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RENI'S FRUIT BREAD

¾ cup flour
¾ cup brown sugar
¼ teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon baking soda
1½ cups dried apricot halves
2 cups whole dates
3 cups walnuts
3 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla

Preheat oven to 300. Mix together flour, brown sugar, baking powder and baking soda. Stir in apricots, dates and walnuts until coated. Beat eggs and vanilla until foamy and add the mixture. Pour in equal parts into two small buttered loaf pans lined with 4 x 8 inch parchment paper. Bake for 1 hour.

We'd love to feature a dish from your KP kitchen that friends and family ask for. Email the details to editor@keypennews.org with your phone number; we'll be in touch. (Don't worry, we do most of the writing.)

It was late one Christmas Eve and I was sharing a piano bench with some guy I thought was my husband. He was playing away and the assembled company, back when company could assemble, were all singing loudly and badly and talking over each other at the same time, but he was a really good piano player plowing ahead undaunted. I was so surprised and kept spilling my drink on him to get his attention and saying, "Honey, honey, when did you learn to play the piano?"

Then his wife appeared. She was this short woman from New Jersey named Reni Moriarity.

She gave me a look that said much, but managed to compress the meaning verbally by yelling over the din: "Would you care to try my fruit bread?"

She extended a tray with slices of what, even in those challenging conditions, was obviously fruit-

cake.

"Fruit bread? Fruit? Bread? Fruit. Bread." I was having trouble with the concept.

My real husband then appeared and said, "Of course, we'd love some. We've heard so much about it."

There was a taste of smokey cinnamon, sweet and bitter apricot, and a bunch of other stuff.

"What makes this bread, exactly?" I demanded, still chewing.

"You bake it in a (expletive) loaf pan," Reni said.

That was so her, as I would come to learn, appreciate and love.

We went into the kitchen — her kitchen as it turned out — where she went on to insist it was properly fruit bread and not fruitcake with the evidence of two still warm loaf pans and some singed parchment paper among remains of egg shell, baking powder, and an unfinished

bottle of wine, which we finished while arguing the merits of various stewed fruits and husbands.

She passed only a few years later, but never lost her taste for life or sense of humor, making for a short but glorious friendship. She was a wonderful painter, photographer, cook and spirit. And she made everything funny, the kind of person whose laughter cut through everything, all the unhappiness, everything that wasn't right. I enjoyed the world more because I saw it through her eyes when I was with her, including how to make a proper fruitcake (that is really fruit bread) which, as she said of so many things, "is the only (expletive) way it ought to be (expletive) done."