

Something from the oven to warm up a cold day

By LOUISE JAMIESON

Renee Mancino, owner of Carrot Top Pastries, says she comes from a family that "loved to bake." She and her brother started experimenting at a young age, and through trial and error and a sense of adventure learned the basics of good cooking.

"Some of the things my brother and I baked tasted like soap. We made brownies once that were hard as rocks." The young chefs took the brownies "to the movies in a paper bag and sucked on them." We were poor," she explains. "My mother said when you get into this kitchen and start baking you are not going to waste anything."

Mrs. Mancino started baking for a living when she was a pre-med student and a young mother trying to support her daughter. She baked cakes for neighbors, until one customer asked for a birthday cake for his brother, an inmate in an upstate jail. He loved it, and orders from inmates began pouring in. Pretty soon she was delivering big shipments of baked goods to half a dozen upstate prisons. "Sometimes when the pies got there they would still be warm," she recalls proudly. In return she received warm letters, artwork and "many proposals of marriage," as well as a thriving business.

A serious car accident ended Mrs. Mancino's chance for a medical career, and plunged her into a deep depression. But her prison friends stood by her. They sent someone to buy some cakes after the deliveries ended. He asked what performer she really liked. When she answered Richard Pryor, they promptly bought tickets to one of his concerts, and wrote to him, telling of her kindness. The phone rang one day and who should it be but Richard Pryor, calling to say he hoped she'd be on her feet again soon.

It took three years, but Renee bounced back. In 1980 she opened Carrot Top Pastries at 5025 Broadway at 214 St. The factory sells carrot cakes, Mrs. Mancino's trade mark, and other baked goods to restaurants and markets. It also sells retail to customers from the

area, including a small but loyal group of Riverdallians.

Carrot Top has prospered, and Mrs. Mancino plans to start the New Year by opening a new restaurant with a gleaming new factory downstairs on Jan. 15 at 3931 Broadway at 165 St. The original shop at 214 Street will eventually become a cafe, she says.

Mrs. Mancino has built her trade and reputation on wholesome, simple recipes with a homebaked quality to them.

"I use recipes that maybe at one time, weren't that homey and I took them and turned them around," she says. "It's the same thing you would make if you were to go to the grocery store and bake them yourself, because I don't know any shortcuts."

Although Carrot Top is best known for the moist, sweet carrot cake it sells, Mrs. Mancino offered recipes for two quick breads she calls personal favorites. The Raisin Orange Bread was a favorite of her prison customers.

RAISIN ORANGE BREAD

2½ cups unbleached flour
1 tsp. salt
2 tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. baking soda
1 egg, slightly beaten
1 cup brown sugar
2 Tbsp. vegetable oil
1 Tbsp. grated orange peel
1½ cups raisins
1½ cups water

Pump raisins by combining with water; bring to a boil. Remove from fire and put aside to cool to room temperature.

Mix egg, brown sugar, vegetable oil and orange peel. Stir into cooled raisin mixture.

Sift together flour, salt, baking powder and baking soda. Combine dry mixture with liquid mixture.

Set oven to 325 degrees. Pour batter into well greased small loaf pan. Bake one hour. When cool, wrap in foil or plastic wrap and let it mellow over night.

One half cup finely chopped nuts or sesame seeds can be folded into the batter before baking, if desired.



RENEE MANCINO, owner of Carrot Top Pastries, offers a fresh tray of croissants and Danishes.

PUMPKIN RAISIN NUT MUFFINS

2 cups unbleached flour
2 tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. nutmeg
1 cup pumpkin, cooked or canned
1 cup sugar
½ cup milk
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
½ cup butter
1 cup raisins
1 cup nuts, chopped

Sift together flour, salt, powder, baking soda and Cream butter and sugar. A milk and pumpkin. Combine ingredients with liquid mixture. Fill oiled muffin tins to the top. Bake in a pre-heated 350-degree for 35 to 40 minutes.

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