

Jell-O For Adults Only

by Lynne Belluscio

We've been receiving e-mails from irate Jell-O pudding consumers about the recent Jell-O pudding television ads. The two commercials that I have seen show parents scaring the daylights out of their kids to keep them from eating the "adults only" pudding. I have to admit, I think they are out of line for what has always been a family food.

I had been forewarned when I called New York and talked with the Jell-O marketing people. They weren't fond of the new advertising that had been developed by Jell-O's new advertising agency. The new ads were supposed to be "edgy" and I guess they are. Now when I get an e-mail complaining, I explain that we are not owned nor are we part of Jell-O and I strongly urge the sender to call the Jell-O consumer number on the side of the Jell-O box. I forward the e-mail on to New York so they can see the stuff we are dealing with.

As I told the marketing folks, this isn't the first time Jell-O tried an edgy ad campaign targeting the adult market. In fact, the painting of Jack and the Bean Stalk that is in the library is pretty scary. The giant is grabbing for Jack who is trying to climb down the bean stalk with a crate of Jell-O in his arm. The giant is pretty mean looking, but that image doesn't say that Jell-O isn't for kids.

However in 1923, Jell-O ran an ad in the January *Harper's Bazaar* that caused quite a commotion. I had read about the ad in a magazine published by General Foods about the illustrators who created the magazine ads. Guy Rowe, who signed his work "GIRO" started working for Jell-O in 1921. His illustrations are some of my favorites. The Jell-Os are jewel-like. Almost like a photograph. Unfortunately we do not have any of his original illustrations, but I always ask visitors, "If you had to paint a molded Jell-O, how would you make it look transparent?" I found out a few years ago that Rowe often painted on acetate - like an illustrated movie cell.

In 1922, Frank LaBounty, the advertising manager for Jell-O



asked Rowe to create an image for upscale magazines, so Rowe painted two women in very stylish clothing with an exposed décolletage. On the table is a dish of Jell-O. The caption is in French, which translated means - "It looks so fancy but is easy." As soon as the ad appeared, Jell-O began receiving complaints. The ad was not family oriented. "Its style was so far in advance of the times that it created a furore, letters of protest flooded the mail and there was nothing to do but wait for the storm to subside."

I was led to believe that the ad was immediately pulled from the upscale magazines, and appeared only in the January issues. I had never seen an original of the ad and didn't have a copy in the collection. Several years ago, I asked Becky Tousey at the Kraft Foods archives in Morton Grove, Illinois if she had ever seen the ad and she said they had one in their collection. She sent me a color copy which I put in our files. In the margin she wrote that the ad appeared in the 1923 January

issue of *Harper's Bazaar*.

Every so often I'd try to find that issue of *Harper's Bazaar*, but never did. I asked Becky to

send a scan of the original and she told me that she had loaned the ad and it had never been returned. So a week ago while browsing eBay I thought I'd try to find the magazine and sure enough a copy was listed, but it was missing the cover. The price - even with the cover missing - - was almost twice that of other issues of *Harper's Bazaar*.

I e-mailed the seller and asked if there was a Jell-O ad inside and at first they couldn't find it. (Of course it didn't have Jell-O in big red letters as usual and the dish of Jell-O is pretty small.) But then they found the ad on the inside of the back cover. It had a tear in it, but they'd be willing to sell just the ad. So I bought a torn copy of the GIRO ad. I noticed that they have put the rest of the magazine - - without the covers back up on eBay. I should mention that I think I discovered why that issue was worth so much more than others. It seems that it features the first article about Coco Chanel's "little black dress.") I will continue to look for the ad in better condition, but for the time being, the ad is in the summer exhibit of "Curiosities" - - a Jell-O ad that was used once and disappeared.

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