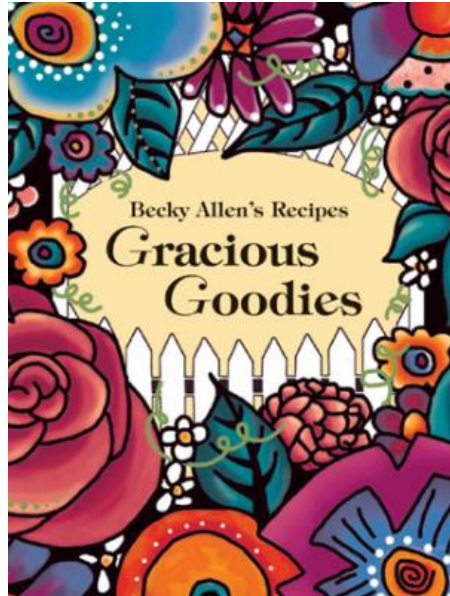


SKANEATELES PRESS ARTICLE MARCH 16, 2010

Gracious Goodies' a delicious treat

Miranda L. Pennock 03/16/10 



Sometimes history lives on in the most tasteful ways. For former Skaneateles resident Lorraine “Becky” Allen, her life and wisdom lives on in a truly delicious way — a cookbook compiled and published by her daughter, Jody Allen, of Florida, following Becky’s death in May 2009. “She learned to cook at an early age. Her family were ranchers, farmers. There were many people to feed including farm hands and others that would live with them from time to time,” Allen said. While some cooks are trained at schools in far-off lands, others are a bit of a homegrown variety, which is exactly the kind of cook Becky was. She learned from her grandmother, Johanna Olson Jacobson (from Norway) and her mother Josephine Olive Jacobson Emmick. She also picked up tricks of the trade from her mother-in-law Viola Swinton Allen and from her husband Bill’s aunt Hazel Swinton Kelly. Growing up, she lived away from home at an early age during the school year. In Sioux City, Iowa, Becky lived with a family and raised their children. The job included cooking and housekeeping — and the former was something she had learned how to do at a young age, read a lot about, subscribed to cooking magazines and even traded recipes with family and friends. Though the story of how Becky learned to cook is fascinating and rich in American history and the American dream — she was a child of the Depression era who eventually with her husband began a business, Skan-a-matic Corporation, in Skaneateles, and manufactured sub-miniature electronics — how the book came about is just as interesting. It began a few years before Becky required heart surgery in June 2008 to replace a leaking heart valve. “I went home before the surgery and stayed with her as her caregiver and advocate for one year,” Allen said. “The surgery did not go well and we had hoped and prayed for a better outcome.” Becky was in Skaneateles from June until December 2008 and then the family returned to Florida. She passed in May 2009 near her winter home in Boca Raton after being unable to recover from the surgery. **During Becky’s illness**, she and her daughter talked. They talked so much, Allen began keeping notes about the stories her mother would tell.

“I had been taking notes before she became ill for a few years. She and I had talked about my writing a story about her life previous to her surgery. Her friends felt that the stories that she would tell were far more interesting than some of the books that they were reading,” Allen said. “After she died, I had the task of organizing her personal things in Skaneateles and Florida. I found large expandable courier envelopes with letters that had recipes attached to them, tin boxes and plastic bags filled with recipes that she had saved.” All the recipes were dishes she had made over the course of her lifetime. Some of the recipes were Becky’s mother’s, some were from her mother-in-law. “I mentioned to some close friends and family members that I would like to finally write the story about my mother's life and also publish her recipes. Everyone thought it was a wonderful idea. I did not want to see her favorite recipes or her story lost and forgotten about,” Allen said. “My mother loved to entertain, she often prepared meals and took them to friends who were experiencing a hard time with a death in the family and sometimes she would just take a meal for the pure pleasure it brought to others.” A compassionate and caring woman, Becky came from a generation that Allen feels may never be duplicated. Specifically, the women of Becky’s generation grew up during the Depression on farms, displaced from their families and suffering the effects of two World Wars. “It would be safe to say this generation of women learned to overcome hardship at an early age. It was okay to want to be ambitious — there was a real reason to want to get somewhere then, a sense of mystery and adventure that these women understood,” Allen said. Because of who her mother was as a person — kind and loving — Allen believes she would have loved the idea that her recipes and story have been published and now shared with readers both young and old. The recipes are classic and the family did not want them to be lost, Allen said. Writing about a loved one after they are gone isn’t an easy task, but by writing Becky’s story, Allen was able to focus on better times they had together. “I was very close with my mother and miss her terribly,” she said. “It was a way I could express my love and dedication to her as a tribute to her fascinating life and courageous spirit.”

The story Allen wrote is about her parents and writing it has been a cathartic journey for her. With a supportive family behind her through the process, Allen said writing the story helped them talk through the feelings they had. **With approximately 300 recipes** in the book, Allen said it wasn’t hard to decide what ones to include. She made a list of the ones that were written in Becky’s and others handwriting first, and those were numerous. “Then I asked my brothers and my father to make lists of their favorite recipes and I had about 200 after compiling the list,” Allen said. “I also asked family members who live all over the country if they had recipes that my mother had given them or favorites of theirs and I got several recipes that way.” After eliminating the duplicates and remembering from memory how she prepared some of the meals, Allen had more than 300 recipes. She decided to go with only 300 for the cookbook. Allen’s three favorite recipes from the cookbook and her childhood include the chicken salad, chicken liver pate and the tomato juice. Why are they her favorites? “She made these when I was growing up, we would make them together. I remember holding onto the meat grinder to grind the ingredients for the chicken salad. She knew how much I loved this recipe,” Allen said.

To learn more about Becky Allen and to try your hand at some of her recipes, pick up a copy of “Becky Allen’s Recipes — Gracious Goodies.” The cookbook is available at Creekside Book and Coffee in Skaneateles or log onto beckyalLENrecipes.com.