

Preserve Family Traditions with a Time Capsule

By: Kate Walling

American kitchens pretty much want for nothing anymore. From the ever-convenient microwave to electric ice cream and bread makers, we have access to tools that help us make just about anything we want in our own kitchens. There is no shortage of ingredients, either. I can get exotic fruits and spices at my local grocery store. I can buy as much flour and butter as I want.

My grandmother Betsy recently explained to me how cooking and meals changed during World War II. During that time, sugar, coffee, butter and beef-steak were among the types of foods that were in short supply. Women were encouraged to plant “victory gardens,” that would provide food for the family if even harder times arose – such as an attack on American soil.

I am amazed by these stories, but I have to say, I want proof! Not that I don’t believe my grandmother, but I want to hold a package of powdered margarine in my hand or see a ration ticket. Through mementos like these, we are able to experience what our grandparents and other relatives went through; know more intimately what was happening in their world. Keepsakes such as these provide us with a unique view of how our families evolved and why certain traditions came to be.

The simplicity of establishing a family tradition is making sure it is passed down from one generation to the next. Stories from the past, whether they involve recipes or what people did for a good time back then, are one of the best ways to keep those memories alive as well as help ensure that family traditions persevere. Another great way to safeguard tradition is to create a time capsule.

Time capsules never seem to decrease in popularity – they’ve simply evolved over the years. When you think of a time capsule, you probably imagine something you fill with mementos and bury, right? Well, today’s time capsules take many forms – from custom-made scrapbooks to video diaries. It is easier than ever to preserve our memories, so why aren’t more of us doing it?

The beauty of a family time capsule is that there are no rules. The dated, penciled-in lines that record your children’s changing heights on the door jam even qualify. Here are some ideas for creating a time capsule for your family that will withstand the test of time:

Birthdays: Create a time capsule that captures the memories of each family member’s birthday. In the beginning of the year, designate a box for birthday memories. Be sure to take pictures at each family member’s birthday celebration and record party attendees, birthday cake details, gifts asked for and those received. Place that year’s birthday memories in the box, date it by year and stash it away. Make a rule that you must wait at least five years to sneak back into a birthday box.

Christmas/Holiday Book: Purchase a large, hard cover journal with blank pages. Ask each family member to record an entry each year, listing three important things that happened to them that year. You can start the book when the kids are in elementary school and maintain it long after they’ve moved away and started their own families, returning each year during the holidays.

Summer Vacation: Does your family return to the same vacation spot each summer? Use this opportunity to capture memories and preserve them in a vacation time capsule. From photos to recipes and videos, be sure to note what the weather was like that week, who was there, and what was the best part? As children grow and start families of their own, they may return to this same place to start their own family traditions.

Family Meals: Do you need to pull out a couple card tables when your family gathers for a meal? If so, chances are there are some well-loved family recipes being served year after year. Ask family cooks to write down these recipes, take pictures of the family during mealtime, record memories and details on special event meals. This way, you can pass on the memories as well as your family’s traditional foods.

Whichever theme you decide on, or even if you don't choose a theme, be sure to include some standard time capsule components: a recent newspaper, coins, postcards, or a listing of top news events. This will provide a backdrop for your memories when you crack open the capsule sometime down the road. Write names and dates on the backs of photos and other items and do not include perishable items! You may love your Mom's chocolate chip cookies, but you won't after 10 years in a box. Use the recipe instead!

We are the only ones to blame when it comes to fading family memories or lost traditions. Taking the time to protect these traditions now is the best way to guarantee that they endure.

Kate Walling is founder of Secret Ingredients (www.TheSecretIngredients.com). She so cherished the traditions passed down in her family that she came up with a way to help other families do the same by creating personalized heirloom cookbooks. Contact her at kate@thesecretingredients.com.

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