

TAKE UP THE CAKE TORCH

READY TO LEARN BIG MAMA'S KITCHEN SECRETS? GET INSPIRED BY BAKER-BLOGGER JOCELYN DELK ADAMS **BY LOLA ADESINA**

Growing up in Chicago, Jocelyn Delk Adams would take road trips to Mississippi with her family to visit her grandmother Maggie Small, affectionately known as Big Mama. "She would always want to bake or show me something in the kitchen," says Adams, 34. "Her cakes are the love notes of my family." Adams shares many of Big Mama's recipes with a modern twist in her new cookbook, *Grandbaby Cakes: Modern Recipes, Vintage Charm, Soulfood Memories* (Agate Surrey).

At 8, Adams made her first scrumptious creation: a 7UP Pound Cake that had a crunchy crust and subtle hints of the citrusy soda. The cake is now a family treasure. Yet as she matured, she says baking started to seem old-fashioned. "I was opposed to set gender rules that women were supposed to be in the kitchen," says Adams. But after earning a film degree and working as a producer and an event planner, she found herself drawn back there in her late twenties. "I walked into my kitchen one day and pulled out ingredients for a pound cake. I decided to stop fighting the urge and baked every weekend since," she recalls. "You can be the woman who bakes and brings home the bacon too."

In 2012, with a renewed interest in baking and the recollection of her early days with her beloved grandmother, Adams launched grandbaby-cakes.com. A mix of her media and kitchen skills, the site quickly took off and now draws thousands of visitors every month. Her Real-Deal Caramel Cake has been pinned more than 150,000 times on Pinterest. "That cake put me on the map," says Adams. "I'm a big-city hipster with a fast-paced career, but I am my most inspired in the kitchen." The avid baker gets new ideas constantly. Her favorite cocktail sparked her Mississippi Mudslide Cake recipe. "I love this drink and thought it would make a cool cake."

Christmas for the Delk family is a huge affair, as members gather in Chicago for dinner. "We always have the holiday



Adams discovered her love of baking while spending time with her grandmother (below).



“You can be the woman who bakes and brings home the bacon too.”

classics, but I also love experimenting. So each year I bring something new,” Adams says. She has yet to top her Christmas masterpiece: Red Velvet S'more Cake. The upgraded delectable, which features a graham cracker crust and marshmallows, is an all-time favorite of Adams's husband of four years.

This festive season, treat yourself to a homemade sweet and learn your own family recipes. "A great way to take the edge off baking is to get in the kitchen with someone else," Adams says. "This makes it a fun project and a much more enjoyable way to create memories." Be sure to go through the recipe before beginning, then get to baking. "There's something relaxing knowing that if you follow a recipe, you'll most likely get what you want." The next time life gives you lemons, make Adams's Lemon Pound Cake.

To get the recipe for Adams's Red Velvet S'more Cake, visit ESSENCE.com/redvelvetmore. □