

Story Cookbook: Featuring Americana Basics from the Northwest Mountains

Jo Ann Bender

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Nestled up against the Canadian border in the mountains of eastern Washington, Jo Ann Bender and her husband, Bud, run the Lazy Bee Bed and Breakfast. In the folksy *Story Cookbook*, Bender shares anecdotes about their home, neighbors, guests, and the attractions of their region. Her breezy, conversational style is very inviting, and her vignettes capture the rural beauty of the area.

Bender's Iowa roots are evident in a wealth of recipes that feature country cooking. These are the sorts of recipes often found in community cookbooks: crowd-pleasers that lack fancy ingredients or complicated cooking techniques. They run the gamut from everyday meals to special occasion treats, and Bender even shares a few heirloom recipes from her family and friends to make the collection unique. Most contain from-scratch ingredients, but there are also a number that utilize convenience foods, like cake mixes or prepared gravy.

The text is presented in a clean format and contains an index to the more than 120 recipes. Bender makes sure that each story and recipe fits on its own page; as such, some of the longer recipes are in a smaller font size.

Though most of Bender's stories contain vivid descriptions of wildlife, Washington scenery, and colorful local residents, there are some that have only tenuous links to the accompanying recipe. A mushrooming jaunt seems an out-of-place segue for the author's cherry-pie-filling recipe, and another entry for a pineapple JELL-O salad is oddly introduced by a tale of how Bud shot a bird-eating squirrel.

Tighter editing would improve the text's appeal to cookbook devotees. There are instances of awkward grammar, a sprinkling of typos ("egg yokes," "peeled apples"), and places where Bender does not specify box or can sizes of certain ingredients. Some recipes don't mention whether ingredients should be chopped, sliced, peeled, or grated, and others either leave out cooking steps or have a joltingly clear misprint (as in the "12 cups of sunflower seeds" called for in the Broccoli Salad recipe).

The Story Cookbook is an appealing collection of recipes and memories from the author's interesting life. With better editing, the volume would be a welcome addition to any cookbook library.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (August 2, 2012)

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