

a world away

A GRANDMOTHER'S DANISH HONEY CAKES ENSURE CHRISTMAS IN AUSTRALIA ALWAYS SMELLS LIKE HOME.

WORDS TRACEY PLATT PHOTOGRAPHY AND STYLING CHINA SQUIRREL

NINE YEARS AFTER Kristine Hansen and her family moved from Copenhagen to Australia, they are still adjusting to celebrating Christmas in summer. The heat makes some Danish traditions impractical — such as decorating with pine branches that would wilt within hours — but it does have unexpected benefits. “In Denmark we cook our honey cakes in November, then place them in a closed jar with a piece of rye bread for two weeks to absorb the moisture, as they are quite hard... Here we can eat them the next day because of the humidity,” Kristine says with a laugh. “I always make sure I have all the ingredients at the end of November, so if we have a rainy day we can start the oven. But they are often eaten before we get to Christmas Eve, so we have to make another batch!”

The iced honey cakes are one of several Christmas recipes handed down by Kristine's late grandmother, Anne-Marie Schmidt Clausen (pictured above with baby Kristine). Best known as Midde, Anne-Marie was born in 1907 and grew up on a farm near the village of Broballe on the island of Als in Denmark's south. She married Hans Christian From Clausen and together they raised four children and ran a small mixed farm.

“They had cows and pigs, and grew crops... My sister Mette and I spent our holidays there,” Kristine says. “At Christmas they'd invite the whole village for afternoon tea to try the recipes that were unique to our family.”

Each day, Midde would prepare hearty meals for up to 15 farm workers and had a cellar full of hams, sausages and clay jars of pickles and jam. “She was always up early picking berries or beans, and she always had her apron on,” Kristine recalls. But Midde still had time to create some Christmas magic. “On Christmas Eve she would close the doors and light the candles on the tree, then ring a bell and we would all run to see them... I now do the same with my two kids.”

Sticking with another northern hemisphere tradition, Kristine's family celebrate on Christmas Eve, when they enjoy a festive meal of duck stuffed with apples and prunes, followed by Danish rice pudding with almonds, cream and cherry sauce, and plenty of singing and dancing. But it's the spiced scent of her grandmother's honey cakes that make them feel at home. “I probably cook more now that we live in Australia. I want my boys to have the same joy and childhood memories that Midde's recipes brought me.” *CS*

FOOD PREPARATION AND RECIPE TESTING CHINA SQUIRREL
HANDMADE CERAMIC STARS FROM OTTIMADE. VISIT OTTIMADE.COM.AU

DANISH HONEY CAKES

Makes about 46

¾ cup honey
1¼ cups firmly packed brown sugar
3½ cups plain flour
1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
1½ teaspoons cinnamon
1½ teaspoons ground cloves
1½ teaspoons ground ginger
1½ teaspoons ground fennel
2 eggs, lightly beaten

ICING

3 cups icing sugar mixture, sifted
2 teaspoons softened butter
3 tablespoons boiling water

Preheat oven to 200°C. Line 4 large baking trays with baking paper. Place honey and brown sugar in a saucepan,

and stir over a medium-low heat until sugar dissolves. Cool for 10 minutes.

Sift flour, bicarbonate of soda, cinnamon, cloves, ginger and fennel into a large bowl. Make a well in centre of flour mixture, then pour in honey mixture and egg. Mix with a wooden spoon until a soft dough forms.

Turn dough onto a lightly floured surface and knead until smooth. Using lightly floured hands, roll dough into walnut-sized balls. Place on prepared trays, allowing room for spreading. Bake for 12 minutes or until lightly golden. Cool on trays.

To make icing, mix icing sugar, butter and water in a bowl until smooth. Top each honey cake with a teaspoonful of icing. Set aside for 30 minutes to set.

SHARE YOUR FAMILY FAVOURITES

Do you have a recipe that has been passed down through generations? Send us your recipe, the story behind it and a photograph (preferably a copy or scan) of the relative who passed it on. Remember to include a daytime telephone number. Email Sarah Neil at sneil@bauer-media.com.au or send a letter to Heirloom Recipe, Country Style, PO Box 4088, Sydney NSW 1028.