

Memories of Meals Past

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This year's [Food Issue](#) is dedicated to the celebration of lost foods, and we wanted to know which foods our readers most vividly remembered from their own pasts. Below are tales of unforgettable snacks, entrées and desserts shared with family, friends and strangers.

1. Photo
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The author (far right) making crepes in chemistry lab at the Free University of Brussels in 1972. Credit Photograph from Alan Brown

Crepes Over a Bunsen Burner in Brussels

Forty-two years ago, we celebrated the end of our first year of medical school at the Free University of Brussels by cooking delicious crepes over a Bunsen burner in chemistry lab. It wasn't my idea; the women in our lab section appeared on the day with the ingredients, the knowledge and the crepe pan. We were able to feed everyone in the lab who wanted a crepe, which was probably about 15 to 20 people. They tasted good, especially with sugar. I have made crepes since then, and the actual crepes probably taste a lot better now, but the excitement of making them in a lab at the end of the academic year in a foreign land can never be matched. What I remember about this meal was its spontaneity and the joy of doing something in the lab that at first blush seemed so far

removed from what ordinarily took place there — although, on reflection, one does mix substances together in a chemistry lab to make a product. *Alan Brown, Yonkers*

2. Photo



The author's sister making a Fluffernutter sandwich at 3 years old. Credit Anne Ennes

A Love Affair With Fluffernutter

I'm pretty sure if you had asked my sister or me what our favorite food was when we were kids, we would have had an easy answer: Fluffernutter sandwiches. They were the perfect combination of creamy peanut butter and sweet, pillowy Marshmallow Fluff. We can thank my mother, a native New Englander, for that one. Every time we visited my grandmother in Connecticut, we stocked up on the white stuff — four or five tubs of it at least.

As gourmet snackers, we got creative. We ate peanut butter and Fluff on crackers, and added spoonfuls of Fluff to our hot chocolate. We even put peanut butter in our s'mores to mimic the flavor combination. But at the end of the day, Fluffernutter sandwiches were our one true love.

A favorite photo in our family — of my sister balancing on a kitchen chair, making a Fluffernutter in her flower-covered church dress — sums up the memories quite nicely. And I'll be damned if it doesn't make me want a Fluffernutter sandwich right now. **Ellen Ennes**, *Washington*

3. Shared Sardines While on a Hike

Our scout troop had climbed for half a day in the San Bernardino Mountains and stopped for lunch. Each kid had some pathetic variant of an apple, a white-bread sandwich and a soda. But Steve's stepdad brought out a tin of sardines, a tomato, an onion and hard bread. We stared as he ate this rustic meal. Despite our troop leader's insistence that we not pester him, he shared his food. The flavor was astonishing. The sharp brininess of the fish, its firm flesh and tiny bones; the tomato, sweeter than any in memory; that bread with its heft. Maybe it was the half-day hike or the suddenness of a meal we had never conceived of before, but nothing has equaled the shock of how good real food could be, cut with a camping knife and hastily assembled. **Dileep Rao**, *Santa Monica, Calif.*

4. Photo



The author's first taste of her mother's pumpkin pudding in Oklahoma City, Okla., in 1979. Credit Frank Allen

Haunted by a Rejected Pumpkin Pudding

I don't remember the first time I tasted Mother's famous pumpkin pudding, but I do remember the last. It was my 14th birthday, and she served it to me by the pool. "It's the color of vomit," I said in my teenaged, anti-everything angst. "Just taste it," my mother urged. "You used to love it." I wiggled my spoon in the thick muck, smelled ginger, clove, honey. "I'm on a diet," I said. "I don't eat sugar." She took big bites and leaned back to look at the pool water. She scraped her bowl dry and I waited until she got up. I dug in, getting the biggest spoonful of pudding I could. I tasted the creaminess and warm honey contrasted with the sharpness of cloves. When Mother came back, I leaned over and spit some out. "It's terrible," I said, pretending to gag. My mother looked down sadly at her pudding, and decided she'd never make it again. I've tried to make the pudding myself, but it never tastes right. Whenever I'm around the Thanksgiving table, smelling pumpkin pie and clove-scented candles, I think about that one day when I had a bowl of warm pudding on my lap. *Audrey Allen, Long Beach, Calif.*

5. Photo



The author's photograph of Rome in the 1980s, taken when she was 7. Credit Alison Marie Behnke

Surprised by a Thanksgiving Lasagna

In 1983, I was a shy, sulking 7-year-old redhead who had recently been moved from Minnesota to Rome, and I was not pleased. To summon a taste of home, my parents decided to host Thanksgiving, inviting our only friends so far: three Americans from our apartment building and our Sicilian landlady, Lidia. Securing a whole turkey was a challenge; yams were obtainable, once we knew where to look; and cranberry sauce was borderline impossible without collateral. Thanksgiving morning brought new adversity: Our hard-won turkey wouldn't fit in the oven. The neighbors' oven was slightly larger. Guests became collaborators, and the main course traveled down two flights of steps and back again.

With dinner finally served, Lidia appeared carrying a massive pan of lasagna. Absurd, I thought. Lasagna for Thanksgiving? Forced into politeness by my mother, I took a bite.

Oh! The sauce was piquant-sweet, the sausage spicy and fennel-rich. Layered between al dente noodles were sliced hard-cooked eggs, their yolks bright and firm. Lidia's lasagna was worlds away from any I'd tasted. For the first time, I was happy to be far from home. *Alison Marie Behnke, Minneapolis*

6. Pork Chops After a Long Bus Ride

In 1981, a restaurant refused to serve our bus full of black people on the way to South Carolina from New York. I was old enough to understand what happened, but young enough to promptly forget about it and snuggle deeper into the crook of my mother's arm, lulled by the hum of the bus back to sleep. I awoke to dappled sunshine and grass and air thick with tangy friedness. We had pork chops. They were well done, the way everyone cooked pork in the '80s, and the outsides were fried a hard red-brown and speckled with things I would later recognize as annatto, tumeric, cumin — flavors I love to this day. Those were the best pork chops I'd ever eaten — outside, sitting with my mom and grandmother, cleansing my palate after my first real taste of discrimination. *Elizabeth Jones, New York*

7. Photo



The author's father's fruit boat. Credit Michael Gribbin

A Fruit Boat With ... Shrimp?

On some holidays, my father would proudly present the star of the menu: the watermelon boat. He would often bring out the boat, carefully carved out of a large watermelon, during the dessert course, or sometimes as a prelude to the meal, inexplicably flanked by small dishes of shrimp cocktail. The boat was methodically decorated with lemon and lime slices, pierced in the center with cherries. The bow of the boat was constructed from a string of cherry tomatoes. Adorning the watermelon chunks were paper flags. It was 1970s dining at its finest. I never got the chance to ask my father the story behind his mysterious fruit boat. He passed away when I was a teenager. But as I plan my Thanksgiving menu this year, I wish he were able to present his whimsical watermelon boat at the holiday table one more time. Preferably flanked with dishes of shrimp cocktail. *Lisa Lauria, Waldwick, N.J.*



The author's ancestral bungalow in Allahabad, India. CreditNimish Saxena

My Aunt's Special Sour Gourd Pickles

In my ancestral home on the outskirts of Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, India, is my maternal aunt's pickle room. Walk in and you'll find floor-to-ceiling dark wooden cupboards surrounding you. These cupboards are lined with glass jars of every homemade pickle ever imaginable. Sweet to sour, cauliflower to mango, green to purple. My lifelong favorite has been her *toraye ka achar*. As a young girl, I would visit Allahabad and my aunt would have her special sour gourd pickle waiting for me. It was yellow, tangy, vinegary and spicy all at once — a magical concoction of mustard oil, homemade sugarcane vinegar, mustard seeds, red chili and a good dose of Indian summer sun. Having my first taste was like experiencing Christmas morning in June. I haven't tasted my aunt's *achar* in years, but those vibrant, playful flavors will forever remain vivid in my mind. *Arushi Saxena, San Francisco*