

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books
and Chapters

University of Nebraska Press

Fall 2013

Fried Walleye and Cherry Pie

Peggy Wolff Wolff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples>

Wolff, Peggy Wolff, "Fried Walleye and Cherry Pie" (2013). *University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters*. 223.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples/223>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Nebraska Press at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

FRIED WALLEYE & CHERRY PIE

[Buy the Book](#)

AT TABLE



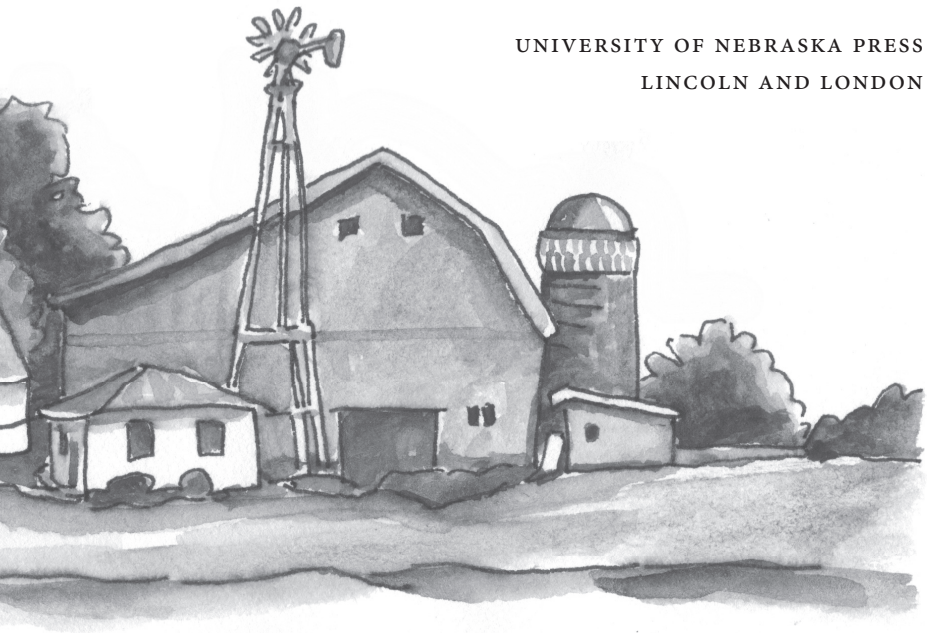
[Buy the Book](#)

Fried Walleye & Cherry Pie

MIDWESTERN WRITERS ON FOOD

Edited and with an Introduction by Peggy Wolff

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS
LINCOLN AND LONDON



[Buy the Book](#)

© 2013 by Peggy Wolff

Acknowledgment for the use of
copyrighted material appears on
pp. 257–58, which constitutes an
extension of the copyright page.

All rights reserved

Manufactured in the United
States of America



Library of Congress

Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fried walleye and cherry pie:

midwestern writers on food /

edited by Peggy Wolff.

pages cm — (At table)

ISBN 978-0-8032-3645-5

(pbk.: alk. paper);

978-0-8032-4855-7 (pdf web)

1. Cooking, American—Midwestern

style. 2. Cooking—Middle West.

3. International cooking—

Anecdotes. 4. Food habits—Middle

West—Anecdotes. 5. Authors,

American—Middle West—

Miscellanea. 6. Middle

West—Social life and customs—

Anecdotes. I. Wolff, Peggy,

editor of compilation. II. Title:

Midwestern writers on food.

TX715.2.M53F85 2013

641.5977—dc23 2013022747

Set in Minion by Laura Wellington.

Designed by Nathan Putens.

In memory of my father

Growing up, my favorite hot dog was the one at Wrigley Field, home of the Chicago Cubs. “It’s just a ballpark hot dog,” my dad would say. But no other Vienna Beef dog anywhere else was the same. That’s because we waited in line together, the thick smoke from the vendor’s cart seeping into our noses, our hair, and our mitts, while we watched our red hots stuffed into a poppy-seed bun. This was where I learned that food is not just food. It’s the experience that counts — where you are, whom you are with, and, if you’re lucky, a win for the home team. Thanks, Dad.

Contents

Acknowledgments	<i>xi</i>
Introduction	<i>xiii</i>

Midwestern Staples

In the Midwest, It's Meatloaf	3
ELIZABETH BERG	
Field Trips	9
STUART DYBEK	
Easter Island Almondine	15
THOM JONES	
The Sandwich That Is Chicago	23
MICHAEL STERN	
Cincinnati Five-Way Chili: Still Legal	33
ROBERT OLMSTEAD	
Corn in Heaven	39
JACQUELYN MITCHARD	
Let Them Eat Pâté	45
PETER SAGAL	
High on the Hog	49
JON YATES	

The Chef and the Farmer	57
GALE GAND	
<i>Recipe: Goat Cheese Panna Cotta with</i>	
Caramelized Figs	62
 Distant Cultures	
Art's Lunch	65
HARRY MARK PETRAKIS	
A Tale of Two Tamales	77
CAROL MIGHTON HADDIX	
<i>Recipe: Beef Brisket, Savory Cherry Compote,</i>	
and Jalapeño Cheese Tamales	83
Le Dog, Ann Arbor, Michigan	87
JULES VAN DYCK-DOBOS	
The Night of the Rhubarb Kuchen	93
ANNE DIMOCK	
<i>Recipes: Rhubarb Kram; Rhubarb Kuchen</i>	
with Almond Meringue	98
The Black Migration	103
DONNA PIERCE	
Eat Now	111
PHYLLIS FLORIN	
The Door County Fish Boil	119
PEGGY WOLFF	
<i>Recipes: White Gull Inn Door County Cherry Pie;</i>	
White Gull Inn Fish Boil Recipe for Home Cooks	128

Holidays, Fairs, and Events

Thrill Food	133
JOHN MARKUS	
Under the Checkered Flag	137
MELANIE BENJAMIN	
Bicentennial Pie	147
TIMOTHY BASCOM	
So You'll Diet Tomorrow	155
LORNA LANDVIK	
Thanksgiving Dinner	163
MARY KAY SHANLEY	
<i>Recipe: Thanksgiving Stuffing</i>	
with Cast-Iron Skillet Corn Bread	173

A Full Belly

The Tam-O-Shanter, Lincoln, Nebraska	177
SHERRIE FLICK	
What Was Served	185
DOUGLAS BAUER	
Tomorrowland	195
PETER MEEHAN	
I'll Eat Columbus	201
MOLLY O'NEILL	
On Cider, Cornmeal, and Comfort	209
ROBIN MATHER	
<i>Recipe: Buttermilk Doughnuts with Cider Glaze</i>	
	217

The Midwestern Sweet Tooth

The Great American Pie Expedition	221
SUE HUBBELL	
The Old Sweetness	227
BONNIE JO CAMPBELL	
<i>Recipe: Fudge</i>	231
The Little Cake Pan That Could	239
BONNY WOLF	
<i>Recipes: Chocolate Pistachio Cake; Ella Helfrich's</i>	
Tunnel of Fudge Cake	243
When a Pie Is More Than a Pie	247
JEREMY JACKSON	
<i>Recipe: Mildred Jackson's Lemon-y Cream Pie</i>	255
Source Acknowledgments	257

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Harriet Bell for green-lighting a collection of food stories and being a wonderful ally; Lisa Ekus for being completely thorough and steering me through this; and farmers David and Susan Cleverdon for teaching me the ways of an organic micro farm.

This project would have been a lot more difficult without the support of in-house editors Heather Lundine and Bridget Barry at UNP; also my summer intern Allison Grover, for a hundred helpful things; and my children, Jordan, for tech support and formatting, and Zoe, for all illustrations.

Thanks also to the “Tuesdays” at the Wesley Writers Workshop and to leaders Sharon and Steve Fiffer for giving generously of their time; and to so many friends for recipe testing: Sonja and Eric Anderson, Ellen Barreto, Claudia Fariello Bolnick, Pat Hitchens-Bonow, Meri Clement, Laura Friedman, Linda Gartz, Elise Kapnick, Holly Raider, Lauren Taslitz, and Lindy Waldman.

Thank you Glencoe Roast Coffee and Park City’s Silver Star Café, because working at home is never any fun.

And I embrace longtime writing pals Pamela and Pat, for giving real meaning to the word “write-in.” Lastly, to Sam, for any measure you want to apply, especially for enjoying the pleasures of the table with me.



Introduction

When I was eleven years old I wrote a hate letter to Betty Crocker. The chocolate chip cookies I baked from Betty's *Picture Cookbook* didn't look at all like the ones in the book's photo. Those cookies could transport you, lacy yet chewy looking, studded with chocolate chunks folded into the dough, piled four high on a pristine white plate. Mine were soggy in the middle, lacking crispy brown edges, a flop. It was all her fault and I thought she should know.

Betty wrote me back! I imagined the most popular American woman, second only to Eleanor Roosevelt for a time (according to *Fortune* magazine), sitting at her desk up there in Minnesota at General Mills, rolling up her sleeves, and typing *me* a letter.

I don't have the letter today, but the way I remember it, she was truly sorry my cookies didn't come out right, and she meant it. She suggested that I measure the ingredients carefully because they test all their recipes in the Betty Crocker kitchen. To show her regret, she sent me a consolation prize: a hardcover book full of cooking basics, tips, and food preparation terms *and* a set of colored measuring spoons. They were *mine*. They came from Betty.

I was flattered beyond words, rubbing elbows with celebrity. My package was from the queen of the Midwest, the Martha Stewart of the twentieth century, and her image said, "I am competent. I don't burn the roast."

With my new book and measuring spoons, I was in business, wonderfully armed with the first tools of my kitchen. Though I now know the cheery all-American Betty to be a myth, a fictitious character invented

to pen a warm, friendly signature to all those letters giving advice to home cooks, still, opening such a package kick-started a lifelong love of cooking and eating.

I grew up in the Midwest and live there now. Of all the collections of contemporary food writing that have appeared in recent years, none have come from the heartland, the region where *the whole food industry began!*

Alongside the innovative mechanical staples — cast-steel plows, tractors, reapers designed to satisfy the needs of the average U.S. family farmer — the Midwest gave the nation the food giants and the whole industrial processing of grains, which amounts to nearly everything we grew up eating. Quaker Oats, Post Grape-Nuts, Wheaties, Rice Krispies, Jiffy, Bisquick, Crisco, and Spam. Swanson's gave us frozen TV dinners; Kraft gave us the ultimate childhood food in a box, mac 'n' cheese. Also from the heartland, the Weber grill, the Reuben sandwich, Oreos, Cracker Jack, the hot dog bun, Good Humors, Hostess Twinkies, and sloppy joes. Midwestern entrepreneurs gave the country fast-food chains such as Pizza Hut, Domino's, Wendy's, Arby's, and White Castle. And the franchise that set its headquarters here, McDonald's.

I felt that it was time to build a collection of heartland food stories from the region's most talented authors. I asked them to recall the times when food triggered a memory, raised a question, or was a starting place for a meditation on the times when growing or cooking or eating became an unforgettable experience. Stories told around and about the table with midwestern foods in the starring role.

As much as *Fried Walleye and Cherry Pie: Midwestern Writers on Food* is memoir — a voyeuristic peek into a life — it's also informational. Who knew about Japanese Mirai corn in Illinois? The Iowa skinny? That gourmet tamale? The top-selling cake pan in the world . . . from Minnesota?

To see this region, get inside a speeding car on the interstate. Start at the eastern border in Ohio where the Midwest region begins, farmed by people like the Amish who use no electricity or modern farm machinery and don't stretch the seasons but adhere to the notion of the ticking of

the seasonal clock. Drive west from there and you will see large-scale postmodern agribusinesses that don't feel the slightest quickening at the sign of cold weather because technology has smoothed the boundaries between seasons.

Make your way through the Corn Belt in the three "I" states: Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa. Corn, wheat, soybeans, corn, exit ramp, corn, and every few miles a herd of pigs or sheep way off on a reach in the distance, a house, a tree with a tire swing, a barn, a satellite dish. You will see America's pastoral face. Grain silos are the only skyline.

Some of this land is flat as a cracker, a rural crossroads where corn is king. There is a hot breeze and, in the wipe of blue sky, a wedge of birds. Piercingly loud and soaring like gulls with extended wings, killdeer throw the boomerang of their song across the ripening fields. Zigzagging along the sides of roads are fields of green, like tiles of colored dominoes laid end to end, the green tint of the Mongolian garlic matching that of the Siberian garlic chive; the very rare Japanese shallot butted up against crookneck squash. French Batavia lettuce next to Winter Density.

Now head north. You think the Midwest is landlocked? Stand on the rocky northern bluffs of Wisconsin with Lake Michigan to the east, Sturgeon Bay to the south, Green Bay to the west, and Death's Door with its smattering of islands to the north.

Head back south through the dense forests of the northern Midwest, its wide and fertile river valleys and broad expanses of grasslands, into Nebraska and Kansas. Here, in America's middle ground, are ranchers letting herds of cattle roam in open pastures, fattening on grass, not corn, just the way livestock was meant to be raised. A fog hangs just over the fields even though it is over eighty degrees and climbing. Later on, the skies can turn green with tornado-warning storms, and at night lightning can run magnificent and terrible from the horizons.

Need some refreshment? Get off the striped pavement and pull over at a farm. Coming up the long drive, the farm and all the outbuildings look like rising bread against a backdrop of folded countryside. The farmer will get you to the right road and the road will get you to the diner. If you're lucky, and there's still pie, the most agreeable food a

farmer's family can make, go ahead, explore the boundaries of *sweet*. It will sustain your hunger until dinnertime.

In *Fried Walleye and Cherry Pie: Midwestern Writers on Food* this wonderful group of authors write about food so simply and exuberantly that I cannot help thinking that I missed out on something by not having farm roots, or not crossing the country in search of pie.

Writing from a culinary lens, Sue Hubbell explains that good pie cannot be found within one mile of an interstate. After reading her overland pie quest, you'll want to search too at an independent truck stop for apple pie that is every bit as good as that served in the United States Senate Family Dining Room.

In "Midwestern Staples," you'll get a mouthful of our iconic foods—beef, corn, cheese, grains, and pork. Here you can follow Robert Olmstead's digressions into the Aztec civilization when he delves into all the variations of Cincinnati chili. Also, there's a lively memoir from Stuart Dybek about a school field trip to a slaughtering house and from Elizabeth Berg a nostalgic look back at her aunt's meatloaf and her longing for the ritual of family dinnertime that has all but vanished today. In Peter Sagal's essay the city made infamous by Upton Sinclair's meatpacking exposé grapples with fattened duck liver, and it does so the Chicago way.

"Distant Cultures" is a section offering up tales of the Midwest as culinary melting pot. Because so many churches in the middle of the country have sponsored refugees, great ethnic food is no longer confined to the country's perimeters or our urban centers. As Carol Mighton Haddix will show you, their foods have gone beyond the boundaries of their original neighborhoods. For many immigrants who need to earn a living, daily life often means the food business, whether lunch stand or food truck, diner or deli. Greek author Harry Mark Petrakis brings us an elegiac and pensive story as he remembers the redeeming aspects of what was for him at the time an exhausting experience owning a south side Chicago lunchroom.

In "Holidays, Fairs, and Events" you'll find a vivid memoir from comedy writer John Markus about wandering the midway at his Ohio county fair and lusting after much more than fried foods-on-a-stick.

And while we're on the road, unplugged from all the servers, databases, and webmasters that rule our daily lives, we can spend a day with Lorna Landvik at the Minnesota State Fair, nibbling on every calorie-laden food.

In "A Full Belly" you'll find essays on memorable experiences from lives centered around food. Molly O'Neill, whose culinary path all over America has taken her to the best addresses for food, traveled back to her Ohio hometown and found that the heart of the country was rapidly becoming the center of the second wave of the gourmet revolution. Douglas Bauer concentrates on the midday farm dinner, his mother's ambitious preparations from the moment of first field work in spring to the end of the harvest, and how he, as a young boy, saw that the kitchen routine was harder than the laborer's work out in the field.

In "The Midwestern Sweet Tooth," a section devoted to our rich, sugary foods, Bonnie Jo Campbell deconstructs a homemade fudge recipe from an old *Joy of Cooking*. Along the way she serves up thoughts about candy making as a means toward a more meaningful life.

These stories and nineteen more follow the authors' passions and appetites, at times focusing on the uncelebrated, homely, traditional foods that were at the time completely off the radar of almost everyone who made a living caring or writing about food. And they bring us into the present by showing us how to live a locavore's life in the upper Midwest or how gene splicing the DNA of sweet corn gave us a hybrid that has, well, everything.

I offer this collection for armchair road trippers and foodies and those who want to peer into the nooks and crannies of the region and make hunger-induced pit stops in the culinary middle ground. Pull up a chair and help yourself. I hope you find enough to satisfy your appetite.

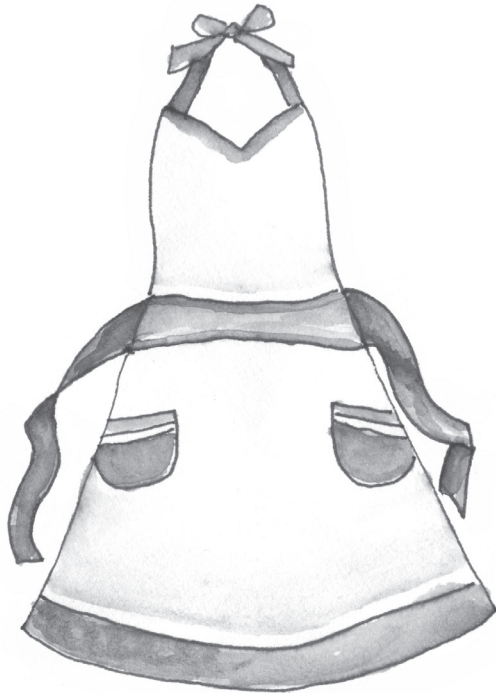
FRIED WALLEYE & CHERRY PIE

[Buy the Book](#)

Midwestern Staples



[Buy the Book](#)



Where has all the meatloaf gone? Where is the meatloaf of yesteryear? Sometime during the seventies we became food snobs. No more casseroles with cream of mushroom soup. No more meatloaf from the recipe on the side of an oatmeal box. And everyone too busy for the shared family dinnertime experience. This is the heartfelt concern of an author who reaches into her memory and comes up with the dish that restores her.

In the Midwest, It's Meatloaf

Elizabeth Berg

I was raised an Army brat. That meant I was jerked irregularly from one location to the next. I lived overseas in Germany; I lived on a farm in Indiana; I lived in Oklahoma and Texas and Missouri. But my home state was Minnesota, smack dab in the Midwest. And so, naturally, I love meatloaf.

Meatloaf may very well be a descendent of European pâté. The first recipe was published around 1900. The ingredients can vary widely, but the taste is always the same: truly satisfying. The usual method is to use a mix of beef, pork, and veal; one or two eggs; a liquid such as tomato juice or milk; an “extender” such as oatmeal, crackers, or bread crumbs; and spices ranging from salt and pepper to mint and marjoram. You mix the ingredients with a spoon if you’re a wimp or by hand if you know how to have fun, and when everything hangs together, you put it in a loaf pan and bake it for about an hour and a half.

Growing up, my favorite meatloaf was my Aunt Lala’s. “It’s only from the recipe on the box of Quaker Oats,” she would say modestly. But if you followed that recipe to the letter, it would not be the same. That is because the recipe says nothing about washing up before dinner

Elizabeth Berg is the author of many bestselling novels. *Open House* was an Oprah’s Book Club pick, and both *Durable Goods* and *Joy School* were chosen as the American Library Association’s Best Book of the Year. She is at work on her next novel. She has also written two short story collections, two works of nonfiction, and one play. Her website is elizabeth-berg.net, which features her popular blog, and she also chimes in frequently on Facebook. She lives and eats near Chicago.

in Lala's kitchen sink with Ivory soap and drying off with a towel that smelled pleasantly of laundry detergent. Nor does it say anything about preparing the table with a well-worn embroidered tablecloth. Or serving mashed potatoes and Blue Lake green beans as accompaniments in pastel-colored bowls — pink or green or yellow. That is what you must have with meatloaf. You also must have apple pie for dessert, made from scratch, the crust rolled out on the kitchen table to the sound of great music, preferably big bands like Tommy Dorsey and Glen Miller.

There used to be a lot of support for serving meatloaf. I'm sure the Stones and the Cleavers had it all the time. Probably Ed Sullivan, too, although you never got to see him eat. Every time I saw a cowboy movie where the handsome lead would stay to dinner after having mended the fence, I was sure that meatloaf was what he'd eaten. "Thanks for the meal, ma'am," he would say, looking up from his empty plate and untucking his blue-and-white-checked napkin from the front of his shirt. "That was mighty good." The heroine, bosom heaving, would tell him that he was very welcome and suggest that perhaps he should . . . stay awhile. She would come closer, ostensibly to pick up his plate, but really to let him smell her perfume. And on that plate would be the telltale signs of meatloaf, I was sure of it. Aunt Lala's rolled-oat recipe, served on a blue-speckled tin plate. I mean, really, what else *would* it have been? Eggplant stuffed with goat cheese? Baby vegetables? Pasta?? No. It was meatloaf.

Of course it's not just the taste of meatloaf that I love. It's the memory of the whole dinnertime experience that particular dish represents. You remember this: You'd be lying on your belly in your striped shirt watching *The Mickey Mouse Club*. Your mother would be in the kitchen wearing an apron and making dinner. You'd hear a few bangs and clangs, drawers sliding in and out, the thunka-THUNKA-thunka of the knife against the chopping board. And pretty soon, seductive finger-like waves of smell would come from the kitchen out into the living room to find you. They would float under your nose and past you, then curl around for another go-by. It would be getting harder and harder to pay attention to Spin and Marty. You would feel very close to being levitated, like the cartoon figures who floated in the air, seeming to body

surf on currents of smell alone. Eventually you would have to do the inevitable: leave *The Mickey Mouse Club* to announce to your mother that unless you ate instantly, you would die.

“Pretty soon,” she would say, her back to you, and you would know she was lie, lie, lying because there she was at the sink, *peeling potatoes*. They were not boiling and almost done. They weren’t even in the pot! “Pretty soon” my eye! You’d be in another geologic age before you ate! You would explain some of this to your mother. You would ask for a bite of the meatloaf in the oven; surely the ends were done. You would be given a piece of raw potato (this chosen over the alternative, a stupid carrot) and you would sulk a little, stomp your feet a little if you thought you could get away with it, and then salt the potato piece and viciously eat it. Then you would go and finish watching television.

At last it would be time. Your father would come home, a tidy stack of white bread would be put on the table next to his plate (because he ate the most of it), and everyone would wash up and sit down. You would put butter on your potatoes and catsup on your meatloaf and eat the green beans first because, although they were good, they weren’t the best. Probably after dinner you had to help with the dishes, and if you were the younger sibling you were stuck with the dreaded task of drying. It occurs to me now that there is still a part of me that believes everyone grew up this way, that I could say “meatloaf” to any passing stranger and the same rich and familiar imagery that comes to me would come to them. What a wonderfully secure and narrow-minded sensibility I had! For years, my kaleidoscope was fixed in one position: All fathers worked. All mothers stayed home with their children. Though you weren’t rich, you didn’t worry about money. And everyone had meatloaf once a week.

Well. My worldview may have widened, but I still love meatloaf and I still make it, though certainly not once a week. For one thing, it is RED MEAT. For another, it is no longer stylish, unless it is gourmet meatloaf, in which case it is not meatloaf. In fact, I’m a little shy about admitting my love of meatloaf to anyone I don’t know well. But I’ve got a lot of recipes for meatloaf, and I make them, including a potato-frosted one, which is my favorite. The thing about meatloaf is how

good it is cold, too. Better than turkey, oh yes. What you do is you put mayonnaise *and* mustard on. Don't mess with lettuce because anything crunchy interferes with the comfort food factor. And use icky white bread because it *enhances* the comfort food factor.

The biggest reason I don't make meatloaf a lot, though, is that I don't cook very much anymore. This bothers me. Because I believe that cooking is about more than taking care of a certain unrelenting biological need. I believe it is spiritual, and calming, and centering. I believe that making something with your own hands and feeding it to the ones you love is communicating something that can't be communicated any other way. As families, we need the time required for preparing and eating dinner to just be together, to see what comes up for conversation, to look around the table and see the faces of those we live with. We need to save this stuff, store it in some vital compartment, because we will need it later. It will sustain and support us, keep us from feeling bad when some stranger is yelling at us, when we lose a job, when our honeys break our hearts.

But times have changed, irrevocably, I suppose. It's hard to have time to make old-fashioned meals. People eat instant mashed potatoes, take-out food, microwaved meals (low cal, low fat, low everything but price). Schedules are crazy — it's a rare thing for all members of a family to sit down together. I'm sad for the loss of that; I'm scared it will never come back; and I make meatloaf every now and then to pretend it's still possible to live the way we used to.

Not long ago, I found myself cracking up a little — snapping at my husband and the kids, lying in bed at night staring at the wall and sighing. This can and does happen to all of us, I suppose — I mean, we *do* live in the nineties. I took a little vacation by myself so I could heal. I went to an ocean-side town and stopped first at the local grocery store. The place I was staying at had a little kitchenette, and I needed to stock up. I wasn't interested in eating in restaurants; I was interested in holing up, lying around in my underwear, and reading.

I bought some designer water. I got some nice-looking fruit and cheese, some eggs. And then, over at the deli counter, I spotted some meatloaf. There were several fat slices, all on white Styrofoam trays,

covered rather sickly with plastic wrap. It wasn't like my aunt Lala's and it wasn't like mine, you could tell. The truth is, it sort of looked like dog food. But it was meatloaf, symbol of too much to pass up. I bought it all. And when I got to my little place, I made a meatloaf sandwich. As soon as I ate it, I felt better. Honest. Not everything changes.