

The lucky kitchen

Growing up with a famous grandmother can be a gift, writes **Karen Hardy**.

LOUISE Fulton Keats has many fond memories of growing up, spending time in her grandmother's kitchen. There were coddled eggs for breakfast, pikelets every Sunday, afternoon-tea tables laden with cupcakes and scones and pavlovas. The kitchen was a welcoming place, a sanctuary of sorts, full of delicious smells, activity and love.

It was the kitchen of Margaret Fulton, Australia's original domestic goddess. For generations, Fulton was the woman who changed the way we looked at food. For Fulton Keats, she was Grandma. Fulton Keats had her first child, Harry, last year and says she began thinking about the importance of grandmothers after her own mother, Suzanne Gibbs, also a food writer, took to the role as if made for it.

"I was blown away by how wonderful my mum and my grandmum Margaret were in their roles as grandma and great-grandma," Fulton Keats says. "It had me thinking about my own childhood and how wonderful Margaret was to me when I was little. She was just brilliant. I wanted the book to be a tribute to her and to grandmothers everywhere and to the role that they play in nurturing children through food."

My Grandma's Kitchen, the story of Louise (Lulu) and Harry and the fun they have in their grandma's kitchen, is part children's book, part cookbook, part picture book. With beautiful illustrations and design by Melbourne's Michelle Mackintosh, there are also 30 recipes from Fulton.

"The one question I'm most often

asked is what was it like growing up in Margaret Fulton's kitchen," Fulton Keats says. "She's been one of those dream grandmas, really. She's never been one of those grey-hair-in-a-bun, knitting grandmas, although she's

recently taken up knitting. She's never been that stereotypical grandma. She was far too cheeky, naughty and good fun, and always up for a laugh; she was a real party girl. I wanted to get that message across and thought it was high time I wrote a book about it."

Fulton Keats and her sister Kate grew up a few doors down from their grandma in Balmain, where Fulton still lives. Fulton Keats still lives a few streets away from grandma's kitchen. She is one of the lucky ones, in that the extended family is playing an important role in her son Harry's life. Both Gibbs and Fulton dote on Harry.

"So many mums of my age group have gone back to work and are relying on their mothers and mothers-in-law to look after their children," she says. "I'm hearing people say that, 'If it wasn't for my mother, my children would know nothing about food because I'm not around. I'm at work'.

"Grandmothers have such an important role. It's kind of what

prompted me to write the book, I guess. They're playing such a large role in raising children today and I wanted to recognise that."

Fulton Keats is a lawyer but there is food in her blood. Before she finished her law degree she studied at

Le Cordon Bleu cookery school.

"When I started there I thought I knew nothing about food; I hadn't had any formal training but I realised how much I did know just from watching Grandma and Mum," she says. "Now when it comes to cooking a recipe I'll think, 'Have I seen Grandma cook this? Have I seen Mum cook this?' and that will be the first image to come into my head when I start cooking. I can almost pull up any dish visually in my head because I've seen them all done."

Fulton Keats has studied child nutrition and is writing a baby and toddler cookbook, with Harry as her "little guinea pig".

"Cooking is such an important life skill," she says. "If you can cook, you can eat well for your entire life and if we can teach children to cook well, they'll eat well. If you do send a child off into the world as an adult without that skill, there's every chance they will eat poorly. That's one thing that Grandma and Mum instilled in both Kate and I." As a parent, she now realises how hard it is to involve children in the kitchen but says we should persevere.

"Let's face it, they do make a mess and ruin your precious ingredients but I was always allowed to do it and I was always encouraged," she says. "I was never told, 'No, you're not allowed to do it': I was never told, 'You don't know

what you're doing,

step aside, I'll do it': I was always given a role, I was always allowed to make mistakes. You only learn through making mistakes."

Fulton Keats admits there's another reason she studied at Le Cordon Bleu. "When I left home, I went, 'Jeepers, I'm used to having a fridge full of food, I'm used to having the best possible meals delivered to my dinner table every night.' I grew up with Mum and Grandma being in the magazine world and having food photographers coming

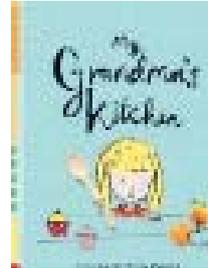
to our house to photograph food and I'd just be there on standby ready to eat it. I refused to give up on the standard of food I'd been enjoying all my life."

Lulu might have grown up and moved out of grandma's kitchen but she didn't want to go too far.

My Grandma's Kitchen, by Louise Fulton Keats. Recipes by Margaret Fulton. Illustrations by Michelle Mackintosh. Hardie Grant Books, \$29.95.

Margaret was one of those dream grandmas, really.

LOUISE FULTON KEATS



(Below left) Margaret Fulton with granddaughter Louise Fulton Keats.

