

Love Letter

For Edith Lee Casey, writing down her recipes unleashed a flood of memories, which became the heart of a family cookbook.

By **DIANE SUMMERVILLE** • *Photography by* **MATT HULSMAN**
Food styling by **MATT HULSMAN and WENDY PERRY**



Cucumber salad (see recipe on page 174) is a cool and refreshing way Edith Lee Casey (opposite page) enjoys summer's bounty.

When Julee Johnson gave her mom a write-it-yourself cookbook with blank pages for Christmas in 1989, all she had in mind was getting her mom to pass along the recipes Julee remembered from her childhood growing up on the family's tobacco farm in Johnston County.

What Edith Lee Casey returned to her daughter three years later, however, read more like a love letter. Because when Edith sat down at her kitchen table and started writing out the recipes by hand, lists of ingredients turned into stepping-stones leading back in time.

Beside her recipe for butterscotch squares, Edith wrote about taking Julee, her only daughter, to college for the first time: "As Harvey drove away, I looked back as long as I could to see her. ... I was trying to be very mature and logical. Harvey said, 'You might as well let it out.' I didn't just sob, I squalled."

Her earliest memory: "waiting for my brother, Ayden Lee, to come home in the afternoon." When he stepped out of the car, he'd put out his arm, and Edith would link her little hands around his wrist and be lifted into the air.

Eighteen years older than Edith, Ayden broke her heart when he left home to join the United States Army during World War II. He redeemed himself by returning home safely and spending a lifetime looking out for his little sister and loving her children and grandchildren.

"I hope he knew the happiness he brought into a little girl's life," Edith wrote beside a recipe that she got

from his wife, Annie.

Beside another recipe, Edith reveals a rarely seen side of her late husband, Harvey, a hardworking man accustomed to letting his actions say more than his words. All morning, Harvey had been rushing Edith through their errands because he had hay to bale. At their last stop, she went into K-Mart to pick up a few things while Harvey waited in the car with their 3-year-old granddaughter, LeeAnn.

"In a very few minutes while I was rushing to get the items I needed, I looked up and who did I see but Harvey and LeeAnn, her little hand in his big hand," she wrote. LeeAnn told her granddaddy that she needed some new sandals. "Time stopped as she looked at the sandals. ... Suddenly, that hay wasn't so important. ... LeeAnn is the one who came closest to breaking through that invisible wall surrounding Harvey's soul and spirit."

Edith didn't set out to capture her life in a book when she started writing out recipes. But each dish took her to a specific time, to a particular person's kitchen or home.

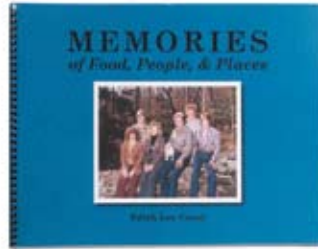
"There's nothing that triggers memory like food," says Edith, who more than once ended up in tears or laughing out loud as she wrote. You remember, she says, Sunday dinner at your mother's house every week, with your nine brothers and sisters, and their children and your children running around in the same yard where you played as a child. You go back to graduation parties, and to sitting up all night when someone died. Sometimes it gets to be too much.

And sometimes it's not enough. Two years ago, Julee asked her mom to update the book, to add stories about grandchildren now grown and to remember aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends no longer here. And with the help of family and friends, Edith produced *Memories of Food, People, & Places*, a book of recipes and photos and much more.

Diane Summerville is the senior editor of Our State magazine.



PHOTO BY BEATRICE YAKLEY



Edith Lee Casey serves every appetizer, main dish, and dessert with a story in *Memories of Food, People, & Places*. The family cookbook is equal parts funny recollection and heartfelt accolades for people who have meant the most to her throughout her life. To order, contact Edith Casey at (919) 553-7868 or edithcaseycookbook@yahoo.com.

Cucumber Salad

- 3 cups cucumbers, thinly sliced
- 1 cup onions, sliced
- 2 cups tomatoes, sliced
- Dressing:
 - 1 cup oil
 - ½ cup sugar
 - 1 teaspoon salt

Mix together sliced vegetables in a large bowl. Combine dressing ingredients in a container. Shake well, and pour over vegetables. Marinate for 2 hours.



Swift Creek Burgers

- 2 pounds ground chuck
- 4 tablespoons onion, chopped
- 4 tablespoons green pepper
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- ½ teaspoon Texas Pete
- 2 teaspoons chili powder
- 2 teaspoons brown sugar
- 2 cups ketchup
- 8 hamburger buns (or spaghetti or rice)

Brown ground chuck, and drain off fat. Add onions, peppers, Worcestershire sauce, Texas Pete, chili powder, brown sugar, and ketchup. Simmer for 10 minutes or longer if desired. Serve on buns, spaghetti, or rice. Serves 8.



Butterscotch Squares

- 1 stick butter, softened
- 1 cup dark brown sugar, firmly packed
- 1 cup self-rising flour
- 1 teaspoon vanilla flavoring
- 1 egg
- 1 cup nuts (pecans or English walnuts), chopped

Mix in order given. Spread into an 8 x 8-inch greased baking dish. Bake at 350° for 20 to 25 minutes. Squares are done when a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Do not overcook.

Vidalia Onion Casserole

- 3 or 4 Vidalia onions, peeled, sliced, and ringed
- 1 stick butter
- 1 envelope Ritz crackers, crushed
- ¼ cup butter, melted
- 1 cup Monterey Jack or cheddar cheese, grated

Sauté onions in a stick of butter until tender. Crush crackers into additional melted butter. Layer onions, cracker crumbs, and cheese. Repeat until out of ingredients. Bake for 20 minutes until hot and cheese is melted.



The Warren family can trace their ancestors from Dover, England, to America's first permanent settlement in Jamestown, Virginia, to Edgecombe and Johnston counties, and finally to Newton Grove, which they now call home. They reunite every September and enjoy dishes from the family cookbook, *Recipes & Remembrances*. To order, contact Carl Warren Jr. at (910) 594-1551.



Arugula-Raspberry Salmon

Raspberry butter:

- 1 stick unsalted butter, softened
- 8 raspberries, crushed
- 2 tablespoons arugula, finely minced
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ⅛ tablespoon pepper, freshly ground

Vinaigrette:

- ¼ cup olive oil
- 8 raspberries, crushed
- 3 tablespoons raspberry vinegar
- 1 shallot, minced
- Kosher salt and fresh black pepper
- 4 (6-ounce) salmon fillets
- Baby arugula leaves
- Fresh raspberries



In a small bowl, blend butter, crushed raspberries, minced arugula, salt, and pepper with a fork. Refrigerate butter mixture. Whisk together olive oil, crushed raspberries, raspberry vinegar, shallot, salt, and pepper. Set aside vinaigrette mixture. Grill salmon over medium-high heat for 3 to 4 minutes on each side. Place 2 pats of reserved butter mixture on each fillet and allow to melt over fish. Whisk vinaigrette to recombine, and drizzle over salmon. Garnish with mound of arugula leaves and raspberries.

— Emily Warren Freeman

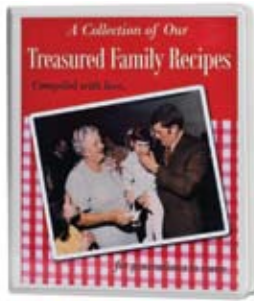


Squash Casserole

- 2 pounds squash, sliced
- 1 carrot, grated
- 1 10¾-ounce can cream of chicken soup
- 8 ounces sour cream
- Salt
- Pepper
- Herb-seasoned dressing mix

Boil and drain squash. Combine squash, carrot, soup, and sour cream. Add salt and pepper to taste. Pour into greased casserole dish. Cover with herb-seasoned dressing mix. Bake at 350° until bubbly.

— Ethel Baynes Warren



What began as a simple collection of recipes for her two children became a 364-page project for the entire family. *A Collection of Our Treasured Family Recipes* “serves as a recipe book, a family history, and photo album, as well as a Chicken Soup for the Soul’ type-book,” Cheryl Rice of Nashville says. To order, contact Cheryl Rice at (252) 904-6093 or crice1947@aol.com.

Fairy Dusted Spinach Salad

Croutons:

- 1½ cups English muffins, cubed
- 2 tablespoons Italian dressing
- ⅓ cup and 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese, grated
- 2 quarts spinach, torn
- ½ cup red onion, sliced and ringed
- ½ cup mushrooms, sliced
- 4 bacon slices, cooked and crumbled
- ⅓ cup Italian dressing

Toss muffin cubes with dressing and 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese. Place on ungreased cookie sheet. Bake at 400° for 8 to 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Combine spinach, onions, mushrooms, and bacon. Add dressing, remaining cheese, and croutons. Toss together.

—Joyce Cole



Frozen Margarita Pie

- 1⅓ cups pretzels, crushed
- ¼ cup sugar
- ½ cup butter or margarine, melted
- 1 (21-ounce) can strawberry pie filling
- ½ to ⅔ cup frozen margarita mix, thawed
- 1 (8-ounce) carton Cool Whip, thawed

Grease 9-inch pie plate. In medium bowl, combine 1¼ cups of the pretzels, sugar, and butter. Press evenly onto bottom and sides of prepared pie plate to form crust. In a large bowl, combine strawberry pie filling and margarita mix. Fold in Cool Whip. Spoon mixture into crust. Sprinkle with remaining pretzels. Freeze for about 2 hours until firm. Before serving, remove pie from freezer, and let stand 30 minutes at room temperature.

—Harriette Albritton