

My father's cookies

By Rita Buettner

My father doesn't golf or fish or do any of the things the card stores imply he should do.

My father bakes cookies.

His chocolate chip cookies feature the perfect balance of chips and batter. His pumpkin cookies are decadent and soft. But the cookies he has shared with hundreds of teachers and friends over the years are what we always called "Daddy's electric cookies." They're spritz cookies, and there is a reason so many have vanished from his cooling racks.

I've watched him make them many times. He fills the bowl with ingredients, stirs it all together, wraps mountains of dough in plastic wrap, and puts them in the refrigerator to chill. The next day he puts it in his electric cookie press, turns it on, and shoots flowers and stars and train tracks onto the cookie sheets.

He has had plenty of help. All his children and now his grandchildren have helped sprinkle cinnamon sugar and place M&Ms on cookie dough shapes just before they go into the oven.

And you can bet we're there when he pulls them out of the oven, fresh and sugary and warm.

When I was a child, it seemed like magic. How could something so wonderful come from butter and flour and eggs? I always marveled at how I would stir and stir the butter and sugar and it still looked like lumps of butter and sugar. Then my father would take the spoon and suddenly they were creamed together.

Still, I always knew I was a big help. I was certain that my father wouldn't want to have to make the cookies alone. He was lucky to have me helping him in the kitchen – even if I ate three M&Ms for every one that made it onto a cookie.

It was only after I became a mother that I realized that baking with children requires a great deal of patience and understanding. The whole process takes longer.

Some flour lands in the bowl, but more lands on the table, chairs and floor. The teaspoon of vanilla the recipe calls for becomes a bottle. A child stirs so fervently that he sends the whole bowl spinning onto the floor. Baking with children isn't always easy.

When I am baking with my children, I often think back to my childhood cookie-making days with my father. His cookies were almost always made as a gift for others, so he had to make sure they turned out. There were six of us, and it must have been chaotic. We didn't have a large kitchen, so he must have had children clamoring for a drink or a snack or homework help while he tried to make his

cookies with the youngest and least adept chefs in the house.

But I don't remember him being anything but patient and enthusiastic. Because he's my father.

It makes me think that maybe our Father in heaven views me the same way. Day after day he watches me stumble. He sees how I make bad decisions time and again, when you would think I would learn. Some days I put the wrong ingredients into the bowl. Maybe he chuckles when I confuse the salt and the sugar and the recipe comes out all wrong.

He knows I will fail many, many times, but he lets me try to do everything myself. And I can only learn and grow and be all he wants me to be if he lets me make my own decisions, under his watchful eye.

How extraordinary is a father's love, especially that of God the Father, who has faith that we will continue to try to become the best version of ourselves, that we will fail but we will also achieve, and that one day we will be with him in heaven.

Until then, I'm grateful I have some bakers to help me make cookies right here. And I probably owe my father a few M&Ms.

Read "Open Window," Buettner's Catholic Review blog, [here](#).