

Lessons of The Earthquake Cake

I come from a long line of quitters.

Not to make excuses, I'm just giving you a preamble for the following story. It has always been my way (and the way of most of my "folk") to: give up, take the easy way out, throw in the towel.

If something breaks, like the remote control or a zipper, I just as soon throw the item away then attempt to fix it. Or if I open a new appliance or toy and find instructions with more than two steps, it instantly becomes "something daddy needs to put together." I won't even make the smallest effort to figure it out. I'm not proud of this glitch in my personality—I'm working on it.

Given this persuasion, it was baffling that I wanted to make my husband's birthday cake. I was determined (determination: another trait not abound in my family) to make a cake from scratch. Now, just to clarify, when I say from "scratch," I mean from a box.

I was in the middle of my pre-party freakout while I was making cake #1. I was distracted by plagues of flies in the kitchen, Palin's updo on TV, and finding just the right music for baking a birthday cake (turns out Billy Bragg was a poor choice, better suited for grilling, I think). So, when I went to unload the first layer onto the pedestal, this is what happened.

Now, I'm no expert, but I knew this was wrong.



This is the part where the story gets perplexing. One hour

before the party kicks off and I traipsed back to the market, but not to buy the easy, pre-made cake from the bakery, but to buy more mix to make another cake from “scratch.”

Why the sudden ambition? Why am I motivated now? for this? Why not to finish college? Or to (fill-in the gazillion other important things I have given up here)? No idea. Larry was as shocked as I was. “Wow, you really don’t want to give up do you?” he said with an expression I rarely get directed my way: pride.

While I began to make cake #2 I realized the carton of eggs was untouched. “EGGS! I FORGOT THE FLIPPIN’ EGGS!” This cake was going to be different. “I can do this!” I tell myself with an unfamiliar voice.

And I WAS doing it: Tristan Prettyman my new music of choice (figuring a female voice would be more encouraging), **EGGS**, 32 minutes in the oven, unload the layers on the pedestal (bingo), crumb layer (channeling Martha saying, “crumb layer”), final frosting, removed the protective wax paper...and this is the result.



Again, no expert...but this isn’t right either.

I called reinforcement. “Can you stop and get a cake for me?” I asked my girlfriend, Jill, with a feeling I have manage to avoid most of my life due to lack of trying: defeat.

My cake and the bakery cake sat next to each other on the counter as a testament to one of my life’s mantra “sometimes it’s better to just give up.” But, you know what? That’s the cake everyone wanted: The earthquake cake (the name they gave to that sunken cake). “I want a slice from the fault line,” smiled/laughed Larry.



Everyone agreed it was the best of the two cakes. So, I suppose the lesson of the Earthquake cake is twofold: failure can be charming if you play it off just right, and next, if you HAVE to make a cooking mistake for a dinner party better it's on the cake than the chicken, because bad cake is still pretty good, but bad chicken can land everyone in the Emergency Room.

