

Up Close
'Online Cookbook' a Must-Read the World Over

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Andrea Meyers, originally from southwest Virginia, moved to Loudoun County with her husband Michael and their three sons in March 2007. Her passion for food and creating recipes led her to start a blog, *Andrea's Recipes*, that receives more than 40,000 page views a month.

In an e-mail interview with *loudounextra.com* staff writer Charity Corkey, Meyers, 42, discussed her blog, the influences on her cooking and her worst kitchen disaster.



Andrea Meyers says working overseas allowed her to enjoy the foods in the Pacific, South America, the Middle East and Asia. (By Charity Corkey -- Loudounextra.com)

Q When did you start blogging about food, and why?

A My cooking blog started as a hobby six years ago, a way for me to keep track of our favorite recipes online. I never intended to start a blog. I decided to use WordPress as a content management system and never thought anyone would visit the site. In fact I was so new to the blogging software that I didn't realize the site had visitors until someone left a comment on one of my early posts.

I felt mortified because the site was very bare, with no photos or anything to make it look inviting. So I started working on the design and began shooting photos of the dishes I cooked. My husband had encouraged me to write a cookbook for our children, and in a way the site became our family's online cookbook.

How often do you blog and what kind of response from readers do you get?

I try to write two recipes and one edible-gardening post per week, though I would like to post more often. My readers seem very supportive of the site and reach out via their comments and e-mails. The site has readers from all over the world, some as far away as Singapore and Australia, but about 60 percent are from the United States.

What is the worst kitchen disaster you've had?

I've had my share, and I actually wrote about my top 10 culinary flops during my first year blogging. I think dropping my husband's birthday cake a few years ago qualifies as the worst thing that has ever happened in our kitchen.

On your blog, you write that you are from the South. What Southern meals inspired you to pursue cooking?

Even though I grew up in the Midwest, my parents brought the South with them, and their Southern upbringing was consistently reflected in our home. There are farmers on both sides of our family tree, so that had an impact as well.

My mother and grandmothers made many things that I wanted to learn, but Southern country-style breakfasts were a big inspiration. For them, it was the big meal of the day, and my paternal grandmother filled the breakfast table with two or three kinds of meat, biscuits, gravy, sliced tomatoes and homemade jellies and jams, and apple butter. I still can't quite imitate my grandmother's fried chicken, but I can come pretty close to her biscuits and gravy. I wish I had spent more time in the kitchen with my mother and grandmothers when I was young.

CONTINUED 1 2 Next >

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Page 2 of 2 < Back

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What professional chef do you admire most?

It's difficult to choose just one. I admire Rick Bayless (Frontera Grill, Chicago) and his approach to authentic Mexican foods and Todd Gray (Equinox, Washington) for his focus on seasonal and local foods. I also have a great deal of admiration for Tony Geraci, the chef who runs the meals program in Baltimore schools. He has worked hard to raise the bar on the quality of the food served to children.



Andrea Meyers says working overseas allowed her to enjoy the foods in the Pacific, South America, the Middle East and Asia. (By Charity Corkey -- Loudounextra.com)

In your blog, you refer to your three sons with nicknames -- Bob the Builder, Top Gun and Monkey Boy. Why is that?

We wanted some way to protect our children's privacy, especially as they grow older. So we chose to use nicknames and not post photos of them. Some photos show their hands as they roll dough or help in other ways, but that's all we show.

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Of the dishes that you make, what are your sons' favorites?

Our boys enjoy homemade artisan breads and chicken noodle soup, and they always get excited when I break out the ice cream freezer. They also like to help make pizza and have had lots of practice rolling dough.

And your husband's?

He says it's a tie between my chicken tortilla soup and the inside-out German chocolate cake I made for his birthday last year.

Tell us about the best foods you have sampled in other countries. Have you attempted to recreate these recipes at home?

Working overseas for eight years gave me many opportunities to enjoy the foods in the Pacific, South America, the Middle East and Asia. Saipan offered a wonderful introduction to really fresh seafood, something I was not accustomed to growing up in the Midwest. I fell in love with the beef in Colombia and flat breads and shawarmas in Saudi Arabia.

My favorite dish from my years overseas is Ajiaco Bogotano, a chicken and potato soup from Colombia. I spent quite a bit of time trying to re-create the recipe, which calls for a potato not grown in the U.S., as well as a weed not commonly used in cooking here. And I think the outcome was pretty successful. Making my favorite international foods is usually easy because of the many international markets and availability of ingredients here in the D.C. metro area.

What is your favorite restaurant in Loudoun?

With three young boys, we rarely eat out, but I enjoy Grand Thai & Sushi in South Riding.

Tell us something about yourself that would surprise your friends and neighbors.

I haven't always had a green thumb. I've inadvertently killed hundreds of plants in my quest to grow our own herbs, vegetables and fruits.

UP CLOSE is a feature in which Loudoun County residents talk about their jobs, interests and experiences in the community. Have a suggestion on whom we should interview? Send it to loudounextra@wpni.com.

< Back 1 2