



# Cookie Monsters

At the modern bake sale, nothing less than your measure as a mother is at stake **By Andrea Curtis**

IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN MORE THAN A MONTH into my son's first year of school when we got the notice about a bake sale. The class would be holding a fundraiser in the front hall starting at 8:30 a.m. Would we bring in our homemade baked goods to raise money for classroom supplies and field trips? Volunteers welcome. No nuts, please.

Remembering the dedicated ladies of my hometown church bazaars, with their miniature glazed strawberry tarts, coconut and lemon squares, brownies, butter tarts, cheese balls, shortbread and fruitcake—acres and acres of green-and-red-cherry-flecked, dense-as-a-brick fruitcake—I felt a tidal wave of panic crushing my chest. How would I ever find the time, energy and skill to make something worthy of a bake sale? Though I have always liked baking, a cavalier approach to measuring and following recipes has, over the years, yielded mixed results. I nervously flipped through my many shelves of cookbooks—each of them with a higgledy-

piggledy annex of pages torn from magazines—looking for something spectacular, something no one would pass up, something that would bring in the funds necessary to get my four-year-old and his classmates coloured pencils and Podge, maybe even admittance to the Gardiner Museum. I settled on my fail-safe chocolate chip cookie recipe. Not too thick, nicely chewy, loaded with morsels of milk chocolate goodness and, if nothing else, nut-free.

Still, I did it with a slightly heavy heart, certain I was falling far short of the church bazaar standard I'd witnessed as a child. The women of my hometown's many con-



## Trust Just Cameras for all things Nikon: Cameras, Lenses, Flashes and genuine Nikon accessories.



I'm Pay, owner of Just Cameras for over 30 years and I have a passion for helping you to take great pictures. I trust Nikon cameras to make it easy. Just Cameras, your official authorized Nikon dealer in Mississauga.

20 minutes from downtown Toronto & worth the drive!



WARRANTY  
**2 YEAR**  
Nikon  
CLAIMING

### Nikon D80 Kit

Waiting for you, at a price you expect, with personal service and expertise.

**Just Cameras**  
MISSISSAUGA photo source



Mon - THURS ..... 9-7  
FRI ..... 9-9  
SAT ..... 9-5:30  
SUN ..... Closed

1248 Dundas St. E., Miss. 905-273-3225

VISIT US AT [WWW.JUSTCAMERAS.COM](http://WWW.JUSTCAMERAS.COM)



### Unique & Exclusive Imports

Everything For Your Entertaining Needs  
Cheese, Olives, Vinegars, Oils, etc. & so much more



416-364-7397

10 Dundas St. West, Toronto • [www.pasqualebros.com](http://www.pasqualebros.com)



house of saapes

505 mt. pleasant Rd.  
416-916-3930  
Live Entertainment

**Cambalache**

[www.cambalache.ca](http://www.cambalache.ca)



**LULA LOUNGE**  
TORONTO'S BEST DINNER & SHOW PACKAGE!

TROPICAL 3 COURSE DINNER  
DANCE LESSONS  
TO 5 BEST LIVE BANDS

1585 DUNDAS W. 416-598-0651  
**LULA.CA EAT.DRINK.DANCE**

gregations would go all out for their annual fundraisers. There was the obligatory tea—cucumber and cream cheese sandwiches on Wonder Bread served with Red Rose in bone china cups. At the white elephant and craft sale, crocheted covers that disguised unsightly toilet paper rolls were sold alongside the once-ubiquitous, now-extinct Lifesavers clown, a half-candy, half-yarn concoction with a Styrofoam head and ghoulish grin.

But it was the baked goods table that, for me, inspired the most awe. The offerings were not just legion, but also astonishingly well-wrapped: squares, bars and cookies were arrayed on Royal Chinet plates or Styrofoam trays, then mummified in plastic wrap, the price and a terse description (“pecan,” “lemon”) written on masking tape on the outside. Indeed, the madeleine may have cast Proust back to his youth, but it is the nanaimo bar—that tooth-achingly sweet layering of chocolate, bright yellow custard, coconut and butter—that does the trick for me. It seems the perfect, over-the-top symbol of the excesses of the late '70s and '80s.

Actually, if you'd asked me before my son started kindergarten, I would have said that the bake sale was one of those phenomena that vanished along with home perms and the Bay City Rollers. But like so many things I've rediscovered since having children (the public library, Saturday mornings), it didn't go away at all.

In fact, the bake sale has simply changed with the times. In Toronto, where public education and resources for such “extras” as art, music and field trips have been cut to the quick and teachers are forced to pay out of their own pocket for classroom supplies, it's pretty much obligatory. (There are even political bake sales these days, though admittedly “Bake Back the White House” hasn't had a noticeable impact on George Bush's reign.) Children have changed, too. Modern kids, I have learned, have no time for fruitcake and won't touch a lemon cheesecake square. Instead, it's all about cupcakes drowned in sprinkles, cookies studded with candy-coated chocolate and cakes in the shape of sponges in square pans.



### THE RECIPE

Though regular chocolate chips are delicious, milk chocolate makes the cookies extra-sweet. Add flax seeds, oatmeal and raisins for a thicker, heartier texture. For special occasions, use Smarties or M&Ms

- ½ cup unsalted butter at room temperature
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- ¼ cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 egg
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ tsp salt
- ½ tsp baking soda
- ½ cup milk chocolate chips

1. Cream butter and sugar, add vanilla and egg and beat until fluffy.
2. Mix flour, salt and baking soda together, then add to the wet mixture. Stir chocolate chips in last.
3. Bake on an ungreased cookie sheet at 350° F for 10 to 12 minutes.

But perhaps the more interesting thing that has changed is the bakers themselves. The bake sales I frequent now are staffed and supplied by harried working parents juggling abandoned knapsacks and lunch bags that smell like sour milk, permission slips smeared with chocolate icing in one hand, cellphone and car keys in the other. It's hard to imagine a group more unlike the grannies and housewives I remember, who proudly offered up their specialty bar or reputation-making pie in the fluorescent-lit church basement.

I wasn't privy to the politics of the church bazaar (though if my memory of certain members of the congregation is any guide, snubs and guilt trips were part of it), but I imagine it was so many pick-up sticks compared to the twisted levels of ambivalence and self-reproach brought to the bake sale table by the multi-tasking parents of today's schoolchildren.

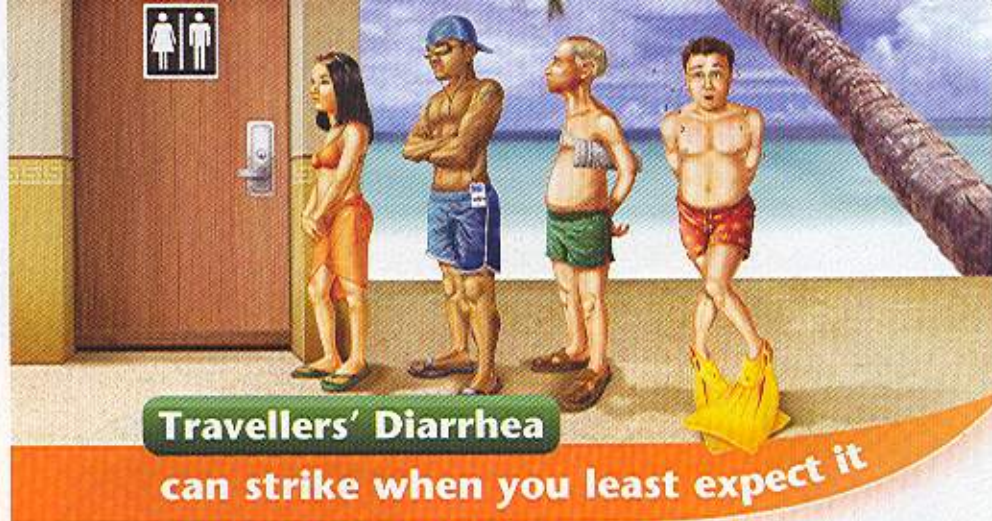


There is a passage early on in Allison Pearson's much-ballyhooed novel from a few years back, *I Don't Know How She Does It*, in which the main character, Kate Reddy, the frenzied working mother of two small children, "distresses" a store-bought mince pie in order to pass it off as homemade. It's hilarious and absurd in equal measure and just about sums up the contortions and angst (if not the actions) of the modern parent faced with the spectre of the bake sale. Most of us don't have the time or inclination to whip up a batch of snickerdoodles in the middle of a busy work week but feel silly buying something (why not just make a donation?) and guilt-ridden if we don't contribute anything at all. Told over and over again that our involvement in our children's education has a direct relationship to their success in school, it's easy to feel as though little Felix is one chocolate chip away from academic failure or exile to the playground equivalent of Siberia.

Add to this the resentment and suspicion directed toward those enviable creatures who embrace the task, appearing bright-eyed and Zen with a stack of reusable containers loaded with homemade goodies, their child's name and classroom emblazoned on the bottom in permanent marker. A sentiment seems to blow through the embattled tribe that she (for it is usually a mom; dads get kudos for baking anything) must have nothing better to do or is so deeply in denial that she *thinks* she likes to bake (and, presumably, clean, cook and tend to the needs of everyone but herself).

It's as if the bake sale, with its lingering feel of an earlier era, stirs up some Betty Friedan-style outrage, along with a hearty dollop of self-loathing. But even to someone raised in an era when mothers asserted their independence with frozen TV dinners and Pop-Tarts, it seems like a lot of freight to place on those plastic folding tables. Surely it's possible to bake cookies and still be a self-actualized woman—or for that matter, not do so and hold your head up high in the schoolyard.

As for me, I've made peace with my sepia-toned vision of the Bake Sale Lady ideal, and continue to produce chocolate chip cookies when my son's class has its semi-annual run at the table. And I'm not ashamed to admit that I, too, have made an effort to appeal to the fickle tastes of the 21st-century child. Before I pop the cookies in the oven, I pierce the heart of the dropped batter with a Popsicle stick, so once cooled, they can be enjoyed stand-up style as a kind of cookie-pop. I don't want to boast, but let's just say I never go home with leftovers. **END**



## Travellers' Diarrhea

can strike when you least expect it

Up to **1 in 2** may get Travellers' Diarrhea during a 2-week visit to areas such as Mexico and the Caribbean<sup>†</sup>

**DUKORAL®** is the only vaccine that helps prevent Travellers' Diarrhea<sup>†</sup>

Ask your doctor or pharmacist about **DUKORAL®**

For more information visit: [www.preventthesurprise.com](http://www.preventthesurprise.com)

<sup>†</sup> Caused by enterotoxigenic *E. coli*.



Help prevent the surprise



**DUKORAL®**  
Oral, Inactivated Trivalent Enterotoxigenic *E. coli* Vaccine

**sanofi pasteur**

The vaccines division of sanofi-sintelabo Group

DUKORAL® is a registered trademark of sanofi-sintelabo. © 2007 Sanofi Pasteur Limited.

THE  
COOP  
PINK

A contemporary menswear store serving the greater Toronto area for over 25 years

**ZegnaSport**

J.J. Lindeberg Rufus Belstaff

**DAVE**

Andrew Marc 7 For All Mankind

John Varvatos

True Religion

**ETON**

Sund

**VERSACE**  
COLLECTION

Ted Baker

**Z**

3287 Young St. Toronto | 416-544-9944  
[www.coopink.com](http://www.coopink.com) | [info@coopink.com](mailto:info@coopink.com)

**LOOK GOOD • FEEL GOOD**