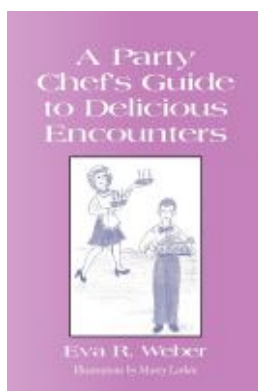


# A Party Chef's Guide to Delicious Encounters



Eva R. Weber

*Illustrations by Marty Larkin*



*A PARTY CHEF'S GUIDE TO DELICIOUS ENCOUNTERS* gives pointers on how to, and how not to, entertain family, friends and other important people. In addition, this work chronicles the possibilities of shared tables between persons of various social standing. Eva R. Weber, a Swiss-trained chef, shares her stories, and offers helpful hints and chapter-closing recipes derived from decades of experience. Marty Larkin's delightful illustrations are an added treat.

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**A PARTY CHEF'S GUIDE TO  
DELICIOUS ENCOUNTERS**

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First Edition

# MEMORABLE DISASTERS



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## MEMORABLE DISASTERS

**“When the Queen of Sheba witnessed Solomon’s great wisdom, the palace he had built, the food at his table, the seating of his ministers, the attendance, and garb of his waiters, his banquet service, and the holocausts he offered in the temple of the Lord, she was breathless.” –I Kings 11:4-6**

Parties, from the largest to the smallest, get usually planned and prepared into the most inconsequential details. Of course everybody wants to enjoy a get-together to the fullest. The hosts have a good time only if their guests have a good time. The party workers find satisfaction only then when things go flawlessly, smoothly, exceptionally well. For the latter, there will be no contentment when the clients are dissatisfied, the guests uncomfortable. But even with painstaking planning, organizing, and executing, freak accidents can and do happen at parties, before and after. Party disasters can be devastating, disastrous, memorable, and hilarious. It all depends.

For example: Falls, sprains, and fractures. All these can occur in entertaining situations. Cuts, burns, and bruises are likely injuries in party kitchens and pantries. Guests can choke on food. Parties can be locations and occasions with as many variables as any other places and occasions, and some possibly unique to parties, as the following incident proves.

### **The Wrong Wedding Cake**

The fairytale wedding reception took place under majestic black oak trees. The soft, green lawn seemed to stretch into infinity. The flowerbeds exuded an intoxicating scent. So did the floating arrangements on pond and pool. The 500 guests delighted on the most exquisite fare, which was arranged on shaded buffet tables. The towering, multi-tiered masterpiece of a cake was admired in the shade of an ancient tree, with a wide, lawn-covered space around for all the guests to gather at an appointed time.

With soft string music soothing the senses, the afternoon drifted into a balmy evening. Finally, the caterer approached the mother of the bride with the suggestion to have the much-admired cake cut. But the lady was reluctant to interrupt the bliss in paradise. During the hours, the master pastry artwork had ever so slightly started to lean to the right front. After another 30 minutes, a fanfare was given for cake cutting. The newlyweds approached and gingerly tried to make the first cut. That is when it all collapsed. In the sweltering heat of the afternoon, the butter-cream filling had started to melt and finally given way.

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Some butlers and waitresses standing close by jumped with their arms wide open to catch the sweet avalanche, thereby preventing the four top layers from hitting the lawn. Of course there was a splattered bridal gown and messed-up tuxedo pants, cummerbunds, lace aprons, skirts, shirts, and blouses. It was truly wonderful-tasting, but, for the temperature of that day, the wrong cake. It would not have been a problem on a cooler day or indoors, with air conditioning. An iced cake might have stood firm. The photographers made sure those children and grandchildren will celebrate that memorable disaster forever after.

#### **The Collapsed Buffet**

For another suburban garden wedding reception, a load of equipment was delivered from a party rental, among which were 35 round, folding tables for the guests to sit and eat at, and six long banquet tables for buffet and bars. After draping the buffet and bars, gold-rimmed china was unwrapped from their crates and placed on the buffet.

Fifteen minutes later, a thunderous crash had the workers running, just to find the table with the dishes on it collapsed and dishes crashed. A close inspection found most screws missing from the metal frame underneath and the few remaining ones, at the one remaining steel support, loose. Thankfully, the disaster happened long before the guests arrived and food was put on top. A pickup truck was dispatched to the shop for replacement for the broken china.

Every precaution is taken to prevent any and all mishaps and accidents. But more than not much in partying has to be improvised, arranged out of the ordinary daily routine. So many variables are to be contended with. People have collapsed, emergency services had to be called in. Hosts and guests have died from massive heart attacks and strokes, right in the middle of a party, or ended up in the hospital in their formal attires. Prolonged power failures left party food uncooked. Delivery trucks of catering companies ended up in traffic accidents, with part or all of the party supplies demolished, and crashed. Although today, transportation for catering food and equipment has become specialized and sophisticated, with built-in refrigeration, heating, and secured compartments for hardware.

It still happens that guests and workers trip over something, ending up with fractures and sprains. Zippers and seams on gowns and swallow-tailed suits are busting; guests still are choking on food; trays and platters are still being knocked out of servers' hands by guests that talk with their hands. Weighty persons still tilt or turn over tables, trying to squeeze by a crowd; ashes are still being dropped inadvertently on food trays by diehard smokers.

Some party accidents however, are so odd, they could not happen if they were staged. Unsupervised children have swept entire table settings to the

floor while playing hide and seek, by getting tangled in the floor-length tablecloth. Folding chairs have given way under guests sitting on them, spilling them into embarrassing positions. Fires have been brought about by tall floral centerpieces with candles and chafing dishes. Hot food has been spilled, and liquid libations. All these can be hazardous to animals and humans. Likewise, the aberrations caused by occasional dopes and drunks have caused havoc during entertainment events. The possibilities are endless.

Accidents that never should happen are those which involve museum-quality, breakable items. Only the owners should handle priceless, rare, table and serving ware. It is an imposition on the personnel to have them use such precious, irreplaceable things that belong in secured display cases. If hosts insist, they should not expect any compensation when breakage occurs. Damage is less likely to happen when sufficient hands are available to do the work. No one wants to break even inexpensive things. Many state laws require only compensation if gross negligence can be proven. But the wealthier the clients are, the more likely they expect replacement of broken valuables. Disasters and damage control by party technicians are as much a part of the party scene as improvising, inventing, and smoothing-over in less than ideal conditions. Party workers are doing it with finesse and style. Often the guests are unaware that anything unplanned and negative has happened.

### **The Food on the Floor**

A gracious couple treated six of their friends to dinner in their home. It had been only a few years since they occupied the opulent, old mansion in the old-money neighborhood. Some decorations and cosmetics in the front provided a friendly, tasteful ambiance. However, much more needed to be done to bring this neglected mansion up to date. The kitchen certainly was very needy despite a sufficient selection of tools and equipment.

Worst of all, the one and only oven had only one rack that did not seem to belong there at all. The hinges of the door seemed broken. Any implements to build a prop—such as roast pans, Dutch ovens, cast iron pots and skillets, cake pans, cake racks, metal bowls, and the like—were in use for the dinner. Somehow, the roasting and baking were done just the same.

At serving time, the main course was arranged onto a large, oval, heirloom, silver platter. Since the only party worker had to do the cooking, serving, and cleanup all by herself, she arranged the platter before exchanging the preheated plates. In the absence of alternatives, she propped the platter in the turned-off oven with the door slightly ajar. After the exchange, she proceeded to lift out the ready platter when the oven door collapsed, followed by the platter. Half of the decoratively arranged and hot



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food ended on the floor. Thankfully, the conversation and music had been loud enough to muffle the thunderous crash. But what a situation to salvage!!

#### **The Blackout at the Beach House**

The hosts had rented a posh peach house for two months to escape the oppressing heat of summer. One evening, fourteen or sixteen guests were to be feasting on a salad of frisee, arrugula, and butter lettuce; followed by broiled salmon; little red potatoes; a bouquet of carrots, green beans and yellow squash. The crowning finale was to be an apricot soufflé.

Not too long before dinnertime, the two wall ovens blacked out, and no wiggling of the switches at the circuit breakers, nor plugging and unplugging, checking of the heating elements, or other tricks would bring it back on. To no avail did some guests even get involved to start the ovens up again. Of course the doors remained closed, to preserve the heat. Fortunately, the salmon had been broiled ahead, the vegetables precooked, in the oven. The little potatoes would be quickly reheated in a skillet stovetop.

The soufflés were sitting in hot water, in a large roasting pan, in the lower oven. They barely had started to raise a wee bit. The upper oven was holding some of the main-course dinner hot. The hosts sat down to their salad.

After repeatedly petitioning them for some alternate intervention, a handyman was contacted by phone. While the main course was being finished up, the man arrived. At that point, the cook had to remove the soufflés from the oven. She did what she never had done before: She stuck the apricot clouds one after the other into the microwave, which was not blacked out. Amazingly, it worked to the point that they could be served as acceptable, if not spectacular. The repairperson got the ovens started again, after the fact.

Oh, yes, oven blackouts had happened before. There wasn't enough power for all the appliances at the same time. The house probably needed new wiring. I beg your pardon? For the exorbitant rent charged, one could not expect sufficient energy flow?

What can go haywire at a party? Anything and everything! Insignificant mishaps can appear to one host as major felonies. On the other hand, some major accident can become the catalyst to bring a somber, stiff event into the merriest of celebration. The following misfortune can be directly attributed to insufficient hands, abysmally deficient ovens, and under-equipped kitchen and pantry. No laughs could be had for this one.

One quiet Christmas Eve, a lovely family with very young children and out-of-town parents sat down to a festive dinner. They had opened their presents earlier and caroled around the tree. The only catering person was faced with one electric wall oven with only one rack, that did not even fit, and the door hinges were broken. Yet it was scalloped oysters, followed by the

traditional turkey dinner and all trimmings. Neither kitchen nor pantry had any bun warmer or warming oven to preheat platters, bowls, and plates, for three courses or to keep food warm. Old bath towels were used to keep the preheated serving pieces warm. Since there was only one person to do it all, the dishwasher was in constant use and could not be utilized to preheat table plates.

The caterer had changed into formal attire and served the oysters. While the family leisurely savored the delectable ocean fare, the worker carved the turkey, arranging it around the steaming stuffing on an ornamental silver platter. This was placed in the still-hot, turned-off oven, on a rimless cookie sheet. The chestnuts and Brussels sprouts in a deep, round tray were kept on top of a wide pot with simmering water in it. The mashed potatoes and candied yams would last-minute be put into one of the round bowls, which had a division in the center. That chore would not take long. Neither would the turkey gravy to be last-minute poured into the gravy boat.

After the last plate was exchanged in the dining room and the caterer returned to the kitchen, the platter came crashing from the oven, down on the floor. The oven door was hanging on one hinge; the rack just had collapsed under the weight of the platter and the door had given way. Fortunately, the floor had been mopped and dried just before serving time, and much of the food—although disheveled—was still on the platter, some on the floor. No one caterer deserves to meet with this sort of crummy kitchen, especially on a holiday.

#### **Other disasters might include**

- Exploding coffee makers
- Broken antiques
- A guest having a stroke or heart attack
- Tainted foods
- Guests showing up at the wrong time or day
- Guests not showing up

#### **SOUPS**

Soups can be light and brothy, to as thick as stew, and anything in between. Preferences vary so greatly as to the consistency, the ingredients following are approximations, which the individuals have to adjust to their liking.

#### **ZUCCHINI PURÉE**

2 lbs. green or yellow summer squash

1 large or 2 small onions, chopped

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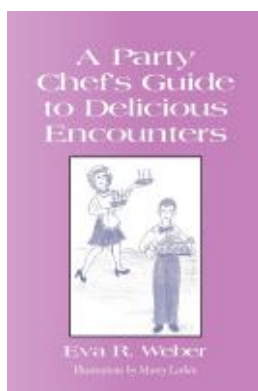
6-8 cloves of garlic or 1 teaspoon garlic powder

1/8 of a teaspoon white ground pepper

6 cups chicken stock

½ cup basil leaves, minced

Cook everything except the basil leaves, till tender. Purée in blender with half the basil leaves. Season to taste. If desired, add some lime or lemon juice, or white wine. Garnish with rest of basil leaves.



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