



Eat This!

By Ian Jackman
ISBN: 9780060885908

Introduction

Eat This! Travels across America looking for interesting food characterized neither by calorie count nor scientific or dietetic approbation, but taste. We should eat sensibly, of course. Not many foods are actually unhealthy—it is the over-indulgence in certain of them that degrades our well-being. Conversely, there are few things more stimulating and life-affirming than a fine meal eaten with abandon, or even a single serving of one dish that you love, whether it be a cheeseburger or a piece of strawberry-rhubarb pie.

The best way to chase this great taste is to look for it locally. In the summer, a roadside farm stand will bring you wonderful produce that may well have been growing out in the field a couple of hours before. A white or yellow peach, an ear of corn, a slice of watermelon, a red-ripe tomato—these are foods that loudly speak of summer. Your local restaurants will take produce like this and craft meals based on the chef's experience. However modest the restaurant or the aspirations of the cook, it is establishments where the food is made with love and soul that taste shines through.

Many among the 1001 items in the book are regionally defined, or even regionally defining. A Philly cheese steak is an obvious example. Of all the great food available in New York City, a slice of thin-crust pizza might be the most iconic. But we also read about toasted ravioli and Prosperity sandwiches from St. Louis, the Runza from Nebraska, Cornish pasties that made their way from south-western England to Michigan, Kentucky Hot Brown sandwiches and more. Many dishes have standout local quirks—don't put ketchup on your dog in Chicago (or your burger in the nation's first burger joint, located in New Haven). Do put ketchup on your burger in Salt Lake City, but add mayonnaise to it and call it fry sauce.

Along the way, many questions are asked, and a few answered. Was the first hamburger actually put together in New Haven? Why is a lot of pizza cut into squares in St. Louis? Why is it that the only place you can't get a Coney Dog is Coney Island? How can you put together a genealogy from the kind of potato salad someone likes? And what is it with Utah and Jell-O?

Questions for Discussion

1. Name three things you've never eaten that you want to try.
2. What is the most memorable thing you ever ate?
3. A lot of people are fiercely loyal to their city's or region's food. Denizens of Kansas City, Memphis, Texas and St. Louis will all swear they have the best barbecue. What if anything do they make in your hometown better than anywhere else?
4. In your experience, what is the best food town in the United States? And the worst?
5. *Eat This* features a short discussion on whether Irish Stew should or should not contain carrots. How important to you is a dish's authenticity?
6. *Eat This* quotes from *O Pioneers!* "Marie took out a pan of delicate little rolls, stuffed with stewed apricots, and began to dust them over with powdered sugar." Marie says the Bohemians (Czechs) like these rolls (called kolache) with their coffee. Is there any remembrance of cooking from the homeland you recall, or still make yourself?
7. What is your favorite food scene from literature? (Or the movies.)
8. Eating takes up a great deal of our time, effort and money. So why isn't there more food in our novels? (Or movies.)
9. Quality of the recipes aside, is there a cookbook writer you enjoy reading?
10. Which cookbook(s) have you bought and never once cooked from?
11. Which external cuisine has been best adapted to the American environment? (Chinese, Italian, German or English? Or other.)
12. *Eat This* contends that the three greatest American contributions to world culture are baseball, jazz, and barbecue. Do you agree?
13. Do you shop at a farmers market? Do you feel there is a movement toward locally produced, fresh food where you live? How far out of your way do you go to get good produce? Do you pay more to get organic food? How much does it matter to you to know exactly what is in the thing you're eating?
14. *Eat This* includes a chapter called "Why There Isn't a Kids' Food Chapter" which contends that in an ideal world, kids would eat the

same as the grown-ups only in smaller amounts. Do you agree? If you have kids, are you a short-order cook for them every mealtime? [How] do you try to introduce new flavors and tastes to your kids? Were you a "picky eater" in childhood and if so, has it affected your eating habits as an adult? Are we too paranoid about what our kids eat?

15. M.F.K. Fisher writes about a piece of chocolate she ate on a cold Alpine mountainside as among the best things she's ever eaten. How much does the context in which you ate affect your memory of something you ate?

About the Author

Ian Jackman has written and co-written numerous books, including the *New York Times* bestseller *Stickin'* by James Carville. Jackman worked at a major New York publishing house and was Managing Director of the Modern Library.