

CHAPTER I

As you make your way through this book you will see many names associated with the various recipes. These are all real people, most of whom were friends of my Mother's and whom I knew fairly well. But two of the names listed on many recipes, Ruth Shapiro Dickstein and Hilda Blume, are particularly dear and special to me. Ruth, my Mother, lived to about seven months past her 100th birthday (I believe a family record) and passed away in 2007. She was an excellent cook and an outstanding baker who enjoyed baking for all occasions or for no special reason. Some of her specialties included apple and berry pies, elegant layer cakes, and an assortment of great cookies. Her huckleberry and apple pies were among her best offerings, and she was also known for stuffed veal breast, standing rib roast and especially her brisket which even today still reigns supreme as a big favorite of both family and friends. It's a tribute to her and her memory that we still use many of her recipes on a regular basis, and particularly on Jewish holidays.

Hilda, who died in the 1980s when she was about 89, was truly a baker extraordinaire. She was my Mother's first cousin (though close as a sister) and lived in Scranton with most of my Mother's relatives. Her prowess with flour and a mixer was legendary, and she was to baking what Walt Disney was to animation, what Sinatra was to vocals and Michael Jackson to cosmetic surgery. To sit at her dinner table was a divine gift, and a gift I enjoyed on countless occasions. She won one of the first national Pillsbury bakeoffs and became a legend in the Scranton area for her bakery creations the flavor of which had no equal, that is except for their appearance. They actually looked as good as they tasted! She was nothing less than a magician in the kitchen, but best of all, she was as good and nice a person as she was a baker. Fortunately, over the years my mother diligently collected many of Hilda's recipes, and thanks to her they can now be shared with all of you. By the way, any time in this book you see the name "Hilda Blume" accompanying a recipe, it's worth at least a second look, even if the recipe is for candied skunk skin!

In some cases I have a first hand familiarity either with a specific recipe or the woman (and perhaps even their family) credited with that recipe. In such instances, and where I thought there might be interest in the information, I have offered some brief color commentary, as it were, which is reflective of the time and the people behind the recipes. Some of the recipes bring back wonderful and often humorous memories which I associate with particular people, places or events. I have included some of these recollections and stories as a way of trying to bring to life some of my older family members and their friends who the younger generations never had an opportunity to meet.

Based on recollections from fifty or more years ago, and the hard copies of recipes available to me, I have tried to give proper credit where it is due, and I apologize where that credit may have been omitted or unknowingly misplaced. One of the interesting things about these recipes, and perhaps all recipes throughout time, is that they are a snapshot of sorts of that particular period in time. The increasing availability of basic food ingredients, and the mass introduction of both packaged and prepared foods, has since rendered many of these recipes obsolete, as have our taste buds and the time we are willing to devote each day to cooking. But even beyond taste and ever changing culinary fashion, an increased desire for healthy food has also contributed to the demise of some of these recipes. Back then, meat and butter and a couple of packs of cigarettes a day were considered the foundations of good health which is probably why most of the men were dead by their late fifties or early sixties. In at least nine out of ten families, the wives outlived their husbands, and

often by thirty or more years. That's obviously not the subject of this book, but rather just an interesting observation that was a sign of the times.

While most of the recipes included are from the generation which preceded mine, I made the conscious decision to also include noteworthy recipes from my generation. If nothing else, this will help insure that these recipes (the food my children grew up with) will also be recorded and preserved for generations to come. Of course, that presupposes that future generations will still be preparing food and eating real meals rather than dining out every night or taking pills for sustenance!

What started out as a rather focused task, simply converting my Mother's recipes to an electronic format, soon grew into a major production. Some of the memories stimulated by going through the recipes were of people or of an incident associated with that recipe, while others were just memories from my childhood which now seems to have been so long ago as to almost be in another life. It is interesting that my Mother's death served to motivate me to take on this task, a task I soon expanded and very much warmed to. But more importantly, I view this book as a wonderful opportunity to record and preserve a small bit of my family history. There aren't that many people left who have personal knowledge of that history, and so it is every bit as much a responsibility as it is a privilege to take on the task.

There are some who will think that one of the objectives here is to encourage you to find room in your daily menus for the recipes included herein. However, even I would not eat some of these foods, nor would I ask you to do so! Most of these recipes are still very good, and in some cases exceptional, even by today's standards, and those are certainly very worth trying. But other recipes (believe me, you'll figure out which ones without much difficulty!) have been included mainly to provide you with the *flavor* of the times both from a culinary and historic perspective.

My objectives in putting this book together were quite simple: (1) preserve a very special piece of my personal and family history and heritage for my family and friends who might be interested and, (2) make the recipes available for those who would like to try them and experience a cuisine from the past, some of which is rapidly becoming extinct. A few of the recipes may be incomplete and lead to head scratching, but that's the form I had to work with. Where possible, we have tried to fill in missing information, but our efforts may not have always been successful.

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