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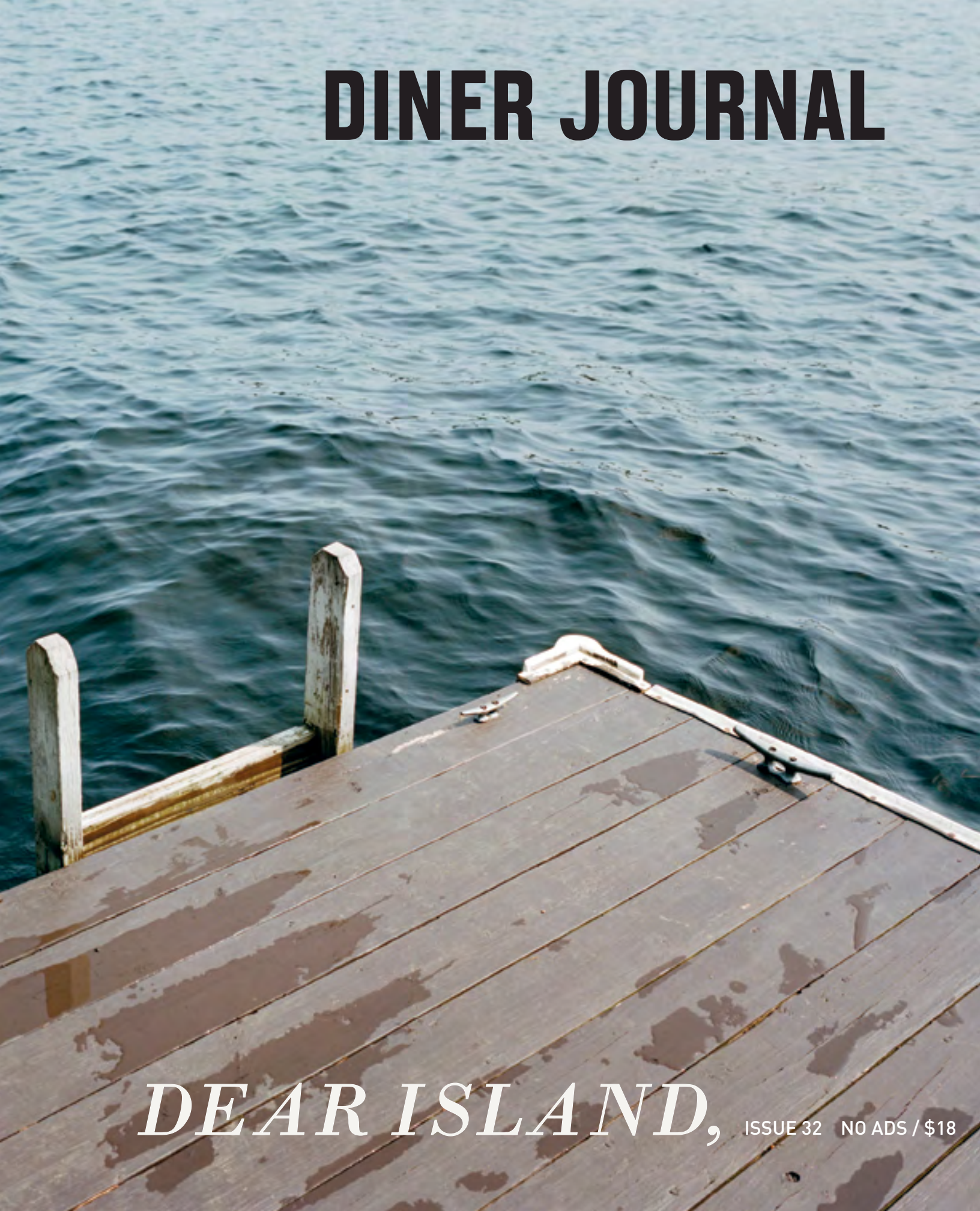

DEAR ISLAND,

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DEAR ISLAND,

Millicent Souris

Deer Island is in what is called the North County, six hours straight up from New York City, between Tupper and Saranac Lakes, and thirty minutes from Lake Placid, where the Miracle on Ice occurred and don't you forget it. A family has owned the island for a hundred years now. They call it camp.

I never went to camp, but I did see Friday the 13th Part 2 when I was seven, and this place immediately reminded me of Crystal Lake. Lots of shacks, a soiled blue jumpsuit hanging on a nail, an icehouse just waiting for a body to hang in it, chainsaws everywhere. OK, really just in the woodshed, but many, many chainsaws.

The island is the farthest north I have been during the summer—months I have typically spent in Baltimore, Chicago, New York. Hot, humid summers with potential brownouts and forecasts of hot trash and violence. But here, well, it's cozy. Warm in the sunshine at its peak; days so long hope seems possible; chilly, sometimes cold, at nighttime. It's a surprise.

Place dictates food. The season and its available vegetables and meat, the daily weather, the buildings. What does it feel like? Is it foggy and moody? Is a fire going and are people wearing wool blankets? Do I need to take a little chill off the bones. Holy shit, is that the sun? I haven't built this kitchen; it's been standing here for over a century. I'm just trying to listen to what it wants.

And that is the power of Deer Island. It is bigger than people. So is New York, but New York is the machine powered by the individuals, the bodies who daily try to make something happen. There is constant movement and anxiety and many competing senses of urgency that dictate the streets and kitchens. The city pushes us, we push back, and we push one another. We perpetually build, create, construct, tear down, and do it all over again.

I arrived on Deer Island through no traditional sense of job application or seeking. I received a phone call from an unknown caller one day at work. I am not a private chef and I don't want to be, but I am intrigued by islands. A popular cook plan B is to be the chef at a resort on an island. I was apprehensive; I needed to prove myself but I didn't know what that meant. I was hired sight unseen on the strength of a recommendation.

The dining room offers a view of Saranac Lake and Mink Island, a small rock with two trees—a solid swim away where the loons like to hang out. There's a taxidermy deer head wearing a crown leftover from a birthday party from summers past, a big deep fireplace, a table long enough for the family to gather round, and so many tree engravings. A lot are rudimentary ones of boats, a few quite beautiful; an intensely demonic nightmare-inducing one; and a couple obviously psychedelically inspired.

The dining room is in the same building as the kitchen. The buildings on the camp are separated, so if there is a fire it can hopefully be contained. I like this kind of utilitarianism. The kitchen is a beaut. I can see the lake while I am cooking. It is sunniest when I am prepping in the late afternoon. There are windows everywhere, a big island, and a big six-burner Viking stove with a tremendous amount of BTUs. There is one upright stainless-steel refrigerator and one upright freezer. The kitchen is well stocked with bowls, cutting boards, and thin metal pots.

And then the anxiety. What, exactly, do you take when you go to an island? How to prepare? I was confronted head on with what to take with me when I leave the land of convenience. To fail to plan is a plan to fail, and I was already lacking the necessary boating skills I needed, even though Emily, my employer, seemed unconcerned.

First the food. I buy a bunch of it wholesale, because it's somewhat smart but mostly comforting. I bring up fifty pounds of AP flour; sherry vinegar, apple cider vinegar, and white wine vinegar; a case of olive oil; a box of dried chickpeas and another of dried black beans; and a box of wine. Safety beans! When all else fails—when I fail—at

least there are beans. I packed up my knives, my steel and stone, Vitamix, mandoline, Microplane, and assorted spices from Kalustyan's.

I bring a stack of books for reference. Harold McGee's *On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen* is my book version of dried beans, the safety net, the security blanket. The *Saltie* cookbook has recipes, both sweet and savory, that I constantly use, more than any other book. I read passages of it when I'm isolated from my people, my friends. Caroline Fidanza's writing helps. Jim Harrison's *The Raw and the Cooked* is another book I turn to for companionship, a great collection of this extraordinary writer's food essays. *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* by Julia Child is a solid copilot, as is *The Auberge of the Flowering Hearth*, Paula Wolfert's *Couscous and Other Good Food from Morocco*, and *Cooking by Hand* by Paul Bertolli. I bring some new ones, too: *Bar Tartine's Techniques & Recipes*; and Justin Gellatly's *Bread, Cake, Doughnut, Pudding*. I inhale the Bar Tartine book the first few days I am there alone, writing down a litany of ideas. I love them. I love their techniques and their transformation of and dedication to the onion and the beet. But these are for another time, another place. I will not be making onion powder here.

Then the *Prune* book. I take it out of guilt, out of the notion that maybe I'm not a real cook, I'm just a hack, and now I'm doing the hackiest thing of all, working as a private chef. I'm not toiling in a restaurant somewhere in Manhattan, being miserable and hot and underpaid. I'm not dedicating myself truly to my craft. I'm watching sunsets and swimming and making a small amount of money, but money all the same. I'm a fraud. So I bring the *Prune* cookbook.

But I don't want to read it. I don't want to have that voice, the one with all the doubt, any more present in my head than it already is. When I do read it, the style makes sense to me: direct and orderly. In the way that a professional kitchen is comforting to me. How it cuts through the bullshit to information and execution. I use the potato roesti recipe and it is great. Clarifying the butter is the key.

But I don't look at it again. I don't want to be on an island with Gabrielle Hamilton. I ask Julia to pick up my copy of the Joe Beef book on the way to the island. Because the Joe Beef guys are my island people.

I pull out every cast iron pan I have in the back of my truck—all five of them—to reset, cure, and cook with for the month. Each gets a good salt scrub to pull up the rust, then I rub some vegetable oil on them. Also a Dutch oven with a lid, an 8-inch pan, a 9-inch pan, an oval pan that covers two burners, and a small 4-inch pan. I don't have room in my kitchen, so they've been in the back of my truck in an apple crate, accumulating over the years. There are a few rust spots—not too bad, considering.

It took me a while to figure out how to cook on Deer Island, because it also took me a while to trust myself. I can get fussy and tedious, overthinking things; it's bad for me, and while the food doesn't suffer, the tedium is not helpful. One lunch I made roasted hen of the woods mushrooms with fresh arugula, toast, and shallot vinaigrette. And then a French rolled omelette for each person. It was delicious, beautiful, and a bit precious. Another cook may have appreciated the beautiful, smooth omelettes with no color, but I'm not convinced a cast iron full of soft scrambled eggs with cheese wouldn't have struck the same note. No one was particularly impressed with the plated lunch versus family style.

And that's it. The rarified does not belong here.

I am best with limited options, period. I am not a dreamer; I make do. I am aware of a room, of what's happening to the people in it, and I can pull an audible in an hour or less if I feel like we need soup, because it's 50 degrees out and I finally learned the lesson that I know for myself: sometimes you just really want a burger or a grilled cheese.

I like to tell myself that I will become a bread baker. In my heart of hearts, with a twinkle in my eye, I will, and the rest of the world will fall away as I commune with my starter, working through the trial and error of crumbs and adjusting to an electric oven. I will gain a majestic calm, like a Zen runner.

I do bake a few loaves using fresh yeast and begin to make a sourdough starter. My sourdough starter is created under the helpful guidance of former St. John's baker Justin Gellatly and his excellent book *Bread, Cake, Doughnut, Pudding*. The recipe is detailed with days and weights for how to create a starter from scratch. I did it! It was triumphant; every little fermentation bubble was a dream come true.

And then I tried to make bread and it took two days. And it wasn't great. I followed the instructions to a T—a motherfuckin' T—except for the moment where I put the raw loaf in the oven, and I forgot to make some steam. It was a loaf of bread almost ten days in the making, and right there, at the end, I blew it.

So I held on to the starter for a few days, and then I let go of bread baking. Eventually I threw it away because it changed from amazing natural fermentation to neglected rot. I moved on and bought bread.

This new person I imagine I will become—a bread-baking fisherman, who loves running, too—leaves me. I am confronted with the question, What do I do when I have the time or the space or the quiet? I want to swim and read and write letters and stare at the sky. Staring at the sky is unquantifiable in its mental-health capabilities, and I've never seen so many variations on the colors gray and green. I embark on a quietly passionate love affair with doing laundry and hand-washing delicates. I befriend ghosts. Being here is being alone in a totally different manner, and there is no escape, no blinking lights or screens, no noise. I can't self-medicate. There are too many witnesses and a lack of bullshit to blame it on.

I trust my instincts and cook not on a whim but with flexibility. To take a look around, to feel and smell the air, to be present, to become a better cook, because instead of staying the course, I allow the course to reveal itself every day.

Just cook. Don't overthink it. Just cook what the island wants.


YAMA

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ALL PHOTOS by Julia Gillard

MILLICENT SOURIS is a cook and writer available for island work. She is author of *How to Build a Better Pie* and excels with the elderly and cantankerous. Apparently she has a knack for boating.

JULIA GILLARD photographs old people, young people, holidays, spectacles, parades, and islands. And food.

VINCE ANDERSON is a reverend and musician who grows things; roses, grasses, lettuce, herbs, and flowers. While he waits for his plants to grow he BBQs things. His Scandinavian side is dominant.

CAROLINE FIDANZA is the owner of Saltie, a sandwich shop in Williamsburg, Brooklyn as well as author of *Saltie: A Cookbook*. She visited Deer Island once when she was actually able to take a real summer vacation; one that involved but was not limited to riding in a pontoon boat, swimming, drinking Genesee beer, eating ice cream, and sleeping in a weird single bed.

BRAISED SHORT RIBS with POLENTA & CARROTS

Let's be honest. Sometimes I pretend this kitchen, this island, is my own little Greek-French-Southern inn; one of my many inspirations is Mademoiselle Ray from *L'Auberge de l'Atre Fleuri* or *Auberge of the Flowering Hearth*. The 1973 cookbook based on this inn is a beautiful reference for country French cooking, a style of cooking that just feels right for me.

Short ribs, or lamb shanks or pork shoulder, love red wine, the whole bottle of red wine, just like you do. In general I think one rib per person is plenty. If they are large, you can use fewer ribs. It is important to have the time to cook these, so the meat can be pulled off the bone. I'm talking about at least 3 hours here.

1 bottle juicy red wine
6 short ribs
3 stems fresh thyme
4 bay leaves
7 cloves garlic
kosher salt
olive oil
2 white onions
3 carrots
3 ribs of celery
1 quart beef or chicken stock
soup spoon of tomato paste
freshly ground pepper

The night or morning before, pour the wine over the short ribs and add a sprig of thyme, a few bay leaves, and a few cloves of smashed garlic. The next day pull the short ribs out of the wine. Save this marinade. Season ribs with kosher salt and brown them in a Dutch oven. Once browned set aside. Pour the fat out and heat a little olive oil. Slice the remaining garlic and dice the onions, carrots, and celery. Sauté the onions and season with a little salt. Once they sweat add the carrots, celery, and garlic and give a good stir. Deglaze the pot with half the stock and scrape up any fond with a flat wooden spoon. Add a spoonful of tomato paste and stir it over medium-high heat.

Add the reserved wine, garlic, thyme, and bay leaves. Put the meat in the Dutch oven. You want it to be covered two-thirds of the way up with liquid, so add the rest of the stock if you need to, or more wine or a beer or some water. Whatever you do, don't submerge the meat in liquid; it messes up the protein/braising liquid harmony. Bring the braise to a boil and taste it. Season with salt and freshly ground pepper, keeping in mind the liquid will reduce.

Cover the Dutch oven and put it in a 325-degree oven. Check periodically during the next 3 hours, just to make sure everything is progressing as expected. The give really happens between the third and fourth hours of cooking. You want the meat to pull easily from the bone. Even if the ribs are small, it still needs time to give. If it's on the verge, let it go a little longer.

POLENTA

The best polenta will be a little coarse and smell like corn. Here's something a bit heretical for the Southerners and the Italians: you can use anything for polenta or grits or cornbread as long as it's some sort of cornmeal. Choose stone-ground cornmeal for the best flavor and texture.

The most important part of making polenta is the liquid-to-solid ratio, somewhere between 4 and 5 cups of liquid for each cup of ground corn. And that's the flavor I want, corn, so I use water for the liquid and finish with some butter for creaminess, just to round out the flavor, but no cheese or milk. I don't want the corn flavor masked by the richness of dairy.

Since this polenta is served with a rich braise, I want to keep it simple and clean, as light as possible. This takes about an hour of mild attentiveness.

10 cups water

kosher salt

2 cups stone-ground cornmeal

freshly ground pepper

6 tablespoon unsalted butter, or more

Heat the water over a high flame and add salt. Whisk in the cornmeal and turn the heat down a bit. Make sure the polenta isn't sticking; that's your main concern. Once it starts bubbling, turn it down; cornmeal gives a painful burn. Keep an eye on it, stirring every once in a while. If there are lumps, whisk them out. Check the polenta: you want the grain to give and not to be gritty. Once the grain gives, check for seasoning and stir the butter in.

If it's not smooth or creamy enough, then add more liquid, be it water, stock, or cream. Or butter. Leftover polenta can be spread in a pan or sheet tray to make cakes. Cover with parchment paper.

ROASTED CARROTS

When carrots come around at the farmer's market, they are gorgeous. I want their freshness and sweetness unadulterated by booze and meat, so I cook them by themselves. I roast them in a single layer on a baking sheet lined with aluminum foil, with enough foil overhang on each side to cover the carrots. This roasts them, but also steams them, so the carrots get tender before they dry out or get too much color on the exterior.

carrots

olive oil

kosher salt

freshly ground pepper

Aleppo pepper

fresh parsley leaves

fresh tarragon leaves

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Cut the carrots in half lengthwise or in quarters. Toss in olive oil, salt, pepper, and a little Aleppo pepper. Place a single layer on the sheet tray and bring the extra foil together to close. Put in the oven and check after 10 minutes. Once the carrots give a bit, to get some color on them, open the foil and turn the oven to 425 degrees. You want the carrots to just get tender, but you don't want them too soft. Finish with parsley and tarragon.

DUTCH PANCAKE

A versatile, simple creation that can go either sweet or savory. Perfect for dessert in the summer heat with fresh berries, lemon juice, and confectioners' sugar, or crème anglaise. This batter is best if it is made ahead of time and sits out. Just let it sit out on the counter for a few hours. A pan of any size works for this Dutch pancake; you just want a thin layer of batter on the bottom of the pan for a crispy, custardy, almost popover-like result. I used a 10-inch cast-iron pan.

2 eggs, room temperature
½ cup whole milk, room temperature
½ cup flour
pinch salt
2 T unsalted butter

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Whisk the eggs and add the milk. Mix well, then add the flour and salt and whisk until just incorporated. Do not beat out all the lumps. Put the pan in the oven to heat for a few minutes, then pull the pan out and place over high heat. Add the butter and swirl it around to melt. Once the butter bubbles, pour the batter in the pan. It should cover the entire bottom of the pan and begin to set and ripple at the edges. Put the pan in the oven. Check at 10 minutes. The pancake will rise up the sides of the pan and puff all around. Let it cook a little longer to crisp up, which takes about 15 minutes. When crispy and golden brown serve with crème anglaise and jam, butter and powdered sugar, or butter and salt and pepper.

CRÈME ANGLAISE

Anything you don't pour onto the Dutch Pancake can just be drunk like the melted milkshake it is. I always make this in a double boiler to gently cook the eggs so they don't curdle.

1 t whole coriander seeds
2 cups whole milk
4 large egg yolks, at room temperature
½ cup white sugar
1 t vanilla extract, or seeds scraped from ½ vanilla pod

Simmer water in the bottom half of a double boiler. Toast the coriander seeds in a pot and toast for a minute, then add the milk and scald. Whisk the eggs yolks in a medium-size bowl and add the sugar. Incorporate the milk by pouring in a slow stream, tempering the yolks. Place the bowl over the pot with simmering water. Use a rubber spatula to move the mixture until it thickens, about 8 to12 minutes. You want it to coat a spoon. Strain the mixture and finish with vanilla. Spoon over the Dutch pancake.

WOODEN BOATS ON THE 4TH OF JULY

Millicent Souris

Boats. They are amazing things, but seriously you could probably just set all the money in your wallet as well as everyone else's money in your proximity on fire right now and be better off. Regardless, the Wooden Boat Parade is the Fourth of July activity on Saranac Lake, comprising a ride from the top of the lake to the bottom. Various wooden boats gather at 10:00 a.m. I'm on Deer Island's historic boat the To 'N Fro, an open-cabin Richardson cruiser built in 1929.

The To 'N Fro is a noble boat that leads the rest of the boats on this seven-mile parade. The top of the lake is full of big beautiful camps: an evangelical Christian camp, which I consider an easy target for any errant serial killers, and a haunted old Girl Scout camp. But Deer Island is the crowned jewel at the top of the lake, possibly the only privately owned island and one full of intrigue and gossip for neighboring vacationers.

I'm in a dreamworld, I know that. And the dream changes; it alters as we head south down the lake. Things get a little tighter, the neighbors closer, the houses smaller. But who cares, it's a house on the lake. As we hit the bottom of the lake, there's an RV and camping park and a large convergence of people. The parade goes from side to side, so people on the land can look at the bastards in the wooden boats and wave. I like it as it gets to the trailer people—my people—living the dream in RVs and pop tents. I don't know why they want to wave to a bunch of WASPs in old boats—it honestly feels like an exercise in wealth taunting—but if that isn't a celebration of this country, then I don't know what is.

Our lunch today will be fried chicken; it just feels like the proper holiday food. I've been frying chicken since I was fourteen years old. My first job on the books was at the Royal Farm Store, cleaning whole cases of frozen chicken, frying them up, taking old rotisserie chicken and making salad, working the register, stocking the shelves, telling kids they had to purchase a screen with their corncob pipe.

It was a job with a smock, a Royal Blue polyester zip-up smock we put a fifteen-dollar deposit on when hired. That was three hours of work, before taxes. I wore a "Please Bear with Me I'm in Training" pin with a bear on it to make my incompetence seem charming. That incompetence quickly turned to dread for the job.

There was an unmistakable scent of fry in the air. Years later when I lived in Chicago in a desolate industrial area, the closest place to stop for smokes was a Shell station on Ashland that also sold fried chicken. Whenever anyone came over and stopped there, I could smell it on him or her, the lingering old fry.

Scott the caretaker drives the To 'N Fro, keeping the pace of the parade. Scott cares about safety more than anyone else, because he is responsible and this is everyone else's vacation. Emily, Jed, Darla and her Seeing Eye dog Chloe, Jonathan, and Henry are on the boat; then there is Vince, Julia, and me. We all have little American flags.

Emily, the head of the parade, the grand dame of historic Deer Island, is drunk with power. Her family's beautiful boat is the first boat for a reason, and she takes very seriously the idea that the To 'N Fro is to bounce from side to side so the people can see it, and the grating horn is to be sounded for everyone waving at us. And we are to wave back. With both our hands and our flags. With enthusiasm. Emily becomes a tyrant, extracting patriotism from us. "Wave the flags, wave the flags. Wave to the people. Sound the horn."

We do. Emily is a force of nature.

FRIED CHICKEN

When New York decided to just straight up eat its feelings, it became obsessed with fried chicken, an obsession that has yet to wane for a decade now. I learned this method from Stephen Tanner of Commodore and El Cortez. Tanner's method is littered throughout the city, and I seriously doubt that he gives a shit I'm writing about it here. Start with a brine. Even if the chicken only sits in the brine for a few hours, it makes a big difference.

1 cup kosher salt
½ cup sugar
1 gallon water
4 chickens

1 liter soda or seltzer water
6 cups flour
2 gallons canola oil
kosher salt for seasoning

Melt the salt and sugar in 2 cups of the water on the stove. Once dissolved, combine it with the rest of the water and let it chill. Pour the combined cold water into a large container and break down your chickens. Four chickens are good, because nobody ever says, "This is too much fried chicken." Slip the chicken into the water and brine away, anywhere from 4 hours to overnight. The brine gently seasons the chicken.

Double-bag 2 plastic bags and put the flour in the double bag to bread the chicken. Dip the raw chicken pieces in a bowl of soda water, then put them in the bag, and shake the bag so that the chicken pieces get coated.

I used my Lodge Dutch oven and one of the camp's pots, a thin number that, in my worst nightmare, bursts into flames when I fill it with oil and turn the fire up. Vessels are important. Thinner pots get hotter faster and lose heat quickly. Cast iron is slow to heat, but once it gets there, it holds fast. I use two pots, so this takes less time. Ideally use a thermometer. On the island, I didn't have a thermometer that went high enough for the hot oil, but fuck it. The chicken will tell me what temperature the oil is.

So, get the oil, canola oil, to at least 350 degrees to be hot enough to really fry the chicken. I err on the side of too hot (hence the bursting into flames fear), knowing that the chicken will cause the temperature of the pot to drop, especially a thin pot. I can control it more, but that is also because it has to be controlled more.

Frying food is like making pancakes. Your first round is often trash, so I fry the wings first. Hold them in the oil for a few counts so they don't drop to the bottom. The oil is too high, I can tell because the wings brown too fast, so I turn the heat down. I pull the wings out and finish cooking them in the oven.

If the oil is right, the chicken looks like it is frying but is not getting color immediately. The chicken almost looks like it is dancing in the oil. If the temperature of the oil drops below 325 degrees, you need to crank up the heat. Your chicken isn't frying as much as it is poaching. 350 degrees is the magic oil temperature.

It takes between 10 and 13 minutes to fry a piece of chicken, depending on its size. Have a tray ready with a rack, to put the chicken on so the oil drips down. Season well with kosher salt, because what's the use of eating fried food if it is not salty?

CAST IRON CORNBREAD

I always bake cornbread in a skillet; it feels too institutional on a baking sheet. This is best in a 10- or 12-inch cast iron. The better the cornmeal, the better the cornbread. Cornmeal, grits, polenta—it's all the same in my book. Extremely versatile, shelf-stable supplies that can be made into porridge or bread.

2 sticks + 2 T unsalted butter
2 cups flour
2 cups cornmeal
2 T baking powder
2 T kosher salt
4 eggs
2 cups whole milk or buttermilk
¾ cup honey

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Put the cast iron in the oven to heat. Melt the 2 sticks of butter in a separate pan on the stove over a low flame, then let it cool a bit. In a bowl, mix together the dry ingredients. In a separate bowl, mix the eggs with the milk. Add the honey to the butter, to loosen it a bit, then whisk that into the wet ingredients. Add the wet ingredients to the dry ingredients. Mix well, but not obsessively.

Pull the pan out of the oven and place over a medium flame. Add the 2 tablespoons of butter, swirling it in the pan. When the bubbling subsides, add the batter. The edges will curl up a bit. Once that happens, about 3 minutes, put the cast iron in the oven. Check at 15 minutes and turn the pan 180 degrees. It's done when a cake tester comes out clean, about 40 minutes.

This recipe can be pushed and pulled a lot. You can make it with varying ratios of cornmeal to flour, fewer eggs, less butter, and less milk. I used to make cornbread for a Southern restaurant that was all cornmeal and one egg and no sweetener, because Southerners believe it is cornbread, not corncake, so there shouldn't be any sweetness to it. A customer once had tears in her eyes when she ate it; she said it reminded her of her grandma's. I secretly think it reminded her of the gravel driveway to her grandma's house, but I was touched by the tears, nonetheless. That's the real shit cooking is made of. You can't argue with a Southerner; you may as well just pack it up.

Let the cornbread sit for a bit. If you try to pop it out of the pan right away, it might break.

MOLASSES BUTTER

Molasses is magic. It has iron in it, so a spoonful is a game changer. I discovered this one summer, opening a restaurant where the only family meal we had was cigarettes and Pabst Blue Ribbon. This is delicious with cornbread and biscuits. And saltines.

1 cup unsalted butter, softened
1 cup of molasses
sea salt

Put the butter in a food processor. Turn on and add the molasses in what will most likely be a slow stream. You may have to add more molasses depending on its quality. Buy blackstrap, if you can. Add sea salt to taste. As a wise woman once said, add more molasses if you need more molasses flavor.

CHERRY PIE

Every time I make cherry pie, I laugh to myself about the Warrant song *Sweet Cherry Pie*, because at heart I am a fourteen-year-old boy. But really the joke's on me, because cherries are time consuming to pit. Cherries are a boon in the North Country; for the past few summers, there have been so many sour cherries for weeks on end. I like to have different cherries around for everyone to snack on. I try to feed people the way I want to eat, and sometimes that just means a bowl of fruit. Other times it means the fruit is surrounded by crust.

2¼ cup flour
2 t kosher salt
2 t sugar
1 cup cold unsalted butter or leaf lard, or a mixture of the two
½ cup strained ice water, plus 2 tablespoons

2 pounds cherries, stemmed and pitted (Bing, sour, and Rainier are good options)
¼ cup brown sugar
¼ cup white sugar
zest and juice of 2 small limes
20 gratings whole nutmeg on a Microplane
pinch kosher salt
2 T flour

1 egg, beaten, for an egg wash
3 T raw sugar

Mix together the dry ingredients. If it's really hot outside or in the kitchen put the bowl in the freezer while you cut the fat. Cut the fat into ¼-inch pieces and get the ice water strained. Sprinkle the fat over the dry ingredients and incorporate by pinching each piece. If it clumps, break it down a little bit by pinching the pieces more. Make sure you lift the flour from the bottom of the bowl while mixing so the fat is evenly distributed.

Sprinkle half the water over the mixture and stir with a fork until it is absorbed, honestly like 30 seconds. Add the rest of the water, sprinkling it over the mix rather than just dumping it in one spot. Mix the crust briefly with your hands—you want to handle it the least amount possible—and press into two balls. Flatten and cover with cling wrap. Refrigerate.

Toss the cherries in the sugars, lime zest and juice, nutmeg, and salt. Taste. Adjust seasonings if necessary. Add the flour (it will be your thickener) and toss well to combine. You can also use ground rice, tapioca, or arrowroot.

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Roll out the bottom crust on a lightly floured board. Move it a quarter turn after each roll so it is even in thickness, forms a circle-like shape, and isn't stuck to the board. Fold it in half for easy transport, place the pie plate in front of you, and slide the dough onto the pie plate, making sure it is centered, and unfold it. Press it against the bottom and sides of the pie plate, leaving a little overhang over the edge. Put it in the refrigerator while you roll out the top. You can do a whole top crust or a lattice. Cut the crust into strips for the lattice. If it's really hot in your kitchen, just cut fatter strips, so they're sturdier.

Fill the pie. Cover with the top crust and cut slits or make the lattice. Brush with an egg wash and finish with a hearty sprinkling of raw sugar. Make a shower cap out of aluminum foil to protect the top crust: you don't want it to touch the crust; you just want it to hover above the crust and edges so they don't burn.

Bake at 425 degrees for 30 minutes. Take the foil off and bake at 350 degrees until golden brown. Let it rest for at least 2 or 3 hours. Ideally make the pie the night before. It sets up better that way.


blackberry
romesco
hummus
beef fried rice lunch - steak
rice scallions limes sunny eggs
greens
meatloaf
rib lamb
salsa verde
boil potatoes
flatbread
grill scallions
french yogurt cake strawberries &
candied ginger
chicken / brine
pork

JULY 5TH, FRIED CHICKEN SALAD

Part of cooking on an island is rolling leftovers over to make more meals. Last night's wild rice and mushrooms become a tart. Leftover steak turns into fried rice. Yesterday's Freedom chicken becomes fried chicken salad for lunch. I certainly cannot eat all the leftovers, and this family I'm cooking for, well, they are appreciative eaters.

4 heads romaine lettuce
or another crisp leaf, outer leaves discarded
handful of radishes
1 cup pickled onions
2 tomatoes, if they're good
6 to 8 strips bacon, if you've got it
1 large shallot, minced
2 T whole grain mustard
2 T red wine vinegar
about a cup olive oil
kosher salt
freshly ground black pepper

Shred the chicken, ideally keeping the fry on it. Bacon isn't necessary in this salad, but it's good. Julienne the bacon and fry it. Discard the oil. Clean and quarter the radishes or slice according to taste. Sometimes I think radishes can save the world the way I use them. Rip the lettuce. Whisk together a vinaigrette: shallots, whole grain mustard, and vinegar, seasoned with salt and pepper, then the olive oil. Get the largest bowl you can find. Toss the lettuce, radishes, pickled onions, and tomatoes together with some of the dressing. Taste and add more dressing if you want, then sprinkle in the bacon and fried-chicken bits, tossing it to combine. Serve.

THE LIFE OF A BEET

Millicent Souris

The weather starts to warm up, and we begin to look for all the vegetables we've been missing during the fall and winter. Zucchinis and squashes, tomatoes and corn, cucumbers. Some days I'd kill for a damn cucumber. It's really evident you're six hours north of New York City by the lack of available produce. The air has only been warm for so long, and the ground, well, it's still working on it.

This growing season has seen a lot of green so far; there's been a lot of late rain. Greens are great—kale, broccoli rabe, mustard, dandelion—beautiful greens with their own distinct textures and flavors. But come on, I'm just biding my time until something more substantial, something I can sink my teeth into, gets pulled. Enter the beet.

The beets at the Lake Placid farmers' market arrive dark red and beautiful, with gorgeous red-stemmed, slightly sturdy greens that are just as vibrant as any kale or mustard greens. I can't say no to them; I can't cut them off and leave for the farmer to compost. I buy six bunches of beets, twenty dollars' worth. They keep well, and everyone except Jed loves them, especially Emily, my eighty-seven-year old bon vivant employer and her daughter-in-law Darla, a blind Mennonite liberal religion professor.

Beets are hard, physically very hard, like baseballs or rocks. Our tendency with hard things is to boil the shit out of them, violently forcing them to soften. For flavor purposes, boiling is not the best method to cook beets. I don't know where the American love affair with boiling vegetables comes from. Roasting is the way to go; time and heat intensify the flavor and bring out a beet's inherent sweetness. Putting beets in a roasting pan and then in the oven isn't a chore.

Don't crowd the beets; let them lie in a single layer in the pan. Sprinkle some olive oil over them, along with salt and pepper, and put about an inch of water in the roasting pan and cover with foil. Roast at 375 degrees.

Check your beets. Size will influence the beets' cooking time, and you want to make sure they are tender. Not sharp-knife tender, but butter-knife easy. Peel the roasted beets when they are still warm. You don't have to peel them if they're really fresh, because the skin is edible, as are any stems left on. I was pleasantly surprised by the stems' flavor and edibility and, beyond that, its tastiness combined with great texture.

Where's the love for the beet green? Why so down on it? It's extra value. But it is a lot of work—a lot of washing and storage I don't anticipate. And most important, what to do with them? A lot of the time when people utilize beet greens—and their compatriots carrot tops and radish tops—they just don't taste good. The intention is there, but the execution lacks.

They haunt me, the beet greens. I wash them three times to make sure there is no grit, let them air dry, then put them in the cooler, where they sit for a few days, staring me down with their Herculean strength. They will not wilt or diminish in beauty.

BEET GREEN CROSTATA

This is a great use for any green, or a mixture of many—kale, chard, dandelion greens. It's perfect for beet greens mixed with something spicy, like mustard greens.

1 cup flour
1 cup whole wheat flour
2 t kosher salt
1 t white sugar
¾ cup leaf lard or butter, or a combination of the two
¾ cup strained ice water

3 cloves garlic
1 small white onion
3 bunches beet greens, with some stems
fresh herbs
kosher salt
freshly ground black pepper
pinch dried chile flakes
fresh nutmeg
¼ cup grated Parmesan or feta cheese
1 egg, beaten, for an egg wash

Mix together the dry ingredients. If it's really hot outside or in the kitchen put the bowl in the freezer while you cut the fat. Cut the fat into ¼-inch pieces and get the ice water strained. Sprinkle the fat over the dry ingredients and incorporate by pinching each piece. If it clumps, break it down a little bit by pinching the pieces more. Make sure you lift the flour from the bottom of the bowl while mixing to make sure the fat is evenly distributed.

Sprinkle half the water over the mixture and stir with a fork until it is absorbed, honestly like 30 seconds. Add the rest of the water, sprinkling it over the mix rather than just dumping it in one spot. Mix the crust briefly with your hands—you want to handle it the least amount possible—and press into two balls. Flatten and cover with cling wrap. Refrigerate.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. To make the filling, slice the garlic thinly lengthwise. Small-dice the onion. Thinly slice the beet stems from the greens. If the greens are tough, and they probably will be, blanch them in salty water, then squeeze the water out. Now chop the greens. You don't want to dice them, but you want them to eat well, so give them a coarse chop.

Put a good glug of olive oil in an 8- or 10-inch cast iron. Sauté the onions with salt and pepper until fragrant and almost soft, about 6 minutes. Add the beet stems; you want both the stems and the onions to be tender. Add the garlic, sauté for a minute or two, then add the greens. The heat should be pretty high. You don't want the greens and onions to be crunchy, but you want the water to evaporate so the crostata will not become soggy.

Taste for seasoning. Salt, pepper, a few chile flakes, and some freshly grated nutmeg do the job. Let it cool a bit.

Roll out the dough a ¼-inch thick. The trick is to move it a quarter turn after each roll to ensure it doesn't stick to the board, and to only roll up and down once with the pin. Continue turning to make a circle and make sure it's not stuck. Once it is rolled out transfer to a baking sheet.

Scatter the cooled filling over the crust, leaving two inches of edge free. Beginning at one point, fold the edge up and over the greens, toward the center. Continue around the whole tart, pleating the crust. Brush with the egg wash and bake until the crust is golden brown and crunchy, about 25 minutes. Let the crostata rest for ten minutes. Cut into slices and finish with Parmesan or feta cheese, and fresh herbs.

PICKLED BEET STEMS

I like to use the stems of beet greens and chard as part of the mirepoix for the crostata, or in a soup. But since there's a lot of stem, vibrant and crisp, they are perfect for pickles also.

as many beet or chard stems as you have
1 T mustard seeds
1 t coriander seeds
1 t crushed red pepper flakes
4 garlic cloves, smashed
3 cups white wine vinegar
1½ cups water
2 T sugar
3 T salt

Wash the beet and chard stems very well, then dice. Combine all the other ingredients in a small saucepan and bring to a boil. Put the stems in a glass bowl or jar. Pour the hot pickling liquid over the stems until they are submerged and let sit in the refrigerator overnight. You can begin using them the next day.

CRACKING THE CODE

Millicent Souris

Cooking is a full-contact sport, utilizing all the senses—touch, smell, vision, hearing, and taste. Every time you cook, the food is telling you something. Steak is not a casual affair; cooking it demands a witness. You must attend to the steak. This piece of meat needs us, our mindfulness, to contemplate its sear, its rareness, and its journey to doneness.

Learn how to cook a steak and you simplify your life. You can spend your money on great meat, lovely vegetables, and beautiful wine—getting the good stuff all around—and still not touch the amount of money you would lay down in a restaurant.

MISE YOURSELF

Use a cast iron pan. They conduct heat the best. Well, actually a copper pan conducts heat the best. That's why plumbing uses copper and why junkies steal it. But the cast iron pan you found and nursed back to health for seven dollars, or the one you bought new for thirty dollars, is a lot more attainable than the three-hundred-dollar copper equivalent.

Gather one stick of unsalted butter and cut it into ½-inch-thick chunks, a big sprig of fresh thyme, and one or two smashed cloves of raw garlic. Find a good basting spoon, larger than a tablespoon and not slotted. It should feel good in your hand, with a long, but not-too-long, handle and deep enough to hold a few tablespoons of melted butter. Get a resting plate for your steak (the hot pan does not count) and have a cake tester on hand.

THIS CRAPPY PIECE OF METAL IS GOING TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Cake testers, those little cheap pieces of metal with pastel plastic holders, are the best way to test the temperature of meat. Consider this: You are 98.6 degrees. A medium-rare steak is about 120 degrees before resting. That is warmer than your body, but not incredibly hot. For reference, boiling water is 212 degrees. Test the steak as you would a cake, right in the middle of its eye, then quickly place the metal right under your bottom lip to feel the temperature of it.

I learned to use the cake tester method on the line in a restaurant in Manhattan, where we sold one-hundred-dollar côte de boeufs. I thought I was pretty good cooking these steaks; I had been pressing them to feel for doneness. But then a new guy started, and he used a cake tester and put me to shame. He was from Iowa and came from the meat station at Má Pêche, so his carnivore pedigree was solid. He used a cake tester for everything, and especially on those 42-ounce côte de boeufs.

It dawned on me: I was okay at cooking meat, but not great—probably in the upper-15th percentile—yet not exemplary. Then I faltered. I thought I was doing a great job, but suddenly this new information arrived. Touching the meat gave me an idea of what temperature the meat was, but really it was a cheap thin piece of metal that would tell me exactly what was going on inside the meat. It was the finesse. The piece of metal would transfer the information inside the meat to my body. It was up to me to interpret the information to understand the temperature of the meat. I was overwhelmed. I understood what to do and how to do it, but I didn't understand what it meant. There was so much touching and poking meat, and lots of internal dialogue for a week or two.

And then one day I got it. I finally fucking got it. When the metal felt a little warm but not hot—yes, completely subjective terms—the meat was medium rare. I have a high threshold for pain and heat, but I don't think that applies to the area right under my lip. And if it felt hot, a little nervy and steamy, and a touch shocking, then it was verging towards medium, which my sous chef told me was the real test of meat cookery. If you could cook a medium steak.

FAST AND SIMPLE

Pull your steak out of the refrigerator at least an hour before cooking. Season well with kosher salt. Your seasoning hand should be 5 or 6 inches above the meat as you sprinkle the salt. This allows for more surface area to be seasoned. The salt will pull moisture out of the steak, so dry it before putting it in the pan. A dry steak sears better.

Five minutes before you start cooking, put your big cast iron pan on idle, that is, over medium heat. You want the pan and your oil hot. I like to the get the pan heating over medium heat so the heat disperses throughout the metal, but it's not so hot that the empty pan begins to smoke. Pour a glug of olive oil in the pan; it should cover the bottom. Let the oil gather heat and sit in the pan, increasing in temperature and smoking, before you put the steak in.

The oil will smoke. You want it to. Don't just toss the steak in; that oil is fucking hot. Place the hanging end closest to you and the end you're holding away from you, lest any hot oil splashes.

You should hear a really great sizzling sound. Keep the pan hot—fret not, you are not burning the steak. If the pan needs a little more oil because the meat is getting scorched rather than seared, pour a little oil around the outside edge of the pan. It will heat up as it moves to the middle.

BASTING A STEAK

The best steaks to baste are thicker ones, at least an inch thick. Toss the fresh thyme and a clove or two of smashed garlic on the steak. Put a few pats of butter in the pan, and tilt the pan to a 45-degree angle toward you. The melted butter will pool at the

bottom of the pan, and the steak will keep in constant contact with the pan. Take the basting spoon and begin.

Hold the spoon with your dominant hand and grasp the skillet with your nondominant hand, keeping it at a 45-degree angle the entire time. Spoon the melting and browning butter over the steak. And keep doing it. You should hit a good rhythm with the butter and the basting spoon; it's like hitting a speed bag or counting money: fast, consistent and incredibly satisfying.

This constant motion ensures the butter will not burn. It's close—damn close—but it's not burning. The tilt of the pan means the butter is pooling at the bottom, and the steak has unadulterated searing contact with the pan. The thyme and the garlic come alive with the heat and the butter. Move the steak up higher on the pan if you need more space with the spoon.

Lift the steak with the spoon. How's the sear looking? If it's just gray you have a ways to go. If it's dark brown, turn it over and continue to baste the steak. The butter will enrich the crust as you sear the second side.

THE WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART

Hey, always let meat rest. It's like light rock and a glass of white wine after work: it evens everything out. If your steak is very lean, just red meat and no marbling, pull it out of the pan when it is closer to rare. All carryover food, or food that rests, continues to cook, and with no fat or connective tissue to slow the process, the meat carries over faster.

Think of fat and connective tissue as country roads through the protein; they intercept the heat and slow things down. Without the flavor fat lends the meat, leaner cuts like tenderloin and filet need to be cooked rare or medium rare. Otherwise they get dry. Fat gives grace in cooking time, and flavor. Some cuts benefit from cooking to medium with their fat and tissue. The Delmonico steak is a favorite of mine. It definitely eats better when medium, rather than medium rare. The fattier steaks—porterhouse, strip, and rib eye—offer more flavor, more satisfaction, than the leaner cuts. They are just more robust, so you don't need to eat as much.

Trust your instincts to gauge them. I fear overcooking meat, so I tend to undercook it. You can always cook it more, but you can't cook it less. So I try to focus and really try to interpret the information, the feel, the cake tester temperature, rather than reacting irrationally.

Take the steak out of the pan and let it rest on a plate. Press it and check it with a tester in a few spots. This creates a tactile reference point between how the steak felt when you took it out of the pan and what it looks like and what temperature it is.

This is my completely subjective manner of explaining meat heat: If you feel no temperature, the meat is quite rare, a little under 100 degrees. If it feels a warm, the meat is probably close to medium rare. If it feels hot, a little shocking in its heat, the meat is medium.

When meat is over 140 degrees, over medium, the cake tester is really fucking hot, like so hot you probably cannot hold it to the bottom of your lip for more than a second or two. In conjunction with this heat, the meat will have little if no spring to it when you press it. We call tragically overcooked meat "hammered." I imagine it has something to do with how hard the food feels when you touch it. The more rare a piece of meat is, the farther you can press your finger into it, and the softer it is. As it cooks it becomes firmer, until it is hammered, when the meat is totally hard with no give.

The give is the flavor. It is vital.

AGAINST THE GRAIN

Then let the steak rest for at least 20 minutes. If you can't tell how the grain of the meat runs pull the steak apart a bit to see the direction of the protein. There it is, the grain. Sometimes it changes depending on the cut. Focus on one end of the steak and start there. Cutting against the grain of any meat makes it eat better. When you slice along the grain your meat doesn't eat as well; it's stringy.

If you like what you see, keep slicing. If it is undercooked, stop slicing and put the meat back together. Put it in a 375-degree oven to cook more, for a few minutes. Putting the slices back together is a safeguard against the steak drying out. Nothing you can do if it's overcooked, but understand that you won't do it next time.

Either way, register in your brain what it felt like both by pressing it with your index finger and using the tester to find out the temperature. Then look at the meat, and file this information away in your brain, somewhere in front of all the useless Def Leppard lyrics you have committed to memory for no reason and adjacent to all of your current-day Internet passwords. Information. It is important. That steak you cooked holds a lot of information.

ROASTED PORK LOIN

Caroline Fidanza

A roast is a sane person's solution to feeding lots of people. Unlike a braise, most roasts don't take hours to cook. You can cook the meat to the temperature you want, like medium or medium rare, and the leftovers are easily turned over into snacks or lunch. For something so simple, the little things count; for pork, that means brining the meat. Brining makes the pork juicy and salty-sweet, as well as allowing for a very deep caramelization that will kind of candy the outside of the meat if you sear it on the stove top.

5 # whole pork loin
2 cups water
⅓ cup sugar
¼ cup salt
1 T coriander seeds
1 t black peppercorns
1 t mustard seeds
1 t fennel seeds
1 small bunch thyme
2 bay leaves
1 head garlic, cut in half
1 onion, cut in half

Place the pork loin in a large container. In a pot, add the water, salt, sugar, and spices and bring to a boil. Simmer until the sugar and salt dissolve. Let cool. Pour the brine over the meat and add additional cold water, as necessary, to completely cover the pork. Add the thyme, bay leaves, garlic, and onion. Refrigerate and let brine for 3 days. Remove the pork from the brine, scrape off any clinging spices and herbs, and pat it dry with a towel. Heat a large cast iron pan with olive oil. Carefully place the pork into the hot pan and lower the heat to medium. Brown the pork well; this will happen quickly, given the sugar in the brine. Flip the pork and place in a 350-degree oven. Cook for about 30 minutes, until the pork is firm. Remove from the oven and let it rest before slicing.

RABE OR ROMESCO

Caroline Findanza

Any leftover pork makes a great sandwich or can be served for breakfast with potatoes and eggs. I like to make a sandwich with romesco and arugula. Or with broccoli rabe and mayo.

BROCCOLI RABE

1 bunch broccoli rabe
6 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
pinch chile de árbol
zest and juice of 1 lemon
olive oil

Wash the rabe and, with a little of the water still clinging to it, toss it in a bowl with salt and olive oil. Roast at 350 degrees until wilted. Remove the rabe from the oven and let it cool. Then chop the rabe. Sizzle the garlic in olive oil until it begins to turn golden. Add the chile de árbol to the garlic and then toss over the rabe, along with the lemon zest and juice. Either make your own lemony mayonnaise or doctor up some Hellmann's. Thinly slice the pork and warm the slices in a pan. Spread mayonnaise on both sides of some good crusty bread. Pile on the pork and broccoli rabe.

ROMESCO

4 ancho chiles
4 pasilla chiles
4 New Mexico or Costeño chiles
1 28-ounce can whole plum tomatoes
2 medium onions
12 cloves garlic, peeled
2 slices crusty bread, cubed
½ cup almonds, toasted
½ cup hazelnuts, toasted
2 t pimentón (smoked paprika)
olive oil
sea salt

Heat a cast iron skillet and toast each of the chiles in the dry pan until they puff up and char a little. Pull the stem ends from the chiles and shake out the seeds. Place the toasted chiles in a pot and cover with water. Bring to a boil and then turn off the heat, allowing the chiles to cool in the water. Remove the tomatoes from their liquid and place on a baking sheet, drizzle with olive oil, and sprinkle with salt. Roast in a 400-degree oven until a little charred. Toss the onions with olive oil and salt and place on a baking sheet, then place it in the oven to roast and char as well. Place the whole garlic cloves in a small pot and cover with olive oil. Gently simmer the garlic until it turns golden. Remove the garlic from the pan and then add the bread to the oil. Fry the bread until golden.

Place the garlic, bread, almonds, and hazelnuts in the bowl of a food processor and puree. Add the chiles (reserve the chile water) and onions, and continue to puree. Finally add the tomatoes and pimentón. Puree the mixture adding the water from the chiles as necessary to keep the machine moving. You want a thick, rough puree. Transfer to a bowl and season as necessary with salt and olive oil.

PARKER HOUSE ROLLS

These are little fluffy white flour rolls with no nutritional value, so you know they taste good. Their only purpose in life is for you to smear butter on them and stuff them in your mouth. This recipe yields enough for a 10-inch cast iron or a 13 × 9-inch pan. Just like any other bit of fluff, they are stale the next day, so finish them off.

The first time I made these was on a day when my employer, Emily, informed me she thought every meal should have bread. She was entertaining some old family friends, and gave me the staredown only an octogenarian can muster. I mumbled, "Lady, you are killing me," then found this recipe. I substituted leaf lard for butter. Butter doesn't lend as much lightness. This recipe takes about 3 hours and yields 27 rolls.

2¼ t instant yeast, or 1 package yeast
1 cup whole milk
¼ cup leaf lard
3 T sugar
1½ t kosher salt
1 large egg, room temperature
3½ cups flour, plus more for dusting
½ cup unsalted butter, melted
sea salt

Whisk the yeast with ¼ cup warm water (110 degrees, just a little warmer than your body) in a bowl. Let stand for 5 minutes. Heat the milk in a small saucepan. Put the leaf lard, sugar, and salt in a large bowl. Add the warm milk and break up the fat as much as possible; it will probably still be lumpy. Whisk in the yeast mixture and the large egg, then add the flour. Stir with a wooden spoon (this is where wooden spoons shine!) until a dough forms.

Turn the dough out on a floured table and dust your hands with flour. Knead the dough for a few minutes until smooth, about 4 minutes. Lightly oil a large bowl and put the dough inside. Cover with a towel and let sit in a warm place for an hour and a half, until the dough doubles in size.

Once the dough has doubled, punch it down. Seriously, this is the best thing you're going to do all day. Separate the dough into 3 pieces, each the same size. Roll each piece into a ball, then roll each ball out into a long rectangle. The goal of this rectangle is 12 inches long (one LP length) and 6 inches wide (about a hand's length). Melt the butter while this is going on. Grease the pan with the butter.

Cut each piece of rectangle into thirds lengthwise, about 2 inches wide, then across, about 4 inches long. Each rectangle will give you 9 pieces. Brush the bottom half of each piece with butter and fold each piece almost in half, leaving a little overhang. This little shim in the dough allows you to stack the rolls a bit, like how shingles on a roof overlap one another. If you are using a circular pan, start by placing the rolls near the perimeter, then work your way toward the center, making sure there is no space in between the rolls as you shingle them. I've discovered that it doesn't make a difference if they are odd shapes. If you are using a rectangular pan, make sure you follow the same concept of shingle coverage.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Cover the rolls and let them chill for anywhere between 30 minutes and a few hours. Brush with the rest of the melted butter and season with sea salt. Bake for about 30 minutes or until golden brown and puffy. Serve immediately and eat them all.

THE ONLY LIVING GREEK ON DEER ISLAND

Millicent Souris

Every morning is a chilly one, some more than others. My cabin has no heat. The guides' house is where the cooks, cleaners, and fishing and hunting guides of Deer Island have lived over the past century. The room I sleep in is my favorite room in the world, with white-washed horizontal wooden slats on the wall that make me feel like I'm living in a boardinghouse in *The Last Picture Show*, while actually I am more akin to the world-wise cook in *Hud*. The adjacent laundry room houses an archaic washing machine and the most beautiful three-compartment sink. I take an intense pleasure in doing my laundry.

The island is lousy with old wool blankets, which carry us through the nights and some entire days. Then there are fireplaces, grand old things, hell-bent on heating as well as decorating. On especially cold mornings, Emily stands wrapped in a blanket in front of the fire. Scott, the caretaker, meticulously constructs the fire-to-be every morning, alternating layers of newspaper on the bottom, then kindling, then logs. He accumulates the firewood throughout the year, downing trees and splitting logs, though his arduous stash quickly dwindles through the summer months because of everyone's aging bones. It is July.

When I am unable to shake the chill, I know it is a soup day. I start the stock when I have my coffee so it has a chance to develop flavor by noon. Lunch is at one, and on cold or rainy days everyone tends to linger a little longer by the fire in the dining room after breakfast, not caring about sitting on the dock or finding the bits of sunshine that might come through the clouds.

Last night's roasted chicken becomes today's lunch. I pick the meat from the bones, about half a chicken. Enough to do something with, but what will that be? My trusty beans are completely dry. Besides, there's been a rumble from one of the older people about too much fiber in her diet. I have one onion, a handful of scallion ends, almost a full bunch of celery, and some carrots. I didn't plan on making a soup, and it's past the time I can boat to the mainland to run any errand. It's still early in the growing season—there's no tomatoes or cornor squash or anything that can just be tossed in some stock, heated and called good. But this is soup, for Christ's sake. This right here, this moment, is the nature of
soup making.

I've got some parsley, because I always have some parsley, and a small bit of fresh dill. Really vibrant stuff from the Fledging Crow hippies. Dill has such a fresh punch to it, a powerful spring. There is an incredible amount of flavor in the stalk. I use the dill and parsley stems in the chicken stock. The warm dill fragrance feels Greek to me. Which is perfect, because I am making avgolemono soup, the comfort food of my life.

I grew up in a bar north of Baltimore city in Towson, Maryland. My father's parents emigrated from Greece and opened Souris' Restaurant in 1934, right after Prohibition ended. My father changed the name of the business to Souris' Saloon, lured by the easiness of booze. Over time the kitchen in the bar, past the booths and restrooms, was used more for storage than cooking. The flattop, sandwich station, and microwave behind the bar saw most of the action. Popcorn for the regulars, and hamburgers for sale. Only once I saw anyone cook in the real kitchen; it was my Yia Yia, and she was making avgolemono soup in a pot as tall as she was, cracking two eggs at a time.

Having no rich history and knowledge of Greek food is one of my many shames. Yia Yia was born and raised on the island of Kythira. She and my grandfather moved to Towson, opened a restaurant, had four kids, and became pillars in both the American and Greek communities. Yia Yia was called Mama Souris by everybody, and the bar was the Towson meeting place. My father and his sisters grew up in that restaurant—"the store" is what we called it—and in the decades to follow, so did I along with my cousins and sisters. Souris' was the center of town; everybody came to see Mama Souris for some homemade food, a drink, and some advice. Hell, she was Spiro Agnew's translator for Baltimore's thriving Greek community when he was still a local politician.

Our interests, common sense, and time are rarely on the same page. This is a cruel truth. I never learned about traditional Greek island food when my grandmother was alive. I have no true culinary legacy. I envy the people with handed-down recipes and their gilt-tinted memories of quality time in the kitchen. The hushed, precious knowledge. I was too busy with Space Shuttle pinball and Frogger, earning quarters from beleaguered bartenders trying to keep me occupied. I guess we will always have Spiro Agnew. His signed White House picture, at least, which she placed facedown in the bottom drawer of her vanity. She placed it there after Agnew resigned in disgrace. He was dead to her.

Avgolemono is lemon chicken rice soup and has a lush creaminess, yet there is no cream or butter. This sublime texture is key to its healing capabilities and satisfaction. I finally discovered what makes this soup sing. Half the rice is blended with hot stock and the juice of two lemons until smooth, then mixed into tempered eggs. This is the texture, the lemony dream.

Everybody loves the soup—even Henry, the kid on the island. The richness of the blended rice and egg with the lift of the lemon and the dill flavor in the stock is perfect for the chill. And we all want more; we fight over the leftovers until I hide the last bowl for myself.

Soup is greater than the sum of its parts, and avgolemono is a perfect example of this cliché. It stretches all of its ingredients and transforms them. Everybody knows your grandmother is the best cook in the house, but rarely in the professional kitchen. Some Yia Yias are both.

AVGOLEMONO SOUP

I had two leftover roasted chickens from the night before. I picked the meat off the bones; it yielded about 3 cups of meat. And I used the carcasses to make stock. That's what soup is supposed to be; the odds and ends of the kitchen become a meal. This soup doesn't need chicken in it; the stock is just fine. But it becomes a meal with the meat. For this soup you make stock, then you cook rice in the stock with some wine and begin the soup in another pot. You blend some of the rice with the hot stock and lemon and stream eggs in, then slowly add to the soup.

1 chicken

1 white onion, or a bunch of allium discards (scallion ends, leek tops, etc.)

2 carrots

2 celery stalks

2 garlic cloves

dill stems, if you've got them

parsley stems, if you've got them

1 T black peppercorns

2 bay leaves

olive oil

1 large white onion, or 2 medium size

4 stalks celery, including any inner leaves

2 cups white rice, rinsed

3 fresh eggs, room temperature

2 lemons

3 quarts chicken stock

1 cup white wine

¼ cup dill fronds

kosher salt and black pepper

Cover the chicken with cold water by a few inches and bring to a boil over high heat. Once the water boils, turn it down to a low simmer. With tongs, turn the chicken over, cover the pot, and gently cook for an hour.

Dice the onion, carrots, and celery stalks to create the mirepoix. Smash the garlic. Take the chicken out of the pot and pull the meat off the bones in big chunks. Put the bones and skin back in the pot with the aromatics and mirepoix. Bring to a boil, skim off the scum, and turn down to a simmer. Let it simmer for at least an hour, or two if you can.

If you are using only carcasses or bones, skip the first step. Cover the bones, mirepoix, and aromatics with cold water. Bring to a boil, skim the surface, and take down to a gentle simmer. The stock is done when it sticks in the back of your throat as you smell it. Strain well before using in the soup.

Cook the rice with 1 cup of white wine and 1 cup of the chicken stock. Season with salt before you cover the pot. Add more stock if necessary. It's OK if the rice is soupy; you just don't want the rice to blow out.

Dice the onions into ½-inch cubes. Cut the celery on the bias ¼-inch thick. Whisk the eggs in a small bowl. Squeeze the lemons in another small bowl, picking out any seeds. On a cutting board, chop the celery leaves and dill together. Now, get a pot hot and add a few tablespoons of olive oil. Sauté the onions. Season a bit with salt. Add the celery and dill mixture after a few minutes. Stir a few times and let it sweat, about 3 minutes. Add the stock and let it come to a boil, then drop to a bare simmer. Season with salt.

Take half the rice and put it in a blender. Cover by a few inches with the hot stock. It's important that it is warm or hot. Blend, add the lemon juice, and mix until smooth. With the machine on medium high, add to eggs in a slow steady stream so they don't curdle.

Meanwhile, we now have the beginnings of the soup, as the onions, celery, and stock have been idling over the heat. Turn it off and stir the liquid to release some of its heat. Keep the blender on medium and temper some hot stock from this pot into the mixture to thin it out. Then slowly add this mixture back into the soup pot.

This part is very important: Eggs can be cruel mistresses. They don't love heat. Make sure to slowly add the whisked eggs to the hot stock and to have the pot off the heat when you do so. And that mixture should be very warm—as hot as can be without scrambling the eggs.

Add the remaining rice. Add the shredded chicken, if you have it. Add an absurd—absurd!—amount of freshly cracked pepper. Taste for seasoning. Finish with dill and celery leaves.

BUTTERMILK BISCUITS

Yields 12 biscuits, or many more tiny ones.

4 cups flour, plus extra for rolling out the dough
1 T + 2 t baking powder
2½ t kosher salt
1 cup cold unsalted butter or cold leaf lard, or a mixture of the two
1¾ cup buttermilk
1 egg, beaten, for an egg wash
sea salt
raw sugar

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Sift the dry ingredients together. Cut the fat into ¼-inch pieces and scatter over the dry ingredients and quickly incorporate into the flour. Do this by pinching each piece of butter or lard. Don't break down the fat too much; we want the fat big so the layers of biscuit are evident. Add the buttermilk, scattering it across the mix. Use a rubber spatula or wooden spoon to lightly mix the dough until the buttermilk is absorbed.

Turn the bowl out on the counter, with all the bottom dry bits on top. It seems a mess, but pull it all together and knead it a bit, about 20 times, until it becomes cohesive. You're not making pasta or bread here, people; these are biscuits. It's a primitive mess of fat and flour barely held together with buttermilk. So don't knead the shit out of it, just until it comes together. Then roll it out to about an inch thick and cut with a sharp knife. Your knife should be sharper than any biscuit cutter. Cutting the biscuits into squares does two things: it cuts down on waste and allows for greater height and flakiness.

Put the biscuits on a greased sheet tray. Brush with the egg wash and sprinkle with sea salt, raw sugar, or both. Bake. Check at ten minutes; they're probably done between 15 and 20 minutes, when the biscuits have risen and the bottoms are golden brown.

Raw biscuit dough freezes well. I cut them into squares, freeze them on a baking sheet, and once they're frozen, put them in a freezer bag. Thaw before baking them in the same manner.

FISHING WITH HENRY

Vince Anderson

During my week on Deer Island, if you were looking for me, chances were I was on the dock, beer in hand, a Styrofoam container of worms next to me, sitting on a plastic Adirondack chair, with a pole in the water. I need to make this clear: I had no idea what I was doing. I hadn't practiced the art of fishing for a good thirty-five years, yet here on this magical island, I found myself nearly obsessed.

One of the beauties of fishing is that you can get by without having the slightest clue. On one level you don't have to have any experience to do it. Anybody can throw a hook in the water and eventually catch a fish. Luck is a big part of fishing. Henry, my eight-year-old fishing companion, a member of the family who were our gracious hosts, demonstrated this. In our first few hours fishing together, he caught five fish. I caught none.

I was patient, determined to let the fish come to me. Henry was not patient. He ran all over the deck, jumping from position to position, peppering me with a series of

annoying "would you rather" questions. You know the game: "Would you rather be a cheetah who poops a lot, or a lion with bad eyesight." My answer was clear. I would rather not be asked these questions; I would rather that he leave me alone and go find another adult to annoy.

Thankfully, fishing is a great equalizer. My annoyance at him catching more fish than I waned as did his hyperactivity. We became friends and ended up enjoying each other's company and catching quite a few fish together. We both eventually fell into a rhythm and slowly learned things about fishing, joke telling, and being human.

Being patient with Henry made me a better fisherman. When you are fully attentive to someone, you end up being attentive to a lot of things. In this case, I ended up paying attention to Henry, which led me to paying attention to the nature that surrounded us.

That led me to paying attention to the fish, which we then caught. And that led me to paying attention to how we prepared and cooked them.

Henry and I brought our fish up from the lake. A couple of trout and a few perch. We put them in a pail of water while we prepared the grill. I told Henry, "Always pay attention to the grill." Never use lighter fluid, unless you want your food to taste like lighter fluid. Use a charcoal starter chimney that allows you to get the coal just right, with only paper and a match to start it.

I like working with two different grills. In this case, I let one grill be for the vegetables and one for the fish. For the vegetables I put the lit coals on only one side of the grill. The reason for this was the corn. I like to roast corn in its husk.

I removed the corn silk by peeling the husks down enough to expose the corn, then removing the silk, making sure I kept the husks on the corn. Then I soaked the corn for about an hour in saltwater, which helps the corn retain water while flavoring it at the same time. After the saltwater soak, I took the corn out of the water and pulled the husks back into place. Then I put the corn on the side of the grill without charcoal, covered the grill with the lid and let the corn cook for about a half hour.

Once we got that done, we lit up the second chimney of charcoal for the fish. For vegetables I like using regular charcoal; for fish I use lump charcoal because it burns faster and hotter.

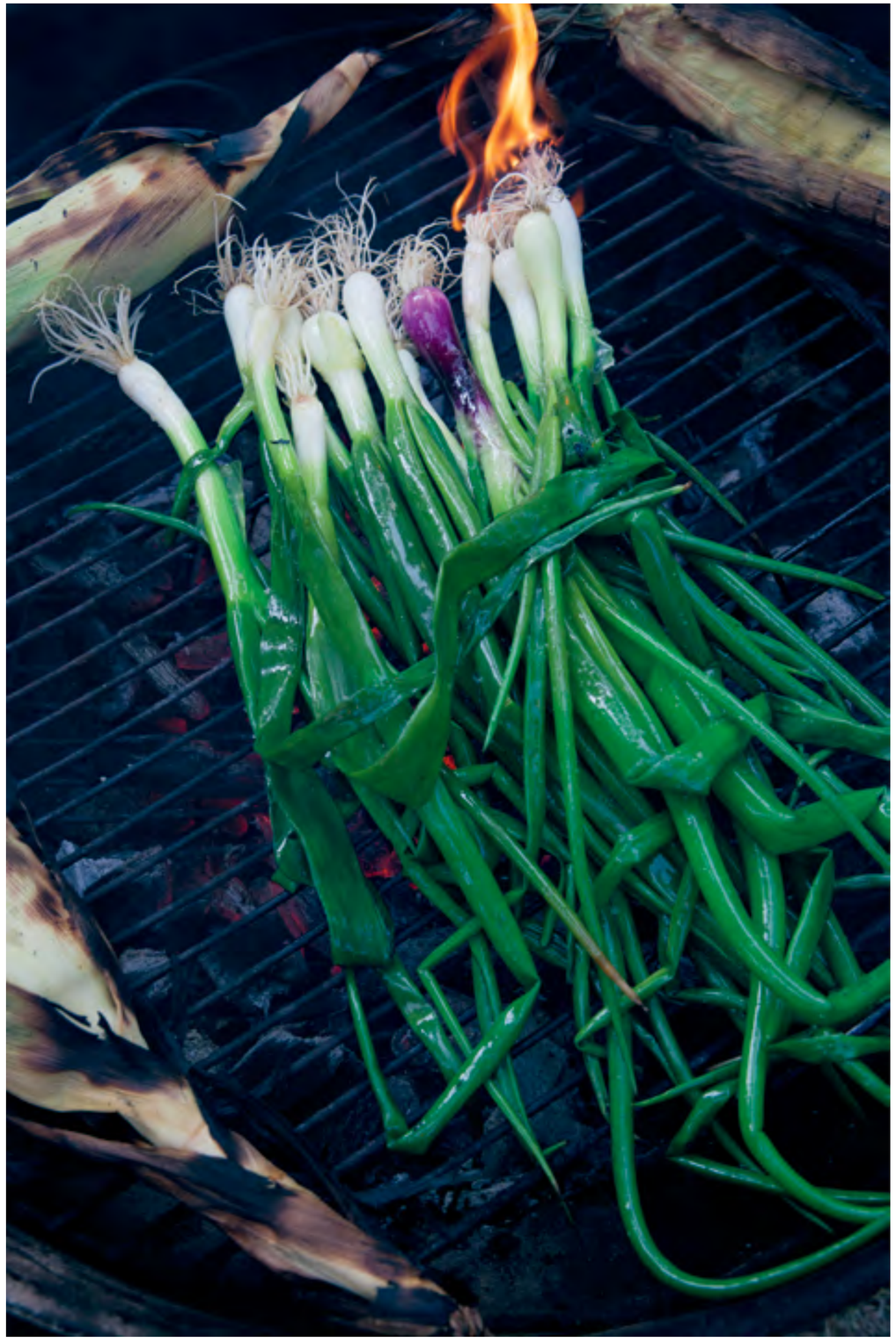
I let the lump charcoal burn in the chimney until I saw flames dancing on top. For fish, I have found that this is the best time to throw the charcoal into the grill. We then let the coal burn in the grill until it was gray and red. At that point, we covered the grill.

While this was happening, we gutted the fish. This was easy work. Just a knife to the belly, clean out the guts, and rinse with water. I like leaving the scales on. Fish cook better that way on the grill. We put a little salt and pepper inside the fish, stuffed them with parsley and lemon rounds, and added just a little olive oil on the scales. We put the fish directly on the grill and left them uncovered because they would get too hot. We grilled them for five minutes on each side.

At this point we threw some scallions in with the corn, on the side with the coals, with just olive oil, salt, and pepper. We put the cover back on to avoid flare-ups. We cooked them for about seven minutes, flipping once.

Using two grills guarantees that all food can come off the grill at the same time, hot and ready to eat. Get a baguette, slice it, and put butter pats on each slice. It makes a great vehicle to get the butter on the corn. Ring the bell. Eat.

I like paying attention to details. I like having ways of doing things. I like learning these ways. Attention to the process calms the soul. I like passing these rituals on, as they were passed on to me. My rituals of summer are sacred to me. Learning how to do them right is important. Be it fishing, cooking over fire, or reading a mystery novel in the hammock after dinner, these rituals allow us to participate fully in the gift of summer and all of its fleeting glory.



I trust my instincts and cook not on a whim but with flexibility.
To take a look around, to feel and smell the air, to be present,
to become a better cook, because instead of staying the course,
I allow the course to reveal itself every day.

Just cook. Don't overthink it. Just cook what the island wants.