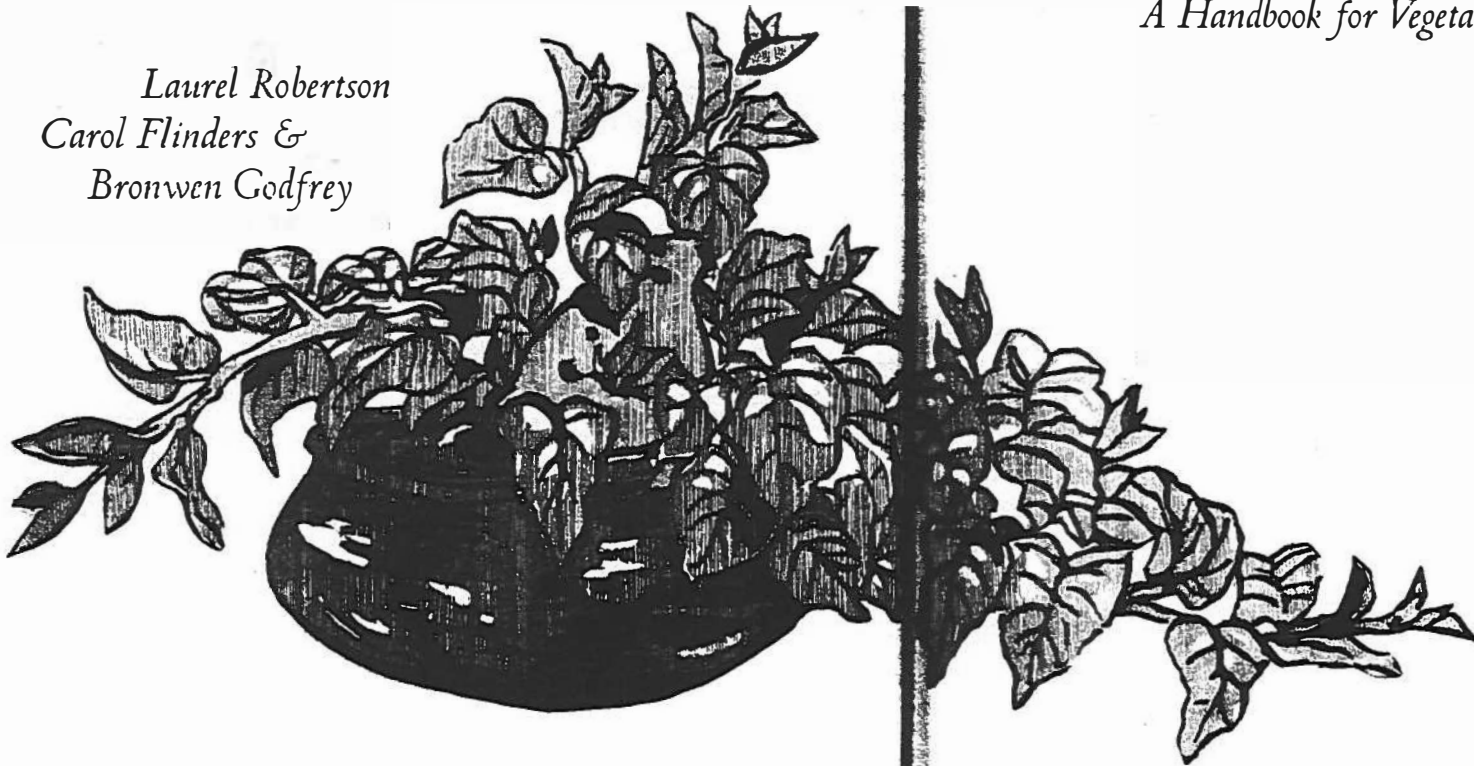


LAUREL'S KITCHEN

A Handbook for Vegetarian Cookery & Nutrition

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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 anti-war 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 appeal 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.

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

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

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 short-change my growing children. Here our friend Stuart, a bio-physicist 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.

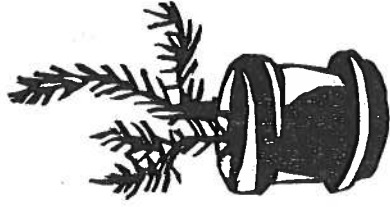
"Protein complementarity" is the subject of the fascinating book *Diet for a Small Planet* by Frances Moore Lappé, published in 1971, which describes the ecological implications of relying on meat as our chief source of protein. The picture is staggering. Presently, in the U.S., we feed most of our grains 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 shirt-waist 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 calimyna 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 store shelf, 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 cookbooks 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 trying 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.

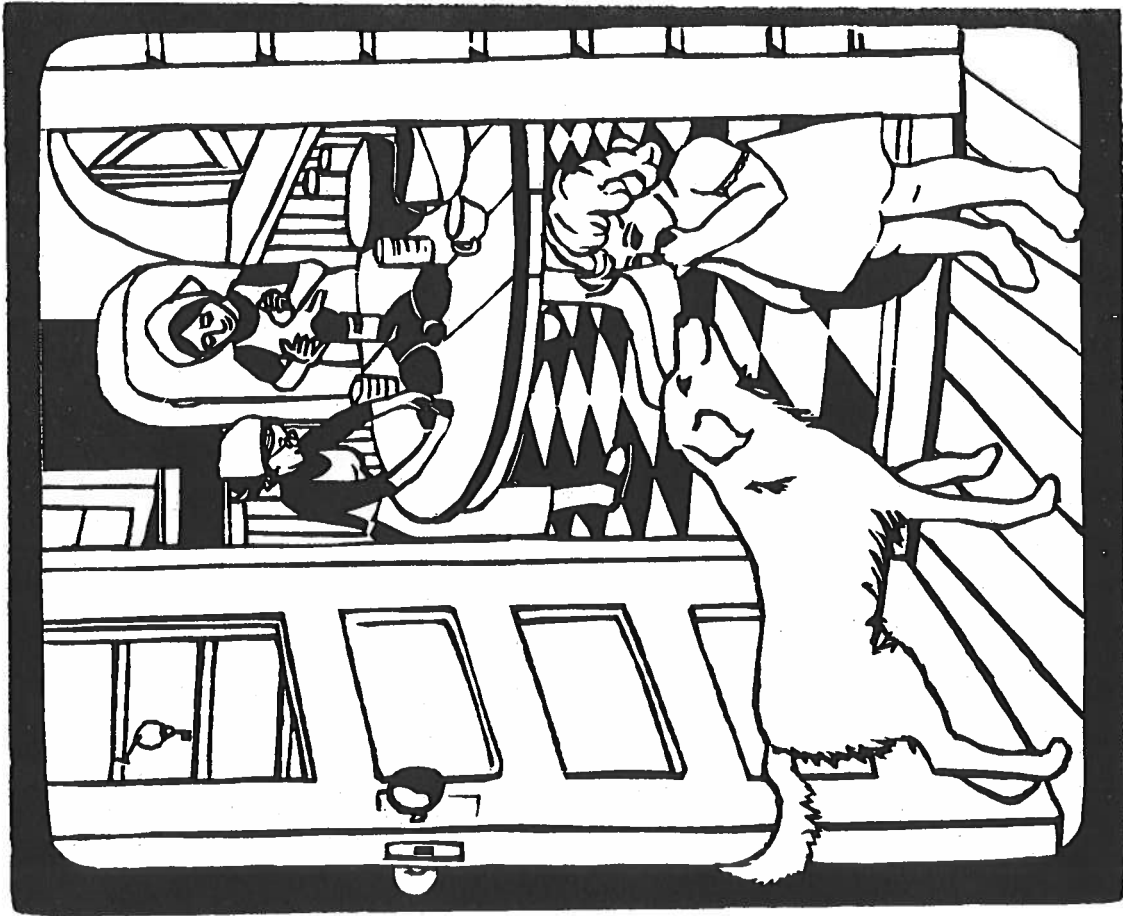
But Laurel was in what Ed calls one of her "First Amendment moods," when nothing short of a billyclub will move her. Until I tackled breadmaking, she insisted, I was just playing at becoming a good cook: the only way I could find out how easy it was to try it. Before I knew what was happening I found 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 beasts," 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 yeasts. Do you think you could cool it off first?"

A protest was on my lips—after all, we were going to *bake* the blessed yeasts 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 yeasts. 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-spiked 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