

THE POPCORN BALL STORY

Popcorn has been a mainstay in our diets, both Bob and mine, going back to our childhoods. Sunday nights weren't complete in my home without a huge bowl of delicious, buttered, (no oleo back then) popcorn, popped by my big brother. My husband, Bob, was the chief popcorn cooker in his home, and I won't say this is what brought us together, but it has certainly kept us munching together.

When our children were young, we searched for homemade some things for them to give to their friends at Christmas and we hit on the idea of popcorn balls. My husband valiantly rose to the occasion – it takes a little strength to shape these things. Here's how it goes. The popcorn is kept warm in the oven and by the time the syrup, which is simmering on the stove, is poured over it (my job), it gets pretty hot as well as sticky. Over the years we've worked out a system of protection for Bob's hands. He puts on heavy gloves, and I slip plastic bags over them, held in place with heavy rubber bands. Then they're greased with globs of oleo.

Next, it's just muscling the popcorn into the size of ball we're after and making sure there is enough syrup to hold its shape. The syrup is flavored with peppermint and colored with a few drops of red food coloring. We can produce about six balls from a Dutch oven full of popped corn. After 45 years we think we've finally gotten the hang of it.

We started out making a few for each daughter to give to her special friends. As they grew older, word got around, and we had to expand the production considerably. And when the children started their own families we, of course, had to make them for our grandchildren. Our friends had grandchildren too, so we made a few more for them. Then we added a peppermint stick in the center for a little excitement. And someone decided we should stir some red and green gumdrops into the mix. So we settled on this formula for the final recipe. After this we wrapped each ball with red or green cellophane tied with heavy Christmas yarn. They looked ravishingly festive!

Eventually things began to get out of hand – year before last we ended up making 75 popcorn balls! And we had to make these early enough so our friends could mail them with their Christmas packages. We mailed a huge package of popcorn balls to North Carolina to an especially prolific friend one year, and explained the production was going to have to be cut drastically, soon. Immediately after, thank you notes arrived, offering to send money. Occasionally we would get a complaint – “they aren't quite up to par this year, Bob.”

Finally we broke with tradition, gave in to common sense, and ended it all. Each recipient received a peppermint stick in a small plastic bag with kernels of unpopped corn, tied with a red ribbon, in a small Christmas tote, with a tag that read:

“For years & year we've popped this stuff.
But now we feel it's quite enough.
So here's the reason for this poem—
We think it's time you popped your own!”



by Poody Lamoureux