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Honey Ma's Molasses Cookies

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Jason V. Swan
Arlington, TX
01 December 2018

Honey Ma's Molasses Cookies Foodways

Informant: Jason Swan is my father and is the youngest son of Susan (Sam) Swan. Jason was born in Tacoma, Washington but was raised in Eugene and Bend Oregon. When he was 8 years old his mother, Sam, got re-married to a man named David Swan. He was an excellent student and loved to ski. He Graduated high school in 1988 and then came here to Utah State to study history. He switched his major several times, and finally graduated in 1998 with a bachelor degree in Instructional Design. He continued his education and gained a masters in Instructional design in 2001. He married Jamie Swan in 1993 and together they have 5 children; 4 daughters and 1 son. I am the second eldest. He now works for a company called L-3 Communications, which has brought him and his family to live in North Carolina for several years and now to Arlington, Texas where they have been for nearly 7 years. Jason is a proud father and is a wonderful provider and patriarch of the home. Family is his everything, and traditions among family are something he holds very dear.

Context: I interviewed Jason last week over FaceTime. As he lives in Texas so it is hard to visit all the time. He was wonderful enough to agree to FaceTime me to help me collect this piece of foodways folklore. I was at my office at work when we started the call, and he was at his home in Arlington in the living room. I'd asked him to share this story because of how each holiday he talks for weeks about how wonderful these cookies are and what great memories they remind him of. Jason is my Dad and Honey Ma is his maternal grandmother, my great-grandmother. She picked the name Honey Ma out herself and was always known as such from day one to my dad. She was a spit-firey old gal who on her 85th birthday she went out and got a tattoo of a ladybug sitting on a 4-leaf clover on her ankle. Now that's a bad-ass grandma if you ask me. My dad, Jason takes after her in many ways, but in this case, it is all about cooking and baking! Jason tells me during this interview of how he came to know, love, and ultimately make on his own, Honey Ma's famous molasses cookies!

Text: Me: I was hoping you could tell me a bit about Honey Ma's Molasses cookies.

Jason: Honey Ma's Molasses cookies?

Me: Yep!

J: Umm.. *clears throat* well there's not much of a story it's just ever since I remember seeing going to see Honey Ma when I was a little kid at Christmas time she'd have molasses cookies.

M: Mhmm.

J: And.. I don't know why I've always loved them they were my favorite cookie *pause* It must be something to do with *clears throat* my memories of Honey Ma too in there somewhere cuz whenever I think of the cookies it comes back with you know smells and memories and you know I- I imagine- like she had this little tinkling uh.. it was like a little delicate brass merry-go-round that was also a candle holder and when the candle would burn *clears throat* the convection from the flame the heat.. would go up and cause the carousel above it to turn and there were like a bunch of little angels flying and one of 'em had a little.. a little, teeny tiny miniscule brass bat that would hit a bell on the other side of th- *laughs while trying to finish sentence* candle. It's hard to imagine it's hard to describe but so as the candle when you lit the candle the heat would cause the thing to turn and the little angel would ring the bell every time it would go around *laughs*

M: Aww cute.

J: I don't know... it's funny how things come back to you when you think of smells and sights and stuff but so yeah those molasses cookies have always been my favorite cookies and as oney Ma got older she was unable to make them because she couldn't her wrists weren't strong enough to roll out the dough so one year she gave me her recipe.

M: wow, so I remember you told me when you grew up she kind of kept it as a secret recipe like passed down through the family, but when you got older you found out it was from something else?

J: Oh.. yeah no it's it wasn't like an ancient Chinese secret or anything ah *coughs* it was just they were her cookies. And uh yeah when I was younger she never gave me the recipe but probably because she didn't want to transcribe it she only had one copy which was clipped out

of a homemaking book in 1957 I think 57 or 52 so she got the recipe from a magazine like a homemaker magazine and it was just a Crisco recipe on like an ad for Crisco cooking lard

M: nice.. can you-

talks over one another briefly

J: like tollhouse cookie dough for us you know?

M: oh like tollhouse? Nice.. can you describe the smell to me?

J: ohhh.. yeah.. it's kinda warm and very subtly spicy. It's like Christmas!

M: ok nice.. so as you kind of carried on that tradition what're some of the things that help you remember Honey Ma or help you um I guess what is that tradition to you today?

J: oh, I just can't imagine Christmas without Honey Ma's cookies umm.. you know I make them I enjoy making them, I enjoy the smell and I as I eat them I still think Honey Ma did them better

both laugh but they I don't know it feels like Christmas when I start making the cookies!

M: ok!

J: Dang... I'm gonna make some this weekend!

M: Do it! Send me some though!

J: yeah *laughs* well you'll get to eat plenty of them when you come! Whoohoo!

M: yay! I'm so excited! Thank you!

New! Crisco's short cut to the merriest Christmas Cookies ever!

New, creamier Crisco makes the richest, tastiest cookies . . .
Crisco's homemade mix makes them double-quick!

Yes, with new creamier Crisco you get top-notch cookies and you can get 'em at top speed! For new Crisco is creamier than any other leading vegetable shortening, specially made to blend quickly. And now Crisco brings you this time-saving mix recipe. With it you can make all kinds of gala cookies!

Of course, pure, all-vegetable Crisco does wonders for *any* cookie recipe! It's so white and fresh. Crisco cookies are as grand tasting as butter cookies, yet oh, so thrifty! Why not use new Crisco for *all* your baking? It's America's finest shortening . . . *twice* as popular as any other brand!



Takes only 6 minutes to make!
CRISCO'S COOKIE MIX
(Makes 7 to 8 cups of mix)

6 cups sifted all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon salt
1 pound Crisco (2 1/2 cups)

Mix flour and salt in a large mixing bowl or on a large square of paper. Cut Crisco into flour with two knives or a pastry blender, until pieces are about the size of peas. Store in a covered container, if you wish. Your Crisco mix will keep for weeks, without refrigeration.



EASY DATE BARS

Stir together: 1/2 cup Crisco cookie mix, 1/2 cup light brown sugar, 1/4 tsp. baking powder. Add and mix thoroughly: 1 egg, 1 tbsp. milk, 1 tsp. vanilla. Stir in: 1 cup chopped dates, 1/2 cup chopped nuts. Blend well. Pour into pan 8" x 8", brushed with Crisco. Bake at 375°F. 20-25 mins. Cool and cut into strips. Makes 1 1/2 doz.

SUGAR COOKIES

Stir together: 2 cups Crisco cookie mix, 1/4 cup sugar, 1 tsp. baking powder, 1/4 cup all-purpose flour. Add 1 egg, 1 tsp. vanilla. Blend well. Dough is soft. Roll out 1/8" to 1/4" thick on floured board or pastry cloth. Cut with floured cookie cutter. Place on lightly greased cookie sheet. Bake 375°F. 8-10 mins. Makes 4 doz.

MOLASSES COOKIES

Stir together: 2 cups Crisco cookie mix, 1/4 cup all-purpose flour, 1/4 cup light brown sugar, 1/2 tsp. soda, 1/2 tsp. each ground cloves and ginger, 1 tsp. cinnamon. Add 1 egg, 3 tbsps. molasses. Stir vigorously, chill dough. Roll 1/4" thick on floured board. Cut with floured cookie cutter. Bake same as Sugar Cookies. Makes 4 doz.

SNOWY BROWNIES

Stir together: 1 1/2 cups Crisco cookie mix, 1/2 cup sugar, 1/2 tsp. baking powder. Add: 3 eggs, 3 sqs. baking chocolate melted, 1 tsp. vanilla. Mix well and add 1/2 cup chopped nuts. Bake in 9" x 9" x 2" pan brushed with Crisco at 375°F. 25-30 mins. Sprinkle with confectioners' sugar. When cool, cut into 1 1/2" squares. Makes 5 doz.

NOEL NUT BALLS

Stir together: 2 cups Crisco cookie mix, 1/2 cup confectioners' sugar, sifted. Add: 1 tbsp. orange juice, 1 tsp. vanilla, 1/2 cup chopped nuts. Blend well (dough is somewhat crumbly). Mold into 1" balls. Place on ungreased cookie sheet 1" apart. Bake 375°F. 12-15 mins. Roll in confectioners' sugar while hot. Makes 3 doz.

use **Crisco**
IT'S DIGESTIBLE



For cakes and pies and tasty fries

(Original printout of "Honey Ma's Molasses cookie recipe")

Texture: At the beginning of the interview call we laughed and joked with each other for several minutes before actually getting into the questions. He was sitting in his favorite armchair and wearing his “old man” glasses he despises so much. It has gotten to the point where he needs them to even see my face as we video chatted with each other. From the angle of the camera I got a perfect view of his “silver chin”. He wears is facial hair as a goatee and his wisdom (not age of course) has turned his normally raven black hair to silver with spots of white in the center of his chin. We often tease him about it, but truthfully it is something that endears him even more to us. Throughout the interview he clears his throat a lot, he may have caught a bit of the December bug. But as he shared this memory of his grandmother’s cookies, he kept looking up as if to recall specific details of the time. He told the whole story with a smile on his face and I could tell it is something that is quite special to him. He spoke of that time with such fondness and nostalgia, one could almost picture the kitchen and the home of which he spoke. He recalled little instances, such as the smell, the sound of a wind chime and other small details as if it were yesterday. And as yummy as the cookies are, it is the memories of Honey Ma and Christmas time with his family that are what make them even more special.

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Lynne S. McNeil
Fall 2018