

## REMEMBERING

PHYLLIS LARSON | 1926-2016

# Turkey Talk-Line expert rescued holiday meals

BY MAUREEN O'DONNELL  
Staff Reporter

As an adviser on Butterball's Turkey Talk-Line, Phyllis Larson could help you choose, thaw, brine, stuff, marinate, inject, roast, grill, smoke, deep-fry or carve a turkey — and then tell you what to do with the leftovers.

She was a terrific cook and trained home economist, but perhaps her biggest skill was in assuring frazzled callers their guests were going to be happy and the holidays would be fine.

Mrs. Larson worked for 15 years on the hotline (1-800-288-8372 or [butterball.com/contact-us](http://butterball.com/contact-us)), which handles more than 100,000 questions from early November to Christmas Eve at Butterball's Naperville headquarters. In that time, she collected some good stories.

One caller told her, "I followed the directions, but the turkey is blue."

Turned out, they left the blue plastic seal on the bird. "They didn't take the wrapping off and cooked the turkey, and it came out blue," said Mrs. Larson's son, Eric.

On Thanksgiving Day, she would field calls from hosts and hostesses who said they were expecting a big crowd, but they hadn't gotten around to removing the turkey from the freezer. She had to break the news to them that they'd better head to the store for a fresh bird because it wasn't going to thaw in time.

Mrs. Larson, 90, who taught home economics for 20 years at Glen Ellyn's Glen Crest Middle School, died in her sleep at her home in Carol Stream on Nov. 18.

She grew up in Glen Ellyn and Galesburg as Phyllis Lindahl, the only child in a Swedish-American

family. When she was 13, her father, a mail carrier, died suddenly. Phyllis and her mother moved to Aurora, and her mother went to work as a secretary. She graduated from West Aurora High School.

At North Central College in Naperville, she met another young Swedish-American, Army 1st Lt. Ward J. Larson, a Downers Grove resident who had returned from serving in World War II in the Philippines. "They used to tell us they fell in love painting the Student Council room," said their daughter, Barbara Jean Williams. The Larsons were married for 66 years, until his death last year.

They lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, while he attended Harvard Law School. Returning to the Midwest, they raised their family in Naperville and Glen Ellyn.

Instead of going on pricey vacations, she and her husband bought a cottage in Wisconsin on Blue Spring Lake, where they enjoyed entertaining friends and having lots of kids running around swimming and fishing. "They wanted something they could share with people," their daughter said.

The Larsons took summer camping trips to Yellowstone, Yosemite, Muir Woods and other national parks, where she would use her Coleman stove to rustle up food for the family. They visited the 1967 Expo World's Fair in Montreal and the 1964-65 New York World's Fair. They went on Methodist church trips to Fort Pickens Campground near Pensacola, Florida.

She collected graniteware, the enameled, speckled metal cookware and dishes associated with cowboys and camping. For a time,



Phyllis Larson with her husband of 66 years, Ward J. Larson.

SUPPLIED PHOTOS

## PHYLLIS LARSON'S SWEDISH MEATBALLS

- 1 lb. beef
- 1 lb. pork
- 1 lb. veal  
(The meats should be ground together by a butcher, if possible. Her daughter Barbara sometimes makes it with a beef-pork combination only.)
- 1 tbsp. onion, minced fine
- 2 eggs
- 4 tbsp. margarine, melted
- 2 slices bread or 1/2 cup crumbs
- 3/4 cup milk
- 2 tsp. salt
- 1/8 tsp. nutmeg

- 1/8 tsp. allspice
- 1/2 tsp. garlic powder (optional, or can be increased if you like garlic)
- 1/4 tsp. black pepper

Combine all ingredients thoroughly. Chill about one hour. Form meatballs, about one inch in diameter. Place on a baking pan with sides. They can almost touch. Bake 30 to 40 minutes at about 350 degrees, until brown and well-cooked. Do not bake too long, as they will get hard. Mrs. Larson usually scraped the baking pan and saved the drippings, adding beef flavoring to make gravy, which she poured over the meatballs. She used to say this recipe freezes well and can be increased by simple multiplication.

get married," Eric Larson said.

She made coveted stollen fruit breads shaped like Christmas trees and gave them away as gifts. She decorated them with green frosting and candied fruits and nuts for ornaments.

Mrs. Larson loved a hot cup of strong coffee. A gracious hostess, she always had something good in the fridge if a friend dropped in, said another son, Peter.

"She was a great conversationalist," said a third son, David. "Whenever I needed to talk, as a teenager or any other time in my life, she loved to talk. She was kind of a night owl. She would give you all the time you needed and be very, very supportive."

Mrs. Larson is also survived by eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Visitation is planned from 1 p.m. Saturday until a 2 p.m. service at First United Methodist Church, 424 Forest Ave., Glen Ellyn.

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she was president of a society of graniteware aficionados.

Mrs. Larson excelled at the recipes passed down from her immigrant grandparents, including Swedish meatballs, cardamom coffee cake and limpa bread. At the

holidays, she served potato sausage, lutefisk and two kinds of hering — one plain and one in cream sauce. She also made a traditional Swedish rice pudding with an almond folded inside. "Whoever gets the almond will be the next one to