

## Cooking · *John Repp*

I cook better than I let on in public. Give me garlic (what else?) and step back.  
My anything with chicken broth and red onion guarantees *samadhi*.  
Marinades are so simple it's criminal—for swordfish, add shallots, my secret.  
Forego forever potato-chip-and-stewed-tomato casseroles, fish-sticks, scrapple,  
ham-in-a-can and every edible whatever advertised by a cartoon chef or animal.  
No crime to eat well, no crime to quit the factory—I'll take Donne and Ellington  
any day, I'll take an air-conditioned office and an orthopedic chair, please,  
hook me to an ergograph in vain, I'm serene as Williams with a three-one count.

Forego, while we're at it, that woman's scapular dance filling my hands, her hips  
pale as August sky, forego the melodies she drew from me, forego long-ago wiles  
so the leaves the block-association rakes can bestow their odor when I walk  
to where I stay. Forever stray, love harrows, goes, abides sometimes in those  
who wait, sometimes blesses those who don't. For asked and answered want  
I would some days cast aside every gift and gaze on Artemis, happily blind.

My neighbor walks to his window, stares down at the street, hands in pockets,  
glasses on, glasses off, shirttails out. His wife sweeps behind his desk  
while he walks to the window and away, even after the stubborn car starts.  
We're home for New Year's, which reminds me of the teacher who said  
if you looked at 1961 upside-down, it remained 1961, and none of us  
would be alive the next time that happened. I wrote a list, found her correct,  
but kept turning years over, wishing less for 1961's symmetry than for the thrill  
of imagining times when none of us would be here—9961, for example,  
January 3, 9961 in the upper-right-hand quiz corner, on the board in blue chalk,  
in my math notebook, where fractions would soon multiply, but no, there'd be  
no me to have a math notebook or see blue chalk or feel my flannel-lined jeans  
crumple and smooth as I walked. Who'd be soaking up these things then?

This morning, my nephew asked me what I asked my mother on the verge  
of my own pustule-ridden lunge into adolescence: *Why does time move so fast?*  
I gave him a cliché and squeezed his shoulder. My mother simply wept.  
Nick, tonight it moves perfectly. I haven't peeled the garlic or tenderized the veal

or poured my first glass of this delightful Merlot. I haven't brought my hand to my nose to gain the green, nutty pleasure of trimmed basil. Nick, you know time can move backward or seem not to exist. My neighbor looks out, his wife sweeps, the stone fire horse rears as the boombox roars, time is rich as the dirt where I lay one night gazing at the melon vines I'd coaxed and wet, whose fruit I'd untwisted, split and devoured, lay in blank, brimming ecstasy as my love drove the last stretch, neither knowing we'd forego music to eat and drink till dawn.