

## HAPPY 25TH ANNIVERSARY TO CHSC!

Congratulations to CHSC for 25 years as one of the best bargains in town for entertainment and education. And a special thanks to all those founders who keep it going: officers Nancy Zaslavsky, Susanna Erdos, Charles Perry and Donna Chaney and committee chairs Don Corbett, Marilyn Beaudry-Corbett and Janet Fahey. They make a good case for no term limits!

The Los Angeles Public Library deserves a huge salute on the 25th anniversary of CHSC. It welcomed us as part of its family, providing the home and nurturing needed to grow and flourish. Without the library, dues would need to be perhaps 10 times as large. Thank you LAPL for your loyalty and embracing our diverse community. We love you.



Jackie Knowles, CHSC Co-founder

Interested in reading more about early CHSC events? Reminiscence here with Jackie Knowles: <https://docdro.id/uBbtwuJ>



Thank you to our members who were supporters from the start of CHSC in 1995:

- Charles Perry
- Jackie Knowles
- Dan Strehl
- Madeleine Beaumont
- Linda Burum
- Billie Connor-Dominguez
- Don and Marilyn Corbett
- Al Cutler
- Susanna Erdos
- Joanna Erdos
- Joan Nielsen
- Joan Reitzel
- Patricia Rose
- Jacqelen Ruben
- Sandy Schuckett

Images of early CHSC events (clockwise from left): 1997 Bastille Day Picnic at the Barbara Streisand Center in Malibu, chefs and attendees at the picnic, Marion Cunningham at the 1996 Fannie Farmer Picnic in Pacific Palisades' Will Rogers State Historic Park

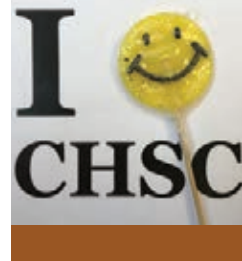
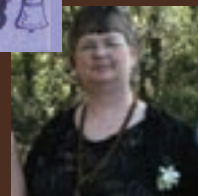


## FUN WITH FOOD PUZZLES

In 1950, Lucky Lager used the slogan, "It's Lucky when you live in California" and they were the first to feature rebus puzzles on the inside of their beer bottle caps. Try your luck in figuring out these rebus puzzles that describe breads and cakes, from Australian stamp artist Frances Byrne. See the answers on page 6.



In addition to being married for 45 years, a mother to adult daughters and grandmother of two, Frances Byrne is a stamp artist from Australia. Her name, StampOwl, combines her two favorite hobbies - stamping and collecting owls. See more of her puzzles at: [stampowl.blogspot.com](http://stampowl.blogspot.com)



# THE FOOD JOURNAL

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Dedicated to pursuing food history and supporting culinary collections at the Los Angeles Public Library

### Twenty-five years. Who knew?



In 1995, out of the blue, I got a call from an LAPL librarian named Dan Strehl. I'd met him in England a couple of years earlier at the annual Oxford Symposium, where I had been presenting food history papers since the early Eighties. Would I be interested in a Los Angeles-based food history society, he wanted to know?

Why, sure. I was ripe for this suggestion. I'd just spent a couple years on the local board of Julia Child's American Institute of Wine and Food, laboring to ease the burden of debt the AIWF had unwisely assumed when it was founded. During its early years it had had to concentrate its efforts on fund-raising events -- largely high-ticket Tuscan dinners -- rather than the food historical stuff I'd signed on for.

Charles Perry  
CHSC President

Dan's idea was more like the Oxford Symposium, an organization with a lean budget that ran on enthusiasm. That sounded doable, though who could say? *Difficult to see, the future is; clouded.* That's a quote from somebody, can't think who.

I remember my first lecture before this new group, which didn't even have an official name yet. It was held in a little nondescript meeting room near the 8th Street entrance to the Central Library, right there beyond the bathrooms. We had a small group of a dozen or so attendees, several of whom are still active in the CHSC.

*Continued on page 6*

### Program Notes



Nancy Zaslavsky  
CHSC Vice President,  
Programs

As we began last year we had no way of anticipating the obstacles COVID-19 would bring to our lives and how CHSC's 25th Silver Anniversary year would be more than slightly tarnished. During the coronavirus March through August break we dove into a virtual crash course and everyone's been Zooming since September. A couple of Brits, Anne Willan with "Women in the Kitchen" and Marc Meltonville's "The King's Chocolate Kitchen at Hampton Court," two of our most popular speakers, proved Zoom can be nourishing in these trying times. Hae Jung Cho's cooking demo of her beloved national dish and comfort food "Kimjang Kimchi, a Korean Tradition" followed, with December wrapping up with Marcy Carriker Smothers' feel-good "The Culinary History of Disneyland and Walt Disney." 2021 continued with virtual programs starting with Charles Perry's annual January president's lecture "That Farm Town, Los Angeles" and we'll continue to Zoom until it's safe to return home to the Central Library's Taper Auditorium.

We'll never forget 2020-21. One shining star continues to be our monthly programs and CHSC is there for you. Please renew your extremely affordable—downright paltry!—\$30 membership (visit [www.chsocal.org](http://www.chsocal.org) and click on "Membership") now during the winter drive and please consider joining at a Patron, Benefactor, or Angel level. I considered including a coupon here for toilet paper or Clorox wipes to encourage early renewals, alas nixed by the Board, so be sure to renew in February to be included in our highly coveted, star-studded March 2021 directory.

A friendly reminder since you're still shopping from home in holiday pajamas: Please *Continued on page 6*

The California Bear-Chef first appeared in the *Pan-Pacific Cook Book*, 1915.



The Fun Anniversary Issue!

630 West Fifth Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90071-2002  
Address Correction Requested

The Culinary Historians of Southern California  
at the  
LOS ANGELES PUBLIC LIBRARY

### Join the Culinary Historians Book Club

A new activity for CHSC members! The opportunity to talk about food, try a recipe, make friends and explore fascinating topics. Discussions are meant to be lively and fun. Come join the online meetings on the first Monday of every month from 4:30 – 6 PM.



Interested in participating?  
Email [Cathy.Behrens@gmail.com](mailto:Cathy.Behrens@gmail.com) to contact Co-Chairs Cathy Behrens & Chelley Maple

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Let's celebrate the 25th anniversary of CHSC! Since 1995, the organization has been one of the largest and most active culinary historian groups in the U.S., has contributed to the library collection and food culture of the greater Los Angeles area and continues to grow, innovate and support those who love food and history. Cheers to us and thank you for your ongoing support!

This festive event, though, happens at a truly bittersweet time. We haven't turned the corner on COVID-19 yet and there are plenty of sobering, worrisome reasons to experience a lot of things: stress, sadness, anxiety, uncertainty, fatigue. Many are struggling to stay optimistic, find ways to be grateful, connect with others, and remember happier times. Some have sought a bit of personal growth and a bit of relief by attending our online programs and participating in our new book club. We're honored to offer these activities and learning opportunities during such a difficult and unusual time.

In fact, to further this effort, we've dedicated this issue towards providing light-hearted stories, amusing games, food jokes and funny tidbits to hopefully get your mind off things, at least temporarily, and to add just a small amount of levity to your day, if you'll allow us and if that's helpful. May we get through this together with kindness, patience, wisdom, and maybe a smile or two.

Wishing you health and wellness,

*Sharon*  
Sharon Tani



## THE TRENDY RESTAURANT GLOSSARY

**STARCH-BURN:** When there's not enough baguette/tortillas/crepes/flatbread/scallion pancakes to go with the stuff in the ramekin, and you finish the dip with a spoon or fork.

**THE ULTIMATE FRISBEE:** That tiny, circular two-top. Can both of your entrees AND side dishes fit on this goofy discus masquerading as a table? Maybe...but your server might have to take away the bread plates and water glasses.

**SMALL PLATES SOLILOQUY:** Wherein the server explains that this is actually a tapas restaurant that doesn't serve Spanish food. Use this 20 seconds to mentally scan your bank account and figure out if you have enough cash to feed yourself tonight.

**COMMUNITY SERVICE:** When you're seated at a communal table instead of a stand-alone table. This is the dining equivalent of being downgraded from business class to coach.

**GLASSWARE SHAMING:** Being served wine in a little-kid-size tumbler or water glass because you didn't order a pricey enough vintage to get grown-up stemware.

**SPECIALS FACE:** The tight, polite smile you make after you've made up your mind about what to order, but you have to listen to the server explain every ingredient and preparation of the nightly specials.

**NO-CASH SPEED-DASH:** Leaving the building to search for the nearest ATM while your date holds down the fort, because — Surprise! — this trendy restaurant does not take plastic.

**THE SORROW SPLIT:** When the guests at the table outnumber the morsels of food on the plate, and one precious bite is carved into slices, like something from a Depression-era newsreel.

**THE JIFFY POP:** That one seat near the door/host podium that everyone bumps into, unknowingly, with their butts, elbows, and bags. In a perfect world, The Jiffy Pop would come with a 50 percent discount.

**THE WINE BUFF BLUFF:** The little act you put on for the server after being poured a sample of wine. Sniff, swirl, taste, approving nod, and "Mmm, that's great," like a real, bona fide wine genius.

**CHEFSPLAININ':** Being told how the chef wants you to order, or how you're supposed to eat the food when it's served to you. Remember: In trendy restaurants, context is everything.



The Trendy Restaurant Glossary: Names for all the things that annoy you about trendy restaurants. by Greg Morabito. <https://www.eater.com/2015/3/16/8224929/trendy-restaurant-glossary>

What cheese is made backwards?  
Edam.

A woman today said she recognized me from the Vegetarians Club, but I swear I've never met herbivore.

What does a nosey pepper do?  
Gets jalapeno business.

Why don't you starve in a desert?  
Because of all the "sand wich is" there.

How fast is milk?  
It's pasteurized before you know it.

## HUNGRY YET?

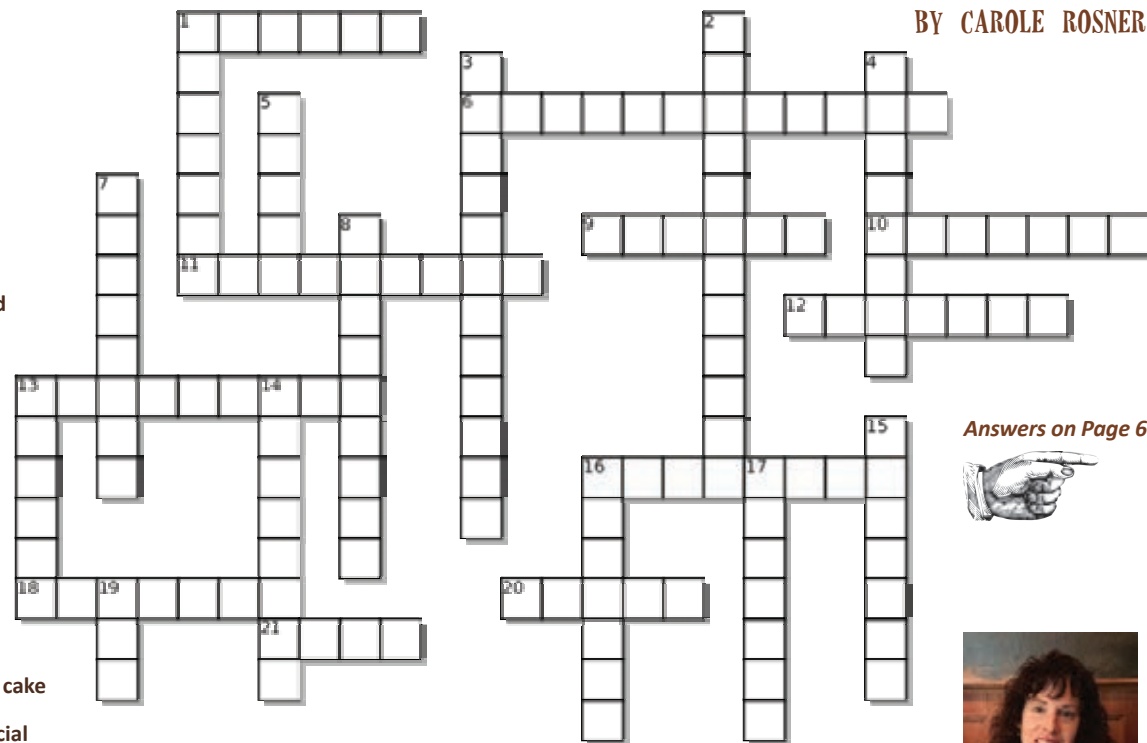
BY CAROLE ROSNER

### ACROSS

- ripe cranberries do this
- Royal Palace's Chocolate Kitchen
- only US state to grow coffee
- citrus eaten peel and all
- state that started Spam
- translation of the Italian word for ciabatta
- sweet treat in mole
- couscous made from
- border town known for Caesar salad
- Latin for "large pearl"
- world's most popular meat

### DOWN

- country created French Fries
- fortune cookies invented here
- priciest edible fungus
- first said "an apple a day keep the doctor away"
- Alabama's nut
- Gold Rush stir fry consisting of oysters, bacon and eggs
- this Prez brought mac and cheese to US
- On British Evacuation Day in 1783, George Washington feasted on this cake
- cheese matures
- zig zag shape of fruit and hipster facial hair
- marmalade orange
- Tarka Dahl main ingredient
- self published in 1931, \_\_\_ of Cooking



Answers on Page 6



Carole Rosner is a native Angelino who enjoys cheesy comfort food, beautifully decorated desserts, secret neighborhood eateries, and easy to follow dinner recipes. Her lemon coconut squares are always a hit, the oldest cookbook she owns is from 1937, and she's a fan of competitive cooking shows.



My mother was up to something. Even at the tender age of 4, I could smell a scheme simmering. She was fussing over me and my little brother more than usual. When before a wet comb would've done the job, today she borrowed some of my father's Brylcreem and slathered on a few dabs. Instantly I reeked of my dad. My little brother Warren emanated the same drugstore muskiness. Something was up.

We then rushed from our rented duplex on Cleveland Street in Los Angeles' Chinatown and strode past the fantastically kitschy apartment building next door, with the red and gold Chinese temple façade. It was my favorite building in the neighborhood; I imagined it as a Shaolin Temple with paid utilities.

Chinatown appeared more festive than usual. Across the street from the playground, my favorite Chinese restaurant, May Flower, had a line slithering out the door. My father brought Warren and me to May Flower every Sunday for lunch. It's where I discovered the wonderful world of wonton noodle soup, and where I first learned to appreciate the complex yet contrasting textures that gristly beef brisket and slippery tendon revealed. It remains my favorite comfort food to this very day, and nobody made it better than May Flower.

We passed the liquor store that I treated like my personal library, where I read cover to cover all the Captain America, Iron Man and X-Men comic books on the racks, occasionally springing the 15 cents to buy a copy. This was the first place I ever saw someone sleeping on a sidewalk, back when these folks were referred to as winos instead of the homeless.

My mom did some final touch-ups to our hair before walking us into the Chinese United Methodist Church. It was used for all the usual events including lots of weddings, but it didn't look as if one was about to happen, so I still didn't know why we were there. Rather, the place looked Christmas-y. There was a 99 Cents Store festiveness to it, all with its cheap ornaments and handmade decorations. However, the room was nearly devoid of people.

When we approached the end of the aisle I noticed a kid about my age being lifted off of an old, fat man's lap. This fat man wore a red velvet outfit trimmed by white fur. I watched the kid wave goodbye and saw in his hand a red stocking full of toys and candy. Right then I knew this man was the Santa Claus I'd been hearing so much about but never had seen in person.

"Look, it's Santa Claus. The old man of Christmas," my mother said, confirming my thoughts. She said this in Chinese, using the Mandarin phrase that translates to Santa Claus. Then the old man gestured for us to get on his lap. Suspecting a trap, I made my brother go first. Mama helped him onto Santa's lap. He looked scared but didn't cry. Santa asked Warren questions but he didn't seem to understand. So Santa chuckled and gave little brother a stocking. It was kid heaven in a mesh sock. My eyes popped out of their sockets like Wile E. Coyote. Inside were all kinds of tiny, colorful, plastic bits of junk and loads of shimmering hard candies. At that moment I would've done a back flip to get on Santa's lap. Instead my mom hoisted me up to him.

Santa smelled like a grown-up man, reeking of something offensive, but I couldn't place it. He wasn't drunk, but he smelled like alcohol mixed with fried food. The next thing I noticed was that his beard wasn't attached to his chin. It was unsettling, but I kept my eyes on the prize: the stocking. Santa bounced me on his knee and asked me if I'd been a good boy; this was when I finally made eye contact with St. Nick.

There was something amiss about this particular jolly old elf. Although I was very young, I'd already seen enough representations of Santa on various media to discern whether any particular Santa was authentic or not. There was something foreign but familiar about this one. I peered deeper. Then, like one of those Magic Eye 3-D posters, the more I stared at Santa, the clearer he was. And then it came to me. It turns out that Santa, my very first Santa, was Chinese.

What the fa la la! I couldn't believe it. My tiny brain burned. My eyes stung with bewilderment. Who was this guy? Whoever heard of a Chinese Santa Claus? Did the mayor know this was going on? I was angry and wanted to tell this impostor that he was bad for tricking people. I wanted to defend my mom and my little brother from this Kringle wannabe and whatever diabolical intentions he had. I knew all my toys were made in China, but Santa couldn't possibly be affiliated with that. I wanted badly to bust him, to publicly shame him, but instead I said "Thank you" when he handed me my stocking.

I looked back at him as we exited the church. We made eye contact again. This time I gave him a look that let him know that I knew. I had him figured

like a two-piece jigsaw puzzle.

It was time to pick up Christmas dinner. Candy firmly in mouths, Warren and I skipped through the parking lot of Peking Poultry, the coolest place in Chinatown. Near the entrance were scores of cages filled with fluffy chickens clucking and pecking at the air. The basic procedure was to tell the guy at the counter, draped in butcher whites, that you want a chicken, how you want it cooked, and finally if you like it whole or chopped. With that settled, the show was on, and Warren and I always got front row center.

At the onset, the butcher reached with his bare hand into a cage and tried to grab a bird while they all crowded to the rear of their confinement. In short time he would nab one. Next the butcher, with the facile grace of a swordsman, unsheathed his blade from his hip holster and slit the chicken's throat, causing it to convulse and spurt blood. A few minutes later, another worker came along to dump all the chickens into a cylindrical machine that resembled a clothes washer. After a few spins the chickens came out featherless.

My brother and I really liked the final process because it was extra grisly. A couple of butchers rapidly pulled out the chickens and one after the other jabbed them by the throat onto hooks hanging from an overhead conveyor. The dangling carcasses then rode the conveyor into an intensely hot steamer. Once out of this sauna of death, the steamed chickens were ready to be cut up or packed whole for the customer to take home along with a tasty, oily ginger scallion sauce. Henry Ford would be proud. This chicken was the best I'd ever had. Plump, juicy, flavorful — apart from raising your own chicken, you'd be hard-pressed to find a better bird.

Alas, this story is but a tale of Christmas past. Peking Poultry, most certainly because of today's health code, no longer keeps the cages out in the open, or slaughters chickens in public view, or even cooks the chickens at all. It is now simply a poultry shop where people can buy freshly slaughtered chicken — "Back to Basics," as the sign proclaims.

But we do not lament the glory days of Peking Poultry; rather, we celebrate its contribution to the unofficial Christmas bird of L.A.'s Chinatown, the steamed chicken. You may never see Bob Cratchit with Tiny Tim on his shoulder dancing around a holly-festooned table with a Chinese steamed chicken at the center. But then again, I never thought I'd be sitting on the lap of a Chinese Santa Claus. And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless us, every one!



This article has been edited due to space constraints. The original appeared in LA Weekly: [www.laweekly.com/a-chinatown-kid-remembers-ghosts-of-christmas-past/](http://www.laweekly.com/a-chinatown-kid-remembers-ghosts-of-christmas-past/)

Eddie Lin began publicly documenting his kinky culinary crusades in the form of a food blog around 2004. Almost immediately it received critical attention; one of his entries was included in the anthology Best Food Writing. His extreme-food exploits have been covered by NPR, PBS, the Los Angeles Times, LA Weekly, and USA Today.

Recently Lin appeared on Roy Choi's series Broken Bread on PBS and is currently working on his newest book, All-You-Can-Eat Hell: Requiem for a Family Restaurant and Gordon Ramsay's 24 Hours to Hell and Back. Follow him on Instagram and Twitter: @deependdining

# WHAT ABOUT FUNNY FOOD BOOKS?

## Gulp: adventures on the alimentary canal by Mary Roach



This book explores areas you've never thought you'd want to: surrogate gut bacteria, the significance of saliva, rectum storage of contraband, organ meat masculinity and the Bristol Stool Chart. Yet each chapter is fascinating and entertaining with titles like "Smelling a Rat: Does noxious flatus do more than clear a room?" and "Eating Backward: Is the digestive tract a two-way street?" The author, called "America's funniest science writer" by *The Washington Post*, also brings a elegant dry wit and good-natured female sensibility that is often absent from science writing as she interviews murderers, scientists, rabbis and Eskimos, to answer a whole host of unusual questions. Take a ride down the hatch for a memorable tour of some taboo topics.

## Food: a love story by Jim Gaffigan



Veteran comedian Jim Gaffigan, author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Dad is Fat*, has made a career of rhapsodizing over bacon, cheese, barbecue, ice cream, pizza, and especially Hot Pockets. With statements like, "I don't know much about grammar, but I think kale salad is what they call a double negative" and "Nobody believes in racial profiling until they get a red-haired sushi chef with a Southern accent," his book is as funny as his stand up routines. With a passion for delicious, trashy food, Gaffigan embraces each food sin and describes the power that this beloved addiction has over his life through self-deprecating wit. An easy read with laughs served up on each page.

## Sugarbaby: confections, candies, cakes and other delicious recipes for cooking with sugar by Gesine Bullock-Prado



There aren't many funny baking cookbooks these days. Though this contains legitimate recipes with colorful visuals to achieve notoriously difficult confections like honeycomb, marshmallows and croquembouche, the author and owner of Gesine Confectionary includes comments that are delightfully chuckle-worthy: Dark chocolate taffy is "the candy I end up shoving into my mouth multiple pieces at a time, ending up with drool pouring liberally out of my mouth and contracting lockjaw when I try to chew" and "I bet there's been a day when you've just been minding your own business – walking the dog, doing your taxes – and you've heard a gut-wrenching cry pierce the air. What you heard may well have been the plaintive wail of 'macaron fail.'"

## Fifty Shades of Chicken: a parody in a cookbook by F.L. Fowler



If you've read the bestselling book or seen the movie version of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, then you know it's ripe for seductive spoofing with recipe titles such as "Dripping Thighs," "Spatch-cock Chicken," and "Chicken with a Lardon." This parody by F.L. Fowler (get it? Fowl-er?) chronicles the adventures of Miss Chicken, who finds herself at the mercy of a dominating, wealthy, sexy, and very hungry chef through 50 chicken dishes, complete with appetizing and suggestive photos.

## Cake Wrecks: when professional cakes go hilariously wrong by Jen Yates



A laugh-out-loud book of photographs based upon the ultrapopular blog that depicts the "best" of the worst cake creations, including grammar mishaps, unintentionally creepy buttercream portrayals, ugly disasters, inappropriate displays, and just plain silly flops of cake decorating. The author's unique mix of humor, sarcasm and puns make it an unforgettable read for all ages. You will definitely laugh at some of the fan favorite picks. If you've ever made a "wreck" in the past, you'll understand that this book isn't about vilifying decorators but about finding the funny in unexpected places. You'll never look at cakes the same way again.

## Nancy Zaslavsky, Program Notes Continued from Page 1

buy all your Amazon purchases on AmazonSmile ([smile.amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/amazonsmile)) and make Culinary Historians of Southern California your charitable organization. There is no extra cost to you and CHSC gets 0.5% for the same products, prices, and service. Thanks so much from everyone's favorite gang of food lovers.

Speaking of food lovers, have you heard how I burned 5000 calories during the pandemic? It's the last time I leave brownies in the oven while I take a nap.

## Charles Perry, Twenty-five years Continued from Page 1

My topic was "Taming the Eggplant in 9th Century Baghdad." In early medieval India, a folk etymology had connected the eggplant's name, *vatingana*, with the wind, which is associated with mental unsteadiness in India, so eggplant had gotten the reputation of causing madness. This idea survived for a surprisingly long time – when eggplant arrived in Italy, the Arabic name *bādhinjān* was altered to *mala insana*, "crazy apple," and as late as the 20th century, the Touaregs of the Sahara believed that if you eat eggplant every day for 40 days you'll go nuts. By the 9th century, Arab doctors, apparently judging from raw eggplant's creepy spongy texture, plus its bitter flavor when fried, had added the idea that it caused sore throat, cancer and freckles.

But ordinary diners were starting to rebel against the experts. The poet Kushajim wrote, "The doctor makes ignorant fun of me for loving eggplant, but I will not give it up. Its flavor is like the saliva generously exchanged by lovers in kissing." One of the people in my audience pointed out that this is probably the only racy poem about eggplant. The decisive element was apparently the discovery that salting eggplant before frying makes it less bitter. Eggplant is now the most popular vegetable in the Middle East. So there, doctors.

It was just a tiny meeting, but a few weeks later Dan Strehl had snagged us the Mark Taper Auditorium for our lectures, and we were on our way to becoming the largest food history group in the country. Who knew?

## Answers to "Fun with Food Puzzles" on Page 8

1. Crumpet
2. Pancake
3. Panettone
4. Sourdough
5. Pumpnickel

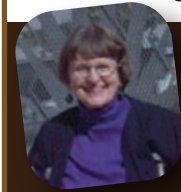
## Answers to "Hungry Yet?" Crossword Puzzle on Page 2



## The Culinary Historians of Southern California www.chsocal.org



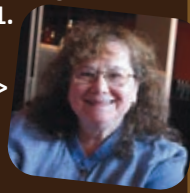
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 Questions? Please contact: [membership@chsocal.org](mailto:membership@chsocal.org)



### In Memoriam:

< Board Member Billie Connor Dominguez passed away on January 11, 2021.

Board Member Joanna Erdos passed away on February 4, 2021. >



Please visit the CHSC website soon for our loving tributes to these longtime contributors.



# I TOOK THE ADVICE OF A BOOK CALLED "COOKING FOR A MAN"

BY ALLISON ROBICELLI



Once upon a time, a woman read that statement with a completely straight face and nodded in agreement. I read that statement and slapped my husband over the head with the book. The poor bastard didn't do anything, and he's a feminist, but I believe I have a biological reflex built in that assists me in fighting the patriarchy. I want to take this book and walk down the street slapping all the men with it, to avenge the lost brain cells of all the women who had to live by—or even listen to—this claptrap.

But this isn't meant to be a series about slapping! It's about trying. It's about cooking for others, discovering how we cared for each other through history, and learning how we communicated through food, because that's what cookbooks used to be for. It's also apparently a column about anger management, because I sincerely underestimated my propensity for rage in the face of abject idiocy when my editor and I came up with this idea.



1941's "Cooking for a Man" by A-1 Steak Sauce: "Don't you dress, make-up and hair-do to please a man? Cook with the same idea in mind; season with A-1 Sauce, and hear some rave reviews of your home cooking!"

Cookbooks weren't always coffee table tomes full of our generation's most socially acceptable form of erotica photography. They weren't celebrity vanity projects that remind you that you'll never get to a point where you consider half an avocado a sinful indulgence and thus your life as a whole is essentially garbage. They weren't self-indulgent recipe-dotted memoirs filled with dirty words, like my Piglet-nominated cookbook *Robicelli's: A Love Story, With Cupcakes* (available where fine books are sold). Cookbooks were nearly always about cooking with the intention of pleasing someone: The man in your life, your fussy children, your friends and neighbors at cocktail parties. They were almost never about mug cakes or soup for one, and when they did wade into the darkness of the lonely hearts club, they were passive aggressive enough to remind you that unless you eventually learned to wow the masses with canapés and meat jelly, your ass was dying alone.

Cookbooks were nearly always about cooking with the intention of pleasing someone. Let's kick this off by cooking for the most helpless of creatures: Men. There is no shortage of vintage cookbooks entitled "Cooking for a Man," perhaps because if us ladyfolk don't cook for them, they'll all die. I'm madly in love with my husband, and have managed to keep him alive for the past 11 years, but have I really been pleasing him? It's about time I found out.

"Matt, how am I doing as a wife? On a scale from one to ten."

"I'm not answering that question."

"It's for work."

"It's entrapment and I'm not an idiot. You just slapped me with a book 30 seconds ago for no reason."

"Shut up and give me a number."

"10."

"Liar."

"Okay, then 8—because you hit me with the book."

"Is any part of that 2-point deduction due to the lack of A-1 Steak Sauce in our marriage?"

"Is Food52 going to make you do weird sh#t?"

"No, they're going to make me prepare a jellied veal loaf with hard boiled eggs for you so I can be a better wife."

"Now you're a 2."

Jellied veal loaf was clearly out, so I dig deeper and find a recipe that sounds très romantique: Salmon Casserole a la Heublein. A little research tells me that Heublein was a restaurant in Hartford, Connecticut, that evolved into a liquor distribution company, and then survived prohibition by acquiring the American rights to A-1 from Great Britain. I found a menu from the Heublein, and hot damn was it something! Oysters on the half shell, Beluga caviar, sweetbreads under glass Veronique (I have no idea what that one is but it sounds fancy!).

You wouldn't just please a man with this sort of stuff—you could please all the men. We're talking the casserole you put on the front stoop to attract the mailman, the garbage man, the milk man. Ladies who are "in the know" understand the wafting scent of salmon and A-1 Brand Steak Sauce is a surefire sex lure.

Yes, the mixture looks like regurgitated cat food. Yes, it has the texture of runoff from an industrialized slaughter house. But if you look past those things, it has extraordinary and subtle zest with sophisticated international flair! I put on a pair of latex gloves and go hard on smooching everything together, because I'm thinking the key to this dish is knowing your man is incredibly tired after a long day at the office, and it helps to have his food predigested. Your extra effort will allow him to concentrate less on smashing his teeth together to pulverize his dinner, and more on the foot rub you're giving him. (There are no notes on slathering his feet with A-1, but I'm guessing that's a given.)

As the casserole bakes, my house begins to fill with the aroma of toasted canned fish. Perhaps this was irresistibly erotic in the 40s? I place it on the table, touch up my hair and makeup, and arrange myself sexily on the couch, hoping that he's turned on by the A-1 stains I've gotten on my bra. That's right, my bra. I went all in on this.

Half an hour later I hear keys at the front door and arch my back for maximum impact. (Important note for those of you who are going to try this at home: Find out what time he'll be home before you do this, because being sexy on the couch for 30 minutes is hard and will give you many cramps).

"Oh, goddamnit—what are you doing?"

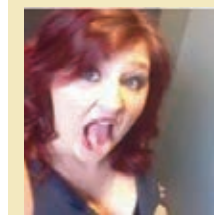
"I'm pleasing you for work."

"I hate Food52. Hate them. You put that in the article so they can read it."

"This is important historical research! It's not too bad. This is the sort of stuff your grandpa liked."

"You are terrible at this."

**Verdict:** Matt made me put this directly into a garbage bag, and then put that bag into two more garbage bags. I then had to take it directly outside, and was told that I could sleep on the couch and under no circumstances am I allowed to do this again. So next time we're just not going to tell him!



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# THE ART OF THE COOKING DEMO DISASTER BY AARON GOLDFARB

FROM LETTERMAN AND JULIA TO LENO AND EMERIL, LATE-NIGHT COOKING SEGMENTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN UTTER CHAOS

Julia Child's third ever *Late Night With David Letterman* appearance, on December 22, 1986, begins like any other television cooking demonstration. She arrives onstage, the playful host warmly greets her, and she announces she's going to make some "very fine" hamburgers. However, when the hot plate refuses to heat up, Child decides to ad-lib her recipe into one for what she calls "beef tartare au gratin," surprising Letterman by pulling out a blowtorch to melt the Gruyère cheese. Letterman is tickled ("What do you do, you cook this when the car breaks down on the highway somewhere?"), production plays a mooing-cow sound effect, and, grossed out after tasting it, he ultimately spits the raw ground beef into a napkin. The audience explodes.

"They [NBC] wanted a service show," recalled Hal Gurnee, Letterman's longtime director, to *Newsweek* in February of 1986, a few months before Child's appearance. "They wanted Dave to do cooking demonstrations. And he resisted. He wanted to do a comedy."

While Letterman knew that cooking demonstrations had always had their place on late-night comedy shows, the segments hadn't exactly been comedic themselves until he started injecting his signature brand of sarcasm and sabotage.

Cooking demonstrations have been a reliable time-filler on talk and variety shows like *The Colgate Comedy Hour* since the late 1940s, as common as stand-up comedy sets or musical guests playing their latest hit. A guest comes onstage and cooks a dish as the well-dressed host gamely tries to follow along. The segments were—and still are—cheap to produce and great for helping fill airtime.

In an era long before celebrity chefs, most of these early cooking demonstrations were done by local yokels (like the "Cookin' Cajun" Justin Wilson, an *Ed Sullivan* regular) or celebrities also known for their culinary chops. A 1975 episode of *The Tonight Show* finds sinister-voiced actor and noted gourmet Vincent Price teaching the self-proclaimed "kitchen klutz" Johnny Carson how to make a trout with aioli sauce. A year later, Price returned to cook salmon in a *dishwasher* (this was the '70s, remember?), Carson merely acting as a bystander. These segments weren't unfunny, per se—while cleaning the fish, Price cracked, "You been married as many times as I have, you learn to bone just about anything"—but they weren't exactly compelling.

This changed with Letterman, who from the get-go aspired to send up all classic television propriety. He had gotten his start on a morning show in 1980, *The David Letterman Show*, where NBC adamantly instructed him to do cooking segments for an audience assumed to be housewives watching the 10 a.m. program at home. Both Gurnee and Letterman thought the entire concept of a cooking demonstration was ridiculous, and they intentionally resisted doing standard ones on the morning show, instead tapping an audience member to cook an omelet using a health food store's freeze-dried "egg product" in one case, or asking pastry expert Meryle Evans to make an apple jumble using old-timey cooking utensils in another.

Once settled in at *Late Night*, the network forced him to do more typical segments. In one of the show's earliest demos, Letterman hosted a casserole-cooking Liberace ("What do you do if you get Crisco on those rings?" Letterman asks the heavily accessorized pianist). He was even more cutting to the real chefs.

"[Dave] would ridicule the cooking," Gurnee recalled in *Inventing Late Night: Steve Allen and the Original Tonight Show*, noting that Letterman got a big kick out of trying to introduce Velveeta processed cheese into every single dish, frazzling guests. "The ones who understood this...and could deal with Dave's nonsense were the most effective guests."

Enter Julia Child. Even if she was one of the first real television chefs, her early late-night appearances alongside Johnny Carson, Dick Cavett, and Tom Snyder weren't particularly revolutionary. On her first Letterman appearance in 1983 (by now Letterman was hosting *Late Night*), promoting PBS's *Dinner at Julia's*, she made a croque monsieur. Unlike the more network-appeasing hosts she'd dealt with in the past, Letterman began screwing around instantly, mocking the sealed pack of ham ("We have enough here to make a wallet") and questioning whether she would actually eat the messy sandwich.

Child, however, instantly got Letterman's schtick and masterfully played along; she swiped the bread detritus onto the studio floor, encouraged Letterman to flatten the sandwich by leaning on in it with his palm, and pulled out a six-pack of Budweiser. All things considered, though, the sandwich was prepared without a hitch. By the end, it was clear Letterman had realized he'd found a new comedic foil, as adept as Chris Elliott or Richard Simmons.

**BY HER 1986 APPEARANCE WITH THE BLOWTORCH, BOTH CHILD AND LETTERMAN HAD PERFECTED THIS NEW FORM—THE ANTI-COOKING DEMONSTRATION, IF YOU WILL—AND IT'S STILL ONE OF THE FUNNIEST SEGMENTS IN TELEVISION HISTORY.**

By Child's next appearance, on October 17, 1985, Letterman had amped up the hijinks, hurling eggs at bandleader Paul Shaffer and into the audience. An 89-year-old George Burns made an unexpected appearance. A cockroach showed up on set. Still, Child nailed her gourmet omelet. By her 1986 appearance with the blowtorch, both Child and Letterman had perfected this new form—the *anti*-cooking demonstration, if you will—and it's still one of the funniest segments in television history.

Like many late-night television tropes we now take for granted, Letterman (with help from Child) had broken the mold and created an entirely new and funnier way to tackle the televised cooking demonstration. Other hosts began to copy him, and the coinciding rise of the Food Network and a new wave of television-ready chefs readily provided the comedy fodder.

By the late 1990s, Letterman's chief rival, Jay Leno, would bring the excitable Emeril Lagasse on as a frequent guest, and the jovial George Foreman—promoting his grill—likewise became a good foil. Letterman acolyte Conan O'Brien, meanwhile, would show his disdain for the entire concept of cooking demonstrations right from the beginning of his run, insinuating *Mr. Food* was on cocaine during the cookbook author's 1997 appearance before totally ruining his shrimp mariachi by slopping cookies and whipped cream over the pseudo-Tex-Mex dish. Even a fictional talk show would lampoon this already well-worn trope when *The Larry Sanders Show* had Paul Prudhomme on as a guest in a 1992 episode.

In many ways, the cooking demonstration run amok has become the ultimate test of a host's improv skills and irreverence. A sycophant like Jimmy Fallon is more likely to kiss Éric Ripert's ass

("Look at that, what is going on, that's insane!!!") while he puts together an ice cream sandwich for college kids. Meanwhile, a quick wit like Conan will intentionally try to raise Gordon Ramsay's ire while they make tortellini, cranking the pasta machine rapidly and causing the filling to explode out the back of his piping bag. I must admit, even as they've become totally trite, cooking demonstration f\*\*k-ups still make me laugh.

Of course, not all chefs have been game throughout the years. In a 1996 appearance on *Letterman*, Daniel Boulud was legitimately pissed off by Letterman's wisecracks, wrestled a bursting champagne bottle from him (it caused both of them to get soaked), and was completely aghast as the host threw raw clams into the audience. The clip has seemingly been scrubbed from the internet.

"David has always been impossible with chefs," Boulud told Yahoo! in 2015, explaining that the host refused to rehearse any banter before they went on air, almost ensuring the segment would bomb. "That show was exactly how he liked it: to basically throw you under the bus, every time."

Never one to not run a joke into the ground, Letterman would continue this schtick until the very end of his late-night career. In a 2011 segment with Éric Ripert, he rigged a Geiger counter so the chef's sole appeared radioactive, wore the fillet as a tie, and then started throwing a very expensive knife at the studio floor over and over again ("Dave, those knives cost a fortune!" Ripert screamed).

Four years after Letterman retired from late-night television, the anti-cooking demonstration trope still lives on, perhaps with a slight tweak. Whereas Letterman realized it was often up to him to inject humor into the staid demonstrations, today's chefs—some of whom, like Alison Roman and Nicole Rucker, have built their brand on social media—are way more comfortable with being entertainers. And ironically, as late-night hosts are getting less absurdist (and often less funny), it's increasingly the chefs who are bringing the hijinks.

Take José Andrés's April 2019 appearance on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*. The gregarious chef clearly knew the game and fully controlled the segment, intentionally ordering Fallon around so quickly that the hapless host had no way not to completely botch his tortilla española. It was exactly what Andrés wanted, and, even though we've seen it all before, it was admittedly a perfect five minutes of television.



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