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Bill Rea ? Pass the ketchup



My wife and I aren't really social animals, so we seldom entertain.

We should, but we don't. I guess that's one reason why we don't get invited to other people's homes very often, but that's the way things are.

One byproduct is when it comes to grocery shopping, it's usually just Beth and myself who have to be pleased.

We keep a few contingency items in case someone drops in. Our niece and nephew are rather partial to ginger ale, so we make sure there's a supply if they pay us a call. And for adult visitors, we usually have a supply of wine, so I can offer a glass. And I keep a couple of quality beers in the fridge, apart from the inexpensive slop that I consume, so I can serve a guest who is thusly inclined.

When it comes to the food we buy, we are usually mainly mindful of ourselves. If we're not likely to consume it, we don't bother. That is especially the case with condiments.

In my younger days, like when I was a kid living under my parents' roof, and later when I moved out and lived on my own, I used a lot of salt. My father, who was mindful of the consequences of having a heart condition, sometimes frowned at the amount of salt I used. I figured if I was going to have to consume it, I was within my rights to season it to taste, and that meant my taste.

As I stated, the habit continued after I had started living alone. I always had a supply of both salt and pepper handy, even if I seldom used any pepper.

And then Beth and I started cohabitating.

In the roughly 10 years I lived on my own, I learned my way around a kitchen. While Beth handles most of the cooking chores, I hold my own when it comes to fixing a meal or two. Having spent a couple of years waiting tables and watching cooks in action helped some too.

Beth does not use much salt, and since it was her cooking that I started eating, I kind of got out of the salt habit myself. And somewhat to my surprise, I found I didn't miss it too much.

But I came to realize last week that there are certain implications from such choices, especially of a social nature.

Beth and I spent most of the week at a cottage in Muskoka, and our niece and nephew joined us for a couple of days. They brought their mom and dad too (someone had to drive).

With six mouths to feed, there was a lot of food being prepared. My sister-in-law Michelle is quite a good cook, and the cottage is equipped with quite a nice barbecue that I spent a lot of time happily working at.

All was going well, until the kids asked for salt.

Beth and I hadn't brought any with us. We never even thought of it. As I already stated, we don't use it, but we suddenly found a need for it.

The cottage was equipped with salt and pepper shakers, but we soon learned, somewhat to our frustration, that they were empty.

Like I stated, we should entertain more.

That's not to say Beth and I don't use condiments. We generally keep a supply of ketchup around, although it is used sparingly. In the normal course of events, I use it only if I am eating eggs. There is the odd occasion when we will have plate of scrambled eggs for dinner, and I will instinctively reach for the ketchup.

It drew me a few dirty looks at the cottage. The whole gang of us were seated at the table one morning to eat the breakfast Michelle had deftly prepared. I spooned some scrambled eggs on my plate, then looked in vain for the ketchup. It wasn't on the table, so I

excused myself and got it out of the fridge. I noticed a few puzzled looks around the table, but they upset me little.
But it gives one cause to ponder about the mystique that surrounds ketchup.
In my teen years, I read a Time magazine cover story about then American President Gerald Ford. One of the points it made was that one of his lunch staples was cottage cheese with ketchup. The very thought of that combination was something I found revolting, but if Gerry could handle it, then I had little business complaining. Besides, the man lived well into his 90s, so it evidently did him little harm.
Those of you who used to watch All in the Family will recall that Archie was chastised for some of the things he put ketchup on.
Beth and I were driving home from the cottage Friday, listening to the radio in the car. One of the broadcasters was talking about the results of a recent poll she had heard about. It seems 80 per cent of those questioned put ketchup on their hotdogs. This lady seemed ready to take serious issue with those figures, not believing that as many as 20 per cent of the population don't use ketchup on their franks.,
With all respect to this lady, I'm one of the 20 percenters. Mustard, relish and onions go on my hotdogs, along with sauerkraut, if it's available. I keep ketchup for eggs.
Beth uses honey mustard, but she told me if she doesn't have it, she might resort to ketchup.
It all comes down to a matter of taste, which varies according to individuals. And anyone worth their salt can accept that.
Did you get the pun? It wasn't the greatest, but remember this was written while I was still technically on vacation. Were that not the case, don't you think I would have found something to write about other than condiments?