

Food: 1 Me: 0

On trying to win the healthy-food wars. By Sandra Hume

A friend of mine was laughing over a woman in the grocery store, who was sharing product labels with her five-year-old, teaching her which ingredients to avoid.

"At five! Can you imagine?" And I laughed along with her, because the way she told it, it was sort of funny. But I was also thinking: *I do that.*

When I had only myself to feed, food was simple. At gunpoint I'm not sure I could tell you exactly what sustained me as a single twentysomething. I know Froot Loops were involved. Hot meals usually meant boiling pasta water and emptying a jar of something

learned, I've stood my ground, and I've changed my mind. But the food wars are a whole 'nother battlefield with a Settlers of Catan level of complexity, and I fear I am not up to the fight.

It's not that I'm not well-versed. I read my Michael Pollan and am down with Jamie Oliver. I don't think naturally occurring fat is evil, and anyone who tries to feed me or my kids artificial sweeteners (including sneaking it into food and slapping on the low-sugar label—I'm looking at you, SUCRALOSE) is on my list.

I've used everything in my arsenal. Yes, I've forced them to read (and pronounce) ingredients. Fed them sushi before they knew they shouldn't like it. Took them to Café VINO when the rest of the world would rather see them at Chuck E. Cheese.

I'll never surrender; I've seen my kids on empty carbs and Red Dye 40. Throw insufficient sleep into the mix, and they become another species. I try to tell them this, to help them draw a conclusion between what they eat and how they feel, but it's hard to listen to Mom when your eyes are glowing.

But not only can I not win the food fight, there's no end in sight. Here's why.

The enemy is a moving target. This isn't the cold war where evil is Darth Vaderesque or confined to that side of the wall. It's the cafeteria serving barely edible lunches. It's

the classroom that rewards with candy or does mathematics exercises with Lucky Charms. It's Frito-Lay and Kraft targeting your kids as consumers. It's the fact that cotton candy comes in cool colors. It's Laffy Taffy.

My kids have opinions. This is no longer a dictatorship. I can't serve my kids only produce and whole-grain bread and call it good. Refined carbs and brand names have a say. If my son could have a corn dog for breakfast, he would.

My kids have friends. Not only is this not a dictatorship, lobbyists abound. Influence is widespread and constantly changing.

I have friends. No one wants to be the mom who ruins it for everyone else, or whose strawberries or sliced apples sit untouched while the kids duke it out for the Doritos.

Grandparents exist. Unless I'm paying them, I don't dictate what others should feed my children (mostly; see: artificial sugar). As a result, I've deduced that it takes roughly one day of nutritional detox per day of vacation at Grandma's. If this equation helps you, you're welcome.

I'm a hypocrite. Even though it's been over a decade since I've sampled any meat from McDonald's, I still think their fries (ideally fresh from the oil, and salted only once) are golden strings of ecstasy. I also have an unhealthy affection for gummi candy. The sour kind.

Oh God, the snacks. Like the fact that every. Single. Activity. Requires a snack. Because kids can't go 45 minutes without Goldfish or Fruit Leather. Or that snack time—at school, at camp—is adequate for scarfing down a fun-size pack of Cheetos but not nearly long enough to consume an apple.

I'm defeated. If you're looking for me, I'll be at Spooner's, fishing the gummi worms out of my kids' yogurt. †

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red. But once I had kids, thanks to—forgive me—diaper changing, I faced living, breathing proof that “you are what you eat.” And the game changed.

In my eleven years as a parent, I've withstood the breastfeeding debates, the stay-at-home-vs.-work analyses, and the red-shirting kindergartener brouhaha. I've listened and