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Mama's Square Doughnuts

— by Inez Schneider Whitney

What a good cook Mama was! So many things she made seemed so special. One of my favorites was her doughnuts. On a rainy day when Papa couldn't work in the field, he'd often say, "What about some doughnuts?"

"All right, if you'll turn them," Mama would answer.

Then she would get out her two-gallon black iron kettle, fill it half full of lard, and set it on the stove to heat while she mixed the dough.

I thought Mama's doughnuts tasted better than anyone else's. They also looked different. They weren't round with a hole in the middle. They were square or sometimes oblong with two long holes, really more like slits.

One time I asked, "Mama, why do you make your doughnuts square instead of round like everyone else does?" This is what she told me.

"I've told you that my ma died when I was fourteen. I was the oldest. There was Bertha, 12; Jim, 10; and Gertie, 8. I was the cook. We had a very kind neighbor on a nearby farm who often came over to help me. She showed me how to make these doughnuts. She said the way she cut them was best. All the dough was used and never had to be gathered up and used the second time, and so I always did it that way."

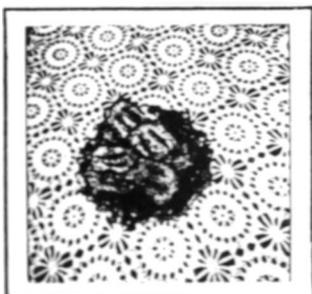
After I married, I asked Mama to send me the recipe. I still have it in her own handwriting. Here's a copy:

MAMA'S SQUARE DOUGHNUTS

3 eggs	½ teaspoon salt
1 cup sugar	½ teaspoon nutmeg
½ cup sour cream	2 teaspoons baking powder
½ cup milk	1 teaspoon soda

Separate eggs. Beat whites until stiff. Beat egg yolks. Add sugar, sour cream, and milk, Beat again. Sift one cup of flour with baking powder, soda, salt, and nutmeg. Add to first mixture. Fold in egg whites. Continue adding more flour until you have as soft a dough as you can handle. I cut in squares with a knife and cut two slits in each square. Then there is no second rolling, which is usually not as nice. Good luck from Mama.

I roll the dough out on a floured pastry cloth. Make it about a half inch thick. Cut strips about three inches wide. Then cut strips in three-inch lengths. In each square, cut two slits, leaving about a half inch at each end. Drop the doughnuts in grease heated to 370 degrees. Immediately turn each doughnut over. This keeps it from absorbing grease. As the doughnut cooks, the slits pull apart, making long holes. When the under side is brown, turn it over to brown on the other side. When I take them out, I put them into a colander to drain. They can be left plain or put one or two at a time in a bag with confectioner's sugar and shake until evenly coated. And like Mama, I'll say, "Good Luck."



Editor's note: The author sent along a photocopy of a picture of one of her doughnuts as well as a human-interest note: "I took this picture on one of Mama's crocheted tablecloths, and that is a story too. I learned to crochet at noon and during recess on bad days at Prairie View. Then I taught my mother. And how many beautiful things she crocheted, especially tablecloths. She gave many to favorite nieces. My daughter and I also have two apiece. I can crochet and tat and knit a little, but only plain knitting. I knitted a scarf from khaki wool during World War I to send to a soldier. I must have been about 10 or 11 since I was only 12 when the war ended."

