

By MANDY DAVIS

It's Raining Salmon

We were driving home from church in Ketchikan when the fish fell from the sky. It was a gorgeous fall day—blue sky with not a cloud in sight. This was not a small fish. Not a herring or a trout. This was a

king salmon flopping in the middle of the road. My brother opened his door as my father slowed down. He pulled the salmon into the car, slammed the door and my father hit the gas. I don't know where the what-to-do-if-you-see-a-salmon-lying-in-the-road gene came from in my family, but it took us less than three seconds. No words, just grab the fish and run.

So there we were in our 1986 yellow Subaru: my mother and father in the front, my brother and I and a 25-pound live king in the back. The tail thrashed wildly; my mother squealed as it slimed her hair. "Keep it on your side!" I protested, but there's no arguing with a live slimy fish when you're turning at 55 miles per hour. Its mouth, with its hooked nose and little fangs, was gasping—fish gills collapse out of water. There were three slash marks up either side of its belly; we later decided that a young bald eagle must have had a big appetite and little talons.

We pulled up in front of the house. I tossed the salmon to my father and, bam! He stunned the fish with a knock to its head and sliced down its belly, pulling out the entrails and the still beating heart, scooping along the blood vein on its backbone. To me he handed the glistening sac of roe, red-orange berries held together in a translucent membrane. He flipped the fish and began filleting one side.

"Fire up the grill!"

Inside, I rinsed the sac, carefully breaking the skin open over a strainer, gently pushing the eggs apart. I could have blanched the eggs and pulled them away from the coagulated membrane, but

that would have made them chewier. I liked it best when they would burst on the roof of my mouth with a little salt and pepper, straight from the salmon.

The salmon was off the road and onto the grill in less than 20 minutes. A few minutes later we were sitting down to eat fresh huckleberry scones, beach asparagus in butter, white rice and the freshest, flakiest pink-orange salmon I'd ever tasted. And, of course, spoonfuls of salmon roe for dessert.

A week earlier, a bald eagle had stolen a whole salmon off the neighbor's grill. The dinner party watched in horror as their entree, slathered in barbeque sauce, was lifted into the sky. Though I'm sure our dinner was at the cost of a very disappointed eagle, it felt like things had somehow come full circle.

MANDY DAVIS grew up in Ketchikan where she recently spent a summer as the chef on a charter fishing boat. She lives in Seattle, where she works as a food writer and cook.

