

DINER JOURNAL

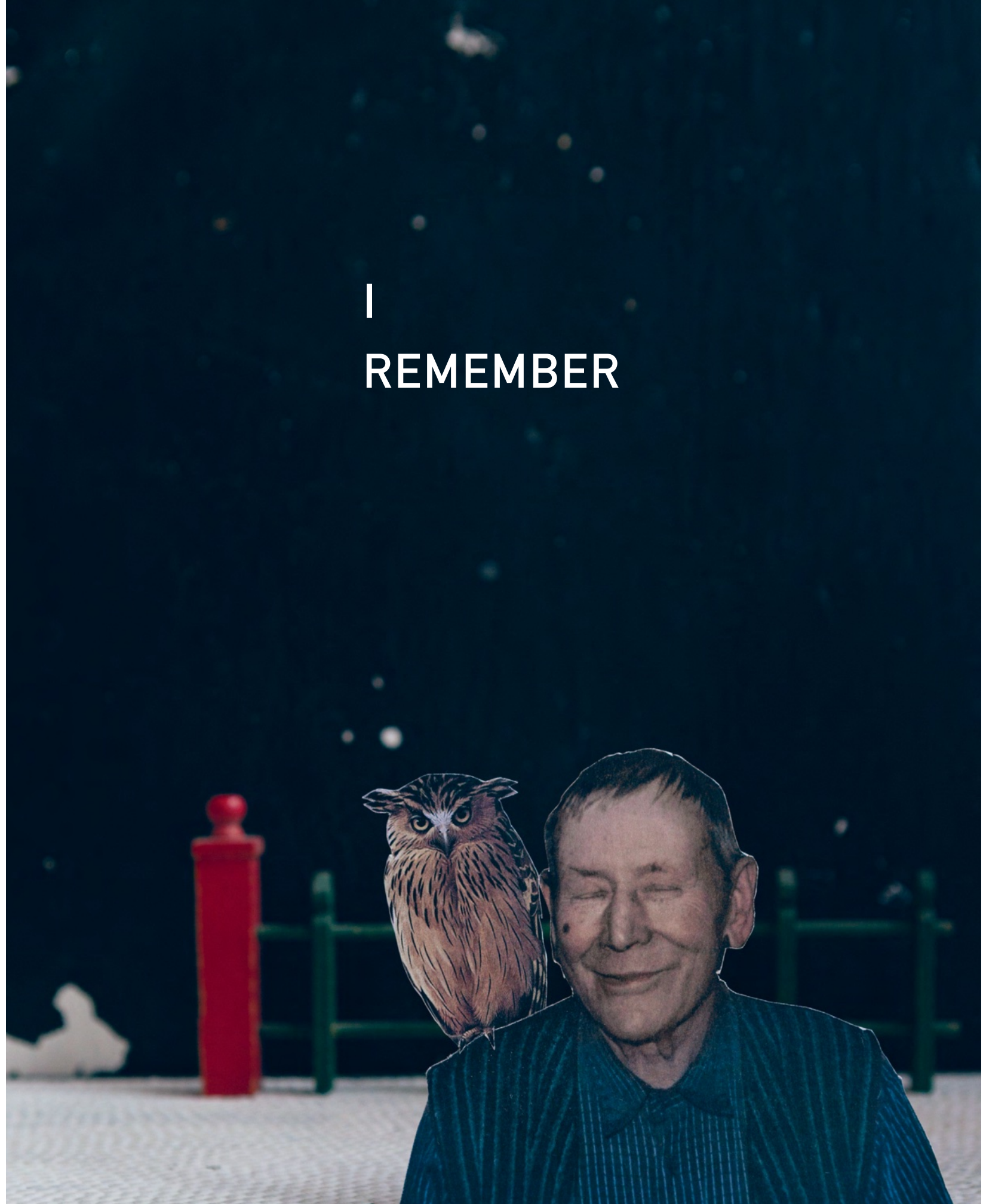
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DINER JOURNAL

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DOWN EAST AT THE OLD MOTEL

Anna Dunn, after Joe Brainard

I remember the train whistling through the night and I remember never sleeping, and the night we rented a room and bought a bottle of Maker's Mark and lied to my parents, the presents bought without anyone in mind, the year the dog drank the Champagne, and food allergies, flat beer, and Caesar dressing from the packet, nut chews, and gumdrop cookies, Dylan Thomas, and seeking solace in books, the way the old motel feels more and more like it might fall in the river every year, how each year more rooms are sealed up, never to open again, and spreading the presents across the cheap duvet, getting paper cuts from the wrapping paper, buying two-sided tape on accident, the snow-capped ice, the freezing rain, and just the stars gleaming across the northern night sky. Holidays are hard, but they are human. Here are breakups and hangups and cake.

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THE GOOD MARTINI

Nick Padilla

3 parts London dry gin, like Beefeater or Gibley's
1 part dry vermouth, a fresh bottle or one that has been kept in the fridge
ice of any shape
olives, or a lemon twist if you're into that (I'm not)

Stir the gin and vermouth with ice until it's very cold. Pour into a martini glass and put some olives in there. If it starts to get warm because you're talking too much, add a couple ice cubes. This technique will also work for white wine. And red wine. And beer.

BRANDY CIDER

Neale Holaday

For Thanksgiving one year, Ross's brother combined a gallon of apple cider, mulling spices, and an entire bottle of brandy. He let it steep in a pot and then we drank it all day. My brother, Ross, and I quickly realized how great this was, and so every Thanksgiving and Christmas we make super boozy spiced brandy cider and drink it all day while we are cooking or watching movies or whatever. It makes the house smell great, and you maintain a steady buzz.

1 gallon apple cider
4 cinnamon sticks, whole
1 tablespoon cloves, whole
1 teaspoon allspice, whole
1 teaspoon cardamom, whole
½ teaspoon black peppercorns, whole
peel of 1 orange
1 liter brandy

Warm the cider with the spices and orange over medium heat. Do not let it boil but steep on the heat for an hour. Strain out the spices and add the brandy. Heat again until just warm and serve in mugs.

CROQUETAS de JAMÓN

Nick Padilla

I'm sure my grandmother Virginia put out other appetizers besides the croquetas, but none were as important. She must have gotten up before sunrise to get everything ready and still had time to get dressed up and looking sharp. The croquetas would be hanging out in a toaster oven set to low, fried off and ready to go, before the family started showing up. The kids, myself especially, got something to eat right away to keep them under control, and the adults had something to go with their drinks. My grandfather Eduardo and my mother, Nancy, would always have a martini together in the afternoon. He had one every afternoon and was especially happy to make one for my mom. From what I remember, they took theirs dry, with olives, and on the rocks. Eduardo would play old Cuban songs on a nylon stringed guitar and he and my grandmother would sing together. It's the kind of thing you can't fully appreciate when you're a kid. And most likely, once you're old enough to really appreciate it, you've already missed out on an opportunity for a good martini or two.

4 tablespoons butter	2 green olives, finely minced
3 tablespoons flour	1 tablespoons shallot, finely minced
2 cups milk	1½ cups flour
salt	2 eggs
pepper	3 cups bread crumbs
6 ounces jamón serrano	neutral oil for frying,
or any other dry-cured ham, finely chopped	cut with a bit of olive oil for flavor

In a saucepan, melt the butter over medium-low heat. Add the flour and whisk until combined. Continue to whisk while the flour toasts, 1 to 2 minutes. Add ½ cup of the milk and increase the heat to medium. Bring the mixture to a boil, whisking all the while, and continue to add the remaining milk, ½ a cup at a time. Whisk until the mixture begins to thicken, then add in the jamón serrano, olives, and shallot, and stir to distribute. Taste the mixture and season accordingly with salt and pepper. Cook for 1 minute longer and then pour the contents of the pan into a shallow dish. Spread the mixture evenly and refrigerate for at least 2 hours, but preferably overnight to allow the mixture to set.

Put the flour in a bowl. Break the eggs into a separate bowl and beat well. Spread the breadcrumbs onto a dinner plate. With 2 spoons, shape the béchamel-ham mixture into walnut-size croquetas. Roll each croqueta in the flour, then the beaten egg, and lastly roll it in the breadcrumbs, coating it evenly. Lay the croquetas in a single layer on a platter. Refrigerate for 30 minutes before frying. Pour the oil to a depth of about 2 inches into a wide, deep, heavy pot and heat over high heat. When the oil is 350 degrees or so, slip a couple of croquetas into the oil and fry, turning them gently, for about 2 minutes, or until they are golden on all sides. Lift out the croquetas with a slotted spoon and transfer to an ovenproof platter lined with paper towels to drain. Keep the croquetas warm in a low oven while you fry the rest of them, always making sure the oil is hot before adding more croquetas.



GREEN SOUFFLÉ

Faye Pichler

It tastes as good as it looks.

5 eggs, separated

3 tablespoons butter,

plus more for greasing pan

1 cup milk, hot

2 tablespoons flour

1 cup grated hard cheese

like Parmesan or Pecorino

1 cup finely chopped herbs

like parsley, tarragon, mint, or basil

Grease a 6 cup soufflé mold with butter. In a medium saucepan melt the rest of the butter, add flour, and cook, whisking all of the while until toasted, 2 to 3 minutes. Don't let it get too brown. Add hot milk and whisk. Continue to cook until the mixture starts to thicken, then take the pan off the heat. Be brave and add the egg yolks, one at a time, whisking confidently, and just know that it will be ok. Whip the egg whites in a clean bowl until they form stiff peaks. It hurts but it is worth it. Lighten the pan sauce by folding in a spoonful of egg whites, then fold in the grated cheese and herbs. Just barely incorporate the rest of the egg whites and everything together, then transfer to the prepared mold. Slide into a 400 degree oven. Upon closing the oven door turn temperature down to 375 degrees. Now you can sit down, turn on the oven light, and watch it rise. Give it 25 or 30 minutes. Then take it out and show everyone. Get the big spoon and enjoy.





AN ASPIC IN TIME

Millicent Souris

In 1987 I was a young teenager studying Russian in public school in Maryland. The Polish woman who taught Spanish was forced to also teach Russian by the school administration, something she did with a thinly veiled mixture of animosity and dread. It took me a few decades to understand why.

The Soviet Union was our Cold War enemy, and my class was a small one, littered with a few smart squares, who probably envisioned a future working for the government, and a hardy mixture of misfits. I envisioned a future more in line with the 1984 movie *Red Dawn*. I chose to study Russian when I entered middle school; in fact, I recall the exact moment. French and Spanish, so common. Russian? So difficult. So intriguing. So alienating.

Our high school Russian teacher, Mr. McPherson, embraced the language and the history far more than Mrs. Patcherelli from Cockeysville Middle. Then again, he grew up in Pennsylvania, not Soviet-occupied Poland. He studied at Moscow State University in the seventies and told us stories of being on Aeroflot flights with chickens and holding conversations in apartment bathrooms under the mask of running water.

Around this time some kind of pamphlet must have crossed my path, alerting me to a trip for students to the Soviet Union. This was the very beginning of *glasnost*, Gorbachev's years of openness for the Soviet Union, but the economy was still closed; the ruble, under Soviet control; and there was a lot of government involvement with travel, lodging, and visas. How or why my mother paid for and allowed me to go to the Soviet Union in 1987, I haven't a clue. She must have convinced herself that I was the real deal, that this was the path to a job at the United Nations or State Department. Such misguided hope.

I met a group of students and a few adults at JFK airport and flew to St. Petersburg on December 26. We stayed in St. Petersburg, Suzdal, and Moscow. Along the way I witnessed the majesty of the Hermitage, lived how the closed ruble beat the dollar into communist submission, and learned how easy ice-cold vodka was to swallow.

We spent New Year's Eve in Moscow in our Intourist hotel. Hotels were only for tourists; no Russians, except for employees, could enter the hotel. Moscow—opposed to the picturesque rural village Suzdal and the stunning, historic St. Petersburg—was the most Soviet of the places we stayed. It was controlled and constructed. The buildings were like the weather, cold and gray.

The night began in a massive banquet room with other hotel guests, many of them Middle Eastern men who wore eye patches. Moscow was the region's epicenter for eye surgery. It took a day and a half to figure this very important information out. Constant elevator rides full of men with eye patches can make the young mind run rampant.

Dinner began with kholodets, a classic Russian dish of boiled meat pieces in aspic, garnished with curly parsley. It was received rather poorly by the teenagers from the United States. I personally moved on to drinking champagne and smoking cigarettes with a German fellow. And so rang in 1988, but really it could have been any year in Moscow, any year in time since the Great War and World War II. The trains and their platforms felt like the backdrop of a black-and-white spy movie. The Soviet system left nothing to indicate time, from the markets to the music to the décor in the hotels.

There was only Lenin, communism, and the state. Aspic is like the Soviet Union: something that can be firm and set in stone, or perhaps wave and bend a bit to the winds of change (yeah, that's a Scorpions reference), but will collapse in the face of a military coup.

PARSLEY ASPIC WITH BEEF TARTARE

1 large white onion, large dice	5 inches horseradish, peeled
1 bunch leek tops, rough chop	1 bunch parsley stems, keep the leaves for blanching later
2 stalks of celery, large dice	2 sprigs of thyme
2 parsnips, large dice	2 tablespoon black peppercorns
1 cup mushroom stems	1 bay leaf
5 large cloves garlic, lightly smashed	

Preheat your oven to 450 degrees. Toss the onion, leek tops, celery, parsnips, mushrooms, and garlic with olive oil and some salt. Lay out on a sheet tray and roast until very fragrant, about 20 minutes. You don't want intense color from the vegetables, but you want the heat to start to pull the flavor out.

Put in a stockpot and cover with cold water by no more than double. Add the fresh horseradish, parsley stems, thyme, peppercorns and bay leaf. Bring to a boil, skim off any scum, and let it simmer and reduce for an hour and a half. Strain and cool the stock. You may not use it all, but it's stock. You'll use it eventually.

I don't want this stock to be any color other than green. To achieve this color, and to have parsley flavor, I blanch the parsley leaves in salted water. How much salt? Until it tastes like the ocean.

Bring another large pot of water to a boil and add salt. Taste. It should taste salty. Have an ice bath at the ready, along with your blender and a pint of cooled stock. Blanch the parsley leaves. They should turn bright green in about 20 to 30 seconds and go limp. Pull them out of the water and immediately submerge in the ice water to shock them. Let leaves sit and cool, then pull them out of the ice water, shake it off and toss leaves in the blender with a cup or two of cooled stock. Whiz on high for a few minutes then strain. Chill.

Buy some molds. I used four individual domes, and each one held about 1½ cups of stock so expect to use 6 cups of stock, including parsley stock. You can also use a small bowl. Put some vegetable or olive oil on a paper towel and rub it on the inside of the vessel, especially if it isn't a mold.

The general ratio is 1 tablespoon of powdered gelatin to 2 cups of liquid. Mix the gelatin with 1 cup of cold stock—don't use the green stock yet. This process is called blooming the gelatin. Let it sit for 10 minutes. Bring another cup of stock (not the green stuff either) to a blazing boil and whisk into the blooming gelatin to dissolve the granules of gelatin. Do not heat any of the parsley liquid, because you will kill the vibrant color you achieved by blanching the parsley.

Once the gelatin is dissolved, add the remaining stock (it should be a quart total), use the green stuff now. What I ended up doing was slowly adding the green so I could control the color. I didn't want it too opaque.

Pour a very small amount in the molds and put in the refrigerator. Check at 5 to 10 minutes; it should just begin to set. When you suspend things in aspic you need to chill the layers so they begin to thicken and gel, but the layer cannot be completely hard and set. The layers of aspic need to meld together. So check the first layer. It should have a little give, but be firm.

1 pound top round
4 eggs, separated
sea salt
radishes

Trim the meat and hand chop it for the tartare. It's just nicer this way. Place a raw yolk in the middle of the just-set aspic. Separate the chopped meat into 4 portions and season them with salt, and compress them into patties. Carefully put them on top of the yolk. Fill the molds with more aspic liquid until the meat is covered. Let set in the refrigerator until firm, at least an hour. To unmold the aspic, submerge the forms in warm water up to the lip, then flip onto a plate, letting gravity do its deed. Garnish with radishes. And everything is cold and suspended. The way the holidays should be.

CHOPPED LIVER AND INSTEAD DEVILED EGGS

Faye Pichler

Each Christmas, Nana would make chopped liver. It involved many steps and special ingredients and special equipment. It also involved me wondering why she would go through all this trouble to make something that no one liked. I mean, that's not entirely true, she would eat a couple of Ritz crackers topped with it and my mom would have a few, also.

The majority of it she would divide in two portions: one for Uncle Tom and one for her youngest son, my uncle Charlie. She would mound it onto a fancy plate—the same fancy plate every year—and decoratively shove green olives in it. The recipient always appeared to be genuinely glad and excited to be given this treat.

I didn't get it. Despite its general unpopularity, it was something she was compelled to produce every year. It filled the entire house with its thick scent. It was an extremely fragrant process. She would fry onions and livers and let them cool on the counter. Then she'd hard-boil and peel eggs and let them cool on the counter. She would then dig out the sixty-year-old meat grinder and attach it to the edge of the dining room table. I don't know why it had to be the dining room table. Why not the kitchen table? I sometimes thought she knew how much it bothered me, and that was why. Nana had a really great sense of humor. Like, she wanted to make sure the entire house was marked with its stink. The grinding process of course then aerated the livers, onions, and eggs. The cats enjoyed watching. Schmaltz was then incorporated, and the masterpiece was complete.

I never tried it. Never once. Now, I believe I would like it. There is no recipe; only the grinder is left in its legacy. Instead, I present to you Deviled Eggs.

12 eggs
¾ cup mayonnaise
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
1 tablespoon vinegary hot sauce
1 tablespoon pickle juice
(add chopped pickles if you please)
salt
pepper

Place eggs into boiling water and turn flame to low. Let boil for 10 minutes and then shock in ice water to stop the cooking. Peel, halve, and separate yolks from whites. Mash yolks with a fork and incorporate the following ingredients.

Every individual egg is unique. This means that this recipe will never be the same twice. Tweak as needed and just make sure they taste delicious.





BEET CHOW CHOW

Scarlett Lindeman

This roasted-beet condiment is home on any table. It's sweet and tart, and goes with anything. If you don't have green tomatoes, you can use tomatillos, or just omit.

- 3 cups apple cider vinegar
- ½ cup light brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 teaspoon black or yellow mustard seed
- ½ teaspoon celery seed
- ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 small onion, diced
- 2 small green tomatoes, diced
- 4 cups roasted beets, diced

Combine the vinegar, brown sugar, and salt in a pot and bring to a boil. Add the mustard seed, celery seed, and red pepper flakes. Add the onions and tomatoes and cook for about 10 minutes. Pour over the beets, toss, and let sit out at room temperature, so the flavors meld.

CARROTS GLAZED

Scarlett Lindeman

Steaming carrots in their own juice! A pat of butter ties it all together, showered in dill.

- 40 carrots (10 juiced, or 30 carrots and 2 cups fresh carrot juice)
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 bunch of dill, chopped
- a squeeze of lemon

Cook carrots in carrot juice in a covered pot over medium heat. Season aggressively with salt and shake up and stir the carrots occasionally. They'll be done when they are firm-tender, about 12 minutes. Add butter to the pot, letting it glaze the carrots, and let the sauce simmer for a minute or two to incorporate. Shower with dill and a squeeze of lemon.

GRANDMA WINNIE'S SPINACH SALAD

Jake & Scarlett Lindeman

JL: I just wanted to tell you a story to keep your spirits up because I am a thousand miles and a solid country away. When I was maybe thirteen or fourteen I decided to create my own tradition of renting a scary movie and watching it alone on Christmas Eve. I would go to sleep frightened but content. Eventually my sister found out about my personal tradition and insisted that my whole family partake in the tradition. She also insisted on choosing the film that year. She chose *The House at the End of the Street* because she "heard it was super scary." Nevertheless it was a compounding of aggressive rape scenes—super fucked up—and my father insisted that we turn it off halfway through the film. I distinctly remember my personal tradition, four years in the making, dismantled. I went to sleep upset and woke up to a Christmas that felt lacking. And now, more than the tradition itself, the memory of it is seared into my brain. It is literally *the* singular instance in which my infallible sister failed big time. Somehow I hope that that makes you happy.

SL: First of all, I have *no* knowledge of this tradition, which I imagine is something Jakey made up, kept secret, and didn't tell anyone, so the fact that I co-opted it couldn't even really be possible, because I didn't know it had a special meaning or was even "a thing" for him. I do remember watching *The Nightmare Before Christmas* pretty regularly during the holidays, and I do remember, painfully, watching the first quarter of the original *Last House on the Left*, which was uncomfortable and casually rape-y, because it was filmed during the early seventies when rape, I guess, was more socially acceptable, or something? And I do remember my dad getting off the floor, where he would always lay to watch movies with his head propped up by a couple pillows, so that we could have the couch, shaking his head in disgust, and turning it off. It was not a good movie to watch with your parents when you're home for Christmas.

JL: That year, my mom served this spinach salad, which is a recipe handed down from our grandmother Winnie, which she served every year at Christmas. The meal was always family style, but for some reason she would plate each salad individually for each guest, so you kind of felt obligated to eat it, even if eggs and bacon in a spinach salad weren't really your thing. Never tried a canned water chestnut? Now's your chance.

½ cup olive oil	1 pound fresh spinach, washed well
2 tablespoons maple syrup	1 cup water chestnuts, sliced
¼ cup ketchup	3 hard-boiled eggs, chopped
2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce	½ pound bacon, crisped and crumbled
¼ cup apple cider vinegar	1 small red onion, thinly sliced
salt & pepper	

Heat olive oil, maple syrup, ketchup, Worcestershire, and vinegar in saucepan until a bare simmer, whisking to combine. Season it with salt and pepper and let it cool. Combine all salad ingredients in a large bowl, pour dressing over—you won't need all of it—and toss well to combine. Season with salt and pepper. Plate one salad for every guest, even if they don't want salad. Serve immediately.





EVERYONE'S FAVORITE CELERY ROOT SALAD

Scarlett Lindeman

with Ken Wiss & Sean Rembold & Dave Gould

SL: Hey, Ken! Can you tell me about that celery root and dried cherry salad you guys used to do at Marlow? Everyone keeps mentioning how it's their most favorite Marlow salad, like, ever.

KW: Hmm, that's another oldie from Sean and Dave, but it went something like this: hydrate dried cherries in wine, julienne to order celery root, toss matchsticks with nut vinaigrette, Parmesan, and chive batons, of course.

Much later...

SL: There's cheese in it? Whoops.

- ¼ cup dried cherries
- 2 tablespoons honey
- ½ cup white wine
- 1 celery root, peeled
- ⅓ cup toasted hazelnuts
- small bunch parsley leaves
- small handful chives, cut into batons
- ¼ cup sherry vinegar
- ½ shallot, minced
- 2 tablespoons hazelnut oil
- olive oil
- salt
- pepper
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese (if you remember)

Hydrate the dried cherries with honey and wine in a small saucepan over medium-low heat. Cook until cherries plump, about five minutes. Cut the heat, and let cool in the pot. Thinly slice the celery root and julienne into matchsticks. Place in a large bowl. Drain the cooled cherries and add to the bowl. Then add the hazelnuts, parsley, and chives. In a separate bowl, whisk together the sherry vinegar, shallot, and hazelnut oil and season well with salt and pepper. Add a healthy pour of olive oil to the mix. Whisk to combine. Pour the dressing over the salad and toss well to combine, seasoning with more salt and pepper, if needed. Add cheese. Don't forget.

POVERTY SOUP

Max Winter

During the holidays, it's hard not to feel the presence of an absence. Of what? You name it: good cheer, your dearly departed, money. If you're a parent and a writer and an adjunct, like me, you do what you can to stretch every last buck. If you're half-Jewish and have a kid whose birthday falls three days before Christmas and whose favorite part of Christmas is a really loud movie at the Cineplex, then have a bowl of tripe, intestines, and blood at Sichuan Gourmet, plus dumplings and cucumbers, and a couple beers for Papa—not every evening can be a holiday. So what are you and your family going to eat on those nights which are exactly like all other nights, except that now you're broke, and tired, and maybe even pre-diabetic from all the snacks and wine, and, if you're lucky, Scotch at other people's houses, and, okay, maybe one time you passed out and hit your head on the sink and you don't have health insurance and your car's inspection sticker expired a year and a half ago? Well, there's always soup, and here's this accidentally vegan version of caldo verde, which is cheap as hell but also good and nourishing because of what it lacks and what it reminds you of. And, hey, maybe you can bring it to other people's houses for this or that potluck and help yourself to their Scotch and make out like a bandit.

VEGAN CHOURICO OIL

- ½ head garlic, peeled, stemmed, and de-germed
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds
- 1 to 2 teaspoons red pepper flakes
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- ¼ teaspoon sherry vinegar

NOT CALDO VERDE

- 1 bunch of kale
- 4 medium-large waxy potatoes
- cold, filtered water
- salt & pepper

Put the garlic cloves in a small, heavy-duty saucepan and cover with the olive oil. Slowly poach the oil-covered garlic on your lowest flame until cooked through. When the garlic is completely soft and just beginning to brown, remove and reserve, then dump in the seeds, flakes, and bay leaf and poach for a minute more, until fragrant, being careful not to burn them. Remove pan from the heat, wait another minute, dump in the paprika and the vinegar, stir, and set aside. When the oil has completely cooled, drain it through a mesh sieve, discarding the toasted herbs and spices. Set aside.

Quarter potatoes and place in a large pot, cover with water, and heat over a medium flame until boiling. Reduce to a simmer. When the potatoes are easily pierced with a knife, add the reserved garlic and mash everything together with a potato masher. Simmer for another five minutes or so. Salt to taste.



Meanwhile, stem and wash the greens, making sure to spin them dry so as not to dilute your potato broth. Stack the leaves like playing cards, roll them up, and cut them once or twice lengthwise (depending on their width), and then crosswise into a chiffonade. Dump the greens into the perking potato broth, stir, and simmer, uncovered, for another twenty minutes or so, until the greens are tender, and their color is painterly. Then turn off the heat, dump in the chourico oil, stir, and cover. After it has sat for five minutes or so, (if it has sat longer, which it probably should, slowly bring it back up to temperature over a low flame), give it another stir, season to taste with salt and pepper, and serve in warmed, shallow bowls. At the table, pass some coarse salt, extra red and black pepper, and drizzles of fresh olive oil. It's also good with a couple hits of cheap, vinegary hot sauce.

I KNOW NOTHING STAYS THE SAME

Bree Nichols

I have no real formal training in holidays. I went from Jehovah's Witness to punk in quick succession. For a few years I approximated tradition; would get dressed gorgeously and Nolan and I would have Thanksgiving dinner at the restaurant where my date was the chef. We were like a couple of princes on red-leather-banquette thrones, flanked by mashed potatoes and gravy, creamed onions, and stuffing. It was the kind of place the Coppolas opt for. And, at the end of service, the chef would join us and try to catch up with our champagne usage. So, a tradition.

We don't usually think of Thanksgiving and catharsis simultaneously. It's not ashes we rise up from—it's asses, from couches. A turkey, not a phoenix. Last year all I had of the chef were takeout boxes of turkey and the biggest breakup of my life.

We were in those tenuous months wherein the diminished idea of getting back together still sits bitch with you and moving forward. I was in the middle of a massive project in my studio, working constantly for weeks, taking jagged breaks to maybe eat, to lie on the floor and sob, to get back up and work. To grieve like I never have before.

Nolan and I attempted to keep our semblance of a tradition. He came over midday, with boxed up food from the chef, that he piled onto the table. Maybe he ended up eating some of it, hours later, congealed. I didn't. Instead, I broke that night. I flipped the fuck out and cried like I never have in my life. I kept trying to stop and I couldn't and I kept apologizing because I don't know how to be like that, let alone in front of someone. For hours, smashing and swelling my eyes, and of course Nolan telling me me that he loved me, and don't apologize, that he had wondered where this was, that he had been waiting for this.

Thanksgiving dinner will still be a stray dog to me. Loved, maybe, looking for a new home. It's easier to break with something you don't know, a tradition that doesn't really belong to you. Last year I accepted the loss of someone and something I knew, and with it I broke with something else—one of those fabled walls that surround us.

SICK OF THE EITHER TRY THE OTHER

Bree Nichols

In this recipe you are making two soups simultaneously, and then combining them to GREAT effect at the end.

1/3 cup dried porcini mushrooms, rinsed
2 large onions, 1 chopped and 1 quartered
2 stalks celery, chopped
1 carrot, chopped
1/2 pound crimini mushrooms, halved
fresh thyme
black peppercorns
1 bay leaf

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Spread everything except for the quartered onion out on a baking sheet and roast until slightly caramelized. Meanwhile, char the other onion over the flame on your stove top. If you don't have a gas stove, get one. Place everything into a big pot and cover with 2 quarts water or vegetable stock, bring to a boil, and then simmer for an hour or so. Strain. Your number one is done.

1 stick of unsalted butter
olive oil
4 yellow onions, peeled and sliced
2 red onions, peeled and sliced
6 cloves of garlic, peeled and sliced
2 fat shallots, peeled and sliced
3/4 pound crimini mushrooms, sliced
lots of fresh thyme sprigs
salt & pepper, of course
roasted-mushroom stock
(at least 6 cups but whatever your yield from above is)
smoked cheese of your choice, grated

Melt 3 tablespoons of butter and some olive oil over medium-low heat in a big fat-bottomed pan. Add garlic and at least 4 sprigs of thyme first, stir, then add onions and shallots, and season with salt and pepper. Slowly cook for at least 50 minutes, stirring only often enough to avoid sticking to the bottom of pan, avoiding too much color on vegetables. Add mushroom stock and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes. While this is simmering, sauté the crimini mushrooms in butter and olive oil and then add to soup. Also, turn on your broiler.

Spoon the soup into bowls and cover with cheese. Broil until delicious. Season with salt, pepper, and fresh thyme.



I DON'T REMEMBER OYSTER STEW

Emma Mannheimer

Tradition sometimes make us sad. If I'm doing the same thing, why don't I feel the same way? If we are lucky, traditions reassure us. If we push our luck even further, we begin to question them. Like how oyster stew came to be a Christmas Eve tradition amidst the cornfields and rolling plains of landlocked Iowa. Each night on the twenty-fourth, my grandmother would be in the kitchen preparing my grandfather's recipe for the stew written on an index card that was splattered with as many drippings as a Jackson Pollock. As a child my mom's mouth shriveled at the idea of eating an oyster, so she would fill her bowl with oyster crackers and choke her required mollusk down in a soggy mess, never realizing her own mother ate only the broth. The Christmas Eve custom entered my parents' house the year I was born only to quietly slip away unnoticed by all but my grandmother. "It's tradition," she would say, remembering the frigid Midwest nights surrounded by children gleeful in anticipation of the next day's wrapped bounty. Redrawn from a recipe box made of secrets, I pass it along to you, in hopes that you give oyster stew a try and perhaps add it to your family repertoire. This stew is rich, and the velvety broth feels elegant. Perfect for a cold night. Don't be shy with the salt.

1 pint oysters, in their shells
¼ cup butter, plus 2 tablespoons, cut into cubes
½ teaspoon salt
dash cayenne
⅛ teaspoon pepper
1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1¼ quarts milk, scalded
¼ teaspoon paprika
handful finely chopped chives

Shuck the oysters before you begin, preserving their liquor. Begin to heat the oysters and their liquor in a skillet over medium-high heat. Add the butter, salt, cayenne pepper, and Worcestershire sauce. When the edges of the oysters curl, add the scalded milk. Bring just to boiling, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat at once. Cut the remaining butter in pieces and place in heated soup bowls. Pour soup over the butter and sprinkle with paprika and chives. It is sometimes preferable to make the soup in advance as it gives the milk a chance to absorb all the flavors.

NON PERISHABLE MATZO BALL SOUP

Mya Spalter

When they were little, my grandpa Leo and his sister Anna would make a wishing game. If they could have anything, would it be a barrel of pickles or a barrel of eggs? The same twitchy newsreel is playing for me in my eyes, as in yours, as in the tenements. I imagine everyone old then, like everyone is old in his or her poverty. Even the children are tiny grandfathers—wearily driving cabs, moving on when the rent is due, dreaming in the whole world of nonperishables.

When my grandma was little, she lived over the beer garden in Astoria. She gathered loopy songs from the window, like a tin pan collecting rain noisily. Some of them trickled down to me: one about a girl with a curl, and one about a willow tree.

I put my pen down as my memory of her, when called upon to unspool as it should, tugs back as if from some distant depth, denying the stoppages of death. The still of herself, as I've stored her, up-jumps and she is now again bleeping on my radar screen, a submarine. A bell sounds close enough to feel it, and, like a ghost, I'm in their rooms again: Dali above the mantle, Othello's black-handed bust on a pillar, the peacock quills and andirons, the Duraflame and Chinese lions, the chandelier and velvet chaise, the drapes within drapes of crepe in eye-shadow shades, grandchildren sprawled across the carpet like writing on a page.

1½ pounds chicken thighs, backs, and bones	5 stalks celery
¼ cup olive oil	4 carrots
¼ cup very cold seltzer	1 small yellow onion
4 eggs	so much garlic, like 6 cloves
1 cup matzo meal	salt & pepper

Like parsnips? Put some in there. Dill? Have at it. I don't particularly, so I skip 'em. Comfort food is less comforting if you have to leave the house for it. Use what you got.

First, set a big pot of water to boil. Plunk in your chicken parts and lots of salt. While it's heating up, whisk together your oil, seltzer, and eggs in a medium-sized bowl. Add matzo meal and mix until you've got a nice damp dough. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes. While your dough is cooling, get to your vegetables and chop them. While you're chopping, notice that scummy froth that's bubbling up from your stock. SKIM IT OFF. Eeew. By the time you've finished chopping, your chicken should be about cooked through. Take it out and set it aside to cool. Add veggies to the stock and simmer. Start another pot of water to boil. Find something else to do for about 5 minutes. Smoke 'em, if you got 'em. When the second pot of water is boiling take the matzo mix from the fridge and use damp hands to form the balls, but don't handle them too much. Toss each one into the second pot and bring it back up to a boil. Reduce the heat to simmer for another half hour. While the balls simmer, separate the chicken from the bones. Add the chicken back to your soup pot, then sit down for a while, cracking the bones open with your teeth to suck at the marrow. Take any extra olive oil and rub it into the skin of your face until it beams. When it's time, you'll know. Add the matzo balls to the soup. Season. Feed yourself and family.



PINEAPPLE HAM

Tom Mylan

I ate a lot of ham in the eighties. The pineapple glazed ham at my grandparents' house on Christmas or New Year's marked the beginning of what I later called "Ham Season." Whether my mom and I were actually as poor as I suspect we were back then or that her thrifty farm-girl upbringing wouldn't allow a bargain pass her by, I am not sure. What I do know is that post-holiday meat sale bins were chock-a-block with very, very cheap surplus hams. From January 1 to whenever those big pink bastards ran out, we ate it. Baked with scalloped potatoes, fried with eggs, hocks simmering away in split pea soup, a dish my mother called "ham chowder," ham salad, deviled ham sandwich spread. The list could go on nearly indefinitely. Here's to the beginning of your own personal "Ham Season" this year. Enjoy.

You'll need toothpicks for this recipe. You can use a spiral-cut ham or a regular cured smoked ham from the grocery store. I like the heritage ones from D'Artagnan because they taste like a good version of the grocery-store-style hams. The main thing is that the ham is a large, shank-end ham. How do you tell if it's a shank-end? If it looks like a cartoon ham with a broad face at one end and a tapered end at the other.

8 to 12 pound ham, shank-end (bone-in)

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup light brown sugar

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup Gulden's Brown Mustard

2 8-ounce cans pineapple juice

1 pineapple

1 jar maraschino cherries

Take the ham out of its shrink plastic packaging and then rinse the ham in warmish-hot water. Whether it's a nice or a shitty ham, it is going to have a bunch of slick, slimy goo all over the outside of it, and that shit needs to be completely washed off until the ham is kind of squelchy or tacky instead of slick. Be thorough.

Preheat your oven to 350 degrees. Combine the light brown sugar and the mustard in a bowl and mix it well until it's a horrible sticky mess. Why Gulden's Mustard? Because that's what your grandma would have used, because it's "nice" but not "Grey Poupon nice." If the mixture is too thin, add a little more brown sugar.

With your glaze mix handled, now place your ham fat side up, in a roasting pan and use a sharp knife to cut diagonal checkerboard slashes across the fat cap about an inch between slashes. Don't cut down all the way to the meat. Just about three quarters of the way through the fat. Now smear the glaze all over the fat cap, working it into the slashes, until it is all used up, and pour the pineapple juice into the bottom of the roasting pan. Place it in the oven and set a timer for 2 hours.

Once the ham has been cooking for 35 minutes start basting the ham with the pineapple juice in the bottom of the pan every 20 minutes until the timer goes off, then remove the ham from the oven and let it rest for 15 minutes.

Cut off the spiny husk of the pineapple, slice it into centimeter-thick slices, and punch out the woody core with a round cookie cutter. Arrange the pineapple slices in a pleasing aesthetic pattern around the top of the ham with the slices touching one another. Then spear the cherries with toothpicks and stick them into the centers of the pineapple slices. Place the ham back in the oven. Cook the ham for 40 minutes more, basting it every 10 minutes. Remove the ham and allow it to rest for 15 minutes before serving. Goes well with Carlo Rossi Rhine wine and Carlton Light 120's.

CREAMED ONIONS

Bree Nichols

- 1 pound pearl onions, peeled
- 5 cloves garlic, peeled, boiled, and pureed
- ¼ cup white wine
- ½ cup chicken or vegetable stock
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 stick unsalted butter, cut into tablespoons
- ⅓ cup grated sharp cheddar (Cabot Clothbound if you can)
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 scrape nutmeg
- salt & pepper
- fried sage leaves, if you'd like

Cover the onions in boiling water to soften skins, then peel. Slow cook onions with a little butter and salt over medium-low heat in a large skillet until caramelized. Make sauce while the onions are cooking. Reduce the wine by half, then add broth, heavy cream, bay leaf, and thyme, and simmer. Turn off heat and let steep for 15 minutes. Strain. Heat the rest of the butter, then whisk in garlic puree and creamy liquid. Add the nutmeg and grated cheddar, and simmer, letting sauce thicken. Stir in the onions and season to your liking. Bake in an appropriate vessel until bubbly. Add more black pepper and maybe some fried sage leaves to finish.





TAMALES & MEATBALLS A FRESNO CHRISTMAS

Rev. Vince Anderson

My family comes from Minnesota. Before that, they came from Norway, Sweden, and maybe England. They moved west in search of warmer weather and better food. They found both in the town of Fresno, California. That's where I am from. Fresno is known internationally for having the dubious reputation of being both the raisin capital of the world and the crystal meth capital of the world. These two titles combined have birthed the town of Fresno's very own saying. You would hear old men mumble it between sips of Coors Light on ice: "Once you become a raisin, you can never be a grape again."

I have never accepted this saying, and I think Fresno is the kind of place where indeed the opposite is true. It is a town based on agriculture. It works hard. Immigrants of all types come looking for a better life. Looking to be a grape again, after life has dried them out.

This quest for a better life can bring the worst out in people; it can also bring the best. I saw the best come out every Christmas Eve, when my Mexican-American neighbor, Mary, (whose house I remember smelling like butter, perfume, and incense), would come over hauling more tamales than we could ever possibly eat. In exchange, my mom would have waiting a Tupperware container of Swedish meatballs, the closest thing we had to a traditional dish from our ancestral home.

SWEDISH(ish) MEATBALLS & GRAVY

3 pounds ground beef	2 tablespoons salt
1½ pounds ground pork	½ teaspoon pepper
1½ cup minced onion	3 eggs
3 tablespoons minced parsley	1½ cup milk

This will make 6 dozen meatballs, because you never make a few meatballs. Mix all ingredients and roll into quarter-sized balls. Roast in a pan until crisp on the outside and heated all the way through.

¼ cup unsalted butter
⅓ cup all-purpose flour
4 cups beef broth
¾ cup sour cream
salt & pepper

My mom's recipe calls for jars of prepackaged beef gravy. I find myself getting sentimental over the Heinz jars, until I go to the grocery store around Christmas time. No more sentiment. So I've substituted a homemade gravy instead. In a medium pot, melt the butter over medium heat. Whisk in the flour and continue whisking until the flour is toasted, 1 to 2 minutes. Whisk in 1 cup of the beef stock, bring to a simmer, and add the rest of the stock, whisking until the gravy thickens, 3 to 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Whisk in the sour cream and warm gently. Pour over the meatballs and serve.

TAMALES

Rev. Vince Anderson

My brother married into a big Mexican-Filipino family, and he and my sister-in-law have a tamale making party every year. Writing credit goes to my brother, Lance Anderson, for this recipe. This recipe was for 400 or so tamales because you never just make a few tamales, but we've quartered it for you.

5 pounds pork shoulder or butt, trimmed and into chunks
2 white onions
2 cloves of garlic
1 teaspoon cumin
2 bay leaves
salt

Season the pork with salt and brown in a large pot. Then add water to cover meat. Cut the onions in half and place in the pot. Add the garlic, cumin, and bay leaves. Bring to a boil and simmer until meat is nice and tender. Remove the meat from broth and allow to cool. Save the about 3 to 4 cups of broth for the chili sauce later. Shred the pork with a fork and remove excess fat.

CHILI SAUCE

5 dried ancho chiles
5 dried California or Anaheim dried chile pods
1 teaspoons cumin
3 cloves garlic, minced
2 tablespoons flour
2 tablespoons oil

Remove the stems from the chile pods and soak in warm water until soft. Brown the flour in a frying pan with the oil. Place chile pods in a blender and blend with a little broth from the pork, added in each load. Pour blended broth and chiles into a pot and add the flour, salt, cumin, and garlic and simmer for 20 minutes. When the chili sauce is done pour over the meat evenly and mix well. Save 1 cup of the sauce to mix with masa. Place in fridge overnight to coagulate.

5 pounds masa preperada
a whole lot of dried corn husks
whole olives, 1 per tamale

Prepare the masa harina according to instructions on the bag or buy ground fresh masa from a tortillería. Allow the masa to come to room temperature and then mix the cup of chili sauce from earlier with masa for color and flavor. Spread masa on each husk, add meat and one olive and wrap it up by folding the husk lengthwise over the masa, rolling it up, and folding over each end, kind of like wrapping a present. Secure each flap with a thin strip of husk, tying it with a double knot. Steam the tamales standing upright with open side of the husk towards the top for 30 to 40 minutes or until masa is a little firm. Add salsa or hot sauce to desired heat as these are not that spicy. Grab a beer or two and then eat about ten. You can freeze the rest uncooked. Just thaw, then steam to eat.

YOU THINK YOU HAVE MOVED BEYOND BUT YOU ALWAYS COME BACK TO CLAM SAUCE

Caroline Fidanza

This is among the quickest pasta sauces. Great for any night of the week when you want to elevate a Tuesday from a salad of what's in the fridge to something of a thrill. It's also been a part of the Fidanza family Christmas Eve tradition for at least thirty-five years. Over time it has gone from canned clams to fresh littleneck clams or cockles in the shell, but I have to admit that I kind of prefer the canned because of the clam-to-pasta ratio and the soupiness of the whole thing.

¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
12 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
1 chile de árbol, crushed
½ to 1 cup white wine
4 cans chopped or minced clams
¼ cup chopped parsley
1 pound linguine or spaghetti

If you would like to make this recipe with fresh clams, it's easy enough to use exactly the same ingredients, adding the whole clams when you would the canned and then putting a lid on the pot to let them steam.

Heat the olive oil with the garlic in a heavy-bottomed pot until the garlic just starts to turn golden. Add the chile de árbol and let it release its heat. Add the white wine and when it starts to boil add the clams and turn everything down to a simmer. Cook just until the rawness of the wine cooks out, but leave it tasting a little winy still. Add the chopped parsley and turn off the heat.

Meanwhile, boil a large pot of water, and cook the pasta, until al dente. Sometimes I'm more in the mood for spaghetti than linguine but I think linguine is the classic noodle. There should be plenty of sauce in the pot, but if it looks a little shy save some pasta water before draining. Reheat the clam sauce, drain the pasta, and then add it directly to the pot with the sauce. Mix well and serve with sea salt and a drizzle of olive oil.

AUNT EDITH'S SWEET NOODLE KUGEL

Megan Auster-Rosen

Aunt Edith talked with a heavy Boston accent and hated most people and things. She was my grandma's older sister, the grandma who disinherited me after my father died, simply because he wasn't there to tell her not to. Aunt Edith never wore her seatbelt while driving out of solidarity with her daughter, who died in a car crash. I never logically understood it, but deep down I did. She always said she wasn't good at much, but she made a mean sweet noodle kugel (pun intended). The last time I saw her was in a nursing home in Swampscott, Massachusetts. She was decayed, toothless, had a couple hairs left (primarily on her chin), and was small. She told me she could barely recognize me, and if she saw me on the street she would keep walking. She told her grandson's girlfriend that she wasn't nearly attractive enough for her grandson, and she hoped he would find a new, prettier girlfriend. She told me she loved me. She told me she loved my father. She told me she was ready to go to Sharon—a Massachusetts town where she'd already purchased her burial plot. I always loved going to Aunt Edith's house. Both for her brutal honesty and her kugel.

12-ounce box wide egg noodles
1 pound cottage cheese
1 cup sour cream
¼ pound salted butter, melted,
plus more for greasing the pan
4 eggs
1¾ cup milk
1 teaspoon vanilla
½ cup sugar, plus 2 tablespoons, divided
1 cup cornflakes
1 teaspoon cinnamon

Cook the noodles in boiling water until al dente then drain. Mix noodles, cottage cheese, sour cream, and melted butter together in a medium bowl. Pour into a well-greased 9 x 13 baking dish. Beat together eggs, milk, vanilla, and ½ cup sugar and pour over the noodles. In a small bowl, crush the cornflakes to crumbs with your hands and mix together with the cinnamon and 2 tablespoons sugar. Sprinkle over the top of the noodles. Bake at 350 degrees for one hour.



GRANDMA DOLLY'S GUMDROP COOKIES

Mary Dowd

The tree went up like clockwork two weeks before Christmas and came down like lightning January 1st. But I'll give her this; Dolly never had a fake tree. The years of junior high, when everyone was buying plastic trees—no messy pine needles to vacuum up, and always the perfect shape, no gaping holes with bent or dried-out branches, no fire hazard—we stayed with the real thing. Many other supposedly living things around our house were fake: the rubber philodendrons on the kitchen shelf, the white lilies sprouting underneath the glass-topped kitchen table, the red tulips in the August garden, the happy marriage. None of that messy living and dying stuff in our house. She couldn't doll up my grandmother, though. She sat in the kitchen rocker like Baba Yaga, in black dress and whiskers, her varicose veins bulging out of the thick tan stockings rolled and knotted beneath her massive knees. The ghost of Christmases to come for her, for me.

But my daughter wants a Christmas memory of my mother. Something warm and fuzzy, nostalgic, I guess. My grandmother made the stuffing on holidays, spreading the slices of a whole loaf of bread all over the kitchen the night before to let them get stale. The mantelpiece was covered in fake ivy with red and white porcelain letters arranged in the greenery spelling NOEL, which my father always changed to LEON when she wasn't looking.

She would read us *The Little Match Girl* on Christmas Eve, about a homeless child, who stands on the cold winter streets in rags selling matches to heartless passersby, and dies of exposure. An odd choice to read to three little girls waiting for Santa. (Maybe where I got my affinity for homeless drug addicts.) In later years, she would read *Miss Flora McFlimsy's Christmas Eve*. I still read that aloud to my grown children every year. I remember her making gingerbread men that we could decorate. Gumdrop cookies came much later when we were grown, and Anna was little.

1 cup sifted flour	½ cup butter
½ teaspoon baking powder	1 tablespoon water
½ teaspoon baking soda	1 teaspoon vanilla
½ teaspoon salt	1½ cup rolled oats
½ cup brown sugar	¾ cup gum drops, each drop sliced into thirds
½ cup white sugar	shredded coconut
1 egg	

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Sift dry ingredients into a bowl and add the egg, butter, water, and vanilla. Beat until smooth and then add the oats and gumdrops. Shape into walnut-sized balls and roll in coconut. Bake on an ungreased cookie sheet and bake for 12 to 15 minutes.





MAPLE WALNUT PIE AND THE UTI

Annaliese Griffin

In 2012, I agreed to drive from Brooklyn to Northern Vermont the day after Thanksgiving to feast with my two sisters, my paternal grandparents, and extended family. The thing that made that all okay was pie. Specifically, a maple pie, adapted from a recipe that appears in the *Gourmet Cookbook*. I take special pride in the maple component because, well, Vermont. My grandmother is a noted piemaker, and her own grandmother also made pies in Vermont. What I didn't count on was waking up that Friday morning with a raging urinary tract infection.

My sisters were incredibly patient with our frequent pit stops. At one gas station where we pulled off so I could cry and pee in private, and because they have the best cider doughnuts on the I-91 corridor, my sister looked at me and said, "This is one of the worst days of your life, huh?" She was not wrong. I ended up in the ER of the hospital in the town my mom lives in, about three hours south of my grandparents. "Remember that Thanksgiving that everyone talked about my vagina?" I said to my sister. "I hope you don't pee out of your vagina," she replied.

Both my sisters offered me the "out" of just staying at my mom's house, but, man, my mom does not care about pie. Making a pie my grandmother would like seemed like an essential accomplishment. So, after I filled my prescription for Cipro and called to say we were running late, my sisters and I made the last leg of the trip. I carried the pie in from the car and set it on the long table of desserts. My grandmother came over to inspect it immediately. "That's the first thing I'm going to have a slice of later," she said. And that was enough for me.

pastry for a one pie crust (see page 53)

1 cup packed light brown sugar

2 large or 3 small eggs, room temperature

½ cup heavy cream

1 cup maple syrup (use grade B, or the darkest grade you can find for more maple flavor, but whatever you can get your hands on will be delicious)

2 teaspoons melted butter

pinch of salt

1½ cups toasted walnuts

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees, and while you're doing that, toast your walnuts. Shake them around a few times. They're done when you can smell them. You have some choices here. You can use walnut pieces and add them to the batter so they're spaced randomly and roughly evenly throughout. Or, get whole walnuts and arrange them in concentric circles in the pastry shell then pour the batter on top. This is prettier, but you know, a little fussy.

Roll out your pastry dough and place in a pie pan, poking the bottom with a fork a few times. Do whatever decorative edging makes you happy, or leave it ugly—it's pie crust. It's delicious.

Combine brown sugar and eggs in a large bowl and beat until light and foamy. Add cream, maple syrup, butter, and salt and stir until combined. Add nuts if you're doing it that way. Or, if you've arranged the nuts in your piecrust, slowly pour the batter over them. They will rise to the top as it bakes.

Bake for 50 to 60 minutes. The pie will puff, rise, and turn golden brown. You want some jiggle when you pull it from the oven, but a uniform jiggle—the whole pie moves in the same way. You may want to set the pie place on a cookie sheet or tray—it should not overflow, but if it does, the burning sugar will likely set off your smoke detector.

PEANUT BUTTER BALLS

Neale Holaday

Every Christmas my brother and I would make candy and cookies to gift to our neighbors, mailman, et al. The favorite was always peanut butter balls—peanut butter mixed with butter and powdered sugar and dipped in chocolate. There is the version we used to make when we were younger with gross Baker's chocolate and Toll House chocolate chips, and then there is the version that I make now with better chocolate and sea salt—you always need to use Skippy peanut butter though.

- 2 cups chunky peanut butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 16 ounces powdered sugar
- 24 ounces semisweet chocolate chips
- 4 ounces unsweetened Baker's chocolate
- flaky sea salt

Combine the peanut butter, vanilla and powdered sugar in a bowl. Stir with a spatula until combined; it will be messy and sticky but keep stirring. Line a cookie sheet with parchment paper. Roll the peanut butter mixture into balls about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch wide. Let the peanut butter balls sit in the refrigerator for 1 hour. Over a double boiler, melt the chocolates together. One by one, dip the peanut butter balls into the chocolate. Coat completely, and use a fork to remove from the chocolate. Set them back on parchment paper, sprinkle with sea salt and place in the refrigerator until set. Store in the refrigerator in a sealed container.





APPLE FRITTERS

Scarlett Lindeman

There are two kind of apple fritters: the polite, bombolone-style doughnuts that are round and smooth; or the craggly, pocked discs with chunks of apples stuck into dark dough, like teeth. We are in the second camp, here, like the apple fritters at Randy's Donuts in Los Angeles, which always soak through the cardboard boxes and seem to weigh over a pound each.

2½ cups flour, plus more for dusting	3 sweet-tart apples, peeled, cored, cut into ½ inch pieces
2 teaspoons active dry yeast	¼ cup sugar
2 tablespoons sugar	1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon plus large pinch salt	2 cups powdered sugar
1 cup milk, room temperature to warm	¼ cup maple syrup
3 teaspoons vanilla extract	warm water
2 large egg yolks	vegetable oil, for frying
7 tablespoon butter	

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, stir together 2 cups of the flour, the yeast, 2 tablespoons of sugar, and ½ teaspoon salt. Add warm milk, 1 teaspoon vanilla, and egg yolks. Mix until smooth. Add the remaining flour and the 4 tablespoons of room temperature butter cubed and mix until incorporated. Continue to mix on medium speed until the dough is soft and smooth and sticky. Place in the fridge, covered, overnight. Meanwhile, melt 3 tablespoons of butter in a skillet over medium-high heat. Add the apples to the pan and sprinkle with the sugar, cinnamon, and salt. Cook, stirring, until tender and the liquid becomes a syrupy glaze, about 10 minutes. Let cool completely.

Roll the dough out to a large oval, ½ inch in thickness. Spread the apple mixture onto half of the dough and fold the other half over the apples. With a large knife, cut the dough into ½-inch strips and then cut the strips into ½-inch pieces in a cross pattern. Scoop up the pieces of dough and filling, jumbling everything together, and then pat out to ½ an inch. Cut the mess of dough and filling, again, in a cross pattern. Scoop up the pieces and rearrange again. You are looking for an even distribution of apple pieces and knobs of dough. Flour your hands and firmly press the dough into a log shape about 3 inches wide. Slice the log, crosswise, into 12 pieces. Take each portion and pack it into a tight ball, like you are forming a snowball—really pack it together to ensure that the apple filling stays embedded in the dough—and place each dough ball onto a rimmed baking sheet dusted with flour. Let the dough balls rise until puffy, about 30 minutes. Meanwhile, make the glaze by whisking together the maple syrup and vanilla until smooth. Add a splash of water to form a loose, drizzle-able glaze.

Fill a large, heavy-bottomed pot with 2 inches of neutral oil. Heat over medium-high heat until 350 degrees. Carefully deposit a couple of fritters into the hot oil. Don't crowd them. Fry for 1 to 2 minutes per side, flipping a few times, until the fritters are a deep-golden brown. You will probably lose a couple pieces of apple from each fritter in the process. Remove from the oil with a spider or slotted spoon and drain on a wire rack. Let them cool slightly before glazing. Repeat with the remaining fritters. Be sure to keep the oil temperature consistent while frying. While the fritters are warm, dip one side into the maple glaze, letting the excess drain back into bowl. They are best eaten the day they are made.

MAGIC COOKIE BARS

Neale Holaday

This is basically shortbread covered with chocolate, coconut, pecans, and condensed milk. We would then set these on really ugly holiday plates, and the most important part was wrapping them in green or red colored cellophane and tied with an obnoxiously big ribbon.

- ½ cup unsalted butter, melted
- 1½ cups graham cracker crumbs
- 1 cup toasted and chopped pecans
- 1 cup semi sweet chocolate chips
- 1½ cups flaked coconut
- 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk

Melt the butter and spread in a 13 x 9 x 2-inch pan. Press graham crumbs into the pan and layer the nuts, chocolate chips, and coconut on top of the graham crumbs. Pour sweetened condensed milk over the top of everything and spread to make sure it is evenly dispersed. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 to 25 minutes until golden brown. Let cool completely and cut into squares.

ALL HAPPY FAMILIES ARE ALIKE

Caroline Fianza

These chocolate chip cookies call for Crisco. I've substituted butter and been deeply disappointed. If you know of a better substitute use it, but these cookies are worth the once-a-year use of vegetable shortening. I dare you to stop eating them.

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2 cups shortening (Crisco) | 2 teaspoons warm water |
| 1½ cups brown sugar | 4½ cups flour |
| 1½ cups white sugar | 2 teaspoons salt |
| 4 eggs separated | 2 teaspoons vanilla |
| 2 teaspoons baking soda | 3 large bags chocolate chips |

Cream shortening with brown and white sugar. Whip the egg yolks and add. Whip the egg whites and add. Combine the rest of the ingredients in order given. Drop spoonfuls onto greased cookie sheets and bake for 10 minutes.





CHOCOLATE PIE

Neale Holaday

My grandma had a famous chocolate pie that everyone in our family would beg her to make each holiday. It is a piecrust filled with chocolate pudding and topped with a mountain of meringue, which gets toasted in the oven. For some reason she wouldn't make it very often, and she would never eat it herself, so when we could convince her to make it, it was extra special. My mom and aunt would fight over who got the leftovers, because the pie always tasted better the next day for breakfast.

6 ounces unsalted butter, cubed and cold

1½ cups flour

pinch salt

⅓ cup ice water

Combine the flour and salt in a bowl and cut the butter in until butter is pea-sized. Slowly add the water until the dough just starts to come together. Bring the dough together with your hands but do not overwork. Roll out the dough on a floured surface and line a 9-inch pie shell. Bake at 350 degrees, until golden brown. Let cool.

1 tablespoon flour

2 tablespoons cornstarch

½ teaspoon kosher salt

2½ cups whole milk

1 cup sugar, plus 2 tablespoons

2 ounces unsweetened chocolate, chopped

2 egg yolks

2 tablespoons butter

1 tablespoon vanilla extract

3 egg whites

2 tablespoons sugar

Whisk together the flour, cornstarch, and salt. Add the milk and whisk to combine. In a pot, combine the milk mixture with the chocolate and sugar and bring to a bowl, whisking to combine, then cut the heat. In a bowl, whisk the egg yolks. While whisking constantly, pour a splash of the hot milk mixture into the egg yolks then slip that mixture back into the pot. Bring the filling to a simmer and whisk constantly until the mixture thickens, about 1 minute. It should just coat the back of a spoon. When thickened, remove from heat and stir in the butter and vanilla extract. Pour into the baked pie shell and let set and cool in refrigerator. When the filling is fully cool and set, make the meringue. With a mixer, whip the whites until frothy. Add sugar and whip until soft to medium peaks form. Spread evenly over cooled chocolate filling and bake at 350 degrees until meringue is golden brown.

CITRUS SPICED CREAM HOLIDAY WONDER

Katy Porte

Both of my grandmas were free spirits and were more likely to be found in a casino or wandering around San Diego picking flowers. Despite my mom's sexual orientation, she never would have let us eat rainbow-colored food. But I love making elaborate jello molds because I like spending hours in the kitchen and the process is very methodical. I tend to rush a bit in my days and the nature of Jell-O just won't allow for that type of energy. Instead I can space out, watch *Murder She Wrote*, read other recipes, and talk to the dogs. After a few hours, the last layer has been poured, and the magic has already happened. Read the entire recipe before starting. Timing is important!

2 boxes lemon Jell-O coconut oil
1 ¼ cup boiling water 1 pomegranate, seeds extracted

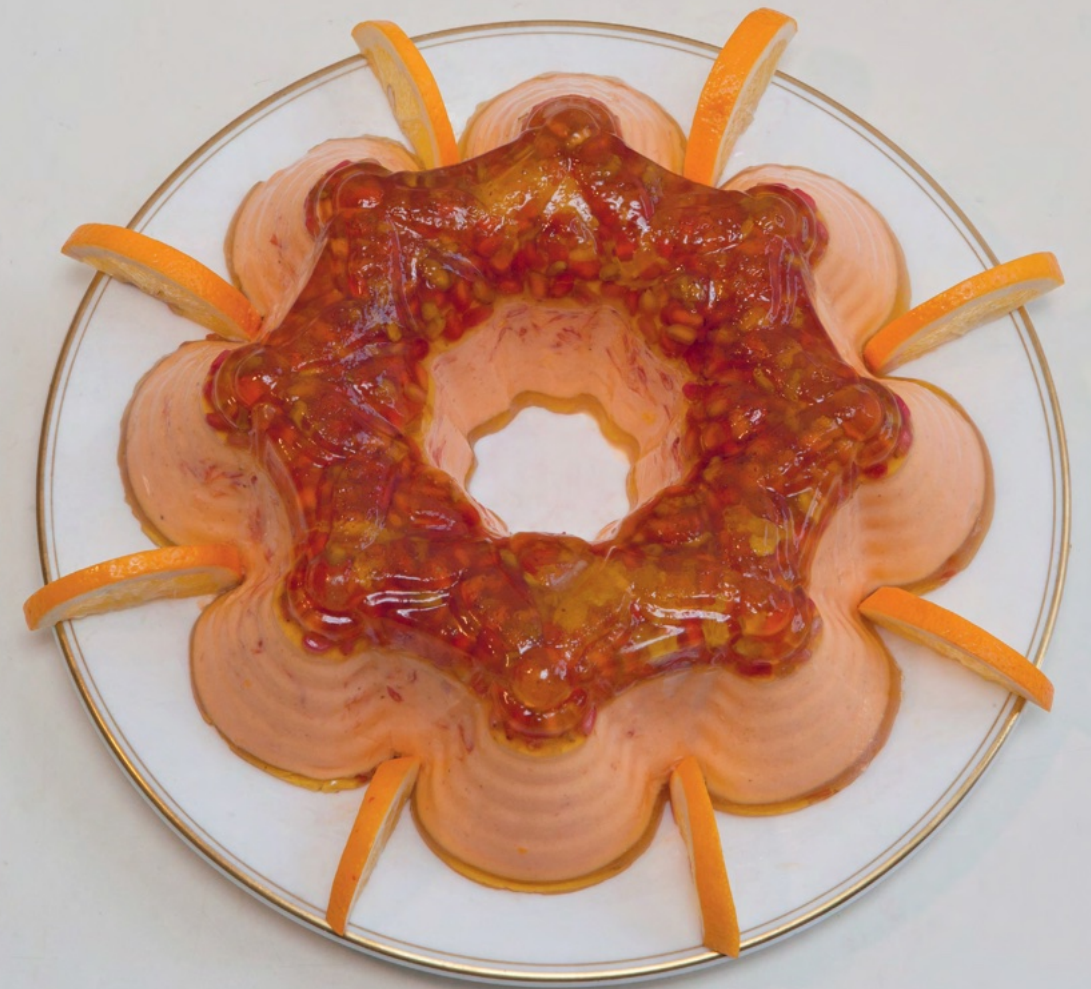
Whisk both Jell-O packets with boiling water until fully dissolved. Add 1 cup of the Jell-O to the bottom of a 6 to 8 cup mold, oiled lightly with coconut oil. This step is important and will really facilitate the un-molding process. Gently place most of your pomegranate seeds evenly into the Jell-O and set aside the mold to make layer 2. The remaining pomegranate seeds and Jell-O are for layer 3. Jell-O should be fine sitting at room temperature but if you notice it's starting to set up, rest the bowl containing Jell-O in a bowl of warm water to slow it down. Don't get water in your Jell-O!

1 teaspoon unflavored gelatin ¾ cup heavy cream
¼ cup water pinch of each: cinnamon, ginger,
1 can grapefruit, nutmeg, & cloves
drained & chopped with liquid reserved ½ teaspoon vanilla
1 orange, zest, peel, chop, and drain ½ orange's zest
1 package orange jello 1 cup sour cream

Only add layers when the existing layer is set up enough to be jiggly and tacky. It should still stick to your finger but is not fully set up. Regulate setup times as needed using the fridge to speed up the process, or warm water baths to slow it down.

In a small bowl, combine unflavored gelatin and water and set aside. Take the reserved juice from the canned grapefruit, and add enough water to measure 2 cups. Bring to a boil in a saucepan. Remove from heat and whisk in the orange Jell-O packet until completely dissolved. Cool for about 10 to 15 minutes. Add spices, vanilla, and zest to heavy cream and mix. Stir the sour cream and heavy cream mixture into the Jell-O. Chill until it's just starting to set up. Add the canned citrus and fresh orange to the Jell-O mixture. Spoon over the first lemon-pomegranate layer.

Carefully place the mold with two layers in the fridge. This is the thickest layer and may take 20 or so minutes to be set up enough for layer 3. Check on it every 7 minutes or so. When it's ready (tacky but not firm) add the remaining lemon Jell-O and pomegranate seeds. Put it back in the fridge for at least 5 hours or overnight if possible. To un-mold place the mold in a warm water bath (without submerging) for 10 seconds while lightly jiggling the mold. Carefully invert onto large platter and serve. Brace yourself for a lot of attention and compliments.



SPICED CHIFFON CAKE

Neale Holaday

Bakers, pastry people, and the precise prefer their ingredients in weights, so you'll need a simple scale for this recipe. They are cheap and make your life a lot easier. Be converted instead of converting. Beauty can be measured in ounces and grams.

3 ounces egg yolks	¼ ounce baking soda
1½ ounces organic sugar	¼ ounce salt
6 ounces vegetable oil	¼ ounce ground cinnamon
5 ounces water	½ ounce ground allspice
1 tablespoon vanilla extract	pinch ground black pepper
9½ ounces cake flour	7 ounces egg whites
3½ ounces organic sugar	6½ ounces organic sugar
¼ ounce baking powder	

Whip the egg yolks and sugar in a stand mixer on high until light and airy, about 5 minutes. Drizzle in water and vanilla. Switch to a paddle attachment. Sift the dry ingredients and add them to the yolk mixture. Mix until just combined. In a clean mixer, whip the whites until frothy. Add the sugar and whip on high until you get medium-stiff peaks. Fold this meringue into your other batter. Pour into a 10-inch cake pan that is lightly oiled and lined with parchment paper. Bake at 350 degrees until set, about 25 minutes.

APPLE CIDER FILLING

375 grams apples, preferably honey crisp	1 gram salt
40 grams organic sugar	2 grams cinnamon
4 ounces apple cider	1 gram allspice
20 grams butter, cubed	1 gram black pepper
	juice of 1 lemon

Cut the apples into cubes. Cook all the ingredients in a pot until apples are completely tender and start to break down. Remove from heat and blend until completely smooth. Cool completely over an ice bath.

CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

470 grams Philadelphia cream cheese, room temperature
157 grams butter, cubed and room temperature
3½ grams salt
135 grams confectioner's sugar
3½ grams vanilla extract

Paddle cream cheese and butter in a stand mixer until completely smooth. (Be sure that they are room temperature.) This will take about 5 minutes on high. Add salt, confectioner's sugar, and vanilla and continue to paddle on high until fluffy and completely smooth (about 5 to 8 minutes).

Cut the cooled cake into three even layers. Spread a layer of apple cider filling on each layer. Cover the outside of the cake with cream cheese frosting. Store in the cooler but make sure to eat it at room temperature.



COMFORT & JOY

Peter Pavia

Buried but hardly forgotten among my personal effects there's a Polaroid of me frozen in front of the gigantic Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center. I'm on a break between shifts at the Broadway bar job I was clinging to, dope sick and drunk. I might've swallowed a couple of pills, although I couldn't tell you what they were, and I had just polished off a joint. I'm wearing somebody else's coat. Evening is descending.

The snapshot memorializes a moment a week before the holiday, and if you're thinking this set of details wouldn't make for a Merry Christmas, you're right. I didn't have much of anything, but I'm sentimental about the holidays and I was determined to honor the spirit of feast, uprooted from its Saturnalian origins to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ. Christmas is about serving others.

So I spent that December 24th haunting the shops of the West Village like the Ghost of Christmas Past. I collected chicken parts and kalamata olives and cracked olives; oily, wrinkled olives; sweet bell peppers; and tangy pepperoncini. I threw a jalapeño or two into the mix. Eventually, dinner was served. I surveyed the faces of my guests. The salt of the olives and the fire of the jalapeños dominated the dish, and everybody reached for another drink. Drained by the effort, embarrassed with the results, I left them in the kitchen and I slumped off to bed.

I dreamed not of a white Christmas, because we don't have those anymore, but of the holidays of my childhood. The women in my family baked for days on end during the season, and the *cuccidati*, a unique and labor-intensive preparation, demanded special attention. Sweet but not sugary, *cuccidati* have a sumptuous, chewy texture, the spice structure a grudging nod to the centuries of Arab influence over Sicilian culture. Perfect with a Rusty Nail and a cup of black coffee.

On Christmas Eve, I transported my brush-cut, chubby-cheeked self to my grandmother's house, to bask in a spoiling I haven't completely recovered from. I was denied nothing. By nightfall, the house was humming with my own Sicilian bloodline: my mother, of course; my dad, ever the life of the party; grandma, who never set foot out of the kitchen; a grandpa of few words; aunts; uncles; and cousins, all together in that old house, where I loved all of them and they all loved me.

CUCCIDATI

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|---|--------------------------------|
| 2 pounds dried figs | ½ teaspoon allspice |
| 1 package dates | ½ teaspoon nutmeg |
| 1 box raisins | 2 teaspoon cinnamon |
| 1 pint honey | ½ teaspoon black pepper |
| 1 pound nuts
(filberts, almonds, walnuts, mixed) | 1 cup butter, room temperature |
| 2 oranges, juice and zest | 1 cup sugar |
| | 2 eggs, beaten |

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|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 teaspoon vanilla | 1 box confectioner's sugar, sifted |
| 1 cup sour cream | 2 teaspoons vanilla |
| ½ teaspoon salt | 3 tablespoons butter, melted |

First make the figgy filling. Heat figs, dates, raisins, orange juice, zest, honey, spice, and nuts in a saucepan over medium-low heat until the dried fruit plumps, about five minutes. Let cool. Pulse the mixture in a food processor until a paste forms.

Cream the butter and sugar together with an electric mixture until light and fluffy. Add the eggs, vanilla, and sour cream. Sift the flour with the baking soda, baking powder, and salt, then fold into the butter-egg mixture, just until incorporated. Chill the dough for 30 minutes. Roll out the dough on a lightly floured surface, ½-inch thick, into a large rectangle. Fill with fig filling and roll like you would a jelly roll. Slice into one-inch pieces. Lay each round cut-side up on a baking sheet and bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes or until lightly browned. For the frosting, beat together the sugar, vanilla, and butter until smooth. Frost the completely cooled cookies. Sprinkle with decorative candies.

ODE TO THE BELOVED AND LOATHSOME ITALIAN COOKIE

Caroline Fidanza

Ciambellini are plain little circle-shaped cookies that my mom makes for Christmas and sometimes Easter. It's hard for any cookie to hold up against her chocolate chip, so these are often left unchosen on the cookie platter. But they really are special cookies and can be reimagined in a number of ways with different flavorings. My parents say that they are great dunked in white wine. Can't do that with a chocolate chip.

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| 7 eggs | 1½ cups sugar |
| 7 cups sifted flour | zest of 1 orange |
| 7 teaspoons baking powder | dash Cointreau, if desired |
| 1 cup olive oil | |

Sift flour and baking powder into large wide bowl. Make a well in the center. Add well-beaten eggs, olive oil, sugar, and flavoring. Gradually gather all the ingredients together with wooden spoon. Cut off pieces of dough and roll into a long rope. Cut rope into 2-inch pieces and shape each into a round ring. Bake at 400 degrees until lightly browned underneath.



X-PHIALS: CRANBERRY YARROW LIQUEUR

Peter Milne Greiner

Nosebleed plant and woundwort are two other names for the yarrow common to our witches' kitchens. It's fluffy, it's ditch dwelling; it's my birthherb. I won't know that until after puberty though, until after the hypothalamus releases its hallucinogens into my tiny, twee fate. The year I want to talk about now hangs like a nebula in my mother's mind. That year's home decade, the eighties, hangs whole in mine, too—a splotch of color against darkness. We live in the valley. It isn't the year soy sauce winds up in the milkshakes instead of vanilla extract, but we are in the midst of that year. It is the year of the cranberry: 1989 or 1990 or 1991 or 1992, Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. An aunt or uncle brings a tiny bottle of cranberry liqueur made by Bogg's. Was it Bogg's? All the grownups drink it. Its redness disappears into the year, the decade, into everyone's lives, into growing older or growing up.

The nineties were the nineties, the aughts were the aughts. The present decade has no catchy shorthand, which makes a dismal, working sense. Since my generation is supposed to be crafty and mindful I decide to make the cranberry liqueur from the story, except better, craftier, worthy of the fancy century I have found myself foundering in. So I make it. I make Matisse-cut-out-inspired labels for the bottles. I call it something. I bring it all up to Massachusetts, I drink most of it, and on Christmas Eve, alone, I'm out in the record low snow, blacked out, singing ABBA's "The Visitors," when Edie drives up, back from church.

- 2 bottles of Tito's vodka, because gluten
- 10 bags of frozen cranberries
- bag of yarrow from a witch store or the side of the road
- bag of fancy sugar
- whole mace

Belief in magic is a powerful enactment of early human naiveté, and it is essential that we continue to perpetrate that belief—cautiously—bearing always in mind that it is theater.

Start with the yarrow. Make a standard decoction, and use the decoction to make simple syrup. Thaw out the cranberries and chop—chop—they in the blender with a little yarrow syrup. Don't liquefy. Chop coarsely, or malevolent elementals will rise up through the fissures and accost you. Once that's all done, throw everything into a giant pot with all the vodka and mix it up. Divide it all up in big mason jars. Add some dry yarrow and a few pieces of mace to each jar. Mace is our winter spice, our wild card. Whole, it looks like something an octopus has shed into a room from *Sleep No More*. It smells like pain and tastes like all the things about ourselves we wish we could change. It tastes impossible, like error, like time travel. Close the jars up tight and put them in the darkest recess of your domicile. Rotate and shake daily for a month. When the month is over and you're still the same unchanged person, strain into the receptacle of your choice through organic, unbleached cheesecloth. Add soda and an orange twist. Talk. Transform.

SOMEDAY SOON WE'LL BE REPLACED BY ROBOTS PRETENDING TO EAT TURKEY

Tom Mylan

As I sit here I am contemplating what will most likely be my last Christmas in New York City, I can't help but consider all the other Christmases that have come before it. If I'm truthful to myself, most of them were failures. Living in New York is a process of constantly blowing it. Not because they weren't warm and pleasant or poignantly bittersweet, but rather because they were failures to align my reasons, my philosophy if you will, for moving here. Repeatedly I failed at the reinvention of a Yuletide holiday in the image of that bohemian drive that delivered me into Penn Station on a sweaty August day in 2003.

Except just the once.

Perhaps it was my relief that the world didn't end that year with the Mayan calendar or perhaps I had just hit bottom, given up really, on having a Christmas that exceptional. Maybe it was the booze? The booze started early. Not a lot. Just enough to make the idea of eating several hits of New Mexican LSD and heading into the chaos that is Chinatown on Christmas night feel inevitable. Sichuan was a dubious choice. As was and going to see the last showing of *Django Unchained*. As was sitting at Clem's and aggressively trying to drink away the meth edge that the drugs were salted with. And yet at the end of the night I strode triumphantly into the sharp early-morning December air with a feeling of calm, wholeness, and, well, succeeding at being human.

Perhaps we'll be replaced by robots someday. Perhaps they won't be robots at all but rather people trying to be robots. I prefer to think otherwise. I prefer to think that there will always be at least a small number of people blowing it so hard that they can't help but succeed.





CONTRIBUTORS

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MARY DOWD an accidental physician, wife, and mother. She is always wishing she were somewhere else, but in fact never wants to leave home. A recluse by nature, she spends way too much time maintaining an old farmhouse, a recalcitrant teenager and spouse. She is fond of puppies, babies and heroin addicts. In her next life she hopes to discover the secret of happiness, failing that she would like to be able to carry a tune and hit a baseball. In this life, she hopes to die laughing.

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