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Style Publishing Group
P.O. Box 1676
Frisco, Texas 75034
Phone: 972.335.1181
Toll Free: 877.781.7067
Fax: 214.722.2313

E-mail: info@friscostyle.com
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THERE IS NO GREATER HERO upon the vast horizon when one is ill than a Mother or Granny, with a cure for what ails you. Before the term “homeopathic” was coined, there were mothers using what was handy for what afflicted their loved ones, and although my grandmother held no degree, she was definitely Dr. Granny to her family.

Mothers wear a wide variety of hats, between cook, tutor, chauffeur and housekeeper; she also holds the position of the family healthcare provider. According to the World Health Organization, 90 percent of family’s primary health care comes from the mother of the house. Their pharmacy is as far as their medicine cabinet, or more likely, the kitchen pantry. A number of American families have their own timeless cures, handed down to them from their mothers and their grandmothers’ mothers before them.

When my mother had a cough, Grandma Izzy would mix together equal amounts of lemon juice, whiskey and honey to make her own cough syrup. For a bad cold, she would mix the juice of one lemon, a jigger of whiskey, a cup of boiling water and a tablespoon of honey. This would be sipped before one was comforted and tucked into their bed at night.

Grandma Izzy had a wonderful recipe collection. A portion of it was dated February 5, 1885 and probably belonged to my great-great grandmother. Amongst the scraps of paper that had measurements such as “ten-cents worth,” and a “jigger” of this, was a recipe for Barley Water, used in those days for typhoid fever. Another recipe was for a wonderful cough syrup. She mixed 10 teaspoons of each horehound, hyssop and rue, into two quarts of cold water. She simmered that until it was reduced in half. Then she strained it, and to the strained mixture added one pound of brown sugar. She then boiled the brown sugar mixture for 20 minutes and stored it in an airtight container. The dose read: 1 tablespoon whenever the cough is troublesome.

Memories are a part of our emotional treasure chest we carry in our hearts. One of my fondest memories is that of our family spending time on our boat. I remember coming home, exhausted, and



Dr. Granny & Other Heroes

By Cynthia Howe

my mother dousing me with apple cider to alleviate the pain from my sunburn. I didn’t know it then as doctoring, just my mother loving me.

I decided to go digging into other people’s treasure chests. I was not disappointed. Along with all these home remedies came stories that touched my heart. Of course I heard the castor oil remedy time and again, but others were novel.

My friend, Crystal, has a mother-in-law who puts evaporated milk on sunburns.

Lisa remembers her mother making a baking soda paste for bee stings, and apple cider to remove the pains left by stinging nettles.

My cousin, Dawn, was instructed by her mother-in-law to suck on a lemon every morning to dissuade her acute morning

sickness. She swears by it to this day. Her mother-in-law also told her to use a drop of mint extract in a 4-ounce bottle of distilled water to help babies with their colic. They didn’t have to drink much, but it worked. Her favorite cure was mixing Karo syrup in warm water for constipation.

My grandfather was in WWII, but he never told his mostly female family about this cure. During WWII, men were told to urinate on their feet in the shower to dissuade trench foot and athlete’s foot. However, most grandmothers from that time period preferred using a soak made primarily of crushed ginger in a cup of water, simmered for 20 minutes. Let it cool before dipping your feet in for a long soak.

The laundry room is another place where age-old wisdom stands strong. Mothers knew to hang their whites in the sun to dry, not only to save on electricity, but the sun acts as a natural bleaching tool. During the Civil War they used a bluing agent in the rinse water. The added blue to the dulling white gave the illusion of being whiter, even though it was actually blue.

Mothers not only had reliable remedies for what ailed their family and how to get the laundry clean, but she had a few beauty secrets of her own. Buttermilk not only gave added fluff to her biscuits, but

also worked quite nicely as a facial cleanser. Linda’s grandmother rubbed olive oil on her face and hands before retiring for the night. Her skin was beautiful into her 90s.

Grandma Izzy had a recipe for hand lotion. She mixed together ½ pint of rosewater, ½ pint bay rum, 1 small cake of castile soap, and three tablespoons of glycerin. Cook on medium heat until heated through. Store in an airtight container.

Grandma Izzy loved being the hero. When she heard someone was sick, she’d have the chicken out of the icebox for chicken soup before the conversation was half over. It wasn’t so much a gesture to heal you, as setting time apart for her to love on you. For those moments of your ailment, you were special, you were loved, and who wouldn’t start feeling better with all that?

Cynthia Howe is a freelance writer living in Little Elm.