

## *The Children's Corner*

# **Bringing Families Closer Together Through Food**

In the last Children's Corner we discussed beginning an exploration of family history with children by having them create a basic family tree to help them understand their place at a particular point in the life of a family. We promised to follow up with some enjoyable ways to expand this understanding, and, as promised, here is one.

The fall and winter holidays are traditionally occasions for families to gather for a large, festive meal. This is a perfect time to begin a collection of family recipes which can document one aspect of the family's story.

Ask grandparents what foods were served at their holiday celebrations, and about their favorite childhood recipes. Ask where the recipes came from, stories about them, memories of making them, occasions when were they served. Try to get copies, in the original handwriting if possible. If one of these recipes is part of your current holiday meal, take a photograph of the dish to accompany the written recipe and the stories about it. Connect the recipes to the people on the family tree. These details about a favorite dish will help flesh out the basic information about the name on the tree and begin to create an image of a person.

For older children, looking at recipes can also lead to a discussion of shifts in preparation, over time. There may be ingredients mentioned in the old recipes that are rarely employed today because of concerns over fat and sugar content or the popularity of time-related "fad" foods.

In my own family food history I was struck by the cucumber mold salad that my mother made with lime Jello and cottage cheese, a reflection of the popular molded salads in the 1950s and early 1960s, and affectionately dubbed "green slime" by my cousin when she was a child. We last enjoyed the dish at a place where we vacationed one summer, and the cook was kind enough to provide the recipe, invoking childhood memories. We also had "Nana Cookies," made by my father's mother who sent us home with a tin of them every time we visited. When she died they disappeared for a while, until I came across the recipe and began to make them for my father as a sentimental treat on his birthday.

When you have collected as many old family recipes and photos as possible, use them to create a family recipe book or family recipe calendars that make great holiday gifts for everyone in the family.

By Nancy Burstein