

The Wolf at the Door

By Meryl S. Rosofsky

The following article is an excerpt from an essay by Meryl Rosofsky titled "Writing the Wolf Away: Food Meaning & Memories from World War II" which appeared in the Spring 2004 issue of Food, Culture, & Society (FCS), published by the Association for the Study of Food and Society (ASFS). A section of the issue was devoted to the "food voice," a term developed by Annie Hauck-Lawson to describe how food helps "to forge cooperative links, extend hospitality, and assert power of obligation."

In "Writing the Wolf Away," Rosofsky explores "themes of food writing and food memory — conveyors and components of... the 'food voice' — against the backdrop of war, in particular World War II." The essay, as she notes, "focuses on three surprisingly interconnected works: M.F.K. Fisher's How to Cook a Wolf; the autobiographical memoir Nobody Knows the Truffles I've Seen by George Lang; and In Memory's Kitchen, the harrowing, defiant collection of recipes compiled by women in Theresienstadt (edited by CHNY member Cara De Silva). Linking all three books are themes of shortage and plenty, survival and celebration, food and food writing as humanizing forces, sources of comfort, and even acts of resistance."

This excerpt focuses on the first of these books, M.F.K. Fisher's How to Cook a Wolf.

"PEOPLE ask me," wrote the great M.F.K. Fisher, "Why do you write about food, and eating and drinking? Why don't you write about the struggle for power and security, and about love, the way others do?" Implicit in this question is a subtle indictment: How can so talented a writer squander her enormous gift on something so trivial, even frivolous, as food? And especially when writing during eras of wartime rationing and greater privations, as she did more than once in her long literary career? For Fisher, the answer is that, "...like most other humans, I am hungry. But there is more than that. It seems to me that our three basic needs, for food and

security and love, are so mixed and mingled and intertwined that we cannot straightly think of one without the others. So it happens that when I write of hunger, I am really writing about love and the hunger for it, and warmth and the love of it and the hunger for it... and it is all one....

There is a communion of more than our bodies when bread is broken and wine drunk. And that is my answer, when people ask me: Why do you write about hunger, and not wars or love? (The Art of Eating)

So is there in fact something about consuming, and remembering, and especially thinking and writing about food, that provides true spiritual nourishment in times

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Papers demonstrating serious culinary history research will be considered for inclusion in issues of the CHNY newsletters. Please contact Helen Brody, newsletter editor. Matriculating students of culinary history or related topics are invited to contribute.

FROM THE CHAIR

WE are happy to report that Amelia Simmons, author of *American Cookery* (1796), the first cookbook written in America, lives on through the Culinary Historians of New York's institution of two awards bearing her name: the *Amelia Award*, recognizing excellence in culinary history, and the *Amelia Scholar's Grant*, encouraging research in the field of culinary history.

On October 19, 2004, as part of the symposium celebrating the publication of the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*, CHNY presented its first annual Amelia Award to Karen Hess. Karen's groundbreaking work is detailed in Andy Smith's affectionate member profile on page 6; she richly deserves the inaugural award. The Amelia Award is represented by an engraved Tiffany's trifle bowl. The bowl was selected after reading the musings of British culinary historian Helen J. Saberi, who wrote that, "trifles offer a rare combination of sensual and intellectual pleasures." Karen's work, and indeed, all excellent culinary history, appeals both to the mind and senses; the trifle bowl seems a fitting tribute. We hope that the annual presentation of the Amelia Award will call attention to significant achievement in culinary history.

An adjunct to the Amelia Award is the Amelia Scholar's Grant, a \$1,000 stipend designed to support culinary history. The grant is open to emerging and established culinary historians. Applications are available on the CHNY website, www.culinaryhistoriansny.org/resources. The grant is not limited to CHNY members, but mem-

bers are encouraged to apply. The recipient of the Amelia Scholar's Grant will present a program based on the funded research to CHNY in its 2006–07 season.

Other news from the Steering Committee is on-going work to modernize the organization of CHNY; we are currently working with the law firm of Patterson, Belknap, Webb & Tyler, LLP, which is representing CHNY on a *pro bono* basis, to change CHNY from an "association" to a "not for profit corporation." As part of the work done, we have learned that *membership fees* (but not program attendance fees) *are tax-deductible for everyone up to \$75*. Your membership in CHNY is a bargain!

We also encourage you to visit the CHNY website regularly and to sign up for "Mailbag," our e-mail notification of events that are of potential interest to members. Among the new offerings on the website is the full-text version of Meryl Rosofsky's wonderful article *Writing the Wolf Away*. Space and financial constraints prevent us from printing her complete essay in the newsletter, but with the nearly unlimited capacity of cyberspace, we can offer you this scholarly piece in its entirety.

We welcome your ideas and participation in the governance of CHNY; please contact any Steering Committee member at program meetings or through the website.

I can always be reached at chairman@culinaryhistoriansny.org or 212 673 6905.


Cathy Kaufman

New York Public Library *Cookbook Preservation Update*

THE New York Public Library (NYPL) continues to improve access to and preserve its magnificent cookery collection. The International Association of Culinary Professionals' Culinary Trust has agreed to fund the restoration of John Murrell's *Murel's Two Bookes of Cookerie and Carving* (London, 1631).

This summer, the NYPL hopes to have its searchable

database for its menu collection up and running. And rare cookbooks are still being moved from the general stacks into the Rare Book Room. The library's cookbook collection is a crucial resource for all food historians, so please encourage the staff to make it even better.

E-mail Andy Coe at 76407.1366@compuserve.com or call (718) 797-0029 for ways to contribute.

Ciampa. from a recipe by Stephen Schmidt. —John Jenkins

A QUESTION OF SERVICE: ELEGANT DINING IN NEW NATION NEW YORK

Presented by Cathy Kaufman
September, 2004

Proper manners were on display in a presentation by Cathy Kaufman, held at and co-sponsored by the Mount Vernon Hotel Museum.

The talk opened with a survey of etiquette books in America in the 18th century, all of which had a very moralistic and somewhat primitive tone (don't feed greedily at table, don't use your sleeve as a napkin or handkerchief), focusing particularly on George Washington's "Rules of Civility" and descriptions by the Scottish physician Alexander Hamilton (not the founding father) of his trip to New York in 1744, including upsetting a pan of fried clams to the chagrin of his landlady: the pan had been perched on a bed warmer that served as a chafing dish, and his blousy sleeve got caught in the handle. The 18th clergyman Christopher Dock had specifically warned against this sort of faux pas.

After many giggles over our crude and primitive ancestors, including extensive quotes from Frances Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, we looked at table diagrams of dish placement to show how the more elegant folks ate, reviewed Robert Robert's *Table Servant's Directory*, and Sargeant's famous painting of *The Dinner Party*, ca. 1835.

The evening finished with some descriptions of New York

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PROGRAM SUMMARIES

ANNUAL MEETING AND PROGRAM

"New Hampshire: A Study in Agricultural and Culinary Innovation"

Presented by Helen Brody
September, 2004

After giving us a brief history of her adopted "Live Free or Die State, Brody jumped to the mid-20th century when the nation's mega farms began undercutting the prices received by New Hampshire farms for similar products.

As the state's farms were caught up in this economic downturn, second home buyers and neighboring state commuters were gazing hungrily at the beautiful farms ripe for exploitation and developers offered unimagined riches and retirement security to farmers who were barely making ends meet. Much of the land had been in families for generations.

Coinciding with this new

population influx, was the growing interest in fresh and healthy food. Locally grown product became the buzz word with small niche market farms opening in many communities. Unlike the larger one or two crop farms of 50 years ago, that sold to a middleman or wholesaler, these neighborhood farmers sell a diverse array of products direct to the customer at farm stands, farmers' markets, fairs – even over the internet. At a farmers' market, baked goods and preserves made from fruits grown on the farm may be displayed near a stand of farm raised meats, home made cheese or fresh produce. Even "English-style" cider (hard cider) is now available at several farms in the state.

To illustrate the growth in small specialty farms, we sampled some New Hampshire grown products and, to remind us that an election was not far off, we cut into an Election Cake made by Bill

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dining from Philip Hone and editorials about the dining room at the Astor Hotel in the 1840s.

SOMETHING FROM THE OVEN

Presented by Laura Shapiro
October 2004

Surrounded by the sparkling new ovens at the Goldman Associates Luxury Showroom, Laura Shapiro discussed her book, *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America*. In particular, she focused on two women whose unlikely friendship represents “the ‘50s writ small”: Poppy Cannon, author of *The Can Opener Cookbook*, and Alice B. Toklas, author of *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*.

Setting the backdrop, Shapiro explained the two forces on the kitchen battlefield during the 1950s: the food industry vs. home cooks. Although instant foods didn’t taste right and weren’t necessary, the food industry worked on improving its product and promoting it through ad campaigns declaring that “cooking is dead.” There was no research behind this claim, and in fact most people enjoyed cooking above all other household tasks. However, thanks to incessant pressure from advertisements, home cooks began to come around, though they never completely turned their backs on traditional cooking.

Cannon and Toklas met in 1954 in Venice, and corresponded warmly for years. Shapiro shared with us the text of some of these letters, including this entertaining exchange: Toklas, who denounced

convenience food and shortcuts, announced in a letter to Cannon, “the mixer hasn’t seduced me.” But it had: she and Gertrude Stein once received a Mixmaster as a gift, and as Stein wrote gratefully, “Day and night, Mixmaster is a delight.” Toklas also was known to keep a blender on the dining room table as a centerpiece in her apartment in the Left Bank of Paris.

The Cannon/Toklas friendship flourished because they knew they could learn from each other. Cannon, a firm believer in the food industry, could see the depth and complexity of Toklas’s cooking. And Toklas, who professed to disdain convenience, to her own surprise fell in love with cake mixes.

Members and guests enjoyed refreshments prepared by chefs at Goldman Associates, and viewed a brief kitchen equipment demo.

—Kara Newman

PUNCH: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MONARCH OF MIXED DRINKS

Presented by David Wondrich
December, 2004

On a cold evening at the National Arts Club on Gramercy Park, we were welcomed by an arrack and green tea punch, 18th and 19th century goodies — Shrewsbury cakes, cheese seed biscuits, almond tarts and election cakes — and a talk about the history of punch by David Wondrich, writer on spirits and cocktails and a founding member of the Museum of the American Cocktail in New Orleans. The talk was given in association with The Culinary Arts Committee of the National Arts Club.

Punch, Wondrich said,

originated in India, and is first mentioned in print in records of the East India Company in 1632. The name is probably derived from the Indian word for five, “panch,” which refers to the five ingredients contained in the original punches. In India they were arrack (an Indian spirit made from coconut sap), citrus juice (lime), sugar (jaggery, an Indian palm sugar), spices (nutmeg, clove, ambergris, etc.), and water. As punch spread around the world, it came to be made with the local spirit favored at the time — in England with wine and brandy, in America with rum, from the islands — and sometimes with several more added ingredients.

In 18th century England punch houses, along with chocolate and coffee houses, grew in popularity. Variations of punch flourished until punch eventually lost its original identity. In the early 1800’s it was made with gin, the drink of the masses — considered a sacrilege by many. Today we would call it a Tom Collins. There was also a whisky punch that resembles today’s whisky toddy.

In America we drank punch in the same way as the English. In San Francisco they even made a punch with pisco, a South American brandy brought up the coast by boat. But the 1862 publication of Jerry Thomas’s *How to Mix Drinks, or the Bon Vivant’s Companion* marked the peak of punch popularity. It contained 78 recipes for punch but only 13 for cocktails. From then on punch’s punch got weaker and fruitier and became even non-alcoholic. The custom of gathering around the punch bowl in a sociable spirit gave way to the individual having a quick shot at the bar.

To prove that the historians are nothing, if not sociable, we ended

the evening sharing a late version of punch — the one created in San Francisco made with pisco. We left this pre-holiday meeting filled with the spirit of Christmas Past.

—John Jenkins

HOW TO FEAST LIKE AN ANCIENT KABBALIST

Presented by Alan Brill
January, 2005

Alan Brill's subject was the dining practices of the 17th century Jewish Mystics in the Holy Land and their mid-winter feast known as "The Tu B'Shvat Seder." He explained who the mystics were, where they came from, and what they believed in. The audience learned how the Jewish Mystics' were influenced by their access to the spice route which constantly supplied them with spices from the Far East. These spices influenced their culinary profile. Brill also talked about the "Tu B'Shvat Seder and explained how each cup of wine and fruit eaten at this event symbolized different mystical spheres and held different spiritual meanings. The fusion of spirituality into the dining experience was illustrated by serving of foods commonly eaten in that era and location.

—Ken Ovitz

"THE GOOD SOUP COMES FROM THE GOOD EARTH" *West African Food and Culture*

Presented by Fran Osseo-Asare
February, 2005

A feast for all the senses best describes the transformed lecture space at the Park Avenue United

Methodist Church, where Dr. Fran Osseo-Asare presented "The Good Soup Comes from the Good Earth," exploring the culinary culture of Ghana, Osseo-Asare's second home. The air was redolent with exotic spices from the cornucopia of Ghana's foods, expertly prepared by chef Eva Forson, of African Palava, a caterer specializing in West African foods, and African music wafted in the background. Cooking equipment, unusual ingredients, and African fabrics and artifacts were displayed and examined. The final preliminary to transport us mentally to Ghana was Osseo-Asare's explanation of day names. Day names are one of seven names (with masculine and feminine variations) given to Ghanese children as a diminutive based on the day of the week on which they are born and are commonly used to organize and group children in Ghana. Using various charts, all attendees were able to discover their day name, and for the evening we donned West African identities.

Once enveloped by the smells, tastes, sounds, sights, and textures of Ghanese culture, Osseo-Asare brought a scholar's eye to Ghana's foodways. Passionate about her topic, and a rare ambassador for this little-known cuisine, Osseo-Asare quickly revealed her peeves with Western ignorance of Ghana. While acknowledging Ghana's Third World status, Osseo-Asare argued that much of Ghana's richness is frequently ignored by the media: starving children are too often portrayed, without balancing these disturbing images with ones that show the bounty of Ghanese food.

Osseo-Asare sees a crisis looming in Ghanese foodways based on rapidly encroaching globalization.

Ghana is moving from a Third World, traditional society in which village women produce and distribute food according to centuries-old methods to one in which modern speed and convenience is becoming the talisman of villagers. Osseo-Asare fears that Ghanese food soon will no longer be recognizable, pointing to the introduction of western products, such as the ubiquitous Maggi bouillon cubes that modern Ghanese women now substitute for the laborious infusions of their grandmothers' cooking. Other western products, such as pasta, now substituting for cassava as a staple carbohydrate, are diluting the unique flavor of Ghanese food that emerged from the "Portuguese Exchange" (a term Osseo-Asare feels is more accurate than the popular "Columbian Exchange" of food scholars) of the seventeenth through twentieth centuries. As cookery knowledge has been an oral tradition transmitted from one generation to the next and very few cookbooks document Ghanese cuisine, Osseo-Asare worries that the cuisine that she encountered in her first trips to Ghana in the 1970s will be forever lost within two generations. With a grant from the International Association of Culinary Professionals Foundation, Osseo-Asare is trying to record these traditional recipes before they disappear. We should all keep our eyes open for her forthcoming book, *Food Culture of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Greenwood Press 2005), and for her work, with Barbara Baëta, on the regional cuisines of Ghana.

—Cathy Kaufman

MEMBER PROFILE

A Tribute to Karen Hess

By Andrew F. Smith

Everyone who has ever met Karen Hess has a story to tell. I first spoke with her on the phone in the late 1980s. Of course, years before, I had read *The Taste of America* (1977), which she co-authored with her husband, John. This provocative book was what got me interested in American foodways in the first place. The book also

makes several comments about tomato history that challenged traditional beliefs. It wasn't until a decade later, when I began to collect material on tomato history, that a mutual friend encouraged me to call her.

The Hess' phone number was listed in the telephone directory, so I called, hoping she'd be willing to chat for a few minutes about tomatoes. At that time I had published nothing on food, and to Karen, I was just a voice on the phone. Yet she talked with me for more than a half hour, patiently answering my

questions and, of course, correcting my mistaken views (alas, something she has continued to do, to my consternation and delight, ever since).

Karen was born in Blair, Nebraska, on November 11, 1918. (For those who may have forgotten, this date is Armistice Day — the last day of World War I). Karen's parents were Danish immigrants, and Danish was her first language. She learned English when she entered school.

Karen learned to cook the old-fashioned way — on wood- and coal-burning stoves. She traces her interest in writing about food to the day in January 1964 that *The New York Times* assigned her husband, John, to Paris in January 1964. For the next decade, she became a devotee of the French restaurants, bakeries, and other culinary wonders that Paris offered. She and John became friends with the food writer Waverly Root, the author of two wonderful books, *The Taste of France* and *The Taste of Italy*. Other American food writers came to Paris and visited them. One such luminary was Julia Child, who joined the Hesses for dinner one night. John and Karen had selected a small but good restaurant; Julia was not impressed with it. Julia was also upset with the French in general because they had refused to publish her cookbooks. This encounter marked the first of many life-long differences of opinion between the Hesses and Julia Child.

Upon their return from France in 1973, the Hesses saw their home country and its cuisine in a new light. Trying to figure out what had gone wrong with the evolution of American food, they determined that a major turn toward culinary mediocrity was one that could be



pinned on Fannie Farmer, whose *Boston Cooking-School Cook Book* (1896) reflected the dumbing down of American cookery. When this work was reprinted in 1973, Karen reviewed the reprint for *The New York Times Book Review*. This may have been the first and only time that *The New York Times Book Review* published a review of a reprint. If this review was her first shot across the bow of the American culinary establishment, *The Taste of America* (1977) was a broadside. In addition to its critique of the food scene in the mid-1970s, the book examined the historical roots of American food.

Researching this book piqued Karen's interest in culinary history, and she began the work of transcribing and annotating the manuscript that was later published under the title *Martha Washington's Booke of Cookery* (Columbia University Press, 1981). The paperback edition is still in print.

Karen's next work was an introduction and historical notes for a reprint of Mary Randolph's *The Virginia House-wife* (University of South Carolina Press, 1984). Her introduction to *The Carolina Rice Kitchen: The African Connection* (University of South Carolina Press, 1992) is, in fact, longer than the original text itself. Karen's introduction and historical notes to Mrs. Abby Fisher's *What Mrs. Fisher Knows about Old Southern Cooking* (Applewood Books, 1995) was a more careful look at the culinary contributions of African-Americans. It was followed by the introduction and notes to the second edition of Amelia Simmons's *American Cookery* (Applewood Books, 1996).

For the past decade, Karen has been completing her magnum

opus, *Mr Jefferson's Table: The Culinary Legacy of Monticello*, which is scheduled for publication by the University of North Carolina Press.

In addition to her culinary books, Karen Hess has contributed numerous articles to magazines and journals and delivered many key speeches at culinary and historical conferences. She was one of the founding members of the Culinary Historians of New York.

While Karen has had no patience with the culinary pretension of the "big" names (Julia Child and James Beard to name two), she has always been approachable by those of us who needed assistance

and were willing to ask. Whatever she said always merited attention, even when we disagreed with her.

For these reasons, it was an honor for me to be with CHNY Chair Cathy Kaufman to present to Karen Hess the first "Amelia" award last October (see page 2). Karen is also delighted that an annual financial award will be given to a deserving "new voice" in the culinary history field.

Andrew F. Smith is the author of numerous books on food history and is the Editor-in-Chief of the recently published Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America (Oxford University Press, 2004).

MEMBER NEWS

Elizabeth Andoh's classes in Japanese culture and cuisine for The New School were selected as Best of New York by *New York Magazine*. Ms. Andoh returns to The New School in June to present a single-session course: "A Peek in the Japanese Pantry" on Saturday, June 18. Call the school at (212) 255-4141.

The (London) Sunday Telegraph Magazine, devoted a full page to a discussion of **Rynn Berry's** new book, *Hitler: Neither Vegetarian Nor Animal Lover* on December 26.

E. P. Dutton has recently published **Bunny Crumacker's** first children's book called *Alexander's Pretending Day*. She has previously authored two books on recipe pamphlets issued between 1875 and 1950.

Betty Fussell's *The Story of Corn* was reprinted in paperback last fall

by the University of New Mexico Press. Fussell's *Masters of American Cookery* is being reprinted by the University of Nebraska Press next fall. She'll be giving a reading of *My Kitchen Wars* with the actress Dorothy Lyman at Connecticut College's Alumni Reunion in June.

Stacey Harwood's poem, "Contributor's Notes," originally published in "Lit" magazine, was selected by Pulitzer Prize winning poet Paul Muldoon for inclusion in *The Best American Poetry 2005* (Scribners). Her essay "The Well-Versed Movie" was published in *The Michigan Quarterly Review* (Spring, 2004)

BH (Billy) Holliday, Education Curator at Lefferts Historic House in Prospect Park Brooklyn, is creating an interpretation of the house and grounds based in environmental history. Billy is working with

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Member News

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experts to build a working brick oven and fireplace in the yard.

Robert Kaufelt's Murray's Cheese Shop has launched "The Cheese Course" education series. See CHNY website.

Arnold Leland is concentrating on graphics related to food, wine, and theatre while living in Bangkok.

Sylvia Lovegren's *Fashionable Food: Seven Decades of Food Fads* is being reprinted by University of Chicago Press this spring.

Marion Nestle participated in panels on science politics, organic foods, and obesity at the World Economic Forum at Davos. She was recently inducted as a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Diana Pittet, who is graduating in June from NYU's master's program in Food Studies (May 2005), has contributed several entries to the *International Encyclopedia of Cheese* to be published by the Oxford University Press.

Food Culture in China by **Jacqueline M. Newman**, according to *Menu Magazine*, "adds another dimension to the enjoyment of the foods of other cultures" with "many facts rarely recorded in other works..." Greenwood Press describes it as a "true one-stop resource."

Ken Ovitz's book release party for *The Israel Seder Haggadah* was held on March 20th. To learn more about the book, log on to www.israelseder.com.

Susan McLellan Plaisted, proprietress of Heart to Hearth Cookery and Director of Foodways at Pennsbury Manor presented "Baking in the 18th Century" at the Leeds Symposium on Food History and Traditions. Susan is also offering German Hearth Cooking and Bake Oven classes and a chocolate workshop. For more information visit Hearttohearthcookery.com or e-mail Foodhxsm@aol.com.

Barry Popik, Gerald Cohen, and the late David Shulman have published a limited edition (60 copies) of a 300-page book *Origin of the Term "Hot Dog"* (published by foreign-languages professor Gerald Cohen). Cost: \$47 (includes shipping). For inquiries contact Prof. Cohen at gcohen@umr.edu

Peter Rose will be presenting her lecture "Art in Food and Food in Art" at a number of Massachusetts and New York venues. Check CHNY website.

Meryl Rosofsky, formerly a Siena resident, is organizing her next Food & Wine Tour in Tuscany. Participants will enjoy hands-on cooking classes, wine tasting excursions to Montalcino and Chianti, olive oil tastings at family-owned estates in Lucca, and excursions to the seaside villages of the Cinque Terre and Portovenere. Trip dates are June 25-July 2, 2005. Contact mrososky@aol.com.

Wendy Samuelson, event planner and consultant to non-profits, has been hired by Westhab, a Westchester County, NY, non-profit provider of services for homeless families, to obtain soup recipes from top chefs in Westchester. At the Coachman Family shelter the

recipes are converted (with the chef's approval) to dried and packaged soups. The sale of the soups provide funding to assist residents in transitioning from welfare to independence. New products such as rice, pasta mixes, and rubs are in the works. For information: www.westhab.org or call Wendy at (914) 472-7522.

Kyle Shadix, received the 2005 International Association of Culinary Professionals Le Cordon Bleu Paris Academie d'Art Culinaire Scholarship. It consists of one full-tuition (\$10,000) for a career professional toward the 10-week Basic Cuisine Certificate Program that is conducted in French and English. It is a continuing education program. For more information, visit www.cordonbleu.edu.

Laura Shapiro is at work on a book about Julia Child, to be published by the Penguin Group as part of their "Lives" series.

Andrew F. Smith is teaching five courses at the New School including two on culinary history including a new one titled "Advanced Culinary History: Chefs and Cookbooks from Ancient Rome to Molto Mario" Andy will be a speaker at the Longone Center for American Culinary Research in May.

Lyn Stallworth having recently returned from South India witnessed tea leaves, sugar cane, and rice, similar to our short grain, being harvested. As the area cuisine is primarily vegetarian, the diet consists of rice not only as a grain but as an ingredient to for making fritters, wrappers, and crepe-like dosas. Many residents eat meat only on Sundays and holidays.

Richard Tarlov attended the first annual Symposium for Professional Wine Writers at the Meadowood Resort in Napa Valley, CA. The conference, modeled on the Symposium for Professional Food Writers held at the Greenbriar in White Sulphur Springs, WV, was shared with 60 writers from around the U.S. and two foreign countries.

Contribute to The Website!

WEBMASTER Tae Ellin welcomes members' contributions to the CHNY website at www.culinaryhistoriansny.org. She is seeking 150 word biographies for the Member Profiles section; short essays with a recipe for the Recipes Section; and educational links for the Research Resources page. In addition to those of CHNY, she is posting member events. Submissions will be accepted at the discretion of the editor. Please submit contributions as a Word document attachment to: tae@iceculinary.com.

HELP WANTED

Cynthia Parzych Publishing, Inc. is producing the *International Encyclopedia Of Cheese* to be published by Oxford University Press. The company is looking for writers to complete entries relating to countries and U.S. states that produce cheese. Inclusion in an Oxford food series title is an excellent way of publicizing a particular area of expertise. Contact C. Parzych for the assignment list at cme@cynthiaparzychpublishing.com.

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of hardship? Or is M.F.K. Fisher's explanation nothing more than the guilty rationalization of a writer whose words may have provided momentary distraction but no deeper comfort when war, or the memory of war, was at its worst?

To be sure, distraction alone can be a worthy solace, as Fisher herself noted when she paraphrased the Vicomte de Mauduit thus: "Eating is an art worthy to rank with the other methods by which man chooses to escape from reality." (With typical unpretentious wit and showstopping understatement, she went on to say that "stripped of its slightly pontifical rhythm, this statement sounds quite true. And one of its strange proofs, in some ways, is the present vogue for *vichyssoise*.")

But to call her prose mere escapism would sell it far short. Her curious World War II-era treatise *How to Cook a Wolf* helped a generation of homemakers cope more gracefully, even cheerfully, with the shortages and deprivations of the wartime kitchen. In it she shares tips and insights on cooking and serving and most of all savoring humble but deeply satisfying dishes — consommés, curries, simple but just-right scrambled eggs, calves' brains — with dignity and aplomb. She dispenses her advice with such amusing humor as to make deprivation seem almost a delight. Her sharp editorial pronouncements leave no doubt, however, about her politics and longings. In her inimitable way, she gives voice to the collective craving for peacetime normalcy and plenty, deploring the war but putting up the brave front for all of us, using her voice as a

writer to both express and transcend the grim realities, food- and other-wise, of her time. As Annie Hauck-Lawson has written, "food serves as a voice—a powerful channel for the expression of meaning" and of identity. It seems, then, that food writing is a very literal, tangible way of giving expression to what Hauck-Lawson calls the "food voice." And Fisher's voice here is one of stalwart but upbeat resistance.

Indeed, if "there is... much defiance in celebrating life in the face of oppressors" (as Amy Spindler wrote in summing up the contributions of wartime British Vogue editor Audrey Withers), then Fisher was at the very forefront of the resistance. For her, to approach food without thought or thanksgiving, whether in times of shortage or of plenty, is to make us "not men, but beasts. War is a beastly business, it is true, but one proof that we are human is our ability to learn, even from it, how better to exist." (*How to Cook a Wolf*) So she teaches us "about living as decently as possible with the ration cards and blackouts and like miseries of World War II" — in short, how to fool the grim, insistent wolf as he's scratching at the door.

While the tone of Fisher's food voice is one of resistance and defiance, its timbre is colored by sly irony and humor. As M. F. K. tells us, "it takes a certain amount of native wit to cope gracefully with the problem of having the wolf camp with apparent permanency on your doorstep" ("How to Be Cheerful Though Starving"). So it must be no accident that while her peacetime prose was generally tinged with a beautiful sadness, her wartime writing was laced with

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sardonic wit and wry humor, bold weapons, together with knife and fork, against the dreadful wolf:

Every slick magazine in the country is filled with full-page advertisements suggesting that all Americans 'try the new thrill of thriftier meat-cuts,' and home economics editors in the women's journals are almost incoherent over the exciting discovery that dollars can and should buy more ("How to Catch the Wolf").

...if you had to choose between [an unappetizing sludge] and hunger, with its inevitable aftermath of fatigue and bad teeth and dull hair and wrinkles, you would eat it three times a day as long as the emergency lasted and perhaps even derive a certain esthetic satisfaction from your own good sense, if not from the food itself ("How to Keep Alive").

Of course, any such [baked fish] dish can be made in small casseroles, which take less time to bake. (Or in generous shells. I find most natural shells too small... like most sherry glasses... like most Gibson glasses... especially like most champagne glasses) ("How to Greet the Spring").

But to cite these quaintly amusing passages out of context might suggest a glib, even superficial, quality to a work that is, for all its odd humor and practicality, deeply serious and thoughtful. While she might lament that wartime fish casseroles would taste better with enough champagne, she more somberly, but no less subtly, notes the pity it is "that war has interfered with our... taste [for fish]. The thought of all the bewildered sturgeons and barracudas dodging depth bombs is a sad one..." Time and again, she commingles the intimate and the political, the trivial



1987 photo of M.F.K. Fisher with Bob Halliday, former president of the Whittier (CA) Historical Society.

COURTESY OF THE WHITTIER MUSEUM

and the profound, as in her musings on minestrone, that "most satisfying soup in the world for people who are hungry, as well as for those who are tired or worried or cross or in debt or in a moderate amount of pain or in love or in robust health or in any kind of business huggermuggery" ("How to Greet the Spring").

There are many variations of any recipe for a soup that includes chopped vegetables. They depend on the ingenuity of the cook and the size of the purse... not to mention a few other things like climate and war, and even political leanings. (I know several earnest thoughtful women who would rather see their children peaked than brew something with the foreign name minestrone, because in this year of 1942 the United States is at war with Italy. There is a fundamental if tiring truth about all this, and you and I can only hope that right will conquer over might before too long) ("How to Boil Water").

With her almost surgical wit, one can imagine her not merely carving but dissecting the wolf. Yet her deft cuts are rarely barbed.

Resistance and humor may both be hallmarks of her food voice, but it is comfort that sounds the final note. She's gentle coach and cheerleader to those dispirited by grief and wartime shortages, reminding them (and us today) that sustenance is about more than what's on the plate: A frittata with "a glass of wine and some honest-to-God bread...is a meal. At the end of it you know that Fate cannot harm you, for you have dined" ("How Not to Boil an Egg"). And if that honest-to-God bread is from a loaf that "you have seen mysteriously rise and redouble and fall and fold under your [own hands, it] will smell better, and taste better, than you remembered anything could possibly taste or smell, and it will make you feel, for a time at least, newborn into a better world than this one often seems" ("How to Rise Up Like New Bread").

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The entire text of the FCS essay with footnotes and bibliography may be found on the CHNY website at culinaryhistoriansny.org.

Annie Hauck-Lawson, the originator of the term “food voice,” is Associate Professor at Brooklyn College’s Department of Health and Nutrition Sciences.

The Association for the Study of Food and Society (ASFS) is a multidisciplinary international organization dedicated to exploring the complex relationships among food, culture, and society. Its members approach the study of food from numerous disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences, as well as in the world of food beyond the academy. Striving to represent the highest standards of research and scholarship in all aspects of food studies, ASFS encourages vigorous debate on a wide range of topics and problems. For more information, please visit www.food-culture.org/

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UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Thursday, April 21, 2005

FRESH FROM THE PAST: RECIPES AND REVELATIONS FROM
MOLL FLANDERS KITCHEN: Writing Culinary History with 18th
Century Cookbooks

Speaker: Sandra Sherman

Location: Park Avenue Methodist Church @ 86th St.

Thursday, May 5, 2005

“FRIED CHICKEN: AN AMERICAN STORY”

Speaker: author John T. Edge

Location: TBA

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