

# Roots in Ripon

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*Chuck Roots*

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## The Ecstasy of Chocolate

Chocolate! The word alone elicits delicious memories of moments of absolute taste bud euphoria which can only truly be experienced by a true lover of the cocoa bean and its eventual liquid, solid or powdered form.

The makers of chocolate are known as chocolate makers by creating chocolate from cocoa beans and other ingredients. This is not to be confused with chocolatiers. A chocolatier is a person or company who makes confectionary from chocolate. Confectionery is also called sweets, or candy. In any event, chocolate is the end result of their efforts. Bless them!

As a kid my favorite chocolate bars were Three Musketeers and Baby Ruth. While in Marine Corps boot camp our training period ended just after Christmas of 1969. Since we had performed very well during our training, winning many honors for our drill instructors, we were told we could receive some Christmas goodies from home. Even with this permission being announced I was unwilling to take the chance so I wrote my parents and family members and specifically instructed them not to send me any goodies. They complied and I was spared the humiliation of possibly having to eat a whole lot of chocolate or other sweet, gooey stuff which more than likely would have wreaked havoc on my innards.

Days before Christmas small packages began arriving for guys in my platoon. Each evening during mail call these packages would be handed to the intended recipient who would take his prize and hoard it in his foot locker. I was relieved to see that the drill instructors did not make any of these guys eat all of their stash in one sitting as I had feared. However, one of the guys hailing from Louisiana was a bona fide Cajun. Cajuns are primarily residents in southern Louisiana having descended from French colonists who had settled in Acadia, an area in ancient Greece. This fellow received a box of homemade chocolate brandy balls from his grandmother. He and his bunkmate ate the entire box that evening. Since our body's systems had not been exposed to anything remotely this sweet, and certainly nothing alcoholic during this closely confined training period of several months, the impact on these two guys was pretty severe. They were a mess the next day, giving the rest of us a good laugh at the expense of their misery.

Since I was a squad leader, I was quick to notice that one of the guys in my squad had received a care package. As he opened the box I noticed a Baby Ruth right on top. I sidled up to him putting a fatherly arm around his shoulders. He wasn't sure what was coming. That's when I asked him, "Who's your favorite squad leader?" He sheepishly acknowledged that I was. "Then I'm sure you won't mind parting with that Baby Ruth sitting there," I said. He looked at me, then he handed me the candy bar. I took my newly acquired prize and sat on my bunk just staring at my treasure. I was torn by desire. I wanted desperately to eat the delicacy right then and there. But I didn't want the craving for it to end just yet. So I slipped the

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candy bar inside my pillow case. For several nights I would slide it out of its hiding place and just gaze upon it. I could smell the chocolate through the wrapper, increasing my longing to consume it, but I denied myself each night. One evening the drill instructors announced that they were very aware that some of us were hiding away candy which would no longer be permitted since Christmas was now past and we were preparing to graduate from boot camp. So the word was given: Eat it tonight, or throw it away.

The moment had arrived! I could delay no longer. The coveted candy bar, the longed-for Baby Ruth was to be eaten. It was delightfully delicious! I don't know that I've ever enjoyed a candy bar as much as I did that one.

I still enjoy chocolate as much as I ever did, only now I get it in different ways. When I first arrived in Ripon in 1998 as the new pastor for the Free Methodist Church, I discovered a quaint restaurant two blocks from the church with the unique name, *The Bakery*, since that is what it was originally. It was a throw-back to the 20s & 30s with a soda fountain, counter and stools, and tables and banquet chairs. One of the gals who worked in there at the time was Carla. I noticed the old style milkshake mixer and asked if they still made them. She assured me they did, so I promptly ordered a chocolate milkshake. Carla topped it off with whipped cream and even gave me what was left in the silver canister, just like the old days. Exquisite!

Another way I enjoy chocolate today is from Starbucks where I occasionally order a hot Mocha. My daughter Laura also makes awesome chocolate chip cookies. And then there is the rare treat of Oreo Cookies and milk. The chocolate biscuit part of the Oreo is perfect! No other cookie comes close.

So after all these reminiscences of chocolate, what do I read in the news today? "The Newest Party Drug is Chocolate." What? Yup. I read it right. Apparently in Europe this is a new fad and is catching on in the USA too. The hip thing is to snort chocolate as a recreational drug. "Raw chocolate or cocoa is taken in drink, pill or powdered form," the article states.

I'm irked. There's just something obscenely wrong about this misuse of chocolate. Is nothing sacred anymore?

My favorite comfort food is now a comfort food of sorts for the drug culture. I need a chocolate milkshake!