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Grandma's Gone Global

Recipe Transmission from the Kitchenette to the Internet

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When Tiffany H. posted her grandmother's recipe for donuts on the website Allrecipes.com with the notation "my grandmother passed this delicious recipe for making doughnuts along to me, and I thought I would share it," (Tiffany H. 2001), she entered into a tradition of recipe sharing that has persisted for generations. With roots in the oral story-telling traditions of the kitchen, the practice of writing down recipes for other cooks to enjoy fulfills more than just the task of providing the ingredients and instructions for producing tasty dishes; recipes become vehicles for sharing stories, communicating identity, and reaffirming ties with the community. Culinary historians, foodways experts and Women's Studies specialists now recognize that women's recipe collections have much to say about their creators' lives beyond just what they cooked. By tracing patterns of language, teasing out underlying narratives, and piecing together the stories in which recipes are embedded, scholars create a fuller understanding of women's lives. Here I extend scholarship that uses recipe collections to explore women's lives in order to discover if the same patterns of sharing recipes and stories persist when women turn to new media, like the internet, to exchange recipes.

Recipes, Stories, and Recipes-as-Stories

Culinary historians and foodways experts have long recognized the significance of food to tradition, culture, and memory. As Charles Camp argues in his book *American Foodways: What, When, Why, and How We Eat in America*, "food matters culturally because it expresses, reflects, and enacts values which are both openly attested to and privately held" (Camp 1989: 23). People eat every day. They eat with friends and family. They eat during holidays and special occasions. Food celebrates. Food becomes a marker of memory. Food becomes a link to identity. Because eating is so central to life, food carries meaning beyond its tastes, textures, and smells. Floyd and Forster note in "The Recipe in Cultural Context" that "personal histories, or pasts, constructed through memory, or the process of remembering with others, are often centered on food: favorite childhood dishes, special family occasions, first attempts to cook, celebration meals and so on" (Floyd and Forster 2003: 7). Recently, scholars have embraced the idea that recipes also communicate information about the women who record, use, and share them. For example, in her book, *Baking as Biography: A Life Story in Recipes*, Diane Tye reveals the complex interweaving of the foods her mother cooked and her mother's life story. In so doing, Tye reveals that cooking was not merely something her mother did, nor was cooking something that wholly defined her mother. Instead, Tye's recounting of her mother's story through recipes powerfully demonstrates the ways in which her mother actively used food and cooking as a way to make connections with others; communicate caring; and leave a lasting legacy for the future. And Tye's mother is not alone in her use of recipes as part of her life story—a truth reinforced in the book *Storied Dishes: What Our Family Recipes Tell Us About Who We Are and Where We Have Been*, edited by Linda Murray Burzok in which dozens of women share stories, and recipes, in a way that reinforces

the deep connection between the foods and the meaning in their lives. These recipes-as-stories reveal that just like food, recipes carry meaning, tell stories, and reflect the identities of the individual women and communities that produce them.

Anne Bower argues that while recipes can be seen as “...something formulaic—a prescription or chart that allows preparation of a particular food...” they are actually more than just a list of ingredients and the instructions for preparation and they “...can go beyond the formulaic in both content and form...it can make us laugh, give us a sense of the world from which it originates, incorporate some history or an inkling of the personality of its writer” (1997: 7-8). For women, writing, exchanging, and using recipes represent opportunities to share their sense of themselves, their families, and their communities. One way they do this is to surround recipes with personal, recollections, memories, family histories—bits of narration within and around the recipes that communicate both the importance of the recipe and the key aspects of their lives. As Janet Theophano asserts, “connections to people, places, and the past are embedded in the recipes women kept and exchanged, transformed, and adapted to their changing world” (2002: 8). According to Theophano, “The stories cookbooks tell are about life and its sustenance in different eras and in different places; they are about enjoyment and desire, family and friendships, stability and change, and the contentment and longings of lives lived and worlds remote from our own” (2002: 10). Women use recipes to share their stories. It is up to those of us who receive, read, and use them to decipher those stories.

Share and Share Alike—Recipe Transmission Traditions

Recipes do not exist in a vacuum. As Susan Leonardi declares, “even the root of recipe—the Latin *recipere*—implies an exchange, a giver and a receiver. Like a story, a recipe needs a recommendation, a context, a point, a reason to be” (1989: 340). Floyd and Forster expand on this idea, noting that “the root of the word recipe, the Latin word *recipere*, meaning both to give and to receive, reminds us that the instructions that appear to tie down the form of a dish to be shared exist in a perpetual state of exchange” (2003: 6). This social context, the passing back and forth of knowledge between women in the form of recipes and stories, is what transforms recipes from a simple list of ingredients and directions for combining them into a marker of community and identity. As Leonardi writes, “...the recipe’s social context gives it far more significance than that of a mere rule for cooking” (1989: 344). Recipes become a key element in creating bonds between women and within families and communities.

Recipe transmission is perhaps most intimate in the kitchen. Miriam Meyers writes, “...as a communication center for the entire household, the kitchen serves as a locus of communication...” (2001: 37). Here a cook can pass on recipes to a curious observer. Meyers describes the process of learning to make her mother’s biscuits, not by reading a recipe, but by watching:

My mother made beautiful Southern biscuits regularly. I sat in the kitchen talking with her as she spooned what seemed to be a random amount of self-rising flour into a special bowl, scooped a piece of fat from a can and placed it in the center of the flour, poured in buttermilk, and worked the mass with her fingers. When the dough was “right,” I watched her shape the biscuits, then place them on a greased baking sheet,

blackened from many years' use. I could make those biscuits today easily, though Mama never taught me formally. Being in the presence of my mother, talking with her as she made biscuits, "taught" me...So this is the way many women learn—by being in the kitchen (2001: 56).

Two elements are the keys to Meyers' story of learning how to make biscuits from her mother. First, she learned through observation. Her mother "taught" her to make biscuits through demonstration. This is recipe transmission at its most basic form. As McDougall notes, "in the past, watching and listening to others was the method of transferring skills from one person to another, from one generation to another, in a communal oral setting. Recipes have not always been written down but have been passed on through speech and demonstration as women cook together" (1997: 108-109). Second, and just as important, is the fact that Meyers and her mother talked while she cooked. This emphasizes how deeply recipes are tied to the act of speaking and to telling stories. As Traci Marie Kelly reveals, "for many women, sitting around a table or standing around a kitchen counter becomes a space where their stories are told. For generations, oral storytelling has brewed while dinners have simmered. Not only do we learn the secrets of a good piecrust or the special ingredients in Hunter's Stew as we listen in the kitchen, but we also learn the important stories that make up the lives of these women. There is power that we get from telling our stories through our recipes." (2001: 252). By telling stories while cooking, the processes of sharing recipes and creating narratives become intertwined.

The link between written recipes and oral tradition can often be seen in the language of the recipes themselves. As McDougall points out "the translation of an oral form into a written discourse results in a form and style that reflects orality. Although recipes appear in textual form, the recipe is presented to the reader through a speaking voice, the "I" of the cook, with the reader occupying the position of listener or follower of instructions or guidelines" (McDougall 1997: 109). Writing recipes down does not necessarily strip them of their ties to spoken language. Moreover, written recipes also reflect traditional ties to storytelling that are present in the kitchen. Recipes not only serve as instructions, but also as a way to capture and share memories, stories, and histories. As Kelly notes, "these recipes-with-memories are a natural extension of storytelling, with the recipes acting as a kind of "cue card" giving the memoir a structure and a template to embellish. Some women have appreciated the "canvas" of the kitchen, using that space to create nourishing meals, memories, and art. These works are rich sources of autobiographical assertion because they present the lives of women through their own voices, rendered from a room that has been, truly, a room of their own" (2001: 252). For centuries, women have told stories while cooking. It is only natural that these stories would accompany the written record of their recipes.

Written recipes allow widespread transmission among family members, friends, and even strangers. And, in many instances, stories accompany the recipes. In her article, "'Family Liked-1956': My Mother's Recipes," Sharon Jansen describes how her mother used recipes to tell stories. Writes Jansen, "usually my mother's recipes come folded up inside her letters, which describe the dish, when she made it, who she made it for, how they liked it. And always what they said to one another who is

fighting with her husband over what, whose son or daughter is expecting a baby, who has the most annoying neighbors” (1993: 67). The recipe is the catalyst for Jansen’s mother to tell her stories. It is a point of contact between two people, and an opening for communication.

Written recipes not only allow for transmission across vast distances, they also allow those living in the present to reach back in time and remember women who are no longer alive. The box of handwritten recipes mixed with clippings from magazines and newspapers becomes the record of a woman’s life. In her article, “Speaking Sisters: Relief Society Cookbooks and Mormon Culture,” Marion Bishop describes how her grandmother’s written recipe collection provides her with a continuing connection to her grandmother:

I also received a small wooden box from my paternal grandmother with thirty-five of her favorite recipes typed neatly on four-by-six cards. At the end of each recipe that was her own, my grandmother signed her name; if the recipe had come from a friend or neighbor—often women in her ward—their typed names were included next to the title. For a time, I was possessive of these recipes, not sharing them, and clutching them close to me as a substitution for my grandmother and the warm meals that were half a country away. Then, my grandmother became ill. I realized that after her death, I wanted to eat her rolls at my sister-in-law’s home on Thanksgiving, her Texas Cake at friends’ birthday parties, and I began sharing her recipes—always taking care to write her name across the top of each copy. When she is gone, her recipes will give many of us access to her, through aroma, taste, and texture (1997: 94-95).

Recipes become the tie that binds—the link between mothers and daughters, grandmothers and grandchildren, the close-by and the far-away, the living and the dead. As Colleen Cotter notes, “in a satisfying way, we are all bound by our language, history, family, food, and community. Recipes in many ways can reflect that.” (1997: 51). Even when a member of the family passes away, recreating her recipes becomes a way to maintain her presence at family gatherings and everyday meals.

Some recipe transmission moves beyond the intimate relationships of friends and family to include a wider audience of community members and even strangers. For example, compilers of community cookbooks not only share recipes, they also recreate narratives. As Marion Bishop elaborates, “...stories are sometimes encoded in recipe names...at other times stories—or parts of stories—are written into the texts of individual recipes...By including such story-telling phrases in their recipes...women reveal information about their personal practices and preferences. Then too, for the reader-user of these cookbooks, a recipe may serve as a token or symbol of memories and stories...In this way, oral histories and the recipes work together to breathe life into the women whose names accompany the recipes” (Bishop 1997: 98-99). Once again, the recipe has become the vehicle for a story. This time the narrative speaks of an entire community of women.

Even when the recipe stands alone in the community cookbook, or is surrounded by only limited narrative elements, it is often possible to tease out a larger story about family, community and/or the

lives of women. Romines argues that in the Methodist community cookbooks her family collected, “...the daily texture of private kitchen life is brought to the page with an almost formulaic anonymity, the language of the recipe. That dignified, standardized language seems to have been important and validating to the women who employed it. It confirmed their unwritten community, the body of skill and knowledge they shared but did not include on the page (for everyone, of course, knew what it meant to “can cold”)” (1997: 87). What seems at first glance to be the dry language of recipes speaks to Romines of the underlying identity of the community. The Methodist women who read and used the cookbooks reaffirmed their ties to each other because they understood the language of the recipes. Anne Bower confirms, “...these cookbooks tell stories—autobiographical in most cases, historical sometimes, and perhaps fictitious or idealized in other instances. The discourse of the discrete textual elements and their juxtapositions contribute to the creation of these stories, which quietly or boldly tell of women’s lives and beliefs. In community cookbooks women present their values, wittingly or unwittingly (we often can’t know which)” (1997: 2). Whether intentionally or unintentionally, community cookbooks reflect the identities of the women who submitted their recipes.

In a reflection of the growing role of the internet in modern American life, the process of recipe transmission has taken to cyberspace. With a proliferation of websites, blogs, newsgroups, and listservs dedicated to cooking, the World Wide Web seems to offer women almost limitless possibilities for sharing recipes with a global audience. And yet, if the purpose of these internet sites is to provide easily accessible and searchable databases of recipes for the eager cook, embedding those recipes in personal stories, reflections, and narratives might seem out of place. One might suspect that contributors who share recipes would consider narratives as irrelevant or at least not directly related to the list of ingredients and directions required to complete the recipe. Yet even a quick perusal of online recipes reveals that recipe transmission as a form of storytelling persists. On the internet, just as in the kitchen around a bubbling pot of stew or within the pages of a community cookbook, women surround their recipes with narratives. Some websites attempt to foster a sense of community but even without encouragement, or when offered little opportunity to include narrative elements in the recipes they post online, users find ways to include personal anecdotes, family stories, and narrative notations in the recipes they share with a world full of strangers. They continue to tell their life stories through recipes.

To demonstrate the ways in which recipe-sharing websites extend and support the recipe-as-story tradition, I plucked twenty-five recipes from three recipe-sharing websites for a total sample of seventy-five recipes. With a plethora of possible websites, I narrowed the field by eliminating sites that drew on recipes mainly from magazines, commercially produced cookbooks, and television programs such as recipes.com, foodnetwork.com, and myrecipes.com. Instead, I focused on websites that encouraged users to post their own recipes, using their own language. With this focus, I selected allrecipes.com, recipezaar.com, and ccooks.com.

Allrecipes.com and recipezaar.com are both community-based websites meaning that they require users to register with a screen name and login in order to take advantage of most of the features of the

site. Clicking on the “join for free” link on the Allrecipes.com homepage brings up a box that reveals if you join the community you will be able to “save recipes to your recipe box; rate and review recipes; create a shopping list; submit your own recipes, and more...” (allrecipes.com). The same is true for recipezaar.com which declares “sign up for Recipezaar to share photos, show off your cooking chops, and connect to an enthusiastic and helpful community. It’s free and easy” (recipezaar.com). Once signed up and logged in, users are encouraged to actively participate in the online process of sharing and commenting on recipes. Recipes posted to allrecipes.com and recipezaar.com are linked to the contributor’s user name. Accompanying every recipe is a box where the recipe’s originator can share commentaries about the recipes. Moreover, there is also ample opportunity for other users to give their feedback in the “reviews” section of each recipe—a component that is well-utilized on both sites. These features combine to create a vibrant atmosphere and the sense of community reminiscent of face-to-face recipe-sharing.

Cooks.com offers a much different experience. It is more of a database for recipes than a recipe-sharing community. As the website notes it is “a convenient and reliable way to store all your recipes! Throw out those recipe boxes and clipping files where you can never find what you’re looking for. Never lose your favorite recipes again! They’ll all be searchable here at Cooks.com recipe database and search engine” (Cooks.com). In fact, users do not need to log in to post their recipes on the site. This means that the source of the recipe remains anonymous unless the contributor decides to take advantage of the “submitted by” feature to include his or her name which seems rare. Acting more as a storage site and searchable database, cooks.com is not concerned with fostering relationships or building communities. Moreover, while cooks.com has a “Talk food, join the discussion!” feature that allows other users to post reactions to the recipe, this feature seems to be infrequently used. And yet, even in the restrictive atmosphere and format of cooks.com, users managed to sneak in narrative elements and stories into their recipes. For example, the anonymous contributor who posted the recipe for “Grandma’s Macaroni Dish,” declares “Grandma (to all us kids in the neighborhood) made this for Saturday lunch when we played with her grandchildren, the Ames’ kids” (Cooks.com). This short notation added to the body of the recipe in a space that is intended for only cooking instructions conveys this user’s childhood memory and sense of the “neighborhood.”

Since each website includes thousands upon thousands of recipes that have been posted by users, I narrowed the field by using the search term “Grandma.” Since grandmothers have played such a critical role in the traditional processes of oral and written recipe transmission, it is fitting that “Grandma’s” recipes would show up in great numbers online. Using the search term “Grandma” resulted in returning 200 recipes on allrecipes.com, 426 recipes on recipezaar.com, and a whopping 2590 recipes on cooks.com. The vast majority of recipes contain very little apparent “storytelling” beyond the recipe itself. In most cases, the user simply uploaded the recipe and did not comment on the contents. In other cases, the commentary was a brief explanation of the content of the recipe and possible variations and not a “story” in the technical sense of the word. However, it is important to remember that even these bare-bones recipes have stories to tell. As Colleen Cotter reveals in her article “Claiming a Piece of the Pie: How the Language of Recipes Defines Communities,” recipes that

consist of just the list of ingredients and directions for combining them can provide “stories.” As Cotter argues, “by looking at the language and structure of a recipe, we begin to see how a recipe can be viewed as a story, a cultural narrative that can be shared and has been constructed by members of a community” (1997: 52-53). Cotter herself conducted a linguistic analysis of pie crust recipes to demonstrate how their language told stories. While the same type of deep reading would be possible for the recipes posted on recipe-sharing websites, that undertaking falls outside the scope of this paper. Instead, I selected twenty-five recipes from each site, purposely choosing examples that contained narrative elements.

From Grandma To Me To You: Recipe Transmission and Stories in the Global Age

Scholars point out that women in the 19th and early 20th centuries used recipes and recipe collections as a way to express themselves because they had very few opportunities to “speak” (Newlyn 2003; Theophano 2002). While the same cannot be said for women of the late 20th and early 21st centuries--women in America today can participate in the public sphere and make their voices heard--the tradition of using recipes-as-stories continues online. It serves the same functions as when recipes are shared orally, on paper, and in recipe collections: recipes help the women who write, share, and use them to share memories and connect with family histories. They strengthen ties that help to create communities, including online communities.

Recipes serve as touchstones for important memories. For Elizabeth McDougall, the cookbooks she inherited from her grandmother and mother are not only a legacy of her cooking heritage, but also tangible reminders of the key tastes and smells of her childhood. McDougall writes, “when I read through these cookbooks, memories of eating resurface as I remember all the get-togethers in the church basement, at the community center, or at the curling club. Cooking is a big part of my relationship to these people” (1997: 106). Online, women also share important recipes and the memories that they evoke. For some, the idea that recipes serve as signifiers for memory is obvious. AngiC declares in her comments for the recipe “Grandma Solberg’s Summer Snack Squares” that “these are a chewy, no-bake bar that my grandma used to make me as a snack when I would play all day in the summer. It goes without saying that they bring me fond memories” (AngiC 2008). AngiC shares her favorite recipe with the online community, but it is the memory of her grandmother making them that emerges as the important message. The same is true for Diane Martin. Her recipe for “Grandma’s Blackberry Cake” is both a connection to her grandmother and a memory of the time they spent together. Martin exclaims “I REMEMBER going blackberry picking with Mom and Grandma. Even at 70 years old, Grandma could pick 3 gallons of berries before I had my pail half full. Grandma made up this recipe with her mom, and it’s been passed down for five generations now” (Martin 2008). For Martin, posting the recipe becomes the occasion to share the story of picking blackberries with her grandmother. CookbookCarrie’s recipe for “Grandma Nancy’s Oatmeal Cake” also carries memories, not just of her grandmother baking the cake, but of her grandfather’s mischief enacted to ensure that he secured the majority of the cake for himself. CookbookCarrie relates that “Grandma used to bake this cake, only to have the whole thing disappear. She finally found out my Grandpa was taking it to his shop and hiding it in a drawer to snack on as he worked. It looks complicated, but it isn’t, and the

flavor is worth it. Every time I eat it I think of my grandparents and smile!” (CookbookCarrie 2003). These online contributors not only post a recipe, they share significant memories that go along with the recipe.

In this way the recipe becomes a link to the past and the person who once made it. As long as the recipe continues to be made, the person who it came from will never truly be gone. For Marion Bishop, a snickerdoodle recipe stands in for Joyce Eck, a friend who died in 1987 (Bishop 1997: 89). Joyce may no longer be alive, but for Bishop she lives on through her recipe. Writes Bishop, “as a young girl, I visited her kitchen; through her recipes, I now invite her into mine” (1997: 103). Sharing recipes online also becomes a way to keep the memory of a loved one alive. The anonymous poster who shared “Grandma’s Ginger Cookies” on Cooks.com conveys both the recipe and her love for her Grandma. She writes, “Grandma Worshek gave me this recipe when I was a young girl. We used to have tea and cookies often, just her and me. I loved those private parties and I loved her very much” (Anonymous n.d.). Writing in the past tense indicates that Grandma Worshek is no longer around to share those cookies over a cup of tea. By posting her recipe online, the contributor ensures that her memories, and some material evidence of her grandmother’s life, are kept alive.

Posters of recipes online often acknowledge that they are participating in a long tradition of recipe sharing. This is what Marion Bishop identifies as a “feminine culinary genealogy—a matrilineage based not just on a woman’s name but also on her kitchen, her act of cooking, and her body” (1997: 102). That is why when SINGERSANDY posts “Grandma Cornish’s Whole Wheat Potato Bread,” she pays homage to the line of women from whom she inherited the recipe noting that “this is the recipe that my husband’s grandmother made for her family, my mother-in-law made for hers, and I have inherited the fun of making this bread for mine” (SINGERSANDY 2000). Even though she is related to these women only by marriage, they are still part of her culinary genealogy through their recipe for bread. As Bishop argues, “not only are women creating and affirming identity through connection, they are fostering new kinds of connections that suggest altogether new ways to configure community and family: for me to remember a recipe is to remember the woman it came from, how it was passed on to her, and where I can situate myself within my culinary female family” (1997: 103). Moreover, SINGERSANDY has now included a worldwide audience in her recipe’s lineage. On March 2, 2001, user Martha Blair added herself to this culinary heritage by declaring in her review of the recipe that “I’ve been attempting to bake bread for the past 25 years with varying success. I’ve tried recipe after recipe and I believe I’ve finally found gold. No doubt this will be a main stay [sic] in our home. The results of my first batch was overwhelmingly successful. I can’t even begin to explain how pleased I was. This recipe is definitely the BEST!” (SINGERSANDY 2000). A recipe found online is now integrated into another baker’s culinary story.

Posting recipes online allows contributors to foster relationships and widen their community circles. In this way the “feminine culinary genealogy” stretches beyond familial ties to include a much broader audience. When ClareVH posts the recipe for “Grandma Osborne’s Applesauce Cake,” she reveals that “my mom says that her mom got this recipe from Grandma Osborne, which means it is a very old

recipe. Unfortunately, no one knows exactly who 'Grandma Osborne' was... Fortunately, she left us a moist old-fashioned applesauce cake" (ClareVH 2004). Whoever she may be, the mysterious "Grandma Osborne, has left a culinary lineage that now includes not only ClareVH's mother and ClareVH herself, but a potentially global audience of online users of recipezaar.com. Other times, users connect their own heritage with the recipes offered online. On January 1, 2008, Diane S. responded to Gwen Johnson's posting of her "Grandma's Lemon Pie" on allrecipes.com:

I have been looking for a lemon pie recipe similar to the legendary one my husband's grandmother used to make; unfortunately, she had never written it down, and her secret is lost. This pie comes very close to hers. I used fresh lemon juice and added the zest as well (as Grandma had). I used 1/4 C. cornstarch, since many other recipes with equal liquid measurements called for it (I didn't want it to turn out rubbery). I decided to try another meringue recipe, since I already had a sore arm from the CONSTANT stirring involved in making the filling. This is very labor-intensive; I can see why making lemon pies has fallen out of vogue. The results are worth it, however; I made it for company, and they raved about how good it was (Johnson 2008).

Diane S's discovery of Gwen Johnson's grandmother's recipe for lemon pie allowed her to reconnect with her own recipe heritage that otherwise would have been lost.

For members of online recipe-sharing communities, posting their family and personal recipes online falls directly in line with the tradition of sharing recipes orally and in writing. When Puppies777 posts "Grandma Lee's Stuffing" on recipezaar.com, she acknowledges the process of transforming the recipe from her mother's practice of cooking it in her kitchen, to a written form for her own daughter: "this is the stuffing my mom, Lena always made for Thanksgiving. She never wrote it down but I helped her so many times I didn't need to see it in writing. My daughter, Sam (17) is not into cooking. However I wrote it down and perfected it so she'll be able to make it some day [sic]" (Puppies777 2007). Puppies777 then draws in the online community by providing definite instructions to assure that the recipe will turn out the way it should by declaring "couldn't be easier. Couldn't be yummiier...BELL's poultry seasoning is a must!" (Puppies777 2007). Chef53Kathy engages in the same process when she shares the recipe for "Grandma Helen's Cinnamon Apples" on recipezaar.com. She acknowledges the chain of transmission that brought the recipe into her hands and then incorporates the online community into that chain. Chef53Kathy declares "my grandmother made these for us every year during the holidays when we would visit her in Illinois. All of the grandkids loved them. I'm happy to share the recipe with my Zaar [sic] cooking buddies" (Chef53Kathy 2006). By including her "Zaar [sic] cooking buddies" in the line of transmission for her grandmother's recipe, Chef53Kathy assures that the recipe will never be lost.

While posting recipes online may give users the sense that their recipes will never disappear, as templates for the creative performance of cooking, recipes are always in the process of being changed, altered, and adapted. As Marie Drews points out, "...recipes call to be interpreted and reinterpreted, set and reset. Like drama, they need to be performed if they are to enable remembrance, resistance,

and persistence in the present” (2008: 69). Even the act of transmission results in changes to recipes. Transforming oral or written recipes to online versions is not necessarily an easy process. Sometimes key information is missing or difficult to convey. User ksduffster points out both the positive and negative impact translating recipes to an online form in her posting of “Grandma Star’s Pot Pie (Chicken & Dumplings) recipe on recipezaar.com. She writes, “this is my Polish grandma’s recipe, taught to her by her mother. She never wrote down recipes, which forced us to spend even more time with her, learning her recipes (no one ever complained about that though), but also had the unfortunate (for you) effect of none of us writing down the recipes either, so most measurements below are estimates” (ksduffster 2007). While the fact that her grandmother never wrote her recipes down had the positive impact of encouraging her grandchildren to spend time with her, it also had the negative effect of making the recipes difficult to duplicate for an online audience. Joan Kasura got around this handicap by translating the recipe “Grandma’s Apples and Rice” into a workable version. Kasura declares “LIKE MOST women of her generation, my husband’s grandmother was a ‘no-measure cook’. This recipe of hers suffered as it was handed down, so I made an effort to work out the kinks. Finally, my husband pronounced the results as good as he remembered, and we declared it the ‘official recipe” (Kasura 2008). In these cases, the very act of documenting, and thus recreating, recipes also alters them.

Online recipe-sharing communities reveal the truly dynamic nature of recipe transmission. In the reviews and responses to posted recipes, community-members describe their own experiences of making the recipes and reveal the ways in which they adapt and alter them to suit their own needs and tastes. This underscores the true nature of recipes—they are not a stagnant document and are instead a representation of an action--cooking. As Cotter observes, “...the recipe is a written reduction of an actual event” (1997: 71). But it is an event that welcomes interpretation and change. Susan Leonardi confirms, “like a narrative, a recipe is reproducible, and, further, its hearers-readers-receivers are encouraged to reproduce it and, in reproducing it, to revise it and make it their own. Folktales, ghost stories, jokes, and recipes willingly undergo such repetition and re-vision. Unlike the repetition of a narrative, however, a recipe’s reproducibility can have a literal result, the dish itself” (1989: 344). If a recipe represents the act of cooking as presented by the writer, recipients reproduce that act. And, since cooking is a dynamic process, recipients transform the recipe to meet their own tastes and needs. That is why when PDGRANT posts her response to the recipe “Apple Pie by Grandma Ople” on February 1, 2009 she not only describes how much she liked the recipe, but also includes the ways in which she altered it to fit her own tastes. She writes:

I’m a novice cook to be sure. I am a Junior at the University of Alabama and just discovered that I can cook just as easily as my mother does by following some key recipes from this website. This recipe in particular has changed my life. This is the most amazing pie I’ve ever tasted in my life, and it isn’t that particularly hard to make. I took several people’s advice by adding 1 tablespoon of vanilla, a dash of nutmeg, and a dash of cinnamon. Additionally, I put the apples in the bottom of the pie crust and poured the hot syrup on them, then put the lattice on top. After that, I made a separate glaze that consisted of brown sugar and cinnamon. I poured it on hot, perhaps

too hot and It [sic] seeped right through the lattice. Note that it should be hot though, otherwise it will clump on you. I cooked it at 350 for an hour and a half. The crust was more crisp, and the apples were softer as a result. I definitely suggest the Granny Smith apples over other types of apples (MOSHASMAMA 2000).

Even though she is a self-described “novice,” PDGRANT feels that she has the right to alter the recipe for her own needs because she has now appropriated the recipe and made it a part of her own life story. This same type of scenario is repeated again and again in comments to recipes posted online. Users change, alter, and adapt recipes according to their own tastes and needs and then share their opinions with the rest of the online community. The process of constantly changing recipes is integral to the tradition. As Janet Theophano recounts, “change is constant. The accidental or deliberate modification of centuries-old recipes takes place with the passing of each generation, with the movement of people from one locale or continent to another, with periods of crisis or scarcity such as war or natural disaster...Human ingenuity will create facsimiles of those old favorites and experiment with new recipes” (2002: 50). The give and take, and the ever-changing nature of recipe-transmission, is what gives the process its dynamic nature and helps the tradition of sharing recipes-as-stories remain vibrant and important even in the 21st century.

Conclusion: Keeping Recipes Alive and Cookin’

As this brief exploration shows, online transmission replicates many of the same processes and meets many of the same needs as when cooks share recipes orally or in writing. In surrounding their recipes with narrative, online recipe sharers reproduce the dynamics that have always underlined recipes and recipes-as-stories; they continue to rely on recipes to make connections, build relationships, and foster a sense of community. If, as Traci Marie Kelly claims, “to share a recipe is to share a part of one’s self...”, then recipe transmission is both an act of trust and intimacy (2001: 266). Yet, at the same time, posting recipes online for an anonymous global audience becomes the ultimate public performance. By contextualizing online recipes with individual reflections, family histories, and other cherished memories, contributors transform a very public activity into a more personal one that creates, or at least attempts to create, a personal relationship with the audience. Just as written recipes cross the boundaries of time and space, connecting women from different generations and in different locations, online recipe-sharing helps users to connect with each other. Recipe-receivers accept the recipes they select and sometimes make them part of their own life-stories. Understood in this way, online recipe sharing is just one more link in the chain of recipe transmission. For as long as there have been cooks, there have been recipes and as long as there have been recipes, women have used them to tell stories. As online recipe posters, modern women continue an age-old practice of sharing recipes, stories, and recipes-as-stories.

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