

Aunty Sylvie's Sponge

Foodmaking, Cookbooks and Nostalgia

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Why does foodmaking matter? Largely because it holds within it so much of everyday life, thought and activity across time, place and generation. This article explores women's embodied foodmaking knowledge as 'thoughtful practice' with a pinch of 'anxious practice'.¹ It begins with a brief biography of my Aunty Sylvie and my mother, and then relates a story that illustrates intergenerational recipe sharing and baking knowledge. In doing so it examines cookbooks as a form of nostalgia and explores aspects of gustatory nostalgia in the creation of 'manuscript' cookbooks and their variation in the twenty-first century. It also reconstructs, in part, the history of a family—of sisters, aunts, grandmothers, mothers, daughters—told through cookbooks and, in particular, a recipe for sponge cake. In using a particular recipe I seek to produce a nuanced argument that illustrates the complexity of intergenerational recipe sharing via the triangulation of aunt, mother, daughter. It also shows the acquisition of a 'thoughtful practice' intertwined with 'anxious practice' across the generations.

My grandmothers were bakers of bread and of cakes. My mother and my aunts are bakers. I bake occasionally. This (mostly) matrilineal and intergenerational baking is one that holds the women of my family together. Many recipes have been shared over the years between my mother and her sisters and with her mother and mother-in-law. I have also slowly begun to write down my mother's recipes. She has homemade cookbooks filled with recipes cut from newspapers and magazines and many written in her own handwriting. I have one of my grandmother's manuscript recipe books—the recipes are written in my grandmother's handwriting as well as the script of my mother, the next door neighbour, friends and even my own 12-year old's printing, each letter separate and clear. In 2010 my Aunty Sylvie self-published a cookbook, *A Lifetime of Cooking: Compiled with love by Sylvia Harris for all her family to enjoy*. It contained a number of her recipes, photos and memoir snapshots—a gift to her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.² It was also a gift to her sisters, one of whom is my mother. My mother features prominently in the cookbook as a baker and a sister, in recipes and photos—they have shared a life of cooking together. Cooking is one of the strengths of the women in my family. It represents solidarity, the continuity of family across time and place.

My cooking apprenticeship began when I was four or five, maybe earlier. I watched my mother baking cakes and slices, but my earliest memories are of my paternal grandmother baking bread and Anzac biscuits.³ I sat on a stool or the bench and watched. At that age I was able to stir the flour with the bicarbonate soda and baking powder, an easy job. If a cake or slice was being made I would have been able to lick the bowl. As I got older I was able to break eggs into the mixture, sift the flour, cream the butter and sugar and add other more exotic ingredients depending on the cake or slice being made. My mother or grandmother would have been by my side throughout the exercise, guiding my hands, talking to me about the texture of the ingredients, describing what they should feel like and look like: 'the creamed butter and sugar should feel like breadcrumbs', 'when you add the milk to the flour it will have a consistency like glue', 'beat the eggs until they are stiff and stick to the beaters'. This knowledge only comes from doing—knowledge and practice that philosopher Lisa Heldke calls 'thoughtful practice'.⁴ It is here that subject and object become blurred, they are imbricated and intertwined in particular foodmaking activities; for example, in kneading bread: 'kneading is an essential part of the

theoretical-and-practical process of making bread—a part in which subjects' and objects' boundaries necessarily meet, touch and overlap'.⁵ Such thoughtful practice is implicit to my aunt, my mother and my grandmothers. It has also become implicit in my own foodmaking, although my own practice is perhaps better represented by Luce Giard's notion of 'anxious practice'.⁶

Women's cooking knowledge has increasingly been valued in scholarship over the past twenty-five years. Writers such as Lisa Heldke, Jean Duruz, Susan Leonardi and Janet Theophano have argued that women's foodmaking knowledge, cookbooks and recipes have epistemological value; they are not just didactic.⁷ My mother's scrapbooks, the recipe book of my grandmother, Aunty Sylvie's self-published cookbook are all symbols of family and cultural knowledge. They tell us much more than just how to cook. The recipe books are a record of daily life and tell stories that acknowledge women's work and women's writing. *A Lifetime of Cooking* is no exception.

This article examines the relationship between my aunt, my mother and myself to elaborate on the importance of aunts, mothers and daughters in recipe sharing. Such a triangular relationship has not been extensively explored through cookbooks or cooking memoirs, but there are some precedents. A recent example of a cookbook which foregrounds the relationship between grandmother, mother, aunts and daughter is Nouha Taouk's *Whispers from a Lebanese Kitchen*.⁸ In this commercially produced cookbook each chapter opens with the story of the main character, an aunt, grandmother and mother of Taouk. Taouk is present in the discussion but she does not have a dedicated chapter for her own cooking practice. The importance of Taouk's cookbook is in its use of memoir, nostalgia and intergenerational recipe sharing.

Here, I emphasise the importance of nostalgia in two registers. Hage describes a 'positive nostalgia', defined as 'a memory of a past experience imagined from the standpoint of the present'.⁹ Positive nostalgia is defined experientially, temporally and spatially. The latter is also the main point of difference for Alison Blunt's conceptualisation of 'productive nostalgia'.¹⁰ Whereas nostalgia is primarily theorised as a return to a particular time, often childhood, Hage and Blunt both foreground the spatial importance of nostalgic remembering. The sponge cake elicits a positive nostalgia in experiential, temporal and spatial terms because in the recipe

for the sponge, in the cooking of the sponge and the eating of the sponge I am transported to a time and place that is evocative of my aunt's kitchen or my mother's kitchen. Importantly, Hage also prioritises the present. Positive nostalgia relies on taking opportunities in the present; implicitly, the past is acknowledged. The sponge does not represent a return to the past; it is a sensory experience that connects past, present and future, aunt, mother and daughter. Aunty Sylvie continues to make sponges, as does my mother, as part of their foodmaking repertoire. Although the sponge has nostalgic resonances it has also become part of my current foodmaking practice. Such 'polytemporality'—the movement of food memory between past, present and future—is a feature of Sutton's discussion of memory and the senses.¹¹ A productive or positive nostalgia also relies on polytemporality.

The second register in which nostalgia is understood is Elizabeth Wilson's notion of ambivalent nostalgia, which links directly to women's cooking.¹² My aunt pre-empts any feelings of inadequacy that her grandchildren or, in my case, her niece, might feel: she reassures, she tells of her own inadequacy when she first started cooking and also relates her own feelings of anxiety.¹³ This ambivalent sense of nostalgia is closely related to Giard's notion of 'anxious' practice, whereby women fulfil their domestic role of cooking but are not always confident about their skills and practice. In previous work I have discussed the tension between gendered roles and women's expectations about their ability.¹⁴ Many women experience a trial and error period, as did Aunty Sylvie, but it is not this earlier anxious practice that *A Lifetime of Cooking* is returning us to through the use of nostalgic foodmaking. Rather, it returns us to the recognition of women's skills: valued, learned and practised. In this way, *A Lifetime of Cooking* also exemplifies Heldke's concept of thoughtful practice.

—A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

I am writing this article at the kitchen table—a one hundred-year-old pinewood stretcher table from Western Australia—in the kitchen of the house in North Fitzroy where I live with my partner and a friend. The table came with me from Perth where, up until 2009, I had lived. My mother and Aunty Sylvie have lived their lives in Perth and Gingin (a small country town 84 kilometres north of Perth). The specific locality that my aunt lived in is called Beermullah, about 15 kilometres out

of Gingin (now she is aging she lives in the township). My aunt moved to Beermullah from Perth when she married a farmer, Ron Harris. They had a lot in common—they had the same surname and the same birthday (although four years apart). He also came from a large family. My aunt is the eldest of seven children, my mother is the youngest sibling with a fourteen-year age difference between them. Auntie Sylvie and Uncle Ron married when my mother was six years old. There is family folklore that my mother once answered the front door of my grandmother's house and told Uncle Ron that her mother (my grandmother) didn't like him, and neither did she! He became my mother's favourite brother-in-law, and he was my favourite uncle. My mother spent a lot of time at my aunt's house on school holidays, often catching the bus from Perth when she was a teenager to visit and keep my aunt company. Later she would visit when she was on holidays from work. It was on one of these holidays at the age of nineteen that my mother met the local schoolteacher.

My aunt and uncle had two children, a son and daughter, whom my father taught at Beermullah School. It is because of the Beermullah School that my mother and father's lives intersected and as a result my brother and I came to be. My father was regularly invited to my aunt and uncle's house for Wednesday night dinner; this is how he met my mother. It could be said that cooking brought my mother and father together.

—TWO RECIPES FOR SPONGE CAKE—OR HOW TO BAKE A SPONGE

Mum's sponge

* pre-heat oven to 170° C fan-forced (180° C normal) electric oven

Ingredients

4 extra large eggs (67g) room temperature

¾ cup caster sugar

½ cup cornflour

½ cup custard powder

1 tsp cream of tartar

½ tsp carb. soda

Method

1. Custard powder, cornflour, cream of tartar and carb soda—sift together **4 times**.

2. Separate eggs. On high beat egg whites until firm.
3. Add caster sugar to egg whites and beat on high for **8 minutes**.
4. During 8 minutes—grease pans and line bottom with baking paper. Dust around sides with cornflour.
5. Reduce speed to low (level 2 or 3); add egg yolks one at a time, until combined with sugar and egg whites. Beat for **3 minutes** on low.
6. Remove mixture from beaters; add dry ingredients to mixture.
7. Use a metal spoon to mix flour into the mixture. Gently. When combined, beat **fast**, 50 times. (Make sure you count to 50)
8. Spread evenly into sandwich tins (8 inches; 20 cms). No air bubbles—if so, use metal spoon and tap on the outside of the tin to remove bubbles.
9. Put into oven for 20 minutes. **DO NOT OPEN DOOR.**
10. Cooked when cake begins to come away/shrink from sides. Can test with skewer after 20 minutes.
11. Take out; place on wire rack in tin.
12. After a few minutes, remove from tin, rest on wire rack, then turn over to make pattern (cross-hatch pattern from the wire rack).

To make up

1 sponge—cut in middle; cream on one side, jam on the other. Join together.

2 sponges—layer cream and jam and then place together.

Dust with icing sugar.

The recipe above has been handed down from Aunty Sylvie to my mother and now from my mother to me. The recipe in my aunt's cookbook, *A Lifetime of Cooking*, is slightly different. It is the second recipe in the book (after scones) and has all the same ingredients, with the addition of a teaspoon of vanilla and a pinch of salt. The method is substantially shorter, perhaps written for more experienced or confident cooks. Aunty Sylvie writes:

Beat the whites of eggs with salt on electric beater. When stiff add yolks and vanilla, beat till light and fluffy.

Remove from beater and add sifted flour.

Fold in flour gradually to start with, then give a good hard whip. Turn into 2 greased and floured tins 8" x 2" high.

Cook on middle shelf of stove. Cook for 25 mins roughly in a moderate oven.

Cooking time varies a little from 20 to 25 mins.¹⁵

The relationship between the recipe giver and receiver assumes a certain level of knowledge. Heldke addresses this relationship in her article 'Recipes for Theory Making'. Specifically, she suggests:

In assessing the flexibility of a recipe/theory, it's often important to consider its source—the person or institution from whom I received the recipe. Why has s/he given the instructions the way s/he has? Is it really necessary that I do step B before proceeding to step C? If my mom gave me a recipe, she's no doubt stripped the instructions to the bare minimum, even leaving out steps she knows I'll know to do.¹⁶

It is clear from Auntie Sylvie's method that she has assumed knowledge on the part of the receivers of the recipe. This would not be a difficult recipe for my mum, my other aunts or cousins, or women of a similar age. However, the assumed knowledge of younger generations of Auntie Sylvie's great-grandchildren cannot be taken as a given. It is a more difficult recipe to follow than the one given to me by my mother, who knows that I am not so confident in my baking. Heldke further suggests:

when [I] receive a recipe, the more I know about the recipe giver, the better the position I'll be in to assess the relevance *for me* of their instructions. And, when I'm in the position of giving out recipes, the more I take into account my recipient, the more I attempt to give information that is sensitive to their level of experience, the better off my recipient will be.¹⁷

This was certainly the case when my mother gave me her sponge recipe. I asked my mother to give me the recipe in 2009, the week before I left Perth permanently to live in Melbourne. We had a 'cooking lesson' before I wrote the recipe down. There are strict instructions about how to make the sponge, also particularly strict ways of doing indicated by the instructions in bold type in the recipe for 'Mum's sponge'. The cooking lesson involved my mother telling and showing me how to make the sponge,

but importantly, me ‘doing’. As with all good cooks she knew that I would only learn by doing.

Heldke would describe this as ‘thoughtful practice’, where learning to read recipes, cooking and the interrelationship between the recipe and the cook ‘merges the theoretical and the practical’.¹⁸ In this sense, Heldke contends that foodmaking can be regarded as a ‘thoughtful practice’ because it is the place where practice and theory converge.¹⁹ Rather than a hierarchical, dualistic separation of knowledge in which theory is privileged over practice, the theory and practice of foodmaking is relational: practice is informed by theory, which is altered through practice. Foodmaking is a “‘mentally manual” activity’, or ‘a “theoretically practical” activity’.²⁰

The idea of Heldke’s ‘thoughtful practice’ is implicit in my mother’s instructions to me, both in the ‘doing and the writing/thinking’. It is typical of my mother that she would explain the method to me in such detail to assist me with the recipe—she knows I am a nervous baker. My foodmaking practice especially around baking is more closely aligned with Giard’s ‘anxious practice’. I like baking but I am nervous and ‘worry’ about mixing the ingredients correctly to ensure the best results.²¹ I need my mother’s reassurance; the detailed instructions are her way of letting me know that she is in the kitchen with me watching over me. We learn to bake by slow apprenticeship. We watch, we learn to break eggs and to separate them, to sift flour, to cream butter and sugar, we stir, we learn to fold, we learn to beat, we learn to use the oven—and there is a difference between wood, gas and electric, not all heat sources are the same, as Aunty Sylvie attests (see below).

Cake recipes require practical and theoretical baking knowledge. The difference in method from my aunt’s sponge cake recipe to the one given to me by my mother represents how different levels of such knowledge can be catered for. However, other recipes in *A Lifetime of Cooking* also show an assumed knowledge about baking. For example, in the ‘Cream Powder Puffs’ recipe, my aunt writes in the method—‘Beat eggs and sugar similar to a sponge’.²² The next instruction is to ‘add flour and rising, mix lightly’. She does not elaborate on how to beat eggs and sugar, for how long, with what utensil or appliance. It is assumed that such knowledge will have already been acquired. There is a solution to this omission (for the inexperienced cook): return to the sponge cake recipe on page three and read how to beat the eggs and sugar. However, the sponge recipe forgets to include sugar in

the method. It reads: 'Beat the whites of eggs with salt, on electric beater. When stiff add yolks and vanilla, beat till light and fluffy'. Although an oversight in the original handwritten recipe, the recipe relies on the reader to know that the egg whites should be beaten with the caster sugar first in order for the first stage of the sponge batter to work, then the egg yolks should be added. It also assumes that the reader will know that the same order is necessary to make the cream powder puffs (beat egg whites first, then add egg yolks).

Susan Leonardi addresses such assumed knowledge in her groundbreaking article, 'Recipes for Reading: Summer Pasta, Lobster à la Riseholme and Key Lime Pie'.²³ Leonardi's article established that recipes and cookbooks have epistemological and literary integrity and credibility. While discussing the introduction to the *Joy of Cooking*, Leonardi suggests that the author, Irma Rombauer, assumes a certain level of cooking knowledge on the part of the reader. Leonardi describes this as 'recipe shorthand'.²⁴ Aunty Sylvie also uses recipe shorthand as demonstrated in the cream powder puffs recipe.

Many of the recipes in *A Lifetime of Cooking* have hints for 'best cooking': which shelf of the oven to place a cake, timing, mixing and ingredient substitution. Aunty Sylvie's text provides gentle support for her readers—it is as if she is in the kitchen with us. In the 'Apple Pie' recipe, for example, she encourages the cook to continue with the recipe even if it does not work the first time. She writes:

This pastry can be hard to roll out without breaking, especially in summer.

But keep trying you will master it. Sometimes I just put pastry on top of pie, it's easier.

Good Luck.²⁵

Leonardi contends that like its Latin root, *recipere*, 'a recipe implies an exchange, a giver and a receiver. Like a story, a recipe needs a recommendation, a context, a point, a reason to be. A recipe is, then, an embedded discourse'.²⁶

As Leonardi suggests, a recipe (and a cookbook) tells a story, or multiple stories. The recipe my mother gave me is a slight variation on my aunt's—the method given to me is more precise and instructional. This is because my mother knows that I am not a confident baker (I am an anxious baker). The story of the recipe then is not just how to cook a sponge, it is about the relationship between my mother and me; it is about continuing a tradition of sponge making in my family; and

it is about the life history of my aunt and mother. *A Lifetime of Cooking* is the story of three generations of women with the fourth generation written in as the participatory audience who may or may not use the recipes and cookbook. This is the 'reason to be'.

—GUSTATORY NOSTALGIA

In his article 'Food and Memory', Jon Holtzman considers various prevailing relationships between food and memory in a number of anthropological studies, one of which is the role of food in 'nostalgia' texts.²⁷ In a section entitled 'Gustatory nostalgia, experienced and invented', he articulates the relationship between food, memory and nostalgia, suggesting that as a form of memory, "nostalgia" has several different senses, generally and in respect to food'.²⁸ He contends that different food writing genres use textual devices to invoke or convey gustatory nostalgia, for example, using 'sentimentality for a lost past' in which food is viewed 'as a vehicle for recollections of childhood and family'. Further examples include food as the lens through which family histories are told, food-centred memoirs, childhood nostalgia and also 'armchair nostalgia', a phrase borrowed from Appadurai to mean a 'longing for times and places that one has never experienced'.²⁹ The telling of family history through food—in this case, a sponge cake—is what I am doing in this article, as well as what Aunt Sylvie did in *A Lifetime of Cooking*.

Holtzman questions why food is such a significant site of memory, suggesting that the 'sensuality of eating transmits powerful mnemonic cues, principally, through smells and tastes'.³⁰ He further explains that food 'offers a potential window into forms of memory that are more heteroglossic, ambivalent, layered, and textured'. It is this sense of memory and its relationship to food for which the use of gustatory nostalgia is insightful.

For me, the eating of sponge cake made by my mother or my aunt immediately transcends time and place and returns me to a comforting childhood and, now that I live in Melbourne, to the place of my family.³¹ In a broader sense, one could argue that knowing how to bake a sponge also admits one into an Australian women's cooking tradition.

The sponge has a long tradition in British and Australian cuisine; it connects the two.³² Barbara Santich in *Looking for Flavour* discusses the British origins of sponge,

its inclusion in Australia's first cookery book, *The English and Australian Cookery Book* by Edward Abbott (1864), and the adoption of the sponge as integral to Australian cuisine. 'One particular kind of cake became more Australian than the rest: the high and handsome sponge. Even higher on its cut-glass pedestal, it was the supreme symbol of the afternoon tea table'.³³ Santich lists a variety of sponges from 'blowaway sponge', the 'neverfail sponge' and the 'cornflour sponge' including many hints at how to make the perfect sponge: use 'duck eggs' use 'day-old eggs', 'make sure you sift the flour three times'. She suggests that 'sponge-making was elevated to an art form' and that rather than the ingredients and recipe it was actually the 'hands that made it that ensured success'.³⁴ Hands have always been a part of sponge making success in my family. My aunt is said to have the 'lightest' hands in the family.

Such variations of type and folklore are still central to sponge making. The 2011 Country Women's Association (CWA) *Classics* cookbook includes seven recipes for sponges, including a 'Never-miss Sponge Cake' recipe.³⁵ Aunty Sylvie was also a member of the CWA in rural Western Australia, first at the Gingin branch. When this closed because of low membership, after more than fifty years operation, she moved to the neighbouring Bindoon branch. She has been a member of the CWA for over fifty years herself. She had a reputation for her sponges, sometimes made with jam and cream and dusted with icing sugar, and often made with cream and passionfruit icing (from passionfruit grown on her own vines). She observes in *A Lifetime of Cooking* that she made many lifelong friends at the CWA and that at CWA regional events 'cooking was considered very competitive and much fun'.³⁶ There is folklore in my family too about the skill of Aunty Sylvie as a baker; my mother still insists that her sponges are not as 'light and fluffy' as Aunty Sylvie's.

Holtzman's further point about memory being 'layered, textured, ambivalent and heteroglossic' connects well to the frame of nostalgia.³⁷ I am using nostalgia in a productive sense, and follow Rubenstein who defines nostalgia as 'the expression of yearning for an earlier time or place ... in one's past history, the memory and significance of which ... contributes to the sense of the self in the present moment'.³⁸ Similarly, a positive nostalgia does not desire a return to a lost home, place or, in this case, kitchen (or cookbook) but desires to connect the past with the present, providing a basis for the imagining of future possibilities. In this sense, the future

possibilities relate to my own mastery of sponge baking and the transmission of the recipe to my daughter, the next generation. For my aunt, gustatory nostalgia is layered, textured and heteroglossic. Sometimes it is ambivalent, especially when she discusses her cooking life.³⁹

A Lifetime of Cooking opens with a vignette of Aunty Sylvie's cooking life—it connects the mid-1940s, when she and Ron married, to the twenty-first century:

I have always liked cooking but it wasn't until after I was married that I really learned to cook (in a camp oven at first). My efforts weren't always a great success, but with patience and practice I learnt to master most things.

I made all my own bread by hand which wasn't quite so easy as it is today with bread makers. However, we never starved and there was generally something for a meal.

You can imagine my joy when I became the proud owner of a Metters No 2. wood stove. To cook in that wood stove was an absolute dream. No more ashes falling into whatever I was cooking, whenever I lifted the lid of the camp oven. Once I mastered the temperature of the stove it was a breeze.

Cooking utensils were pretty basic but it's marvellous what you can manage without when you have to. I have loved cooking all my life and sharing food with family and friends.

Ron was so good to cook for as he liked almost everything. A couple of things he hated was [*sic*] pumpkin pie, baked beans and brussels sprouts. Probably the things he liked the best were a baked meal and apple pie and cream. If I was away for the day he would always have a saucepan of potatoes cooking when I got home.

To all my family, I hope you get some enjoyment from my gift to you.
Happy cooking!⁴⁰

This snapshot (which I have quoted in full) not only provides an example of Holtzman's understanding of gustatory nostalgia, it also connects back to the themes raised by Heldke. The vignette parallels explicitly Heldke's insistence that foodmaking is a thoughtful practice. It is possible here to glimpse Aunty Sylvie's

daily cooking activities, her love of cooking, the trial and error of early cooking attempts and the changes in cooking technology over the past sixty years.⁴¹

Cooking technologies matter; they enable as well as disable. The Metters wood stove transformed my aunt's cooking life.⁴² No longer did ash fall into her meals, and the ability to control the oven temperature, even if only through three measurements, 'cool, moderate and hot', was a vast improvement on the relatively invariant temperature of the camp oven fire. She still practised the 'feel' method for determining oven temperature and this judgement is an exemplar for thoughtful practice about foodmaking. Through knowledge and practice of foodmaking, cooking temperatures can be determined. Knowledge of the wood-burning stove including the amount of wood necessary; how much air to admit or let out in the flues, and what cooking time was necessary for successful foodmaking. Because wood stoves were often inaccurate in temperature, the 'sense' of heat was how women gauged the 'correct' cooking temperature. Luxton provides an example: 'If you wanted to cook muffins you stoked up the fire then stuck your hand in and started counting. If you got to eight before it got too hot to stand it, it was right for muffins. Bread was six and pies were ten.'⁴³ My aunt and my grandmother used a similar method with their ovens. I have vivid childhood memories of watching my grandmother 'measure' the oven temperature.

Often Aunty Sylvie's recipes explicitly reflect the changes in cooking technology. This is evident in her two recipes for 'Mock Chicken'.⁴⁴ 'Mock' recipes were common if ingredients were too expensive or not readily available. In these recipes the reader knows that real chicken was not an ingredient. 'Mock' cream is also another common recipe, a substitute for fresh cream.⁴⁵ These recipes are also textually different to all other recipes in the cookbook in that the ingredients are interwoven throughout the method rather than set out separately as became increasingly common in the late twentieth century. Aunty Sylvie writes:

1 oz butter, 1 onion chopped. Fry these lightly in saucepan. Add 2 tomatoes peeled and sliced salt and pepper to flavour. Cook until tomatoes are soft. Then blend in 2 oz soft breadcrumbs, mixing well. Now add 4 oz grated cheese, stir over low heat for couple minutes. Take from *fire* and stir in 2 beaten eggs and a few drops of hot sauce, return to *fire* and stir well until eggs are set. Store in refrig[erator].⁴⁶

Discursively the recipe operates as a narrative of instructions, rather than a list. It is only in the reading of the recipe that one distinguishes what needs to be done and that the fire is not the camp oven fire, but that of the Metters wood stove. It is also quickly apparent that the use of fire distinguishes it from the electric stove that my aunt later had installed.

The recipes in *A Lifetime of Cooking* are predominantly for cakes and slices, the types of food served for celebrations, morning and afternoon tea and desserts; they are more complex than everyday food. Such recipes are generally associated with happy times. They show the skill of the baker, and often women enjoyed baking because it was a respite from everyday cooking. There are twenty-seven recipes in the cookbook. All but five are for cakes, slices, desserts and syrups. The recipes for everyday foods and condiments include 'Little Meat and Potato Pies', 'Mock Chicken', 'Cauliflower Pickle', 'Tomato Sauce', and 'Filling for Bread Cases' (a type of white sauce). It is likely that there are more recipes for cakes and slices because exact measurements are required and thus a recipe has to be followed quite strictly. Women commonly make a distinction between everyday cooking, in which they do not need recipes, and specialty cooking such as cakes, pastries and biscuits where recipes are used.⁴⁷ Most women cook their everyday meals by memory, no longer consulting recipes. It is for this reason I suggest that Aunty Sylvie did not include more recipes for everyday foods in her book. Those that are included are either useful (such as the condiments) or family favourites. The accompanying memoir snapshot for 'Little Meat and Potato Pies' informs the reader that my aunt first tried the 'little pies' in 1948 and that she has continued to make them throughout her life: 'These little pies have been in our family for many, many years. I first tasted them at my Nanna and Pop's fiftieth wedding anniversary, about 1948. They are very tasty.'⁴⁸

In a very direct way *A Lifetime of Cooking* develops intergenerational links and connects the twentieth with the twenty-first century. It reinforces a positive nostalgia and elaborates a gustatory nostalgia. The recipes do not require the reader to cook in a Metters No. 2 wood stove, but the recipes connect us back to a shared time and place with multiple meanings. The cookbook documents recipes and discusses some early cooking attempts, but it does not refer to the often day-to-day drudgery of cooking. It does not elide women's daily work, but concentrates on the

function of food to bring families together. The recipes operate as mnemonic cues that link us to a previous generation of women's foodmaking knowledge—gained in kitchens we would not want to work in today, but which recall a valued aspect of women's everyday lives. The reader gains the best of both kitchen worlds, which, according to Akiko Busch, we desire: 'We want the future in the kitchen, but not at the expense of the past.'⁴⁹

—COOKBOOKS AS NOSTALGIA

Theophano suggests that cookbooks are autobiographical.⁵⁰ As with my aunt's cookbook, there are traces also of my grandmother's life in her manuscript recipe book: my grandmother's recipe book is an autobiographical and intergenerational record of her daily life in the kitchen. Writers such as Trace Marie Kelly have described recipe books like my grandmother's as 'autobiographical cookbooks'.⁵¹ They provide a means of incorporating aspects of a writer's everyday life with cookery writing and recipes.⁵² Manuscript cookbooks, such as my grandmother's, were once commonly passed down through generations; they become texts of nostalgia, documenting the food and daily lives of women in years past. Aunty Sylvie's self-published cookbook, even more than my grandmother's manuscript cookbook, fits comfortably into this genre because of the addition of photographs and explicit memoir snapshots.

Manuscript cookbooks can be likened to scrapbooks. They often include photographs, recipes, poems, newspaper clippings, excerpts from other books, such as the Bible, and other such ephemera.⁵³ By placing these ephemeral items into a manuscript cookbook (or scrapbook) they become durable texts.⁵⁴ Further, as Katriel and Farrell argue, 'scrapbooks represent a ... mode of self-representation ... As autobiographical texts, [they] articulate a sense of coherence and significance.'⁵⁵ This is more evident in Aunty Sylvie's cookbook because it has become a printed, hardback book that can be accessed by not only her family, but also anyone who has access to a computer and a credit card. It is possible for her manuscript cookbook to be published on-demand. The story of her cooking life is now durable, permanent and significant.⁵⁶ It is globally available, but only if you already know about it.

Susan Stewart also discusses the importance of scrapbooks as a type of 'souvenir', contending that scrapbooks do not lend themselves to 'mechanical reproduction'.⁵⁷ She writes:

You cannot make a copy of a scrapbook without being painfully aware that you possess a mere representation of the original. The original will always supplant the copy in a way that is not open to the products of mechanical reproduction ... Because of its connection to biography and its place in constituting the notion of an individual life, the memento becomes emblematic of the worth of that life and of the self's capacity to generate worthiness.⁵⁸

In contrast to Stewart's contention, self-publishing gives authors the opportunity to recreate scrapbooks through mechanical reproduction. This new technology allows such 'souvenirs' and personal mementos to be shared many times over not only with family members (and certainly no longer with just one family member as was the case with traditional scrapbooks), but also with a wider audience. Self-publishing opens up the possibility of a 'professionalisation' of the home cook, making them a cookbook author. Tellingly, Stewart acknowledges the importance of scrapbooks in their capacity to value the self. *A Lifetime of Cooking* demonstrates how valued Aunty Sylvie's foodmaking knowledge is.

A Lifetime of Cooking is also self-representational. It fits into the genre of autobiographical manuscript cookbooks because it is a collection of recipes my aunt used.⁵⁹ Aunty Sylvie has chosen particular recipes that fulfill a specific role—they are recipes she is known for, that she liked to bake and cook, that her husband liked and that evoked certain memories. For example, the memoir that accompanies the recipe for 'Rhubarb champagne' reads: 'This 'brew' has been known to affect the most innocent tea totaller ... Aunty Joyce was famous for this brew and it was shared on many occasions at the McKimmie St, Palmyra, residence of Aunty Joyce and Uncle Fred Wray.'⁶⁰

The use of handwritten recipes, black and white photos and written memoir snapshots in *A Lifetime of Cooking* not only serves the purpose of constructing a sense of self for my aunt. Importantly, the interplay of memory, photographs and recipes elicits readers' own memories of places lived, foods eaten and lives shared.⁶¹

Life writing scholar Jeremy Popkin, following French psychoanalyst Lydia Flem, suggests that Flem's work:

underlines the point that engagement with one's own family and particularly with life-writing documents about them—letters, oral interviews, diaries, and autobiographical writings [and I would suggest cookbooks]—can never be objective and disinterested. It is always bound to stir up strong reactions and to raise questions about one's own relationship to both the relatives concerned and the materials with which one is confronted.⁶²

My reaction to the cookbook reinforces Flem's contention and it took me by surprise. When I first received the book I read it through tears. There are photos of my grandparent's house in East Fremantle, Western Australia, where I lived for a short time as a child, photos of my aunts and uncles, cousins and kitchens which elicited memories of a happy childhood filled with family and food. It is as Jean Duruz suggests a type of 'nostalgic remembering'.⁶³ This is not remembrance commodified; in this case, it is remembrance of cooking, food and family, and perhaps also a type of myth-making within the family, especially of the skill of Aunty Sylvie as a baker. It is central to my mother's (and perhaps even my own) sense of self and her place within her family.

On a recent visit home to Perth I showed my mother Aunty Sylvie's cookbook. She had the same reaction as I did: wonderment and tears. The book is full of memories, more so for my mother than for me, or rather they are different memories. They are memories of her life as a young woman and the times she spent on the farm with her sister. She recalled the building of my aunt and uncle's fibro-cement and iron house in 1947 and 1948, before which they had lived in tents. My uncle built the house himself with only minor help from my maternal great-grandfather and great-uncle Bill. Her comment after reading the book was 'many happy times occurred in that house, many happy memories'. Importantly, she could date the photos and knew where they were taken, at whose wedding or birthday and at whose house. She also recalled the shopping trip with Aunty Sylvie to buy my aunt's outfit for her son's wedding in 1971—not just a dress and shoes, but also gloves and a hat. It was still expected that women would wear a hat and gloves to formal occasions.

The cookbook was designed as a memory keepsake. Aunty Sylvie hoped that the recipes would be used as they serve as a reminder of foods she liked to cook and that she had cooked for her children and grandchildren. In this sense the book creates a community—of family and friends. It is evident that my aunt included recipes given to her by my mother, such as ‘Rich Boiled Fruit Cake’. The recipe indicates it is from ‘Phyl’ (my mother’s name, Phyllis). There are also two recipes from my grandmother, ‘Apple Pie’ and ‘Grandma’s cake’.⁶⁴ My grandmother’s apple pie was a family favourite. On close reading, *A Lifetime of Cooking* draws together four generations of women in my mother’s family: my grandmother, my aunt and my mother, my cousin (my aunt’s daughter) and myself. Theophano suggests:

although the knowledge in cookbooks reflects a collective enterprise, a cookbook also represents the individual woman who created it. When the subsequent reader is a daughter or other descendant, the heir not only has inherited a domain of cultural knowledge about cooking and household recipes but has received a token of her female kin. The bond created by possessing this physical artifact is the means by which members of different generations become entwined with one another.⁶⁵

It is important to remember that because this cookbook is self-published and can be printed on demand (although it must be bought and shipped from the United States) it can be shared many times. It is not limited to one person or one generation—multiple copies exist simultaneously. Further, because it is self-published on the internet, the potential for creating a wider community of readers also becomes possible. The particular, in this way, might also become universal.

—CONCLUSION

The sponge recipe is a carrier for telling a story about my aunt’s life and, also, the stories of other women in my family. It was the beginning point for me to explore the importance of intergenerational recipe sharing, foodmaking and nostalgia. The cookbook in which it is included allowed me to further explore these connections. *A Lifetime of Cooking* draws together four generations of women through the everyday experience of cooking and sharing recipes. The sponge recipe is one of many in the book that evokes nostalgia through its use of black and white photos, handwritten recipes and memoir snapshots. *A Lifetime of Cooking* then becomes an aide-memoire

for my aunt, my mother and myself. For the current generation it also serves as an autobiographical text that relates my aunt's life.

There are a number of reasons why *A Lifetime of Cooking* is important. The recipes in it provide a snapshot of Aunty Sylvie's life. They were chosen because they tell a story about her domestic and family life, about her relationships with her sisters, her daughter and daughter-in-law, her husband and her friends. They also tell other stories about gender relations, domesticity, cooking technology, family relations, everyday life and social life from the mid twentieth century onwards.

Is it a cookbook that will be used? Aunty Sylvie's daughter most certainly has cooked many of the recipes in the book, her daughter-in-law too. My mother has cooked some recipes and I have baked a version of the sponge recipe. It remains to be seen if her grandchildren and great-grandchildren will cook the recipes. Importantly, *A Lifetime of Cooking* tells the story of a family through a collection of much treasured recipes. It is a testament to my aunt's love of cooking and of her family.

The sponge recipe and *A Lifetime of Cooking* show clearly that recipes and cookbooks are much more than a set of instructions. As texts they evoke life histories, recall friends and family, illustrate that foodmaking is a thoughtful, although at times, anxious practice, and in this case, they also tell us how to bake a sponge, the icon which holds this story together.

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—NOTES

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² *A Lifetime of Cooking* was self-published through the online publishing company Blurb.com located in San Francisco, California. One of the interesting things about this cookbook is that my aunt's recipes, photos and memoir snapshots have been published by a US company in hardback format which took three weeks to arrive in Australia, via print-on-demand. This is an example of time-space compression in a globalised world. Thus, my aunt's recipes came to me via an online publishing company based in California, she lives in Gingin, a small regional town in Western Australia and I live in Melbourne. It is perhaps because of this new phenomenon that I now have my aunt's recipes and a memoir of her life. Sylvia Harris, *A Lifetime of Cooking: Compiled with Love by Sylvia Harris for all her Family*, 2010, Blurb.com, accessed/purchased January 2012.

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- ¹³ Harris, p. 1; cf. Giard, 'Doing Cooking'.
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- ¹⁵ Harris, p. 3.
- ¹⁶ Heldke, 'Recipes for Theory Making', pp. 25–6.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ Heldke, 'Foodmaking as a Thoughtful Practice', p. 203.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ Giard.
- ²² Harris, p. 22.
- ²³ Leonardi, pp. 340–7.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 341.
- ²⁵ Harris, p. 23, my emphasis in italics; underline in original.
- ²⁶ Leonardi, p. 340.
- ²⁷ Jon D. Holtzman, 'Food and Memory', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, no. 35, 2006, pp. 361–78.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 367.
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- ³³ Santich, pp. 110–11.
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- ³⁷ Holtzman.
- ³⁸ Roberta Rubinstein, *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women's Fiction*, Palgrave, New York, 2001, p. 13; cf. Hage; Blunt.
- ³⁹ cf. Wilson.
- ⁴⁰ Harris, p. 1. Alongside the opening memoir is a black and white baby photo of Aunty Sylvie resplendent in lacy bonnet and booties.
- ⁴¹ Supski, *'It Was Another Skin'*.

- ⁴² Metters was an Australian stove-making company that manufactured wood-burning and gas stoves.
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- ⁶⁵ Theophano, p. 8.