

Bourne toWrite...

creative writing
workshops

Recipe for life

by Chris Robsinson

Sitting in the back of her father's old battered Volvo Cathy was feeling excited. They were on their way to her grandmother's house, a journey they undertook every Saturday morning. Her father would drop her off outside with her brothers and sister and then go and do the weekly shop with her mother. The children enjoyed these visits. They were allowed to watch Swap Shop and Nan, as she liked to be called, would make them cups of tea and plates of cream crackers with extra strong cheddar. Cathy liked Swap Shop but she liked helping her Nan with the household chores more.

Saturday was washing day and Cathy was fascinated with the old twin tub her Nan used. You could open the lid and watch the cycle up close but she particularly liked watching the water being emptied via a large plastic see through pipe through the kitchen window and straight onto the garden. The smell of damp washing and the way the kitchen steamed up leaving droplets of condensation on the walls were comforting childhood memories. Cathy's favourite part was running the clothes through the mangle and then hanging them on the line with big chunky wooden pegs. She liked spending time with her grandmother. These memories were precious.

Today's visit was particularly exciting because it was the beginning of November and that meant they would start making the Christmas pudding. It amazed Cathy that the pudding was made so far in advance but it was exciting too because it meant that the Advent countdown had begun.

As each year passed Cathy had been given more and more important jobs. She had gone from just licking the spoon to the honour of weighing out the ingredients. Today she was to be taught how to prepare the pudding for steaming using a muslin cloth. Her Nan worked from a hand scribbled recipe in a tatty old notebook. The notebook had recipes in it that spanned generations. Cathy looked at the book regularly, flicking through pages of recipes for soups, pies, casseroles, puddings and cakes. Some had little comments in the margins with suggestions for improvements or variations. Cathy marvelled at the handwriting. The neatness and clarity of it was so beautiful. She always vowed to practise her handwriting more after perusing the book.

Today she got the book out of the drawer for Nan and turned to the last page which was completely devoted to The Christmas Pudding. There were two things that always struck Cathy about this page. Firstly there were no alterations or suggestions at all. The recipe had remained untouched. The second thing was that right at the bottom of the page, in capital letters, were the words 'FOR THE PERFECT PUDDING ADD THE FAMILY SECRET INGREDIENT'.

Every year Cathy asked her Nan what the secret ingredient was. Nan would never give a straight answer. She preferred to joke and make up silly answers such as a spoonful of marmite or one of grandads old socks. This year was no different and Cathy came away later that day still none the wiser.

Eighteen years later Cathy was standing in front of the mirror in her bedroom admiring her own reflection. Her bridal gown was exquisite and she could smell the delicate fragrance from the flowers in her bouquet. She even liked the fact that her beautifully made up face was a mess, smeared with mascara caused by her tears. In her hand she held a card from her grandmother, the wonderful woman who had passed away two years earlier. She had recognised the writing as soon as her mother had given it to her. The envelope simply said 'To Cathy. To be opened on your wedding day.'

Her mum suggested opening it after the ceremony but curiosity got the better of her. The card was a simple watercolour of pastel flowers in a jug. The message was short but incredibly special. It said,

'To my darling granddaughter on your wedding day.'

I wish you every joy and happiness. I'm sorry I can't be there but I want to give you one final special gift and that is to reveal my secret ingredient. You can use it not just in a pudding but in all aspects of your life. It costs nothing but it produces unbelievable results. It is, quite simply, a great big dollop of love.

From your ever loving Nanna Rose xxx