

Linda Yeargin speaking on Communion – Food and Drink

Chicken Dinner

I am a self-identified Foodie! Not the Anthony Bourdain type of adventurous person who loves to try new and weird foods on the TV show “Parts Unknown,” but more the Guy Fieri type who loves the best of popular foods on “Diners, Drive-ins and Dives.” I come by this predilection quite naturally—I was born into a Foodie family. Indeed, food has always been our love language.

My Grandma Glennie, who made her way to California from Arkansas and New Mexico, arrived without a husband and armed with only a third-grade education, supported her three children by cooking at a student lunch stand in San Pedro, specializing in chili for high school kids.

Then, when her oldest daughter married, moved north to Walla Walla, Washington, and started a restaurant featuring fried chicken, rib steaks, and homemade rolls, Grandma moved, too. And then, my family followed. The restaurant was called the Trolley Inn, built out of an old trolley, and featuring a giant chicken on the roof. Soon almost the whole family was involved—my Uncle John was the cook, my Aunt Kate and my mother, known as Dutch, were waitresses, and my Grandma Glennie made pies.

That was the site of some of my most vivid memories. My brother and I were there a lot! Uncle John indulged our every whim. We made all kinds of concoctions out of the extra dough my uncle kneaded every morning to make rolls, we had fried chicken any time we wanted, and ate those hot clover leaf rolls, slathered with melted butter from the crock on the stove. And then there was the ice cream freezer, loaded with the basics: chocolate, vanilla, and strawberry. It was a kid’s paradise.

Then my father had a heart attack at 36. When he couldn’t find a job in Walla Walla, we moved to Amarillo, Texas. I was actually excited about the move,

imagining myself wearing long dresses and bonnets, and walking on the wooden sidewalks we saw in the westerns of the day. Now, imagine my disappointment when we actually arrived! The only upside was that we finally got a TV. I was in the third grade, and deemed by my teacher and classmates to have an “accent” that made me a very popular choice for reading out loud.

We spent about 2 years in Texas, first in Amarillo and then 3 hot, steamy months in San Antonio. Finally my family got a reprieve and my dad was transferred to southern California.

Every summer during this time we made a vacation trek to Walla Walla, which we considered to be God’s country, to visit my mother’s family. And every once in awhile, my Grandma Glennie came for a month’s visit with us. My childhood was filled with wonderful, if plain, food. Because my mom always worked, we had our fanciest meal on Sundays, alternating fried chicken, potatoes and gravy, with pot roast, vegetables and, of course, —gravy!

Eventually, the Trolley Inn was driven out of business by the year-long reconfiguration of roads in Walla Walla, but my Uncle John wasn’t through with the food business. He was hired to manage the food service at the Washington State Penitentiary in Walla Walla and our conversations then revolved around things like his taking a cadre of prisoners to fish for salmon on the Columbia River, and how far a single onion could go to flavor the tartar sauce they made to eat with it.

After the Trolley Inn closed, my Grandma Glennie’s cooking career morphed into becoming a fry cook at the wrong end of Main Street, where the grill and counter was on one side and the liquor shelves and bar stools on the other. Everybody in town called her “Mom.” She had many friends among the “winos” in Walla Walla because she would slip them food when they were down and out. Her last job was feeding the sisters at a local convent.

So there you have it—my history with food. So, nowadays, I often cook for others: my family at birthdays and holiday time, and I offer auction items for church members, too.

Recently, my brother had a birthday. He was 79 on August 3rd. He is usually at his house on Vancouver Island in the summer, but this pandemic year was different and he had to stay home in San Clemente. Naturally, I invited him and his wife for dinner. He requested fried chicken—his favorite since childhood, but something health minded people—and his wife— don't fix any more! Then, I thought I would invite his children to join us. This was very tricky because he and his children have developed a rather rancorous relationship borne out of different political positions, and very different values and life styles. It was the clash between my brother and his wife— white, conservative, economically successful, money focused, —and my hippie, artsy, underpaid, progressive, alternative junior high school art and science teacher niece, and my newly divorced and struggling nephew trying to start a new career. It was questionable that the younger generation would come. They had to “think about it.” But they did come. I had decided to “surprise” my brother with their presence, and didn't tell him they would be there. I was hoping something good would happen, that there would be detente. That they could enjoy each other without bringing up politics or any of the other hot buttons that trigger them. After all, my brother is getting older, and I think it is a shame that his relationship with his children is so fraught with anger. I thought my presence and my house would temper their behavior. I thought fried chicken could save the day!

It could have all blown up in my face—but it didn't, for the most part. My sister-in-law, unwilling to sit in the living room with the children and Mike, came to join me in the kitchen as I was frying the chicken. She said, “I probably won't be staying, just to let you know.” I replied, “That's too bad.” At which point, my brother came and had a very quiet conversation with her in front of the refrigerator, a few feet away. I couldn't hear a word, doggone it! But she stayed. She pouted and didn't speak, but she stayed.

My niece and nephew were delightful and I got to catch up on news of their children and so did my brother. Chloe is a senior at Otis, is selling her designs already, is investing a little in the stock market, and is working several jobs besides. Niko has graduated from high school, and is taking on line classes at junior college in a wide array of subjects, and is playing his guitar and other instruments. My great nephews are spending their time playing club soccer, and going on hikes searching for Pokemon with their dad.

The important thing here is that we got together, facilitated by the promise of the fried chicken and good times of our youth. We talked and laughed. We communicated and caught a glimpse of what life as friends could be if only we let go of our various wounds from the past. It was a communion of the dinner table.