Food for Thought

Memories and Recipes from the Minds and Kitchens of Lifescapes

Washoe County, Nevada
Lifescapes
2003
This book was created as part of Lifescapes, a senior life writing project sponsored by the University of Nevada English Department, the Washoe County Library System, and the Nevada Humanities Committee.

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Cover art, cookbooks from the collection of Jean Myles: clockwise from upper right:

O'Keefe and Merritt Cook Book, Los Angeles, no date.
Baker Chocolate Choice Recipes, Dorchester, Massachusetts, 1916.
Knox Dainty Desserts for Dainty People, Johnston, New York, 1924.

Thanks also to the Lifescapes participants who provided copies of antique cookbooks as well as the handwritten and often ingredient-stained recipe cards: Jean Myles, Lois Smyres, Kay Allen, Bonnie Nelson, Steve Adkison, Susan Tchudi, Connie Kvasnicka.

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Introduction

Lifescapes is a project of the Washoe County Library System and the Department of English, University of Nevada, Reno, with financial support from the Nevada Humanities Committee. The project engages approximately seventy-five “seniors” in writing their memoirs and life stories at the Sparks, Sierra View, and Northwest Libraries. Each year, Lifescapes publishes an anthology of participants’ writing. Past volumes include December 7, 1941: Memories of Pearl Harbor and World War II and Dancing. To those volumes we now contribute Food for Thought, a collection of stories about kitchen adventures and misadventures, family traditions, cultural differences, and the expectations that are placed on family cooks, especially young ones. To augment these stories, we also include some of the writers’ handwritten recipes—some passed along from several generations—and samples of cookbooks from the writers’ shelves. We invite your culinary and intellectual enjoyment of these experiences from the minds and kitchens of Lifescapes.
Six Week Bran Muffin

15 Oz. RAISIN Bran
1 cup oil
3 cups sugar
4 beaten eggs
1 qt. buttermilk
5 cups flour
5 cups soda
2 tsp salt

Mix in large bowl. Store in refrigerator.
Fill greased muffin tins 2/3 full.
Bake at 400 degrees for 12 to 15 minutes.
Batter keeps forever!

E. Louise Smith

Louise Smith’s Bran Muffin batter can be refrigerated for up to six weeks.
1. In the Kitchen

1960 Betty Crocker Calendar. Note the circled Fridays: “Friday is Baking Day!”
Recipes for Cranberry "Sauce" and a Breakfast Burrito

Cranberry Sauce
2 c. fresh cranberries
3/4 c. sugar
1/2 c. liquid (fresh orange juice + water)
1 Tbsp grated orange peel
1/4 c. chopped pecans or walnuts
Cook cranberries in liquid until they pop, about 2 min. Add sugar + cook one minute while stirring. Add orange peel + nuts. Chill.

Serves: 6
Recipe from the kitchen of:
Here's what's cookin'!
Breakfast Burrito
Combine 6 hard cooked eggs (chopped), 3/4 cup shredded Jack cheese, 1 can (4 oz) diced California green chiles, 3 T mayonnaise + salt to taste. Spoon evenly over half of each of 6 flour tortillas; fold each to enclose filling. Melt 1 1/2 to 2 T. butter in a skillet over med. heat; when bubbly, add 2 tortillas at a time + cook until brown on both sides; add butter if needed.
On baking day I could hardly wait to get home after school. The aroma of fresh baked bread would reach out and embrace me like welcoming arms when I opened the front door and would draw me into the kitchen. There, an array of soul satisfying delicacies would be displayed along with the serrated knife that would cut a thick slice of perfect, light nourishment, to be slathered with homemade butter and jelly. A day of play and schoolwork served to whet the appetite of a child, and hunger added flavor to the already delicious staff of life that Mother had prepared. The delight of the first bite and the mixture of smells and tastes constituted a very real and unforgettable message of love and security. The pans of cinnamon rolls and a cake or two added to the luxury of well being in our home. With a few waves of her magic mixing spoon Mother changed ordinary ingredients into enchanting dishes for her family. Her smile as she watched us gobble up the work of her hands told us that our appreciation made all her work worthwhile.

But in my early years I was not interested in food. I was a very sickly child, and I have vivid memories of sore throats, earaches and feeling so hot and achy I just wanted to lie quietly or sleep. There was the uncontrol-
symbol, of the sharing of the sorrows and joys of being human and moving through the significant events that punctuate our lives.

To see emaciated, hungry people in the news makes us all want to feed them, and when we hear that political and racial issues make it impossible for us to help get their basic needs fulfilled, we become angry and frustrated. Starvation of others seems to be a crime against the Creator of all life. Food and the land to produce it has been a main reason for war throughout the history of man. Food, the macrocosmic problem and pleasure of mankind, and food, the microcosmic problem and pleasure of the individual, lies at the roots of survival of the species and of each human being.

It is interesting to look back in our lives and trace how we became indoctrinated with our attitudes towards foods. Where a citizen of New Guinea might be delighted by a feast of large, raw, white grubs, there are those of us who would starve to death rather than join him in this repast, regardless of his genial offer of hospitality. Disgust or pleasure is registered in facial expressions and body language, which we soon learn to read, and we understand the words and noises associated with them.

I can vividly remember the wrinkled noses and shaking heads, which accompanied my Mother’s exclamations of “Blah! Ca ca! Dirten, dirten!” Even if I should hear those repeated now I am sure I would refuse to eat whatever might be before me without even tasting it. On the other hand, smiles, nods, and eyes opened wide in approval would assure me that whatever was being offered was probably well worth a try.

I have read that over the millions of years humans have been sampling new foods, it has been a pretty good rule of thumb that if the food is sweet it is probably non-poisonous. Perhaps that explains why I am such a sweets-freak. For instance, some of my favorite memories have to do with the making of ice cream in the hand-cranked freezer. Mother would have cooked the custard, which was to be frozen and left it to cool. Often, snow had been packed down in gunnysacks by horseback from late melting snow banks in the mountains. Sometimes chunks of ice were put in sacks and pounded with hammers until they were reduced to fine pieces which could be packed around the center barrel of the freezer containing the custard that would be transformed into the exotic, delicious ice cream we all anticipated. We would all stand ready to take turns at the crank when another’s arm wore out. As we started this process, snow or ice would be added to the freezer and then rock salt, one layer at a time. Eventually, it would become so difficult to turn the beater that we would know the ice cream was ready. Then the barrel would be lifted out, the top taken off, and the beater taken out. Mother would stand ready with a large spoon to scrape as much ice cream off the beater as possible before it would be placed on a platter and the child who had said, “Dibs!” first would be the one to have the honor of “licking the beater,” as we called it. Of course, we others would get samples, but not much.
Later, at a picnic or other kind of celebration, liberal dishes would be handed out for dessert. I have a picture of me on my fifth birthday standing barefoot in the dirt in front of our house with a dish of ice cream and a spoon at the ready, and an expression of extreme pleasure on my face. I was an August baby, and this was before refrigerators or freezers, so one can tell that this was a very special treat, indeed. The honor bestowed on the youngest member of the family assured me of my importance and helped give me feelings of self worth and security.

In retrospect I can see how wise my parents were to take milk cows, chickens, rabbits, cats and dogs with them when they moved to the small mining town where I was born. It was a barren, mountainous region in the high desert area of Northern Nevada; during pre-depression years it was only natural for them to want to provide fresh foods for their family. They were the only ones to do so in that town. Our cows provided milk, cream, cheese, and butter. Chickens provided eggs and wonderful chicken fried dinners and chicken dumplings. The rabbits also were a good source of protein, although in later years I realized the reason my pets mysteriously disappeared was because they were being prepared for the dinner table. The cats ate rodents that came to eat the grain for the cows and then tried to invade our house. The dogs drove away coyotes, badgers, and other strangers that would like to have preyed upon the chickens and rabbits. They also chased jackrabbits and cottontails away from our vegetable gardens, a job that kept them happy and well exercised. I’m just glad that the horses, dogs, and cats were not on our menu of edible animals, as I loved them dearly and have always considered them to be more family members than comestibles.

After land has been cleared of sagebrush it is fertile. Mother grew very productive vegetable gardens, feeding us fresh vegetables during the growing season and an array of things she canned herself and stored in the cellar under the house during the rest of the year. My parents made trips to Idaho and brought back apples, pears, cherries and other fruits and vegetables we couldn’t raise, which were also stored or canned.

Cows had to be milked twice a day. The milk was processed through a hand operated machine that separated the cream from the milk. The milk and cream were sold to the local people in glass bottles with cardboard lids. My brother used to deliver the orders on his horse, Hank, accompanied by his Red Setter dog, Bonnie. Since he was nine years older than I, one of his special pastimes while milking was to make me stand at various distances away with my mouth open so he could see if he could squirt milk directly into it. He usually missed, which I suspected was deliberate on his part, and I got more nourishment from his poor aim than I really needed or wanted. Certainly the cats would have welcomed this attention far more than I.

We purchased the grain and grew the hay for the herbivorous animals and often gave them treats of fresh vegetables or apples, according to their personal preferences. We set out salt blocks for them to lick and

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I would sometimes sneak a piece of that salt myself. Parts already licked by the cows seemed especially good. They also got supplements of linseed and other things to keep them healthy. We taught one young colt to drink sugar water from a glass, and he felt so at home with us that he was known to enter the kitchen when we were gone and help himself to applesauce and cookies. Even animals can be conditioned to eat things not on their normal menus.

All of us participated in producing, preparing and caring for food.

Trips to the grocery store for the many items we could not make ourselves such as flour, yeast, and sugar, was part of the task of feeding the family and friends who sat at our table. It was always a treat to get to go to Marshall’s Grocery Store for things. Sometimes we would get to hear absent minded Mr. Marshall himself pace up and down behind the counter, looking up and down the stacks of items against the wall murmuring, “I wanna pair of unnerwear,” or perhaps reciting such interesting bits of poetry as, “The poor benighted pelican, his beak holds more than his bellycan.” There is food to tickle the funny bone as well as the palate.

Years later when Mother and I were cooking for hay hands to make money for me to go to college, we would signal that a meal was ready by going out and striking a steel triangle hanging from the branch of a tree with a steel rod. The sound carried a long distance and Pavlov’s dog was not better conditioned to its bell than the people who heard this unique signal, for they would come pouring out of the barn, bunkhouse, corral or wherever they might be. They would enter the cookhouse, seat themselves at the long table, and tuck into the mountains of food. At breakfast there would be steaks, bacon or ham, eggs, oatmeal, stacks of feathery pancakes, toast, jellies, jams, bowls of canned or fresh fruit, gallons of coffee, cream, pitchers of milk, and whatever else Mother might have decided they needed to sustain them through their heavy labors until lunch time, when they would come back to the ranch houses to take a break and a huge meal of meat, potatoes, various vegetable dishes, casseroles of some kind, the usual beverages, homemade bread, butter, and varieties of desserts that would rival a bakery. Dinner would pretty much be a repeat performance of lunch. The men ate hugely, but because their jobs were so physically demanding they didn’t become fat. Most of them were big men and needed a lot of calories to expend the energy necessary to cut the hay, rake it and stack it or bale it for the animals in winter. Their manners were hardly elegant, but they relished good food, and Mother and I were treated with respect. They thanked us often. It was well known that really good cooks could be unreliable or lazy. Many are reputed to take to the bottle from time to time. Whole crews have been known to walk out when the “grub” is not up to par. Mother loved watching them eat their meals, much, I suppose, as an artist enjoys watching people admire their works. Who could blame her? Cooking on large scale is a physically and emotionally demanding job.

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True, she did not have to supervise three children at breakfast as in the old days, when my older brother and sister would seize possession of the syrup pitcher and see if they could fill each individual indentation in their waffles without dribbling across the intersections. I, being the youngest and smallest by far, had the only recourse left to me, which was to wail and tattle until I could have a turn. I have often wondered why Mother didn’t stop serving waffles at all, or at least provide three syrup pitchers. Such petty hostilities set in motion over foods and who has priorities over it when we are young often become much larger issues of dominance, rebellion, and resentment which stay with us the rest of our lives.

Women and men still take pride in their cooking, and to go to a potluck where they can bring their special dishes is always a pleasure and delight. Breaking bread together has a special significance when it comes from the heart. Of course, some may guard the secrets, which make their dishes so much more delicious. One friend, now long gone, cheerfully gave out her recipe for lemon pie, but no one was ever able to duplicate her triumphs. We all knew she was holding something out on us, but the secret went with her to her grave. What a loss to the world!

Mother was a wonderful cook, and she taught her daughters much expertise. Her angel food cake fairly floated, it was so light. My favorite breakfast was venison steaks with biscuits and brown gravy, which I served to my family later in life when my husband had gone hunting. She made sourdough pancakes that melted in one’s mouth, and she kept the starter for years. Her fruit pies, especially apple, were marvelous. But her greatest triumph was her mincemeat, which she made every year. She canned it in quart or pint jars and often gave them as Christmas presents. These were highly prized gifts and would be made into pies for very special occasions. We asked for the recipe several times, and she would oblige; but it became obvious that she improvised, and it would be impossible to capture the exact flavors she developed. It took a long time to make and required real effort, so we modern cooks really prefer to buy the ready made kind at the supermarket. None can compare with hers. Two of her favorite recipes are given on the next page. Even these require “reading” skills that can be acquired only by watching a cook in the process of making the recipe.

A study of these recipes and pondering upon the significance of the art of food preparation makes one realize the huge legacy left to us by our ancestors as far as the production and preparation of food is concerned. Libraries are filled with books on these subjects in every written language in the world. Much is also contained in the oral histories handed down through families, clans, communities and cultures. It causes one to wonder what special recipes were made up by men and women since fire was discovered and they started using it to prepare food. Did Mrs. Cave Woman burn a hunk of mastodon on a stick so badly that they could not eat it, so Mr. Cave Man became the first man to invent the first barbecue and to invite the neighbors over? Who taught Hawaiians to dig pits, line
Martha Hice’s Mincemeat Recipe*

First version 1979

3 lb. Meat (half beef tongue and half neck meat)**
3 apples (coarse grind)
½ c. suet (fine grind)
½ c. citron
1 ½ c. white sugar
1 ½ c. brown sugar
3 tsp. salt
4 tsp. cinnamon
1 ½ tsp nutmeg
½ tsp. cloves
½ tsp. allspice
1 tsp. ginger
3 c. cider (I have used vinegar and apple juice)
1 ¼ c. vinegar
1 c. butter
3 lbs raisins
1 ½ lb. currants
plums and jams, etc.

Pick out best of meat and coarse grind.
Pour cider and vinegar in a large pan. (I used a 6-qt. Pressure cooker)
Add salt, plums, etc.
Add butter (I used oleo).
Sugar, raisins and currants.
Keep stirring over very low heat.
Grind and add apples.
Simmer 1 hr. Stirring.

*She was 83 years old when she recorded this. I know she improvised every time she made up a batch of mincemeat, using different jellies, jams and conserves. She used Roman Beauty apples, usually.

**Previously Mother had said she used venison neck meat. Often local hunters would bring her the meat during hunting season. Later she used the tongue and beef.

Martha Hice’s Deluxe Mincemeat Recipe

1 lb. beef tongue
1 lb. Beef neck meat
2 ½ tart apples, peeled and chopped.
¾ lb. Suet, ground fine
2 lb. Raisins
1 lb. Currants
½ lb. Citron, diced
1 lb. White sugar
1 lb. Brown sugar
2 tsp. salt
3 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp. nutmeg
½ tsp. allspice
¼ tsp. ginger
1 tsp. cloves
2 cups cider
grated rind of 1 lemon – juice of same
¾ cup cider vinegar
¾ cup butter

Simmer meat in small amount of water.
Same for tongue, separately.
Cool, discard bones and run in the meat grinder (medium blade).
Combine the meat, suet and apples in a large kettle.
Add raisins, currants and lemon.
Combine in saucepan, sugar, salt, spices, cider.
Heat to boiling point. Add to cooked first mixture.

Run through grinder canned plums, peaches or jams.
Possibly enough to make 1 or 2 quarts.
Heat to boiling point, stirring often.
Add vinegar and stump.

Pack in jars and process in pressure cooker at 5 pounds pressure for 35 minutes.

This still requires skills acquired by watching a cook in the process of making the recipe. For instance, what does she mean by “the best meat?” Also, she doesn’t mention the fact that one needs to peel the tongue after it has been boiled and cooled. One wouldn’t want all those taste buds showing up in the pie. (As one wag put it, “I don’t want to taste anything that can taste me back.”) Another point is that she used jams, jellies and conserves that she made herself, so the exact taste would vary with each batch of mincemeat.
them with rocks, lay fires to burn until the rocks were hot, then wrap a whole pig (previously butchered of course) in banana leaves, put it in the hole, and cover the whole thing with dirt and allow to cook until the rest of the luau foods were ready and the people were licking their chops in anticipation? Which cooks became famous for special herbs and ways of preparing the pig so they would be sought after to do this cooking? Did a Cree woman in ancient days make up a recipe for pemmican so delicious that she told the secret only to her daughters and it was handed down for generations? What are the secret ingredients added to the meat of Saint Bernard dogs in Japan that make it such a delicacy to these people? One can imagine the delight in which a Chinese man in the Ming Dynasty might have savored a spicy dish of black snake with vegetables and rice that only his wife knew how to make to his liking.

Even today new ways of seething, stewing, simmering, baking, broiling, basting, and boiling are being written about constantly and presented on TV cooking shows. Hundreds of magazines with eye catching illustrations are placed by checkout stands in markets. Even reading the recipes can cause one to salivate, and probably increases the sale of groceries substantially.

The fates of nations can depend on the outcome of lunch between heads of state, and one wonders if good food doesn’t present as good a case for a treaty as logical persuasion. Likewise vomiting in the lap of a dignitary (as did President Bush the elder) could possibly make that recipient want to declare war on the offending country for sending a representative who ruins a perfectly good appetite as well as a suit of clothes. Table etiquette is very important to know before sharing the groaning board with people in other countries. One can easily offend one’s hosts or pleasantly flatter them in ways which to us might seem unseemly. With certain people in the Near East or Arabia one eats from a communal pot with the right hand only. If the eye of the sheep who gave his life for the pot being sampled is offered to the guest, he had better eat it for it is considered a delicacy, and an honor, indeed.

If a patient refuses food we consider that a bad sign, but when the ability to eat returns the nurse notes that on the chart at the end of the bed, and the doctor is pleased to see that recovery is on its way. If someone habitually eats too much, he or she becomes an object of derision; on the other hand, someone who suffers from anorexia or bulimia may be in danger of a premature death. One’s eating habits are often topics of discussion. The eating habits of the great are recorded and often used to illustrate their characters. Ghandi is the epitome of one who used fasting as a political weapon. Henry VIII was famous for his prodigious appetite for food as well as women. Even Jesus remarked that people were gossiping about him saying, “...the Son of man came eating and drinking, and the say, ‘Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” (Matt. 11:19 RVS)

An old saying states that the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. Many women wonder if the
time in the kitchen is worth the trouble to navigate the alimentary canal. Fortunately, today’s man is usually conditioned to a diet of Kentucky Fried Chicken or take-outs from fast food drive-ins.

One wonders how many generations it actually took for Mother Eve’s daughters to make apple pies once she had plucked the irresistible fruit from the forbidden branch. At least, this art has made the eviction more palatable, and today an apple pie from Marie Callender’s can go a long way toward persuading a gentleman to go along with a lady’s wishes.

When a woman weans her children, her refrigerator becomes her surrogate breast. For example, one of my cousins who had two very large boys showed me the two huge shoeprints worn into the linoleum in front of her refrigerator, for they frequently stood in those exact spots to get the ever ready goodies to fill their empty bellies between meals or before bed. This epitomizes the popularity of the refrigerator and may explain why each generation of Americans seems to be larger than the previous one. Certainly the bountiful supply of food made available to them must have a great deal to do with that.

And so our days and sometimes our dreams are concerned with food: how to obtain it and what to do with it once we have it. Some believe that our spiritual paths are straighter and truer if we rise above the nutritional needs of the body, but let’s face it: when we are sitting in church trying to pray, if our neighbor’s stomach (or our own) insists on growling it can be quite distracting. It makes the aspirant wonder what’s being served at the potluck right after service.

Some believe the best grace is that old chestnut, “Good food, good meat, good God, let’s eat.” And so it is. Did Eve’s daughters use Prido shortening? John Morrell and Company. No date.
I was given the recipe on the next page to prepare for a Reno, Nevada, YMCA fund raising dinner in 1958, by a new friend. She had gotten this recipe from her mother, who, in turn, got it from her mother. The recipe has been used by several generations and, I am certain, has changed a bit from the original. Today we buy ready-made pasta, rather than making it, and boughten sauce, rather than making our own. The recipe has been used at many large potluck dinners and fund raising events in Reno, and was a central entrée for YMCA fund raising dinners for many years.

In the late 1800s the grandmother, a mail order bride, had traveled by train from New York to Hazen, Nevada, to meet her husband-to-be. Imagine her sense of well being as she was left at the small Hazen Railroad Station in the middle of the desert. No one was about, and there was no other building in sight. All that she could see was a vast, flat, empty space, with far off hazy mountains in every direction.

Trains were never on schedule. She had been sitting on her luggage for several hours, not knowing which direction to look, when a cloud of dust appeared on the southwest horizon. In due time a buckboard pulled up, with two trousered ladies, her new husband’s sisters. The traveler was stylishly dressed and had never before seen a woman in trousers. She climbed onto the buckboard and they set off, riding for miles into the far hills before they came to the family ranch near what was then an active frontier Army Fort, Fort Churchill. There she found a large working ranch at the edge of Lake Lahontan, a charming clapboard home and the welcoming arms of her new family.

The marriage produced several children, and lasted for well over sixty years. Many of the traveler’s descendants now live in Reno. The home was on a main route to the West. The women of the family—grandmother, mother, daughters, and new wives—often served food to travelers passing their way, and to officers at the Fort. Eventually, as homes were built for the older parents and newly married couples, and as others moved away, the original home became a hotel.

You may well have seen this building in segments of “Ponderosa” on TV. The Buckland Station home/hotel has been restored, and is now a part of the Fort Churchill State Park. The second story of the beautiful old building has been converted into a museum.

Today we buy ready-made pasta, rather than making it, and boughten sauce.
Mock Ravioli

Serves a large group as a main dish, or as a side dish for a buffet.

#1
- 2 medium onions – chopped
- 1 – 8 oz. can of tomato sauce
- 1 clove of garlic – chopped
- 1 can tomato paste
- 3 Tbs. olive oil
- 1-½ cups water or red wine
- 2 Lbs. lean ground beef
- 1 large can sliced mushrooms
- Salt and pepper to taste

Sauté the onions and garlic in a large pot. Add the meat and brown. Add all other ingredients and simmer 2 hours. Adjust taste as needed. (I do use more garlic – 3-4 cloves.)

#2
- ½ cup salad oil
- ½ cup grated sharp cheese
- 1 ½ cup chopped spinach
- 1 tspn. ground sage
- 1 ½ tspn. ground Italian herbs
- ½ tspn. salt (may be omitted)
- ½ cup chopped parsley
- 4 eggs, beaten lightly
- 1-cup soft breadcrumbs

Mix all together and set aside.

#3
Cook 1 lb. Butterfly macaroni. Grease an 11”x14”x2” lasagna pan. Starting with the meat sauce, layer sauce, pasta and spinach mixture, beginning and ending with meat sauce. Top the grated Parmesan cheese – or a mixture of cheese – Parmesan, Mozzarella and cheddar – and herbs, oregano and thyme.

(For best results with dried herbs, always crush them between your palms or in a kitchen mortar as you add them to a recipe.)

Bake at 350° for 30 to 40 minutes. Serves 12 – 16

. . . and for dessert? Fragment of a recipe found by Jean Myles in an old and partly burnt cookbook.
My Granny—Katherine Elizabeth Emilie Adams Rechenmacher—and others of her generation did not have to be told of the importance of eating breakfast. Not only did Granny eat breakfast, but it was a hearty one eaten early in the morning, since there was much work to be done afterward. Quickie breakfasts of milk and cereal or donuts and coffee were unheard of. A proper morning meal required time to cook the hot breakfast and time to sit down at the table and eat it.

First thing in the morning in the kitchen Granny put on her apron. It was a substantial piece of clothing covering the front of her, passing over her shoulders, and tied in the back. She had many of these aprons, which she wore every day all day over her dress and cardigan sweater. Second thing was to build a fire in the kitchen cook stove. She had a propane gas range, which she did not use except to keep loaves of bread in its oven.

Cooking began with water in a sauce pan for the coffee which was made with Postum, a substitute instant coffee available during World War II. Next, dried prunes were stewed in a sauce pan in a small amount of water. Those of Granny’s day and age were well aware of the function of daily fruit in keeping the body regular. If they were available, oranges were squeezed for fresh orange juice. Then mush of some kind was prepared, maybe Cream of Wheat or the long cooking type of oatmeal.

After the mush course came eggs and toast and sometimes bacon or ham. To hurry the frying of the meat and eggs along, Granny would remove the round stove lids so the fire would heat the bottom of the frying pans directly. Of course the fire licking the pan bottoms left them covered with black soot. We often teased Granny about the black on her face, which came from her hands handling the frying pans or stoking the fire. At the same time, slices of wheat bread were put on the rack in the oven to make toast. Granny never had or wanted a toaster.

Now, to eat a hearty breakfast required lots of dishes. There were no one piece mugs but a cup and a saucer for the coffee plus a sugar bowl and a creamer. The table was also set with many bowls, fruit bowls, a toast plate, butter plate, jam dish, plates for the eggs and bacon, and individual plates. Silverware completed the table settings.

Once breakfast was over, somebody had to wash all those dishes, utensils, and cooking pans, and dry them. There were no automatic dishwashers to speed things up. Then the next morning it all happened again and the next morning.
After the Thanksgiving holiday in 1968, I started curing a leg of pork in the Filipino tradition. I purchased the hind leg of pork because the meat is usually more tender.

For the curing solution I mixed about a teaspoon of “salitre” (saltpeter) for every kilo or pound of meat (saltpeter can be purchased from the local pharmacy), one cup of course salt, two cups of brown sugar, and half a cup of hot water to melt these ingredients. Before pouring these ingredients on the pork leg, I made an incision or poked a hole in several areas of the meat with a sharp knife so that the solution would penetrate the meat and cure it evenly. I left the meat marinating in the refrigerator for twenty-three days, checking the meat every day and basting it or injecting the meat (if a large syringe was available) with the solution. This process was repeated every day for twenty-three days until the meat is thoroughly cured.

On the twenty-fourth day, I prepared the cured ham for smoking. I made sure I used sweet smelling wood like the guava tree branches for firewood. I also used an improvised smoker (an old gasoline drum one of my brothers cut out to look like a cooker) for this process. It took about two to three hours to smoke the meat.

On the eve of Christmas, it was time to bake the ham in the oven for two hours or more, depending on its size and weight, and making sure that the brown sugar glaze completely saturated the ham, or until it was golden brown in color.

In some areas of the Philippines where there were no ovens, the ham was cooked over fire in a “kawali” (a big wok-like pot—an improvised Dutch oven). After the meat was cooked it was transferred on a pan and a process we call “plancha” (meaning iron) was done. A metal or stainless steel spatula was heated in an open fire until it was red hot and then pressed down on the ham covered with brown sugar for a crusty glaze. The brown sugar would melt and its liquified form seep through the skin and meat giving it that distinctive flavor of home cooked ham. This process was repeated until the desired golden brown texture was arrived at. This is a long and tedious process, but the end result is delicious and scrumptious.

Today ham can be purchased inexpensively, but it is a more delightful experience to cure, smoke, and bake/cook your own ham as I have; thanks to Mrs. Daganzo who taught me how.
II. Tragedies and Comedies

*Ten Speed Press, 1988.*
1940 cake recipe. You just have to know what a “slow oven” is and how to time and test a cake in the oven.
In 1938, working as a laborer with the Division of Highways at Livermore, California, Captain Bill was rooming and boarding with an Italian family on their ranch, about three miles from Livermore. The landlady was an excellent cook, making sure that old Bill always had generous portions of food morning and night, including a noon meal in a lunch pail.

One evening Captain Bill was surprised and a little baffed when he alone was served a large tamale for dinner. Now, this tamale wasn’t any rinky-dink portion. It was four inches in diameter and six inches long wrapped corn husks and tied at both ends and covered the whole plate. Capt. Bill assumed that Mrs. Perini was providing a special treat, so tackled the monster with gusto and finished eating it, however, still curious as to why the other members of the family were not served tamales.

Several days later, while at work in the Altamont Pass on Highway 50, a co-worker, John Maclenchy, asked Captain Bill about a tamale.

Damn, the light lit up in Capt. Bill’s mind—just three days before the crew had been bird-dogging along Highway 50 between Livermore and Dublin, picking all the trash along the road. That damn crew found that tamale and put it in Capt. Bill’s lunch pail and when Mrs. Perini found it, she must have thought it was brought to be cooked.

How old that tamale was is a big question mark—one day, a week, a month, or six months.

Those bastards could have caused the demise of old Capt. Bill with that prank, which was one of many during the two years working in Livermore. Well, that’s all for that Super Tamale Dinner.

Super Tamale Dinner
William Barnes

Now, this tamale wasn’t any rinky-dink portion.
Food for Thought

Lourdes Agcaoili-Harshbarger

**Tapioca Float**

The instructions said, or we thought it said, to put the tapioca into a dish of cold water.

When I was about thirteen or fourteen and still living in the Philippines, my friends: Carmen Chunuan, Josephine Douglas, Emma Gonzales, Lu Laigo, and Salima and Lydia Deen, had planned on holding a weekend shindig at the Deen’s residence. The usual snacks that we served at our parties were cheese with pimento sandwiches, Russian salad and soft drinks. When we had more funds to spare, we added “pansit” (rice noodles), and dessert. This time, we decided to try something new to surprise our guests. We were going to prepare tapioca pudding for dessert.

Carmen, Lydia, Lu, Emma and I marched to Sunshine Grocery in search of this coveted Tapioca. However, when we got there, not one of us had brought the piece of paper on which we had written the name down. We could not remember the name of the pudding. We wracked our brains, and the closest we could recall was “Tampico.” We asked the salesgirl if they had Tampico, and she just looked at us as if we were talking Greek. She shook her head and took off. We were determined to get this stuff, by hook or by crook, so we combed all the isles in search of the familiar box. We knew that if and when we saw the box, we would recognize it. Alas! There it was – Tapioca. With a little patience and determination, we knew, sooner or later, we would find it.

We marched back to Lydia’s house to prepare the pudding. The rest of the girls had already finished preparing the sandwiches and salad. Since we were all inexperienced cooks, we had to read and reread the instructions carefully and followed each step as closely as we understood it. We first boiled water in a pot, emptied the contents of the package into the boiling water, and stirred it continuously so that the tapioca did not burn at the bottom of the pot. After a few minutes, we noticed the tapioca starting to thicken. When the cooking time was over, we tasted it, and yummy! It tasted good. We were very pleased with our accomplishment. However, when the final instruction called for cooling or chilling the tapioca, we ran into a snag. We did not have refrigerators then. We did not even have an icebox. So we had to improvise the cooling/chilling system. The instructions said, or we thought it said, to put the tapioca into a dish of cold water. So we did just that. When we saw the tiny pearl-like tapioca start to float, we knew we made a big boo-boo. We tried to salvage them to no avail. Our dream of surprising our friends with a new dish and impressing them was completely dashed. We just hung our heads in disappointment, and charged it to culinary in-experience *faux pas*. 
In 1945, I had just finished my first year of college and was home for summer break. I was looking forward to hands on activity, real physical labor, giving serious, academic matters a rest. At this time, wartime, my mother was working in a defense plant in Burbank and my father prospecting for oil in Texas, leaving me to care for Phil, Judy, and Davy—my siblings—the victory garden, and the cow.

A day or so after I came home, Mother, on the way out the door to work, announced that she was bringing friends home for dinner and said to me, “Would you bake a French apple pie, fix dinner, milk the cow, check the irrigation, and care for the children? If friends come over to play, just put them to work.” She added. “And, oh yes, mangle the sheets and change the beds, just if you get a chance, Dear.”

I made up the menu for dinner, singing, “Show me the way to go home,” so happy to be in Altadena, puttering in the kitchen. Then I peeled and sliced the apples and put them on the stove to cook.

Davy, who was six, bounced into sight, as Phil and Judy appeared at the door at the end of our long kitchen. Davy’s eyebrows were raised in a playful way, as usual. Just as I was straining the morning’s milk, he sailed across the room and gave me a big hug. The bucket poised in the air, then fell, spreading a flood of milk, the length of the kitchen floor.

I could hear: “Oh no, what a mess. Davy, don’t, don’t step in it. Someone get the mop.”

Davy was sliding, then skating. Phil was skating toward him. “I’m getting the bucket,” Phil said, choking with laughter, slipping on the floor. Davy laughed more, looking at me, doubtfully, then careening into Judy, who was laughing still more, then admonishing, then laughing again. “I’m getting the bucket,” he repeated and collapsed in tears. “The bucket, the bucket,” he repeated, convulsed with laughter.

Phil got the bucket from the closet, put soap and water in it, and said, “This will help,” then poured it on the linoleum, as he started spreading it around, skating and skidding in his stocking feet.

There was a knock on the back door. Davy’s friends from down the street, Tommy and Dicky, took one look into the kitchen and quick to size up the situation, sailed into the kitchen and quickly to size up the situation, sailed across the floor, tackling Davy’s ankles. This encouraged a scramble to get airborne again, bodies flying, a dog pile, and gales of laughter.

Judy was saying sternly to Davy, “You boys, don’t...
All my sober warnings were drowned, canceled by our laughter.

Finally, more or less calm, with sudden relapses, like sputtering engines, we all got together. Even Davy, Tommy, and Dicky mopped up the kitchen floor. But we never did get to the dinner.

When Mother arrived home, she was pleased to see, what a nice job everyone had done. “Shining up the kitchen,” she called it.

“I’m sorry about dinner,” I said.

“Never mind, I see you’ve done the apples and whipped the cream.” She smiled and said: “When the guests arrive, I’ll just put them to work.”

I headed for the barn.

Apple pie and variations, from America’s Cook Book. 1941.
Food

W.S. Parker

The water piped into the house froze so we were without running water

My Mom and my maternal Grandmother were good, if not great cooks; my paternal Grandmother could barely cook; my wife is a fantastic cook and a superb hostess. Eating to me has been for the most part of my life something you have to do to stay alive, do not measure my waist. Like breathing, it takes more effort, concentration and time that I feel could be better used in other ways. As Kipling said and pretty well summed it up: “Here’s to a beefsteak when you’re hungry, a bottle when you’re dry, a pretty girl when you want one and heaven when you die.” To me you would have to say that I ate to live more than I lived to eat.

Kitchen escapades that I remember are not so much about food as they are about being a boy in the kitchen. The winter of 1937 in the high Sierra was quite severe, and we were living in Sierraville, California. It started to snow one afternoon, and by next morning it had covered the lower story windows as though someone had hung sheets over them. We had a coal oil furnace, rather modern for those times, and the oil in the lines got so stiff it would not flow, so the only heat we had was from the wood stove in the kitchen. Dad was snowed out and could not get any closer than Portola (He skied in two weeks later.) so Ted (8), Bob (6), me (5) and Dick (3 months) were Mom’s men around the house—but mostly we were boys. We tunneled from the front door to the road and the mailbox. This was important, since the local store ran out of bread and the mailman skied in yeast with the mail from Truckee so Mom could make bread. The bread sure smelled and tasted good when it was hot out of the oven.

The water that was piped into the house froze, so we were without running water or the use of the bathroom. Because of the cold, we lived in the kitchen and dining room that was heated by the wood cooking stove. We tunneled to the wood shed, the outhouse, and the outside water hand pump. We had to prime the pump with hot water to get it going, and if you took too much time between buckets to the kitchen it would freeze up again— and if you spilled water on your pants leg, it froze hard before you could get to the kitchen. We would carry in blocks of clean snow and put them in the copper boiler kept on the stove so she had water to wash Dick’s diapers. If you dropped snow or ice on top of the hot stove, it steamed across at blinding speed and sometimes cracked the pan plates, as they were thinner, and that
made mom unhappy with the offender. It should be mentioned that Ted and Bob had school after the first day of the snow. They went by horse drawn sleigh. Public employees did not have unions in those days and were expected to work like everyone else; thus the mail and school continued. I was Mom’s helper and looked after Dick, trying to keep him happy most of the daylight hours.

There was a ranch about a quarter mile up the road, and I could walk to it and get milk, bacon, and meat for Mom. I limped a lot, as they had recently had the silver plate removed from my right leg that had repaired a compound fracture (another story). It hurt but when I complained, Mom would say that I should thank the Lord each night in my prayers, because if the silver plate was still in there, it would be worse in the cold. Mr. Celso Dalario would most always take me home. By the time we got home the cream had risen to the top of the milk bucket, and we would fill a big dish with snow. Mom would sprinkle sugar, and a little vanilla and cream. We stirred it up and had instant ice cream. What a treat!

Living in the kitchen can’t be all bad if you are five and have a great mom and three brothers.

According to a testimonial in its brochure, a Flamo stove was used “to heat sixteen small rooms in my annex and the dining room of my hotel.” It also was used as a “cooking range for short order cooking.” No date.
Cooking Was Not My Cup of Tea

Bobbie Otis

*I remember saying, “Oh, it’s not so bad.”*

I remember my mother’s cooking. She was a very good cook, and every other Sunday she would prepare dinner for my father’s brothers and their wives and children. My aunt would have everyone the next week. The two of them had a contest on who could fix the best dinners. The rest of us would just enjoy the delicious food.

I loved her wonderful fried chicken and the tollhouse dinner rolls made from scratch. They gave a wonderful aroma throughout the house. The dining room was very small, and the table was the largest piece of furniture in it, but it was set with our finest china and our very best tablecloth. The children would eat in the kitchen, and that was fun, because we didn’t get scolded for giggling and talking. The only problem was that my mother would use every pot, pan, and utensil we had in the kitchen to prepare the dinner. That wouldn’t have been so bad, but my cousin and I had the job of cleaning up after the meal. I remember saying, “Look at all these dishes we have to do.” But my cousin would always say, “Oh, it’s not so bad.” We had to heat the water on the stove for washing and rinsing the dishes. It would take a while, but we would get them all done.

I remember when I was a teenager still at home, my mother, Alta, was in the hospital, and it was my responsibility to cook for my father and brother. I decided to try baking some biscuits, because I knew my father loved them. I was proud to serve hot biscuits, right out of the oven.

My brother, Earl, took one and pounded it on the table and said, “Boy, you could use these for hockey pucks.”

I thought, “Oh no, I’m a failure; the biscuits are too hard.”

My father saved the day because he said, “This is just the way I like them. You call this kind of biscuit ‘Hard Tack’.” I always remember daddy saying that, but I really don’t know if he liked them or just said it to make me feel better.

We were told as children that when at the table, we were to eat everything we put on our plates, keep our elbows off the table, and no laughing and acting silly. My brother and I obeyed the rules until one evening my father used the ketchup and placed the cap back on the bottle. A few seconds later the cap popped off, flew up in the air, and landed on the table. My brother and I
laughed because it surprised us and it looked so funny. The expression of surprise on daddy’s face, made us laugh even more. I couldn’t stop laughing, Alta said, “Bobbie, I think you better leave the table until you can compose yourself.” But they could still hear me laughing in the other room. Finally, I was able to finish my dinner.

When I got older and married, my father came to visit us in California for Christmas. My mother had passed away by that time.

I was making meatballs and my father was sitting at the kitchen table talking to me. He asked, “How many meat balls are you going to make? You’ve been rolling them into balls for a long time?” I said, “Yes, it does get boring, so I have to make up something to make it interesting.” With my back to the stove, I started throwing the meatballs over my shoulder into the frying pan. I was pretty good, except the grease would spatter a little on the stove. My father laughed at my performance and said, “I hope you never miss the skillet.”

My meatballs were a great success with my family and they asked me to make them every Christmas.

If you would like to try them I will give the recipe; it is so easy I’m a little embarrassed to write it. I would like you to think it was a difficult recipe.

When I first got married, I told my husband that I didn’t know how to cook. One day I decided to fix a roast. I was in the process of browning the roast in a skillet before putting it in the crock-pot. My husband got home early and saw what I was doing, and he put his arm around me and very gently told me, “Honey you can’t fry a roast.” I laughed so hard I could hardly tell him I was only browning it for slow cooking.

I found that my cooking always had a way of burning, falling, dropping, getting too hard when it was supposed to be soft, and too soft when it was supposed to be hard. So that’s why I say cooking is not my cup of tea.

**Hamburger Meatballs**

- Hamburger
- Salt and pepper
- Onion, finely chopped
- 1 bottle of Missouri Hickory Barbecue sauce
- 1 bottle of any other barbecue sauce
- Salt and pepper hamburger
- Mix in onions
- Form into balls
- Fry in skillet until done
- Put both sauces in a crock-pot
- Place meatballs in the crock-pot
- Let stand over night then reheat in crock-pot.

With my back to the stove, I started throwing the meatballs over my shoulder into the frying pan.
Cooking Instructions from a Pro

Annetta James

*I misunderstood and put in Epson salts, and I will leave to your imagination the consequences.*

With my pilot husband, who was killed in the war, I had only three wonderful weeks in Sandston, Virginia, in a rented room with no cooking privileges before he went overseas never to return. While he was gone, I cared for my very ill mother until her death three months before his, so most of my cooking was with soups—canned, of course. Having no family I moved to California to live with his sister and her family. She was a marvelous cook, so I spent little time in the kitchen except for dishes. Later I married a man who was a master sergeant in the service. He had complete control of the commissary, planning meals and the whole ball of wax. He was a Pro.

I wanted very much to please my new husband and would go to the market and buy ingredients painstakingly to prepare a meal. He would come home and, entering the kitchen, lift the lid on pot or pots and say, “I know a good way to fix that.” I would retire to the bedroom and cry. Then I decided I would try to do better. I still had some lessons to learn from him. I remember two incidents clearly where he told me to put baking soda into a pot of ham hock and beans. I misunderstood and put Epson salts, and I will leave to your imagination the consequences. The second incident was when he told me, “You do not need to taste soup and stews...just smell the aroma.” I followed his instructions, lifting the lid on a steaming pot and had trouble breathing through my nostrils for quite some time.

My husband was a great guy and a marvelous cook. I did not do turkey or breakfasts on Sunday, for he was the expert on pancakes, also the grill with barbecuing. I attempted a turkey two or three times in all my years. Either they were old tough birds or my cooking ossified them. Still, I have cooked many great meals over the years and can bake a wild pumpkin pie. This is due to my husband saying: “My sister Dorothy bakes the best pumpkin pie ever.” What a challenge this was, and the lesson I learned from his comment was to tell my son later: “Never, and I mean never, compare your wife’s cooking to your mother’s or anyone else’s.”
Great Aunt Josephine was a very small Italian lady who lived in a small white house with green shutters. Her home was in Lime Rock, Connecticut. The house looked small from the front, but was built long like our ranch homes of today. Her yard had a brook flowing through it, plus a vegetable garden, fruit trees, and a grape arbor.

Whenever you visited Great Aunt Josephine, you would find her smoking her corncob pipe, working in her garden, or in her home canning fresh vegetables. There was always a large cooking pot with something simmering on the back of her wood cooking stove. As soon as she saw you, she would say, “You have to eat”—this before you were even out of the car. In no time at all, she would have us setting the table with a wine glass at everyone’s place. She would toss together some kind of pasta dish, Polenta, and a salad, and we would be ready to eat. Whatever was simmering in the pot she would serve with either pasta or potatoes.

The wine was made from her grapes from the grape arbor. I often wondered how she accumulated so many different sized glasses—small glasses for the children and larger glasses for the adults.

While she was preparing the meal, she would be smoking her corncob pipe and talking at the same time. I wouldn’t be surprised to hear that she made her own pipe from her cornfield. Many times the pipe would burn out, and she would cuss at my dad saying, “Damn you Tommy, you made my pipe go out.” He would answer, “If you didn’t talk so much it would still be burning.” They would laugh together after his response.

In the meantime she would be speaking to us in English and Italian and get exasperated with us children if we didn’t understand her. We still had to eat a little of everything, even if we had eaten a meal before we arrived at her home. The best food she served came fresh from her vegetable garden, and she made the best peach and apple pies I’ve ever tasted. Funny how she always served pasta and potatoes, when her specialties for children were her pies.

I can still see Great Aunt Josephine with her corncob pipe and her little white house. I can still hear all of the laughter, at her happy home.

God Bless our Great Aunt Josephine.
Butchering a Chicken
Lourdes Agcaoili-Harshbarger

That was the most foul smelling thing . . .

When my parents left the Philippines for the United States in October of 1966, I was left with the responsibility of looking after my younger siblings’ welfare. This responsibility included, among others, marketing, cooking, and taking care of my own baby daughter, Danette, who was then only five months old.

One day I decided to buy a chicken, because we had not eaten chicken since my parents left. The only problem was that at that time, chicken was not sold dressed. You had to buy them live.

It so happened, too, that our maid was away on vacation. I had no alternative but to do what needed to be done.

With my young siblings as my audience, I was ready for the action. I rolled up my sleeves, put on my apron, and placed the chicken down on the kitchen floor. Its feet were tied when I bought it, so all I had to do was to step on it with one foot, kneel down on both wings (which I placed together on its side), and hold the head down on the cutting board. In my right hand I held the cleaver ready to chop off its head.

Done.

Little did I know that as soon as its head was cut off the chicken would struggle and fight for its life for a while. I let it go too soon, so it started flapping its wings and hopped around the kitchen without its head. My siblings started laughing and tried to catch it. Its blood was dripping all over the kitchen floor and we had some on our clothes, too.

My Grandmother, who was outside tending her garden, heard all the commotion and came inside in time to assist us. She caught the chicken without any problem. By this time, too, the chicken had finally expired.

The next thing we had to do was to pluck its feathers. My Grandmother took a big pot, filled it with water, and put it on the stove to boil. She said, “The feathers will come off more easily if hot water is poured over them.” So as soon as the water was boiling hot I poured it over the chicken. Boy! That was the most foul smell you’d want to smell. I let my siblings do the plucking as soon as it cooled down a little bit. They made a game of plucking the feathers by counting how many each had plucked, and they enjoyed it.

In the meantime, I prepared all the ingredients needed to cook the chicken. I was going to cook “Chicken Tinola” (a chicken dish sautéed with garlic, ginger,
I chopped here and there, often missing where I first chopped . . .

onions, and vegetables added to it, seasoned with salt and pepper, fish sauce (optional) and with plenty of broth). I recommend this menu on a cold and rainy day.

When my sisters were finished plucking the feathers, I was faced with the problem of getting rid of the fine feathers. My Grandmother was there again to the rescue. She told me to singe the feathers by putting the chicken over the fire on the stove, then rubbing off the stubs with coarse salt.

Now I was ready to cut the bird into sections and to gut it. This was another task I had to experiment with. It wasn’t difficult to find the joints, but when it came to the body, I chopped here and there, often missing where I first chopped and thus causing a lot of splintered bones. The chicken meat pieces were a shattered mess, but the job was done and I was ready to cook.

After about an hour or so of chicken meat tenderizing, we were ready to eat. My siblings were all ready and eager to taste something they had taken part in preparing. I just had to caution them to be careful with the broken or chipped bones. We all enjoyed the meal. However, I vowed to myself that if I had to eat chicken ever again, I should not be the one to butcher it.

Our maid soon returned from her vacation, and I was more than glad and relieved.

For the complete homemaker: home recipes for medicine, cosmetics, laundry, candy, ice cream, and insecticides. 1934.
III. Coming of Age

O'Keefe and Merrill Cook Book. no date.
Linguini with pesto and Proshuitto ham “from Solveig”
Whoopee! I’m a Mother-In-Law

E. Louise Smith

_Unjust gossip has it that my son may have gotten married partly to get away from my cooking._

The following information is not to be bandied about, since I have no desire to be classified as a middle-aged rabble rouser. I have something to tell you which practically undermines civilization’s entire approach to a major problem in human relationships. My aim is not destruction but clarification.

Let me stop circling the issue and come right out in the open with it. It isn’t so bad being a mother-in-law!

Come on now, admit it, all you recently deposed mothers—isn’t it wonderful to know that someone loves your son and/or daughter _almost_ as much as you do? To get right down to the nitty-gritty: Isn’t it great that _she_ is ironing all those huge shirts, while you sit and write philosophical items like this or sew a fine seam or set your hair?

How lovely, too, that after all those years of “bending the twig” you now have two nice, interesting friends who lead you down bright paths you might never take alone. You will love the generation gap. It keeps you so busy and alive trying to bridge it.

Obviously, you would never have bought yourself that long full-legged chiffon pants dress, which was your new daughter’s idea of a perfect birthday gift, but, oh, how you love it. And, if you feel it is too young for you (of course you don’t feel that way at all, but some of your friends might), all you have to say is: “My daughter-in-law bought this outfit for me.”

Naturally, you give a martyred look as if to say, “Well, you know how it is.” And they do. Everybody knows you can’t be too careful about hurting a daughter-in-law’s tender feelings. I don’t know who spread the rumor that mature women have no feelings that require protection.

As a new mother-in-law, I have discovered many areas of consolation and rationalization.

In the first place (I hope this won’t sound like bragging to my dinner guests), but I am not a good cook. Unjust gossip has it that my son may have gotten married partly to get away from momma’s cooking.

As your first baby gets rid of most of your youthful self-centeredness, your child’s marriage destroys any bits of sensitivity you may have been harboring.

My son begins conversations nowadays with variations on the following theme: “Mom, do you remember how I never would eat macaroni at home? Funny thing,” he muses, “I just love it the way my wife fixes it.”
Believe it or not, my once gentle, considerate son stands there beaming, plainly expecting me to be delighted that a beginner, half my age, cooks better, irons neater, and even looks glamorous with her hair in enormous rollers.

I console myself to myself. After all, I taught him to drive when his own father wouldn’t even get into the car with him.

Then, too, I doubt if he remembers (and I am not the type of mother to remind him) that I was Den Mother when all the other mothers turned the Pack down. I also went to see every game, play, and program he was in from kindergarten through college. If you knew my son (and if you don’t why don’t you?), you would realize that this required a lot of “going to see.”

It also meant a lot of quickie dinners and floors from which no one suggested eating.

I once knitted him a sweater which, since he wasn’t a full grown gorilla, did not fit. It wasn’t my fault that he wouldn’t stand still long enough for me to measure it on him. Even a well intentioned mother can’t take the blame for everything.

And, lest we forget, my dwelling was the only one in the neighborhood which held a fifteen-year open house for the tennis shoed, blue-jean brigade. Roving bands of apparently homeless young people around constantly turned me into an expert on cookies, popcorn, fudge and cool drinks which, while not in the category of meals, require hours in preparation and disappeared at an alarming rate after a hot game of ping-pong.

Before any of the young people learned to drive, I was always available to take them to the beach, football games, dances, or parties. I guess all the other moms were too busy preparing those wonderful home-cooked meals, which the hearing about would drive wild the next generation of young wives.

If you do not find my approach to mother-in-lawhood reassuring, then remember this when things seem gloomy: Time will solve your problem without any effort on your part.

From the much-maligned words, mother-in-law, butt of all dumb jokes, it is only a step to one of the most revered names in our language – Grandmother. Yes, that’s the culmination of all this tightrope walking. Just keep your cool. Did you ever hear of anyone who wanted to replace Grandma?

**Variations on a macaroni from**

*America’s Home Cook Book. 1941.*
When Mom Was Away

Ken Adams

*I remember so clearly: the squat heaviness of the large tin of Dinty Moore Beef Stew.*

Day 1 – Sunday.

It always started the same way. It was Sunday dinner and Dad was cooking for the two of us. My mother was on her way to one of the seasonal West Coast apparel markets where, for a week or two, she’d shop the various resource lines with every bit as much care and expertise as a major department store buyer. My brother and cousin always managed to be absent at these times. Brother Gary, senior to me by four years, was off enjoying the good cooking at the home of the family that would one day become his in-laws. Cousin Howard was at the fraternity house. Since coming to live with us after his release from the Army hospital, he seemed a lot more interested in classes at the university and living what he called “a full social life” than he did in recounting for his young cousin what it was like to be seriously wounded, left for dead, then taken prisoner of war during the Battle of the Bulge. During the evening meal, he preferred the company of his brothers by choice at the frat house to that of his relatives by birth at home. I didn’t understand this at the time, but I decided not to let it bother me. So it was just Dad and me: pals, buddies, chums. Dad cooked and I watched and learned.

Repetition, they say, is a good teacher. Since it always started the same way, it was easy for me to learn the first steps, the basics. I remember so clearly: the squat heaviness of the large tin of Dinty Moore Beef Stew and the can of green peas, the dark green of its paper cover hinting at the paler green of the peas within. I can see the Dazey opener erectly at attention on its wall mount at the end of the cupboard over the sink. I can see the gaping maw of the aluminum stew pot, empty but ready. At last, it was time. I had a job to do and I knew how to do it. Over the years, my Dad had taught me well. I was handed the tin of Dinty Moore. I took it and approached the Dazey. Holding the can carefully, I lifted it up to the can opener. I guided the tin to the small, sharpened wheel that would pierce the lid. I pulled down the lever that locked the can into place, engaged the cogged drive wheel, and pierced the thin tin of the lid all in the same operation. I did not become careless at this point. The past was a good teacher, and I kept my hand under the can. (A pound and a half of Dinty Moore Beef Stew falling from a height of five feet, hitting a tile counter top in the way, makes a mess on a kitchen floor that I recall every bit as clearly as I remember the heft of the full can.) Sup-
“Don’t want to smash up the peas.”

porting the can with one hand and turning the crank with the other, I got on with the job. Around, around, around, around, the can turned in its circle. And now the hard part—the challenge! I could feel my Dad’s breath on my neck. Would I succeed? Would I stop just at the right moment? It had to be before the lid fell into the can and into whatever the contents might be. If I stopped at the exact right place, the lid would rise slightly, even though still attached to the can with an umbilical of tin. It was very important to my Dad that you be able to lift the lid without getting your fingers dirty. Breathing a sigh of relief, and with clean fingers, I handed over the Dinty Moore. I opened the green peas faultlessly and Dad took over.

Dinty Moore and sweet green peas were emptied into the stew pot, accompanied always by a few ounces of the sweetish and slightly salty liquid from the pea can. Inside the stew pot, the contents were given a quick but gentle stir. “Don’t want to smash up the peas.” The explanation always went with the mixing. Then it was onto the stove and a gently heating to simmer. “No scorches. We want to use this pot again.” I was left to watch the pot, despite my Mom’s warnings about the downside of this activity. I’d give the occasional stir to keep the contents from sticking to the bottom and use the time to think about things. Mostly I thought about “Why?” “Why are there so many rules? And why can’t I make them? Why is ‘Because’ or ‘Because I said’ all the reason I need? Why is Dinty Moore so different from Mom’s or Gran’s beef stew? Why are the carrots and potatoes in the picture on the label so big when the ones in the can are really little? Why do Dad and I always eat dinner together at the dining table? Why hadn’t I used some of the thinking time for setting the table? Why hadn’t I anticipated Dad’s reminder about the rules concerning the chores?”

I did manage to get the table set without pushing too hard for an explanation for the fairness or lack of it underlying the entire chores concept. I’d learned to read the glint in Dad’s eye and the clench of his jaw, and I knew just when to defuse to prevent the explosion. We ate a quiet dinner, with Dad giving his customary enthusiastic rave notice to the culinary feat we’d just performed. I’d some time ago recognized a gap between Dad’s accolades and his appetite. He’d put away a lot of bread and butter, a little Dinty Moore, all the while admonishing me to clean the brimming plate he’d filled and put before me. I did a fair job on the Wonder Bread, drank lots of milk, and tried to spread the Dinty Moore I hadn’t eaten into a thin even layer over my plate. Dinner over, the lid went on the stew pot and it went into the cleared space on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator. We were ready for...

Day 2 – Monday.

The second day was always Monday; it meant back to school for me and back to work for Dad. We wouldn’t see each other until evening when he pulled into the driveway and got out of the truck, sometimes seeming almost reluctant. He’d be carrying the small grocery bag he’d picked up at his stop at Ring Lee’s market. I
knew the contents without opening the bag: Mondays meant spaghetti, usually Franco American but sometimes Chef Boyardee, always two cans. Dad would go to the fridge and take out the stew pot containing the remainder of our Sunday dinner. He'd check the quantity of the leftovers carefully and ask, “How hungry are you?” My usual reply of “not too” didn’t seem to make much difference. It would either be a one can or a two can night. Tonight was a one can night and Dad took the extra can and put it into the cupboard where it would lurk, ready and waiting. He gave the other can to me, and I performed my can opener duties without mishap. A clean-fingered lid lift revealed the reddish, faintly wormlike contents of the can and the not quite tomato sauce odors from within. “Perfect,” Dad would say as he scooped the contents into the stew pot on top of the Sunday Dinty Moore. His gentle mixing with a large spoon produced colors, textures, and odors in the pot that are hard to imagine. I really couldn’t see how mashing or smashing could possibly hurt anything, but Dad would give his usual admonition. Then the pot would go onto the stove over low heat so as not to scorch. I’d watch the pot, set the table, and think fondly of my cousin sitting down to chicken fried steak at the frat house. Actually, I’d think more about the chicken fried steak with mashed potatoes and country gravy than about my cousin. I’d also think about my Mom, away from home doing her other job.

Our family business was retailing. We had what was called a junior department store in Reno, Nevada, and both my parents spent what seemed like most of their lives there. My Mom, among her responsibilities at the store, was buyer and department manager for the entire infants’ and childrens’ area. This meant that several times a year she would have to leave Reno and travel on those buying trips. Dad made similar trips for different departments, but usually at different times. One of my parents was usually home, no matter how hard I tried to convince them that it wasn’t necessary. “You can trust me,” I said, “I’m almost twelve. What could possibly happen?” Dad would get that look in his eye meaning not to expect an answer anytime soon. “End of discussion,” he’d say. “Stir the pot.”

Dinner itself on Mondays was always a speedy event. Where Sunday’s Dinty Moore stew with green peas and extra juice was a spreadable offering providing me an opportunity for camouflage, disguise, or outright stalling, Monday’s dinner was a no-nonsense forthright glob. It was the spawning ground for what was to mature into a lifelong enjoyment of, and appreciation for, ketchup. Dad and I ate quickly, thankful for the red blanketed bounty before us. Then the lid went back on the pot and the pot returned to the fridge. I’d do the dishes, do my homework and go to bed. All was in readiness for ...

Day 3 – Tuesday.

Tuesday was O.K. By nightfall, two school days in the week were over and so far no catastrophes or monumental problems of the kind I’d usually save for Mom. Dad and I were taking things in stride, and I hadn’t
put a ball of any kind through anybody’s window for over two weeks. My homework was done and I was looking forward to listening to some good radio shows after dinner. My brother and my cousin stopped by the house after their afternoon classes and on their way to work. They both worked at the store, as I would when I was old enough. Both declined my invitation to dinner; they had other plans, they said. On the way out the door, my cousin stuck in the needle. “It’s chicken fricassee on Tuesdays, right?” he asked grinning. Then they were off. My cousin would be eating spaghetti and meatballs at the ATO House after work: real spaghetti with real sauce and real meatballs. My brother and his girlfriend would be grabbing a hamburger after work on their way to the library where they were very busy working on something called term papers. All I knew about term papers was that they always seemed to coincide with Mom’s market trips, but then, they couldn’t be too bad if hamburgers, cokes and fries were somehow involved. They just meant that my brother was gone more than he was around and I couldn’t quite understand that.

Alone, reminded about the chicken fricassee, I waited for Dad. I heard the truck pull into the drive-way and knew he was home. The truck door opened, then slammed closed as Dad got out of the old Ford panel delivery vehicle. He came through the back door as he usually did, but this time not stopping to turn on a sprinkler or to check the neatness of the lawn mowing job I’d done in the back yard. As I knew he would, he held a small brown paper bag in his hand. I opened the bag and removed the jar of chicken fricassee. It was always chicken fricassee with noodles, in a glass jar. There would be no can opener duties for me tonight. He came into the kitchen, went straight to the fridge and pulled out the stew pot. The jar was always screw top, and I’d remove the lid usually after tapping it several times on the tile counter top. “Careful! Crack or chip that tile and your mother will skin us both.” I’d take care and get the top off with no damage to the tile. Dad would take the jar and scoop the contents into the stew pot. He’d remind himself to be gentle with the mixing then proceed to stir the stew pot contents. He seemed to be searching for something that eluded him. I don’t know what he was looking for, but he couldn’t find it in the stew pot no matter how long he stirred.

Dad would change his clothes while I watched the pot and finished setting the table. Since it was Tuesday, I’d usually start my campaign for a telephone call to my mother. “Let’s call Mom,” I’d suggest down the hall toward my parents’ bedroom. “You know, just to make sure she’s O.K.?” My parents, Dad in particular, frowned on telephone calls not of an emergency or business nature. “No news is good news,” he’d proclaim, and I could count on being reminded firmly about the folly of needlessly running up the phone bill. “And besides that, what if somebody was trying to get through with something urgent, and we had the line tied up?” The opening salvos of my campaign...
resulted as they usually did in no target damage. I’d retreat to the kitchen and the stew pot, hunker down and wait for dinner. Tomorrow was another day and the challenge of getting through dinner was all I could handle. It’s strange, but I’d come to like Tuesdays and chicken fricassee. My greatest challenge was fishing the chunks of chicken and the bits of noodle out from among the rest of our dinner. The success or failure depended directly upon the amount of stirring that had been done and the amount of time Dad would allow me to pick through the pot contents. This Tuesday was not a good one, there’d been way too much stirring and my father’s patience level didn’t lend itself to lengthy stew sifting on my part. I settled, wisely I think, on a quick scoop of mostly chicken and noodle mixture and the usual accompaniments of milk, Wonder Bread, and ketchup. Dad gave his usual five-star appreciation and one-star appetite performance, all the while seeming to be a bit preoccupied. Could it be that one of my shots had come closer than I thought? I could hardly wait for ... 

Day 4 – Wednesday.

I always like Wednesdays, even though at age eleven I was still a stranger to the “Hump Day” concept. All I knew was that Wednesday brought closer the day of return for an absent parent. At Wednesday’s dinner the atmosphere was always lighter. Dad’s mood was better when he got home from work, even though his arrival was a bit later than on other days. Wednesday meant that Dad would meet some of his friends at the Elks Club for, as he put it, “a toddy or two.” This stop did wonders for his disposition, and he’d arrive home joking and happy. Relaxed and cheerful, Dad would create Wednesday dinner with an imaginative flexibility. There were no fixed or regular additions to the stew pot. Unlike earlier meals, Wednesdays always depended on a visual examination of the stew pot contents and Dad’s creative assessment of what might be added to supplement quantity or enhance quality and flavor. It was always something different: maybe canned ravioli or a canned vegetable or chopped up hot dogs or even that unopened can of spaghetti from Monday. Whatever the addition, it was always accompanied by a healthy splash of Worcestershire sauce.

The current addition in this memory turned out to be a small can of whole kernel corn, with juices. This did wonders for the kaleidoscopic appearance of the stew pot contents, with the yellow bits of the corn adding new flecks of color. The juices and the sauce were a helpful addition and aided in thinning what was by now a pretty thick and gluey mass. Gentle mixing, low heat, and dinner was ready. Dad’s good mood continued as we ate, and I even had seconds. As we were finishing, Dad suggested that I hurry doing the dishes so that we could put through a long distance phone call. “I think we’d better check up on your mother. Make sure she’s O.K.” Yes, I always did like Wednesdays....

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Day 5 – Thursday. Mom had said on the phone that she’d be home on the train late Saturday afternoon. Here it was almost time for Thursday dinner. Tomorrow was Friday, last school day of the week. Then Saturday. I had the stew pot out as Dad came whistling in the back door. As surely as it was Thursday, I was certain that dinner would be “Slum Gullion;” the only uncertainty was as to the particular kind of Slum Gullion it would be. (I learned in later years that the term had several meanings and had probably entered our family vocabulary after my grandfather’s stint on the Klondike and stay at Nome, Alaska.) I do know that to Dad and me, Slum Gullion signified the final disposition of all stew pot remnants by turning them into soup. The particular kind would be determined after a careful examination of the contents of the pot. The largest portion of recognizable leftovers in the pot would determine the kind of soup to be used. More beef stew left meant vegetable beef soup. A preponderance of chicken fricassee would call for chicken noodle soup. The most dreaded result, however, was a stew pot heavy on the red color and contents of canned pasta. This would mean tomato soup, the very bottom of my totem pole of taste.

I must confess that by now I had learned that it was possible to improve the odds on Dad’s picking a favorable soup choice. In fact, the stew pot was out because I had just finished some selective screening to reduce the likelihood that tomato soup would be chosen. Several accessible and intact clumps of spaghetti had been scooped out, wrapped in newspaper, and buried deep in the garbage can outside. Suspecting nothing, so I thought, Dad lifted the lid and peeked inside. His “who are you kidding?” sideways glance coupled with a muttered “...I could have sworn...” said it all. My days as a stew pot con man had just come to a screeching halt. Despite knowing what I’d done, Dad stuck to the rules and after almost tallying beef bits versus chicken shreds, decided vegetable beef it would be. Into the pot went Campbell’s finest and a can and a half of water. Gentle mixing, low heat to simmer and dinner was ready.

Over our chowder-like Slum Gullion on Thursdays we’d always talk. Dad would want to know more about my school week and after school activities. Some times, like tonight, we’d have what Dad called a “meeting of the board.” We’d discuss events or happenings and things like what was right and wrong; what was good or what was bad; what would fly and what wouldn’t. Even though his position on the board would have guaranteed a one-sided short and not necessarily sweet session, Dad always gave me the floor and a chance to ask questions. This was not a night that I asked questions. Dinner hour flew by and the Slum Gullion seemed to disappear along with handfuls of Saltines. We had eaten all we could hold, but there was still just a bit left in the pot. Dad covered it and put it into the refrigerator and reminded me that Mom would be home Saturday, the day after tomorrow....
Day 6 – Friday.

Though I’d never heard of T.G.I.F. I was still ecstatic when Friday rolled around. No school ‘til Monday! Mom coming home! The prospect of a return to a routine with the whole family together again! But first, there had to be Friday dinner. What would it be? The wait for Dad to get home seemed endless. Then I would hear the truck in the driveway and the door slamming. Up the back steps and into the kitchen: He was whistling, and no stop at the Elks Club: a really good sign. Over to the refrigerator, open the door. Pull out the stew pot and take it to the sink. Remove the lid and peer inside. Bend over and take out the small garbage pail from under the sink. Invert pot over pail; scoop to loosen with large spoon; and finally, finally: splat! “What would you say to a hamburger with fries and a coke? Just promise me, son, not to say anything that’ll get us the wasted-food-and-starving-orphans lecture from your Mom.” I quickly agreed as I tried to imagine the feeding of a horde of hungry children with the scant half-cup of leftover Slum Gullion....

Day 7 – Saturday.

Saturdays meant up early to help Dad change the beds. After breakfast and before he left for work, Dad would hold inspection of the house. I’d be given a list of anything that “needed sprucing up” before Mom walked in. I could use the vacuum cleaner, knew how to dust mop the hardwood floors, and mop the tile and the linoleum. I could dust carefully and was generally at home with house cleaning chores. Except, that is, for bathrooms. In spite of my best efforts, it would take several years and some pointed critique from a gravel-throated Chief Petty Officer to get me to a level of competence acceptable to my Mom. But I did try.

After my chores, I’d head downtown and meet Dad at the store. We’d go to the train station at the appropriate time, meet my mother, and go back to the store until closing. When the store was cleared of customers and locked up, we’d stow Mom’s suitcase in the trunk of the family car and head for a restaurant close to the store. We’d walk up Sierra Street to the Moulin Rouge or the Wigwam or maybe over to the Waldorf Club, Tiny’s Waffle Shop, or the Monarch Café on Virginia Street. Wherever we went was special; the restaurant didn’t really matter. I’ll always remember, as clearly as I do the can of Dinty Moore, watching Dad seem to grow taller as Mom proudly took his arm and we headed up the street.

Ideas for the bachelor cook?
No date.
It is said that from the meat of a turtle one can taste different flavors that resemble chicken, pork and beef. We had an opportunity to test this possibility when camping at Long Lake in the Adirondack Mountains of New York.

At the foot of the path, where our boats were moored was a huge boulder at the waters edge. Below the surface it was surprisingly concave, perhaps from thousands of years of lake freezing and thawing. In this sheltered spot my husband Russ discovered a large snapping turtle, perhaps twelve to fifteen inches in diameter. He tied a rope to both ends of a small tree limb the same length as the turtle’s shell. The turtle “snapped” at this threat to the calm environment and held onto it. Russ then “harnessed” the turtle by tying the ropes around and under the shell.

We campers decided soup should be made by Mom. After decapitating the turtle, we placed the remains in a pail of water which was boiling on the fireplace. This made it possible to remove the meat from the shell. Sadly we discovered our meal was a pregnant female with eggs.

Plans went ahead and Mom made a delicious soup. Yes, there were varied flavors in the meat. A day or two later another snapping turtle was discovered in the same spot. A unanimous decision was made not to repeat our experiment, as we had all suffered heartburn the first time. Conjecture was that the second, but more fortunate turtle, was our dinner’s mate.

We discovered our meal was a pregnant female with eggs.

Turtle Soup
M. Pearl Cartwright

We discovered our meal was a pregnant female with eggs.

America’s Cook Book. 1941.
Balancing on my shoulder a large tray of hot tomato soup and fruit cocktail appetizers for eight hungry customers, I thrust my foot with the dirty white and unglamorous waitress shoe to hit the swinging door into the dining room. Swoosh, flop: Down I went, slipping on spilled salad dressing that no one had bothered to clean up.

The classy restaurant was usually quiet and dignified, featuring white tablecloths and glowing amber lights, with whiffs of delicious smells emitting from the kitchen. The diners looked up from their rare roast beef and saw two legs sticking out of the doorway, with orange soup mixed with sliced pineapple and peaches oozing along the floor. My face was covered with the soup and broken dishes. My ugly pink nylon uniform that always had an icky smell stuck to my body, and I felt the slithering fruit juice on my arms and neck. I got up, unharmed but embarrassed, cleaned up, and very carefully carried a new tray full of hot soup and appetizers to my table. Such was my life as a waitress on any given day.

The Homestead was a fine old hotel and restaurant in downtown Evanston and served as my first place of summer employment at age sixteen and continued until I was twenty-one. Several of my friends were able to secure jobs—we liked the hours. We’d ride our bikes to work at ten a.m. and have a two-hour break in the afternoon, then work through the dinner hour until nine p.m. We’d race from the Homestead at three and ride to the beach for a quick swim and relaxation and race back to punch our time cards right at five.

As beginners, we were relegated to work the garden, a lovely outdoor area with several tables with umbrellas that also included a small teahouse used for special parties. Each morning we had to scrub the tables and put up the umbrellas. We each had our assigned tables, and when the restaurant opened they all had to be clean and ready. One of our coworkers was notoriously late, so we often cleaned her tables, since we were so conscientious that we wanted everything done on time. We never caught on that she used us to avoid her work.

On a Saturday morning we’d steal a fresh cinnamon roll, put a pat of real butter in it (at home we only ate oleo) and then stick it in our pocket for later, forgetting that the butter would ooze out to stain our pocket—a telltale sign for our boss. And, something that sounds repulsive now, was to gleefully clear the tables after a
I wanted to scream, “I'm burning!”

wedding party and look for leftover wedding cake or an elaborate dessert—we’d scrape off the part that was half eaten and eat the rest! On occasion we would order extra desserts and then hide them in the cupboard in the teahouse where no one would see us devouring the melting parfaits and lemon meringue pie.

The best part was dinner. We would eat at the end of the day and take our plate of roast beef, mashed potatoes and gravy and all sorts of succulent foods we only had at home for special occasions, down to the basement changing room that served as our “lounge.” We’d sit on old sofas and chairs, among those awful pink nylon uniforms, bathroom, tiny windows, suffocating atmosphere, and devour the food as if it were a feast.

Miss Shear was the head dietician. A buxom woman with a thick Viennese accent, she elicited terror but respect from us. She was a dignified and educated woman and often admonished us for our sloppy appearance. She had a special alcove in the basement for her uniforms, and when she would leave for the day she would be dressed in an elegant outfit, as if going out for a stroll in her native Vienna. We’d leave in shorts and tee shirts and wonder about the kind of life Miss Shear lived.

I was always amused to serve a group of women for their “ladies day out lunch.” Often they were large overweight women who would always say, “Oh, we shouldn’t” and then promptly order chocolate cake or baked Alaska or some such rich coveted dessert.

Then they argued over the bill. I developed an uncanny sense of when this would happen at my first glance at my new customers. The hardest part about serving was bringing the hot plates to the table, especially to a lively bunch that were engaged in their jokes and chatter and I was the invisible servant. I’d stand holding the hot plates saying very nicely, “Who has the shrimp please?” and they’d continue talking while I wanted to scream “I’m burning!” You see, at the Homestead, customers filled out their own order with a number system, so I was not always aware of who got what.

Many wealthy widows lived at the Homestead—it was considered a residential hotel, so the restaurant was their private dining room and we were their maids. I thought it odd, and a bit sad, that so many of the women came in at the exact same time each evening, sat alone at their special tables, but never conversed back and forth with one another. They seemed to need their sense of space or independence. I always thought they should just give up and sit together!

One learns to smile when furious. Caught between the temperamental and defensive cooks and picky customers, I often had to return plates to the cooks for a “bit more well-done” or “this is not what I ordered” and the cooks would be furious with me, never the unseen customer. Then I’d politely (you didn’t want to upset the cooks or they would not serve you a good dinner at the end of the day) go back to the dining room with the new plate and tell
Most of my good friends could not afford to eat there.

my table we were sorry and blah blah blah, all the while I was extremely annoyed with these troublesome nitpicking customers.

Sometimes famous people ate at the restaurant. I waited on the actor Melvin Douglas once, and during the World Council of Churches Assembly that met at our church across the street in 1954, we had many prominent church leaders at our tables. Occasionally I served customers, whom I knew, and it always surprised me to be treated like a servant in a uniform when without the pink dress, I was just a schoolmate or acquaintance. Most of my good friends could not afford to eat there.

My Homestead summers remain a vivid memory of hard work, good money and food, and a lifetime of funny memories. For us, it was a summer job—we would leave it behind us at Labor Day and go back to high school or college and forget about it. But for many of the staff, this was their job and I’m sure our cavalier attitude annoyed them.

While the building still stands, the restaurant is just a café and no longer holds that special ambience—only memories of a long time ago and my first job.

Veggie casserole from frozen mixed vegetables. You invent the “thick white sauce.”
“Welcome to the Depression Deli”

Julie Machado

_I was the only one not wearing jeans and a t-shirt._

The first month of my freshman year of college (fall of 1979), I saw on the bulletin board in the music department a notice that a bluegrass band was looking for a bass player who owned their own instrument. I qualified since I was a bass player, classical only, but I owned my own bass.

I gave the number on the paper a call and they invited me to a rehearsal.

That week I practiced for hours on modulating between different keys and good pitch and tone quality. The only auditions I had been to at that point were for orchestras.

When I went to the rehearsal I found that playing bluegrass was not the same as playing a Beethoven Symphony. Yet, I was very qualified and they let me join the band, Buzzards Roost, as the seventh musician.

My first “gig” with them was that weekend at a bar and deli called the Depression Deli. I didn’t know what to wear since I had no experience with bluegrass or bars. I neatly dressed in a gray pinstripe suit with a showy red satin vest.

When I arrived at the deli with my stand-up “dog-house” bass I was the only one not wearing jeans and T-shirt. What a big surprise!

We played our first set and everyone loved us. We actually went on to become one of the top two bands in Northern Nevada.

At the end of the first set everyone in the band went off to talk to their friends and drinking buddies.

I was left standing by the stage next to a large, hairy man sitting at a small round table eating peanuts and throwing the shells under the table where his large, hairy dog was lying.

Just to make conversation I said “Looks like a nice dog.” He said, “Ugh.”

I said, “I have a dog.” He said, “Ugh.”

I said, “I also have a cat.” He said, “I like a little pussy now and then.”

I just stood there with my mouth open. Joe, the bandleader, came over and put his hand on my shoulder and said, “Welcome to the Depression Deli.”

Food for Thought 50
Pie in the Sky

Sally Quade

I accepted the job as cook and vowed to post all menus in French on the nearest pine tree.

When I was twenty-one, an Archeologist by the name of Joe Wampler gave me a job as cook on the John Muir Trail Trip. I don’t know why he offered me the job, except he had great respect for my mother. He had known us both on Sierra Club High Trips, where Mother was admired for the way she cooked trout. Earlier, Joe and I had talked about my schooling in Europe, his expeditions in Egypt, and exotic foods that we both liked, which may have given him the idea of us joining forces.

I accepted the job as cook and vowed to post all menus in French on the nearest pine tree. My wage was $150 for the six week trip or $25 a week.

When the time came, my parents dropped me off at the trail head west of Lone Pine, the starting point for the trip. I joined Joe and the Digger, the Woodchopper, and the Packers, ten mules and ten horses, and twenty guests, all ready for our trip into the Sierra.

This high Sierra expedition, traveling eight to twelve miles a day would end up two hundred miles north at Tuolumne Meadows, and then return by the same route. We would be back at Mt. Whitney by mid August.

The first day we hiked up six thousand feet, into a high mountain meadow, and made camp. I was awakened the next morning, by the clank and screech of the stove’s firebox as the Woodchopper started the fire. I joined him to prepare breakfast. The cook and the camp were packed up to move north, just as the first rosy light of day appeared behind Mt. Whitney.

Joe found perfect camps, knowing by heart certain desirable features: grass for the stock, a roaring stream surrounded by a panorama of mountains, and a little tree cover. He looked for camps at the inlet of lakes that held the reflection of the nearby peaks. I would usually have a monolithic granite slab in commissary for work space, and large granite boulders for seating.

Cooking was very simple. Mules carried an iron stove with an oven. Most important, we positioned the stove away from pine needles and dry wood. Joe had packed a quarter of beef on a mule after wrapping it in gauze and tarps. In camp, he hung the carcass high in a tree in the middle of camp. Then he lowered it into the commissary, where I cut off what we needed for dinner, then re-wrapped the meat. Then Joe hauled it back up into the tree.
Unfortunately, the oven browned the pies upper crust and left the lower crust raw.

Our leader had brought imported European cheeses, sausage, and salami for lunches, along with hard tack and Rye Crisp, dried fruit, chocolate and tea. I placed these delicacies out on the kayaks every morning after breakfast for the guests to collect for lunch on the trail. They gathered the lunch in bandanas and carried it tied to their belts, next to their tin cups.

I laid out fruits, dried and canned, and prepared hot cereal, pancakes, eggs, bacon, toast, coffee and cocoa most mornings for breakfast, without variation.

On layover days, or when waiting for a new group of guests to arrive, I baked pies. The Woodchopper built a hot fire, and then stood back and watched me cook. There were neither butter nor lard, my preferred pie crust ingredients. Only Crisco traveled well by mule. So, I mixed flour, salt, and Crisco into soft crumbling piles, added icy stream water to form mounds, then careful not to overwork it, quickly rolled the dough out and lifted it into pie tins. A mixture of slightly cooked apples seasoned with sugar, cinnamon, with a spot of nutmeg, and margarine, was poured into the crusts. Canned sweetened boysenberries, their juices slightly thickened with a pinch of cornstarch and a bit of flour, were placed in other pie tins. All pies were covered with a top crust, fluted and vented. Unfortunately, the oven often browned the pie’s upper crust and left the lower crust raw. But, a half hour on top of the stove browned the lower crust, perfectly.

The pies were then placed next to the travelers on the nearby granite slab. There at the very top of the Sierra, at that delicious moment in time, they could lean back, feel the heat from the granite on their bodies, the chill in the mountain air on their faces, as the sky faded in Nevada and the sun sank in California.

A 1942 cookbook urging the use of Spry shortening.
Before setting out hitchhiking across the great western expanse in 1934, Dad made his hardtack for us to carry in our pack sacks. I was five years old, my brother seven, and my was Dad crippled, but down the road we went in the depths of the Depression looking for a place to live. Dad had sewed together canvas pack sacks for the three of us that still remind me of the story of the three bears: a big one for himself, a medium size for my brother, and a small one for me to carry my things in. Dad was the kind to try to plan for every eventuality so his idea for us to carry hardtack was that even if we were stranded and had no money, we would still have hardtack to eat.*

*Making preparations and going forth, uncertain of the future was something dad had in common with the British in their colonizing days. When they set sail for distant shores they took carbohydrates with high nutrition that wouldn’t spoil. They ate a lot of beans. They found that by adding limes to their diet, the high vitamin C content prevented scurvy. Hence “Limey”—slang for British. In this book and elsewhere, the food is written as “hardtack,” “hard tack,” “hardtack,” “Hardtack,” and “Hard Tack.” Take your pick of spellings, but the chewing is the same.

Dad made his hardtack by experimenting with proportions of whole wheat flour, white flour, water, salt and baking power. The dough was made into biscuits and laid on a greased skillet. Baking with a hot fire caused the biscuits to rise, and then Dad would let them dry for hours with a “slow” fire. This made a hard, lightweight, nutritious, but almost indestructible, biscuit that we would eat in an emergency. (I think if Dad had been the wagon master for the Donner Party they would have had hardtack to eat the winter of 1946-47. Instead, out of the 81 member party only 5 men, 8 women and 32 children survived.)

We made it to Oregon and tried living in the upper Willamette Valley, but Dad said it rained too much there. So in 1936 we put our things in our pack sacks and headed for the Ozarks in Arkansas. We started out by just getting in the road near Lowell and walking east on the newly built gravel road through the Cascades. This was risky because the Cascades were unpopulated with few cars on the road in those days.

Normally we could find a place to stay for 50 or 75 cents or by showing up on somebody’s doorstep at night. This time though, we made it through the Cascade...
Mountains but got into Redmond, Oregon after dark—too late to buy our usual bread, butter, bologna, and milk from a grocery store. And with no place to stay.

We wound up in a cold, breezy jail—cold because there were just bars on the windows. The police said they could help us with some blankets and we could stay the night, but that they had to lock us up—“that was the law.” It was so cold, the next morning Dad waited until he found water in a ditch along the road to shave. The jail was a large concrete room with a toilet, a sink, and a drain in the center of the floor so the whole room could all be hosed down for cleaning. We spent a miserably cold night, but when they unlocked the door in the morning we walked east into a warm October sunshine. We left Redmond, Oregon behind us but took away the memory of a night in a jailhouse and thankful to have had Dad’s special hardtack to eat.

Another kitchen classic: Chicken and rice casserole from canned cream of mushroom soup and dry onion soup mix.
Pie Baking

Bonnie Nelson

Sissy, but don’t forget the chickens need feed and water, gather the eggs, and I’m countin’ on you to fix us a nice supper

I was 13 years old the summer Dad told Mother that one of his horse buyer friends was leaving for Chicago in a few days, and he had arranged for her to ride along. She could take the train from there to Holland, Michigan, where she could visit her parents, my Grandma and Grandpa Lugers.

“But Ray, how can you manage? You said George would be gone for two weeks.”

“Now, Mother don’t you go to worryin’. We have the other house moved in and connected so we have a nice place to live. You’ve got it all arranged and fixed up nice. Alden does all the chores and Bonnie can take care of the chickens, the garden, and fix the meals.”

I spoke up, “Gee whiz, Dad, you guys had better pitch in and help.”

“Of course we will, Honey. I was just seein’ if I could get a rise out of you.”

My brother and I were growing up and we now called our parents “Mother and Dad” instead of “Mama and Daddy.” Somewhere in the ensuing years, Dad also started to address his wife, Connie, as “Mother.” It seemed to be comfortable for him, though at times I felt he shouldn’t take that liberty.

I helped Mother pack her suitcase, and we saw her off early in the morning when Mr. Perkins drove up in his fancy Buick.

I turned the radio on to Mother’s favorite, “Don McNeil’s Breakfast Club,” washed the cream separator, and swept the kitchen floor. Then I saddled up my horse, Dixie. Dad wouldn’t let me ride her sister, Babe, anymore, as she had thrown me too many times. Dad said it wasn’t my fault, for I was a good rider, but Babe would be going at a full gallop on our way home from school when a tumbleweed might blow in her path and she would shy, stopping with such force that I would fly through the air. A couple of times, my landing had resulted in broken ribs and tailbone.

Dad was in the barn harnessing up a team of horses to go out and do some plowing. I told him I was going to ride Dixie up to get the mail—the mail box was one mile away and the mail was delivered on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday by the rural mailman.

Dad said, “Fine, Sissy, but don’t forget the chickens need feed and water, gather the eggs, and I’m countin’ on you to fix us a nice supper.”

I grabbed the denim lunch and book bag Mother had
made me from old worn out overalls, slung it over my shoulder, and took off on Dixie in a whirl of dust. She was a sweet horse—Dad had been firm about never racing the horses or mistreating them.

When I got home, I put the mail at Dad’s place at the kitchen table and sat down in Mother’s reed rocking chair to look at the new issue of the Ladies’ Home Journal. Dad had subscribed to it for Mother for Christmas, and it was a delight to follow the latest fashions, to read recipes to try, and to fantasize while reading the romantic fiction stories.

I turned to the column written by Ann Batchelder, the magazine’s food editor. She was extolling the wonders of rhubarb and gave her rendition of a distinctive recipe for rhubarb pie. I knew at once that would be my achievement to please my father and that he would realize I was up to the challenge of cooking for him.

Since we were five miles from town, and Dad probably wouldn’t let me drive the 1937 Ford to the store—I had driven before, but not by myself—I needed to figure out if the ingredients for the pie were on hand in the cellar and kitchen cabinet. I knew there was plenty of flour in the glass-doored space with the attached sifter on the cabinet. I stepped outside and opened the big slanted trap door to the cellar. Dad had made shelves for Mother’s canned goods, and there was a row of mason jars filled with snow white lard rendered from last fall’s hog butchering. There were some baskets of scarce fresh fruits and vegetables to be used sparingly. I spied the rhubarb that Nettie Hawkins (one of Mother’s friends in town) had brought to her and one lone lemon and orange, which were called for in the recipe.

I followed the instructions for the pie filling with extreme care, washing the rhubarb and dicing it, measuring by the cupful into a mixing bowl, making a custard in another bowl of sugar, flour, eggs, orange and lemon grated rind and juice. Then came the challenge of the pie crust. I knew my mother thought she didn’t make good crust and blamed lack of an ice box and an undependable kerosene or coal stove for her failure. I remembered Grandma telling me to measure the two cups of flour with a pinch of salt and to put one-half of the lard (about 1/3 of a cup) into the flour, working it with one’s fingers to a fine cornmeal texture. Then I added the rest of the lard, leaving this additional about the size of peas. Then came about ¼ cup of very cold water, and I mixed gently. I pressed it into a round ball, broke it in two and carefully rolled it out on a floured bread board. I carefully folded it, placed the crust in a pie tin, and poured in the filling.

Glancing back at the magazine, I saw that it now called for a lattice crust topping. I took a minute to ponder this new challenge while I lit the burners beneath the oven. I knew I had to try, so rolled out the other part of the crust and proceeded to cut strips of pastry. I painstakingly wove the strips on top of the pie, sprinkled a bit of sugar on it, and put it into the oven. I tried to time it with the higher flame for fifteen minutes and then adjusted it lower to bake for another thirty minutes. It actually looked beautiful when I took it from the oven and placed it on a rack to cool. Next it
was to cover it with wax paper and oh so carefully take it down the cellar steps to cool until supper time.

“Sister, I do believe this may be the finest pie I’ve ever tasted.”

Dad leaned back in his chair after eating the supper I had prepared of fried potatoes and scalloped corn with the rhubarb pie for dessert.

“I mean it, Sweetheart. You’ve outdone yourself and I’m proud. When Mother comes home next week, you must surprise her by baking another pie.”

Dad turned toward my brother, Alden. “What do you think, Son?”

Alden patted his stomach, “Yeah, Sis, you did a swell job.”

Mother came home from Michigan, and I did surprise her by making another pie, and she was astonished and pleased.

A few weeks later, Dad was reading the *Highmore Herald*, a weekly newspaper. He sat upright, reading aloud an article about the concern of farmers about the development of margarine, a sort of synthetic vegetable shortening developed by wartime ingenuity. The Midwest hog farmers decided to wage a campaign to combat the replacement of lard—they would kick off this campaign with local pie baking contests.

Dad spoke excitedly, “Bonnie, I want you to enter this contest. By golly, I bet you could win.”

“Oh, Daddy, do you really think so? A lot of ladies will be entering who have been baking wonderful pies for years.”

Mother decided I should bake a cherry pie, since she had bought canned cherries on sale at the Home Grocery, where we were loyal to our friends there and Dad was concerned about chain stores invading the town.

After a couple of flops as I had thickened the cherry juice with cornstarch to a thick glob, I turned out a masterpiece. My artistic mother had sketched out a design for the top crust. I used the small round top of a salt shaker to cut out cherries and a sharp knife to make the stem and leaves.

Mother found a box in which to carefully place the pie, and Dad put it on the floor by the front passenger seat for the trip to town. I didn’t want to be seen, as it was to be a secret judging.

Two days later, the *Highmore Herald* came out with sub-head lines, “Bonnie Westcott wins pie baking contest.” I won $3 and my picture was in the state *Farm Journal*. Dad bought me a beautiful pale blue ceramic pie plate and server. I was embarrassed when we went to church, as I felt the ladies who regularly baked pies for the suppers and bake sales were staring at me. Dad told me to pay them no mind as they were just jealous.

*See photo, next page.*
Bonnie Wescott with pie.
IV. Family Traditions

Thanksgiving dinner served at Good Housekeeping Institute! In testing out recipes and in planning menus to be published in Good Housekeeping or in our bulletins or our cook book, much cooking and meal making go on in our busy kitchens. Every recipe is carefully tried out, and when the result is deliciously satisfactory to our tasting staff, it is written out in a clear and concise form and added to our list of recipes Tested, Tasted, and Approved. Many of the meals we plan are prepared and served to guests and to our own staff. Only standard measuring cups and spoons tested and approved by Good Housekeeping Institute are used; all measurements are level; the cooking temperature and time are carefully recorded. You can trust every recipe.

Good Housekeeping Cookbook, *circa 1896.*
Recipe for Caramel Sand Puts:

1 cup brown sugar (light brown)
1/2 cup Crisco
1 egg
1 tsp. vanilla
1 1/2 cups sifted flour
2 tsp. baking powder

Cream Crisco until sugar
Stir in egg + vanilla
Add flour sifted in B.P + salt
(1 tsp) Measure 1/2 cup flour and spread
to thin sheet. Cut - may be made into shapes
Sprinkle with Cinnamon
(two gran sugars to 1/4 Cinnamon)
Or little red sanding for Christmas.

Bake 10 min. 350 F

Written by
Elizabeth Hughes 1949
French (1879-1971)
a recipe made by
her Grandmother
While I was attending the University of Santo Tomas, in Manila, Philippines, and was boarding with my aunt Generosa “Rosa,” (my dad’s cousin), and her family: uncle Benigno “Cho Momoy”, my cousins Viol and her youngest sister Estrella; my cousin Viol and I volunteered to cook the weekend’s dinner. We looked in the refrigerator for anything we could put together that would come out palatable. There were some green beans and a kilo (weight & measure used in the Philippines instead of pounds) of beef. We thought for a while: “What could we possibly concoct?” I suggested she slice the beans julienne style, while I slice the beef thinly. After these were done, we looked around for a few cloves of garlic and minced it, and onions, the shallot kind, which we diced. I proceeded to sauté the beef slices with the garlic and onions, then threw in the beans, added a dash of salt and pepper to taste and a couple of tablespoons of soy sauce. I also thought we should add some broth and a little bit of cornstarch to thicken the sauce. When it was done, we tasted it, and it was pretty yummy to our taste buds. We congratulated each other for a job well done.

We set up the table and called out that dinner was ready. After we said our grace and dug in to our plates, my uncle said, “Hum, this tastes good! Where did you get the recipe?” We answered in unison, “It was just our invention; we did not have a recipe.” My aunt Generosa, who was a Home Economics teacher in the past, also said, “It is indeed very good! What will you call it then?” Viol and I looked at each other and said, “How about calling it LOUVIOL (my name and my cousins’ name combined)?” From then on, a new family recipe was born.

Today, almost fifty years later, we still refer to the LOUVIOL for want of another menu to add to our family potlucks, or when our brains are drained from thinking of what meal to prepare for the family.

“*It was just our invention; we did not have a recipe.*”

Louviol
Lourdes Agcaoili-Harshbarger

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I loved to spend the night at Granny Whiddon’s. She was my great grandmother on my mother’s side. Mornings were spent playing house. If Papa wasn’t home, we got to play under the fig trees in the forbidden chicken yard (he thought we scared the chickens) or we played in the front yard under the mulberry trees on the sand that was swept first thing every morning with a straw broom. Dinner, served in the middle of the day in the south, would be fried chicken (from those scared chickens), potato salad, and Granny’s special sweet potato pie – it had the flakiest crust and the filling so thin she would stack them by the dozens in her pie safe in the corner of her kitchen. But the best part of spending the night came after lunch. We always sat on the front porch in the rocking chairs in the heat of the day. If you were the lucky one you got to share the big rocker with Granny.

Granny always wore an apron with two pockets; out of one of those pockets would come her tatting (a lace making tool), and out of the other her snuff—that was the pocket we all loved. She would put her pinch of snuff just under her bottom lip (so smooth you couldn’t even tell it was there) and then the lessons would begin. My cousins, Diane and Larry, who lived with Granny, would each get a snuff can filled with cocoa and sugar. We learned to hold the cocoa and sugar snuff just right (you have to get just the right amount under your bottom lip) and to spit. Spitting is an art you have to practice, and practice we did. We drew a circle for accuracy and lines for distance, in the sand. The secret for proper spitting is to spit between two fingers with no dribbling, most importantly not to dribble or spit on the porch—that would be the end of the games. Granny would be the judge of who spat the farthest and the best, and we never tired of the game. Of course, our Moms would always say “no dipping snuff,” but Granny didn’t care. She had only one rule: You had to sweep the yard when you were done. Now, when I look back I think what a game to play with kids. But would I change it? Never.

None of us ever used our skills of dipping and spitting as adults, and maybe that was the lesson.
Grandma’s Donuts

Marilyn Ebner

Her hands flew as she pinched and smoothed the dough into round balls.

Dad used to say, “Your mother is the eighth wonder of the world!”; and indeed she was, especially in the art of cooking. Actually, donut making was her forté, and some of my favorite childhood memories are of Mom in the kitchen, wrapped in her brightly colored apron and surrounded by flour and spices and bowls. As the donut pan with lard heated on the old wood stove, she busily mixed and added to and felt the consistency of the dough (no measuring cups for her). Her hands flew as she pinched and smoothed the dough into round balls, and soon she was rolling and cutting, and we kids knew our jobs would soon begin. She would add wood to the stove, watch until the lard was bubbling at just the right speed (no therMometer for her), and then pop a test donut into the hot oil. If it sank to the bottom and immediately returned to the top of the pan, we were ready to roll. While she rolled and cut and popped the dough into the pan, we kids used long-handled forks to turn the donuts as they became golden brown. The eldest sibling usually turned, being more adept at working around the hot stove and grease. Another took them out and placed them on a large sheet of brown paper sacking, and the youngest (me) turned the donuts as the excess grease was absorbed by the paper sacking. Mom would sing as she worked, and we soon learned the songs and would try to harmonize as the donuts began to take shape. This is when we learned those old favorites like, “Daisy, Daisy,” “The Band Played On,” “Oh, Suzanna,” and “Down By the Old Mill Stream.” Thus donut making and singing became a family tradition!

Mom was well known for her great donuts. When our school chums would come to visit, they would first ask if Mom would make donuts. At PTA meetings, church socials, pot lucks, Esther’s donuts were always in demand. Uniform in size and shape, golden brown in color (no powered sugar, chocolate topping or jelly filling needed), their melt-in-the-mouth consistency made them a delicacy to remember.

As time passed, I married, moved to Nevada and started a family of my own. But alas, even with electric mixer, measuring cups, and deep-fat fryer I could never get the proportions just right for making donuts. I found I could only turn donuts and sing funny old songs! I quit trying when I overheard my kids’ friends comparing my donuts to hockey pucks.
But then Grandma and Grandpa began to make frequent trips to Nevada to see their grandkids, and soon Grandma’s donut fame was well established at our household. Because the delightful fragrance permeated the house, our kids knew the minute they stepped in the house after school that Grandma had performed her magic in the kitchen. Soon all their neighborhood chums knew as well, and our house was the place to be when Grandma visited! Even our Golden Retriever, Amber, was a Grandma’s donut advocate. She would lie patiently on the kitchen floor watching Grandma’s every move as the donut making progressed and then would faithfully stand guard by the cupboard drawer where the donuts were kept, assuming a point stance each time someone entered the kitchen.

And so, the years have passed and grandma and her famous donuts are now a cherished memory. Unfortunately, neither my sisters nor I have been able to replicate the famous donut tradition. But these days, as my grandchildren ask to sing those funny old songs at bedtime and join me in a rounding rendition of “Down by the Old Mill Stream,” I realize that part of the tradition continues. And, in heaven, I’m quite sure you could now hear the angels say…”Have you tried Grandma’s donuts?”

As for us, well, there’s always Krispy Kremes!

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**Graham Cracker Doughnuts**

1 1/2 cups sifted flour 1 teaspoon nutmeg
4 teaspoons baking powder 2 tablespoons shortening
3/4 teaspoon salt 3/4 cup sugar
1 1/2 cups finely rolled graham cracker crumbs 1 egg, beaten

Mix and sift flour, baking powder, salt and nutmeg; stir in rolled cracker crumbs. Cream shortening; add sugar and egg, beating thoroughly; add flour-crumb mixture alternately with milk. Turn out on floured board and roll 1/4 inch thick; cut with floured doughnut cutter. Fry in hot, deep fat (360°-370°F.) for 2 to 3 minutes, or until lightly browned; drain on unglazed paper and roll in powdered sugar, if desired. Approximate yield: 2 dozen doughnuts.

*Doughnut variation with graham crackers. America’s Cook Book. 1941.*
Angel Food Cake

Lois Smyres

We didn’t have angel food cake often because the recipe called for twelve egg whites.

Angel food cake—my favorite cake. My mother made angel food cakes before cake mixes were on the market and before she owned an electric mixer, although she happily switched to cake mixes and electric mixers when they became available. We didn’t have angel food cake very often because the recipe called for twelve egg whites.

My mother raised chickens. She had a small fenced in yard where the baby chicks grew to be fryers and then became Sunday dinner. She had a large yard where the hens and the rooster roamed. The hen house had boxes filled with straw where the hens would lay their eggs and a row of boards off the floor where the chickens would roost at night. Every evening someone would have to leave the house and go to the hen house and close the door so the coyotes, foxes or skunks couldn’t have chicken dinner. There was an argument about who would make the trip to close the hen house door. The loser was usually the person who had forgotten to take off their shoes.

Eggs weren’t always in plentiful supply even if my mother had many hens. In hot weather the hens stopped laying eggs. Sometimes my mother let the chickens roam the whole farmyard and if any of us wanted corn bread or cake we had to climb around in the barns looking for the hidden nests. Actually the hens weren’t good at hiding their nests because after they laid an egg they strutted around the yard cackling and carrying on.

When an angel food cake was needed, we all hoped the chickens would cooperate and lay a lot of eggs. The eggs had to be stored for three to four days because the whites of fresh eggs do not get stiff when beaten. After separating the whites from the yolk my mother would sit on a stool with the bowl in the crook of her arm and with a whip beat the egg whites until they were stiff. I watched her arm muscles tighten as she whipped the eggs. Finally the egg whites would become stiff enough to satisfy her and she would gently fold the flour into the egg whites.

After pouring the batter into the pan and putting it into the oven, my mother forbade me to run through the house or slam any doors. Woe is to the person who caused an angel food cake to fall.

At last the cake was ready to eat. Sometimes it was frosted and sometimes it was piled high with strawberries and whipping cream.

And, of course, it was someone’s birthday.

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Angel Food Cake

1 cup cake flour
¾ cup plus 2 Tbsp. Sugar
12 egg whites
1 ½ tsp. cream of tartar
¼ tsp. salt
¾ cup sugar
1 ½ tsp. vanilla
½ tsp. almond extract

Heat oven to 375°. Stir together flour and first amount of sugar; set aside.

In large mixer bowl, beat egg whites, cream of tartar and salt until foamy. Add second amount of sugar, 2 tablespoons at a time, beating until meringue holds stiff peaks. Gently fold in flavorings. Sprinkle flour-sugar mixture, ¼ cup at a time over meringue, folding in gently just until flour-sugar mixture disappears. Push batter into ungreased tube pan, 10 x 4 inches. Gently cut through batter.

Bake 30 to 35 minutes or until top springs back when touched. Invert tube pan on funnel; let hang until cake is completely cool.
Early Memories

Blanford Finley

My aunt assigned me the job of chicken dresser.

I was very young when my mother died of cancer. I had two sisters and one brother. This was a sad time for my father, because he had lots of decisions to make concerning his children.

My sister, Bobbie, and I were to live with our Aunt Ida on their farm in Missouri. Since we had spent our summer vacations there, it wasn’t much of a change. It was fun for us with all the animals they had on the farm, and there was too much to explore.

Summer was lots of fun, but winter was a bit different, because Missouri had a great deal of snow. It made it more difficult to feed the cattle and to do all the farm chores that needed to be done every day.

Our aunt and uncle didn’t have children, so it was a challenge for them to entertain two little girls. I was ten, and my sister was four, and we both had a lot of energy.

My Aunt Ida was a wonderful cook, and all her recipes were her own creations. One of my favorite times was when Aunt Ida made taffy and gave the job of pulling the taffy to my sister and me. We would stand facing each other, with me taking one end of the taffy and my sister taking the other end, and then we would pull, stretching the taffy until it was long enough to fold it back to the other person. Then taking the bottom of the taffy and start pulling again. As we pulled and folded the taffy to each other, it appeared as if we were doing a dance. Aunt Ida would have to stop us from pulling and folding because we didn’t want to stop, but the taffy was ready to be laid out on sheets of cotton material. The stairs that went to the second floor were always closed off from the rest of the house to conserve the heat. That left the stairs cool and a perfect place to cool the taffy. A cotton cloth was laid on the stair steps and the taffy placed on it. We eagerly waited for the time Aunt Ida would tell us we could eat the taffy.

Taffy pulling and the heat from the big oil heater made the room cozy and with the snow quietly falling outside, made a wonderful memory for me.

My sister and I didn’t just run and play and then come to the table for a wonderful dinner, because we had to feed all the field hands and thrashers, Ida needed a lot of help preparing the meals.

My aunt assigned me the job of chicken dresser. This job included taking feathers off the chickens after soaking them in very hot water, which made a very disagreeable odor. My aunt showed me how to remove
I strongly refused to have anything to do with the killing of the chickens.

the chicken’s innards and the special way to cut the chicken into edible pieces. I hated this job but Aunt Ida had no one else to help her. I strongly refused to have anything to do with the killing of the chickens. A more pleasant job was churning the sweet milk and cream into butter. A long wooden handle that had paddles at the end of it was put into a large cylinder shaped tub, then with my hand holding the handle, I would pull up and down causing the paddles to turn. When the butter was ready I would take the paddles out and scoop the butter out and form it into balls. The balls were placed on cheesecloth tied at the top. Each one was then put in our cistern and tied to a board that was attached to the top of the cistern, so they would not fall into the water. The cool cistern would hurry the hardening of the butterballs. The butter churning was one of my favorite jobs out of many I had to do. I didn’t feel like I was being punished to do these chores I really thought they were interesting and fun and I felt grown up to be able to do these things to help my aunt. Those special times I will always remember.

How to Make Butter.
Lee’s Priceless Recipes. 1934.
If my Grandmother, Sarah McPherson McCloud, had not become a superb cook, my father would never have found my mother and married her.

Sarah was the daughter of a Scotch farmer, who had settled the rocky and barren soil of Nova Scotia. Poor as they were, the family had cows, whose rich cream was converted to desserts of many varieties. Sarah learned to make pies and cakes, and along with her sisters, she grew plump in the process. She worked in a local dry goods store at an early age, but soon escaped to Duluth, where she could make a better wage. She also worked after hours in a Milliners shop and learned to appreciate fine fabrics and clothing. She learned, in addition, that a penny saved is a penny earned, and she could be seen sorting pennies with the tips of her fingers, pinching them and pushing them into a coin purse which snapped closed and was placed in the depths of a large purse and held tightly with both hands.

One Sunday in the Presbyterian Church she attended, Sarah met an Irish immigrant, a linen merchant, named Philip Armstrong. Very soon they were married.

Philip viewed his occupation, a salesman in his brother’s store, with distain. He preferred to study the bible—and Phrenology, the bumps on the head. Philip liked to make elaborate graphic drawings of the Universe, the abode of the saved, and the abode of the lost. He was not always well, appearing to suffer from Asthma. He and Sarah were married and in due course had a son, my father, whom they named Harold. Sarah continued to work and to save her money, until one day she was able to make payment on a house with several bedrooms, large enough to take in boarders. Philip’s health declined further, and he died when Harold was thirteen, leaving him and his mother alone, but on a determined course.

Sarah took in roomers, who were so pleased with her cooking—and especially her dumplings and Boston Crème Pie—that her reputation spread. She had a list of widowers from her church waiting for a vacant room in her boarding house. Harold remembered washing the dishes, stacked in the kitchen fifteen high, and recalled pushing plump boarders up the steep staircase to their rooms, and tediously making beds and hauling laundry.

Harold soon declined to go to church and began to play sports at the YMCA, where his friends called him

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“Army.” He later said that he welcomed the name and, except for his mother, the name “Harold” was heard no more.

Though short in stature, Army did well in athletics. His coach, the YMCA director, told him he should prepare for the university and track, thoughts that apparently had not occurred to him. “Army” became a person apart from the boarding house and one who might dare think of a life of unexplored possibilities.

Soon after Philip’s death, Sarah and Army moved to Minneapolis to be near some favorite cousins and better economic opportunity.

Using her savings, Sarah bought a large house near the University of Minnesota. She inevitably filled it with faculty members. At the dinner table were three Mining Engineers, an English Professor, and two History Professors. Discussions were constant and arguments exciting, according to Army. Sarah said all that disagreement was unfortunate and threatened thereafter to get boarders from the Presbyterian Church alone.

Army worked in the mines in summers and graduated as a Mining Engineer. After graduation, he worked in gold and silver mines in Colorado, and then he joined the Navy Air Corp during WWI. When the war ended, he left for the copper mines of Peru and stayed two years. Oil prospects in California piqued his interests in the 1920s, and he proceeded to Berkeley for graduate work in oil exploration. As a Petroleum Geologist and Mining Engineer, he was employed in oil prospecting in the lower San Joaquin Valley. At a University of California Alumni meeting in Bakersfield, he met a lively reporter from the Bakersfield Californian and sat down beside her at dinner. They were married six months later, and I was their first child.

Recipe for “cream” pie, with cook’s written reminder to save 1/3 cup sugar for the meringue. America’s Cook Book. 1941.
I
t was spring, and once again we were plowing the
rich, loamy soil, working the multi-toothed harrow,
leveling and breaking the clods into miniscule grains of
soft, warm earth. I walked bare-footed behind my dad,
each step showing my high arches and leaving little
round toe prints in the freshly worked field. The planter,
drawn by old Du...
flour sacks Mama had spread, to reveal six mouth-watering loaves of golden crusty bread, a pan of cinnamon rolls, and dozens of dinner rolls. The covered glass butter dish, filled with freshly churned sweet butter, made us feel as though we had found the Pot of Gold at the end of the rainbow. Mama would cut thick slices of the still warm bread for each of us. A jar of strawberry jam, or sweet spicy apple butter, made an even greater treat. Served with a glass of cold milk, what could be better?

It sustained, comforted, and supported us. No wonder we became addicted to “The Staff of Life.”

Psychologists tell us it is important that families eat at least one meal per day together. That was no problem when I was a child. My family ate three meals per day together, and those meals were totally family affairs. Since my mom and dad both worked outside the home, the whole family pitched in at mealtime. Mom and Dad cooked together while my sister, my brother, and I took care of setting the table and cleanup duties. When we were old enough to drive, we sometimes got to do the grocery shopping. We loved any excuse to take the car so we were glad to do the shopping. Mother and Dad put good meals on the table and we all enjoyed our food and our time together.

We didn’t have the labor savers that we now enjoy. There were no automatic dishwashers till years later, and microwaves were also an item of the future. For a while, we had an icebox instead of an electric refrigerator. The iceman brought a fifty-pound square of ice and placed it in the icebox. In the summer, when we were little, we like to go out to his cart and pick up shards of ice to eat for a little treat.

The cholesterol police would not have approved our breakfast menus. We had bacon and eggs several times a week. Those were delicious breakfasts, and the cooking aroma that wafted through the house assured that we would be out of bed and ready to eat on time. Of course we had toast. My Dad maintained that no meal was complete without some kind of bread, and to this day I agree with him. After all, bread is the “staff of life.”

Lunch was mostly sandwiches and/or soup. There wasn’t time for doing the dishes at noon, so my sister and I took turns attending to that duty after school. That was our first clue that “there is no such thing as a free lunch.”

Our evening meal was called supper, not dinner. We had good meals and plenty to eat, and we never left the table hungry. Meat, potatoes, and vegetables made up the menu and, of course, the obligatory bread.

Then, as now, special occasions were observed with special meals. My very favorite meals were the ones we ate outdoors. When the weather was fair, we loved to have picnics. Going to the city park with a picnic made any day a special day. Fried chicken was a favorite food for picnics, but sometimes in the autumn we roasted hotdogs at Fort Zarah, a park in the nearby countryside.

Every year an essential part of our Fourth of July
Even a condemned prisoner is allowed to select the menu for a last meal.

celebration was helping Dad make a freezer of ice cream. We could hardly wait till it was time to lick the paddles. That was the best ice cream ever. Dad put just a touch of lemon flavoring in it and he wasn’t afraid to use good thick cream. I have never been able to duplicate that heavenly flavor in all the years since.

We seldom went to restaurants for meals. That was an extravagance and money was in short supply. But sometimes in the evening, my dad would tell us to “pile in the car” and we’d go for a ride. That was a pleasant experience for all of us, especially if we stopped at the drive-in for root beers.

Although I have never taken a great interest in gourmet meals and the finer points of cooking, there’s no denying that food touches a certain chord in my memory. I don’t remember certain favorite foods as much as I remember the pleasure of being with my family at mealtime. To me, a meal is a success if the partakers continue to sit at the table to visit after they have finished eating. I like to remember the carefree days of childhood and the warmth of family meals.

Thinking of special meals and special foods brings a good feeling to almost everyone. Good food and good meals are universal pleasure givers. Even a condemned prisoner is allowed to select the menu for his last meal. It can ease the pain of a sad and scary experience. If I were in that situation, I wonder what foods I would select. I wonder if the guards would let me have a picnic. I guess it wouldn’t matter what was on the menu as long as it was served al fresco.
All Paths Lead To The Kitchen

Louise Lang

*Baked beans are just that.*

Do you remember when you first ate pizza? I do. I was fifteen; it was about 1947. My first boyfriend, Gordon, invited me to come home to have supper with him and his family. He worked as a pinsetter at a nearby bowling alley after school and weekends and had little free time for dating. So with his mother’s okay and my mother’s permission, I went. His mother made two huge pizzas for the six of us: her two sons, her daughter, herself, her husband, and me. Both heavenly homemade pizzas vanished quickly. Just talking about them makes my mouth water. I was hooked forever after, but my mother never did make pizza. Sometimes a group of us high school kids pigged out at a deservedly famous pizza restaurant in Dedham after football games.

In 1956 my own family lived in Fullerton, California, and there we bought our first home. We needed a cook stove as the house had none. The fabulous Chambers gas range was the only one that would do. At the time, it was extremely expensive at around $500, but it was worth it—what a cooker! Of thick iron construction, it had a griddle on the left side from front to back. I used it to make pancakes, hamburgers, bacon, eggs, grilled cheese sandwiches, and probably much more. It had what Chambers called a “deep well,” the predecessor of today’s crock pots, but this one was large and deep, and had a knob for controlling the exact temperature within. It was perfect for soups and stews, and keeping things warm. The oven was so heavily insulated that it cooked for a long while after the gas was shut off. The stove weighed as much as a car, but we hauled it across the country on a trailer when we moved from Fullerton to North Conway, New Hampshire. It isn’t surprising that the Pontiac’s automatic transmission died several years later.

A tradition for too many generations, Saturday night in New England means beans and franks and brown bread for supper. It’s similar to the fish-on-Friday thing. (When I was a kid in Boston our family ate seafood on Fridays even though we were not Catholic.) Baked beans are just that, beans baked for hours with dark molasses and thick chunks of bacon in a bean pot in the oven. They are sickeningly sweet.

The brown bread is a dark molasses and raisin concoction baked in a can in the oven, more like a quick bread than a yeast loaf. It’s quite sweet also. During my New Hampshire decade I was in charge
I must have had a reputation among the family for being the worst of cooks.

of the menus for my family. Tradition be hanged, on Saturdays I prepared anything and everything except beans and franks and brown bread. I became convinced I was born on the wrong coast of these United States—in my opinion both the food and the climate are much more agreeable in the West.

Until this past year, whenever the topic of conversation turned to cooking my only comment was “I hate to cook.” I was always too busy. I had never learned to make anything more than the necessary basics to feed the family, and didn’t care to. Cooking was drudgery, and if I could have afforded a full-time cook I’d have hired one.

I recall once when some relatives were visiting made pancakes on the above-mentioned griddle. They were dry, thick, overcooked, and awful. They ate my pancakes, but we all went to a restaurant for the next meal. I must have had a reputation among the family for being the worst of cooks. No one has ever said this to me, but somehow I think it must be so. About a year ago, I suddenly became interested in attempting more exciting grub, and this change has become sort of a new hobby for me, now that I have retired and can devote some thought and energy to food preparation. Some of my concoctions are disasters, but more often they are delicious. I subscribe to Cooks Illustrated

Right: What the orderly cook of 1941 kept in the ‘fridge.
V. Cultures and Holidays

Many manufacturers produced their own “in house” cookery books or pamphlets. Many are now collector’s items. This from Crisco in 1913.
Let me propose the question: “Is bread an important element to every meal we eat?”

My experience leads me to believe that this question is determined by a person’s early family life and the traditions and customs of eating as presented by the culture. We must also be aware that there are many varieties of bread and focus on the fact that the kind preferred is, no doubt, a learned behavior.

My parents were immigrants from Sweden, which, of course, was the total influence of my mother’s cooking and presentation. The bread of tradition served with our dinner was called “knackebrod”, which is a hard, flat, unleavened bread made of rye flour. It is made in rounds that are approximately 12” in diameter and about ¼” thick after being baked. My mother, however, did not bake this at home as it was readily available in the local stores. She preferred to be creative by baking butter horns, pastries, cakes and cookies—needless to say her preference suited my family just fine. Many of her friends tried to encourage her to open a bakery, which she did not, because she had too many other interests to be confined to this one activity. The bread rounds were broken into 3” or 4” pieces and placed in the ever-present basket on our kitchen table. I liked the taste and texture of this bread but rarely ate any of it with dinner. For me it was more appealing as a bedtime snack, with a piece of cheese on it and a cup of hot chocolate.

My basic bread eating included sliced, soft, toasted bread in the morning or soft bread used to create a sandwich for lunch. My Mom always had a variety of breads at home that she had baked or brought from the store, including pumpernickel, wheat, white, rye, Swedish rye, or other favorites. At this point, I must confess that I have never baked a regular loaf of bread in my life. Oh! Yes! I have baked banana, zucchini, pumpkin, corn and even cranberry bread, and very much enjoyed doing it.

Before we leave this topic of the Swedish breads, I must interject with a bold fact. We in the west are so aware of the cowboys and the trail drives of not too many years ago. I would like to point out that these cowboys had for bread on the trail what they called “hardtack”. That and the Swedish knackebrod were one-and-the-same. It was the obvious choice for the long periods of time on the trail; it was a long lasting, good tasting, substantial bread to accompany their stews.
and beans while on the trail driving their cattle to their destination.

Now, let us look at things concerning bread through the eyes of my husband Jose. He is from the Basque country of Spain and came to this country as a sheepherder, contracted by Pete Cenerosa, the Secretary of State of the State of Idaho. He grew up in Spain at the time of the war in the 1930s. His family was comfortable as landowners, but those times were difficult for everyone. His home was relatively near to Guernica, and most of us are aware of its fate. Believe it or not, one of the important luxuries of this period was to be able to feed your family with white loaves of bread with meals. The pure white flour was, of course, the product of much refining and was therefore the most expensive kind that could be bought having gone through the extensive refining processes. The less refined, and by the way, the healthier of the two, resulted in what was referred to as “black bread.” Serving that in your home was a sure sign of being poor. Jose’s mother always had the white bread which she baked once a week at home and shared with many relatives.

Now let us be seated at the Spanish Basque dinner table and observe the importance of the soft, delicious, white bread. At each person’s place a few pieces of bread are arrayed near their plate. Many entrée dishes of the basic meals feature broths and sauces. Because of this, your bread becomes an intricate element of your eating utensils. Your fork and your bread work together as your bread soaks up the juices and assists the food onto your fork. You can, no doubt, picture the difficulty of this union of fork and bread using “hard-tack.”

It is extremely difficult for Jose to eat a meal without bread. Because of my non-interest of bread with dinner, early in our marriage, at times I neglected to place that sacred loaf on the table. The dear man would somehow make it through the entire dinner without his beloved bread and at the end, just say that it all would have been better if he had had a piece of bread. I would feel very bad about it, but also resent, just a little bit, his stubbornness displayed by not telling me or getting it himself.

My husband has made many loaves of bread at home in the oven and also baked bread underground when we were out camping. It always seems to turn out to perfection. He tells me that the difference between the sweet and sourdough bread is strictly relative to the amount of salt used in your dough. The more salt, the more sour it becomes. Gee, I always thought that sourdough was made from some very exotic, fermented, concoction developed only during the full moon.

Before I give up on the bread topic, I must relate a camping experience when Jose provided our hungry group with a loaf of the sheepherder bread made in the cast-iron Dutch oven and baked under the ground. One summer my sister, her husband and five children, Jose, our son and me went to Eastern Oregon for a vacation of camping in our RV trailers. I must interject here that this had been a very dry season, and the fire
They thought that they had seen an enormous burning fire.

danger was extreme. When we go camping, my husband just cannot contain himself and magically becomes “Jose the shepherd.” He loves to relive his first four years in America as a shepherder whenever possible. He delights in providing the food when we are in the out-of-doors. We slaves to the boundless conveniences of our home kitchen facilities do not have problem with this. He is always prepared with his white flour, salt, yeast, large aluminum basin pan, and, of course, the Dutch oven. To get the ball rolling, he begins his mixing of ingredients and sends the rest of the group out to clear a ten-foot area and gather dry twigs and sagebrush. By the way, if you are unfamiliar with this area of Oregon, it is much akin to parts of Nevada with its rolling hills, lots of sagebrush and few trees. We comply and amass a huge pile of dry fuel. After his dough has risen and been punched down a number of times, the time has arrived to prepare the cooking hole. This hole is about 2 or 2 ½ feet in depth and 2 ½ feet in diameter. The area around it has at this point been totally cleared of vegetation and as it is in Nevada, finding a large clean area is not very difficult. The dough, being properly aerated, has been placed in the big black pot and covered. A fire is started in the hole and soon it is blazing away with all of our great fodder offerings. The result from this mass inferno is a wonderful bed of glowing embers just waiting for the introduction of that black pot and contents, tightly fitted with the lid. This is skillfully executed, and our pot becomes one with the bright orange glow and is covered carefully with dirt. This accomplished, all we need to do is “whatever” for the next hour or better still, until it is time to eat.

This time, about 15 minutes after our bread was “in progress,” we noticed a Forestry Service vehicle approaching our camping area. It pulled into a clear spot and the Rangers descended from their truck. The Rangers had come to tell us that from a distance away, they thought that they had seen an enormous burning fire in or about our campground. They asked if we knew anything about this. Our husbands said “no,” and said that they might want to look around to see if they found any evidence of a fire. They checked and found nothing. Then Jose produced his fire permit, explained the bread-making process and suggested that they might wish to move their vehicle as it was parked directly over our “oven.”
It is surprising to me that Granny was such a wonderful cook. She would cook string beans, fresh from her garden, in a green enamel sauce pot on her wood burning kitchen cook stove. Her youngest granddaughter would put them on her plate first and soon ask for more. They were sliced on the diagonal and served in a sauce made of flour browned in shortening, the cooking liquid, and a splash of vinegar. The really surprising aspect of the this remembrance is that Granny was raised in San Francisco, the first born of a German brewer of wealth. Her family of nine had a cook and servant girls to look after them in those years of the 1880s and 1890s. It is my guess that when she married in 1891, of necessity, to a respected but unwealthy German brewer, she learned her way around a kitchen.

After several moves, my grandparents settled in Auburn, California, where Granny’s cooking delighted her growing family. Christmas Day dinner was a feast, and the standout offering was her “Bavarian Cream,” made of unflavored gelatin, whipped cream, crushed pineapple, and lemon juice. For years there was no written recipe, as she instinctively combined the correct amounts.

Granny’s kitchen magic really happened on dark rainy afternoons in her cozy kitchen warmed by the green and cream enamel wood burning cook stove. In its oven she would bake a coffee cake or gingerbread to please her two young granddaughters. She lined the square baking pan, which was very dark from years of use, with a waxed bread wrapper. This was long before store-bought bread was encased in plastic. Then, when the cake was ready, she poured cups nearly full of coffee, leaving room for real cream and lots of sugar. Because it was too hot to drink immediately, we poured some into the saucers. In those days saucers were deep, almost like shallow bowls, and we would blow on the hot coffee to cool it. Soon we were happily slurping our coffee, but always with the admonition to “never do it anywhere else.”
In the 1930’s, I was in my teens and used to visit my parents in Nanjangud in the summer vacation months of April and May, because I was at school at the Mahila Seva Samaja in Bangalore, staying with my grandmother. I also used to visit my parents during the two weeks’ vacation in October called the Dasara vacation and for two weeks in December for the Christmas vacation. It was during these times that I could eat the food cooked by my mother in her kitchen.

The kitchen was about ten feet by eight feet and had a polished cement floor and a roof of red clay tiles called Mangalore tiles. It was the last room at the back of the house, and its entrance was through the larger dining room which was about twelve feet by twelve feet. The dining room also had a polished cement floor.

In the kitchen, there was a small stove made of clay which was about fourteen inches by fourteen inches in area and about eight inches in height, with a circular hole in the center of about six inches in diameter, and this hole extended into a kind of small open door which opened into the floor space in front. Small pieces of firewood could be pushed into the stove through this door. After pushing in three of four small pieces of wood, my mother would put a crumbled piece of old newspaper on top of the wood pieces and pour on a spoonful of kerosene oil and light this bundle of paper. The paper burned bright and glowing, and by the time the glow was gone, the ends of the wood pieces were lit. At once, she had to blow air through her mouth through a foot long iron pipe that was about one inch in diameter onto this small glow at the ends of the wood pieces. After about five to ten minutes the wood pieces were really glowing bright and hot, and conditions were right to put a brass pot of water on the stove, so that the morning coffee could be made.

When the water was boiling she would put about two large spoonfuls of freshly ground coffee powder into the pot, and then remove the pot from the stove and keep it on the side on the floor, covering the pot with a brass plate. The raw beans were bought from the shop once a week and roasted properly in an iron pan, with constant stirring till it gave the aromatic smell. After it was cool, the beans would be stored in an airtight tin. Every day, before she lighted the kitchen fire, my mother would grind enough beans for the day in a grinding machine which was hand operated. So the coffee powder she used every day was freshly ground.

By this time, the milk woman would have delivered
Overflowing of boiled milk was a good omen and was supposed to bring prosperity.

the morning milk which she had got fresh after milking her cow. This milk would look frothy. The brass pot containing this fresh milk would be put on the stove uncovered and heated till it started boiling, when it was removed from the stove. If you did not watch carefully, the milk would overflow very easily, and once in a while this would happen and create a mess in the kitchen, which had to be cleaned up. According to old beliefs in India, overflowing of boiled milk was a good omen and is supposed to bring prosperity. In fact, when a family enters a new house, they usually have an elaborate house warming ceremony, and overflowing of boiled milk is a very important part of it. Milk and its products like curds (yogurt), buttermilk, butter and ghee (clarified butter) are supposed to be the best food according to the belief all over India.

By this time, the coffee decoction would be ready, and my mother would pour the clear liquid from the pot slowly into another brass pot which was covered with a thin white muslin cloth, so that the coffee grounds would be trapped in the muslin cloth. Enough hot milk and sugar would be added to this decoction and stirred, and then the pot of the morning coffee was ready. My father would enter the kitchen around this time, and would demand his cup of coffee, which would be served to him in a small silver cup. As the coffee was very hot, the sliver cup would be hotter and he used his upper cloth to hold it in his hands, and slowly sip the coffee almost drop by drop. My mother had a similar silver cup from which she sipped her coffee, holding the hot cup in the upper part of her sari. Both would not give up this habit of their piping hot morning coffee for anything else in the world.
Life was Spartan for Gary and Lois after they were married and while Gary attended the Colorado School of Mines. They lived in a 28 foot trailer, and in his junior year they were living on savings from his summer job at Coors, money Lois made taking care of a neighbor’s baby, and Gary’s student job working for the Athletics Department. That fall Lois won a turkey at a local grocery store. She was so happy because they could have a real Thanksgiving dinner that year – not the usual hamburger. Each year Lois’s mother, Hester, gave them hamburger from the beef her family butchered because, she said, she didn’t like hamburger. Hamburger was certainly better than beans, which they also ate a lot of. But, turkey – yum.

Lois was cooking the turkey Thanksgiving morning when they received a phone call. They didn’t have a phone, but there was a pay phone in the trailer park and if there was an emergency people could call them on that phone. Getting a phone call also depended on someone who lived near the phone wanting to take the trouble to answer it and after answering it, going and getting the person who was receiving the call. This call was from Gary’s brother, Larry, who was on one of his “run away from responsibility” travels and was in Denver at the train depot. He had conned an engineer into letting him ride the train for free by saying his father was a train engineer for the Santa Fe Railroad, which was true.

Gary drove down to the train yard and picked up his brother. When they returned and were getting out of the car Lois saw, in addition to Larry, the biggest, ugliest dog she had ever seen. The dog’s name was Freckles. This unruly beast tore through the yard like a plow – devastation in its wake. While they ate Thanksgiving dinner, the dog sat drooling outside the screen door.

It was a warm day and after having the oven on for several hours the trailer was hot. After dinner Gary, Lois, and Larry went outside to cool off and when their backs were turned the monster dog somehow got into the trailer and pulled the rest of the turkey off the table and devoured it. Lois was furious – her hopes of having turkey sandwiches and leftovers for several days were being crushed and swallowed by Freckles. To add insult to injury, he destroyed the flowerbed while eating the turkey.

Having exhausted their welcome, Freckles and Larry left the next day and went to his parent’s home.
Freckles did have one redeeming value.

Larry went back to his family in California and left Freckles with his dad.

Freckles did have one redeeming value. After Freckles came to live with him, Larry and Gary’s dad never had problems with things disappearing from his yard.

Larry says Lois will never forgive him for bringing Freckles to Thanksgiving dinner and he is right.
My maternal Grandfather did most of the meat cookery at our house and always prepared the holiday turkeys, with as much tradition and ritual as cookery. The turkey was chosen several weeks ahead from a local rancher. When I was old enough, I was allowed to go along to choose the bird. What a difference between the proud, arrogant gobblers seen in the paddock, to the naked, very pale and very dead bird, arrogant head with feathers still attached, suspended by his feet from a hook in the cool back porch.

The choosing took some time. The two men discussed weather, politics, and growth in the area, all the while walking around and through the birds. At first I was smaller than most of the turkeys, so was promptly set up on the top rail of the fence when we arrived. When I grew tall enough, I could walk through the mass of birds, holding firmly on to my grandfather’s hand.

When the bird was finally chosen, a ribbon was knotted around its neck with our name on it, and the ribbon stayed on until grandfather cut it off at home. At home the bird was hung in the porch over the wash tub, and the giblets were set on the stove to simmer. Grandfather candled off the pinfeathers and checked the skin.

He would always grumble a bit, but was always pleased. The rancher had raised turkeys most of his life, as his father had before him, and always did a good job of butchering. When the final preparation was to Grandfather’s liking, the bird was covered to keep the flies off, as if a fly would dare come into my Grandmother’s porch.

The night before the holiday meal the stuffing was prepared. Whoever was at home worked busily in the kitchen chopping apples, celery and onions. Bread would have been purchased several days before and set in the cooler, a screened cupboard in the kitchen, to dry. When everything was chopped and ready, Grandfather got to work, first assembling the dressing. When it had been tasted by everyone and pronounced “just right,” he would bring the bird into the kitchen. The head was cut off and the neck fat removed to make room for dressing. Grandfather then, very carefully, cut out the oil sac just above the tail. Then, with helpful hands holding the bird upright, he stuffed the neck cavity, laced the skin together with a huge needle, and we turned the bird over to stuff the body. Wings and legs were secured, and the bird again hung in the porch. The lower legs came off.
When the turkeys eventually arrived at the holiday table they always looked like the bird on the Norman Rockwell cover.

just before the bird was placed in the baking pan. Covered with an old piece of soft, threadbare sheeting, the turkey was tucked into the oven early in the morning, and Grandfather retreated to the yard or to his rocking chair to listen to football, occasionally going into the kitchen to make a big fuss about “basting the bird,” his self appointed chore.

Turkeys were always placed in the blue baking pan breast down. Midway through the morning, Grandfather took the pan out of the oven, removed the cloth cover from the partially cooked turkey, and turned the turkey over, adding the odor of sage, rosemary, apple, and onion to the other delicious odors filling the house. Odors of Thanksgiving and Christmas, of sage dressing, turkey, and cranberry are odors well remembered.

When the turkeys eventually arrived at the holiday table they always looked like the bird on the Norman Rockwell cover, golden brown, steaming and delicious. Grandfather carved the bird and handed the plates to my Grandmother, who filled them with mashed potatoes and Hubbard squash, peas, carrots, and sometimes rutabagas or turnips. The table was covered with bowls of cranberry sauce, always with whole cranberries (I never saw seedless cranberry sauce until I spent my first holiday dinner with my husband’s family), and an assortment of pickles, olives, celery, and carrot sticks, and other relishes and vegetables. Needless to say, we all ate until we were stuffed. In the evening the vegetables were heated and served, the turkey was served cold, and we all came back for more.

When I had my own household, I followed the traditional routine, right up to turning the turkey. The only difference was that the turkey came from the market, prepared and ready to stuff. Boughten turkeys didn’t even need candeling. As Grandfather would have said, they were “cleaner than a pig’s whistle.” Grandfather was raised on a farm in Ohio. Each year the family raised pigs for hams and bacon. At butchering time everything was used, even the bladder, which was tied, inflated, and given to the children to use as a ball. Everything was used, even the squeal, the larynx, which was also given to the children who would blow through it creating a weird whistling sound. When the butchering was finished, everything was...“as clean as a pig’s whistle.”

One year, when our children were young, we won a 29 pound turkey. It was enormous. By the time I had stuffed it and was attempting to wrestle it into the same blue baking pan, I just couldn’t see turning over the large, hot bird. I roasted it breast up, doubling the cloth cover and basting the bird more frequently, and it turned out very well, although I quietly apologized to my Grandfather as we said grace. From that day on the holiday birds went into the oven, breast up.

The first time we spent Christmas at our mountain cabin, a much smaller turkey was dutifully prepared and placed with appropriate ceremony into the oven of our old wood fueled Wedgewood stove. The odor
of holiday cookery filled the cabin, and mouths were watering as I placed the bird on the table. My husband did the honors of carving. As he cut through the breast it was done to perfection, but, at the first cut through the thigh we realized that something was very wrong. Immediately, we realized why my Grandfather turned turkeys. He had learned to cook on a wood stove, and had continued the tradition of turning turkeys over midway through the baking time for as long as he prepared holiday meals. Turning the bird had nothing to do with dryness of the heat, it was, quite simply, because of the heat in the wood heated oven.

Both of my sets of grandparents used wood cook stoves. However, Grandmother and Grandfather French changed to gas cooking when they moved to Palo Alto, California, in 1921. Grandmother Heisler cooked on a wood stove until the day she died, at the age of 97. When Grandfather Heisler bought her a new stove in 1956, replacing the old one that his parents and grandparents had used, she refused to use it. She refused to cook at all until my Grandfather and uncle set up the old wood stove in the “summer kitchen,” a dirt floored extension of the ground floor of their three story shiplap home in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. Eventually Grandmother Heisler did learn to use the new cook stove, but it took a long time before it got used to her ways. Until she died, the two stoves remained back to back on either side of the wall between the two kitchens, sharing a common chimney.

For those not familiar with wood stove cookery, the fire box of a wood stove is at one side. Heat from the burning wood goes up and over the oven to the chimney, regulated by one or two “drafts” that allow air to circulate. Because of this, the upper half of the oven is far hotter than the bottom of the oven, no matter what the thermometer on the door might say. Because I had not thought of this, we had before us a beautiful golden brown turkey, with succulent, well done breast meat, but the stuffing, thighs and back were barely done. We all had slices of white meat, then back into the oven went our mishap, breast side down as it should have been at first. Eventually the turkey was pronounced “done.” The next day I reheated everything and we had a second Thanksgiving dinner, with much laughter about turning turkeys.

Grandfather French would have loved the experience and would have loved telling the tale at Zwerline’s shoe store where he was the chief salesman. He was called “Grandfather” by children in Palo Alto, California, for many, many years. Known for his stories, this one would have been a favorite.
The day before the Lenten season started was called Fat Tuesday. It was the day to “pig out” on foods that we would give up during the Lenten season – forty long days! This is what the Catholics did.

When I was growing up, mama would make paczki (bismarks – filled, raised donuts) once a year on Fat Tuesday. It was our custom.

Starting on Sunday she would make the yeast dough. It would have to rise in a warm place. Our home was small, so mama put the dough under the pierzyna (feather comforter). After several hours she would roll the dough into small balls and let the dough rise again. There were paczki all over the place—on the table, on the sewing machine, anywhere where there was a flat area. They were deep fried, rolled in granulated sugar, and eaten.

Relatives were invited to “pig out” on Tuesday and eat all the paczki that they could handle.

One thing still puzzles me. How did she put that red jelly inside those bismarks? She probably did it when I wasn’t looking. Mama did those kinds of things.
Christmas took a different turn this year. A “sandwich generation” visit took us to the wet and windy Pacific Northwest. Even Christmas dinner was different, with a turkey roasted without stuffing, and canned vegetables. When I said that I should have made fresh cranberry sauce, our son came up with a classic statement, “Mom, the cranberry sauce is so fresh that it still has the wrinkles from the can.”

One day our three granddaughters, my husband and I filled the house with the scent of fresh gingerbread and Scottish shortbread, while our daughter-in-law went shopping. A gingerbread church with stained glass windows, one that could be used with a votive candle, graced the holiday table. Made from my grandmother’s recipe, making the church was a daylong project. Royal icing doesn’t set fast in the moist atmosphere, and to the girls delight, we created a magnificent mess in the kitchen. My daughter-in-law was less enthused. The one batch of shortbread did not last long.

We flew to Portland and stayed in a family-oriented hotel in Vancouver, Washington. Our three granddaughters were with us most of the time, except, of course, for Christmas Eve. Enjoying the warmth of the hotel’s indoor pool with the girls, we met other displaced grandparents who were visiting children and grandchildren, a regular holiday event for them. The day after Christmas we drove to the Olympic Peninsula for a visit with my aunt. Tides were extraordinarily high in Puget Sound. At our shoreside hotel in Port Townsend, we woke to the sound of waves crashing against the windows. The drive along the Hood Canal was exciting. Water blew across the highway, mud slides and fallen trees blocked the road, and crews were hard at work sawing and removing tree trunks and replacing downed electric and phone lines.

Rain persisted on the trip back to our hotel in Vancouver, where we stayed for three more days to celebrate my husband’s and our oldest son’s birthdays. We left the Portland Airport in the rain, flying into Reno on a very bumpy approach. Wind had cleared the storm and formed stratus clouds into flat plates over Washoe Valley. We welcomed the feeling of the cold, clear and dry air.

We had a second Christmas dinner, celebrating Twelfth Night with family and friends at home. The turkey was stuffed with the bread and apple dressing...
my grandfather had taught me to make, one that never varies year to year, and the cranberry sauce was made from fresh cranberries, lumpy and smooth, with no wrinkles from a can.

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**Grandmother's Gingerbread Cookies**

For cookies, gingerbread men and gingerbread houses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>½ cup light brown sugar</td>
<td>½ cup Crisco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ cup dark molasses</td>
<td>¼ tspn. Salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 egg</td>
<td>1 tspn. baking powder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ tspn. baking soda</td>
<td>2-½ cup sifted flour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 tspn. ginger</td>
<td>1 tspn. cloves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ½ tspn. cinnamon</td>
<td>½ tspn. nutmeg</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Cream sugar into shortening, until very smooth. Add molasses and salt. Add egg, and mix thoroughly. Add spices, baking soda, baking powder and 1 cup flour, sifted together. Add remaining sifted flour, one cup at a time. Again this recipe will take more or less flour depending on the humidity of the day. Mix until smooth. Dough should not stick to your fingers when you pinch it. If the room is very warm, chill the dough for an hour or so.

Roll to desired thickness and cut shapes. Bake a 350° 10-12 minutes.

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**Royal Icing or Cement Icing**

Used to decorate and hold gingerbread houses together.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 egg whites</td>
<td>1 cup sifted confectioners sugar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 tspn. cream of tartar</td>
<td>food coloring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use an electric mixer to save time. Separate eggs and beat whites until thick. Add cream of tartar and beat until stiff. Gradually beat in 1 cup sugar. Beat for 10 minutes. Beat in second cup of sugar, and beat 10 minutes more. Divide frosting and add colors. Press plastic wrap directly on top of frosting in bowls to prevent drying. Use with pastry bag to decorate and to add “cement” to hold pieces together. It is wise to bake and decorate shapes and let the frosting dry before building structures. A stained glass church, 2 ends, 2 sides, 4 roof pieces, is really a two day project.

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**Stained Glass Cookies**

Separate colors from several tubes of Life Savers, break into pieces. … You must be quick with these cookies, with everything ready before you start. … Place cookies on foil on baking sheet. Bake for 8 minutes. Remove from oven and quickly cut “windows” from cookies. Place candy into spaces, immediately return to oven and bake until candy melts… about 2 minutes. The candy should be smooth but should not bubble.
In 1935 we lived in the house next to the vacant lot on the corner of 107th street and Hoover in Los Angeles. It was Christmas Eve and the house was full of family and friends. Aunt Bertie and Cousin Bill were currently living with us in the two bedroom pink stucco. My parents were having a Christmas Eve party. My mother and aunts Willie, Opal, and Lily were in the large white kitchen fixing various components of the Christmas Dinner for tomorrow while friends Ruby, Corrie, and Alice kept them company. My Dad and various uncles and friends were enjoying the libations my Aunt Bertie was serving to them and to the ladies in the kitchen. We kids, Bill, Jimmy, Rae Lou, June, and I were playing Fish, and my baby brother was asleep in his crib in the back bedroom. There was music on the radio and occasionally one of the men would grab a lady or one of us kids for a dance around the living room.

With all the fun going on no one thought about the kids having to go to bed and we were enjoying being largely ignored and occasionally being included. About midnight, someone thought about it being Christmas in a few minutes so there was a toast with a last drink and the rest of the liquor was ceremoniously poured down the sink because as Daddy said in his toast, “We don’t drink here on Christmas Day.” I’m quite sure they were sorry they didn’t save a bit of the hair of the dog for the next morning.

The late night didn’t make much difference to Bill and me and we were up early to head for the living room and Christmas tree. I was stunned to find a three-foot Shirley Temple doll in front of the tree resplendent in the costume she wore in The Little Rebel. By her side was a steamship trunk open displaying replicas of the dresses and coat I had in my closet. It included the panties to match the dresses in the drawers on the side just as my dresser drawers held panties to match all my dresses. I thought it was an elegant gift but after taking all the clothes out, examining them and carefully putting them back in the trunk, I placed Shirley and the trunk out of the way. What I really wanted to get my hands on was the pair of boxing gloves that Bill had found in one if his packages. Bill and I were soon in the yard out of sight of the busy adults for my first boxing lesson. And that is another story.

Some months earlier Bill had appeared home after school one day with a sad looking puppy and swore it

Angel Mashed Potatoes
Sherl Landers-Thorman

They were sorry they didn’t save some hair of the dog for the morning.
had followed him home. After much discussion Mama said we could keep him—with some rules. He could not come in the house; we had to feed him, bathe him regularly and take care of him. We had many discussions about what to name him and when we couldn’t agree Mama said, “We’ll call him Boy.” When we went to bed at night we took the screen out of the window, Bill held my legs, and I leaned out the window and picked Boy up and brought him into the bedroom to sleep with us. In the morning we put him back out the window and were careful to make the bed so Mama wouldn’t see the various and sundry pieces of grass and mud that decorated the sheets. Bill had the presence of mind to be sure we stripped the bed early on wash day and put the sheets in the washer before she could get to the back porch. We had some moments of glory for being so helpful before she discovered why.

Boy grew into a rather non-descript small short-haired terrier of some sort and was our constant companion while outside. Being trained by Bill and me, he didn’t have what one might call company manners. Nonetheless it was Christmas and Aunt Bettie had brought Boy a present.

Aunt Willie had arrived shortly after we got up and while we entertained ourselves after the gift opening, she and Mama finished up Christmas Dinner. A number of tables were arranged in a T formation across the dining room and extending into the living room almost to the front door. The turkey was resplendent in the center of the table where Uncle Slim would reign to carve and serve. Various side dishes—green beans, peas, red molded Jell-O salad, sweet potatoes, hot fresh rolls, creamed onions cranberry sauce and the large bowl of mashed potatoes mounded into a sculpted mountain—were all in place. The adults were filing in to sit down when Aunt Bertie decided to give Boy his Christmas present.

She had gotten him a red leather halter and leash. She had the halter on him even though he was squirming wildly; then she lost her grip and he took off under the table and ... By some miracle, none of the decorations broke, even though the food and table were littered with pine needles and tinsel.

Aunt Willie picked up the Angel, stuck her squarely on top of the mountain of mashed potatoes, admonished everyone to remove the pine needles and/or tinsel from their food, and said in deep, authoritative voice, “Sit down and eat.”

And we did.
VII. A Final Story

Rival Manufacturing Company, no date.
‘Brown Candy’
Is Traditional Yule Recipe

AUNT BILL’S BROWN CANDY
3 pts. white sugar
1 pt. whole milk (or cream)
1/4 lb. butter
1 1/4 l. soda
1 lb. nut meats, chopped fine

Pour 1 pt. sugar into heavy aluminum or iron skillet and place over low heat. Begin stirring with wooden spoon, and keep sugar moving as it will not scorch at all. It will take over half hour to completely melt this sugar, and at no time let it smoke or cook so fast that it turns dark. It should be about the color of light brown sugar syrup.

As soon as you have the sugar started to heat in the skillet, pour the remaining 2 pts. of sugar together with the pint of milk into a deep heavy kettle and set it over low heat to cook along slowly while you are melting the sugar in the skillet.

As soon as the sugar is melted, begin pouring it into the kettle of boiling milk and sugar, keeping it on very slow heat and stirring constantly. Now the real secret of mixing these ingredients is to pour a stream no larger than a knitting needle and to stir across the bottom of the kettle all of the time.

Continue cooking and stirring until the mixture forms a firm ball when dropped into cold water. After this ball is made, turn out the heat and immediately add the soda, stirring vigorously as it foams up. Soon as the soda is mixed, then add the butter, allowing it to melt as you stir.

Now, set off the stove, but not outdoors or in a cold place — for about 20 minutes, then add the vanilla and begin heating. Use a wooden spoon and heat until the mixture is thick and heavy, having a dull appearance instead of a glossy sheen. Add the broken pecan meats and mix. Turn into tin boxes or into square pans where it may be cut into squares when cooled slightly.

Marilyn Short’s Yule Recipe.
When Nora Ephrom wrote her story of the husband who left her for another woman, she included many recipes which seemed to help her cope with her loss and despair. Would that I had that ability to cook, or cope, in order to write a wonderful novel about food’s important place in my life.

Born in 1930 along with the depression of our country, and in Oklahoma, my life is much more mundane than that of the great chefs and novelists; therefore to write about food and its importance in my life, while still a challenge, is not likely to be the great attraction of those seeking a “good read” with a few recipes included.

I do wonder if having the phone number of the takeout Chinese restaurant on my speed dial, and a “Jack in the Box” Styrofoam head on my car antenna might qualify me as a “gourmet” or a “gourmand.” In my small dictionary, gourmet is defined as a “connoisseur in eating and drinking,” and a gourmand as “one who is excessively fond of eating and drinking.” That settles that. I am a gourmand.

My television interests lie in wonderful sitcoms like “Everybody Loves Raymond.” Never have I watched an entire “Martha” program from beginning to end. In Raymond’s case, his wife is not the cook; his mother is quick to point that out and brings meals to her son on a regular basis, continually pointing out Ray’s wife’s inability to cook and clean.

My mother-in-law, early in my marriage, told me I would never have to listen to that kind of “this isn’t like mother makes!” I really appreciated her kindness even more, when I met her mother-in-law, and my husband’s great aunt, who had been a caterer to the Danish Royal Family. They were the ones to whom my mother-in-law had been compared for years!

Peanut butter and mayonnaise or peanut butter and banana sandwiches were my comfort foods as a youth. Everything we ate was fried! And Good! Chicken, steak, pork chops, eggs, bacon, potatoes (however, potatoes are good, no matter how you cook them). Thus my idea of comfort foods was formed in my childhood in Oklahoma; meat and “taters” and occasional grits (the cheese grits are better than the soggy breakfast kind).

The closest I remember to a gourmet meal in childhood was (fried) frog legs. Delicious! (Taste a lot like chicken, or maybe spotted owl—they tell me).

Smelly vegetables never turned me on: Parsnips,
Seafood was acceptable, but nothing that “smelled” like fish.

okra, eggplant all fall into a category of no interest at all. I have learned to like asparagus and shrimp cocktails as an adult but would never have eaten such things in my formative years (which helps explain my formation?).

I was so fortunate to marry a man who liked everything except fish and liver. He would eat casseroles and left over casseroles as though they were French Food at its finest. Seafood was acceptable, but nothing that “smelled” like fish. The closest we came to gourmet friends was the group of Marin County people we saw a few times a year, who loved to go dove hunting, and would have a dove dinner cooked for us by the chef at a restaurant in which one was part owner. Pretty good stuff, if you had several drinks first and lots of wine with dinner.

On a Carmel weekend in the 1980s I found a cookbook called White Trash Cooking by Ernest Matthew Mikler. I bought it with the intention of sending it to an Oklahoma friend for a gift. We were there for a weekend with several other couples, and we started to read the book, laughing and remembering ’till the book was so handled I could not give it as a gift. Some of the comments in the book are better than the recipes... and for those who do not know what “cooter” is, it would never appeal. I shall attempt, in my best Nora Ephrom manner to share one of the recipes: Freda’s Five Can Casserole: 1 small can boneless chicken... 1 can cream of mushroom soup...1 can Chinese noodles...1 can chicken with rice soup...1 can evaporated milk...1 small onion, minced...½ cup diced celery...½ cup sliced almonds: Mix all ingredients; place in casserole. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour.

Well, that went so well, I will share one more: “Kitchen Sink Tomato Sandwich.” In the peak of the tomato season, chill 1 very large or 2 medium tomatoes that have been vine-ripened and have a good acidy bite to their taste. Take 2 slices of bread. Coat them with ¼ inch of good mayonnaise. On one piece of bread, slice the tomato 1 inch thick; salt and pepper that layer. Add another layer of sliced tomato, and again salt and pepper. Place the other piece of bread on top of this, roll up your sleeves, and commence to eat over the kitchen sink while the juice runs down your elbows.

When my husband died in 1995, I saw a friend in the grocery store as I stood in front of the meat counter in tears. She did her best to console me when I said I did not know what I would eat for the rest of my life. I discovered that Lean Cuisine is made just for the old lady who lives alone; however, I’ve also discovered all the white ones taste alike, and all the red ones taste alike.

Moving to Reno in 1999 has brought me into the area of epicurean delights! Within walking distance of my apartment are Burger King, K.F.C., Taco Bell, McDonalds, Port of Subs, Jack in the Box, Carl’s Jr., Del Taco, and Arby’s. And a stop at Starbucks for coffee on the way to or from is a pleasant diversion.

What, you ask, do I do for fresh fruits and veggies? Well, any day now, in the midst of all these fast food places, ground will be broken for a brand new Super WalMart.