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Recipe: Lace Cornbread

By Andrea Weigl
The News & Observer

Atlanta cookbook author Rebecca Lang inherited her late grandmother Tom's dining room table.

Lang's grandmother, whose maiden name was Thomas, dined at that table as a child with her 10 siblings. Lang and her family gathered around that table to mourn relatives' deaths. Lang passed her hand over that table to show grandmother Tom her engagement ring.

Now that table is the center of Lang's home life: It's where she, her husband and two children share meals. And that family heirloom inspired Lang's fifth cookbook, "Around the Southern Table: Coming Home to Comforting Meals and Treasured Memories."

"We wanted to make the table a part of the book, not just something to set your plate on," said the author. Lang, 35, a contributing editor at Southern Living magazine, achieved that goal by interspersing her 150 recipes with stories about family life around that table and personal essays from other Southerners, such as television designer Vern Yip and Grammy Award-winning musician Zac Brown.

Her recipes range from a modern take on shrimp and grits using prosciutto and jalapeños to lace cornbread, an old frugal Southern recipe requiring only three ingredients beyond water.

Lang hopes the book — so centered on family life and coming together — will be one whose recipes are passed along to the next generation. In the immediate future, she hopes it will inspire families to put down their cellphones and walk away from the television to eat a meal together.

"The table," Lang said, "is the time to turn it off and be with those you love."

This old Southern take on cornbread is a crisp, lacy brown wafer best enjoyed a few seconds after it leaves the skillet. It was popular in the early 20th century. Southern kitchens had all the ingredients on hand, and the wafers were inexpensive to make

Lace Cornbread

Makes 10 pieces

1/2 cup stone-ground white cornmeal

1/4 teaspoon salt

3/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons water

1/4 cup bacon drippings, divided

1. Combine cornmeal, salt, and water in a small bowl.
2. Heat 1 heaping tablespoon bacon drippings in a cast-iron skillet over medium-low heat. When drippings are shimmering (the sign that they're hot), very carefully add 2 tablespoons batter to hot pan. Gently spread batter from center outward. (The batter will immediately look lacy and bubbly.) Cook 3 minutes or until edges are brown. Turn and cook 3 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack. Repeat procedure with remaining batter, adding more drippings to pan as needed.

From "Around the Southern Table," by Rebecca Lang (Oxmoor House, 2012).

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