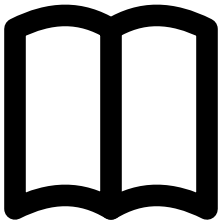
Extra 3

Before It's Lost

The family recipe interview: questions to ask before the memories are gone



How to Use This Interview



Her card says what she wanted to remember. The rest is with the people who stood in her kitchen: what “a good handful” meant, which pot she used, who got the first jar. This booklet gives you the questions to ask before those answers are gone, and a place to write them down.

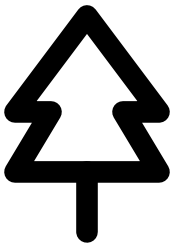
It doesn’t replace the method in Chapter 2. It feeds it. In Step 1 you copy her card and mark the gaps (Chapter 2.1). Some gaps belong to the tested twin and get filled from a tested recipe. Others — her amounts “by eye,” her spices, how she served it, the story — only a person can fill. This interview is for those.

A few things that help:

- **Ask the oldest first.** An aunt in her eighties remembers things no one else can, and a visit is worth more than a phone call.
- **Take it slowly.** One card per visit is plenty. Bring the card, or a copy, and set it on the table between you.
- **Let the story wander.** A question about a pot can turn into a story about a wedding. Write the story down; come back to the pot later.
- **Ask before you record.** If she’s happy for you to record on your phone, you can listen again later and catch the words exactly.
- **Write her words, not yours.** “Cook till it coats the spoon” is worth more on the page than your tidy version of it.
- **Bring something back.** A jar, a printed copy of her card, a photo of the family at the table. People open up when they see the card is being kept.

What you write here goes into **her layer** and into **the story**. It never changes the process: the jar, the time and the canner always come from the tested twin (page 12).

Who to Ask

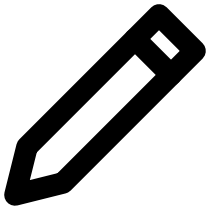


Start with the cook herself, if she's here. Then work outward, to the people who watched her or worked beside her.

- **The cook herself.** Even a short visit can settle a question you've wondered about for years.
- **Her sisters and brothers.** They grew up with the same mother's cooking and may remember where a recipe came from.
- **Her children.** Especially the ones who helped: who peeled, who stirred, who carried the jars to the cellar.
- **Her daughters- and sons-in-law.** They often asked the questions the family never thought to ask.
- **Neighbors and church friends.** Recipes traveled between kitchens. A neighbor may have the same card in her own handwriting.
- **Anyone who ate at her table.** A cousin who spent summers there remembers the smell of the kitchen on canning day.

Who	How they knew her cooking	Asked about which card	Done
_____	_____	_____	☐
_____	_____	_____	☐
_____	_____	_____	☐
_____	_____	_____	☐
_____	_____	_____	☐
_____	_____	_____	☐
_____	_____	_____	☐
_____	_____	_____	☐

The Questions for Each Card



One card at a time; skip what doesn't fit. The answers go on the card pages (pages 6 to 11).

Her amounts

- When she wrote "a handful," "a pinch" or "some," how much was that? Can you show me with your hand, or with a spoon?
- What did she measure with — a cup, a teacup, a coffee can, her palm?
- When the card says "spices," which ones? Whole or ground?
- Did she ever change the recipe? When, and why?

Her pot and her jars

- Which pot did she cook it in? Do you know where that pot is now?
- What jars did she use — pints, quarts, something else?

When she made it

- What time of year did she make it? Was it tied to a harvest, a holiday, the first frost?
- Did anyone help? Who did what?

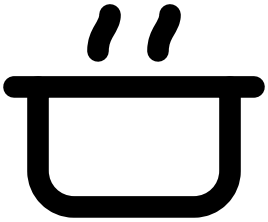
How she served it

- What did she serve it with? At which meals?
- Did she add anything when she opened the jar — butter, onions, cream, a little sugar?
- Who loved it most? Who wouldn't touch it?

Where it came from

- Who taught her this recipe? Did it come from her mother, a neighbor, a church cookbook, a newspaper, a canning booklet?
- Is there another copy of this card anywhere in the family?

The Questions About Her Kitchen



Some of what you'll want to keep isn't on any card. These questions are for the canning days themselves.

The canning days

- When did canning season start in her house, and when did it end?
- What did the kitchen look like on a canning day? Where did the jars wait?
- Who was there? Who came over to help, and who came over to eat?
- What did she say while she worked? Did she have sayings or rules?

The senses

- What did the kitchen smell like? Vinegar, cinnamon, tomatoes cooking down?
- What sounds do you remember — the lids popping, a radio, a particular song?
- What did her hands do that no recipe says? How did she know it was "ready"?

Her shelf

- Where did the jars go once they cooled? A cellar, a pantry, under the stairs?
- Did she give jars away? To whom, and on what occasions?
- Is there a jar, a ladle or a funnel that's still in the family?

What you heard	Who told you	Date

Card 1

Her name for the dish: _____ **Whose recipe:** _____

> **Paste a copy or a photo of her card here.**

What the card leaves out, and what you learned:

On the card	What it meant — in their words	Who told you

How she served it: _____

A memory of this dish: _____

_____

_____

_____

Card 2

Her name for the dish: _____ **Whose recipe:** _____

> **Paste a copy or a photo of her card here.**

What the card leaves out, and what you learned:

On the card	What it meant — in their words	Who told you

How she served it: _____

A memory of this dish: _____

_____

_____

_____

Card 3

Her name for the dish: _____ **Whose recipe:** _____

> **Paste a copy or a photo of her card here.**

What the card leaves out, and what you learned:

On the card	What it meant — in their words	Who told you

How she served it: _____

A memory of this dish: _____

_____

_____

_____

Card 4

Her name for the dish: _____ **Whose recipe:** _____

> **Paste a copy or a photo of her card here.**

What the card leaves out, and what you learned:

On the card	What it meant — in their words	Who told you

How she served it: _____

A memory of this dish: _____

_____

_____

_____

Card 5

Her name for the dish: _____ **Whose recipe:** _____

> **Paste a copy or a photo of her card here.**

What the card leaves out, and what you learned:

On the card	What it meant — in their words	Who told you

How she served it: _____

A memory of this dish: _____

_____

_____

_____

Card 6

Her name for the dish: _____ **Whose recipe:** _____

> **Paste a copy or a photo of her card here.**

What the card leaves out, and what you learned:

On the card	What it meant — in their words	Who told you

How she served it: _____

A memory of this dish: _____

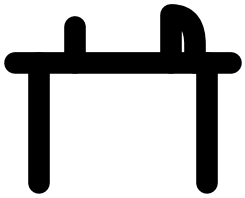
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Need more card pages? Print this page again.

Where Each Memory Goes



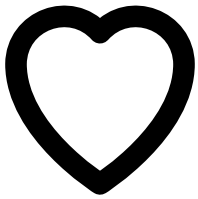
Everything you heard has a place. Most of it goes into **her layer** — the flavor — or into **the story**. None of it goes into the process. That rule is what lets her dish come back to the table.

What you heard	Where it goes
“She used allspice, not cloves.”	**Her layer.** Dried spices can take the place of the twin’s, in the same amount or less (Chapter 2.4).
“She always salted it heavy.”	**Her layer** — except in pickles and sauerkraut, where the twin’s salt stays (Chapter 2.2).
“A big handful of onions went in.”	**At the table.** Onions go into the jar only where the twin lists them, at the twin’s amount (Chapter 2.4).
“She thickened it with flour.”	**At the table**, or in her full version in the freezer (Chapter 10).
“She served it with ham.”	**At the table**, and on the new card under “At the table:” (Chapter 2.4).
“She boiled the jars twenty minutes.”	**A note, not the process.** The time comes from the tested twin for your altitude (Chapter 2.1).
“She sealed them hot, upside down.”	**The story.** It shows how she worked in her day; the jar follows the tested twin.
“It came from the church cookbook.”	**The story** — and a lead. Some family recipes may already trace back to a tested source.
Who was there, the smells, her sayings	**The story page** (page 15), and the family booklet.

According to the CDC, home-canned vegetables are the most common cause of botulism outbreaks in the U.S., and the CDC advises using only recipes that follow the USDA guide. That is why a memory, however sure, never sets a time or a jar size.

Penn State Extension suggests keeping old canning books as family treasures while using research-tested recipes. Her card works the same way: keep it as it is, clipped to the new card, so whoever opens the box next can see both.

Cooking Together



For the adult who cans with the grandchildren.

Her card comes back to life fastest when someone young asks about it. These pages are for you to use with the children at your side. They give the children things to do and questions to ask; they ask nothing about the children themselves.

Jobs for young helpers, away from the stove

- Washing fruit and vegetables in a bowl of cool water
- Sorting jars and checking them for chips with a grown-up
- Reading her old card aloud while you copy it
- Drawing the label or the picture for a jar
- Counting the jars on the cooling towel — without touching them

Jobs for the adult only

- The knives, the hot pot and the hot jars
- The canner: filling it, lifting the jars in and out, the pressure
- Checking the seals the next day (Chapter 11)

Questions a child can ask an older relative

- What did you like to eat when you were my age?
- What did your grandma make that you still think about?
- What was your job on canning day?
- What's the funniest thing that happened in her kitchen?
- If you could taste one jar from her shelf again, which one would it be?

Their questions, and the answers

Our Canning Day



Fill this in together after a day at the stove.

What we made: _____

Whose recipe it was: _____

The tested twin we followed (book chapter): _____

What the kitchen smelled like: _____

The best moment: _____

_____

A question we asked, and the answer: _____

_____

What we'll make next time: _____

> **Draw the jars here, or paste a photo of the shelf.**

Her Recipe, Her Story



A page for the family booklet. Make one for each dish, and file it with her card and the new card.

The dish: _____

Whose recipe: _____

Where it came from: _____

When she made it: _____

How she served it: _____

What her hands did that the card doesn't say:

_____

_____

A memory of her kitchen:

_____

_____

_____

Told by: _____ **Date:** _____

The new card for this dish is filed: ☐ in the recipe box ☐ in the family binder ☐ with the freezer cards

The Interview on One Page



- [ ] Copy her card word for word before the visit (Chapter 2.1).
- [ ] Make a list of who to ask, oldest first (page 3).
- [ ] One card per visit. Bring the card or a copy.
- [ ] Ask about amounts, the pot, the jars, the season, the table (page 4).
- [ ] Ask about the kitchen: the days, the people, the smells (page 5).
- [ ] Write their words on a card page, beside a copy of the card (pages 6 to 11).
- [ ] Sort each memory: her layer, the table, the freezer, or the story (page 12).
- [ ] Never let a memory set a time, a jar or a canner: those come from the tested twin.
- [ ] Fill in “Her Recipe, Her Story” and file it with the two cards (page 15).
- [ ] Bring the children in, with the stove left to you (pages 13 and 14).

Notes: _____

_____

_____

> *This booklet goes with* The Amish Canning Cookbook for Grandma’s Recipes. *It is for information and education. Every jar follows a tested recipe, exactly as written: the ingredients and their proportions, the jar size, the headspace, the type of canner and the processing time for your altitude. The book and this booklet are independent and not affiliated with, sponsored by or endorsed by the CDC, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National Center for Home Food Preservation or any university or extension program they cite.*