

## A Kitchen Sponge “Aha” Moment

*By Jo Schloeder*

While flipping through the women’s section of my local newspaper, I came across a headline that caught my eye, “Tips to improve your life,” it boasted. What a novel idea, I thought. I can toss out the self-help books, forego the visits to the therapist, and improve the quality of my life simply by reading my newspaper. How silly of me not to have tried this before. So, without hesitation, I began to read the words of wisdom waiting for the one tip that would cause an “Ah ha” moment in my life, and make me thinner, smarter, wealthier, and/or prettier than before. It’s sheer genius.

But, alas, no such “Ah ha” happened. Much to my chagrin, there were no thinner/prettier/wealthier tips. There were, however, several little ditties about the 101 cleaning uses of seltzer, how to extend foundation makeup by mixing it with your moisturizer, and one about the importance of drilling holes in storage boxes to air out winter boots...all about as critical to my daily existence as the theories of quantum physics and molecular quantum mechanics.

Then I came across one that had me both roaring with laughter and shuddering in distress. The tip, subtitled “Keep it Clean,” pointed out that the dirtiest thing in your kitchen was most likely the sponge that you use to clean everything else. It went on to detail how those porous yellow scrubbies are storehouses of bacteria and a host of other vile germs, and should be sanitized daily in order to stay clean.

Daily? They’re kidding, right? Like I have time each day to sanitize my sponge? If it doesn’t smell like a sour, 5-day-old load of laundry that’s been sitting wet in the dark washing machine, I’m thinking it’s fairly sanitary. But, according to the article, one must wash and sanitize this popular cleaning tool by tossing it into the dishwasher nightly, soaking it for 15 minutes in a bleach-water solution, or popping it in the laundry with the whites on “scald.”

But the real kicker came when the article divulged that the average sink-side life of a sponge should be no more than three weeks. They’re joking, I mused, while putting away groceries, mopping up the mud tracked in by the dogs and pausing briefly to take a bite of the stale donut that was my breakfast. Three weeks? Surely I am not the only person who uses a sponge until the green scrubby side is hanging off like shreds of ripped fabric, and the soft yellow sponge disintegrating into little ochre-colored balls of unidentifiable mush on a clean plate.

I shuddered at the thought of the disease, toxins and grime to which I had unknowingly exposed my trusting family. Surely this was a ploy by the sponge-making industry to get us to buy more product? Well, it won’t work on me! I have decided that I can no longer subject my husband and child to the serious dangers of the viruses, microorganisms and other cooties that lurk in my kitchen sponge. So, from now on, it’s nothing but paper

plates in my house. No pots and pans, either. If I can't nuke it on paper in the microwave oven, it's not to be eaten at my place. Oh, yes, I realize that this will greatly increase the amount of take-out we will have to order, and I'll be forced not to spend afternoons cooking laborious meals and cleaning up all the dishes, but it is a sacrifice I am willing to make for my loving family.

Besides, if I were to throw the sponge in the washing machine, it would no doubt sit for several days with the laundry and stink like sour milk. This is the only safe alternative.

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