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# The Bundt Pan Man, Letting Them Eat Cake

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 Tuesday, January 11, 2005; Page C01

Should we take a moment to say goodbye to the man who invented the Bundt pan? We should, especially considering that he also gave the world the microwave carousel platter.

His name was H. David Dalquist, and he died last week of heart failure at age 86 in Edina, Minn. He is survived by Dorothy, his wife and business partner in the Nordic Ware empire, and their four children and 12 grandchildren, and we are resisting the urge to swing by for a condolence visit with the family and to drop off a little something: a casserole, maybe, or a nice dessert. (Though Minnesota is a long way to go to drop off a Bundt cake.)

The Bundt pan: Would that any of us could contribute something so perfect to the domestic tableau, some quiet achievement that everyone knows about without knowing who thought it up. Bundt cakes (and Bundt Jell-O desserts, and Bundt breakfast bread, and "monkey ball bread" made with Pillsbury Poppin' Fresh dough and butter and cinnamon in a Bundt pan) are about buffet tables and family reunions, Christmas brunches and, sometimes, church hall receptions after funerals.

Something about a Bundt cake makes it disappear faster. The tombstone-shaped slices seemed smaller, lighter. Particularly clever people know how to make a Bundt cake with a tasty surprise within. The Bundt pan, with its trademark hole in the center, is a thing that filled a need -- a void -- no one quite knew existed.

Well, almost no one. According to an obituary in the Los Angeles Times, the ladies of a Minnesota chapter of Hadassah, the Jewish volunteer organization, sensed the need 55 years ago and went to the Dalquists at Nordic Ware with a request: Please replicate this old ceramic dish that somebody's grandmother had kept for years and years to bake a dessert called *kugelhopf*.

Dalquist and company made a newfangled kugelhopf pan out of aluminum. Hadassah was delighted, and Dalquist called it a "bund." The German word *bund* loosely means "a gathering of people," and that seemed like a good name, if not for the Bund, a German American group in the 1930s that was pro-Hitler. So Dalquist added a "t" on the end of the word: Bundt.

Meaning nothing, except Bundt. As in, "Where's my Bundt pan?" (clatter, clatter, rummage), and the realization that you lent it to your sister and she never gave it

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back. Everyone used to get a coppery Bundt pan as a wedding present. (And everyone still should -- enough already with the bamboo sushi mats and Le Creuset Doufeu ovens from Williams-Sonoma.) People wonder why gays want to get married. It's because we want our own deluxe Bundt pans, people. Just simple American things.

The rest of the Bundt pan's success story, according to the Times, involves something called the "Tunnel of Fudge": In 1966, Ella Helfrich of Texas won the 17th annual Pillsbury Bake-Off using a Bundt pan for this concoction, and so enchantingly hypnotic it was that everyone suddenly needed the pan to make it, which, it turned out, could only be a Bundt. Dalquist smartly had patented the pan's design and Nordic Ware upped production to 30,000 a day. Pillsbury signed on to the fad in 1970, creating special cake mixes for Bundting purposes, until it discontinued them seven years ago - which has cut into demand for the pans.

Giving the world millions of Bundt pans would be accomplishment enough, but then there's this whole business of pioneering the glass carousel that rotates in the microwave. Dalquist did that, too. The inside of most microwave ovens (especially the ones at the office) is a scary and depressingly caked-on place, but it is made all the more safe and clean by his work. He was all about the microwave: Nordic Ware came out with splatter covers, rotating plates, gadgets to improve nuked food.

In the end, this would perhaps prove more important than the Bundt, if somehow more mundane. Think about him tonight, while you're thinking about what to pull out of the freezer. Watch that Lean Cuisine do its slow rotation. Think about how much you'd rather have a Bundt cake instead.

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