

Newfoundland Tea Buns

By: Alanna Wicks

In October of 2011 I documented my father, Lloyd Wicks, making tea buns from a recipe that belonged to my great-great grandmother and that members of her family have been using ever since. When I asked my father if he would make a batch of the tea buns in our family kitchen the way he always does so that I could record the process, he was thrilled to have the recipe documented.

Although in Newfoundland, biscuits, or tea buns as they are usually known, are a popular staple in many kitchens, in my family they are considered special. Not only are they delicious, they are integral to the tapestry of my father's family. They embody some of my father's childhood memories and because, in turn he made the buns for me, they now are tied to my own memories of growing up and of belonging to our family.

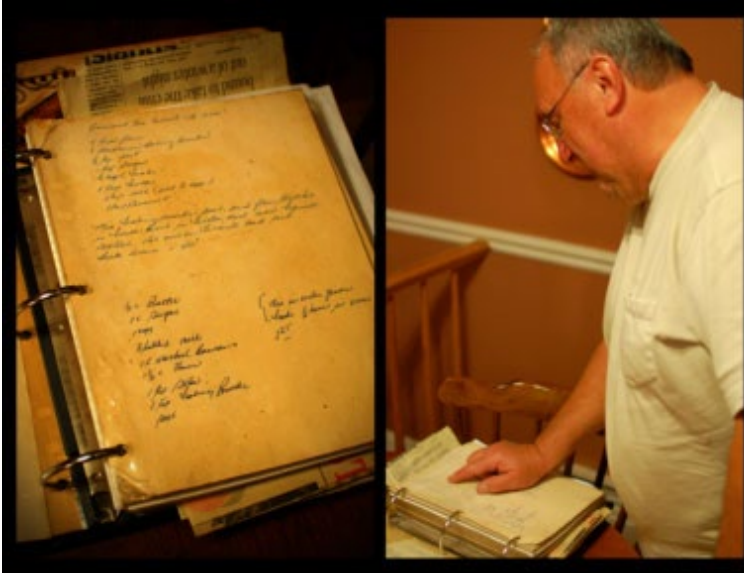
My father recalls his mother, Julia Wicks, baking tea buns for their family when he was a child. My father and his siblings have many fond memories of my grandmother's baking, including coming home from school to warm, fresh out-of-the-oven bread which they ate with butter. However, their mother's baking of tea buns is their most treasured memory.

My favorite memories of the tea buns are connected to my father, rather than my grandmother. As a child growing up in St John's, Newfoundland in the 1990s, my mother or maternal grandmother always prepared my meals. They also did the baking. This changed when I was sixteen and my father retired. He became more involved in the family's food preparation. Since then, the one item he has perfected and is most proud of, are tea buns. Warm and sweet, they remind him of his childhood and of his mother. He has made them so often, they now also hold nurturing associations for me. Because the recipe goes back to my great-great grandmother, I like to think that I belong to the fifth generation of my family to grow up savoring the taste of these tea buns.

The recipe came into my immediate family when my grandmother, Julia, gave it, along with many others, to my mother when she married my father. As far as I know, my parents have always kept my grandmother's recipes in the same large black folder that holds them today. With the exception of adding a few special ingredients like coconut or cheese from time to time, my father has not changed the recipe. As long as I can remember he has baked the tea buns in our kitchen with the same ingredients, tools, and techniques that his mother, and her mother before her, used. Making tea buns in this way is a family tradition that I cherish and will continue myself as I grow older.

1. The tea bun recipe is written in my grandmother's handwriting. Lloyd has a quick look at the ingredient measurements even though he knows them by memory. Ingredients: 4

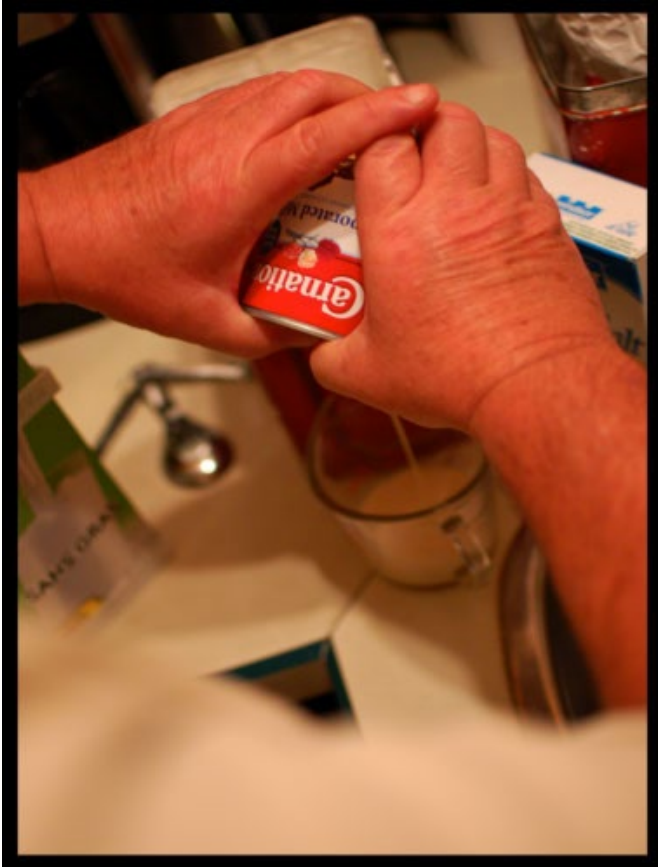
cups flour, 8 teaspoons baking powder, ½ teaspoon salt, 1 cup sugar, 2 eggs (beaten), 1 cup butter, 1 cup milk (add to eggs).



2. The ingredients are laid out. The red flour and sugar tins belonged to my grandmother and she used them when baking.



3. Carnation brand evaporated milk has always been used in the recipe. It is never substituted with fresh milk. Lloyd says it's the secret ingredient.



4. The margarine is added to the flour. The wax paper that surrounded the margarine is kept to grease the pan for baking. Two eggs are added to the evaporated milk in a glass. This is stirred and later added to the flour.



5. The margarine and the dry ingredients are rubbed together by hand. Lloyd claims this is the most important part and that “it’s all in the wrist.”



6. The milk and egg mixture is added to the dry ingredients. In the background of the photo is a glass placed in the flour tin. This glass is later used for cutting out the tea buns.



7. The wet and dry ingredients are mixed together by hand until they are well combined. In this photo my father is reminding my mother of how much I used to enjoy eating the unbaked dough as a child. I still do.



8. Before cutting the buns out and putting them in the oven, my father always tears off some dough to give to me. I will always have this memory of my father.



9. The rest of the dough is formed into a rough ball and flattened out on a floured cutting board to be cut into circles.



10. My father uses a drinking glass to cut out the dough into circles for baking; he rarely, if ever, uses a cookie cutter. So that the dough does not stick to the glass Lloyd places it in the tin of flour after cutting a couple circles and then continues to make the rounds.



11. The dough is cut out and placed on a round baking pan. There does not need to be any space between the buns.



12. The dough cut outs circle the pan until it is full and ready to go in the oven.



13. The oven temperature is set to 450 degrees and the tea buns are baked for ten minutes. Then Lloyd turns the oven down to 400 degrees and bakes the buns for five more minutes. When I asked him why he turns down the oven, he said it was what his mother did when she baked the tea buns.



14. While the tea buns are in the oven my father, my fiancé, and I have a conversation about the age of the recipe and how long my father has been baking them. My father enjoys telling people about the recipe and sharing it with them.



15. When the tea buns are out of the oven they are allowed to cool for a few minutes. Then they are ready to enjoy, usually with some butter spread on them and a cup of tea.

