ROBERT MILTNER

Comfort Food

During the Depression, my mother’s father always ate meat for dinner, despite the rest of the family having only potatoes and cabbage. He was, after all, a man, and he needed to keep his strength up since he was the one who stood between the wolf and the door. This was at a time men stood in line for jobs that weren’t there or for handouts that could not keep them full.

But my mother’s father had the good fortune to have a job working for the Fire Department. One thing sure his Irish father had taught him: flood and fire are indifferent to social class or difficult times. So it was that his plate was full: a pig’s knuckle, a calf’s liver, or a hen’s neck, the rule was always true: the strong need meat. And we, descendants of immigrants, relocated remnants of displaced peoples, step down from the ladder and seat ourselves in restaurants where we pay handsomely for traditional peasant fare, savoring the tastes our ancestors ate—old cows,
slow rabbits, or cocky chickens; snails, nettles, or leeks—anything to nourish us, give us the strength to run faster than whatever disaster is coming down the road this time: wolves, floods, or fires.