

LOAD UP ON BEANS TO STAY WARM & PROPEL THROUGH THE AFTERNOON 12/07/99

I will expound on the virtues of beans for this column. They were included in a list of the eight most important single food items on a recent TV health segment.

I was reminded of how much I enjoy beans and how long it had been since partaking of same. I was so moved that the ingredients were hastily assembled and I threw a batch of baked beans together.

Warming to the task at hand, it occurred to me they might make a good topic for a column. I came up with several reasons; most of them spurred on by my fondness for them.

Beans taste good and if you are engaging in any strenuous outdoor activities, they stick by you. That's one reason why they have been a staple of loggers and farmers for years. There are endless varieties and ways to prepare them. They are cheap and easy to store for long periods without refrigeration.

I admit I was not always a big bean fan, but have come to appreciate them in my later years. Most younger people do not share my enthusiasm, nor did I when I was a lad. For one thing, they are not that easy to prepare. In and of themselves, they tend to be relatively bland and are best teamed with and enhanced by the addition of meats, sauces or other vegetables.

Like many other foods most of us deplored when we were young, there had to be some special awakening that showed us the error of our ways.

It may have been a novel or unique way of preparation or just down-to-earth, honest to goodness hunger. Mine came about in the early 60s when it came to beans and it was a combination of both of the above.

I had walked out of the Moose River Plains after my annual extended beaver-trapping trip. I had been staying the Wilcox camp on Beaver Lake. I arrived tired and hungry at the Limekiln gate with 30-odd dried beaver pelts and sundry other items in a backpack. The area was still private property and Gould Paper Company had a gate and gatehouse at the entrance.

The gate-tender was a retired West Virginia native who had been a lumberjack. He was a crusty old character who entertained me with stories of the woods and West Virginia hills while I waited for my wife to pick me up.

One story remains burned in my memory. He asked if I was related to the Allens from his hometown who “jumped up in the courthouse, shot the DA and the judge, then jumped out of the window to make their escape.” I reluctantly had to tell him I was not.

He had a pot of beans and side pork stewing away on the old wood stove and the aroma was inviting. When he said, “Come on, Allen, you might as well have something to eat with me.” I did not have to be asked twice. It was one of the best meals of my memory and I have liked beans ever since. I seldom ever have good beans without thinking of him.

Beans are the first thing I check out at any buffet table or outing where they are included in the repast. If there is more than one presentation, I take a dab of each for evaluation and consideration for seconds.

My love of beans got me in big trouble on one occasion. A lunch of beans and ham ended with me deathly sick with a severe case of ptomaine poisoning. An hour after the lunch in a small local diner, I was stretched out in a doctor’s office unable to stand or walk.

That was not the end of my troubles with beans and for awhile I had to forgo them. My system changed and I had trouble digesting them. Today I am back on track, thanks to Prilosec and Beano.

To make a long story short, why not plan to include more beans in your meals? It’s the time of year when a little extra energy and warmth are needed.

Oh, before I forget – I recall having beans and pickled onions on a Navy transport coming back from Japan. I was told it was a Thursday morning tradition in the Navy. Can any of you old sea dogs verify that?