A Taste of Santa Clara

A community-created collection of recipes, artwork, and short writings

Edited and compiled by

Santa Clara City Library

Foreword by Patty Wong, City Librarian

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A COMMUNITY-CREATED COLLECTION OF RECIPES, ARTWORK, AND SHORT WRITINGS

EDITED AND COMPILED BY SANTA CLARA CITY LIBRARY

A Taste of Santa Clara

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A Taste of Santa Clara is a community-created collection of recipes, artwork, and short writings submitted by community members. This volume was edited and compiled by staff of the Santa Clara City Library.

Published by:
Santa Clara City Library | City of Santa Clara
2635 Homestead Rd
Santa Clara, CA 95051
https://www.sclibrary.org/

ISBN: 979-8-234-11189-0

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Printed in the United States of America
First edition

FOREWORD

What a delight to discuss a favorite topic – food! And with this, the culinary and other delights that bring the best in our five senses- taste and smell, sight and feel, and the memories of love and family that bring about the best in all of us.

This tribute to the Santa Clara City Library's Big Read program featuring Bite by Bite by Aimee Nezhukumatathil is a wonderful way to connect food beyond sustenance– moving forwards the connection we feel in the preparation and visualization and consumption of the dish and the different ways each part of the recipe fold together. I hope you will glean through this compendium and try some recipes and read some of our community's literary and visual donations. Their contributions are full of joy and love and meaning. Each has its own story and place in our City's history.

It has been an honor to work with our wonderful staff to bring this first Santa Clara City Library Big Read program to life. Thank you to the team and our many volunteers and readers and contributors for their support for this book and the transformation from program to engagement.

With appreciation,
Patty Wong
City Librarian
Santa Clara City Library

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INTRODUCTION

A Taste of Santa Clara is part of the NEA Big Read 2025–2026, a grant-supported initiative that brought our community together through shared reading, conversation, and creative expression. Centered on *Bite by Bite* by Aimee Nezhukumatathil, this project was designed to inspire meaningful dialogue, celebrate local creativity, elevate a wide range of voices and perspectives, and build stronger connections across the community.

During this cycle of the NEA Big Read, our programming explored the theme **"Our Nature."** Inspired by the reflections and imagery in *Bite by Bite*, Santa Clara City Library offered book discussions, writing workshops, nature journaling, cooking demonstrations, and a special visit by Aimee Nezhukumatathil.

This book is the culmination of those shared experiences.

Echoing themes present in *Bite by Bite*, we invited members of the Santa Clara community to contribute recipes, artwork, and short writings inspired by food, nature, memory, and identity. The response was extraordinary: we received nearly 200 submissions, far more than we could include in this volume. While this book represents only a selection of the work shared with us, it reflects the creativity, insight, and lived experiences of our community.

I am proud to share these submissions with you and deeply grateful to all who contributed their voices, memories, and creativity to this project. We extend our sincere thanks not only to those whose work appears in these pages, but also to everyone who submitted and helped make this collection possible. We hope this book celebrates the spirit of community that shaped it and invites readers to reflect on the many ways food, place, and personal experience connect us.

Sincerely,
Jason Thomas
Adult Services Program Coordinator

RECIPES



Photograph by Emily Shaffer

SAVORY

BRAZILIAN PEIXADA

Recipe by: Karla Oliveira



Brazilian Peixada is a delicious dish I grew up seeing my mom and my aunties make back in Brazil almost every weekend. It celebrates our culture and the diversity of Brazilian flavors and colors.

This dish is more than just a fish plate. It brings family and friends together. As an immigrant, I have cooked it countless times here in the United States, and every time someone tries it they say, “OMG, it’s an explosion of flavors!”

This recipe is very simple. What really determines the flavor of this dish is the type of white fish you use. I usually make it with tilapia, but you can also use cod or any white fish you prefer.

BRAZILIAN PEIXADA

Ingredients

4–6 tilapia fillets (or cod or other white fish)

1 tbsp paprika

1 tbsp garlic powder

1 tbsp onion powder

1 tbsp Cajun seasoning or Old Bay seasoning

Salt to taste

1–2 onions, sliced into rounds

1–2 bell peppers, sliced

1–2 potatoes, sliced

1 ear of corn, cut into pieces (optional)

Green onions, chopped

Fresh cilantro, chopped

2 cans coconut milk (Thai coconut milk works the best!)

2 tbsp olive oil

Directions

Season the Fish

- Place the tilapia fillets in a bowl and season them with paprika garlic powder, onion powder, Cajun or Old Bay seasoning
- Use about 1 tablespoon of each seasoning and mix gently so the fish is well coated.

Prepare the Base

- Heat a large pot over medium heat and add olive oil.
- Add the sliced onions and cook for a few minutes until they start to soften.

BRAZILIAN PEIXADA

Directions

Add the Fish

- Carefully place the seasoned fish fillets into the pot, arranging them around the pan.

Add the Vegetables

- Add your vegetables on top of the fish. I like to include peppers, more onions, potatoes, corn, green onions, and lots of fresh cilantro
- Feel free to adjust the vegetables to your taste.

Add Coconut Milk

- After about 2–3 minutes, pour 2 cans of coconut milk into the pot. You can also add 1/2 cup of water.
- Let everything simmer together.

Cook

- Cook for about 30 minutes, until the fish is tender and the vegetables are fully cooked.
- Taste the broth and add more paprika or salt if needed.

Serve - Servindo

- Serve your Brazilian Peixada hot with white rice or any grain you like.
- This dish is comfort food, full of flavor, and a beautiful way to celebrate Brazilian culture.
- P.S. You can decorate your dish with some shrimp, too. Enjoy!

CIOPPINO

Recipe Submitted by: Beverly Purdy Adamo

In Loving Memory of BARBARA F. PURDY

I can still hear Mom say, “Come in, relax, have something to eat. Mangia, Mangia...” She was a good Italian mother.

I’m one of the eight children of Art and Barbara Purdy who grew up here in Santa Clara. Our home was a place of peace and comfort where they raised our family with love and kindness—and good food!

Mom could cook anything to perfection. She even wrote a recipe book for the family and updated it annually, adding new recipes and tips. But it was her Italian recipes, many of them passed down through generations, always with her special twist in the ingredients that became favorites. Friends and family were always welcome, and if it wasn’t the positive energy and warm glow of happy times in the house that gave you a sense of belonging, it was the delicious meals.

It’s an honor to present one of our family's favorites from Barb’s Family Cookbook.

One of her delightful seafood dishes is Cioppino. There was one secret ingredient that made all the difference in making this easy one-bowl meal. “It’s the single red chili pepper,” she would say. It’s served with fresh Italian Batard bread and a salad.

CIOPPINO

Recipe Submitted by: Beverly Purdy Adamo

Another enjoyable dish is “Roladini,” a beef entrée. This recipe dates back several generations. It takes a little longer to prepare and was often served on special occasions. Sides of fresh veggies, salad and bread pair well with this one. [Editor’s Note: Unfortunately, owing to the size of the book, we were not able to include the Roladini recipe.]

We hope you enjoy this recipe and remember, she was known to tweak recipes to individual taste so please feel free to do that too!
Mom would be pleased to see you take a second helping!

The Purdy Family

Serves 6-8

Ingredients

1 hot, dried chili pepper, crushed
2 cloves garlic, chopped
3 Tbsp chopped parsley
3/4 C chopped onion
1/2 tsp each rosemary, oregano, basil, and thyme
1/2 C olive oil
1 (14 oz.) can tomatoes
1 C white wine
2 (8 oz.) cans tomato sauce
1 lb. fish fillets
1/2 lb prawns
1/2 lb scallops
1 lb small clams
squid (optional)
2 crabs, cleaned and cracked
2 stalks celery, minced
1 bottle clam juice (8 oz.)

CIOPPINO

Directions

- Sauté onion, garlic and celery in oil until soft. Add tomatoes, tomato sauce, spices, wine, and clam juice.
- Cut fish fillets into 1-inch chunks and add to mixture. Heat to boiling, then simmer 20 minutes. (This may be done in advance and then refrigerated.) Add seafood to simmering sauce. Cook over medium-high heat 10-15 min. Optional: If you don’t want it too spicy, leave the chili pepper whole then remove it before serving.
- If more juice is needed to cover fish, add more tomato sauce or clam juice. Serve in wide, shallow soup bowls with plenty of crusty French bread for soaking up sauce.

CORNED BEEF LEFTOVER SURPRISE

Recipe by: Carolyn Schuk

Something else to do with those corned beef leftovers besides hash.

I was looking at leftover corned beef. We had already made hash and eaten dried out leftovers the day after St. Patrick's Day. I felt the imperative of my mother who could always create something that tasted good with leftover anything and a can of condensed soup. Although I have largely replaced condensed soup in my culinary repertoire with cream sauce—which my mother also taught me to make with cornstarch (more reliable than flour)—I have maintained the tradition of dinner from whatever leftovers have accumulated.

With that in mind, I was looking at that leftover lump of corned beef and thinking, 'what can I do with this?' If you search for "leftover corned beef recipes," you will find a series of variations on the Reuben sandwich—Reuben nachos, Reuben burritos, Reuben quiche, Reuben whatever. As I had no Swiss cheese and no sauerkraut, these weren't possibilities.

So, I channeled my mother. I did an inventory. I had a sizable leftover corned beef round, and boiled potatoes and carrots. I chopped the corned beef and carrots up with some onion and celery (given an initial blanching in the microwave).

Then I considered what kind of sauce I could mix this all up in. I did return to that Reuben sandwich idea with a "Reubenesque" sauce (yuk, yuk): ketchup, mayonnaise (in this case Miracle Whip because that was what was on hand), and horseradish; expanded to a sauce with evaporated milk and canned tomato sauce and a tablespoon of cornstarch for good measure (insurance against things getting watery). I mixed this all up and poured it in a medium sized casserole dish.

I sliced up the potatoes, shook them up in a plastic bag with a couple of tablespoons of olive oil and a few shakes of salt, and arranged them on the top as a sort of crust. I put it in the refrigerator overnight and baked it the next day at 350 degrees on convection bake (to crisp up those potatoes) for about an hour.

CORNED BEEF LEFTOVER SURPRISE

It was great. That was my husband's assessment, and he's always dubious about anything with the word "surprise" in its name.

Ingredients

Half a pound or so of cooked corned beef

3 or 4 cooked carrots. If you don't have cooked carrots, cook some.

Half and onion, one stalk of celery; chopped and cooked in the microwave for 2 minutes

1-2 cups of sliced boiled potatoes. If you don't have leftover boiled potatoes, slice up some raw potatoes and boil them for 5 minutes.

For the sauce, mix this up in a bowl:

3-4 Tbsp ketchup

4-5 Tbsp mayonnaise or Miracle Whip

1-2 tsp horseradish (or more if you like it)

1 Tbsp cornstarch

1/2 cup evaporated milk

1/2 cup canned tomato sauce, or canned tomatoes, or 1-2 Tbsp more ketchup

More tomato sauce and evaporated milk to make a sauce that's pourable, and not watery. If it seems too thin, add more cornstarch.

2 Tbsp olive or other vegetable oil, melted butter would work, too.

A plastic bag to shake the sliced potatoes and oil in, with a few shakes of salt

Directions

- Mix it all up in a casserole dish, arrange the potato slices on the top. Bake in a 350 degree oven (convection if you have it) for about an hour.
- Let it settle for about 15 minutes.

ENCHILADAS

Recipe by: Shirley Foreman

This recipe makes up to 12 enchiladas. These enchiladas are the ultimate comfort food and ideal for any time you need an easy-to-make, crowd-pleasing dish.

Ingredients

12 10” diameter flour tortillas

1 ½ pounds ground beef or cooked shredded chicken or pork

2 pounds uncooked pinto beans

1 large yellow onion

1 can medium pitted ripe olives

1 pound cheddar cheese

2 28 oz cans red chile sauce

Directions

You will need two 9 x 13 inch casserole dishes for the enchiladas.

- Cook the pinto beans. To prepare the beans: First, wash them in a colander to remove any dirt or small stones. Then place the beans in a large pot and add up to 4 quarts of water. Bring to a boil; the beans will float to the top. Then, turn down the heat to a simmer. Simmer the beans for about two hours adding water as needed until the beans are cooked through (soft but not mushy). Once the beans are cooked you can add about 1 teaspoon or more of salt to taste. Be sure NOT to add salt before the beans are done because salt stops the cooking process. Note: the beans can be cooked 1-2 days ahead of time. Just reheat them when you are ready to use them. You can also use canned pinto beans instead for convenience.

ENCHILADAS

Directions

- Sauté/reheat the meat to the desired level of doneness. If using beef, stir in a little flour to soak up any extra fat in the pan. Then, add both cans of red chile sauce to the meat and heat. Simmer the meat/sauce mixture for a few minutes to meld the flavors.
- While the meat is cooking, dice the onion coarsely, shred the cheddar cheese, and drain the ripe olives into a bowl.

Assembly

- Dip a flour tortilla in the meat/red chile sauce to coat both sides and place it in the casserole dish.
- Place a spoonful (about ¼ cup) of meat with sauce.
- Next, place a spoonful (about ¼ cup) of pinto beans into the tortilla, draining excess juice.
- Then, add a tablespoon of chopped onions, two olives, and a small handful of shredded cheese to the tortilla.
- Fold up the tortilla and secure it with toothpicks.
- Repeat steps 1-5 for the remaining tortillas. Place six enchiladas in each casserole dish.
- Next, spoon any remaining sauce, onion, and cheese over the enchiladas. Then, top each enchilada with two more olives.
- If you have extra beans left just reheat and serve as a side dish.
- Heat the enchiladas in a 350° Fahrenheit oven for about 30 minutes or until the cheese is all melted and bubbling. Remove from the oven and serve!

Variation: use green chile sauce instead of red for a delightful and tasty change.

GAZPACHO ANDALUZ

Recipe by: Esperanza Sanz Escudero



During the hot days of summer, nothing is more refreshing than a cold glass of a beverage. If that concoction is something nutritious, natural, easy to prepare and tasty... who would say no? The origins of this common recipe are still debatable but definitely they have to be with an overproduction of the gardens during the summertime. When all the tomato and cucumber crops produce everything, everywhere, all at once, this is the most creative, sustainable and fresh way to go. You can benefit from your community garden, be sustainable, cook less, enjoy summer and get refreshed all in just one cup of scarlet liquid.

This mix is sometimes referred to as a cold tomato soup, but it is not, since it does not even approach a source of heat, and it is not a juice either, since it involves not just fruit (yes, cucumbers, peppers and tomatoes are fruits, biologically speaking,) but also bulbs like onion and garlic, plus minerals like salt. It is a different animal in its own right. It could be used as a drink, as an appetizer, or as a main dish.

The original gazpacho from Andalucia is closer to what is now called salmorejo. Salmorejo is prepared with bread from the previous day soaked in water, tomatoes, olive oil, and salt, among other ingredients. Some other gazpachos were originally made with cucumber as the main ingredient. Nowadays you can even find watermelon gazpacho, but that is another story.

GAZPACHO ANDALUZ

The gazpacho I prepare for my family has a thick body in comparison to the bottled gazpachos you could buy in any Spanish supermarket. We normally use a bowl and a spoon instead of just drinking it from a glass. The one my mother used to prepare is more watery than thick. There are several ways to get that and it has to be with the way you prepare the vegetables or the time you leave it in the fridge. Some people scald the tomatoes, remove the skin and the seeds and use just the meaty part. I do not remove any of those, because I really like to enjoy the full tomato body that includes all the fiber and it is so nutritious. Some others add cold water or just ice and keep it chilled in the refrigerator. It doesn´t matter how you prepare it, you are going to enjoy the gazpacho anyway, and since normally it is prepared in big quantities, make sure to share it with your loved ones. My recipe yields four portions but really depends on how much you serve in each glass or bowl.

Ingredients

10 to 12 medium size tomatoes. The softer the better, riper is best.

1 or 2 small cucumbers with no skin

1 medium red bell pepper

1 small onion

1 or 2 cloves of garlic

1 oz of extra virgin olive oil (around to 50 ml)

1 oz of vinegar of Jerez (around 30 ml)

Pinch of salt

GAZPACHO ANDALUZ

Directions

- Wash tomatoes, remove the green part near the stalk and cut into quarters.
- Peel the cucumber and cut it into four pieces.
- Peel and cut the onion into small pieces.
- Peel the garlic.
- Wash, seed and cut the red bell pepper into quarters.
- Put everything in the blender and make sure it mixes well.
- Add the oil, vinegar and salt. Better to start little by little and keep tasting so you can adjust to your taste.
- If needed, you may add now more tomatoes, garlic, vinegar, olive oil or salt. Don't be shy with the olive oil and vinegar. That is what gives the amazing taste to the tomatoes. You may use apple vinegar, but the delectable acidic taste is given by this particular kind of vinegar.
- Put it in the fridge and enjoy it very cold later. ¡Buen provecho!

HEALTHY WHITE SAUCE CHICKEN PASTA

Recipe by: Sangeeta Jariwala



Ingredients

16 oz penne pasta

2 tbsp olive oil (divided)

1 tbsp butter

1 medium white onion, diced into small pieces

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 cup mixed vegetables (broccoli, mushroom, bell peppers, carrots, French beans, etc.), roughly chopped

2 1/2 tbsp all-purpose flour

1 pound boneless chicken thighs, diced into bite size pieces

2 cups milk

1/2 cup heavy cream (if you want a richer texture, you can use 1 cup)

McCormick Roasted Garlic & Herb/All-purpose Italian seasoning

Salt and pepper to taste

HEALTHY WHITE SAUCE CHICKEN PASTA

Directions

- To prepare the pasta, bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil and add salt generously. Add the pasta and cook until “Al dente,” firm to the bite (this is important). Drain and set aside. Add some olive oil to the drained pasta to avoid sticking.
- In a large pot, slightly heat the rest of the olive oil. Then add the diced onions and the minced garlic and sauté until light golden (do not overdo it).
- Now add the bite-sized chicken pieces and some salt and pepper. Sauté until the chicken is tender. Add the chopped vegetables and sauté for another 2 minutes. Transfer the sautéed chicken and vegetables into a bowl and set aside.
- To make the sauce, melt the butter in the same pot and add the flour. Roast well on low heat until it attains a very pale and light brown color and starts releasing a nutty aroma. (do not over-roast).
- Once the flour is roasted well, add milk, salt, and pepper. Whisk continuously to avoid lumping and bring to a boil. Once the sauce comes to a boil, simmer and add the sautéed chicken and vegetables into the sauce. Add the seasoning and cook for another 3-4 minutes, until the sauce thickens and the vegetables still slightly crunchy.
- Add the heavy cream and cook for another minute and turn off the stove.
- Add the drained pasta and mix well with the sauce. Sprinkle a generous amount of seasoning and serve hot.

MECHADO CHILI

Recipe by: Iann Ivy



Mechado is typically a Filipino beef stew dish that originated from Spanish colonial influence. As someone with mixed heritage, I wanted to create an original recipe for this cookbook that is a fusion of these Filipino flavors with the Tex-Mex savoriness of chili. This chili has a unique hint of acidity from the soy sauce as well as mild heat from the ancho chili powder. Best served with garlic bread, Enjoy!

6-8 Servings
Prep Time: 30 minutes
Cook Time: 4 Hours on High, 8 on Low with slow cooker

MECHADO CHILI

Ingredients

1 tbsp avocado or neutral oil

1 (2-pound) boneless beef chuck roast, cut into 1-inch cubes

1 medium yellow onion, chopped

5 cloves of garlic, minced

1 (15 oz) can tomato sauce

1 (14.5 oz) can of petite diced tomatoes

1/4 cup soy sauce

1/4 cup sherry vinegar

2 tbsp ancho chili powder

1 tbsp lemon juice

1 tbsp fish sauce

3 Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes

3 carrots, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces

2 red bell peppers, cut into 1-inch pieces

2 cans kidney beans, rinsed

2 bay leaves

6-8 strips bacon, cut into 1-inch pieces

Salt and pepper, adjust to taste

MECHADO CHILI

Directions

- Heat oil in Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat. Once hot, sauté onions and garlic for about 2 minutes.
- Add chuck roast cubes and season with salt and pepper, giving them a nice sear for about 3-4 minutes, until browned on all sides.
- Add red bell pepper and sauté for about 2-3 minutes.
- Once sautéed, place beef, bell peppers and aromatics including any liquid into a slow cooker. Add diced carrots and potatoes.
- Pour over tomato sauce, diced tomatoes, sherry vinegar, soy sauce, lemon juice, fish sauce, kidney beans and seasonings. Stir. Then add bay leaves.
- Cook on high for 4 hours or 8 hours on low in slow cooker until beef is tender to your liking.
- Cook the bacon pieces in the last hour and add to slow cooker. Taste and season with salt and pepper if desired.
- Serve with rice or garlic bread on the side, enjoy!

MY AUNTIE'S CRAB SOUFFLÉ

Recipe Submitted by: Deborah Logue

This soufflé goes well with a simple salad and a chocolate soufflé for dessert. This soufflé brings back so many childhood memories, and it is so good!

Ingredients

8 slices of white bread

2 cups crab meat (I buy fresh, but you can use canned crab)

1/2 cup mayonnaise

1 onion, chopped

1 cup celery, chopped

3 cups milk

4 eggs, beaten

1 can mushroom soup

1/2 lb sharp grated cheese

Dash of paprika

Directions

- Dice half the bread in a baking dish.
- Mix the crab, mayonnaise, onion, pepper and celery.
- Spread over diced bread.
- Trim crusts off remaining bread and place over mixture.
- Beat eggs, add milk and pour over mixture.
- Place in refrigerator overnight.
- Bake at 325° Fahrenheit for 15 minutes.
- Remove from oven and cover with soup and top with cheese and paprika.
- Bake one hour at 325° Fahrenheit.

ONE-POT CHICKEN AND RICE

Recipe by: Justine Thompson

Cook time: 30 mins
Makes 6 portions

Ingredients

2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts

4 whole chicken legs

2 cups uncooked rice

4 cups chicken broth

1 cup of frozen broccoli

1 cup carrots, chopped

½ white or yellow onion, diced

1 teaspoon butter

Salt, pepper, garlic powder, onion powder, paprika, cumin (optional)

Directions

- Season the chicken with your choice of seasonings.
- Heat the butter in a large pan over medium heat. Put the chicken in the pan and cook each side for 5 minutes or until the outside of the chicken is golden brown.
- Take the chicken out and set aside.
- In the same pot, throw in the carrots and onion. Cook them until the onion is translucent, about 3 minutes.
- Once the onion is cooked, pour the uncooked rice in the pan and toast it until it turns slightly golden.
- Pour in the chicken broth and place the chicken back into the pan. Bring to a simmer.
- Once it starts simmering, switch it to low heat, cover and cook for 15 minutes.
- Put the broccoli on top of everything and let it cook for 10 more minutes.
- Now take the chicken back out to ensure that it cooks all the way through and then fluff the rice.
- Serve and enjoy.

PERUVIAN CAUSA RELLENA

Recipe by: Second Harvest of Silicon Valley



Peruvian Causa Rellena is a vibrant, layered dish featuring silky mashed potatoes seasoned with aji amarillo (yellow chili paste) and lime, paired with a savory tuna salad filling. It is a cherished staple in Peruvian households and celebrated in restaurants worldwide.

This delightful recipe was contributed by a Second Harvest of Silicon Valley client and brought to life by participants in the Santa Clara City Library's Food and Culture series, honoring the rich heritage found in this beloved dish.

Prep time: 40 minutes
Cook time: 20 minutes
Total time: 60 minutes

Ingredients

Potato Layer

8 starchy potatoes

1/4 cup olive oil

2 chili peppers (aji Amarillo), finely chopped or 2 Tbsp aji Amarillo paste

2 limes, juiced

1 tbsp fresh parsley, finely chopped

Salt and pepper to taste

PERUVIAN CAUSA RELLENA

Ingredients

Filling

1 can of tuna, drained

1/2 red onion, chopped

1/2 cup frozen peas and carrots, thawed

2 tbsp mayonnaise

1/2 avocado, sliced

Garnishes

2 hardboiled eggs

4 black olives

Directions

- Place the unpeeled potatoes in a large pot of cold, salted water. Bring to a boil and cook until they are very tender and cooked through. Drain and set aside to cool.
- When the potatoes are cool enough to handle, remove the skin. Mash the potatoes very well using a potato ricer or masher until a smooth fluffy “dough” is achieved. Add the olive oil, aji amarillo, lime juice, parsley, salt and pepper to taste. Mix the ingredients until they are all combined, and the potato dough has a smooth consistency and an even color.
- In a separate bowl, add the tuna, red onion, peas, carrots, and mayonnaise. Mix well to combine and set aside.

PERUVIAN CAUSA RELLENA

Directions

- Use a round cookie cutter to assemble the layers. You may need to lift the cutter along the way as you form each layer. First, add a layer of the potato dough, about 1 inch high, and press down with a spoon. Next, add a layer of the avocado slices on top. Now add a layer of the tuna filling and gently press down with a spoon to create an even surface. Finish off with another layer of potato dough and gently press down with a spoon again. Carefully remove the cookie cutter and repeat this process with the rest of the ingredients.
- You can garnish the causa with a hardboiled egg slice, a sprig of parsley, and an olive. Enjoy!

SALMON WELLINGTON

Recipe by: Emily Shaffer



An all-time favorite of mine. It takes time, but not all that much effort. You can get creative with how you fold, cut, or braid the puff pastry around your fish and impress the heck out of your dinner guests. (I've successfully used this when meeting my ex's parents over Thanksgiving the first time.)

You can make it with homemade puff pastry very successfully, but usually I buy the frozen Pepperidge Farm puff pastry sheets; be careful, because they're usually sitting right next to the little round puff pastry circles for making fancy desserts or hors d'oeuvres, and if you get home with your big cut of salmon and a box of dainty little pastry circles, you will be disappointed. This recipe uses one sheet; the box usually comes with two sheets. You can stick the second one back in the freezer; just use it before it gets freezer burned.

The general concept here is that the moisture from the sauteed onion mixture will steam the fish, keeping it from drying out. This can result in a rubbery skin, so I usually take the skin off the filet. (You can save the skin and roast or fry it separately for a tasty crunchy snack!) You can also swap out the ingredients in the onion mix, but remember that it should be pretty moist for the steam to work.

SALMON WELLINGTON

Ingredients

Onion mix

1 onion (any kind), sliced

1 leek, halved, sliced, and washed (see Tips)

Neutral oil for sautéing

Salt, pepper, herbs, seasonings to taste

Wellington

1 egg white

1 sheet of puff pastry, thawed in the fridge

Flour for dusting

1 large filet of salmon, skin removed, 1-2 lb

Salt, pepper, seasonings to taste

Directions

Onion mix

Make the onion mix about an hour before you want to put the dish into the oven - warm onion mix will melt your puff pastry and make it hard to get into shape.

- Sauté the leek and onion bits in oil over medium-high heat until just translucent. Add salt and seasonings to taste (and do taste it, often!)
- Set aside and let it cool.

Wellington

Really, seriously, make sure the onion mixture is cool. You might need to walk away for half an hour.

- Preheat the oven to 375° F.
- Prepare an egg wash by putting your egg white in a little glass or cup and adding a tiny splash of water and a pinch of salt. Whisk this well, then set it aside.
- Prepare a rimmed baking sheet by covering it with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat. Or, if you love cleaning off crusty bits, you can just oil and flour the bottom of the sheet so that your Wellington doesn't stick.
- Liberally dust a surface and your rolling pin with flour.

SALMON WELLINGTON

Directions

- Lay out the puff pastry sheet, and dust the surface of that with flour, too.
- Roll the pastry out until it's 3 times the width of the short width of your salmon, and 3-4" longer than the length on either side. Frequently move and flip the pastry sheet around on your work surface, adding more flour as needed, so you can make sure it's not sticking down.
- Move the pastry to the top of your prepared sheet pan, approximately centered.
- Add the cooled(!!) onion mixture to the middle of the puff pastry. Push it around until you have a bed of onions that is approximately the shape and size of your salmon filet.
- Add your salmon filet on top of the onions.
- Fold the short sides over the ends of your filet first.
- Next, you can use kitchen shears to decoratively cut the side flaps of pastry. If you cut both sides like a take-a-number tear-off strip, you can make them look like a little braid as you fold them over the fish and over each other; if you only cut one side that way, you can fold the whole side first, then fold the strips over the top, and it makes a neat striped look. Go wild with it - just remember that you don't want the top to be totally wide open, because you need the fish to steam a little bit inside.
- Apply your egg wash with a pastry brush all over the outside of your folded-up Wellington. This will give it a nice gloss as it bakes.
- Bake until the outside of the Wellington is an appetizing golden brown, usually around 40 minutes. With fish, you don't have to worry too much about it being undercooked inside - 40 minutes in the oven is enough to finish pretty much any fish to safety.
- When it's finished, use a spatula (or two) to carefully transfer the Wellington to a serving platter or cutting board. You should be able to get through it with a metal spatula to serve, since the fish will be flaky and soft. Remember that the ends of the Wellington will have twice as much puff pastry in them.

SALMON WELLINGTON

Notes

- Leeks get dirt all up in their leaves - you can't really clean them before cutting them. First, trim off the root and the dried out cut ends. Lay the leek flat (it only fans out one way, so it should naturally lie) and cut it in half, lengthwise, down the center. Then chop it into 1/4"-1/2" slices. Put all the chopped leek into a bowl, then fill it with water and swish the leek around really well. Drain them, either with a strainer or just using a hand or spoon to hold the leek parts in while the water drains out.
- This meal microwaves like a champ. Don't be afraid, it's almost better from the microwave than it was fresh. Almost.
- If you want to make a really huge one, as pictured, you can use both sheets of puff pastry and a much longer filet. Just overlap the ends of the two sheets a little bit when you start rolling, and they should merge into one larger sheet just fine.

SMOKY VEGAN MAC AND CHEESE

Recipe by: Sangeeta Hegde Leeper and Marcus Leeper



We are a husband and wife team that developed this recipe for our family. Creating recipes is a hobby of ours, and we even have a website chronicling our adventures! https://www.hangryherbivore.com

Ingredients

Cashew Cheese

2 cups raw soaked cashews

3 cloves raw Garlic

3/4 cup nutritional yeast

16 oz macaroni noodles

1 tsp smoked paprika

2 tsp onion powder

1 tsp sea salt

1 1/2 cup water

SMOKY VEGAN MAC AND CHEESE

Ingredients

Roux sauce

2 cups soy milk

3 tbsp vegan butter

1/8 cup all-purpose flour

2 pinches sea salt

1 pinch nutmeg

Directions

- Boil noodles in hot water, drain and set aside.
- Soak cashews for an hour, drain and add to a high-speed blender along with the garlic, nutritional yeast, onion powder, sea salt and smoked paprika with water and blend until smooth and set aside.
- Melt butter in a heavy pan.
- Once butter is melted, whisk in all-purpose flour until a paste is formed and then whisk in soy milk.
- Stir and allow sauce to simmer until it thickens.
- Pour cashew cheese into the pan and allow mixture to simmer.
- Whisk frequently to maintain texture and prevent lumping.
- Add noodles to the pan and simmer for 5-10 minutes.



A favorite recipe of the Pomeroy Elementary Garden to Table Program, with thanks to the Charlie Cart Project

Artwork by Hannah S., 4th grade

[Editor's Note: The artwork was originally submitted as the background for the recipe.]

Ingredients

2 tsp. salt (plus more to taste)

1 lb. pasta (your favorite shape)

4 Tbsp. olive oil

2 cloves garlic

1 lemon

1 large bunch asparagus (about 1½ lbs)

1 lb. English/shelling peas

1 lb. snap peas

2 Tbsp. chopped fresh mint

Ground pepper (optional)

Grated Parmesan cheese (to taste)

SPRING GARDEN PASTA

Directions

- Wash and dry all produce.
- Bring 4 quarts of water to a boil. Add 2 tsp of salt and stir. Add the pasta and cook according to package directions. Drain and place in a large bowl. Toss with 1 Tbsp. olive oil to coat. Cover and set aside.
- Peel and mince the garlic.
- Zest the lemon into a small bowl, juice the lemon into the same bowl and remove any seeds. Set aside.
- Prep the asparagus: snap about 1 inch off the woody end of each stalk. Break remaining stalk into ¾ inch pieces and set aside in a small bowl.
- Remove the English peas from their pods. Set aside. Snap off the ends and strings from the snap peas and snap them in half. Set aside in a separate bowl.
- Add the remaining olive oil (3 Tbsp) to a skillet over medium heat. Allow oil to warm for 30 seconds, then add the garlic and sauté for 1 minute, stirring occasionally.
- Add the asparagus and cook for 3-4 minutes, stirring occasionally, until tender. Add the snap peas and cook 1 minute longer. Add the shelled peas, sprinkle with a pinch of salt, and remove from heat.
- Combine the cooked vegetables into the large pot with the cooked pasta and stir. Mix in the lemon zest, lemon juice, and mint. Taste and adjust for salt and pepper and mix well.
- Serve pasta warm, topped with grated Parmesan cheese to taste.
- Thank the hands that helped prepare the meal, from the farm to your table. Enjoy!

VEGETABLE QUICHE (EGGLESS AND VEGETARIAN)

Recipe by: Diti Jhaveri Sanghvi



Last Diwali, my husband and I made this as a starter for our party. We honestly thought people would just taste it and move on to other dishes. But to our surprise, it was finished in no time! Some of our friends even said they would happily eat this as the main course.

So today, I'm very happy to share this simple and delicious recipe with you.
Note: We are vegetarian and do not use eggs. This recipe is not gluten-free.

Ingredients

- Eggless white bread
- Butter
- Oil
- Carrot (finely chopped)
- Bell peppers (finely chopped)
- Sweet corn (boiled)
- Milk (approx. 100–200 ml)
- All-purpose flour
- Salt
- Black pepper powder
- Oregano (dried)
- Chili flakes
- Italian seasoning
- Garlic powder
- Shredded processed cheese
- Fresh mint leaves (for garnish)

VEGETABLE QUICHE (EGGLESS AND VEGETARIAN)

Directions

Step 1: Sauté the Vegetables

- Heat oil in a pan on medium flame.
- Add finely chopped carrot and bell peppers. Cook for 2–3 minutes.
- Now add boiled sweet corn.
- Add salt, black pepper powder, garlic powder, Italian seasoning, and chili flakes.
- Mix everything well and cook for a few more minutes so the vegetables absorb all the flavors.
- Turn off the flame and let the mixture cool.

Step 2: Prepare the White Sauce

- In another pan, add 2 tablespoons butter and 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour.
- Keep the flame on medium and mix well until the flour looks slightly cooked.
- Slowly add milk (around 100–200 ml), stirring continuously so no lumps form.
- Keep stirring until the sauce thickens.
- Add salt, black pepper powder, and dried oregano.
- Now add the cooked vegetables to this sauce and mix well.
- Turn off the flame and let it cool slightly.

Step 3: Add Cheese

- Once the mixture has cooled a little, add shredded processed cheese and mix completely.

VEGETABLE QUICHE (EGGLESS AND VEGETARIAN)

Directions

Step 4: Prepare the Bread Cups

- Preheat your oven to 350°F (180°C).
- Take the bread slices and gently roll them flat with a rolling pin. Do not press too hard or the bread may break.
- Place each flattened bread slice into a muffin tray. Press gently so it forms a small cup shape.
- Brush melted butter on the inside edges of the bread cups.

Step 5: Fill and Bake

- Spoon the vegetable and cheese mixture into each bread cup.
- Fill all the muffin slots.
- Bake in the preheated oven at 350°F for 15–20 minutes.
- After about 15 minutes, check them. The bread should turn light golden brown and become crispy like toast.

Step 6: Garnish and Serve

- Remove from the oven and let them cool slightly.
- Garnish with finely chopped mint leaves.
- Serve warm with tomato ketchup or Szechuan sauce.

This recipe is simple, comforting, and perfect for parties. It looks fancy but is actually very easy to make. I hope you try it and enjoy it as much as our friends did!

SNACKS, SIDES & SHAREABLES

AKKI ROTTI

Recipe by: Archana Ashok Kumar



I was born and raised in Bengaluru, Karnataka, India. I am excited to share a special recipe from my state called Akki Rotti. The word ‘Akki’ in Kannada simply translates to Rice, and ‘Rotti’ is kind of a flatbread. So, Akki Rotti can also be called Rice Flatbread.

This is one of the oldest traditional delicacies in Southern India. Though the style of preparation differs from one district to another in Karnataka, the recipe below follows the Bengaluru and/or the Mysuru style. I learned this from my mother, who in turn learned it from her mother. If you ask a kannadiga (a kannada native) about this dish, you are sure to see their eyes gleaming and radiating. It is also a lunch box favorite for both the kids and the adults even today.

AKKI ROTTI

Ingredients

1 big bowl (like a cereal bowl) of rice flour

1 Tablespoon cumin seeds

1 carrot, grated

1 onion, thinly sliced (use red onion for better taste)

1 cup coconut, grated

4-5 green chilis (can be adjusted with your spice levels), chopped into thin pieces.

1 inch cube ginger, finely grated

Salt, taste

1 handful cilantro, chopped into very thin pieces

Optional: dill leaves, very finely chopped, to enhance the aroma and taste

Note: All the items above can be found in an Indian Store near you

Directions

Note: Use your hand to prepare the dough. It is not feasible with a big spoon.

- Take a large bowl (three times as big as a cereal bowl) and mix all the ingredients once.
- Keep adding water slowly to prepare the dough. The final consistency has to resemble a big, soft ball. It should neither be too sticky nor too dry.
- Tip: Use water and oil to adjust the consistency.
- Pull out a small piece (about 8-10 cm in diameter) from the dough and make a soft ball by circling in between both your palms.
- Take a flat pan (or a non-stick tava pan) and smear oil on it either by hand or by using a brush.

AKKI ROTTI

- Place the soft ball on the pan and make it into a flat texture evenly by pressing it flat with your four fingers (forefinger, middle, ring, and the little finger) at the same time. Imagine the shape and structure to become something like a tortilla.
- Note: You can also press it on a banana leaf or a butter paper and then transfer it on the tava. Many people prefer this method.
- Make five or six holes on the rotti and apply oil or ghee throughout the outline of the rotti and also on the rotti.
- Note: The oil on the sides is to easily lift the rotti once it is cooked, and the amount of oil you pour on the center of the rotti depends on how much you tolerate. The less the oil, the better it is from a health perspective.
- Close a lid on the pan and heat it under medium to high heat until you see vapors coming out from the sides.
- Take out the lid, flip the rotti using a dosa turner spoon or flat spatula, and heat it on the other side for 1-2 minutes.
- Note: The dosa turner spoon has a flat end to lift the rotti. Since you are using a non-stick tava, it is better to use a wooden spoon to avoid scratches.
- The crispy akki rotti is now hot and ready to be served with a small chunk of butter on the top.
- The akki rotti can be best served with coconut chutney, sambar, fruit jam, or any kind of sauce. Enjoy!

CHINGRI CHOP

Recipe by: Abhishek Ghosh



Made of prawns. A famous Indian snack.

Ingredients

250 g small prawns (cleaned & deveined)

2 medium potatoes

1 tsp ginger (finely grated)

1 tsp garlic (finely chopped or grated)

2-3 green chilies (finely chopped)

1/2 tsp turmeric powder

1/2 tsp red chili powder (adjust to taste)

1/2 tsp garam masala

Salt, to taste

2-3 tsp all-purpose flour (for coating)

Sunflower oil (for frying)

Breadcrumbs (for extra crispy coating)

CHINGRI CHOP

Directions

- Boil the potatoes until soft. Peel and mash them well.
- Lightly sauté the prawns with a pinch of salt and turmeric until just cooked and chop them finely.
- Make a mixture in a mixing bowl, combine cooked chopped prawns, ginger, garlic, green chilies, mashed potatoes, turmeric, red chili powder, garam masala and salt to taste.
- Shape the chops by making small portions into oval or round patties
- Lightly coat each chop with all-purpose flour and roll in breadcrumbs for a crispier crust.
- Heat oil in a pan, adding enough so the chops will be half-submerged while frying.
- Fry the chops until golden brown and crisp on both sides.
- Serve hot with tomato ketchup, green chutney, or mustard sauce.

DAHI PURI BOMB

Recipe by: Sharvani Nagamalli



This is an Indian street food called “Dahi Puri”. I have tried to give fine dining representation to street food. I have tried to recreate it in the dahi puri bomb style, which is inspired by the Fried Ice Cream dessert. This is my mom's favorite dish, and it's dedicated to my mom.

There are five elements in this dish.

Ingredients

Tamarind Chutney

1/2 cup: seedless tamarind

1/2 cup: jaggery (evaporated sugar cane)

2 cups: water

1/2 tsp: roasted cumin powder

1/2 tsp: red chili powder

According to taste: salt

DAHI PURI BOMB

Curd Coriander Dip

1 cup: thick hung curd

1 packed cup: fresh coriander leaves, including the tender stems

2: green chili

1/2 tsp: roasted cumin powder

According to taste: salt

Potato Mixture

2 medium: potatoes (boiled and finely mashed)

1/2 cup: chopped onions

1/2 tsp: roasted cumin powder

1/2 tsp: roasted coriander powder

1: finely chopped green chili

1/4 tsp: red chili powder

1/4 tsp: black salt

According to taste: salt

Curd Mixture

1 cup: thick hung curd

According to taste: salt

Outer Shell and Fried Ball

1 cup: all-purpose flour

2 cups: water

According to taste: salt

1 cup: thick poha (coarsely ground)

DAHI PURI BOMB

Directions

Tamarind Chutney

- Soak the tamarind in 1 cup of hot water for about 20 minutes. Once softened, mash it with your hands or a spoon and strain it through a sieve into a bowl. Discard the fibrous remains and keep the smooth pulp.
- Pour the tamarind pulp and another cup of water into a pan. Bring it to a gentle boil over medium heat.
- Add the jaggery and stir until completely dissolved.
- Add the cumin powder, chili powder and regular salt.
- Simmer the mixture for 10 minutes.

Curd Coriander Dip

- In a mixer, add all ingredients and grind it.

Potato Mixture

- In boiled and mashed potatoes, mix all the ingredients.

Curd Mixture

- In curd, add salt and mix well.
- In an ice cube tray, add 2.5 tsp of curd, 1 tsp curd mint dip and 1/2 tsp tamarind chutney and freeze for 2 hours.

Outer Shell and Fried Ball

- In a cup, add all purpose flour and water and mix well so that no lumps are formed, and add little salt. Then slurry is ready.
- Coat the outer shell of the freed mixture of curd balls with the potato mixture.
- Dip the potato ball in the slurry and then coat it with coarsely ground thick poha.
- Keep this in the freezer for 30 minutes.
- In a pan, heat oil and then deep fry the balls.

DAHI PURI BOMB

Plating

Take some whipped curd and draw a circle in the plate and with a fork drag it inside and place the fried ball at the center.

FRESH KIMCHI

Recipe by: Susan Seo

We have two kinds of kimchi: fresh kimchi and kimjang kimchi. Kimjang kimchi is for winter when we preserve food because Korea's winter is too cold and there are no vegetables. Making kimjang kimchi needs a lot of cabbages. Almost every family needs 30 to 40 cabbages. We use kimjang kimchi after fermentation to cook kimchi soups. Fresh kimchi does not require fermentation and is eaten immediately after preparation. Here I am going to tell you how to make fresh kimchi.

Ingredients

1 large napa cabbage

1 cup rock salt

½ large pear, peeled and core removed, cut into pieces

½ large apple, peeled and core removed, cut into pieces

½ onion, cut into pieces

10 garlic cloves

3 tablespoons salted shrimp (saeu-jeot)

5 green onions, cut to long pieces

1 cup red pepper powder

2-5 tablespoons anchovy sauce (myeolchi-aekjeot), homemade or store-bought

Note: In different regions of Korea, people use different fish sauces and the flavors are different for the kimchi made.

FRESH KIMCHI

Directions

- First, tear the napa cabbage into 2-inch strips.
- Spread salt evenly on them and pickle for 30 minutes.
- Then wash the cabbage three times and drain the water.
- While waiting for the cabbage to be pickled, make sauce in a blender. Peel and cut pear, apple, onion, and garlic, add salted shrimp, and blend them together with red pepper powder.
- Mix sauce and pickled cabbage in a big bowl with cut green onions. Anchovy sauce can be added to your taste. Fresh kimchi is ready.

If you eat it with oysters and other seafoods, it tastes great.

KADHI WITH BESAN PAKORAS

Recipe by: Sneh Lata Agrawal



Ingredients

<u>The Base</u>

1 1/2 – 2 cups sour yogurt

(dahi),

1/2 cup Gram flour (besan)

5–6 cups water

<u>The Tempering</u>

2–3 Tbsp mustard oil (or oil of your choice)

1/2 Tsp fenugreek seeds

1/2 Tsp cumin

2 pinches asafoetida (hing)

<u>The Aromatics</u>

1 inch cube of ginger, sliced

2-3 whole green chilis

1 bay leaf

1 cinnamon stick

2–3 whole cloves

2 whole dry red chilis

6–7 curry leaves

KADHI WITH BESAN PAKORAS

The Spices

1-2 Tsp turmeric

1 Tsp red chili powder (optional)

1 1/2 - 2 Tsp salt, to taste

Pakoras

1 Cup besan

Water

1 pinch hing

Oil for frying

Directions

- The Base: Whisk the yogurt with 1/2 cup besan until perfectly smooth. Slowly whisk in 5–6 cups of water.
- Tadka (Tempering): Heat the oil in a large pot. Add mustard seeds. Once they sputter, add the remaining whole spices, curry leaves, and hing. Add the sliced ginger, whole green chilies, turmeric, and red chili powder.
- The Slow Simmer: Pour in the yogurt mixture. Stir continuously until the mixture comes to a boil to ensure a smooth texture. Lower the heat, add salt, and let it thicken. Continue to simmer on low heat for at least 20–25 minutes (or more) to develop the deep, traditional flavor.
- Pakoras: Mix a pinch of hing into 1 cup of besan. Gradually add water while whisking constantly. Continue whisking until the batter is light and airy enough to pass the "Water Float Test" (a small drop of batter should float on top of a bowl of water). Fry small portions in oil until golden.
- Finish: Carefully add the pakoras to the simmering gravy. Garnish with a sprinkle of garam masala and fresh cilantro.

My Secret Scale

“1 cup refers to my favorite medium-sized katori, and a 'pinch' is exactly what fits between my thumb and forefinger. If the Kadhi looks too thick, add a splash of warm water until it feels right.”

PEANUT GARLIC STEAMED BEANS

Recipe by: Divya Ramachandran



Ready in 15- 20 minutes

Makes 4-6 side-dish servings

Ingredients

About 1 1/2 pounds green beans

1 cup dry roasted peanuts

1/2 cup grated coconut

2 cloves garlic

3 tsp oil

3 tsp red chili powder/cayenne pepper powder

Salt to taste

PEANUT GARLIC STEAMED BEANS

Directions

- Trim the ends and chop the beans into 1- or 2-inch pieces.
- Cover and cook the chopped green beans with just enough water and salt as needed. Alternatively, steam them.
- Grind the roasted peanuts, garlic, coconut, red chili powder and salt.
- Once the beans are cooked, heat oil in a pan and add the mixture from step 3, roast for about 3-4 mins.
- Drain off excess water and add the cooked beans into the same pan and mix. Cook on heat for about a minute.

Tips

- This can be a side to naan/roti or a main dish. If intended as a main dish, you might want to coarse grind the mixture from Step 3 to keep it crumbly.
- Make sure to not overcook the beans; overcooked beans doesn't go well with this recipe.
- Ideally, you don't want any excess water so that maximum nutrition is preserved.
- The recipe is quite forgiving. You can easily modify the quantity of the ingredients going into the blended mix, per your taste.
- Enjoy!

QUICK IDLA (WHITE DHOKLA)

Recipe by: Prachi Joshi



Prep time: 5 minutes

Cook time: 15 minutes

Servings: 2–3 people

Ingredients

For the Batter:

2 cups idli batter

3/4 cup water (as needed, the batter should be thin consistency)

1 Tablespoon ginger green chili paste (adjust to your spice preference)

1 Tablespoon oil (keeps it moist)

Salt, to taste

1/2 teaspoon eno (optional, for extra fluffiness)

QUICK IDLA (WHITE DHOKLA)

For the Topping/Tempering:

Black pepper, coarsely crushed (for the classic look)

Red chili powder, dusting for color

1 teaspoon mustard seeds

1 teaspoon Til (white sesame seeds)

8–10 curry leaves

Fresh coriander, finely chopped for garnish

Directions

Prepare the Batter

- In a mixing bowl, take your idli batter and whisk in the water, ginger-chili paste, and 1 tablespoon of oil. The batter should be thin and pourable. If it's too thick, add a splash of water.

Setup the Steamer

- Add water to your steamer or a large deep pan and bring it to a boil. Grease a round cake tin or a high-rimmed plate with a little oil.

The "Lift" (Optional)

- If you want the Idla to be extra airy, add the Eno to the batter right before steaming and give it a quick, gentle stir. The batter will foam up. Whisk it quickly after adding Eno.

Steaming

- Pour the batter into the greased tin, spreading it to about 1/2 to 3/4 inch thickness.

QUICK IDLA (WHITE DHOKLA)

- The Signature Look: Immediately sprinkle a generous amount of crushed black pepper and a little red chili powder over the top.
- Steam: Place the tin in the steamer, cover, and steam on high heat for 12–15 minutes.

The Tempering (Tadka)

- Once a toothpick or knife comes out clean, remove the Idla and let it cool for 2 minutes.
- While it cools, heat a little oil in a small pan.
- Add mustard seeds; once they crackle, add sesame seeds and curry leaves.
- Pour this hot tempering evenly over the steamed Idla.

Serve

- Cut into squares or diamonds. Garnish with fresh coriander.

Tips for Success

- Consistency: If your Idli batter is very watery, the Idla will become dense. And if it is too thick, the Idla won't be that soft and fluffy. Ensure the consistency is perfect.
- Where to get the Idli Batter: You can get the batter from any Indian grocery store. Alternatively, you can soak 3 cup White Rice (either idli rice or jasmine rice) and 1 cup Urad Daal separately for at least 5-6 hours. Then crush both in a grinder in a very smooth consistency. Once you get the smooth consistency, add 1 1/2 cup Water and 1/3 cup plain Yogurt and let it ferment for another at least 5-6 hours.
- Best paired with Ketchup or Green chutney (Sauce)

SHAKKARKANDI CHAAT (SWEET POTATO CHAAT)

Recipe by: Mridula Rao



If you are a health advocate but cannot sacrifice your tastebuds, I have got the right recipe for you. From kids to adults, it is for everyone to love and relish. This is my go-to snack for my kids, and I am always happy to see them enjoy this recipe. It gives me total satisfaction to see them relish this dish. Wonderfully sweet from the sweet potatoes (the main ingredient of the recipe), a little heat here and there from chilis, and the correct crunch from toasted peanuts, with a dash of lemon at the end, this recipe is perfectly balanced and so satisfying. It is a big hit at my home.

This is a dish inspired from the streets of India, chaat.

SHAKKARKANDI CHAAT (SWEET POTATO CHAAT)

Ingredients

2 medium sweet potatoes (shakkarkandi), boiled and peeled

2–3 tablespoons roasted peanuts

1 small onion, finely chopped (optional)

1 green chili, finely chopped

1/2 teaspoon red chili powder

1/2 teaspoon chaat masala

Salt to taste

Juice of 1/2 lemon

Fresh coriander leaves, chopped

1–2 tablespoons cilantro chutney

1–2 tablespoons tamarind sweet chutney

A few pomegranate kernels (optional)

Directions

- Cut the boiled sweet potatoes into bite-sized pieces, add a dash of oil and some salt, and air fry them at 400° Fahrenheit for 10 minutes for a slightly roasted effect.
- Add them to a bowl along with chopped onions, green chili, and roasted peanuts.
- Add cilantro chutney and tamarind sweet chutney.
- Sprinkle red chilli powder and chaat masala.
- Squeeze fresh lemon juice over it and mix everything gently.
- Garnish with fresh coriander leaves and a few pomegranate kernels and serve immediately.

THEMED CHARCUTERIE

Recipe by: Monica Cusanelli



Growing up in an Italian-American household, charcuterie boards were how we came together every Sunday. Now, as an adult who values tradition and creativity, I enjoy creating themed boards for special occasions. From holidays to birthdays, I coordinate color themes and patterns, while always keeping the dietary preferences and restrictions of my loved ones in mind. For me, food is both an art form and a way to honor my heritage.

Here Comes Fall Charcuterie

The Aesthetic: Deep oranges, reds, and warm earth tones.

Key Features: Leaf-shaped chips, fresh figs, apple slices, and a pumpkin-embossed brie centerpiece.

Inspired by the changing seasons, this harvest board focuses on texture and warm color palettes. Using leaf-shaped crisps and seasonal fruits like figs and apples, I coordinate patterns that reflect the abundance of the fall holidays.

THEMED CHARCUTERIE

How to Create a Salami Rose:

Select a Glass: Choose a small glass with a thin rim, such as a champagne flute or a small wine glass.

Layer the Salami: Fold a circular slice of salami over the rim of the glass so half is inside and half is outside.

Repeat and Overlap: Continue placing slices around the rim, overlapping each one by about half, until you have layered 3–4 full circles around the glass. Press down firmly on the layers as you go.

Flip the glass over onto your board and gently lift it away. The meat will hold its shape, creating a beautiful rose centerpiece.

How to Create Themed Cheese Cutouts:

Gently press a metal cookie cutter (like a bunny, pumpkin, or bat) into the center of the cold wheel. Carefully lift out the center piece with a small knife.

The Contrast: You can leave the cutout empty to show the creamy center, or fill the negative space with colorful jam, small candies, or a different colored cheese for contrast.

Accents: Use smaller cutters to create repeating patterns of cheese "stars" or "leaves" to scatter throughout the board to tie the theme together.

Through these themed boards, I hope to share how the simple act of gathering around food—a tradition passed down from my Italian-American upbringing—can be transformed into a modern, inclusive, and deeply personal form of art. Please follow me on IG: MonicaCusanelli for more Charcuterie and Art.

SWEETS AND BAKED GOODS

APRICOT PIE

Recipe Submitted by: Bridget Gregory



A special treat in my family was when Grandma would bake an apricot pie for dessert. We would show up for dinner and Grandma's house was filled with the smell of a freshly baked apricot pie and everyone would be instantly excited.

It all started when my farmer grandfather relocated his young family to Victoria Ave. in Santa Clara from Groton, South Dakota. He purchased a home where he turned his farming roots and passion into his backyard oasis filled with fruit trees. He planted an orange, apple, plum, peach, guava, and an apricot tree. He worked a side job one weekend where orchards were being removed. Part of his compensation was to hand-pick a young apricot tree and orange tree and then remove from the ground. He then replanted the apricot tree in his backyard. This tree turned out to be a family favorite for over 50 years and multiple generations.

APRICOT PIE

My grandfather carefully tended to all of the fruit trees in his backyard orchard to ensure they produced a large fruit harvest each year. When my brother and I finally became old enough, we got to climb the fruit ladders to pick the apricots. The apricots were watched so closely that they were not picked until the fruit had a certain orange blush and were soft enough to practically fall off the tree into our hands. If I had to pull on the apricot at all, it needed another day or two on the tree to ripen. My grandfather would stand below us and tell us which ones we were allowed to pick and which needed a few more days on the tree. We were “scolded” if we ate more apricots than we gently placed in our buckets.

Once the buckets of apricots were picked, my grandmother went to work in the kitchen. She had her kids when they were young helping to can apricots, bake pies and make jars of jams, and later taught her grandkids the same skills.

My grandmother would prepare the entire pies from scratch in July when the apricots were fresh and then freeze them. When she had an occasion to serve one months later, she would pull it out of the freezer and bake it. I would submit my birthday pie request in July so that when my birthday finally came around the Thanksgiving weekend, my grandmother would pull a pie with my name on it out of the freezer and bake it. It was always served with a large scoop of rum whipped cream or ice cream.

The argument for who was getting the biggest piece of pie got so intense one year that my mother and aunt cut the entire pie after carefully measuring each piece with a ruler so that everyone got a piece that was exactly the same size.

APRICOT PIE

To this day I have never eaten apricots that had so much flavor and juice that you were bound to have it all down your shirt if you were not paying attention.
Over the years the pie crust recipe has changed a few times. Today, the family favorite is the Martha Stewart pie crust recipe listed below.

Ingredients

Apricot Pie

4 cups fruit for 9-inch pie pan, or 5 1/2 cups fruit for 10-inch pan

1/2 cup brown sugar

1/8 tsp salt

1 1/2 Tbsp cornstarch

1/4 tsp cinnamon

1 1/2 Tbsp butter

Directions

- Preheat oven to 400° Fahrenheit. Line a pie pan with pie dough. Make sure that the crust recipe allows for a top and bottom crust otherwise the recipe will need to be doubled.
- Combine in a bowl: brown sugar, salt, cornstarch and cinnamon
- To prepare fruit: wash, pit and slice fruit. Layer one half of the fruit into pie pan lined with the bottom crust. Dab on half of the butter and sprinkle half of the sugar mixture. Proceed to layer the second half of the fruit and then dab the rest of the butter. Depending on the sweetness and ripeness of the fruit, sprinkle the rest of the sugar mixture over the fruit. The riper the fruit, the less sugar mixture will be needed. Place second piece of pie dough over the top of the pie and trim the extra dough so that approximately 1 inch of dough can then be tucked inside. Pinch the crusts together. Cut small vents into the top of the pie curst with a sharp knife.

APRICOT PIE

Directions

- In a small bowl beat one raw egg and add 1 tablespoon of water to the egg. Lightly brush the egg wash over the top of the pie crust just before the pie goes into the oven. The egg wash will give your pie a glossy finish once baked.
- Bake the pie at 400° for 10 minutes then reduce the heat to 350° and bake 35-40 minutes until your pie is golden brown.

Ingredients

Classic Pie Crust - Based on Martha Stewart's recipe

1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour (spooned and leveled), plus more for rolling dough

1/2 tsp salt

1/2 tsp sugar

8 Tbsp (1 stick) cold unsalted butter, cut into pieces

2 Tbsp ice water, plus 2 more, if needed

Directions

- In a food processor, pulse flour, salt, and sugar several times to combine. Add butter. Pulse until mixture resembles coarse meal, with just a few pea-size pieces remaining.
- Sprinkle with 2 tablespoons ice water. Pulse until dough is crumbly but holds together when squeezed with fingers (if needed, add up to 2 tablespoons more ice water, 1 tablespoon at a time.) Do not over process.
- Turn dough out onto a work surface; from dough into a 3/4-inch thick disk. Wrap tightly in plastic, and refrigerate until firm, at least 1 hour.

APRICOT PIE

Directions

- Before baking, unwrap dough; place on a large piece of floured waxed paper. Roll dough to a 14-inch round. Using paper, lift and wrap dough around rolling pin (discarding paper); carefully unroll over a 9-inch pie plate. Gently fit into bottom and up sides of plate.
- Trim overhang to 1 inch; fold overhang under itself. Pinch between thumb and forefinger to make a uniform edge around the rim. Crimp edge; refrigerate until chilled, about 1 hour.
- The recipe needs to be doubled if your pie calls for a top crust.

Ingredients

Whipped Cream

2 cups heavy whipping cream

1/4 cup granulated sugar

Dash of salt

1 tsp vanilla

1/2 tsp rum extract, or your favorite rum

Directions

- Combine cream, sugar, salt, vanilla and rum extract in a mixing bowl. Mix until whipped cream is light and fluffy. Do not over whip the cream.
- For best results chill the beater and mixing bowl for 10 minutes prior to mixing all ingredients.

BANANA BREAD

Recipe by: Ginger Stasi

Ingredients

1 cup unsalted butter

2 cups sugar

6 or 7 ripe, mashed bananas

4 eggs, well beaten

2 1/2 cups sifted all-purpose flour

1 tsp salt

2 tsp baking soda

1 tsp vanilla

Directions

- Cream butter and sugar thoroughly
- Add bananas and eggs
- Sift dry ingredients
- Blend into creamed mixture, but do not overmix
- Pour into ungreased loaf pans
- Bake at 350° Fahrenheit for 50-55 minutes.

I add walnuts and raisins for a different taste.

BERRY KAJU DELIGHT

Recipe by: Srinivas Maddula



This is an Indian fusion dessert.

Ingredients

Vegan Kaju Katli

1 cup - roasted cashew powder

3 tbsp - monkfruit

½ cup - water

1 tsp - ghee

½ tsp - saffron

½ tsp - cardamom powder

Vegan Berry Kulfi

1 cup - fox nuts

2 cups - unsweetened oat milk

½ cup - cashews (soaked in warm water for 15-20 mins)

5 tbsp - monkfruit

1 tsp - cardamom powder

1.5 cup - frozen berries

BERRY KAJU DELIGHT

Berry Compote

1 cup frozen mixed berries

Sugar according to taste

Lemon juice according to taste

1/4 cup water

Directions

Vegan Berry Kulfi

- Heat a pan and dry roast fox nuts.
- In a blender add roasted fox nuts, cashews and a little oat milk and blend it to a fine paste.
- In a pan add the paste and remaining oat milk, mix well and add monkfruit, berries and cardamom powder and cook over a medium flame for 5-10 minutes.
- Set aside the mixture in the freezer for a minimum of 6-8 hours.

Vegan Kaju Katli

- Heat a pan and add ghee and once ghee melts add roasted cashew powder.
- Stir for 1 min.
- Add water, monkfruit, saffron and cardamom powder and cook until mixture turns into the consistency of dough.
- Transfer the dough onto a piece of parchment paper or a greased marble surface.

Berry Compote

- In a pan add berries and water and heat the mixture for 8-10 mins.
- Mash the berries until they are smooth.
- Add sugar and lemon juice (optional) if required according to your taste.

BERRY KAJU DELIGHT

Plating

Cut 2 equally sized disc shapes of Kaju Katli, cut another equally sized disc shape of Vegan Berry Kulfi. Place the kulfi in between the kaju katli discs. On a plate place the berry compote as shown in the picture and kaju katli sandwich.

BLACK SESAME SWEET SOUP

Recipe by: Sau Ling Yiu



There is a variety of sweet soups in the traditional menu of Chinese desserts. Black sesame sweet soup is a popular one. It is prized for its nutty flavor as well as its nutritional value. This recipe is a simplified version of the traditional black sesame sweet soup that requires an extra roasting step and more ingredients.

Serves 2

Ingredients

1 oz black sesame seeds

5 oz cooked white rice (approximately 1/4 cup of uncooked rice)

1 oz rock sugar

1 1/2 cups water

BLACK SESAME SWEET SOUP

Directions

- Put all ingredients, except the rice, in a pot.
- Bring it to boil and let the rock sugar melt.
- Put in the rice while it is still boiling and remove from heat before the rice starts to turn glutinous.
- Blend the hot mixture in a heat-resistant blender. Or wait until the mixture cools down.
- Blend well, until the consistency is thick and smooth.

Variations

- Based on personal preference, consistency of the soup can be altered by increasing or decreasing the volume of rice and water.
- Sweetness can be altered and manipulated as well. I like to use Deglet Noor dates to add fruity flavor to this sweet soup.
- If possible, purchase black sesame seeds that have been oil-free sauteed, because it will bring out the nutty flavor. Some sauteed black sesame seeds show cracks. And upon opening the bag, we can smell a strong nutty flavor.

BROWN SUGAR BUTTER CAKE

Recipe by: Ranjana Ambannavar



Ingredients

2/3 cup unsalted butter softened

1 3/4 cups brown sugar

2 eggs

1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

2 3/4 cups all-purpose flour

2 1/2 teaspoons baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

1 1/4 cups milk

Store bought chocolate or vanilla frosting (optional)

BROWN SUGAR BUTTER CAKE

Directions

- Heat the oven to 350° Fahrenheit
- Grease and flour rectangular pan (13x9x2 inches) or 2 round pans (9x1.5 inches)
- Mix sugar, butter, vanilla extract and eggs until fluffy
- Beat on high speed with manual whisk, scraping bowl occasionally for 5 minutes.
- Mix in flour, baking soda, and salt alternately with milk, whisking in slowly
- Pour into pans
- Bake until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. For rectangular dish bake 45-50 minutes, for round cake layers bake 30-35 minutes.
- Cool completely. Frost with chocolate or vanilla frosting (optional).

Note: Baking times vary and are different for each oven, so check at 25 minutes onwards.

CALAMANSI BARS

Recipe by: Mikaela Garcia



Ingredients

Crust:

1 cup all-purpose flour

1/4 cup granulated sugar

1/2 cup butter, cubed

1 tsp Kosher salt

2 sprigs fresh rosemary, minced

Powdered sugar for dusting

Curd:

4 eggs

1/2 cup granulated sugar

1/4 cup all-purpose flour

2/3 cup Calamansi juice (can substitute

with lemon juice)

1 Tsp zest

1/2 Tsp salt

CALAMANSI BARS

Directions

- Preheat oven to 350° Fahrenheit.
- Line 8” x 8” pan with parchment paper.
- In bowl, combine ingredients for crust. Use pastry cutter to cut until coarse crumbs. You can also use your hands or a food processor.
- Press into pan. Prick crust evenly with a fork to prevent puffing.
- Bake until golden brown, 25-30 minutes.
- Prepare curd. In bowl, combine all ingredients and whisk until smooth.
- Pour over hot crust. May use sieve for smooth curd.
- Reduce oven to 325° Fahrenheit.
- Return to oven for 20 minutes, set.
- Chill before cutting. Dust with powdered sugar.

DAWOODI BOHRA STYLE BOTTLE GOURD HALWA

Recipe by: Dr. Sakina Lakdawala



This Bottle Gourd Halwa (Doodhi no Halwo) holds a special place in my heart for two reasons. In the Dawoodi Bohra community of Gujarat, India, this dish is a staple of our celebrations. From festive gatherings to wedding feasts, it is the quintessential dessert that brings people together. As a doctor, I appreciate that the star ingredient—the Bottle Gourd—is often overlooked. It is rich in fiber, minerals, and Vitamin C. Its high water content makes it excellent for skin health and immunity. This recipe allows me to satisfy my sweet cravings while maintaining a healthy, beneficial diet.

Ingredients

Bottle Gourd (Doodhi): Fresh and firm.

Milk: Double the volume of the grated gourd.

Sugar: Approximately 1/3 the volume of the gourd (adjust to taste).

Dry Fruits: Almonds, raisins, or your choice of nuts for garnishing.

DAWOODI BOHRA STYLE BOTTLE GOURD HALWA

Directions

- Wash and peel the bottle gourd. Prepare your warm milk beforehand to ensure it is ready for the next step.
- Use a coarse grater for the best texture. Tip: Work quickly once grated, as the gourd oxidizes and browns rapidly when exposed to air.
- Place the grated gourd in a large vessel and immediately add the warm milk. Cook over medium-to-high heat for 20–30 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- The gourd will release its natural moisture into the milk. Continue cooking until the mixture reaches a thick, "cookie dough" consistency.
- Add the sugar. This will temporarily thin the mixture again. Continue to cook for another 2–3 minutes until the moisture evaporates and the halwa returns to a thick consistency.
- Let the halwa cool in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes. Garnish generously with almonds and raisins before serving.

GERMAN APRICOT DUMPLINGS (APRIKOSENKNÖDEL)

Recipe by: Katja Zuske



I decided to submit this recipe from my mom to the Santa Clara Community Book as it is a perfect blend of my German heritage and one of the most cherished fruits in what used to be the Valley of the Heart's Delight.

Makes 8-12 dumplings, depending on size of fruit

Ingredients

8-12 flavorful apricots like Blenheim

500 g floury potatoes

125 g all-purpose flour

1 Egg

1 Tbsp cream

10 g unsalted butter

1 pinch salt

Extra sugar as filling (optional)

Melted butter and cinnamon sugar as topping (optional, but oh so yummy!)

GERMAN APRICOT DUMPLINGS (APRIKOSENKNÖDEL)

Directions

- Wash the apricots and remove the stones, keeping the two halves attached. Set aside.
- Cook, then peel and mash the potatoes.
- While the potato mash is still hot, add rest of the ingredients to form the dough.
- While doing the next steps, bring water with a dash of salt to a boil in a large pot; turn down to simmer.
- Take a dollop of dough and flatten it in your hand.
- Put the apricot on the dough and wrap the dough around it so that the fruit is covered on all sides. If the apricot is not very sweet, fill it with ¼ tsp. of sugar. Set dumpling aside on a cutting board or baking mat. Repeat the process until the dough is used up.
- Add the dumplings to the simmering water to cook them.
- They will float to the surface when they are done.
- Remove from the pot with a slotted spoon. Serve immediately as is or with melted butter and a sprinkle of cinnamon sugar.

Tips

- If the dough is too sticky, wet your hands with cold water to prevent the dough from sticking to your hands, or add a bit of flour.
- In autumn, make this recipe with French prunes or similar European-style plums instead of apricots (but don’t use big plums, such as Santa Rosa plums, as they have too much juice). When using plums, you might need to fill the fruit with a bit more sugar.

HOT CHOCOLATE BANANA BREAD

Recipe by: Kat Lynch

Ingredients

Wet Ingredients:

300 grams ripe bananas, mashed (approximately 3 bananas)

120 mL or 1/2 cup of oat milk (or soy milk, almond milk, or dairy milk, based on your preference)

1 Tbsp lemon juice

70 g or 1/3 cup white sugar

120 mL or 1/3 cup of vegetable oil (or avocado oil, olive oil, or ghee, based on your preference)

2 tsp vanilla extract

Dry ingredients:

175 g or 1 1/2 cup flour

60 g or 1/2 cup hot chocolate powdered drink mix

2 tsp baking soda

1/2 tsp salt

Directions

- Preheat oven to 350° Fahrenheit.
- Combine all wet ingredients in a medium bowl.
- Combine all dry ingredients in a large bowl.
- Fold wet ingredients into the dry ingredients.
- Bake for 1 hour in a parchment paper lined loaf pan (9x5 inches), until an inserted toothpick comes out clean.
- Rest and cool for 30 minutes then remove from the loaf pan and serve.

NANA'S CUCIDATA

Recipe by: Freda Ward

Food is Love

A Sicilian couple immigrated to America in the year 1921. They eloped in 1919 because their families would not approve of their love for each other, or support them in any way. They hoped they could do well in America, but the journey was hard and long on a ship. They came into Ellis Island New York and settled in Mt Morris, New York. It took them many years for them to conceive a baby but finally they did and Freda was born on March 8th, 1929. When Freda was 6 plus years old, they relocated to San Jose, California, per Doctor's orders, to find a warmer climate. Her father suffered from arthritis. San Jose and Santa Clara were beautiful with orchards and picturesque countryside. The much warmer mediterranean climate was just what the Doctor ordered for her father. Freda finished high school in 1947 and would often work her summers working in the canneries pitting and drying apricots. Her hair cap is still with us. She also worked at the Diamond cleaners in San Jose, which is still there on San Carlos Street. She also studied and became licensed as a beautician. That same summer she met the man she soon married. Her parents sent her off with a beautiful wedding even though they were disappointed he was not Italian. It didn't take long for them to start their own family. They purchased their first house in Santa Clara, California on Catala Court, and they were able to buy a new car too. It was a 1950 Dodge. Their first of 5 daughters (Marla) was born and life was really happy, then the adventures began.

NANA'S CUCIDATA

Before I continue about Freda's adventures, I want to let you know that Freda is my mother. She carried on many traditions passed down from her mother and father to her children. All of the holidays were very special, especially Christmas and the foods they prepared to celebrate because food was a way to show love and happiness, along with socializing, and making music with mandolins and guitars. Can't you just see the gatherings of celebrations and love? Holiday feasts consisted of homemade spaghetti sauces that took many hours of simmering down to the perfect thickness and flavor. Southern Italy and Sicily made red sauces generally. Homemade raviolis were made by my grandmother They were small, only about one and 1/2inch in size. Usually made with spinach and cheese, and Caponata, an eggplant appetizer, homemade meatballs with Italian herbs, and so much more. The meals were served in courses. My father told us this story: that when he was dating my mother, he was invited over for dinner and to get acquainted with the Sicilian family. They brought out the antipastos, caponata and salad and then the garlic bread and spaghetti, of which he liked so much that he had seconds and thirds, thinking that was dinner; only to find out that the rest of the meal was still coming! The meats and the vegetables along with many other side dishes were served and he had to keep eating or be disgraced!! Then of course the desserts and espresso. Cookies were a big part of finishing the meal. There are so many incredible recipes, however the recipe I want to share is a very special cookie recipe from Sicily. Most people do not know about it. I did find that the La Villa deli in Willow Glen was selling this cookie at Christmas time for $45.00 a pound. I was happy to find it, but sure happy I could make my own. I bought one to try but they were not quite the same as our family recipe, so this is a very special secret I will share.

NANA'S CUCIDATA

My Father was offered a Civil Service job with the Navy on Guam and the next thing Freda knew, was that she was moving to some far away tropical island in Micronesia!! She didn't really sign up for that, as she was very happy with her home in Santa Clara, but went with him as women dutifully did in the 1950's. The island was beautifully green and the ocean blue. It looked like a picture postcard. Getting used to the humidity and heat took time. They lived in a house with tin roof, (which leaked in the tropical rainstorms), in the village of Toto. There was no running water or electricity, so they bought water by the gallon jug and used it sparingly. They bought a generator for part time electricity. Freda worked part time as a beautician in the capital city of Agana and enjoyed some adult friends. Eventually they moved to a house by the ocean that did have running water and electricity. Then in 1955 I (Gina) was born. The second of their five daughters. In 1958 we moved into base housing with other civilian employees, where we lived about twelve years. Mom and Dad added three more sisters making us a family of seven. Freda became a full-time mom, cook and taxi. Dad became very good at his job constructing power plants on our military bases and climbed the ranks. He also fell in love with diving in the beautiful waters and became a big fish in a little pond, often taking out very important people to see wrecks from WW1 and WW2. The military required my dad to locate to other foreign lands to build these power plants on their military bases. Our family's new adventures in travel started when I was 7 years old and the youngest sister was just three months old. The U.S. Military took us to Spain, Morocco and to Libya. We were fortunate to see beautiful and ancient cities, which included Roman ruins, churches, the Sahara Desert and much more. Freda also learned many other recipes from these foreign lands and became a wonderful cook of dishes we enjoyed all our lives. Mom and dad visited Portugal, Tunisia and Malta before our return.

NANA'S CUCIDATA

Before returning to Guam Freda took a trip to Sicily to visit her long-lost family and discover her roots. Her Uncle still lived in the house that her mother was born in, in Termini, Sicily. Her father's brother came from Palermo to see her. They had a great reunion. It meant so much to finally connect with her family in Sicily. They welcomed her warmly. Mom met up with us in Charlotte, North Carolina where Dad rented a car and we drove across the U.S. seeing many points of interest along the way. We saw the White House, President Kennedy's gravesite (the man who had taken us to the moon) the Smithsonian, (so many museums) New York City, went to Ellis Island where her parents entered the U.S. and the beautiful Statue of Liberty, The Florida Everglades, and so much more. We ended our summer cross country trip in California where we visited out families before flying back to Guam where we were raised. My parents ended up living on Guam 20 years!

While living in Apra Heights, which was civilian housing, we grew up with friends that became lifelong. Mom would bake at least a dozen types of cookies at Christmas time that Dad and all of us girls would deliver to neighbors and friends on Christmas Eve. Freda always made the special Sicilian cookie, along with other Italian cookies for the platter.

My mother came back to California in 1975 to be near her mother and siblings. My father never came back, because he died in a tragic diving accident on Guam. Mom went to work for the Santa Clara County finance department and retired in 1992. She would travel to visit all her daughters and their families, who had married and lived in other states, in her retirement.

NANA'S CUCIDATA

Freda continued making her cookies for her friends and family at Christmas time, throughout her entire lifetime. I got to learn and make them with her since I now lived close by, along with my daughter. I bought my own home in Santa Clara where I live on Robin Drive, not far from their original house on Catala Court, which I did not know about at the time.

I have learned to make her spaghetti sauce, lasagna, caponata, as well as dishes from Morocco, Spain, and many other celebratory dishes, and of course, the cookies. I make cookies with my daughter and granddaughter now every Christmas, but I am the only one of the five daughters that continues the tradition of Freda's Christmas cookie. I often make the foods of all our travels, as Mom did for us and I plan to continue her tradition for my lifetime because I feel her love through them. I miss her, and her cooking and no longer take any of her recipes for granted. Often as we pass down recipes from prior generations things are lost in transcription and often the tastes we remember aren't quite the same but just try to keep them alive the best you can. I am sure many of you remember your mother's cooking and your favorites, just remember the love that came along with it.

Enjoy the recipes of Freda Ward.

NANA'S CUCIDATA

Ingredients

Filling

1 cup raisins

1 cup roasted almonds

1 cup roasted walnuts

1 round pkg. of white figs (10 oz.)

1 teaspoon cinnamon & honey

Grated peeling of 2 oranges and 1 lemon

Cookie Dough

4-5 cups flour

1 cup sugar

4 eggs

1 cup melted shortening

2 tsp. baking powder

2 tsp. vanilla

¼ cup milk or more

Frosting

2 cups powdered sugar

1 tsp. vanilla

Enough milk to make a glaze that can be brushed on the cookies

Sprinkle with sugar and dry completely before storing

NANA'S CUCIDATA

Directions

Filling

- Grind all the ingredients in a food processor; moisten with orange juice from the oranges, honey, sherry, and cinnamon. When it is pliable to put on dough, it is ready.

Cookie Dough

- Beat eggs, sugar & vanilla; when the shortening has cooled, add it slowly to the egg mixture, beating as your pour. Add the dry ingredients (4 cups to start). Add milk a little at a time. Add more flour if needed. Roll into long strips. Put filling in center and wrap. When wrapped, cut into 1 ½ to 2 inch pieces. Bake at 325 degrees until slightly browned. Cool and frost with glaze and sprinkles. Dry completely before storing.

PASURATE

Recipe by: Viktoria Neđelka Gleason



Pronounced pah-soo-RAH-te in the dialect of Vis, Croatia, where my grandparents were born

Though my grandmother (Baba) Frančeska Nada Selich (nay-duh, meaning “hope” in Croatian), made pasurate at Christmas and New Year in my childhood, my great grandmother Antica Ivičavić apparently made them all the time. A Santa Clara native, my mom Nada Joy chuckles retelling stories of her grandmother cleaning house or tending her garden while snacking on pasurate stowed in her apron pockets.

PASURATE

Ingredients

3 eggs

6 tablespoons sugar

1 tablespoon brandy

1 teaspoon rum

1 teaspoon vanilla

1/2 cup raisins or currants

1/2 cup chopped walnuts (optional)

Grated zest of an orange

1 envelope yeast + 1 1/2 cups lukewarm water

Dash salt

1 teaspoon baking powder

About 4 cups all-purpose flour or more

Powdered sugar for sprinkling

Note: Though walnuts are listed as optional, there is an ongoing family debate about whether they really are. I am definitely pro-walnut. Croatians (and most of Eastern Europeans) use walnuts heavily. They add great flavor and texture to this recipe.

Directions

- Beat eggs. Add sugar, brandy, rum, and vanilla.
- Dissolve yeast in lukewarm water. Add to beaten eggs.
- Sift 2 cups flour, baking powder, and salt.
- Add slowly to egg mixture, beating with wooden spoon as you add.
- Add grated orange zest, along with raisins and walnuts.
- Add up to 2 cups more flour if necessary. Have a soft dough that will run kind of thick from a wooden spoon. If it is too thick, add a little warm water.
- Let rise until double in bulk (cover with tea towel and place in warm spot).
- Use teaspoon to place small amounts of dough in hot oil to fry, turning to fry until both sides are golden brown.
- Remove to drain on wire rack over cookie sheet lined with brown paper or paper towels.
- Sprinkle with powdered sugar.

PATISHAPTA

Recipe by: Mrinalini Debnath



Rice crepes stuffed with milk pudding. A famous Bengali sweet dish.

Ingredients

Patishapta Pitha (rice crepes)

1 cup maida (all-purpose flour)

2 Tbsp rice flour

2 cups milk

2 Tbsp sugar

A pinch of salt

Milk pudding

1/2 cup milk

2 tbsp suji (semolina)

2-3 Tbsp sugar

PATISHAPTA

Directions

- For the filling, heat a pan and add milk.
- Cook for 2–3 minutes.
- Add suji (semolina) and mix well.
- Stir until it becomes sticky and thick (not watery).
- Next prepare the batter by mixing all-purpose flour, rice flour, sugar and salt.
- Add milk slowly to make a smooth batter.
- First heat a non-stick pan on medium flame for 2 mins and then lightly grease.
- To make patishapta pitha, pour a ladle of batter and spread thin (like a crepe).
- Place 1–2 tbsp of the milk pudding filling in the center and roll gently like a wrap.
- Serve warm and top with a little extra milk pudding for added richness.

PONGAL (SWEET)

Recipe by: Mridula Prakash and Sriram Srinivasan



Pongal: A Celebration of Tradition and Flavor

Pongal is a beloved South Indian dish made with rice and moong dal, prepared in both sweet and savory variations. The name “Pongal” comes from the Tamil verb ponguthal (பொங்குதல்), meaning “to rise” or “to overflow abundantly.”
This meaning is rooted in tradition. During the Pongal festival, rice and milk are cooked together and intentionally allowed to boil over. This overflowing symbolizes abundance, prosperity, gratitude, and a life filled with goodness.

We come from the southern part of India, where Pongal has been a cherished part of our family for generations. As children, we used to visit our grandmother’s village near Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India, where we watched her lovingly prepare Pongal on old-fashioned wood- and charcoal-fired stoves. The aroma of ghee, roasting cashews, and spices would fill the air, creating memories of warmth, family, and togetherness that we carry to this day.

PONGAL (SWEET)

For us, Pongal is more than a dish—it is a celebration of tradition, connection, and sharing. Recently, our family was blessed with a new baby, and with this Pongal recipe we share a small piece of our happiness and tradition with the community.

While there are many variations of Pongal across regions and households, we are happy to share both the sweet and savory versions that have been part of our family for generations. [Editor's Note: Unfortunately, owing to the size of the book, we were not able to include the recipe for the savory version.]

Ingredients

1/2 cup raw white rice (preferably not basmati, you can also alternatively use brown rice)

3/4 to 1 cup jaggery (cane sugar, grated or powdered)

1 cup milk

4 cups water

10–12 cashew nuts

5–6 raisins

4–5 tablespoons ghee (clarified butter)

PONGAL (SWEET)

Directions

- Wash the rice thoroughly. Cook it in a pressure cooker with milk and 3 cups of water until soft and mushy (about 3–4 whistles).
- For Instant Pot: Cook on high pressure for 10–12 minutes. The rice should become very soft.
- Prepare the jaggery syrup
- In a separate pan, add jaggery to 1 cup water and heat until it melts and forms a slightly sticky syrup.
- Add the cooked rice to the jaggery syrup. Mix well and cook on low flame for about 5 minutes.
- Heat ghee in a small pan. Fry the cashews until golden, then add raisins and sauté briefly until they puff up. Add it on top of the above mixture.
- Stir everything well to combine; add an extra drizzle of ghee on top for enhanced flavor.

Note: Pongal thickens as it cools. It tastes best when served warm, with the rich aroma of ghee and roasted nuts.

POSTPARTUM LADDOO

Recipe Submitted by: Shirali Amin



Traditions of Care

In many Indian homes, the weeks after a baby's birth are guided by the quiet wisdom of mothers and grandmothers. This sacred period, known as sava mahino, lasts 40 days and is devoted entirely to the new mother's recovery.

Long before modern supplements, families relied on recipes like this one, dense with ghee, jaggery, and ancient Ayurvedic herbs, to help a new mother rebuild her strength. Fenugreek, garden cress, and edible gum each bring their own healing, and the generous measure of jaggery, honey, and sugar is no accident. It is how the bitter medicine becomes something a tired new mother will actually want to eat.

This laddoo is not just food. It is care, rolled by hand and offered every morning for forty days with love.

POSTPARTUM LADDOO

Ingredients

2 cups black matpe flour (urad flour)

2 cups wheat flour

1 cup chickpea flour (besan)

2 large cubes ghee

50g edible gum (gundar)

100g almonds, coarsely chopped

100g cashews, coarsely chopped

50g dried coconut

3 tsp poppy seeds (khus khus)

3 Tbsp fenugreek powder (methi)

3 tsp Ayurvedic herb blend (katlu/batrisu)

3 tsp garden cress seeds (asario/halim seeds)

Cardamom, to taste

2 cups jaggery (gud)

1 cup honey

1 cup sugar

Directions

- Sauté each type flour separately in ghee over low heat, stirring continuously until golden and fragrant. Set aside.
- In the remaining ghee, fry the edible gum on low heat until it puffs and doubles in size. Remove, cool, and lightly crush.
- Coarsely chop the almonds, cashews, and dried coconut. Combine with the poppy seeds, fenugreek, herb blend, garden cress seeds, and cardamom.

POSTPARTUM LADDOO

- In a large kadai (or deep skillet pan), melt the jaggery and sugar with ghee over medium heat until it forms a thick syrup. Add the crushed edible gum, followed by the nut and spice mixture. Stir well.
- Turn off the heat. Fold in the honey, then add all three flours. Mix thoroughly until well combined.
- Allow to cool slightly, then roll into small balls while still warm. Once cooled completely, store in an airtight container.
- Serve one laddoo each morning during the 40 days of sava mahino.

Notes:

- Katlu powder (also called batrisu) is a traditional Ayurvedic blend of 32 herbs, available at Indian grocery stores. It can be skipped if making for general use.
- Garden cress seeds (asario) are especially prized in postpartum recovery for their iron content.
- Honey is added off heat to preserve its properties. Do not heat honey directly.

WRITINGS



Artist: Etta Yvonne Jensen

POETRY

A-MA'S ZONGZI

Author: Karen Holop

Every year my mom asks

Do you want to make zongzi this year?

Every year I say

Yes

A-ma's family recipe

The best zongzi

According to a-gong

Precious bamboo leaves

Brought from Taiwan in a-ma's suitcase

Special string soaked in water to soften

Ten strands knotted together

Ready to wrap twenty zongzi

Hung from a cabinet or broom handle

The biggest pots you can find

Peanuts cooked to soften

Dried squid cut into pieces, sautéed with shallots

Marinated pork, the fatty cut

Uncooked sweet rice with salt and white pepper

Mix in peanuts

Soy sauce eggs halved or quartered

Cooked chestnuts

A-MA'S ZONGZI

Time to assemble

Select two leaves and check for holes

Overlap and make a cone

Fill the cone with

Scoop of rice

Scoop of squid

Piece of pork

Piece of egg

One chestnut

More rice

Not too much or it won't close

But don't skimp, or they'll be too small

Fold the leaves over

To make a little pyramid

Don't leave holes or the rice will escape

Wrap tightly with the string

Hung on the cabinet handle

A-MA’S ZONGZI

One down, 119 to go

First bunch done

Into the pot it goes

Boil for 3 hours

It’s getting hot in here!

And on we go until we're out of ingredients

Time for the accounting

We share this wealth

Who will be the lucky recipients this year?

How many each?

Finally cooked and ready to eat

We are the luckiest ones

To eat them fresh out of the pot

Cut one off the bunch

Undo the string

Unfurl the leaves

Reveal a glistening pyramid of rice

Plop into a bowl

Cover with soy paste, sweet chili paste, or both

A VECES

Author: Gal Perelman

A veces deseaba ser alcachofa,

Para que todas las personas quisieran comer mi corazón.

A veces deseaba tener ojos de uvas,

Para que todo lo que mirara fuera dulce.

A veces deseaba tener calabacitas por dedos,

Para nunca tener que cortar mis uñas.

A veces deseaba ser un cacto,

Para que nadie tratara de hacerme daño.

A veces deseaba verme como un tomate,

Porque sería tan bella, la gente pensaría que soy tóxico.

A veces deseaba tener el cuerpo de una manzana,

Así siempre estaré confortable, no importará dónde sentara.

A veces deseaba tener las ropas de las fresas,

Para nunca tener hambre.

A veces deseaba ser una naranja,

Porque las naranjas siempre hacen a la gente muy feliz.

A veces deseaba que ser un coco,

Para nunca permitirles a las palabras malas entrar a mi mente.

A veces deseaba ser un limón,

Porque cuando alguien tratara de dañarme, podría lanzar un chorro de jugo en sus ojos.

A veces deseaba ser una banana,

Porque si alguien me olvidara, yo me pudriría y olería muy mal.

A VECES

Author: Gal Perelman

A veces deseaba ser una baya,

Porque si no tienes cuidado, pues sangraba mi jugo en tu ropa.

A veces deseaba ser una lima,

Para poder estar en todas las bebidas, hacerlas saber mucho mejor.

A veces deseaba ser alcachofa,

Para que todas las personas quisieran comer mi corazón.

English translation:

Sometimes

Sometimes I wish I was an artichoke.

So that everyone would want to eat my heart.

Sometimes I wish I had grapes for eyes,

So that everything I saw would be sweet.

Sometimes I wish I had zucchinis for fingers,

So that I would never have to cut my nails.

Sometimes I wish I was a cactus,

So that nobody would ever try to hurt me.

Sometimes I wish I was a tomato,

Because I would be so beautiful, everyone would think I was poisonous.

Sometimes I wish I had the body of an apple,

So that I would always be comfortable, no matter where I sat.

Sometimes I wish I had clothes made out of strawberries,

So that I would never be hungry.

A VECES

Author: Gal Perelman

Sometimes I wish I was an orange,

Because oranges always makes everyone happy.

Sometimes I wish I was a coconut,

So that I would never allow bad words to enter my mind.

Sometimes I wish I was a lemon,

Because when someone would try to hurt me, I could squirt my juice in their eyes.

Sometimes I wish I was a banana,

Because if someone forgot about me, I would rot and smell really bad.

Sometimes I wish I was a berry,

Because if you weren't careful with me, I would bleed my juice on your clothes.

Sometimes I wish I was a lime,

So that I would be able to be in everybody's drinks, and make them taste that much better.

Sometimes I wish I was an artichoke.

So that everyone would want to eat my heart.

THE CULTURE'S STILL THERE

Author: Kristina Stasi

To embrace a culture,
one must experience it thoroughly.
How can I fully submerge myself into mine
if I have more than one?

As I walk in the kitchen,
the aromatic sensation of curried spices
tickle my nose and empower my senses.

A soft spoken and kind woman slaves over the hot stove
making puris and tasty cholay bhature,
“Good morning Bheta,” sighs my mother.
Minus the bindis and saris,
The culture’s still there.

I cannot speak the language,
I do not own the clothes.
This is who I am,
that’s all I need to know.

Dinner comes around.

THE CULTURE'S STILL THERE

Author: Kristina Stasi

Once again roaming the kitchen,
I’m now taken aback by
the hypnotic scent of oregano.

“Buona sera!” is jokingly shouted
from my humorous father who voraciously eats bruschetta at the table
while waiting for the baked zitito cool.
Minus the gelatos and cannolis,
The culture’s still there.

I cannot speak the language,
I do not own the clothes.
This is who I am,
that’s all I need to know.

With the meshing of these cultures,
I am able to experience
a world where nationalities are more than just a race.
That,
is all I need to know.

THE DANCE OF BUTTERNUT SQUASH AND APPLE SAUTE

Author: Sujatha Ratnala

In the City of Senses

in the portals of taste

the Apple Squash cubes inviting the Eye

the aromas hitting the Nose

in that irresistible bite

the teeth savoring the bite cubes

the waters stirring the taste buds

the soul basting in the fall Song.

THE EMPRESS AND THE BAKER

Author: Cary W. Tucker

Long ago, I was a baker for the Empress of the Valley
And would labor in the kitchens of her palace on the mountains
In the heat of the stone ovens with no time to dream or dally
Then would carry my confections past the chandeliers and fountains.

So politely would the Empress nod as I approached her table,
Whence she ate my pastries, smiled at me, and set my heart aquiver,
But come ev'ning, I would leave to fetch my stallion from the stable
And ride off into the forest t'wards my cottage by the river.

Thus at last under the moonlight, in a saddle, out of harness,
I imagined that the Empress guarded over me in silence
Like a lioness out hunting after creatures of the darkness,
She would vanquish every veela and protect me from their violence.

Yet arriving home alone, I set to tempering my sorrow,
For the lioness was just a constellation in the heaven
And the veela soon to vanish with the sunlight of tomorrow—
So the fantasies deflated like a loaf that fails to leaven.

Even as a lowly baker, I still had some pride of duty
And the knowledge that my days before the Empress were worthwhile,
As I found a benign gladness from brief glimpses of her beauty
And a simple consolation from the pleasure of her smile.

FALL

Author: Preeti Kulkarni

Fall is the season, I love most of all!

Vibrance, nature's glow, a pop of colors,

That you cannot ignore...

It's what will brighten your day,

especially after a long day of work,

when your body and mind are sore.

In Fall, everyone speaks of how change is beautiful...

nature has lessons, about change and much more!

Yes, with Fall comes change.

Orange. Red. Purple and Golden yellow,

The colors seem loud- almost as if creating an uproar,

even though the cloudy weather wants the mood to stay mellow.

The trees relish,

as though showing off their self-designed, limited-edition fashion attire-

Ignoring the winds,

that eventually force them to retire,

back to various shades of what some might say, 'just brown'-

Nevertheless, the trees wear all colors like they are worthy of a crown.

With Fall comes loss.

Loss is to be accepted at this time,

the trees show us as they become bare-

for it is *necessary in order to* survive winter's cold stare.

FALL

With Fall comes a mess.

But Oh!!- when I think of that “crunchy” sound on quiet, foggy mornings…

when one walks on a sea of crumpling leaves-

it is nothing less than music to my ears,

the trees *happy to have obliged to bring this joy*,

and not one, grieves.

With Fall comes death.

Still conscious that I am walking on leaves that are dead.

Dead for a cause.

Dead because nature intended so-

Dead so new leaves can sprout past winter in the spring –

so that a *new version of themselves* the trees can sing!

With Fall comes hope.

The old must go for the new to come!

For that, the trees bear the burden and then some!

The leaves will be blown away, walked upon

or stacked up by toddlers to play…

But in all those moments-

they *bring a smile to the anyone walking with them* for the mile.

FALL

With Fall comes celebration.

Turkey, Squashes, Pumpkin Pie and Cranberries,

Bringing loved ones around a table, creating everlasting memories-

Of course with the celebration of abundance and gratitude,

A reminder to be thankful, for everything that brings us joy.

With Fall comes many things...

Never mind all those leaves you need to rake away- but Fall, I believe

is nature's way to say...

Something new always awaits –

just look forward to what's already on its way!

IN MY KITCHEN AND OUT OF DOORS

Susan L. Grill

Tonight was an adventure.

A rustling in my kitchen.

Could it be a cow with a pulse?

Not rotten meat left over in the

refrigerator.

A vegetarian wouldn't know

what to do with it in either case...

except let it out.

Into the field in front of my house,

where daisies grow.

Perhaps a wreath of them

around her neck

would set her right,

to know this is her new home,

where she can give

milk if she has had a calf

already, and we can

be in business.

THE MAKING

Author: Sheila deShields

a Santa Rosa plum torte recipe in the New York Times

lauded in 17,000 reviews 5 stars

so i check my spring-formed pans

and then you suggest

using pluots that complex hybrid stone fruit

a Dapple Dandy or Flavor King the color of Blood Moon

and adding lemon zest to the dough

an infusion of intense zing

our shared concoction

much like our mother-son connection

birthed on a sweltering afternoon

when you arrived four weeks early

and the angels 12 shimmered as golden windows

beyond the footboard of the white birch bed

THE MAKING

Author: Sheila deShields

birch for joy a home birth

a party of a dozen

who knows why the angels?

perhaps to stay near you

12 the same number as the pluots halved

sitting now in a thin layer of flour egg and zest

a malleable mixture a dialogue of sweet and tart

saying yes oh yes on the rise

THE RAIN AT NIGHT

Author: Erika Michelle Stasi

Midnight again.

I watch through my rain-speckled window

as dying storm clouds spit out a heaven of

sleeping stars.

They slice through the black velvet blanket

above with innocent, naked light.

So carelessly perfect.

So perfectly careless.

I envy those infinite lights...

They can see you at this very moment

and caress your face with silver kisses...

I remember falling asleep in your arms

as the mist of warmth swallowed my

consciousness.

Your gentle fingers traced the pulse of my temple

just as sleep covered my eyes.

So carelessly perfect.

So perfectly careless.

THE RAIN AT NIGHT

It's raining again.

Just as quickly as the stars came,

they cover themselves with a fresh cloak of

tempest pitch,

and disappear.

No more silver kisses tonight, my love...

Rain taps again at the window.

Let me in...

So persuasive.

So tempting.

The graceful droplets weave in and out of

each other,

become each other...

if only for a moment.

Why must midnight and rain mingle so

perfectly?

They remind me of us.

I'd never been embraced like that before.

RAINS

Author: Rashi Agarwal

These rains have stories to tell,
Some sonnets to rhyme,
And some ballads to play.
These rains whisper bygone era into the ears of future.
They have witnessed the cries of wars,
And the rapture of women's laughs as they winnow their wheat.
They have been the background music to a hungry child's lullaby,
And an excuse for two lovers to come closer to share an umbrella.
They have become a reason for the aweary soldiers to find solace in their 2 am tea.
These celestial rains are unbiased,
As they do not discriminate against
the skin, the caste, the religion, the god.
These intermittent silver lines,
Are the love letters from sky to his beloved earth.
The rains are silent watchers,
As they know both side of the stories,
Yet they keep their lips sealed.
I whisper my secret to these rains,
And send it to you in a million little glass bottles,
Hoping that you hear my voice when they shatter after hitting the land.

TANKA

Author: Rama Kulkarni

Fresh ginger garlic

onions sizzle in my pan

in golden butter.

The heavenly aroma

draws family to the kitchen.

TAHOE

Author: Elaine Lin

When I see you shine,

Your surface shine as light divine,

It's calm and quiet in the night,

You warm my heart with gentle light.

I want to know the reason why,

You may change when the time goes by.

Make you meet the endless sky.

Gazing long with a big sigh !

That's timeless beauty in my eyes.



WINTER RESPITE

Author: Rebekah Bloyd

1.

Rainwind whips

down Mānoa Valley gusts good and hard

through the neighborhood

Re-hangs shed doors, batters pandanus canopies, unfurls new banana tree leaves only to shred them. Pelts community garden plots of daikon, red pepper, and eggplant fronted by dioramas. Mermaid and rhino inside a ring of pebbles

The small house on stilts

should tremble

Out and in we trot through rainslant, a week's bursts, threshold

bloated with shucked-off shoes, slippers. Barefoot on floorboards, we circle through small rooms, eat, pause, repeat until I fold myself into the damp curtains

WINTER RESPITE

2

Holiday tiredness. Wind paused at last, my teenaged son snaps
at me, for my snaps at him. We three visiting relatives snatch
a suncleared walk

Ala Moana Park to San Souci Beach. Mood still brown, I settle for periphery.
Mainlander beach bodies. Continentals. Islanders visiting other
islands. Cheery tones world multiplied

Do you know a little girl? asks a four-year-old who pokes
the first of five stones in a row Warm stone ledge, words French rimmed
Give her these. Runs to catch her caravan, brother pulled in cart.
A listening girl, older scoops from the ledge into her hand
one, two, three, four, five
talismans

WINTER RESPITE

3

Plunge in to snorkel out. Sandchurn, bobbing bodies. My husband's head and tube appear. Just coming to get you out here, he warbles out here

past two women stroking back, saying to each other Oh! What a day

A couple keeps place on the waves, each kneeling on a paddle board,

saying Oh yes! They're here I float nearby, gaze below

Degraded coral hedges. A coral head boulder-sized, grime-dull, algae flags flapping

Giant Carapace Oh I see! My field of vision collapses to cream underbody sliding sideways half as big as me, wider. Soilbrown mosaic shell tilts hard

in the current. Front flippers re-adjust. She bites and bites the coral head's nubs

A Second Giant glides in.

A Third, a third of the size. Myself two open arms away

The First tucks into the base of the coral head

From above

obsidian greys, sage greens. Ocean home such

you wouldn't know she's there

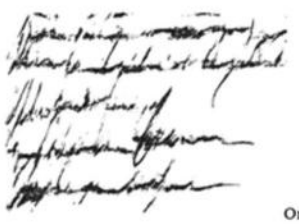
WISH YOU WERE THERE!

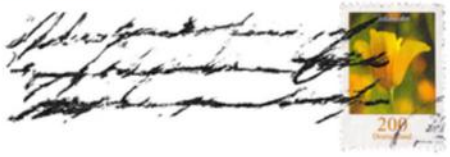
Author: Olivia G.











And it will end.
One day—it's true. Someday, then I'll look back with You;
find the truth. If there is one.

None the less, I still move on.

Yes, I was there, listening to memories and scenes of all you knew;
Filled with hope of what's to come.
All with grieve of what is done.

And, with that, I groan with you.

Who knows what the Wind will do?
Yet I know that when that moment comes,
And all is said and done,
--You'll know, as I will too--
I was there [with all of you].

Olivia G.

WRAPPED IN SPRING

Author: Jordann Diaz

My heart begins to bloom
for a crown made of flowers,
a scent of rites like perfume
in a romance of April showers.

Deep in my bones, the power-
of ideas begins to boom
and recklessness I devour,
my heart begins to boom.

Over hills, I consume-
the beauty of wooden towers
and the leaves I dress for a ballroom
with a crown made of flowers.

Tasting sweets after endless hours,
the new season subsumes-
the last and the cold cowers
for the scent of rites like perfume.

WRAPPED IN SPRING

Author: Jordann Diaz

Dancing till I ache as darkness looms
the thought of stopping makes me sour.
Deep in my soul, I'm not immune.
to the romance of April showers.

For rain and sunflowers
will be my heirloom;
the strength empowers
a warmth unscoured
and my heart blooms.

ESSAYS, STORIES, AND REFLECTIONS

BEYOND CHICKEN TIKKA MASALA

Author: Ritu Ahuja



A Taste of Real Indian Cooking

Karahi Chicken — chicken cooked in a fragrant blend of spices

Mention Indian food, and most people can list the usual suspects on one hand: chicken tikka masala, tandoori chicken, naan, and, for the adventurous, saag paneer or chickpea curry. But that's only the surface.

The real beauty of Indian cuisine lies in its astonishing diversity and its reverence for fresh ingredients. We take our produce seriously — I grew up watching my mother snap the tail off each piece of okra before buying it, ensuring it was perfectly tender. It's a tradition I've carried into my own kitchen. In fact, the only way I convinced my middle son to try okra was by recruiting him to help chop two pounds of it. His little brother joined in, too. My hope is that one day they'll decide it's far too much effort to do all that work and not eat what they've prepared.

What makes Indian food so compelling is its regional variation, shifting dramatically from state to state. I grew up in Delhi, the capital of northern India, yet I can barely identify many of the vegetables and spice blends used in Kerala, a state in the south.

BEYOND CHICKEN TIKKA MASALA

From a Childhood Kitchen to a Global Table

As a child, we rarely ate out. Maybe once every couple of months, my mother would take us shopping, and the outing would end with a restaurant meal. We ordered the same few dishes every time — usually items that required more skill and equipment than our everyday home cooking allowed. As a result, I became proficient in cooking exactly what my mother cooked, and little else.

Can you imagine tasting pizza, burgers, or chow mein for the first time in high school? That was me. Western food didn't become mainstream where I lived until the late 1980s. I still remember the awkward thrill of being on a first date, ordering a pizza, and having no idea what would arrive at the table — or how we were meant to eat it.

Everything changed when I moved to the United States twenty-five years ago. Suddenly, I was surrounded by flavors from around the world. I fell in love with baking and with trying to recreate the multicultural dishes we enjoyed at restaurants. Over time, cooking became both exploration and comfort. Today, I delight in spoiling my family by recreating those favorite meals at home.

My culinary experiments paused briefly when my middle son asked, with surprising insight, "Mom, what will we eat outside if you make everything at home?"

He has a point. But the satisfaction I feel watching my family devour something I've recreated is reward enough. I'm proud to have passed on a love of cooking to all three of my boys. They aren't afraid to follow a recipe — a gift I believe every parent can give a child. When they try something new, I happily step into the role of sous chef. They measure meticulously; I prefer to cook by instinct, eyeballing spices the way I watched my mother do.

BEYOND CHICKEN TIKKA MASALA

What Is Authentic Indian Home Cooking and how is it different from a restaurant?

An Indian restaurant menu is often a reflection of its owner's roots — a culinary postcard from a specific corner of the country.

Restaurant dishes often rely on generous amounts of oil, butter, and cream to achieve richness and visual appeal. They offer a celebratory version of Indian cuisine — elevated, indulgent, and designed to impress.

At home, it's different.

You'd be hard-pressed to find fluffy naan on a weekday table. Instead, our daily bread is chapati or roti — a simple whole-wheat flatbread cooked on a griddle.

Home cooking depends on fresh ingredients, washed and chopped just before they hit the pan. Canned and frozen shortcuts are far less common. The foundation is humble but powerful: onions, tomatoes, ginger, garlic, and carefully layered spices, often brightened with yogurt or fresh vegetables.

A typical meal might be cauliflower and potatoes sautéed with minimal seasoning, a simple lentil dal served over rice, or carrots and peas gently spiced and simmered.

It's nourishing. It's practical. And it's deeply satisfying.

BEYOND CHICKEN TIKKA MASALA

Where Can You Taste Food That Feels Homemade?

If you're searching for Indian food that comes closest to what we eat in our homes, here's my advice: visit an Indian grocery store. Many have small kitchens or delis tucked inside, serving daily meals that rarely appear on restaurant menus. This is often your best chance at tasting something truly authentic.

The dishes are usually displayed buffet-style, allowing you to see what appeals to you. And don't hesitate to ask questions. If they're not too busy, they may even offer you a small taste.

Because beyond the butter and cream, beyond the familiar restaurant staples, there exists an entire universe of Indian cooking — one shaped by memory, migration, seasonality, and home kitchens where recipes are rarely written down but deeply understood.

And that is the India I carry with me.

THE BUNNIES OF RIVERMARK

Author: Beth Cananzi

From a hole in the hill poked two fluffy brown heads.
Sophia was hankering for salad,
and Julia wanted a book to read
that she thought she could fit in her burrow bedroom.

They looked to the left and they looked to the right.
They looked up and looked down and behind.
They didn't see hawks or a fox, just a dog
(who was leashed), so they waited, then darted outside.

They hopped up the bank to the riverside trail.
They hopped in between the bikes
and tumbled on down to the sunny, warm park.
They rolled into balls and they slid down the slide.



THE BUNNIES OF RIVERMARK

They hopped to the—STOP! It's the street! Wait to cross!

The cars and the trucks had a green.

Sophia jumped up and she reached and she reached,

but the button to cross was too high.

Julia Bunny then had an idea:

Hitch a ride! Then, a baby rolled by.

They hopped in the stroller and rumbled across.

Julia Bunny said, "This is great!

We can roll to the books—" but she paused for a look

and she blinked—for Sophia was off like a flash!

A fluffy, brown tail was all she could see

as it slipped through the fence between the school and a tree.

"The salad!" Thought Julia, and she tumbled out, too.

With a hippity-hop, like a flash she was off.

THE BUNNIES OF RIVERMARK



Sophia had lettuce all stuffed in her mouth,

tomatoes in each paw, and radishes

tumbling around. She shouted, “What luck!

The schoolchildren planted a salad for us!”

But Julia saw faces looking their way.

“I don’t think so—” she said. “Run away!”

The children yelled, “Thieves! That’s our salad you’re eating!”

The two bunnies went hopping as fast as they could.

THE BUNNIES OF RIVERMARK



They zig-zagged their way through a soccer melée

dodging cleats, dodging feet, thwarting kicks.

Sophia had never gone hopping so fast!

They were both out of breath at the library door.



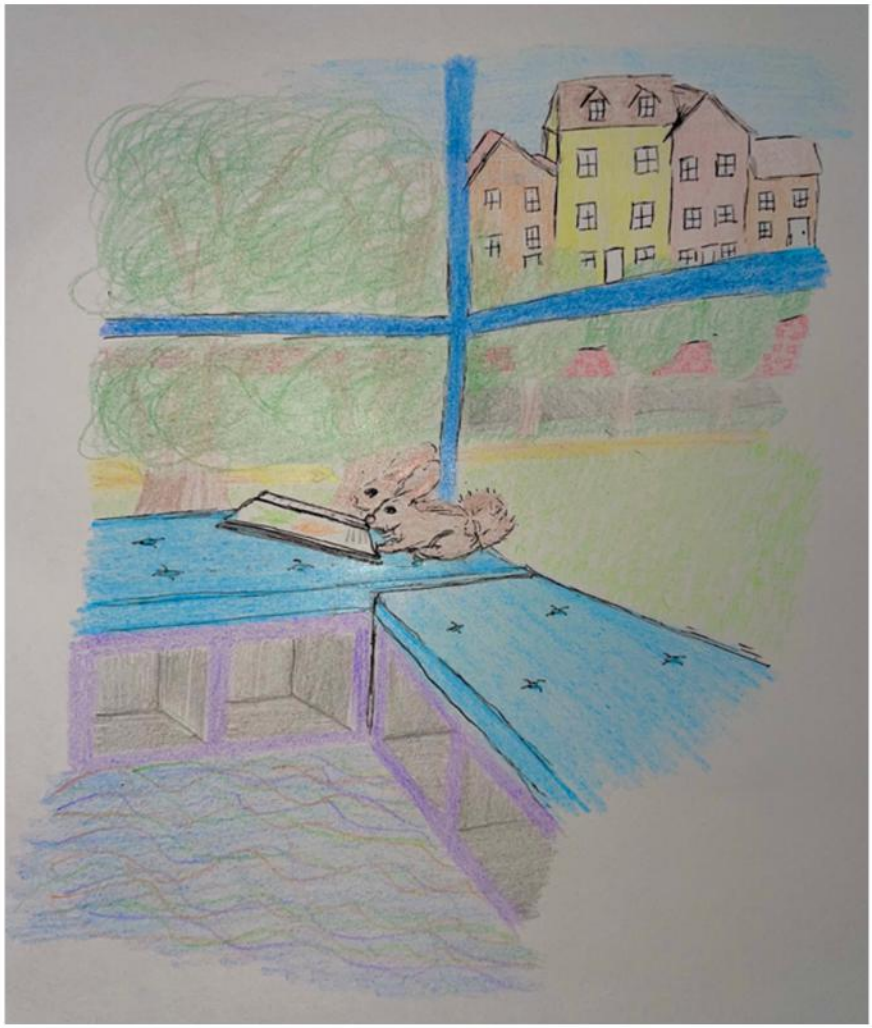
THE BUNNIES OF RIVERMARK

They gathered themselves, then they snuck on inside.

They tip-hopped through shelves to the cookbooks.

A Compendium of Carrots! They tugged it on down,

and curled up by the window all sunny and warm.



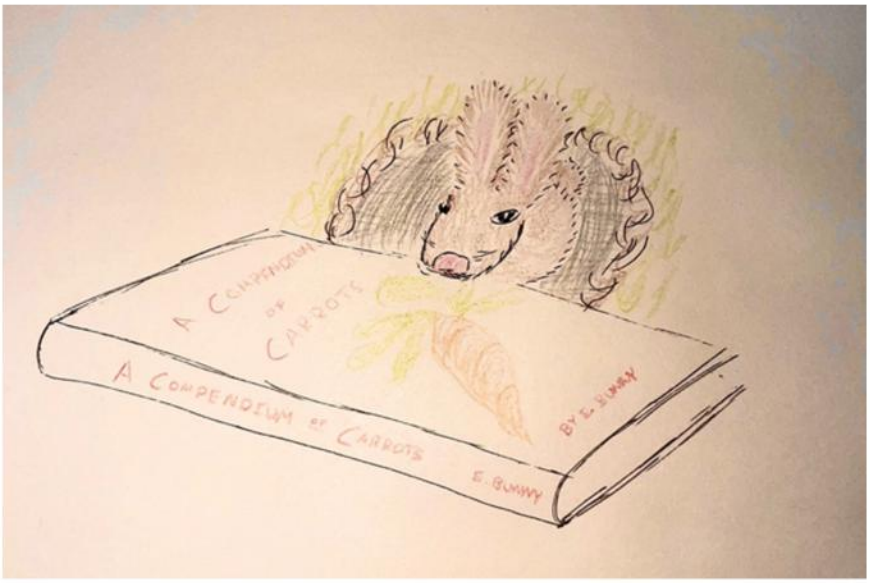
THE BUNNIES OF RIVERMARK

While most of the salad was lost in the chase,

And the book didn't fit in the burrow,

The sisters were cozy and happy to spend

Such a beautiful day snuggled up with their book.



CANDLELIT DINNERS

Author: Gabriel Goch

I am an adult now. What you might call a grown man. Some fifteen years ago, you would not recognize me. I was a very small boy with bright, blonde hair. My mother would cook dinner for my brother and I. We would sit around the wood dining table, candles lit, the world completely black outside. The same music would always be playing, violins and cellos in scratchy baroque notes, rising and falling. The food was always the same too, pan seared chicken cubes and carrots and onions and white rice. We would eat in total isolation. The double glass door was devoid of light.

When I picture it, the room was quiet except for the music. It sounded like a lamentation of ending, of loss, of something very slow but distressing coming. There might have been talking, but not much. We were just in each other's company. The candlelight was very dim. Imagine it. A little boy, I was always so little for my age, with long blonde hair, in the orange yellow candlelight, quietly eating dinner with his big brother and mama. The music ferrying us somewhere. The outside just a void. Nothing but our dining room, a table for six occupied by three, a mother and two little boys. I felt such a deep foreboding, a fear of something so much greater than myself. Something I could not understand at the time.

But there was no immediate end. I would always finish my dinner and wash up and go to bed. I am an adult now, living in my own rented space, cooking my own food, eating dinner alone. Now that I think back on that time, years ago, I realize what the feeling was, what the music was ushering in. It was the eventual ending of that time. The coming of the unfamiliar and unknown. No longer eating my mother's cooking. No longer sitting beside her and my brother. No longer isolated in the candlelight of our dining table. No longer sitting with them, in the quiet void, eating dinner.

COMING HOME TO BIRIYANI

Author: Femy Praseeth

For the past few months, Coco, my furbaby and I have been camped out in my study - doors shut tight, trying to escape the drilling, the hammering, and the loud Spanish songs drifting from the other room. It's been almost two months of renovations. Two months of dust settling on every surface and endless decisions landing on my shoulders.

My days are punctured by interruptions - checking that the mirrors will arrive on time and calling to confirm the tiles are in stock, so work doesn't stall. Small decisions that somehow carry the weight of the world in that moment. And in between it all, I run to the bank to withdraw cash for Carlos, the contractor.

It's been long. I am tired and that dull ache won't quite lift. As I was driving back from the bank, a thought bubbled up inside me.

I want *Biriyani* for lunch.

The craving came out of nowhere. Instantly my mouth watered.

At the next red light, I pulled up the number for Kabab and Curry and pressed Call. It was Friday. Usually Fridays meant they make Mutton Biriyani. I wanted Chicken Biriyani. Still, I had to try.

COMING HOME TO BIRIYANI

By the time someone picked up, the light had turned green. “Do you have Chicken Biriyani today?” I asked as I weaved through the familiar streets of Santa Clara, balancing the call with the rhythm of traffic. When he said yes, it felt like I had won something precious, a small rush of relief and excitement all at once, disproportionate to something as simple as lunch.

I placed my order for one Chicken Biriyani. “I’ll pay when I pick up,” I told him. “I’m driving,” I added, half apologetic, half distracted. I was desperate for Chicken Biriyani in a way that surprised even me, as if the craving had taken on a life of its own.

When I reached the restaurant, it was only 11:30 am. Soft Muslim prayer songs floated through the nearly empty dining room, low and steady, filling the quiet space with a sense of calm. In another half hour, it would swell with people arriving after the Friday prayers at the mosque, voices rising, chairs scraping, the room coming alive in waves of movement and conversation.

The man with the long silver beard at the counter smiled kindly and told me I’d have to wait until noon. There was no rush in his voice, just certainty. So I nodded, and returned to the car to wait with Coco. We sat there together, watching as people slowly began to trickle in, each arrival marking the quiet passage of time.

COMING HOME TO BIRIYANI

At exactly 12:00 pm, I walked back in. I paid, collected the warm packet, and asked for two of their green mint chutneys, my added indulgence, something small that made the meal feel complete. The packet was warm in my hands, radiating comfort even before it was opened, the heat seeping through the paper and into my palms.

The drive home felt charged with anticipation. As if this biriyani might steady my chaotic world or soothe the frayed edges of my nerves. As if something about it might land exactly where I needed it to, filling a space I hadn't been able to name.

At home, I scooped a generous serving of the steaming rice onto my Corelle plate and carried it into my study. Coco trailed behind, his nose twitching as the aroma reached him, curious and alert to every movement.

I closed the door and sank into my chair. He sniffed the air once more, then curled into his corner bed, keeping one watchful eye on my plate as if he understood something important was happening.

I dug my hand into the rice, fragrant with masala, cardamom and cloves. Spiced oil slicked my fingers, turning them golden as I gathered another handful and lifted it to my mouth.

For a moment, the drilling outside faded, as if the world itself had paused.

COMING HOME TO BIRIYANI

But my relationship with biriyani did not begin well. As a young girl, I hated it - which now feels almost unforgivable, considering Mummy was an extraordinary cook. She loved the kitchen in a way that made it feel alive. And her biriyani was never just food. It was a celebration. Something that took over our small home in Kannur, Kerala, filling every corner with warmth and anticipation.

Back then, making biriyani began long before the cooking itself. Ingredients were gathered slowly, like small treasures collected over days. Cashews, raisins and pure ghee came from Nambishans in the town center. The special biriyani rice came from the little provision store along Market Road. The chicken, always fresh, came from the poultry shop near our house, selected with care.

Mummy didn't drive, so she would take stock of the steel canisters in the kitchen cabinets and peer into the storeroom shelves, checking what was left and what needed replenishing. She moved methodically, mentally mapping out everything that would be needed. Then she would carefully write out her list before handing it to Pappa, who would take on the task of gathering everything, one stop at a time.

COMING HOME TO BIRIYANI

He would circle the town after work, picking up each ingredient one by one - sometimes after paying the electricity bill, sometimes on an errand that conveniently took him past Nambishans. It was all an act of coordination, a quiet, practiced system that ensured everything came together at the right time without ever feeling rushed or chaotic.

On biriyani day, the maid aunty brought the chicken home and cleaned it, stripping off the skin and cutting it into pieces with practiced ease. And then Mummy would clean it again, thoroughly and patiently, as if care itself was an essential ingredient. She rubbed it with the masalas and left it to marinate, giving the spices time to seep into every piece, deepening the flavor slowly.

Then came the onions. Mountains of them, sliced thin, enough to make your eyes sting just looking at them. They went into hot oil, turning golden and caramel at the edges, releasing a sweetness that filled the air and lingered in every room. Minced garlic and ginger followed, then chopped green chilies. The pan hissed, the spices crackled, and the air thickened by the minute.

By then, the entire house would be consumed by the fragrance. We didn't need any announcement. We knew. Today's lunch is biriyani.

COMING HOME TO BIRIYANI

Pappa would hover around the kitchen, visibly excited, asking every few minutes when it would be ready, unable to contain his anticipation. Me? I hated it. I hated the raisins. And the cashews. The way sweet and savory dared to share the same plate without asking for permission, as if that combination itself was a mistake.

Why couldn't we just have plain rice and chicken? I would nag, performing my little protest with full sass, convinced that I was making perfect sense.

After hours of sautéing and layering, the biriyani would arrive on a large steel platter and take its place at the center of our round dining table. It looked grand, almost ceremonial in its presence, like something meant to be admired before it was eaten.

The moment Mummy said, "It's ready," Pappa would practically fly to his seat, eager and smiling. He ate happily, fully present in the meal. And Mummy, after hours in the kitchen, finally sat down, her appetite dulled by the labor of it all, her energy spent.

I, on the other hand, would drag myself to the table and sit there picking through my portion, removing every raisin, every cashew, every strand of caramelized onion. It was slow, tedious work, and I treated it like a task that had to be endured rather than enjoyed.

COMING HOME TO BIRIYANI

Back then, I didn't understand what that platter really carried. I didn't see the lists written in Mummy's careful handwriting. The circling of the town after Pappa's long workdays. The lifting of steel lids, the measuring by sight, the marinating done with Mummy's patient hands. The hours she stood over the stove, frying onions to the exact shade of gold she wanted.

I didn't see how many small movements had to align to land that biriyani at the center of our table. To me, it was just rice and chicken tangled up with unnecessary sweetness, something overly complicated for no reason at all.

I was too young to recognize the love in it. I tasted only inconvenience. And I assumed it would always be there - this ritual, this platter - something I would have to endure forever, something permanent and unchanging.

I don't know when biriyani started becoming something I craved. Maybe it happened slowly, like most important things do. Maybe it was when I left home for my Master's.

For the first time, home became something I returned to, not one I simply lived inside. And returning home became its own kind of celebration.

The moment I shared my travel dates with Mummy and Pappa, I'm certain the planning began. Lists written. Ingredients gathered. Chicken ordered in advance. Everything set into motion quietly, without announcement, just as it always had been.

COMING HOME TO BIRIYANI

I still remember reaching home, ringing the bell, and before the door even opened, I could smell it. Biriyani. The scent arrived before anything else, wrapping itself around me like something familiar and deeply comforting.

The door would swing open to Pappa's wide smile. And from somewhere deep inside the house, the fragrance of spiced rice and caramelized onions would reach for me first, pulling me in before words were even exchanged.

Coming home meant chicken biriyani. Every trip began that way. A declaration that you are back, and we are celebrating, even if nothing special had happened beyond your return.

Somewhere in those years, I stopped picking out the raisins and onions. I began to devour it instead.

The juicy chicken, the sweet bite of cashews, the warmth of cloves and cardamom tucked between long grains of rice - it all began to make sense. I went back for seconds. Then thirds. There was no hesitation anymore, no resistance, just an eagerness to take in as much as I could.

When it came to chicken biriyani, there was no holding back. It wasn't just food anymore. It was all of us gathered around a steel platter, sharing something that felt both ordinary and deeply meaningful at the same time.

COMING HOME TO BIRIYANI

Then life moved forward, as it always does. I got married. My hubby joined the celebrations, and biriyani became part of our shared language, something we understood without needing to explain.

When we moved to the US, Mummy gave me a handwritten copy of her biriyani recipe. I followed it faithfully. Measured with precision. Let the chicken marinate the way she always did. It tasted right.

But it didn't taste like hers.

When she visited us here, she made it in my American kitchen. We relished it - laughing, eating too much, reaching for seconds as though nothing could ever change. Those moments felt suspended in time, untouched by everything else that life would eventually bring.

I didn't think to stand beside her and learn it properly. I didn't think to make one for her. I thought there would be time. I thought I would learn someday, when life slowed down enough to make space for it.

That someday never came. Slowly, life began to turn. Cancer came for Mummy. In the blur of treatments and hospital stays, we were swept into a different rhythm, one that had nothing to do with celebration and everything to do with survival.

COMING HOME TO BIRIYANI

And somewhere in the midst of it all, her eyesight began to fade. She stopped cooking. The kitchen, once so alive, grew quieter.

The maid aunty took over. She learned to make biriyani. She followed the steps carefully. The rice was fragrant. The spices were right. But something was missing.

As if the dish itself remembered whose hands once made it. There was a subtle absence, something you couldn't quite name but could unmistakably feel.

I remember sitting beside Mummy's bed during her last months, rubbing her hands - the same hands that had cleaned chicken twice over, fried onions in endless batches, sautéed spices until they released their perfume into our small Kannur kitchen.

Those hands had carried so many celebrations. Now they were finally at rest.

I never cooked biriyani for Mummy. I thought there would be time. I wish I had.

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After Mummy was gone, biriyani was no longer just food. It became memory layered in basmati rice. The smell of ghee warming in oil could undo me completely, pulling me back without warning.

COMING HOME TO BIRIYANI

The sight of caramelized onions on top of saffron-streaked rice could carry me straight back to our dining table in Kannur, as if no time had passed at all.

The very raisins I once painstakingly removed began to taste like something sacred. Funny how that happens. How we spend childhood rejecting what adulthood will one day cling to with quiet reverence.

As the years went by, my love for biriyani stayed. For a while, I tried to be practical. Fish biriyani is lighter, healthier, and more suited to my hubby's tastes. It made sense on paper, the kind of sensible choice you convince yourself to accept.

But slowly, I realized something. Fish biriyani was a compromise.

When it came to biriyani, there was no compromise. Chicken biriyani, always. Some things are not meant to be negotiated or adjusted. They are meant to be held onto exactly as they are.

As life in the US filled up with work and family, I began sourcing biriyani from restaurants, trying to match it to my memories, searching for something that felt close enough.

COMING HOME TO BIRIYANI

There were countless varieties - dum biriyani, Hyderabadi biriyani, layered, sealed with dough. I tried them all, each one offering something slightly different, but never quite landing where I needed it to.

Eventually, I settled on Kabab and Curry, a small restaurant near my home in Santa Clara. It still wasn't Mummy's. But it came close enough to quiet the longing, at least for a little while.

When Pappa visited us in San Jose, we developed a ritual. One chicken biriyani from Kabab and Curry. We'd bring it home and share it between us. One packet. Two plates. Simple, familiar, enough.

We didn't say much while eating. We didn't need to. The silence carried its own meaning, filled with things that didn't need to be spoken out loud.

But the feeling lingered between us.

Biriyani was no longer just a celebration. It was a memory. It was the three of us, even when one of us wasn't there.

So as I sat in my study that afternoon and began eating my way through that plate of chicken biriyani, it wasn't just hunger. It was longing. Longing for a time when someone else carried the weight of decisions, when love arrived on a steel platter without being asked for.

COMING HOME TO BIRIYANI

I took another generous scoop. The chicken was tender. The fried onions were rich and slightly sweet. And then there it was - the soft burst of a raisin between my teeth.

This time, I didn't pick it out. I let it stay. Because biriyani isn't meant to be separated into neat preferences. The sweetness belongs with the spice. The softness with the heat. The nuts with the rice.

Just like life.

As I finished my plate, the drilling outside resumed. The chaos hadn't disappeared. The renovations weren't magically complete. And life was still asking its relentless questions, demanding decisions and attention in equal measure.

But something inside me had softened. The sharp edges had dulled, if only slightly. The weight felt just a little easier to carry.

For a moment, it felt as if Mummy had reached across the years and touched my shoulder, the way she used to when things felt heavy, when words weren't necessary. As if she were saying, it's going to be okay.

And there, in that small room filled with the scent of biriyani, I felt it again - her love and memories wrapping themselves gently around me, steady and familiar, like something that had never really left.

FAMILY LEGACY

Author: Pranjali Pratik

Ashima was sitting at the window, downstairs in the living room. With a cup of tea in her hand, looking out towards the pre-dawn darkness, she was wandering through the nostalgic bylanes of her childhood. Sleep had not been her friend tonight.

Today was Amma's birthday, the fifth one where Ashima only had her memories to keep company. She could almost picture herself running through the courtyard of the old house, drenched in serenity of classical music, the delicious aromas of Amma's cooking mingling with the brisk morning air.

She recalled one time when she could have been no more than six years old. The mouth watering fragrance of chhole[1] (garbanzo beans) had woken Ashima up that morning. She had rushed to the kitchen to find Amma cheerily humming, moving back and forth, scooping up a taste of the chhole here, rolling the dough for Bhaturas[2] there.

"Amma... are you making Chole? I smelled it all the way in my room! In my sleep!" Ashima bounced gleefully, "It is my favorite-est!!"

"I know, Cheeku," Amma turned around with a smile, "It is my favorite-est too!" Ashima clapped, "Where did you learn to make it Amma?"

"My amma taught me, she always made it for my birthday," her mother replied, her eyes moist, her face wistful. It was an expression Ashima did not understand then, but one that had come to be very familiar to her in the last five years, on her own face.

“Ammaaa...,” Ashima tilted her head, thinking deeply, “Does it mean it is your birthday today?”

“Why, yes my darling, it is...,” Amma put her sorrows away, picking up her little girl in her arms, “...and I decided to treat myself with your grandma’s recipe.”

“Why didn’t you tell me it was your birthday? I would have asked Papa to get you a gift,” Ashima protested.
“Also... what is a recipe,” her childish innocence immediately making her forget the protest she had launched moments ago.

“You, my love, are the greatest gift I could ever get,” Amma said, kissing Ashima on both cheeks.
“Besides, I am pretty sure your father got me a gift. Now, why don’t you run along and see what he got? In the meantime, I will finish up the cooking here.”
“Okaaayyyyy!” Ashima leapt from her arms, and strutted away to go find her father.

♦♦♦♦♦♦

“Ammaaaa!”

Sia’s voice jolted Ashima out of her reverie. Ashima greeted her three year old with a smile, returning the melancholy to that one corner of her heart that it permanently inhabited.

“Good morning angel,” she said, picking Sia up, “How was your night? Did you sleep well?”

“Yes, Amma!”
Sia gave her a peck on the left cheek.
“But what are you doing here right now? Why are you not in your room? I was looking for you EVERYWHERE,” she questioned, with her eyes wide, spreading her hands as far apart as she could emphasize how hard she had looked for her mother.

“I woke up a bit earlier today, so I came to get my tea,” Ashima said, not wanting to burden her little daughter with the whole truth.

“Okay,” Sia jumped out of her arms, looking for her favorite toy.
“Amma, what are we doing today? Do you have to go to the office?” she asked, her head buried in the big toy basket placed in one corner of the living room.

“No, sweetie, it’s the weekend. Remember?” Ashima answered, walking towards the refrigerator in the kitchen, that was attached to the living room

“I thought so,” Sia yelled back, her head still in the basket.

“What do you want to eat today? Some cereal or should I make some poha[3]?”

Sia pulled her head out of the basket. Her head tilted sideways, “Ammaaaa.... What is that thing you make sometimes?”

Ashima smiled to herself. This was going to be a fun game of twenty questions. “Which thing?”

“The one with the brown gravy...,” Sia replied in a sing-song voice.

“There’s lots of things with brown gravy, baby,” Ashima walked back towards her daughter, “Tell me more.”

“The one with the little round things in it,” Sia explained with her tiny fingers gesturing to show the little round things.

“Do you mean daal[4]?”

“Nooo.. not daal...,” replied Sia, exasperated.

“I need more hints, Sia.”

Sia thought really hard for a minute. When she figured out the decisive hint, with twinkling eyes, she said, “You always put little onions on top and then do a bit of squeezy squeezy with the lemon to make it more yummy!! Do you remember now????”

“Do you mean... chhole?” Ashima’s eyes glistened. What were the odds?!

“YESSS!! CHHOOLEEEE” Sia jumped up and down for joy, having cracked the case of the mystery food item.

“Can you make it? Can you make it? Pleeeeeeaaaassseeeeeee?” She grabbed Ashima’s hands and blinked her big eyes in rapid succession, doing her best imitation of a ‘pretty please’.

“Yes, my love,” Ashima hugged her daughter tightly, “Today, I will definitely make chhole for you.”
The tears rolled down Ashima’s face, thick and fast. As she stealthily wiped them, she asked, “Sia, do you want to hear a story?”

Sia pulled back, “Yes amma, always! What’s it about?”

“It’s about my amma, your nani.”

“You also have an amma? Like me?” Sia’s eyes widened with surprise and incredulity.

“Mm hmm,” Ashima nodded.

“Where is she? Can I meet her?” There were so many thoughts and questions rushing through her tiny brain.

“She…” Ashima breathed deeply to compose herself, she didn’t want her daughter to hear the break in her voice when she heard about her grandmother for the first time, “she lives with God. We can’t meet her now, but I can show you pictures.”

FAMILY LEGACY

“You have pictures? Yes yes yes!”

“Ok, come with me...” Ashima took her little girl’s hands and took her to the study, where she kept all her old family photo albums neatly stacked.

“Amma...? Did your amma also make yummy chhole?” Sia really did not want Ashima to forget about her request, after all the energy she had spent on explaining what she wanted to eat.

“Yes, darling”, Ashima smiled, “she also made chhole for me when I was a little girl. In fact, the ones I make are her recipe.”

“YOU WERE A LITTLE GIRL?!!!!!” The day had been revelationary for Sia so far. “Also.. what is a recipe?”

Ashima laughed uproariously.

Suddenly the realization that she had been feeling lonely in her sorrow, not a half hour ago, hit her. Being able to share her memories of her mother, her food, with Sia had been medicine for her broken heart. She did not have to miss her mother alone, she could cherish her together with her daughter. In that moment, Ashima resolved to never let the memories of her mother break her spirit. Her mother deserved a celebration of her life.

FAMILY LEGACY

Ashima and her little helper spent the next hour and a half in the kitchen, cooking up the chhole and discussing tales of Sia's grandmother. After lunch, Ashima showed Sia many pictures from her childhood. Sia asked as many questions about her nani as her little brain could conjure. Ashima happily answered them all, recollecting tales of her beautiful childhood, her beautiful mother.

That night, as Ashima tucked Sia into bed, Sia whispered sleepily, "Amma.. We should make chhole every time when it is Nani's birthday."

Ashima ran her fingers through Sia's hair, grateful for her daughter's thoughtfulness. She kissed her goodnight, and whispered back, "Yes my love, we should. We will."

[1] garbanzo beans in an onion-tomato gravy and spices

[2] fried, puffed flatbread

[3] rice flakes with veggies, peanuts

[4] lentil soup

THE HUMBLE WADA PAV

Author: Prajakta Rohit Dhobale

A gentle jolt woke me up. I realized the train had halted. My eyes were stuck shut from the dryness of the coupe's air conditioner. I could hear a few gentle and not so gentle snores from other fellow passengers. But a few were up and about. Maybe it was their station, maybe like me, they were woken up by the absence of the gentle swaying motion of the train. The delicious chill of the AC was refreshing, especially being so close to the vents on the upper sleeper berth.

Was it still night? Was it early morning? My eyes wouldn't open so I concentrated on the sounds. I could hear the faint strains of a nasal sing-song voice getting louder as it came nearer, "Mashallah Chai! Mashallah Chai!". Another squeaky voice was weirdly playing some laser gun like sounds, "Ditch Kyau! Ditch Kyau!". That brought forth a smile and realization dawned, it's morning. Tea- time! As the brain fog cleared, my eyelids gave up the fight and opened. The blessed chai turned out to be, Masala Chai while the laser gun sounds was a call for Dip Chai. Yes, I was finally completely awake.

THE HUMBLE WADA PAV

I looked at the berth across mine and saw my brother was still fast asleep. Jumping about like the monkey he must've tired himself out. I looked down and saw that not only were my parents up and awake but seated by the windows reading the morning's newspaper, my mother reading the inner regional pages and my father the national front pages and sports section. Later they would exchange. I clambered down and snuggled up to my mother who lifted her arm and pulled me closer without taking her eyes off the column she was reading. This close to them, I could smell her minty toothpaste and caught the strong aftershave of my father as he flipped the pages. In my little girl mind, it always amazed me how they could get up so early and freshen up while it took me so much effort just to open my eyes.

Soon the din in the bogie began to rise. People were stopping the tea sellers and getting their morning cuppa. Every person opening and closing the compartment door created drafts that would send faint wisps of ginger and cardamom as the teas were being poured into cups. My father opened the coupe curtain on one side indicating the tea seller to stop at our berths. My mother let me sit next to the window and I resumed cuddling up against her, soaking in her warmth and watching people bustle by through the window. This was a big halt, no small station. But I couldn't see the station name.

THE HUMBLE WADA PAV

The tea seller stopped at our coupe. My father handed him the ceramic teacups that had been distributed before I had even woken up. They had been waiting in neat little plastic trays on the small table attached to the wall between the facing pair of berths. Included were sugar and milk powder packets and small packets of tea biscuits. My parents didn't like biscuits, or at least that's what I thought. I loved Parle G biscuits and could finish off an entire pack with just a glass of milk, while they would nibble on just one biscuit as they sipped their tea. I knew that one packet of those biscuits minus one biscuit would be mine, the other for my brother, if he woke up in time. You snooze; you lose.

Just as the smell of ginger began filling up the air as the tea was being poured, my nose perked up as it caught another scent, an aroma that brought forth a flood in my mouth, a loud grumble from my belly and an epiphany on where we had stopped. Bhusawal. We were finally in Maharashtra, my home state, which I had been away from for a whole year. Every summer holiday we would head home to Pune where the following weeks would be full of visits to extended family, trips to some beach or some fortress or some hill station or some dam's backwaters and lots of fabulous Maharashtrian traditional and street foods. The king of all street foods, the staple of every holiday weekend, the one and only that I had been craving for so long to eat, was finally within my reach.

THE HUMBLE WADA PAV

My father smirked and my mother smiled gently as they looked at my gleaming face and alert stance that I had sensed it. And there it was, following in the wake of the tea seller amongst the other passengers, through the open doors of the compartment, wafted in the heavenly smell of the humble, freshly fried, crispy, golden wada pav. With eyes that showed suppressed laughter and a barely hidden dimple on his cheek, my father tried to be stern and reminded me to quickly go and brush my teeth. As I leapt up looking for my toothbrush in my small backpack, my mind did quick calculations of how long it would take me to get past the tea seller, get in any small line outside the compartment, perform my morning travel-ablutions and get back before the wada pav seller reaches our berths. Quick as lightning, on-point with my calculations and jostling the tea seller twice, I was back, sitting cross legged with a paper plate and napkins in my lap, eagerly anticipating the wada pav.

The seller stopped at our open curtain. The wicker basket was high on his head, on his left shoulder was a cloth bag through which loaves or laadi of freshly baked buns or pav peeked through their newspaper wrapping while on the right shoulder was a smaller bag which had some paper wrapped bundles. He held the basket up with one hand and with the other he held a small foldable stand under his arm. He did a quick look around to see how many customers he had in the vicinity and quickly set down his short stand and placed his clean pink cotton cloth covered basket atop it. As he took the orders from my father and our neighboring passengers, he pulled back the pink cloth to reveal the glorious concentric circles of neatly arranged wadas (roughly and insufficiently translated to potato fritters).

THE HUMBLE WADA PAV

The whole coupe was filling up with the spicy aroma of the fried goodness. I could hear my brother finally stirring but my eyes never left the sight of the golden treasure I would soon be partaking. There was a mechanical fluidity, a poetry in motion in the way the old seller began picking up the wadas, holding them in neat squares of newspaper conveniently secured on the side of the basket, then smoothly pull out corresponding number of pavs and scootch them beside the wadas and with a deftness that defied his age, dipped his hand into the other bag and pulled out a few paper bundles and dropped them in the gastronomic bouquet he held in his hand. He wrapped it close and handed it to my father and took the payment in exchange. The entire sequence felt like a graceful dance that was over within a minute. He wrapped more such bundles for the other passengers, but my attention was no longer there. It was laser focused on the bundle my mother was now setting down at the table and opening.

The small paper bundles within held the scary fire red spicy garlicky dry chutney and long, deep fried split green chilies with stems still attached and glistening crystals of salt clinging onto them. She opened the pav which had been neatly cut in half and looked at me with a raised eyebrow and a smile that hinted a challenge. I grinned and loudly said yes, accepting the spicy chutney challenge. Fortune favors the bold and there’s no better way to start a day than to set forth with self-confidence. She lightly dusted one half of the pav with the chutney and then placed the plump golden disc like wada on top and placed the other half of the pav atop it and placed it in my readily held out paper plate.

THE HUMBLE WADA PAV

I closed my eyes, inhaled deeply and took a big bite of the pillowy pav with the crunchy coated wada within. A whole flavor party just burst into my mouth, my senses overwhelmed with the heat, the smell, the taste of that savory sandwich with spicy kick. I savored the different textures, the softness of the pav, the crispiness of the fried outer chickpea flour coating and the firmness of the perfectly mashed potato filling that unleashed wave after wave of aromatic flavors of the tempering it underwent. Each bite revealed subtle hints of different spices and aromatics like coriander seeds, ginger and garlic. The gracefully balanced savory flavors of the wada getting highlighted by the sharp garlic of the dry chutney and a slow low fire of the red chili powder in that same chutney.

As I enjoyed each bite of my wada pav, I felt a gentle pull of the train as it slowly rolled out of the station. I was vaguely aware of the world around me, my brother swinging down his berth in a graceful leap like a chimpanzee, my parents settling back with their teas and papers, a low murmur of activity of the other passengers, the vignettes outside my window turning into a montage, then melting into a blur as the train picked up speed. And I mused. Soon, by the end of this day, we'll reach my hometown Pune. What chutneys will I get to eat next with my future wada pavs? A sweet and spicy tamarind jaggery chutney, or a refreshing coriander- mint chutney, or a nutty coconut- peanut chutney? Should I try layering fresh chopped onions? Should I dare to try the fried green chilies? Maybe keep a glass of sugarcane juice within my reach if I do so. Or maybe a mango shake? A glass of Mastani? I closed my eyes as I mulled over the choices.

THE HUMBLE WADA PAV

“Mumma! Mumma! Look! Fire truck!”

I opened my eyes and saw my 3-year old’s big smile and twinkling eyes. I turned around and saw a fire truck quietly waiting at the intersection behind me. I looked back at my daughter’s happy face, smeared with chutneys as her father laughingly tried to clean up her messy hands. It took me a fraction of a second to realize I was sitting at small cozy picnic table set up beside a food truck at an intersection in Milpitas. California. USA. I looked down at my hands and saw the big bite I had taken out of a wada pav, an offering from the Indian food truck we had spotted driving by.

It has been more than 30 years since that train ride and 2 years since I last met my parents back in India. My brother, also back in India, has his own naughty 4-year-old monkey as a payback for all the shenanigans he got up to in his childhood. My eyes moistened as I looked back at the time machine I held in my hand.

My daughter toddled up to me and climbed up in my lap. She snuggled her small, satiated body into arms. Her trusting, loving warmth seeped into my soul. Dusk was upon us. The cool Bay breeze brought a refreshing chill reminiscent of that train AC. The light changed at the intersection and the traffic began to move, slowly gaining speed. The nostalgic tears blurred my vision until the world looked like it did from that train window. The steamy aroma of the wada pav filled my senses and I took another bite.

A HUNGER FOR MORE THAN FUEL

Author: Yoshinobu Yamasaki

Getting to Santa Clara University was a huge shift in my life. I had to meet new people and make new friends; I had a new bed to sleep in and a new room to decorate. But more than the physical surroundings, the most jarring change was the food. In this new, small, unfamiliar world I called a room, the air seemed stale, almost dead compared to the aroma that would dance around my room when my father would cook for me. Sitting in a dorm room with a warm burrito wrapped in aluminum foil just wasn't the same. It was fuel, but it was empty, a transaction rather than a connection. Now I was alone. Now I had to walk halfway across campus by myself just to grab something alone, to return to my room alone, and to eat alone. I wanted something more than just empty calories sitting on a plate wrapped in aluminum foil. I wanted to return to the times when my food actually meant something to me, when I could feel the love and dedication my father put into each decision he made when making the meal. Whether it was adding too much salt or putting the perfect amount of ginger in, I could always taste the soul my father put into each dish he made. The one meal I missed most from my father was one that reminded me of my homeland. Although I had never been, Japan still seemed like a place I belonged, and nothing gave me more of that feeling than when I would eat my father's ramen. For me, food is not simply a necessity; it is a vital link between myself, my family, and my heritage. Now sitting alone in my college room, I can't help but hunger for that same sensation, a sensation that not only reminds me of my homeland, but also a small connection I share with people hundreds of thousands of miles away in Japan.

A HUNGER FOR MORE THAN FUEL

In the dining hall, the comforting sounds of a home kitchen have been replaced with the overwhelming noise of hundreds of hungry college kids. Kids with whom I never felt like I had anything in common. Kids whom I would never talk to, let alone share a meal with. Every conversation overlaps with the next until a sea of chatter erupts like waves crashing on the shore, each voice more muddled than the last. As cooks scream over one another to finish orders, the air fills not with the sharp, clean smell of fresh-cut ginger, but with the heavy scent of oil and grease from hundreds of quickly cooked meals, thrown together without much care. It is food produced for the masses, efficient and functional, but entirely devoid of the spirit that makes a meal alive.

This stands in stark contrast to the kitchen at home, which always felt alive. The kitchen would be filled with a symphony of sounds as a knife rhythmically hit the cutting board and the hot steam hissed as water boiled over the brim of the pot. As the steam built up in the room, it not only sounded alive but felt alive, too. Every time I walked into the kitchen, I would be given a warm embrace by the humid air coming from the pot. The pot itself stood firm but groaned under the heat of the stove. Within lay the noodles themselves. Stiff at first, but then yielding to the water until they moved like kelp in the ocean current. Neon green scallions were scattered across the surface like rocks on a beach, bleeding their sharp scent into the air. The scent of ginger wouldn't be far behind, soon mixing with the scallions in the air to replace the stale midday air. When it was all said and done, the air had a complex aroma of freshly diced vegetables and bonito flakes, making the air itself savory with the smell of the rich broth.

A HUNGER FOR MORE THAN FUEL

My father's ramen was never just a meal; it was a tether to my heritage and a gift from him to me. He never used a recipe book to make them. All he did was remember the way his father used to make them; the timing needed to get the right consistency was never a matter of time for him, but rather a feeling he didn't know how to describe. A feeling passed down from his father to him. Every time I asked him how he knew they were done, all he would say was "you just know." That knowing was the relationship, the invisible thread connecting him, his father, and now me, all to our homeland. The connection to our homeland was preserved in that intuition. By trusting his senses, my father was not just cooking; he was showing me a way to connect with my homeland. My father may have never taken me to walk the streets of Tokyo or see the lanterns at the Setsubun Mantoro shrine, but he did teach me that you don't have to be somewhere or be born somewhere to feel like you belong.

Separated from that relationship at SCU, I tried to fill the void anyway I could think of; instant ramen. I would walk alone to the cellar to buy some noodles, keeping my head down the entire time, only looking up when the lady at the register told me I could scan my card now. Noodles in hand, I would always rush back to my dorm, not only to satiate my hunger but to try to make something that would rekindle that relationship, even if it was only a fragment of it. I poured in the hot water and waited. But the result was hollow. Each time I tried them, no matter the brand, it was never the same. The noodles were there, but the soul my father put into his dish, the perfect amount of ginger, the slight over-saltiness that I loved, was missing.

A HUNGER FOR MORE THAN FUEL

To truly bridge the gap between my new life at SCU and the Japanese heritage, I decided to do what my father had always done and make the ramen myself from scratch. I found a Japanese grocery store not too far from the camps called Mitsuwa Marketplace and decided to walk there to get the ingredients I needed. Walking through the doors, I could immediately identify the blend of strong aromas that permeated the air. Walking through the aisles, I recognized some of the foods my father used to get for his noodles, and, based on what I could remember, I tried to pick out the exact same things I would see my father use every time he cooked his ramen. Happy I found everything, I went back to my room, and I started cooking my own ramen in the dorm. I began the process of cooking the ramen. Starting with the prep of cutting garlic and ginger, and then putting it in the water with some chicken broth to start the broth, while a second pot starts to boil that will soon house the noodles. As I continued this juggling act of actions, I had seen my father perform hundreds of times, I noticed the room filling with a familiar smell.

Once the performance of making the noodles was done, I sat back down in my room to bask in the unmistakable scent that wafted from my bowl. As I lift the bowl, the steam rises up and hits my face in a warm embrace. Thick and humid broth instantly chased away the stale, dry air of the dorm, instantly reminding me of my kitchen at home when my father would cook the ramen for me. The broth is cloudy and dark, swirling with that briny scent of dashi that smells exactly like the ocean. When I take that first sip, it isn't just salt and heat; it is deep and savory.

A HUNGER FOR MORE THAN FUEL

Eating it is a messy, loud process of slurping and splashing of broth, but it feels real in a way the dining hall never does. The warmth of the broth filled me with a comforting warmth. Yet something about it was still missing, and whatever it was, I had a feeling that it was crucial. Was it some missing ingredient? Was the timing of the noodles off? Or could it have been something else? Whatever it was, it was important, that last missing piece that would bring back the feeling of reconnecting me with my heritage and homeland.

Thinking back on it now, I think I knew what it was all along, but I just didn't want to admit it. It was my father, but I found it absurd that someone could change the feeling a food gives you if you make it exactly the way they did. It was like a story by Robin Wall Kimmerer called Braiding Sweetgrass. In particular, the excerpt is called “The Gift of Strawberries.” This excerpt is about Kimmerer in upstate New York as a kid. She talks about picking strawberries and explains how they are not something meant to be bought with money, but how they are a gift from the earth. She then goes on to explain how there is a “cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange that a gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people” (Robin Wall Kimmerer 26). This text explains why the instant ramen that I bought from the seller would not have the same effects as the ramen my father would make for me. Purchasing culture from a shelf didn't connect me to my homeland; it only highlighted the distance. It made me realize that the ramen my father would not make for me was not special because of the fresh ingredients or the extra salt.

A HUNGER FOR MORE THAN FUEL

It was the act of giving that made his food so special. My father would make the noodles as a gift to me, never once asking anything in return. That was the crucial difference. He would cook to connect, whereas all the food at Santa Clara was only there to turn a profit.

Food has profoundly shaped my connection to my homeland, bridging the physical distance and allowing me to experience a sense of belonging to Japan. This sense of connection is not based on my genetics, but rather in the heritage and culture I feel like I am a part of every time I make ramen the same way my family and its past generations did. Furthermore, thinking back on my experiences with my father's food and the contrast it had to mine, I realize that the food is not significant because of its ingredients or quality, but in the thought and gesture of preparing and making something with the intention of it being a gift for someone else. It is this act of offering food as a gift that gives things soul and makes them feel alive, like the kitchen and food. Through this realization, I now see that sharing food emphasizes relationships, whether it is the relationship between people or the relationship between people and their culture.

Work cited

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THE LONG AWAITED

Author: Ashley Huang

He watched hour after hour, waiting. Waiting for the moment he could meet his love. She waited for him, day after day. A storm had come, and he couldn't see her. She was angry; she raged for days, destroying land and anything that dared touch her. After weeks, the storm stopped, she calmed and settled again. She knew she could see him soon.

He waited and waited, he could hear her agony day after day listening to her sorrows was pain enough for him. He yearned for her, they only got to meet for a few minutes every day, but seconds would feel like an eternity if he willed it so. He watched as the clouds parted ways and his light showed through pouring over everything in sight, his light stretching on for an eternity.
She watched as the clouds parted way, and saw the blue sky above, she hummed as she knew it was only a matter of time before she saw her love again, her light.

Hours passed, and finally they were in sight of each other; he saw her beauty as it shaped the horizon, and she felt his light flood her shores.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity they met, they held each other in their embrace turning the world the color of their love. Bright oranges and pinks drenched everything in sight. They held each other for as long as they could but eventually, he had to go under, to wait for another day until he was hers again and she was his.

She stretched her arms out, trying to hold him for longer, but as he dipped past her sight, she wallowed as the sky no longer held his light.

A PINCH OF FENNEL

Author: Nora Harrington Monette

My grandfather was an immigrant from Sicily. I remember his excitement seeing fennel plants growing tall and flowering along the roadside when he would visit us in California from Michigan. He called them finocchio. He would ask my father or mother to stop the car so he could get a pinch of the fronds or seeds—which he had grown up seeing and eating as a child.

On his visits we also traveled to see several of his childhood friends, his paisans, from his hometown. We would have the best, simple, fresh food that was lovingly shared. In Modesto, it was peaches and grapes from the orchards and vineyards on the farm plus homemade sauce and spaghetti from 10-pound boxes of pasta. In Long Beach and San Diego, we would be out in his friends' large, terraced gardens and enjoy figs, citrus fruit and cured olives, sitting at round tables with much discussion of how everything grew.

These days I have been pulling out fennel plants near San Francisco Bay as part of a native plant restoration. We weed with other community members. Though the dense stands of fennel are out of place next to the tidal wetlands, I have found others who have fond memories of gathering fennel leaves and seeds with their families. It has been inspirational to discuss recipes using gathered fennel from our parents and grandparents' youth in China, Mexico, and Italy. I may just have to put in a fennel plant in my yard (contained of course) so I can grab a pinch of fennel, which is full of memories.

PORTLAND REFLECTIONS

Author: Christine Teng-Henson

God speaking through creation was a foreign concept to me until a lectio divina group I was in around 2012-2013 first challenged me to go outside, look up at the trees, and try to listen. I remember hearing a crow cackle loudly, and feeling a bit of irritation that it was disturbing the quiet moment I was trying to have.

But little by little, over many years, I kept trying to listen. I tried to stay open. Lord, do you have something you're trying to say to me through the natural world? You are the God of creation. Rarely did I hear anything of import.

Somehow, around the years that I was pastoring Orchard Valley (during pandemic: 2019-2021), something clicked. One day, I was wrestling with the cruciformity of the call (pastoring while raising very young children who were 1, 3 and 5), I remembered the Lord speaking very specifically to me – through a single red rose randomly bursting into bloom amidst a rose bush that was otherwise completely full of white roses. "Tina, you are my red, red rose." That meant so much as I grappled with the strangeness of my call. It was so tough preaching from our bedroom, having meetings from the back bathroom, having no boundaries on our life – people coming by without notice to drop by. "Tina, you are my red, red rose." I felt so loved, so known, in my difference, in the difficulty and the uniqueness of the call to pastor and shepherd others. I remember bursting into tears as a result. But feeling so known by God.

Then he kept encouraging me through deer. I would see deer at Glen Eyrie retreat center in Colorado Springs and deer at Mission Springs retreat center in Scotts Valley, CA, just up the road from Santa Cruz. Didn't matter where I was, or what the exact circumstances would be. The Lord had a specific word for me through the deer.

In Glen Eyrie, as deer took turns emerging high up on the top of the ridge, silhouetted by the sunrise, I felt him saying: "I know it has been difficult as of late; see, there you are. You feel alone, like this one deer standing there by itself. But look, there are deer who have come to stand behind you – much like your husband John has been there for you, supporting you this whole time. And look, see these other deer emerging ahead of you? There will be friends ahead of you, on the road ahead. There will still be hard times, just as the ridgeline goes up. You'll have to be ready for more tough times ahead. But you, you are definitely not alone. You have John behind you. And you have friends awaiting you."

One of my favorite psalms connects God speaking to me thru DEER to God speaking to me thru WATERFALLS. If you'd allow me to read it for you...

Psalm 42:1-2, 7-8 (NIV)
For the director of music. A maskil of the Sons of Korah.

PORTLAND REFLECTIONS

1 As the deer pants for streams of water,

so my soul pants for you, my God.

2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When can I go and meet with God?

7 Deep calls to deep

in the roar of your waterfalls;

all your waves and breakers

have swept over me.

8 By day the Lord directs his love,

at night his song is with me—

a prayer to the God of my life.

When I think of waterfalls, I can't help but remember when, in the fall of 2022, my husband organized a family trip to Portland for his 40th birthday weekend. We brought our three kids and my sister came and joined us.

We had a mostly wonderful weekend, but every time we would stop to visit a waterfall, and stop we did, four times... I would just be taken away and almost transported by the power of what the Lord said to me as I listened. I realized I was experiencing what Christian mystics sometimes call a "unitive moment" – an overwhelming, powerful, spiritual experience where there is some revelatory message from God to the person. They feel one with God, and something within them shifts. I was not expecting this to happen, but it just kept happening, with each waterfall we would visit – and through the specificity of the waterfall's physical characteristics – God seemed to speak to me of what was coming ahead for me in my life.

PORTLAND REFLECTIONS

Latourell Falls spoke to me about trusting in God's ceaseless, unrelenting provision. It just kept coursing downward, over and over and over again.It was so powerful – and the water just kept coming, kept falling, crashing onto the rocks beneath. I felt God encouraging me with the notion that opportunities would just keep coming our way to serve and minister and love others... I shouldn't doubt whether I would have enough. There would always be enough. And he would be enough.



PORTLAND REFLECTIONS

Bridal Veil had this distinct two part structure. I felt like the Lord was saying I needed to be more open to the next stage of development. That there would always be new things to learn, so I needed to remain more open to growth and whatever is next. I have generally longed for a sense of “having “finally made it.” But I needed to hear this nudging to remain open and not try to stay in one place or exactly where I am. I need to be open to what new thing the Lord is trying to grow in me.



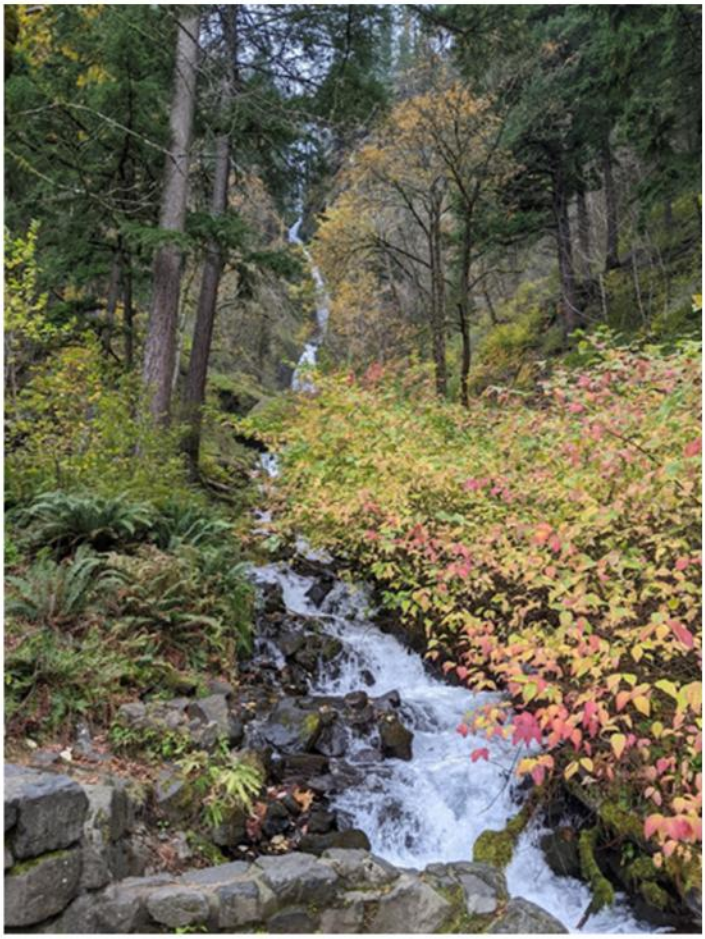
PORTLAND REFLECTIONS

Wahkeena Falls was next. This waterfall was long and water would cascade down from quite an extended diagonal distance. This evoked in me the sense that life might be quite long and we would make our way thru many different seasons. God reminded me of my 100yo grandma and that I might live a very, very long time. I should pace myself – because I might need to live a long time!

(Quick praise report: My grandma passed away in fall of 2025 at 103 years old! She was such a prayer warrior and faithful Christian woman until the end.)

But let me go back to the waterfalls and tell you about the last one. Multnomah waterfall is probably the most famous one in Portland. It just gushes down, and there are these different levels or tiers of cascading waterfalls. It gave me the reminder that God pours into us and that we pour into others... who then pour into others. This reminded me to invest in my children, not only in others we're ministering to... How fitting then, to include this picture of Multnomah alongside our family – because I believe God was trying to get me to pay more attention to our children. These precious little ones are worth all of our time, energy, attention, and love.

PORTLAND REFLECTIONS



If it's alright, let me read this Psalm one final time – as a blessing over you. If you want to place your hand on your heart, you can receive this from God to you. May He bless your devoted heart.

1 As the deer pants for streams of water,

so my soul pants for you, my God.

2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

When can I go and meet with God?

PORTLAND REFLECTIONS

7 Deep calls to deep

in the roar of your waterfalls;

all your waves and breakers

have swept over me.

8 By day the Lord directs his love,

at night his song is with me—

a prayer to the God of my life.



TOO MUCH OF A CHILDHOOD

Author: Emanuelle Rodrigues

We were on a coffee break during a course. Out on the porch, the conversation was supposed to be about work, but somehow it drifted to video games.

“I have never played video games.” I said it casually, already stepping away from the conversation.

Surprised, a colleague replied: “Then you did not have a childhood!”

I paused for a few seconds... and explained why I had never played as a child.
“I grew up in the countryside, with two sisters close in age. In our backyard, a small creek ran where we caught tadpoles with our hands and turned them into sailors aboard our paper boats. At the bottom of the water, tiny specks shimmered — like glitter. Heaven help anyone who dared say it was not gold.

Our mother would mix earth, water, and sugar so our works of art would last a little longer. Branches of guava, jabuticaba, and starfruit trees became our reading chairs. There was always a juicy fruit to go with the stories.

During the Southern lapwing’s nesting season, we would go to the marsh just to get close to the nests — only to run for our lives moments later, throwing ourselves to the ground, escaping the mother bird’s dive as she defended her young.

TOO MUCH OF A CHILDHOOD

On our way back from town by horse-drawn carriage, our father would point to the stars and tell the story behind each constellation. Fireflies along the road made it feel as if everything were a star-filled sky.

When the rain kept us indoors, a few pieces of furniture became a racing circuit where we would compete to see who could set the best time. We would also listen, for the umpteenth time, to the stories told by the woman who cared for us. Even though we knew them by heart, the fear and laughter felt new every time.

If a touch of boredom ever arrived, I would draw a treasure map. My sisters followed the clues from the backyard to the kitchen, where I waited with fried dough balls dusted with sugar and cinnamon.

When I finished speaking, there was a brief silence.
He looked at me, his eyes shining, and said: “You did not play video games because you did not have a childhood...but because you had too much of one.”

There is no comparing what we find valuable. Maybe we should not even speak of childhood, but of childhoods — plural and unique. Each of us carries what touched us — and what, in our desires, memories, and identity, makes us who we are. So I wonder: Do our children need what we lacked, or what made us whole?

A VERY SPECIAL TREAT

Author: Gwen Freeman

On many Sundays during summer, all the children in my family got a very special treat. Our Aunt Odean made old fashioned custard ice cream. We were allowed to watch the whole process from beginning to end. First, she made the custard with eggs, sugar, milk, cream, and vanilla. We noticed when she looked around at us and said, “Now I’ll add my secret ingredient”. We smiled and believed it to be an extra pinch of sugar. Not too much, but just the right amount. When the custard was cool, she got out the old hand cranked ice cream freezer. It had a wooden bucket with metal around it, a round metal tin, a dasher and a top with a handle. First, she poured the custard into the round metal tin, then she put the tin in the middle of the bucket. Next, she put on the top with the handle. When these parts were in place, she put ice and rock salt inside the bucket and all around the metal tin. She smiled and said, “Let’s add extra rock salt to make the ice cream freeze faster. "We looked at each other with big smiles on our faces because we were really ready for our special treat. When it was time for turning, it began with the youngest in the family. Everyone got a chance to turn the handle. It began with the youngest because the more you turned the harder it got. So, one by one, everyone turned the handle. When our turn was over, we sat in a circle around the freezer to watch it go around and around. It moved slower and slower, and we were reminded that the turning had to be continuous. When the handle could not move anymore, we were so excited because we knew some delicious old fashioned custard ice cream was ready for us to eat.

A VERY SPECIAL TREAT

Author: Gwen Freeman

When Aunt Odean opened the freezer, she took out the dasher and gave each of us a tiny taste. Then, we got our dish of creamy, delicious homemade custard ice cream. She also gave us a slice of her homemade pound cake. It was the most tasty treat ever, and it gave us such an awesome feeling. Homemade old fashion custard ice cream was so delightful. Plus, a slice of homemade cake made it even better. I can remember the sight of the old hand cranked freezer, the sound it made during the turning, and the first taste from the dasher. I remember well those warm summer days, and that special Sunday treat. If I think hard enough, I can see Aunt Odean's bowl of ice cream being placed in front of me. And, if I close my eyes, I can taste that unbelievable treat we believed to be the best in the whole wide world. Those special, summer Sundays were quite a treat, don't you agree!

THE WIND SPIRIT

Author: Beatrice Maxeen Balansay

Wind spirits have many names in many different languages. The spirits did not particularly care for the names the people assigned to them, so humans came up with many more, all meant to describe and define them. It made no difference to the spirits what they were called; they continued to cause various problems for the humans, nonetheless.

One spirit, a soft breath of air born of the forest breezes, did not feel fulfilled with the antics other winds played on humans. It admitted that sometimes it was fun to mess up a human's hair, but never much more than that, unlike the storming tempests of the north who would trample everything in their path with glee. It was more often observing humans as it passed by, watching them toss spheres they called “balls” between one another or standing at the edge of a cliff, staring at the sunset. Some would twirl and leap, mimicking movements of the wind spirits, but as they were not wind spirits themselves, the gentle spirit found their gestures strange and unsightly.

Why did humans do such strange things? What was the purpose of throwing a ball back and forth? Why would they purposefully stand at the edge of a cliff to look at the sky if they were afraid of falling? Why did they find such joy in those strange movements? Humans would fix the hair the winds played with and rebuild homes where the tempests trampled, as if it would deter the spirits from doing it all again, despite being proven wrong time and time again.

THE WIND SPIRIT

The gentle wind spirit couldn't understand the human behaviors it so often witnessed. Once, it tried joining two humans' ball game, but without a physical body, the sphere simply passed through it, throwing it off course and causing the humans confusion. Before the nameless spirit could even attempt to make amends, it was pulled away by its companions, who were giggling at the humans' reaction.

The gentle spirit continued like this for centuries. It believed that one day, it would understand the fun in ruining a human's day and partake in it. Or maybe, with enough observation, it would be able to understand why humans do what they do, label it ridiculous, and move on. Neither of these things happened.

One bright day, the breeze found itself in the forest. News had flown around — literally — about Mother Nature Herself being present there. Tired of living an existence of empty endless energy, the gentle wind spirit decided to attempt asking something from Her. It weaved agilely through the branches and leaves, finding Mother Nature kneeling in a clearing before the trunk of an old tree.

"Mother Nature," the wind spirit whistled, yielding before Her presence.

Mother Nature finished speaking Her blessings to the tree, whose spirit relaxed with a sigh. She turned to the spirit of the gentle breeze, standing. "Yes, my child?"

"I would like to ask of you a blessing, of sorts."

The winds of the forest started to settle. It wasn't every day a spirit was so bold to confront Mother Nature Herself. Even She was a little surprised to hear the breeze's respectful request. "A blessing of sorts?"

Yes, Mother. Only as you see fit, of course."

Mother Nature only smiled. "What is your request, child?"

THE WIND SPIRIT

“I am humbly asking you to grant me a human body, Mother.”

The spirits of the forest fell silent, save for the soft settling sounds of the wind currents, as if every spirit was holding their breath. A wind spirit asking for a physical body? Outrageous!

Mother Nature kept a soft gaze on the spirit before Her, fascinated by its request. “Why is that?”

“I wish to experience life the way they do. I feel that it will be the only way that I will be able to understand their behaviors.”

“Humans behave the way they do because they want to mimic freedom,” one tempered wind spirit in the area chimed. “Humans were not designed for freedom, not like us. Their spirits will always be anchored in their body, thus they pretend they have none and try to play like we do. Our existence is the best way to experience the world.”

The gentle breeze before Nature hummed. “I don’t believe this is the best way to experience the world. There must be more than wandering aimlessly and messing up hairstyles and trampling the land.”

“Are you not satisfied with your experience of the world, my child?” Mother Nature asked earnestly.

The soft spirit stilled. “I mean no disrespect again, Mother Nature, but there is something about the humans’ behaviors that suggests there is something I am not experiencing in this world.”

“Child, I must ask you, are you sure you fully understand what you are asking for? The burden of the human body is a lot to handle, especially for a spirit who has never taken care of a physical body before.”

THE WIND SPIRIT

“I will find someone to help me,” the breeze said confidently.

Nature hummed. Silence hung in the air as She pondered. Then, She said, “I shall grant you this request. I will give you a human body and you will know the human experience, so long as you find a trusted human to guide you in this journey.”

The gentle spirit spun with joy, ignoring the whispers of the other spirits around them who were quietly questioning Mother Nature’s decision to allow this; after all, the best life was the one of freedom and detachment, was it not? Mother Nature ran Her hand through the dirt, forming a ball of clay. From it, She fashioned a figure of a human child, putting careful effort into each small detail: hands to play catch with, eyes to see the sunsets, a heart in its chest to feel emotion, a brain in its head for rational thought. Nature gave them blue eyes that mimicked the gentian flowers of the mountains. She made the dress soft cream in color. She pressed Her hand to the earth, growing a golden globeflower to place in the child’s hair. Mother Nature made their hair brown like the clay they once were and gave their skin a natural warm tan.

The empty human child figure stood complete in the clearing by the time the sun began to set, warm orange hues taking over where blue skies once were. Mother Nature took the gentle wind spirit in Her hand. “I will grant you one cycle of the moon for you to decide if this is something you want to continue. If you choose to remain human, then you will lose your immortality as a wind spirit; that is the price of becoming mortal. Do you understand this?”

THE WIND SPIRIT

“Yes.”

“Are you ready to start this new life then?”

“Yes, Mother Nature.”

The Goddess smiled upon hearing the spirit’s conviction. She pressed the spirit into the figure’s chest. Spirit and body came together, replacing what was once clay with flesh and bone. Mother Nature placed a gentle kiss on their forehead. “I bless you, my child, on this journey of discovery and understanding. May My land and My creatures protect you during your time on this path, and may you return to Me when you reach your destination.” Their heart began to beat, their lungs began to breathe, and slowly, their eyes opened.

ART



Photographer: Ross Payne

PHOTOGRAPHY

IVY

Photographer: Ross Payne

“Ivy

on south side

of concrete wall

separating

Woodsborough Condominiums

from Santa Clara High School ballfields

on Sunday morning

22 March 2026.”



PAINTED LADY

Photographer: Bobby Chin



POINT LOBOS

Photographer: Sarthak Grover



UNTITLED

Photographer: Terry Jansen



PAPER, CANVAS, AND DIGITAL

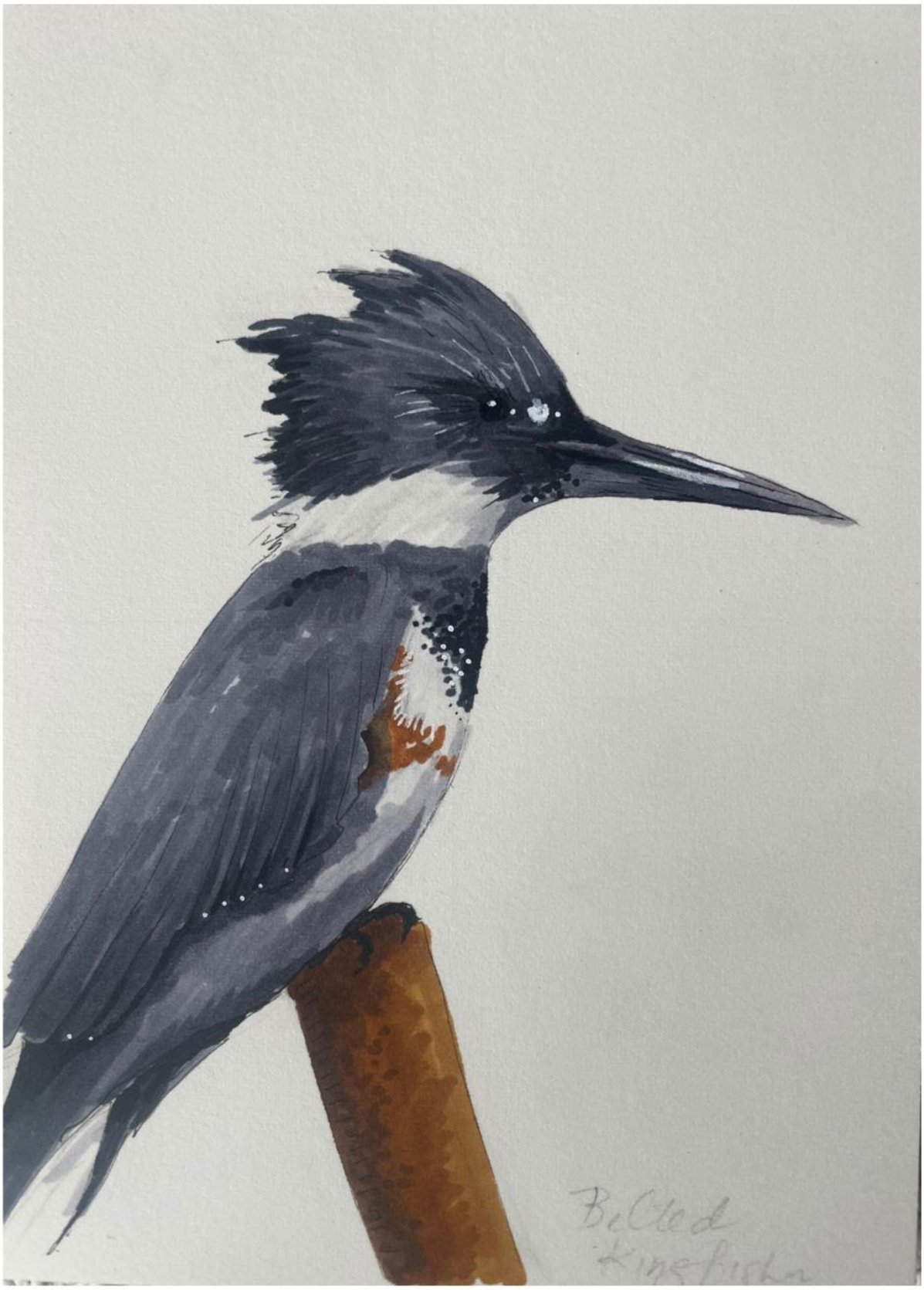
ANGEL ANGEL PRETTY BIRD

Artist: Carrie Padgett



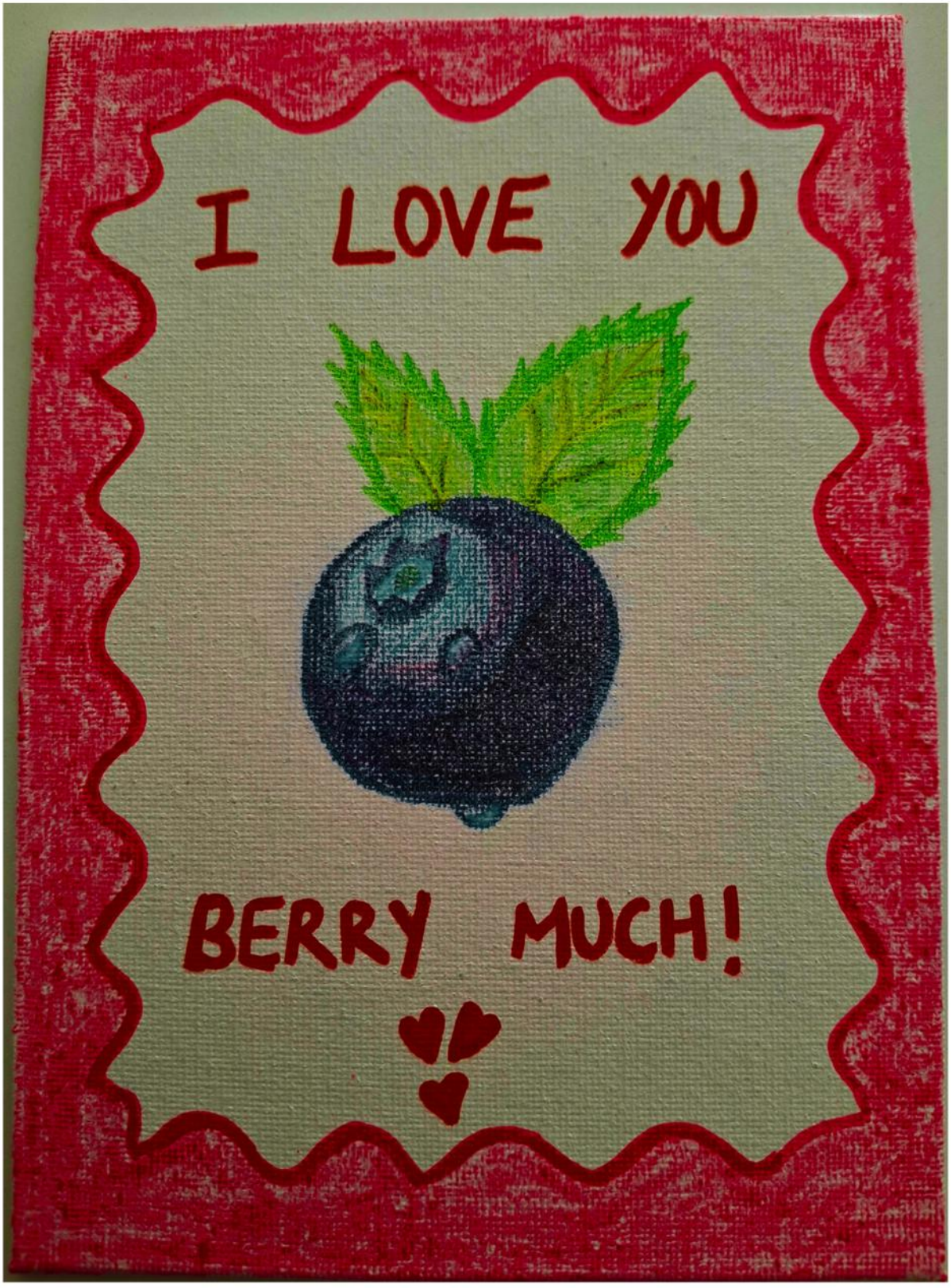
BELTED KINGFISHER

Artist: Anita Prasad



BLUEBERRY

Artist: Sahithi Julapally



CALIFORNIA GROWN

Artist: Helena Ljoljic



Size: 14 x 11 inches

Medium: Mixed media on paper

Description: A symmetrical wreath made out of some of California's best fruit: kiss melons, cherries, figs, and peaches. Drawn entirely by hand, this artwork was built upon a geometric grid and completed with watercolors, gouache, colored pencils and golden ink.

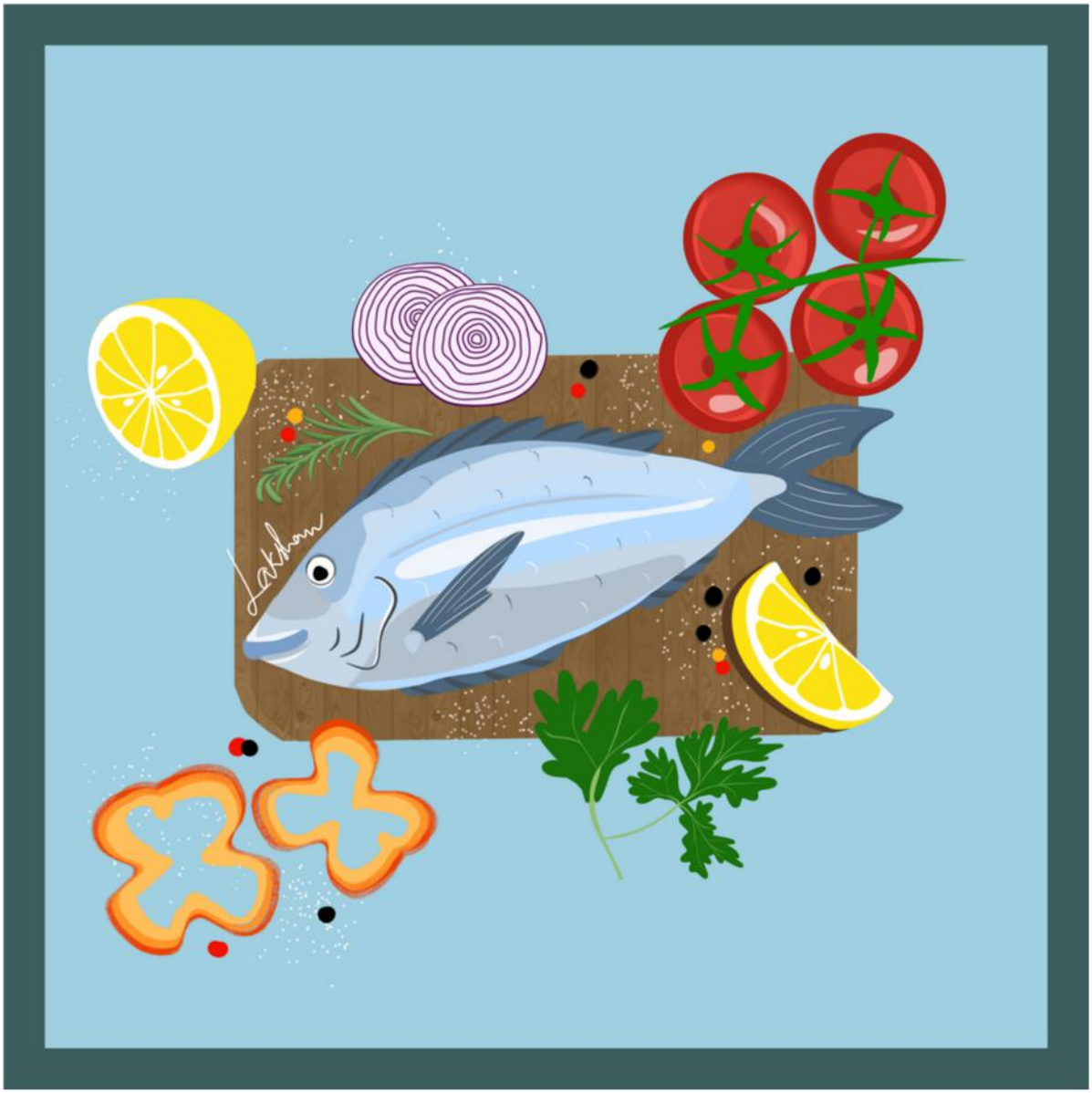
EASTER BRUNCH

Artist: J.Y. Chang



FISH & VEGGIES

Artist: Lakshan Gokarn



HEART OF THE FOREST

Artist: Juliette Bazurto



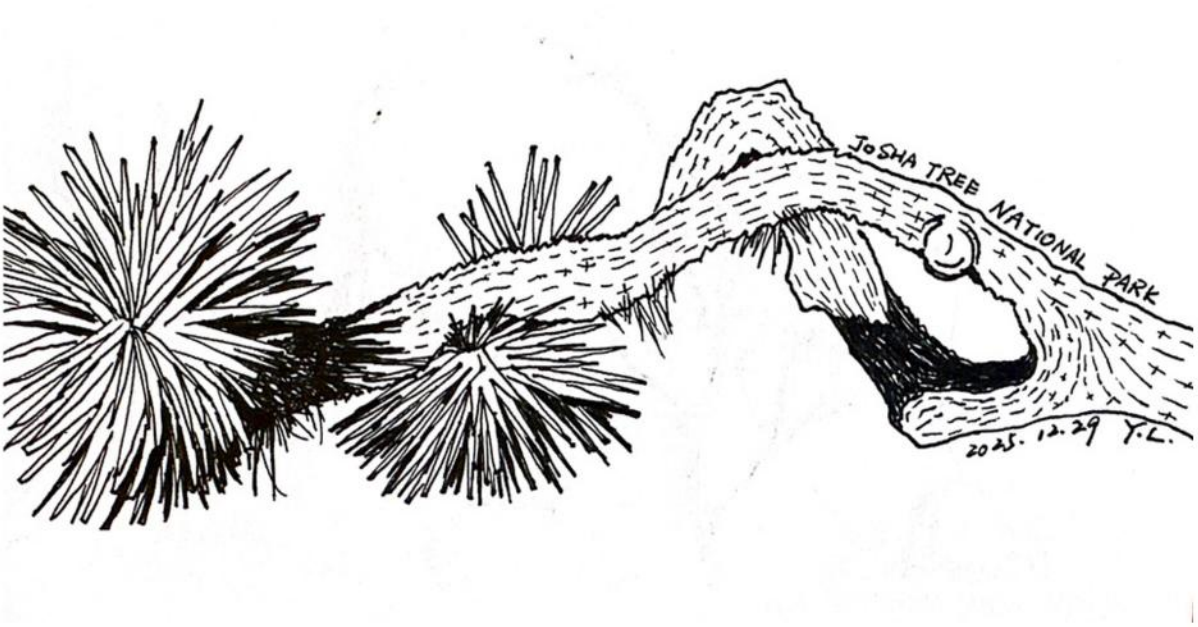
HENRY SCHMIDT PARK

Artist: Tracey Au



JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK

Artist: Yun Liu



MY SCORPION

Artist: Virginia C. Dori



Size: 14 x 11 inches

Medium: Oil on Canvas

PLUMS

Artist: Silpa Baby



PURPLE CANOPY

Artist: Saswatee Kashyap Chatterjee



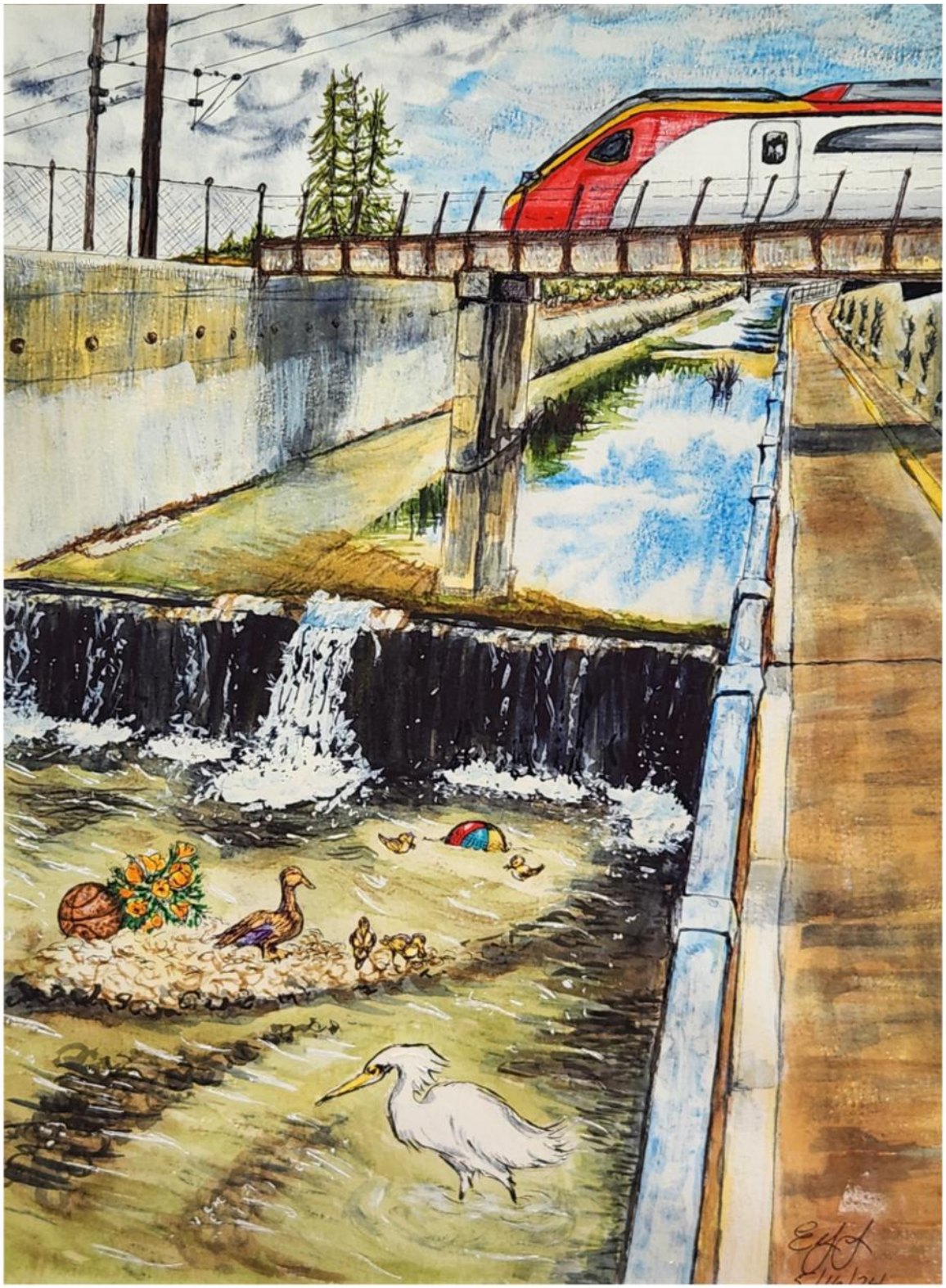
RED ROCKS STADIUM

Artist: Lilac Vu



SAN TOMAS AQUINO CREEK

Artist: Etta Yvonne Jensen



SOULFULL - A OLFACTORY POSTCARD

Artist: Cynthia Pilgrim



SUNFLOWER HORIZON

Artist: Divya Sasidharan



SUNFLOWERS

Artist: Hillary Pratt



TANDEM CYCLING

Artist: Dipti Dedhia and Anand Subramanian



UNTITLED

Artist: Megan Anderson



UNTITLED

Artist: Emily Boccignone



UNTITLED

Artist: Charles Caston



UNTITLED

Artist: Kaitlin Coltin



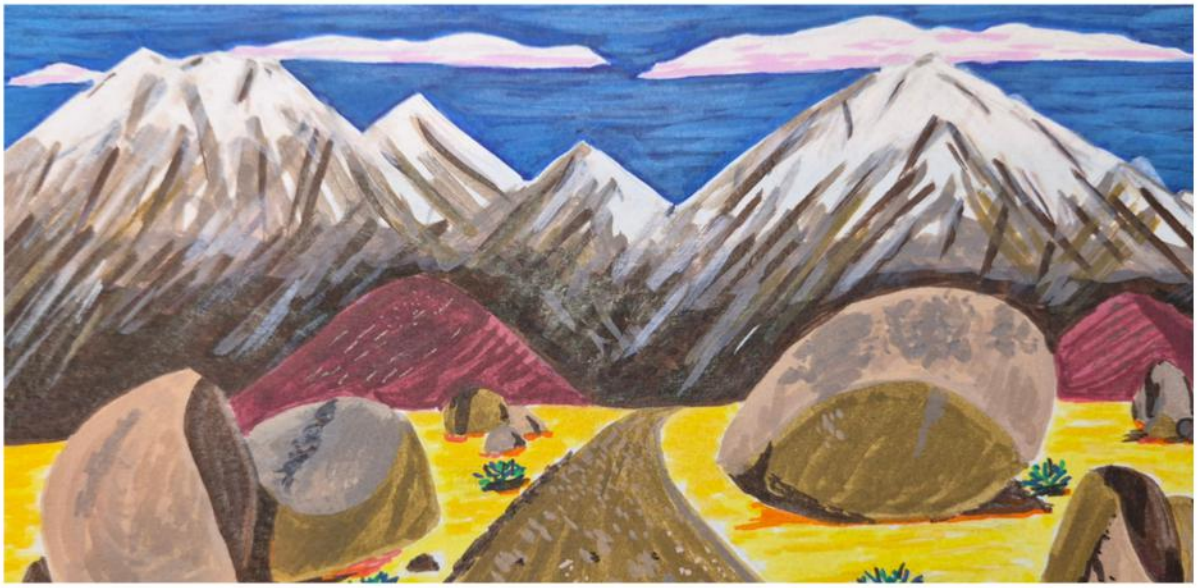
UNTITLED

Artist: Ritu Gupta



UNTITLED

Artist: Elise Laffosse



UNTITLED

Artist: Edy Song Madsen

I like nature because nature is peaceful and relaxing. It is soothing and beautiful. It makes me feel happy. I like the sounds of nature and the clean air. It smells good. I like to hear the birds singing. I like to take pictures of the light so that I can sketch and then paint a scene that makes me feel good.

In these paintings there are no other people within at least 3 miles. Nature is always peaceful. I hope that other people enjoy and explore nature and make friends with it. People who sit in nature and pay attention to it can think about poetry and art and may be nicer to other people. We have to appreciate and respect nature, and then we will have peace of mind and be healthy. When I see nature, I always smile.



UNTITLED

Artist: Alycia Ramirez-Leatherman



UNTITLED

Artist: Kim Marie Smith



UNTITLED

Artist: Sowmya



THREE-DIMENSIONAL

CERAMICS

Artist: Joseph Mastroieni



Ceramics created at the Santa Clara Senior Center Ceramics Studio

UNTITLED

Artist: Antoinette (Burgos) Lesch



Antoinette (Burgos) Lesch (age 95) pictured here with her current project of creating beautiful bracelets of all colors as well as her creative paintings she has displayed on her home walls.

WHEN FRAGILITY DECIDES

Artist: Swapna Das



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Santa Clara City Library gratefully acknowledges the many individuals and organizations whose support helped make *A Taste of Santa Clara* possible.

We gratefully acknowledge the National Endowment for the Arts (https://www.arts.gov/) and Arts Midwest (https://artsmidwest.org/) for their support of the NEA Big Read initiative and for helping make this community-centered project possible. We also offer special thanks to the Santa Clara City Library Foundation and Friends (https://lovethelibrary.org/) for facilitating this grant.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to community members who submitted recipes, artwork, and writings for this project. Your creativity, generosity, and willingness to share your memories, traditions, and perspectives gave this collection its heart. Although only a selection of submissions could be included in this volume, we are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed.

We also offer special thanks to our programming partners for providing their skills, expertise, and resources to making this project possible. These partners include: Second Harvest of Silicon Valley (https://www.shfb.org/) for providing cooking demonstrations and facilitating the writing workshop; to Readers to Eaters (https://www.readerstoeaters.com/) for providing the juvenile companion title, Sylvia's Spinach; and to Aimee Nezhukumatathil, whose book *Bite by Bite* inspired this project and who took the time to visit us at the launch of the grant.

Finally, we thank the staff of City of Santa Clara and the Santa Clara City Library for their work in planning programs, conducting outreach, marketing, supporting participants, and editing and compiling this volume.

In particular, I want to acknowledge the work put in by Megan Stroup Tristao, my partner for this project, who not only helped to develop this project, write the grant which made it possible, coordinate and lead many of the programs, but also lent her design experience to shape the look and marketing for the project. Without her, this project would have been very different.

With appreciation to all who helped bring *A Taste of Santa Clara* to life.

Jason Thomas
Adult Services Program Coordinator
Santa Clara City Library

Santa Clara
CITY LIBRARY

Collected between Fall 2025 and Spring 2026, these pieces reflect the unique voices of our community as they explore food, nature, memory, and identity. Drawn from a wide range of submissions, this volume celebrates creativity, connection, and the shared stories that bring Santa Clara together. This collection brings together recipes, artwork, and writing that speak to the richness of everyday experience. It is both a celebration of local creativity and an invitation to see our community through one another's eyes.

NEA Big Read is a program of the National Endowment for the Arts
in partnership with Arts Midwest.
Special thanks to The Santa Clara City Library Foundation and Friends
for facilitating the grant that made this project possible.

THE SANTA CLARA CITY LIBRARY FOUNDATION AND FRIENDS

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Managed by Arts Midwest
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ISBN 979-8-234-11189-0

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The Center of What's Possible