October 2026 Writing Assignment: 'Mmmm Cake'- A FOOD STORY

My dear Mum loved to cook, and when I was a young boy, I used to love watching her creating her culinary masterpieces; no mean feat in our tiny galley kitchen. I spent many Saturday afternoons standing beside her watching her gathering all the many cooking ingredients, weighting them out on her faithful old cast iron weighing scales with little Imperial bell-shaped brass weights. Mum was meticulous in her weighing and preparation never throwing in a handful of flour or sugar for good measure!

Mum's home-made cakes were her real masterpieces though. She sometimes baked cakes for the local Women's Institute she attended and they always looked forward to her delicious creations, although me and my brother inevitably begged her to let us have a taste before she left the house with it!

Looking back, the cake I have fondest memories of was her delicious 'Mmmm' cake. Mum was devotee of Mary Berry's recipes, but this cake was of her own creation. Containing some of the ingredients usually associated with Christmas – mincemeat and glace cherries – but this one also contained marmalade for an extra zing. Watching Mum combining all the cake ingredients in her huge Mason Cash mixing bowl, I remember the heavenly aroma of the spiced fruit and vanilla essence wafting out of the kitchen into the hall.

Mum had married Dad just 3 years after the war ended and went straight from living with her family many miles away to being a young bride living in a new unfamiliar home. As an inexperienced housewife, she had the unenviable task of learning to cook meals from scratch and carry out all housework duties of running a home. Mum also had to contend with the post-war austerity years of food rationing having far less quantities of food available than today and no refrigeration. She would have to regularly walk and queue up at the local butchers, bakers and greengrocers for her food supplies. In the summer in his spare time Dad worked tirelessly in their small back garden growing potatoes, runner beans and carrots to supplement family food (no doubt gaining valuable experience during the war 'digging for victory') but winter was inevitably harder with only government rations to cook with. Though as the old saying goes - Necessity is the mother of Invention -and through the lean years

Mum carefully learnt her craft. I am not sure what recipes she depended on, but she learnt to be very resourceful, no food could be wasted, and ingredients were stretched very far. I remember her food larder in later years long after food rationing had ceased stocked with all manner of canned foods Mum probably still in a 'rationing' mindset'.

When Mum created the 'Mmmm' cake in later years when there were more plentiful ingredients available, I think invented this cake as a way of using up left over mincemeat from her home-made Christmas cake so none of it went to waste - which was lucky for us!

Sadly, dear Mum passed away many years ago but fortunately for us she wrote her out cake and dessert recipes in a book which she left behind - saved for posterity for future generations of the family to enjoy. If any of them decide one day to read the recipes it, will I hope, reveal a bit of nostalgic peek into the past, to a different time and society when meals, puddings and cakes were made from scratch with some home-made ingredients. The housewives of the 1950's had to shop everyday by foot without the convenience of supermarkets or home delivered groceries. I came across Mum's recipe book recently and decided to lovingly recreate the 'Mmmm' cake. I am not sure it was quite as delicious as Mum's version but even after I took one bite, I was transported back to my childhood days with wonderful cooking smells emanating from the kitchen, me as usual hovering near the entrance pleading with Mum trying to persuade her to let me eat a slice once it came cooked from the oven. (684 words).