

A Summer in Newfoundland: Living Somewhat Locally

June

When I leave Montreal and its early summer days of salads and light rosés to come to the island, I set my culinary season back. Summer doesn't reach the southern shore of Newfoundland until well into July, so I can happily return to slow braising and pots of soup. We go straight from the airport to Lester's Farm Market for produce that evokes fall more than early summer: onions, carrots, the best potatoes, big yellow turnips, inevitably cabbage, and, happily, early turnip greens, better than spinach and much more desirable than kale. The supermarkets are stocked with all the produce of the great global market, so peppers, okra, slightly bedraggled romaine, boxes of American blueberries and strawberries, Mexican (and sometimes Quebec) tomatoes, greenhouse cucumbers, apples, peaches, pears, and plums are all available. This has not always been so. When we first lived in St. John's in the 1970s, our local corner market of beloved memory—Murphy's Store at Rawlins Cross—had a year-round selection of root vegetables, as well as cabbage, potatoes, and brussels sprouts, hung by their stalks in the backroom. The local produce was supplemented by cellophane-wrapped head lettuce, broccoli, “five-point” apples (aging Red Delicious), small oranges, and “cello” tomatoes in a plastic tray—though given their durability, they probably did not require this added protection. But that was then, and St. John's now has not only a Costco and a Walmart but also a new consciousness of local foods, and in addition to Lester's Farm, there is a farmers' market with earnest purveyors of backyard chickens and their eggs, grass-fed lambs, goat's milk, and local cheese and preserves.

Of course, there is glorious fresh fish, but what was once a staple is now a rarity. We can occasionally enjoy a feed of fish (that would be cod, since no other fish, with the exception of salmon and trout, is actually deemed to be worthy of the name), when the meager local catch is sold from the back

of a truck along the road. The tale of the northern cod is a bellwether for our relationships with those wild things on whom we depend. Since the early 1600s, people had fished the shoals of the Grand Banks, where they claimed the cod ran so thick you could walk on their backs from boat to boat. Returning to the deep harbors of the southern shore, people split, salted, and dried the catch, “making fish” for export. Looking from my window now, I can see the bed of rough gray rocks back of the foreshore, reminders of the flakes built above them, the wooden platforms where the fish dried in the sun. Turning and curing the fish in the short Newfoundland summer was the work of women and children. When the fishery changed from salt to frozen in the mid-twentieth century, the women left the flakes for the filleting tables in the fish plants, and the men still went to sea. By the 1970s, giant factory freezer trawlers were harvesting more fish than ever, but what was once considered an inexhaustible stock was losing the ability to replenish itself. Twenty years later, the waters that used to teem with cod were almost empty. In July 1992, too late, the Canadian government declared a moratorium on the northern cod fishery. That summer, thirty thousand people lost their jobs and the only life they knew. Each year, those whose lives had depended on the fish still hope for good news, but more than a quarter century after the boats were pulled up and the plants closed, the great schools of cod have not returned.

When we lived in St. John's before the moratorium, we would linger by the wharfs in Petty Harbour where the boats landed their catch, and buy fish just out of the water. Now, to acquire freshly caught fish, you have to know someone, or catch your own. We have had little luck fishing for salmon or the pink-fleshed trout, but my husband has been assiduously cultivating our local lobsterman, and he manages to produce a feed of lobster every June. Depending on your tastes, and on whether you can find them before they are exported, you may dine on huge hand-gathered scallops,



FIGURE 1: *Harbor view.*

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mussels, crab, shrimp, sea urchin, squid, and the usual fishy suspects—halibut, flounder, even tuna if you are lucky. It used to be that June was capelin month and on the nights of the full moon the little silvery fish would roll up on the gravelly beaches, laying their eggs and then expiring. Freshly dead or still flopping, they were quickly gathered up in nets and buckets by young and old, either for a feed of fresh capelin (sometimes right on the beach), or to be dried, smoked, or spread on the gardens along with kelp, as fertilizer. We have spread kelp on our gardens, but the capelin roll later and don't come so often to their old haunts. The water is warmer, the currents shift, and some years the capelin don't come at all.

When I arrive on the southern shore of the Avalon in late June, I go first to the sunny south side of the house, what local residents call the weather side, to see what still stands in the herb garden after the winter gales. As always, the chives are strongly upright, with showy purple flowers and new little chives creeping out from the mother plant,

threatening the spindly lavender that just managed to hold on, gnarled and woody like one of the windblown junipers. The robust oregano is marching bravely forward to engulf another slightly more vigorous lavender, also a winter survivor. Last summer's sage and thyme are only sticks. This year in St. John's I bought some fragile looking basil, locally cultivated parsley, rosemary, sage and thyme, plus a random selection of tomato plants, a zucchini, and a cucumber. The basil—a straggling locally grown organic plant—lasted three days; the weather was against it. Cool, barely hitting 10 degrees C, windy, foggy, with lashings of rain. Luckily, I have found that fresh oregano will substitute for almost anything, and the resilient rosemary, thyme, and sage will thrive. There is also garlic from cloves planted last year, but I won't harvest that till late summer, making do in the meantime with little imported bulbs until the local stuff comes to market.

In June, I not only shift seasons but also eras. My shelf of cookbooks harks back to the postwar generation. When we bought the house at the beginning of this century, I brought

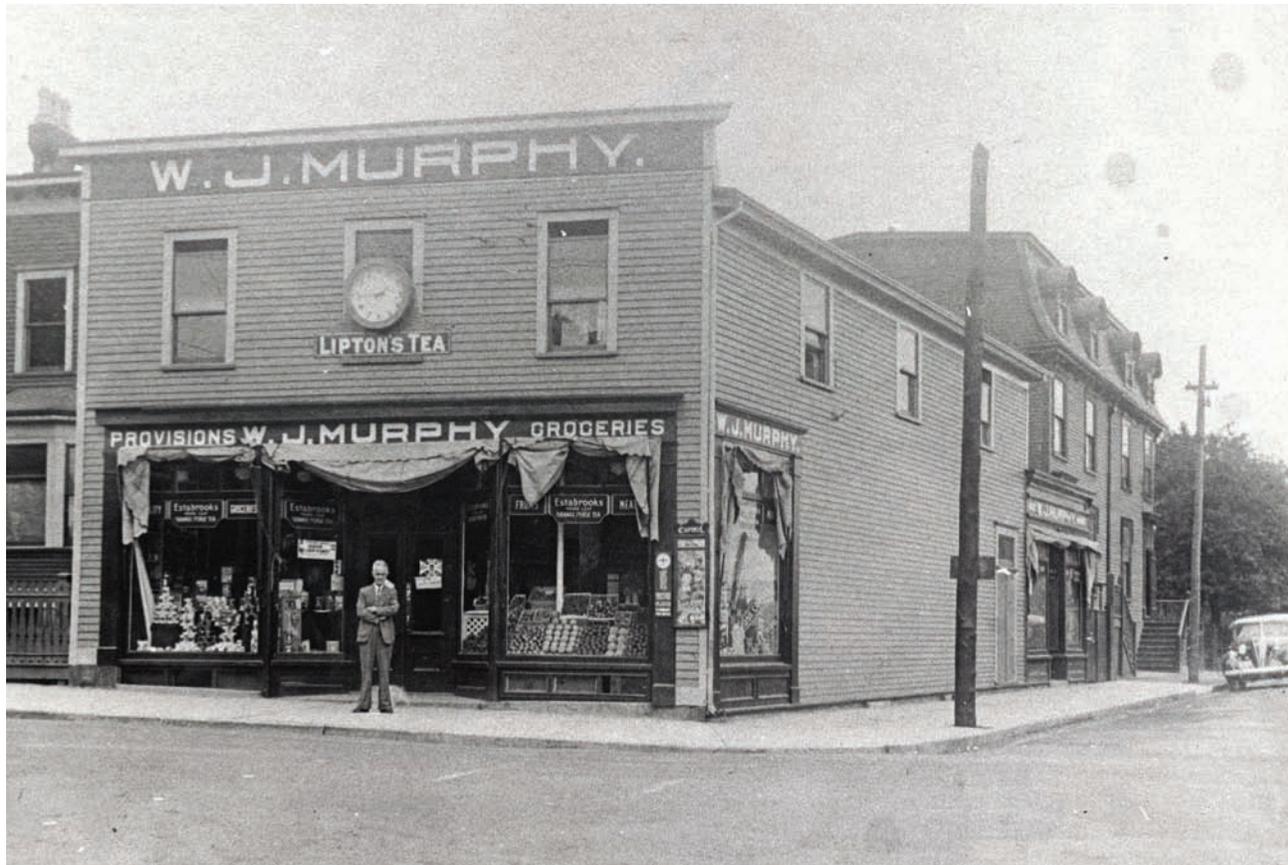


FIGURE 2: Mr. Murphy's Grocery Store at Rawlins Cross, St. John's, Newfoundland, pre-1950.

COURTESY OF MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND, ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

my mother's 1950 *Betty Crocker's*, with its missing spine and spattered pages stuck together on favorite recipes. Each year it takes on a few more drips of batter and a little more flour and mildew. It smells like home by the sea. This is the edition that could still call itself a cookbook of regional American cuisine, with three different recipes for cornbread (I like the Arkansas version, perfect for gluten-free friends), and the scratch cake recipes that all come in two sizes, proportioned for regular or "small families." This was the cookbook my mother used as a young homemaker after the war, and she ticked off the recipes she liked best, though I suspect she served some of them only on fancy occasions, as I don't remember her making fussy little dessert squares and foreign-sounding dishes like Chocolate Vienna Torte or Italian Eggplant. I do remember her wonderful apple and blueberry pies, and her training in making a pie crust stands me in good stead here, where pie seems a natural end to any meal. Next to Betty Crocker leans Elizabeth David, whom I cannot but help picture with a cigarette and a glass of wine stirring a pot while Betty looks on, disapprovingly sipping her "mock-tail." Elizabeth David was also a postwar cook, but of

a different order. Her regions were France with its *daubes*, *cas-soulets*, *vichyssoises*, and *tartes à l'oignon*, and the Mediterranean, with lemons, olive oils, *pilafs*, *risottos*, *bouilla-baisses*, and recipes for *baccalà*.

Surprisingly the ladies get along very well with the local women who put together the exceptional *Cookin' Up a Scoff*. Coil-bound with covers decorated in the Newfoundland tartan, the two volumes of *Scoff* (*scoff* is "supper" in Newfoundland) are chock-full of recipes that take me back to my grandmother's kitchen. On Saturday, if I were good, I would be allowed to make baking powder biscuits at the kitchen table, to be served with orange cheese and strawberry jam and strong tea that brewed on the back of the stove, leavened with a splash of Carnation milk, always put in the cup first. I love the recipes for blueberry cake with molasses, boiled raisin cake, date squares (my grandmother called this "matrimonial cake"), rhubarb muffins, and dark, dark gingerbread. *Scoff*, both volumes, is my go-to cookbook when I have local foods like turnip greens, moose, and salt cod. I start there and then think what Elizabeth might have done with them.

Necessity drove me to expand my range. If we wanted to eat a more varied menu in 1970s St. John's, I realized I would have to learn skills and recipes to take me beyond lasagna. My mother had given me the *Larousse Treasury of Country Cooking*, perhaps in compensation for having raised me on Betty's pseudo-goulishes and "foreign" casseroles. With the *Treasury* for inspiration, I made *bouillabaisse* and sole and mussel stew, *pfannkuchen* with apples, *crème brûlée*, and rhubarb fool. Like a thrifty French cook, I learned to use turnip in everything, from soup to soufflé. After I discovered Elizabeth's *French Country Cooking* and *Mediterranean Cooking*, which I literally slavered over, I began to think more about local foods and traditional methods. So many of the great dishes begin simply, with a little fat, a handful of onions, meat or fish, a few herbs, and a glass of wine. Even desserts, the bane of the imprecise cook, could be spun out of eggs and sugar, or coaxed from butter, flour, and an apple. Cured meats, salt fish, dried beans, rice, and lentils were always at hand, and their variations followed the seasons, from the earliest of spring greens to the ripest of summer tomatoes and the earthiest of root vegetables. Making do with what you have is a virtue in many circumstances, not least for a cook on the southern shore of Newfoundland.

So what do I cook in June? Behind the houses along the shore, you can see turnips sprouting out of big plastic salt-beef buckets full of dirt. In the store, the greens come in kitchen-catcher-size bags, and like all greens boil down to nothing, but

I still get three feeds from a bag. Pork is a natural with greens, and here on the shores of the cold North Atlantic, you can start with local slab bacon cut into squares, rendered in a bit of butter or even olive oil, now wonderfully available at our local "groc and conf" (grocery and confectionary in Newfoundland), a few chopped onions sautéed till soft, and then handfuls of cleaned greens, stirred into the fat then steamed in a covered pot, and served with baked fresh cod. You can also combine the greens with salt cod in a *caldo verde* made with the local sweet-fleshed potatoes, or just steam them like spinach and finish with butter and lemon juice. Tomatoes still come in plastic packs but now they are hydroponically raised on the shores of the St. Lawrence and retain some memory of tomato beneath their tough red skins. You can buy them at the local store, along with big winter carrots, onions, a clove of garlic, squares of slab bacon, and the impossibly white cubed fatback, always available to be rendered into crispy scrunchions. Add a piece of top rump from Halliday's, a meat market that has stood on the same corner in St. John's for over a hundred years, plus a few garden herbs and a glass of red wine, and you can make a *daube* that perfumes the house as it cooks and cooks and cooks. One year, I applied the same method to a huge chunk of frozen moose haunch supplied by our neighbor. Moose has a reputation as a tough, gamey meat, but thawed, marinated in an entire bottle of wine, then cooked slowly with salt pork, carrots, onions, garlic, and parsley, it was a success. That was lucky, since we ate moose *en daube*, reheated moose slices, cold moose sandwiches, and moose gravy for a week.



FIGURE 3: *Capelin on the beach.*

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While June on the mainland is the month for strawberry socials, here we revel in rhubarb. There are old plants buried in the fields above the house, and not until they start waving the white spume of their flower heads above the long grass do we remember where they are. The stalks are thick and green, striped with red, and they make a wonderful rhubarb relish. The recipe comes from *Scoff*—cut up rhubarb and leave it overnight with a bit of salt, then drain; add onions, brown sugar, vinegar, and cinnamon, mace, and cloves (though since I only have cinnamon, allspice, and nutmeg in my cupboard, I make substitutions); and boil for 30 minutes. It is sweet, sour, chutney-like, and fragrant. The variety of “strawberry rhubarb” we planted close to the house seems much more delicate, perhaps lavished with too much care and manure. But there is enough for crisps and pies and stewed rhubarb, and some years the last of the rhubarb lingers until the first of the strawberries redden in mid-July, and then it’s strawberry-rhubarb pie and jars of jam.

July

July should bring sweeter weather, but not always. There have been frost warnings on July 1, Memorial Day here, when Newfoundland mourns its long-ago dead at Beaumont Hamel. But the wind is more often from the west and the skies less gray, though fog still sidles up the bay in the mornings and sometimes lingers all day. The east wind brings the most unsettled weather, but the south wind, which should be gentle, bends the willow sideways. Once, during a really bad blow in June, it stripped the flowers right off the currant bushes. Hard-scrabble plants, low to the ground with lots of spreading roots, do well. Lester’s Market is now full of lettuces—hard, dark romaines and enormous red leaf lettuces—plus spring onions and the first of the new red potatoes. Newfoundland was the first place I ever saw potatoes of any color other than white. There are also kale and Swiss chard with ruby red stems. We seed radishes in June in our raised bed and by now the rows are sprightly and green but the roots minute. More sun, more time.

There is something about this not-quite-summer that makes me want to bake. The heat from the oven warms the kitchen, and since freshly baked goods are in short supply in our local store, the results are satisfying. Sometimes the store has homemade three-bun loaves from a baker in the next community, but more often than not, we buy our bread in St. John’s. Forty years ago, when we first moved there, bread seemed to come only in supermarket white. On trips back to the mainland, we would pack suitcases with loaves of Rideau Bakery dark rye from Ottawa’s best bakery, and haul them back. We eventually learned how to make our

own bread from earnest healthy cookbooks that counseled whole grains and sourdough starters. I would pound and knead and make indifferent but nourishing loaves. Despite or perhaps because of our stolid whole-grain productions, we longed for baguettes, and our only recourse was the strange Napoli Pizza on Duckworth Street. If you were lucky, on Saturday the owner would make thin salty Italian loaves, sold alongside his pizzas.

Today St. John’s is blessed with wonderful bread. We can shop at The Rocket, a bakery-café that grew from the roots of Auntie Crae’s specialty food store, a legend in its own time, but now sadly defunct. At the Rocket, happily, you can buy excellent sourdough, rye, cranberry and dark chocolate (which is delicious), whole-wheat sandwich loaves, and traditional Newfoundland dinner rolls, twelve to a square, or raisin buns in units of six. When the owners are not on holiday, which unfortunately often coincides with our summer stay, we also frequent the Georgetown Bakery, which sells a crusty Belge loaf, *pain au chocolat*, and bagels. Georgetown also suffered a fire one summer, which seems to be endemic to bakeries. Our local southern shore bakery, with its satisfying home-style loaves, doubled-humped and shiny-topped, flats of raisin buns, dinner rolls, and lassy bread, burned down a number of years ago, not to be rebuilt.

I also delight in quick breads, the baking powder shortcut to risen bread, and have made them since I was a child. They are delicious, for all that they are dense, sometimes dry and crumbly or too sweet. Bananas, once a luxury at Mr. Murphy’s, are now commonplace. Although they come green to the local store, I wait for them to soften and spot, and then make banana bread stuffed with raisins and nuts. Dates, the food of desert wayfarers, also cross oceans, and date and nut loaf is a Newfoundland staple, sliced thin with butter or plain (though it is not my favorite—too sweet and chewy). I am fond of whole-wheat quick breads, darkened with brown sugar, but best of all, scones and tea biscuits. These are the baking powder biscuits of the afternoons with my grandmother, shortening crumbled into flour with your fingers, then milk, sweet or sour, sometimes eggs, stirred just enough to hold together, then kneaded a few times in the bowl, turned out onto a floured board (or the kitchen counter), patted down with your fingers, cut into rounds with a juice glass, and baked at high heat. The flat circles puff up, and when pulled apart, fresh from the oven, they steam, the butter melts, and the jam adds the sweet you have been missing. Some mix in currants or shredded cheese, but I am a purist, and the slightly chalky baking powder taste and melting butter satisfy my need for the staff of life, plus a bit more.

Finally the strawberries are ripening in the overgrown beds. Each morning, I walk through the wet grass in my flip-flops, too lazy to put on shoes, and harvest the fruit before the slugs and the carpenters (“pill bugs” on the mainland) take their share. Ripe strawberries actually glow, and I am always astounded at the shimmer of the berries half hidden among the leaves and thick grass in our untidy rows. The long, cool, sometimes foggy days mean we can eat strawberries every morning from mid-July to mid-August, and make jam, strawberry pie, and strawberry shortcake. I look to Betty for advice on the American classic. Her shortcakes are short with butter and not too sweet. I sugar the berries and spoon them on the steaming cakes with lashings of Fussell’s Thick Cream, a particular Newfoundland commodity, common here and rare in the wider world, now rebranded as tinned cream by Nestlé. In 2010, a Fussell’s shortage made national news, and I understand why. As someone who grew up with evaporated milk in her tea, there is something odd and delicious about tinned cream. It is reminiscent of *dulce de leche* without being sweet, and spooned on berries, it is lovely. Better, in fact, than the heavily processed “whipping cream” in its waxed carton or “redi to serve” in a spray can.

But life is not all breakfast, regrettably, and even in July there are still times when thick fog demands hot comfort food. Our neighbors sometimes bring filets of fresh cod they catch in the family fishery, almost the only time when residents are allowed to take their boats to the water and fish. When we first came to Newfoundland and bought fish on the wharf, we would watch as it was split and cleaned in front of us. Sometimes, the splitters would throw in a mackerel, a great treat cleaned, splayed, and broiled the day it is caught. I am still very partial to smoked mackerel, which we buy in the local stores and mash into fish paste, a welcome surprise to all who taste it. Again, it was Elizabeth David who introduced me to fish paste, quintessentially English, and such a simple thing—butter, smoked fish stripped of bone and skin (and sometimes soaked in boiling water to soften), a sprinkle of lemon juice, some cayenne if you are inclined, and there you are. In Montreal, I use anchovies and kippers and make the paste in a Cuisinart; here, I mash the soft mackerel in a bowl with a fork. Any road, it is always very, very good. Once, at a thrift store, I found a small, dark green ceramic pot, the lid adorned with a leaping salmon. Eventually the lid chipped and the pot broke, and I still regret the loss of that perfect vessel for buttery, rosy smoked salmon paste.

Despite success with smoked fish, I am less confident with the fresh variety. I abide by James Beard and the Canadian method he espoused, but he obviously had a defter touch. My fish may taste fine, but it comes to the plate in broken

pieces, adorned with scrapings from the pan too delicious to throw out. Much more successful are the dishes I make with the flavorful and more robust salted fish. I buy high-quality salt cod loins, and leave the great white planks of heavily salted fish with its spotted gray skin still attached for hardier kitchens. I religiously water the cod for at least two days, changing the water morning and night, if not more often, and then drain the softened flesh, flour it, fry it in olive oil, and then stew it in a good tomato sauce, just as Elizabeth recommends for *baccalà alla Livornese*. (The *baccalà* of Mediterranean kitchens very likely originated in Newfoundland, the great salt fish emporium of the Atlantic.) Stewed salt cod is our Christmas Eve dish, and a most successful company dish, even here on the southern shore. Very few still cook with salt cod, and if they do, it is fish cakes, fish and brewis (a whole other story), or cod au gratin. I have made *bagna cauda*, and poached salt cod in milk, and mashed it for *caldo verde*. There is an excellent cookbook devoted to salt cod by a local author, Edward Jones, with recipes for curries, salads, soups, and stews that highlight an antique flavor we have mostly forgotten.

Most of us have also forgotten salt pork, and that is another ingredient that is integral to the flavor of traditional dishes. In Newfoundland, scrunchions, rendered from fatback, are the standard accompaniment to pan-fried cod, but salt pork also underlies the rich flavors of more complex dishes, from beef to beans. Salt pork and pork rind are essential to a satisfying *daube*. When we lived in Toronto, finding salt pork seemed impossible until we finally found some in a supermarket in Mennonite country, north of the city. In Newfoundland, you can buy pickled riblets, slab bacon, and squares of fatback at the corner store. A good thing, since it would be difficult to make a *cassoulet* without it. *Cassoulet*, as one of our sons said, is simply a better take on pork and beans. Recipes can seem enormously complicated, and I am sorry, Julia Child, but while yours may be thoroughly researched and tested, it wins no more accolades than Elizabeth’s more straightforward version. *Cassoulet* is a wonderful dish to serve to a crowd, and the last time I made it for friends they practically licked the pot clean. All you need to accompany it is bread, salad, and wine, and it goes down a treat.

It used to be that coming up with salad was also a challenge, but we have now cultivated a more serious vegetable garden, after some serious work. The ground hardly looks like soil. It is larded with stones, large and small, and truly more gravel than earth. We built raised beds and filled them with bags and bags of compost, mulch, earth, and topsoil hauled from the local hardware store. I cheerfully bought several

packs of St. John's-based Gaze Seed Company Black Seeded Simpson Lettuce and Sparkler Radishes, guaranteed to grow in Newfoundland, just to try them out. Like the strawberries, they flourished, and we cannot pick the soft green lettuce fast enough. Before they became tough and prickly, we added radish leaves to our mix with the garden chives and oregano. I can now be profligate with my salads, whereas before I hoarded every leaf of the heads bought in St. John's. At the end of July, we sow three more rows of lettuce and two of radishes to see us through till August, when, with a little luck, the tomatoes may bear fruit.

August

It is harvest time on the mainland, but here we are still picking the fruits of early summer. In addition to our lettuce and radishes, Lester's offers bunches of shiny purple onions, kale, broccoli, young green cabbages, red and yellow beets, and best of all, field cucumbers—wonderful with salt and nothing else. Corn is in the fields and tomatoes are on the vines, but it will be late in the month before we taste them. Buying local on the southern shore means shopping at the groc and conf or the small supermarkets scattered in the larger communities along the coast. Sometimes we drive from one to another, on the hunt for rare deliveries of fresh celery, mushrooms, cucumbers, plastic packs of Ontario or Mexican tomatoes, and sweet peppers. Rarer still are fresh fruits, and as our strawberries begin to bear small, twisted berries, we are grateful for the bags of oranges, Nova Scotia apples, and the green hands of bananas. Strangely they all seem sweeter, firmer, and less bruised. Are fruits handled with more care here, a legacy from times when these were scarce commodities?

We used to buy our eggs down the road, but old Mr. H. has passed on and his children didn't keep the chickens. Mr. H.'s eggs were a staple of our "company" food in our first years on the shore, before we had a kitchen. Our stove then was a countertop oven, and I could just fit a pie plate inside it, so lunch for friends was *quiche lorraine*, and onion or even potato *tarte* (thank you, Elizabeth David). For some years we drove down the shore for our eggs, to the town of Renew and a neat little farm by the harbor. One year, Farmer C. had a cow, and we would buy his homemade butter, bright yellow, with beads of milky water on the soft surface. This year he has a white goat and we buy her milk, and I have relearned how to make yogurt. When our children were little and I was deeply influenced by Frances Lappé and Rodale Whole Foods, I acquired an avocado-green yogurt maker. It was a simple device, a styrofoam-lined hard plastic cylinder with a tight-fitting lid. Heat the milk, add the culture, plo

your container in the yogurt maker, and by morning you had yogurt. The avocado-green maker is long gone, but the internet provides tips on making yogurt using a cooler filled with hot water. It worked a charm, and we ate thin goat's milk yogurt with our strawberries. I bought cheesecloth at the hardware store, found a lemon and a recipe on the web, and also tried my hand at cheese. It turned out dry and crumbly but distinctly goat-ish and, with a bit of yogurt blended in, made a passable spread. I tried to make ricotta from the whey, but it ran right through my cheesecloth. I think the milk of buffalos and dairy cows must be made of stronger stuff.

It is warm enough in August to think that we are finally in summer, and I have planned cold summer meals—slices of meatloaf with rhubarb relish, green salad, potato salad, and sliced tomatoes, golden with olive oil and dotted with fresh oregano and chives from the herb bed. The oregano is rampant with purple flowers abuzz with bees, and the chives are a great clump, more like grass than lily. We have pasta with Lester's broccoli, and frittatas loaded with goat cheese and purple onions. Roast chicken seems a natural and then chicken stock and risotto with mushrooms, and of course more salad. We barbecue, but do so sparingly for fear of burning the house down. We acquired a metal fire pit equipped with a grill several years ago. It stands on a platform of flat beach stones, next to the deck. It is always with trepidation that we light the starter-doused charcoal, and watch the flames shoot up, fanned by the ever-blowing wind. The fire roars and whips around, yellow flames flattening out in the stiff breeze then shooting up again. When we finally do have something resembling white-hot coals, the wind tears across them, and they crumble to ash. Luckily, we can eat steak rare and I cut the chicken for brochettes into small cubes. The same wind keeps the blackflies away and makes it possible to have lunch on the deck staring at the sea or, on sunny evenings, to sit with a glass of wine and watch the sun settle below the clear, fine line of the hills of the barrens across the harbor. But often the sun is too bright, the wind too strong or too cool to make dining out of doors over-frequent. No mind, the kitchen windows face the harbor and eating at the brown and white chrome set, part of the original furnishings of the house, means we don't have to anchor the napkins or the food.

In June it stays light until 10 p.m. and later, but come mid-August there is more than a hint of fall. It is noticeably cool when the sun goes down, and I am back to thinking of roasts and stews. Pork always strikes me as remarkably cheap. Once we could buy roasts and chops from the pig farm in St. Shotts, a small community a short drive over the



FIGURE 4: *The chrome set.*

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caribou barrens. (Some years, the caribou herd would block the road, while other years we would see only one or two, at great distance, tiny moving dots of pale brown against a huge sky.) We understand the farm succumbed to regulation and lack of market, but the meat was flavorful and tender. In the days when we lacked a kitchen, we would sear the pork chops at the table in an electric frying pan, then cook them slowly atop braised cabbage and onions, still a meal I make no matter where I cook, so ubiquitous are pork and cabbage. A small pork roast can be improved with marinating, according to Elizabeth, and she offers two suggestions, the first with white wine and herbs, a marinade of hours, and the second with a red wine marinade that transforms the flavor of farmyard pig to the earthier taste of wild boar, provided you leave it for four days. The first method produces a tasty, tender roast, but the red wine marinade is of a different order: dark, succulent, and moist. I lacked red wine and I lacked juniper berries, but I felt that Dubonnet would be an adequate substitute, along with the carrots, bay leaf, onions, garlic, the ever-present oregano and thyme. It was. Marinate the meat

for four days (I did put it in the fridge, but the kitchen is cool enough that I might well have left it on the counter as I am sure broad-shouldered, aproned French farmwives must have done). Drain the meat (reserving the marinade), wipe it dry, sear it in rendered fatback (I left the scrunchions in), then remove it from the pot. Sprinkle the fat left in the pot with flour, add the drained marinade, then a little stock, bring to the bubble, return the meat to the pot, cover, and place in a low oven to simmer away for a few hours. Celery is traditional with the dish, and the celery I bought at Lester's was so green, leafy, and tough that, braised, it was marvelous. Elizabeth suggests puréed potatoes alongside, but I had none of the recommended varieties that become silken with pounding, and so I stuck to boiled white potatoes, mashed by fork into the gravy on our plates.

There is a moment in the last days of August when summer reasserts itself, at least in the fields, and we can buy fresh corn, green beans, ripe tomatoes, field-grown cucumbers, and new potatoes. We can eat what I think must be the perfect summer meal of Newfoundland roast chicken, green salad from our own backyard, tiny new potatoes and sliced tomatoes from Lester's, and corn on the cob. I cannot remember ever seeing corn on the cob when we first lived in St. John's. We would long for it, and a trip to the mainland in summer meant looking for the farm stands and gorging on hot cobs with butter and salt. We still buy more at Lester's than we can eat in a sitting, and having read that every day off the stalk more sugar turns to starch, I boil all the cobs at once. We down as many as we can, and then I scrape niblets from the uneaten cobs into a bowl. As a child I thought niblets only came in cans, and it is satisfying to make your own. Some I freeze for soups and chili, but most become corn chowder. This must be an American recipe but I no longer know where I learned to render finely chopped bacon in butter, sauté diced onions and sweet red peppers, then stir a bit of flour into the fat, add water, or, since I have learned to appreciate so much the green fresh taste, the corn boiling water, and my homemade niblets. Milk to thin before serving, and voilà: a North American *chaudrée*. This is also the moment when I cannot resist the Niagara peaches. Peach pie is the other perfect summer food, followed closely by the two great, local, berry pies—raspberry and blueberry.

As far as I am concerned, there is no greater pleasure than picking berries on a sunny day on the Newfoundland barrens. There are raspberry bushes along most of the trails, and toward the end of the month there is at last enough ripe fruit to make picking worthwhile. Raspberry picking demands a certain athleticism; the berries are tiny but intense, and the



FIGURE 5: *Blueberries.*

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canes grow down into hollows or up on hillocks. Picking blueberries is more grunt work. There are blueberries everywhere in Newfoundland, but rarely do we find the easily plucked highbush variety. In some places the berries huddle close to the ground, mingled with low spreading juniper and black crowberries, or lost among the thick-leaved kalmia, all cowed by the prevailing winds. We have recently acquired a berry rake, but I prefer to pull the deep blue clusters off the bushes by hand. I am more selective than my husband and my pail contains fewer green berries and leaves, though it takes me longer to fill my white plastic pork riblets container.

The raspberry harvest will yield one pie, but blueberries come by the gallon. I can make numerous pies, plus blueberry cakes, for which *Scoff* has more than a few recipes. I have tried several different blueberry loaves and blueberry muffins, and I have made the very white blueberry cake with shortening, and the richer brown sugar blueberry spice cake with raisins, both sprinkled with granulated sugar that seems better than icing on these cakes. I have also made the blueberry molasses cake, a somewhat forgotten treat, dense, dark,

and delicious. We have blueberries in yogurt and blueberry pancakes, and you can just eat blueberries plain by the handful, but given the quantity we have managed to pick, the only solution is blueberry jam. Purity, the archetypal Newfoundland food company (source of hard bread, sweet bread, jam-jams, ginger snaps, milk lunch and lemon creams, as well as cream crackers and peppermint knobs) makes a very decent blueberry jam. It must be the easiest jam in the world. Berries, a bit of water and a splash of lemon juice, add sugar, boil till thick and put down in jars. I run out of preserving jars and scour the stores in three communities until I find the smallest size. Then clean, boil, and bottle. The smell is redolent of the spice box scent of the barrens with its balsam, juniper, and bog myrtles, and the color is so deeply purple it looks black in the jars. When you wash the pots, it stains the old porcelain sink with spots of navy blue.

The end of August has autumnal tones. The lettuce turns brown at the edges, and the strawberry leaves are curled and sere. But I am not yet ready to give up on culinary summer, though it becomes the summer of Mediterranean afternoons, at least as I imagine them, reading Elizabeth's descriptions of pilafs and polentas. There are artichokes and eggplants now at Lester's, and these were also unheard of in our first years in Newfoundland. We used to frequent a Greek restaurant in a small bedraggled shopping center in St. John's, and when I ordered *moussaka*, a dish I had tasted perhaps once before, I was surprised to find it made with potatoes, since I was pretty sure it was traditionally an eggplant bake. But potato is a virtuous tuber, and the substitution was delicious. Eggplant is for me the stuff of *ratatouille*, a dish I learned to make from a friend who had grown up in Jamaica. Though she is gone, I remember her standing at the stove stirring the pot with onions, chunks of unpeeled eggplant, peppers, zucchini, tomatoes, and garlic. That is essentially my *ratatouille*, though I add torn oregano leaves and tend to be heavy on the garlic. One year a friend sent us her homegrown elephant garlic bulbs, and we planted them just before we left for the mainland. The next year we could rejoice in homegrown garlic, though in subsequent years the gift has failed us, and the garlic we haul out in August consists of small, single, pungent bulbs.

The peppers are still coming into the market from Ontario or Quebec, but that might classify as local from our perspective. They are key to the lovely golden rice dishes that Elizabeth David recommends for lunch beneath the grape arbor—or, in our case, beneath the “sally trees,” as the wind-bent willows that circle our house are called. Start with

small cubes of smoky slab bacon rendered in olive oil, then purple red onions and peppers, and finally tomatoes, chunks of ham, chorizo, cooked (or not) chicken, and leave to stew together into a fragrant mass, then stir the rice in to absorb the golden liquid. Add boiling water, and as the rice begins to cook, artichoke hearts, garlic, perhaps a bit of thyme from the garden, pine nuts (but these are expensive and hard to come by, so perhaps almonds?), and when you have it, saffron. Stir and simmer, and serve with a sprinkling of parsley. The wind now has enough of an edge that we cannot eat outside on the deck, sunny though it is. These are the last dishes of summer that I can make here by the sea before we return like migrating birds to our mainland roost. But I pack into our luggage little pots of jam, bags of fresh herbs, and dried sprays of the lavender that I grow in honor of Elizabeth and her Mediterranean fancies, and of the hard, lovely shores of Newfoundland. 🍷

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