

What's for Dinner?

By Suzy Hopkins

That question is asked by people all over the world every day, especially by women. From her early twenties until her seventies a woman will make 15,000 dinners, if for 65 days of each year she goes out for dinner or someone else makes the final meal of the day. In most countries the women are the only dinner makers as well as breakfast and lunch. They make 54,750 meals for their 50 year cooking lifetime. In those countries it is a repetitive, dull task. That's why there are so many cookbooks.

Since the 1700's people, mostly men, have written cookbooks with recipes. Women wrote cookbooks about how to cook basics like a chicken or potatoes or kale. Rich people had cooks so they never saw a cookbook. There are several thousands of cookbooks in every language with more published every year.

My mother was not a cook. We had steak most nights, because it was easy. Fridays were seafood. We had a fish-man who brought fresh catch from Gloucester harbor. As a kid I had clams, lobster, swordfish, cod, haddock, halibut and sole.

When I was first on my own I lived at the YWCA which had kitchen privileges. I ruined everything I tried to cook except canned raviolis and canned peas. I can't stand the thought now but at the time it was all I knew.

When I was newly married I learned by mistakes how to cook a few things. My husband Tony was extremely picky so I was not adventurous as a cook. My second husband Michael and my son Mac were big eaters and would eat anything that didn't move. I would make meals for six and never had leftovers for the 10 years I was married to him. Every week I would try a new recipe. 50 a year! They were adventurous eaters so it was delightfully rewarding.

As I get older I still make a 'real' meal every night from the three main food groups – meat, a starch and a vegetable like we were taught in school. Nowadays I use instant potatoes, chicken cooked by Walmart and frozen vegetables or something equally simple. I've given all my cookbooks to the goodwill.

I consider myself fortunate to live in a country where we have unlimited quality choices so even simple meals are not repetitive.