

FROM WHERE I SIT

JOHN COONEY

The Cake

Grandmothers are meant to be soft. Everyone knows that. But I'm married to a grandmother who's so soft she's squishy! When it comes to doing stuff for her grandkids, she's always been a pushover. And, these days, she doesn't even need to be pushed! Like, several weeks back, when her oldest grandson ordered yet another birthday cake ...

My wife, you see, who's big on tradition, has this thing about kids' birthday cakes. For almost 40 years, she's insisted on making them, baking them, icing them and decorating them. The habit started when our firstborn was a toddler, and has grown through the decades as 12 grandkids have added their birth-dates to her diary.

She's made, by my reckoning, more than 200 birthday cakes. And each kid each year has been allowed to choose their cake's design. I've tried to stay out of it (as any man would), but these one-woman working-bees have, with increasing frequency, robbed me of sleep and turned my tidy home into a bomb-site. And no amount of sighing, complaining, and oh-not-again-ing on my part has caused my stubborn lady to break with tradition.

However, this foolishness reached new heights last month as our oldest grandson approached his 21st birthday ...

His grandmother asked, "What sort of cake would you like me to make?" And he, recalling the little train-plus-carriage cake he'd had on his



third birthday, said, "Another train, please ... BUT WITH 21 CARRIAGES!"

Now, he was joking, of course. And what my wife SHOULD have said was, "Yeah, RIGHT!" (like they do on those *Tui Beer* ads). But, instead, she said, "Okay!" – and launched herself into a week-long cake-making frenzy.

She scoured the shops for cake-mix (if *Betty Crocker* is missing from your supermarket shelves, it's because my wife grabbed the lot). She nearly blew the motor on her *Kenwood Chef* (the machine

was *smoking* – I saw it). And she soon had lashings of goo splashed from one end of the kitchen to the other.

As carriage-sized cakes began spilling from the oven, I asked helpful questions – like “How much LONGER is this gonna take?” “How many MORE have you gotta make?” “Where on earth are you gonna PUT all these things?” And “Why did you agree to such a STUPID request?”

But she just sent me off to the shops in search of more cake-mix ...

As hours merged into days and days became a week, her train just grew and grew. And, ignoring my advice that she downsize or simplify, my wife announced that each carriage would be iced in a different colour – and decorated with chocolate biscuits for wheels, chocolate mint-sticks for trims, chocolate *Smarties* for hubs, and coloured popcorn for contents.

By this stage it was obvious: she was crazy! And when the tension got too much (which it did, from time to time), I simply had to go and watch TV.

The first carriage she showed me looked GREAT! But it had taken HOURS to make. And when I pointed out (with love in my voice) that, at this rate, our grandson would be 23 or 24 before his birthday cake was finished, she begged me to help.

Against my better judgement, I agreed ...

In the wee small hours on the night before our grandson's party, his train-with-21-carriages was finally finished. Bucketsful of cake-mix had been cooked ... acres of icing had been rolled out ... 90 wheels had been attached ... hundreds of *Smarties* had been stuck on ... handfuls of popcorn had been piled on top ... and authentic-looking popcorn 'smoke' had been added to the smoke-stack up-front.

Bookshelves off bedroom walls had been turned into sections of track ... sugar-coated lolly-loops now coupled the completed carriages together ... and a chocolate-covered cow-catcher had been fitted to the engine (by myself, as a clever finishing-touch).

The cake was now fully FIVE METRES LONG! And it all cost less than an overseas trip! We may have to sell our house once the credit-card bills are in, but that's what grandparents are for.

Right? 

GRAPEVINE'S FOUNDER/EDITOR SAYS THIS PROVES THAT YOU CAN HAVE YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT AND HAVE IT AND EAT IT AND HAVE IT AND EAT IT TOO. BUT HE'S SERIOUSLY THINKING OF LEAVING THE COUNTRY WHEN HIS OTHER ELEVEN GRANDKIDS TURN 21 ...

THORT



If, instead of talking to your plants, you yelled at them, would they grow up troubled and insecure?