Our Lady at the Journal
Didn't I own 47 cookbooks?  
Wasn't my very own mother a home ec graduate who introduced me to cooking at the tender age of five?  
Wasn't I the Perle Mesta of Kirkwood, Missouri?  
Of course I could be the food editor of Ladies' Home Journal.

By SUE BARTON HUFFMAN

"I didn't even know Bart knew how to cook," said my fellow OU J-School graduate who edits this Sooner Magazine when she heard I'd been named food and equipment editor of Ladies' Home Journal. Truth is, I can. But I don't much anymore.

Sitting in Stewart Harral's public relations courses taking diligent notes on how to deal with striking miners or something equally relevant, I didn't fancy myself as OU's answer to Betty Crocker. As a matter of fact, I'd settled on PR as a major by process of elimination. Ruled out newspapers, because who wanted to do that? Ruled out advertising, because I couldn't draw a straight line with a ruler. Ruled out broadcasting (silly girl) . . . God knows why. Which left PR. The choice of a major was insignificant anyway, since I planned to write the Great American Novel and be instantly and forever famous.

Actually, PR was not, in retrospect, a bad choice. It turned out to be my bread and butter, from my all-important first job at Hallmark Cards in Kansas City, to San Diego where I fast-talked my way into becoming the "Milk Council Girl" at an ad agency, to running my own small business in St. Louis (between freelancing for a large PR firm and changing diapers).

I fell into food just like I seem to fall into everything else in my life. In January of '72, I found myself newly divorced with two kids ages 3 and 5, whose sole support had landed on my sloping shoulders. The food editor of the St. Louis Globe-Democrat had decided to retire, and I had decided I

Sue Huffman, center, and LHJ staff analyze recipes for bake sale article.

was the perfect person to replace her.

Setting out to convince the managing editor of that, I thanked my lucky stars for my Oklahoma Daily experience all those years ago. I'd practically lived at that paper, since by then I was tired of living at the sorority house, and nobody could have an apartment in those days unless you could prove you had severe social problems. I blithely assured him he did not want a home economist. This was a job for a journalist.

Of course I could be a food editor. Didn't I own 47 cookbooks? Wasn't my very own mother a home ec graduate of Oklahoma College of Women? Hadn't she introduced me to cooking at the tender age of 5? (I neglected to add my first culinary masterpiece was Royal chocolate pudding.) Wasn't the Perle Mesta of Kirkwood, Missouri, entertaining and cooking for up to 50 people? (Notice I did not say effortlessly.) Didn't I whip out my own sourdough bread and croissants and gourmet-this and ethnic-that with the confidence — or foolhardiness — to use my guests as guinea pigs? I got the job.

As hard as the work was, I loved the newspaper. I was the food department — did the writing, editing, heads, layout, proof-reading, copy-reading. Answered the phone when it got answered and opened the mail which hardly ever got answered. Found new friends, even had my first post-marriage romance with the religion editor of the paper. Since he happened to be very tall and very skinny, everybody thought maybe I could fatten him up. I never did.

I wrote stories on Spanish olives. In Spain. And Swiss roesti. In Switzerland. Judged the Pillsbury Bake-Off, the Pineapple Cooking Classic in Hawaii, the National Chicken Cooking Contest. I thought perhaps I would spend my golden years in St. Louis fighting with the printers over typos. Wrong.

One May day in '75 the then-food editor of Ladies' Home Journal called. She was moving to San Francisco, and wasn't I interested in applying for her job? I was not. I was not a home economist — as magazine food editors tend to be. I was divorced with two kids 6 and 8, and not only did I not know anybody in New York, I'd only been there three times ever — strictly as Tessie Tourist. Besides, I was very West Coast-oriented and thought maybe I'd move back to California one day.

Finally I agreed to send in a resume and a few tear sheets. Maybe LHJ would fly me to New York and take me out to dinner. But no. The managing editor was touring the provinces, interviewing. We had dinner all right — but in St. Louis. The interview was pure chemistry, and I was flown to New York for more serious discussions. By then, I knew they'd interviewed 47 people and had narrowed it to four. LHJ requested a commitment that I would take the position should it be offered. "How hard can it be," I asked myself. If you move to Peoria, you have to find a new place to live, new school and new babysitters. If you move to New York, you still have to find a new place to live, new school and new babysitters. Besides, I could tell my boss at the Globe I was almost food editor of Ladies' Home Journal, hence he was so fortunate to have me that I should get a raise.

The day I received the truly unexpected phone call from the Journal, my horoscope said "Today you receive..."
Being the food editor is great for job satisfaction and terrible for the figure. Recipes have to be tasted and analyzed, prepared again, tasted and analyzed . . . The last thing you want to do in the evenings is to go home and cook.

Huffman consults LHJ art director Tamara Schneider, left, on the selection of color slides to illustrate an article for the magazine food and equipment section.
New York City isn't always a piece of cake, but it is the theatre and Rockefeller Center at Christmas, and the deli in our building . . . and on a crisp fall day in Central Park, you can't imagine why anyone would ever live anywhere else.

A long way from home, Sue B. Huffman is welcomed into the Ordre des Compagnons du Beaujolais (friends of the Beaujolais wine-growing areas of France).