

the Virginia woods. Laughing, Jones recalls, “So she got her brother to send these little dead squirrels by Fed-Ex. I mean, they’d been shot the day before. So I skinned and prepared them, and I made squirrel stew. And it was just delicious!”

Jones’s memory of Lewis is reverential. “I was so genuinely taken with her that it must have reached her,” she recalled. “Edna taught me a lot about what I care about, human nature.” Jones remembers Lewis as among the gentlest and humblest people she ever knew—sure, but never showy.

After publishing Lewis’s first book with Knopf, Jones signed more authors to tell the culinary story of America. She published books about New England cooks and the Northern Heartland. But the South had caught Jones’s eye. For her visionary but underappreciated Knopf Cooks American series, Jones commissioned *Barbecued Ribs and Other Great Feeds* (1987) and *The Florida Cookbook: From Gulf Coast Gumbo to Key Lime Pie* (1993) from writer and editor Jeanne Voltz, a native of Florida. *Preserving Today* (1992) was written by Jeanne Lesem, who grew up in Depression-era Arkansas eating her mother’s pickles and preserves. Perhaps most famously, she published *Biscuits, Spoonbread & Sweet Potato Pie* (1990) by Southern food evangelist Bill Neal, the chef-owner of Crook’s Corner in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Jones’s late career embraced the world outside American borders. More each year, she explored international cuisines to better understand what was happening here at home. As Americans learned more about the world through travel, and as more immigrants came ashore, we recognized the distinctiveness of our own culinary cultures.

Jones’s work with Edna Lewis and other Southerners helped lay the foundation for today’s resurgence of regional food. Think Sean Brock and Vivian Howard, both of whom are now at work on their own place-based books. Over a fifty-year career, Jones helped us narrate and make sense of our young nation’s complex history. Her ideal was not a melting pot, but a patchwork quilt that honored what each region brought to the great American table. 🍷

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VERSE

Mise en Place

By Melissa Dickson

It’s a routine mole removal, but he charts
the dark sweep of skin inside his patient’s forearm,
an oven burn long since healed to this calligraphy.
He sees them every day, four or five inches beyond the palm,
proof that when the timer chimes its impatient trill
these women grab dishrags instead of oven mitts

It’s written here as clear as the cookbooks
she’s long since stopped consulting: the toddler lurching
into the scent of an unleashed oven, the slick
of applesauce to mop up, the rice and butter beans
simmering stovetop, the little thing it is to scar
an arm, and the sin it is to burn the cornbread. 🍷

Melissa Dickson is a poet and mother of four whose poems can be found in Shenandoah, Cumberland River Review, and Southern Humanities Review.

ART by Blair Hobbs.

