

READ INGREDIENTS

Overview

Read Ingredients is a reading and discussion series about food and foodways developed in conjunction with the Wyoming Humanities Council's 2012 tour of "Key Ingredients," a traveling exhibit from the Smithsonian Institution.

My Life in France by Julia Child with Alex Prud'homme

Nine of us gathered to discuss the book about Julia Childs, *My Life in France*. Generally the group enjoyed the book. We did look at two of the archived videos (PBS) of Childs and her cooking show. The difference in her style and confidence was noticeable as the years went by. Most in the group remembered when her show aired but the trip down memory lane was good.

Surprisingly no one in the group was interested in developing cooking skills that would allow them to prepare the French recipes. It all sounded interesting, but the richness (fat intensity) in the recipes did not agree with what we consider a healthful diet. We compared the you-don't-have-to-eat-it-all mentality of the French to the supersize-it mentality of Americans. The abundance of wine was also noted.

The Ackroyd skit about Julia, the fact that stuff happens when you are cooking at home, and the sense of humor of Julia were all commented upon during the discussion. The time she spent developing her recipes sounded tiresome, but we realize that we all do that just not so scientifically.

The lone male member was one of the two not liking the book. He found it difficult to find the book terribly exciting or even interesting as the bulk of it was a description of meals eaten and enjoyed by Julia, Paul and friends. I did not bother to look up translations of the overly abundant French terms. I think one or two chapters of detailed meal descriptions would have been enough. The group did agree that Julia Childs had an interesting, exciting, and productive life that is worth admiring.

Sherri Randall

Twelve of us had a delightful conversation of "My Life in France" while sitting at white linen tablecloth-covered tables (in honor of Julia). We began the conversation by watching part of one of her cooking shows and looking at the Valentine's card picture of Julia and Paul in the bathtub with bubbles that Julia describes in the book. (A number of photos taken by Paul are available online.)

Everyone thought the book marvelous, and it is a book that prompts discussion about more than just food and

cooking. But we did talk a lot about food and cooking, comparing French attitudes towards eating and cooking with those in the U.S. and discussing the idea that food and culture are intertwined. We also discussed the ways in which Julia found her passion for food and cooking. Everyone is impressed with the amount of research and effort Julia put into her cookbooks. We also talked about her attitudes towards cooking, especially looking at her statement that a person should never apologize for his/her cooking.

It is interesting to look at the tremendous influence Julia Child had. She is referenced in a number of movies and was featured in a 1978 Saturday Night Live sketch, which she loved. (We talked about how comfortable she seemed to be with herself.) The comments made by her editor about the reasons Julia did not like what Julie was doing (as featured in the Julia and Julie movie) are interesting also.

We also talked about the relationships in Julia and Paul's life and the importance of relationships. Most of all, we were touched by the loving relationship the two of them had.

We looked at some of the political and social happenings that Julia mentions and discussed how those happenings reflect the world in which Julia and Paul were living.

I think this book prompts wonderful discussions, and everyone in the discussion group enjoyed the book and the talk.

Maggie Garner

Fourteen of us met at the Niobrara County Library to discuss *My Life in France*, our first text in the Reading Ingredients series. Most of the "regulars" were in attendance, as well as a few new readers/discussers, so we first made introductions. And as an introduction to Julia Child, I played two You Tube videos. The first was her famous chicken show, and the second was her discussion of McDonald's french fries. Both are brief, but they give a quick glimpse into the quick wit and personality of Ms. Child. While most had seen or remembered hearing about her show on PBS, I think this was still a good introduction.

After some background on the authors, particularly Child, our discussion began. As is usual with the Lusk group, just a few prompts on my part were enough to get the discussion started. This is a good group, experienced with discussions, and they need little more than occasional direction for discussion. Most of the discussion centered around food, as is entirely appropriate. Nutrition was a first discussion--how did she live so long living on such a rich diet? How do the French stay away from obesity with their diet? Those sorts of questions were discussed with many perspectives presented.

How do we eat in comparison? One participant mentioned the old expression that there is a difference between living to eat and eating to live. Culturally, the French seem

much more inclined to live to cook and eat well. This led to a discussion of Julia and Paul's acculturation process to France. Other ideas discussed included the painstaking research done by Child in creating perfect recipes, which also used ingredients found in American supermarkets, and "Never Apologize" about one's cooking. Many mentioned the apologetic manner many American cooks use when having guests for meals.

The final area of discussion could be called relationships. Those relationships involved not only the people, but the politics around those people. At least one participant was put off by Child's liberalism and her relationship with her father. But it was also clearly the case that Paul enjoyed presenting things American to French audiences, that relationships are a two-way street, and that there was clearly a solid family relationship regardless of how strained it may have been at times.

There is much to be found in this text, and it certainly leads to plenty of ideas and discussion. At least two participants were going to try recipes, and the evening was most pleasant. This was a good start.

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Wayne G. Deahl

Readers brought French food to get us in the mood for our discussion of *My Life in France*. We noticed the paperback has no photos, except for the actors in the movie based on this memoir, so some of us had gone to catch glimpses of Julia and Paul Child (they signed their letters Pulia). None of us, nor our mothers, had owned *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, but most had the *Joy of Cooking*. Julia and her coauthors, Simone and Louisette, we shocked to meet Irma Rombauer and learn she had not tested all the recipes in her successful cookbook.

Talking about the cultural food differences between America and France, prompted many stories of dining in different lands, ranging as far as Bulgaria and Turkey before I brought them back to the effect Julia had on the approach to food in America in the 60s. While housewives of the decade sought easy meals with Shake 'n' Bake and Betty Crocker cake mixes, Julia, through her TV show *The French Chef*, showed us how to make natural foods taste wonderful, that the taste is worth the effort and the time.

The McCarthy era loomed large over Paul Child's career. Most of us were old enough to have seen the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings on TV. The term "witch hunt" brought Arthur Miller's *Crucible* into the discussion.

I had suggested weeks ago to watch *Julie and Julia*, brought the characters in the book to life.

Claire Gabriel Dunne

Good food appeared for our discussion: cheese puffs, marinated artichokes, and apple tarts. So we tucked right in and passed it around. I opened a map of Europe, but we already could locate Paris, Marseilles, Bonn and Oslo in our mind's eye.

After I introduced the series and the four books, the discussion took off. A woman brought the hardbound version of *My Life and France*, in which we glimpsed the real faces (rather than the movie faces) described in the book. One member, a professional actor, analyzed Julia's distinctive voice as a problem with pitch. I said I thought she sounded just like Meryl Streep.

This hardy group began to tie the series books together by bringing in food policy, nutrition, and names of the local Volga German farmers. I think this lively group will devour our next offering.

Claire Gabriel Dunne

The Ten Sleep area was hit with a snowstorm at 5:30 p. m. on March 6, the last book discussion group date in which we were to talk about *MY LIFE IN FRANCE*. There were only four of us at the discussion, with lots of food to eat!

Those in attendance and many others I have talked with enjoyed the book in general. A few were disappointed that there were no real recipes, though some of us used other sources for recipes. The French language (without translation) was a bit annoying for those having no resource to translate. We started by telling some of our favorite stories of this biographical writing of a short period of her life. The stories of the time spent in Marseilles were discussed, Julia's dislike of the German culture, and some of the politics she wrote about - McCarthyism, European view of American politics.

Julia's total commitment to her passion for cooking was amazing, as was her desire to speak French. Her work ethic toward perfecting the recipes was amazing to us, as she tried to make this wonderful French food easily prepared by her American friends, family, and women in general. Her lengthy relationship with Semca was intriguing and brought discussion of the differences in the two cultures they represented. Paul embracing Julia's passion and eventually becoming a partner in her endeavors was quite amazing, considering his own creative flare for other arts. They seemed to be able to incorporate each other's tastes into the entirety of their life.

The book offered humor, cultural perspectives, history, political climates, and respect for others. We watched a YouTube presentation of Julia in her t. v. show and thoroughly enjoyed it. Some had seen the movie based on the book - *JULIA AND JULIE*. Anyone who has ever tried the publishing world can empathize with Julia and Semca in the frustrations, hard work, and often the failure to move forward.

After discussing we ate salad, meat loaf, French bread, and upside down pear pie. A lovely way to end the evening and the group's discussions. We were sorry not everyone could be there, but it didn't dampen the spirits of those who were there!

Elouise Rossler

Fifteen people attended this first discussion in the series, *Read Ingredients*. There had initially been some doubt as to whether there were real humanities issues involved in this topic, but the discussion soon dispelled that doubt.

Starting from the book itself, the group soon began to discuss the whole question of the meaning of food and the rituals and values that surround it. We discussed the differing attitudes toward food in France and America, and the degree to which the preparation and consumption of food is, or is not, a social and affiliative activity. This led to a discussion of the "food industry" and its effects on nutrition and physical and mental health. The topic of obesity in America naturally arose, and we spent some time commenting on its causes and effects. This, in turn, led to a discussion of the larger issue of the cultural assumptions and values that underlie attitudes toward, and treatment of, food. Specifically, people commented on the relationship between obesity and malnutrition in a world of industrialized agriculture and food processing. Some participants commented on the possible relation between capitalism, socialism and food production.

In relation to the book itself, participants generally appreciated Julia's joie d'vivre and her general enthusiasm for her work.

Others thought that her criticisms of her father and of her collaborators were small-minded. Building on those observations, we discussed the genre of the memoir in general, and the relationship between the reader's expectations and the work itself. While Julia did not seem particularly introspective, her energy was evident throughout, and carried the book for most of the participants. At the end, most participants shared brief stories of their favorite recipes or eating experiences, which brought our conversational meal to a satisfying close.

Stephen S. Lottridge

Thirteen people gathered at the Powell Branch Library to discuss "My Life in France" by Julia Child (with Alex Prud'homme), a memoir of Child's life and career in cooking. Child moved to France with her husband, Paul, for the first time at the age of 37, and had never seriously cooked until that point. From that point on, her professional and personal life was focused on cooking, and she gained fame as the author of "Mastering the Art of Cooking" and as host of the TV show, "The French Chef." The book discussion group largely enjoyed the book.

Nearly all people commented that they enjoyed Child's perspective, but we also agreed that the writing of the book sometimes separated from Child's perspective, and became more of the voice of her ghost writer. We enjoyed discussing Child's passion for cooking – it seemed to consume her life. Some of us agreed that she was a true artist who was completely devoted to her craft. Others commented that they enjoyed learning about French culture, language, and cooking. Our discussion easily and enjoyably led to thoughts and experiences about traveling to Paris. We discussed French culture versus American culture. We discussed European politics versus American politics. We also discussed how American food and cooking is not based on fresh ingredients that a house cook might buy on a daily basis, while French home cooking is based on a daily trip to market. We speculated and discussed – at length – why that difference between cultures is the way things are. In all, the book discussion group enjoyed the book because it was a good story of a creative person – and it was a catalyst for great conversation on topics of culture, art, cooking, food, and more.

Michael Konsmo

Twelve ladies and one gentleman gathered at the Pine Bluffs branch library of the Laramie County Library System to discuss the memoir *My Life in France* by Julia Child. This was the first book in the *Read Ingredients* series for this group. I had brought along several of Julia Child's cookbooks, and a couple of other Julia Child biographies (*Appetite for Life* and *A Covert Affair*) for us to look at during the discussion. These extra books were so fascinating to the group it was a little hard to get them to focus back on *My Life in France*. I brought the cookbooks (including both volumes of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*) because they effectively illustrate her almost obsessive thoroughness and attention to detail in her writing of recipes. Also many of the later cookbooks and the biographies featured some of the wonderful photographs of Julia, her co-authors and France (many taken by her husband Paul) that were not included in the discussion copies of the book. We started out talking about Julia's influence on the cuisine of the United States and how Child introduced (or reintroduced) French cooking and cooking with fresh ingredients to America through her cookbooks and her TV programs. We also noted how different cooking and cookbooks are today (you can hardly find a cookbook today that's not loaded with full color pictures and vegetarian, low calorie or gluten free recipes). A few of the discussion members checked out some of the recipe books after the discussion and were anxious to try some of the recipes. I myself might try out Boeuf Bourguignon or her Queen of Sheba chocolate cake (with real chocolate, rum and almonds).

We talked quite a bit about Julia's admirable persistence in learning how to cook and in getting published. She had to overcome both an anti-female and anti-American bias at Le Cordon Bleu to earn her graduation and a dismissal of women in general and house wives in particular in the publishing industry. We learned quite a bit about the culture of France and the United States in the 1950s. France was still recovering from the effects of World War II

and dealing with rationing and housing shortages and buying all meat, produce and bakery products fresh for consumption that same day; while the United States was learning about frozen food and mixes from the new invention of television. We appreciated the book on many levels; as a biography, and as a travelogue filled with many delicious and some vaguely disgusting sounding meals (pressed duck anyone?) and as a story of her romance with her husband Paul and with cooking. Several of those at the discussion had been to or lived in France and could tell us about their own experiences with the food and the French people.

We also discussed some of the side stories, such as her time in the OSS, her sometimes fractious relationships with her father and her co-authors, her husband's investigation during the McCarthy era, and her other discussions of American politics. We also talked about our favorite parts of the book. Several people said that their favorite part of *My Life in France* was her descriptions of the people and food of Paris, Marseille, Germany and Norway and her always positive, exuberant attitude. She was always quick to learn what she could of the local language and to dive right into the cuisine. I hope to never forget her attitude towards cooking and entertaining, which is "never apologize". We all agreed that Julia Child was a very interesting and influential person and enjoyed the memoir she wrote with her grand-nephew Alex Prud'homme *My Life in France*.

Elaine Hayes

13 women gathered for this second discussion in the "Foods" series in Ranchester. I started the discussion by asking for comments about anything that particularly struck them about the book. This brought, of course, a variety of topics that prompted wide range discussion: the relationship between Julia and Paul and between Julia and her co-writers, the many ways Julia illustrated her dedication to her cooking and writing, the variety of foods (all those different kinds of birds!), the McCarthy years, culture issues in France vs. U.S., lessons learned about cooking, and more.

Because of the introduction to the book, I didn't give a lot of background about Julia other than to mention the two notable biographies, Spitz's *Dearie: the Remarkable Life of Julia Child* and Fitch's *Appetite for Life*, the latter of which did not please Julia, and she chose to disassociate herself from it probably because the author revealed very personal things about her life that she had kept private. We agreed that the book we read did not delve into her private life much.

This group had done the ICON series last year, and one person said she particularly enjoyed the details about Paris during this period that reminded her of the Hemingway book (memoir?) we read. We talked about Julia as certainly an American icon herself and how her first cook book came out and paralleled the early Kennedy years when the Kennedys brought a new interest about France in the US....Jackie was fluent in French, they had a French chef in the White House, and so on.

Everyone in the group had some recollection of seeing Julia on TV and could form a mental image of her persona. We agreed that the enormous success of her television shows had as much to do with her personality and presentation as with her cooking lessons.

We talked about the trends in American cuisine that made it so different from the European, particularly French. I read some of the comments Julia made over the criticism sometimes aimed at her for all that butter and cream. Since we had read *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* last month, I asked the group how they thought Julia would feel about Kingsolver's book. Most felt that she would approve of the commitment to local foods and free range poultry and meat but we decided she wouldn't think the deprivation was necessary or even sensible.

In spite of the fact that most of us didn't know what Julia was eating much of the time since she didn't translate the French for us, the group thoroughly enjoyed the book. I was frankly surprised how broad and rich the discussion was even though I should know to expect that from this group.

Norleen Healy

About 13 of us (I forgot to count) gathered in Story for Julia Child. We had a lot of fun with this discussion, and we all want to go to or go back to Paris. Also, while no one in the group has a Julia Child cookbook, a few said they now intended to get and use that first one she was writing during the period.

When I asked about what particularly struck readers several mentioned the painstaking preparation Julia went through with each recipe she includes in the cookbooks. Others talked about the world Julia and Paul inhabited in Paris--hobnobbing with artists, writers, political figures, etc. Several mentioned the seeming discrepancy between how little money Julia claimed they had based on Paul's salary and the way they seemed able to spend money.

We talked about the pervasiveness of the McCarthy "witch hunt" during the period in the 50's and about the political climate generally in the U.S. at that time. We went on to discuss the change in the culture in the United States in the early 60's when the Kennedys moved into the White House noting that Jackie Kennedy helped bring about a change in attitude toward the French which was likely was a contributing factor in the reception of Julia Child's French cooking books and shows

While most of us were drawn to Julia, enjoying her personality and her drive, a few in the group found her to be bit of a snob. One person went so far as to say she found Julia to be "arrogant, snobbish, and selfish!" This, needless to say, engendered a lot of discussion -- a good thing because it drew to the text for support of our positions. We talked about the nature of a memoir and considered what might be left out and why in this one. We agreed that Julia maintained a certain privacy in her telling.

Most in the group had some recollection of seeing Julia in her TV shows at some point. One in the group had actually encountered Julia Child in the mid 1990's in a resort that included some sort of a session on cooking and said she was very polite and kind but appeared somewhat shy and reserved. This is not the Julia we pictured from reading the book and remembering her on TV, but someone noted that this would have been around the time of her husband's death which maybe accounted for her subdued demeanor.

In all, we had a great evening with lots of lively discussion. I have to admit that this series on Foods works much better than I feared it might!

Norleen Healy

There were four people in attendance last night, and the discussion lasted nearly 1.5 hours. It was lively!

I must be honest – this was the only book selected for the program that I wasn't interested in reading. A few years back (before moving to Wyoming), I had watched the screenplay referenced on the cover of this book, *Julia & Julia*.

Funny side note: My PhD advisor and his wife had invited my husband and I to accompany them to a dinner and a movie – the movie *Julia & Julia*. I remember walking into the film, which was already playing, sitting down, and thinking ... we must be in the wrong theatre, the movie shouldn't have started yet. Well, I was right – 10 or so minutes after taking out seats, the movie ended. We were in the wrong theatre. My advisor had led us into the wrong theatre ... but I didn't want to be the one to tell him that.

Anyhow, back to the book *My Life is France*. I'm not a fan of reading books after watching movies – especially movies that I didn't overly enjoy. I'm not saying it was a bad movie, just not my favorite. So, I was definitely judging this book by its cover (or by the movie advertised on its cover).

Yet, once I started reading, I quickly realized it wasn't so bad. In fact, there were parts that I thoroughly enjoyed. And, even though it's not the best memoir I've read, it was well worth the read. Unlike the other books in this series, however, this one didn't make me hungry. It did, however, remind me how much I want to travel to France and Germany. In fact, I might just travel to Paris next in 2014 with a group from Western.

Here's a shameless plug – a few of my colleagues at Western are presently organizing a trip to Paris and Amsterdam in May 2014. It will be announced at the college in a few days. It would be a great opportunity for anyone who is interested. Culture, history, and food – for college credit! You can't beat it.

Now, again, back to our task at hand – our book discussion. I enjoyed learning about Julia Child's interest and training in history. In fact, I think that's why this book

worked so well. She was thoughtful and careful to analyze and interpret and critique her own memories. It's sad to think she didn't get to see the final product.

So, let's get the discussion started – as there's so much here to bite into.

Questions

So, what did you think about this book, before you opened it? What were you expecting? And, what did you find?

2 participants had no expectations, and thoroughly enjoyed the book (one hadn't finished)

1 participant pre-judged the book, as I had done, yet was happily surprised by the book

How does it mesh in with our theme – READ INGREDIENTS?

Discussion ensued on ethnic foods in America

One of the criticism you all had with Kingslover's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* was that it was too academic. In the forward of *My Life in France*, the co-author writes: "this is not a scholarly work." Does this influence your like or dislike of the work? And, does it lose its validity since it's not academic?

Discussion regarding Childs' education background making this work more insightful and critical than most memoirs.

Acknowledging her use of abstract ideas, like selective memory.

Traditional historians tend to dislike memory-based sources (such as oral histories and memoirs). They claim there are too many gaps in memory to be considered reliable sources. On page 7 of this memoir, Julia Childs recognizes that memory is selective. What do you think? Are memory sources less reliable than traditional historical sources (legal documents, newspapers, diaries)?

Discussion ensued on the use of multiple source and the purpose of a book.

Acknowledging that all sources have weaknesses was also discussed

What was your favorite part, story, or element of this book?

Discussion regarding the process of publication, her role as a teacher, her relationships with co-authors, her relationship with Paul.

There were so many elements discussed here

Everyone enjoyed her passion for Paris!

Let's rank these four books ...

Barbara Kingslover's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*

- 1 person ranked this first
- 2 people ranked this third
- 1 person ranked it fourth

Hope Skyes Williams' *Second Hoeing*

- 2 people ranked this first
- 2 people ranked this second

Mark Kurlansky's *Food of a Younger Land*

- 1 person ranked this third
- 3 people ranked it fourth

Julia Child's *My Life in France*

- 1 person ranked this first
- 2 people ranked this second
- 1 person ranked it third

Jessica Clark

On Friday afternoon, May 8th, eight of us gathered at the Cowboy Inn in Baggs to discuss Julia Child's autobiography, *My Life in France*, compiled by Julia and Alex Prud'homme, her husband's grandnephew, and finished by Prud'homme after her death in 2004. Julia said she wrote about what she loved most in life: her husband, Paul, France (her "spiritual homeland"), and food. It covers mainly the late 40;s and early 50;s, when Julia and Paul were living in France, and Julia learned French cooking and worked to assemble and publish her first cookbook. Paul was a diplomat, and the story, and Julia's work, moves around with Paul. We even have a rather horrifying account of when he is brought up before the UnAmerican Activities Committee in the US, with no warning, and no offenses, yet grilled and insulted.

Responses to the book and Julia differed. Some found it a direct, refreshing and honest account, and Julia kind, open, and loyal. Others in our group felt that Julia was domineering and elitist, running roughshod over others to get her away, and that made for lively discussion.

Mary Karen Solomon

Second Hoeing by Hope Williams Sykes

A group of eight gathered to discuss *Second Hoeing* by Hope Williams Sykes at the Upton Branch Library. Everyone enjoyed the book and thought it the best in this series. It did not read like a text book rather it told a story and created memorable characters which appealed to the Upton group. We found the others in the series interesting, but not something we would recommend to our friends.

The discussion first focused on the child labor. Several thought that the situation was dire for the children in this

story, but that many from various groups worked nearly as hard and were at mercy of the system. The 1935 setting made us think of all the people in the depression and the difficulties they faced. The father in the story was mean, but after some discussion we decided that part of the meanness stemmed from the stress of trying to keep such a large family from starving, a desire to make a better life, and not knowing any other way to go about it. One participant commented that even in the 1950's it was not uncommon to keep boys out of school after 8th grade to work on the ranch/farm.

Watching the saga of Hannah and her bid to escape was debated. She did not escape, but the group was not sure that a high school education in 1935 would have allowed a big escape. In the end she welcomed her own people and a life like her mother's, but it was noted that she and Fred were starting several steps higher than her parents had. That is the goal of parents for the children to have a better life, and Hannah's looked like it would be. In addition, the introduction of the machines to do some of the labor was a harbinger that life would be somewhat easier for Hannah and Fred.

The author's use of dialect was discussed with some degree of humor. One member has an aversion to books where characters take the Lord's name in vane and refuses to read them. She read half the book before she realized what the father was doing when he said "Gott." We all agreed the dialect was effectively done and added realism.

The conflict of two cultures is a theme in much literature and was emphasized here. It was surprising that the German/Russians (upon which this book was based) make efforts to maintain the culture of Germany from 200 plus years ago. North Dakota University maintains a site called Germans from Russia Heritage. Recipes, stories and traditions are included on the site.

The group had some difficulty trying to reason why this book was included in this series since it is so different from the other three books. Nonetheless it was thoroughly enjoyed.

Sherri Randall

All seven persons participating in the discussion enjoyed *Second Hoeing*. One person suggested that it would have been good to read this book right after *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* because the Kingsolver book revolves around people wanting to produce their own food, work the land, and the Sykes book revolves around people who must work the land for their own survival and, understandably, don't enjoy it.

I brought some information about the history of the Germans living in the Volga area—they were invited to the Volga area by Catherine the Great, but then later czars reneged on the promises she had given the Germans so they began emigrating.

We talked about the social commentary made in *Second Hoeing*. We commented on how the book was instrumental in changing child labor laws in our country, but child labor is still being used in the production and harvesting of some foods that we import.

We discussed some of the aspects of the sugar beet industry in the timeframe of the novel—not much mechanical help, use of poisons (pages 168 and 191), the beginning of the beet farmers' association (page 275). We talked about the use of Mexican migrant workers to work the sugar beet fields from the 1920s onward, and how agricultural work has always been a place for immigrants because it does not require the knowledge of English or education.

We were bothered a bit by the broken English written in the book because (1) the mother and father (and probably the whole family) would have been speaking German at home, and (2) the dialect written sounds more like Pennsylvania Dutch than a German dialect. We realize Sykes could not have written the talking in German, but perhaps it would have been better in standard English.

Everyone agreed that Hannah's story was riveting, and we wanted to know what would happen to her.

Maggie Garner

Eight hardy souls braved the below zero weather to gather at the Niobrara County Library on Monday to discuss the final book in this series. Participation was a bit down due to weather, but we were able to carry on a lively discussion. And, as usual, while the discussion was not always specifically centered on our text, the text led us to many related topics. As I read regarding another group, the dialect made the reading a bit hard at times, but it was considered appropriate and made the characters seem more real and full. The cultural descriptions and family life were thoroughly discussed, with universal agreement that there is little, if any, sympathy for Alex. His behavior toward the children, his physical abuse, and his letting his wife die in such a callous way all create a thoroughly disliked person. Little sympathy was found for Jim and his attitude, and although there was no romantic love, the love of family and the practicality of life which led Hannah to her marriage to Fred were considered appropriate. The last line of the text was discussed and generally considered a bit much.

Most in the group were pleased that a woman had a choice in the end. Although Hannah may not have fulfilled her dream, she did make her own choice for her life. I commented, and the group agreed, that this series began with Child's "live to eat," and it ended with more of an "eat to live" text, which may be why *Second Hoeing* is included in this series. Our discussion of cultures, immigration movements, and relationships led one member to suggest that these texts, discussing human relationships with food, seem to be indicative of a spiritual crisis. The relationship of man with his environment, how we use it and abuse it, and how modern society is removed from the cycle of creation and harvest, may be resulting in giving up part of

our souls to convenience. Perhaps an underlying theme, which was articulated in large part in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* much better than I have suggested above.

This was a fun series, generating much comment, and seemingly enjoyed by all participants.

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Wayne G. Deahl

Sixteen turned out for German food and camaraderie: Grandma's apple kuchen, rye bread, and pickled beets. After comments of "schmeckt gut," I gave a five minute history of the Volga Germans (see attached), which elicited memories of German families in our area. It broadened to include the POWs during WWII who were housed in the Basin Fairgrounds barracks (now used as display halls for zucchini and crocheted baby dresses). Prisoners who had worked beets in Germany were sent to sugar producing regions of the US. They thinned beets and hoed beans, were well fed by farmers' wives, and returned under guard each day.

We touched on how the family's life in *Second Hoeing* would have been different under child labor laws, Social Security, pesticide safety training. Until Monsanto introduced Roundup-Ready sugar beet seed to the Big Horn Basin a few years ago, we all had seen such families in the beet fields. Each farm housed migrant Mexican or Kickapoo Indian families. Once a child was able, they hoed alongside their parents while the younger ones played at the ends of the rows, just as Adam's children in the book.

The discussion became contentious when it turned to the US sugar price support, currently at 21 cents per pound. The world sugar price is usually lower, so an import quota kicks in to maintain the 21 cent level, and the price of an American candy bar stays up. A farmer in our group reminded us the price support enables American farmers to stay in the game; without it we would use petroleum to ship in sugar from Brazil and Pakistan. It took six of us in the group who are farmers, ranchers or retired orchardists, to counter the farmer-bashing conversation; well "farmer-bashing" may be too strong a term, let's say agricultural ignorance. Our next book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, which assails industrial farming methods, should be lively.

Claire Gabriel Dunne

Sixteen turned out for German food and camaraderie: Grandma's apple kuchen, rye bread, and pickled beets. After comments of "schmeckt gut," I gave a five minute history of the Volga Germans (see below), which elicited memories of German families in our area. It broadened to include the POWs during WWII who were housed in the Basin Fairgrounds barracks (now used as display halls for zucchini and crocheted baby dresses). Prisoners who had worked beets in Germany were sent to sugar producing regions of the US. They thinned beets and hoed beans,

were well fed by farmers' wives, and returned under guard each day.

We touched on how the family's life in *Second Hoeing* would have been different under child labor laws, Social Security, pesticide safety training. Until Monsanto introduced Roundup-Ready sugar beet seed to the Big Horn Basin a few years ago, we all had seen such families in the beet fields. Each farm housed migrant Mexican or Kickapoo Indian families. Once a child was able, they hoed alongside their parents while the younger ones played at the ends of the rows, just as Adam's children in the book.

The discussion became contentious when it turned to the US sugar price support, currently at 21 cents per pound. The world sugar price is usually lower, so an import quota kicks in to maintain the 21 cent level, and the price of an American candy bar stays up. A farmer in our group reminded us the price support enables American farmers to stay in the game; without it we would use petroleum to ship in sugar from Brazil and Pakistan. It took six of us in the group who are farmers, ranchers or retired orchardists, to counter the farmer-bashing conversation; well "farmer-bashing" may be too strong a term, let's say agricultural ignorance. Our next book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, which assails industrial farming methods, should be lively.

History: What do Senator Tom Daschle, Lawrence Welk and John Denver have in common? I will give you a clue-- John Denver was named by his mother Henry John Deutschendorf. All three men were descendants of Volga Germans.

In 8 years, from 1764-1772, thousands of German families left war-ravaged Central Europe and accepted the invitation of Tzarina Catherine the Great, to move to Russia. Why did Catherine the Great offer them a good deal? Foreign settlers were to serve as models to the Russian peasants in agriculture and craftsmanship. So in 1762 she invited Europeans, (except Jews) to immigrate and farm Russian lands while maintaining their language and culture.

Thirty years later, by 1798, there were more than 38,000 individuals living in 106 German-speaking colonies along the southern Volga River. They were craftsmen and farmers who plowed the grasslands of the Great Russian Steppe, pushing out nomads who grazed there.

Those who went to Russia had special rights under Catherine's terms.

1. Free to maintain their religion, culture and language.
2. Exempt from land taxes for thirty years .
3. Interest-free loans for the purchase of equipment
4. Exempt from the draft
5. They could run their own towns and schools
6. Free land to each family

Three main reasons motivated many Germans to leave their homeland and immigrate to Russia:

1. Political reasons – military service, foreign occupations, wars, suppression by their own government or ruling prince

2. Economic reasons – crop failures, high taxes, years of famine, lack of living space
3. Religious freedom –

Apart from the food ration and travel money granted by the Russian government, the immigrants received an advance loan for the purchase of building materials and farm equipment amounting to 660 rubles for each family. The property that most of the immigrants brought along was clothing, bedding, and household goods. If they had actual cash it was quickly spent or swindled from them."

They settled, suffered, starved and eventually prospered bearing 5 generations of German children on Russian land. After 120 years of maintaining their German culture in Russia, some of the promises evaporated. In the 1860s when the Tsar needed more conscripts for the Russian army, Germans suddenly were no longer exempt from the draft. In the half century between 1860 and the Russian Revolution in 1917, they went from Privileged to Dispossessed. The Germans packed up again and headed to South Africa, Argentina, Canada, and the western US, including Fort Collins, Newcastle and Worland.

After more than a century of living in autonomous colonies on the steppes of Russia, the Volga Germans had developed a distinctive world view that set them apart from the peasants of their German homeland as well as neighboring Russian villagers. Pietism and idealization of work. In the New World, the Volga Germans were unable to recreate their former way of life. Their idealization of work however, helped them succeed as farmers. They worked hard and their little children worked hard. They live among us still as neighbors: the Salzmans, Scheuermans, Wostenbergs and Lungrens.

Terrible famines in Russia 1920-1925 and again in 1930-1934 prompted relief efforts from their families and friends in the United States. Money and goods were collected in the United States and distributed among the German colonies along the Volga by camel on the frozen river.

Websites:
Center for Volga German Studies at Concordia University in Portland Oregon. cvgs.cu-portland.edu
American Society of Germans from Russia located in Lincoln, Nebraska. <http://www.ahsgr.org/>
Germans from Russia Heritage Society in Bismarck, North Dakota <http://www.grhs.org/>

Claire Gabriel Dunne

12 attendees. 8 Germans. 3 non-Germans. 1 not sure about German heritage. 1 PURE VOLGA GERMAN! What a joy to have a discussion SECOND HOEING, our first book of the Read Ingredients series with this much background. Sharing personal experiences, relating to stories in the book and talking about the Volga Germans in our area was a great beginning to this winter's reading.

We discussed the controversy the book created when written, and for some today, as Volga Germans struggled to preserve an established identity and at the same time

transition into Americans. We also considered the larger historical context as in the lasting effects of this group, which includes topics of today. Social issues of ethnicity, class structure, economic impact, child labor were topics discussed in lively fashion. The work ethic of the Volga Germans as exhibited by Hannah's family and others seemed a good thing gone wrong, yet also seemed a necessary way to survive and better your family. Certainly Child Labor Laws came as results of this type of family intrusion into education. The class structuring in the German society and in the greater society was discussed. Interestingly, research by the leader brought out the demise of that as the Germans earned their place in Ft. Collins (and other places) and became leaders.

Cultural and religious intertwining as both good standards and surmised standards was discussed. Religion played a large role in the family life, not always on a daily basis, but on an overall basis of decision results and standards for children as they moved into adulthood. Family and its importance, especially for Hannah, brought each of our participants to the conclusion that she had married correctly - had "done the right thing."

The group enjoyed the author's style as authentic and readable. It was not so much a book about food, we concluded, as a book about family, relationships, and the changing of culture in many ways.

Elouise Rossler

Eight people gathered at the Powell Branch Library (2/9/12) to discuss "Second Hoeing" by Hope Williams Sykes, a novel that explores the lives of German-Russian sugar beet farmers in Northern Colorado during the early 1900s. The discussion was lively; everyone agreed the story was a masterpiece. Though the book connected to themes familiar to our place in Powell – themes like family, agriculture, immigration – our group focused almost entirely on more literary topics. We loved the main character, Hannah, the young woman who is the center of the story. We marveled at her ability to change. We invested in her conflict between independence and sacrifice. We rooted for her. We speculated about her choices. Then, on the topic of the writer, we discussed how everyone is very interested in looking for her second novel, "The Joppa Door." We loved how "Second Hoeing" brought up the idea of how the characters in the story try to Americanize, and we agreed there is a related and nice metaphor at work in the title. We also liked Sykes' use of authentic language, use of her careful descriptions of events like weddings and the confirmation ceremony, and use of nicely organized chapters, each of which led to the next chapter with cliffhangers, drama, and excitement. For us, this was a page turner.

Michael Konsmo

Thirteen participants attended this final discussion of the series. We spent some time at the beginning deciding which series to request for next year, and then launched into our discussion. Two of the participants were

enthusiastic about the book, one because it rang so true to her experience of growing up among German-Russian beet farmers in Wyoming, and another because she found the novel form more engaging than the preceding three books. We discussed issues of immigration and assimilation, or lack thereof, and its effects on family culture and values. We discussed what is gained and lost when work itself is the primary family value. One participant spoke of the difference between leaving to get away, which most of the older children did, and leaving for a goal. We discussed the importance of perspective, and what the different characters could envision. Some people saw the father as simply a domestic tyrant with no redeeming features, but others saw him as doing all that he knew how to do, and pitied him, as did Hannah, at the end. All of this led to a discussion of the degree to which we are formed by our environment and how much by our genetic nature. There is no clear answer, of course, although some came down more on the side of nature and some of nurture (or lack of it). We spent some time comparing and contrasting the four books. As far as the theme of the series goes, *Second Hoeing* focused almost exclusively on the production of food, rather than the preparation or enjoyment of it. That is partly the result of the family and community culture, where food was, for the most part, used to fuel work. Hannah's work at the neighbor's house presented another view, but that had more to do with economic class than with enjoyment of food itself. At the end, we discussed the power politics of the growers' association in relation to the beet processors, with differing opinions as to the effectiveness of associations, and the psychological need for autonomy in relation to the need for community and group action. Almost everyone agreed that this was a challenging series, and that the discussions were worthwhile.

Stephen S. Lottridge

Place: Worland Library

Date: April 17, 2012

Discussion Leader: Claire Gabriel Dunne

Participants: 11

We met April 17 for *Second Hoeing*, about Volga Germans who emigrated to Colorado (and Wyoming and elsewhere) in 1870s. In the Worland hospital is a photo of the Wostenberg family harvesting sugar beets by hand, the women and girls in long skirts, wearing kerchiefs. Bob Stottler from Washakie Museum brought photos from their archives and told us the history of Volga Germans in our area. This group included four older women who remembered raising beets by hoe and by hand. One's mother worked for a doctor's wife and learned to set the table like the girl in the book; she was told she had "peasant's feet."

A week ahead of our meeting I sent these links to

GERMAN DUTCH HOP POLKA

Dance Music - Dutch Hop <http://cvgs.cu-portland.edu/history/music/DutchHop.cfm>

The term Dutch Hop refers to a type of dance and style of music that was brought to the United States by the

Volga Germans. It is found today in the Volga German communities of Northern Colorado, Western Nebraska, and Southeastern Wyoming practiced most authentically.

Until World War II, Volga German immigrants gathered for what they called German Dances. In response to the anti-German sentiment of the World Wars, these dances were renamed Dutch Hops, and the new name stuck.

In Dutch Hop, the hammered dulcimer is played in a unique manner and it is also the only one of the original instruments left in the typical modern-day Dutch Hop ensemble. Earlier groups in Russia and the U.S. usually consisted of a dulcimer, a string bass, two violins, and a clarinet. The versatile accordion became one of the lead instruments prior to the 1940s, supplanting the clarinet and violins. Gradually, the string bass has given way to a combination of trombone and electric bass. Dutch Hop bands typically include four musicians who play an accordion, a bass electric piano or guitar, a trombone, and the characteristic hammered dulcimer. Dutch Hop dancers respond to the band's beat by adding a bounce to their steps and frequently an extra little hop or a stomp to the smoother regular polka dance.

This video is a wonderful close-up of the playing of the dulcimer, the only original instrument from the German polka bands of the Volga region

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ceHXJ7bYM4w>

Here is a dance band with good dancers demonstrating the dutch hop, which is the polka with added little hops and stomps.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovuWiXfx6es>

Claire Dunne

Eleven ladies gathered in Pine Bluffs in the library on Election Day 2012 to discuss *Second Hoeing* by Hope William Sykes. Attendance was down probably because several of the regular members choose to stay home to watch election returns. Of those who attended *Second Hoeing* was a clear favorite in the *Read Ingredients* series, along with *My Life in France*. In general, group members appreciated the spunk and determination of young Hannah Schreissmiller, the main character. They also believed that the book seemed strangely modern. It was remarked that the book seemed like it took place in the 1950s rather than the 1920s and 30s. We were impressed by the impact the book made on the political climate of the 1930's, particularly the effort to enact child labor laws and we were also impressed by Sykes' meticulous attention to cultural details.

I asked how many of the ladies had German ancestry and about 8 or 9 out of 11 said they did. One lady grew up in a Germans from Russia community in Nebraska and felt that the book was a true and fair portrayal of their way of life. Another was a grandchild of Germans from Russia grandparents and said that Hannah's story reminded her of her grandmother's childhood. They were not bothered by the emphasis on the dirty and dishonest members of the Germans from Russia community because (to paraphrase) "there are bad eggs in every community and this book merely showed the good with the bad". They

believed that the charges of dirty and thieving are the same curses placed on every group that are the struggling newcomers in society. Many of the group members grew up in the Great Plains region in the midst of sugar beet country and remembered that those who worked the sugar beet fields often did stink. They told me that the sugar beet smell got into the skin and was hard to wash off, plus many of those doing "stoop labor" in the sugar beet fields lived in migrant shacks that might not have running water. Even if they did have running water it wasn't hot unless it was heated up on the stove and only one tub full at a time was available for the whole family. Usually the oldest in the family got a bath first and the baby was bathed last, which is the origin of the saying "don't throw the baby out with the bath water".

We talked a bit about Hannah's family and the children's strict upbringing. The realities of life in the sugar beet fields made it necessary for the children to work in the fields and added to the pressures to quit high school and to work the family farm until age twenty-one. One of the Germans from Russia ladies said that her mother was not allowed to marry until she was twenty-one so she could continue to work for her father as long as possible. The life of the Schreissmillers was very hard but they actually had it fairly well compared to others in the community because Adam Schreissmiller was a tenant farmer rather than just a laborer. He was quite aware of this status and it led him to have a large ego. The group did not care for Hannah's older sisters, especially when it came to the distribution of household goods and the adoption of the younger children after Hannah's mother's death.

The discussion then turned to local history. Most of the participants remembered the beet dump that used to be located in the Pine Bluffs area and that it was a smelly business. A couple of the ladies remembered picking beets as children or young adults by stooping in the fields and wearing a "potato belt" or by putting the beets into "beet baskets" that were then dragged along after the picker. By the end of the row the baskets were bumped and shook enough just by being repeatedly moved along that most of the dirt was already off the potatoes. Many also remembered the German prisoner of war camps in the area during World War II. Some of the prisoners were allowed to work on local farms and interact with the farmers. One lady remembered that her mother kept her in the house while the prisoners were on their farm, probably due to prejudice against the Germans caused by war propaganda.

This was the last book we read in the *Read Ingredients* series and we had lively discussions (and some yummy potlucks) with every book. Everyone considered the series a great success.

Elaine Jones Hayes

18 people gathered at the Story Library for the first discussion of the Foods series. Most said they We had some new people who came or were brought by someone because of their own backgrounds or that of their relatives among the Volga Germans. I started the discussion by

asking (since it seemed uppermost in their minds) people to share their response to the book in terms of their own experiences. This opened the floodgates, and it was only by being pretty persistent that I was finally able to move from this to the novel itself although most of what people shared related to some aspect of the novel. We discussed the points the introduction made about the initial reception of the novel in 1935. Some in the group felt that there was an unfair emphasis on the bad traits (dirty, dishonest, sexist, etc) while others saw it as a realistic reflection of any community. We noted that these same traits are often attributed to other outside the main culture groups until they become fully assimilated: Mexicans, Native Americans, Irish, Arabs, etc. Some felt that Adam was one dimensional and despicable while others saw him as more well rounded and even somewhat sympathetic in that he had no other reference for how to be. We talked about the values of the culture, most notably WORK and how that affects the family. We talked about the gender roles in the culture and most insisted that the women had it harder no matter which choices they made among the limited ones available to them. I asked them if they saw issues in the book considering the setting that we still see today. They, of course, did and mentioned children rebelling against the life of their parents, sexuality, abortion, religious questions, and more.

They were interested in the historical background that brought the Volga Germans to the U.S. and Canada. I also told them about Peter Massie's new biography on Catherine the Great which many of us intend to read (and which the librarian ordered today!).

In terms of the series on Foods, we agreed that this book illustrates how hard some have had to and still do work to provide us with that food. It will be interesting to contrast this book with the next one, Animals, Vegetables, and Miracles.

Norleen Healy

We had a pretty good turn out considering that "it was a dark and stormy night" in Rancheater. The group, not surprisingly, loved the book..."couldn't put it down," "read it in two days," etc. As most of the other reports on this book have indicated, many in the group had parents or grandparents who came from that same German-Russian background or grew up around people who did. One lady, who was unable to attend, sent a long letter with photographs about her mother who "could have been Hannah," and the indeed parallels were amazing. The book is especially intriguing for me since all four of my grandparents were Germans (never considered themselves Russian though they were second or third generation German- Russians) who immigrated from that Volga River area in Russia to the wheat fields in North Dakota in the early 1900's.

The group was interested in the historical background going back to Catherine the Great, so we spent some time on that initially (by the way, I heartily recommend the new Peter Massie biography on Catherine).

This group was not bothered by the use of dialect. We talked about the positive and negative traits of the main characters at length. Right away someone noted that the bad traits attributed (dirty, thieving, lazy) to the immigrants are the same stereotypical labels any dominant culture puts on the "other".....in our area, Native Americans and Mexicans mostly. Interestingly, most were pretty understanding of the father and felt that he acted in the only way he knew, and considering what Ana told of the patriarchal dominance in Russia, probably wasn't even as tyrannical as what he saw growing up. We saw Hannah as becoming her mother as she matured--giving of herself entirely to her family, and we didn't think things would have worked out very well with her and Jim anyway (too much of a social gap between them).

The group liked the ethnographic detail, but some said they actually wished there had been more detail about the food. We too discussed the difficulty of maintaining the cultural heritage while trying to assimilate and noted how with each generation, more of the cultural heritage passes away. There was lots of discussion about the local Polish population in the Rancheater/Dayton area and how closely their rituals compared with those in the books.

Some felt this book, much as they enjoyed it, didn't really seem to fit in this series, especially considering the other three books. We agreed that this book certainly looked at the human cost and the negative side of food production. Anyway, the book was unquestionably the favorite of the series.

Norleen Healy

First published in 1935, *Second Hoeing* is a controversial piece of historical fiction. I think serendipity played a role in having me facilitate these discussions. In 2010 I finished my PhD in rural history by defending my dissertation – titled “Germans from Russia on the Northern Plains: An Oral History.” That’s correct, I spent more than six years studying this ethnic group. In fact, I completed my doctorate at the same institution that employed Dr. Timothy J. Kloberdanz – North Dakota State University. Despite being engulfed in German-Russian history for years (and well-published in the field), I had never read Hope William Skyes’ work until now. When I discovered it was the first book on this reading list, I was truly elated.

Skyles book is a well-written and intriguing one (as well as controversial - at least among Germans from Russia). After spending six years working on the Dakota Memories Oral History Project – a project that I designed and coordinated to preserve the history and heritage of Germans from Russia on the Northern Plains – I can speak with great authority – Dr. Kloberdanz is correct – many first, second (and even third) generation Germans from Russia were or would be offended by a “negative portrayal” of their ethnic group.

That said, Skyles didn't intend to offend them. Rather, as an author of any historical fiction, she was trying to be as true to the narrative as possible. Thus, she wrote in broken English – as many of the immigrant generation

were in fact speaking broken English. She wasn't making fun of them or putting them down, rather she was portraying an ethnic group in a foreign land. In addition, German-Russian fathers have a reputation for being distant, harsh or stern, and domineering. While not all German-Russian men were abusive, some were (as in any ethnic group). She was telling a story. There's more to it ... as we will discuss.

This book provides a glimpse into small immigrant farm families in Northern Colorado (a regional history). There's a great deal that can be gleaned from this book related to the focus of these Key Ingredient discussions – food. Through her fictional narrative, Skyes discusses the land of plenty (or not as the case sometimes is), the costs and benefits of working the land, life on a farm, and much more. So, we have a lot to discuss.

Jessica Clark

Friday afternoon, January 24, nine of us met at the Cowboy Inn in Baggs to discuss Hope Williams Sykes novel *The Second Hoeing*. The novel was well-liked; thirteen readers read the novel, though only nine were able to make the discussion.

While attending college at Colorado Agricultural College in Fort Collins, Hope Williams taught elementary school in a two-level red-brick building near "the Jungle", the German-Russian immigrants' area. She got to know her neighbors well and taught their children in school also.

German agricultural workers had been invited to Russia to cultivate new land by Catherine the Great, who promised them freedom from taxes and military service as well as good land to work. When her successors didn't live up to her bargain, many of these German immigrants left Russia for the land available in the Great Plains of the United States. These immigrants, known as "dirty Russkies" by most of the middle-class of Greeley, worked hard to succeed as sugar-beet rent-farmers.

Hope married a few years later, and while living further in Greeley, she worked on *Second Hoeing*, drawing upon the lives of her students and neighbors. She claimed to rewrite it twice over a period of 5 years, and it was published by the University of Nebraska press in 1935.

As I told our readers during my background for the novel, I had several 20th century novel classes in the process of obtaining my Master's degree, yet in none of those classes did we read or mention *Second Hoeing*, despite the fact that it was a much more gripping novel with characters more interesting and developed than some of the novels we did read. Evidently it was flying below the academic radar, perhaps, suggested one lady, because the subject was immigrants.

Everyone found the novel's protagonist, Hannah, believable and interesting, as well as a character with character! She badly wants to continue her schooling but is fated to be the backbone of her family instead. The dirty back-breaking work, the births and care of children, unrealistic social and emotional aspirations, all are

handled realistically and well. Hannah's infatuation with the young man of the Manor House is handled sympathetically, yet all of us were satisfied by the unromantic yet realistic ending of the novel, as Hannah finds a workable partnership for life and is able to continue raising and supporting her youngest siblings. The density and liveliness of the details of their lives makes the novel easy and compelling to read.

We discussed the immigrant background of our own families and relatives, as well, finding the portrayal of the Russian-Germans in the novel realistic and convincing. It was a good novel and deserves much more fame than it seemed to find! –Mary Kay Solomon

Series: Read Ingredients
Book: *Second Hoeing*
Place: Newcastle
Date: January 20, 2016
Discussion Leader: Phyl Sundstrom
Participants: 12

The Newcastle group met on January 20, 2016, in the Weston County Library meeting room. Twelve members gathered to discuss *Second Hoeing*, by Hope Williams Sykes. Everyone in attendance had enjoyed reading the book and is looking forward to the rest of the series! One of the members who arrived early asked everyone, as she came in, if the ending was a surprise; most said it was not and all were pleased with it!

We most enjoyed main character Hannah and the relationship that developed with her father, Adam, throughout the book; she is beyond strong and all of us agreed that we have life pretty easy these days. The dialect of the characters was difficult to get used to, but easy to understand once we had. It was nice to see Hannah's language improve as she became more educated.

We discussed the comparison to *The Grapes of Wrath* in the book's introduction, and I added some comparisons between John Steinbeck and Sykes, which I knew from having taught TGOW. We also discussed the publication controversy back in the 30s, which centered around the broken English spoken by the Volga Germans in the book, as well as the implication that they were typically thieves and dirty.

The connection with the series theme was interesting and surprising. I think all of us went into this series expecting each book to be about food in the sense of consuming it, not producing it. But of course, the agricultural community is critically important to the process, and I was glad to have chosen this as the first to read.

A very thorough study of Volga Germans in Ft. Collins, the setting for this novel, is found at <http://www.museodelastrescolonias.org/History/Work%20Renders%20Life%20Sweet.PDF> One of our members is descended from Volga German immigrants and was quite interested in reading it, as was her farther.

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle by Barbara Kingsolver

Ten of us gathered at the Upton Branch Library to discuss a much talked about thing in our society—food. A question about the purpose of the book initiated the conversation. The general concession was the Kingsolver wanted to create a greater awareness about from where our food comes. Our group was very aware of what happens from the egg to a roasted chicken on the Sunday table, but we also know that many people younger than us do not. A rural background involves us in that process a little more closely, but one member did not know what a “fryer” was because of a childhood of Navy relocations and an adulthood of city life. .

Kingsolver thinks there is a crisis in our food system that is threefold. We consume much food and health is not the priority. That seems to be changing as there is a much greater concern for healthy food in school lunches and healthful eating is promoted in special TV ads. People are more aware of fats and sugars now than they were in previous decades. Secondly Kingsolver discusses the environmental impact of food being transported great distances to get to our tables. We thought about what is available in the fresh food sections of our nearby groceries both large and small, and Kingsolver’s ideas were evident. We eat what the supermarket sells; they generally sell the same thing all year around. Prices may vary, but what is available does not. Some of our foods must travel a great distance immensely increasing the carbon footprint of our food. Kingsolver’s third concern was our forgotten farmers. It is gauche to be one. It is not a noble occupation to dig in the dirt. Now corporations bring us our food, and we don’t think about what was involved. We are guilty of social blindness in many food processes from the carrots we eat to mass produced slaughter house beef. In earlier times the farmer was the backbone of the nation

Kingsolver’s family produced as much of their food as they could and purchased the rest locally which they decided was a 100 miles radius. They did not give up coffee, spices, and a few other items, but generally they ate locally for a year. They made bread from flour ground nearby, canned from the garden, froze meat from the chicken coop and beef producers close by, and made cheese. The book includes recipes for some of their favorites. The group thought that it was a good way to live but had some reservations. In Virginia the growing season is longer; in Wyoming it is shorter, too short for many of our favorites. We can however grow zucchini with the best of them. Our gardens need a good source of water. She never mentioned needing any kind of sprinkler system.

Our skepticism about the book and the lifestyle came in several forms. We were concerned about her canning methods. Currently food experts highly recommend a pressure canner for food preservation from pickles to fruits. The acidity of modern tomatoes is less than the acidity of tomato varieties of old, and a hot water bath could be asking for trouble. She felt that 40 quarts of

tomatoes would be sufficient for the winter months for a family of four. We were not so sure. (Last winter was still too fresh in our minds) The author confesses at the end that during this wonderful year, she was at college and not home much. She was part of the summer gardening and canning, but the bulk of the year she was on a campus living in a dorm. Her husband and daughter wrote many sidebar sections of the book bringing several more perspectives to the lifestyle.

The book included many statistics to back her food view. We felt it had a bit of a textbook feel thereby making it a slower read. The information was interesting and thought provoking. I do not think any of the group will become local eaters only, but they will look at their dinner plate a little differently. Adjusting one’s perspective is not a bad thing.

Sherri Randall

Thirteen persons had an animated discussion of *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* at the Albany County Public Library. All but one person really liked the book; the one who did not thought it was too preachy and made her feel guilty (one more thing she is supposed to do with her young children). Another person thought it was too preachy at first but then got better.

Some of the attendees already do a lot that Kingsolver suggests, and others said that they would now change a few buying habits after reading the book (such as not buying bananas). We discussed that “local” means Colorado for people living in Laramie because we have such a limited growing season. But we do have a wonderful farmers’ market and, occasionally, a winter’s farmers’ market. We talked about the fact that farmers’ markets also provide a community social event that is really wonderful.

We talked about the wisdom and joy of eating foods in season, the importance and delight in heirloom seeds, the delights of growing one’s own food.

We talked quite a lot about the economic and political aspects of the food industry, such as industrialized food and the problems with international food sources (especially how it affects the local populations). We questioned whether having acres of corn fields in Nebraska is really the best way for us to use our land. We were disturbed by the genetic manipulation of seeds and companies selling seed that produces plants with non-productive seeds.

We all liked the writing itself. Some liked Camille’s entries the best. The book engendered wonderful discussion and stimulated people to tell some of their own stories about food and producing food.

One discussion leader mentioned in her post that the author was at a university during most of the year. However, Camille was the one going to school, not the main author, Barbara Kingsolver.

Maggie Garner

Some 12 of us gathered at the Niobrara County Library on a rainy Tuesday evening for a discussion of Animal, Vegetable, Miracle by Barbara Kingsolver. It was a most pleasant evening of discussion and reminiscing, as the book evoked powerful memories of childhoods, and I think that is a large part of the joy of this series. Culturally, food is at the center of much of our social lives (as is suggested in the text), and to discuss food is to relive where we have been, what we have done, and what has made us. And this is certainly humanities-centered discussion.

But enough preaching. As I seem to always mention, this group has a core cohesiveness developed over many years, and very little is required of the discussion leader before they take off and begin talking about the text and related issues. I began the evening with a YouTube video (about ten minutes) of Kingsolver reading from Chapter 1. I find it useful to hear author's read their own words and interesting to hear what is emphasized. I think it is also useful to see authors as people rather than a vague presence behind the text. I then asked the group to consider their perceptions of the book and what it had evoked in them. Many said it was hard to get started on the book, but once past the first two or three chapters it began to read much more easily. Some of the ideas were considering the past and how we have changed eating/cooking/food habits. One participant suggested she now reads labels more carefully and was amazed at what products contain corn sugar. We discussed gardening and how it is different where one lives--Wyoming weather and altitude makes it more difficult, for example, than the climate in Virginia. There was discussion of labeling for place of origin, which has added to understanding of just how far food travels. Other discussion involved cultural expectations for what foods are expected, lifestyle choices, corporate farming/ranching and how that affects those family operations still trying to make a living from the land, urban gardening, and the joy of the humor in the text. Zucchini, for example, and maintaining vigilance to keep a neighbor from "dropping off" yet another bag of the endemic squash.

All in all, this was a wonderful discussion and a wonderful evening. I would also point out that those who are on electric cooperatives and get WREN magazine might note that, on page 27 of the October issue, they will find a reminder that the UW Extension Offices have made available a Guide to Wyoming food producers and local food groups. A serendipitous moment of discovery for me as I was preparing for this discussion. It is now off to our next text, and I asked the group to be prepared to share recipes, food-related stories, and family or cultural memories at the next gathering. I will let you know how that works.

Wayne Deahl

We tried to share food produced within 100 miles, like the authors of our book, and found it hard. One woman made pizza from the recipe in the book and documented the origin of the ingredients: flour from North Dakota and herbs from her own garden were the closest. I brought salsa from our tomatoes and peppers, but told the group we would have to dip in with a spoon since I couldn't find my metate to grind corn for corn chips. Another had ordered the cheese making kit and made mozzarella. Local eggs and grass finished beef are available, though with the retirement of our processor, local meat will become scarcer.

Kingsolver and her family didn't rely on fish and game; but most of us have wild protein in the freezer, canned or smoked. The rancher in our group says government regs at every level are making feedlots untenable.

When our young family moved to the Big Horn Basin in 1984, I bought raw milk, floated off the cream and churned butter (in the Cuisinart), but no one sells milk now.

Two of the women had been raised on farms, had milked, grown gardens, canned the bounty, and butchered poultry. They are glad late in life to have a supermarket instead, though they join with daughters to put up jars of produce in the fall. We frequent our new Farmers' Market and note that our new Community Garden is taking renters for spring 2012.

We wonder whether the 99 Bountiful Baskets that arrive at the Methodist Church every Saturday is saving fuel. Nevertheless, we feel that the farmers are getting better prices and we get more flavor and some organic produce for less money.

Recipe for sunflower or pumpkin seeds: fill pressure cooker half full with fresh seeds, cover in heavily salted water, pressure cook for ten minutes, dry in the oven, with nothing extra added. The salt will be forced into the kernel, so they are a salty snack even after you shell them.

I noted the local Food bank won't take extra garden produce (must be still in the grocery store wrapper; some food bank got sued in Colorado.) But surplus can be delivered to the Senior Center or Apple Apartments where our older citizens remember how good a garden tomato can taste.

We found the book humorous, not preachy or condescending at all, learned more about the source of our food, and pledged to make small changes in our shopping habits.

Claire Gabriel Dunne

Nine of us charged our way through a lively discussion of the various ANIMALS, familiar and otherwise

VEGETABLES, and an uncertain Miracle in Ten Sleep. There were points of strong agreement - disdain for methods of treatment of animals, processing of food in an industrialized atmosphere, supporting local economy and others. Strong disagreement centered on realism of the concept for the average family (we did not feel they were an average family due to types of occupation and amount of available resources to them). Time issues with 8-5 jobs were discussed. Travel issues and what is regional? Regional in Virginia is much different than regional in Wyoming.

The group felt there were inaccuracies in her assessment of the "fossil print" left by the normal way of operating. There was discussion from a study regarding the amount of fuel used to protect and to grow organic foods. The process of growing organic food is not quite as simple as she described from the standpoint of doing it on a large enough scale to compete with other growers. The real meaning of organic was also discussed; it varies almost by grower and by person discussing it!

Heritage plants evolved with nature's help and with help from people. Here in Ten Sleep we have some heritage apples planted many years ago by an early settler. They still produce, but have to be pruned and need other help from growers to produce well and to be protected from insects. This is one of the biggest problems of the organic farmer who is trying to earn a living - protecting his crop from the pests that come from other growers.

There was some resentment to the classifying of all growers as industrialized. The beef growers and the sheep growers in Wyoming also often have gardens for their families, sometimes participate in farmers' markets, usually freeze and/or can fruits and vegetables. One person pointed out that the beef has to be taken out of Wyoming to be butchered and processed for large markets - no such facility is in Wyoming.

Governmental regulations have not always helped make food less industrialized and this isn't always supported by the growers. Often it is the "middle men" and the sellers to grocers that have pushed for many of the laws.

Technical knowledge has made growing plants and animals more efficient for both the self sufficient grower and the commercial grower. Certainly some is less desirable than other ways of using the knowledge.

There is agreement among the group that food tastes and longevity have changed over the years. However, as this has changed so has the lifestyle of people in our country and all industrialized countries. We move to the same impulse as the animal - requiring food on a regular basis. This has not changed. The Green Revolution of the seventies did not and has not yet produced realistic ways of changing the food operation to a more organic and natural part of the life style of most people.

The tone of the book was sometimes condescending, which our group resented. People who live close to the land, as most people in Ten Sleep do, know the pulse of nature and the flow of life it brings.

We all applauded Lily for her work ethic and her young enthusiasm for entrepreneurship. She understood, as children often do, the basics of her environment as well as the challenge of providing her own needs.

Most of us agreed we liked the book for the challenge it gave us and found it more readable than at first perceived. We did not particularly care for the format of the three plus recipes. The recipes could easily have been a section of their own at the back of the book; perhaps Steven's and Camille's could have been placed at the end of chapters.

Elouise Rossler

Eleven people gathered at the Powell Branch Library (3/8/12) to discuss "Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life" by Barbara Kingsolver, a non-fiction book about one family's move across the United States, from Tucson to southwestern Virginia, to live off agriculture and livestock produced largely on a family's farm. All participants agreed the book was enjoyable, interesting, and informative - nearly all responses were positive. Readers enjoyed Kingsolver's writing style, finding her writing easy to follow - many in the group had read and recommend other fiction and non-fiction books by Kingsolver. But, most of our discussion focused on food. Most readers commented on how the information about food production and food costs will change how they will buy, raise, and store food products. We live in a community with farmer's markets, and we agreed we will visit them more often. We discussed how we can raise more fruits and vegetables in family gardens. We agreed that local produce and livestock were better for our community's farmers and ranchers, our diets, and our bank accounts. In all, we agreed to make small changes to try to think locally about our food sources and commit to more practical and responsible practices. We also compared our local community resources to food resources found in larger cities or other countries. One of the strengths of this book is that it helps us to think about many, many possibilities related to food. At the end of the discussion, we were certainly hungry.

Michael Konsmo

Seventeen people attended this discussion (Animal, Vegetable, Miracle), the second in the series. Most people responded positively to the book, although some thought that the author was moralistic or was lecturing the reader. This led immediately into a discussion of the question of whether the way we produce food is, or is not, a moral issue. While most participants did not engage this question in the abstract, it became clear that the majority thought that it is a moral issue, because the health and survival of our species depends on it. We discussed the pros and cons of large scale, industrialized agriculture, and its effect on our population. The issue of exhausting

our land for the sake of cheap food in the long run, evoked passionate responses. We discussed whether humanity, as a whole, is actually capable of making decisions that are in our long term interest but involve short term "deprivation" and sacrifice.

The issue of obesity combined with malnutrition, as a result of plentiful, cheap but less than nourishing food, commanded our attention. This led us to a consideration of what values lie behind the way we produce food. When we "save time," what do we do with the time that we save? When we forgo meals together, what do we sacrifice in the way of connection, community and ritual appreciation of the earth that sustains us? When we never see food produced, can we appreciate the effort and risks it involves, and do we cut ourselves off from some part of ourselves as beings on the earth? What are the hidden economic costs of all our labor saving machinery? Have we made a value of comfort, of not having to work hard or be connected to the source of our sustenance? What are the costs of that value? What political and economic system lends itself best to a sustainable relationship with the earth on which we depend for our survival?

Three members of the group identified specific actions they were committed to taking to support more local, sustainable food production. And, two members had made recipes from the book and brought them to share. The consensus was that they were delicious.

Stephen Lottridge

The usual group of fourteen ladies met at the Pine Bluffs branch of the Laramie County Library System and shared local produce and/or vegetables from their own gardens while we discussed the memoir *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver. The group consumed garden grown tomatoes, squash and cucumbers; along with fruit (peaches, pears and nectarines) from the Cheyenne Farmers Market. This was in keeping with the topic of the book which is the author's family's experience with eating only what they could grow or raise themselves or purchase locally to reduce their carbon footprint and live healthier lives. In addition to the produce, one of the ladies brought a wonderful peach pie and two other ladies shared food made from recipes in the book (zucchini chocolate chip cookies from page 194 and the dried tomato pesto on page 295) and these creations were all really delicious. Another lady mentioned trying the spaghetti sauce recipe in the book with great success.

This is a group with a great deal of experience in agriculture, nearly all of those present either grew up on a farm, currently live on a farm or ranch or currently have their own vegetable gardens. But there was so much factual information presented about growing vegetables, hunting for mushrooms and the sex lives of turkeys (and etc.) that we all learned some sort of interesting agricultural tidbit. I personally relayed my awe when I learned that peanuts plant themselves, which is how the peanut (a nut or seed) comes to be underground when harvested. One of the first comments from one of the

ladies was that Kingsolver sometimes got things wrong; for example, this group member says that chickens really do run around when their heads are chopped off, they don't just flop around a little as Kingsolver claims. Another group member found her politics to be a little annoying along with her tendency to give too much botanical details (for example, nearly 60 pages about asparagus).

We chatted a bit about the fate of the small farmer and the evils of corporate agribusiness which is a major theme in the book. One person shared a story about a gardener that saved seed corn for planting the next year but didn't get a single cob that second year because they'd used genetically modified corn that was engineered to not produce the second year so that new seed would have to be purchased (from the multinational seed corporation) every year. We also discussed how things have improved for the gardener/small family farmer/organic food eater since the 2007 publishing date of this book because of the increased availability of heritage seeds and the increased popularity of farmers markets and organic produce. The group also noted that the Kingsolver-Hopp family had the benefit of extremely good growing conditions in wet and warm Virginia compared to dry and cold eastern Wyoming. Many of the plants she grew in Virginia would never grow in Wyoming outside of a greenhouse.

We greatly enjoyed the contributions to the story from her husband Steven Hopp and daughter Camille Kingsolver. Steven added scientific and statistical information and Camille added nutritional information and recipes. The recipes especially were a great hit. We also enjoyed the author's youngest daughter Lily's inspiring entrepreneurial spirit regarding her successful egg business. We look forward to discussing *Food of a Younger Land* in our next meeting.

Elaine Hayes

15 ladies gathered for our initial discussion in the "Foods" series at the Tongue River Library. I began as usual with some biographical information on Barbara Kingsolver. Several in the group had read some of the novels she wrote, so we talked about some common themes that emerge in her writing, some of which related to the book at hand such as her concern for environmental issues and for those who tend to be disenfranchised in our country. Many of the group said they intended to read more of her writing.

I had prepared a list of discussion questions, but it was a struggle to move from one point to another because once this group got on to the book, I could hardly keep them in control! Ranchester/Dayton is pretty rural; almost everyone has had gardens their whole lives, and everyone had lots of thoughts to share. One elderly lady came in saying "I could have written this book. It was about me and my family." The difference became clear in that 50 or so years ago when she and her husband made the decision to move to the country and survive on what they could

raise, it wasn't as an experiment, it was more a necessity. We talked about how those two things differed.

Some of the questions we considered were as follows, but as I say, it certainly wasn't a structured discussion:

- How has your attitude and use of food changed over the years (eating, cooking, food habits, shopping, etc)? Will any of this be affected having read the book? (Only one person out of the 15 said "Probably not.")

- What exactly is she about here? What about the tone of the book? I mentioned that some think Kingsolver is a bit "preachy" or self congratulatory, but this group didn't agree.

- Can we counter any of the issues she sees as big problems (crises) in our food system? This led to big arguments about her points concerning pasteurization and government controls.

- What were some specifics we learned from the book? (In my case, it was about heirlooms, that bottled water is not as safe generally as faucet water, and that turkeys no longer have a natural sex life!)

- What would inhibit us in this area from following Kingsolver's plan? What advantages did she have that we wouldn't?

- When I finally got everyone calmed down a bit toward the end, I asked why is a series on "food" appropriate for a humanities based discussion. I am happy to say they really got that.

Norleen Healy

13 Participants gathered in Story for our discussion. After some background on Kingsolver I began the discussion by asking what the group thought her primary concerns are in this book, i.e. what prompted Kingsolver to go on this year long food "journey" with her family. We agreed that she was challenged by the idea of eating only local foods for the health as well as the environmental and social benefits, and we talked about these issues. The discussion jumped around a lot and tended to veer off into the experiences of the group with gardening and farming in the Story area. I asked them to think about what they might have learned from reading the book as well as what they might take issue with. This initiated another lively exchange (often totally unrelated to the book!). We discussed how our own attitude surrounding food has changed or evolved over the years.

Unusual for this group, several hadn't finished the book. Some said they were put off a bit by the "preachy" tone and a few others said they just didn't find the book compelling. Even so, the discussion was animated though it continued to be difficult to keep focus on the book. I finally had to decide that was OK because they were certainly engaged.

In closing, I asked them to think about how this book compares with *Second Hoeing* which they read (and loved) last month. WE agreed that in that book, the farm work was grueling and diminished the potential of many of the participants to have fulfilling lives, where-as Barbara Kingsolver's family's circumstances were vastly different allowing them to relish their connection to the food they were growing.

Norleen Healy

To be honest, I didn't know what to expect with Barbara Kingslover's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. And, I have no qualms about admitting that I wasn't expecting to enjoy it nearly as much as I enjoyed Skyes work. However, I was only a few pages into the work when I knew I was going to like it more (if that was possible). This work is a memoir of sorts. The primary author is Kingslover (an evolutionary biologist turned journalist) with excerpts or vignettes by her husband (an animal behaviorist) and her daughter (a student of nutrition). I love the idea behind a family authored book! ☺

If anyone has read Michael Pollan's *Omnivore's Dilemma* they will see a great deal of similarity between the works. Both books really make you think about what you are eating. (Another one that comes to mind when reading *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* is Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*.) The details and graphic nature of this book leave on frightened about what they are consuming. This book is inspiring. It makes one want to change his/her lifestyle – to eat more regionally!

This memoir traces the author and her family's move from an urban lifestyle to a rural lifestyle. Kingslover discusses what it was like producing her food for a full year – or buying local (or as local as possible).

The greatest strength of Kingslover's work is her candidness. She never minced words. She owns the difficulties of removing processed foods, as well as the one "cheat" that her family opted to allow. For instance, her husband wanted coffee and she had spices. She also doesn't hold back in her descriptions – from butchering chickens to turkey sex. Her readers can visualize "a year of food life" – the subtitle to this work.

While *Second Hoeing* and *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* don't have much in common – except they are both farm family oriented works. They both provide a number of discussion points. So let's get to it!!

Jessica Clark

Series: Read Ingredients
Book: [Animal, Vegetable, Miracle](#)
Place: Newcastle
Date: February 17, 2016
Discussion Leader: Phyl Sundstrom
Participants: 10

The Newcastle group met on February 17, 2016, in the Weston County Library meeting room. Ten members gathered to discuss *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, by Barbara Kingsolver. Everyone in attendance found the book an interesting read, although they preferred the first book due to its storyline and characters.

I was very impressed with the author's website and shared it with the discussion group: <http://www.kingsolver.com/>. Rather than tolerate misinformation, she chose to share much of her biographical information. Most interesting was how much her fictional writing is based on personal experience, such as *The Poisonwood Bible*, based on the years she lived in The Congo as a young girl.

We enjoyed reading how much the book's experience of living for a year on what they could grow or buy locally was a family effort; everyone contributed and appreciated the results. I particularly enjoyed daughter Camille's essays and husband Steven's sidebars. Camille's perspective was refreshing and Steven offered informative background to issues the author discussed. We felt that she often went into unusual detail, such as the pages on asparagus, but we appreciated her passion for what they were doing!

We were also interested in many of the recipes included, such as varieties of potato salad based on the seasons, and I had already tried several before our discussion. We've considered bringing food the last session...made from recipes in the books we've read or from old family recipes that have come to mind as we've read.

We discussed a variety of specifics we learned about from the book, such as global warming, organics and the impact of GMOs, making cheese, the author's cost analysis of their year...and of course, the sex life and harvesting of turkeys! We concluded our discussion with the question "would this be realistic/possible for people living in Weston Co.?" We feel isolated here from the variety of food sources the author's family had.

Food of a Younger Land **by Mark Kurlansky (editor)**

The Upton group had a small turn out for the discussion of this book. We were competing with homecoming coronation and bingo at the senior citizens, and the book was not that great so five was a decent showing.

We were interested in the author's writing style since it could not be determined from this book. His novel *Battle Fatigue* might be an interesting read. Kurlansky is a dedicated researcher so the group felt some of his other works might bear investigating. Several of the pieces in the book were by authors still known today. Zora Neale Hurston's contribution was a fantastical delight. She has lately come into the good writers' circle. The 2001 movie *Songcatcher* records the efforts to capture the songs of the hill South illustrating the process that parallels the writer's project.

On Kurlansky's site, he mentions that this book and *Cod and Salt* are New York Best Sellers, but that is "a dubious laurel" since Sarah Palin's tome made that list. We were inclined to agree. The premise of the compilation is transportation and conformity has homogenized the American eating habits. Pizza Hut and Olive Garden are good examples of how our views of particular cuisines are formulated. The group felt that to be generally true, but one critic felt that if one delved deep enough into American culture off the interstates, the area dining patterns were still varied and intriguing. We could not think of a local dish that would fit that definition.

After reading the book, no one seemed inclined to want any geoduck or menudo. Several of us confessed to making the depression cake (with the raisin base) frequently. The writer accurately described the smell of that cake baking. The book brings up some curiosities for other books. What did they serve at any particular president's table? What did Walt Whitman eat? Are there specialties at local potlucks? What do they serve at weddings across the land now? Then? I think the group would not be standing in line for those books should they be written, but it was "food for thought."

Sherri Randall

Seven persons gathered to discuss *The Food of a Younger Land*. We all enjoyed the discussion, and everyone seemed to like the book.

We began by talking about the U.S. in 1940 and all we learned about it from the book. We were surprised that "This Land is Your Land" came out in 1940 and automats appeared in 1912, apparently with good food.

We talked about the distinct cultures in each region in pre-World War II U.S. and how many of those differences have now disappeared. We discussed how the various foods in each region are a reflection of people adapting to where they live and eating what is available to them (in contrast to today). We laughed and cringed about some of the foods and drinks mentioned.

The food is so much a reflection of the culture, and the entries themselves tell us a lot. As mentioned in the introduction, the entries from the South reflect the prejudice and attitudes towards African-Americans. We laughed that Los Angeles was seen as a pretty weird place even in 1940.

This book works really well after Barbara Kingsolver's book because the ideas of eating locally and seasonally dovetail well. And it is delightful to read about Coca-Cola parties in Georgia, sugaring off in Vermont, and the new taco sandwich in California.

Maggie Garner

Our smallest group of the year, 7, met on Monday night to discuss The Food of a Younger Land. Other events, like the junior class play, illness, and various reasons led to a smaller group than usual. However, this was a fine discussion, as is the norm. The core of the Lusk group has been meeting and discussing books long enough that there is an apparent comfort level and openness to opinion. I did not really need to begin the discussion, as the group jumped right into the events for the evening. The section on feeding threshing crews got us underway. Most had heard of or witnessed something very much like this, and that seemed to be the theme of the evening--reminders of times, places, events, and family.

While this is not a novel and has no immediate sense of flow, the various items served as memory prods. I had asked the group to think of food-related events at the end of the last session, and they were eager contributors. Our discussion was not nearly as focused as is usual, rather I just let the group run its course. One participant was reminded of her father's involvement with the first hot lunch program in Colorado. Others were reminded of favorite foods, how the loss of regional foods has led to a loss of identity and culture, the importance of the essays to the text, and the cultural rivalries spawned by food (clam chowder, son-of-a-gun or son-of-a-bitch, preparation and types of clams, etc.). One of the essays which was read aloud in part and enjoyed by all was the mashed potatoes essay. Many expressed surprise that the automat was already a part of life. We also talked about table manners, wondered why mint juleps are so popular, and wondered at the change in our country and world.

Many personal stories were shared, and we determined that Wyoming probably had no essay included as we are a bland meat and potatoes state. However, those are the comfort foods and are the cornerstone of our food groups. Additionally, one participant wondered if that will continue to be the case, as children today seldom experience eating around a table, with home-cooked fresh food, in a social atmosphere. That if it isn't fast food, it just isn't that good. And that echoes the idea from two months ago about living to eat or eating to live. This nostalgic text made us wonder what we are losing as the world changes.

A good discussion with a convivial group, as usual.

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Wayne G. Deahl

The introduction was a wonderful history lesson for us. The WPA and the Federal Writers' Project were no doubt things most of us had heard of, but we did not really know much about them (other than the WPA provided workers who built the Meadowlark Lake dam). The idea of basing AMERICA EATS on the guidebook format seemed interesting to us. We tried to imagine a world without fast food, interstates, automatic transmissions, suburbs and were successful as most of us had lived for at least a period of time in that situation. We noted the increase in population from 1940-1950, the increased number of cars, hence more roads. The country became more multicultural also. We also became a military-

industrial complex during this time, as well as a consumer based economy.

Some of the things we enjoyed discussing were in each region, May breakfast in the Northeast, the "automats" and beverage pumps and "tray jockeys" from the New York area. The luncheonette slang was a bit much we decided, but all of us remembered enjoying drugstore lunches. Mushrooming, sugaring off were familiar to some. The "chittlins" of the South served with hush puppies weren't enticing to some. The sourdough starter and pancakes were familiar to all of us, however the lutefish and lefsa of the Scandinavian regions weren't desired by many. The salmon and smelt of the Northwest sounded good. The inclusion of discussion of the Basque culture was interesting since all of us knew of Basques and most had been to the Basque celebrations in Buffalo, WY. The inclusion of Native American food was interesting and much of it was new to many. The L. A. taco sounded familiar! The lamb fries and Kentucky oysters are close relatives of Rocky Mountain oysters.

We felt the concept of a book of this type was great and were thankful to Mr. Kurlansky for going through the papers that had been turned in and making some sense of it. The food was regionally based in all the areas, tying us into the Kingsolver book from last time. For a country that some say has no food culture, we got a lot of education out of reading about the regional foods. We also made some food, spoon bread, corn bread, pasties (from a cookbook from Butte, Montana) and sopa bread budding (a Mexican variation of bread pudding) and certainly we enjoyed eating!

We have had food at each session, trying to do something from the book we were reading. Our last meeting will discuss Julia Child's MY LIFE IN FRANCE. I have challenged them to see if they can bring something French!

Elouise Rossler

Fourteen people attended this discussion. Several participants reported struggling with the book, and reading only parts of it. The reasons were many: it is neither novel nor essay nor reporting, but an olio of bits and pieces; there was a relative lack of human interaction; the writing ability varies widely; and the regions were not equally, or necessarily accurately, represented; and, it was very difficult to find humanities issues to discuss. Some readers, however, found the variety of recipes and accounts fascinating. We discussed the ways that most of the eating described was local, perforce, because it was hard to transport food the way our transportation system allows now.

We also noted that the concerns with diet and "healthy eating" seemed to be absent, with many of the recipes calling for large doses of fat, sugar and salt, and the free introduction of such prepared things as catsup, tabasco sauce and other condiments. This then led to a discussion of the way eating habits have changed in

America, as we have moved from an primarily agrarian society through an industrial society to a post-industrial society. We engaged the question of what values underlie these shifts. Many thought that the ideas of efficiency and convenience were paramount. This led to a more probing examination of what has been lost and what gained through these shifts. The art of conversation, the social and human connections through the shared preparation and consumption of food, the appreciation of the sustenance that food provides have all been weakened or lost. But efficiency, the ability to feed huge numbers of people, most of whom are not able, or willing, to produce their own food, and an attitude toward food that matches a faster-paced society have been gained. One of the core humanities questions is that of the need for humans to experience both a sense of connection and community, and a sense of autonomy and independence.

How do we balance those? How do other societies balance them? We discussed the fact that there always seems to arise a counter movement when the balance is weighted too heavily in one direction or the other. Finally, we spoke of the importance of retaining a connection to the world of the senses. When things become too sterile, the pleasures of smell and taste are reduced. We spent a good deal of time talking about the popularity of the automat, and its modern day equivalents. In relating this book to the preceding two, we noted that people in this book did enjoy the ritual of the preparation and sharing of food, including the competitiveness, and the idea of the connection of food with celebration. We did note, as in the other two books, that life for many people precluded the use of food other than as a necessary part of nourishing the body for work. The other two books did articulate a vision of the importance of food and being mindful of our relationship to it, while this book did not seem to have that conscious intention. At the end, people spoke of the regions of the country they came from, and the emotional connection with childhood smells, tastes and connections associated with food that remain with us for our lifetimes.

Stephen S. Lottridge

Eleven people gathered at the Powell Branch Library to discuss "The Food of a Younger Land" by Mark Kurlansky. The book provides a large collection of recipes that were gathered in the 1930s and 1940s by the Federal Writer's Project. The FWP was started by the Roosevelt Administration as part of the Works Progress Administration, an agency that was formed to create jobs during the Great Depression. One of goals of the FWP was to collect recipes that represented local food sources, local traditions, and local cultures. The author of the book, then, collected the best of the recipes that he found in the unpublished collection of recipes he found in archives. Our book group found the recipes to be interesting, but they found that 400 pages of recipes was tedious to read. We all agreed that skimming the book for favorite recipes was the best strategy for reading this book. We did enjoy and appreciate the author's introduction to the book – Kurlansky described the American status quo of the late 1930s with great historical insight. And, many of Kurlansky's introduction to sections of the book were also

interesting, though we agreed that many times his information duplicated what was written in the recipe introductions and descriptions that were created by the original WPA writers. In all, the book group did not review this book with too many favorable comments, but we agreed that it sparked good conversation. We spent much of the hour discussing family food traditions and recipes and we discussed whether or not there are contemporary recipes and food traditions that match what was prevalent before World War II.

Michael Konsmo

Place: Worland Library

Date: March 20, 2012

Discussion Leader: Claire Gabriel Dunne

Participants: 8

Believe it or not, some Government bureaucrats in Washington in the late 1930s were wondering what Americans eat. They worked for an agency unique in American history: the Works Progress Administration, or WPA. When a third of the labor force was unemployed in the Great Depression, many families facing starvation, they were charged with creating work for millions. For unemployed writers they created the Federal Writers' Project. After producing a popular guidebook for every one of the 48 states, they cast around to come up with a second good idea and landed upon regional foods.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt won a mandate in 1932 and within 15 months Congress passed the controversial Emergency Relief Act to put people back to work. Rather than a handout, they were given self-respecting jobs. The paychecks were spent, pouring millions of dollars into the spiraling economy. The CCC, Civilian Conservation Corp, built hand crafted log museums in Yellowstone, and they blasted the Beartooth Highway out of solid granite. Writers, too, were desperate for work. Newspapers and magazines were forced to lay off copy writers, ad men and secretaries. Subsidies have never been popular with Americans and came under attack. The CCC workers were called "shovel Leainers."..... and now the workers of the Federal Writers Project were labeled "Pencil leaners."

Who was qualified for a writing job? Anyone reasonably literate who would take an oath that they had no job, no money and no property..... Many writers were eminently qualified. The wage scale varied from state to state, from \$103 a month in New York to \$39 a month in Mississippi. Chicago could boast some real talent: the black Richard Wright wrote *Native Son* in his spare time. And oral historian Studs Terkel interviewed working people for radio broadcasts. In Florida, Zora Neale Hurston, who had a degree in anthropology and three books to her credit including her best novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,.... was penniless. When Hurston joined the Florida Writers Project in 1938, the editorial staff was called together and told, "Zora Neale Hurston, the Florida Negro novelist, has signed on to the project and will soon be paying us a visit. Zora has been feted by

New York Literary circles, and is given to putting on airs,..... including the smoking of cigarettes in the presence of white people. So we must all make allowances for Zora." Being black and a woman, she was paid a few dollars below the lowest pay level.

The project was to culminate in a 75,000 word book call America Eats, with essays from every region, but Pearl Harbor changed everything. Writers left for military or munitions jobs. Given two weeks' notice the agency director called in every written scrap from around the country and delivered five file boxes to the Library of Congress. Thanks to the Federal Writers Project, we can rifle through the onionskin carbon copies in our Nation's Greatest Library and find recipes for fried beavertail from Montana, how to dig and cook the 10-pound gooey duck clams from the Olympic peninsula, how to feed a thresher crew in Nebraska, and how to mix the best Kentucky mint julep.

Of the 8 participants in Worland, the older members had their parents' stories to relate from the Great Depression. One told of the location of the German POW camp in Worland. According to the Geneva Convention, the prisoners could not be forced to labor; these men volunteered to get out of prison camp and enjoy the big dinners on the American farms.

Claire Dunne

Place: Basin Library
Date: April 18, 2012
Discussion Leader: Claire Gabriel Dunne
Participants: 12

This discussion was much different from the one in Worland. They were younger and wanted to focus on their own food fads and opinions. I tried to pull the discussion back to the book, but each speaker was passionate about their gluten free diet or all raw diet. Half of us sat by and listened while the other half moved from one diet idea to the next. On one hand I wanted to return to the book, and on the other hand wanted to give each person their say.

Nevertheless, I was able to give an overview of the book from the excellent introduction, and we all enjoyed the food and wine which laced the library tables. This friendly group has been together for seems like fifteen years, so I was happy to see four new members, one of whom responded to a large emailing of my address book. He was one of two men in the group this year. All in all, this series was well received...when I bump into readers at the village well, they still mention how affected they are by *Second Hoeing*. Thank you to the Wyoming Humanities Council for Reading Wyoming.

Claire Dunne

Nine ladies joined the discussion in the Pine Bluffs branch library of the Laramie County Library System. It took very

little prompting to get the ladies started discussing the book. Everyone wanted to talk about their favorite essays and their reminiscences about the way Americans used to eat years ago as opposed to how we eat now. We all agreed that the backstory of the unpublished WPA Writers Project "America Eats" was quite fascinating and probably the best part of the book. Some of the ladies shared their favorite stories. One group member brought the Washington aplets (similar to Turkish Delight) from the Far West section of the book. We talked at length about the more unusual "eats" in the book such as mountain oysters, pig fries, flying squirrel, possum, Vermont maple syrup and hoecake. Unlike the food in Julia Child's books or the recipes in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*; the recipes in *Food of a Younger Land* were not very appealing to modern tastes (with the exception of a few deserts like depression cake and the Washington aplets). We noted that inexact and vague recipes like the ones included in the book were the reason why Julie Child wrote her first cookbook. Kurlansky's book ties easily into *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* because many of the endangered and disappearing foods mentioned in Kingsolver's book are featured also in *Food of a Younger Land*. And of course the "live off the land" ethic of *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* was common in the small family farms of the 1930s.

I asked the group some questions about how the foods that Americans eat now have changed since the 1930s. We noted the prevalence of fast food and the fact that American families don't regularly eat at home anymore. I shared that I rarely ate out in restaurants as a child and I didn't eat in a Mexican restaurant until I was 12; and then didn't even know what a burrito or an enchilada was. The only ethnic food I knew was spaghetti, tacos, and Chow Mein from a can. Other things that are now commonly found all over the country such as bagels were only found in large cities where there was a large ethnic population. Other group members remember learning to cook on a wood stove that had no temperature control (you judged if it was preheated enough by testing the heat by sticking in a hand or an elbow), having an ice box and even keeping butter and milk cold by keeping it down at the bottom of a well.

We also discussed the amazing regional restaurants we'd visited and the "old-fashioned" food we used to eat in old fashioned restaurants. We marveled at the fact that when you travel one of the things you always remember is what great food you ate, so regional food is still very important. One group member remembered visiting New York City automats, and several members remembered eating at Woolworth's lunch counters. I shared the story of the huge Maine lobster I ate in Portland, Maine several years ago and the wonderful food I ate in New Orleans. Another member shared the delicious barbeque and cornbread she ate at Bullocks in Durham, North Carolina. She recently ordered some of this food shipped to her from Bullocks for a grandchild's birthday here in Wyoming. There were no local foods mentioned in the book from Wyoming although many of the Colorado, Montana, Nebraska or Idaho essays could have been written about Wyoming. When discussing local food some group members mentioned a company called Rocky Mountain Snacks which has great thick sliced kettle cooked potato chips and still seems to

be in business near Pine Bluffs. As usual it was a very fun discussion and we look forward to finishing the series with *Second Hoeing* next month.

Elaine Hayes

10 of us gathered in Ranchester for this discussion. This is a much smaller number than usual; I tend to think that is partially because some people found it difficult to get through the book and than didn't feel motivated to join us. Of the ones who did come, a few said they read only parts of the book and skipped around some while several others read it entirely and thoroughly enjoyed it.

I started with a brief background on Kurlansky and a bit more on the background of this book. Personally I found the history of how this book came to be at least as interesting as the book itself. This group had read the Eleanor Roosevelt last fall so could relate to some of the material about the period of WPA and Roosevelt.

I had asked the group to, as they read, pick out something in the book to bring to the discussion, so we started with that which naturally veered off into a random discussion of our own memories and experiences with food that the book evoked.

We all agreed that until the last several decades eating locally and seasonally was a given, not an ethical decision; Barbara Kingsolver had the luxury of it being an ethical decision. Of course, there was the usual lamenting about our reliance on fast food and the moving away from the traditional family sit-down meals.

We noted the racism in many of the selections, particularly and obviously, those dealing with the Southern food traditions. Looking at the food traditions in our country is an interesting way to look at our history, socially and culturally. In discussing this, we agreed that food plays a defining role in our culture and is telling historically when we examine the cause/effects of the changes of food custom and consumption.

Overall, while not as energetic as usual, the discussion was interesting and the participants were engaged. I'm glad we are finishing the series with *Second Hoeing* next month because this group will particularly enjoy that novel.

Norleen Healy

Only nine of us attended this discussion in Story. Evidently some people had turned the book in earlier saying they just couldn't stick with it. However the nine who were there were enthusiastic about the book. Most said they had skipped around some, but all said they found it interesting and even "fun" to read.

I had asked the group to do two things in preparation for the discussion: read the introduction carefully and, in reading the book, pick out one selection to bring into the discussion for whatever reason. We spent a lot of time talking about the introduction in terms of the WPA,

especially the Civilian Conservation C and the FWP. The CCC left its mark in many places right around northern Wyoming and we all became aware of some we didn't know about in the discussion. Story tends to have quite a few people involved in the arts so we also talked a lot about the legacy of WPA on the arts in our country. We agreed that now any federal support for the arts seems to have to come over the dead bodies of many legislators.

I just read Jessica Clark's intriguing report on her recent discussion session on the book, and interestingly, our group differed in their attitude about the lack of representation of the West. They were quite willing to excuse Kurlansky any seeming omissions based on the idea that he explained in the introduction that many of final reports were sketchy at best and some were not even in the files due to the enforced deadline for the project after Pearl Harbor. The participants here liked the variety of selections throughout -- from beautifully written to almost illiterate prose. We didn't think it read like a recipe book because few of the recipes could actually be considered complete or "doable" based on the way they were recorded! Everyone was anxious to share her chosen selections which spurred other discussion. As has been the case with this entire series, there was lots of sidetracking into personal stories and remembrances.

The discussion was still going strong after almost two hours when we needed to stop to let the library close. I will say I did not find this kind of enthusiasm in previous discussion of the book in another venue, and I didn't expect the response I got in Story. One never knows!

Norleen Healy

Last night we had approximately 25 people in attendance – that's right 25. There were a number of students from Western Wyoming Community College in attendance – students who were very familiar with the work and eager to share their insights.

Book Synopsis by Facilitator:

A massive disappointment is how I sum up this work. Before reading this book, I had heard such wonderful things about Mark Kurlansky's work. My husband uses Kurlansky's book *Cod* in a Wildlife biology course at Western, and he is currently reading Kurlansky's *World without Fish* to our daughter – Ocean. He was stoked that I was reading this book. In fact, he even opted to offer extra credit to his Rangeland Management students to attend this book discussion (this specific discussion) because he also expected it to be a high caliber work. Shortly after finishing the introduction, our disappointment set in.

Before that, however, I was hooked – or so I thought – with Kurlansky's dedication page. He dedicated this work to Studs Terkel (the father of oral history). I thought this meant it was another serendipitous moment, as I am an oral historian by training. My excitement and intrigue grew as I read the introduction, discovering that much of this work was based on the Works Progress/Projects Administration's Federal Writers Project. Trained oral historians have relied immensely on this project to learn

what to do and not to do when conducting oral histories. I, myself, have spent a good deal of time digging through the FWP records in North Dakota and South Dakota. These are rich sources.

When Kurlansky introduces the FWP's *America Eats* project, I thought (or assumed) that he would be taking the same approach -- that he would be writing a book on America's foodways of earlier days by interpreting the primary sources. Yet, that was not his intention. This book is a glorified heritage cookbook. I spent five years working at the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection -- a genealogical special collection that prides itself on collecting heritage cookbooks. These are valuable sources, as they provide tasty dishes and a connection to heritage and tradition. That said, they are not intended to be read as a novel or monograph. And, neither should this work.

In addition, Kurlansky overstates his arguments, neglects to discuss the reasoning behind his selections, and fails to evenly represent the five regional sections of America. First, in regards to overstating his arguments, if we look at the section on "The Middle West," Kurlansky overstates his arguments a few times. For instance, he states that ethnic foods in the mid-west are more unusual than regional cuisine. That's simply not true -- just ask any German-Russian or Norwegian on the Plains. Second, in regards to his lack of explanations, at one point (I believe it was the opening to "The South Eats") Kurlansky notes that he has only provided some of the documents. I'm curious as to why he chose the ones he did. There's no discussion. And, third, the last two chapters are so short. Kurlansky really downplays the Far West and South West -- Why?

All-in-all, it was a disappointing read.

Prepared Discussion Questions:

- Let's start this discussion by sharing/discussing your initial thoughts on this work. Did you like it or dislike it, and why?
Most didn't like it. In fact, only 2-3 said they really enjoyed the work. Most thought it was a cookbook and didn't like the lack of continuity or a plot. Those who did enjoy it, said they did because they didn't have any expectations of the book beforehand, and took it for what it was -- a collection of primary sources.
- What did you find to be the most interesting dish described in this book?
There were a variety of dishes discussed -- from squirrel to opossum to pork and more.
- What dish would you love to try?
Clam chowder variations were mentioned, as well as various alcoholic drinks. The Lobster dishes were discussed, as well as the Automat's chicken pot pie. Of course, I had to bring up the Smelt Fries (being from Washington state) and Lutfske (given that I lived on the border of Minnesota for 8 years).

- Kurlansky takes care to approach the "5-sections of America." How well did he represent your area?
For those from Wyoming it was noted that Wyoming was largely ignored. For those from the South, they thought the area was represented well. There seemed to be a consensus that Kurlansky overlooked the Far West and Southwest. In fact, one participant asked if he puckered out by the end!?!)

- How does this book rank with the last two -- *Second Hoeing* and *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*?
Scores were ...
 - 2 for *Second Hoeing*
 - 1 for *Animal Vegetable Miracle*
 - 0 for *The Food of a Younger Land*

*The survey only reflects those in attendance who have read all three books. There was two additional participant who had read *Animal Vegetable Miracle* as well as Kurlansky book. They both found Kingsolver's work better.

Series: Read Ingredients
Book: The Food of a Younger Land
Place: Newcastle
Date: March 10, 2016
Discussion Leader: Phyl Sundstrom
Participants: 12

The Newcastle group met on March 10, 2016, in the Weston County Library meeting room. Twelve members gathered to discuss *The Food of a Younger Land*, by Mark Kurlansky. Once again, everyone in attendance found the book an interesting read, and one member walked in with a plate of Depression Cake she had made that afternoon! The recipe for it is on page 358 and worth trying.

We were disappointed that the book didn't have any specifics from ND, SD or WY...but we were certainly interested in all the sections of the country included. As part of our discussion we shared what we'd enjoyed most (the list of Soda-Luncheonette jargon and the essay on the horrible mashed potatoes some restaurants served as two examples) as well as what we could have done without, such as the essay on tripe! I'm not sure any of us will ever cook squirrel, either, despite several recipes describing how, and we all learned a lot about barbecue! Overall, we really enjoyed the vision into food in this country in the 1930s.

Our library had lots of support materials for the Federal Writing Project during the WPA years, so we browsed through those near the end of our meeting; we also looked at several guidebooks from that time of surrounding states. Because the book's content was set in the 1930s, I brought some old family recipes to share, and we plan to all do that at the next meeting. As that will be our last

meeting of the series, we may also bring some food from family recipes to share.