

Finding Folklore in the Cereal Aisle

By: Heather King

Selling cereal has changed over the years. When dry cereal or ready-to-eat cereal was first retailed, advertising was on the paperboard packages. Radio advertising in the 1920s and television advertising in the 1940s and 1950s increased the consumption of cereals. By 1993 Kellogg's, General Mills, Nestle, Quaker Oats and Post produced and marketed approximately 173 cereals (Highlights, www.wikipedia.breakfast) and were spending \$762 million on television ads as part of a more general advertising effort that resulted in literally "Cerealizing America" (Scott and Crawford 1995:xiv). Trends also emerged. In the 1960s sugar was a major selling point (usually in fruit flavours) with some examples being "Sugar Pops," "Sugar Smacks," "Sugar Stars" and "Cocoa Krispies". In the 1970s box designs were meant to attract children while the writing on the boxes was directed at mothers. Prizes in cereal boxes were a draw for children; they were discontinued due to safety issues in the 1980s but reintroduced in the 1990s. Scholars such as Michael Owen Jones, Bruce Giuliano and Roberta Krell suggest that the multidisciplinary nature of foodways demands a varied approach (1983:xii) and in this research note I adopt a similar approach to exploring the intersections of folklore and dry cereal. Today cereal boxes communicate messages that are both direct and subtle. They target children and/or adults through the use of recognizable symbols that originate from popular culture, folklore and foodways. According to Roger Griffin and Stanley Sacharow, the goals of communicating these messages have to do with the basic principles of package development which are 1) to sell the product, 2) to attract attention, 3) to create a desire for the product and 4) to increase repeat sales sometimes with incentives such as a free gift reward (1978:212). In this research note, I survey the folklore influences on cereal boxes as found in a grocery store aisle in St John's, Newfoundland. The people I spoke with in Newfoundland also reported using expressions that originated as cereal advertising slogans. This illustrates what Paul Smith refers to when he indicates that information in narrative form can flow back and forth from popular culture and folk culture through the channels of advertising and merchandising and vice versa (1991:127). My preliminary research note supports this claim, suggesting that there are many direct and indirect interactions between folk, popular culture and advertising mediums (see: Smith 1991:147; Rohrich 1980:114-5).

Origins

The word cereal comes from the name of the Roman goddess of agriculture Ceres (McGee 2004:453) and refers to edible seeds/grains that originated from wild plants of the grass family. There is evidence of grain eating from the Mesolithic era, but the first wild grains were domesticated in the Neolithic age when hunter gatherer societies changed to agriculture or to cultivating crops for a food source (Flandrin et al 1999:15; Scade 1975:56). Due to this development in the Neolithic era, grass/cereal plants became a major food staple and this continues to be true today.

Today grains/cereals are a large part of North American's daily food intake. As infants cereal is our first introduction to solid food, and from there onwards, cereals increase significantly in what we consume on a daily basis. According to McGee, there are three basic categories of grain/cereal: major, minor and pseudo-cereals. The major and most common grains are wheat, oats, barley, rye, rice, and corn while millet and sorghum are classed as minor cereals. Amaranth, buckwheat and quinoa are not from the grass family but are used like cereals and thus are classed as pseudo-cereals (McGee 2004:482). "Cereal" also refers to products made from these grains. The most common forms of this food staple are breakfast cereals but Scade notes that cereals form the largest part of human diets because, in addition to processed cereals, other forms of food like bread, pasta, noodles, couscous, tortilla, pita and flat-bread are classified as cereal as well (1975:2, 51). Hidden forms of cereal are added to processed foods such as instant pudding, pie fillings, soup mixes, sugar confectionery, and used as binders in meat products (Scade 1975:54). For this research note, however, the focus is on processed cereals, meaning dry ready-to-eat breakfast foods.

It is believed that the very first cold breakfast cereal or ready-to-eat cereal in the new world was created by the Native American Indian tribe, the Hopi (Gay and Gay 1996:44-5; Kadish 2004:1-10). According to Gay and Gay, the cereal was a corn wafer known as "piki" and it is still made by the Hopi today. It was Dr. James Caleb Jackson who created and sold the world's first ready-to-eat cereal "Granula," which had to be soaked overnight to be edible (Bruce and Crawford 1995:6-8). Gay and Gay report that in 1893 Henry D. Perky created "Shredded Wheat," the first ready-to eat cereal available through retail (1996:31, 44-6). However, according to Scott Bruce and Bill Crawford, Dr. John Harvey Kellogg of the Institute of the Medical and Surgical Sanitarium of Battle Creek, Michigan was the forefather of dry cereal in America and the flake cereal that he invented in 1894 is the precursor to cereals we eat today (1995:22). Kellogg's cereal was created out of his Seventh Day Adventist religious beliefs and treatments that derived from his medical background; it was his solution to the rampant problem of dyspepsia in America. Kellogg understood that a person's diet affects their health and in treating his patients through diet control, he included grains as part of the regime. He believed that sex was the source of social evil and that the cause of aggression and sexual impropriety was inherited by blood, by gluttony and by diet or the consumption of meat (Kellogg 1882:284, 290, 292). In other words, diet was a medical and a moral issue that required food sanctions such as no meats.

Kellogg looked for a way to make grains into a more edible form. After he met with Henry Perky in 1894 about his invention of "Shredded Wheat," Kellogg was inspired to make a flake cereal (Bruce and Crawford 1995:21-22). The idea came to him one night when he was abruptly awakened from his sleep for a phone call. The next day in the experimental kitchen of the institute, the development of a cereal flake began. An exhausted kitchen crew unintentionally left a batch of wheat to soak overnight. When this batch was baked the next morning, it formed the perfect flake that they called "Granose" (Bruce and Crawford 1995:49-50). In the beginning, these cereals were made only for Dr. Kellogg's patients and it was his younger brother, Will Keith Kellogg, who turned the idea into big business. His decision to use corn led to the development of the Corn Flake in 1898 and on February 19, 1906, the Battle Creek Toasted Corn Flake Company became incorporated (Bruce and Crawford 1995:51).

It is ironic that today's sugar laden cereals were born out of what was originally intended to be a health food. Dr. Kellogg's convictions, which formed the underlying principles for the development of Battle Creek, came out of principles of vegetarianism as laid out in the early 1800s by Sylvester Graham, namesake of the graham cracker (Bruce and Crawford 1995:23). Significantly, Charles William Post, founder of Post Cereal Company, was a patient of Kellogg. The four major cereal companies of today, Kellogg's, Post, Quaker Oats, and General Mills came into being in the late 19th century. Bruce and Crawford refer to John Harvey Kellogg as the forefather of dry cereal and the great-grandfather of the self-help movement, to Charles Post as the grandfather of advertising, and to Henry Crowell of Quaker Oats as the god-father of merchandising (1995:14, 65). The development of ready-made cereal occurred as a result of the coming together of ideas of health reforms, alternative religions, business innovations and technologies, and coincided with the development of several social movements, like temperance, vegetarianism and the self-help movement (Belasco 2000:256). Over the years dry cereal processing has evolved to include cereal forms that are flaked, puffed, shredded, baked, sweetened, flavoured, coloured and enriched with vitamins and minerals (Scade 1975:51). A modern element added to cereals is the addition of dried fruits and flavour combinations. It is from these processes and from variations on these processes that today's cereals are derived.

Folklore and the Cereal Aisle

On October 7, 2005 I surveyed a cereal aisle in Sobeys Howley Estates, a large grocery store located in the east end of St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, and one of many typical large national grocery chains across North America (Photo 1). The store stocked 79 cereals under the major brand names of Post, General Mills, Kellogg's and Quaker. The number is high because cereal companies add new flavours yearly. For example, Honey Bunches of Oats comes in regular, honey roasted, with strawberries and with almonds; Cheerios has multi-grain and eight other flavours, like apple cinnamon, honey nut or berry burst. This constant variation may be part of a marketing plan directed at children, and Charles Camp notes that children revel in what is new, novel and hybridized (1989:108). Cereal producers seem to understand this as they devise different ways to present variants of the same product. Quite frequently, "new" is predominantly displayed on such new improved products. It also has to do with "built-in obsolescence" trends started in 1950s and 1960s (May Bender 1975:15).



Photo 1: The Cereal Aisle.

Cereal boxes are designed with different formats and colours, depending on the intended target audience of either children or adults. Those designed for children typically are filled with more detail, and look extremely busy (Photo 1). To entice children, a number of cereals had games, activities and gifts included in the boxes. For example, there were series of CDs that included Trivial Pursuit. Another had Robots watches. Camp states that play is a way of embellishing the culture of food (1989:108) and there are strong elements of play and fun associated with children's cereal. For instance, Quaker Cinnamon Life cereal had a contest to create images out of the cereal encouraging children to play with the food in creative ways. It thus associates food with pleasure. Contest winners are essentially treated as celebrities or heroes having their picture shown on the box side panels. Rice Krispies provided patterns to make edible shapes out of their cereal, and the front of Captain Crunch cereal boxes had in bold letters, "Fun and Play." Children's fruit flavoured cereals tended to be sugary, suggesting a cross between candy and food. The lines demarcating what is food have been blurred by some parts of the food industry and this is apparent for cereal products. Companies use elements of play and fun to promote their cereals because it is a solid selling point attractive to children.

Cereal Themes, Text and Images

Kellogg's

Kellogg's has several lines of cereals that can be categorized by themes. There are healthy cereals that focus on high fibre and weight loss. All Bran Buds, All Bran Original, All Bran Strawberry Bites and All Bran Flakes fall into this category. They have a red heart motif which as a folk symbol of love can have many meanings. Kellogg's uses it as a symbol to denote a product that is heart healthy. The All Bran and the Strawberry Bites boxes have wheat shafts that in folklore symbolize the staff of life and wholesome goodness. The Raisin Bran box has a stylized sun, a ritual symbol that has been worshipped by many religions, and means power and warmth. Strawberry Bites has a proverbial-type slogan, "Make

Bran Your Friend,” that personifies bran and portrays bran as a hero who can save you from health problems.

Special K was developed in 1955 because of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg’s dream to create a health food or miracle food in the face of the popularity of sugary cereals at that time (Bruce and Crawford 1995:112). The bright red K probably represents Kellogg’s. However, it is possible that the idea for this cereal may have been in the spirit of K-rations because it was lightweight, small in volume and high in nutritional value. The meaning of K in K-rations is unknown. It started as a WWII army provision (Bruce and Crawford 1995:99). Eugene McKay who created Rice Krispies for Kellogg’s, also helped develop WWII K-rations (Bruce and Crawford 1995: 99). Special K now is available in soya, carb-fit, Special K red berry and vanilla almond, and its advertising is associated with weight loss specifically targeting women. For example, there is a silhouette of a slim female figure on the package of regular Special K (Photo 2).



Photo 2: Silhouette in the Background

Kellogg's has a few other cereals that are designed for the health-conscious. The company offers a number of multigrain cereals and other cereals that are promoted as meal replacements. Kellogg's Vector has a large "V" spanning the entire front of the cereal box. V is also the traditional sign for victory or the victor, or champion (Photo 3). Kellogg's Vector is an official sponsor of Canadian Olympic athletes in training. The ad slogan is "Fuel Up" which infers if you eat this cereal you will become a powerful human machine, or a hero, like athletes. A close cousin to Vector is Tony's Turboz, which uses the corporate character of "Tony the Tiger" as an energy powerhouse because he eats Turboz. Tony signifies "greatness," power, and strength. He is the all-American male stereotype. Sometimes he is the symbol of a family man. Other times he is a sports jock affiliated with football, basketball and baseball, games that are truly traditional American symbols. In their own right, these symbols have their special folklore specific to these sports. The newest element is sponsorship for The Kids Help Line. The personified Tony is paired with the social ideal of helping others.



Photo 3: Nutrient Dense Meal Replacement.

The health appeal of certain cereals targets adults through using ideas of wholesomeness. An example of this is Corn Flakes that are available in three kinds: Honey Crunch, Banana Crunch and the original Corn Flakes. The original Corn Flake has been around for almost one hundred years. These boxes are plain except for the stylized classic rooster named Cornelius who has been a corporate character since the beginning of the company in 1906. A rooster is a folk motif for multiple cultures, and is a barnyard symbol associated with mornings and delivering the morning wake-up call. He is a reference to wholesome, country living that you can have vicariously by eating Corn Flakes. According to Gillian Dyer, Kellogg wanted to connect the rooster image to Corn Flakes and build on the rise and sunshine element (1982:120). Dyer also considers sunshine to be an emotive association linked to the product (1982:152). These images are like cultural icons that are relatively easy to grasp. It was interesting that a red maple leaf, that is symbolic of Canada, was used on some of the Corn Flake boxes to announce the newer nutrition labels. This indicates the level of institutional involvement with nutrition education.

The next category of cereal is one that targets both adults and children by combining fun and nutritional appeal. Kellogg's Rice Krispies uses the corporate characters of the Snap, Crackle and Pop elves that are easily recognized because they resemble the elf characters in the folktale "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves." In addition, three elves illustrate the law of three which is one of Axel Olrik's laws of folk narrative (Olrik 1909). The Chocolatey Marshmallow Rice Krispie Squares has a free gift inside of a Kidz Counter. The gift in cereal boxes, like any free gift, is meant to motivate children to get their parents to buy more cereal and to collect all versions of the prizes. There are also footprints on the Rice Krispie box meant to encourage kids to be physically active. The "Kidz Count" Mission or statement suggests being physically active, but it may also imply that children are important and valued in this culture. Thus, there can be many layers of meaning associated with these images.

Kellogg's sugar-coated Mini-Wheats also falls into the fun and nutritional category of cereal. The sugar is meant to entice the consumption of what would normally be a bland unappealing food. Mini-Wheats come in original, brown sugar and maple flavours. The Mini-Wheat (MW) hero is personified as the product and the product's character. MW uses a spoon as a paddle to canoe through a bowl of Mini-Wheats rapids. The maple Mini-Wheat is the whole-wheat version of the cereal, featuring a bottle of maple syrup and a maple leaf on the box. The syrup bottle's shape readily denotes a folk symbol, in particular for French Canadian culture.

Frosted Flakes and Cinnamon Frosted Flakes are in the category of sugary cereals marketed toward children. As noted above, cereal companies have blurred the lines between what is food and play and these foods can be classed as candy or dessert. The cereal companies have responded to the recent accusations that the current problem of childhood obesity is due in part to the consumption of junk cereals or fast foods, and Frosted Flakes is now available in a one-third less sugar version. Tony the Tiger is the corporate character for this product associated with the well known ad slogan, "They're Grrreat!" The tiger is a sports icon, and sports teams often use it as a mascot. The back of the Frosted Flakes cereal box shows Tony participating in active sports but there are a number of puzzles and

mazes provided there as well that encourage less active type of play and in a sense gives mixed messages.

The Froot Loops cereal created in 1964 falls into the category of sugary cereals. The current box in the supermarket has elements of folk culture and popular culture. It is available in a one-third less sugar version. The corporate character is Toucan Sam, known as Uncle Sam, since he has two nephews. Significantly, the namesake is an American icon embodying national pride and US Army recruitment; pairing of such symbols is common in ads (Richard 1992:29-46). Linking Froot Loops with Uncle Sam ensures recognition of the cereal. The playful character of Sam has a nose for recognizing the Froot Loops fruit flavours. Inside each cereal box there is a free Robots watch, from Robots the movie, thus tying the cereal to popular culture. There are five versions to collect ensuring repeat sales. Kelloggs Corn Pops, another sweet treat, offers the same prize with the wording “Collect All Five” on the box front and centre. Ads are written with word economy in dialogue form (Meider and Meider 1977:309). “Collect All Five” is a direct command, or an imperative.

Quaker

All Quaker products are easily identified because the logo itself is a stereotypical motif for the Quaker culture. The symbol represents purity and is the classical symbol for oats. Quaker Puff Rice and Puff Wheat, two of their oldest brands, have always had low salt, sugar and fat content. No adjustment has been made to these cereals in order to fit modern demands. Most of the Quaker products have the Heart Check symbol signifying their health benefits. The most popular cereals are Life Oat Bran and Life Cinnamon Swirl. However, Quaker brand cereals have a unique way of ensuring product loyalty for their Life Cinnamon Swirl. They have a contest “Design the Box” where children can make a design out of the cereal and enter it in the contest (Photo 4). If they are picked as a winner, their design becomes the box cover and their picture is featured on the box side panel. In this manner, the winner truly becomes a celebrity or, in a sense, attains hero status. This activity encourages children to play with food in a creative way and thus associates food with pleasure. The slogan “Kids Love Life” is both a double entendre and proverbial, an example of expressive folk culture and in itself is a positive metaphor for meaning in life. Also, Captain Crunch, the one sugary cereal that Quaker produces, has bold letters on the front of the package: “Fun and Play.” The use of the element of fun and play remains a major way to attract children to these products.



Photo 4: Design a Box Contest and Playing with Food.

General Mills

Whole grain oat Cheerios were originally created for military personnel, but in 1941 they were retailed to the general public (Bruce and Crawford 1995:98). Today, there are at least eight variations of the cereal: original, toddler, multigrain, apple cinnamon, honey nut, frosted, triple berry and berry burst (Photo 5). The original Cheerios are now sold in a box with a red heart bowl, and another small red heart in the lower corner, indicating support for the “Heart and Stroke, Mother and Daughter Walk” campaign. When the heart motif is paired with “mother,” it is a powerful cultural symbol of love and it has an emotive effect. Again, fitness is stressed. The Cheerio Apple Cinnamon cereal has a large red apple in the background (Photo 5). It is a proverbial reference to “an apple a day keeps the doctor away” signifying health. The bright red apple is also a motif in the folktale “Snow White” and in the legend of “Robin Hood,” in which good triumphs over evil, an excellent metaphor for Cheerios. The toddler Cheerios has a toddler’s cereal bowl on the box front and a mail-in offer for the popular culture storybook the Disney character “Baby Einstein.” This reflects the value that culture has on the importance of education. It suggests that Cheerios are the kinds of food chosen by parents who want their young children to thrive. The multigrain and the apple cinnamon Cheerios have a free CD-Rom offer. The package features popular culture characters Sponge Bob Square Pants and Dora the Explorer

geared to younger children—and for older children basketball hero Michael Jordan with the NBA logo and popular culture trivia games. The hard sell approach of “Collect all 6” is front and centre of the box. The CD promotion saturates the boxes of other cereals such as Cinnamon Toast Crunch, French Toast Crunch, Lucky Charms, Lucky Charms whole grain, Reese Puffs, and the Nesquik Bunny. There are two versions of each, one with the CD and one without, which impresses upon you that this is a limited time offer.



Photo 5: Apple for Health.

The Lucky Charms cereal, which has been around for four decades, uses folklore motifs. The frosted oat cereal is itself shaped into familiar folk motifs that are related to good luck. For example, there are rainbows, pots of gold, shooting stars, horseshoes, and four leaf clovers or shamrocks. As an icon of Irish culture, Lucky the Leprechaun, is appropriately dressed in green, the colour is symbolic of the Eire Isle and the colour of Irishness. Lucky the Leprechaun is linked to the Irish folk belief of fairies and magic. If you eat the cereal, it is implied that vicariously you become part of that magic.

The General Mills Reese Puffs cereal directly references sugar and candy. Reese is a manufacturer of candy and even the bowl on the front of the package is in the form of a Reese's pleated candy bar cup. This cereal makes a bold statement for candy over food, as does the Nesquick Bunny and Count Chocula cereals. The Count character imitates the Dracula character in popular culture and while children may perceive the Count to be a Hallowe'en figure, he is also a folklore figure.

Post

Post has five cereals that share one central element in the graphics of the package. These are Grapenuts, Original Shredded Wheat, Spoon Size Shredded Wheat, 100% Bran and Spoon Size Wheat and Bran. The common element is a yellow heart and a green ribbon banner which implies that this product can reduce the risk of heart disease (Photo 6). Like the other brand names, the heart is used to stress the product's health benefits and the motif is common in folk cultures and rituals. The ribbon banner implies the product is a winner, as ribbons are symbolic of awards and denote a champion. Some boxes have the symbolic wheat shaft, the representation of the staff of life. The uncomplicated designs on these boxes are geared toward adult consumers and there are no corporate characters, fun elements, or free prizes. One exception is Wheatabix cereal. The adult style box has many wheat shafts and a mail-in offer for an MP3 player. In contrast, Post's sugary cereals, like Alphabits, Sugar Crisp, and Honeycombs have playful presentations that target children. The Alphabits letter-shaped cereal lends itself to creative food play, as children can make words from it.

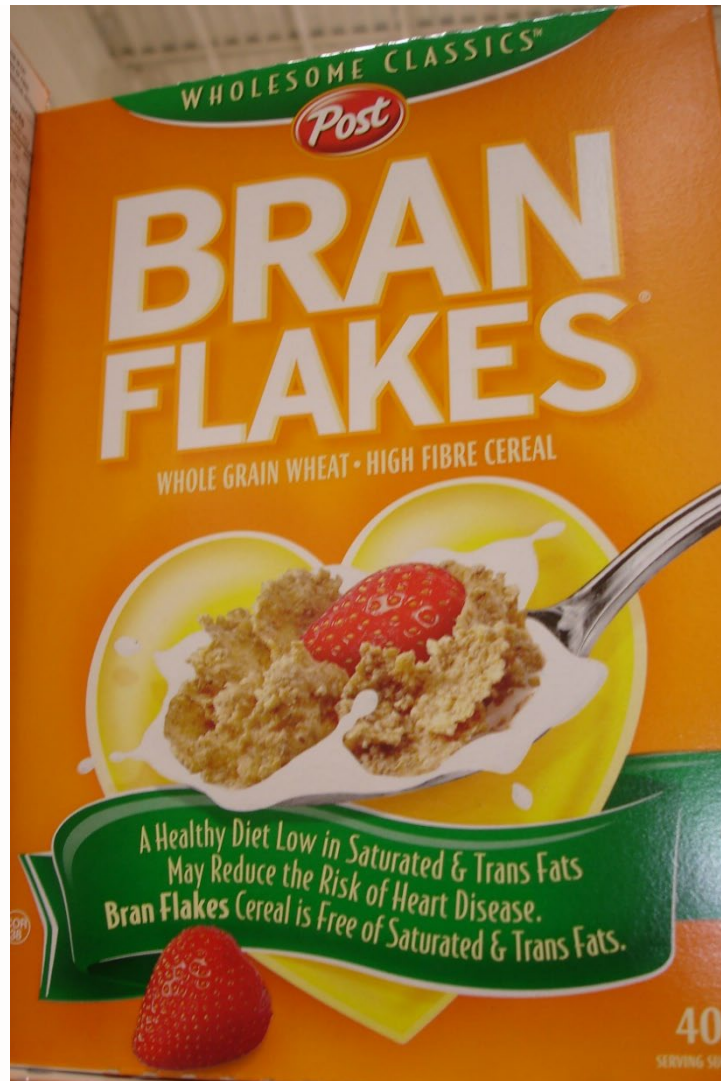


Photo 6: Hearts as Health Symbol.

As consumers, adults tend to seek what is familiar and, unlike children, sometimes avoid the clutter of newer things (Camp 1989:108). Adult cereal boxes are more simply presented and geared toward health, nutrition and weight loss issues. The bran cereals have heart symbols in some form indicating this is for heart health and for reducing heart and stroke risks. According to Roger Griffin and Stanley Sacharow, humans have physiological and psychological reactions to colour (1978:218) and generally the adult cereal boxes use subdued colours such as white, soft yellows, dark blue, and dark purple, suggesting a serious approach. In advertising, white is perceived as female and dark blue as male.

Cereal-Related Eating Habits and Memories

After completing the cereal aisle survey at Sobeys supermarket I spoke with nine people from the Avalon region of Newfoundland and several expatriates now living outside the province about their

cereal-eating habits. They referred to cereal in relation to their childhood and that of their children's. The respondents were Gordon (age 63) and Michael (age 22) of Placentia; Murray (age 40), Bob (age 56) and Charlotte (age 48) of Logy Bay; Jack (age 40) of Torbay; Lori (age 38) of St. Philips; and expatriates Faye (age 58) and Wendy (age 47).

Michael, a young academic, named Kellogg's Vector as his favourite cereal. As a child he and his brother ate Kellogg's Just Right, Shreddies, Cheerios and Kellogg's Raisin Bran. They were allowed Coco Puffs and Froot Loops as a special Christmas treat. As a student in residence at Memorial University, he mixed three to four sugary cereals to eat when he did not like the dining hall desserts. When alone at breakfast, he likes to read the back of the cereal boxes—particularly the nutritional breakdown--while eating. He described it as something like waiting-room behaviour; he does it to occupy his mind. He considers it as something most people tend to do. His comments are in line with Bruce and Crawford's observation that box literature has the ability to inspire some writers (1995:262).

Gordon shared a personal experience narrative from when he was seven years old living in Point Verde (near Placentia, Newfoundland) in mid 1950s. He responded to a Kelloggs Corn Flakes mail-in offer for red binoculars for which he had to send in box tops with a quarter. He recalls the excitement of picking up the parcel from the Post Mistress who only opened the post office in her house when people came to get their mail. The binoculars were made from cheap plastic but to him it did not matter that the paint flaked off easily. The childhood thrill of receiving mail remains with him. As a child, he ate Corn Flakes for breakfast with a blend of half hot water and Carnation Evaporated Milk (tinned milk was a food staple during this time period in relatively isolated Newfoundland communities), and sprinkled with sugar. He still eats it this way for breakfast minus the sugar.

Murray (a St. John's resident originally from Lockport, Nova Scotia) indicated he never ate ready-to-eat cereal growing up because he hated the milk mixed from skim milk powder and water that his mother made for them. He remembers his Uncle Murray having a large orange bag of puff rice from which he ate a large bowl every day with hot milk and sugar. The hot milk shrank the rice and made it mushy. Murray began eating ready-to-eat cereal at university in the 1980s. He too recalls using it as a snack food, and having baked party mix of Cheerios, Chex, pretzels and garlic powder. Today, he eats Raisin Bran. His daughter liked sugary cereals as a child, but he and his wife allowed it only as a special Christmas treat. His daughter and his wife now eat Vector.

Wendy has two sons. Cereal is her youngest son's favourite food. She indicated he would eat cereal for every meal if she allowed it. His absolute favourite is oatmeal in any form, hot or cold, at anytime. When he was little, he referred to it as "oatme" and the family still affectionately refers to it with his term. According to her, it is great that cereals with CD games are not the worst kind to eat, because it does not result in confrontations with her children. The boys love playing games like trivia, so game CDs are perfect. She avoids buying sweet cereals as they make her son hyperactive. These cereals are reserved for traditional or special times like Christmas, or at Grandmas' cottage where they have Froot Loops or Lucky Charms. Wendy believes there is something sinister about cereals like Count Chocula

that turn milk either brown or pink. To her, the colour transfer makes it obvious these foods have additives and are not good to consume.

Jack has two daughters who are seven and eight years old. Sugary cereals are the norm and are eaten daily for breakfast. One daughter prefers Lucky Charms, the other Froot Loops, and both like the new Dino Egg Quaker cereal.

Lori from St. Phillip's does not give her sons sweet cereals as it makes them hyperactive. They prefer whole grain cereals that stay crunchy in milk, as they dislike soggy textures. If they dislike dinner, she gives them cereal as a meal replacement, or uses it as a bedtime snack. The Quaker Dino cereal is a favourite. Lori described the cereal as looking like opaque egg candies, but when you add hot water, the outside dissolves and little candy-like dinosaurs are revealed. Because it is made of oatmeal, she considers it is not bad for them. Dino Eggs sounds like an interactive product that engages children. It must seem magical to children transforming oatmeal into a fun/play item. Interestingly, Lori referred to it as "candy eggs".

Charlotte Sheppard of Logy Bay grew up in Torbay, in a household of 11 siblings. They ate hot cereals for breakfast and cold cereal as bedtime snacks. She spoke of rolling up her sleeve and "diving" into the cereal box to find the prize. As siblings, they fought amongst themselves for the prize. Her husband Bob originally from Cormack, Newfoundland, recalls eating mostly hot oatmeal for breakfast as a child. When their daughters were young, they ate ready-to-eat cereals and this marked a notable generational change in the family's eating habits.

I found many examples of ad slogans or catch-phrases for cereals that became part of folk expressive culture. Robert Sheppard remembered "Tall Up with Corn Flakes." It suggests eating cornflakes made you grow tall, and was a Kellogg's ad campaign from the mid-1960s (Bruce and Crawford 1995:187). When I asked Gordon about eating Corn Flakes, without prompting he said "Ooooh that's Corny," but he did not know its origin. The phrase was part of a 1962 ad campaign promoting the idea that Kellogg's had the corniest corn flakes. It was in response to a General Mills rival version of corn flakes, and Kellogg's ran a series of corny puns in radio ads to counter the competition (Bruce and Crawford 1995:167). The phrase was popular in North America. Michael also recalled a Trix cereal ad "Silly Rabbit, Trix Are For Kids," and reported using the phrase as a sarcastic or cynical way of making a comment on something. The nouns can change, but it is said in the same sing-song way as on the TV to convey a mocking message. He said the term is used in his peer group. His example was "Silly Michael (Rabbit), Grants are for Profs." Although no one in his peer group uses the phrase in this way, he has heard it used as a slur or insult about a person's gender, sexual orientation or race. He also noted that if something was on TV in 1980s it is cool to refer to it in 2005. Faye Jones, an expatriate, often heard her mother-in-law say "he is feeling his Cheerios today," in reference to Faye's father-in-law. It means someone who was sexually frisky, or tipsy from alcohol. Some understand it as an expression of a young man "sowing his wild oats," or to refer to sexual promiscuity. The roots of this expression are located in the history of Cheerios that were earlier called "Cheerioats" and designed for military personnel; in 1943 General Mills coined the term "He's Feeling His Cheerioates," (Bruce and Crawford 1995:98).

There was a familiarity with other cereal-related expressions used to convey ideas that respondents shared with me. For example, the term “Crunchy Granola,” was something everyone in the study understood to refer to a personality type; it denotes an earthy person, an intelligent nerd, or a creative eccentric. Murray said he knew the term “He had his Wheaties this morning,” indicating an energetic person. Apparently Frank Sinatra attributed his sexual virility to eating Wheaties every morning, but General Mills prefers sports celebrities to promote Wheaties (Bruce and Crawford 1995:169). Murray reported hearing the saying, “who pissed in his/her Corn Flakes,” especially at work to refer to an upset person in a crabby or sour mood, but he never uses it. Interestingly most people I talked to were familiar with this expression, but noted they did not use it. When I gave the Corn Flake example to prompt their memories Murray offered another variation: “What did you put in your Corn Flakes this morning?” which means someone in an energetic or lively mood.

Finally, as a child, I remember playing the “wish Corn Flake” game although no one else I spoke to, other than my siblings, seemed to remember playing this game. If you found an extra large flake in the Corn Flake box it was a wish Corn Flake. You make a wish before eating it and the belief was that your wish came true.

Even though this was a small cross section of nine people, some patterns emerged. For example, the older respondents ate dry cereals hot and mushy, or hot oatmeal for breakfast. It was important to start the day with a hot meal and to end the day with a cold snack. For the younger consumers, cold cereal was the preference over hot; it can be eaten as a meal replacement or a snack before bedtime, as well as a breakfast food. Except for one exception, the parents did not like to give their young children sugary cereals; these were considered special treats for special occasions and were sometimes regarded as part of family traditions. It is also interesting that the adults have taken advertising slogans and catch-phrases and created their own expressions that are meaningful. Again, this demonstrates a flow of exchange from advertising to folklore and from folklore to advertising, as outlined by Smith in his sequential model (1991:127, 129).

Conclusion

The study of advertising and cereal is far more complex than can be explored in a brief research note. Originally cereals were introduced as a way of treating health problems. With commercialization, ready-to-eat cereals developed into a product often laden with sugar, often specifically targeting children, and today many are a far cry from their roots as a health food. Although still marketed as a breakfast food, cereal is eaten as a snack, bedtime lunch, dessert, or for a special treat on a special occasion. Cereals today with lower sugar content have come full circle, representing a return to the idea of eating as a way of controlling many health problems. Ready-to eat cereal can be both healthy and unhealthy; it often represents a convenient and fun food.

Contemporary cereal boxes can send mixed messages. For example, being physically active and having a healthy diet is stressed on some products yet the same company may be selling varieties of sugary

cereal that are low in nutrition. That said, cereal manufacturers successfully blur the lines of fun and food in ways that are very entertaining and keep consumers coming back for more. Cereals are “edible entertainment” (Bruce and Crawford 1995: 263). Advertisers of cereal also offer young consumers something that many find irresistible: the possibility of becoming a hero, or at least of feeling important. When Gordon received a mail-in offer from Kellogg’s in the 1950s in Point Verde, he felt special. For a child at that time in his community, receiving mail was an important event. The reward was not only a toy but a feeling of importance that went with it. It is probably equal to how the children feel as winners of the “Design The Box” competition and getting featured on the Life Cinnamon Swirl cereal box. Cereal companies promise children that celebrity status is possible and attainable. These tactics are successful in part due to marketer’s incorporation of folklore symbols and ideas. In turn cereal-related eating habits, advertising motifs and expressions have become a familiar, albeit often unselfconscious, part of people’s lives.

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