill or parsley for garnish, chopped

Melt the butter in a large saucepan or medium soup pot.

- Stir in the onion and celery.
- Partially cover the pan and cook the vegetables over moderate heat for 9 to 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- Add the chicken stock, corn, potato, and salt and bring the mixture to a low boil.
- Lower the heat, cover the pot, and simmer for about 7 minutes, until the potatoes are just tender.
- In a small bowl, whisk together the cream and flour.
- Stir the mixture into the soup with the pepper.

- Bring the soup back to a low boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for about 8 minutes.
- Serve hot, garnished with herbs.

Recipe from Family Fun magazine

Chapter 13

Stretching Meals with Quick Breads

Using quick breads to stretch a meal is not only economical, but adds variety to your meals.

Libby's Pumpkin Cranberry Bread

3 cups all purpose flour
5 tsp. pumpkin pie spice
2 tsp. baking soda
1 1/2 tsp. salt
3 cups sugar
1- 15 oz can pumpkin
4 eggs
1 cup vegetable oil
1/2 cup orange juice
1 cup fresh or dried cranberries (Switch it up and use raisins, chocolate chips or nuts!
Use what you have!)

Preheat oven to 350°, then grease and flour 2-9x5 loaf pans.

Mix flour, pumpkin pie spice, baking soda and salt together, set aside. Then mix sugar, pumpkin, eggs, oil and orange juice. Fold flour mixture into pumpkin mixture, blend well.

Pour into loaf pans and bake for 60-65 minutes or until inserted knife comes out clean. Let cool for at least 10 minutes in pan, and then on a wire rack for complete cooling.

The Best Banana Bread ~ Ever!

1 1/2 cup olive oil
4 eggs
1 cup yogert
1 tbsp. sea salt
2 cups sugar
6-7 very ripe bananas
1 tbsp. vanilla

Mix together, then slowly add:

4 1/4 cups flour
1 1/2 tbsp. baking soda
1/2 cup ground flaxseed, optional

Divide your batter into 4 greased loaf pans about 2/3 full. Bake at 350° for 50-60 minutes or until inserted knife comes out clean.

***You could add chocolate chips, tastes great!