

Long Island Larder

Irish Stew and More

BY MIRIAM UNGERER

Corned beef and cabbage is the traditional dish of March 17, but, at the special request of a native of County Wexford, I'm not going to write about it this year. "Irish people don't eat that," according to my informant, who hails from one of the most affluent counties in Ireland.

I wonder if that's true in County Clare or Sligo, the home base of so many of the poorer Irish who emigrated to the U.S. at the time of the great famine in the mid-19th century. I don't know.

Monica Sheridan, author of "The Art of Irish Cooking," wrote that corned beef and cabbage was "a very popular dish in Ireland" in my yellowing 1964 copy of her book. I'd like to check out corned beef in Ireland right now. I haven't been on the Emerald Isle since the summer I lived in Dublin decades ago.

There are as many disagreements on how to cook it as there are Irish opinions on just about everything. Although Ireland produces a significant amount of beef — one of the republic's chief exports — this is a fairly modern development.

No sensible Irish farmer would be likely to slaughter a good cow with all its dairy potential just for the short-lived pleasure of a few meals with fresh meat. But brined and smoked meats have always been popular in Ireland — terrific hams, corned beef, and, of course, the famous Irish farmhouse bacon — and they could be kept without refrigeration.

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FICTION

You Are What
You Drive

BY L.J. GURNEY

One glorious day George finally had his long-awaited fender bender — and with a large S.U.V., no less.

George loved cars, but had never owned a car worth loving. And none of his cars had ever impressed the women he wanted to impress. His very first car was an ancient, pea-green Dodge Dart with only one redeeming feature: a wide, welcoming back seat. But the high school girls never noticed either George or the Dart. The back seat was sadly underused.

Hoping for better luck with college girls, he junked the useless little Dart for a more hip but very cantankerous Volkswagen Bug. He never got lucky in it either. When the Bug died after only one year, he replaced it with a rusted-out Renault that groaned and sputtered with every move. Coeds didn't appreciate its French qualities and refused to risk their lives for a date with him. The Volvo station wagon with the chronic exhaust problem was no chick magnet either. They disliked riding in rain, sleet, and hail with all the windows open.

To celebrate his graduation from college, his parents proudly presented him with a "gently used" Ford Fairmont. Only two years old, the car was in mint condition: no rust, scratches, dents, or even dings. "Caramel and terra-cotta," his parents called the two-toned paint job. He called it just plain ugly. Cheap vinyl encased the hard top of the vehicle like a caramel-colored fungus. That same vinyl spread from the exterior to cover the interior and clash with hard, orange vinyl seats and thin beige carpeting. The interior looked as new as the exterior. Clearly the original owner had used it as little as possible, keeping it hidden in her garage. George could see why.

Unfortunately, the previous owner's reluctance to drive her mushroom car meant a longer sentence for George. The odometer registered a mere 1,000 miles, condemning George to at least another 70,000 long, slow miles before the thing died. The four-cylinder engine was depressingly reliable and also severely underpowered. George could barely keep up with traffic on the highway. If he had the misfortune to encounter even the gentlest incline, frustrated truck drivers would tailgate him in the slow lane, lights flashing, horns blaring. The Ford Fairmont, a gift from his devoted parents, would never look good, never go fast, and never break down. George was stuck.

Somehow he managed, in spite of the car, to eventually find Dolores. She had no interest whatsoever in cars, but she was interested in George. Although he wasn't especially handsome or exciting, he was very reliable, and she wanted reliable. They fell in love, got married, and drove around in the dependable Ford for 10 more years. George, having finally found a woman to love him, resigned himself to his vehicular fate, and was relatively content with his life. He did fantasize occasionally about cars, but the Fairmont, having reached its 23rd year, remained depressingly immortal.

Then one glorious day George finally had his long-awaited fender bender — and with a large S.U.V., no less. The S.U.V. slowly crumpled the trunk of the Fairmont into its back seat, merging caramel and rust red with orange vinyl.

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Morgan McGivern

MARLA GAGNUM
Gardens and Adventures

BY SHERIDAN SANSEGUNDO

To be a landscape gardener you need to have an artist's eye, a gardener's skill, and a very clear sense of the flow and rhythm of nature.

It only takes one visit to Marla Gagnum's own garden in North-west Woods, East Hampton, to know that she has these qualities in spades. In summer, a path almost overwhelmed with fragrant, waist-high perennials suddenly emerges on the grassy verge of a pond that seems to have been there forever. On the steep slope behind it, water trickles over a series of rocks. A frog jumps. Clematis and roses smother the low fence around her vegetable patch, where no lettuce runs to seed, no slug intrudes.

"I believe a garden should give a sense of peace and privacy in the controlled parts closer to the house and an urge to explore in the wilder places," she said recently. "I love to divide a garden into rooms, each offering a different experience. One might have flowers in many variations of a single color enclosed by a dark green yew hedge with a gate leading to another room — perhaps a secret place to sit and meditate, to watch the play of light and shadow at different times of the day."

Her life has always been pulled in two directions, by a love of gardening and a love of adventure. The latter started when she was very young, inspired by two memories from her early childhood. In one she was riding on her father's back, her arms clutching his neck, as he swam across a fast-flowing Missouri river. In another she was flying with him in his small plane, swooping dangerously low over the Mississippi Lowlands.

She knows they are very early memories because she was only 5 when her father was killed in that same plane. If her father inspired her wilder side, her mother and grandmothers passed on a love of gardening.

All three were expert plantwomen. She can recall making May baskets with flowers from her mother's garden and hanging them on the doors of their neighbors in Dexter, Mo., where she was born.

When Ms. Gagnum's father died, she and her mother went to live with her paternal grandmother, the owner of a quintessential grandmother's garden, with morning glories on the fence, hollyhocks, roses, lavender, and secret places for a small child to play.

It was from this quiet and idyllic setting that she was catapulted into a life of travel and change, scarcely putting down roots in one place before they were torn up and transplanted

somewhere else. But Ms. Gagnum always managed to make gardening part of that life.

It wasn't until 20 years ago, when her travels brought her to East Hampton, that she finally found a place where she could settle down.

"I have finally made a garden that I will see mature. I have planted saplings knowing that I will be here to see them grow to be trees."

And it was in East Hampton that she finally got a chance to share her compendious garden knowledge. She went back to school to study formal landscape design and then started her own business, inspired both by English gardening and by the gardens of her childhood.

"The company is called English Landscape Design because 'landscape' implies more than a flower garden. It encompasses many different ways of dealing with a landscape, from pastoral stretches of trees and meadows, formal shrub and tree plantings, and woodland walks, to the proverbial English cottage garden."

The latter may appear to be unstructured drifts of flowers, Ms. Gagnum said, but it is actually rigorously planned, with swaths of color and shapes, some spiky, some mounding, carefully repeated, and then informally planted. This gives the voluptuous look of flowers spilling out over a terrace or a path, only partly contained by its boundaries.

"As well as cottage gardens, I love doing woodland gardens and water features," she said. "Waterfalls can look so contrived and I take great pride in designing ones that look as if nature put them there, as if they have been there forever."

But her incarnation as a landscape gardener was way down the line, and at least a couple of lifetimes had to be lived before then. When her mother remarried and moved to Kansas City, Ms. Gagnum enrolled at the University of Colorado. To her passion for skiing she soon added a passion for the ski coach, Helge Gagnum, a Norwegian as adventurous as her father.

When he moved to Switzerland to work for an international company, she arranged to take her junior year abroad at the University of Geneva. They were married shortly after.

"We would ski in the Alps, drive to Barcelona for a long weekend in our old M.G. sports car. Life was idyllic."

Then her husband was transferred to Northumberland, England, and all the things she had been enjoying — the wine and

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A New Crop
Of Places to Eat

Spring brings new restaurants,
and new tastes

BY SHERIDAN SANSEGUNDO

If you step outside it feels as if someone has hit the pause button. There are still patches of snow on the dead brown grass, but any minute now spring will be here, bringing tax-return panic and a crop of new restaurants sprouting alongside the skunk cabbage.

In Wainscott, there is good news for the building on the highway that has to share space with a large military tank. Ristorante Capri, which was there briefly, has gone. Its place will be taken by Almondito, a Mexican restaurant run by the owners of the popular French bistro Almond in Bridgehampton. It will open in April with its co-owners, Eric Lemonides and Jason Weiner, serving as maitre d'hotel and executive chef.

Almondito will be a casual space completely redesigned by Jamie Drake, who decorated Madonna's Los Angeles house. It will have Mexican-inspired appetizers from \$7 to \$12 and entrees from \$15 to \$25 including Mexican chopped salad, chicken tacos, steak with frijoles borrachos, and whole fish with olives, capers, and tomatoes. Dinner will be served seven nights a week.

In Montauk, the Old Shebeen is now Montauk Valley. (Montauk Valley? Well, I suppose you couldn't call it Montauk Bottom-of-the-Hill.) Gunnar Myers, the owner of the Napeague Stretch restaurant, is converting the Shebeen, which used to be the Blue Marlin before that, into a chic cocktail and nightlife spot with a bar, a main hall with a dance floor and lounge, and an indoor/outdoor bar and porch. It will offer fresh seafood, prime steaks, and American classics, as well as a bar menu.

In the spot on South Edison Street in Montauk that was Acqua Terra last year, serving northern Italian food, a new restaurant, Aqua East, will be opening in mid-

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Opinion

Sunsets And
Subway Cars

Chemicals and convention
in a photo show at Ashawagh Hall

BY ROBERT LONG

Technophobes might lay blame for the abundance of oversized, overly manipulated prints seen at photo shows these days on the flexibility of digital cameras and printers. But that would be like blaming Microsoft Word for sloppy writing or holding Adolphe Sax responsible for Kenny G.

Snapping photos is easy but not everyone takes good ones. Digital technology provides myriad ways to alter prints, for better or worse, and it's tempting to try to make a boring sunset more interesting by turning up the color volume till the picture screeches, but doing so usually doesn't make a better print, just a louder one.

There are pictures in the East End Photographers Group exhibit at Ashawagh Hall in Springs that are the equivalent of visual Muzak, and there are some very good ones, too. Whether they are old-school silver gelatin prints, polymer gravures, or supersaturated images straight from an inkjet, each of the memorable works here is the work of someone with a remarkable eye, not necessarily the person with the biggest digital toolbox.

Nick Tarr, who is better known for his mirror-box assemblages, is showing a series of very crisp, dramatically lit views of structural details, shot in Montauk, which could have been taken anywhere. That's a strength, particularly in a show where sentiment in the form of sunsets and sailboats is rampant.

The glinting steel frame of the Montauk Playhouse, seen in slanting yellow-orange sunlight, is isolated against a nearly black ground in "Montauk Tennis," and thus seems otherworldly and elegant.

A brick chimney is seen through a broken window in a tightly cropped print, and girders — the playhouse again, perhaps — make a complex shape against a high-keyed blue sky. The artificially hued sky provides a strong backdrop for the girders. It doesn't make you think "sky"; it makes you think "bluc."

Sue Runkowski's five small tinted images of 19th-century architectural details — a stone railing in Oyster Bay, a garden in New Orleans, a lichen-flaked Orpheus holding a lute in one decaying cemetery or another — are densely textured, richly detailed.

Gary Bartoloni's prints of big, gnarly trees, printed in sepia tones or shot on infrared stock, have a Gothic cast, particularly when a nude woman enters the scene. Mr. Bartoloni seems to have been influenced by Daguerre as much as by progressive photography circa 1965, but he has synthesized his own style.

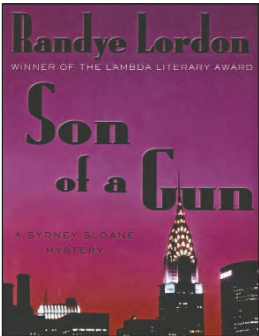
Gerry Giliberti and Ken Rubino have taken up the banner of abstraction, at least

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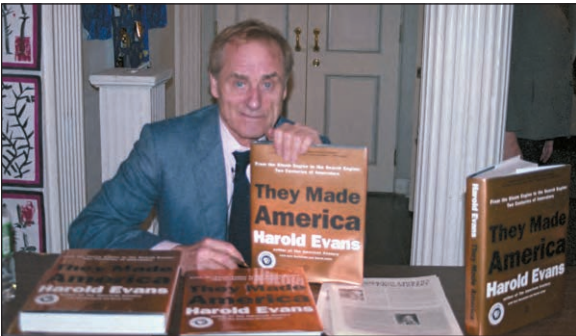
Dan Becker
marshals his
musical forces
with John
Finney and
Paule Ortigosa

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Lordon's
feisty gay
sleuth has
another
mystery to
solve

C5



At Guild Hall,
Harold Evans
promoted his
new book and
spoke about a
writer's life

C5