

Recipes worm their way into judges' hearts, stomachs

By Mary Fastenau

The worm industry has opened a new can that will not be found on the grocer's shelf.

Worms have yet to find their way into connoisseurs' hearts, but they did squiggle their way into the University of Nebraska at Omaha Monday.

The worms crawled into recipes for pizza, breakfast rolls, crepes and fritters. The judges cast their teeth into the worm dishes prepared by a beginning home economics class at UNO, and then cast their vote for the winning culinary creation.

The whole story would sound "fishy" to me, but I was one of the judges and am living proof that you do not have to have fins to eat worms.

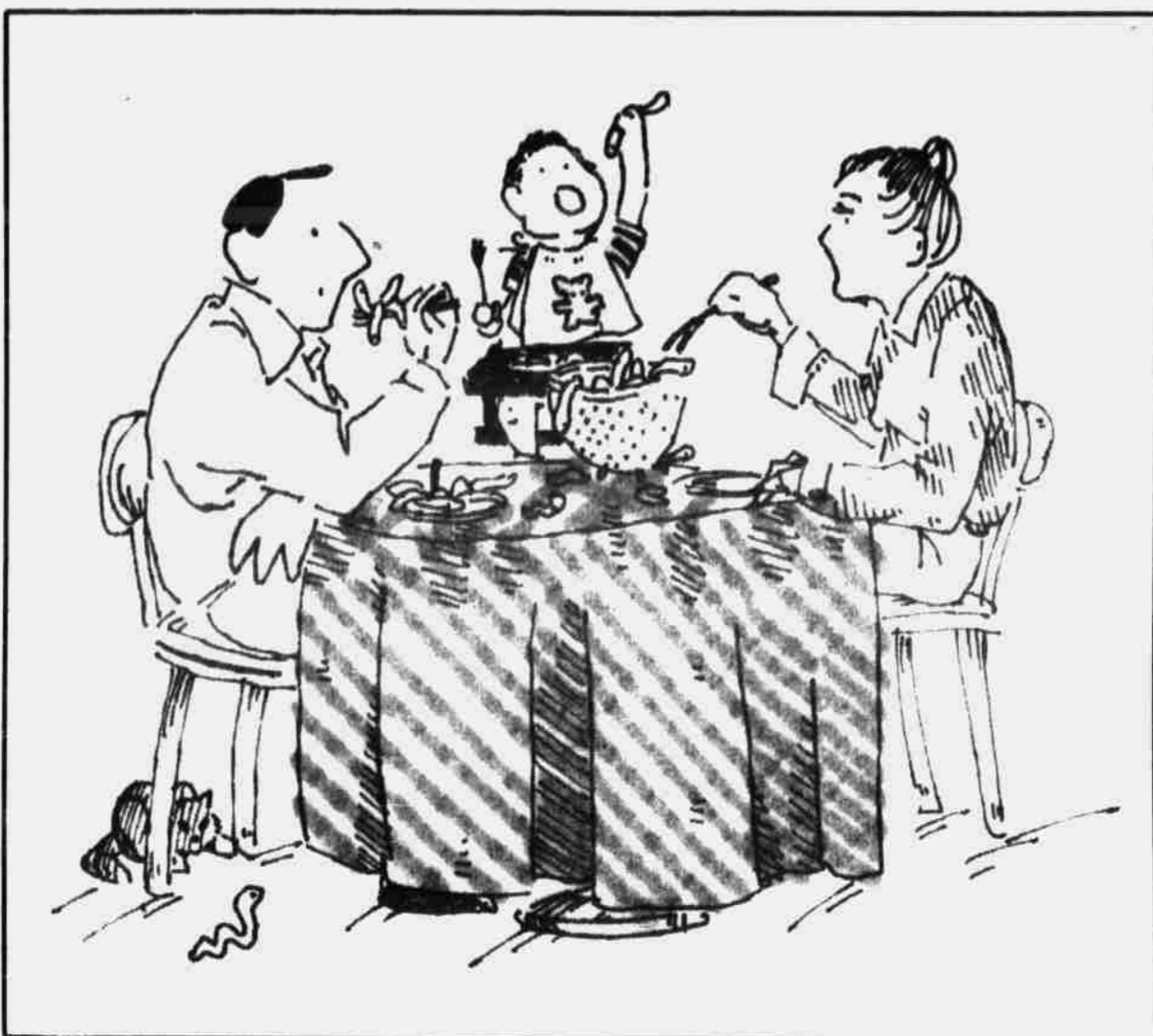
The other brave ones who shared the experience were Peter Citron, Omaha World-Herald reporter; Fred Thomas, Omaha World-Herald reporter; Jane Johnson, reporter for the UNO campus newspaper, Gateway, and Bill Knipscher of Continental Ecology Farms, Omaha.

Before the contest, the five best recipes were selected and prepared.

The judges sat around a table. Red wine set a social precedent, since there are no etiquette rules to govern worm consumption.

We were provided with a score card on which to rate the food on appearance, flavor, texture, odor and color.

I looked at the blank faces of my fellow judges and took the first bite of pizza. It



had looked very ordinary on my plate, but wondering how it would taste squirming my stomach.

I took the bait (or at least a bite) and prepared myself. The worms were covered with tomato sauce, peppers and sausage.

I glanced at the other judges and saw

that the first bite had also surprised them. Their expressions and comments had formed a consensus that eating worms was not bad.

My next target was the breakfast rolls. They were covered with a sticky, brown sugar glaze and had risen to delicious heights. The top of the rolls were decorated with brown shreds that looked like dry grass. I knew this would be the true test since there were no flavors to mask the worms.

I again mentally prepared and took a bite. It was good!

The worm flavor was more evident this time, but the rolls tasted like fish — only crunchy.

The third food was the cookie. The worms were lost in a crowd of chow mein and covered with a rich chocolate flavor. There was not a hint of worm flavor in this creation.

Next came the Crepe de Verre de Terre, whose elegant name adorned a not-so-elegant foodstuff. There was a feeling of crunchiness, but again, no violent reaction.

My next conquest was the Earthworm Supreme, a type of fritter, which was accented by bits of visible brown worm. It also tasted similar to fish but with an added crunch.

The judges looked around the table again. This time their expressions were full of questions. Who was the winner?

The only way to decide was by a second tasting. Each judge took a second bite, then a third and a fourth, their thoughts seemed to move as slowly as their mouths.

Finally each judge reached a conclusion and handed in results for tabulation.

The worm pizza was pronounced winner, followed by the cookies and then the crepes.

Knipscher, of Continental Ecology, said the winner will be awarded \$50 and the recipe will continue in the national contest. Second place earned \$30 and third place \$20.

The national contest will be held in Los Angeles May 24, he said, and three finalists in that contest will be flown to California for the final cooking.

Despite my initial fright, eating worms can be a learning experience. When I am in the position of the childhood ditty, "nobody loves me, everybody hates me," eating worms may not be a bad alternative.

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