



The Banana Bread

We stood in the kitchen with 12 mini bread pans, a mixer, flour, sugar, eggs, baking powder and a pile of very ripe bananas. The plan was to make 60 loaves of banana bread for 60 caregivers at the assisted living facility where my mother lived. Each person would receive their own loaf from my mother.

Banana bread is in my sinews. Banana bread was the gift for my brother and me to give to our teachers, our scout leaders, our Sunday school teachers, our neighbors, our family and anyone who happened to visit us during the holidays – any holiday. I watched my mother bake banana bread from my childhood. I grew up by her side mashing the bananas until I graduated to making the golden loaves on my own. Banana bread was a part of our family culture. I took it into my home when I married and made it for my children’s teachers and scout leaders and for my bosses. I sent loaves in Care packages to my son and my two step children while they were in college and to my Marine during his enlistment.

My mom knew the recipe by heart, no need for paper or a cookbook. In fact, when my sister and I set out to create a family cookbook, we had a hard time finding a copy of the original recipe. I watched my mom set up, pour, sift, mash and dump ingredients into the bowl and mix. Pouring the mixture into pans to bake, she would turn to make another batch ready to pour into the line of pans. The whole house, sometimes for several days, would hold the aroma of banana bread. The golden loaves would come out and be basted with honey, (or on the rare occasion, when I was older, with honey and rum.) The beauties were set on the counter to cool, and then lovingly wrapped, sealed and stored to be given with love. That was my mom’s ritual.

Now, here we were in the kitchen facing our task to make 60 loaves—five batches. I asked my mother how she wanted to help. She stood and stared at me, lost in her inner world of a deteriorated Alzheimer’s self. I took the

lead. I took her over to our breakfast table, sat her down with a plate, some bananas and a fork and asked her to mash the bananas. You see, bananas were not put into a food processor or a Ninja. The bananas were all mashed with a fork, by hand. She mashed the bananas I had put on the plate for a few minutes. Then, she lost herself in thought, she got up and she wandered off to her room. I brought her back to the bananas hoping there would be a buried memory to take hold and she would enjoy this process she so loved before the disease took her mind. But, alas, she was gone.

That poignant day, I knew she was physically present yet lost to us in her own dream world of a deteriorating mind. With tears, memories and sadness I mashed, I sifted, I greased pans, and I wrapped and I packed 60 loaves to take with her to express the love she felt for those in her world.

My gift to you is her recipe. Enjoy during your holidays.



Helen Weaver's Banana Bread

In memory of my mother's giving soul

- 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ c. all-purpose flour, sifted
- 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. soda
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. black walnut (almond flavoring is a substitute)

1/2 tsp. vanilla
1/2 tsp almond flavoring
1/3 c. shortening
2/3 c. sugar
2 eggs
1 cup mashed very ripe bananas, mashed with a fork, by hand (2 – 3 bananas)
3/4 c. chopped pecans
Preheat oven 350°
Cream shortening and sugar until light and fluffy. Add flavorings. Add eggs, one at a time at low speed. Add dry ingredients alternately with bananas at low speed. Fold in nuts. Do not over beat. Prepare pans: grease and flour or spray with baker's spray. Makes 4 small loaves or one large loaf. Bake for 60 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean. Place on cooling racks with wax paper under the racks. While still warm and cooling, brush with honey. When cool wrap with love and give to someone who has served you or someone you love.

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