

THE BEST BAKER IN TOWN

By Lillian Klein

My mother was one of the best bakers in Detroit. That's what we told our little friends and it was almost true. Her strudel was famous among our relatives and even the Hungarian community. I remember her putting the dough on a white tablecloth on our big round dining room table. She would start stretching it over her hands, like it was elastic, until it covered the whole table and looked like tissue paper. Then she put on a roll of filling of either apples or cherries, cottage cheese, or a walnut batter. My father's favorite was cabbage that was chopped and browned in butter. Then it was folded up like a jellyroll to bake. Then our windows were open, our neighbors would come out to inhale the wonderful aroma and drool. By now they knew how it tasted from previous samplings.

On Friday nights, we had a festive meal from chicken soup and roasted chicken to a torte with a delicious chocolate topping. Sometimes there was a piece left over and put in the cupboard. I would get up at dawn to get that piece of cake but my sister Eleanor always beat me to it. She either got up during the night or waited until I fell asleep and then went for the cake. The plate was always empty.

I tried to be around the kitchen on baking days so I could lick the cake bowl. Thought the raw batter was even better than baked, but Mom disagreed about that.

When she made coffeecake, I was often allowed to knead the yeast dough. It made me feel grownup and important. Think she was trying to teach me a few things but I didn't realize that until it was too late. She died very young at age 39. Unfortunately, I didn't inherit her talent but am grateful to have so many nice memories of our times spent together.