

It's in the blood

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [August 26, 1998](#) issue

About 30 years ago, in a doctoral examination, a student, Trygve Skarsten, a colleague, R. Pierce Beaver, and I, the historian of religion, got into a colloquy about ancient pagan rites of Norway. The Norse had had a thing about horses and horse blood, as I recall it. They rode the former and drank the latter.

Christianization did not mean the end of blood-ingesting and other such activities as would distress Jehovah's Witnesses. Skarsten proudly told us that his family of Norwegian-Americans were members of tugboat-crew labor unions in New York. Tryg remembered his Lutheran family eating "blood pudding," a tasty reflection of the old religion, in the 1940s. Recently I wrote Tryg, now a professor, and asked him if I correctly remembered this distinctive custom. Yes, he answered--and sent me pages from a 1947 Norwegian-American cookbook.

Doing what I can to promote pagan, Christian, Lutheran, Norwegian and other rites for the gourmet, I pass on a blood pudding recipe to you. Skarsten assures me that there are better kinds of blood than that of horses, as Mrs. M. O. of Toledo, who wrote this recipe, also will testify. It calls for "1 large cup rice; 3 cups water; 2 cups blood; 2 cups milk; 1/2 tsp allspice (ground); 1/2 tsp. pepper; 1/2 tsp. ground ginger; 1/2 tsp. ground cloves, white flour and salt; 2 cups raisins and 2 cups suet."

Boil rice in water until half done. Let stand until cold. Add blood (pig's blood is best), milk, allspice, pepper, ginger, cloves and enough white flour to make a dough that is not too heavy. The mixture of dough should be a little thinner than for meat balls when ready for frying. Salt to taste. Fill partly in well-greased pans. Soak raisins in boiling water for fifteen minutes, drain, and when dry roll in flour. Cut suet in tiny pieces and let come to a boil in salted water. Drain and cool. Place suet and raisins in alternate layers on top of partly filled pans and press down with fork, so they will be more evenly distributed. Bake in medium hot oven about one to one and one-half hours. Test with toothpick in center, and if no mixture adheres, the pudding is done. Can be eaten at once, with coffee or milk, and may be sprinkled with sugar, and submerged in melted butter or syrup as desired. If preferred keep until cold, slice

and fry in lard or butter.

As Jean-Paul Roux reminds us, "Blood is the drink of the gods or the drink shared by mortals with the gods." For interfaith rituals, use anything but pig's blood. But all Christians can enjoy this gift, pig blood and all, from northern Lutherans and Staten Island tugboaters.

In the spirit of interfaith and ecumenical fairness, I may in the future pass on other recipes for ethnoreligious foods. Send me your examples and I will reprint them if I am impressed by their symbolism and probable tastiness. For now: eat well and watch your cholesterol.