



Rhubarb pie comes in several varieties, from tart to sweet. ANDREA MELENDEZ/THE REGISTER

Eating rhubarb pie a religious experience

Rhubarbarians 'feel God's pleasure' in every joyful bite

My religious preference? I'm a Rhubarbarian, a childhood convert to rhubarb pie.

A miracle led to my conversion.

I remember trotting through the kitchen when I was about 10 years old and scooping up the last piece of pie from the counter. In a family of seven, the miracle was the existence of a "last piece" of any dessert. I ate it on the run. I had assumed it was apple, but it wasn't. It was new, it was delicious, and I was hooked. I was a believer.

Rhubarbarianism is not monolithic. Like many religious groups, we have our schisms. I am Orthodox: I take my rhubarb straight. Liberal Rhubs add strawberries to dilute the tartness. Progressives prefer even a milder version with custard.

In pie, as in life, however, Rhubarbarians are willing to embrace the character-building tension between the bitter and the sweet.

It is the personal relationship that distinguishes rhubarb from other fillings. Unlike with a blueberry or coconut cream, you are often personally acquainted with the plants that supplied it. The best rhubarb comes fresh, not from the grocery store but your own backyard,



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or a relative's or friend's, loved and tended by someone you know.

Not that it needs much tending. A rhubarb plant asks for so little. Rich, black Iowa topsoil will sustain healthy roots for years with little special treatment. I once asked a master gardener at Living History Farms if he puts manure on his rhubarb in the spring. "No," he deadpanned. "I prefer sugar and cream."

It is worth getting to know rhubarb people. After some 25 years in our Ames church congregation, I had persuaded several excellent pie bakers to believe that rhubarb was a sacrament essential to every successful potluck. I knew I had succeeded when I was scolded for missing a potluck where there was a rhubarb pie baked especially for me.

When my wife and I moved to Lamoni, we drove up and down the streets getting acquainted with our new hometown. She looked at houses; I checked out backyards for rhubarb. As long as

you're making new friends, I reasoned, it's just as easy to start with those who grow rhubarb.

In the movie "Chariots of Fire" about the 1924 Olympics, a British sprinter confides to his sister: "God made me fast, and when I run, I feel God's pleasure." I get no pleasure out of running. Increasingly, running reminds me of my own mortality. But I get a great deal of joy in eating rhubarb pie. If it were an Olympic sport, I would be a medal contender.

A sense of gratitude is at the heart of every religion. Each of us has been gifted with a unique list of joy givers, activities that brighten our days and affirm the value of life. They can be anything — walking with friends, doing crosswords, watching football, playing with toddlers. They are the things that, when you do them, make you grateful for the moments spent. The measure is not how well you do them but how much you enjoy them.

For me, eating rhubarb pie is, indeed, a joy giver, and I am grateful for it. Is it too much to say that when Rhubarbarians eat a slice of homemade rhubarb pie, we "feel God's pleasure?" Not for me.

May the piece of God be with you.



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Liang Chow has shown that by building his amazing training facility in West Des Moines some of the best gymnasts in America will come to Iowa. He has become the go-to coach for young girls who want to try to become Olympic gold medalists.

Maybe we should look at ways to encourage more community pools across Iowa, so one day an Olympic-caliber swimmer might emerge from our state. That would be most appropriate, as Iowa has a significant place in the history of swimming. The butterfly stroke (in which Michael Phelps won his last individual gold medal) was invented at the University of Iowa in 1936. There is a beautiful sculpture in Iowa City to commemorate that achievement.

But even if we don't produce an Olympic gold medal winner, there are good reasons to encourage swimming. Iowa aspires to be the "healthiest state in the nation," a marvelous goal pressed by Gov. Terry Branstad and business leaders like John Forsyth of Wellmark and Ric Jurgens of Hy-Vee. There are few sports that could do more for keeping young people active and for giving them a means to exercise throughout their lives as swimming.

Swimming pools cost a lot of money both to build and to keep up. But just imagine if all across our state, communities invested in new swimming pools and programs to induce the next generation of young Iowans into the water. And one day we might become known as the state that brings thousands of summer swimmers together for a statewide championship meet for ages 6 to 18, inspiring others to join in this exercise.

And, who knows, from this maybe, just maybe, an Olympic dream might emerge.

The lesson is clear: If we build them, our kids will swim.

Iowa View

If we build pools, kids will swim

It was difficult last weekend to know just who the biggest American superstar at the Olympics was: Michael Phelps, the swimmer who began his Olympic career at age 15 and has won more medals than any other person, or the irrepressible 16-year-old Gabby Douglas, who trains a few miles down Grand Avenue from our home.

We cheered heartily for both as we sat riveted to the television each night for hours after successfully avoiding all news reports and social media throughout the day.

But one of the most surprising gold medalists who touched our family deeply was another teenager, Katie Ledecky, the 15-year-old high school sophomore from suburban Maryland, outside Washington, who stunned the swimming world by her victory in the 800-meter freestyle.

We felt a special connection to Katie because she trains at the Curl-Burke Swim Club at which all three of our children participated for years while we lived in the Washington, D.C., area. CUBU, as it is known, has turned out a number of Olympic champions over the past several decades from among the thousands of young swimmers it has trained.

But what is so remarkable, and of potential interest to Iowa, is where all of these young swimmers come from who belong to CUBU and several other top-caliber swimming programs in the D.C. area. They have emerged from summer swimming leagues that grew up in the past 30 to 40 years as Washington spread out beyond the beltway.

As new subdivisions were created, each built a community pool at which a fledgling, just-for-fun swim team was created. Over time, this grew into a highly competitive league, complete with all-star meets and parental caravans crisscrossing the suburbs every Saturday morning.

Living in Virginia, our kids were part of the Northern Virginia Swim League, which has grown to have more than 100 teams and about 15,000 participants starting at age 6 up through 18. Somewhat like Little League, as these summer programs grew, interest in participants to try out year-round swimming programs like CUBU began to expand, with kids like our daughter signing up as early as age 6 or 7 and beginning the rigors of early morning training and after-school workouts.

Out of this milieu, high school swim programs blossomed and large crowds were attracted to the regional and state championship meets. Young swimmers began to have dreams of Olympic medals. And every once in a while, a Katie Ledecky would rise to the top.

What Others Are Saying

Iowa GOP chairman's call to oust court justice is irresponsible nonsense

Nearly two years have passed since Iowa voters removed three Iowa Supreme Court justices — the unfortunate ending to a reckless drive to punish the court for its

Spiker's statement on the issue is a jumble of misinformation.

He accuses the court of ruling "arrogantly and deceitfully" on a "whim" and imposing its "personal views" without regard for "laws and values." Spiker argues that the court had no "justification or ability" to rule on the constitutionality

the court, and the justices had to make a call.

Removing justices from the court for making a single controversial ruling undermines the very foundation of an independent judiciary, and flies in the face of a constitutional retention process intended to assess judges' fitness

