

Black Fly Stew: Wild Maine Recipes
 by Kate Krukowski Gooding
 Northern Solstice Publishing (2007);
 225 pages, \$19.95
 Available in bookstores or at
www.blackflystew.com

Game for the Table

IF A CONTEST WERE HELD for the official Maine State Recipe, it would be tough to choose which dish to enter from Kate Gooding's cookbook, *Black Fly Stew: Wild Maine Recipes*. Bear Bourguignon or Maple Moose Barbecue could be strong contenders. But then one might cave in to the Baby Boomer Whoopie Pies, updated with espresso powder, or Spicy Island Venison, with coconut milk and curry, or perhaps South of the (Canadian) Border Marinade, which the author claims has enough heat to warm you from the inside after shoveling out from a winter storm in "The County."

Gooding's own nominee would be Warm Black Fly Vinaigrette, she said dur-

ing an interview for this magazine. A tasty, not-too-sweet dressing for mixed-greens salad, it was a hit among friends at my house when I served it (until I divulged its name). Fortunately, poppy seeds stand in for the unofficial state bird.

Gooding and her husband live on Mount Desert Island and in Portland. She's been cooking a lot of moose since winning the lottery last year—the moose lottery, that is, the method by which moose-hunting licenses are granted. Thai Moose, Moose and Bar Harbor Stout Chili, and Roasted Walnut and Mushroom Moose Loin are creations that made the cut after repeated testing and tasting by her circle of friends.

Gooding spent every childhood summer in Jackman before moving from Connecticut to Portland 25 years ago and has eaten game most of her life. She avoids eating anything with antibiotics and hormones added, and told me: “Chicken’s not worth eating unless it’s free range.” Her kitchen is kept stocked with game by friends, and by her brother, a Maine Guide.

On game versus commercially available red meat, Gooding told me there’s little comparison. “Other than beef filet or tenderloin,” she said, “red meat tastes bland compared with venison, beaver, elk, bear, caribou, and moose, which are lean and flavorful. Part of their gaminess and taste comes from how the hunter got the animal and how it was then treated. When adrenaline rushes into the meat, it gets tougher. If a deer is shot, and the meat is hung and handled quickly rather than paraded around in warm weather in the back of a truck, it’s tastier.”

I’m a city girl so I had to ask, “Beaver? Really?”

“I usually get beaver in January,” Gooding said, “but I just made beaver stew from one caught in March [we spoke in mid-April] and it has a different flavor. You won’t see beaver on restaurant menus, but it’s not at all tough, depending on how you prepare it. Like all game and poultry, it depends on what they’ve been eating. With duck you can sometimes tell what their last meal was. If they ate a lot of marshy stuff—dirt and greens—they taste almost muddy, but fish makes them taste fishy.”

Gooding recognizes that not everyone has access to wild game. For those who neither hunt nor trap, and don’t know anyone who does, the book suggests “alternate critters” whose meat is appropriate for some of the recipes throughout the book. She also said that buffalo or grass-fed beef can usually be substituted.

At Gooding’s upcoming twentieth annual Winter Solstice Party, she plans to again cook dishes from her book.

Maybe mac-and-cheese with Maine lobster, or cedar-smoked salmon, but then again she might go with rabbit, grilled chicken, wild turkey, or something with a Caribbean tang, such as her Grilled Swordfish with Mango Salsa.

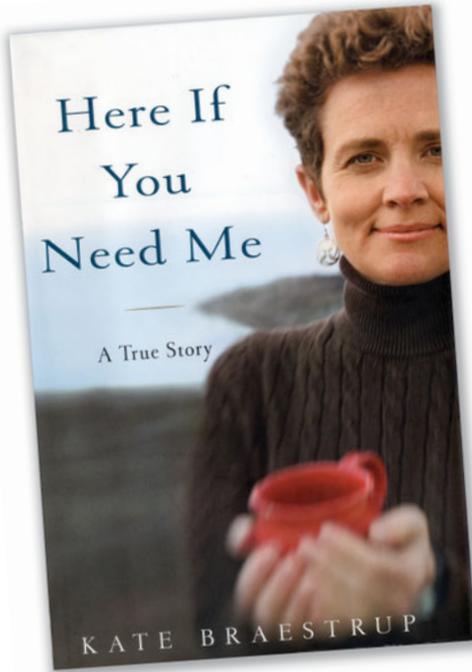
During travels abroad, she always asks about indigenous dishes, then buys the local spices. There is a special section in her book on spices, sauces, and marinades, tucked between a chapter on desserts that are sure to sell at the next fire-station fundraiser and beverages for the next “It’s Five O’Clock Somewhere” celebration.

Nobody had a good recipe for goose, said Gooding, so she created her own. In her Smoked Wild Goose recipe, the bird is soaked for 24 hours in a brine of soy, pineapple juice, garlic, onion, ginger, and sherry, then smoked.

Did I mention her Vietnamese Spring Rolls with Peanut Sauce or the Maple Apple Pie?

— *Janet Mendelsohn*

A Really (Really) Cool Job



Here If You Need Me: A True Story

by *Kate Braestrup*

Little, Brown and Company (2007); 211 pages, hard cover, \$23.95

ALONG WITH THEIR DUTIES protecting fish and wildlife, Maine game wardens search for people who get lost in the woods, are perhaps injured, or meet a worse fate. They traverse steep terrain, scour back roads, enter rock crevices, and dive under water or ice while the missing person's anxious friends and family members wait for news. Their chaplain is Kate Braestrup, and her true story, *Here If You Need Me*, is nothing like the woe-is-me or celebrity-driven memoirs that have lined bookstore shelves in recent years.

"It's so cool that the warden serv-

ice has a chaplain to keep us from freaking out," a frightened mother told Braestrup as searchers combed the woods for her six-year-old daughter who had wandered off while camping.

"Ah," the chaplain replied, "I'm not really here to keep you from freaking out. I'm here to be with you while you freak out," later adding for readers, "or grieve or laugh or suffer or sing. It is a ministry of presence. It is showing up with a loving heart. And it *is* really, really cool."

Braestrup did not grow up religious or even attending church, but she loved and married Drew Griffith,

a Maine state trooper whose career plan was to retire eventually and become a Unitarian Universalist minister. In 1996, an oncoming driver lost control of his truck and crashed into the trooper's cruiser, killing Griffith instantly.

Braestrup, a writer and suddenly single parent of four children, ages 8 to 14, channeled her shock and grief by pursuing her late husband's goal. She enrolled at Bangor Theological Seminary, intent on serving as a chaplain to her late husband's law enforcement comrades.

Instead, after ordination she was assigned to the Maine Warden Service's search-and-rescue missions. The post frequently takes her into the midst of danger and mystery, surrounded by the state's natural splendor.

The wardens are men and women from whom she learns about wildlife, hunting, fishing, and trapping. For 120 of its 125 years, the Maine Warden Ser-

vice managed well without a chaplain; they don't need her, she observes. "I don't make the difference between finding and not finding a body, between order and chaos, life and death. They do." But the wardens seem grateful that she is there. Her greatest contribution, she said, is to be with them, to listen when others need to talk.

As a minister, "My uniformed presence signifies a human and humane understanding on the part of the wardens and the wider community."

Beyond freeing the wardens to search rather than stay with a missing person's family or friends, and unlike a social worker or other professional, she believes that as a minister, "My uniformed presence signifies a human and humane

understanding on the part of the wardens and the wider community that the body in the woods or in the water is not just a practical problem, but a matter of tremendous spiritual significance for those most intimately involved. As a reverend, I can express our reverence."

Braestrup's book is more than well-told stories of her journey from sorrow to scripture to service. There is plenty of drama, and humor, in her vivid accounts. She has an excellent ear for dialogue and can nail a description in just a few sentences to give readers a 3-D picture of the people in her life.

Startlingly honest and never maudlin—she quips that folks can't resist "The Tale of the Plucky Widow"—she overcame immense grief and achieved new happiness, including an openness to fall in love again. As in only the best memoirs, she finds common ground in joining herself with her subjects and her readers.

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Sometimes Braestrup exhibits uncommon inner strength. When her husband died, she chose to bathe and dress his body herself, preparing him for cremation so he would not be “processed” by strangers at the funeral home. Hers was an act of love. When her children, who she notes were raised by two Unitarian Universalists, were skeptical about what she studied at the seminary, their questions nailed some of her own doubts. They helped her find meaning in the teachings and relevance in modern life.

One time an ice fisherman died when his snowmobile fell through a thin patch. Warden Service divers brought him to the surface, where Braestrup knelt beside the body to make the sign of the cross, as the man’s worried wife had taught her along with the Catholic prayers he would have wanted. She was mystified by the sense of communion she

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felt in those actions. When wardens found the body of a young woman viciously murdered by a sexual predator, Braestrup saw a miracle in “the cops with their soft hearts breaking.” As searchers pursued a lost child, she waited with the girl’s parents who told her they are atheists. That makes no difference, she replied. As a mother, and despite her own fears, to give them hope she told them that children who get lost in the woods are smart; they find a snug place to hide safely and sleep. She wanted to be right. This time she was.

There is no blueprint for widowhood, said Kate Braestrup, it changes everything. She became a chaplain because her husband couldn’t. A loving heart pointed her in the right direction.

— *Janet Mendelsohn*

