



MEMORIES MUSINGS

By Cheri Sims

Cheri lives, writes and gardens in Charleston.

I have always been fascinated with stamped bakeware and baking forms. My first experience was back in the 1970's while shopping at a Williams Sonoma store and the staff was sampling an intricately designed bundt cake. I had just entered my first baking faze and leave it to me to want to start at the top by making theme cakes for my son's birthday, but those pans were ridiculously expensive and I would have to wait a long time to purchase one. I searched every store we visited for a cake pan in the shape of a clown and none were to be found.

Later I would find out that this bundt cake mold was made by Nordic Ware and today they boast a line of bundt cake pans shaped like various castles. A bit of cake pan history: Nordic Ware owned by H. David Dalquist, a metallurgy expert, who unwittingly secured a place in culinary history when he cast the first Bundt cake pan

in 1950. Dalquist made the Bundt pan -- a ring form with a center post and elegantly fluted sides -- for the Minneapolis chapter of a Jewish women's society whose members sought to reproduce a cake their European mothers had made.

Sixteen years later, the confluence of a baking contest, changes in women's lives and the rise of convenience foods made the pan a kitchen staple and put Dalquist's Nordic Ware brand on the baking world's map. <https://www.latimes.com/>.

We would shop antique stores and could find old copper pudding molds and old fashioned cookie molds, which I now wish I had purchased. Cast iron pans and aluminum pans were abound and I especially liked the cast iron pans that looked like corn cobs. I even found pretty fluted pans for individual cakes but I could not find pans in shapes for kids.

Luckily Hubby was an artist and would draw the shapes I wanted and I would bake rectangular cakes and trace the shapes Hubby provided.

I had to learn how to decorate these cakes and Hubby would painstakingly trace outlines on the cakes and I would cut them out and pipe them with colored frosting and spatulas. At the time I did not know that the Wilton brand had ventured into bakeware production but later in my life I was able to use some of their theme pans and tools. I baked all kinds of these cakes and my favorites were the first one we made, the clown, but I also made doll shaped cakes and business logo cakes, a guitar, footballs, baseballs and basketballs and a diamond ring.

My all time favorite was the BMX Quarter pipe cake I made for our son's fifteenth birthday. A real quarter pipe is a eight foot tall ramp structure and the boys would ride their bikes up and down the ramp and perform tricks in the process. The cake was eighteen inches tall and one foot wide and was frosted with the red, white and blue colors of the real ramp. It was a tremendous hit with the teenage boys and the crowning glory of my theme cake baking.

In later years Hubby became interested in his Scan-

dinavian roots and we began to bake with stamped cookie and cake pans. A brief history of dookie stamps: Around 150 years ago or so, it was common for the people of Sweden to hand make furniture and useful tools to help them get through the long dark days of winter. Among the tools they made were cookie stamps. These stamps had designs inspired by daily life, nature, and symmetry, and were traditionally made from wood. They were so popular, practically every family had a set of stamps. In some cases, history has been well preserved and people are still using the stamps from generations ago today.

Cookie stamps were given away as gifts during the holidays. Christmas time was, and still is a traditional occasion on which to make stamped cookies. During the Christmas season, my family makes cookies similar to these every year in the German tradition. I plan on making some later this year, and will share my results with you then. (cookiestamps.com)

I had forgotten about this bit of our history until I received a catalogue from the King Arthur Baking Company which features unusual cake pans and stamps. I am particularly fond of the shortbread stamped pans and

the designs, rendered on the shortbread, they are quite beautiful. I said last week I was not going to bake very soon but I might have to change that and make our favorite Swedish cookies. Somewhere in the boxes that are still packed in the attic are my stamped pans so I must find them first. The recipe I am sharing can be made without a stamp tool. Enjoy.

Here are a couple web sites for you to investigate if you are interested in beautiful cake pan molds. They are so fun to look at and to imagine the finished results.

Beautiful Cake Pans: <https://www.pinterest.com/darklight68/beautiful-cake-pans/>.

Cake Art: <https://cakeart.com/Baking-Pans-%26-Molds-Novelty-Cake-Pans/429/>. This site has a guitar. I am so envious!

Williams Sonoma: Novelty Cake Pans & Shaped Cake Pans | Williams Sonoma. Look at the spectacular castle mold.

Great British Bakeoff: <https://www.realitytitbit.com/opinion/pans-used-on-bake-off-2020>.

Swedish Shortbread Cookies

Ingredients

- * 16 tbsp. unsalted butter, at room temperature
- * 1 cup superfine sugar
- * 2 eggs, separated
- * 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- * 4 cups flour
- * 1 tsp. kosher salt
- * Pearl sugar, for garnish

Instructions

1. Combine butter and superfine sugar in a large bowl and beat, using a hand-held mixer set to medium speed, until mixture is pale and fluffy, 1-2 minutes. Add egg yolks and vanilla and beat until smooth. Add flour and salt and beat until just combined. Transfer dough to a work surface and shape into a flat disk; wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 1 hour.

2. Heat oven to 350°F. Transfer dough to a floured work surface and, using a rolling pin, roll dough to a 1/8" thickness. Using a 2"-wide star-shaped cookie cutter, cut out cookies and place them 2" apart on baking sheets lined with parchment paper. In a small bowl, whisk egg whites until frothy. Using a pastry brush, brush egg whites evenly over cookies; sprinkle cookies with pearl sugar. Bake cookies, 1 sheet at a time, until just set, about 10 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to let cool completely.

<https://www.saveur.com/article/Recipes/Swedish-Shortbread-Cookies/>

Douglas County tentative property assessment equalization factor announced

Douglas County has been issued a tentative property assessment equalization factor of 1.0000, according to David Harris, Director of the Illinois Department of Revenue.

The property assessment equalization factor, often called the "multiplier", is the method used to achieve uniform property assessments among counties, as required by law. This equalization is particularly important because some of the state's 6,600 local taxing districts overlap into two or more counties (e.g. school districts, junior college districts, fire

protection districts). If there were no equalization among counties, substantial inequities among taxpayers with comparable properties would result.

State law requires property in Illinois to be assessed at one-third (1/3) of its market value. Farm property is assessed differently, with farm homesites and dwellings subject to regular assessing and equalization procedures, but with farmland and farm buildings assessed according to standards based on productivity.

The equalization factor

is determined annually for each county by comparing the sales price of individual properties sold over the past three years to the assessed value placed on those properties by the county supervisor of assessments/county assessor.

If this three-year average level of assessment is one-third of market value, the equalization factor will be one (1). If the average level of assessment is greater than one-third of market value, the equalization factor will be less than one (1). And if the average level of assessment is

less than one-third of market value, the equalization factor will be greater than one (1).

Assessments in Douglas County are at 33.40 percent of market value, based on sales of properties in 2017, 2018, and 2019.

The equalization factor currently being assigned is for 2020 taxes, payable in 2021.

Last year's equalization factor for the county was 1.0000.

The tentative factor is subject to change (1) if the County Board of Review takes actions which signifi-

cantly affect the county assessments or (2) if local officials or others can present data showing that the Department of Revenue's estimates of the average level of assessments in the county should be adjusted. A public hearing on the tentative multiplier will be held between 20 and 30 days after the tentative factor is published in a newspaper of general circulation within the county.

A change in the equalization factor does not mean total property tax bills will increase or decrease. Tax bills are determined by lo-

cal taxing bodies when they request money each year to provide services to local citizens. If the amount requested by local taxing districts is not greater than the amount received in the previous year, then total property taxes will not increase even if assessments may have increased.

The assessed value of an individual property determines what portion of the tax burden a specific taxpayer will assume. That individual's portion of tax responsibility is not changed by the multiplier.

Millions of taxpayers will receive their second stimulus by debit card

The Treasury Department and the IRS are issuing millions of second Economic Impact Payments by prepaid debit card to speed delivery of the payments to as many people as possible.

If the hyperlink "<https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/get-my-payment>" on IRS.gov shows a date that a recipient's payment was mailed, they should watch their mail for either a paper check or debit card. The debit cards arrive in a white envelope

that prominently displays the U.S. Department of the Treasury seal.

The prepaid debit card, called the Economic Impact Payment card, is issued by Treasury's financial agent, MetaBank, N.A. The IRS does not determine who receives a card.

The form of payment for the second mailed EIP may be different than the first mailed EIP. Some people who received a paper check last time might receive a pre-

paid debit card this time, and some people who received a prepaid debit card last time may receive a paper check.

EIP Cards are safe, convenient and secure

These cards provide certain protections against fraud, loss and other errors. They can be used to make purchases online or in stores anywhere Visa Debit Cards are accepted.

Cardholders can also use the cards to do any of the following without pay-

ing a fee:

- * Transfer funds to a personal bank account
- * Make signature or PIN-debit purchases anywhere Visa Debit Cards are accepted — in stores, online or over the phone
- * Get cash back with a PIN debit purchase where available
- * Get cash from in-network ATMs
- * Get a replacement EIP Card, if needed
- * Check their card bal-

ance online, through a mobile app or by phone

People should watch their mail carefully

EIP Cards are being sent in a white envelope that prominently displays the U.S. Department of the Treasury seal. The envelope also states "Not a bill or an advertisement. Important information about your Economic Impact Payment." The EIP Card has the Visa name on the front of the card and the issuing bank name, MetaBank®, N.A. on the back. Each mailing will include instructions on how to securely activate and use the EIP Card. These cards are being issued to eligible recipients across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Residents of the western United States are generally more likely to receive an EIP Card.

People can check the status of their payment using the <https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/get-my-payment> "Get My Payment tool on IRS.gov.

Tips to improve your underperforming WiFi connection in your home

Speedy, reliable internet is something people have quickly grown accustomed to. That's no doubt why dropped WiFi signals can be so frustrating.

Various things can contribute to slow or interrupted Wi-Fi. As a result, there's no one-size-fits-all solution to address underperforming Wi-Fi. But that's good news,

as it means there's an assortment of strategies that consumers can try to improve the Wi-Fi in their homes.

· Upgrade your router. Many people rent their routers from their internet service providers, but it may surprise some to learn that they can buy their own. Buying your own router can be beneficial in various ways,

not the least of which is it can save money. Router rental fees vary, but they typically cost between \$10 and \$15 per month. Consumers will save money in the long run by buying their own router rather than renting one from their ISP. When buying their own routers, consumers also can pick from a host of options, including routers with strong performance ratings that may contribute to better WiFi performance.

· Set up automatic firmware updates. It's easy to

forget a router after it's been plugged in and internet service starts working. However, manufacturers routinely issue firmware updates to improve router performance. Turning on automatic updates may improve WiFi performance, and such updates also can provide a host of additional benefits, including added security measures.

· Relocate the router. PCMag.com notes that the location of the router can affect WiFi performance. If

possible, locate the router in the center of the home so it can easily reach all parts of the house. Locating wireless routers away from walls and other obstructions also may improve performance.

· Switch frequencies. Switching frequencies can help wireless consumers whose service might be adversely affected by congestion. Consumer Reports notes that wireless congestion can affect WiFi performance in apartment buildings and densely populated

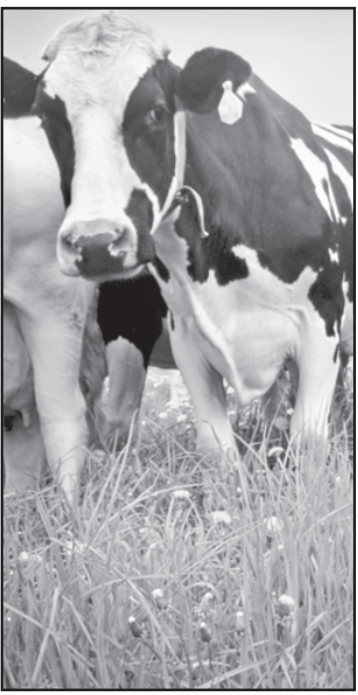
neighborhoods. In such instances, consumers can check their routers to see if they're running on the 2.4 GHz frequency band. If so, switching them to the 5 GHz band, which has more channels and is likely to be less congested, may improve WiFi performance.

Slow and/or interrupted WiFi signals can be very frustrating. Thankfully, various strategies can help consumers quickly remedy such issues.

Ag in the Classroom discusses dairy farming

The Ag in the Classroom topic this month has been dairy farming. Dairy cows are an amazing animal, able to turn grass and silage into milk by the gallons. A dairy cow will eat 100 pounds of feed and drink 25 to 50 gallons of water each day. A cow then can produce seven to eight gallons of milk per day. It takes about two days for milk to go from the farm to the retail store.

Students learned about different breeds of dairy cattle. Some cows, such as Holsteins, are used for the large quantity of milk they produce. Other cows, like the Brown Swiss breed, are



chosen because they produce a very rich, velvety milk that is high in butterfat. This milk can be used to produce delicious cheese. Still other cows are chosen because of their size or grazing habits. Jersey cows are a smaller breed and do not take as much land or feed to maintain. Milking Shorthorns are better able to utilize pasture grasses, thus not requiring as much feed.

Almost 97 percent of dairy farms are family owned. Dairy farmers work extremely hard to produce a safe and wholesome source of dairy products for the public. Dairy farmers protect the

land, water, and air not only for their animals, but also their families and surrounding community.

Dairy products provide your body with calcium which is needed for healthy bones and teeth. Calcium also helps our muscles and nerves work properly and helps blood to clot. Children need three servings of dairy products every day. Low-fat dairy foods improve overall diet quality.

Douglas County Ag in the Classroom is supported by Douglas County Farm Bureau, Douglas County Ag Center, and Illinois Ag in the Classroom.

Good Riddance, Rodents.

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