

Bangor Daily News Wednesday, September 29, 2004  
Schooner Fare By Kristin Andresen of the News Staff

The brilliant sun dances on the water and crisp ocean air fills the sails of the windjammer J&E Riggin as the bustle of Bass Harbor- last night's port of call- fades into the distance. On deck, the guests chat and relax. Some knit, others crochet, and one man teaches himself to tie knots. A few sailors consult with the captain, and several people are stretched out like cats, sleeping and soaking up the warm sunshine.

Pine-dappled island and craggy pink granite cliffs slip by as the ship makes the languid journey toward Brooklin harbor. Later in the afternoon, the Wooden Boat Festival will be in full swing, with a steel-drum band and tours of the famed boat-building school. The passengers are looking forward to the evening's festivities, but truth be told, they're even more excited about dinner.

"Whenever the bell rings, everybody goes running," Noreen Robinson, a Riggin regular from Reading, Penn., said, only half-kidding. "We're conditioned just like Pavlov's dogs."

On the Riggin, food is king and Anne Mahle, 37, who owns the ship with her husband, Capt. Jon Finger, 43, is queen of the kitchen. In her recently published cookbook, "At Home, At Sea," Mahle shares her coveted recipes, family anecdotes, her soulful approach to cooking.

"She's not only just feeding [us]," said Kathy Ansell of Wilmington, Del., a former food editor. "It's breaking the bread."

Mahle sees meals as a way for friends and family to come together, to share the day's events, and in doing so, to share their lives. Food fuels conversation, and after a week's worth of meals aboard the Riggin, a sense of camaraderie develops among the passengers, the crew, Mahle, Finger and the couple's two young daughters, Chloe and Ella.

"It's a good lifestyle-it's good for our family," Mahle said while kneading raisin bread dough in the Riggin's compact galley. "We have extended family through our crew and our guests. I welcome them to the boat as guest in our home.

In 1989, when Mahle joined the windjammer fleet as a mess cook aboard the Stephen Taber, she immediately felt at home. But at the time, she saw cooking as the means to an end, and the end was sailing. She snuck away to the quarterdeck whenever she had the chance, which also gave her the opportunity to spend more time with ships mate, now her mate, Jon Finger.

Things with Jon were serious from the get-go, but several summers into her windjammer experience, including a stint as the head cook on the Victory Chimes, Mahle also decided to get equally serious about cooking. She asked Rockland chef Hans Bucher, of Jessica's Restaurant fame, to be her mentor, and she refined her skills under his tutelage.

"It was great," Mahle said. "He was a really good teacher. A lot of times we would just stand in our separate spaces and we'd just talk and chop and cut and cook, and I learned a lot from him. A lot of it was classic, a lot of it was traditional food, which was a great foundation."

After three years at Jessica's, Mahle and Finger were hired as chef and captain on a private yacht. They spent summers in New England and winters in the Caribbean, where Mahle perused the local markets for fresh fruits, vegetables and spices.

Through the Riggins plies the waters off midcoast Maine, Mahle retained a bit of the island influence when she and her husband bought the ship in 1998. It shows not only in her liberal use of salsas and spices, but in her dedication to locally grown and raised produce and meats, and that dedication isn't lost on the passengers.

"Everything is always so fresh," Ansell said. "I'm really into food, and [Mahle] belongs to a co-op, so she buys a lot of stuff locally. She gets her meat from a local butcher, she uses local coffee. That stuff really makes a difference. It does-its quality."

And quality is what its all about for the couple –in life, on the ship, and on the table. As chicken curry sizzles on the ships wood-fired cook stove, Mahle stops to sample a piece of honeydew melon for the raita, a yogurt sauce that will accompany the main dish. It tasted great yesterday, but today its past it prime. She wrinkles her nose and then turns to pour chopped onions into the pot.

On the dining tables, which double as workspace in the close quarters., Erick Schwendy, 23, and Hilary Schleimer,22, chop hardboiled eggs and bananas, condiments for the curry. Erika's working as a mess cook for the summer, while Hilary is working as a nanny for Anne's girls. They're a little bit like Anne was when she first came to Maine.

"I thought I was going to come and do this for a summer job and then I'd get a real job where I would have to wear a navy blue suit," Mahle said, laughing. "Then I thought it'd be two summers. Then I thought it'd be three summers."

She never left, but now that Chloe has started school, Anne stays home for the week and then rejoins the ship on the weekends. It's the first time she's been away from the Riggins 1998, and she misses it. You can see it in her eyes when one of the mates ducks into her cabin and excitedly tell her that the marshmallow gun is working-he's been shooting tiny marshmallows at other schooners in the fleet, which are anchored nearby.

"I'm so proud," she replies with a mischievous grin. Then she turns back to the stove.

Soon, the guests will return from shore to relax, sip wine and eat warm horseradish-cheddar dip as the red sun sinks lower in the sky. When the curry is ready and the bread has finished baking, the dinner bell will ring and guests and crew will gather around the tables to hear the story behind the meal.

Mahle will tell them the history of the spice trade and the ships that carried curry-and rum, and slaves, and porcelain- centuries ago. And as they break bread, scoop couscous and help themselves to roasted squash, they will share their own stories and laugh with strangers who have become friends.

"They're keeping the tradition alive," Mahle said. "We consider them part of the Riggins family."

*At Home, At Sea is available at My Maine Bag and Boarders in Bangor; Dave's Book Shop in Old Town, the Reading Corner and Second Read in Rockland, Owl and Turtle in Camden, all Sherman's locations, all Grasshopper Shop locations, and all Mr. Paperback locations. For information about the J&E Riggins, visit [www.MaineWindjammer.com](http://www.MaineWindjammer.com).*

Jim's Raisin Bread Makes 2 loaves

8 cups all purpose flour  
2 packages (2 tablespoons) yeast  
1 tablespoon salt 3 ½ cups warm water  
½ cup cooking oil  
1/3-cup sugar  
2 cups raisins  
1 egg (optional)

Combine the dry ingredients in a large bowl.  
Stir in all the remaining ingredients, reserving ¼ cup water. Add more water if needed.

Knead for 10-15 minutes.

Oil the bowl and the top of the dough, cover, and set aside in a warm, draft-free place to rise until doubled, about 1 hour.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

Divide the dough in half and shape each half into long French-style loaves. Dust a cookie pan with cornmeal and place the loaves on the pan. Cover and allow to rise again. When the loaves have nearly doubled, make three diagonal slashes on each loaf with a razor or very sharp knife.

Place the pans in the oven, throw a cup of water over hot stones set in a pan on the bottom of the oven (or toss 3 or 4 ice cubes into a pan on the bottom of the oven) to generate steam and **quickly** close the oven door.

Bake until golden brown (around 35-40 minutes).

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Chocolate Decadence Pie Serves 8

2 8-ounce packages cream cheese, at room temperature  
2 squares unsweetened chocolate  
1 ½ cups chocolate chips  
½ cup half-and-half  
5 eggs  
½ teaspoon peppermint extract

Pie Crust:

2 cups crushed Oreo cookies  
¾ cup melted butter

Topping:

2 tablespoons sugar  
½ cup whipping cream

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

Heat the chocolate and half-and-half over a double boiler until the chocolate is melted; cool slightly. (Mahle often removes the chocolate from the heat before it's fully melted and let the residual heat melt it the rest of the way. That way, it doesn't take as long to cool.)

Add ¼ of the melted chocolate to the cream cheese. Add a bit more, mix, and then add the rest.

Add the eggs and extract.

Melt the butter and mix it with the Oreo crumbs, then press the mixture into the bottom and sides of a pie plate. Pour in the chocolate mixture and bake for about 30 minutes. It should still be a little wiggly in the center when you take it out.

While the pie cools, whip the sugar and whipping cream together.

Serve with a dollop of whipped cream.

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### Chicken Curry                      Serves 6-8

2 tablespoons olive oil  
3 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs cut into 2-inch pieces  
2 large onions, chopped  
1 large green pepper, seeded and diced  
½ jalapeno pepper, seeded and minced (optional)  
3 cloves minced garlic  
2 tablespoons freshly grated ginger  
3 tablespoons curry powder  
1 teaspoon cumin  
1 teaspoon salt  
1 14-ounce can diced tomatoes  
1 can coconut milk  
Juice of 1 lime

Heat the oil in a large, wide stockpot over medium-high heat. Place the chicken in the pot and cook until browned on all sides. Add the onion, peppers, garlic, ginger, spices and salt; cook for another 10-15 minutes until the onions are translucent. Add the tomatoes and coconut milk. Simmer, uncovered, 45 minutes or until chicken is tender. Add water if needed. Serve over couscous or rice, with any of the condiments below and the Canteloupe Raita. [sic]

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### Warm Cheddar and Horseradish Dip                      Serves 4-6

4 ounces softened cream cheese  
1 tablespoon grated onion  
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
2 tablespoons horseradish  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley  
½ cup grated cheddar cheese

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Combine all the ingredients by hand or in a food processor. Spoon the mixture onto an ovenproof platter. Bake for 20 minutes until the

dip is bubbling around the edges. Serve with crackers or in a hollowed-out round loaf of bread.

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### Cantaloupe Raita [sic]

Raita is typically yogurt and cucumbers, used to “cool down” the spiciness of the curry. Mahle uses canteloupe [sic] as a twist.

1 cup diced cantaloupe

2 cups yogurt

1 tablespoon minced fresh cilantro

¼ teaspoon salt

Freshly ground black pepper to taste

Mix everything together. Serve immediately.