

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I now know about trans-fat! I, always, knew about being fat, but trans-fat was a new word for me. Trans-fat is defined as being trans-fatty acid, a chemical term for any unsaturated fatty acid with a trans (across or beyond) arrangement of atoms about its double bonds, such acids, occurring in margarines and cooking oils as a side-effect of manufacturing and being thought to increase the risk of coronary heart disease. Now, you and I both know about trans-fat. It is good, of course, that I know the definition of trans-fat, but what I don't understand is that, when I was very young, my mother always told me that margarine was better for one's health than butter because butter was a dairy product and, as such, it was not good for the body, causing blood arteries to get clogged up. Now, we are told to relearn the nutrition lessons of youth. It is, really, getting very difficult to know what to eat and what not to eat, these days. New York has just banned the use of trans-fat in all restaurants. Some New York restaurants are switching to soya bean oil for the production deep-fried foods. In Hongkong, one is told to beware of fish from China and the Philippines due to chemicals in the water in which the fish are raised, chemicals which, sometimes, contain poisons – which are very harmful to health. Certain vermicelli products, made in China, have, recently, been banned, also, due to the fact that they have been dyed with a carcinogenic substance. Chicken and duck eggs from China may, also, be bad for health, one is told, because, in the case of chicken eggs, they may be dyed in order to make their yolks look redder and better and, in the case of duck eggs, the poor birds are likely to have been fed with chemicals in order to fatten them, quickly, and, as a result, one should not eat their eggs. One has to be careful about eating chickens, too, we are told, because of Bird Flu. From time to time, American and Canadian beef is banned because of outbreaks of Mad-Cow Disease in North American. Certain oysters, also, can make one very sick, the Government of Hongkong warns, and vegetables from China are, often, sprayed with poisons, too. So, what is one to do? What may one eat, safely? Life is difficult enough as it is, especially for somebody, such as I, who has to watch her weight. I love to cook, as you well know, and I love to make croissants for Bo-Bo, my husband, who looks forward to them on Sunday mornings as they come straight out of the oven. Croissants are made only of flour, milk and lots and lots of butter. Since there is no trans-fat in a croissant, it means that they cannot be bad for Bo-Bo. At the same time, however, if he eats too many of my croissants, then, his weight will shoot up and he could have heart problems because of the added requirements, placed on his heart by the added weight that he puts on by eating the best kind of food. It is all very perplexing, don't you think?

I was thinking of moving to Australia in order to be able to eat until my heart's content, but I know that the Aussies, as they are called, don't love Orientals. (There is, still, a 'White Australian Policy' even though it is denied, officially, by Canberra, you know.) New Zealand, as a place in which to retire and eat, heartily, is out, also, because it is a land of odd-jobbers and handymen where one could easily become a vegetable in a land of vegetables and about 4 million people with about 50 million sheep. I went to Auckland, New Zealand, a few years ago, and ate some chicken in a restaurant. It had almost no flavour to it! When I asked the waiter about this matter, I was told: 'Look, Maite! If you don't like our food, you can jolly well go back to your own country @@@!' I was told later that the waiter was born in Australia. You see what I mean: White Australian Policy! When the British ruled Hongkong, we didn't have all of these food problems. For what reason do we, now, have them? Could it be that the British Colonial System was more proactive than the present system when it comes to the inspection of imported foodstuffs? Or, is it that China is, now, more vigilant in respect of her exports of foodstuffs? I, really, don't understand all of the problems, but I do understand that the Hongkong Government reacts to a situation rather than being proactive in order to

prevent a situation. In the United States, there is a Food and Drug Administration which is supposed to be, among other things, a food watchdog for the American people. Why has Hongkong not established a similar type of organisation? It seems to me that such an organisation is more important than widening the tax base, the 5-day working week, a minimum-wage law, or worrying about not being able to collect medical fees from pregnant ladies who come to Hongkong from across the border in order to give birth so that their children will have the right of abode in these 416 square miles. The health of Hongkong people, now numbering about 7 million, is vitally important and there ought to be a permanent, completely independent body of Hongkong doctors, scientists and nutritionists, all with one mandate: To care about the health of Hongkong people.

Think about it, My Dear Grandchild.

Talk to you in 2007.

Chief Lady

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