



IT'S ALL ABOUT FOOD!

Strip tease

RAUL RODRIGUEZ GIBSON

A COLLECTION OF STRIPS ABOUT **FOOD** AND FRAGMENTED MEMORIES IN 2021

“All the Muse That’s Fit to Print”
CUT OUT EACH STRIP AND COLLECT!

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NEW YORK CITY

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Contents.

<i>España</i>	1
<i>Estragon</i>	2
<i>Finally</i>	3
<i>Gabrielle</i>	4
<i>Hors d'oeuvres</i>	5
<i>Kids</i>	6
<i>Lentils</i>	7
<i>Michelangelo</i>	8
<i>Ñoquis</i>	9
<i>Nutella</i>	10
<i>Oliver</i>	11
<i>Piemonte</i>	12
<i>Quiche?</i>	13
<i>Roland Barthes</i>	14
<i>Santiago (or Scallops?)</i>	15
<i>Tacos</i>	16
<i>Xanthan Gum</i>	17
<i>YSL</i>	18
<i>Za'atar</i>	19

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STRIP-TEASES® are always one page long, 3 paragraphs maximum and each comes with a a “strip” that, when printed, you can cut out and collect.

The ALL ABOUT THE FOOD series is organized semi alphabetically (starts with the letter E and not all letters are featured) and each entry ends with the letters w, x, y, or z.

Please feel free to request any recipe for the meals that are mentioned in this booklet. If I don't have it, I'll make it up!

— New York City, September 2021



España. My favorite piece of orchestral music. It's a *jota* (**LOOK IT UP!**) As in the letter "j". As in **J**orge. My paternal grandparents were from Galicia, Spain. The land of Santiago Matamoros ("Saint James Killer of Muslims"). Oh, boy! Shall I renounce that tarnished ancestry? What about Spanish music, Spanish fans, Spanish wine, Spanish food?

I made paella for New Year's Eve. I had never made it before. I consulted with an expert: my FB friend Carlos, who was born in Casablanca but lives in Alicante, a two-hour drive from Valencia. I asked for advice. The first thing he whatsapp'd me was: "*My advice is NOT to make it if you have never made it before, for such important date.*" I replied: "*It's just me and my husband so far. If we get poisoned, we'll die together and the epitaph will read: 'They died as they lived, in union and unison. The last supper was Paella a la Valenciana.'*"

So after a good laugh, Carlos proceeded to tell me how to make a seafood paella by video chat. Forty two minutes later and with the help of Google translate (names of fish in Spain differ from Argentinean Spanish) and copious notes, I faced the challenge and left for the fish store the next day with my list. I won't say how it came out —yet— because that is discourse for the dinner companion to include in his yelp! review.

—New York City, 1/1/2021

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Estragon. An herb I love. You probably know the English word. If not, please **LOOK IT UP!** It's also one of the 5 characters in Samuel Beckett's tragicomedy in 2 acts *En attendant Godot*. Why is it that everything sounds better in French? Just compare: "*en attendant*" with "waiting." If you ask me, "expecting" feels anticipatory. But *Waiting for Godot* is the official English title.

When we are *lucky* —another character in the play— and the herb grows abundantly in our city roof garden, I love to chop it, mix it with soft butter, sprinkle some salt and create a flavored delicacy spreadable on a fresh, warm baguette.

Estragon's first line in Beckett's play is "*Nothing to be done.*" (He is trying unsuccessfully to take off his boot.) And he has the last word as well: "*Yes, let's go.*" Although the stage direction says "They do not move. Curtain." This existential paralysis can be shaken with a quick, refreshing summer salad. Go no further. (You can't, since you are also waiting for Godot.) Use the root vegetables mentioned in the play. Grate two carrots, one medium turnip. Add a few radishes thinly sliced. Combine a tablespoon of apple cider vinegar with two tablespoons of grape seed oil, salt and pepper to taste. A dash of mustard and a half teaspoon of grated horseradish are optional. Mix all hurriedly and enjoy.

—New York City, 1/12/2021

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Finally.

Two Wednesdays ago. 11:42 A.M: a Black and South Indian American stands on the podium of the Capitol building, in her purple outfit. She repeats along what a Bronx-born Latina Supreme Court judge intones, becoming the first female vice president in this 245-year-old country. I should be doubly proud, since Argentina, my native country, had the first female president in history. A record, unfortunately, held by [a weak head of state](#) who was deposed by the military junta two years into her reign. (Worth another musical. A sequel to Evita since they shared the same husband.)

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After the inauguration ceremony, I googled “what are kamala harris’s favorite foods.” Lots came up including [a video in YouTube](#) that shows her, then a Senator, cooking Masala Dosas and Potato Curry with Mindy Kaling, a comedian also of South Indian ancestry. Both Kamala and Mindy’s mothers came here when they were in their teens and died young. The video shows them prepping and telling family stories as the cooking evolves. (You can tell a lot by the decisive way Kamala chops her red onions.) Don’t expect a precise rundown of the recipes. This is family cooking. You learn as you converse, sharing idiosyncrasies that transcend individual kitchens.

John teases me that I save too many empty glass jars with good lids. From now on, I will always remember Kamala bursting in her iconic laughter, as she mentions that her mother used empty Taster’s Choice jars to keep all the Indian spices fresh, a tradition she and Mindy still follow.





Gabrielle Hamilton is the founder of Prune restaurant in New York. I was there once, with a date. I read [her memoir](#) during lockdown. Ms. Hamilton is now married to a woman but was married to an Italian-born male doctor at Weill Cornell Medical College when she wrote the book. It is divided into three parts. In the third part, she talks about the visits to her in-laws in [Puglia](#), the southernmost eastern region of Italy, the “heel” of the boot.

Some sections bring to mind a Luca Guadagnino film. Carmeluccia, the family housekeeper, teaches her how to make *orecchiete* (little ears) and *minchiareddhi*, the iconic pasta from that region.

Ms. Hamilton explains it in detail: “[The *minchiareddhi* or] “little penises” she makes by pressing a common knitting needle down into the pellet and using it like a rolling pin until the dough has closed into a tube around the needle. Americans would never recognize the shape as a penis, because of our obsession with circumcision, but anyone familiar with the unmaimed ones—in their unaroused state—will see it in an instant. These two shapes, she explains, are typically made together and served together because they share a cooking time.”

Or because of their whimsical, complimentary and copulative shape? When served as one dish with a ragù, Italians call it *I maritati*: The Married. Soaked in that heavenly gravy, these homemade gluten-full sexual organs melt in your mouth. 🤤 It’s quite tasty.

—[New York City by Ms. Hamilton](#), 2/16/2021

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Hors d'oeuvres.

Which are your favorite finger foods at a party? “Party”? What is that? So 2019!

Hors d'oeuvres, usually served in “*the transition period between day and night*” as Sheila Lukins and Julee Rosso explain on page 3 of their 38-year-old [The Silver Palate cookbook](#), should be not too filling so your dinner guests ruin their appetite, but not too bland so your guests have to hide their sincerity.

These are the ones in our repertoire: Guacamole finished with a bit of red onion and tomato slivers; [pepperazzi](#) stuffed with goat chese, eaten unabashedly in one mouthful; [grissini](#) (breadsticks) wrapped in prosciutto—a recipe we copied from our friends Jill and J-P. If I feel industrious I make tiny *albondiguitas con azafrán* (**LOOK IT UP!**) but I need to stock up on those precious threads at www.chiquilin.com, along with some Spanish *pimentón*. I always forget to ask my husband what kind of *hors d'oeuvres* they serve in Kentucky, where he is from. When I first came to this country, *crudités* were very popular at parties. I almost choked on an uncooked broccoli floret once. Thank God for the Heimlich maneuver. Did you know that this life saving technique was invented by a Delaware-born doctor around the same time President Joe Biden was becoming [U.S. Senator of Delaware](#)? A good time to toast! All *hors d'oeuvres* are well accompanied by a glass of Cava, a summer Chablis, or an [Aperol Spritz](#), a refreshing libation with a fizz.

— *New York City, 3/2/2021*

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ALL ABOUT
THE FOOD!

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VOL.III, N° 6

Kids had to stay at home for long months last year.

I hear they still do in some places. We don't have children so we cannot even imagine what that's like. I hope savvy parents put kids to work in the kitchen, either helping with dishes or assisting as *petits sous chefs*.

My studio created one of the first cookbooks entirely for children—with adult supervision that is. In 2013 there was nothing like this in the market. It's still available in [Amazon](#), used copies going for as low as \$3.47! Our author modified the recipes to make them kid-friendly, organized the steps methodically, came up with fun titles—always following safety guidelines. I have never had more fun producing a book: attending the food styling and photo sessions, tasting the meals afterwards, art directing the models and illustrators, and telling copy editors to stop changing text if grammar and style consistence were taken care of. Books, print or audio, have deadlines. Like blogs. It's not about the poetry of the words. (Or is it?)

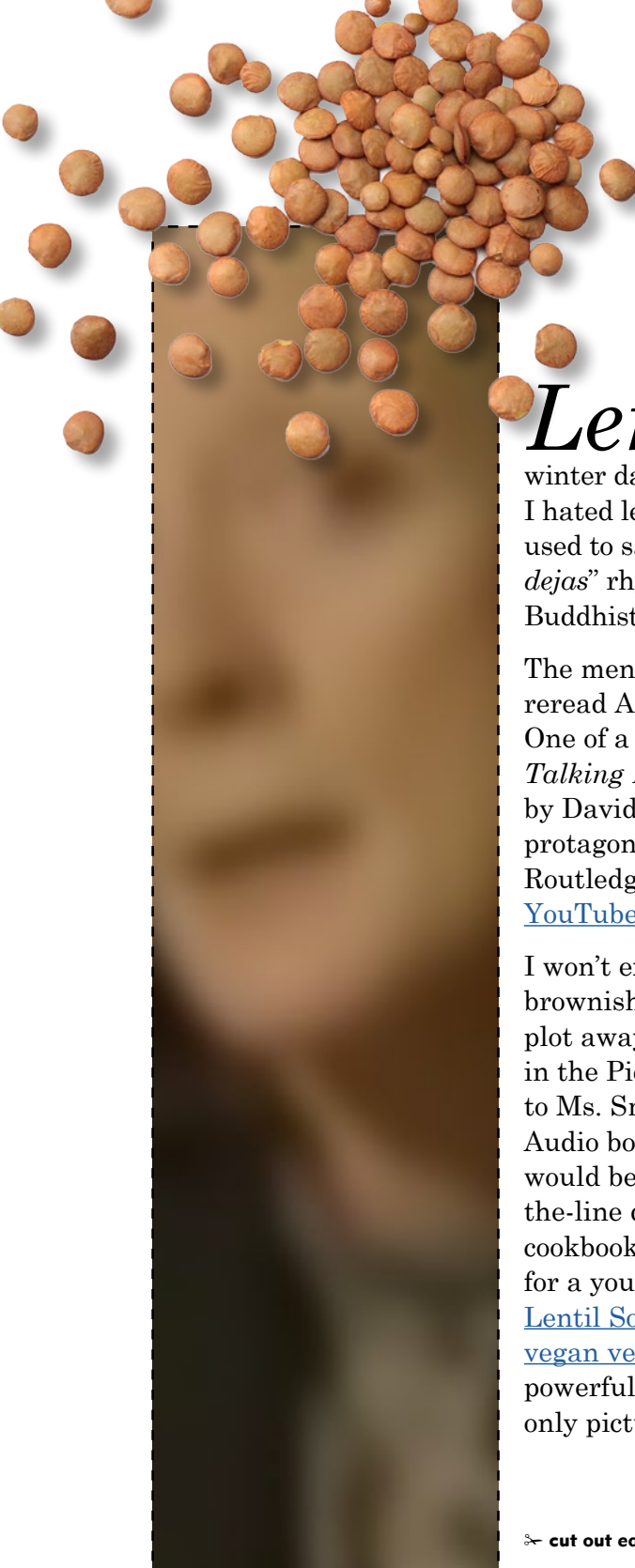


PHOTO BY CRAIG DEUTSCH

One of my favorite recipes in the book is the *Egg Salad Sandwich Stacks*. Our photographer did a splendid job focusing on the chives that garnish the bread, blurring the outer corners of the sandwich halves. Whenever I have spinach, bacon, and of course eggs, I make it for lunch. It's technically a club sandwich, which apparently didn't get its name from the acronym for chicken & lettuce under bacon, but because it was served at clubs. Who knew?

— New York City, 3/16/2021





Lentils. Nothing better on a cold winter day than a bowl of lentil soup. When I was a kid I hated lentils. Most children hate them. My mother used to say: “*Lentejas: si tú quieres las comes, si no, las dejas*” rhyming “*lentejas*” with “*dejas*.” Something very Buddhist for an Italian Argentinean matriarch.

The mentioning of these legumes made me want to reread Alan Bennett’s *Bed Among the Lentils* (1988). One of a dozen hour-long monologues for BBC called *Talking Heads* (nothing to do with the band created by David Byrne.) All, except two, feature female protagonists, played magnificently by British stars: Routledge, Walters, Atkins. *Lentils* is available in [YouTube](#), starring Maggie Smith.

I won’t explain why lentils —everything looks very brownish— because I don’t want to give some of the plot away in case you want to watch it. Or read it in the Picador paperback edition if you are allergic to Ms. Smith. I wonder if it exists as audio book. Audio books are so popular now. These monologues would be fantastic to listen to, although those top-of-the-line dames are hard to match. How about audio cookbooks? I picture Sophia Loren—or Sofia Vergara for a younger generation—reading [Marcella Hazan’s Lentil Soup](#) with their sophisticated accent. Or a [vegan version of the soup](#) in Spanish that requires powerful, voiceless velar fricative j’s in *lentejas*. I can only picture it sensuously narrated by Penélope Cruz.

— *New York City, Tenebrae, 3/31/2021*

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Michelangelo.

I tried my best not to stain the pages of Patricia Rubin's *'Che è di questo culazzino!': Michelangelo and the Motif of the Male Buttocks in Italian Renaissance Art*, an essay I had just downloaded from the Oxford Art Journal via Jstor. I was both riveted and hungry. I had rushed to the kitchen to make a quick black bean quesadilla while I digested the rest of this fascinating article.

What's wrong with a sour cream blemish or a Cholula sauce spill? Cookbooks often withstand coffee stains, pencil marks, grease smudges. Why should an art history treatise be treated differently? Aren't a fresco and a feast creative concoctions? When do you control overflow?

So called self-help gurus recommend changing the way you do things to obtain new perspectives and avoid repetition. Butter for instance. You usually cut it with a knife. Try scissors. It's possible and still efficient. Routine kills the artist—and the chef. Michelangelo popularized something in painting that his predecessors did timidly: to show people from the back. To place an ass right on viewer's face. He probably arrived at that through sculpture, since front, back, and sides are all important. He pushed torsion to its limit to show every facet of the body. For this, some consider him a proto cubist. His *Battle of Cascina*, a fresco he never completed, started the trend for such anatomical novelty.

—New York City, 4/13/2021

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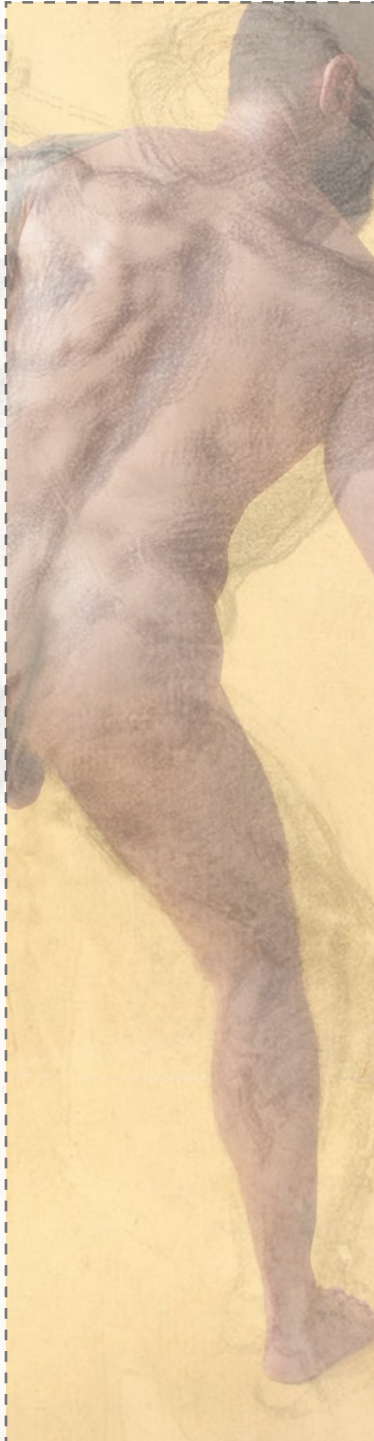


PHOTO BY CRAIG DEUTSCH



Nutella. One of my guilty pleasures —besides binging on Tim Burton’s *Mars Attacks*— is a banana and Nutella crêpe. The combination of banana, cocoa, and hazelnut makes it irresistible. Or is it its 50% sugar and palm oil content?¹



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My maternal grandparents emigrated from Piedmont, Italy to Buenos Aires, Argentina in the 1890s, as you’ll find out in one of my next STRIP-TEASES®. Piedmont is rich in great food and wine. The province of Alba was the birthplace of Nutella. And in the hilly long areas (the Langhe or “tongues”), local vineyards produce *Dolcetto d’Alba*, a dry wine with tones of cherry and plum². During World War II, and thanks to courageous resistance fighters, Alba declared independence —for shy of a month— from the short-lived Fascist Republic of Salò founded by Mussolini. After the triumph of the Allies in 1945, Pietro Ferrero sold the first “300 kg (660 lb) of pasta gianduja, the predecessor of Nutella.”

Another guilty pleasure is *morcilla* (**LOOK IT UP!**), or *boudin noir*, as the French call it. The last time I was in Paris, my friend César and I had lunch at a 7th arrondissement restaurant, not far from Pont d’Alma where Princess Diana’s life came to an end. Waiters were serving the *boudin noir* lunch special left and right, accompanied by steamy, heaping portions of mashed potatoes and affordable glasses of Bordeaux.

—New York City, 5/4/2021

¹ In the United States, Nutella’s ingredients are: sugar, palm oil (50%), hazelnuts (13%), cocoa (7.4%), skim milk (8.7%), reduced minerals whey (milk), lecithin as emulsifier (soy), and vanillin, an artificial flavor.

² Many thanks to Pier Paolo Prassolo for this information.



Ñoquis. April 23rd, 2021
 was “ñ” Day according to [Google Doodle](#). Many languages accessorize vowels and consonants with the little wavy line to modify the recipient’s sound, but the “ñ” is its own independent letter only in the Spanish alphabet. The tilde is technically called *virgulilla*. Isn’t that an awesome word? It means a very little thin line.

Ñow that I come to think about it, perhaps I should have chosen this letter as the only tattoo on my body instead of [the aleph](#).

One of my favorite dishes is *gnocchi*, which in Spanish we call *ñoquis*. I make them from scratch, following Marcela Hazan’s recipe ([Now her son makes them](#)). Although safe if married with pesto, I prefer them with a simple sage garlic butter sauce: A few tablespoons of butter warmed up in a pan, pressed garlic cloves, and a dozen sage leaves pithily frying in the bubbly mixture. It’s not only a fragrant mix, but a colorful one: the translucent, almost vintage yellow of the clarified butter against the grayish green or greenish gray (depending which [Josef Albers painting](#) you are looking at) of the sage. Finish it up with a sprinkle of grated pecorino and abundant black pepper. There is a tradition in Argentina that if you have ñoquis on the 29th of the month and place a dollar bill under your plate, you will be showered in luck and prosperity. Pay-day superstition? Too late to switch alphabets? *Sí, una eñe en vez del aleph, tal vez.*

—New York City, 5/13/2021

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OLIVER SACKS, M.D.

Kate was
alarmed at my lending
out the only copy of
our book - (I thought,
mistakenly, there was
another one), and asked
if we could get it
back -

A friend is staying
over tonight, bringing his
bicycle, and we plan
to go for a ride at 5 am



OLIVER SACKS, M.D.

Join us if you wish
or look by later -

If you could get
the book back to us
tomorrow, that would
be fine!

But to you both

MJ
↙

PHOTO BY HARRY KING, JULY 9TH, 2013

Oliver Sacks was a neurologist, best-selling author, professor of neurology — and hard-core biker. [Music](#) and cycling were our initial bonds. Living two doors apart from each other added frequency. We used to go biking early in the morning all the way to Wagner Park from our Horatio Street apartment building. When he asked me what time I got up and I said 6 a.m. he replied: “Too late!” and he smirked. He once dropped me a note: “A friend is staying over tonight, bringing his bicycle, and we plan to go for a ride at 5 A.M. [underscored on the original note] Join us if you wish or look by later.”

I remember when Dr. Sacks moved into our building. He was shy, I was respectful. I hadn't read any of his books, so my friend Jane — who is probably mingling with him in Heaven — recommended [Oaxaca Journal](#). That weekend I had made meat empanadas, so I decided to drop off some for him as a neighborly gesture. I left them in a plastic bag by his door, without knocking. Then went home and started reading [Oaxaca Journal](#).

In the first chapter, Oliver is served an empanada on the flight bound to Mexico. “I wanted the chicken or fish [...] I dislike the empanada, but eat some as part of my acculturation.” I rushed out the door to grab my token of friendship but it was too late. It wasn't there. Either he had enjoyed them — he never said, I never asked — or he dumped them. I was initially dismayed but later on, after we became friends, he placed [milk](#) on his threshold for my Siamese cat. Leo used to wander in the hallway. He *hated* milk. Idylls are sometimes born out of steps that French call [faux](#).
—New York City, 5/28/2021



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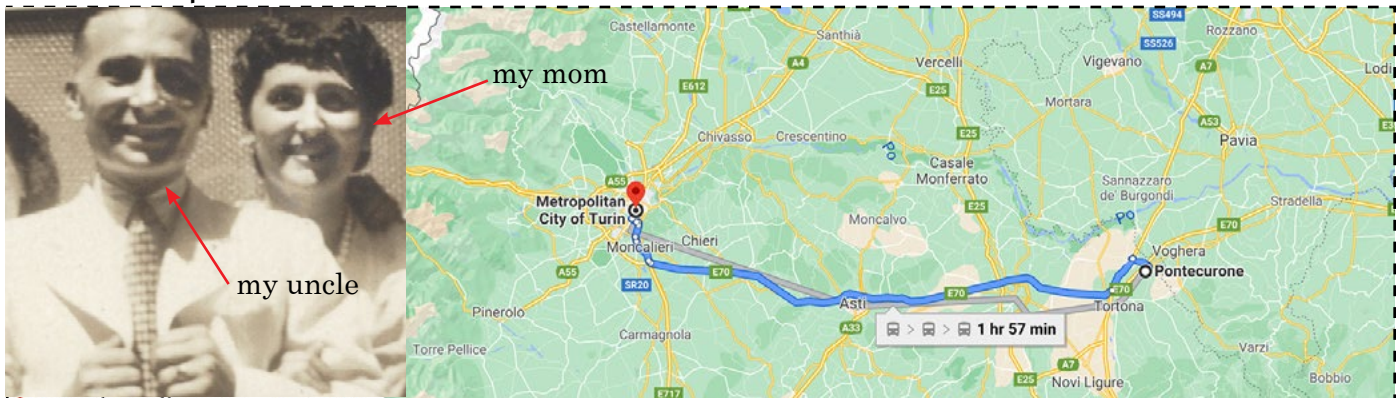
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Piemonte. My grandfather was born in Pontecurone, a small town in Piedmont, Italy, two hours east of Turin. He [emigrated to Argentina](#) sometime in the 1880s as a teenager. He met my grandmother in Buenos Aires. She was also Italian-born. Perhaps they fell in love on the ship, during the transatlantic journey. Giuseppe (“José”) Prassolo went back to Italy for reasons unknown and died there. My grandmother died in Buenos Aires, after raising seven kids. My mother was the youngest—and only woman.

I contacted the [comune of Pontecurone](#) and Ms. Gabriella Sala is searching for records. In the meantime, our friend Mark, whose passion is to decode family trees, has found revealing clues in ancestry sites. In facebook I met a second cousin once removed living in that region. He looks just like my

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uncle Federico. He loves to cook and speaks English perfectly. But he looked puzzled when I mentioned the word “kudos” during a WhatsApp video chat.

My childhood was imbued with Italian flavors: my mother made [vitello tonnato](#), *bagna cauda*, pizzas, and of course homemade ravioli (with a fluted wheel that my sister still has). My father assisted her with the artisanal pasta every Sunday morning, while the ragù was simmering away. In the U.S. I learned to push Malbecs aside and appreciate Piedmont wines: Barberas and Dolcetto d’Alba. Although Prosecco has taken over the bubbly market, I still love a fizzy [Asti Spumante](#), specially when served with a portion of *meringata*, another Piedmont classic. My mother also taught me how to play the piano. With effort or, as printed on scores, *sforzando*, “*sfz.*”

— New York City, 6/15/2021



QUICHES

Nothing is quite so quick and satisfying to assemble as a quiche. Provided you have a bit of *Pâte Brisée* in your freezer (and since it freezes beautifully you should), some eggs and heavy cream or half-and-half on hand, you can leave the rest up to the improvisations of the moment. A handful of mushrooms sautéed with a shallot and finished with a little sherry or Port to taste can join grated Swiss cheese in an elegant quiche. Onions and salami or pepperoni, left over from last night's pizza, can be hearty and delicious. Combine cold crab meat with a bit of sautéed green pepper; team cooked chicken with black olives and Cheddar; try scallions sautéed in butter—add grated cheese as you like, or not at all. A bit of ham or bacon, fresh herbs, even some cooked Italian sausage—all can enliven a meal by flavoring a quiche. The possibilities are endless and always fascinating.

For a 10-inch quiche crust (and we think this is the best size) you will need 2 to 3 cups of filling and 3 eggs beaten with 1½ cups of cream, heavy or light. Season the egg mixture generously with salt, nutmeg and fresh black pepper to taste. Top the assembled quiche with cheese if it seems appropriate.



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Quiche?

Kitsch? Quip? K'iche' or Quiché? Quiché are indigenous people of Mayan descent. Their myths and legends are compiled in the *Popol Vuh*. The word “man” in quiché has multiple versions according to a man’s attributes or actions: **man** (n) achi; **man or animal which has greatly multiplied** (n) winaqal wächaj; **man who doesn’t want to stay in house** (n) mun ach; **man, great man** (n) nimalaj achi; **man’s skirt** (n) rawa’; **man-animal who frightens people** (n) subunel.*

I have read the *Popol Vuh*, but never read [Real Men Don't Eat Quiche](#), although it hit the market the same year that I arrived in this country. It stayed in the New York Times bestseller list for 53 weeks. (Its hardcover edition is retailing at \$596!). As a real man, **man-animal who cooks** (n), I decided to make my first quiche.

Sheila Lukins and Julee Rosso, the real **women who sometimes want to stay in house** (n) and 1980s bestselling authors, were my guide. I got my premade frozen crust at Gristede’s, heavy cream, and eggs. Briefly baked the crust. Sautéed a bunch of vegetables that were in the fridge like asparagus and onions (If you use zucchini, make sure to drain them before you add them to the pie crust). In a 375° oven and after 25 minutes, the quiche looked done, presentable, firm yet bubbly.

—New York City, 6/29/2021

* Allen J. Christenson, *English-K'iche' Dictionary*, Brigham Young University, available at: http://www.famsi.org/mayawriting/dictionary/christenson/quidic_complete.pdf



Roland Barthes

was a French essayist, social and literary critic specialized in semiotics. He smoked. He was born in Cherbourg, famous for historic disembarkations and umbrellas. Died at 64, as a result of a car accident.

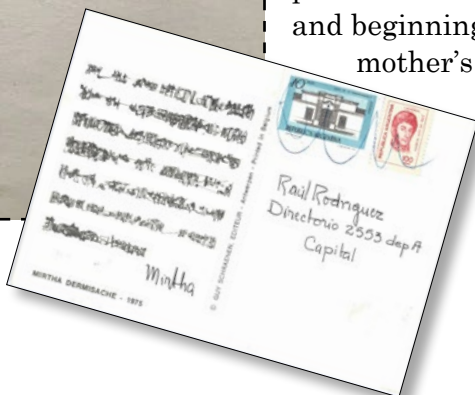
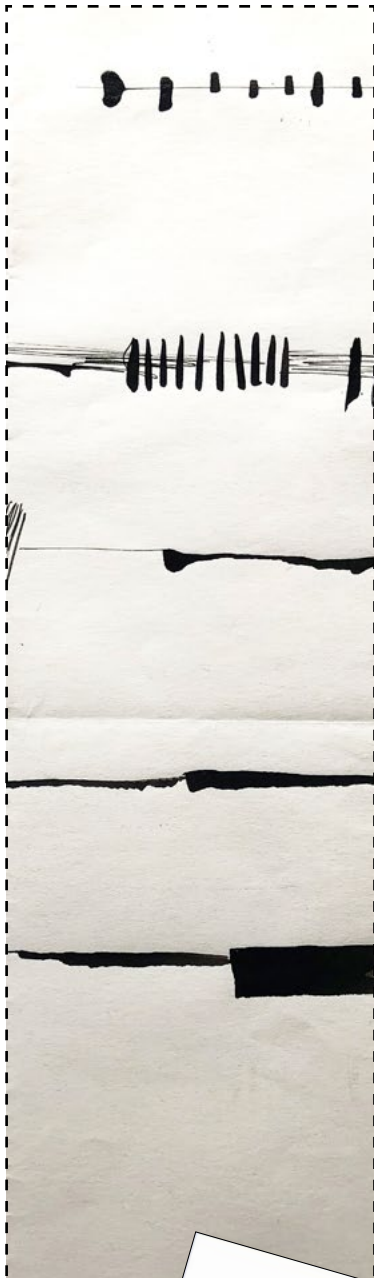
My friend the artist [Mirtha Dermisache](#) (1940-2012) created unique books and periodicals filled with asemic writing starting in the 1970s. One of her *Diarios* is currently displayed at MoMA in room 205. In *Variations sur l'écriture* (Variations in Writing, 1973), Barthes says: “There are writings that we cannot understand, and yet, we cannot say they are indecipherable, because they simply are beyond decipherment: those are the fictitious writings that certain painters or certain subjects imagine.” As examples of this, he mentions the work of artists like André Masson, Henri Michaux—and [Mirtha Dermisache](#).

Our friend Norman, who is pursuing a Master in Food Studies, just e-mailed me his most recent paper: *Fish on Friday: A Barthian Approach*. In a succinct and engaging five-page essay, he travels through early Christianity, symbolism, metaphorical cannibalism, and a pinch of Tennessee Williams. In the concept that “to eat is a behavior that develops beyond its own ends [...] and it’s a *sign*,” Barthes provides Norman with the arc to tie all those ends and beginnings. I ask myself: what “signs” were in my mother’s brain when she chose which fish to cook in our Catholic stove any given Friday?

— New York City, 7/13/2021

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Santiago (or Scallops?)

After the crucifixion and Pentecost, Saint James, one of the 12 Apostles, went to Spain to preach the gospels. His name became Saint Iacobus, San Thiago, *San Diego*, Santiago. He is the patron saint of Spain and legend has it that he appeared as a ghost knight slaying Muslims (“*matamoros*”) and infidels—something that is no longer mentioned in the official web site of Santiago de Compostela, the city where supposedly his bones are kept. Its cathedral has been a [pilgrimage mecca](#) for thousands of years.

Santiago’s symbol is a shell, like the vermilion and gold logo designed by Raymond Loewy for [Shell](#), the oil and gas company. Those shells contain the delicious scallops—which are actually the [adductor muscle](#) of the animal. The most famous dish is *Coquilles St. Jacques*. At almost \$30 a pound nowadays, I am very wary how often I buy these mollusks—but both John and I love them. Just searing them for minutes makes a great dish. What’s *your* recipe?

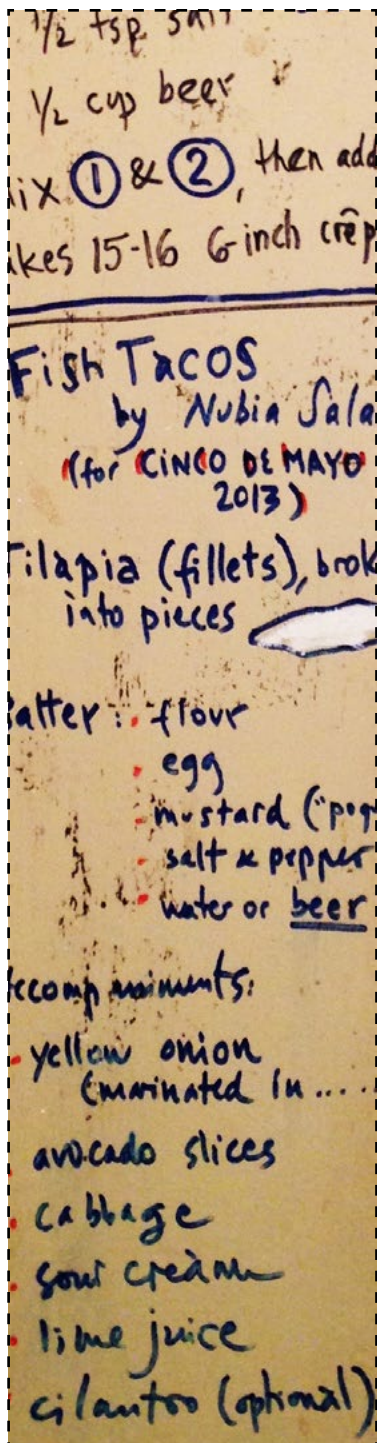


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Back to the pilgrimage. Since the Middle Ages, the 500-mile (825-km) hike was based on fervor and dedication—even indulgence. But these days it’s all about fitness. Social media ads for immersive art shows and classical music by candlelight^(*) accost me these days. After joining a medieval art online group, I started getting sponsored content for *El Camino de Santiago tours* (The Way of Saint James). “*Are you looking for the perfect excuse to get moving and crush your fitness goals? Your activity will automatically upload to your challenge’s virtual map and leaderboard! Plus you’ll get a Fitness Tracker with heart rate and blood pressure kits and a pulse oxymeter app—compatible with both iPhone & Android.*” Something that centuries ago, devout pilgrims with hypertension and worn out shoes probably never foresaw. — *New York City, 7/30/2021*

* By “classical music” these sites advertise Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* and Erik Satie’s *Gnossienes*. 🙄





Tacos. Most of the favorite recipes I make don't come from books, [Alexa](#), or web sites. They come from friends. Transmitted in the most archaic form: conversing on the phone or in person, and jotted down with the swiftness of a stenographer.

My *paella* debut was the result of a 45-minute WhatsApp video chat with a friend from Murcia, Spain. For [polpetti](#), I always call our friend Claudio, originally from Treviso but living in CDMX. When John asked me recently to make *Moules Frites*, I called our friend and neighbor Gerard instead of searching online. He was in his car. I said I could call him back but he said *Non!* and gave me his recipe for this exquisite dish as he was maneuvering to park. Proportions and measurements were inflexions of his beautifully French accented voice, not mathematical calculations. It came out great.

Our housekeeper—when we lived in San Diego—sometimes acted as a psychotherapist without filling out insurance claims. One day she told me how to make fish tacos while she was polishing our dining room table. I took feverish notes in my mind, not sure where my notebook was. Whenever I make this foolproof recipe our guests are happy (well, the [tequila](#) shots help). She wasn't specific about quantities for the batter or sides, but she was adamant about marinating the sliced white onions in vinegar with whole peppercorns for hours. And "[un poquito](#)" of mustard in the batter! Cooking has to do with trust—in yourself and in others who are passing their experience onto you. Practise, never apologize, smile while serving your dish, make sure all the wine glasses are filled anew.

— New York City, 8/12/2021

✂ cut out each strip & collect





Xanthan Gum.

One of the services [my studio](#) provides is indexing cookbooks. Having done it for more than ten years has given us a knack for snack alphabetizing. And adding some good recipes to our cooking corpus!

The first time I heard of xanthan gum must have been either in the *Naomi Campbell 3-Ingredient Diet Cookbook* or in some *Keto Fest Cookazine*.

R studio T was thrilled to finally allocate a food item to this letter sometimes vilified by moralists and mathematicians, but not musicians (I always loved [xylophones](#)). The *x* in *xanthan* though, sounds more like a slurry “z” than the cymbalic “ks” of words like *foxy*, *flux*, and [sex](#). Carbophobes use xanthan gum to emulsify a sauce or as an alternative to cornstarch or flour when thickening. Our friend Norman explained to me that a bacteria called *Xanthomonas campestris*, a plant pest, is part of this ingredient. The formula is $C_{36}H_{58}O_{29}P_2$ just in case any of you, like Ms. Campbell, has a lab set up in your second home in Malindi, Kenya where you can make keto-friendly xanthan gum. (I’d rather make *papier mâché* with real flour.)

Indexing cookbooks is challenging when you have a limited amount of pages to fit the beast. Is it kosher to group kosher salt and sea salt in one category placing the least used in parentheses? Do you list *chocolate fudge sauce* under *Chocolate* (yum!) or under *Sauce*, surrounded by sodium-ridden bottled concoctions? Is fish sauce a condiment or a “sauce”? Having grown up in a binary house (white and brown when it came to sugar), I was delighted to embrace the polysyllabic demerara, muscovado, and turbinado kinds in baking cookbooks. Under what category would you list *roux*?

✂ cut out each strip & collect

— New York City, 8/30/2021



YSL(*)

Last January, while I was searing steak, I heard an instagram ping. It was from [@thefilmzone](#), linking to [Gaspar Noé's](#) 8-minute video for the YSL Summer 2021 collection. I met Gaspar, the son of my art mentor [Luis Felipe Noé](#), when he was 9 years old, critiquing his father's choice of colors with precocious audacity in their apartment at the [House of 70 Balconies](#), in Buenos Aires. He has lived in Paris since 1977 and has become an *enfant terrible* of French cinema, venerated by many including [John Waters](#).

✂ cut out each strip & collect

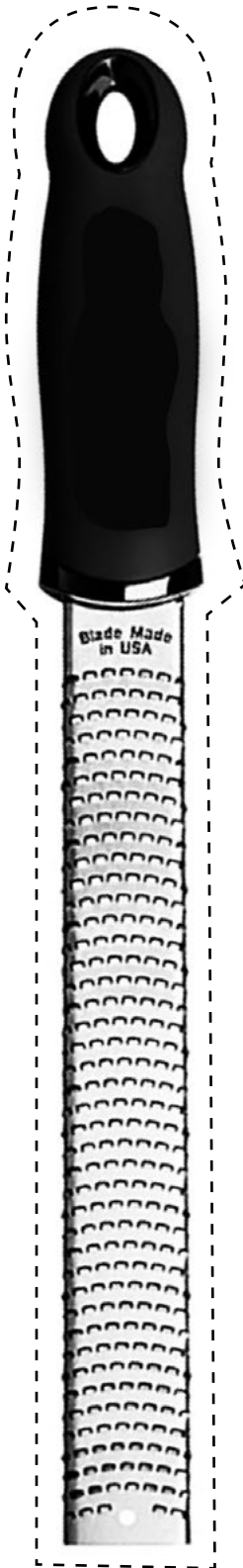


This [fashion featurette](#) stars the actress Charlotte Rampling, 75 and born under Aquarius, as a couture priestess. A bit like Ursula Andress in the sumptuous [Cremaster 5](#) film by Matthew Barney. All is bathed in deep reds, the red of velvet opera seats, the red of meaty rosebuds. Models come and go up a royal staircase showing off their skinny, sugar-cane looking legs and the new YSL line. I've always wondered what models *really* eat—that is, if they eat at all. Googling it can be confusing, testimonies contradictory, like supermodel Bella Hadid's: "*My diet is pizza . . .*" she told WWD, and then "[...] *protein, veggies, and green juice*" when interviewed by Harper's Bazaar.

Christie Brinkley, 67 and another Aquarius-born, with 724,000 followers in instagram, starts the day with warm water and lemon, then a cappuccino. She not only drinks it but draws on the foam. Yes, it's "latte art." It could be a heart, or a letter, the face of Jesus or a *latter* day saint—even a model walking down the runway.

Yom Kippur, New York City, 9/16/2021

*Short for Yves Saint Laurent



Za'atar. “The spice that we cannot stop sprinkling,” to quote *Bon Appetit*’s editor Sarah Jampel. Ms. Jampel, according to her web site, is a “recipe developer, food stylist, and chronic wee-hours baker in New York.”

Wee hours. Why not choose that topic instead? I’m skipping the “w” still not knowing why it’s called in English “double u” and not “double v.” Over the summer, I met this charming elderly Italian-American lady in Williamsburg whose name was Vanda. I asked her why Vanda and not Wanda. She replied: “Because Mussolini banned the letter “w” from the Italian alphabet in 1929.”

But back to *za'atar* and the end of the alphabet. For this last blog, I could have chosen *zest*, *zoodles* or even *zabaglione*, which my mother used to make from scratch: all 8 egg yolks, booze, and a good double boiler. I always add lime zest to cooked rice right before serving, steamy and moist. And orange zest to pico de gallo or homemade salsa. Our lives certainly changed when we got a real zester in our kitchen, the long kind with a black handle—but you’ll survive if you have to use a regular multipurpose grater. Somewhere in our pantry we have a zoodler (?) or zoodle maker. (I hope this device is not commercialized in Spanish speaking countries because I cannot imagine how many words you need to translate its name.) Unfortunately, the zoodler has succumbed to idleness, because the fad has vanished. When was the last time you spotted zoodles in a menu? Wait, wasn’t I supposed to talk about *za'atar*? Well, next time, in the next alphabet, or as they say in Spain, *la próxima vez*.

— New York City, 9/30??/2021

✂ cut out the zester & co | e c t (or zest away!)



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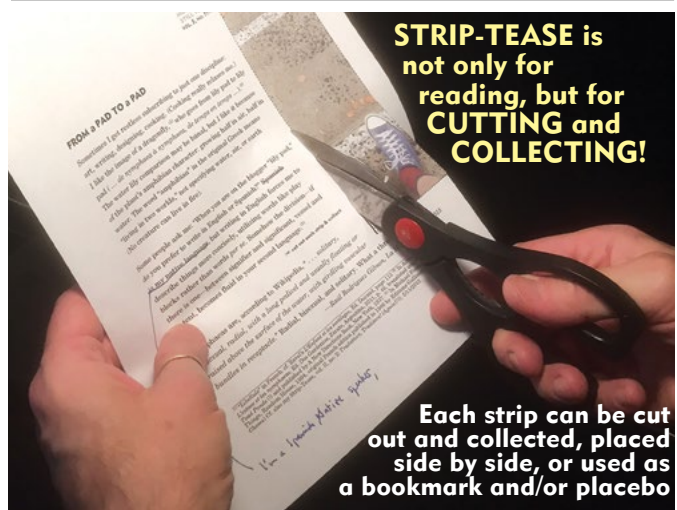
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