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# Concoctions and Life-Long Connections: Women in the Kitchen

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**Concoctions and Life-Long Connections: Women in the  
Kitchen**

by

Jeanne O'Farrell Eddy

FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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## Concoctions and Life-Long Connections: Women in the Kitchen

### Abstract

This thesis examines the evolution of the American kitchen from the turn of the nineteenth century--historically, technologically, and socially--and the effect of such a transition on the lives of women. Following the introduction of such innovations as the kitchen sink, the cooking stove, the dishwasher, and the microwave oven, this thesis also examines the condition of women in the kitchen and observes the parallel growth, over time, of the kitchen and women's lives. The kitchen evolves from a place of imposed drudgery to that of the enlightened center of the home. We see that, as decades pass, the kitchen becomes a place of brightness, considered to be the home's heart, a place where food is shared, memories are created, and time with loved ones is savored.

In conclusion, this thesis poses the following questions: what shape will the kitchen of the twenty-first century take? How will food traditions and communication continue, and how will they evolve? These topics are relevant as our new century enters its second decade.

Jeanne O'Farrell Eddy

# Concoctions and Life-Long Connections: Women in the Kitchen

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## **Concoctions and Life-Long Connections: Women in the Kitchen**

### **~ Introduction ~**

#### **Early Memories**

Fond recollections of cooking lessons in my mother's kitchen are not part of my early history. My mother didn't enjoy cooking, but she did enjoy time spent there. The mother I see in ghosts-of-kitchens-past is 50-something, joined by a couple of neighbors with the same daily routine: drinking cups of instant Maxwell House and smoking Newports. At about 5:00 P.M., I see my mother fretting over what to serve her family for dinner. I remember packages of chicken breasts thawing on the kitchen counter, lying in pink puddles after hours at room temperature. With seven hungry kids and a husband who traveled most of the week, dinners were typically thrown together in an hour or less and with little enthusiasm. Rather than the aroma of home-baked bread or warm cookies, swirls of cigarette smoke greeted me at the door when I returned from school. I don't remember my mother ever mashing a potato or serving a fresh vegetable, except for corn-on-the-cob in the summer. My mother had four daughters and rarely asked for help. She was a one-woman band with limited inspiration. Still we loved the food our mother prepared for us, and she was clearly pleased when we enjoyed her meals. It was all we knew, and other mothers' cooking, no matter how fresh, well prepared, or gourmet, couldn't match it.

Despite the lack of culinary lessons from my mother's kitchen, I have happy memories of time spent there. We celebrated milestones (with a purchased cake, no doubt), and had many hours of conversation, happy and otherwise, around our table. My most enduring perception of time spent in my mother's kitchen is the sense of community we experienced there, assuring the

value of those moments. That relational aspect of community extended beyond the walls of our home. Our family rarely ate out, but when we did, it was a spectacle as nine of us entered the restaurant. No one loved eating out more than our mother. Whenever we fantasized about dinner and asked about her favorite thing to make, my mother's answer was always the same: "reservations." The repercussion of that legacy is that, since our mother's death, my siblings and I love to eat out together, and often spend hours talking and reminiscing at the table after dinner. Our cherished meal-time memories are of those occasions when we all dressed up—my dad wore a suit, our mother put on lipstick, and we'd pile into the station wagon to find a restaurant that could accommodate all nine of us at one table, or where we could fill every seat at the counter.

### **Experimentation and Encouragement**

Inspired by a simple recipe in one of my mother's women's magazines, I decided to learn to cook in fourth grade, and it changed my family's life. One well-received dish set me on a path toward continued experimentation and creativity. Happy with the new and different offerings, my parents and siblings were enthusiastic for each new dish served. I was the newly-crowned queen of our kitchen which fed my ego and prompted continued experimentation. I prided myself with mock apple pie (made of Ritz crackers and no apples) and Indian pudding. My mother was very proud when I formed eight hamburgers from one pound of ground beef (beloved McDonalds as my inspiration). A can of tuna fish combined with a can of cream of mushroom soup became an elegant meal when served over a mound of minute rice (with cooked frozen peas on the side). Then there was cake. Without any training, I learned to bake. First it was cake, and brownies, then cookies, and ultimately lemon meringue pie. For my twelfth birthday, my older sister presented me with my first recipe card box, still filled with recipes and

little notes written in loopy, rounded pre-teen cursive. Most recipes came from magazines, and some from sympathetic neighbors. My family was well-fed and happy. Acknowledging my mother's shortcomings in cooking, I applaud her encouragement whether my experiments succeeded or failed. I was the preferred family cook until my middle-teens, when life outside our family home became more attractive and I abandoned cooking for typical teenage pursuits.

### **Legacy**

As a young wife and mother, I initially duplicated the meals from my childhood. I, too, saw preparing dinner a chore. It wasn't until my children were teenagers and I was divorced that I found inspiration and freedom in creating good meals in my kitchen. While I always baked for my appreciative family, dinner preparation had been burdensome. Later, with less pressure to provide a meal, less demand to feed, and as my children grew up there was time to relax a bit and creativity was sparked. Now I enjoy cooking, which is ironic since there's often no one to share the wonderful concoctions of my lonely kitchen. To experience a shared meal and conversation, I often eat out with friends or my sisters rather than alone in my apartment.

The late renaissance of kitchen inspiration arrived in time: my offspring all love to cook. One daughter is a cook by profession, and her brothers and sisters are all very good cooks as well. Something positive happened in their formative years, and now, on those rare occasions when we are all together, memorable meals and interesting conversations arise.

### **Inspiration**

My own experiences in the kitchen and curiosity about women's culinary histories inspired me to investigate women's kitchen relationships. Women's earliest and arguably most important relationships develop in the kitchen. More than the nutritional center of the home, the



kitchen facilitates familial bonds within its walls. A family recipe provides an opportunity for learning and the kitchen becomes a classroom, a place where a family shares its history, where secrets and traditions are created and carried on. The space of the kitchen takes on significance as the setting to explore women's relationships. Relationships formed in the kitchen play a determining role in the life of a midlife woman as daughter, mother, and sister.

### **Perspectives**

Critics have divergent perspectives in regard to the kitchen as women's space. This thesis argues in favor of the positive role in the kitchen in maintaining tradition and relationships. However, it acknowledges that the kitchen has traditionally been viewed as a place of women's drudgery. Perhaps no critic better articulates the notion of kitchen as drudgery than Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who proposed the "kitchenless house" in which cooking along with preparation and clean up, as well as other domestic chores, be assigned to a central community service. Food would be more universal and less individualized, and women would realize hours of newfound freedom. In her works *Women and Economics*, *Concerning Children*, *The Home*, and *Human Work* (all written around the turn of the twentieth century), Gilman argued that women's domestic work was not and would never be granted the monetary value it deserved, and women would better serve the world relieved of such chores. Women in Gilman's ideal society, once free from domestic burdens, would exist on a more equal social and financial footing with men, and the entire community would benefit. Gilman's hope for liberating women from domestic responsibility would be somewhat realized in the twentieth century, but more due to societal and demographic transitions than the loosening of patriarchal binds. In *Coming Out of the Kitchen: Women Beyond the Home*, Una Robertson states:

The message that girls were destined to be wives and (hopefully) mothers and that married women stayed at home to care for husband, household and family was reiterated by countless authors throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. However, the world was changing rapidly. Society was changing...Above all, the concept of housewife herself was changing from that of pivotal person to figurehead, accompanied by the viewpoint that since domestic work was a matter for servants, domestic work was of a lowly status and demeaning, therefore, to anyone with a modicum of education or social worth. (188, 189)

## Space

Around the turn of the century, the bulk of kitchen work passed from privileged women to domestic servants, though patriarchal constraints were still evident in inadequate kitchen design, as noted in Joan Rothschild's and Victoria Rosner's essay "Feminisms and Design: Revisioning Spaces, Places, and Everyday Things":

Exploring how women experienced the spaces they occupy and use, architects, historians, and social scientist found that inadequacies of built environments reflected patriarchal social beliefs and practices of the white, middle-class culture. From housing design to the structuring of neighborhoods, cities, and suburbs, spatial arrangements for women and their families have not only been built on but have also served to reinforce two interrelated, reigning ideologies: (1) women are and should be confined to the home; (2) the private and public are separate spheres. (10/11)

In her book, *The Everlasting Pleasure: Influences on America's Kitchens, Cooks and Cookery from 1565 to the Year 2000*, Kathleen Ann Smallzreid writes about turn-of-the century magazine articles. She describes a 1900 *Ladies Home Journal* article with pictures depicting a new bride's kitchen:

...the *Journal* printed pictures of six prize kitchens, only one of which appeared to have a gas range. In two, counters were built around the sink, one with a tile back wall rising to a window. Ruffled curtains were hung at this window. Another picture illustrated a "novel idea for a kitchen—a table with a hinged shelf, for kneading and rolling bread. When not in use the bread pan and rolling pin are kept under the shelf." Another illustrated a one-legged "hinged preparing table which can be dropped" when not wanted. Captions stressed light and ventilation. (204)

Designers are very perceptive of their customers' desire to capture the feeling of intimacy in today's kitchens with layouts that foster connectedness and relationship. Philip Stahl, a practicing residential architect, writes in a 2008 article in *From House to Home*:

I like the idea of a family or couple having opportunities in their home for a nice, quiet, intimate meal where all family members can face each other for a better connection to each other... Julia Child's own kitchen... was a quaint, blue country kitchen that hosted many groups in her day... when challenged about the apparent smallness of her kitchen, replied that she liked the intimacy and feeling of family. I think she was right. <sup>1</sup>

While kitchen as space underwent transformation in the twentieth century, so have perspectives and interpretations of what happens there. In her introduction to *Kitchen Culture in America, Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race*, editor Sherri Inness writes about kitchen culture and the ways in which it has shaped women's lives:

Women's roles have been shaped by kitchen culture, whether found in advertising, articles in women's magazines, cookbooks, or many other sources... kitchen culture accomplishes far more than merely passing down Aunt Matilda's recipe for Swedish meatballs. Kitchen culture is a critical way that women are instructed about how to behave like "correctly" gendered beings. (4)

In contrast to earlier theories of kitchen drudgery and patriarchal oppression, there seems today an evolution to embrace the kitchen as a positive place, where the feminine expression of cooking is not necessarily anti-feminist. This is especially evident in popular British and American television shows about food. Joanne Hollow and Rachel Moseley, in *Feminism and Popular Culture: Can I Go Home Yet? Feminism, Post-Feminism, and Domesticity*, write about Nigella Lawson, British TV personality and cookbook author of *Domestic Goddess*:

Nigella acknowledges the temporal constraints that produce, for many women, the experience of contemporary femininity. *Domestic Goddess* does not suggest women can 'have it all'... but offers us the experience at the level of fantasy of what other 'retro-femininities' might feel like. It is precisely the time-consuming nature of baking that

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.fromhousetohome.com/rnt/kitchen\\_evolution](http://www.fromhousetohome.com/rnt/kitchen_evolution)

offers a temporary escape from the pressure of managing time, which, for many women, constitute the contemporary feminine experience of modernity. (106)

The embrace of cooking as pleasurable, or even an escape, is in direct contrast to Gilman's notion of drudgery and can be considered liberating. This choice can be defining. Those who love to cook must cook and that decision should not be judged as anti-feminist as we practice what is typically thought of as "women's work." Those who prefer not to cook, similarly, cannot be assumed to be feminist in rejection of such domestic practice. Self-definition and personal and community values are realized from our choices which significantly shape individual experience and identity.

### **Surrogate Influences**

What then defines women who embrace kitchen culture but have no example to follow?

Women who grow up in immediate families devoid of kitchen tradition can realize culinary fulfillment through other relationships. In *Tender at the Bone*, Ruth Reichl writes:

I had three grandmothers and none of them could cook. My mother's mother didn't cook because she had better things to do. She was, as Mom proudly told everyone she happened to meet, an impresario. My father's mother didn't cook because she was, until Hitler intervened, a very rich woman. Aunt Birdie didn't cook because she had Alice. I'd run into the kitchen, throw my arms around Alice, and beg her to let me roll the dough for the apple dumplings she made every time I slept over. "Well now" she always said in her soft Barbados accent she had retained after sixty years in America, patting me with her floury hands. She was a handsome old woman with brown skin, short black hair, and a deeply wrinkled face. She smelled like starch, lemons, and if she was baking, cinnamon as well. I loved helping her... (21)

Reichl's memories are bursting with texture, aromas, and images. She was deeply impressed by her experiences with surrogate cooks in her family's kitchen. Like Reichl, my love of cooking was sparked by someone other than my mother and outside my immediate family. When I was in junior high school, Mrs. Garafano, a neighbor, taught me how to peel apples in one long

ribbon, roll a disc of dough into a crust, and bake a real pie. In high school; another neighbor, Mrs. Maggiori, invited me to watch as she formed home-made ravioli. She gently laid a thin sheet of pasta over little mounds of filling, and created individual pillows using a fluted cutting wheel. Mesmerized by the art of it, I never knew ravioli could be made at home. I'd always known it was invented by Chef-Boy-Ardee and considered my neighbor very clever in figuring out how to duplicate the canned perfection. She explained that it was an old family recipe, one her mother taught her as a young girl, just as her grandmother had taught her mother. In contrast, my mother owned one paperback cookbook with invariable defaulted to the coleslaw page. It was the only recipe I ever saw my mother follow, and we loved it.

### **Out of the Kitchen**

Like many families of the sixties, we enjoyed the occasional novelty of fast food restaurants. Unlike dinner at home where the family was seated around a common table, eating at a fast food restaurant centered on experiencing the venue and the product rather than relating to each other. Kate Kane's essay, "Who Deserves a Break Today?" in Carole Counihan's *Food in the USA: A Reader* suggests:

Commercials code fast food restaurants as havens of nourishment, but the emphasis is not on nutrition, it is on fun. Food rituals revolve around the excitement and individual identity, not sharing or interacting. What that means for the role of women is impoverishment of the food relationship. No longer a privileged one (with all the problems that carries), food relations for women are emptied of sanctity but still loaded with hierarchy... (320)

Kane's comment about the promotion of fast food argues that the relational aspects of sharing has been lost in family dining habits in recent decades. More and more, over-scheduled families choose dining out in fast food restaurants or casual dining chains in lieu of sharing a meal together at home. In these restaurants, the mature mother figure in the kitchen is all but erased as

line cooks prepare individual meals. Each family member (if they manage to eat together) typically chooses a different menu item. There is no mutual sharing of the same roasted chicken, mom's gravy, or a lovingly prepared dessert. The move to eating in restaurants which cater to individual preferences mirrors the increasingly fragmented lives families experience today, though there is evidence that families are tiring of the routine and long to recapture time in the kitchen together, as evidenced by the popularity of the Food Network.

### **Vicarious Cooking**

Launched in 1993, The Food Network is experiencing incredible growth and popularity. According to its website,<sup>2</sup> the network averages more than 7 million web visitors each month, with television programming distributed to 96 million households. Considering that more and more families are eating away from home, The Food Network's popularity is a telling phenomenon. The network lures viewers with nostalgia and possibility, presenting fantasies of how home cooked food can be, and what life used to be like when we prepared and shared meals together. Based on sales of the network kitchen products, it's clearly not all fantasy. The Food Network is inspiring people to come back to their own kitchens as well. With a stable of world-class chefs and down-home cooks instructing the viewer not only how to prepare a meal but how to choreograph the presentation, the network promotes all aspects of cooking and serving food with an emphasis on relationships: satisfying our friends and families. Gone is the old-school, clinical, and instructional style of PBS cooking shows in favor of the seductive, inviting experiences the network delivers from its homey kitchens to our living rooms. The viewer is

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.foodnetwork.com>

invited to share the pleasures and relationships conveyed on-screen, enticed to replicate the experience at home.

The popularity of The Food Network is one indication that women and families can enjoy cooking together, in contrast to Gilman's enduring notion of women trapped in the kitchen. As Sallie Han writes in her article "From Drudgery to Jubilee in the Kitchen," '*The Joy of Cooking*' wrought a delightful change...there was no joy before 'Joy.'" *The Joy of Cooking* was prelude to a revised view of the kitchen as physical hub of relationships for women in the twenty-first century. With baby boomer women coming of age and confronting midlife, such joy is evident in contemporary cinema in films including *Under the Tuscan Sun*, *Mostly Martha*, and *Tortilla Soup* where we see women embracing time and relationships in the kitchen.

Adopting a chronological approach, this thesis follows the kitchen's evolution from its dark, turn-of-the-century past as a repressive place for women toward its technologically-advanced future, using examples from literature, film, the media, and personal testimonies. Chapter two examines the notion of kitchen as a source of oppression, incorporating historical and contemporary voices such as, respectively, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Sherrie Innes in their critique of the domestic sphere. While this chapter concentrates on the turn of the century, quintessentially in Gilman's works, the notion of oppression persists today as Innes demonstrates in *Kitchen Culture in America* and *Cooking Lessons*. Chapter three describes the evolution of the kitchen, historically and technically, and its effect on women's lives. While chapter two concentrates on nonfiction and criticism, chapter three integrates personal experiences, including examples from cookbooks, recent fiction, and film that counter Innes's views.

The fourth and concluding chapter contemplates women's relationships in the kitchen for the future. It tackles the following questions: in what way will the kitchen—considered variously as a source of oppression and joy over time—change again as we move into the twenty-first century? How has technology in food packaging, preparation, cooking, and communication impacted kitchens and thereby women's experiences and relationships? What does the kitchen of the future hold for women?



## Chapter Two ~ Of Kitchens Past ~

Mothers are an iconic symbol of the kitchen. Television's 60s-era June Cleaver of the *Leave it to Beaver*<sup>3</sup> show stands in her kitchen with a freshly-iced cake, outfitted in pearls and a fashionable house dress. A century earlier, stoic Marmee in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868-69) conveys all the caring, warmth, and benevolence of the mid nineteenth-century mother ideal. Both characterizations endure as cultural indicators of the high standards for mothers of their respective times. Remnants of such notions persist, at the same time inspiring and intimidating contemporary women's behavior in the kitchen--a woman's haven to some and a place of oppression to others.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Charlotte Perkins Gilman imagined a society where women would be free from the consuming obligation of cooking to have more time to pursue alternate activities, to be a "world servant," not a house servant. Gilman's argument is about creating more options for women. She felt cooking should be performed by experts; families living in kitchenless homes would take meals communally, although a woman could keep a cook stove as a hobby. Gilman imagined the adoption of centralized community cooking as one tool to provide greater liberty in women's lives. Gilman's projected world aimed to liberate women from kitchen drudgery. What she failed to consider were the notions and values of kitchen life we have come to appreciate today: in kitchens, women form and nurture relationships, and family traditions carry on as women share recipes and cook together. The kitchen at the turn of

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<sup>3</sup> *Leave It to Beaver* is a 1950s and 1960s family-oriented American television situation comedy about an inquisitive but often naive boy named Theodore "Beaver" Cleaver (portrayed by Jerry Mathers), about his adventures at home, in school, and around his suburban neighborhood. The show also starred Barbara Billingsley and Hugh Beaumont as Beaver's parents, June and Ward Cleaver. The show has attained an iconic status in the United States, with the Cleavers exemplifying the idealized suburban family of the mid-twentieth century. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leave\\_it\\_to\\_Beaver](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leave_it_to_Beaver).

the twentieth-century was an oppressive sphere where inadequately trained women prepared food in less than ideal conditions. The infant mortality rate was nearly fifty-percent. For children who survived infancy, many were lost to premature death attributed to food-borne illnesses.

Gilman envisioned a world of mothers raising healthy children with proper nutrition, skilled teachers, and a kindergarten program (then a controversial idea). She sincerely believed that her utopian world with kitchenless homes would result in robust individuals and strong families, all contributing to a more vibrant community. These ideas resonate in Gilman's introduction to *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (1903):

We may all have homes to love and grow in without the requirement that half of us shall never have anything else. We shall have homes of rest and peace for all, with no need for half of us to find them places of ceaseless work and care. Home and its beauty, home and its comfort, home and its refreshment to tired nerves, its inspiration to worn hearts, this is in no danger of loss or change; but the home which is so far from beautiful, so wearing to the nerves and dulling to the heart, the home life that means care and labour and disappointment, the quiet, unnoticed whirlpool that sucks down youth and beauty and enthusiasm, man's long labour and woman's longer love—this we may gladly change and safely lose. To the child who longs to grow up and be free; to the restless, rebelling boy; to the girl who marries all too hastily as a means of escape; to the man who puts his neck in the collar and pulls while life lasts to meet the unceasing demands of his little sanctuary; and to the woman—the thousands upon thousands of women, who work while life lasts to serve that sanctuary by night and day—to all these it may not be unwelcome to suggest that the home need be neither a prison, a workhouse, nor a consuming fire. (12-13)

Gilman imagined the home could be a sanctuary for all its inhabitants, including mother, and a place of refuge from the harsh demands of life. For the man coming home from work, such refuge was already in place, provided by his self-sacrificing wife. Children witnessed mothers denying their own vitality and comforts for the condition of the house, a form of involuntary domestic martyrdom. Gilman dared to imagine a world of healthy, fulfilled women, relieved of

the chores that demanded so much of their time and strength, finding fulfillment in their own homes. She imagined this possibility for women only if domestic chores, including cooking, were provided by an outside service.

Kitchens at the turn of the century were not conducive to improving the lives of women. Gilman considered the home as “a prison, a workhouse,” and the kitchen table a site of labor, not enriching a woman’s life. In *Women and Economics* (1898), Gilman writes of home life based on the “sexuo-economic” condition:

...A home in which the rightly dominant feminine force is held at a primitive plane of development, and denied free participation in the swift, wide, upward movement of the world, reacts upon those who hold it down by holding them down in turn. A home in which the inordinate love of receiving things, so long bred into one sex, and the fierce hunger for procuring things, so carefully trained into the other, continually act upon the child, keeps ever before his eyes the fact that life consists in getting dinner and in getting the money to pay for it, getting the food from the market, working forever to cook and serve it...are things that should have been outgrown long, long ago if the human race had advanced evenly. Man has advanced, but woman has been kept behind. By inheritance she advances, by experience she is retarded, being always forced back to the economic grade of many thousand years ago. (185)

Gilman believes that gender, tied to economics, has allowed man to advance, but “retarded” women, forced to cook and clean rather than contribute to the world. Likewise, her poetry perfectly illustrates her struggle with the role of “housewife” and her concern for the quality of the woman’s life and mind in a system that perpetuated a legacy of servitude. “The Housewife,” published in 1911, is one of many poems on this theme, and is especially reflective of the conflict inherent in the role of housewife. It reads in part:

Food and the serving of food -- that is my daylong care;  
What and when we shall eat, what and how we shall wear;  
Soiling and cleaning of things -- that is my task in the main --  
Soil them and clean them and soil them -- soil them and clean them again.

My mind is trodden in circles, tiresome, narrow and hard,

Useful, commonplace, private -- simply a small back-yard;  
And I the Mother of Nations! -- Blind their struggle and vain! --  
I cover the earth with my children -- each with a housewife's brain.

Gilman's housewife realizes that the redundancy of her work—"soil them and clean them and soil them – soil them and clean them again"—is a futile exercise in that nothing will be gained or achieved. No matter how hard she works, the mother must perpetually work in an oppressive domestic sphere. Any gains are temporary. "Food and serving food – that is my daylong care; what and when we shall eat, what and how we shall wear" are the thoughts that occupy all of her mind's space. Her mind, like the walls of her home, is closing in on her. Her prescribed world exists within the walls of her house, and she considers herself "the serving squaw." The narrator is concerned about the legacy she's leaving for her children, for all they have witnessed of their mother is a woman whose primary role is housewifery. As "the Mother of Nations," she is pessimistic about the challenges they'll face and how they'll ever rise to greatness with such an example. Acknowledging and reluctantly accepting her duties, the housewife realizes the limitations the kitchen places on her life. She is keenly aware, however, that her life is unsatisfactory, and while she wants better for her children, she has little hope that their lives will be different.

Gilman's short story *The Cottagette* (1910) suggests hope that the "sexuo-economic" realities of her time could change. Young protagonist Malda is enjoying life in a wooded cottage community where meals are taken communally at the Calceolaria. Days are spent in artistic expression as Malda interprets the natural beauty of her surrounds. The cottage is comprised solely of a bedroom and a parlor. She finds herself falling in love with Ford Mathews, a young man in the community who appreciates Malda's artistic talents and love of nature. Suggesting

that “the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach,” Malda’s misguided roommate Lois encourages the addition of a kitchen to their cottage so Malda may prepare home-cooked meals for Ford. Skilled at cooking, but enjoying the liberties of their kitchenless cottage, Malda reluctantly agrees to add a kitchen and begins preparing dinners for Ford. Consumed by this new obligation, Malda has no time for drawing and painting. She is disappointed but knows that once she’s married to Ford (anticipating a proposal) she’ll be cooking all day, and tells herself “...I should have to do it always and might as well get used to it.” Ford does propose but with the caveat that Malda stop cooking. As Gilman’s perfect man, living in her vision of a perfect community, Ford realizes that the consuming yet unnecessary demands of cooking have left no time for the very thing that attracted him to Malda: her artistic interpretation of the beauty of nature, and the built-in freedom within the community to experience it fully.

Gilman’s Ford Mathews is indeed a revolutionary character for his time, and the kitchen-free life he offers Malda would have been considered a fantasy for many women at the turn of the twentieth-century and decades beyond. The broader expectation then was for middle-class women to provide all aspects of domestic comforts ensuring that the husband and children of the family benefit from the fruits of women’s labor.

Not all women were concerned with the restrictions home life demanded at a time when home economics came to be seen as a discipline and an avocation. Gabrielle Stewart Mulliner wrote in her March 26, 1907 letter to the editor of *The New York Times* that, in contrast to Gilman’s perspective, cooking was a pleasure, not a drudgery “once the art is acquired”:

...Anything a woman can do well, she enjoys doing. And it is because I believe that firmly that I advocate teaching young girls to cook well. If she goes into a kitchen mistress of her work, she will love it and take her pleasure in life producing good things to eat. If she enters upon her household duties not understanding her work, fearing

failures, spoiling good raw material, fretful, uninterested, she will find it a great hardship, and will flee from it into some shop, tell every other girl not to do housework, and help to spread the panic...Cooking done well is as great a pleasure as painting a picture. Serving a good meal cooked by yourself is as great an achievement as arguing a case well in court. And the woman who can do so, and lets her servants have the benefit of her knowledge, has no trouble with her servants...<sup>4</sup>

Her letter, under the heading “Women Enjoy Cooking,” speaks of the satisfaction of cooking to acquire a skill that will serve women practically. Nowhere in the letter is the concept of “joy” expressed, as we think of cooking today. Mulliner prefaces the above statement, writing, “As long as the race exists, men will have to eat and some one will have to do the cooking.” It is implied that women are necessary to advance the “race”; someone has to cook, and that responsibility (in the context of her contemporary culture) falls to women. Her statement, although not as dark as Gilman’s, clearly defines gender roles and the patriarchal dictates of the period.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, such clearly defined women’s roles were less evident.

Maxine Margolis, in *Mothers and Such: Views of American Women and Why They Changed* (1984), writes of the life of the pre-industrial housewife:

Unquestionably, the nature of housework in this country has been transformed over the last three hundred years as the family, once a unit of both production and consumption, became a unit of consumption alone. The preindustrial housewife produced goods primarily for household use, and she sold or traded the surplus products of her labor, which gave her some degree of economic independence. Her work was far more diverse and central to the survival of her family than are the tasks performed by contemporary housewives. She was responsible for spinning and weaving the material used for family clothing and linens; she transformed all sorts of foodstuffs from their raw state into edible form; she manufactured candles, soap, buttons, home remedies, and a myriad of other items, to say nothing of the time she spent gardening and tending the family livestock. Laboring under this workload, the preindustrial housewife spent relatively little time on the tasks we consider central to housework today: cleaning,

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<sup>4</sup> <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9C07E0DE1738E033A25754C2A9659C946697D6CF>

cooking meals, and doing the family wash. The lofty standards of cleanliness which have prevailed in twentieth-century America are of relatively recent origin; colonial era housewives spent their time doing far more essential tasks than getting their floors “cleaner than clean” or their husbands’ shirts “whiter than white.” (109)

With the Industrial Revolution came the decline of cottage industry, bringing changes to the home that saw the decline in domestic household help, particularly for middle-class families. Margolis mentions “utilities and conveniences” which transformed the family as a unit of production to a unit whose main purpose was “socializing and educating children who would become the workers and managers essential to the industrializing economy. The family had become a unit whose productive activities were limited to housework and child rearing” (111). In an industrial society, the home--with the decline of internal production for the family or others--evolved into a space that allowed greater focus on family and the conditions within.

The “utilities and conveniences” in the newly industrialized home included running water and electricity. These innovations transformed the domestic landscape, thereby setting the American kitchen on a progressive path of technology, continually redefining women’s roles in the kitchen. These modernized kitchens were not places that Gilman knew – in her poetry, she dwells in dirt and never-ending chores, such as in “The Housewife” –nor do I speculate modernized kitchens are places where she would be comfortable. Inherent with the adoption of these conveniences is the implied obligation that women maintain ever-higher standards for housekeeping, including food preparation. Advertisers have lured women with the promise of time-saving appliances, all the while creating more and more gadgets that have to be figured out, operated, cleaned, and put away. The simplicity of the pre-industrial kitchen hearth and multi-functioning wooden bowls and spoons gave way to Hoosier cabinets full of must-have appliances such as toasters, mixers, and measuring tools for specific needs. From the 1920s

through the 1950s, Margolis notes that “despite the plethora of modern household conveniences, there is little evidence that housework was less time-consuming and less demanding than it had been before American business and industry entered and transformed the home.” (149)

Today’s well-appointed and labor-saving kitchen bears little resemblance to its ancestral forerunner. In *The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society*, Christine Rosen writes in “Are We Worthy of Our Kitchens?” about the history of kitchen technology and questions the benefits of ever-more sophisticated appliances. She reflects on Isabella Beeton (1836-1865), London housewife and author of *The Book of Household Management* and *A History of the Origin, Properties, and Uses of all Things Connected with Home Life and Comfort*. Beeton states in 1869 that the kitchen “is the great laboratory of every household, and that much of the ‘weal or woe,’ as far as regards bodily health, depends upon the nature of the preparations concocted within its walls.” Beeton, writing in the nineteenth century, recognizes the kitchen as a site of experimentation and advises the typical Victorian woman on cooking. Rosen adds:

Today, the laboratory is filled with the finest equipment, but there is often no one to use it. Despite purchasing more and better appliances, home-cooking and family dinners are both racing toward extinction. American Demographics reports that between 1985 and 1995, “the number of hours women spent cooking per week dropped 23 percent, and the number of hours men cooked dropped by 21 percent.” By 1997, the U.S. Energy Information Administration reported that more than one in five households used their...oven “less than once weekly” and only 42 percent “make a hot meal once a day.”<sup>5</sup>

Lucy Lethenbridge, in her article *Cooking Up a Storm*, a review of Kathryn Hughes’s *The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton* (2006), writes:

...and Hughes is surely right that when it came to Mrs. Beeton’s mid-nineteenth century readers, confidence was what they were looking for. In a society changed radically and fast by railways and industry, where fortunes in the expanding middle class rose and fell with alarming speed and where ancient class

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/are-we-worthy-of-our-kitchens>



distinctions were crumbling, or at least shifting, what the average housewife wanted above all was a guide to navigating these choppy waters of social change and insecurity.<sup>6</sup>

More than one hundred years later, what do we make of Gilman's declarations that women and families would be better served by a central kitchen where all neighbors would take their meals communally, or Beeton's recognition that the kitchen could be a laboratory of kitchen concoctions that could lead to "woe"? Once women (with technology) progressed beyond the labor intensive responsibilities of the early twentieth-century kitchen, they realized opportunities within their own homes to create good food, share recipes and time with family and friends, and begin traditions that resonate generations later.

While many women politically rejected the kitchen as space during the early days of the Women's Liberation Movement, some came back. Arlene Avakian, in the introduction to her collection *Through the Kitchen Window: Women Writers Explore the Intimate Meanings of Food and Cooking*, writes:

I could not have told you then, in the 1950s, why I hated my...female relatives' discussions about cooking. We had no language for our feelings about the injustices we suffered as women in those days. I only knew then that cooking was something I would refuse to do. That refusal became public when I proclaimed to my horrified family that I hoped by the time I got married, something I assumed I would do, "scientists" would have produced an all-purpose pill so that I could escape cooking and the daily dilemma of deciding what to make for dinner... This rejection of cooking was a small resistance, but even this little rejection of the expectations of me as a woman nurtured a sense of self that would eventually blossom in the Women's Liberation Movement... Why then, forty years later, I have I undertaken to edit a book about women and food which is focused on cooking and even includes recipes? Unexpectedly, I became a cook. (2)

Avakian initially represents not only Gilman's views but those of women who rejected the kitchen in a revolution against too-narrowly defined expectations of women in the 1950s and

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.literaryreview.co.uk/lethbridge\\_on\\_hughes.htm](http://www.literaryreview.co.uk/lethbridge_on_hughes.htm)

60s. Yet she did not reject marriage and assumed that one day she would indeed provide dinner, but in the form of a pill. Her role as wife did not change; she got married. She states, “I loved to eat too much to do without good food, so I learned to cook” (2). This later acceptance of cooking became a fact of life. Avakian realized an enjoyment of cooking and spent the rest of her life studying food, indicating the power that stories about food—others’ and her own—have had in her own life and our culture.

To illustrate the richness of such a tradition that emerged in the later twentieth century, the next chapter integrates personal experiences, including examples from cookbooks, memoir, recent fiction, and film. The kitchen table emerges, not as Gilman’s “workhouse” of drudgery, but as a place where women come together to share the bounty of their lives.

## Chapter 3

~From Drudgery to Community: The Evolution of the Kitchen as a Physical and Social Space~

*"The pleasant hours of our lives are all connected by a more or less tangible link, with some memory of the table."*

*Charles Pierre Monselet*

In the twentieth century, the kitchen is reincarnated. Beginning in the early 1900s, the kitchen emerges from its dark history as a place of oppression and takes on new life as a meeting place where stories flow and bonds form.

The kitchen of the twentieth century evolved toward a lighter, brighter, and more efficient space. Innovations such as Hoosier cabinets, gas and electric stoves, and refrigerators completely changed the appearance and the function of the kitchen, elevating it from its place in the cellar to its warm position as metaphorical heart of the home. Due in large part to these technological advances, the twentieth-century kitchen promoted positive personal interactions and creative cooking, transforming a place of drudgery to a place of joy.

### **The Kitchen's Own Industrial Revolution: Everything Including the Kitchen Sink**

We take so much for granted today with the expected conveniences every kitchen offers. Do we ever give a second thought to turning on a faucet to fill a pot or rinse vegetables? If we want to boil water to cook those vegetables, we simple turn on a burner on the stove. When it's time to store left-over food, do we think about a time when there was no refrigeration? Most of

us have grown up with these ever-expanding technological advances that make the kitchen an easier place to cook than it was during our grandparents' time. These services are reliable and automatic. The only time we become acutely aware of these conveniences is during a power outage or when we've forgotten to pay the gas bill. When suddenly we can't have instant access—to turn on the faucet, light the stove, or open the refrigerator for a nicely chilled beverage—we realize how blindly we go through each day, taking for granted these once cutting edge twentieth-century inventions—the sink, stove, refrigerator. Only then might we wonder what it was like to run a household before such advancements, which freed people from onerous tasks like pumping water from a well and carrying it in to a basin, stoking the kitchen fire with wood, or storing a chunk of lake ice underground after winter to help keep perishables fresh a little longer.

### **The Kitchen Sink**

Marjorie Dorfman in “The Kitchen Sink: Wherever Did it Come From?” discusses the origins of the kitchen sink, a kitchen staple:

The kitchen sink has always been a mutant hybrid, springing from any number of available materials. These varied from region to region. Heavy stone, for example, was too expensive to ship from New England quarries and stainless steel wasn't widely available until the 1940s. For more than 150 years stone sinks were made throughout America, but not in the Mid West or on the West Coast. Soapstone is quarried exclusively in Vermont and slate is more widespread along the Appalachians in Pennsylvania, Maryland, New York, Vermont and Maine. During the nineteenth century, running water was pumped from a supply tank, usually into bowls or buckets set into a dry sink.<sup>7</sup>

Dorfman goes on to discuss the sink's composition from the 1940s through today. I begin my analysis of household improvement with the sink because it occupies a central space in the

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.housenotsobeautiful.com/Articles/sink.html>

kitchen. In the utilitarian layout of the kitchen work triangle, the sink forms the apex between the stove and refrigerator. It facilitates many tasks—primarily as a vehicle for washing dishes—but also serves as a prep center for the evening meal. The sink’s function expands beyond the kitchen when it serves as baby’s first bath tub or the home’s hair-washing station. For those dining alone, impromptu meals are often eaten over the kitchen sink, which has evolved into a cliché to capture inclusiveness in 20<sup>th</sup>-century American culture.

As the focal point of the kitchen, modern-day sinks are often attractive and functional, a far cry from the early metal-lined wooden sinks first used the home. Today whole magazines focus on kitchen design, and sinks take center stage in both advertisements and articles. They can be beautifully charming, as in apron-fronted farm sinks found in many non-farming households, or sleek and elegant composites blending seamlessly with a complementary countertop. Sinks might contain garbage disposals and built-in cutting boards or may simple be a stainless steel tub with a spray hose. Regardless of the sink’s appearance, utility is its primary responsibility in the heart of the home. Little do we think of the outside pump and the days when carrying of buckets of water was routine when we turn on the tap for an instant supply. Acquiring water is so automatic to us now that we have no thought of how difficult bringing water in to the kitchen was for our predecessors. As Dorfman’s article reminds us, having a supply of water available at our fingertips allows us to carry out innumerable tasks and certainly makes our lives much easier, removing a huge element of drudgery and making the kitchen space much more conducive to joy.

### **The Kitchen Cabinet**

Convenient and accessible kitchen storage became desirable around the turn-of-the-century as women assumed more of the responsibility for the running of their own homes. Mary Ann Beecher, in her article “Promoting the ‘Unit Idea’: Manufactured Kitchen Cabinets (1900-1950),”<sup>8</sup> writes of the turn-of-the-century Hoosier as the precursor to today’s built-in cabinets:

Advertisements introducing Hoosier’s cabinet No. 10, “The Great Step-Saver,” for use by women who did their own housework first appeared in women’s journals at the beginning of the twentieth century. As shown in an advertisement in *House Beautiful* magazine in 1904, this compact (42 inches wide and 72 inches tall) multipurpose unit provided storage for bulk foods and a wide range of kitchen tools. Hoosier’s cabinet No. 20, “The Portable Pantry,” was marketed for use in larger households that were more likely to have domestic servants or for use as a substitute pantry room in dwellings where space was generally more limited...Claims were commonly made in these advertisements that Hoosier cabinets offered storage for all of the tools and supplies that were necessary for the turn-of-the-century cook. Some ads bragged that the Hoosier had a place for “four hundred articles all within arms’ reach.” The provision of a variety of sizes of containers within the cabinet was the key to the Hoosier’s capacity to consolidate and disclose large numbers of items. (32)

Beecher’s descriptive analysis of the Hoosier cabinet shows us how this piece of furniture allowed women to conveniently organize and stock their kitchens in ways they’d never been able to before. Suddenly, there were large shelves and drawers for pans and kettles and smaller ones for kitchen linens and cutlery. The Hoosier contained metal boxes for cakes, canisters for baking staples, and jars for spices. It even had a spinning dial that listed its contents, so the early-to mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century housekeeper always knew what she needed to stock. The possibility of having “four hundred articles within arms’ reach” was a huge step-saver and storage problem-solver.

As precursor to the built-in kitchen cabinet, the Hoosier was the catalyst for innovative kitchen design for all of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as it evolved from a free-standing unit to one that

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<sup>8</sup> “Promoting the ‘Unit Idea’: Manufactured Kitchen Cabinets (1900-1950)”: <http://www.jstor.org/pss/1504736>

contained a kitchen sink and later supported a countertop. Through the twentieth century, the kitchen cabinet became the foundation of kitchen space, serving as host to the many items stored within. Cabinets also proved integral to the primary components of the twentieth-century kitchen triangle: stove, sink, and refrigerator.

The early Hoosier and later the basic wood and metal cabinets of mid-century have evolved in both form and function and are now available in many styles and designs, allowing home owners to choose the look that best reflects their own sense of kitchen fashion. Today's cabinets provide an attractive presentation for all the kitchen has to offer, similar to a beautiful frame surrounding a painting. Like their predecessors, today's kitchen cabinets store a wealth of foodstuffs and utensils but have become updated to meet new kitchen technologies. Cabinets today perform even greater feats with moving panels to disguise hidden microwave cabinets and trash compactors. There is even available a dishwasher drawer, which completely conceals the fact dishes are stored and washed within. Cabinet "fronts" for refrigerators allow this larger appliance a more subtle presence, blending in well with the surrounds. Such choice in cabinet design has made the modern kitchen personal and individual, a place where a cook wants to spend time creating, and the spot in the house where family and friends congregate.

### **Gas and Electric Stoves**

The kitchen stove, too, has seen many incarnations from its earliest wood- and coal-burning days that Charlotte Perkins Gilman bemoaned in her late nineteenth-century poetry, such as "The Holy Stove." From its grim beginnings, using the stove was dangerous, and disdain of and fear for it emerges earlier than Gilman's 1890s poetry, in fairy tales such as *Hansel and Gretel*, where the witch threatens to burn Hansel alive in her oven. The housewife, too, had

reason to be wary of the early stove. Besides being dangerous, it created a mess. The stove's evolution to gas and electricity was transformative not only technologically but also for the daily lives of women. Ruth Schwartz Cowan, in "The Industrial Revolution in the Home: Household Technology and Social Change in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," writes of the move from coal stoves to gas and electric stoves in the home:

Most middle-class homes had switched to the new method of cooking by the time the depression began...the new stoves were much easier to light, maintain, and regulate (even though they did not have thermostats, as the earliest models did not). Kitchens were, in addition, much easier to clean when they did not have coal dust regularly tracked through them; one writer in *Ladies' Home Journal* estimated that kitchen cleaning was reduced by one-half when coal stoves were eliminated.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to time-saving benefits and easier use and cleaning, Cowan continues to explain that along with new stoves came dietary habits attributed to the increased use of canned foods and the availability of fresh produce by way of refrigerated railroad cars. Concurrently, convenience foods came into popular use, and for the housewife, the burden of cooking eased considerably. Combined with these advances in food processing and transportation, the new kitchen stove literally liberated the housewife from hours of labor-intensive work, which is not to say women left the kitchen. They just didn't have to be there all the time. Women began to enjoy their kitchens creatively and socially as not only the hub of the house but also as a communal gathering place welcoming friends and neighbors.

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The "Industrial Revolution" in the Home: Household Technology and Social Change in the 20th Century  
Cowan, Ruth Schwartz  
*Technology and Culture*, 1976, 17, 1, 1-23, The Johns Hopkins University Press on behalf of the Society for the History of Technology



Today's kitchen stove shares similarities with its ancestral model in that it provides a hot surface on which to prepare food and an oven in which to bake or roast. Similarities end when we see contemporary stoves in a variety of materials and colors, with choices of cook-top surfaces (electric, gas, or glass-top) and ovens with convection capability. Rather than stoke a fire with wood or coal, we fire up today's models electronically. These new models are tuned to provide, at the push of a button, digital readouts of temperature and warnings ("hot surface") and built-in timers to delay cooking if desired and make sure the roast doesn't burn. Today's stoves provide consistent and even heat, insuring that the food we do take time to prepare has the best chance of turning out perfectly. Even the simplest of stoves available today incorporate the latest technology. For those with a desire for restaurant-quality in cooking and aesthetics, manufacturers Viking and Wolf produce versions of their professional ranges for the home cook, though these are an expensive luxury most cannot afford.

Even the most basic kitchen stove provides the warmth of the hearth. Many of us have happy memories of baking batches of cookies with our mothers, or waiting for that steaming bowl of oatmeal on a cold winter morning. When we return home after school or work, the aroma of dinner cooking on the stove becomes the magnet that draws us straight into the kitchen. A pot of marinara sauce simmering on the stove and a slice of soft Italian bread spread with butter are comforting kitchen pleasures. With friends or family sharing the cooking, the kitchen stove *is* today's hearth. Whether it is a planned family dinner or an impromptu meal among a group of friends, the act of cooking in the twentieth century has become something to be enjoyed together, a special event to be enjoyed in the moment and in memory after.

### **The Refrigerator**

Early kitchen refrigeration was possible due to the ice box. The aptly-named website *WiseGeek.com*,<sup>10</sup> which provides histories of many inventions, describes the typical ice box as “roughly the size of modern refrigerators, though somewhat shorter. The face had three to five hinged doors, one smaller and designated for the ice block. Interiors were lined with material such as tin, and for insulation there was cork, seaweed, or straw, among other popular choices. Internal wired shelves held the food.” Ice was delivered to homes early in the morning, often alongside dairy products delivered daily. The iceboxes were equipped with rubber hoses to drain water from the melting ice into a pan. Though not convenient by today’s standards, ice boxes were a welcome addition to the early American kitchen, allowing new possibilities for the storage of perishable food items.

Sandy Isenstadt, in “Visions of Plenty: Refrigerators in America around 1950,”<sup>11</sup> discusses refrigerator technology and advertising of 1950:

Emphasis was clearly on the refrigerator’s technical dimensions. Just as often, refrigerator advertisements reinforced gender stereotypes and sustained components of female identity. Most often, for example, the more technical descriptions found in manufacturer brochures were explicitly addressed to a male reader. When addressed directly to women, the refrigerator was posed as a new object of consideration and an embodiment of fundamental values that might be shared among homemakers and between mother and daughter. Manufacturers published cookbooks, for instance, expressly geared to electrically refrigerated foods...Nevertheless, the benefit of linking technical advantages with women’s work was that the former could minimize the latter. Thus, at the same time that advertisements stressed technical advantages, they also stressed labour saved. ‘The story of electrical progress,’ claimed General Electric in 1936, ‘is the record of the emancipation of womanhood—it has brought new golden hours of leisure to women and better living to millions of homes.’ With leisure the benefit, manufacturers could begin a catalogue of industrial merchandise with pictures of the outdoors and an invitation to “Come out of the Kitchen and Enjoy Life.”

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-the-history-of-the-refrigerator.htm>

<sup>11</sup> “Visions of Plenty: Refrigerators in America Around 1950” <http://jdh.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/11/4/311>

The appliance heralded for emancipating women in the mid-century was invariably white with rounded dimensions. This vehicle ensuring a “woman’s leisure” housed a small freezer and had a crisper to keep vegetables fresh. The 50s model gave way to later century refrigerators with boxy shapes, larger freezers, and door shelves that could accommodate condiments and bottles of milk. As the century progressed, side-by-side refrigerators with ice makers and “water through the door” became popular. For today’s consumer, the choices seem unlimited. Refrigerators are available with freezers on the top, bottom, or side. They come in a classic white finish but also in black, buff, and stainless steel among other choices. Brand-new retro-styled models are sold with the outside appearance of a fifties refrigerator and the latest technology within. These come in pastel colors never even considered when the original was manufactured and are far more expensive than other models on the showroom floor, proof that there is a market for that which reminds us of our childhood, whether it’s a Radio Flyer wagon, Lincoln Logs, or a refrigerator that reminds us of Mom’s kitchen.

### **Mid-Century and Beyond**

The introduction of the kitchen cabinet, the sink, the electric or gas stove, and the refrigerator allowed the kitchen to evolve into an environment for positive cooking experiences, transforming a formerly labor-intensive space into one where loved ones share the *craft* of cooking. Mid-twentieth century kitchens, especially, were celebrated as fashionable and the center of the home. Advertising images (Appendix A) of that period depict a smiling, apron-clad mother in her well-appointed kitchen. Streamlined cabinets with decorative hardware, smooth counter surfaces displaying a host of handy appliances, shiny linoleum floors, gas cook tops and wall ovens, sleek refrigerators, pretty window curtains and printed wallpaper surround her in an

attractive and comfortable place in which she serves her family. One image<sup>12</sup> showcases a woman's new dishwasher, its door open displaying spotless dishes sparkling like jewels. The dishwasher is as much an accessory as the high heel shoes she's wearing or the beautiful coat her impeccably groomed husband is helping her put on. Advertisements like this link new kitchen appliances with women's joy and leisure. She is joyful, and it's all because of her new dishwasher.

Images of sixties-era mothers in the kitchen depict women who were happy to serve their families in every way, including preparing three square meals and mid-afternoon snacks. Television gave us June Cleaver and Donna Reed, beautifully dressed mothers who waited by the kitchen door for their families to return from school and work, with a roast in the oven and a two-layer chocolate cake with a frosty pitcher of milk standing by. Idealized visions of such mothers portrayed them as beautiful caretakers. A mother might be portrayed as joyful on her way up the stairs, carrying neatly folded laundry, or greeting her deserving husband at the door with his favorite cocktail. With stylish bobbed hair, tailored house dresses, neat cardigan sweaters, nylons and pearls, they looked the part of the quintessentially happy housewife. Even when their children or husbands caused them distress, they stood by, a freshly baked two-layer cake at the ready. No wonder so many young women at mid-century aspired to become wives and mothers— such a life looked great on TV and in magazines.

As the mid-century proceeded, mother's joy in the domestic sphere would be shaken if not threatened as women began to question their role in society and politics. While the second wave of the Women's Movement opened doors previously closed to women, particularly in

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<sup>12</sup> This image can be seen in Appendix A and was acquired at <http://retrorenovation.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/1950s-dishwasher>

regard to political and career equity with men, at the same time it nudged shut the door to the kitchen. In 1963, Betty Friedan published her landmark book, *The Feminine Mystique*. The website for the National Women's History Project, *The Second Wave*, posts its importance:

*The Feminine Mystique* evolved out of a survey she had conducted for her 15-year college reunion. In it she documented the emotional and intellectual oppression that middle-class educated women were experiencing because of limited life options. The book became an immediate bestseller, and inspired thousands of women to look for fulfillment beyond the role of homemaker.<sup>13</sup>

This second wave of feminism liberated women from activities that limited their life options, and it also socially devalued activities that had long been categorized as “women’s work.” Along with the symbolic act of bra burning, women were encouraged to abandon traditional female roles to “strike” against such activities as cooking and laundry. Once again, the kitchen was depicted as a prison’s mess hall and the home a place where women’s lives went unfulfilled. News stories of the 1970s show frustrated women sitting outside their houses in lawn chairs with posters that read “on strike.” The news portrayed their families as abandoned with baskets of laundry piling up and hungry-looking husbands and children pathetically looking on as if the wife and mother were the only persons in the world capable of fulfilling *their* needs. That these individual domestic strikes made the news indicates the shock such rebellious acts by women had on society at the time. Such protests were not new, nor was the criticism accompanying women’s liberation, as the 1847 George Cruikshank cartoon “My Wife is a Woman of Mind” reveals. Cruikshank depicts a husband who looks distressed as his house falls apart and his children tumble into one another and the fire, all the while his intellectual wife writes on, seemingly oblivious to the chaos around her.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.nwhp.org/information/faq.php>

Despite the political pressures for women to again abandon the kitchen, not all accepted the rhetoric. Many continued to value kitchen space as a place where creative culinary expression and loving nurturance could continue without diminishing women's contribution to society. Fulfillment could be achieved inside *and* outside the kitchen. This was a time when women re-entered the workforce, after the majority of mid-century women had stayed home to raise their children. It seemed possible to balance one's life with work and family. On television, a 1970s commercial<sup>14</sup> advertising Enjoli perfume assured women they could not only do it all; they could have it all, too. The jingle celebrated women's capabilities if not unintentionally suggesting an unending workday along with a dose of obligatory sex: "You can bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan, and never, ever let him forget he's a man. You're a woman, W-O-M-A-N...!" What that commercial didn't promise was *how* a woman would possibly accomplish "it all." The 1970s was a time of mixed messages for many wanting to follow the progressive wave of women's consciousness but at the same time experience a strong impulse to cook for themselves or their families and to participate in other "domestic" crafts.

### **Recipe Sharing, Inheritance, and Influence**

Second-wave feminism did not actually close the doors to the kitchen, and many women throughout the twentieth century cooked together and shared the legacy of family food. Many women continue to find sisterhood in the creation, discussion, and preparation of food. Such discussions often focus on our knowledge of and pride in a treasured recipe's origin.

Grandmother's chocolate cake has layers of significance absent in the tempting facsimile prepared at the local bakery. The value lies in its legacy, and the cook rekindles a direct bond to

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<sup>14</sup> video of commercial found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4X4MwbVf5QA>

grandmother in her own kitchen when she simply follows a favorite recipe. It's as if grandmother's hands are guiding today's measuring and stirring, and she's looking on with approval and honor as her granddaughter recreates her dish. The senses fire as the aroma of *her* cake wafts through the air, and time is temporarily warped. Such value does not exist exclusively within a recipe's matriarchal lines. Aspects of another family's story are then woven into the text of our own when we exponentially broaden our own story as we adopt recipes and traditions from friends and in-laws with backgrounds different from our own.

In discussing her career's culinary roots, Ann Cooper, in *A Woman's Place is in the Kitchen: The Evolution of Women Chefs*, attributes her own and other women chefs' inspiration to family influences:

Food is so central to some families that the magic of familial bonds can be rekindled simply by cooking. In some ways it personifies the family who shares it. The mother/daughter food connection has been strong throughout history, and for Jody Adams, chef/co-owner of Rialto in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the connection is ingrained. Jody traces her passion for cooking to her childhood, where food played a key role in her family. "I grew up in a family that celebrated food; it was central to everything that was important. We sat down at the table every night, with candles and napkins. I think for my mother, it was symbolic of the strength of the family: to give, to take care—I wanted to do something that would make me feel that I was being good! If I was going to survive, I had to be happy—food [and cooking] had made me happy!" For some women, their first connection to food came as a result of the influence of their families. (35)

Our families' culinary legacies represent family strength, values, and tradition. By incorporating recipes of other cultures, since the 1990s and beyond, kitchens in America have become a true melting pot. In many American homes, today it is not uncommon to find a weekly cross-cultural menu of spaghetti, couscous, stew, pot-stickers, lox and bagels, and black beans and rice along with fried chicken, hot dogs, and apple pie. Many Americans born mid-century never had a bagel or a taco until they were adults. Ever-increasing exposure to food of other cultures has allowed

this generation's children to experience our increasingly global world as more similar than different, both in dining choices and the practices of everyday life. Food has become a powerful conduit to creating community and the meshing of cultures far beyond the homogenization of our culinary lives.

### **Story Telling**

It is in the sharing of our diverse food histories that we experience personal and community growth. Generations of family recipes combined with the adoption of food habits from other cultures and family friends create a unique culinary family tree, which is then passed down as a richer heirloom for future cooks. I discovered universal threads when speaking with women about their food memories. For a previous MALS study, I interviewed twenty-three local women about their food memories, particularly regarding their favorite recipes and the family narratives that accompany them. Primary in many women's memories are stories around the preserving of food. The memory of making jam or canning vegetables is potent for many women. Food writer and culinary instructor Kendra Bailey Morris, in the NPR Program *Kitchen Window* (March 2007) writes of family connection while canning fruits and vegetables in her mother's kitchen. In "Preserving Our Past, One Jar at a Time,"<sup>15</sup> Morris writes:

For us, canning is as much a family tradition as holiday turkey. It represents the bounty of the season. Whether it's summer's sweet corn or vats of early fall apple butter, generations of mothers have found deliciously creative ways to store their gardens in immaculately clean jars....As an adult, I now follow my mother around the kitchen as she creates delicious homemade jams using fresh peaches from the local farmer's market... Frantically, I scribble down her random aside (which becomes my culinary nugget) and continue to watch as she stirs the sweet-smelling pot with a wooden spoon. I can see my granny, too. It's as if she is superimposed over my mother, gently directing her to stir with less force or add a tad more sugar to the bubbling peaches. And in that

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12780637>



moment, we're all in the kitchen together – pouring, sealing and preserving everything that makes summer wonderful.

Morris perfectly demonstrates that a family's recipe history is more than its ingredients, for it creates a culinary diary of moments in the kitchen with people we cherish most. Grandmother, mother, and daughter come together in life and memory to stir, cook, seal, and preserve.

Morris's emphasis on being "all in the kitchen together" clearly makes that point.

In "*If I were a Voodoo Priestess: Women's Culinary Autobiographies*, Traci Marie Kelly writes:

For many women, sitting around a table or standing around a kitchen counter becomes the space where their stories are told. For generations, oral storytelling has brewed while dinners have simmered. Not only do we learn the secrets to a good piecrust or the special ingredients in Hunter's Stew as we listen in the kitchen, but we also learn the important stories that make up the lives of these [storytelling] women. Pearl Bailey, entertainer and cookbook author, tells us of her deep connection with the kitchen: "I don't like to say that my kitchen is a *religious* place, but I would say that if I were a voodoo priestess, I would conduct my rituals there." (p. 252)

Kelly sees kitchen storytelling as "a culinary biography" and discusses the kitchen as not only a place of ritual but also a canvas where women create "nourishing meals, memories, and art."

The oral tradition of passing recipe stories down generational lines serves as a link to the past.

The re-creation of these recipes allows us to share the same experience as our foremothers – to

cook, smell, and taste their creations as they did. These oral histories are valuable in that they

convey precious family recipes. Cookbook authors have expanded upon this tradition by making

recipes, accompanied by stories, available to the larger population, thereby broadening their

readers' culinary reserves and memories.

**Culinary Writing: Cookbooks and Food Writers, and a Nod to the Future**

The reading of cookbooks and essays by food writers is different from other types of reading. There is vicarious pleasure derived from the reading of recipes and stories associated with them. The reader realizes the possibility that she, too, can experience just what the author has experienced. True cooks often confess that they fall asleep reading cookbooks, but for amateur cooks such reading fosters inspiration and motivation to create, just as visiting an art museum often prompts one to buy a set of oils and paintbrushes. Inspired cooks learn much from the pages of a cookbook, as in Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. That the author had the motivation and inspiration to record a recipe for others' anticipated use reassures a reader. That the dish has been proven encourages a new cook. When we read recipes and food stories, we're reading autobiography by way of food. It is an invitation to look inside and learn more about the author and about ourselves.

Culinary writing, in cookbooks and in essays, allows us glimpses into the kitchen windows of individuals who are passionate about creating and sharing food. Cookbook authors and food writers enthusiastically communicate with us their inspiration about all aspects of food: preparing, cooking, eating, and discussing. Ann Cooper acknowledges the practical aspects of early cookbook writing by women:

Women, although not the first writers of cookbooks, as a group have been the most prolific. In the early nineteenth century, educational reformers advocated mass elementary education in the form of common schools. Prior to that time, literacy for all but the wealthiest women was uncommon, and most recipes were passed down via verbal history. A number of trends surface when researching women and cookbooks. In some of the earliest of these books, there is a trend toward economy and frugality, management and organization, and a predilection for sweets. Recurring themes include a concern for the role of women, their duties, responsibilities, and rights, as well as finding ways to lighten women's workload and improve their lives. (13)

Cooper looks at the topic of women and cookbooks through a professional lens; her insight reflects an academic and historical perspective on the lives of women and their struggles for recognition in the mostly male-dominated world of the professional chef which Julia Child confronted in Paris in the 1940s. That most early chefs were men is an ironic fact, given that women have historically been responsible for feeding the masses. When cooking evolved to an art form, men had greater freedom and opportunity to pursue careers as chefs, though Cooper's book illustrates that contemporary women are claiming their rightful place among the best chefs in the world. Many of these chefs, male and female, attribute their career inspiration to time in the kitchen with their mothers and grandmothers. Matriarchal influence is a universal truth when discussing the earliest seeds for the love of cooking. It conveys a personal touch, a loving gesture, and a sense of home.

In her Preface to the Thirteenth Edition of *The Fanny Farmer Cookbook* (1996), Marion Cunningham writes about the non-practical, personal reasons to enjoy cooking:

Today, more than ever, I sense a hankering for home cooking, for a personal connection to our food, despite all the statistics thrown at us that no one is cooking at home anymore. What with our busy, complicated, high-tech lives, there seems to be a yearning to be in closer touch with a simpler, more natural world. Why else would there be such a warm and enthusiastic response to the hundreds of farmers' markets that have sprung up all over the country?...For a long time now we have been given a heavy dose of propaganda from the food industry that the working woman (and of course, man) hasn't got time to cook anymore. But what are we saving all the time for? Another half-hour of television? If you come to enjoy cooking, that half-hour of cooking will become the high point of your day, as relaxing as swinging in a hammock, after long hours at work. (ix)

Cookbook authors harken back to childhood to excavate gems from their mothers' kitchens.

They define themselves also by the region in which they were raised -- i.e. southern fried chicken, New England clam chowder, Louisiana ring cake or Wisconsin cheddar biscuits. There

is a sense of belonging and community that reveals itself in a cookbook writer's story or a food writer's essay. For a clear impression of the diversity of food writers' lives, one only has to read a collection of recipes or essays. There you will find family history, ethnic foods and recipes, cultural expectations, social mores, and perspectives on life. There, too, you learn about a cookbook author's motivation. Cooper writes:

Women's connection with food is indelibly tied to their need to nourish, nurture, and provide for their families. That special desire is instilled from a very early age. The role of nurturer and provider has been passed on from mother to daughter, aunt to niece, cousin to kin. As more and more women were able to read and write, these skills were passed on through cookbooks. The majority of the cookbooks throughout the ages have been written by and for women, whose stories come to life in these books. (13)

Cookbooks and the stories they tell are just one way the kitchen continues to become a vital place in women's lives in the late twentieth- and twenty-first centuries.

## Conclusion

### ~Looking Forward to Time in the Kitchen~

As we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, exciting changes are taking place in the kitchen. Technology daily promises faster and sleeker modes of cooking. Although the kitchen is still the heart of the home, modern kitchens incorporate computer centers, turning the kitchen into a satellite office. Great rooms include entertainment systems within the kitchen. Kitchen goers sit on raised stools to be entertained by celebrity cooks on shows like *Iron Chef America* and *Ace of Cakes*. The kinds of discussions that traditionally took place around the kitchen table have also moved outward—to the restaurant table, and to the Internet, where we can read intimate, tell-all diaries about a blogger's kitchen life. For many, social networking sites have replaced one-on-one time with friends, and conversations once savored in the kitchen are now posted for all the world to read.

### Technology, Kitchen Space, and Décor

Recent advances in cutting-edge kitchen technology continually change the functional and relational aspects of the kitchen. The 21<sup>st</sup>-century kitchen is far different from the kitchen of a generation or more ago and is still evolving. Appliances meet every culinary need and perform many functions that cooks once did. Food processors and blenders have largely replaced manual slicing, dicing, and chopping. Large mixers take care of heavy beating and whisking. Bread-making machines knead and raise our dough—tasks that bakers once performed by hand. Convection and microwave ovens shave hours off cooking time. Silent dishwashers get our plates and cups sparkling clean, so people today merely rinse a dish and load a dishwasher rather than don rubber gloves as women did, for example, in the 1950s. We use computers to research

recipes rather than share recipes with friends and family in our kitchens. Rather than labor in the kitchen as Gilman bemoaned at the turn of the twentieth century in her nonfiction and poetry (e.g. *The Home*, “The Mother’s Charge”), we are entertained in the kitchen by television chef celebrities like Bobby Flay and Rachael Ray. How ironic that the same site where Gilman lamented women labored over “the holy stove” has now become a place of leisure where we watch cooking shows for inspiration and “assist” our appliances in preparing elaborate dishes with minimal effort, taking credit for meals that would not be possible without our technological kitchen helpers.

The ambiance and décor of modern kitchens draw us to them. Today’s kitchen is no stranger to fashion trends. Sleek stainless steel and cool granite surfaces are in high demand. Gleaming hard wood floors have replaced mid-century linoleum. Artistic ceramic backsplashes protect kitchen walls. Ornate hardware knobs and handles compliment kitchen cabinets. A wardrobe refrigerator opens its doors to reveal all colors of food in stylish packaging. Form meets function as technological and stylistic advances make the kitchen not only an easier and more enjoyable space in which to prepare food, but a visually attractive space where we entertain family and friends.

Open floor plans eliminate walls and blend the kitchen with offices, family rooms, and dining rooms. This trend creates a “great room,” often eliminating the formal dining room altogether. A great room consists of a kitchen that opens into a large living space with comfortable couches, a fire place, and often a large-screen television. No longer exiled in a hot kitchen or burdened by chopping and slicing and other laborious tasks, today’s home cook can simultaneously prepare meals at a kitchen island and participate in family activities. Gone are

the formal barricades that separated the work of the kitchen from the leisure of the family room. Such proximity encourages family participation in meal preparation.

Beautiful and well-equipped kitchens sell houses, which is why the kitchen renovation business is booming.<sup>16</sup> But even with beautiful and well-appointed kitchens at home, many families are spending a much higher proportion of their food budgets in restaurants. It is not unusual to find the most elaborate kitchens in homes of people who profess they don't cook. Their kitchens are often investments to maintain the value of their homes and to lure potential buyers. Whether a family intends to sell a home or simply get better use of the kitchen space they have, investment in kitchen space and appliances is money well spent.

### **Entertainment and Vicarious Relationships**

What kinds of relationships form in a kitchen that also serves as an information and entertainment center? On television, cooking shows offer us cooking lessons, with the Public Broadcasting System and The Food Network hosting step-by-step cooking shows linked to computer websites for recipes and additional information. In this age of instant information, it isn't necessary to open a cookbook. We can find practically any recipe that's ever been written on the Internet. A click on a recipe's Web page often links the cook directly to a step-by-step video. Shopping lists of necessary ingredients in exact proportions can be printed or sent directly to the cook's email account or cell phone. The ease of finding recipes and cooking tips online is something our mothers and grandmothers would never have imagined. Food shows on television

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<sup>16</sup> In her June 12, 2005 Boston Globe article, Kimberly Blanton writes "Kitchens matter. Condo developers often say that the more money they spend on kitchen appliances and design, the bigger their profits." [http://www.boston.com/news/globe/magazine/articles/2005/06/12/a\\_good\\_investment/](http://www.boston.com/news/globe/magazine/articles/2005/06/12/a_good_investment/). Carl Vogel, in his CNN "This Old House" feature of March 3, 2007, quotes Kermit Baker, director of the remodeling futures program at the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University: "People buying a house look first at kitchens and baths...So while these rooms can be the most costly to redo, they're more likely to pay for themselves." <http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/03/14/renovations.investment/>

have captured the nation and spawned a huge spin-off business of celebrity-sponsored kitchenware. The Food Network's chef/hosts are bonafide celebrities. Bobbie Flay, Rachael Ray, Tyler Florence, Paula Deen, Guy Fieri, and Ina Garten are among the network stars who are recognizable everywhere they go. Along with their cookbooks, products they endorse sell in department stores. Celebrity chefs are reality stars with real talent and throngs of fans. The celebrity chef has been marketed very successfully. Most of these chef/stars have charismatic personalities that complement their skills as great cooks.

Celebrity chefs on the big screen and television have changed the way we cook and look at cooking. With most women working, there is less time for casual get-togethers enjoyed by previous generations. Gone are the coffee klatches of the 1950s, a time for stay-at-home mothers to exchange recipes and the details of their day. While it is not unusual to find women deliberately gathering in kitchens at family events or at holiday time to prepare traditional foods, for the rest of the year, such is not the case. Neighbors no longer have the free time to attend a "coffee klatch" as my mother did in the 1950s as she was raising her large family. Impromptu "dropping by" requires the luxury of time that many of us do not have, especially during the work week.

Rather, we often bond with friends by reading the same blogs or watching the same cooking shows rather than cooking together. Moreover, cooking has become an activity, almost a sport, with competitions and prizes. More than instructional, food television is entertainment. The Food Network hosts cooking shows as well as cooking challenges and baking contests. For example, on the challenges, celebrity chefs must prepare fine dishes from a host of unusual ingredients, racing against the clock. On reality shows with huge followings, men and women



compete, side-by-side, for prestigious honors, but the experience of watching the chefs cook is also a prize for the viewer. *Food and Wine Magazine* hosts huge trade shows in New York and Miami, featuring celebrity chefs, and these events draw massive crowds. People who've never baked a cake (and perhaps never intend to) are devoted fans of *The Ace of Cakes*, a Baltimore-based show following the lives of baker Duff Goldman and his college friends who have become his employees.

*The Barefoot Contessa*, aka Ina Garten, has a vicarious appeal: the chef invites viewers into her beautiful Southampton, Long Island home. There we share a virtual kitchen experience, watching as she adds ingredients to her Kitchen Aid mixing bowl, and we can almost taste the results as she holds a spoon up to her mouth and utters a happy, satisfied sigh. She sets a theme table for her friends at lunch, who are the most stylish of guests and who always greet her at the door with a gorgeous bouquet of flowers or a bottle of wine. She makes viewers feel welcome and comfortable in her kitchen, which is a remarkable skill – personalizing herself and her kitchen to a mass audience – and she motivates her audience to duplicate her recipes because, in doing so, we enter into her Southampton life and imagine setting such a stylish table and having beautiful guests rave over the lunch we have just prepared. It's a fantasy that the Food Network sells, and a lot of us are buying it – lock, stock, and wire whisk. All the Food Network shows akin to *The Barefoot Contessa* offer us the opportunity to experience cooking via TV and to recreate the experience in our real lives. All we need to do is buy the same groceries, follow the directions, and produce the same meal. And those of us who watch only for the entertainment value find that to be enough. We vicariously enjoy the camaraderie and the food (some go so far

as to call it food “porn”) without having to indulge in a calorie, spend a dime, or disrupt our own kitchens.

There are wonderful kitchen scenes in recent movies as well. As a self-declared “foodie,”<sup>17</sup> I seek these movies out. *Under the Tuscan Sun* (2003) best epitomizes the generous nature of cooking for others and how food fosters relationships. It’s based on Frances Mayes’s 1996 memoir and stars Diane Lane as Frances. The movie shows how food heals a broken heart and helps a woman define, for herself, what “home” means. In this movie, food creates family. Frances fears, after her divorce, that she will never have the family she wished for. Despite language barriers, by cooking she draws together a community in her new Tuscan home with neighbors, contractors, and old friends. With these important people in her life, Frances creates a surrogate family of her own – not a traditional family of immediate relatives – but a family just the same.

*The Family Stone* (2005) similarly uses food as a theme to develop personal relationships and facilitate family ties. The relationships in this family are strained in every direction. Grown kids come home for the holidays, and the mother is suffering from a recurrence of cancer, trying to keep it a secret until after Christmas. The introduction of son Everett’s soon-to-be fiancée Meredith, a very tightly-wound woman, does not go over well. Not until she drops her family’s traditional Christmas morning strata on the floor and makes a complete mess does this family warm up to Meredith and finally welcome her into the fold. Her attempt to share something meaningful, something from her own family’s holiday food tradition, and her devastation at

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<sup>17</sup> Foodie is a term which the on-line encyclopedia *Wikipedia* defines as “an informal term for a particular class of aficionado of food and drink... The word was coined in 1981 by Paul Levy and Ann Barr, who used it in the title of their 1984 book *The Official Foodie Handbook*.”

dropping it on the floor, evoke compassion and sympathy for her. By cooking and sharing, Meredith reveals who she is and where she comes from.

The most recent “foodie” movie that has captured America is *Julie and Julia*, based partly on the book of the same title written by Julie Powell. Indeed, there could not be a movie like *Julie and Julia* or any foodie movies if it were not for Julia Child, who pioneered the first televised cooking show, *The French Chef*, in 1963.<sup>18</sup> In 2002, Powell, an Internet blogger, was unhappy working for the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, LMDC.<sup>19</sup> She challenged herself to cook every day for one year at least one of Julia Child’s recipes from *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* and chronicled the experience in her blog, which became a book, which, in turn, inspired the film. Through the film, Powell allows us to witness cooking scenes both funny and fabulous, and the movie gives great insight into what motivates someone to cook, the desire to share the fruits of their labor with others, and the satisfaction that comes with successfully preparing a difficult recipe, especially after failing with the first few attempts.

Julia Child’s own discovery of French cooking opened up a world of opportunity for her. It also allowed her to indulge her passion for feeding her beloved and appreciative husband dishes he swooned over. Food was a very important part of their relationship. Julie Powell, the other half of *Julie and Julia* in both book and film, transforms Julia Child’s recipes into a solution for a creative void in her life. She challenges herself to acquire the skills necessary to succeed at creating complicated gourmet recipes. At the same time, her year-long project of duplicating these recipes affects her relationship with her husband, positively and negatively. Powell’s

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<sup>18</sup> Child’s enthusiasm for the art of cooking and her ability to draw an audience paved the way for The Food Network stars of today, and created the possibility for Powell’s book and film.

<sup>19</sup> LMDC is a post-September 11, 2001 Corporation formed by then New York State Governor George Pataki to raise funds to rebuild the devastated site.

dedication to her project puts a strain on their marriage though she and her husband rejoice in the wonderful food she produces. Cooking and blogging<sup>20</sup> about it, Julie Powell, in life and art, writes as much about how relationships form in the kitchen as how the kitchen, in the early 21st century, has transformed into a space of entertainment.

## **Food Blogs**

*Julie and Julia* provides a perfect example of the changing communications around food. Discussions about food are moving from the kitchen table to books, films, but most importantly, to the Internet. Food blogs<sup>21</sup> written by master chefs or by stay-at-home moms abound. Bloggers write frequently about their own lives, giving the reader a much broader view of a restaurant or a particular recipe. Part diary, part tell-all-confessional, food blogs bring reality to food writing with a freedom that newspaper columnists would never dare. Some food blogs post recipes with no commentary. Some are question-and answer-forums for quandaries in the kitchen. Food blogs can be addictive. There is even a blog for food blogs, a directory of sorts where one can find writing about any and all food interests.

Although a “foodie” could easily lose a whole day perusing listings, these manifold blogs fall into categories. There are professional food blogs sponsored by corporations such as Williams Sonoma, or King Arthur Flour. Freelance writers create blogs about food; my favorite of these is *Smitten Kitchen*, which elicits immediate and often enthusiastic responses to posts of recipes with illustrative photographs. Moreover, there are blogs written by everyday people who simply love to prepare and share food with their family and friends.

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<sup>20</sup> A Web log, or blog, is an on-line column

<sup>21</sup>Links to blog sites mentioned on this page: <http://Thefoodblogblog.com>; <http://www.williams-sonoma.com/recipe/tip/comfort-cooking.html>; <http://www.kingarthurfour.com/blog/>; <http://smittenkitchen.com/>

My own blog, Adirondack Baker,<sup>22</sup> falls into this category. Adirondack Baker is a homogenized blend of essays and recipes, written to share my favorite stories about food and life experience with readers. Adirondack Baker evolved as I began this historical analysis of the kitchen for my master's project. I have transformed the conversations I savored growing up in my mother's kitchen into the virtual kitchen in which many people "connect" and share stories about cooking. Each week day, I post a link to my blog on my Facebook and Twitter pages, exposing my latest post to an ever-expanding network of on-line communities, inviting people to read each day's cooking entry. To date, I have posted over 150 entries. With an average of thirty visitors a day, I aspire to reach a much wider audience, recognizing that food blogs are bound to replace the Sunday food column in printed newspapers.

### **The 21st-Century Kitchen**

Blogging is just one example of how kitchen culture is evolving. No longer do we have a wall phone tethering us to a six-foot radius around our kitchen sink. Cell phones, texting, and email have allowed our once kitchen-based conversations to move away from the sink and the kitchen table to the office, the restaurant, the grocery store, the car, and the commuter train. Discussions we conduct via hand-held devices are basically the same, but they are no longer held around our kitchen tables: via cell phones and blackberries, texts and blogs, we discuss family, money, romance, kids, health, work, dreams for our futures, and inevitably food.

Although I cannot predict the exact direction the kitchen of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will take, I know it will evolve beyond baby boomers' recognition. If the current trend continues, I expect increasingly minimalist décor with appliances hidden behind sleek surfaces. There are already

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<sup>22</sup> <http://adirondackbaker.blogspot.com>

trash and dishwasher drawers hidden behind cabinet doors, but I expect that soon, cabinet doors will not look like doors at all. Their surfaces will blend seamlessly with floor and countertop surfaces to display a uni-kitchen where only the cook knows where everything is. There will be more stainless steel and granite, or some other super surface, and I expect kitchens will take on a very utilitarian façade as less and less utility happens there. It is possible, however, that since history often repeats itself, warmth will return to the kitchen at least to some degree. Soft curtains may take the place of remotely-controlled blinds. A retro-movement may well bring color and shape back to clearly-defined kitchen appliances. A big wooden table could again take center stage, with chairs all around it to facilitate kitchen closeness. But even a return to the past will incorporate the future. With the effort to be “green,” will families, in rejecting genetically engineered produce and hormone-induced meats, start buying locally-grown food from farmers’ markets and return to cooking more meals at home? Regardless of what form the 21<sup>st</sup>-century kitchen will take, the kitchen—once viewed as a source of oppression and now turned into a center of technology and cooking entertainment—will continue to evolve without losing sight of its rich past.

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*Mrs. Charlotte Perkins Gilman*

*A sociologist first, a writer incidentally and a lecturer at all times,*

A-2



A-3









A-7



MONDAY, JUNE 8, 2009

## Other Women's Kitchens!



For the past several months, I've been baking in other women's kitchens! The kitchen in my new home will be functional within a few weeks (it's been "two weeks" for a lot of weeks!). This need to find baking space has been a mixed blessing. I've been combining baking with visiting good friends, and it's been a lot of fun.

**Sydney:** Sydney is the significant other of my daughter's father-in-law. Say that ten times fast! She has offered up her beautiful country kitchen, and that's where the "blueberry muffins" slide-show was photographed. What you don't see is her well-stocked kitchen and gorgeous, cobalt-blue Kitchen Aid with two sizes of mixing bowls! I get excited just thinking about it! We usually bake while little Henry is napping, or sometimes she'll graciously welcome me in the evening and we'll throw together muffins, scones, or cinnamon rolls. One week I made coconut cupcakes with coconut frosting for a taste test for a friend's upcoming wedding cake. Sydney is a quilter-extraordinaire, and has made precious gifts for her family, including Henry. She's about to become a grandmother again soon, and she's thrilled about it. We have lots of fun in that kitchen. The deal is that I leave her with samples. It works well.

**Barb:** My friend Barb is a lovely woman, and as a recent young widow with grown children, her house is quiet these days, unless she's hosting her new grandson Joey! Joey, the son of her daughter Tracee, brings along his mom and her husband Joe, and Barb loves every second of their visits. When her son Jeff joins them, it's even better. When I asked Barb if I could come bake one evening, she was very welcoming. We enjoyed mudslides while I got flour all over her kitchen. I even left with one of her measuring cups and must remember to return it. We sat and talked about all the fun we had when our girls were Girl Scouts together. We took trips to Philadelphia, the Jersey shore, Walt Disney World (twice!), and just had a great time watching our kids (and ourselves!) grow up together. When my kids were young, there were many Girl Scout outings where all my kids were welcome, and because of Barb and her sister Cathi (GS leader) my children experienced many wonderful trips and outings that they otherwise would have missed. What I didn't mention is that I started out as the leader, with my



friend Christina, and neither one of us were anywhere near as enthusiastic about the job as Cathi was, so she happily took over and was an exceptional leader. I was demoted to Cookie Mom, but that was good, too! At least we didn't have to spray paint gold any more macaroni sculptures!

Carolyn: my sister-in-law Carolyn not only provides me baking space, she feeds me too. When I was there last, she and her husband Bill made a great dinner of grilled chicken (marinated in ranch dressing), asparagus, and rice. We always have a great time together. Of our combined nine children, three of mine and three of hers are the same ages, and grew up three houses apart. One memory that's funny now, but wasn't then, is of a birthday party at Carolyn's house for her daughter Louise. I asked if I could help and was told I could make Kool-Aid for the kids. I took the sugar from its canister in the pantry and stirred up a big batch. The kids took sips from their cups and their faces contorted in reaction to the Kool-Aid. Seems I mistook the salt for the sugar. Like I said, it's funny now! We had so many fun times. We used to take the kids to the drive-in movies. They'd be all set in their pajamas with pillows and blankets and we parked our two massive station wagons side by side. Some of the kids sat on the roof of the car, some had lawn chairs, and the little ones fell asleep in our laps. We'd light those mosquito-chaser coils and hang the metal speaker on the window. The kids would beg for treats as the loudspeaker announced "five minutes to show time" while hot dogs and tubs of popcorn danced across the screen. Those were wonderful summer nights.

Anne: My sister Anne is the youngest of seven siblings. Her husband John is a great guy. Anne's a realtor in Saratoga and has four boys of her own, almost all grown up. She has a beautiful kitchen and I LOVE baking there -- partly because of the beautiful kitchen -- but more because her boys are there and they are so much fun. Ben just graduated from Marist, where his brother Jack graduated two years ago and where brother Patrick just completed his sophomore year. Will is incredible. He just turned sixteen and is the nicest kid you'd ever want to meet. When I was moving boxes from my apartment to storage, he helped a lot. I wanted to pay him and he refused. He said "That's what family does for each other!" I mean, really. He's sixteen, and so NICE! Plus, like his brothers, he's very handsome and smart! (I'm not biased!).

Katie: I drive up to Bolton Landing to bake in Katie's kitchen, and the bonus is that I get to spend time with her and little Henry. It's the best way to spend a day, that's for sure. Can't wait until we have

dueling kitchens in the new house! Neither of us got double ovens because we figure we can bake in each others' kitchens! We're so excited about hosting big meals for family and friends, SOON! I love watching Katie "be" a mom. She's relaxed, confident, and loving. She is patient and doesn't panic when Henry bumps his head. She talks him through the little bumps and bruises and he reacts accordingly. Not like her mother who ran screaming through the house searching for band-aids or said to her husband "You look, I can't!" And I wanted to be a nurse... Yikes.

Patsy: my sister Patsy has been the most gracious host while my "short" stay has been extended beyond three months! That seems unbelievable. I don't typically bake in Patsy's kitchen because she's got a renovation going on, and I'm not the neatest baker. I figure if I bake where I'm not living, I can be tolerated. So, most of my pantry is in the back of my car which now smells like vanilla extract (yes, the *good* stuff, Ina!) and cinnamon! Patsy has three grown sons, two grandchildren (with #3 due any minute) and fiercely loves her family and friends.

What I'm attempting to say here is that there are many wonderful women in my life, sisters, friends, relatives -- all of whom are so generous and kind. It's so easy to have a great time, and really, what's better than spending a few hours with our best friends? This roving-baker gig has allowed me to impose on my friends and come away with so much more than a basket full of baked goods. I leave them with samples, but I take away so much more -- warm memories of wonderful conversations, laughs, and shared looking-forward to the next time, and the best I can say is, "Thank you."

Next blog: Chicken a la King with Claire, Kathleen, and Ed! And coming soon: my favorite dogs (real dogs, not hot dogs, though I love them too!)

photo credit: <http://images.google.com/images?gbv=2&hl=en&q=coffee+cup&sa=N&start=80&ndsp=20>

POSTED BY ADIRONDACK BAKER AT 12:28 PM 

LABELS: BABIES, BAKING, FRIENDS, GIRL SCOUTS, KITCHENS, MEMORIES

THURSDAY, JULY 23, 2009

## Jeanne McGeehan Cella's Iced Tea



I'm named for my Aunt Jeanne. She will be ninety in October, my mother's youngest sister. Virginia and Jeanne McGeehan were "Irish twins," born less than a year apart, in 1918 and 1919. The youngest daughters in a family of six children, they grew up loving each other and were devoted sisters until my mother's death at age eighty-three in 2002. It's been sad for us, not having our

own mother anymore, but whenever we hear Aunt Jeanne speak, we hear a bit of our mother in her voice. I love that. They were very much alike. Aunt Jeanne is a lovely and gracious lady. She lives in a pretty red house with a beautiful yard with gorgeous flower gardens (tended by son Jim) in Danbury, CT. You'd never guess she's almost ninety – she is fit and sharp and until recently, when she was feeling better, consistently did one hundred sit ups a day! She has never driven a car, and I believe one of the reasons she's so fit is due to the walking she's done all her life. Aunt Jeanne's been having physical challenges lately, with back problems that make navigating a little bit difficult right now. She received a good report from the doctor yesterday, though, and her back is on the mend.

Aunt Jeanne is a very special lady, and she is my Godmother, a role that seemed to carry more significance when she was given the honor a generation ago. Her husband, Uncle Eddie, passed away almost twenty-five years ago, and was my Godfather. They were a devoted couple, and she still wears her wedding and unique engagement ring, a beautiful pearl. When I was married, it could get confusing when we'd visit them at their home in Danbury: Jeannie and Gene Eddy visiting Aunt Jeanne and Uncle Eddie! Maybe that's why we didn't name a son "junior" – it would have only added to the confusion! The parents of eight children, six sons and two daughters, Jeanne and Eddie did a great job. They raised fun-loving, intelligent, and caring kids (who grew up to be terrific adults), and with my parents' seven children, the only families we could visit and tolerate the crowd were each other! They used the same names for their kids, too. Both families have a Michael, a Jeanne, and a Virginia! (Back then, children's names weren't exclusive within a family!)

To this day, as cousins we maintain close relationships despite being raised hundreds of miles apart. The Cella kids were raised in New

Rochelle, NY, where my Mom grew up, and we were raised, for the most part, in Saratoga Springs. For the summer, we'd "trade" kids for weeks at a time. Steven would go there and Ginna would come here. Anne would go there, and Jim would come here. It was something we always looked forward to and some of our happiest memories are of summers spent with our cousins. Last summer we had an O'Farrell/Cella/McGeehan family reunion at my sister Anne's house in Saratoga Springs, and most of the Cella "kids" (as well as McGeehan and McCormick cousins) along with their kids and Aunt Jeanne were able to make it. It was over too soon, though we have happy memories and photos of that special day.

Aunt Jeanne has always made the best iced tea. At the beach house in North Carolina last summer, I tried to duplicate it every day. If I'm in a restaurant and order iced tea, I always measure it by Aunt Jeanne's. Most don't match it, but once in a while, I take a sip, and I am transported back to her kitchen on Elm Street. There I am, my seven-year old chin resting on the cool surface of her enamel-topped table, the one with the silverware drawer, watching her scurry around to feed her family and the surplus kids from ours.

I called Aunt Jeanne yesterday morning to say hello, see how she's feeling, and to ask for her iced tea recipe. She said she doesn't make it much any more because no one wants the sugar she puts in it. Well, I want her iced tea, sugar or not! It was so good to talk with her. I'm looking forward to a road trip to Danbury soon, to spend some time with this lovely lady.

Aunt Jeanne's Iced Tea:

Place a pot of water on the stove.

Add six teabags.

Bring to a boil and turn off the heat.

Leave it for an hour or so.

Pour it into a pitcher.

SQUEEZE the tea bags to get every last drop (she emphasized that)

Stir in 3 scoops sugar

Add cold water to fill the pitcher.

Add a couple slices of lemon.

With love, I raise my iced tea glass to you, Aunt Jeanne!

POSTED BY ADIRONDACK BAKER AT 5:22 AM 

LABELS: CELLA, DANBURY, ICED TEA, MCGEEHAN, NEW ROCHELLE

THURSDAY, AUGUST 13, 2009

B-3

## Meaningful Cakes



I'm baking cakes for all sorts of celebrations this week. One is for a 50th wedding anniversary; another is a small cake for an intimate wedding reception, and then finally a surprise

birthday cake for a 40th birthday bash. These cakes will be for parties on Friday and Saturday, and at 7:20 a.m. Sunday I'm on a flight headed toward a long-awaited vacation in Emerald Isle, NC (see my blog dated June 22, 2009 about Shrimp Scampi and EI, NC).

It's such a pleasure to bake cakes for happy occasions. More than any, I have especially loved baking my own children's birthday cakes. When they were little, I made a Batman Cake for Joe, a Holly Hobbie cake for Katie, Strawberry Shortcake cake for Meghan, and a Cabbage Patch Doll cake for Tricia. Each year the kids would pick out the cake they wanted, and were enthralled watching the creations come to life.


For all their growing-up years, I baked a cake on January 3. My kids would always ask, "Who's the cake for?" and I would answer, "It's just for us." In reality, January 3 cakes were baked for a child I didn't yet know. This annual cake marked the birth of my first son, born when I was just sixteen, and relinquished for adoption days later. Every year since, that date was such a sad one for me, filled with open-ended grief for the child I'd lost, and regret that I wasn't older and more capable at the time, despite knowing that I couldn't possibly keep him. Baking his cake on his birthday was one way to feel connected, hoping the energy put into it would somehow generate outward and find him, so that on some level he'd know I celebrated his life and wished good things for him. Life was very different in 1971, and my secret was well-hidden, even from my own family, until just before his birth. When Jeffrey (named Patrick John O'Farrell) was born, there was no way an Irish-Catholic sixteen-year-old girl could openly raise a child. There were too many prejudices and repercussions, so I made the most difficult choice of my life. When we were twenty, I married his father and we went on to have four more children, all full siblings and beautiful reminders of my first-born, yet distinct individuals unto themselves.

It's been almost eight years since I was "found" by my first son's

relatives, and it was months before Jeffrey and I met in early June, 2002. All his life he'd been living in Colonie, near Albany, New York, just 30 miles away from Saratoga Springs. My own mother had died just two months before that first meeting, and I was aware that Jeffrey's mother, Rosemary, had passed away a few years earlier. Mothers Day was going to be impossibly hard for me, and I could only imagine how hard it would be for him, as her only child. I decided to send him a letter and included a photo of his four siblings. I wrote it at work and everyone in my office was encouraging me to mail it right away! It wasn't long before I received an email back, and we met just weeks later. I saw his face and it was such a familiar one – he looks like a compilation of all of us and the reunion was joyful. We've had an easy and comfortable relationship ever since, and I'm so grateful for this time that I could never have hoped to expect. This reunion is my life's gift. One of the first things I learned about Jeffrey is that he is a baker. He has been baking cakes since he was a little boy! We've worked on a number of baking projects together.

Jeffrey now has a nephew Henry (my daughter Katie's son) who looks very much like the photos I've seen of his Jeffrey as a baby. It's such a special connection for him. We've come full-circle, and on his nephew's first birthday, Jeffrey carried Henry's choo-choo train cake in to the party. It was a moment I'll always remember, as I watched him and thought "I wish I could have been there to make your first birthday cake, and for every birthday after." I am so grateful that Rosemary was there for him, as his true mother for every year in-between. Now I'm Mom, Second Shift.

The photo to this blog was taken on October 1, 2005, the day Katie and Bill were married.

POSTED BY ADIRONDACK BAKER AT 5:22 AM   
LABELS: ADOPTION, BIRTHDAY CAKES, REUNION

## 6 COMMENTS:



Jude said...

Holy TEARS Jeannine! I read all your posts and they make me smile, laugh and mostly HUNGRY! But for this one I cried big tears of joy .. and love. Thanks for sharing your story!

AUGUST 14, 2009 6:34 PM



Clulus said...



Greetings to Adirondack Baker

I never cook-- but movies and some of those who act therein DO interest me; and my special interest right now is "Julie and Julia." So I have been looking at some blogs which mention Julia Child, and was just now searching for blogger acknowledgment of her August 15th birthday.

[That region of the calendar has other connections-- Julie Powell embarked on her year's-French-cooking-journey blog on August 13th. Two years later, Julia Child peacefully died in her sleep on August 13th. And I note that August 15th is a big holiday in France. That must have made Julia's birthdays in Paris more fun. As a Catholic I'm aware of the holiday's Marian origins.]

Anyway, I ran into you here....

[http://www.facebook.com/posted.php?id=79590367580&share\\_\\_id=120411791414](http://www.facebook.com/posted.php?id=79590367580&share__id=120411791414)

I have a cousin who gave her child up for adoption for precisely the reasons you did. [She's on Facebook, named Carolyn Mittlestat.] I was very warmed by and absorbed in your story. And, my cousin got to come back into the life of her daughter, much like you.

How dear to hear about how you commemorated your first child's birthday, preparing a fragrant memory to rise every year. And making an origins-unknown family event out of it.

God bless. Applause.

[It would be a lovely upbeat story to speak of, or write, as a pro-life testimony somewhere. Couldn't help but note that.]

AUGUST 16, 2009 12:38 AM



Adirondack Baker said...

Jude, thank you. I so appreciate your comment and am thrilled that my blog is something you enjoy.

Clulus, thank you so much for your thoughtful response to my posting. Birthmothers share a common sisterhood but I can honestly say that I know very few despite the universally challenging experiences we share. Makes me think that

there's a good opportunity to creat that community for myself in the future. Perhaps I'll start by friending your sister on FB!

AUGUST 17, 2009 6:46 AM



Diane said...

Jeannie -

I will always feel badly that you and Gene had to go through that period without the support of your friends. At the same time, I have to say that I understand and admire your choice and I am so glad that your family is now complete. From everything you've told me, Jeffrey is a fine young man - the result of being raised by loving parents and now blessed to have quite an extended family. And he bakes!! Life certainly does hold surprises for all of us. I can't wait to meet him!

AUGUST 20, 2009 7:23 AM



Dolly said...

This is Jeffrey's cousin Dolly. Please tell him how much I love him and miss him. I can't tell you how blessed we were when we knew that he was being adopted into our family. I was 14 and it meant so much to his mother Rosemary and all of us that he was coming in to our family. We all still love him and miss him. I sent him Christmas cards every year. The last one came back last year. I always remembered his birthday, but didn't know how to reach him this year. We all love you Jeffrey---Dolly, Kimmy Merry Ronnie and Bernie.

JANUARY 9, 2010 4:35 PM



Adirondack Baker said...

Dolly, I've just come across your note and I am so happy to hear from you. I will share this with Jeffrey and hope you know that I am very, very grateful to all of you and realize how fortunate he was to grow up in such a loving family, his first family.

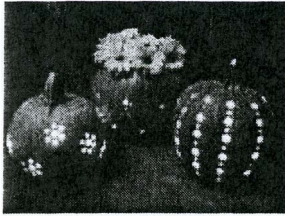
JANUARY 21, 2010 6:47 AM



B-4

MONDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2009

## Autumn Open House and Old Friends



This weekend I attended an open house at the home of a long-time friend, Mary. We work at the same place and she happens to be married to my ex-husband's cousin. Small town

living. I saw many familiar faces, some from work, but more from the extended in-law relatives there, part of the massive Cogan clan. (I am still considered an in-law, rather than out-law, despite the divorce). The great thing about this open house was the opportunity to spend time with people I don't see enough of, or haven't seen in years. A number of us expressed regret that our lives have taken us on paths away from each other.

Daily distractions and responsibilities have taken the focus away from friends in a way that we wouldn't have allowed happen when we were younger.

Mary and Danny have a beautiful new-old home. Danny is a master carpenter, and had a vision for what appeared to be the neighborhood's ugly duckling. Together with his grown children and Mary, they have transformed this formerly non-descript house into a beautiful home. This house, this home for their future, tells a quiet story of coming home and settling in. Last evening, as the cold weather descended upon us, the warmth from their kitchen threw its arms around all who entered the space.

It was very good to see brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, and kids with babies of their own. It was particularly good to see Betsy, another friend and cousin-in-law. Even though we live in the same town, it's been over a year since we've seen each other. My daughter Katie spent many of her formative years at Betsy's house, an un-official mother's helper with Betsy's then newborn son Corey. Today, as I witness Katie mothering little Henry, I hear "Besty-isms" come from her mouth all the time, and wonder if I had any influence at all! Last night we all expressed that we will make a real plan to deliberately spend some time together, and maybe after that, it won't take so much intention to enjoy each others' company. Maybe it will come easier again, like it did when our children were young and

convined us with each other -- when we were in the same

getting up the next day to find us get up as young mothers together.

I am grateful for the opportunity to spend time yesterday, where in this warm kitchen there were hugs, embraces, and spoken regrets that we don't make more of an effort to keep in touch, each one of us as guilty or innocent as the other. I noticed my beautiful mother-in-law, Mary Lou, now in her 80s, wisely watching as these re-connections took place, certain she's more aware than the rest of us how important these relationships are, and how we should hold dear to the people that matter. They may not be the relationships that matter most in our lives, those that take most of our time, but they matter nonetheless.

*Now for the food:*

There was an abundance of food, and a dessert table that would knock your socks off. Knowing there would be many delicious desserts, I decided to do a "180" and made Artichoke Dip (recipe follows), since Mary suggested an appetizer when I asked what I might bring.

Here's the recipe for my version of Artichoke Dip:

### **OPEN HOUSE ARTICHOKE DIP**

1 12-oz. can artichoke hearts  
1.5 cups mayonnaise  
1 cup sour cream  
1.5 cups grated or shredded Parmesan cheese  
½ tsp. garlic powder  
A few grinds of black pepper  
Nice crackers.

Drain artichoke hearts and finely chop.  
Mix all the ingredients together, including drained, chopped artichoke hearts.  
Spray pie plate or heat-proof serving dish. Spread dip in dish.  
Bake at 350° F until it bubbles and the top is begins to brown.  
Serve warm.

Refrigerate if not using and warm in microwave or oven when ready to serve.

Photo Credit: [http://www.craftynest.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/final\\_cooking.jpg](http://www.craftynest.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/final_cooking.jpg)

/2009/10/10/10101\_pumpkins.jpg

POSTED BY ADIRONDACK BAKER AT 10:37 AM 

LABELS: ARTICHOKE DIP, AUTUMN DINNER, COGAN, FAMILY CONNECTIONS, FRIENDS, OPEN HOUSE, REUNIONS

B-5

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2009

## Food - is it all about me? Not anymore.



I often think of food as a communication tool. If you ask women, particularly, to think of their relationship with food, the response is usually in terms of the personal: how much is eaten or ingested, how it is personally satisfying, or how many calories and the repercussions of indulgence. After decades of food=me=mood, it's a relief to realize that as I've gotten older, my own ego-centric view of food has shifted outward to consider it as more a social medium than something so specifically personal. Food is something we *do* as much as it is something we consume. Food sets a mood, creates a tone, and invites community.

Think about walking into someone's home, perhaps for a party, and the aroma of something cooking in the kitchen greets you before you have a chance to take off your coat. Food is atmosphere. It is setting. It's as much a part of the environment as the host's living room furniture and potted plants. Food serves a purpose. It welcomes us home. It celebrates a marriage or birth, and it soothes a grieving soul.

Do you ever wonder why it is that we respond to life's most significant events with food? We bring a lasagna to a family with a new baby, or a cake to a reception after a funeral. There's always too much, but it is exactly enough because the food brings more than the servings it provides. Delivered with a casserole or a bundt cake is the message "I care. I want to nourish you at this important time. You are important to me."

I am so glad that I see food differently at this stage in my life, and I feel fortunate to share occasional recipes for my food, and my thoughts about it, with you.

Photo image: [http://i.ehow.com/images/GlobalPhoto/Articles/4845294/bundtcake1-main\\_Full.jpg](http://i.ehow.com/images/GlobalPhoto/Articles/4845294/bundtcake1-main_Full.jpg)

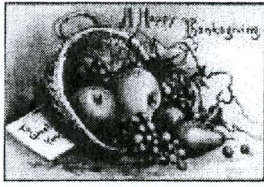
POSTED BY ADIRONDACK BAKER AT 6:27 AM 

LABELS: CELEBRATION FOOD, FOOD IS SOMETHING WE DO, FUNERAL FOOD

B-6

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2009

## Thanksgivings Past



I've written about this before, in other venues outside my blog. This is where I describe what I once considered to be the supreme-and-never-to-be-surpassed Thanksgiving dinner of my childhood.

Disclaimer: my mother was not a "scratch" cook (though we loved her food). She always used processed food but never store brands.

We were delighted to find, on our Thanksgiving table, the following:

- A big turkey (Butterball) and in later years, simpler-to-cook turkey breasts.
- French's instant mashed potatoes
- Franco American turkey gravy
- Pepperidge Farm stuffing
- Ocean Spray jellied cranberry sauce
- Parker House rolls (with real butter. We were a butter family.)
- Birds-eye peas
- Birds-eye creamed onions
- Green and black olives
- Celery Sticks
- Mrs. Smith's Pumpkin Pie
- Friehofer's Apple Pie
- Cool-whip
- Instant Maxwell House coffee (adults only)

If someone were to serve me this dinner today, I would be thrilled. It elicits the fondest of memories of happy times with my family of nine. I credit my mother with inspiring my interest in cooking, because though she was not particularly interested in recipes or anything more than basic cooking, she did encourage my budding interest and enjoyed helping me discover recipes. She let me mess up her kitchen. Her words of advice (that I still hear as I begin a cooking project) were: "Always make sure you have all the ingredients you need before you start" (after starting something and making her run to the store mid-recipe) and "Cleaning up is part of cooking."

If my mother loved to cook, this blog might not exist.

This Thanksgiving, I'm thankful for every meal my mother prepared

day in and day out for nine people, for the happy memories of time in her kitchen, and for the inspiration to learn to love something she didn't.

Thanks Mom!

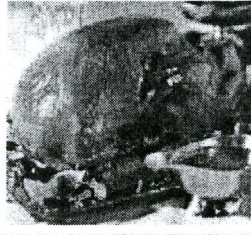
Photo credit: [http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.brantfowler.com/blog/uploaded\\_images/thanksgiving-768059.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.brantfowler.com/blog/2006/11/happy-thanksgiving.html&usq=\\_\\_7zvCh\\_boc-lkeUDReJ1JhNzEGcw=&h=357&w=526&sz=70&hl=en&start=26&tbnid=TmL4UGLPqPp9BM:&tbnh=90&tbnw=132&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dthanksgiving%26gbv%3D2%26ndsp%3D20%](http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.brantfowler.com/blog/uploaded_images/thanksgiving-768059.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.brantfowler.com/blog/2006/11/happy-thanksgiving.html&usq=__7zvCh_boc-lkeUDReJ1JhNzEGcw=&h=357&w=526&sz=70&hl=en&start=26&tbnid=TmL4UGLPqPp9BM:&tbnh=90&tbnw=132&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dthanksgiving%26gbv%3D2%26ndsp%3D20%)

POSTED BY ADIRONDACK BAKER AT 8:13 AM   
LABELS: THANKSGIVINGS PAST

B-7

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2009

## More than Black Friday: Thoughts the Day After Thanksgiving



We enjoyed a very nice Thanksgiving dinner hosted by my ex-husband Gene and his wife Catherine. They have a beautiful old home on the Hudson River, north of Schuylerville. As Russ and I arrived, a huge flock of geese was landing across the river, making an incredible noise as if to welcome all arriving.

And we were a crowd! With Catherine's two daughters and four of our five children, and associated partners and babies, we totalled 17 and managed to sit all around one expanded table. Catherine is a vegetarian, and she and her daughter Marcy cooked the entire traditional meal, turkey and all, along with vegan offerings for the vegetarians among us (at least four).

This was our third joint Thanksgiving dinner, and it's a happy occasion for our kids who don't have to choose which of their divorced parents they're going to share the day with, and an especially happy day for a Mom who doesn't have to miss the party while her kids are all off having a great time without her! It's a great solution, though I doubt many divorced families can get beyond some of the heavier baggage to allow themselves this liberation. I'm so glad we did. It provided a rare opportunity to appreciate the good things and silver linings that always come after a storm. It's easier on the kids, too. Rather than rush through a meal here and run to a meal there, they get to enjoy their family all at once. I loved sitting at the table and listening to my kids enjoy each others' company. They spent all those years together, and after things warm up, we're right back to the comfortable familiarity that makes us a family. My son Joe wasn't there, and he was missed, and I look forward to the Thanksgivings in the future when he takes his place at the table.

I don't get together with all of my children often enough, and I miss that. I really am grateful to Gene and Catherine that they've opened their home to me, Russ, and all the kids. Ours may not be a conventional holiday gathering, but it feels like family, through and through.

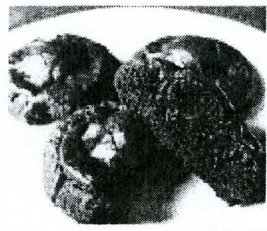
Photo credit: <http://vanelas.files.wordpress.com/2007/11/turkey-dinner.jpg>

POSTED BY ADIRONDACK BAKER AT 11:13 AM   
LABELS: DIVORCED FAMILIES, THANKSGIVING DINNER

B-8

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2009

## Lunch Buddies and Chocolate Cherry Cookies



For years I've been so lucky to share my lunch hour with my friend Sue Valenti. Sue is retiring in a few weeks, and I can't imagine a lunch hour without her. We became fast friends across a cubicle divide about ten years ago, and it soon became evident that this friendship will last long

beyond one person's retirement. She's a friend for life. Now we can look forward to spending non-work time together, without watching the clock to rush back to our offices. There are good times ahead.

Sue is a very good baker and every year at Christmas time she bakes dozens and dozens of cinnamon rolls as gifts. She's not limited to cinnamon rolls, though. She has a great recipe for chocolate glazed cookies stuffed with cherries (recipe follows). She's from Michigan and likes to bake "bars" as they're called there. She also has a recipe for raisin pie and one for gum-drop bread. Her favorite cake is lemon, and I make one every year for her birthday. Here's Sue's recipe for Chocolate Cherry Cookies! They'd make a nice addition to your Christmas Cookie repertoire.

### Chocolate Cherry Cookies

1 1/2 C flour  
1/2 C unsweetened cocoa powder  
1/4 tsp salt  
1/4 tsp baking powder  
1/4 tsp baking soda  
1/2 C butter  
1 C sugar  
1 egg  
1 1/2 tsp vanilla  
2 10 oz jars marashino cherries (drained, reserve juice)  
1 6 oz package semi sweet chocolate chips  
1/2 C sweetened condensed milk

Sift dry ingredients together. Cream butter and sugar well. Add egg and vanilla and blend well. Add dry ingredients and blend well. Roll mixture into 1-inch balls and place on an ungreased cookie sheet. Press a cherry into the center of each ball. Over medium heat, melt chocolate chips with sweetened condensed milk until melted and well blended. Stir in 4 tsp. cherry juice. If the mixture gets thick, add more cherry juice. Prior to baking, spoon 1 teaspoon of the frosting



over each cookie.

These cookies are baked frosted. Bake at 350 for 10 - 12 minutes.

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LABELS: CHOCOLATE CHERRY COOKIES, CHRISTMAS COOKIES, LUNCH BUDDIES