



1929 Ford Model A pick-up
Courtesy of Lee Cooper

Locals may still miss shopping at Steele's Markets, which closed in 2000. But for Carol Ann Kates, the closure meant much more.

"Life as I knew it changed with the bankruptcy," she told *Journey* magazine recently. "I needed to build something new."

So the daughter of Fort Collins grocery store founder Merrill Steele, showing the unbending determination associated with her family, took the kernel of an idea – publishing her collection of recipes – and made it a reality.

Already in second edition, Carol's "Secret Recipes from the Corner Market" is a delightful jaunt through useful food handling tips, historical tidbits and easy-to-follow meal preparations.

But to enjoy the core of this lovely book, readers should skip to the photo-studded dedication and read Carol's acknowledgments of the many chefs in her kitchen.

recipe for success

carol
ann
kates



The complex process to get this award-winning book into print – and Carol's subsequent transformation into an entrepreneur – began in early 2005.

Carol had a generous batch of recipes in hand. Some were family favorites. Others she developed to run with the weekly Steele's Markets advertisements in the Fort Collins Coloradoan during the 1990s. Many were popular deli specialties from Steele's in-store delicatessen.

Carol was confident she could succeed due in part to the way customers contacted her time and time again after Steele's closed to get the recipes. Most often requested were her jalapeño cheese dip, cranberry salad and three potato salad recipes.

Carol was keenly aware of how unfamiliar she was with the world of publishing, so she sought input from trusted friend Susan Stuessie, a former owner of the Stone Lion Bookstore. When Susan agreed Carol just might have a saleable idea, Carol got serious.

There was no way around the arduous process to select the right recipes for her book.

"I went through the recipes one by one," she said.

Forcing herself to sit day after day until she could not type one more letter, Carol carefully chose which to include. Reformatting and correcting as she went, 600 original

recipes were finally distilled down to 300.

But she didn't stop there. Carol researched parameters for food publications, noting standardized terms and writing styles to give clear instructions for repeatedly dependable results. She enlisted readers to find any inaccuracies she might have missed. Satisfied her manuscript was close to editor-ready, Carol plunged into the publishing process.

She knew her market and wanted to empower cooks of all abilities. Carol was certain she could enhance her readers' grocery shopping skills and remove the guesswork from choosing wholesome foods. Having grown up unloading, sorting and stocking all types of foods, Carol suddenly realized her unusual ability could be parlayed into a sizable advantage in her publishing venture.

What is Carol's special competence?

She is an excellent shopper. Not a finder of bargains.

"I am really picky," she said. "I know how to shop. Learned that from my dad. I know how to go through a grocery store and not get any junk."

Carol has an aptitude for identifying quality. She knows how to choose for nutritional value and peak flavor, spotting easily the freshest and the choicest, be it a cut of meat, variety of fruit or vegetable. These aisle-by-aisle decisions, which often exhaust shoppers, come naturally to Carol.

ARTICLE & STORY SUGGESTED BY MARYJO FAITH MORGAN ❖ JOURNEY CONTRIBUTOR

Carol Ann Kates photo courtesy Skillman Photography
Truck photo courtesy Lou Cosby Photography
Recipe courtesy Carol Anne Kates / Penny Lane Press

Carol also decided to include caricatures of her dad, sketched for a long-past ad campaign, in the book. She liked the thought of teaming these winsome images with helpful hints. A slice of local history was a must.

Carol also followed another rule she learned from her father: giving back to the community.

“Most independent grocery stores are integral parts of their communities, known for donating to local charities,” she said. “In northern Colorado, Steele’s had a reputation for hiring the developmentally disabled.”

Carol followed her father’s example, choosing Project Self-Sufficiency, a community-based nonprofit organization that assists single parent families, to receive a portion of the proceeds from the sales of her book.

The finished book would be a tribute to her dad and independent grocers, she decided. It had to have that corner market appeal right on the cover, something nostalgic and inviting. Plus, the spine and back cover designs had to be eye-catching. The result was a cover featuring a storefront that could be from Anywhere, USA, complete with an awning over the window, a sack of potatoes, a barrel and a bushel basket.

As she neared the point where her book could be printed, Carol spoke to people experienced in publishing. They educated her about time frames and editorial standards in the industry. She investigated likely publishers. It soon became apparent that it would be a struggle to remain true to her vision.

But Carol was unwilling to relinquish editorial control, so she decided to self-publish her project.

She approached the task with her typical attention to detail based on professional input. Hoping to avoid common pitfalls and learn successful strategies, Carol joined the Colorado Independent Publishers Association (CIPA). There, she gained the know-how and contacts needed to produce a quality product.

Carol Ann Kates became a woman on a mission.

She put herself on a stringent timetable. There would be no second chances, given her wafer-thin budget. There was no room for failure. She secured sponsorship, drew up a marketing strategy and readied the manuscript. Carol became vigilant to guarantee accurate content, verifying axioms and documenting father-dispersed wisdoms. She researched tirelessly, pairing little-known food facts with her recipes. She worked with a designer and illustrator to design eye-pleasing pages chock full of accurate information. Carol copy edited, proofread and edited again. The finished manuscript went off to the printer.

In an astonishing 10-month gestation, from inception to hard-cover cookbook, Carol’s Penny Lane Press published “Secret Recipes from the Corner Market.”

Maybe it was just coincidence that she took delivery of this passion-fueled endeavor on Dec. 13, 2005, her father’s birthday.

That would have been a great time to take a rest, but Carol could not – at least, not yet. She had some serious marketing yet to do. Carol enlisted a respected distributor to help with book sales and carried a trunk filled with books everywhere she went, giving many specialty store proprietors the opportunity to carry her shiny new cookbook.

She made relentless requests until “Secret Recipes from the Corner Market” became available in book stores large and small. She lugged foodstuffs for countless cooking demonstrations at book stores, grocery stores, kitchen stores and municipal parks and recreation classes. She shipped off numerous books to reviewers in hopes of getting noticed. She made sure her Web site had a “corner store” feel – with a shopping bag background and pages sprinkled with charming illustrations of aprons and shopping carts.

It didn’t take long for regional newspapers such as the Denver Post and Fort Collins Coloradoan to publish favorable reviews. Coloradoan Senior Content Editor Sara Hansen praised Carol’s creativity: “She has great recipes. She suggested a story about parsnips because they are a very misunderstood vegetable.”

Meanwhile, feedback from readers proved her intuition was right on. Loveland reader Darcy Hodge knew the moment she saw it, she’d be leaving the bookstore with “Secret Recipes from the Corner Market” tucked under her arm.

“I grabbed it off the shelf...it was a corner store,” she said. “Once I saw it, I just had to have it. I like the fish and salad recipes. It is a wonderful book.”

Carol’s shopping suggestions have subsequently been broadcast on local radio spots. Denver’s Channel 2 News has invited her to give on-camera advice for preparing Thanksgiving turkeys and Super Bowl hot wings.

When her first edition sold out in less than a year, Carol incorporated book contest judges’ suggestions for revisions in the second edition. She enhanced the cover and added herb hints and fish recipes in response to positive reader responses.

This past summer, Carol’s wares became a familiar sight at farmers’ markets in northern Colorado, where she and family members staffed booths regularly. In addition to the cookbook, Carol launched an ever-expanding line of condiments, marinades and oils. She gave each product label the same exhaustive attention as her cookbook. She used those days at the outdoor markets to greet customers and invite their creativity in the kitchen or at the grill.

Carol did indeed build something new. It would seem this all counts up to success. But when asked, Carol responded with her usual candor.

“Success?” she said. “I’m not sure I’ve done it yet; I’m still on the journey.”

She also referred to a favorite Winston Churchill quote: “Success is not final, failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts.”

What’s next for this accomplished lady who has a bunch of fresh ideas ready to cook up? She wisely used her cookbook project to work through her own pain and disillusionment over the bankruptcy. Already, she is at work on a book about bankruptcy to help others do the same. ❖

An excerpt from *Secret Recipes from the Corner Market*

Fiesta Black Bean, Corn, and Bell Pepper Salad

SERVES 12

This is a colorful salad to serve as a side dish with your favorite Mexican entrées. I like to make servings for 12 so I have leftovers for lunch, or you can easily halve this recipe. We offered this salad in our delis, and it was always a smashing success.

FOR THE DRESSING

- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 6 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons large grind black pepper



In a small bowl, combine olive oil, lime juice, salt, and pepper and whisk to blend. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until ready to toss salad.

FOR THE SALAD

- 1 pound black beans, soaked overnight
- 1 package (10-ounces) frozen corn, thawed
- 2 green bell peppers, cored, seeded, and chopped
- 2 red bell peppers, cored, seeded, and chopped
- 2 jalapeño peppers, seeded and chopped
- 8 green onions, thinly sliced
- 5 tablespoons fresh parsley, snipped



Drain beans. In a large kettle, place beans with just enough water to cover. Bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium and simmer for 1 hour, or until tender. Cool beans, drain, and rinse. In a large bowl, combine beans, corn, green and red bell peppers, jalapeño peppers, green onions, and parsley. Pour dressing over salad and toss gently. Chill.