

AN AUSTRIAN  
GRANDMOTHER'S  
COOKBOOK

FRANZISKA BURGER

Copyright © 2004 by Franziska Burger  
All rights reserved.

Translation: Frank J. Baumann  
Cover picture: The Author's Grandparents (ca. 1941)  
Layout: Wilhelm Burger  
Typeset with L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X in *Computer Modern*

Printed in Austria by  
Druck & Verlag Denkmayr GesmbH.  
A-4040 Linz

ISBN 3-902257-80-6

# Contents

1	Breakfast 1925 . . . . .	1
2	Sauerkraut and Other Savory Things . . . . .	5
3	Sausages and Schnitzel . . . . .	11
4	Sweet Dishes for Weekdays or Holidays . . . . .	17
5	Grandmother’s Sunday Lung Hachee and the Quest for Truth	21
6	Roast Duck in June . . . . .	25
7	Pudding: What is Real—and What Is Not? . . . . .	29
8	If You Eat Cake Every Single Day . . . . .	39
9	Dumplings, Noodles, <i>Sterz</i> and <i>Nocken</i> . . . . .	45
10	Strudel-Making Is an Acquired Skill . . . . .	59
11	Pumpkins and The Like . . . . .	65
12	Canning and Preserving . . . . .	71
13	Who is Afraid of Leavened Dough? . . . . .	81
14	With and Without Baking Powder . . . . .	89
15	Champagne Breakfasts and Brunch . . . . .	101
16	This Is Fit For Company . . . . .	105
17	And Now a Treat For Vegetarians . . . . .	113
18	Soups . . . . .	125
19	Desserts and Other Sweet Dishes . . . . .	133
20	Pies . . . . .	143
21	Pizza . . . . .	149
22	Fruit Cakes and Other Christmas Pastries . . . . .	155
23	From the East to the South . . . . .	165
24	The Potato Feast . . . . .	171
25	Where the Asparagus Grows . . . . .	181
26	Washing and Healing . . . . .	183
	<hr/>	
	Epilog . . . . .	187
	Index . . . . .	191



# 1 Breakfast 1925

This is not just another cookbook, it is somewhat of a biography, beginning with my very first impressions of food and of eating. It is also a reminiscence of my grandmother, a petite, work and care-worn, and extremely frugal, farmer's wife, at whose side I spent most of my early childhood, or, with the retrospect and respect that comes with maturity, at whose side I was privileged to spend my early years. And, although every recipe in here is still in frequent use, it is not so much a "how-to" book, as a "how they used to do it book", back when times were hard and kitchens quite primitive.

My very first memory of food, and of eating, is a dish I never cooked, nor, for that matter, would ever eat. The dish was called "Eggfish", and grandmother prepared it every evening (except Saturdays) for grandfather. Grandmother would add an egg to some water to which she had added some vinegar and a little salt. Then she would add some cream and some chopped chives. "Chives" was my magic word because, even as a very little girl, I was allowed to go and fetch them from the garden. In the spring chives would grow wild under the "sowpear tree", a pear tree that I thought even then, ancient and mighty, and whose small fruit, if it wasn't just the right ripeness, was quite inedible (i.e., fit only for pigs). Once the pears achieved the right maturity, however, they tasted much better than even the best hybrid pears. The terrain where this tree still stands slopes slightly, and there at age 10, did I first attempt to learn to ride a bicycle. In the fall everyone would find a reason to go past the tree to enjoy some of the fruit, and it was a sad year when it didn't bear much fruit. In late winter the women would chop kindling "Wied" [pronounced "weed"], the small branches of felled trees, and other forest undergrowth, under that tree because the snow would melt there before anywhere else, and where, under the insulating layer of the as yet uncut kindling stored there, the first wild chives would poke their heads through in early spring, right after the snowdrops had made their appearance.

*You have two hands with which to labor  
but only one mouth with which to savor.*

When I was a little girl, there wasn't a whole lot of variety in daily fare. Mornings we always had "Sour Soup". For this, on the evening before grandfather would cut and dice some stale bread. The quality of the sour

soup was entirely a function of the cook's generosity, namely, how much cream she would, in the end, bring herself to add to the soup.

### ◇ Sour Soup

Add a little salt and some caraway seeds (whole or ground) to about 1 quart (1 liter) of water, and bring to a boil. Stir 1 heaped teaspoon of flour into some cold water and add to the boiling liquid, stirring all the time. Add a generous amount of cream and pour the hot soup over the diced bread (serves 4).

Most often the soup would be served with potatoes that had been baked in the oven. Sour soup tastes even better if instead of water the cook uses whey (a waste product of cottage cheese making), or, still better, if buttermilk or soured milk is used. I'm told there were farms where the Sour Soup had quite a greenish and anemic tinge because the cook skimmed too much on the cream. Surely, those were the farms where the farmer's family and the hired help did not eat at the same time or at the same table.

What we call breakfast nowadays was not eaten right after getting up. There was much work, such as the milking of the cows and feeding of the stock to be done before breakfast. When I had to go to school I would get my soup earlier than anyone else because I had to start my long walk to school no later than 6:45 am. In the wintertime grandmother would cook my soup by the dim light of a burning wood taper, the big kerosene lamp was put in one of the windows so its light would (just barely) illuminate the farmyard. The dairy and horse barns were quite dimly illuminated with hurricane lamps. In the winter it wasn't only the humans that got a warm breakfast, the cows and pigs, also got a warm "drink". This was done by finely chopping beets and rutabagas the day before, then in the morning pouring boiling water over them in a wooden bucket. After adding some bran the steaming fodder was carried by two people into the barn. In the summer everyone would get up at 2:30 in the morning because fresh grass had to be mowed before the milking and other barn chores. Then, breakfast would consist of an especially powerful

◇ **Schmarrn**<sup>1</sup>

*Ingredients* (per person):

1 heaped tablespoon wheat flour,  
1 egg, salt,  
enough milk to make a runny dough (water may be used  
instead of milk),  
Drawn butter.

Blend all the ingredients thoroughly. For best results let the dough stand for a while to let the flour swell up. Heat the drawn butter in a pan, add dough to make a layer of about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch (1 cm), fry the dough lightly, turning it frequently with a spatula. Tear the frying dough into small pieces, and finish frying it to the brownness and crispness desired. Dust with powdered sugar and serve.

Since my grandmother was always firmly convinced that I would surely starve to death one day, and because she, probably correctly, realized that the standard heavy fare was not entirely suited for someone as small as me, she would cook special dishes for me, such as for example Bread Schmarrn or Semolina Schmarrn:

◇ **Bread Schmarrn**

*Ingredients:*

day-old white bread, diced  
per 2 persons: 1 egg,  
milk, salt,  
butter or drawn butter,  
Powdered sugar.

Mix the milk, egg and salt, soak the diced bread in the mixture; heat the butter in a shallow pan, add the bread/milk mix and bake, turning frequently, until light brown all over. Dust with powdered sugar and serve.

---

<sup>1</sup>The word “Schmarrn” defies translation. Schmarrn means a mere nothing, a trifling thing—no, not a Trifle, as the term is used in England. A Schmarrn can be a favor denied, it can be what one has left after a stock ‘tanks’ on the stock market. In culinary terms, however, a Schmarrn can be a quite ordinary meal, or it can be a great delicacy, as evidenced by the most noble of all Schmarrns—the “Kaiserschmarrn”—, so named after it was served to the Austrian emperor, who apparently much enjoyed it.

◇ **Semolina Schmarrn (Grießschmarrn)**

*Ingredients* (per person):

ca.  $\frac{1}{4}$  ounce (20 g) butter or drawn butter,  
2 ounces (50 g) semolina, the coarser, the better,  
salt, 4 ounces milk.

Heat the butter and semolina in the oven, but do not brown, season lightly with salt, add the milk, bring to a boil, then let steep either in the oven or (very carefully) on the stove top. Loosen and break up the mix with a spatula, dust with powdered sugar and serve. For even better Schmarrn, add some raisins before steeping.

Another of grandmother's offerings was

◇ **Children's Mush,**

which is prepared by simply stirring some flour into cold milk, then adding that blend to some boiling milk.

Grandmother often went to all this trouble in vain; because when the dish was ready she would call me and call me—I wouldn't show up because back then I always seemed too busy to be hungry.