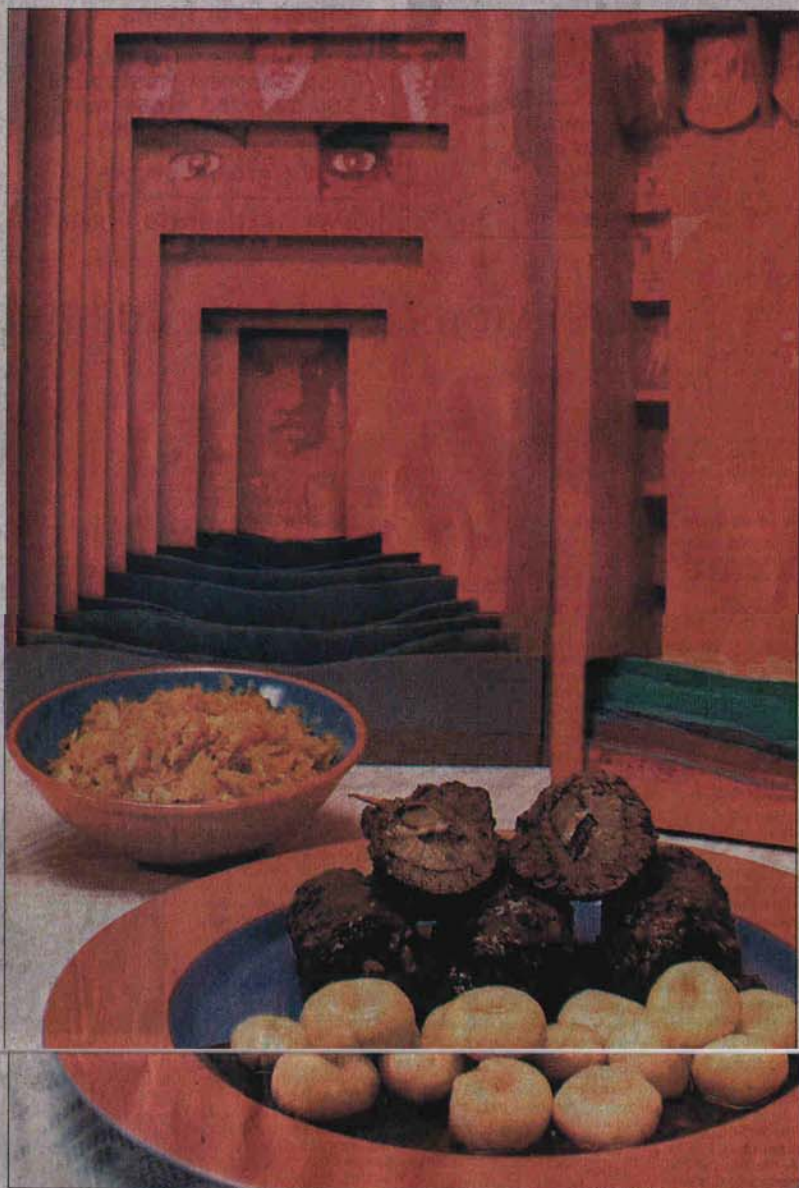


INSIDE Cheap Thrills Cuisine H2 • TRAVEL China along the Yangtze H4



ANDREA BARRIST STERN/AT HANKA'S TABLE

Uplifting meals

Hanka Sawka's recipes and stories of life in Communist Poland nourish the body and the soul.

BY KARIN WELZEL
TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Hanka Sawka refuses to let life leave a bitter taste in her mouth. That's a reason why she didn't just merely write a cookbook sharing her favorite recipes.

The Polish immigrant also wants to let others know that, despite the suffering and lows of human existence, they never should give up. Endurance depends on good food, she says. "I call these 'recipes to deal with life's prob-

lems,'" says Sawka, co-author with her daughter, Hanna Maria Sawka, of "At Hanka's Table" (Lake Isle Press, \$21.95).

A proper meal — especially with friends and family — can lift the spirit as well as nourish the body to handle problems big and small.

Residents of the United States since 1977, the Sawka family cherishes every second of freedom. Jan Sawka — Hanka's husband and an internationally acclaimed modern artist in a variety of media — can pursue paths he never dared to tread under Poland's former Communist regime. He has advanced from censored poster art in Poland to sculpture, stage designs, three-dimensional works with lights, and multimedia shows. He created stage designs for the Grateful Dead and is working

ABOVE: Hanka Sawka's Beef Roulades and Silesian Noodles (front) and Sauerkraut Salad (back) are arrayed in front of three-dimensional box paintings by her husband, Jan Sawka. Jan wasn't able to pursue his interest in modern art until the family moved from former Communist-ruled Poland to the United States in 1977. He now has a studio in their home in upstate New York. Recipes, H3.

SEE AUTHOR • H3

FOOD

Author shares recipes, stories of life in Poland

AUTHOR • FROM HI

as "The Sawka Team" with other artists on a major project in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Hanna Maria Sawka has just signed a contract to produce and direct a full-length feature film — impossible before in her native country. The family now lives in upstate New York.

And Hanka Sawka keeps on cooking, this time enjoying a wealth of ingredients and cuisines she only dreamed of under years of oppression. For decades, putting a good meal on the table was a way to cope with poverty, frustration and what seemed like one failure after another.

"We never give up," she says. She uses the present tense — the challenges of the past are fresh in her mind. But while she wants Westerners to discover the truth about the horrors and depression of Communist rule, she isn't looking for sympathy.

Her philosophy: "You have nothing to lose, so why not try? Go and fight."

Hanka Sawka, 52, was born in Czestochowa. Her husband, 58, is from Zabrze in Upper Silesia. Hanna Maria Sawka, 30, was born in Warsaw.

The two women worked on the cookbook-autobiography for three years, says Hanna Maria Sawka.

"Some was already written down by my mother, and we had the recipes," she says. "But there were places that needed to be filled in. We sat down and discussed events that happened in my mother's life, in her family's life and what was going on historically so it could be put into perspective."

"I first had to understand everything myself first before I could put it on paper. I learned a lot about my family — usually you only know frag-

ments," says Hanna Maria Sawka. "I also realized that Communist Poland was an alien world to Americans — complex and strange. It needed explaining. My mother supplied the family story, and I researched Polish history, then and now. Then I weaved everything together."

Adapting the recipes to specify ingredient measures and change them from metric to "cups and tablespoons" was Hanka Sawka's major challenge.

"When I cook, I just add everything," Hanka Sawka says. "I don't think about it. My editor said, 'You have to be exact.' That was the most annoying part (of writing the book)."

Says her daughter, "Mom would sometimes bake a cake and would have to do it over and over and over."

"At Hanka's Table" includes traditional Christmas and Easter dishes, classic Polish soups, salads, main dishes and sweets, and international recipes that Hanka Sawka picked up as she traveled around the world after her husband began receiving international commissions.

She retains her love of entertaining.

"Cuisine is the basis of a culture," she says. "And food is the spirit of the family. We always can come back to it."

"I lived to entertain. I wanted everybody in great shape and in a good mood. We could exchange ideas in an intimate atmosphere."

The same idea can work regardless of life's circumstances, she adds.

"There is hope. I want to send a message that's delicious."

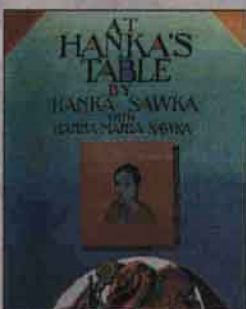
Karin Welzel can be reached at kwelzel@tribweb.com or 412-320-7992.



PHOTOS: ANDREA BARRIST STERN, "AT HANKA'S TABLE"

This mushroom soup has homemade chicken, pork or beef stock as its base.

Cookbook signing



What: "At Hanka's Table"
Who: Authors Hanka Sawka and Hanna Maria Sawka
When: 2 p.m. today
Where: Barnes & Noble Book-sellers, Waterworks Mall
Admission: Free
Details: 412-781-2321, www.athankstable.com

Fresh Mushroom Soup

The Polish forests are famous for their wide variety of wild mushrooms. Unless you are trained in hunting edible mushrooms or know an expert who can help you, look to produce bins for mushrooms to make this traditional soup.

- 1 large onion, diced
 - 2 to 3 cups finely chopped mushrooms
 - 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
 - 6 cups Homemade Stock (recipe follows)
 - Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
 - Small noodles, cooked and drained, or croutons, for serving
- For the slurry:**
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
½ cup cold water
½ cup sour cream

Fry the onion and mushrooms in the butter on medium-high heat until the juices from the mushrooms are released and steamed away and the onion is golden, for about 15 minutes.

In a large pot, bring the stock to a boil. Add the mushrooms and onion; reduce the heat to low and simmer for 30 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

To make the slurry: Combine the flour and water. It is important to mix the flour with the cold water thoroughly, getting rid of any lumps, before combining it with the sour cream. The water must be cold so that the flour mixes with the water smoothly.

Once the mixture is smooth, add the sour cream and mix. Add an equal proportion of hot soup from the pot (¾ to ¾ cup) to the slurry and mix well. If the slurry seems to have lumps, add it to the soup through a strainer. This brings the temperature of the slurry to that of the soup, preventing the slurry from becoming lumpy once it's added to the pot.

Add the warmed slurry to the soup and stir. Keep the soup at a boil for at least 1 minute, stirring continuously while the soup thickens. Serve with the noodles or croutons.

Homemade Chicken, Pork or Beef Stock

- 2 pounds chicken, pork or beef bones or a combination
- 2 quarts cold water
- 1 large onion, peeled
- 2 large carrots, peeled
- 2 ribs celery
- 1 parsnip, peeled
- Salt, to taste
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Put the bones and cold water in a pot and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer and skim off the foam that rises to the surface.

Add the vegetables, salt and pepper and simmer, covered, for 2 to 3 hours.

Remove the bones and vegetables. The stock is ready for use in soups and sauces. It can be refrigerated for as long as 4 days, or frozen for later use.



Paczki, or Polish doughnuts, traditionally are served just before Lent.

Paczki

These "doughnuts" are one of Poland's most popular desserts, especially just before Lent. They are pronounced "ponch-kee."

- 2 cups milk, divided (1 cup cold)
- 2 teaspoons active dry yeast
- ¾ cup plus 1 tablespoon granulated sugar, divided
- 8 egg yolks
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 1 tablespoon vodka
- 1 teaspoon grated orange or lemon zest
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 5 cups all-purpose flour, divided, plus more for sprinkling
- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, melted
- 2 pounds vegetable shortening, for deep-frying
- 1 jar fruit preserves (prune butter, apricot jam or rose hip preserves are best)
- ½ cup confectioners' sugar, for sprinkling

Heat ½ cup of the milk until luke-warm. Pour it into a small bowl and add the yeast and 1 tablespoon granu-

lated sugar. Set aside in a warm place until frothy, for 10 to 15 minutes.

Using an electric mixer, beat the yolks with ¾ cup sugar until fluffy. Beat in the vanilla, vodka, zest and salt.

Heat another ½ cup milk to a boil; remove from the heat. Place 2 cups flour in a bowl and add the hot milk. Mix, using a fork, and add the remaining 3 cups flour. Add the yeast mixture and the yolk mixture; combine.

Mix in the remaining 1 cup cold milk. Gradually mix in the melted butter at the end. Knead well for at least 10 minutes. The dough should not be too firm, but it should not stick to your hands. Set aside in a warm place until doubled, for about 2 hours.

Melt the vegetable shortening in a wok or deep-fryer to 375 degrees. If the shortening is too hot, the paczki will cook too fast on the surface, remaining uncooked inside. If it's too cool, the dough will soak up the oil, making the paczki soggy.

Take enough dough and make a

round, flat pancake 2 to 3 inches in diameter and ½-inch thick. Place ½ teaspoon preserves in the middle. Close the pancake around the preserves so that you have a little ball, and pinch it tightly closed on top. A tight seal is important, or the paczki will come apart while cooking.

Place the ball, pinched-side down, on a plate or counter dusted with flour. Repeat with the remaining dough and preserves. The balls should rest in a warm place for 15 minutes to rise before deep-frying. By the time you make all the dough into balls, the first ones will be ready for frying.

Deep-fry the dough balls in batches for 2½ minutes; turn them over to fry on the other side for another 2½ minutes. They should become dark brown.

Remove one and test with a toothpick to see whether you have fried it enough — the toothpick should come out dry. Remove the paczki and blot on a paper towel. Immediately sprinkle with confectioners' sugar. Repeat until all are fried and sprinkled. Makes about 40 paczki.

Beef roulades are a traditional German recipe. Hanka Sawka's husband, Jan, is from Silesia, which was a part of Germany until the end of World War II, when it was turned over to Poland under Communist rule. The cuisine there is a mix of German and Polish. This recipe reflects classic home cooking there. It can be served with Silesian Noodles and Sauerkraut Salad, also from that region.

- 2 pounds beef round
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 onions, one sliced, one diced
- ½ pound bacon, cut into fine strips
- ½ pound sharp Cheddar cheese, cut into strips
- 3 to 4 pickles, cut into strips
- 3 to 4 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- Vegetable oil, for frying
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 cup beef stock; or 1 bouillon cube dissolved in 1 cup hot water
- 2 tablespoons sour cream

Cut the beef round into ¾-inch patties and beat with the bottom of a skillet or a meat mallet until ½-inch thick. Salt and pepper each patty lightly. In the center

of each, place a slice of onion, a strip of bacon, a strip of cheese and a strip of pickle. Add more pepper.

Roll each patty around its filling and close with a toothpick or tie with thread.

Place the flour in a shallow dish. Roll each roulade in flour until it is completely covered with a thin layer.

Coat the bottom of a large skillet with oil and place it over high heat. Brown the roulades on all sides.

In a separate pot over medium heat, saute the diced onion in vegetable oil until golden. Reduce the heat to low and add the browned roulades and the bay leaf. Cover and simmer.

Using the frying pan in which the roulades were browned, heat the stock until it bubbles. Pour the hot stock into the pot with the roulades and simmer over low heat until tender, for about 2 hours. Check occasionally to see whether you should add some water. Make sure the roulades don't stick to the bottom of the pot.

Remove the roulades from the heat, remove the bay leaf, stir in the sour cream and check the seasoning, adding salt and pepper as necessary. Makes 8 servings.

Silesian Noodles

These noodles go well with different meats or served as an individual dish covered with fried bacon bits.

- Water
- 2 teaspoons salt, divided
- 6 large potatoes, peeled
- ½ cup potato starch or cornstarch
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 large egg

Fill a large pot with water. Add 1 teaspoon salt and the potatoes. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to medium and cook until the potatoes are soft, for 20 to 30 minutes.

Drain the potatoes thoroughly and return them to the pot over medium heat to steam away excess water, for 30 seconds.

Puree the potatoes thoroughly, using

a potato ricer or food processor; the puree must be very smooth — no lumps. Mix the potato starch, flour and egg into the puree.

Form the puree into 1-inch balls. Using your finger, poke an indentation into each ball.

Bring a fresh pot of water with the remaining 1 teaspoon salt to a boil. Add the noodles; reduce the heat to medium and stir immediately to prevent the noodles from sticking to the bottom. After they float to the top, cook for no more than 2 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon and serve immediately. Makes 4 servings.

Sauerkraut Salad

- 1 pound sauerkraut, drained and chopped
- 2 tart apples, diced
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 2 carrots, peeled and grated
- ½ teaspoon salt, more to taste
- ½ teaspoon granulated sugar
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black

pepper, more to taste
2 tablespoons olive oil

In a large bowl, mix the sauerkraut, apples, onion, carrots, salt, sugar and pepper. Add the oil and combine thoroughly. If needed, add more salt and pepper. Makes 4 servings.