



Andrew M. Ayers

AndrewMAyers.com

877-262-9377

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MAN UP!

A Dad Cooks Up Family Meals ... and Fun

It's not every day a guy gets a "National Day" celebrated in his honor. But as National Men Make Dinner Day rolls around on Nov. 6 this year, I am seizing this holiday as an opportunity to celebrate **me!**

All kidding aside, although National Men Make Dinner Day was created as a reality check for men who never cook, I make dinner quite often at our house. My wife is content to let me use our smoker, and I do most of the meal planning. For my family and me, making dinner is a source of enjoyment and a way to learn valuable life skills.

After I've been using my brain hard all day long as an attorney, solving problems, answering questions, and helping clients, immersing myself in a recipe is a welcome change of pace. I might put on some music, and then start checking the boxes: Put this ingredient here, that one there, cook it for this long, and **bam!** Dinner is ready! You just follow the steps and enjoy a tangible outcome at the end. It's relaxing ... the opposite of practicing law!

I might invite one of our three kids to get involved. Our middle child, who is 13, is taking a growing interest in cooking. My wife and I are encouraging him to expand his culinary tastes. Our daughter, who is 15, and our younger son, 10, are more adventurous eaters, so it's good to see our older son take some initiative. He's more open to cooking if we make a recipe that he has chosen. If he says, "I saw this recipe online," we'll try it.

He is fascinated by our smoker and has been making smoked mac-and-cheese. I don't consider myself qualified as a critic of mac-and-cheese because I don't eat much of it myself, but he seems to like it. Now, he wants to try grilling jalapeño peppers.

Not all of our culinary adventures turn out well. When my son was doing meal prep recently, we ruined a large chicken breast beyond repair. He had tried to cook it on the stove, and it turned out black on the outside and pink on the inside. Fortunately, the chicken cuts came in a package of two. We put the second piece on the smoker, and it turned out great.



For all three kids, our home-cooked meals are healthier than what we would usually get if we went out to dinner. If one says, "Let's go out for burgers," we can remind them, "Well, we can cook burgers here." I also point out to them that cooking is a life skill that is good to have. I urge them to avoid becoming one of those college freshmen who can't do their laundry or boil water. I had a friend in college who, after a night of drinking, could open the pantry, pull out a bunch of random ingredients, and make a delicious meal. That is a skill well worth building.

I'm not sure what our next new culinary frontier will be. An air fryer is probably our next big acquisition. The challenge will be finding counter space for it.

Our outdoor smoker requires no counter space, and we use it year-round. In addition to smoking turkey at Thanksgiving, I will smoke some pork belly nuggets for the holidays. We subscribe to Meat Church, inventor of the Holy Cow beef rub and other great seasonings. We've been using their Texas Sugar rub on our nuggets. Every year, I make a few more, and they're always gone!

So, whether you're the head chef at your house or need a guide to find your pots and pans, I hope you can take time to appreciate Men Make Dinner Day. Whether you cook once a year or every day, making a meal to share is well worth the effort.

- Andrew M. Ayers

Before Smartphones, There Was Water

GETTING OUT OF BED LONG BEFORE THE SNOOZE BUTTON

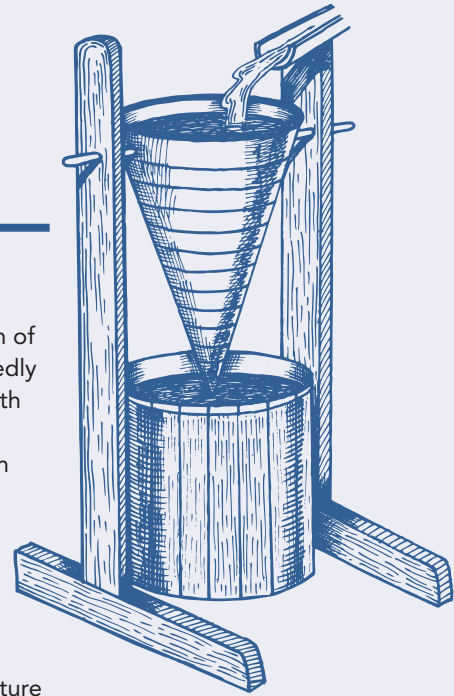
Members of Generation Z may find it difficult to believe that people used plug-in alarm clocks to help them get up on time in the morning. However, that seemingly archaic means of timekeeping has nothing on how people managed wake-up time before cellphones and even electricity, as we use it today, became staples of daily life.

In the 4th century BCE, the Greek philosopher Plato created a method to ensure students at his academy, which once counted Aristotle among its pupils, woke up at the correct time each day. To perfect a foolproof system, he turned to a surprising tool: water. He constructed a set of clocks that operated using two basins. One basin would slowly empty into the other throughout the night; when the second basin was full, rattling pebbles or whistling air awakened students from their slumber. Known as *klepsydra* (or “water thief”) clocks, these timekeepers were astonishingly accurate.

About a century later, Greek inventor Ctesibius of Alexandria expanded on Plato’s design by incorporating mechanics that produced sounds not unlike those of the more modern cuckoo clock. Ctesibius’s version remained popular until the pendulum clock emerged in the 1650s.

Although Plato often gets credit for creating aquatic-based alarms, some variation of the *klepsydra* concept allegedly dates back to at least the 16th century BCE. Archaeologists uncovered a tomb inscription detailing how an Egyptian court official of the era devised a similar system. Regardless of its definitive inventor, the water clock roused people long before phone apps, proving that nature often provides solutions to problems centuries before human technology catches up.

While the water clock was undoubtedly an imaginative masterstroke, it is still reasonable to argue that the “*snooze*” button remains the most critical time-related creation known to man.



Ice Cream in Your Pocket?

YOU CAN'T EVEN MAKE UP THESE STRANGE FOOD RULES

When it comes to state laws about food, specific provisions on the books from past years may leave a funny taste in your mouth, and potentially get you in a heap of trouble if you break them. This fact is especially true in parts of the South, where your lunch order may need to come with a side of legal advice.

Cones and Captured Horses

If you want to stay on the good side of law enforcement in Alabama, always remember that ice cream cones are for licking, not sticking in your back pocket. While it’s pretty safe to assume the thought of engaging in the latter activity hasn’t crossed a single mind in 2025, there was a time when horse thieves would stick ice cream in their pockets to attract equine abductees. Considering that we rarely share the highway with horses these days and most people would prefer not to turn the seat of their pants into a sundae, it’s a safe bet this charge won’t fill up courtrooms for the foreseeable future.



Finger-Licking Fun ... or Else!

On the subject of making a mess with food items, eating chicken with your hands can be a sticky thrill — and is the *only* way to partake in poultry eating without running *a-fowl* of the law in Gainesville, Georgia. If you want to enjoy tasty chicken in that city, stock up on wet wipes and skip the knife and fork, as eating it with utensils is a crime. Although the ordinance banning knives and forks when consuming chicken was meant as a joke by the local police department, chucking the rule may draw some disapproving clucks when dining in the place affectionately known by locals and city officials as “the Poultry Capital of the World,” especially during its renowned Spring Chicken Festival. Perhaps only a good lawyer can help determine whether the law also applies to vegan “chik’n” options.

TAKE A **BREAK**



SLOW COOKER BRISKET

Ingredients

- 1 (1-oz) envelope onion soup mix
- 1 lb carrots, peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 lb baby golden potatoes
- 1 1/2 tsp kosher salt
- 3 celery stalks, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1/2 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 large sweet onion, cut into 8 wedges
- 1 3-lb piece of beef brisket (flat cut)
- 2 1/2 cups beef stock
- 8 fresh thyme sprigs
- 2 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 8 whole garlic cloves
- 2 tbsp cornstarch
- 2 bay leaves

Directions

1. In a small bowl, combine soup mix, sugar, salt, and pepper. Sprinkle over brisket.
2. Place meat, fat cap side down, into an 8-qt slow cooker.
3. Top brisket with thyme, garlic, bay leaves, carrots, potatoes, celery, and onion.
4. Whisk stock, Worcestershire sauce, and cornstarch until fully dissolved. Add to slow cooker.
5. Cover and cook on high for 5–6 hours until tender.
6. Remove to a cutting board, fat side up. Remove thyme and bay leaves.
7. Thinly slice brisket against the grain.
8. Serve with vegetables, drizzled with gravy from the slow cooker.

Inspired by [ThePioneerWoman.com](https://www.thepioneerwoman.com)

Dividing Homes, Not Hearts

Co-Parent Like a Pro After Separation

Divorce or separation is often stressful, but it should never be used to draw battle lines for your children.

Dissolving a marriage or partnership can be as logistically challenging as it is emotionally draining, especially when developing a positive and effective co-parenting situation. Here are a few suggestions for creating and sustaining clear communication and responsibilities when you and your former spouse/partner no longer live or parent under the same roof.

The Key Steps Toward Stability

First and foremost, all co-parenting arrangements need a consistent plan for success. A written co-parenting plan should include the custody agreement, travel and/or relocation considerations, financial responsibilities for both parties, schedules (e.g., school pick-up/drop-off times and who is responsible for fulfilling these commitments), and details regarding the child's education and health care needs. A document of this nature helps solidify both parties' involvement and holds each accountable for what they've agreed to do on the child's behalf. Additionally, it helps prevent disagreements or misunderstandings that could lead to arguing in front of the child/children, a scenario to avoid as much as possible.

While a divorce may present logistical obstacles for one or both parents, it is critical to work toward maintaining the child's existing friendships and activities, even if they require spending more time with one spouse over the other. For example, if your child's best friend lives closer to your ex-spouse, accommodating the continuation of this close relationship will help your child maintain a sense of normalcy.

The Risks of Reticent Relationships

When the end of a marriage or relationship results in a breakdown in communication or cooperation, these fractured ties can have a potentially devastating impact on your child. Common effects of unhealthy co-parenting on children include reduced performance at school, lowered self-esteem, and difficulties in maintaining healthy relationships with others.

If communication has devolved into acrimony or has resulted in either side failing to fulfill their parental duties, seeking counseling from a trained professional is one way to help steer the ship in the best possible direction for your child's health and peace of mind.





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Willy's Ruined Chocolate Experience WHEN AI MARKETING GOES HORRIBLY WRONG



Never fail to deliver on a promise of chocolate to children.

House of Illuminati, a London-based event company, learned this lesson the hard way when it hosted what angry parents and disappointed kids in Glasgow considered one of the biggest scams in children's entertainment history. The disastrous day went from offering scant amounts of lemonade and jellybeans to prompting cries of terror and calls to Scottish police, and artificial intelligence was at least partially to blame.

In early 2024, social media feeds in the U.K. were abuzz with vibrant images promoting "Willy's Chocolate Experience," an immersive event boasting chocolate fountains, costumed characters, and "a day of pure imagination and wonder." Naturally, people assumed the event was a tie-in with the then-recently released film "Wonka" and a nod to the imaginary world created by the classic 1971 movie "Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory."

Unfortunately, what attendees experienced when "Willy's Chocolate Experience" arrived that February was far from a fairy tale. Instead of rivers of sweets, they were treated to half-filled cups of lemonade and

(in some instances) a single jellybean served in what appeared to be an abandoned warehouse. The scenery was cheap, while the actors struggled to perform through hastily provided scripts. One character, The Unknown, was a masked and frighteningly attired figure that prompted youngsters to recoil and cry in fear. Perhaps most disturbingly, there was *no chocolate* to be found.

Naturally, people called the police amid demands for refunds, and the lackluster affair was shut down. Subsequent revelations that creators used AI to generate the online marketing images and that the \$44 event was not an officially sanctioned "Wonka" undertaking also brought into question House of Illuminati owner Billy Coull's background, including his history of publishing AI-generated books on conspiracy theories and taboo subjects.

Although Coull's fraudulent and exploitative marketing scheme was reprehensible, it's far from his worst transgression. Around the time House of Illuminati was shuttered in late 2024, he was forced to register as a sex offender after it was revealed he had followed up his "Willy's Chocolate Experience" fiasco by sending unwanted explicit messages and images to an unidentified woman.