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Eating 'Monkey food' good for your health

I was reading about the healing powers of the coconut yesterday in a health magazine, which set me to thinking about the first time I ever saw one and very reluctantly ate it.

My dad was one of those people who loved trying out new things and whenever he went to the city, which was not all that often, he always brought something special and exotic back for all of us. And believe me, even an orange was special and exotic on the road allowance in the 1940s.

We, my siblings and cousins, would wait, excitedly watching the road all day guessing what it might be this time. On this day we all raced out to meet him as he rode into the yard.

"Daddy what did you bring?" we screamed as he lifted the big white bag lying across the front of his saddle.

"I brought you monkey food," he said as he climbed down and carefully laid the bag on the ground and turned to unsaddle the horse. "And you leave it alone," he told my brother he was feeling the bag's contents.

"They're big and round," Ray whispered to us as he got up and raced to the house so he could be the first to announce the news.

"Mom, Mom, Daddy has monkey food!"

Turning the horse loose in the corral, dad picked up the bag and we all followed him to the woodpile where our uncles were stacking wood. By now our mom and the nokoms had joined us. As we watched breathlessly, Dad opened the bag and took out a giant hairy brown ball. He handed it to Cheechum, our great-grandmother.

"Ay aht tow way stum aht ahn nokom. I bought this for you grandmother," Dad said.

"Wahtstuchahch!" our Cheechum said as she turned the ball over and we all crowded around.

"Mitoni mine ahksew. It does not look very good, grandson."

"And daddy we're not monkeys," I said disappointed. "We can't eat it."

"Yes we can," he answered, sending my brother for a hammer and a big nail. "We can eat it and drink it too. So go get some cups."

We all raced off returning with enough tin cups for everyone and leaned in close to watch him as he put the nail on the top of the ball and gently tapped it with the hammer 'til the nail went in. Then tipping it over, he poured it into Cheechum and nokom's cups.

"Monkee ahpoi," our uncle Alex chuckled as the old ladies, after a lot of coaxing, took a small mouthful, then another.

"Eey, weekahsin ooma. This is very good." Dad poured the rest of the monkey juice for the nokoms as our uncles opened the others and shared the juice among us. It

was wonderful. While we drank and marveled at the taste, dad chopped the balls open and into small pieces which he handed around.

“Mamma, this tastes like coconut,” my brother Ben said chewing the soft white meat. And right he was, only this was much tastier and softer than the small bag of shredded coconut Mamma bought from the Watkins man to sprinkle on the Christmas cake and cookies.

As we sat around the woodpile on that warm summer day, Dad told us that coconut grew on tall, tall trees called palms on an island in the middle of the ocean called Hay why ee. He said it was very hot there and that the natives and the monkeys ate coconut every day.

“Just like us and bears,” he laughed. “We eat blueberries everyday if we can.”

Many years later, I went to that island in the middle of the ocean and I sat under a tall palm tree and drank coconut milk and ate coconut meat and remembered that summer day.

This magazine was interesting, it said that coconuts are indigenous to the Pacific Rim and South Asia and that they, the coconuts, first immigrated to North America on ocean currents without the aid of humans. American native people found them on the beaches. The coconut meat, water and oil, the magazine said, is all powerful medicine and has many healing properties. It cures all kinds of aches and pains, purifies the blood and slows down the progression of Alzheimer’s.

Fresh coconut water is also one of the richest sources of electrolytes known to medicine. It has the same electrolyte balance as found in human blood and during World War II, in the Pacific, both the Americans and their allies as well as the Japanese, regularly used coconut water siphoned directly from the nut to give emergency plasma transfusions to wounded soldiers. That is pretty amazing!

Well not really. I am reminded that my nokoms always said that all indigenous plants are medicinal to their people and that they must always be treated with the same respect we give each other or are supposed to give each. And with that, have a good Christmas all of you and a wonderful O Chay too kee sikow. Kissing Day.

And start eating more munkeesis mee chi win in the New Year for your good health.