



## The Next Big Thing

Can you stand it if I talk about baking again? (I wonder if this is something to do with the season? Even *thinking* about having the oven fired up seems to help keep my kitchen at least a little bit warmer!)

Talking about the muffins last week (and I was nibbling on one while typing the story) reminded me of the years when I lived here as a single parent with my two daughters. Even though - as I mentioned - I am not a good cook, the three of us did eat properly, and the preparation and eating of a 'good dinner' was an important part of our day, every day. Not having had much experience in the kitchen up 'till then, I depended quite a lot on cookbooks. And because my skill at reading Japanese was far lower then than now (and it is still nothing to write home about), I of course used English books.

I have one of them here with me now, and if I describe it, anybody of English descent who reads this story will know exactly the one I mean. It is a slim little pamphlet, with a picture of a young girl on the cover. It is tattered and torn, with many of the pages being stained by buttery floured hands. The cover is held on with tape - more than one layer of tape. And many of the pages carry scribbled notes ... Here's one: "1 1/2 pints to 2 lb sugar ..." Hmmm ...

It is the 'Be-Ro Home Recipes', and is one of the most famous of all cookbooks, currently in its umpteenth edition, having been first published back in the 1920s. My copy dates from 1972, and must have been given to me as a present by my mother when we first started a family. Her own copy must be a good twenty years older than that, if she has managed to keep it in one piece this long.

Just for curiosity, I searched on Google to see if these books were still available, and learned that they have achieved a kind of cult status. In response to a question about finding a copy, one person replied, "You won't find one. People don't get rid of them, they use them 'til they're in tatters then they tape them together and use them some more."

What kind of things did my girls and I make based on these recipes? We stuck pretty much with basics, nothing fancy. Flipping through the book now and mentally checking off some of the things we tried, I see scones (of a few different types), oatmeal biscuits, cheese straws, bacon and egg pie, quiche, and apple crumble. Anything that required complex pastry folding and layering was beyond us.

And this browsing gives me an interesting idea. Now and then here in Tokyo we see some company or other making an absolute fortune with a new food 'fad'. Recently it was the turn of a US doughnut company - people waited for hours in long line-ups eagerly waiting to buy some of their 'creamy' doughnuts. The year before that it was some kind of chou cream pastry. There's *always* some kind of big fad going on.

So I wonder ... Looking through the book to see which of these baked goods might be interesting and appealing to Tokyo taste-buds, I see a few. Devonshire Splits might do it, very sweet and creamy. The Ginger Cake too, might hit the spot; Japanese also use ginger in interesting ways. Rice Buns are a definite 'no no'; rice is used for crisp crackers here, but I don't think a cake-like confection would find ready acceptance.

And then, turning the page, I see it. Eccles cakes! And the more I think about it, the more I think it would work. They are light, can have a nice touch of fruit peel flavour, and are sweet. But over and above this there is a real craft to making them, and the finished product shows it - something that would be very much appreciated by consumers here.

Yes, this is it ... Uncle Dave's Eccles Cakes! They are sure to be a hit! I wonder what part of town would be best for opening the first branch?

Now all I have to do is ... you know ... ummm ... learn how to make them!

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