

Savvy Summer Entertaining



A Guide to Quick Tips, Easy Ideas, and Summer Recipes

SHANNA HATFIELD

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by Shanna Hatfield

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Books by Shanna Hatfield

FICTION

Grass Valley Cowboys Series

The Cowboy's Christmas Plan

The Cowboy's Spring Romance

The Cowboy's Summer Love

QR Code Killer

The Women of Tenacity Series

The Women of Tenacity - A Prelude

Heart of Clay

Country Boy vs. City Girl

Not His Type

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NON-FICTION

Savvy Holiday Entertaining

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Summer Entertaining

Welcome, Summertime!

Summer is one of my favorite seasons. Long, sunny days, blue skies, and an abundance of opportunities to make Captain Cavedweller cook dinner since he is the barbecue expert make for happy times at our house.

Casual entertaining is the key to easy, summer gatherings. Keep the fuss to a minimum and maximize the fun you have with family and friends.

On the following pages, you'll find ideas for celebrating summer, tips for summer entertaining, party theme ideas and, as always, recipes.

You can find more tips, recipes and ideas every day at Savvyentertaining.com.

Make the most of your summer and enjoy!

Summer Picnic Tips

Summer is the perfect time to grab a blanket, pack some food, and eat in the great outdoors. If you haven't gone on a picnic in a while, think about inviting a few friends or family members to join you for a casual meal. The key ingredient should be fun.

The Perfect Spot

Pick your picnic spot strategically. Look for an area in the shade, away from foot traffic. If you have children along, make sure there are no hazards nearby: busy roads, deep water, or cliffs. Be realistic about what you can carry to the picnic spot.

The Perfect Seat

Lounging on a blanket is all fine and dandy unless the ground is wet. Bring along a plastic tarp or even plastic tablecloth to put underneath the blanket. My favorite picnic blanket is a comforter that is thick and soft and just meant for lazy afternoons out in the sun.

The Perfect Food

Keep the food simple and opt for no-fuss picnic fare like crusty bread, cheese and fruit. Add something sweet for a treat like cookies, brownies or slices of pie. Think about foods that are easy to transport and keep cold. Wraps and sandwiches are yummy, simple to make and easy to pack. Before you fill the cooler, make sure everything is thoroughly chilled. Take plenty of ice and remember food should not set out more than an hour in heat that is 85 degrees or higher. Also take plenty of beverages to stay hydrated.

The Essentials

- Picnic basket or cooler
- Bottled water (freeze overnight and use as an ice pack)
- Outdoor dinnerware
- Flatware or plastic silverware
- Napkins
- Glassware
- Cutting Board
- Sharp Knife
- Bottle opener
- Tablecloth, blanket
- Sunscreen
- Bug spray or citronella candles
- Wet-wipes
- Paper towels
- Hand sanitizer
- Trash bags
- Games (Frisbees and balls for the kids, badminton for adults)

Party Buckets to the Rescue

Ever had guests over for an outdoor meal and struggled with a way to serve individual bottles of beverages? You wanted to create an elegant atmosphere and pulling out a cooler for the drinks just didn't seem to go with your theme.

Keep beverages cold while maintaining a classic look to your events with party buckets.

You can purchase buckets from a variety of department stores or even use containers you may already own. Think outside the box and see what you can come find.

If your theme has more of a casual or western tone, think about using a small wash tub. You can find these at feed supply stores. Tie the handles with a raffia bow and it fits right into a country theme.

Big planters or flower pots can also be put into service. Make sure they are sparkling clean then fill with ice. These could work well with most any theme.

A child's wagon is also a fun way to present beverages. Again, just fill with ice, tie the handle with a ribbon and you are set.

If you can find a party bucket on a stand, that is even better! The stand allows any condensation to drip down and frees up table space for more important things... like chocolate.

Be creative and have fun with this. You can be as elegant or as whimsical as you desire!

Summer Beverage Station

Start with the one thing you will need in outrageously plentiful amounts – ice. I can't stress this enough, but have twice as much ice as you think you will need. Running out of ice is like a death sentence to your gathering. No one wants to sit around and drink luke-warm or hot beverages when it is 90 degrees outside. So buy or make ice, lots of it!

Have a party bucket or container that you can fill with ice and put in individual-sized bottles, like pop, water or juice. Make sure to keep larger bottles chilled.

For a pre-mixed beverage, serve it in a pretty glass beverage server so guests can see the delicious drink they are about to consume.

Always, always, always have water available. Serve it in icy cold pitchers or have individual bottles, but make sure you have it out and available.

Set up an area at the station with glasses. If you have a variety of different drinks that require a variety of glasses, set the glassware next to the beverage. If it is one-size-fits-all, place all glasses together. Offer charms or cute little stickers to put on glasses so each person's glass is easily identified.

A tray set with fun little extras like fruit or olive accents on picks, little umbrellas, swizzle sticks and more can add a fun finish to most any beverage.

Canning Jar Drinks

For a simple, fun way to serve beverages, use canning jars. You can go really big or really small, or a mixture of sizes depending on your group.

Just fill a tub, cooler, bucket or whatever container you like with ice, fill canning jars with your beverage of choice, screw on the lid and not worry about spills.

I especially like the idea of being able to have a variety of drinks without a bunch of pitchers or containers taking up valuable counter or table space.

Most of us have some canning jars running around and even if you don't, they are super inexpensive and you can find them everywhere this time of year.

Summer Entertaining Essentials

If you are planning to do some entertaining this summer, make sure you have a basic “toolkit” of summer entertaining essentials. It will make your life so much easier and your entertaining efforts so much simpler.

Ice and Beverages – I can’t stress this enough, but make sure you have plenty of ice and beverages on hand. When you think you’ve purchased all you need, buy a little bit more. You’ll be glad you did. In addition to whatever fun summer beverages you are serving, make sure to have an ample supply of ice water available. Encourage guests to stay hydrated. If you are into interesting party drinks, keep some tasty sugars on hand to rim the glasses.

Chairs – Again, when you think you have all you need, set out a few more. There is nothing worse than being at a party and not being able to sit down to chat or eat. Create groupings or set them around a fire ring, but just make sure you have enough.

Trash Cans – If you put them out, people will use them. One easy way to clean up after a party is to have a trash station set up. Have a trash can and another container for recyclables (lined with trash bags, of course), provide a pan or basket to collect dirty utensils and have a tray or container to hold used plates and glassware. Your guests will gladly throw away their trash and pile in their plates and forks if you give them an easy way to do it.

Shade - If you are entertaining outdoors, check out what shade is available at the time you have designated for your party a few days before the event. Is there adequate shade for everyone? Do you need to get a few lawn umbrellas or maybe put up a tent? If your yard is lacking in shade think about how you can create some. If you are on a tight budget but have the willingness to get creative, something as simple as a sheet tacked to corners of the house and some stakes in the yard can create temporary shade.

Barbecue Grill - Make sure if you are barbecuing that the grill is in a safe place. Do not reuse plates or utensils that touched raw meat.

Napkins, Towels and Hand-Wipes – Between drippy hamburgers and juicy watermelon, summer entertaining seems to call for more napkins. Have plenty available. You may want to also have paper towels on a stand set out or a container of hand-wipes. A great place for the paper towels and hand-wipes is near your trash station.

Keep Food at the Right Temperature – Never let food sit out more than an hour or so, especially in hot temps. Keep cold foods cool by nestling serving bowls into bowls or pans filled with ice. If you don’t want guests to see the ice pans, put a drape over them before setting in bowls. This not only keeps food cool, but also creates a nice element of visual interest on your buffet table. Keep hot foods hot by bringing out a hot plate, using a crock pot or warming bricks and laying them under the warm dishes. My own rule of thumb after a party is “if in doubt, throw it out.” Don’t try to save food, especially containing things like mayo, if it has set out too long.

Condiments are Important – Have a variety of condiments including everything from ketchup to pickles and keep them well-stocked. And for goodness sakes, buy mayo not salad dressing. Your guests will definitely thank you!

The Extras - If you do a lot of outdoor entertaining, have a basket that contains bug spray, hats, fans and sunscreen and set it out where guests can easily find what they need.

***Quick Tip** - Use lemon wedges, maraschino cherries, peach slices and mint to garnish drinks.*

10 Rules of Condiments

1. Do not fear the family-sized bottle of ketchup. Unless you are serving dignitaries, your guests will be happy with the big bottle.
2. You can please most of the people all the time if you have a good assortment of mustards.
3. Plan to have mayonnaise handy at all times. Yes, it's salty, bad for you, but everyone likes a dab now and then. And don't substitute salad dressing! I'll hunt you down and slap your hand!
4. Find your own special sauce and serve it proudly. This could be something you make from scratch or a blend of pre-made favorites. Create a great sauce with plain yogurt, finely chopped cucumber, garlic and lemon juice.
5. Nothing tops a hot dog better than relish. Have an assortment of sweet relish, yellow relish and onion relish on hand.
6. Pickles are important and not everyone likes the same kind. Have an assortment of dill and sweet and make sure you identify them!
7. Have plenty of salsa – it goes fast!
8. Grill the onions for your guests' burgers. The grill is already hot and it just takes a minute.
9. Explore several barbecue sauce recipes, find your favorite, and make it your signature.
10. Don't be afraid to serve coleslaw. It's not just a side dish. Try it on your hot dog.

Summer Theme Party Ideas

Around the World

BAD (*Beverages, Appetizers, Dessert*)

Chocolate Tasting

Drinks & Divas

Easy Living

Flip Flops & Fun

Garden's Bounty

Home on the Range

Ice Cream Social

Jazz Fest

Kid's Day

Luau

Marshmallows & More

Night in Paris

Ocean Escape

Picnic Time

Quesadillas

Rainy Day (*create your own rain with sprinklers outside in front of a picture window. You could even put it close to the front door so guest would get wet if they don't have their umbrella.*)

Sippers & Sandals

Taste of Tuscany

Under the Stars

View the Sunset

White-Out (*this could be quite lovely – use all white, cream and clear glass serving pieces with white linens and ask guests to wear white. The food would provide brilliant pops of color. It would be beautiful outside with the colors of nature as the backdrop.*)

Xmas in July

Yummy Bites

Zucchini Fest (*Okay – so this one is stretching it a bit.... but it could be quite tasty: fried zucchini for an appetizer, maybe some eggplant Parmesan with zucchini for a main dish and, of course, chocolate zucchini cake for dessert!*)

Have a BAD Party

With the temps high, patience short, and everyone in the lazy mode of summer, keep your entertaining efforts simple.

Think about hosting a BAD (Beverages, Appetizers and Desserts) party. This type of party is easy on the host, very casual in atmosphere and is a fun way to get everyone together, especially when no one is into eating heavy food.

Follow these few pointers and you will once again be the hostess with the mostess!

- Make it very clear in your invitation that you are serving only beverages, appetizers and desserts. If your guests come expecting a full sit down meal, they may be disappointed.

- Choose items that are easy to eat when seated casually or standing. Something that requires a steak knife or additional bowls will not be appreciated. Think about finger foods or bite-sized pieces that are super easy to eat while moving about.

- Stick to a casual buffet when you are setting out the food.

- BAD parties work well with both small and large numbers attending. It works particularly well with an open house format.

- You can also set up stations for the buffet in different areas. One station might hold the beverages, one might have the appetizers, one could have cheese, crackers, dips, veggies, fruit and another area may be the dessert station.

Remember to have fun with it, keep it casual and focus on your guests.

Hoedown Party Theme

Since summer is prime fair and rodeo season, why not host a western themed party or hoedown?

This type of party can be fast and simple to put together and very entertaining for those attending.

Invitations

Send out invitations with a western theme like a boot background, cattle brands or something that looks like leather. You can find hundreds of paper choices online.

Decor

Plan an outdoor party. If you have access to a barn or covered building, even better. Make sure you have country music playing in the background. Use straw bales for seating and sawhorse tables.

Fill canning jars with sunflowers or wildflowers and tie with a raffia bow. Use bandanas to tie bows or drape along tables. Have extras to give to guests who need a little umph to their costume.

If you have western tack or can borrow some, use bridles, saddles and boots as props to create a more authentic feel to your party setting. Old boots also make fun centerpieces when you put a vase inside with flowers.

Make sure you have lots of fun lighting. Use battery-operated candles in punched out tin cans or great accents. You could also use some roping and string cans with lights across entry ways or over tables.

A word of caution – if you are using straw for seating or decorations at your party please refrain from using anything with an open flame. It catches fire very quickly and the last thing you want is to have the fire department show up at your party.

Fun & Games

Encourage everyone to wear their best western duds. Contests could include things like ugliest boot or most unique boot, biggest belt buckle, biggest cowboy hat. Use toy pistols to have a fastest draw contest or encourage guests to join in a yodeling contest. You could also have a line dancing contest or a square dancing contest.

Food

Serve a simple barbecue dinner with baked beans, corn on the cob, cucumber-tomato salad and fresh watermelon. You could barbecue chicken breasts or steaks or if you are on a tight budget, offer hamburgers or hotdogs.

Finish the meal off with platters of brownies and cookies or something all-American like apple pie. Set up a beverage area by filling a galvanized tub with ice and adding individual bottles.

Send your guests home with a little gift like a personalized candy bar at the end of the evening. You can download a variety of templates and print them yourself. Most fit on candy bars like Hershey's.

County Fair Party Theme

Back where I grew up, August meant it was time to pick the best produce, whip up your best recipes, scrub down 4-H animals, gulp gallons of lemonade and indulge in dozens of “Happy Bowls” at the annual County Fair.

It was always a fun time of year as a kid. Everybody went at least one day. I remember strolling through the animal barns with my dad, begging for a bag of cotton candy and gawking at the huge and sometimes bizarre produce on display.

I never liked the carnival, so that wasn’t a big draw, but you could get all the junk food a little body could hold, see friends and family you hadn’t visited with for a while and, in general, enjoy all the spectacles the fair provided.

When I was in college and desperate for a summer job, I spent several weeks working at the fairgrounds, first as a grunt and then in the office, which was way more fun! The fair manager was a sweet and wonderful lady who made going to work a pleasure.

Even where we now reside, we can go to any one of three county fairs in our immediate area.

For those of you who are too far away from a county fair or not into the whole carnival/dirt/smell/crowd-thing that goes along with it, think about hosting a county fair themed party. It could be a blast for both you and your guests.

Start out with the invitations. Make it look country using red or blue checked paper with contrasting red or blue gingham ribbon.

Set tables with red and white checked tablecloths. Nothing says “county fair” quite like those traditional table coverings. You can find inexpensive plastic options at party or craft stores or cloth ones at most department stores. You could also buy fabric and cut it with pinking shears to fit your tables.

Use sunflowers as centerpieces and to highlight tables. Loosely arrange them in canning jars and tie a piece of gingham fabric around the top of the jars. If you have old jars that have turned blue, even better!

Ask guests to bring something to enter in a judging competition. It could be produce, a craft project, whatever you like, although I recommend leaving the animals at home. Trust me on this one. Have everyone vote on their top three favorite entries, tally the votes and give out ribbons as prizes. You can easily make your own, or have the kids create them.

The food could be potluck or you can go “whole hog” and make a fun selection of fair food like corn dogs, funnel cakes, lemonade and ice cream.

You could even set up some country fair type games. Attach balloons to a piece of foam board and have darts people can throw to pop the balloons. You can use jar rings and empty pop bottles for a ring toss. Sack races, water balloon fights and tug-of-war are all inexpensive and entertaining. Prizes could be little trinkets picked up from the dollar store.

Flip Flop Party Theme

In an effort to wring every drop of fun out of the summer season, why not throw a Flip Flop themed party?

Super easy and simple, the focus is on keeping everything very casual.

Set up a buffet outside, serve something simple like hamburgers or a make-your-own taco bar. Have plenty of cold beverages. In addition to bottles of soda or water, filling small canning jars with lemonade or sweet tea, secure lids in place and nestle into ice for a versatile and easy beverage station.

Encourage your guests to wear their flip flops and have a contest.

What pair of flip flops is the ugliest? Prettiest? Oddest? Oldest?

Give away some creative prizes. You could even pick up inexpensive gifts at the dollar or craft store.

I've found some great gifts like a note pad in the shape of flip flops as well as decks of cards shaped like flip flops for prizes in the dollar bins at the craft store.

Beach-Themed Party

Summertime always conjures up thoughts of the beach for me: the warm sand, the sound of the ocean, the sunsets that play across the water.

I could totally go without the seagulls and weird fish smells, but it is all part of that unique beach package.

If you are like me and have no hopes of seeing the beach anytime soon, host a beach-themed party and create your own beach magic.

Start with some creative invitations. Reuse empty glass bottles or jars as a clever vessel for your invite. Print your invitation information using a flowing font on crisp white or cream parchment paper. Use about 1/4 of a sheet per invitation. Cut out and roll paper around a pencil until it curls into a scroll. Fill cleaned out empty bottles with about an inch of sand in the bottom, add a few seashells and then drop in the scrolled invitation. Make a simple tag out of card stock that says “To: (insert guest name) From: (insert your name)” and tie to the neck of the bottle with raffia string. If you have bottles with corks or stoppers, that is even better. Hand-deliver the invitations.

Plan your menu. What foods make you think of the beach? You could serve a simple meal of some great seafood (fish, crab, lobster – whatever you like), fresh fruit (think mango or something a little different), rice, fresh veggies, gingerale or gingerbeer . Finish the evening with s’mores, or if you are feeling a bit more adventurous, whip up a dessert like a coconut cake or berry pie.

Create the atmosphere. Use whites, watery blues and bottle greens to get started with your decorating. Set up a buffet table using crisp white sheets as the covering and add accents of blue and greens. Bowls or jars filled with sand and seashells make the perfect decorations. Make sure you have plenty of candlelight scattered throughout your serving and seating area. It creates just the right warm glow for the evening. Hang paper lanterns around the perimeter, play some “ocean” background music. If you have time and your budget allows, think about creating a big sand box where kids and adults alike can create sand castles or wiggle their toes in the sand. Netting, burlap and jute are also great texture pieces to look to for highlighting your beach theme.

Use your imagination and see how exciting a beach-themed party can be!

Ice Cream Social

I encourage you to do something totally and completely old-fashioned, possibly cheesy, but most certainly fun and delicious – host an ice cream social! You'll be so glad you did.

Invite a few friends and family over for a wonderful afternoon or evening of ice cream extravaganza.

You can make your own ice cream if you wish (there are a few yummy recipes at the back of this book). Or, if you are lazy like me, buy some good ice cream and indulge. Two of my favorites are Tillamook and Schwans.

You can use plain vanilla ice cream and offer an array of delicious toppings like nuts, chocolate chips or chunks, marshmallows, sprinkles, berries, banana slices, pineapple, maraschino cherries, coconut, and crushed candy bars like Heath. And don't forget the syrups – chocolate, caramel and fruit.

You could also limit the toppings and have a variety of ice cream flavors available. Something fruity, something nutty, something chocolate. If you are making the ice cream, you can get creative with the flavors through add-ins and extracts. Think along the lines of mint, root beer, almond or rum extract.

I recommend having plain vanilla ice cream as an option no matter what route you take.

If you have a place in the shade to set up a table, take this outdoors. It could get a bit messy and outside, who cares?

Make sure you have plenty of napkins. You might even want some wet-wipes available. Your basic serving supplies will include bowls and spoons, some get-the-job-done ice cream scoops and serving pieces and spoons for your add-ins and toppings.

Serve a fruity punch or iced tea and have plenty of water available as well.

Cover your serving table with a disposable paper or plastic table covering. You can use this as a stand-alone or under a tablecloth. Either way, it keeps your table surface from getting all sticky from ice-cream drips and spills and makes clean up a breeze.

Sit back and watch the smiles erupt on the faces of those gathered at your home from ice-cream bliss!

Summer Scents

Around this time of the year, I start dreaming of being somewhere tropical and wonderful versus somewhere that the lawn needs mowed, the housework needs some attention, and someone needs to go to the grocery store. Again.

So to compensate for the fact that fresh pineapple is about as close to an exotic location as I'm going to get, I like to fill my home with some fun fragrances.

Some of my favorites for summer are:

Citrus

Sage

Nectar

Tropical

From candles to lotions, you'll find me using these during the next few months.

Certain scents, like a delightful lotion that mixes tropical flowers with coconut, get me through my island-less existence. I inhale it deeply, slather too much of it on, and pretend I'm sitting in a chair somewhere close to the beach.

Find the scents that make you smile and add them to your go-to selections for the summer months.

4th of July Party Ideas

The 4th of July is a time when many people gather for barbecues, picnics and celebrations. If you are the lucky one hosting an event, here are some ideas for pulling together a fun Patriotic Party theme.

Use what you have - and add interesting accents. Gather all your white, red and blue dishes then mix and match. Use a tablecloth in red, white or blue (or sheets work, too). Create a fun centerpiece using dishes placed at different heights and presto, you've got a great looking table. If you don't have pedestals or cake plates to use, create height by turning bowls upside down and putting plates on top.

Inexpensive finds – Purchase patriotic pinwheels from the discount or dollar store and place in vases or jars around the gathering. These are fun and whimsical and provide a laid-back accent to your gathering. Hang red and blue crepe paper streamers along with red, white and blue balloons around your gathering. For a really cool accent, blow up balloons then create a streamer of them using thread and running the needle through the knotted ends.

Involve the kids – by having them create the decorations. They can cut stars out of red, white and blue construction paper. Punch a hole in the top and hang with red, white or blue ribbons above a table, along a fence, at the front door – anywhere guests will gather.

Tie one on – your seat cushion or pillows. Liven things up with red and blue bandanas and red and blue fabric you may have on hand. If you are using fabric, cut it in squares to fit a pillow or cushion, trim edges with pinking shears, place a piece on both the top and bottom of the cushion then tie corners with a white ribbon. Do this for your throw cushions, accent pillows or seat cushions. It will bring a fabulous pop of color to your decor.

Hang your Flag – outside as a greeting to your guests and a reminder that you are celebrating the 4th of July to everyone who drives by. Use mini flags throughout your decorating scheme as well. A nice take-away for guests is a small flag with a bag of sweets like red, white and blue peanut M&Ms.

4th of July Food Safety Tips

With the number of people who gather for backyard barbecues and outdoor parties to celebrate the 4th of July, keep some basic food safety tips in mind. By using a little precaution, you can avoid anyone going home with food poisoning.

- Have two sets of cutting boards, cooking utensils and platters – one for uncooked foods and the other for cooked foods.
- Use a meat thermometer to make sure you are cooking meat and poultry to proper temperatures.
- Prevent the spread of bacteria by washing fruits and vegetables before putting them in a basket or cooler, or placing on a serving platter.
- Use clean foil, plastic wrap and resealable bags to store leftovers. Don't reuse what you used on uncooked food.
- If you won't have access to soap and water at a picnic, bring along moist towelettes, antibacterial hand cleanser, bleach wipes or a spray bottle with soapy water.
- Use nested bowls to serve cold items, filling the larger with ice and using the smaller as the actual serving bowl.
- Fill unusual containers with ice and place cold dishes inside. A red wagon is the perfect way to serve up a trio of salads, especially on the 4th of July!
- Hot foods should be eaten within two hours of being made.
- Food should not stand out longer than two hours and on a day when the temperature is above 85 degrees, one hour is the maximum.
- When packing coolers, wrap raw meat, poultry and fish in air-tight resealable plastic bags or containers and keep separated from cooked foods, fruits and veggies.
- Think about taking a separate cooler for beverages, as it gets opened frequently and makes it difficult to maintain a cool temperature.
- Thoroughly chill cold foods and beverages before putting into a cooler.
- Pre-chill your cooler by adding a bit of ice about an hour before you are ready to pack it.
- Transport hot foods in a separate insulated cooler. Wrap in newspaper or dishtowels and pack tightly in a cooler surrounded by more newspaper or dish towels. You can also heat bricks and place in the cooler to keep hot foods hot. Remove the bricks and put under dishes to keep warm while serving.
- A full cooler will stay colder longer than a partially filled one. If your food doesn't fill the cooler, add more ice.
- If you are traveling a distance, insulate coolers even more by wrapping in blankets or sleeping bags. If possible, avoid putting in the trunk.
- If possible, replenish ice as it melts. If you don't have access to more, keep the water in the cooler. It works almost as well as ice.

30 Things to Do This Summer

Plan now to have your best summer yet. Will you spend time with friends? Enjoy the great outdoors? Attend concerts or shop at a Farmer's Market?

Here is a list of a few ideas of fun things to do this summer:

1. Gather up a few friends and have a picnic in your backyard.
2. Go on a walk and take pictures of trees, flowers, animals, clouds, sunsets.
3. Watch the sun set then stay outside to gaze at the stars.
4. Give your house a summer beachy-feel with breezy curtains, white slipcovers and ocean blue accents.
5. Make ice cream.
6. Take one of your parents to lunch.
7. Bake cupcakes and deliver them to people who are extra special to you.
8. Play childhood games like "Sorry", "Uno," or "Clue."
9. Make a root beer float.
10. E-mail a friend you haven't spoken to in awhile.
11. Make popsicles in your freezer.
12. Stroll down memory lane by looking through old family scrapbooks, photo albums, and yearbooks.
13. Eat last night's leftovers for breakfast.
14. Go to the movies and make sure you eat some buttery popcorn.
15. Go window-shopping with a friend.
16. Write a poem, the sillier – the better.
17. Make fresh, homemade juice or lemonade. The scent of freshly squeezed lemons is magnificent.
18. Take a bubble bath.
19. Make dinner for a neighborhood family.
20. Baby-sit for a neighbor with the agreement that she will babysit for you in return.
21. Go for a spa day with a friend – or create your own at home.
22. Plan a vacation you want to take next summer.
23. Plant flowers in your yard.
24. Go for a drive in the mountains and breathe in that fresh pine-scented air.
25. Run around in the sprinklers.
26. Invite friends over and have a tea party in your yard.
27. Order a pizza – and get all the toppings you like.
28. Splash around in a plastic kiddy pool.
29. Swing on the swings at the park.
30. Write in a journal. Don't know where to start? Stand outside and record everything you can see in front of you in descriptive detail.

EASY RECIPES!

Here is a collection of recipes I like to make in the summer when fresh produce is abundant.
Enjoy!

Mint Iced Tea

This minty tea is so refreshing on a hot summer day. One of my friends is convinced I make it just for her. Please don't tell her I make it for me to enjoy, too!

Mint Iced Tea

3 mint tea bags (I like Bigelow Plantation Mint the best)

4 cups boiling water

8 cups cool water

2/3 cup sugar

Mint sprigs

Stir sugar into the boiling water until it is dissolved. Add the tea bags and let steep for about 10 minutes. Discard tea bags and pour tea into a 12 cup pitcher. Add cool water and stir. Toss in a few fresh mint sprigs and serve over ice in chilled glasses.

Strawberry Bliss

Simple, easy and so yummy!

Strawberry Bliss

1 can of Bacardi Mixers Frozen Strawberry Daiquiri concentrate

1 1/2 cans of water

1 bottle of club Soda

granulated sugar

Mix concentrate with 1 1/2 cans (using the concentrate can) of water. Stir and freeze for a couple of hours, until it starts to firm up.

Wet the rims of your glasses and dip in sugar. Just put a teaspoon or so of sugar on a flat saucer and dip away. I like to put the glasses in the freezer after I sugar them so they are frosty when I serve the drink.

When you are ready to serve, remove the glasses and strawberry mix from the freezer. Scoop slush into glasses and fill about two-thirds full. Pour in enough club soda to fill the glass. You can garnish the glasses with a strawberry if you so desire or a sprig of mint.

Grenadine Sunrise

(from the cover)

This drink comes together in a flash and looks so impressive in the glass!

Grenadine Sunrise

1 bottle of grenadine syrup

Orange Juice

Ice

Put it in the glass first. Pour in the orange juice. I fill the glass about three-fourths of the way full.

Carefully pour in a spoonful of the Grenadine Syrup

It will do amazing and wondrous things in the glass and make a beautiful drink. Do not stir! Repeat, do not stir! This completely destroys the amazing and wondrous things.

If you are transporting the glass, put it on a tray to carry and don't shake it or you'll have the same results as stirring.

Simple Summer Fruit Salad

Easy and bursting with juicy flavors, this salad is a perfect addition to any picnic or summer buffet.

Simple Summer Fruit Salad

1 cantaloupe
1 cup of grapes
2 cups of pineapple
Pineapple juice

Cut open the cantaloupe, peel and then slice. I diced mine up into bite-sized pieces or if you want to get all fancy-pants you can use a melon baller.

After washing the grapes, I cut them in half. Yes – take the time to cut them in half. It will add less than two minutes prep time to your day and your guests will be forever thankful to you. Have you ever been sitting somewhere nice trying to show people that you weren't born in a barn and do have a few manners, trying to stab a whole grape with your fork? You stab, it moves, you stab harder, it threatens to shoot off your plate and take out someone's eye. Never a good thing, not that it has ever happened to me. So take the time to cut those little orbs in half!

Last but not least, cut your pineapple into bite-sized pieces. In a hurry (could also be interpreted as lazy) I bought pineapple spears. I do recommend going with fresh pineapple over canned because of the flavor and texture intensity. If you like whacking up a whole pineapple, go for it. If not, just buy the fresh that is pre-cut. Save the juice that will be in the bottom of the pineapple container and pour it over the fruit. Give it a good stir, cover with plastic wrap and let the flavors blend in the fridge for an hour or so. You can make this a day ahead.

As a final step toss on a few sprigs of mint and berries. Ta-da. Wasn't that simple and easy?

Watermelon and Feta Salad

Anyone who knows me well, knows I kind of have a thing for feta cheese. It is creamy and salty and perfectly delightful on so many different things, especially salads.

I also have a thing for watermelon and mint. So why not combine all those favorites into one fun salad?

This is super simple to make. It literally takes just scant minutes to put together and turns out so bright and beautiful!

Watermelon and Feta Salad

1 seedless watermelon
3 ounces feta cheese
1/4 cup fresh mint chiffonade
1/4 cup olive oil
1/4 cup rice vinegar
1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. seasoning

Mix salt, oil and vinegar and set aside.

Cube, ball or chunk melon into bite-sized pieces.

Cut your mint into little ribbons (chiffonade). Mix together mint, watermelon and dressing. Chill.

When ready to serve sprinkle on feta cheese and a dash of seasoning. Garnish with a sprig of mint and enjoy!

Ranch Potato Salad

Captain Cavedweller calls this “the only edible potato salad,” since he doesn’t like most of the ingredients of traditional potato salad recipes. If you have a picky eater, give this one a try!

Ranch Potato Salad

3 pounds baby red potatoes
6 hard-boiled eggs
1/2 cup mayonnaise
1/2 cup ranch salad dressing
1 cup dill pickles, chopped
1 tsp. onion flakes
1 tbsp. juice from pickle jar
1 tsp parsley, finely chopped
dash of paprika
salt and pepper to taste

Scrub the potatoes and boil with skins on until fork tender. Cool, then cut into small chunks. (If I’m really in a hurry I cut the potatoes before I cook them.)

Separate the hard-boiled yolks from the whites. Chop the whites and add to cooked potatoes along with pickles and onion flakes. Mash the yolks in a separate bowl and mix with the mayo and ranch dressing.

Pour dressing over potatoes and stir. Add salt and pepper to taste. Stir in parsley then top with a sprinkle of paprika.

Cucumber Dill Salad

Inspired by a fresh, cool, creamy salad I had at a German restaurant, this is a great side dish to add to any summer meal. Make sure you press out as much water as possible from the cucumbers before making the salad.

Cucumber Dill Salad

5 mini cucumbers (or a couple of regular sized ones)
1 cup sour cream
1 tbsp. apple cider vinegar
fresh dill, chopped
salt

Wash your cucumbers and thinly slice. I found the most wonderful mini cucumbers at Costco and left the peels on, but you can peel if you so desire.

In a shallow bowl, layer slices, sprinkling a little salt between each layer. Cover with plastic wrap and set a heavy bowl on top. You want to press the water out of the cucumbers, so let it set this way for an hour or two (or overnight – please put in the fridge if going the overnight route).

When you are ready to make the salad, drain the cucumbers and then pat dry. In a separate bowl, mix together the sour cream, vinegar and the chopped dill. Mix well with cucumbers. To make it look pretty, add a few fresh sprigs of dill to the bowl and serve.

Fresh Summer Salad

Fresh, colorful and full of zingy flavor.

Fresh Summer Salad

3 cups cucumber, peeled and sliced
3 cups tomato, cut into bite-sized pieces
1 cup crumbled feta cheese
1/2 cup Italian salad dressing

Mix together and serve immediately. You can also add sliced black olives.

Fried Mozzarella Salad

I must issue a warning that this salad might not be the most healthy you could choose -but the tastiness more than makes up for it!

Fried Mozzarella Salad

mozzarella cheese (thickly sliced)
flour
egg (beaten)
Panko crumbs
Parmesan cheese (shredded)
salt
spinach leaves
raspberries
blueberries
raspberry vinaigrette

Wash spinach and berries. Put on plate(s) and set aside.

Put flour in one bowl, beaten egg in a second and the Panko crumbs mixed with the Parmesan cheese and salt in a third. Make sure the bowls are wide enough your cheese slices will sit flat inside.

Heat oil in a deep fat fryer or cast iron skillet. You want it to be good and hot.

Drench cheese slices through flour, egg and Panko mix. When they are all finished, start frying. It will take just a few seconds to brown each side. The smell will begin to weaken your knees. Should you give in to temptation and take a bite, you may never get the cheese onto the salad.

Drizzle dressing over spinach and berries then top with a slice or two of the cheese.

Summer Mediterranean Salad

The blend of flavors in this salad is so fantastic, I could eat this every day!

Summer Mediterranean Salad

- 8 cups of baby spinach or tender baby greens, washed and dried
- 3 ounces of Calamata olives, pitted and sliced
- 3 ounces of pimento stuffed Manzanilla olives, sliced
- 1 small can of sliced black olives
- 1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese
- 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese, freshly shredded
- 1 cup diced fresh tomatoes
- 1 cup chopped cucumber
- 1 bottle of Caesar Vinaigrette with Parmesan Dressing

Mix together all ingredients, toss with dressing and serve with a sprinkling of Parmesan cheese on top. Add slices of grilled chicken, serve with sliced warm bread and you've got an easy summer meal!

Flank Steak Salad

Flank Steak is a long flat cut of meat that can get really tough if not prepared properly. Grill it quickly and it is so good!

Flank Steak Salad

1-2 flank steaks per person
lettuce
tomatoes (sliced)
cucumber (sliced)
sliced black olives
shredded colby-jack cheese
salt
pepper
Mrs. Dash

Flank steaks are thin cuts of meat that cook really fast. Season them with salt, pepper and whatever seasoning you like best. Get creative – Captain Cavedweller usually does which is why I ask for half-seasoning on my meat!

Grill the flank steak for just a few minutes. CC put these on a hot grill with indirect heat. It took just shy of two minutes per side for them to be done to perfection.

Once the meat is done, let it rest a few minutes before slicing. I made long, thin strips of meat and CC whacks his into bite-sized submission.

Layer lettuce, tomato slices, olives and cucumbers in a bowl or on a plate.

Place the meat on top and then finish with a sprinkle of cheese. I add feta cheese crumbles to my salad while CC adds croutons, sunflower seeds and almost everything except the kitchen sink to his salad. My point would be to add whatever tastes good to you. I used a light vinaigrette dressing and CC coated his in salt.

Quick Tip: Make your cucumbers look fancy by running a fork's tines down the outside peel before slicing. It creates an impressive edge.

Fried Zucchini

Captain Cavedweller and my most wonderful mother-in-law would founder on fried zucchini if someone would let them. When I make fried zucchini, I have to quietly sneak into the kitchen and make it as fast as I can, otherwise CC is camped out beside me eating them as fast as they cool down enough to put in his mouth. When his mom is visiting, I can just give up any thought that I will get even one bite, because they aren't sharing.

Not at all.

Here is my simple recipe for making fried zucchini. Enjoy!

Fried Zucchini

small zucchini (they are more tender and flavorful before they get too big)

1 egg, lightly beaten

1/2 cup flour

1/2 cup Panko crumbs

salt

pepper

all-purpose seasoning

Heat a heavy skillet (I like cast iron) over medium heat with enough oil to cover the bottom. Let the oil get hot. While it is coming up to temp, wash and thinly slice your zucchini. Put your flour in one dish, the egg in a second and the Panko crumbs mixed with the seasonings in a third.

Coat each zucchini slice in the flour, drench with the egg and finish off with the Panko crumbs. Then fry on each side until golden brown. Place on a plate or platter covered with paper towels to absorb excess grease.

If there are any left to serve, you can have a basic ranch sauce to dip them in or eat plain.

Roasted Zucchini

Captain Cavedweller will only eat zucchini if it has been dipped in batter and deep fried. Until I served roasted zucchini.

Don't ask me what is magical about the fast roasting process, but it makes the zucchini taste so good.

And talk about fast and easy. In less than 10 minutes you can make this side dish and have it ready to eat.

Roasted Zucchini

zucchini, cut into slices
dash of salt
dash of seasoning
extra virgin olive oil

Pour a tablespoon or two of oil into a resealable bag. Sprinkle in a dash of salt and some seasoning. Put in zucchini slices, seal and shake bag to coat slices. Place slices on a baking sheet and bake at 400 degrees for about five minutes. Serve and enjoy!

You can use this method with a variety of vegetables including carrots and beets (which will need a longer baking time).

Loaded Baby Bakers

If you are looking for an easy side dish that is filling and really yummy, give these potatoes a whirl.

Loaded Baby Bakers

1 pound baby baking potatoes, precooked
1/4 cup butter, cut in cubes
1/2 cup bacon pieces, precooked
1/2 cup shredded colby-jack cheese
1/3 cup sour cream
salt and pepper to taste

Combine potatoes and butter in a foil pouch and seal. Place on a grill over medium indirect heat for 15-20 minutes if you are using pre-cooked potatoes, you'll need a bit longer if you are using uncooked potatoes. You can also toss them in the oven at 400 for 15 minutes.

Once they are done, open up the foil, sprinkle on the bacon, cheese and seal back up until cheese melts – just a minute or two. Then add sour cream and close your eyes in bliss as you take a bit and your taste buds do a happy dance.

BLT Wrap

Flavorful like a BLT, but all wrapped up in a soft flour tortilla.

BLT Wrap

flour tortillas
shredded colby-jack cheese
sliced olives
bacon
tomatoes
lettuce
ranch dressing

I did not give specific measurements because you can assemble each one individually and alter the amounts to your desire. For this particular wrap I used medium-size tortillas, two strips of bacon, a heaping tablespoon of cheese, three cherry tomatoes, a teaspoon of olive slices, a half-teaspoon of ranch dressing and a few pieces of lettuce.

Cook your bacon. When it is nice and crisp, let cool then crumble. Line it up in the center of the tortilla. Top with tomatoes, lettuce, cheese, olives and dressing. Roll up and savor!

Barbecue Pork

This recipe saved my bacon one hot summer day when my oven went on the fritz and we happened to be out of propane for the barbecue. So good and simple to make!

Barbecue Pork

3-5 pounds of pork tenderloin
2 cans of chicken broth
1 cup barbecue sauce
dash of salt and pepper

Put all ingredients in crock pot and cook on low for eight hours. You can then shred the meat and serve on rolls or slice it. We sliced it and served with a side of additional barbecue sauce for those who like things a little spicier.

Roasted Salmon

I'm not a big seafood fan. About as exciting as I get on the seafood front is tuna sandwiches and that is only if we haven't had them for a while. A really long while.

But for whatever oddball reason, fresh salmon really hits the spot on occasion. This recipe is so simple even Captain Cavedweller can make it. The first time we made it, we couldn't stop eating it. Really, it was that good. So give this a whirl and enjoy!

Roasted Salmon

salmon filet
olive oil
salt
pepper
spices

Place filet on baking sheet. Drizzle on olive oil and then sprinkled on spices. Put into a cold oven and bake at 400 for 25 minutes. Serve with your choice of sides and savor every wonderful bite.

Chocolate Coconut Kisses

Not only are these cookies super easy to make, they are drop-your-teeth delicious!

I could have eaten them warm from the oven all day and not looked back. Imagine the wickedly good topping that goes on top of German chocolate cake coming in cookie form (minus the nuts). Yep, the cookies are that good!

Chocolate Coconut Kisses

½ cup egg whites (4 medium eggs)
1 ¼ cups sugar
¼ tsp. salt
½ tsp. vanilla
2 ½ cups moist shredded coconut
2 oz. unsweetened chocolate, melted and slightly cooled

Heat oven to 325 degrees.

Separate eggs and beat whites until frothy. Gradually add in sugar. Continue beating with mixer until very stiff and glossy. Stir in salt, vanilla, coconut and chocolate until mixed. Drop by heaping teaspoonfuls two inches apart on a baking sheet lined with parchment (the original recipe called for ungreased brown wrapping paper).

Bake about 20 minutes or until set and delicately browned. Lift off paper, lay wet towel on hot baking sheet. Place paper on towel. Steam will loosen kisses. Slip off with a spatula. Eat one, and savor the bliss. Force yourself to share.

Simple Coconut Dessert

I've been making this dessert for years. It works especially well to take to summer potlucks and barbecues. Be warned, the dish will come back empty every time.

Simple Coconut Dessert

1 3-ounce package cream cheese, softened
1 1/2 cups milk
1 large package instant coconut pudding mix
1 cup whipping cream
1/2 cup coconut, shredded and sweetened
graham crackers

Line the bottom of a 9×13 inch pan with graham crackers and set aside. Whip cream, add a dash of confectioner's sugar to lightly sweeten.

In another bowl, mix cream cheese and milk until smooth. Add pudding mix and beat one minute. Fold in half of the whipped cream. Pour over graham crackers and chill for one hour. Once chilled, spread rest of whipped cream on top and sprinkle with coconut.

So yummy and easy for summer entertaining!

Raspberry Bars

Way back during my junior year of college, I somehow worked it out to have Fridays free from classes. It was awesome. Then I realized I really, really needed a job, so I found one babysitting.

Fridays were great days for me. I got to go hang out at a nice house with the sweetest little baby, and the fun lady I babysat for always gave me open range in the kitchen. She kept a secret stash of delicious raspberry cookies, only sharing their hiding place with me because her husband and older son would devour them all in seconds. So I managed to not eat them all when I babysat. But even one of them was plenty. They were rich and delicious and divine.

Even though that baby is now all grown up, I still remember how good those cookies tasted.

This recipe is close to those marvelous cookies, especially if you dust them with powdered sugar before serving.

Raspberry Bars

1 1/2 cups flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1/4 tsp. salt
1 1/2 cups quick-cooking oats, uncooked
1 cup firmly packed brown sugar
3/4 cup butter, softened
1 cup raspberry jam
powdered sugar, optional

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Combine flour, baking powder, and salt. Stir in oats and sugar. Cut in butter with a fork or pastry blender until mixture resembles coarse meal.

Press two-thirds of the mixture into an 11 x 7 inch pan. I gave mine a light coating of non-stick cooking spray before I dumped in the crust.

Once you have the crust pressed into the pan, top evenly with jam. Sprinkle remaining oat mixture on top.

Bake for 30-35 minutes. Cool, cut into squares and dust with powdered sugar.

Banana Ice Cream

When I was a kid, on random and rare occasions my sister-in-law Debbie would treat us to homemade banana ice cream. It was smooth, creamy bliss in a bowl on a hot summer day. A bit of a banana fan, I absolutely loved this ice cream and eagerly looked forward to the times she made it.

My mom tried to make it a few times, but it never tasted the same because she refused to use the raw eggs required by the recipe.

Consider this your warning – consuming raw eggs may increase your chance of food borne illness. Use fresh eggs that aren't cracked, please, if you plan to make this ice cream.

It is really easy to make and this recipe will fill a four-quart ice cream freezer easily. If you have a one and a half quart freezers, I'd cut this down to a one-third recipe.

Banana Ice Cream

5 eggs
2 1/2 cups sugar
4 cups whipping cream
1 tsp. salt
2 tsp. vanilla
2 tsp. banana flavoring
4 cups milk
4 ripe bananas, mashed

** **Warning!** Consuming raw eggs may increase your risk of food borne illness. If you do decide to make this and use the raw eggs, please choose eggs that are fresh with no cracks in the shell.*

Start by beating the eggs until they are foamy and light. I let mine go about six minutes. Add in sugar and continue mixing. Slow the speed on the mixer and add in the cream followed by the salt, vanilla and banana flavoring. Continue mixing and add in the milk, blending in the bananas last. Pour into your ice cream freezer and freeze according to machine directions.

Serve and enjoy! I dipped a few banana slices in chocolate and added a garnish of mint, just for fun. Captain Cavedweller preferred his plain, of course.

If you leave out the bananas, this also makes a great vanilla base. You can add whatever fruits, syrups, nuts, candies, etc. you want.

Chocolate Ice Cream

My Aunt Karen makes the absolute best chocolate ice cream. I don't know what magical thing she does to make it so good, but the fact remains that her chocolate ice cream rules!

Aunt Karen's Chocolate Ice Cream

3 cups sugar
Rounded 1/2 cup measure of cocoa powder
3 eggs, beaten
2 cups half-and-half
2 tablespoons vanilla
1 quart heavy whipping cream
approximately 2 quarts of whole milk

Blend sugar and cocoa powder together then add 1 quart of milk in large kettle (saucepan). Bring to a simmer, add a small amount of the hot mixture to the eggs to temper. Beat well and add back to the kettle. Bring this to a boil and then remove from heat. After it cools a few minutes add vanilla, half-and-half and the heavy cream.

Refrigerate until cold, stir occasionally. Overnight is good. Add cold mixture to your ice cream freezer can and fill up to the one gallon mark with whole milk. Freeze as your ice cream freezer directs. Makes one gallon.

Jiffy Fruit Cobbler

If you have fruit and a few minutes to put this together, you can have a delicious dessert warm from the oven to serve guests or family or horde for yourself. Add a scoop of vanilla ice cream to puddle around the edges of the dish.

Jiffy Fruit Cobbler

1 c. sugar
1 c. flour
2 tsp. baking powder
1 c. milk
1/2 stick butter
3 cups fruit

Melt butter in baking dish at 350 degrees. Mix sugar, flour, baking powder and milk. Add to melted butter. Do not stir. Put fruit on top. Again, do not stir.

Bake at 325 degrees for 30 minutes or until golden brown.

Berry Crisp

Here's a recipe for a quick and easy crisp that can be used with a variety of fruit. It works well with everything from apples and peaches to berries.

Since I love raspberries it is my go-to fruit for this yummy crisp.

Berry Crisp

3 cups of raspberries
2/3 cup granulated sugar
1 tablespoon corn starch
1/2 cup flour
1/2 cup oatmeal
1/2 tsp cinnamon
1/3 cup butter – softened
3/4 cup packed brown sugar

Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees.

Mix corn starch and granulated sugar with berries. Let rest for about 10 minutes. I mix this right in the baking dish – using a square 8-inch pan. While the berries are doing their thing, mix the remaining ingredients together with a pastry blender, food processor or a fork. You want the mixture to have a crumbly texture. Sprinkle on the berries and bake until fruit bubbles and topping is a golden brown.

Serve warm with ice cream or whipped topping.

Orange Dream Pie

Thanks to the Schwan's man, I had a carton of Summer's Dream languishing in my freezer. If you haven't tried it yet, it is pretty dreamy. They blend vanilla ice cream with orange sherbet and package it frozen under the title of Summer's Dream.

I decided to whip up a pie using a recipe in the Schwan's catalog as a starting point. I tweaked it just a bit and ended up with a delicious pie that even Captain Cavedweller liked, which is really saying something!

It was very simple and easy to make. Having the patience to wait until it was frozen and ready to eat was the biggest challenge. Especially for those of us who are patience-challenged.

Orange Dream Pie

5 cups softened Summer's Dream Ice Cream
1 1/2 cups freshly whipped cream
3 ounces cream cheese, softened
1 15-ounce can Mandarin oranges
1 graham cracker crust

Substitution Note: If you don't have a Schwan's man who brings deliciousness to your door, you can easily mix three cups of vanilla ice cream with three cups of orange sherbet. If you don't feel like making fresh whipped cream, a tub of frozen whipped topping works just as well. If you aren't a lazy slug like me, you can mix crushed graham crackers, a spoon of sugar and melted butter to make the crust. Pat into a pan and refrigerate 30 minutes before pouring in the filling.

While ice cream is softening, drain the oranges and set aside.

Beat cream cheese until it is light and fluffy then add in whipped cream.

Spoon softened ice cream into crust. Use just enough to cover the bottom and up the sides – probably about 1 1/2 cups. Scoop the remaining 3 1/2 cups into the cream cheese mixture along with the can of oranges. (Reserve a few orange slices for garnish, if you wish).

Pour into the crust and freeze for three hours. Remove from freezer, slice and serve with a dollop of whipped cream and an orange slice for garnish.

Cream Puffs with Vanilla Pudding

They aren't hard to make and are so tasty when stuffed with a delicious, creamy filling and dusted with sugar or drizzled with chocolate. Make a batch and see if your family doesn't act a little bit appreciative of your efforts.

Cream Puffs

1/2 cup butter
1 cup flour
1 cup water
1/8 teaspoon salt
4 eggs
powdered sugar (for dusting)

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, combine butter and water and salt. Bring to a boil. Add flour all at once, stirring vigorously. Cook and stir until mixture forms a ball that doesn't separate. Remove from heat. Cool 10 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating with a wooden spoon after each addition until smooth.

Drop batter by heaping tablespoons, three inches apart, on a greased baking sheet (I line mine with parchment). Bake for 30-35 minutes or until golden. Cool on a wire rack. Split puffs and remove any soft dough from inside. Fill with pudding, dust with sugar, serve and enjoy. You could also fill with whipped cream, ice cream, sherbet or fruit.

Vanilla Pudding

3/4 cup granulated sugar
3 tablespoons cornstarch
3 cups milk
2 beaten eggs
1 tablespoon butter
1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla

In a heavy 2 quart saucepan, combine sugar, cornstarch and flour. Stir in milk then cook over medium heat until mixture is thickened and bubbly. Stir constantly. When it starts to bubble, cook for two minutes more. Remove from heat and gradually stir about one cup of the mixture into the beaten eggs. Return the egg mixture to the pan and cook until nearly bubbly but do not boil. Reduce heat and cook for two additional minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat, stir in butter and vanilla. Pour into a bowl, cover the top with plastic wrap, pressing it down to the surface of the pudding and chill until ready to serve cream puffs.

If you are a chocolate addict like me, you can drizzle chocolate sauce over the top before you dust it with sugar.

Apple Pie

Here is a simple and easy recipe for apple. Make some this weekend and watch your family savor every bite!

Apple Pie

6 firm, tart apples (I like Granny Smith the best)
2/3 cup sugar
2 tbsp. flour
2 tsp. cinnamon
1 tbsp. butter, softened
pie crust

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Roll out your pie dough and line the bottom of a 9-inch pie pan. You can use pre-made dough or whip up a batch of your own. (*My Spring Savvy Entertaining booklet offers a great Vodka pie crust recipe or you can also find it on my blog at savvyentertaining.com*)

Peel, core and thinly slice your apples. Put in a microwave safe bowl and stir in sugar, flour and cinnamon. Microwave a minute at a time, stirring after each setting, until the apples begin to cook. Spoon apples into the crust and drop in a few teaspoons of butter. Place the second crust on top, seal the edges and poke in a few air holes with a fork. Slather the rest of the butter over the top of the crust then bake about 35-40 minutes until juices are bubbling and crust is golden brown. If you are worried about the edges of the pie getting too brown, cover them with a strip of foil and remove about 10 minutes before the pie is ready to take out of the oven.

To save myself from cleaning up a mess in the oven, I use a round pizza pan or a metal pan with a ring in the center made especially for pie baking to catch any juicy spills.

Serve warm with vanilla ice cream and a drizzle of caramel.

Patriotic Trifle

I love making trifles.

They are fast, easy and so good. And people will think you have slaved over these babies for hours.

I'm going to give you a list of ingredients and you can adjust the portions based on how many you want to make.

Patriotic Trifle

pound cake, cut into bite-sized pieces
instant vanilla pudding, made according to package directions
raspberries
blueberries
whipped cream

Layer cake, pudding, berries and whipped cream in a pretty serving bowl or individual serving cups. Repeat layers and top with whipped cream and a berry. Refrain from snitching too much while you are layering and enjoy the looks of awe and joy as your guests dig into this delicious dessert.

You can make ahead of time and refrigerate for an hour or two – but don't make too far in advance because the cake can get soggy.

Strawberry Bundt Cake

This recipe for Strawberry Bundt Cake is easy, moist and very tasty. Especially by the time you put frosting, strawberry and chocolate syrup on top of it.

Strawberry Bundt Cake

1 box strawberry cake mix
1 small package instant cheesecake pudding
1 cup sour cream
1/2 cup water
1/2 cup oil
3 eggs
1/2 cup vanilla or cream cheese frosting
strawberries
strawberry syrup
chocolate syrup (optional)

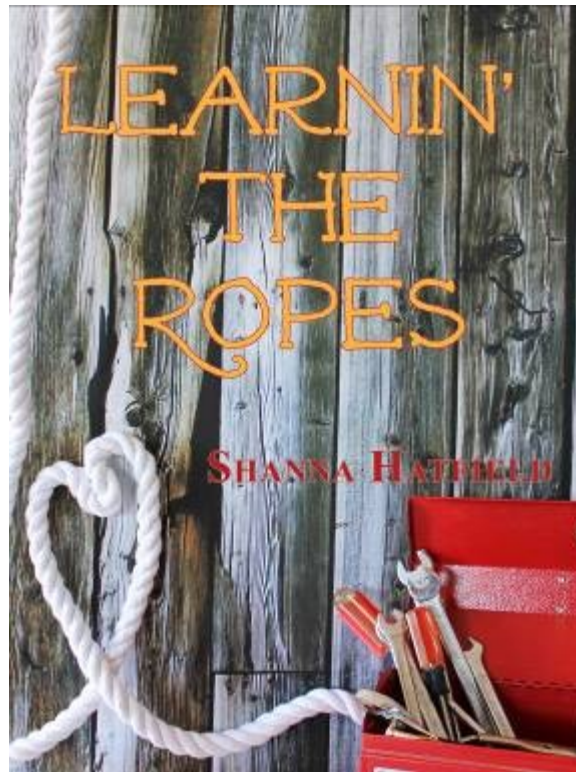
Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Blend all ingredients on medium speed until combined. The batter is supposed to be super thick, so don't worry if it seems heavy.

Scoop it into a greased bundt pan, evening it up as best you can (I tap the pan on the counter to get out air bubbles and even up the batter). Bake for one hour or until the cake starts to pull away from the edges of the pan.

Let cool completely then invert on a cake plate. Put 1/2 cup of frosting into a microwaveable pitcher or bowl and nuke it for about 12 seconds. Drizzle frosting over the cake. Then drizzle on strawberry syrup.

You can finish it off with a drizzle of chocolate syrup if you so desire, and of course I desired. Serve with sliced fresh strawberries and enjoy!



Coming Summer 2012!

Learnin' The Ropes - Out of work mechanic Ty Lewis is homeless and desperate to find work. Answering a classified ad for a job in Harney County, Oregon, Ty accepts when he is offered the position. Saying goodbye to his sister and his life in Portland, he heads off to the tiny community of Riley to begin a new adventure, unsure about his boss Lex Ryan, a man he has yet to speak with or meet.

Lexi Ryan, known to her ranch hands and neighbors as Lex Jr., leaves a successful career in Portland to keep the Rockin' R Ranch running smoothly after the untimely death of her father. It doesn't take long to discover her father did a lot of crazy things during the last few months of his battle with brain cancer, including hiding half a million dollars that Lexi can't find.

Ty and Lexi are both in for a multitude of surprises as he arrives at the Rockin' R Ranch and begins learnin' the ropes.



Coming May 2012!

The Cowboy's Summer Love - After six years in the service and two tours of duty in Iraq, Travis Thompson eagerly returns home to Grass Valley, ready to resume his life on the Triple T Ranch with his two older brothers. Always the wild-child, Travis doesn't disappoint as he rolls from one adventure to another in his quest to keep his adrenaline pumping.

In love with Travis Thompson since she was old enough to notice boys, Tess Morgan can't stay away from him no matter how hard she tries. Growing up together, she thinks Travis sees her only as his best friend's sister, not as a woman who could turn his head.

Will these two be able to overcome their challenges and fall in love? With a little summer magic, anything is possible!

THE COWBOY'S SUMMER LOVE

By

SHANNA HATFIELD

An excerpt...

The Cowboy's Summer Love

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by Shanna Hatfield

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Prologue

*First love is only a little foolishness
and a lot of curiosity.*

George Bernard Shaw

"Do we have to take her, Mama? She's a girl!" Travis Thompson protested to his mother.
"She's got cooties and everything!"

"I'm fully aware that Tess is a girl, baby, and yes, you do have to take her along." Denni Thompson ran a hand over the mussed sandy brown hair of her youngest son's head and smiled.
"I promise you won't get cooties from her."

"But Mama," Travis said, grasping Denni's hand in his own and tugging on her fingers.
"Please don't make us take her. She'll mess up everything."

"Yeah, Mom, we were going to play war at the fort. How can we do that with a girl?" Trent asked as he sat on a barstool at the kitchen counter drinking a glass of milk.

"I'm sure you'll figure something out. I want all three of you to be nice to Tess," Denni said, glancing at Trey, the oldest of her three rambunctious boys. "Promise?"

"We promise," Trey said, turning his intense, bright blue gaze to his youngest brother. "We don't have to like it, but we promise."

"That's my good boys," Denni said, giving each one of them a hug. She was filling a backpack with cookies and juice boxes when she heard a car door slam and pounding at the back door. Following her boys through the kitchen and mudroom, she waved a hand at Michele Morgan as she drove back down the driveway. They occasionally took turns babysitting each other's three children, offering a welcome break from motherhood duties. This afternoon was Denni's turn and she thought the weather was much too nice for the kids to stay inside.

She smiled as the two Morgan boys ran up to her three offspring. They generally played well together, especially since Ben and Trent were both nine and Brice and Travis were both six. Sweet little Tess stood watching the boys rough house before she saw Denni at the door and ran over to see her.

"Hi, Mrs. Thompson," Tess said, handing Denni a droopy daisy in her plump little hand.

"Hello, Tess! Thank you for this beautiful flower. How did you know I like daisies?" Denni said, hugging the 7-year-old and breathing in the scent of little girl.

“Everyone likes daisies, don’t they?” Tess asked, looking at Denni with big brown eyes and dark brown pigtails tied with pink ribbons. She wore denim shorts with a ruffled pink shirt and canvas sneakers that were at one time white. Sandwiched between her two rowdy brothers, Tess had a hard time balancing her preferences for baby dolls and tea parties with her desire to be part of their action.

“You know, I think they do,” Denni said with a warm smile. “Are you ready to go have fun with the boys?”

“I guess so,” Tess said, warily eyeing the five boys scuffling around the yard. “They aren’t going to tackle me are they?”

“Absolutely not! If they even think about it, you come tell me,” Denni said, trying to keep the smile off her face. She somehow thought Tess could hold her own if any of the boys did bother her. Stepping into the kitchen, Denni grabbed the backpack of snacks and called to Trey. Running over, he grasped the straps of the bag in his hand and whistled to the other boys.

“Come on, let’s go!” They all took off running, leaving little Tess behind.

“Well, sugarplum, if you are going to go play, you better hurry to catch up.” Denni turned Tess in the direction of the boys and gave her a little nudge.

“Okay,” Tess said and took off after the boys, her stout little legs pumping hard.

“Trey, don’t forget Tess,” Denni called to her eldest. He stopped and waited for the little girl with a look of begrudging acceptance on his young face. When Tess approached him, he smiled down at her and took her hand, then resumed running after the younger boys.

Racing down the path behind the barn, Trey led his band of young followers toward their fort. Trey, Trent and Travis spent many an afternoon there, playing war or cowboys and Indians. Not a throw-together project of little boys, their fort was a solid play room located in a stand of trees near the creek that ran through the Triple T Ranch. Built to last, Drew Thompson constructed the fort for his boys like he did everything – with purpose and love. Properly cared for, the fort would stand as a place for youngsters to play when his grandchildren had children.

Nearing the fort, Trey let go of Tess’s hand and stood barring the door.

“Men of Fort Thompson, we need to make an amendment to the fort rules today,” Trey intoned, pulling himself up to his full height and trying to sound official. “We have a no-girls rule in place. Since Tess is a guest, we need to amend our rule to say no girls are allowed with the exception of Tess. All in favor?”

Trent raised his hand while Travis scrubbed the scuffed toe of his sneaker in the dirt.

“Travis,” Trey prompted and Travis finally stuck his little hand part way up with great reluctance. He was still convinced he was going to go home with a bad case of girl cooties.

“Before she can join us inside, we need to have an initiation,” Trey said, opening the door and setting the backpack inside on the table.

“What’s a ination?” Brice asked. He was all for making his sister squirm, but he didn’t want anyone to hurt her. “You won’t make her cry will you?”

“No,” Trey said, shaking his head with 12-year-old superiority. “An initiation means she has to do something to prove she is worthy to be allowed in our fort or go through a ceremony.”

The boys were quiet for just moment then Ben’s face lit with a smile. “I know. We could pretend she’s getting married to somebody, like a wedding ceremony, then she could be allowed into the fort, right?”

“Sure,” Trey said, warming to the idea. “Travis, you kiss her.”

“No way!” Travis yelled, ramming a fist into his older brother’s arm. “I ain’t gonna do it.”

Trey grabbed Travis and held his arms down before he could punch him again.

“I won’t kiss him!” Tess exclaimed, not liking what the boys had planned. If they didn’t straighten up and be quick about it, she was going to march right back to the house and tell Mrs. Thompson.

“Yes you will and you’ll like it,” Ben said, grabbing Tess’s hand and dragging her toward Travis, who was being pushed along by Trey.

“You can’t make me!”

“I won’t do it!”

“Get away from me!”

Finally, Trey said the magic words that would make Travis cooperate, which, in turn, would get Tess to go along with the scheme.

“Travis, we dare you,” Trey said, bending down so he was eye to eye with his baby brother.

Travis stopped yelling and glared at Trey, then Trent.

“Double dare you,” Trent said, knowing Travis wouldn’t back down now. He and Trey learned the easiest way to get their brother to do what they wanted was to dare him. Even at the tender age of six, if he was dared, he forged ahead without a thought to the consequences.

Travis stood staring at the little girl who glared back at him with big brown eyes and a questioning look on her face. She was kind of cute, for a girl, and she was his best friend's sister. Sometimes, she was even fun to play with.

"Okay," Travis said, stepping closer to Tess, who took a huge step back into Ben.

"I'm not kissing him," Tess said, crossing her arms across her chest. "Not unless you do this right."

"How do we do it right?" Brice asked, taking his sister's hand in his. He wasn't sure this game was a good idea. He thought they should skip the kissing part and get down to the business of playing war. That sounded like a much better plan.

"I need flowers and a crown first," Tess said, looking down her pert nose at the boys.

"You heard the lady, a crown and some flowers," Trey said, as they started plucking wildflowers and weeds. Ben poked straggly stems into Tess's pigtails and Travis, who was resigned to doing the kissing honors, handed her a bedraggled bouquet.

"Now can we get on with this?" Trent asked, anxious to begin their game of war.

"I don't know," Tess said, still not convinced kissing Travis Thompson was a good idea.

Like a sacrificial lamb being led to the slaughter, her two brothers pushed and tugged until she was toe to toe with Travis. Smoothing down her shirt and standing with her feet precisely placed together, she let out a small sigh of surrender.

"Okay, Travis, kiss her," Trey said, with a jaunty grin. This initiation ceremony was almost as fun as playing cowboys and Indians.

Seeing no way to avoid it, Travis leaned forward, closed his eyes, and somehow managed to land a kiss on Tess' lips. For the briefest moment Travis somewhat enjoyed the experience, inhaling the scent of strawberries and bubblegum. Then he remembered he was no doubt being infected with an entire platoon of girl germs. Pulling back, he wiped his sleeve across his mouth.

"It's done," he said, standing up straight and looking at his oldest brother. "Tessie can go in the fort now."

The newly initiated fort member pulled back her fist and socked Travis in the stomach hard enough to knock him down. "Don't call me Tessie. I don't like that name!"

Spinning around, she ran back toward the house, leaving five boys watching her go.

“I guess she told you,” Trey said as he helped Travis up and brushed him off, making sure his little brother wasn’t injured anywhere except his pride.

Travis narrowed his eyes and watched the retreating form of Tess, determined to stay away from her.

Not only had she infected him with her girl cooties, he kind of liked it.

Chapter One

Love is a Mystery.

You can't find it; it has to find you.

Author Unknown

"I know you don't like it, Mom, but you aren't going to get better unless we do this," Tess Morgan said as she helped her mother through a series of exercises meant to strengthen her wrist.

"This whole thing is so frustrating," Michele Morgan said, watching her daughter put her wrist through the paces of her routine. An excellent physical therapist, Tess was thorough but gentle in her work. "I should have paid more attention to where I was walking and none of this would be necessary."

"You couldn't help it. Who knew a combination of wet steps, the cat rubbing around your feet and an armload of boxes would result in you falling?" Tess said with a teasing smile. Her mom had a bad habit of trying to do too much at once. That was the case the day the cat tripped her on the front steps while carrying one too many boxes to the car for the community rummage sale. "It's not like you to ever try to carry more than you should."

"I'm not the only one guilty of that, Tess."

Releasing a long-suffering sigh, Michele realized how grateful she should be she sprained her wrist when she did. Tess, who had been working in Portland since she began her career in physical therapy a few years ago, grew weary of the noise and the city. Two weeks ago, Tess accepted a position in The Dalles, Oregon, and moved back home to Grass Valley where she commuted an hour to work. Not only was Tess home to help take care of the household chores Michele couldn't do one handed, she provided the physical therapy her mother would have needed to drive into The Dalles to receive.

Smiling at her mother, Tess continued taking her through the therapy exercises. She was just finishing when her dad poked his head in the door.

"You ladies ready to go? We don't want to be late," Mike Morgan said with a twinkle in his warm brown eyes.

“Your daughter just finished her torture session, so I could use a little fun about now,” Michele said, taking Mike’s hand and getting to her feet. “Let’s go see how Brice does today. Too bad Ben had to work this weekend. It would be so nice to have all three of you kids together.”

“I think I’ll stay here. I’ve got plenty to keep me occupied,” Tess said, trying to look busy. There were a few people here in the small community of Grass Valley that she preferred not to see. Brice’s best friend Travis Thompson was at the top of the list.

Almost seven years ago he gave her a kiss goodbye that sent her world spinning off-kilter and she hadn’t seen or spoken to him since. As a former playmate and occasional enemy, the good-looking cowboy excelled at provoking her with his wild, reckless behavior. Tess couldn’t imagine the teasing charmer growing up in the time they’d been apart. The fact that he was driving in the race today proved that point.

“I heard you tell your brother you’d watch him today and watch him you will,” Michele said, giving Tess a motherly scowl. “You’ve managed to avoid seeing anyone since you moved back. It’s a beautiful spring day and I insist you come along.”

“Yes, Mother,” Tess said, knowing when her mother laid down the law, she might as well surrender and go along with her plans.

Arriving at Oregon Raceway Park, the Morgans joined the rest of the spectators as they waited for the race to start. First the participants would show off their cars and then they’d get down to the racing action. Walking toward the group of people gathered near the track, Tess recognized many of the faces. Growing up in Grass Valley, it would be hard to attend any kind of event in the area without knowing several of those attending.

With an exchange of friendly waves, Tess soon found herself standing next to an expanding Thompson family. Michele Morgan and Denni Thompson had been good friends since before their children were born. Tess remembered many an afternoon spent at the Triple T Ranch playing with the three Thompson boys or having them join the three Morgan children at the Running M Ranch.

Travis Thompson and Brice Morgan, only days apart in age, became best friends as soon as they were old enough to walk. Trent Thompson and Tess’s older brother Ben were the same age and also friends. Trey Thompson was the oldest of the group and often filled the role of leader of their little tribe when they were kids.

That left Tess sandwiched between the five boys and often uncertain as to where she fit in, especially when Travis always made her feel so unsettled.

Both Mike and Michele gave Denni Thompson a hug, visiting about her work at a quilt shop in The Dalles. She moved into town after her husband Drew passed away seven years ago.

Tess took a moment to observe Trey and his beautiful bride Cady, along with the adorable little red-headed girl they adopted. Trent was also there, not getting more than a step or two away from his new fiancé, Lindsay Pierce, Grass Valley's first-grade and kindergarten teacher. Although Cady and Lindsay weren't originally from Grass Valley, they both seemed to fit into the community and the Thompson family with ease.

Walking up to Trent, Tess held out her hand. "I hear congratulations are in order."

"Thanks, Tess," Trent said, ignoring the handshake and giving her a one-armed hug, keeping his other around Lindsay. "You've met Lindsay, haven't you?"

"Yes, a few times. It's nice to see you again, Lindsay. You are engaged to one of the nicest guys I know. I'm really happy for you both," Tess said with genuine warmth. From what she heard, Lindsay was as pretty on the inside as she was on the outside.

She thought the two of them made a very striking couple. Trent, who was six-foot-five, couldn't have found a girl better suited to him than Lindsay with her six-foot frame and athletic build. Going out with Trent a few times when they were younger, just as friends, Tess knew he was a wonderful gentleman who would treat Lindsay with love, respect and care. "Have you set a date yet?"

"We're thinking between the end of wheat harvest and before school starts," Lindsay said, her face glowing. It was easy to see she and Trent were deeply in love.

"Sounds like you'll have a busy summer," Tess said, feeling a warm hand on her arm. Turning, she was engulfed in a hug by Trey. She'd nearly forgotten the Thompsons were all big huggers, having avoided the family as much as possible in hopes of not running into Travis.

"Miss Tess, I heard you were back but haven't seen you around. Glad you could make it today," Trey said, a smile lighting both his gorgeous face and his bright turquoise eyes. Tess could see why people always said he was the best looking of the three boys. Trent was the gentle giant and Travis was the rowdy rebel.

"Thanks. It's nice to be home, I think," Tess said with a laugh that made everyone smile.

“I’d like you to meet my wife, Cady,” Trey said, putting his arm around the shoulders of a beautiful brunette. “Cady, this is Tess Morgan, Brice’s older sister by almost a year. She used to keep all us boys on the straight and narrow. Tess is our unofficial sister, since we never had one of our own, and the only girl to ever be initiated into our manly-men fort.”

“Thanks for putting up with them,” Cady said with a smile as she gave Tess a friendly hug. “It’s lovely to meet you. With Travis home and Brice hanging around, I’ve heard them talk about you.”

“And you’re still happy to meet me?” Tess teased. “I can only imagine the stories those two shared.”

“All good,” Cady said reassuringly.

Tess decided both Trey and Trent did well in choosing their spouses. She liked both women immediately and immensely. Feeling a bump against her legs, she looked down into a pair of big baby blue eyes set in an impish face.

“You must be Cass,” Tess said, bending down to shake the little girl’s hand. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“Thank you. You look like Uncle Travis’ friend,” Cass said, studying her curiously.

“That’s because Brice is my brother,” Tess said. “Your daddy looks like your Uncle Trent and Uncle Travis, doesn’t he?”

“Yep. Mama says you can pick a Thompson out anywhere,” Cass said with a firm nod of her head.

Tess laughed. “That is true. Well, you can also pick out a Morgan. Don’t you think Brice looks like my dad?”

Cass turned and looked at Mike, who was still visiting with Denni and Michele. “Yep, he does.”

“So that’s why I look like Brice and my brother Ben.”

“But you’re much prettier,” Cass said, giving Tess an impulsive hug. “I think you have pretty eyes and hair.”

Tess hugged her back. “Thank you for that nice compliment.”

“You’re welcome,” Cass said, showing off her good manners. Although she could be precocious and hard to keep still, Cady and Trey worked hard to make sure she was well behaved.

“Hey, you guys made it,” Brice Morgan said, giving his mother a careful hug and slapping his dad on the back. Spotting his sister, Brice gave Tess a grin. “And look who came out of hibernation. Is the sunlight hurting your eyes?”

Tess glared at her brother. He advanced toward her with a look on his face that said he was up to no good. She started backing up and would have escaped except she bumped into something warm and solid. A spicy, familiar scent flooded her nose and she felt an electrical jolt snap up her arms when her hands reached behind her, connecting with the muscled thighs of a man.

Jerking away, she turned to find herself staring into the handsome face of Travis Thompson. It had been almost seven years since he enlisted in the Army and told her goodbye. The years away made him even more appealing and, in Tess’ mind, more dangerous.

Blue eyes filled with mischief, he offered her a wicked grin.

“I see you still can’t keep your hands off me,” Travis teased, then yanked her to him, giving her a big, brotherly hug. Tingling sensations spiraled from the top of Tess’ head to the tips of her toes and her legs felt as stable as a worn out rubber band. “It’s been a while, Tessie.”

Pulling out of his embrace, Tess stepped back and gave Travis a narrowed glare. “And you’re still incapable of calling me by the correct name.”

“Absolutely, Tessadora Tatiana Morgan. Is that better?” Travis laughed, flashing white teeth in his tanned face. He knew the only thing she hated more than being called Tessie was being called by the given name that she loathed her entire childhood.

“Some things never change,” Tess said, studying him. When Travis’ dad died suddenly of a heart attack, he had a hard time handling the loss. He got into trouble causing more than one head to shake in dismay at his behavior. He’d always been the daredevil wild-child of the Thompson family, but when his adventures got him arrested for destruction of public property, even if it was blowing up a public restroom at the park, something had to be done. After many lectures from his brothers and a river of tears from his mother, he finally enlisted in the Army and spent almost six and a half years in the service, completing two tours of duty in Iraq. From information she gleaned through Brice, Travis was honorably discharged in December and came home a changed man.

Despite her determination not to, she couldn't help but admire some of those changes. Travis stood just over six-feet with a head of sandy-brown crew cut hair. A teasing smile, square jaw and come-hither blue eyes completed the all-too-attractive package.

While he'd been only eighteen and not quite finished growing the last time she saw him, Travis was now a big man with a broad chest and well-toned physique that probably had girls drooling after him for miles around. She also sensed a shift in Travis from the devil-may-care boy to a man who hadn't escaped his life experiences unscathed.

"Some things have definitely changed," Travis said cryptically before kissing his mother's cheek then giving Lindsay and Cady one-armed hugs.

"Uncle Travis, are you really racing your car?" Cass asked, tugging at his hand. He picked her up and tossed her in the air, making her giggle. "You bet I am, kiddo. Are you gonna watch?"

"Yep. Daddy said I get to sit on his soldiers," Cass said, making everyone laugh.

"Shoulders, sweetie-pie," Cady said, correcting the little girl. Born to the town drunk and bad girl, Cass was a little behind in her classes, but catching up fast. Up until her mother passed away right after Thanksgiving, Cass had no schooling or training. With school getting out for the summer in a few weeks, Lindsay volunteered to help Cass with lessons during the break so she wouldn't get further behind.

"Will you wave big when I drive by?" Travis asked, as Cass leaned her head against his cheek. He inhaled the sweet scent of little girl that was a mixture of bubble gum, strawberry shampoo and a lingering hint of babyhood. The scent reminded him of another little girl he once knew. She had grown up quite beautifully, even if she was currently staring at him like he'd sprouted horns.

"Sure. I'll wave like this," Cass said, wildly flailing her arms over her head as she leaned back in his arms. "How's that?"

"Perfect," Travis said, knowing if Cass did that while sitting on Trey's shoulders, she'd knock his cowboy hat off and possibly maim anyone standing too close.

"We better get going, dude," Brice said, glancing at his watch. The race would soon be starting.

Travis set Cass down and rumbled her head of uncontrollable curls before walking off with Brice. Tess watched him walk away, enjoying the view more than she wanted to admit. Even dressed in his fire-proof coveralls and shoes, Travis cut a fine figure. Too fine.

Trying to hide her interest, Tess turned to Denni and started asking her all about life in The Dalles, promising to have lunch with her one day in the coming week.



A few months ago, Brice talked Travis into fixing up a car so they could both participate in races. Finding a wrecked car in Portland, Travis towed it home and with the help of Brice, his brothers and a few of their ranch hands, the vehicle was ready to roll in no time. Although he and Brice had been out to the raceway before, today was the first time they were going to race with their family watching.

Now, parked side by side, they looked over the vehicles one last time before putting on the rest of their gear. Climbing in the cars, they waited for the signal for the event to begin.

Travis knew he needed to get his focus centered on the race ahead, but he found his thoughts drifting to Tess.

Growing up, she was the lone girl in the group of five rowdy boys. More than once, she proved she could hold her own against them. While his brothers regarded her as an honorary sister, Travis didn't. Somewhere along the way, she became much more to him.

When they were in high school, he was so in love with her, he had a hard time thinking straight, but she always looked at him like he was just one more obnoxious brother she had to tolerate. Part of the reason he acted out so much then was due to his frustration with Tess and not knowing how to handle his feelings for the sweet, sassy girl.

Six years in the military might have straightened him up and helped him become a responsible man with a hard edge, but those same years had softened Tess. He remembered the last time he saw her was a late summer morning. She'd been out riding and he borrowed Ben's horse to find her. She was a skilled rider and for a while he sat at the top of a hill watching her graceful movements on her horse, Lila, before riding down to see her. Her dark hair was loose and tumbling in thick curls down her back, her cheeks were flushed from the wind and the sun,

and her eyes were like molten pools of sweet milky chocolate. Travis thought she looked so beautiful.

Seeing him approach, she reined in her horse and waited. He wanted so badly to tell her how he felt about her, but was afraid she'd either laugh at him or think he was perverted, since she treated him like another brother.

Instead of speaking about what weighed so heavily on his heart, he instead memorized every detail of how she looked at that moment and kept that vision with him. From the pain and struggle of boot camp to the unspeakable horrors of his time in Iraq, Travis carried the picture of Tess in his heart and focused on it when he thought he couldn't get through one more day, one more moment of his life.

He thought there was something she was holding back that day they said goodbye. Her eyes were moist with tears and he remembered Tess leaning from the saddle to place a hand on his leg, looking at him intently, making him promise to come home safely.

Gathering his courage, he put a hand on the back of her neck and pulled her close in a kiss that should have let her know beyond any doubt what he felt in his heart. Before she could say anything, he turned the horse and raced back to the house, telling the rest of the Morgan family goodbye before leaving.

Tugging his thoughts back to the present, Travis recalled how sweet her lips tasted. He wondered if they would still be as sweet. She was even more beautiful than he let himself remember. Big, warm brown eyes and thick brown hair were complemented by her rosy cheeks, pert nose and heart-shaped face. Standing somewhere around five-six, she wasn't tall or short, but she was definitely all woman. Unlike so many of the girls who looked like walking skeletons, Tess was full-figured and well-curved.

During their teen years, she was constantly on some sort of diet, trying to lose weight and often called herself fat. He'd never once thought that about her. In his eyes, she was the epitome of how a woman should look – soft and voluptuous. Now, he could see a new confidence in her, like she'd finally accepted herself.

When she accidentally backed into him, Travis felt a familiar jolt shoot through him. He couldn't keep from pulling her into a hug, wrapping his arms around her. He'd dreamed of doing it nearly every day he was in the Army and now that the opportunity presented itself, he didn't plan to miss out. Dressed in cowboy boots, jeans and a flowing blouse, she felt so soft and

wonderful in his arms. Even her scent was soft and delicate, with a hint of something citrusy. He could smell it now, though their contact had been brief.

Seeing Brice wave to him from the corner of his eye, Travis realized it was time to get his head back into the race and off Tess Morgan.

Moving into the line of cars, the race soon started. Travis used his military training to keep focused and it wasn't long until he found himself at the front with Brice right behind him. Racing through the course, Travis marveled once again that such a great raceway had been installed in Grass Valley. Although relatively new, Oregon Raceway Park was gaining notoriety among both car and motorcycle racers. The road course of just more than two miles offered sixteen turns and a few of them were quite a challenge.

Travis roared right through the Half Pipe and North Bowl, holding his breath as he came through the turn known as the Pucker Factor before speeding ahead.

Racing past the group gathered to watch, Travis was gaining speed when he looked back to see a car burst into flames. Realizing it was Brice, Travis whipped his car off the track, hurrying back to where Brice crashed. It looked like he lost control and bounced the car off the concrete divider lining the track near the starting line. Flipped on its side against a divider, flames licked greedily at the hood. While a couple of guys attempted to extinguish the flames, another tried without success to get Brice out of the car. The flames were getting bigger and Travis was concerned about getting Brice to safety.

Jumping out of his own car, he assessed the situation as he ran. Climbing up on the divider so he could reach into the car, he felt a rush of adrenalin pump through his veins. Working quickly to undo Brice's harness, Travis could see him breathing even though he was unconscious.

Grabbing Brice around the chest, Travis hauled him out of the car and lowered him down to waiting hands. By the time he jumped off the concrete divider, Trey and Trent, along with Mike, Michele and Tess were gathered around the still form of Brice. Travis helped remove his helmet while Tess checked him over. Brice's eyes fluttered open and a collective sigh of relief was exhaled.

"Brice, do you hurt anywhere? Can you move your hands and feet? Does it hurt to breathe?" Tess peppered him with questions, scared half witless. The scene that just unfolded seemed like

it happened in slow motion. She couldn't believe she was watching Brice crash and then Travis run to his rescue.

"I'm fine, just got the wind knocked out of me," Brice said, trying to sit up. He took Tess's hand in his and gave it a squeeze. "Calm down, drill sergeant, I'm just fine."

Tess let out a relieved sigh and turned to see Travis take one step away from them, then two before falling to his knees. He slumped over with his head hanging down. Rushing over to him, she put a hand on his back and was surprised to see a haunted look on his face.

"Travis? Are you okay?" Tess was more worried about Travis than her brother at this point. There was raw pain in Travis' glazed eyes and his breath came in short, tight gasps.

As soon as Brice was safe and he knew he was fine, Travis flashed back to another vehicle on fire, to another friend in danger. Only that time the fire spread to the fuel tank and the truck exploded before Travis could do anything about it, killing his friend and two others from his squad.

Shaking his head to clear away the memories, Travis closed his eyes and tried to regain his mental balance. He could feel warm sunshine on his face as he tipped it up and solid earth beneath his knees. He could hear the sounds of voices he recognized talking behind him. He could smell something soft and inviting. Tess. He could smell her perfume.

Opening his eyes, he found her face close to his, looking at him in concern.

"You okay?" she asked quietly, her hand still on his shoulder as she leaned over him.

"Yeah, I'm okay," he said, struggling to get to his feet. His knees still felt weak and he would have fallen if Trey hadn't stepped beside him, putting an arm around him.

"Trav? Need some help?" Trey asked, considering what had brought Travis to his knees. He knew his baby brother was turning into an adrenaline junkie, but wondered if he always crashed like this when the thrill was over.

"I'm good, thanks," Travis said, gaining his equilibrium and stepping away from Trey. "Brice scared me for a minute, is all."

"Hmm," Trey said, still keeping a steadying hand on Travis' shoulder.

Trying to lighten the mood, Travis gave Trey a playful slug on the arm and winked at Tess.

"No need to fuss. Brice has earned all the attention today," he said then walked back to Brice and slapped him on the back, joining in the conversation of those who gathered around them.

Tess and Trey both stood watching and wondering what was going on with Travis. It was obviously something more than just helping Brice out of the wrecked car.



SHANNA HATFIELD spent 10 years as a newspaper journalist before moving into the field of marketing and public relations. She has a lifelong love of writing, reading and creativity. She and her husband, lovingly referred to as Captain Cavedweller, reside in the Pacific Northwest with their neurotic cat along with a menagerie of wandering wildlife and neighborhood pets.

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