Mom, It's Easy to Bake!

For decades, little girls pretended to make meals just like Mom's with miniature cast-iron, then sheet-metal, stoves that looked like small versions of the real thing.

That's where the similarity ended, however. Most didn't actually cook, except for a few stoves that ran on electricity, alcohol or some other fuel.

Things changed in 1963 with the introduction of the Easy-Bake Oven by Kenner Products, selling for $15.95. With this innovation, little girls really could bake their very own treats, using an ordinary light bulb as the heat source.

Those first Easy-Bake Ovens were turquoise with a carrying handle, fake stovetop, pan pusher, bowl, rolling pin, pans and mixes. In the first year, more than 500,000 of the ovens were sold.

By 1968, General Mills had bought Kenner and created miniature Betty Crocker cake mix boxes for use with the Easy-Bake Oven.

The next year, the new avocado green Easy-Bake Oven appeared, complete with more dials, a fake clock and an oven hood.

In 1970, harvest gold replaced avocado green as another improved oven was introduced. This one baked cakes twice as fast and included a working timer.

In 1978, the orange, brown and white Mini-Wave Oven came out; it looked like a microwave oven. In the '80s, a dual-temperature oven was offered, later joined by a pink combined oven and snack center.

To date, more than 16 million Easy-Bake Ovens have been sold with many different mixes to make a wide range of treats. Today,

the newest version of the oven, the Easy-Bake Real Meal Oven, now made by Hasbro, lets kids make an entire meal, everything from macaroni and cheese to pretzels.