

MEATLOAF AND LEMON COFFEE

The eating season is upon us – Thanksgiving, New Year, Christmas and all those seasonal parties. Why? Why do we celebrate by eating – and drinking – more than we should to observe a holiday that has little to do with food? I don't know. Probably it has to do with the times when food was scarce and only the rich and the powerful were proudly fat – just look at the paintings of the aristocrats a few centuries back. What would be considered a good figure for today's females was a sign of tuberculosis or pining away for love or some other dramatic reason – and the goddesses and other examples of pulchritude were always at least size 20s.

But all of this philosophy aside I want to acknowledge the eating season by dedicating this article to, what else: Food!

First a confession. Many of you will despise me, especially those who were born in America and had a chance to absorb some of the local prejudices.

I like some of the foods that America looks down on. I suspect that there are many like myself, secret admirers of the despised delicacies, but they are probably too timid to come out of the culinary closet.



I have decided to come clean. And so here it is: I like fruitcake. I know that there are jokes of fruitcakes given as gifts that travel around the world, hand to hand, being gifted to people who give it to others, and after a year they come back to the original recipients. Well, I don't care – I like fruitcake and I wish it were as available in the summer as it is during the Christmas season. Yes, there is bad fruitcake, and yes, it is fattening and full of all those different

cholesterols, carboshmidrates and calories, but when it's good, it's very, very



good. Mmm...

I also like meatloaf. This is another totally unappreciated food that people seem to eat it surreptitiously and order it in whispers in the few restaurants that offer it. I love meatloaf and I even make it myself – with a hardboiled egg baked inside it – just like my mom used to make. My lovely wife who wasn't born here, can make a wonderful meatloaf but she has been infected by the American *Bacillus Antimeatloafus* – she promises to make it but keeps putting it off until I make it myself. The meatloaf situation puzzles me: why is it that a country that is crazy about hamburgers and consumes them by the millions in every possible permutation despises the giant hamburger – meatloaf?



Then there is Spam. It comes in cans and is some kind of compressed meat. To be honest, it isn't the greatest delicacy but I like it for personal reasons. The Americans who liberated my concentration camp 60 years ago, threw food at us as their trucks drove by the crowds of survivors at the roadside. Most of what they threw was crackers, cigarettes, candy and small metal cans of food from their emergency C-rations. Most of the cans contained Spam, which the soldiers didn't like. They were happy to get rid of it and do a good deed at the same time. The starving survivors weren't picky – we happily ate the Spam and, ever since, I eat Spam and like it. I should add that I am the only one in my household to do so.

I also like hardboiled eggs in salt water – but I only get to eat them at the Passover Seder. I keep asking for them, Ella keeps promising, and I keep forgetting to make them – what’s to make? - for myself until the next Passover.

Bagels, lox and chopped liver have been accepted as American and are no longer eaten by Jews only. There is another Jewish food, however, that hasn’t caught on. In fact, it can be used to determine who is Jewish and who isn’t. It’s gefilte fish and it isn’t so much the actual fish patty but the jelly in which it is kept in the glass jar. A gentile is disgusted by it – a Jew will eat, enjoy and ask for more, especially with good hot horseradish that also serves to give you a Yiddish accent when you say its name: “Khrrein” with the “rrrr” coming from the back of your throat. In my college days, I took my gentile girlfriend to a deli. She looked in horror at the gefilte fish I ordered. “It’s snot!” she said. “How can you eat snot?” We broke up soon after.

On the other hand I too have my prejudices. I don’t like sushi – why should I eat raw fish? So how come I like lox? And I don’t like fish in general but I love sardines, adore sprats and enjoy (some) herring. I don’t know why.

And why do I think it so strange that my wife drinks coffee with lemon? She says that this is common in Russia but I don’t know about that. Maybe coffee with lemon is the Russian equivalent of fruitcake?

Anyway, have a happy eating season and a pleasant diet after it is over.