THE Chicago FOODCULTURA CLARION

ISSUE 3

Toucan Sam IN REPOSE
A TRIP TO M&K POULTRY KILL FARM

By Evan Williams

I recall M&K Poultry most by what my family calls "the smell of money." Snack foods in the front, squawking in the back. The squawking went on until a customer arrived, and then it didn't. I was there with two classmates to learn about live butchery, to speak with its practitioners, to interview its clientele, to examine, I thought, a segment of the American population free from the cognitive dissonance that afflicts many meat-consuming individuals.

Despite having grown up in a community of livestock farmers, 4H legacies, and FFA leaders, live butchery was entirely foreign to me. Like most American consumers, my meat came from the supermarket in plastic casing, backed by white or black styrofoam, picked out from a cool shelf under harsh light. The idea of the animal was detached from the sandwich. What M&K offered was the unification of the animal and the sandwich, it represented to us on that first visit an absurd proximity to death that spoiled our appetites.

Waiting to turn off the squawking with a pointed finger, we met a married couple, R&N, regular customers. We chatted, nervously, about our research and about the caged chickens. We traded stories of lived-farm experience, and asked finally if the pair would help us pick a poultry. They obliged, walking us through the traits to look for in a ripe bird. All the while, N shared stories of the fresh figs she'd eaten growing up, the fresh meat, how sentimental a meal made from such direct ingredients can be. That's why the couple came back, again and again, for that little taste of some other place, some other age. We selected a chicken, said goodbye to N&R, and left with the bird in a paper bag, still warm.

The most provocative part of the visit wasn't the unusual experience of watching your dinner die, it was uncovering the distance in any two people's food nostalgia. Food is weird. Memory is weirder.

In a series of photographs, we linked the minimally-processed and unfamiliar with the colorful, highly-processed foods of our own Gen Z nostalgia. A photo we playfully called *Toucan Sam in Repose* had our head-on, raw chicken propped against a pastel pillow of Fruit Loops; another photo showed our chicken, dismembered and painstakingly reconstructed, exhibiting the kind of homely care the preparation of a meal entails; a final photo places chicken nuggets alongside mashed potatoes and peas, ketchup and pickles on the side, a quintessential childhood meal from an unfamiliar source.

As an addendum to the project, we captured audio footage of the M&K kill floor. In conversation with the idea of nostalgia and the meals we prepared bridging individual nostalgias, it draws out the common form of it all, and is a reminder that these variations can and do exist at the same time within any community.

Butchery process. Interior of the M&K Poultry Kill Farm.

Paige Resnick, Nora Burkhardt and Evan Williams presenting M&K Live Poultry at the Gray Center Lab.

KOSHER COOKING
EATING IN and EATING OUT

Chicago kosher food ways degustation at the Gray Center Lab.

By Rachel Abrams

Why is kosher food in Chicago so bad and so limited? This is the question I began my project asking, and the truth is, that despite having multiple parts, it is not a particularly difficult question to answer. The lack of quality kosher restaurants in Chicago essentially boils down to a lack of eating out culture among Kosher keeping people, a lack of interest in "kosher cuisine" among non-kosher keepers, and the manipulation of the Chicago Rabbinical Council through their monopoly on kosher food certification in the Chicago area. Kosher restaurants have a captive audience who are essentially willing to eat and pay for whatever is available to them due to the limited options in the kosher space, but non-kosher keeping patrons, with a wide variety of high quality options at a range of prices, are not willing to pay 20 dollars for a pastrami sandwich or 17 dollars for a limp Greek salad. In communities like Skokie and West Rogers Park, where the vast majority of the religious Jews in the Chicago area reside, a fair number of kosher restaurants have been able to succeed, but each one leaves something to be desired, whether in ambiance, food, or pricing. The restaurants know the demand exists and understand that they need only do the bare minimum to have the support of these captive communities.

While kosher restaurants may often feel empty, or it may be unclear how they continue to pay their bills, one place that is never lacking are the kosher grocery stores. Chicago and its suburbs are served by two full-service kosher grocery stores, as well as two Jewel-Osco's and a Mariano's in which there exists full service kosher grocery stores, and of course Chicago's kosher food gem Romanian Kosher Butcher located in West Rogers Park. These stores are always busy and provide a fascinating insight into the kosher industry. When you walk in on a Sunday afternoon, you can see anyone from

Kosher bacon cheeseburger.

ultra-orthodox women and their ten kids stocking up on food for the coming weeks, to men who don't even wear a yarmulke in public, filling their carts with kosher meat. Although there is less of a restaurant culture among kosher-keeping Jews in Chicago, there is certainly a definitive eating-in culture. The kosher sections and kosher grocery stores in Skokie and West Rogers Park are filled with hard to find kosher ingredients like Parmesan cheese, rice noodles, and gummy candies. If you walk through the aisles, you will also find kosher brands of products that already bear a kosher symbol in their name brand form, like ketchup, mayonnaise, and yogurt. It's important to note that these "kosher brands" are uniformly terrible, and no one who shops at all in a conventional supermarket buys them. Sometimes the kosher brands are catering to those who adhere to an even tighter set of stringencies, consuming only milk or wheat products handled by Jews (Chalav Yisrael and Pas Yisrael respectively), but often these products are simply another example of how companies are able to capitalize on this captive and often quite wealthy audience. You will also find uniquely kosher products that don't exist on any other market. Some are imported from Israel, while others are made right here in the US.

Kosher grocery stores and products provide a wonderful insight into the unique "cuisine" of kosher-keeping people, and the micro industry that is kosher food. This is why in my quest to better understand the kosher food landscape in Chicago, I chose to cook with and showcase Chicago kosher food products for my final project.

For this project I prepared two different items representing two different parts of Chicago kosher foodways. The first item is a challah stuffed with two items that I rarely see outside of the kosher food section: Silan, a date honey, and halva spread. Challah is the most recognizable Jewish food on the planet, and is likely the only thing many people know about kosher or Jewish food. By taking an ultra recognizable item and stuffing it with niche products found broadly in kosher communities, it brings to light certain questions I have been asking throughout my project; who is kosher food made for? Is kosher a cuisine? And if it is, what defines kosher cuisine?

The second item I made is a riff on kosher style. The association between kosher food and Jewish food is strong but not always correct. When people crave matzo ball soup or a pastrami sandwich, they tend to go to a Jewish deli rather than a kosher restaurant. This leads to a lot of confusion about what is and isn't kosher, and the differences between kosher style and kosher. Kosher style seems to represent a cuisine that tastes like home and elicits warm feelings and full bellies, while kosher certified generally implies low quality, high prices, and lack of options. I turned these notions on their head with what I call "Treif Style", treif being the Yiddish word for non-kosher and the colloquial term for food that does not bear kosher certification. What I prepared was a completely kosher bacon cheeseburger, with beef bacon from Romanian, kosher ground beef, and vegan cheese. I brought in all my own cooking equipment to ensure that the food was kosher enough that I would eat it, but the goal was for the food to be the complete opposite of what is expected from kosher or even kosher style cuisine.

Food is central to Judaism and sharing home cooked meals is a huge part of the Jewish experience, and even more so the kosher keeping experience, because most things we want to eat are not easily accessible from stores and restaurants, so we have to make them ourselves. I personally have taken this on as a challenge and often try to find recipes that I can "Kosherize". While the lack of shrimp paste may make my Thai food inauthentic, and I'll never know what a real cheeseburger tastes like, I take these limitations as an opportunity to explore the culinary world that is accessible to me, and satisfy my cravings with home cooking when the restaurant options are limited.

EDITORIAL

Extra, extra, read all about it! Spaghetti and meatballs! Deep dish mysteries! Food for the Gods! Frankenfish! Friendship Cake! Traif-style bacon cheese burgers! Live butchery! *The Chicago Foodcultura Clarion* rings out for a third time.

For those who happen to have encountered an issue in their local *Reader* box for the first time, let me explain: *The Chicago Foodcultura Clarion* was born out of a collaboration between the Barcelona/Miami-based multidisciplinary artist Antoni Miralda and your editorialist, a University of Chicago professor of anthropology. The midwife was the University of Chicago's Gray Center for Art and Inquiry who supported our joint efforts with a generous grant from the Mellon Foundation. Its immediate outgrowth was a course on "Foodcultura: The Art and Anthropology of Food and Cuisine" that Miralda and I taught in the U of C in the fall of 2019 where we sent students out to explore the truly fantastic diversity of Chicago's culinary worlds. Our initial goal was to showcase the results in a symposium and pop-up exhibit at the Chicago Cultural Center in the spring of 2020. But then you all know what happened.

Miralda and I had always wanted our project to reach out beyond the confines of an elite institution like the University of Chicago, and so we decided to retool our project towards the venerable institution of the *Chicago Reader*. Its publisher, Tracy Baim, kindly agreed to let us run some 3000 copies of the *Clarion* as an insert every now and again, and Miralda and I found ready and enthusiastic collaborators in Peter Engler, Eric May, and Paige Resnick, and that's why you are holding issue number three in your hand right now—if you were lucky enough to get a hold of it, that is.

The genre of the editorial generally entails a preview of coming attractions. But it can accommodate a good story or two. In our last issue, I mused about what Nelson Algren and Simone de Beauvoir might have eaten for dinner when they first met and madly fell in love with each other on Chicago's Near West Side in 1947. This time, I'd like to step back a little further in time and ruminate about one of the less emblematically Chicagoan, but nowadays genuinely all-American dishes, mac 'n cheese. Its origins are surprisingly uncontroversial. The first generally agreed-upon mention of something resembling the contemporary dish comes from the Reverend Mannasseh Cutler who reminisced about a dinner at Thomas Jefferson's White House in 1802 as follows:

> "Dined at the President's – ... Dinner not as elegant as when we dined before. [Among other dishes] a pie called macaroni, which appeared to be a rich crust filled with the strillions of onions, or shallots, which I took it to be, tasted very strong, and not agreeable. Mr. Lewis told me there were none in it; it was an Italian dish, and what appeared like onions was made of flour and butter, with a particularly strong liquor mixed with them."

The "strillions" and "strong liquor" that the good Reverend Cutler found so objectionable have been fairly conclusively identified as pasta and parmesan[1], which Jefferson had encountered during his diplomatic service in pre-revolutionary France and his travels in Italy, where he first seems to have tasted and came to love pasta (which he consistently refers to as "macaroni" in his writings). But the third president of the United States not only had his agent William Short ship parmesan on a regular basis, but had acquired a Neapolitan pasta machine, a diagrammatic sketch of which he committed to his writings, along with a highly improbable recipe for how to make "nouilly á maccaroni"[2]. But then again, according to his slave, Isaac, Jefferson never went into the kitchen "except to wind up the clock". Instead he would have relied upon his enslaved cook James Hemings to make his mac 'n cheese. James Hemings was the older brother of Sally Hemings, the mother of Jefferson's unacknowledged enslaved children[3]. You see, when Jefferson first went to France as minister plenipotentiary of the newly founded American Republic to the court of Louis XVI, he took his slave James Hemings along and apprenticed him to a Parisian chef. Hemings was literate, eventually spoke French better than his master, and became so skilled in the culinary arts that, in 1796, Jefferson promised him his freedom under the condition that he train another (enslaved) chef for him. It was an offer Hemings could not refuse, but in Jefferson's mind his cooking had become indispensable. To be sure, Jefferson eventually emancipated him, and reacted with distress when he heard that James Hemings had committed suicide in 1801. But poor James, in many ways, had made a bargain with the devil: There was no place for a free Black French chef in the world that the likes of Thomas Jefferson had forged in early 19th century Virginia.

It is likely that the recipe for macaroni dressed with cheese that Jefferson's daughter in law, Mary Randolph, published in her cookbook *The Virginia House-Wife* in 1824 was none other than James Heming's. If so, does it mark an instance of cultural appropriation?[4] In a sense, yes, for Hemings's culinary genius remained unacknowledged. But what is it that was being appropriated here? An African American chef de cuisine's version of a Parisian-inflected version of an ancient Alpine or Mediterranean peasant dish mixing dairy products with starches? Nor do we really know how and through what channels of communication mac 'n cheese entered an emerging African American culinary tradition that, by the second half of the twentieth century, came to be known as Soul Food. The proximity of pasta-consuming marginalized Italian immigrant communities to African Americans in Post-Civil War American cities such as New Orleans is often thought to have played a considerable role in this story. But it was not until 1916 when the Canadian resident of Chicago James Lewis Kraft patented the "Process of sterilizing cheese and an improved product produced by such process" that the price of pasteurized and soon emulsified cheese began to match the household budgets of the majority of African Americans. By 1928, Kraft Foods launched Velveeta and, in 1937, came up with the 19 cent boxed version of instant mac 'n cheese in the midst of the Great Depression. Feeding a family of four per package, and soon to be put on the WWII rationing cards, Kraft's mac 'n cheese began its meteoric commercial ascent, coupled with a race towards the culinary bottom. That Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society unloaded vast amounts of heavily subsidized dairy surplus in the form of processed cheese upon welfare recipients and into school lunches only accelerated the process.

The rest, we might say, is history. With Marx we could say that people make their cuisines, but not under conditions of their own choosing: The recipes once prepared by Black cooks like James Hemings and published by white housewives like Mary Randolph converged in the seeming paradox of a racially unmarked industrial comfort food that evokes childhood memories among Americans both white and Black. A "crossover" dish bridging otherwise quite distinct culinary and social formations.

Of course, the bill of fare in this issue of the *Clarion* is decidedly neither industrial nor homogenized. On the contrary, it is entirely artisanal, always unpasteurized, and deliberately diverse. In many ways, the overarching theme is immigration: whether of Afro-Cuban deities, Asian carp, or dishes like *polpette in umido*. You will read about the labor of love that goes into the feeding of the *oricha* on Chicago's Southside (themselves immigrant gods, first from Africa to Cuba, and then on to the United States, large parts of Latin America, and Europe as well); the woes of kosher-keeping Jews who moved to Chicago from New York City and find their culinary choices severely restricted by the stranglehold of Chicago's Rabbinical Council's certification policies; a chef's heroic struggle to establish "Shanghai bass" on the menu of the Palmer House Hilton; the nostalgia evoked among immigrants by Chicago's live butchery venues; and then some: an interview with Bridgeport activist and culinary pioneer Ed Markowski, the mysterious origins of deep dish Pizza, and art work by Eric May and Hyun Jung Jun. ¡Que aproveche! Enjoy!

By Stephan Palmié

1. "American Cheese Products" were then still more than a century in the future (currently defined by the FDA as containing at least 51% of cheese).
2. See Thomas Jefferson's macaroni machine sketch at https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/macaroni
3. That James was also the son of Jefferson's father in law with an enslaved woman, and so not only the half-brother of Jefferson's wife Martha, but also the uncle of Jefferson's children with Sally Hemings throws a glaring light on the kitchen at Monticello, and the gastro-sexual worlds of late 18th century Virginia more generally.
4. Martha Washington's heirloom manuscript *Booke of Cookery* is largely based on 16th and 17th century English foodways, but she, too, may well have cribbed some recipes from her enslaved cook Hercules Posey.

SPAGHETTI and MEATBALLS

REFLECTIONS ON A MISUNDERSTOOD DISH

By Anthony F. Buccini

Though I am an Italian-American, I have never eaten the most emblematic dish associated with Italian-Americans, 'spaghetti and meatballs.' Growing up in North Jersey, where Italian-Americans are very numerous, and in a family where we ate our traditional foods almost every single day of every year, I of course consumed regularly both spaghetti in various ways and meatballs in various ways, but the two never once appeared together on our family table and the absence of this dish in my life has continued on as I approach the end of midlife. When occasionally confronted with the dish in institutional or other contexts, I have spurned it, though not specifically because a combination of pasta and meatballs is inherently objectionable but rather out of an awareness that any sort of 'Italian' food made by unknown people of unknown culinary background is likely to be at best a disappointment and possibly a form of gustatory torture. In other words, had I been presented this dish in the home of an Italian(-American) friend or relative here in the States or Italy, I would have tucked into it, bemused yet appreciative, but in all my years on this earth, that situation has never come to pass.

Spaguetti and meatballs.

As the emblematic dish of Italian food in America, 'spaghetti and meatballs' has received a certain amount of attention from food writers of different sorts, from the academic to the journalistic to the amateur food-enthusiast. Though some are knowledgeable enough to see connections to traditional southern Italian dishes, there is nonetheless a consensus opinion that the dish is uniquely American and many make the claim that this 'Italian-American' preparation evinces shock and horror in native Italians. For example, in the context of a discussion regarding culinary appropriation and authenticity, a justly renowned food scholar, Ken Albala, wrote of this dish: "We say spaghetti and meatballs is Italian-American, worthy of respect in its own right, though it makes 'real' Italian people shudder in horror." Similarly, the journalist Corby Kummer, in an Atlantic article of 1986 intended to teach us all about pasta—an effort which now might be regarded as a bit of culturally appropriative hubris—starts off with a header "An inquiry into a few fundamental questions: How did spaghetti and meatballs, a dish no Italian recognizes, become so popular here?…" I have yet to find a well-informed discussion of the topic.

Native Italians are notoriously proud of their traditional cuisines and vociferously object to the violence that outsiders perpetrate on them—garlic in *all'amatriciana*? cream in *alla carbonara*? Those are simply not admissible variations. But so too are Italian-Americans who grew up in a culinarily traditional setting—loose ground meat in a *lasagna alla napoletana*? Grated cheese on linguine with clam sauce?—unacceptable violations of taste and tradition. In point of fact, culturally conservative native Italians and Italian-Americans have always agreed on a great many fundamental culinary issues and if one aligns the two groups for regions of origin in Italy, the agreement extends to myriad details of particular preparations as well. All would agree on issues of meal structure—(antipasto/) primo/secondo/salad (/dessert)—as well as general contours to the weekly meal plan and the basics regarding which special events one celebrates at table and how one does so. When some forty years ago I travelled to my grandfather's hometown in Italy to reestablish a several decades long hiatus in contact between the American and Italian branches of the family, I was flabbergasted at how similar—in many respects identical—the cuisine with which I grew up was to what my cousins enjoyed. The major differences were their stricter adherence to seasonality and access to better versions of many basic ingredients, both of which are related to the fact that they live in direct contact with a particularly rich agricultural countryside and the one in which our shared cuisine came into existence. For example, their home is where the buffalo roam, but not too far, as they must be milked each day for the production of exquisite mozzarella and ricotta, even better than the excellent cows-milk analogs available in Jersey.

Like language, music, religion, dress, etc., cuisine is a cultural domain, which is to say it is not simply a set of ingredients, dishes, meals, cooking procedures, etc. Rather, it is a set of ideas, of rules and preferences, of beliefs, regarding the regulation of how, what, when, and why one properly eats within a given cultural community; the ingredients, dishes, etc. are the physical manifestations of that underlying body of shared mental constructs that resides in the minds of members of that community. This body of culinary knowledge is, like language, learned and in most communities throughout history the primary locus of the transmission of this knowledge has been the family and proximate, allied families who all share similar living conditions; the predominant transmission has been from parents and grandparents to children through explicit instruction and modeled behavior along with the sensory experience of the children themselves. In the United States and now in many other 'modern' societies, culinary knowledge is increasingly transmitted to a far less degree in this traditional manner than elsewhere: American culinary discourse is largely oriented outside the family and proximate social group, open to ever-expanding influences through media and impersonal discourse and experience (e.g. in restaurants). And in mainstream American society this has been an increasing trend since the 19th century.

The great wave of (overwhelmingly southern) Italian immigrants that came to the States between 1880 and 1924 were mostly peasants and non-elite urban dwellers and the culinary culture they brought with them was very much traditional in nature. In the old country their poverty had dictated limited consumption of muscle meats, fresh fish, and pasta—these were foods typically only consumed by most on festive occasions, which might include Sundays if one were not terribly poor. The attraction of America was primarily economic and the greater purchasing power Italian-Americans had naturally led to an increased ability to enjoy the aforementioned triumvirate of festive foods, a natural development soon paralleled in southern Italy itself amidst increased prosperity in the mid-twentieth century. In the U.S., a degree of leveling of southern Italian regional differences took place and all the newcomers were subjected to similar new environmental conditions of life in America; out of these processes, there began to develop for a time for a time a new sort of southern Italian regional cuisine(s) in the Northeast and Midwest centers of Italian settlement, neglecting some of the elements of *cucina povera* and making former holiday dishes more quotidian in nature, but the heart of their un-American cuisine remained.

Abiding and deep mainstream prejudice toward southern Italians and, at least initially, a language barrier inhibited assimilation, but many southern Italian immigrants also chose to resist assimilation to the mainstream with regard to some domains of life and this was especially so in family life and the culinary culture which was inextricably linked to it. To a far greater degree than with some other immigrant groups, culinary culture became a central pillar of ethnic pride and identity. Nonetheless, socioeconomic realities have worked against the long-term stabilization and preservation of this Italian-American cuisine. Intermarriage with non-Italians has played a part but more significant are the many forces in American society that work against the maintenance of a tight family and neighborhood association, the context needed for the transmission of traditional culinary knowledge. Some Italian-Americans have consciously and willingly assimilated to mainstream culinary culture but for many more the break in generational transfer of culinary culture has been an unintended consequence of the demands of participating in American socioeconomic institutions and the concomitant weakening of family bonds, the loss of the crucial family- and group-internal discourse about food on which, by definition, traditional culture depends. The newer generations—the second or third or fourth American-born, varying by family and location—who identify as 'Italian' but who have acquired little or nothing of their ancestors' cuisine beyond a few recipes for individual (mostly festive) dishes, might be more appropriately referred to as 'Americans of Italian descent' rather than 'Italian-Americans.' This development, parallel and related to the loss of Italian dialects as 'heritage language,' is typically fairly abrupt and we should therefore not speak of Italian-American cuisine changing so much as of 'culinary death,' just as we speak of 'language death' in a given community, and of replacement of it by the mainstream cuisine.

So then, what is it about 'spaghetti and meatballs' that allegedly induces shock and horror in native Italians? First, we must wonder who these shocked and horrified Italians are and it is my suspicion that they are of either of two types. Many Italians (like many other peoples) bear a cultural prejudice against America, especially in connection with things culinary, and an Italianate but non-Italian dish from America would naturally engender a negative reaction. One must also wonder whether these horrified consultants are northern Italians, for meatballs eaten together with pasta is a decidedly southern Italian thing. To be sure, from a traditional southern Italian standpoint, a plate of spaghetti topped with large, round meatballs is also strange and objectionable but hardly a source of horror in itself: Legitimate horror might be evinced if the tomato sauce is of the over-garlicky or kitchen-sink American style or if the pasta is overcooked or if the meatballs are rubbery and excessively and peculiarly seasoned, as American takes on *polpette* often are. But with the components all properly prepared according to tradition, what is objectionable about the American dish is simply this: For Italians, when one eats pasta, the pasta is the featured item in a separate course—it is not a side-dish to meat, as Americans often consume it, and when pasta co-appears with meat, the meat is part of the dressing, processed in such a way that one can eat a forkful that contains both elements of the dish, without recourse to the use of a knife. If pasta is dressed with a sauce made with substantial pieces of meat, the meat is set aside and served apart as the second course.

Against widespread belief, pasta and meatballs *are* closely associated in traditional southern Italian cookery, but always in conformity with the just mentioned conventions. To this day, in the outlying regions of the old *Regno* of southern Italy—Abruzzo, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria—there are many preparations of *pasta asciutta* dressed in a tomato sauce in which the meatballs are cooked *and* served in the bowl with the pasta. But, crucially, the meatballs are tiny, cherry-sized or smaller, *polpettine* and thus these dishes conform perfectly with traditional conventions. The festive nature of this style of dish is made manifest by their traditional inclusion of special forms of fresh pasta, e.g., *pasta alla chitarra* in Abruzzo, *sagne torte* in Puglia, etc. In the core region of Campania, *polpettine* appear first and foremost in baked pasta dishes, *al forno*. A classic version uses *ziti* and a simple, quick tomato sauce in which the meatballs are briefly cooked after being fried, with further ingredients (*scamorza*, hard-boiled eggs, etc.) added to the sauced pasta before baking. Also necessarily containing *polpettine* is the aforementioned *lasagna alla napoletana*, one of our most festive dishes, laden with cultural associations and eaten only on a couple of well-defined occasions per year. Indeed, for me personally, one of the objections to 'spaghetti and meatballs' is aesthetic: A dish with *polpettine* seems festive, and spaghetti, as wonderful as they are, seem too ordinary for the pairing.

Polpette—ordinary sized meatballs, traditionally not spheres but flattened for easier pan-frying and typically smaller than their American counterparts—are also associated with pasta, though not necessarily so. The main association comes via a kind of sauce for pasta in which the meatballs are cooked, often along with *braciole* (stuffed, rolled slices of veal or beef) and/or sausage. Following convention, however, the sauce dresses the pasta, but the meats are served thereafter as the *secondo*. *Polpette* are also traditionally made outside of any association with pasta and can appear *in umido* (fried and then cooked in a simple tomato sauce) or simply fried and served with lemon wedges. *Polpettine* are also used in a soup with escarole (now erroneously called here 'wedding soup'). For me, as an Italian-American, all of these uses of *polpettine* and *polpette* have been common fare since earliest childhood… but not 'spaghetti and meatballs.'

Fusilli napoletani con polpettine.

Where and how did this dish, in violation of a basic rule or convention of both Italian and Italian-American culinary tradition, arise? We do not know but I would suggest the following possibilities.

In the period of mass immigration, many Italian men came alone to the States to earn money (and many ultimately returned to Italy) and, being without family, they resided in cheap boarding houses which also served meals—spaghetti with *polpettine* was likely a favorite, but conceivably the placement of larger *polpette* together with the pasta arose in this no-frills setting of cheap eats for hard workers. Whether this be true or not, I suspect that the real establishment of serving spaghetti and large, round meatballs together as a hearty one-dish meal occurred in the next stage of Italian eateries, when the intended audience was as much or more non-Italians than single *paesani*—indeed, Italian-Americans with families long remained particularly disinclined to eat in restaurants of any sort. In essence then, I posit on the part of early Italian-American restaurateurs a conscious effort to adapt an inexpensive meal of their tradition to the conventions of mainstream American cuisine, where meat was the center of a meal and appeared together on a plate with its starchy accompaniment. Bigger meatballs, exotic but tasty spaghetti, a nice one plate meal.

In this sense, 'spaghetti and meatballs' is American, a product of cultural interaction in the U.S., but given the older, traditional southern Italian association of pasta with *polpettine* and *polpette*, the dish—if properly made—can hardly be regarded with shock or horror, at least not by someone with a southern Italian culinary culture such as myself, for whom it remains merely structurally objectionable. For Americans of Italian descent, whose culinary 'grammar' is American, it seems normal and genuinely Italian.

Anthony F. Buccini, Jerseyman by birth but long-time resident of the Taylor Street neighborhood, is a historical linguist, dialectologist and food historian. His work in this last field focuses on Mediterranean and Atlantic World cuisines and he is a two-time winner of the Sophie Coe Prize in Food History.

MY FRANKEN-FISH

By Phillip Foss

It was back in 2010 when Asian carp first dragged my high-striving culinary mind into the deep end. The invasive species, brought into the southern U.S. to clean algae in catfish farms, flooded over into main waterways and quickly worked their way north. The fish reproduce voraciously and overtake pretty much every ecosystem they enter. They had already arrived in Illinois waterways, and there was great fear that they would eventually enter Lake Michigan, causing much greater ecological and economic damage.

There was much discussion around a potential solution, and food journalist Mike Sula of the *Chicago Reader* was asking why nobody was considering eating the problem. So he reached out to several chefs around town to see how they might dish it up, and I was among them. I was the chef of Lockwood Restaurant at the Palmer House at the time, and had no idea how thoroughly this invasive species would invade my life.

At first I turned my nose up at the notion of eating Asian carp, probably like you just did. The carp I knew of were bottom feeders with an oily, yellow flesh, used to make the gefilte fish I disdained eating growing up as a Jewish kid in Milwaukee. So I was skeptical at best, but accepted the challenge.

But when I cut into the invasive carp for the first time, I was taken aback by the color and firmness of the flesh; it was a clear and vibrant white, and resembled sea bass more than the carp I knew of. I later learned that unlike our indigenious bottom feeding fish that eat anything on the water's bed, Asian carp are filter feeders, fueling themselves off the algae in the water. As we all are what we eat, the flavor of the American carp is more acrid and muddy, while the invasive species is more mild and vegetal. So far, so good.

But as my knife dug deeper into the fish, the dilemmas began. On account of the thick bones that run nearly the entire length of the flesh, it was impossible to remove the bones and keep the fillet in one piece. This meant that I wouldn't be able to serve a typical 'steak' style portion most diners were used to. So contrary to the laws of supply and demand, the low yield of usable meat actually made our cost per portion closer to the range of the pricier salmon or halibut.

But when I put the fish to the fire for the first time, I loved it. In fact, aside from the aforementioned obstacles, I would be willing to even put it on our menu. Sensing the media windmill that might come with cooking and serving an invasive species, I discussed my thoughts with hotel management, and they gave me the green light. We all agreed nobody would actually order it, so the plan was to give it away as a complimentary course at the beginning of the meal.

I stretched my culinary chops around the fish, preparing it in as many ways as I could; we served it as a tartare, carp-accio, broiled, fried, crab crusted, just about every way you could conceive. People were eating it all and enjoying it, and the attention started flowing in.

After the *Chicago Reader* article came out, Phil Vettel, the then food critic with the *Chicago Tribune*, wrote glowingly about our experiment. In the next couple months, I appeared on Fox News, WGN, the Today Show, and went on an Asian carp fishing trip with a journalist from *The Wall Street Journal*.

My ego quickly inflated from my fifteen minutes of fame, and I doubled down on the fish, deciding to offer it for sale on our menu. Not surprisingly, we didn't sell a single order on the first night.

I was in the office with my sous chef after service and we were discussing the stigma of the name.

"What if we just changed it?" I offered.

Examples of this are plenty: Orange roughy was once known as mudfish. Black cod isn't even in the cod family. Most notably, Patagonian toothfish was a little known species until its name was changed to Chilean sea bass. Then it became incredibly popular, expensive, and overfished to near extinction.

"Why don't we call it Shanghai bass?" he suggested.

My eyes lit up. Sure, it's completely illegal to change the name of a fish without FDA approval. But it felt like a legitimate solution, and shouldn't the end justify the means?

I was on a mission to show everyone that they were wrong about this fish, so I just did it, typing up a new menu for our next service on the spot.

Our 'Frankenfish' took on a new life as Shanghai bass, and it began to sell extraordinarily well. Our server checked in with every portion sold, and every plate came back cleaned and with compliments. Nobody commented on never having heard of the unusual bass varietal.

I'm not sure how long I would've kept up this stunt, but the hotel soon pulled the plug. It wasn't on account of renaming the fish; instead they had grown uneasy with the attention it brought, believing that I was becoming known as the "carp chef." Although I was a little bitter, in time I saw they were right. The fish (and fame) had become an obsession.

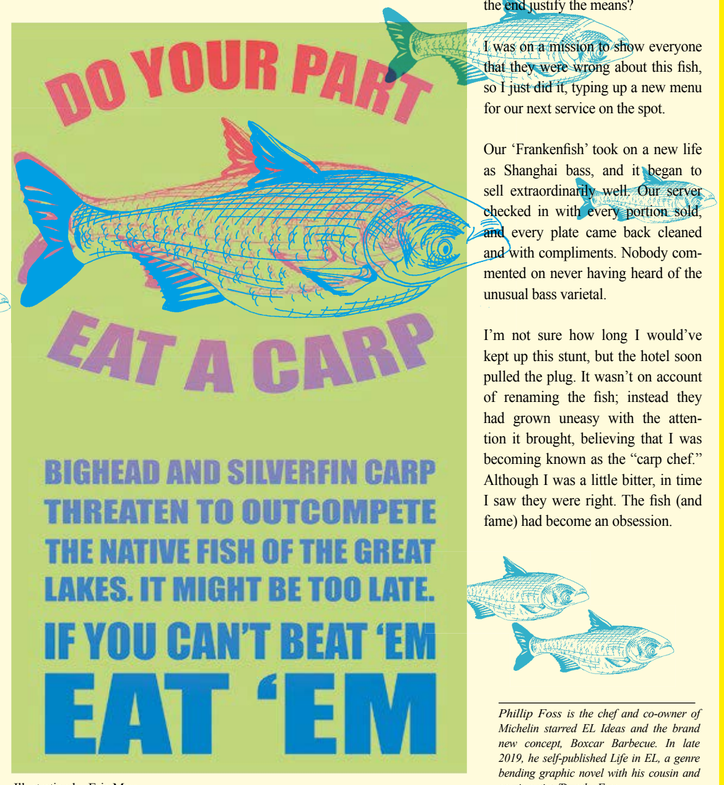

Illustration by Eric May

Phillip Foss is the chef and co-owner of Michelin starred EL Ideas and the brand new concept, Boxcar Barbecue. In late 2019, he self-published Life in EL, a genre bending graphic novel with his cousin and comic artist, Timothy Foss.

CATERING TO THE GODS

In Chicago (& Beyond)

By Elizabeth Perez

I learned about sacred food on the South Side when I moved to Hyde Park in 1997 in search of a master's degree at the University of Chicago Divinity School. I wanted to study holy women with power and authority—women in leadership roles, unafraid to lift their voices in both prayer and protest.

These women turned out to be the rule, rather than the exception, in religions that are among the most stigmatized today: Haitian Vodou, Afro-Cuban Lucumí (also called Santería), and their sister religions throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. Enslaved Africans carried the seeds and spores of these traditions across the Atlantic Ocean, in a Diaspora which began a hundred years *before* 1619 (the year enslaved Africans first arrived in the British colony of Virginia) and ended a decade *after* the Civil War.

Although my parents are Cuban, nobody in my family had ever been initiated in an Afro-Diasporic religion. Once in Chicago, I started spending afternoons in Puerto Rican and Mexican *botánicas*, those religious supply stores dotting the North Side and Pilsen in the late 1990s. Often run by practitioners of West and Central African-inspired religions, they were miniature versions of the Haitian and Cuban *botánicas* I grew up around in South Florida. I met prolific diviners, as generous with their time as they were skilled in the reading of oracles with Yorùbá and Kongo roots. I bought so many saint-emblazoned pillar candles and incense wands that I lost count, but I didn't find a community.

That is, not until I stepped into the South Side home of Elegguá, the Lucumí deity of thresholds, crossroads, and communication. In my scholarship, I refer to this house of worship as Ilé Laroye, meaning "the house of Laroye"—one of Elegguá's praise names—in the Yorùbá language. I had been introduced to its founder, Ashabi Moseley, by Miguel W. Ramos, a senior Lucumí priest, respected scholar, and prolific author. I happened to arrive at Ilé Laroye on the anniversary of Moseley's initiation, an elaborate rite of passage that confers status and obligation in equal measure.

I don't remember what I ate on that fateful day in 2001, but there was surely food in abundance: a rainbow of colorful treats that symbolize Elegguá's playful side, along with a white-frosted grocery store sheet cake to mark Ashabi's "birthday"—her ritual rebirth in 1986 as an ordained priest of the deities called *orishas*. Her well-wishers enjoyed the equivalent of a Sunday supper: well-seasoned meat with fragrant rice, fluffy dinner rolls, and savory greens.

There would definitely have been clusters of grapes, apples, pears, pineapples, coconuts, and other fresh fruit on Elegguá's altar. In a comic "salsa pop" number from 1991, "Mister Don't Touch the Banana," Cuban-American musician Willy Chirino sets his song at a feast for Changó—the deity of thunder, justice, virility, and the drums—to whom the banana in question pertains. The song's joke turns on a buttinsky's obliviousness. "Tempted by folklore" and curiosity, he shows up uninvited and mistakes a display of sacred food for a buffet.

When the party-crasher snatches a piece of Changó's favorite fruit, the host faints, one of the guests gets possessed, and another hops up to perform a cleansing rite. Their reactions are absurdly exaggerated, but a taboo has been violated.

The banana-grabber isn't only ignorant of Changó's divinity—he's unaware of the intricate etiquette that governs the orishas' celebrations. Foods brought into contact with the orishas get charged with a vital primordial energy called *ashé*. The first time I walked into Ashabi's bungalow, I knew more than Chirino's "Mr.," but not much. I suspected that T.V. and movie portrayals of Santería were distorted to make "voodoo" seem savage and primal, the better to feed racist fantasies of African inferiority. I never asked myself what happened once the scenes of sacrifice were over.

Elegguá and Changó belong to a pantheon that probably did not accompany the first enslaved people to land on Cuban shores in 1518. They nevertheless became the dominant group of African spirits in Cuba. By the time devotees brought the orishas to the United States almost a century ago, they had been objects of legal prohibition and academic investigation. They went on to flourish in Puerto Rican and majority-immigrant communities in Miami and New York. In Chicago, the Lucumí tradition took hold after the Mariel boatlift of 1980, a mass emigration of over 125,000 Cubans.

Ashabi's Havana-born mentor had arrived over a decade earlier. I was fortunate beyond any expectation that the initiated elders of Ilé Laroye, a predominantly Black American house of worship, allowed me to observe and prepare for rituals in Ashabi's home as part of my doctoral dissertation research. I wound up making food, and the centrality of the kitchen transformed the way I understood religion—including the role of women in it.

As in other transnational Afro-Diasporic religions, every major Lucumí ceremony entails the preparation of dishes for the deities, ancestors, and other practitioners. Some Afro-Diasporic religions have deemed kitchen managers valuable enough to bestow official titles on them. In Lucumí, the most exalted term is *alashé*.

Afro-Diasporic gods have distinct preferences and aversions. For example, their sacred animals are differentiated by type, color, sex, and age. A complex mythological system explains why the orishas consume certain things or don't—why, for example, a certain manifestation of the orisha Oshún abhors watercress and Oyá never eats ram (why, if truth be told, she never wants to catch even a whiff of its gamy odor).

Altar for Oshún on the anniversary of a priest's initiation ("ocha"), June 2006, with sincere thanks to Oshún Leye.

Combined Shangó and Oshún altars for the one-year "ocha birthday" of two priests initiated at the same time, April 2008. Reproduced with the generous permission of Bangboshé and Oshún Yemí.

Amalá Ilá (savory cornmeal pudding topped with a spicy tomato and okra sauce) for the orishas Changó and Olokún.

Sopa borracha and cappuccino (traditional Cuban sponge cake desserts soaked in sugar syrup, cinnamon, and sometimes rum) for Oshún.

Devotees nurture the orishas in order to be nourished morally and materially by them. Other gods and ancestors around the world want food, too. Of these, the orishas may bear the greatest resemblance to Hindu deities, with their penchant for sweets (and sometimes meat, as in the case of goddesses who receive chickens, goats, water buffaloes, and more). The two traditions also share a practice of giving foodstuffs to the deities and obtaining an edible blessing in return.

Flan (vanilla-flavored egg custard with caramel sauce) made for Oshún.

Most Lucumí culinary techniques derive from precolonial Yorùbáland (encompassing swathes of modern-day Nigeria and Bénin). In Chicago, practitioners benefit from the presence of West African markets on the South and North Sides. The members of Ilé Laroye shopped for ingredients on S. Commercial Ave. and E. 87th and E. 89th Streets, stacking their baskets to the brim with guinea pepper, red palm oil, plantains, frozen banana leaves, tubers prevalent in Caribbean cuisine (like cassava and malanga), white yam flour (*iyan*), and black-eyed pea flour (*moin-moin*).

Senior initiates trained newcomers to recognize and replicate the orishas' favorite tastes. Their menus feature plenty of corn, cornmeal and hominy, hinting at the indigenous contribution to Black Atlantic cultures. And the orishas' craving for sugar tells a tale of racialized appetites in the Spanish colonial world. Even on the South Side, their desserts have tropical flair, like *dulce de coco* (coconut candy) and caramel flan. Although most members of Ilé Laroye hail from families propelled north during the Great Migration, the house ran on Cuban coffee, and the alashés poured their hearts into steaming platters of Puerto Rican *arroz con gandules* on special occasions.

The women of Ilé Laroye put the same love into plucking, butchering, and roasting for the orishas as their foremothers put into dressing "the gospel bird" and cooking other Church food. Ashabi sometimes consulted the soul food stylings of *The African-American Heritage Cookbook: Traditional Recipes & Fond Remembrances from Alabama's Renowned Tuskegee Institute* by Carolyn Quick Tillery. She also drew inspiration from her Caribbean travels to make jerk chicken, curry goat, and Jamaican escovitch fish. (I bragged to my fieldnotes once when my improvised garlic bread met with her approval, since being asked by Ashabi to cook was like having Yo-Yo Ma request a little dinner music.)

"Love offerings" for post-ritual repasts might be homemade peach cobbler, pound cake, or Entenmann's Louisiana Crunch Cake. But the most sumptuous meals were reserved for the orishas and visitors unaffiliated with Ilé Laroye. One of my earliest fieldnotes reads, "Everyone was hungry and wishing the food could be eaten but *forget it!*"

Cooking for elaborate rituals could be an agonizing task, making for sore hips, stiff necks, and hand cramps. Practitioners usually undertook it as labor of love after a full day of teaching, nursing, shopkeeping, bank-tellering, call-centering, or construction—to name a handful of occupations represented in Ilé Laroye.

And it wasn't only cisgender women at the stove. As I write in *Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions* (NYU Press, 2016), gay men have cooked alongside women and run sacred Lucumí kitchens. In fact, while no one would deny that the kitchen is women-centered—notwithstanding the presence of straight cisgender men—the "kitchenspaces" of Afro-Diasporic religions have been queer spaces where their most hallowed traditions are preserved and passed on.

I left Chicago in 2010. Since then, I've had the opportunity to work in sacred kitchens in Brooklyn and Los Angeles. These experiences bore out my book's arguments about gay men's stewardship of kitchenspaces. What I didn't foresee is how the internet would come to normalize catering for the orishas as a culinary specialty.

In 2011, Nydia Pichardo (*Ibae*) debuted the Adimu Network, "the first video internet website dedicated to the preservation of Lukumi sacred food heritage." With gorgeous photographs and instructional clips, it remains a rich informational resource. A much larger collection of videos can be viewed on YouTube, at the Nydias-MiamiKitchen channel. Pichardo is the late wife of Obá Ernesto Pichardo, whose 1993 Supreme Court case won religious practitioners in the United States the right to perform animal sacrifice. Pichardo's alchemical archive lives on after her tragically untimely death in 2019.

Just last year, I had the pleasure of meeting one professional alashé, Chef Joel "El Cangri," after Ashabi raved about his cooking. I shadowed him in a tiny basement kitchen during an initiation (often called "ocha," an abbreviation of *kariocha*). Based in New York, Chef Joel has an impressive Instagram and Facebook following based on his motivational messages and tutorials that showcase his culinary versatility. Joel proudly puts "Chef Alashe" and "Orishas Kitchen" on his business cards, alongside "Latin fusion food" and "*Cocina* [cuisine or kitchen] *de Ocha*." How much higher can *haute cuisine* get when you're cooking for the gods themselves?

OSHÍNSHÍN

A do-it-yourself approach to orisha worship has unfortunately become prevalent on social media and video hosting sites like YouTube. The senior members of Ilé Laroye would not condone any sharing of recipes that might encourage this DIY trend--and discourage seeking the guidance of initiated practitioners. For my own practice, I rely heavily on Miguel W. Ramos' excellent Adimú: Gbogbo Tén'unjé Lukumí (Miami: eleda.org, 2012), and occasionally consult John Mason's Ìdáná Fún Òrìsà (Brooklyn: Yorùbá Theological Archministry, 1999). This recipe for oshínshín, one of Oshún's favorite dishes, adjusts Ramos' to my taste:

Ingredients:

- 5 eggs
- 2 cups spinach, collards, or chard
- Half a yellow onion, chopped
- 5 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 6-oz can of tomato paste
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tablespoon dry white wine
- ¼ cup dried shrimp
- Five (or more) raw, medium-sized shrimp
- ⅛ teaspoon sea salt
- Black pepper, to taste
- 3 tablespoons of olive oil
- A tablespoon of red palm oil, optional
- Fresh cilantro

Instructions:

Rinse the greens thoroughly and set aside. Soak the dried shrimp in warm water (more than an hour is ideal). Shell and devein the fresh shrimp, making sure to remove the tails. In a bowl, whisk the eggs with a fork and stir in salt and pepper.

Heat the oils over medium heat in a medium saucepan. Add the bay leaf and cook until fragrant, 30 seconds. Add the onion, garlic, and dried shrimp and lower the heat. Cook until the onions are translucent, about 5 minutes. Stir in the tomato paste, wine, and greens. After the greens have wilted slightly, about three minutes, add the fresh shrimp and cook for about two more minutes; Ramos (1999, pgs. 63-64) cautions: "[A]llow a slight change in shrimp's color, but do not allow them to become white to avoid overcooking them." Pour beaten eggs over the other ingredients and press them gently against the greens to incorporate. Remove from heat since eggs will keep cooking in the hot pan. Keep nudging and turning over the mixture with your utensil (a spatula or wooden spoon) until the eggs look set yet moist, about five minutes. Garnish with cilantro.

Oshínshín made for Oshún by Lucumí practitioners.

Elizabeth Pérez is an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her first book, Religion in the Kitchen: Cooking, Talking, and the Making of Black Atlantic Traditions *(New York University Press, 2016) won the 2017 Clifford Geertz Prize in the Anthropology of Religion, presented by the Society for the Anthropology of Religion, and received Honorable Mention for the Caribbean Studies Association's 2019 Barbara T. Christian Literary Award.*

IT'S THE Freakiest Show THE MULTITUDES OF ED MARSZEWSKI

By Eric May

Ed Marszewski is the busiest freak in town—he is the co-director of Public Media Institute (PMI), a nonprofit that publishes Lumpen Magazine, which is approaching its 30th anniversary. Other PMI programs include Co Prosperity, an experimental cultural (and art) center in Bridgeport, and Lumpen Radio. Alongside his mother Maria and brother Mike, he is the founder of a portfolio of celebrated eating and drinking brands, mostly located in Bridgeport—Maria's Packaged Goods & Community Bar, Kimski, Marz Brewing, and Pizza Fried Chicken Ice Cream.

I've been a big fan of Ed Mar (as he's known around town) since I first picked up issues of Lumpen as an impressionable teenaged freak in the mid-90s, drawn to it's lefty gonzo journalism and trippy art and design. During the Iraq War years, I marched behind a megaphone-touting Ed Mar down Michigan Avenue, protesting against global capitalism. We became comrades a decade later, co-organizing the MDW Fair, an alternative art fair showcasing independent art spaces from around the country. I had the pleasure of Zooming with him recently over a couple of cold ones—rapping with Ed is just as head spinning as his ambition to take on new projects. Somehow in 90 minutes we forgot to talk about the radio station, his "Buddy" store at the Chicago Cultural Center, or his new tie dye clothing line. It would truly take an entire issue of this newspaper to capture the multitudes that are Ed Mar.

The Marszewski family at Maria's.

Eric May: You've got a couple of milestones coming up—the one year anniversary of the Quarantine Times and I saw that the Community Canteen is wrapping up.

Ed Marzewski: Yeah the Community Canteen at Kimski will be closing this week. Basically we don't have enough funding to make 4000 meals a week anymore. We are still asking different foundations for money to keep the program going in some fashion. But we're cutting off Kimski, because it might re-open. Wherewithal will be going for another month or so. Most of the people are going for another month or so. And then after that we'll probably continue to make 300-600 meals out of Kimski and Marz and I'll just pay for it. But yeah, the Quarantine Times book just came out. It's a pretty great document of how freaked out everybody was. When the shutdown happened, Nick and I were like, shit, we're gonna have to cancel all the shows for a couple of months. We had some funding allocated for those shows and we're all freaking out and, like, what can we do? So lets start this project and pay everyone who contributes to it. Because you know most artists are precarity workers—they're doing multiple gigs—bartenders or waiters or catering, right? The point was, how can we provide some relief.

We were engaged with some foundations at that point and they're like "this sounds like a great project, let's help you out for a month." Like yeah, we'll be done in a month, it'll be fine. And then it's like, this is neverending! And they actually reupped a couple times. We were able to pay people, I mean, over $100,000. The idea was to have all creative industry workers, including chefs, bartenders, hospitality industry, as well as musicians, artists of all stripes, performers, activists, talk about what they were doing. And we selected seven editors to each select different contributors each week. And that's why we had this nice diversity of voices and people.

So we started seeing what all these different chefs were doing in the Quarantine Times—making meal kits and feeding industry workers, and we decided since our kitchens were closed, let's reopen the kitchens, let's employ some people and make food for the neighbors. We found out the senior citizens' homes, their kitchens closed because everyone was quarantined to their rooms. The food pantries, they needed meals. And our whole thing was we pay people to work, we pay them good wages, and we source what we usually source—local produce, local farms, local supplies, whenever possible, all local stuff to give them money, and then we deliver and bring the food to the constituents. And bring them really healthy, awesome farm-to-senior-citizen home meals.

Eric: I feel like you're ideally positioned to be the person that does this. On one hand you've got the organizing roots and then you've got the businesses, the infrastructure. And you also know everybody. And I was curious what community groups you were working with?

Ed: Yeah the infrastructure, this would not have happened if we didn't have these kitchens to use immediately. So if we didn't have Marz or Kimski this program wouldn't have happened as quickly or robustly. I actually asked our state rep, Teresa Mah, which orgs need help now? And she put us in touch with a few. And some other orgs contacted us and we started doing food for them. And then of course the Love Fridge started and we started putting meals in the Love Fridges. And then the Döner Men were doing their own thing and we were like, hey man why don't you do this with us? We'll try to get some more funding and pay you to do the meals. So let's throw all this coin we get into these programs and try to help as many people as we can. Mom's on Marz came and started doing stuff. And then we expanded to Iyanze, that West African restaurant. I mentioned it to the First Ward and they set us up with some senior citizen homes. We started providing food for Esperanza school and transitional housing. And we're working with an organization in Englewood that's not a food pantry, but an interventionist group—whenever a shooting happens they come out and talk to the neighbors, try to cool things down and they do it by providing meals and invite everyone to come out and talk. It's a really unique way of utilizing food to start a conversation or provide some relief, just nourishment to people who are traumatized.

Eric: So we're kind of going backwards through my questions, but I do want to go back in time, since I've been a fan of yours since high school.

Ed: The 60s!

Eric: So, you grew up in Bridgeport?

Ed: No, no one's from Bridgeport. Unfortunately due to poor reporting all over the universe, people just assumed we grew up in Bridgeport. So I'm glad we're getting the truth. I actually grew up in Evergreen Park, but my family moved when I was nine or ten to Downers Grove, I went to high school there. And went to University of Illinois for art school but dropped out and went into political science. I thought I'd become a lawyer, but instead I believed in alternative journalism.

Eric: So was Lumpen Magazine based in Wicker Park in the early days?

Ed: After I moved out of Champaign, I moved home briefly, got a job at a brewery, and got fired for trying to form a union. I got an internship at "In These Times" and found a house for rent around the corner and moved into it at Armitage and Rockwell.

Eric: And you're about to reemerge there. So you have some love for the Northside?

Ed: Of course I chose to open up another Marz Brewery a block and a half away from my first house in Chicago. Yeah I always love the Northside, if it wasn't for Quimby's and Myopic and Wicker Park, the whole scene of amazing people—throw a rock and you know someone, I mean the internet was the street, right? Those third places got me convinced that doing these things may be worthwhile and then deluded myself to keep doing them forever.

Eric: When were the Buddy Years? I wasn't a regular but I remember some sweaty dance parties and I remember coming to a Food Not Bombs event and maybe a stencil-making workshop. Back then I didn't totally understand what Buddy was. At that point, art, to me, belonged to stuffy elite spaces. And people called Buddy an art space but I'd go there and it was like a squat.

Ed: A dump! Well it's true. That was 2002-2005. I think we did about 100 events a year, it was insane. Every Wednesday was improvised lotto. There were rooftop parties and BBQs. That space, there were always 8-10 people living there, it was really tough. And maybe that was the Freedom Festival. We had a three or four day festival—the Food Not Bombs, a fashion show, lots of workshops and talks and parties. It was an interesting approach, getting hipster kids to become activists. I remember we held Version Fest during the Iraq War and a thousand people were arrested in front of the MCA building. And the public interventions like the Chicago Art parade where we decided to have a parade and hundreds of artists showed up.

Eric: Is that when you marched on the Merchandise Mart?

Ed: No, that was the art war. That was a different thing. We attacked by land, sea, and air.

Eric: Did I ever tell you the anecdote about that—the 1st year at NEXT Fair, Kavi Gupta called me up and had a meeting with me and said "I'm worried about this Edmar guy" and asked me to keep an eye on you. I must have done a shitty job, because, of course, the guillotine...

Ed: Yeah the guillotine. That was an incredible day. The art war was organized in the CoPro. We had people actually do surveillance of the entire area around the Merchandise Mart. Some artists made effigies, like Chris Kennedy, that got beheaded by the artists with a neon guillotine in a pick up truck. We had a phalanx of Roman soldiers. We had a catapult. And dozens of people in Critical Mass on tall bikes dressed up like knights with lances, they came through, they provided us the cover to escape. There was a flotilla of shitty boats. The blimp broke and didn't launch for the air attack. And there were a hundred people doing pillow fights. We were catapulting stuffed animals and water balloons against the building. And then other people showed up, artists came out and attacked us with paint bombs.

Eric: Back to Bridgeport—you and your brother started helping your mom out at some point.

Ed: Oh we always worked. My mother had a Korean and Japanese restaurant called the House of Kim at 109th and Harlem, in a strip mall. So I worked there as a teenager. My mother built a beautiful restaurant with a pond, a turtle, koi fish. She had traditional Korean tea rooms with the wood and paper doors. You could sit on the floor to eat. She grilled kalbi at the table. She had a banquet hall, there was a sushi bar. She then had a beauty shop. We've always worked for her.

Eric: So she's a real entrepreneur.

Ed: Yeah, and so was my father. He was a butcher. He had the bar. My mother took over the bar when my father passed away. That was the 80s. I was a bar baby.

Eric: The name changed to Maria's when you rehabbed? When was that?

Ed: It was Kaplan's until 2010 when my brother and I took over managing it and called it Maria's Packaged Goods.

Eric: One of my big questions is there's Ed the activist, the Edmar I was first exposed to. But then you've got the entrepreneurial thing. Do those things square up?

Ed: Well you know, the joke I tell people is that I've become the person I hated in my 20s. But at the same time it's probably better I was who I was in my 20s—I have more empathy for a lot of different things most capitalist dudes wouldn't be interested in.

But also, when you're an activist you have no resources. But we didn't have any real budget when we changed up Maria's. It was Charlie (Vinz), he used some reclaimed wood. My wife designed the chandeliers. My brother laid the floor. I painted, we all did the work to start that.

Eventually when you have passion, people care and they notice. As you know Maria's became globally famous for being one of the best bars in America. We were in these tv shows that called us the best bar in America, twice! Every magazine on earth heralded our craft beers and cocktail stuff. And of course Maria, herself, getting the recognition she deserved decades earlier as being this woman who was welcoming to all people and made everyone feel safe in her dive bar, regardless of the color of your skin or class, you know.

Community Kitchen prep, credit: Rich Klevgard.

Eric: What about the "Community to the Future" concept. You use the term community a lot.

Ed: So, 2005 the White Sox are about to win the world series—a New York Times journalist comes into the bar to interview me about the neighborhood. One of the quotes of that article is me saying Bridgeport is the community of the future, if the future is the apocalypse. At that point, the apocalypse referred to the lily white, racist, white supremacist shithole that Bridgeport was, right? The black hole of segregation. So that's really the apocalypse part—bemoaning the bad parts of Bridgeport. We started imagining what we wanted to see in the neighborhood—it was about like, wow lets queer the fuck out of Bridgeport by having more freaks and artists move in.

One of our first media festivals here, the subtitle was "Bridgeport, Community of the Future" with the Bridgecot Center as its icon, the Epcot Center hovering over a bunch of two flats. It was that interplay between it being a rough and shitty neighborhood and us being idealistic artists trying to be open minded. After Buddy, we had to get another space and that's how we wound up in Co-Prosperity. We were looking all over the place and this random customer at my mom's bar who I'd see Monday nights when I worked said, "Eddie, I want to sell the building down the block." Like which one, the one with all the shit in the window that's been abandoned for 20 years? So I bought this abandoned building. It's always been great to be down here because it's affordable, there's a lot of space, there's a lot of room for things to happen that you probably couldn't afford to do north of Roosevelt Road, you know what I mean?

Eric: I remember the first brewery you guys had set up down on Halsted. You were already making delicious beer back then.

Ed: Down on Halsted, right, the little tiny three barrel set up. That was 2013-2016. It was pretty good beer. I mean for being hand bottled with fucking CO. We were completely bonkers.

Ed Marszewski at the Life on Marz Community Club.

Eric: I see all your beers in Binny's out here in the burbs. It's like artwork on the shelf – it's awesome to see Jacob Ciocci art out here. So going back to the use of the word "community," I wonder what does community mean on a beer label in a big store in Geneva, Illinois?

Ed: Right. When we started doing the brewery naturally we were working with our friends who were artists and designers and weirdos. All these things are distributing ideas—the beer can, the brewery, the gallery, the magazine, and the radio – it's all amplifying interesting ideas and stuff that matters to us and hopefully to make other people care about. That vibe, working with artists and weirdos and freaks is hopefully prevalent in most of the things we're doing.

Eric: Do you have hope for what's next as we emerge from this dark winter we've just faced?

Ed: Absolutely man, living through this year obviously in some ways chilled me out a lot and then also made me believe we're going to do whatever the hell we can do and just go for it—do things I've been wanting to do for years, we're just going to do it, I'm not going to regret things anymore. And how do we help people have opportunities that they wouldn't have normally? Hopefully things work out.

BRIDGEPORT
COMMUNITY OF THE FUTURE

Community of the Future logo.

Ed Marszewski at the Art War, 2008, credit: Oscar Arriola.

PIZZERIA UNO AND THE *MYSTERIOUS* ORIGINS OF DEEP DISH PIZZA

By Peter Regas

March 1945: The only known photo of Richard Riccardo in his pizzeria *(Peter Regas Collection).*

1949: Then called "Pizzeria No. Una" note how thin deep-dish pizza was in the 1940's ("Chicago by Nite" magazine, "Photography by Morrow", *Watson Family Collection).*

Circa mid-1960s: Alice Mae Redmond's daughter, Lucille Conwell, serves a now noticeably thicker modern-day deep-dish slice at Pizzeria Due *(Lucille Conwell Collection).*

Who invented Chicago deep-dish pizza? Is there a more controversial question in Chicago food history? Despite decades of debate and speculation, no one has definitively identified who created the pizza style that has—rightly or wrongly— branded Chicago as a deep-dish pizza town with a market niche now worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

I was reminded of this question 12 years ago reading the title "Mysteries of the Deep" on the cover of a tabloid newspaper. The article, written by Chicago Tribune reporter James Janega, described the efforts of Tim Samuelson, then Chicago's official cultural historian, to find the inventor of deep-dish pizza. Tim lamented, "I wish that there were more written records—recipes or vintage photographs." I was immediately intrigued. After reading the article, I met with Tim and agreed to try my hand at finding more information to help us solve this decades-old mystery.

Before we look at this deep-dish whodunit, let's establish some historical context regarding the pizza business. The first documented pizzerias in the world appeared in Naples in the late 1700s. In the U.S. the first known pizzeria appeared in New York City in 1894 on Mulberry Street. It wasn't until 1924 that Tom Granato established Chicago's first verified pizzeria, on Taylor Street. Granato's pizza, cooked in a wood-fired oven, looked like a New York-style pizza with its wedge-cut thin crust. With the repeal of prohibition, pizza started to become popular in Italian-American taverns on the east coast in the mid-1930s. The idea of serving pizza in taverns as an accompaniment to drinks eventually made its way to Chicago in the early 1940s. Hence the dominant pizza in Chicago is a thin cracker crust sliced with a square "tavern cut."

Now back to the deep-dish story. Let's define deep-dish pizza as a pizza cooked in a circular pan, sauce on top of the cheese, and a *modestly* thick crust that's rich in fat. Typically the fat used in the dough and in the pan is a mixture of olive oil and corn oil. There's little doubt the pizzeria at 29 East Ohio Street in Chicago—originally named "The Pizzeria," later renamed "Pizzeria Uno"—served the original deep-dish pizza in December 1943. The main controversy is who created the original deep-dish pizza: Ike Sewell, a Chicago-based liquor manufacturing executive, Richard Riccardo Sr., a famous Rush Street restaurateur, or Rudy Malnati Sr., Pizzeria Uno's longtime manager.

To tell your story, it helps to be alive to recount it. In this case, Riccardo, a part-owner of the pizzeria, died young in 1954. By contrast, Sewell died in 1990 in his late eighties as Pizzeria Uno's owner. As a result, Sewell's origin story became the dominant narrative in newspaper articles on the early days of deep-dish pizza. Briefly, Sewell's story was as follows: Born in Texas, Sewell had a longtime dream to open a Mexican restaurant in Chicago. He approached Riccardo in early 1943 with the idea and formed a partnership. Sewell found an abandoned basement tavern at 29 East Ohio Street and, by June 17, 1943, they had leased it. Eventually, Riccardo, an Italian by birth unfamiliar with Mexican food, wanted a meal to taste before they opened the restaurant. After eating an authentic Mexican meal prepared by one of his Rush Street bartenders, Riccardo got violently ill. Angered by the experience, Riccardo stormed off to Italy for two or three months. Eventually, Riccardo came back from Italy with a new idea for Sewell: pizza. But Sewell had no idea what pizza was. They tried to order one at the only pizzeria in Chicago on Taylor Street, but the owner told them he only makes pizzas for parties. Riccardo, a longtime cook, then went into his kitchen and started experimenting with pizza recipes. Sewell's only input to the recipe was to tell Riccardo to "make it a meal" instead of an appetizer. Finally, they opened their pizzeria with Rudy Malnati Sr. as the manager in December 1943. After Sewell retired from the liquor industry in 1966, he told various versions of this story to the media until his death in 1990. And that was that.

October 1940: Advertisement for "The Pelican" the first pizzeria at 29 E. Ohio St. ("Chicago Nite Life" magazine, Peter Regas Collection)

Until one day in 1998, when Riccardo's ex-wife, Mae Juel Allen, called Chicago Magazine's Jeff Ruby and told a very different story. According to Mae Juel, "Ike Sewell didn't know beans about deep-dish pizza." She went further and said Sewell wasn't present when Riccardo hatched his pizza idea in 1943. In another unpublished interview I reviewed, Mae Juel said wartime liquor shortages caused them to form the partnership with Ike only *after* the pizzeria was already open, stating, "We only had Ike because he was in the liquor business. And we needed the liquor. It's that simple."

Since both sources are now dead, the only way to assess who's telling the truth is to find as many primary sources as possible and see whose story is consistent with those sources. And so, on and off for the last 12 years, that's what I've done often with Tim Samuelson's invaluable help.

My research largely supports Mae Juel's version of events and finds Sewell's origin story implausible and at times outright false. For example, I found all the Chicago liquor license applications for 29 East Ohio Street for the period 1939-1955. The critical application was the first one signed by Richard Riccardo on November 15, 1943. Riccardo explicitly states on that application he has no partners. This directly contradicts Sewell's story that they bought the tavern business and leased the space by June 17, 1943. I was also able to find the original partnership agreement between Riccardo and Sewell (actually, Sewell's wife signed for him). The most interesting thing about the agreement is it was signed on February 15, 1944, almost eight months aft

er Sewell said they bought the tavern business and their lease started. Why would you wait eight months to sign a partnership agreement after—according to Sewell—committing capital to the partnership?

In addition, liquor license applications show the original manager was not Rudy Malnati Sr., as Sewell said, but Riccardo's cousin Bartolomeo Fico. It turns

Circa mid-1930s: Ike Sewell. Possibly his official photo for Fleischmann's Distilling Corporation *(Florence and Ike Sewell Collection, Northwestern Memorial Hospital Archives).*

out Rudy Malnati Sr. was the pizzeria's third manager taking over in 1951. Also, telephone books and a birth certificate establish the Riccardo family moved into 29 East Ohio Street in late 1942, renting an apartment right above the then abandoned basement tavern. Is it credible that Sewell discovered the basement tavern Riccardo was already living right above?

Remember that pizzeria on Taylor Street in 1943 Sewell claimed would only make pizza for "parties"? The only known pizzeria at that time on Taylor Street was Tom Granato's pizzeria. Tom's daughter, Marion Simone, turns ninety-three this June and has clear memories of the pizzeria in the early 1940s. She told me Sewell's claim was "absolutely not" true. Finally, Sewell claims Riccardo went to Italy during the summer of 1943 for two or three months. Sewell was a highly respected Chicagoan but he really told a whopper here. The only way for an American to go to Italy in the summer of 1943 was to *invade* Italy with the U.S. Armed Forces. For the record, Riccardo never served in the U.S. Armed Forces, and there is no record of him leaving North America during the war.

Based on all of these sources, I believe Sewell's origin story for Pizzeria Uno is substantially untrue. Crucially, I don't think Sewell was Riccardo's partner when Riccardo *initially* opened the pizzeria in December 1943. And if that's the case, then the original deep-dish recipe was very likely the sole creation of Riccardo.

Is the pizza served today substantially the same deep-dish pizza served when Riccardo opened in the 1940s? There are reasons to doubt it. I found photos of Pizzeria Uno's deep-dish pizzas from 1949, which show pizzas made in a shallower pan looking noticeably thinner than today's deep-dish pizza. Additionally, in 1945, Riccardo gave newspapers a deep-dish pizza recipe that has approximately half the fat compared to Pizzeria Uno's current dough. This lends credence to the story that legendary Uno pizza cook Alice Mae Redmond told the Chicago Sun-Times in 1989: "When I came to Uno's the dough was terrible… It wouldn't stretch." So she said she developed her own recipe. My interviews with her now-late daughter Lucille Conwell confirm Alice Mae likely added more fat to the recipe making it easier to stretch.

Where did Riccardo get the idea to open up the pizzeria? A 1954 Sun-Times article states that Pizzeria Uno was established "... to satisfy pizza lovers who complained because Riccardo's [on Rush St.] didn't serve their favorite dish…" That seems plausible as tavern pizza was booming on the east coast in 1943. But a more intriguing reason may be the abandoned tavern Riccardo bought in 1943 called "The Pelican" was also a pizzeria, at least from 1940 to 1941. Riccardo may have simply reopened an abandoned pizzeria with pizza ovens and possibly deep-dish pans still there.

All of this revisionist history doesn't mean Sewell and Malnati were not critical to Pizzeria Uno's success. Contingency in history leads to some interesting counterfactuals. Would Riccardo's pizzeria have survived those early months without Sewell and the extra liquor he allegedly supplied? Would another manager have been as successful as Rudy Malnati Sr. was for more than two decades? Would Riccardo have opened a pizzeria if "The Pelican" had not previously introduced pizza at the little basement tavern at 29 East Ohio Street? Researching old questions leads to new questions. The mystery continues.

Peter Regas works as a financial statistician. Which is another way to say he stares at a computer screen all day. He has an inexplicable interest in—his sisters would say an obsession with—the origins of pizza. For more information on his research please consult pizzahistorybook.com.

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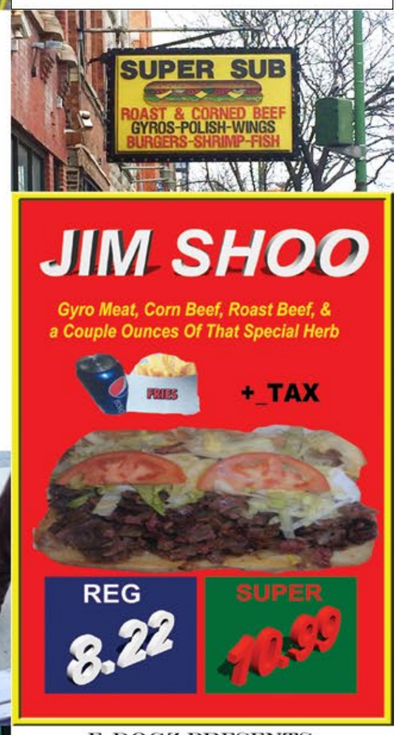
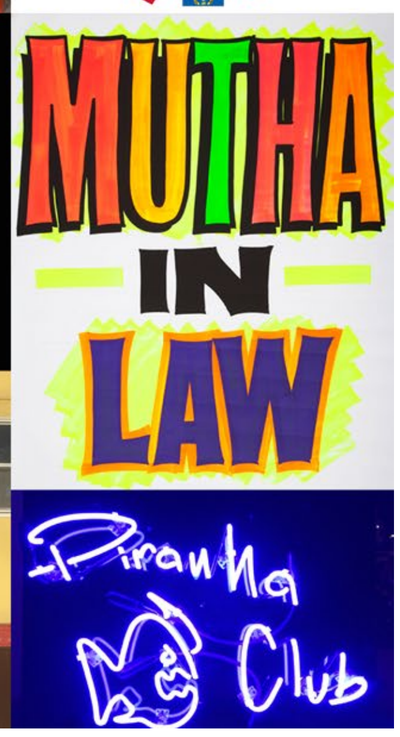
By Eric May





FRIENDSHIP CAKE

By Hyun Jung Jun,
edited by Cody Tumblin

I am outside, come out and bring a plate!

It took me 29 years to make my first cake. It was a carrot cake slathered with pre-whipped cream cheese from Trader Joe's, mixed with raspberries and sugar. It was meant to be a birthday cake of sorts—a joint birthday between my partner Cody and our close friend Jeff.The cake was as much about their year around the sun as it was about their friendship. I liked the sound of it—friendship cake. I began to make more and more cakes for friends—a reason to say hello, an excuse to drop by, to meet up, to eat together and catch up. I started a journal, piles of notes and colorful doodles full of flavor combinations and recipes. This was how Dream Cake Test Kitchen began.

orange olive oil cake with ginger syrup, candied ginger, orange zest, lemon zest, lime zest, and chinese five spice

It's important to hold on to the friendships we have, the small moments that bring us together. Sometimes people move away, some even leave us forever. It is a sad thing to lose someone, and maybe we can cherish even the smallest moments we have together, even if it is over a slice of cake. I think there is something about being in your 30s that makes the reality of time feel so much more apparent. Some of us are getting married, starting families, settling down, looking for jobs in other cities. There is little stillness in the quiet chaos of our daily lives and there is something in me that hopes to savor each morsel of a moment.

goat milk sponge with a drizzle of coffee icing, a dollop of basil whipped cream,strawberries, red currants, black raspberries, and nasturtium leaves

A cake carries significance. It can be the crown jewel (the cherry on top) of a momentous occasion. But sometimes a single slice can say "hey we haven't talked in a while, are you free on Friday?" A single layer cake can be casual, quiet, and unassuming, while a tiered cake with toasted meringue piping can be the shining star of an everlasting memory. Even cake can carry memories within it, its sweetness reminding us of the forgotten joys that linger under the bitterness. If anything, a slice of cake brings us comfort at the end of a long day, especially when that slice is shared.

rosemary olive oil cake with drizzle of condensed milk

Cakes are a landscape for the dreams we carry. My cakes usually embody the natural world and its many wonders—piped buttercream butterflies dancing in the summer breeze, swirls of mascarpone and cream anchoring down forests of rosemary and lavender sprigs, lazy lakes of raspberry jam dotted with dried rose petal boats and glistening gold leaf flecks. Some cakes become a mountain or a hillside, some an ornate palace freckled with bee pollen. A single line of black sesame seeds can become a procession of ants marching under the hot sun.

strawberry rhubarb patchwork for an upside down cake with almonds and toasted meringue

Most recently, I dreamed of swans bathed in light. Gathered together on the water, their smooth white curves were radiant, haloed by thousands of sunlit refractions dancing on the surface of the water. The image was burned in my mind, and the next day I found myself drawing swans with piped meringue, gently teasing feathery peaks into their foamy egg white bodies. They soon surrounded a buttercream cake with a lemon curd pond on top. Sometimes dreams are meant to be shared.

CHICAGO FOODCULTURA CLARION 3
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BIOS

Peter Engler worked at the University of Chicago carrying out basic research in mammalian genetics. A South Side resident for over forty years, he took an interest in the often-overlooked cuisine of the area. He has written and lectured on topics such as soul food, barbecue, and bean pie, as well local oddities such as the jim shoe, big baby, and mother in law.

Eric May is a Chicagoland-based parent, chef, and recovering artist. Eric is the founder and director of Roots & Culture, a nonprofit visual arts center in Chicago's Noble Square neighborhood.

Miralda is a multidisciplinary artist who has lived and worked in Paris, New York, Miami, and Barcelona, his hometown, since the 1960s. His work has evolved around food culture, obsessive objects, ceremonials, public art, and community events. In the year 2000, he created the Food Pavilion for the World Expo held in Hannover, Germany, and subsequently the FoodCultura Museum, in connection with the Sabores y Lenguas/Tastes & Tongues and Power Food project.

Stephan Palmié is a native Bavarian with a Huguenot (French Calvinist) name and a German accent that he can't seem to shake, but likes to think of as close to what the German-born founder of American Anthropology, Franz Boas, might have sounded like. He is the Norman and Edna Freehling Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, works on Afro-Cuban ritual traditions, is the author and editor of a bunch of books, and likes to think with food, preferably stews.

Paige Resnick is a nonfiction writer, an amateur yet confident cook, and a very good eater. She grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, lives in Chicago, Illinois, and has a strong Midwestern accent. She writes about food, culture, and her perplexing childhood.

All of the lettering in the Chicago FoodCultura Clarion Issue 3 has been hand-painted by Chuck Willmarth of Southwest Signs.

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