

GRAVY

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**POISONED
BY CORN?**
PAGE 18

**WHAT WILL
CAMPBELL
MEANT TO
NASHVILLE**
PAGE 36

**DOUBT AND
FAITH IN
SCHOOL
GARDENS**
PAGE 44





ISSUE #61
FALL 2016



Emily Hilliard

GRAVY

THE SFA SERVES YOU...

FEATURES

36

CAN I GET A WITNESS?

David Dark

44

A PARABLE OF PRODUCE

Martha Park

2

FIRST HELPINGS

22

**A LIFETIME
OF BARBECUE
IN SELMA**
Meredith Bethune

66

**BEANS AND
FRANKS FOR A
MOTHERLESS GIRL**
Caroline Leland

8

ALL-STAR CUISINE
Gustavo Arellano

26

**SLAW ABIDING
CITIZENS**
Emily Hilliard

68

FEEDING A NEED
André Gallant

11

**WHEN SICILY
CAME TO
CHARLOTTE**
Cynthia Joyce

58

**NASHVILLE, CITY
OF NEWCOMERS**
Steve Haruch

72

**THE FUTURE OF
SOUTHERN DRINKING**
David Wondrich

18

MALNOURISHED
Tanya M. Peres

Cover photo by
EMILY HILLIARD

78

**LUNCH AT THE
OCTOPUS FARM**
Richard Schweid



First Helpings



Tomatoes ripen on the vine at McMerton Gardens in Memphis, TN.

No cornbread. No bourbon. No tortillas, tamales, nor pozole.

For as long as I've been part of Team SFA, we've danced around one topic without ever landing on it: religion. Or, put another way, spirituality. It seems like a no-brainer, doesn't it? But there are just so many ways to get it wrong. So many ways to drive our wagon into the ditch. Here's where we have landed: We're an academic organization, not a political one. We don't want to tell you how to vote. It follows, then, that we don't want to tell you how to worship. Or whether to worship at all.

That said, two writers in this issue of *Gravy* compelled us to make room at the SFA table for honest, thoughtful, and open-minded writing on religion. When you reach the middle of the book, you'll find two distinct, yet related meditations on progressive Christianity in the South. Think of them as acts of pondering, not proselytizing. Come to think of it, that's what we hope *Gravy* offers readers, regardless of the topic. —SCM

AT SFA WORLD HEADQUARTERS, we organize programming and documentary work around an annual theme. We tend to alternate among totemic ingredients, subregions of the South, and more abstract ideas that intersect with food and drink in ways that shape and define our region. This year we explore all things corn, perhaps the most Southern of all staple foods. Without it, there would be no grits.

Houston Corfield

Featured Contributors

Emily Elizabeth, Squared

WRITE. EAT. DRAW. That's how **Emily E. Wallace** lives her life. She's become a fixture on these pages. Her words and illustrations grace most issues. Called a pimento cheese scholar (she totally is, by the way) by *The New York Times*, Wallace was a 2015 James Beard Foundation Journalism Award nominee for "Ham to Ham Combat," featured in *Gravy* 57.

She works as deputy editor of *Southern Cultures* and has written and illustrated for *The Washington Post*, *The Oxford American*, and many others. Her other areas of expertise include mayonnaise, *The Price is Right*, roadside restaurants, and yams.

Emily E. Hilliard is the West Virginia state folklorist and a self-taught expert in pie.



Emily Wallace

She has worked for a number of cultural heritage organizations, including Smithsonian Folkways Recordings and the American Folklife Center.

For over a decade (and that's a lifetime in the blogging world), her blog about pie, *Nothing in the House*, has set a standard for thoughtful, engaging, beautifully produced food websites.

Hilliard's interests include foodways and music, women's domestic creativity, and the intersection between traditional and experimental art and music. She also plays old-time fiddle and guitar.



Emily Hilliard

Top: Kate Medley;
Bottom: Jess Schreiberstein

TIP No. 61

No more FOMO: Look for two articles from the Nashville Summer Symposium in this issue, and more from the Fall Symposium in the winter issue.



SHEA HEMBREY'S CADENCED CONVERSATION

A Prelude to *The Secret Ingredient*
by KATE BARNEY

ARTIST SHEA HEMBREY thinks of corn as fish bait. He recalls feeding human blood-kissed corn kernels to black hens to cure pesky skin warts—his grandfather's remedy. Hembrey was reared by a hairdresser mother and a factory worker father on forty acres of sorghum, peanuts, watermelon, corn, and cantaloupe in Hickory Grove, Arkansas (pop. 128 or 129, depending on your source), a country hour from movie-theater popcorn or Star Wars pinball machines on carpeted arcade floors.

Hembrey speaks of his corner of Arkansas with great reverence: "Where I grew up, there was a mysticism and creativity to everything. Everyone made things with their hands." His gratitude for the rural life reminds us how much genius has been cultivated in the fields of the American South.

Hembrey's works span media and



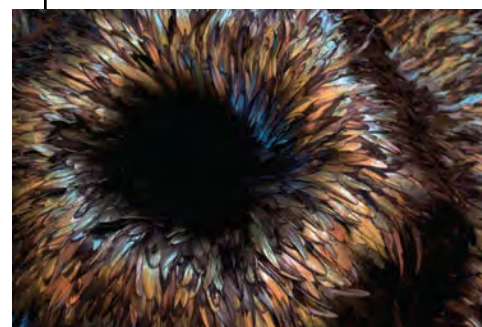
subject matter, their most consistent quality the relentless chase of answers to unanswered questions. He believes that contemporary art should exhibit exquisite craft *and* pass what he calls the "MeMaw test": the ability to explain the concept of a piece to his grandmother in five minutes or less.

For the SFA Fall Symposium commission, Hembrey revived a period when he used dried corn husks in sculptures and images of corn in

Ana Sousa

trompe-l'œil paintings. He daydreamed about utilizing the textures and aromas of corn husks for large-format sculptures. This past summer, he visited the Powerhouse in Oxford to explore the possibilities.

The Powerhouse stands tall and sits long. Its grand wall spaces called Hembrey to attention and begged him



Shea Hembrey

to listen. He describes the space as "conversational, requiring a piece with a stronger narrative, both poetic and informational." He turned from more large-format sculptures to a long, conversation-starter of a piece supplemented by several smaller components.

This larger piece, *The Secret Ingredient*, debuts at the Powerhouse in October as part of an exhibit by the same name. Wall-long installations of recipe boxes each display a single,

FROM TOP TO
BOTTOM:
Oven; Detail
from Font;
OPPOSITE:
Double Portal



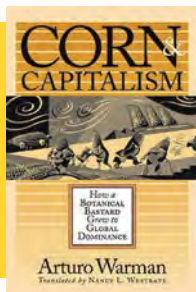
talismanic recipe card. The recipes feature Hembrey's writings and drawings with instructions for food and fodder.

Alongside *The Secret Ingredient*, Hembrey will install four sculptures made of humble, often-overlooked materials—from wheat straw to corn-husks to tailfeathers.

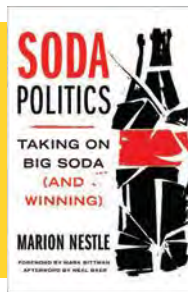
Hembrey prods and proselytizes. His art examines the mega and micro that we do not see but should strive to understand. He affirms that "heart and soul transfers directly from the maker into the object, and furthermore, that no idea is so brilliant that it shouldn't be personally be backed up with masterful construction." Hembrey's work is a model for curiosity, craft, and clarity in contemporary art.

Driven by a multi-year grant from 21c Museum Hotels, we open the Symposium with a viewing of The Secret Ingredient. We invite you to visit the Powerhouse in Oxford, MS, October 4–30 to experience the exhibit.

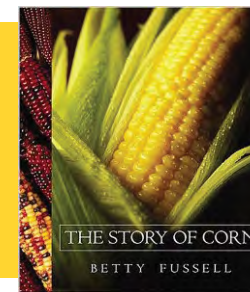
GRAVY
BOOK CLUB
Gets Corny



Corn and Capitalism by Arturo Warman is a political, economic, anthropological, and historical analysis of a crop that dominates the world—and the human systems that propagate it.

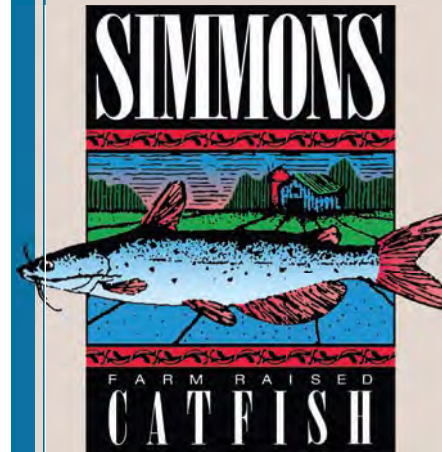


Marion Nestle's Soda Politics: Taking On Big Soda (And Winning) offers a comprehensive survey of soda consumption in America and a dive into the syrupy problem with corn.



The Story of Corn by Betty Fussell is the tale of the grain that built the New World and then spread worldwide. Spoiler alert: Humans and corn don't live happily ever after.

First Helpings



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Detail from Radius

Shea Hembrey



ALL-STAR CUISINE

WHEN "SOUTHERN FOOD" MEANS "MEXICAN FOOD"

by Gustavo Arellano

EVERY COUPLE OF months, a controversy about Mexican cuisine requires me to grab my refried hammer of vengeance. I am, after all, the author of *Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America*. Defending the cuisine's honor is my lifelong duty. I leave no combo plate behind.

It's a fun cross to bear. In the past, I've called out celebrity chef Rick Bayless for saying he was going to introduce "authentic" Mexican flavors to Southern California by consulting on a Los Angeles restaurant, when the truth is there's been "authentic" Mexican in SoCal ever since we were a part of Mexico. I trashed Austin, Texas, for their claim that the city invented the cult of the breakfast taco—it actually came from *muy* Mexican South Texas. When Donald Trump Tweeted a picture of himself enjoying a taco

bowl, I pointed out that the dish was popularized in Disneyland by Mexican workers in the 1950s.

So imagine my excitement this summer when I learned that San Diego Padres first baseman Wil Myers had told a reporter, "I've said this on a couple occasions, and people get really mad at me. I enjoy East Coast Mexican food a little better. Yeah, wow. I grew up on it. That's just what my taste is, but there's nothing wrong with San Diego Mexican food."

The barbs came swiftly, not just from angry San Diego residents, who believe, like many other cities in *los Estados Unidos*, that their Mexican food is the best. Fans of Mexican food nationwide also blasted Myers, incredulous that someone, anyone, could declare Mexican food on the East Coast better than in the Southwest. As I read the blowback, I was impressed: Finally,

Americans rush to the defense of Mexican honor!

I readied my ire and began researching Myers. (I'm a Chicago Cubs fan, and the Padres haven't mattered to me since the days of Tony Gwynn.) But I had to stop before I could begin my swing. Turns out Myers isn't a blue-blooded Boston Brahmin or a wise-guy New Yorker. He's a Southerner—a Tar Heel, specifically. When the twenty-five-year-old native of Thomasville, North Carolina, talked about growing up enjoying East Coast Mexican food, he really meant *Southern* Mexican food.

The casual reader might shrug at the distinction, and I get it: Mexican food in the South still isn't up to the level of West Coast Mexican or any other Mexican, really. The Southwest has a 250-year head start on South-Mex; Easterners can boast of the many immigrants from the state of Puebla who have enlivened New York's food scene. The South? Despite recent gains, the region's Mexican restaurants are mostly stuck in a Tex-Mex menu circa 1991. Its biggest contribution to the U.S.'s Mexican food scene is the tostaguac, which is little more than a guacamole taco.

But Myers shouldn't be pilloried for his remarks; he should be hailed for them. He represents a fundamental change happening in the South right now: A generation is growing up with Mexican food and embracing it not as something exotic and foreign, but as part of who they are as

Southerners. And that's an important indicator of the South's continued embrace of Latinos.

TO BE A SOUTHERN Californian nowadays, as I am, is to eat Mexican food from cradle to grave. That means everyone can claim the cuisine and never feel a sense of guilt about appropriation—how can you, when it's part of your mother's milk?

Eating the cuisines of other cultures hardwires people for the better. Demonizing ethnic food is one of the first things that dominant cultures do to mark

A GENERATION IS GROWING UP WITH MEXICAN FOOD AND EMBRACING IT AS PART OF WHO THEY ARE AS SOUTHERNERS.

minorities as Other. Back when my mom, aunts, and uncles immigrated to Orange County, California, in the 1960s, white people ate Mexican food. But they didn't consider it—or the Mexicans who made it—American.

But if you are raised with tacos and enchiladas as regular sustenance, it makes it that much easier to embrace Mexicans as friends, neighbors, classmates, and spouses. And relationships like that have made Southern California a far better place for Mexicans.

The South is now taking the first steps toward achieving such

Myers: Doug Pensinger/Getty Images; Tamales: Shelly Stuart/Adobe Stock

a reality. No region of the United States has experienced a larger proportional increase in its Latino population over the past twenty years. And Wil Myers's home state of North Carolina has absorbed more Latino immigrants than almost any other state. According to the University of North Carolina's Carolina Population Center, there were about 845,000 Latinos living in the Tar Heel State in 2012 out of a total population of about 10 million—this, from a population of just over 76,000 in 1990. Only Florida and Georgia have bigger Latino communities in *el Sur*.

Data compiled by the Pew Hispanic Center showed only 602 Latinos lived in Myers's native Davidson County in 1990, the year he was born. By 2011, that number was 10,550, 6 percent of the county's population. But the 2010 U.S. census pegs them as 14.4 percent of Thomasville's population, meaning Myers grew up in a town twice as Latino as the rest of Davidson County, and more Latino than the rest of the state. So while his parents' generation dealt with Latinos as newcomers, Myers would have gone to school with them, and probably even played baseball with the children of immigrants and second-generation Latinos drawn to the area's manufacturing industries and proximity to the Winston-Salem/Greensboro/High Point Triad area.

Gustavo Arellano is the editor of OC Weekly and Gravy's columnist.

His pride in the state's Mexican food has a strong basis in reality. Stats compiled by the Institute for Mexicans Abroad show that the majority of *talones de brea* (Tar Heels) come from Hidalgo, Veracruz, Guerrero, and Oaxaca. These states all have proud culinary traditions: slow-roasted *barbacoa estilo Hidalgo*, Veracruz's famous fish stews, Guerrero's awesome take on *huevos rancheros* called *aporreado*, and Oaxacan moles. The restaurants of Myers' youth were most likely in the hands of people who knew good cooking. Even if these restaurateurs made the business decision to serve crowd-pleasing nachos rather than Oaxacan tamales, we at least know that Myers was eating respectable grub.

Myers's pride in his hometown Mexican food is significant. The cuisine is now part of his Southern identity, and makes it easier for millennials like him to join their Latino peers in shaping the bright future of the region.

So, congrats, young Wil Myers: America might have ridiculed you for your food choices. And I still think that San Diego Mexican food offers more than what North Carolina has. (Have you tried the seafood at *Mariscos German*?) But you were brave to announce something that more people need to realize: *Carne asada* tacos are now as Southern as biscuits and gravy, whether people want to believe it or not. 🍷

WHEN SICILY CAME TO CHARLOTTE

REMEMBERING MANGIONE'S

by Cynthia Joyce

“YOU’RE FROM CHARLOTTE?” THE WAITER ASKS. “I NEVER meet anyone here who’s actually from Charlotte.”

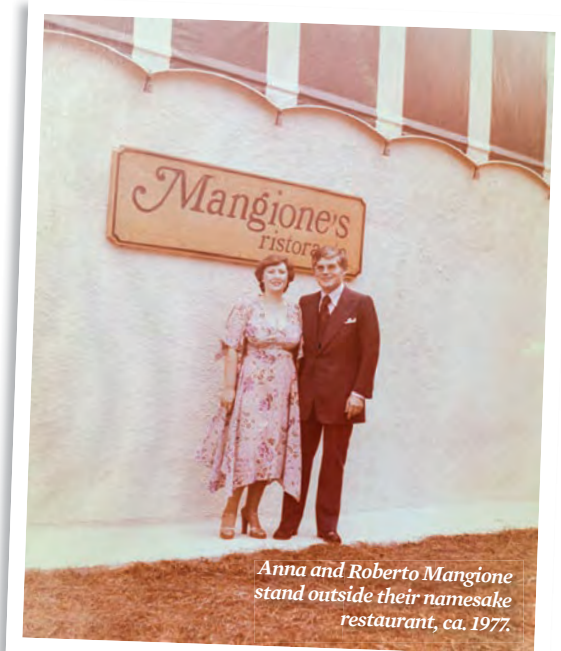
I am having lunch with my parents at Kid Cashew, a newish tapas spot in the Dilworth neighborhood. (I’ve chosen not to order the restaurant’s signature cocktail, Goat’s Breast Milk, which is made with ouzo and amaretto and not a drop of milk.) We have pulled the waiter into our game of “Guess what this used to be?” It’s a favorite pastime of ours in a city that’s paved over so much of its past.

I explain how this restaurant used to be Wad’s soda shop, a favorite after-school hangout where a few bucks would get you an expertly grilled hot dog and a large orangeade (a story he’s polite enough to pretend he hasn’t heard before), and I’m suddenly aware that I’m beaming with a hometown pride I don’t often feel.

It’s hard to be proud of a place that doesn’t exist anymore.

When people ask me where I’m from, I tend to answer “North Carolina,” knowing it’s likely to bring to mind fond associations with any number of lovely towns: Asheville, Durham, Wilmington, Winston-Salem. If I say more specifically Charlotte, the slicker big sibling of those cities, I get a blank stare.

Today, Charlotte struggles to outgrow its reputation as a little Atlanta, big on money and ambition, short on historic and



Anna and Roberto Mangione stand outside their namesake restaurant, ca. 1977.

cultural charm. The Charlotte I knew in the 1970s and early '80s still felt like a small Southern town (population 241,178 in 1970), with an evangelical streak



Roberto Mangione sits beneath a 1976 portrait of himself in the Mangiones' home.

that often clashed with the chamber of commerce.

It wasn't until 1978 that diners could order a mixed drink in a restaurant (no more brown-bagging and pouring drinks under the table), allowing the city to expand its hospitality industry. As more banks consolidated and moved operations into town, Charlotte successfully refashioned its downtown—once eerily empty outside of business hours—into Uptown, a shining example of urban renewal by way of happy-hour drink specials.

That same year, IBM opened a manufacturing plant in Charlotte, relocating 1,000 employees and

their families from upstate New York. The city had already begun its transition into a banking center, a process that continued to pick up speed: Bank of America would eventually move its global headquarters there, making Charlotte the country's second-biggest financial center.

For years, I dismissed this new Charlotte as shellacked and tacky, overly conservative and embarrassingly uncultured. Lately I find myself looking for signs of that in-between time, when the din of constant construction was drowned out by sounds of high and low culture clashing. It was a place where my music teacher—a classical violinist in the local symphony—occasionally mud-wrestled in bars for money, and where Bojangles' drive-throughs served the city's best fried chicken and biscuits. The local pizza joint, Picasso's, was thus named because the owner thought it sounded Italian.

That era of Charlotte—the one that stock car racing, Billy Graham, and the Milestone underground music club put on the map—that's the one I miss.

In a time when perceived authenticity has become a high-value commodity, Charlotte would do well to celebrate more of its down-home history. But only a small handful of landmark eateries—among them Lupie's Café, Gus's Sir Beef Restaurant and Price's Chicken Coop—survive today.

So while we sit on the patio overlooking this stretch of East

Boulevard, we compare our list of firsts and used-to-be's from that earlier era. The place next door? Used to be Venus Diner, one of several Greek-owned diners in the city. It's where my parents ate their first meal (burgers, medium-rare) after arriving here from Quebec more than fifty years ago. That empty lot where, before long, condos will rise? That was the old East Blvd. Bar and Grill, whose manager fired me from my first waitress job for neglecting to offer fresh pepper to burger eaters.

And up the street, tucked just behind what is now JJ's Red Hots (formerly The Drum restaurant, the circular center of which is still visible from JJ's rooftop patio)? That was Mangione's Ristorante: a white tablecloth, Sicilian family-run restaurant that was the first to introduce black linguine, pasta alla pesto, and other “farinaceous exotica” (as one early review characterized it) to Charlotte.

“We taught Charlotte to *eat*,” says now-retired chef Anna Mangione, in an accent that isn't easy to place. Like other immigrants who left their East Coast cohorts to come South, she picked up the language from locals who spoke in mysterious colloquialisms. Now she speaks her own personal patois, adding syllables to certain words while cutting others short. Her elaborate gestures to say as much as her words.

“Lemme tella you,” she says, throwing both hands up in the air. “I make *lotta* friends with my hands.”

ONE OF THE UPSIDES to the exponential growth of the past twenty-five years has been that Charlotte, like other metropolitan areas in the South, is now home to a fast-growing Latino population. Today, when you say the word “immigrant” in Charlotte, it's automatically assumed that you mean “Latino.”

That assumption is often correct, thanks to the wave of predominately Mexican laborers who arrived during the economic boom of the late 1980s and early '90s. Immigrants from El Salvador, Honduras, Ecuador, and Peru have followed, vastly expanding the city's culinary offerings along the way.

But there was an earlier, smaller wave—a ripple, really—of immigrants who settled in Charlotte in the 1960s. They came not because of the pull of existing community, but in response to serendipitous opportunity. Having come from Italy, Cuba, Hungary, Germany, Greece, Quebec, and elsewhere, many of the them gained footholds in their new home by cooking, serving, and selling food. Margaret and John Mancino owned the city's first IHOP. Helga Molnar fled the Nazis in her native Czechoslovakia and became known all over town for the German Christmas cookies she sold at the Charity League bake sale. Phil Levine, a second-generation New Yorker of Russian descent, moved to Charlotte when his father took a job with

Kate Medley



the clothing store Stein's, and later opened Phil's Deli. All wove themselves into the city's fabric long before Charlotte started calling itself a cosmopolitan city.

For Anna and her husband, Roberto, a talented tailor who opened a shop on Madison Avenue in Manhattan when they first moved from Sicily to the Bronx in 1963, the South was the land of textiles. A traveling salesman who had spent time in Charlotte convinced Roberto that bigger and better opportunities awaited him in North Carolina.

By the time the Mangiones arrived, the textile industry, once a major employer in the area, was already in decline. Roberto had trouble finding skilled workers. (One employee was so incompetent, according to Anna, that he couldn't keep the thimble on his finger. Roberto used to tape it on.)

Meanwhile, Anna started cooking elaborate meals for a rotating cast of friends—Italian friends, Jewish friends, other not-from-Charlotte friends. Sometimes fourteen or more gathered at her table at once. They all begged Anna to open her own place. At first, she didn't take them seriously. She was just doing what she'd done since she was a little girl working at her father's deli in Sicily, helping prepare Sunday meals for friends with whatever game the men hunted.

During a visit back to the Bronx, a good friend finally convinced Anna that her cooking skills could be put to professional use. She

brought it up to Roberto during the long drive home. "We had to talk, had to say *something*, you know?" Anna says. "So I said, 'What you think we open a restaurant?'"

Many Greek immigrants who arrived in the South and opened restaurants in the 1950s and '60s made their mark with Southern food: fish camps and barbecue joints, diners that served meat and threes. One exception was the Open Kitchen, which has served Greek and Italian food since 1952. (Or, as one local writer characterized it, "Italian-flavored" food.) It took just one meal at the Open Kitchen to persuade Anna she could do better. "They had chicken parmigiano, pasta parm, meatballs...but it don't taste like the way I cook."

Anna and Roberto opened La Strada pizzeria in 1974, introducing thick, crusty Sicilian-style pies to a population that had never seen rectangular pizza. They sold La Strada in 1977 and opened Mangione's. The restaurant cultivated an upscale atmosphere in the former location of a Li'l General convenience store. Roberto oversaw the bar and the front of the house; Anna ran the kitchen.

It wasn't always easy, trying to coax diners who didn't know the difference between ravioli and rigatoni to expand their palate beyond the lasagna and chicken parm they were used to. Appealing to Charlotte's increasingly affluent customers sometimes required indulging in trends more than traditions. In the 1980s,



Anna and Robert bought an Italian espresso machine.

"Cappuccino we drink in the morning—we don't drink it for dinner," Anna says, her eyes narrowing at the thought of it. "But my husband says, 'Hey, we are here to make money. We're not here to teach people.'"

Even the local food critics, who wrote generally favorable reviews of Mangione's, didn't always get it. In the early 1980s, the "Southern Fried Gourmet" columnist from the local newspaper ordered espresso after dinner. Anna recalls her complaining that the coffee cups were too small.

When I was a kid, my parents ate dinner out once a week. Fine-dining restaurants in Charlotte had names that seemed

designed to scare off a child. There was Slug's Rib, which served all prime rib, all the time. And the Silver Cricket, where Chris Hastings, now chef of Birmingham's Hot & Hot Fish Club, got his first taste French brasserie fare. If they were going someplace "nice," my sister and I usually didn't mind getting left behind. But we loved Mangione's.

Anna still remembers some of her longtime regulars' orders. She says that my father liked the veal scaloppine, and my mother ordered chicken Marsala, no mushrooms. Bojangles' founder Jack Fulk, a regular and a close friend of the Mangione family, made his money on fried chicken and biscuits. When he dined out, he went to Mangione's for Anna's rigatoni.

Anna Mangione at home.

Kate Medley



While many of Mangione's regulars were American businessmen on expense accounts, local Italian Americans also frequented the restaurant, and on occasion brought in friends and family visiting from Italy. On those nights, Anna went all out.

One night, she sent plates of pasta alle vongole, or linguine with white clam sauce, to a table of Italian diners. One plate came back. Not enough sauce, he said. She didn't have extra. ("I had so many tickets, and I had to deal with that bullshit from these people?")

She made another dish, adding the sauce. And then she added more sauce. And then she added too much sauce.

She sent it out anyway and said

to the waiter, "Tell him he can wash his feet with it." Roberto worried they'd lost a good customer.

"You know what? Some customers are better to lose, not gain," Anna told her husband. She doesn't regret the sauce incident. "That guy was a pain in the ass. *Still* a pain in the ass."

Procuring good ingredients was a patchwork. The Mangiones had their own vegetable and herb garden. They bought pork from one of their cooks, who raised pigs in nearby Waxhaw, and made their own sausage. They drove ninety miles to Greensboro to buy olives.

"The only way to get Italian products was to get them off a truck coming from New Jersey on

their way to Florida," says Roberto Jr., who was bussing tables by the age of ten and began cooking beside his mother at fourteen. His sister Sara was the hostess.

Roberto Jr. hasn't been back to see the old restaurant, which his parents closed in 2004. It is now Big Lebowski's, a restaurant-bar that serves fried pickles to sports fans. He works for Oracle, selling computer systems to restaurants and hotels. A few times a year, he gives talks at culinary schools. He's discouraged by students who seem more interested in personal brand-building than in actual cooking.

He misses the restaurant life at times, but he prefers hosting informal feasts at his Virginia Beach home. "I hate to sound so stereotypically Italian, but all that stuff in the restaurant? That was the same thing we did on Sundays at home. I didn't think anything of it. I thought everybody knew how to cook."

Contemporary expressions of the New South culinary scene are typically found in immigrant pockets—the taco trucks and strip mall Vietnamese places typically thought of as twenty-first-century phenomena. Italian restaurants like Mangione's were an early precursor. These were places owned by people eager to assimilate. Instead of building an immigrant community, they carved

out their own niche.

Today, if Mangione's were still in business, it would compete with the all-American, high-end chains like The Capitol Grille or The Palm that tend to flourish in Charlotte. By comparison, it might be considered more of an upscale trattoria, less of a fine-dining establishment. I wonder if it would be celebrated as a longtime local favorite, and not an international eatery.

Charlotte dining has come full circle, even if epic expansion has yet to yield many world-class restaurants. Kid Cashew, where I contemplate Charlotte past in the company of my parents, is one of more than thirty North Carolina restaurants in owner Giorgios Bakatsias's portfolio. The restaurant's name references the owner's childhood pet goat, and the menu includes lamb burgers and gyros. Few of Bakatsias's restaurants have such an explicitly Mediterranean identity.

It remains to be seen whether Kid Cashew can keep the early buzz going now that Babalu, another small plates restaurant, has opened across the street. Based in Jackson, Mississippi, Babalu Tapas & Tacos serves Latin-flavored Southern food, such as Mississippi Delta tamales. It isn't Mexican, or Mediterranean, or Cuban—and that may be what characterizes a successful restaurant in Charlotte today. 🐔

Roberto Mangione holds Anna's 1993 recognition from *Chefs in America*.



Kate Medley

Cynthia Joyce teaches journalism at the University of Mississippi and is the editor of *Please Forward: How Blogging Reconnected New Orleans after Katrina*.



MALNOURISHED

CULTURAL IGNORANCE PAVED THE WAY FOR PELLAGRA

by Tanya M. Peres

ANCIENT FARMERS DOMESTICATED CORN, OR MAIZE, ABOUT 9,000 years ago in the Rio Balsas River region of present-day Mexico. From there, dried kernels made their way along ancient trade routes to other locales in Mesoamerica, Central America, and eventually North America. Corn was easy to grow and produced a high yield. Eventually, entire communities flourished alongside maize crops. Corn traveled to Europe in the post-Columbus world and spread across the continent. When early European colonists arrived in North America, Native peoples, especially the Iroquois, taught them how to farm and prepare corn. An essential step in the preparation of corn is nixtamalization, which liberates the chemical compounds niacin and tryptophan and makes them bioavailable. While we do not know exactly when ancient Mesoamericans developed this method, the earliest culinary equipment associated with the process dates to approximately 3,200 years ago. Real and long-lasting problems arose when corn became a commodity crop as early as the 1700s in Europe. In the nineteenth-century rural South, sharecroppers grew it, sold it, ate it, and became sick—all because of a lost recipe.

Marion Post Wolcott/Library of Congress

CURE FOR PELEGRA
 PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE HAS
 FOUND CAUSE OF DISEASE
STARTS BY WRONG DIET
 Dr. Goldberger Experiments Upon
 Convicts Giving Them the Disease
 by Improper Feeding and Curing
 Them by Using a Balanced Diet.—
 Disease to Be Fought Harder Now.

South Carolina Digital Newspaper Program

Centuries earlier, the indigenous populations of North America had successfully adopted maize culture and preparation from Central America. Yet the process of nixtamalization was left behind when corn crossed the Atlantic. European farmers were seemingly unaware of this essential step. Their ignorance of nixtamalization severely impacted the American colonies. Corn-dependent populations in both Europe and North America suffered from pellagra, a chronic niacin deficiency that brings on four progressively catastrophic “Ds”: diarrhea, dermatitis, dementia, and death. The human body uses niacin, or vitamin B3, to control blood sugar, process fats, maintain healthy skin, and make new DNA. Early symptoms of pellagra include loss of appetite, irritability, and vomiting, followed by inflammation of the mouth and tongue and a scaly red rash on the hands and neck.

Gaspar Casal, a Spanish physician, first diagnosed pellagra in 1735. The disease also showed up in eighteenth-century Italy—its English name likely derives from the Italian *pelle agra*, meaning “rough skin.” Two centuries later, pellagra reached epidemic proportions in the American South.

It afflicted rural poor sharecroppers, orphans, mental-hospital patients, and those living in coal-mining camps and cotton-mill towns. These populations often lacked fresh meats and produce, leaving them with an unvaried diet based on cornmeal.

An agricultural invention from the turn of the twentieth century unintentionally hastened the spread of pellagra. John Beall of Decatur, Illinois, patented the Beall degerminator in the United States in 1901. Degerming corn reduces processing time but lowers its niacin content. (Today, the machine is still used to dry-mill 90 percent of all corn globally.)

In 1914, the U.S. government tasked Dr. Joseph Goldberger, a Hungarian-born infectious disease specialist, with determining the cause of the pellagra epidemic. He proposed that pellagra was a dietary disease and not one caused by germs. The following year, Goldberger conducted an experiment on twelve prisoners at the Rankin State Prison Farm in Mississippi. The men ate only corn and corn-based foods: likely cornbread, grits, and fresh corn. Within six months, more than half of them had developed symptoms.

LEFT: A headline from the Manning (SC) Times, November 17, 1915; **OPPOSITE:** An elderly pellagra sufferer in Orange County, NC, ca. 1939.



TOP: A nurse counsels a young pellagra sufferer on improving her diet. *Gee's Bend, AL, 1939.* **BOTTOM:** An article from the Abbeville (SC) Press and Banner, August 25, 1915.

When they returned to a diet that included fresh meat, the symptoms disappeared. (Unlike the victims of the infamous Tuskegee syphilis study, these prisoners knew about the experiment and negotiated pardons from Governor Early Brewer in return for their participation.)

Critics called Goldberger a fraud. Luckily for those who suffered from pellagra in the South, he persisted. In 1916, Goldberger took drastic measures to prove his hypothesis. He injected blood from a pellagra sufferer into the arm of his assistant, Dr. George Wheeler. Wheeler then returned the favor. They took swabs from the infected patient's nose and throat and rubbed them in their own noses and throats. Finally, they swallowed capsules containing scabs from the patient's skin rashes. They repeated the experiment, enlisting friends, colleagues, and Goldberger's wife. No one contracted pellagra.

Goldberger's research proved that pellagra was a dietary disease, and that it could be reversed or

avoided by consuming fresh meats, milk, eggs, and other nutrient-rich foods. The national Public Health Service instructed physicians to prescribe a nutrient-rich diet for Southerners at the highest risk of suffering from pellagra. Unfortunately, in the poorest pockets of the rural South, doctors bristled at taking orders from the East Coast medical establishment. Many ignored the new recommendations.

Public health officials persisted. Beginning in 1915, the Department of Pellagra Research ran ads in Southern newspapers with the slogan "Own a Cow," urging farmers to consume some of their homegrown milk instead of selling it to "city folks." Unfortunately, not all Southerners could afford to take this advice. When cotton prices tumbled in 1920, pellagra cases surged again.

Some Southern leaders worried more about image problems than a public health crisis. One South Carolina politician, James F. Byrnes,

"Own a Cow" Still the Slogan
 "Own a cow," is still the slogan of the department of pellagra research, and if the farmers can be educated to the point where they realize that by owning a cow, keeping it in good condition, and using the milk derived therefrom, they are lessening the chances of their getting pellagra because of their one-sided diet, the department believes that it will have done something towards stopping the ravages of pellagra. Of course milk alone will not prevent pellagra, but when the farmer has milk, and eats meat and eggs instead of selling them to the city folks, he will never have pellagra, the experts say.

Marion Post Wolcott/Library of Congress; South Carolina Digital Newspaper Program

TWO CENTURIES OF HUMAN SUFFERING COULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED IF SPANISH EXPLORERS HAD RECORDED THE INSTRUCTIONS FOR PROCESSING AND SERVING MAIZE.

feared that coverage of the pellagra epidemic would steer investors and tourists away from South. In the summer of 1921, he wrote a strongly worded letter to President Harding, claiming that pellagra statistics had been overstated and the President had been "misled... into making statements that parts of the South were actually menaced with famine and plague." Finally, federal recommendations to fortify the nation's bread and flour supplies with thiamine, niacin, and iron led to the eradication of pellagra in the South by 1945.

Interestingly, diets heavy in cornmeal and low in fresh fruits, vegetables, and meat lack tryptophan, an essential amino acid that makes niacin. As Goldberger noted in his research, indigenous people in Mexico and North America didn't suffer from pellagra. They knew how to soak dried corn kernels in limewater and how to pair corn with companion nutrients. Two centuries of human suffering could have been avoided if Spanish explorers had recorded

the instructions for processing and serving maize. Nixtamalization was no secret—many of the steps occurred outside of houses in easily observed public areas. The Europeans chose not to pay attention to this key practice.

Archaeologists credit the domestication of corn and the nixtamalization process with providing a stable foundation on which the indigenous cultures of the Americas flourished. Growing and storing a surplus of foods, especially corn, enabled Precolombian peoples to focus their attention on art, politics, science, and architecture. Corn nourished civilizations for thousands of years before Columbus ever stepped foot in the "New World." Anthropologists and food historians see the unwillingness of the Spaniards to adopt indigenous foodways as the reason corn is mischaracterized as a low-nutrition food. The unearthing of ancient foodways allows us to understand and appreciate the complex relationships between Southerners and our totemic foods. 🍷

Tanya M. Peres is a zooarchaeologist and an associate professor of anthropology at Florida State University. She is at work on a book about the prehistoric roots of Southern foodways. Part I of this article appeared in the summer 2016 issue of Gravy.



A LIFETIME OF BARBECUE IN SELMA

PULLED PORK WITH A SIDE OF CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY AT LANNIE'S

by Meredith Bethune

PLATES HEAVING WITH thick strands of smoked pork and topped with a single crackling are synonymous with Lannie's Bar-B-Q Spot in Selma, Alabama. They've been serving it that way for nearly seventy-five years. Locals flow in and out of the low-slung brick building, picking up to-go orders. A photo of founder Lannie Moore Travis,

who passed away in 1994, hangs above vinyl-cushioned booths.

Current owner Lula Hatcher is Travis's daughter. Now in her eighties, she used to watch her mother, who was born in 1915, make that sauce on the stove. Lannie's had a dirt floor when it opened in 1942. Before the age of meat inspections, Hatcher's stepfather purchased live hogs and

Photos by Jerry Siegel

slaughtered and butchered them himself. "We had big old black pots. He would boil the water and get that hog hair off," she remembers. "Then, he'd cut them up on the table." He smoked the hogs on site. "We used to have open pits built out of blocks," she says. "It was kind of dangerous with those pits, with fire going and grease dripping down."

At twelve, Hatcher's mother assigned her a new and unexpected task—retrieving the hogs from a stockyard on the eastern outskirts of town. The owner calmly tied up the terrified, wiggling animal and placed it in Hatcher's bicycle basket. "It was a live hog! We used to get big old hogs squealing all the way home," she laughs, recalling how she struggled to balance the bike as she peddled back to the restaurant.

Selma lies in the Black Belt, that large swath of rich soil stretching across south-central Alabama. Once considered the "Queen City of the Black Belt," its prime location on the Alabama River made Selma the region's bustling commercial center, with a thriving downtown. The cotton trade initially drove the city's economy. Craig Air Force Base, built in 1940, helped sustain local businesses in the mid-twentieth century. Selma's black residents, though, were typically excluded from prosperity. Most lived under the poverty line, and nearly all were denied the right to vote.

In 1963, African American attorneys, ministers, teachers, and

IN JANUARY 1965, A CROWD OF VOTING-RIGHTS ACTIVISTS GATHERED AT LANNIE'S TO CELEBRATE THE NEWS THAT DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. WOULD BE COMING TO TOWN.



high-school students began working with national civil rights leaders like John Lewis and Bernard Lafayette to demand voting rights in Dallas County. Hatcher remembers carrying barbecue sandwiches to activists staying in the neighborhood.

Although Lannie's was located in East Selma, a historically black residential neighborhood, customers of all races were welcome there.

"We were the only place that wasn't segregated," Hatcher says. "White, black, whoever. They



bought what they wanted. I don't know of any other place that did that." Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church, less than a mile away, acted as a headquarters for the local movement.

In January 1965, a crowd of voting-rights activists gathered at Lannie's to celebrate the news that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would come to town. By March, with the help of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the voting rights campaign reached a fever pitch in Selma, attracting locals like Annie Lee Cooper, a close friend of the Travis family. After standing in line for hours outside the Dallas County Courthouse to register to vote, Cooper famously got into a fight with the billy club-wielding Sheriff Jim Clark.

"It was tough back then in '65.

We had some mean people back then," Hatcher says, recalling the violence that many civil rights activists suffered at the hands of police. On March 7, 1965, Alabama state troopers mercilessly beat peaceful protestors marching across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. That televised moment burned its mark on the American consciousness.

The right to vote didn't necessarily produce better economic conditions for all the black residents of Selma or the Black Belt. Whites continued to maintain much of the power in the region. When the Air Force base closed in 1977, many local shops and restaurants shut their doors.

Lannie's managed to stay open. Hatcher took the reins when her mother retired in 1984 and built the current brick structure a few



years later. Lannie's continued to support causes the family believed in. In 1990, when Selma High School students protested the firing of Selma's first black school superintendent, Hatcher and her employees brought them barbecue sandwiches.

Over the past fifty-four years, Selma has lost 30 percent of its population. Like many Southern towns that once relied primarily on agriculture, the commercial buildings on Broad Street are now vacant. Stately antebellum mansions line side streets. So do boarded-up businesses and decrepit shacks.

Still, Hatcher acknowledges that Selma has made astounding progress, even if more work is

needed to achieve true equality.

Lannie's Bar-B-Q Spot thrives today. On weeknights, it's one of the few non-chain businesses near downtown Selma where locals can grab a quick meal. Joanne Bland, a Selma native who marched on the bridge on Bloody Sunday back in 1965, started eating at Lannie's as a child and still goes there regularly. To her and to many other Selmians, the Lannie's staff is like family. "They're loving and kind," she says. "And I'll tell you what, it's always been a black and white business. It's not a black thing—good food spans the rainbow." And so does Lannie's Bar-B-Q, which bridges Selma past and present. 🍷

Meredith Bethune is a writer based in Washington, D.C. She descends from a long line of Alabamians.



SLAW ABIDING CITIZENS

A QUEST FOR THE
WEST VIRGINIA HOT DOG

by Emily Hilliard,
with illustrations by Emily Wallace

A tray of hot dogs and peanuts from Buddy B's in Sissonville, WV.

WE ARRIVED AT THE small country store at dusk, giddy for our first hot dog. The hand-painted sign outside Buddy B's in Sissonville, West Virginia, advertised fresh produce, pinto beans and cornbread, and "Best In Town Hot Dogs." Inside, bulk seeds, bags of peanuts, and jars of penny candy lined the red gingham-papered walls, and a cash register and food counter stood on either side of the door. We gawked like tourists at the hot dog clock and hand-painted hot dog sign, outlined by the triple-underlined text, TRY OUR HOT DOGS THEY ARE GO-O-O-O-D. As the cashier-cook prepared our dogs, we surreptitiously took pictures.

We walked into an ongoing conversation. "Watch out, she's

the meanest thing here," a man joked as he walked past, lugging a twenty-pound tube of ground beef from the self-serve meat case. Recognizing the words were intended for her, the cook countered, "Get outta here, trouble!"

She slid our dogs through a side pick-up window and we retreated, tray and a bag of peanuts in hand, to the diner booth outside. Lifting our dogs in the air as coleslaw and chili dribbled onto the waxed paper below, we toasted the kickoff of our trip.

Chili, slaw, mustard, and onions: Since moving to West Virginia last fall to work as the state folklorist, I've answered with that refrain when asked how I want my hot dog dressed. My travels to conduct interviews with vernacular artists and doc-

Photos by Emily Hilliard

ument community-based traditions often include stops at hot dog joints. These lunch counters, ice cream stands, and country stores are sometimes the only lunch option in rural areas. The passionate declarations of loyalty I'd overheard between interviews suggested that there was more to hot dogs in West Virginia than just that four-ingredient list. To better understand this cultural phenomenon, I enlisted the help of a fellow folklorist who also happens to share my first and middle names. That's how Emily Wallace and I found ourselves on a 286-mile loop that we affectionately dubbed The Emily Elizabeth West Virginia Hot Dog Road Trip.

Arriving at my Charleston apartment wearing a hot dog T-shirt and a pickle pin, Wallace prepped for our journey by illustrating a Google map with hot dog doodles (they still pop up on my phone whenever I near one of our dog stops). I consulted *The West Virginia Hot Dog Blog*, founded in 2006 by a native who goes by the *nom de sausage* of Stanton. Yes, he has rated hundreds of joints with a 1-5 weenie system. But he has also elucidated a taxonomy of hot dog styles and, most important, developed a Slaw Mapping Project that would make any digital humanities scholar proud.

The perfect West Virginia hot dog is an exercise in balance. Compared to eastern North Carolina's bright-red dog or the Chicago-style Vienna Beef (which

Wallace and I grew up on, respectively), a West Virginia hot dog relies less on the sausage and more on the interplay of spicy, hot chili and cool, sweet coleslaw. Over the course of our trip, we learned how to parse variations on that iconic combination, but as folklorists, we also recognized that the stories locals tell about these places were the true dressing on West Virginia dogs.

West Virginia is home to at least 350 hot dog joints (and that's playing it safe). Almost all claim "Best Hot Dogs in Town." In a state of fewer than two million people scattered across 24,000-odd mountainous square miles, that's a surfeit of hot dogs.



LOCATION: EVERYPLACE, WV

Presented with this bounty, I narrowed our quest to a loop that ran through the southern coalfields. We planned stops at drive-ins, convenience stores, and an ice-cream stand. That route put us firmly beneath the Slaw Line, which West Virginians recognize as a kind of Mason-Dixon of



condiments. We'd miss out on some of the regional variants, particularly in the northern part of the state, where Italian heritage is strong and slaw is often unavailable. There, in what is also pepperoni roll country, chili is referred to as "sauce," and doubles as a pepperoni roll topping.

WE WEREN'T THROUGH with Sissonville after a couple of Buddy B's dogs. The next morning, we scouted Skeenies, peering in the windows of the unlit kitchen. In business since 1953, the yellow-and-white roadside stand inspires both local loyalty and expat longing. Mrs. Skeen (as she's reverently known), now in her nineties, runs the place with her son

Joshua. As Wallace wondered out loud if they had any signature waxed hot dog bags she could take home as souvenirs, Joshua Skeen, who lives next door with his mother, walked over to greet us. Soon we were deep in a conversation about West Virginia hot dog history.

It's unclear how the hot dog came to West Virginia. Like Michigan Coney dogs, which also feature ground-beef chili, mustard, and onions, Greek immigrants may have introduced them to the state. Perhaps the Germans of West Virginia played a part. Maybe hot dogs traveled south down the Ohio River from Cincinnati, a national meatpacking center in the 1800s. (Kahn's

hot dog company, once a West Virginia favorite, was founded there in 1883.)

We know a bit more about the beginnings of slaw dogs. Just a bun's throw from Skeenies is the site of the former Stopette Drive-In, arguably the originator of the slaw dog. Documentation of those early years is scarce. But we do know, thanks to Stanton's research, that the Stopette advertised slaw dogs in the local newspaper by the 1920s. "Everybody's talking about Stopette's hot dog with slaw," read a 1922 ad. Cabbage was a common home garden crop, and slaw made a hot dog more filling. In 1951, a *Charlotte Observer* writer joked that slaw was the only good thing that

West Virginia hillbillies brought south to the Carolinas.

A more detailed history of West Virginia dogs has yet to be written. But I'm pretty sure of one thing: The popularity of hot dogs here is linked to the industrial labor that boomed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Coal miners, steel workers, and other factory laborers needed a quick meal they could eat between or during shifts. Hot dogs, like pepperoni rolls, proved an inexpensive and filling option. Entrepreneurs sold them because the ingredients were cheap and demand was high.

After Skeenies, Wallace and I made our way about an hour south to the 1,800-person town



of Logan, which boasts two hot dog-slinging drive-ins. Parkway, with its red-capped carhop sign, is near the home of folk legend and banjo player “Aunt Jennie” Wilson and adjacent to Chief Logan State Park. Morrison’s Drive-In sits alongside the Guyandotte River, south of town. CHICKEN IN THE FINGERS HERE IN THE BOX TO GO reads the inscrutable message on their faded red-and-white sign. We ordered one dog at each. Our waitresses gave us strange looks. Did they think we were abstemious, or just plain silly? It didn’t help when I pulled out my trusty red Swiss Army Knife to halve our dogs. But I couldn’t help myself. Like a girl scout, a folklorist is always prepared.

Around back at Morrison’s, leather-clad bikers convened at the picnic tables while families

in minivans and couples in trucks circled the perimeter. A server brought our prize on a metal tray and hooked it over our car window. Surprisingly, it came slawless. As I sang a variation of Beyoncé’s “Flawless” (“I woke up like this—slawless”), Wallace, determined not to be deprived of cabbage, jumped from the car to ask the waitress for a side order.

At this point, we became the weenies of the story. After eating just three dogs between the two of us, we were queasy. Wallace blamed the curvy mountain roads. I named the June heat. But the promise of J’s Grocery in Kegley, which one of Stanton’s fellow hot dog bloggers called “the fulfillment of some hot dog shaman’s ancient prophecy,” beckoned.

We made a call to the convenience store, nearly a hundred

miles away. It was our second dial that day. “Is Marie still making dogs?” I asked, seeking encouragement. Her husband, who answered again, confirmed that indeed she was. “Who is this?” he asked. We pressed onward.

Driving south through the mountains, past rolling rivers, mine sites, and abandoned company stores, we stopped in the small town of Oceana to stretch our legs and buy snap beans from a roadside stand. A group gathering donations for a local political candidate asked if we wanted free hot dogs. We gave them a polite no thank you.

Late that afternoon, we pulled into Kegley, an unincorporated community some twenty miles from the Virginia state line. Inside J’s Grocery, which also serves as the village post office, gas station, and alterations shop, Marie Burell stood at the counter, chatting and stacking a hot ham-and-cheese sandwich. From stool perches, we ogled the menu hanging above: homemade buttermilk biscuits, hand-pattied hamburgers, and pizza. Instead of succumbing to mission creep, we gave Marie our standard order: one hot dog. She side-eyed us and asked, smiling, “Are you two the ones that called earlier?”

Our cover blown, we told her and her husband Junior, who live together in the house next door, about our quest, our habit of cutting hot dogs in half, and our attempt to find meaning in West Virginia’s hot dog joints. She told

us that she was glad we were there. And she meant it. Though J’s has been in business for thirty years and the Burrells have owned it for thirteen, they’ve struggled recently. Mercer County has been hard-hit by the opioid epidemic, she said. “No one spends money on food around here, just on pills.”

The paper-wrapped hot dog arrived hot, in a grilled bun brushed with butter. Topped with homemade chili, thick-cut onions, and gobs of mustard, it achieved the synergy that defines the best West Virginia dogs. Unassuming yet distinctive, the dog was worth driving for—a chili-slathered, slaw-capped representation of Marie herself.

Though we would make three more hot dog stops and one





swimming stop at Sandstone Falls that afternoon, we knew it was time to turn north toward home. Slap-happy, we improvised hot dog jingles as we drove, following “Little Red Hot Dog” (which, no joke, came to me in a dream) with the rallying song “One More Hot Dog.” We were done—ready for a salad, some snap beans, and a beer to wash it all down.

IT’S EASY TO take hot dogs for granted in West Virginia. Like pimento cheese sandwiches in North Carolina, slugburgers in Mississippi, and the pepperoni rolls of my adopted state, they are fast and filling. Priced at a buck or three, they’re cheap and convenient, pervasive and dependable. Industrially produced wieners and buns make preparation quick and easy.

Because hot dog establishments are a central (and sometimes the only) gathering place in town, they serve as multi-purpose community centers. From a first job to a first date, hot dog joints are often the sites of important life milestones. As West Virginia writer V.C. McCabe put it, her hometown hot dog stand was a “building of memories.” The double meaning of “building” as both a noun that describes a physical structure, and a gerund that represents the layering of meaning was, I’d like to think, intentional.

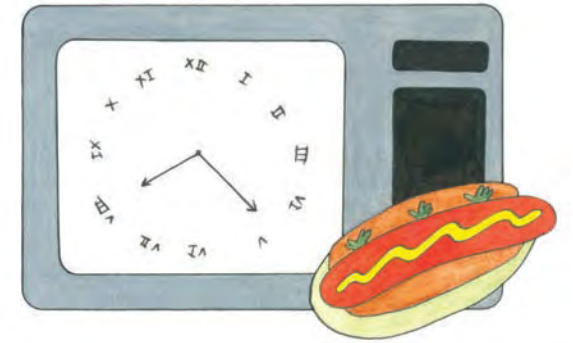
While hot dogs and the businesses that sell them inspire devotion, they evoke a sense of precarity, too. The men and women who run the hot dog stands of West Virginia have not escaped the economic, social, and

environmental drag in a state with a declining population and rising unemployment. Profit margins aren’t what they used to be, Joshua Skeen told us. His mother used to make more money when Skeenies charged ten cents per dog in 1953. Today, at \$1.90 for a fully loaded dog, the profit margins are lower.

DEVASTATING FLOODS SWEEPED through the state just days after our road trip. Clendenin’s Dairy Queen, initially on our route, was destroyed. In Sissonville, high waters swept across roads, farmers’ fields, and family camps, rendering them unsalvageable.

Economic pressures continue to build. On July 1, J’s Grocery in Kegley announced that they would no longer peddle food. “Working people used to come through on the train, but the coal mines here shut down and they haven’t run the rail since October,” Marie said. “It just got so slow—we started having to throw things out. We painstakingly made that decision to stop.”

As the state rebuilds from recent environmental calamities, though, hot dogs are playing a role. Chum’s in Marmet, famous



FROM A FIRST JOB TO A FIRST DATE, HOT DOG JOINTS ARE OFTEN THE SITES OF IMPORTANT LIFE MILESTONES.

for its yellow mustard slaw, recently set up in Clendenin to give away free dogs to the flood victims and volunteers helping with recovery efforts. Stewart’s Hot Dogs in Huntington and Kenova became drop-off sites for flood victim supplies. While a hot dog can’t restore what West Virginia has lost, it can offer comforting sustenance, affirming the strong ties that bind local hot dog joints and the community of people who sing a common refrain of chili, slaw, mustard, and onions. 🍴

Emily (Elizabeth) Hilliard is the West Virginia state folklorist and the author of Nothing in the House, a blog about pies.

Emily (Elizabeth) Wallace is an illustrator and writer based in Durham, NC. She is also Deputy Editor of Southern Cultures quarterly at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Visit The West Virginia Hot Dog Blog at wvhotdogblog.blogspot.com.

A dog from Kirk’s in Hinton, WV, where the chili tops the slaw.



A WV HOT DOG ROAD TRIP

ROAD TRIP

START → CHARLESTON ← END

SKEENIES HOT DOGS

"INDESCRIBABLY DIFFERENT"

EST. 1953

WV'S FAMOUS

★ SKEENIES
2399 Sissonville Dr.
Charleston, WV

BUDDY B'S MARKET
FRUIT & GROCERY

OPEN AIR COME IN
FRESH PRODUCE EAT DINNER
VEGETABLES **HERE**

HOT BEST IN TOWN **HOT**
FOOD

HOT DOGS Bologna
Bar-B-Ques Pintos
CORN BREAD

FRUIT VEGETABLES FRESH CUT
BASKETS MEAT TRAYS ROAST BEEF

OPEN 8 AM ^{TU} 11 PM ^{TR} TURKEY

★ BUDDY B'S
6083 Sissonville
Charleston, WV



Chicken BOX TO GO
IN THE FINGERS HERE

NEW HAND DIPPED
ICE CREAM

★ MORRISON'S DRIVE INN
126 Stollings Ave.
Logan, WV

FREE HOT DOGS

Dining Room
PARKWAY

DRIVE IN

CURB SERVICE

Hot Dogs

FROZEN CUSTARD

★ PARKWAY DRIVE IN
401 Justice Ave.
Logan, WV

★ SECRET SANDWICH SOCIETY
103 Keller Ave.
Fayetteville, WV



KING TUT DRIVE-IN

FLASH LIGHTS FOR FOOD

★ KING TUT DRIVE-IN
301 Eisenhower Dr.
Beckley, WV

PEPSI

TOM'S CARRY OUT

★ TOM'S CARRY OUT
554 Jones Ave.
Oak Hill, WV

Kirk's

MOST BEAUTIFUL VIEW

★ KIRK'S
Hinton Bypass
Hinton, WV



VEGGIES

J's GROCERY

VILLAGE POST OFFICE
KEGLEY, WV

★ J'S GROCERY
3377 Beckley Rd.
Kegley, WV

CAN I GET A WITNESS?

THE RIGHTEOUSLY, RADICALLY
CAMPBELLITE CORE OF NASHVILLE

"Religious Collage"
from Will Campbell's
Katallagete magazine,
ca. 1960s.



BY DAVID DARK



WE NASHVILLE NATIVES ARE OFTEN ASHAMED OF HOW SATURATED OUR CITY IS IN FOR-PROFIT RELIGION.

From religious publishing to religious music to motivational speaker-preachers, we're a magnet for people who feel compelled to speak on God's behalf and who confuse, from time to time, the voice in their heads for the voice of the Holy Spirit. This makes for a lively mix of newcomers, some of whom casually preface their migration stories with "When the Lord called me here..." to pursue a calling—be it as musician, minister, or restaurateur.

When the label head or the CEO-pastor inevitably lets them down, these wide-eyed followers become weary pilgrims. They are my favorite people to talk to. I want to simultaneously honor their disillusionment and disenchantment while inviting them to think again about the longsuffering sincerity of Nashville's best self, a sweetness that lives here despite the silliness and the lies. I want to tell them that a visit to the Grand Ole Opry for a *New Yorker* piece inspired Garrison Keillor to create *A Prairie Home Companion*. That the songwriting, session-musician culture at work here, besides drawing in folks like Bob Dylan,

Leonard Cohen, and Elvis Costello over the years, has filled its own reservoir of artfulness and wit. And that some of the earliest and most widely publicized lunch-counter sit-ins occurred here.

Each of these phenomena strike me as intimately related and uniquely Nashvillian. I have in mind a man who holds together the Civil Rights Movement, theology, and country music. Reverend Will D. Campbell, a friend and close associate to Martin Luther King Jr. and Kris Kristofferson, was our underappreciated bridge figure. He dismissed our divisions and brought all to one table to break bread together, literally and figuratively.

Campbell first appeared before me in the pages of *Rolling Stone*, a breed of God-talking Southerner I didn't know existed. Here was a Mississippi native called to ministry by a small Baptist church at the age of sixteen. After serving in World War II and procuring a degree from Yale Divinity School on the G.I. Bill, Campbell took a job as chaplain at the University of Mississippi in the fifties, before senior administrators forced him out for playing ping-pong with an African American minister.

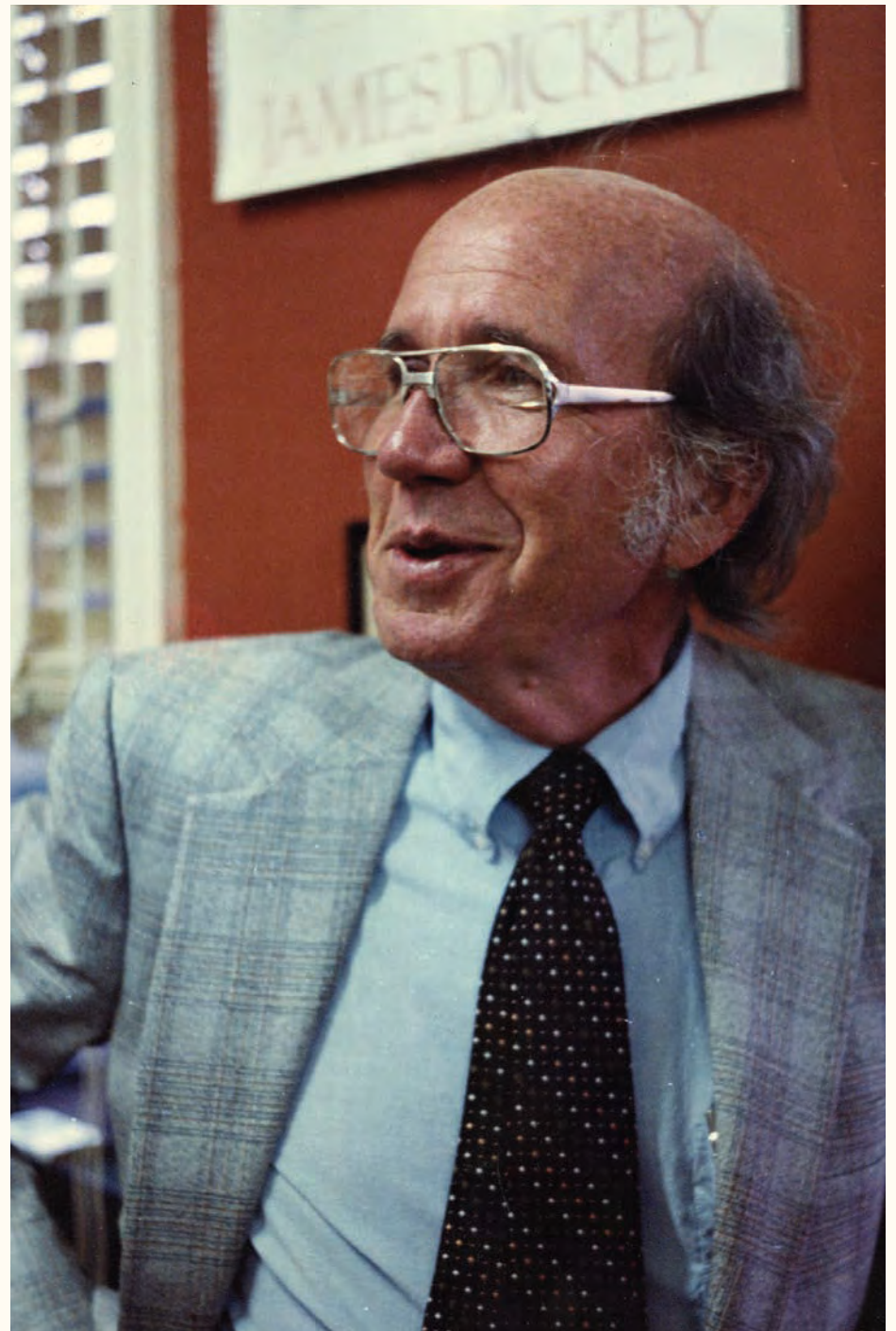
From there, he worked in the race relations department of the National Council of Churches, moving to Nashville and beginning to appear, Forrest Gump-like, in one sacred scene after another. He can be seen in a photograph ushering the Little Rock Nine past an angry white mob in 1957. He met John Lewis at a training session in nonviolent resistance at the Highlander Folk School. He counseled and supported Freedom Riders in the sixties, ministered to imprisoned Klansmen in the seventies, and travelled with Waylon Jennings as a cook in the eighties. ("I was the one that opened and closed

the microwave the most.") No role was too small or too large to escape Campbell's self-deprecating vocational assessment: "I don't like the term ministry...It's arrogant, presumptuous, even imperialistic."

While his obituary did appear on the front page of the *New York Times* in 2013, he did not conduct himself in the manner of a legendary historical figure. He looked after and loved the distinctly unfamous, the marginalized, the estranged, and the incarcerated. He steadfastly refused to credit any hierarchy or system that placed one person higher (or lower) than anyone else. As a relentlessly witty and intensely articulate opponent of discrimination and an aggressive ambassador of reconciliation, he never met a snob he wasn't hell-bent on delivering from snobbery. How does one live a life so extraordinarily varied and so inspiringly defiant?

By asking around, I discovered that Campbell was in the phonebook and entirely accessible to anyone who wanted to discuss such questions, especially if it involved taking him out for barbecue. In 2003, with the prompting and encouragement of a friend and local minister,

HE COUNSELED AND SUPPORTED FREEDOM RIDERS IN THE SIXTIES, MINISTERED TO IMPRISONED KLANSMEN IN THE SEVENTIES, AND TRAVELLED WITH WAYLON JENNINGS AS A COOK IN THE EIGHTIES.



Will Campbell during a visit to Oxford, MS.

“YOU HAVE TO KEEP IN YOUR MIND AN IMAGERY OF INFINITE POSSIBILITY.”

David Harkness, we made the trek to his farm in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, to behold the man. Through Campbell, I began to understand better the neighbors and strangers of Nashville.

Campbell often held court at Gass's Tavern, a beer hall down the road from his Mt. Juliet home. He called the joint his church. It served as a reminder that sacred work can be done well when human beings come together at table, trying to hear one another over the hum of an air conditioner.

Despite his infamy in some circles, he was an insistently hospitable introvert possessed and haunted by a devastatingly revolutionary idea: *Katallagete*, a Greek word he picked up from the Apostle Paul's Second Letter to the community of Corinth. It means “Be ye reconciled” to one another in view of God's mercy. Or, as Campbell liked to translate it, *Be who you are*. To respond to such an imperative is a life's work, best undertaken together with others. And we're probably never more ourselves than we are when we're eating. When we satisfy our hunger, it's harder to maintain a front. We surrender our composure and, out of the necessity of chewing, we enjoy these amazing seconds of silence. Words come to mind and get spoken. We have no choice but to be patient and listen.

Receiving visitors and paying visits, Campbell would offer watermelon or cornbread unto all manner of human being. There could be a loss to be grieved, an apology to be made, or a realization to be had, but blessedly, a pickled egg is

not an argument or even an assertion. It's just an offering that can, like any true gift, bring a person out of hiding. Campbell carried with him, in a kind of deep conjuring, a space in which to be oneself.

He brought the same largely unsanctioned ministry to those among us who feel estranged from institutionalized religion. He liked to say that you can't go to church, you just have to be it, together with others. Church, for Campbell, had to be a verb. He told me about a neighbor who'd drop by and steer the conversation toward his anxiety over never having been baptized. After the third or fourth telling, Campbell excused himself and crept quietly back into the room, sneaking up behind him with a bowl of water. Before the visitor could turn around, Campbell blurted the words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father...” and performed the rite. This was anything but flippant. Campbell took the love of God seriously. Be ye reconciled. Act like it.

As much as he reveled in telling these stories, he also understood that you have to *do* without saying. Nashville, at its Campbellite core, gets this. The city knows all too well the toxicity of empty moralizing. After all, televangelism is one of our largest industries. Campbell called such agents of false witness “electric soul molesters.” That culture of fakeness can make the real deal of community, of neighborliness and down-home hopefulness, all the more hard-won. The dishes we come to think of as comfort food have gained this association through healing and humble gestures. Friends

and neighbors communicate deep affection, one squash casserole at a time.

Here's Campbell on this sacred ritual in his 1977 book, *Brother to a Dragonfly*:

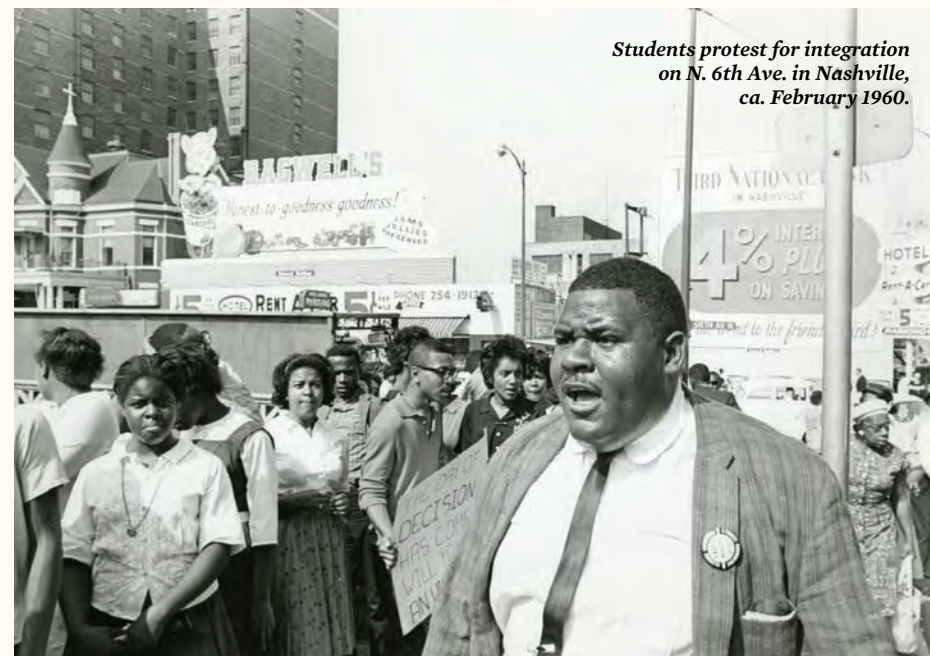
Somehow in rural Southern culture, food is always the first thought of neighbors when there is trouble. That is something they can do and not feel uncomfortable. It is something they do not have to explain or discuss or feel self-conscious about. “Here, I brought you some fresh eggs for your breakfast. And here's a cake. And some potato salad.” It means, “I love you. And I am sorry for what you are going through and I will share as much of your burden as I can.” And maybe potato salad is a better way of saying it.

To be true to Will Campbell's witness is to take stock of all the ways Nashville has resisted and even persecuted the call to humanness, the radical spirituality undertaken within its environs.

There is no deep reconciliation apart from deep reckoning.

THINK OF JOHN LEWIS, WHO worked closely with Campbell while living in Nashville as a student at American Baptist College. Proclaiming God's desegregated future in 1960, he and fellow student James Bevel demanded the right to order and eat a hamburger in peace at a downtown Krystal. The manager locked the two of them in the restaurant and turned on a fumigator full of insecticide.

“I didn't panic. I was frightened, but I wasn't frantic,” Lewis recounts in his memoir, *Walking With the Wind*. As the room filled with fumes, the young men could no longer see each other. Bevel started loudly quoting the Book of Daniel: “Whoever falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.” At last, firemen burst through the front door.



Students protest for integration on N. 6th Ave. in Nashville, ca. February 1960.

Lewis and Bevel had both trained with another Will Campbell acolyte, the Reverend James Lawson, for moments like these in which they'd face hostile crowds and inevitable arrest while sitting in the "whites-only" sections of downtown Nashville restaurants. One Saturday, Lawson was on the scene to coach students and to dissuade white passers-by from responding violently to young people whole-heartedly—and whole-bodily—committed to nonviolent witness. Lawson approached one aggressor in a motorcycle jacket at the center of a group who'd kicked Bernard Lafayette and Solomon Gort. The man directed a racial slur at Lawson before spitting in his face.

Reverend Lawson regarded the aggressor calmly and asked if he might have a handkerchief. The man was so taken off guard that he'd handed it to Lawson before he knew what he was doing. As Lawson thanked him and wiped his face, he asked the man if a nearby motorcycle belonged to him. It did. And in no time, they were discussing horsepower. Within a few minutes, the man was asking how he could aid Lawson and the students in their work. The script had been flipped. I once asked Lawson how one might develop the habit of handling people so beautifully, and he responded, as if it was just then occurring to him, "You have to keep in your

mind an imagery of infinite possibility."

These words serve as a proverb for living up to your most lyrical, imaginative, and loving self. I think them worthy of a tattoo. Hear them again: "You have to keep in your mind an imagery of infinite possibility." Try *that*. And when I think of that summons, I think of Will Campbell, whose funeral Lawson officiated. Both men represent the habits of mind and body they referred to as Beloved Community, a way of relating that can serve, every so often, as the unhidden conscience of a city.

CAMPBELL CARED FOR THOSE who hurt and didn't pass judgment on why they hurt. In 2003, he went to visit a seventy-three-year-old friend who was incarcerated in Kentucky. After driving more than three hours from Nashville, Campbell and a carful of friends, including John Egerton, arrived at checkpoint and prepared to go through security. A young male guard pointed out that one member of their party, wearing sandals, had failed to comply with the footwear standard for inmate visitation. When Campbell wondered aloud if it might be possible to make an exception, the guard yelled, "One more word out of you and *none* of you see *anyone* here today!"

The group retreated to the parking lot, where Will broke down in tears. After a trip into a nearby town to buy some

THE STANDARD OF HUMANNESS HE HELD UP TO NASHVILLE WAS THE UNENDING CALL TO MEET FEAR WITH COMMUNION RATHER THAN HOSTILITY.

shoes, they were allowed in.

"What do you do?" Campbell asked me later, having laid out the situation. He fixed both eyes on mine in an unexpectedly plaintive stare. He could tell I was thinking about the visit, the drive, and how they might get in, but he had a larger and more immediate vision in mind. "What do you do with *him*?"

It would not occur to many people to extend any degree of concern to the angry young guard. Most, in fact, would be ready to pounce. A lifetime of persistent work in and around prison culture had not hardened Will Campbell to the outburst.

Weeks later, he was still mourning it and wondering how he might have more righteously engaged that sad soul, enmeshed—like we all are—in an endlessly adversarial culture. I'd read him and admired him from afar, but it was in this moment that I felt challenged and invited into a long wondering over the suffering of our world. The standard of humanness he held up to all who knew him was the unending call to meet fear with communion rather than hostility.

Campbell saw Lawson's "imagery of infinite possibility" everywhere and viewed it as an imperative. Every human being he met was a bearer of the divine image. He refused to think of people according to stereotypes, categories, or labels. Once, I asked him, "Shouldn't the pouring out of God's spirit on all flesh on Pentecost have settled the race issue once and for all?"

"It did!" he fired back, looking at me with bewilderment and concern as if I was choking on a seed. And I realized I'd been out-conservatived, out-liberaled, and out-evangelicaled. For Campbell, Pentecost was a settled reality, and we'd



Will Campbell (r) and North Carolina Klansman J. Robert "Bob" Jones, ca. 1960s.

all do well to act like it. Be yourselves. Be ye reconciled.

Campbell was present in 1998 when Sam Bowers, White Knight of the Ku Klux Klan, was sentenced to life for the murder of civil rights hero Vernon Dahmer. Campbell greeted Bowers warmly just before taking a seat in a Hattiesburg, Mississippi, courtroom with the Dahmer family. When a reporter asked how he could befriend both parties, he said, "I guess it's because I'm a goddamn Christian."

To risk an understatement, this radical hospitality is not widely publicized today. But from where I'm standing as a child of Nashville, the Campbellite spirit is in our blood, even when we're ignoring it. We're a space of unlikely reconciliation, of contrary forces hopefully somehow working it out, one potato salad at a time. Keeping in our minds, so help us God, an imagery of infinite possibility. 🍷

David Dark is a theologian and author who teaches at the Tennessee Prison for Women and at Belmont University. He delivered a version of this article as a talk at the 2016 Summer Foodways Symposium in Nashville.



A Parable

Thinking
little at two
Memphis
gardens

by *MARTHA PARK*

Photographs by *HOUSTON COFIELD*

of Produce

By 6:30, the morning air in Memphis is thick with heat,

and David Vaughan has been in the garden for an hour, clearing debris from last night's storm. David holds back clumps of drooping switch grasses, still drenched with rain, for me to walk through. Hardy fruit and vegetable plants grow alongside herbs, perennial flowers, and clumps of comfrey. Blackberry bushes engulf the chain-link fence that borders the garden. In the coming months, neighbors will pull over and get out of their cars to pick and eat berries warm from the vine. On my first visit to the garden, though, the unripe fruit still look more like raspberries than blackberries, their skins pulled tight and red.

From the highest point of the garden's slope, David shows me how he uses berms and swales to keep rainwater from running straight down and collecting at the bottom. From this vantage, I glimpse the road that runs alongside us, past the garden, beyond the neighboring apartment buildings with their wide parking lots, toward the intersection crowded with gas stations and fast food. Over the past three years, David has turned what was just under an acre of unused land in the Frayser neighborhood into a thriving garden for New Hope Christian Academy, an elementary school across the street.

Maybe you're thinking you've heard this one before: A young, white gardener works at a predominantly African American private school in a neighborhood

choked by poverty, its streets pocked by vacant houses, its residents cut off from the rest of the city by substandard public transportation. Over time, the garden becomes a magical oasis of community, alleviating the effects of food deserts one Instagrammable herb garden at a time. Even though I've gardened for several years now, I still bristle at this sort of story, and I arrive at New Hope's Urban Farm equal parts curious and skeptical.

DAVID'S GARDEN PATHS undulate and sprawl, inviting roaming and discovery. Barriers are intuitive: New Hope students know to walk on the grass alongside the plants, which shoot up from layers of woodchips. I follow David as he points out each project. The sixth graders planted



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a carnivorous garden of pink-speckled pitcher plants beneath banana trees and elephant ears. The fifth graders built a wooden frame in the shape of a house and ran twine between the beams. Over the summer, long bean vines will grow along the twine, covering the wooden frame, so that students can pick the beans from inside the shade of the overgrown house. The fourth graders designed and planted a huge Tennessee-shaped garden bed, which functions as a sort of map of agricultural production and natural wildlife. All the major cities are marked, and each of the rivers is carved out like a narrow ditch. A neighbor's donated plow rests along the northern border, and wildflowers grow according to their native areas. Tiny rows of cotton, corn, and soybeans shoot up along the western side of the bed, obscuring the sign for Memphis.

The soil here is healthy and fertile, one reason David is able to plant directly in the ground, rather than use raised beds. Years ago, the land occupied by the school and the Urban Farm was gently rolling cow pasture. I try to imagine the way the land here has changed over time: from farms and wealthy estates clustered around a single passenger railroad station, to the white flight that streamed into Frayser from Memphis in the 1950s, to the industry and businesses that would arrive in Frayser only to shut their doors by the 1980s, leading to another migration of whites out of Frayser and into suburbs farther east. Today, Frayser is segregated; the population is eighty-five percent black and twelve percent white, and it is one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in Memphis.

The City of Memphis annexed Frayser in 1958 in an effort to retain taxes. In time, the city has grown to encompass more than 300 square miles, though the population—600,000 to 650,000 in the city limits—has not significantly

increased. We've seen this story again and again. As city encroaches on farmland, industry triumphs over agriculture and then fades. White families flee city centers, and planned neighborhoods replace small farms. Houses are abandoned, asphalt spreads and hardens on newly paved roads and parking lots. We see less of the ground underfoot and grow less of our food there. The natural rhythms and cycles of the land become distant, mysterious, almost unknowable.

DAVID AND I ARE BOTH preachers' kids. Our fathers have long served small United Methodist congregations scattered across Memphis. David's father, Billy, helped officiate my parents' wedding. In the photos, Billy wears his black robe and stole, and David is a pink infant in his mother's arms. I was born one year and two days after David, and when it came time for me to be baptized, his father sprinkled water on my head while my parents looked on.

Our fathers' Methodist churches were progressive, non-proselytizing, and defined by a bent toward social justice. Our fathers shared many of the same heroes—theologians like Walter Brueggemann, Marcus Borg, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and writers like Will D. Campbell, Mary Oliver, and Wendell Berry—all of whom encouraged spirituality concerned with our neighbors and the world around us.

As David and I grew up, we traveled our own paths and fulfilled our spiritual impulses outside the church. For David, that place has long been a garden. In 2012, a year after the United States census designated Memphis the poorest city of its size in the country, David moved back to Memphis from Senegal, where he'd been a Peace Corps volunteer in several community gardens. Soon after, he heard from a family friend, Mary Leslie Ramsey,



A youth volunteer picks tomatoes at McMerton Gardens.

who had big dreams for a vacant plot across the street from the school where she taught science in a room filled with terrariums, aquariums, and enclosures housing reptiles and insects.

Three years later, the fruits and vegetables from New Hope's garden are served in the school cafeteria, and David sells whatever is left over at a bustling pay-what-you-can produce stand.

New Hope's faculty and administrators were interested in teaching more than how to grow and eat healthier food. Mary Leslie, who, in addition to teaching science also serves as the school's Experiential Learning Coordinator, sees the Urban Farm as a place to experience God in the world, where children might practice being stewards of their environment. Standing in a labyrinth of herbs, David tells me he designed the Urban Farm to create an inspirational space for students and visitors: "What may seem like a waste of valuable growing space to some,"

David says, gesturing toward the "jungle" section of the garden, full of non-edible banana plants and mammoth-sized elephant ears, "can be pretty awe-inspiring."

Other flora, like the ornamental switch grasses, fountain grasses, and miscanthus, are also there to provide a sense of wonder and beauty, which David hopes will strengthen students' connection with this place. He sees gardening as a necessary local response to global climate change. To protect the earth, David says, people have to feel a kinship with it. This can be hard to come by in a city like Memphis, where the land sprawls flat and paved for miles.

"One day," David tells me, "I was weeding Bermuda grass endlessly, on what seemed like the hottest day of the year. And as I was silently cursing the universe in frustration, an old woman drove by and yelled, 'This is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen!'"

A year after the Urban Farm took off,

residents of the apartment complex next to the school started growing their own crops. On the other side of the chain-link fence, towering rows of corn stalks wave in the slightest breeze.

ACROSS TOWN, DAVID'S father Billy works in one of six lots that make up the McMerton Gardens, a nearly ten-year-old community garden project. It began at the corner of N. Merton Street and McAdoo Avenue and is now scattered throughout the Binghampton neighborhood. As Billy waters six-foot-tall tomato plants, he gestures to nearby streets, telling me about fig trees behind an apartment building and a small plot of sweet potatoes near the highway. Basil, mint, and rosemary spring from stacked tires at the corner of one parking lot; strawberry and pepper plants grow on side yards and in vacant lots. In 2011, more than 10 percent of the land in Binghampton sat vacant. The gardens are both a practical use of this abundant space and a reclamation.

Before the City of Memphis annexed Binghampton in 1910, it was a racially integrated suburb. Home to farmers and agricultural workers, Binghampton had



its own main street, train station, newspaper, and post office. Over time, wealthier neighborhoods surrounded Binghampton, and the construction of Sam Cooper Boulevard in 2000 cut the neighborhood in half. Binghampton's population reflects Memphis' demographics. According to the 2010 census, 69 percent of Binghampton's residents are black and twenty percent are white, almost exactly mirroring the larger city's population.

Frayser and Binghampton are two of many low-income neighborhoods in Memphis with insufficient access to supermarkets. Local efforts like community gardens, mobile produce markets, and aggressive pushes for more neighborhood supermarkets are increasing food security.

For Billy, who's lived in the Binghampton neighborhood and served as a volunteer minister at a church here for fifteen years, gardening has helped him get to know his neighbors better and makes him more aware of the ways politics, spirituality, and environmental issues are inextricable. Billy says our distance from the land is "one of the reasons we have given so much control to corporate powers that are doing such massive damage to the environment." That distance, Billy says, "is a spiritual issue, on the one hand. But it is clearly a major environmental and political issue that includes the destruction of topsoil and packing the soil and food with chemicals."

As Billy and I talk in the sparse shade, two girls wearing backpacks and school uniforms walk past and wave, telling Billy they will be at the gardens on Saturday. Binghampton is home to a large refugee population, and many of the children who volunteer in the garden arrived in Memphis from countries like Sudan, Rwanda, and Tanzania. As the McMerton Gardens have expanded and begun selling produce at local farmer's markets, they've been able to pay volunteers six

dollars an hour for their work. If the kids who work during the busy summer season put one dollar per week into a savings account, the McMerton Gardens match those funds. The children also receive produce to take home.

Billy is passionate about helping to increase neighborhood access to fresh, locally grown food. “Most organic food is expensive and available to the wealthy,” he says, “but not the poor. And transporting food involves the need for cheap oil, which gets this country into foreign-policy issues in treacherous ways. Gardening makes me more and more aware of these issues. It affects my preaching, eating, and voting.”

When I hear Billy say these words—preaching, eating, voting—I can hear how little separation there is between them. For Billy, religion, health, and political life are strung together like beads. Tonight, when Billy is done watering and weeding, he won’t get into his car and drive to a suburb outside the city. Instead, he’ll walk one street over to the home where he’s lived for fifteen years. Through the garden, he gets to know the land and his neighbors better.

We talk until the sun goes slantwise, lighting on the cucumber seedlings Billy will transplant to empty garden beds in the morning. As I say goodbye and close the gate, Billy calls out, reminding me to come back when the sweet potatoes are ready to dig up.

IN ONE OF OUR MANY RECURRING conversations about gentrification in Memphis, a friend described community gardens as *just another way to tell poor people what to do*. The hype surrounding community gardens often carries more than a whiff of teach-a-man-how-to-fish condescension, especially when people or organizations begin a community garden without a deep understanding of the neighborhood that garden will serve.

In this regard, I am especially skeptical of organizations like The Kitchen Community, a Colorado-based nonprofit whose motto is “Community through Food,” and whose mission is to establish Learning Gardens “in schools and community organizations across America.” Co-founders Kimbal Musk and Hugo Matheson created The Kitchen Community as a philanthropic offshoot of their upmarket farm-to-table restaurant chain, The Kitchen, which has locations in Colorado and Chicago, and recently opened in Memphis. Over the past two years, in a kind of garden blitz, The Kitchen Community has installed Learning Gardens in more than sixty schools in Memphis and the surrounding area.

Meanwhile, the fruits and vegetables produced each year at David’s and Billy’s gardens would not be enough to feed the households in their own neighborhoods. Much of the yield of gardens like Billy’s and David’s is not measured: Before the food can be counted or weighed, it has already been whisked away to be cooked in the school cafeteria, carried home in children’s backpacks, or sold at farmers’ markets for next-to-nothing. Yet these small gardens are the ones I find myself rooting for. That begs a question: If we’re not measuring the amount of food produced in these gardens, and if gardening matters, *how* exactly does it matter?

IN HIS 1970 ESSAY “THINK Little,” Wendell Berry posits that gardening fosters a kind of personal environmentalism. It requires that the gardener pay close attention to the land, to his or her place. This change of perspective, this attention, will ultimately allow the gardener to “see that war and oppression and pollution are not separate issues, but are aspects of the same issue.” Both institutional racism and environmental degradation are, Berry argues, born of greed and



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exploitation: “The mentality that destroys a watershed then panics at the threat of flood is the same mentality that gives institutionalized insult to black people and then panics at the prospect of race riots.”

Berry sees the environmental movement “not as a digression from the civil rights and peace movements, but the logical culmination of those movements.” He believes that too many of the people in the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam-era peace movement were fueled by guilt and “short-term enthusiasm.” Over time, these “popular causes” became “fashionable politics.”

As for the environmental movement, Berry writes, a single gardener who is “willing to undertake the discipline and the difficulty of mending his own ways is worth more to the conservation movement than a hundred who are insisting merely that the government and the industries mend their ways.” Berry warns that if millions of individuals, rather than organizations, do not undertake conservation as a personal cause, “the energy of our present concern will have petered out in a series of public gestures—and no doubt in a series of empty laws—and a great, and perhaps the last, human opportunity will have been lost.”

It’s been forty-five years since Berry made this prediction. I wonder whether we have already missed the opportunity to reverse the effects of climate change, to become better stewards of the earth, and to create healthier communities.

As a person whose house is surrounded by tomato plants in five-gallon buckets and raised beds overcrowded with peppers and beans, I believe in gardening. But as a preacher’s kid, I’m particularly wary of writing a sermon. I can’t claim to have any answers to the valid criticisms of the community garden or Farm to School “movements.” I do think that if community gardening is going to be



more than a passing fad, it will require the kind of individual commitment and rootedness I see in the McMerton Gardens and at New Hope’s Urban Farm.

When Billy waters the McMerton gardens from a barrel of collected rain water, he’s not saving lives or reversing droughts. Industry, agribusiness, militaries, and corporations—not individual citizens—use the majority of energy resources. But echoing Berry, I don’t know how we can make sweeping changes in government, industry, or agriculture without first examining our hearts and our habits. A real movement—affecting our preaching, eating, and voting—comes from individuals, who know more about what we want, need, and can offer than any outside company ever will.

SCHOOL HAS BEEN IN SESSION for two weeks on the morning I arrive at New Hope garden a little later than I had planned. By 8:30, the sun has drawn itself up to its full height. I find David hidden between rows of pepper plants. We spend the morning picking tomatoes, peppers, and long beans. I am trimming dead zinnias, dropping the wilted blooms into a five-gallon bucket, when two boys, around

nine or ten years old, come to the gate and tell me they are reporting for flag duty.

David walks with the boys to the flagpole in the center of the garden, where I expect to see them raise an American flag. But the flag they raise is white. At first, it looks like a flag of surrender. But then I see its purple script reading URBAN FARM in funky lettering. A cartoon turtle shell forms the N, and a carrot grows out of the B. When the flag reaches the top of the pole and unfurls, I can see, under these words, the question: CAN YOU SEE IT?

I try to imagine looking out over this garden three years ago, as David must have, when it was just a vacant lot. It takes imagination to be a gardener, to regard an island of weeds surrounded by a sea of asphalt and envision what could be. It requires tending the soil, coveting worms, patiently composting, and the repetitive prayer that is weeding, all in service of a vision. In this way, gardening

is a kind of faith, a practice of seeing what can’t yet be seen. A garden is a space to re-imagine all kinds of things, where we can think big and little all at once.

ONE NIGHT IN LATE SUMMER, I ride with David, Billy, and David’s mom Joni past the city limits to watch the Perseid meteor shower. We search for darkness, pulling over on several back roads, but the sky retains the hazy glow of reflected city lights. It seems impossible to find a place where the heavens might pull back from the earth and open up into that vast distance and darkness.

Lying on my back on the side of the road, I watch the sky and try to ignore the chiggers silently gnawing my ankles. Re-adjusting the sweatshirt under my head, I hear David say he saw a shooting star, but by the time I look up the sky is settled and still. Later, I see three lights streak faintly across the gray-blue expanse. With each sliver of light, my breath catches in

Youth and adult volunteers at McMerton Gardens.



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THIS ONE-DAY SOUTH MIGHT BE A PLACE WHERE
NEIGHBORS, STUDENTS, AND TEACHERS

get their hands dirty and reaffirm and reinvent our homeplaces,

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”

my throat, and my voice sounds strange when I try to say I saw one, too.

In the coming months, I'll see photos of Pluto's scarred surface, of red mountains on Mars, of Jupiter's moons. I'll see news of monthly mass shootings, lead-contaminated water, and policeman fearful of those they're supposed to protect. Global temperatures will continue to rise, and glaciers will continue to melt. I'll wonder, sometimes, in the face of all this, what it might be like to start over somewhere else.

With the imagination of a gardener, digging into my own “postage stamp of native soil,” I sense the ways I might reinvent my community from the ground up. It will require imagination to renew our relationships with the land on which we live and depend, to create a South we've never seen before, a place that is healthy and safe for everyone who calls it home.

THIS ONE-DAY SOUTH MIGHT be a place where neighbors, students, and teachers get their hands dirty and reaffirm and reinvent our homeplaces, long besieged by trauma. Millions have been shackled to the land here, and millions are not yet free.

This is what I thought about when I

watched the white flag unfurl at the top of the garden's flagpole, in the same month Bree Newsome scaled the thirty-foot flagpole at the South Carolina capitol and removed the Confederate flag: I imagined a South loosed from the specters of the past and from the destructive, hateful beliefs they represent—which we have clutched so tightly, and for so long.

After we've been lying on the ground for a while, we head back home. We get in the car, and Billy drives toward the city. Joni falls in and out of sleep in the front seat. David and I sit in the back, each looking out the windows at the sky. On the way back into the city, we pull over one last time. We get out and stand with our backs against the car, our necks craned at the heavens, which seem even milkier from here, awash in the city lights, almost close enough to touch.

Across town, people turn toward sleep. Lights go out at one house, and then another. The blue glow of television screens lingers, flickering through curtains and drawn blinds. At New Hope, blackberries ripen on chain-link fences, and the peppers will be tinged with red come morning. In small plots of land alongside highways and in backyards, sweet potatoes form, bulbous and silent, underground. ♡

Martha Park is a writer and illustrator from Memphis, Tennessee. She studied creative writing at Hollins University, and was the spring 2016 Philip Roth Resident in Creative Writing at Bucknell University's Stadler Center for Poetry.



A New Hope student with tomatoes from the Urban Farm.

NASHVILLE, CITY OF NEWCOMERS

MUSIC CITY FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

by Steve Haruch



Emily B. Hall

EVERY YEAR, THE *NASHVILLE Scene* holds a reader contest called “You Are So Nashville If...” (YASNI for short). The idea is that readers submit entries that complete the sentence. For example, “You are so Nashville if you filled out a prayer request card for Google Fiber.”

Here’s another one: “You are so Nashville if you complain that you can’t buy tube socks and pineapples anymore at the Nashville Farmer’s Market.”

I judged this contest for seven years, and the entry we got most often was: “You are so Nashville if you’re not from Nashville.” This is the most perfect of all possible YASNI entries, which is why dozens of people submit it every year, which is why it never gets printed.

One more YASNI. In 1996, the grand prize-winning entry was: “You are so Nashville if you never meant to stay here this long.” Which is to say, a Nashvillian is something you can *become*.

EVEN IF YOU’VE been in Nashville a good long time, you might not know the answer to this question: What does the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 have to do with Waylon Jennings?

The 1965 Immigration Act basically did away with nationality quotas and, in effect, opened the country to new immigrants from all over the world. In the five years after it passed, immigration to the United States from Asia increased fourfold. By the 1970s, immigrants began to arrive in Nashville in

Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images



ABOVE: Waylon Jennings in 1975; OPPOSITE: Javeneh Hemmat, The Hummus Chick.

WHAT DOES THE IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY ACT OF 1965 HAVE TO DO WITH WAYLON JENNINGS?

significant numbers, many from Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand.

Around the same time, the country music industry experienced a bit of an identity crisis. Country music was selling out. It was going pop. It was going to hell. In 1970, Paul Hemphill published *The Nashville Sound*. Hemphill’s book mapped the battle lines in the war for the soul of country music. Hardscrabble mountain-music traditionalists stood on one side and spotlight-bathed, pop-oriented newcomers on the other. One of the biggest crossover successes on the pop-country side was Glen Campbell (born in

Billstown, Arkansas), who appeared in movies and on his own network television show. Onstage, he commanded \$30,000 for a single concert. As Hemphill put it, the ascent of Campbell and his ilk “polarized the traditionalists and the new breed.”

By “traditionalists,” Hemphill meant folks who believed that drum kits and electric guitars didn’t belong at the Grand Ole Opry. Nashville had brought country music to the wider world, but not everyone in Nashville wanted the wider world seeping into country music.

In 1975, the colliding plates of earnest tradition and country-politan sheen produced arguably their highest, sharpest peak. That’s the year Waylon Jennings (born in Littlefield, Texas) released “Are You Sure Hank Done It This Way.”

*Rhinestone suits and new
shiny cars, it’s been the
same way for years
We need to change
Somebody told me when I
came to Nashville
Son, you’ve finally got it made
Old Hank made it here, we’re
all sure that you will
But I don’t think Hank done
it this way*

Nineteen seventy-five is also the year that Patti and Win Myint opened International Market & Restaurant on Belmont Boulevard. It was (and still is) barely a restaurant. The Myints serve pad thai and

other Thai dishes cafeteria-style inside a small grocery store.

About three years after International Market proved that white Nashvillians would eat Southeast Asian cuisine, Pete Silpacharn opened Siam Cafe on McCall Street in South Nashville. The restaurant offered a steam table buffet and a full-service menu with Thai curries and pla lard prig.

I recently heard a white gentleman who lived there in the 1960s describe that part of South Nashville like this: “When I was growing up, there was only one color on Nolensville Pike: redneck.”

In the nearly forty years since Siam Cafe opened, this corridor has become—slowly, organically, weirdly, unevenly—the de facto International District of Nashville. No one, at this point, would call this place monochromatic. It is home to the largest concentration of Latinos in the state, many originally from Mexico, and others hailing from Central and South America. Salvadoran-style pupusa joints have proliferated in recent years. One of the first to attract citywide popularity was Las Americas, which, like many immigrant-owned food businesses here, comprises a restaurant and small market. After English, Spanish is the predominant language on signs for everything from tacos to used tires to attorneys. Arabic, Korean, and Vietnamese speakers live and work here, too. The most diverse population in the Metro Nashville Public Schools system attends nearby Glencliff High School.



MOHAMMAD “MO” KARIMY and his wife, Shiva, were both born in Iran. After they met in Istanbul, Shiva moved to Vienna, where Mo was living. “Political pressure,” as Shiva described it, forced them out, and they alighted in Nashville because a nephew was already here. At first, Mo worked three jobs while Shiva studied computers. Later, the couple sold ice cream and chicken cordon bleu out of a flea-market stand on Murfreesboro Pike, until their landlord got sick of them cutting into his snack business. Finally, in 1989, they opened their own restaurant.

They called it “Expressway,” not

because they liked the name, but because they couldn’t afford to change the sign out front. Today there are thirteen Fat Mo’s locations around the Nashville area. Their secret is not a sauce: The patty is seasoned like a shish kabob. A Middle Eastern twist on an American classic, cooked to order at a drive-up window. Beautiful.

The year 1989 was a big one for some other newcomers to Nashville. Clint Black (of Katy, Texas), Alan Jackson (of Newnan, Georgia) and Garth Brooks (of Tulsa, Oklahoma) all released albums that year, ushering in an era of “new traditionalism.” A revival, if you will, of what established Nashville as the



Kurdish pastries at a market on Nolensville Pike.

country music capital before people like Glen Campbell messed it all up with their violins and turtlenecks. Nineteen eighty-nine is also the year Taylor Alison Swift was born, in Reading, Pennsylvania.

BY THE 1990S, Kurdish, Somali, and Sudanese refugees began settling in Nashville and finding their way to Nolensville Pike. Violence drove many from their home countries. The Kurds fled war in Iraq, and through refugee resettlement programs found their way to the United States. Today, the largest Kurdish population outside the Middle East—about 13,000 people—calls Music City home.

Among them is Kasar Abdulla. After escaping Iraq with her family, she grew up in a sprawling refugee camp in Turkey. Later they resettled in North Dakota, a

jarring experience culturally and climatically. Word eventually reached them that a community had taken hold in Nashville, and they headed south for good.

Abdulla told me that the American Thanksgiving holiday has been so widely and deeply embraced here that the day has a special name of its own: *eida eilokay*, which basically means “the festival of turkey.” Alongside the turkey, her family’s table might also include Kurdish stuffed grape leaves called epikhras, naan from a local Kurdish bakery, and cheese enchiladas, made from a slightly modified version of a recipe by that Kurdish icon Rachael Ray. (Kurds tend to prefer a little less cheese and a little less sauce.)

Unlike the Kurds, the Somali community in Nashville does not

comprise the largest in the United States. That distinction goes to Minneapolis. If they are slightly less visible than the Kurds, that’s because Somalis are more likely to be on the move. As my friend Mohamed-Shukri Hassan says, Somalis are a nomadic people. Their businesses here tend to revolve around transportation. Think shipping, long-haul trucking, taxis. Entrepreneurship extends to culinary endeavors. There is a Somali coffee shop on Murfreesboro Pike called The Horn, where you can find sambusas—triangular fried-dough parcels stuffed with seasoned meat or potatoes—as well as coffee and tea. If “sambusa” sounds a bit like “samosa,” that’s no coincidence.

Because the Somalis and Kurds here are Muslim, Hassan says they think of themselves as sister communities. They have certainly suffered the wrath of Islamophobia together. One of the main Somali places of worship, a masjid just south of Downtown, has been vandalized twice since 2001. In 2011, state Senator Bill Ketron and state Representative Judd Matheny introduced a bill that would have effectively outlawed Islam in the state of Tennessee. It basically criminalized adherence to Sharia law, which, as Muslims pointed out, also includes such tenets as *not stealing*. Fortunately, it never became law.

Recently, Somali families in Nashville have been on the move again. As rents have gone up, dozens of families have been

priced out of their apartment complexes in South Nashville, scattering what had been an informal center of the community. That, Hassan says, is gentrification.

IF YOU BELIEVE the numbers, a hundred people a day move to Nashville. We expect a million more in this region over the next twenty years. These people need to live somewhere. Across the city, cranes crosshatch the skyline, building condominiums or luxury hotels. This concerns some who cannot afford them, and others who care about the less affluent. Meanwhile, neighborhoods are changing very fast.

Glen Campbell sporting a turtleneck in 1972.





Kasar Abdulla at her Nashville home.

Recently I took part in a ceremony at the Casa Azafrán community center. We presented a report called *Envision Nolensville Pike*, the culmination of two years of conversation about what people living along Nolensville would like to see it become. They want better walkability and pedestrian safety. Bike lanes. Sidewalks. More green spaces and trees. Less traffic. Better and more capable transit. They want to continue living among neighbors who value customs and foods and stories from many places. They want to be recognized as a signature part of Nashville, the way Music Row and Centennial Park and Lower Broadway are recognized.

What will stop the next wave of newcomers from sweeping aside the last if this area is rezoned and redeveloped? I put this question to a room full of city planners and administrators recently, and

none of them had an answer. I don't have an answer. I don't think anyone does.

NASHVILLE WELCOMES A thousand refugees a year. According to the Partnership for a New American Economy, the number of new Americans in Nashville has doubled since 2004. For decades, immigrants have gravitated to Nolensville Pike, an area that real estate agents are now starting to talk about as the “next hot neighborhood.” In recent memory, this kind of heat has always meant that affluent whites are on their way in, and that the less well off, who are disproportionately black and brown, are on their way out.

A chain of coffee shops recently opened a location on Nolensville, next door to a kabob restaurant. That has made some people in the neighborhood nervous. Even

Ava Lowrey

though it's a regional business—the original location is in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and the second in Nashville's Germantown neighborhood—some folks sense an intrusive presence.

Some days the pace and tenor of change feel discouraging. And I don't know if Hank would have done it this way. Although, to get real for a second, I don't know what old Hank—or Waylon—would have thought of Little Kurdistan, either.

As Nashville grows, questions loom. How many of the small family-owned operations that give Nolensville its character—the Fat Mo's and International Markets of the future—have long-term leases? How many of these storefronts and restaurants stand to be “retenanted” by someone savvy and connected who wants to get in right as the demographics of the area start to shift? If the hoped-for improvements outlined in *Envision Nolensville Pike* do come, will the people who now live there be able to stay and enjoy them?

Recent history suggests that no one and nothing in Nashville is safe from displacement by escalating real estate prices. Even the vaunted RCA Studio A, where Dolly Parton recorded “Jolene,” faced demolition until a philanthropist with deep pockets intervened.

Arguments about whether

Nashville is losing its soul may be cyclical. Songwriter-turned-computer-programmer-turned-entrepreneur Kate O'Neill once told me, “Inevitably what happens is we tell our respective stories, but the upshot always seems to be, ‘How can we work together?’” She was talking about how the collaborative songwriting culture of Nashville carried over into its tech community, but that manifests more broadly. And it manifests in local food culture.

I am not kidding when I tell you the most exquisite biscuit I have ever tasted was brought into this world by Karla Ruiz, a transplant to Nashville by way of Mexico. Ruiz's favorite culinary collaborator is Javaneh Hemmat, a former chemistry student from United Arab Emirates whose hummus is now on shelves at Whole Foods. And Hemmat, in turn, used to share kitchen space on Nolensville Road with Brittney Blackshear, a crepe-making white Georgia transplant, and Ragab Rashwan, a food truck owner from Egypt who once ran a coffee shop in Tahrir Square.

It's possible that the character of this place is changing irrevocably, for both good and not-so-good. It will be a while before we know. But in the face of all that, I do believe that a Nashvillian is still something that anyone who wants to can become. ♡

Steve Haruch is a Nashville-based writer who is producing a documentary film about college radio. He delivered a version of this article as a talk at the 2016 Summer Foodways Symposium in Nashville.

FEEDING A NEED

HOY POR TI, MAÑANA POR MÍ

by André Gallant



Flor Esmeralda, Lupe, and Patricia Cortez pose for a photograph outside the home of Ana Patricia López.

A LINE OF CARS SNAKED ALONG THE CRACKED pavement near Ana Patricia López's mobile home. Plenty of people had shown up for the *venta de comida* (food sale). On a Saturday in January in Athens, Ana Patricia's family and friends set up tables on the cement pad outside her home in the Pinewood Estates North mobile home park and spread out aluminum trays of enchiladas, sleeves of tostadas, and jugs of neon aguas frescas. It was cold for Georgia, but the sun cleared the sky of clouds. The women fried sopes and took to-go orders on cellphones. In her kitchen, thirty-nine-year-old Ana Patricia, her raven hair tied in a bun, molded tamales alongside her husband's cousin, Ana Cecilia Damian. It wouldn't have been hard for Ana Patricia to close her eyes and imagine herself back in Acapulco in her mother's kitchen, where she learned to pat tortillas and fry a perfect egg. Instead, here she was, over 2,000 miles from home, spooning pulled chicken soaked in tomatillo salsa onto moist layers of masa.

Photos by André Gallant

Pinewoods, where Ana Patricia has lived for more than thirteen years, is comprised mainly of undocumented immigrants from the Mexican states of Guerrero and Michoacán. She fought back tears. Her husband, Oscar, sat in a jail forty-five minutes away, detained on an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) hold. She didn't know how to provide for her twelve-year-old daughter and four-month-old son. A life without their father wasn't a future she wanted for her kids. Ana Cecilia had an idea: Let's cook and sell food, and make some money to pay for a lawyer. When someone from Pinewoods died, it was common to go door to door, or place a bucket at a nearby gas station, to ask for donations to help send the body back to Mexico. What if they rallied the community to help the living?

AS MOBILE HOME parks go, Pinewoods is verdant. Residents here pack slim lots with topiaries for decoration and shade. Kids, who outnumber adults, kick soccer balls between poblano bushes and thickets of nopal cacti. A library branch here serves as a hub for Athens's Latino population, and a community garden stocked with papalo herb and habaneros offers a gathering place.

Still, the sad stories are easiest to tell about Pinewoods. As a reporter in Athens, I've told my share. In the hunt for violent and felonious immigrants, ICE agents



sweep through here about once a year, often picking up residents with records for minor infractions and deporting them. It's almost always men who get sent back, leaving mothers alone to care for children.

There are plenty of cases like Oscar's—otherwise law-abiding men who commute to work without a driver's license. One too many violations, Ana Patricia told me, and *la migra* picked him up when he went to pay his fine. Facing the deportation of her

Tacos de res and consommé served during a venta de comida at Ana Patricia López's home in Pinewoods.

CUSTOMERS ORDERED ITEMS A LA CARTE—LIKE TWO FRIED QUESADILLAS FOR \$4—OR COMPILED A PLATTER AND NEGOTIATED A FAIR DONATION.

husband, her first thought was to pack up the kids and head back to Guerrero. But she had no money for the trip. She wanted to hire a lawyer to fight for Oscar's release, but at \$3,000, an effective immigration advocate would cost more than an exodus. A stay-at-home mom like Ana Patricia had no savings. Families like hers live check to check, sending extra money back home to care for aging parents.

One option remained. Ana Patricia had to ask for help. Her *comadres*, her children's godparents, answered. Word went out through phone call, text, and Facebook: Come to Ana Patricia's on Saturday for a *venta de comida*.

OUTSIDE ANA PATRICIA'S home that January morning, I met Patricia Cortez. Patty, as she's called, and Ana Cecilia are godparents to Ana Patricia's children. She collected cash, tucking donations into a purse hanging from her shoulder. Customers ordered items a la carte—like two fried quesadillas for \$4—or compiled a platter and negotiated a fair donation. Patty asked me what I wanted to eat as she lifted a corner of aluminum foil from a pan of *tacos dorados*, chicken-stuffed tortillas rolled and stacked like edible hair curlers and then fried to order. I handed her a wad of cash. Soon after, I perilously balanced two overflowing styrofoam plates and walked to a fold-out table near a trampoline. A blob of sour cream jiggled atop crisp slivers of lettuce as I stepped over a BMX bike left in the path. A pool of rich *molé* formed around a boiled chicken leg and threatened to drip onto my shoe.

I shared the table with a brick mason who knew Patty. His daughter played with Ana Patricia's oldest child as we discussed construction projects he worked on in Athens. While some neighbors walked up to donate cash



for food, a procession of cars pulled up to collect to-go orders. Not everyone was from Pinewoods, Patty told me. She knew people all over town who had promised to save room for *la venta*. As I left, I received a text message from a friend: *How do I get to Pinewoods?*

The *venta de comida* raised nearly \$1,000 for Oscar's lawyer. Three weeks later, Oscar was out of detention on bond. He went back to catching live chickens on poultry farms, traveling site to site to corral and stuff them into slaughterhouse-bound trucks. The work causes his hands to swell and ache, but with a bond to repay at \$400 a month, he worked harder and longer, accepting any and all

overtime that came his way.

Weeks after Oscar's fundraiser, Patty and Ana Cecilia organized another event for yet another Pinewoods family threatened with the removal of their father. I asked Patty if, faced with deportation fears and turmoil, she found relief in cooking with her friends. A Spanish saying, she explained, guided this spirit of charity: *Hoy por ti, mañana por mí*. Today we helped you, because tomorrow, I might need your help. "The moment we're together, cooking or eating, feels powerful," Patty said. "In that union, we have hope." It was an act of love to cook for Ana Patricia's benefit, and an exercise in resiliency for her undocumented community. ♡

Ana Cecilia dresses enchiladas and *tacos dorados* during a food sale in Pinewoods.

Signs point motorists toward the Pinewoods Library and the fundraiser at Ana Patricia's home.



André Gallant is a journalist based in Athens, Georgia. His book about the Georgia oyster industry, *The High Low Tide*, is forthcoming from University of Georgia Press in 2017.



THE FUTURE OF SOUTHERN DRINKING

FOUR RECIPES FOR 2066

by David Wondrich

SOME THINK THAT HISTORIOGRAPHY is a science more or less like ballistics; that the careful plotting of where a phenomenon has been enables you to predict where it is going. If only the world were thus! The future, as history shows us, is essentially impervious to investigation. Sure, every once in a while somebody smart or lucky manages to plot a through-line, like when Isaac Asimov said in 1988 that one day we would have “computer outlets in every home, each of them hooked up to enormous libraries, where you can ... look up something you’re interested in knowing, however silly it might seem to someone else.” But that happens so rarely as to make individual attempts at prediction as reliable as trickle-down economics. Still, it’s fun to try.

In fifty years, Southern drinking will be very different from drinking in the rest of the United (or, by then, Disunited) States. Twenty-first-century drinkers have shown disdain for

the centralization and homogenization that dominated twentieth-century tipping. They have embraced the small-scale and the localized. By 2066, that will have given us a South where new-wave agrarianism, rooted in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century idea of the region as an agricultural paradise where you can grow the best of everything, coupled with the craft movement and its self-consciously traditionalist ways, will have kicked up a whole range of new-old drinks. There will be local wines, made from cleverly hybridized grape varieties whose DNA is largely American. And beer, of course, made in every county that allows it and often flavored with items from the Southern larder. Cowpea-chicory stout, anyone? No doubt Southern soft drinks will extend their recombinant ways in new directions—for all I know, the drink of the South in 2066 will be an electric-blue, chili-mango soda sweetened

with local cane sugar (I’ll get to that) and factory-spiked with legal, synthetic THC.

There will also be a lot of spirits. Historically, the South was a land where the native grapes were nasty and imported ones were louse-food; a land too hot to brew beer. It was all about spirits, and if there’s one thing current trends tell us, it’s that hooch is back to stay. Whiskey, of course, is made everywhere. In half a century, one can hope, it will also be all well-distilled and fully matured. (One can hope.)

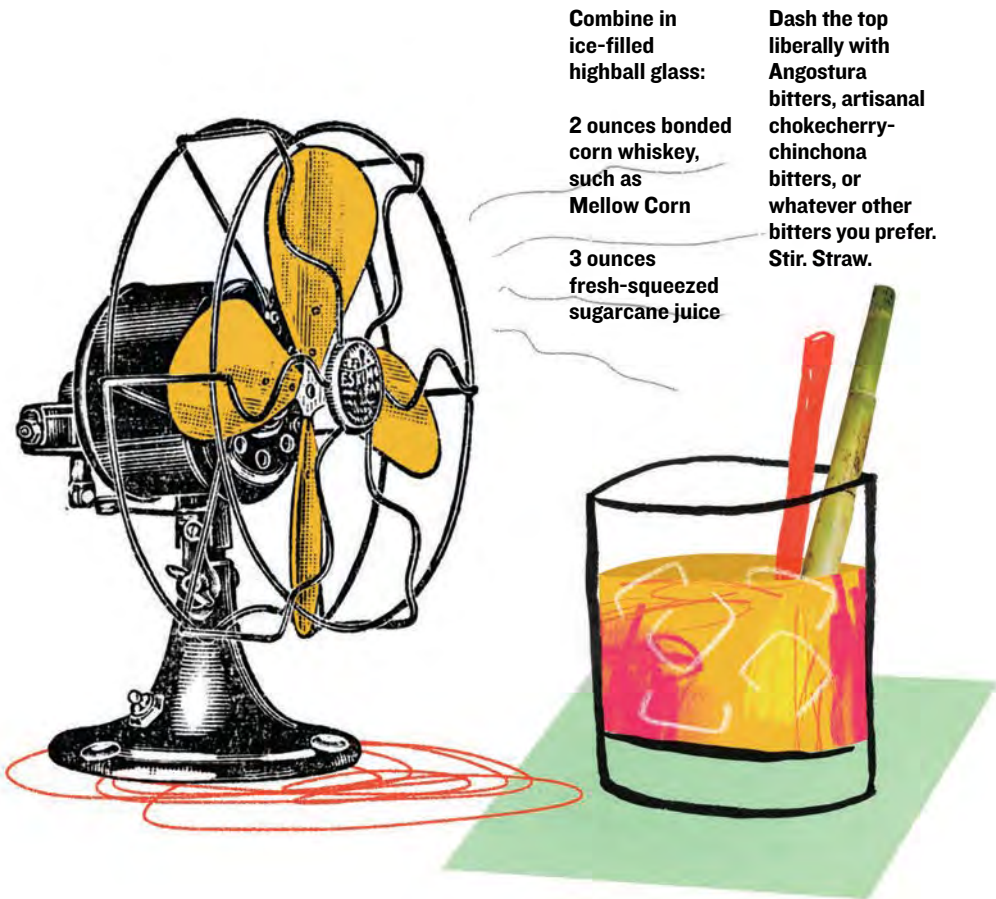
A look at American distilling manuals from the early days of the republic, before whiskey chased off all its competitors, reveals a startling range of crops that were once distilled in the region, all ripe for reviving. Some were terrible: Persimmon brandy was notoriously vile. Some were indifferent: Cornstalk rum, distilled from the juice that wells up in the stalks before they put forth ears, was generally thought to be passable if it was made properly (although it usually wasn’t). Some were good: paw-paw brandy, apple brandy, and whiskeys made from various grains. Even Lowcountry rice produced a decent liquor. One spirit was considered so excellent that it cost more than the finest imported Cognac: peach brandy from the Carolinas and Georgia, distilled from fresh peaches and their crushed pits and aged for many years in oak.

Fifty years from now, somewhere

in the South, these spirits and drinks will be crafted, sold, and shaken or stirred into cocktails, flips, punches, coolers, and what-have-you. We’re already well on the way with many of them, as, say, a julep made with Copper & Kings brandy from Louisville will readily demonstrate. As a sort of experiment, here are four reconstructions—or rather, I suppose, pre-constructions—of Southern drinks, vintage 2066.



IT WAS ALL ABOUT THE SPIRITS, AND IF THERE’S ONE THING CURRENT TRENDS TELL US, IT’S THAT THE HOOCH IS BACK TO STAY.



Combine in ice-filled highball glass:

2 ounces bonded corn whiskey, such as Mellow Corn

3 ounces fresh-squeezed sugarcane juice

Dash the top liberally with Angostura bitters, artisanal chokecherry-chinchona bitters, or whatever other bitters you prefer. Stir. Straw.

Canebrake Cooler

I'm assuming humanity is going to prove too pigheaded and dysfunctional to reverse climate change. Some parts of the South, hot and wet already, are going to get a whole lot hotter and wetter. There will be bugs. If we're lucky, there will also be more sugarcane. Mixed with a little lime juice and a lot of ice, fresh cane juice is lightly sweet, grassy, and refreshing. It's easy to imagine little electric cane-presses popping up on lunch counters throughout the South; places where they'll mix the juice with tea and ice and whatever else you want. Maybe even a healthy tot of local rum or, even better, an aged corn whiskey. Always a Deep South staple, corn whiskey—unlike its close cousin bourbon, which goes into new oak barrels—ages in previously used barrels, from which most of the sharp tannins have already been extracted. The result is a softer-tasting, grainier spirit that won't overwhelm subtle cane juice. Dash some bitters on top (assuming the current trend valorizing bitter flavors continues) and you have a drink that's refreshing, spicy, and just plain delicious.

Chinese Grocery Five-Treasures Punch

The South already grows a good deal of sorghum, a hot-climate grain that is mostly used for animal feed or—when the stalks are cut before the grain develops and then squeezed—as a source for a particularly pungent sort of syrup. Like all grains, sorghum seeds are full of starch, which can be converted to sugar, fermented, and distilled. Now, until recently, we didn't really do that with sorghum in America, other than for ethanol. Microdistillers such as South Carolina's High Wire have begun turning the stuff into a slightly wooly sort of whiskey, but that's just scratching the surface of sorghum spirits. The country that goes deep into beverage sorghum is China, where the resulting spirit is called *baijiu*, or "white wine." It bears approximately the same relation to sauvignon blanc that a saber-toothed tiger does to an elderly, declawed lap-kitty. Funky—and that's an understatement—fruity, dry, and very strong, *baijiu* is the blue cheese of the spirits world (indeed, much of that funk comes from a fungus, *aspergillus*, which Asian distillers traditionally use to start fermentation).

Is *baijiu* going to be the tequila of the mid-twenty-first century? It doesn't seem that way. But in 1950, Americans were still deeply suspicious of tequila, and just look at us now. As the foodways that Asian immigrants bring to the U.S. South interweave with local traditions, it's not much of a leap to imagine East Asian spirits influencing Southern drinkways. My example is a variant on the nineteenth-century Mississippi Punch, renamed with a nod to the Chinese immigrants who opened groceries in the Delta at the turn of the last century. It's not for the faint of heart, but there's a deep, swampy tang to it that captures the essence of the region.

Shake well with ice:

1 ounce Kinmen Kaoliang 58% *baijiu**

1 ounce Jamaican rum, such as Smith & Cross 57%

1 ounce high-proof bourbon

1 ounce light sorghum syrup (made by mixing equal parts thick sorghum syrup or

sorghum molasses and water)

1 ounce fresh-squeezed lime juice

Strain into ice-filled pint mason jar and garnish with—hell, I dunno. I don't even know what the cool kids are garnishing things with now, let alone fifty years from now. You'll need a straw.

**For this drink, you don't want baijiu at its most intense. Kweichow Moutai, the flagship brand, would move into this drink, take over, and kick every other ingredient out on the street. Kaoliang, from Taiwan, still has plenty of the funk, but it can play with others.*





Lowcountry Julep

In 1854, the New York wine merchant and drinks authority Frederick S. Cozzens wrote in his newsletter, *Cozzens' Wine Press*, that “the young rice of our South would make a very fine Arrack, beyond doubt,” and that “American Arrack might be made to rival that of Batavia.” A bit of explanation: Cozzens’s “Arrack” is the English version of an Arabic word, used throughout the Middle East and southern Asia, that means “liquor,” and is just as specific. There are many arracks, made from everything from palm sap to mare’s milk, and yes, even rice.

Cozzens was right: You can distill something delicious out of rice. He’s also right that such a spirit “needs to be kept many years...before it is mellow enough for use.” As proof, we now have Kikori, a Japanese rice “whiskey” that is a blend of three- to ten-year-old pure-rice shochu. Light, nutty, and mellow, this quasi-whiskey with a hint of Asian fungal fermentation makes a good argument that Southern distillers should get into rice. Assuming they do, and assuming that regional tradition inspires people to drink juleps, it’s easy to imagine the bartenders at Husk in Charleston in 2066 (I’m sure it will still be around) mixing fine Carolina Gold-whiskey juleps for their happy patrons. And, it being Charleston, a city once extraordinarily devoted to drinking Madeira, they’ll no doubt float some of the wine on top. By then, they might use a Southern-made equivalent.



Stir 2 teaspoons sugar and 2 teaspoons water together in a tall glass.

Add 5-6 fresh mint leaves and press lightly with a muddler.

Pack glass to top with finely-cracked ice (the best way to get this is to put it in a canvas sack and murder it with a big mallet).

Add 3 ounces Kikori rice whiskey.

Stir.

Carefully pour $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce fine, rich Madeira or sweet Marsala on top.

Slide in 3 or 4 mint sprigs and a couple of straws.

Shake well with ice:

$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce peach brandy, either artisanal (such as Kuchan or Dutch’s) or bootleg

$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce old (VSOP or XO-grade) Cognac or Armagnac

$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce, or a little more, dry orange Curaçao (such as Pierre Ferrand)



$\frac{3}{4}$ ounce, or a little less, fresh-squeezed, strained lemon juice

Strain into a chilled cocktail glass that has had its inside and its rim wiped with a mint leaf. Flame an orange peel over the drink.

The Resurrexit

The South isn’t all country honk. It’s also city slick, and I doubt that part of it’s going away. In the South of 2066, there will be elegant cocktail lounges and people drinking elegant cocktails, and I’m sure some of those will be based on peach brandy that has spent seven or eight or twelve years slumbering in the wood. (Modern microdistillers have begun reviving this staple, but it’ll be years before their attempts reach maturity.)

The Resurrexit is a liquid tribute to Atlanta, the Big Peach. “Resurgens,” the city’s motto, is Latin for “rising again,” as a Phoenix rises from the flames. By 2066, I predict we can nail that participle down into a past perfect: “It has risen again.” *Resurrexit*. The drink is a twist on a 1920s French one, the Burnt Fuselage (flames, what what). Lacking old peach brandy, I’ve used young peach brandy mixed with well-aged Cognac to add the old-brandied notes. The result is as suave and sophisticated as you please, but with a little extra warmth and generosity. 🍷

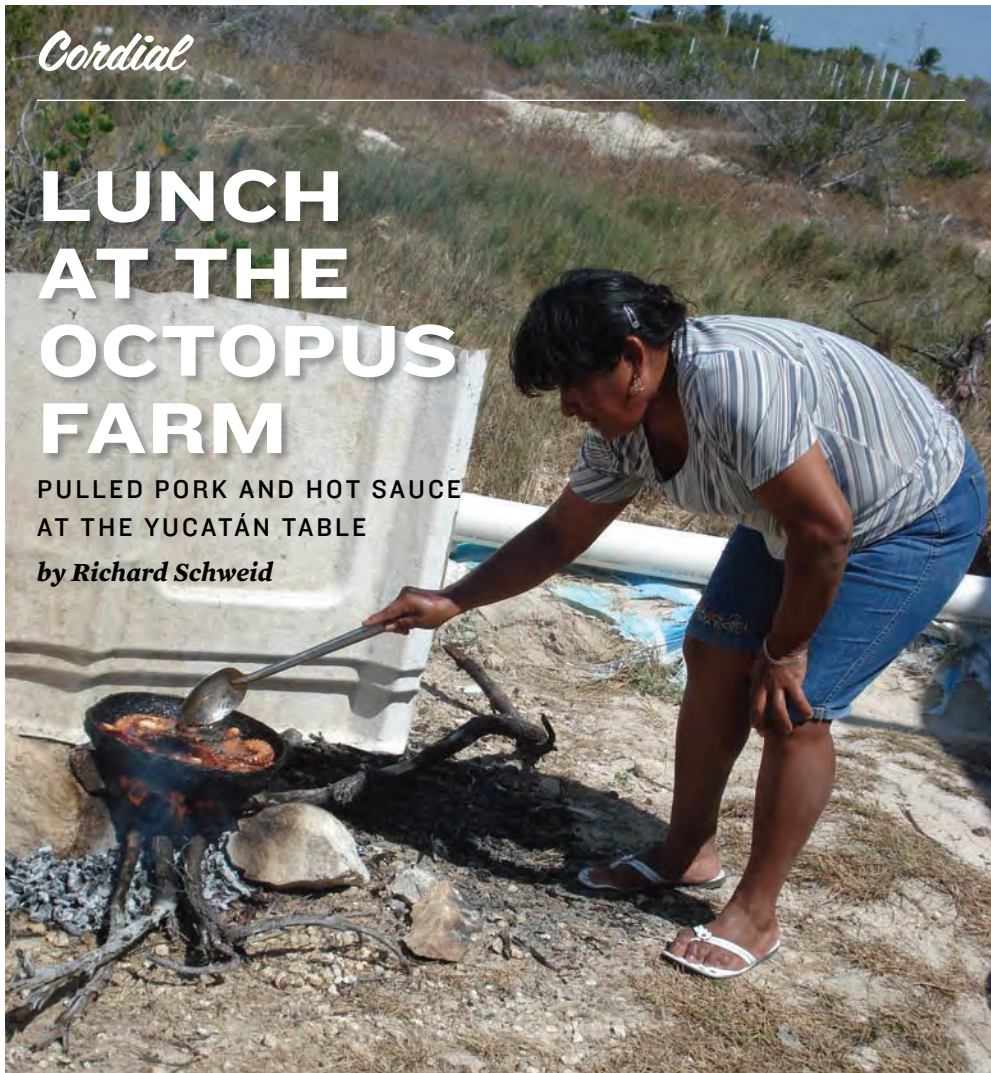
David Wondrich is the James Beard Award-winning author of *Imbibe* and *Punch* and the senior drinks columnist at the *Daily Beast*.

Cordial

LUNCH AT THE OCTOPUS FARM

PULLED PORK AND HOT SAUCE AT THE YUCATÁN TABLE

by Richard Schweid



Genny Uicab Novelo prepares octopus for her coworkers' lunch.

ONCE WORKED FOR A CO-operative of Mayan women who manage an octopus farm in Sisal, a small fishing village on the wind-blown northern coast of the Yucatán peninsula, about 500 miles south across the Gulf of Mexico from New Orleans. I was researching octopuses, and the farm was, in fact, the only commercial octopus farm in the world.

The work was as repetitive and monotonous as any other agricultural labor, consisting mostly

of feeding the tiny octopuses and cleaning their tanks. Our first task each morning was to vacuum out all the residual particles of food-paste—a glop of vitamins, mixed into ground-up shrimp and squid—from the day before. We did this with a length of hose to siphon out the waste, a process initiated with one end of the hose in a tank and the other end in your mouth, sucking until salt-water came flooding down your throat, at which point, suction

Photos by Richard Schweid

established, you took the hose out of your mouth and put it in a drain at your feet while using the other end to vacuum the tank. I drank what seemed like quarts of Gulf water, and I provided slapstick entertainment to my colleagues as I choked and spluttered.

The workday had one reliable bright spot: lunchtime. Once we made sure our 15,000 baby octopuses had clean tanks and plenty to eat, my five coworkers' attention turned to making sure that we, too, were well fed.

Each worker took turns buying provisions for the midday meal. When it was my turn, I spent eleven dollars on a feast for eight people: short ribs grilled over the fire, served with a salad of chopped lettuce topped with a tasty, fresh, lime juice dressing; rice and carrots; sliced avocados; a big bowl of limes to squeeze on the ribs; black beans; warm tortillas; and soft drinks.

A constant at the lunch table was Ernesto's hot sauce, which he made from fresh, chopped habanero peppers (from a bush behind his house), salt, and lime juice, mixed in an empty Philadelphia cream cheese box. In the Mayan language, this mixture is called *xnipec*, which translates as "dog's nose": Eating it makes a person's nose run wet as a dog's. I was surprised the cream cheese box didn't smolder and immolate.

The stubby habanero is often ranked as the second hottest pepper regularly consumed by human beings. A few drops of

Ernesto's sauce was enough to add excitement to a whole plate of rice. My coworkers occasionally stopped by the storeroom with their lunches to ask, "Got any of that hot sauce?" spooning just a bit out of the cream cheese box on the table. No one used more of the hot sauce than Ernesto, and by the time lunch was over he was always sweating profusely.

Ernesto's wife, Genny, generally cooked the main dish over an outdoor charcoal fire. One day she might prepare tender octopus,



cooked in its own juices. Another day we would eat freshly shot ducks from the mangrove lagoon behind the village. She grilled the ducks and served them in a broth of lime, cilantro, and chopped onions, along with rice, black beans, and plenty of tortillas. In the Roman Catholic tradition, meat was proscribed on Fridays, and we ate dough wrapped around chopped onions and hard-boiled eggs, fried over the fire in an inch of lard.

Once, to celebrate a coworker's birthday, we contributed the princely sum of eight dollars apiece to buy a young pig for that most typical Mayan dish, cochinita pibil. Ernesto dug a pit and built a fire. He let it burn until it reduced to coals. Genny slathered the pig with the juice of bitter oranges and pulverized achiote seeds, which gave it a reddish pimiento color and added its own undertone to the flavor. She spread banana leaves over the coals and laid the pig on them with more banana leaves on top to seal in the heat. The pig cooked slowly overnight.

The next day we pulled the exquisitely tender meat from the bones and piled it on a plate to be

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passed around the table. We rolled the meat in tortillas. The method was new to me, the flavor subtly different, but it was basically pulled pork barbecue, like what I

Richard Schweid is an SFA founder. A Tennessee native, he lives and writes in Barcelona, Spain.

knew growing up in Nashville. Also on the table for the birthday meal were octopus ceviche and octopus in a slightly vinegary escabeche. After meals like these, we went back to work, refreshed, at the world's only octopus farm.

Some 400 million pounds of octopus is bought and sold around the globe each year. Plenty of economic incentive exists for octopus aquaculture, but it has proven difficult. Spain, Japan, and Italy buy over half of the world's catch of octopus, but they have not been successful in their attempts to cultivate it.

Cooperative members were convinced they would see a day when they would enjoy a thriving business, selling and shipping small, tender octopuses to gourmet restaurants across Mexico and beyond. They are still at it, and if successful they will have created a viable aquaculture where before there was none. If all goes as planned, patent revenues for the infrastructural and biological solutions devised in the process will accrue to the cooperative.

"I believe it's going to happen," says forty-four-year-old Genny, looking up from her plate of cochinita pibil. "I've got five kids—two are married, and three are still in school. My youngest daughter's fourteen. I expect to see my kids inherit a share in an octopus farm." 🍷

GRAVY

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THE MISSION of the Southern Foodways Alliance is to document, study, and explore the diverse food cultures of the changing American South.

Our work sets a welcome table where all may consider our history and our future in a spirit of respect and reconciliation.

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