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### Cooking with Canned and Frozen Foods

Prior to the pandemic my wife, who grew up in the Philippines, would often make traditional Filipino dishes from scratch. We were living on an American Navy base in Japan at the time, so there was an abundance of stores just off base where she could easily find the ingredients she liked. The base did have a commissary, but everything was imported from the United States, so it was often difficult to obtain fresh ingredients, hence the off-base shopping.

Our base went into lockdown almost immediately once the pandemic hit, despite our government leadership claiming it was nothing more than a hoax by their opposition. There was no official call from our President to lock the base down, but our base leadership was not taking any chances with the safety of their sailors or their families. This certainly put a damper on the quality level of our daily dining. If fresh ingredients were already scarce at our commissary, they became non-existent after lockdown because they stopped importing fresh ingredients during this time. My wife and I stocked up on canned and frozen foods, enough to last us nearly 6 months just in case they stopped getting food altogether. At this point no one really had any clue how this pandemic would play out. We did not know if it would be a couple months or a couple years.

Going from fresh ingredients to canned and frozen foods took some getting used to on our part. I began to realize how much we took these fresh ingredients for granted. Our nightly meals became a revolving door of canned soup, canned vegetables, and frozen dinners. I tried to eat some canned fruits, but I just could not stomach them. I know that sounds incredibly entitled, but it just was not the same. Biting into a ripe, juicy peach is infinitely better than eating a peach

slice from a can with a fork. It is just not the same. My meals became more of a chore that I had to get through, rather than an enjoyable experience that I would anticipate with joy.

The canned soups themselves were not bad, but they simply do not compare to a homemade soup created from scratch. They also wore out their welcome very quickly. I found myself rotating my main dishes between soup, SpaghettiOs, and macaroni and cheese, accompanied with canned vegetables like peas, carrots, and green beans. I had to rotate them otherwise I would grow weary of the same thing day in and day out.

We kept this routine of canned and frozen food meals for nearly 6 months. We continued this even after our initial lockdown ended because we did not want to take any chances going off base at first. While those 6 months certainly tested our resolve, it made me really appreciate the taste and texture of a fresh, homecooked meal. Our first homemade meal in 6 months was absolute heaven. Eating bland foods for the previous 6 months made that first bite into quality food that much better. We both treasured that first real meal after lockdown ended. It also completely changed my perspective on canned and frozen foods.

Prior to quarantine, I never minded eating canned or frozen foods, but that was also because it was done at my discretion and only every so often. Having to eat these things every day for half a year made me grow to despise them. It sounds ridiculous, but I feel myself almost getting angry just seeing them on the shelf at the grocery store. I feel like I ate a lifetime's worth of canned and frozen foods during those 6 months, and I just cannot bring myself to willingly eat them anymore. I will never take fresh foods for granted again.