

WATCH: Office Hours: The Women Who've Impacted Shonda

A writer recalls the food she survived on as a kid during hard economic times.

BY ZORINA EXIE FREY PUBLISHED: OCT 2, 2020



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There's something about this quarantine that makes me want the food I used to eat as a kid, like syrup sandwiches. It's not because of nostalgia. The threat of how bad this pandemic could get puts me into survivor mode, buying things I wouldn't normally eat, such as peanut butter and jelly, dried beans, and powdered food.

To make a syrup sandwich, you grab one slice of bread and a bottle of your favorite syrup. Drizzle the syrup onto the white spongy bread (because if you're eating a syrup sandwich, you damn sure don't have the luxury of wheat bread). Put the cap back on the bottle and wipe it clean, otherwise, it's ant and roach bait. Then put it in the cupboard. Next, fold the slice of bread in half. Gently squeeze and watch the syrup imbue the rest of the white bread. If the syrup drips from the sandwich, then

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...and that's a good thing. The fact is, it might be a little bit of a stretch to appreciate the irony.



"A killer airborne virus is loose and our country reacts by arguing whether or not we should wear a mask to prevent the spread. Everyone seems to forget the reason why we closed in the first place"

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I'm trying to reacquaint myself with foods like syrup sandwiches, peanut butter and jelly, dried beans, and powdered food just in case there's another food shortage because I remember what it felt like to be lean on food. Before Covid-19, my

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have become more conscious of the amount of food that we consume, especially since the initial 14-day quarantine when the shelves in every store ran out of essential foods like bread and eggs.

My husband Chris isn't as conscious about the food shortage. He was at work when I stocked up at the grocery store. He didn't see the empty shelves.

I suggested to him that we should buy some powdered eggs. "I'm not eating any damn powdered eggs," he said. He immediately ordered a dozen of fresh organic eggs through Instacart.

Chris grew up with Capri Suns and Lunchables in his Ninja Turtle lunch box. For me, on the days my lunches weren't free, my mom packed a scrambled egg sandwich in between two slices of white bread — the same white bread used for syrup sandwich making. Instead of a cartoon lunch pail, I got an oversized brown grocery bag — with the logo of Martin, the supermarket owner's caricature printed on the outside. Chris had a pool in his backyard and got to go on a family vacation to Niagara Falls. I had a leaky blow-up kiddie pool and road-tripped to the west side of Chicago to visit my aunts and uncles.

I remember what it felt like to be lean on food.

Powdered eggs do sound gross. I just remember the years when my cereal floated in a bowl of lukewarm tap water mixed with powdered contents from a white box labeled "milk." I only thought it was gross after I saw my mother prepare the milk.

To make powdered milk, you scoop two cups of the powder and whisk it into a gallon of room-temperature water so the powder easily dissolves, then chill in the refrigerator. If you prefer whole milk, add another cup of powder.

It's the same with powdered eggs, except you use tablespoons. To make one egg, you scoop out two tablespoons of organic powdered eggs and whisk into two tablespoons of water. It does sound gross, but like many processed foods, it usually ends up tasting like the real thing.

I knew all I had to do was prepare the powdered eggs without Chris seeing it and he'd love them.

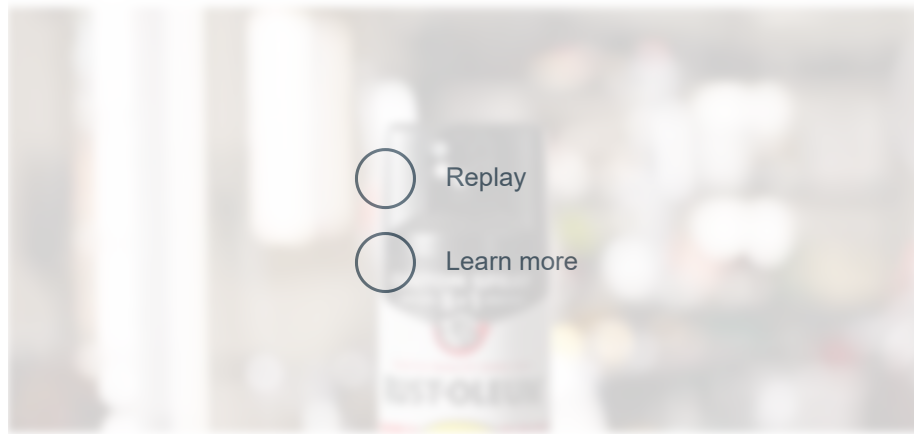
Powdered anything has a long shelf life, and this kind of food is something I think we might need with this coronavirus pandemic. The grocery store shelves are fully stocked now, but I'm not letting my guard down. It's hurricane season, too, and I want to be prepared for everything.

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...canned turkey (they were out of chicken), and a case of canned milk.

The day after Chris boycotted the powdered eggs, his Instacart delivery arrived. It didn't include cheese. The grocery store was out of cheese. I added organic powdered cheese to my Amazon cart and searched to see if organic powdered butter existed. It did. I added that to my cart too.

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When we got the groceries, we wiped the groceries down with soapy bleach water. The following morning, Chris made omelets. Omelets! He used up six eggs. My plan was for us to ration two eggs a day, not six. All I could think was that we ate up three days' worth of breakfast in one morning. He was oblivious to my concern. In his mind, all we had to do was press a few buttons and we'd have more eggs at our doorstep in 48 hours. All I could think of is what if there's a time when there aren't any more eggs, and where do you go to buy a live chicken? Also, we might need to move back to Indiana to buy a farm where the chicken can roam free. We'd have plenty of eggs then.

They've reopened the economy with Phase II. Governor Ron DeSantis suggests that Florida may be inching toward Phase III. Depending on who you talk to, it's either a success or disaster. They say the state of Florida is one of the places with the highest case numbers of Covid-19 in all the United States. Schools have opened but are scheduled to end after the Thanksgiving holiday.

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During the coronavirus, it's important to be conscious of your food consumption.

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In the next Instacart, Chris orders a carton of liquid eggs because they last longer. For lunch, I made him a liquid-egg omelet and toast. I had peanut butter and jelly. Meanwhile, I added powdered eggs to my Amazon cart and found a deal on powdered Gatorade. I also looked up a recipe for low-carb homemade bread thinking how good it would taste with sugar-free syrup.

New Syrup Sandwich Recipe: Grab a cup of Almond flour because you're making your own bread this time and regular flour has too much sugar. Powdered butter won't work here. Use peanut oil instead. They say it's healthier anyway. Plus, there's more of that than butter available these days. Add baking powder so the dough can rise, like my patience toward this *Twilight Zone* version of *Pandemic in the USA*.

A killer airborne virus is loose and our country reacts by arguing whether or not we should wear a mask to prevent the spread. Everyone seems to forget the reason why we closed in the first place. So far, there's still no cure or vaccine for coronavirus. All we can do, is take it day by day, step by step, just as we do with cooking, just as I made powdered milk and powdered eggs. Add water to the powder. Add a teaspoon of salt — but not from your tears. Mix, bake and wait. Wait and see how this all cooks out. No matter the outcome, you'll have to find a way to live with it. So, be sure to sweeten reality up with some syrup, find some flavor if you can, and appreciate it all for what it is.

Zorina Frey is a poet, writer, and publisher living in Miami, Florida. She is published in Filter.org, Writing Class Radio, Lip Service: True Stories Out Loud, Voyage MIA

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