

Ninety-one year old James Tamplin and his wife, Evelyn, vividly recall growing up in the rural South during the Great Depression and the rationing of food and other necessities during World War II. Mr. Tamplin spent his youth in Georgia cities like Cedartown and Rome, while Evelyn remained in Centre, Alabama until she married and began teaching. Mrs. Tamplin began her teaching career in the field of Home Economics, a genre she admits had little demand at the time. Ironically Mrs. Tamplin's experience in getting her Home Economics degree was the first time she had ever attempted to cook, her mother had always insisted she handle the family meals. Just as her mother was well known around the community for her tea cakes and fried pies years ago, Evelyn Tamplin's unique recipes have led her to be dubbed the "muffin lady" around Carrollton, and "Betty Crocker" by her friends in Florida. Mrs. Tamplin's Christmas Lizzies are a popular holiday treat and though convenience and health concerns have led her to use modern pre-packaged goods in some of her recipes, Evelyn fondly recalls the days when farm-fresh ingredients were available.

Interview of James and Evelyn Tamplin
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DHR: Ok. Now the question that we're getting to, about the food. Describe what types of types of bread were eating in your home. What types of bread?

ET: Well, my, my mother was a good biscuit-maker. So she made biscuits, uh all the time. Uh, she made cornbread and, uh, if we had company, if the preacher was comin', we bought a loaf of bread, we had loaf-bread [laughing], which we called it.

DHR: Ok.

ET: And, uh, but, um, anyway, it's biscuit and, uh, cornbread.

DHR: Biscuits and Cornbread? What did she t-, did she use to make those? (mumble)

ET: Well now, oh yeah, by then, I mean, we were, we always had a hog every year –

DHR: Ok.

ET: -and so, they had, we had lard, and so she used lard.

DHR: And what type of oven did you have?

ET: It was, a-, when I was very small, it was a wood-stove.

DHR: Ok.

ET: With a warmer. Um, but then of course, when I got, a, I guess, a, I think I must have been, uh, seventh or eighth grade, um, we got an-, a electric stove.

DHR: A electric stove.? In seventh or eighth grade?

ET: Yeah, Mm-hmm

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ET: Ok. On Sunday morning, my mother would give me a half of a biscuit, and I'd sit on the steps, and shine my shoes with that biscuit.

DHR: [laughing]

ET: [laughing] Before I went to church, and the chickens would come along and eat the crumbs that fell off [laughing] of the steps.

DHR: So you-

ET: [laughing]

DHR: -that is interesting. You were recycling before your time.

ET: [laughing] Yeah.

DHR: Using the biscuit to shine your shoes, and therefore, the birds received some nourishment also.

ET: Yeah. Chickens.

DHR: Chickens.

ET: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

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JT: Well, dur-, ah- at Christmas, Mother always made tea-cakes-

ET: Yeah, my mother kept tea-cakes-

DHR: Now, what are tea-cakes?

ET: Uh, tea-, uh, it's a sugar-cookie.

DHR: Ok.

ET: It's just a plain cookie, and my mother would make 'em and put 'em in a pillowcase, and hang 'em up to stay fresh in that pillowcase. And she would make dozens and dozens and dozens at one time, all though it was just the three of us.

DHR: Did she give 'em as gifts-

ET: Yeah.

DHR: -or did she have a ready supply?

ET: Yeah, she'd, she'd go somewhere and she would take 'em, if somebody was sick, she'd take tea-cakes.

DHR: Was it just one flavor? The sugar cookie kind? Or what?

ET: Well, she, you know, she'd put flavor in different kinds of flavor-

DHR: flavors in-

ET: -vanilla, vanilla, I think, was one of the flavorings she mighta had.

DHR: Ok. And what about you, Mr. Tamplin-

JT: Ju-, just vanilla is all I know, and it was always at Christmas time-

DHR: At Christmas time.

JT: -'bout, 'bout, eight or ten days 'fore Christmas, she'd have tea-cakes.

DHR: Ok.

ET: My mother always made fruit cakes at Christmas because, and she, instead of buying a lot of this fruit that goes in it, uh, she would, of, of coo-, she would of canned, um, blackberry b-, uh, jam, and different kinds of jam, uh, apple j-, uh, apples, and different things, and that's what she would put in her fruitcake.

DHR: Ok.

ET: It'd be the fruits, all of the fruits, and then she'd just by a few things to go in it.

DHR: Hum. That was very economical and very smart-

ET: Mm-hmm.

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DHR: Ok. Ok. Now, let's move to the second set of questions and we're going to talk a little bit about the baking process and you all have kinda answered some of these but I would appreciate your pat-, patience in repeating some of the information if some of the questions sound a little bit redundant for ya. What time of day do you do your baking?

ET: Uhh, it depends on what I am bakin'. But, I bake uh I bake uh muffins and carry it to everybody. I'm the muffin-lady in town and uh your husband can, knows about that.

DHR: And what kind of muffins do you like to bake?

ET: Well, I tell you what. I like to experiment so I buy cranberry uhm muffin mix and instead of putting a cup of water or a cup of milk I but a cup of orange juice and then also I put a half a cup of whole cranberry sauce and instead of makin' twelve muffins you get, you get eighteen.

DHR: Ok. And what kind time of day do you bake those muffins?

ET: Usually late in the afternoon or either early in the mornin' after I get up and, if I don't have any.

DHR: Do they do better at a certain time of day or just depends on . . . [speaking over one another]

ET: No. No. Anytime. I, I bake, I baked muffins last night at nine o'clock.

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DHR: And what type of fat did your mother use Ms. Tamplin for bakin'?

ET: Uh, she used lard uh when I was little but after we could I guess afford or it came on market and was reasonable she always used uhm Crisco.

DHR: And where did she get the fat from that she used before she the Crisco.

ET: Uhh these people that came in to help work when my Dad kept, had a uhm killed a hog. They took a washpot and they, they made the lard.

DHR: Ok.

ET: And mother would give them half the lard for makin' the lard . . .

DHR: Ok.

ET: It was made in a washpot

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DHR: Ok. Ms. Tamplin describe the types of sweeteners used for baking bread and when did she use these sweeteners and why?

ET: Sugar. Regular sugar and uh she'd uh you know buy it in the bags but that what's uh durin' World War II although there were just three of us, mother did a lot of cooking with swe-, using sweet stuff, 'Cause you can make pies and make cakes so they did not drink coffee and during the war you would get food stamps, not food stamps but yeah, ra-, I mean it was ration stamps 'cause you were only allowed a certain number of stamps per month according to the household and uhm mother would swap her coffee 'cause we didn't drink coffee, her coffee for sugar. A neighbor wanted the coffee 'cause they would be coffee drinkers so they would exchange the stamps and mother would buy her extra sugar so she didn't, she didn't have to do without durin' the war.

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DHR: Yeah and you told me. Where there any other special things that they baked that you left out? Our mentioned the different cakes uh . . .

ET: The pies, my mother, oh my mother's fried pies. Ohh yes! [laughter]

DHR: What kind of fried pies?

ET: Apple. 'Course we had a big orchard and we had uh peaches. She would dry peaches. We would dry peaches and we'd dr-, dry apples out a piece of tin an' uh so she put those in the winter she'd have those in uh white sacks different places. So she'd cook, stew those up and she'd make fried pies on top of the stove.

DHR: Now did she uh, what about your mother did she make any other special ones? You mentioned . . .

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ET: Because I, I do baking, we go to Florida and spend the month of May every year and we pass out recipes, in fact, I'll show you the book I've made in Florida.

DHR: Ohh. Ok, that's going to be pretty.

ET: An' uh, anyway they call my Betty Crocker down there because I do all this cooking and they all go out to eat. These people from up North come down, they all go out to eat an' I cook.

DHR: Ok, ok. And I look forward to getting those once we finish everything uh up here. Now describe the baking process for some of these specialty foods for your, with your mother. In terms of the cakes and the pies. Did you have to cool 'em a certain way uh could you not jump in the kitchen, different things that uh she'd bake when she talked about, or baked her specialty goods?

ET: Well you see when I was growin' up we had a well an' you'd draw your water an' uh we had a chef, it was called the wash chef, it was where you had the wash pan an' a bucket of fresh water out of the well an' all that kinda stuff. And so it was cool out there. It was a side porch like. And so she'd put 'em out there to uh cool an' then she'd stack an' sometimes she'd just turned 'em out on the table an' they'd cool an' then she'd stack 'em.

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DHR: Ok. Now you had already said that in terms of the baking and cooking different uhm breads, tell me some of the things that you cook. You mentioned your muffins, you cook . . .

ET: Oh, I make cookies.

DHR: Cookies.

ET: Ohh, that something I need to tell you. Recipe-, I, when, those last two years I was, before I retired I [inaudible] brownies.

JT: Write this down when she tells ya.

ET: Because my si-, I have a degree in home economics.

DHR: Yes, ma'am.

ET: And so I taught home economics at Jr. High, ok, but I had to make up things for the kids to cook but they were seventh an' eighth graders so I made up a cookin' recipe. It's a box of cake mix, any flavor, uh, I give it to you later, don't worry with writin' it down Deirdre. Anyway it's a box of uh but you have to get fat with not butter in it. You know similar to butter an' you put a half a cup of oil an' two eggs into that cake mix into your bowl, big bowl an' then you divide it out into other bowls an' you put coconut in one of 'em, you put chocolate chips in the other one an' you put what ever you want M&M's, uh in those different bowls an' then you can make that many kind of cookies. You make five or six kinds of cookies at one time. Drop by, off the spoon an' flatten 'em with a fork an' stick 'em in the oven. 'Cause I can make between seventy an' a hundred cookies out of one box of cake mix.

DHR: Wow. So, wa-laa, so you were very, definitely very creative.

ET: And those kids I meet on the street now, they're adults an' have families, will say I make my kids cookies. [laughing]

DHR: 'Cause of uh Ms. Tamplin.

ET: Yeah.

DHR: Now you already said it doesn't matter in terms of the time, day of the week in terms of your baking, it just depends on what you're goin' ta cook and what kinda mood you may be in terms of need.

ET: Need, the need mainly. If I go into, every doctor I go to, my dentist, all the people we go to doctors an' dentists an' anyway, I make cookies uh muffins, I make

somethin' an' carry an' they know, when, when my appointment is they expect that.
[laughter]

DHR: So, you've gotten 'em all spoiled now.

ET: Yeah.

DHR: Now, you've already describe for me how you would use boxed or refrigerated goods because you talked about you developed that cookie recipe. Is there any other boxed or refrigerated baked goods that you use now? Uhm, because you talked about how you developed the cookie . . .

ET: Also, also on my muffins, I made muffins over there last night an' I took the banana recipe, I mean the box of banana muffin mix an' I added two fresh bananas, I added a cup of nuts an' it makes 'em much better.

DHR: Ok.

ET: But I just add to, to make 'em, make what I want. I just make up stuff.

DHR: Ok. Ok, now do, do you, do you and Mr. Tamplin prefer corn or wheat based flour bread?

ET: I, I prefer uh the wheat. Jim, I guess you'd say you prefer the corn, 'cause you like cornbread.

DHR: Ok, ok.

ET: I don't like cornbread that much.

DHR: And the types of flours, you already told me about that. You use uh White Lily and it doesn't really matter about the kind of meal, but you gotta have White Lily unbleached . . . [JT begins speaking]

JT: Red Label . . . [ET and DHR begin speaking]

ET and DHR [at the same time]: self-rising, red label.

DHR: Ok, not the green. And, and right now how do you get those flours and meals?

ET: Well, uh I check Food Lion, Krogers, Food Max, those three stores I trade at an' who ever has it on special, I buy it an' I use coupons, I use a lot of coupons to buy my groceries.

DHR: Ok.

ET: Uh hum.

DHR: Now, describe the type of fat that you use now in your baking, baking fats and sweeteners.

ET: Ok. I use Cr-, I use only Crisco for my bakin' I also only use cholesterol naturally fr-, free, fat free oil, Wesson Oil.

JT: For fryin'.

ET: For fryin'. Uh hum.

DHR: And what about the milk. What type of milk do you use for baking?

ET: Well right now I'ma havin' to use lactose free 'cause I'm allergic.

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DHR: Ok. We'll have to get that one too. Now why do you think uh do you do any type of holiday bakin'?

ET: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

DHR: What do you . . .

ET: I make fruitcakes an' I make it's called Christmas Lizzies. It's really a fruit uhm cookie an' that recipe came down to me from somebody in Texas, when we were living out there. I make those, those an' I make uhm I make a lotta those cookies that I was talkin' about with my cake mix.

DHR: Yes, ma'am.

ET: Because I make, I'll make uh coconut, I put that much coconut, bake like a coconut macaroon when you get through with those an' uh I don't know, usually try to make a coconut cake uh 'cause Jim likes coconut an' uh I do coconut cake.

DHR: Ok. So you do quite a bit of holiday baking?

ET: Yes I do.

DHR: And when do you start doin' that holiday bakin'?

ET: Two or three days.

DHR: Two or three days [inaudible]

JT: When, when [inaudible] an' them comes down on weekends too we usually . . .

ET: Yeah, my son's comin' next weekend uh when they come down from Kno-, when they come from Knoxville about once a month, somethin' like that an' Jim's son an' his wife come over from Newnan uh an' uh sometimes I have uhm ten or twelve at one time that I have to cook, that I cook for now an' then they will bring in somethin' sometimes. They'll ask, "let me bring so-an'-so" an' I say ok. Uhm but usually I do all the cookin' an' they'll bring somethin' that they have picked up at the grocery store you know that's needed to make the meal.

DHR: Ok. And do you think that baking traditions have changed over time in your family?

ET: Well, I don't, I mean just like, I think the change's come about because of the diff-, of the different things that are available. When my parents were cooking, when my mother was cooking lard was available an' she couldn't get into town that often to get some kind of bought shortening uhm an' they had eggs on the farm we had all this kind of thing that we could use so it's, it's changed in the fact that the source of our baking materials is even more available an' uh easier to get.

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