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WASHINGTON BLADE

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## food GEORGE OLIVER



Robert Meyers-Lussier credits the film  
'Babette's Feast' with sparking his interest in  
cooking. His new book celebrates comfort foods.

## Now we're cooking

WHEN YOU THINK OF THE WORLD OF legal consulting and software training, the phrase "good food" does not come immediately to mind. Robert Meyers-Lussier's new cookbook "This Is Delicious! What Is It?" hints at the author's own journey from Army intelligence man to caterer to legal consultant, in its subtitle: "An Eclectic Collection of International Comfort Foods".

As a gay man who was first inspired by a movie to experiment with cooking, Meyers-Lussier's personal eclecticism includes a published book of poetry, a television cooking show for Bloomington Public TV, sports writing, a run for state lawmaker in Minnesota, and legal consultant.

The recipes in his cookbook are all connected to some stage of his life, including his coming out.

"Delicious" has an international menu, with few recipes that are "American" in any traditional sense of that word; the book invites the cook to

venture out from his or her comfort zone, but still be comforted by the food. This parallels Meyers-Lussier's own journey from Midwestern roast beef guy to gourmet caterer-teacher-chef.

Meyers-Lussier's nascent interest in food really burst forth when he was in Germany stationed with the U.S. Army as an intelligence analyst. As he tells it, it was toward the end of his stint in the military that he happened to rent the film "Babette's Feast," which changed his life.

In the film, Babette, a famous French chef in exile among a religious sect in Denmark, wins the lottery and spends all of her money to put on a spectacular feast for the small, austere community. Suspicious at first, people there eventually are won over by the food and wine, and begin to loosen up, mending old hurts and rediscovering their spiritual zeal.

It was, as he says, "an epiphany." The author was moved to tears both by the spectacle of the meal, the generous soul

*this is delicious!*



*what is it?*

*An Eclectic Collection of  
International Comfort Foods*

by Robert Meyers-Lussier

of Babette, and the effect of the feast (and the wine) on the staid diners.

He wanted to recreate this experience for himself and for others. So he went immediately to the library to find out about the food of other countries. He organized a series of dinners for his barracks buddies — five-course dinners from five countries (France, Greece, China, Mexico and Italy) on five nights.

Some classic international comfort foods from this extravaganza he included in his cookbook: crepes, moussaka, Peking duck, rum-banana cake, and zabaglione.

These were all never-before-attempted creations for Meyers-Lussier, the likes of which had not been seen in his barracks dining area. At the time, he was well closeted and the flamboyant culinary display raised no eyebrows.

What it did raise was his barrack's profile: Upper level officers began to show up at the dinners.

IT'S ALMOST UNBELIEVABLE THAT up to this point, Bob had done little cooking himself. He grew up outside of Minneapolis, where macaroni and cheese reigned and hamburger was helped in many ways.

When I asked him how he could pull off such an amazing series of dinners with no previous background in cooking, he replied, "I'm good at following instructions."

His childhood was often difficult and unhappy. When he was 12, his parents divorced. His mother was committed to a state mental institution, where he would



This is a table setting for one of Robert Meyers-Lussier's dinners. (Photos courtesy of Robert Meyers-Lussier)

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