

Someone was talking about *palt* recently. To non Scandinavians and even to many Swedes, this is a mysterious word. When someone explains that it is a concoction of dark flours and potatoes, with pork, liver, and/or blood, made into balls and boiled in a large kettle of salted water, the mystery is one that many people prefer to leave unsolved. For others, though, *palt* is a delicacy to prepare for guests and Swedish-American *smörgåsbord* meals.

Our family had no experience with *palt*. *Lutefisk*, yes, *limpa*, ditto, rice pudding in the Scandinavian style, yes again. But, apparently, either the locality from which my Swedish ancestors came was not a place where people ate *palt*, or someone along the way did not like it and cut it from the menu. Runo's mother sometimes made a similar dish they called *klubb*, because her mother liked it. And Runo was familiar with *blodpalt* that one of the neighbors made.

It is interesting that many of the “comfort foods” that people of a common ethnicity enjoy are, in the main, “peasant foods.” They are dishes that people made to stretch expensive and rare ingredients. Feeding a large family all the pork they could eat was undoubtedly impossible, but when added to a mainly potato/whole grain flour dish, everybody got a taste, all were satisfied when they left the table, and once again, a farm woman could feed her family in times when resources were scarce.

Potatoes were not only the staff of life for the Irish—until a fungal disease decimated the crop and led to widespread starvation and emigration—but were also almost equally important to the Swedes. Unhampered by a foreign power that took the crops of grain that the Irish also raised, the Swedes were able to depend on grain, particularly rye.

When the Swedish settlers arrived in this part of the world, it was no wonder that potatoes became a staple of their diets. To some of us—including here on Coe Creek—a meal isn't really complete without potatoes in some form. And, Swedish rye bread, the descendant of the *limpa* from the old country, lost nothing in “translation.”

So, do I like *palt*? Boiled and then fried in butter, it is pretty good. Otherwise, I am not a big fan. But, I didn't grow up with *palt* on the menu. Its popularity in our community illustrates how we keep our connections with our past. Food is not the only tradition that binds us to our ancestors, but it is a powerful one, and, in addition, often a very delicious one.