

# My Name Is Graham, as in Cracker

by Janice Barrett Graham

It's not easy having Graham for a last name. Our family gets teased a lot. One day in kindergarten my daughter, Elise, got tired of being called "graham cracker." So she told everybody at school that her Uncle Sylvester invented graham crackers. They laughed. Sure he did, they said.

Guess what? It's true. Today we have graham crackers because of Elise's great-great-great-great-uncle!

He was born in 1794—a sickly boy named Sylvester Graham, who had no parents to care for him. He grew up wishing he were strong and healthy. He went to college and became a minister. But all his preaching was about good health.

He watched people gulp down their food. Greasy piles of fried potatoes. Slabs of red meat. Pounds of pastries. He thought they looked like snakes swallowing their huge meals whole! Then he saw the same people get sick or overweight. Doctors back then didn't know how to cure them.

Sylvester read about an experiment in which a dog, fed only white bread, got sick and died. But a dog that was fed whole-wheat bread stayed healthy. Sylvester began to wonder if the processing of grains to make white flour destroyed some of the nutrients. He changed his own diet to

mostly whole grains, fresh fruits, and vegetables. He felt a lot better, and he couldn't wait to share his new ideas.

Huge crowds gathered to hear the small excited man in a high collar and tailcoat. "Eat foods that are good for you," cried Sylvester. "Find Nature's way and follow her!" Many people took his advice, and he began to hope that someday all Americans would stop eating like boa constrictors.

Flour made from the whole-wheat grain was named after Sylvester. With this graham flour, his followers, called Grahamites, baked bread and crackers. Instead of hot morning gruel, the popular breakfast at the time, Grahamites ate the first cold cereal, "Granula," made of crumbled rebaked graham crackers.

Sylvester Graham had only a hunch that munching on whole-grain snacks was good for you. Back then, newspapers called him "a nut among the crackers." But today, 150 years later, scientists are proving he was right. And factories make millions of packages of graham crackers a year.

Even when Elise gets teased, she's glad her name is Graham, as in cracker. At least it's better than, say, Boa Constrictor!

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