

Out & About

The Dish: Dining in & Around Sacramento

THIS
MONTH'S
SPOTLIGHT:

Simply Recipes

The Dish

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With a recipe collection that spans over 30 years, **Simply Recipes** really cooks! **Simply Recipes** is an online cookbook (found at <http://www.simplyrecipes.com>) started by **Elise Bauer**. She and her parents prepare delicious and accessible meals and photograph them, frequently updating the website. **Elise** is also a partner in a consulting firm in the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition, she maintains several weblogs in addition to **Simply Recipes** as part of **elise.com**.

Senior Magazine: Please tell me a little about yourself and your parents. How did you come up with the **Simply Recipes** website?

Elise Bauer: My parents, (now in their 70s) are both excellent home cooks. Mom made everything from scratch out of necessity. There were six kids and we all ate a lot (each as much as an adult, according to her). Cooking from scratch was the only way she could afford to feed us all. Mom has always been somewhat of a health nut too; she gave out homemade popcorn for Halloween and the only way any of us kids ever got a **Ding Dong** or a **Twinkie** was if we traded something else for it at school. Whereas many of my friends "got to eat TV dinners" we always had homemade soups, stews, chicken and bread. I had no idea what a blessing this was until years after leaving home.

My father was always interested in cooking and basically learned how to cook from watching mom and asking her a lot of questions. He always used to make us apple coffee cake on Sundays with a streusel topping! About 20 years ago I bought him a subscription to **Gourmet Magazine** which was just the kindling he needed to really get going. He started taking over the holiday meals, spending days studying recipes and preparing elaborate meals for family gatherings. Now that he has retired he does a lot of the day to day cooking. At first mom resisted his muscling in on her kitchen, but I think it finally sunk in that she doesn't have to cook every meal anymore and that's a good thing.

I started the **Simply Recipes** website to help me learn how to cook the way my parents did. Busy with my career in technology I was traveling too much and working too hard to have time to really cook. Once I hit forty I realized it was now or never. I moved back to Sacramento a few years ago after decades in the Bay Area. I spend a lot of time with my parents learning their favorite recipes and trying out new ones. It's a lot of fun to work on a project like this with them.

SM: How do you select the recipes featured on your website?

EB: I mostly look for good, basic recipes of dishes that many Americans would like to eat, but don't necessarily know how to cook. Sometimes we come up with our own recipes, and sometimes we find them in magazines and cookbooks. My father is constantly researching recipes; he has a couple huge binders filled with clippings from years of collecting them. We are scratch cooks, so we avoid recipes that call for pre-made mixes,

and we try to feature recipes on the site using in-season ingredients that are easy to obtain.

SM: What is your favorite dish to prepare?

EB: Mom is a master of soups, dad likes making stews, and I enjoy making jams and jellies.

My favorite recipe that my mother makes is her cheese enchiladas, they're wonderful.

SM: Have you or your parents ever had any funny moments in the kitchen, such as something that turned out horribly wrong?

EB: All the time! Just a couple weeks ago I made some muffins that were so dense and tasteless you could have used them for baseball practice. That was a new recipe I was trying from some cookbook. Turned out to be an awful recipe. But we have a healthy sense of humor about "mistakes". (Our cooking is an ongoing experiment. When something doesn't work out, we laugh about it, figure out what went wrong, learn and move on to the next thing.

SM: What is your oldest recipe and where did you find it? What is the most interesting recipe?

EB: Our oldest recipe is **Hamburger and Macaroni** (please refer to the information box above to find it on the **Simply Recipes** website) which came with my grandmother's electric skillet. It's probably from the 40's. We have this at least once a month. It's easy to make, fast, and delicious. Our most interesting recipe is my dad's **Shrimp Cakes** (link also provided in box above). The mix includes shrimp, cooked sweet potatoes, cilantro, jalapeños, onion, breadcrumbs and spices. It's fabulous.

SM: How can seniors benefit from your website and why would they be interested?



Faces Behind the Food: Elise's Parents, Alice & Tom Bauer.

Visit the **Simply Recipes** website at:

www.simplyrecipes.com

Hamburger and Macaroni

http://www.elise.com/recipes/archives/000123hamburger_and_macaroni.php

Shrimp Cakes

http://www.elise.com/recipes/archives/000302shrimp_cakes.php

EB: When you are retired, you have more time for home cooking, which is what **Simply Recipes** is all about. Cooking is part science and part art. It is a joyful creative act, the results of which you get to eat. There is always something to learn and techniques to improve, perfect for people with active minds and time on their hands.

SM: What have you found to be the most useful tool in the kitchen? Some seniors have limited space in their kitchens and several gadgets are impractical.

EB: A sharp, high quality, well balanced chef's knife is essential. An electric mixer is very useful if you like to bake. A blender is helpful for making smoothies, puréeing soups and making sauces.

SM: In addition to all the tantalizing recipes, I have seen "shopping alerts" on your website. Please tell me about those.

EB: I monitor sales that happen on **Amazon.com**. When I find a good deal on a piece of useful kitchen equipment that I think my readers would like to know about, I write about it on the site. Often the deals are too good to pass up. I've bought a lot of great cookware over the last couple years through these deals—**Le Creuset**, **KitchenAid**, **Cuisinart**, etc. I focus on kitchen essentials like pots, pans, and mixers.

SM: How do you make the food look so good on your site?

EB: Having a good digital camera helps. I use a Canon Rebel with a 50mm lens. With a digital camera you can take as many shots as you like. I typically take 50 photos for every one that ends up on the site. I take shots from different angles and with different backgrounds and then I just pick out the best ones. Lighting is also very important. Whenever possible I take photos during the day, in indirect light. No food styling tricks (like using glue to imitate milk) are used in these photos.

SM: What do you do with all the food you make? Do you find a recipe to prepare and decide it is what you will have for dinner?

EB: We eat it! Preferably while it's still warm. Often we will find a recipe we want to make and that's what we have for dinner.

SM: Do you have a recipe for St. Patrick's Day?

EB: What about **New England Boiled Dinner**? (Recipe found on pg 38.) or log on to http://www.elise.com/recipes/archives/001819_new_england_boiled_dinner.php. It's a classic for **St. Patrick's Day**.

SM: Thanks for all the great information, Elise! Our readers will really enjoy the website and searching the archives for recipe ideas! **SM**

"The Dish" highlights restaurants and interesting food finds in the Sacramento area that have a rich historical significance.