

Crunchy or Chioey?

I pulled into the driveway and observed two things. For a Saturday, there are an awful large number of kids -- none of them under 13 it seemed -- hanging around our house today. That is not anything new. So there were a lot of kids, one. The other thing was that everyone seems to be sitting, standing, or walking around with bowls in their hands or laps. As I got out of the car, I observed that cereal is - or was -- in those bowls with liquids. I shook my head, walking inside the house.

Since hooking up with "Dolly" -- her name is really Elizabeth, but while dating I started calling her "Dolly" because she looked the part -- our home has constantly been surrounded by kids. Our own kids until the three girls and two boys all moved to get that college education or went to see other parts of the world; and the neighbors' kids at the invite of the two boys we later received on the "long term loan system" -- Dale and Charles.

Dale, the guy with the "big brain and big ideas", with an IQ which cannot be calculated (no lie! The University had to send his scores to Harvard and M.I.T. to verify them. They came back and told us that this kid's brain power is really unlimited and not to discourage him...) and Charlie, who was a splitting small version of his birth father, also named Charles (we saw photos of him during the adoption process). So we started calling him "Chip" -- as in "chip off the block", and it happily stuck. Want something torn up? Want something built with no blueprint? Need to get rid of smelly SOMETHING in the gutters? Call Chip -- he's neither squeamish nor fearful of anything!

So you know that Chip and Dale always has something going on...and because they are both *that age* -- 10 -- (Chip is older than Dale by two months) those things frequently also involve their friends, especially Summer and April...the two younger girls living down the road from us. It would not be unusual for the four of them doing something -- inventing a new game, jumping on the trampoline in the back of the house, taking pictures of insects they've blown up with firecrackers "just to see what they look like", setting off crickets into space, or acting out childhood stories around the backyard stage and fire ring -- you know KID STUFF.

I've stopped seriously asking. But Dolly always asked every morning the same question during their summer break which elicits giggling or outright laughter: "What are you guys planning to do today?"

One or the other -- this morning it was Chip -- would answer "Mom. You ask that question EVERY DAY of our vacation."

This morning, Dolly answered, "I forgot; sue me!"

The other -- Dale -- chimed in, "the same thing we do EVERY DAY...We're gonna do something FUN!" and then the fist bump would occur between two siblings not related by genes, birth or part of the state.

I walked into the door, and made my way to the kitchen.

"How was the workshop?"

"Okay." I kissed Dolly briefly before I continued, "You have any idea of what our sons -- and every other kid in the state -- are doing here today?" I then walked past her and into the living room.

"You won't believe this. Don't go into the livin..." Dolly started to answer but stopped after I saw our living room.

On one corner, there were two kids writing marks from pieces of paper onto my office whiteboard. The whiteboard in which I use to provide notes to myself about writing projects to work on and their status, people to contact and their phone numbers or email addresses, and general notes to myself. All of that was gone and replaced by neat lines of spreadsheet data -- with names of various cereals on the left side and categories like "crunchy" "slimy" "chiey" (I think that was supposed to be "chewy") and a couple others I

could not interpret...I was too upset about my whiteboard being used. One of the kids turned and looked at me, sensing I was mad.

"Mr. Walton. Don't worry. Dale videotaped and Chip photographed everything which used to be on the board. They made copies and left them downstairs. In your office. On your desk." That made me feel a LITTLE better.

"Where are they?" A little girl, not meeting my eyes simply pointed in the direction of the backyard. I moved to the sliding back door, opened it and walked outside, Dolly following behind me.

Outside, there were small groups of kids. As I walked past them, I overheard discussions about school, the new gym being built as part of the community center, and listening and commenting to a Celtic music show on public radio called the "The Thistle and the Bush". There were a group of kids talking about various kinds of the same foods while eating and making notes on pieces of printed paper.

"Well, all Toasties are but Frosted Flakes without the frosting..." one kid said. Another, after swallowing, placed his spoon in the Styrofoamed bowl and said, "I haven't seen Tony the Tiger on TV anymore...is he still selling Frosted Flakes or have our parents moved him outta town?" More crunching and slurping, then one kid looked at the rest and said "I saw him on TV. During the little league playoffs. He just doesn't say that "GRRRRREAT" thing anymore. A shame."

I smiled as I continued to look for my son -- one or the other of them. Where one is, I can take it to the bank...the other is around close by.

Dale was talking with a group of kids by the trampoline.

"April, hold the line...I need to talk with these kids..." Dale started.

"Now you gotta be honest. No telling what will happen to the data, but I'm sure that some company will pay for this information. So don't put stuff down that's not true. If you don't like the cereal, don't eat it. My dad won't like having to walk around in vomit, okay? On the other hand, eat what you like and tell others here about it. Cereals are in the large box over there (taken from downstairs in the community recycle stall). There's milk, almond milk, soy milk, and water in the cooler. When you're done with your bowl, put them in the trash can over there -- they aren't recyclable. Neither are the spoons. And whatever do you do, have fun -- that's the whole idea of today!"

Chip was listening to the spiel from the other side of the trampoline and added, "and don't play on the trampoline unless you want your food to come back up!"

I smiled. As a kid, I recalled spending my summers putting on short plays for the younger kids. Making a movie featuring my neighborhood friends. Playing softball with a tennis ball. Seeing how far we could "parachute" from the swing sets.

I never did do taste tests of various cereals with my friends, while listening to two hours of public radio. I shook my head and started back to the house. Dolly met me.

"I tried to warn you..." she started, resting her hand briefly on my shoulder.

"I don't remember. Where did we adopt those two from...some lab somewhere?" I grinned. "At least they are pretty well organized about it..."

We walked back in and made our way to the kitchen. I sat down at the breakfast nook and started to place my hands to my head.

"And how many days are there before the end of summer vacation?"