

## ‘No Place Like Home’ mixes Southern, Latin flavors

It started as a tribute to her mother. • When Iris Raie began writing a cookbook with her son Michael, she just wanted to preserve her mother's recipes. Today, their self-published *No Place Like Home: Southern Cooking With a Latin Flair* (Tate Publishing, \$21.99) is allowing them to share their recipes worldwide. • For the Raies, the cookbook was a chance to remember their past and inspire readers to create their own memories over shared meals. The recipes in the book bring back memories of Iris' mother, Lillie Pope, who always said she won her husband's heart through her chicken and yellow rice. It must have worked, because they were married for 50 years, Iris says.

Iris, 60, filled her cookbook with the Southern and Latin recipes she learned growing up in Tampa with an Italian mother who loved Latin food and a father with a taste for Southern cooking, such as fried chicken and collard greens.

When Iris was a young girl, she would come home after school to the smell of garlic, onion and green peppers. Sometimes their small house was filled with the aroma of a just-baked sour cream pound cake. Her mother was always creating something, and every night, she gathered her family around the dinner table together, a tradition Iris continues for her own family.

For her, sharing food is a way of showing love. That, too, is something she learned from her mother, who always invited neighbors or acquaintances to holiday dinners. Iris continues that tradition.

"I've never known anybody to leave here hungry," Michael says.

From an early age, Michael inherited his mother's love of cooking. One morning she awoke to find 4-year-old Michael standing on a chair, frying bacon on a gas stove. He asked for an Easy-Bake Oven when he was 7. Michael discusses olive oil, garlic and seasoning with the same passion as his mother.

Iris says the family finds comfort in food — such as a bowl of okra stew or a warm apple crisp — especially when tragedy shakes their world. She lost a son in 1997, and her husband suffered a disabling stroke in 2000.

Iris and Michael, 26, bonded over the cookbook. They re-created and recorded old family recipes that they knew only from memory. In their peach-colored kitchen with white cabinets, they cooked and laughed and forgot their troubles

for a time. Their four cats watched, providing a rapt audience. Friendly, a 16-year-old Maine Coon, is particularly fond of Iris' rum cake.

Sometimes, Iris says, she woke up Michael in the middle of the night to cook a recipe with her.

"We don't get much sleep around here," Michael says wryly.

But the lack of sleep was worth it. As she wrote the cookbook, Iris felt closer to her mother, remembering half-forgotten recipes from her childhood. "I feel like mother's speaking to me," she says.

The finished cookbook includes simple recipes for appetizers, breakfasts, salads, entrees and desserts. It's available through local bookstores and online at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com), [sears.com](http://sears.com) and [tatepublishing.com](http://tatepublishing.com).

This won't be their last cookbook, she says, outlining ambitious plans to write at least 15. The next book on their list is a holiday cookbook, which will have recipes for 16 holidays, including Hanukkah and Cinco de Mayo, and should be finished by fall 2011. They hope to have a cooking show someday. For now, they've been busy marketing their cookbook at Epcot's Food and Wine Festival and various book signings, appearing on TV shows and doing cooking demonstrations at the Rolling Pin in Brandon, where they will be Thursday.

It was her mother's memory that prompted Iris to write. But now she realizes that writing a cookbook is something she has always wanted to do, ever since she was in junior high school and put together a book of international recipes. For Iris, cooking is both a link to her family and a rewarding hobby.

"I dream of cooking," she says.