

Gravy

DOCUMENT • STUDY • CELEBRATE

ABOUT GRAVY

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THE GRAVY FOOD & CRIME ISSUE

Not as easy as it sounds

by guest editor Jack Pendarvis

THERE'S A WOMAN WHO LIKES to audit the classes I teach at the University of Mississippi. Her name is Margaret and she grew up in Yazoo City, Mississippi, as a contemporary of the late writer Willie Morris. "We went cradle rolling together," is how she put it to me.

Margaret took a couple of my classes that focused on crime fiction, and in one of them she happened to mention that she had known eight murderers in the course of her life—and the daughter of a ninth murderer. Margaret is not the type to frequent low places ("You know the difference between this and pornography? Pictures," she said of a Scott Phillips novel we read), and the startling amount of homicide with which she has an incidental connection must be put down to bizarre coincidence.

Naturally, I thought of her when it came time to edit this “Food and Crime” issue of *Gravy*. So I asked her whether any of the murders in her life had to do with food.

Because that’s the trick: Food + crime = easy. Food + “The South” = easy. Crime + “The South” = easy. But food + crime + “The South” = not as easy as it sounds.

Even Margaret had to think hard to come up with a food-related murder. It happened in 1950. The boy who did it “lived out in the county,” she said. He and his mother disagreed over the girl he was seeing. “There was nothing wrong with her,” Margaret hastened to add.

The boy had plans to take the girl on a double date to “the midnight show,” and the mother denied permission. So the boy killed his mother, “wrapped her in a quilt, and threw her in an old cistern.”

That night, when he and the girl and the other couple were on their way to the movie, the boy said, “My mother wants me to stop and pick up some bacon and eggs. She’ll be very upset if I forget the bacon and eggs. We have to go before the show because the store will be closed later.”

“So that was his alibi. Bacon and eggs,” said Margaret.

Margaret, a high-school cheerleader then, was practicing out on the football field some days later. “The big football game with Canton, our rival, was coming up,” she told me. She was right beside this boy, who was “blowing his horn” (trumpet) in the marching band, when the sheriff approached, along with the boy’s father.

“We have found your mother’s body in the cistern,” said the father.

“You need to come with us,” said the sheriff.

ME, I THINK OF THE BACON AND EGGS sitting there in the car on a warm Mississippi night. Well, it was football season, so maybe they were cool enough to keep. But I think of them spoiling.

Crimes of a more appetizing nature wait within. 🍷

Gravy guest editor Jack Pendarvis of Oxford, Mississippi, is the author of *Awesome* (a novel), *Your Body Is Changing*, and *The Mysterious Secret of the Valuable Treasure* (short story collections).

ILLUSTRATION, PAGE 1 by Jason Polan, the illustrations editor for *The Believer*.

TAKING THE WILD OUT

The beasts were wallowing below us, unseen

by Abigail Greenbaum

