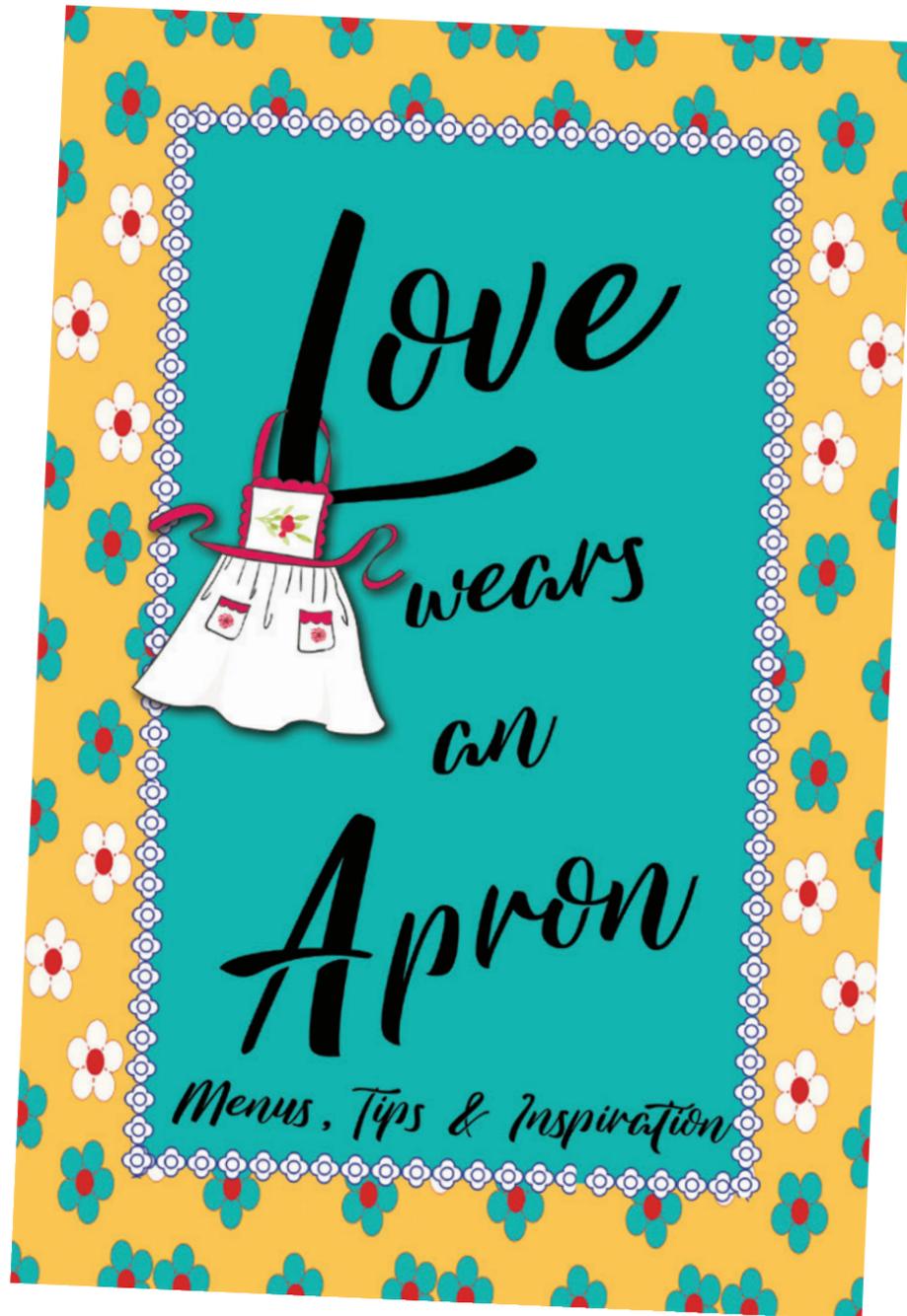


Moms Know Best

By Amy Conry Davis
Photography courtesy of Gateway Rasmussen--The Cookbook Printer



A group of West Point moms culled parental advice with recipes to produce a cookbook that goes beyond preparing meals.

Mothers all over the world can attest to the patience and determination required to raise children. And while parenting styles may vary, housework, homework and hungry mouths are constant. Thankfully, the hard job of motherhood can be made easier with a little help, especially when it arrives as advice from other moms. Support from those who have done it before, or are in the thick of parenting, can mean a world of difference. Meals get made and mountains get moved when moms come together.

One such group of “school moms” in West Point, Miss., decided to do just that. Thirteen friends from the same Mennonite church joined forces to compile their firsthand

knowledge into a printed guide. They took their family success stories and made a reference manual, not just for others but for themselves as well. The result was “Love Wears an Apron: Menus, Tips, & Inspiration.”

It all started with a WhatsApp thread. The women had been sharing child-rearing tips and favorite recipes in a group chat called “What’s For Dinner?” After nearly five years of messages, it became too difficult to refer back and find specific conversations. They wanted a more organized way to access the information so a few began labeling and saving the tips and recipes into manageable files.

Not long after, the notion of a cookbook entered the

discussion. Valerie Koehn, a busy mother of four boys who enjoys creative pursuits like sewing, writing, and working in the garden, took the lead to spearhead the project.

“At some point or another, I started getting enthused about a cookbook,” says Koehn. “We knew we wanted more than a usual cookbook. We wanted one that included the tips we were coming up with and focused more on school-aged children [and] what children like and what moms say.”

With the help of three others, Koehn began work on the process in the fall of 2018, scouring cookbooks to find a publisher. It took a few tries to find the right company that would work with the customization the group wanted. Eventually, they settled with Gateway Rasmussen of Canada. With the Christmas holidays around the corner, they were eager to have the book ready by December. They worked feverishly, while still running their households, to finalize the design, layout, editing, and publishing.

“They were extremely intense months,” says Koehn. “The first round was relatively easy and we thought, ‘Oh wow, all we have left is the editing.’ Well, the editing we were not prepared for. It was a huge job.”

Two months later, “Love Wears an Apron” hit the shelves, the collective wisdom of those 13 women transformed into 300-odd spiral-bound pages. The title, which had won the vote out of numerous suggestions, seemed to say perfectly what they wanted to portray.

“Love shows itself to our families as we give ourselves to the life of a mother, which includes an awful lot of cooking,” Koehn says. “The apron makes one think of kitchens and cooking and such.”

What started as casual conversation between friends was now a valuable resource for future generations or a gift to others who might benefit. Complete with colorful, retro illustrations, the chapters include recipes on everything from

marinades to pies to Sunday roast. There’s also seasonal menus and meal plans for those who want to dine on a diet. How-to pages for teaching children manners, doing chores, organizing school papers, and having family game nights, as well as a section dedicated to homemade soaps and detergents and tried-and-true secrets for dealing with chigger bites, poison ivy, and eczema round out the book.

The book is primarily sold online through Gospel Publishers where it retails for \$24.99, Nightingale’s Pantry & General Store in West Point, and the Busy Bee Nursery & Gift Shoppe in Macon. A large portion of its sales comes through Mennonite Church libraries across the United States and Canada. All of the proceeds are allocated to a fund to help children and families in their congregations with social or medical needs. To date, “Love Wears an Apron” has sold nearly 1,500 copies.

Many of the book’s authors have since moved out of state, and their children have grown older, but the group stays in touch. And though the chat carries on, according to Koehn there are no immediate plans for another cookbook.

“No, not at the moment,” she says. “I think I’m still getting over the last one. It was major, let me tell you. But we are still collecting things.”

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Chicken & Grits (LaVonne Wedel)

4 cups water
2 tablespoons butter
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup white grits
1/2-cup shredded cheese
4 strips bacon, cut into 1/4-inch pieces
1/2-cup chicken broth
2 tablespoon cream
2 teaspoon lemon juice
Dash Worcestershire sauce
3 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
1/2 teaspoon Cajun seasoning
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
Pinch cayenne pepper
3 cloves garlic, minced
2 tablespoon chopped green pepper
2 tablespoon chopped green onions
1 tablespoon minced jalapeno
1 tablespoon parsley

For the grits, bring water, butter, and salt to a boil. Whisk in grits, stirring occasionally, cooking until smooth and creamy, about 20 minutes. Stir in cheese.

Fry bacon and remove from the skillet. Leave 1 tablespoon grease and set bacon aside.

For the chicken, mix together chicken broth, cream, lemon juice and Worcestershire sauce and set aside. Cut 3 large boneless skinless breasts into 1-inch cubes. Put in bowl. Add the Cajun seasoning, salt, black pepper, and cayenne pepper to the chicken. Stir chicken with spices to coat evenly.

Heat the reserved bacon grease in skillet until you see the first wisp of smoke. Quickly add chicken mixture and spread into an even layer. Turn heat down to medium-high and coat, stirring for 5 minutes. Add garlic, green pepper, green onions, and jalapeno. Cook and stir for 5 more minutes.

Add liquid mixture and fried bacon. Cook and stir until chicken is done. Turn off heat. Stir in parsley.

Spoon cheesy grits into a bowl and top with chicken. Serves 8.