

## Kids lack culinary keenness

My heart sank when I saw the headline.

"Kids health habits shaky, study finds."

We'd been found out.

I scanned the page for mugshots of my children.

After breathing a sigh of relief to find our photos notably absent, I read the article. It reiterated what most of us already knew: Kids don't know a whole heck of a lot about nutrition. Furthermore, they are not eating their peaches and peas or brushing their teeth before bed.

I could commiserate. After all, our dentist finances his annual family vacation on the Kubicks' cavity bill alone.

"Where should we go this year guys? EuroDisney?"

And as far as balanced meals go, most of the time I feel like a short order cook in The Diner From Hell.

"Yuck!"

"Gross, what is it?"

"I'm not eating."

But just how far down the path to scurvy and capped teeth had my children actually gone?

I lined them up on the couch, newspaper in hand, for a little quiz.

What kind of fruit had they eaten yesterday?

They responded at first with a stunned silence and sidelong looks of panic.

I waited, tapping the paper impatiently.

"Apple juice and Fruit Roll-Ups," my oldest son Justin offered tentatively.

"Um, carrots?" Joe asked.

"Froot Loops?"

"Flintstones vitamins?"

Like every decent parent, I felt the need to prove my children's nutritional literacy, even if it took



**Cindy Lange-Kubick**

some prompting.

"What did you have for lunch, Joe?"

"Peanut butter."

"OK. A peanut butter sandwich."

"NO! Peanut butter."

"PLAIN peanut butter?" (Had the Republicans been fooling with the school-lunch program already?)

"In a cup!" he yelled.

"Oh," I said sweetly, attempting to get the interrogation back on track. "I see, did you dip celery in it?"

His look said, "You, Mom, are an absolute lunatic." His voice said,

"No. An apple."

Bingo. He'd passed. Under the auspices of the balanced lunch program, he had consumed a genuine fiber-filled piece of fruit in the last 24 hours.

I moved on.

"What kind of vegetable did you eat yesterday?"

"THIS ISN'T A QUIZ! I QUIT!"

Joe left the room before I got a chance to ask him if he'd brushed his teeth last night.

I know I'm not alone, and there is some small comfort in that knowledge.

Like the majority of their peers, my offspring are lacking in culinary keenness and nutritional savvy.

They think pesto is an Italian word for nuisance and that a kumquat is a country in the Middle

East.

The newspaper article furthermore stated that the reason half of America's schoolchildren think apple juice has more fat than whole milk is a reflection on the "poor quality of health education."

I'd have to agree. My kids seem to have gotten much of their limited knowledge on the subject from The National Enquirer School of Nutritional Thought.

"Yuck, do you know how many bug body parts might be in that soup?" Anna asked one night at supper. (This from a girl, who as a toddler ate ants off the sidewalk.)

"Did you know that if someone is working and their wig falls off, you might get a hairball in your tuna fish?" (Only, of course, if the person is working in a tuna fish-processing plant.)

"Mom, there's a germ on you. There's about 100 million germs on you right now," Joe told me recently, his eyes wide.

"And even if you take a bath it doesn't work. They don't come off."

I think Joe's class had been talking about the importance of hygiene, and the poor kid got sidetracked on the prevalence of bacteria on the human body.

But, all in all, they seem pretty healthy despite their nutritional failings.

Now if only I could quit worrying about those germs all over my body.

And the potential hairball in my sandwich.

And the roach wings in my Campbell's Cream of Mushroom ...

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## White House druggies given special passes

There was some interesting testimony Monday before a Senate appropriations subcommittee looking into drug testing.

The director of the White House Office of Administration, Patsy Thomasson — who, with Hillary Rodham Clinton, picked many of the senior people in the Administration — admitted under sharp questioning by Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.) that 11 White House staff members have been enrolled in a special random drug-testing program because of concerns about "recent drug use."

She had previously mentioned the figure in a written response to the inquiries of Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.), but this was the first time details were mentioned at a public hearing.

Thomasson did not elaborate on what she meant by recent drug use. And she revealed that volunteers without adequate security clearances have been given access to sensitive areas in both the East and West Wings of the White House.

Who are these volunteers? One can only speculate. It's safe to say they aren't from the traditional values-promoting Family Research Council.

Such access contradicts testimony Thomasson gave to the subcommittee last year. At that time, she denied that any volunteers had access to the West Wing, where the Oval Office is located.

Under the White House's color-coded security system, blue passes allow access to both the president's and vice president's offices. Now Thomasson has acknowledged that some blue passes had been issued to volunteers.

Even those with short-term memories may recall that last December, while Newt Gingrich was the Speaker-in-waiting, he suggested that the reason so many people working in the White House had delayed getting their official access passes was because they had used illegal drugs. For such persons to submit to the background checks required of all pass applicants would have meant divulging that drug use, a possible denial of a security clearance and the passes and bad publicity for the administration. So they were given temporary passes instead.

Gingrich quoted a "senior law-enforcement official" as saying that up to 25 percent of White House staff members had used drugs as recently as within "four or five years" of joining the Clinton staff.

The media and the Democrats



**Cal Thomas**

outbid each other in outrage. Editorials spoke of character assassination and worse. White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta said of Gingrich, "His charges are absolutely false. There is no one in the White House who uses drugs. If Newt Gingrich has evidence to the contrary, he ought to tell me about it, he ought to make it public, and I'll fire them."

Does being enrolled in the random drug-testing program because of recent drug use meet Panetta's test? One eagerly awaits to see if heads will roll.

When Rep. Wolf raised questions about the delay in finishing security clearances for all White House staffers, the administration stonewalled.

Wolf's investigation of some staff members uncovered cases of past drug use and drug convictions, years of unpaid taxes, unpaid debts and financial irregularities. All of these could have been grounds for denial by the Secret Service of a permanent pass.

The right pass allows the holder full access to the White House, including the president and vice president and any papers one might see lying around. Such access ought not to be provided to "volunteers" who have not received the proper clearances. Neither should it be granted to people who have not cleared the usual FBI background checks.

Wolf's office requested a General Accounting Office investigation into the pass matter last year. It is ongoing. A congressional source, who wishes to remain anonymous, says the investigation was hampered because of the "slow and painful response of the White House." Things picked up, the source says, after the November election, and White House compliance is said to have improved.

How many White House staffers who ought to have permanent passes still don't have them, and why not? What's holding up their clearances? Have they submitted the required paperwork? These and other questions should be answered immediately.

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## Generation X is state of mind

Inner struggles are fun, aren't they?

And I'm not referring to the kind of inner struggle where you say to yourself, "I can make it to the next commercial before I go to the bathroom." I'm talking about the inner struggles that take place in the mind. In my case, there's plenty of room for these conflicts.

Usually what happens is that one of my brain cells takes up an issue, another will disagree and the other one will just kind of hang out, waiting for the next commercial.

The latest issue about which at least two-thirds of my brain cells disagree is generations.

I'm having a very difficult time with the theory that it is possible to lump an entire segment of the population of a certain age range into a group. Generation X, for example, is a very strange concept to me.

Technically, I fall into this group. This bothers me. I am disturbed by the fact that I am legally bound into this group of Xers, strictly on the basis of the year in which I was born, because I really don't like anything about this group.

This is where my brain cells begin their tug of war over the issue. One cell claims that it is just not right to stereotype a generation of people and then secede from the group because I don't like the stereotype.

My other brain cell tells me I'm right. It tells me in a very convincing voice that the Generation X person is nothing but a lazy, disgruntled, Seattle-band lovin', goatee wearin' (mainly the males) loner who wants to be so individual and alternative that he eventually becomes a mockery of those very desires by his pitiful imitation.



**Todd Elwood**

I've even gone so far as to develop a test for potential Generation Xers. If you claim that your favorite color is flannel, if you replace the word "like" for the word "said" (as in "I was like, 'No way!' and she was like, 'Uh-huh!'"), and if all of your friends are named "Dude," you can safely claim membership in the X Generation.

And may I say that I do not wish to be a member. Actually, my membership would probably be cancelled, anyway. I would probably be rejected from the generation for having three brain cells. I believe that this number overqualifies me by at least two cells, but I'll have to review the official charter.

This may be a cruel exaggeration, but the simple fact is that some of those characteristics are believed to be fact by some people, and I do not want to be classified this way. But apparently there are some people who enjoy being viewed in this way. Some people in the Generation X don't mind being moody recluses. Some seem to want their lives to be a Nirvana video, and this is strange behavior. At least it is to my second brain cell.

Where does all of this leave me and my three brain cells, though?

It seems that many people claim membership in Generation X, or any neatly named generation, for the pure fact that they can call something their own. It's as if they

become more of a complete person by signing onto a stereotyped age range.

I simply cannot do this. I feel that all three of my brain cells evolved to what they are today in the '80s.

Yes, the "Decade of Greed." The only problem with this label is that I do not consider myself to be a greedy person, even though I grew up in that decade.

Sure, I would someday like to own a house with a two-car garage, have a perfect, high-paying career, raise 2.3 healthy children and live happily ever after (Gimme, gimme, gimme). But does this make me greedy? And if it does, is it because I claim membership to the vile and evil decade known as the Reagan years?

I doubt it. So here I am without a generation to call my own, and that's just fine with me.

I'm not a hippie. To me, Woodstock is Snoopy's small yellow friend, and the strongest drug I've tripped on is NyQuil.

I'm not a yuppie. I have no portfolio, and I am certainly not a professional anything.

I'm not a baby boomer. I don't even remember when Elvis was alive.

And, dude, I'm like, not a Generation Xer.

I feel that everyone has a right to claim membership in a generation, but for me, I believe it is all just a state of mind. You can ignore the stereotypes and be anything you want to be.

At least that's what my third brain cell told me after the commercial break.

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**Mike Luckovich**