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Contact Susan Nye at
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Summer and Birthdays seem to go together in our family. I have four nieces, four nephews and a couple of god children. It seems that most of them have summer birthdays, giving us more than our fair share of parties on the beach with excited cousins, cake and melting ice cream.

However, the celebrations of this younger generation pale in comparison to the extravagant festivities of The Original Birthday Girl. Yes, my mother, the Grand Dame of birthdays, celebrates her day at the end of August. Most people recognize that autumn is approaching when soccer practice starts or when the stores hawk their back-to-school sales. Some figure it out because they suddenly need a sweater for their evening walk or when it's dark at 8:00. In our family, we know that summer is over when Libby celebrates her birthday.

In her youth, Mom's birthday celebration went on for days. There was the family party, a cozy celebration with her parents and grandmother. This party was preceded and followed by lots of merry-making with friends and extended family. My mother was an only but never a lonely child. In need of siblings, she simply adopted a few from across the street. The Blackwell kids were the brothers and sister she never had. Friendships this so close demanded a second "family" party. Next, all the kids in the neighborhood were invited around. There were no bouncy castles but plenty of cake and lemonade. Throw in a ladies lunch or tea and a cookout with cousins and the number rounded out at five or six. As soon as she agreed to marry my Dad, a party with in-laws was added to the list.

Now Mom's birthday generally falls right before Labor Day. So it is possible, just possible, that all these celebrations were nothing more than a last hurrah of summer. Just a few friends and family getting together for some last minute fun before back-to-school, back to the suburbs and back to reality. The long weekend is filled with cookouts and clambakes so it's easy to throw in a cake and call it a birthday party. However, I would never dare suggest that all these galas over all these years were not expressly created for her ... and so far, no one else would either.

Particularly this year. This year is not just any birthday. It is one of the big ones. This year, my mother turns eighty. Now I know that some will criticize; appalled that I share this information with the world. But I say, ridiculous! What's with this old school notion that "one should never tell a lady's age." Heck, I'd shout it from the rooftop if I wasn't afraid I'd slip and tumble off.

I think that it is absolutely marvelous that my mother has reached the august age of eighty. It is a magnificent milestone. She has raised three kids, spoiled a passel of grandchildren and survived fifty-nine years of marriage with never a harsh word. She has always been the heart and glue that has held our family together. She deserves praise, admiration and celebration, not secrecy.

As Mom's special day rapidly approaches, multiple generations of Nyes are making plans. Pens are scratching and keyboards are clacking out tributes, toasts and poems. We are hopelessly considering the perfect gift for the girl who has everything. Sunshine and clear blue skies have been ordered and reservations have been made. We will celebrate in fine fashion and look forward to, well maybe not another eighty years, but at least another decade or two.

I hope that you celebrate your birthday every year. Whether you are young, ageless or somewhere in between, birthdays are a great way to celebrate life and a wonderful excuse for a party.

Bon appétit! ~ Susan

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susannye@tds.net or

603/526 7319

Lemon Cupcakes

It is a toss-up of whether to go with chocolate or lemon cake for my mother. Either way, cupcakes are a fun addition to any party. Decorate each cupcake with a perfect blueberry or raspberry and complete the picture with a spoonful of fresh fruit. Enjoy!

Makes 10-12 cupcakes



- 3/4 cup (1 1/2 sticks) softened butter
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 3/4 cup whole milk
- 1 egg
- 1 3/4 cup sifted flour
- 2 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- Grated peel 1 lemon

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line muffin tins with paper liners.
2. With an electric mixer, cream together the butter and sugar. Add the egg and beat on high speed until smooth. Add the milk and beat on medium speed to combine.
3. Sift together flour, baking powder, cinnamon, ginger and salt. Stir in lemon peel. Add to the butter mixture and combine.
4. Fill paper liners 2/3 full with batter. Bake at 350 degrees for 18-20 minutes. Let cool completely before frosting and decorating.

Cream Cheese Frosting

- 8 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature
- 1/4 cup (1/2 stick) softened butter
- 2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- Grated peel 1 lemon
- About 4 cups confectioners' sugar

1. Put the cream cheese and butter in a large bowl; beat with an electric mixer on medium speed until smooth, add the vanilla extract and lemon peel and combine.
2. Slowly add the confectioners' sugar and mix until well blended. Increase mixer speed and continue beating for 2 to 3 minutes, until the frosting is light and fluffy.



Another Birthday, Another Decade

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