

My Nana's kai

**Whakapapa Research
Project series: Kai**



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Whakapapa Research Project series

This is part of a series of writings from eight whānau researchers on nine kaupapa. This kaupapa is about kai.

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My Nana's kai

With the combination of butter, sugar, zest, and juice of lemons with eggs over a double boiler, one of the most satisfying spreads is created—lemon honey. Commonly known as lemon curd or lemon cheese, lemon honey is a spread that has been made by my Nana Maisie Leatherby (née Crow) for the past 59 years. Born 30 June 1936, Nana Maisie is the youngest child of Samuel Crow and Lena Crow (née Rusling). It is through my Nana Maisie that I obtain my European ancestry, as well as whakapapa connections to Ngāti Rāhiri hapū of the Te Ātiawa tribe in North Taranaki.



Nana Maisie Crow. Image taken prior to her marriage to Koko Charles (Scotty) Leatherby. Photograph courtesy of the Crow-Leatherby whānau.

On a recent visit to her whare in Taranaki, I was pleasantly surprised with a fresh jar of Nana's delicious lemon honey, which was waiting for me on her kitchen bench on my return to Whanganui. It has been some time since I have had Nana's lemon honey. I have purchased lemon honey from supermarkets and at the odd school gala or market but none of these come close to hers. Of course I couldn't wait until I got back to Whanganui to open my jar, however Nana being Nana,

she had a jar of her liquid gold in the fridge. The best way to have lemon honey is on hot toast with butter. The combination of all three go together like bacon and eggs. As soon as I took my first bite my childhood memories began flooding back.



Maisie and Charles (Scotty) Leatherby. Photo taken in 1957, at Maisie's parents place in Waitara. Photograph courtesy of the Crow-Leatherby whānau.

For as long as I can remember, lemon honey has always had a place in our whānau pantry and fridge. Nana began making lemon honey when her and Koko Scotty moved into their home on Seymour Street in Waitara, Taranaki. Debra, their first-born child at the time, was 12 months old. Funnily enough, my Nana and Koko didn't have a lemon tree on their property. However, their neighbour Mrs Northcott would provide Nana with lemons from her tree. The 59 year legacy of Nana's lemon honey was born. The recipe that Nana used then and continues to use today is from the well-known Edmond's Cookbook. Her lemon honey has been one of her treasures, and is considered a delight by many within our whānau.





Maisie and Charles (Scotty) Leatherby with their three children: Debra, Dean (front left) and Antoni. Photo taken at Dean's first Holy Communion, St Joesph's Church, Waitara. Photograph courtesy of the Crow-Leatherby whānau.

Although lemon honey is one of Nana's specialties, she is also an excellent baker. As a child, Debra remembers her mother baking butterfly cakes, marshmallow cake, and cream puffs. These would form part of her and her brothers, Antoni and Dean's, lunches. As a child, Nana would often bake with me. A fond memory of mine is when we would bake 'Elsie's fingers' which are small buttery biscuits coated with sugar to give a crunchy coating once baked. This too was a recipe from the Edmond's Cookbook. Once the butter and sugar were creamed together, the egg would be added, followed by the sifted, dry ingredients. At this point, the fun began with shaping the biscuit mixture into individual fingers, then coating each in sugar which was then placed on a tray for baking in the oven. Nana would shape each biscuit with care and precision. Baking

Elsie's fingers is one of Nana's favourite recipes as this is what her mother, my great-grandmother Lena Crow (née Rusling), would bake with her also.



Maisie Leatherby's parents: Samuel Crow and Lena Crow (née Rusling). Photo taken at a whānau wedding. Samuel passed away a few weeks later. Photograph courtesy of the Crow-Leatherby whānau.

Lena did all her cooking and baking on a coal range at the Crow family homestead on High Street East, Waitara. "Mum use to do all the cooking. In those days that's how it seemed to work. That's what those times were like" recalls Nana. "When Mum would cook, it was basic, ordinary food such as mince, sausages, chops, roast beef, or mutton". Nana has many fond memories of her mother cooking in the kitchen, especially when she would make her pound cake: "Mum would have one hand mixing the cake batter, and the other hand cracking eggs into the bowl". Lena would only use her hands when mixing her pound cake batter, including transferring from the bowl to the cake tin. The only utensil used was the knife to remove the cake batter from her hand. Another fond memory for Nana was her mother's 'Yorkshire puddings'. Every Sunday, Lena would make a roast meal for her whānau. Whenever roast beef was cooked, you were guaranteed that her



Yorkshire pudding would be the cherry on top. Unlike today, where the batter is cooked in muffin tins with oil, Lena would remove the roast beef from the roasting pan, and place the pan on the top part of the coal range. Once the hinu in the roasting pan was very hot, she would pour her Yorkshire pudding batter into the roasting pan which would puff up immediately. Once cooked, she would cut into squares and serve. To this day, at 82 years of age, Nana attests that her mother's Yorkshire pudding is the best she has ever had.

Nana acknowledges that her mother was a great cook and baker. Observing her mother in the kitchen and helping her when asked provided Nana with the necessary life skills for her to use and demonstrate to her own children within their family home. "I done what my mother done. This is the same for your mother". Like her grandmother and mother, Debra is also a great

cook and baker. Whenever there is a whānau gathering, it is very likely that she will cook a roast meal with all the trimmings, along with a rolled pavlova or classic sponge with whipped cream and passionfruit pulp for pudding. Her classic sponge is certainly a favourite and well-received by whānau whenever taken to the marae.

My love for cooking and baking stems from those who feature in my immediate whakapapa. I have been blessed to have spent time in the kitchen cooking and baking with my Nana. Being taught to bake Elsie's fingers from Nana, and discovering that as a child she was also taught to bake these by her mother over 70 years ago is something I cherish. Like her mother, Nana has given love through kai to her whānau and friends and, at the same time, began her own legacy of liquid gold lemon honey made with butter, sugar, lemons, and eggs.



Nana Maisie and I, taken on my fifth birthday. Photograph courtesy of the Crow-Leatherby whānau.



Kuputaka: Glossary

Use of tuhutō (macrons): the introduction of macrons over some Māori vowels, have (1) clarified definitions and (2) made it easier to pronounce Māori words (i.e., knowing where to place the emphasis as you are saying the words). When we quote sources from earlier periods where macrons have not been used, we have not included the macron to remain true to the original text. In the glossary, we have included both versions of the word (with and without macrons).

hinu	fat; drippings
kai	food
Koko	term of endearment for grandfather
Nana	grandmother
Ngāti Rāhiri	hapū of Te Ātiawa tribe in North Taranaki
Te Ātiawa	tribe in North Taranaki
whakapapa	geneology
whānau	family
whare	house; home

