

Simple Wonder

In the kitchen of my house, sits an old, wooden bowl. Its rough patina together with a long crack running down the side combine to give it a rustic air. The smooth, well-worn texture suggests many years of loving use. The bowl is a familiar fixture in my home. For years, it has served to hold fruits and vegetables or decorations for the holiday season. As I look at it now, it contains a shiny bright red pile of apples in celebration of autumn. But it did not always hold apples. Once upon a time, this bowl held flour, yeast, salt, and sugar. Once upon a time, this bowl sat on the kitchen counter of a big, white farmhouse in Kentucky. Every day, my Great-Great-Grandmother Baker coated her hands in flour, rolled up her sleeves, and kneaded dough against the smooth wooden sides of this bowl. Somehow Grandmother Baker's wooden bowl casts a spell on me. As I gaze at it, I find myself wishing I were in the kitchen with her, baking a loaf of bread, and enjoying simpler times.

For as long as I can remember, I have listened eagerly as my Grandma Jan told me stories of the big, white farmhouse in Kentucky where she grew up. In my mind, it has grown to almost mythic proportions. I can see the spacious, front porch and hear a creaking porch swing. In the front yard, I can see a giant oak tree with its leaves rustling in the wind. That tree would be perfect for climbing. Inside, from the way my grandma describes it, the house seems cozy. I can almost touch the handmade quilts on the beds and smell the smoke wafting from a crackling fire in the parlor. And in the kitchen sits the bread bowl. Slightly newer but still retaining its well-worn feel. From Grandma's stories, I can imagine Grandmother Baker making bread, pulling the dough up and over itself in a ceaseless, soothing rhythm. As for Grandmother herself, I have seen a picture of her, so no imagining there. She was a round, motherly woman with wispy white hair and a pair of thick glasses. Her face was etched with lines that tell the stories of a hard life, but she never lost room in her heart for love.

What I would not give for a chance to be in that country kitchen with her, baking by her side. I would learn all her secrets: how to make the dough rise perfectly, how many times to knead, and what her secret ingredient was. But most of all, I yearn to be in that kitchen because, to me, Grandmother

Baker and her bread bowl represent a simpler way of life. They stand for a time when family took first place in the home. When baking bread was an honorable pursuit for a woman. In today's fast-paced world, we often forget the simple pleasures that fill the world around us. G.K. Chesterton once said, "We are perishing for want of wonder, not for want of wonders." Wonders are all around us. In a simple wooden bread bowl, in a big, white farmhouse in Kentucky, in the flour covered hands of a woman baking bread for her family. All that is left for us is to appreciate the simple wonder.