

EAT THIS POEM

ANTHOLOGY



Selections from the 2013 Contest

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“I believe poetry is as much preservation as excavation—a moment, emotion, observation, memory, history, tradition, communion. In that sense, food and its ritual preparation, its many associations of family, can unlock a doorway into the past, into self-discovery and-understanding, as is so often the path in poetry, from the personal and particular into a universal experience to which most readers can relate.”

- *Linda Parsons Marion*

editor's note



Eat This Poem hosted its inaugural contest in summer 2013. Entries took varied approaches to the language and landscape of food, from memories of a Moroccan market, inspiration from cookbook writer Marcella Hazan, and relationships understood through the lens of blood oranges at a farmer's stall, tropical pineapple, and spicy kimchi.

Following are selections from the splendid entries, as well as interviews with the two winners, Linda Parsons Marion and MariJean Sanders.

Bon Appetit!

*- Nicole Gulotta
September 2013*

FIRST PLACE

“Sukiyaki” by Linda Parsons Marion

SUKIYAKI

My stepmother stirs swift tides of sesame
and soy, strange sea bubbling dark. Nights
she rocks that samurai blade, flank or roundsteak
soaking the drainboard, a brace of greentailed
scallions hacked headless. Taught the ancient ways
by her brother's war bride, who shadowed him
to Tennessee with eyes downcast, she sugars the beef,
dipped in egg beaten bright as rising suns. Raised
on Boyardee and La Choy, I enter her kitchen
like a bamboo grove, part paradise, part unknowable,
exotic as distant Osaka. From one slippery shore
to another, my mother's cold shoulder to the steam
of ribboned onions, red meat cut on the bias.
Ricebowl filled, I ladle an extra sorghum-slow
syllable, *suk-i-ya-ki*, my tongue trying new salt.

*First published in *A Tapestry of Voices: The Knoxville Writers' Guild 2011 Anthology*, 2010. Reprinted with permission from the Knoxville Writers' Guild.



Japanese Hot Pot

Recipe by Nicole Gulotta // Adapted from White on Rice Couple

Serves 4 to 6

Sukiyaki is a type of nab, or Japanese hot pot. Traditional recipes include thinly sliced beef and vegetables like mushrooms and green onions simmered in a flavorful broth of sake, soy sauce, and sugar. It is often served with a beaten egg that the vegetables are dipped in before eating, and is endlessly adaptable depending on the ingredients accessible to you. Essentially, it's Japanese comfort food.

This post from White on Rice Couple is a very comprehensive overview of Japanese hot pot cooking. Reading their description of the method reminded me of Italian minestrone in the sense that there are some general guidelines worth noting, but improvisation is encouraged. To this end, I made adaptations to suit my taste, and hope you feel inspired to do so as well. The ingredients below are easily adaptable, and you can serve your broth with white rice or soba noodles.

INGREDIENTS

Vegetable oil
3/4 pound grass fed sirloin, thinly sliced
4-6 shallots, peeled and thinly sliced
1 Napa cabbage, halved lengthwise and sliced
4 scallions, sliced into 2-inch pieces
5 to 6 large Shiitake mushrooms, sliced
3 to 4 ounces bunapi mushrooms
4 cups vegetable stock
1/4 cup Japanese soy sauce (use the best you can find)
1 to 2 tablespoons sugar
1 bunch watercress
Cooked short grain white rice for serving



DIRECTIONS

In a 5-quart cast iron stock pot, warm the pan over medium heat and add 1 tablespoon of oil. Add the beef slices in a single layer (as best you can), season with 1/2 teaspoon salt, and brown each side; place in a large bowl. With the pot still on medium-high heat, add 2 tablespoons of oil, then add the shallots, cabbage, and scallions. It will take only a minute or two for the cabbage to wilt and the shallots to brown in places; reduce the heat to low and add the mushrooms. Stir to coat, season with 1 teaspoon salt, and cook for 3 to 5 minutes.

Add the stock, sugar, and soy sauce, and gently place the beef back in the pot; simmer for 10 minutes. Place the watercress on top, then cook 1 minute more, until just wilted. Place rice into bowls and ladle soup over the top.



JAPANESE
HOT POT

Q&A With Linda Parsons Marion



Tell us a bit about the genesis of the poem and what compelled you to write it.

I wrote “Sukiyaki” for an anthology published by the Knoxville Writers’ Guild whose focus was diversity, *A Tapestry of Voices* (2010). I wanted to continue exploring the food issues in my childhood regarding my mother and stepmother, with an added layer of ‘foreignness.’ I’d begun this exploration in my second book, *Mother Land*, with the poem “Mother Wars,” about my mother’s homemade macaroni and cheese and my preference (at that time) for Kraft mac ‘n cheese, used by my stepmom. Oh, how things have changed! I was drawn to the modernness and comfort of my stepmother, who was twenty when she married my father and is only thirteen years older than I. She loved to play and offered me the peace and refuge of a ‘normal’ homelife when I visited on the weekends. My mother suffers from bipolar disorder, an illness no one understood in those

days (1950s-60s), least of all a child torn between two worlds.

“Sukiyaki” is a poem that evokes a vivid memory. How many years passed between the experience of trying sukiyaki for the first time and writing the poem?

Close to fifty years! I left my mother at the age of eleven to live with my dad and stepmother. I remember my stepmom making the dish after I was with them full-time. Her brother served in the Navy right after the war and married a Japanese woman, but the sukiyaki is the only Japanese dish I recall her making.

The poem depicts moving from one existence to another—mother to mother, culture to culture (Japan to Tennessee), familiar to exotic, uncertainty and fear to security, taste to taste, etc. The strangeness of sukiyaki, the dish and the name itself, illustrates my stepping into a new life, still feeling the guilt and angst of leaving my mother behind—that “slippery shore” I navigated, “part paradise, part unknowable.”

For someone raised on Chef Boyardee and La Choy, Japanese flavors must have been a shock to the palate. Did you take to the cuisine right away?

As I said, the sukiyaki symbolized the ‘newness’ I entered when I moved in with my dad and stepmom. How would I embrace this change? How would I begin again (especially during the rocky years of adolescence)? As for the dish itself, I most remember the saltiness of soy and the wonderful scallions and rice, but the soy sauce wasn’t that different from the Worcestershire we poured on our steaks! Salt, salt, salt. My dad was a traveling salesman and, when he returned home on the weekends, he wanted his beef—roasts, T-bones. Even so, all of my parents (and I) were raised on—and still love—traditional southern dishes like chicken and dumplings, fried fruit pies, cornbread, homegrown tomatoes, pintos, green beans cooked to death with fatback (but oh, so good), etc.

How does food influence you as a poet?

I believe poetry is as much preservation as excavation—a moment, emotion, observation, memory, history, tradition, communion. In that sense, food and its ritual preparation, its many associations of family, can unlock a doorway into the past, into self-discovery and understanding, as is so often the path in poetry, from the personal and particular into a universal experience to which most readers can relate.

And, of course, there's the hunger. Hunger for language and sound, for connections, to feed and be fed, to learn from the past and grapple with its meanings—all set, perhaps, on a plate of fried chicken, the weekends I spent with my grandmother, her cast-iron skillet and Sunday dinners, the bacon grease she spooned into the blackened tin for corn muffins, what I lost when I moved away from her, yet how she still hovers at my shoulder, my muse. Food is so evocative and sustaining for me and my writing, a subject I can always return to and find new ways of seeing and experiencing the world. "O taste and see," Denise Levertov wrote.

Do you have a favorite meal or snack you like to eat when you're writing?

Not really, but hot herbal tea is often on my desk as I write in cold weather. Feels good to the hands and the nose, warming and loosening bits of memory, easing the journey down one hallway and the next, shadow to light and back again, line to line—one sensual experience triggering, guiding another.

What similarities do you find between cooking and writing?

I'm a gardener as well as a cook, each an art in its own way, each a meditative endeavor that brings ideas bubbling to the surface. The making of a stew or soup isn't so far afield from creating a poem—I choose for flavor, color, texture, what has succeeded in the past while being willing to experiment and veer from the recipe into mystery, unknown territory.

I don't write every day and, when it's been a while, I begin to feel an emptiness, a restlessness, a craving to get back to it, that process of peeling away the layers of creativity and darkness, of returning to light and balance, however briefly. Both cooking and writing satisfy those empty places in the psyche, the gut, the spirit and give my life a wholeness, an offering I bring to the table, the page, the listener residing within and without.

SECOND PLACE

“Translation” by MariJean Sanders

TRANSLATION

You should know
we resort to cookies
when we run out of words.
when saying is too sharp
or too incoherent -
here have some
extra-stuffed chocolate chip, pumpkin-buttermilk
seven layer snickerdoodle
(yes let's fill you up with too much sweet -
as if you really need it-)
it's maternal instinct, maybe.
Or perhaps we just fail at loving,
and all we've got to hide behind now, our
last language
is coded for your tastebuds, masterpiece-by-the-dozen
disappear-by-the-dozen...
(maybe you missed it)
so

allow me to translate.

cookies mean
I love you
cookies mean I need a hug
cookies mean I just wish you would

say I'm beautiful or
tell your friends that I'm Pretty Much the Best
cookies mean please don't leave
because I feel at home when you're around,
mean
I'm so very proud of you
mean

you can do it I know you can and
I want you to know so badly that
I'm afraid to tell you
out loud

We stir it all in
with the butter and vanilla
and hope
you
understand





Pumpkin Snickerdoodles

Recipe by Nicole Gulotta // Adapted from Michael Rhulman

Makes 12-14 cookies

I only have two philosophies when it comes to baking.

1. If you're going to melt the butter, you may as well brown it.
2. Baking is for sharing.

True to form, one of my favorite cookies now has a new flavor profile with nutty browned butter and fall pumpkin, and my husband's colleagues won't need to wonder what their afternoon snack will be.

INGREDIENTS

4 tablespoons butter, browned
1/2 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup granulated sugar
4 tablespoons pumpkin puree
1 large egg
1/2 teaspoon vanilla
1 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
Pinch of salt

Cinnamon Sugar

1/4 cup granulated sugar
2 teaspoons cinnamon

DIRECTIONS

When the butter has cooled slightly, pour it into the bowl of a stand mixer and add the sugars and pumpkin. Mix on medium speed until well incorporated. Reduce speed to low and add the egg and vanilla; mix until combined. Gently add the dry ingredients and mix until just combined; dough will be slightly sticky. Refrigerate for 30 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Stir the sugar and cinnamon in a small bowl, then drop heaping tablespoons of dough into the bowl and roll around to coat before rolling between your palms to make a uniform circle.

Chilled dough will be easier to work with, but will still be a bit sticky, so rolling the dough in the cinnamon sugar first will make it easier to rub between your palms. Place on a parchment-lined baking sheet and bake for 12 minutes, or until edges are golden.

Q&A With MariJean Sanders



What struck me first about “Translation” was how relatable it was. Has food always been a language of love for you?

Yes! I grew up with family dinner as a central part of the day, and gathering around the table with family or friends are some of my best memories. Particularly after a hard day’s work. Nothing draws people together like working hard together and then sitting down for a meal afterwards.

Also I am drawn to anything that piques the five senses, and food has a special monopoly - sitting down to eat is one of the only things that utilizes sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. And since eating also happens to be necessary to sustain life, a well-done dish is a wonderful example of making the most of what you have, transforming something potentially mundane into a masterpiece.

Tell us a bit about the genesis of the poem and what compelled you to write it.

I ran for my college’s small cross country and track team, where often the entire team would go to the cafeteria together for dinner after practice. Since it was such a small team, often the guys and girls would train together as well. Therefore, I developed relationships with both the guys and the girls on the team. I started to notice that girls could compliment and affirm each other verbally, whereas that didn’t work so well with the guys. For instance, I could tell my girls “I’m so proud of you” after a great race – but those words wouldn’t communicate what I meant as effectively with the guys – they were too afraid of anything that smacked of sentiment! Baking them cookies always seemed to get the message across, though.

The poem is a sort of universal confession from women to men they care about (though not all women and men will communicate exactly alike!) – when we get frustrated with the sometimes vast gulf of communication that exists between the sexes, it isn’t words, but food, that can occasionally bridge the gap. Which is a bit magical, I think.

Besides chocolate chip cookies and snickerdoodles, what’s your favorite thing to cook?

Pie is definitely my specialty. This summer I think I averaged one pie a week. My two latest pies were a pie baked into a cake (a piecaken) and a pie shaped like a pirate ship. I enjoy experimenting and making anything from as ‘scratch’ as it gets (I even butchered a turkey once), and I love recreating recipes from my favorite stories. I could also make and eat any kind of soup or pesto every single day.

How does food influence you as a poet?

To me, food is a vehicle for solidifying a good memory or visualizing a sensory image...since scent and taste are strongly linked to memory, the food we eat can easily place permanent landmarks on our mental timeline. I will always associate blueberries with friendship, for instance, because of a cup of blueberry tea I shared one night with a friend many years ago. And a whiff of homemade hot chocolate (laced with nutmeg) will instantly bring me back to my childhood, when my mom made it every year the night we decorated our Christmas tree. Food gives the memory an actual tangible material to center around – much like finding the perfect descriptive word that makes a sentence pop off of the page.

Do you have a favorite meal or snack you like to eat when you're writing?

I like the typical Englishy hot drinks when I sit down to read or write– but I like them bittersweet. (Always a sucker for paradox!) I'm not a sugar junkie – I like just enough sweetness paired with rich, nutty, or spiced flavors. Like: very strong coffee with cream and brown sugar, black tea with cinnamon and honey, or hot chocolate with chili. I always like them paired with a pastry involving lots of butter - Scones, shortbread, and pain au chocolat are probably my favorites. My favorite way to eat a cookie is just a bit stale (biscotti-like) with a mug of black coffee.

What similarities do you find between cooking and writing?

This question immediately made me think of the poem, “The Poet’s Occasional Alternative” by Grace Paley - which is about baking a pie - because it draws some great connections - and distinctions - between writing and cooking.

Cooking helps create an atmosphere for whoever is being cooked for – the smells, textures, taste (of course) and presentation all form sensory impressions. The cook has control over that to some degree. A writer has a similar control over the sensory picture she is painting in the reader’s mind – and has to draw upon those concrete sensory details to create the atmosphere she desires.

Cooking and writing both create space for conversation – whether in the kitchen with a friend while chopping vegetables or canning tomatoes, or as a vast timeless medium that spans the ages – there’s always a good conversation happening in both genres.

selections

from the 2013 contest entries

GREEN OLIVES WITH MEDJOOOL DATES

BY AMY MACLENNAN

Sweetness to take the tang
from the salt. Similar opposites.
Like built and guilt—one high, one low.
As when your life
strips you down: you look up.
Even when it all
stings deep, a memory
of sugar in your mouth.

—from *The Smoking Poet*,
Winter 2010-2011, Issue #17

COUSCOUS & ALMONDS

BY KOROMONE KOROYE

8am in Morocco and the sun is high,
burning but not violent.
Night is already forgotten.

Women wake their sleeping shadows
and make their beds,
they move toward the kitchen,
bare-backed and bare-foot,
sweating and laughing- breakfast must be made.
They gather around blackened pots
like lost cattle with experienced hands
ready to satisfy waiting taste buds.

I am my mother's child,
I dance in the rain
with long hair in braids down my back,
I pretend not to hear her shouting
for me to join her,
calling for me to taste the growing smoke
and rub her charcoal stained fingers clean.

Morocco,
is nothing like the New York city I dream about,
it is no over crowded subway station
or yellow taxi cab speeding by in the summer,
it is not 5th avenue or mink coats or 42nd street.
It is a bowl of dry Couscous and crushed almonds.

I BELIEVE IN BREAKFAST

BY ABBY LEIGH

i believe in breakfast.
in the holding power of hot coffee between us,
in the truths that spill from eyes still squinting with sleep
and lips still clinging to dream-drenched words.
i believe in mornings.
in the new mercies of summer breaking through the blinds,
in the amplified sounds of neighbors and deliveries and the
resetting of all that yesterday set off.
for first hour routines hold such holy potential,
rites of preparation, intention,
the feeding of body and soul -
eggs and delusions cracked open and laid bare.
to starting, again, and awakening the world,
one sip,
one word,
one morning at a time.

READING POEMS DURING LUNCH AT EL ARADO

BY SARAH SUKSIRI

What's nice about a paperback
that someone lets you borrow is the spine
is broken and the pages fall open
on the table like a hinge
or a dancer's legs. You don't have to balance
tacos in one hand and make a bookstand
with the other. You don't have to worry
about chili oil in the margins
as much. You don't even have to read it,
not really, since the point of a book
at lunch is to appear engaged
and in the best of company and not
to make the table next to you,
where a couple of humans
share an appetizer, worry
about you, all alone.
The server won't know, though.
Does a paperback--of poems!--
mean you need extra attention,
more water, anything? Well, what's nice
about a paperback that someone
has already read is it isn't too shy
and doesn't mind if you just listen,
don't say much, eat tacos, get distracted
thinking about those humans
and their salsa in a story,
what they would say.

—*for Christopher*

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT (IN IRELAND)

BY AKAISER

I.

I am Irish
soda bread with swollen raisins
caught in your throat lovely
with home-churned unsalted
butter and hand-mashed jam.

II.

I am wild Irish
salmon, pink-bellied flashing
iridescent as I slip
from my sea captor's hands.

III.

I am pungent blue
veined cheese torturing
my taster with a bite of acid
a caress of velour cream.

IV.

I am inflated
raspberries locally gleaned
and sealed in plastic package.
Your fingers stained just the same.

V.

I am drink
culled from the land's
peated bog core leaving
notes of apple and fresh almond
on your green tongue.

THE LOVE SONG OF J. ALICE BEEFSTOCK
(WITH APOLOGIES TO T.S. ELIOT)

BY SUSAN WOLBARST

Let us go then, out to eat
When grumbling stomachs break the twilight peace
Like some mindless babbling bowl of milked Rice Krispies;
Let us go, like magnets toward our drive-through choices
Where disembodied voices
Will demand what to bag in paper for us
As we huddle hungry in your father's Taurus
Scanning familiar options on the menu
From inside our cozy automotive venue
Leading to that overwhelming question...
Oh, do not ask, what diet?
Let us make our tummies quiet.

In our minds our mothers go and come
Advocating greens and calcium.

And indeed there will be time
In line to wonder faintly, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn away from meat cooked bloody rare,
But I'm pulled by strong attraction to this fare --
[They will say: "How her waist is growing thick!"]
My relaxed-fit pants perform their best elastic stretching trick
My sweater trying helplessly to make my trunk a stick.
[They will say: "But how her arms and legs are thick!"]
Do I dare
To eat a double cheese?
In a minute there is time
To reverse long months of deprivation if I please.

For I have known them all already, known them all –
Have known Carl's Jr., In 'N Out, and Mickey D's;
I have measured out my life in calories;

I hear my diet dying with a dying fall
Toward the sizzle of the griddle's grease
So how will I decrease?

I grow fat...I'm not light...
I shall wear my trousers tight.

Shall I part with fast food meals? Do I dare to eat the beef?
I could risk the switch to vegetables and munch a spinach leaf.
Then my doctor might stop giving me such grief.

I do not think E. coli will get me.

BE WARNED

BY EMILY RUTH HAZEL

I fear I am an awkward fruit:
pineapple, with its armadillo armor,
rough in all the wrong places
and prickly as a pinecone,
with a shock of impossible hair
(a tempting handle,
but the tips are sharp as agave).
There is no efficient way
to get to the heart of a pineapple.
It takes a good strategist, a serious
knife, and a certain commitment:
someone who is patient, willing
to let the juice spread all over the counter
and inch its way under the microwave.
There will be several trips to the trash can
as the armor falls away
in slabs and slivers—as the blade discerns
between my skin and what's worth keeping.
Then those tiny barbs
that stay embedded in my flesh
must be dug out one by one
with a smaller, gentler knife.
I will overwhelm you
with my sweetness if you catch me
at the perfect yellow moment,
and turn tangy in your mouth
if you love me too much.

INITIATE INSOMNIA

BY MATT HEMMERICH

Tearing at the womb of a pear
In bed alone, quarter past nine
Spitting baby seeds into the air

Victorian dolls across the room simply stare
As if waiting for a sign
Cautiously, I tear at the womb of a pear

A window breeze whispers and dares
Me to sleep, but I sharply decline,
Spitting baby seeds into the air

Trees cast shadows that resemble split hair,
Printing a mural of jagged lines
As I tear at the womb of a pear

A pint of Nyquil could not impair
The ceiling thumps or rustles of pine
So I continue spitting baby seeds into the air

Coiled within satin sheets, I prepare
To behave like apprehensive swine,
Tearing at the womb of a pear
Spitting baby seeds into the air

BRASSICA OLERACEA CAPITATA*

BY CLAUDIA F. SAVAGE

ancient one
you grew
while winter
made lesser vegetables
wilt

you were in the pots
of Pompeii wives
the belly of Viking ships
your rough body
filling the bowels
of warriors
nourishing conquest
after conquest

you too are warrior
holding your shape
in heat
in cold

your leaves offer up
the sulfur of
the volcano
even cooked
for hours
your smell everywhere
each limb
silky translucent
a noodle down the throat

the Swedes love you
when the sun leaves for months
when the clouds settle in
blanket the earth
they spread you
on dark bread kissed
by cream
sprinkled by specks
of caraway

the Chinese revel in your
occasional tango with garlic
your eggplant samba
the way you curl your
arms around each piece
of peanut-fried tofu
like an old friend
I would not dare take away
your bitterness
with long cooking
I honor your pale face
that sudden release
of months of water
as your jade skirt swirls
against the hot pan

you are proud
you do not care
if you are the last one eaten
you return
regardless of fame
or frost

you are the oldest
the one before

you are a hibernating bear
a found bird
a beetle gone home
you have been known
to blush purple
crunch underfoot
unfurl and
unfurl
a sturdy green
garden rose

**Brassica oleracea capitata*
(green cabbage)

Although the cabbage was first grown in Asia Minor and the eastern Mediterranean, Celtic knowledge of the vegetable was so ancient that the Latin name brassica comes from the Celtic word bresic, meaning “cabbage.”

In China, as well, the Cantonese word for “vegetable” is choi, which is the same as the word for cabbage.

—from *The Last One Eaten: A Maligned Vegetable's History*
(Finishing Line Press, 2005)

KIMCHI IS FOR LOVERS

BY AUBREY RYAN

It will please a certain kind: the way
you salt-massage your cabbage leaves.

He'll like your earthen crock; he'll hold
a hot and tiny pepper up in silhouette

inside the lamplight beam. Tell him:
my kimchi tastes just like a dozen little

bells. They're ringing, ringing
up against your ear. Kimchi knows:

garlic is the bulb of love: a fist
unhinging fingers one by one

and going whole into the crock.
Tell him: *garlic is the bulb of love,*

and chilies are a wick. Let nothing
graze your lips that isn't fervent.

Flood with salt and water, and remember
how once you were the same: buoyant

in your little sea: waiting to be born.

BLOOD ORANGE

BY TASHA COTTER

This morning I packed two blood oranges
for lunch. It's not that I love the way they taste—

like a splashy combination of bitter and bright,
a red grapefruit on a good day. Fact is,

there's something about understanding what you need

that is complicated, that reminds me of you, the way
you make sunset heights potent, descriptions that drip

with perfection like obsidian knocked up with night.

I'm told that not having one foot on the ground makes me
cryptic, and I am hoping that by doing this one thing

you understand me, sub-textually. If it were up to me, we'd exist
in a private orbit, watch critics peck at the planet for seeds.

Why is it no one understands what a blood orange is when they see it?
People think that either the red or the orange should go, because to blend the two

alienates some readers. You told me to never compare you
to a piece of fruit, but I, too, am having an identity crisis,

just like the blood orange. Now that we've peeled back
the artifice, you're inviting me in anyway,

which is not something I've seen, not in recent memory.

ON THE WAY TO AN UNDETERMINED WESTERLY LOCATION,
YOU PAUSE ON THE EASTERN SHORE

BY NATASHA KOCHICHERIL MONI

The summer after the summer we graduated
with degrees, you drove three states

south to collect me
from the fourth of July

and I had prepared
some summer fruit—

maybe nectarine—installed it
in a crust with apricot and you

led me toward my own
deck into the hazy blanket

of night that kept the crickets
singing, those bugs with lanterns

doing what they could to punctuate
the sky and you with your undeniable

grin, a slice of something sweeter
than what I could concoct—

we were the bud and the branch
and the westward leaning

the promise of continued
continental heat.

A NOTE TUCKED WITH MY WIFE'S WILL AND PERSONAL DIRECTIVES

BY PAT PHILLIPS WEST

Remember to ship in Dungeness crab cakes
from Etta's in Seattle. The ones
with tomatillo cocktail sauce
we had the night you proposed.
That night, so clear and warm,
looking out the plate glass windows
at the bustle of Pike Place Market.
Where we people watched past sunset,
certain years from then we would be
the old couple doing the Croatian
wedding dance on the sidewalk.

Prepare the Bucatini
with wild fennel and saffron
for a little North African flavor.
Use toasted bread crumbs.
Remember, the recipe we bribed
from the chef that time in Sicily
on our tenth anniversary.
The place where that huge black car
pulled up and an older man
in sunglasses and a woman got out.
We were certain he was the Godfather.

And please, celebrate the bitter, the salty,
the sour, the sweet with lots of Chianti.
Late evening, don't forget, serve Tiramisu
and champagne. This will go well
with lingering conversations
like the ones that lasted
until dawn on our first date.

THE SALAD COURSE

BY DAWN CORRIGAN

1. *Un'insalada vs. l'insalada*

Literally
“that to which salt has been added”
un'insalata
also suggests a décor
or a set of thoughts that appears
mixed up.

Invariably
served after the second course
l'insalada
signals the approaching end
of the meal; releasing us from
the grip

of the cook's
fabrications, it leads to fresh
sensations,
to a rediscovery of food
in its least labored state.
Salad's

components
change with the seasons: boiled
broccoli or shredded
Savoy cabbage in winter,
asparagus or green beans
in spring,

while in the fullness
of summer, raw ingredients
prevail. The broadened
availability
of many vegetables all year
has blurred

seasonality,
but still the salad course should speak
of its origin.

There are many other salads:
rice and chicken, rice and shellfish,
tuna

and beans, or any
number of other dishes
containing cold meats,
fish, or chicken mixed with legumes.
These salads are fine as *hors d'oeuvres*,
as first course

instead of pasta
or risotto, as principal
in a light meal,
or as part of a buffet.
They may be served as anything
except

l'insalada,
the salad course.

2. Dressing the salad

Dressed at the table
when ready to serve, the salad course
is never done
ahead of time. One large bowl

is used for the whole table,
roomy

enough for all
the vegetables to move around
when tossed. First, the salt.
Bear in mind that judiciousness
does not mean very little,
but rather

neither too much nor
too little. Give the salad
one quick toss to
distribute the salt and dissolve
it, then pour the oil
liberally.

Outside Italy
people never use sufficient
oil. It should produce
a gloss on the surface.
Vinegar is added last,
just a few

drops for aroma.
A little vinegar is enough
to be noticed,

too much monopolizes.
Gently toss, turning the greens
delicately

to avoid
bruising and blackening.

3. Other seasonings

All'agro,
or “in the tart style,” describes
the substitution
of lemon for vinegar.
It is acceptable on chard,
in summer.

Sporadically
garlic can be exciting,
though tiresome
when used too often. Its presence
should be an offstage one. Pepper
is not common.

Originally
it was too expensive to become
part of a humble
everyday dish like salad,
yet there can be a place for it
in Italian

salads, so long
as it is black pepper, with its
more complete aroma
than white. Balsamic vinegar
has been used in Modena
for centuries

to lift the flavor
of the basic salad dressing.

But the Modenese
don't use it every day,
and neither should you.

—After Marcella Hazan, *Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking*

SLIGHTLY CONTROVERSIAL FOR A FOOD POETRY COMPETITION

BY SARAH ELIZABETH DAVIS

It's been four days since you ate a proper meal,
and in that time you have starved yourself in the ache to feel your hipbones
more pronounced.
And it seems stupid
that someone who loves cooking
and wholesome ingredients
and being in a kitchen
can develop something that they're terming as an eating disorder,
but there you have it.

Toast for breakfast and then you run until your lungs are going to burst
and the jam on your tongue is replaced
by the taste of the sweat that's dripping from your lip,
because you'll be damned if that toast is just going to sit inside you.
And it's not elegant or poetic
but it's the way you're living right now
and you think if only you can skip lunch,
you'll be okay.
We'll be okay.

They're all trying,
around you,
to fix this, to fix you.
And they cook quinoa and prawns
and make taco salad and you think about how you love this food
and now you look at it
and it scares you.
And you feel small and big and strong because you're in control
but you feel weak,

because you're not in control at all.

So you make plans
and you bake banana bread that you won't eat
and you try not to revolve your days around the meals you won't have.
And you write
and you write
and you write
because food got you into this mess
but maybe writing will get you out.

GRIST

BY KATE PETERSON

The surgical team chipped pieces of bone from my hip.
I thought it was the right hip
that first time
and then later, when it failed, the left.
They scraped at the sacral vertebrae,
those bones seeing light and air
for the very first time.
They ripped at them until blood came up,
little spots of it, and the bones looked like coral,
or soft white bread.
They rubbed the surface so that it would stick,
the way you etch the edges of dough with a fork,
dipping your fingers into milk and eggs,
sliding it over the open wounds, so that the pie will close
and hold everything inside of it
the sweet red juices, the round yellow edges of nerves
under broken skin.
The first time they tried it the hip bone turned to gristle,
they used that word to describe it to my mother
as she stood after sitting for so many hours,
ripping recipes from old magazines.
They told her that my body had rejected its own
bits, ground them and spit them up.
I had spent four months staring at crown molding,
dislocating my right arm to slide it under the cast
to tear pieces of paper tape from the closed wound.
Sometimes I pulled out a few stitches,
and spun them between my fingers,
little half dissolved knots.

That first time, I imagined my bones healing
into calcified hands that would keep
my spine from slipping.
But the second time, failure flashed like a dying bulb,
and with each portion of ceiling that I counted,
I thought of the day when I would stand
again, and when I stood my bones would slosh
and sink down with gravity, and I would hit
the bright linoleum with a splashing sound.
I imagine it today, each time I catch myself
sliding on a patch of ice. Or as I walk
across a train platform and a man watches me
dig my thumbs into my lower back.
He can't see the wall the surgeons made,
but I can. The fusion looks like that delicate molding,
and I count again; how many years it has been
since the bones were sculpted, and how many years I have left,
until I begin to crumble, until my body spits the bones back out,
like gnawed clumps of fat,
onto a clean white plate.

AUTUMN

BY MARY HAMRICK

Autumn is like an old book:
Marred spines turn mean yellow,
staples rust red-orange.

Every stained page is stressed
by a splat of color. Rough-red,
like an old tavern,

we become hungry birds
and prepare for fall.
Shape and shadow are candied citron

as lanterns turn bitter yellow. Autumn
is a red fox, a goblet filled with dark wine,
a hot chilli pepper with smoky eyes.

Pressed leaves take in the colors
of seafood paella and saffron; these leaves
are like death, climaxing with a smile.

Autumn: Her dress is a net of mussels;
dark shelled, it covers up
summer's weather-beaten body.

So pull out your boots
and stand on an aged, wood floor
like an evergreen.

—*from About.com, 2009*

EVERYBODY MADE SOUPS

BY LISA COFFMAN

After it all, the events of the holidays,
the dinner tables passing like great ships,
everybody made soups for a while.
Cooked and cooked until the broth kept
the story of the onion, the weeping meat.
It was over, the year was spent, the new one
had yet to make its demands on us,
each day lay in the dark like a folded letter.
Then out of it all we made one final thing
out of the bounty that had not always filled us,
out of the ruined cathedral carcass of the turkey,
the limp celery chopped back into plenty,
the fish head, the spine. Out of the rejected,
the passed over, never the object of love.
It was as if all the pageantry had been for this:
the quiet after, the simmered light,
the soothing shapes our mouths made as we tasted.

—From *Artful Dodge and Less Obvious Gods*