

From my grandmother's kitchen

In my kitchen drawer, you'll find a simple hand-made object — a small flour shovel used by my grandmother and made by my grandfather. It is at least sixty years old, crudely made, tarnished in parts, flawed and imperfect.

Holding it, I see that it is made from scraps of tin. The soldering is crude, the handle is broken; its makers mark is in the roughness of its finish. As the simplest of objects, it bares the trace of my grandfather's hand in every rivet and stray solder that he used to craft it. He was a modest and practical man who loved to make things and could be found endlessly tinkering, mainly in his back shed at the end of the yard of their home of forty-nine years in Kensington, Melbourne.

Today it is stained with left-over flour and if I curl my fingers around its handle, I can see my grandmother, a petite woman with her hands caked in dough. She was a simple baker - frugal, no doubt a remnant of growing up in the Great Depression. She had no recipe books that I know of. Hers were those taught to her, handed down through generations of women in my family. She measured portions by sight and the consistency of dough by its feel in her hands.

As a child, I loved to sit in her kitchen on baking days. A pot of tea would have been made and all that was left were for her scones — lemon and date, to be taken from the oven, wrapped in an embroidered linen cloth in readiness for my grandfather's return from the yard. He loved to lavish them with butter and jam, despite her non-too-gentle reprimands.

This simple everyday object is the most treasured of my possessions and the one that I specifically asked for when she died, that and an old butter knife, also from her kitchen. There was a great love story, my grandfather marrying her in 1939. After he died, we found love letters that he had written to her throughout their marriage that she had kept. For me, the significance of this simple object — a flour shovel is the memories it evokes, of the years I spent at their table and the love between them.

When I use it in my own baking, which I do often, it is its imperfections that I most appreciate - a object fashioned out of love — as imperfect as all love is.

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