10 minutes with

By Abby Luby

Susan Allport

Author of five fascinatingly diverse books, Susan Allport has a talent for turning scientific data into engrossing page-turners. Her most popular book for Bedforites is Sermons in Stone, *about exploring stone walls. In her newly released book on* Omega-3 fatty acids, The Queen of Fats *(University of California Press, 2006), Allport reveals the tale of how the scientific community concluded that "good" fats thwart killers such as heart disease, cancer, and obesity. We sat down with Allport to see if we could figure out what to have for dinner.*

Why is someone with a love of stone walls researching Omega-3 fatty acids?

It's about looking closely at what's around you. I've examined animals searching for food as closely as I've examined stone walls. The foods that animals eat affect their social interaction and their behavior. Animals that eat leaves and plants have a high Omega-3 diet, which allows them to be more active and avoid hibernating. Since humans don't have the luxury of slowing down in our society, eating foods with Omega-3s is important.

You've long criticized fad diets. Does that play out in The Queen of Fats?

Yes. Quick-fix fad diets are extremely lacking in certain fundamental basics. That's because of the power of the food industry, which drives these diets. It condemns all fats. I started the book by asking why this very important oil, which is essential for brain and heart functions, was being dismissed as a supplement, when it should be a daily requirement.

Your book has a five-page timeline starting in 1792 and an extensive glossary, yet it reads like a detective story. How does that format work?

I followed different researchers and scientists. In Copenhagen I looked through Jorn Dyerberg's sealskin notebooks about Eskimos who ate large amounts of whale blubber. Then I went to Minnesota to talk to Ralph Holman, the world authority on Omega-3s, who gave the fatty acid its name. Eventually a story developed.

You write that free-range or pasture-fed animals have more Omega-3 fats in their tissues than confined, grain-fed animals do. How does the Big Mac weigh in?

Depending on what the cow ate, the Big Mac could be high in either Omega-3s or Omega-6s. If confined cows eat a lot of grains and seeds, its tissues will be full of competing fats like Omega-6s. If an animal eats a lot of grass and other greens, its tissues will be full of Omega-3s.

How can we get more Omega-3s?

Eat Omega-3-enriched eggs or use canola or vegetable oil. Compared to other nuts, English walnuts are high in Omega-3s. Fish have a lot of Omega-3s, but there are other sources such as green vegetables, fruits, beans, potatoes.

What was fun about writing this book?

Talking to older scientists. When I called Ralph Holeman in Minnesota, he answered the phone and said, "I've been waiting for this call for decades." He knew there was whole drama that hadn't been told. Many people that have researched fatty acids are elderly. This was just the right time to tell their story. ■