



Reflections of a River Rat:

My approach to eggs was scrambled

By Jim Holleran

It was time to play the gracious host last week when my brother Fran and his wife Mary Jo visited overnight on their way to the Thousand Islands. My wife, Mary Frances, had been sidelined by hand surgery so I offered to cook breakfast. This was going to be a piece of cake, actually pancakes. They are my specialty

whenever our children are home.

I pulled out the electric griddle and made the announcement: “Who’d like some pancakes for breakfast?” The response was underwhelming. No problem. I pivoted to bacon and eggs. That drew a heartier response. So I dug into the refrigerator and my career as a short-order cook began.

Mary Frances had made bacon and eggs often while I was lingering in the kitchen. I hadn’t been in charge of the griddle, but I watched. I’m not a total novice. I’m the guy who bakes apple pies from scratch and can whip up a tasty jambalaya. This would be easy.

When the bacon strips contacted the hot griddle, they sizzled and crackled immediately. The aroma drifted from the kitchen to the living room. The sense of a hearty



Mary Jo Holleran, in his first relief appearance as a short-order cook, saves the scrambled eggs.

breakfast was building. With spatula in hand, I looked like I knew what I was doing.

That's when I noticed my first mistake.

The bacon was shrinking steadily and browning, and a pool of grease was forming on the griddle. It was draining through the hole at the rear. I peeked underneath to find a small lake of grease. Oops! I forgot to install the little plastic grease tray. Darn. I never needed that when I was making pancakes.

I didn't want to spook my guests. What to do? Find the tray in the cupboard? Rush for the paper towels? That's when Mary Jo stopped to smell the bacon and

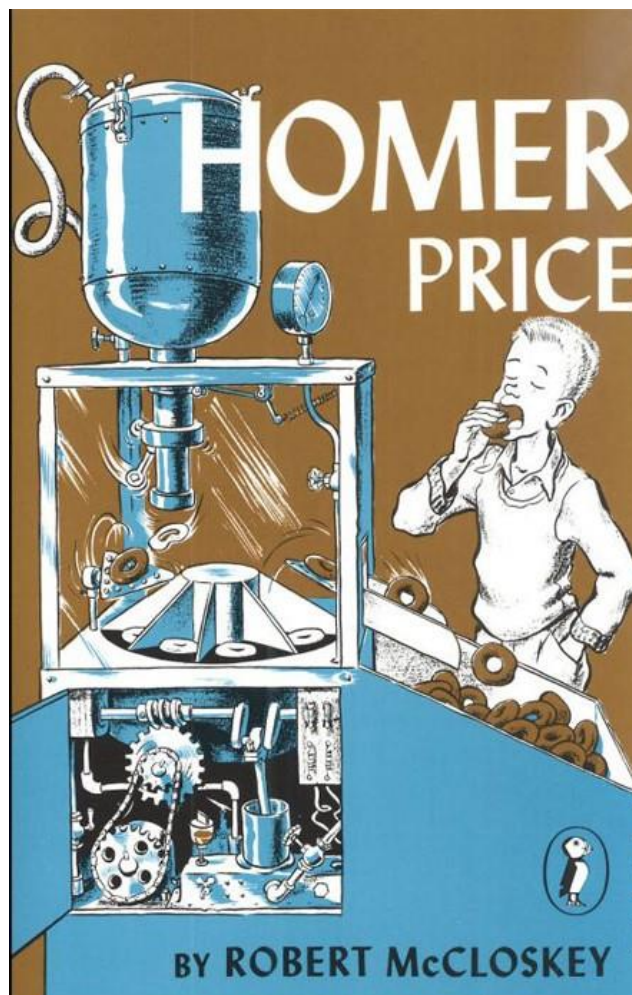
sensed a clusterschmuck happening. She saw it all. She slipped a small plate beneath the griddle to catch the grease while I moved the bacon to a platter.

I tried to move faster to mitigate my disaster. I snatched my mixture of eggs and milk and dumped half the bowl onto the griddle. It was time to start scrambling the eggs, recalling how Mary Frances pushed them to the middle of the griddle and kept turning them over.

Oops No. 2. Without a spatula in hand to corral the eggs, the mixture made a beeline for the griddle hole and started running onto the grease plate.

This is when I started to feel like things were spiraling out of control. Remember the children's books when Robert McCloskey's character Homer

Price worked in his uncle's diner. The doughnut machine malfunctioned and



Robert McCloskey won two Caldecott Medals for his illustrated books in the 1940s.

wouldn't stop running. Homer stacked donuts until the shelves and counters were filled and still the machine ran.

This is when Mary Jo interceded. Thank goodness we had a left-handed spatula. She started pushing the egg mixture around the griddle and it began to scramble.

I found more eggs to stir up and made up for the calamity that slipped down the griddle hole. Mary Jo kept performing her magic with the spatula.

"This is working out eggs-actly right," she proclaimed in her worst pun.

Breakfast was saved.

This was just another amusing chapter among Holleran cooking disasters. I've burned a few steaks on the grill during Buffalo Bills games and once omitted the sugar from a batch of apple pies. The pies were sweet enough, but they went to diabetic friends.

My parents used to joke that they served Shad Fly Chicken whenever they invited a few families to meet at Jacques Cartier State Park. Invariably, they'd pick a weekend at the picnic grounds when the shad flies were swarming. Any river dweller knows what a nuisance they can become. If you drive through a swarm, you must pull to the side of the road, and you never turn on your windshield wipers for fear of smearing their little translucent bodies into a sticky paste.

As a girl, Mary Nora was the master of hiding food. She had this sneaky way of slipping the peas off her plate and down the cold-air register behind her chair. It ended badly on a spring-cleaning day when our mother, Eileen, discovered her secret stash.

My chapter will reside next to Anne Marie's legend when she followed a cookie recipe designed to feed an entire school. Anne Marie started with flour before our mother spotted the error. She insisted on not wasting the ingredients so she began pouring in sugar and spices to keep the recipe in proportion.

When it came time for baking, we ran out of Tupperware. There were cookies everywhere. They got passed to neighbors around the parish, around Morristown, seemingly around St. Lawrence County. They became gifts. They were put in the freezer. We ate cookies for weeks.

After Mary Jo saved the eggs, we went out for lunch. In the evening, I redeemed myself at dinner with my signature dish, a steaming bowl of jambalaya with corn muffins on the side.

I offered to cook breakfast the next morning, but Fran wasn't having it. He shot me his best stare, then announced: "Let's just go out."

Jim Holleran, a Morristown native, is a retired teacher and registrar for the Rochester City School District, and former sports editor of the Democrat and Chronicle. Reach him at jimholleran29@gmail.com or view past columns at <https://hollerangetsitwrite.files.wordpress.com> under Reflections of a River Rat.