



## Formula Advised by the School Nurse

By Gilbert Gia

Copyright © Gilbert Gia, 2009

The US was at war in April 1917, and almost immediately the country had food shortages. In January, the lack of farmhands in California made politicians consider allowing women to bring in crops, and that month the state petitioned Washington to lift restrictions on farm labor from Mexico.<sup>1</sup> Here in Bakersfield Hochheimer Store grocery manager Cecil Shaver told his customers that if they wanted to buy white flour, half of it would have to be in corn or rye.<sup>2</sup>

Food shortages soon affected poorer families. The Federated Parent Teachers Association appeared before the Bakersfield City Council in January and reported that forty-five children, more or less, arrived at school each day "without having received proper nourishment at their homes."<sup>3</sup> The pupils were too poor to buy the five-cent school lunch and too poor to bring a lunch bucket. Mrs. James C. Curran, President of the PTA, called upon the Council to contribute \$45 a month so that needy children would get a "warm and nourishing meal."<sup>4</sup>

Said Mrs. Curran, "These children are the victims of circumstances over which they have no control, and they are entitled to the same chance that more fortunate children have. We are not asking for charity for their parents. The children are the ones we are looking out for. They need food, and surely there is some way in which the City of Bakersfield can provide this. Heretofore, the teachers have been doing most of what we are now asking the City Council to assist in doing. The teachers have been preparing food for these children from a formula advised by the school nurse to supply the necessary fare for their starved little systems."

---

<sup>1</sup> Bakersfield Californian, Jan 9, 1918

<sup>2</sup> Bakersfield Californian, Jan 29, 1918. In 1918 most bread was baked at home.

<sup>3</sup> Bakersfield Californian, Jan 7, 15, 1918. In January, 3,200 pupils were enrolled in city schools.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

Mrs. Curran concluded that the school lunch program was "...all right as far as it goes, but it is inadequate, and the deficit has to be met by *private subscription*. If the Council will grant us the additional five cents per day for each child, which we are asking, the unfortunate children can be fed properly at least once each school day." Curran had used the coded words *private subscription*, but Council members understood their meaning: individual teachers were providing food for hungry children.

The Council was sympathetic, but it questioned such use of City funds. They referred the request to the City Manager and City Charity Commissioner for further study, but the Council promised Mrs. Curran a definite answer at the next meeting.

The above narrative from 1918 rings true to anyone who has taught in poverty schools; today's classroom teachers continue to provide necessities for their needy pupils.

