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Passing Down the Rolling Pin: Lefse, Memory, and a Norwegian-American Identity

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Introduction

I woke up early one Friday morning in June to the banging of pots and pans echoing down the stairs. At that point, I had been staying with some relatives in Fosston, Minnesota, for three weeks, so I had started to get used to hearing the trudging of feet early in the morning as everyone got up and ready to get going on the farm. But that morning, the *clank, clank, clank,* that reached my room just below the kitchen, reminded me that I would be learning how to make potato *klubb*[1] later in the day.

I had no idea what potato *klubb* were when Terry, my cousin who was hosting me, excitedly suggested that we should make them. She had planned a family party since her daughter was in town and wanted to surprise everyone with a common favorite. So, when I came upstairs that morning, I was not prepared to come face to face with two industrial sized pots and a huge bowl filled to the brim with potatoes that had been left to soak.

Just as we were about to begin, a repairman arrived, so Terry left me alone to begin peeling the potatoes. I was relieved to start with this simple task as it was something I had done before. Yet, I would learn that my relief was naïve. The soaking-wet potatoes were hard to hold onto, and, as I peeled them over the sink, they would slip out of my hands like bars of soap. I let out a frustrated sigh as I dropped another into the growing pile of peels when Paul and Filip, Terry's husband and son, came in from working on the farm to have something to eat. Often teasing me about what I did and did not know about "being Norwegian," I could tell that Filip was trying hard to find something to critique as he haphazardly threw a sandwich together. It was silent except for the peeling for a few minutes when he asked if I had ever had *klubb* before. "No," I told him. "It wasn't something I grew up eating." Looking at me completely aghast, he

[1] *Klubb* is pronounced: kloob. It is sometimes spelled: *klub.*

pointedly asked, “What kind of Norwegian are you?”. Promptly taking another bite of his sandwich, he went back outside.

I learned later that potato *klubb* were bumpy masses of ground potato with a few tiny pieces of meat in the middle. They were grey, and, if I am being honest, they were smelly. Sure, the overflowing river of butter that many people pour on them adds some appeal, but much to my disappointment, I could not get past the starchy taste that clung to the roof of my mouth. Out of politeness, I continued to eat bites of mushy potato, but as I looked at the happy faces of folks taking seconds at dinner, I could not stop thinking about Filip’s question.

This interrogation of my identity continued during that June and July of 2019 while I completed fieldwork in Fosston. Located in northern Minnesota about two hours from the Canadian border, this small rural town also happened to be my grandmother’s hometown. Living in Chicago my whole life, the community in and around Fosston was infused with a “Norwegian-American-ness” that I had never experienced before. Growing up, all I knew about my Norwegian heritage was that my grandmother had Norwegian roots and so did my favorite food, *lefse*.[2] A potato-based flatbread, *lefse* takes a certain level of expertise to make “properly”, so my immediate family always ordered the factory-made kind as none of us knew how to make it. I later learned that this was an almost heretical thing to do, as one woman I interviewed noted, “I don’t call *that* lefse!” For the residents of Fosston, many of whom had been steeped in this deeply cultural environment since birth, it was silly that I could not identify with homemade, “authentic” *lefse* or other traditional foods like potato *klubb*. These were Norwegian foods and I

[2] *Lefse* is pronounced: LEHF-suh.

Figure 1: Potato klubb *are made of a ground potato mixture like the one in the above photo. Terry uses Red potatoes in her* klubb *recipe.*

Figure 2: After the ground potato is mixed with flour, salt and pepper, it is shaped into balls like Terry is doing in this photo. A small piece of boiled meat is placed in the center before the entire klubb *is boiled.*

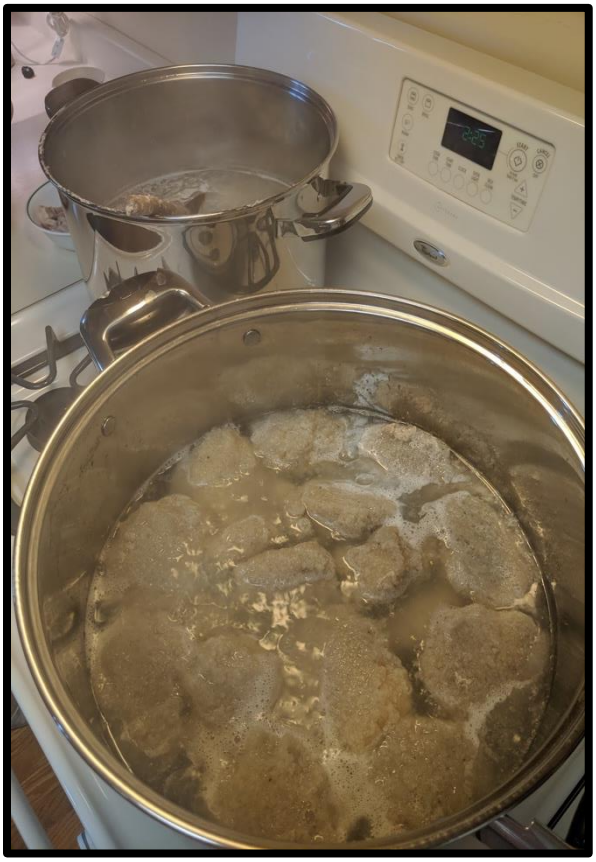
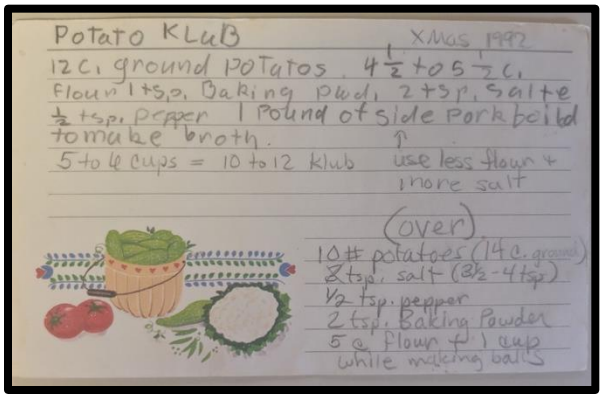


Figure 3: In this large pot are about fifteen potato klubb*. The* klubb *will boil for an hour before they are ready to eat.*



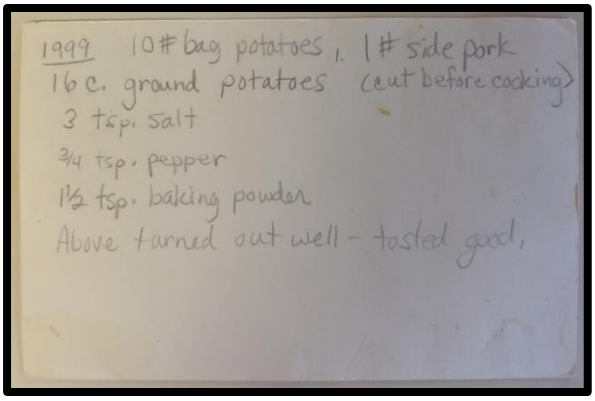


Figure 4: The above recipe cards display Terry's potato klubb *recipe. The various versions of the same recipe include different measurements depending on how much Terry wants to make.*

am Norwegian-American; therefore, I should be familiar with them. But for me, that shared Norwegian-American identity that was fostered in Fosston was lost in translation when my grandmother moved to Chicago in the forties.

This paper focuses on these food-based memories—how they are created, maintained, and lost. With *lefse* as my focal point, I look at how food acts as a medium through which Fosston residents engage with a collective memory of an immigrant heritage. I argue that traditional food-making relies on the knowledge passed down through family lines allowing food-makers and eaters to directly connect with their cultural past. In cases where this familial knowledge is not present for some food-makers within a community, food-making knowledge is shared between community members across family lines. Drawing on Paul Connerton's notion of structural amnesia, I posit that even when traditional foods like *lefse* are accessible, without the embodied experience of making them and the communal and familial food-making knowledge that informs the process, Norwegian-Americans are unable to fully synthesize traditional foods and a sense of identity. However, I maintain that if the generational cycle that passes down these experiences and knowledge is re-introduced into a group or family, structural amnesia can be undone, and a sense of identity can be learned.

Methods and Data Collection

Data collection for this project occurred in two locations: Fosston, Minnesota and Chicago, Illinois. Similarly, the research involved two sets of participants: Fosston residents and members of my family located in Chicago. In both field sites, I relied on semi-structured interview data—ending with fifteen total interviews, and eighteen total interview participants. In addition, participant observation also represented a significant portion of my data collection.

While the methodological choices that I made during research in Fosston and Chicago were essentially the same, they played out differently in each location.

As Fosston was the main focus of my research, the most significant body of data comes from that location. Of the fifteen interviews I conducted, eleven were with residents of Fosston or the surrounding townships. A majority of these participants were suggested to me by other participants and community members; however, a few were recruited at local events. Additionally, there was one participant who lived in and was interviewed in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Although I had no age criteria for participant recruitment, all but one participant was between the ages of sixty and ninety-five. The only criteria for participant recruitment was that the participants were Norwegian-American, [3] though participants may have non-Norwegian cultural heritage, as well. Because of the nature of this project, the participants that were recruited were also members of the community that actively practiced some sort of Norwegian-American cultural tradition, though not every Norwegian-American resident did so. Topics of interviews with these community members ranged from *lefse* and other traditional food-making to family history and even to Norwegian folk arts.

Despite being outside of the scope of this paper, folk art did play a major role in participant recruitment and participant observation. During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to take part in a weekly rosemaling group in a town just outside of Fosston. A traditional form of painting that varies from region to region in Norway, rosemaling[4] is one of the more popular Norwegian folk arts and can be used to decorate plates, bread boards, furniture, walls and more.

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[3] I use the term Norwegian-American throughout this paper to describe participants—despite that fact that participants most often verbally identified as "Norwegian"—to ensure the distinction between my participants' identities and those of contemporary Norwegian people.

[4] See Figures 5-7.

Figure 5: The rosemaling on the above cabinets was done by Hilma Stadstad and is located at the East Polk County Heritage Center in Fosston.

Figure 6: My own first attempt at rosemaling.

Figure 7: A canopy bed that was made by Aaron and Arvid Swenson. The rosemaling and other paintings on the bed were done by Karen Jenson.

There was even one woman who brought in a mailbox to decorate with rosemaling. Making space to practice the art with others who enjoy it, the group I attended met once a week, every Monday, for several hours. For the most part, the same individuals showed up to every meeting

while I attended—some of whom were participants in this project—though newcomers (like myself) were warmly welcomed.

Other community events, such as festivals, also contributed to participant observation during my fieldwork including the Scandinavian Hjemkomst and Midwest Viking Festival in Moorhead, Minnesota, the Midsommar festival at the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Nordic Fest in Decorah, Iowa. However, besides the rosemaling group, the community events that were most essential to my fieldwork were the monthly Sons of Norway meetings in town. A national fraternal organization, Sons of Norway is a space for Norwegian-Americans to socialize, practice their Norwegian (the Norwegian table grace, for example, was said at each meeting I attended before members shared dinner), engage with traditional art forms and foods, and learn more about Norway ("About Us"). During these meetings I had the opportunity to meet and engage with members of the community who strongly identified with their Norwegian heritage. I recruited several participants from these meetings as well as had the opportunity to engage in participant observation.

Back home in Chicago, however, fieldwork opportunities were more limited. Before even beginning my research, I had reached out to various family members to determine if any of them would be interested in participating in an interview. Due to time constraints and distance, I was only able to conduct three interviews with family members which, due to my personal knowledge of these participants, were more informal than those I conducted in Fosston. Topics discussed during these interviews were also significantly more limited and generally centered around my family's personal Norwegian heritage, *lefse*, and my grandmother, Marilyn. Each of these interviews was able to provide a body of information about the experiences that other members of my family had in relation to their Norwegian-American identity.

As a majority of my family members did not practice any Norwegian-American traditions, there were less opportunities for participant observation as well. Because of this, rather than relying on the spontaneity of these opportunities like I did in Fosston, I planned and created these opportunities in Chicago. In November 2019, I hosted a *lefse*-making party for any interested family members. This acted as the only significant piece of participant observation data from my family participant group.

Project Scope

Because food traditions and food-making take on a performative nature, there are several topics that are relevant to Norwegian-American foodways in Fosston that I felt were not relevant to the scope of this paper. The biggest of these topics is gender. While there are clearly gendered aspects to the history of *lefse*-making and food-making, generally speaking, analysis of these historical realities will not be centered in this paper. In addition to this, though gendered interpretations of food-making do come through in participant responses, I have intentionally chosen not to explore the depths of this aspect of food-making performativity. In part, this is due to scope, but it is also due to respect for participant understanding of gender in *lefse*-making. While I did attempt to ask participants about how they see gender playing a role in their traditional food-making and cultural maintenance, the majority did not want to speak on the subject.

Additionally, as I mentioned before, folk art will not be explored in this paper. Although a significant amount of my data collection did center folk art, as it was important to many participants, discussion of its place in relation to food and memory did not fit within the goals of this paper. I do suggest, however, that further projects are devised to analyze the role that gender

plays in Norwegian-American food-making as well as the importance of Norwegian-American folk art as a way to engage with cultural heritage.

Literature Review: Food, Community, and Memory

As folklorist Robert A. Georges (1984) explains, you are not only what you eat, but what others think you eat. In other words, what you eat, how you eat, and even who you eat with informs what and how others think you *should* eat (Kalčik 1985; Georges 1984; Oyangen (2009). This focus on the social understanding of food consumption has been prominent since the early stages of the anthropology of food. Lauded anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strass (1966), for example, took a more reductionist approach to foodways than Georges. He argued that the social understanding of food consumption could be broken down into three categories: the raw, the cooked, and the rotten. Raw foods were unmarked, but cooked foods were marked with cultural transformation and rotten foods were marked with natural transformation. Although Lévi-Strauss was majorly influential during these first stages, more recent research has chosen to instead focus more heavily on the learned process embedded in the human-food relationship (Oyangen 2009). These voices argue that food creates a variety of symbolic social boundaries that can restrict diet and methods of food preparation (Anderson 2005; Kalčik 1985) thus becoming essential to the maintenance of these boundaries (DuBois and Mintz 2002).

One of the main motivations behind this maintenance is identity performance (Oyangen 2009; Whitehead 1984). In terms of ethnic identity performance, food can be used to make a group stand out, as in the use of festivals (Rahn 2006) or it can be used to blend in, such as through the purposeful Americanization of immigrant food (Kalčik 1985). In a similar way, food acts politically and as trade between different, and within similar, cultural groups (Anderson

2005). In some cases, this political trade off results in the assimilation of one group into another as melting-pot theorists of the early twentieth century proposed (Steinberg 1981).

Nevertheless, this performance of identity can be passed down from one generation to the next through food traditions as they often come from a long history of practiced recipes and methods of cooking (Rahn 2006). These traditions act as a way to look back into the past or forward into the future (Boe 1945; Legwold 1992; Preston-Werner 2009). For many immigrant families, this glance into the past functions as a connection to their country of origin. Helping to ease culture shock, food can be held onto while all other aspects of life change (Kalčik 1985; Jones 2007). As Traci Marie Kelly (2001), a scholar of women's food writing, argues, food traditions often endure even after native language, a fundamental link to culture and country of origin, is lost (23).

Food can also create feelings of nostalgia for migrants (Butler 2006; Hage 2010; Sutton 2001). Anthropologist, David Sutton (2001), notes that home is where physical needs, including eating, are met. He argues that a longing for and remembering of home represent a desire for those same resources that were available in a migrant's home community (77-82). Similarly, anthropologist, Ghassan Hage (2010), posits that the desire for homemade food is related to an infant's desire for its mother's breast milk—this relationship mirrors a migrant's remembering of home, where "homemade," or at least regional, foods were made (416). On the other hand, Beverley Butler (2006), a scholar of cultural heritage, claims that this nostalgia surrounding the presence or non-presence of traditional food is rather a longing for *real* food from the migrant's home country.

However, the relationship between food and memory goes beyond what the migrant in the present misses from home. This connection to the past can also link whole groups of

similarly identifying people through collective memory. Although first developed by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1941), some scholars now argue that collective memory can be broken down into two distinct groups: communicative memory, based on everyday communications between people within a cultural or ethnic group, and cultural memory, based on a fixed point or shared cultural event in a community's distant past (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995). For others, collective memory should take a less reductionist form focusing instead on the semiotics that inform it (French 2012). In either interpretation, food, as a symbol of cultural identity, can act as a conduit for the memories that cultural groups share (Connerton 2006; Hage 2010; Holtzman 2006; Sutton 2001).

However, in examining collective memory, anthropologist Paul Connerton (2006) suggests that forgetting is also a collective event and proposes the concept of "structural amnesia," or the forgetting of once culturally valuable information that is not immediately *socially* important. Connerton argues that some collective memories can be lost when food traditions are not passed down. Especially in circumstances where recipes are passed down orally, if the next generation is not taught how to make them, what is remembered through those foods may be forgotten (Connerton 2006; Sutton 2001).

For many who study the human-food relationship, something that is agreed upon when it comes to this passing down process is that learning must occur through observation and trial (Farquhar 2006; Legwold 1992; Sutton 2001). In doing this, the individual learns skills that are necessary to perform both basic and specialized recipes. Social scientist Judith Farquhar (2006) argues that it is impossible to use a cookbook or recipe without hands-on experience. Additionally, Sutton (2001) notes that many longtime cooks in Kalymnos, Greece rely on "practical knowledge" including tool use, how different ingredients taste together, and technique

(126-127). This "practical knowledge," Farquhar would argue, is obtained through the physical act of cooking.

Although food creates connections to the past, it can also change and evolve within a tradition. For ethnic groups that have been present in America for generations, younger members have a different connection to their "country of origin" than older generations (Steinberg 1981). Changes to foodways can be caused by these generational differences, whether that be changes to recipes, changes in cooking technology, or the prevalence (or non-prevalence) of a traditional dish within younger generations (Kalčik 1985; Preston-Werner 2009). However, changes in foodways can also be caused by changes in available resources. This means that an immigrant population's ability to make traditional foods can be altered depending on the amount of access they have to the key ingredients within their cuisine (Kalčik 1985; Oyangen 2009).

Remembering: **Making, Learning and Teaching**

Making an "Authentic" Lefse

In 1825, the first group of Norwegian immigrants left Stavanger, Norway to come to America. Known as "The Sloopers," those fifty-two migrants would be the first of thousands of Norwegian citizens to immigrate to the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Drawn by stories of opportunities in America, there were multiple "mass exoduses" from peasant towns where populations were growing rapidly, and resources were becoming scarce (Lovoll 1999, 1-2, 10-11).

It was during this time of mass migration in Norway that the ancestors of Fosston residents were immigrating to the United States as well (Moen 1944). In the present, most Fosston residents are third or fourth generation Norwegian-Americans which, to the supporters

of early twentieth century melting-pot theories, would suggest that they would have no cultural reference to their "country of origin" (Steinberg 1981, 44). Yet, like many other Norwegian-American communities, residents continue the laborious process of rolling out *lefse* (Lovoll 1984; Stokker 2000). During this period of immigration and today, *lefse* is the traditional food that is most often found on any Norwegian-American's table. A peasant food, it did not consist of much other than what was easily accessible on the farms where Norwegian-Americans homesteaded—potatoes, sugar, flour, butter, and milk—and kept well during the winter (Stokker 2000, 253). In a way, this continued *lefse*-making allows Norwegian-Americans to preserve a snapshot of "Old Country cooking" from over a century ago (Kelly 2001, 22). While some other traditional foods, such as the infamous *lutefisk*,[5] are no longer popular in Norway currently, multiple varieties of *lefse* are still made by many contemporary Norwegians.

With this history in mind, it is no surprise that *lefse*-makers across the country strive for a perfect *lefse*. In general, this means the *lefse* is round, as big as possible (fourteen inches in diameter is common), as thin as possible, and speckled with brown spots on both sides. The expectation of making a perfect *lefse* is sometimes so high that *lefse*-makers may avoid specific tasks in the cooking process if they have others who can take over those roles. In food writer Gary Legwold's (1992) book, *The Last Word on Lefse*, Olive Voeller, the daughter of a skilled *lefse*-maker, mentions in an interview that she still hides the *lefse* that she rolls so that her mother cannot see it: "I roll them all different shapes, or they get holes in them and look like a venetian blind" (83). Yet, despite these claims and attempts, it seems as though what these *lefse*-makers are all striving for is not a perfect *lefse*, but an *authentic* one, a *lefse* that is like Grandmother's or Mother's (Legwold 1992, 7, 83-85).

[5] *Lutefisk* is pronounced: LOO-teh-fihsk.

In fact, it could be said that the desire for an "authentic" *lefse* is simply a desire to connect to a precursory version of the food—a symbol of immigrants of the past. Katherine Stokker (2000), who has written about Norwegian-American food traditions for the Minnesota State Historical Society, would agree with this. Stokker argues, "...Norwegian Americans celebrate their roots in those bleak past times and fondly credit *lutefisk* and *lefse* with having seen their ancestors through"' (253). According to Stokker, eating these foods can be a way of demonstrating "loyalty to the community" (243). In other words, Norwegian-Americans make traditional foods like *lefse* to remember their immigrant ancestors who left the Norway and endured the hardships of building a new life for future generations. In a short book chapter, Beverley Butler (2006), explores this longing or what she calls a "nostalgia for authenticity." She argues that, "[these feelings] are highlighted for particular attention as core heritage values and as key underpinning and motivating dynamics of modernity's escalating desire for roots and origins" (466). For *lefse*-makers, this "nostalgia for authenticity" ties into a desire to connect with past immigrant generations.

Despite this collective "nostalgia for authenticity," however, it is important to note that no two *lefse* recipes are the same. In every interview, I asked participants to describe their *lefse*-making process. Each explained that their way of making it was tried and true, or as one participant, Loretta, put it, a "no-fail recipe." While Loretta is a key player in Fosston's Norwegian-American community, as a member of the local Sons of Norway lodge and a well-known folk artist, she did not start her *lefse*-making until fairly recently. Her recipe was given to her by a friend after several attempts to make *lefse* without success. During our interview, rather than explaining to me from memory how she makes her *lefse,* like many other participants did, Loretta chose to read the majority of the recipe from a piece of paper. Throughout her recitation,

however, she did pepper in comments about her personal technique that were not written down. The following is Loretta's "no-fail recipe,"[6]

> So for me it's a two day process because I like to cook my potatoes the night before…[*Sections in quotation are being read off of a written recipe*] So, "ten pounds of potatoes, two-thirds cup of sugar, two tablespoons of salt, one cup of butter, and a third cup of whipping cream". So, "peel and cook the potatoes until done but not mushy", and that's what nice about the Cherokee potatoes is they don't get mushy, they stay nice and firm. "Drain well, put hot potatoes through the ricer, making sure not to leave any lumps. Immediately add the sugar, salt, butter and cream, and stir well. Mix with my hands until well blended and then cover with a dish towel and place in the refrigerator until well cooled, like overnight."...And I usually put it all into the big Tupperware, or even a bigger stainless steel bowl...And that makes it really easy because then you divide that into four parts...And then, "to each part, add one cup of flour and mix well." And then, while I'm doing that, the other part is back in the refrigerator again to keep it cold. "Make each part into about ten patties"—so I take that forth and make it into a log shape and then cut out ten patties from that one...log. "Roll on the lefse board until very thin, using a cloth covered, ridged rolling pin." And then, "with the lefse stick, start on one edge of the lefse and roll the dough up onto the stick and then unroll it onto the grill that's set at five hundred degrees." And, "lightly brown *lefse* on one side, and then, using the stick, lift it and flip it to the other side. Once the lefse is browned, place it on a towel"—so I don't fold 'em yet...And then "cover it with a dry towel"—and that towel—usually we put down a bath towel that's slightly, like, misted with a little bit of water. And then...a dry towel on top... "Fry another lefse and place that lefse on top of each other so they can steam together until cool. Once the pieces are fairly cool, fold each piece into four and then layer your pieces like you do napkins on a fancy table" And then, "cover until completely cool" [*laughs*] "Once they are completely cool, place them in a Ziploc bag and they freeze well" It says, "we do not add the flour until just before we are going to fry the lefse, because if you add the flour too soon it becomes sticky and won't roll well. So, it's important to keep the dough cool while we are rolling and frying." And, I dunno if it says in here, but I always roll a little bit, put a little more flour on it, and then, as I'm flipping it over, putting a little more flour underneath, just so it doesn't stick.

The recipes and techniques used by the *lefse*-makers, like Loretta, who I met in Fosston are quite different from one another. For example, some have sugar, some do not. One participant, Maria, explained that she uses powdered sugar instead of granulated sugar in her *lefse* because, "*of course,* powdered sugar is going to incorporate better than regular sugar." Some *lefse*-makers let their potato-mixture cool overnight, and some let it cool for a few hours.

[6] See Appendix for interview transcripts of other participant recipes and *lefse*-making techniques.

Just the difference in potatoes alone could start many controversial conversations about "authentic" *lefse*. Some recipes call for potato flakes, which in those instances are enjoyed for their convenience. But, to some, the thought of using anything other than "real" potatoes is abhorrent. While Loretta's recipe is one of the more "authentic" that I encountered in Fosston, some would argue that her use of Cherokee potatoes is anything but. While Russets are arguably the potato most often used to make *lefse*, I have heard many people make their cases for Russet, Red, and Cherokee potatoes alike. Though I will not take sides in the potato debate, one local told me bluntly, "If you get any other kind of potatoes [besides Russets], you're stupid." Despite these differences, however, there still seems to be a standard, "authentic" *lefse* that makers aim for.

I too was overwhelmed with this desire to make an "authentic" *lefse* the first time I made it in the basement of a small Lutheran church forty minutes outside Fosston. It had rained earlier in the day, and as I walked up to the church carrying a ten-pound bag of potatoes in one hand and a pint of cream in the other, my canvas shoes were soaked with water and mud. One of the older Fosston residents who I had grown fond of during my fieldwork, Alice, had accompanied me as she and my volunteer teacher, Grace, were well acquainted. Alice was in her early nineties, but she was as sharp and active as ever, frequently making quippy jokes.

I was jittery the whole morning, though, despite Alice's attempts to lighten the mood. I never thought I would be nervous to cook potatoes, and yet, as I listened to Alice explain in her thick Minnesotan accent how she and Grace knew each other, I was desperately reviewing all of the information I had read about *lefse*-making in my head. Many of the women I had met in the area praised Grace for her *lefse*-making skills, deeming her an infamous "*lefse* queen." According to the stories, she rolls out thirteen hundred *lefse* during the Christmas season with the

other ladies at her church. I was definitely intimidated. I was dreading rolling the most and had never seen a *lefse* rolling pin before, let alone used one.

When Grace pulled up in her sedan just after we arrived, I noticed that the back was packed with *lefse* griddles, turning sticks, and rolling pins. In her eighties, and much like Alice, Grace had a strong sense of humor and laughed easily. I had gotten to know her at the rosemaling group I attended where she taught me the basics of the art form. She waved me over enthusiastically to help carry in our supplies and soon we were inside taking turns peeling that ten-pound bag of potatoes.

Preparing the potato mixture was the quickest part of the process. After the peeled potatoes were boiled and riced, we combined them with butter, cream, sugar, and salt and placed the mixture on a baking sheet in the freezer. While most *lefse*-makers allow their potato mixture to cool overnight, because of the limited time we had that day, we opted for a quicker cooling method. As the potatoes cooled, I helped Grace set up our *lefse*-making station in the church basement. The room was connected to a full kitchen outside of which there was a long counter, and an industrial sized *lefse* griddle that sat in a far corner. Grace began by setting up the pastry board—a round flat board with a pastry cloth wrapped tightly around it—and placed in the middle of the counter. Markings on the pastry cloth would measure how big the *lefse* was getting all the way up to fourteen inches in diameter. Next to the board, Grace had placed a ridged rolling pin that she slid a fitted cloth over. While this type of rolling pin is often used to leave a pattern of imprints on the *lefse*, because of the grooves, the dough will often stick. Covering the rolling pin, in addition to using a decent amount of flour while rolling, helps combat the sticking, Grace explained to me. Behind her, she had set up two *lefse* griddles. Essentially a large, circular, raised hotplate, *lefse* griddles are set to five hundred degrees to fry and achieve the

Figure 8: In this photo, Grace is rolling one of many lefse *rounds. To the side can be seen balls of* lefse *dough before being rolled out. As flour is an important part of making the dough and rolling it, Grace had some nearby (in the yellow bucket) while she rolled.*

Figure 9: The above photo is one of my several attempts to roll a lefse round. I am wearing Grace's apron that reads "Lefse Cook."

Figure 10: The above photo depicts a pastry board with marked pastry cloth, turning stick, and rolling pin used to make lefse*. Photo was taken at the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, IA.*

Figure 11: Above, a freshly rolled lefse *round is cooking on a five-hundred-degree griddle waiting to be flipped.*

Figure 12: Two piles of finished lefse *rounds cool on tea towels off to the side of the workspace.*

brown freckles on both sides.[7] After we set up, we chatted idly about the process and ate snacks. I continued to worry about what the quality of my rolling would be like, and after two hours it was finally time to get started. Luckily, Grace did not start me with rolling. Instead, I began by flipping.

Lying next to the griddles, were two *lefse* turning sticks—long, flat pieces of wood that, in some cases, have rosemaling along the handles—used to carry the *lefse* to the griddle, flip it, and remove it. I tentatively reached for one as Grace grabbed a rolling pin and began rolling, finishing her first *lefse* after thirty seconds. She then placed the round on the griddle for me to fry. I watched as Grace—demonstrating how to flip the *lefse* and handle the *lefse* turning stick—reached down to the five-hundred-degree griddle, grabbed the scalding *lefse* with her bare hand and quickly laid the edge over the turning stick. Making *lefse* was apparently significantly more dangerous than I anticipated. She slid the stick under the *lefse* and flipped it quickly enough that I did not manage to get a good look at what she was doing.

Now, it was my turn. I reached down hesitantly attempting several times to grab the *lefse* and ripping it in the process. I became quickly frustrated, as each time I reached down my fingertips would burn resulting in many ruined *lefse* rounds. Every so often, Grace would stop, show me again, and go back to rolling. I watched closely, each time finding little things to try. After approximately fifteen attempts, I had graduated from finger burning to finger singing as I was able to work with the *lefse* a little more quickly. I would later learn, the second time I was taught, that there is a more common way to flip the *lefse* that does not involve reaching down toward the scorching hot griddle. I was a much better flipper once that information was passed along.

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[7] Though "fry" is the most commonly used term for cooking a *lefse* round, it does not include the use of oil like the word would imply.

I had only just gotten the hang of flipping when Grace told me it was my turn to roll. I had been sneaking looks over my shoulder when I was not flipping the *lefse* so that I could see how she was rolling. Her actions were so smooth and natural that it was difficult to see the technique. I reluctantly took the rolling pin in hand and began my first attempt. That first *lefse* was not even close to being round. Staring down at what I had rolled with a disgruntled look on my face, I was discouraged and suggested I go back to flipping. I did not want to ruin a perfectly good batch of *lefse.* But Grace would not let me. "You know, I always joke that sometimes my *lefse* looks more like one of the 10,000 lakes in Minnesota than a perfect circle," she said with a laugh. "Why don't you try another?" She turned and called Alice in from the kitchen to help her flip and I continued to roll.

I rolled, and I rolled, and I rolled, and by the end of the day we had close to sixty *lefse* rounds. I had contributed to half of the rolling, but I had by no means mastered it, though I was starting to understand the technique. Since Grace taught me, I have made *lefse* several more times, and I gain more insight each time as to how I can make improvements. But, I often feel that urge in the back of my mind to make an "authentic" *lefse*, becoming frustrated if dough starts to stick to the pastry cloth while rolling or when I tear a round as I lift it up to bring it over to the griddle.

However, in breaking down *lefse*-making into its different components, it becomes apparent that every recipe and *lefse*-making technique has some important key factors. For example, essentially the largest portion of the ingredients in each recipe are the same: potatoes, some sort of dairy product like milk or cream, a fat, like butter or margarine, and salt. But most importantly, every *lefse* recipe requires the rolling, frying, and flipping of *lefse*. With this in mind, the pieces start to come together when taking into account Butler's "nostalgia for

authenticity" related to these actions within the framework of a collective memory of immigration. Paul Connerton (1989) argues that within collective memory there lies a category of embodied memory that he labels "commemorative ceremonies." Connerton likens this form of remembering to rituals, however he differentiates them explaining that "commemorative ceremonies are distinguishable from all other rituals by the fact that they explicitly refer to prototypical persons and events, whether these are understood to have a historical or mythological existence" (61). If yearly *lefse*-making is then taken to be the ritual or ceremony performed, it could be suggested that "the prototypical persons or events" referred to through this ritual process are those first Norwegian immigrants to the United States, or the historical experience of immigration.

Reflecting then on the embodied experiences that lie within *lefse*-making—the rolling and the flipping—*lefse*-makers are able to embody not only the yearly traditions but the movements of their immigrant ancestors. The desire to make *lefse* like one's grandmother did, while a way to connect directly to a family member, also harkens back to an image of the Norwegian immigrant that is not necessarily personal or familial, but rather a symbol of cultural identity. Making an "authentic" *lefse*, despite the subjectivity of that interpretation, is what commemorates the Norwegian immigrant as a model to live up to.

Learning and Teaching: Donna and Ian

I first met Donna at a Sons of Norway meeting and was re-introduced to her at the local rosemaling group that I had been attending. Another one of my volunteer *lefse*-making teachers, thinking about chatting with Donna brings a smile to my face as she was able to immediately make me feel at home with her friendly demeanor. Actively involved in the Norwegian-

American communities in the areas surrounding her home, Donna is the primary *lefse*-maker in her family as well as for the surrounding elderly community who can no longer make *lefse* to have at holiday dinners. While I interviewed her one morning in July at her kitchen table, she explained to me how she learned to make *lefse* when she was younger,

> So, I guess maybe I started making *lefse* when I was about eight, ten years old? And, I helped my mother...she was known as the "*lefse* queen," because she was very good at it. You know? And we had *lefse* for Easter…Thanksgiving, Christmas, we had *lefse* for...absolutely every holiday...That was just expected, you know? And...my mom being the only one of the relatives...of my immediate family that made *lefse*, [she] always got the job makin' the *lefse*. So... we would spend hours [making *lefse*], growing up...
>
> And then it got to the point where...she ended up with a pacemaker, and the rolling of the *lefse* wasn't so easy for her. So, then it became my job to do the rolling, and she stood right behind me and would look and touch, you know, and make sure "No, it needs to be a little more rolled there, or here." So, that was her way of doing it...My mom passed away seven years ago, but I can still feel her and hear her right there saying "Oh no, little more, too many bubbles over there," or, you know, "it's not thin enough," that kinda thing.

Folklorist Millie Rahn (2006) notes that within ethnic communities, the active passing down of food traditions functions as a tie between those making and eating foods in the past and in the present. Donna's experience of feeling her mother there with her when she makes *lefse* exemplifies this idea. In this case, *lefse*-making exists outside of a solely cultural function, it maintains the close familial tie that the two had while her mother was living. In a similar way, Donna's note that she gradually took over her mother's job as primary *lefse*-maker highlights this connection along generational lines as making the same foods that one's mother or grandmother made triggers a sense of mutual identity through repetition.

Passing down food traditions also acts as a way to pass down knowledge. Citing Charles Keller and Janet Dixon Keller's work on blacksmithing, David Sutton (2001) draws on the almost Bordieuan idea of a "stock of knowledge," an individual's foundation of knowledge about a particular skill that is informed by memories of past actions such as what did and did not go

well. While not originally applied to food-making, Sutton argues that cooks, like blacksmiths, also rely on a "stock of knowledge," as a skilled cook will use past failures and successes to inform their present technique or alterations to recipes (128-130). I argue that, within family food traditions, a "stock of knowledge" as a general category, can be broken down further into two subsections: an *individual* "stock of knowledge, and a *familial* "stock of knowledge." For example, when an individual *lefse*-maker makes a change to their technique or recipe based on a personal failure or success, they are the only one within the family to have that specific piece of information within their "stock of knowledge." However, if that individual *lefse*-maker then teaches another family member how to make *lefse*, their *individual* "stock of knowledge" is not only passed down to their student, but to their student's student, assuming the *lefse*-making tradition continues. When this happens, the *individual* "stock of knowledge" is added to a *familial* "stock of knowledge." This would suggest that food-making knowledge could go back multiple generations as this *familial* "stock of knowledge" is passed down. In addition, it indicates that an *individual* "stock of knowledge," provided there is a teaching event, will continue within the *familial* "stock of knowledge" over multiple generations. Looking at Donna, when she was taught how to make *lefse*, the "stock of knowledge" developed by her mother, grandmother, and others before was then

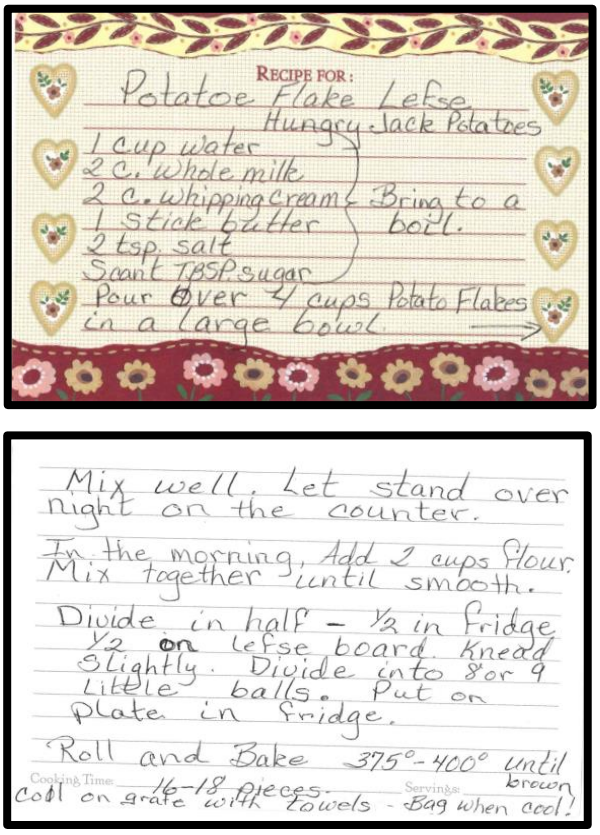
RECIPE FOR:
Potatoe Flake Lefse
Hungry Jack Potatoes
1 cup water
2 c. whole milk
2 c. whipping cream
1 stick butter
2 tsp. salt
Scant TBSP. sugar
Bring to a boil.
Pour over 4 cups Potato Flakes in a large bowl
Mix well. Let stand over night on the counter.
In the morning, Add 2 cups flour. Mix together until smooth.
Divide in half - ½ in fridge ½ on lefse board. Knead slightly. Divide into 8 or 9 little balls. Put on plate in fridge.
Roll and Bake 375°-400° until brown
Cooking Time 16-18 pieces Servings Bag when cool!
Cool on grate with towels -

Figure 13: Donna's potato flake lefse *recipe can be seen in the above photos.*

passed along to her. After becoming a practiced *lefse*-maker, Donna then added her own knowledge to the "stock." As an example, Donna explained that while she was growing up, she did not use the potato flake recipe that she does now.[8] That recipe, developed out of a desire for convenience by her mother and a family friend, was something she took up *after* learning how to make *lefse* with "real" potatoes. Not only was this recipe more convenient, Donna argued, but she also mentioned that her mother claimed that it tasted the same as *lefse* made from "real" potatoes. Therefore, when Donna chooses to use this recipe, she is pulling from her mother's additions to that "stock of knowledge" within her family's *lefse*-making tradition. Then, for example, if Donna teaches her granddaughter this recipe—with any changes she might have made—she is teaching both her *individual* and the *familial* "stock of knowledge."

Also applicable to the experiences of *lefse*-makers is Maurice Halbwachs' (1941) theory of family memory. Consisting of a multitude of symbolic reflections that connect a framework of cultural expression across time, this form of collective memory functions in tandem with a "stock of knowledge" to inform *lefse*-making,

> Although these [family memories] have a date, we can actually move them along the line of time without modifying them. They have become pregnant with all that has preceded them just as they are already pregnant with all that will follow. As often as we return to these events and figures and reflect upon them, they attract to themselves more reality instead of becoming simplified. This is because they are at the point of intersection of an increasing number of reflections. So it is that within the framework of the family memory many figures and facts do indeed serve as landmarks; but each figure expresses an entire character, as each fact recapitulates an entire period in the life of the group...When we reflect on them, it seems indeed as if we had again taken up contact with the past. (61)

Essentially, what Halbwachs is arguing is that while "family memory" relies on time-bound people and events, the information that is transmitted through remembering builds over time as an individual or group returns to these memories repeatedly. As new memories are created and

[8] See Figure 13.

relate to past memories, additional layers are formed. For instance, each time that Donna makes *lefse* using her mother's recipe, she is returning to several memory points that others in the family share as well, such making *lefse* with her mother, grandmother, and sister or serving *lefse* to family members during a holiday party. These memories layer together to inform Donna's *lefse*-making.

The main difference, then, between "family memory" and a *familial* "stock of knowledge" is that "family memory" is the *why*—the learned cultural value placed on *lefse*-making within the family's food tradition—and a *familial* "stock of knowledge" is the *how*—the techniques, tools, and recipes used to make *lefse* that are passed down. As an example, say Donna, decides that instead of butter, she is going to use margarine from now on in her *lefse* recipe because she had experimented with using it once before and noticed that she liked the taste of her *lefse* better. The memory of this change, though it may be passed down or shared with other family members, functions within a "stock of knowledge." However, neither this change to the recipe, nor a teaching event that would link the new recipe to a *familial* "stock of knowledge" functions within "family memory." The continual re-remembering that occurs within "family memory" relies on shared memories of a person, group, or event. A *lefse* recipe, alone, could not exist within "family memory" because it has no cultural or familial value if left uninterpreted. Rather, it is the memories of making *lefse* with family, eating *lefse* with family, or teaching *lefse*-making to family members that invokes "family memory." These memories, then add to the layering of previous memories that teach the group that keeping *lefse* at the table during holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas and passing down the food tradition is valuable.

These same ideas can be seen in the description that another participant, Ian, gives when describing his *lefse*-learning process. An important figure in the Fosston community, Ian is the youngest of my participants and is also well-known for his *lefse*-making. Humorous and direct, he has led many *lefse* demonstrations during town heritage festivals. When I met Ian for an interview, I was surprised to find out that, in his family, *lefse* making was passed down from his father and grandfather.

> Something that I come to find out that is very unique and different and kinda odd about our family is that it's usually the guys who make the *lefse*…My grandfather was, for lack of a better term, an overbearing naval officer...he would be the type of husband that stood over his wife's shoulder and told her how to cut the toast. I do not know how he didn't end up with many black eyes over this. But he was very overbearing in that regard. So, he was very particular about how to make the *lefse*. So, I think Grandma just threw up her hands and let him have it, as long as it got done in time for Christmas dinner.
>
> So, anyways, my dad learned how to make *lefse* from him, not the way he did it but how to do it...And then I just kind of glommed on, went over to Grandma and Grandpa's house, watched my dad, my uncle, and my grandpa make *lefse*, and I just kinda did what I could. I first started flipping, then turning, then eventually learning how to roll it out right…Now as grandpa got a little older he would just sit in a chair next to the lefse griddle and he would flip it and let everybody else do the walking back and forth, and the hard rolling stuff. But he'd always be giving commands the whole time.

Similar to Donna's description, it is apparent that a *familial* "stock of knowledge" was being utilized as Ian learned to make *lefse*. As it is unusual for men—those in the older generations especially—to take on the main *lefse*-making role within a family, Ian's grandfather would have to have relied on knowledge gained from watching and, or, making *lefse* before taking on that role. By enforcing *lefse*-making in a specific way, he is not only enforcing the use of that *familial* "stock of knowledge," but also enforcing *how lefse* should be valued within his family and therefore, aspects of their "family memory" surrounding *lefse*-making, learning, teaching, and eating. Later in the interview, Ian explained that each time he continues to make *lefse* he only uses his grandfather's recipe. Like when Donna uses her mother's recipe, Ian is

drawing on a *familial* "stock of knowledge" that was passed down through the men in his family. Each time he rolls out *lefse* for a holiday dinner or for a *lefse* demonstration he re-emphasizes the cultural value placed on *lefse* within his "family memory" of making it with his grandfather, father, and uncle.

Aside from their prominent roles as *lefse* makers in their families, both Donna and Ian take on the role of teacher, in various ways, passing down their *lefse*-making to others in the community beyond their family. As generations continue to change and *lefse*-making is passed down less often, many Norwegian-Americans rely on other community *lefse*-makers outside of their family in order to learn this skill. In this situation, food traditions must adapt. Where Donna and Ian drew from an *individual* and *familial* "stock of knowledge" to inform their recipes and techniques, as well as from "family memory" to inform a long-term *lefse*-making tradition, those who did not have their food-making traditions passed down to them draw from that of their community members. It becomes evident, then, that what I deemed a ***familial*** "stock of knowledge," and what Halbwachs labeled "**family** memory" can exist outside of the family unit within tight-knit ethnic communities like Fosston and its surrounding area. While individuals might have specifically family-based knowledge or memories to pull from, as teaching and recipe sharing cross family lines, there is a sense of communal knowledge that is developed.

For Donna, teaching primarily happens within her neighborhood. Located outside of Fosston and surrounded by a community of mainly Germans, Norwegians, and Swedes, Donna told me that she was often asked to share her skills with the wives of Scandinavian-American men so that they could start making *lefse* for their husbands.

> ...friends that I taught are mostly German but are married to Norwegian or Swedish men...one of them being our neighbor, over here. Oh boy! He said, "Why did you wait so long to move into the neighborhood!" [*she laughs*] 'Cause his wife then came over and...

> we did about four years of making [*lefse*] together...and now she ventures on her own. And now *she* is teaching it to *her* daughters-in-law.

Through teaching, Donna is able to start a cycle of *lefse*-making to potentially be passed down in another family. The years that she spent allowing her neighbor to watch her roll out dough and fry *lefse* combined with the time spent actually teaching her to make it—sharing her *familial* "stock of knowledge," and making those small corrections like her mother used to do for her—then makes space for her neighbor's husband, who is Scandinavian, to reconnect with his heritage. Now, he may not only think of family members that have passed on when he eats *lefse,* drawing on, perhaps his own "family memory," but he may also think of Donna and her family too.

Ian on the other hand, often teaches *lefse*-making through demonstrations at local heritage events. He explained to me that his time spent teaching *lefse*-making is time he tries to use to connect with the Scandinavian community in town, especially older generations.

> So if I'm out at a demonstration...my favorite thing to ask is "What do you remember when you were making *lefse*?"...And it will often wind its way to something completely other than *lefse*...they remember something about their grandfather or their mother or something like that. And the thing they remember started because they just made *lefse* together.

Taking on that teacher/demonstrator role, he is able to more clearly see how others have tied their memories of *lefse* and traditional food to the people that they have witnessed make it. In addition, he is able to pass along his family's learned cultural valuation of *lefse* ("family memory") and his family's techniques and recipes (*familial* "stock of knowledge"). Like Donna, through teaching he becomes one of the people that others may describe if ever asked about their *lefse*-learning process. In fact, one of my other participants, Katherine, noted that she learned the technique that she uses when making *lefse* from watching Ian give demonstrations. While

Katherine does have "family memory" to pull from—and has told me many stories about watching her grandparents make *lefse* when she was younger—as she was never taught to make *lefse,* she drew from Ian's "stock of knowledge" to inform her own.

Forgetting: Passing Down Structural Amnesia

I was volunteering at the local heritage center when Berit, one of the first faces I met in Fosston and a board member at the center, told me that there was a Scandinavian festival happening just ninety minutes away in Moorhead, Minnesota at the Hjemkomst Center. It was an annual festival that the museum held, and she just happened to see an ad for it as we were chatting that Saturday morning in June. It was early so I still had time to make it over there before it ended and she encouraged me to hurry up and leave with a smile.

I must have looked like a child walking into the Hjemkomst Center as I rushed around the lobby trying to get a good look at the activities offered. A pair of wooden *nisse*[9] greeted me and a large sign to my left directed me to a room where the food was being sold. That room was completely packed with people looking for the chance to taste Scandinavian food—I myself waited forty minutes to have two small pieces of *lefse.*

I had just finished listening to Ole Olsson's Old Time Orkestra give a stellar performance when I stumbled upon a small booth with various souvenirs. At the front was a stand with several different books stacked neatly. I noticed one in particular with a blue cover and rosemaling along the edges. From the cover two children with blond hair and dressed in the colors of the Norwegian flag stared back at me while holding a plate of *lefse*. The title read, *Real Norwegians Eat Lefse*. "Well", I thought, "at least I've got that part down." The inside cover reads,

> Ancestry and heritage are important for our children and the purpose of this children's book is to provide both in an inviting and mind provoking way. Lefse is known

[9] *Nisse* are creatures often likened to trolls or gnomes.

> throughout the United States and Scandinavia as an old traditional food of our Scandinavian forefathers. The book provides a Lefse recipe with an engaging story about a young boy and girl's first cooking lesson to make this traditional dessert, Lefse. Follow their path to becoming 'Real Norwegians'. (Meuwissen 2018)

I wondered, then, if *lefse* really was the key to being Norwegian-American. Did I just have to eat *lefse* to be considered Norwegian-American? Did I have to make it? If collective memory was a linking factor here, then who gets to take part in that remembering? I knew the details of my own family's immigration history, and yet, my experiences with my Norwegian-American identity were significantly different from those of Fosston residents. I found the answers to my questions in the stories of my own family members.

Upon arriving back in Chicago after two months in Minnesota, I decided it was time to investigate the questions that I was unable to answer while in Fosston. So, I piled all of the photographs and genealogical information I had accumulated during my fieldwork into my little purple Toyota and drove from one suburb of Chicago to another to talk with my relatives about our family history and *lefse*. Interestingly, my uncle Rich, aunt Heidi, and uncle Dan all said pretty much the same thing: the only things that they really remembered about their Norwegian heritage while growing up were "Uff-da!"[10] and, above all, the *lefse*. All three were quick to note, however, that my grandmother had never actually made it.

Uncle Rich

> Well, the first time I ever experienced [*lefse*] was at [my Grandma's] house up in Fosston. And it had to be when we were there in the Wintertime....I guess...I had an interest or a fascination or a fond memory of *lefse*...but mom never made it, didn't have it at home really. I think once or twice somebody...found some and brought it to Christmas dinner or something. You know, it was never quite the same as when Grandma made it up in Fosston...So I guess my memories mostly of *lefse* really go back to my

[10] "Uff-da!" is an exclamatory phrase that is used (according to a small sign in my Uncle Dan's kitchen) when "waking yourself up in Church with your own snoring" or "getting swished in the face with the cow's tail when you're milking the cow".

> Grandma...So, I guess to me, *lefse's* Norwegian, and Norwegian is *lefse*, and I don't know too much about any of the rest of it!
>
> *Aunt Heidi*
>
> Well, really, [the only thing I knew about was] probably the lefse...[mom] made *sandbakkels*[11] at Christmas and she made the spritz and probably living in Illinois those foods were probably the biggest connection with...Norwegian heritage...But mom would always try to have lefse. I suppose Grandma sent it. We did often have it at Christmas. And...it must be that either Grandma made it and sent it, and I think then maybe after Grandma was gone sometimes she'd find it somewhere and then, you know, Roy [Heidi's brother] could get it in Iowa and he would send it to mom.
>
> *Uncle Dan*
>
> You know, mom used to bring [*lefse*] back from Fosston. Every time she went to Fosston, she'd bring back some *lefse.* And we all love *lefse*, and we were all thrilled to have it...I remember [my mom] trying to make it once. She had a lefse skittle and a lefse...flipper stick...and the lefse flipper stick has Norwegian artwork on it. And I dunno if Heidi got it for her, but I remember Heidi and my mom trying to make it one time, and...my memory is that it didn't work. It didn't turn out very well.

In a short text about cultural memory, Paul Connerton discusses structural amnesia. Essentially, this form of forgetting takes place when it no longer becomes socially important to remember information that was once culturally valuable (Connerton 2006, 319). Connerton gives the example of regional cooking stating, "The attraction of regional cooking...is tied to what Grandmother did, and the methods of country cuisine are acquired by observation rather than by reading. In these circumstances recipes are systematically forgotten" (320). In Fosston, collective memory is reliant on the presence of an immigration narrative and a communal identity that is interpreted and given value by individual families. Food, symbolically, acts as a medium through which these interpretations and values flow. But Connerton's example, applied to food in a more

[11] *Sandbakkel is pronounced SAHND-bah-kl. They are small cookies that are pressed into metal tins to give them a ridge-like pattern around the edges.*

materialistic sense, also finds ground within the ways that collective memory functions through food-making and eating as embodied activities.

Lefse is important in Norwegian-American communities as a staple that has been carried over from Norway and carried on after immigration. Often, *lefse* is the one food that Norwegian-Americans who are not steeped in an ethnic community end up having access to. As Uncle Rich said, "*lefse's* Norwegian, and Norwegian is *lefse."* However, what was the anchor for collective memory in Fosston was not *lefse*, or any other traditional food, it was the community—something that my family did not have easy access to in Chicago. In leaving Fosston, my grandmother also left behind a community that is intertwined generationally through a collective memory of immigration. While that memory was not negated when my grandmother moved to Chicago, it was no longer collective. She was no longer able to rely on others, such as immediate family or community members, to share these same identity markers.

Beyond the kitchen, "family memory" (and, collective memory) is what informs identity performativity. For my family, the "family memory" that taught Fosston residents to value their Norwegian-American identity, for the most part, ended with my grandmother as it was no longer socially important to continue to teach and engage with this information once she moved. Coming back to *lefse* specifically, the consensus in my family is that my grandmother, most likely, was not taught how to make it—she was never taught that *familial* "stock of knowledge," nor was she able to pass it down. Furthermore, because there was limited access to a strong Norwegian-American community, there was not communal knowledge that she could pull from either.

Looking deeper into both Uncle Rich and Aunt Heidi's interviews specifically, the results of this lack of collectivity and community is made more apparent. Both of them refer to their

grandmother or trips to visit their grandmother in Fosston as the connection point to both *lefse* and their heritage. However, because they did not have access to this community or the family that was a part of it due to distance, this connection was not strong enough to allow them to fully develop a Norwegian-American identity. I do want to clarify, however, that while I am arguing that this loss of identity is an example of Connerton's structural amnesia, I would not, however, on a more individualized level call what myself or my relatives experience as "amnesia," as that suggests that at one point we would have known the collective memory that my grandmother did. However, thinking more broadly in terms of generations, the structural amnesia that was experienced by my grandmother—in the sense of coming to lack a Norwegian-American identity—was passed down to her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, much like *lefse* recipes are passed down in Fosston.

Conclusion: Undoing Structural Amnesia

On a Saturday morning in November of 2019, I invited my relatives living in the Chicagoland area to attend a *lefse*-making party that was to be the culmination of my fieldwork. While attempts had been made by various family members in the past, aside from what I learned in Fosston, no one had any experience with making *lefse*. I had spent hours planning the event, including the preparation of a lunch of Norwegian-American and Minnesotan regional foods that I had learned how to make during the summer. However, chaos reigned that morning as I rushed to get everything made as perfectly as possible. Not only did I discover in the midst of cooking that I was missing necessary tools, but the potato *klubb* I was trying to make were coming apart as they cooked in the pot. I barely finished everything before the small group who could attend started arriving. Besides my immediate family, the event consisted of my uncle Dan and his wife,

my aunt Gabby, and my aunt Heidi and her daughter Ellen—it was a good size party for *lefse*-making.

After showing off my newly acquired cooking skills during lunch, it was time to get down to business. I had made several batches of the potato mixture the night before (using Donna's recipe), so I asked four volunteers to crowd around the kitchen table to hand mix flour into each batch. Truthfully, I had never thought that I would be giving *lefse* demonstrations after only two attempts at making it, but I tried to explain with confidence how the *lefse*-making process would go as the mixing continued. Nevertheless, an air of uneasiness hung over us as we mixed the *lefse* dough, everyone unsure as to how this would pan out.

As soon as we got rolling, however, flour began to fly as folks settled into the rhythm of *lefse*-making. I was the first to make a round as I was the demonstrator. Everything was going fine, even the rolling, until I went to flip it and the *lefse* ripped. Mildly embarrassed, I was surprised when it was Aunt Heidi who came over to try and help me fix it, giving me tips. She then walked over to the pastry board where we were taking turns rolling out *lefse* rounds and rolled one perfectly. "Rebecca, I think the issue might have been that it was *too* thin," she said with confidence as she showed me how thick she thought they should be to withhold being carried to the griddle and flipped. I smiled as I watched her get to work on the *lefse*. She told me during her interview that she had only ever tried to make it one time with my grandmother and that it did not turn out, yet here she was making *lefse* as if she had been for years.

Throughout the next few hours, there were many ups and downs. Tensions would rise as some got the hang of rolling and flipping and others did not. My mother could roll the *lefse* perfectly but would sigh frustratedly when she ripped a round while trying to flip it on the griddle. My dad was a natural, just like Aunt Heidi, much to everyone's amusement. Upon

Figure 14: Volunteers work flour into the potato mixture, and the resulting lefse *dough is formed into balls. From left to right - Aunt Heidi, Aunt Gabby, my sister, Audrey, and my cousin, Ellen.*

Figure 15: Aunt Heidi rolling out a lefse *round as Ellen takes a photo.*

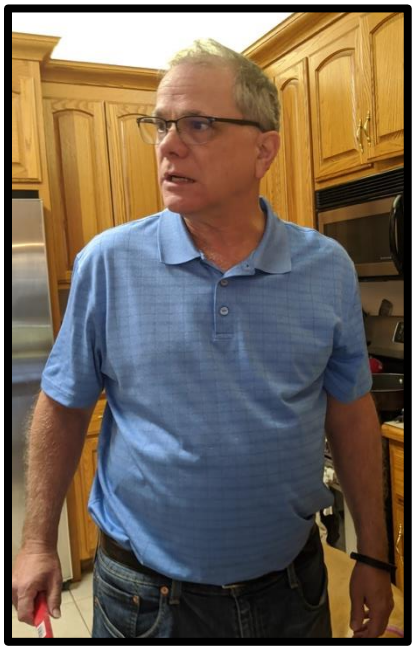

Figure 16: Uncle Dan's reactions after his first time successfully flipping lefse.

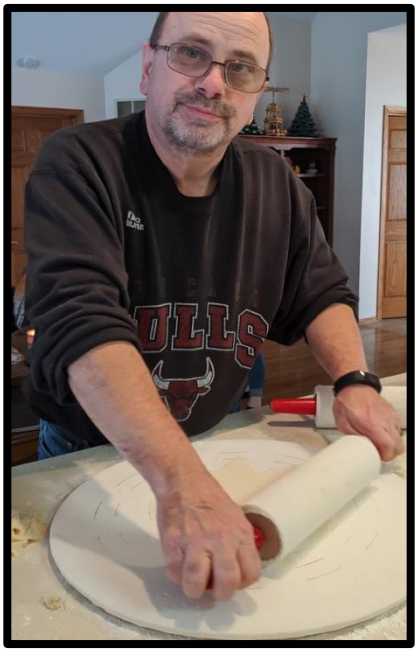

Figure 17: My father, Scott, rolling lefse *for the first time.*

rolling and flipping her first *lefse* successfully on her own, Ellen, jumped up and down excitedly as Aunt Heidi stood next to her with a smile on her face. I can clearly picture in my mind the look of pure shock and relief that crossed Uncle Dan's face[12] as he finally flipped a *lefse* without ripping it with the turning stick. As we were taking turns, I chatted with him for a bit. This was an emotional day for all of us, as *lefse* was a way to connect with my late grandmother. He looked at me with a smile and said, "You know, I never thought I'd make *lefse*." It was then that I realized just how important this was—our family had started to reconnect with a Norwegian-American identity.

In this paper, I have argued that food has acted as a medium through which Fosston residents are able to remember family and community members in an effort to preserve the collective memory of immigration to the United States. The sense of community and available cultural knowledge creates a foundation on which current day *lefse* makers base their own traditional food practices to better embody and remember the experiences of Norwegian immigrants. In contrast, based on personal experience, and the experience of my family members, I asserted that whether or not traditional foods are present, the absence of community is equal to an absence of collective memory. Without these factors, Norwegian-Americans are unable to experience the cultural and social knowledge required to perform that identity. However, it becomes apparent that when food-making is re-introduced to a group, such as my family, identity and the cycle of passing down memories can be taken up again, though once lost.

The time I spent in Fosston completing fieldwork was also time spent undoing some of the structural amnesia that was passed down to me. After gaining an *individual* "stock of

[12] See Figure 16.

knowledge" in Fosston, I was able to begin a *familial* "stock of knowledge" within my family during the *lefse*-making party. Since then, I have had various relatives reach out to ask for recipes and photos. Aunt Heidi even told me that she had made *lefse* at Christmas with her own family this year—something that she had not been able to do before. During our interview, Uncle Dan said something that I could not help but think of as I watched my family roll out *lefse* that day in November, "You know...I'll tell you...something we all have in common, us sitting here, and all of us...your dad, and my brothers, [my sister], all of us...we have Grandma in common." While we did not have a community to anchor us to a Norwegian-American identity, memories of the *lefse*-making party paired with memories of my grandmother link myself and my family members to a Norwegian-American identity that is beginning to find a foundation in "family memory." By creating a sense of communal identity among my family and fostering what little bits remained from what my grandmother did share with all of us, we were able to start answering Filip's question as we learned what kind of Norwegian-Americans we are.

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Appendix

The following is a series of *lefse*-making recipes and techniques that I collected during my time in Fosston. The majority of participants chose to verbally explain these ideas to me, so rather than providing photos of recipes, I will be providing snippets of interview transcriptions. As some participants did not make *lefse,* the following is not inclusive of every Fosston resident who participated in this project. Interview materials are organized in alphabetical order by participant’s pseudonym.

David

...It's kind of evolved over time—but if I were to make it today...I would...peel the ten-pound bag of potatoes, boil them, you know, just like you boil potatoes. And then, I'm gonna add quite a lot of salt to the water actually...I mash them in the water, which is kind of sacrilege. [*he chuckles*] It kind of makes like a big potato soup...And then I add potato flakes...to get to the point where it dries up to where I want it to be. I always wanted to get as much quantity of mashed potatoes as I could...so I thought I'll just add the flakes...'Cause, you know, half the people use potato flakes anyway to make their *lefse* with...But I really liked the flavor of the real potato too...And then I add butter and oil. Oil is probably an unusual thing, most people add cream and butter, uh, or just butter maybe. But, oil seems to let potatoes stretch without breaking...I let it cool to room temperature, and then...I would take a little bit of that mixture, add some flour--just enough that I can use it quickly 'cause if you add flour to the whole thing then it'll get gummy...You kinda work it so that it gets a little gluten going and stretches a little bit. And then...I press the ball of potatoes between two pieces of plastic…the same way that you'd make a tortilla...you put it in between two plastic bags or Ziplocs basically, and then you...just press it down with the plate...then you get it to a certain diameter without adding anymore flour yet...So then I take the plastic off and put it on my regular rolling board with plenty of flour and then roll it out and fry it, basically.

Donna

I use potato flakes, Hungry Jack potato flakes. And so that...you mix up the mash—you cook the milk, cream, and the butter together, and you boil that and then you pour it...over the potato flakes. And so...you cannot tell the difference between the riced potatoes and the...potato flake mixture. And then you let that sit on the counter, for room temperature, overnight. And then, in the morning, then you add two cups of flour, and, you know, mix it all up, kinda knead it in. And then...you divide it up into two halves and...you put [one] back in the refrigerator...and then the other half you make into eight or ten—depending on how large you want 'em—little tiny, almost looks like snowballs, you know. And then you flatten those out, make them perfectly round, and flatten them out a little tiny bit and then put them on a plate, and you take them back out one at a time, and roll it on the great big pastry board, or the *lefse* board, as we call it, you know. And... I guess they get to be about fourteen inches around. That's what you try to aim for anyway. And... you sprinkle flour on the...pastry board or the *lefse* board—but not too much so it gets hard—and then roll it out, first only about eight inches, then sprinkle more. Pick it up with your *lefse* stick and sprinkle more flour on it, then lay it down so it's backwards. You know, upside down. And then you roll it the rest of the way, and then slide your *lefse* [stick under] and roll it around your *lefse* stick and put it on the grill. On the *lefse* grill...And so once you finish those eight or ten, however many, then you take out the other batch, or the other half, and do the same thing with that. And I cut it in half, and cut it in half, and cut it in half.

Loretta

So for me it's a two day process because I like to cook my potatoes the night before…[*Sections in quotation are being read off of a written recipe*] So "ten pounds of potatoes, two thirds cup of sugar, two tablespoons of salt, one cup of butter, and a third cup of whipping cream". So, "peel and cook the potatoes until done but not mushy", and that's what nice about the Cherokee potatoes is they don't get mushy, they stay nice and firm. "Drain well, put hot potatoes through the ricer, making sure not to leave any lumps. Immediately add the sugar, salt, butter and cream, and stir well. Mix with my hands until well blended and then cover with a dish towel and place in the refrigerator until well cooled, like overnight."...And I usually put it all into the big Tupperware, or even a bigger stainless steel bowl...And that makes it really easy because then you divide that into four parts...And then "to each part, add one cup of flour and mix well." And then, while I'm doing that, the other part is back in the refrigerator again to keep it cold. "Make each part into about ten patties"—so I take that forth and make it into a log shape and then cut out ten patties from that one...log. "Roll on the *lefse* board until very thin, using a cloth covered, ridged rolling pin." And then, "with the *lefse* stick, start on one edge of the *lefse* and roll the dough up onto the stick and then unroll it onto the grill that's set at five hundred degrees." And, "lightly brown *lefse* on one side, and then, using the stick, lift it and flip it to the other side. Once the *lefse* is browned, place it on a towel"—so I don't fold 'em yet...And then "cover it with a dry towel"—and that towel—usually we put down a bath towel that's slightly, like, misted with a little bit of water. And then...and then a dry towel on top... "Fry another *lef*se and place that *lefse* on top of each other so they can steam together until cool. Once the pieces are fairly cool, fold each piece into four and then layer your pieces like you do napkins on a fancy table" And then, "cover until completely cool" [*laughs*] "Once they are completely cool, place them in a Ziploc bag and they freeze well" It says, "we do not add the flour until just before we are going to fry the *lefse*, because if you add the flour too soon it becomes sticky and won't roll well. So, it's important to keep the dough cool while we are rolling and frying." And, I dunno if it says in here, but I always roll a little bit, put a little more flour on it, and then, as I'm flipping it over, putting a little more flour underneath, just so it doesn't stick.

Maria

...You don't wanna put the flour in ahead of time, and you want everything incorporated. So, when I cook up the potatoes, and I know you're supposed to have russets—I'm sure you've heard that...I use Reds because...they've got more flavor to them. Sometimes I will do half and half...Russet is much dryer, that's really why people like to use it. But, when I cook them up...and they're already peeled, you know...I don't cook them in their jackets or anything. And then I put 'em out on a cookie sheet so that they kinda dry, or steam dry. Then I put 'em through a ricer, and I do that in my Kitchen Aid...And then it's still hot!... And it depends on how much potatoes of course, but...then I will put in... maybe a pound of butter? I put lots of butter in. And... a little salt. I don't put a lot in, but you have to have some, or it doesn't have much flavor. And powdered sugar...To me that's like the key...is adding that little bit of sugar to it...And, *of course,* powdered sugar is going to incorporate better than regular sugar is...I know mom always added cream, I

was going just with butter for a while, with the powdered sugar...But then now I add...a little bit of cream to it because it seems like it...doesn't crack as much when you stick it in the freezer. And sometimes no matter what you do—you can do the same identical thing and it's not gonna turn out the same. You know, sometimes it's just wonderful! And then other times it's eh, okay...Especially if you've got a lot. And then...I put it all in the refrigerator, you know, of course. And then I take out, like a couple batches worth and then add the flour and form it into balls and then stick it back in the fridge again and then roll them out as I go. And then I have out here on this table then...a dish towel, a white dish towel, you know those?... And then I put wax paper down, and then I put the hot...*lefses* between there so it steams it. And then any...little crispy spots...will get softened then by that. And once it's completely cold, then...I start wrapping them. I usually put three to a package, and then wrap it in wax paper again and then put it in little baggies and throw that into a container. So, I have...double sealing, otherwise you end up with dry *lefse*, just from the freezer. That's not a good thing. So, there's a whole process involved, but. And I'm usually by myself, I usually do it [don't] do it with anyone else.

Ian

...You start by getting Idaho russet potatoes. If you get any other kind of potatoes, you're stupid. People are really judgmental about the potato that they take. Some people are flake people, some people are Idaho Russet people, some people are Cherokee potato people. And some people have a whole different way of doing it! That's the God's honest truth— "better do it otherwise you're stupid" kind of a way to do it...But you get Idaho Russet potatoes, and you get heavy cream, and you get flour and you get a little salt. And you use Grandpa's recipe, which he shared with the Sons of Norway and they printed out in the magazine...and he was very proud of that. And then...you make it...You peel your potatoes and then you boil 'em until you can just barely stick a fork in 'em...and then they just slide off just right and then they're ready. You then rice them immediately...into the biggest bowl you have. If you've gotta split it in two that's fine but the bigger the bowl the better. And people think a big bowl is like this. [*he puts his hands a foot apart on the table*] It's actually about [he *doubles space in between his hands*]. If you can get a 2-foot wide bowl, that's about as good as you can hope for...And then it takes a ton of butter. You rice the potatoes on top of the butter so that the heat from the potatoes helps melt it...well, first you gotta cut the butter up into little pads and then that helps it too. I found that, like, grating the butter can work if you really wanna be...anal about mixing it all together. But cutting it is just fine...Then you use a KitchenAid mixer because we are in a modern era and we can afford stuff like that. So, you use a machine mixer, it really helps...blend everything together. The very last thing you do is add the flour on day two. So, day one is ricing—sorry, peeling, cooking, ricing, mixing with butter and adding cream. And then...you let that cool overnight. If you don't let it cool...the heat from the potatoes will start to cook the flour. And it will be very gummy. You'll extract the glutens from the flour and...it will be a very difficult roll out for you...Day two, you uncover the *lefse* from the fridge. You part it out. In the recipe that grandpa had, into halves. So... you combine...half the flour into that one half and then the other half to make it into the mixer cause none of us have a big enough mixer for that...And then you start rolling it out. You start with a generous, like a large spoon—a tablespoon. Like an

old-timey soup tablespoon. And then just kinda see...what kind of size that gives you. If you're the kind of person that wants to maximize the real estate on the *lefse* griddle, you go and maximize the real estate on the *lefse* griddle with how big you can roll it out...But start small, that'd be the advice I'd start with most people. That's the process of making the *lefse*. You...then use a dry griddle. A dry non-stick griddle usually works very well. Some people swear by the regular aluminum top with no non-stick on it. I've found that the results maybe just take just a half minute longer on the non-stick, but you don't have to worry about the sticky burnt hot spots...on the regular aluminum griddle. So... we're way into the weeds. Maybe America's Test Kitchen style about how you would do *lefse*! That's kinda the details.