

F-911 * \$4.95 * ANOTHER BOOK

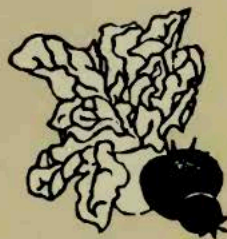
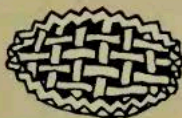
SALE
286 240

AMERICA'S FIRST COMPLETE GUIDE TO
COOKING DELICIOUS NATURAL FOODS

LAUREL'S KITCHEN

A HANDBOOK FOR VEGETARIAN
COOKERY AND NUTRITION

BY LAUREL ROBERTSON,
CAROL FLINDERS,
AND BRONWEN GODFREY



0.05 01
\$.99





Welcome to Laurel's Kitchen...

Sun splashing on wood and crockery, bright colors and green houseplants, the aroma of baking bread and bubbling soups...Cupboards filled with jars of beans, seeds, dried fruits, and chopped nuts. Bins of wheat, rye and soy flour ready for scooping. In the cooler, wheels of cheese, homemade yogurt, milk and fresh fruits and vegetables....

Now, let Laurel and her friends introduce you to the art of cooking with delicious natural foods. They will help you rediscover the joys of your own kitchen, where wholesome meals artfully prepared and lovingly served amid talk and laughter reunite the home.

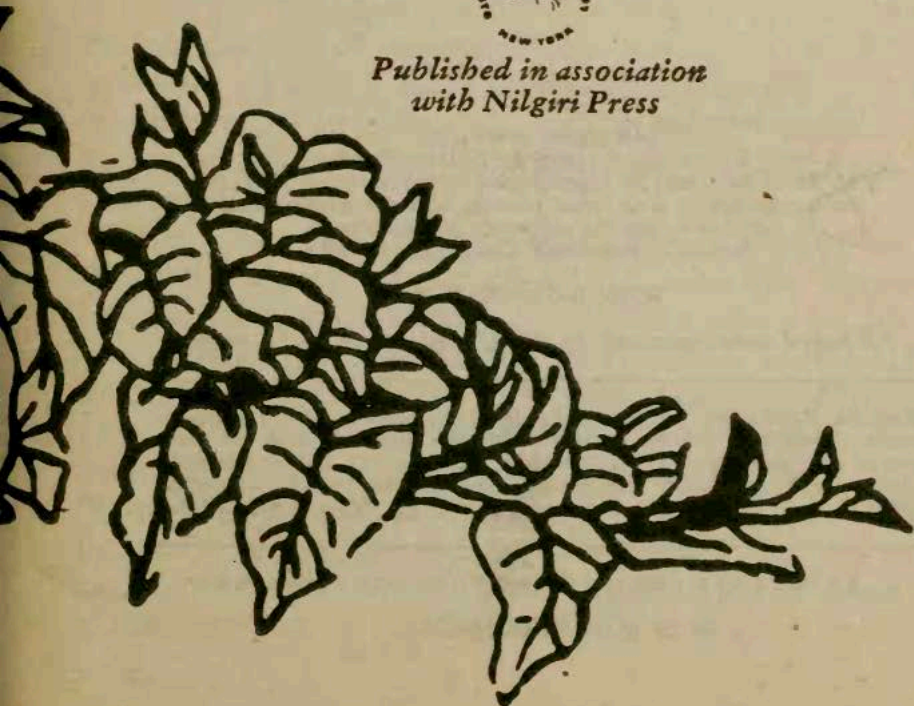
LAUREL'S KITCHEN

*A Handbook
for Vegetarian Cookery
& Nutrition*

LAUREL ROBERTSON,
CAROL FLINDERS
& BRONWEN GODFREY



*Published in association
with Nilgiri Press*



*This low-priced Bantam Book
has been completely reset in a type face
designed for easy reading, and was printed
from new plates. It contains the complete
text of the original hard-cover edition.
NOT ONE WORD HAS BEEN OMITTED.*



**LAUREL'S KITCHEN: A HANDBOOK FOR
VEGETARIAN COOKERY & NUTRITION**
*A Bantam Book | published in association with
Nilgiri Press*

PRINTING HISTORY

Nilgiri Press edition published September 1976

2nd printing .. November 1976 4th printing .. November 1977
3rd printing June 1977 5th printing May 1978
6th printing October 1978

Bantam edition | December 1978

2nd printing .. December 1978 7th printing March 1980
3rd printing January 1979 8th printing April 1980
4th printing March 1979 9th printing October 1980
5th printing August 1979 10th printing October 1980
6th printing .. December 1979 11th printing April 1981

All rights reserved.

Copyright © 1976 by Nilgiri Press.

*This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by
mimeograph or any other means, without permission.*

*For information address: Nilgiri Press,
Box 477, Petaluma, California 94952*

ISBN 0-553-20140-9

Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada

*Bantam Books are published by Bantam Books, Inc. Its trade-
mark, consisting of the words "Bantam Books" and the por-
trayal of a bantam, is Registered in U.S. Patent and Trademark
Office and in other countries. Marca Registrada. Bantam
Books, Inc., 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10103.*

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13

*Giving
the Gift
of
Life*



LAUREL'S KITCHEN

The Diet Revolution was big news a while back, but now it seems to have invaded just about every sphere of American life. Everyone has a slightly different idea about what should be cast out in favor of what and why, but it's at least clear that nothing is sacred now in our pattern of eating. In just a few short years, the fat, lusciously illustrated cookbooks we got for wedding presents—usually the same books our mothers and grandmothers used—have become fat, lusciously illustrated white elephants. Not just for my own generation, either—vegetarianism might be spreading fastest among young people, but for one reason or another, nutritional, economic, spiritual, or ecological, our parents and even grandparents are also beginning to experiment with new patterns of eating.

The way people eat is closely connected with the way they live. The changes in our own food habits—my family's and many of our friends'—reflect the changes that have taken place gradually, yet dramatically, in our whole life style. I'd like to tell you about these changes, in the hope that our experience might be useful to you. In particular, I'd very much like to help dispel the illusion I had myself before all this started: that is, that "giving up meat" implies some kind of grim, irreparable loss. For twenty-five years each, my husband and I lived and ate as most people do, and in



all that time, I don't think we ever enjoyed food as much as we do now. One reason is quite simple—the food is good. Most of us have no idea how satisfying fruits, vegetables, grains, beans, and dairy products can be, because these foods usually play supporting roles to nonvegetarian main dishes (and heaven help the zucchini who tries to upstage a pork roast!).

To the eye, to the palate, to the entire body, the food is good. But I don't think that's the whole story of the great pleasure we find now in our meals together. The real secret, which we hope our children will cherish always, and that you, our reader, will discover if you have not already, is the simple knowledge that every meal we eat spares a fellow creature, gives the gift of life.



Let me begin by giving you a glimpse of the real heroine of this piece, the Prime Mover and Guiding Spirit of vegetarian cooking as I know it. For that, we need to go back a ways.

Tim and I first came to Berkeley in 1967. Julia was two; Chris was yet to come. Being a mother absorbed and delighted me, but still there were loose ends, wisps of energy without focus, and I found myself seeking some kind of involvement. Increasingly oppressed by the war in Vietnam, which in Berkeley as nowhere else one was never able to forget, I decided to put a timid big toe into the maelstrom of Berkeley's antiwar movement. I found a group whose program appealed to me: self-education on the one hand and helping to organize a peaceful march in San Francisco on the other. Before long I was attending weekly meetings and had long lists of people to telephone.

One Saturday, a committee meeting was scheduled

at an apartment just a block west of Telegraph Avenue, the home of someone I knew only as Laurel.

Mutual friends had spoken affectionately of Laurel, but I had never met her. I knew that she had been arrested in Sproul Hall during the Free Speech Movement, had had her teaching credential withheld as a result, and now worked part-time at a low-paying library job, part-time for the American Civil Liberties Union. She was in high demand for her calligraphy, which you would often see on flyers advertising a rally, a benefit, or a demonstration. Here, I knew, was a woman of principle. I prepared myself to be intimidated, and was alarmed when I got to her apartment to see that no one else was there yet. It was a basement flat—coming in by the front door was like entering a cave. A voice issuing from the back of the apartment guided me through two dark rooms that gave way at last to a sunny kitchen opening onto a tiny patch of patio. Potted plants crowded every sill, and the walls were bright with color—poster art was in its heyday then.

Laurel was just setting out four long, fat strips of dough to rise for French bread. A light dusting of flour was especially visible on her black cat, but it covered everything in the room. Framing the whole scene was the most luxuriant sweet potato plant I had ever come across. It shot up from one corner, curled up across the ceiling, meandered along the far wall, and darted out a window. Laurel herself was right out of Vermeer—a sturdy young woman in her early twenties with wide, clear blue eyes and a thick braid, her sleeves rolled up, a vast white apron over her long skirts. I suddenly felt spindly and insubstantial. I must have looked it, too, because she pressed a handful of oatmeal cookies on me and a mug of coffee.

“These are pretty stale,” she said with a wry face, “and the coffee’s been on since eight. I hope it doesn’t bite back.”

I dropped into a wicker chair and watched her work, wondering, as I munched, what I’d been eating all those times I had thought I was eating oatmeal cookies, and remembering how my grandmother, too, always used to

apologize for her cooking. Laurel's movements were sure and deft. The warmth, the bright colors, the fragrance of the room enveloped me completely, and I kept silent so as not to break the spell. In ten minutes, though, some twenty-odd people were milling about, all talking at once. The meeting went on all afternoon, and when I left at five it showed every sign of continuing on into the night, fueled by Laurel's fresh bread and a big pot of lentil soup. From this meeting and a few more, equally pleasant but utterly inconclusive, I drifted off unsatisfied. As for Laurel, I saw her again only in passing, once or twice, as we rushed along our separate ways down the aisles of the supermarket, behind full carts. When I was finally to meet her again five years later, it was like finding something very special I thought I had lost.



During the years that intervened, Chris was born, so my free moments were fewer and farther between, but with the help of a babysitting co-op, I continued to wander in and out of political activities, tutorial projects, and encounter groups. I took up potting and dropped it; I learned to play a recorder; I thought about going back to school when the children were older. I was terribly restless. I knew that beyond the desire to

be a good wife and mother, admittedly no small thing, my life had no real goal. For a long time I thought the answer lay in finding the right activity—a job, a hobby, an art form. I even enrolled in a judo class for a few weeks. I longed for something that would draw out the resources, the obscure strengths that I could feel percolating away, locked inside me.

In retrospect, I would place a high value on those years of casting about, for in time, having explored most of the avenues the external world presents (dope smuggling and sky-diving I passed up), I was ready to conclude that whatever it was I was after, it might just be somewhere else. I'm sure it's no coincidence that about then a friend persuaded us to come hear a man from India talk about meditation. I can't remember a word now of what he said that night; and I had no idea why it affected me so deeply. For a few hours, though, my driving restlessness abated. I felt as if I were coming home, after a long time away. Tim shared my response completely, and we began to practice meditation every day under the guidance of our new teacher. From that first night, our lives began to change, slowly but irreversibly.

I remember reading a story once about a woman who was a terrible housekeeper. Someone gave her a beautiful lily which she brought home and put in a vase in her parlor. The lily, though, showed up the vase for being all tarnished and dusty. She took the vase and polished it, only to see that the table it sat on now looked terrible and had to be cleaned as well. At last she stood back and contemplated the gleaming table and the white lily in satisfaction—but then the parlor itself was dim and murky by comparison. Before she knew what had happened, she was scrubbing down the whole house, washing curtains, throwing open windows, letting air and light pour into every dark corner.

That's almost the way meditation seemed to work for us. Just half an hour each morning of intense, disciplined concentration, with real clarity of purpose, made it possible to see the rest of our day in a new light. We realized for the first time how carelessly we were spending our lives. I began to understand the ap-

peal of that old Quaker phrase "living intentionally." With the help of meditation, we were able to slow down more and more; we saw now that we didn't have to let ourselves be pushed and jostled along with the Joneses. We could take our lives into our own hands, and begin to live them meaningfully. We began to take careful stock of everything we did to see if we were doing what we really wanted to—the kind of work we did, the parties we went to, the causes we supported, the books we read. One involvement after another fell away, replaced by something better, or not replaced at all except by a little more time, a little more peace of mind.

But this is a cookbook, after all, so let me tell you what began happening to our diet. I had learned to cook the way most girls do these days: a home economics class in junior high and as much experimenting at home as your mother will tolerate. My specialties were Sloppy Joes and *profiteroles au chocolat*. I built up my repertoire somewhat when we got married, but the Standard American Diet (S.A.D. indeed) isn't all that challenging, after all, given the range of convenience food that's available. I took more and more advantage of such foods when Julia and Chris were tiny, and out of sheer habit, I continued to rely on them as the children grew older. Our diet was probably typical among people we knew. Since no one had an obvious case of rickets or beriberi, we assumed we were all pretty well nourished.

Even before we started to meditate, though, I had begun to question the way we were eating. The cost of food was providing stronger impetus each day for a radical reassessment. From 1970 on, we watched benumbed as food prices lifted off, pointed upward, and soared out of sight. We simply couldn't afford to go on eating the way we had. I couldn't buy a roast now without realizing that it jeopardized Julia's new bathrobe. Every food dollar we spent had to count. Empty calories and so-called fun-food were now beyond our budget.

Something of a subtler nature was going on as well—a growing suspicion that something was terribly wrong with our whole culture's attitude toward food. Leaf

through a woman's magazine, or a standard cookbook, and notice the way they speak about food. A whole language has been worked up to convince us that a well-prepared blintz is just this side of Nirvana. In Fannie Farmer's day, you went out to the kitchen and baked a chocolate cake. Big deal. Now you're invited to "Have the Chocolate Experience." I've always liked good food—I mean, *really* liked it. But now, for the first time, helped by that little edge of detachment which meditation was providing, I just couldn't share the gravity with which friends would discuss their quest for the perfect crepe, and I found myself getting embarrassed at the prolonged intensity with which we'd all study our menus in a restaurant. I was feeling more and more like the little boy in "The Emperor's New Clothes," as it became daily more apparent that the original, all-important function of food—to nourish the body—was fast slipping into oblivion. Vegetarianism was still a ways off, but at last I was ready to become "intentional" about our diet.

We began by cutting back on the deep-fried foods and super-rich desserts. That wasn't so hard. Honey and brown sugar replaced the wicked white granules, and we started using more fresh vegetables. Still easy. From that point on, though, the going got a bit rough. I had a vague idea that we should be eating healthier food, but what that meant, I wasn't sure. I bought a natural foods cookbook, a very stern and uncompromising one that had me putting brewer's yeast into everything we ate until an unnamed party confiscated the jar. (It turned up next spring, when we spaded up the backyard to put in a garden.) Otherwise, now that I think about it, the children were awfully patient.

("Mom?"

"Uh-huh?"

"What's this stuff?"

"Broccoli-soybean loaf. Do you like it?"

"Yeah—it's okay." A long silence. "If I eat it, can I have some Spaghetti-o's?")

I began to browse about in health food stores to see if there was something I didn't know about. (Isn't it typical of our upside-down culture that we have special

stores for food that's meant to nourish? Maybe someday you won't be able to buy white sugar or "balloon bread" anywhere but dark, seedy little stores in rundown parts of town.) As I bumbled about, feeling my way hesitantly into the world of health food, it began to dawn on me that a good number of people who eat for health are also vegetarians. I hadn't counted on that, and in all honesty I can't say it made me very happy. I felt strangely threatened. It's amazing how much of our security we tie to relatively superficial things like food habits.

Tim, on the other hand, was already flirting with vegetarianism. The possibility of a meatless diet had first occurred to him years before, in college, when his track coach had discovered that a vegetarian diet actually improved his boys' running time. Much more influential, though, was the fact that our spiritual teacher is a vegetarian. We knew that many Hindus are vegetarians and that in the mainstream of India's spiritual tradition, meat-eating is considered an obstacle to spiritual development. Our teacher spoke seldom about vegetarianism, though, and he never insisted that we make the change. We were grateful for this, as we wanted to be completely objective and scientific in our choice of food. After all, we reasoned, just because a vegetarian diet was best for a Hindu meditator, why should it be for us? We began to experiment with meatless days, though, and we managed, with some difficulty, to get hold of several articles about the physiological benefits of not eating meat. Few doctors at that time seemed to be aware, or even interested, but it became increasingly clear to us that outside of supplying protein, we do the body no great service by giving it meat: particularly today, when most animals raised for food are injected—and fed—with all kinds of toxic substances. Even setting aside *these* chemicals, one article pointed out that just at the moment of death, the animal's body is flooded with adrenalin. That immediately struck a chord with me, for I had read of a Hindu belief that when you eat an animal, you assimilate all the terror and agitation he feels at his death. Science and spiritual insight were converging.

I had always heard, though, that you could not get a complete protein except with meat, and I was not about to shortchange my growing children. Here our friend Stuart, a biophysicist buddy of Tim's, helped by providing tables of amino acids and other information that relaxed all my fears. Eggs, it turned out, actually had more to offer by way of complete protein than beef—in fact, it appears now that the amino acid pattern of soybeans is even better than that of eggs for meeting human needs. Even more surprisingly, we learned that by combining grains, legumes (beans and peas), seeds, and milk products in specified ratios, you can have a complete protein of as high quality as meat, eggs, or milk.

“Protein complementarity” is the subject of the fascinating book *Diet for a Small Planet* by Frances Moore Lappé, published in 1971, which describes the ecological implications of relying on meat as our chief source of protein. The picture is staggering. Presently, in the U.S., we feed most of our grains and legumes to livestock, to produce meat. To produce one pound of meat protein, a cow is fed at least sixteen pounds of nonmeat protein from sources like corn and beans, most of which could be eaten (and enjoyed) just as well by human beings. The amount of protein wasted in this manner each year—this is for meat consumed entirely within the United States—is equal to *ninety percent* of the world's yearly protein deficit. In personal terms, that meant that if significant numbers of people like us would change their eating habits, adequate protein could conceivably be put within the reach of everyone in the world, for a fraction of the cost of meat. What a privilege to be able to give such a gift!

My resistance was slipping away fast. I began to remember the wonderful weeks I'd spent as a child on my grandparents' farm—the satisfaction of feeding the animals and helping to look after them, the wrenching pain I'd felt the night the family ate my favorite rabbit (they didn't *know* he was my favorite, and they were sorry, but I really shouldn't make such a fuss about it). I began to think now about how good it would be if our little ones could be spared the “doublethink” of loving

animals, with all the tenderness children do, and eating them at the same time—being told they *needed* to eat meat. The more I thought about it, the more attractive vegetarianism grew.

But habits of a lifetime change slowly. It took several factors to help us make the transition. Food prices were a strong incentive, of course. For the cost of four lamb chops (about a dollar then), yielding a hundred grams of protein, I could buy six pounds of soybeans for a total yield of more than nine hundred grams of protein. That was pretty sobering. But after all, I couldn't feed my family soybean soup every night—in fact, the one night I tried, we ended up phoning out for a pizza. I was still unconvinced that vegetarian food could be varied and interesting; when “vegetables” has never meant much more to you than frozen peas, you can be forgiven a vein of scepticism. So, vacillating between an old diet that was leaving us colder by the minute and a new one that was still unknown territory, there we sat, waiting for something—or someone—to tip the scales.



It was toward the end of this period that Laurel slipped quietly back into my life. Time, reflection, and wonderful coincidence had brought her and her husband to the same teacher we had found. I spotted her sitting near the back of the room one night, with a tall, skinny fellow whose wild mop of hair and preoccupied expression reminded me of pictures I'd seen of the young Einstein. I kept peeking at her all evening. She obviously didn't remember me. She was completely absorbed in what our teacher was saying, and afterwards, she turned with almost the same loving attentiveness to her husband (the glint of gold on her left hand had confirmed my guess). She looked radiant—one of those women, I was sure, who doesn't come completely into her own until she has someone to take care of. She still had the same thick braid of dark brown hair, but now it was on top of her head. The whole effect was a little quaint, a little "old country," as if she belonged more to the last century than to this.

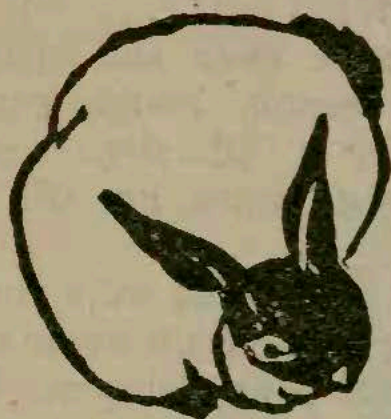
Ordinarily, we'd have gone over and visited with them afterwards. For some reason, though, I put it off. I couldn't say why, but I felt a little shy. Weeks went by and they came regularly to class, but still I didn't approach them.

Meanwhile, our days as omnivores were numbered. The scales were finally tipped—and not by financial, or nutritional, or even ecological considerations. We were spending more and more time now with our teacher, in class and during informal visits, and we were coming to see that his relationships with animals were almost as varied and personal as his relationships with people. For him every living creature revealed divinity. He was incapable of harming another being, human or animal, or of taking pleasure at their expense. For a long time, he kept silent his deepest feelings on vegetarianism. At last, though, sensing perhaps that we were all becoming gradually more receptive, he began to reveal to us how he really felt.

I'll never forget the first night he spoke openly about eating meat. He began in a very light vein, telling us about George Bernard Shaw. When Shaw first decided to become a vegetarian in his mid-twenties, physicians

crowded forth to warn him that an early grave would be the result. Sixty-five years later he was asked whether he had ever gone back to Harley Street to confront his medical friends. "I would," he replied with a twinkle, "but they all passed on years ago." When he died, Shaw used to say, he wanted his pallbearers to be cows, sheep, pigs, and "a small travelling aquarium of live fish, all wearing white scarves" in his honor.

Almost imperceptibly, our teacher's tone became more and more serious. "When we come into the human context," he said, "no more precious responsibility falls upon our shoulders than that of trusteeship for the earth and all its creatures. All animal life looks to us for protection. How can we bear to be its predators?" Pindrop silence fell upon the room. That evening, though neither of us said a word, we knew our experimentation was over. We were vegetarians for life.



But a vegetarian by commitment, however determined, is still a far cry from a competent vegetarian cook. I found myself the next morning, feeling distinctly miscast, in the Organic Foods Co-op. Tubs of beans, all colors and shapes, surrounded me, and barrels of noodles—buckwheat, whole wheat, soy, and spinach. Everything was beautiful: earthen-colored and completely free of cellophane wrappers, alluringly tactile. But no packaging meant no cooking instructions—and no visible means of getting the stuff out of the store. My stomach sank. Moving about me confidently on every side were lithe, tawny young men and women in faded blue denims, peasant blouses, and skirts made

from old bedspreads, their thick manes braided, rubber-banded, or falling free. I was painfully conscious of my wash-and-wear shirtwaist dress.

Suddenly there was a familiar voice at my elbow. It was Laurel, her blue eyes like deep wells of concern. She looked no more Aquarian Age than I did, but that obviously didn't faze her—she was completely at home.

“Can I help you find something?”

“Yes, I think I'm in over my head. What are the ground rules here?”

“You've never been here before? Gee, next to the Cheese Board it's my favorite place. Did you see these?” Her eyes shining, she stuck her hand into a barrel of dark brown coffee beans and let them fall in a rich, fragrant cascade.

“Aesthetically, it's the living end,” I agreed stiffly. “I should have brought my watercolors—but I was sort of hoping to take a few things home with me.”

Laurel kindly ignored my churlish manner and helped me find paper bags—they hid them, apparently, to encourage you to recycle your own—and a couple of scoops.

“Now,” she beamed, “what do you want?”

“I haven't the vaguest idea. What do *you* think I want?”

She put down her scoop and looked at me with new respect.

“You really *do* need help, don't you?”

I nodded sadly, mutely. Immediately, without a single wasted word, Laurel took the situation briskly in hand. Talking away about soaking times and cooking times, spices and sauces, she bagged several kinds of beans, then weighed out a few wide, flat, two-foot-long lasagna noodles made from whole wheat and soy flour. “These are fantastic. I'll give you a recipe for them. But watch out they don't crumble! They're as brittle as two-foot potato chips.”

From there we moved on to the organic vegetable displays, where I met my first kohlrabi (funny, you don't *look* like a kohlrabi). At the milk cooler, she explained the difference between kefir and yogurt and why the cultured milk they're made of was such a boon.

Then we worked our way through the dried fruit section, ogling the calimyrna figs and dried pineapple—"Pricey," Laurel explained, "but even a little piece goes a long way with kids." We bought a couple of "date treats" to nibble on and then paid for our booty—in cash, as it turned out; I had half expected to barter.

By this time I had gained back enough composure to invite Laurel and her husband to stop by our house for tea after class that night (herb tea, I managed to specify, not wanting her to think we were completely out of it). I still found her alarmingly competent, but something else was starting to outweigh that: warmth, and a complete lack of pretentiousness. Her enthusiasm—almost puppy-like—was hard to resist. I couldn't be sure yet, but I had a strong surmise that the help I needed was on its way.

I guess we've all had the experience of meeting someone and knowing instantly that we have something to learn from them. That's how I felt on this second meeting with Laurel. I'm not just talking about kitchen know-how. I probably couldn't even spell out what I'm really talking about, but the impression grew stronger as the four of us visited that evening. I was sure Laurel had already solved some of the problems I was having. Finally, right in the middle of a distressingly high-level discussion of meditation, I took the plunge.

"What do you know about soybeans?"

Tim snorted. Laurel looked startled but rose to the question with real poise.

"Well. . . . They're full of proteins and vitamins—the best of all the beans, I guess—and cheap, too. But just plain they don't have much flavor and they take forever to cook soft. I add them to things—in small amounts, but often. You can grind them up and sneak them into all sorts of foods—casseroles, hot cereals, sauces, soup. I've been working out some recipes for spreads, made from soybeans and other things."

"Do you make yogurt?"

"Sure."

"I've been trying all week now, and it keeps coming out all watery and stringy with a flavor like alum."

"What's your heat source?"

"A heating pad, set on gentle."

"Do you use powdered milk?"

"Yes."

"Non-instant?"

"Yes."

Her brow furrowed, then cleared. "May I smell it?"

"The yogurt? I threw it out."

"The powdered milk."

We went to the kitchen and got out the box of milk. She looked critically at its color, sniffed it, and scrunched up her nose.

"Old."

"But I bought it a week ago."

"Smell it yourself."

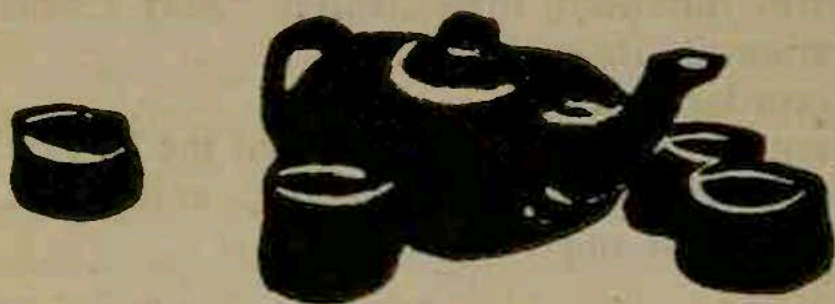
I couldn't smell anything but milk.

"That's just it," she said in triumph. "If it's fresh it has no smell, and if it isn't fresh, your yogurt won't set up. See, the instant powdered milk is used so much more that sometimes the non-instant kind stays on the store shelf for ages."

Remembering the film of dust on the box, I knew she was right. I could see, too, that she was warming to the role I had thrust upon her. Within an hour I learned more about vegetarian cooking than half a dozen cook-books had told me. Laurel had been cooking since she was a little girl, at the knee of her Pennsylvania Dutch grandma, and she had developed strong intuitive powers when it came to food. She wasn't afraid to experiment, because she usually had a rough idea what the result would be. Enthusiastic, but not in that gushy women's-magazine way, she had a sense of artistry about homemaking; you could see it in the way she talked about texture and color, the way she moved her hands, which looked like (and were, I found out later) a potter's hands. At the same time, there was a drollery about her I hadn't noticed at first—a way of undercutting herself at just the right moment, or retreating abashed when she thought she'd made too sweeping a pronouncement.

It was getting close to midnight. I realized there was far more here than I could absorb in one evening, so

without further ado, I declared myself her loyal apprentice and broke out a bag of Hydrox cookies to celebrate. She took one politely, but murmured, "These will have to go, you know." I swallowed hard. No victory without sacrifice.



In the weeks that followed, I spent every free moment in Laurel's kitchen. She lived now in a classic Berkeley brown shingle house, with the requisite Tiffany glass windowpane over the front door, an avocado tree in the yard, and a pocket-handkerchief garden at the side with trellised beans, tomato bushes, and lettuce standing up in three crisp rows.

Her kitchen had evolved considerably over the years. It was as fragrant as ever, but more earthy now, and more mysterious. Several swatches of fresh herbs hung to dry on the wall and a string of pearly garlic in one corner. Glass jars let you gaze unobstructedly at contents that, for all their beauty, still didn't suggest anything edible to my uneducated eye. In time, though, I was initiated into their mysteries. I learned to make superb sandwich spreads from dried peas and beans. We experimented with all kinds of grainy casseroles and, of course, sprouted everything in sight.

Gradually, the four of us saw more and more of one another. Laurel and I were drawn together by the formidable task of turning me into a good vegetarian cook, Tim and Ed by shared obsessions with carpentry and Volvo repair. The real basis of our deepening friendship, though, was our shared commitment to meditation and the spiritual values our teacher was helping us build our lives upon.

One of the pleasantest of the disciplines we were try-

ing to practice was walking—brisk walking, every day, for a full hour. When you begin to turn inward, concentrating intensely for even a limited period each day, it's terribly important to get the physical exercise that *any* body needs, and that our normal life style these days all but forbids. Without this exercise, it's easy to get a little indrawn, jumpy, or irritable. Laurel and I met often to walk early in the day, as soon as our families had been dispatched, while the air was still fresh. Sometimes we visited, but often we just swung along in silence.

One morning—it must have been March, because the Japanese plum trees were in full, tufty pink bloom—we had been walking along without talking for half an hour when Laurel said: "I think you're ready for bread."

I knew what was coming, and I hedged desperately. "Gee, I don't know, Laurel. We had breakfast just an hour ago."

"Silly bean. To *bake* bread."

I hemmed and hawed for several blocks. It wasn't just that I was timid, and she knew it. I was reasonably certain that if I learned to bake bread at all, even if I wasn't very good at it, she would insist that I take over the baking for my family. Up until now we'd had what I thought was an ideal arrangement: she baked our bread, and I made sprouts and soy spread for both our families. In fact, she provided bread for several other people besides us. Every Wednesday night at class a discreet brown paper bag would appear under your chair, so fragrant that if you bumped it with your foot, nostrils would flare for yards around. The tall, round loaves, baked in coffee cans and bulbing on top like a baker's cap, studded with raisins and nuts one week and the next week flecked with aromatic green herbs, had us all hooked. If I gave in now, I knew, we were on our own—or, rather, we were on *my* own.

But Laurel was in what Ed calls one of her "First Amendment moods," when nothing short of a billyclub will move her. Until I tackled breadmaking, she insisted, I was just playing at becoming a good cook: the

only way I could find out how easy it was was to try it. Before I knew what was happening I found myself back in her kitchen, being tied up in one of her voluminous aprons. In seconds flat, she had kerchiefed our heads and tossed yeast, salt, honey, and warm water into a huge crockery bowl (she never baked fewer than a dozen loaves at a time). She scrubbed her hands and arms like a surgeon, dumped in a gallon or so of whole wheat flour, and started stirring mightily—at first with a spoon, then suddenly in up to her elbows and inviting me to join her.

“We’ll talk about the proportions later; let’s concentrate on technique today. This part is where you get the gluten going. Stir it hard—especially if you’re going to add heavy flours like rye or buckwheat or cornmeal.”

By this time I too was paddling about in the stuff, breaking up lumps with my fingers.

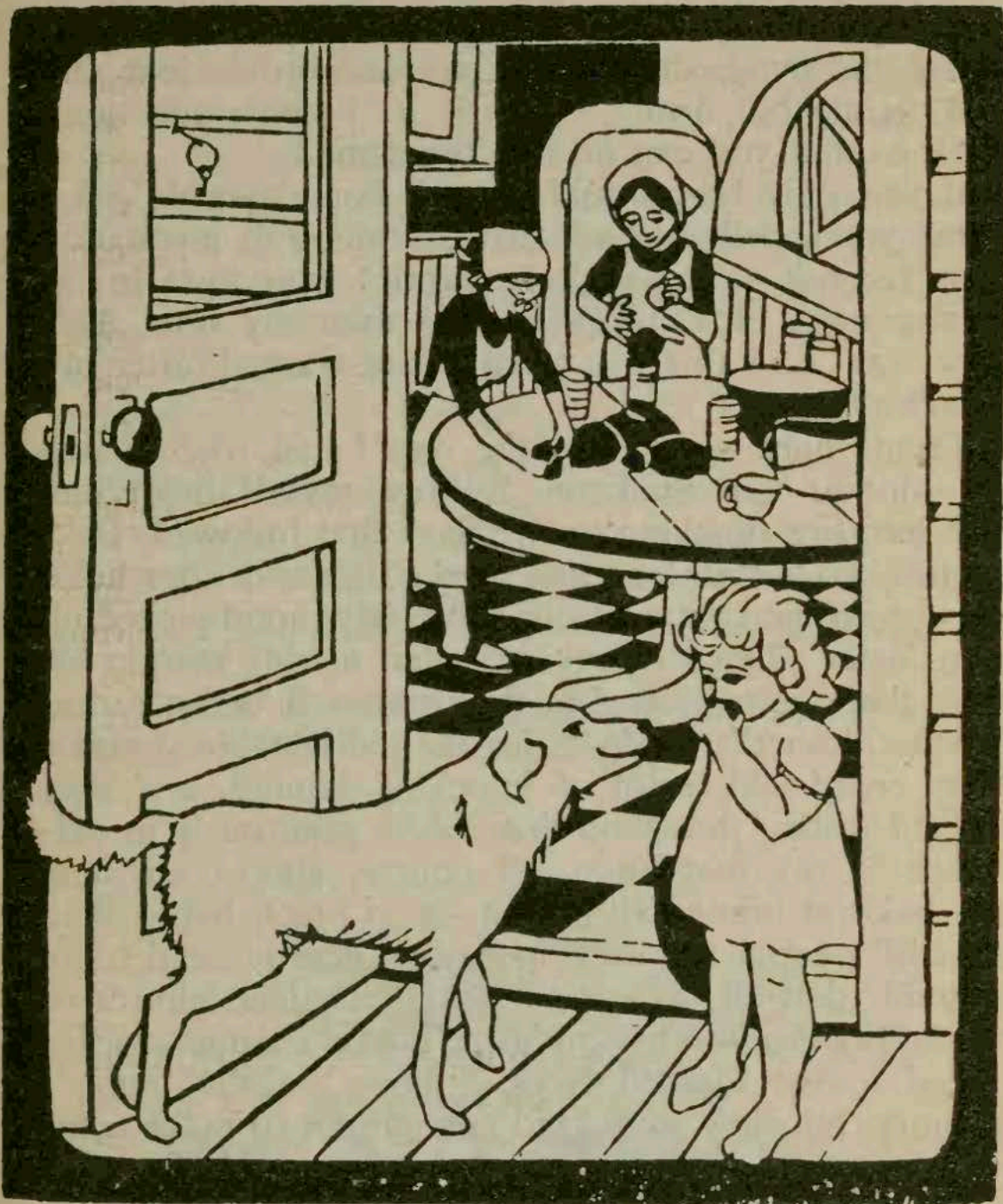
“When it gets stringy like this the gluten is awake, and you can add whatever else you like.”

She pulled down a couple of gallon jars, shook them over the bowl, and plunged in again with both arms. Soon the batter was dough. It seemed to come alive in her hands. In fact, I found out later, it *was* a sort of living entity for her: Laurel thinks of herself as merely an accessory to the whole process, whose part it is to call to life the one-celled microorganisms who do all the work. She nurses a warm affection for the tiny creatures—the “yeast beasties,” as she calls them—and never feels completely right about the use we put them to. I know the conflict still rankles, because just the other morning as I was about to add a small pan of leftover oatmeal to the dough we were mixing (it keeps the bread moist and does nice things to the texture), I saw her brow contract sharply.

“Come on, Laurel, out with it. I won’t be hurt.”

“It’s just, well, the oatmeal looks pretty hot still. I mean, for the yeasties. Do you think you could cool it off first?”

A protest was on my lips—after all, we were going to *bake* the blessed yeasties in another hour, at three hundred and seventy-five degrees—until I saw the look



of mute suffering on her face, and without another word, I spread the oatmeal onto a cookie sheet to cool.

That first morning she startled me by giving the dough a hearty slap at the end of its kneading. "It should feel just about like a baby's bottom," she said with satisfaction.

My worst fears were realized. When the bread came out of the oven, she handed me one brown loaf and said, gently but firmly, "This is it. I know you don't think so, but you can do it without me."

It was only fair, I told myself. Some terribly emaciated young fellows had started coming to meditation class recently—over-zealous ascetics who were in far greater need of Laurel's bounty than my own sleek crew was. And this was what I had wanted, after all, wasn't it?

Trying hard not to feel the way I had when I first left Mother and Spokane, I threw myself heart and soul into breadmaking in the days that followed. Baking just two to four loaves seemed a light task after helping to turn out twelve at one blow. My mood picked up even faster when I discovered what a wide margin for error there actually was in the process. I began to understand Laurel's fondness for the redoubtable yeasties. They could take a lot of knocking around, and they seemed willing to extend themselves generously in deference to my ineptitude. Of course, almost anything you bake at home, with yeast, is so much better than the stuff people are used to eating, heartier and more fragrant, that all my experiments, technical failures or not, were devoured by sundown. Laurel's tender, raisin-piked loaves loomed large, I knew, in the family's memory, but they were kind enough not to make comparisons.

I had an obscure feeling that I shouldn't go back to Laurel, in the true apprenticeship tradition, until I could demonstrate that I had not only absorbed her teaching but had added something of my own as well. My contribution, I decided, would be protein complementarity. Once I had the basic whole wheat loaf under control, I started adding other ingredients, aiming at a bread that was scrumptious but as high as it could be

on the protein chart as well. Our friend Stuart, the biophysicist, came to my rescue on the mathematical side of things, and with his help I worked out several alternative formulas to test.

The day came at last when I marched to her back door with a warm, beautifully textured loaf in hand.

"Try this." I broke off a chunk in a somewhat theatrical manner, and she took it obediently. "Notice anything different?"

She munched thoughtfully.

"Well, it's very tasty." She narrowed her eyes in concentration. "Three parts whole wheat flour, maybe one of wheat germ, half that much of soy flour, milk, rice bran, and a trace of buckwheat." She took another nibble. "Gluten flour."

"Okay, Wonder Woman, do you know what that means?"

"Well, it's probably pretty nutritious."

"That bread has an NPU that would bring tears to the eyes of Frankie Lappé. Not an amino acid spared."

"Gee, it's good, too. Sort of nutty. Where did you get the recipe?"

It was my moment of glory. Our relationship had entered a new phase.



As Laurel came gradually into clearer focus, I found it hard to understand how I could have felt overawed at first. True, as I had anticipated, she did have strongly held principles. She had specialized in American history at Cal, and the mere mention of Thomas Jefferson would bring on a warm flush and a ten-minute disquisition. But all sorts of contradictions kept emerging. She was an odd blend of radical and conservative. Her loyalties went deep—she had used the same shampoo since she was six, and she still drove miles to get her shoes repaired at the shop she'd lived next to as a freshman. On the other hand, the wonderful energies she was possessed of used to come along sometimes and possess *her*—pick her up and carry her along willy-nilly so that she would do something completely uncharacteristic, shattering whatever image of her you had managed to construct. Half the fun of knowing her was watching her ride herd on the conflicting sides of herself. Boisterous, corny, and slapstick in the morning, she'd turn sober and introspective in the afternoon, and for all her high principles and right answers, she could now and then nearly capsize under the great waves of insecurity you would normally expect in a teenager. Indifferent, by and large, to her looks, she wore clothing that combined Traditional Berkeley (baggy, dark, somewhat ethnic, and old as the hills) with Neo-Sears and Roebuck Catalog. Every now and then, though, for an evening in San Francisco, she would haul out a full-length wool coat the color of a summer sky at twilight, and when she put it on, hair, eyes, and complexion glowing, you saw instantly what it was those Flemish painters were all trying to capture.



Her love of the solid and traditional was nowhere more evident than in the food she cooked. Laurel is the only vegetarian cook I know whose food can manage to taste just like your mother's or grandmother's without ever straying beyond what is nutritious or vegetarian. She would never serve something just because it was nutritious; it had to *taste* good—and look good, too.

The concept of protein complementarity came Laurel's way at just the right moment, for after two years of relying heavily on eggs and milk for protein, she was becoming interested in a more varied cuisine. Within two days after I had sketched out the basic idea of balancing proteins, she was conversant as a chemist with the whole mysterious business. She could call every amino acid by name and tell you where he lived and in what concentration. Little by little my cooking lessons came to be workshops, where we experimented, cautiously at first, then with a bolder hand, with all the ways you could maximize the protein in a meatless diet. Here Laurel's sure, stubborn sense of the classic rescued us—and our families—time and again. A particular dish might balance out right on the dime, but if it didn't make it on the flavor scale, nothing doing.

We didn't stop with the tired old question, "Well, but where do you get your *protein*?" Other challenges were presenting themselves, like coming up with a low-calorie reducing diet for vegetarians. And what about children? What are their special nutritional needs, and can a vegetarian diet really meet them all? How can we prepare vegetables so that people will want to eat lots without drenching them in caloric sauces? How can we cut expenditures to a minimum and still serve appetizing and varied meals? All these were questions of great practical importance for us. I doubt, though, that we'd have gotten quite so embroiled in answering them if we had been thinking strictly of our own needs.

For we were aware by now that we weren't the only people curious about vegetarianism, nutrition, and good eating. By this time we were spending more and more time with other meditators, people attending the same classes we were. Supporting one another, sharing our

new sense of purpose and direction, we were becoming much more than just friends. Any excuse would do for an impromptu get-together: a jam session in someone's basement, a volleyball game at the beach, a work party to remodel a new meeting place for our meditation center. Whatever the occasion, food was part of the picture, and it wasn't long before we noticed that almost everyone was going through the same reorientation towards food that we were. The range of diets was remarkable—so remarkable that Laurel and I, full of our new zeal for protein balancing, began to get concerned. Finally, at a picnic, we snooped and peered shamelessly at every lunch we could get close to, asked a number of indiscreet questions, and then put our heads together afterwards.

Some people were eating just what they'd been eating all along, minus the meat: the same old white bread and sugar, processed cheese, canned vegetables, and potato chips. Steve and Debbie had dropped eggs and milk products as well as meat, but were pretty vague about where their protein was coming from now. One woman, on the other hand, was eating eggs and cheese three times daily for fear she would keel over from protein deficiency.

Sumner was convinced that vegetarianism meant you ate vegetables. Period. Raw. He proved a stubborn case. To this day, if no one is watching, he'll dine on a head of raw broccoli and a few fresh parsnips, preferably with bits of earth still clinging to the root-hairs.

One very earnest and alarmingly ethereal girl had read of a mountain yogi who subsisted on fruit that was dropped—not picked, heaven forbid—from the trees. Such food alone, she reasoned, is God's gift; all other food involves "taking." The argument was beautiful in its simplicity, but a few weeks on the regime had left her so frail she was in no danger of "taking" anything much heavier than a kiwi fruit.

Our teacher was even more distressed at our findings than we were. We decided to work on two fronts. He would start spelling out more explicitly something he'd thought we'd all realized—the absolute necessity, for the practice of meditation, of maintaining strong,

healthy bodies. Laurel and I, meanwhile, would learn everything we could about intelligent vegetarian eating and share what we found with the rest of our group.

One discovery that emerged clearly from our research was that people were making woefully inadequate use of grains and beans. Not realizing how much usable protein they could get from these sources, especially in combinations, they thought of grains as heavy or starchy—the women in particular. With charts and sample menus, we were able to show our skeptical friends that they could enjoy a very satisfying diet (including items with real body like beans and whole-grain bread) which would be no higher in calories than their present one.

Here, of course, a familiar problem arose. Most people didn't have the foggiest idea how to prepare whole grains or legumes, and much as I had, they thought of breadmaking as a highly esoteric art just this side of alchemy. At the risk of cutting into our own prestige a little, we invited people to come to our homes for demonstrations. Laurel's enthusiasm was so infectious that within a few weeks the characteristic round bread slices were showing up in the most unlikely places. The old "each one teach one" method had triumphed. People discovered all kinds of ways to fit a weekly baking into their schedules. Several of the busier women worked out a "bread pool" so that they baked only at two- or three-week intervals, while others worked out the same trade Laurel and I had, bread for soy spread and sprouts.

The practice of trading food blossomed soon into a trend. People began cooperating to minimize the time and money they were spending on food. Berkeley's famous (and successful) experiment in neighborhood cooperative buying, the "Food Conspiracy," had its origin just a block from our house, and we participated wholeheartedly. It was the first time since I was a little kid that I felt like I lived in a real neighborhood. Soon one of our number volunteered to make our own run every month to the wholesaler in San Francisco who stocked the local health food stores with dried fruits, nuts, grains, and flours. We had all be-

come resigned to spending long Saturday mornings in supermarkets, shoving carts down glaring aisles where profiteering middlemen had placed thick (and costly) layers of cellophane between us and everything we were buying. Now we spent the same hours getting together in one another's backyards and kitchens, weighing, bagging, laughing, and visiting as we divided our spoils.

We began to exchange our *ideas* about food, too. Our group of meditators reflected something of the ethnic mix you'll find all over Berkeley—including dogs of several breeds, none of whom were eating meat now and none of whom seemed to be suffering except Frodo, whose owner was the raw-vegetable man. (We persuaded Sumner at great length that even if he wouldn't cook his own broccoli, he had better cook and blend poor Frodo's, and throw in some wheat germ and milk to boot.) Almost every national diet, we learned, had some specialty that was vegetarian, or could easily become vegetarian. Once we realized this, we rounded up a few king-sized cooking pots and a heady series of feasts ensued—Hanukkah, Greek Easter, South Indian Vishu, an American Thanksgiving, Chinese New Year, a Columbus Day spaghetti feed, a Cinco de Mayo tamale dinner. You name it, we celebrated it.

This first phase of our experimentation was wildly creative—and wildly elaborate. Casseroles fairly bristled with pine nuts, citron, chia seeds, and other exotica. After a few months, though, we began to settle down a little; our menus became simpler. I imagine meditation was bringing about the same slow transformation on our rather jaded palates as on our nervous systems. By dint of slowing down a bit and getting



calmer, we were better able to appreciate the delicate pleasures of simply prepared, straightforward foods: garden vegetables, whole-grain breads, and fresh fruit. Besides, freehanded use of imported cheeses, dried fruits and nuts, or out-of-season produce can dent a food bill almost as badly as meat can. We still enjoyed our feast days—austerity has never been our style. But we had found that a varied, tasty cuisine need not depend on costly extras.

I've said very little about the children so far, and any parent probably wonders how ours reacted to the new regime. Our decision to go meatless and swing over to food that nourishes *was* something of a stopper to Julia and Chris. Of course, I vacillated for such a long time that the transition was actually quite gradual, but nonetheless, it was confusing to them to find that something we'd once eaten heartily was now looked on with distaste. Chris missed hot dogs, and Julia hankered after her old favorite, tuna fish sandwiches. We exerted very little pressure—just tried to share with them our growing sense of fellow-feeling with animals, birds, and fish. Children have this sense instinctively anyway, so it was mostly just a matter of brushing away some of the cobweb-rationalizations that had covered it over.

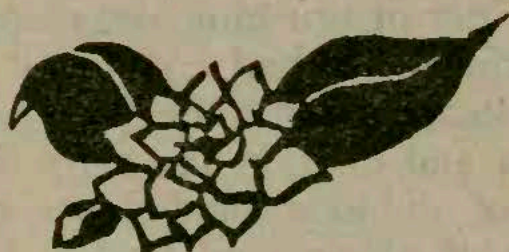
It *did* bother them at first to be “different” from their classmates. Now and then, in the early days, I used to find remnants of dubious sandwiches in their lunch pails, the result of playground trades. I chose not to harass them about it, though, and in time it stopped happening.

Then one Sunday afternoon, with no ulterior motive, we took the children for a walk on the Marina. It was a warm Berkeley day and both sides of the pier were lined with fishermen. Suddenly someone landed a fish right in front of us. It flopped down at our feet, gasping and writhing as it struggled to get free of the hook.

The children's eyes got very big. It was a crucial moment. At an earlier time we might have said, “Wow, what a catch! He's got himself a real dinner there!” They'd have half bought the idea, and if it were rein-

forced enough times, they'd have started saying it themselves, even though all the time, despite their attempts to dispel it, the image of that poor, struggling creature would have remained locked in their consciousness. Now, however, not knowing what to say, and not wanting to say the wrong thing, we said nothing—let them watch for a brief instant, then herded them gently away. It wasn't long after that before tuna sandwiches and then hot dogs faded into the past.

Now, though they bear no ill will toward their friends who eat meat, our children are quietly sure that they are right in their own decision, and their example has caused many of their playmates, even parents of playmates, to stop for a moment and question their own food habits. Their teachers have been intrigued and often helpful: Mrs. Davis, for instance, who made sure there was corn wrapped in foil for our two at the end-of-the-year barbecue. I wonder what other parents would think if they knew how many kids offered to trade their spare ribs (*whose* "spare" ribs? and what pig ever said he didn't need all of them?) for Julia's corn on the cob.



I've only touched lightly so far upon a whole other side to the developments that led to this book. Nutritional considerations aside, the last three years have changed radically some of my deeper, unconscious feelings about cooking, and about me as a cook—and (let's face it) about me as a *woman*.

It hadn't occurred to me that there could be much direct connection between kitchen work and meditation until one evening when our teacher was reading some verses from the Bhagavad Gita, in which Sri Krishna, an embodiment of the Lord, tells his disciple:

*A leaf, a flower, a fruit, or even
Water offered to Me in devotion,
I will accept it as the loving gift
Of a dedicated heart. Whatever
You do, make it an offering to Me—
The food you eat or worship you perform,
The help you give, even your suffering.
Thus will you be free from karma's bondage,
From the results of action, good and bad.*

*I am the same to all beings. My love
Is the same always. Nevertheless, they
Who meditate on Me with devotion,
They dwell in Me, and I shine forth in them.*

He talked all evening about work, and how Gandhi had believed that work we do for a selfless goal, without thought of profit, is actually a form of prayer. Work done in this spirit unifies our fragmented energy and attention, calms the mind, and actually deepens our meditation. In Sanskrit, the path to God by way of such selfless work is called *karma yoga*. Even the smallest task can be thought of as an offering to the Lord, and when it is, it follows that it will be performed in the best possible way, with the greatest care and attention. Looked at in this light, every action becomes, potentially, an act of love—a work of art.

Our teacher closed the class with a passage from a Christian mystic, a very simple monk of the seventeenth century, Brother Lawrence:

*The time of business does not with me differ from the
time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen,
while several persons are at the same time calling for dif-
ferent things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if
I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament.*

I listened spellbound, and thought all the next day about what he had said. Then, haltingly, I began to try to put into practice what I thought I had heard him say.

It took only a few days for me to see what an enormous challenge he had placed before us. The practice of

“one-pointedness” was the first big hurdle. To carry out work as something just this side of a sacrament, it’s necessary to give your complete attention to whatever it is you’re doing. As it turns out, this gets quite difficult at times. Say you’re cutting up a cauliflower. “Idiot work,” the mind sneers, and starts going great guns. Before you know it, somewhere between solving the Mideast crisis and designing the perfect day-care center, you’ve lacerated your thumb and have begun to think of the whole operation as a rude imposition on your time and energy.

When I asked our teacher about this problem, he knew what I was talking about instantly. His suggestion was the silent repetition of the mantram. I was skeptical at first, but I began to try it, just to see. After a while I realized how effective it was.

A mantram, very simply, is a name of the Lord, hallowed by the thousands of people who have repeated it. People have used some form of mantram in almost all the great religious traditions. “Jesus, Jesus” is a mantram; “Rama, Rama” is Gandhi’s mantram. It seems paradoxical, but repeating the mantram has a way of keeping you planted firmly in the right here and right now, concentrated and calm. Not only that, but it helps you to remember all the while that you aren’t just slapping together a meal; you’re preparing food for the Lord in those you love.

Needless to say, becoming one-pointed didn’t mesh with my Western idea of efficiency—stirring the soup with one hand, working the can opener with the other, while your mind is composing a grocery list or a limerick for your little boy. Getting myself to slow down and focus on one thing at a time went hard against the grain at first. One particular application I fought with special stubbornness. The local independent radio station used to broadcast an excellent news analysis every day at five-thirty, right in the midst of dinner preparations. (The same program would be rebroadcast the next morning, at a perfectly convenient hour; but that’s *old* news, right?) For love or money, I couldn’t bring myself to turn it off. After all, you can’t let yourself get out of touch; and it wasn’t as if it were TV—my eyes

were still one-pointed. For months I went on working with half my mind, listening with the other.

It took a while for the evidence to mount up. Occasional injuries weren't such a big deal. Salting the soup twice or over-cooking a carrot or two still wasn't serious. Missing steps in the recipe—who's to know, anyway? The real problem wasn't with the food. It was with the cook. A half hour of the Latest and I was decidedly rattled by the time I got to the dinner table—fragments of half-heard news reports skittering through my mind, veiled predictions of war, famine, and depression weighing me down, leaving a terrible taste in my mouth, distracting me from our family and their more immediate concerns. I was gradually coming to realize that it isn't just food you serve your family. I wanted to nourish them in subtler ways as well; my state of mind couldn't help but affect theirs. If I wanted our meals to take place in a congenial, relaxed atmosphere, I had no choice but to come to the table in a calm, cheerful, and relatively unified state of mind.

So little by little, news coverage gave way to music. Before long, though, that too came to be a distraction. If I were going to listen to music, I wanted to listen to *good* music, and give it my complete attention. Fifty-three was obviously not the time. At last the radio was stilled, and I was able to admit to myself how deeply satisfying it is to work in silence, the mantram bubbling away within, providing a peaceful, regular rhythm to work by.

But of course there was a more profound side to what our teacher was talking about when he urged us to make our life and all our work an offering to the Lord who lives in all. For a wife and mother to carry out her work in the spirit of karma yoga, she needs to try quite literally to see the Lord in the people she loves, clothes, and feeds. A woman who grows up in the Hindu tradition has this ideal placed before her always: her children have been named after one of the "thousand names" of the Lord or the Divine Mother, and before every meal she offers up a serving of each dish to the family deity so that what her family eats afterwards is *prasad*—"the Lord's leftovers," already

dedicated to his service. To the rest of us, however, this ideal is a bit awesome. I found the concept breathtakingly attractive, but it would have remained an abstraction until, only half aware that I was doing so, I began to watch Laurel, drawn yet again by the half-unwilling suspicion that there was something I could be learning from her.

One morning, out for a walk, I stopped at Laurel's house to see if she'd join me. She was packing Ed's lunch—his dinner, rather, because he was working from twelve to nine at the time. Thinking it would take just a few minutes, I sat down and waited. She suggested a little nervously that I might want to go on without her, but I blithely told her to take her time. No lunch pail was in sight, just a big wicker basket with a lid—quite a large one, really, for just sandwiches and fruit. Then I saw the sandwiches: thick slices of dark rye around an egg salad sparked with sweet red peppers and parsley, so thick she had to cut the bread in half before assembling the finished product. But the sandwiches were the least of the story. A fragrant barley soup with translucent pieces of zucchini, celery, and mushrooms went into a wide-mouthed thermos carefully preheated with boiling water, and a tiny packet of grated cheese went in alongside to be sprinkled on top of the soup. She rinsed and dried lettuce and cherry tomatoes and put them into a plastic container with a tiny bottle of herb dressing, then got out a cantaloupe and cut it in half in perfect zigzags, scooped out the seeds, and packed one of the halves with cottage cheese and a sprinkling of toasted sunflower seeds.

I was getting more impressed by the minute. "Is that dessert?"

"Almost. These"—she held up an innocuous brown lump rolled in coconut—"are pure dynamite. I made them last night. Ed's tipping the scales at a mighty one forty-five now; I have to sneak in all the calories I can."

The breakdown was impressive, all right: peanut butter laced with milk powder, honey, wheat germ, ground sesame and sunflower seeds, soy powder, dates, and carob.



“Five grams of protein each—and *balanced* as all get-out.”

“You know, Laurel”—I must have been feeling insecure—“you can *buy* those things at a health food store.”

She recoiled in distaste. “Oh, I know. They’re sort of expensive, though, and these are much fresher. It doesn’t take fifteen minutes to make them.”

I backtracked fast. The Laurels of the world have enough opposition these days without having to fend off their closest friends. After all, I didn’t have to scallop Tim’s honeydew or peel his grapes—he’d probably break out in hives if I did.

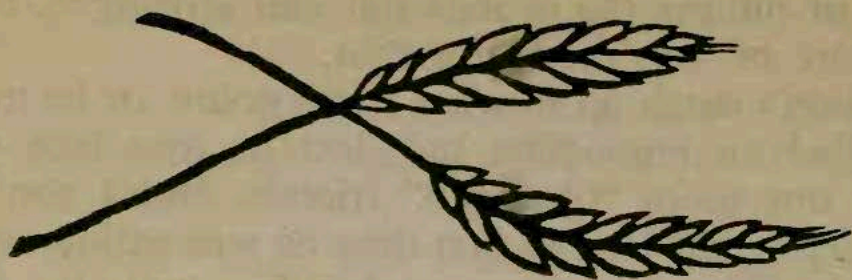
I watched while Laurel fixed two more thermoses (one of decaffeinated coffee, one of hot malted milk spiked with a protein supplement) and put in napkins, a spoon, a fork, and an orange, carefully scored for easy peeling. “He’s fighting a cold,” she said hurriedly, without looking up. The lid was secured, just barely, and we were on our way.

That night I told Tim about the huge basket and all the little containers that fit together just so; he was as fond of Laurel’s droller side as I was, and I knew he would be amused. We tried to envision the reactions of Ed’s co-workers as our skinny friend sat soberly bringing out jar after box after bag after bottle of exquisitely catered food. The fantasy became more and more elaborate, and soon we were laughing so hard our sides hurt.

The next morning, though, as I was whipping lunches together in my usual assembly-line fashion, I felt a distinct drag on the operation. Something in me was balking. For the first time, I wondered whether Tim actually liked the lunches I fixed him. He’d never said he *didn’t*. His lunch was always the same—an apple, an orange, and two sandwiches, one of soy spread with alfalfa sprouts, one with peanut butter and honey. Very tentatively, I put a couple of tomato slices with the soy spread, and I bagged the sprouts separately to keep them from sogging down in the mayonnaise. Banana slices and a sprinkle of leftover toasted sesame seed brightened up the peanut butter. I threw the sandwiches

into the bag with the fruit, but this time I took a little more care than usual that the apple shouldn't sit directly athwart the sandwiches. I came within a hair's breadth of pulling the orange out and scoring it, but I wasn't sure he was ready for that.

Tim didn't catch on to what I was doing, or he might have called an immediate halt lest he lose face with some of our more "liberated" friends. But I couldn't help noticing that for the first time he was eating everything I gave him. I've never packed him quite the feast Ed puts down each night—Tim's home for dinner, after all—but I *have* accumulated my own modest collection of tiny containers, and now whenever I make a dessert, fruity and full of wheat germ, I make enough for bag lunches as well. Julia and Chris, too, aren't nearly as vulnerable to the allurements of the candy machine at school now that their lunches have a little more pizzazz.



THE KEEPER OF THE KEYS

We began this book a couple of years ago in a pleasantly desultory manner, seeing it as a chance to share our kitchen experience and pass on a solid collection of nutritious, inexpensive vegetarian recipes. The events of the past year, though—the growing threat of world famine and the spreading awareness that all natural resources are limited—have brought a new sense of urgency to our work. For the rest of this century, the American housewife is in a uniquely important role. As never before, the “gift of life” is hers to give or withhold.

Traditionally, the world over, the woman in a house has been known as the “keeper of the keys.” To hold the keys to the household, to its storerooms, attics, chests, and cupboards, was a position of great responsibility and, therefore, of great honor. In a season of impoverishment, it was the woman’s wise allocation of limited supplies that would see the family through, and in times of plenty, it was her foresight that provided for future needs. Some of us have grandmothers whose linen closets and kitchen pantries, stocked with gleaming jellies and pickles, marked the last vestiges of the tradition.

In just a couple of generations, we seem to have lost sight of this beautiful custom. I don’t mean in the strictly private sense; my family isn’t suffering for lack

of the splendid pile of embroidered linens that dowered Grandma. The *world* is suffering, though, for our having forgotten the frugal practices, the wise use of resources, that the keeper of the keys represented. Now we need to become trustees not just for our immediate families, but for the entire planet.

As of mid-1975, world famine has intensified to the point that fifteen thousand human beings, most of them children, are dying of malnutrition each day. For the first time in its twenty-seven-year history UNICEF has declared an emergency situation. Meanwhile, for all our own anxieties over economic recession, the major health problems in the United States continue to be those related to overconsumption. Our consumption patterns are hurting us, and they are now jeopardizing life the world over.

Our meat-based diet is perhaps the most obvious example. We now consume about twice the protein our bodies need, and beef is our hands-down favorite way of doing it. As Frances Moore Lappé has shown us, every pound of beef on our table represents sixteen pounds of grain and legumes removed from the total available to a hungry world. What we do not all realize is that this high-protein feed is administered to a steer during the last few weeks of its existence. The sole function of most of the soybeans and other feed crops we raise is to turn lean range-fed beef into the marbled-fat beef that our doctors warn us against.

The relationship between meat consumption and available grain is therefore more sensitive than we might think. If demand for meat goes down, the steer's last-minute cram session does not take place. In 1974, when the market for meat did fall, the grain that was so unexpectedly released actually *did* find its way to poorer countries.

Reducing American meat intake, therefore, by even a small, scarcely noticeable margin would help alleviate the problem and, according to Harvard's Dr. Jean Mayer, would probably improve our health as well. By the same token, our health as a nation would certainly improve if consumption of alcohol were lowered: twenty million people could live for a year on the

amount of grain used by our beer and liquor industry annually.

Americans consume 3300 calories per capita each day, which helps explain why some 40 percent of us are clinically obese. Of course, that 3300 calories represents food *sold*. Some idea of how much of that we *waste* has been provided by a study of the garbage cans of Tucson, Arizona, where about 10 percent of the food that was purchased in each home ended up in the garbage. That's *edible* food, mind you: half-eaten apples, quarter heads of lettuce, etc. In a single year, a city with three hundred thousand inhabitants threw away ten million dollars worth of food. So it all adds up.

But food is just part of the picture. Because modern agriculture depends on petroleum-based fertilizers, the disappearance of cheap oil has forced a pointed choice on us all: 88 gallons of gas (one round trip from San Francisco to Las Vegas) *or* one acre of corn, not both. We *know* this, and we know that fossil fuels are limited, and yet in 1975 we are using more oil than ever before.

Though the U.S. represents just 6 percent of the world's population, we use up 40 percent of its primary resources—twice as much per person as the average Swede uses for an equally high standard of living, forty times what the average Indian or Nigerian requires. Immediately we blame the automobile, but industry itself is the bigger culprit—industry, which produces the “goods” we buy, the synthetic fabrics, the paper plates, the disposable plastic this's and that's, the elaborate packaging we grumble about but go on paying for.

We've grown up thinking of our country as possessing unlimited resources which it is our “right” to use. Actually, we go far beyond U.S. borders to support our inflated life style, importing great quantities of oil and minerals, nonrenewable resources, on the one hand, and foodstuffs on the other. The U.S., for example, is now the world's biggest *importer* of beef—and its sources include Latin American countries which are themselves critically short of protein. The entire planet, and generations to come, are imperilled by our greed.

When we first look straight on at all this, it's easy to

fall into despair, overwhelmed at the picture of Yankee know-how run amok, chomping up mountains and rivers to produce Barbie Dolls and Screaming Yellow Zonkers. But before you crumple up in a heap, notice the critical link in this awesome chain of industrialism. The reason for overconsumption is overconsumers. If the consumer refuses to be manipulated and makes wise choices that are not based on advertising, he—she—we! —can save the planet.

For most of us, the moment of truth comes when we first awaken to how our own lives are demeaned by overconsumption. The first glimmering can come in many forms: a week in village Mexico, say, or Greece, where needs may be few, the pace slow, and relationships much warmer than those we're used to seeing. Poverty, yes, *grinding* poverty in many cases—but a precious, ineffable something that we *don't* have, and miss sorely. The clue might be a very harsh one: a heart attack in a forty-year-old salesman, or severe asthma in his child, intensified by badly polluted air. The signals register one by one in our consciousness like those red signs on the freeway: "Turn back; you're going the wrong way."

It's somehow poignant that we pay such high prices for the hand-carved bowl, the hand-polished silver, the hand-dyed scarf from a village in Peru or Indonesia. We delight in using these very personal objects. We prize them over their mass-produced counterparts, and we cherish even their imperfections. Without denying their beauty, I wonder whether what really draws us is the way of life they suggest, where people meet their needs, and *just* their needs, by their own skilled handiwork, and by trustful cooperation with their neighbors. In painful contrast, the "high standard of living" of our own time and place has deprived us of such work, and estranged us from our neighbors. We buy our bread, we buy our clothing, we buy our transportation, our entertainment, our artistic satisfactions; and the price of it all is much higher than it appears to be. For just as serious as the cost to world resources is the threat that our life style poses to life itself. Our exploded notions of what is "enough," conditioned by long expo-

sure to Madison Avenue, drive us mercilessly to earn more, spend more, eat, drink, and smoke more, at whatever the cost to our health and environment. The diseases most Americans die of as a result, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and emphysema, are all but unknown in some parts of the world. We watch with alarm as violent crime becomes the order of the day, and we sense dimly a connection between these crimes and a general atmosphere that encourages greed, and values things above people.

The changeover is in our hands. It can only take place if women like us will change our own habits and help family members to change theirs. I say "women" very stubbornly, because we are still the ones who decide how most of the money is spent. More important, by example and instruction, we are the ones who influence coming generations most directly. The challenge is immense, but women all over the land are finding it irresistible. Hesitantly, we are taking the first steps; then, exhilarated by the growth in health and well-being, we are taking a few steps more. Little by little, a quiet but effective revolution may be taking place. Diet is part of the change, but the larger picture takes in every aspect of our daily life.

The first step, then, is to cultivate a keen eye for the inessential—in food, clothing, transportation, appliances, entertainment, in our use of resources of every kind, direct and indirect. There is a deep satisfaction in rousting a supposed need out of its hallowed niche.

When you start thinking in this way, your life can never be quite the same. If we are concerned with wise use of resources, food, for example—this *is* a cookbook, after all—appears in a new light. One of the best arguments for serving whole, fresh, unprocessed foods, like homemade, whole-grain bread, is that this practice conserves what is most precious in food—its nutritional value. When you refine away nutrients you have to replace them somehow, and a whole industry springs up to manufacture vitamin supplements, at high cost to you, high profit to them. Processed foods are not just unhealthy; they are wasteful, even before you consider the cost in elaborate packaging and competitive ad-

vertising. In 1974 we Americans spent ten billion dollars on packaging, five times the amount that the World Food Council in Rome estimated it would take to stave off famine for nine months.

The next inevitable insight is that we women ourselves are a valuable and often misused resource. A sidelong look at my own activities, and I have been forced to ask myself—very tactfully, of course—whether part of my time could not be spent in ways that would more directly contribute to solving the world's problems, or even my own community's. Planting a garden is one way, teaching a neighbor to make bread is another, raising money for famine relief a third. Our time, talent, and energy are resources the world needs desperately.

This leads to a troubled and troubling question—in some circles, even, an explosive one: How is my time best spent? Gardening, cooking with whole, fresh foods, making our own clothes and upholstering our own couches, all require time spent at home. To “retrench” and return to less mechanized and commercialized methods of homemaking may mean I won't have time for a job, or golf lessons, or a course in silk-screening. Even if it *is* necessary for women to make this shift, how palatable would it be? Could I stand it? Could I carry it off without feeling, and expressing, resentment?

I would like to face this question squarely. Convinced as I am that women have a vital role to play in



steering our small planet out of its present disaster course, I want to examine some of the attitudes and assumptions—and pressures, too—that are keeping us from doing it. Let me emphasize that everything I'll be saying is drawn from eight years of shared experience of a group of women who have undertaken these changes in their own lives.

Most women have come to see housework as tedium, a real threat to individual growth. The truly creative and challenging activities, it is generally agreed, lie outside the home. Moreover, staying home is *lonely*. The isolation is something fierce, and when you come right down to it, there isn't really all that much to do at home. Parkinson's Law can stretch the morning clean-up on into the afternoon, but how clean does a house need to be

Housework, as it is generally practiced today, is indeed tedious. Worse, it insults the spirit, and wearies us profoundly. But need this be so? Has it always been so? Granted, there are aspects of housework that are monotonous, but this is the case in any job or, indeed, any "creative pursuit." Ask any teacher, artist, or executive. What really troubles us most about housework is that in our desire to be freed from its tedium, we have welcomed a host of time- and labor-saving devices which have not only not eliminated tedium but cut us off from the truly pleasurable, creative side of our work. If that were all they did, it would be bad enough, but in addition, they actually lower the quality of our lives by rendering everything we eat, drink, wear, and sit on quite uniform, uninteresting, and even downright harmful. What possible satisfaction can I get from preparing a bag lunch for my little boy if it means slapping together a sandwich from "balloon" bread and pre-ribboned peanut butter and jelly spread, dropping in a miniature can of fruit cocktail and a bag of potato chips, and adding a dime (milk money) which will end up in the soft drink machine? For that matter, how much satisfaction can child-rearing itself offer when our children spend six hours a day with the electronic babysitter? Worst of all, these labor-saving products and devices represent an enormous sinkhole for the world's dimin-

ishing resources. *The world cannot afford this version of homemaking.*

The less than thrilling side of homemaking will always be there. But as soon as we take into our own hands some of the tasks we'd previously consigned to machines and manufacturers, our work becomes vastly more gratifying. (I mean that literally, by the way, about the hands. Until I started making our bread, dragged out my old knitting needles, and planted our side plot in vegetables, my hands were in serious danger of atrophy.)

Obviously, when you're bored, it's hard to concentrate. Only lately have I been helped to realize that I could actually eliminate boredom no matter *what* I was doing, by simply concentrating more. In the old days, cooking dinner was just a matter of getting something onto the table that people would like. A certain listlessness pervaded the whole affair. Now, though, nutrition is as crucial as appetite appeal. I'm *interested* in what I'm doing—and boredom is quite out of the picture. Anyone who's started cooking with whole foods knows that the work itself actually is much more engrossing: the variety of texture, shape, and color calls out the artist in anyone.

I have begun to wonder, of late, about this belief that housework is *essentially* tedious. To what extent do you suppose it has been foisted upon us by those very same commercial interests who so obligingly provide us with dishwashers, dehydrated dinners, and disposable diapers—all meant very generously, of course, to relieve us of all that horrible work, obviously an evil in itself? Is it possible that somewhere on Madison Avenue a very wicked but very brilliant junior executive has built his career on the age-old principle known to Julius Caesar as *divide et impera*—divide a people among themselves and they are easy to keep in line? In this case, it's our consciousness that's being divided into more and more nagging desires so that, continually frustrated, we will obediently buy a little more "stuff" every year. Sit down one afternoon and watch an hour or so of TV commercials, or flip through the pages of any women's magazine. Two images of

yourself will flash at you alternately with strobe-light rapidity: one moment you are a loving, devoted wife and mother who wants only the best (best flower-embossed paper towels, best frozen tamales) for her loved ones; the next moment, or even simultaneously, comes the subtle or blatant suggestion that you're really much too good to be stuck at home. The real thrills in life are out in the world: life at the office has a certain glamor that your little bungalow is bound to lack. The gist of the typical commercial is, "We know you love your family, but let us free you from its drudgery and give you Time to pursue a more Meaningful Existence."

The tactic is most insidious. For business and industry, the ideal situation is for us to be trying to have a family *and* a job, for when we do, we spend a lot more money on a lot more things. It's not just because we have more money to spend: a working wife and mother needs a second car (or bus fares), dressier clothing, more nylon stockings, a babysitter, and perhaps a cleaning lady. She's pressed for time in the morning and worn out in the evening, so restaurant meals regularly take the place of bag lunches and home-cooked dinners. Prepared quick-serve foods, far more expensive than basic foods, take another bite out of the budget, along with a dishwasher, a microwave oven, and ready-made clothing for the children—and, in all probability, more money spent on random gifts *for* them because she feels bad at spending so little time *with* them. All this on top of the regular operating expenses of the household. "Household" is hardly the word—at this point, when the emphasis falls increasingly on speedy refueling and immediate departure, "pit stop" might be closer to the truth. This is the pattern of life now for a vast number of American families.

It is grim indeed to realize that Big Business has everything to gain from my inner fragmentation. As I run in several directions at once, the sense of incompleteness within can only deepen. The more insecure I am, the more money I spend in the pathetic belief that I can purchase security. The spending spree would taper off abruptly if I were to discover within myself the ful-

fillment I lack. So it's no wonder, really, that the media's image of the home nowadays has all the charm of *Stalag 17*.

We have been hoodwinked somehow into believing that creativity is in a separate category from the simple acts of daily life. Art is something you do in a crafts studio or a writer's workshop. We dispatch our housework as swiftly as mechanization and frozen dinners will let us so that we can hustle off to the Y to get recharged with a few hours of "creativity." Meanwhile, to support this pattern of life, we Americans are consuming the lion's share of world resources, and time is ticking out for the poor people of the world—and, just a little more slowly, for ourselves. Surely our "creativity" need not have so high a price.

Why compartmentalize our lives so that art is a thing apart? There is an artistic way to carry out even the simplest task, and there is great fulfillment to be had from finding out that way and perfecting it. That is the silent message that comes to us in the village handicrafts we value so. A culture that gives priority to speed and greed and multiplicity—well, it *is* no culture, it *has* no culture. To lead lives of artistry, we have only to slow down, to simplify, to start making wise choices.



Certainly, for a great number of women, holding a job is not a matter of choice. But for hundreds of thousands of us it is. Confused desire for a "higher standard of living" or a sense of utter bewilderment at the idea of staying home thrust us willy-nilly onto the job market. I know women who would rather *not* work, who would be quite happy to simplify their family's material needs and concentrate on the subtler ones, but who are embarrassed to admit it. ("Am I a dullard? Lazy? Timid?") To counteract this absurd development, and reverse it as soon as possible, is essential if we are to help relieve the food and resource crisis. To my mind, the solution lies in our taking seriously the role of wife, mother, homemaker, in a way we are not being encouraged to do. We can talk back firmly to those who would belittle the significance of our work; better yet, we can demonstrate by quiet personal example that no other job or career involvement can be quite so effective in bringing about the world we all long to see.

Idleness is a genuine fear for many of us. A friend, eight months pregnant, mentioned her plan to return to work a month after her baby was born. At my look of dark dismay, she gave a helpless gesture: "I know myself well enough to know I would go batty if I stayed home and did nothing." With a new baby, nothing to do! When you have a job, you are spared, by and large, the anxiety of figuring out how to structure your day. More little tasks usually fall across your desk than time to do them in. That's very comfortable. We tend not to trouble ourselves over the *ultimate* importance of these tasks; it's just a job, after all. If you dig in your heels at home, though, and refuse this rather easy out, you are truly thrown back on your own inner resources. (No small matter, considering how little help we've had in *developing* those inner resources.) But if you can hold out and look around you at your home, neighborhood, and community, you will see a host of challenges, very real problems that are crying out for creative attention and hard work to solve. By foregoing the temptation to feather your own nest, you free yourself to tackle them. No paycheck comes at the end of

the month, and no promotion: the incentive here is much less obvious, and much more worthy of you as a human being.

What about isolation? For many women, a job in an office or store means the relief of human contact and nothing more. They'd work for almost nothing—and do. The loneliness of the typical suburban family is profound. No simple problem, it has to do with deep-rooted inadequacies in our present life style, and especially with our astonishing mobility. A new home every seven years is the national average: make the move or lose the promotion. No wonder so little effort is made to meet our neighbors: it's much easier just to get a job. Through constant daily exposure, we can get to know our fellow workers very quickly. Of course, they aren't our neighbors, or the mothers of our children's friends, or the wives of our husbands' co-workers, but they're better than nothing. The pattern that results is well known: strangers to our neighborhood, we have to drive considerable distances to see our friends, and separately, in different directions. The idea of the whole family visiting another whole family seems to have disappeared with bronzed baby shoes.

This state of affairs is a clear threat to any kind of warmth or interdependence on the family or community level. We only prolong it when we knuckle under. The real cure for loneliness is not to "glom" on to other folks just for the sake of glomming, as we do in so many of our pursuits. Instead, suppose we were to commit ourselves to building up a *neighborhood* where we live: a kind of village, where lives overlap and intermingle in a rich and productive way? What greater challenge to our creativity? Loneliness comes whenever we dwell on ourselves, and it leaves immediately once we start working for the welfare of others, beginning with those immediately around us.

I may seem to have come a ways from that first-stated intention: to prove that American women have the key to the food and resource crisis. But look—see how it all fits together. A neighborhood that meets its needs cooperatively takes a much smaller bite out of world resources. Car pools form naturally; a commu-

nal garden springs up. Joint wholesale food purchasing comes easy; families may even find they can live under one roof. One lawnmower, one Rototiller, one sailboat does for a whole block. The barter system can flourish: fresh-baked muffins for minor car repairs, knitting lessons from the elderly lady down the block in exchange for a lift to the grocery store. (So you already know how to knit—she needs the *ride*, and your kids can use a nearby grandma!) Outgrown clothing gets passed around among the children until it's threadbare, and gradually, in the evening, people can even be seen out-of-doors, visiting with one another as they did twenty or thirty years ago before television locked us up in our separate houses like so many Sleeping Beauties.

Judging from our experience, women are the people who can best accomplish these changes, by bringing warmth, self-sufficiency, and interdependence to our homes and communities. I am *not* insisting that women should not take jobs. The nurturant impulse, the eye for the good of all, may have its most obvious place in a domestic setting, but it is a blessing to hospitals, offices, and classrooms as well. No, I would never go on record as saying "a woman's place is in the home." But to my mind, the most effective front for social change, the critical point where our efforts will count the most, is not in business or professions, which tackle life's problems from above, from outside, but in the home and community, where the problems *start*. Any woman about to take a job should think carefully about the pressures compelling her choice and decide which are legitimate and which questionable. She should consider what her home and family and neighborhood stand to lose—and she should never underestimate her own worth.

