

Homemade Bread...by Jean R. Gardner©

I am grateful for the memories of my beloved grandmother. She was a very industrious and hardworking person and I have many beautiful recollections of her impeccably-kept garden and flowers, and her many homemaking skills. But, I believe the best memory of all is the wonderful food my grandmother cooked and the delicious bread she baked:

My grandparents had originally lived on a farm, but when I was a child, they sold the family farm and moved into town. Because of great good fortune, I lived only two blocks from my grandmother. This arrangement became a blessing to me, and I spent many happy hours in her home. "Ma," as I called her, was a paragon of virtue and kindness. I never saw her angry or raise her voice. She attended church regularly and particularly enjoyed the German services offered in our Lutheran church at the time. The time was the 1940's and 1950's. Ma loved to cook and bake and I had many memorable meals in her home. I especially remember her delicious homemade soups, stews, pies, and roast chicken and beef. Her bread and doughnuts were so light they practically floated in air. Her bread baking took place in the basement of the house. There, sat an old-fashioned, cast iron wood-burning stove. Short wood logs were used for building the fire in the stove and keeping it stoked. The stove was a carry-over from her days on the farm and although she had a "modern" stove upstairs in the kitchen, she insisted on doing her bread, rolls, coffee kuchen (a German word meaning cake), and doughnut baking on her "real" stove downstairs.

On baking day, the stove first had to be fired up by placing short wood logs in a strategic manner inside the stove so as to maintain a particular level of constant heat. This process was very tricky. The fire was lit and had to come to a certain temperature before the bread was put into the oven. The bread dough was made with yeast cakes, water, and flour. (She bought the flour in 25 pound amounts that came in floral print cotton sacks. When empty, the sacks were washed and made into aprons that she sewed on her treadle, Singer sewing machine.) When the bread came out of the oven, it had a golden brown crust. She would take a piece of wax paper slathered with butter and rub all over the bread and slice off a huge portion. To this day, just thinking about this...I can almost smell the fragrant aroma of baking wafting through Ma's house. And, I will never forget the sound of the crackling stove fire and the incredible manna from heaven that Ma made with so much love and patience.