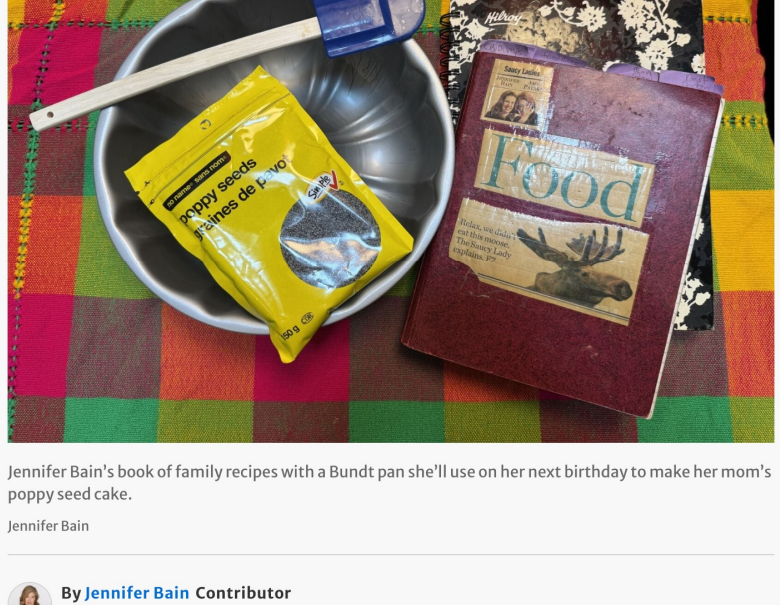


Opinion | How mom's Alzheimer's stole our treasured family recipes

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Jennifer Bain's book of family recipes with a Bundt pan she'll use on her next birthday to make her mom's poppy seed cake.

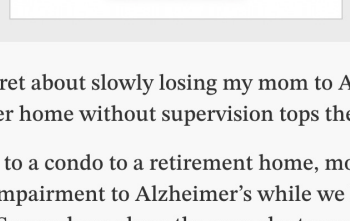
By Jennifer Bain Contributor
Former Star travel editor, food editor and Saucy Lady columnist Jennifer Bain still calls Toronto home but now travels the world in search of quirk. [JenniferBain.ca](#)

Growing up in Toronto in the 1970s, all my birthday cakes were homemade. Mine was always poppyseed baked in a Bundt pan with a swirl of cinnamon sugar. Money cakes were all the rage, so my mom wrapped nickels, dimes and quarters in wax paper and slipped them into the cake after it had cooled.

I wish I knew how something as exotic as poppyseed cake wound up in our home.

My mom was a nurse turned home cook who embraced the shortcuts of the era — like Shake 'n Bake chicken and canned soup for school lunches.

Our meals were usually adorned by just butter and salt. I once rejected Kraft Dinner — yes, the iconic orange kind — when mom inexplicably added black pepper.



Of all the things I regret about slowly losing my mom to Alzheimer's disease, letting her pack up her home without supervision tops the list.

Moving from a house to a condo to a retirement home, mom quietly progressed from mild cognitive impairment to Alzheimer's while we let her maintain some independence. Somewhere along the way, she tossed her book full of treasured family recipes.

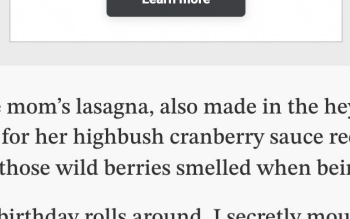
Luckily, I had saved a few.

In my time as food editor for this paper, I published our planked sirloin steak recipe. Our friend Lizet Catita's Portuguese sweet bread made it into my "Toronto Star Cookbook: More Than 150 Diverse & Delicious Recipes Celebrating Ontario."

I know how to bake mom's apple crisp, blueberry pie and shortbread, how to turn Christmas leftovers into turkey divan, and how to pan-fry pickered the Bain way — simply coated in soda cracker crumbs. We still make spinach and cheese-stuffed pasta shells, although my kids prefer ricotta to cottage cheese.

Thanks to mom, I love unbaked cheesecakes that chill condensed milk, sour cream and cream cheese in a graham cracker crust.

By the time mom moved from independent to assisted living it was too late to ask for more recipes and their stories. Besides, she could no longer speak.



I've failed to replicate mom's lasagna, also made in the heyday of cottage cheese. I never asked for her highbush cranberry sauce recipe, but will never forget how wretched those wild berries smelled when being boiled.

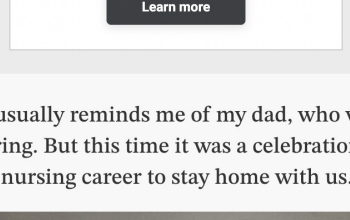
When my December birthday rolls around, I secretly mourn for that perfect 1970s poppyseed cake and ask my husband just to purvey a consolation cake.

This year it occurred to me that the lost cake might have come from a vintage fundraising cookbook my mom helped put together.

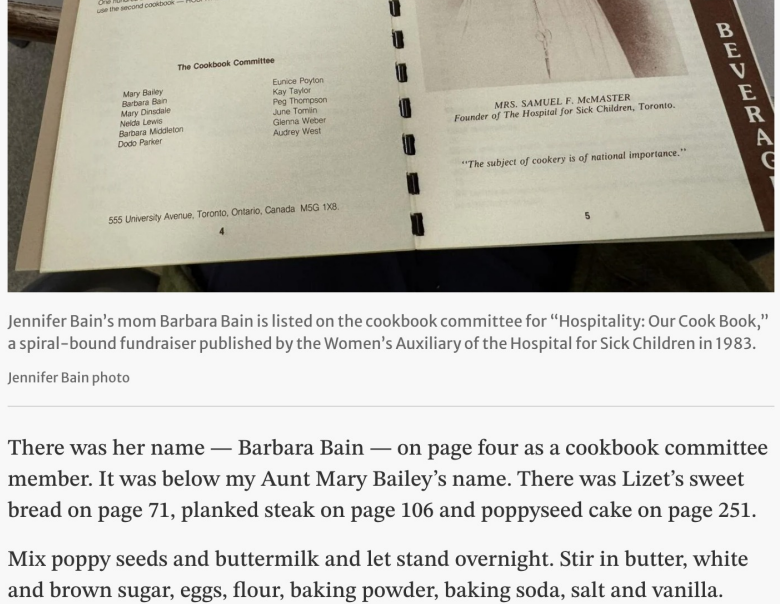
"Hospitality: Our Cook Book" was a spiral-bound fundraiser published by the Women's Auxiliary of the Hospital for Sick Children in 1983. I've struck out on eBay, but the Women's Auxiliary Volunteers still run the 5Fifty5 Shop at what's now SickKids so I fired off an email.

"I was finally speaking to the exact right person about the cookbook you were inquiring about," Membership Chair Yvonne Lawson wrote back. "It is called 'Hospitality.' And amazingly we do have one copy that stays in the WAV president's office."

"I have been advised that we could make arrangements for you to come down to the WAV offices and take pictures of the recipes you want," she continued. "However, there aren't any other copies available (that anyone knows of) and I've been told you can't take it out of the office."



Visiting the hospital usually reminds me of my dad, who was chief of pediatrics before retiring. But this time it was a celebration of my mom who gave up her pediatric nursing career to stay home with us.



Jennifer Bain's mom Barbara Bain is listed on the cookbook committee for "Hospitality: Our Cook Book," a spiral-bound fundraiser published by the Women's Auxiliary of the Hospital for Sick Children in 1983.

There was her name — Barbara Bain — on page four as a cookbook committee member. It was below my Aunt Mary Bailey's name. There was Lizet's sweet bread on page 71, planked steak on page 106 and poppyseed cake on page 251.

Mix poppy seeds and buttermilk and let stand overnight. Stir in butter, white and brown sugar, eggs, flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt and vanilla. Turn half the batter into a Bundt pan. Sprinkle with cinnamon sugar. Top with the remaining batter. Bake for 45 minutes.

Was this the recipe that inspired my mom? I'm letting the suspense build until my birthday.

If it tastes like my childhood, I'll add it to my own family recipe collection. Volume one takes up a burgundy notebook. Volume two is filling a black and white one. If my kids are reading this, please protect these recipes as I age. Someday, you're going to want them.

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BE Beverley - 2 DAYS AGO: I have the opposite experience. Having lived with her, I became the repository of my grandmother's superb recipes and my mother's who perfected a few into the 70s macular and there is no one who remembers or cares how good they were. Fast food and highly processed replaced the painstaking exquisite flavours and no one knows the difference. It breaks my heart and I don't know what to do with them. I'd give them to someone who cares. The 70s were a renaissance of food preparation, some things awful but many well worth the effort today.

KE Kelly - 2 DAYS AGO: Lost my mother the same way. She made shortbread and lemon pound cake and butter tarts only at Christmas and for my only ste made cinnamon and brown sugar roll ups with leftover pie crust. She was our anchor and when she passed I never returned to where I grew up. I think about her and my late father a little everyday. How lucky we were back in the day.

PI Pat 1 - 2 DAYS AGO: I have my favourites of my mother's, my mother-in-law's and my aunts-in-laws' who were all great bakers and cooks. It was a very emotionally sad day when I realized I would never, ever again have my mother's shortbread cookies, which were absolutely the best in the world. I have only once had ones that were maybe very close. I have my Mom's recipe. I have made it numerous...

CH christine - 2 DAYS AGO: I can so relate to this. We have one cookbook from my mom but sadly many favourite recipes aren't in there. She just made them from memory. In retrospect we all wish we'd paid more attention, asked more questions and wrote things down.

JA Jane - 2 DAYS AGO: What a very lovely tribute to your mom and so heartwarming. I catch and cook a lot of pickered but I've never cooked them in Soda crackers!! Gotta try that.

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