
The Allen Family

People

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Extract from Statement by Myrtle Allen, at Official Opening of Ballymaloe Cookery School, 1983.

Myrtle Allen

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EXTRACT FROM STATEMENT BY MURTLA ALLEN, BALLYMALOE
RESTAURANT, AT OFFICIAL OPENING OF BALLYMALOE
COOKERY SCHOOL, NOVEMBER 14th, 1983.

The Ballymaloe Cookery School is the latest block built into a little pyramid of farming activities operated by our family. The very fact of having farm land led ^{to} my husband originally, growing all sorts of culinary delights like mushrooms, cucumbers, tomatoes and apples. He also kept the cows that yielded us milk and cream and all the things that Irish land can produce.

With nothing much to hand except these products, along with the locally caught fish and the very good meat of the district, there had to be good food in the farmhouse. As well as this, I personally learnt about fresh food because it always came into me fresh. I would like to suggest that the greatest enemy a gourmet has in the 1980's and onwards is the type of shelf life that most foods are now expected to have. That results in some of the emphasis being taken off freshness. That is a great loss.

Anyway we now have a little cooking school added to the restaurant and farm shop and the hotel aspect of Ballymaloe House, all of which depend basically on our land and perhaps we can make our own contribution to underlining the importance of high quality, fresh ingredients in good cooking.

The simple belief that the very best food in Ireland is actually grown in Ireland, unfortunately is not shared by everybody, but it has been our strength in running the restaurant at Ballymaloe and the principle has won us whatever accolades and awards we have received.

I sometimes think that the best food in France is also grown in Ireland. That is perhaps a little bit of a sweeping statement, but I make it from the experience of running a restaurant, La Ferme Irlandaise in Paris. There are certain Irish materials that I would like to use in my restaurant there which have no equal on the French market. But now, I have to add, with regret, that Ireland is dismally bad at recognising her own best products and getting them to the people who would appreciate them.

I don't mean to be so insular as to say that the food of other countries is not also marvellous but I do say that food, climate and people go together. When we talk about an Irish identity in food, we have such a thing but we must also remember that we belong to a geographical and culinary group with Wales, England and Scotland and we share their traditions as all countries share their traditions with their next-door neighbour.

Of course, one must also say many recipes from France, particularly Northern France, are wonderful when they are made over here in Ireland. The recipes adapt to our food just as their climate is similar to our climate.

It may seem funny, for instance, that if you make Hollandaise Sauce with Irish butter and eggs you get a different sort of Hollandaise Sauce than if you make it with French butter and eggs. I'm sure that it is the butter that is different, not the eggs. So this in its own way, gives us a distinction and an identity. It is different but just as good.

I do hope that the students who go through this school will learn to select and appreciate the best Irish produce wherever it can be found. It is important that those who produce very good produce are recognised for it, otherwise they would go out of business. I could give you a list of such people who go unrecognised and unsung.

I hope the students understand that the most important food is the day-to-day food, that which goes on to the breakfast table and the supper table and the Sunday lunch table for the family every day and that also goes into the factory canteens, the school dining rooms and most certainly into the hotels and restaurants. I'm referring to the best quality potatoes and bread, the best porridge and so on. I hope that they will present our excellent basic material cooked with great care and also style.

Fish

Fresh prawns & lobster bought a week
from Barry's to be cooked simply
on the fish table that same day.

We have the food but we are doing it
no cheese maker in the market
Institute just now when a
he has farmhouse cheeses are
beginning to be popular - the small
quality foods.

Just from Smoketown for Smoketown
one Crook - Dining - last night - still good - need
I could do by restaurant - Paris if
I could not get the first wholesale
flour in - for the Paris
appreciate the fish breakfast.
Completely lost fresh
brown bread.

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to tackle the more sophisticated
meals.

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