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Take a Favorite Recipe and Write Your Story

Favorite recipes or those family favorites that are passed down from generation to generation are a great place to start a family story. The familiar smells conjure up memories of family times around the table. Sometimes an everyday recipe will remind us of a favorite aunt or uncle or something memorable about them. Perhaps your uncle liked to cook outside on the grill. And you had to remind him to be careful because he always started the fire with gasoline! Maybe your uncle wasn't that crazy. Maybe your aunt made something that sounds strange in the twenty-first century.

I had an aunt who made a baked cheesy baked pineapple dish. It looks like those flavors wouldn't go together, but it was surprisingly tasty. Not something I would make and serve, but every time I run across it in my recipe box, I can hear her telling me how to make it and chuckling. That chuckling in my memory's ear just brightens my day—every time! Favorite recipes or those family favorites that are passed down from generation to generation are a great place to start a family story. The familiar smell conjures up memories of family times around the table.

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How about making cookies for Christmas festivities? One friend always made a Swedish cooked called Peppakarkor (Swedish Ginger Cookies). They smelled delicious when I would visit her house before Christmas. And she also gave us a plate to enjoy each year; their taste surpassed the sweet smell. That memory makes me smile as I sit here writing this paragraph.

One other recipe memory I have is of my mother's recipe for Veal Cutlets au Vin. She was proud of this recipe and always served it with rice. That was special when I was young. We always ate potatoes since they were cheap. Rice was for fancy times and every once and in a while Mother cooked this. This recipe calls for wine, and we only had white wine for recipes such as this. The copy I have of this recipe is in the curly handwriting of my teen years. I suspect I asked her for the recipe, and she dictated it to me.

Thinking of that wine bottle in the top of the kitchen cabinet, reminded me of another story from my teen years. One year when we lived in Lubbock, Texas, my parents got the bright idea of making their own fruitcake. Dad went to the liquor store to buy the brandy. Mother and I went and bought the candied fruit at the grocery store, along with the nuts and brown sugar. I remember seeing stacks of that candied fruit and always wondered how to use it, so this trip was instructive as well. I still wondered who would be making so many fruitcakes! I suppose there are plenty of ways to use this bright, sweet fruit, but I don't know about them from my recipe books.

Speaking of fruit, my maternal grandfather lived fifteen years after my grandmother died. He stayed out on the family farm for most of those years and cultivated a large garden every spring and summer. His Central Texas farmland grew tomatoes that were red and delicious and abundant. Every summer he put up lots of quart jars of vegetables and pints and pints of tomato preserves. He enjoyed them on his toast all year long. I always thought they tasted good, but it was strange to see preserves made from tomatoes instead of grapes or peaches or strawberries. He only liked tomato preserves, probably from his farmland childhood. He never used a recipe and just made them from memory.

Another old-fashioned recipe comes from my mother-in-law who used to make watermelon rind pickles and watermelon rind preserves. She was a meticulous cook and liked to make some recipes from her farm childhood living outside of Avoca, Texas. During the days of the Great Depression, there wasn't much rain, and farming was hard. She and her sisters and brother found relief in town at school, but Winona Huffaker McLaren learned how to use what grew on the farm and transform it into delicious dishes. I knew her decades after that childhood when I married her older son, my husband, Don. She was an excellent cook—lots of fried vegetables and meats and plenty of sweet salads and desserts. We enjoyed them at her home, but we haven't ever eaten that way in our own home. Good memories!

Now, see, that was a quick way to start our stories—the memories just flow from one person and recipe to the next, picking up a few holidays along the way. I hope this will give you some inspiration for your own stories.

**Here is a plan to get started on using recipes for your life story.**

Find a family favorite—could be one you grew up with or one you shared with your family

Write out one or two memories using that recipe, using your senses: How did the dish smell while it was cooking? What did it taste like? Did you eat it in the summer or the winter; is it a cold or hot dish?

And, don’t forget those handy question words. When did you enjoy this recipe? Who introduced this recipe to you, or who did you introduce to this recipe? What special ingredients or preparations are needed for the recipe? Where did you enjoy this recipe—at our house, at the house of a friend or a relative? How often did you enjoy this recipe? Do you continue to enjoy and share this recipe?

Now, you are ready to get started on a short story about sometime very familiar.

Remember…When you are ready to get started…we are ready to help!

Contact me at carol@uniquelifestories.com if you have any questions.