had received the greatest gift—to pass muster with her was no small feat. (Little did she know that my only domestic talent was in the culinary arena.)

Jeanette, Louise, and Ruth were my role models for rich pound cakes, delicate cheese straws, and billowy lemon meringues. I'm a tinkerer, but I never messed with my baking angels' recipes: They were simple, exceptional, and lovingly passed down. Their time-tested methods, explanations, and memories associated with each recipe were as valuable as the recipes themselves. I learned that fresh, hand-grated coconut was the secret to Gran's famous holiday coconut cake; and how Aunt Ruth's impeccably fried pies depended on apples that were home grown, picked, and dried, encased by a flaky lard dough. It was impressed upon me that the family's definitive cornbread recipe relies not only on full-throttle buttermilk, farm eggs, and fresh stoneground meal, but a well-seasoned skillet and a generous amount of bacon grease.

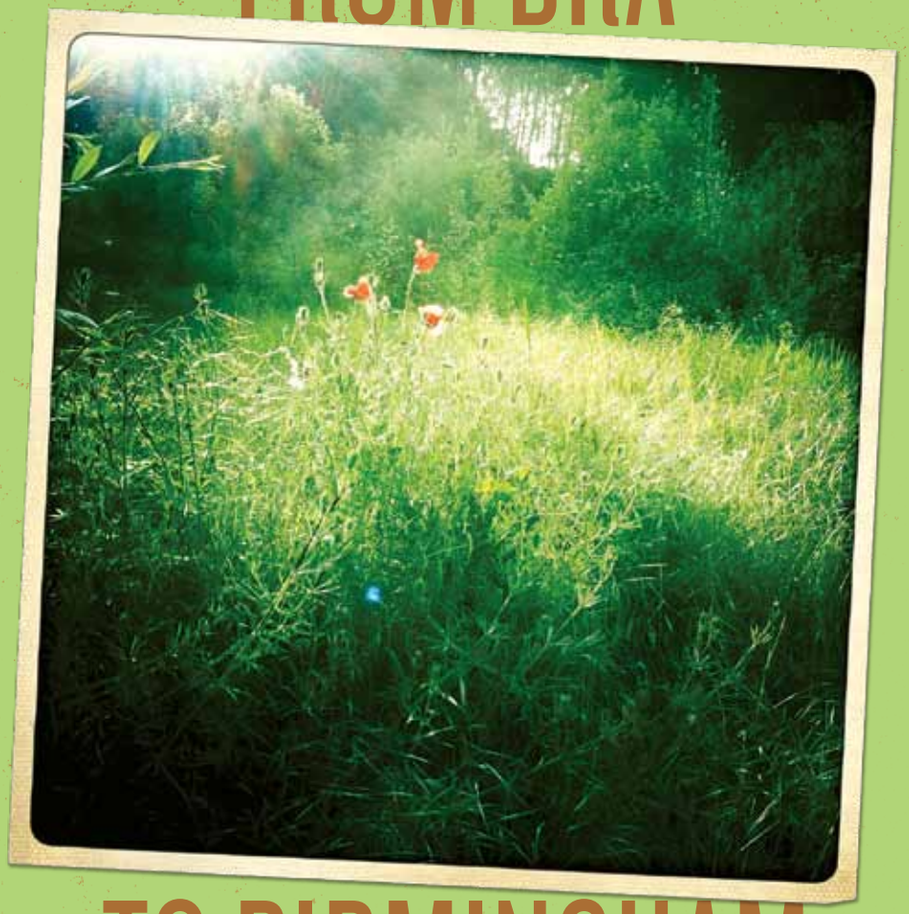
The next generation is in training. My niece Lee has spent the last two Christmas Day mornings at Jeanette's elbow, learning how to replicate her biscuits. My son Gabriel has shown a strong interest in scratch baking, and my granddaughter Kayla has recently asked me to show her how to make bread pudding. I have come to believe that in fact you are what you eat, in that a family's history resides in those passed-down recipes.

My Bubby had little in common with Ben's kinfolk other than the nurturing secret of home baking and how important it is to create a set of food memories for your family. It is not lost on me that the phrase "give me a little sugar" means "show me some love" in the Southern lexicon. Remarkably, I can hear my grandmother saying the same thing in Yiddish: *gib mir a bissel tsuker*. Perhaps, at their hearts, Flatbush and Union Ridge aren't so different after all.

Karen Barker was happily co-proprietor and pastry chef of the Magnolia Grill in Durham, NC (1986–2012). Now, happily, not.

IMAGE, PAGE 2: Gladys Always Put a Rabbit's Foot in Her Apron Pocket When She Made a Meringue, *acrylic on wood (2010), by Amy C. Evans.*

FROM BRA TO BIRMINGHAM



On honeysuckle and going home

by Marie Stitt

IT'S THAT TRANSITIONAL TIME, here in northern Italy, when spring turns summer and flowers open in silent explosions. Lately, on evening runs, I've been thrown off pace by the pollen-thick air. I run through farmland, alongside chestnut trees and poplars, past a small hazelnut grove, a few slopes of vines, an acre of green wheat, a field of violet, and a patch of golden wildflowers.

The wisteria hits me first. A month ago, it was purple and it smelled like a cold glass of Grapico. Now there's a white variety sprawling throughout the trees. When your heart rate is up and you breathe deeply, everything smells more intense. But last weekend, I ran through a wisteria-heavy air pocket and smelled something else—the rich, skull-filling scent of honeysuckle.

I scanned the brush until I found a small patch of flowers. I stepped over some low bushes to reach the blossoms and pulled a few from the branches. I pinched the bottom of a flower and sucked the nectar from the stamen. Honeysuckles aren't really a food, they're more like Christmas lights of fragrance strung up in the green boughs—little olfactory firecrackers.

The smell of those flowers took me back to when I was six years old, living in Alabama. We lived close to the public golf course, and the fence was always draped with honeysuckles in the summer. What makes these flowers intriguing isn't just their taste-smell—direct, sweet, floral—it also has to do with quantity. I'm no economist, but I think the limited supply—one single, sugary drop pulled from a flower, placed on the tongue—somehow increases demand.

We'd gather as many honeysuckles as we could and try to fill a whole mason jar with the flowery juice. We'd spend what seemed like hours extracting the droplets from each flower into the jar. I remember the heft of the glass, the ridged script on the sides of the jar, the sound of metal scraping as I screwed on the band and ring of the top, the holes in the lid—the same jar did double duty for catching lightning bugs. The most nectar we ever collected was probably a tablespoon.

Years later, I returned to Alabama and reunited with my childhood friend Charlie. Charlie has the most smiling eyes you've ever seen. And—fear of stereotypes be damned—he's a farmer who wears plaid, has a beard, makes banjos, and sits on his front porch and plays them. One afternoon he invited a few friends over for biscuits and honeysuckle sorbet. He'd gathered armfuls of blossoms and let them steep in a big pot of sugar and water. He made a honeysuckle syrup, and from that made the sorbet. We sat on the porch, as the biscuits went black in the oven, eating icy flowers. Charlie brought out moonshine in a mason jar. We sat there together, the summer smell of Alabama all around us, green and humid, box fan blowing, eating sorbet out of mugs and passing around the moonshine, another kind of magic unable to be contained in a jar.

Italian gelato bests our ice cream, and porchetta rivals our whole-hog barbecue, but they are merely temporary diversions. The memories I'll always carry with me are the ones that transport me home.

Marie Stitt grew up in various Alabama and South Carolina kitchens before hightailing it to California to stomp grapes. She has recently returned to the South after completing a master's program in Gastronomy in Bra, Italy.
PHOTOS by Marie Stitt.