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# Mother's love was secret ingredient

*Memories, recipes  
both preserved  
in family cookbook*

**Merle Wilberding**

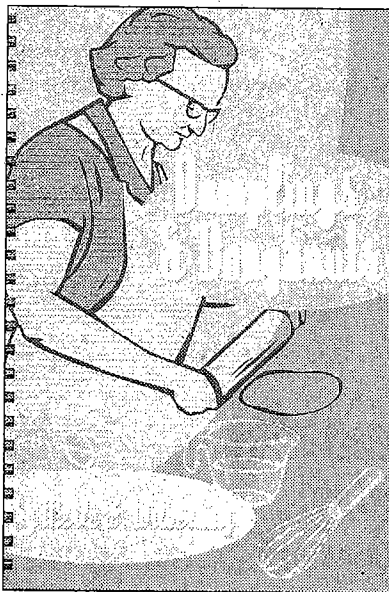


Looking at the ingredients in my mother's recipe for doughnuts, I wondered where I would find "one level tablespoon lard." Could I buy "lard" at Dorothy

Lane Market? I wasn't sure.

Then again, I wasn't sure that I could make any of the items in my mother's recipe collection. She had boxes and boxes of family recipes — recipes that she had inherited from her family, along with recipes she had made up herself. They were filled with ingredients of bygone kitchens. That was part of what made her recipes a special part of our family. Just looking at the recipes brought back memories of family life and the sweet aroma coming from her big farmhouse kitchen.

When my mother died, her recipes were boxed up and stored in my sister's house. As the years went by, various family members wanted to bor-



**'DUMPLINGS & DOUGHNUTS'** contains 50 recipes, as well as family photographs and stories.

row one recipe, then another, and it was becoming clear that these family bonds were going to be strewn in the wind.

I looked at some of the recipes again — the doughnut recipe my mother had inherited from her own mother, and the raisin dumpling recipe she had inherited from her mother-in-law. I thought, "This is family history. It should be preserved."

Then I remembered that, a few years earlier, Meredith Moss had written an article in the *Dayton Daily News* about the joys of a family cookbook. I saved it because I thought it presented a wonderful idea for combining family memories and recipes.

At the next family reunion, I announced that we were going to create a family cookbook, and that we would complete it to honor the centennial of my mother's birth. We had her recipes. We just had to bring those recipes to life by adding the photographs and family stories.

Everyone had an assignment — look for old pictures of Mom in the kitchen or photographs from our family dinners. Each of my siblings was also asked to contribute one from their own family, to connect our family history to the next generation.

The plan was simple enough, a wire-bound book with one recipe on each of 50 pages on the right, complemented by a family photograph or a family story on each of the 50 pages on the left.

The latest technology made it simple to scan a few of her handwritten recipes, family photographs and other memorabilia. It took about one year to complete the project.

When it was done, the book included photographs of all descendants in four generations, for a total of more than 50 people.

Gathering the information was rewarding in itself, as it gave all of us the opportunity to reconnect our lives, and relive many of the family stories that preserve the past and explain the present. Some of the best fun for me was reliving all the mock fights I had with my brothers over my mother's cherry pie, served during all special occasions and reunions. These fights went on until my mother's death.

This family cookbook could now preserve the cherry pie recipe, the stories and the "battle" pictures. Anyone who can't imagine grown men fighting over cherry pie has just never tasted my mother's cherry pie.

Perhaps the most rewarding and somewhat unexpected part of the project was the generational connection it made. I knew my siblings would love the opportunity to have the recipes and relive the family stories. What astounded me was the impact it made on the next generation, as virtually all of my nephews and nieces had a chance to reconnect to their grandmother.

My niece Lisa said, "I am moved today as I am reminded of some of my very happiest times in childhood: visiting and staying at Grandma's house."

With that, I was reminded why a family cookbook can be such a great recipe for preserving family history.

**Merle Wilberding** is a longtime downtown lawyer and published legal historian. He lives in Dayton.