

How the Memory of Smells Affected My Moves between Countries

By Sophy Churches

I hated it. We had to eat it, almost every day at elementary school. It was savoy cabbage cooked with the most disgusting sinewy meats. They cooked it in the school and it was spreading its awful smells all over. I just wanted to get out of school for only that reason but they locked the doors until school was over and we finished our lunch there. In high school we also had to eat (it was the school nutrition program. They gave us some watery vegetables also with sinewy meats, mostly carrots and potatoes. It was cheap.

My mother improved on that, she went to work at a motor bicycle shop where they gave her free restaurant coupons to go to a nearby restaurant. She wanted to see me after school and came with me and gave me half, but usually all of her lunch. The company was right but the food was still yucky.

On Sunday my mother cooked. She made wonderful smells in the kitchen: roast meat, roast potatoes and always a colorful pudding or cake or fruit salads. I helped her often, thereby I learned how to cook. When she was sick and had to be taken to the hospital I cooked for the family. My father was proud of me. I was maybe 14 years old then. I once got a manicure set from a friend of his who was invited for lunch. I had to give him a kiss for it. I did not really like that.

Somehow I still finished high school. Fortunately during the latter years I did not have to go and eat lunch there or in the restaurant, I could go home and prepare a sandwich for myself. After high school, I went to Germany. Germany smelled of beer and sausages all over. The Oktoberfest in Germany was a smelly affair for a young girl so I thought I'd better escape from there. I went to live in England then. I almost fainted in England at the site of beautiful slices of meat at the butchers' shop windows. I have never seen lean pork slices, beefsteaks and white chicken meats like those in England. I thought to myself, these must be so delicious to eat. Yet, the English did not know how to cook them. They came out fairly soft to eat but everything was poured over with their brown gravy that they made of Bisto or Oxo - a factory-prepared artificial meat flavor smelling like burnt meat. The national smell of England was gravy and the so called Yorkshire pudding which had nothing to do with pudding but was like a puffed up pancake made in muffin tins.

Jamaica – you can forget it. The goat meat and dried fish and Callaloo soup (which was like a weed soup) was strange for my Hungarian-German-English stomach.

America – they have at last invented good food smells, if nothing else! The summer barbecues are inviting to your senses, the onions on the hamburgers are enticing, the fresh bread smell emanating from the bakeries and you can find restaurants from the whole world to try out what and where you really are from.

Are you Americans really a globe-trotter food nation?