

## **Horace Horrise catches a Shoplifter**

Ravens patrol had just had what Horace would call a "fantastic evening." This was usually code for food having been consumed. Today was no exception. The scouts had finished their weekly troop meeting and Ravens were on their way home munching raspberry and Marmite pizza.

Scout Leader John, known to the scouts as "Skip," had introduced the evening as a "pizza oven" event and immediately the mention of a food word had the scouts' attention. "I've brought along four empty crisp boxes, one for each patrol. The other materials that your patrols will have at their disposal include a roll of silver foil, four metal coat hangers and some Sellotape. I'll also give you a pair of scissors and a thermometer. The crisp box is the basis of your oven...Yes Emily?"

Emily had already put her hand up in the air and was waving it frantically around as if trying randomly to swat a fly. For some reason, known only to children, it was impossible for adults to advance past the first in a series of instructions before one child would need some clarification even though, if they waited, the answer would invariably come further down the line and without any prompting. However, it did not matter how often this was explained, it was inevitable that the next time instructions were given, the scene would play itself out once more. John stopped talking and addressed Emily, raising an eyebrow.

"Please Skip, my mum has just spent thousands of pounds on a new oven and she's had it specially sprayed to match her kitchen and you think we're going to make something out of a few bits of tat that does the same only not as good and probably won't work? Why Skip? Why are we doing this when we can use a proper oven?" Skip looked at Emily, smiled and decided to explain.

"The answer, Emily, is simple. Your mother may have a Lacanche Classic Range Macon Cooker capable of prodigious output when needed but we can hardly take it on camp, can we? On the other hand you will always have what we're using on camp, especially crisp boxes, and empty ones at that." John returned to his monologue.

"Now then, all you have to do is reconfigure the lid to make a door by sticking the two or four flaps together, cover the box with three layers of silver foil making sure that you don't use Sellotape on the inside of the box, straighten out the coat hangers and poke through the sides to make a rack, then make a dish for the bottom of the oven to put the charcoal coals on that I will give you once you're ready for them. See what temperature the pizzas need to cook at, then, taking your ovens outside, put a few coals in that I have started on the campfire, on the tray at the bottom. Leave the oven for five minutes then check how hot it is. When the temperature is about right, after you've added or subtracted some coals, put the pizza on the rack, close the lid and wait ten minutes. After that lift the lid carefully and check that your pizza's piping hot. If it is you can eat it. Off you go!"

As an added incentive John told the scouts that if they worked quickly they would have time for two pizzas per patrol. This was music to Ravens' ears as it meant the difference between still hungry and not so hungry. Melanie announced, "Hurry and we can have one third of a pizza instead of one sixth!" Edward was unimpressed.

"I don't like any old flavour pizzas. I wonder what flavours Skip has in mind to give us?"

"Don't be stupid, Edward," said Archie, frustrated by his friend's ability to look a gift horse in the mouth. "It doesn't matter what it says on the box, all pizzas are the same. They're dough and cheese and tomato and a few lumps of something. They have more or less the same ingredients and also taste the same as well. I bet if I gave you a margherita and told you it was a romana you would think that you had a romana."

"No I wouldn't, I would know exactly what it was. I would be able to tell after the first mouthful what it was," said Edward with conviction.

"Then we'll blindfold you when it's pizza tasting time and you can guess what it is," Archie challenged.

"Okay. And if I guess it right I'll get the whole pizza as long as I like it?" suggested Edward hopefully.

"Okay," Archie agreed.

The added incentive of a second pizza worked wonders for the scouts' productivity. With the oven linings being constructed at full tilt, Archie wandered up to John and casually asked him, "Sorry to sound a bit cautious Skip, but do you actually have enough pizzas for two per patrol?" Archie was not going to put himself out more than he had to only to find that John had only bought a couple of extras. He had good reason to be a little cautious for, if he were Skip, he would surmise that, on balance, there would be at least one, and most likely two or more, patrols that would be too slow to have time to get one pizza in their oven, let alone two - and cooked. But for once John had excelled himself, helped by the special offer at his local supermarket.

"Yes, of course. In fact I've come more than prepared. I actually have twelve so that once you've all gone home Patrick and I and the young leaders can have one each."

"That's not fair," said Mel who had been listening in. "You've paid for them with scout money and it should be spent on scouts not leaders..."

"We are all scouts equally together," said John irritably. "It's just that some of us are leaders and some of us are being led..."

"Well if you read George Orwell's 'Animal Farm,'" Mel spat out, "you would know that some are more equal than others."

Archie wasn't going to stop Mel having her say, especially as he felt that she, for once, had a valid point, but at that particular moment he was more interested in testing Edward's assertion than following the argument concerning the literary justification of Skip scoffing an extra pizza. "The thing is, Skip, Edward reckons that he can tell the flavour of any pizza blindfolded so we wondered if we could at some point swap them over to really test him just in case he's thinking of cheating?"