

Sharing

FAMILY SECRETS

STORY AND PHOTO BY JENNIFER CHANDLER

It is an unspoken rule of the South. Family recipes that are prized are passed along from generation to generation— but only to family members. Beg all you want. You probably won't be able to get your friend to divulge their secret family recipes.

Regan Williams is not related to the Jones family (of Jones Orchard fame), but this hard-working sixteen year old has found herself in a lucky position. Not only has she been given the Jones' secret jelly and jam recipes, but she has been taught by the master herself.

Located in Millington, Jones Orchard has been providing homegrown peaches to the mid-South for almost 70 years. Currently run by Lee Jones and his son Henry, Jones Orchard also grows nectarines, plums, apples, strawberries, blackberries, and blueberries in addition to the multiple varieties of peaches for which they have become famous.

Juanita Jones, Lee's wife and the matriarch of the family, began making jellies more than 18 years ago as part of their family business. "I went to a peach meeting and someone was handing out recipes for making peach jam. I thought it would be a perfect way to use our surplus peaches," Mrs. Jones (as Juanita is affectionately called) says of her start in the jelly and jam business.

But her new business venture wasn't her first foray into canning. Instead, it was a tradition that had been ingrained in her as a young girl. "I grew up on a farm and my mother made jellies and jams. We tried to preserve what we had available and that's what I do now."

These days Mrs. Jones' repertoire has spread well beyond peach jam. She now offers more than 20 different flavors of jams, jellies, fruit butters and relishes. Each batch is made by hand using fresh, locally-grown fruits and vegetables.

"I was making my jellies at night after a long day at my restaurant and on the farm," explains Mrs. Jones, "and I realized it was getting to be to be too much." Enter Regan Williams.

Regan's father Paul has worked for Jones Orchard for several years. So it was a natural fit that Regan's after-school job would be to work for

Mrs. Jones just like her older sister Whitney. "Regan started out washing dishes...and she never complained," praises Mrs. Jones, "I soon realized that this outgoing, pleasant girl could do more than just the dishes."

Regan quickly found herself as Mrs. Jones' protégé. Mrs. Jones taught this young girl a generations-old talent of making traditional jams and jellies. "We make ours just like you would in your own kitchen...in small batches. It is truly homemade," Mrs. Jones is quick to point out.

"Making jellies is somewhat of an art," Mrs. Jones clarifies, "Not everyone I have tried to teach has been able to do it. But Regan possesses the artistic ability to make jams and jellies."

"It's cool...I have been doing it for about two years," is the typical, non-effusive teenager answer this junior at Faith Heritage Christian Academy initially offers when questioned. But as we further discuss her craft, her enthusiasm is evident. "I like making peach jelly the best," Regan explains with a gleam in her eye, "I like the color and it smells really good!"

"Regan really does a fine job," Mrs. Jones says of her protégé, "There are certain steps you have to follow...steps that cannot be cut. Regan gets that and is meticulous about the entire process."

At the young age of 16, Regan may not have realized the depth of the gift that Mrs. Jones has given her by teaching her this art. But as Regan explains how she also makes jellies and jams at home for fun, I have a sneaking suspicion that one day Regan will find herself passing along her "art" to the next generation. *eM*

Jennifer Chandler is a freelance writer and author of *Simply Salads*. For years now, she has been trying to get her friends Barbara and Fontaine to divulge their secret family pickle recipes. By putting it in print she is hopeful that maybe...just maybe...they will share the recipes. She promises never to reveal the secrets!

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