

melt-ing pot

by Wendy Perry

noun

a place where different peoples, styles, theories, etc., are mixed together.

Just as with ingredients found in a well-rounded recipe, here in our little part of North-Eastern North Carolina, we have come to find ourselves blessed with a delightful mixture of folk, here by birth or, simply drawn in by our charming ways of life. One need not look far to find characters who have traveled interesting paths along their journey. Our melting pot runneth over, and some of our characters are a melting pot within themselves.

Carol Mann is one such character. At a glance, you would probably never guess this fair-complexioned lady was not southern born and bred... that is, until she speaks. But even then, after calling North Carolina home for three-plus decades, you will only detect the slightest bit of New England “Yankeeism” accent to figure she probably wasn’t born here.

Like many ladies of her generation, Carol married young and set out into the world at the tender age of twenty as a new wife. Both her grandmothers as well as her mother were all extraordinary cooks. Her Italian grandmother was a no-recipe “show me” cook, while the other kept busy stirring up traditional New England fare from her English-Irish roots. “It’s unfortunate,” she says, “but we were too interested in boys in high school to be in the kitchen learning to cook,” so as a newlywed, Carol set about reading cookbooks and teaching herself how to prepare delicious meals for her new husband.

Bill was an FBI agent whose career took them here, there and everywhere. Their travels brought bountiful opportunities for Carol to learn and experiment with all sorts of cuisines and experience a plethora of culinary adventures. Along their

journeys across America, she collected many recipes from family, newfound friends, newspapers and magazine clippings she kept in a spiral notebook, having no idea someday they would be compiled into several cookbooks. Tucked in amongst these scribbles, frayed and faded recipes were Carol's own she had created over the years as well. She even entered her Cheeseburger Pie recipe in a Better Homes and Gardens Contest long ago and won \$25, which back then was a LOT of money!

Bill's final assignment landed them in Raleigh. Upon retirement, like so many before them, the couple were drawn to Beaufort County and have called Chocowinity "home" for the past seventeen years. As their three North Carolina born daughters grew older, they started asking just which one would get that coveted spiral bound notebook full of treasured recipes Carol had collected. She pondered for a bit on how to solve this little problem. It was decided the collection was worthy of a book, so she set about compiling them into her first cookbook... followed by a second, and "probably" third and final, Bountiful.

Bountiful is Carol's most recently published book and personal favorite. Because, you see, along the way, Carol found she had another passion, a painter hidden inside her, which has flourished and illustrated this beautiful book.

Yes, on a whim, at nearly 60 years old, this lady decided to take up art lessons with North Carolina's acclaimed and multi-award-winning watercolorist Jeffrey Jakub. It didn't take long for Carol's inner artist to reveal herself, and as they say, the rest is history. Her splendid works can be found in downtown Washington at The Lemonade Gallery where she is one of 5 proprietors, and of course, gracing the covers of her Bountiful cookbook and throughout its pages.

From her whimsical desire to try her hand at watercolors just a few short years ago, Carol now shares her passion and skills with sixty students each week.

Like the conglomeration of recipes in her book she has collected from her years of travels with banjo-picking husband Bill, her students come from all walks of life, all ages and for a variety of reasons... a true melting pot of students from our Eastern Living community.

I asked Carol to share one of her favorite recipes and got a quick "Oh Lord, depends on which category!" It's obvious she loves each one collected over the years for reasons each their own. But this one stands out for her since it was a bit of a challenge to get, and was a memory from a special time in her young life.

So goes the story... Carol and Bill honeymooned at an inn in Vermont. As was customary, afternoon refreshments were offered, and the specialty of this inn was a delightful ginger cookie. "It smelled like Heaven when those cookies started baking in the afternoons," recollected Carol. "I truly believe recipes are meant to be shared. But they simply would not share the recipe." As luck would have it, many years later, by pure happenstance, Carol picked up a magazine before her in an office waiting room. As she turned the pages, she came upon an article with "recipes from favorite Inns." And right there, in her hands, appeared that very cookie recipe she had wished for so many years before! So, Eastern Living friends, this is Carol's "favorite" she chose to share with you, but do drop by The Lemonade Gallery in Downtown Washington, pick up a copy of Bountiful, and catch Carol there if you can. She is one character in our pot you'll not want to miss!