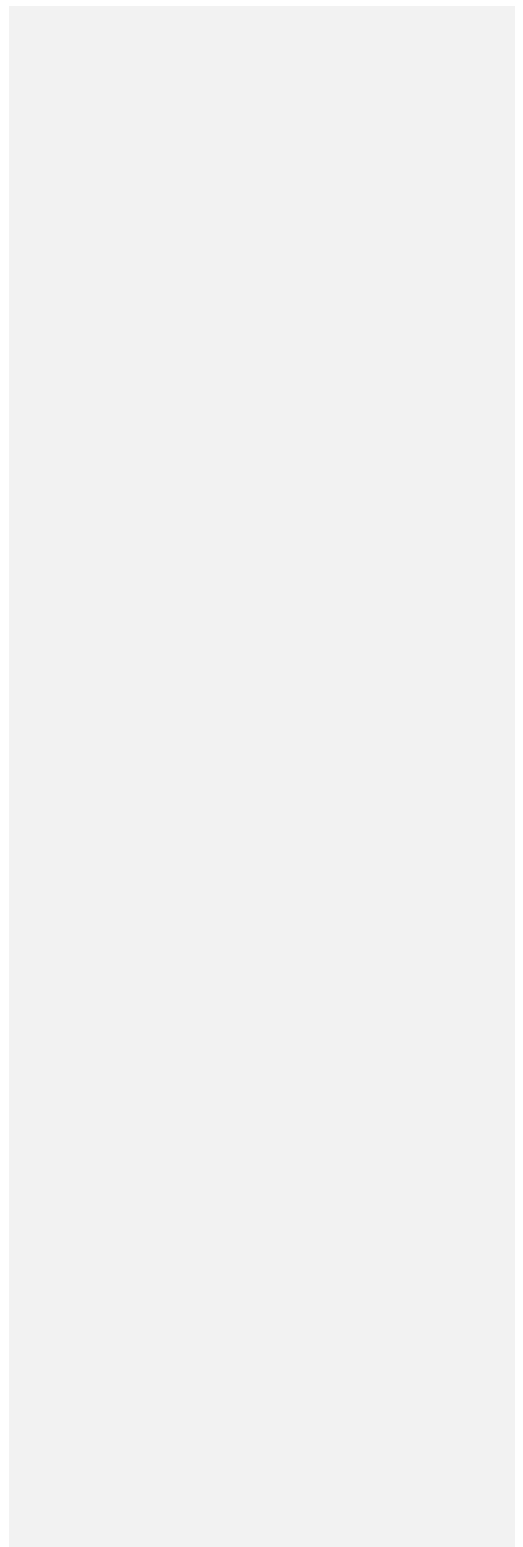


The Potluck Blueprint

A call to fellowship through
food and scripture

LADY RHONDA



The Potluck Blueprint

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Dedication

To my daddy for being a spiritual leader in my life.

To my loyal sisters, committed aunt, and my adorable daughters for loving me unconditionally.

To my steadfast friends who relentlessly said I must write a book. To the members of Saint John's CME Church, my family and friends who donated the recipes featured in this book.

And, finally, in memory of my mother who instilled in me both courage and strength.

I ask God how I can pray for you all.

"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

Colossians 1:9-14

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Preface

Each morning I wake up with enthusiasm and a sense of gratitude. From the time I open my eyes until my feet touch my carpeted bedroom floor, I am consumed with awareness that my life has been blessed. My breath is even and steady, my body is strong and alert, and my mind is clear and focused. It is in this moment that I ask God how I can be of service to others. These days I open myself up to the direction God sets out before me and it has made all the difference in my happiness.

“In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.” Proverbs 3:6

From an outsider’s perspective, I appear successful. From my decorated military career, beautiful triplet girls, and our spacious family homes, everything looks perfect. From an insider’s point of view, my life has been riddled with tragedy after my mother’s early death and two short-lived marriages; one ended through divorce and the other through widowhood. Neither perspective encompasses my faith, however, and that is where my true blessings lie.

Becoming a widow, in particular, has been a transformative experience. In my heart, nothing had prepared me for that moment. I couldn’t stop saying to myself, "he was supposed to live." Now what do I do? I felt numb and adrift after receiving the news of his passing. Thankfully my sister drove me home from the hospital that fateful night. I remember sitting silently in the passenger seat. I had no words; I could only think about my daughters.

The God who is in his holy dwelling place is the father of the fatherless and the defender of widows.

Psalm 68:5

During that drive, I remembered losing my mother, as a teenager. It broke my heart to think about my girls growing up without their father.

I assumed that this was the biggest test God had for me, but I was wrong. As I moved forward with burial arrangements, I learned that we didn't have enough insurance money to pay the mortgage off. Not only did we lose my husband and my children's father, but now the girls and I had to move out of our family home.

Within a week, I learned that our house was worth \$200,000 less than what we owed on it. The banks didn't care that I had just lost my husband's income, had three young daughters, and no equity in the house. Even though I had not missed a mortgage payment and my credit was still strong, things would shift dramatically if I didn't take action soon. I knew if we stayed in that house longer than three years I would no longer be able to pay the mortgage at my current income.

I called out, "God, please hear my cry and help me now!"

There was silence.

"God you promised You would supply all my needs..."

Again, I waited for an answer.

Eventually I fell asleep as I remembered this passage:

"But my God shall supply all your needs according to his

riches in glory by Christ Jesus

Philippians 4:19

Something changed that night; maybe it was my prayer being answered or my fear being swallowed up by faith. Either way, when I stopped worrying and surrendered my whole heart, God showed up and saved me from my circumstances!

Amazingly, on July 23, 2013 we were able to move into a brand new house built from the ground up. I was also able to keep the home that Maceo and I had together. It went on the market and a renter fell in love with it and within 30 days there was a rental agreement in place.

Another blessing arrived a year later when I was promoted at work. That promotion came with a higher salary. With increased finances, I was able to purchase two new vehicles for my family.

Praise God and thank you, Jesus!

My blessings were suddenly overflowing.

And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others.

2 Corinthians 9:8

As you read this book, I want you to realize that God is able to bless you abundantly. In all things, at all times, you can have all that you need; you will abound in every good work.

Over time, I have come to the conclusion that my relationship with the Lord will never waver. I have learned to trust Him more than I ever had before. Reading the Word and

spending quality time with God is a way of life for me now. If you haven't developed a closer relationship with Christ, I encourage you to do so right now - today!

Thank you for you having an interest in discovering what the Potluck Blueprint is all about. May your potluck creation be one that will allow you to be filled with goodness of God forever.

Introduction

When I attended Sunday school as a young girl, I learned about Israel and how they misplaced their values. It was God who let them know they would not prosper if they didn't change their ways.

"You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill.

You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm.

And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes. "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the Lord.

You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why: declares the Lord of hosts."

Haggai 1:6-9

I like this passage because it demonstrates how important our values are in our lives. Therefore, our first hunger should not be for material possessions, but for spiritual riches through a fellowship with Christ. Because I love God, I am so grateful for His grace and mercy. This love allows me to get my priorities in order so my life will be full and I will have need of nothing.

It is because of my faith that I have been led to this moment to write this book. I have been called to share my lessons, the experiences of my Christian sisters, and the recipes that

bring us all together in fellowship for nourishment and growth. *The Potluck Blueprint* is rooted in love, trust, faith, truth and respect for all women across the globe. I know that we are here to help enrich each other's lives through the love of Christ.

As you read through this book, please know that my goal is to fuel all women in the world as they reflect on Christian teachings and fill their bodies with food made with love. I pray that you use this book to enrich your relationship with God and to enhance your encounters with everyone who crosses your path.

We are all called to bring something to the table; and in true potluck fashion, we are not told exactly what must be made. Instead, we are encouraged to bring a dish that reflects our individual skill-set. Everyone benefits when we come in communion with a gift that only we can serve. Just like in life: we are all called to show up with our talents that reflect the blessings from God.

Many of my favorite Scripture passages are at your disposal for spiritual growth and biblical awareness. This book is designed for readers, in every continent, to develop an intimate and rewarding relationship with our Heavenly Father – God! *The Potluck Blueprint* will provide meaningful Scripture passages to help you develop a well-seasoned foundation for your personal spiritual knowledge and wisdom. In each chapter there will be inspiring stories from my life, along with authentic stories from other women, a prayer-filled action step from me, and finally a smorgasbord of recipes for yourself and others to feast on.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

Colossians 3:16

In addition, in the back of book, there will be space for you to create your own gathering as you fellowship with others to share God's breakthroughs, healings, and victories in your life. There is also an extensive list of music to add to your playlist while you are cooking. The purpose of this book is for you to gain and achieve refreshing fulfillment coupled with a spiritual reward. May God bless you and continue to keep you near Him.

I pray that you recognize your spiritual contributions to the potluck gathering of life. Sharing your gifts in service for others is the ultimate reflection of God's love. May you grow from this book and share it with others so that they, too, may grow in faith and community.

**In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my
refuge, is in God.**

Psalm 62:7

Disclaimer: The Bible verses included in this book come from various sources including NIV, AMP, NKJV.

Chapter 1: Alignment

You have armed me with strength for battle;

you have humbled my adversaries before me.
Psalms 18:39

We are called into one another's lives to grow and learn, but not always through kindness and support. Some of the most important lessons that I have learned, and which have helped me grow, have come out of unpleasant situations. Through moments of difficulty and inconvenience, we can all learn how strong we truly are.

One of the most distinct "unpleasant" lessons came early in my military career when I was a First Lieutenant. I was assigned to the same barracks with a superior, female Captain for an overnight assignment. This is a common practice within military ranks due to the limited number of women who need housing in a particular situation. I wasn't familiar with this officer, but I knew her to be a respected leader.

On one evening, she answered the door for a male First Lieutenant she supervised who wanted to discuss his evaluation. I was surprised that she let him into our barracks, but didn't question her judgment beyond that because she was in a senior position. After discussing his grievances at length, the young man left with an understanding of how he could improve his standing with the Captain.

The next day, she and I were called into our superior's office. Admittedly I was confused; it was not regular practice for us to be ordered into a meeting as a pair. My confusion quickly switched to anger when I learned that it had been reported that we had hosted a male colleague in our room and had engaged in sexual misconduct with him. I was immediately triggered by these accusations because I knew that I hadn't even been in the same part of the

barracks with the man in question. The Colonel was relentless in his conviction that we had displayed poor judgment and had violated policy.

What happened next taught me a lot about myself; in the midst of my formal reprimand, I fought back. I defended my reputation and myself by stating the facts and questioning my anonymous accusers. I eventually turned to the Captain I was bunking with to corroborate the truth of the events, but she stood in silence. She later told me that she didn't feel that the leadership would believe her anyway. She maintained this stance throughout the entire investigation.

I decided early on in this conflict that my reputation was too valuable and my career too new to allow rumors to ruin my potential. Even after that initial conversation in our Colonel's office, I demanded that the truth be revealed. Instead of shrinking from shame and embarrassment, I stood in the conviction that my integrity would be acknowledged.

Eventually the investigation revealed that no wrongdoing had taken place and the accusations had no merit. The Colonel even apologized to me for reprimanding me before getting all of the information about the situation. His level of humility surprised me and I realized how we had both been "sharpened" through this experience. In that moment, I also reflected on how my response differed from the female Captain's. She was more than willing to allow the circumstance, while false, define her image and reputation. She didn't feel she had the ability to stand up for herself even with her rank. I, on the other hand, even as a First Lieutenant, knew I had to defend myself if I was going to be respected and advance in my career. I was "sharpened" through this experience and I learned how to stand in my strength as a woman within a military organization.

I have learned to trust my intuition and show up bravely in situations of adversity. When I stay true to myself and walk with the strength of Christ, I can accomplish all things.

**“You’re blessed when you stay on course,
walking steadily on the road revealed by God.”**

Psalm 119:1

Not every trial is accompanied by a workplace sex scandal. Many of my trials as a mother involve my three, high-energy eight year olds and simple things, like breakfast.

Let me explain: I believe in the nourishing power of a warm, healthy breakfast each day. This is a natural desire for any parent, and I am so grateful that I can provide for them in this way. My daughters love when I make them “nutty pancakes,” which are pancakes infused with caramel flavor and crushed nuts. They tell me that it’s their favorite breakfast offering. This filled me with delight until they asked if they, too, could make the signature recipe.

I’m ashamed to say my immediate desire was to say no to my girls; the time it would take to teach them the proper steps, monitor their every move, and clean-up their mess afterwards made me feel fatigued before any work had actually begun. I know that these are skills I want them to have, but, honestly, I find it difficult to find balance between the desires of three independent girls and my need for efficiency. We all want to be good parents, but priorities need to be established or we would never get anything done.

So does that mean that I never teach my girls my special recipe? I never allow them to experiment and grow if it means I’m inconvenienced? Of course not. But this area of parenting

is a challenge for me; I don't always want to step out of my comfort zone and try risky behavior. It takes the grace of God to get me in that kitchen with those beautiful children bouncing and bustling about. It takes a prayerful heart to keep calm in the midst of spills and silliness, but I do it. I become the mother my children need me to be and I guide them through the process of cooking a delicious meal. These moments are adding to their ability to be independent women who can take care of themselves and work well with others. It's an honor to be the one they turn to for guidance.

That being said, I understand that my daughter Traci will try to take over the kitchen and tell everyone, including me, what to do. I also realize that this will probably cause Maci to yell, "You aren't the boss of me." Meanwhile, Staci will avoid the conflict by focusing on the task of stirring and she will probably stir so furiously that batter will spill out and cause a mess that all of us will need to address. I understand these things may happen, but that doesn't change my course. I walk steadily on this path of parenthood as a widowed woman who wants her children to flourish. I know that God shows favor to me in my times of struggle and I know that He will guide me as I attempt to guide my girls. Pancakes will be made!

The LORD says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.

Psalm 32:8

God has also shown me favor in the writing of this book. For example, when I reached out to several women to contribute their insights and "wisdom," I was surprised how some

hesitated and even worried they had no lessons to share. One of my close female friends confessed that she didn't feel that she had a testimony. Here is what she wrote to me:

As I sit here trying to think of a testimony, I wonder what has been my understanding of faith and blessings. It should not be this difficult to give my testimony of the goodness of God in my life. I worry that I have no testimony to offer. You see, I am not a teenage mother, I was never in an abusive relationship that took everything I had to get out, I don't have any addictions to overcome other than binge watching "Law In Order: Special Victims Unit." I have not had any minor or major ailments. My immediate and extended family members are still living, including my 88-year old grandfather. No struggle; no testimony.

That being said, several months ago, I sat in my room, complaining and crying to my heavenly Father about the discontentment I was feeling in my life. I am a single mother, never been married, and a soldier of 23 years, serving in the U.S. Army and Army National Guard. I sometimes feel like I'm in the middle of the ocean treading water. Why am I the tail instead of the head? Why am I beneath instead above? Why am I not the lender instead the borrower? Where is my abundance and overflow? Why am I in a spiritual rut? Why am I still single? Why doesn't my son have an earthly father?

In the midst of my tears and aggravation, the Lord said, "you don't know who you are." What struggles have you had? You excel in all you do. You are "untouchable". The enemy cannot touch you.

You claim you don't have power; the reason why you don't have power is because you gave it to a man. Not because he took it away; you gave it away. So, your frustration is because you are out of touch with Me.

Return to me."

I am amazed at how powerful her message is, in spite of her claim that she has "no testimony." Whether we are fighting for our reputation on the job, working hard to supervise three small girls in the kitchen, or looking for God in the midst of stagnation, we all have a story to tell.

When we are in alignment, we are able to appreciate our progress and see the future that our Lord has waiting for us. I believe that everyone has a testimony and from our experiences we gain wisdom. Therefore, it is necessary to align with Him so that our message can be shared while growing in His love.

Comment [DA1]: Love this testimony, will resonate with many women.

My Prayer:

I thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that we are humble to ourselves and others. That we remember to delight in weak moments and difficult times. For when we are weak, then we will be made strong.

I pray that you will take time today to reflect on your alignment and how you choose to respond to those who challenge your sense of peace. How do you stay on the path when there are so many distractions and frustrations along the way?

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God;

I will strengthen you, I will help you,

I will up hold you with my righteous right hand."

Isaiah 41:10

** The following is the first of seven authentic and vulnerable stories entitled "Wisdom from Women" at the end of each chapter. These stories are from real women who have grown in their faith through their trials and personal hardships. I hope that you are blessed by each one!*

-Wisdom from Women-

"He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."

Psalm 147:3

"Abigail" - Age 22

I remember sitting on a bench in a courthouse lobby when I was a teen. A female social worker silently approached me and sat beside me. The woman kindly told me who she was and explained that my cousin, who was my guardian at the time, had decided to give up her rights to the state and that I would be going into the foster care system. She then asked me if I was okay with that decision. Out of hurt and anger, I vaguely processed the idea of no longer being in the care of the woman I was living with, and nodded my head in approval. There were so many thoughts and emotions whirling within me, that, at the time, I wasn't really focusing on what exactly was transpiring around me. My primary thought was, "where am I going to live next?"

Ever since I was born, and with every few passing years prior to foster care, I lived with multiple family relatives for different reasons. Sometimes it was because of my volatile home environment and other times it was because my family members and I had relocated; abrupt moves were a way of life. On some level, I had become accustomed to moving from one relative's house to another.

My parents weren't in a stable position to provide for me, so my maternal grandparents raised me for the majority of my childhood life. When my grandparents decided to move to another state, I went to live with my cousins for a couple years. I happily lived with my grandparents again during my middle school years. Things shifted for me when it was close to

the time for me to go into high school. I started feeling the loneliness of not being with my mom. At that point, I moved back to Michigan to be near to my mother and to build a better relationship with her. She was still unstable at this point, so I was living with a cousin. It wasn't ideal, but I was grateful that I could see her on a regular basis.

For a while, things were great. I excelled in my first year of high school: I was socially secure, quite healthy, emotionally happy, and thankful for all of my blessings. Around the beginning of my second year of high school, my mother was hospitalized for chronic back pain. Doctors soon discovered something more severe with her health and she had to undergo open-heart surgery. We briefly hoped for a full recovery. Unfortunately, during a second procedure the doctors realized there was nothing they could do to save her. She had an infection in her blood stream that was killing her slowly, and her organs were failing. My mother suffered through extreme pain and discomfort. There was no way to stop her heart from pumping the toxic blood through her veins unless she was going to live on a machine for the rest of her life. On the 22nd of October in the year of 2007, my mother, my angel, went to heaven to live eternally in spirit. I was 14 years old at the time and it was very detrimental. I can see now that it has impacted all aspects of my life.

I can admit that the initial mourning over the loss of mother became destructive. This may have been the reason my cousin gave up her guardianship rights to the state. I also wonder if there were other options besides foster care, but at the time, I assume everyone thought it was the best move. Of course, I contacted other relatives, but my reputation proceeded me and I wasn't offered an alternate housing option within the family.

Comment [DA2]: Be more transparent, describe what destructive means to you.

Being in foster care was no 'walk-in-the-park;' it was more like a walk through the woods in the dark. There were some positive experiences sprinkled throughout that time. I was able to attend a girls' camp that taught character building, healthy relationship development, and trust and teamwork skills. I participated in talent shows and pageants and received care that was funded from different sponsors associated with the foster care agency. There were many different situations that supported my growth in personal independence and appreciating sisterhood. I never would've had these opportunities if I were still living with my actual relatives.

Even though I was living in foster care, I was not the typical foster youth stereotype. This is because I spent the majority of my life in better homes and good schools and positive influences; so the environment that I came from was a lot different from most foster youth who experienced something more negative. I was blessed to be introduced to people who wanted the best for me; they consistently helped guide me with skills that were necessary for me to succeed in the future.

The relationship between my father and I improved during this time because it felt necessary after the loss of my mother. (My father had always been around for the majority of my life, but usually from a distance). As I advanced through the foster care programs, the connection with my father was a saving grace in my life.

There were times during my teen years when I ran away from home with no knowledge of where I would end up. I had faith that I would figure it out, or God would somehow get me through it.

The LORD is my light and my salvation--so why should I be afraid? The LORD is my fortress, protecting me from danger,

Comment [DA3]: This contradicts what was said earlier about having good and bad experiences. The author should strive to be more transparent so the reader has full understanding.

so why should I tremble?

Psalm 27:1

The faith of my childhood became even stronger when I got into foster care. Since I had been living in Christian households up to that point, it never escaped my heart that God had a purpose for me. I had always been involved with my religion; being active in churches, doing community services, praying by myself, with my family, and even at school. There was always something and someone around me that constantly reminded me of all of God's ability and His promise.

The LORD is my shepherd,

I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside quiet waters.

He restores my soul;

He guides me in the paths of righteousness

For His name's sake.

Psalm 23:1-3

My grandmother enforced the Bible, my cousins encouraged church and community activity, my family supported prayer, and my counselors insured all of the above. In the end, it all helped me to align with God's Grace. Throughout my life, I have been a witness to God's graciousness and the power of prayer. With every challenge that I have encountered so far, it has forced me and my faith to become stronger. I know that not only do I have the strength to become better, but I serve a purpose here on Earth as my gift back to God. I am discovering my

fullest potential, that He has blessed me and each of us with some sort of unique gifts; giving back to others and helping to make this life a better place and help others see why life is worth living is my part to show Him how grateful I am for His love and His promise. (Romans 4:21)

I encourage everyone who has dealt with hardship and challenges to really know that with God and within you, everything will be fine. No matter how hard it may seem; as long as we follow through with what God requires of us, and always believe, God will bring you through it.

He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings.

His faithful promises are your armor and protection.

Psalm 91:4

I have learned that I must remain in gratitude and continue to live life God's way in order to receive the promise of prosperity in all ways.

Do not ever stop believing. With time and experience, you will notice more of His love for you and it is up to you to show your love back to Him by not allowing anything to give you doubt of His power. Stay in His word and stay true because it is guaranteed to work out in your favor.

Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

1 Peter 5:6-7

-Relationship Recipes-

Join the family together at breakfast

Comment [DA4]: Should include pictures if you can – will add to the appeal ☺.

Nutty Yummy Pancakes

1 1/2 c flour
3 tbsp. sugar
1 1/2 tsp baking powder
1/2 tsp salt
1/4 tsp nutmeg
1 tsp baking soda
1c and 2 tbsp Carnations milk
1/2 tsp vanilla extract
1/2 tsp caramel extract or flavor
4 tbsp. melted butter
1 egg
1 c chopped pecans or walnuts (to taste)

Whisk dry ingredients in a bowl. Add in milk, vanilla and caramel, whisk until blended. In a separate bowl, mix butter and egg; fold into the flour mixture until just combined. Add chop pecans or walnuts in batter or on top. Pour mixture in preheated, greased skillet until bubbles appear. Cook until golden brown.
Serve with butter and maple syrup.

Scrambled Omelet

1 tsp cayenne pepper
1 tsp onion powder
1 tsp lemon pepper
Diced green and/or red bell pepper
Diced onion
1 chopped mushroom
2-3 slices of cheese
Pet milk (enough to cover bottom of bowl)
2 eggs

Mix all ingredients into a bowl. Spray skillet with pam. Add 1 tbsp. of butter and let melt in pan. Pour omelet into pan, let sit and cook for 2-3 min and scramble together.

Glazed Sausage Bites

1 slightly beaten eggs
1 lb. pork sausage
1/2 c finely crushed saltine crackers (14)

½ tsp rubbed sage

½ c water

¼ c catsup

2 tbsp. brown sugar

1 tbsp. vinegar

1 tbsp. soy sauce

In mixing bowl, combine egg, sausage, crackers, milk, and sage. Beat at high speed on electric mixture for 5 min. Shape into 1 ¼ inch balls. Mixture will be soft. Wet hands to shape easily. In skillet, brown meat in all sides, shaking pan occasionally to keep balls round, about 10 min. Pour off excess fat. Combine water, catsup, brown sugar, vinegar and soy sauce. Pour over meatballs. Cover and simmer 15 min, stirring occasionally. Keep hot until ready to serve. Makes 3 dozen balls.

Louisiana Salmon Croquette

1 can of red salmon

1 yellow onion, chopped fine

1 bell pepper

2 slices of bread

1 medium white potato, boiled and mashed

1 egg

1 tsp black pepper

yellow corn meal

Combine first 7 ingredients until well-blended. Shape into patties. Coat in cornmeal and fry in hot oil, turning once. Lay on paper towels to drain. Serve hot. Makes 4 patties.