

# She's Famous for Her Cookbook

By Becky Wooten

It's not uncommon for Minnie Lee Montgomery to be stopped on the street by a newlywed and thanked for a recipe that works so well.

A resident of Fairfield County her whole life, Mrs. Montgomery is known for many contributions, among one is her famous cookbook.

"That cookbook has been sent to 33 states and several foreign countries," she modestly admits. For a project that just started out as a way to record family recipes for her kinfolk, the little cookbook has become a part-time business for the retired school teacher.

It's been almost four years that the cookbook solely authorized by Mrs. Montgomery was first printed. "I sent the first 100 to nieces, nephews, cousins and friends. Then I put a few in Economy Drug Store. In four weeks, she had orders for 200 more that had not even been printed."

The simple ~~yet~~ tasty recipes probably lend themselves to the massive popularity. However, Mrs. Montgomery's reputation as a great cook doesn't hurt sales either.

"I was the oldest of six children. I've been cooking biscuits since I was six, and that's a lot of years," she quips, "I remember those first biscuits being as hard as rocks but my Daddy would look across the table and say in all earnestness, 'Minnie Lee, those are the best biscuits I've ever eaten'."

She's convinced her father's encouragement sparked her interest in cooking.

Her twelve years as the wife of Fairfield County's sheriff, Leroy Montgomery, Sr., also added to the files of good recipes.

"The trustee always did the actual cooking, but I bought groceries and was the meal planner for the jail during my husband's tenure. It was not uncommon to feed thirty inmates on a Sunday morning," she recalls, "grits, eggs, biscuits, preserves, it all had to be prepared."

Her talent in the kitchen could possibly be inherited as her brothers and sisters are also known throughout the county as good cooks.

But the little paperback cookbook by Minnie Lee Montgomery includes recipes that she alone collected over the years. Her husband added only one, for catfish stew.

Before she had the book printed, she tried every recipe again, cooking casseroles, pastries, and breads every day for months. "They are foolproof", Mrs. Montgomery promises, "people are all the time stopping me on the street and telling me which one they tried the night before or which one their husband likes."

Does she have a favorite in the book? No, she uses them all. Her two children, "Bubba" and Mary Ellen, and their families are the attesting witnesses to her bountiful spreads they feast upon often.

This time of year Minnie Lee is not only busy mailing copies of the book to fill out-of-state requests, but she is also busy baking goodies for the holidays. "Tea time tassies, peanut brittle, chocolate balls, chocolate covered cherries, and fruitcakes are some of the Christmas sweets I always make," she says.

She thinks the secret to being a good cook is following directions and using a little creativity in meal planning. She likes to grow her own vegetables in the summer and still does a great deal of canning and freezing to utilize fresh foods during the winter months.

"I suppose when you begin a project you never know what might happen, but the cookbook idea really snowballed," Mrs. Montgomery explains. More than 1,000 are in print and people still write and call her home asking for more.

A printing firm in Iowa has worked closely with Mrs. Montgomery since the first printing. They even use her book as a model to send to other aspiring cooks hoping to publish their own files.

"I just enjoy giving them to friends. I have also made friends by giving the book to people I meet on bus trips," she says.

The busy schedule this retired school teacher keeps makes one wonder when she ever had time to work. Sharing a part of her life in the kitchen with others through her cookbook is a rewarding hobby for the talented lady of the Lebanon area of this county.

And many a bride with perplexed looks at the likes of colanders, food processors, and blenders is truly thankful that Minnie Lee Montgomery wrote a book to help them through the maze of meal planning.