



Top of page: Family Hook & Spoon, the Leathams, pictured from left: Georgia Mae with Phoebe Lou, Sandy (Grandy), Rose Hart with bub, Gussie Ray, Bonnie Joy and Corrie William. Above: A typical family breakfast menu. Above left: Mutton silverside roast.

## THE REAL DEAL HOOK & SPOON

What ever happened to the Sunday lamb roast? Are we losing our cultural identity? With the media throwing so many detailed *Masterchef*-esque culinary food challenges at us, perhaps our humble family food traditions are becoming increasingly underrated. Among all this hype you might notice the term 'slow food' bandied about — ironically appropriate, considering the length of time it takes for these TV chef, celebrity wannabes to put together a decent plate of food. Although 'slow food' is a popular term, it's still increasingly hard to find the real deal; in which case, it's nice to consider that Sandy Leatham's Benalla butchery and larder, Hook and Spoon is truly slower than a snail's pace.

'Slow food, like a lot of things has become formalised — and I've been doing it forever without knowing that it's got a name, it's just how we lived.'

Drawing from her experience as a newlywed farmer in Tasmania, Sandy is proficient in quality DIY farm-made food. Being self-sufficient was a vital ingredient in allowing her to succeed in her way of life on the farm. There was no power, and to put food on the table, Sandy looked to her then tools of the trade: extensive veggie garden, reliable house cow (she made her own cheese) and trusty shotgun — rabbit ragout, anyone? These days, Sandy produces an astonishing range of meat products at Hook and Spoon, a business that has become a paddock-to-plate icon and much-loved food destination on Victoria's culinary map. With Merino wethers and Angus cattle run organically on her Warrenbayne farm (animals are not chemically drenched and run freely, grazing on native grasses and flora) and a herb garden at the back of the shop, Sandy oversees production of mutton and beef from all aspects of the animal breeding and husbandry, through to its butchering, hanging and cooking.

As a fourth generation butcher it is not surprising that Sandy has instilled in her children a passion for growing and making their own food from scratch. While daughter Georgia works beside Sandy in the shop, son Corrie is proud and proactive at managing the farm. Tending to their own impressive vegetable gardens, which yield an astonishing, consistent harvest, daughters Bonnie and Rose have also recently taken to making their own breads and yogurts.

Using traditional English meat preservation and cooking methods, Hook and Spoon creates all the things you wish your mum had made. Potted meats like shank, pork and ox tail are a treat, a delectable range of pies, stocks, relish, gluten and preservative-free sausages, terrines, or 'picnic loaf', as Sandy calls it, made with chunky mutton and pork meat pieces. 'It looks great when you slice it, it's just beautiful.'

Also on the menu is Sandy's ever popular water crust pastry pork pie, which has proven to draw customers back time and time again. 'We make that with a mixture of lard and butter — it's pretty old-fashioned. We make the pie with a hole in the top and cook it fairly slowly so the meat in the middle shrinks and you're left with sort of a gap around the edge. So when it's cold, you pour in some of your really beautiful pork stock to complete the pie.'

In terms of meat processing, there is little wastage at Hook and Spoon. You could say, for example, that nearly every part of a pig (including its ears for puppy treats) is made into a food product — except, of course, its squeal. Also on the larder shelf is a range of premium stocks for cooking. 'Making the stock is a really important thing. We use the stock in our pie fillings and a couple of local chefs order the stocks from us, along with other meat products. The bones are just lovely for stocks, you know, they're too good to give to the dogs.'

Accompanying Sandy's unique lifestyle is an alternate view towards healthy foods — for example, considering the consumption of processed fats, or low-fat food products, versus natural animal fats. 'I've always thought that animal fat is healthier than margarine or things that are highly processed. A lot of my customers are interested in our products because they're natural and they too have the belief in animal fat (in moderation) being healthier than something processed. I also think cooking with fat is a lot more flavoursome and sometimes it'll be self basting by having that layer of fat.'

So, if you if you like Sandy's take on a natural foodie approach, take a trip to Hook and Spoon to witness the spoils of Sandy's self-sufficient lifestyle; maybe even take a piece of it home for yourself.

'It was sort of out of necessity but then it just became a passion; I mean, it was just so interesting doing all your own stuff. You feel so proud sitting down to a table where everything's from your place. It's also a beautiful thing to share with your family.'

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