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- Local
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- Opinions-Letters
- Obituaries
- Real Estate
- Classifieds
- Special Publications
- Archives

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- + Text
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LIFE of PIE

Washington resident returns to hometown for Celebrity Authors Luncheon

By MARILYN MCMAHON, NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER
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For Kate McDermott, making pies is more than creating the perfect flaky crust and tasty filling.

It's a metaphor for her philosophy of life, which she has pared down to three simple rules:

- Keep everything chilled, especially yourself.
- Keep your boundaries.
- Vent.

During a laugh-filled interview from her home in Port Angeles, Wash., the author of "Art of the Pie: A Practical Guide to Homemade Crusts, Fillings and Life" (The Countryman Press, \$35) gave a hint of what promises to be an entertaining segment at CALM Auxiliary's 31st annual Celebrity Authors Luncheon on Saturday at Fess Parker's Doubletree Resort.

"Chill your dough, the flour, the fats, your pastry cloth, the bowl you make your dough in and, the most important chill of all, yourself. I celebrate the perfectly imperfect pie. All pies are unique like every person," said Ms. McDermott, 63. "Perfection is one of those things that can drive people crazy.

"When placing a pie crust in the pan, make sure it doesn't droop over the edge of the pan, causing it to melt and burn on the sides. Make sure there is a boundary. Thinking about how I handle something as simple as finishing the edges of a pie helps me pay attention to the boundaries of my own life.

"Venting is good in pies and in life. Cut a few vents in the top of the pie crust to let the steam out. You and your pie will feel a

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"I celebrate the perfectly imperfect pie. All pies are unique like every person," according to Kate McDermott, author of "Art of the Pie: A Practical Guide to Homemade Crusts, Fillings and Life." Now a resident of Port Angeles, Wash., the Santa Barbara native will be interviewed at CALM Auxiliary's 31st annual Celebrity Authors Luncheon on Saturday at Fess Parker's Doubletree Resort.

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lot better."

Her fascination with baking began as a young child growing up in Santa Barbara in a prominent family who owned McDermott Mortuary, now McDermott-Crockett & Associates Mortuary. Her parents were the late Tom and Louise McDermott.

"Both were active in the community. My father served as Fiesta's El Presidente in 1954 and ran for mayor unsuccessfully in 1960. My mother was well-known as a piano teacher," said Ms. McDermott, who was born at St. Francis Hospital and graduated from Marymount School in 1971 when it was an all-girls campus.

Her interest in baking goes back to when she'd come home from school and get out the mixing bowl and spoons to make cookies, cakes and breads while her mom taught piano lessons.

Ms. McDermott went to Santa Barbara City College for a year before attending the Manhattan School of Music in New York City. "Music was my first love. I was accompanying people on the piano when I was 9 years old. I learned from my mother and my grandmother," Ms. McDermott said.

After earning a bachelor's degree in humanities from the University of Santa Clara in Northern California, Ms. McDermott returned to Santa Barbara in 1978 to care for her ill mother and take over her music studio. In addition to teaching, she also was an organist at local churches and temples.

In 1980, Ms. McDermott moved to Seattle for five years and then Port Angeles, her current home.

"I have always loved the Northwest and fell in love with Port Angeles on a trip," said the single mom of Sara Phillips, who died in November at the age of 37, and Duncan Graham, 30.

She lived for a time on a blueberry u-pick farm on the Olympic Peninsula with her son.

"There was no shortage of berries there! I made blueberry pie, blackberry pie, raspberry pie, combining them all to make triple-berry pie. I brought pie to the local grange events for fundraiser bake sales. I used to take a quick peek later in the day to see if there was any left. It always brought a smile to my face to see that every piece had disappeared!" she recalls on her website, www.artofthepie.com.

Ms. McDermott said she titled her book "Art of the Pie" because making a pie is an "ongoing creative process. It's not a science. It's a craft. There is no right or wrong way. Everything changes."

She also stressed that she has never sold a pie and never plans to.

"I give them away," said Ms. McDermott, who spends her time giving classes and workshops, which she started in 2008 purely by chance.



Top photo, flour, salt, fat and water are the four ingredients in a pie crust.

Middle photo, pie crusts begin with "chubby discs" before they are rolled thin.

Bottom photo, Ms. McDermott's fascination with baking, not necessarily pies, began as a young child growing up in Santa Barbara in a prominent family that owned the McDermott Mortuary. Her parents were the late Tom and Louise McDermott.

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While living in Seattle and working in public relations, she became fascinated with making a "really good pie crust. I became a crazed devotee of making a perfect crust. It was not unusual to prepare five different crusts in one day, and I started giving pies to friends. Several of them, who were in the food profession, asked if I would teach them how to bake pies.

"I had an informal class at my home for two writers and a chef, and afterward, they said, 'You should be teaching.' I started my website, www.artofthepie.com, and all of this came from that. I have taught over 2,000 people," said Ms. McDermott, who also offers "pie camps" that are three to five days long in Washington and France.

"I talk pie from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. for five days and still have more to say," she said with a laugh. "I learn something new from everyone who comes to the sessions."

The first thing her students learn is that pies have two parts — crust and filling — and each of them have four parts — for the crust, flour, salt, fat and water, and for the filling, fruit, sweetener, seasoning and thickener.

Ms. McDermott adds another special ingredient, which she calls an "intention or sending out good vibes to someone struggling or someone who needs a little extra light in their day. This is the most beautiful part of my craft."

The author dedicated her book, which was released in October, to her son "because he is the apple of my eye," said Ms. McDermott, who still plays piano every day, and there is music playing in her house, Pie Cottage, most of the time.

In her book, she advises others to do the same.

"Whatever the genre that gets your juices flowing, pick music you absolutely love, turn it up and sing and dance your heart out. Your pies will love you for it."

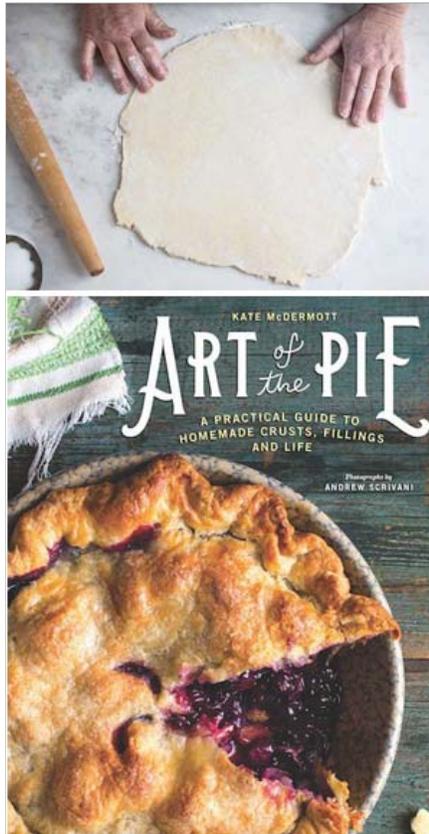
Near the end of her 352-page book, filled with mouth-watering photographs by Andrew Scrivani, is "Kate's Very Short Glossary of Pie-Making Terms" that include the following:

- "Chubby discs: Round discs of dough similar in size to the buns of a famous space princess. Some also say they are about the size of hockey pucks.
- "Mookie-mess: What your dough will roll out like if pieces of ice are left to melt inside of it.
- "Sizzle-whump: The sound a double-crust pie makes when it is ready to come out of the oven. The crust makes a sizzling sound and the bubbling filling will hit the inside of the upper crust making a whumping sound. Some folks say this is the sound of the pie's heartbeat.
- "Pie love: The moment a just-baked pie emerges from the oven, and the baker only has eyes for it. Sometimes accompanied by words like, 'I can't believe I made this. It's the most beautiful pie ever.' "

email: mmcmahon@newspress.com

IF YOU GO

Kate McDermott, author of "Art of the Pie: A Practical Guide to Homemade Crusts, Fillings and Life," will be interviewed at CALM Auxiliary's 31st annual Celebrity Authors Luncheon to raise funds for Child Abuse Listening Mediation, which helps prevent and treat child abuse in Santa Barbara County. The event begins at 10 a.m. Saturday at Fess Parker's Doubletree Resort, 633 E. Cabrillo Blvd. Tickets are \$150. For more information, call 969-5590 or visit www.calm4kids.org/events/celebrity-authors-luncheon.



"Mookie-mess: What your dough will roll out like if pieces of ice are left to melt inside of it," warns Kate McDermott.

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- Rentals

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