

As a child you never know what will stay with you throughout the years ahead and end up being just as important to you as an adult. Some people may become lifelong friends, the first book that made you cry may remain a firm favorite, and one recipe may always be fondly remembered, not just for the food it produces, but for the warm memories it conjures up. Such things link us with our past, regardless of how much we change, how far we move away from home, or how much time goes by. Sustaining and supporting us in good times and bad, these connections provide a special kind of comfort—the kind that can only come from a long and happy association.

I close my eyes and return to the kitchen of my childhood home. I'm about 10 years old. The first thing I notice is the scent of melting butter wafting toward me like a perfumed promise of the delights to come. Next, I hear a gentle sizzle as spoonfuls of batter connect with the surface of a hot pan. As the batter cooks, I watch as bubbles appear on the surface, hinting that it's ready to be flipped. With the aid of a spatula and a quick flick of the wrist it's done, and a minute later I'm gobbling down the finished product. This process is repeated until the bowl of liquid batter has been transformed spoon-by-spoon into a plate of delicious pikelets. Well, that's if I'm able to stop myself from eating them as quickly as they're made.

Such is my earliest pikelet memory. Related to the pancake family of treats, pikelets are smaller, lighter, and less sweet. Round in shape, they are normally served as a morning or afternoon

treat, but they can be enjoyed at any time of the day (or night). They are delicious served either warm with butter, or allowed to cool and spread with strawberry jam and whipped cream.

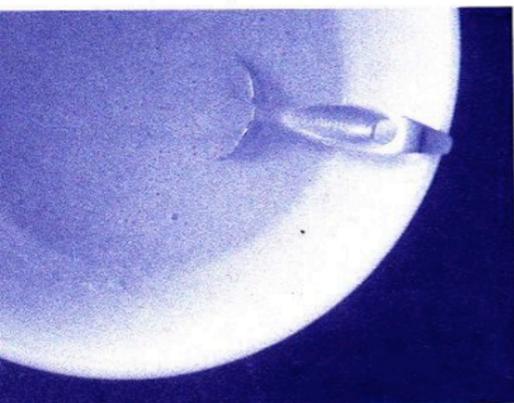
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It was through pikelets that I was first entranced by the magic of home cooking. In discovering that something substantial could be produced by combining certain ingredients in a particular way, and then transforming them by heat, I felt like I'd been introduced to some wonderful form of alchemy. That first pikelet recipe was taken from the pages of an old family cookbook which had an orange paper cover and a spine formed by staples that ran down its left side. It was a book well worn and much knocked about, the combined result of both age and heavy use. The page edges were curled from regular thumbing through, and a few corners were folded to mark the place of favorite recipes like that for Peggy's Pikelets.

I became famous for those soft and plump pikelets—well, at least within the territory of my own family. As my confidence in the kitchen grew, I started to experiment with my pikelet-making skills and I'd occasionally try a different pikelet recipe. However, every one of those alternatives would disappointingly deliver a batch of tough, doughy discs instead of the light and pillowy

versions we all loved. I eventually came to realize that Peggy's Pikelets and I had already become cooking soulmates. We had formed a partnership that was so perfect, there was no need to look further afield; the original could not be improved upon.

While cooking in general is a soothing balm for the complexities and challenges of modern life, for me I turn time and time again to the specific comfort of pikelets. They offer tremendous versatility regardless of the occasion—whether it's to cheer up a sad heart, to fill a plate



when unexpected guests drop by, or to satisfy a passing fancy. They aren't overly demanding in the way some recipes can be, forgiving me if I'm a little less than precise with my measurements or if I take a sneaky shortcut or two. Yet at the same time, making them requires a certain measure of presence and patience; they are not a food that can be walked away from when cooking, or popped away in an oven for a specific amount of time.

Instead a batch of pikelets has me hovering watchfully over the pan, taking care to flip each pikelet at the right moment, and removing them from the

heat once cooked. I particularly like the way that while my hands are kept busy measuring ingredients, mixing the batter, and turning each pikelet, I'm forced to get out of my head and focus instead on the here and now. Unlike a finicky gourmet meal, making pikelets involves nothing too fussy or complicated, it requires no noisy or expensive equipment, and uses the simplest of ingredients. In these ways pikelets become a quiet, contemplative treat that are a pleasure rather than a chore to make.

While the original Peggy's Pikelets recipe was unfortunately lost somewhere over the years, through much trial and error I have created my own version of that favorite recipe. In doing so I feel as if I opened the door to a new collaboration, merging the past with the present, and the old with the new. We may sometimes view our past as an anchor, something which weighs us down and ties us to one place. But given the right medium, memories from our past become a wonderful opportunity for us to form a connection between the person we are today and the person that we used to be.

Thankfully my new recipe produces pikelets that not only taste better than ever, they still manage to calm and provide reassurance in a very special way. They allow me to feel the presence of family members who are no longer here, and in many respects they symbolize how simple the pleasures of life can be. But perhaps most important of all, they remind me that regardless of what the future holds, everything will always turn out just fine. **R**