

# HOMES THAT COOK

**BEST-KEPT SECRETS** for Buying,  
Selling, and Creating a Home

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INDIE BOOKS  
INTERNATIONAL

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## **SECTION ONE**

What is a Home  
that Cooks?



## INTRODUCTION

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# What a Home that Cooks Means to Me

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*Better is a dish of vegetables where love is than a fattened ox served with hatred.*

**Proverbs 15:17, New American Standard edition**

For as long as I can remember, I've always loved to sell stuff. As a child I would set up a table in our front yard and sell candy to the neighborhood kids.

Back then there were candy stores, and their inventory was exclusively candy—all different types and varieties of candy. My mom would take me to the candy store once a week and I'd load up on goods, mark up the price and sell it to the neighborhood kids who never got to go to the candy store. That worked so well that I started selling knickknacks from our house and peddling the items to these same kids, especially around the holidays.

“You gotta get your mom a gift—it's almost Mother's Day,” I'd tell them. Yes, they bought. That all ended when my mom found out I was selling her knickknacks to the other kids. My intentions were good and I really enjoyed marketing (trying to get these kids to buy) the goods. I wonder what ever happened to Wacky Wafers. That was the most popular candy that I sold. Every time I see the newer candy Fun Dip I'm reminded of those days. I was destined to be in sales, even back then.

After moving to Kansas City in 1992, I decided to get my real estate license. Prior to that back in Pittsburgh I had worked as a tour operator

for USAir, selling group ski trips to the western US ski destinations. What fun I had for those seven years. But I found out that most people drive to the Rockies from Kansas City, so the group ski trip marketing was now over for me.

After the birth of my son, I relinquished my real estate license in order to be a fulltime mom. Now, back in the business, I've been a realtor for more than seven years, and I am enjoying (almost) every minute of it—never a dull moment and no two deals are ever the same.

I take pride in knowing that sellers and buyers trust me with the sale and purchase of one of their largest assets.

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## The Loving Power of a Cookbook

When I first arrived in Kansas City, I was desperately homesick. Leaving my home and family in Pennsylvania was a little more difficult on my heart than I believed it would be. I missed the family dinners, the wine and appetizers under the grape arbor, the laughter and the closeness of my family.

As the youngest of three siblings, I was the last to move out of the state. My oldest brother David moved to New York City after graduating from Auburn University. Eric, the middle sibling, remained in the Chicago area after graduating from Northwestern University. Both brothers are married and I am blessed to have not only them, but two wonderful sisters-in-law, nieces and a nephew.

We were raised in an Italian family in western Pennsylvania where we shared most Sunday meals together at my grandmother's house. My grandfather came to the United States from Lendinara in northern Italy in 1909. In 1914 he met and married my grandmother, also a full-blooded northern Italian, in the town of Meadowlands, Pennsylvania. That same year my grandmother's parents, Peter and Letitia, built a three-story farmhouse in this same town with the intention that the whole family would live there together. My grandmother and

grandfather, Baptist and Louise, would occupy the right side of this three-story home and my grandmother's parents, along with her four brothers and one sister occupied the left side of the home. The home shared a center staircase; however, each side had its own living room, dining room, fireplace and full kitchen.

My dad was born in this home in 1928. He would tell my brothers and me about the times when he was growing up there—when, if he didn't like what his mom was cooking for dinner, he'd go over to his Aunt Mary's side of the house to see what she was preparing for dinner. When my great-grandparents built this home in 1914, little did they know it would become a place where generations of happy memories would be made, many of which would include the food that was prepared there and shared there throughout the years—food made with loving hands and generous hearts.

How could I turn my homesickness memories into something that could last a lifetime? My brothers and I grew up learning about food, appreciating food and that dinner was more of an event than just another meal. As I was thinking about the good food and memories, it hit me that I needed to collect all of those recipes from my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins before it was too late. I would collect them and then share them with my brothers' families so that they can keep that piece of history and perhaps share the food and memories with their children.

When my great-grandparents built this home in 1914, little did they know it would become a place where generations of happy memories would be made, many of which would include the food that was prepared there.

As my gift to you, I have shared some of those recipes, along with recipes from other families, with you here in this book. What foods do you most remember or remind you of your family? Are there recipes out there that you would like to pass down or have passed down to you?

## More About Meadowlands, Pennsylvania

The entire back yard of this home was a well-maintained garden full of all kinds of food such as Swiss chard, corn, garlic, lettuce, beets, tomatoes, onions—you name it. There was also a cherry tree, two apple trees and one plum tree. Back then it was truly “farm to table”.

There was a small area of grass where we often played badminton. I loved hearing my grandmother and my Great Aunt Mary tell me about the outdoor oven that was in the yard back in the day, where they baked bread and other goodies. It sounded like so much fun to me, but I’m certain it was a lot of work for them.

My Aunt Mary and grandmother baked bread weekly until they were in their mid-seventies. Every Wednesday, as I recall, was bread baking day, an all-day event that included kneading, proofing, baking and cooling. They would then wrap each loaf in white freezer paper and tie it with butcher string. I loved Wednesdays.

As you might have guessed, I learned to cook and loved it. My family taught me that preparing food meant so much more than being just “one more thing to do”. As I witnessed and learned, sitting down with family and friends to a meal prepared with loving hands and a generous heart not only creates memories but also provides the opportunity for conversation, sharing and strengthening bonds.

## Present Day

I am a newlywed of two years, and I have one son and five lovely stepchildren. It brings me such joy to cook for them and introduce them to new foods. Before I met my husband he was a “meat and potatoes” guy and, I’ve learned, typically kept his food choices quite simple. Well, after two years of marriage that has changed drastically. It is fun now to see my husband sipping fine wine and helping me in the kitchen.

My heart is so happy when I hear my youngest stepson, now sixteen, ask me to make a certain one of my dishes. You have to understand he is the pickiest eater in the family. I’m so delighted that he and the rest of the family are branching out with their food choices. It has been a really fun food journey.

With numerous holidays now under my belt with my husband's side of the family, I've learned that they, too, have some long-standing food traditions. Those recipes can be found in this book as well, as we wanted to preserve them for our kids.

What recipes, foods and traditions do you enjoy with your family? Remember to ask family members for those recipes. You'll find pages in this book where you can write some of them down and preserve them for generations to come.

And, so, I have taken these two very happy areas of my life and combined them in this book of real estate buying and selling tips along with delicious family recipes, with the hope that they will enrich your life in your quest for a home that cooks.

Enjoy.

Lettiann Southerland

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What recipes,  
foods and  
traditions do you  
enjoy with your  
family?



## **SECTION TWO**

# Buying a Home that Cooks



# Tips for Buying a Home

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- 1. Before house hunting, get pre-approved.** Getting pre-approved makes it clear what you can afford so you will not waste time looking at houses that are out of your price range. In addition, when you do find the right house you will be in a better position to make a serious offer.
- 2. Start by looking at your credit.** Most people need to apply for mortgages to buy a home, so take the time now to look through your credit history and be sure it is accurate and clean.
- 3. Aim for a home you can really afford.** Don't set yourself up for disappointment or financial grief. There are many online calculators to help you understand how your income, debts, and expenses affect what you can afford.
- 4. Buy in a district with good schools.** This may not seem important if you don't have children, but it is often a top priority for home buyers. Therefore, even if you will never have a need for those good schools, when it comes time to sell, it will boost your property values.
- 5. Get professional help.** An exclusive buyer agent will be looking out for your best interests and can help you navigate the bidding and buying process. The best part is, since the seller of the home pays the buyer's agent, you will pay very little and they can probably save you a substantial amount of money.
- 6. Do your homework before bidding.** Look at comparable homes in your neighborhood that have sold in the past three months. Your opening bid should be based on these trends.
- 7. Hire a home inspector.** Don't rely on the seller's information—hire your own certified home inspector who will evaluate the home on your behalf and make you aware of potential problems that could be expensive to fix later.

8. **Keep your money where it is.** Remember this is a huge financial transaction and your finances are being examined. Avoid possible red flags by refraining from major purchases and significant money transfers for three to six months before buying a new home.
9. **Don't obsess with trying to time the market.** There is no perfect time to buy and you'll make yourself crazy trying to predict the housing market. The best time is when you have found the right house for you at a price you can afford.
10. **Bigger isn't always better.** It may seem like opting for the best and biggest house would make sense but it is actually the opposite. You have to remember that the largest house in the neighborhood is not going to appeal to many potential buyers when it comes time to sell the house in the future.
11. **Stalk the neighborhood.** Some neighborhoods are very different by day, or by night. To avoid being surprised after the fact, visit the area at various hours to see what's going on.
12. **Think long-term and think resale.** While we are talking about *buying* a house, not *selling*, it is important to consider your plans for the next few years and whether the house will be easy to sell in the future when you are ready to move on.
13. **Make a checklist of your must-haves, nice-to-haves, and other essentials.** This may seem obvious but emotional reactions to houses can be strong and make you forget the realities. Have a list in writing so you can check the house against it—if it doesn't have your must-haves, do you really love it?
14. **Look at *all* the expenses when you are budgeting for the house.** If you are only budgeting for the principal, interest, taxes, and insurance, you may be surprised in the long-run. Think about other factors like upgrades you'll need to make to the house and changes in costs of utilities and commuting that will affect your bottom line.
15. **Ask for the homeowners association covenants before you make a decision.** If your house is part of a HOA, you have

to abide by all their rules—so make sure you read them first. You may find that certain conditions do not fit your needs; for example, preventing you from making improvements or renting the house.

- 16. Read your contract before you sign it.** This should be a given, but it bears saying that you must fully read and understand your contract. Since this is probably the biggest purchase of your life, if you have questions about anything in the document, ask your mortgage broker and your real estate agent.
- 17. Look beyond the staging (or lack thereof).** As you look at houses, try to ignore the staging and pay attention to the layout and structure of the house. Ugly paint colors or décor can distract some buyers but those are easy fixes. On the other hand, beautiful staging often disguises problems you may have seen in an empty house. Try to mentally clear out the space and go from there.
- 18. Explore mortgage options.** Mortgages are not one-size-fits-all—different banks offer different interest rates and terms. Consider your plans for the future and shop around to determine what best fits your goals.
- 19. Understand the offer process.** Don't make a blind guess. I already mentioned you should know the price of comparable properties that sold in the neighborhood, but you should also know how that compares to currently available properties. Even knowing how long the house has been on the market can help you decide what to offer. Also, know that you will most likely need to negotiate, so don't offer the most you can afford on your first go.
- 20. Be prepared for competition when making an offer.** If this house is perfect, you are probably not the only one who thinks so. You may be up against others who are after the same house so make a good offer and discuss with your agent ways to distinguish yourself from the crowd of buyers.
- 21. Find the right neighborhood.** The house is important but the neighborhood is just as crucial to your happiness. It isn't just about commute times. Think about what is important in your daily

life that you want in this new home base. Do you like outdoor recreation spaces? Do you need nearby nightlife and restaurants? Are you concerned with good schools and safe spaces for children?

- 22. Don't allow yourself to be pressured by the seller or the real estate agent.** This is a major decision—don't allow yourself to be rushed. If you are unsure, ask people you trust for help and advice and take the time you need to be clear you are making the right choice.