



# THE INQUISITIVE EATER

## NEW SCHOOL FOOD

Fiction

Non-Fiction

Poetry

Think Tank

Reviews

Visual Art

You are here: Home › Non-Fiction › Prose › 'Swedish in a Southern Drawl' by Rachel L. Martin

February 3, 2015 | 0 Comments

## 'Swedish in a Southern Drawl' by Rachel L. Martin



source

### Swedish in a Southern Drawl

by Rachel L. Martin

Fruktsoppa:

Dump dried fruit into a large soup pot. Especially recommended are: prunes, apples, apricots, raisins (both brown and golden) and currants. If I'm eating with you, don't use dates. Add cinnamon sticks, allspice, nutmeg and cloves. You may also add orange slices, peels intact.

Pour in an apple-cranberry cocktail diluted with water. The liquid needs to cover the fruit. You could add a generous dosing of glögg, but my Swedish relatives were Pilgrim Holiness. The Demon Alcohol did not belong at any table, especially not at the Christmas Eve celebration.

Boil it until the fruit is softened and swollen, richened with a dark spiciness. Be careful not to eat too much. This dish

Search...

FOLLOW US!

By RSS, Twitter or Facebook



TWITTER UPDATES

Follow @InquisitiveEat on Twitter

Don't think the fish is salted and smothered in a dark spread; the children had to eat too much. The chef punishes gluttony.

---

We never ate like Tennesseans, but on Christmas Eve, my food became unrecognizable to my friends. That was when Grandma took over and we became Swedish. But it's been almost fifteen years since her death, and my sister has in-laws she needs to visit. Now, we cook Swedish every other year, the alternate holidays when it's our turn to have Ruth.

This will be one of the quiet years. A few weeks ahead, Momma will suggest that we skip our Swedish feast. On Christmas Eve, we will go to the local steak house. We will sit there, surrounded by other families who have also fled their kitchens and eat prime rib or lamb chops before heading to midnight mass. We will pretend it is as good as the good-old-days.

---

Loksill, Lutefisk and Inlagd Sill:

So many things can happen to herring to make it live forever in a can—curing it in lye before reconstituting it in cream; drowning it in oil; pickling it with onions.

The ancestors did all that so they'd live through the long, cold winters, but this is the age of refrigeration and transcontinental food networks. Maybe Momma will forget to stock up.

If she remembers, double check the hardtack stock. You need enough wheels of crackers so you can arrange tiny pieces of herring across the bread.

---

I stole Momma's family slides out of the garage. I was a graduate student in history. I decided it was professional failure to leave them behind, so I stacked them in my rolling overnight bag and hid them in the trunk of my car.

That fall, I watched PBS and scanned the images to my Macbook. There vacation shots from the early 1960s in which my mom and her two sisters posed like pinup girls in their structured one-piece swimsuits and bouffant hair. There were annual Christmas photos, a flip book of the girls maturing from fat-faced toddlers to gangly adolescents to sophisticated young ladies. There was also an envelope of photographs. In some of these, Grandma's in her mid-20s, about to meet Grandpa. She's a pretty woman, with wary eyes and her hair braided around her head.

Her parents were farmers in Sweden, so when they immigrated, they moved to the mountains of Pennsylvania. Grandma was happiest roaming the woods, gathering berries and running from bears. Her parents only spoke Swedish. She first heard English at school, where she was punished every time she spoke her native language. She dropped out after the eighth grade.

Ruthie's kids call my mother *Mormor*, which is Swedish for Grandmother. Grandma would be disappointed by this. She didn't want us to speak Swedish. Even her favorite hymn became "Children of the Heavenly Father" when she sang to us. The only remnants of Swedish in our speech is in how Mom and aunts say words such as *sorry*.

I've often wondered what would have happened if Grandma had gone to school today and entered a modern ESL program. Who would she have become? Would I know how to say more than, "Ja, god Jul"?

---

My mother is on a continual quest for lingonberries. One year, she ordered them frozen from Ikea. They were jammy and sweet, lacking the tart, fresh bite she loves. Another time, she bought them canned from a Swedish-owned store in New Jersey. At least then, she knew they would be preserves.

There is a rumor that somewhere in Chicago, near where Mom grew up, you can get lingonberries freshly frozen, not preserved. But you need an introduction to the supplier, a mutual friend, someone who will tell the woman with the berries that you're ok. Then she'll lead you into her basement and pull bags of fruit out of her freezer.

---

Grandma was the youngest of thirteen children. They had a system for leaving the farm: the oldest ones moved to Chicago and started careers. Eventually, only Grandma was left on the farm.

When they met, Grandpa was engaged to marry the daughter of a doctor in Chicago. He elected instead to marry Grandma, the undereducated daughter of an impoverished farming family. Was it true love or true rebellion? My mom and her sisters disagree.

They moved to Chicago. He became a preacher. A few years later, he lost his pulpit. No one in the family knows why.

Grandma had a simple faith: Jesus was all she needed. I've found one poem she wrote:

"Ye are complete in Him," —

Mable Norman

Ye are Complete in Him

+ He in you;

And what, O. Christian,

Then have you to do.

Just yield yourself to Him,

Let Him control—

And day by day He'll fill

And flood your soul.

The other weary ones,

still thirsting yet,

Will find, in meeting you,

they Christ have met,

and drink abundantly

from Him, through you,

this is, than Christian, all

you have to do; Thank God

for such a privilege divine

that such a life of blessing can be thine.

This faith of Grandma's was never going to sustain Grandpa. When he needed to think, he retreated to the bathroom. There he would scrawl his thoughts across rolls of toilet paper in biblical Hebrew and Greek, a collection of modern scrolls no one in the family can decipher.

Grandpa died when I was three. Grandma lived with us for the next seventeen years, the last survivor of her siblings and exile from the farm she loved. Two years ago, my mom established contact with her family in Sweden. We have cousins living twenty miles away.

---

Krup Kakar:

First, divide a bag of white potatoes. Boil half of them. Do this step early in the day. If you wait until the last minute, you'll burn your fingers.

Next, chop a package of bacon. Yes, while it is raw. No, it's not easy. Be sure to use a serrated knife and frozen bacon. Actually, make Ruthie do this part.

While Ruthie's handling the bacon, finely chop a couple of onions. Sauté them in a large, flat-bottomed pan with ground allspice, cloves, salt and pepper. Add the bacon and cook some of the fat off. The great-grandmothers made krups with raw homemade ham sausage, but the recipe's lost to time. Plus, we know about trichinosis.

Cool the boiled potatoes and the bacon with onions. Call the men into the kitchen. Let them think they are needed to

Cook the boiled potatoes and the bacon with onions. Cut the meat into the kitchen. Let them think they are needed to peel and grate the raw potatoes while the women process the soft, cooked ones.

Drain the grated raw potatoes in a colander, pressing out all the excess liquid you can. Don't be alarmed when they turn an unhealthy pink. They will be to potato-white when they are cooked.

Put two large soup pots on the stove. Fill them with about three inches of water. Add salt. Turn on the heat and cover them. They need to be just barely boiling. If you have more than one or two bubbles a minute, the krups will disintegrate.

Using your hands, mix potatoes with several eggs and a handful of flour. Check with your mother. She's the one who remembers the way Grandma said it should feel.

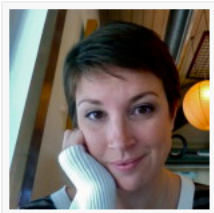
This is a good time to start praying.

The krup makers scoop a handful of the potato mixture and hollow it out in the palms of their left hands. Next, comes a generous pinch of the bacon and onion fry up, placed in the center of their palms. Seal the potatoes around it. Be sure no bacon or onions poke out the side. If the mixture sticks to their hands, they should dip their hands in cold water.

Hand the perfectly-formed dumpling the size of a tennis ball to a pot-minder, who gently places it in the water using the slotted spoon. Continue this process until there are no more potatoes. There should still be some bacon and onions. Cover the pots with their lids.

The krups will raise the water level enough that the dumplings are covered. They will rest on the bottom. When they float, they are finished.

Sauté the leftover bacon with a milk roux to make gravy, and keep praying. After 30 minutes of boiling the dumplings, you will either have cooked krups or a disgusting soup. If the krups survived, put one on your plate, split it, add butter and gravy. As you eat, reminisce about Grandma, who left the house when Mom cooked with garlic but who added hot sauce to her Christmas Eve krups.



*Rachel L. Martin, Ph.D., is a historian and memory scholar. She uses foodways, oral history interviews and material culture to better understand the often unwritten experiences of women and minorities in America. She is working on Out of the Silence, a book about the desegregation crisis in Clinton, Tennessee. Follow her on Twitter at @R\_LMartin.*

Share this:



## Follow us!

By RSS, Twitter or Facebook



← Video: Craft Brewers Strike Back At Budweiser

No comments yet.

Leave a Reply

Name (Required)

Mail (will not be published) (Required)

Website

**Submit Comment**

- Notify me of follow-up comments by email.
- Notify me of new posts by email.

