

Now that December is here, Christmas baking cannot be far in the future. It isn't so much that we need special cookies and coffee breads, and it is not even a craving for more rich or sweet treats. Instead, Christmas baking, at least here on Coe Creek, is triggered by the pleasure in the activity and by remembering the traditions that surround the holidays.

Some of the cookies are the ones my mother made, so the Christmas celebration isn't authentic without them. Other cookies and rolls are from Runo's mother, Gunborg's recipes. And some are just the ones we have come to enjoy making—and eating—most over many years.

This is the season during which we remember many people who have passed from our lives for one reason or another—not only those who have died, but folks who have moved away or people with whom we have lost contact. And, some friends from the past come to mind through their recipes.

There is one cookie (candy is more like it) that my mother made that I avoid. Church window confections are basically chocolate, coconut, and miniature colored marshmallows, formed into a log, chilled, and cut into slices. The only experience I had with these things ended in a very big mess. My sister, nieces, cousins, and friends all make them, and they come out looking festive and perfect. Not mine, and I will never attempt them again.

Swedish pepparkakor—the ultra-thin gingersnaps—are probably my favorites. I tried recipe after recipe, but was never able to achieve the perfect cookie like those Gunborg made. Then, by chance, I looked at a recipe in a baking book written by a Swedish/American woman who had grown up in the north of Sweden. Her recipe had a tablespoon of whisky in it. Now, it doesn't seem like that would do anything special, and it certainly wasn't included for the flavor. But, with that recipe, I can make nearly perfect pepparkakor. I tried once without that tablespoon of spirits, just to see what would happen, and the cookies were not the same and didn't have that snappy crisp thin quality.

Ruth Peterson's overnight coffee cake is on the agenda every Christmas. It is rich with both sour cream and butter, and is so tender and delicious that it is fortunate that the recipe makes five braids. Ruth has been gone for several years, but I think of her every time I open the recipe book to her handwritten directions, written on a Gwen Frostic note card.

My mother, Frances, made many kinds of cookies during the holiday season. The top of the freezer in the back shed off the kitchen was covered with tins and jars, all filled with cookies and treats to fill a plate or tray with a wide variety to tempt every visitor who came along. And, she had many of those. We have often said that there was scarcely a day that someone did not stop in to enjoy her hospitality.

But, tonight, Runo and I made another delicacy. We will have to wait until tomorrow to see how this one is accepted. It may be eagerly eaten, or it may be that our offering will be soundly rejected. The ingredients are certainly not unusual—grated carrots, molasses, oil, flour, salt, and rolled oats. We have determined that we should really sample these cookies ourselves, and only then offer them to Alvik and Bjorgy, Pony and Topsy.