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Kitchen Cooks Up Love

By **Bobbie Bryant**, Jefferson County

The holiday season has come and gone. Our home always serves as the gathering place for the family. Some come from distant lands, while others live just a stone's throw away. This celebratory gathering is a time where, at any moment, you might hear squeals of laughter or perhaps see a tear-stained face as we share stories from our busy lives with one another. It also is a time when we borrow customs and traditions from loved ones that no longer walk among us.

The feeding frenzy that is our family's tradition is packed into three full meals a day. And let's not forget to crowd in the snacks, appetizers, cocktails and desserts. It is a repeat performance of delicious gluttony that we pass from generation to generation.

I marvel at how my foremothers had the physical stamina to prepare and serve holiday meals for our family. Even in their advanced years, they insisted on everyone coming to their house for the big celebrations of Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. Each time, they shooed us out of their kitchen when we tried to help in the preparations or the cleanup.

It was their way of showing love.

I am incredibly honored to carry on a tradition that transcends the ages. Planning, preparing and serving a traditional holiday meal is most certainly an art form, improved upon over time with patience, perseverance and practice.

In its simplest form, it is known as cooking. In its spiritual form, it is love, which is conveyed to those for whom we prepare the food. The preparation and serving is our tribute to those who taught us by their example and shared recipes, decorating tips and holiday customs.

It was commonplace for me to help my elders as they toiled in their warm and inviting kitchens. I was taught as a child how to stir the pot and add the seasoning. Rarely did we measure ingredients. Our senses gauged the proper amount by touching, watching and tasting. Throughout the ages their kitchens served as the central heartbeat of the home. All good things emanated from there.

Top, the author's great-grandmother, Lois Robinson Brewer, with her chickens; above, a catalog ad for ordering chicks.

I recall the chirping baby chickens in my great-grandmother's kitchen. She ordered them every year through a mail-order catalogue, and they were delivered by the mailman. Like other women in western Kentucky, she contributed to the family's income by raising chickens in order to sell eggs. Both country stores and city businesses took eggs or chickens in exchange for payment for items or services, even newspaper subscriptions.

I ran to her kitchen every afternoon after school to touch their soft feathery down. **Mama Brewer** kept them in a brown cardboard box next to the refrigerator to catch the warm air from underneath.

In time, the chirping baby chicks could create quite a noisy commotion as they grew large enough to be put out in the hen house. Pecking around the yard and squawking at one another; chickens were a staple of the family farm.

I can still hear the soft cluck, cluck, clucking of those hens. They provide a gentle lullaby, playing softly in my memory.

Mama Brewer's Hash

2 small potatoes, diced
1 medium onion, chopped
Butter for sautéing
1 cup breadcrumbs
½ cup water
3-4 slices leftover beef, chicken or pork roast
¼ teaspoon each of garlic powder, salt, pepper, sage and water

1. Sauté onions and potatoes in butter-coated skillet until all are tender.
2. Add 1 cup crumbled bread (Mama Brewer used her leftover biscuits) and ½ cup water.
3. Stir in leftover meat and seasonings.
4. Simmer until liquid is gone. Serve hot.

Try Mama Brewer's hash recipe on chilly winter days.

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