

The Best Darn To-heck-with-Calories

Soul Food Recipes

Period.

from *Soul Stirrings: How looking back gives each of us the freedom to move forward*

Recipes for a Holiday Celebration

Joyce M. Coleman with Elsie S. Qualls



“Onions” By Julia Crainer
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The onion, like many of us, starts its life under the garden, compressed and without light. But the tender green shoots that grow into the sun are enough to bring that life to the surface where it breaks through into the brightness above. Beyond the bitterest tears, even the first time cook can release the sweetest flavor, with a little fire and ... a little Stirring

Food has always been the centerpiece of all celebrations in our family. Whether it was a School Turnout program, Easter Sunday, Christmas, or just good friends getting together, we always felt blessed when the table was full of scrumptious, home cooked dishes.

As I reminisced about our past with Elsie and John Willie, it was inevitable that the subject of food would frequently interject itself. Each memorable experience and milestone were punctuated with the aromas and textures of food. We discovered that, despite our numerous detours through health and food trends, the foods of our youth retain a special place in our hearts and minds.

Following are some special foods from our Celebration Menu that have been the centerpiece of our get-togethers over the years. Try them the next time you have a family gathering.

Holiday Celebration Menu

Fresh Fruit Bowl
Assorted Cheese Platter
Assorted Crackers
Fast and Easy Homemade Rolls

Elsie's Gumbo, or
Sommemor' Vegetable Beef Soup

Nutty Cranberry Salad
Spring-Mix Green Salad

Ernest's Grilled Pork Loin
Baked Christmas Goose

Cornbread and Oyster Dressing
Rice (for gumbo)
Perfect Candied Sweet Potatoes
Old Fashioned Collard Greens
String Beans and Potatoes

Locust Hill Lemon Pie
Cream Cheese Pound Cake
Fruitcake Extraordinaire

Sinners' Punch
Coffee
Ice Tea

Recipes



Elsie's Gumbo

Although Daddy introduced us to seafood - oysters and shrimp - when he cooked Sunday dinners, the closest we ever came to gumbo during the early years was chicken feet and vegetable soup.

Elsie's Gumbo is nothing at all like chicken feet soup.

It is called Elsie's Gumbo because the entire recipe – ingredients, taste, and consistency – are uniquely hers. This is, without fail, the first course at our family Christmas dinner, whether celebrated at home in Mississippi or away. It is chock full of seafood, chicken, sausages, and seasonings that makes it irresistible. After Christmas day, it is served as a late night snack, or if one is lucky enough to find leftovers, anytime. Elsie's Gumbo has also been the centerpiece at our Cajun theme parties. She has gracefully prepared it by the gallons, frozen it, and hand delivered it to me in many of our cities throughout the United States. It always brings rave reviews.

Day 1

- 1 large or 2 medium soup bone(s)
- 2 large onions, chopped
- 2 large green bell peppers, chopped
- 6 celery stalks, chopped
- 5-6 whole bay leaves
- 1 medium red pepper

Add all ingredients to a stockpot. Add 2 gallons cool water. Boil on medium heat until meat falls from bones. Add salt and pepper to taste when meat is half done. (Ensure that water level remains constant by adding as needed). Set aside in a cool place and permit fat from meat to harden. Skim and discard the fat.

Remove all the bones and fatty bits of meat. Chop the meat into small pieces. Add the meat to the broth. Refrigerate.

Day 2

Place the stockpot of broth and meat over medium heat.

To make the roux:

Add 4-5 tablespoons of vegetable oil to skillet. Add 1/4-cup plain flour. Heat over medium heat stirring constantly. When brown, add 1/2-cup water. Stir well, scraping the roux from the bottom and sides of skillet. Add mixture to broth, and bring to a boil.

Assemble 2nd set of ingredients:

2-3 pound chicken wingettes (separate joints)

2 1-pound bags frozen gumbo vegetable mix

1-pound bag cut frozen okra

3 pounds peeled and de-veined shrimp

4-5 pounds snow crab legs

3 pounds smoked pork sausage, cut into 1/2 inch pieces, fried and drained

Salt to taste

2-3 tablespoons chili powder

3-4 tablespoons gumbo file

2-3 tablespoons thyme

Add wingettes and gumbo vegetables. Continue cooking for about 20 minutes, or until vegetables are tender. Then add all remaining ingredients and cook until all vegetables are tender. Serve over a bed of rice.

Serves 10-12.

Immediately freeze leftovers. Gumbo freezes well, but cannot be left un-refrigerated for long periods.

Sommemor' Vegetable Beef Soup

1 large beef soup bone
2 lbs boneless beef stew meat
2 1-lb bags frozen soup vegetables
1 1-lb bag frozen gumbo vegetables
1 qt crushed or diced tomatoes
1 large + 1 small cans tomato paste
1 1-lb bag of cut okra (optional)
3 cans chicken broth
salt and ground black pepper to taste
2 medium onions, coarsely chopped
3 stalks celery, sliced
2 medium or 1 very large green pepper
4-5 bay leaves
4-5 finely garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 pod red or jalapeno pepper

Put soup bone and last 6 ingredients in a large stock pot with about 6 quarts of water. Bring to boil and cook until meat falls off bone. Cool. Remove meat and chop into small bite size pieces. Discard bones and fatty pieces of meat.

Add 3 quarts hot water to existing stock. Add chopped meat, and soup and gumbo vegetables. Bring to boil and cook for 45 minutes. Add okra, tomatoes, tomato paste, and salt and pepper to taste. Cook until all vegetables are tender.
Makes 18-20 servings.

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Nutty Cranberry Salad

- 1 8-ounce box of cream cheese, softened
- 1 16-ounce can crushed pineapple
- ¼ cup sugar
- ½ cup chopped pecans
- 1 3-ounce pack unflavored gelatin (dissolve in 1/3 cup cold water)
- 2 3-ounce packs of cranberry jello
- 1 16-ounce can whole berry cranberry sauce

Make jello according to directions on box. While dissolving the jello in hot water stir gelatin very well and pour into the jello before adding the cold water. While this mixture is still warm add the softened cream cheese and sugar. Blend with mixer until smooth. Chill until the mixture begins to set, and then stir in pecans, pineapple, and cranberry sauce. Pour into mold, cover and refrigerate overnight. When ready to use release on a bed of lettuce on serving dish.

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Baked Christmas Goose

Elsie says Miss Millie, eccentric wife of Great Uncle Ben, first introduced her to Christmas Goose. Miss Millie lived down the hill and across the ditch from our home and raised geese as a food source. (In those days it would have been unthinkable for anyone at Locust Hill to spend time and money on something that didn't have a quick return on investment, such as a pet). Every Christmas (and really special occasions in between) Miss Millie would sacrifice a goose for Christmas dinner. About a month before the big day she would pluck the bird from the flock and put it in a coop - to "clean it out". This way the bird couldn't have access to unsavory food, and could be fattened up. By Christmas the goose would be plump and juicy. Elsie, who was quite young at the time, swears that the taste of the goose was one of the most delightful food treats of Christmas. Elsie was not then, and is not now, easily impressed. She worked on the baked goose recipe until she got it down pat, maybe even better than Miss Millie's original version. There are never take-home portions, only disappointment when its all gone.

10-pound goose, fresh or frozen (fresh preferred)
Salt and pepper
Garlic powder
Cayenne pepper
1 large onion
3 stalks celery, broken in half
1 green pepper

If frozen, thaw at room temperature 8-12 hours. If not thoroughly thawed run cold tap water over it. Pick off pinfeathers, wash well, and pat dry with paper towels. Cut off excessive skin at neck. Sprinkle inside and out with salt (lightly), black pepper, seasoned salt, garlic powder and ever so lightly with red pepper. Cut 1 large onion into slices, place in the cavity of the bird. Place in pan and cover with aluminum foil. Refrigerate overnight. Before placing in oven, put 2 stalks celery and 1/2 green pepper (sliced the long way) into cavity. Place the rest of the sliced pepper and 3-4 pieces of celery around the goose.

If baking in a lightweight pan, wrap the goose in foil and add 3/4-cup water in the pan (not inside the foil) to prevent burning. Keep adding water as you cook. Do not let all the water cook out.

If using a roasting pan, add 1/2-cup water directly in with the goose. Check after cooking 1 hour for tenderness and salt content. When the goose is almost done remove the foil to let it brown. Turn to brown on the other side. (Usually it will brown with the lid on in a roasting pan).

Cooking time is about 2-3 hours for a 10-pound goose.

Duck is cooked the same way. Cooking time is about 2 hours for a 7-pound duck.

Chicken can also be cooked this way. Cooking time is about 1 1/2 hours for a 6-pound chicken.



Ernest's Grilled Loin of Pork

Cooking methods have changed since our days of "hog killings." We like to grill it over slow heat, but have adapted the recipe for oven cooking.

Preparation of meat and fowl for grilling is very similar. You need only observe the process to understand how we can cook such large quantities within a relative short time span.

These guidelines work just as well with chicken and will enable you, too, to prepare for a crowd with relative ease.

8-pound pork loin
Seasoned salt
Salt
Pepper

If possible use meat that has not been frozen. 6-8 hours before ready to begin cooking, prepare the meat. Cut off excess fat and/or pick off pinfeathers. Wash and drain the meat.

Pork Loin - cut 1 1/2 inch deep gashes about 4 inches apart and insert a medium slice of garlic in each opening.

All meat (and fowl) - sprinkle lightly with salt and red pepper, more liberally with black pepper, seasoned salt, and garlic powder. Dice onion and place pieces between layers of meat.

Wrap in aluminum foil and refrigerate overnight, or 6-8 hours. Keep refrigerated until ready to cook. Place on grill and cook slowly over moderate heat.



Cornbread And Oyster Dressing

Daddy took great pride in making cornbread and oyster dressing for Christmas. We thought it delicious and exotic because we knew that none of our neighbors had it. Daddy brought oysters from New Orleans and added them to the dressing with a great flourish. Locust Hill natives initially balked at the notion of adding the strange food to the more common and acceptable cornbread dressing. "Too citified, and strange looking, to boot," they murmured. That is, until they tasted it.

Although stuffing is quite common during the Christmas holidays, Daddy's recipe has always been my favorite. The only place that I have ever been able to get it is at home; Elsie has recreated it. She makes it in huge quantities and all close family members take home a frozen bag of it for later. When the hubbub of Christmas is over, toward the end of January, we prepare it (translate - thaw and warm) and relive the moment.

Part I, day 1

You should do this part the day before you plan to serve dressing.

Broth

Wash 3 to 4 lb. of turkey necks or 1 baking hen. Place in large pot and cover with cold water. Add:

- 2 large onions, chopped
- 2 large green (bell) peppers
- 6 med. cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 4-5 stalks of celery, finely chopped
- 1 medium red pepper cut in half
- 4 large whole bay leaves

*If using turkey necks add 3-4 slices of raw bacon

Be sure to keep enough water in pot to yield 3 quarts of broth. Boil until meat readily falls off bone. Set aside to cool. When cool, take the meat from the bones and chop finely. Strain the broth through a colander, and discard the bay leaves. Keep the remaining ingredients (from the broth) to use in the dressing. Store the broth and the ingredients in the refrigerator.

If you make oyster dressing you will still need to boil the chicken or turkey necks for broth. Don't worry, the meat will not be wasted; it makes great salad.

Part II

The dressing

Do this part the day you plan to use the dressing.

- 1 large pan cornbread
- 1 large box cornbread dressing mix, with herbs (packet included in mix)
- 1 cup cooked rice
- 4 cups yellow squash, sliced, boiled, and drained
- 2 cups oysters, chicken, or turkey, finely chopped
- 2 sticks butter or margarine
- 2 tablespoons rubbed sage
- 1-tablespoon season salt, or salt to taste
- Pepper, to taste

Thoroughly crumble the bread. Add the first three (3) ingredients listed above, using the broth to moisten the mixture. When well mixed, add the remainder of the ingredients. Soften the butter before adding to the mixture.

If you plan to use all the dressing at once beat six (6) eggs and stir into the mixture. If you use one half of the dressing, use three (3) eggs. Do NOT add the eggs until you are ready to bake the dressing. The dressing freezes without the eggs.

Bake in a casserole dish for 55 minutes at 400⁰.

Yield: about 2 gallons of dressing.

The remainder of the broth can be used to make gravy.



Perfect Candied Sweet Potatoes

Although sweet potatoes were quite plentiful during the period immediately following our late September potato digging time, candied sweet potatoes were only served on Sunday. We thought of them as a dessert and savored the tastes of lots of sugar, nutmeg, cinnamon, and orange. All other days we ate them baked in their jackets. When cool, sweet baked potatoes made excellent snacks. Sometimes we took them to elementary school as lunch. Some of our more in-the-know fellow students thought the lowly potato quite “country” compared to their store bought potted meat and crackers. At the time we would have gladly traded.

Candied sweet potatoes were also a Sunday dinner treat at our college-dining hall. They didn't taste home made, but they were edible.

The syrup in this dish is really a bit tricky. One must not only get the right mix of water and sugar, it must be cooked to the proper consistency. Another trick is not to get the potatoes mushy. This is a failsafe recipe for perfect candied sweet potatoes. Elsie has improved on the original family recipe.

6 medium sweet potatoes
1/2 stick margarine
3/4 tsp. cinnamon
1 1/2 cup sugar
1/2 tsp. grated orange rind
1/2 tsp. nutmeg
1 scant tsp. vanilla

Peel, slice and wash potatoes. Keep covered with water until ready to cook. In Dutch or large pot put 3/4 cup water, 1 cup sugar, margarine, and 1 scant teaspoon vanilla flavor. Cover and bring to a boil. Stir frequently, so as not to let the syrup stick. When the syrup has thickened add the potatoes. Mix the orange rind, nutmeg, cinnamon and 1/2-cup sugar, and sprinkle over the potatoes. Lower the heat and cook until tender. Gently spoon the syrup over the potatoes.



Old Fashioned Southern Collard Greens

Collard greens and corn bread were served for dinner at least a couple of days each week from October through May. When I was growing up I prayed for something different for dinner. Now I crave them. Once upon a time it was very difficult to get fresh collards at some grocery stores in major US cities. They are becoming more readily available, if you're willing to go to the right neighborhood.

3 to 5 pounds of fresh collards
4 to 6 thick slices of salted pork
½ teaspoon of Morton's Nature's Seasoning
1 pod red pepper. Use less if you don't like hot food
4 tbsp vegetable oil

Carefully wash greens to remove dirt and other debris. Remove about 1/3 of the stem from each leaf, beginning at base of leaf. Wash another three times. Roll green leaves the long way into a tight roll, and slice the roll into 1/4 to 1/2 inch strips. Drain. Put salt pork in large pot, add 3 cups of warm water. Cover and boil 12-15 minutes. Remove the meat and blot dry on paper towel. Discard the water. Put 4 tablespoons vegetable oil in skillet. On medium heat fry the salt pork until crispy. Pour the salt pork and drippings into the large pot, lower the flame, add 1/2 cup water and washed and drained greens. Cover and let simmer for 8 minutes. Turn the greens so that they are all coated. If all did not initially fit into the pot, add the remainder. Cover and bring to boil, and continue to cook for another 5 minutes. Stir. Check the water level; add another 1/2 cup warm water if necessary to maintain the water level. Add Nature's Seasoning and red pepper. Salt to taste. Return cover and continue cooking until greens reach desired tenderness (about 40 minutes).

(Optional)

When greens are almost to desired tenderness add 10-15 pods of whole fresh or frozen okra. Add a pinch of salt after 3 minutes of cooking. Do not crush okra, as pods should remain intact. Serves 6 people with big appetites.



Fresh String Beans with Potatoes (Okra Optional)

4 lbs. string beans, broken into small pieces about 1 ½ inch in length.
6 or 7 small red Irish potatoes
10 or 12 small pods okra (optional)
4 or 5 medium slices of salt pork (do not use pre-sliced meat)
Salt and black pepper to taste

Cut salt meat into ¼ inch slices. Add to pot and cover with cold water. Bring to boil and continue boiling for 10-15 minutes. Drain. Add 4 tablespoons cooking oil to the pot. Fry salt pork in oil until crispy. Add 2 cups cold water to pot.

Wash and drain beans, and add to pot. Add 2-3 slices fresh red pepper (optional). Add enough water to cover beans. Cover, and cook on medium heat until beans are ¾ done.

Peel Irish potatoes and cut in half. Rinse, and add to beans. If water does not cover beans and potatoes, add enough hot water to cover. (The finished dish should have about 1 cup of liquid).

If adding okra, wash it in cold water and cut ends off. Add to beans and potatoes.

Add salt and black pepper to taste.

Mix 2 teaspoons plain flour with 1/3-cup cold water. Mix well. Add to beans during last 10 minutes of cooking. Stir well.

If using CANNED snap beans, follow recipe below.

1-gallon snap or string beans
6-7 small red Irish potatoes
10-12 small pods fresh okra or 1 box frozen whole okra (optional)
2 medium slices salt pork
¾ pound cured ham ends
salt and black pepper to taste
½ pod cayenne or jalapeno pepper

Prepare salt pork as indicated for fresh snap beans.

Wash and add ham ends. Add 1-cup cold water (from tap) to meats. Cover and cook for 8-10 minutes. Add ½ pod red pepper. Peel potatoes.

Cut in half and add to meat. Cook for 8 minutes. Add okra (optional). When almost done, add beans plus ½ liquid from the can of beans. Add salt and black pepper to taste. Cover and bring to boil. Add flour and water mixture as indicated for fresh snap beans. Cook an additional 5 minutes.

Serves 8-10.



Locust Hill Lemon Pie

Lemon pie, commonly referred to as custard pie by the uninitiated, is still the downfall of many of our diets. The recipe has been in our family for generations. It is at the same time sweet, tart, creamy, and absolutely delicious. Miss Lula's mother, Mama Mollie, used to bake them and give Papa his own pie. Not just a slice, but his own 9-inch pie. Papa would savor the taste, but his pie never lasted the day. Even though we know it probably isn't a good idea, some of us still succumb to this tradition. We accept a lemon pie as a gift, agree to share it with those who are unable to join us for our holiday feast, then hunker down in a corner of an airport lounge or whatever quiet place available and eat the whole thing. This is not recommended, but it is so enjoyable.

3 large eggs, separated
3/4-stick margarine or butter
1 9" regular pie shell, unbaked
3/4-cup sugar
1 tsp. plain flour
1/4 cup lemon juice

Cream margarine and sugar at medium speed (about 2 minutes). Add egg yolks and flour. Beat egg whites separately at high speed until high peaks form. Add this to the sugar and margarine and blend well. Add lemon juice, mix well. Pour into pie shell and bake at 350 for 25-30 minutes. Let cool before cutting.



Cream Cheese Pound Cake

At Locust Hill, pound cake was not our favorite. It didn't have enough sweet stuff on it, and could be dry as a powder sponge. We loved layer cakes, where each layer of cake was no more than one inch thick, with lots of jelly filling in between. And then Elsie discovered cream cheese. The entire family suddenly developed a new appreciation for pound cake.

8 ounces cream cheese
1 ½ stick margarine
1 ½ stick butter
3-¾ cups sugar
6 eggs, beaten
3 cups flour
2 teaspoons vanilla flavor
1 teaspoon orange flavor

Cream first four ingredients in a mixing bowl. Slowly sift in flour. Gradually mix in eggs, using a mixer to blend. Add flavors.

Place in cake pan and bake at 350° for 1:30.



Elsie Qualls Fruit Cake Extraordinaire

Bad fruitcake jokes were around even when we were children. Even during our youth when no food was store bought, fruit cake was acceptable as a purchased food item. Since this was such a rarity we felt compelled to eat it although we really didn't like it. Elsie experimented, and came up with a recipe that is quite delicious. It is even better when made into cookies that fit quite nicely into a purse or other small compartment.

2 sticks butter
2 sticks margarine
4 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 tsp. salt
2 tsp. vanilla extract
1 15-oz. pack golden raisins
4 cups (1 1/2 pounds) mixed candied fruit & peel, chopped
2 cups (1 pound) candied yellow, green, and red pineapple
1-cup cherries, chopped
1 1/2 cups white sugar
1-cup light brown sugar
6 eggs
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. baking soda
2 cups Bourbon whiskey (recommend Tom Moore or Old Charter)
1 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
1 tsp. nutmeg
1 tsp. ginger
1 cup pitted dates, chopped
1 cup candied citron
6 cups medium chopped pecans

This cake has a wonderful bouquet and lots of fruits and nuts. For best flavor it should be made well ahead of time. Elsie makes hers during the Thanksgiving holidays.

Mix all fruits and nuts together in a glass or stainless steel pan. Re-cut any piece of fruit that is a bit large. Pour bourbon over the mixture. Stir well. Let stand overnight.

Sift flour. Pour 1 cup of the flour over fruit mixture. Mix well. In a second bowl put the remainder of flour and add all other dry ingredients except sugar. Mix well and set aside. In a third very large bowl, cream margarine, butter and sugar well. Add eggs, 2 at a time, beating well. Add vanilla. Now add dry ingredients, 1/2 at a time. Beat until very smooth. Pour batter over the fruit and nuts.

Remove rings and thoroughly wash hands. With hands, mix the batter and fruit well.

Grease 9"x5"x3" loaf pan or 10" tube cake pan well, and dust with plain flour. Spoon batter into pan. Bake at 275 for 1 1/2 hours for loaf pan and 2 1/2 hours for 10" tube pan,

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or until done. When the cake is done it will crack on top. A long wooden skewer inserted in the middle of the cake should come out clean.

While the pans are very hot set them on a wet towel. When they have cooled enough to handle, turn the cakes out onto heavy foil. When completely cool wrap tightly and put in a sealed contained (such as a big popcorn tin).

For fruit cookies, use foil muffin cups. Fill with 1 tblsp. batter. Place on cookie sheet and bake at 350° for 35 minutes. For fruitcake, place dough in large tube pans and bake at 275° for 4 hours.

Yield: several dozen cookies or 4 large cakes.

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Sinner's Punch

Elsie first experimented with this delectable offering over 3 decades ago. She gave a small party to celebrate a birthday with a few friends and colleagues. Although she and most of her guests consider themselves righteous souls, she declared the devil made her add a bit of the hops to her otherwise wholesome punch. Although she fully planned to put a warning label on the brew, she got really busy and, well, ... you know. Her guests, including the preacher, drained several bowls of the stuff. (Elsie later made full disclosures). Sinner's punch is still a favorite with the righteous and unwashed.

2 packets orange Kool-aid
(Add to 1 qt. water)
2 qt. grape juice, white
(Use white grape juice for yellow punch, regular for red punch)
2 qt. water
1 1/2 qt. orange juice
1 pt. grapefruit juice
4 oz. lemon juice

Combine all above ingredients in a large glass or stainless steel container. Stir well. Add:
3 cups sugar
2 16-oz. cans beer
1 2-liter bottle ginger ale

Stir. Check for flavor and sweetness. Serve over ice.

Optional: Add 1 qt. fruit cocktail. If the punch is kept for over 24 hr., strain to remove the fruit. Refrigerate.

Yield: about 12 quarts.



Quick and Easy Homemade Rolls

1 cup milk
½ stick butter + ½ stick Crisco
¼ cup sugar
2 teaspoons salt
2 packages dry, active yeast
¼ cup warm water
3 large eggs
5 cups plain flour
Extra melted butter

Heat milk until just before it begins to boil. Remove from heat. Add ½ stick butter, Crisco, sugar, and salt. Set aside until cooled.

Dissolve yeast in warm water. Beat eggs lightly, add to milk mixture, then add yeast and water mixture. Add flour gradually, mixing until all flour is used. Let stand for two hours.

Punch down. Separate into small batches. Roll out on floured, smooth surface. Cut with biscuit or cookie cutter. Brush top with melted butter. Let rise for about an hour. Bake at 400° for 8-10 minutes. Makes about 4 dozen rolls.

Holiday Celebration Ambience

Back in the day, we didn't know about special decorations to create a festive mood. The camaraderie of good friends and the rarity of plenty of our favorite foods was sufficient cause for celebration. Nowadays, we are blessed to be able to eat whatever we want whenever we want it. So, we try a little harder to add magic to our special occasions, although there is still nothing like breaking bread with family and good friends.

I have discovered that theme settings help evoke pleasant memories of times long past, or serve to create new ones. A few special touches can transport you and your guests to a magical place that each will treasure.

This is how we make our Holiday Celebration dinner an event to remember.

Color Scheme:

Soft gold, red, white, and green.

Invitations:

We make our own, using software and decorative paper available at any office supply store. We try to use words and pictures that help get our guests in the "I just gotta be there" mood. (Use colors that compliment your theme).

Flowers:

Sometimes we stick a sprig of holly or other holiday flower in existing flower arrangements. Snow-tipped greenery, gold ribbons and balls, and holly berries are used as mantelpieces, around banisters, and in special bouquets. Fresh mistletoe with sprigs of holly are placed over all doorways, for old times sake. A holiday flower arrangement anchors our buffet table. Our centerpiece is a fresh spruce or fir tree decorated with a zillion gold and glass ornaments, and tiny, clear lights.

Electric logs make our fireplace crackle with a soft, red glow. Clear light bulbs in strategic fixtures are switched to soft pink. Lights are turned low.

Patio doors and windows where guests will dine and chat overlook a wooded area of the yard. We decorate the trees with twinkling clear lights that visually extend the party area into the yard.

The Table:

Pale gold table coverings, with festive red and green holiday runners.

Paper and plastic dishes don't hold up with this menu. We are forced to use the real thing. Our china is plain white and white with gold trim. Sometimes we use fancy patterned plastic glasses for our beverages if we run out of the real thing at a large party.

Music:

Christmas instrumentals, as guests arrive and mingle. It is later switched to special tapes of Christmas classics by our favorite artists.

Guest Mementos:

Small white box filled with tiny Fruit cookies Extraordinaire. Cookies are nestled in individual red and green foil cups. Box has embossed seal. (We now use Soul Stirrings seal).

HOW TO MAKE YOUR HOLIDAY CELEBRATION EXTRAORDINARY

One of the first things that I did after I finished my book, *Soul Stirrings*, was arrange a family get-together in celebration of all the good times that we shared. It's all too easy to focus on the negative, but if we search hard enough and open our hearts, we will find good. I wrote and published the following article to celebrate my new perspective. In it you will find practical ways to bring your extended family together during the personal discovery process.

Family Pearls, Family Peace

by Joyce M. Coleman

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You toss and turn, trying to wake up from a recurring nightmare that has you in its grip. Four generations of family members are descending on your house for this year's Christmas dinner. It's suppose to be a happy occasion, so why are you in a cold sweat? Tension rises and tempers flare. God forbid, they aren't coming to dinner! They live with you. Your daughter-in-law flees from you, stung by your simple request to be quiet already, she's getting on your last good nerve. Your mother-in-law tells you for the umpteenth time how lucky you are to have snagged her son. Your grandchildren are trying to hide a snicker about the weird way you and great-grandma talk and dress.

You are seriously ticked off because your mother and mother-in-law refuse to accept the undeniable fact that you are a grandparent, and should be respected accordingly. You and your husband are beside yourself, and out of frustration you act like enemies instead of each other's support system. All in all, it is a dream from hell.

And then you wake up and discover that it isn't a dream after all. Although statistics show that intergenerational families are a common occurrence, it is still one of the least talked about family situations. We women seldom talk about it, because we don't want to embarrass our loved ones. We bear our burdens, almost in silence, sharing our frustrations only with our few remaining friends.

If this situation hasn't come to your house yet, not to worry. It will. Give it a year or two. If you are a baby boomer like me, and fortunate enough to have a living parent (or parents), it will come. And sadly, time is not with us with regard to keeping this repository of wisdom and information with us forever. We need to capture it while time permits.

We Boomers don't think of ourselves as "older," but let's face it, we are the generation most able to articulate our accumulated experiences, wisdom, and other information

critical to helping our children, grandchildren, and those not yet born understand why they are the way they are. Our knowledge holds the key to their recognizing if not avoiding sand traps, and other dangerous situations.

Here's the good news. There is no need to be a victim of this situation, or wait until all we can say is I shoulda, woulda, coulda. You have the capacity to change things, to bring understanding and joy into your intergenerational family. You have the capacity to capture history and share it with generations to come. There is nothing that brings a sense of purpose, self-esteem, and fulfillment like having a formal, documented account – memoirs, if you will – that chronicles your own history.

The process has three simple steps and is actually a lot of fun.

Step 1: Create your own memoirs, or become an angel of mercy and help an older family member get started. If two or more like each other's company, consider collaboration among family members. Start with your childhood home. A picture really is worth a thousand words. Draw a picture of it that will literally "map" this part of your story. You don't have to be Picasso. Start with a rectangle, about the size of a regular sheet of paper. Draw your house. Lay out your street, then the streets in your neighborhood. Who were the people and what were they like? What were your favorite places? Why? Maybe you didn't exactly live "on a street." My "map" included our house, yard, chickens, corn crib, ditch, a path through the patch and another leading "up the pasture." Everything we did contributed to getting food, getting our lessons, going to church, and the normal games siblings play on each other. The main characters were my family, dominated by my mother and grandfather. Whatever else I wrote about, these were recurring people and themes.

Next, write down everything you remember about each part of the picture you've just drawn. Write it as it comes to you. Give depth and character to your pictures. Write what you feel. Keep writing until you can actually smell the food, reach out and touch your favorite chair, or hear your mother's voice calling to you. You'll have time later to sort it all out. Some of it will make you weep, and others will have you rolling on the floor with glee.

Now determine what most vividly touched your early life. Was it family, school? Did you move frequently? You have to feel strongly about it in order to help others "see" why you feel the way you do.

Challenge your memory. Family members come in handy here. See if they remember it the same way you do. Be careful not to get into memory turf wars. Each of us jealously guards our recollections; they make up who we are. So be gentle. This is supposed to be fun, and these are your memoirs.

Use facts to give your memoirs authenticity and accuracy. Your local library is a great place to start. Property records at a county recording office will clarify who owned the property next to you (and you thought they were aliens). Court records will tell you who was married to whom (oops!).

Probate records show death and inheritances. Department of Education records recount the public education grandma and Aunt Tilda received. Police records might allay your suspicions about your ancestors, or confirm your runaway suspicions. You might find information that shows an entirely different perspective from that you have carried all your life.

When you revisit your early life, you'll discover that each day, week, month, and year present wonderful fodder for your memoirs. Block these periods. Let your memory take you across each landscape. Write what you see. Soon you will be able to capture the essence of experiences and activities that made you who you are. Don't stifle your reactions to them, even those you would just as soon forget. You survived, didn't you. If you're reading this, you've done better than simple survive; you're taking charge of your life.

As you work through each blocked period, look for the these elements within your memories, and how you feel about the impact each had on your life.

Church

School

Teachers

Most influential adult

Happiest event

Most frightening event

Proudest moment

Most embarrassing event

Your first love

Locate all the pictures of people, places, and things you can get your hands on. Pictures, historical fact, and the role each had in your life make for dynamic and interesting reading.

Congratulations. You have taken the first steps to writing your memoirs.

Step 2: (Preparing your Memory Journal)

Lay out your information and pictures in chronological order. Use historical events to frame your stories. This makes your memoirs an excellent resource for teaching local history, sharing heritage, and instilling pride in family legacy.

Step 3:

Prepare for gift-giving, as your Memory Journal makes a most treasured gift that lasts throughout generations. Make it into a book to share with others, develop individual stories into skits and/or readings to bring excitement to family celebrations and share wisdom gleaned from the ages. Or, turn them into dollars as you launch your new writing and teaching career.

Step 4: Develop a dramatic production from your Memory Journal

Develop vignettes based on characters and scenes from your Journal.

Give each character and scene depth. Use pictures to determine period clothing. Record actual voices or recreate them to the best of your recollection. Recreate nuances and body language.

Add period music to accentuate the message, period, and scene.

Develop stage sets and props to add depth and character to your production. There are enough tasks to permit inclusion of all who wish to participate. Let them help. Give praise for jobs well done. Set the date for your production premiere.

Congratulations, Director. You're ready for Lights, Camera, and... Action.

RESOURCE DIRECTORY

Electronic Books

<http://www.agoodread.com/> A book club that offers an extensive resource list, books on writing, and other practical information. Links to numerous free resources on the Net. This is one of the best resources I've ever seen.

<http://www.visualvision.com/> E-book compiler and other electronic publishing gear.

<http://www.microsoft.com/frontpage.com> Web hosting.

Write, and Profit

[Make Your Knowledge Sell](#) - The definitive word on capturing your special knowledge and publishing it on the Internet.

Personal history resources

All these resources are extremely beneficial in researching and writing your personal and family history.

<http://www.personalhistoryhelp.com/>

<http://www.bitsofivory.com/gettingstarted/wheretostart.htm>

<http://www.ancestry.com/>

Self Assessment Resources

<http://www.lifework.umn.edu/indicator/index.html>

<http://www.adv-leadership-grp.com/programs/evaluations/performance.htm>

<http://www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/BehavSty.html>

Quotations online

<http://www.quotationsreference.com/>

<http://www.womenshistory.about.com/library/qu/biquelist.htm>

Journaling

http://www.oprah.com/journal/journal_howto.jhtml Join this community and benefit from sharing with others.

Women Entrepreneurs on the Net (general)

<http://www.onlinewbc.gov/> SBA Online Women's Business Center

<http://www.nfwbo.org/SuccessStrategies.htm> Center for Women's Business Research

<http://www.agoodread.com/> Excellent support for women Internet Entrepreneurs

Selling Online

All tools are from Yanik Silver, guru of online marketing

<http://www.instantsalesletters.com/?10214> - The most complete package of sales letters for every situation ever assembled. Works just as well for brick and mortar businesses as online. A must for every business manager.

<http://www.milliondollaremails.com/?10214> - If you have anything to do with bringing customers into your business, you definitely need this tool.

<http://www.33daystoonlineprofits.com/?10214> - Exactly what the name implies. Follow instructions to the letter.

Personal Growth books

[Faith in the Valley](#) by Iyanla Vanzant

[The Psychology of Self Esteem](#) by Nathaniel Branden

[The Life Strategies Workbook: Exercises and Self Tests that Will Help You Change Your Life](#) by Dr. Phil McGraw

[The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People](#) by Stephen R. Covey

[Something More: Excavating Your Authentic Self](#) by Sarah Ban Breathnach

Personal Success

[Dreams Alive](#) - A software program that not only helps you release any stress or struggle - but also helps you find and realize your most treasured Dreams and goals.

[Make Your Knowledge Sell](#) - The definitive word on capturing your special knowledge and publishing it on the Internet.

[10 steps to Fulfilling your Divine Destiny](#) - This Christian book will impact your life for an eternity. Inside this book you will learn who you are and what your life is about. You will also learn to identify and remove roadblocks that stand in your way.

Online Author Support

<http://www.published.com/> The Free Directory of Independent Writers and Artists

<http://www.ebookjungle.com> E-book directory and free listing for E-book authors.

<http://www.agoodread.com/> A book club that offers an extensive resource list, books on writing, and other practical information. Links to numerous free resources on the Net. This is one of the best resources I've ever seen.

[Make Your Knowledge Sell](#) - The definitive word on capturing your special knowledge and publishing it on the Internet.