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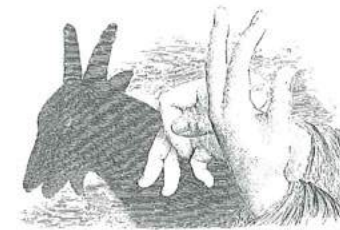
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the House by Mark Firth

Yesterday I went to the slaughterhouse. They deal exclusively with locally raised naturally fed animals. As we were surveying the huge composting operation out back, a farmer pulled up in a pickup truck with four sheep, two pigs and a goat. His wife was chatting away to the animals as if they were pets and the fact that they were being dropped off to face the reaper seemed unimportant. It was as though the pigs and goats were simply entering a second phase of life by providing food for the family that had raised them. I spoke for a while to the farmer who has a small holding outside Ithaca. He drops the animals off and a week later picks them up packaged for freezing and for sale to a few local restaurants and a small farmers market. The total lack of sentimentality surprised me. It struck me, as we continue to shrink the distance between ourselves and the food we eat and cut out the additives and waste that agribusiness necessitate we begin to experience life, death, growth and rebirth on a level that must have been common among our forefathers.

Later, we were shown the grass meadows where the animals spend their last days and weeks. Twenty acres of lush fields stretched out just above a babbling brook. Then we made our way to the "killing floor", a large white room with light streaming through the window despite the wet and rainy day. Three men wearing rubber pants and two of them sporting Budweiser hunting caps welcomed us. There was a monastic feeling to the place, a spirit of reverence almost, and as one animal was led into an enclosed pen a hush enveloped the room. A small hatch above the pen slid open and as the steer looked around licking its lips a sharp crack issued out of a short rifle. Two thousand pounds of steer dropped to the floor instantly.

What followed was as efficient as it was stunningly vivid. A chain was attached to the steer's hind legs and it was hoisted into the air. A large steel bucket was placed underneath the still twitching animal and with a single vertical stroke a thin curved knife cut the animal's throat. The blood gushed down, filling the bucket in a matter of seconds. A few more deft cuts and the head was removed and placed on a rack. The cheeks were removed and an omnipresent USDA inspector examined the skull for any signs of disease or cancers. Meanwhile a shallow wheelbarrow was placed under the body and as one butcher worked on removing the skin, another made a slit the full length of the body. The entire contents came free with a few precise cuts and dropped into the

barrow. The heart and liver were separated and again the USDA inspector moved in.

After each procedure the floor was sluiced down with hot water washing the blood away in a crimson haze. The skin and hooves were removed and tossed into a barrel. Not a word had been spoken. The entire carcass was rinsed and rubbed down then cut in half, sprayed with white vinegar to sterilize, stamped with an inspection marker and rolled into a cool down fridge.

I looked at the head, nerves still twitching before it was whisked away. Due to "mad cow" all heads and spinal columns are destroyed after inspection, now deemed unfit to eat, sacrilege in some cultures... The hoofs, bones and even the skins are composted. After a short cigarette break, during which the butchers extolled the virtues of Sarah Palin and I politely tried to change the subject, a second cow was led into the pen.

After watching this engrossing yet morbid ballet another three times, each one from beginning to end not taking more than twenty minutes, I was beckoned onto the platform over the pen. A large steer looked at me, its big mournful eyes flickered around the room. I was handed the rifle, "right between the eyes" I was instructed. Maybe I had been numbed by the ritual, the calmness, and the complete lack of drama. I took the rifle into my hands without hesitating, steadied myself against the cold steel crate, muttered, "sorry buddy" under my breath and squeezed the trigger. The animal reared up, mooing loudly, now scared.

"Too low," my now fellow executioner said calmly, taking the rifle from me and dropping the cow with a swift shot. He looked at my pale face, "don't worry, we miss sometimes too."

It was humbling, to say the least, that because of me the animal had to suffer those extra seconds. Visions of bright scarlet adrenaline-tainted meat flashed through my mind. Once my legs stopped shaking I climbed down, stooping, once again apologized to the now still steer, patting it lightly, "Sorry Buddy." The irony at my choice of words only occurred to me later as I tossed a sleepless night away.

The next day I came to terms with what had transpired and was left with the thought that every piece of meat I had ever eaten had been killed by someone, sometimes, often, less humanely. And that the life led previously by the animal, like the pig and goat from Ithaca, is how we redeem ourselves when we come to take it back.



by Lindsay Debach

Slaughter Daughter

It's a shame that we so naturally accept the circumstances into which we are born. By the time we are old enough to go to preschool, we've already acknowledged the people and places around us as our world, and a few years later, we take that world, in all of its uniqueness, for granted. When puberty hits we more often than not regret, despise, and try to conceal all which implicates us. It could be our country of birth, the language that we speak, or the color of our skin. What takes time to realize is that all those bits and pieces comprise the person we see in the mirror every day. In my case, I took for granted my father's occupation, and in so doing, failed to see the profound influence his work had on my way of life. His unglamorous post ultimately showed me that the details of our past need to be accepted in all of their glory before we can see clearly the road ahead.

My dad boasts that my uncle could skin a cow at the age of 8, and he at the age of 10. My father is a butcher. Like his father before him, who started the Leona Meat Plant in 1963, he and my uncle have been in the meat business their whole lives. There was no question who would take over the shop once my grandfather retired. My dad and uncle became managers of the place in the early 80's.

Recently, Leona began raising their own grass fed beef, a process that we've all had an active part in, be it watering the cows or mowing the pastures. Indeed, the little butcher shop we tenderly refer to as "Leona Meats" has always been quite a family affair. My cousins and I would, since we were toddlers, walk in to visit our dads at work, casually passing the sterile white tables strewn with knives, the open case of chickens, and the bits of raw hamburger meat on the floor.

Since I was old enough to remember, I've known what the inside of a cow looks like, the way a pig twitches as it dies and know that there are exactly 50 cocktail wieners to a pound. I've never had to worry about going hungry and to this day I've never ordered a steak in a restaurant, knowing I can get the best beef at home. Often we'd watch as people came to drop off animals for the slaughter: cows, pigs, sheep, and, on rare occasions, even ostriches would stare blankly from behind the

white slats of the holding pens. Whenever friends came over, the visit always included a trip down to the shop, where they'd gawk in amazement at the sides of beef hanging in the cooler, the cow heads in the bone barrel out back and the puddles of blood that got washed off the kill floor. But the fact is, the blood stains on my dad's white apron and coat never deterred me from giving him a hug. I accepted the fact that my dad cut carcasses all day, that the dog licked his shoes clean some nights when he came home from work and that the knives in our kitchen were always sharp. Being a vegetarian is something that I'd never be able to do with an honest heart. Meat has been my bread and butter.

However, adolescence is inevitable. Encounters with the meat plant evolved from unwonted to routine to detestable. The reason: we were now required to work there. I don't remember how old I was the first time my dad asked me to help out in the shop, but I remember it involved measuring bits of cubed beef into one-pound bags. At first I thought it was kind of cool. The oversized butcher coat and apron that I wore swathed me in white and I felt important. But after ten minutes of grabbing the chilled meat chunks and fumbling them into their plastic receptacle, I was-to put it gently- over it. My hands felt like they were going to fall off, and the smell of raw beef was giving me a taint of nausea.

Working at the meat plant never did regain its novelty. From 5th grade on, my brother, sister, cousins and I spent our last day of school each year in one of the plant's coolers doing what we came to refer to as "clamming." While the rest of our class was out enjoying the first hours of summer vacation, the Debach kids were stuck in a meat cooler freezing our fingers off and trying not to cut ourselves on broken clam shells for the Vets Club annual bake off. In December, it was ring bologna. If we needed money, if dad needed help, if mom wanted us out of the house, we'd work at the meat plant. There was always something to do, and if you couldn't find anything then, as dad used to say, "you can always slice bacon!"

During high school, in order to afford a class trip to England, I made the jump from part-time help to full-time employee when I agreed to work for the entire summer in the retail part of the plant. Somewhere between counting out Hormel

Cocktail Smokies and slicing the chipped beef I decided that as soon as I could help it, I wouldn't ever have anything to do with this place again. I saw butchering as a dirty, smelly, vomit-inducing occupation. One so unglamorous that I was embarrassed to tell people what my dad did for a living.

Still I couldn't seem to erase the Leona Meat Plant from my identity. During move-in day at college, my roommate gave a silent stare in the direction of the cardboard container of books I'd just plopped on the floor. They were in a huge box that I had taken from the meat plant that had probably in its initial incarnation housed a rib eye or a top round. "Is that blood?" I looked up from unpacking to tell my curious roommate that yes, it was blood, and that no, it wasn't human. My dad was a butcher. Move-out day of that same year gave me an even harsher reminder of my past. On the afternoon that my parents were to come get me at school, the family car happened to be having some motor trouble. I was mortified when my mother and father arrived outside my dorm in a refrigerated meat truck. The "Leona Meat Plant" insignia shone boldly against the other families minivans and SUVs. I transferred to a college out in Chicago, a good 15-hour drive from home and from the family business. I came home less often, talked to dad less often, and little by little, managed to conceal my bloody roots.

Throughout college I tried not to think about the butcher shop and the way I thought it invaded my childhood. But sometimes life's circumstances have a way of making you confront your demons. The summer after I graduated, I moved home. Confused and daunted by the prospect of choosing a career path, I opted to work at the one place where I knew I'd always have a job: Leona Meat Plant. But this time I wasn't bagging chickens or wrapping ground beef. I worked in the office, answering calls, chatting with customers about whether or not they wanted their pork shoulder cut into steaks or left as a roast and wondering what the hell I was doing with my life. So, I left. In May I packed my bags to come to New York, a city where no one would ever know that my first job involved raw meat and a deli slicer. I would be rid of that identity for good.

I was initially swallowed by the excitement of living in New York, a new job, a new social circle. But upon each successive visit home, I'd be met with a father and former boss who never ceased to remind me of what I had left behind. I'd known for a while that the family business wasn't anything ordinary: the daily routine might involve capturing a runaway goat for slaughter or packaging cow tongue. But it wasn't until I'd been in a place where my identity was no longer defined by the butcher shop that I realized there was something more to it.

It was about two months after I'd moved to the city. On a hot and muggy July visit home I took my dad's invitation to come down to the pasture to help herd our grazing beefers from one end of the field to the other so they could eat fresh grass. Trapsing behind dad in overs-sized muck boots and dodging the occasional cowpie, I watched him as he opened one gate and closed another, talking to the cows in a half-serious voice. He laughed as they literally ran into the pasture with fresh grass. He was so invested in it, these were more than just animals, this was his and my uncle's pride and joy. And that's when it hit me: maybe this butchering thing wasn't just the bloody mess that I saw on the killfloor. There was something dignified about it. My dad knew this trade inside and out; from the cows' favorite type of clover to how to properly tie-up a crown roast. My uncle too, they've perfected upon their craft for their entire lives, and the skills that they have are not only rare, but foster a tradition that began before sustainability became a commodity. I came back to the city after that trip with the notion that there was something more to what

my dad did, and that I would be open to learning more about it.

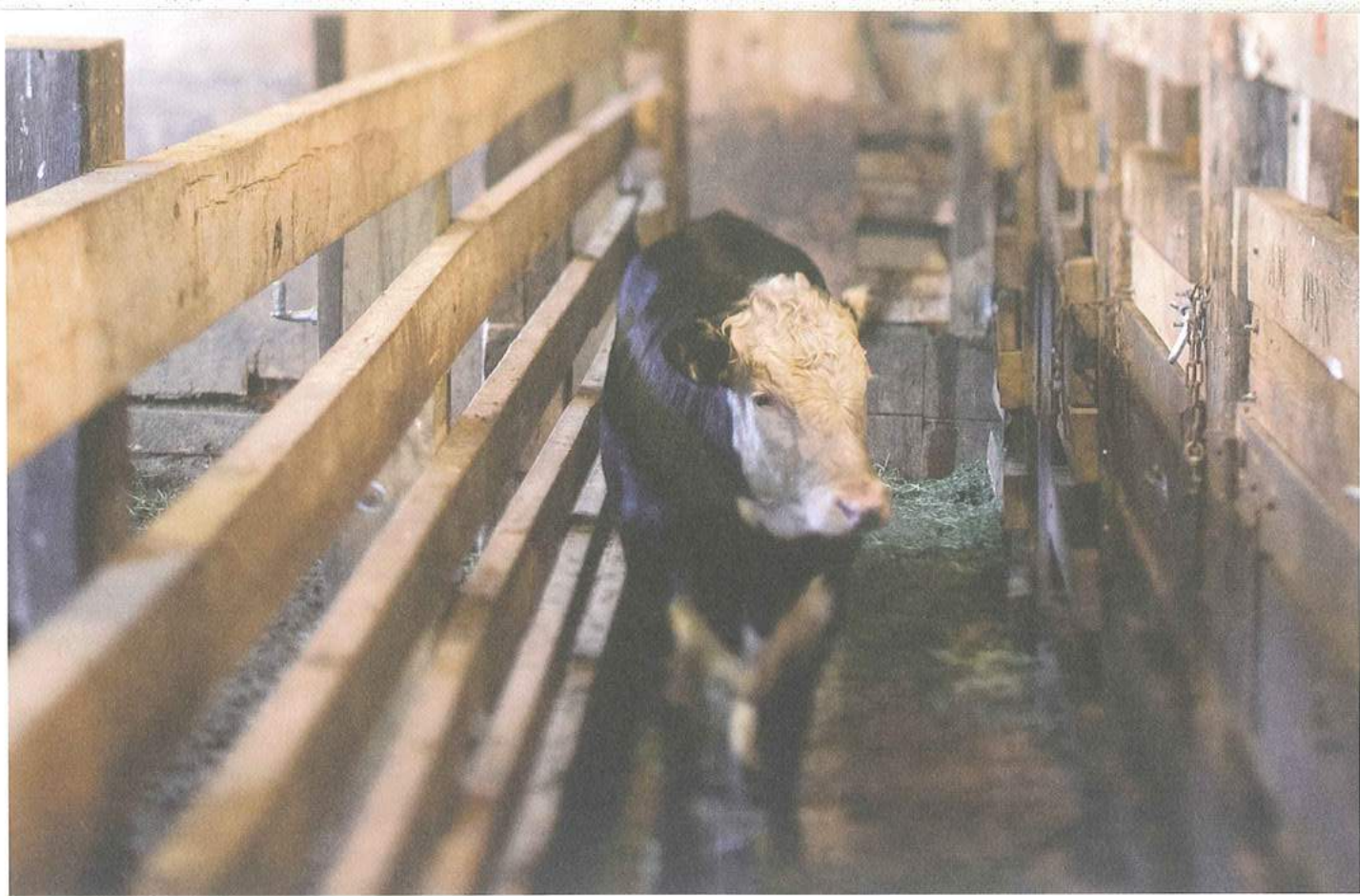
I stumbled into this understanding again one winter night. The snow blew across the thin spotlight beam and illuminated the pasture before me. My uncle and my dad yell muffled orders to each other and herded a hearty group of cows through a gate and to the 1200lb. bail of hay. The rowdy bunch eagerly stepped up to the mountain of food and began grazing, ignoring the blizzard that dusted their thick winter coats. The men looked on like proud parents. Parents preparing to kill their children. This would be one of their last meals. In a few days, they would be taken from pasture and into the slaughter house where they'll receive a blank shot to the head, hung upside down. Each will be bled, skinned and cut into 500 lb. sides of beef and put in a cooler. Ten days after that, they'll be boned out, cut into steaks, ground into burger or sausage, wrapped, labeled, boxed, and stuck in a freezer until their owner comes to pick them up.

I followed my Dad into the meat plant where he and his brother were eager to see the beef killed earlier that day. In a small walk-in cooler with sterile white sides and a cement floor, hung six or so sides of beef. They are heavy oblong slabs of waxy congealed fat and pink muscle.

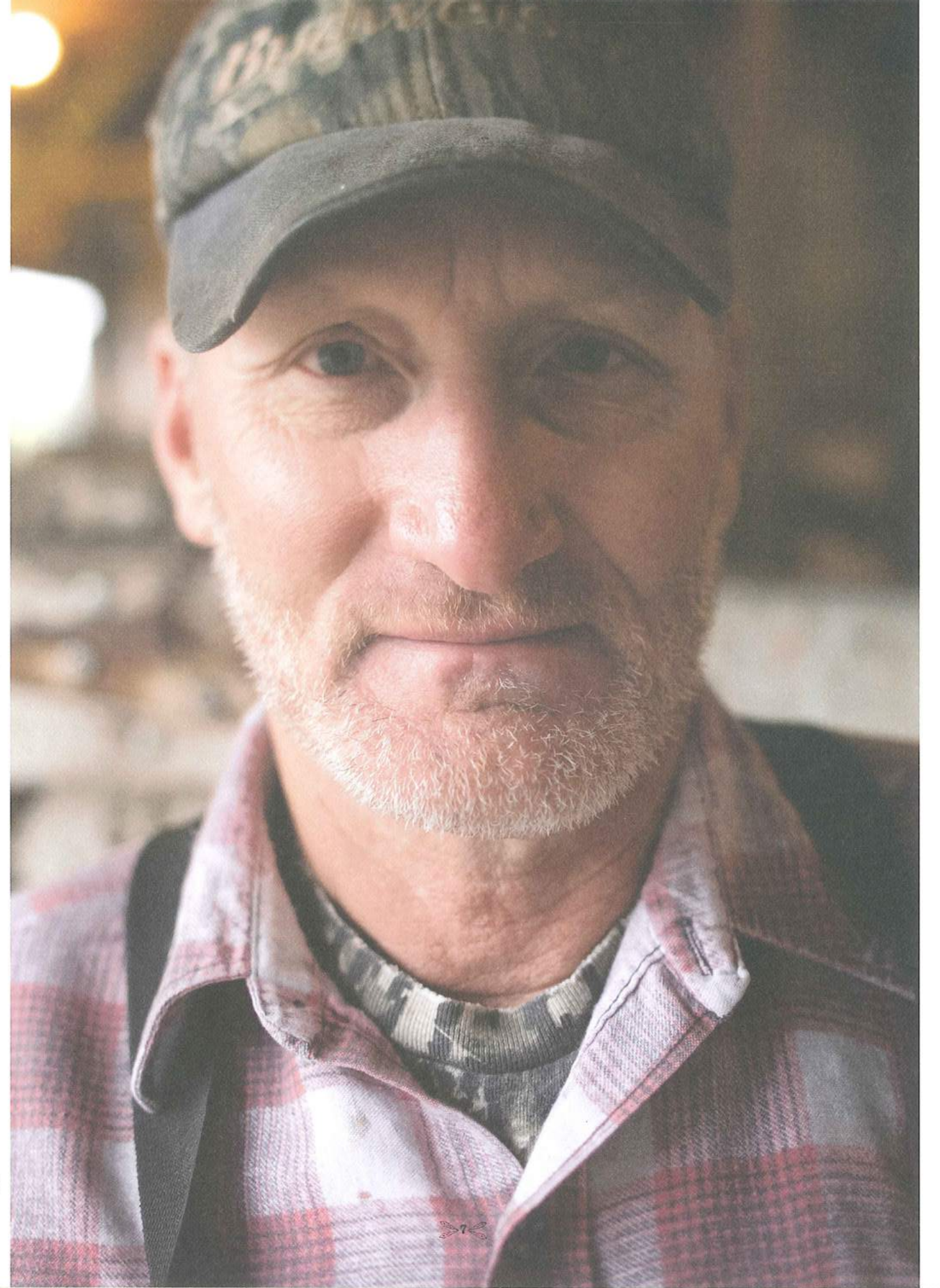
"They're filled out nicely...this one looks really good...nice cover on the shoulder...bet we could get at least 1200 for him." It's a language I've heard all of my life, but that I still don't understand. Or rather, one that I never chose to learn. That of killing, meat and commerce. I pulled off my glove and reached out to touch one of the chilling carcasses. It was lukewarm and sticky under my hand. A hard coating had formed in the cooler's chill, almost like an orange that's been peeled and left out. It seems my dad and uncle can read these lines of fat and muscle as a map. Their hands don't just graze over flesh, but over a canvas that they've been priming for decades.

Never have I given a thought to the process, the craft, and the skill behind the blood and guts. Until now. We talk about that period in our lives where we "find ourselves," but I never thought it meant making peace with what your father does for a living. Since I was old enough to remember, I've seen the butcher shop floors covered with blood and bits of fat, I've seen the red stains on my dad's white apron and coat. I've been embarrassed of the sordid conditions my father worked in. And all the time I have been surrounded by true craftsmen my whole life, and I never even realized it. It's when you stop running from the inevitable that you are able to turn around and face it. I'm coming now to terms with the "slaughter daughter" that I am, the owner and keeper of a childhood working in a butcher house.

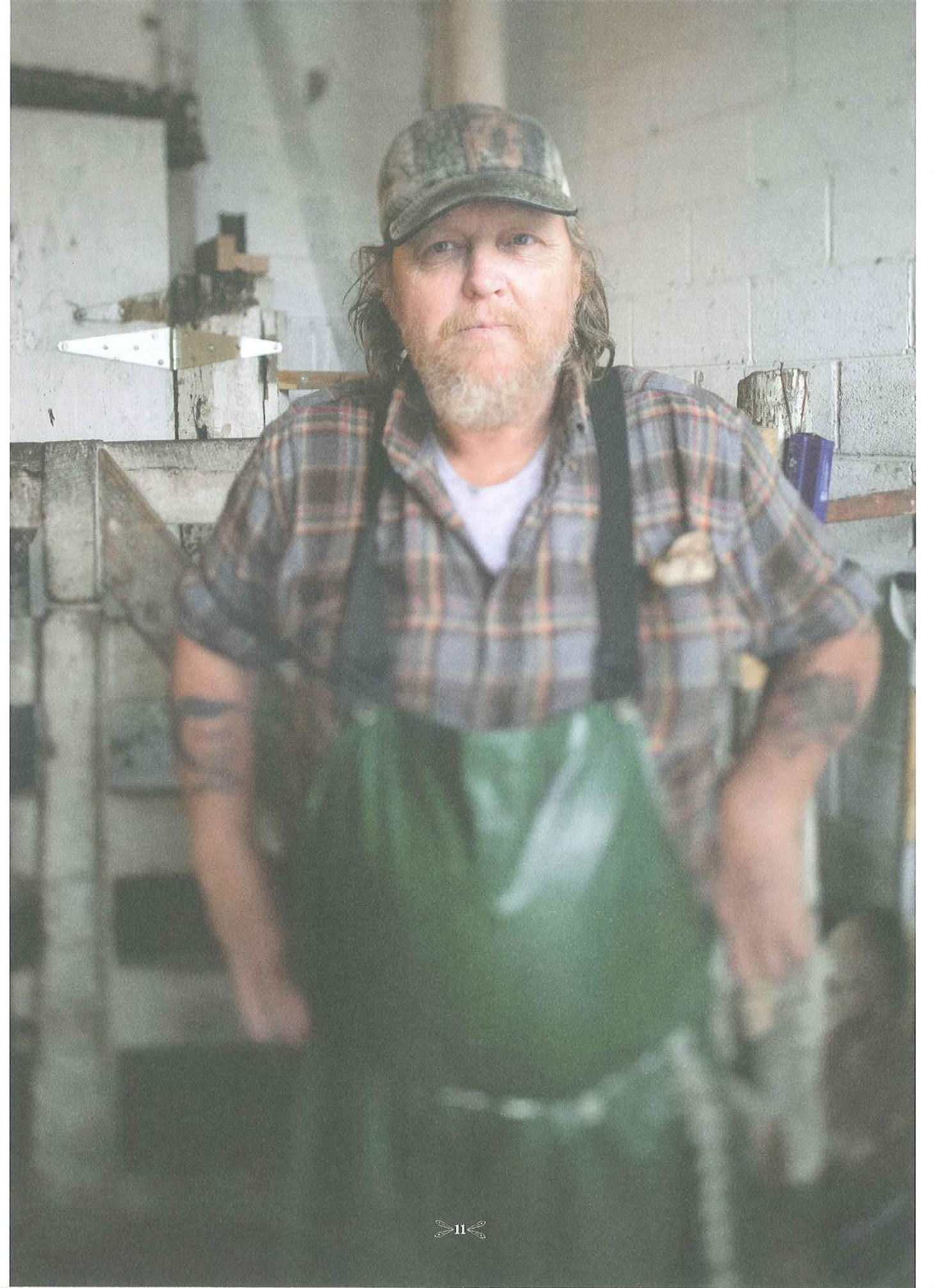




Leona *by Bill Phelps*







CHICKENS ARE FOOD



by Mya Spalter

I poked my bald little head into every store front in the East Village looking for a job. One door belched out a cloud of incense smoke when I cracked it open. This, to me, was a good sign. I admit I wore black velvet and many necklaces simultaneously. I was an eyeliner enthusiast. I liked novels about vampires. I entered a cramped room filled with books, some by Alistair Crowley and many by a lady called Silver Ravenwolf. The walls were lined with racks of candles and rows upon rows of herbs with arcane names. It was an apothecary, in short- an emporium designed to serve New York City's witchy needs for enchanted oils and candles in the shapes of cats, penises, etc. They hired me on the spot.

"Whatever you're sending out, it's working lady," the owner told me.

I showed up the next day, the littlest witch-in-training. It was my job to make spells for people, and dispense the necessary items for them to preform their own rites, or what have you. I'm the crone you visit in legend of Zelda who gives you the potion you need to get through the next level. Only we weren't licensed for potions. We specialized in candles. We would carve symbols on them and coat them in different blends of essential oils and burn incense that corresponded to the customer's intention.

Now, this is why I love the pagans: a spell in its broadest definition is a wish that you send off into the atmosphere like when you blow on a dandelion or break the bone from the center of the chicken. But a spell is a wish with a destination, a god or goddess or archetype that handles just your sort of problem. Pretty soon it was clear that my job was more about amateur psychology and handicrafts than turning lead into gold and mind control. I had to break it down for people pretty often. We don't cast spells on people- we just hang out with lonely gamers and metal heads and help them have better self-esteem so they can get dates. If we have to do that by evoking a deity and decorating a candle with "ancient" (late-1970's) sigils in glitter- then so be it. We were just as harmless a group of witches for hire as one could hope for. When people would come in with a burning urge to conjur themselves up a demon, we'd let them know in no uncertain terms that we couldn't or wouldn't help them. We were strictly a 'white magic' or 'right hand' establishment. A goddess shop, I believe was the pseudo-technical term.

My coworkers were coffee junkies, rune-readers, and speakers of Klingon. Heavily tattooed, chain smoking vegetarian animal lovers, just like me. CAT LADIES, par excellence. At some point, in the not too distant past, the apothecary had served as home base for a group of guerrilla animal activists. The storage room had been a make shift animal shelter, and the studio upstairs must have been where they held their meetings. One member of the cadre was rumored to have scaled the side of a nearby apartment building to liberate what they thought might be a neglected pet.

About three years into my time there (yeah, I lasted that long, longer even) you can imagine my shock when I learned that one of the deity's required annual animal sacrifice was due. Almost all religions have sacrificial rights built in. Circumcision, anyone? They're just cloaked in their ancientness or blended into dietary laws, so they avoid being labeled as barbarism. We made sacrificial offerings on the various altars around the shop almost every day, but the sacrifices we used were not only tame, but inanimate, usually honey, sometimes a particular fruit or vegetable. But in this case, this time, well it was a chicken. Two chickens exactly. No one liked the idea but whatever nameless deity wants nameless deity gets. At least it would be quick, painless? And completely hypocritical.

I found out later that this traditional bloodletting happened every year, and no one except those directly involved in the ritual knew anything about it. I surely didn't but that was no

surprise. I wasn't what one would call a true believer. I liked the kind of work I did, but I wasn't willing to stretch so far into the murky regions of paranormal realities. I was cool playing arts and crafts. And I never would have found out, either, if not for the santero's appendix.

The priest who would conduct the ceremony spoke only Spanish and my good friend and coworker was the translator. On the day it was all going to go down, some guy showed up at the shop up with a cardboard box and a message. Something to the effect of—

The priest has appendicitis. Stop. He'll be here next week. Stop. Look after these death row chickens. Full stop.

Somehow the honor fell to me. I guess I'm just that lucky. At first I thought I'd put them in the bike shed out in the back yard. I had yet to open the box to face them and actually wasn't sure if I could. Being soft-hearted and completely idiotic, I decided I should treat them with the dignity that the doomed deserve. I lugged them up to the studio, where the store's owners crashed when they were in town, and prepared to release them into their sweet, if temporary, pad. I steeled myself and cut free the bakers string that bound their tiny prison. I was prepared to bond with all of the goddess' little creatures; even hopeful that their winged grace would inspire me to hatch some daring plot to free them. But when I finally got the box open, they didn't seem to notice. I nudged them gently, left some water and corn a few feet away to encourage them explore. No dice. They didn't really notice that the box was gone either. They crowded each other until I had to physically separate them. You remember the chickens from the barnyard set of plastic figurines? These weren't those kind of chickens. These guys were straight up poultry. White, spindly and irredeemably stupid. Nothing like the proud cock of the weather vein. Nothing at all to e-i-e-i-o about. I was handing them the keys to a sweet Manhattan apartment where they could live out the rest of their days RENT FREE and they just huddled dumbly in the shadow of their box.

One of my earliest memories is in Chinatown. I'm three, standing in the kitchen of a tiny restaurant, my patent-leather mary janes sinking in a puddle of blood. I'm screaming. Pig's blood. I quit eating meat as soon as I could reliably operate the gas range. I couldn't stand feeling responsible at every meal for a puddle of blood on some far-off slab of linoleum. I couldn't rationalize felling a cow, or wrestling a pig. But when I looked at these dead chickies walking, I experienced something I'd never felt before. There was a living breathing creature before me, but all I saw was food. I got a glimpse of something inside of me that the old Chinatown trauma hadn't completely sublimated. I could do it. I could kill the chickens. And if I could kill the chickens, then I could eat the chickens. It was just that simple.

They smelled rank, like driving through Elizabeth, NJ on the turnpike, with scaly slithery ashy feet. Such feet should be exhibit a in the case against intelligent design. Human feet have evolved to not look like sandwiches because if they did, we would probably try to eat them. So why why why did whatever nameless deity who created the chicken make their feet look like giant pre-historic worms? Millions of chickens must die everyday due to self pecking. They're just not that bright. Their heads are not even essential to their chicken-ness. They can take 'em or leave 'em.

After a few days on chicken duty we got word that the santero was feeling better and on his way. In the intervening days, the store's owners researched alternative vegan rituals and found a new way to honor said nameless deity. These two little nastys would be the last to receive the medieval treatment. During our farewell visit, I looked into their beady eyes, trying to muster some sort of blessing for them, or at the very least, an apology. But I came up short. I left them to their fates, and they left me to mine.

Derick Holt / Grant Cornett

Leading up to the full-blown chicken mania, I had an epiphany. I was watching Downtown 81, a movie about the New York art scene in the early eighties, starring Deborah Harry and Jean Michel Basquiat. I think most people's epiphanies might have been, "I want to move to New York and be a hip starving artist," or "Deborah Harry is really hot, I want to be her/do her." My shining moment was inspired by a scene where Jean Michel Basquiat passes a punk rock guy in a recording studio. They talk briefly, then the punk offers Basquiat a piece of fried chicken from the red and white bucket he is holding. Basquiat takes a piece and they say goodbye. Wham. It hit me like a Mack truck. I wanted to do it. I wanted to walk around with a bucket of fried chicken and offer it to strangers.

Perhaps it was my desire to fit in as a child that drove me to dress up like a chicken. As a youngster I found myself predisposed to obsessing about food. Maybe it was being part of a large extended family whose gatherings revolved around food. Or maybe it was the fact that the food I ate as child was diametrically opposed to the food I saw in the world around me. For example, breakfast at our house might consist of tofu scramble, seasoned liberally with brewers yeast. Birthday cakes were carob, honey and coconut concoctions. Peppermint flavored cod liver oil? My first seven years were spent in a working class neighborhood where health food hadn't really caught on. The kids around me were eating things that seemed like astronaut representations of real food. Velveeta cheese product, Kraft cheese stuffs and cheese puffs. Hotdogs or, as my aunt once broke the news to me over a little league game, pig tits and assholes. Twinkies, Wonder Bread, wax covered mini doughnuts and sugar cereal. And buckets of Kentucky Fried Chicken. I don't have a memory of eating Kentucky fried Chicken as a child. Not one greasy measly memory. In the early eighties fast food was king. Michael Jackson burned his hair off in a Pepsi ad and Ronald McDonald had the same first name as the president. On television, my window to the world, I watched people drink Coca Cola, eat Happy Meals, and get really satisfied by Snickers. I wanted to be like them. I chewed a stale unsalted baked blue corn chip and hoped that once, just once, my Mom would bring home a bucket.

FOWL PLAY

My partner M and I straightened our suits, put on our dark glasses, took a couple of deep breaths and then knocked on the door. A redheaded young woman, with ice blue eyes and black leather four-inch-heeled boots, answered. She was expecting to go on a lunch date with her two best friends. She was not expecting to be met by two secret agents and yet, she was not surprised. She had been surprised when she came home from The Restaurant last Tuesday, at two in the morning, and found that damn chicken wearing a feather boa on her table.

"Huh," she had thought, "weird."

"Good morning miss. I'm officer You Know Who and this is Officer You Know Who Two. We need to ask you some questions." She played along without skipping a beat.

"Officer Who? What is all this about? You can ask but I am not talking to you." Red shook her head no but her eyes sparkled with mischief.

"We only need to ask you a few questions about what happened the other night. It won't take long. May we come in?"

"There is no way in hell I'm letting you into my house," said Red with a smile.

"Well then, if you won't cooperate, we're going to have to take you down to head quarters. Maybe a little truth serum will help." M and I then escorted the well-heeled, well-coifed broad to the vehicle. The curtains in the back seat were intended to

protect the identity of the person being transported. Red made a mental note. The curtains were covered in chickens. Chicken heads. Hundreds of tiny chicken heads with beady little eyes staring and asking "what next?" First the chicken on the patio table...now this...What was going on? The drive to headquarters was short, but long with anticipation. Once inside, we ushered her into the interrogation room. We stood and she sat on the sleek brown leather couch. We presented the truth serum. A pink, bubbly alcoholic beverage known in the industry as Method Champenoise. A couple glasses of this stuff and you can get anyone to talk. Anyone.

A few honest libations and we grew tired of questions. Why did the chicken cross the road? What came first the chicken or...? We decided it was time for phase two. So we locked her alone in the interrogation room and we changed. Out of my pinstriped suit and into a black sateen zip up onesy. On the back was a large framed triangle made of the same material as the car curtains. The same beady eyes. White down feathers outlined the triangle of tiny chicken heads. Black lettering said it simple. CHICKEN. Special feathery gauntlets covered my forearms, and a little googly eyed felt chicken head graced the space over my heart. To complete my outfit I pulled on a pair of white patent leather platform boots, the kind strippers and drag queens wear. M was also wearing a onesy, a white one with a deep v-neck in the front and red fringe

under his arms. The suit had once belonged to Elvis. On the back was the same superhero chicken insignia. He wore red brief style underwear on the outside of his white suit. Across the red butt read BUTT. A similar tiny felt chicken head on the front of his bikini pants covered his pecker.

We placed the chicken masks over our faces and completed our transformation. The voice of Cab Calloway filled the room "Say! Everyone is talking about chicken, chicken is a popular word, but anywhere you go, you're bound to find a chicken ain't nothing but a bird!" We burst open the door to the interrogation room and danced for our detainee.

When I was about seven my parents got divorced and my mom told me that my dad wasn't my real dad, and I had another dad in Mexico. My nuclear family bombed. I couldn't imagine where this fictional land called Mexico was or what it meant to be Mexican. Or Mexican American. In the town I grew up in everybody was white and for a long time I was the only Mexican I knew. For many years the way I learned about my Mexican culture was through the chilaquiles, tacos y quesadillas my mom cooked at home, and from information I could glean from the world around me. The information didn't help to disambiguate my world, and overcome those who practiced circumlocution. For example, I remember while being babysat, taken to Taco Bell for lunch and being told that Mexicans were lazy people. I was very distressed as I was rapidly becoming an excellent student and was afraid that the laziness might strike me at any moment. I found out other worrisome things too, Mexicans ate beans and were known as beaners, "beans the magical fruit..the more you eat the more you toot!" I was fourteen years old when my boyfriend from San Diego called me a wetback. I froze. I had no idea what he was talking about. I did not know that "wetback" was a derogatory term originating in Texas for Mexicans who had crossed over the border illegally by swimming across the Rio Grande. I did know that being Mexican made me different from those around me and that difference was not always appreciated. I felt alone. My attention returned to something more easy to swallow, food.

"We have something to tell you," we said, as we danced around the room. "Were not secret agents. We're chickens. And so are you!" Then we handed over a pile of perfectly wrapped boxes. Inside the first was a chicken mask. The second revealed feathery arm gauntlets. Box after box was opened until finally emerged a maroon onesy with the familiar triangle chicken feather super hero insignia on the back. She changed and we three stood for a moment preening and admiring our handsome new look. We debriefed her with our mission. Our goal was simple. We were going to give away fried chicken on the street dressed in present garb. We

would ask strangers if they would like some fried chicken, and if they wouldn't mind if we asked them a few questions. The three of us then got back into the vehicle. Now the chicken curtains and cock hood ornament made perfect sense.

Chicken Butt drove from headquarters down the hill to Ezell's Fried Chicken. The first people we ran into were a group of teenagers hanging outside the fast food restaurant after school. As soon as we got out of the car they started to laugh. One of the boys shouted, "you goin to a ho-down or something?!" and they erupted in piles of giggles. Inside the restaurant we were the only ones dressed as chickens. Strange. The people behind the counter looked suspicious, then softened into smiles.

"How can I help you?" the cashier smirked. "Ya'll chickens or something? Chickens buying chicken. Chickens eating chicken!" Cannibalistic poultry? We bought our chicken, hopped in the car and went downtown.

I suddenly felt a rush of panicky shyness. It was like the

moment when you realize the skirt you wore is way too short and you're going to get a lot of unwanted attention. We didn't have to break the ice. We were soon approached by one of Third Avenue's many homeless denizens. M, Red and I had all spent days and hours and years working at The Restaurant on Third Avenue. We knew the area well. From inside the gold-lit room you could sip champagne and look out and watch money and tiny white rocks exchanging hands. From the outside you could look in and try and divine the quickest way to sneak into the bathroom or just pee on the window.



Adam Ward

by Marisa Marthaller

A bucket of chicken is an iconic symbol of the American family. A family spending time and sharing a meal together. The red and white striped bucket of chicken invokes gatherings, company parties and church picnics. Nobody eats a bucket alone.

"Hey, excuse me, what the hell are you? Chickens or something?" said the man with a toothbrush behind his ear.

"Why yes we are chickens," said we the people, dressed in chicken suits. "Would you like some fried chicken?"

"Sure, thank you." We handed him a piece of the perfectly fried fowl and he took a greasy bite.

"Oh hell, this is too peppery. Do you have some milk or something? I can't take this spicy shit. Can I trade this one in? You got any regular flavor in there? This is too hot for me."

"No, we don't have any milk. We're not cows. We're chickens. Well here, maybe this one is regular flavor. And how about a biscuit to cut all the spice?"

"Yes, thank you. Ahh, now that is much better."

Our next interviewee was a petite secretary stumbling down Second Avenue, stoned off her tiny face on pink martinis.

"Excuse us miss. May we talk to you for a few minutes, about chicken?"

"Sure" she giggled.

"Would you like some fried chicken?"

"What kind is it?"

"Ezell's."

"I love Ezell's," she gushed. "Oh my god, this is so great I just got out of happy hour but I spent all my money on cosmopolitans and I'm starving! This chicken will really soak up all that booze! Thank you chickens!"

She was so excited she hugged me. Of course, because of the stripper boots I was over six feet tall and she only came up to my waist.

"Can we ask you a few questions about chicken?" asked C from behind the camera. Our boozy ingénue nodded yes while happily crunching away.

"Do you like white meat or dark meat?"

"White. Less fat"

"Have you ever been bitten by a chicken?"

"No."

"Have you ever been sexually attracted to a chicken?"

"No, well maybe not until now." She winked at Chicken Butt and teetered off on her way.

I was at a summer picnic party at a log cabin lake house surrounded by evergreens. There was a girl. She was a little older than me. Maybe nine or ten. I followed her around for the better part of the afternoon and we played house. We did the dishes. Neither one of us knew how to run the washing machine and we filled it up with hand dish soap and turned it on. The whole kitchen filled up with foam. We laughed and danced in the bubbles. When it got dark she stole a bottle of Ranier and I sat

down on the floating dock with her and tasted my first beer. The beer was fizzy and sour and I wanted more. In the background the adults sang campfire songs and there was a picnic table full of black olives and pickles, deviled eggs and potato salads, cold cuts, and a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Chickens do get thirsty. We decided to grab a drink and a bite and walked into a restaurant that was having karaoke night. The MC coined us, "and now singing Bon Jovi's Living On A Prayer... the Chicken Super Heroes." The house was packed and the crowd went wild. Everybody loved us. Everybody except for one guy. Maybe he was jealous that he wasn't a CSH. Maybe Chicken Butt's tiny hot pants over his chicken suit made him feel emasculated? Maybe the chicken suits ignited his animalistic desire to rule the roost. Whatever it was, when we finally decided to leave, he followed. He wanted to fight. Putting his hand up in Chicken Butt's face, getting all puffed up and calling him names.

"Who do you think you are?" He taunted. "What are you some sort of chicken fag or something?!" Chicken fag? We could see that Chicken Butt's feathers were beginning to get ruffled so we corralled him and started walking away. What we didn't see was a man who had been watching the whole episode explode on the sidewalk. A window washer named Catfish remembered us from earlier in the evening and had taken a liking to us. He grabbed my arm and walked with us away from the drama.

"Don't worry. I was watching the whole time. I got your back," he said. Then he pulled back the cloth on the bucket he was carrying to reveal Windex, a wedgie wiper and a handgun. We smiled weakly and thanked him for his concern.

Less than three percent of us are Native. We, our parents, or grandparents, or great grandparents or great great greats arrived to the United States from somewhere else. From there, we brought our foodways and dreams. The American history of fried chicken has its roots in Africa. West African women would fry birds in shea butter. The Atlantic Slave trade landed the practice of frying chicken in the United States. In absence of shea butter people here began to fry chicken in the locally available pig fat. Like an oily, spreading stain, fried chicken has found its way to every nook and granny in the land. American food, like *deja vu*, can give us the sense of having already seen this, been there, done that. Or remind us of a time and place that is was never our own. A fat bite of a fennel kissed pork sausage with a tangy marinara sauce reminds us of our boyhood in Sicily. A crisp dilly bean reminds us of a time when we were farmers and spent the summer months canning and preparing for the winter lean, or maybe a christmas morning bloody mary. Flavors and sentiments survive, become new, and become ours. Sticking to legs and thighs and breasts. Just as much as food can inform us of who we are and connect us to our past, it can also draw us to lean out and reach for something we are missing. Feeding our desire to be together. Perhaps around a bucket of chicken.



ICONIC GAGGLE

THE DISPATCH OF THE FAMOUS GEESE

It was cold. So cold that the water froze in their favorite puddles. So cold that, even three days later there were blood crystals in their hearts. So cold that they routinely broke into the house to poop in the comfort of my living room, mouthing books and rug tassels with their sharp little teeth. After much delay, I resolved to harvest my goose posse.

Geese have long figured into my emotional understanding of rural living. They are familiar, iconic and relatively predictable. For me, as for many children, my first experiences with geese were just plain traumatizing. I spent every summer of my childhood on a dairy + cherry farm where, in addition to the guard dog, a clutch of geese, kept in the old pig sty, served for protection. They (particularly the gander) would hiss like demons, arch their necks like cobras, and lunge viciously at my eyes. You might not anticipate that traditional, sensible Swiss farmers would trust a goose to maintain a boundary but with their paddling peri-ambulations, burbles and hisses they patrolled the barnyard, defining and defending it. Like all children, I quickly learned to dominate the geese by flapping my arms as wide as they'd go. In my circle of small cousins, those fearlessly entering the barnyard to fetch milk, coolly ignoring the geese, were the brave ones. It was this savoir-faire that etched between us gradations in power, the authority to be deciders of forest games, and tamers of kittens.

Now, almost grown up entirely, I decided to move to the Hudson River valley this summer into a modified tool shed cum bat-cave. I was still a little frightened of coyotes and bandits. Off to the office in the morning and back sometimes after dark, I was scared of the hunters on their 4x4s and the menacing pit bulls on chains that I might bike past on my way to the farm. I would have preferred a wolf-hound, or a German Shepard, or a tall strong man to drive fence posts but what I got was a pair of geese: manageable protectors of my new domain.

One grey, one white, a goose and a gander. I named them Griffen and Gremlin, but actually their characters never really emerged. More than most kinds of animals I've cared for the geese seemed contained in their caricature, and almost entirely within their unit pair. They lived with me for about 14 weeks, slightly longer than John Seymour, in his book *Self Sufficiency*, indicates as optimal. Following the suggestions of a 1932 edition of *Successful Duck and Goose Raising*, by professor Darrel Sheraw, I fed them on breadcrumbs from the local bakery and cracked oats. I provided them access to a bussing tray filled with water for splashing, and after a long career of poo-pooing the feeding of corn to livestock, including a stint trespassing at a feedlot in Iowa just to have seen the horror for myself, I was converted to it in about a week.

A word on corn. The corn I fed is local organic corn, grown on the farm of a Johnson and Johnson heiress about 25 miles east of me. To pick it up I would drive my red, veggie oil station-wagon past a dreamy organic farm-stand, through an

area of Millbrook that is full of blissful, though overmedicated, horses and millions of dollars in well-built white painted fences. Ultimately, it was the way the corn gave them golden goosey down, fattened their snugly belly-folds and gave a bright fatty sheen to their neck feathers that convinced me. Despite its over-planting, despite the gross destruction of our nation's soils for High Fructose Corn Syrup, despite the GMO contamination present in all conventional production and the genetic drift that keeps polluting organic seed as well. Despite the abuse of the genome and elimination of its native lineage, despite all that corporate scallywaggery that has altered this crop and polluted the Iowan breadbasket with atrazine, sensibly raised and slightly cracked corn can make a fine, culturally appropriate feedstuff. I like it, and have subsequently found myself a much more avid polenta eater.

We all got a little rounder. The geese appreciated my transition to the corn-based diet very much. Every morning they'd tromp up to my tool shed foyer and rat-tat-tat on the glass demanding their ration. Their frenzied corn gobblings inspired me to fatten their little livers. Some readers may be familiar with foie gras and the horrible stuffing machines employed to produce it. I recently heard about 'natural foie gras,' a practice that optimizes the inclination of the geese to stuff themselves ahead of cold temperatures, filling their body cavity with fat and swelling up their little livers for culinary delight. And gobble they did, jealously bobbing up and down their long necks, honking expectantly and flap dashing toward anyone carrying a corn ration. Frequently annoyed by their constant pooping and clamor, I would just think about their plumping livers and that usually helped. Also, it got so cold that the goose poop just froze solid, which resolved that annoyance.

It was far too cold for an enthusiast of Mediterranean flora-forms, far too cold for someone who likes to walk outside first thing in the morning. Far too cold for anyone with low blood circulation and a problem matching socks. All my other animals developed coping strategies. The rabbits burrowed in hay and nestled together, the cats batted at my face in the middle of the night so I'd stoke the fire for them and I had taken to huddling in bed with hot water bottles cursing myself for ever leaving California. We were all managing admirably, but in dashing in and out with hot beverages and dramatic scarves, running off on field trips to my heated office, I had neglected to do the deed. They geese needed to be killed, it was overdue, so I cut the fingers off the ugly yellow gloves my sister gave me and strode out onto the frosted field to round up my gaggle for slaughter.

Unlike the ducks, which I'd dispatched with a fancy Japanese cleaver, I decided to do-in the geese with the "broomstick method" deemed more ethical by John Seymour. I wanted to learn more techniques and I also wanted to avoid the whole 'bloody feathered headless mess dashing around' issue. It just so happened to be the last day of deer hunting season. I

conscripted the deer hunters, the orange-clad tobacco spitters standing and cursing loudly, bloody booted on my threshold to help kill the geese. The hunters thought it slightly odd that I wouldn't just slice the necks and said so. Instead, Seymour instructs us to "firmly hold the feet in your hands, keeping the back of the bird away from you, lay the head on the ground and place a broom stick over the base of the neck. Then have someone else stand on the broom stick while you pull the feet upwards, quickly." Such simple instructions, I read them about twenty times and even brought the book outside into the frosty morning to show the hunters, who dutifully read the passage, along with Seymour's much longer diatribe about the impossibility of coexisting with foxes.

There were no foxes that morning, only the steaming carcasses of deer and the uncomfortable intimacy of standing on the neck of a goose with a perfect stranger. We watched the steam rise and the patterns of migrating birds in a fiercely blue sky. It certainly didn't feel that much more humane-- standing on the neck of any creature probably wouldn't. But the feathers stayed clean of blood, and I felt calmer than the last time I killed anything. It seems like the killing of an animal gets easier with practice. You slow down the pounding heart, you collect yourself with the intention of a careful dispatch, you concentrate on the technique. It was a kind of limbic maturity that replaced the intellectual giddiness of killing these geese, these famous geese who appeared with me in the newspaper and greeted my guests like fairy-tale beacons of agrarianism. In the moment I focused on my reverence for their flesh, their feathers, their fat. I was quiet and determined, focused with gritted resignation on the unpleasantness that necessarily precedes sizzling meat.

Then I sliced off their heads to drain, hung them with twine from the tree and went to the office.

The wind blew fiercely, and the weatherman predicted worse to come. It was so cold that the blood froze underneath the tree where they hung, into little bloody drip castles. Swatches of red ice clung to the woodpile from when the wind swished over in its direction. I had to take them inside to warm up so I could begin the plucking, collecting the glorious down into cardboard boxes. It was heroic and lonely work, I plucked for 4 hours and got blisters. I was hurrying through the surprisingly difficult task, not hardly even documenting it, because I had to get down to the city for a funding meeting. They have two layers of feathers, and there is only one angle that works to pull the feathers out. But then when they do come, it is a perfectly magical release of gorgeous fluffiness from the cold pimply skin of the goose. Some of the feathers have oozy yuck inside the shaft. Imagine a feather with an innervated flesh inside it that you can squeeze out. Totally

riveting. I discovered a fireside pus fetish.

When I returned from the city it was to a dark house and a warm refrigerator. Columbia County had declared a state of emergency and we had no power for five days. It was an ice storm and along every ridge-line the bright glassy glittering glory was followed by an agonizing cracking. The trees split, groaned and fell. The Taconic Parkway was closed; the shops were a-buzz with people buying candles, batteries and booze. Families stood around at gas stations waiting to fill fuel containers for their generators. Everyone stopped what they were accustomed to doing and hauled wood, tarps, heaters, animals, clearing fence lines, chainsawing. And I had to figure out a way to cook my geese before they rotted. The solution? A famous goose dinner party.

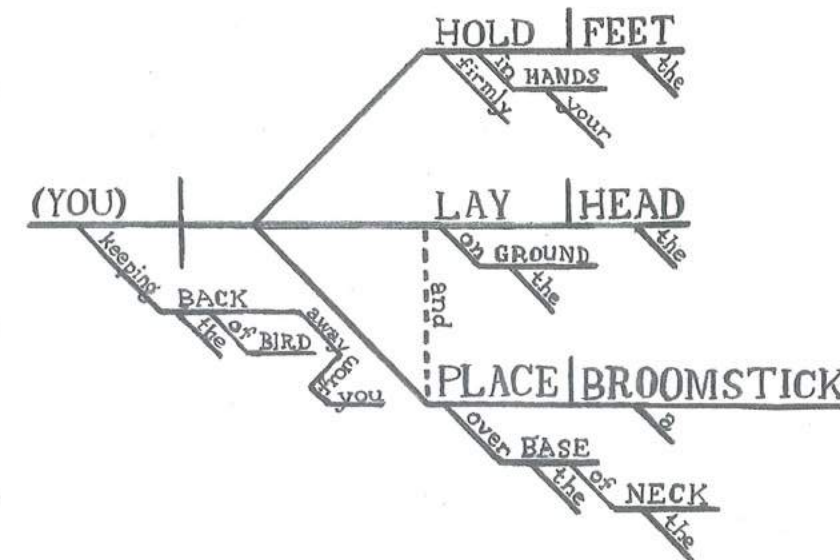
Which was fine, which was easy. It turned into a goose and tomato braise on the oven top--all my frozen summer tomatoes had thawed, casualties of the power outage. And so, without remorse I basked the goose in a luxurious concentrated sauce, with about a quarter cup of crumbled marjoram and wine from California. My little cast iron woodstove, filled to bursting, chugged merrily all day, and when my guests arrived--bringing stinky experimental cheese

from the backs of their own failing refrigerators, frosted kale, bean soup, home-made wine and merriment-- we all decided that our 18th century cooking experience had been surprisingly carefree, made so by food grown close at hand.

These were my first geese, a first tentative, manageable foray into waterfowl husbandry. And I recommend it to anyone testing the edge of an animal idea. Before launching a major enterprise of any kind it seems to be a good idea to start small, to observe

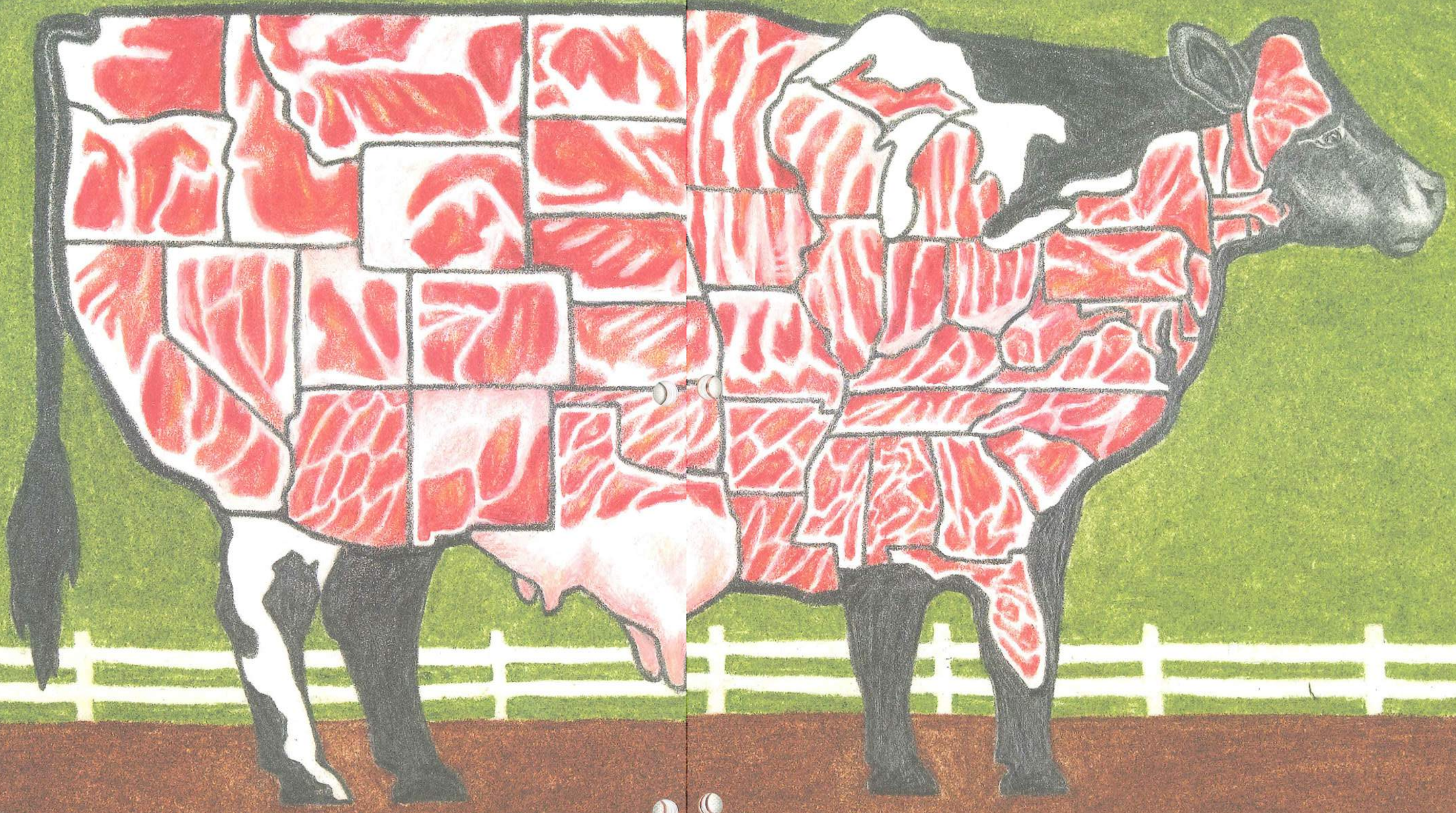
the creature's patterns and behaviors. With a small operation you can figure out the best place for the drain, the source and cost of all your inputs, the best way to minimize them. You can learn almost all the lessons you'll need to scale up. You can also form your opinions about husbandry in the absence of economic pressure. There is a learning curve in all businesses, especially ones whose profits can be ravaged by wild coyotes. It behooves us all to expect a few hiccups along the road to self-sufficiency, and to better commiserate with the farmers whose produce is pocked with frost or punctured by flea beetles.

After this long cold winter, let our hobbies stay relevant and useful. Let us progress along the avenues of professional sustainability, under the shady bower of gleeful anticipation. May our networks of local inter-dependence flourish. These two geese, six ducks and twenty seven rabbits have given me the courage to this year try for two pigs, more rabbits and some laying hens. That quarter acre garden has prepared me for 1.6 acres this year. May we continue to barter our surplus and baste our working life with adventures.



Erin Diebboll

by Severine von Tscharner Fleming



YOU CAN LEARN A LOT FROM A DEAD PIG

The beginnings and endings in my life have always taken me by surprise. I'm never sure when exactly they happen until they are over. The hours were long, the work was the hardest I had ever done and, most of all, I was bad at it. I hate being bad at anything. I wanted to quit almost as soon as I started.

I am a butcher. This used to sound strange to me, like I had awoken one morning to find that I was living someone else's life. I wanted to be a lot of things in this life, a bull rider, a soldier, a fiction writer, a musician or even a performance artist. I never planned on being a butcher.

I continued to show up and cut meat everyday because I had no idea what else to do. I kept a brave face and slogged through each 14 hour shift cutting up fish and pigs and beef legs while squeezed into a corner of the prep area. All the porters made fun of me. If I was the kind of person who could end his own life I surely might have done it that winter.

Part of the layer of the delusional bullshit I had sprinkled over everything to hide my growing fear and loathing was volunteering to help a couple of my friends slaughter and butcher their pigs in the middle of the brutal Vermont winter. I needed to keep up appearances, like Liberace getting married instead of screaming, "Have you seen the way I dress? I'm gay, just deal with it!"

The pig's name was Brick House. I had been up to visit him and his fellow sty dwellers several times when they were only feeder pigs early in the summer. He was now a hulking, black and white spotted Berkshire cross that was much bigger than any pig I had ever seen, let alone butchered or killed. Looking back through my photos of the farm from that summer and fall I had several shots of this pig eating, playing and snuggling with the other pigs in the slanted northern light.

I could barely call myself a butcher and now I had gotten myself into a mess where I had to kill a pig? I had never killed anything bigger than a ground squirrel and even then I did it at distance with my trusty .22 Marlin lever-action rifle my dad bought me when I was barely out of junior high.

As the days became shorter and colder and closer to the morning I would have to kill the pig I began to alternate between deep study and heavy drinking. One was to be as prepared as possible, the other to forget that I might crack and fail under the pressure of the moment. I distracted myself by arranging an extra precious day off to be able to drive up and back to the remote corner of Vermont, secretly hoping that the iron fisted powers-that-be would deny my request and allow me to escape untested.

The first professional butchers of the Western world were, according to the Larousse Gastronomique, descended culturally from early Jewish high priests who carried out ritual slaughters of sacrificial animals. Everyone else just killed and cut their own animals. In my malaise this information put me squarely in the midst of a classic Madonna/whore situation. Was I the priest or the average shepherd?

I bought poorly produced videos about cutting up whole pigs from odd men who ran meat lockers in the mid-west. The internet became my friend as it contained more than a few home brewed videos of slaughters of hogs. The action was apparent but the details and philosophy were sketchy as almost all the films were either soundless or briefly described in Ukrainian, which neither I nor anyone I knew spoke fluently enough to understand. Pig killing remained dichromatic function of the amateur and the professional.

To further complicate or at least add comedic relief to matters I read that the Romans set up a strict separate class of men that butchered animals for the general population but were segregated, due to their unclean status as butchers, to

their own tiny city within Rome hundreds of years before the Vatican. Becoming a butcher under this system was like being a type of filthy royal: one could only enter the guild of master butchers by birth. Women and illegitimate children excluded. I was confused. Was I unclean?

Many people claim that the Dutch East India Company was the first corporation to terrorize the peoples of the world. They're wrong. Predating the DEIC (or VOC in Dutch) the members of the master butchers guild that had its roots in the Roman system, installed in France when it was conquered as Gaul, wielded enormous power in the France of the 8th century. Butchers held absolute control of the sale of any creature that flew, swam or walked. In much of Western Europe if you wanted to eat anything except wild game or vegetables you were beholden to the monopoly of the butchers guild.

My tyranny was self-inflicted. Paralyzed by low self-image, doubt and uncertainty we set out on a cold, terrible morning for Northern Vermont. I spent hours sharpening knives to a razor's edge and making checklists of supplies needed to distract me in the days before our departure. My internal monologue as we moved, mile by mile, became darker and darker like an anxiety dream from which sober consciousness offered no escape.

When we arrived at the farm it was already night and the hill leading away from the farm was too steep and slippery for the tires of our city car to climb. I was stuck. There were no options left but to seek whatever solace could be wrested from the half-empty bottle of Pappy Van Winkle and wait for morning. I drunkenly visited the pig in the barn. It was sleeping.

As it turns out morning on a farm in the middle of winter begins before the sun has even begun to think of coming up. At 4:45 Matteo woke me with a poke and the whimsical sentence, "Time to pop piggy!" Pulling on my work clothes felt like crawling up a steep incline of broken bottles. I don't remember there being any coffee though I am sure there was because we had brought them a 5 pound bag of it that had been roasted in Brooklyn a few days before. We walked in a line towards the barn, Andy with his rifle and me with my favorite knife gripped in a blue latex glove.

Brick House was awake and frisky as he had received no rations the day before in anticipation of his slaughter. Andy ejected the spent shell from the rifle and placed it in his pocket after pushing a fresh cartridge into the chamber. I held my ears with the knife in my hand waiting to slit the hog's throat. Everything up until this point had been purely self-indulgent musings of a person who went to art school when he should have just kept hanging sheetrock. I felt like I was losing my mind as Andy waited for the right shot. It could have taken a few seconds or perhaps 41 hours and 23 minutes.

I don't remember hearing the report of the rifle. I couldn't even smell the comforting aroma of burnt cordite as I rushed towards the thrashing pig. Brick House was already snorting gouts of blood through its snout. While the others held down the rear of the pig I pinned it with my feet and arm and sunk the knife into the hollow under its collar bone. I was instantly covered with what seemed like one and a half gallons of blood and then everything was very still.

We walked from the darkness of the barn into the sun that had just crested the low hills that lay to the east of the barn and the pastures beyond. I wanted to throw up and spike a football at the same time.

The last vestigial remains of the grand and powerful society of butchers was the New York City Butcher's Parade. The Butcher's Day Parade was an elaborate affair for the time, involving floats and carts and banners carrying wry slogans like, "To every man his piece" and, "We preserve by destroying". While the influence of the guild had waned the trapping of their former glory remained. As I stood in the sun I felt like I should be publicly berated for what I had just done or perhaps given the keys to the city of Greensboro, Vermont.

We scalded and scraped and gutted and sawed. We ground sausage and cured hams while our breath steamed and our hands hurt from the cold. I can't even properly recall our drive home or even anything that happened in the weeks following the trip. I do know that I carried myself with a bit more swagger and confidence. Even if I wasn't as strong or fast with a knife as I thought I should be I knew that I was going to be soon. I was no longer a imposter. I was a butcher.

By: Tom Mylan

Swine is Divine

I guess you could say that my love affair with swine developed as my hopes for a love affair with an Italian man waned. I was 22. Having graduated from a typical liberal arts college with a typical liberal arts degree (art history), I quickly realized that I had no idea what to actually do. So, typically, I quit my job as a lunch waitress and moved to Italy to work on a farm. While my intentions were pure—I hungrily sought to learn about traditional Tuscan farming—I couldn't help but fantasize about meeting a dark-haired, olive-skinned vintner or cheesemaker or shepherd. It didn't really matter. We would walk hand-in-hand through the olive groves, and he would whisper sweet nothings, the words of which I wouldn't understand, but the meaning coming through loud and clear.

These fantasies quickly disintegrated as I embraced my new role on the farm. Pig Girl. In truth, my job was to care for all of gli animali—pigs, chickens, cows, horses, sheep, and one stubborn donkey—but as our herd of Cinta Sinese (a heritage Tuscan breed) numbered near a hundred, with piglets being born daily, chores on Pig Hill took up most of my time. I spent my days feeding, corralling, raking up poop and building fences to keep the cinghiale (wild boar) away from our sows. Pigs have a filthy reputation, literally, and the smell on Pig Hill was pretty bad. But I got used to it, embraced it even, and soon the running joke was that the main benefit of being Pig Girl was that you didn't have sit next to her at lunch.

It wasn't, ultimately, the smell that drove away my imagined suitors, but rather my fascination with castration. As our pigs were destined for the dinner table in the form of chops, ribs, sausage and charcuterie, all males had to be castrated early on. Testosterone tends to give the meat a rank flavor as the pigs age. Some call it Boar Taint.

Contrary to what you might think, castrating piglets is fun. A month or so after a new litter was born the vet would arrive in his beat up truck. As we held down our squirming charges, the vet administered a local anesthetic, made two small slits and extracted the testicles. Snip! Snip! We poured Extra Virgin Olive Oil in the open wound and sent the piglets wriggling away. Besides the day we slaughtered our bull, Castration Day was probably my most favorite day on the farm. And so, with each castration, my obsession with pigs grew and my desireability faded. Something about my excitement at cutting off balls did not sit well with the male Italians I met.

This, however, was ok by me. I realized I'd much rather spend my time massaging prosciutto legs in the dank basement of the stone tower which doubled as our curing room, or grilling pork sausage over an open fire, than walking into the sunset with some guy who's language of love I couldn't understand a word of. Except for maiale, of course.

Eventually, I left the Italian countryside for the bright lights of Brooklyn, I brought my love of swine with me to the New World. Here, where domesticated animals are limited to cats, dogs and the occasional ferret, the closest I've gotten to a pig is the braised belly I order every chance I get, or perhaps the

lardo that my roommate makes in his parents basement in Jersey. That changed this spring when I embraced the opportunity to re-introduce myself to pig in all its glorious forms by enrolling in two classes covering swine from birth to butcher.

I started my re-education where the pig stops being a pig and starts being pork on the butcher table. I knew I was at the right place by the sign on the door, "Vegetarians Enter at Your Own Risk!" It was a Tuesday night, and 12 eager porkophiles gathered to watch and learn as Tom cut apart half of a 210 lb. Berkshire pig. The butchering class, hosted by The Brooklyn Kitchen, promised the opportunity to know what your pork looks like before it hits your plate, along with a take-home of 6–8 lbs. of succulent heritage meat. As Tom went at the carcass with gusto, separating loin from rib from ham, the crowd asked questions ranging from why the pig's skin was red (pooling blood) to what the kidneys tasted like: pretty good medium rare, but kind of like urine if you overcook them. Tom, who has only been butchering animals for a year or so, waxed philosophical about the process, "cutting up animals is completely arbitrary." The way you butcher a pig, we learned, is dependent on how you intend to use the meat. Despite the "arbitrary" nature of how pork is sliced and diced, it was clear that if you're standing over half of a 210 lb. pig, brandishing a cleaver or a saw, it would be disrespectful to the animal and the farmer who raised it, to not know what you are doing.

And with that realization, I started thinking more about the circumstances of this class. Despite the title, we weren't actually learning how to butcher. I certainly wasn't going to go home, sharpen up my \$19.99 knife set and go hog wild, so to speak. Instead, we were learning about the process of bringing a pig to market, and through that knowledge we were becoming more deeply connected and invested in our food. It is one thing to know what farm your food comes from, and an entirely different thing to understand how it got from the field to your plate.

Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture in Tarrytown, NY was offering a two-day course, Swine School, on pig herd management. I arrived one early spring morning, and drove through the front gate, passing newly green pastures full of munching cows. Turns out the participants were all farmers, save me. Representing farms throughout the Northeast, these farmers came to learn everything from silvo-pastoral grazing (think pigs in forests) to choosing the right heritage breed and maintaining herd health. While they were wearing overalls, not skinny jeans, the atmosphere in the classroom at Stone Barns was similar to that at The Brooklyn Kitchen. These farmers, like their butcher-wannabe counterparts, wanted to be part of a better food system and were actively seeking out knowledge to help them do their part.

"It's all about the pigs," Craig Haney, livestock manager, reminded us as we settled in to a day of lectures. Over the next eight hours I learned such fun facts as: Pigs Can Swim! Sows Build Nests! And, it's spelled "BERKshire" But it's pronounced "BARKshire."

While much of the knowledge I retained will probably serve me better at Trivia Night than out on the farm, I was comforted by the fact that raising healthy, happy, tasty pigs has a lot to do with common sense. Practices vary by location and farmer, but essentially follow the rule that a marketable pig is one that has been well-fed, kept clean and sheltered, lived free from fear and been allowed to express its natural behavior. Wouldn't it be a glorious world if all animals, humans included, lived in such conditions? The fact that these lessons are now being re-taught through weekend seminars indicates just how far we've strayed from that ideal. But things are changing. As evidenced by these classes, farmers, chefs, and eaters realizing that just as important as buying local foods is reclaiming knowledge.

In 1903, August Escoffier published what many consider to be the guide to French haute cuisine, *Le Guide Culinaire*. In this cookbook, Escoffier divulges recipes combining exquisite flavors and meticulous preparation. I'm sure that they are gastronomic delights, each and every one. Yet, for the most part, this cuisine is off-limits to the modern home cook. They call for ingredients you just can't get and preparations using skills that have been lost in the last 100 years. You know that nursery rhyme, Sing a song of six pence, a pocket full of rye. Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie? Well, that wordsmith wasn't making things up. Blackbird pie was a signature dish of Escoffier. That, along with Turtle Soup, which calls for a double butcher hook and a waight and advises collecting the blood for future use.

This loss of knowledge is not limited to the kitchen. At all points along our "modern" food system traditional, proven skills are being traded in for the latest, most efficient technological marvel. Food production has benefited from new developments throughout history and will continue to evolve in the future. Farming itself could even be considered one of our first technologies, after fire and clubs and the wheel, of course. The difference with recent developments is that while they may be more efficient, they are not necessarily the most beneficial in the long term. As we start to see the effects of the "conventional" food system on our environment, our communities and our bodies many are turning back to traditional methods of production and processing. The problem is that these methods were discarded with such abandon in the last few decades that remembering how to do things is tricky. It is kind of like learning that you suddenly have to sew all your own clothes. I'm sure my attempts would be a little lumpy and misshapen. Lumpy and misshapen t-shirts I can deal with, but I don't particularly want to be eating lumpy and misshapen animals.

How do we get back to a healthy food system where traditional knowledge and skills are honored and we respect the process of food as much as the product? I think it starts with those involved in the food system (by which I mean everyone who

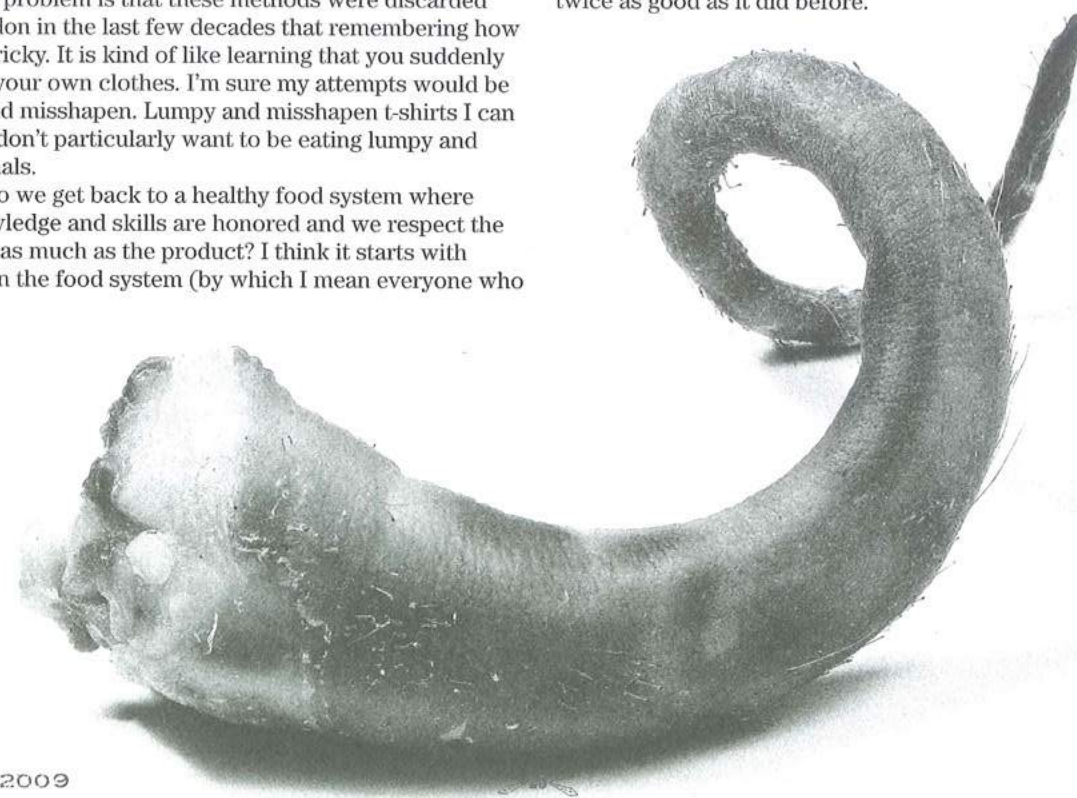
eats) starting or continuing to ask questions of their food and to demand that it gives you clear and rational answers.

Though I relinquished my title of Pig Girl to the next round of farm interns over five years ago, I've maintained a healthy relationship with my food. And by healthy relationship, I mean just that. My food nourishes me and I in turn nourish it by choosing to consume plants and animals that were raised with dignity and treated with honor as they turned from Bessie to Burger. In search of a trustworthy food source, consumers have shifted from "healthy" to "natural" to "organic" to "local" to "local and organic"—resulting in an increased awareness and interest in how food becomes food. And, just to be clear, this newfound responsibility of both farmers and eaters creating a food system we can all be proud of is as exciting as it is delicious.

The second day of Swine School sixty-eight farmers and a Brooklyn kid piled onto two tractor pulled carts to visit Craig's pigs. Scattered throughout pasture and forest, and ranging in age from a few days to several years, the pigs we saw met all those healthy and free from fear and natural instinct standards. As we watched, they frolicked and rooted and, memorably, humped. At our last stop, Paul Willis of Niman Ranch in Iowa, announced that he would demonstrate his castration method on some new born pigs. Music to my ears! Holding the piglet upside down in one hand, he used a razor blade to extract the testes, tossing them to the ground at my feet.

Despite the fact that Paul didn't use Extra Virgin Olive Oil to seal the wound as I had in Italy, watching him calmly emasculate that tiny pig I couldn't help but feel that I'd come full circle. I know my love affair with pigs, and food in general, is far from finished and hopefully I'll use the knowledge I gained from Tom and Swine School to raise my own little pig herd someday. Perhaps with a beautiful Italian pig farmer? More importantly though, these experiences connect me with my community and with my food. And that, not the specific skill or fact, is the take-away from all these new educational opportunities. It will take some practice with a cleaver before I feel comfortable cutting up a whole pig, but I feel pretty confident that the next time I bite into one of those well-marbled, BARKshire chops, it will taste twice as good as it did before.

Grant Cornett



by Cecily Upton

Pan's Labyrinth

If you lean over the damp, mossy, stone wall that flanks the east side of Central Park between 63rd and 62nd street you will be able to witness my favorite permanent petting zoo residents in all their quiet glory. I can only catch a glimpse of the various goats that call the park home if I stand on my tippy toes and strain against the cold granite. They are immediately comforting, a bucolic representative of farms I would like to visit and the smell of hay. They are also strange, foreigners with alien eyes, each one so unique that they've seemingly sprung from their own gene pool. Often, they too are on tippy toes, leaning from hind-legs and propped up against their own fence towards human hands.

Watching tourists hold out humble offerings of crumbly corn makes me think of the goat as horned deity, a god of ancient living. In my mind, they steady themselves on two hooves with shining crowns that circle their horns, as they sip golden mead and wax post-barnyard poetic. Goats have been with us for a long time and can tell us as much about ourselves as we can say of them.

In the history and legends of early cultures, goats make repeated appearances; the stories we tell and the eccentricities we dole out for the billies and nannies are frequent and notable. In Greek and Roman civilizations, goats were often, unapologetically, linked to sexuality and virility. Though the frenetically productive rabbit may come to mind, goats were considered the poster child of virility and emblem of fertility, in an era that glorified sexual congress.

Throughout mythology, male goats were often represented in wild states of unbridled lust, chasing after nymphs, singing, and dancing. Pan, the Greek god of shepherds and flocks and his Roman counterpart, Faunus, is a noteworthy example of the joyful hedonist. With curly goatee, horns, and hooves but the upper chest of a man, Pan ruled over the woods, groves, and glens. He was a shepherd, a lover, and a troublemaker. His countless attempts of nymphet seduction did not always come to fruition but his efforts were impressive. Pan tried once to sway Syrinx, a water-beauty, whose sisters had to turn her into a thicket of reeds to avoid his advances. The wind whipped through the reeds producing a lonely melody. Pan, unable to identify which was his beloved, cut through the hollow stalks, tied them together fashioning an instrument he carried with him for eternity. These panpipes mimic their goatish artisan, rough and simple, forever embedded in the pastoral.

The she-goat, however, represents a more maternal side to this coin, nurturing with genteel natures. In one such tale Zeus, God of all Gods, was raised by a goat named Amalthea, who's name in Greek means "tender goddess" nursing him in his infancy on her milk. After one of her horns breaks off, Amalthea fills it with fruits and flowers and gives it to Zeus, turning her horn into an icon of plenty, perpetually brimming with abundance. In adoration, Zeus places the goat in the stars as the constellation, Capra. These legends uphold the goat as fertile and as full of possibility as a warm day in Spring, the season that they watch over.

Nevertheless, dichotomies run deep through mythology and goats do not escape. The prolific goat, good-spirited, flirty and frolicking was also represented as a two-headed, fire-breathing beast. The Chimera, with one lion head, one goat head, a goat's body, and a snake or dragon for a tail was born of the union between Earth and Sea, ravaged the countryside in fiery bursts.

by Scarlett Lindeman

She was eventually slayed by Bellerophon, a hero riding the flying horse Pegasus. The charming Pan also had dualistic elements; he controlled panikon, the Greek word for panic for the explosive bouts of terror that can encompass animals and humans. Masters of hybridization goats juggle lust and fruitfulness, alarm and fear.

In the ole' Bible, our kids do not fare well. In the book of Matthew our hooved brethren get cast into lakes of fire while sheep live eternal. Later on, in Leviticus, all of the sins of Israel are placed on the head of a scape-goat and he is cast off into the wilderness to die. This ill treatment is interesting; one could argue that Jesus Christ became the ultimate scapegoat, dying for our sins. Only an innocent can bear the weight of an entire civilization's transgressions. Similarly, during this era and for thousands of years after, goat sacrifice was quite common in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Why the goat and not the sheep, one might ask? Well, sheep were also a sacrificial animal but goats seem more common. Anything that is valuable, necessary and meaningful is a contender for sacrifice. In order to please and placate the gods, you need to show that you are willing to give up an item, or a life, of worth. Goats are simply more badass. They were the Renaissance animal of their time, used for their muscles, skin, milk, meat, and bone: a worthy gift to any god.

Mythology is a landscape of multiplicities. Animals are often given multiple personalities, serving as stand-ins to human beings. Human characteristics, vices and eccentricities are pasted onto animals in order to represent and explain our own behaviors. Men have hooves and goats whittle out melodies.

These myths of the goat and their various characteristics, make sense in modern terms. Goat are viewed as coarse and rustic, cute, but traipsing far away on some distant farm. To me, what first comes to mind when considering a goat is a steaming bowl of birria, a spicy goaty soup served with a plate of chopped white onion, cilantro springs, and lime wedges—the finest restorative to a night of heavy drinking.

The second thing that comes to mind is how infrequent the goat comes to mind. *Capra aegagrus hircus* remains absent from our collective consciousness, left to roam pastoral hills of some farmer's faint memory. Goats may not bleep on the public realm that often but they do silently tramp through our culture. A cornucopia, the aforementioned broken goat's horn, filled with plenty is a popular Thanksgiving icon. Our practical and self-reliant Capricorn friends have a half goat, half fish, as their zodiac symbol. And at every metal show, goats get a nod from the pumping fists of devil horns. Goatish characteristics and devilish imagery go hand and hoof.

Removed from the fantastic stories, goats become relatable, their polymathic personalities demonstrative of the conflicting and complex lives that we lead. I am a cook, a writer, a doodler, a trumpet player, and a 25-cent Crane Game master. We do it all and then some because we should, can, and love to. Like Pan's numerous inspirations, we are not two-faced but multitasking, spreading ourselves between many disciplines and passions. Outside of myth, goats hold true to their copious attributes. They make tangy cheese and climb slanted trees. They are curious and inquisitive but sometimes scatter like marbles. And us? We paint and make radish pickles. We nuzzle and spit.



a HORRIBLE & Magnificent SPECTACLE

"There will be factories and bad air and accidents and adulterated food."

- Upton Sinclair, upon the release of his novel, *The Jungle*

And there she was, the most famous actress in all the world – the beautiful Sarah Bernhardt – surrounded by butchery. It was, said that Parisian friend of Gustave Dore, Victor Hugo, the Prince of Wales, "a horrible and magnificent spectacle." The spectacle she spoke of was Chicago's Union Stockyards which opened on Christmas Day, 1865 and closed 106 years later.

Inside the stockyards, Bernhardt's senses would have been assaulted. The smell of mangled meat, blood, dung, urine, smoke. The sounds of men shouting at the animals bellowing, squealing, bleating, and screaming as they were efficiently killed, drained, chopped, and packaged. And the sight. Bernhardt, that dainty actress who played in Shakespeare and Dumas, Moliere and Ibsen, saw the hogs being butchered. That meant seeing a line of hogs driven up a chute into a catching pen. The machine was a huge wheel with chains hanging from its rims. A man, filthy with the gore of animals, wrapped the chain around the hind leg of a pig and the animal was jerked into the air, upside down, screaming. Sent along a track to a man with a knife in his hand, the pig's throat was cut, the blood drained. Then, the pig, perhaps still alive, twitching, blood pouring into a trough to be used for fertilizer, would be released into a vat of boiling water. It's dead for sure now. Then, of course, it has to be scooped out of that tub, scraped and shaved and then, with its head now almost completely decapitated, it would be hitched to a rail and sent along to the cutting gang.

"You shall find them about six miles from the city," wrote Rudyard Kipling, the famed author of *The Jungle Book*, "and once having seen them you will never forget the sight."

In the United States, about ten billion animals are slaughtered every year in 5,700 slaughterhouses and processing plants that employ more than a half a million workers. 28.1 billion pounds of beef are consumed yearly in the United States alone. Meat – people like to eat it. But what of this insatiable hunger for flesh in this day and age when people like to eat more local, people like to know where the food in their mouths have come from. What happens when the windows of the slaughterhouse become as transparent as the air between farmer and consumer across the market table? Witnessing a cow receive an electrical shock of 300 volts and 2 amps to the back of the head before being hung upside down and then have its neck cut open before its decapitated and skinned, before its organs

removed, before the carcass is broken down to dinner-sized portions may change the way eaters consider that steak sandwich at lunch.

Some human, millennia ago, killed an animal and then ate it. "Hmm," he must have thought, gnawing on the leg of some hapless creature, "this is good." And he ate more meat. And the meat was shared with others. "This is good," they thought. Hunting for animals goes back thousands upon thousands of years. Before the domestication of livestock, about 11,000 years ago, hunters hunted. The bow was developed 18,000 years ago. The dog was domesticated, to aid in hunting, 15,000 years ago. The kings of Mesopotamia were depicted hunting lions. Artemis, the daughter of Zeus, was the Hellenistic goddess of the hunt.

And some of these humans, millennia ago, settled. No longer nomadic hunters-gatherers, they formed communities. As settlements grew, and more meat was consumed, there wasn't enough room for each homeowner to stable their own animals yet to be eaten. The Shambles were born. On the peripheries of major cities, the Shambles were open-air slaughterhouses. Butchers, on site, would take their knives and wares to all sorts of animals for consumption. Blood would drain down the streets, the barks of men would mingle with the bleats of animals, and the knives, sharp, would cut deep. If one could stay away from those dark houses of death, all the better. Antipathy was keen for centuries. Slaughterhouses were mentioned at least as early as the 16th century, as it was in Sir Thomas More's famed *Utopia*. There was, people argued, loose morals and gore surrounding these butcheries.

Slaughterhouses moved innocuously to the periphery, away from public view. People liked eating ham. People did not like knowing how it got to their Easter table. And so began the split between the food we eat and the animals that became our food. Out of sight, out of mind.

The one Bernhardt visited; the one Kipling marveled over; the one visitors at the World's Columbian Exposition took day trips to; the one in which, by 1890, nine million animals were processed yearly; the one where 25,000 people worked at and lived near; the one that produced 82% of all the meat eaten in the United States; the one poet Carl Sandburg immortalized in verse as a Stormy, husky, brawling/City of the Big Shoulders; the one that, by 1900, was a 475-acre plot containing 50 miles of road and 130 miles of railroad track lining its perimeter; the one that Sinclair Lewis wrote about:

The name of that jungle was Chicago's Union Stock Yard and Transit Company.

That muckraking masterpiece by Minnesota-born Socialist Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*, published in 1906 was to be a shocking look at the Labor Movement, a terrifying look at the Haves and the Have-Nots. It was all that, but, nauseatingly more. It highlighted to the public the horrid conditions within the meatpacking industry, specifically the meatpacking happening in Chicago. "I aimed," Sinclair said about his book much later, "at the public's heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach."

There was much to stomach for those who read it, and most everyone read it. *The Jungle* became a run-away bestseller. Deplorable and first-hand, readers sensed all what went on beyond the Union Stock Yard gates, like Sinclair's account of workers falling into rendering plants and being ground, along with animal parts, into "Durham's Pure Leaf Lard," and then sold to the general public. This can't be, the public thought. President Roosevelt, persuaded by Sinclair himself, investigated to find out, sending two men into the yards. Forewarned with time to clean up, the inspectors still found the conditions "revolting." Revolting is never good in regards to eating. Foreign sales of American meat fell by one-half. Because of Sinclair's novel, and the public outcry after its publication, the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 were passed. Also due to the passage of those acts, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration was born, an agency of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

One hundred-plus years later and meat eating is still big business. As of 2005, four companies controlled the processing of over 80% of this country's beef and three of those four companies control 60% of our country's pork. 79% of cattle slaughters occur at only 22 plants. The USDA collected ground beef samples in 1996 for testing and found that 7.5% were contaminated with Salmonella and 53.3% had *Clostridium perfringens*, aka bacteria. Twenty years ago plants could slaughter 175 cattle an hour. Due to increased line speeds, plants can now slaughter about 400 an hour.

Forget about the animals for a moment and consider the workers. In 1996, meatpackers had the highest rate of repeat-trauma disorders of the nation's work force. In 1998, 30% of packing plant workers sustained a work-related injury or illness, making meatpacking the most dangerous job in the country in terms of non-fatal injuries. Today, the largest slaughterhouse in the world is in Tar Heel, North Carolina. The Smithfield Packing Company

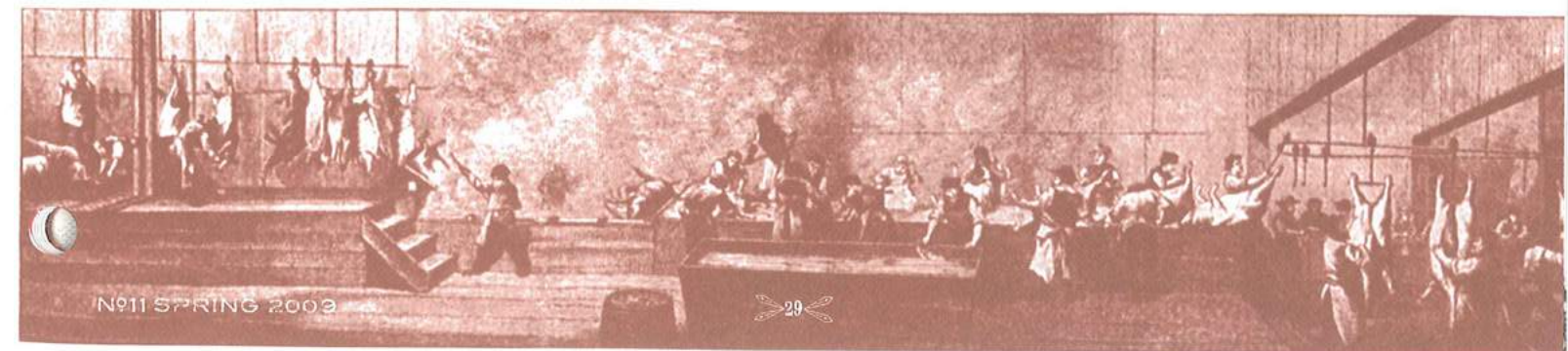
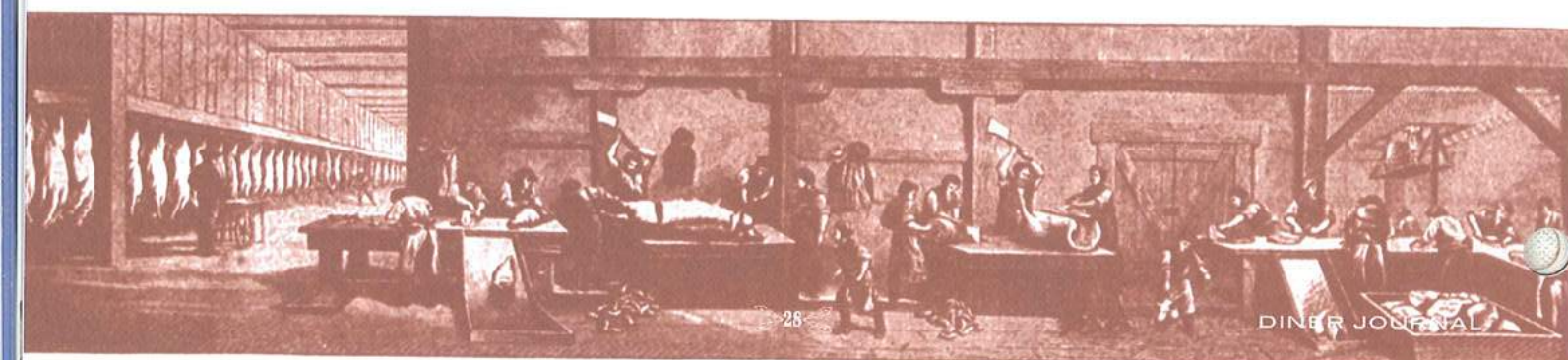
was founded in 1936 by Joseph W. Luter and his son. Now a Fortune 500 company, Smithfield is capable of butchering tens of thousands of pigs daily. That Easter ham feast is probably a Smithfield ham.

Organic farming, of course, has come to the fore these days and organic meat production is no exception. Organic butchers dot the country with steely knives and a steely resolve to make meat eating a little simpler, more back-to-basics, more pure. The benefits of pastured, organic meat are many. It tastes better, for one. The meat's leaner and the fat that remains have benefits. Whole milks, cheeses, and butter, for example, have higher amounts of conjugated linoleic acid. This acid has shown, in animal studies, anti-carcinogenic properties. There's also no hormones, antibiotics, or steroids injected into the animals. And the animals are afforded a happy life, before it ends anyway. Those soon-to-be-porkchopped pigs get to wallow in the mud and eating healthy in the process. Cattle get to moo over fresh grass. Goats prance about in the fields and chickens are free on the range.

There is no way to avoid the death of a chicken if you like chicken cordon bleu. Whatever happy life a chicken may have it'll end, swiftly, for your dinner plate. A cow can't survive if you want to eat a kabob. You can't eat a gyro and not have a lamb perish. Organic butchers are trying to narrow the vast disparity between a reverence for life and the brutality of the knife. The contrast doesn't have to be as severe as it was in Chicago's hey day, or at the Smithfield Packing Company where multitudes of pigs seemingly clamor for their own demise. It can be a bit more peaceful, the process, so the animals aren't stressed before the slaughter and people aren't stressed in knowing animals were slaughtered.

In 1949, Frenchman Georges Franju made a short documentary, *Le Sang des Bêtes* or "Blood of the Beasts". It was his first film and remains memorable. Black and white, it contrasted sweet quiet scenes of Paris with scenes from a slaughterhouse. Sheep are slaughtered, calves. Franju, using these counterpoints of bucolic and butchery, made the film, "realistic while remaining a surrealist by displacing the object in another context." A horse is stunned with a pistol, bled, and butchered. There's no telling what Sarah Bernhardt, would have thought of the film. Perhaps she would have remarked it "a horrible and magnificent spectacle."

by Jonathan Shipley





LETTERS

A CONVERSATION ABOUT EGGS & FAMILY

ROBERT LAVALVA & CAROLINE FIDANZA

Dear Caroline

I began leafing through some cookbooks to find egg recipes - or really just one book, a huge collection of regional recipes from Italy. My cousin from Rome gave it to me years ago. It's a bit awkward to flip through because the recipes are arranged region by region, rather than by type, but that is what makes the book so interesting. It gives you a feel for each part of the country, how the cooking varies as you travel from north to south, but also how much it has in common, like a language and its dialects. Some of the dishes are pretty unusual, for example, Uova alla Monacella from Calabria is a sweet version of deviled eggs covered with cocoa and cinnamon, dipped in beaten egg white and fried. Or Uova in Trippa from the Lazio, which is not eggs with tripe, but eggs made to look like tripe, beaten, seasoned, fried in thin discs, cut into strips and covered in tomato sauce. And I had to pause when I came across Frittata Rognosa, which means "Mangy Frittata." Not the most appetizing name, but it sounds pretty good, stuffed with a special salami from Piedmont that is preserved by keeping it jars, covered with lard.

Mostly though, looking at the book triggered my own memories of eating and cooking eggs and it made me realize that I am more interested in the simplest, anonymous recipes. The things you make at home without thinking about it.

What I like about eggs is how they can make nearly anything into a meal. Recently, Cerise made us a really simple, delicious lunch, just some farro mixed with sautéed onions, olive oil and feta cheese, which was good enough. But she also placed two hard-boiled egg halves on top of the farro. The eggs made a side dish into a lunch. I remember you telling me you liked eating at home that way as well. Nearly anyone can afford to eat a plate of grains, vegetables and eggs, and it can all be fresh, local and clean. I keep thinking that if we're really going to push this movement forward we have to consider not just how the food is grown, where and how it is sold, but also where and how it is prepared. Even the most expensive free-range eggs cost 50 cents apiece. Put one of those on a ½ cup of grains and some sautéed greens and you get a great and nutritious meal for under \$3, maybe even under \$2.

Lately my favorite way to eat eggs is as a "mock" omelette. I took a class on omelette making and then promptly forgot the instruction. My method is to heat a little butter in a pan, beat two eggs in a bowl (but not too much), pour the liquid in the pan and begin stirring it with a spatula as soon as it begins to set. The stirring keeps exposing the liquid eggs to the base of the pan where they solidify, but it also prevents the solidified eggs from browning or hardening. If I get it just right, most of the egg cooks into wide "folds" that include streaks of white, almost like marbling in a steak. Also, some of the beaten mix remains liquid, just enough to give a warm, saucy coating to the cooked eggs. I flip all of this into a dish and eat it quickly while it's still warm, with just a sprinkling of salt. A little pepper is also nice, and I imagine some finely chopped herbs would be great as well. I find that if the eggs are good you don't even need salt. That and a little bread makes a great lunch. With some greens on the side it would

make a good light dinner. I think this is the whole intention behind the omelette, i.e. to present the essence of the egg and its various and most pleasant textures. It takes a while to master that "flip" whereas my way is pretty simple, though of course I'm cheating. Also, I've found that even with just a pat of butter, the constant stirring (I like to use a flat wooden spatula) prevents the eggs from sticking, making clean up is very simple without needing a non-stick pan.

I also like fried eggs sunny side up. In Italy we called them "occhiodibue" which means "the bull's eye." Those are a little harder to get just right. I've not quite mastered how to get all of the whites cooked yet keep the yolks runny. I don't like eggs this way when the yolks get cooked, even partially; what is even worse is when the whites remain a bit uncooked, forming that mucosy cold membrane over the surface of the whole thing. The other problem is that these eggs tend to stick on the pan unless I use a lot more butter. I like using olive oil for this dish. When they do come out well, they're delicious, the warm yolk perfect for dipping toast. I'm never quite sure what to do with the whites though. I usually end up putting them onto the toast but I keep thinking there has to be a better way.

Of course, soft-boiled eggs are the absolute best for dipping toast. Another one of those methods that take a while to master, because you really have to get to know your egg and how long it takes to reach the perfect balance, where the yolk is warm and velvety and the white is just a shade firmer than butter, almost like a panna cotta. When we lived in Rome, in the early 1970's, we would often have dinner with my grandparents, dinner Italian style, i.e. a light meal. I always wanted soft boiled eggs, which we called "a la coque" - for some reason they use this French term. My grandmother would make them perfectly. After eating my two eggs "a la coque" I developed a little ritual where I would fill each hollow shell with water, then throw the eggs from my grandmother's balcony onto the courtyard below. I loved hearing them crash and seeing about four or five alley cats running over to see what treat might have fallen their way, only to turn back disappointed. Apparently the custodian of the buildings next door complained about this so I made sure to throw my eggs only after dark, and I never got caught.

I remember going to the market with her and all of the farmers sold eggs. I don't think she got them from any one place in particular. I do recall they were of varied sizes, sometimes white, sometimes brown and always seemed to have a bit of dirt and feathers stuck to the shell. In fact recently some eggs I bought at the Tompkins Square market had just the tiniest bit of feather stuck to one of them, and seeing this made me so mysteriously happy! The farmers in Rome would have the eggs piled up alongside the produce, and would sell you however many you wanted, wrapped in newspaper. Once in a while they would have a double yolk, something I've really never seen here, even in eggs from the Greenmarket. I guess we've found a way to screen that out, lest anyone be too disgusted by nature. Also, those Italian eggs had yolks that were really, really deep yellow-

orange, though I wouldn't be surprised if something was put in the chicken feed to give them this color.

This actually reminds me of a curious tradition. Around Easter time vendors would set up stands to sell baby chicks, dyed different colors like eggs. They would put them into clear plastic bags, tied up at the top, just like goldfish, and kids would take them home to play. I have no idea what happened to them after that, it seemed like a custom stemming from a time when nearly everyone had some connection to the countryside, and the chicks would probably be returned to the farm once they grew too large to keep at home. I do remember wanting one, but also being happy that my parents said no. The other thing I remember was going on picnics the day after Easter, which is also a holiday. The objective was to get out into the countryside and eat all those leftover hard-boiled eggs, along with salami and bread. Eggs really do go well with salami.

I also remember my grandfather once coming home with a live chicken. It was a present from a friend and my grandmother locked herself in the bathroom and refused to come out until the bird was no longer on the premises. However, she had no problem cooking it once it had been slaughtered and plucked. When we cut into the roasted chicken we discovered it was full of infertile eggs, of varying sizes, which my grandfather much enjoyed. The chicken itself was a bit tough, if I recall.

My parents would make this very simple egg dish for us, especially on those desperate evenings when they couldn't think of anything else to cook:

Sauté some finely chopped onion with olive oil in a large pan. Add a container of strained tomatoes and simmer for about 10 minutes, seasoning with salt, pepper and basil until it cooks into a sauce. Break about six or eight eggs into the sauce, and layer with thin slices of mozzarella. Even the processed, supermarket mozzarella works well with this, in fact can work better than the fresh type. Cover the pan and simmer on a low flame for about 10 minutes. Keep checking. When it's done, the eggs will have poached perfectly and the mozzarella will be melted. Scoop up the eggs with lots of tomato sauce and eat with bread. It's really delicious and filling. The only problem is that the mozzarella can congeal on the bottom of the pan and be a mess to clean. But I would still rather deal with that than use non-stick.

I remember my parents cooking this in one of those square, aluminum electric pans from the 1960's... I think they were made by Faberware, right here in Queens, though I'm not sure about that. My father used that same pan to make an egg dish called Infigliolata, which in Sicilian means "wrapped up." He has not made eggs like that in ages, so I called to ask him how he did it:

Beat 6 or so eggs thoroughly, and season with salt, pepper, grated parmesan and finely chopped parsley and mint, to taste.

Add breadcrumbs so that the mix becomes more like a paste. Pour this into a frying pan well-seasoned with olive oil, and begin "pushing" the egg mix with a spatula away from you, leaving behind a thin coating of a few inches. As this thin "tail" cooks, begin forming it into a roll, as you continue pushing the uncooked egg mix away. This sounds tricky but it's really not that difficult once you get the hang of it. I remember being fascinated as we watched him do this. Eventually you'll get a long, strudel like roll of cooked egg, which I remember would be nicely browned and rather dry. He would cut the roll crosswise into rounds, which we pulled apart with our fork as we ate them. I remember really liking this a lot as a kid.

Anyway, these are some initial egg thoughts for you. Maybe you could show me how to make a proper omelette.

See you this evening....

Robert

Robert,

I love and agree with all of your thoughts on eggs, particularly the notion that they are an inexpensive and healthy way to eat. Whenever anyone asks me how people are supposed to eat sustainably raised food on a limited income I give them that very same response. Eat eggs, eat whole grains and beans supplemented with a vegetable and you are eating both for ideal health and can choose the very best ingredients. Eating well, which always includes for me the consideration as to where and how the food was grown, is possible for everyone. How we continue to think of a meat as the measure of a meal is impossible to me.

I always feel funny, especially now that I'm not working in the kitchen anymore, that the food I eat at home is completely unlike the food we make in the restaurants. I always think I should be braising a brisket or making cassoulet. I realize that if I feel this way other people must too. Here again, we don't trust or even seriously consider how simple a meal at home can and should be. There is no need to be a gourmet. People have always needed quick, easy and inexpensive food for dinner. We don't need to over-complicate the idea of cooking at home.

Eggs play the perfect role in fortifying and formalizing a meal. I often make myself rice one day and on the next sauté it in a pan and break an egg into it, stirring it up with a wooden spoon until the egg is streaky and set. I serve it with a salad and, for some reason, sesame seeds. I eat sesame seeds on top of almost everything I make at home. But that's because almost everything I make at home is something like I just described. Serve that with a glass of wine and maybe even a piece of cheese and it's dinner.

The first time my mother ate the potato tortilla at Marlow & Sons she said it reminded her of the frittata that her mother used to make on those Friday nights when she didn't make pizza.

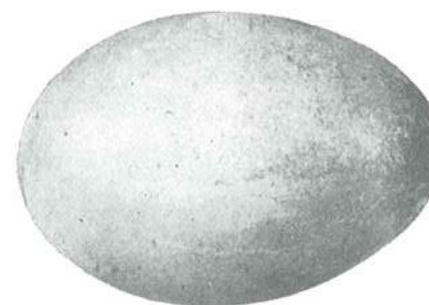
Her mother would make it and it would be waiting for my mother when she came home from work, room temperature. I never met my grandmother but I have heard so much about her cooking that I can imagine exactly what it must have been like. I was so thrilled that I had somehow instinctively connected to this dish, which I had to make every day for a year at Savoy, and brought with me to the restaurant. That somehow my history, even one unknown to me, found me in the potato tortilla. The tortilla, as simple as it appears, requires attention to technique. And the technique can change a little from person to person. You have to personalize it in order to succeed. When Rebecca used to make it she called it the "stations of the cross" because she had to move the pan forwards and back, side to side, on the burner to get it to cook evenly. I always love watching the cooks go from overwhelmed and dreadful to mastering it. A perfect tortilla with beautifully rounded sides and just a hint of a golden hue makes me so proud.

This is another reason why egg cookery is so interesting because it does require technique. On the one hand it's so easy, it takes only minutes to cook an egg. But that little gesture requires some understanding. As you said, you took a class on how to make an omelette. The very idea that you would take a class on something that is made from one ingredient and cooks in under five minutes is amazing. Yet to do it well and therefore enjoy it, you need to learn how to do it right. I don't know if I can. I've never personally valued the pristine yellow omelette without even a speck of brown. Too French for me. I actually like a little brown on my omelette, but I hate it on my scramble. I want my scramble to be yellow and wet.

It's interesting too that eggs, usually scrambled eggs are often the preferred vehicle for other culinary delicacies. Truffles are, in their purest form, shaved on top of soft scrambled eggs. Similarly oysters and even caviar are often served with eggs. Somehow the texture of the egg, its exquisite creaminess and richness is the perfect accompaniment to our most esteemed and luxurious foods.

The book that I consulted for egg ideas and inspiration is from the Time Life Good Cook series, the one on Eggs and Cheese. Every time I dust off one of the books from that series I am always amazed at the range of recipes, some that are so dated and deeply unappealing and some that are completely timeless. For every archaic recipe there is one that is completely current.

Sincerely,
Caroline



Dear Caroline

I never knew you liked sesame seeds so much. I assume you mean the white ones, like the kind they put on semolina bread or on sesame bagels. My grandparents always bought that kind, at a little bakery across the street from their apartment building on First Avenue, in the East Village. I would go with my grandfather to buy bread. I don't think a loaf could have cost more than 50 cents in the late 1970's. The owner would ask if we wanted it "colcimino," meaning, with sesame seeds. Although what that term "colcimino" means literally I have no idea. It's probably a very local dialect. Further up First Avenue, I think near 13th Street, there was another bakery whose owners were from the same town as my other grandparents, and whenever they came to visit us from Italy we would stop by the shop to say hello. Come to think of it there were about five or six bakeries all along First Avenue, just between Houston and Fourteenth Street. They were all extremely spare, just a wooden counter with crude shelves behind, with a selection of maybe four or five types of bread. All of them are gone now. That was an entirely different economy, where you could have businesses paying low rent and creating the neighborhood fabric.

Reading your egg recipes reminded me of how useful eggs are in transforming leftovers into a meal. Beat some eggs, add cheese and leftover vegetables, and make an omelette or frittata, nothing could be simpler. Growing up, my parents would also take leftover spaghetti with sauce, mix it with beaten eggs and grated cheese, and fry it in a pan. They would push this around the pan while it cooked, so it would come out a bit like scrambled eggs mixed with pasta. I remember liking the bits that would get crisped. I think they used butter for this and not olive oil, or else a mix of butter and olive oil.

Years later when I was in graduate school I met my friend Emy, who grew up in Sorrento. She and her husband Luigi, who is also from there, have perfected the art of what I've come to call "spaghetti pie." Which is similar to what my parents made, pasta cooked with beaten eggs and cheese. It's one of those things that's good warm, at room temperature, or cold and it makes a perfect lunch. You can make it with any pasta, but I like it most with spaghetti in tomato sauce. I add lots of grated cheese and sometimes a few anchovies. It's also important to add a bit of salt, more than you think is necessary; and to make sure you have enough eggs, again more than you think is necessary. The mix should be slightly runny, with all the pasta well coated in egg, or otherwise it won't form into a pie. It will still be good though, just not as nice to look at. That's why I don't think I can really give a recipe. It's one of those things you just have to try for yourself until you get it the way you like it, and since it's always delicious anyway you always come out ahead! I like it cooked in butter, with a little olive oil. Again a bit more than you think you need.

Soon,
Robert

Dear Robert,

I can't believe that you made the spaghetti pie at home. I have only ever made it at the restaurant and associate it with late nights at Diner. I don't really even know how I became acquainted with it. Sometimes I think classic recipes just come to you without ever having seen them before, as though if you hang around long enough in the atmosphere all of the stuff of the ages will come to you. Like the potato tortilla, which I had an instinctive connection to, the spaghetti pie is just something that I kind of thought I invented and then realized that it was a real thing. I would make it at the end of the night with the leftovers from the family meal that we'd have before service. We always made little snacks for the staff at the end of the night but there were a couple of things that were extra special; mini burgers, curry fries and spaghetti pie. I agree that it has to be spaghetti with sauce. You wouldn't think that the sauce and the egg would be so good together but they are. I also like to sauté the spaghetti in a good amount of olive oil first to get it a little crispy and then add the egg.

I like the notion of a bit more than you think you need with regard to salt and oil and eggs. I think that this is a good governing principle in general when it comes to cooking. It is certainly true of the potato tortilla, you want the egg to displace a certain amount of oil as it slides into the pan and then you want the oil to soak into the tortilla as it cooks. It seems such a monster and it's true that sometimes there is a little too much for the pan but you want it to be really creamy. These dishes, the tortilla or the spaghetti pie are meant to be silky and creamy and even a little oily. Not greasy oily, flavorful oily.

And yes, eggs are a great way to use leftovers, sometimes I look more forward to eating the thing the next day than the first day. Leftovers too are a matter of economy and of making more with what you have. Eggs offer a way to re-make leftovers rather than just having the same thing again and therein a new dish is created which is often better than the original.

On the subject of sesame seeds, I don't know when my obsession began. It must have been in cooking school. Gomasio, which is a mix of toasted sesame seeds and sea salt is a staple macrobiotic condiment and I have always loved those Italian sesame loaves. But it's only been the past 5 or so years and hardcore for the past 2 years that I cannot be without a sesame seed in the kitchen. There was one waitress who knew I loved the Sullivan Street's sesamo and when she would cut the loaves for service she would always save the ends and neatly line them up next to each other along the shelf on my station. I would almost immediately move them away because I really couldn't leave them there all night and there were way more ends than I could ever eat. I never told her not to do it because it was the sweetest gesture.

Sullivan Street makes the best one, covered in seeds. I love it grilled with fresh ricotta, sea salt and olive oil. Between that and anything made with an egg you have dinner.

Regards,
Caroline

EGGS POTATO TORTILLA RECIPE

POTATO TORTILLA

This recipe is for a large tortilla which will serve ten. Tortilla can be held out at room temperature and be eaten the next day.

10 medium potatoes (yukon gold style)
2 medium spanish onions
12 eggs
Extra virgin olive oil (lots)

Set a large dutch oven on the stove and fill it with 4 cups of olive oil. Turn the heat on low and slowly warm up the oil.

Meanwhile peel the potatoes and slice them into 1/8" slices. Do not rinse or hold the sliced potatoes in water, you need the starch. Turn the oil up to medium and place a slice of potato in it. When the potato slice starts to bubble add the rest of the potatoes. Cook the potatoes slowly, at a simmer not a boil, stirring occasionally. While the potatoes are cooking slice the onions against the grain into thin slices. When the potatoes are still al dente but starting to soften, add the onions to the pot. Continue cooking until the potatoes are completely soft and the onions are translucent. It's okay if the potatoes start to fall apart, better to overcook them than to undercook them. When potatoes are done strain them off through a colander saving the oil. The oil can be reused, it's a little flavored but entirely useable and delicious. Place the potatoes and onions into a large stainless steel bowl and season them well with salt. Allow the potato and onions to cool a little until they are warm but not hot. If you stick your finger in the center you will find out best how hot they are. While still warm break the eggs into the potato and egg mixture. Do not pre-break and whisk, just break the eggs directly in. Once all of the eggs are in mix the eggs, potatoes and onions well with a wooden spoon. Season to taste additionally with salt. Yes, you have to taste the raw egg, make it a good egg.

Take a 12" cast iron skillet and place it on high heat. Add back enough of the cooking oil to cover the bottom of the pan by 1/4". Bring the oil to smoking and then slide in the potato mixture. Immediately turn the heat down to medium and jiggle the pan. Using a rubber spatula, go around the potato mixture pulling the sides of the tortilla in and moving the egg around. Once egg begins to set continue to push the spatula against the sides of the tortilla and jiggle it as you go to shape it and prevent it from sticking as it cooks. Once the edges of the tortilla seem nicely set you have to flip the tortilla. This is the daunting (but fun) part. Take a flat lid larger in circumference than the skillet. Place the lid on top of the pan and then flip the tortilla onto the lid. Any number of things can happen at this point: the tortilla could be completely stuck, the tortilla could be partially stuck, the tortilla could have a nice firm top but be spreading out onto the lid. Don't panic. If the tortilla is completely stuck flip it back and stick it into a 400° oven until it sets which should take about 5 minutes. If it is partially stuck use the spatula to unstuck the rest and patch the tortilla together. If it is in tact but spreading move quickly.

Place skillet back onto the heat, add a little more oil to the pan and slip the tortilla back into the pan to finish cooking on the other side. At this point the tortilla is mostly cooked through you are just finishing off the top, which you want to be more gold than brown. Push in the sides with the spatula to make sure that the finished tortilla will have a nicely rounded shape. Cook the tortilla on medium-low heat for another 3-5 minutes and then turn off the heat. Allow the tortilla to cool for 5 minutes and then flip AGAIN! onto a serving platter.

If you stuck the tortilla in the oven, run a spatula along the sides and then flip and serve.

Note: You can add things to the tortilla, chorizo, ham, cheese, greens. I prefer it simply prepared as above and would eat some chorizo or cheese on the side with a salad.



SPRING RAMPS and EGGS

This recipe is based on one for Wild Onions and Eggs in the Time Life Good Cook series. While we at the restaurant use ramps in everything when they're in season I'm always amazed to find a recipe like this one in an old book that is so right and relevant. The thing that I find most interesting about this recipe is the use of a lot of ramps. They really are the feature. The eggs are just the transportation. You could certainly omit the bacon and as the recipe writer points out if you don't have ramps you can use a combination of scallions, garlic and chives.

2 large bunches ramps (approximately 24)
4 slices thick cut bacon, cut into lardons
butter
8 eggs
1/2 cup milk

Slice the ramps and keep the whites and greens separate. Place bacon in a large frying pan with a little butter and turn the heat on medium low. When bacon starts to brown add the white of the ramps and cook until they are wilted, then add the green and let wilt. Beat the eggs with the milk. If you want to make it really rich use half milk, half cream. Season with salt and pepper. Pour the eggs over the ramps and scramble quickly being careful not to over cook. Serve.

EGGS SCRAMBLED w/ MUSTARD

Another recipe from the Time Life series. Genius.

- 8 eggs
- ¼ cup milk
- 1 medium onion, fine dice
- butter
- ¼ cup gelatinous braising juices or home made demi-glace
- 1-2 teaspoons dijon mustard

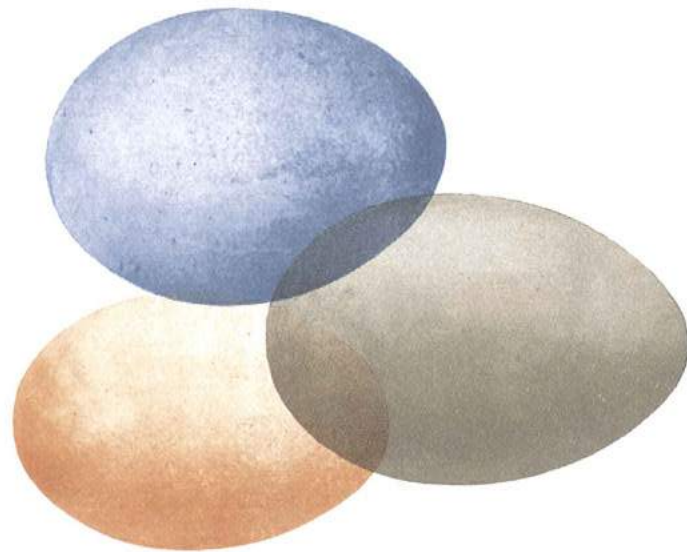
I don't usually use words like demi-glace, but here I am trying to convey what you might have if you made your own beef stock at home and then reduced it to a flavorful gelatinous state. It's a handy thing to have and I know there are people out there buying beef bones and making stock at home. I've seen you. Otherwise, if you've just cooked some short ribs, brisket or beef shanks and you have a bit of the braising liquid left over here's a great savory way to use it. I would serve this with garlic toast.

In a large sauté pan cook the onion in 2 Tablespoons butter until golden. Allow to cool. Beat the eggs and season them with salt and pepper. Add the braising liquid, the onions to the eggs and sprinkle in 2 Tablespoons of cold diced butter. Heat the pan again and add a little more butter and pour in the egg mixture. Cook it over low heat stirring the whole time with a wooden spoon until the eggs are creamy. Stir in the mustard and serve.

FRIED EGG on GARLIC TOAST w/ WILTED GREENS, ANCHOVY and PECORINO

- 1 bunch dandelion greens
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 tin anchovies in oil
- 1 pinch chile arbol (optional)
- 1 lemon
- eggs
- rustic italian bread, sliced
- aged pecorino cheese

If you have any way of grilling this bread, please do. Drizzle it with olive oil and grill or else toast it in the oven or in a pan. Place a small pan on the stove and add about 3-4 Tablespoons extra virgin olive oil. Allow the garlic to sizzle and then add the anchovies and, if you want, the chile arbol. When garlic is golden and the anchovies have melted pour them over the washed dandelion greens. Add the juice of the lemon and season with sea salt and pepper. Toss dandelion greens well and place them on top of the toasted bread. Fry eggs sunny side up and place on top of the greens and bread. Shave pecorino on top of the eggs and drizzle with a little more olive oil. Serve hot.



POACHED EGGS in SPRING VEGETABLE BROTH

- 4# beef bones
- 2 carrots
- 3 leeks
- 1 bunch ramps
- 1 bunch radishes

Make the stock the day before you are ready to serve the soup.

Brown the beef bones by roasting them in the oven. Remove from the oven and place the beef bones in a pot and cover with water. Slice the carrot and one of the leeks in half lengthwise and add them to the pot with the bones. Bring everything to a boil, skim and turn to a low simmer. Allow stock to cook as long as possible 4, 6, 8 hours. You want to get as much gelatin and flavor out of the bones as possible. Strain and discard the solids.

Slice the remaining 2 leeks and the ramps thinly on the bias. Separate the white and green of the ramps reserving the greens to garnish the soup at the end. Thinly slice the radishes into rounds. Slowly heat the stock and season it well with salt. Add the sliced vegetables and allow them just to cook through but not overcook in the broth. Meanwhile poach the eggs. Place a medium pot on the stove with at least 4" of water. Add a splash of white vinegar to the water and bring to a boil. Turn the heat down to a simmer and break an egg into a ladle. Slowly lower the egg into the water and gently poach. When the white is completely opaque and the egg is floating remove the egg with a slotted spoon and place it in an individual bowl. Poach as many eggs as there are diners. Gently ladle the broth and vegetables over the poached egg. Sprinkle ramp greens on top of the broth along with some cracked black pepper.

CURRIED RICE w/ HARD BOILED EGG and YOGURT

- 2 cups rice
- 1 large spanish onion, fine dice
- 4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 2 heaping tablespoons curry powder
- 1 bunch scallions, thinly sliced on the bias
- 4 eggs
- plain yogurt, preferably thick greek style
- some sort of pickled vegetable: beets, onions, even regular pickled cucumbers

Heat a medium pot with a tight fitting lid. Add 3 Tablespoons olive oil and sauté the onions and garlic (add salt) until they begin to turn golden. Add the curry powder and stir it around a bit. Add the rice and stir everything together well. Add 3 cups of water and a pinch of salt and turn the heat down as low as you can. Place the lid on the pot and cook until all of the water is absorbed.

Meanwhile, place eggs in a pot and add just enough water to cover. Add a pinch of salt and turn the heat on high. As soon as the water comes to a boil turn the flame off. Time the eggs for 7 minutes. After 7 minutes plunge the eggs into an ice bath. Peel immediately, the longer you wait the harder it becomes to peel them.

To serve, place a portion of rice into a bowl. Spoon some yogurt onto the rice. Dice up pickles if they are big and place on top of yogurt. Add a generous amount of scallion and slice the egg and place on top.

SPAGHETTI w/ EGG YOLK and BREAD CRUMBS

- 1# spaghetti
- 6 egg yolks, room temperature
- 4 large slices crusty bread
- 1 small bunch parsley, washed and picked
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled
- aged pecorino

To make the bread crumbs: brush bread with olive oil and then toast in the oven until completely dry. When cool place the garlic and bread in the bowl of a food processor. Whizz until coarse. Add the parsley and whizz until crumbs are fairly fine. It's okay if they are a little coarse.

Cook the spaghetti in plenty of well salted water. Before draining the spaghetti take a cup of the pasta water out and hold. Drain the spaghetti and toss with olive oil, thin if necessary with pasta water. Place individual portions

of spaghetti in bowls and make a little well in the center of the spaghetti. Place the egg yolk in the center of the well and then sprinkle spaghetti with plenty of breadcrumbs, some shaved pecorino and fresh black pepper. Stir the egg into the spaghetti and eat.

FARRO w/ ARUGULA PESTO and a FRIED EGG

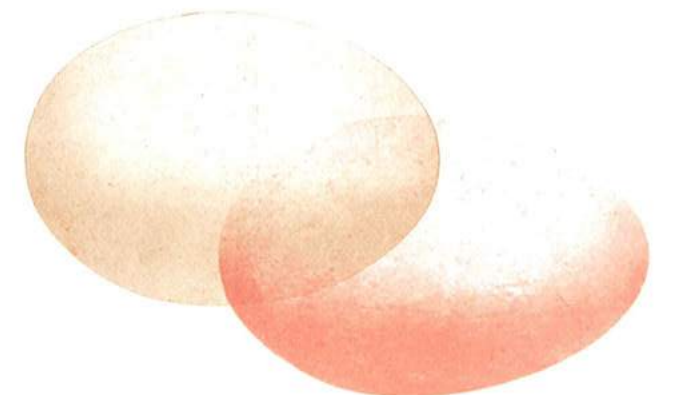
- 2 cups farro
- 3 cups water
- 1 bunch ramps, sliced
- 1 bunch scallions
- 4 cloves garlic
- ½ cup pistachios, toasted
- 6 cups baby arugula
- eggs
- feta cheese

Place a medium pot on the stove and add ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil. Add the ramps and sauté until a little golden and soft. Add the farro and mix well with the ramps and olive oil. Season with salt and add the water. Bring to a boil and then turn to a simmer. Cook the farro until it is done but not mushy, adding water if necessary. When the farro is cooked allow to cool a little but not completely.

Meanwhile make the pesto. Puree the garlic and pistachios in the bowl of a food processor. Add the arugula and puree until smooth adding a little olive oil as necessary to move it along. Season pesto with salt.

Toss the warm farro with the pesto and season additionally with olive oil and salt. Toss in the scallions and mix together.

Fry one egg per person, sunny side up. Place a portion of farro in a shallow bowl and crumble some feta over the top. Place the fried egg on top of the farro and crack some fresh black pepper.



LEFTOVERS

Eggs are a great way to make leftovers into something new as well as to fortify and extend them.

SPAGHETTI FRITTATA

I have never made this at home but loved to make it at work for the staff at the end of the night. As a result this recipe is for a big frittata. Like the potato tortilla you could cut this in half.

½ # leftover spaghetti, preferably with a meat sauce
12 eggs
½ cup grated parmesan or pecorino
½ cup chopped parsley

Heat a large skillet and add enough olive oil to evenly cover the bottom of the pan. Add the spaghetti and sauté a little, warming it through and allowing it to get a little brown. Meanwhile break the eggs and whisk them with ½ cup water, the cheese and parsley. Season the eggs well with salt and pepper. When the spaghetti is warm pour the eggs over the spaghetti and using a rubber spatula push the spaghetti away from the sides of the pan, moving the egg around as you go. Like the tortilla, either flip the frittata when it is set on the bottom or place it in a 400° oven to finish cooking. It will take a while to cook as it is so dense. Flip onto a plate and serve warm or room temperature.



FRIED EGGS w/ BRAISED BEEF and SCALLIONS

This dish is intended to be used with leftover braised beef and makes enough for two.

1 cup shredded braised beef or pork
1 bunch scallions, thinly sliced on the bias
4 eggs

Heat a large skillet and add 3 Tablespoons olive oil. Place the meat in the pan allowing it to warm through. Add any liquid that is left over as well. Add the scallions and spread everything evenly about the pan, leaving spaces to crack the eggs into. Crack 4 eggs into the pan and turn the heat on low allowing the eggs to cook sunny side up. Remove meat and eggs carefully with a spatula and serve.

FRIED RICE w/ EGGS, SCALLIONS and SESAME SEEDS

1-2 cups cooked white or brown rice (or any other grain, quinoa, bulghur, barley etc.)
2 eggs
1 bunch scallions, thinly sliced on the bias
2-4 tablespoons toasted sesame seed

As far as I'm concerned one should always have a container of toasted sesame seeds on hand, buy seeds with the hull on and place in a dry pan. Heat until seeds begin to smell toasty. Cool and use on everything.

This recipe is for two. Heat a skillet with 3 Tablespoons olive oil. Add the rice and cook on high heat warming the rice through and maybe even getting a little color and crunch. Break the eggs into the rice and with a wooden spoon stir vigorously until the eggs just cook through. Toss in scallions and place in a bowl. Sprinkle generously with sesame seeds.

