

# Protein Transfer

*by* Natasha Whyte

## Protein Transfer

### *Ham*

If you have never cooked a ham steak, you need not be afraid. The ham is often cut so thin that to over or undercook it is nearly impossible. The exterior reflects the centre better than any other meat; you will know when to stop.

### *Chicken Pot Pie*

The first time I had food poisoning, I was sleeping on the couch. My best girlfriend was sleeping over that night, behind me and to my left, face burrowed in the soft, black cushions of the loveseat in our living room. The undercooked meat pie bucked and writhed in my body, reaching with a poisonous hand to turn my sleeping form constantly from supine to prone, prying open my eyes with each rotation. When I at last realised I was off kilter, I stumbled groggily to the gleaming white room that had seen so many bubbles and so many band-aids.

I remember wondering where all the air in the room had gone, why it felt like I was being submerged in the tub beside me; though it was empty, I was drowning in it. My mouth watered faster than my eyes and I was violently ill.

My mother came to my rescue, horrified at the state of the once polished porcelain of the bathroom and the once polished porcelain of my teeth, now both burning with the acid sinking steadily into their smooth surfaces.

The meat pie came from the farmer's market in Hamilton. My mother cooked it for me. I don't think she's forgiven herself.

### *Steak*

The only beef I have ever truly loved is steak. My dad has a way of making it, perfectly rare and yet still hot all the way through, so it doesn't feel as though you're eating an animal nearly

raw. In a Gordon Ramsay cookbook I bought him for his 59th birthday, he found a beautiful recipe for steak: sitting on a bed of roasted red pepper sauce and under a blanket of blue cheese melted with a kitchen torch. The steaks practically fell apart on your fork. I learned to do it as well as he did.

### *Venison*

As an adolescent, I spent many nights at my best friend's house, wiling away the after-school hours in bowls of *zupa* and under *perogies* drowning in puddles of sour cream. One afternoon, near the end of our first year of high school, my friend's father came home, steaks in hand, offering to cook them for us. Of course, smothered in sunscreen and the promise of the impending summer break, we accepted his offer with all the gratitude two fourteen year old girls on the last legs of their freshman year are capable of bestowing.

The steaks were succulent, tender — some of the best I had ever had. It wasn't until later that we discovered the steaks were venison. We joked that we had eaten Bambi and I kept the laughter going into my father's car. The smile dropped and I ruminated in horror; I had eaten Bambi.

### *Pork Tenderloin*

My father says that everyone overcooks pork. I suppose he's right, though I have never trusted the sweet and sour tenderloin he makes that seems too purple to be edible. Yet, his pork has always been the most tender, moist, and flavourful that I've had. He covers the tenderloin with tin foil while cooking so that keeps the moisture in. I have come to understand that it is only after years of cooking it this way that he knows when it is finished. He does not use a timer and sometimes the tenderloin emerges from the oven in better form than others.

When my father buys pork tenderloin, he stocks the fridge with apple sauce. I spice my apple sauce with cloves, cinnamon, and a separate spoon.

### *Canned Tuna*

We had the same can of salmon in our pantry for the duration of my childhood. It followed us when we moved (I was fourteen). I threw it out the first time I came home to visit my parents after moving to Toronto. Another has begun to take its place.

*Canned Salmon*

My mother and my sister eat canned salmon on hard breads, bones in, mixed with mayonnaise and celery, green onions, salt, pepper, whatever happens to be handy. I know the bones are edible but still struggle to enjoy canned salmon.

*Haddock*

There is a fish and chip store in Port St. Mary on the Isle of Man that I visited when I was there. The line goes very nearly from the top of the hill to the Irish Sea one or two kilometers away. It is only open on Fridays and every soul in the town goes there to wait in line for dinner. When I got to the front of the line, the Friday before we left, I ordered for two people, pretending I knew what either of us liked.

*Halibut*

The first time I ate fish and thought I liked it I had in actuality eaten only a tartar sauce-smothered bit of the crispy batter that had once covered a deep fried filet of halibut. I liked the texture, the satisfaction of a craving for salt that North Americans always have, the then false belief that I finally liked the taste of seafood. I had really only discovered that I, like everyone else, have a taste for crunchy, salty foods.

*Haddock (Reprise)*

I don't think I've ever had an experience quite like the first time I had haddock. I have never loved a food so instantly or so completely. The batter, while admittedly was the deceptive hook that brought me around for a second try, was wonderfully light, crispy, and perfectly greasy. The fish, too hot to taste on the first bite, slowly revealed itself to my slightly singed-palette as being an experience of subtlety masked in dill and salt.

I have never quite been able to reproduce the wonders of fish and chips purchased at a singularly focused dive. I have made wonderful facsimiles of this first edition but cannot quite grasp the greasy flavour complex.

#### *Bacon*

I grew up largely without bacon. When I did eat it, it was preceded by the removal of the white, fatty strip. My mother often insisted upon this mediation, saying, "You are what you eat!" and burrowing through the strata of my mind to deposit in the warm, inner layers the first notion that not all food is nourishing.

The only way I made bacon was extra crispy. The farther from raw it was, the more I enjoyed it.

My generation has a lot to say about bacon. There are entire restaurants devoted entirely to wrapping other foods in bacon. When I tell young omnivores that I am a pescetarian, they nearly always ask me, "But, what about bacon?" They cannot imagine a life without the crunchy strips of salty pork that are pumped tonne after tonne through a fragile system of slaughter based on the health of pigs forced to live ass to mouth in quarters more cramped than those of the Franks.

#### *Peameal Bacon*

Instead, I would eat a peameal bacon sandwich every year at the Rib Fest, savouring the corn meal over the sticky barbeque smothered on the intercostal muscles everyone in Burlington flocked there to consume.

#### *Pork Scratchings*

In the United Kingdom, pork scratchings are a popular snack sold in pubs to cut the bitterness of binge beer-drinking. Pork scratchings come in a plastic bag, like potato chips. Though made from the *salè* and cured bellies of pigs, I never drew a sober connection between the salinity of the crisps and the animals from which they are derived.

#### *Ribs*

The act of eating ribs is, to me, the definition of barbaric.

I distinctly recall a trip to a chain restaurant that has now long since been disbanded during which my father ordered ribs. I remember being horrified that we were to be dining in public and he were about to engage in the archaic act of eating an animal while using their bones as utensils. I ordered pasta; I hardly touched it.

There is an annual Rib Fest at Spencer Smith Park in Burlington. I went every year with my family, never once eating ribs. Though my dad would often find a way to make foods I was picky about more appealing to me, tempting me with carnival games and festival favours was still not enough to turn me onto ribs.

### *Chicken Wings*

A strange synonymy has been erected between chicken wings and sports. They have somehow become intertwined, avid sports-fans salivating reflexively at the TSN theme jingle, sports bars cropping up and sporting an extensive list of flavours, pubs almost unanimously following their sticky hand-prints.

I grew up without chicken wings because my mother wished they would never appear on our four-person kitchen table and because I do not think I would have eaten them even if they had been there. Chicken wings were fatty like bacon to my mother and barbaric like ribs to me.

### *Turkey*

I will miss the gravy derived from this bird more than the flesh.

At Thanksgiving last year, my father undercooked the turkey. It bled all over our kitchen when it was carved; luckily no one was made sick. My sister and her boyfriend broke up later that week. At traditional German Christmases, families dine on cold cut meats and cheeses, sauerkraut, boiled potatoes, and bread with mustard. My family was not traditional; we always had turkey.

### *Sausages*

Sausages are a difficult thing to wrap and tie neatly with just the one word; they are hempy and will try to trick you. There are so many varieties, you cannot group the entire realm of

this food into one general heading with a phrase like, “I dislike sausages”.

I cannot discuss sausages objectively. I must talk about them on a cline.

#### *Breakfast Sausages*

I loved breakfast sausages until the day I ate one that was comprised nearly entirely of the fatty tissue you see once in a while when you bite through the tough skin of a sausage to the tessellated interior. Suffice to say, I shed breakfast sausages like a skin.

#### *Italian Sausages*

I have never liked fennel seeds.

#### *Bratwurst*

This is the type of sausage that is quite literally stuffed down your throat when you grow up in a German family (even though we are non-traditional, these cannot be done away with). I did not mind them until I saw one being made.

#### *Hot Dogs*

I ate a hot dog on Victoria Day this past year. I had spidered it and cooked it on the barbeque. It was crispy almost to the point where I could taste charcoal more than meat. This was how I liked my hot dogs; as far removed from their origins as animals as was possible while still maintaining edibility.

#### *Chorizo*

The day after I decided to become a pescetarian, I went to a restaurant for brunch and ordered a dish containing chorizo by accident. I ate none of the sausage, but felt intensely the salt of it on each remaining bite. I pushed it away when I had had my fill, sick with the knowledge that I have never eaten chorizo but know what it tastes like.

