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Seven Cakes



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Life during the depression in rural Alabama wasn't too different from any other time of year for my people. You see, they were sharecroppers – dirt farmers who didn't even own their own dirt. They wouldn't have known if the world had been prosperous, their lives had always been a struggle of hard work and all too often relying on hope for the next meal.

This time of year, there wasn't a whole lot to be thankful for, other than the fact that there wasn't any cotton to pick. For them, winter was as bleak as the Alabama landscape. In Alabama, we are not often afforded the sight of glistening snow resting atop hills and trees in a winter wonderland. Here, the sky just gets gray and the landscape browns - bare trees, brown grass, and muddy earth where fields lay in wait for spring . . . as far as the eye can see.

My great grandmother had four children and they all lived in a small shack house. Wood was a precious thing and that meant only heating one room. My grandmamma says “it got so cold at night. Mama would heat rocks and wrap ‘em up in old towels and things to put in bed with us but we still got so cold. You didn't dare get out of that bed unless you just had to”.

Families would work all year for the farmer in exchange for monthly rations of staples such as dried beans, flour, and the occasional bit of meat. At harvest's end they'd get a percentage of profits on the cotton, but all of the staples which had been provided for them were then deducted from the final cost, leaving families in a continued state of dependence upon the farm owner for enough food to survive the winter.

But with winter, came Christmas, and my great grandmother always did manage to make it special despite their hardships. Lela's life had always been a hard one. Growing up one of nine children in Jackson County, she had spent her childhood traveling from farm to farm with her parents and siblings, picking cotton and tending to whatever crops the farm owner decided to plant. Now she had four kids to provide a Christmas for and keeping them fed and clothed took about all she had and then some.

But she never failed them. She always came through, especially at Christmastime.

Lela squirreled away ingredients all year long. A little sugar here, some dried apples there, maybe some raisins and a bit of cinnamon. After the kids went to bed on Christmas Eve, she'd set to work. Using only what she had on hand and no recipes to speak of, Lela would stay awake all night baking cakes in her little wood stove. She'd make an apple stack cake, a raisin cake, yellow cake with chocolate icing, peanut butter cake, and so on. There was never a plan beyond that of needing to make seven of them – one for each day from Christmas until the New Year.

The next morning, four sets of eyes would open wide and four sets of feet would hurry out of their cold beds into the only heated room in the house where their faces would light up at seeing the bounty of seven cakes sitting on the worn kitchen table. I know how their faces looked because my grandmother's still lights up the same way now, some seventy years later, when she talks about those cakes. The kids took turns being the one to choose the cake they ate that day and between the six of them and any company who happened by, they made short work of it and were ready to start with a new one the next morning.

Most kids today would consider having cakes baked for you as your only Christmas gift to be a disappointment. But amid all of the wrappings and bows, gift sets and feasts, I hope your Christmas somehow manages to be as magical as it was in that little sharecroppers house in Alabama during the depression, when four kids woke up with stars in their eyes at finding seven cakes.

Gratefully,

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Chocolate Velvet Cake

- 1 Box any flavor of chocolate cake mix (I use Duncan Hines)
- 1 Cup sour cream
- 1/2 Cup milk
- 1/4 Cup oil
- 3 eggs
- 1-2 tsp butter flavoring (can substitute vanilla)
- 1 cup chocolate chips
- 2 heaping T cocoa powder, plus more for dusting pans

Preheat oven to 350.

Grease pans with shortening and dust with cocoa powder. Combine all ingredients into mixing bowl, except chocolate chips. Mix about two minutes, or until well blended. Mix in chocolate chips. Divide evenly among prepared pans and let cook until done, about 25 minutes. Let sit in pans for ten minutes before turning out to cool completely.

Cream Cheese Icing

- 8 ounces cream cheese
- 1 stick margarine or butter
- 3 1/2 to 4 cups confectioner's sugar
- 1-2 tsp butter flavoring (can substitute Vanilla)

Soften cream cheese and margarine by leaving out on counter until it reaches room temperature. Combine the two in a mixing bowl and mix until well blended. Add sugar. Mix until smooth. Add flavoring and mix some more until well incorporated and icing is creamy. Ice cooled cake.

Elvis Presley Cake

- 1 box yellow cake mix
- 1 (3-ounce) box vanilla pudding (not sugar free!)
- 4 eggs
- 1/2 cup oil
- 1 cup milk
- 1 (16-ounce) can crushed pineapple, undrained
- 1 cup sugar

Mix cake mix, pudding, eggs, oil, and milk. Beat until smooth.. Bake in greased 9×13-inch pan in 350F preheated oven for 45-60 minutes (or until center springs back). While cake is baking, boil pineapple and sugar on top of stove until sugar has melted. While cake is still hot, punch holes in cake and pour hot pineapple over cake. Let cool.

FROSTING:

- 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
- 1 stick butter or margarine, softened
- 3 cups confectioners' sugar
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans (optional)

Beat cream cheese and butter until smooth. Add confectioners' sugar gradually and beat until creamy. Add pecans, if desired, and mix well. Drop by dollops onto cake until top is mostly covered, then smooth and spread to frost cake.

Granny Jordan's Apple Skillet Cake

1/3 C margarine	1 tsp cinnamon
1 C self rising flour	1/3 C evaporated milk
2/3 C sugar	5-6 apples, sliced and peeled.
3 T additional melted margarine	1/3 C sugar
1/4 tsp cinnamon	1 egg, well beaten
1/3 C water	pecans

Melt butter in skillet. Stir in 2/3 C sugar and 1 tsp cinnamon. Top with apple slices; cover over medium heat for ten minutes. Top with pecans. In separate bowl, stir together flour, 1/3 C sugar, and 3/4 tsp cinnamon. Combine 3 T melted margarine, egg, milk, and water in separate bowl. Add to flour mixture and mix until just moistened. Spoon over hot apples and pecans. Cover and cook on stove eye for twenty minutes on low heat or until firm to the touch. Turn out onto large plate.

Fruit Cocktail Cake

2 C self rising flour
1 can fruit cocktail
2 unbeaten eggs
1 tsp vanilla
1 1/2 C sugar

Mix all ingredients at low speed. Pour into greased and floured 9×13 in pan. Bake at 350 for 45 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean.

Sauce

1 stick margarine
1 can coconut
1 C sugar
1 tsp vanilla
1 C evaporated milk
1 C pecans, chopped

Boil in pan for one to two minutes. Pour over hot cake.

Yellow Cake Old Fashioned Peanut Butter Icing

Duncan Hines yellow cake mix, made according to package directions and cooled

1- 1/2 C sugar
7 T milk
2 T Shortening
2 T margarine
1/4 tsp salt
1 tsp vanilla
1/2 C creamy Peanut Butter

Combine sugar, milk, shortening, margarine, and salt. Bring to a rolling boil in a heavy saucepan, stirring constantly to prevent scorching. Once it reaches a boil, let boil for one or two minutes without stirring. Remove from heat and add vanilla and peanut butter. Beat until smooth and quickly spread onto cake.

Chocolate Pound Cake With Fudge Glaze

Cake:

3 sticks margarine or butter 3 tsp vanilla
3 C sugar 1/2 C Cocoa
5 Eggs 1/2 tsp Baking Powder
3C All Purpose Flour 1 C Milk

Preheat oven to 325. Grease and flour bundt pan, set aside. Cream butter in large mixing bowl. Add sugar, beat until light and fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. In separate bowl, stir together flour, cocoa, and baking powder. Measure milk and stir vanilla into it. Add milk and dry ingredients alternately, mixing after each addition. Pour into pan and bake for one hour and twenty minutes. Let cool for ten minutes before removing from pan and allowing to cool completely before adding glaze.

Glaze:

1 1/2 C Sugar 7T Milk
1/4 tsp salt 2 T Shortening
1 tsp vanilla 2 T Margarine
1/2 C Cocoa

Combine sugar, cocoa, milk, shortening, margarine, and salt in heavy saucepan. Bring to a rolling , stirring constantly. Once it reaches a boil, allow to boil without stirring for two minutes, no more. Remove from heat and add vanilla. Stir until cooled just slightly. Spoon over cooled cake.

Coca Cola Cake

1 package plain white cake mix
4 Tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
8 Tablespoons (1 stick) butter or margarine, melted
1 cup coca cola
½ cup buttermilk (Or substitute 1/2 C whole milk with a T of lemon juice stirred in)
2 large eggs
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 ½ cups of marshmallows
Icing:
8 Tablespoons (1 stick) butter or margarine
4 Tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
1/3 Cup coca cola
4 Cups confectioners' sugar, sifted
1 Cup chopped pecans

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly mist a 13×9-inch baking pan with vegetable oil spray. Set the pan aside.

Place the cake mix, cocoa powder, melted butter, cola, buttermilk, eggs, and vanilla in a large mixing bowl. Blend with an electric mixer on low speed for 1 minute. Scrape down the sides with a spatula. Increase the mixer speed to medium and beat 2 minutes.

The batter should be well blended. Fold in the marshmallows. Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Place the pan in the oven.

Bake the cake until it springs back when lightly pressed with your finger and just starts to pull away from the sides of the pan, 40 to 42 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven, prepare frosting while cake is still hot.

Place the butter in a medium saucepan over low heat. As the butter melts, stir in the cocoa powder and cola. Let the mixture come to just a boil, stirring constantly, and then remove it from the heat. Stir in the confectioners' sugar until the frosting is thick and smooth. Fold in the pecans.

Pour the frosting over the top of the cake, spreading it out with a rubber spatula so that it reaches the edges of the cake. Cool the cake for 20 minutes before serving.