GRAVY

NO. 87

SPRING 2023

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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.

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ON THE COVER AND ABOVE:
Illustrations by Molly Brooks

HOLD ON LOOSELY

It's the secret to good editing.

BY SARA CAMP MILAM

ONCE A QUARTER, AS *GRAVY*'S PRINT DEADline approaches, I send Melissa Hall a Slack message to the effect of, "What should I write my editor's note about?" For this issue, one of her suggestions was "the frustrating and exciting reality of having a job that you can never actually master." After resolving not to interpret this as a passive-aggressive performance review, I decided to lean into that prompt, coupled with this one, buried near the end of the list: "why editing matters."

I hoped to find inspiration in a paperback that had been lurking on my shelf for nearly a year: *Dreyer's English: An Utterly Correct Guide to Clarity and Style* by Benjamin Dreyer, the copy chief of Random House. Boy, did it deliver. I've referred to Strunk and White's *Elements of Style* over the years, and I respect its advice, but it wouldn't occur to me to read it cover to cover. That's just what I did with *Dreyer's English*, guffawing obnoxiously along the way. If you have little interest in the finer points of English prose usage and style, come for the humor. Some of Dreyer's jokes verge on catty. Others are dirty—no verging about them. Early on, there is a joke in flowchart form, the punchline of which is that you are only allowed to use the phrase "should of" if your name is Flannery O'Connor.

Once you've had your fill of laughter, stay for the advice, even if you're not an editor. It's clear, useful, and deftly illustrated with examples from classic literature as well as from Dreyer's own decades of experience.

I'm doing my best to avoid Dreyer's list of "wan intensifiers and throat clearers," which includes plenty of duds I reach for too often: very, rather, really, just, so, pretty, and quite. I'm clicking over to the dictionary tab in my browser, making sure I deploy my chosen terms with accuracy. So far this week, I've looked up urbane, visceral, inveterate, parse, and droll. None made the cut for this piece.

I imagine someone reading this will interject with an assumed criticism along the lines of, "But language changes!" or "But rules are made to be broken!" To which I reply: Sit down. And also: Read the darn book. And most importantly: He thought of that. At no point does Dreyer suggest that language is, or should be, staid or static. Even as it changes, and even if you're not sure how you feel about some of those changes (an uncertainty he admits to on a few points), you can find elegant and consistent ways to proceed. What Dreyer

Svetazi/Adobe Stock

advocates for, and what his experience bears out, is a dance of convention, clarity, consistency, and voice. He takes pleasure in precision, and he knows that careful readers do, too. To that end, he doesn't seek to flatten or conventionalize an author's voice, but to help it emerge as the truest manifestation of itself. He doesn't subscribe to arbitrary rules, embracing only those that render language clearer, tighter, or stronger.

As funny as Dreyer is when he's delivering a sick burn, he's endearingly realistic about knowing when to let authors have their way. Correctness is a beautiful thing, but a wise editor doesn't wield it like a bludgeon. He or she suggests, then steps back. Dreyer admits it took him years to get here. Me, too.

The older I get, the more I'm reminded that control is almost always an illusion, and that its pursuit tends to devolve into frustration. Six years into parenthood and three years since the beginning of a paradigm-shifting pandemic, I've made progress on accepting these truths. I still have ample room for improvement.

Yet I still get a thrill from the finer points of comma placement and the correct application of en-dashes. I'm privileged and delighted to work with colleagues who feel the same way. None of us can control much. But if we're going to try to make sense of our world by writing about it, let's make that writing as clear, as precise, and as powerful as it can be. I'll do what I can to help.

I read *Dreyer's English* cover to cover, guffawing obnoxiously along the way.

Molly Brooks grew up in Nashville, Tennessee, and now lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her wife and cats. Her work has appeared in numerous magazines and newspapers, including the *Nashville Scene*, *The Guardian*, *Kazoo Magazine*, and *The Boston Globe*. She is the author and illustrator of the *Sanity & Tallulah* graphic novel series, as well as the illustrator for *Flying Machines: How the Wright Brothers Soared* by Benjamin A. Wilgus and *Growing Pangs* by Kathryn Ormsbee. Visit her online at *mollybrooks.com*, Twitter (@mollybrooks) and Instagram (@goodgollyetc). Her baseball walk-up song is "Drag Me Down (One Direction Cover)" by Weaves.

Joshua Nguyen is the author of *Come Clean*, which won the the 2021 Felix Pollak Prize in Poetry, as well as two additional poetry collections, most recently *Hidden Labor & The Naked Body* (Sundress Publications, 2023). A Vietnamese American writer, collegiate national poetry slam champion, and native Houstonian, he is also the winner of the 2021 Writers' League of Texas Discovery Award, and the 2022 Mississippi Institute of Arts & Letters Poetry Award. He is an editor at *The Offing* and a regional co-chair for Kundiman, an Asian American literary nonprofit. He loves bubble tea and good puns. He would enter the baseball field to "Meal Ticket" by Tim Woods.

Mikeie Honda Reiland is a nonfiction writer whose work has appeared in the *Oxford American*, *The Bitter Southerner*, and *SB Nation*. He recently earned an MFA in narrative nonfiction from the University of Georgia. He lives in Nashville, where he also plays and coaches ultimate frisbee, which he likes at least as much as he likes writing. Though he's never played baseball, he believes that Maggie Rogers' "That's Where I Am," a favorite psych song for his ultimate frisbee club, would also make a good walk-up song.

TOP TO BOTTOM: Molly Brooks, Mengwen Cao, Mikeie Reiland

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Kristen Solecki is an artist and illustrator based in Durham, North Carolina. Her work includes editorial illustrations, book cover art, large-scale wall coverings, product illustrations, marketing materials, and paintings, She exhibits her art in galleries across the country, teaches workshops, and curates exhibitions. When she's not working, Solecki is busy trying every cannoli on the East Coast and being a human IMDb. You can see more of her work at www.kristensolecki.com. Her baseball walk-up song would be "Heads Will Roll" by the Yeah Yeah Yeahs.

Matthew Vollmer is the author of six books, including *All of Us Together in the End*, published by Hub City Press in April 2023. His work has appeared widely in magazines, including the *Paris Review, Virginia Quarterly Review, Tin House*, and *Oxford American*. He is the recipient of a 2010 National Endowment for the Arts grant as well as the Sturm Award for Creative Arts at Virginia Tech, where he teaches in the English department. Vollmer's work has been shortlisted for *The Best American Short Stories* and has appeared in *The Best American Essays 2013*. "Sad but True" by Metallica is his pick to take the plate.

Shay Youngblood is a writer, educator, and interdisciplinary artist. She is the author of the novels *Black Girl in Paris* and *Soul Kiss*, a collection of short stories, and numerous essays. Her published plays have been widely produced. Her current projects include a novel; a multimedia performance work on architecture, memory, and the environment; children's illustrated picture books; and a commissioned play inspired by interviews with more than one hundred Southern Black women. Though she's not big on sports, she'd step up to the plate to "Just Fine" by Mary J. Blige.

TOP TO BOTTOM: Kristen Solecki, Mary Crawford, Carolyn Miller

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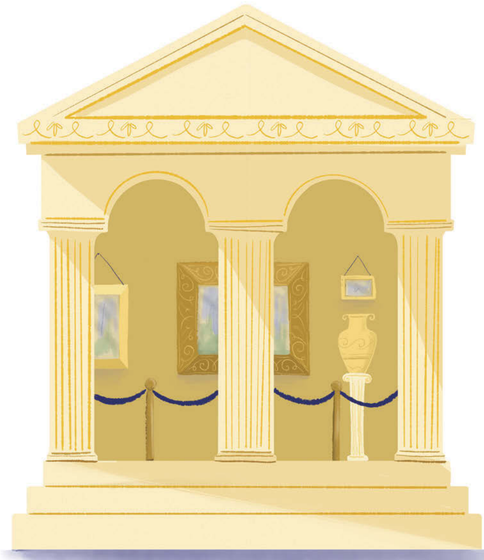
ALEX PERRY AND HIS WIFE, KUMI OMORI, INITIALLY PLANNED TO OPEN A RESTAURANT in Charleston, South Carolina, but after two years of location-scouting, they realized the costs would be astronomical. While regrouping in Perry's hometown of Ocean Springs, Mississippi, a friend showed them a downtown location that they fell in love with: a historic house turned bookstore turned shoe repair with a highly motivated seller. In 2013, they opened Vestige, a restaurant inspired by ingredients from the Gulf Coast. "We're from here," says Perry. "We saw a lot of untapped potential in what we could do in this city." Here, Perry shares his favorite places in Ocean Springs.

Vestige

Ocean Springs has a good history of dining, but it was mostly New Orleans cuisine. We wanted to come at it from a different angle. When we opened, the menu skewed Southern but was more vegetable focused. Kumi is from Japan, so she got me into Japanese flavors, and those started slowly creeping in. In 2020, we went tasting menu only. We had a story we wanted to tell, and with à la carte, we were feeling a lot of limitations. The community has been fantastic to us. We lucked out. This is the most fun we've ever had.

Walter Anderson Museum of Art

The museum is a nonnegotiable if you're in Ocean Springs. So much of Ocean Springs' identity is the Anderson family. You see it everywhere in the city—murals, color schemes, art. Walk downtown on a Saturday and you'll definitely see someone with a Walter Anderson-inspired tattoo. Twisted Anchor Tattoo owner Matt Stebly is a great-grandson of Walter Anderson. To see [that lineage] in another form of art is really cool.



Bright-Eyed Brew Company

I'm an avid consumer of coffee, and the best here is Bright-Eyed. It started as a nitro cold brew hand cart at the farmers' market and evolved into a tiny storefront. The owners, Katherine and Ryan Reaux, are such nice people that just standing next to them, you already feel bad about yourself. They're super interested in coffee and roasting everything. None of the choco-mocha-half-whip—it's all about the beans.

Front Beach

I get sunburned, and I'm a night owl, so I prefer the beach at or after sunset. It's calming and grounding. During the pandemic, I would walk at night to gather my thoughts. *What are we doing? Where do we need to go? What do we need to improve?* In the spring, we forage and serve wild ingredients like pickleweed and sea purslane. The maritime ecosystem is central to the identity of this place.

Illustrations by Bridgette Blanton / Tiny Pencil Studio

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

WHY TACO TUNES MATTER

There's potential beyond punch lines.

BY GUSTAVO ARELLANO

THE SONG STARTS WITH MARIACHI TRUMPETS blaring a serpentine melody. Next, a man says, "Ready to eat some f----n' tacos, bro?" Lil' Jon repeats the line in his signature gleeful growl as a drum machine joins the horns.

The rush of sound builds to a double-tracked Lil' Jon screaming "Taco Tuesday!" This two-word chorus, repeated over the horn hook, forms the backbone of the song's two minutes and eleven seconds.

"We came to eat some fire Mexican food!" the Atlanta-born-and-bred artist boasts. "And if you like to eat like me/You gonna eat everything!" His enthusiasm spills over into shout-outs to enchiladas, burritos, quesadillas, pescado (fish), and chorizo.

The inspiration for the 2019 release came from NBA superstar LeBron James, who frequently takes to social media along with his family to yell "Taco Tuesday!" with stereotypical yelps and an exaggerated Mexican accent. Lil' Jon doesn't do that, thankfully. Neither did fellow Atlanta rap stars Migos, who released a "Taco Tuesday" single of their own for Cinco de Mayo 2020.

"We servin' tacos/Get 'em with the nachos" Takeoff sings, describing a party where everyone is enjoying home-cooked Mexican food (with an unnecessary scoop of misogyny, to be honest).

Friends texted me these Lil' Jon and Migos tracks as soon as they dropped. Most of them thought both versions of "Taco Tuesday" were hilarious. Others thought they mocked Mexicans and Mexican culture, and assumed I would agree.

I've long tracked depictions of Mexican food and drink in American culture, especially music. I appreciate twentieth-century Southern songs that lionize tamales, including Robert Johnson's

> In American popular music, taco songs tend to be the equivalent of a whoopee cushion.

"They're Red Hot" and Clifton Chenier's "Hot Tamale Baby." Tequila, another popular topic, has historically been treated as a license to party or sob. (That's how Mexican songs treat the liquor, too.)

But songs about tacos? They barely register in the Mexican songbook. They're just too ubiquitous and

Illustration by Maria Loor

rudimentary—it would be like writing ballads about toast. In American music, however, taco songs tend to be the equivalent of a whoopee cushion.

You can practically hear the tongues planted firmly in the cheeks of singers across genres: metal, pop, hip-hop, children's, country. The taco is a subject not to be taken too seriously. And by extension, these songs imply, neither are Mexican people.

Doris Day began the trend in 1947 with her "Tacos, Enchiladas, and Beans," a slinky number that's cute until the end, when she says in a mock Spanish accent "They make me kind of sick/But I love them."

Even "Weird Al" Yankovic, whose 1992 "Taco Grande"—a parody of Ecuadorian rapper Gerardo's 1990 hit "Rico Suave"—is genuinely funny and clever, throws away his goodwill at the end of the song, when he cautions listeners not to drink the water at a Mexican restaurant.

The "Taco Tuesday" tracks by Lil' Jon and Migos ostensibly fall into this category. Yet I immediately thought they were great.

I was pleasantly surprised that two of my favorite hip-hop acts cared enough about the titular occasion to record odes to it, with no backhanded insults. I liked those songs so much that I even gave their respective videos a pass on things that would usually draw my ire, like Migos members wearing sombreros and serapes, and a Lil' Jon emblem that features a handlebar mustache and tequila bottles.

How could I like a song that might be interpreted as a patronizing joke? It's because I feel seen.

Even now, my stance on these two songs confounds some of my friends. How could I possibly like them?

The answer is simple: It's because I feel seen.

Whether knowingly or not, Migos and Lil' Jon offer tacos not as novelty, but as mainstream. They correctly center Taco Tuesday around what the namesake meal represents: community. A time when everyone is happy and everyone is sharing.

To see Quavo, Offset, and Takeoff (who died in 2022) cook ground beef, fill hard shells, then gobble them like many families of all ethnicities on a Tuesday night is comforting. To hear Lil' Jon rattle off nine other food items besides tacos reminds me of my cousins trying to entice me to weekend get-togethers with the promise of an abundant spread.

That these artists happen to be Black men from the South makes their songs that much more powerful.

Despite millions of Mexican American hip-hop lovers, the industry rarely acknowledges this fan base. Most of us can only quote one such shoutout: the line in Tupac Shakur's 1996 song "To Live & Die in L.A.," in which he sings "It wouldn't be L.A. without Mexicans/Black love, brown pride, and the sets again."

Lil' Jon and Migos could've been more artful in their depiction of Mexican culture. But it wasn't negative. It's out there. May it not be a one-off.

I talked to Nate Jackson, a deputy editor for the *Los Angeles Times* and my former music editor at *OC Weekly*. He was one of the friends who texted me each song when it first came out.

"Hip-hop artists are masters of remixing elements of American culture to fit the scope or the beat of a good song," he told me. "Taking the time to work Spanish music or words into a rhyme scheme in a witty or crafty way isn't prejudice. If anything, it shows how far Mexicans have come in terms of cultural acceptance."

I differ with Nate on the question of acceptance. The United States, for Mexicans, is still too often a place where other Americans are more than happy to consume our food and culture while not accepting us as neighbors. That's why I hope if any other musical acts from the South craft their own taco songs, they go beyond the fiesta.

Maybe someone can pen a ballad about a taco vendor's struggles, like the Delta tamale tracks of over a century ago. Or bring in Latin American genres. The crossover success of Spanish-language singers like Bad Bunny and Rosalía suggests American ears are ready. The ties that bind Mexicans and Southerners are deeper than a short song about a single food. I think we just need the right bard.

Hey, Outkast, can y'all reunite? I'm sure *ustedes* would make a taco track for the ages.

Gustavo Arellano is a Gravy *columnist and host of the podcast* The Times: Daily News from the L.A. Times.

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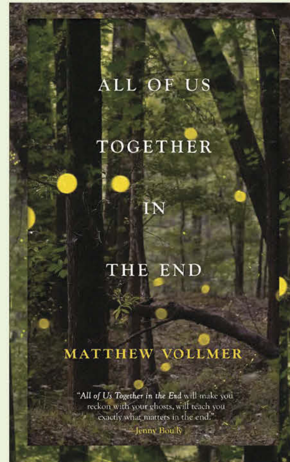
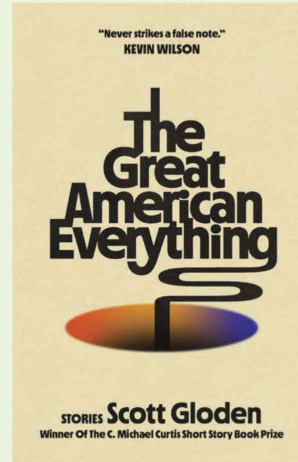
—Jenny Boully
author of *The Body*



ALL OF US TOGETHER IN THE END
MATTHEW VOLLMER • MEMOIR

MAY 16



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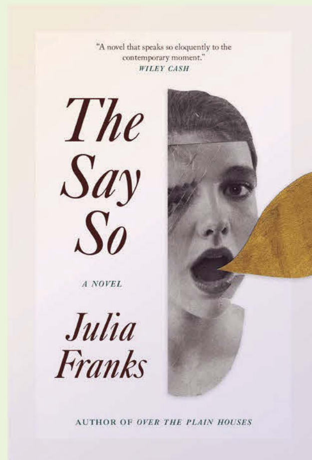

JUNE 6

GOOD WOMEN
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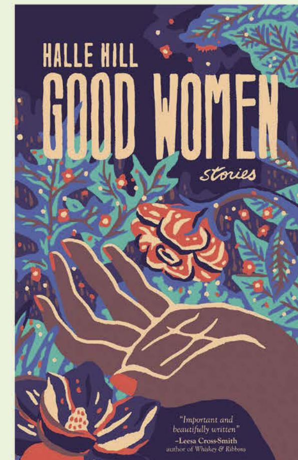

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author of *Whiskey & Ribbons*

SEPTEMBER 12

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“You were born in Vietnam. I don’t see any of that in your food.”

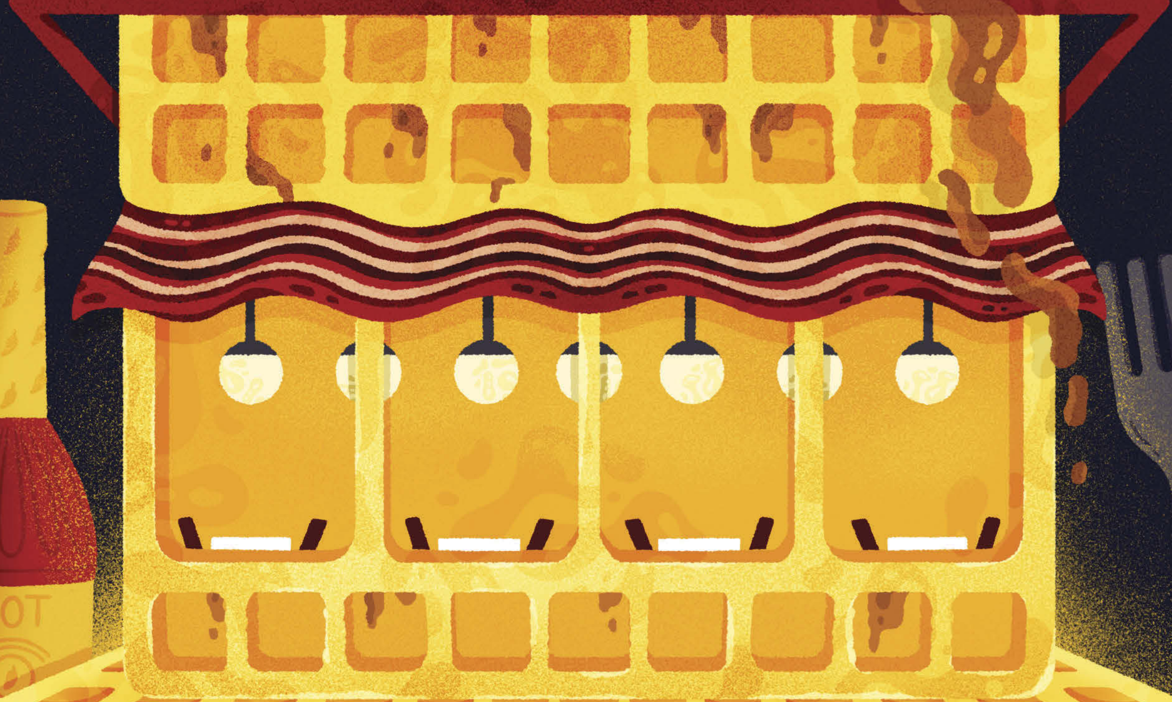
—*Top Chef* judge Tom Colicchio to season 3 winner Hung Huynh

BY JOSHUA NGUYEN

I must have left what you want from me
back at home—along with my full metal *ao dai* cardigan
& my fuck-you rice hat—you speck of snow pea
squeezed between take-out chopsticks. You splinter
of a person, you papercut pushed into a vat
filled with two-year-old office hand sanitizer. You single
pop-rock in the back of the throat. Rinse your mouth
with my tongue until you forge the accent you crave
straight through the roof of your mouth
until it protrudes out above your right eye. Tell me
how to pronounce me again: does it sound
like phở, or foe, or does it sound like a hole? O, the lights,
the camera, the cilantro going black. Step back
from the knife before you get cut to commercial.

Illustrations by Thumy Phan

WAFFLE
HOUSE



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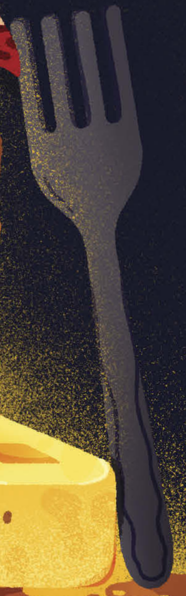
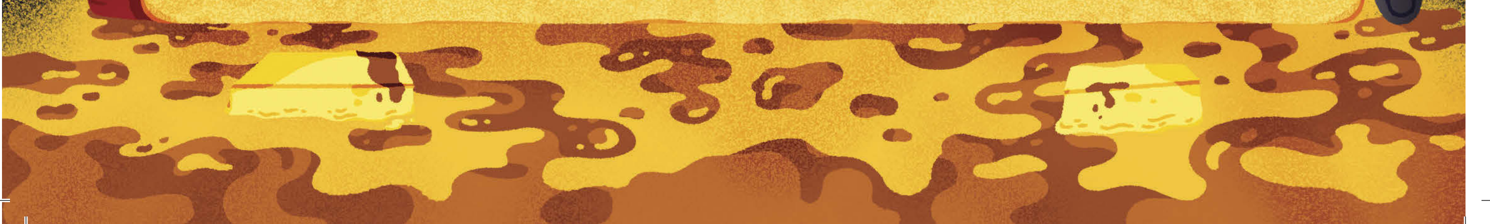



A Nocturne for Waffle House

BY JOSHUA NGUYEN

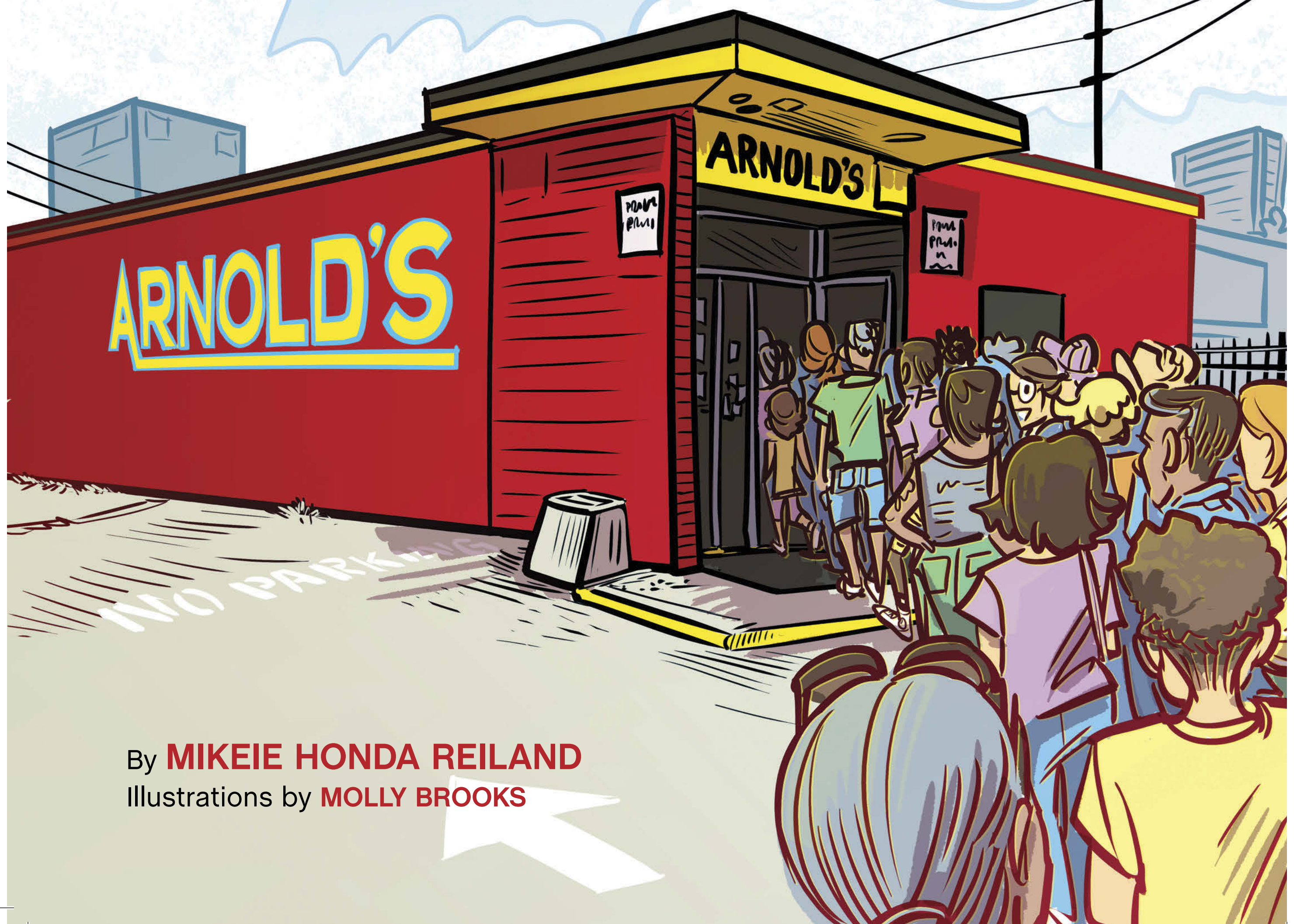
Chunked / hashbrowns / two hard / eggs / a waffle [sometimes] / less than $5 / this second / home / knows / my usual / order / I wonder / if they remember / me / from the dropped / bacon / I ate / off / the floor / once / Tony said something / that changed / my life / *Don't lie to yourself* / The Jackson 5 / plays / on the jukebox / who / is really loving / you? / I watch / the old cook / spread / the potatoes / across the hot-top / potatoes from / a large milk carton / a mountain / of potato / ham over / the sausage / I eat / the waffle / just with butter / Tony brings / his own hot sauce / syrup / & fork / they store it / in the back for him / we eat / by the window / in Waffle House / in Houston / in Atlanta / in Mississippi / the yellow orbs / reflect infinite / above us / in the glass / a friend tells the other / advice / waffle / waffle / & apply to graduate school / *Joshua / follow / your damn / dream / be / a writer* / the grits / are clogging / the grease trap / I save / my hands / for my dining / some orders / don't change / some orders / get taken / back / some orders / are 86 / Tony & the Waffle / House / are my usual

---

Joshua Nguyen is a Vietnamese American writer, a collegiate national poetry slam champion, and a native Houstonian. He earned his MFA in creative writing at the University of Mississippi.

THE ARNOLD DYNASTY

FAMILY AND SUCCESSION AT A NASHVILLE ICON.



By **MIKEIE HONDA REILAND**

Illustrations by **MOLLY BROOKS**

AROUND NEW YEAR'S 2023,

news broke that Arnold's Country Kitchen, a legendary Nashville restaurant, would close within the week. In response, the city descended into collective sadness and nostalgia. Here was another example of how we've lost sight of ourselves, people said, another old Nashville spot swallowed up by tall-skinny duplexes and construction cranes. At Arnold's, you slid your tray along a steam table, choosing a protein and three sides to compile your plate. There was something easy to romanticize about Arnold's, something about the great democracy of the meat-and-three that drew people close—judges and singers, accountants and laborers, all shoulder-to-shoulder, all queued up for the same roast beef.

Whether they worked downtown or on Music Row, people who'd left somewhere small for somewhere big could enjoy a plate of familiar food at a place like Arnold's. In the past three decades, as Nashville has exploded, it's welcomed an entirely different group of people, for whom Appalachian hill cuisine means nothing. My parents, who moved here in 1995, were among these transplants. After spending the first forty years of their lives in southern California, eating Thai and Mexican food, they had no interest in Vittles, our local meat-and-three in suburban Brentwood. Instead, we ate at Miyako, the Japanese place next door, one of the only non-Southern options for miles.

While "Arnold's Country Kitchen" might sound like a Southern Mad Lib of a name, the restaurant benefited from a subtle universality. The meats were decidedly Southern in flavor—catfish, chicken livers, sugar-cured ham—but most guests, no matter where they came from, could find a version of their own cuisine in the "and three" offerings. When the chef Maneet Chauhan visited Nashville in the early 2010s, a friend took her to Arnold's. She grew up in east India, and the sights and smells of the steam table reminded her of the chaat she'd loved in the streets and markets of Ranchi, her hometown. The turnip greens reminded her of saag, the fried green tomatoes carried a whiff of pakora, and the black-eyed peas were the same she grew up eating. For the first time since she'd set foot in this unfamiliar city, Chauhan felt comfort.

The Arnold family was also savvy, and over the years, their restaurant labored to serve a new Nashville. A majority of newcomers no longer hailed from the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, from places like Soddy Daisy, Tennessee. Instead, they moved here from the East and West coasts and from dozens of countries.

From the time family patriarch Jack Arnold bought the restaurant in 1982 until its closure forty years later, the neighborhood surrounding Arnold's transformed from the ghost of a railyard to a glitzy, mixed-use area. But this isn't a gentrification story. It's the story of a smart family who made a bold wager, saw that bet hit, and then danced all the way to the bank. It's a story of succession, inheritance, the weight of a name, and the cost of culinary greatness.

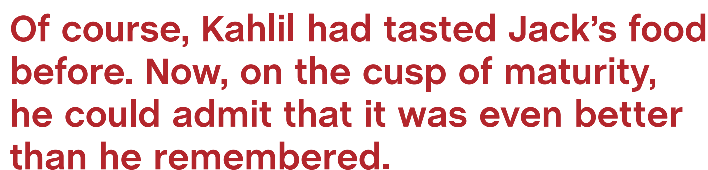
It's a story of what parents want for their children.

IN THE FADING TWENTIETH CENTURY, thirteen-year-old Kahlil Arnold, Jack's second son, was free from Catholic school for the summer. Most mornings, Kahlil hopped on his Diamondback, sped up and down the hills of his neighborhood, and wound up at the West Meade Tennis Club. He and his friends played tennis, then cooled off in the pool, trying to swim from the deep end through the shallows without getting tagged.

In Kahlil's memory, West Meade was faintly but decidedly second-rate: rickety tables, sun-faded clubhouse. Rich people preferred Hillwood Country Club. For all its flaws, the West Meade concession stand knew how to make damn good cinnamon rolls. Curls damp, rosy cheeks flushed, blue eyes rimmed pink from the pool, Kahlil charged three rolls to his father's account at a time. They were the taste of his youth, brushed with butter and sugar and icing.

Early in the summer, Kahlil ran up a tab of more than fifty dollars. One day, when he got home from the pool, Jack waited. "Your ass is gonna get up," he told Kahlil.

The next morning, Jack woke Kahlil at 4:30, and father and son went to work. Arnold's operated out of a concrete building in an area now called The Gulch. The neighborhood used to be Nashville's Valley of the Ashes, built on the remains of a rail- and coalyard. If you looked through the restaurant's parking lot, you might've found traces of the people who slept there. Every now and again, freight trains blew through on the tracks behind the restaurant, debris floating in their wakes like paper lanterns.



Of course, Kahlil had tasted Jack's food before. Now, on the cusp of maturity, he could admit that it was even better than he remembered.

At Saint Henry School, Kahlil spent his days with the children of doctors at Vanderbilt University Medical Center and lawyers at downtown firms. Then there was Jack, chef and proprietor of Arnold's Country Kitchen. Jack had once been a premed student at Vanderbilt, a peer of those fancy parents, but he'd chosen a different path.

That morning, after they set up for the day, Jack made Kahlil a breakfast of biscuits, gravy, home fries, and eggs. *Wow,* Kahlil thought, a little begrudgingly, as he took his first bite. *This is really good.* As a kid, he avoided reminders of his dad's vocation. Of course, he'd tasted Jack's food before. Now, on the cusp of maturity, he could admit that it was even better than he remembered.

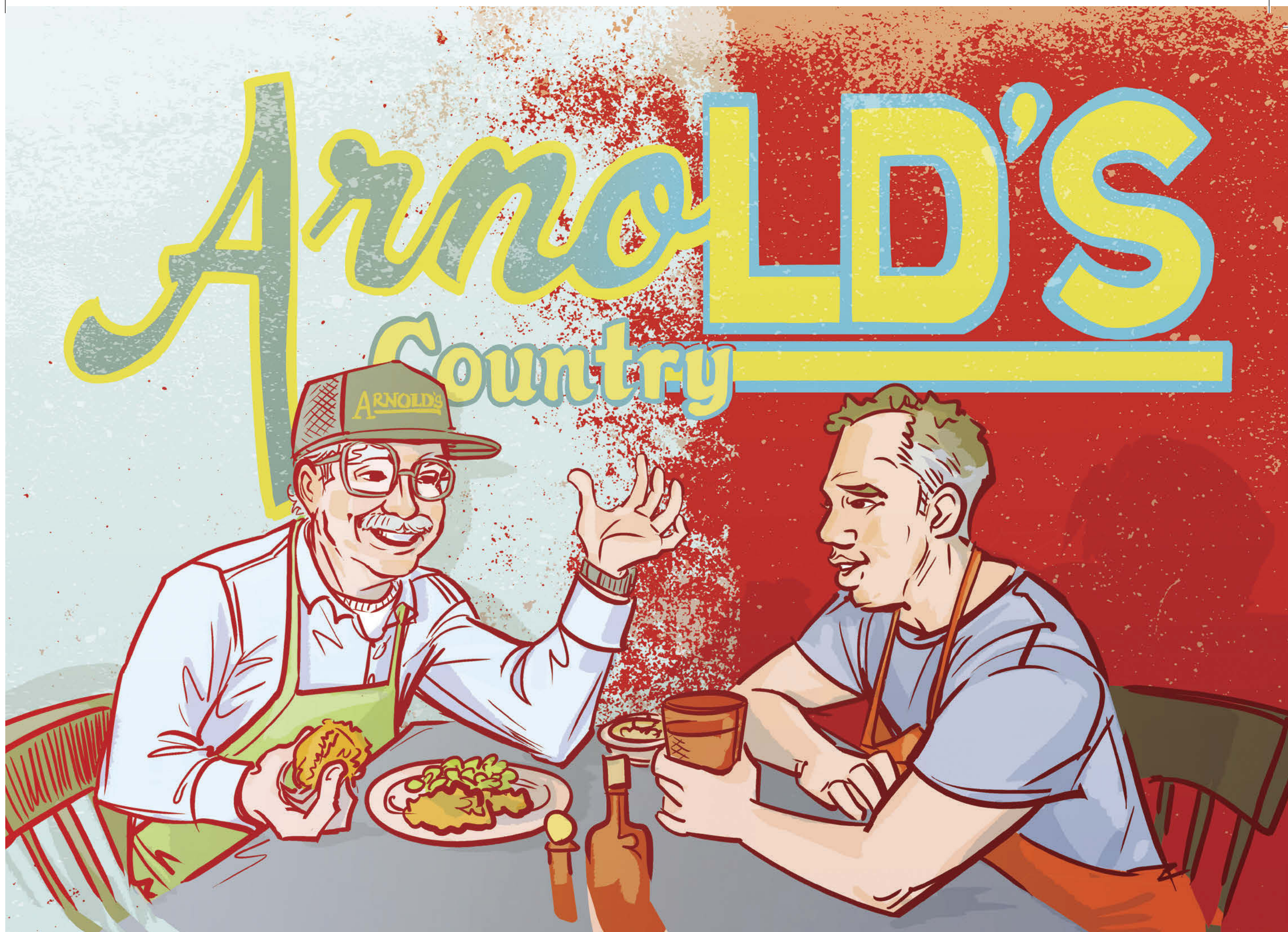
Throughout the workday, Kahlil bussed tables, rang up customers, picked greens, ran food, and washed dishes. He saw his dad serve construction workers, firefighters, doctors, and lawyers. In each customer's expression, he saw something he didn't expect: respect for his father's work.

Was this what it felt like, Kahlil wondered. *To be proud of your dad?*

JACK ARNOLD WAS BORN ON A KITCHEN table in 1937, and in many ways, he never left it. He grew up in a three-room house at the foot of the Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia, with what he described as "God's creation" beyond his back door. A friend's father owned a local diner—vinyl-topped stools around a high counter, a Wurlitzer jukebox setting the mood. In his early teens, Jack started washing dishes there. One day, the fry cook didn't show up, and Jack took his place. Soon after, he began to prepare the vegetables and bread the veal cutlets.

Jack, a bright student, earned a partial scholarship to Vanderbilt. To pay the rest of his tuition, he pulled shifts in Rand Hall, the college cafeteria, as a line supervisor. After a stint at Belle Meade Buffet, he found a job working for Lynn Chandler, whom he called the "kingpin of the meat-and-three." Chandler ran the Elliston Place Soda Shop, a celebrated local spot, and hired Jack at one of his restaurants on Eighth Avenue. Chandler was a businessman more than a chef, and from him Jack learned how to be the face of a restaurant. This resonated with Jack, who described himself as "more personality than chef."

Jack is a man who uses words like "mulatto" in conversation without batting an eyelash. To cope with the breakneck pace of the restaurant industry, he turned to alcohol. To cope with its loneliness, he turned to waitresses. "Women have been my nemesis, to say the least," he once admitted in an oral history interview with the Southern Foodways Alliance.



In 1974, he married a woman two decades his junior named Rose Arrieta, who had immigrated to the United States from Colombia when she was five. The two operated a food truck. Rose, pregnant with Kahlil, started dropping chicken in the fryer at four in the morning. In 1982, they bought Lynn Chandler's meat-and-three on Eighth Avenue and renamed it Arnold's Country Kitchen.

On different mornings across the decades, Jack woke one or more of his five kids—Manuelito ("Mon"), Kahlil, Rose Emily, Savannah, and Franz—at 4:30 and brought them to work at the restaurant. During Kahlil's teenage years, father and son cussed and threw things across the kitchen. Kahlil can't recall a time when his father praised him. When he made a subpar dish, Jack let him know.

"This is shit, son," he'd say, tossing Kahlil's creations in the trash. "This isn't any good."

Yet almost paradoxically, Jack often reminded Kahlil that mistakes had their own value. "When you screw up, you remember. That leaves more of a memory than when you do something well."

ROSE ALWAYS HOPED KAHLIL WOULD leave the restaurant business. She wanted him to go to college, to do something more glamorous and less grueling, to become a doctor or a lawyer like his friends' parents. And yet he always returned to Arnold's, to Jack and Rose. If Kahlil was to live in the world of restaurants—an industry that, as the family knew, tended to fuel addictions—Rose appreciated that he worked in her kitchen, where she could keep an eye on him.

Kahlil briefly left Nashville for college at Tennessee Tech in Cookeville, an hour and a half away. He called home all the time. He always worried that Arnold's, which only accepted cash and checks, would get robbed; or that his dad would shoot someone with his AR-15. He only saw Jack fire his gun once at the restaurant. One Saturday when he was nineteen, he and Jack prepped food. The restaurant was closed, and the neighborhood—its industrial churn, its strip club and adult bookstore—was dead quiet. From the kitchen, Kahlil heard a tap at the back screen door, where he saw some men who slept at the local shelter.

"Hey, dad," he said. "Let's give them a little food."

Jack peered through the screen. "Son," he said. "They're gonna jump you if you open that door."

"No way!"

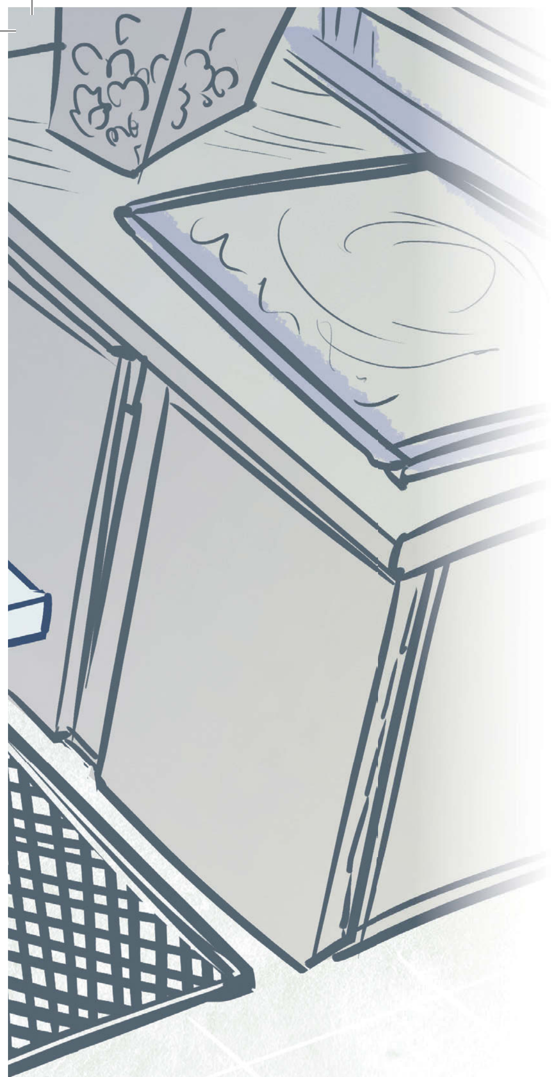
"Watch." Jack pushed open the door. One man stood directly in front of him. Two others crouched off to the side, invisible through the screen door, ready to pounce. Jack aimed his rifle at the sky and squeezed off five rounds. *Bam-bam-bam-bam-bam.*

"Get the fuck out of here!" Jack screamed as the men ran off. "Don't ever come back!"

For all Jack's volatility, he knew how to engender loyalty among customers. Customer service, Jack believed, started with the best food: something tangible that made people happy. So he ran his kitchen—always *his* kitchen—with authoritative precision. When he drank to excess, his temper flared. It didn't matter how many people were in the kitchen.

Rose describes herself as "the peacekeeper at Arnold's...the mediator." Most of all, she knew how to calm Jack down. But as Kahlil reached adulthood, he felt compelled to shoulder some of his parents' stress. He transferred to Middle Tennessee State in Murfreesboro, where he could live near home and work at the restaurant while he finished his degree in criminal justice.

Kahlil soon got married to Alyson Bennett. They



had two children: a son, Barrett, and a daughter, Juliette. Later, the couple adopted a second daughter, Savannah. Kahlil got an interview with the Secret Service but determined that career path wasn't compatible with family life.

He briefly left Arnold's to work as a general manager for Tom Morales at the Loveless Café, another Nashville stalwart famous for its biscuits. Kahlil hoped some of Tom's charisma might rub off on him. Soon, though, Jack's health began to fade. He'd spent his life on his feet in the kitchen, and he needed surgery. After his operation, he came right back to work. But it became clear that before long, he would need to leave the business.

Rose saw traces of Jack in Kahlil. They both loved the stage, the gladhanding, the showmanship of the restaurateur. Rose is a great cook—fried chicken and seafood are among her specialties—but a private person. When obligated to speak publicly, she prefers to stand next to one of her children so that she can grasp their hand. She had little interest in being the face of Arnold's, but she suspected Kahlil would. So she did what she knew was necessary: She called Morales, a good friend, and asked for her son back.

BY 2005, WHEN JACK RETIRED FROM Arnold's and Kahlil rejoined his mother, Nashville had changed around them. In 1999, a group of local developers bought twenty-five acres near Arnold's and drafted a vision for the neighborhood. By the end of the aughts, the result was a mixed-use neighborhood called The Gulch, packed with bars, fusion restaurants, high-rise apartments, and an Urban Outfitters. It was centrally located, half a mile south of Broadway, the type of neighborhood that could make you feel, for a minute, like you lived in a bigger city. It was the type of place that made sense to transplants from New York and Los Angeles.

"We're not doing anything new, son," Jack often told Kahlil. "Stick to what works."

"He set a firm foundation for my family to follow and expand upon," Rose says. "And I am very grateful to him." But to survive, Rose and Kahlil needed to embrace both tradition and innovation. "Adaptability," Rose replies when asked what kept Arnold's open for four decades. They stayed true to the foundation of consistency and quality that Jack built, and from there they began to tinker and evolve.

Kahlil and Rose figured that New Nashville would probably be confused by chicken livers, so they added fish to the daily menu, along with rotating specials. They changed the catfish recipe and dusted off the restaurant's smoker, in which they made brisket. They added sides they hadn't previously offered like cauliflower casserole, corn pudding, and succotash.

The atmosphere in the kitchen became more collegial and collaborative. Dishes often passed through several iterations before hitting the steam table, shaped by the palates and perspectives of multiple cooks.

While they evolved, Rose and Kahlil also clung to some of the old: to Jack's high standards of customer service and food quality, and to the nostalgic touches that were their own selling points. Near the beginning of the city's twenty-first-century renaissance, a reporter from New York visited Arnold's, unaware of the restaurant's cash-and-check-only policy.

"All I have is a credit card," he told Rose at the register. "Let me go get some cash."

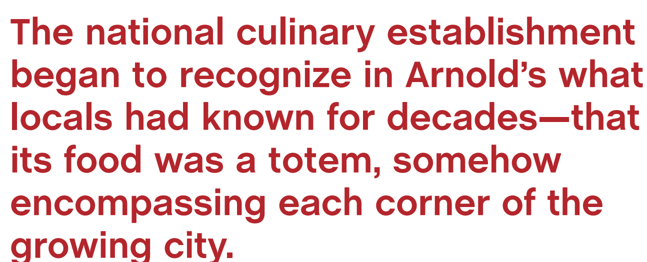
"Don't worry about it," she said. "When you get back to New York, just send me a check." He did—and, as Rose recalls, he included the anecdote in his article.

The national culinary establishment began to recognize in Arnold's what locals had known for decades: that its food was a totem, somehow encompassing each corner of the growing city. In 2009, Arnold's won an America's Classic award from the James Beard Foundation. Guy Fieri visited. Dolly Parton ordered takeout: chicken livers and creamed corn. At John Egerton's behest, Kahlil competed in, and won, a shrimp and grits competition alongside some of the most prestigious chefs in town.

As its national profile grew, Arnold's maintained its base of regular customers. Rachel Louise Martin, a journalist who often writes about Nashville food, cites Arnold's location—on a busy four-lane street within stumbling distance of Lower Broadway and downtown offices—as a reason it thrived as the city changed.

There were bigger forces at play, too, Martin says. People who move here are always eager to grab hold of something that makes the city theirs. In 2017, when the Nashville Predators hockey team made a surprise run to the Stanley Cup Finals, bars were full, Broadway was packed, and everyone shared in collective joy. Whether you'd been here for three decades or three months, you could high-five the stranger next to you when the Preds scored.

Nashville food provides a similar opportunity.



The national culinary establishment began to recognize in Arnold's what locals had known for decades—that its food was a totem, somehow encompassing each corner of the growing city.

"I think food is a way that people who aren't raised here can start to feel like they're from here," Martin says, pointing to the proliferation of hot chicken—and the enduring pull of Arnold's.

"Because this is someplace where, at least historically," she continues, "you need to be three generations deep before you can really say you're from Nashville. ...And I think anything that can help people feel like this is their town is a valuable cultural touchstone. Especially when it uses lingo folks not from the South don't know, like meat-and-three."

In 2012, Jack's thirty-year lease was about to end, and Rose and Kahlil saw their building for sale on a commercial real estate website. They ran the numbers and realized that if they were willing to take a big risk, they could buy the property themselves. They took out a loan and combined it with their own savings to reach $750,000. They purchased their building and its two neighboring lots.

LIKE MOST RESTAURANTS, ARNOLD'S lost money in the early months of the Covid pandemic. Once more, the family adapted. When Nashville started to eat out again, Kahlil and Rose expanded beyond lunch hours, offering a dinner menu they called Arnold's After Dark. It was a hit. Customers could order specials like hanger steak over cheese grits and drink craft beer and cocktails. To help with the rollout, Kahlil's eldest, Barrett, moved back to town from Chicago.

Kahlil had always tried to nudge Barrett away from the restaurant business. When he graduated from Lancaster Christian Academy, Barrett thought he'd become a preacher. In undergrad—fascinated by the humanities, spellbound by philosophy, religion, and ancient history—he realized he wanted to become an academic. As part of a study he worked on with a professor in Chicago, he delved into what ancient philosophers like Plato had written about the legendary city of Atlantis. Although he's continued to find opportunities in academia, Barrett often ends up back in Nashville, working for his father and grandparents. He started at Arnold's at six or seven years old, peeling potatoes and serving tea. He remembers watching as his grandfather tossed his dad's "shit" dishes in the garbage. Then Jack looked at Barrett, nodded, and smiled.

Barrett, as laid-back as Kahlil is animated, is still imprinted with traces of his father and grandfather. In part because of Jack, he didn't drink alcohol until he was twenty-five. Like Kahlil, like Jack, he's ambitious. When he's asked about the DNA that he, Jack, and Kahlil share, Barrett thinks for a moment. "I'd say a love for the stage."

Kahlil wants Barrett to understand what this business takes from you, what it took from Jack and Rose. When he looks back on his run at Arnold's, he thinks about the vacations he didn't take, the places he's never seen, the marriage

that didn't last. Kahlil hopes Barrett will chase dreams beyond the kitchen—the same wish his mother Rose once had for him.

By fall 2022, property taxes in The Gulch had risen. Rose, by then sixty-five years old, felt drained. Kahlil, in theory, wanted to take some of those vacations he'd missed. The bet mother and son made when they bought the building had paid out. In a decade, the property's value had tripled to $2.1 million. The adjacent lots, which the Arnolds also own, are worth nearly double that amount. Just as the Arnolds knew how to survive, they knew when to exit.

THE NASHVILLE MEAT-AND-THREE ISN'T doomed without Arnold's. Silver Sands Café, near downtown, is in its third generation of family ownership. Yet much of Nashville seemed to agree there was something special about Arnold's. It was a mirror in which the city saw the best version of itself.

"It was a spot where a lot of people from different walks of life all ended up," Martin says. "Which made it a really valuable third space. It was somewhere where you would eat next to a construction worker, whose people have been here for generations. You would see people of other races, you would see people from out of town, from in town, you'd see record executives having their meetings."

"So it gave a much broader cross-section of Nashville, and I don't know that we're also going to have *that*."

On Saturday, January 7, 2023, Kahlil opened the restaurant's doors for the last time. A line had already formed around the block. Kahlil thanked the crowd, then started to cry.

Though he's still married to Rose, Jack now lives in a retirement home. Kahlil sees him regularly. Rose suffered a minor stroke last winter, so she stayed home and watched the final shift on a livestream. Barrett felt ambivalent about Arnold's last day. There had been times, he says, when he thought he might one day run the place.

"I was a little mad, because when I was younger, I thought I would inherit the restaurant," he says. "That was probably the end goal. So it was bittersweet also, in a sense, because I'm happy for my Grandma Rose. Like, I'm happy for them. They're retiring." He pauses. "But I'm also a little mad." He grins and laughs.

To start the day, Kahlil and Barrett made 7Up pancakes, which have become an Arnold's staple. Kahlil claims they cooked up the recipe together, while Barrett maintains it came to him in a dream. Barrett is the one who added the secret ingredient: a dash of lemon-lime soda. Now, even Kahlil admits that Barrett makes better pancakes than he does.

Along with pancakes, the last steam table offered meatloaf, roast beef, hot chicken tenders, blackened trout, baby back ribs, and fried chicken. The veggies included mashed potatoes, green beans, turnip greens, and white beans.

At the final After Dark, they served smoked brisket. Preston James, a singer-songwriter Kahlil swears will be famous, played a set. After he finished, Kahlil stepped onto the restaurant's stage and gave a toast, raising his Jack-and-Coke to the crowd. He thanked his family and the community for everything. The night crescendoed into karaoke. In today's Nashville, there's one song to sing when you're feeling maudlin, and Kahlil launched into its chorus.

You're as smooth as Tennessee whiskey
You're as sweet as strawberry wine

Even though vacations sound good in theory, Kahlil's a restaurateur for life. He can't keep himself out of the game. He loves the showmanship, the connections, the chance to face the people. He'll be back, but this was the last time he'd work at the place his parents had built.

At the end of the night, after all the regulars had gone home, Kahlil walked to the serving line. Barrett, who had worked the whole shift behind the scenes in the kitchen, came out to join him. He'd sliced a mountain of roast beef that day, and calluses—the outlines of which were visible when I interviewed him a month later—covered his fingers. Now, when he thinks of his future, he pictures himself giving history lectures to rapt classrooms.

There, in front of the steam table—the Arnold family's stage for three generations—Kahlil wrapped Barrett in a bear hug.

"Thank you," he told his son.

Mikeie Honda Reiland is a writer from Nashville, where he also coaches ultimate frisbee. His work has also appeared in the Oxford American, Bitter Southerner, Nashville Scene, *and* SB Nation.

WHERE IS THE SOUTH

A VISUAL RESPONSE

Curated by BITA HONARVAR

IN 2023, THE SOUTHERN FOODWAYS ALLIANCE centers its programming around the question, Where is the South? We ask, How do we identify its edges? Can we mark its coordinates with bourbon, catfish, and birria? Can we map our present South onto the culinary and labor landscapes that preceded it? And what does the tendency to define space with borders tell us about ourselves?

Illustration by

Dèsirèe Kelly

I did a bit of research into my great-grandfather Percy, who was born in Arkansas in 1899. He moved to Detroit in 1950 during the Great Migration and worked for an auto factory as a furnace tender. Here, he wears his work uniform with his lunch in hand.

◀ *Photo by* **Jason B. James**

During a visit to Bali, we stayed in an artist's house in the city of Ubud. There was an open-air restaurant, Made Becik Waroeng, located a short walk from the house, and we ended up eating there every day. Their specialty was sticky pork ribs that were succulently sweet yet spicy enough to produce small beads of sweat on my forehead. The more we ate there, the more the entire meal reminded me of my life in Savannah, Georgia, where I lived at the time. The ribs, the black tea spiked with fresh ginger, the side of juicy tomatoes and fresh cucumber, and the plates of nasi goreng (fried rice) all reminded me of eating in the Lowcountry.

▼ *Mixed media illustration by*

Ann Madden

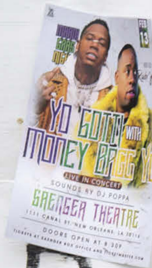
My college friend from Minnesota remarked on her first visit to the South, "I get it! This is a place where you can fill your gas tank and get dinner all in the same spot. And it's GOOD! How can it be this good?" This illustration is inspired by the pleasure of finding such roadside fare.

Illustration by **Delphine Lee**

Is Washington, DC, the South? Many people would say no, yet the DC metropolitan area includes the northern part of Virginia, a decidedly Southern state. Many Southerners come to DC for work and settle down, bringing the South and its culinary culture with them. Here, the border of the South is not a line but a gradation.

Photo by **Sandy Noto**

Cuba feels like a place unto itself, yet it maintains a distinct relationship with Florida. There's the geographic proximity and the flow of people between Havana and Miami. Despite the ongoing trade embargo, Cubans on the island have long been able to pick up radio stations from Florida. As the music scene in Cuba has evolved over the decades, it has incorporated certain sounds and influences from American radio.



"Run to the Corner Store for Me"
Photo by **L. Kasimu Harris**

While photographing Black Masking Indians in New Orleans' Central City on Mardi Gras Day 2018, I was struck by the hand-painted food ads on the wall of a corner store. This traditionally working-class Black neighborhood has a dearth of fresh food options, and these corner stores have long filled that void.

REAL ENERGY
FOR REAL PEOPLE...
rip it
ENERGY FUEL
POWER
AT A REAL VALUE!
RIPITENERGY.COM

REAL ENERGY
FOR REAL PEOPLE...
rip it
ENERGY FUEL
POWER
AT A REAL VALUE!
RIPITENERGY.COM

Phone

Illustration by **Jamiel Law**

For this illustration, I imagined a Sunday dinner featuring some of my favorite Southern comfort foods: cornbread, collard greens, macaroni and cheese, fried chicken, and all sorts of desserts that make my heart (and stomach) content. Growing up in Florida, I found this cuisine and hospitality all around me.

Photos by

Aaron R. Turner

My grandmother Fannie Bohanon washes kale, mustard greens, and turnip greens in preparation for a dinner of greens, sweet potatoes, and cornbread at her home in West Memphis, Arkansas, in 2013.

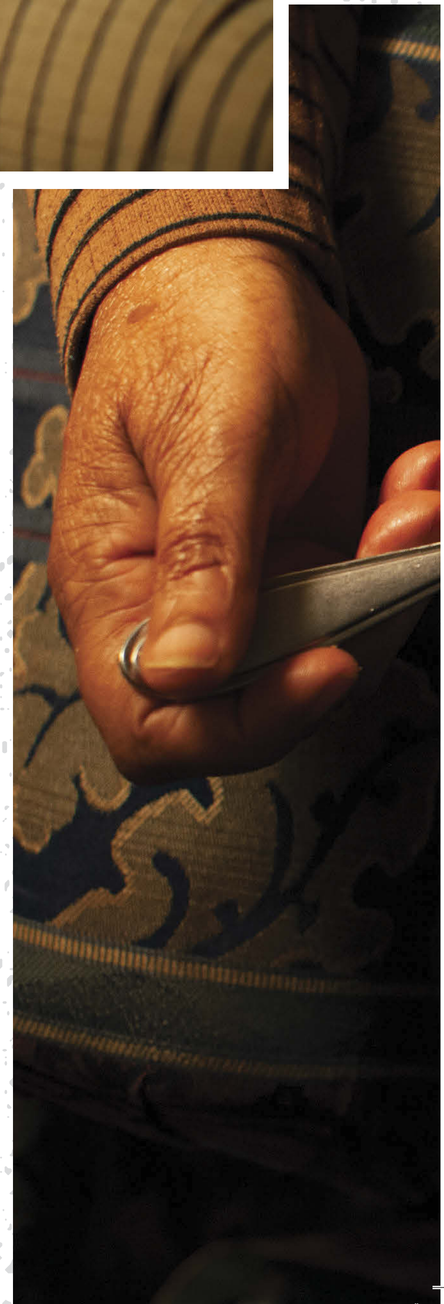


Illustration by

Simone Martin-Newberry

The South exists wherever its history lives—or has been buried. This illustration shows leased convict workers at the Sugar Land Plantation, one of the largest in the state of Texas. The sugarcane that surrounds them is simultaneously depicted as their harvest and their means of imprisonment, sprouting up from the same ground where centuries later the workers' bones would be unearthed.

Feasting on Bread and Dry Bones

Why hadn't I offered the hungry man a meal from my own well-stocked pantry?

by SHAY YOUNGBLOOD
Illustrations by LINDSEY BAILEY

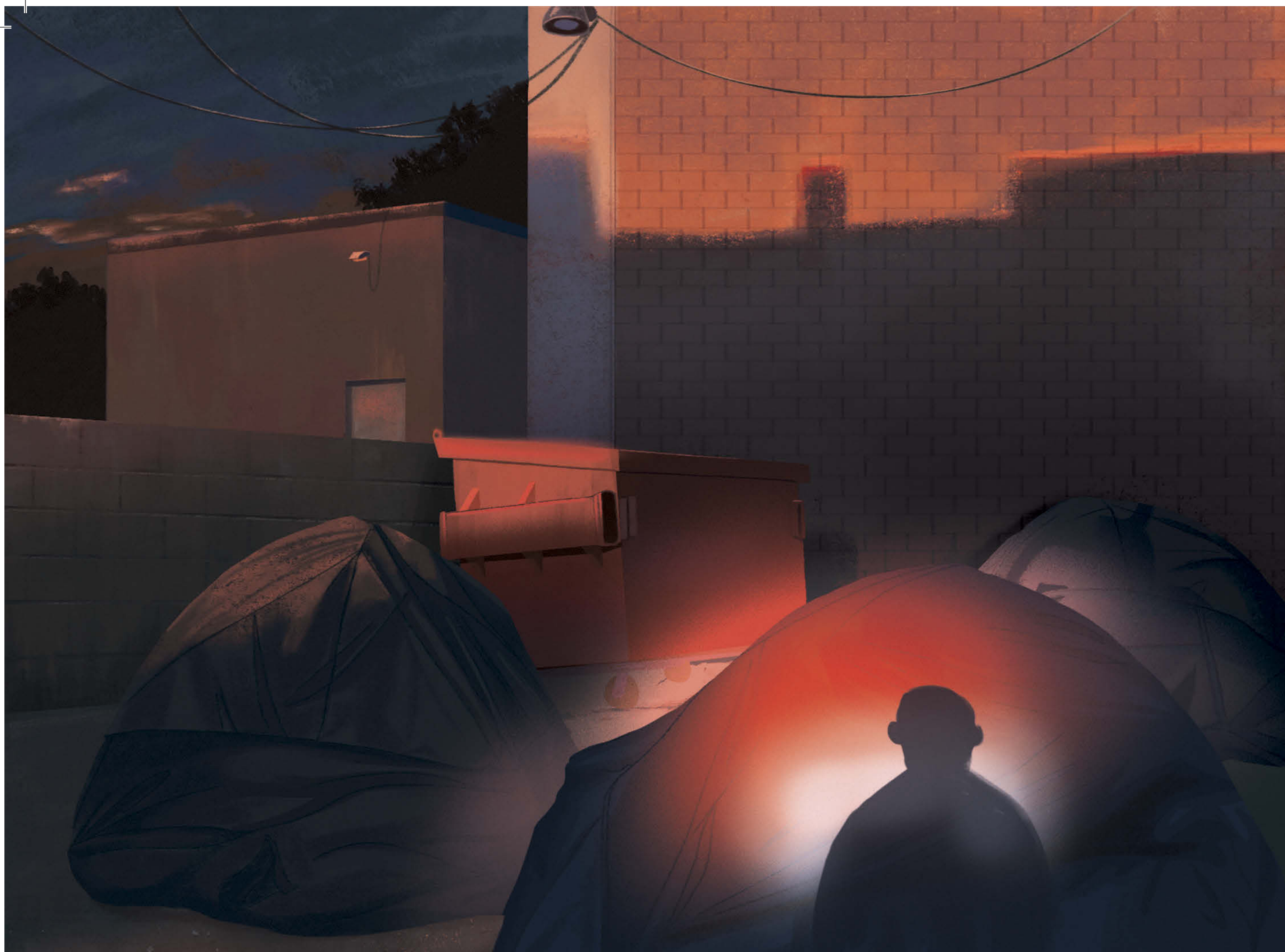
ON MARCH 13, 2020, THE DAY COVID-19 was declared a national emergency, I was in Philadelphia at the launch party for my first published work in a decade, a graphic novel collaboration featuring a Black woman superhero. It was also the day my spouse of more than ten years told me she wanted to divorce. A few weeks later, I would move again for the third time in less than two years.

In the first chapter of the pandemic, I ended up sheltering-in-place alone in my new home in the Old Fourth Ward in Atlanta, where cooking would become part of my daily practice as an artist. I filled my pantry, my freezer, and a hall closet with enough food and supplies to last for months. Two shelves of one kitchen cabinet brimmed with spices from around the world. My kitchen transformed into a creative lab, a room in my memory palace, a place of comfort in unsettling times.

My new home in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood was close enough to walk to four large chain grocery stores. Those walks became my daily exercise. I used the *New York Times* section "What to Cook This Week" as my guide to create dinners for one. While friends and family were taking online classes in yoga, concealed weapons, and Sanskrit, I cooked three meals a day plus snacks, seven days a week.

A lot of things comfort me in hard times—music, art, friends, family, nature. In one day, I streamed the *Nixon in China* opera, took a playwriting master class with Suzan-Lori Parks, had a virtual dance-off with a friend in Texas, and attended a surprise Zoom birthday party for which I dressed up and then raised a glass of champagne in an empty room. Yet food, most of all, is what has eased my anxiety during the most challenging periods of my life.

On the first morning of the lockdown, I headed



out early. I turned onto a usually busy main street. Few cars were on the road, and for more than seven blocks I didn't pass a single person. I arrived at the grocery, put on my required mask, and wiped down my cart. The air in the grocery store was thick with the feeling of panic and fear. The morning news showed empty shelves, which fueled my concern that staples might be unavailable.

It felt dangerous to have left the house without a shopping list. What I did have was an insatiable hunger for things from my childhood—like cherry Jell-O, sardines, peanut butter, collard greens, fried chicken, cornbread, vanilla wafers to make banana pudding, a bacon and jelly sandwich on white bread. I imagined that being stuck inside, I'd have time to experiment with recipes, so I loaded my cart with dozens of spices and condiments. In one month, I spent seven hundred dollars on groceries. I didn't order takeout even once.

When I craved Indian food, I looked up a recipe and went to my pantry to create dishes that made me cry. I baked cookies just for the aroma. I discovered that I could make up a batch of ginger and cinnamon-spice oatmeal cookies and freeze the dough into a log so I'd have fresh-baked cookies whenever I wanted. I went around the world in my kitchen, reaching for comfort and distraction in quick Japanese pickles, Spanish omelets, BBQ tacos made with jackfruit—and stews, the delicious stews. I experimented with old favorites, plating my meals in gorgeous Instagram-worthy arrangements on fancy dishes and serving myself champagne or mineral water in gold-rimmed crystal glasses. When I craved meat, I made oxtail stew with thyme and a good red wine for gravy that I sopped up with a thick slice of bread.

One afternoon, I looked out of my office window and noticed a young Black man walking along the back fence outside my duplex. His thick Afro looked dusty, slept on, uncombed. He was shirtless, his chest lean and dark brown. With sagging jeans two sizes too big, a dirty white blanket around his shoulders like a superhero cape, he cut across the grassy lot behind my house and approached the large blue dumpster assigned to the apartment building next door. I watched as

the young man circled the dumpster. He reached in and pulled garbage bags out, dropping them at his bare feet. He leaned over the small pile, tore open the bags, and poked through them. I thought he might be looking for bottles or cans to sell. Times are hard, I thought. I turned back to my computer but kept thinking about him. When I looked again, he was sitting on the ground with his back against the dumpster. I watched in horror and fascination as the young man ate food he pulled from a garbage bag in the middle of a pandemic. He chewed and swallowed each bite as if savoring a restaurant meal. My stomach lurched, and my eyes filled with tears as I looked away, paralyzed in my spot by the window. A few moments later, he was gone. I felt a sting of shame. Why hadn't I offered the hungry man a meal from my own well-stocked pantry, itself an embarrassment of riches, a trip through time back to the desires of my youth? Having experienced housing insecurity, I know it is a privilege to be able to turn to my art, to the writing of this essay, to reckon with the heartache I feel for this man. I know that it is not enough.

That night, I had a dream—a nightmare, really—that I was homeless, dressed in dirty clothes, coughing, wiping away sweat from my face as I pushed a shopping cart full of cans and bottles. I was living on the street, afraid that I would soon be desperate enough to eat out of a garbage can.

It was day 223 of the pandemic, according to my journal, when I had another dream. In this one, I walked to the grocery store. It was a beautiful spring day. The sun was shining in a cloudless sky, birds were singing, and a gentle breeze caused the leaves to sway as if they were dancing. The streets were nearly empty. On my short walk, I passed only four or five people on the sidewalk. The few cars on the street sped by as if being chased by the virus. When I reached the store, about a dozen people wearing masks of every color and kind were lined up one body length apart. At the head of the line, a young man wearing a yellow-flowered apron, pale blue mask, and lavender gloves sprayed my hands with sanitizer. A presanitized, shiny red cart was positioned in front of me. I pushed the cart forward, hoping there would be something left on the shelves to fill it. There were expensive cans of crab meat, cheap black bottles of no-name champagne, and large tubs of fancy nut butters. There were limits on essentials: three dozen eggs and one package of toilet paper per person, if available. The aisles were full of people who looked stunned, like they'd been hit with a beam of light. Their eyes were stretched wide, and they walked slowly as if underwater. Their fingers twitched as if signing signals of distress. I pushed my cart slowly and kept my distance from the other shoppers.

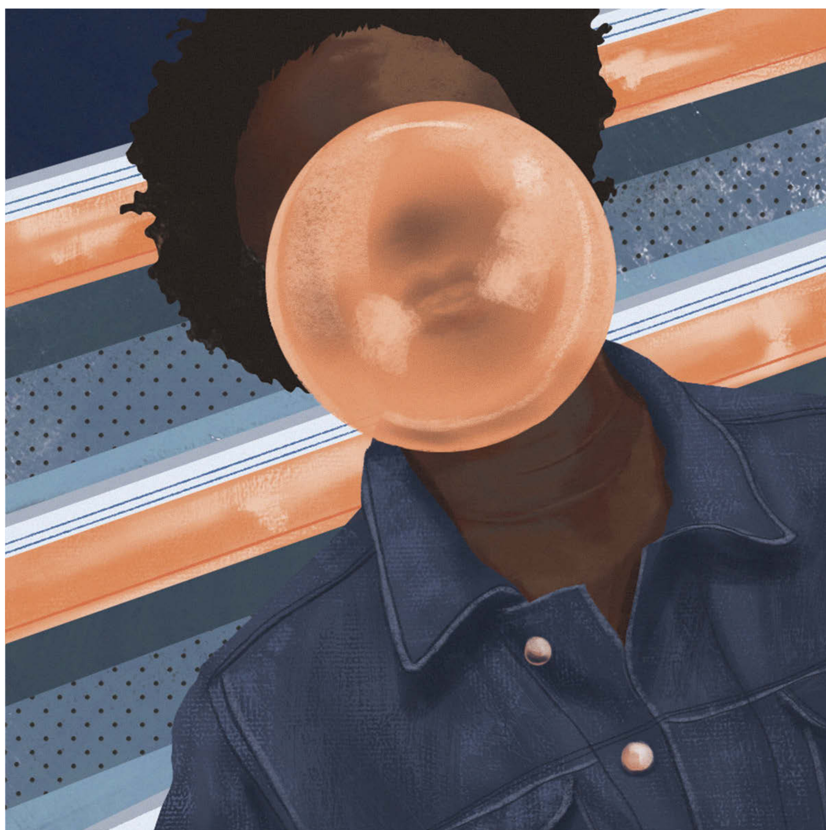
When I turned down the paper products aisle, I saw a teenager standing in front of the empty shelves. She was not wearing a mask despite the rule. Her black cloth mask hung around her neck, its ties trailing down her chest. Her hair was a huge halo of dark curls sprinkled with glitter. The cloud of hair framed a pretty brown face on top of a thick frame in a body-hugging blue-jean jumpsuit. She smacked on a wad of gum in her right cheek. She pressed her lips together and blew a pink, sparkly bubble that trembled as it stretched bigger and bigger and bigger until it grew to the size of her Afro. When it popped, she smiled and sucked the sticky wad back into her mouth. "Nothing lasts forever," she said. When she noticed me standing the requisite six feet away, her eyes landed on me warily. She reached for a roll of toilet paper—there was none, all of it having been ransacked by panicky shoppers—but still she pantomimed the motions of lifting a package off the shelf and dropping the invisible rolls in her basket, already filled with several cans of crab meat, bottles of champagne, and a tub of cashew butter. I watched her stroll down the aisle with a giggle in her walk.

A few weeks later, in the waking world, a single tent popped up on an empty corner lot across from my house. Soon, there were five tents, and then there were a dozen people living on the land. I rarely saw anyone enter or leave the tents during the day, but at night I saw the glow of a computer screen in one tent and watched the

In the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic, my kitchen transformed into a creative lab, a room in my memory palace, a place of comfort in unsettling times.

single garbage can in the center of the area fill up and spill over onto the ground.

A year into the pandemic, a young, gaunt white woman in a black hoodie and sturdy boots, pants hanging off her small frame, strolled down the driveway next to my house and approached the big blue dumpster. She disappeared inside and came out a few minutes later with clothes over her arm. Moments later, I heard noise under my deck. The following day, I noticed that plastic bags inside my garbage can had been torn open. Anyone looking in my trash would find only ripped up drafts of false starts on a new novel, letters I never sent, stale bread, and dry bones. There must be more I could do, I thought, than donate to the local food pantry.



In June 2021, I walked into a grocery store, wearing a mask as usual, and heard an announcement that people who had been vaccinated were free to remove theirs. I felt a sense of elation. As the world slowly opens up, it means that I can look forward to sitting down at a table with friends and family to laugh and feast together. It means traveling again to places that will feed my imagination and bring new recipes and food memories back to my home kitchen. Yet I can't help but think of all the people for whom there will be no feasts. No new recipes.

In my last vivid dream, I invent a bright yellow pot that is always filled with delicious, healthy comfort food. No matter how many people eat from it, the pot is never empty.

Postscript, January 2023

When I wrote this piece in 2021, like many folks, I thought the scourge would not last forever. That, in time, our lives would return to normal. This was the hope and dream. In some ways, it does feel as though we're back to our day-to-day, pre-2020 routines. By now, many of us have been vaccinated. People don't seem to be afraid to take trips on planes without wearing masks. New restaurants are opening. Audiences fill movie theaters and sing along at in-person concerts. We socialize outside of the safe circles, or "pods," that many of us created when the world locked down. The unsheltered, hungry folks who haunted my neighborhood have moved on, too. The abandoned houses where they sought refuge have been torn down. The open fields where they set up tents have been fenced off to make way for dozens of townhouses and new commercial developments. Where those souls landed, I'm not certain. I imagine that many are still hungry and seeking sustenance. And the virus that has claimed millions of lives worldwide is likely with us, the sheltered and the unsheltered, forever. What I know for sure is that we will always need to care for each other and nourish ourselves in good times and bad. I'll keep making meals that feed my soul. Cooking will always be my expression of love for myself and others.

Adapted from "Feasting on Bread and Dry Bones" from Bigger Than Bravery: Black Resilience and Reclamation in a Time of Pandemic*, edited by Valerie Boyd (Lookout Books, 2022).* *Copyright © 2022 by Shay Youngblood. Reprinted here with the permission of Lookout Books, University of North Carolina Wilmington, lookout.org.* *Shay Youngblood is an Atlanta-based author of plays, novels, short stories, poetry, and children's books.*

BAR TABS AND BOTTOM LINES

Is the barbecue restaurant business looking at a booze-soaked future?

by HANNA RASKIN
Illustrations by Emily Wallace

IN THE LATE 1700s, VIRGINIAN DUDLEY MITCHUM MOVED DOWN THE Great Wagon Road as a member of The Travelling Church, buying 500 acres of farmland in Kentucky. ¶ At Maple Hill, the grass was blue, the water was clear, and the soil was fertile. By the time Mitchum died in 1831, his estate was valued at roughly $15,000, the equivalent of half a million dollars today. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Mitchum owned a canopy bed, a dozen chairs, and a pair of spectacles.

But it wasn't feasible to cart around all those belongings, so Mitchum needed another way to let strangers know that his bankroll was bigger than theirs. His beakers smithed by Asa Blanchard—an artisan known to collectors as "the Paul Revere of the South"—no doubt did the trick.

As Daniel Ackermann of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts put it, "Think about a time before plastic cups and Yeti tumblers." Back then, if a friend offered you a nip of brandy, you'd have to be ready with a receptacle to receive it. Most male citizens in nineteenth-century Kentucky were thus armed with beat-up tankards or earthenware cups.

But not Mitchum. This guy kept a monogrammed Asa Blanchard beaker in his pocket. And it's important to note that it was made of the same silver that served as coin in Mitchum's day. As Ackermann said, "It would be like using a dollar bill to eat cereal."

Talk about a flex.

Showing off with silver and other fancy tableware is an old Southern tradition for those who can afford it. In Louis Manigault's ink drawing of a raucous 1754 Charleston dinner party, which has devolved into wig stealing and selfie posing, the punchbowl and glasses on the table leave no question about the diners' relationship to the exhausted-looking Black man pictured to the right. This is a gathering of the Lowcountry elite.

The men's jackets and fashionable buckled shoes communicate that same message, but wealthy Southerners with status to flaunt have always invested in the finest platters, tureens, and fish forks. That's because they often supped on the same stewed pork, cornbread, and other humble preparations that their poorer neighbors ate, a circumstance of geography and limited transportation networks.

In other words, their table settings conveyed what their favorite foods couldn't. Mitchum may have enjoyed unaged corn liquor, but in a society seized by class anxiety, he sure wasn't about to enjoy it in a cracked stoneware mug.

Dickey's Barbecue Pit, the biggest barbecue franchise in the world, has lately come up with a different spin on drinking corn: the Bourbon Cheery Fizz, made with bourbon from Balcones Distilling in Waco, Texas. If a Fizz isn't your speed, Dickey's also now pours Hickory Old Fashioneds, sweet tea blended with peach whiskey, and vodka lemonade.

They're all part of a new bar program, which provides a gin-clear illustration of how important the open service of spirits has become to the barbecue business, a significant departure from the days when enterprising owners with access to hooch kept their sidelining out of the public eye. (Outside of restaurants, of course, booze and barbecue have always gone together.)

In an October 2021 press release announcing its liquor initiative, the company declared,

"Moving forward, all new Dickey's Barbecue Pit owners and operators will have a full-service bar or beverage tub or cooler," adding that existing operators could adopt bar service if they wished. That is, if they wished to pump up their sales by an estimated 10 to 15 percent.

As an inspirational example, the release described the patio that Arlington, Texas, franchisees David and Ashley Boisture recently built in anticipation of an influx of thirsty customers. It quoted CEO Laura Rea Dickey as saying, "We are happy for the Boistures...who see the potential to increase profits while offering guests a chance to stay a while, watch a game, and have fun."

Now, any restaurateur can confirm that alcohol is a moneymaker. Compared to food, the margins are massive. And while the price of meat keeps climbing, the wholesale cost of beer, wine, and hard liquor has held relatively steady. But serving drinks is much more complicated than adding a few bottles of whiskey to the inventory list.

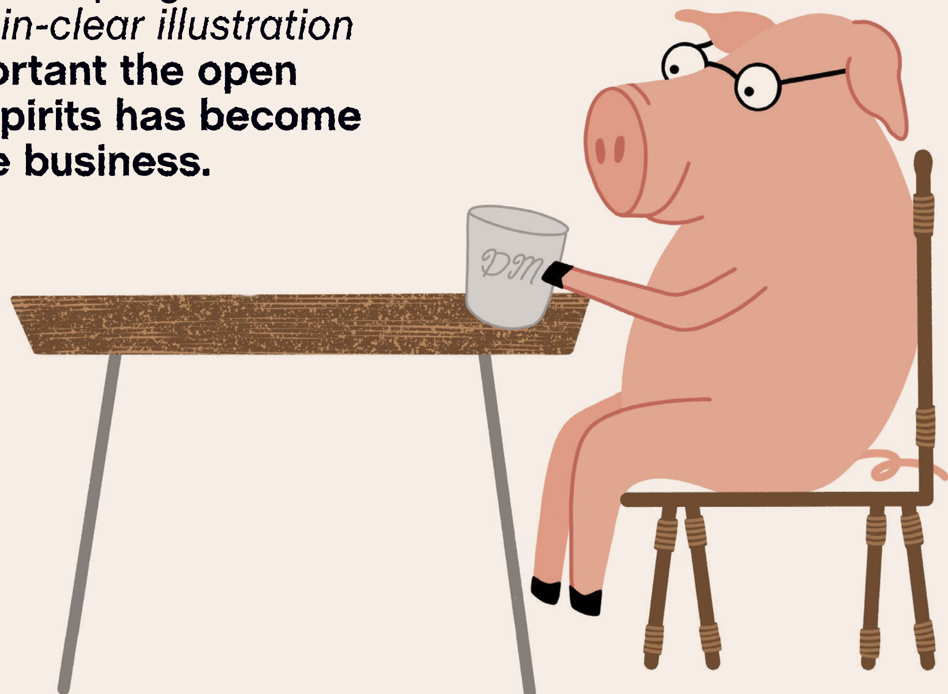
For one thing, it dramatically increases the chances of run-ins with a restaurant owner's least favorite kinds of people: belligerent customers and government bureaucrats. For another, it requires a total rethinking of space allocation, storage, and service logistics. Significantly, the easiest way to overcome all of the above is money and connections, which can create an added burden for Black restaurant owners, who are historically undercapitalized and excluded from circles of municipal power.

Wanting to learn more about why Dickey's changed course after decades of peddling G-rated drinks, I rang up its corporate office. My messages were never returned, so I started emailing. I finally connected with a representative of the catering department who said she'd be happy to help if I wanted to order a big batch of beans, but she didn't know anything about the company's philosophical direction.

Still, a reporter hasn't struck out until she's knocked on a door. Accordingly, I paid Dickey's headquarters a visit when I was in Dallas researching an unrelated story for *Gravy*—or at least that was my intention. But the high-rise floor with Dickey's name on it isn't accessible without a keycard, so I rode up and down in the elevator for a while, hoping a Dickey's executive might come back from lunch.

I was in the elevator long enough that I got hungry myself. Eventually, I disembarked and

Dickey's new bar program provides a gin-clear illustration of **how important the open service of spirits has become to barbecue business.**



went to Dickey's. I figured maybe the bartender could talk barbecue drinks with me.

Except when I got to Dickey's, it didn't have a bar. My beverage choices were a medium soft drink for $2.25 or a "Big Yellow Cup" for $2.95. The situation was the same at every Dickey's I checked out in the Dallas metro area: Customers who'd clocked out of work for a sandwich seemed satisfied with their iced tea and Barq's root beer.

And that's when I realized that the drinks lists at new-wave barbecue restaurants, and the chains hoping to emulate them, weren't designed just to boost the bottom line. Pit owners who program drinks such as the rum punch at Swig & Swine, the Tennessee Sour at Martin's Bar-B-Que Joint, or the amaro-tinged Pullstring Cowboy at Buxton Hall are taking their patrons' money, sure. But they're also giving guests an opportunity to feel a smidge superior to working-class barbecue fans.

When a barbecue customer asks for mezcal with her pulled pork plate, she may well appreciate the comingling of smoke from both sides of the border. But she's also saying: "Hey, I'm not eating pig meat because it's convenient. I didn't get this coleslaw on the side because it's all I can afford. I partake of barbecue because I am a sophisticated connoisseur with a refined palate."

Remember Dudley Mitchum's silver beaker?

Alcohol can make restaurant owners rich and restaurant goers feel special, but it traditionally hasn't been a revenue stream into which barbecue sellers could so much as dip a toe.

At least, barbecue sellers in the Southeast have long been expected to stick to soft drinks, in accordance with prevailing community beliefs about faith and family. As is often the case, it's a whole different deal in Texas, where immigrants from Bohemia and Czechoslovakia didn't have any compunctions about beer. Even Dickey's harkened back to its 1941 origins as a "barbecue sandwich and ice-cold beer" stand when unveiling its bar plans.

In most other Southern states, barbecue and liquor didn't mingle. Throughout the nineteenth century, when barbecues were primarily group feeds hosted by politicians, civic organizations, or churches, it was understood that such events should be bone dry. In fact, it was not uncommon for barbecue attendees to toast temperance with cold water.

In 1844, a Madison, Georgia correspondent chronicled the gathering of 2000 Whig party members, many of whom wanted to make America moral again by mandating the Christian Sabbath and outlawing alcohol. They capped off their meeting with "a well-arranged and plentiful barbecue. The tables literally groaned beneath the weight of various well baked meats, immense loaves of cornbread and cake, which with pure water from the spring composed a feast."

Of course, there were exceptions. In 1926, at the height of Prohibition, the mayor of Union, South Carolina, went to an American Legion barbecue in the nearby town of Chester. As he later told a reporter, "A drunken fellow came up to me with a half-gallon fruit jar about one-fourth full of corn liquor and held it up to my lips. I pushed him away and told him that I didn't care for any of it. He then proceeded to pour it on my shoulder." The teetotaling Mayor E.D. Smith was so upset by the situation that he asked his Chester counterpart to have the man arrested; instead, Smith said, "They took me out to the ballgame and later to a lawn party."

When barbecue emerged as a commercial endeavor in the form of restaurants, relatively few of them sold alcohol. Cash-strapped pitmasters weren't about to court additional government oversight or risk running afoul of the Lord—or worse, potential customers who had a pretty good idea of what He would consider appropriate.

At Skylight Inn, opened by Pete Jones in Ayden, North Carolina, in 1947, beverage choices range from fountain Cheerwine to bottled Cheerwine. At first, Jones' grandson Sam thought he'd feature a similar lineup of soft drinks at Sam Jones BBQ, which he opened in Winterville in 2015. But then a mentor pointed out that a seven-seat lunch counter in the new building could function as a bar, serving beer and wine.

Sam's business partner, Michael Letchworth, told me that he immediately liked the idea: As a businessman, he'd rather install a beer cooler than lose a guest to Applebee's. But that's not how Sam's father saw it.

Letchworth told me, "Samuel's father is a Southern Baptist preacher, and his grandfather didn't drink, so having alcohol was frowned upon."

Plus, it wasn't just family members who were frowning. Letchworth said several elderly members of the predominantly Southern Baptist community were also disapproving of the scheme. I asked him

to explain what that kind of censure might look like, so I could better explain the nuances to folks who weren't brought up Southern Baptist.

He said there was one woman who went through the drive-through when Sam was working. When she got up to the window, she screamed, "You're going to hell!"

In terms of earthly accounting, beer and wine at Sam Jones BBQ weren't a runaway success. They ended up selling so little wine that they stopped carrying it, scaling back to just six local drafts. Letchworth says beer makes up about three-quarters of one percent of sales at the Winterville restaurant.

Contrast that with Sam Jones BBQ's second location, which opened in downtown Raleigh at the start of last year. According to Letchworth, at the new store, 8 to 10 percent of sales consistently stem from alcohol. "Which is helpful," he said.

In Winterville, the typical Sam Jones BBQ customer has a blue-collar job. For instance, Letchworth said, he might work for the power company. That means a three-Manhattan lunch could end in electrocution or a fatal fall. By contrast, folks in Raleigh seem to have jobs that they can do drunk.

After Letchworth resolved to develop a cocktail menu for Sam's Raleigh location, he made a pilgrimage to the barbecue restaurant hailed across the South as a pioneer on the bar front: Charleston-based Home Team BBQ, which now has half a dozen locations in cities from Columbia, South Carolina, to Aspen, Colorado. When Home Team opened its first restaurant in Charleston, owner Aaron Siegel was determined to replicate the best elements of the city's celebrated full-service restaurants, including a well-thought-out bar.

"It's not like you can wave a magic wand and have a bar business," Siegel said. "We put a lot of effort into it."

Their efforts paid off. The bar at Home Team's newest Charleston location runs fifty-four feet long. On the weekends, every seat at that bar is taken.

When Home Team opened a location on Sullivan's Island in 2009, it introduced the Gamechanger, a tiki-adjacent frozen cocktail that became the chain's signature drink. Based on a Painkiller, the Gamechanger combines two rums, two fruit juices, and cream of coconut. Letchworth said he believes this is precisely the type of cocktail—batchable, crowd-pleasing, evocative of a good time—that could surface on more barbecue menus in the next year or two.

He's not certain how many operators will end up offering alcohol, even though increased demand for it represents a rare chance to make barbecue more profitable. As he put it, "Some of these older places are set in their ways." After years of selling mostly sandwiches, their owners may not be accustomed to keeping careful records, which is essential when doling out drinks.

Yet if they wanted to try, he'd recommend mixing drinks that require no produce past an orange slice or maraschino cherry garnish, and leaning into the bourbon nostalgia that tends to overlap with interest in barbecue. That, and buying a frozen drink machine. Restaurant owners who don't want to fuss with liquor licenses could even skip the bourbon part.

Letchworth assured me that "there are wine-based slushie opportunities."

Just imagine how that drink might look in a silver beaker next to a full slab of ribs.

Hanna Raskin is a Gravy *columnist. Her newsletter,* The Food Section, *is published on Substack.*

IN THE COOL OF THE MOUNTAINS

Kanlaya Supachana's northern Thailand roots are bedrock to her Appalachian cuisine.

BY MEREDITH McCARROLL

Dalaya owners Kanlaya Supachana (front) and David Weeks, Sylva, NC, February 2023

KANLAYA SUPACHANA PULLS INTO THE PARKING LOT OF DALAYA, THE RESTAURANT SHE owns in Sylva, North Carolina. On the doorstep of the tiny creekside restaurant, she spots a plastic grocery bag. Someone—perhaps a local farmer or a retiree with a backyard garden—has left her a gift of produce. She smiles and shakes her head; unsolicited deliveries like this one happen regularly at Dalaya. She peeps into the bag: Thai peppers. Perhaps she'll incorporate them into a new special tonight, or see how they work in sai-ua, a house-made herbaceous pork sausage served with northern Thai green chili dip. Midsummer in the southern Appalachian mountains yields many gifts like this—of produce and of neighborly connection. Supachana merges traditional recipes from the mountains of her native Thailand with the local produce of her new home in North Carolina. In doing so, she is not simply making a fixed menu of Thai food in Appalachia. It seems that Supachana is also making Appalachian food, deeply influenced by her experience in Thailand and evolving to incorporate her life here in the mountains of North Carolina.

Supachana left her hometown of Chiang Mai, in northern Thailand, for New York City almost three decades ago. Friends who had moved before her encouraged her to join them, to "start working, make money," she says. Supachana had earned a bachelor's degree in management at Payap University in Chiang Mai and a master's degree in economics from Meijo University in Nagoya, Japan. New York was a place to begin a new life.

When she first arrived, she began working in a Thai restaurant to support herself. Though she started off taking orders over the phone, she eventually stepped into the kitchen to make family meal for the staff. As she moved on to other Thai restaurants, she realized that cooking could be her new career. Over time, she learned the American format for Thai food: "Pad Thai. Pad see ew. Fried rice." Everything rated on a one-to-five-star, spicy-heat scale, she recalls.

On her days off she experimented in her own kitchen, cooking the Thai dishes she was homesick for—like sai-ua, redolent with lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, and homemade curry paste—and eventually branching out into new ingredients and techniques. She brought home butternut squash blossoms from an Asian supermarket and learned to fry them to delicate perfection. For more than a decade, Supachana continued to cook in these two modes: by rote at work and with increasing skill and freedom on her own time.

In 2014, she and a partner opened Kao Soy in the Red Hook neighborhood of Brooklyn. Supachana then opened Chiang Mai just down the street from Kao Soy in 2015. Both restaurants specialized in the cuisine of northern Thailand, which rarely features on the Bangkok-centric menus of Thai restaurants in the United States. The cooler climate in northern Thailand yields more vegetable- and herb-centered dishes, while the hot and rainy south of of the country produces coconuts that are central to southern Thai curries, which are typically spicier. Dishes like um som o, kang hung le, krabong hua plee, and tapioca-coconut soup expanded and complicated diners' understanding of Thai food.

Photos by Bita Honarvar

Supachana spent three years settling into Sylva. By the time she opened Dalaya, she was already part of this place.

In 2016, Supachana lost the lease on Chiang Mai, when, she says, the rent became too much to afford. Her partner David Weeks convinced Supachana to leave New York and join him in Sylva, North Carolina. David grew up coming to western North Carolina as a child. He remembers fishing and camping in the region and decided that it was time to move his aging parents to the area they had grown to love.

"When he picked me up at the airport [in Asheville], I said, 'Oh!' It looks like Chiang Mai,'" Supachana says. "We have the mountains, we have the creeks, the waterfalls." Like western North Carolina, Chiang Mai province draws tourists with its natural beauty, its outdoor recreational offerings, and its comparatively cool temperatures.

Supachana found people in and around Sylva to be warm and welcoming. "Everywhere we go, the people smile and say 'hi,' like in my country," she says—unlike her experience in New York City. She began to think about how her next venture would differ from her New York restaurants. In Sylva, as in Chiang Mai, rainbow trout is not only a menu item, but also a topic of discussion. The area is popular with fly-fishers, and Sunburst

ABOVE: Dalaya's cozy dining room, February 2023; RIGHT: Kao soy is one of Supachana's signature dishes.

Trout Farms—a third-generation trout farm that breeds fish in the waters of the Shining Rock wilderness—is just twenty minutes up the road.

Supachana spent three years settling into the region, getting to know growers, and serving select dishes (like sweet mango sticky rice and roasted beet and candied hibiscus flowers sorbet) at festivals and farmers' markets. During that time, she worked with Clean Slate, a local transitional housing program for women who have been incarcerated. Through that program, Supachana came to understand how neighbors help one another in her new town. She embedded herself into the community as a helper and a listener, even though she knew no other Thai people in the area. By the time her restaurant permits came through, she had already become a part of this place.

Dalaya is a portmanteau of David and Kanlaya. David primarily manages the website and social media, but sometimes helps in the kitchen as a line cook. The restaurant opened just before the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Despite the quick pivot to take-out, diners were eager to try dishes like massaman neur—a curry with slow-braised beef short ribs from Hickory Nut Gap in Fairview, just an hour away. Customers waited up to an hour for their orders, Supachana recalls. And they kept coming back. In a time of isolation, many were eager to connect, and many did so through devotion to the food at Dalaya.

One group of diners, whom Supachana nicknamed the "Cullowhee Gang," began a weekly group order during Covid. They continue the tradition. Mostly retired professors from Western Carolina University in nearby Cullowhee, their appreciation of Dalaya is evident in their regular orders and in the ways they support Supachana. They are among those dropping off vegetables from their gardens and have been known to trade lawn care for food. They even pitched in to wash dishes when Supachana had difficulty with staffing.

Chris Cooper, a professor of political science and public affairs at Western Carolina, had a similar experience when he first ate at Dalaya. "It's not standard-fare, Americanized Thai," he explains. "It makes me endlessly happy that pad

Thai is not on the menu. They make me try different things. It stretches my palate in ways that make dining fun."

To Supachana, pad Thai is not exactly the enemy, but its sweet-and-sour profile is "an American taste," she says. She prefers to challenge diners' expectations and palates. That familiar Sunburst Trout Farms rainbow trout is served in a savory naam yaa curry sauce with a soft-boiled egg, bean sprouts, picked mustard greens, green beans, and lemon basil. She might convince a group to order naam phrik ong, a very spicy dip made of ground pork, tomatoes, and dried chiles that is common in northern Thailand. Or she'll talk them into trying the plaa nueng si ew and then watch, delighted, as they lift chunks of whole filleted branzino from a steaming soy-ginger broth. After she brings a plate of the beef meatballs called look chin ping to a table, she might linger to witness the wide-eyed smiles that follow the first bites.

While her flavors were new and surprising to many of her customers, there was one who found familiarity and the comfort of Chiang Mai in Dalaya's menu. As Supachana remembers, a young Thai woman moved to the area with her husband. The woman longed for the flavors of her childhood home, specifically kao soy—egg noodles in a Chiang Mai coconut curry soup with dark-meat chicken. She was heartened when she stumbled across Dalaya's online menu. She was certain the chef must be from the same region as she was. When the couple visited, Supachana says, she and the young woman felt an immediate connection that led to a short-term kitchen job.

When I dined at Dalaya with a friend in late fall, I felt immediately welcomed. The unassuming restaurant overlooks Scott Creek, and the rustic décor with mismatched chairs and tables feels more like a home than a business. Supachana took our order, filled our glasses, cooked our meals, and made time to chat and learn our names. She recognized my friend as a returning customer and remembered her previous order. We started the meal with krabong—butternut squash, taro, and banana blossom fritters served with a chili-infused vinaigrette and finished with a pumpkin custard. Supachana recommended my friend try the kao soy. The dish came topped with a stunning display of crispy egg noodles with pickled mustard greens, shallots, sweet soy sauce, and chili oil on the side. When I said that I was vegetarian, she helped me settle on the phat mii khanom sen—crispy tofu and pickled mustard greens over a bed of stir-fried rice noodles in Thai dark soy sauce. I'd grown up eating mustard greens, often served with a sprinkle of vinegar on top, and these pickled mustards were both new and familiar.

Cooper, the Western Carolina professor, loves to bring friends and visitors to Dalaya. He delights in watching Supachana challenge their preconceptions of what Southern Appalachian food can be. "To be Southern doesn't mean that you don't also have identities and roots in other places," Cooper says. A meal at Dalaya "makes you feel rooted in two places simultaneously. It makes you feel rooted in the [North Carolina] mountains and it makes you feel rooted in Thailand. I think that's what food can do for us in the best of circumstances."

As we were leaving, Supachana packed up our ample leftovers. It reminded me of when I'd leave my grandparents' house on the other side of the mountain from Sylva, my hands juggling

Tupperware filled with Granny's home cooking. My ties to western North Carolina feel as firm as ever, despite my living now at the other end of the Appalachians—in Maine. To return home and discover restaurants like Dalaya, and to get to know new Southerners like Kanlaya Supachana, only confirms my connection to this always evolving place that welcomes both the new and the returning among us.

Meredith McCarroll is originally from the western North Carolina mountains and now lives in Maine, where she is the director of writing and rheotoric at Bowdoin College.

HEAVEN IS TOUCHING EARTH WITH REST

Even after I stopped going to church, I still kept the Sabbath.

BY MATTHEW VOLLMER

Illustrationn by Kristen Solecki

IF THERE WAS ANYTHING I MISSED ABOUT belonging to the Seventh-day Adventist church, it was keeping the Sabbath: a period of rest and reflection that had, during my childhood, awaited my family and me at the end of every week. Those hallowed hours between sundown on Friday and sundown on Saturday always felt like they constituted a kind of sanctuary in time, an invisible cathedral we Adventists constructed with our hearts and minds, the feeling of which I could still summon by listening to "Borrowed Angel," the opening song of Anita Kerr's *A Sunday Serenade*, which my father often placed on the turntable of our hi-fi as the last rays of sun were leaking into the cove where our little house lived. The blank glass of the silent TV reflected our living room, where a fire blazed in the hearth. In the kitchen, a pot of lentils bubbled on the stove. Cheese danishes bloated slowly in the oven. Our expectations—and our meals—were always simple, as they were in the homes of most of the Adventists we'd ever known, the majority of whom avoided "flesh foods" and, following the example of the prophet Daniel, who'd refused the rich food and wine of King Nebuchadnezzar, elected to eat a legume-rich diet of fruits and vegetables. As evening grew nearer, my mother lit candles. My sister set the dining room table. Dad stoked the fire, stabbing cindery logs. Embers wafted like celestial fireflies up the flue. Another week had ended. At some point, we might sing "Day is dying in the west / Heav'n is touching earth with rest / Wait and worship while the night / Sets her evening lamps alight / Through all the sky."

There had been something magical about those evenings: the palpable sense of a restorative force at work in our lives and in our home. To stop work, turn off the TV and radio, set aside newspapers and secular magazines and acknowledge the arrival of Sabbath rest with prayers and throat-warming songs seemed like the most natural and comforting thing in the world. The keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath was so obviously right, you could feel it in your bones. Like so many of the things we were expected to believe and know, like acknowledging that alcohol and cigarettes were poisons to be avoided, or that dead people were just that, dead; or that no loving God would perform a miracle to torment sinners forever with hellfire, keeping the Sabbath *made sense*. And when I consider the things I miss most about being an Adventist, it is always this tableau to which I return: the nights when, as a family, we retreated from the world, and entered a time outside of time, a sacred space of quietude that foreshadowed—as we believed Holy Scripture indicated—the heavenly paradise our family would someday inherit, and where we would reside together for all eternity.

When I consider the things I miss most about being an Adventist, it is always this tableau to which I return: the nights when, as a family, we retreated from the world.

Even after I stopped going to church every week, I still kept—more or less—the Sabbath. Anytime I applied for a job—busing tables at a golf course in Massachusetts, delivering meals to the tables of tourists at the Old Faithful Inn in Yellowstone, working as a cashier at Barnes & Noble and at the Record Exchange in Raleigh—I always let my managers know that, due to "religious convictions," I would be unavailable for work on Saturdays. Exodus 20:8–11—"Remember the sabbath day," etc.—might as well have been imprinted into my DNA. As I was often reminded in my youth, it was the sole commandment that began with the word "remember," and the only one that the rest of Christendom seemed to have forgotten. And so it was easy to think that we Adventists were special. That we had access to what felt like secret knowledge, even though it had been spelled out, plain as day, by the Lord our God.

Adapted from All of Us Together in the End *by Matthew Vollmer. Hub City Press, April 2023. Reproduced with permission of Hub City Press and the author. Matthew Vollmer is the author of half a dozen books of fiction and nonfiction. He lives in Blacksburg, Virginia, where he teaches in the English department at Virginia Tech.*

How I Cook in Spring

I HAVE SO MUCH LOVE FOR SPRINGTIME IN ATLANTA, WHEN THE flowers are going wild. Wisteria, cherry tree, jonquil, dogwood. I spend mornings walking around feeling drunk and come home with huge bouquets of flowers. I really enjoy my mornings and my breakfasts this time of year; I grill, I fry eggs, I eat fresh green things, and I put it all on thick toast. I was thinking about a long walk and a good breakfast when I painted this image.

Illustration by
Alex Aldrich Barrett

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