

A Family Love Letter

*A cookbook laden with simple foods, wildflowers,
and remembrances pays tribute to the family of a
Pennsylvania artist and her grandmother.*

By Lisa Kingsley

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Photo captions by Carrie J. Gamble



In the late 1960s, when Carrie Gamble was still sporting a pixie, The Homestead, the farmhouse where her grandmother grew up, was torn down to build a ranch house.

She never got to visit it in person, but she most assuredly has been there in spirit, through images preserved on film, and in her dreams.

"I had heard countless stories from my grandmother, mother, and aunt about 'the farm,'" she says of the land 20 miles north of Doylestown, Pennsylvania. "I had always wished that for just one day I could be there and live it and know the feeling of summertime on the farm, eating farm-fresh food, homemade bread baked by my

Above: Nicholas Griffaton in the fields of "The Homestead" in the summer of 1946.



Anna and Nicholas Griffaton of Philadelphia welcomed their first child into the world on April 1, 1909. Here they pose proudly with their "angel" Elizabeth Rosalia. As a young German girl, Elizabeth would later Americanize her middle name to "Rose."

great-grandmother and spread with fresh raspberry jam and butter, going out in the fields to pick berries, taking a walk in the woods - living life the old-fashioned way."

The longing for a taste of this life inspired Carrie, a commercial artist and illustrator, together with her grandmother, Elizabeth von Hohen, to preserve the echoes of the woods, the laughter around the table, and the fine food served on it, in a book entitled *Grandmother's Cookbook*.

It's a family cookbook full of old-fashioned recipes for such foods as Hungarian Goulash, Sausage Bean Chowder, Feather Beds (the ever-so-slightly sweet, fluffy rolls that nearly every grandmother laid on the table), Bohemian Nut Slices, and Lemon Sponge Pie. The recipes are a synthesis of the foods Elizabeth learned to cook from her Austrian-Hungarian mother and the regional Pennsylvania dishes she sampled from the lunch pails of her classmates.



It would be many years and three moves back and forth from city to country until the family settled on a 42-acre orchard farm in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

The book also includes advice such as the recommendation that a steaming bowl of potato or vegetable soup makes a wonderful one-dish meal when followed by a hearty dessert of "cinnamon buns, apple cakes, or strawberry shortcake."

Its pages are embellished by the watercolors of the wildflowers Elizabeth picked with her child's hands, lovingly painted by Carrie's steady ones. A small story or reminiscence written by Elizabeth accompanies each one.

The family cookbook is like a long love letter to one's family - a paean in praise of hearth, heritage, and home. Grandmother's Cookbook springs from two people, but it speaks volumes with a singular voice about a family's life. They are Elizabeth's words and recipes, but Carrie has infused them with her soul.

Baby Elizabeth in her mother's arms next to her handsome father (holding sheet music) in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia as members of the choral society. Nicholas' true tenor voice was a God given gift. This lady's tailor always loved to sing beautiful German songs. Right: A photographer's pose. Elizabeth spoke only in German until she started school.





In 1987, Carrie's father passed away. The loss started her thinking about the impermanence of life, and how her Grandmother von Hohen was already in her late 70s. She began spending afternoons sipping tea and talking with Elizabeth, nudging her to write down her favorite recipes. "I really wrote those things down for my children because I'd always wanted to do that," Elizabeth says. "Then we started talking about how it might be good to make it into a cookbook. And then Carrie asked me to write down things that I remembered - so that's why I wrote all of the little stories."

The manuscript Carrie turned in for consideration to publishers, in fact, was written in Elizabeth's hand - but she was told it wasn't clear enough. Several publishers expressed interest but wanted to change the format, so Carrie turned them down.

Carrie is a typesetter, but type seemed too cold for the warmth of this project. In the version she eventually published herself, Carrie hand-lettered Elizabeth's words - almost 100 pages worth.

On those afternoons spent talking over tea, Carrie learned all about her grandmother's life: her birth in 1909 and her growing up on the farm with six brothers and a sister. She also learned

Above: At fifteen Elizabeth and her mother. After moving to the city to live with and work for the Strauss family Elizabeth wrote touching letters home. "Enclosed is a money order for \$25.00 for which please send me all the love you can put in a letter and send it as soon as possible for I need it as soon as I can get it." She was such a devoted daughter she sent most of her pay home. Her mother would send wildflowers, with stems wrapped in moss to keep them fresh. They helped Elizabeth get through some lonely days.



Erwin von Hohen came into her life when Elizabeth was seventeen. His father managed the building she lived in with the Strauss Family. Mr. von Hohen and Mrs. Strauss encouraged their meeting. The next day Erwin took Elizabeth on their first date to Willow Grove Park where they saw John Philip Sousa's band. As a young girl, Elizabeth frequently went to the Saturday matinee. She loved actor Gary Cooper. She told her family, "I met a man who looks just like Gary Cooper!" How lucky could a girl get? Bottom Left: While still dating they visit Olga's family farm. Right: Elizabeth and Olga - best friends.



Much to Elizabeth's regret, there were no photos taken on their wedding day. Elizabeth and Erwin always intended to have a professional photo taken in their wedding clothes. The photo above was the next best thing taken five years later with Joan (and Carol on the way). At right, Elizabeth at home on the farm with her first born.

about how, at the age of 9, while her mother helped work the farm and her father spent weekdays in Doylestown as a tailor, Elizabeth did the cooking for the family. It was the beginning of a love affair with food.

"When my little sister was born, I would make us lunches, really simple things," Elizabeth says. "I would make applesauce from our apples and soups and egg drops."

When Elizabeth was a little girl, her mother could not read English, so they would cook everything together. Her cooking sense sharpened as she grew.

There were many delicious things. Her schoolmates, she says, "would bring all of these fantastic things to school and I would ask what they were." One of those memorable foods was a pie.

"My mother had never heard of a pie," Elizabeth says. "In the old country they did not bake pies." Their first pie was butterscotch.

Her mother also was much more familiar with tortes - made with lots of eggs as leavening - than she was with baking powder cakes. But she valiantly tried her hand at the new desserts.

"We were so pleased with ourselves!" Elizabeth says in the foreword of Grandmother's Cookbook. "And when she made her



This tradition comes but once a year - taking a walk in the woods to look for Hepaticas, one of the first signs of spring. Back row from left: Anna, sister-in-law Mary (hold a bunch of Hepaticas), Erwin & Elizabeth. Front row from left: Nicholas, Joan and Carol.

first layer cake! It was for my last day of school. In our little country school the last day was always a picnic and everyone brought a goodie. Mother had no layer tins so she made it in a big bread pan. She sliced it in half to make two layers. Then she iced it. I was so proud of her! I think I stopped every ten minutes on my way to school to admire it!"

Elizabeth met her future husband, Erwin, when she was 17. They married two years later and settled in Philadelphia to begin their family.

"He was the sweetest man," Carrie says. "Every night after

dinner he'd give her a kiss to thank her for a delicious meal. She was very well appreciated by the family. She still is. She made a dinner last week I wish I was having again tonight - fried chicken, zucchini with tomatoes, mashed potatoes, and coconut cream pie."

Her grandfather's kiss is very likely something Carrie witnessed, a gesture that was not solely the province of her dreams, as a visit to the farm was.

Together sisters Carol and Joan would experience many "summertimes on the farm". What fun it must have been! I've heard many stories of the antics and teasing of their young uncles, which always sent the two girls screaming!

Top: Joan with a calf. The outhouse in the background was still being used at this time. Center: Young Carol in one of her favorite dresses made by Elizabeth. Bottom: Carol with her cousin Jeannie, whom she adored. Bottom Left: Joan with a few of her uncles playing with kittens, of which there were always many!



To bestow the bounty of her family's table on the lips of everyone who reads Grandmother's Cookbook, Carrie invested unlimited time and energy delving into the life and soul of her grandmother.



"I never loved anything more than working on this book with my grandmother," Carrie says. "When she would write one of these little stories, she'd just hand it to me and ask, 'Is that ok?' Every one of the stories I would read would make me want to cry. I don't know if it's the story, or if it's because I know her so well, but it just reinforced what a warm, loving person she is. It also made me realize my grandmother has a flair for writing that I never knew about before."

Like the best kind of letter, Grandmother's Cookbook is written by hand from the heart. It has flowers pressed between its pages as a true love letter should - and like all love letters, it will be taken out and read over and over again.



Above: For years Elizabeth's family enjoyed traditional holiday celebrations with delicious dinners prepared and beautifully presented by her. She is pictured here carving the turkey on Thanksgiving. How lucky we all are to have the memories of "over the river and through the woods to grandmother's house we go." (We did drive over a stream and through a woods on our way to grandmom's house. I remember as a small child my dad sometimes actually singing the song as we were on our way!)



***A Tribute
to my great-grandmother,
Anna Griffaton***



***She was all that a woman and a mother should be . . .
strong, hard working, selfless and nurturing.
A picture of a mother and child which
hung in her kitchen said it all,
“What is a home without a mother?”***

Carrie J. Gamble

A typical scene at the farm on a holiday. This was Thanksgiving with a loving family gathered 'round mother Anna and her delicious feast! Elizabeth's life long passion for cooking and baking had begun years earlier as she and Anna experimented with new recipes cooked on the old wood/coal stove. To the bitter end she was always so proud of her mother! I think it shows here, as Elizabeth poses behind her mother, with sister and brothers all around. Joan is in the foreground with husband, Gerard.



*Elizabeth Rose von Hohen
loved nature and flowers as much as she loved
cooking. In 1934 in the fields of the family
homestead she holds her beloved wildflowers.*



Sausage Bean Chowder

Take one pound of pork sausage. Brown in a dutch oven stirring to separate the meat. Add 2 cups water, 1-16 oz. can kidney beans, 1-16 oz. can stewed tomatoes, 1 finely chopped onion, 1 large potato (peeled and cubed), 1/4 cup chopped green pepper, 1 bay leaf, 1/4 teaspoon salt, pinch of thyme, 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Cook until vegetables are done. This usually takes about 1/2 to 3/4 of an hour. Serve with crackers.



This is another good one dish meal which can be made ahead of time.



Feather Beds

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup sugar
1 teaspoon salt
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup margarine
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup hot potato water
1 package yeast
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup warm mashed potatoes
1 egg
4- $4\frac{1}{2}$ cups flour

Stir together sugar, salt, mashed potato water and margarine. Let cool. Add the rest of the ingredients and knead well. Let rise until double in bulk. Then roll out and cut into circles. Put close together on a baking sheet. Let rise again until double. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes until golden.



These may also be made into crescent rolls and clover rolls. They are very light and most delicious.



Hungarian Peasant Meal

One thing we had lots of times for dinner was this meal. My mother told us in the old country they called potatoes "feld hendles", field chickens, as they took the place of meat.

Boil ½ dozen red new potatoes in their jackets for about ½ hour or less until soft. Mix 1 pound cottage cheese with a sprinkle of salt, pepper and paprika. Add a heaping tablespoon sour cream and ½ cup chopped scallions. Toss this all together.

Serve potatoes in their jackets. We just peeled them on our plate, sprinkle with salt and pepper and a lump of butter. Serve with a couple of spoonfuls of the cottage cheese mixture.



This really is very tasty and I still make it once in awhile when I get a yen for it. It's healthy too!



Grandma's Sugar Cookies

1 cup margarine, 2 cups sugar, $\frac{2}{3}$ teaspoon baking soda, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon vanilla, 3 eggs (beaten), $3\frac{2}{3}$ cups flour, 2 teaspoons baking powder and sugar to sprinkle.

Cream margarine with sugar, baking soda and vanilla. Add eggs. Mix well. Add sifted flour, salt and baking powder. Chill. On a well floured surface roll $\frac{1}{8}$ " thick. Cut with cookie cutter and sprinkle with sugar. Bake at 350 until light brown - 8 to 10 minutes. Very old recipe.

Sand Tarts

Cream $\frac{1}{2}$ cup margarine with 1 cup sugar and 1 egg. Add a pinch of mace or $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon grated lemon rind. Sift 2 cups flour, 2 teaspoons baking powder and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt. Mix sifted ingredients in with creamed mixture. Shape into a ball and chill for $\frac{1}{2}$ hour. On a well floured surface roll out to $\frac{1}{8}$ " thick. Brush with a beaten egg. Combine $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cinnamon and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped nuts. Sprinkle this over the dough and roll with rolling pin. Cut in 1" x 3" strips. Bake at 350 degrees for 12 minutes or until golden brown.