



FOOD AND CATERING IN ONE WOMAN'S CREATIVE PERFORMANCE OF ETHNIC
AND GENDER IDENTITY

by

©Andrea Antal

A thesis submitted to the School of
Graduate Studies in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Folklore Memorial
University of Newfoundland

August 2011

Abstract

This is a study of food and catering. In this thesis I focus on the multiple meanings food can play in the life of a caterer – Anna (of Hungarian ethnicity) – and her clients.

Catering can be conceived as folkloric performance, for it contains the most important aspects of a folk drama: front, back stage, role distribution, teamwork, etc. Food and catering can also express ethnicity. Foodways provide a whole area of performance in which statements of ethnic identity can be made. In Anna's case, food is a fluid creation; she creatively brings together European, American, and even Asian taste trends. Her combinations, adaptations, and modifications express her flexible cooking style. She also uses food to earn a living and to build a reputation for herself in a small North American city. The power struggle between men and women can be expressed through food, just as in Anna's case. She also uses food to reinforce family ties among the members of her family.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the essential and gracious support of many individuals. First and foremost I offer my sincerest gratitude to my Hungarian friend, Anna, who has supported me throughout my thesis with her patience whilst letting me into her life, sharing with me her vast knowledge of cooking, and allowing me to get a good insight into the particularities of catering. I attribute the level of my Masters degree to her encouragement and effort. Without her help this thesis would not have been completed. I am also grateful to the customers whose homes we have visited. I am indebted to those clients and interviewees who agreed upon being part of my project.

I am grateful to Memorial University for financial support through the two-year fellowship and a number of research assistantships. Special thanks go to my helpful supervisor, Dr. Diane Tye. The supervision, guidance and support that she gave, and the information that we have exchanged truly helped the progression and smoothness of my thesis.

This thesis would never have been completed without the encouragement and devotion of my family and friends. I am thankful for the support of the small Hungarian community, to my landlord, and to my family who relentlessly supported me in the tiresome process of thesis writing.

Last but not least, I am grateful to my loving husband, Zoltán, for his constructive, ingenious and creative ideas and for his constant, enduring and tenacious support.

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter One: Introduction	1
1.1. Food Matters.....	1
1.2. Eating & Ethnicity.....	4
1.3. Multiple Cuisines	7
1.4. Occupational Folklife.....	11
1.5. Characteristics of the Catering Company.....	16
1.6. The Story behind the Scenes.....	23
1.7. Fieldwork Experiences.....	27
1.8. Chapter Outline.....	29
Chapter Two: Catering as Folkloric Performance	31
2.1. " <i>Ten More Minutes...We're Almost There</i> "; Insights into the Particularities of Catering.....	31
2.2. " <i>This is Not the Real Me – But Will Do It Anyways</i> "; Fictive and Mundane Roles in Catering.....	36
2.3. " <i>Food is Good, Food is Love, Food is Beautiful</i> "; Catering as Work of Art.....	40
2.4. " <i>Good Teamwork Makes Catering Rock</i> "; The Network of Co-Workers.....	45
2.5. " <i>Being in the Spotlight, Ready for Action</i> "; On the Front Stage.....	54
2.6. " <i>Performing the Kitchen Life</i> "; In the Backstage.....	59
Chapter Three: Food as Creative Manipulation of Ethnicity	65
3.1. Ethnicity as Identity Marker.....	66
3.2. " <i>I Don't Cook Hungarian Anymore</i> "; The Fluid Character of Ethnic Foodways.....	76
Food Repertoire	
Performing Creative Ethnicity – Authenticity and Americanization	
Style of Presentation	
3.3. An " <i>Almost Perfect</i> " Hungarian Evening.....	100
The Circumstances of the Event	
Setting the Table	
Serving the Food	
Food as Tangible Site for Memory	
Chapter Four: Food and Gender	117

4.1. Food as Site of Power Relations between Men and Women.....	118
4.2. Mothers – Daughters Connecting through Food	127
Chapter Five: Conclusions.....	132
Bibliography	138

List of Figures

Figure 1. Table of Cold Appetizers at One of the Catering Events.....	21
Figure 2. Zoltán Performing his Role of a Bartender at a Retirement Party	38
Figure 3. Sautéd Mushroom in White Wine Sauce	90
Figure 4. Devilled Eggs	91
Figure 5. Customers Surrounding the Food Table	96
Figure 6. Final Version of Setting the Table.....	103
Figure 7. Setting the Table in Hungarian Style	104
Figure 8. Fatback Pork Consumed Raw	107
Figure 9. Daniel's Colourful Plate with Cold Appetizers	107
Figure 10. Anna Serving the Stew	111
Figure 11. Apple Squares Ready to be Served	111

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Food Matters

The idea for this thesis began with the observation that many of the most interesting social and cultural aspects of life in our contemporary world feature food.

It is an understatement to say that food is important. On a national level, it represents one of Canada's most significant industries and exports. On an individual level, there is nothing more basic. Food is both an essential of life and a frequently indulged-in pleasure. If you cannot eat, soon enough you will not be able to stay alive. But food is also a symbolic marker of membership (or non-membership) in practically any sort of social grouping. Food can express creativity and diversity. As psychologist Paul Rozin puts it, "food is fundamental, fun, frightening, and far-reaching" (Belasco 2002, 2). Its meanings and usages extend far beyond nutritional maintenance. Food, observes anthropologist Arjun Appaduraj, is a "highly condensed social fact" and "a marvellously plastic kind of collective representation" (Belasco 2002, 2). Food indicates who we are, where we came from, and what we want to be.

I first recognized food as a tool of creative expression with deeper significance than simple sustenance in the summer of 2009, soon after my arrival in Atlantic Canada from Romania. While completing my graduate program I was introduced to Anna, who had operated a small catering company for more than twenty years. A Canadian citizen of Hungarian descent, she had built a name for herself as a caterer by creatively bringing together European, American, and even Asian taste trends. She provided food for events

organized by companies (Christmas parties, retirement parties, etc) as well as individuals (anniversary parties, birthday parties, etc). I have chosen not to identify Anna's exact location in an effort to provide her with anonymity, but she lives in a city where many of the inhabitants know each other. Here word of good food travels fast and Anna's reputation as a caterer spreads by word of mouth. The success of her catering business rests not on advertising, but solely on oral tradition. Soon after I met Anna, she offered me part-time employment. As I helped prepare and serve food at catered events, I began to develop an appreciation for the many meanings Anna's food expressed for the caterer and her clients.

In this thesis I explore several interrelated questions concerning the meanings of food for Anna and her catering business. I ask how food becomes an occupationally based performance of both ethnicity and gender; How does this catering business accommodate local tastes and foodways? Which are the foods that have built Anna's reputation as a good caterer? What characterizes her presentation of North-American and European cuisines? How does she combine the "exotic" with the local? How does the caterer adapt elements of her own culture to North-American tastes? Can we talk about a fusion cuisine? In terms of the catering as a site of occupational folklife, how have employees shaped the company's foods and practices? What oral traditions and customs characterize the worklife of the catering company for the owner and her employees? In terms of Anna herself: How is food an expression of both ethnicity and gender in her life?

Roland Barthes asserted many years ago that with the emergence of modern society, food was transformed from a substance that fits with a certain ritual, atmosphere, or occasion into a substance that epitomises that which it is to supposed to accompany

(Barthes 1972). He noted that this transformation of food makes sense especially under conditions of affluence. When people are really hungry, especially when they are hungry all the time, the secondary meanings of food understandably diminish, sometimes to the vanishing point. Although he was speaking of modern France, Barthes's claim has become a more general characteristic of modernity. As Sydney Mintz writes, "We are witnessing an extraordinary expansion of the areas associated with food." He continues: "Food is becoming incorporated into an ever-lengthening list of situations. Food is also charged with signifying the situation in which it is used. It has a twofold value, being nutrition, as well as protocol, and its value as protocol increasingly more important as soon as the basic needs are satisfied" (Mintz 2002, 28). In other words, we might say that in contemporary society, food has a constant tendency to transform itself into situation. Catering and catered parties provide a basis for exploring the two sides of the coin: food as nutrition and protocol. The food selections at a catered event illustrate the point that to eat is to distinguish and discriminate, include and exclude. Food choices establish boundaries and borders. As Mintz argues, whether it be ceremonial or everyday, public or private, kin-based or not, at work or at play, religious or secular, social groups characteristically employ food to draw lines, confirm statuses, and separate those who do or do not belong. Food habits are so close to the core of what culture is that they sometimes function almost like language. As with language, on many occasions people define themselves with food; at the same time, food consistently defines and redefines them (Mintz 2002, 26).

In this thesis I explore the multiple meanings of Anna's catered food in the lives of people who encounter it. An examination of both sides of the catering performance -

the performers (Anna and her employees) and audience (clients) - is the topic of my second chapter. The argument for folklore as performance, so vigorously supported by many contemporary folklorists (Green 1978, 845), is particularly applicable to the present discussion. I argue that catering can be conceived of as a folkloric performance, a folk drama, for it contains the most important aspects which are inherent parts of a dramatic performance. Within this framework, I analyze the constant juxtaposition of fictive and mundane roles and the identities that caterer, employees and clients assume as part of the same performance acted on front and back stages.

1.2. Eating & Ethnicity

North America is a prime multicultural meeting ground of foreign folklores, and thus provides an ideal arena for observing the survival of old traditions (Brunvand 1998, 46). When people are hungry, a host of restaurants offer "ethnic cuisines" which compete for their attention and capital. They read in the newspapers of numerous ethnic events and festivals, they decorate their homes and offices with ethnic objects and enjoy exchanging ethnic jokes with neighbours and friends (Oring 1986, 23). Within this larger context, Atlantic Canada provides its own basis for exploring ethnic groups with distinct and significant cultures.

I consider myself part of an ethnic minority group with an Eastern European background. My nationality is Hungarian but my native country is Romania. Hence I am Romanian citizen, too. Soon after I arrived in Canada in the summer of 2009 to complete my graduate program in Folklore, my husband and I discovered a small Eastern European

community made up of approximately twenty Romanians and slightly fewer people of Hungarian nationality. Most are students completing their graduate programs. Folklore plays a part in defining ethnic groups and shaping interactions between the different ethnic groups. It contributes to their sense of an ethnic identity. Because ethnic groups are recognized on the basis of a particular traditional style, folklore can and does contribute to this tradition or style and hence provide the central symbols of ethnic definition. (Oring 1986, 23-26). Being a Hungarian, for example, involves not only knowing the traditional Hungarian tales, legends, games, music, and foodways, but also understanding and appreciating them. To participate in and identify with an Hungarian ethnic group is to know and to be able to use its folklore. I soon found that foodways figure prominently among the many types of folklore that bring together the members of the small Hungarian community in the city of Atlantic Canada I came to know. Food contributes significantly to its sense of ethnic identity. While completing the coursework for my graduate program in Folklore, I explored different aspects of my Hungarian ethnic background (foodways, ethnic jokes), and members of the Hungarian community became involved in my research as well. For me this is a form of self-exploration and self-contemplation.

I have also used food - specifically Apple Squares - to express and communicate my identity as Hungarian in a new Canadian environment. My Apple Squares (a uniquely Hungarian version of the well-known North American apple pie) have enjoyed great popularity. In my first year in Canada I made the dish on a regular basis for potluck parties, for different social gatherings, and even for "assignments" for my Foodways class when it came to discussing the ever-challenging questions of food and memory. Apple Squares became my trademark in my new Canadian context. They played multiple roles

in different settings. For members of the small Hungarian community, the dish enabled a reconnection with our mutual past and traditions and a reinforcement of our common national bond. It also embodied nostalgia for the old times. Outside of Hungarian gatherings, Apple Squares facilitated my entry into new communities for it served as an icebreaker in new situations. It was a convenient way to approach other cultures and offered a common ground for discussion. Since food is such a basic element in our everyday lives, it often brings people together. Individuals share with each other their food experiences, their recipes, and their memories related to food. My Apple Squares had exactly this effect; they played an important role in defining my own Hungarian identity by allowing me to share it with the others. We discussed the differences and similarities among apple pie recipes, bringing our families and past experiences into the discussion. Food is an excellent device in initiating or developing new bonds in a foreign community and we started to get to know each other as we shared an Apple Square. Hungarian Apple Squares will be the topic of further inquiry in the third chapter when I discuss the fluid character of ethnic foods.

After contemplating the exact topic of my thesis project, I decided to focus on one member of the Hungarian cultural group of an Atlantic Canadian city. Anna (not her real name), came to Canada from Hungary as a child more than fifty years ago. In selecting the right person to interview and for a research project, folklorist Susan H. Armitage raises the question of cultural likeness, including gender, race, class, ethnic, and even regional identification. According to Armitage, cultural likeness can greatly promote trust and openness, whereas dissimilarity reinforces cultural and social distance. She argues that it is not only a matter of trust; the subtle clues to which culturally similar persons can

respond might mean the difference between a good and bad interview (2002, 9). When deciding on the topic of my research, I considered these points. In the end, I had two main reasons for wanting to produce a thesis project focused on an Eastern-European immigrant. First of all, I share many of the same experiences (Eastern-European experience) and therefore I hoped I could understand her and her reminiscences better than an outsider. I came from the same geographical location, and we share the same first language (Hungarian). By choosing to focus on an individual who shares my own heritage I'm automatically more personally involved, and I recognize that this project is also a search for answers to my own questions. In the third chapter of this thesis I explore in detail the flexible and fluid character of Anna's catering with special attention to her creative performance of ethnic foodways, the role of ethnic foods in evoking a nostalgic yearning for the old times, maintaining traditional boundaries with the dominant culture, and nurturing familial closeness.

1.3. Multiple Cuisines

There is no question that more people are studying food than ever before. Folklorists have shared a long-standing interest in the intersection of food and culture, one that Lucy M. Long argues was embraced by the 1881 inaugural mission statement of the American Folklore Society (2009, 3). As Long explains, however, this interest initially translated into attention to the foods and food practices that existed in the oral traditions of those groups considered "folk," particularly those foods in danger of dying out, and little work on food was published in the *Journal of American Folklore* until the 1970s (Tye 2010, 18).

The more comprehensive study of "foodways" evolved from "folkways," a term coined by William Grant Sumner in 1906 "to denote those customs, practices, and ways of thinking shared by members of the same group" (Camp 1989, 24). The term "folk cookery" was introduced by Don Yoder and can be readily defined as traditional domestic cookery marked by regional variation (Yoder 1976). As everyday, domestic, family cookery based on regional tradition, it is obviously the opposite of the commercial, institutional, and scientific-nutritional versions of cookery. Diffused regionally into folk-cultural "provinces," it varies from both national and international cuisines. The study of folk cookery includes the study of the foods themselves, their morphology, their preparation, their preservation, their social and psychological functions, and their ramifications for all other aspects of folk-culture. Folk cookery as a research field within the discipline of folklife studies, an area of such obvious and basic relevance for everyday life, has been strangely neglected in the United States (Yoder 1976, 325). North American cookery today is eclectic or hybrid in a national sense. It shows deeply the effects of urbanization and food processing technology, as well as an interest in selected foods from North American ethnic cultures (e.g., pizza, bagels) and from world cuisine (e.g., smorgasbord, chow mein, sukiyaki, lefse, goulash). As the rapid rise to prominence of food studies suggests, scholars have become fascinated with the cultural and historical dimensions of multiple cuisines. In this thesis I set the disciplinary context for these empirical studies and identify key issues that have animated and continue to stimulate researchers' efforts. Food Studies is an "emerging field" (Belasco 2002, 7) that frequently exposes fruitful connections that can be made between collateral areas of scholarship that hitherto had been regarded as separate, if not disparate. Since the 1980s some scholars

have carved out respected, food-related, subdisciplines as ethnographers, folklorists, and rural, medical, or nutritional sociologists. These works form the base for this project.

Cooking can be a vehicle for artistic expression, a source for sensual pleasure, and an opportunity for resistance and even power. Scholars have found food to be a useful tool for expanding ongoing research inquiries, especially into class, gender, ethnicity, consumer culture, material culture, and environmental studies. Belasco and Scranton in their collaboration, *"The Construction of National Cuisines"* (Belasco and Scranton 2002), raise provocative questions, particularly about the old saw, "you are what you eat." When speaking of national cuisines, the axiom often conjugates into "we are what we eat." But who is this collective "we"? Do we define the national cuisine by bioregion? By foodshed? By arbitrary lines on an inaccurate map? What if those lines keep changing? How many people does it take to comprise a "we"? And in what context? As voters? As cooks? As customers? And what about the word "eat"? Which foods? When? Where? Which meals count as signifiers of "national identity" and which ones are simply occasions for "filling up" or "grabbing a bite"? And then there is that troublesome identity word "are," derived from "to be," "is." What is identity anyway? And which one? Most of us have a quite a few. These issues have challenged and intrigued me while doing my research for this project and they enabled me to look at food and catering through a new lens.

The relationship between women, gender, and various foods has been explored in the work of Sherrie A. Innes. Innes argues that foodstuffs have offered women a way to gain power and influence in their households and larger communities. For women without access to other forms of creative expression, preparing a superior cake or batch of fried

chicken has been a way to display their talent in an acceptable venue (Innes 2001, 11). Food has offered and continues to offer women a means for self-expression. Ethnic foods have had a great impact in the lives of many immigrant women in the New World. Many American women in the past and present have not had access to outlets for self-expression such as painting or writing. For some of these women, cooking, rather than being something that confined and limited them to the kitchen, was a way to gain personal power both in and outside the home. Many scholars examine how preparing a traditional foodstuff, like an ethnic dish, offers women a form of self-expression and a way to gain influence and recognition both in the domestic realm and the larger community outside the home. For example, Traci Kelly examines the role of lefse-making in North Dakota and Minnesota. She suggests that making these labor-intensive potato griddle-cakes has long offered status to some Lutheran-Norwegian American women, as the most talented lefse makers were openly lauded within their families, churches, and towns. Benay Blend focuses on tortilla-and tamale-making and the role that they have in the lives of Hispanic women in the Southwest. Patricia M. Gantt examines cake in the American South and demonstrates how it long has had a special significance for Southern women. She argues that cake has become a way for Southern women to demonstrate their power, influence, and prestige both inside and outside of the home (Innes 2001, 14). Psyche A. Williams-Forsen explores how the stereotype of African Americans as chicken lovers perpetuated racism through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She also demonstrates, however, that African American women have resisted this stereotyping by transforming fried chicken into a source of power and influence both in the family and community. My thesis will add to this growing literature through the examination of one

woman's privately owned catering company. It will explore how a Hungarian woman made a place for herself in a small city of Atlantic Canada by preparing and selling food.

1.4. Occupational Folklife

Every occupation demands skill, whether it is analysing the data of a complex molecular structure, mopping the kitchen floor, presenting a theatrical act in front of an audience, grading student papers, assembling parts of a motor engine, repeatedly cutting vegetables for a dish, or monitoring a patient at the intensive care unit. In each case, the worker must make decisions, manipulate objects and devices to achieve the desired result, express him/herself verbally, and communicate with his/her co-workers formally and or informally. These techniques, gestures, oral expressions, and customs comprise the occupational folklife of a particular work group (McCarl 1980, 158). The concept of "folklife" (German *Volkskunde*, Swedish *folkliv*) is more inclusive than "folklore," embracing the material as well as the verbal and "intangible" elements of traditional expression. Articulated in early articles by Don Yoder and Warren Roberts, the folklife movement gained recognition in the work of Henry Glassie, particularly his empirical, cultural-geographic work on large patterns of material expression in the Eastern United States and later in his more critical and reflexive *Passing the Time in Balleymenone* (1982). Scholars' earliest investigations of occupational folklife arose from the interest in tracing the derivation of words and songs used within particular trades, from seafaring and logging to mining and farming. Later studies expanded into specific traditional crafts, followed by examinations of increasingly industrialized, urban work groups (McCarl 1980, 200).

In 1978, the Smithsonian Office of Folklore Programs established *Smithsonian Folklife Studies* to document folkways still practiced (or recreated through memory) in a variety of traditional cultures. This office has accumulated more than three decades of research accruing from fieldwork conducted for its annual production of the Festival of American Folklife. The genesis of the *Smithsonian Folklife Studies* dates back to 1967 when the Smithsonian convened a group of cultural geographers, architectural historians, and European and American folklore scholars in July of that year. One recommendation of the conference stressed the need for new directions in documentation to keep pace with the ever-broadening scope of the discipline, as it extended to encompass all aspects of folklife. *Smithsonian Folklife Studies* were designed to provide new perspectives on earlier research or to investigate areas of folklife previously unexplored. The topics proposed for the publications ranged widely from such traditional folklore interests as ballad singing to newer areas of concern such as occupational folklore. Included were studies of "old ways" in music, crafts, and food preparation still practiced in ethnic communities of the New World, centuries-old technologies still remembered by First Nations peoples, and "homemade" utilitarian items still preferred to their "store bought" counterparts (McCarl 1985, 7-8).

The field of occupational folklife studies began as a movement to bring modern factories, workplaces, and industrial settings to the attention of folklorists as valid locations in which to find folklore. Without taking a reductionist attitude toward an entire genre of folklore studies, it is observable that prior to the 1960s, very few studies concentrated on factories or non-traditional workplace settings. As work shifted from agrarian to more urban and factory contexts, so did the folklorist's focus of study.

Industrial and factory folklife studies since the 1970s have emerged as a singular area of focus, pulling away from more romanticized occupations and recognizing the importance of examining industrial and factory waged labour. Scholars such as Archie Green, Robert Byington, Bruce Nickerson and Robert McCarl have furthered understandings of folklore within occupations. They helped shift folkloristic attention away from country craftsmen and towards industrial and urban settings (Gillett 2008, 1).

Early occupational folklorists were primarily concerned with documenting an indigenous American expressive form – cowboy songs – in order to prove the existence of a unique folk idiom in the United States. This concern was pursued by later occupational folklorists, such as George Korson, Horace Beck, Wayland Hand, and Archie Green, who sought to portray the role played by folksong and narratives in expressing the changes, struggles, inequities, and hardships of workers in an emerging industrial milieu. Robert McCarl (1985), contemporary scholar of occupational folklife studies, draws our attention to becoming more adept at documenting broader ethnographic wholes in an attempt to show how the expressive material is used by the members of a working culture.

To question the ordinary, the routine, and the everyday is a necessary project for a truly critical social science. The enduring importance of a work such as Barthes' *Mythologies* (1972) is that it brings the ordinary stuff of everyday life into a sharp focus and reveals how it is related to ideology and the exercise of power. Objects and practices normally taken for granted are shown to be social symbols. This book describes and analyses aspects of the culture of young white working-class men. Their culture is prosaic rather than poetic. It revolves around the local and immediate; it celebrates the ordinary,

the profane. I draw upon this author's impressive theory in that the subject of my inquiry is one of the most basic manifestations of our everyday life: food and cooking. I will argue that the simple act of food preparation and food serving retains and reveals deeper social symbols and expressions of power. I focus on ethnicity and gender, showing their relation to a dominant culture (in the Canadian environment). I reflect on how an immigrant woman from the Eastern-European bloc uses food to perform her ethnic and feminine identity and to gain recognition within her new community.

The presentation of esoteric techniques (that take place farther from the central processes of the work flow) must be carefully considered so that the outsider may also "see into the culture" (McCarl 1985). Robert McCarl's study of fire fighters explores forms of cultural expression that emphasize the primary importance of work skills. According to McCarl, the first task of the folklorist is to ascertain the central elements of the work culture (1985, 28). All behaviour patterns, from the most mundane to the most unusual, are ranked according to their importance to the successful accomplishment of recurrent work tasks. In the course of his career, an individual has thousand of opportunities to perform in front of his peers; and there are as many varieties of performers as there are members of the culture. The canon of work technique is an informally held cultural standard that is rigid enough to perpetuate traditional rules of conduct, but elastic enough to allow for variation in the group. Not all fire fighters are good at all the techniques demanded by the work, but each individual establishes a reputation in the culture by anticipating the critical appraisal of fellow workers and developing a niche for himself (1985, 28-29). While reading through this occupational folklife study of fire fighters, I became aware of the various identities with which a

worker is able to perform or identify within a specific working group. This is true among the employees of the catering business as well. Not all employees are able to perform the same task, or at least not to the same level of skill. For example the "art" of folding a napkin is not usually part of the skill set, or canon of work technique, of the bartender who is used to measuring and serving drinks. It is a task that more often falls to female servers.

Michael Robidoux drew my attention to the same issue: working individuals manifesting themselves as creative human beings within a certain occupation. In his work titled *Men at Play*, Robidoux focuses specifically on professional hockey in Canada. His objective was to gain an understanding of hockey as an occupation, as it is "worked" (2001, 4). Although not the view of the sport generally shared by Canadians, he explores how professional hockey players experience hockey as work, and shows how their identities are shaped and defined through the labor process. Robidoux presents the workers'/ hockey players' struggle to be creative individuals within the hockey environment. This may often mean performing a task that incorporates the unique skills and precision for which the player is known, and ultimately creating a distinctive product or end that is interpreted, esoterically, as his own.

Archie Green encourages folklorists to consider oral expressions that feature the everyday manifestations of work (Green 1996). Since the catering business explored in this thesis is carried out by employees of Hungarian and Canadian descent, and the owner of the company is of Hungarian origins, it is a rich setting in which to explore various forms of language usage (Hungarian and English). Most of the discussions and stories are in English because of the presence of the English speaking employees, but the unique

character of the multilingual discussion merits further attention.

Folklorist Maggie Holtzberg's work, *The Lost World of the Craft Printer* (1992) develops the same idea. Quoting at length from interviews with stonehands, compositors, and Linotype operators, Maggie Holtzberg describes not only the material components of the printers' profession but also their customs, values, and vocabulary - the stuff of which the printers' collective memory is made. She argues that the hot-metal printers' lore has survived in an exemplary form that functions as a source of reconciliation with the demise of their craft. Holtzberg introduces the concept of "occupational nostalgia" (1992). This brings to light an extremely important aspect of occupational folklife studies because many studies have overlooked the implications of the passage of time on a trade or craft. Holtzberg's work is extremely relevant for my approach since Anna had to adapt in the face of a changing world to a new environment, and another world ceased exist once she left her native land. Customs, oral expressions, and aspects of her cooking style are embedded in this ambiguous identity: living the Canadian life with strings attached to another native land and Hungarian identity.

1.5. Characteristics of the Catering Company

Over its twenty-five year history Anna's catering business has been constantly changing in terms of menu variations, styles of food presentation, and number of employees, but during my fieldwork and over the time period I spent in her company (Summer 2009 to Winter 2011) it displayed a relatively consistent pattern: a fixed, uniform menu, constant employees, and routine food preparation. Anna prepares and serves food that has stood the test of time and that she considers reliable. For example, the

hot and cold appetizers are basically the same at every event with a few new additions at the request of certain clients or as a way of introducing a novel element. This food repertoire that has earned Anna a good reputation among her clientele will be the subject of the third chapter when I analyse the fluid character of Anna's ethnicity.

Anna's catering company draws indirectly on her family: her eighty-seven-year-old mother, living in Ottawa, and her two daughters, living in Montreal and Ottawa. The women are in constant contact and they exchange ideas via telephone and internet on a daily basis. A main topic of their conversations, most of the time, is cooking, especially before and during Anna's preparation for a catering event. Anna's mother, after many years living in the capital city of Canada, still practices traditional Hungarian cooking and she has passed much of her knowledge on to her daughter. Anna often receives oral instructions for traditional dishes from her mother, while her two daughters hunt down and provide new and unique recipes from the internet that they think might be suitable for their mother's use. How food and cooking connect these three generations of women will be a topic of the fourth chapter.

Anna has several close friends who are involved in aspects of her catering, including food preparation, cooking, or helping her out with some last minute shopping or dropping off different food items she may have forgotten. In addition to friends' occasional help, in the last five years Anna has employed one woman on a regular basis, Jane. They work together preparing, serving and cleaning up after catering parties on a weekly basis. Jane has proved to be a skilled and ingenious helper and her prompt and agile thinking and cooking style has improved the quality of Anna's catering. The other two relatively constant employees in the last two years have been my husband, Zoltán,

and myself. While our quartet has proved satisfactory and sufficient in most cases, when it came to parties with a huge number of guests (usually more than 50), Anna has complemented our team with two or three additional employees. Although my husband and I are not available for work on a regular basis, especially not at the end of semesters, or before important exams or papers, our involvement has been significant. When she requires additional staff, Anna likes to hire daughters or sons of close friends on a casual basis. She almost never employs strangers, having had bad experiences with them in the past.

Anna's kitchen constitutes the main work place where the bulk of the preparation work is done, usually by Anna and Jane. As mentioned above, at busy times she welcomes additional helping hands, like myself or some of her closer friends. The "official" side of the catering materializes at the client's home where all the food items are displayed and served to the guests in a sophisticated manner. In the next chapter, I discuss catering as a performance. The hectic side of Anna's kitchen will be presented as the backstage while the host's home will be presented as the front stage where the end product – fancy food – is served by the smiling protagonists of the catering performance.

The catering industry, which is sometimes referred to as the hospitality industry, provides food, drink and, in certain sectors, accommodation for people at school, in hospital, at work and at leisure (Kinton and Ceserani 1992, 12). Kinton and Ceserani in their textbook, *The Theory of Catering*, identify four types of catering establishments:

1. *Commercial catering* includes hotels, restaurants, wine bars, fast foods, clubs, and chain catering organisations. Hotels and restaurants provide breakfasts, lunches, teas, dinners and snacks. In some hotels, conferences and banquets are an important part of the

business. Customer demand has resulted in the rapid growth of a variety of establishments offering a limited choice of popular foods at a reasonable price, and with little or no waiting time, to be consumed either on the premises or taken away (fast foods). There are many establishments with chains spread over wide areas and in some cases overseas. Prospects for promotion and opportunities are often considerable, whether it is in a chain of hotels or restaurants.

2. *Welfare catering* (hospitals, old people's home, nursing homes, residential establishments, etc). The fundamental difference Kinton and Ceserani identify between welfare catering and the catering of hotels and restaurants is that the hotel or restaurant is run to make a profit and provide a service. The object of welfare catering is to provide a service without necessarily making a profit. The object of hospital catering, for instance, is to assist the nursing staff to get the patient well as soon as possible. To do this it is necessary to provide good quality food which has been carefully prepared and cooked to retain the maximum nutritional value and presented to the patient in an appetising manner.

3. *Transport catering* includes aircraft, railway catering, and catering at sea.

4. *Other aspects of catering* include contract catering, outside catering, and licensed house (pub) catering (1992, 12-29). It is this category that Anna's business falls under. Her catering is based on contracts and she makes a living by doing this. The basis of catering in Anna's case is formed by unwritten tradition and is characterized by orality. During her time in business she has never used any kind of formal advertisement; her only promotion has been informally through her network of friends and acquaintances. One client commented, "Anna did my mom's party eight years ago, and I really enjoyed

her food. I didn't know her, just tasted the food at the party, I haven't tasted it previously, but the food was very nice, and the food is different, it's different than North-American catering" (Brenda Brown – October 13, 2010). Another reflected, "Sydney, that's my daughter, and that's who, I've met Anna through them. They told me. You usually go to your friends, and if they had somebody, a caterer and they are happy, and if done a good job, you usually connect with them. This is how it works, word of mouth" (Maryanne Hunt – October 6, 2010).

People share their experiences, tell stories of the latest party they attended, recount the various food items they tasted, give advice to each other, and make suggestions. That's how Anna meets her costumers; once they taste her food, they contract her services.

Based on my interviews with past and present clients, numerous discussions with Anna, and hours of participant observation I identified the following characteristics of Anna's informal catering business:

- The parties are conducted in the private sphere, at informal places;
- Anna's reputation and the success of her catering is spread by word of mouth and is characterised by orality;
- All but one of her employees are casual (mostly students) who work on an irregular basis and are called in when needed;
- Employees lack formal training and most learn by watching and following the instructions;

- Preparation for a catered event - the actual cooking - takes place within the same physical space: Anna's kitchen;
- The owner and her employees enjoy flexible work schedules. The time devoted to preparation depends on many factors, including the employees' availability, Anna's schedule, customers' demands, and the type of food;
- The division of labour among the employees is not a given but can be negotiated with more or less strain;
- Anna's catering is not controlled by any "formal" institution;



Figure 1. Table with Cold Appetizers at One of the Catering Events

Over the years Anna has developed a core menu that consists mostly of cold and hot appetizers. Appetizers are the most requested dishes and the most time-consuming to prepare. There is no rule for estimating how many "bites" of each appetizer guests will eat, but Anna has a sense of how much food she needs for cocktail parties and which are the most popular appetizers. If there will be a meal to follow, fewer appetizers will be needed than if it is a cocktail party. The quantity of the food prepared for parties depends on factors such as the number of guests invited and the age group (older groups eat less). Usually the hosts ask for appetizers when organizing cocktail parties, but in some cases they might request a meal following the appetizers. Anna discusses the menu with the host a few days (or even weeks) before the party. In most cases clients are open to her menu suggestions as she indicates:

[I] Not necessarily take into consideration customer's demand. They don't know what they like. I know what they like, I know what people are excited about, and I know what's good, doable for me. And I know that everyone will be happy, so that's why I have a wide variety of list. The only thing I ask them is, I have to know the event, as I said, and I have to know the allergies. They rely on my judgement because they know me, and since I don't advertise, people know it by word of mouth, they know I'm good, and many times I do a catering, people will say: Oh, thank God you're doing it, I can eat. Because some people will not eat strange foods (Anna - September 1, 2010).

According to Anna, the food needs to be "user friendly," by which she means it can be easily eaten, without dripping. The food must be cut in small pieces, because people cannot easily manage big pieces. Further aspects of Anna's catering, such as the

characterisation of food types, will be presented in the third chapter.

1.6. The Story behind the Scenes

Anna's life story, although spiced with negative elements, is also a success story. She is not a trained caterer; catering wasn't a chosen occupation for her and she never worked in the hospitality industry. But as her life progressed, catering became a feasible option. Over time she was able to make a living out of it and to become a reliable and successful caterer.

Anna arrived in Canada as a child after the Hungarian revolution of 1956 which had been crushed by the Soviet Union. She lived with her family in Montreal for many years, but it was difficult to get along with her strict father, so she left her family as soon as she could get a job. When in her twenties she met a handsome, charming doctor, David, who turned out to be married. They fell in love with one another and there was no turning back. David left his wife for Anna; they got married as soon as David's divorce went through. At that time Anna did not excel in cooking; she learned to cook only after she was thirty. She did not need to become a kitchen-fairy because most of the chores were done by her husband who was an excellent cook. It was simply too good to be true. They had two daughters and they both worked at the hospital, David as a doctor and Anna in a laboratory. Later they moved to another city and bought a house there. David got a new job in a hospital and Anna continued to work in a lab as well. Anna recalls:

Those were quiet times, just like before the storm, I would have never imagined what is going to happen in the future, and my life will change radically. We both worked at the hospital, hired a babysitter for the girls. Had big circle of friends and parties all the

time, and David loved to cook, he spent hours in the kitchen cooking, that was his hobby. At that time I didn't need to cook, wasn't even fond of cooking, that was my husband's area. I would have never imagined that one day cooking will be my job, that's what I'm gonna do for a living (Anna - August 16, 2010).

After a couple of years spent in their new home, David fell in love with another woman, who happened to be Anna's best friend, and a few weeks later he wanted to divorce. He left his wife and the two daughters and Anna's life suddenly changed. That was her most difficult period, and she found consolation in her friends' comforting words, not having any relatives in the city. She quit her job at the hospital, for her ex-husband was working there and she could not tolerate his close proximity. Anna started to think about making radical changes in her life. She needed a new job, something convenient and achievable from home. Leaving her daughters home alone or hiring a babysitter was not an option. Listening to her friends' helpful advice, she started to consider catering as a way of making a living:

I wanted to stay at home for the girls, needed a job that can be done from the comfort of your home, and also flexible, so I can be there for my daughters. Kathy, my little daughter, she helped me a lot, she loved to be around me, she was more affected by our divorce than Andrea. She was my first employee, and did a good job. In the first years I've worked with my daughter, and hired occasionally other girls too, mostly my friends' daughters (Anna - August 16, 2010).

The thinking time was a two years long process. It was what she needed to make sure that she had been on the right track. She never considered taking a catering course. Neither has Anna had any formal training as a cook. She became an autodidact; her culinary education consisted of reading and learning from different sources. She started by reading cookbooks. At the beginning, she did not know what braised, sautéed, or poached even meant, much less how to do them. But she kept reading and she got a sense of things. Her main inspiration was the book and career of the Montreal-based caterer Catherine Harris. Anna received Harris' book, *Cash from Your Kitchen* (1984), as a gift from her father, who supported her in every way after her difficult divorce. The book traces Harris' beginnings as a caterer and is full of tips on kitchen organization, how to shop and how to work out quantities. It is intended for the amateur caterer who lacks training in food service and contains advice on menu planning. Harris also discusses the client-caterer relationship, how to deal with staff, how to draw up a contract, and how to work out prices. At the end of the book are recipes for a variety of occasions, from cocktail parties and wedding brunches to business lunches and buffet dinners. In many aspects Catherine Harris' life and career resembles Anna's own. They both are divorced, a fact which influenced the evolution of their destinies. They also both relied on their friends who helped their unfolding careers, as Harris comments: "One day a friend of a friend called, and I had my first job: a buffet supper for seventy people. I chose twelve different exotic dishes, cooked for two days solid, hardly slept, I was so nervous, and prepared more food than a hundred famished football players could have plowed through. It was a great success" (Harris 1984, 6).

Anna's first job was for a charity organization, where one of her friends was the

"arranger." One day she called Anna asking if she was ready to provide food for an event organized by the charity group. Anna said yes, and that's how her career started. Three days of hard work was involved and friends helped her with the cooking. She needed three cars to deliver the food but eventually the party was a successful one. Anna remembers:

It was a difficult period, I've relied totally on my friends, had no clue how to deal with this situation, wasn't even sure if that's a good idea. Everybody helped me, we worked hard for three days in a row, my friends provided me with advises, what to cook, how to do it. At that time I cooked from recipes, and followed every step, not like now, that I don't need recipes anymore, because I know everything by heart. Didn't cook anything fancy and complicated, there were no quiches for example, or Caponata, but managed to compile a decent menu. I used eggs, devilled eggs, and that never changed since then. I also used vegetables, ham, puffs, cheese, crackers, just like now, but didn't have quiches at that time. Quiches came later, when I started to develop my own style of cooking (Anna - August 16, 2010).

A couple of weeks later another opportunity arose and with time Anna had her own clientele worked out. She became well-known in certain circles and with time she received even more orders. The basis of Anna's catering is friends, relationships and networks. As mentioned earlier, her good reputation has been built informally by word of mouth.

Anna's other source of inspiration was Martha Stewart's book, *Hors d'Oeuvres: The Creation and Presentation of Fabulous Finger Foods* (1984). Raised in Nutley, New

Jersey, in a family with six children, Stewart developed a passion for cooking, gardening, and homekeeping in her childhood home on Elm Place. After moving to Westport, Connecticut, in 1972 with her husband and daughter, Alexis, she developed a catering business that was unlike any other. The business's unique visual presentation of food and the elegant recipes created for various catered events were the basis for her first book, *Entertaining*, published in 1982 (www.marthastewart.com, accessed 12 -04-10). Anna learned various aspects of food design from her book, but she added further aspects to it, and made changes according to her tastes. She learned to cook well because she loved good ingredients, new tastes, and eating delicious food. Sometimes the same dish in different cookbooks varied enormously so she often combined ideas from several recipes. Her Hungarian ethnic cultural background also played an important role in the evolution of her catering business; her tastes mirror Hungarian cuisine more than North American. Today Anna provides food for many different events, including retirement parties, birthdays, and holiday celebrations and she enjoys a good reputation as a caterer.

1.7. Fieldwork Experiences

The fieldwork for my thesis took place in a small city of Atlantic Canada where Anna now lives. As I indicated earlier, I met Anna in the summer of 2009, soon after my arrival in Canada, when I first heard about her from an Hungarian student who had been her previous employee. Since then I have spent a significant amount of time in Anna's company helping her with the preparation of foods for her catering events. I have also accompanied her when she catered events. I originally conducted fieldwork on the catering business in winter 2010 as part of my coursework. At that time I interviewed

Anna, as well as a few of her customers and employees. This research sparked my interest, and I eventually decided to make Anna's food and catering the focus of my thesis. I continued my participant-observation and during the one year period which I spent in Anna's company I have had the opportunity to get a good insight into the meanings of food in her life as well as the functions of her catering business. I am familiar with the different types of foods she prepares and serves, have met some of her customers and worked with several employees who have worked for her for a long time. I agree with those, like Thomas Dunk, who argue that insider research is more effective than ethnographic research undertaken in a foreign culture because one's greater familiarity with the "home" culture makes it easier to recognize subtle, but important differences, and generally simplifies the process of data collection (Dunk 2003, 13). This thesis draws heavily upon my experience as an employee of Anna's catering business. For example, with Anna's help that I managed to contact several past clients. I also benefited from many discussions with members of the catering team and with other relevant individuals such as friends of my employer. Of course, Anna herself is my main informant. In addition to participant-observation and interviews, I carried out library and archival research at Memorial University of Newfoundland and at the Folklore and Language Archive on foodways.

The forms of my documentation were diverse: videos, photos, and recorded interviews. In addition to several interviews conducted with Anna, I also carried out fourteen interviews with both clients and employees (current and former) of the catering service. Most of these interviewees were over fifty. While I used sample questions in my interviews, I did not request my interviewees to complete questionnaires. Since I was

frequently involved in some way in events catered by Anna, I was also able to document them through participant-observation, photographs, and videos. My fieldwork officially ended in January, 2011, but since I continue to be involved in Anna's catering business as an employee, I have been able to gather further or complementary information as my thesis evolved.

1.8. Chapter Outline

In this chapter I have introduced the main themes to be covered in the rest of this study that explores Anna's food and catering as a folkloric performance of ethnicity and gender. Catering is a relatively new subject for folklore studies so I have attempted to place it within the context of different types of food service and to root my study within occupational folklife studies. I also traced the story of Anna and her catering and described my fieldwork process.

Chapter Three, "Food as Creative Manipulation of Ethnicity", examines how Anna's catering business accommodates local tastes and foodways. What characterizes her presentation of North American and European cuisines? How does she adapt/form the elements of her own culture to local tastes? The role of ethnic food in Anna's own performance of ethnic identity is explored as well. I also focus on the relationship between food and memory: How has food preserved and retained oral traditions, customs and beliefs?

Chapter Four, "Food and Gender," investigates Anna's use of food as a gendered expression of identity. I discuss cooking in terms of the gender roles in her life and food as a point of connection for Anna and her family members.

Chapter Five, "Conclusions," draws together the ideas explored in previous chapters.

But first, the next chapter introduces the two sides of catering as performance: the performers (the caterer and her employees) and the audience (clients). Here my main focus is on the roles and relationships of the caterer and her employees. Within the context of the caterer's kitchen, I explore Anna's role as well as the juxtaposition of fictive and mundane roles of employees who are from different backgrounds.

CHAPTER TWO: CATERING AS FOLKLORIC PERFORMANCE

In his work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Erving Goffman uses the imagery of the theatre in order to describe the dynamics of human social action. In the center of his analysis lies the relationship between performance and the front stage. In this chapter I draw on Goffman's framework to argue that catering can be conceived as a folkloric performance, or folk drama, for it contains the most important aspects that are inherent in a dramatic performance: backstage, front stage, setting, actors, role-distribution, and performing team. First, however, I set the stage with a personal experience narrative from my own point of view, as both employee and participant observer. It focuses on the catering team's last minute preparation for a catered event, the route to the host's house and our arrival at the customer's home.

2.1. "Ten More Minutes...We're Almost There": Insights into the Particularities of Catering

It's half past 4 in the afternoon and my husband Zoltán and I are heading to the West End side of the city where Anna's house is. There's a catered party somewhere in the city from 6, but we all should be there by 5. I'm waiting for the green light to turn red. I didn't have time to finish my make up at home, but I have mastered the challenging manoeuvre of the last minute car make-uping. It's the worst time for driving through the city, the middle of the rush hour. And it's Friday on top of that, when people are frantically rushing home to escape the working environment and enjoy the rest of the

weekend. "We're not gonna make it by 4.30 to Anna" - states Zoltán with resignation in his voice. There's nothing new in this statement; to be 5 to 10 minutes late is included in the package. Besides that, Anna never specifies the exact time when we are to be at her house, rather she gives a relatively flexible time period. We've learned during all these past months working with her that around 4.30 means between 4.15 and 4.45. If we escape the last two red lights we're going to make it right on time. As we enter Anna's kitchen a very familiar picture unfolds in front of us: Jane, Anna's helper and her "right hand," stays in front of the counter eagerly cutting strawberries in half with skilled movements. Anna is busy drying the blade of the food processor with a cloth. Asparagus and ham are waiting on the counter to be finalised and chicken puffs are lying on a cutting board. They are to be filled with chicken cream, the cream that Anna just finished processing at the moment of our arrival. I glance at the kitchen clock, it's quarter to 5. In 15 minutes we should be at the house of the host, but Anna doesn't seem bothered by the time factor. She greets us quietly and kindly; we share friendly greeting kisses, and exchange a few sentences about our lives. Anna informs us about the present stage of the situation: everything is finished except for a few food items that need to be finalised. Otherwise we are ready to go. In the beginning of my encounter with catering I was sceptical about this statement. I would have never imagined how much work can be done in just about 10 minutes, but now I don't question the situation, I know exactly. If we all do our part of the last-minute preparation, in about 15 minutes we'll be ready to take off. I take my elegant black coat off, grab the green apron from the rack, and get ready to finalise the ham and asparagus duo. I cut the cooked asparagus into equal pieces and roll the ham slices around them, sticking a toothpick across at the end, then placing them into

a plastic container. It is a very simple procedure, one of the first food practices I learned at Anna's home. I don't need directions anymore in completing this task, I can finish it in a short time. Jane has just finished cutting the strawberries in half and has placed them into a bigger container. Now she is busy fixing the mixture of brown sugar and Grand Marnier sauce for them. Zoltán is the only one not employed into any kind of kitchen activity. It has never crossed Anna's mind to teach him something catering or food related, and he also thinks that he wouldn't be able to do the job as well as we women do. The only thing he can manage skillfully is washing and drying the dishes. At this moment there are no dishes to wash or dry, so he cracks a joke to entertain his fellow female workers:

"A little cowboy walks angrily into a bar. 'Who painted my horse black'? There's no reply. The cowboy shouts out again: 'Who painted my horse black?' This time a huge cowboy stands up, he's so big, his head is almost touching the ceiling, 'It was me!' he replies".

The sudden and noisy sound of the food processor drowns out Zoltán's voice, so he takes a break in joke telling. Nobody talks for a few seconds; the noise is too loud for chatting. Anna is food processing the artichoke mixture. I have finished the ham and asparagus duo, placed them into a container, and now I'm filling the puffs with the chicken cream. This will result in the very popular and tasty chicken puffs. It's another very simple procedure: I make a cut into the puffs, not too big, not too small, just enough to fill them with cream using a teaspoon. This will be my last task before we go. As soon as the food processor's noise stops, it occurs to Anna that the pressure of the tires needs to be

checked before we go, so she asks Zoltán to carry out this task. Then he can start taking the boxes with the food into the car. There are about 7-8 plastic and carton boxes filled with food and kitchen appliances that need to be taken out into Anna's car. We will find out the end of the joke another time, for Zoltán is busy with the boxes and hardly in a joke-telling mood while carrying them. Anna rushes upstairs to put on her catering clothes, always black pants and an elegant shirt. She might wear white, just like us, but not necessarily. Being the "boss," she distinguishes herself from the rest of the team by wearing a coloured shirt. Jane is already in her catering outfit: black pants, white shirt and black coat. Now she's taking off the apron she's been wearing while working in the kitchen. My costume is similar to hers, only I wear an extra black vest on my shirt, and a coat, too, not being used to the cold climate of Atlantic Canada. Our last duties are accomplished: food items in the containers, containers skilfully placed into the boxes, and boxes carried to the car and placed there. Now Jane fixes her long hair again, using chemicals only in the washroom, never around food. With the pressure of the tires checked and the boxes placed into the car, we are really ready to go. While still waiting for Anna in the living room, Jane gets anxious that we are late. It's past five o'clock and theoretically we should be at the host's house by now. She's complaining that they lost precious time because Anna was busy talking on the phone and that she also forgot to buy certain items, so she had to call a friend up to make a last-minute shopping trip for her. I know these stories by heart. I'm just intrigued why Jane is still surprised by Anna's calm, steady, and forgetful nature. She never loses her temper, never panics in any kind of situation. Jane is the opposite of her, always in a rush, never running out of time, performing every task with amazing promptness and speed. Even if they cannot

understand each other's temper, they form a great team by complementing each other's deficiencies. Finally, Anna comes down all nicely done, looking for the car key, and taking one last phone call from her mother who forgot that today is a catering day, and seems unaware that this is a very bad moment for chatting. Still Anna won't hang up and, she's talking while starting the car engine and backing out with the car. We are not rushing through the city, Anna never speeds under any circumstances, no matter how vital is the situation. She manages to keep her calm and balance every time. Around twenty after five we arrive at the customer's house, theoretically 20 minutes late, but as I've learned from the customers too, time is an elastic and adjustable factor and we shouldn't let it exert pressure upon us. We are all in a relaxed mood as we enter into the house of the customer. Both the wife and husband greet us and when Anna introduces us to them, everybody smiles. They are still wearing their comfy casual garments, not even half ready to start the party. The guests are to arrive at 6 or after, but mostly they are late, too. Anna takes time to catch up with the wife, they used to be good friends or they still are. I've learned that every single customer is a special one, often a good friend from Anna's past or present life. Even if she doesn't keep in contact with them on a regular basis, they are happy to see each other. Anna is showing the latest pictures of her grandchildren. As the night unfolds I will find out the whole story of their friendship, but for now we are ready to set the scene for the party.

2.2. "This is Not the Real Me But Will Do It Anyways": Fictive and Mundane Roles in Catering

The idea that catering can be conceived of as a folkloric performance, or a folk drama, and the host's house as the stage for this dramatic performance, came from a remark of a guest at one of Anna's catered events. Impressed by the food and the kindness of the staff, he noted at the end of a party that such an evening is usually only seen in a movie. In his opinion, the staff (knowing that we are not professionally trained personnel) performed outstandingly. The idea that individuals assume roles is not new, and Green indicates that even the most cursory survey of contemporary scholarship in the social sciences reveals a regular, if not systematic, use of theatrical metaphor in the analysis of human behaviour (Green 1978, 843). For example, in 1950 Robert Ezra Park summarized the theatrical aspect of our everyday interaction: "It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role. We are parents and children, masters and servants, teachers and students, clients and professional men, etc. It is in these roles that we know each other, it is in these roles that we know ourselves" (1950, 249). Central to this approach is Erving Goffman for whom the relationship between life and theatre is analogical. Within Goffman's framework virtually all behaviour is susceptible to being designated as "drama" and forms such as ritual, festival, pageant, or even baseball which utilize the means of dramatic art (costuming, distinct playing areas and "scripting"), can be categorized as folk drama.

Here I draw on Alan Brody's notion of folk drama as "explained action" and

Roger Abrahams' characterization of folk drama as "traditional play activity that relies primarily on dialogue to establish its meaning and that tells a story through the combination of dialogue and action, the outcome of which is known to the audience ahead of time" (Green 1978, 845). I have come to recognize the role-playing and drama-like character of catering. Zoltán explains:

This is not the real me, I have never been a bartender in my life, but I like this half of it. There's no pressure there, the boss and host are nice, the guests are chatting with me, I do not feel particularly that I'm working. I know she counts on me, I also count on her (Anna), therefore I always perform well and I want to ensure that guests are satisfied at the end of the day (Zoltán Antal - August 9, 2010).

Jane elaborates on the performance quality of her role:

I don't always feel like doing this, many times I'd rather stay at home. The last time for example, I've went through the evening with a hurting tooth, right before my oral operation. But the event was too big for me to stay home. I was constantly on drugs, but the guests have observed nothing from all of this. I've put the smiling face up and everything was ok. They don't want to hear about the everyday troubles of the staff, they've come to enjoy themselves. A week later I had my operation (Jane Hawkins - August 12, 2010).



Figure 2. Zoltán Performing His Role of a Bartender at a Retirement Party

These comments support Green's observation that folk drama requires performers to enter into traditional fictive roles which differ significantly from their real or mundane roles, both social and personal. The result is a constant juxtaposition of fictive and mundane roles (1978, 846). Over the years most of Anna's employees have been students from different backgrounds or close friends who are willing to give a hand when called upon. Everyone, except her right hand, Jane (who had been working in the hospitality

industry for more than thirty years), has another occupation in real life which does not resemble catering in any way. However, at a catered event, everyone is able to play his/her role efficiently as either a server or bartender. Sometimes fictive and mundane roles overlap when it comes to discussing real life and what everyone does with her/his life. It has also happened on several occasions that catering has proven useful in our own professions. Zoltán, while performing his role of a bartender, has met interesting people who provided him with relevant information regarding the research in theoretical chemistry. As a folklorist, I have been introduced to new people and new social contexts through catering. Folklore is about people, people's lives, and people's informal culture, and while interacting constantly with customers, I have had the opportunity to gain insights into others' lives and to find relevant information and future informants for my research.

Roger Abrahams describes life within a social group as being filled with orders, systems, and co-ordinations (or sense of failure of expectations). We exist within a family system, a system of manners or decorum, and so on. Once a group devises a system of order, the system will tend to reiterate itself in different realms of the group's life (Abrahams 1972, 77). Drawing upon Abrahams' definition, performance is a demonstration of culture, one of the products of people working out expressive means of operating together. In the next section I explore the artistic side of catering performance, emphasizing three aspects of the foods prepared and presented by Anna: a treat for the stomach, a treat for the eye, and an unforgettable aesthetic experience.

2.3. *"Food is Good, Food is Love, Food is Beautiful": Catering as Work of Art*

All interactions are, to some extent, patterned and therefore describable in terms of redundancies (style), decorum (expectations), and rhetoric (the uses by the performer of these patterns to entertain and persuade) (Goffman 1959, 15). Goffman defines performance as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (1959, 15). It has been common to regard "performance" as involving some dimension of a nonreciprocal, asymmetrical, and non-spontaneous communicative relationship between "performer" and "audience." It is usually the case that the more stylized the performance, the more asymmetrical and ritualized the performer-audience relationship becomes. It seems important to emphasize performer-audience coordination. The use of performance will parallel the common uses of the word "art." Thus Abrahams suggests that when we speak of the "art of living," we recognize certain repetitions occurring in everyday life. He argues that if there can be an art in life, then there is no problem to also see the utility of calling the life-artist a performer and to regard his manipulation of the latencies of life-style as performance (Abrahams 1972, 76). This view places the work of art at the center of culture because it both embodies the primary motives of the group and epitomizes them through stylization and performance. For a work of art to be effective it must not only communicate with an audience, but it must also excite its participation. The idea that lies behind performance is a remarkably simple one: to set up rhythms and expectancies that will permit – indeed, insist upon – a synchronized audience reaction. This places the burden upon the performer to establish those rhythms and expectancies. According to Abrahams, creativity

is the ability to excite imaginative sympathy for perceptions of order and directed energies. Creativity is the fruitful bringing together of form and energy and insight. The creative spirit more commonly manifests itself in the adaptations of old and accepted orders to the current concerns and energies of a culture. The moment a conventional play-word is summoned, the expectation of the onlooker is for creative entertainment and this expectation provides the occasion that the performer may or may not be able to capitalize upon (Abrahams 1972, 78). The following quote from an interview with a former customer points out and concisely summarizes the essentials of catering as performed by Anna. Those who know her and eat her food, highlight all the special flavours that remain significantly different from the usual North American flavours. Variety, good taste and aesthetics are the determinant elements of her catering. These constitute the creative nature of the catering performed by Anna.

It's delicious, it's prepared with love, I'm sure, I can taste it, it's homemade. I enjoy the international flavour of her food, it's different. She offers something that wouldn't be offered by any other caterer. It's consistently delicious, consistently good, dynamic, presentation is beautiful, service is impeccable. She always has wonderful servers, personable. She always plays an integral role in it, she's always there herself. It's from her heart, it's from her home, and she's always involved (Susan LeGrew - August 24, 2010).

Anna reflects on what she identifies as the successful components of her catering performance:

They love the variety, I will have Italian, the Caponata, and eggplant. My philosophy about the

catering is that I want to give a culinary experience to these people, something that they will remember also. I have had many parties, many times, I have met people who have had my food ten years before and they remembered it. So that's my whole philosophy (Anna - September 1, 2010).

The catering performance has educational, intellectual, and aesthetic functions. A continual dialogue and information exchange is going on; we (the staff) are constantly explaining food items to clients, asking Anna and double checking on every aspect. Many people are just curious about the ingredients and the recipe, but many of them are struggling with health issues or allergies, and they need the exact details about potentially harmful ingredients. I know from experience that customers' attention needs to be drawn to the walnut content in foods, as well as to nuts, cheese, and milk, for these ingredients are on some people's forbidden lists. In most cases people are not familiar with the foods they eat, since Anna does not make Canadian food, but they are open to new tastes and eagerly curious about everything. During my employment, I have personally learned a great deal about foods, ingredients, and modes of preparations, but the educational process has two directions. I have reminded Anna of the importance of detailed planning and the preparation of shopping lists which she neglected for years, opting instead to rely on her vast experience.

On every occasion food is part of the entertainment. It is a topic of conversation as people discuss both presentation and taste. For those meeting for the first time, or for those who do not know each other well, food can act as an icebreaker as well. In many cases the customers are not "starving." The main reason for their visit is not to eat everything they see, but to learn new things, experience new food items, and enjoy the

beauty of its presentation. Catering is about freedom for both the customer and the caterer. They are open to each other's suggestions, and in certain cases there are special requirements coming from the customers. For example, they might ask for a special Mexican dish that is the favourite of the guest of honour, or they might request a special cake, like Hummingbird.¹ In certain cases they specifically ask that Anna not bring a certain food item. Just recently a host requested that Drunken Doggies (sausages in bourbon sauce) not be on the menu because the food brought up unpleasant memories.

Love is one of the key words most customers rely on. They define Anna's food as having been made with love, presented with love and joy by a lovely person, and explained by her and her staff with patience. All of this builds the customers' trust and comfort. Anna dispels any fear people may have about the food by describing it so well and knowing so much about it. One customer commented:

The secret is, she's a beautiful person, and that's the number one thing about her, the food is second to her personality to me. She's lovely, she loves what she does, no one can see that she's ever tired. She sells her food though. Like, it's her, entices people to try her food. Oh, try this, this is delicious, she explains the ingredients, because people are nervous of different looking food, it's just not normal, not a comfort food, you know. She knows every ingredient, she can explain in great detail, the

¹ Despite its name, Hummingbird cake is not made from or for hummingbirds. It is a moist, flavourful cake made from a relatively simple recipe. Many speculate that the cake's name is due to its sweetness, but the origin of the cake remains a mystery.

texture of the food, how it's prepared, and everybody trusts her (Susan LeGrew - August 24, 2010).

These comments support Abrahams' understanding of performance as art and as love. He contends that the idea of art is to move the performer and his audience, the group, from a point of repose to one in which larger and greater continuities may be demonstrated, recognized, and/or recaptured. He believes that creative performance is no statement of status or hierarchy but an act of love. Performance, like love, works only by engendering reciprocity. It can be acted upon so that both the interests of self and others are served. The acts of creative performance and love are equitable because both demand that representative and symbolic acts elicit responsive energies from those to whom the acts are directed (Abrahams 1972, 81-81).

Along with creativity, improvisation is another inherent part of the catering. Just as in folk drama, catering demands that unexpected improvisation often takes place. Anna and the whole staff need to be ready to find optimal solutions to any emerging problems, all the while presenting a calm and competent exterior for the customers. I have witnessed a few times when glasses were broken or drinks were spilt, but panic was avoided in all cases and no one was blamed for the event. The problem was quickly solved. In some cases Anna and Jane have run out of a certain food or ingredient. For example, one time the guests were very fond of the vegetable dip but not the vegetables and they ate the dip in less than an hour. Anna cleverly saved this situation by replacing the dip with another one. This flexible improvisation is closely related to the cooperative spirit of teamwork among members of the catering staff, the next topic of my discussion.

2.4. "Good Teamwork Makes Catering Rock": The Network of Co-Workers

Workers' Community

One cannot understand an occupation without considering the employees. All occupational work is grounded in collective action and a division of labour (Fine 1996, 36). Catering workers are no exception, even when their work appears chaotic to the untrained eye. Catering, like many occupations, demands organization, teamwork and coordination. The work team is as much the unit of analysis as is the individual worker. Richard W. Scott defines organizations as "social structures created by individuals to support the collaborative pursuit of specific goals" (1992, 10), and catering employees work within an organizational mesh where collaboration is essential. For example, successful catering demands that co-workers be cordial, or at least civil. Without such at least superficial pleasantness, interpersonal tensions can undermine the end result for all. If one part of the team does not come through, the whole system will fall apart like a house of cards. This is not unique to catering. Hughes emphasizes that even highly "professional" occupations, like medicine, rely on alliances between lowly workers (1971, 306-9). Occupations are inevitably made up of webs of interaction; these ties are not only technical but also social. Robert Freed Bales comments that "most small groups develop a subculture that is protective for their members, and is allergic, in some respects, to the culture as a whole. They (the members) draw a boundary around themselves and resist intrusion" (1970, 152-54). Fine terms this culture of small groups an "idioculture" which he defines as "a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviours, and

customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and that serve as the basis of further interaction. Members recognise that they share experiences, and these experiences can be referred to with the expectation that they will be understood by other members, thus being used to construct a social reality for the participants" (Fine 1978, 125). Here Fine is building on Thurmond Arnold who more than fifty years ago detailed the cultural dimension of the "folklore of capitalism": "When men are engaged in any continuous cooperative activity, they develop organizations which acquire habits, disciplines, and morale; these give the organizations unity and cause them to develop something which it is convenient to describe as personality or character" (1937, 350).

Workplaces are sites of fellowship and of culture. They are places where people care about each other; they may not like one another and may scorn or resent their colleagues, but they do care. Activities of co-workers matter, directly or indirectly. Anna's catering business is a community. Teammates tend to be bond by rites of what might be called "familiarity" (Goffman 1959, 83). With the small number of employees, workers not only know each other by name, but often have learned vast amounts about each other's lives and interests through shared personal narratives and experiences, and see themselves as linked. The personal backgrounds of catering workers vary widely, as do their ethnic backgrounds. We all benefit from this cultural diversity. When I arrived in Canada, catering was the main channel through which I integrated into Canadian life. Jane, my Canadian co-worker, introduced me to all the basic information that every newly arrived foreigner needs to know. Even though Anna has lived in Canada most of her life, she has kept her Hungarian spirit alive, and it was Jane who proved to be my real guide. She possessed the vital information that one needs to acquire, including the names

of insurance companies, the best doctors in the city, the location of health clinics where you do not need to spend hours waiting in case of emergencies, and the best places to shop. Her help greatly facilitated my adjustment to my new life.

Anna recruits workers for her catering business through her family and social networks, and chance connections. She most often looks to friends to locate staff. For example, Anna hired Jane, her most steady employee, through a close friend:

I met Jane at Elaine's pension. That blonde lady, you've seen the other day. She's one of my best and closest friends. So, Jane, used to work there on a daily basis. At that time I had my friend working for me, but he passed away. I needed somebody to help me out on certain days with catering, so, I asked both of them, if Jane could work for me too. You know, that's the best in catering, I can do the job anytime, evenings, mornings, doesn't matter. And so, Jane liked the idea, she agreed on working for me and also to keep her job at Elaine's. That's how we met (Anna, August 16, 2010).

Anna also draws on acquaintances or "weak" social ties in her search for employees. It can be a matter of being in the right place at the right time, and if Anna meets someone casually who she identifies as having the qualities of a good employee, she may hire them, even though they lack any culinary background. For example, on my second week spent in Canada I met Anna through another Hungarian friend. The friend was a graduate student who used to work for Anna. My friend no longer lived in the city but was returning for a visit and Anna threw a party for her. All the Hungarians who lived in the city were invited and that was where I met her. She was recruiting personnel again, and my husband, Zoltán and I just seemed to be the right choice. Although neither Zoltán nor

I had catering experience or had worked in the hospitality industry before, she assured us that anyone can do it if there's a motivation.

Although Anna assured me that catering is a job that can be mastered by anyone with sufficient motivation, when I first began work, I was overwhelmed by the booming, buzzing confusion. Everything happened simultaneously and in the beginning nothing made sense to me. Since then I have learned that members of the catering team learn informally from each other and share techniques. In catering, formal models of education are weak and instead cooks have, in the words of Wilbert Moore, "a fellowship of suffering," in which all are attempting to master often difficult and unpleasant tasks through role modeling, coaching, and peer support (Bucher and Stelling 1977, 268). Catering doesn't rely on formal apprenticeship, but on informally transmitted techniques and workplace culture.

Role Division

Catering is exciting, challenging, and creative. For Anna, catering from her home is also very personal work. She is essentially the business. The cooking itself and the image she projects through contacts with clients, the presentation of the food, and even the service is an expression of who she is. By running her own business she plays several roles: sales person, organizer, administrator, chef, cook, server, dishwasher, manual labourer, and bookkeeper. While her family, her employees, and her clients see some of her roles, only she knows all. She constantly multitasks even though she admits that she, sometimes, finds it challenging:

There is the job that needs to be done, the catering job. And this doesn't mean cooking in the kitchen. Like when you and Jane are here, that's the easier part, and once we are in the customer's home, things can go smoothly. But all the preparation, the shopping, the organizing, and I forget so many things. Most of the time I forget something, you see, little things, like napkins, I run out of napkins, and forget to buy new ones. There were times when I had to do last minute shopping, right before the party started. Or, I forget to bring some food along, like last time the artichoke. That's my biggest problem (Anna - August 16, 2010).

Anna assumes what Erving Goffman terms the role of director. According to Goffman, when one examines a team performance, one often finds that someone is given the right to direct and control the progress of the dramatic action. This director tends to see the performance in terms of whether or not it went smoothly, effectively and without a hitch, and whether or not all possible disruptive contingencies were prepared for in advance (Goffman 1959, 97). As caterer, Anna is the director of her performance team. She is the organizer, the manager of the kitchen, and the creative force. She knows all or most aspects of the catering. Her most important qualities include creativity, personal management, and organizational abilities. While her employees focus on limited tasks, she is responsible for a wide range of activities. She "orchestrates," much as symphony conductors do; within the kitchen she is also the decision maker and negotiator, the overseer, creator, and supervisor. As she has confessed many times, Anna finds it a big challenge to deal with all these roles alone, and that is the reason why she engages her employees in different activities and assigns different jobs to them. In the beginning I was surprised by the job division in Anna's catering. I soon learned that the division of labor

is not always assigned by Anna but often negotiated among members of the catering team. Within the team, Anna and Jane have the most distinct roles, in part due to their experience, formal titles, and personal qualities as cooks. Jane has thirty years experience in the hospitality industry and she claims her role as the main cook after Anna, who as I have indicated, enjoys the distinctive place of boss, chef, number one cook, and decision maker. Difficult, highly skilled tasks, like cutting the birthday cake at the customer's home, adding spice to a dish, cutting bread into really tiny slices, or heating up food to the right temperature, are always performed by Anna or Jane. Most of the time Anna prefers to do it by herself. The other chores, the "light" ones that require less skill, like boiling eggs, serving the food, refilling plates, dishwashing, and wiping dishes are divided among the other workers. This does not mean that Anna or Jane refuse to perform easy tasks, like doing the dishes. Anna particularly likes to take part in everything, as she explains:

There's no ugly job, or dirty job, and I personally think, every job that we do here, is equally important. For example, a plate, a silver one, if it's not washed properly and wiped properly, it just won't look good. Silver has to shine, otherwise there's no point of using it. So, whoever washes and wipes the cutlery and the silver, needs to do a good job, this is something basic (Anna - August 16, 2010).

When describing Anna's catering team as a work community, I note that an instrumental cooperation is tethered to expressive friendships. Servers get drinks from the bar and the bartender is served food, just like the customers. There is a "favour bank" (Fine 1996, 38) operating, just as there is in most occupational worlds.

Although everybody knows his or her relative role in catering, these roles can be

changed, negotiated and spontaneously mastered. Even if Jane's main role is usually to cut and heat up foods, she will perform the waiter's role if one of the waiters has had enough of the noise, running, and smiling to the people continuously. Any of the waiters could be the bartender for a while, if the assigned bartender has become hungry or needs some time alone in the kitchen. During the months I have worked in the catering team I have witnessed a continuous role-exchange and role-negotiation. Most of the time roles are interchanged easily, but occasionally tensions arise. For example, Anna and Jane have contrasting personalities and different ideas about certain aspects of cooking, so that disputes and misunderstandings sometimes arise between them. When their interests diverge or when communication is ineffective, tension can result among team members as workers can have different ideas of what is expected of them. As well, when workers perform each other's jobs, they must exercise flexibility and cooperation, and if the signal to change roles is not clearly communicated, there can be surprise and tension. One employee described how Anna once expected her to take on a task that usually fell to the caterer but failed to communicate the transfer of the responsibility:

In the beginning I didn't know what am I expected to do. Not talking about the catering at the customer's house, but the preparation. Once, when we had a party, and got there, at Anna's house, she asked me, if I brought the strawberries. I said no, we didn't agree on this. She said, she called me, and asked me to buy some. I said, no, you didn't call. Then she said, maybe, she just wanted to call, but didn't. Anyway, nobody had the strawberry, so I went quickly and bought some. Maybe she did call, but I really can't remember that (Melinda Dean - September 6, 2010).

As this example illustrates, successful role exchange requires mutual agreement.

When an event has ended and the last pan has been put away, it is always a very personal triumph for Anna to have seen the whole job through from the start to finish. Anna reports finding few things more satisfying than having people come back for seconds and thirds, and for people to notice the extra care and trouble she takes. She believes that the secret of her success lies in her positive attitude, devotion and dedication to detail in all aspects of the cooking, food preparation and serving. She confessed many times that every single occasion that she caters is equally important for her; there are no exceptions and no privileged customers. Every party is conducted as if she was doing it for her own family. I have never heard her utter phrases like: "I don't care," "That's not important," or "I won't do it." In fact she is the member of the catering team who encourages everyone else to take every aspect of catering seriously, and insists that everything is important to the smallest detail. One of the reasons for her success is that every detail related to catering and every organized party is coming from her heart.

Satisfaction is an integral part of catering work, and Anna makes sure that her employees share in this aspect. The employees all help create products that are beautiful and appealing to the senses. This fosters feelings of pride and a recognition of accomplishment among members of the catering team. Skill is associated with an occupational identity and Anna consistently praises team members for even the smallest accomplishment, making sure that they realize she appreciates their effort and skill. At the end of every party she thanks each worker personally for their help. When workers serve the food and drinks skilfully they also make the customer feel satisfied and pleased.

I have not yet participated in a party where there was a dissatisfied customer. Clients are always happy and they express their satisfaction many times during the event.

Joking Around

Often occupational culture is connected to expressions of humour; jocular traditions bind workers. Humour, including attacks on fellow workers, is critical for determining the boundaries of a community and, thus, who can be trusted. Jokes also reflect for the moment an individual's willingness to accept a shared view of the world (Fine 1996, 118). Everett Hughes notes that "among the most important subject matter of rules is setting up of criteria for recognizing a true fellow-worker, for determining who is safe...who must be kept at some distance" (1971, 341). Play can strengthen community, channel excess energy, or relieve boredom among workers. Humour is alleged to contribute to one's job satisfaction; it keeps everybody's spirits up and can help minimize or manage tensions. Fine identifies three genres of workplace humour: horseplay, teasing, and pranks. Although these types do not exhaust all the possible forms of humour, Fine suggests that they represent the main forms of interpersonal humour (1996, 119).

Teasing is one measure that a workplace – or social system – is harmonious. Teasing is a marker of community; its existence recognizes that there is enough looseness or "give" in relationships that one person can make a joke at another's expense without the belief that those sentiments are real. Proof of friendliness is critical for interaction; teasing provides a clear indicator of this attitude (Fine 1996, 121). With the exception of the rush that accompanies actually serving the food, catering environments are filled with interpersonal joking. This teasing may be work related, but anything can trigger a teasing

episode. Not all teasing is easy, in that it depends upon relationships of trust. Teasing demands that participants be of equal status. Emotions at work are tolerated to a degree because it is in everyone's interest that things flow smoothly. Any conflict is papered over so that all seems well on the surface. Teasing and joking is one major way in which harmony and the appearance of harmony is maintained. The two "bosses" can take jokes easily; in particular, Jane, who is very easygoing, appreciates all kinds of jokes. Most of the time Zoltán, the only male employee, is the joke teller or instigator. Most of the jokes are performed in Anna's kitchen while preparing for the parties. Usually there are only the four of us present: Anna, Jane, Zoltán, and me, and the discussion is flowing in Hungarian. We tell Jane that we do not speak in English because we are gossiping about her, and we are having fun by doing this. At other times Jane makes fun of our Eastern European accent. Jokes about Anna are rare, simply because her quiet personality does not invite jokes. She likes to listen to them, but rarely is the target of the jokes. Anna's kitchen is the scene of most of the joke telling, jokes at the customer's home - the front stage of the catering performance - are rare. We all, the caterers, are concentrating on performing our roles as waiters and bartenders efficiently. This will be discussed further in the next section.

2.5. "Being in the Spotlight, Ready for Action": The Front Stage

Table prepared nicely, food arranged tastefully, drinks, glasses on the bar order up, the bartender, waiters in white and black dresses are carrying out the finishing touches. Barely a few minutes past 6pm and the place is ready for the show to start. Artfully laid out, the food stimulates all the senses. The waiters and bartender are in their best form

and are ready to receive guests. The bell rings, the first guest has arrived. The host hurriedly comes down the stairs in an elegant party dress to open the door. A pair has arrived, both over fifty years old, prima facie, friendly, smiling people. They happily greet each other; it likely was several months since they met. The host's birthday is today, with more than fifty invitees. She said she has invited everyone who counts: new and old friends, as well as neighbours and relatives. There are some whom she has not seen in months, but this event brings everyone together. Because they are the first guests, the catering staff does not have much to do. We are introduced to them as well. The magnificence of the food charms the first arrivals, and Anna immediately starts in on an enthusiastic presentation about the food. Neither the guests nor the host is familiar with the food on the table. The first guests approach the bar (the first checkpoint as Zoltán likes to jokingly call it). Ordering drinks always comes first, closely followed by the food. Jane in the kitchen comes to a decision: time to heat up the quiche, more guests will arrive soon and it will have to be ready. Just a few minutes later, a large group of guests arrive and the house is full of chatting. Zoltán becomes very busy with the mixing and serving of drinks, Anna stands beside the host and warmly welcomes everyone as they arrive, and Jane and I spring into action in the kitchen. Soon the quiches are all warmed up, ready to be loaded onto trays and served to people. Napkins in one hand, holding a tray full of spinach quiches in the other, with a smile on my face, I'm ready for serving.

Goffman (1959) uses the term "performance" to refer to all the activities of an individual which occur during a period marked by his or her continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on those observers. According to

Goffman, "front" is that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance (1959, 16-22). Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his or her performance.

Goffman identifies several standard parts of the front, including the "setting" which includes furniture, decor, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery. Those who use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place, and must terminate their performance when they leave it. It is only in exceptional circumstances that the setting follows along with the performers as in the case of a funeral cortege or civic parade (Goffman 1959, 22). In many ways catering resembles a moving theatre. The necessities and the foods are all taken to the host's place, and their house is set up for the performance: the food is tastefully placed on the table; a separate table is used as a bar, etc. There is no fixed stage. The action occurs in whatever space is designated for the reception of guests. The place of the performance is different at every occasion. During the one year period which I have spent in Anna's company helping her with the catering, with very few exceptions involving close friends, we have never performed twice at the same place.

Just as in a folk drama, performers in a catering performance use stylized movements. Our group of catering performers stylize their interactions, often by introducing symbolic objects and movements into their encounters so they may more economically coordinate their activities. The more deeply they stylize, the more redundant their activity is and the greater the degree of possible coordination (Abrahams

1972, 76). Anna instructs her employees on how to act appropriately in front of the customers, how to serve the food in a sophisticated manner, and how to pour drinks skillfully. These are small details, but as indicated above, the success of Anna's catering business lies in exactly these details. The example of handing a serviette to the customer perfectly illustrates a stylized movement. Serviettes are placed on tables all around the food for easy customer access. They are arranged with interchanging colours on one another for aesthetical reasons. When a server hands a serviette to the customer, the serviettes are held between the index and middle fingers and the thumb is used to direct them toward the customer, so that they can most easily take a single napkin.

Just like in a folk drama, in catering the performers wear costumes. Anna decided long time ago that everyone, who serves food or plays the bartender's role, must wear black and white colours. In this way, they are easily differentiated from the customers, and, at the same time, the two colours have an aesthetical advantage: they are both elegant and classic. When I put on my white shirt, black vest and black pants, I step into the role of waitress caterer. Goffman calls this phenomenon "appearance," which he identifies as part of the performer's "personal front." "Appearance" may refer to stimuli which function to tell us of the performers' social statuses. The stimuli also tell us of the individual's temporarily ritual state that is, whether he is engaging in informal social activity, work, or informal recreation, or whether or not he is celebrating a new phase in the annual seasonal cycle or in his life cycle. "Manner" refers to those stimuli which function to warn us of the interactive role that the performer will expect to play in the upcoming situation. For the individual's activity to become significant to others, he must mobilise his activity so that it will express during the interaction what he wishes to

convey (Goffman 1959, 24-30). By putting on my black and white outfit, I enable myself to step into a different situation, to play a new role, and at the same time, I enable the others, the audience of the catering performance, to identify me in this role. The old me disappears as the new me steps forward. The dress brings new information, and will help the customers to see me as a waitress and to serve their purposes.

The notion that a performance presents an idealised view of the situation is, of course, quite common. In interactions where the individual presents a product to others, he will tend to show them only the end result, and they will be led to judge him on the basis of something that has been finished, polished, and packaged. In some cases, if very little effort was actually required to complete the object, this fact will be concealed. In other cases, it will be long tedious hours of lonely labor that will be hidden. Errors and mistakes are often corrected before the performance takes place, while telltale signs that errors have been made and corrected are themselves concealed. In this way an impression of infallibility, so important in many presentations, is maintained (Goffman 1952, 43). The aesthetic aspect of catering connects to this. I consider that the food provided by Anna is a triple treat: beauty for your eye, beauty for your soul, and an unforgettable treat for your stomach. This aesthetic element becomes important when serving the food, rather than during the first part which is the preparation and cooking. The catering team spends a significant amount of time attending to decoration, arranging food on the trays, setting the table, and matching the napkins with the food. For example, crackers, cheeses, and grapes are all placed on the same side of the table, and the napkins, which are used, are the same colours as the food is. All of this takes attention and skill. Drawing on years of collective experience, Anna and Jane have developed an amazing combination of food

items that go together well and which create both a treat for the palate and for the eye. The final product, the theatrical catering scene, or front stage, is only the tip of the iceberg of the whole catering process. The customers see appetizing food beautifully arranged, a smiling waitress, and a kindly host. The frustrating, lonely hours of labour spent in the kitchen, or upset and arguing workers, remain hidden by the successful front. A lot of preparation is required before the catering team gets to the point it is ready to set the fancy stage at a customer's home. The backstage and its activity will be my next topic.

2.6. "*Performing the Kitchen Life*": In the Backstage

When I encountered catering for the first time, I had some preconceived notions of what it was all about. My ideas of catering were based entirely on the front stage and I associated it with tables piled up with fancy foods, beautiful presentation, and smiling personnel. The back stage took me by surprise. It was in July when Anna asked me for the first time to help her out with some preparations for a party. This basically meant helping her cook in her kitchen for the next party. When I arrived to help out, I was startled by the scene I encountered in Anna's kitchen: spice boxes were scattered on the counter, food items were strewn everywhere: on the table, on the chair, and on the cooking stove, and dishes were piled up. Amidst all of this, Anna was covered with flour and yeast as she was into the middle of the bread-making process; there was flour everywhere. Jane was engaged in a multitasking process at the counter, cutting vegetables, fruits and eggs, all at the same time. To my eyes it appeared to be complete disorder, chaos, and dirt. Not the most flattering first impression of catering. "The party is

tomorrow for one hundred persons, that's okay, we have plenty of time," says Anna with absolute calmness. "Are we making food for a hundred of people? Only the three of us? And in this closed, small, and chaotic kitchen?" These questions arose in my head, and I was completely sceptical about the success of the next day's party. I grabbed the broom and swept around the kitchen. Later that day, after I witnessed the preparation of different food items, one by one, and saw the final product in its fanciest form ready for presentation, my initial disbelief at the success of the next day's party slowly but steadily vanished. I learned that it is possible to make fancy food in a small and chaotic kitchen. At least in my eyes, as a mundane and amateur cook, the three of us accomplished something astonishing by preparing food for one hundred persons in just one day.

The real kitchens of restaurants are not like the "display" kitchens that some restaurants use to entertain their customers. Coping with filth in chaotic environment is a classic instance of what Everett Hughes speaks of as "dirty work" (1971, 343): "Dirty work of some kind is found in all occupations." In catering that is happening in the kitchen, the hidden side of the catering business. The kitchen is a hot, dirty, close place – no expansive office with flowers and big picture windows. Over time this reality affects kitchen workers. It has affected me for the time period I have worked in the company of Anna and Jane. First of all, I found Anna's kitchen far too small for accomplishing all the catering tasks required to cook and prepare all the various food items. As a matter of fact, there is barely room for three people. As we have experienced many times, a fourth or fifth person causes confusion and disrupts the work. Anna comments:

I don't like to cook with too many people around me. It's not about how many of us are in the

kitchen, it's about how do you synchronize your cooking tasks. For me is important to think clear, and to figure, how will I make four-five dishes at the same time. Timers help me a lot, but I need to think clear as well. With too many people in my kitchen, I couldn't do this (Anna - August 16, 2010).

Cooking under a deadline is an occupational challenge to be overcome by skills of synchronization: the recognition of a temporally grounded division of labor (Fine 1996, 60). Besides the working conditions, kitchen workers face challenges of time and pressure. As a principle of social life, temporality affects the life of workers as much as physical space or hierarchical organization. For a business to run efficiently and prosper, schedules must be meshed and work products must be generated at a regular or intermittent rate. The way that people experience the passage of time is a central, yet frequently ignored, feature of occupational life. Time is a resource like material and personnel. Time can also be transformed into a mechanism of social control. Workers develop techniques to cope with demands on their time and, as a consequence, gain a measure of temporal autonomy carving out temporal niches. As Fine points out, time operates on several levels: from lengthy periods of work (seasons, weeks, days) to smaller chunks of time: portions of days, or the time taken to achieve particular work tasks (Fine 1996, 54). The philosopher Henri Bergson emphasized that effects of time cannot be fully separated from how it is felt (1919, 236-237). The experience of time is created by workers, given the constraints on their actions. Successful restaurants are those that use time effectively. Time is as important to cooking as any herb. For food to be cooked properly, the cook must be simultaneously aware of the timing of multiple tasks (Fine

1996, 55).

How is synchronization achieved? Just as I presented in the above section on team work, the preparation of food in the backstage involves a delicate negotiation among cooks, with each having demands, constraints, right, and privileges. Although we all know our main tasks in Anna's kitchen, every one of us is open to negotiation when it comes to division of labour. Boredom can be avoided by performing different tasks. For example, although there is a constant and permanent need for a dishwasher, just like in any restaurant kitchen, in Anna's kitchen this role is performed by everyone involved in the kitchen work. Certain cooking tasks are finalised only by Anna, for they require special cooking knowledge, but regular kitchen work, like cutting vegetables and fruits, or dishwashing, are divided equally among all the kitchen workers. In regular restaurant kitchens the hierarchy is established by the role one kitchen worker performs. Chefs² are above cooks and dishwashers. They earn higher salaries and perform more "important" tasks, like coordinating the kitchen work. Chefs supervise cooks and dishwashers. In Anna's catering business there is no such fixed division of labour; no one feels above another worker or exclusively performs more or less important tasks.

The effects of an occupational environment on its temporal structure is dramatically evident when the system is loaded to capacity. In the kitchen this is during the rush, but it has equivalents in many organizations such as emergency rooms, fire stations, theatre aisles, airline counters, and tollbooths. Every restaurant, especially those that are successful, has a rush: a period when the demands of customers threaten to overwhelm the capacity of the kitchen employees to cope. From these demands derive the

² Traditionally it refers to a highly skilled professional who is proficient in all aspects of food preparation.

experience of the rush. External demands produce a pattern of action by workers, and this use of time produces the lived experience of the rush. The rush represents a distinct behavioural characteristic of kitchen life, which is noted for its demanding tempo and intense pressure. As Fine puts it, kitchen workers are fighting a battle of chaos (Fine 1996, 64).

The kitchen "rush" demonstrates how structure, emotion, and time interact. I have experienced the feeling of "kitchen rush" several times, consciously or unconsciously; this is the moment when all kitchen workers have a feeling of running out of time. But we all experience this feeling differently. Personality, age, ethnicity, and gender affect how workers experience their busiest periods. Cooks can be so caught up in the tempo and rhythm of their work that all else is suspended. The public presentation of emotions is relevant in the kitchen backstage, for example, when cooks "pump themselves up" and experience an adrenaline rush (Fine 1996, 67). They brace themselves for the "flow" experience. Sometimes anger and tension fill the kitchen. Anna copes with this feeling of rush by becoming suspiciously quiet and concentrating totally on her last tasks. On the other hand, Jane becomes more on the edge; she becomes more talkative and frequently complains and criticizes. Outside of each other's presence, Anna and Jane both complain about the other. Jane thinks that Anna is slow and that she wastes precious time on unimportant tasks. On the other hand, Anna objects to Jane's quick temper and her inability to take direction. Fine presents generalized anger, as the stereotype of culinary life (1996, 69). However, he notes that emotion in the kitchen or other workspaces need not be defined as negative. By occasionally expressing anger, one closes a frustrating event and re-establishes rhythm. Anger can be seen as a means of the kitchen. Of course,

while anger may have therapeutic benefits for individuals, it may also raise collective tension and may be contagious. What may preserve the temporal order for one may undermine it for others. In Anna's catering team anger is not usually a destructive emotion. Anna's calm exterior, the familiarity among staff, and the jocular teasing that characterizes much of the personal interaction, all help to create a pleasant working environment. This cooperative back stage atmosphere ensures the team's successful performance on the front stage.

In the next chapter I explore some of the meanings conveyed by Anna's performance of food and catering. Here I focus on her creation and presentation of food as an expression of her ethnicity.

CHAPTER THREE: FOOD AS CREATIVE MANIPULATION OF ETHNICITY

Shortly after my arrival in Canada I established contact with a group of men and women from various walks of life. We were of different ages, occupations, and backgrounds, but we shared one common factor: Hungarian ethnicity. Our common ethnic background brought us together here, in culturally diverse Canada, and it proved to be a strong community builder, albeit expressed in different degrees and ways by each of us. Although an active member of this group, Anna claimed not to strongly identify as Hungarian. In fact, she confessed many times that she no longer felt like a "real Hungarian". While it is beyond the scope of this thesis, and perhaps an impossible task, to define what it means to be a "real" Hungarian, in Anna's case she does not self-define as Hungarian because she feels detached from her native country and her ethnic background. This phenomenon manifests itself in many concrete forms: she does not keep in contact with her relatives living in Hungary, she does not make visits to Hungary, and she does not follow Hungarian current events or listen to Hungarian news. On a personal level, she does not celebrate Hungarian holidays or cook Hungarian food. Yet, there are ways in which she continues to express and value her Hungarian heritage. Focusing on ethnic foodways performed by Anna in public and private spheres, in this chapter I attempt to elucidate how ethnicity – being Hungarian and Hungarian-Canadian – is a complex and fluid creation in Anna's life.

3.1. Ethnicity as Identity Marker

If I were to describe Anna, I would characterize her as a Hungarian woman in her sixties, living in Canada, who does catering for a living. I would summarize her identity, based on her ethnicity, gender, age, and occupation. But this is certainly subjective. From many identity markers Anna possesses I have selected just a few that I consider important. I realize that for me Anna's ethnicity is her most important identity marker because it represents my link with her. If she was of another ethnicity I probably would never have met her. Her close friends highlight other features of her identity, for instance age, gender, or marital status. For example, Anna developed close friendships with several women during and after her divorce from her husband. Her gender and marital status as a divorced woman became relevant in this new context as it helped strengthen her relationships with female friends. On the other hand, Anna's clients define her primarily by occupation. Anna comments: "People know me through my food, I am the food lady, everyone knows me, because of the wonderful food that I cook" (Anna – February 11, 2011).

This diverse and multiple characterization of one person's identity articulates the problematic nature of identity. Social researchers have discerned many types of identities. One distinction refers to primary and secondary identities (Scholliers 2001, 5). The former is an identity that is more stable and community-based (the family), and the latter is flexible, has precise aims, and is often institutionally based (a political party, occupation, or football club). The secondary group may comprise several identities suggesting a hierarchy, where a "real" or given identity outweighs a constructed identity.

Yet, some theorists argue that it is impossible to make distinctions; rather they argue that identities are always multiple and they form the synthesis of various categories (for example, see Scholliers 2001, 5-7). These characterizations of ethnicity, especially the latter view, emphasize flexibility. Drawing on Scholliers's categorization, Anna's age and gender constitute her primary identity, the one that is given, constant, fixed, and invariable. The features of her secondary identity, such as marital status, occupation, and ethnicity, are more flexible and negotiable. For instance, Anna can decide on the degree she practices her Hungarian ethnicity and language usage. As well, she can change her occupation or modify elements of her current one.

In his article "The Arts, Artifacts and Artifices of Identity," Elliott Oring builds on this understanding of identity as fluid. Oring breaks identity down into three related concepts. Individual identity refers to understanding and recognising the self. Personal identity is composed of memory, identifications, ideas and experiences that come to "constitute a perhaps shifting, but nevertheless discernible configuration" (Oring 1994, 212). Finally a collective identity refers to the experiences, expressions and ideas common to a group. Oring argues that for generations, folklore was considered an artefact of identity because through folklore one could "establish and ascertain the underlying common qualities of those who were fundamentally unlike oneself" and that oral communication would preserve such artifacts (Oring 1994, 216). Building on Oring's idea that folklore is an artefact of identity, I will argue that in Anna's case folklore provides her with a way of expressing her Hungarian ethnicity not just through oral communication but through non-verbal channels as well, like material culture, custom, and foodways.

Identities are constructed through creating or marking both differences and similarities with others (Hall 1996, 4-5). Highlighting similarities builds commonalities and often has the aim of achieving collective self-esteem and group solidarity. Social theorists claim that 'identity' is crucial to all people: it allows one to situate oneself and the Other, to give a sense to existence, and to order the world; it forges norms and values. Identity contributes to how individuals and groups perceive and construct society, how they give meaning, and how they (re)act, think, vote, socialise, buy, rejoice, perceive, work, eat, judge or relax (Scholliers 2001, 5).

Ethnicity is one of many competing identities available for individuals. It is what Donald Tricarico describes as "one layer of a segmented self" (1989, 26). Ethnicity competes with other components of identity such as gender, class, occupation, religion, or geographic region in the construction of self just as indicated by the competing layers of Anna's identity mentioned above. Recent scholarship on ethnicity has helped to refocus the conceptualisation of the ethnic group from the idea of "thingness" to the idea of "process." Folklorists are now not so much concerned with defining ethnicity as a category whose characteristics and traits they want to list, but as a social process in which the relationship of individuals and groups and the communication of identity are significant (Kalčik 1984, 44).

Not every member of an ethnic group experiences his/her ethnicity, or the evolution of his/her ethnic identity in the same way. Expressions of ethnicity vary by age, gender, and personality. For example, some anthropologists have argued that ethnicity becomes more important in later life (see Luborsky and Rubenstein 1987). Using a life course perspective, Mark Luborsky and Robert Rubenstein (1987) suggest that ethnicity

as an organizing principle emerges at key moments when a person is consolidating a new identity, whether it be as an immigrant to North America, a retiree, or a widower (Stoller 1996, 146). The flexibility, change of identities and the impact of the "New World" on individuals' lives became a recurring motif when discussing and sharing experiences within the Hungarian community that Anna belongs to. In Anna's case, there was no emotional separation from the homeland because she was a fourteen-year-old child when her family immigrated to Canada. She was excited and looking forward to a new life in a new country. She welcomed the fact that everything was new. Her emotional ties to the home country vanished after a while and she became attached to Canada. She notes that it has always been her mother who maintained connections with relatives still living in Hungary:

My mother does mostly the contact keeping, but when I go there, I think I could stay there forever. But forever shouldn't last more than two weeks. You know, I'm very happy to be speaking my own language, that's why I love coming and talking to you, you speak Hungarian, that's very nice. I do enjoy it, I'm not really a Hungarian anymore, I love the freedom of Canada. I miss that Hungarianism, and I'm sorry, I didn't grow up there and I don't have the wealth of the language, like you have. My soul misses it (Anna – February 11, 2011).

Although Anna repeatedly raises the Hungarian language as something she highly values, and identifies it as a chief component of her Hungarian identity, she has few opportunities to speak it and feels self-conscious about her lack of fluency. Anna's comments reflect an ambiguity about her Hungarian heritage specifically, and her ethnicity more generally; she has one foot in Hungary but the other is firmly planted on

Canadian soil.

Abner Cohen offers further insights into the processes of performing ethnicity. He defines the kinds of symbols people turn to when expressing ethnicity: objects, acts, concepts, or linguistic formulations that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of disparate meanings. They usually occur in stylised patterns of activities like ceremonies, rituals, gift exchange, prescribed forms of joking, or communal eating and drinking. Symbols help develop and maintain social relationships and they define groups. In turn, individuals identify with some of these symbols (Cohen 1944, 29). Identification with a certain ethnic group is expressed through language and practice, or more appropriately through the interconnection between language and practice, through discourse and narratives in the sense of how people think, tell and write about their lives (Scholliers 2001, 6). As indicated above, within the Hungarian group that Anna belongs to, the first ethnic identity marker is the Hungarian language. However, artifacts represent additional identity markers. Anna displays and uses Hungarian items in her home so that the display of her ethnicity is not so much through lived experience but in museum-like objects. Anna owns artifacts, like a hand woven tablecloth that she had bought in Hungary many, many years ago and now is stored in the bottom of a drawer. It represents the passive side of her Hungarian ethnicity, because it had never been used until I initiated a Hungarian evening. Then Anna's enthusiasm for "making things perfectly right and Hungarian" prompted its use. Like the tablecloth, Anna has other materials, stories, and knowledge stored away, to pop up only when her Hungarian ethnicity is stimulated or she wishes to express it.

In fact, I have contributed to Anna's store of Hungarian artifacts. When I visited my family and friends in Hungary in 2010 I brought back souvenirs for my Canadian-Hungarian friend: a depiction of the Hungarian anthem; Unicum,³ the Hungarian drink; and paprika, the famous Hungarian spice. In Hungary I would never buy a specifically Hungarian artifact for friends, but in the Canadian context Hungarian symbols take on new meanings. Anna gratefully accepted my gifts and made use of them during our Hungarian dinner. Her experiences illustrate that like most European immigrants to North America, participation in an ethnic infrastructure or ethnic subculture is not an everyday experience. Rather, Anna's involvement more closely resembles symbolic ethnicity as described by Herbert Gans (1979, 9). Gans characterizes symbolic ethnicity as selective or intermittent in nature, making few demands on the individual. It more closely resembles a leisure pursuit; he notes that ethnic identity is situationally variable, and involves both revivals and creative constructions. The voluntary nature of symbolic ethnicity acknowledges the active role people play in constructing their own version of ethnic identities. Fredrik Barth describes ethnic identity as a vessel that is filled by participants as they select particular elements from their past, while Joane Nagel (1994) suggests the analogy of a shopping cart. Ethnicity is part of the self individuals construct and present to others if, when, and how they choose (Stoller 1996, 165), just as Anna decides when to use her hand woven Hungarian tablecloth, when to season foods with Hungarian paprika and when to serve Unicum.

³ Unicum is an herbal digestif liqueur. It is regarded as one of the national drinks of Hungary. The liqueur is today produced by Zwack according to a secret formula of more than forty herbs, and the drink is aged in oak casks. During the Socialist regime in Hungary, the Zwack family lived in exile in New York and Chicago, and during this time, Unicum in Hungary was produced using a different formula.

Studies of ethnicity by Barth (1969) and Cohen (1944) urged the examination of the symbolic use of traditional culture for a greater understanding of the processes by which ethnic groups form, reform, and maintain themselves, and how group and individual ethnic identity is communicated to in-group and out-group members. This process involves the construction of what Dag Blanck (1989) calls a "usable past" that often includes the identification of contributions by ethnic group members. Sometimes it also involves identifying "famous" coethnics (Stoller 1996, 156). Dr. Paul Mezey, a recognized Hungarian chemist, is also part of Anna's small Hungarian-Canadian ethnic group. At social events he shares first-hand accounts of meeting famous Hungarian scientists, such as Nobel prize winner, Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, the inventor of Vitamin C. During an interview, Dr. Paul Mezey explained how the main component of the Vitamin C was named:

And also a story. Vitamin C has a structure like many sugars have, so it has ring structure and OH groups on it, so Vitamin C has it, too. It's a kind of sugar and Szent-Gyorgyi knew that, but didn't quite know the structure, the technology wasn't quite available yet, to figure out things very quickly. And so, he wrote a paper about it, and sent it to a famous journal, I don't remember which journal it was, and he called this sugary-like compound, he called it. Well, you see, just before I say that word, sugars always end up with the ending -oz, Glukoz, Fructoz, Galaktoz, and so on. So he called it, Ignoz, because he didn't know what it is, like ignoring things, he called Ignoz, because you don't know what the heck it is (laugh). But, it's a sugar, so he called it Ignoz. So, the editor of this journal said, well, okay, Szent-Gyorgyi, your work is good, you know, your results are fine, but please change the name, I mean, this is a serious journal, don't make jokes about names in the journal. Okay, he

said, okay. Sent it back, okay, let's call it Godknows
(Dr. Paul Mezey - November 15, 2010).

Anna listens to these stories with apparent interest, but her pride in her Hungarian heritage is expressed mostly through food: "I go to somebody's Christmas party every year, and she makes a Hungarian Goulash, but it's so bad! I tell her, I make it for her, because I know that everyone will like it. My philosophy is, if you're not Hungarian don't try to cook Hungarian food, cook your own style. They have no idea" (Anna, February 11, 2011).

When she talks about the authenticity of her Hungarian cooking, she turns to her mother to make her point. Here the underlying assumption is that the earlier generations know the traditions better, and retain them more accurately, than later ones.

Anna often compares Canadian and Hungarian cooking, always concluding firmly that Hungarian cooking is better than Canadian. The reason she gives for her mother never having learned to cook Canadian food is that she does not need to when she can prepare superior Hungarian food to satisfy her tastes:

My mother has turned into a very good cook, whatever she does, a few things, she does it very well. She cooks only Hungarian food. But we have cut down on the fat, we don't cook with as much fat, as they do in Hungary. They still cook with too much fat in Hungary. She makes a wonderful Porkolt,⁴ she makes a fabulous, like a hamburger, but only with pork meat, not with beef, Fasirozott,⁵ so that's a hamburger. That's what she knows,

⁴ Hungarian stew with boneless meat, paprika, some vegetables and no potato.

⁵ Hungarian version of the Hamburger.

that's what she likes. She never learned too much the Canadian food, and Hungarian food is tastier than Canadian food, let's face it (Anna - February 11, 2011).

Negative stereotypes are in themselves folklore and may be part of ethnic identity.

Derisive labels may be used to emphasize differences between ethnic groups and to express hostile emotions concerning them. These stereotypes are in fact a statement of an individual's own identity and an articulation of their commitment to a particular group. By criticizing Canadian food, Anna expresses her Hungarian ethnic identity. Her words mirror her deep feelings for Hungary even though she may not be conscious of them.

In her article "Uses of Folklore as Expressions of Identity by Hungarians in the Old and New Country," Linda Dégh argues that two opposing forces influenced the identity of Hungarian Americans. First, was the assimilationist policies of the government that "discouraged and suppressed manifestations of ethnic loyalty" (Dégh 1984, 194). Second, was the North American civil rights movement in the 1960s and its consequence of reawakening of white ethnic pride. The acculturating first step for the immigrants was to create pan-Hungarian ethnic symbols and thus "Gypsy music, Hungarian dress, the stuffed cabbage, chicken paprikas and strudel became the most popular and lasting Hungarian identity symbols" (Dégh 1984, 195). Dégh argues that it is those Hungarian immigrants who came after the failed Hungarian Uprising of 1956 who are the biggest disseminators of Hungarian folklore. She asserts that maintaining an ethnic identity is a matter of individual choice for members of an immigrant community and that those who opt for an ethnic identity must choose a few select symbols for creative cultivation. This

is usually in the form of holidays, foodways, religion, folk arts or language (Dégh 1984, 196).

Anna is a living example of those ethnic Hungarians who came to Canada after the failed revolution against Russia in 1956. Yet, I would not consider her, as Dégh puts it one of "the biggest disseminator of Hungarian folklore." Certainly there are others, including her friend, Dr. Paul Mezey, who willingly and consciously promote elements of the Hungarian formal and informal culture. But, through her chosen symbol of foodways, Anna definitely creatively constructs her own ethnic identity, whether consciously or unconsciously. I emphasize the adverb "creatively" for it highlights Anna's adaptable character; she innovates while retaining traditional elements of her homeland. Defining ethnic identities as practical accomplishments rather than as static forms, conceptualizes ethnicity as a situationally constructed variable. It is this selective nature of ethnicity that makes it so attractive (Waters 1990, 115). As Anna illustrates, with a symbolic ethnic identity an individual can choose those aspects of her ethnicity that appeal to her and discard those that do not. Sometimes creating ethnicity involves efforts to discover formerly unknown elements of ethnic practice. Joane Nagel defines these efforts as cultural revivals or restorations that "occur when lost or forgotten cultural forms or practices are excavated and reintroduced or when lapsed or occasional cultural forms of practice are refurbished and reintegrated into contemporary culture" (1994, 162). In the rest of this chapter I explore how Anna practices her versatile ethnicity through foodways.

3.2. *"I Don't Cook Hungarian Anymore": The Fluid Character of Ethnic Foodways*

The close relationship between food and identity is summarised in Claude Fischler's article which opens with the confident statement that "Food is central to our sense of identity" (Fischler 1988, 275). Eating is of course a biological act, he argues, but it is much more than that. Food crosses the border between the "outside" and the "inside," and this principle of incorporation touches upon the very nature of a person. This is why eating and drinking matter greatly to all people, and why, as reported in some cases of groups of migrants, people retain some food habits when language or other cultural expressions tend to be forgotten. This incorporation is the basis of collective identity, Fischler continues. Earlier in this chapter I drew on Oring's definition of collective identity which is comprised of experiences, expressions and ideas common to a group. Ethnicity was presented as one significant marker of an individual's identity. Pierre L. van den Berghe explores the relationship of ethnicity to the whole food complex (the inventory of food items, the repertoire of recipes, and the rituals of commensalism). He suggests that it is scarcely surprising that we get attached to the foods that we link with our most intimate and pleasant associates, and that, conversely, we feel attracted by the people who share our food tastes and manners, that is, by members of our ethnic group. Berghe argues that in the same sense as ethnicity is an extension of kinship, ethnic food is a widening of home cooking (van den Berghe 1984, 392).

Significantly, the ethnic foods Anna prepares and presents as part of her catering do not directly correspond to either her personal Old and New World cuisine, but instead

exist in a dynamic relationship to both and to each other. As Hoover, Kaplan and Moore point out, change is too often seen as an enemy of tradition. They argue that this view is basically ahistorical; it focuses on a particular recipe (with or without its social context), removes it from the stream of time, and holds it up as "authentic." Any deviation from this one version is not read as a change, but as a loss of tradition. In reality, however, people - even during previous centuries in the Old World - constantly alter traditions to fit their lives; a static tradition is, most likely, a dead one. Ethnic foodways are far more than surviving relics of Old Country cuisines (Hoover, Kaplan, Moore 1998, 123). A South Slav *potica* cake, for example - the quick-bread version of a traditional yeasted delicacy - shows how foodways evolve and change with new contexts. By altering the form and preserving the flavour, South Slav women demonstrate their commitment to tradition. Just like her Slav neighbours from the Old World, Anna alters her Hungarian traditions to fit new circumstances. Her creation and presentation of food items is an index of human creativity as well as of the ways people balance cultural continuity with change. Food is in fact the most common form of symbolic ethnicity present in ethnic display events and multiethnic festivals, which Dorson describes as the "public" face of American ethnic folklore. He points that it is often a powerful symbol in private or "esoteric" ethnic events as well: baptisms, weddings, funerals, holidays, and family re-unions (Dorson 1981, 110). The reasons for this are varied; one is that, as Klymasz points out, the loss of the ethnic language or dialect often prevents the preservation of verbal folklore forms (Klymasz 1973, 133). But food, with its sensual qualities, is also a powerful reminder of the past and an ideal vehicle for communication (Stoller 1989, 34). In North America, it is often the most pronounced "text" of ethnicity. As noted above, Anna expressed concern on

many occasions regarding her ability to speak the Hungarian language. She seemingly feels that during her years living in Canada she has lost part of her ability to express herself fully in Hungarian and thus has lost part of her Hungarianness as well. Foodways provide her with a way to compensate for her language loss. What she has lost in terms of language she can make up in terms of food. In the next section I attempt to decipher the meanings contained in the text and texture of Anna's food repertoire, as well as her style of presentation, in an effort to explore the fluid character of her Hungarian-Canadian ethnicity.

Food Repertoire

The very first striking element of Anna's catering is the exotic and unique character of her food. One of her former customers highlighted differences between Anna's catering and that of other caterers. According to the client, the main distinction lies in the fact that Anna serves home-made food made from good quality ingredients while other catering companies in the city rely heavily on pre-prepared, deep-fried, frozen food:

I didn't know her, just tasted the food at the party, I haven't tasted it previously, but the food was very nice, and the food is different, it's different than Newfoundland catering. She's not doing Newfoundland food at all, she doesn't even think Newfoundland food, it's the European flavour of her food, and the different things that she uses that makes it so tasty and so different. And I've found with a lot of catering in North America they deep fry a lot, they use a lot of frozen food, and then deep fry, and it's greasy and eat them, it's not tasty. Anna makes really, really good food. People like it,

because it's tasty. Anna puts liquor in everything, that makes the taste different, she uses good ingredients, she uses good butter, good cream. And it's extravagant with all the decoration and everything (Brenda Brown - October 13, 2010).

As this comment suggests, Anna's customers emphasize the exotic nature of her catering.

Most informants named her international cooking style as the most appealing feature.

They also praised the excellent flavour of her home-made food and mentioned her extravagant style of the presentation. Another customer states:

I enjoy the international flavour of her food, it's different. She offers something that wouldn't be offered by any other caterer. It's consistently delicious, consistently good, dynamic, presentation is beautiful, service is impeccable. She always has wonderful servers, personable (Susan LeGrew - August 24, 2010).

Partly because Anna offers a diverse selection of foods that is always changing, customers never grow tired. Anna comments:

I don't think they ever get bored, because I add things to it, for instance, yesterday, I did a party for medical conference that they have here. And people couldn't believe how wonderful it was, and they never ever saw such good food, and they came from Vancouver, Philadelphia, Montreal, and Ottawa, and Toronto. And they couldn't believe their eyes, and taste, and delicious everything it was, and how elaborate it was. Because somebody came up to me and said: How many different kinds of orders do you have? Fifty? I said, I don't think there is fifty, but there is probably about thirty-five (Anna - February 11, 2011).

Anna's food repertoire has changed through time and has been influenced by many factors. In choosing dishes for parties she relies on knowledge and experience she has gained through many years. She has developed a selection of foods suitable for dinners or lunches when she serves warm food along with just a few cold appetizers. Most often, however, she caters parties that require buffet or "stand-up" party food, when customers consume so-called "finger foods." Anna explained the development of her current selection of repertoire of dishes:

I developed that myself to some extent, some from that catering book, we know that people like meatballs, quiches, and so. I have, through the times that I've been catering, I realised that there are so many different requirements, especially with the diets people have, with the allergies that people have, I had to develop wide variety of orders, that everyone would be satisfied. That is about the same all the time (Anna - February 11, 2011).

The following sample menu provides an indication of the type and scope of foods Anna regularly serves:

Sample Menu	
<i>Cold Appetizers</i>	<i>Hot Appetizers</i>
Devilled Eggs	Quiche Lorraine
Shrimp in Cocktail Sauce	Spicy Meatballs with Sweet-and-Sour Sauce
Chicken Puffs	Drunken Doggie

Vegetables and Dip	Mushroom Quiche
Lentil Cream	Fish Cake
Strawberry with Chocolate	Spinach Delight (Spinach Quiche)
Cheeses	Scallops
Crackers	Sautéd Mushroom in White Wine Sauce
Artichoke	
Eggplant – Capponata	
Humus	
Chicken Liver Pate	
Ham with Asparagus	
Blue Cheese Quiche	
Smoked Salmon Quiche	
Palate Cleanser (apricot with cream cheese and pecans)	
Köröszött ⁶	
Chinese Beef with Soy Sauce	

The foods that Anna prepares for her catered parties represent a mixture of old and new recipes, as well as different types of foods from different countries and different

⁶ Traditional Hungarian dish made with curd cheese, butter, paprika, onion, mustard.

sources. When interviewed about her style of cooking, however, Anna named one author who most influenced the beginning of her career as a caterer:

My husband left me, and I didn't want to go to work somewhere. I tried, but it was too hard with my little children, and my girl friends suggested and my father too. My father got a book for me: *Cash from your Kitchen*, Catherine Harris, and she, her book for catering was the same style of cooking that I really liked. And that's how I cooked. She's a Canadian girl, but she does mostly French cooking, and that's my style, cooking with herbs, wine, and cream (Anna - February 11, 2011).

Using Harris's book as her reference, Anna supplemented the author's ideas with her own, combining French, Hungarian and Canadian influences.

Kenneth S. Goldstein highlights the flexible nature of the tradition bearer's repertory. He notes that not all items are of the same importance to the tradition bearer. It is not simply the case of "two hundred songs learned over a period of fifty years" (Goldstein 1971, 63). Some hold greater memories for the singer than do others; some have greater aesthetic appeal while others have special meaning only at certain times. Some are occasionally performed, while others represent only a memory of tradition. At any particular time in the life of a tradition bearer some of the items in his or her repertory are active and others are inactive. Although Goldstein is writing about folksingers, his observations apply to all genres of folklore (1971, 63-66). Goldstein identifies a number of clear patterns in the movement of particular songs in a singer's repertory:

1. Permanence: some songs are actively performed immediately after having been learned and remain a permanently active part of repertory.

2. Transience: some songs are actively performed immediately after having been learned, but their attraction is a temporary one and when the novelty has worn off they become part of the inactive repertory.
3. Intermittence: some songs are actively performed immediately after having been learned, later become part of inactive repertory, only to be revived still later to take their places again as part of active repertory.
4. Postponement: some songs do not become part of the active repertory until some time after they were first learned (Goldstein 1971, 63-66).

Goldstein's explanation of active and passive elements of a singer's repertory is applicable to my analysis of the food repertory performed by Anna. The foods on the sample menu presented above are permanent; they are present at every occasion. These are tested foods and have survived through time. Anna finds them doable, easy to present at every occasion, and welcomed by customers. Other food items are added from time to time, representing a mixture of transience, intermittence and postponement patterns. For instance, *Dolmades*, a Greek dish, was made by Anna a couple of times, but it has never become part of her active food repertory. It might appear again on a certain occasion, but its presence is uncertain. Anna explains, "I did a wedding once for a Greek family, so I did my usual repertory, but I added some Greek foods, as the Dolmades, which is the stuffed grape leaves, and I added some special cheeses, and some special pasta. So, I will do that for certain events, but not for all of them" (Anna - February 11, 2011).

Other food items enter her food repertoire by chance. Anna's dish, *Dried Apricots with Cream Cheese*, was inspired by her mother who suggested Anna combine apricots, cheese and walnuts after she ate something similar at a food event in Ottawa. She mentioned it instantly to her daughter in an effort to help her improve her catering selection.

There were a number of dishes that Anna used to make, but that she does not do anymore, sometimes because of increased prices, sometimes because of health issues, and sometimes because of the difficulty of their preparation. *Teriyaki Chicken* is one example, as Anna explains:

It is too expensive, and also the chicken, the way it is today, I shy away from it mostly. Well, for one thing with the chicken, we have to be so careful with contamination, and E-coli, so I just don't like raw chicken in my house too much, so I don't have it that. Especially for catering, because I am very careful about contamination (Anna - February 11, 2011).

Teriyaki Chicken represents an item that follows the transience pattern; its presence at catered events was a temporary one. After being part of Anna's active repertoire for a short time period, it entered the inactive or passive one. Because of Anna's concerns about contamination, however, it likely will never be performed again.

Taking a closer look at Anna's core food repertoire, one can see that most food items are based in a French cooking style. *Quiche* is a classic dish of French cuisine and Anna has five kinds of quiches in her food repertoire. *Sautéd Mushrooms in White Wine Sauce* is also a French dish. Originally a side dish, Anna re-created it as a fabulous finger

food. At the basis of Anna's cooking is cream, butter, wine, herbs - all features of French cuisine. French influences outweigh Hungarian ones. Hoover, Kaplan and Moore's work (1998) helps explain why this might be, especially given Anna's stated preference above for the tastiness of Hungarian food over Canadian food. The authors suggest that members of ethnic communities often make predictably safe choices when occasions call them to present their foodways (and thus themselves) to the public. The foods that are offered as badges of ethnicity, whether at a festival, a religious observance to which outsiders are invited, or an ethnic New Year's celebration, for example, usually maintain a delicate balance: they are "exotic" or distinctive enough to convey an ethnic image yet they are "tame" enough to appeal to the uninitiated. If ethnic foodways are used to draw boundaries, to separate "us" from "them" (in either a hostile or a supportive manner), they may also be used to bridge the gap between nationalities. Selectively sharing food is a basic form of hospitality. Sharing ethnic food is a rudimentary way of giving strangers and friends a glimpse of one's culture while projecting a positive image of one's self and one's group (Hoover, Kaplan, Moore 1998, 123).

Hungarian food is often spicy due to the heavy use of hot paprika. Sweet paprika is also common. Combining paprika, lard and onions is typical of Hungarian cuisine as is the use of raw ingredients like fatback pork mixed with red onion. The early Hungarians, the ancient, barbarous Huns⁷ led by Attila, ate raw meat. They had a special procedure to preserve meat under their saddles where it was tenderized for as long as a day's ride. People feared the Huns and attributed their strength to the energy source of raw meat and

⁷ Group of nomadic people, who appearing from east of the Volga, migrated into Europe c. AD 370. The Hungarians in particular lay claim to Hunnic heritage.

spices. As I will describe more fully shortly, an Hungarian delicacy consists of lard spread on bread and spiced up with sweet or hot paprika, often accompanied by red onion or garlic. Sometimes the bread is toasted and garlic is directly rubbed onto the bread then greased with lard and spiced with paprika to produce an even more extraordinary taste.

As these few examples indicate, Hungarian cuisine has nothing of the light and sophisticated nature associated with French cooking. Based on Anna's experience it would be impossible to imagine a Canadian at a catered party dealing with these kind of raw ingredients. Although it may be exotic enough, and certainly constitutes "authentic" ethnic food, this kind of Hungarian dish is neither safe nor sophisticated enough for Canadian party tastes. By turning to French cuisine Anna created a usable bridge toward her clients and also projected a positive image of herself and her ethnicity. She uses her Hungarian foods and ingredients as a "back-up" plan to "spice up" her food repertoire on certain occasions. *Quiche Lorraine* is a great example of this. She uses Hungarian paprika to give colour to the otherwise pale quiche. Just as Barth suggested, ethnicity is like a vessel where the participants select particular elements of their past. Hungary's original peasant-like food tradition is not appealing to everyone. Certainly, it would be unlikely that one could build a life career as a caterer based on it in the city where Anna lives. Instead of drawing on her Hungarian cuisine, she chose to adopt the more sophisticated French cuisine, while still retaining and finding a way to perform her own Hungarian ethnicity.

The analysis of certain foods as indicators of social difference and superiority shows two things: that particular foods can anchor a group's identity and sense of collective self and can help them to differentiate themselves from other groups. For

example, Jansen argues that, pure meats, ritually slaughtered and non-porcine, mark the boundedness of the Muslims and the Jews, and unambiguously differentiate them from the Christians (Jansen 2001, 212-14). Wine on the other hand, he notes, marked the French. Jansen's analysis shows that not all foods are acknowledged as equally symbolic of otherness by group members. Importantly, some foods are more ambiguous than others and they can be used to claim social mobility and to change identity. Rather than marking the identity of a bounded, closed group, these foods can express the aspiration of belonging to the higher status group. They can facilitate social mobility and indicate a group's identification with dominant powers. Jansen uses the example of the French Algerians to illustrate this. By choosing French bread and wine instead of the original Algerian bread, they express their aspiration to belong to a higher, more powerful strata of society (Jansen 2001, 214). It is interesting that Jansen presents the case of the French wine as his example because the same phenomenon is detectable in Anna's case when she performs her cooking style. She stays close to the French cooking tradition, using the same ingredients as French cooks do, such as wine, cream, butter, and herbs. By doing this she makes another statement of her identity: she wishes to be associated with an elite and refined cuisine and culture.

Performing Creative Ethnicity: Authenticity and Americanization

Recently, researchers have questioned the authenticity of ethnic foods in contemporary American society (Lu and Fine 1995). They argue that a prominent feature of much ethnic food is that its ethnic "purity" has been diluted (see Alba 1990, 86). As in all cases of cultural diffusion, adjustments are made to immigrant foods to accommodate

the values of the host society. Lu and Fine contend that it often undergoes "Americanization," meaning that American restaurateurs consciously decide to transform ingredients and techniques of traditional recipes to meet American tastes (1995, 532-36). Despite the changes, the food is often presented by the ethnic restaurant as being "authentic," signalling that it is genuine or real: true to itself. In a competitive and differentiated market, the claim of authenticity attracts customers for whom it is a socially desirable image. This is not a phenomenon specific only to one ethnicity; Lu and Fine note that restaurant signs proclaim "authentic Italian food" or "authentic Mexican food," despite the market-based adaptations of these cuisines (1995, 536).

Although Americanised ethnic food suggests that the local and traditional characteristics of the dish as indigenously prepared have been modified or transformed, authenticity is a locally constructed folk idea and those objects that are said to represent authentic experience may become a site of contention (Lu and Fine 1995, 537). Just as tradition is mutable and contingent (Linnekin 1991), so is authenticity. The culture of any social group is in continual flux. Cultures are never entirely closed systems: external changes affect cultural logics. Nowhere is this more evident than with regard to cuisine. From generation to generation, some culinary preparations and foodways absorb features of "alien" foods as a function of biological succession of foodstuffs, migration, technological change, shortages, or alterations in food-related ideologies (Lu and Fine 1995, 537). Hungarian food performed by Anna in the private domain - as esoteric food - when cooking for a small number of Hungarians, illustrates the dynamic nature of food traditions. The first time I encountered it, my initial impression was that I had never tasted such interesting Hungarian food. It was different than anything I had ever

encountered. As Anna later confessed, the taste was unusual because she added some special spices that had changed the Hungarian character of the food. Influenced by her vast knowledge of foods, her French cooking style, and her endless supply of spices, she consciously or unconsciously "contaminates" traditional Hungarian recipes with alien ingredients to create new dishes. Anna comments:

I have a problem with my Hungarian cooking. I really have to, almost, as I say sometimes jokingly, I have to tie my hands, to not put any other ingredients. I like to cook with wine, sometimes I toss in a little bit of wine in the Hungarian food, and it turns into something different. Because they don't use that much wine in Hungary. I have an urge to add more spices, so I have to be careful (Anna, February 11 - 2011).

As Anna indicates, innovation is fundamental to her cooking style. According to her, the most creative solutions sometimes occur when she is running out of time. Some of the best ideas arise from desperate situations. She relates the origins of her latest version of *Chinese Beef*:

Yesterday I made an unbelievable sauce, it was fantastic. This Chinese beef I made, and I wanted to make a sauce, I boiled it down, actually it almost burned because I didn't have time to look after it, and I just scooped out what didn't burn. It was fine, I tasted it. But I put some orange peel and orange juice in it, and it cooked down, and then I mixed it with ginger marmalade, just for a little extra flavour. Just for a good measure, I put a little extra sherry in it, mixed it up, and it was so good, they were eating it with a spoon, just the sauce that you have to put a little drop on the meat. That's new, from yesterday (Anna - February 11, 2011).

The addition of the orange peel and juice was a new discovery and it worked perfectly.

If Anna had to define her foods, or the exact recipes, she would face a difficult situation. She uses cookbooks as a guide but her own creative ideas and fabulous improvisations make up the bulk of the cooking process. There are no "pure" recipes anymore that she uses in their original form. Rather, she demonstrated her innovation by presenting and explaining to me in detail several dishes. It seems, every dish has a story. It is the result of a more or less exciting encounter, but certainly the original recipe has been changed through time. *Sautéed Mushrooms in White Wine Sauce* and *Devilled Eggs* are examples of her creative cooking.

Sautéed Mushrooms in White Wine Sauce:



Figure 3. Sautéed Mushrooms in White Wine Sauce

Anna explains the origins of *Sautéed Mushrooms in White Wine Sauce*:

[It is] mostly French. That's a side dish, it comes from a side dish, that I have created it from a side dish. So I thought: 'Hey, I could put it on a toothpick and it would be wonderful.' So I just cut the mushroom to the right side, or don't cut. And then Katie called me one day, and she said, 'Mom, why don't you flambé it a little bit with Cognac?' And it went so well, and I'm doing it that way, and it's fabulous. We make the Hungarian soup, the mushroom soup, it's similar, it has cream, and maybe a little bit of wine and it's a creamy sauce (Anna - February 11, 2011).

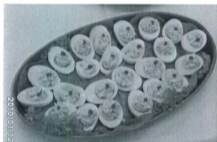


Figure 4. Devilled Eggs

She also describes the evolution of her *Devilled Eggs*:

Devilled Egg is extremely popular, everyone loves it, no one makes it at home. They don't do it the way I do. I put in the Dijon mustard and the fine herbs mixture, that is my own mixture kind of. And then we put there the Hungarian Golden, Hungarian

paprika sauce, but you can't buy it here, so I bring it from Ottawa or Montreal. And they love it (Anna - February 11, 2011).

Both dishes reflect the innovative nature of Anna's cooking style. While some of her foods, like the *Devilled Eggs*, seem to be the result of considered and purposeful innovation, others change because of circumstance, like the nearly burned sauce that ended up in a new and improved version of Chinese Beef. Still other dishes, like the *Sautéed Mushrooms in White Wine Sauce* - a side dish modified and transformed into an appetizer - seem to grow from her opportunistic playing with the food. In spite of Anna's apparently random experimenting with food, it must be remembered that at the root of every experiment, combination, change, adaptation, and modification lies her vast general knowledge of cooking which enables her to successfully perform and express her flexible and fluid cooking style.

Style of Presentation

Foodways allow for statements of identity to be made in many forms: in preparing, eating, serving, forbidding, and talking about food. As I have already demonstrated, food style is one means of expressing self-identity as well as group membership. In other words, people tend to eat as they would like to be perceived so that, as Kalcik states, it is as much a matter of "you eat what you wish to be" as of "you are what you eat." (Kalcik 1984, 54). Kalcik's statement also applies to the style of food presentation: you present your food as you wish to be perceived. Styles of presentation characterize certain ethnic traditions, most specifically setting them apart from eating patterns in the United States. Hoover, Kaplan and Moore examine the different styles of

food presentation among different ethnic groups. Whether they be second or third generation descendants of immigrants who generally consider themselves American, or recently arrived Hmong refugees, many people contrast their traditional serving styles to a generic "American" one of placing all foods, including dessert on the table at the same time (Hoover, Kaplan and Moore 1998, 124). When Italian or German Americans enjoy a traditional meal, it is in courses, each presented with new tableware. Russian Jews believe that a dinner is not dinner unless it begins with a soup course; salads are American. Hmong people are adamant about serving rice and vegetable-meat dishes in separate bowls and keeping the foods discrete on individuals' plates (Hoover, Kaplan and Moore 1998, 125). Hoover et al demonstrate that in addition to ingredients and dishes most ethnic groups also have preferred techniques for preparing and presenting food.

Anna's presentation style at her catered events combines an Hungarian presentation of food with the North American serving style. When I encountered Anna's catering for the first time, her food display was alien to me. First of all, there was a single table filled with different kinds of food. At first glance I was not even able to identify individual items; it seemed to me a chaotic mixture of dishes. With time, Anna explained to me the food items and the way each should be consumed, but at the beginning I had no idea what was going on. Secondly, I was struck by how people consumed their randomly chosen foods, at random times, all the while standing up. I had never consumed any food standing up, except maybe at school when I gulped down my sandwich during a ten minute break between my classes. Certainly, I had never attended any social event where the host served the food in this manner. In Hungary, food constitutes the basis of every social event, but it is not at all random. Eating follows an unwritten tradition: there must

be different courses, starting with the appetizer, followed by soup (usually chicken soup), then the main dish (meat is mandatory), and finally dessert. The table is filled from the beginning with four kinds of plates, one for each course of the meal. There are also different glasses for different drinks: schnapps,⁸ wine, beer or water. In my traditional Hungarian view this is what a food event should look like. I soon discovered that North Americans have a different notion. Anna enlightened me regarding the North American buffet style of catering:

It's hard and it isn't. Less hard, than you think. Because you can combine. I learned that from North America. In Hungary we never combine food. But here we have this buffet, people just put everything on the plate and it seems to work, so it's fine. It is really personal preference, I tell people, look it tastes much, much better on a piece of bread. Put it on a piece of bread, and they do (Anna - February 11, 2011).

At most of Anna's catered events the majority of guests do not plan to stay until the end. Nor do they even arrive at the same time. The buffet's popularity therefore might be explained by the rushed character of North American society. Journalist Christopher Tiwald in his article, "American Society Becoming too Rushed," (2006) details how Americans want to achieve everything in a short time. Because they have so many other obligations and appointments, they experience a time crunch. This results in many Americans seeking shortcuts: they want a great body with only fifteen minutes of exercise

⁸ Type of distilled alcoholic beverage. The English word *schnapps* is derived from the German *Schnaps* (plural, *Schnäpse*), which can refer to any strong alcoholic drink but particularly those containing at least 32% ABV (64 proof). American *schnapps*, however, are liqueurs.

per day and are satisfied with a dinner heated for three minutes in a microwave. They schedule their free time around other appointments, or buying their last minute Christmas gift. Their time and personalities are divided to meet other activities, other schedules, and other appointments. Often they are simply too rushed to sit down and have a good meal. Anna's catered stand-up parties in buffet style reflect this hectic nature of contemporary North American society. A three to five hour long (or even more) sit-down meal in Hungarian style would not work well in this overscheduled society. At Anna's catered events guests are free to pick whatever food they like, whenever they want, and to talk with whoever comes into contact with them. Then they can leave whenever they desire to do so.

The success of the buffet might also reflect something of the impersonal and superficial nature of North American society. The long Hungarian dinners I grew up with are shared among family members and close friends. I was initially astonished by the huge number of the guests at the events Anna catered. Whether a birthday party, a retirement party, or simply a meal with "friends," most events are very large by Hungarian standards. Anna's catering style allows people to move and talk freely, eat without restraint, and leave at their discretion. At a food event in Hungary there are much fewer people present. There is an established sitting order with close relatives or friends seated in proximity. The arrangement facilitates meaningful discussions on a personal level. The buffet is more suited to short casual conversation among colleagues or people who do not know each other, or at least are not well acquainted. These are more often the guests at Anna's catered events. Perhaps drawing on her familiarity with the Hungarian dinner party, Anna often also helps to facilitate interaction among guests at a catered

buffet, leading conversations at the food table and explaining food items to guests in detail. In this way she not only helps to keep talk flowing among people who do not know each other well but shares first-hand accounts of the food served with her clientele. Anna comments, "People, they ask. Yes, I could put out little signs, saying this is this, and that is that, but it is more personal, and people are asking one another and there is a whole conversation about the food at the table, it is very nice. It is very exciting, hey, taste this, this is marvellous" (Anna - February 11, 2011).



Figure 5. Customers Surrounding the Food Table

Even though the guests often do not really know each other, they become more relaxed when around the food table simply because Anna maintains a personal level of conversation about the food. She explains the ingredients, the source of the ingredients, and the difficulty or ease of the preparation. She also provides her customers with useful advice when it comes to food combinations. These are only leads to follow; Anna would never force a customer to try any food combination. She only suggests. Perhaps in Hungary the host would force a guest in a friendly manner to try their food, and he would even feel insulted if refused, but Anna merely offers recommendations to be followed or not. Her suggestions, often in the form of a dare to a guest to try a new dish, mirror the teasing that comes with close friendship and familiarity, and again help facilitate social interaction.

When I asked Anna how her catering differs from that of other catering companies in the city, she highlighted her Hungarian style of presentation:

My whole catering is different because of my ethnicity. I cater in a Hungarian style. Because it is a beautiful presentation, much more than what people do here, and like yesterday somebody said, 'No plastic trays?' 'Oh, she has real trays', the woman said. 'It's not plastic.' I use silver and also I put in all the flavours in everything. I don't cheat on anything I put in (Anna - February 11, 2011).

This is not the first time a customer has praised the quality and uniqueness of Anna's presentation. An informant I quoted earlier emphasized the quality of Anna's home-made food. This is another basic characteristic of the Hungarian cooking and serving style. I have never participated in an Hungarian food event where artificial, deep-fried or frozen food was served. Nor have I ever seen food displayed on paper plates or drinks poured

into paper glasses. In my experience, it would never cross a Hungarian's mind to buy paper plates and glasses to serve food and drink to their guests. That would be considered cheap and superficial. I encountered the phenomenon of a single-use plate and glass for the first time in Canada. Anna has never adopted this common North American practice. She is a follower of the old Hungarian custom that one has to make her guests feel special in part by the quality of the food display. It is not uncommon in Hungarian households to have a set of silver cutlery or a silver tray. These are usually gifts received at important occasions, like a baptism or graduation. Silver cutlery, gold necklaces, and gold rings are all precious gifts that the recipient will display on significant occasions. Coming out of this tradition, Anna believes that there is a huge difference between presenting food on a silver tray and on a single-use paper plate. She displays her food on silver trays and uses silver cutlery at catered dinners.

Certainly, the use of paper plates and glasses can save a host a significant amount of time cleaning up and reduces their overall time commitment to a food event. The cleaning up process after every food event in Hungary can be long and demanding. Washing all those plates, cutlery, and glasses can take a long time. But it can be considered time well spent, especially if the dinner was shared with good friends who, you feel, deserve all your hard work. During the dishwashing the host and hostess can discuss what went well and what went wrong as well as whether or not the guests enjoyed the evening. Alternatively, by dumping the remains of the event, the paper plates and plastic glasses into the trash can, one might argue that hosts are able not only to end an event in a blink of an eye but also to forget about it. It is behind them now. It is like the evening was not important or worthy. It might be argued that the cleaning up process is

just as important as both the preparation and serving of the food event.

After a catered event is over Anna spends a significant time collecting, washing and drying the trays and plates that remain after the guests are gone. She demonstrates that her customers are important to her by displaying the best that she has (best cutlery, home-made food, silver trays, friendly and familiar approach). As she cleans up, she reviews with both the host, and members of the catering team, events of the evening, making mental notes of aspects that went well and others that might be improved. Anna considers the time she spends on this invisible work, like washing dishes, worthwhile, simply because she feels her customers are worth every minute.

As has already been discussed, a sense of belonging can be expressed through many aspects of food (see Scholliers 2001, 7) and meanings are inherent in its presentation. Serving food - any food - is a sign of hospitality and sociability; we can learn a great deal by paying close attention to the kinds of foods offered, and the style of serving the food. In Anna's catering, presentation style communicates social intimacy and distance, background and aspirations. It conveys the kind of impression she hopes to make and the image she wants to project, as well as the relationship binding those who gather to eat her food.

The informal character of Anna's catering business provides her with freedom to combine her personal and professional lives. She has the luxury of being able to schedule her working periods. Since she prepares the food at home, her home becomes her working place, and many times her employees are also her friends. Due to this informal organization, Anna's personal and private lives overlap. On many occasions, I witnessed working hours evolve into friendly chatting, members of her working team become her

intimate friends, and food items prepared for catering events end up given to friends. Anna happily mixes work with pleasure because she enjoys working in a friendly environment with no pressures. In the next section I explore this flexible and fluid aspect of Anna's catering. Using a Hungarian dinner shared among Anna's friends as the central focus or text, I examine overlapping elements of Anna's professional and personal life and discuss how her ethnicity manifests itself in the private sphere.

3.3. An "*Almost Perfect*" Hungarian Evening

An Hungarian evening took place at Anna's house on the 27th of February, 2010. It was not the first time that Anna and I had organized an Hungarian evening or shared a dinner in Hungarian style. It is a common practice for members of the small Hungarian community to organize food events that bring them together and connect them to their homeland. These evenings are nostalgic enactments of our Hungarian identity. I have chosen to examine this specific Hungarian dinner because it reflects the hybrid nature of Anna's cooking style.

Preparations for the event

This dinner was a consciously planned and organized evening. Since Anna needed help for a catered party scheduled for Saturday, Jane and I spent Thursday afternoon in her kitchen helping with the cooking and preparations. We had the mutual idea to end our work day in a unique way, in Hungarian spirit with Hungarian food. The food event started the day before, on Wednesday evening, when I made Hungarian Apple Squares for dessert. It continued the next day when we prepared the Mediterranean Fish Stew as

the main dish. I provided the first course which consisted of Hungarian dishes made from Canadian equivalents: fatback pork from Montreal (brought for me by Anna) which resembles the Hungarian homemade "szalonna" fatback pork, Danish Blue Cheese which resembles the traditional Hungarian homemade cottage cheese, lard, imported Hungarian salami, red onion, green pepper, paprika, Italian bread, and crème spices: Red Gold, and Goulash crème. The drinks were provided by Anna and me. I presumed that a six-pack of beer would be enough, but it turned out that the evening lasted more than three hours and my six pack of beer lasted for only a short time. Fortunately, Anna always has a supply of wine and liquor on hand, including Hungarian Unicum (which resembles German "Jägermeister").

The evening was initially planned for four people: Jane, Anna, Zoltán, and me, but at the last moment Anna's best friend, Orinda was invited when it turned out that her important meeting had been cancelled. Daniel Murphy, a carpenter who had been working all day in Anna's house, deserved a good Hungarian treat at the end of the day and he was invited as well. He was the sixth participant.

Setting the Table

The first step of the actual food event was putting the tablecloth on the table. This task was executed by me while listening to Anna's advice. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the tablecloth we used was an original hand woven one from Hungary that Anna bought years ago. As I indicated above, this tablecloth had remained untouched for years in Anna's drawer. She never uses this cloth for her catering events. For those she has several others, some white and just like this one, but not hand woven. The cleaning process for

this tablecloth is time consuming as it needs to be hand washed. The other cloths Anna uses for catering can be machine-washed which makes them more practical. While Anna will not use the precious hand woven cloth (which is also more expensive than her other tablecloths) for catering purposes, she did consider it worthy for this special Hungarian meal.

After the tablecloth was in place, we arranged the plates. Three types of plates were needed since we were planning to serve three dishes: the starter, the stew (main course) and dessert. Besides these plates a support plate was also used which had the role of holding the other plates; this idea was Anna's brainchild. Also we have experimented with other plate arrangements. The way I learned to set a table when growing up in Hungary was to place each plate on top of the other, in the order they would be used. The one on top is for the starter, followed by one for the main course and so on. The order of the plates parallels the courses they are to be used for. Hospitality is a well-known feature of the Hungarian culture and every time we had guests in my parents' home, our family was proud to display a whole range of food items for the main meal. For example, at lunchtime my mother would serve starters, soup, main course and dessert. All this meant an endless number of plates: a small flat one for the first course, a deep one for soup, big flat plate for the main course, and a smaller one for dessert. The whole range of plates displayed at the beginning of the meal signified the wealth and variety of the upcoming dishes. Anna's advice was that place settings like this restrain one's freedom of movement and make eating uncomfortable, especially when there is a flat plate resting in a deep one. We decided to leave only the support plates on the table with the small flat

plates used for the first course on top of them. This new setup is more in common with a Canadian arrangement than an Hungarian one, and is similar to how Anna sets the table at the dinners she caters. All the plates to be used throughout the meal are not displayed at the beginning of the evening, but gradually emerge as the dishes follow each other. Although the stacking of plates is still an element of food events in Hungary, even if it is inconvenient and sometimes impractical (when it requires eating from one plate



Figure 6. Final Version of Setting the Table

balanced precariously on another), Anna has diverged from this tradition. She is more concerned about making the food accessible and easily consumed. She is perfectly aware of the Hungarian tradition regarding place settings but has abandoned the practice because she considers it impractical and a bit of nonsense.

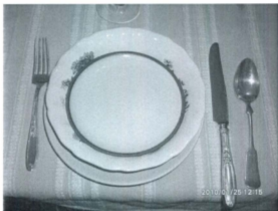


Figure 7. Setting the Table in Hungarian Style

After we arranged the plates, I placed the silverware at each place setting: the fork on the left side and the knife and spoon on the right. The knife sits beside the plate and the spoon is on its right. Later, I realized that the knife and spoon should have been

switched for the knife was to be used first when eating the starters. I also placed wine glasses to the upper right hand side of the plates. Since the table was getting crowded with flatware already, we decided to use only one type of glass for both wine and beer. We did not put a small shot glass at each place. Instead Zoltán poured the Unicum into shot glasses and then handed them to everyone. The display of a whole range of glasses is another feature of Hungarian food events. The more glasses are displayed the more drinks to be served. And for different types of drinks different kinds of glasses need to be used. A typical Hungarian table would be overwhelmed by a ridiculously huge number of plates, flatware, and glasses. Of course, Hungarians do not find this arrangement overwhelming or unnecessary; they consider it appealing and read the abundance of dishes as signifying the beginning of a big feast. Who would have thought that the simple act of setting the table could be this complicated, and raise this many questions? Anna's table was the result of cultural confrontation or more correctly, the result of cultural negotiation, as Anna and I sought a compromise between my way of doing things rooted in a conservative Hungarian tradition, and Anna's more flexible, adaptable approach that blends elements of Hungarian and Canadian ways of life.

Serving the Food

We began the meal by serving the first course onto separate plates; the onion and green pepper was sliced, bread placed in a basket, and the fatback pork and cheese was also sliced. The lard was served in one piece on a separate plate and the salami sliced into thin slices. During the setup, I consumed the first glass of Canadian beer of the evening and we were ready to "write history." These were the words of Orinda. This was the first

time she had participated in such an evening; as she put it, the city is not famous for its Hungarian events and that was why it would go into the history books.

When everyone was at the table, we lit the two candles on the table, creating a warm atmosphere. Anna and I took our seats at the open end of the table, assuring our freedom of movement for future rearrangements. The first move was to drink a shot of Unicum, so we clinked our glasses and wished good health to each other. Jane knew an appropriate poem for the event: "Over the lips over the gums, Look out belly here it comes." Hungarian custom is that all liquor is to be emptied before the shot glass is placed on the table again and the drinkers have to look one another in the eye as a sign of respect. Anna told us that in the old times in Hungary fights were frequent and people often used to kill each other. But "when you toast each other you know that is not going to be a knife at the same time" because people cannot drink and thrust the knife at the same time. During the toast Anna, Zoltán, and I also taught the Canadians their first Hungarian word of the evening: "Egészségedre," which means "To your health." At the end of the evening everyone was able to pronounce the word correctly for it was practiced at every clinking (and we had many of those).

The starter was unusual for the Canadian guests since they are not used to consuming raw fat back pork, especially when combined with raw onion and green pepper. It constituted what might be termed Hungarian esoteric food.



Figure 8. Fatback Pork Consumed
Raw



Figure 9. Daniel's Colourful Plate

The importance of esoteric foods is discussed in detail by Sabina Magliocco (1998) in her article about Italian Americans. According to Magliocco, these foods are prepared by group members for co-members and occur most often within the context of family meals and gatherings. They are not usually apparent to tourists, but are typically found in private homes where the female head of the household is of Italian descent. Magliocco notes the presence of many dishes of a clearly regional origin that continue to be popular at family get-togethers. These foods persist in a highly conservative form, showing clear links to the Italian tradition from which they came. Esoteric foods are often most meaningful to the family members who make and partake of them. Their symbolic value lies in their sensual ties to immigrants' pasts, rather than their ability to reveal anything about the immigrants to outsiders (Magliocco 1998, 153).

The Hungarian esoteric food at our dinner revealed a great deal of information

about Hungarian country cooking style, which is heavy in fat and spices and extremely unhealthy. It is also inaccessible to an outsider. Anna, Zoltán and I needed to provide instructions about how to eat the foods and in what combination. Zoltán demonstrated a few deadly combinations which were every fat free person's nightmare: a slice of bread topped with fatback pork, blue cheese, and a slice of onion with everything covered with "Red Gold" (a cream made out of Hungarian red pepper) and an olive on top. Anna also remembered the lard/Red Gold combination from her childhood. The Canadian guests experimented with different combinations and everyone tasted the raw fatback pork with onion, except for Jane who does not eat fat at all. The Canadians politely highlighted positive aspects of their new food experience. Daniel admired his colourful plate, "Personally I always believed that a colourful meal is the best meal," and while we all agreed on the unhealthy aspects of such foods, Orinda emphasized the importance of moderation. To quote Orinda, "It's not what you eat determines health. I have seen enough to see that it is the amount of food that you give your body to process. We die from overeating."

During the starter four of us drank wine while I stayed with the beer because fatty foods go well with beer.

Between the first and second courses we realized that in our enthusiasm for the event, we forgot to say grace before starting to eat. Most of the guests usually practice this religious custom, therefore we corrected our mistake between the starter and the main dish. Everyone shared their versions. Jane offered several parodies: "God bless this food which now we take, To do us good for goodness sake"; "Holy Mary, Mother of Grace, Drop your pants and show us your face"; "Holy Mary, Mother of God, Send us down a

new fishing rod" (she mentioned this was said to tease Catholics); and "Thank you Lord, thank you Missus, the last one finish does the dishes." Anna recited a translation of an Hungarian prayer: "Little Jesus be my guest, you gave me food, may I have your bless" (Anna) while Zoltán ended on a humorous note: "Little Jesus be my guest, you gave me food but you can have it." Zoltán's grace was a parody of "Lord, bless this food which now we take and may it feed our souls for Jesus' sake." When he was growing up it was used by children when they did not like the food served.

Anna and I cleared the table and switched the plates because it was time for deeper plates for the main course, *Mediterranean Fish Stew*. We placed the bowl with the stew in it on the middle of the table and Anna served everyone from there. In Hungary, usually everyone serves themselves to avoid any misunderstandings which can arise over the desired quantity of the food. A cream was also placed on the table. This is the combination of mayonnaise, vinegar and cayenne pepper. Again, everyone served themselves. According to Anna, the stew was not the original Mediterranean recipe but a "Hungarianized" version of it. She added potato, green pepper and paprika for in Hungary these are very popular ingredients. Potato is unusual to find in traditional Mediterranean fish stew. Anna also used cod fish because that was readily available to her even though the original recipe did not call for it as it is not found in Mediterranean waters. As a consequence, Anna's stew represented a fusion cuisine that combined elements of three cultures: Hungarian, Mediterranean and Canadian.

The stew actually began as a fish soup but the addition of large quantities of vegetables and cod fish transformed it into a stew. Everyone enjoyed it. The tastes were familiar to Anna, Zoltán and I for this was not the first time we had eaten it. Anna's fish

stew approximated *Fisherman's Soup*,⁹ a hot, spicy paprika-based river fish soup that is a significant dish within Hungarian cuisine. It is particularly associated with the Danube and Tisza river regions of Hungary but nowadays it is mostly served for tourists. Anna used this dish as her guide when modifying the Mediterranean version. Her adaption was approximate because she added tomato to the original recipe to make it more Italian and substituted the kinds of fish that go into the Hungarian version: a mixture of river fishes, most commonly the carp, catfish, and pike. Perhaps most significantly, Anna chose not to use paprika, a main ingredient in the Hungarian fish stew. Because the dish was also doubling as the main dish at her next catered event she did not want to take the chance of ruining it by adding too much or too little paprika. Since at her catered dinners there is only one main dish, she is careful to accommodate for different tastes. This includes not making a dish too spicy. The use of paprika can be challenging at times. She did add green pepper, a commonly used ingredient in Hungary and an ingredient in Hungary's national dish, *Goulash*. Anna noted that her mother uses green pepper in various dishes because she finds it gives a special flavour to the food.

Looking closely at this dish, Anna is not sure what national cuisine it is most closely associated with. She is uncertain whether she adapted a Mediterranean stew to Hungarian tastes or vice versa. As well, in her view, the soup became just as Italian as Hungarian when she added the tomato. The list of ingredients suggests that the dish is more Hungarian than either Italian or Canadian, however, because the use of vegetables, and even the fish, is very common in Hungarian cooking. Most of all, this culinary

⁹ Fisherman's Soup is also one of the most popular Christmas dishes.

creation is an example of Anna's creative cooking style that blends national cuisines. It also serves to illustrate the flexible, fluid nature of her ethnicity.



Figure 10. Anna Serving the Stew



Figure 11. Apple Square Ready to be Served

For the last course I prepared *Hungarian Apple Squares*. Before serving dessert, the table was cleared again and the plates changed to dessert plates; teaspoons were added as well. The squares were made from an Hungarian recipe. In many cases this is the first dessert recipe a child learns to make growing up because it is simple, fast and delicious. Usually it is not served on special occasions; it is too common and simple for fine dining. Fancier desserts are made for those events. As I mentioned in the first chapter, since coming to Canada I have made the dessert on several occasions. At first, I baked the Apple Squares because it is the only cake recipe that I know to make without a cookbook.

To my initial surprise, however, the dish was very popular. In Canada, the Squares are regarded as exotic and their status has been upgraded from that of a common cake to a special dessert.

Our dinner proved again that ethnic foodways are rarely identical to those in the homeland. In the first place, specific ingredients may be unavailable in the new land and substitutions are inevitable. In the case of the stew, fish common in Hungary was unavailable in Canada and cod was substituted. More important, however, are the influences of a new setting; foodways are intrinsically connected to social and cultural life. As life styles change - both work habits and leisure-time activities - so do foodways. Recipes are modified to accommodate changing time commitments, technology, and ingredients. Occasions for eating traditional foods change; religious or calendar holidays may become prime times for eating ethnic food. New foods are incorporated into the everyday diet. Common foods of the immigrant generation are reserved by descendants as ethnic treats for special occasions (Hoover, Kaplan, Moore 1998, 123). My Apple Squares provides an example of changing food habits in a new context. Even though I did not change the ingredients or method from the original recipe, I did make an important shift. I have raised the status of common food to a special one. As I noted, in Hungary Apple Squares is an everyday cake, popular among novice bakers. For special occasions experienced cooks would serve a more sophisticated dessert, like the Dobos cake, another symbol of Hungarian cuisine, that is made with cream, and rich ingredients. I have not made this cake in Canada because of its complexity. Instead I have been delighted to find that Apple Squares, so common in Hungary, are regarded as unique in the Canadian context where they are considered tasty.

As the dinner drew to a close, Daniel was the only one who had coffee. We put new bottles of wine on the table and chatted for a few more hours while eating the squares. By the end of the event almost everyone managed to get drunk or close to it. Given our condition, it was perhaps fortunate that no one had to do the dishes. This was taken care of by Anna's automatic dishwasher. Anna and I covered the remaining food and placed it in the fridge. When everything was done we sat back down at the table to take part in the conversation. It should be noted that Anna never wastes anything. Just like any leftovers from her catering events, uneaten food from our dinner was saved to be used the next day or on another occasion. Anna never throws away food. She either preserves it for her next food event or gives it away, either to her employees or to the host of the catered party. This quality may well be an expression of her Hungarian identity because in Hungary it is important that nothing should be wasted. In fact it used to be considered a sin if somebody got rid of the food or bread. How foodways relates to our past and to memory is my next topic.

Food as Tangible Site for Memory

Food elicits memories and stories from the past. As a result it can be useful in understanding people's experiences of displacement, fragmentation, and their reconstruction of wholeness. In using the concept of "wholeness" I am drawing on James W. Fernandez's work. Fernandez explored the process of "returning to the whole" in the context of religious revitalization movements in West Africa. He understood Bwiti,¹⁰ the

¹⁰ West Central African spiritual practice by the forest-dwelling Babongo and Mitsogo people of Gabon.

revitalization movement among the Fang of Gabon where he worked, as a response to their alienation and fragmentation brought on by "the agents of the colonial world and simply modern times" (Fernandez 1982, 562). In the face of radical changes in their society, the Fang used Bwiti to reintegrate the past and the present and to "recapture the totality of the old way of life" (1982, 9). It was a tool used against fragmentation.

Fernandez's work is useful because it provides an analysis of some of the ways that those whose worlds are being rent asunder attempt creatively to reconstruct them. Fernandez's approach is potentially applicable to many sorts of alienation, from that of victims of war, to that of refugees, migrants, downsized workers, those caught in major political shifts such as the fall of Soviet socialism, and all those who in the midst of change "are looking for firm ground under their feet" (Thomassen 1996, 44).

Anna uses food to look back or "return to the whole." Most of these food-related memories and stories she and her friends share are focused on very basic food items: meat and potatoes. These were the most valued foods, and also the most basic foods for the survival, in the old days in Hungary when life was hard. In her reconstruction of the whole, Anna goes back in time, describing conditions of the Hungarian revolution in 1956:

Cooking was very poor because there was no food. No potato, very little meat, just very sparse ingredients. My father, he was wonderful with Wiener Schnitzel,¹¹ they always cooked roast, like pork roast. Well, in Hungary you couldn't buy any meat, so we couldn't make a roast, not that I

¹¹ Due to strong Austrian influence of the Austro-Hungarian era, Wiener Schnitzel is very popular in Hungary, known as Bécsi Szelet, or Viennese Slice.

remember any. Here it was accessible, so we cooked lot of nice roast, garlic stuck inside the pork meat, completely Hungarian food, with red cabbage for instance, pork with red cabbage, that kind of thing (Anna - February 11, 2011).

As Anna's narrative reflects, her family's escape from the oppressive power of communism meant a better life. Life in Canada brought better food, especially meat. In her memory, meat is equated with a better life and wealth.

The Revolution of 1956¹² was an important event for Anna and her family, as it was for all Hungarians. Anna's close friend, Dr. Paul Mezey remembers it vividly:

I was in Budapest at that time in 1956 the Hungarian Revolution, against the communism. And once it seemed to be peaceful time, so my father went to get some food because we run out of food. So he went, there was a small market near my apartment so he went there. [There was a] long line up for bread and potatoes, and Russians came and started shooting the line up. And so that time I still wasn't quite right because of my polio, so I was very slow, so we couldn't run away, but we were hiding behind the potato sacks in the market. So, when Russians were gone it was very good. We were first in line because we couldn't run away. So thanks to the Russians, we got potatoes, two big sacks of potatoes (Paul Mezey - November 15, 2010).

It is significant that these stories relate to the basic food items for the survival: meat and potatoes. The whole Hungarian struggle for freedom was first and foremost about survival and about getting enough food.

¹² It was a spontaneous nationwide revolt against the government of the People's Republic of Hungary and its Soviet-imposed policies, lasting from 23 October until 10 November 1956.

Since the bacon (fatback pork) was an important part of the diet in pre-Revolution Hungary, it is also linked to survival and it can evoke many stories and memories among older Hungarians. The fatback pork at our dinner prompted Anna to share a warm childhood memory. She told how there is a tradition practiced everywhere in Hungary called "*Frying the Bacon*." She explained how chunks of bacon are placed on a stick and roasted over an open fire. One must keep turning carefully it until it fries beautifully. It is then consumed with bread and onion. It is the Hungarian version of barbeque bacon.

In conclusion, I quote from Pierre L. van den Berghe who states, "ethnic cuisine represents ethnicity at its best, because at its most sharable. It does not take much effort to learn to like foods, even exotic ones. Ethnic cuisine is the easiest and most pleasant way to cross ethnic boundaries. As eating together is perhaps the most basic expression of human sociality, ethnic food could well be the ultimate reconciliation between a diversity we cherish and a common humanity we must recognize if we are to live amicably together"(1984, 395). As Anna brings together foods from different nations at both catered events and dinners among friends, she shares some of the influences that have shaped her. Her ethnicity is a fluid one, marked by openness to new influences. Her innovations as a cook result in a reinvigorated and dynamic culinary tradition. Anna's experiences show that ethnic food is not a mere reflection of the need for differentiation but also a process of creating shared symbols of diversity by which one can make sense of and embrace their own fragmented culture. Some of the gendered meanings found in Anna's food and catering are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: FOOD AND GENDER

In the previous chapter I examined ethnicity as a fluid creation in Anna's life. I focused on her ability to creatively bring together different tastes and variations in preparing and presenting her ethnic food in the public and private spheres.

In this chapter, I again explore the multiple meanings of food in Anna's life. This time the context is gender, as I examine the role that food has played in the evolution of Anna's career as a successful caterer. Within this framework I investigate two main issues. First, I consider the power struggle between men and women as evidenced through food. How has Anna gained power by the simple act of cooking? How does food reflect her position as a strong, independent woman and a successful caterer? Second, I discuss how Anna uses food as a tool to reinforce family ties among the female members of her family.

Many scholars have acknowledged that gender is an essential component of analysis when focusing on food culture in the United States (and around the globe). According to Meyers, food was largely neglected as a serious area of study until recently because women did most of the "food work" and anthropologists, mostly men, "didn't find such matters especially interesting." In other fields as well, "women's work" has not been considered a "serious intellectual interest." Even sociological studies of family life traditionally ignored "cooking, eating and clearing up" - an unfortunate exclusion, given that food historians point out, food habits, values, and attitudes " [help] to fashion the peculiar tone and direction of a society" (Meyers 2001, 5).

4.1. Food as Site of Power Relations between Men and Women

Women and food have been deeply connected for countless centuries; they still do most of the domestic cooking in the western societies (Innes 2001, 3). Sherrie Innes uses the term "kitchen culture" to refer to the various discourses about food, cooking, and gender roles that stem from the kitchen but that pervade our society on many levels. Kitchen culture influences advertising, cooking literature, and our daily meals, wherever we might consume them. Whether we are reading an advertisement for peanut butter that depicts a blissful woman preparing sandwiches for a bunch of ravenous teenage boys or going to the restaurant down the street that offers "mom's cooking," our culture is filled with values and notions about gender that stem from cooking and food. Kitchen culture is a critical way that women are instructed about how to properly perform gender. Innes argues that if we are to understand women's gender roles, we need to study food (Innes 2001, 3-4). Similarly, Mary Drake McFeely asserts that the irony of American women's relationship to the kitchen over the course of the twentieth century is that as home cooking became less essential, indeed more and more an option, it continued to be perceived not only by society but often by women themselves as a measure of a woman's true value (2000, 2).

Anna questions these statements. She does not think of domestic cooking as gendered, female activity. Instead she argues that her male friends voluntarily step up to the stove and perform traditional female activities, like housekeeping, cooking, and childrearing. She points to her own family as the perfect example of non-traditional gender roles. As she reflects on the evolution of her career as a caterer, she finds it

striking that in her family cooking was never considered exclusively a female activity. In fact, talent in the kitchen was not considered an important quality in a woman. She comments:

Actually it was interesting, because my mother didn't know how to cook either. No. But my father did. My father, he was in the army, and he knew how to cook. So, then we came out to Canada and then my mother didn't know how to cook still. They cooked together, but mostly my father knew how to cook. Everything. Then my mother learned and she did a little bit (Anna - February 11, 2011).

Her father was the bread earner and he also did the cooking. The family's meals consisted of meat, mostly pork, with different side dishes. Her father was the one who cooked the main dish that always involved meat, at every occasion. Anna's mother prepared light food, which consisted mostly of vegetables. Anna still vividly remembers her mother's wonderful home-made soups and praises her mother's excellent soup making skills:

She could make very good soups. She made mostly vegetable soup, carrot soup, pea soup, green pea soup, and that kind of thing. She made marvelous soups, oh, cauliflower soup, she makes the best cauliflower soup still, and she still makes it, she's 88 years old, and she still makes soups (Anna - February 11, 2011).

Carole M. Counihan argues that patriarchal power in Western society is embodied in meat consumption, which involves the linking of women and animals and their objectification and subordination (1990, 5-6). Women can rebel through vegetarianism,

which she interprets as rejecting patriarchal domination and affirming female power and respect for nature. According to Counihan, American college students associate "light" foods like salad, chicken, or yogurt with women, and "heavy" foods like beef, beer, and potatoes with men. Their corresponding rules about appropriate food consumption define men as powerful and women as weak (1999, 10). Even though the gender role responsibilities in Anna's home went against the norm for her generation, it can be argued that they reflect power dynamics within the family. Anna's father exerted his authority by taking control of most of the cooking, including the meat preparation. Anna's employee, Jane, spoke of similar cooking arrangements in her family. She remembers her father as being an excellent cook who was the primary cook for the family on weekends. Her mother was in charge on weekdays:

My mother cooked on weekdays, my father on weekends. My father was a better cook than my mother. Way better. He did the Sunday dinner, cause everybody had to sit down on Sundays. Sunday was more of a family day. I learned to cook from my father, cause my mother couldn't really cook, right? She was a very plain cook. She cooked more like fish and potatoes. Everybody had to be home for dinner, no matter where you were, like you were late for dinner. My father made up this rule. Then I got to watch hockey with him at the same time. We did that every Saturday night, make pies and cookies for the whole week. My mother made bread all the time, she made really good bread. But she made bread every day. My father made really good bread pudding. He cooked cause he loved it. He loved to bake, I think he learned to bake from his father (Jane Hawkins - July 7, 2011).

Mary, Anna's occasional employee, also praised her father's excellent cooking skills. As in Jane's family, Mary's father was the main cook on the weekends while her mother did the cooking on week days. She remembered, "My mother would be the cook most of the times, and then when my father came home on weekends, every Sunday he would cook lovely pancakes. Home made pancakes" (Mary Smith - July 7, 2011).

Although these recollections caution against broadly generalizing that women had the kitchen all to themselves and that men never took any responsibility for cooking, they do not significantly challenge patriarchal gender roles. As Counihan suggests, the association of men with meat and women with vegetables and softer, sweeter foods has a long history. Pollock indicates that it was a widespread and customary practice among many tribal societies that women cultivate vegetables while men were in charge of supplying the meat. Among the Culina of the western Amazon, men and women similarly established distinctive identities as well as social and economic interdependence through the production and distribution of food. A clear sexual division of labour allocated most of the gardening to women and the hunting to men. Pollock writes that the sexes were identified with the different products of their labor: women with vegetables and men with meat. Marriage involved the reciprocal exchange of "food for food: meat for cultivated garden products" (Pollock 1985, 33). In this egalitarian culture, male and female differential control over diverse aspects of the food system was explicitly balanced in exchanges and in beliefs (Counihan 1999, 13). This division of labour reproduced itself in Anna's 20th century family. It is not surprising that in this male-dominated environment Anna did not acquire cooking skills.

As an adult, Anna still did not know how to cook. In a continuation of her family tradition, she married a husband who also possessed excellent cooking skills. They established relatively egalitarian household arrangements and made successful efforts to share the household work or distribute it in non-traditional ways. Her husband was the main bread earner, just like in the case of her father, but they both were employed outside the home. In a reversal of traditional male and female roles in terms of the domestic labour, he did most of the everyday cooking. They both preferred the arrangement and there was no stereotyping in their household. After many years and a painful divorce she still can recall the charm of their first encounter. Her husband flattered her from the beginning with his amazing cooking skills. From the start of their marriage the division of labour in their household was established: he was in charge of cooking and Anna assisted. Anna recalls:

Actually I learned to cook from my husband, who was completely Canadian. He came in the early 1970s, he was in California, and he learned a few dishes, because this was the time when he started to get interested in cooking, and he learned several dishes. And I didn't know how to cook at all, I knew a couple of Hungarian dishes. I met him, and he made this marvellous French dish for me. He learned how to cook about six or seven dishes, and that's all, but he knew how to cook them perfectly. For me it was enough. In any case, he did all these, and I was watching him, I was chopping onion, or something. So, he knew Mexican, Indian, French, Italian, I knew Hungarian. You don't need too many more (Anna - February 11, 2011).

Meg Luxton identifies domestic labour as a mixture of four related work processes, each composed of a variety of tasks and each having its own history, its own internal rhythms and pressures and its own particular pattern of change. The most immediate task involves looking after oneself and other adult members of the household. The second component of domestic labour is childbearing and childrearing. The third component is housework that includes all those activities, such as cooking, cleaning and washing clothes, that are necessary for maintaining the house and servicing the household members. The final component of domestic labour involves the transformation of wages into goods and services for the household's use. This process of "making ends meet" includes money management and shopping (Luxton 1980, 18). Most of the tasks within Luxton's classification of domestic labour did not fall to Anna at the beginning of her marriage although after her marriage collapsed she bore the brunt of every household task described by Luxton. During the years of her marriage Anna did not do a great deal of domestic work. After their two daughters were born they employed a babysitter who helped out with the childrearing. As mentioned above, housework, especially cooking, was done by her husband. Anna enjoyed the luxury of a marriage with no heavy housework and without the pressure and necessity of the paid work.

Diane Tye notes that food preparation can be a site of complex power relations and couples often name issues around food and food preparation as sources of conflict. Power struggles between men and women are frequently expressed through the medium of food. She argues that the study of who controls a family's food may tell us much about family power structure and that research suggests if a wife has greater emotional stake in the marriage, she will often exercise less control over the flow of the food into the house

(Tye 2010, 206-207). Similarly, DeVault claims that "in addition to its constructive, affiliative aspect, the work of care has a darker aspect, which traps many husbands and wives in relations of dominance and subordination rather than mutual service and assistance" (1991, 163). This is true in many marriages where the husband exerts power by controlling or sabotaging family meals and cooking. In Anna's case, however, there was no real power struggle around food, at least not explicitly or consciously. Food events provided the couple with lots of pleasure and have left Anna with warm memories. She remembers, "We always sat at the table, very beautifully, with candles, and we ate on the balcony and made it very special, and the food was very special" (Anna – February 11, 2011). These elegant meals conveyed deep messages about class. The sophisticated dinners Anna shared with her husband contrasted dramatically with the more modest meals that she grew up with. As discussed in the last chapter, life in Communist Hungary was a struggle for survival and even the most basic food items like potatoes, bread, and meat, could not be taken for granted. In fact, it was the poor living conditions that caused Anna's family to leave their native country. By marrying a doctor, Anna gained entrance into a higher social class and her new way of eating reflected this change. She was introduced to rich and sophisticated food practices that included an elegant cooking, presentation and serving style. The lasting influence of this fine dining that she enjoyed with her husband can be seen in her catering: in the types and quality of food she prepares, her reliance on a French cooking style, and her emphasis on an elegant food presentation.

Unfortunately, Anna's marriage did not last and her husband eventually left her for one of her best friends. After enjoying the luxury and security of her marriage she

experienced the struggle of her single life. In a short period of time she went from being happily married to a becoming divorcee and a single mother of two teenage girls. Life and survival became a real challenge to her. Earlier she had given up her job in the hospital where her ex-husband was employed as a doctor and had no means to support herself and her children. With no tangible career options and no real cooking skills, she was neither a working woman nor capable home-maker. She could not find a satisfying source of self-esteem in either domain. She had to find a way to break free and to find her own path in this new situation. Without a spouse to depend on she had to adopt survival strategies.

Levison and Silverstein in their study of single business women assert that a number of women have discovered their business talents after the death of their husbands. They were reluctant to get their feet wet in the outside world as long as they had a man to take care of them (1971, 28-29). Anna's husband was not dead but their marriage had collapsed, and she found herself in the same situation as many other divorced or widowed women. She had to face the problem of supporting herself by relying on her own resources. Her family and friends suggested cooking as a career option because her main object was to make a living from her home so that she could still supervise her children. Mothering remained her top priority. Catering proved to be her best option. Her first real encounters with cooking remain vivid in her memory:

I got very excited about this cooking thing, and I started to learn how to cook, just from the magazines, and I got Julia Child, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, and that was my bible. Martha Stewart came much much later, then I got the food processor for myself. My mother had a best friend, who was a marvellous cook, and we talked about

cooking many times, we were just chatting about cooking. She told me her little tricks, and she gave me recipes, Maria, and she was marvelous, all Hungarian cooking. I spent a little time in Hungary with her, she had a maid, she was a marvellous cook, she taught me how to do, and then I got interested. I took couple of courses from a Portuguese lady to do Portuguese cooking, here in Canada, just to know. I got really interested in different cultures, different cooking, but mostly French cooking (Anna – February 11, 2011).

Within just two years of the collapse of her marriage Anna started her own catering business. At the beginning it was very hard work. She had no regular employees and relied on her friends to help her out in every possible way, with the shopping, cooking, and transporting of food. After a while, she made a name for herself providing a unique food service. She successfully supported herself and her children as a caterer. At home, she learned how to accomplish every form of the domestic labour described above by Meg Luxton: she looked after herself and her daughters and she did all the housework that included cooking, washing clothes, and cleaning. She took care of all the traditionally female tasks such as preparing meals, washing dishes, cleaning house, and grocery shopping. On top of that, she also took over the traditionally male tasks, such as yard work and auto maintenance, and any gender-neutral tasks, like paying bills and driving the children to school. Again, her life did not conform to the typical gendered division of labour. West and Zimmerman point out that norms of doing gender, of which division of labour between women and men is one aspect, create differences between girls and boys, and women and men that are not natural, essential, or biological (West, Zimmerman

1987, 137). Anna never fully practiced these gendered roles. As a married woman she had the luxury to choose between different household tasks, and as a divorcee she was responsible for them all. Food and cooking helped her earn a living as well as to make a name for herself and establish her own place in society. As she mentioned earlier, within the city she lived, she became known as the "food lady." She was no longer defined in terms of her husband or her husband's occupation. At the same time, Anna built her business and her reputation, and she managed to stay close to her family. She raised her children to adulthood and has kept close ties with both her mother and daughters. The connection of food to Anna's familial relationships is my next topic of inquiry.

4.2. Mothers and Daughters Connecting through Food

The late food writer M.F.K. Fischler suggests, "our three basic needs, for food and security and love, are so mixed and mingled and entwined that we cannot straightly think of one without the others." (Fischler 1988). And, as Meyers and other writers note, women recognize the close connection of food and love (Meyers 2001, 96). Anna emphasized her deep commitment to catering many times; she identified her love and passion for cooking as her greatest asset and the secret of her success as a caterer:

My first thought is how good can I make it, and my fourth thought will be how much money am I charging for it. Or, I never even think about it, that's at the end. My first thought is my passion for the cooking. I think that's the only way you can do anything in life very well. If you go into business to make money, it will never work (Anna – February 11, 2011).

As indicated earlier, her customers recognize and appreciate the care that Anna puts into every step of her food making and presentation.

Anna chose catering as a way of making a living, first of all, for the sake of her children. She wanted to stay close to them, day and night, especially immediately after they went through the divorce. She involved her daughters in her business as they got older and one was an employee for many years until she moved away to attend college. After Anna began her catering business, her father died. Anna's family now consisted of her mother and daughters: three generations of females. Food was something that brought them together. Since food is central in Anna's life, even today many discussions revolve around food. Both Anna's daughters and mother live away from her, but food continues to be the main topic of many of their conversations. Food figures in their telephone conversations, emails, and other mediated exchanges. During our interviews she mentioned her daughters and mother several times, and made comparisons between her cooking style and theirs:

We all have our little tricks, our little special something that you do. For instance, the Paprika chicken, I know the trick is to put the milk or the cream in little bit before, so the meat cooks with the cream, rather than add it at the very end. All recipes say, just add it at the very end, and don't boil it anymore, but we know that you can boil cream and your cream tenderises the meat. In my family, we always put it that way. My mother doesn't put in as much paprika as I do. I like it more red, she likes it pale, these little things. And my daughter like my mother's, because she lives nearer her, so she does it exactly like my mother does, not like the way I do it. Just an interesting idea. She's in proximity

closer, and she eats at my mother's house (Anna – February 11, 2011).

Historians show that women's entry into the labour force did not change their relationships as daughters, wives, and mothers to their families. Women's responsibility for meals in the past, and, for the most part, in the present, means that mothers and daughters are linked through food in a unique way. Meyers writes that within familial relationships, food can become a "symbol of joy and abundance in life—a way to cherish a place, a person, a moment in time," (Meyers 2001, 34) and that it can connect mothers and daughters in ways that not only reflect an appreciation for the past but helps women negotiate the future. Meyers investigates the different ways mothers and daughters connect with each other through food. Conventionally, our conception of the direction of learning is from mother to daughter, but learning goes both ways. Research suggests that just as mothers influence daughters, so daughters influence mothers (see Tye 2010). Learning about food is a two-way street between mothers and daughters. In an earlier chapter I presented the different ways that items enter Anna's food repertoire. I noted how she is introduced to dishes by her daughters or by her mother and how she learned to make one of her core foods, *Palate Cleanser (Dried Apricot with Cream Cheese)*, from her mother. Here she elaborates:

I learned something from my mother, for instance. One time she was invited to a diplomatic reception in Ottawa. It was right at the beginning of my catering, and she phoned me up immediately, and this was the dried apricots with cream cheese and pecans. And she

told me what to do, and I did it the very next time, and it was such a success, and it's beautiful, it was like a butterfly, and it's delicious, and it worked ever since. Every time I serve it, people say, oh my goodness, this is so beautiful, and it's delicious. And I call it Palate Cleanser sometimes. [It] cleans the palate, but, that's from my mother (Anna - February 11, 2011).

As this example shows, daughters learn from mothers if the opportunities and openness are there. Mothers learn from daughters under the same conditions. What may be learned ranges from values to specific cooking techniques. How learning takes place varies as well, from direct training to simply being in the presence of cooking. The strength of women's memories of their learning testifies to its importance. Anna's exchanges with her mother and daughters show that there is always something to learn and that the mother-daughter bond offers a lifelong opportunity to do so (Meyers 2001, 97). Meyers characterizes this opportunity as an ongoing gift for many daughters and mothers and this seems to be the case for Anna as well. In her case, food is part of a never-ending process of learning, teaching and contact among her family members. During my fieldwork period, she often got new ideas from her mother and her daughters. For example, the evolution and final version of the *Sautéed Mushrooms in White Wine Sauce* presented in the first chapter is the result of a fruitful co-operation between Anna and her younger daughter, Kathy. Anna's older daughter, Andrea, more often calls her mother for advice than to offer suggestions as Anna comments, "My daughter makes better *Lecsó*¹³ than I can make. Andrea, only time she calls me, is to ask about the recipe, just about it. But she makes burritos, more fashionable. I tell her how to cook a few of the

¹³ Thick vegetable stew, considered to be traditional food in Hungary.

meats. I give her ideas, because I'm better than her" (Anna – February 11, 2011).

For feminists, women's responsibility for domestic life has been key to understanding women's subordination and has been an important item on any agenda for change. Whether they have argued that women's domestic work must be acknowledged and compensated (e.g. Edmond and Fleming 1975), shared with men (e.g. Chodorow 1978; Hochschild 1989), or fundamentally reorganized (Hayden 1981), feminists have been concerned with understanding the processes of choice and enforcement through which women's responsibility for domestic life has been maintained (DeVault 1991, 96). Through history women may have been trapped in the kitchen by cultural demands, but Anna's example demonstrates how they have also found ways to resist them. For some women, like Anna, the kitchen has been a place they can control, as well as a place for expressing something of the private self (McFeely 2000, 4). Her story is a successful one. She managed to enter into the business world through cooking. By creatively adopting an elite style of French-inspired cooking, she has been able to make a living from cooking - or catering - and has drawn on it to sometimes bring her family closer together. Just as Anna's hybrid, fusion cooking style mirrors the fluid character of her ethnicity, the changing place of cooking over her lifetime reflects the different gender roles and responsibilities she has assumed.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

In the summer of 2009 I was introduced to Anna, a nice Hungarian lady who earns her living by cooking. Right after our encounter I started to get involved in her catering business by helping her with the preparation of the foods and working for her at catered events. Very soon I realised that the meanings of her foods and catering extend far beyond their nutritional value. In this thesis I have explored the multiple meanings that food and food catering convey in her life. I have examined how catering can be understood as folkloric performance and how Anna creatively uses food to perform aspects of both ethnicity and gender.

In Chapter Two I argued that catering involves the most important aspects of a folkloric performance or folk drama. Within this framework I explored the roles, as well as the front and backstage performances, of caterer, employees and clients. Folk drama requires performers to enter into traditional fictive roles that differ significantly from their real or mundane roles, both social and personal. I argued that this is the case for Anna's employees for whom there is a constant juxtaposition of fictive and mundane roles. These workers have been, and still are, mostly students and Anna's close friends who are willing to give a hand when needed. Together they help Anna present a consistent front stage performance that conveys the impressions of quality, elegance, and worldliness that she aspires to create for her clientele. "Audience members" seem appreciative and often highlight her special flavours that differ significantly from the usual North American fare. The catering team functions as a performance team to provide the variety, good taste, and aesthetic appeal that are the determining elements of Anna's catering and that constitute

the creative nature of her catering.

In a sense, catering is a minisociety: a world with social structure and culture. Workers are recruited to Anna's catering staff work through family connections and social networks and they tend to know each other. Activities of co-workers matter, directly or indirectly. By running her own business, Anna plays several roles: sales person, organizer, administrator, chef, cook, server, dishwasher, manual labourer and bookkeeper. In examining the catering as team-performance, the caterer is the director. She is the organizer, the manager of the kitchen, and the catering's creative force. She knows all aspects of catering and while her employees focus on limited tasks, she is responsible for a wide range of activities. Within this framework the division of labour among the catering team is negotiated with more or less strain. Often workers communicate through teasing which is one measure that a workplace – or social system – is harmonious. Teasing is a marker of community; its existence recognizes that there is enough looseness or "give" in relationships that one person can make a joke at another's expense without the belief that those sentiments are real. With the exception of very busy times, like the rush, Anna's catering team is characterized by interpersonal joking.

In many ways catering resembles a moving theatre. The catering team takes the necessities and foods to the host's place and their house is set up for the performance. There is no fixed stage. The action occurs in whatever space is designated for entertaining. The final production, the theatrical catering scene, is only the tip of the iceberg of the whole catering process. All that the customers can see is the beautifully displayed food, a smiling waitress, and a kindly host. Any frustration or mishap experienced in the kitchen remains hidden.

In the third chapter I examined how food and catering express Anna's ethnicity. Anna had to adapt to a new life when she left Hungary with her family and settled in Canada. Many of her customs and oral expressions, as well as her cooking style, are embedded in her ambiguous Hungarian-Canadian identity: living in Canada with strings still attached to her native land and Hungarian identity. This characterization of Anna's ethnicity articulates the problematic nature of identity that is always multiple and the synthesis of various categories. Although one can argue that characteristics such as Anna's age and gender constitute her primary identity that is more constant or fixed, ethnicity falls into another category that is more malleable. It is one of many competing identities that Anna capitalises upon. She uses symbols of Hungarian identity, such as objects, acts, concepts, or linguistic formulations, to stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of meanings. Within the group of Hungarian Canadians to which Anna belongs, the first ethnic identity marker is a common Hungarian language. Anna also has additional identity markers in the form of artifacts. She displays her ethnicity in museum-like objects, like a highly valued, hand-made tablecloth. Such artifacts, like stories and knowledge stored deep in the back of her mind, come out only on certain occasions when her Hungarian ethnicity is stimulated. Her expressions of ethnic identity are situationally variable and involve both revivals and creative constructions.

The power of Anna's ethnicity is that it is not static; rather it is mutable and adaptable to changing surroundings and new environments. The ethnic foods she performs maintain a dynamic relationship with both her Old and New World cuisines and Anna alters her retained Hungarian tradition to fit new circumstances. Her creation and presentation of food items is a valuable index of human creativity as well as of the ways

people balance cultural continuity with change. Her international cooking style is perhaps the most appealing feature of her catering. This successful food repertoire has evolved through time and been influenced by many factors. In choosing the food types for parties Anna relies on knowledge and experience gained throughout her lifetime. The foods that Anna now prepares for catered parties represent an improvised combination of old and new recipes, as well as a mixture of different types of foods from different countries and different sources. At the base of her catering is a reliance on a French style of cooking. Hungarian cuisine has nothing of the light and sophisticated nature of the French and by turning to French cuisine Anna created a usable ethnic association for herself. Anna chose to move into more sophisticated territory, like French cuisine, while still retaining and finding a way to perform her own Hungarian ethnicity. Her choice to stay close to the French cooking tradition, by using the same ingredients as the French cooks do, such as wine, cream, butter and herbs, is another statement of her identity. Arguably, it signals her aspiration to be associated with a higher and more sophisticated society than her humble Hungarian roots.

At the back of Anna's experimentation: her combinations, adaptations, and modifications lies a vast cooking knowledge that enables her to successfully express her flexible cooking style. As this thesis has shown, foodways provide a whole area of performance in which statements of identity can be made, through preparing, eating, serving, forbidding, and talking about food. Anna's style of catering effectively combines elements of a formal Hungarian presentation of food with a more informal North American serving style. The secret of Anna's success lies in her meticulous attention to such details: she prepares exclusively home-made food and presents it in a sophisticated

manner.

Anna's personal and professional lives overlap. Elements of her professional life are present in her private one and vice versa. Her ethnicity manifests itself in both spheres. The Hungarian evening shared with friends was a nostalgic enactment of her Hungarian identity. It also reflected the ambiguous, hybrid nature of Anna's cooking style. Anna replaced the traditional Hungarian serving style, which she considers awkward, with a more accessible and convenient one, based on her Canadian experience. This is one example of her willingness to replace any unappealing elements of her native culture. Another example was found in the dish Anna served at the dinner: what she referred to as an Hungarianized version of Mediterranean Fish Stew. The dish represented a fusion cuisine which combined elements of three cultures: Hungarian, Mediterranean and Canadian. In another illustration of Anna's flexible style, she transformed a fish soup into a stew with the addition of vegetables and fish. This culinary creation is further proof of Anna's creative cooking and illustrates the flexible, fluid nature of her ethnicity. Our Hungarian dinner proved again that ethnic foodways are rarely identical to those in the homeland. In a new setting recipes must be modified to accommodate changing time commitments, technology, and ingredients. Occasions for eating traditional foods change as well. At our dinner, fish stew and Apple Squares, everyday foods in their original contexts, became significant markers both of Hungarian ethnicity and of a very special evening shared among friends. This meal was a mixture of different food types, as well as esoteric and display foods, but they all had something in common: they mirrored the flexible, fluid nature of ethnic foods in the new environment, and they also reflected Anna's hybrid ethnic character.

The idea of food as a fluid creation was explored again in the fourth chapter, this time within the context of gender. Anna lived a significant part of her life in a male dominated environment. Both her father and her ex-husband exerted control over the family by maintaining control over the food and cooking. After Anna's divorce from her husband she learned to cook and started a catering business all by herself. She has used food to earn a living and to build a fine reputation for herself. At the same time food remained a point of connection between Anna and her mother and daughters.

Underlining Anna's cooking style and catering performance, as well as her expressions of ethnicity and gender, is fluidity. The success of her catering business is rooted in her constant and creative manipulation of parts of her identity, like ethnicity and gender. Anna's use of food highlights the importance for folklorists to consider foodways not just as an expression of tradition and stability but of change.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abrahams, Roger D. 1972. "Folk Drama." In *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, ed. Richard M. Dorson, 352-353. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- , 1972b. "Folklore and Literature as Performance." *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 9.2: 75-94.
- Alba, Richard D. 1990. *Ethnic Identity*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Armitage, Susan H. 2002. *Women's Oral History: The Frontiers Reader*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Arnold, Thurmond. 1937. *The Folklore of Capitalism*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Avakian, Arlene Voski. 2005. *Through the Kitchen Window: Women Explore the Intimate Meanings of Food and Cooking*. Oxford; New York: Berg.
- Bales, Robert Freed. 1970. *Personality and Interpersonal Behaviour*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Barth, Fredrik. 1969. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Barthes, Roland. 1972. *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Belasco, Warren James. 2002. *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*. New York: Routledge .
- Blanck, Dag. 1989. "Constructing an Ethnic Identity: The Case of the Swedish-Americans." In *Ethnic Enigma: The Salience of Ethnicity for European - Origin Groups*, ed. Peter Kivisto, 134-152. Philadelphia: Balch Institute Press.
- Bourdain, Anthony. 2000. *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Brown, Linda Keller, and Kay Mussel. 1984. *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States: The Performance of Group Identity*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Brunvand, Jan Harold. 1998. *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction*. New York: Norton.

- Buchner, Rue and Joan Stelling. 1977. *Becoming Professional*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Camp, Charles. 1989. *American Foodways: What, When, Why and How We Eat in America*. Little Rock: August House.
- Charles, Nickie, and Marion Kerr. 1988. *Women, Food, and Families*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- Chodorow, Nancy. 1978. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cline, Sally. 1990. *Just Desserts: Women and Food*. London: Deutsch.
- Counihan, Carole M. 1999. *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power*. New York: Routledge.
- Dégh, Linda. 1984. "Uses of Folklore as Expressions of Identity by Hungarians in the Old and New Country." *Journal of Folklore Research* 21.2/3: 113-129.
- de La Pena Brown, M.H. 1981. "Una Tamalada: The Special Event." *Western Folklore* 40.1 (January): 64-71.
- DeVault, Marjorie. 1991. *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dorson, Richard M. 1981. *Land of the Millrats*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Dunk, Thomas W. 2003. *It's a Working Man's Town: Male Working-Class Culture*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Edmond, Wendy and Suzie Fleming, eds. 1975. *All Work and No Pay: Women, Housework, and the Wages Due*. Bristol: Falling Wall Press Ltd.
- Fernandez, James. 1982. *Bwiti: An Ethnography of the Religious Imagination in Africa*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fine, Gary Alan. 1996. *Kitchens: The Culture of Restaurant Work*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fischler, Claude S. 1988. "Food, Self and Identity." *Social Science Information* 27.2: 275-92.

- Gans, Herbert. 1979. "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2: 1-20.
- Gillett, Heather Roselle. 2008. "What is a Brickmaker?": An Occupational Folklife Study of the Brick Industry in Chipman, New Brunswick". MA Thesis (Folklore), St. John's: MUN.
- Giuliano, Bruce, Michael Owen Jones, and Roberta Krell. 1983. *Foodways and Eating Habits: Directions for Research*. Los Angeles: The California Folklore Society.
- Glassie, Henry. 1982. *Passing the Time in Ballymenone: Culture and History of an Ulster Community*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.
- Goldstein, Kenneth S. 1971. "On the Application of the Concepts of Active and Inactive Traditions to the Study of Repertory." *The Journal of American Folklore*. 84.331: 62-67.
- Green, Archie. 1996. *Calif's Head & Union Tale: Labor Yarns at Work and Play*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Green, Thomas A. 1978. "Toward a Definition of Folk Drama." *The Journal of American Folklore* 91. 361: 843-850.
- Harris, Catherine. 1984. *Cash from Your Kitchen*. Toronto: Gage Publishing.
- Hayden, Dolores. 1981. *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Hochschild, Arlie R. 1989. *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. New York: Viking.
- Holtzberg, Maggie. 1992. *The Lost World of the Craft Printer*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Hoover Marjorie A., Anne R. Kaplan, and William B. Moore. 1998. "Introduction: On Ethnic Foodways." In *The Taste of American Place*, eds. Barbara G. Shortridge and James R. Shortridge, 145-161. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Hughes, Everett C. 1971. *The Sociological Eye*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Humphrey, Linda T. 1979. "Small Group Festive Gatherings." *Journal of Folklore Institute* 16.3: 196-201.

- Innes, Sherrie A. 2001. *Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- , 2006. *Secret Ingredients: Race, Gender, and Class at the Dinner Table*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jansen, Willy. 2001. "French Bread and Algerian Wine: Conflicting Identities in French Algeria." In *Food, Drink and Identity: Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe since the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Scholliers, 195-218. Oxford: Berg.
- Kalčik, Susan. 1984. "Ethnic Foodways in America: Symbol and the Performance of Identity." In *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States: The Performance of Group Identity*, eds. Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussel, 37-65. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Kinton, Ronald, and Victor Ceserani. 1992. *The Theory of Catering*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Klymasz, Robert B. 1973. "From Immigrant to Ethnic Folklore." *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 10: 131-39.
- Levison, Teddi and Mickie Silverstein. 1971. *Have You Had It in the Kitchen?* New York: Grosset & Dunlap.
- Linnekin, Jocelyn. 1991. "Cultural Invention and the Dilemma of Authenticity." *American Anthropologist* 93.2: 446-449.
- Long, Lucy M. 2004. *Culinary Tourism*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- Long, Lucy M. 2009. *Regional American Food Culture*. Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood Press.
- Lu, Shun, and Gary Alan Fine. 1995. "The Presentation of Ethnic Authenticity: Chinese Food as a Social Accomplishment." *The Sociological Quarterly* 36.3: 535-553.
- Luborsky, Mark and Robert Rubenstein. 1987. "Ethnicity and Lifetimes: Self-Concepts and Situational Contexts of Ethnic Identity in Late Life." In *Ethnic Dimensions of Aging*, eds. Donald E. Gelfand and Charles M. Barresi, 35-50. New York: Springer.
- Luxton, Meg. 1980. *More Than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home*. Toronto: Women's Educational Press.

- Magliocco, Sabina. 1998. "Playing with Food: The Negotiation of Identity in the Ethnic Display Event by Italian Americans in Clinton, Indiana." In *The Taste of American Place*, eds. Barbara G. Shortridge and James R. Shortridge, 145-161. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- McCarl, Robert. 1980. *Good Fire, Bad Night: A Cultural Sketch of the District of Columbia Fire Fighters as Seen Through Their Occupational Folklife*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- . 1985. *The District of Columbia Fire Fighters' Project: A Case Study in Occupational Folklife*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- McFeely, Mary Drake. 2000. *Can She Bake a Cherry Pie?: American Women and the Kitchen in the Twentieth Century*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Meyers, Miriam. 2001. *A Bite of Mama's Plate: Mothers' and Daughters' Connections through Food*. Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey.
- Mintz, Sidney W., and Christine M. Du Bois. 2002. "The Anthropology of Food and Eating". *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31: 99-119.
- Nagel, Joane. 1994. "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture." *Social Problems* 41: 152-176.
- Oring, Elliott. 1986. *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press.
- . 1994. "The Arts, Artifacts and Artifices of Identity." *The Journal of American Folklore* 107. 424 (Spring): 211-233.
- Park, Robert Ezra. 1950. *Race and Culture*. Glencoe, Ill., Free Press.
- Pollock, Donald K. 1985. "Food and Sexual Identity among the Culina." *Food and Foodways* 1:1-2, 25-41.
- Robidoux, Michael A. 2001. *Men at Play: A Working Understanding of Professional Hockey*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Scott, W. Richard. 1992. *Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open Systems*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Scholliers, Peter. 2001. *Food, Drink and Identity: Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe since the Middle Ages*. Oxford: Berg.

- Shortridge, Barbara G. and James R. Shortridge. 1998. *The Taste of American Place: A Reader on Regional and Ethnic Foods*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Stern Stephen, and John Allan Cicala. 1991. *Creative Ethnicity: Symbols and Strategies of Contemporary Ethnic Life*. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press.
- Stewart, Martha. 1984. *Hors d'Oeuvres – The Creation and Presentation of Fabulous Finger Foods*. New York: Clarkson Potter Publishers.
- Stoller, Paul. 1989. *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Stoller, Eleanor P. 1996. "Sauna, Sisu and Sibelius: Ethnic Identity among Finnish Americans". *The Sociological Quarterly* 37.1 (Winter): 145-175.
- Sutton, David E. 2001. *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory*. Oxford, New York: Berg.
- Thomassen, Björn. 1996. "Border Studies in Europe: Symbolic and Political Boundaries, Anthropological Perspectives." *Europea* 2: 37-48.
- Tiwald, Christopher. 2006. "American Society Becoming too Rushed" *Daily Nebraskan*. Accessed May 6. <http://www.dailynebraskan.com/opinion/christopher-tiwald-american-society-becoming-too-rushed-1.305083>.
- Tricarico, Donald. 1989. "In a New Light: Italian-American Ethnicity in the Mainstream." In *The Ethnic Enigma: The Saliency of Ethnicity for European-Origin Groups*, ed. Peter Kivisto, 24-46. Philadelphia, PA: The Balch Institute Press.
- Tuleja, Tad. 1997. *Usable Pasts: Traditions and Group Expressions in North America*. Logan, Utah : Utah State University Press.
- Tye, Diane. 2010. *Baking as Biography: A Life Story in Recipes*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- van den Berghe, Pierre L. 1984. "Ethnic Cuisine: Culture in Nature." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 7.3 (July): 387-397.
- Waters, Mary C. 1990. *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- West, Candace, and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender and Society* 1.2 (June): 125-151.

Williams-Forsen, Psyche A. 2006. *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Yoder, Don. 1976. *American Folklife*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

List of Interviews

Anna Fekete. Personal Interview by Author. August 16th, 2010.

Anna Fekete. Personal Interview by Author. September 1st, 2010.

Anna Fekete. Personal Interview by Author. February 11th, 2011.

Brenda Brown. Personal Interview by Author. October 13th, 2010.

Csaba Szakács. Personal Interview by Author. September 12th, 2010.

Daniel Murphy. Personal Interview by Author. February 27th, 2010.

Jane Hawkins. Personal Interview by Author. August 12th, 2010.

Jane Hawkins. Personal Interview by Author. July 7th, 2011.

Karen Power. Personal Interview by Author. September 9th, 2010.

Mary Smith. Personal Interview by Author. July 7th, 2011

Maryanne Hunt. Personal Interview by Author. October 6th, 2010.

Melinda Dean. Personal Interview by Author. September 6th, 2010.

Orinda McCarthy. Personal Interview by Author. February 27th, 2010.

Paul Mezey. Personal Interview by Author. November 15th, 2010.

Susan LeGrew. Personal Interview by Author. August 24th, 2010.

Zoltán Antal. Personal Interview by Author. August 9th, 2010.



