

Sweet Childhood Reminiscences

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Every family has special keepsakes, mementoes, and remembrances, which are cherished and passed down from one generation to the next. These tangible and intangible items are treasured because of their connections to loved ones who may no longer be with us. Several of my own family treasures contain personal histories and will always remain dear to my heart.

One family treasure originates from my earliest days of life, when I was aware of my mother's loving presence and calming voice. I recall her gently rocking me to sleep with lovely lullabies such as, "My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean," "Short'nin' Bread," and "Bye, Bye, Baby Bunting." These precious lullabies evoke warm sentiments of security and love, and my own children were rocked to sleep with these same melodies that I learned from their grandmother. With the recent birth of my first grandchild, I am now singing and sharing these same lullabies, as well as others, with my own grandchild, which brings the loving family of the past to touch the present generation. These melodic tunes are one of the first language experiences of many children, and these treasures enhance the acquisition of language and literacy. As an early childhood educator, I have shared my fondness for these soothing tunes by singing with my students who are learning to verbally express themselves.

Another family treasure is praying the family rosary, using cherished rosary beads such as the sterling silver one that belonged to Aunt Gloria, our dear friend who was like a mom and grandmother to our family. At times of difficulty, I have found great solace and comfort in clasping the prayer beads as I pray about the Gospels and the life of Our Lord Jesus.

Additionally, we pray together with rosaries and booklets that display beautiful pictures from Bible passages in the life of Jesus. This beloved family practice is a boost to our faith and is an enhancement of literacy and language practices in our home as the family prays aloud and reads together for prayer time. This treasure is a part of the Catholic culture of my family and of the Catholic elementary school where I work, and I frequently have the opportunity to discuss the Bible readings that are part of this meditative prayer.

A third family treasure is the practice of searching for and purchasing old books at various book sales in the area. Many years ago, as a very young child, I attended the New Orleans Symphony Book Fairs, which were originally held in the French Quarter. These sales later were conducted at the University of New Orleans, and my family faithfully went to these events every year; consequently, our home was packed with old classics and great books. On one occasion, I stumbled upon the hardback original editions of C.S. Lewis' Narnia series for a dollar each. What an incredible buy! I continued the tradition of going to the fairs with my own children for many years. But, after moving to the Northshore area of Mandeville and Covington, we were no longer able to attend. Nevertheless, the love of books, reading, and collecting used reading materials, which started with my parents, still continues in my family through our frequent browsing for books in second-hand stores. With the advent of computer technology, this adventure has now expanded to the Internet and, in particular, the Amazon book website, which is an excellent resource for finding used books. My students profit from my quest for great, old books because I am able to purchase many children's texts at inexpensive prices. Recently, I discovered Eric Carle books at the Amazon site for reasonable prices, and they were in excellent condition. The language and literacy skills of my students have flourished because of the incorporation of these reading materials into our classroom.

Aside from book, other priceless treasures include the many delicious recipes that have been handed down from my mother, Nana, who was a superb cook. In addition to red beans and rice, our list of "family favorites" includes chicken creole, homemade spaghetti sauce, crawfish etouffee, shrimp creole, grillades, seafood gumbo, lemon ice box pie, German chocolate cake, meringue kisses, and homemade eggnog. These recipes are part of our family tradition of cooking Louisiana foods, which we owe directly to our dear grandmother, Nana. My own children are now old enough to help in the kitchen, and they are likewise learning how to make these family treasure meals. Language and literacy skills are reinforced in the preparation of these meals due to the necessary discussion and reading associated with the recipes. Many family meals also start with conversations about Nana's recipes, and we recall that her memory lives on in the family through our mealtimes. At the classroom level, discussions may center on the cultural uniqueness of Louisiana cooking, and I could share recipes or even bring treats to sample. Reading recipe cards would be a great activity for older children and would allow for discussion of the special style of Louisiana cooking.

As illustrated, my family has many treasures that have been handed down from generation to generation, and I now realize that these traditions must be preserved. This is best done by recording them for future family members and discussing the significance of these items with each other. Without these concrete methods of safeguarding our family treasures, these traditions would vanish, and we would lose some of the most valuable gifts we have from our loved ones who are no longer with us. Perhaps, our family treasures-such as Nana's red beans and rice-also can be preserved by becoming a part of others' own cherished collections.

Red Beans and Rice

3 pounds of dried red beans - soaked overnight and water discarded - OR dried beans added to

boiling water, soaked for one hour, and water drained off

Add water to cover beans by 1- 1 ½ inches; bring to boil; lower to simmer for 3 hours

Add 1 teaspoon thyme for each pound (of beans)

Add 1 Bayleaf per pound

Add cayenne pepper

Add 1 large chopped onion per pound

Add ¼ bell pepper per pound

Add 2 stalks of celery, chopped, per pound

Add 3 large cloves of crushed garlic

Add chopped Cajun sausage; ½ pound for every pound of beans

Add ham with a bone

Add fresh chopped parsley

Simmer for 3-4 hours, and serve over rice.