

My maternal grandmother, Amanda Stordahl Mollan, 1901-1976.

By Trudy DeKeuster

So many wonderful foods came out of Grandma's kitchen: light and crumbly rosettes, krumkake, rice pudding, beet jelly and perfect fried chicken.

Grandpa Emil Mollan and Grandma had gardens in Minneapolis and at their cottage near Chisago City. They grew strawberries, tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, onions, squash, rhubarb and beets. They also picked every edible wild berry including raspberries, blueberries and chokecherries. Using it all, Grandma created pies, crisps, relishes, pickles and jellies galore! Nothing went to waste. All the water from the boiling process was somehow incorporated into something else. After all, "the good vitamins are in the water" she frequently stated. But it was her beet jelly that won my heart. After boiling beets for pickling, the remaining juice was combined with sugar, packets of blackcherry kool-aide and pectin to become beet jelly. Didn't taste anything like beets – thank goodness -- but Grandma felt she was passing on their nutritional value to finicky grandchildren.

I was in my early 20's when I asked Grandma to show me how to make her 'fried' chicken. She hemmed and hawed and said she couldn't. Why not I asked? Because you don't have the right pan and can't buy one she replied. After cutting a whole chicken into a dozen pieces, Grandma dropped them into milk or buttermilk [whichever she had] and then into a cracker crumb/seasoning mix and into [home rendered] hot chicken fat for a quick fry to brown and set the coating. Then they were piled into -- a small broken pressure cooker! I don't remember whether it didn't seal correctly or the top whistler was gone, only that grandma thought it too good a pan to discard and simply worked around the problem. That sums up so many moments I remember with them: it's too good to throw away so make it do. My grandparents taught me their version of reduce, reuse, repurpose and recycle. They were so far ahead of trend! And I'm so grateful for their example.