FOOD

This chef worked with a Holocaust survivor to re-create the lost recipes of his childhood

Chef Alon Shaya and Steven Fenves worked on the recipe project over Zoom during the pandemic.

— Shaya worked with Fenves to re-create his favorite family recipes like roast turkey, semolina sticks and walnut cake. TODAY Illustration / Alon Shaya / Rush Jagoe / US Holocaust Memorial Museum

March 11, 2021, 3:55 PM MST / Source: TODAY

By Ronnie Koenig

Chef Alon Shaya understands the strong connection between food and childhood memories. As a young boy, he was already cooking meals alongside his mother and grandmother. When the 42-year-old restaurateur and cookbook author toured a Holocaust museum in Israel with a group

of other chefs in 2011, he had the chance to go into the archives and see culinary artifacts that amazed him.

"That was the first time I learned that recipes were written down by these prisoners in concentration camps," he told TODAY Food. "I thought that was so moving, so powerful." Shaya said that what he saw that day had such a profound effect.

Nine years later, while living in his current home city of New Orleans, a friend put him in touch with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C.. There he connected with Steven Fenves, a Holocaust survivor and museum volunteer who had donated many prewar artifacts, including his family's recipe book, which was rescued by the family cook, Maris, when Fenves and his family were forced out of their home in 1944 on the Yugoslavia-Hungary border and into a concentration camp.

— Shaya re-created the tastes of Fenves' happy prewar childhood, using recipes translated by Fenves from Hungarian. Emily Shaya

Shaya knew he wanted to collaborate in some way with Fenves, who is now 89. "I wanted to cook the food and send it Steven. He was very open to it."

"Perhaps more than any other aspect of culture, recollections of foods eaten take us all back to who we were, where we came from, what we have lost.

HASIA R. DINER, PROFESSOR OF AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

And so began the process of Shaya trying to re-create the tastes of Fenves' happy prewar childhood, using recipes translated by Fenves from Hungarian that were not very specific and sometimes only included ingredients with no oven temperatures or measurements. The men have never met in person due to COVID-19, but with help from the museum they coordinated talks over Zoom and even did a Facebook Live where Fenves tasted the food of his childhood for the first time in over 75 years.

"The tastes, the smells, the very look of particular foods, trigger memories," Hasia R. Diner, professor of American Jewish History at New York University told TODAY Food. "Perhaps more than any other aspect of culture, recollections of foods eaten take us all back to who we were, where we came from, what we have lost."

"It's been one of the most powerful and most important things I've done," said the James Beard Award-winning chef. "Ever since I was a child, being able to cook for someone and have that translate into a happy moment, that was the one thing I felt like I could do. This was so much of a culmination of all of that. For me being able to rekindle positive prewar memories and talk to him about the foods that made him and his sister happy was incredible."

— Alon Shaya made a special turkey recipe, which involved grinding the turkey meat and putting it back on the bone. Emily Shaya

Shaya made a special turkey recipe, which involved grinding the turkey meat and putting it back on the bone to bake, potato circles that Fenves said were reserved only for guests, not the kids, to eat and a walnut cake. Shaya knew he was tasked with an important job and wanted to make sure he got things right. He would send Fenves pictures of the food he made and ask for feedback. Fenves gave Shaya notes, for example that the semolina sticks he remembered should look like fish sticks – Shaya made sure to shape them correctly. Eventually, he sent Fenves food, packed in dry ice, for him to taste test.

— Fenves told Shaya the semolina sticks he remembered should look like fish sticks. Emily Shaya

"I was nervous, I didn't want to change what the recipe was or make it in a way he wouldn't recognize it," Shaya said. "I'd ask questions, take pictures, he'd say, 'No it looked more like this.' I'd remake it, take more pictures, send it to him, finally he would say, 'Yes, that it.'"

Holocaust survivors reconnect after miraculous twist of fate

After the recipe book's long journey to America, Shaya said he is glad that it won't just sit in a museum in a language that future generations of Fenves' family do not read. "They are delicious recipes, I hate to think that after all that and having so much love for this artifact that it won't be used," he said. He said he plans to serve some of the recipes at his restaurants, Saba in New Orleans and Safta in Denver, for Passover this year.

Shaya said that people have told him how moved they were by seeing their project come to life. "I've been getting notes from people describing their own family history and the Holocaust and how food played a role," he said. "To Steven's point, which I never considered, he's spent his whole life talking about what happened during the war. He wants to talk about what happened before the war. They were a happy family with a lot of love and success and dreams. And that gets drowned out by the story of what happened in the camps or the ghettos."

Professor Diner said that projects like the one that Shaya and Fenves embarked on are so significant, especially for women and men who lost their food cultures through trauma. "How important for them to then, in later years, be able to reflect back on life and food before displacement and dislocation and share those recollections of tastes taken away from them," she said.

Shaya said he thought he achieved that with his cooking.

"I hope that I brought Steven and his family some sense of joy or a memory that is powerful for them."

Ronnie Koenig

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The New York Times https://nyti.ms/29m3IPZ

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M.F.K. Fisher, Writer on the Art of Food and the Taste of Living, Is Dead at 83

By MOLLY O'NEILL JUNE 24, 1992

M. F. K. Fisher, the writer whose artful personal essays about food created a genre, died on Monday at her home on the Bouverie Ranch in Glen Ellen, Calif. She was 83 years old.

She died after a long battle with Parkinson's disease, her daughter Kennedy Wright said.

In a career spanning more than 60 years, Mrs. Fisher wrote hundreds of stories for The New Yorker, as well as 15 books of essays and reminiscences. She produced the enduring English translation of Brillat-Savarin's book "The Physiology of Taste," as well as a novel, a screenplay, a book for children and dozens of travelogues. While other food writers limited their writing to the particulars of individual dishes or expositions of the details of cuisine, Mrs. Fisher used food as a cultural metaphor.

Ignored for Years

Her subject matter, she said in an interview in 1990, "caused serious writers and critics to dismiss me for many, many years. It was woman's stuff, a trifle." But she was not deterred. In 1943 she wrote in her book "The Gastronomical Me": "People ask me: Why do you write about food, and eating and drinking? Why don't you write about the struggle for power and security, and about love, the way others do. They ask it accusingly, as if I were somehow gross, unfaithful to the honor of my craft.

"The easiest answer is to say that, like most humans, I am hungry. But there is more than that. It seems to me that our three basic needs, for food and security and love are so mixed and mingled and entwined that we cannot straightly think of one without the others. So it happens that when I write of hunger, I am really writing about love and the hunger for it, and warmth and the love of it and the hunger for it."

In 1963, W. H. Auden called her "America's greatest writer." In a review of "As They Were," (Alfred A. Knopf, 1982) for The New York Times Book Review, Raymond Sokolov wrote, "In a properly run culture, Mary Frances Kennedy Fisher would be recognized as one of the great writers this country has produced in this century." 'On the Outside Looking In'

Mrs. Fisher's work has been steadily re-collected and re-released and her books sell briskly. "M. F. K.", an hourlong documentary by a California film maker, Barbara Wornum, released in 1992, is a comprehensive view of Mrs. Fisher. Ms. Wornum followed Mrs. Fisher for four years, she said, because the single mother and writer "is the most poetic voice of the working woman in the 20th century."

Mrs. Fisher was the first child of Rex Kennedy, a small-town newspaper owner, and his wife, Edith. Mrs. Fisher wrote of her entrance into the world: "I began in Albion, Mich., and was born there on July 3, 1908, in a heat wave. I leapt forth only a few minutes before midnight, in a supreme effort from my mother, whose husband had assured her that I would be named Independencia if I arrived on the Fourth."

She had two younger sisters, Anne, who died in 1965, and Norah, and a brother, David, who died in 1942. Before she entered kindergarten, Mrs. Fisher's father purchased The Whittier News, a newspaper in Whittier, a predominantly Quaker town near Los Angeles, where the Kennedy clan grew up "on the outside looking in," she said. She was an Episcopalian, and, she said, was never invited to the home of a Quaker.

"Episcopalians were the third world in Whittier," she said in a recent interview. "I wrote a book about my childhood, and I wanted to call it 'Child of an Inner Ghetto.' "

Instead, the book, which was published in 1970, was called "Among Friends." On its cover, a sepia-toned family photograph shows Edith Kennedy, tall, hatted and veiled, looking into the distance, her arm protecting a pouting Anne. Mary Frances stood alone, biting her full, lower lip, staring at the camera. "I was a haughty child," she told an interviewer. Lessons From the Family Cook

She was removed enough to become a keen observer, and her sharp blue eyes remained pinned on significant moments of communion. She described herself, a well-loved little girl, by depicting a meal that her mother once served: "deep rich, floating puddles of hot cocoa for supper, with buttered toast sogging deliciously in them."

Her tastes and her eye for nuance continued to sharpen through adolescence. Apprenticing with the family cook, she became accomplished in the kitchen.

She also became, she said, "an insatiable reader and scribbler." After brief sojourns at Illinois College, Whittier College, Occidental College and the University of California at Los Angeles, she married a doctoral student, Alfred Fisher, in 1929 and moved to Dijon, France, where he would complete his doctorate in literature.

A beauty and an enchantress, Mrs. Fisher was photographed by Man Ray, but by her own lights, she said, "I wasn't so pretty that I didn't have to do something else." She said she "spent hours in my kitchen cooking for people, trying to blast their safe, tidy little lives with a tureen of hot borscht and some garlic-toast and salad, instead of the fruit cocktail, fish, meat, vegetable, salad, dessert and coffee they tuck daintily away seven times a week."

Her writing had the same ornery passion, the same impetuous urge to soothe her readers while shaking their souls. Her first book, "Serve it Forth," published by Harper Brothers in 1937, took America by the shoulders and said, "Look, if you have to eat to live, you may as well enjoy it." The theme was repeated in "Consider the Oyster," which was published by Duell, Sloan & Pearce in 1941:

"An oyster leads a dreadful but exciting life. Indeed, his chance to live at all is slim, and if he should survive the arrows of his own outrageous fortune and in the two weeks of his carefree youth find a clean smooth place to fix on, the years afterwards are full of stress, passion and danger. . . ."

"Men have enjoyed eating oysters since they were not much more than monkeys, according to the kitchen middens they have left behind them. And thus, in their own one-minded way, they have spent time and thought and money on the problems of how to protect oysters from the suckers and the borers and the starvers, until now it is comparatively easy to eat this two-valved mollusk anywhere, without thought of the dangers it has run in its few years. Its chilly delicate gray body slips into a stew-pan or under a broiler or alive down a red throat, and it is done. Its life has been thoughtless but no less full of danger, and now that it is over we are perhaps the better for it." Food Sensual and Practical

Her ebullient embrace of the slow, sensual pleasures of the table was matched by her cool acceptance of sudden violence and evil. In a 1942 review of "How to Cook a Wolf," in The New York Herald Tribune, Lewis Gannett wrote that anyone familiar

with the writer's earlier work "will recall the faintly Gothic perversity that makes Mrs. Fisher's literature unique."

Mrs. Fisher, on the other hand, saw herself as practical. In "How to Cook a Wolf," for instance, she suggested that when the wolf is at the door, one should invite him and have him for dinner.

She saw little room at the table for caution. In "An Alphabet for Gourmets," (Viking, 1949), she wrote: "A complete lack of caution is perhaps one of the true signs of a real gourmet: he has no need for it, being filled as he is with a God-given and intelligently self-cultivated sense of gastronomical freedom. He not only knows from everything admirable he has read that he will not like Irish whisky with pineapple chilled in honey and vermouth, or a vintage Chambertin with poached lake perch; but every taste bud on both his actual and his spiritual palate wilts in revulsion at such thoughts. He does not serve these or similar combinations, not because he has been told , but because he knows ."

Throughout the 1940's, 50's and 60's, the peripatetic writer and cook lived in California, Switzerland and France, weathered three marriages and reared two daughters. Her marriage to Mr. Fisher ended in divorce in 1937 and that same year she married the painter Dilwyn Parrish, who died after a lingering illness in 1941. Her daughter, Anna, was born in 1943 and in 1945, she married Donald Friede, a literary agent. Her second daughter, Kennedy, was born in 1946, and she divorced Mr. Friede two years later.

In 1952, Mrs. Fisher and her sister, Norah, rented houses on neighboring vineyards in St. Helena, Calif., an area that, with the exceptions of stays in the South of France, would remain home.

In 1971, she moved to Bouverie Ranch in Glen Ellen, where her house of two sprawling rooms became a salon for visiting writers and food worshipers. She made her final trip to Europe in 1978, writing about Marseilles in "A Considerable Town," published that year by Knopf.

Since then, Mrs. Fisher has worked and entertained at Bouverie Ranch. "My life is simple," she said in an interview several years ago. "When I can't write, I read. When I can't read I cook."

Bedridden in recent years, she cooked less and less. But she continued to write. "Sister Age," was published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1983. Northpoint Press (which released new editions of many of her earlier books), published "Dubious Honors," a

collection of introductions that Mrs. Fisher wrote for others' books. "The Boss Dog," a book for children, was published by Northpoint in 1991. The Tablet of Her Mind

In an interview in 1991 she said: "I've lost my appetite. But my mind and heart have never been clearer."

Plagued by diminishing sight and crippling arthritis, her voice reduced to a whisper by Parkinson's disease, she spoke of waking up before 4 A.M. and writing stories in her mind for the hours before her secretary came in to take dictation. According to her agent, Robert Lescher, the writer "has been working on a number of manuscripts which will be published posthumously."

"The purpose of living is to get old enough to have something to say." she said last year. "But by that time, your voice doesn't work and your hands won't obey you so it's tough as hell to find a way to say it all."

Mrs. Fisher is survived by her sister, Norah Barr; two daughters, Anna Parrish, of Portland, Ore., and Ms. Wright of Alameda, Calif., and four grandchildren. A Delicious Meal Of a Bookish Kind

Here are nine of the better-known books written by M.F.K. Fisher over the course of six decades. She wrote a total of 15.

"The Gastronomical Me" (Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1943), collected essays.

"Here Let Us Feast (Viking, 1946), collected essays.

"Not Now But Now" (Viking, 1947), a novel.

"An Alphabet for Gourmets" (Viking, 1949), collected essays.

"The Physiology of Taste," (Heritage Press, 1949) an English translation of Brillat-Savarin's treatise.

"A Cordiall Water," (Little, Brown, 1961), folk cures.

"A Map of Another Town," (Little, Brown, 1964), reminiscence of years in Aix-en-Provence.

"With Bold Knife and Fork," (Putnam, 1968), collected essays.

"The Cooking of Provencal France," (Time-Life, 1968); Mrs. Fisher served as a consultant with Julia Child and Michael Field.

A version of this obituary appears in print on June 24, 1992, on Page A00018 of the National edition with the headline: M.F.K. Fisher, Writer on the Art of Food and the Taste of Living, Is Dead at 83.

A Thing Shared

1918

Now you can drive from Los Angeles to my Great-Aunt Maggie's ranch on the other side of the mountains in a couple of hours or so, but the first time I went there it took most of a day.

Now the roads are worthy of even the All-Year-Round Club's boasts, but twenty-five years ago, in the September before people thought peace had come again, you could hardly call them roads at all. Down near the city they were oiled, all right, but as you went farther into the hills toward the wild desert around Palmdale, they turned into rough dirt. Finally they were two wheel-marks skittering every which way through the Joshua trees.

It was very exciting: the first time my little round brown sister Anne and I had ever been away from home. Father drove us up from home with Mother in the Ford, so that she could help some cousins can fruit.

We carried beer for the parents (it exploded in the heat), and water for the car and Anne and me. We had four blowouts, but that was lucky, Father said as he patched the tires philosophically in the hot sun; he'd expected twice as many on such a long hard trip.

The ranch was wonderful, with wartime crews of old men and loud-voiced boys picking the peaches and early pears all day, and singing and rowing at night in the bunkhouses. We couldn't go near them or near the pen in the middle of a green alfalfa field where a new prize bull, black as thunder, pawed at the pale sand.

We spent most of our time in a stream under the cottonwoods, or with Old Mary the cook, watching her make butter in a great

churn between her mountainous knees. She slapped it into pats, and put them down in the stream where it ran hurriedly through the darkness of the butter-house.

She put stone jars of cream there, too, and wire baskets of eggs and lettuces, and when she drew them up, like netted fish, she would shake the cold water onto us and laugh almost as much as we did.

Then Father had to go back to work. It was decided that Mother would stay at the ranch and help put up more fruit, and Anne and I would go home with him. That was as exciting as leaving it had been, to be alone with Father for the first time.

He says now that he was scared daft at the thought of it, even though our grandmother was at home as always to watch over us. He says he actually shook as he drove away from the ranch, with us like two suddenly strange small monsters on the hot seat beside him.

Probably he made small talk. I don't remember. And he didn't drink any beer, sensing that it would be improper before two unchaperoned young ladies.

We were out of the desert and into deep winding canyons before the sun went down. The road was a little smoother, following streambeds under the live-oaks that grow in all the gentle creases of the dry tawny hills of that part of California. We came to a shack where there was water for sale, and a table under the dark wide trees.

Father told me to take Anne down the dry streambed a little way. That made me feel delightfully grown-up. When we came back we held our hands under the water faucet and dried them on our panties, which Mother would never have let us do.

Then we sat on a rough bench at the table, the three of us in the deep green twilight, and had one of the nicest suppers I have ever eaten.

The strange thing about it is that all three of us have told other people that same thing, without ever talking of it among ourselves until lately. Father says that all his nervousness went away, and he saw us for the first time as two little brown humans who were fun. Anne and I both felt a subtle excitement at being alone for the first time with the only man in the world we loved.

(We loved Mother too, completely, but we were finding out, as Father was too, that it is good for parents and for children to be alone now and then with one another . . . the man alone or the

woman, to sound new notes in the mysterious music of parenthood and childhood.)

That night I not only saw my Father for the first time as a person. I saw the golden hills and the live-oaks as clearly as I have ever seen them since; and I saw the dimples in my little sister's fat hands in a way that still moves me because of that first time; and I saw food as something beautiful to be shared with people instead of as a thrice-daily necessity.

I forget what we ate, except for the end of the meal. It was a big round peach pie, still warm from Old Mary's oven and the ride over the desert. It was deep, with lots of juice, and bursting with ripe peaches picked that noon. Royal Albertas, Father said they were. The crust was the most perfect I have ever tasted, except perhaps once upstairs at Simpson's in London, on a hot plum tart.

And there was a quart Mason jar, the old-fashioned bluish kind like Mexican glass, full of cream. It was still cold, probably because we all knew the stream it had lain in, Old Mary's stream.

Father cut the pie in three pieces and put them on white soup plates in front of us, and then spooned out the thick cream. We ate with spoons too, blissful after the forks we were learning to use with Mother.

And we ate the whole pie, and all the cream . . . we can't remember if we gave any to the shadowy old man who sold water . . . and then drove on sleepily toward Los Angeles, and none of us said anything about it for many years, but it was one of the best meals we ever ate.

Perhaps that is because it was the first conscious one, for me at least; but the fact that we remember it with such queer clarity must mean that it had other reasons for being important. I suppose that happens at least once to every human. I hope so.

Now the hills are cut through with super-highways, and I can't say whether we sat that night in Mint Canyon or Bouquet, and the three of us are in some ways even more than twenty-five years older than we were then. And still the warm round peach pie and the cool yellow cream we ate together that August night live in our hearts' palates, succulent, secret, delicious.

YOUNG HUNGER

It is very hard for people who have passed the age of, say, fifty to remember with any charity the hunger of their own puberty and adolescence when they are dealing with the young human animals who may be frolicking about them. Too often I have seen good people helpless with exasperation and real anger upon finding in the morning that cupboards and iceboxes have been stripped of their supplies by two or three youths—or even *one*—who apparently could have eaten four times their planned share at the dinner table the night before.

Such avidity is revolting, once past. But I can recall its intensity still; I am not yet too far from it to understand its ferocious demands when I see a fifteen-year-old boy wince and whiten at the prospect of waiting politely a few more hours for food, when his guts are howling for meat-bread-candy-fruit-cheese-milkmilkmilk—ANYTHING IN THE WORLD TO EAT.

I can still remember my almost insane desperation when I was about eighteen and was staying overnight with my comparatively aged godparents. I had come home alone from France in a bad continuous storm and was literally concave with solitude and hunger. The one night on the train seemed even rougher than those on board ship, and by the time I reached my godparents' home I was almost lightheaded.

I got there just in time for lunch. It is clear as ice in my mind: a little cup of very weak chicken broth, one salted cracker, one-half piece of thinly sliced toast, and then, ah then, a whole waffle, crisp and brown and with a piece of beautiful butter melting in its middle—which the maid deftly cut into four sections! One section she put on my godmother's plate. The next *two,* after a nod of approval from her mistress, she put on mine. My godfather ate the fourth.

There was a tiny pot of honey, and I dutifully put a dab of it on my piggish portion, and we all nibbled away and drank one cup apiece of tea with lemon. Both my godparents left part of their waffles.

It was simply that they were old and sedentary and quite out of the habit of eating amply with younger people: a good thing for them, but pure hell for me. I did not have the sense to explain to them how starved I was—which I would not hesitate to do now. Instead I prowled around my bedroom while the house slumbered through its afternoon siesta, wondering if I dared sneak to the strange kitchen for something, anything, to eat, and knowing I would rather die than meet the silent, stern maid or my nice, gentle little hostess.

Later we walked slowly down to the village, and I was thinking sensuously of double malted ice-cream sodas at the

corner drugstore, but there was no possibility of such heaven. When we got back to the quiet house, the maid brought my godfather a tall glass of exquisitely rich milk, with a handful of dried fruit on the saucer under it, because he had been ill; but as we sat and watched him unwillingly down it, his wife said softly that it was such a short time until dinner that she was sure I did not want to spoil my appetite, and I agreed with her because I was young and shy.

When I dressed, I noticed that the front of my pelvic basin jutted out like two bricks under my skirt: I looked like a scarecrow.

Dinner was very long, but all I can remember is that it had, as *pièce de résistance,* half of the tiny chicken previously boiled for broth at luncheon, which my godmother carved carefully so that we should each have a bit of the breast and I, as guest, should have the leg, after a snippet had been sliced from it for her husband, who liked dark meat too.

There were hot biscuits, yes, the smallest I have ever seen, two apiece under a napkin on a silver dish. Because of them we had no dessert: it would be too rich, my godmother said.

We drank little cups of decaffeinized coffee on the screened porch in the hot Midwestern night, and when I went up to my room I saw that the maid had left a large glass of rich malted milk beside my poor godfather's bed.

My train would leave before five in the morning, and I slept little and unhappily, dreaming of the breakfast I would order on it. Of course when I finally saw it all before me, twinkling on the Pullman silver dishes, I could eat very little, from too much hunger and a sense of outrage.

I felt that my hosts had been indescribably rude to me, and selfish and conceited and stupid. Now I know that they were none of these things. They had simply forgotten about

any but their own dwindling and cautious needs for nourishment. They had forgotten about being hungry, being young, being . . .

In an essay by Max Beerbohm about hosts and guests, the tyrants and the tyrannized, there is a story of what happened to him once when he was a schoolboy and someone sent him a hamper that held, not the usual collection of marmalade, sardines, and potted tongue, but twelve whole sausage-rolls.

"Of sausage-rolls I was particularly fond," he says. He could have dominated all his friends with them, of course, but "I carried the box up to my cubicle, and, having eaten two of the sausage-rolls, said nothing that day about the other ten, nor anything about them when, three days later, I had eaten them all—all, up there, alone."

What strange secret memories such a tale evokes! Is there a grown-up person anywhere who cannot remember some such shameful, almost insane act of greediness of his childhood? In recollection his scalp will prickle, and his palms will sweat, at the thought of the murderous risk he may have run from his outraged companions.

When I was about sixteen, and in boarding-school, we were allowed one bar of chocolate a day, which we were supposed to eat sometime between the sale of them at the little school bookstore at four-thirty and the seven o'clock dinner gong. I felt an almost unbearable hunger for them—not for one, but for three or four or five at a time, so that I should have *enough,* for once, in my yawning stomach.

I hid my own purchases for several days, no mean trick in a school where every drawer and cupboard was inspected, openly and snoopingly too, at least twice a week. I cannot remember now how I managed it, with such lack of privacy

and my own almost insurmountable hunger every afternoon, but by Saturday I had probably ten chocolate bars—my own and a few I had bribed my friends who were trying to lose weight to buy for me.

I did not sign up for any of the usual weekend debauchery such as a walk to the village drugstore for a well-chaperoned double butterscotch and pecan sundae. Instead I lay languidly on my bed, trying to look as if I had a headache and pretending to read a very fancy book called, I think, *Martin Pippin in the Apple Orchard,* until the halls quieted.

Then I arranged all my own and my roommate's pillows in a voluptuous pile, placed so that I could see whether a silent housemotherly foot stood outside the swaying monk's-cloth curtain that served as a door (to cut down our libidinous chitchat, the school board believed), and I put my hoard of Hersheys discreetly under a fold of the bedspread.

I unwrapped their rich brown covers and their tinfoil as silently as any prisoner chipping his way through a granite wall, and lay there breaking off the rather warm, rubbery, delicious pieces and feeling them melt down my gullet, and reading the lush symbolism of the book; and all the time I was hot and almost panting with the fear that people would suddenly walk in and see me there. And the strange thing is that nothing would have happened if they had!

It is true that I had more than my allotted share of candy, but that was not a crime. And my friends, full of their Saturday delights, would not have wanted ordinary chocolate. And anyway I had much more than I could eat, and was basically what Beerbohm calls, somewhat scornfully, "a host" and not "a guest": I loved to entertain people and dominate them with my generosity.

Then why was I breathless and nervous all during that sol-

itary and not particularly enjoyable orgy? I suppose there is a Freudian explanation for it, or some other kind. Certainly the experience does not make me sound very attractive to myself. Even the certainty of being in good company is no real solace. —*Whittier, 1946*

 From: Tender at the Bone 28
by Ruth Reichl

▪ Mrs. Peavey went downstairs every night carrying a huge silver goblet of ice water. The moisture pearled and beaded on the outside of the sterling, which she set on the tile floor next to her bed. My mother, in one of her Ozzie and Harriet moments, had put red and green ticktacktoe linoleum on the basement floor of our summer house; after that she insisted on calling it the rec room. When Mrs. Peavey came to live with us, the rec room became her bedroom, and she always set the goblet right in the middle of the center square.

Unlike Louvinia or Winnie, who preceded her as the family maid, Mrs. Peavey was never called by her first name. And unlike them, my mother did not refer to her as "the girl."

My mother loved telling Mrs. Peavey stories, even the ones that showed her off to disadvantage. Like the time she asked Mrs. Peavey to make a sweet-potato casserole topped with marshmallows for Thanksgiving dinner and Mrs. Peavey replied that she wouldn't dream of it. "A horrid middle-class concoction," she said firmly.

Once Mrs. Peavey insisted on ironing the sheets when my grandmother came to visit. "But we don't iron our sheets!" my mother protested. "Just because we live like animals," Mrs. Peavey replied, implacably moving the iron across the smooth white cotton, "is no reason for us to impose our habits on others. A guest is a guest!"

And of course my mother loved complaining about Mrs. Peavey's habit of turning her day off into a week. Mom's voice always went down to a whisper when she talked about that. She'd glance in my direction and put a finger to her lips; I understood that whatever Mrs. Peavey did, it was terrible. I couldn't imagine what it might

be. The next time my mother's voice became audible she was always saying, "And of course that's why she's reduced to being a maid." And then she'd laugh a little bitterly and add, "And my maid at that. Who else would put up with it?"

But the most famous story didn't involve my mother at all; it was about the time Mrs. Peavey's three sons came to visit in a chauffeured limousine. It was summer and we were in the country when the long black car came gliding up our driveway. "She knew right away who it was!" my mother always told her rapt audience. "And she asked Ruthie to go out and tell them to go away!"

I saw my reflection in the shiny window of the car, a serious eight-year-old with brown eyes, dirt on both cheeks, clutching a scrawny orange kitten. There was a big square patch on one knee where I had scraped it falling off my bike, and my curly hair was wild. I could see my pot belly sticking out beneath my torn "Singing Oaks" T-shirt and I sucked in my breath as the window silently disappeared.

I peered into the cool darkness where the glass had been. "We promise to only keep her for a minute," said a voice inside the car. It had come from the man nearest the window. His long sad face looked very old to me, and as he raked his bony fingers through receding gray hair I retreated. "I'll tell her," I said, turning so fast that the gravel scrunching beneath my feet flew up and hit the shiny silver hubcaps. I hugged Marmalade as I walked across the driveway and up the flagstone path. Banging the screen door behind me, I went into the narrow pine-paneled kitchen, where Mrs. Peavey was pulling a blackberry pie out of the ancient oven.

"No," she said. "No, no, no."

I went back to tell them. The sons were still sitting morosely in the limousine but this time a different one spoke. He had a solid, self-satisfied face and shining silvery hair. Handing a silver dollar out the window he said, "I'll give you five more if you can get her to just come out here."

When I showed Mrs. Peavey the money she looked down at her swollen ankles puffing out of her sensible shoes, looked at me, and said, "I see Palmer hasn't changed." Her face puckered as if she had eaten a lemon. "If I were you, I wouldn't take his money. Tell him that he should be ashamed of himself. Tell him I wouldn't come out for all the tea in China."

I gave him the message, but I couldn't bring myself to give him the dollar back. I squeezed the coin hard, pressing it against the inside of my palm. Then the third son gave it a try. The best-looking of the three, he had rosy cheeks, black hair, and deep blue eyes that he fixed on me. "Is she in the kitchen?" he asked. I nodded solemnly. "Does she still make the world's best brownies?" I nodded again. "I used to be her best helper," he went on. "I bet you're her best helper now." He smiled, showing all his teeth, and said pleadingly, "Don't you think a mother ought to talk to her children? Tell my mother I miss her. Give her a kiss for me."

Mrs. Peavey looked sad when I planted the kiss on her papery white cheek. I threw my arms around her solid body and inhaled her powdery scent. "Tell Potter I miss him too," she said. "Tell him I love him. And tell him I certainly won't see any of them!" Then she untied her apron, threw it on the counter, and went down to the basement.

The three sons murmured, "What do we do now?" when they heard her final message. Then the window rose, silently and majestically cutting off my view. The chauffeur turned the large black car around. I stood watching for a long time as it disappeared into the trees that edged our narrow, twisting driveway.

The next morning Mrs. Peavey left for her day off. Our house was less than fifty miles from New York but Mrs. Peavey always insisted on going "back to civilization," making her disdain for our shabby summer house in the Connecticut woods very clear. My mother drove Mrs. Peavey to the station and watched with a wor-

ried look as she laboriously hauled herself up the steps of the New York Central train.

"I hope she's coming back," my mother said quietly as we climbed back into our old Ford station wagon.

"Did you have a fight?" I asked.

"No," said Mom.

"Then why are you worried?" I asked. My mother refused to say.

Mrs. Peavey didn't come back the next day, or the next, or the day after that. My mother banged around the kitchen, serving bloody roast beef, hard potatoes, and peas that were still frozen in the middle. As she vacuumed she murmured imprecations, swearing that this was absolutely it. But when a taxi pulled into the driveway my mother watched silently as Mrs. Peavey came through the living room and walked down the stairs to the rec room. When she came back up wearing her white uniform, Mrs. Peavey polished the candlesticks, made cold poached salmon with dill sauce for my mother and a Schwarzwalder Kirschtorte for my father. Then she read me four stories in French about Bécassine, the foolish peasant. And nobody said anything about anyone being fired.

Summer ended and we went back to New York. I liked it better there. Mrs. Peavey and I shared a bedroom, our twin beds placed toe to toe. Some nights after the lights were out and the cars eleven stories below us were sending shadows racing across the pink ceiling Mrs. Peavey told me stories about her childhood in Baltimore. As I listened I imagined a miniature Mrs. Peavey with long golden ringlets visiting the stables and going to sea in her father's yacht. I could smell the entrance to the pillared house with its waxed wooden floors and bowls of roses. I could see the blue satin sash on Mrs. Peavey's pale dress as she danced around a candle-covered Christmas tree. And I could hear the string quartet that came every Sunday to play in the music room.

But I especially loved it when she talked about her wedding.

Mrs. Peavey wore a dress of pale white silk and a veil of lace made by silent French nuns. Her satin train was eight feet long, her carriage was drawn to church by six snow-white horses, and ten men with silver trumpets played as she walked down the aisle. Afterward the guests dined in pink tents on a green lawn and danced in a pavilion at the edge of the bay. "And then," said Mrs. Peavey, "we cruised off to visit England, France, and Germany."

Before that summer all the stories ended with the sun setting over a European sea, but in the fall Mrs. Peavey began including Carter, Palmer, and Potter Peavey in her stories. I liked Potter best: he was the one who snuck into the kitchen to help Mrs. Peavey kick out the cook. "Mr. Peavey thought it was slightly eccentric when I started taking cooking lessons," said Mrs. Peavey. "But he wouldn't hear of my actually cooking. It just wasn't *done*. So Potter and I devised other methods."

I could see the two of them hustling the cook out the door and dancing around the huge tiled kitchen. "It was such fun!" said Mrs. Peavey. "Before long I became known for having the best cook in Baltimore, and people clamored for invitations."

When she talked about her kitchen escapades, Mrs. Peavey's voice always grew younger. "Once the British ambassador came from Washington to dinner," she said dreamily. "We were only twelve at dinner that night so we decided to honor him by cooking dishes from Queen Victoria's wedding dinner."

I watched jealously as she and Potter constructed complicated dishes. I loved the words: galantine, forcemeat, aspic, florentine . . . I saw them building the iced sweet pudding that was the dessert for the evening, holding my breath as the cherry- and almond-filled creation came tumbling precariously out of its old-fashioned mold. "I was so worried that the cook would spoil it," Mrs. Peavey admitted, "that I asked the governess to feed the children in the kitchen. I knew Potter could fix anything that went wrong."

"The cook," she added darkly, "was always the problem. But the night of the British ambassador went very smoothly. The truth is, she wasn't much of a cook. She even asked me to teach her French cuisine. I tried," said Mrs. Peavey, sadly shaking her head, "but she just didn't have much imagination."

Watching Mrs. Peavey making gougère in the kitchen, I wondered what imagination had to do with it. Cooking, it seemed to me, was mostly a matter of organization. "Ah," she said, "it is only because you have imagination that you say that."

She stirred eggs and cheese into the batter and bent to light the oven. "Be careful!" I called, remembering the time my mother set her hair on fire. Mrs. Peavey straightened up and looked directly at me. "I am not your mother," she said succinctly. "I do not turn on the gas and then go into the living room looking for matches. Normal people do not set themselves on fire."

And then, as she leaned into the oven to put the gougère on the rack, she added, "And normal people do not allow eight-year-olds to baby-sit for themselves."

Mrs. Peavey did not approve of the way my mother had solved her baby-sitter problem. "I just pay Ruthie to take care of herself on the maid's nights off," my mother bragged to her friends. "She's so grown-up."

I certainly didn't want to disappoint my mother. So I never said a word as I watched my mother and father dressing for dinner, just held my breath and listened to their usual going-out-to-dinner ritual, wishing that just this once Mom would win.

The ritual went like this. As she looked at the black dress hanging in the closet, Mom would say, "You know, dear, I don't really feel very well. Why don't you go without me?"

And Dad would look concerned and tell her how dreary the evening would be without her. "It won't be any fun without you, darling," he'd say, urging her to come, for him. I would hang on

every word, willing them not to leave. But in the end, no matter how hard I hoped, my mother always allowed herself to be persuaded.

"Don't go to bed too late, Pussycat," she'd say gaily, walking out the door in a cloud of perfume. As soon as they were gone I would begin running frantically around the house, much too scared to go to sleep, looking nervously in all the closets and underneath the beds.

One night the doorbell rang as I was doing this and I jumped as if someone had snuck up and touched my shoulder. Who could it be? Walking stealthily to the door, I shouted, "Who's there?" in a very deep voice; I didn't want the person on the other side to think I was a kid.

"It's me, Ruthie," said a voice I didn't recognize.

"Who's me?" I asked, wondering how to handle this. It would be embarrassing to turn the person away, frightening to let her in.

"Mrs. Peavey!" she replied in a buoyant tone.

I wasn't tall enough to reach the peephole so I opened the door a crack. Sure enough, it was Mrs. Peavey, with a tall gaunt man dressed entirely in black who was "My friend Mr. Holly."

I was relieved to see a familiar grown-up. Mrs. Peavey and Mr. Holly settled themselves in the living room. Mr. Holly admired my mother's tree and peered at the fading fall leaves my mother had wired to its branches. I listened to them making small talk, happy to have their company and too young to wonder what they were doing there. But even I could tell that Mrs. Peavey was not quite herself. Her pale skin was flushed and she was talking more animatedly than usual. Then she asked if I would like to come out with them for a little while.

I instantly understood that my parents were not to know about this excursion. It was a school night. More than that, I knew that wherever we were going was not a place my parents would approve of. As we were walking to the door Mrs. Peavey stopped and asked,

as if it were an afterthought, "Do you have any money in your piggy bank?"

I checked; there was $7.27 in dimes, pennies, and quarters, and the silver dollar I had gotten from Palmer.

"Bring it along," said Mrs. Peavey gaily. As I handed her the money she said, "I'll pay you back next week." She smelled like peppermint LifeSavers.

It was a dark, chilly night. We walked west on Tenth Street to Sixth Avenue and made a left. Just across from the Women's House of Detention was a sign that said GOOGIE's beneath a huge pair of red neon spectacles.

"We're going to a bar?" I asked.

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Peavey. I could have offered any number of reasons, but decided not to. We went in and Mr. Holly lifted me up to one of the tall, Naugahyde-covered barstools. He ordered Perfect Manhattans for them and a Shirley Temple for me.

The air was cool, smoky, and dusty blue. Mrs. Peavey was so jolly it seemed as if she had put on a new personality. When she excused herself to go to the bathroom she went down the length of the bar with a word and a smile for everybody along the way. Watching her, Mr. Holly leaned over and said, "What a wonderful woman!"

I could smell the sweet liquor on his breath, mingled faintly with aftershave and cigarettes. I nodded. "I tell her that I'm not good enough for her," he said mournfully, looking more skeletal than ever, "but she says that she has had enough of being rich to last her a lifetime."

I kept very still, thinking that perhaps if I didn't say anything he might keep talking.

"Imagine that husband of hers leaving all the money to the boys!" mused Mr. Holly, almost to himself. "He was going to be so smart, avoiding the taxes. And then those little pricks thought they could tell her how to live! Why—"

He stopped abruptly as Mrs. Peavey returned. "One more drink," she said cheerfully, "and then I think it's time to take Ruthie home. She has school tomorrow."

The bartender draped half a dozen cherries around the rim of my Shirley Temple and I sipped it slowly, wishing Mrs. Peavey would go back to the bathroom. It had never occurred to me to ask if Mr. Peavey was still alive, or wonder how he had died. But I got no more information that evening.

Mrs. Peavey did not come back the next day. Or the next. For almost a week I came home from school every day, put my key into the lock, and wondered what I would find on the other side of the door. I'd stick my nose in first and sniff hopefully, wishing for the smell of cooking. Instead it was just my increasingly irritable mother with a long list of errands for me to do and lamb chops, again, for dinner.

On the third day I ran to Mrs. Peavey's closet to make sure her dresses were still there. I put my face against the sagging cotton shapes with their pale tiny flowers and inhaled the reassuring smell. Then I went into the bedroom, where my mother was polishing her short nails with blue-red polish, and asked if I could make dinner.

"You?" she asked, waving her hands in the air so her fingernails would dry. "What will you make?"

"Wiener schnitzel," I said boldly. "And green salad. And brownies for dessert."

My mother looked amused. "Why not?" she said. I held my hand out for the money and she nodded toward her nails and told me to take what I needed from her wallet.

I pulled out a twenty-dollar bill and walked up the street to the Daitch Supermarket on University Place. As I walked through the store I experienced a delicious moment of freedom. I felt very grown-up as I wandered the aisles. I strolled past the meat counter and found some pale, pearly scallops of veal. I bought bread

crumbs and a lemon; I was going to impress my father by making his favorite dish.

But walking home, the bag of groceries banging against my leg, I panicked. I had forgotten to ask the butcher to pound the meat, and I didn't know how to do it myself. And how was I going to make the bread crumbs stick? My mother would be no help. I needed Mrs. Peavey.

Amazingly, when I got home, she was there. The air in the apartment was heavy and it crackled as it swirled around my mother and Mrs. Peavey, but I had missed the storm. When I walked into the kitchen Mrs. Peavey lifted the bag of groceries out of my arms and said simply, "What are we going to make for dinner?"

"I'm going out," my mother called from the hall. Mrs. Peavey did not answer. My mother slammed the door.

"Wiener schnitzel," I said.

"Ah," said Mrs. Peavey, "the secret is getting the veal thin and the oil hot. The Viennese are really wonderful cooks." As she moved around the kitchen she hummed a German children's song about a horse and rider.

"Where were you?" I asked. "Why didn't you come back?"

Mrs. Peavey took the big iron skillet out of the cupboard and unwrapped the meat. "Get some waxed paper," she ordered. She tore off a large piece of the paper and laid it on the counter. She put the meat on it and placed another layer of paper on top. "Now watch," she commanded.

She lifted the skillet above her head and brought it crashing down on the meat. The sound reverberated throughout the small kitchen. She picked up the skillet and showed me how thin the meat was. "You have to do it a couple of times to get the meat really, really thin," she said. "That's all there is to it." She lifted the skillet again and brought it down on the paper; the meat had become even thinner.

When all the veal had been pounded, she got a platter and three

large soup dishes out of the cupboard. She filled one dish with flour, one with bread crumbs, and broke an egg into the third. Seasoning each dish with salt and pepper, she dredged the cutlets in the flour and then dipped each one in the beaten egg. She handed me the first cutlet and said, "You do the bread crumbs." I carefully rolled the sticky piece of meat in crumbs and laid it on the platter.

When all the meat had been breaded, Mrs. Peavey put the platter in the refrigerator. "It's much better if you let the meat rest before you cook it," she said, rinsing her hands and patting them on her apron. "Don't forget that. This is your father's favorite dish and somebody in the house should know how to make it properly. Here, I'll write the recipe down for you."

I didn't like the sound of that and I sat down in one of the rickety metal chairs and watched sadly as she wrote.

When she was done, Mrs. Peavey poured me a glass of cranberry juice, filled her silver goblet with ice and water, and sat down at the kitchen table. "I thought I'd have longer to explain," she said at last. "But it's not your mother's fault."

"Explain what?" I asked.

"Why I'm here," she said simply. "Why I'm leaving."

Something inside me had known that she had not come back for good. "Don't leave me," I wanted to say, but I couldn't. I just looked at her dumbly. "I can't be a maid," she said. "I just can't. It is time for me to make a change."

"What will you do?" I asked.

She took a deep breath and looked straight at me. "I am going to do what I should have done when Mr. Peavey died. I am going to be a cook."

She looked proud and noble as she said it. I believed that she could. "What about Mr. Holly?" I asked.

"He is not part of my plan," she said softly. "I will have to change other aspects of my life as well."

I wasn't sure what she meant by that, but I pictured Mr. Holly in the permanent midnight of Googie's. Then I pictured Mrs. Peavey in the big tiled kitchen in Baltimore. They did not go together.

"You mean you won't be going to Googie's anymore?" I asked.

"I will not," she said. She hugged me. "I've joined an organization that will help me keep my resolution." She sat up straight, as if someone had just told her to pay attention to her posture. She folded her hands on the table.

"Now," she said, "there are three things I want to tell you before I leave. The first is not to let other people tell you how to live your life."

"You mean," I asked, "that you should not have pretended that the cook was doing the cooking?"

"Something like that," she replied. "The second is that you have to look out for yourself." I thought of her three sons in their big limousine.

"And the third?" I asked.

"Don't forget the extra pastry when you make beef Wellington." She reached out and hugged me. The she picked up her silver goblet and clinked it hard against my glass of juice. The sound was pure and lovely.

Photo courtesy of the Bourdain family

Editor's Note 6/8/18: *We are saddened to learn of Anthony Bourdain's death at age 61. In 2012, he wrote a Father's Day essay for Bon Appétit about his childhood, his memories of his father, and raising his own daughter. We're re-sharing his words today.*

If you are having thoughts of suicide, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, at 1-800-273-talk (8255), or the Suicide Crisis Line, at 1-800-784-2433, or text 741741.

I was shucking oysters at a raw bar in the Village when my father died. He was 57 years old, an age I'm rapidly approaching. I think about that a lot—and about my father, whose face I see in my own more and more with the passing of the years. There's a picture of me with my then four-and-a-half-year-old daughter that was taken at a food festival in the Caymans last January. She's sitting on my lap, eyes closed. I'm holding her tight, my face sunburned and blissed out with the joys of fatherhood. I've never looked so much like him.

My father was, as he liked to say, "a man of simple needs." He grew up with a French mother, a French name, speaking French, and spent many summers in France. But this history wasn't really a factor in my childhood. It always came as a shock to me when he'd break into French with a Haitian cabdriver as there was, seemingly, nothing "French" about him, or us, or how we lived. He liked wine (on the rare occasions when some came our way), making pronouncements like "all wine is red," but couldn't have cared less whether it was a Chateau de Something or a *vin de table*—as long as it was from Bordeaux, near where his family came from.

To him, all food was either "marvelous" or not worth mentioning. A decent *steak frites* at a crummy brasserie was as good as a fine-dining meal. (During my early vacations in France, our family's crummy brasserie of choice was the unpromising-sounding Quick Elysee, where a thin slice of humble *rumsteak* with curiously blond *frites* soon became a treasured taste memory.) In his view, France and New Jersey, where we lived, were the same; he seemed equally attached romantically. France had runny, pungent cheeses and sausages that were "marvelous." But the Jersey Shore, where we were more likely to vacation, had steamer clams, not to mention the occasional lobster with drawn butter.

He taught me early that the value of a dish is the pleasure it brings you; where you are sitting when you eat it—and who you are eating it with—are what really matter. Perhaps the most important life lesson he passed on was: Don't be a snob. It's something I will always at least aspire to—something that has allowed me to travel this world and eat all it has to offer without fear or prejudice. To experience joy, my father taught me, one has to leave oneself open to it.

The world, in his view, was filled with marvels. George C. Scott's manic eyebrows in *Dr. Strangelove* were deemed "marvelous." But then so, potentially, was any food that was new. Wherever you were, he taught me, was an opportunity to eat something interesting.

Growing up in New Jersey, American food was Italian. Chinese. Jewish. Diner. (I still drive out to Hiram's roadhouse in Fort Lee to order my father's favorite birch beer.) It took a trip "across the bridge" to be able to delve into the exotic worlds of "smorgasbord," "sukiyaki," "German," and old-school bistro French. Chinese food was deemed worth investigating as a family—and investigate we did, venturing frequently into Manhattan on weekends for fabulously gluey and bright-colored Cantonese on Upper Broadway and in Chinatown. Visits to my father's office in Manhattan would yield trips to Wienerwald for foreign sausages steamed with sauerkraut; salty pretzels and charred roast chestnuts from street carts; the mysterious joys of the dirty-water hot dog.

He was delighted by different. Thrilled by discovery. In the early '70s, he "discovered" sushi because it was being served in the signless, some-what sinister back room of a run-down hotel on 55th Street that some Japanese colleagues had tipped him off to. When he walked me, 14 years old, through the shabby hotel lobby for the first time, opened an unmarked door, and ushered me into a smoky room crowded with Japanese people eating raw fish, he was bubbling over with childlike glee.

There's a photo of my father. My favorite. He's sitting on a beach at Cap Ferret in France, near the oyster village of La Teste-de-Buch, where he'd spent many summers as a kid. My younger brother, Christopher, and I are with him—we must have been about 10 and 12, respectively—eating sandwiches: *saucisson a l'ail* or *jambon blanc*. I remember very well the texture of crusty baguette, the smear of French butter, the meat, the inevitable grain of sand between the teeth. Surely, somewhere nearby, there was Orangina or Pschitt for us kids, and a bottle of warm Evian or Vittel—all wildly exotic to my brother and me at the time.

There might well have been a comically runny cheese. My father, upon unwrapping it, would have joked about it, comparing its reek to "old socks," calling my brother and me by our alternate names in Dad language: Oscar and Eggbert. He was generally a pretty serious man, prone to escaping into books and

music—a moody one, too, I suspected. But with us, he was almost always goofy and without vanity. I think it was that day—the day of the photograph, or another very much like it, sitting by the edge of the rough Atlantic, perhaps after a swig of rough red table wine—that I first heard him make that statement: "I am a man of simple needs." An expression of genuine satisfaction with the moment.

It left an impression. I remember those words every time I find myself made ridiculously happy by a bowl of noodles eaten while sitting on a low plastic stool, sucking up the smell of burning joss sticks and distant wafts of durian, the sight of Vietnamese families on their motorbikes around me.

I feel myself moving like him. I feel his face in mine when I pick up my daughter. I hear his voice in mine when I say something silly, make myself ridiculous for her entertainment. When we eat together, I can't help but try, like my father, to portray what we eat as potentially awesome or funny—as "marvelous." While I feel strongly that to try and make a small child into one's own image as a pint-size "foodie" would be at best annoying and at worst a form of child abuse, I am secretly proud when she reaches for a hunk of salty Pecorino, a caper, or an anchovy, as she is apt to do on visits with my wife's family in Italy. I admit to shamelessly praising her when she, to our surprise, became enamored with oysters on the half shell.

I was made proudest in Paris last year. My daughter came along for dinner with me, my wife, and Eric Ripert—the grown-ups eating oysters and clams, whelks and periwinkles from an enormous seafood tower at La Coupole. She had been picking at her pasta with butter and moved on to oysters. She looked up at what must have seemed, from her perspective at near eye level with the tabletop, an Everest of crushed ice and sea creatures. Her gaze traveled up and up, past the giant crabs on the second tier, settling on the two steamed lobsters dueling at the top.

"Sebastian!" she cried, misidentifying one of the lobsters as the adorable crustacean sidekick of Ariel, the heroine of the Disney film The Little Mermaid. Without blinking, she reached up, grabbed her little friend, and began devouring him without hesitation or remorse.

I thought, *That's* my little girl.

I'm quite sure my father, had he been there, would have been just as proud—of both of us.

Why Ravioli Tempts And Gold Does Not

By MARY CANTWELL

The subway stalled twice on the way uptown so I was late meeting my friend at the theater. That meant we had to sit in the second row, which is perhaps not the best place to be at a film that opens with a knifing followed by a shooting. Of the same person, I might add.

Eventually I stopped counting bodies. "A little Grand Guignol, don't you think?" I whispered and concentrated instead on the cuisine. Like "The Godfather," which had me memorizing meals, this movie combined food and violence.

In the rare moments when the protagonists weren't hijacking trucks, wasting their cronies or sniffing coke, they were eating. Sausages sizzled; spaghetti sauce burped in its pot; the lobsters were three-pounders, and the steaks the size of catchers' mitts. One guy, the *capo*, recommended shaving a clove of garlic with a single-edge razor. Sliced that thin, it would melt in the pan, he told his jail-house colleagues. I left that movie as hungry as I had ever been in my life.

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In truth, I am always hungry. This is not a family trait. I can't remember my grandfather ever eating much beyond soft-boiled eggs, and my grandmother lived to a great age fueled by crullers and tea. My mother is forever apologizing to waiters for not finishing what she ordered — "although," she tells them, "it was very good" — and would live on cornflakes if she didn't think such a diet discourteous to fish and vegetables. My sister picks. "I'm just not interested," she says, and leaves the plate untouched. I do not understand these people.

Sometimes, though, I envy them. My relatives don't know what it is to turn down fresh ham, collard greens and bright yellow rice for the sake of a skirt zipper, because fresh ham, collard greens and bright yellow rice wouldn't tease them at all. But I do know. They were on the bill at a street fair last week, and it was all I could do to get past the booth. I had a hard time getting past the Caribbean cuisine booth too, and I had more sense than to get within sniffing distance of downtown's Feast of San Gennaro.

That same day, when I was giving more-than-usual thought to skirt zippers, I had to steer clear of the neighborhood food palace as well. Terrible things happen there. Let me go in for a bottle of olive oil, and I hear a voice saying, "A pound of the wild mushroom ravioli, please, and a quarter-pound of the brandade." The voice is mine.

Though I sail through Cartier's first floor en route to Watch Repair without a glance at the display cases, I cannot get through this food palace without checking out every aisle, bin and counter. More often than not, I run into a friend. My relatives may not eat, but my close friends do. Perhaps eating is one of the reasons we are close friends.

The first course was a chicken brother absolutely bursting with truffles and the whole thing concealed under a muntaine of croissant, pâte, seuillite and then there was a nougat basket of fruit ices, each nicely frozen and little fruity shapes with a marzipanleaf at the top. That's what a good friend, who was a terrible typist, had for dinner in Paris about 15 years ago.

We ate together a lot over the years: a pair of Goldilockses in search of perfection. "Too sweet," she'd say; "too dry," I'd reply. The night before she went to the hospital for the surgery that marked the beginning of the end, she gave a dinner party. We four guests had roast beef, a good salad and a good wine, and on leaving slapped high-fives.

> 'I cannot go to a food palace without checking out every aisle.'

She had a palate, this friend of mine, and so do I, and we could be as plain as we were fancy. I worked for weeks on the quintessential tapioca pudding, and both of us were fond of the french fries at McDonald's. She did a very good chocolate sauce for vanilla ice cream, and I acquired a certain reputation for my apple pudding. During the last week of her life, we ate smoked salmon and a ham that reminded her of Spain and, once, that apple pudding; and for the time that she toyed bravely with what was now past tempting her, our world was in its normal spin.

The world is spinning away from the sun now, and the sky is dark when I step off the bus and start the short walk home. I am lonely, and missing the responsibilities under which I used to chafe and sometimes even cry.

When I come in, the refrigerator is purring, and the pilot light under the stove top seems a kind of eternal flame. I take down the sauté pan.

My hands are busy and my head is as near to blank as it can get in life. The day is erased and so, perhaps lamentably, is loneliness. I am having a good night.

Family Meal

he birthday lunch that never grew up, until. . . .

For my sister, Mary, who has lived in a Maryland institution for the mentally retarded since she was 8, there's no hiding the fact that food is central. When she is eating, food appears to be the focus of her attention. She doesn't like to be distracted from it by conversations, let alone by dramatic events. In anticipating the birthday lunches my parents planned for her on her yearly two-hour visits to their summer rental in Bronxville, N.Y., to which she was accompanied by an attendant, she would always reel off the menu she was expecting. This meal never varied throughout her teens and remained unchanged as she passed through her 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s: chicken salad, tomatoes, rolls with butter, iced tea, ice cream and cake. Each summer, she would mention the food within moments of arriving. Mary has a way of speaking that can almost be like singing or intoning, with each syllable given enormous weight. This menu always sounded particularly emphatic. During the chicken-salad course, she would mention a few times that ice cream and cake were coming.

Mary is 59. So am I. We are twins. These days, children with the degree of autism, mental retardation and elements of schizophrenia from which she suffers are more likely to live in a group home than to be institutionalized. Indeed, even the notion of "suffering" that I just suggested has come to look a

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Allen Shawn, the composer and writer, teaches at Bennington College. He is the author of "Wish I Could Be There."

Photograph by Laura Letinsky

Escorted by an aide, Mary arrived dressed in a snappy striped shirt and pink summer pants. She had a particularly comfortable, confident air. In fact, it was as if she knew her way around. Although she asked where the bathroom was, she walked to it as if from long-buried habit. Her ease in the apartment, and with our mother, was self-evident. But this was the least of the surprises. She ate her chicken salad and rolls and tomatoes, to be sure, but she was particularly taken with the antipasto, of which she asked for second and third helpings, while asking for more of everything by name. She dug into the watermelon and the unexpected salad with obvious delight and interest. More than once she said that she was having a wonderful time.

And all of this occurred in the presence of a miracle. From the moment our mother was brought into the room, her eyes remained open in unmistakable wonder and joy, as she looked from one of us to the other in astonishment and gratitude, galvanized, awakened, transfixed, radiantly fulfilled by the sight of her daughter. The occasion brought her back from a kind of somnolence that had lasted for months, as if encountering bright daylight after an age of darkness. Her eyes remained opened even after Mary left, and that night she barely slept.

It is amazing how much people contain that we never have a chance to

until the garlic just begins to color. Add the anchovies, reduce the heat to very low and stir until the anchovies have dissolved. Season lightly with salt and pepper to taste.

2. Just before serving, arrange the trimmed vegetables on a large platter and serve with the anchovy dip. *Serves 4. Adapted from "Biba's Northern Italian Cooking."*

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know about, how vast and mysterious we all are. I thought back to this birthday lunch when, only a few months later, we were remembering our mother. How could I not cry when Piergiorgio recited these lines in Italian from a poem by Salvatore Quasimodo:

Ognuno sta solo sul cuor della terra
trafitto da un raggio di sole:
ed è subito sera.

(Everyone stands alone on the heart of the earth
transfixed by a sun ray:
and suddenly it is evening.) ■

The Velveeta Chronicles: a Food Memoir

Phyllis Weaver

Eating, cooking, family feeding, menu planning, recipe testing and cookbook reading. These activities don't just punctuate my life story, they tell it. Making and eating food together binds three generations of my family like bread crumbs and eggs bind the different ingredients in a meatloaf. I can still recall, with equal enthusiasm and precision, the best fried-egg sandwich I ever ate and the first time I ate white truffles shaved over fresh pasta. I remember vividly my childhood favourite foods, their colours, tastes and smells, and the long-ago table around which I ate them. But are the memories accurate? Distinguished Co-Chair, Theodore Zeldin, concluded the opening session of the 2000 Symposium noting that all memory is inaccurate. When we consider memory – whether of food or family or war or flowers – we necessarily consider it in the context of psychology. Food memories are shaped and reshaped by our individual and collective psyches, to serve the needs of our psyches. In memoir form I explore and interpret the significance of my childhood food memories, inaccuracies and all.

Ingredients: take two sisters

They were sisters, my mother, Ida, and my aunt Evelyn, born to Rumanian-Jewish immigrant parents, Bubby and Zady (grandmother and grandfather) to me. Both girls were smart but neither went to college after high school. Beyond their intelligence Ida and Evelyn bore little resemblance to one another: not in appearance, disposition, or life style. Although I loved them both dearly, as a child, I sometimes wished for a part-time family transplant, where Evelyn was my mother and Ida was my aunt. Family background reveals the reason.

My mother was an attractive, often stout, strawberry blonde. Although she moved away from Bubby and Zady, she never expanded her horizon. She married my father, the vagabond lover, Frank Sinatra look-alike, who blew into town and swept her off her feet, literally. (He was a dancer.) He had many 'careers'. He worked for Zady peddling cigars, cigarettes and candy. He owned saloons, one with a craps game upstairs. He drove a taxi. He was a furrier. He sold cars and aluminium siding, and he fixed televisions and re-modelled

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kitchens. He kept company with low-level gangsters, when they weren't in jail. He adored us but he didn't offer much day-to-day emotional or financial stability.

Ida tried to keep house and raise us, her two daughters. But she wrapped herself in a protective fantasy world so the banality of her everyday life could only disappoint her. She suffered from bouts of depression before the condition became a household word. So our home was chaotic and our lives unscheduled. My sister and I were governed more by whim than by rules; we were often left to find and make our own way. But sometimes when our mother was in the kitchen she shined like the colour of her hair. When she cooked her dishes were seldom ready at the same time, and some never even made it out of the kitchen. But there were stretches when the recipes worked and arrived at the table about the same time we did.

Aunt Evelyn, six years younger, was long-legged and lean with coarse black hair. She effervesced like the bottles of seltzer water delivered to the back door of our house. She always lived with or near her parents, but her spirit propelled her out of the small first-generation world she was raised in. Evie married well: the young doctor she met while working at the local veterans' hospital. She set her sights on him, attracted to his future as much as to his refinement and intellectual brilliance. He became an allergist, and she became a homemaker. She painted and sculpted; she gave dinner parties with themes. She tap-danced and wrote musical parodies for charity events. She raised four children and then educated herself. Evelyn embraced the role of traditional homemaker as much as Ida was overwhelmed by it. Her house was clean and orderly and her meals were served like clockwork. The food from her kitchen was as reliable and consistent as she was. I thought it was delicious.

Ingredients: stir in the grandparents

Bubby and Zady's house was my home for the first five years of my life. We lived with them (and Aunt Evie, until she married) in the three-family house they owned. They were Orthodox Jews, kept kosher and spoke Yiddish.

Zady was a practical man. He smoked his cigar from a pipe to free up his hands, cut holes in his leather shoes to make room for his bunions and recommended *Briosci* after dinner for heartburn and indigestion. It stood tall in its cobalt-blue glass jar, right next to the seltzer bottle on the kitchen table, both at attention guarding against digestive angst. He would hold court at that same table for anyone who would listen: 'I know fowl,' he might command. 'I know chicken; I know capon; I know turkey,' expounding on the culinary advantages of each. He treasured his grandchildren: '*meine kinderlach*,' he called us, and we worshipped him.

Bubby was a quiet, simple woman. She kept house and cooked peasant food. She dressed early every morning, corsetted in a 'house dress', wearing gartered stockings and sensible shoes. Her flower-printed apron held hard candies in its big front pocket for us grandchildren to help ourselves. She rarely smiled and she was not gentle-handed. When she bathed us we were scoured clean – like her pots and pans. But we never doubted her unconditional love.

Zady spoke a little English, Bubby spoke virtually none, and she never learned to drive. So Zady did the food shopping according to her instructions. He was the driving force in their small empire; but he let Bubby believe she was empress of the kitchen. Their kitchen conjures up food memories with faraway names like *helzel*, *prakas*, *essig fleisch* and *lukchen* and *kay*. To me *helzel* could be a cousin, *prakas* a river, *essig fleisch* an industrial city and *lukchen* and *kay* a couple. Except for *helzel*, stuffed chicken neck, I loved these strange sounding foods. (The remaining three are stuffed cabbage, sweet and sour beef, and noodles with farmers' cheese, respectively.)

Bubby did the everyday cooking. On Friday mornings she made egg noodles for the chicken soup she'd ladle out at Shabbat dinner. She would knead and then roll out the dough, paper thin, dust it with flour, and roll it tight, jelly-roll fashion. After she had cut thin slices across the roll my sister and I got to uncoil the velvety noodles between our up-turned, floured fingers. Under Bubby's watchful eye we'd transfer them to a bed to dry, laid out on clean linen towels.

Zady commandeered the kitchen for the preparation of special dishes. He was in charge of making gefilte fish on Passover, starting with the white fish swimming laps in the bathtub. Live chickens spent their last hours pacing in our cellar, soon to become our Jewish holiday main attraction. On those Sunday mornings that Zady declared special he made *mamaliga*, a corn meal mush of Rumanian descent. Long before polenta went mainstream we knew about cornmeal. Zady would boil it up, stirring with a giant dowel, and then he'd ceremoniously turn the steaming yellow mound onto a wooden cutting board. Just a second ago it was a viscous liquid; now it was a brick he sliced with a string held taut between his hands. We ate it dripping with butter, farmers' cheese and sour cream; comfort food without equal.

Meals at Bubby and Zady's were heavy, delicious and memorable. These two were born of peasant stock. Their food reflected their culture, and their hefty bodies reflected their food. The dishes contained few ingredients, lacked subtlety and were prepared without much magic. They stuck to my ribs like the names stick in my memory. Every dish was made from scratch with none of the canned or frozen conveniences of the next generation. The recipes for Evie and Ida's specialities were often from the backs of boxes or from labels on

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cans. They beckoned more for their names than their tastes. These names could be exciting, using words like 'soufflé' or 'surprise' in the titles. Or they could be alliterative names like 'cheesy tuna chowder', 'cold curried rice salad' or 'chocolate super speeder'. The sisters clipped, saved and traded recipes. Evie's modified for her kosher kitchen.

Sea(food) change

When I was five years old there was a sea change in our kitchen and in our lives. We moved away to another house in another city and state, leaving behind the security of our warm and steady home. It was scary and exciting at the same time to be on our own. I remember the thrill my parents expressed over their decision to stop keeping kosher. They were giddy as they integrated the separate milk and meat flatware and dishes into the same cabinets and drawers. They wasted no time bringing forbidden pork products to the table. Now we could have bacon and eggs for breakfast, with butter on the biscuits that came from a cardboard tube. We were free to add ham to a cheese sandwich or cheese to a hamburger.

When our turbulent financial circumstances were calm and steady I remember my mother managing the housework and cooking. Then we might have the all-American shrimp cocktail, filet mignon and twice-baked potatoes for celebratory suppers; but such extravagances were rare. Apart from these special meals, her cooking didn't vary regardless of our financial security. Because my father had more financial downs than ups my mother preferred to steel herself for the inevitable tough times ahead. So she embraced recipes that called for lesser cuts of meat and ones where ground beef was stretched with fillers. Our kitchen, our meals and our whole house were only loosely organized, and then only some of the time. There were no strictly scheduled mealtimes. We ate when Ida got the food ready, or we snacked when we got hungry; often the latter came first. I am ashamed to remember that my sister and I spent more time ridiculing our mother's culinary efforts than we did supporting them. The balance in our family was delicate, and it was easily and often upset. Accordingly, if we minimized the importance of her cooking when she could do it, then we could deny its impact when she couldn't.

Yellow: the colour of my dream food

I was always hungry and could satisfy my hunger best at my aunt's table. I longed, not so much for her food, but what her food signified: the order and predictability of her kind of mothering. If Aunt Evie was the sometimes mother of my fantasies, then her house was my dream house and being with her in the kitchen was my dream come true. Evelyn was bigger than life, a

Technicolor screen shielding me from the burdensome circumstances of my own family.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner were at the same time every day. I can still picture Aunt Evie: 8.00 a.m. and she was in the kitchen with her apron on, ready to fix breakfast. Cereal boxes were on the table, and Wonderbread was near the toaster. While my cousins and I ate we could watch her do her prep work for future meals. On Friday she might be readying a brisket for Shabbat dinner or making blintzes to freeze for Sunday brunch. When we finished eating we were ready to help her.

When I was too young for serious kitchen work I would play on the floor with my younger cousins. The bottom cabinets held treasures just for us: plastic bowls and wooden spoons, measuring cups and cookie cutters. We were her shadow chefs, ready to do in thin air what she did with the raw ingredients of my dream food. In time we had real jobs suited to our age and skill: spooning flour into measuring cups, spinning just-washed lettuce in a mesh metal basket.

Lunch was at noon. One cousin only ate Kraft macaroni and cheese, sliced hard-boiled eggs, baked potatoes – a carbo-loader before the days of marathons. Another cousin ate only grilled cheese sandwiches. He wouldn't eat them unless Evie made them according to a formula so precise it would have challenged future rocket scientists. She could only use one thin slice of Velveeta, cut with a certain cheese slicer. And she had to render it virtually two-dimensional as it cooked, squeezing the marigold yellow guts out of it with the pancake turner. If my cousins ate few things, I would eat anything Evie prepared.

Dinner was at six. Keeping a kosher kitchen meant that meals were either dairy or meat. Her dairy meals form my most vivid memories: three cheesy, starchy dishes in particular. Although we had tuna burger surprise regularly, it remained a mystery. Cubes of Velveeta, 'hidden' in tuna salad, held the surprise position of honour, but not for me. Every time Evie fixed it, I'd marvel: 'How can you bake sandwiches in waxed paper bags without them catching fire? Why doesn't the wax melt onto the buns?' Evie never revealed how the waxed paper baked without pyrotechnics, so her kitchen magic, not Velveeta, held the surprise for me.

I loved Evie's tuna noodle casserole. Helping her make it was child's play: boiling, draining, chopping, dicing, stirring, layering, sprinkling, baking. It emerged from the oven in its glass vessel. Bubbling up through the cracks in the buttered bread-crumb topping, the molten cream of mushroom soup erupted. It rose through the volcanic layers of spaghetti alternating with flaked tuna and diced Velveeta, onion and green pepper. Once it settled down we could excavate the layers. I studied the second day's chilled remains, the layers visible now, each in cross-section.

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There is a world of difference between a cheese sandwich and The Cheese Sandwich Soufflé. They start out the same, white bread and slices of yellow American cheese. There the similarities end. The cheese sandwich soufflé works its magic overnight; assembled in a buttered baking dish, it hibernates in a milk and custard bath, refrigerated until ready for the oven. Before it is baked melted butter is poured over the top. Up it puffs, the butter forming a rich crusty, protective cover. After an hour under fire it is ready to eat for whichever meal you crave it.

So it was that Aunt Evie could perform miracles with milk and eggs and bread and cheese. She was the queen of canned tuna fish. Her leftovers were legendary, her casseroles fit for royalty. Yellow was the predominant colour of her dairy meals. And it is the colour of my dream food. At the warm centre of the colour spectrum it seems to illuminate and bring warmth to every other colour. My Aunt Evelyn must have known instinctively how to translate the warmth of her soul to the palate of her kitchen.

My dream food: a nightmare in yellow

And then I tested the recipes. I prepared the three yellow cheese dishes I so fondly remember. That I hadn't had tuna burger surprise or cheese sandwich soufflé in over 25 years should have been a hint. During my pregnancy, thirteen years ago, I craved and indulged in the tuna noodle casserole. It was delicious. My tastes and eating habits are different now – dare I say more sophisticated and worldly? Nevertheless, I was fully convinced these homey provincial dishes would be tasty and satisfying. I was unprepared for the results. Firstly, the tuna noodle casserole was only edible, the crumb topping good, but not rich and delicious as I remembered it. Overall runny and bland, it simply was not worth the time it took to make and eat it. Thinning the condensed cream of mushroom soup recalled the colour, smell and consistency of the flour and water paste we concocted in grade school for making papier mâché.

Secondly, the cheese sandwich soufflé was notably ghastly. The spongy bread turns to mush from the long soak in custard, and the American cheese within is oily and too tangy. The prescribed one-hour cooking time dries out the edges. I could not eat a full portion. My son, Chaz, and I have been making a contemporary version of this dish for about two years now. We use a good, store-bought bread and fresh mozzarella cheese. Sometimes we bake the sandwiches, sometimes we pan-grill them French toast style. My son calls our dish French-toast *Arepas*, a take on the Columbian street food we buy in Miami Beach. We think they are delicious. I hope Chaz still does when he remakes them as an adult.

Thirdly, tuna surprise was the biggest surprise of all. It was inedible. The bun was papery dry and tasted of melted wax; the filling looked and tasted pre-digested, and there was no cheesy surprise. I could not eat it. Neither would my West Highland Terrier. 'No matter,' I mused, 'with its onion and celery filler the tuna salad would make a tasty cold sandwich tomorrow.' Tomorrow came but the Velveeta vanished. The package features a slogan, 'The magic is in the melt.' It sure is! This processed cheese food can melt even without being heated.

If American cheese is no longer to my liking, millions of others apparently do not agree. I learned from Kraft Foods that their cheese slices sold in the United States, placed end on end, would circle the world fifteen times. And across my country approximately 24 sandwiches with Kraft cheese are eaten every second. These are just one company's sales. Velveeta was developed in 1928 by Kraft scientists to prevent the loss of milk nutrients removed during cheese making. They perfected a means to incorporate the whey components into the processed cheese food. It's ironic that such an unlikely source of nutrition in fact was developed to meet a nutritional need.

These taste-testing disasters did not tarnish my food memories in the least. Instead, they strengthen a theory that, in memory, the food is far less important than the maker. Remembering my aunt and her food in a halo of perfection is suspect, suggesting that her exaggerated image served to defend against a far less sanguine reality at home. My preference, in memory, for yellow food is significant. Yellow is the colour of butter, cream and eggs that associate to mother's milk, both literally and figuratively.

Meatloaf revisited

If my aunt and her food were not as perfect as my memories are, then was my mother and her food necessarily as flawed as I remember them? Yes and no. My sister, six years my senior, confirms the loss of stability when we moved away from our grandparents and aunt. She recalls the same disorder and lack of regularity in our household and our meals. But we put our heads together and could remember our favourite foods from our mother's kitchen. Sometimes, from the chaos, dishes emerged that were brown and orange and reliable. And, unlike my aunt's yellow cheese recipes that I so fondly remember but do not use, I realize some of my mother's staples are my family's favourites to this day.

Ida and Evie used the same recipe for sweet and sour brisket, but my mother's rendition was tastier. Being more budget conscious and less health conscious she used the fatty second cut of meat for this treat. A top layer of fat-laden meat moistened and protected the lean meat below. I include this recipe here but I have renamed it 'Sweet and Sour Ida's Brisket' to acknowledge her travails. Please try this at home.

Glazed corned beef was a kosher stand-in for baked ham. At our house we could have either. But we begged for the corned beef version because I detested the dreaded pre-shaped ham from a can. My sister and I would gag as the metal top was rolled back to reveal the gelatinous pink and white mess inside the tin. Like the ham version, glazed corned beef had canned pineapple rings that caramelized as they baked on top of the meat.

The sisters made the same meatloaf, but ours was topped with bacon. It was an ugly pinkish orange in the mixing bowl but I defend it, nonetheless, with its fillers of ketchup, canned evaporated milk and cornflake crumbs, because the end result was so delicious. At dinner my sister and I would fight over the slices with the most bacon. There was none left to fight over by the time we had it cold in sandwiches the next day.

I didn't cook with my mother very often, although there is one dish I remember making with her. I enjoyed preparing it more than eating it. She called it porcupine meatballs. I got to mix the ground beef with uncooked rice then roll the combination golf-ball size. As I lowered them into the pot, they would sink and then disappear into the canned cream-of-tomato soup sauce. I remember peeking into the steaming pot, watching the sauce bubble, hoping to witness the moment when the rice would expand into porcupine needles, enlarging the meatballs to their end-game size. When I tested this dish recently it wasn't good, though I found it comforting and edible. It is the meatball magic and the shared food experience that give me a taste of the mother I longed for and the mother I try to remember.

Conclusions

Jewish tradition and 1950s post-war America form the tableau against which my childhood food memories are set. Traditional Jewish food strengthened the spiritual bond of the dispersed Hebrews of the Diaspora (Dolader 1999), and it tied me to the family we moved away from. But more prominent in my memory were the convenience foods of the post-war era prepared by my aunt in her Betty Crocker inspired kitchen. As an adult, remembering her food was far more satisfying than eating it. Shremp (1991) notes, 'reminiscences...make the food sound so special...but nostalgia gives it more status than it deserves.' If my aunt embodied Betty Crocker, then my mother was the Anti-Crocker. Anna Freud (1965) explains how, in the 'food-equals-mother' equation, the mother-child relationship is played out over feeding and eating, but conflicts can be circumvented by mother substitutes, in my case grandparents and aunt.

We all respond to the appearance of food in forming our preferences, and colour is among the first attributes we perceive. In fact, the evolution of colour in flowers and fruit arose from the co-evolution of vision and food colour. In

the jungle, red and yellow fruit evolved to help animals distinguish it from foliage:

> Zoologists are satisfied that the mechanism of color vision can develop or diminish in various species according to the requirements of survival.
>
> *Hutchings, 1999.*

It is no coincidence that yellow is a favoured food colour. According to Kaufman and Dahl (1992), noted colour designers, yellow appears to pervade our surroundings like sunshine. We associate yellow with light, so it is both illuminating and compelling. Our eyes are always drawn to a source of light. When we moved my aunt was my sunshine; her yellow food was my source of light.

There is, in psychoanalytic theory, reference to the screen memory, which I think is particularly relevant. Dreams or memories that are bathed in very bright light sometimes serve to cover, or screen, true memories. The more troublesome the actual circumstances are, the more unnaturally bright the screen light needs to be to shield reality. This mechanism accounts for the hyper-importance of my aunt and her yellow food. I remembered her and her 'perfect' cooking in uncommon detail, cast in a sunlit-like glow. Like the halo effect, everything associated with her was as good as gold.

Sweet and Sour Ida's Brisket

2 large onions, coarsely chopped • ½ cup unsulphured molasses
10 garlic cloves, peeled, left whole • Juice of 1 large lemon
3½ pound whole beef brisket, first or second cut • ¾ cup ketchup
Salt and pepper to taste

1. Pre-heat oven to 350°F.
2. Spread onions and garlic on the bottom of a shallow lidded baking dish.
3. Rub salt and pepper onto brisket and place in pan.
4. Mix molasses, lemon juice, and ketchup and spread over the meat.
5. Cover tightly or seal with heavy-duty aluminium foil. No steam must escape.
6. Bake 2½ to 3 hours or until very tender.
7. Slice across the grain and serve with pan juices.

Serves 4–6.

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A Yum Yum Party –Page 1

A fond food memory: It's 1968 and I'm a freshman at DU. The dorm doesn't serve dinner on Sunday so we're on our own. The usual weekly scenario is this: one of us wants Mexican, one, Chinese, another Italian—all on the cheap, of course. We go round and round until one Sunday when someone recalls a restaurant on South Colorado Blvd. -- The Yum Yum Tree -- Eight Restaurants Under One Roof. We're soon heading north away from campus.

Now anyone who remembers The Yum Yum Tree knows it was hardly fine dining. It was, instead, a novel concept, a precursor to the ubiquitous food courts found in every mall in America. But unlike today's mall food court, where customers stop by default, The Yum Yum Tree was a destination restaurant. You went there because you wanted Tommy Wong's sweet and sour drummettes (though whether they had any chicken in them is questionable), or bbq from Adam's Rib, or a thick sandwich from Ruben's Deli, or dessert from Apple Annie's. You went because it was a hoot getting your meal ticket from the young girl at the swing by the entrance. (You paid a cashier as you left.) Goofy as it sounds now, it was adventuresome dining and it was affordable.

Like most concepts, The Yum Yum Tree ran its course. It was last listed in the phone book in 1981 and by then it had moved from its South Colorado Blvd. location to 2802 South Havana. I'd stopped eating there many years earlier.

Still, I never forgot it and the role it had played during a major transition in my life. Away from home for the first time, navigating unknown territory with newly made friends, I could socialize on Sunday night without angst. The playing field was level – we all got what they wanted and no one had to spend more than they could afford. It was a great equalizer.

A few years ago, when my daughter's high school graduation and son's college graduation presented an occasion to celebrate, I flashed instantly on a party theme: The Yum Yum Tree. After all, except for the honorees, who'd never eaten there and were bored my stories about it, everyone else would not only remember it but also recall their own favorites meals.

My goal was not to recreate the eight restaurants once there. I wanted GOOD food. What I envisioned was my own version of The Yum Yum Tree with foods from long-gone Denver restaurants created from the recipes I'd cut out of the newspaper over the years—like Apple Tree Shanty's BBQ Sauce on brisket or chicken. In the absence of a recipe, I was willing to do an internet search for recipes that would recreate a restaurant dish I had loved –like the Pretzel Pie served at Furr's.

Coming up with a final menu was hard . What would translate well and feed 75 people?(Certainly the Chart House's Mud Pie didn't make the cut.) I read and reread my restaurant and internet recipe clips. Finally I put together a list of appetizers, main dishes and desserts -- all either exactly like the original (because I had the recipe) or reminiscent of the original -- along with great help from ~~my~~ Three Tomatoes, the wonderful caterer who also remembered many of the dishes I wanted to serve. (See menu.)

A Yum Yum Party—Page 2

My Yum Yum Tree was created with serpentine tables around the largest tree in my backyard (filled with twinkling lights) and signage in front of each dish. As guests went through the line and then sat at round tables lit with votives, they not only told of their favorite foods at the original Yum Yum Tree but they mentioned recipes from long-gone Denver restaurants that they had tucked away in their archives. Many offered the recipes to me to use at my next Yum Yum Tree party. I didn't have the nerve to say, "You only throw this kind of party once."

That said, the party was a blast, the food incredible, the nostalgia a hit. The pay -off -- both honorees who'd never set foot in the restaurant and pooh poohed my party theme ("How's this party about us?" they repeatedly asked), agreed that everything—absolutely everything-- was yum yum.

The Yum Yum Tree Menu

(If a dish has a star, it means I had a recipe; if not, it means I recreated it with the help of the internet and the caterer.)

Appetizers:

Wise Potato Chips and Onion Dip

(Why Wise? My hubby's favorite chip---I ordered them on-line).

Tommy Wong's mini egg rolls

Poncho's Patio mini chili rellenos

Main Course

Denver Drumstick's fried chicken drummettes

With Texas toast

Round the Corner's Mini Caesar Burgers *

With dill pickle chips

Furr's Creamy Macaroni and Cheese

With mini cinnamon rolls

Apple Tree Shanty BBQ Brisket of Beef Sandwiches *

With cole slaw

Thunderbird Salad *

(An Omaha restaurant favorite—I ordered the dressing from the supplier in Lincoln.)

Dessert

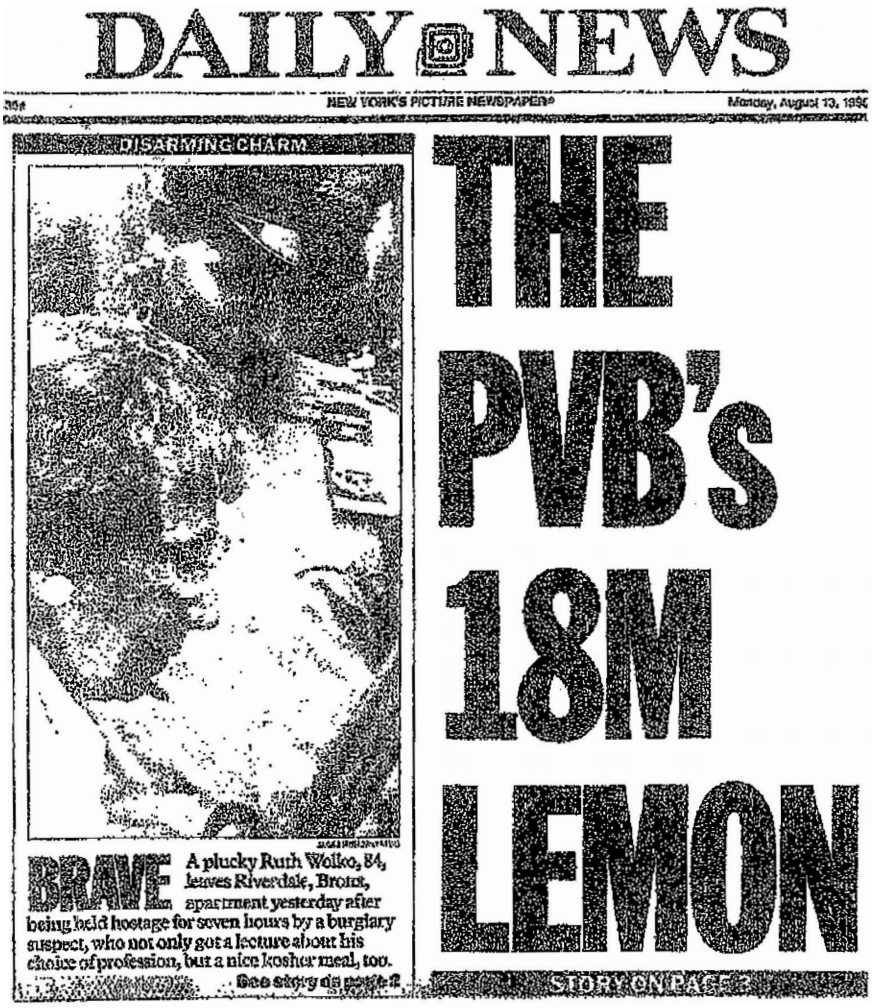
Furr's Pretzel Pie

Apple Tree Shanty Baked Apples*

Alfalfa's Espresso Chocolate Chip Cookies*

Rice Krispy Treats (Just because!)

Stuffed by Patricia Volk



DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

Monday, August 13, 199

DISARMING CHARM

THE PVB's 18M LEMON

BRAVE A plucky Ruth Wolko, 84, leaves Riverdale, Bronx, apartment yesterday after being held hostage for seven hours by a burglary suspect, who not only got a lecture about his choice of profession, but a nice kosher meal, too.

See story on page 2

STORY ON PAGE 2

Aunt Ruthie makes the front page after hostage negotiators exchange her for two cigarettes. (She never kept kosher.)

BUTTER COOKIES

"Your Uncle Albert and I had a whirlpool romance," Aunt Ruthie tells me. Then she pauses. "Is that the word I mean?"

We're having lunch to celebrate her eighty-ninth birthday. She dabs a little applesauce on her blintzes.

"I make the best applesauce," she says. "You want to know the secret? I put in the pits."

"You leave them *in*?"

"There's taste in the pits," she explains. "You quarter the apples, cook them in water, then you put them through a . . . through a . . ." The word is gone.

There are 159,260 women in New York City over eighty. You see them taking tai chi at the Y. You see them at Fairway elbowing toward the Florida grapefruits or examining the string beans one by one. They're on the bus after ten and before three. In winter they wear woollies. You used to see them at the Women's Exchange and Mary Elizabeth's. You used to see them at Schrafft's having tuna on toasted cheese bread and hot fudge sundaes with coffee ice cream. New York's oldest women have

outlived their hangouts. Most have outlived their husbands. One of them ran the marathon last year. Few are as lucky as Brooke Astor and Kitty Carlisle Hart and my mother's friend's mother Lola, who, at ninety-seven, stands on her dining-room table twice a year to clean the chandelier. What's a little old lady anymore anyway? Grace Paley? Matilda Krim? Aunt Ruthie?

"If I live to be a hundred, I won't finish these blintzes," Aunt Ruthie says. "Take one, darling."

"You really leave the pits in?"

"And the skin."

Maybe you've heard of my Aunt Ruthie. She's the woman who was taken hostage in her Bronx apartment by an ex-paratrooper on August 4, 1990. It was a hot night. She left her bathroom window open. José Cruz climbed in and held Aunt Ruthie at gunpoint for seven hours. BRAVE, the *Daily News* ran under her photo on page 1. YIDDISH CHARM NAILS SUSPECT, said the *New York Post*. He ate all her plums, a wedge of Jarlsberg, and three nectarines before the police exchanged her for two cigarettes.

"When you go to prison," Aunt Ruthie counseled him, "take out some books. Learn a different profession. It's important in life to get hold of yourself."

Aunt Ruthie got hold of herself young. After graduating Morris High, she got a clerical job at the Pathé Exchange on West Forty-fifth Street. Aunt Ruthie couldn't help noticing that the office supervisor, a Miss Maloubier, was taking lunch from twelve to four. Six months later Aunt Ruthie had Miss Maloubier's job. "I was so fast and thorough, they advanced me." She made fifty dollars a week, which she gave to her mother, who gave her an allowance. "That's the way it was then, darling. I didn't think anything else."

A woman who looks like George Burns sits down at the table next to us. She knows Aunt Ruthie from the building and starts complaining about the super, how he mops the lobby using the same bucket of water he uses to mop the basement, how she's been keeping an eye on him and she knows. When we finally

disengage, Aunt Ruthie blinks at me in an exaggerated way. First one eye, then the other, then both, then one eye again. I think she is sending me a code that she doesn't like the woman, so I nod to show I get it. Then Aunt Ruthie tells me she can't see out of her left eye.

"You accept these things." She shrugs. "No pain, thank goodness."

Aunt Ruthie can remember the taste of her mother's egg sandwiches and recite "All the world's a stage." But she's puzzled she's "lost" Latin. In 1930, when she married Uncle Albert—"I was attracted to him. He was the Beau Brummel type"—her mother-in-law insisted she retire.

"But you'd worked there five years. You loved that job. Didn't you mind?"

"I ran sixteen girls in that office, but she was against it. *So* against it. At that time there weren't many married women working."

Aunt Ruthie's not tough, but she's resilient. She's what you'd call old New York genteel. I worry that when she dies, her syntax will disappear from the universe. There should be a place that preserves the way women spoke, the way the Yivo Institute preserves Yiddish. For instance, when you agree with Aunt Ruthie, she prolongs the agreement with "Am I right?" as in:

AUNT RUTHIE: So help me, that woman looks just like George Burns.
ME: You're right. She looks just like George Burns.
AUNT RUTHIE: Am I right?

"I'll be jiggered," she likes to say. "Out of this world." "Isn't it something?" "May I be struck with lightning." "Honest to God." "As I live and breathe." "She's not my cup of tea." "Mixed vegetables." "You should only never know." "I could eat her up." "Always the lady." "I won't hear of it." "Vichy." "Certainly." "Frigidaire" and "Down below" or "*There.*"

Like the song says, she calls everybody "darling."

"Darling, do you think you could find this for me in a fourteen?"

"I'll have the toasted pimento cheese and a cup of coffee, darling, if you don't mind."

"Darling, if you have a seat on the aisle, I'd be so appreciative."

And to me on the phone: "I had my hair done, darling. I wish you could see it."

I ask her about a word my grandmother used to use.

"*Umbashrign?* It's like God bless you. On that order, darling."

Aunt Ruthie lives by herself. She's not half of the New York Odd Couple, a widow and her live-in companion. You see these women on sunny days, walking with care or getting pushed. Aunt Ruthie does just fine, even though she was hit by a stolen van in front of Key Foods two years ago. She wound up with a broken hip and shoulder, and now, when she leaves the apartment, Aunt Ruthie uses a shopping cart for balance. She weights it with the Bronx Yellow Pages.

"I make out I'm going shopping." She laughs. In her black tight skirt, black sweater, and black heels with patent toe caps, Aunt Ruthie looks stylish even with the cart.

A friend stops by our table and admires her red jacket.

"Trying to get noticed, Ruth?"

"Well, what do you think?" Aunt Ruthie jokes back.

Then she whispers, "The *Blair Catalog.* Thirty-nine dollars," to me.

The three sisters—my grandmother Polly, Aunt Gertie, and Aunt Ruthie—all wound up having trouble walking. But it's especially sad to see Aunt Ruthie with a limp. She and Uncle Albert were the family dancers. At every fancy function they took over the dance floor, chin-flicking to the tango, kicking out to the cha-cha, fox-trotting so it actually looked like a trot, spinning in smiling synch, clearing the floor, everyone watching as Aunt Ruthie's fingers rested like the tip of a wing on Uncle Albert's palm, our very own Fred and Ginger.

Every week Aunt Ruthie gets together with the girls. These are new girls. The old girls, her four best friends, are dead. And

every week Aunt Ruthie gets her pageboy done. It's still got a lot of black.

"Is that your real hair color?"

"I swear to you as my name is Ruth. But people don't believe me, so I tell them I use shoe polish."

Back at the apartment, Aunt Ruthie asks if I could use her mahjong set. When I admire a needlepoint pillow, she says, "Take it home." I follow her into the kitchen. There's Aunt Ruthie's twenty-four-inch white enamel gas stove, the one that's seen forty-three years of Chicken à la Thousand Island Dressing, Meat Loaf with Dole Pineapple Rings and Stuffed Cabbage with Ocean Spray Whole Cranberry Sauce, the vintage oven she uses for her butter cookies. The three sisters all made thumbprint butter cookies. They all used their mother's recipe, but the cookies came out different. Nana's were the roundest, Aunt Gertie's were the flattest, and Aunt Ruthie's were free-form. Nana's were the butteriest, Aunt Gertie's were the flakiest, and Aunt Ruthie's used the most sugar. Nana's were pale, Aunt Ruthie's were brown, and Aunt Gertie's shined because she alone painted the tops with egg white. The three sisters filled the thumbprint with jam or a chocolate morsel except for Aunt Gertie. In addition to jam and chocolate, Aunt Gertie improvised with walnut crumbs, although she was the only one who liked walnut crumbs. Sometimes Aunt Ruthie put a whole Hershey's Kiss in the thumbprint, creating a cookie of high promise. But the sorry fact is, her cookies were inedible. Each time Aunt Ruthie gave me a tin, I'd try one, hoping this batch would be different, that I'd be able to taste the butter and vanilla, that this time they'd be good. I'd take a bite, raise my eyebrows, and go "Ummm . . . UMMMMM!" because that's what Aunt Ruthie was waiting for. I'd smile and shake my head with faux wonder. Then I'd say, "They're so good. Can I save them for later?" How could I tell her they had freezer burn and left an oil slick on the roof of your mouth? Once I learned to cook, I knew what was wrong. Aunt Ruthie didn't use butter in her butter cookies. The Crisco must have been to save money.

Aunt Ruthie takes her carving knife out of a drawer. She unwraps a slice of marbled halvah from the birthday basket Mom sent from Zabar's. With decisiveness she cuts a piece. Then, wrapping it in waxed paper, "This is for your *husband*," she warns in a different voice. "*You* don't need it."

I never anticipate the zinger. When I'm with Aunt Ruthie, I'm having such a good time I forget she does that. Even though I may not have spoken to Aunt Ruthie for two months because of a past zinger, all is forgotten when I am swept back into the culture of my youth, when I am called "darling," "light of my life," or her favorite, "my love." I am adored, adored. But then there it is—the Aunt Ruthie zinger. My heart and upper arms feel fizzy. It's an adrenaline surge, the kind you get crossing the street when a car almost clips you.

This is for your husband. You don't need it.

Zing! Does she think I'm fat? Zing! Zing! Was I going to scarf the slice on the Mosholu Parkway, allowing my husband to think I visited Aunt Ruthie without bringing something for him? That Aunt Ruthie provided no gift for the man of the house? Zing. Zing went the strings of my heart. What's the matter with me? Can't I have some halvah too?

It's a shocker, the Aunt Ruthie zinger. She loves you to death, she loves you so incredibly much you forget she zings. Then she zings. Sometimes I take a little vacation. I don't call. Then Aunt Ruthie phones, her voice wobbly, and says, "Why haven't I heard from you, my love?" and I'm overcome with missing her. Why does every encounter come with one poison dart? Is it the power to hurt that proves you still mean something to somebody? Is it a tic? Is this why the daughter-in-law I never met won't see her? Why the granddaughters don't call? Why has she never seen and held her great-grandchildren? How does Aunt Ruthie survive the hole in her heart where family should be?

"For the life of me"—Aunt Ruthie dabs her eyes with a han

kie—"I don't know what I did. As God is my witness, you tell me, darling. What on the face of this earth did I do?"

This is the theme, the central gnawing conundrum of Aunt Ruthie's every waking day. How can people hate an old lady so much they won't let her see her own flesh and blood?

Some zings are breathtaking.

To a child having trouble in school: "Your brother gets nothing but straight A's. What a pity you're having such difficulties, darling."

To an aunt with a weight problem: "Would you like a safety pin for that seam, my love? Fat people are so hard on clothes."

To my mother whose hand-me-downs Aunt Ruthie depends on: "It cost me eleven fifty to fix the shoulders on the pink suit. Can you imagine, light of my life? Eleven dollars and fifty cents! It was that out of fashion."

To me as she points to one of my children: "Now *that* child is extraordinary."

What about the other one?

If you say, "Aunt Ruthie, it hurts my feelings you only inquire about one of my kids," her jaw drops open like a nutcracker. "Darling, you misunderstood me," she says.

Does she do it on purpose? Does she not know she does it? What's in it for her? Why does she keep doing the thing that makes what she wants most in life impossible? Only once, when my mother refused to retreat, did Aunt Ruthie back down. "I know." Aunt Ruthie wept. "I can't help myself. Forgive me, Audrey darling. I don't know why I do that."

I cherish Aunt Ruthie for loving my grandmother Polly as much as she did. "There's no words," Aunt Ruthie says. "I don't know how to describe her. She made up for everything heavy in my heart." And for remembering details like how my grandmother wore her braids on her wedding day and how a woman could fake having a hymen on her wedding night with chicken blood. Aunt Ruthie is the last survivor of the generation that spawned my mother. She never complains about

money. She's never had any. She makes me think of my beloved godmother, whose financial security can't do a thing for her Alzheimer's. It's advanced to the stage where my dearest Dorothy doesn't know she's Dorothy. The last time I took her to lunch, she couldn't remember our names. We sat in a luncheonette on West Seventy-second Street, and she kept asking, ever polite because patterns of civility are the last thing to go, "Now, you are . . . ?" and "Who, may I ask, exactly are you?" The first few times I told her, "I'm Patty." Then I'd say, "I'm Patty. Cecil and Audrey's daughter, Jo Ann's sister, Peter and Polly's mother." Then I took a paper napkin out of the dispenser and began writing it down. Each time she asked me who I was, I'd write Patty on a napkin and hold it up for her to read. Then she'd work the clasp of her bag, stuff the napkin in, and say, "Ahhhh. And how do I get in touch with you . . . uh . . . Patty?" So I'd take the napkin back and write my phone number on it too. When we used up all the napkins in our dispenser, I took a dispenser from an empty table. Each time I wrote my name and number down, Dorothy looked relieved.

We walked back to her apartment at the Majestic, her handbag crammed with napkins. Then I left the city for the weekend. When I returned Sunday night, there were nineteen messages on my answering machine: "Hello. . . . Who are you?" "Hello. . . . Where are you?" "Hello. . . . Who is this?" "Hello. . . . Who is Patty?" "Hello, this is Patty. Call me." That was three years ago, when she was still able to speak. Aunt Ruthie is a reminder it doesn't have to be like that, not with our gene pool.

I thanked Aunt Ruthie for the needlepoint pillow and the halvah. "Good-bye, Aunt Ruthie." I bent to kiss her.

After visiting Aunt Ruthie, that night I dream I'm taking her to the Metropolitan Museum. "Leave your shopping cart at home," I tell her. "We'll slide." We do the Great Hall like ice-skaters, gliding over the stone floors in flat shoes.

I wake up thinking about her applesauce and call my mother.

"What's the thing you push food through that gets out the pits when you make applesauce?" I ask.

"A Foley Food Mill," Mom says.

So I dial the Bronx.

"Of course!" Aunt Ruthie gasps. "The letters are right there on the side! Darling, would you tell me something, please? I want to know. How on earth could I forget that?"

Why Grandma Piggyback's Coffee Cake Was *That* Good

My grandmother Henrietta Ring, aka Grandma Piggyback—because she gave piggyback rides—was the most idolized cook in our family. Every few months during my elementary school years, my two older sisters and I would pile in the backseat of my parents' 1960s wood-paneled station wagon and trek from suburban Philadelphia to the Upper West Side of Manhattan for a feast at Henrietta's place. We usually spent the night at her house, a magical apartment trimmed in gold, from the picture frames to the armchairs; I loved sleeping on her satin sheets (which were gold too...what can I say? She *really* loved the color). She'd greet us at the door in a tailored suit with matching jewelry and shoes.

My whole family—except me, the ultimate fussy eater—loved the Polish-Jewish cuisine she served: chopped chicken livers, gefilte fish, herring, tongue, many things aspic and gelée, and honestly, I cannot complete this list without gagging. In my mind, I was there solely for my grandma's baking. Until that time, I could be found hiding in a corner, clutching my jar of Skippy peanut butter.

In the mornings, she'd make challah French toast, yet even *that* was too eggy in the center for my taste. But it smelled so good, so I ate the edges only, and she wouldn't mind at all. Afterward, I'd lean against her retro kitchen island and watch as she prepared the most marvelous treats, like thin and crispy lace cookies and her brownie pie.

"This is more than just brownies in a pie pan, my dear," she was fond of saying.

She also made the flakiest pie crusts, achieved via one of her seeming favorite ingredients: Crisco. I think she loved watching me watch her, and she always gave me a job, like collecting ingredients, or sifting the flour, or greasing the pans, forever with Crisco. Fussy eater that I was, I abhorred the Crisco, but I never

complained. Because when you could achieve a crust like hers, who cared how you got there?

While she worked, she'd look over at me with her huge blue eyes, which I inherited, and gold-tipped hair, which I did not, and stroke my cheek with the back her perfectly manicured fingers, which were often covered with flour. At those moments, the aromas of butter and sugar swirling around us, we were in our own baking bubble, and I was a happy girl. Especially when it came time to prepare my kind of masterpiece: her "world-famous" Broiled Coffee Cake.

"There are very few coffee cakes like mine, my dear," she'd say. "It's world-famous, because it requires broiling."

"Yes, Grandma. I know!"

Very dramatically, she'd whisk together the easy ingredients I'd collected for the recipe, her gold bangles clanging against the side of the bowl. I'd already prepped the pan, and minutes later, she was pouring in the smooth golden batter. Before long, the cake scents made their way into the kitchen. Then she'd work swiftly again, mixing up the topping, and when the cake was the color of doneness, she'd apply the creamy, buttery, nutty sugar on top and turn up the oven up to a broil.

"Stand back, my dear," she'd say. And I did. She put the cake under it for 30 seconds, a near eternity. She and I admired the brilliant sheen that had manifested before our eyes. Magic. We cleaned up quickly while the cake cooled, and finally, we were ready. I can still smell that cake today.

The aromas of butter and sugar swirling around us, we were in our own baking bubble.

My sisters never hung out in the kitchen with us, so I'm not sure if they were jealous when I'd escort Grandma Piggyback into the dining room with her Broiled Coffee Cake. I would have been! I considered our one-on-one baking sessions my primary culinary education. My grandma rarely recorded her recipes, and when

she did, in her round curlicue handwriting, it was to notate a pinch, something scant, overflowing, or heaping.

Grandma Piggyback married at 19, became a mother at 20, and when her parents died soon after, she raised her younger siblings as well. She did not work outside the home, but what a home she created! Golden. She developed a lifelong mantra: "Young people love me," and I think that's why she always showed such admiration, or possibly a longing, for lightheartedness and *jeu d'esprit*.

I've tried to pass along her baking prowess to my own daughter, but she seems happier in more of a front-of-house type position. She doesn't mind leaning against the counter, though, watching me broil coffee cake, or hearing stories about my kitchen time with Grandma Piggyback, whom she never met. In those moments, my daughter and I have created our own ritual, whereby I brush her cheek with the back of my flour-coated fingers, and we quote my grandma together:

"'Grease the pan, my dear. With Crisco....'"