
MAY 2021 | ISSUE 6

Joyce's Journal

A monthly dispatch from Joyce A. Miller, Writer



MAY IS BIRTHDAY MONTH!

May was a big birthday month in the Harris' household. Pearl's birthday was May 18th and Joe's birthday was May 20th. They were both born under the sign of Taurus, and they lived up to the Taurian traits of being smart, ambitious and trustworthy. May birthdays celebrate the spirit of rebirth and renewal that comes with warmer weather. People born in May consider themselves luckier than others.

Why do we put candles on birthday cakes? In ancient Greece, if you were praying to the goddess Artemis you went to the temple with a cake and a candle. Artemis was the goddess of the moon and a lit candle would make that round cake glow like the moon. When the flame went out, the smoke would carry the prayer up to Artemis. I like the idea of "the Moon" having a glowing moon-shaped birthday cake! The tradition of candles specifically for birthday cakes came from Germany. On the morning of your child's birthday, you would take out the cake and put a candle on for each year they were alive, plus one more for the year ahead. Throughout the day, the family would keep the candles burning, switching them out as needed, because they thought the flames kept bad spirits away. Once dinner was over, the child could blow out the candles and eat the cake.

A GLIMPSE OF
WHAT'S INCLUDED:

**Super-chocolate
Cake recipe**

After the Industrial Revolution, when ingredients were cheap enough for everyone to have a birthday cake, people loved writing things on their birthday cakes. The Birthday Song was recorded in 1912. People wrote, "Happy Birthday," on their cakes after that. Before that, they probably wrote, "Many Happy Returns of the Day."

On Saturday, May 8, I'll be participating in the RVA Booklovers Festival. It's an online festival this year and you can register for free at their website: <https://www.rvabookloversfestival.com> There will be readings, author panels, children's events and crafts. Join me and share your love of the written word.

As the bonus for the May newsletter, I'm enclosing a copy of the recipe for Super-chocolate Cake from Agnes Jekyll's Kitchen Essays published in 1922. Maybe you'd like to make it for a birthday at your house!

I live in the Church Hill section of Richmond, VA with my husband and my retired racing greyhound. Before I started writing, I worked for 30 years at a nuclear physics research laboratory.

Show up and shine!



JOYCE A. MILLER, WRITER

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Super-chocolate Cake from Agnes Jekyll's Kitchen Essays published in 1922.

“Half a pound fresh butter beaten to a cream, 7 eggs (yolks and whites beaten separately, and the whites stirred in the last thing), 1/2 lb. best vanilla chocolate grated and heated in oven, then beaten up in the butter with 3oz dried flour, 1/2 lb. sifted sugar, 4 oz. ground almonds, 1 teaspoonful of sal volatile. Bake in a slack oven, then ice with thin soft icing flavoured with maraschino. If ingredients are thoroughly beaten up it will be very light.”

“Lest this last calls for a reproach from the thrifty, here is a nice useful cake suited to the Rector's 5 o'clock call, or the ladies of the local political organisation in conclave, and good for the office luncheon tin or the fisherman's basket next day.”



Ingredients for the cake:

1 cup (225 grams) butter at room temperature
7 eggs, separated
225 grams bittersweet dark chocolate
1 tsp pure vanilla extract
90 grams flour
225 grams superfine sugar
115 grams ground almonds
1 tsp baking powder

For the icing:

115 grams powdered confectioners sugar
2 Tblsp of cherry liqueur (Maraschino or Kirsch)

Pre-heat the oven to 350 degrees.

Grease a 9-inch springform pan or cake tin and line with parchment paper. Then butter the parchment paper and sides of the pan. Dust inside of pan with a little flour and a little sugar.

In a bowl, combine the flour, the almonds and the baking powder. Whisk ingredients.

Make a bain marie of a pan barely simmering water with a heatproof dish set in the top. Make sure the water doesn't touch the dish and that it sits comfortably – you don't want steam in the melting chocolate. Break the chocolate into chunks and add to the dish, keeping an eye on the water, so the chocolate doesn't burn. Once the chocolate is melted, set it aside to cool.

Separate the eggs. Put the yolks into a medium bowl, beat them briefly to blend and stir in the vanilla extract.

Beat the egg whites on medium or high until there are soft peaks. (Use a clean bowl and beaters, as you don't want any fat to come into contact with the whites, or they won't rise properly.)

Using electric beaters whisk up the softened butter and the sugar to a pale, fluffy cream. (Agnes Jekyll would have used a wooden spoon.) Beat the cooled chocolate into the butter.

Mix in a spoon full of the flour mixture to the butter/chocolate and that will stop the eggs from curdling.

For the eggs, add in egg yolk mixture first and beat those in.

Then, add in the rest of the flour mixture. Fold this in by hand so you don't overwork the flour.

Once the flour is incorporated, fold in a quarter of the egg whites. When no streaks remain, fold in the remaining egg whites.

Spoon the batter into the prepared cake tin and smooth the top.

In Agnes Jekyll's original recipe, she calls for a "slack oven." A slack oven is a cooling oven. Put the cake in the oven at 350 degrees. As soon as the door is closed, turn the oven temperature to 250 degrees.

Bake for 1 hour and 15 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes until a wooden skewer poked in the middle of the cake comes out clean.

Set the cake on a wire rack to allow it to cool in the pan. Once cooled, flip it over on the wire rack to remove from the pan and remove the parchment paper.

For the icing, whisk the confectioners sugar with the liqueur until smooth. Spread across the top of the cake.