SFA

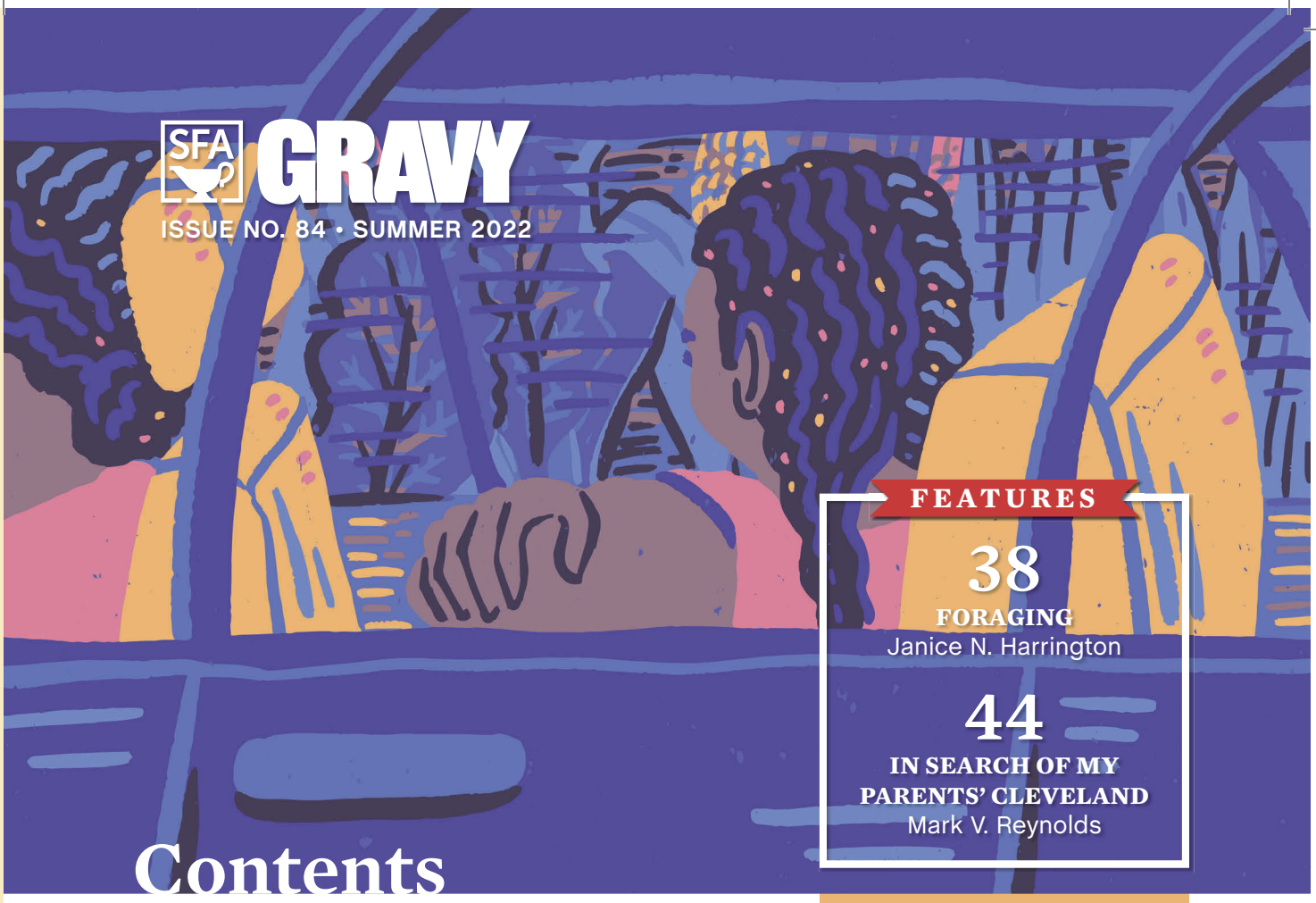
GRAVY

NO. 84
SUMMER
2022

IT'S NOT EASY OR EFFICIENT. BUT HAND-DIPPING EVERY BOTTLE OF MAKER'S MARK® IN RED WAX MAKES IT DOWNRIGHT IMPOSSIBLE TO FORGET WHY WE STARTED MAKING BOURBON IN THE FIRST PLACE. IT WASN'T TO MAKE AS MUCH BOURBON AS WE CAN. IT WAS TO MAKE THE BEST BOURBON WE CAN. WHICH MEANS MAKING IT PERSONAL. MAKING IT BY HAND. MAKING EVERY DETAIL MATTER. AND GUESS WHAT. MAKING ANYTHING THAT WAY MAY NOT MAKE A WHOLE LOT OF SENSE TO SOME. BUT IT DOES MAKE FOR A WHISKY WORTH DIPPING. AND SIPPING.

Maker's Mark®

SFA GRAVY
ISSUE NO. 84 • SUMMER 2022



FEATURES

Contents

Gravy is a publication of the Southern Foodways Alliance, whose mission is to document, study, and explore the diverse food cultures of the changing American South.

AUDREY PETTY
Guest Editor

SARA CAMP MILAM
Editor in Chief
gravy@southernfoodways.org

ROSALIND BENTLEY
Deputy Editor

BITA HONARVAR Image Editor

RICHIE SWANN Designer

OLIVIA TERENZIO Assistant Editor

KATIE CARTER KING Copy Editor

MELISSA HALL AND MARY BETH LASSETER
SFA Executive Staff
info@southernfoodways.org

Visit southernfoodways.org for web-exclusive content from this issue.

ON THE COVER AND ABOVE: Illustrations by Simone Martin-Newberry

WHERE YOUR PEOPLE FROM?

In memory of Celestine Chaney, Roberta Drury, Andre Mackniel, Katherine Massey, Margus Morrison, Heyward Patterson, Aaron Salter Jr., Geraldine Talley, Ruth Whitfield, and Pearl Young, murdered at the Tops Friendly Markets in Buffalo, New York, on May 14, 2022

BY AUDREY PETTY

There is nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns. —Octavia Butler

I grew up on the South Side of Chicago; first in the Black, working- and middle-class neighborhood of Chatham, and then in Hyde Park-Kenwood, a relatively well-to-do, racially integrated community and home of the University of Chicago. As a kid in the 1970s and 1980s, I experienced my coming-of-age in the city in fundamentally similar ways to Isabel Wilkerson, author of *The Warmth of Other Suns*. In a 2021 TED talk, Wilkerson recollected, "...growing up in Washington, DC, surrounded by people whose parents or grandparents had all come up from the South, it was something that was just part of the atmosphere. It was in the food. It was in the accents. It was in the culture. It was the language. It was the music. It was everywhere. But no one was speaking directly about [it]—no one was giving it a name."

My mother, Naomi Elizabeth (Jackson) Petty, was born and raised in El Dorado, an oil town in southeastern Arkansas. My father, Joe Louis Petty, grew up in two places: a coal mining camp in Parrish, Alabama (about an hour north of Birmingham, in the northwestern part of the state), and a farm on the outskirts of Columbus, Mississippi. My parents met and fell in love as students at Talladega College in the late 1950s. After they married, they moved to Chicago, where they raised me and my two sisters. My grandfathers died before I was born, my grandmothers passed when I was very young, and my parents' siblings were spread out all over. Unlike many of my childhood classmates and friends, who spent long stretches and seasons down South with grandparents and extended family, my travels to Parrish, Little Rock (where two of my mother's siblings settled), and other parts of the South were special occasions rather than routines. It took over forty years for my mother to return to El Dorado. My sisters and I made a Christmas gift of it—all expenses paid. She took us with her, and she talked about that trip for the rest of her life. It was more than a homecoming for my mother. It was a pilgrimage.

As I now parent a teenager myself, I think about the many ways love, silence, and protection were conveyed in the household my parents created.

Photos courtesy of the author

There was so much that they didn't directly pass on to my sisters and me about the finer details of their home communities, nor about the horrors of Jim Crow that they'd known and survived. When I ask my father why he became a scientist, he tells me he was always interested in history as he was coming up—more than anything, he wanted to learn about the past. But so much of what he was given to read in school, he knew to be racist and untrue. And so he came to have more confidence in the integrity of the periodic table.

Reading about the Great Migration in college made Chicago—and the United States—sharply visible to me. And each time I returned to the South as an adult, it felt like a strange, powerful reunion. I started to grapple with the South that had been shared with me through custom, mores, and memory. And I began to deeply appreciate all that had been shared by heart, and to realize that my education in the Great Migration has been lifelong.

This issue of *Gravy* explores Great Migration legacies in the Midwest. The authors write from and of their homeplaces in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, and Wisconsin. They write from and of kitchen tables—complicated sites of storytelling and instruction. They ponder silences and mysteries. They invite us to sit with the act of migration itself. At the very least, it is some kind of leap; an act of seeking. These *Gravy* authors document leaps and arrivals and narrate how worlds were remade along the way.

Any primer to the Great Migration must explore the push and pull factors that informed Black peoples' decisions to depart the South. These are explored here as well, most notably in Lyletta Robinson's "Come Here and Watch" and Emily Lansana's "Of Chitlins and Care." And any true introduction to this mass movement of seven million Americans, between 1910 and 1970, must also begin to reckon with all that the migrants brought with them. As this entire issue of *Gravy* evinces, the migrants' bounty is impossible to fully document, whether measured in material or metaphysical terms.

When my father moved to Chicago as a young man, in the early 1960s, he didn't carry many physical keepsakes from Alabama or Mississippi,

There was so much that my parents didn't directly pass on to my sisters and me about the finer details of their home communities, nor about the horrors of Jim Crow that they'd known and survived.

where so many of his family members still lived. One of the few items he brought with him was a sturdy, worn back brace that my grandfather John wrapped himself into after long, grueling days working in coal mines. It was something my father wore for support rather than recovery, as he managed heavy lifting and building projects around the house. And although he wasn't very religious, he brought one of Grandma Mattie Will's Bibles with him. Huge and leather-bound, it held our family tree, with birthdates recorded in cursive in the back. My mother didn't carry many physical things either, though I do recall elegant-looking sheet music from Grandma Ruth's library, and the ancestor photos our mother framed and cherished that my sisters and I now share.

When we moved from our walk-up in Chatham to more space in Hyde Park, our mom filled our backyard with bee balms and impatiens—bright,

PREVIOUS: The author's parents and her sister Jill, circa 1965; ABOVE: The author (center) with her sister Jill and her mother on a 2003 trip to El Dorado, AR

happy flowers remembered from her childhood in Arkansas. My mother was also an excellent cook. And on special occasions, she would prepare dishes that did not have appended recipes, working from memory alone. One of my favorites was shrimp Creole, a light, tomato-based stew with celery, tomatoes, bell peppers, and fresh or frozen shrimp, My sisters and I were her assistants, deveining shrimp and chopping all the veggies just so. When my mother served this dish over white rice, she'd make a small song of *ta-da,* unveiling it at the long buffet table, set with our nicest plates and linen napkins. Like black-eyed peas, shrimp Creole was New Year's food, and for us, it was a dish infused with good fortune.

APRIL 9 – SEPTEMBER 11, 2022

A MOVEMENT IN EVERY DIRECTION LEGACIES OF THE GREAT MIGRATION

AT THE MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM OF ART

Robert Pruitt (b. 1975), *A Song for Travelers*, 2022. charcoal, conté, and pastel on paper, mounted onto four aluminum panels. Courtesy the artist and Koplin Del Rio Gallery.

Be the first to see breathtaking artwork on the lasting impacts of the Great Migration created for this exhibition by 12 acclaimed contemporary artists!

A Movement in Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration is co-organized by MMA and BMA with support provided by the Ford Foundation, Teiger Foundation, Henry Luce Foundation, Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Bloomberg Philanthropies, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Its presentation in Jackson, Mississippi, is sponsored by the Robert M. Hearin Support Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Lucy and John Shackelford Fund of the Community Foundation for Mississippi, The Selby and Richard McRae Foundation, Trustmark National Bank, Mississippi Arts Commission, Mississippi Humanities Council, Visit Mississippi, Visit Jackson, Butler Snow, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Mississippi Symphony Orchestra, The Westin Jackson, the Ramey Agency, Downtown Jackson Partners, Ross & Yerger, Hope Credit Union, Baker Donelson, Fox 40, Nancy and Ray Neilsen, H. F. McCarty, Jr. Family Foundation, Claudia and Robert Hauberg, Brian T. Fenelon, Christina and Brian Johnson, Mary and Sam Miller, and Kathryn L. Wiener.

MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM OF ART

BMA BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART

MSMUSEUMART.ORG

Audrey Petty, a native of Chicago, guest-edited this issue of *Gravy*. Her writing has appeared in *Callaloo, The Massachusetts Review, ColorLines, Saveur,* the *Oxford American, Poetry, Best American Food Writing,* and *The Chicago Neighborhood Guidebook*. She is the editor of *High Rise Stories: Voices from Chicago Public Housing* and co-editor of *The Long Term: Resisting Life Sentences, Working Toward Freedom*. A teaching artist in the Prison + Neighborhood Arts Project, Petty directs the Sojourner Scholars Program at Illinois Humanities and is a Senior Fellow at the Invisible Institute. Right now, she hankers for peaches: room temperature, chilled, grilled, baked, and blended.

Alex Aldrich Barrett is a Philadelphia-based animator and illustrator originally from Atlanta. In her artwork, she tries to find the messy places where cozy meets haunted and where the hand-drawn meets the digital. She has created illustrations and graphic identities for *Jewish Currents*, Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, and People's Paper Co-op. Of the many cities she's lived in, she thinks Atlanta has the best food. Her favorite summer flavors are mint and lime.

Rosalind Bentley, *Gravy*'s new deputy editor, says she's from Florida's Panhandle, but she's really from The Big Bend, the hilly, top side of the state that curves to connect Deep South Florida to the tropical flatlands. Now, she calls Georgia's Piedmont region home. She is the interim director of the Narrative Nonfiction MFA Program at the University of Georgia and an editor-at-large for the *Oxford American*. A longtime contributor to *Gravy*, her "Rooted in Place" column was a two-time James Beard Award finalist. Her top summer food pick is middle Georgia peaches, straight from the crate or good and cold.

TOP TO BOTTOM: Maurice Rabb; Courtesy of Alex Aldrich Barrett; Alyssa Pointer

Tara Betts is the author of the poetry collections *Refuse to Disappear*, *Break the Habit*, and *Arc & Hue*. A teaching artist and mentor for young poets, she has taught at Rutgers University, the University of Illinois-Chicago, and DePaul University, among others. Betts is the Inaugural Poet for The People Practitioner Fellow at the University of Chicago, poetry editor at *The Langston Hughes Review*, and founder of the nonprofit Whirlwind Learning Center on Chicago's South Side. Her favorites tastes of summer are mango sorbet, a slice of watermelon with seeds, and a Rainbow Cone—a Chicago original.

Lolly Bowean is an award-winning journalist and a community storyteller. She spent more than fifteen years as a reporter at the *Chicago Tribune*, covering Chicago's African American community and the development of the Obama Presidential Center. She previously covered suburban crime, government, and environmental issues for the *Times-Picayune* in New Orleans. Her writing has also appeared in *Chicago Magazine* and *The Washington Post*. She has won a Studs Terkel Award and a Nieman Fellowship. In summer, she craves a scoop of vanilla ice cream, enjoyed at a South Side beach along Lake Michigan.

Charla L. Draper is the owner of It's Food Biz!, a marketing consultancy. She is the founder of National Soul Food Month, a former food editor at *Ebony* and *Southern Living* magazines, and a former test kitchen home economist in The Kraft Kitchens. Draper also led public relations for the Birmingham Public Library system and managed communications for the Campbell Soup Company. She is a member of Les Dames d'Escoffier and previously served on the boards of the Southern Foodways Alliance and Common Threads. This time of year, she enjoys peach cobbler made with peaches from Chilton County, Alabama.

TOP TO BOTTOM: Courtesy of Tara Betts; Jenee Osterheldt/*Boston Globe*; Courtesy of Charla L. Draper

Janice N. Harrington's latest book of poetry is *Primitive: The Art and Life of Horace H. Pippin*. She is also the author of two previous poetry collections, *Even the Hollow My Body Made Is Gone* and *The Hands of Strangers,* as well as several award-winning children's books, including *Buzzing with Questions: The Inquisitive Mind of Charles Henry Turner*. A former librarian, Harrington teaches creative writing at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her favorite summer food is ice cream, and she adores skillet cornbread year-round.

Stephanie Hart opened Brown Sugar Bakery in 2002 with Southern cakes inspired by family memories and recipes. A 2019 James Beard Award nominee for Outstanding Pastry Chef, she has been featured on numerous radio and television shows, including *Steve Harvey* and the Food Network's *Holiday Baking Championship*. Her specialty sweets include sweet potato pie, peach cobbler, and bread pudding. In 2022, she prepares to renovate the new home for her candy line, Life Is Sweet, and she will be the Karen Barker Baker at the SFA Fall Symposium. Her favorite taste of summer is peaches.

Jade Johnson is a New Orleans–based illustrator. Painted primarily with gouache, her work is character-driven and explores abstract feelings and connection through storytelling. She received her BFA in illustration from the Savannah College of Art and Design and has taught visual arts in nonprofit arts education programs. When she is not at her desk, Johnson enjoys listening to scary-movie podcasts and singing to her dog, Ernie. This summer, you can find her eating the foods of New Orleans' festival season, especially praline beignets and crawfish mac and cheese.

TOP TO BOTTOM: Rachel Eliza Griffith; Courtesy of Stephanie Hart; Courtesy of Jade Johnson

Michelle S. Johnson supervises an urban garden that accompanies the housing community she is developing and contributes to a culturally based multi-business hub. Johnson spins summer weddings, parties, dances, and festivals as DJ Disobedience. She is currently planning a fall symposium with Black Midwest Initiative organizers and working with Kalamazoo scholars as co-founder of the Institute of Public Scholarship. Fresh Michigan corn and new potatoes vie for her favored summer flavor, but plump, sweet, organic blueberries—by the pound—take the prize.

Born and raised in Detroit's Eastside, **Dèsirèe Kelly** discovered oil painting while studying graphic design at Wayne State University. She became inspired by the environment and developed a style of storytelling through portraiture. Kelly's portraits of public icons are historically immersive and reflect on the narrative of her subjects by including artifacts and phrases within each piece. Her distinctive style combines traditional oil painting and street art. Kelly formerly worked as a production manager and senior graphic designer for the *Detroit Metro Times*. Her summer go-to is grilled chicken.

Kidiocus King-Carroll is a covert enthusiast of vintage typewriters, old Harlequin paperbacks, copious amounts of black pepper, and grilled cheese sandwiches spread with grape jelly. A scholar of the Black Midwest, he is an incoming professor of Africana Studies at California State University-Channel Islands. He earned a PhD in American Studies from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities and a BA in sociology from Beloit College. His favorite summer bites are frozen grapes and kiwi, eaten in his mother's backyard in front of a roaring industrial fan.

TOP TO BOTTOM: Courtesy of Michelle S. Johnson; Tristan Oliver; Courtesy of Kidiocus King-Carroll

Emily Hooper Lansana is a community builder, storyteller, arts administrator, and educator. She has performed at the National Storytelling Festival, the National Association of Black Storytellers Festival, and many other venues. Lansana's work highlights those whose stories are often overlooked, especially those of the African diaspora. She serves as Senior Director of Community Arts for the Logan Center for the Arts at the University of Chicago and was a 2021 3Arts Award recipient. Her favorite taste of summer is strawberry shortcake.

Donna Battle Pierce's work aims to set the record straight about misrepresented, ignored, and sometimes erased cultural history. Her syndicated food columns include "Black America Cooks" for the *Chicago Defender* and *Ebony*'s "Hungry for History." A former *Chicago Tribune* test kitchen director and assistant food editor, Pierce was a 2015 Nieman Foundation Visiting Fellow. A Missouri native with Mobile roots, she lives in Santa Monica, California, where she is writing a book about former *Ebony* food editor Freda DeKnight. Her favorite taste of summer is her grandmother's okra and tomatoes, loved even by okra skeptics.

Khalisa Rae is an award-winning poet, activist, and journalist based in Durham, North Carolina. She is a senior writer for *Jezebel* magazine, content creator for BET, and author of the debut collection *Ghost in a Black Girl's Throat*. Rae is a winner of the Vulgar Genius Award and the Appalachian Arts and Entertainment Award. She is the assistant editor of *Glass Poetry*, a co-founder of Think in Ink and the Writers of Color Speak reading series, and a poetry instructor at Catapult. Her YA novel in verse, *Unlearning Eden*, is forthcoming. In summer, she enjoys raspberry popsicles and wildberry sherbet atop pound cake.

TOP TO BOTTOM: Keyana Marshall; Courtesy of Donna Battle Pierce; Tish Yvette

Mark V. Reynolds is a Chicago-based writer who explores the intersection of history, race, and culture. His essays appear in *Red State Blues: Stories from Midwestern Life on the Left* and *Black in the Middle: An Anthology of the Black Midwest*. He wrote extensively about Black art and life for *Popmatters* and received an Ohio Society of Professional Journalists award in 2005. He's also *this close* to finally completing his 1971 baseball card set. While he loves barbecue year-round, in the summer he likes to wash it down with a heaping cup of lemon Italian ice.

With twenty years clocked in as a South Side resident, **Lyletta Robinson** is a Chicagoan by choice but Hoosier by birth. She has had words and opinions in *ChicagoNow*, the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the "Listen To Your Mother" reading series. Robinson is a gardener who likes rosé (the drink, not the flower), craft stores, and drag queens. She also thinks that the demise of brick-and-mortar bookstores is a national tragedy. Her Mississippi relatives would be ashamed to know that she prefers Jiffy cornbread over hot water cornbread. Robinson's favorite summer flavors include almost anything off the grill.

Chavonn Williams Shen is a 2022 McKnight Writing fellow and was a first runner-up for *The Los Angeles Review* Flash Fiction Contest. She was also a Pushcart Prize nominee, winner of the Loft Literary Center's Mentor Series, and a fellow with the Givens Foundation for African American Literature. A Tin House and VONA workshop alum, her writing has appeared in *Diode, Anomaly, Yemassee,* and *Cosmonauts Avenue*. When she's not teaching with the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop, Shen can be found at home obsessing over her plants. In the summer, she sips lavender lemonade with lots of ice.

TOP TO BOTTOM: Dennie Eagleson; Courtesy of Lyletta Robinson; Peter Limthongviratn

ONE OF STEPHANIE HART'S FAVORITE WORDS IS *MERAKI*. "THIS IS A WORD THAT MODERN Greeks use to describe doing something with soul, creativity, or love," she says. "When I first learned it, I was like, 'Wow, that's the word for food: the creativity, the love, and the soul that goes into it.'" A 2019 semifinalist for the James Beard Foundation's Outstanding Baker award, Hart opened Brown Sugar Bakery in 2004. Located in the South Side neighborhood of Chatham, the bakery stands in the middle of a corridor of Black-owned businesses, including Soul Veg City (formerly Soul Vegetarian) and the legendary Lem's Bar-B-Q, which first opened in 1954. Hart's enterprises now include a bakeshop at Navy Pier and Life is Sweet, a candy shop that operates out of the historic former Cupid Candies factory in the Southwest neighborhood of Ashburn.

Brown Sugar Bakery

Navy Pier was an opportunity for me to export out of my community—but, you know, I never left. I made that stuff on 75th Street and took it to Navy Pier. And people started looking at Brown Sugar from a different light and coming to 75th Street, which then affected my whole community positively. Having the second store at the Pier—I'm not going to say that Kamala Harris wouldn't have come to the bakery, but probably not. And she didn't just come to the bakery. She came to 75th Street.

Soul Veg City

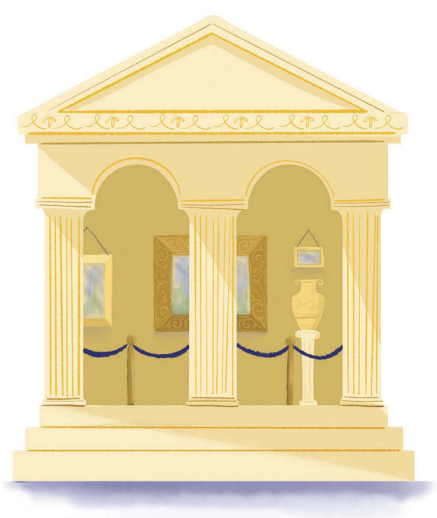
I found them years ago, in the 1980s. I would drive my raggedy Maverick on Sunday from Downers Grove (the Chicago suburb where I grew up) to Indiana Street to get that meal. The main thing was: You could get these greens. And they had cornbread and they made lima beans—and my grandmother made lima beans! And where are you going to get lima beans? Their intention is soul, but it's also well-being. And so I felt good eating the food; the vibration around it is good.

Virtue

The first time my grandmother took me to Mississippi, we picked the green tomatoes out of the garden. She always got great produce, but that was my first time really connecting to *her* connection—this is where that came from—and watching her go and retrieve this food. That memory of fried green tomatoes stuck with me. And [Virtue chef] Erick [Williams] took me all the way back to that memory of my grandmother picking the tomatoes, preparing them, and serving them. What I love is that it's my grandmother's food on a plate—on a fancy plate, in an environment that is uplifting, inspirational, and meant to pay homage to our history.

Museum of Science and Industry

The museum represented a way to take my child around the world at Christmas. It represented a way for me to expose her to opera. My daughter is an opera singer now because of a puppet show at the Museum of Science and Industry that she was completely fascinated by. It represented a way to just expose her to so many different things. And we could walk there. We'd go to the museum at least three times a month. We used it to explore, explain, and experience together.



Illustrations by Bridgette Blanton / Tiny Pencil Studio

Most Visited Places is an ongoing digital and print series underwritten by The Mountain Valley Spring Water.

WORMS

BY CHAVONN WILLIAMS SHEN

I APOLOGIZE TO WORMS WHENEVER I REMEMBER
that I'm upending their worlds with each uprooted vegetable.

My father, used to being uprooted,
harvests celery, carrots, and onions,

for our waiting mouths. With bruised fingers
and a mouth made salty from sweat, I listen

as he tells how he grew up with a mouth made salty from curses
left unsaid, and how his fingers used to harvest for white folk,

their mouths full of slurs left to bake under a Mississippi sun.
Years later, he'd have his own garden that he came to love. He'd save

seeds from Minnesota's unrelenting frost.
He'd name the flowers he planted.

When I can, I thank the worms and their work
to make my father's land love him back.

Illustration by Johnalynn Holland

Chavonn Williams Shen is a 2022 McKnight Writing Fellow and was a first runner-up for The Los Angeles Review*'s Flash Fiction Contest. A Tin House and VONA workshop alum, her writing has appeared in* Diode, Anomaly, Yemassee Journal, *and* Cosmonauts Avenue.

THE MIGRATION LESS TRAVELED

Mom and Dad believed that our crossing barriers would assure a fully integrated future.

BY DONNA BATTLE PIERCE

ALMOST A DECADE AGO, ON A VISIT TO MY father's house in Columbia, Missouri, I popped my head into his home office. I was just in time to catch his wistful smile as he sat behind his desk, looking at a framed photo. It showed Muriel and Eliot Battle—Mom and Dad—a few months after they completed the first leg of their Great Migration journey. It was one of their favorite images.

The year was 1950, and the HBCU graduates in the photo were newly married. Dad was a World War II veteran. Both of my parents were Gulf Coast natives who came from distinguished professional families made up of physicians, lawyers, educators, musicians, and writers. My paternal great-grandfather Charles Peters was close friends and business associates with Booker T. Washington—Washington stayed in his home when he visited Mobile to meet with the city's leading entrepreneurs. In 1891, Peters constructed a two-story wooden building on Dauphin Street in downtown Mobile to house his three businesses: an insurance company, a general store, and a furniture retailer. With the profits from these businesses, he sent his nine daughters and sons to college.

After their June 1950 wedding, both sides of the family expected my parents to settle in Mobile where, like previous generations, their children would benefit from a strong family legacy to which they would one day contribute. Despite this, Mom and Dad felt certain of their decision to leave.

"We made a pact to raise our children away from segregation," Dad has been described as repeating. There was also an element of spiritual calling. As a college student at Tuskegee, Dad, who had grown up with a fascination for neighborhood vegetable gardens, got a campus job working on the farm and in the stables. This brought him into regular contact with George Washington Carver over the next two years. Dad explained his enormous appreciation of Dr. Carver using words people would later use to describe him. "It was exciting to see him at work and to converse with him…a man could study and reach the heights he attained, and yet remain humble," Dad wrote in his 1997 book, *A Letter to Young Black Men.* Carver died in 1943, the year before Dad graduated from Tuskegee. By that time,Dad dreamed of someday raising a family in a rural setting. "By the way," he told me decades later, "Carver was born in Missouri—just like you."

When my parents relocated to Missouri, both took jobs as educators. First, they lived in Poplar

The wedding of Muriel Williams and Eliot Battle, Mobile, Alabama, 1950

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Eliot Battle pushes his toddlers on a Boonville, Missouri, park swing; Leana Peters Battle, a 1915 Spelman College graduate, sits on the front steps of the Dalton Vocational School principal's residence with three of her granddaughters (the author, her younger sister, and their first cousin, Pat Battle), during a Christmas visit in the mid-1950s; Muriel Battle runs weekend errands near Dalton with Donna and Carolyn Lya (inside family car).

Bluff, where I was born during Easter vacation 1951. From there, we moved briefly to Boonville, and then settled in Dalton, Missouri, where my father served as the principal at Dalton Vocational School. The school was deemed the "Tuskegee of the Midwest" by its founder. Dalton was the only high school available for Black students from several counties. Each weekday, students took long school-bus rides to the 123-acre campus, which maintained a working farm, complete with horse stables, hog pens, and hen houses.

Despite their urban Mobile, Alabama, roots, both of my parents remembered feeling right at home on Dalton's campus. My father referred to a child's dawning consciousness as the moment "when their lights came on." The switch flipped for me at Dalton. I vividly recall gathering eggs from the chicken house behind the principal's residence, watching senior agriculture students digging pits for whole-hog barbecue, and endlessly cracking and shelling the famous Chariton County pecans from the nearby pecan grove with my sister Carolyn.

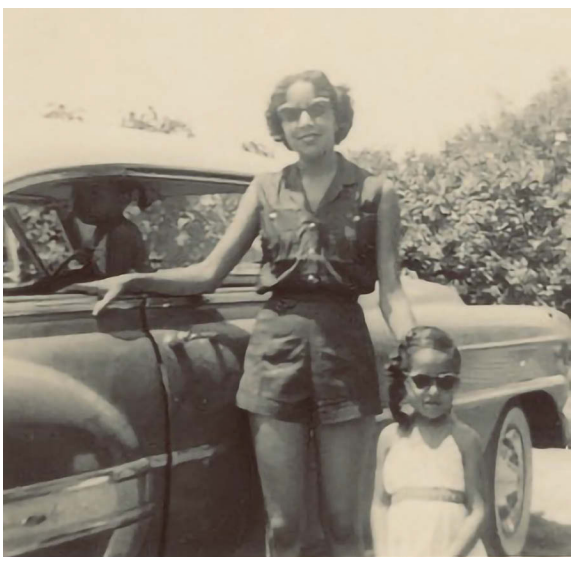
Though she had grown up with the vibrant flavors and ingredients of the Gulf Coast, Mom surprised our rural neighbors with her sincere interest in learning their dishes and traditions. Before she passed away in 2003, Mom recounted one of her most treasured compliments, a comment made by a Dalton faculty wife long ago: "You don't act like a city girl in the kitchen!" The woman was referring to my mother's chicken- and turkey-plucking skills, as well as to the pies Mom baked with wild persimmons and local apples. She also added brisket, chili, wild rice, corn on the cob, and frozen custard to her repertoire.

At the same time, she insisted on passing down the dishes of our Creole and Southern family history. Along with their wedding silver and china, my parents had moved to Missouri with handwritten family recipes and treasured ingredients like gumbo filé, hot sauce, and Creole mustard. Those passed-down recipes always came first at our house.

My parents maintained close correspondence with family and friends on the Gulf Coast after their move to Missouri. Among other topics, they wrote about the segregation that persisted outside the South. During our time at Dalton, we returned to Mobile for holidays. I remember sharing the family station wagon with carefully wrapped and chilled turkeys, ducks, and pheasants my mother had slaughtered and dressed on the farm. My grandmothers were always excited to receive these gifts, which seemed exotic in Mobile at the time.

Returning to the Gulf Coast meant reunions with our extended family over long meals. On these visits, both grandmothers fervently encouraged me to consider Mobile my hometown. I couldn't fully understand the passion of their exhortations, but I remember feeling proud and doted upon each time they claimed Mobile for me.

Dalton closed in 1956, following the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision ending de jure segregation. Our family moved



to Columbia, where Mom became a first-grade teacher and Dad worked as an assistant principal at Douglass High School before integrating Columbia's David H. Hickman High School as its first Black administrator.

My parents raised four children in Columbia at a time when that part of Missouri, which had been founded by Southern enslavers, still bore the nickname "Little Dixie." They shared a vision that Carolyn and I, their two eldest children, would spend the late 1950s and 1960s peacefully integrating Columbia's public schools. Beyond the classroom, we would join every club, orchestra, and extracurricular activity our progressive mother had decided needed the presence of a "smart Negro girl," as we referred to ourselves at the time.

Mom and Dad believed that our crossing barriers would assure a fully integrated future, and not just for our own family. Looking back, I remember working hard to shelter them, particularly Mom, from the hurt and pain Carolyn and I felt from our daily battles with racism and segregation. Neither of my parents knew how cruel some of our classmates could be. Our school curriculum left out crucial parts of Missouri's racial history, from Klan activity and lynchings to triumphant stories of Black entrepreneurship. When I went shopping with friends, I was not allowed to try on clothes or shoes in white-owned stores. Even as a child and a teenager, I respected my parents' sacrifices. And I wanted to protect their feelings.

I never told my parents about the conversations I'd have with my grandmothers during our visits to Alabama. My grandmothers understood why my parents left. But they wanted me to see Mobile as a place where I had deep, honest roots—roots that my elders longed to nurture. My maternal grandmother patiently taught me to cook her own special gumbo, the family yeast rolls, shrimp Creole, and fruitcake on those trips, too. I was about ten years old when Granny anointed me the grandchild who had earned the opportunity to follow her footsteps in the kitchen, learning family recipes and food traditions to pass down to future generation. Some six decades after lessons began, I need only close my eyes to experience vivid memories of my happiest times spent at her home in Mobile's Down the Bay neighborhood. Her kitchen had long, breezy, cotton curtains in yellow and white; well-scrubbed appliances; a pantry that was always stocked; and an efficiently organized collection of utensils, cookware, cutlery, and dishes. Granny insisted we speak softly in the kitchen "to create a welcoming space for our ancestors."

Today, from my home in southern California, I write a regular column for *Lagniappe*, Mobile's independent weekly newspaper. I'm also teaching the family cookbook to my youngest relatives. Now I understand that I can claim more than one place as my hometown. Migration does not have to mean permanent exile. My grandmothers knew this all along.

Donna Battle Pierce, a former SFA board member, has written the syndicated food columns "Black America Cooks" for the Chicago Defender *and* Ebony's *"Hungry for History." A former* Chicago Tribune *test kitchen director and assistant food editor, she lives in Santa Monica, California, where she is writing a book about longtime* Ebony *food editor Freda DeKnight.*

BLACK TACOS

In Chicago's Black neighborhoods, tacos are always in rotation.

BY LOLLY BOWEAN

Taylor Mason of Taylor's Tacos in Chicago holds a fried shrimp taco topped with pickled red onion.

I CALL THEM "BLACK TACOS": THE COMBINATION of a Mexican-style corn tortilla with slow-cooked, highly seasoned meats and other ingredients affiliated with Black cuisine—oxtails, sweet potatoes, fried pork chops, and more.

Chicago's unique African American population is made up primarily of the descendants of Southern migrants who journeyed to the urban outpost and brought much of their culture and tastes with them. As a result, collard greens, macaroni and cheese, candied yams, grits, fried brains, Hoppin' John, and cornbread are familiar guests on restaurant menus and home meal plans.

Black Chicagoans have remixed soul food over and over to keep it relevant. There are now recipes that eliminate the ham hocks, fatback, and seasoning salts to make the foods healthier. There are even vegan soul food variations. Fine-dining chefs in some restaurants have elevated the dishes by turning the flavors into foams and by adding richer and exotic ingredients so that the food appeals to a new generation with a posh palate.

But for as often as I eat Black tacos, I almost never read anything about them.

I spent much of my childhood in Queens, New York, and Knoxville, Tennessee. I didn't grow up eating tacos as a staple food. Taylor Mason, the owner of Taylor's Tacos, did. She grew up on the West Side of Chicago in the majority African American neighborhood of Lawndale. And like so many Black residents born and raised in this Midwestern city, she developed an affinity for tacos—in part, she told me, because they brought her community together around the table.

"Tacos were always in rotation," said Mason, who operates Taylor's Tacos as a catering business and pop-up. "It was an interactive experience. And visually the colors came together, and you'd eat with your eyes first."

She can still remember the fatty, brown seasoned beef, shredded lettuce, and chopped bright tomatoes scattered across the serving platter.

When Mason went away to California for college, she became even more enamored with tacos as a street food. She found herself shopping around to find stands where the carne asada was cooked right in front of the patrons and served simply on tortillas placed on parchment paper. She returned home and decided to open a business that would combine Mexican American street tacos with African American home cooking.

"It's the meat that separates ours from authentic Mexican tacos," Mason explained. "It's been our experience that Mexicans emphasize salsas. For us, the meat has to be seasoned so you get flavor in every bite, not just in the sauce."

Just like in many African American households, Mason seasons her meat with a combination of salt, black pepper, cayenne, and garlic powder.

> Since I moved to Chicago, I've had tacos made with fried chicken, breaded pork chops, and jerk steak.

The meats are braised for tenderness and flavor.

Mason uses corn tortillas for her tacos so that they are more faithful to the Mexican style, she said. But she prepares them in such a way that the texture resembles that of flour tortillas—the preferred choice of her Black patrons. Taylor's business is based on the Lower West Side of Chicago, but she pops up all over the city and in nearby suburbs.

"We deep-fry the tortillas, which is Mexican in some aspects...but deep-frying plays a big part in a lot of Black cooking," she said. "[Tacos] are not traditionally Black, but our preparation is Black: slow-cooked with cayenne and garlic powder, not oregano and chilies.... We braise our meats instead of searing them."

MY AFFINITY FOR tacos came subtly and quietly. My introduction as a kid was to the mainstream, hard-shell version with bland and greasy ground meat topped with cheese, lettuce, and chopped tomatoes.

Before I came to Chicago, I lived in New Orleans, where beignets and coffee were the late-night snack of choice. During my time in Washington, DC, I remember grabbing fried chicken wing dinners from the local carryout spots.

In Black Chicago, it's tacos.

It wasn't until I moved to Chicago nearly twenty years ago that I ate a "real" Mexican taco and began consuming them regularly. On nights out with my friends and colleagues, after drinks and laughs or taking in a show, grabbing tacos was customary. I recall it starting at local late-night taquerias, where the sliced steak and tender chicken were

Photos by Sandy Noto

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Taylor Mason (l) and her wife, Maya Mason, of Taylor's Tacos, at their Taylored event space in Chicago; Maya Mason greets a customer, May 2022

grilled and topped with cilantro and diced onions and served piping hot.

Over time, I was introduced to tacos made with fried chicken, breaded pork chops, and grilled steak marinated in Jamaican jerk sauce. We'd build them up, sometimes adding slices of avocado, grilled onions and peppers, or hot sauces to embolden the flavors.

Chicago is segregated by race and also class, and it shows. The city has the second-largest population of Mexicans in the United States, after Los Angeles. Yet for a city that is almost evenly divided between Black, white, and Latino residents, the majority of white residents live on the North Side. The majority of Black and Latino families live on the South and West Sides in distinct communities that neighbor each other. On the West Side, the historically Black communities of Lawndale and Austin sit right next to the Latino communities of Little Village and Cicero. On the South Side, the primarily Latino neighborhoods Gage Park and Chicago Lawn are bordered by the Black communities of Englewood and Ashburn. Despite the racial divide, taco shops seem to be a universal commonality in nearly every neighborhood here.

For me, an outsider learning the ways of the city, I was delighted by the ways in which my African American neighbors with roots here had seized the taco as their own. New acquaintances would point me to certain restaurants across town. I was often sent to local establishments to try this stand's fish tacos, that restaurant's shrimp tacos, or this place's short-rib version. Many folks boasted that the tacos they made at home were better than any you could buy on the streets. I'd stand in warm kitchens watching home cooks squeeze limes over grilled skirt steak or fried ground lamb before dumping it on a tortilla and handing it over for me to try. The devotion itself intrigued me.

I should note that Chicago isn't unique in this food coupling. There are Black communities throughout the country where tacos have been filled with black-eyed peas, oxtails, sweet potatoes, and even pot roast. Yet I couldn't find a definitive history of the Black taco, nor of its crossover into Black Chicago foodways.

Scholars and journalists have chronicled the relationship between Mexican and African American food traditions in Los Angeles, said Jeffrey Pilcher, an author, editor, and professor of food history at the University of Toronto whose scholarship has focused on the history of the taco. But there has been less consideration of that food phenomenon in the Midwest, he told me.

"It's not at all surprising that in Chicago, where there is a large Black community and Mexican community going back decades, that there are food ties between those two communities. Food customs often get exchanged," Pilcher said. "It's very common to have this sort of cross-cultural eating and sharing of food."

Pilcher pointed to the Mississippi Delta tamale as another example of a Latino food that took on a new identity as it penetrated a new, foreign region many decades ago. Migrant workers likely introduced the tamale to the area, but Black folks there adapted and reworked it. Mississippi tamales are smaller than the traditional Mexican versions, are simmered instead of steamed, and tend to be spicier. For some in that Southern state, they are a menu staple.

With foods, "there's a constant search for novelty, and then it becomes everyday. For the past fifty years, the taco has been going through this cycle," Pilcher said. A new generation comes along, and they don't like their parents' tacos, so they adjust them. Later, there's a shift back to the authentic style.

Tacos migrated into the American diet in the early 1900s, Pilcher found. And by the 1950s, what was previously an exotic food had been made commonplace with the help of American processed ingredients, like ground beef and the

hard shell. The taco that became mainstream was very different from the original Mexican version.

Those are the tacos I grew up eating sporadically. But in Chicago, for many Black households I've encountered, tacos are part of the regular rotation, alongside catfish, roast chicken, meatloaf, and ribs.

According to Chicago historian Shermann "Dilla" Thomas, what I call the "Black taco" is likely just the natural result of the proximity between Latino and Black communities—historically, they tend to be adjacent. And while the invisible boundaries between neighborhoods may have highlighted political differences, factions, and affiliations, that hasn't stopped anyone from crossing over for a good meal.

"Tacos were my college survival meal," a jovial Thomas said as he talked about tacos. "Then, it was the celebratory meal. And it's the first thing I taught my kids to cook."

"Tacos is not just a part of the [family dinner] menu—it's on the ten-day menu. You are going to eat tacos at least every ten days," he said.

On the South Side, Thomas told me, a restaurateur once ran out of bread for his fried chicken sandwiches and decided to serve the meat on tortillas. The idea was a hit with customers, and it stuck. He mentioned another entrepreneur on the West Side whose jerk chicken and steak tacos became the foundation of a sucessful business.

The unique food marriage between traditional Black flavors on a Mexican staple food demonstrates that the two communities have so much more in common than the differences and tensions that are too often highlighted, Thomas said.

"At the end of the day, we all want the same things," he said. "To take care of who you need to care for. A lot of that is done in the kitchen with your family. We have learned from each other's cultures. Protests, community galvanizing, voting in blocks: Latino communities have gotten that from us. With tacos, it has become such a Black staple," he said.

I love the incidental cultural fusion, not just because of the way the flavors pop on my taste buds, but because I think it symbolizes a blending that can be replicated off the plate.

When I'm at home in Chicago, when anyone asks me if I want to grab tacos, I ask for clarity, "Tacos—or Black tacos?"

To me, either version is a gift.

Lolly Bowean is a journalist based on the South Side of Chicago. Her work has appeared in the Chicago Tribune*,* The Guardian*,* Chicago Magazine*,* Lenny Letter*, and* Longreads.

JUST ABOVE MY HEAD

When I make greens and dressing, I imagine that my ancestors are with me.

BY KIDIOCUS KING-CARROLL

WE STOOD IN THE PRODUCE SECTION OF the Save A Lot at Silver Mill Court in Milwaukee, surrounded by leafy, cruciferous vegetables—dark, emerald green and deep purple; curly and voluminous. It was 2001. I was nine years old, and my brother was eight. Our grandma gripped the buggy with both hands and pondered her choices. "Collards," she said aloud.

A middle-aged Black woman standing nearby turned to us, her tongue sassy and imperious. "Those are mustards," she corrected. "I'm from Pine Bluff, Arkansas—I know my greens!"

Grandma, always quick on the take, snappily replied, "I'm from Arkansas, too. And I *know* my greens."

The woman sneered and pushed her buggy away while my grandma stuffed our cart with bunches of collards, mustards, and turnips. That night, I watched patiently as she washed and destemmed the greens before simmering them in a metal stockpot with salt pork and ham hocks. She also prepared sour cream cornbread, so fluffy and sweet that it could be cake. When I crushed the cornbread into the potlikker, that liquid gold soaked it up, and I could finally take a bite.

Pinto beans and cornbread, white rice, fried green onions, mixed greens, fried catfish, smothered pork chops, and rabbits and raccoons obtained from Bill the Butcher were regular dishes at the dinner table when my grandma cooked meals. My mother called this "country food," and she did not altogether disdain it—pinto beans with hot water cornbread and sliced raw onion were dinnertime staples throughout my childhood. But the sight of a coon in the freezer was anathema to her. I found the deliciousness of that greasy, tender meat with a side of candied sweet potatoes undeniable, even as the sharp-toothed coon head peeked up from the roasting pan.

The Southern food that that shows up on my dinner table is not the same Southern food that shows up on the table of the Black folks three houses down from my mother's home, or even within our extended family in Milwaukee and throughout the Midwest and the West Coast. Culinary traditions of the Delta region of Mississippi and Arkansas informed the foods we often ate in our Milwaukee household. Rice. Catfish. Coon. Sweet Potatoes. Egg pie. These are Delta foods. They are the foods that my ancestors hunted, farmed, and cooked to provide sustenance for their families, and those recipes made their way north to Milwaukee by car, bus, and train.

Illustrations by Alex Aldrich Barrett

I learned to cook from sitting in the kitchen watching my grandma stir, whip, beat, bake, boil, and fry various foods into delicacies during her periodic stays in my mother's house on the North Side of Milwaukee. Grandma was born in Drew County, Arkansas, and learned to cook from her mother and from the folks she was in community with. Some dishes she learned from my grandfather, who'd been born on the other side of The River in the Hill Country of Marshall County, Mississippi, and had learned to cook from his people. My mother was more hands-on. By the time I left for college and returned home for holidays, I found myself making meals under her diligent supervision. She'd watch as I cleaned chitlins, cooked dressing, grated and sliced cheeses for the macaroni dish, and baked various pies. After taste, she might say it needed more salt, or vanilla, and I'd add and stir until everything was just right.

The dish that necessitated the most care was our family's dressing, which has evolved over the generations and over the miles from the Deep South to the Upper Midwest. My maternal great-grandmother Arguster didn't use boxed breadcrumbs when she labored in her kitchen in southeastern Arkansas—she used white bread that she'd dried herself. The boxed breadcrumbs made their way into the family recipe courtesy of my grandfather Hubert. My mother and I made our own contribution to the dressing: jarred chicken bouillon paste. We believe it yields a richer stock, but my grandfather would have dismissed it as unnecessary.

In *The Cooking Gene*, culinary historian Michael Twitty notes, "In cooking, your informed imagination fills in the blanks. The dead and the living cook with me, and things once forgotten come to life." My ancestors are not physically with me as I prepare foods that have come to define my culinary heritage as a Black Midwesterner, but I imagine that they are just above my head, guiding my hand as I nourish my family. The dressing that I make is informed by family history and innovation, but sometimes my innovations don't work. I will let the fresh sage burn in the brown butter, use too much black pepper, or buy the wrong breadcrumbs. And sometimes it only turns out exactly the way that I want it when I make it in my mother's kitchen.

In the years since that run-in at the Save A Lot, "I'm from Pine Bluff, Arkansas—I know my greens!" has become a recurring joke between my grandmother, my brother, and me. When we want to make a humorous, sometimes spurious claim to culinary tradition or superiority, we might say, "I make my *famous* cornbread from scratch because I'm from Pine Bluff, Arkansas!" Still, tradition is important for my family because it connects us to our past and honors how we have come to be. For our family, there must be an Old Country: somewhere that exists in the time before, a place that calls us into being and will always be home. Food is the connective force that allows us to forge a new sense of place while honoring all that existed before. That connection was never really discussed in my family. It was a feeling that manifested in the care of cooking a meal with recipes passed down from our people in Arkansas and Mississippi—or in the humor of claiming to be a better cook than everyone else.

Greens and dressing are significant in my family because of the labor required to prepare them. Both recipes demand quality ingredients, rich and layered stocks, and time. I've witnessed entire days

dedicated to shopping and cooking to build a good flavor profile. Greens and dressing are typically prepared for holiday gatherings in my mother's home and represent the closeness of Black family life for me. When I need a reminder of home and familial intimacy, I devote myself to cooking a pan of dressing—I bake and cube the cornbread a day in advance to dry it out, dice the vegetables, lay out my seasonings, and prepare the stock. And when I taste the dish, I think of the immense care that has brought me to this place in time.

Kidiocus King-Carroll is a food enthusiast, scholar of the Black Midwest, and an incoming assistant professor of Africana Studies at California State University-Channel Islands.

Photo courtesy of the author

ON BECOMING *EBONY*'S FOOD EDITOR

That iconic, psychedelic test kitchen is only part of the story.

BY CHARLA L. DRAPER

WHEN I DRIVE THROUGH CHICAGO'S Bronzeville neighborhood, I often remember experiences from my childhood. This happens when I ride by the now-refurbished Wabash YMCA on 37th and Wabash Street, where, in 1926, Carter G. Woodson and colleagues created what is now Black History Month; when I pass St. Elizabeth School, where Daddy played basketball with Art White, the first Black referee for the Big Ten athletic conference; when I see DuSable High School, which counts the magazine publisher John H. Johnson as an alumnus; and when I steer past the former site of the Washington Park YMCA, where Daddy taught me to swim in a pool that seemed as big as a lake. There is so much history in Bronzeville—and, while I couldn't have known it as a little girl, there are so many connections between that South Side community and the work I eventually did at *Ebony* magazine.

Like me, my parents were born in Chicago. Both my father's and my mother's parents were part of the first wave of the Great Migration. Born in Alabama and Louisiana, they arrived in the city in the early 1900s. When Black folks began to settle in Chicago, they were relegated to an area known as the "Black Belt," a narrow strip from


date with a dish

Pizzazz! The Potato Salad Bar

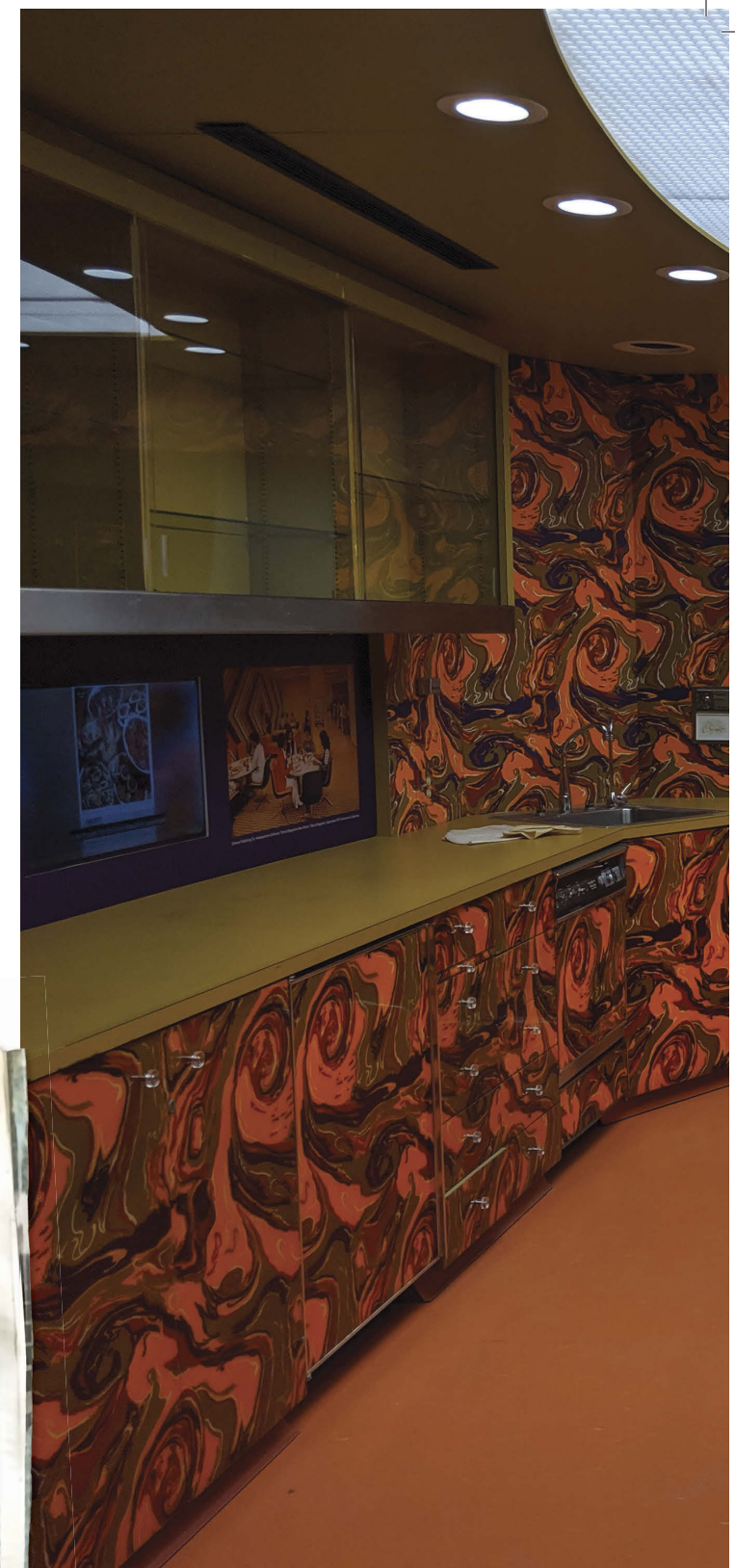
POTATOES: Dressing Up A Mainstay

Steak 'n potatoes, hamburgers with fries or potato chips; potatoes are one of the most popular and versatile vegetables. In addition to fresh, potatoes are available canned, frozen and dehydrated. Any of these can easily be used in salads, soups, stews or simply as a side vegetable.

The potato, an economical and nutritious staple is high in vitamin C and contains several B vitamins. Although potatoes have frequently been associated with high calories, one medium potato contains only 110 calories.

Potatoes are available in three basic types—round white, red and russet. "New" potatoes are harvested smaller and shipped directly from the field. When selecting potatoes for family favorites, choose firm, smooth potatoes that are free of bruises or sprouts.

Although you may have a special potato dish, try the following recipes for a new look on an old favorite.



PREVIOUS: The author at the *Ebony* test kitchen exhibit at the Museum of Food and Drink (MOFAD) in New York City, February 2022; LEFT: The "Date With a Dish" mock-up the author created for her *Ebony* interview; ABOVE: The *Ebony* test kitchen at MOFAD

LEFT: Courtesy of the author

ABOVE: Courtesy of MOAFD

The test kitchen was outfitted in a multicolored, psychedelic-style pattern. The appliances were cutting-edge, but there was not a fork, spatula, or pan to be found.

Photography for an *Ebony* feature on summer cookout recipes, styled by the author

12th Street to 51st Street, which soon became overcrowded and overpriced. Residents nicknamed the area "Bronzeville," which most found more appealing than the "Black Belt."

As a child, I did not realize the neighborhood's cultural importance. The iconic *Chicago Defender* newspaper was founded in Bronzeville. Black-owned businesses flourished there, as did the arts and literature, in what would later be called the Chicago Black Renaissance movement.

I was born into a family of talented and resourceful cooks. My maternal grandmother, Gonga, had a reputation for baking light, lemon-flavored pound cakes, and I attribute my love of baking to her. Daddy's mom, whom the family called Big Mama, was an exceptional country cook. I remember her breakfasts of eggs and brains and suppers of gumbo and fried rabbit.

In college, I chose to major in home economics, hoping it would lead to a job I would enjoy. Shortly after graduation, I accepted a position in the Kraft Foods test kitchen in Chicago. It felt like a dream job: in addition to developing recipes that showcased the company's products, I learned about product research and development, advertising, marketing, food photography, and food styling.

While at Kraft, I began to study *Ebony*'s "Date With a Dish," a popular section created by the magazine's first food editor, Freda DeKnight. Through "Date With a Dish," DeKnight explained in the 1948 cookbook of the same name, she sought to dispel the notion that, "Negroes, the descriptor at that time for our race, could adapt and cook only the standard Southern dishes."

Applying what I was learning at Kraft, I took note of the recipes and food stories *Ebony* published, analyzing each one for informativeness and accuracy. DeKnight had passed in 1963, and by the early 1980s, it seemed to me that the magazine could benefit from a food editor who understood the needs of both home cooks and advertisers. Why not me?

ABOVE: Photo by Tom Firak; OPPOSITE PAGE: Courtesy of Ann Camille Saunders

IN A ROUNDABOUT WAY, I can trace my interest in *Ebony* magazine to my preschool days at Rosenwald Nursery School. There, as a three-year-old, I met Ann Camille Saunders, who became a lifelong friend. (Her double first name spoke to her family's Southern roots.) In 1949, Ann Camille's mother, Doris Saunders, became the librarian for the Johnson Publishing Company. She conceptualized and built a repository of the African American experience that informed the company's advertising strategy and contributed to the success and influence of *Ebony* and later *Jet* magazines.

Mrs. Saunders was still at Johnson Publishing Company when I began to think seriously of working there. I'd pepper her with questions: Did they have a food editor? Did she think I could land the job? At first, Mrs. Saunders dismissed my interest and even tried to scare me off with stories of Mr. Johnson's strict managerial style. She told me that he liked to take a seat in the building's lobby as the staff arrived for work. Any tardy employees would face Mr. J, who would remind them—without mincing words—what time they were expected to be at work! (I didn't believe this story until I witnessed it firsthand.)

The author (far left) and her friend Ann Camille Saunders (second from left) at Ann Camille's birthday party, circa 1958

Finally, Mrs. Saunders suggested I create a mock-up of an issue showing how the food pages could be strengthened. I took on that challenge, literally cutting and pasting text and images to reimagine a feature on potatoes from the September 1980 issue. Soon thereafter, I secured a meeting with Mr. Johnson and some of *Ebony*'s editorial staff.

Walking into the glass-walled conference room that day, I felt nervous but spoke confidently. I left the meeting feeling that I had made a clear case for the value an in-house food editor could bring to the magazine. When one editor asked if I had selected the ugliest feature I could find to use as an example, I thought of Thumper from the movie *Bambi* and demurred.

An entire year passed before I got the job.

I was in for a reality check when I arrived at *Ebony* in the fall of 1982. The test kitchen was outfitted in a multi-colored, psychedelic-style pattern everywhere—the opposite of the neutral-beige color scheme that prevailed in The Kraft Kitchens. The appliances were cutting-edge, but there was not a fork, spatula, or pan to be found. It was a striking kitchen, but not a functional one. My first task was to get the *Ebony* test kitchen up and running so that we could unveil an updated food section in time for the new year.

I moved on to develop an editorial calendar for a year's worth of "Date With a Dish," creating a tool that the magazine's advertising department could share with potential clients in the food industry. We also needed an element that would create new interest and maximize reader participation. Thus the "Reader Favorite Recipe" was born. I believe the initial idea came from a reader letter regarding an age-old question: Is sugar an acceptable ingredient in cornbread? (The reader in question was adamant that it was *not*.)

Also on my early to-do list was identifying and securing a photographer who specialized in food. Photographer Thomas Firak took our images to a new level, making "Date With a Dish" that much more attractive to both readers and advertisers. Each month, I selected recipes to photograph that would appeal to cooks of various skill levels. I always included at least one for novices, one for experienced home cooks, and one for experts.

ABOVE: *Ebony* exhibit at MOFAD; RIGHT: Photography from an *Ebony* feature on fish recipes, styled by the author

For example, if we were featuring recipes for pasta, we might photograph a simple spaghetti with meat sauce, a slightly more advanced lasagna layered with spinach, and a carbonara which required stirring an uncooked egg into the pasta at just the right moment.

I could not have done my job without an exemplary administrative assistant, Ava Gardner (yes, that is her real name). Whether we were proofing copy, prepping recipes, packing boxes, or creating an ad presentation, Gardner helped me stay on task.

Strengthening the food pages at *Ebony* was challenging, but the payoff was knowing that the changes made a difference. Our readers responded with gratitude, unsolicited suggestions, and a willingness to share their personal recipes. With "Reader Favorite Recipe," the volume of responses clearly showed *Ebony*'s audience was paying attention and eager to engage. Each month, the winner's recipe was published with the reader's name and city of residence. That home cook earned bragging rights and a $100 prize.

In June 1983, I was asked to prepare a presentation for the annual advertising sales meeting and provide an overview of objectives, results and plans for the 1984 calendar. As the last editor to share results from my department, the food section, I was excited to present the accomplishments of "Date With a Dish." The all-male senior editorial staff had other ideas. As I took the podium, every one of them got up to leave the conference room. I had learned those first few months at the magazine that there was no love lost between the senior editors and the food department. I'm not sure why the animus existed—was it because I was the new kid on the block? Because I understood food marketing? Because my initial interview had zeroed in on their shortcomings? Or was it because I reported directly to Mr. Johnson? In any case, their blatant rudeness took me aback. When they reached the door to exit, Mr. Johnson boomed, "Sit down, you might learn

Courtesy of MOFAD

Photo by Tom Firak

something!" The editorial staff learned the food section showed significant growth in reader engagement and a 50 percent year-over-year increase in food-related advertising revenue.

I see the *Ebony* story as a Chicago story. Chicago has always been a food town and the foodstuffs of the city are heavily influenced by immigrants, from Chicago's Haitian founder, Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable; Southerners, bringing the affordable and highly seasoned meals of the South; and other African and Caribbean aromas and pungent flavors we've come to love. In Chicago, the food and hospitality industries have long been rich soil for growing Black businesses. In the 1980s, African American entrepreneurs were building and developing loyal clienteles. Eateries such as Lem's BBQ, Army & Lou's, Gladys' Luncheonette, Edna's, and Izola's restaurants, were go-to options when folks didn't want to cook. Parker House Sausage, Michele's Maple Crème Syrup, Baldwin Ice Cream, and Argia B's Mumbo Sauce were offered in restaurants and at grocery stores, and were options when people were cooking at home. In "Date With a Dish," I created editorial topics that made it easy for home cooks to use these products, by sharing sample menus, recipes, and serving suggestions to promote product sales. I also believe we played a part in helping keep Black-owned brands top-of-mind for our readers—and on their grocery and shopping lists.

During my two years at *Ebony*, I experienced some of the challenges and characteristics found in family-owned and -operated businesses. Overall, my experiences at the magazine were gratifying. Those years affirmed my professional knowledge of, and appreciation for, food, marketing, and the strength of the Black consumer. I remain deeply proud of all I learned and accomplished there.

Charla L. Draper, the former food editor of Ebony *and* Southern Living*, is the owner of It's Food Biz! Consulting. She founded National Soul Food Month and blogs at* Chow-Chow & Soul.

OF CHITLINS AND CARE

The women in my family blended customs with memories and served survival.

BY EMILY HOOPER LANSANA

MY EARLIEST MEMORY OF ENJOYING THE distinct taste of a particular food was when I was about three years old. It was early afternoon on Thanksgiving. My mother, my grandmother, and several great-aunts were in the kitchen finishing preparations for dinner.

I'd been playing in the living room when one of them handed me a saucer of soft, wavy food decorated with ketchup. I tasted this delicacy and finished the entire plate in moments. I asked for more. I finished a second plate. Chitlins were my first food love—until my older siblings convinced me otherwise. When I told my older brother and sister what I'd been eating, they explained in detail that the food I was falling in love with was called "chitlins." They further counseled, "Chitlins are pig guts. You do *not* want to eat that."

My great-aunts did not agree with my siblings. I don't believe my elders participated in the complex task of cleaning and cooking chitlins solely because they loved the taste. The ritual of preparing chitlins reflected some of the journey of our people. It honored one of the ways in which we have learned to repurpose what has been discarded in order to sustain ourselves. These women blended customs with memories and served survival. I was a little girl who didn't know what I was eating, but I did know that when they handed me that plate, I felt cared for.

At so many moments in my life, I have needed sustenance prepared with the kind of energy that emanated from that kitchen—food drenched in wisdom and seasoned with courage. My memories of soul food are as grounded in the foods themselves as they are in the care that surrounds the preparation, the serving, the eating, the gathering and the sharing. It's not only what we ate, but how we ate and with whom we ate.

My family traveled north from Birmingham, Alabama, to Cleveland, Ohio, as part of the Great Migration. My great-aunt Ora was the first family member to move to Cleveland to pursue an environment with greater freedom and opportunity. When her father—my great-grandfather—Will Cogman, a tall, mahogany-brown man with a deeply chiseled face and wise eyes, heard about the quality of life for Black people in northern cities at that time, he followed. He wanted something more than the environment of racism, segregation, and limited education available to Black people in Birmingham. In their hometown, there were separate water fountains, they had to sit

ABOVE: Earline Hooper, the author's mother, in 2019; OPPOSITE PAGE: The author (lower right) and family

so high up in the theater that it was difficult to see the stage or screen, and the schools were separate and profoundly unequal. He found a job at a factory in Cleveland and saved until he was able to purchase a handsome, solid home and bring the whole family north. Generations of our family lived in that house on Olivet Avenue. We were proud to plant roots in a place where we could grow and dream without the daily battle of Southern segregation.

My mother often talks about how her grandfather nurtured and encouraged her. She says that he loved children and always wanted them to feel valued. Their family often hosted large

> When I was growing up, my elders served food drenched in wisdom and seasoned with courage.

gatherings. She remembers a table filled with foods like fried chicken, macaroni and cheese, turnip and collard greens, sweet potato casserole, pound cake, sweet potato pie, apple pie, and peach or blueberry cobbler.

My mother explains that at most other houses, the children had to wait until the adults had eaten. The kids then ate what was left over. However, in Will Cogman's home, things followed a different order. He loved children. He called them his "chaps." He said, "In my house, the chaps come first." What an impact that must have had. Too

Photos courtesy of the author

Too few places in the world are structured to say, "Black children are loved and respected here. They are valued and nurtured. In this place, they come first."

few places in the world are structured to say, "Black children are loved and respected here. They are valued and nurtured. In this place, they come first."

When my great grandfather saved enough money to support the move and purchase a home, the family traveled north as part of the Great Migration. They carried their hope for more: for more opportunity, for financial and material blessings. They also brought the faith and the foods that had sustained them. My mother recalls that the meals were the same. From Oxmoor, Alabama; to Birmingham Alabama; to Cleveland, Ohio; my family carried that love of community, especially of children.

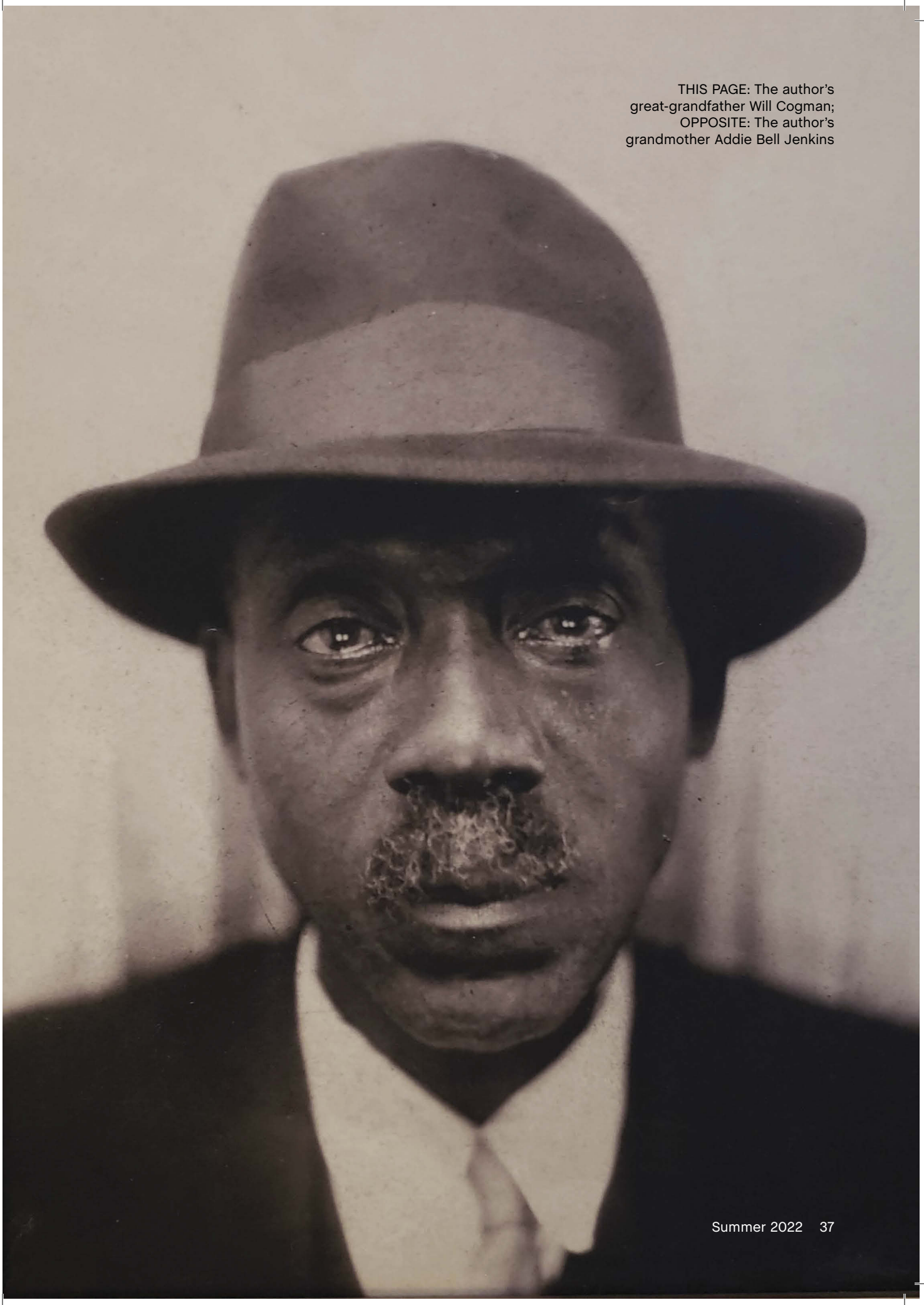
When my mother reflects on this move, she shares that the transition was not always easy. The school environment and community were very different in Cleveland than in Birmingham. She recalls that those family gatherings were an important part of feeding her body and spirit. When she was anxious, her grandfather said, "You are going to make it. You're going to be somebody." My great-grandfather's work ethic and family values endure.

I never had the chance to meet my great-grandparents, but when I am standing in my mother's kitchen and we are preparing her family menu from fried chicken and greens to pound cake and cobbler, for forty or fifty guests, I can feel the energy of my ancestors in the food, the music, and the stories. My mother is joyous when sitting in a house full of people around a bountiful table.

After college, I moved from Cleveland to Chicago and started a family. When my sons were little, I sometimes worried that they were missing something, because I didn't always have time to cook the food that I'd been fed as a child. I was juggling a time-intensive job, navigating across the city between school, work, extracurricular activities, and doctors' appointments. Sometimes I served them roasted chicken from the prepared foods section or microwave chicken nuggets rather than homemade chicken, macaroni and cheese, greens, and cornbread. I did not worry that they were missing nutrients; instead, I felt that the food that I had come to know as soul food, held the power to feed their spirits. These cultural dishes seemed intrinsic to being whole, strong Black people. Despite the myriad challenges of being a working mom to four Black boys in Chicago, I managed to feed them enough of what they needed to be grounded in their culture and hold a commitment to their people. I believe that my ancestors were consistently present, and that the ritual of sharing of foods from our history both honors their memories and calls them into the present.

These days in my kitchen, when I'm preparing a holiday meal with my sons—now young adults—cooking is a collaborative project. One focuses on fried chicken, another on macaroni and cheese, and another prepares sweet potato pie. One of them sets the table and greets friends. I set aside a plate for my ancestors on my great-aunt's china. I thank them that we are well fed.

Emily Hooper Lansana is a community builder, storyteller, arts administrator, and educator. She serves as Senior Director of Community Arts for the Logan Center for the Arts at the University of Chicago and teaches storytelling at venues from universities to community centers.



THIS PAGE: The author's great-grandfather Will Cogman; OPPOSITE: The author's grandmother Addie Bell Jenkins

FORAGING

WE RECALLED THE SWEETNESS WE LEFT BEHIND.

BY
JANICE N. HARRINGTON

Illustrations by Dèsirèe Kelly


BLACKBERRIES
MUSCADINES
PERSIMMONS
Poke weed

I COME FROM FORAGERS.

Southerners who hunted and fished, and who knew where to find blackberries, wild grapes (*muscadimes*), walnuts, pokeweed, and persimmons. I learned as a child that if I used my eyes, if I was patient, if I risked welts and itchies and mosquitoes, I would be rewarded with sweetness, with mason jars filled with wild fruits, with store for hard times. I knew that foraging made us generous. *Child, you go ahead and take some of that with you. We sure can't eat it all.* We plucked and picked and gathered. Every season had its fruit and its difficult arithmetic. How many berries to put in the bucket and how many to put in your mouth? I received my first lessons in ecology and conservation beside the banks of creeks, in weedy thickets, under the boughs of forgotten orchards. When my family travelled north, we continued to forage and fish. Food was expensive for a young family. My mother gardened and canned, but not for recreation. We foraged—yes, for good, free food. But we foraged more because it was who we were, how we could recall the sweetness we left behind. We foraged because of the pleasure we found in gathering secret treasure. And always, afterwards, we had—not just wild berries, or fruit, or nuts—but also a memory: a necessary food.

MUSCADINES

ALABAMA
1962

DISHPANS, LARD BUCKETS, BUSHEL BASKETS, we went out—cousins, aunts, uncles, elders—to search for *muscadimes*, wild grapes threaded around pines. We walked through the brambles searching for the bruise-colored fruit, small as knuckles and acid-sweet. We brought them home sun-warm to wash with well water, boil and sugar into jelly, or smash-pop against the tongue, so acidic they burned and scalded our lips. Purple-black, blue-black, ink-black grapes—we hummed around their vines like gnats and bees. Laughter and Black voices rising from a pine thicket; warm, pine-scented air mixing with the winey smell of wild grapes;

muscadimes dropped into a lard tin or a washpan or into waiting hands. We went out together and came back the same way.

Poke Salad

ALABAMA
1963

I DIDN'T LIKE IT THEN. ***AMERICAN NIGHTSHADE, POKE SALLET, POKEBERRY, POKEROOT, POKEWEED, SKOKE, VIRGINIA POKE, PIGEON BERRY, INKBERRY.*** Poke salad mixed with egg and scrambled. Anna walking beside a seam of red dirt looking for the large green leaves and purpled berries. How did she fix it? We were poor then, Webster's gal and her baby girl. *Mama,* she said, *fixed it all the time. Back there, pokeweed was plentiful.* How to fix pokeweed: Wash the leaves carefully. Tuck the leaves into cold water and boil. Drain off the water. Heat bacon grease in a skillet. Add pokeweed and a touch of sugar. Scramble in egg. Serve hot. Or add pepper sauce and eat it like spinach.

Sand Plums

NEBRASKA
1964–1969

NEBRASKA—LONG, ROLLING HILLS, RED cedars, open pastures, barbed wire—and we were a Negro family taking a Sunday drive. I remember the sunlight, the sweeps and panorama of black mud and mud-matted angus. High summer or maybe fall. It was a clear day and warm. Anna saw them first and recognized what they were: sand plums, sun-colored, large as quail eggs, memory says. Charles pulled over and Anna scrambled across the ditch and climbed the weedy embankment to lean and stretch over barbed-wire spurs to pluck sand plums, dropping them into the basin of her upturned hem. The grove buzzed with yellowjackets and flies. Anna cried out, stumbling down the bank, and we could see the shiny ribbon winding red and red and red down her yella thigh. A barbed spur had slit her skin. Her flesh burst apart, as ripe plums do. We picked no more but brought the bounty home. Juice on our fingers, our cheeks, sweet liquor, liquid light. Anna made jelly from them, danger and sweetness saved in a mason jar— plum jelly to stay winter and kindle sunless days with light.

Morels

NEBRASKA
Late 1970s

WAYNE AND I WERE HEADING OUT ON HIS motorcycle somewhere above Omaha to search for morels.

Hickory chickens, molly moochers, merkels, sponge mushrooms. By whatever name, morels were the holy grail for mushroom hunters. I was smitten by their mystery.

A fungus that tasted like nothing else.

Wayne drove north. I no longer remember the exact *where* or the exact route. We rode his motorcycle—a Norton, I think. I sat behind, as I always did, with my arms wrapped around Wayne's side. I watched the scenery blur, hoped that no errant bee or wasp found its way up my sleeve, while I listened to the drone of our engine and the steady rumble of the road. Wayne said he liked motorcycles for the sense of freedom they gave him. I hardly equated cars with claustrophobia, and I thought that the sky I saw through any windshield was sky enough. Despite the discomfort and fishbowl exposure, I squeezed myself between his rump and the back end of the cycle and held on.

We sped fast through Nebraska countryside, a mixed-race couple, driving toward some likely wood that Wayne knew about where we might find morels. We passed a farmhouse and throttled through a tunnel of trees, when the motorcycle wrenched violently to one side. It was one of those moments when you suddenly see everything at once. Time slowed and time sped by. I saw what I thought would happen: the motorcycle slamming against the asphalt, sparks spewing from the throat of the exhaust pipe. I saw my body in free fall, my helmet ramming against the road, and Wayne's body folding into a broken heap. I saw the *now* when an arrow—an arrow someone had aimed, and which Wayne had jerked the bike to miss—passed between our tires. I saw the long, yellow shaft (thick around as my little finger), heard it rattle against the asphalt, followed it mentally into *what next* and *after*.

The motorcycle shuddered, wavered. My hands tightened on Wayne's ribs. The arrow skidded

onto the shoulder. Wayne fought the wheels, straightened the cycle, and drove on, both of us relieved. Morels, I learned later, have another common name—*miracles*.

Did someone see my brown arms wrapped around Wayne's body? My brown face through the helmet's visor? Answers are like mushrooms. Some are poisonous. Others are too difficult to know for certain.

Blackberries

LOUISIANA
1989

MY MARRIAGE ENDED. "A MISTAKE," MY ex said, along with several other complaints about my deficiencies as a wife. But loving badly doesn't mean that you don't love. Doesn't mean that you don't suffer when it all unravels. I did—if not sleeping, eating, or going an hour without weeping are any measure. But I tried to pick my life up again. Having had enough of my briny sadness, I went blackberrying with a mother and her young son. Early evening before the mosquitoes, we carried plastic strawberry baskets and paper sacks. I picked my way through the thicket and underbrush and searched for the leggy canes. Blackberry thorns require precision. You have to choose. You have to sort (ripe, not ripe, too many brown drupelets). You have to move deliberately if you don't want a thorn to teach you respect. I remember stooping, squatting, reaching over, and pushing my hand in and out of shadows, through scrims of weedy brush, and never giving a thought to snakes. This was Louisiana. There were snakes. But I didn't think of them at the time. I wasn't—for the first time in months—afraid. I only wanted to find the purple-black bumpiness called *blackberry*, to reenact the ancient theatre of scavenging and hunting, of searching. Briars, thorns, scratches, pricks, welts, and purple stains: I suffered all for the seedy sweetness. I remember later, after a bath and dinner, after washing and eating my plunder (what I hadn't just popped into my mouth), I stretched out on the back-breaking reminder of a lost marriage, a salt-stained foam sofa, while night came on purple-black, humid, thorned by starlight and the canes of the Milky Way. I fell asleep.

Asparagus

ILLINOIS
1990s

I LEARNED FROM A MAN WHOSE SON HAD died a year or maybe several years before—killed, I think, in a church-bus accident. He took me out, taught me where to look. We drove far from town. He stopped, finally, and we walked along the edge of farm rows, beside field fences, near railroad tracks. *Wherever you find telephone lines,* he said. *Wherever birds shat their stolen seeds.* We spent the afternoon going from site to site. He showed me his asparagus patch, so that I could learn to identify the ferns. They were easy to see once I knew their feathery foliage. He taught me how to bend the spine, just slightly, to find the breaking point, a precision that required practice and a kind of seeing touch. Take the slender, tender ones, but leave the tough, thicker stalks. He let me gather as much as I wanted, cautioning only that I leave some for the birds and other foragers, to reseed for the next season. We never spoke about his son. I wasn't sure I had the story right. He hinted that there was something wrong with his wife, that she had not recovered. But he didn't complain. Abandoned barns made good sites, he said, and old root cellars. *Come back in the spring, and look.*

I know spring mostly by its smell: earthy and clean. It's also the season that requires patience, especially if you're waiting to go asparagus hunting. But what woman goes into the countryside alone? What Black woman searches abandoned farmsteads or strolls along overgrown ditch banks to search for asparagus? The answer pressed against my skin. I could feel it, a knowing touch.

I gave way and called a girlfriend (Chicago South Side) and we went out together. I helped her see the ferny leaves and showed her how to bend slender stalks just so. Two Black women walking a rough seam of ground beside a railroad track, pickups passing by, puzzled faces turned in our direction.

Ephemera

ILLINOIS
Late 1990s

IN SHOEBOXES, IN THE JEWELRY ARMOIRE, in closets, in an upstairs crawl space, I keep old

letters. My mother, my grandmother, my father also kept letters. *You'll want to look back some day,* my mother says. There's foraging in the reading of letters. Between *Dear* and *Sincerely yours,* I search for signs and memories and lore. Here the letter Anna kept for over thirty years. There, birthday cards, holiday greetings, and letters home. Cardboard reliquaries filled with yesterdays and bygones. Letters from friends, colleagues, lovers—now lost, moved on, forgotten. Old words. Old news. Old stories, yellowing. The acid of skin, air, and sunlight has brittled the paper and turned fading words into ghosts. In the winter, I pick through—old news: *I guess you heard about my well cave in. . . .*; cures: *Get some sweet oil warm it and drop two drops in each ear do this for three times at night*; recipes for cornbread dressing; and solace: *there is nothing the Lord can't do.* I hear their voices again, the family left behind, faces that, after we went *Up North*, I never saw again.

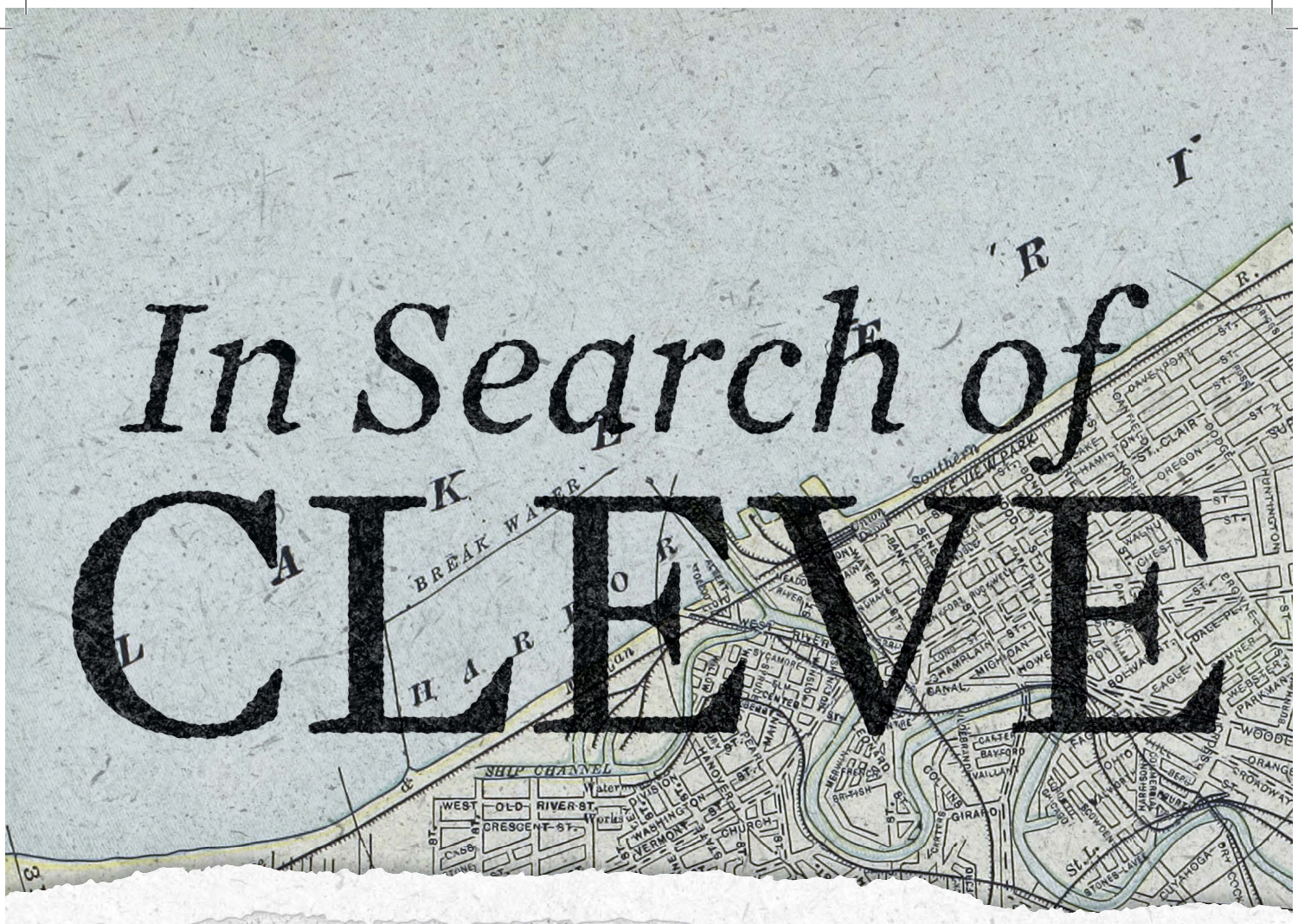
WALNUTS
ILLINOIS
2010s

AT THE ARBORETUM, IMMIGRANT FAMILIES toss cudgels up into the walnut trees. Walnuts rattle and rain down in hard knots, along with leaves, twigs, and small limbs. The families stoop to gather walnuts. I cannot tell the words or language. But I understand the laughter and squeals.

Lillian boiled black walnuts slowly in a metal bucket to make dye for Webster's shirts. *That stain'll get over everything,* Anna warned. *Be careful, if you do it. Never will come out.* I remember how Anna spent hours cracking walnut shells and picking out the nutmeat to make a cake. *Not worth the time it takes.*

I gather a few from the ground, large enough to fill my palm, shells covered by black husks, to take home and crack with a hammer. It's not as easy as you'd think. Walnuts are stubborn, and I was disappointed by the withered mummies I found inside. I'll try again, one day. If not walnuts, then maybe pokeberries. I want to make ink, some indelible juice or stain, so I can write words that nothing will erase.

Janice N. Harrington writes poetry and children's books. A native of Alabama, she teaches creative writing at the University of Illinois.



In Search of CLEVE

Folks made a way
where there was no way,
loving what they had
while knowing full well
what they didn't.

by MARK V. REYNOLDS

My Parents' LAND

Map: Adobe Stock; Photo: Courtesy of the author

Dad loved his house,

the first he'd ever owned. He built a fence around it. He kept the front and back yards neat and trim. He painted the front shutters Mom's desired shade of pink. He even installed a home plate in the backyard so I could pretend to be a baseball player.

But the centerpiece of the backyard was his barbecue grill. At some point during my grade-school years in the late 1960s, Dad upgraded from an old-school metal grill on wheels to a permanently installed grill, landscaped with rocks around the base, next to the sour apple tree. It was relatively modest compared to the multilevel grillmaster stations often found on decks nowadays. The grill itself wasn't much bigger than the old one, but it was mounted on a pedestal and ensconced in a cast-iron shell that survived every Cleveland winter. It was the first time I'd ever seen a barbecue grill given pride of place as a backyard fixture. It made perfect sense, because Dad loved to barbecue.

Steaks were his specialty. I have no idea what prep work went into getting them grill-ready. All I know is that they came off the grill consistently tender and juicy, somehow looking and tasting fuller than steaks from our kitchen oven. He didn't overdo it with the sauce, always just enough to bring out the flavor of the meat. He had his way with a slab of ribs, too, but he had competition in that regard.

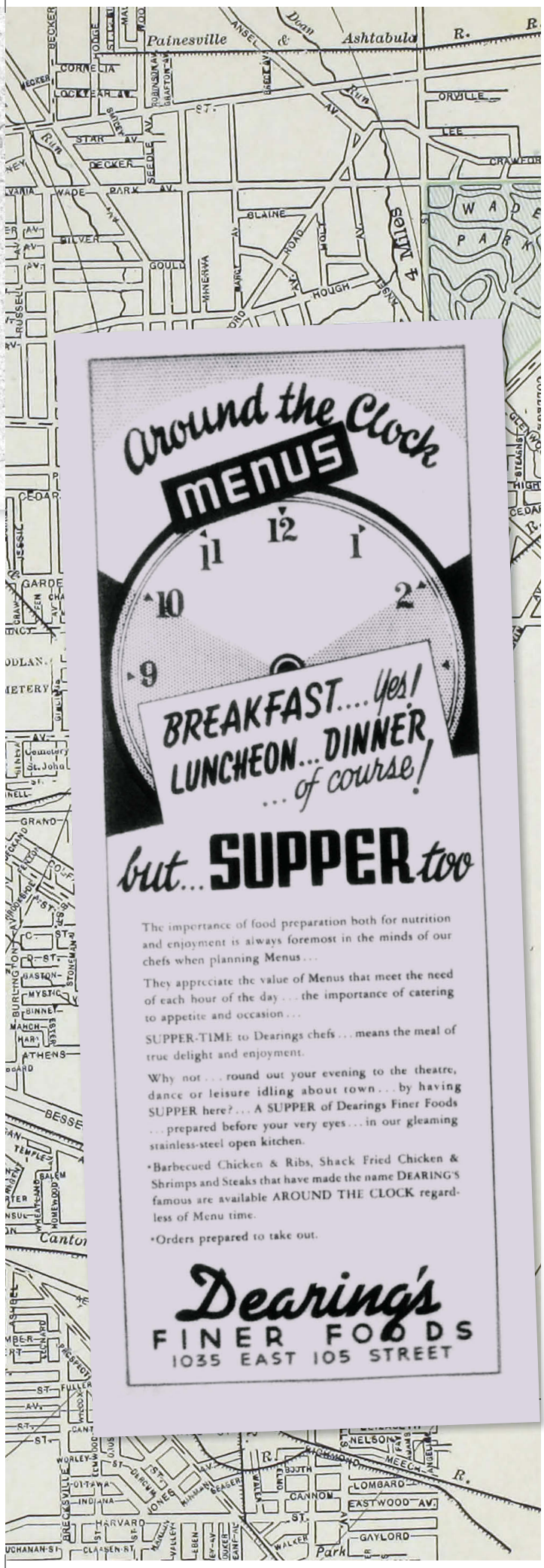
On the next block, just past the Citgo gas station, there was a small, square, white building with a hand-painted sign and room for a few cars to park in front. This was Whitmore's, my introduction to the world of retail barbecue. Whitmore's ribs were meatier and had a heavier taste than Dad's, and the sauce was redder and more plentiful. They were a different kind of delicious. The fries struck a keen midpoint between shoestrings and steak fries, with just enough substance and seasoning to compliment both the ribs and the sauce. Mom liked Dad's ribs better, but he fired up the grill only on those Sundays he felt inclined, and Whitmore's was open seven days a week.

Although my family had moved around a lot prior to my coming along, the Lee-Harvard part of town where they'd landed—as one of the first Black families to move there—was the only neighborhood I knew as a kid. Whitmore's was just part of the landscape to me, the natural order of things, like the A&P and Pick-N-Pay supermarkets in the shopping center down the street. But Whitmore's and Hot Sauce Williams, another barbecue joint in the neighborhood, meant something entirely different to Mom. When she'd get to telling me about the good old days, she'd mention places like these, and streets like Cedar and Central Avenues, which were nowhere near where we lived.

I DIDN'T REALIZE IT AT THE TIME, BUT I WAS BEGINNING TO LEARN A LESSON ABOUT FOOD AND THE THINGS IT COULD SUMMON: MY CITY'S PAST, MY BIRTHRIGHT AS A BLACK CLEVELANDER, AND EVEN HOW MY PARENTS LIVED BEFORE I SHOWED UP.

She'd rhapsodize about those eateries of yore. "That was *good* eatin'," she'd say, stretching out the "good" for an extra vowel or two. She'd talk

Map: Adobe Stock; Dearing's advertisement: *The 12 Counts Year Book 1947*, courtesy of the author



about the nightclubs of her young adulthood, including the one where she met Dad, and how much fun she had back then. And then she'd lament that I had no way of knowing just how special those times were.

The reminiscing ramped up when a Dearing's restaurant and party center opened in a vacant building across from Whitmore's. Mom went on and on about their chicken wings (which, frankly, I never much cared for), and how big a deal they were back in the day. But the Dearing's she knew—on East 105th Street in the Glenville neighborhood—was from some other dimension, as far as I could tell.

Had not Mom fired up the wayback machine, I might not have known about any of this. We didn't live anywhere near the spots she raved about, and we had no reason to venture toward them. We didn't have family or friends there; we didn't worship there; we didn't shop or dine there. Why would we? Everything we needed was a short drive away, within minutes of my childhood home.

I didn't realize it at the time, but I was beginning to learn a lesson about food and the things it could summon: my city's past, my birthright as a Black Clevelander, and even how my parents lived before I showed up.

As Black Cleveland grew in the 1920s and '30s, with Great Migration newcomers expanding by multiples the community that already existed, a vibrant economic and social structure took hold. This was in part because Blacks were redlined into subsets of the city's sprawling East Side, mostly between the downtown business district and the University Circle cultural neighborhood. Within those confines, they created a universe. Since Blacks weren't always allowed to patronize businesses in white-dominant areas, they built their own on the East Side. Everything Black folk might need, from radio repair to a realtor, was available in the 'hood, and often from more than one source. In that respect, Black Cleveland was similar to Black Chicago, Black Detroit, and pretty much every urban area where Black people sought opportunity.

There were also Black social clubs: groups of compadres who would rent out a nightclub or banquet hall to throw a party. Some weren't much more than a close-knit friend circle, but one


THE 12 Counts SOCIAL CLUB
TRUSTEES and STAFF
FREDERICK D. GRAIR
MERRITT N. STEPP
JACK L. OLIVER
TOYCE M. ANDERSON
CAESAR A. DAMERON
MORRIS E. MORGAN
MATTIE BELLE TUBBS
KATHERINE BOYD
MARY MUMPHREY

EVERYTHING BLACK FOLK MIGHT NEED, FROM RADIO REPAIR TO A REALTOR, WAS AVAILABLE IN THE 'HOOD, AND OFTEN FROM MORE THAN ONE SOURCE. IN THAT RESPECT, BLACK CLEVELAND WAS SIMILAR TO BLACK CHICAGO, BLACK DETROIT, AND PRETTY MUCH EVERY URBAN AREA WHERE BLACK PEOPLE SOUGHT OPPORTUNITY.

club, the 12 Counts, went a step further. Known for their debonair style and high-class events, they made their name in the late 1930s and '40s, They made the leap from informal gatherings to established businesses, holding down a series of addresses along Cedar Avenue, the main entertainment strip of the East Side back then. Their parties were so meticulously planned, they even filmed them to show at subsequent events, so folks who missed out could get caught up.

The Counts were more than just party-throwers who could also make a buck. They were community-minded brothas as well, and took pains to champion and support their fellow entrepreneurs. In 1947, at their peak, they published their annual yearbook as a "Better Business Issue" that showcased every Black retailer and service provider who chose to take out an ad.

"It is symbolic of the progress and modern methods of our businesses to note that 94 ½% are aware of the wisdom of advertising," managing editor J. L. Oliver and executive editor F. D. Grair wrote in the introduction. "Of the 273 businesses contacted, 258 were pleased to accept this opportunity to better acquaint Cleveland citizens with the Negro business and professional world. We hope the other 5 ½% will soon become equally as enterprising."

That enterprising majority represented the gamut of products and services available within Cleveland's Black community of the day. On page 20 are small advertisements for, among others, a law firm, an accounting firm, a hardware store, and a coin-operated machine proprietor. The full-page ad on page 71 touts Carver Appliance Company, "complete electric kitchen outfitters." Throughout the rest of the book are ads for auto body shops, hairdressers and barbers, photo studios, bicycle shops, hotels, and florists. There are nightclubs, like Club Ron-Day-Voo ("The House of Swing") on Cedar Avenue and Little Harlem Tavern ("It Jumps All the Time") on Central. There is even a Black-owned farm and horseback riding academy out in the suburbs. Between the ads are short articles extolling the virtue and achievements of Black Clevelanders, including the 12 Counts themselves.

In 1997, my wife and I worked on a fiftieth-anniversary reprint of this publication. The entrepreneurial range and vitality (as well as the production values) exhibited throughout those pages amazed us then—and they still do. Sadly, virtually all of those business are long gone. So, to the best of our knowledge, are any surviving Counts. By the time of their last gasp in the 1980s, life had irrevocably changed. The patronage of their heyday had thinned beyond rebirth; Black people socialized in different ways and in other parts of town; and corporate interests sought to seize what they suddenly considered valuable real estate on the East Side.

But that doesn't mean there was no connection between the Cleveland of my parents' young adulthood, depicted in its heyday in the 12 Counts yearbook, and the Cleveland of my own childhood. I didn't notice it while working on the reprint, but now I do: Inside that 1947 yearbook are two ads that linked my parents' past to mine.

Page 57 sports a full-page ad featuring a beaming pitmaster and slab upon slab of ribs. It's for Hot Sauce Williams—"Featuring Ribs and Shoulder, Golden Brown, Mellow and Cooked to the Bone"—and the weekly radio show he sponsored. Years later, a Hot Sauce Williams set up shop in my neighborhood, miles from the East 49th Street location in the yearbook.

And on page 103, a half-page notice with post–Art Deco graphics invites readers to not only breakfast, luncheon, and dinner, "but Supper too": "Why not...round out your evening to the theatre, dance or leisure idling about town...by having SUPPER here? ...A SUPPER of Dearing's

The 12 Counts Year Book 1947, courtesy of the author

Finer Foods...prepared before your very eyes... in our gleaming stainless-steel open kitchen."

I remembered Mom invoking the name Dearing's with reverence when one opened down the street from us in the 1960s. Here was proof that Dearing's wasn't just another chicken shack. It was part of Cleveland history, and so was Hot Sauce Williams. Years after their respective foundings, their names still carried currency. They were places that mattered to the Black lives of their times, and would continue to mean something a generation later. Growing up, I did not appreciate how a take-out joint could become a cultural institution.

The stories of Dearing's, Whitmore's, and Hot Sauce Williams reach farther back than I knew as a kid. Not surprisingly, they each contain strains of time-worn American tales: rags-to-riches sagas, family legacies, and the vicissitudes of the restaurant business.

Let's begin with Ulysses S. Dearing, born in 1903 in Washington, Pennsylvania, in the Allegheny foothills. As a teen he worked in the local steel mills, then made his way to Pittsburgh. There, he scraped together enough money to open a restaurant and hotel, but it was destroyed by a flood.

He eventually lit out for Cleveland, getting off the bus with about a dollar in change to his name, which he promptly left on the sidewalk. (According to legend, he did so because he figured someone could use that money more than he could.) After gigs as a short order cook, he became manager of the Cedar Gardens nightclub, one of the most popular in town.

There, he perfected his fried chicken recipe, and by 1946, he'd opened his first restaurant in Cleveland, the location featured in the 12 Counts yearbook (in a neighborhood soon to flip from white to Black). That made him the first Black owner of a sit-down restaurant in Cleveland—other Black-owned eateries of the day, apparently, were either take-out-only or had only modest seating space.

Eventually, the Dearing's chain stretched to six locations, the one in my neighborhood being the last outpost to open in 1969. It even had a banquet room for special events. By then, according to a 1972 blurb in *Ebony* which featured his recipe for chicken stew with cornbread dumplings, Dearing was frying 5,000 chickens a week.

But at the time of Ulysses Dearing's death in 1984, only one Dearing's was still in business. The

Map: Adobe Stock; Advertisements: *The 12 Counts Year Book 1947*, courtesy of the author

HOT SAUCE WILLIAMS

WORLD'S BEST BAR-B-Q

FEATURING RIBS AND SHOULDER, GOLDEN BROWN, MELLOW AND COOKED TO THE BONE

★

HOT SAUCE WILLIAMS TIME

Each Saturday Afternoon at 5:30 P. M.
Over Radio Station WJW

STARRING

Gay Crosse and His Mercury Recording Orchestra

OPEN 3:00 P. M. to 5:00 A. M.

Central Ave. at East 49th St. EN. 9828

founder had no desire to impose the hardships of the business upon his heirs. There is now a massive church at the original location's address; it would be nice if somebody erected a historical marker alluding to what once was there. Had not Jaya Saxena referenced that *Ebony* piece in her 2016 book, *The Book of Lost Recipes: The Best Signature Dishes from Historic Restaurants Rediscovered*, present-day and future Clevelanders would have scant awareness of Dearing's pride of place in their Black culinary and entrepreneurial history.

The story of Hot Sauce Williams is equally fascinating. For starters, just as blues music has two separate harmonica legends who went by Sonny Boy Williamson, so, too, does Cleveland barbecue history claim two separate Hot Sauce Williamses. The Hot Sauce Williams featured in the 12 Counts yearbook (Hot Sauce Williams I, for our purposes) was Eugene Williams, born in Louisiana in 1901. During the Great Migration, he made his way from New Orleans to Memphis, then Chicago, and, in 1923, to Cleveland. There, he opened a fish stand and later expanded to barbecue, a craft he had learned from his father. In the midst of the Great Depression, he bought the rights to a space in the heart of the East Side, and all of a sudden he was a businessman.

That business took off, thanks in no small part to Williams' secret sauce, based on herbs and recipes he learned in New Orleans (first, as a youth, and later, on his annual trips back home for Mardi Gras). He was featured in *Ebony* years before Dearing, and Louis Armstrong once bought 300 boxes of ribs at a single order, according to *Texas Monthly*. Business was so good that Williams bought land in the suburbs to raise his own hogs and expanded to Detroit and Pittsburgh. On days off, he parked his Cadillac on the shores of Lake Erie and fished from the front seat.

The good times didn't last, though. Williams suffered his first stroke in 1954, lost the business by 1958, and passed away shortly thereafter.

Hot Sauce Williams II, the one I actually remember, was founded in Cleveland in 1964 by five Mississippi-born brothers: Lemaud, Alonzo, James, William, and Herbert Williams. Such was the quality of their ribs that their customers started calling the newcomers' establishment Hot Sauce Williams, too. Not wanting to throw away found name recognition, the brothers allowed the name to stick (after reaching some sort of financial arrangement with the survivors of Hot Sauce Williams I).

Hot Sauce Williams II also expanded, opening various other spots across the East Side and, in the early 1970s, moving into the neighborhood where I lived. I was always partial to their shoulder dinners, which I suspect might be a uniquely Cleveland nomenclature since folks elsewhere call it pulled pork. But that location, like the Dearing's of my youth, seems to be closed; the whole operation appeared to be running on fumes by the time the last of the Williams brothers, Herbert, died in 2019. At the time of his death, the existence of the previous Hot Sauce Williams was barely reported.

But Whitmore's, the first barbecue place of my youth, is still around, with two locations not far from where I grew up. Virgil Whitmore Sr. opened his first restaurant in 1942, quickly becoming known for his special sauce. (That sauce is still a Whitmore family secret, but my taste buds remember a rich, tangy concoction with just a hint of sweetness). He soon expanded throughout the city and beyond, to Cincinnati and even Honolulu.

Whitmore died in 1983, but the business remains in the family. His granddaughter Vanessa even harbored notions of selling Whitmore's sauce online at one point. The fact that she and her brothers are still involved makes Whitmore's something of a rarity—a third-generation, Black-owned family business. That such a legacy belongs to a take-out spot, not a newspaper or an insurance company or an auto dealership, speaks as much to that individual family's dedication and resilience as to the vagaries Black businesses of

WHILE DEARING'S WINGS, HOT SAUCE'S SHOULDER, AND WHITMORE'S RIBS WERE JUST FOOD TO ME, THEY WERE CONNECTIVE TISSUE TO MY PARENTS, KEEPING THEM AT LEAST A LITTLE IN TOUCH WITH A TIME AND PLACE ALREADY RECEDING INTO HAZE.

The 12 Counts Year Book 1947, courtesy of the author

every stripe have suffered over the years.

To this day, Whitmore's is still known not only for their ribs, but also their Polish Boys. The official Cleveland sandwich, a Polish Boy is a Polish sausage, topped with French fries, coleslaw, and barbecue sauce, on a bun (a Polish Girl adds shoulder to the mix). You can get the authentic version only in its birthplace. As with Chicago's Italian Beef or the Philly Cheesesteak, other places that put their own spin on the Polish Boy invariably do more harm than good.

No one can say who actually invented it, though. It has been a Cleveland barbecue staple since the 1970s, but neither Whitmore's grandchildren nor Lemaud Williams' widow could say for certain, when *Cleveland Magazine* asked in 2019, that they had birthed it. Most likely, they concurred, some anonymous food vendor on some anonymous street had the idea, and it took off from there. No matter; your next visit to Cleveland is incomplete without a venture to Whitmore's or another local spot (the less fancy, the better) to sample this gorgeous, sloppy meal-on-a-bun. And when you take that first delicious bite, you'll be biting into an extension of Black Cleveland's cultural heritage.

My parents were both born and raised in Cleveland—Mom often ridiculed the Migration newcomers, calling them "'Bamas." They married not long after World War II and lived in various places across the East Side before they bought into Lee-Harvard in 1963. Prior to then, their social life—the nightclubs they frequented, the places they dined—was proscribed by Cleveland's segregation. Black businesses established themselves in proximity to where Black people were allowed to live. It's the classic story of segregation: Folks made a way where there was no way, loving what they had while knowing full well what they didn't.

But the vast majority of those establishments didn't keep those Black consumers who could afford to move into other parts of town, where they could have their own piece of the pie. In the fullness of time, new entrepreneurs—new record stores, new attorneys, and so on—emerged to meet their needs without their having to revisit their old stomping grounds, which were rapidly declining, due partly to a lack of business from former customers like my parents. (Government disinterest and corporate disinvestment also played a role, but that's a longer story.)

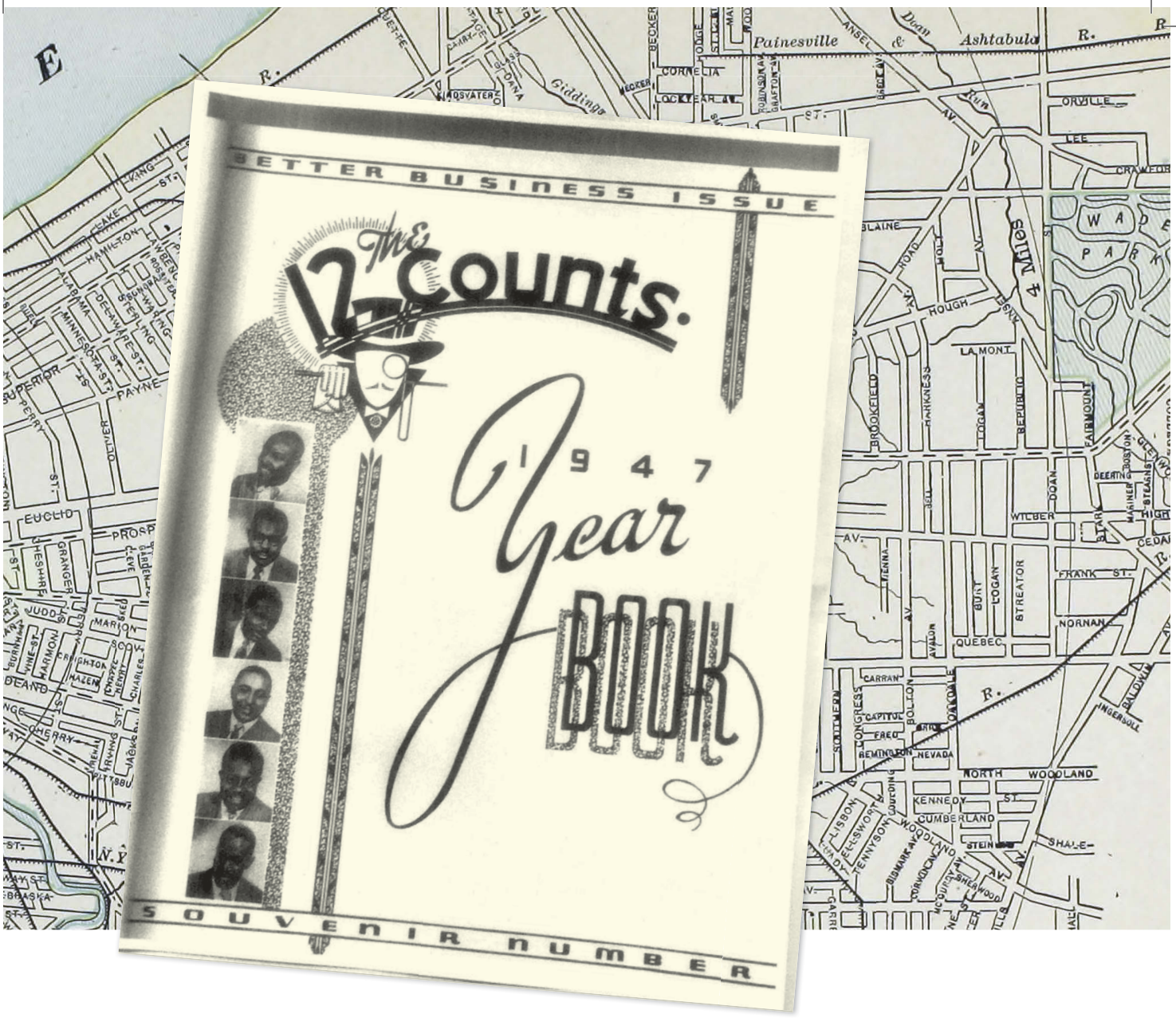
Yet old-school barbecue and take-out restaurants often followed their longtime customers, establishing satellite locations in the expanding Black territory. And of all the businesses my parents could have hearkened back to—indeed, every last one of them in that 12 Counts yearbook—it was the restaurants and take-out joints they remembered and regaled.

That's got to do with the centrality of good food to enjoying life, it seems to me. When we think of Black folk and food, we tend to think of home-cooked holiday feasts, at least as the popular imagination would have us: plates upon plates of deep-red roasts, chickens both fried and baked, collard greens, mac and cheese, biscuits, pies, and all the fixings. But, according to the stories my parents told, food from a popular take-out joint or the fanciest restaurant in the Black part of town could be just as soulful—and memorable—as an endless Sunday banquet. Those Black-owned restaurants, take-out joints, and nightclubs represented happy moments, flush paydays, hot nights on the town. But it doesn't end there.

That Dearing's, Hot Sauce Williams, and Whitmore's weren't just places to get a quick meal, but establishments spoken of like community pillars—especially when other well-known Black businesses weren't—speaks to the value they added to Black life in a difficult time. Of course the food was good, but it wasn't just that. They helped engender comfort and community for people otherwise occupied with making a way out of no way. It speaks to the power of food to evoke not just immediate satisfaction, but lasting cultural memory.

Although such lofty ideals weren't likely top-of-mind for the founders, they're part of why we remember them still. Their legacy relates to their wherewithal to expand, and extend those feelings of comfort and community across disparate parts of town (and the nation), and succeeding generations, even as the Black community took on tenors and locations that weren't even a pipe dream when they started.

So while Dearing's wings, Hot Sauce's shoulder, and Whitmore's ribs were just food to me, they were connective tissue to my parents, keeping them at least a little in touch with a time and place already receding into haze. They would tell their back-when stories, with something



MAP: Adobe Stock; *The 12 Counts Year Book 1947*, courtesy of the author

between wistfulness and boastfulness that I would never experience such good times for myself, that I'd never know how unified and vibrant being Black in Cleveland once felt. I suspect that tissue helped make the eating so good for Mom and her memories.

And true, I couldn't experience the Cleveland they knew. As a child of integration, there's no way I could know about having a whole world—its services, its sounds, its savory tastes—inside one defined space, no matter why it was so defined. Mom's storytelling always made me feel like I'd missed out on something special, intangible, irretrievable.

But I have my own tales of young adult life in Cleveland to tell, adventures at nightclubs and venues in parts of town my parents could never have dared to explore. And because those barbecue joints set up shop where the Black community had expanded, where my parents settled down and where I grew up, they're part of my stories, too.

I live just outside Chicago now, and I've found several barbecue and wing joints to my liking here. But, through no fault of their own, they're not the same as the ones back home. So the next time I'm back in Cleveland, I'll make it my business to swing by Whitmore's for a heaping box of memories, dripping with tangy sauce.

Mark V. Reynolds is a Chicago-based writer who explores the intersection of history, race, and culture. He wrote extensively about Black art and life for Popmatters *and received an Ohio Society of Professional Journalists* award in 2005.

SNOW FALLING ON COLLARDS

In Minnesota, one newcomer offers another a taste of home.

BY ROSALIND BENTLEY

WHY IN GOD'S NAME I MOVED FROM FLORIDA to Minnesota, I will never fully understand. I am deeply Southern, born and bred in Florida. But I'm not from tropical Florida—or, as we used to call it back in the day, "The Bottom": palm trees, oranges, and bougainvillea. I'm from moss-draped, dirt-road, Big Bend Florida, more akin to Georgia and Alabama than Miami and Key West. I am okra and Gulf Coast oysters, peanuts and field peas, mullet and grits, and collard greens with threads of ham hock swirling in potlikker.

How did I land 1,115 miles north, trading sand for snow and sunburn for frostbite in the land of ten thousand lakes? The land of lutefisk and little smokies—those delightful mini hot dogs floating in barbecue sauce in a crockpot set on low. The land of "hotdish," a catch-all name for the baked concoctions I grew up calling casseroles. (I soon learned that if the hotdish was topped with tater tots, I was all in.)

By the time I moved to the Twin Cities, in the late 1980s, the Great Migration was over. It began around 1910, and when it ended, around 1970, six million of us Black folks had left the South for points north, west and Midwest. Mechanization and pesticides—meant to control and manage crops—and racism—meant to control and manage Black folks who picked the crops—drove us away in search of better lives.

When I left home for Minnesota, the South was changing in critical ways. Black Southerners were gaining political power, if not economic equity, in larger cities, especially Atlanta. The stream was steady: Black people were returning to the South, back to our homeland, at least on these shores.

Yet I left. Joined a trickle of Southern migrants heading north. Many of us were graduates of HBCUs with degrees in business, engineering, journalism, or pharmacy. We were recruited for corporate jobs with companies that, a generation before mine, saw no need for Black folks in secretarial pools, let alone C-suites. The Twin Cities offered a better-paying newspaper job than the one I had in Tallahassee and a skyline of skyscrapers rather than live oaks. I planned to stay in Minnesota for five years, then move on to bigger and better things.

One Saturday morning ten years later, I walked down the concrete aisles of the Minneapolis Farmers Market, alone. It was fall, overcast and gray. The air promised snow and ice. There I was, wrapped in down, wandering past table after

Illustrations by Jade Johnson


JADE JOHNSON

table of fresh-baked breads, bison jerky, bags of wild rice: everything a hardy Minnesotan would want in her pantry.

Though I could say the most Minnesotan of phrases with ease and appropriate accent by then ("Oooh, fur sure!" and "You betcha!"), in my heart, I was not a Minnesotan. I was a Black woman from the backcountry of north Florida. For me, the truest expression of that identity was on a plate.

But okra in Twin Cities grocery stores was always old and hard. Oysters had to be flown in. Other than the old VFW near Dale Street in St. Paul, where Black veterans went for bourbon and plates of succulent oxtails and gravy, there was really only one soul food restaurant in Minneapolis or St. Paul. I never could make my peace with their mac and cheese. Even so, I ate it. In a state where Black people were 2 percent of the state's population, you counted yourself lucky if there was someplace other than your own kitchen serving stewed cabbage and cornbread.

BACK THEN, IN THE 1990S, Hmong people comprised a similarly tiny sliver of Minnesota's population. Pushed from China over a millenium, by the nineteenth century they had settled in the mountainous areas of Southeast Asia—many in the northern region of Laos, near that country's border with Vietnam. As an ethnic minority, they faced discrimination.

In the early 1960s, the United States government believed that Communism threatened to march through Vietnam, across Southeast Asia, and eventually to India if it was not stopped before it overtook Laos.

The world focused on the Vietnam War. But in northern Laos, the CIA began a clandestine

offensive known as "The Secret War." It was dubbed "secret," because US military troops weren't deployed in Laos. Instead, the CIA trained and armed Hmong men and boys. Eventually, this civilian army of fathers, brothers, uncles, and sons—turned almost overnight into guerilla fighters and child soldiers—numbered more than 30,000.

The Secret War lasted a decade. Thousands of Hmong were killed in action or died in villages trying to survive. When it was over, and Communism was not vanquished, Hmong that fought with the U.S. military, along with their families, became the targets of an attempted genocide.

The United States government evacuated hundreds of Hmong veterans and their families. It left behind tens of thousands. Of those who remained, many attempted the treacherous journey across the Mekong River into Thailand, where they settled in refugee camps. There, in squalor and depravation, Hmong refugees languished for years.

How did Minnesota figure into this? The state had a robust social-service and resettlement network, lead largely by the Lutheran Church. Minnesota received the second-largest number of Hmong refugees to the United States, after California. The first Hmong family arrived in Minnesota in 1975. Over the next twenty-five years, more than 40,000 people followed. In terms of physical distance, they traveled at least five times farther than I did. Yet—given the centuries of forced displacement, discrimination, and disproportionate poverty our peoples have faced—I must consider just how yawning the gap between our histories really is.

Northern Laos is mostly tropical, with a growing season that lasts nearly all year. The agricultural traditions of Hmong communities reach back thousands of years. Drawing on that knowledge and skill was one of the early ways they laid claim to their new home in the Upper Midwest. They adapted to the shorter growing season. Small community gardens sprang up, then exurban farms. Soon that bounty flooded the city's farmers' markets. In the decades that followed, Minnesota Hmong farmers would generate more than $250 million in annual sales of produce, based on some estimates. The impact on Minnesotans' palates was significant, as well: Larb and purple sticky rice eventually became part of the state's culinary canon.

Those early years on the tundra were hard, though. The language barrier was steep. Elders complained that the American-born generation neglected the old ways. And the war left scars. Those of the mind were hardest to heal. Winter lasted nearly nine months. When you're far away from all you know, the cold can amplify your loneliness.

Maybe that's why I was feeling so sorry for myself that chilly Saturday morning at the Minneapolis Farmers Market. Meandering from table to table, glancing at produce, I heard someone call out, "I have collards for yooou!"

I looked up, and an older Hmong gentleman smiled and beckoned me toward his table. I stared at him, thinking, *Wait a minute. The one Black person you see, and you assume I want collard greens? For real? I mean, what kind of culinary racial profiling is this right here?*

I had my eye-roll locked and was set to dramatically suck my teeth, but I stopped short. He was an elder, probably old enough to be my grandfather. His smile was genuine and disarming. It was as though he'd been saving this leafy prize of his labor and talent for someone who would appreciate it.

My face softened. I laughed at myself under my breath and walked over to his table. His collards were pretty. The leaves weren't too big; the color was right. As my Aunt Mable taught me back home in Florida, collards are best picked after a cool night. They're more tender that way.

I gathered bunches. The farmer held open a bag. I stuffed them in and left nary a leaf. As I paid, he thanked me and told me to come back. Clearly, I had not been his first Black customer.

A dear friend of mine does not believe that breaking bread together builds bridges. The act of sharing a meal may fill bellies, but it won't solve problems, he insists. Perhaps he is correct. Perhaps it is a platitude we should retire. But on that day at the market, that gentleman and I were both trying to make our way in a place that was not ours. Collard greens, fresh with dew, helped us—if only for a few moments—walk that road together. In their own way, perhaps greens made us feel that we belonged; made us believe that in a place so white, so frigid, so foreign, we could be home.

Rosalind Bentley is Gravy*'s deputy editor and the interim director of the MFA program in narrative nonfiction at the University of Georgia. This story is adapted from "Snow Falling on Collards: Finding Our Way Home," a presentation given at La Cocina's Voices From the Kitchen storytelling event in November 2019 in San Francisco.*

A TENDER LEGACY OF GREEN BEANS

Simple rituals forge memories and connection across generations.

BY TARA BETTS

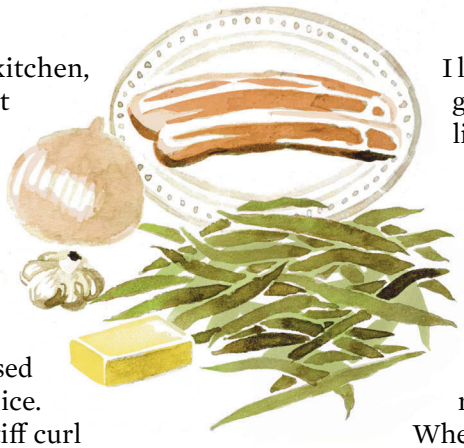
MARCH 2020. IT WAS ABOUT ONE WEEK after city officials issued the shelter-in-place order in Chicago, and I wasn't sure what my life (or my livelihood) would look like. As a Midwestern girl who did not grow up in the city, I automatically started thinking about what would I need in order to be able to eat in the long term. I bought nut butters, rice, beans, yeast, flour, canned goods, seeds, potting soil, and vegetables, both fresh and frozen.

I had stocked up, and I had already declared a very tight bubble of people as my safety net. Jennifer and her then-seven-year-old son, Evan, were in this tight bubble. Since Evan calls me Auntie Tara, I was happy to watch him one night while Jennifer tended to her last errands before we were all sealed into our homes. Evan is giggly with eyes like bright, brown chestnuts. That evening, he played one of the many games that he's always introducing me to on his iPad, while I completed a more time-tested task: snapping green beans.

That simple chore reminded me of childhood, especially being in my grandmother's orange kitchen in Kankakee, Illinois. The light that shone through the huge kitchen window danced past the white and orange drapes and illuminated the tile's orange marbled pattern. My grandmother and I ate and laughed together around her glass-topped table. We'd cover the table with newspaper to enjoy watermelon there, and it also served as a theater—we watched many episodes of *Wheel of Fortune* together and witnessed the crowning of the first Black Miss America, Vanessa Williams, there.

My grandmother Charmaine, frequently called "Charm," was raised in Tennessee. She was tall and brown-skinned, with a round birthmark on her cheek that reminded me of Marilyn Monroe's beauty spot. When she spoke, she turned her long fingers to make a point. Her laugh was a full cackle, and I loved making my grandmother laugh. I don't know how she came to be in Illinois. She didn't talk much about Tennessee, where she and my great-uncle L.D. grew up. I wondered if she thought her young granddaughter might not care, but I learned a great deal from her, including a serious respect for food. I learned to shell peas, shuck corn, and snap the ends off green beans at her kitchen table. I remember how the tough stems made the undersides of my thumbnails sore, and I thought I'd never get to the bottom of the basket, but I did. Pleasing my grandmother with little tasks like this made me happy and proud. Then we would make dinner together and eat with my grandfather.

Illustrations by Delphine Lee



That night in my Chicago kitchen, I told Evan how I used to sit with my grandma at a table like this. When I asked him if he wanted to help me snap green beans, he simply asked, "Why would I wanna do that?" I imagine many kids would have said the same thing. His young ears might have missed the twinge of sadness in my voice. He wasn't familiar with the stiff curl of stem; the skinny little points like leaf tips; the tiny, woody, dark circles before stems become beans snapped off to discover the glistening deep green inside.

At first, I felt a little hurt that he didn't understand how food could be precious like that, or how doing a simple, repetitive act could bring two people closer. I realized that I was asking a lot of my seven-year-old visitor, who often cooks with his mom at home, but it also made me think about why I was sad. I think it was because, that evening with Evan, I wanted to share the care that I experienced with my grandmother. I quietly kept snapping the ends off each bean, knowing that good food takes time. And I found myself thinking about how so many adults build memories with kids by going out to eat. Instead, the memories I made with my grandmother were domestic. Cooking at home with her meant that I grew up eating healthful foods. And just as importantly, it was also an expression of mutual love and care.

Many of us feel hampered by demands on our time and choose more convenient, processed food or have someone else we don't know make our food because we work so much. And so many of us are working so much, we don't have time to unpack and explain to younger people why certain things are important—access to fresh vegetables and other healthy foods. Landownership. Being responsible stewards of the environment. Sitting at my grandmother's kitchen table gave me time to listen and talk to her.

That night, I bottled my shock and disappointment that Evan didn't want to snap string beans with me. Maybe later he would. In the meantime, I let him be the bright-eyed, energetic boy he is, jumping around like a junior parkour master.

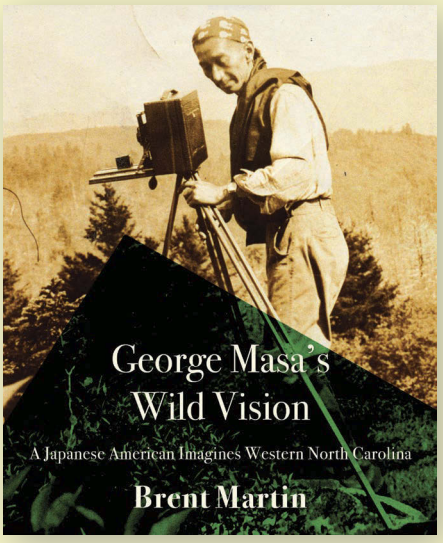
There are so many ways to fill the gaps now. I hope I can learn to do a better job of sharing with my little nephew Evan and my other young friends. There's so much I want to pass on about Black people's resourcefulness and thriving. When I was a kid, I had my grandmother's cooking, my grandparents' tavern full of Black people, ripe with the sounds of a jukebox. I had rib-tip shacks, and even moments like watching *Eyes on the Prize*. Today, Evan and his peers can see so many more representations of Black foodways. I can share Black cookbooks, or eventually watch *High on the Hog* and *Eyes on the Prize: Hallowed Ground* with him. Maybe I can tell him the little-told story of Dr. Alvenia Fulton, a Black woman who cowrote a vegan cookbook with the comedian Dick Gregory and opened Fultonia Health Food Center, the first health food store and vegetarian restaurant on Chicago's South Side.

Thankfully, we're also at a point where Black communities are staking their claim as vegans and vegetarians. We can prepare vegan meals inspired by the vegetables that formed the foundation of soul food and, I hope, practice healthier eating overall. In doing so, we continue a tradition that was often based on the scraps of slavery and poverty, but also built from a deep legacy of cultivating the land. We follow in the footsteps of expert foragers, herbalists, and midwives who learned how to care for our community when no one else would.

My grandmother has been gone for years now, and no one knows where her cookbook went. I wish I could hold that cookbook, with its red and white cover, and study the recipes clipped from newspapers and tucked between its pages. Nevertheless, she passed her love of cooking on to my brother Marcel and me. The act of snapping green beans still soothes me. Making meals and putting hands on the beans ourselves is a love we can transfer, an act we can remember long after the teachers have moved on to other planes.

Dr. Tara Betts, an editor, artist, and educator, is the author of three poetry collections: Break the Habit, Arc & Hue, *and* Refuse to Disappear. *A native of Kankakee, Illinois, she now lives in Chicago, where she is the Inaugural Poet for the People Practitioner Fellow at University of Chicago and founder of Whirlwind Learning Center.*

SUMMER RELEASES FROM HUB CITY PRESS



JUNE 21

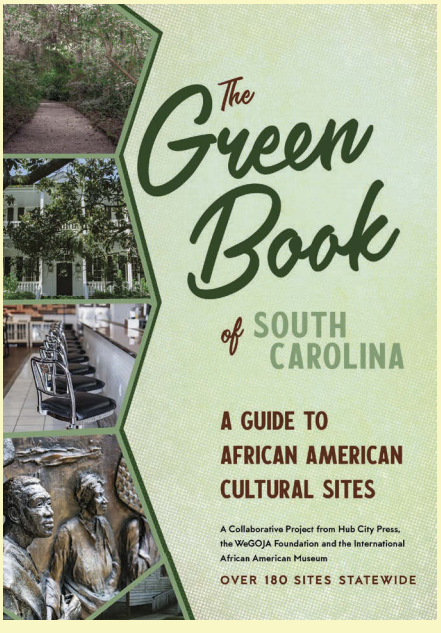
GEORGE MASA'S WILD VISION:

A JAPANESE IMMIGRANT IMAGINES WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

GEORGE MASA

"If I were making a personal top ten list of important Appalachian artists, writers, and musicians, I'd include—along with more well-known names like Doc Watson and Nikki Giovanni—photographer George Masa. —**Charles Frazier**, author of *Varina*

"Brent's book transcends time with creative insights and reflections on the natural world that honor George Masa's 'Wild Vision.'" —**Paul Bonesteel**



JULY 5

THE GREEN BOOK OF SOUTH CAROLINA

A GUIDE TO AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL SITES

The Green Book of South Carolina, compiled by the WeGOJA Foundation (on behalf of the SC African American Heritage Commission), is a first-of-its-kind travel guide to the most tourist-friendly destinations offering visitors avenues to discover intriguing African American history as they travel the state.

◊ More than 180 historic markers, structures, and landmarks for a diverse audience
◊ Includes popular sites as well as hidden gems
◊ Organized by region for easy travel planning and discovery. Includes suggested day trips for each region.
◊ Compact accessibly-priced book
◊ Beautiful full-color photography

ALSO FROM HUB CITY PRESS

HUBCITY.ORG/BOOKS
SPARTANBURG, SC

Founded in Spartanburg, South Carolina in 1995, Hub City Press, is the South's premier independent literary press. Focused on finding and spotlighting extraordinary new and unsung writers from the American South, our curated list champions diverse authors and books that don't fit into the commercial publishing landscape. Hub City is interested in books with a strong sense of place and is committed to introducing a diverse roster of lesser-heard Southern voices.

GREENS, ONCE REMOVED

A family recipe

BY MICHELLE S. JOHNSON

THE NEXT-TO-LAST TIME I SAW MY SISTER Martha, we cooked the meal we'd been planning for months. My older sister Donna and I left Kalamazoo, Michigan, for Martha's home in Hobart, Indiana. We'd packed dried black beans, all my seasonings, and Donna's secret ingredients for her signature cornbread. This was my first road trip with "Big Queen," the name she adopted for my use these last couple of years. Between bites of our Creole takeout, we talked about family history.

Donna, Martha, and I share a father, yet we did not grow up together. Twenty-three years separated Donna, the eldest sister, from me, the youngest. We experienced three distinctly different versions of Roy Smithon Merricks, and, for "grown people's reasons," saw each other only intermittently when I was a small girl. We reunited in 1986, almost twenty years after my mother remarried and ten years after our father passed. Donna and I intensified our relationship as sister-historians, archivists, and friends, and saw Martha on two or three extended occasions during that time. We don't know why, but we lost touch with Martha for nearly thirty years after her mother passed.

When my nieces found me on social media in 2018, our relationships blossomed. We basked in discovering each other and ourselves. With Martha now back in the fold, our conversations often centered food, exploring shared tastes, preferences, and cooking techniques. My thirty-five-plus years as a vegetarian sparked many questions from my sisters, and I felt a keen desire to prove the flavor of my cuisine. My greens served as my proof that vegetarian greens slammed, and I liked showing them off.

The evening we arrived in Hobart, Martha shared the plans she'd coordinated for our feast the next day. My niece LaShanda and I would make a trip to an Ethiopian restaurant in Valparaiso to snag Martha's favorite sambusas; LaShanda would pick up fried chicken from Strack and Van Til; and Martha and Donna would each add their special cornbread to my beans and greens. We'd cap off Saturday evening with a sisters' pajama party at the hotel.

The next day, we executed most of Martha's plan. As I prepared the beans in Martha's kitchen, my niece LaDonna and her family arrived with a huge bunch of fresh greens for me from their urban garden in Merrillville. When cooking for others, I'm usually more restrained with salt and heat than when I'm cooking for myself, so I held back

Photos courtesy of the author

Entrepreneurial Black women opened their homes as tea rooms, frequently offering high-end dining experiences.

on the crushed red pepper that my father used in his greens. It's unclear if Donna refused to make her cornbread to keep her secret recipe, or if she simply deferred to the middle sister that day, but Martha proudly let us watch as she added creamed corn and finely diced jalapeños to her batter.

WHEN I WAS A CHILD and teen, my stepfather—or "second father," as I thought of him—demanded that I disremember my biological father. I privately recollected and cherished times spent with my biological father in Chicago, Kalamazoo, and at Paradise Lake in Cass County, Michigan. A jazz drummer and bass player, stylishly bespectacled, with a mustache and goatee framing his legendary smile, Roy Smithon Merrick's circuitous life coursed through Kansas City, Missouri; Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids, Michigan; Harlem, New York; and the South Side of Chicago. While my father moved frequently, Michigan remained home base for his mother, my grandmother Woods. She lived on two iconic Kalamazoo streets for twenty-six years.

Grandmother Woods was a source of mystery and fascination for me and my sisters. We have little information about her life between her youth as Annabelle Chaney in Natchez, Mississippi, and her arrival in Kalamazoo as a woman in her early thirties. Based on family stories, we know that she worked in Kansas City, my father's birthplace. She gave birth to him in 1916, at age fifteen. The two of them first appear in federal census documentation in 1930, living in Kalamazoo's Bottoms on Harrison Street, one of the main arteries of Black settlement west of the Kalamazoo River. Harrison Street extended through East North Street, another heavily Black corridor.

Sometime between 1930 and 1935, my grandmother and her lodger-turned-husband, Auzie Woods, purchased a large, two-story house on Krom Street, a short but culturally important vein of Black Northside Kalamazoo. Auzie paved for the city as an "asphalt man," while my grandmother cooked

long hours in kitchens, including in tea rooms.

Tea rooms were a national trend in the early-to-mid-twentieth century. Typically owned or run by women, they usually served lunch and light suppers in settings that ranged from homes to private clubs. Sometimes chefs cooked the food at home and brought the dishes to the tea room; other times, they fixed light sandwiches and small meals on site. Entrepreneurial Black women opened their homes as tea rooms, frequently offering high-end dining experiences.

In Kalamazoo, at least seven tea rooms emerged, starting as early as 1909. As with all the other places my grandmother worked, we don't know the name or type of establishment where she created meals, but we suspect it was white-owned. Black women operated and promoted tourist homes as close to Kalamazoo as Battle Creek, Three Rivers, Lawrence, and Grand Junction in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, but *The Green Book* shows no establishments in Kalamazoo.

While the specifics of what my grandmother cooked for patrons of tea rooms, hotels and private clubs are unknown, we know a great deal

FAR LEFT: The author with her father, Roy Smithon Merricks, circa 1965; THIS PAGE: The author (l) with her sisters Donna Alford (center) and Martha L. Johnson (foreground), 2018

about what she cooked at home. As a little boy in the 1950s, my father's cousin Malcolm, moved from Natchez with his parents to Grandmother Woods' Krom home. He remembers that my grandmother cooked greens regularly and recalls his father eating greens five days a week.

Donna remembers my grandmother's greens as the first she ever ate. That dinner stands out, some seventy years later, not only because of her initial exposure to greens, but also for the rare occasion of having steak as a child. She wonders if my grandmother brought the meat home from the private club where she worked as a cook.

Grandmother Woods' passing in 1956 was a turning point for all of us. Martha, her mother, and my father left New York and moved into my grandmother's house. Donna's meals with our father became sporadic—takeout from downtown restaurants like the Kalamazoo Fishery or hot dogs from the Coney spot, eaten at the house on Krom. Donna taught herself to cook greens when she married Lee, a Louisianian, in 1970. Her greens recipe—a mix of turnips, mustards, and mostly collards—shifted over time, but always included salt, pepper, and onion. Over the years, she cut back a little on bacon grease from the skillet. Later, she included turkey knuckles and sometimes a little jalapeño. She fondly remembers buying all types of greens soaked in salt water from a man who hailed from Okolona, Mississippi. Every summer, for decades, he drove his red truck stocked with vegetables around the Northside. Even with the vendor's soak, they required cleaning—and, Donna insists, "they were fresher and better if they had a little dirt on them."

Martha didn't like to talk about the past—digging in her history with my father and her mother was delicate and rare. Later in life, she preferred to share enthusiasm for her favorite television shows and the antics of her puppy, Titus. She delivered passionately detailed accounts of the foods she loved, which were often the same foods LaShanda tried to restrict. She'd relish the victory of getting to eat what she wanted. She was born in Harlem, New York, in 1943, while my father was pursuing his music career and driving a cab. By all accounts, his wife Mattie followed him to the clubs. Rearing Martha became the honor and blessing of her aunt in New Rochelle. That aunt passed around the same time as Grandmother Woods, and the family of three moved to Kalamazoo shortly thereafter. Martha fondly recalled our father's greens, flecked with red pepper flakes.

Because my grandmother passed before I was born, everything I know about her comes from conversations and primary sources. Luckily, my mother was a story gatherer who fervently wanted to me to know my family history. She never met my grandmother, but relayed my father's stories—that my grandmother was a fantastic professional cook and that my father learned from her. I don't remember my father's dishes at all. My mother said he made exceptional steak, and she vividly

recalled my father's greens, seasoned with ham hocks and, of course, a little crushed red pepper.

EIGHT MONTHS AFTER our sisters' reunion in Hobart, I received the call that Martha had passed away at home. I was on a road trip in Washington state. Before I caught my flight back to Kalamazoo, I comforted myself with Ethiopian food in Oakland, California. The grief borne of unasked questions still stings and surprises me. In all the conversations that we had about greens—her intense curiosity about my recipe and the liquid smoke I add—I never asked her how she made her own.

Almost a month after she passed, I posed that question to Martha's daughters via text message. LaShanda wrote, "She didn't use a recipe. She would soak the greens for an hour or so. She would cook them with smoke meat for hours. That's all I got, but they were delicious!" She sent a picture of Martha smiling in front of a grocery produce cooler piled close to two feet high with fresh collard greens. She's wearing her brown winter down jacket and matching baker boy cap. LaShanda took this snapshot as Martha shopped for Thanksgiving in Gary, Indiana, in 2016. I saved it, and it has become one of my favorite photos of her.

LaDonna texted, "I know she used pepper juice in them as well. She cooked them down for hours.... I love this," followed by two red heart emojis. And Shari, the oldest, offered, "I know she used smoked pork meat, but I use smoked turkey & pepper juice & minced garlic."

I've come to see greens as the tie that binds my sisters to me, and the three of us to our father. And greens remain at the heart of the family. Donna's husband raises them on the Louisiana family farmland he manages. LaDonna and her husband grew collards in their urban garden again this year. Kalamazoo's now-shuttered Fuel Vegetarian restaurant featured my greens, seasoned with heat and smoke, and my Pot Liquor Soup on their menu. Collards ground the economic development project I began on Kalamazoo's Eastside, just across the river from the Bottoms. This year, four hardy collard plants survived the Michigan winter. By June, they were still growing strong in last year's beds.

TOP: Produce from Ampersee Wellness Garden in Kalamazoo, MI, August 2021; BOTTTOM: Martha Johnson shops for greens in Gary, IN, November 2016

Michelle S. Johnson is a cofounder of the Institute of Public Scholarship in Kalamazoo, Michigan. She also supervises an urban garden and serves on the advisory board of the Black Midwest Initiative.

COME HERE AND WATCH

I've never been to Mississippi. But my grandparents made sure that it became part of who I am.

BY LYLETTA ROBINSON

Illustrations by Lindsey Bailey

"COME HERE AND WATCH."

That's what my mother would say. Nothing written down. Nothing measured. She taught my sister and me how to prepare a sweet potato pie by sight, smell, and taste. It's how she'd learned.

Despite my solidly Midwestern upbringing, the Mississippi in my family runs deep—which is ironic, since neither my mother, my sister, nor I have ever been there. When my maternal grandparents became a part of what is now known as the Great Migration, they ran north toward hope and opportunity and settled in Gary, Indiana. Once there, they started a family and raised my mother and my aunt. My grandfather worked at U.S. Steel and my grandmother was a domestic.

When I was younger, the stories of the South scared me—and Mississippi, in particular, terrified me. The lynchings. The sharecropping. The Klan. Emmett Till. I'd overheard the whispered conversations not meant for younger ears, about why someone had to leave in the dead of night. Those whispers contradicted the stories my grandparents shared about the beauty of a sunrise over a favorite creek or the specialness of Sunday dinner with family after church. My grandparents left for reasons I'll never know and can now only speculate, but I suspect that those reasons were to literally save their own lives. Or, perhaps, factory work in a Gary steel mill for my grandfather was preferable to back-breaking field labor. Nonetheless, the full and true story of why they left was buried with them. What remains are my memories of flour-sack mattresses stuffed with chicken feathers, hiding money in coffee cans, kerosene lamps providing light during a storm, and the horrible taste of Black Draught laxative.

> What nourishes your body when you're younger nourishes your spirit when you're older.

Both of my grandparents were born before 1910. When they were growing up, their families grew or hunted most of what they ate. That legacy continued once they arrived in Gary. One of my most vivid childhood memories was watching my grandparents prepare squirrels to cook after my grandfather returned from hunting in unincorporated areas on the outskirts of Gary.

But try to talk about sustenance to a six-year-old who is bawling her eyes out because she thinks her grandfather is hurting a squirrel as he skins it. To me, meat was something you got at a grocery store, wrapped in plastic on a Styrofoam tray, not on a string with other small game to be eaten for dinner. Despite my tears, my grandfather skinned and dressed his catches. After the animals had been properly dressed, my grandmother brined them in a saltwater bath as the first of many steps before they wound up in a simmering pot. I can't recall if those squirrels became part of a stew or some other dish. I was so jarred by the experience that I knew I wouldn't eat that meal. Still, I learned a deep lesson: Work with what you have, and you can elevate humble and simple fare to life-affirming cuisine.

The complexity of our Mississippi ties seemed to arise from my grandparents' longing for the familiar cadence of Amory and Houlka (their hometowns), despite the knowledge that there would have been limits on their personal growth and ambition if they had stayed. I sensed they were very proud of their hometowns. They missed their siblings and other family members left behind, yet they rarely referenced Mississippi positively—except for when it came to food. They reminisced over cutting collard greens from the field and serving them for dinner the same day. They praised the sweetness of a freshly caught and fried catfish.

Depending on the day or the mood, Mississippi was either sacred or profane. Doing things the "right way," the Mississippi way, was a lesson as valuable as any we could learn in school. At home, I'd be tutored in making a proper homemade Crisco crust for a pie. I gleaned the importance of sending red clay up north for people who literally wanted a taste of home. I listened to my great-uncle lament not being able to purchase a freshly killed chicken for Sunday dinner, and my grandmother longing for access to a garden plot when segregated and crowded conditions meant that there was no room for one.

In the summertime, snapping beans, picking greens, and shucking corn for canning were normal Saturday chores in my hometown of South Bend, Indiana. They were expected and inevitable. The golden age of processed food—the 1970s—was in full swing, so teaching children about homegrown food wasn't exactly in vogue. My mother learned how to can fruits and vegetables

from *her* mother. In turn, she instructed us.

How could we possibly understand the lessons she taught us? For us children, learning how to prepare and cook vegetables meant missing out on Saturday cartoons. Our mother was giving us the gifts of self-sufficiency and marketable skills, yet we didn't even realize it. What child would? We were expected to do as we were told, so we did what children do: made the drudgery of prepping the vegetables into games. Who can snap the most beans or shuck the most ears of corn?

Eventually, the monotony of the work was broken when I observed the practiced hands of my mother. Seeing her prepare home cooked feasts was magical. Even though I was too young to know it, I was establishing a connection with my food and a connection to the generations of women before me who, whether through necessity, servitude, or gratitude, also had to learn how to preserve their food.

What nourishes your body when you're younger nourishes your spirit when you're older: the smell of fresh beans and the crispness of their snap; the accomplishment of baking your first sweet potato pie; the sense of legacy you're entrusted with when you're learning family recipes. The renewal of community brought about by a family dinner. I learned patience, planning, active listening, collaboration, and even how to manage disappointment from the many simple acts required to plan and execute a meal.

There is a comfort and connection in the food of my grandparents that I've only come to recently appreciate as an adult. I've come to realize that you never really leave the Magnolia State, but simply take her spirit with you wherever you land.

A Chicagoan by choice but Hoosier by birth, Lyletta Robinson has had words and opinions in ChicagoNow*, the* Chicago Sun-Times*, and the* Listen to Your Mother *reading series.*

YEAST

after Robert Hayden

BY KHALISA RAE

I'M UNSURE WHY AT 7 A.M. MY MOTHER NEEDED ME TO RISE
alongside her on cold holiday mornings, first light
and I'd whine/growl right as the light bled through the curtain
the elongated ahhhhh of "Khalisaaaaaaa" curdling
what dream I clung to. Still, she'd extend the air
of my name—her kettle whistle a warning bell that I had exactly five minutes
and 14 seconds to wipe the sleep from my eyes, and appear—hands washed
and floured, apron tied, hard knot ready for bright-early beating. I'd arrive, dough batter
already started, sticks of butter waiting for me.

One stick of butter for the mixture
one stick to fold in during the kneading process. Combine
one stick of butter, one egg, ½ cup of sugar, ½ cup of 2%
Whip the egg into the milk first so it does not cook. Stir in wet ingredients.
In a separate bowl combine ½ cup of sifted all purpose flour—
One package of all-rise yeast,

I nodded my head as she shadowed my steps, *pour in salt, baking powder, more sugar,* her brown hands over my hands. Saturday mornings were lessons in the pretty patience of a boxer—roll and fold mixture, watch the lump turn to sticky mess—this fermented bread—an inheritance of laying hands, her mother and mother before her begot yeast secrets, hushed for only the counter to hear. *roll, knead and fold. roll, knead, and fold. Cover and rest*. Wait. Quiet. Rise.
Uncover. We curled our knuckles, balled them into a fist, now she could take her hands off. Muscle memory knew what came next. I was only there for the pounding—at eight I'd push all my weight into the dough rocking forward, then whale into the heap. This was what a woman was capable of—my tiny fists metabolizing into weapons—I could feel the marble
slab shake and rattle under my little fingers. It needed me hit it, to release, and I needed to feel powerful. Here, this is what we were born for—to turn yeast into carbon, cock hands back and watch a million meals spiral from risen bread.
I understand the rise and chemistry of it now.
Today, in my kitchen I'm thinking about fermentation,
the way my body over the years has been reduced to carbon,
how small I feel even now, but I am prepared, standing ready with kneading hands.

Illustration by Johnalynn Holland

Khalisa Rae is an award-winning poet, activist, and journalist based in Durham, NC. She is a senior writer for Jezebel *magazine, content creator for BET, and author of the debut collection* Ghost in a Black Girl's Throat *(Red Hen Press, 2021). Her YA novel in verse,* Unlearning Eden, *is forthcoming.*

Perfect Eats

THE PERFECT EAT SHOP, A RESTAURANT ON 47TH STREET NEAR South Park in Chicago, Illinois, is shown here in April 1942. The restaurant was owned by Ernest Norris, seen standing at rear near the mirror, and his wife (first name not provided). Many Black migrants who settled in Chicago in the first half of the 1900s started businesses such as this one.

PHOTO BY JACK DELANO

Photo and caption: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, LC-USW3-001469-D

CENTER FOR
THE STUDY OF
SOUTHERN CULTURE

UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

The Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, located in Barnard Observatory, is the home of the Southern Foodways Alliance.

COME STUDY WITH US

Be a part of innovative education and research on the American South with our B.A. and M.A. degrees in Southern Studies, and M.F.A. degree in Documentary Expression.

Visit **southernstudies.olemiss.edu**

SOUTHERN FOODWAYS ALLIANCE
Center for the Study of Southern Culture
Barnard Observatory
P.O. Box 1848
University, MS 38677

$12.00
ISBN 979-8-88574-003-6
51200>
9 798885 740036