A "Secret" Family Christmas Cookie Recipe

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Informant:

Tammy Call currently lives in Logan, Utah with her husband. She has three children who no longer live at home and will be a grandma in April 2019. I first met Tammy at church while she was serving as one of my Beehive Young Women’s leaders. I have known her for about eleven years. She has also accompanied me on the piano a few times while I sang in church. She likes to travel with her husband and has been to many fun and adventurous places, one of them being Mount Everest. Tammy is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Context:

I interviewed Tammy in her home on a Friday evening. We sat in her living room and talked for a few minutes about what was going on in our lives before I began the interview. I also gave her a brief description of what the collection project was and why I wanted to interview her. It was a very casual interview because we have known each other for a long time.

I asked Tammy if I could interview her about the “secret” family sugar cookie recipe that she has. This recipe has been in her family for many years. It came from her husband’s side and originally started with her sister-in-law. The reason why this recipe is “secret” is because her husband’s family has asked that she not give the recipe to anyone except for her immediate family. Tammy says there isn’t anything that is really “secret” about the recipe, but they are extremely good cookies and more people want to recipe every time she makes them. Because it is a recipe she doesn’t give out, I have not included the recipe in this collection project. Tammy doesn’t know how far back the recipe goes since Nate’s sister was the one to make them when Tammy first came into the family. It could have been a recipe that Nate’s mom already had in the family or it could have been a recipe that his sister brought in.

Text:

So, well, here’s the thing, we, actually last year we were trying to figure out how who who this came from originally and we’re not one hundred percent, sure so it’s kind of mixed stories

Nate’s mother [Nate is Tammy’s husband] has passed away and so she can’t really give us the story on it but, I remember the first year Nate and I were married, his parents were living in Ecuador at the time we were married, and so we were able to travel down there for Christmas the
first year, and his sister made these sugar cookies, put them in a box they were all wrapped you
know with care and tinfoil well between them and had us haul them all the way to Ecuador with
us to give cause these were like apparently the famous cookies that I didn’t know anything about.
So I’m like ‘something special about these cookies that I don’t really really know’ so, that was
kind of the start of like what is this cookie recipe and what does this mean to your family and
who does this and so, finally about a year later I was able to convince his mom to give me the
recipe and it sounded like, are ‘they are gunna to stay married, maybe, okay I’ll give her the
recipe’. [Both of us laugh]

[Me] So it’s almost like a, a rite of passage almost too?

[Tammy] Yes, ya there you go! So, anyway, so I got the recipe the o-- um, it was always my
sister-in-law that made ‘em. I’m not sure if my mother-in-law made ‘em before I came along or
not but um, she was the one that always re-- and it was at every Christmas it seemed like these
cookies and they were shaped like a Christmas tree, frosted sugar cookies and so, um and their
delicious! I mean and I have never really tasted another sugar that I love nearly as much, so.

[Me] I agree! When you made them for Young Women’s I was like, yes!  [Tammy] Ya, Yes!

[Tammy] And so I brought them to people and people will say you know like oh my gosh their
so good could I have the recipe but, it’s almost like I was like you cannot give this cookie recipe
out to anybody, my mother-in-law so I’m all, oookaaaay [Dragged out the okay], I won’t! So um,
I have never given it out to anybo—actually I have given it to my sister, she was there when we
made them [Nate yells “What?!”] [We both laugh] Oh! He’s in there saying ‘what?’ I knew it. I
did give ‘em to my sister but she’s never…she’s not a cook at all I don’t think she’s ever made
‘em, she’s never told me she’s made them so. But I have had people aske for them, but I have
never given it to anybody, so. That’s the big thing, so my daughter-in-law, when Jordan and Shelly got married, you know she had to have the famous Christmas cookies and so after she tried them Jordan’s like, ‘you can’t get the recipe till we’re married for at least a year!’

Anyways, so just kind of as a joke last Christmas I printed up the recipe and I gave it to her and I said ‘well you guys have been married long enough now you can finally have the cookie recipe’ so, anyway so just kind of a family, Call family thing that its kind of its more fun to to say it’s a secret thing, you know, that thing then it really is, but it makes it kind of kind of.

[Me] But like their really good cookies and nobody else can have them!

[Tammy] They are really good! And I’ve even had a friend who at one time was always asking ‘now what is it? What’s in it? I’m gunna try to make some I’m gunna just try!’ And then she you know she’d try something and I’d said ‘the secret it lemon’ I’d just tell her that so she’d go ‘no I tried and I put lemon in and I tried and that wasn’t it! That’s not the secret, that’s not the secret…’ so, anyway it’s just kind of what’s been handed down and. And the only people now that I know that make so my, Nate’s brother’s daughter she makes ‘em at Christmas time and then I make it at Christmas so I think we’re the only two left in the family that I don’t think Nate’s sister has made ‘em for a few years, but, so were the last two kind of making this other than my daughter-in-law if she makes ‘em I don’t know if she’s ever made ‘em I’ve never asked her but usually it’s Christmas time when make them. I have started making them I’ll do them, at Easter or I’ll do them for Valentine’s Day a special occasion but, they were always I think in his family known as the Christmas cookies so, anyway.

[Me] That’s fun. And do they does the recipe make a lot?
[Tammy] So it does. It makes I think one recipe makes about two dozen twenty-four cookies, so, and then the frosting is a big part of it too just part of the recipe the frosting and…

[Me] So the cookie and the frosting.

[Tammy] The cookie and the frosting together. And their thick and their soft and they’re, really good. I feel like I need to make some now now that I’m talking about it. [laughter]

Texture:
The way Tammy told me the story about these sugar cookies was fun and enjoyable. She still enjoys making these sugar cookies for her family at Christmas time and occasionally has her daughter help her make them. It has become more a big deal to do with her immediate family than with her extended family. During the interview Tammy started to say one thing and then mid-word or mid-sentence would change what she was saying or talking about it. I did my best in the transcribing process to catch those kinds of things.

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