

Recipes My Mother Swore By

As a result of the article about baking at the turn of the twentieth century, my editor has asked if perhaps there were some recipes from that time period that might be in my mother's list of favorites.

A little background might be in order here: Grace Crosby (my mother) was born in 1901 and began cooking, as did many girls growing up in that era, at a very young age under the tutelage of her mother, aunts and grandmother. It soon became apparent that she had an unusual ability both in cooking and baking. She also had a capacity of retaining whatever she set her mind to when it came to academic achievement; first graduating from Framingham Normal School, then Columbia University and finally Johns Hopkins. She spent her summer vacations cooking at summer camps. One camp in Maine routinely employed two cooks, but one year something went wrong at the last minute, and they found themselves with only my mother. She told management that if they would double her salary, she would handle the cooking duties for the entire season. Everything went without a hitch, although I don't think she had many hours to herself that particular summer!

Upon finishing her formal education, which included her becoming a licensed dietitian, her first employment was teaching culinary arts at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York for a year, then went on to pursue a teaching career in public and private schools. After deciding to start her family, she never taught again on a regular basis, but she did spend about a year and a half working with Dr. George Papanicolaou at the Cornell Medical Center in Manhattan while he perfected his technique to detect uterine cancer in what became known as The Pap Smear test. For fifteen months she and a nurse at the Hartford Hospital were the only people in Connecticut who could process and interpret these slides, which have saved so many thousands of patients over the years (that was around 1951-52).

This background is to set the stage for the recipes that she left behind; she not only was a gifted cook, but she understood the value of a balanced diet and the importance of what went into the food that was to be ingested.

Here are a few of her recipes:

Oatmeal Bread

1 cup rolled oats
¾ cup molasses
1 tablespoon lard
½ teaspoon soda
2 tablespoons salt

Mix these together and pour over 1 pint boiling water, then cool until lukewarm. Add 1 yeast cake and flour to make a good dough (about 6 cups).

Let rise overnight. Cut down early in the morning; allow to rise again – about two hours. Mold into loaves and bake 1 ¼ hours after the loaves have risen to double their bulk.

Doughnuts

[This recipe is in the form of a letter, and it is reproduced here as written]:

“Here is an old fashioned doughnut recipe you might like to try: It is very old, dating back to the days when men were hard workers demanding a good, hearty breakfast and the women left their warm beds at 4:30 AM to get it for them. These were not called doughnuts, but ‘fried potato cakes’.

1 cup hot, mashed potato
4 tablespoons butter
3 eggs
1 ¼ cups sugar
1 cup milk
4 cups flour
6 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon vanilla
¼ teaspoon nutmeg

Add butter to the hot mashed potatoes and beat well. Beat eggs with sugar and stir into first mixture. Mix and sift flour, salt, baking powder (the ancients used cream of tartar and soda) [two parts cream of tartar, one part baking soda] and nutmeg. Add alternately with milk to first mixture. Add vanilla (I leave the vanilla out). Cover mixing bowl and let mixture cool for an hour or longer (overnight is good). Dust moulding board and rolling pin with flour; turn dough onto board and roll lightly to one-half inch thickness; cut with a floured cutter or make twist cakes (if you know how – I don’t). fry in deep hot fat and drain on crumpled paper. Do not pile one above the other until cool. These were made in a family that liked fresh ‘hot cakes’ for breakfast and are really the lightest things in doughnuts. It is the recipe I use now that I make only a few cakes at a time and I do like them hot and fresh for my breakfast.

I made a note on my recipe that hot potatoes are not necessary; left-overs from dinner will do if they are rubbed through a sieve. If left to stand overnight, roll without kneading.”

15 Minute Sponge Cake

Beat yolks of 3 eggs and ¾ cups cold water 5 minutes; add 1 ¼ cups sifted sugar and beat 15 minutes. Sift together 1 ½ cups flour 4 or 5 times, 1 scant teaspoon baking powder, ½ teaspoon salt and fold in, then fold in the stiffly-beaten white of 3 eggs. Bake in an ungreased angle cake pan in moderate oven 1 hour.

Historic Bytes

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