

You Either Love It or Hate It!

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When MawMaw died in 1987, it was not shocking to my family because she had suffered a stroke in 1980. During the following seven years, she had experienced numerous mini strokes, which prevented her from either walking or talking. I miss her immensely. MawMaw and PawPaw were my mom's parents who lived in Mandeville, where we spent many weekends on the lakefront. Every Sunday, my mom, dad, sister, brother, and I would visit MawMaw and PawPaw, and our memories of these times remain very special to me. But, when God closes one door, he opens another door.

When I married in 1980, I was blessed with a huge family. My husband—now my ex-husband—had one brother and six sisters. Although I was a new addition to the family, my in-laws accepted me as their own daughter. Still today, though my husband and I are divorced, when I see or talk to his parents, I am still considered their daughter. My biggest blessing arrived when I became acquainted with Grandma Hilda, my husband's grandmother. She was French, just like my MawMaw, and reminded me immensely of her; she was surely a new gift from God.

My family treasure comes from my "new" MawMaw—Grandma Hilda—and it leaves the most amazing taste in my mouth; however, from past experiences, I've learned that this taste is not a favorite for everyone. One either loves this treasure or he hates it. For me, my family treasure is the moistest, nuttiest, fruitiest, most luscious fruitcake that my taste buds have ever savored. *My mouth is watering as I write.*

Grandma Hilda's fruitcakes were so splendid that friends and family placed their orders a

year ahead of time. She also baked her fruitcakes for the yearly Catholic Daughter's Christmas raffle. Everyone in Ponchatoula knew about Grandma Hilda's fruitcakes. However, Grandma Hilda never ate a freshly baked fruitcake for Christmas; she always saved one from the year before so that the cake had a year to set with its yummy flavor. For me, I always had to test my cakes as soon as they cooled, but I, too, now save a cake or two for the following Christmas. Not everyone in my family desires my family treasure, but some of my family members look forward to Grandma Hilda's fruitcake every Christmas, just as I do.

I remember the first year of our marriage when I decided to bake Grandma Hilda's treasure. Imagine my surprise upon learning that the recipe was huge and expensive! Although Grandma Hilda offered to help me with my first time baking, I still was nervous and worried about spending so much money on ingredients for fear that I would mess it up. Nevertheless, I arrived at her house at 7:00 in the morning. I brought all my ingredients, but she had the butter and eggs ready to go, since Grandma Hilda had forgotten to tell me that the eggs needed to be at room temperature before mixing. The preparation time was an hour just for the mixing, plus the mixing bowl was the size of a foot tub. After combining the dry ingredients, we added the wet ingredients; but, we reserved some of the flour mixture to mix with the fruit that had been soaking in sherry for two weeks. We also had to cut brown paper bags and wax paper for the pan liners, coat both sides of the brown paper liners with Crisco, and then line the pan with the same size sheet of wax paper. Finally, a pan of water had to be placed on the floor of the oven to keep moisture in the oven. The cakes took on average four to five hours to bake, depending on the size. Because I never can fit all of the cakes in one oven, my baking time is all day—about 12 hours total.

I have had many fruitcake lovers ask for our family recipe, but, since Grandma Hilda

never shared her recipe with anyone but family, we continue to follow her tradition. In the family, only my ex-sister-in-law, ex-mother-in-law, and I bake our family treasure. Even though these are my ex-family members, I treasure our recipe, as well as their love and friendship, in my heart. Love it or hate it, my fruitcake family treasure provides a lasting reminder of both Grandma Hilda and my own MawMaw.