



CHAPTER 2

TO DINE
SOUTHERN





Cooking In Bitsy's Kitchen

Written by Vera Stewart / Photography by Henry Gonzales / Styling by Laura McLeod Cole

There's something about meatloaf—it's not the most gourmet dish, but it almost always evokes warm comfort food memories. Maybe it was your grandma's specialty or the dish your mama always made when you had company. It's simple, but hearty. Easy to prepare and often a crowd pleaser. It probably represents a time or a place in the past, and just the smell of it can transport you there. Personally, it takes me on a long journey down memory lane, twisting and turning and landing in the kitchen of my sister, Bitsy.

Ten years my senior, Bitsy was more of a second mother than she was a sister. We lost daddy in 1960, leaving mama a widow with five children. A determined woman with a head-down mindset, she worked tirelessly to support and provide for us on her own. The days were long and some of the seasons were tough, but dinner – albeit not always homemade – was on the table at the end of the day. Homemade, formal dinners weren't a reality for us most of the years, but it was the act of gathering around the table, not necessarily the food we were eating, that mattered.

As Bitsy would say, "in our family, food is love," and this is a value she started teaching me when I was an impressionable young girl. Bitsy married when I was ten years old, and I would spend two weeks each summer at her home while she was a young newlywed. She was dedicated to making their house a home and putting dinner on the table for her husband. The scene was picture perfect – an apron tied around my waist, my sleeves rolled up, and my eager eyes watching my sister's every move. I'd thumb through the recipe cards, admiring Bitsy's handwriting and daydreaming about preparing each and every dish. She was perfectly poised, taking pride in what she prepared in the kitchen. When I think hard enough, I can smell the warm chocolate chip cookies she gave to the neighbors down the street. I can still see the steam released after she lifted the lid to stir a batch of spaghetti sauce. And of course, I can remember the feeling of accomplishment when that meatloaf – Bitsy's meatloaf – was placed on the table for all to enjoy. They were more than recipes – they still are more than recipes. Representing family and commitment, they showcase hard work and a willingness to learn. They're linked to memories, and form traditions that hold strong even when nothing else seems steady. These

recipes are about love – a way to give and receive.

As time continues passing by, the memories seem a bit more distant, but there are those moments where scenes of my childhood play just like a movie on the big screen. Like just the other day when I stepped into the kitchen during VeryVera Cooking Camp in Augusta, Georgia. This passion project of mine, which was widely influenced by kitchen memories from decades past, gives children the opportunity to learn prepping and cooking lessons while engaging in teamwork and experiencing the satisfaction and sense of

accomplishment you earn from preparing a meal or treat for family and friends. My life moves at one speed – fast – but everything slows down when I join those wide-eyed kids in the kitchen. How sweet are the squeals of delight when they peer into the oven at their masterpiece in progress. How nostalgic I feel when I see those little hands working cautiously, but at the same time without regard. Those are the moments I live for, whether I'm being politely called "Ms. Vera" by the campers or switching gears into one of my most rewarding roles as "Granny V". I see my ten-year-old self in those innocent faces. Their eager minds yearning to be taught and molded without even understanding what that means. Just as I sat excitedly in Bitsy's kitchen decades ago, these little campers and my dear grandchildren enjoy the fun had when mixing the batter, seeing the end result, and finally tasting their creation, but like a young Vera Wingfield, they have no idea the impact those



kitchen memories will have.

Much of my love for what I do was formed in Bitsy's kitchen. Those recipes tackled, memories made, and lessons learned found their way into the nooks and crannies of my life, forever influencing both my personal and professional lives. I was honored to publish my first cookbook this year, and Bitsy's meatloaf was on the top of the list of recipes to be included. I've put a Vera Stewart twist on her classic dish, but this recipe never fails to transport me back to 1965.

I hope you'll give Bitsy's meatloaf a try, allowing it to remind you of the kitchens and recipes that inspired you somewhere along the way.





THE SOUTHERN TABLE COOKS

BITSY'S MEATLOAF



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- 1½ pounds ground beef
(80/20 ground chuck recommended)
- ¼ pound hot pork sausage
(Jimmy Dean® recommended)
- 1 cup panko bread crumbs
- 1 large egg
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 medium Vidalia onion, chopped
- ½ cup marinara sauce
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce

SAUCE

- ½ cup marinara sauce
- 2 tablespoons yellow mustard
- 2 tablespoons dark brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons white vinegar

Serves: 4 to 6

Prep Time: 30 minutes

Cook Time: 50 to 55 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. In a large bowl, mix all the meatloaf ingredients together until well incorporated.
3. In a separate bowl, mix together the sauce ingredients and set aside.
4. Press the meatloaf mixture into an 8 x 4-inch loaf pan.
5. Place in the oven and bake for 45 minutes.
6. Drain the fat and cover with the sauce.
7. Place back in the oven and bake for an additional 5 to 10 minutes.
8. Remove from the oven and let it rest for 10 minutes before slicing.



ABOUT VERA STEWART: A nationally-recognized cookbook author whose career in the food industry spans nearly four decades. With a passion for memorable, Southern dishes passed down through generations, Vera is a natural entrepreneur who launched her career in the 80s with a cottage catering business aptly named VeryVera. Her business quickly became a household name and grew to encompass an Augusta, Georgia based café and a cooking show – *The VeryVera Show* – now syndicated across the southeast. With a passion for encouraging people – especially children – to create memories in the kitchen, Vera expanded her business by launching the VeryVera Cooking Camp in 2004. Now franchised across the southeast, Vera's camp provides children with the opportunity to not only learn cooking and preparation methods, but also experience the joy of teamwork and the feeling of accomplishment from creating something in the kitchen. Vera's more recent project – *The VeryVera Cookbook: Recipes from my Table (Story Farm 2018)* – includes more than 75 Southern favorites that were best sellers from her café and mail-order business. www.veryvera.com